

## **‘Art’ of War: Analysis of Weapons of the 19th Century Yoruba Civil Wars**

**El ‘arte’ de la guerra: un análisis del armamento de las  
guerras civiles yoruba del siglo XIX**

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**Abstract:** The 19th century was no doubt one of the most turbulent periods in the history of the Yoruba people. For most, the period was characterised by revolution and struggle for independence from different authorities. War was a defining factor during this peri-od and in most cases the determining factor in war was the type of weaponry deployed. This paper attempts an examination of the 19th century civil wars in Yoruba land, focusing on some selected north-eastern Yoruba towns. It traces the evolution of the weaponry system in Yoruba land as contained in historical records and surviving museum artifacts. Towards supporting the significance and justification for such a work, various weapons used during the Yoruba civil wars are also identified and analyzed along the lines of artistry of manufacture and material culture. The paper concludes with a trace of possible effects of syntheses resulting from acquaintance with war equipment from other lands, and that the 19th century Yoruba civil wars revolutionized Yoruba weaponry significantly as contact with the Europeans introduced weapons that were more deadly in an unprecedented manner, particularly judging from the gross increment in fatality. The introduction of European weapons did not however obliterate local weapons as these continued to exist side by side even till the 20th century. Significant contribution to knowledge is derived from the analysis of the military weapons employed in the prosecution of the 19th century Yoruba civil wars, especially the attempt to trace the evolution of military weapons in Yorubaland. This focus is managed without prejudice to

how the manipulation of such weapons influenced the course of the wars, with cases in point being the transformation of defeat to victory for the allied forces in the Owu war in 1823 and the Kiriji war of 1876-1893. This work makes use of written and oral sources, relevant artifacts found in north-eastern Yoruba Palaces and surviving mu-seum artifacts.

**Key words:** Artistic Weaponry, weapons, civil wars, Yoruba, North-eastern Yoruba land.

**Resumen:** Sin lugar a dudas, el siglo XIX fue uno de los periodos más turbulentos en la historia del pueblo yoruba. En su mayor parte, el periodo estuvo definido por la revolución y la lucha por la independencia llevada a cabo por diferentes autoridades. La guerra fue un factor crucial durante este periodo, y en la mayoría de los casos el elemento determinante en su resolución fue el armamento empleado. Este artículo busca ahondar en las guerras civiles acontecidas en las tierras yoruba, centrándose en algunas localidades concretas de la zona noreste. Así, rastrea la evolución del sistema armamentístico yoruba a través de los documentos históricos y los útiles preservados en distintos museos, ya que algunas de las armas empleadas durante las guerras civiles yoruba fueron identificadas y estudiadas como muestras artísticas de la cultura artesanal y material. El artículo concluye con una ponderación de los posibles efectos de síntesis resultantes del conocimiento de otro tipo de material bélico procedente del extranjero, al tiempo que sugiere que las guerras civiles yoruba del siglo XIX revolucionaron de forma muy relevante el armamento yoruba debido a que el contacto con los europeos permitió la introducción de armas mucho más mortíferas, especialmente desde el punto de vista del incremento exponencial de la mortandad bélica. No obstante, la introducción de estas armas europeas no eliminó por completo las armas locales, ya que ambas coexistieron incluso hasta el siglo XX. De este modo, la contribución más relevante que realiza el artículo se deriva del análisis de las armas empleadas en el desarrollo de las guerras civiles yoruba del siglo XIX, sobre todo mediante el estudio de su evolución. Este enfoque se articula independientemente del modo en que el empleo de estas armas influyó el curso de dichos conflictos, como la obtención de la victoria por parte de las fuerzas aliadas en la Guerra Owu de 1823 o en la Guerra de Kiriji de 1876-1893. Para ello, el artículo emplea fuentes orales y escritas, así como importantes útiles encontrados en los palacios yoruba nororientales y útiles preservados en los museos.

**Palabras clave:** arte armamentístico, armas, guerras civiles, yoruba, tierras yorubas del noreste.

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### Introduction

This paper is founded upon evidences of weaponry system from historical records and surviving museum artifacts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba Civil Wars, Life and Culture. The importance of art in history is probably best captured by Professor Rowland Abiodun in his recent book *Yoruba Art and Language: Seeking the African in African Art*,<sup>1</sup> with his pointed expansion of the earlier works such as *Sources of Yoruba History*.<sup>2</sup> This paper highlights the knowledge of the art and artifacts of a people (the north-eastern Yoruba, in this instance) as viable source of their history. In studying north-eastern Yorubaland, reference is made in consonance with established trends, to the art and artifacts as emanating from, and forming a crucial part of its culture. The art and artifacts especially as obtained in the Yoruba palace are traditional products of the people, relics of man’s ability to think and reflection of the self. Hence, the arts and artifacts of north-eastern Yorubaland are analysed as encapsulating knowledge about the people and circumstances affecting them.

For the states and the kingdoms of north-eastern Yorubaland, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of revolution and struggle for independence under different authorities. In the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was competition between Benin empire and Nupe over the control of eastern Yoruba region. The inability of Benin to maintain its influence over Owo, Akoko and Ekiti provided the opportunity for the Ilorin to penetrate the region and the Fulani Jihadists under Malam Dendo to occupy some north-eastern Yoruba towns such as Oworo, Bunu, Iyagba, Owe, Ijumu, Igbomina, Akoko, and northern Ekiti between 1830 and 1850. An existing Ibadan authority in the region was soon to be confronted by the subject people. By 1878, the Ekiti, the Ijesa and the Igbomina seized the opportunity of the engrossment of Ibadan in the fight with the Egba and Ijebu over the problem of trade routes to Lagos, and suppressing Dahomey’s invasion. The Ife threw off the Ibadan dominance in 1882, ena-

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<sup>1</sup> Rowland ABIODUN: *Yoruba Art and Language Seeking the African in African Art*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Saburi BIOBAKU: *Sources of Yoruba History*, London, Oxford University Press, 1974.

bling an alliance among Ekitiparapo, Ilorin, Egba and Ijebu and degraded the Ibadan war machine in eastern Yorubaland. In 1886, the Ibadan entered a treaty that recognised the independence of the members of the Ekitiparapo.<sup>3</sup> The implications of these wars for the Yoruba people covered beyond political, economic and demographical changes. The wars impacted on the artistic heritage of the people. The Yoruba military weaponry of the period reflected the state of the art of the people and how receptive they were to foreign artistic influences.

