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**AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE NIGERIAN STATE**

The historical background of the Nigerian government and politics involves the pre-colonial period and the colonial period in Nigeria. The pre-colonial period refers to the period before the coming of the colonialists to Nigeria while the colonial period refers to the era that the colonial administration was established in Nigeria. Before the emergence of the Nigerian state, pre-colonial Nigeria comprised of different independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires. These among others include the Borno Empire, the Hausa states and the Sokoto Caliphate in the North; the Igbo segmentary societies in the East; Benin kingdom and the Oyo Empire in the West and several ethnic identities in the Benue valley. The ethnic groupings all significantly differ in their historical, social and cultural make-ups. Nigeria is bordered to the south by the bights of Benin and Biafra, which are on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean, on the West by Benin, on the North by Niger and on the east by Cameroon. Nigeria stretches roughly 700 miles from west to east and 650 miles from south to north, covering an area between 30 and 150 E longitudes and between 40 and 140 N latitude.

The exact time when man began to live in Nigeria is unknown but there are archeological evidences from different parts of Nigeria which pointed to the fact that man had settled in a region now known as Nigeria since the Paleolithic period 500,000-9000 BC. The artefacts found by archeologist further confirmed that Nigerians also took part in the stone-age civilization. The Stone Age can be divided into several periods. These are: Early Stone Age 3,000,000- 35,000BC; Middle Stone Age, 35,000-15,000BC and; Late Stone Age, 15,000-500BC. Excavation has also revealed where people first settled in Nigeria. Some of the places where man lived in Nigeria in the very remote past included: Nok, Igbo Ukwu, Ife and Benin among others these places are referred to as CENTRES OF ANCIENT CIVILISATION.

There are major landmarks in the early Nigerian history and it was made possible through the excavation work done on places where man lived in Nigeria in the very remote past. Some of the places where man lived in Nigeria in the very remote past include: Nok, Igbo Ukwu, Ife, Benin among others. They are usually referred to as centers of ancient civilization.

Nok culture/civilization: The discovery of a terracotta (burnt clay) head of a monley by tin miners in Nok in 1936 prompted more discoveries in other places such as Wamba, Katsina-Ala and Jema. The area where these terracotta figurines were calledisthe Nok culture or civilization area.

Benin civilization: Benin was important for its artwork. The craftsmen of Benin carved in wood and ivory and cast objects in bronze and brass. Art historians claim that bronze casting was introduced into Benin by an Ife artist.

Ife civilization: Ife is important because of its terracotta and bronze heads. Objects such as stools and figures were carved on hard stone called quartz while animal and human figurines were carved from granite and decorated with iron nails. Art historians believe that Ife art originated from the Nok culture because of similarities in the two.

Igbo Ukwu civilization: Some bronze objects and ornaments were accidentally discovered while digging a toilet pit at Igbo Ukwu in 1939. It eventually led to the excavation of three sites in the area by an archeologist called Thurstan Shaw. The three sites included a burial chamber, a pit and a compound wall.

The traditional political institutions in pre-colonial Nigeria:

The Yoruba’s

The Yoruba’s are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Yoruba’s trace their origin to Oduduwa. Ile-Ife is regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba’s. Stories about origin of the Yoruba people are diverse: There is the story of their migration from the East. This is the belief that the Yoruba people migrated from the North-East So from Mecca, through Egypt leading to a final settlement in Ile-Ife. There is the Oke Oramfe version. That is the earth was full of water, and God Olodumare sent servants who were given some objects with which the world was created.

The political structures of the Yoruba’s:

The political structures of the Yoruba kingdoms were similar in nature. Each consisted of a capital town, subordinate towns, villages, and farmlands. Each town has a king known as “Oba” who resides in the palace called “Aafin.” His paraphernalia of office included a beaded crown (Ade), a slippers (bata), horse tail (irukere) and sceptre Ase). The Oba is both the spiritual and political head of the kingdom. The king also had other rulers of lesser ranks and status. Those of lesser ranks were in charge of the subordinate towns and wore crowns made of white beads known as “sese ofun”. Another group of rulers were the Baale the third in rank and in charge of the villages and then the oloja the fourth rank leaders and they ruled over the farmlands.

