

## 1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

- Niger-Congo, Edo, Benue-Congo

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

- ISO 639-3: bin

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

- 6°26' N and 5°41' E (2)

1.4 Brief history:

- “From at least the fifteenth century, the Benin Empire held varying degrees of authority over neighboring peoples, including the western Igbo, northeastern Yoruba, and various related Edo-speaking groups. In 1897 British-colonial forces conquered the kingdom and made it part of the Niger Protectorate. Today it is incorporated into the modern state of Nigeria.” (2)
- “Early in the twentieth century, the Church Missionary Society and the Society of African Missions arrived in Benin, but they had less success there than in other parts of Nigeria. Nigeria gained independence in 1960, and at that time the kingdom became part of the Western Region. Over the years, the modern political boundaries of the territory and its names have changed several times. In 1963 it was separated from the Western Region and called the Midwest Region, and then, in 1976, it was renamed Bendel State. In 1993 Bendel State was split in two, and today the Benin Kingdom is part of Edo State.” (2)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: The Portuguese and British had the most influence on the way the Edo live and govern today:

- “Portuguese explorers arrived in the third quarter of the fifteenth century. They were interested in spreading Christianity and developing commerce. Trade with the Netherlands, France, and England followed. Oral traditions and European records indicate that the power of the kingdom fluctuated over the centuries.” (2)
- “In 1914 the British amalgamated the Southern and Northern protectorates into the new country of Nigeria. In the same year, they restored the monarchy in Benin, allowing Ovonramwen's son, Eweka II, to assume the throne. They instituted a system of Native Administration (a form of indirect rule), introduced a uniform monetary system and direct taxation, established government schools, and built a communications network of roads and railways.” (2)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

- Terrain: “rolling coastal plain(s) crossed by rivers, in an area of tropical rain forest.” (2)
- Climate: “The average daily temperature is about 27° C. There is seasonal variation, with a wet season from July to September and a dry one from December to February.” (2)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:

- Population is 1,000,000
- They “live in compact village settlements ranging in size from small hamlets to towns of several thousand people.” (3)

## 2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

- “yams, supplemented by corn (maize), plantains, cassava, and other vegetables.” (3)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

- goats, sheep, dogs, and fowl (3)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

- “Adult men tended the principal crop, yams, clearing and working the land together with male relatives, affines, or friends. Women cared for their households and grew subsidiary crops. Marketing, at least in precolonial times, was entirely in the hands of women. Within the city, the labor was divided in a similar way, that is, male guild members did the craft or ritual work, and women sold some of the products of the guild in the market.” (2)

2.6 Land tenure:

- “The king is considered “the owner” of all the land in the kingdom” (2)

2.7 Ceramics:

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

- “The actual landholding unit is the village; its elders act as the custodians. Approval must be sought from the elders and chief for the right to use certain plots.” (2)

2.9 Food taboos:

- They use their livestock as sacrificial offerings (3)

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

- “When the time comes for burial, a canoe shaped piece of wood is used as a coffin... the canoe is the substitute for the dead body.” (8p410)

### 3. Anthropometry

#### 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

- Male: 169.444cm (4)
- Female: 162.200cm (4)

#### 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

### 4. Life History, mating, marriage

#### 4.1 Age at menarche (f):

#### 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

- “25 percent of women aged 15-19 are either mothers (21 percent) or pregnant with their first child (4.3 percent). Among women aged 25-29, the median age at first birth is 20.” (6p252)

#### 4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

- “On an average, 4.7 children were borne to each husband; but the infant mortality was heavy, and two-fifths of the children in the main village enumerated seem to have died at or soon after birth.” (5p9)

#### 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

#### 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

#### 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

- “Formerly, divorce was very rare, granted only under circumstances of infectious disease or impotency, but the establishment of Native Authority courts by the British at the beginning of the twentieth century had the effect of making divorce easier to obtain.” (2)