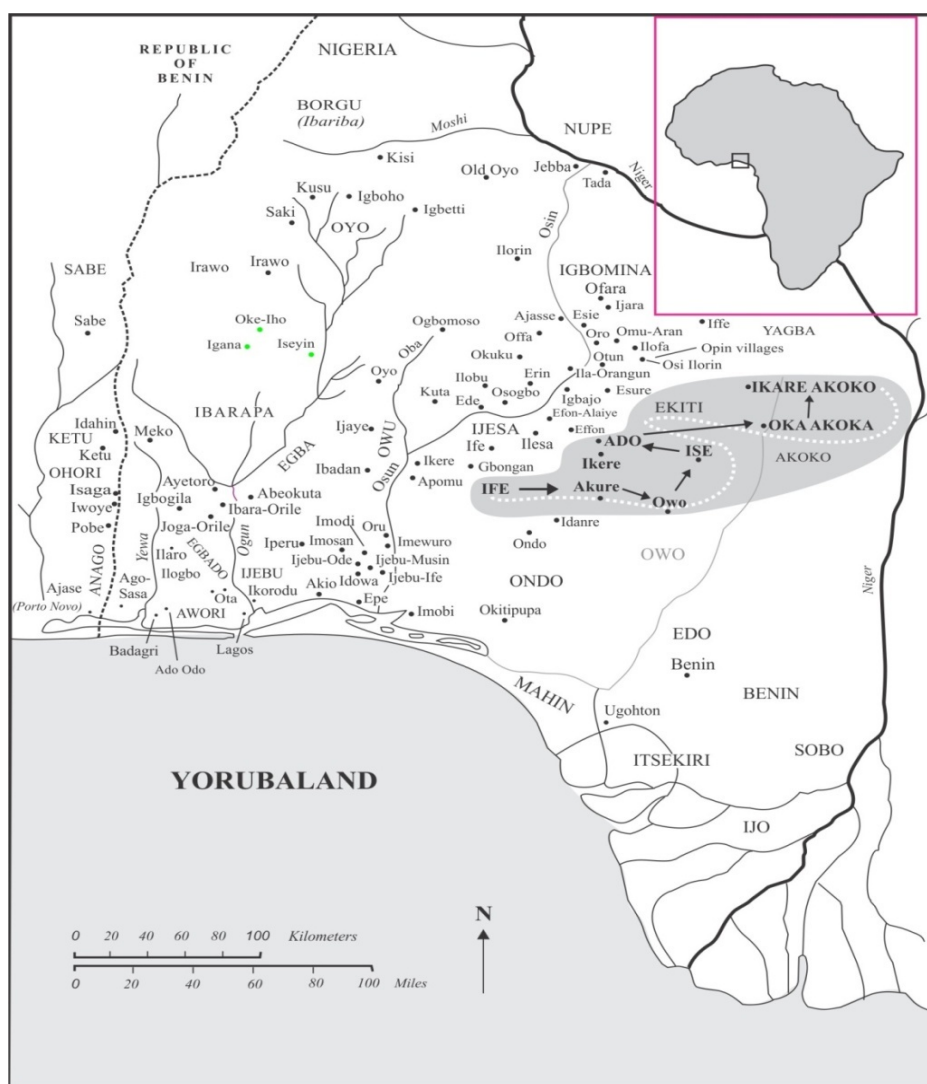


Fig. 1: Map of Yorubaland delineating the north-eastern area: (Source: Akin Adejuwon).

<sup>3</sup> Isaac AKINJOGBIN: "The Causes of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Yoruba Civil Wars," in Adeagbo AKINJOGBIN (ed.), *War and Peace in Yorubaland 1793-1893*, Ibadan, Heinemann Educational Books Plc, 1998, pp. 138-146. For details of the Ijaye war, see Ade AJAYI and Robert SMITH (eds.): *Yoruba Warfare in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press in Association with the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan and the Cambridge University Press, 1971.

Falola and Oguntomisin's work focuses on the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba civil wars.<sup>4</sup> The work examines on the one hand, military alliances, strategies and diplomatic moves that characterised the wars and effects of these on socio-political landscape of selected Yoruba city-states, and on the other political dynamics of 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba politics.<sup>5</sup> An important aspect of the wars, military weaponry, which considerably changed the course of the wars especially from the second decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was sparsely treated and this forms the focus of the present study.

### **The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Yoruba Civil Wars and the Scramble for the Control of North-eastern Yorubaland**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba civil wars could be divided into three stages. The first stage 1813 to 1837 signalled the collapse and suppression of Oyo and the outbreak of the Owo war, which is the first of the civil wars. The second stage 1837 to 1878 was characterised by struggle to fill the power vacuum left by the decline of Oyo. This power rivalry was primarily between Ibadan and Abeokuta/Ijaye. Significantly, it was also this period, that marked the first direct intervention of the British in Yoruba affairs and the civil war, specifically when Gov. Glover of Lagos colony, dispatched a regiment to repel the Egba from the siege of Ikorodu. The third stage, which is also the last phase was characterised by the rise of the Ekitiparapo and other coalition of Ijebu, Ilorin against Ibadan hegemony.<sup>6</sup>

After their first major loss against the Ibadan at the battle of Osogbo in 1840, Ilorin shifted its attention towards eastern Yorubaland and thus forced its way into the Igbomina, Ekiti and Ijesa countries. While Ilorin had little difficulty in conquering most Igbomina towns, they recorded little success in the Ekiti and Ijesa countries. The failure of Ilorin to achieve laudable feats in this region was not unconnected to the topography of Ekiti and Ijesa countries- hilly, rugged and thickly forested. This was unsuitable for cavalry warfare. This unfamiliar terrain, unlike the grassland and savannah belt, posed serious danger and was impregnable for the Ilorin army to venture.<sup>7</sup> Besides, Ekiti and Ijesa forests harboured dangerous insect, tse-tse fly which could transmit disease on (beasts of burden) horses.<sup>8</sup> Whereas the Ilorin army made