The Igbo’s

The Igbo people are best known for their segmentary or acephalous way of life. They have no centralised state. They are grouped into five sub-cultures: the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria, the Igbo of North-Eastern Nigeria, the Western Igbo and the Northern Igbo. One of the most popular versions of the migratory stories of origin of the Igbo people is the one that points to Israel. This assumption is based on the so-called similarities between the cultures of the Igbo and the ancient Hebrew. Some Igbo scholars consider themselves as off-shoots of the lost tribes of the Hebrews who migrated southward.

The Nri version: Nri version is the only authentic version of origin in existence in the oral tradition of the Igbo. According to Nri version, the ancestor of the Igbo, Eri, descended from the sky and sailed down the River Anambra. When he arrived at Aguleri, he met some autochthonous group of people who had no living memory of their own and settled with them. As their population increased, some groups migrated to other parts of Igboland to establish their own settlements.

The political structures of the Igbo’s:

There is no highly centralised authority what they have is a diffusion of authority into diverse groups although, there was no highly centralised authority, some socio-political institutions existed in each village to perform legislative, executive, administrative, military and judicial functions, such institutions included the family, council of elders, age grades and secret societies. The family was the smallest political unit in Igbo traditional society. Each family was headed by an “Ofo” title holder.

The Hausa’s

Hausa land is located in Northern Nigeria. Hausa land, before 1804 was made up of fourteen states, and they were of two distinct groups. The first group consist of seven states called “Hausa Bakwai” states, that is, Hausa legitimate states. The second group consist of the remaining seven states and were known as “Hausa banza” states, that is Hausa illegitimates states. The Hausa “bakwai” states are Daura, Biram, Zaria, Katsina, Kano, Rano, and Gobir while the Hausa “Banza” states are Nupe, Gwari, Yauri, Bauchi, Zamfara and Kebbi. Oral tradition attributed the origin of the Hausa states to a man named Bayajidda, an Arab prince who travelled to the Sahel from Baghdad. He killed a monstrous snake that oppressed the people of Daura, and he married the queen. The queen had six sons already, and she produced another son with Bayajidda, and each of these sons ruled one of the seven Hausa city-states, becoming the first kings. The combined kingdoms of Hausa land were sometimes called the Daura, since Daura is the place where Bayajidda supposedly founded the Hausa people.

The political structures of the Hausa’s:

The “Sarki”was known as the head of any typical Hausa state. He worked with a retinue of officials in a well-organised court. Sarkin Kasar, which means “ruler of the land,” was the full title given to any effective and efficient head of Hausa State. The Sarkin Kasar combined both political and religious/spiritual functions. He was also the chief executive and judge of the State, but he was aided by a council of state. At the district level, the government was modelled after that at the national level. It is worthy of note that between 14th and 15th centuries, the socio-political organisation of Hausa States took another shape. For instance, Islam was adopted and this gave rise to many new political institutions such as the offices of the Galadima, Madawaki, Magaji, Dogari, Yari Sarki and Sarki Yau.

Islam among the Hausa people: Islam was introduced to Hausa land in the fourteenth century, and by the fifteenth century it was accepted as the religion of the ruling class. The Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio of 1804 further strengthened and consolidated the religion in this area.

Colonial administration of Nigeria: The British who have often been credited with the creation of Nigeria were not the first Europeans to land in Nigeria. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive Nigeria through Bini Kingdom. Thus, The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was the unfortunate channel that first put the British in contact with Nigeria. The trans-Atlantic slave trade was abolished in the 19th century.

The birth of Nigeria as a Goe-political entity: Before the year 1900, all the different parts of Nigeria conquered by the British were still under their original administration. But by 1900, the whole Nigeria was under the responsibility of the British Colonial Office. The May 1906 amalgamation is known as the first ever amalgamation of the British in Nigeria. British government amalgamated Lagos colony and protectorate with the protectorate of Southern Nigeria to form the new colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The second amalgamation was that of 1914. In January 1914, the British government amalgamated Northern and Southern Nigeria.