

THE FALL OF BENIN KINGDOM: THE PUNITIVE EXPEDITION OF 1897 IN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the various multifaceted remote and immediate causes that triggered the British-Benin war of 1897. It analyses the political upheaval in the pre-colonial Benin kingdom on the eve of the conflict. It also traces the imperial policies of the European powers during the era as an underlining cause of the war. The study adopts the historical method and both primary and secondary sources were used. While the immediate cause of the war had its roots in the halt to the Philips Mission by Benin soldiers, the roll out of the war machinery by the British in 1897 was premised primarily on the ambush and killing of Captain Phillips and his party. However, this paper deals with the copious facts that the war on Benin by the British had been in the works for several years, and that it was an inevitable end to the expansionist drive of empire building in the late nineteenth century. It examines the pre-war preconceived narrative built up by sections of the British parties that visited Benin which became a form of propaganda used by British traders and interests to build up a case to invade the precolonial Benin kingdom. The British war preparations, the various deployment of warships and weaponry, the battles of the war, especially the little mentioned battle at the entrance of Benin, the weapons and strategy of the Benin army are all examined by this paper. The paper concludes that imperialist expansion, largely driven by economic interest led to the fall of the Benin Kingdom.

KEYWORDS: *precolonial, preparations, imperialist expansion, economic, expansion.*

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