<sup>4</sup> Toyin FALOLA and G.O. OGUNTOMISIN: "Military Leadership and Political Structures: Yoruba Warlords of the Nineteenth Century", *The Journal of African History*, 43:2 (2002), pp. 313-376.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> Ade AJAYI and Robert SMITH (eds.): *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen AKINTOYE: *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland 1840-1893*, Ibadan, Longman, 1971, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> One of such evidence was found in the Pole war in which the Fulani army from Ilorin under their able leader, Abdulsalami, recorded heavy loss from the Ijesa people. Johnson notes that the Fulani depended a

headway in the less hilly and sparsely forested towns like Itaji, Oye, Ikole and Obo, their influence on the hilly and forested areas were limited to occasional raiding and interference through alliance with small Ekiti towns against the expansionist venture of the Ibadan.

The incursion of the Ibadan into north-eastern Yorubaland was not unconnected with the need to ward off the threat to the security of Yorubaland. Johnson notes that the Ibadan and the Ijaye were mandated by Alaafin Atiba under a new state policy to assume the responsibility of protecting all Yoruba towns. While the Ijaye protected the Yoruba towns in the western provinces, Ibadan secured the eastern towns from Fulani invasion. According to Johnson, «That the Ibadans were to protect all Yoruba towns to the north and north-east, and meet whatever danger might arise in those quarters, to have a free hand over all Ijesas and Ekitis, the eastern provinces generally, to reduce them to subjection.»<sup>9</sup> Thus, Ibadan's responsibilities in north-eastern Yorubaland were basically two, to protect what remains of Yoruba towns from the invasion by the Fulani Jihadists and to bring those towns under one political umbrella of the new Oyo Empire. This last responsibility was perhaps wrongly described by Johnson and subjectively emphasised as “subjection” of the north-eastern Yorubaland.<sup>10</sup> Johnson was an Oyo man who placed emphasis on the gallantry and military valour of the Ibadan. On the other hand, Oguntuyi, an Ekiti man, tried to justify the belligerence of the Ibadan people towards the people of Eastern Yorubaland particularly against those who lived in the Ekiti region.

It would also appear oversimplification to cling strictly to the protectionist thesis of Johnson and altruistic motive of the Ibadan. Substantial evidence supports the fact that the Ibadan foray into eastern Yorubaland was inspired by expansionist factor.<sup>11</sup> Various battles fought by the Ibadan against the Ekiti and Ijesa towns were punitive. They were wars to suppress the recalcitrant towns or to bring hitherto independent towns under the Ibadan suzerainty. Ready instance could be found in the Ibadan punitive expeditions against Ikoro, Ijero and Ara in 1850s, and Ilesa in 1870 and 1872 respectively.<sup>12</sup>

Another important factor that dictated the Ibadan venture into north-eastern Yorubaland could be located in the military custom and chieftaincy structure of Ibadan. Ibadan was a conglomeration of migrant settlers and aggressive warriors. Unlike

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great deal on their cavalry than their infantry. This was of no avail in the primitive forest of Ijesa province. See Samuel JOHNSON: *History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, Lagos, CSS Bookshops Ltd., 2009, p. 222.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 282.

<sup>10</sup> Oguntuyi emphasized the Ibadan bellicosity by quoting Johnson thus: «to have a free hand over all Ijesas and Ekitis, the eastern provinces generally, to reduce them to subjection».

<sup>11</sup> Stephen AKINTOYE: *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> For the details of these wars, see Samuel JOHNSON: *op. cit.*

other Yoruba towns, chieftaincy titles in Ibadan were obtained by rising through the military ranks and exhibition of military valour at the war front. With this, many adventurous warriors gained fame and recognition at Ibadan and thus organised their following, *omo ogun*.<sup>13</sup> As Akintoye observes, «the Ibadan fighting forces were therefore made up of a series of personal armies owned, maintained and led by the chiefs. The chief's army was his main instrument in his struggle for power in the state.»<sup>14</sup> Thus, each chief usually attempted to win honour for himself by embarking on raiding and adventurous expeditions. While the war loots were used to increase their wealth, the captives were used to swell their army.

Lastly, whenever any military commander was installed in Ibadan, it was customary that such commander would prove himself through military expeditions. The implication of this for the people of north-eastern Yorubaland was that, the region became fertile ground for obtaining slaves and booties for the Ibadan soldiers. Put together therefore, it is difficult though not impossible to identify the motives of military incursions of Ibadan army into the north-eastern Yorubaland. While a thin line demarcated the altruistic motive from expansionist and adventurous reasons, the problem becomes less cumbersome if each expedition is treated on its own merits.

By 1877, nearly all states in the north-eastern part of Yorubaland had been brought under the suzerainty of the Alaafin through Ibadan.<sup>15</sup> Hence, Ibadan vestige in the region was represented by the Ajeles. The Ibadan reign in north-eastern Yorubaland was marked by oppression and ruthlessness. The Ibadan turned the region to the pool and reserves where slaves could be drawn. The oppressive and reckless behaviour of the Ajeles became unbearable for the people of Ijesa and Ekiti. Falola et al summarize the reckless and ruthless attitude of the Ibadan Ajele thus:

The vassal states had more grievances. Ibadan was accused of exploitation. It actually did, through reckless demands of food items, livestock and cheap labour. Its Ajele were often callous to people and local feelings, while they engaged in intolerable privileges. The colonies paid tributes and gifts and supplied contingents to the Ibadan army.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of their appeal to Momodu Latoosa, the Aare Ona kakanfo to check the excesses of the Ajeles, the ill-treatment continued. The implication of this was that it built up anger and hostility towards the Ibadan. Thus, the Ijesa, the Ekiti and the

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen AKINTOYE: *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> Toyin FALOLA et al. (eds.): *History of Nigeria 2: Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century*, Lagos, Longman, 1991, pp. 79-80.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 81.