#### 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Polygamy is large in Edo culture:

- “The number of wives on average living with each man was 1.5.” (5p8)

#### 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

- “In amoiia marriage, the wife becomes the absolute property of the husband, and, after his death, of his heirs; the isomi wife, on the other hand, is free to leave her husband at any time after she has borne a child to him, or even before that, if she arranges that the bride price paid by the husband shall be refunded.” (5p5)

#### 4.9 Inheritance patterns:

- “Under certain circumstances a girl remains in her father's house unmarried; the house is her property, and she is free to receive as many lovers as she pleases; if she leaves a son, he is the heir to the house.” (5p8)
- “The system of primogeniture prevails among the Edo: the eldest son receives the rights to property, hereditary titles, and ritual duties. The eldest son performs the funeral ceremonies for his deceased father and inherits his father's house and lands. Although the bulk of the estate goes to the senior son, the eldest sons by the other wives of his father receive shares as well, in order of their seniority. When no sons are left, the property sometimes passes to the father's brother or sister, or sometimes to a daughter. A woman's property is inherited by her children.” (2)

#### 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

#### 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

#### 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

- “Local exogamy prevails in some places, apparently as the result of the expansion of one family into a village.” (5p8)

#### 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

#### 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

#### 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

#### 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

#### 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

#### 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

#### 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring:

#### 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

- “Should an isomi wife, or the child of an isomi wife, die during the lifetime of the husband, the latter must hand them over to the father of the wife, or pay a fine” (5p7)

#### 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

#### 4.22 Evidence for couvades: none found

#### 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

#### 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

#### 4.24 Joking relationships?

#### 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations.

#### 4.26 Incest avoidance rules:

- “A wife may not be taken from either the father’s or mother’s families in most parts, though occasionally the rule is relaxed to permit the wedding of half-sisters on the father’s side.” (5p8)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?: There are variations of marriages within the Edo-speaking culture:

- “These differences may be summed up in the statement that there are two kinds of sexual relationships known... marriage and concubinage.” (7p95)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

## **Warfare/homicide**

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

- Ingroup: “In precolonial times warfare was an important component of the state polity. It apparently was the custom for kings to declare war in the third year after their succession to the throne.” (2)

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

- “ruling princes of the empire who refused to pledge their allegiance at that time were considered rebels, and war was declared against them and their towns.” (2)

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

4.18 Cannibalism?

## **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

- “The Edo live in compact village settlements ranging in size from small hamlets to towns of several thousand people.” (3)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

- Precolonial Society: “the summit was the king (oba), who was the focal point of all administrative, religious, commercial, and judicial concerns. Besides the king and his family, the political structure consisted of the holders of various chiefly titles, who were organized into three main orders of chiefs: the seven uzama, the palace chiefs, and the town chiefs. These various orders of chiefs formed the administrative bureaucracy of the kingdom, and their main concern was to augment the king's civil and ritual authority. They constituted the state council, which had an important role in creating laws, regulating festivals, raising taxes, declaring war, and conducting rituals. The king controlled the granting of most of these chiefly titles and used this power to consolidate his control over governmental processes. Once granted, a title could not be rescinded unless treason could be proven.” (2)
- In contemporary Nigeria: “Edo State officials consult with the Benin king and chiefs. Supreme executive and legislative power was vested in a military-based Provisional Ruling Council and an Executive Council, both headed by the commander-in-chief, who is also the head of state. Plans for a return to civilian rule have been announced.” (2)

5.4 Post marital residence:

- “If the marriage is polygamous, the wives and their children all live in separate apartments within the larger compound. Women past childbearing age often move to their own houses.” (2)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

- Age: “The basic organizing principle within both the village and the urban ward is the division of the population into age sets.” (2)
- “The elders are exempt from physical labor and constitute the executive and judicial council of the village, led by an elected senior elder (odionwere).” (2)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

