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Chapter Two: An Historical Analysis Of The Evolution Of The Nigeria State

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

Achievements Of Early Man

The early men 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 animals and to gather fruits; and this was how agriculture slowly began because after they were done eating they re-planted the seed of most food. But man began inventing tools consisting of pebbles made into chopping and cutting tools which Archaeologists called; Oldowan-tyoe tools. This was first identified in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. Such evidences pointed to the fact that man had settled in the region now known as Nigeria since the Paleolithic period; 500000-9000BC. The artifacts mostly stone tools found by archaeologists further confirmed that Nigerians also took part in the stone-age civilsation. 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.

Major Landmark In Early Nigerian History

Nok Culture/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, Kastina. Through the use of carbon dating, it was discovered that the Nok culture existed between the 5th and 2nd century B.C.

Benin Civilization

Benin was important for its art-work. The craftsmen of Benin carved in wood and ivory and cast objects in bronze and brass. Art historians claim that bronze casting was introduced into Benin by an Ife artist. One of the ivory mask which was created was used as FESTAC symbol in 1977.

Ife Civilization

It is important because of its terracotta and bronze heads. 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 believe that Ife art originated from Nok culture because of similarities in the two.

Igbo Ukwu Civilization

Many objects made of bronze were discovered in the various sites including the remains of decayed skeleton which have been suggested to be those of a king and five slaves who were buried with him. The sites excavated at Igbo Ukwu have been dated to the middle of the 9th century A.D

History Background Of Pre-Colonial Political System In Yoruba Land

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. Ile-Ife is regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba people. Oduduwa is believed to be the first leader that led the Yoruba to Ile-Ife and subsequently sent his sons and grandsons to found other Yoruba kingdoms.

Political Structure Of The Pre-Colonial Yoruba Land

The political structures of the Yoruba kingdom were similar in nature. Each town has a king known as “Oba” who resides in the palace called “Aafin”. His paraphernalia of office included a beaded crown (Ade), a slippers (Bata), horse tail(irukere) and scepter(Ase). The Oba is both the spiritual and political head of the kingdom. The pattern of administration was hierarchical. At the lowest level were the compound heads (Baale). They administered the compound on behalf of the king with the assistance of heads of component lineages. Next in line was the ward head who administered the ward on behalf of the king. At the apex was a group of civil chiefs (igbimo ilu) headed by the king. The bodies in the various towns were called different names such as Oyomesi, Ewarefa, etc. The government of the old Oyo is a typical example of the pre-colonial administration in Yoruba land. The first organ of government in Oyo Empire was the king known as Alaafin of Oyo.

Historical Background Of Pre-Colonioal Political System In Igbo Land

The Igbo people are best known for their segmentary or acephalous way of life. This is because from the ancient times, they had no centralized states. Consequently, they operated a kind of government without kings. One of the most popular versions of the migratory stories of origin of the Igbo people is the one that points to Israel. The assumption is based on the so-called similarities between the cultures of the Igbo and the ancient Hebrew.

Political Structure Of The Pre-Colonial Igbo Land

The family was the smallest unit in Igbo traditional society. Each family was headed by an “Ofo” title holder. The family sees itself as having one common ancestor. Among the “Ofo” title holders, some of them was recognized as the most senior to others. He was known as the “Okpara” who held the “Ozo” title and presided over the council of elders meeting where issues affected the lives of the people were discussed.

Age Grade was organized on a village basis. The association or age grade grew from childhood and took a common name to commemorate an event associated with the time of their birth

Oha-na-eze was a form of general assembly in traditional Igbo society. All the male adult members usually met in this assembly to perform legislative functions. Each age-set had its own special rights, duties, obligations and responsibilities in matters affecting the village.

The secret societies consists of the diviners’ masquerades, “Ubinuknabi” at Arochukwu, the “Amadisha” of Ozuzzu and so on. They all played significant roles in the Igbo traditional society. They acted as intermediary between the living and ancestors.

Historical Background Of Pre-Colonial Political System In Hausa Land

The “ Sarki” was known as the head of any typical Hausa State. He worked with a retinue of officials in well-organized court. The Sarkin Kasar combined both political and religious functions. He was also the chief executive and judge of the State but he was aided by a council of state. The Islamisation of Hausa land also influenced its judicial system. The judicial administration of Hausa-Fulani was based on the Islamic legal system called Sharia. Sharia courts were established throughout the Emirates and each was headed by a trained Sharia Court Judge called Alkali.