

**Ovonramwen**, also called OVERAMI (d. January 1914, Calabar, Southern Nigeria [now Nigeria]), West African ruler who was the last independent oba (king) of the 500-year-old kingdom of Benin (in present-day Nigeria). **Ovonramwen** tried to maintain his independence in the face of increasing British pressure but was able to delay for only a few years the annexation of his kingdom by the colony of Nigeria.

He was called Idugbowa until he took the title **Ovonramwen** upon becoming oba. He succeeded to a kingdom much reduced by growing British commercial and colonial encroachment from its greatest extent (c. 1700). He attempted to seal Benin off from Europeans but by 1892 was forced to sign a protection treaty with the British administration. Disputes over trade along the Benin River (1892-94) led to a campaign against Benin; the murder of the British acting consul general in January 1897 precipitated a full-scale military expedition, which captured Benin City in February 1897. **Ovonramwen** surrendered to the British in August and died in exile.

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Benin City, also called EDO, capital and largest city of Edo state, southern Nigeria. Benin City is situated on a branch of the Benin River and lies along the main highways from Lagos to the Niger bridge at Asaba and the eastern states. The city is also linked by roads to Sapele, Siluko, Okene, and Ubiaja and is served by air and the Niger River delta ports of Koko and Sapele.

Formerly the principal city of the Edo (Bini) kingdom of Benin, it burned down (and was ransacked for nearly 2,500 of its famous bronzes) in 1897 when

the British occupied the city after the Edo had massacred a purportedly unarmed British diplomatic mission. Traces of the old wall and moat remain, but the new town is a close-packed pattern of houses and streets converging on the palace and compound of the oba (Edo: "king") and the government offices. In the main square is a statue of Emotan, a lady honoured for offering herself as a sacrifice to restore the prestige of her husband, the **oba**. The present **oba** retains traditional and advisory roles in government.

Benin City has long been famous for its "bronzes"--actually brass work--some of which is said to date from the 13th century, and for its ivory and wood carvings; its museum (1960) has a notable collection of some of the kingdom's early pieces. The city's present artisans still practice the ancient method of cire perdue ("lost-wax") casting, and its wood-carvers are organized into a cooperative craft society.

The centre of Nigeria's rubber production, modern Benin City has several processing plants and a creping factory; the Rubber Research Institute of Nigeria (1961) is at nearby Iyanomo. Benin City has been known for sawmilling since the 1930s, and the products now made in the city include furniture, beer, and soft drinks. The traditional export of palm oil and kernels remains important. The Nigerian Institute for Oil Palm Research (1939) is just outside the city on the old road to Lagos. Benin City is the site of the University of Benin (1970). Pop. (1991 est.) 202,800.

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Niger River,

principal river of western Africa and the third longest in Africa.

A brief treatment of the **Niger** River follows. For full treatment, see Africa: *Niger River* .

The river rises in Guinea on the eastern side of the Fouta Djallon highlands and flows in a great arc northeast to Taoussa in Mali, then southeast through western **Niger**, continuing to Lokoja, Nigeria, where it turns south to flow into the Gulf of Guinea, of the Atlantic Ocean, west of Port Harcourt. The **Niger** drainage system is bounded in the south by such highlands as the Fouta Djallon, the Banfora Cliffs, the Plateau of Yorubaland, and the Cameroon highlands. The northern edge of the **Niger** basin is less clearly defined. The river's upper-course tributaries include the Mafou, Niandan, Milo, Sankarani, and Tinkisso; its major middle-course tributary is the Bani; and its major lower-course tributaries are the Kaduna and the Benue, the latter approximately doubling the volume of the **Niger**'s annual discharge. At the confluence of the **Niger** and Benue at Lokoja, the rivers form a lakelike stretch of water about 2 miles (3 km) wide that is dotted with islands and sandbanks. In the **Niger** River delta, extending over an area of 14,000 square miles (36,000 square km), the river breaks up into an intricate network of channels called rivers, which include the Nun, the Forcados, the Brass, the Sambreiro, and the Bonny.

Within the **Niger** basin, climate shows great variability; mean annual rainfall decreases northward from more than 160 inches (4,060 mm) annually in the delta to less than 10 inches (255 mm) in Timbuktu. Because of climatic variations, the annual river flood does not occur at the same time in all parts of the basin. Along its course the **Niger** traverses virtually all of the vegetational zones of western Africa, including sedge vegetation, savanna grassland, thorny shrub and acacia wood, rain forest, and mangrove

swamps. Many varieties of fish are found in the **Niger** and its tributaries; catfish, carp, and Nile perch supply an important economic activity along the length of the river system. Other **Niger** fauna include hippopotamus, crocodile, lizards, and a rich collection of birds.

The **Niger** River valley is sparsely settled, with the exception of population concentrations in the lake region of central Mali and in the Nupe area in Nigeria. The ethnic pattern along the course of the river includes such peoples as the Bambara, the Malinke, the Songhai, and the Zerma (Djerma). The **Niger** provides a tremendous source for irrigation and hydroelectric development. Most of the river is used by commercial shipping, and rail and road routes cross it at many points. Length 2,600 miles (4,200 km); drainage basin 730,000 square miles (1,890,600 square km); mean annual discharge 212,000 cubic feet per second (6,000 cubic m per second).

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