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Level: 200

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Course Code: GST 203

Matric No: 19/LAW01/213

Question: In about 3 pages, review Chapter 2, “AN Historical Analysis of the Evolution of the Nigerian State” in Salient Issues in Government and Nigeria’s Politics, page 15-32

The Historical Background of the Nigerian Government can be traced to the pre-colonial and colonial period in Nigeria. The pre-colonial period is the period before the coming of the colonial masters while the colonial period is the era that colonial administration was established in Nigeria.

Nigeria is a colonial creation, with it being a product of historical arrangement which arose from European adventure and eventually the colonization of Africa. Initially pre-colonial Nigeria comprised of different independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires such as the Borno Empire, Sokoto Caliphate, Benin Kingdom, the Oyo Empire and many others. They all differ in their historical origins, cultures and social make-ups. Nigeria is bordered by other countries surrounding it, such as Benin, on the west, on the North, Niger and on the East, by Cameroon.

According to archaeological findings, man had the settled in the region now known as Nigeria since the Paleolithic period 500,000-9000BC. The artifacts found later on by archaeologists mostly stone tools confirmed that Nigerians also took part in the stone-age civilization. The Stone Age can be divided into several periods such as the Early Stone Age 3,000,000-35,000BC; Middle Stone Age, 35,000-15,000BC and; Late Stone Age 15,000-500BC. Further excavation of a Stone Age skeleton at Iwo Eleru near Akure in Ondo state, shed more light of the occupation of the early man and showed that the skeleton was dated back some 12,000 years ago, suggesting that the country has long been inhabited.

The Early Man who lived in Nigeria during those years worked hard to cope with his environment making tools and equipment to help make living easier. He hunted for animals and gathered fruits, and later on made cutting and chopping tools. Archaeologists called the tools the Oldowan-type tools due to its origin in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. The Early man then started to advance and began making hand axes, which were oval and pointed in shape, they also had a cutting edge and were trimmed from both sides, and were made for multiple uses. Similar tools had been located by archaeologists who worked outside Nigeria at a site in St Acheul in Northern Nigeria. These tools were made in the Early Stone Age, refined in the middle stone age and Late Stone Age.

Information on the major land marks in early Nigerian history 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 included: Nok, Igbo-Ukwu, Ife and Benin among others. They are usually referred to as centres of ancient civilization. The history of these centres of ancient civilization present us with the scientific and technological developments of early Nigerian Societies.

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, Kastina-Ala and Jema and the area where these terracotta figurines were found is known as the Nok culture or civilization area. The culture is believed to be a transitional civilization between the Stone Age and Iron Age in Nigeria because of the presence of both stone and iron objects. It is discovered that the culture existed between the 5th and 2nd century BC. For Benin civilization, Benin was important for its art-work. The craftsmen of Benin carved in wood and ivory and cast object in bronze and bass. Art historians claim that bronze casting was introduced into Benin by an Ife artist. They cast wooden doors and ivory mask, one of which was the ivory mask used as FESTAC symbol in 1977. Also Ife is important because of its terracotta and bronze head. Objects such as stools and figures were carved on hard stone called quartz while animal and human figures were carved from granite and decorated with iron nails. Art historians believed that Ife art originated from the Nok culture because of similarities in the two, especially beaded neck, wrist and ankles and they also believed it was from Ife that Benin probably learnt bronze sculpture. For Igbo-Ukwu civilization, some bronze objects and ornaments were accidentally discovered while digging a toilet pit at Igbo Ukwu in 1939. This eventually led to the excavation of three sites in the area by an archaeologist called Thurstan Shaw. The three sites included a burial chamber, a pit and a compound wall. The remains of decayed skeleton which have been suggested to be those of a king and five slaves who were buried with him was discovered in various site and these sites excavated has been dated back to the middle of 9th century A.D.

In this chapter, the writer examined the three ethnic groups; Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani. The Yorubas trace their origin to Oduduwa. Ile-Ife is regarded as the ancestral home of the Yorubas. The 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, that is from Mecca, through Egypt leading to a final settlement in Ile-Ife; there is the Oke Oramfe version which says that 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 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 Ade, bata, irukere and sceptre Ase. The Oba is both the spiritual and political head of the kingdom.

The Igbo people are best known for their segmentary or acephalous way of life. This is because from ancient time, the Igbos have no centralised state. The Igbo 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. Nri version was seen as 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. In the pre-colonial Igbo land. 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.

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, 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 “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 birth to many new political institutions such as the offices of the Galadima, Madawaki, Magaji, Dogari, Yari Sarki and Sarki Yau.