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An historical analysis of the evolution of the Nigeria state

The Nigerian government historical background involves the pre-colonial period and the colonial period in Nigeria. The pre-colonial period is the period before the coming of the colonialist to Nigeria while the colonial period is the era of the colonialist administration which was established in Nigeria.

The Nigeria state is a product of a historical arrangement that arose out of European adventure with its eventual culmination in the colonization of Africa making Nigeria a colonial creation. These states among others include the Borno empire, the Hausa states and the Sokoto Caliphate in the North; the Igbo segementry societies in the East; Benin kingdom and the Oyo Empire in the west. The exact time man settled in Nigeria is unknown but archeological evidence points that man settled in the region now known as Nigeria since the Palaeolithic period 500,000-9000BC. The stone can be divided into periods like the early Stone Age 3000000-35000BC; Middle stone age, 35000-15000BC and Late stone age 15000-500BC. The excavation of a Stone Age skeleton at Iwo Eleru near Akure in Ondo state has thrown more light on the earliest occupation of Nigeria. The skeleton was dated some 12000 years ago and this suggests that the country has been long inhabited.

Man who lived in Nigeria those days worked out methods of coping with their environment. First he needed food and began hunting of animals and gathering fruits. Archaeologists called the tools the Oldowan-type tools. This is because this type of tool was first identified by the archaeologists in the Olduvai George in Tanzania. Early man then went ahead to invent another type of tool known as the heavy chopper, this was more efficient in cutting than existing tools. During this period there were people and figures. The figures were made of terracotta and they all possessed a distinctive artistic style. Some of the places where man lived in Nigeria in the very remote past include: Nok, Igbo-Ukwu, Ife and Benin among others. They are usually referred to as centers of ancient civilization. The history of these centers of ancient civilization presents us with the scientific and technological developments of early Nigerian societies.

Nok culture/civilization

The discovery of terracotta (burnt clay) head of a monkey 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 found is called the Nok culture or civilization area.

Benin civilization

The craftsmen of Benin carved in wood and ivory and cast objects in bronze and bras. They cast wooden doors and ivory masks, one of which was the ivory mask used as FESTAC symbol in 1977.

Ife civilization

Ife is important because of its terracotta and bronze heads. Objects such as tools and figures were carved on hard stone called quartz while animal and human figures were carved from granite and decorated with iron nails.

Igbo Ukwu civilization

Some bronze objects and ornaments were accidentally discovered while digging a toilet pit at Igbo-Ukwu in 1939. These sites excavated at Igbo-Ukwu have been dated to the middle of the 9th century A.D.

Historical background of pre-colonial political system in Yoruba land.

The Yoruba’s are one of the largest ethnic group in Nigeria and are united in language. The Yoruba people trace their origin to Oduduwa who was the founder of the Yoruba kingdom. Ile-Ife is regarded as the ancestral home for the Yoruba people. Johnson traced the origin of the Yoruba people to the East. To them the East is Mecca and Mecca is the East. Oduduwa is believed to be the first leader that led the Yoruba to Ile-Ife and subsequently sent his sons and grandsons to found the Yoruba kingdoms.

Oke Oramfe is located in Ile-Ife. It is believed to be the center from which the world was created. According to the legend, there was a period when the world was covered by water. The almighty God then decided to send some of his messengers to the world and they included Obatala or Orisa Nla or Orisa Alase (as the leader)n and sixteen Oye (immortals). They were given five pieces of iron, a lump of earth tied to a white piece of cloth and a cockrel. Obatala got drunk on the way with palm wine, Oduduwa seized the symbol of authority from him nand eventually let the party to the world. The site on which they landed is traditionally known as Oke Oramfe in Ile-Ife. On arrival, Oduduwa set down the pieces of iron and placed the lump of earth on them. The cockerel then spread the lump of earth with its feet throughout the earth. Consequently, the earth was formed and Oduduwa, who became the ruler.

