

GST 113

NIGERIA PEOPLES & CULTURE

Sarah AJIYA
Cordelia CLAYTON
Tobi JOHNSON
Dinatu B. TANKO
Felix ODOFIN
Cynthia M. SAIDU

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LESSON 7

Major Ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria

THE NUPE

Just like the Hausa/Fulani, the early history of the Nupe people is not much known. The pre-colonial Nupe people and state developed in the region of the Niger and Benue valleys of the Nigerian Middle Belt. In present day Nigeria, the Nupes are predominantly found in part of Kogi, Kwara, and Niger state. The Nupe state was located on the north bank of the Niger at its confluence with the River Kaduna. Nupeland was located at the cross roads of trade from Borno to Kano axis in the Northeast, as well as Yorubaland, Ganga and Benin in the Southwest. Gbara was its capital. It was located on the bank of the Kaduna River and was an important trading center as well. Gbara functioned as an entreport connecting Benin and Oyo trade with Nupe.

Origins of the Nupe People

Like any other ethnic group in Nigeria, the Nupe people also have various versions of origin.

The Nupe-Centred Version

Some scholars believe that the early Nupe people originated where they presently occupy.

The Egyptian Version

Other elites argue that the first peoples of the Nupe came from Egypt. Therefore, Egypt was the origin of the Nupe people.

The Idah Version

Tsoede or Edegi is considered by some Nupe people as the founder of their State. According to Nupe tradition, Tsoede might have arrived in the early 16th century from Idah. He (Trodede) is also believed to have had an Igala father and a Nupe mother.

The Igala Version

History tells us that the Nupe people had at a time paid allegiance and tribute to the Attah of the Igala state. To them, in the 16th century, a hero, an Idah Prince known as Tsoede re-established Nupe's independence with himself as the "ETSU NUPE" (king of Nupeland).



A Nok head with Nupe features

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE NUPE PEOPLE

The Etsu Nupe was known as the head of the Nupe Kingdom. He operated a two-level administration: central and provincial. History tells us that the Etsu Nupe enjoyed a divine status and people worshipped and respected him. His word was law. But the Etsu Nupe was not always absolute because his power and actions were regulated by a body of traditions and taboos. Due to early contact with the Europeans on the river Niger, the Nupe are somewhat westernized.

Regarding their religion, the Nupe people are highly Islamised group. A strong Nupe kingdom had existed since the 15th century up to the Fulani Jihad. The Fulani leaders who took over Nupe land were completely absorbed into Nupe culture and became Nupe.

The Nobility

Besides the Etsu Nupe, there was a class of powerful gentlemen called nobility. Its main task was to help the king in carrying out his duties as leader. There were nobilities such as the Shaba, Kpotuh and Maku.

The Zitzu

In traditional Nupe land, each village was headed by the Zitzu. He was an appointee of the Etsu. The Zitzu was in turn assisted by a council of elders. The Zitzu always pays tribute to the Etsu in recognition of his authority.

THE JUKUN (KWARARAFI)**Origin of the Jukun**

Again, like other ethnic groups in Nigeria, the origin of the Jukun people is not fixed. The Jukun are also known as the Kwararafa. They are believed to have occupied the area between the River Benue and the River Ibi in Gongola state. Wukari was also known as the principal town of the Jukun people, and it is in that town that their King resided. The Jukun State was large.

The Kano Chronicle Version

The Kano chronicle version was the most authentic source that could say something convincing about the Jukun history of origin. According to records from the Kano Chronicle, the Jukun people raided the Hausaland and Bornu in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This shows that although the origin of the Jukun people was almost unknown, they were at least in existence before the sixteenth century or thereabouts.

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE JUKUN

As said earlier, the Jukun state was certainly not a small state. This is one of the reasons why Jukun was seen as a confederation of peoples who recognized the religious supremacy of the AKU UKA. History tells us that by the end of the seventeenth century, the Jukun had been well established in the middle Benue region. The Jukun people operated a theocratic system of government. AKU UKA was the head of any effective Jukun state. He was believed to be spiritually appointed and was regarded as the representative of the gods on earth. Although AKU UKA was very powerful, his system of government was not despotic. He had no absolute power over his people. There were many ways of regulating his power. According to

Jukun tradition, AKU UKA was judged, for instance, by his performance (result). Since he was the symbol of the Jukun existence, a good harvest could bring in more prestige while a bad harvest could result in serious calamity, and thereafter, his unpopularity and downfall. Also, there were many taboos which acted as checks on his royal power as well. Even as the head of the executive, legislative and judiciary, AKU UKA also ruled with the advice of his nobles and subjects. Public opinion was respected in Jukun pre-colonial administration.

Achuwo

He was the head of Aku Uka's Council of nobles. He functioned as the Prime Minister. He was seconded by the Abo Zike, Kinda Achuwo and the Aku Nako. You should also remember that these nobles were representatives of their lineages as well.

Use your own words to describe the socio-political organization of the traditional Jukun people.