Efon revolted against Ibadan hegemony. A few factors further worsened the already tensed relationship between Ibadan and its north-eastern vassals. First, Fabunmi, a prince of Oke-Mesi impregnated a trader who was the wife of the Balogun of Ibadan, Ajayi Ogboriefon. The latter was bent on revenge and could not be persuaded. The second factor was the rash reaction of Fabunmi in severing the heads of four of the six messengers sent by Ajayi to bring his head. This singular incident provoked Ajayi to declare war on Oke-Mesi. Another important factor was that, the *Are* was bent on using the revolts in north-eastern Yorubaland and the provocation in the west and the south by the Egba and the Ijebu respectively, to end all wars in Yorubaland. More importantly, the crisis created an avenue for the Ijesa, the Ekiti and the Efon to demand their freedom. Hence, the Ijesa, the Ekiti and the Efon formed military alliance and confederation called the “*EkitiParapo*” to repulse the Ibadan military might and to secure their independence. This marked the beginning of the *EkitiParapo* war also known as the *Kiriji* or the sixteen years’ war in Yorubaland.

The civil wars continued to be protracted despite peace negotiations since 1886. The meddlesomeness of indigenes of both sides resident in Lagos through supply of modern European weapons of warfare to their compatriots, especially the Ijesha indigenes in Lagos protracted the war beyond expectation.<sup>17</sup> Apart from this source, the Allies also had access to weapons and ammunitions such as «flintlock guns with large muzzles imported through Benin» and this increased their advantage over the Ibadan forces.<sup>18</sup> It was not until the brutal decisive defeat of Ijebu in 1892 that the war finally came to an end. Significantly, the use of modern weapons was partly responsible for the crushing defeat of the ijebus by the British. The Lagos force reportedly using a maxim and a seven pounder and rockets changed the nature of the warfare from protracted warfare to a conclusive defeat. Armed with the might, power and destructive capability of the British force, Governor Glover was able to persuade the Ibadan and Ilorin forces to disband their war camps and this ultimately ended the war and the declaration of protectorate over Yoruba land (what later became western Nigeria).<sup>19</sup>

The latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a transformation driven by the contact with the Europeans at the coast and spurred by the proliferation of firearms. This period was characterised by steady advance in the use of fire arms and epic conflicts producing untold casualties. The introduction of the firearms was gradual. The first was the musket, introduced to Benin City by the Portuguese and the Dutch in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively from where it spread to Yorubaland probably through local trade.<sup>20</sup> The musket is a muzzle loaded long gun which appeared as a

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<sup>17</sup> Samuel JOHNSON: op. cit., p. 448

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> Ade AJAYI and Robert SMITH (eds.): op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

smoothbore weapon and was first used in warfare around the war in the early sixteenth century.<sup>21</sup> It was a highly destructive weapon and had the capability to travel faster than the existing.

Sophisticated European weapons therefore probably shaped the outcome of various wars during the 19th century Yoruba civil wars. The first use of guns in these was experimented by the Ijebu during the Owu war. The Ijebu exploited their geographical propinquity to the coast and the control of the trade routes to Lagos to obtain European guns.<sup>22</sup> Their strategic location on the Lagos trade routes left other Yoruba groups, particularly the belligerent Ibadan at the mercy of Ijebu monopolists. The Owu war was probably the first-time firearms decided the outcome of a war in Yorubaland. In fact, the eventual fall of Owu after a long siege was attributed to the defender's lack of European guns/firearms. Throughout the first half of the 19th century, guns were limited and few in Yoruba land and the major weapons for war were swords, spears and axe. For instance, at the Osogbo war c.1840, the Ibadan was still armed mainly with swords; only few muskets were available.<sup>23</sup>

It was also during Owu war, that for the first time the gunpowder was used in Yoruba warfare.<sup>24</sup> So important and valuable was the gunpowder to the 19th century Yoruba warriors that they favoured it above any gifts and preferred this as ransom for slaves. For instance, when Ijaye fell in 1862 to the Ibadan army, Basorun Ogunmola insisted on collecting 200 bags of cowries (then equivalent to £200) 200 kegs of gunpowder and 200 guns before granting freedom to Mr Edward Roper, a European caught in the deserted Ijaye town.<sup>25</sup> It took the intervention of the Alaafin of Oyo before the white man was granted his freedom.<sup>26</sup>

For the people of north-eastern Yorubaland however, the first access to firearms and deployment of these in warfare could not be divorced from their connection with Benin. Egharevba notes that European firearms first arrived in Benin in the second half of the fifteenth century and were first used during the reign of Oba Esigie.<sup>27</sup> In separate studies, Oguntuyi and Smith record that perhaps the first use of gun among the Ekiti was during the Ado-Ikere war in which Benin interfered through

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<sup>21</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, *Musket Weapon*, Available at [www.britannica.com/technology/musket](http://www.britannica.com/technology/musket) (last accessed on 20-10-2019).

<sup>22</sup> Samuel JOHNSON: op. cit., p. 208.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 210.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 352

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 360.

<sup>27</sup> See Jacob EGHAREVBA: *A Short History of Benin*, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1968, pp. 27-30; R. A. KEA: "Firearms and Warfare on the Gold and Slave Coast from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries", *Journal of African History*, XII:1 (1971), p. 185.

Ogoga on the side of Ikere.<sup>28</sup> So strange was the new technology to the people of Ado that the sound of guns terrified them into submission.

By 1850, the Musket had become a major weapon of the Yoruba armies. In 1851, all Abeokuta defenders reportedly had guns and in 1878, Ibadan and their opponents (other Yoruba armies) were mostly armed with long-short barrelled muskets. It therefore seems that the musket was the first gun to gain prominence in Yorubaland.<sup>29</sup> Popularly known as Dane guns owing to their Danish manufacture, the Dane guns were used for warfare until the introduction of Snider-Enfield rifles (Breech loading rifles) during the Ekitiparapo wars (the third phase of the war). The Dane gun as earlier mentioned was the first to flourish in Yorubaland, though its impact was minimal compared to other guns that will be introduced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Significantly, the Dane Gun was only able to cause severe harm at a relatively short distance. However, its noise causes a resounding that served as terror to enemy combats who were unused to the gun.

