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CHAPTER 2: AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE NIGERIAN STATE

The background of the Nigerian government dates back to the precolonial and colonial period. Precolonial period was before the coming of colonialists whereas colonial was the time colonialism was established. Archaeological evidences show that man settled in Nigeria since the Paleolithic period 500,000- 9000BC. Stone Age is divided into the early, middle and late Stone Age.

The early man had to survive first with food, he invented cutting tools called Oldowan-type tools. The early man went ahead to invent another type of tool, called the heavy chopper.

THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY NIGERIAN SOCIETIES

Major landmark in Early Nigerian History

Man lived in the ancient place of civilization, which are Nok, Igbo Ukwu, Ife and Benin. The history of these centers presents us with scientific and technological developments.

Nok Culture/Civilization

Once terracotta was found in Nok in 1936, more discoveries were preceded in other places. The culture is believed to be a transitional civilization between the stone and the Iron Age. It was found that Nok existed between the 5th and 2nd century B.C.

Benin Civilization

Craftsmen of Benin carved in wood and ivory and cast objects in bronze and brass.

Ife Civilization

This is important for its terracotta and bronze heads.

Igbo Ukwu Civilization

Many objects made of bronze were retrieved in different sites including the remains of skeletons of a king and five slaves buried with him.

TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN PRE-COLONIAL NIGERIA

Historical background of pre-colonial political system In Yoruba land

Yorubas are among the largest ethnic groups. Ile-Ife is their ancestral home. Their origin story defers but people traced their origin to the east, saying Yoruba’s originally came from the north-eastern part of Africa. Oduduwa is believed to have been their first leader.

According to Oke Oramfe’s version of origin, at the beginning the world was filled with water, then God sent some of his messengers to disperse and make what the world is today.

Political Structure of the Pre-colonial Yoruba Land

Each Yoruba kingdom consisted of a capital town, subordinate towns, villages and farmlands. Each town has a king. He has both the spiritual and political power. He is the supreme authority. There were subordinate rulers heading towns under the king. The town was the basic political unit, while subordinate towns were where the running of the whole kingdom was based. The pattern of administration was hierarchical.

THE OYO EMPIRE

The first organ of government was the king, the Alaafin of Oyo. Oyo was one of the rarest empires with in-built checks and balances. The Alaafin was assisted by a lot of officials, sometimes he had an autocratic tendency but was regulated by a council of seven members headed by Bashorun, acting as the prime minister.

Apart from the Alaafin cabinet, members of the Oyomesi cult made up another arm of government. It comprised of free and prominent members, holding a vital position in the society.

The army was another arm of government conferred with the title Are-Ona-Kankanfo. They were expected to live outside the capital ensuring stability of the empire, expansion as well as keeping territories in check.

Historical Background of Pre-colonial Political System in Igbo Land

Igbo people had no centralized states because of ancient times, they are best known for their segmentary or acephalous way of life. The igbo are grouped into the; The Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, The Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria, The Igbo of North-Eastern Nigeria, The western Igbo and The Northern Igbo. The most popular origin story of these people points to the Israel. This assumption is based on the similarities between the Igbo and ancient Hebrew. The society was acephalous, had limited professional historians, there were no equivalents of Oba, Alaafin or palaces in most parts which is what makes reconciling all these various versions difficult.

There’s another version called the Nri version, which people believe to be the to be the only authentic version of the igbo’s origin story. According to them their ancestors descended from the sky and sailed down the river. They met a group of people and settled with them. As their population grew people began to migrate to various parts of Igbo land.

POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF THE PRE-COLONIAL IGBO LAND

In their society, there was no centralized authority rather a diffusion of authority into several groups. They practiced direct democracy because there were no rulers in the form of Oba. Although, the society was democratic, there were socio-political institutions existing to perform political functions. The family was the smallest unit and was headed by an Ofo, a title holder. Among the Ofo,one of them is regarded as the Okpara who held the Ozo title and presided over the council of elders when issues affecting the lives of people were discussed. The age grade grew from childhood and took a common name to link with an event associated with the time of their birth. Communities organized themselves through this for work, war and government. The elders enforced elders’ decisions, seniority was of great importance, age graders not only enforced discipline but guarded people’s morality, it was thus a society of companionship and protection.

Oha-na-eze was a form of assembly where all male adult members met to perform legislative functions, it was usually held in the open village square. Decisions here were final. The recognition of an individual was based on his age and capacity rather than his background. Hardworking and wealthy people were accorded respect and were given important positions of authority. The secret societies comprised of the diviner’s masquerade playing an important role by acting as the link between the living and their ancestors. They performed sacrifices to ward off evil and atone for the sins of members of the community. Traditional religion was their official religion.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PRE-COLONIAL POLITICAL SYSTEM IN HAUSA LAND

Hausa land is located in the northern region of Nigeria, before 1804, there were two distinct groups called the Hausa Bakwai states, legitimate states and the Hausa Banza states, the illegitimate states.

The origin story of the Hausa states says a man named Bayajidda was an Arab prince who is their ancestor. The combined kingdom of Hausa land was called Daura, since it was supposedly the place Bayajidda founded the Hausa people. In their early history, the Hausa were polytheists.

POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF THE PRE-COLONIAL HAUSA LAND

The Sarki was the ruler of any typical Hausa state. He worked in a well-organized court with officials. Sarkin Kasar was the name given to an effective ruler, he combined both political and spiritual functions. He was helped by a council of state. Between the 14th and 15th centuries, the socio-political organization of Hausa states took another shape, Islam was adopted and it took new political institutions such as positions of Galadima, Magaji, Dogari etc. ,it also influenced its judicial system. The sharia law started taking place.

EMIRATE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT AMONG THE HAUSA PEOPLE

Islam was accepted as the religion of the ruling class in the 15th century but was introduced in the 14th. The jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio of 1804 strengthened the religion at the time. This lead to the conquest of the old Hausa kingdom, overthrow of the leadership by Fulani. In every conquered state, the former Hausa ruler would be replaced by the Fulani emir, a centralized political system was introduced.

The whole of Hausa kingdom was divided into two confederations. The emir was an absolute monarch, he was the political, administrative and spiritual leader. He maintained law and order in his domain. Important title holders in the emir’s cabinet include; Sarkin fada, Waziri, Galadima, magaji, Sarkin ruwa etc. To make the local government effective, each emirates were divided into districts and an official was appointed by the emir.

COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION AND INDIRECT RULE SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

The British weren’t the first Europeans to land in Nigeria, the Portuguese were. The arrival of the first Europeans was in Benin was in 1472. The Atlantic slave trade was carried out between the Europeans and Africans.

Birth of Nigeria as a Geo-political Entity

By 1900, Nigeria was under the responsibility of the British Colonial Office. The May 1906 Amalgamation is the first of the British in Nigeria. The second was that of 1914, where the British joined the Northern and Southern Nigeria. Sir Frederick Lugard is best known as the father of the January 1914 Amalgamation.