The political structures of the Yoruba kingdoms were similar in nature. The Oba is both the spiritual and political head of the kingdom and his words are laws are binding on everybody. The Oba enjoyed many privileges but certain limitations were placed on his powers. These limitations known as “eewo” were designated to curb the despotism and tyranny on the part of the part of the king. If a king violates “eewo” it could lead to his death. These bodies in the various Yoruba towns were called different names such as Oyomesi, Ewarefa etc.

The first organ of government in Oyo empire was the king known as Alaafin of Oyo. His powers were limited by the Oyomesi. The Ogboni cults administration was kind of a counter power to the Oyomesi as well. The army was credited with performing important functions which included stability of the empire, expansion as well as keeping dissident territories in check.

The igbo people are best known for their segementry or acephalous way of life, there was no highly centralized authority. The families were the smallest political unit in Igbo traditional society. The Oha-na-eze was a form of general assembly in traditional igbo society. The official religion practiced in pre-colonial igbo land was the traditional religion. They believed in re-incarnation.

Hausa land is located in Northern Nigeria. Oral tradition attributed the origin of the Hausa states to a man name Bayajidda. He killed monstrous snakes that oppressed the people of Daura and married the queen. The combined kingdoms of hausa land were sometimes called the Daura since Daura is the place where Bayajidda supposedly found the Hausa people. Despite the story that Bayajidda came from Baghdad, for most of their early history that Hausa were polytheists; Islam was not introduced to the region on any discernible scale until the eleventh century. The Sarki was known as the head of the head of any typical Hausa state. Sarkin Kasar which means “ruler of the land” was the full title given to any effective and efficient head of Hausa state and he was the head of political and spiritual functions. Islam was introduced in Hausa land in the 14th century and it was accepted as the ruling class religion in the 15th century. The jihad of Uthman Dan fodio of 1804 further strengthened and consolidated the religion in this area. Each of the Emirs owed allegiance to Dan fodio and his two representatives at Sokoto and Gwandu. The whole of the former Hausa kingdom was divided into two confederations. The Emir was an absolute monarch in his emirates. The members of the council were: Sarkin Fada who is the spokesman of the emir and organizer of the palace workers, Waziri; the prime minister of the emirates, Galadima; the administrator of the capital city, Madawaki; the commander and the head of the emirate army, Magaji; government treasurer in charge of the government treasury, Sarkin Don Doka; inspector general of police force called Don Doka, Sarkin Ruwa; minister in charge of water resources or the rover fishing official, Sarkin Pawa; Head of chairman of butchers at the abattoirs, Yari; chief superintendent of prisons in the emirate. The Hakimi appointed village heads to assist him in collecting taxes for the emirate. The chief justice of the Sharia courts was called Grand Khadi

Colonial administration and indirect rule system in Nigeria historical background

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive Nigeria through Bini Kingdom. In 1441, a Portuguese voyager, Gonzales presented 10 African slaves ton Prince Henry the navigator as gifts. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was the unfortunate channel that first put the British in contact with Nigeria. The trade got to maturity in the 16th century. In the 19th century, the British decided to abolish the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and they did so through the operations of the British west African Naval Squadron. After three centuries of shameful slave trade, came the so-called period of legitimate commerce. Europeans first introduced the “Gun-boat” politics. The British first formally annexed Nigerian territory and in 1861, they took Lagos as a colony but, the bulk of Nigerian territory treaties was occupied in the late 19th century. The scramble for Africa, by these European powers led to the partitioning of Africa after the Berlin Conference of 1884-85. As from 1898, the British government sought to establish and maintain a colonial state in Nigeria.

The birth of Nigeria as a Geo-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 1906 amalgamation is known as the first ever amalgamation of the British in Nigeria. British government amalgamated Lagos colony and protectorate with the protectorates southern Nigeria to form the new colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria. The second amalgamation was that of 1914, the British amalgamated the Northern and the Southern protectorates. The reason for the amalgamation was because the Northern protectorate was not economically buoyant as the southern protectorate. Sir Fredrick Lugard (later became Lord) is best known as the father of the “January 1914” amalgamation. Britain governed Nigeria through indirect rule whereby they ruled through local traditional rulers.