The use of imported firearms influenced the nature/pattern of war and decisions on the battlefield, partly influencing the political course of events in the history of the period. The widespread importation and use of firearms also influenced the nature of the war by increasing war fatalities, the lethality and warfare tactics. Hence, the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a reduction in hand to hand combat. Also, the wounded and the dead after each war increased considerably. According to the Baptist missionary R. H. Stone, the copper and iron bullets during the Ijaye War in the 1860s «tended to become gangrenous.» with limited modern medicine at play.<sup>30</sup> Most of injured who didn't receive adequate medical care ended up dead or at least handicapped. For instance, A. Mann, an Anglican missionary, also described as an «amateur surgeon», was treating between forty and sixty wounded soldiers daily in his dispensary in Ijaye.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, the struggle to ensure constant supply of weapons and powder and the control of the supply trade routes was a major concern for the various warring camps, it was for this reason that the Egba went to war to gain control of the Ikorodu trade routes where they met their Waterloo at the hands of the British force stationed at Lagos. The realisation after the Owu war and at Ikorodu, that whoever has the best and more guns have the upper hand in the war further heightened this competition.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Anthony OGUNTUYI: *History of Ekiti from the Beginning to 1939*, Ibadan, Bisi Books, 1979, pp. 65-66.

<sup>29</sup> Saheed ADERINTO: *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria: Firearms, Culture and Public Order*, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 30

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 35

<sup>32</sup> Robin LAW: "The Owu War in Yoruba History", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 2:1 (1973) p. 146.

Ekiti Parapo/ Kiriji war saw the replacement of the old weapons «through a boost to the morale of the confederates ...from the coast».<sup>33</sup> This was achieved primarily through the reactivation of the community development efforts by Yoruba traditional towns' groups or society meetings, notable of which is the Ekitiparapo Society of Lagos. This group made up of eminent returnees from Brazil and other such Yoruba Diaspora rallied against the possible disgrace of their homeland by sending military aid in the form of arms and ammunition. «Prominent among their members was Labinjo, a successful Lagos merchant and Gureje. Others were Haastrup, and Doherty».<sup>34</sup> These are till today prominent names in Ijesa land. In fact, the Kirijii war was so named due to the resounding echoes of gunfire during the war. The Snider guns were more effective than the Dane guns and gave the Ekitiparapo coalition a lot of edge over the Ibadan. Effectively, the snider guns could fire rapidly at longer ranges and with better accuracy compared to the Dane guns.<sup>35</sup>

This intervention provided superior weapons like the Snider-Enfield rifles and cartridges, Flintlock guns, muskets and rockets- this change meant a devastating effect on the outcome of the war as experienced by the Ibadan at Kiriji war. Subsequently, the traditional face to face fighting was ditched for better warfare strategies and tactics. It was also during this time that the Ekitiparapo group introduced Trench warfare facilitated by their use of snider rifles. The havoc caused by this strategy was so much that it forced the Ibadan to replace their bamboo with mud walls.<sup>36</sup> There were significant casualties on the Ibadan side owing to the devastating effects of the more accurate, long range and quick firing Snider guns of the Ijesa-Ekiti armies. Had they not been able to procure modern weapons from the coast through the Ijebu, the Ibadan would probably have lost earlier in the Kiriji war.

### **The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Yoruba Military Weapons: Analysis of North-eastern Objects of War Artifacts**

Not much exists on the description of the pre-colonial Yoruba armament beyond Reverend Samuel Johnson's accounts and Robert Smith's seminal work.<sup>37</sup> Johnson accounts remains a major source in reconstructing this vital aspect of the Yoruba past. This paucity of information on the pre-colonial Yoruba armaments is compensated for by the existing few art works and surviving museum artifacts from the wars.

<sup>33</sup> *Kiriji Centenary Souvenir*, published by Ibra Shak Printing Company, Ketu, Lagos, 1986, p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

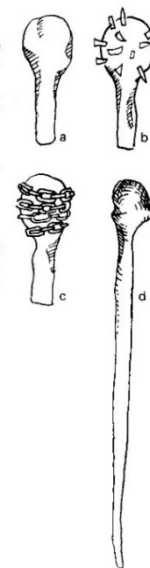
<sup>35</sup> Saheed ADERINTO: *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>37</sup> Robert SMITH: "Yoruba Armament", *The Journal of African History*, 8:1 (1967) pp. 92-98.

While the existing art works are the products of imagination inspired by Yoruba oral evidence, surviving museum war artifacts depict the reality of Yoruba armaments in warfare.

Some of the artifacts presented here were gotten from drawings, paintings and museums. This does not in any way invalidate their functionality during the wars. The authenticity of these objects lies in the fact that they are surviving artifacts from the past that represent the weapons deployed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba civil wars. Owing to the increasing demand for and supply of imported European firearms as a result of the contact with the West, traditional Yoruba weapons were deployed in the prosecution of the nineteenth century Yoruba wars. These weapons varied in structure and size. In some cases, the traditional Yoruba weapons were ritualised.



**Figure 1:** The Throwing Club. Source: Dennis Williams (Icon and Images 1974).

The “*Kondo*” or throwing club is probably one of the oldest weapons in Yorubaland. Images 1(a- d) display the types of throwing clubs traditionally known as the “*Kumo*”, “*Orukumo*” and the “*Gaman*” respectively.<sup>38</sup> The club in figure 1(a) is entirely made of wood with a carved knot as a head. Figure 1(b) is also carved like (a), but with the addition of iron spikes to give a deadlier throw. In contrast figure 1(c) which is traditionally known as “*Gaman*” has an iron chain to augment the weight of the club. Figure 1(d) on the other hand has a longer handle and a sharper knotty end than figure 1(a) as head. It is very possible that figure 1(a) and 1(d) were in use before the coming of iron, while the iron additions in figure 1(b) and figure 1(c) arrived later with the proliferation of iron.

