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CHAPTER 2

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

The Nigerian state is a colonial creation. It is a product of a historical arrangement that arose out of European adventure with its eventual culmination in the colonization of Africa. Prior to the emergence of the Nigerian state, pre-colonial Nigeria compromises 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 segmentry societies in the East; Benin Kingdom and the Oyo Empire in the West and several ethnic identities in the Benue Valley.

The exact time when man began to live in Nigeria is unknown but there are archaeological evidences from different parts of Nigeria which pointed to the fact that man had settled in the region now known as Nigeria since the Paleolithic period 500,000- 9000BC. The artefacts, mostly stone tools, found by archeologists further confirmed that Nigerians also took part in the stone 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.

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 12,000 years ago, and this suggests that the country has been long inhabited.

The man who lived in Nigeria during those years worked hard to cope with his environment. First, he needed food. For this purpose, he began to hunt the animals and to gather fruits. But he soon began to invent tools consisting of pebbles made into chopping and cutting tools. Archeologists called tools the Oldowan-type tools. This is because this type of tool was first identified by the archeologists in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. Early man in Nigeria advanced from the Early Stone Age. He began to make hand axes. Early men proceeded to invent another type of tool, which is a heavy chopper. It was more efficient in cutting than existing tools. The type was first seen at Sango bay on the shores of Lake Victoria in Uganda, East Africa. This is why it is called Sagoan.

There is evidence of more advanced technology in various parts of Nigeria during the bronze and metal age. Indeed, one of the most active periods of the technological efforts in Nigeria was during this period, around 500BC to 200BC. There are various major landmarks in Early Nigerian History. Information on the major landmarks in early Nigerian history was made possible through the evacuation work done on places where man lived in Nigeria in the very remote past. They are usually referred to as centers of ancient civilization. They are Nok Culture/Civilization, Benin Civilization, Ife Civilization and Igbo Ukwu Civilization

In this chapter, it talks about traditional political institutions in pre-colonial Nigeria. The three majority ethnic groups of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani in Nigeria traditional political system of government shall be examined. The Yoruba’s are one of the largest ethnic group in Nigeria and are united by 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 of the Yoruba people. The political structures of Yoruba kingdoms were similar in nature. Using the Oyo Empire as an example, they are namely the Alaafin administration which consists of the Alaafin as the head who was assisted by some other officials and he is regulated by the king makers who are called the Oyomesi which is headed by the Bashorun, the Ogboni Cult’s administration which play as a mediatory role among the Oyomesi and the Alaafin and the Army which headed by the Are-Ona-Kakanfo.

The Igbo are best known for their segmentary or acephalous way of life. This is because from the ancient times, they had no centralized states. Consequentially, they operated a kind of government without kings. The Igbo are grouped into five sub-cultures. They are the Igbo of Eastern Nigerian, the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria, the Igbo Of North Eastern Nigeria, the Western Igbo and the Northern Igbo

The 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 consists of seven states called ‘Hausa bakwai’ states that is, Hausa legitimate states. The second group consists of the remaining seven states and was known as ‘Hausa Banza’ states, that is Hausa illegitimates states. The Hausa ‘Bakwai’ states are Daura, Biram, Zaria, Kastina Kano, Rano and Gobir while the Hausa ‘banza’ states are Nupe, Gwari, Yauri, Bauchi, Zamfara, Kebbi and Yoruba. The Emirate system of government was later introduced which is made of Emir as the head and other assisting officials giving specific functions like Waziri, Madawaki and Magaji.

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 Nigeria. British government amalgamated Lagos colony and protectorate with the protectorate of the 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 amalgamates Northern and Southern Nigeria. The principle reason for this is the same as that of May 1906. The Northern protectorate was not economically buoyant as the colony and protectorate of the Southern Nigeria. That was why, for the British imperial offices, since the Southern trade was booming, amalgamation would allow the surpluses acquired in the South.