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The historical background of Nigerian government and politics involved the pre-colonial and colonial period of Nigeria. The Nigerian state is a colonial creation and is a product of a historical arrangement that arose out of European adventure with its eventual culmination in the colonisation of Africa and prior to this, pre-colonial era consists of different independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires. Man’s exact time to live in Nigeria was unknown but archeological facts point to the fact that man settled in Nigeria since the Palaeolithic period (500,000 – 9000BC). The artefacts found point to the fact that Nigerians also took part in the stone-age civilisation. The man who lived in Nigeria during the early years worked hard to cope with his environment. Because he needed food, he began to hunt animals and gather fruits; then he began to make tools consisting of pebbles for cutting and chopping. There is evidence of more advanced technology in various parts of Nigeria during the bronze and metal age and one of the most active period of technological efforts in Nigeria was during thus period around 500BC to 200AD. There were people who made sculptures of which many were of human heads and figurines made from terracotta and possessed a distinctive artistic style.

Information on the major land marks in early Nigerian history was made possible by evacuation works done on the places man lived in the remote past. Examples are Nok, Igbo Ukwu, Ife, Benin, etc. And they are referred to as the centres of ancient civilisation. The Nok culture is believed to be a transitional civilisation between the stone and iron age because of the presence of stone and iron objects. The Nok culture existed between the 5th and 2nd century BC. Benin was important for its artwork . Benin craftsmen 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 is important because because of its terracotta and bronze heads. Art historians believed that Ife art originated from the Nok culture and believed that it was from Ife that Benin probably learnt bronze sculpture. In Igbo Ukwu, some bronze objects and ornaments were accidentally discovered while digging a toilet pit in 1939 which led to the evacuation of three sites which included a burial chamber, a pit and a compound wall. This discovery was made by Tgurstan Shawn in the middle of the 9th century AD

The Yorubas are one of the largest ethnic group in Nigeria and are united by language. They trace their origin to Oduduwa who was the founder of the Yoruba kingdom and Ile-Ife is regarded as their ancestral home. Johnson traced the origin of the Yoruba to the North-Eastern area of Africa. With them the East is Mecca and Mecca is the East. After several years of journey from Egypt, they finally settled in Ile-Ife in Nigeria. Oduduwa is believed to be their first leader who passed down the title to his sons and grandsons to found other Yoruba kingdoms. Oke Oramfe is located in Ile-Ife and is believed to be the centre from which the world was created. In Oke Oramfe's version there was a period when the world was covered by water and so God sent messengers to the world which included Obatala or Orisa Nla or Orisa Alase (as the leader) and sixteen Oye (immortals). They were given five pieces of iron, a lump of earth tied to a white piece of cloth and a cockerel. On their way to the world, Obatala got drunk and Oduduwa seized the symbol of authority and led them to the world. The place they landed is Oke Oramfe in Ile-Ife. Oduduwa then set five pieces of iron and placed the lump of dirt on them. The cockerel spread the lump with its feet throughout the earth and so the earth was formed with Oduduwa as its ruler. The political structure of the Yoruba kingdoms were similar in nature as each consisted of a capital town, subordinate towns, villages and farmlands. Each town has an Oba who resides in Aafin(palace) . he is the spiritual and political head of the kingdom who’s laws are binding as he is the supreme authority. He enjoyed many privileges but limitations were put in place to curb the despotism and tyranny of the king. He had other leaders whom he delegated other things to.

The old Oyo empire’s government is a typical example of the pre-colonial administration in Yoruba land. The first organ of government was the king( Alaafin of Oyo). It was very unique in its system of government. The checks and balances of Oyo was rare and contributed to its stability for centuries. The Alaafin was the head of the empire and resident in the capital and was assisted in his administration by a retinue of officials. He was regarded as the companion of the gods. He autocratic powers were regulated by the Oyomesi (council of seven members who were also kingmakers with the power to remove an Alaafin). The members of the Oyomesi constituted another arm of government. They compromised of prominent members of society. The Ogboni cult played a mediatory role in any conflict between the Oyomesi and Alaafin and was a kind of counter power to the Oyomesi. The army was another arm of government which was very organised. It was called Are-Ona-Kankanfo made up of infantry and calvary. They were expected to live outside the capital and performed important roles like peacekeeping.