One of the most significant effects of these wars is portrayed in the way West African slaves imported to the Americas staged revolts and the type of weapons they used. Manuel Barcia, laid emphasis on activities of slaves or West African born soldiers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century period as they connect to the New World; that is the Americas. The slave-led revolts were primarily led by Yoruba speaking slaves also referred to as “*Lucumi*” in Cuba or “*Nago*” in Bahia. Significantly, the tactics and

<sup>38</sup> Williams DENNIS: *Icon and Image: A Study of Sacred and Secular forms of African Classical art*, London, Penguin Book Ltd., 1974.

strategies, weapons and nature of warfare are closely related to what is obtainable back home in the Yorubaland of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The close relationship between the military activities and weaponry system of the West African born soldiers and that in their homeland and the availability of records portraying these are quite significant. They highlight how these weapons and war culture came into play in notable upheavals in the regions of Bahia in Brazil and Cuba within the range of two periods and prominent historical occurrences; November 1843, in the upheaval known as the Triumvirato and Ácana plantations slave rebellions.<sup>39</sup> The West African born soldiers despite being way far from home, displayed acute and very well-tuned knowledge of their West African fighting heritage. This meant they conveyed with them their traditional war rituals and weaponry which when required were deployed in their bid to free themselves from their colonial captors and oppressors.

In Barcia's account, the types of weapons used, the combat methods, predominantly hand-to-hand, and the types of war paraphernalia were elucidated upon. The types of weapons used by the West-African born soldiers were machetes, spears, swords, bows and arrowheads, wooden clubs, stones and rods. References of places of usage of these weapons include the warfare in Bahia, where a Nagô woman, Zeferina, was said to have capably led the Urubu Quilombo fighters in 1826 while also using 'a bow and arrows.'<sup>40</sup> In Cuba, in 1842, soon after quelling one of these movements, a Captain Alejandro Pelosa reflected on the weapons he confiscated, informing his superiors about the African force.

Also mentioned were spikes made of wood which had been sharpened by hand and hardened with fire to the point of resembling iron spears, similar to the ones described by Smith in his study of warfare in West Africa (see Figure 1). Branches of trees as powerful clubs were part of the exported knowledge of the Yoruba to the Americas from the native land. For the Yoruba in particular, clubs had been a basic weapon for generations as pointed out earlier, known as *kondo*. These were made from various materials like hard wood and sometimes coupled with stone heads as obtained in predominantly Yoruba enclave of Bahia, and the Urubu quilombo in 1826. There a peculiarly sophisticated 'wood stick with iron spikes nailed to the end' was found among many other weapons.<sup>41</sup> References to the use of shields in those faraway lands as against the homelands were not rare however. In specific cases, they were por-

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<sup>39</sup> Manuel BARCIA: "'Weapons from their land': Arming strategies and practices among West African-born soldiers in early nineteenth-century Bahia and Cuba", *Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, 39:3 (2018), p. 481.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibídem*, p. 486.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibídem*, p. 487.

trayed to have been crafted from raw materials in ways that illustrated the Africans' range of creativity and ingenuity.

Some scholars such as T.M. Ilesanmi, Bolanle Awe and Omotayo Olutoye made references to instances where women either led the war or were pivotal to winning wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba Civil wars. For instance, Ilesanmi pointed out that Ijesa women laid traps for the Fulani cavalry when they attacked the city in 19<sup>th</sup> century wars. When the Fulani cavalry fell into the traps, the women came out and killed thousands of them with their weaving sticks (rod). There is also the case of Tinubu of Abeokuta who rallied and led an army against attackers of the city.<sup>42</sup>

Ajayi and Smith identify the primary armaments of the Yoruba infantry as consisting of swords, spears, and bows and arrows.<sup>43</sup> The swords were of two forms: the heavier *agedengbe* and double-blade *ida*.<sup>44</sup> The shorter swords were called *jomo*.<sup>45</sup> Their description of traditional Yoruba weapons is succinct, and pertinent here:

...the heavier *agedengbe*, curved with a single outer blade, and the double-bladed *ida*, either slightly tapering or of an elongated leaf shape. All types were designed for cutting or slashing, while for stabbing at close quarters a dagger was carried. Spears were intended both for throwing and thrusting, and their iron heads, often barbed, were dipped in poison, as were the arrow heads. Cross bows were in use among the Yoruba during the century, but the usual bow was a simple stave some four to five feet in height with a string of hemp or hide.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, Johnson also notes that the traditional Yoruba weapons consisted of bow and poisoned arrows, *jomo*, a short sword, a heavy cutlass known as *Ogbo* and spears.<sup>47</sup> The use of shield was not unknown but was not popular among the Yoruba armies.<sup>48</sup> Beyond Johnson's description, and Ajayi and Smith's analysis, the available evidences show that two major types of swords were used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yorubaland. They were the military or battle and the ceremonial swords. *Jomo*, *Ida* and *agedengbe* would fall under the battle swords. Three forms of battle *Ida* were noted among Yoruba armies. They are narrow, gently tapering double-edged swords with wooden hilt.

<sup>42</sup> T.M. ILESANMI: "The Yoruba Worldview on Women and Warfare", in Toyin FALOLA and Robin LAW (eds.), *Warfare and Diplomacy in Nigeria*, Madison, African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, 1994, p. 89.

<sup>43</sup> Ade AJAYI and Robert SMITH (eds.): op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

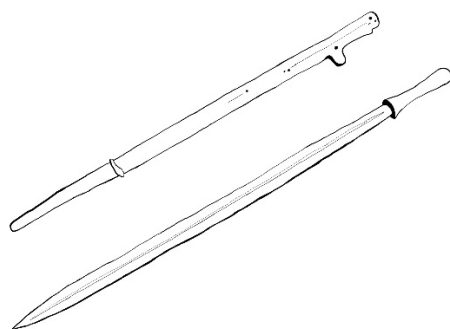
<sup>45</sup> Ade AJAYI and Stephen AKINTOYE: "Yorubaland in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century," in Obaro IKIME (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan, Heinemann, 1980.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

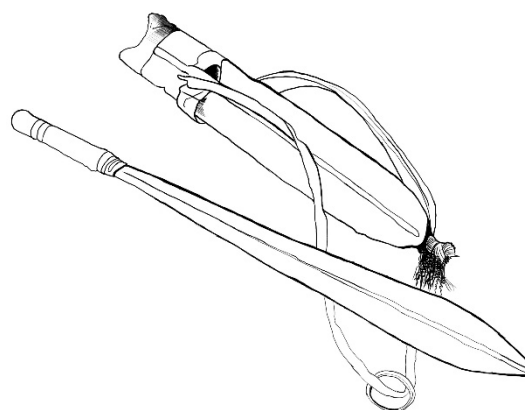
<sup>47</sup> Samuel JOHNSON: op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>48</sup> Ade AJAYI and Robert SMITH (eds.): op. cit., p. 16.

