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Notes on the Manners and Customs of the People about Little Popo, Bight of Benin

Leveson Wildman

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Notes on the Manners and Customs of the People about Little Popo, Bight of Benin Leveson Wildman "Notes on the Manners and Customs of the People about Little Popo, Bight of Benin" is a description of the lifestyles and cultural practices of people living on the coast of what is now the Republic of Benin in West Africa in the 19th century. This account was written by a ship's captain named Leveson Wildman who spent time on the coast in the town of Little Popo around the time of the United States Civil War (i.e. 1860s).

The Bight of Benin was known as the "Slave Coast" by Europeans during the transatlantic slave trade, because it supplied large numbers of enslaved Africans to the plantations of the Americas between the 16th and 19th centuries. The region's most powerful kingdom was Dahomey, which emerged in the late 17th century, and became a great empire by the 18th century.

From their inland capital of Abomey, the Dahomean kings expanded to conquer the coastal towns of the Bight of Benin, including Little Popo, Allada (Arada), and Ouidah (Whydah). Seizing control of the coast gave Dahomey access to the coastal trade with Europeans. From then on the state enriched itself by selling human captives, often prisoners of war or victims of the kingdom's slave-raids, and received guns, and other European imports in return.

The kingdoms of Oyo and Benin lay to the east of Dahomey, and the Asante (Ashanti) kingdom lay to the west. The Oyo Empire, which possessed a powerful cavalry, was a long-time rival of Dahomey. The Dahomean army relied heavily on infantry armed with muskets, and included an elite all-female "Amazon" corps. Dahomey and surrounding regions were conquered by France in the late 19th century.

The people of the coastal regions of the Bight of Benin spoke Gbe languages (including Ewe, and Fon). It was in these regions that Vodou (or Vodun) religious practices originated, although the Vodou (or Voodoo) practiced in the Americas diverged from that of the Bight of Benin because New World Vodou incorporated influences from other parts of Africa, as well as Christian influences.

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