- House organization: “this family can consist of a man with his wife or wives and their children and, in some cases, married sons and their wives and children and even younger married brothers. Widowed or divorced mothers, daughters, and sisters can live there as well.” (2)
- “Today in Benin City the average size is seven to ten per household.” (2)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

- “Descent is reckoned patrilineally in Edo society” (2)

#### 5.12 Trade:

- “Throughout the history of European trade, one of the sources of the king's wealth was the monopoly that he held over ivory, pepper, and certain other exports. His control extended to the markets and trade routes, which he could close whenever he wished. High-ranking chiefs of the Iwebo Palace Society administered European trade for the king, and various trading associations controlled the routes to the interior that brought products to Benin for export. These exports varied over time but also included cloth, palm oil, and slaves. In exchange, Benin imported European goods such as cloth, mirrors, coral beads, and brass and other metal objects. Since the colonial period, Benin has been tied in to the Western capitalist system.” (2)

#### 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

- “Precolonial Benin society had a clearly demarcated class structure: a mostly urban elite, comprising the governmental, religious, and educational bureaucracies; a commoner group, consisting of lower-status urbanites, such as artisans; and the peasantry.” (2)

### 6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

#### 6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

#### 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

- “There are two main categories of religious specialists: priest (ohen) and diviner/herbalist (obo). A priest, who can be either male or female, undergoes a long series of initiation rites before specializing in performing a wide variety of ceremonies and communicating directly, often through trance, with his or her patron deity. The diviner/healer, usually male, specializes in some branch of magical activity such as curing, divining, handling witches, or administering ordeals.” (2)
- The Edo distinguish between common and serious illnesses. The former can be treated at home or by Western-trained doctors; the latter must be treated by specialists in traditional medicine, whether priests or diviner/healers. Edo today distinguish between “White man's medicine,” for the treatment of diseases such as measles, and “Edo medicine,” which is still used for problems such as barrenness or illness created by witches.” (2)

#### 6.2 Stimulants:

#### 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

- Birth: “Among the Edo proper prenatal rituals differ from place to place.” (9p250)
- Death: “As a rule the burial customs depend for their character upon whether the deceased has children or not; in a certain number of instances, childless people are buried with the same ceremonies as those who have left descendants, and this whether they are men or women; but as a rule the heirless man or woman receives treatment little or no better than the child, who is simply thrown into the bush.” (8p379)
- Seasonal: “In precolonial times there was a royal ritual cycle of ceremonies, one for each of the thirteen lunar months. Some were of a private nature, such as the sacrifices the king made to his head or his hand; others were public. The most important of these are Ugie Erha Oba, which honors the king's ancestors, and Igue, which strengthens his mystical powers. Domestic ceremonies mark the life cycle and the private worship of various deities and ancestors.” (2)

#### 6.4 Other rituals:

- “In the villages, devotees of local deified culture heroes perform rituals employing a variety of different kinds of masks some of wood, others of cloth or red parrot feathers, to honor these deities and appeal for health and well-being.” (2)
- In the spirit world, the ancestors live in villages and quarters similar to those in the world of everyday life. From there, they watch over the behavior of their relations in the everyday world, punishing transgressions such as incest. Their descendants perform weekly and annual rituals to placate and implore the ancestors to bring benefits of health and fertility.” (2)

#### 6.5 Myths (Creation):

- “In the traditional Edo view, the universe is divided into two planes of existence: the visible, tangible world of everyday life (agbon ) and the invisible spirit world (erinmwini ) created by Osanobua and inhabited by him, other deities, ancestors, spirits, and supernatural powers. These are two parallel, coexisting realms; their boundaries, however, are not inviolable, as gods and spirits daily intervene in the lives of humans, and particularly powerful humans draw upon the forces of the spirit world to transform daily experience.” (2)

#### 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

- “The Benin Kingdom is well known for its brass and ivory sculpture, which is found in museums throughout the world.” (2)