They are about 3 feet long, slightly weighing about 2lb. They are also known in Yorubaland as *Ida gigun*, check figure 2.<sup>49</sup> The second form of battle swords found in Yorubaland are leaf-shaped, check figure 3 for image. The *Ida gigun* (long sword) is straight and long unlike the broad sword in figure 3, while the broad sword is considerably shorter and heavier; the *ida gigun* sword is lighter and thus easier to carry and use during battles. The broad sword has a double-edged curve outward to give an odd shape that could impress but ineffective as military weapon.



**Figure 2:** *Ida gigun* sword.  
Source: Akin Adejuwon



**Figure 3:** *Agedengbe*, (Broad sword and sheath) Source: Akin Adejuwon

The third type, *agedengbe*, is a broad single-edged sword with backward shape. As Smith notes, *agedengbe* is less elegant and heavier than the double-edged swords (compare figures 2 and 3).<sup>50</sup> Another category known as *agada* could be categorised both as military weapons and ceremonial swords (see figures 4, 5, 8 and 9). *Agada* is a single-edged blade and used as symbol of state office by the monarchs and important chiefs. It is also utilised as military weapon. Two variants of these ceremonial swords were found in Owo Palace museum (see figures 4 and 5). The *agada* from Benin (figure 4) has double handle bars while the one from Owo (figure 5) has a single handle bar. It also has a flat surface with holes shaped in the form of an X while the one in figure 4 has a relatively thicker iron surface. These single-edged blades curved backwards. The materials used for the hilts varied from wood to iron. Because of its single edge, *Agada* is sometimes categorised as *ada* (cutlass). The two iron blades are distinguished by their values and uses. When *agada* was used as military weapon its utilitarian function was emphasized over the ceremonial value. When it functioned as war weapon, it was called *ada*. As a royal insignia, *agada* could be singularly used or combined with

<sup>49</sup> Robert SMITH: op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibídem*, p. 93.



*eben* (Benin) or *ape* (Owo) (see figures 6 and 7). Two clear proof of this are observed at the Olowo palace. Figures 11 and 12 depict royal emblems carved on the door featuring a crown, criss-cross *agada* and *ape*, and tiger from Owo palace. A similar royal emblem is engraved on an inner palace wall of Owo palace (compare figures 11 and 12). *Eben* and *ape* are unique royal badges made of bronze and are exclusive to Benin and Owo kingdoms.

Swords were instrumental during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba civil wars. Even after the introduction of European firearms, swords were still heavily utilised during these wars. For instance, the Gbanamu War, was won by the Ibadan with the help of their superior war skill though they were greatly outnumbered by the Egba, Owu and Ife coalition who were armed with firearms. The war was so named “Gba ‘na mu” “grasping fire’ because of what transpired during the fight. Significantly, the war is one of those few cases where sometimes war skills matter more than weaponry. The Ibadan warriors armed with swords were reported to have rushed on their enemies, baring swords while grabbing the barrel of the latter’s guns, thereby preventing the guns to go off, while they used their swords and cutlasses to diminish their enemies’ ranks.<sup>51</sup>

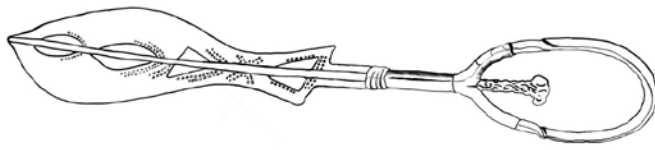


**Figure 4:** *Agada* from Benin.  
Source: Owo Museum



**Figure 5:** *Agada* from Owo.  
Source: Owo Museum

<sup>51</sup> Samuel JOHNSON: op. cit., p. 241.



**Figure 6:** *Ape* from Owo.  
Source: Akin Adejuwon



**Figure 7:** *Eben* from Benin.  
Source: Akin Adejuwon



**Figure 8a:** Drawings showing the *Agada* and *Ape* as part of the royal emblems of the Olu-kare palace walls. Source: Akin Adejuwon



**Figure 8b:** close-up look of *Agada* and *Ape* and other royal emblems on Figure 8a. Source: Akin Adejuwon



**Figure 9:** Image showing the *Agada* as motifs on Oka palace entrance/door. Source: Akin Adejuwon



**Figure 10:** (Olukare showing *Agada* to his visitor) at the Ikare palace

In north-eastern Yorubaland, *agada* of various shapes abound as objects of royal insignia and instruments of war. At the Ikare and Oka palaces, two different forms of *agada* were observed (see figures 8 and 9). While the murals of *agada* on the palace entrance of Oka (Figure 9) are starkly simple and closely resemble the Benin type, the mural found on the mausoleum wall and engraving on palace walls at Ikare (Figure 8) possessed distinct features (compare figures 8 and 9). Like the Benin and Owo types, the Ikare type is a single-edged blade gently curving backward in a convex shape. The upper half of the blunt edge of the *agada* is chipped to give it a saw shape. These distinct features notwithstanding, there is no doubt that there was presence of the Benin type of *agada* in the Ikare palace (see figures 8 and 10). Though the images of various *Agada* (swords) in this work are majorly attributable to the 20<sup>th</sup> century images, nevertheless, they are representations of weapons prior to 20<sup>th</sup> century, sometimes still functional in the present or at least now serving ceremonial and ritualistic purposes.



