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Digital Benin

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[Digital Benin](#) is a stunning example of a centralized digital platform for displaced, translocated collection objects. The clearly articulated web interface and robust, well-researched content powerfully reconnect “objects looted by British forces from the Kingdom of Benin (now Edo State, Nigeria) in February 1897” in a digital space. The collections represent 5,246 objects across 131 institutions in 20 countries. Alongside the collection objects, a written story of the Benin Kingdom, [Itan Edo](#), is presented from an indigenous perspective, and [oral histories](#) illuminate the stories of the Benin people, from the Benin people. Education resources are available for PDF download in the form of a coloring book and language cards representing collection object types.

The project [documentation](#) section is extensive. Background on team members, funding, scholarship, history, metadata, and technical specifications are all available. Also included is a section on derogatory, racist, and harmful language, which details the project’s thoughtful approach to handling colonial language inherited from some of the institutional catalogs. Twenty-three international team members are credited for their work. Many are based in Benin City, including Principal Investigator Prof. Dr. Kokunre Agbontaen-Eghafona, Associate Professor/Professor of Anthropology at the University of Benin, Benin City. Funding was provided by the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung. The Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK) in Hamburg, Germany serves as the official seat of the project.

The website is free to access, easy to use, well designed, functional on mobile platforms, organizes content into accessible features, and utilizes data visualization. The website’s linked data relationships and robust descriptive metadata work together to illuminate collection objects in context with their history. The result is an interrelated item-level catalogue that is accessible to a wide range of audiences. Users can casually browse through the vibrant multimedia or research detailed information.

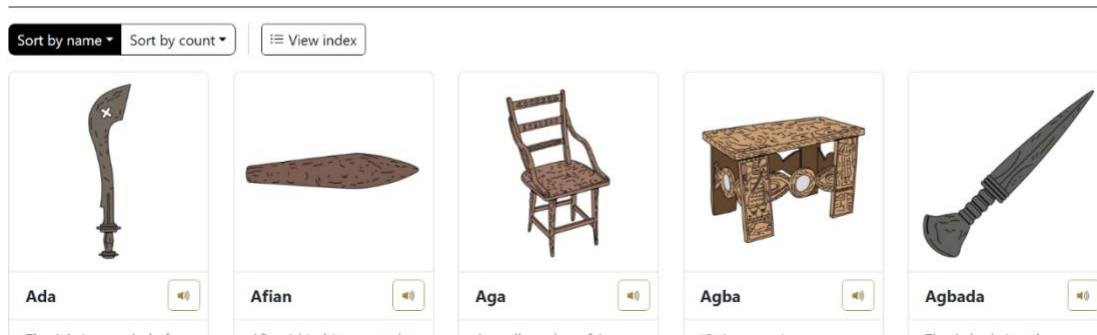


Eyo Oto

The aim of this space is to display the historical objects with their correct Edo designation, which creates object groups that differ from the current vocabulary used and interpreted by institutions outside of Nigeria. The object groups are displayed visually, described in written language and vocalised in spoken language. [Read more](#)

[Download Language Cards and Colouring Book](#)

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A selection of the object groups available to browse in the Eyo Oto section

One place to begin is the [Eyo Oto](#) section where collection objects are presented as historical object groups. The Digital Benin team worked to group and display historical objects with their correct Edo designation. The object groups are represented visually with an artist rendering, described in written language, and vocalized in spoken language. Select any object group and a page will open with a definition, filterable description information, and photographic images of all the recorded items in that object group. For example, there are fifty recorded [Ekpen](#) (leopard figurines widely featured in Benin arts), at twenty-one different institutions around the world, categorized under seven different English language names. Select any catalogue object and the corresponding item-level record page will open with relatively high-resolution images. Metadata will vary depending on availability from the host institution.

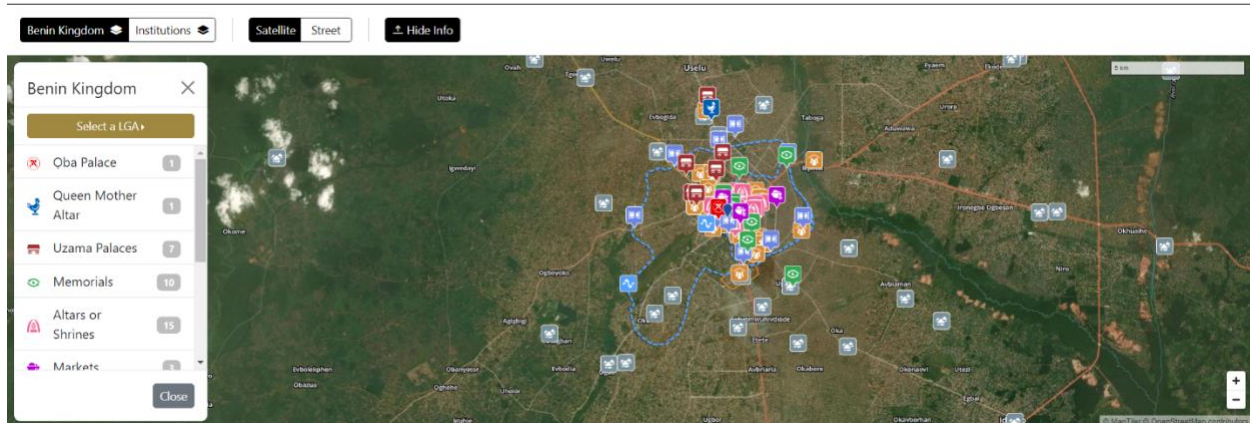
The links and different ways to display data continue throughout the website, inspiring users to think about data from different access points. Locations link to the [Map](#) section, where users can visualize data through geography. The [Institutions](#) section identifies where objects are physically housed and the [Provenance](#) section tracks the hands through which objects passed. Both the Institutions and Provenance landing pages visualize the number of collection objects in each place or category with a bar chart display in descending order.

DIGITAL BENIN

Eyo Oto Catalogue Institutions Provenance Map Oral History Itan Edo About

Map

This map shows contemporary Edo South (ancient Benin Kingdom) and Benin City. Focussing on the historical landmarks of Benin Kingdom, it is a geographical presentation of the rich cultural heritage of Benin people from the capital Benin City to the outlying ancient towns and villages within the seven present-day Local Government Areas of Edo South Senatorial District of Edo State, Nigeria. [Read more](#)



A view of the Map section landing page with color coded icons representing different places

The project's creators did such a great job describing the extensive content and multiple features of Digital Benin, it is difficult to find cause for criticism. The one project section that, when compared to the others, is less intuitive to discover is the [Media](#) section. This is where users can find an introductory video that may be useful on the main page, and links to the education resources. The Oral History section could improve accessibility with closed-captioning and/or transcriptions. However, documentation does not define an end date for the project. These improvements and more may be on the way. Overall, this platform displays excellent execution of its documented goals. The best way to grasp all its features, relationships, history, and thoughtful approach to description is to explore it oneself.