The Igbo people are best known for their segmentary way if life because in the old times, they had no centralised states and operated a government without kings. Igbo is grouped into the Western Igbo, Northern Igbo, Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, South-Eastern Nigeria and North-Eastern Nigeria. One of the most popular migratory stories is that the cane from the Hebrew tribes that migrated southward. Due to the limited professional historians it is impossible to really know where the Igbos originated from. The Igbos had no centralised authority but a diffusion of authority into different groups and some sociopolitical institutions existed in each village to perform legislative, judiciary and executive which included the family, age grades, council of elders and secret societies. The family being the smallest unit was headed by an ‘Ofo' title holder. The village believed they had one common ancestor and so they came together to make decisions as brothers. Of the ‘Ofo’ title holders, one was above all with the name ‘Okpara’ who held the ‘Ozo' title. The Age grade grew from childhood and took a common name to commemorate an event associated with the time of their birth. They were in charge if communal work, wars and government. The Oha-na-eze was the general assembly of the Igbo society. They met at the market squares and a decision taken during these meetings were final. The secret societies consisted of diviner's masquerades. They are the intermediaries between the living and the ancestors.

The Hausa land was made up of fourteen states and they were divided into two distinct groups; the “Hausa Bakwai", also known as the Hausa legitimate states and the “Hausa banza", also known as the Hausa illegitimate states. The “Sarki" was the head of the typical Hausa state and he worked with a retinue of officials in a well-organized court. He combined being the political and religious head.

Islam was introduced to Hausa in the 14th century and in the 15th, century was accepted as a religion of the ruling class. This was strengthened by Usman Dan Fodio in the Jihad of 1804 which led to the conquest of the existing old Hausa Kingdom.

In every state conquered, the former Hausa ruler was replaced by a Fulani Emir. However, the basic political organisation was not destroyed but improved upon. Each emir was owed allegiance to Dan Fodio and his two representatives at Sokoto and Gwandu.

The Emir was an absolute monarch in his Emirates. He was the political administrative and spiritual leader. He administered his Emirates in accordance with the provisions of the Islamic and Sharia law. The emir controlled economic activities with his Emirates. He maintained law and order in his domain and was assisted by a group of district heads buddy of counsellors and council of advisors. The members of the council were project officers appointed by Uthman Dan Fodio and all had a special title. They included;

The Sarkin Fada- head of palace workers; the waziri- the prime minister of the Emirates; the galadima-:the administrator of the capital city; the madawaki- the commander of the Army; the Magaji- Treasurer; Sarkin Dan Doka-Inspector of Police Force; Sarkin Ruwa- Minister of water resources or fishing; Sarkin pawa- Head of chairman of Butchers; Yari- Chief Superintendent of Prisons.

Emir was appointed by the emir to reside at the headquarters and Head the district on behalf of the Emir. Each district was further subdivided into villages, each village into wards for administrative purposes.

The Hakimi appointed village heads to assist him in collecting taxes for Emirates. They have no power to make laws but the enforce laws made by the Emir. They do settle minor cases, customary case of inheritance and divorce but were obliged to refer all serious cases to Alkali courts at the state level.

The judicial administration of Hausa Fulani is based on Islamic legal system called Sharia. They are established throughout the emirate and each was headed by a trained sharia court judge called the Alkali. The chief justice is called the Grand khadi.

The first Europeans in Nigeria were the Portuguese through Bini kingdom. The Atlantic slave trade became more important than the arrival of the Portuguese. Demand Force it for slaves, could be traced to the introduction of plantation system of agriculture in places like Brazil, Jamaica, on Haiti among others. The transatlantic slave trade was the unfortunate channel that puts first the British in contact with Nigeria the trade got to maturity in the 16th century. After three centuries of the shameful slave trade came the so-called period of legitimate Commerce. There was another Golden opportunity for Europeans to get more directly involved in the affairs of the African state. Europeans first introduced the gunboat politic. Is wrong

The struggle among the European powers for colonies led to the partitioning of Africa among the 19 century each of the European powers were given the opportunity to establish colonies where it vested interests. The scramble for Africa by these European powers led to the partitioning of Africa after the Berlin conference of 1884 to 1885. Britain colonise Nigeria Ghana and Gambia and Sierra leone in West Africa. Before the year 1900, all the different parts of Nigeria conquered by the British were still under the original administrations. 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 Omega mission was that of 1914. In January 1914 the British government amalgamated northern and southern Nigeria the principal reason for this is the same as the may 1906. the northern protectorate was not as economically buoyant as the colony of the protectors of southern Nigeria.

Indirect rule may be a system of Britain ruling her colonies through the local authorities. The British officers defined the framework of the policies to be adopted and left the implementation to the local personnel or rulers.