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**MATRIC NO; 19/sms09/077**

**LEVEL; 200**

**DEPARTMENT; INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY**

**COURSE TITLE; GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTION**

**COURSE CODE; GST203**

QUESTION

REVIEW CHAPTER 2 ON THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE IN POLITICS, IN SALIENT ISSUES ON GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIAN POLITICS.

ANSWER

The pre-colonial period is one of such major importance in the Nigerian history. It is before the coming of the colonialists to Nigeria while the colonial period refers to the era that colonial administration was established in the country. The pre-colonial Nigeria existed without a united front as it was characterized by different independent chiefdoms, state , kingdom and empires, which include the Bornu Empire, Hausa states and the Sokoto caliphates in the North, the igbo segment societies in the east, Benin kingdom and the oyo Empire in the west and several ethnic identities in the Benue Valley.

The country is bordered to the south by the bights of Benin and Biafra which are on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. On the west Nigeria is bordered by Benin, on the North by Niger, and on the by Cameroun in its existence North eastern corner, Lake Chad. Nigeria stretches roughly 700 miles from west to east and 650 miles from south to North, covering an area between 3 degree and 15 degree east longitude and between 4 degree and 14 degree Latitude. Man settled in the region now known as NIGERIA since the Paleolithic period 500,000-9000BC. The artifacts, mostly stone tools around by archeological further confirmed that Nigerians also take part in the Stone Age civilization. These are the early stone age; 3,000,000 – 35,000BC; middle stone age; 35000-15000BC and late stone age; 15000-500BC.The excavation of 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 long been 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 gather fruits. He soon began to invent tools consisting of pebbles made into chopping and cutting tools. Archaeologists called the first tools the Oldowon-type tools. This is because this type of tool was first identified by the archaeologists in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. The early man advanced in the making of hand axes. These tools were made during the Early Stone Age, but they were later refined during the Middle Stone Age and Late Stone Age. Small stone tools believed to be used for hunting have been located in Jos, Plateau State and Iwo Eleru in Ondo state.

Early man then proceeded to invent another type of tool, which is a heavy chopper. The type that was first seen at Sango Bay on the west shores of Lake Victoria in Uganda, East Africa. This is why it’s called the Sagoan. One of the most active periods of technological efforts in Nigeria was during this period, around 500BC to 200AD. During this period there were people who lived in Nigeria who made Sculptures many of which were human heads and figures. The site in which the figures were found was the village of Nok. The figures were made of terracotta and they all possessed a distinctive artistic style. Similar findings have been made in parts of Ile-ife, Jebba, Esie, Igbo-Ukwu and Benin. Some of the places where man lived in Nigeria in the very remote past included; Nok, Igbo-Ukwu, Benin, Ife among others. They are usually referred to as centres of ancient civilization. The discovery of a 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 areas where terracotta figurines were found is called the Nok culture or Civilization area. The Nok culture is believed to be a transitional civilization between the stone Age and the Iron age in Nigeria because of the presence of a combination of stone and iron objects. It was discovered that the Nok culture existed between the 5th and 2nd century B.C.

The craftsmen of Benin carved in wood and ivory and cast objects in bronze and brass. They cast wooden doors and ivory masks, one of which was the ivory mask used as FESTAC symbol in 1977. In the Ife civilization, Ife is important because of its terracotta and bronze heads. Object such as stools and figures were carved on hard stones called quartz while animals and human figures were carved from granite and decorated with iron nails. An example is Opa Oranmiyan in Ile-ife. Art historians believed that Ife art originated from the Nok culture because of similarities in the two, especially beaded neck, wrist and ankles. They also believed that it was from Ife that Benin probably learnt bronze Sculpture. Some bronze objects and ornaments were accidently 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 site excavated at Igbo Ukwu has been dated to the middle of the 9th century A.D.

In the historical background of pre-colonial political system, the Yoruba are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and are united by language. The Yoruba people trace their origin to Oduduwa who was the founder of the Yoruba kingdom. Johnson in his book,” History of the Yoruba” traced the origin of Yoruba to the “East”, the Yoruba originally came from the North-Eastern area of Africa. With them is Mecca which is in 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 find other Yoruba Kingdoms. The pre-colonial Yoruba kingdoms had established law making and judicial institution called the Ogboni; they also had established tax system and defense or military out fits.

The Hausa/ Fulani kingdoms were divided into Emirates and Caliphates. They had a highly centralized system surrounded by their customs and religion. They had an established tax system and military outfit called Calvary.

The Igbo system, they had a decentralized system. They also had tax system, which wasn’t as stringent as the western or northern states. There was equality within the system as everyone both male and female were allowed to participate in decision making. It was made up of the council of elders, age groups, etc.

The advent of colonialism slowly took a hold on Africa as the scramble for Africa by these European powers led to the portioning of Africa after the Berlin conference of 1884-85. Britain colonized Nigeria, Ghana, the Gambia and Sierra Leone in West Africa. As from 1898, the British government sought to establish and maintain a colonial state in Nigeria.