#### 6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

#### 6.8 Missionary effect:

- “When the Portuguese arrived in Benin, they tried to introduce Christianity. In 1516 they built a church in the capital city and taught the king's senior son and two important chiefs how to read. Their efforts to spread the Christian faith were not successful.”(2)

#### 6.9 RCR revival:

- “Missionary efforts increased substantially with colonialism, and today there are churches of every conceivable denomination in Benin City, including Hare Krishna, and some missionary outposts in villages. Church participation frequently occurs side by side with indigenous ancestral and herbal practices.” (2)

#### 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

- “Communication with the dead, however, accounts for a high proportion of all ritual activities and every kind of social group forms a congregation for the worship of its dead in some form or other.” (10p130)

#### 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? No, but they have a special process after people die:

- “Death is seen by the Edo as part of a cycle in which an individual moves between the spirit world and the everyday world in a series of fourteen reincarnations. Each cycle begins with an appearance before the Creator God, at which time a person announces his or her destiny or life plan. The person's spiritual counterpart (ehi) is present and thereafter monitors the person's adherence to the announced plan. After death, the person and his or her ehi must give an account to the Creator God. If the account is acceptable, the person joins the ancestors in the spirit world until the time has come to be born again.” (2)

#### 6.12 Is there teknonymy? Not found

#### 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

- “Many Edo are Christians or Muslims. Traditional religion includes belief in a remote creator, lesser gods, mythical or semimythical village heroes, and spirits of the dead.” (3)

### 7. Adornment

- Nothing found on adornment in Edo culture

#### 7.1 Body paint:

#### 7.2 Piercings:

#### 7.3 Haircut:

#### 7.4 Scarification:

#### 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

#### 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

#### 7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

#### 7.8 Missionary effect:

#### 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

### 8. Kinship systems

#### 8.1 Sibling classification system:

#### 8.2 Sororate, levirate: neither

#### 8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

- “The royal lineage is particularly set apart by virtue of its descent from the Yoruba culture hero Oranmiyan (called "Aranmiyan" in Edo), who founded the second Benin dynasty, which has reigned continuously since about the twelfth or thirteenth century. Kinship terminology is of the Hawaiian type.”(2)

### Numbered references:

1. Ethnologue.com

2. Ben-Amos, Paula. "Edo." Encyclopedia of World Cultures. 1996. Encyclopedia.com. 1 May. 2012  
<<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.

3. "Edo." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 01 May. 2012.  
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/179361/Edo>>

4. "Height: Ulna Ratio: A Method of Stature Estimation In A Rural Community in Edo State, Nigeria." - ISPUB. Web. 01 May 2012. <<http://www.ispub.com/journal/the-internet-journal-of-forensic-science/volume-3-number-1/height-ulna-ratio-a-method-of-stature-estimation-in-a-rural-community-in-edo-state-nigeria.html>>.
5. Thomas, N. W. "The Edo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria." *Journal of the Royal African Society* 10.37 (1910): 1-15. Oxford University Press on Behalf of The Royal African Society. Web. 29 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/715028>>.
6. Murray, Nancy, William Winfrey, Minki Chatterji, Scott Moreland, Leanne Dougherty, and Friday Okonofua. "Factors Related to Induced Abortion among Young Women in Edo State, Nigeria." *Studies in Family Planning* 37.4 (2006): 251-68. Population Council. Web. 29 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20058439>>.
7. Thomas, Northcote. "Marriage and Legal Customs of the Edo-speaking Peoples of Nigeria." *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation* 11.1 (1910): 94-101. Cambridge University Press on Behalf of the British Institute of International and Comparative Law. Web. 29 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/752571>>.
8. Thomas, N. W. "Notes on Edo Burial Customs." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 50 (1920): 377-411. Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. Web. 29 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2843490>>.
9. Thomas, N. W. "Birth Customs of the Edo-Speaking Peoples." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 52 (1922): 250-58. Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. Web. 29 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/284373>>.
10. Banton, Michael. *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1966. Print.