**Figure 11:** Agada from the Owo palace



**Figure 12:** Agada and other royal emblems from the Olowo's palace

The use of horses or chariots were limited in Yoruba warfare, apart from the old Oyo empire, which was the only state to have fully adopted the use of cavalry, most Yoruba states avoided cavalry. Oyo was able to do so, because of its closeness to the northern savannah region and consequently its freedom from the menace of tsetse fly. Nonetheless, the image of the warrior soldier mounted on a horse was not totally absent in Yoruba land as depicted by figures 13 and 14. Figure 13, is a door which depicts some carvings on its plates. Plate number 3 of the door shows a warrior mounted on a horse with attendants on foot armed with spears. Figure 14 on the other hand shows carved images of a king, his wives and a warrior in full regalia. The warrior is mounted on a horse, with a sword and spear on each hand respectively and a gun at the hips.



**Figure 13a** showing warriors mounted on horse and attendants armed with spears.  
Source: Akin Adejuwon



**Figure 13b** showing a closer view of warriors mounted on horse and attendants armed with spears.  
Source: Akin Adejuwon



**Figure 14a:** House posts at the Ikere palace depicting an equestrian general, “*the eleshin*” (on the right), and the powerful older women of the society, the iyami (on the left). Source: John Pemberton III Art and Rituals for Yoruba Sacred Kings.

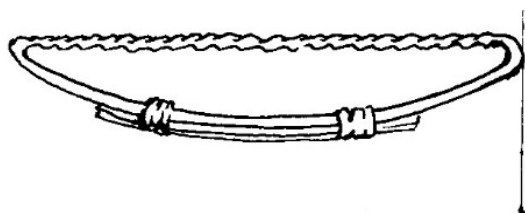


**Figure 14b:** Closer look at the equestrian general, “*the eleshin*” on figure 15a. The general is armed with a cutlass on the right hand, a long spear on the left hand and a gun at the hips. Image Source: John Pemberton III Art and Rituals for Yoruba Sacred Kings.

The Yoruba also made use of spears, arrows and bows in their warfare. Spears were used by the Yoruba soldiers either for thrusting or throwing to dismount cavalry soldiers or to kill enemies at a distance (compare images 13b and 14b). A Yoruba spear was characteristically leaf-shaped with pointed tip. The iron head was mounted in a socket on wooden staff or shaft of 4 to 6ft length. Two types of spears were found in Yoruba armoury. They included *Oko* (thrusting spear) and *esin* (javelin).<sup>52</sup> Unlike swords which were more effective in close range battles, spears were more effective in engaging enemies from a distance. The spear could also be used for forward thrusting and backward strokes. It is on record that spears were used at Erinmo by its defenders and later by two cripples who were left to defend the town after it was deserted.<sup>53</sup>

Smith notes that some of these spears were poisoned in concoction made of poisonous herbs and head of poisonous snakes. The immersion of such spears in deadly poison makes them more potent especially against enemies who possess black magic and or protection against such spears. Thus, they could inflict inescapable death on the enemy targets. Figure 15 is a sample of an iron bow used by war chiefs and as emblem of rank. However, as Williams rightly notes, it seems the iron bow was more of a ritualised and ceremonial weapon than a weapon for war.<sup>54</sup> Though it is also possible that as a ritualised weapon, iron bows and curved arrows could have been weaponised with incantations for use during wars, and not necessarily in physical face to face combats.

The ritualised weapons come into service during wars, not particularly through the conventional process. Examples of ritually weaponised arms in Yorubaland includes *Osonyin*, *Apeta*, *Ayeta* etc. In similar instances to the aforementioned, rough images of targeted subjects are made known as ‘*Shigidi*’. These rough effigies are then attacked with miniaturised weapons (spears, arrows and bows) aided with incantation. Once pierced or attacked, there is a commensurate impact on the physical body or presence of such targeted subjects wherever they may be.



**Figure 15:** A bow used as a symbol of rank by a Yoruba war chief. Source: Dennis Williams (Icon and Images 1974) (About 40 cm long).



**Figure 16:** Pair of iron arrowheads sacred to Ogun, the god of War/Iron. Source: Dennis Williams (Icon and Images 1974) (about 25cm long)

<sup>52</sup> Robert SMITH: op. cit., pp. 94-95.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel JOHNSON: op. cit., pp. 312-313.

<sup>54</sup> Williams DENNIS: op. cit., p. 79.

The use of missile weapons was also observed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba warfare. These consisted of bow (*orun*) and arrow (*ofa*) check and compare figures 15, 16 and 17. Bow and arrow were parts of traditional hunting weapons in pre-colonial Yorubaland. These weapons were effectively employed by the infantry as missiles to quickly dispense death to the adversaries from a long distance. A bow consisted of flexible stave of bendable wood and bowstrings. The bow stave was obtained from *atori* or *osunsun* (*Rothmania maculate*), *igi-erin* (*Carpolobialatea*) or *aringo*. The bow cords were made of contractile tissue of animals or twined leather particularly that of antelope. Like the spear head, the arrow head was fitted on the shaft. The arrow heads were triangular in shape with pointed tip and barbs. The shafts were obtained from reeds, bamboo trees or palm wood. Interestingly, at the Institute of Cultural Studies Museum in Obafemi Awolowo University, a strong iron bow with few thick iron arrows is preserved (see fig. 17).

It is not clear how these were deployed either as hunting or war weapons. The museum labels for these artifacts describe them as “Iron-age weapons” produced in Ile-Ife. This may require further research as there is no evidence of the proliferation of these weapons in Yoruba warfare. What seems probable is that attempts were made in Ife to fashion iron bows and arrows. It might be that after trying out the weapons, they were abandoned for lack of efficiency. Alternative explanation for this is that the weapons were probably miniaturised ritual objects.



**Figure 17:** Iron bows and arrows from Ife. Source: Akin Adejuwon. (Iron bows 20cm long, arrows about 16 cm long).

Besides being major weapons of hunting, what seems as the first use of arrows in Yoruba warfare was dated by Johnson to the second reign of Ajaka as the King of the Old Oyo Empire.<sup>55</sup> In his expedition against the *Bariba* (*Tapa*), Ajaka employed

<sup>55</sup> Samuel JOHNSON: op. cit., p. 88.

the use of arrows.<sup>56</sup> Another instance of importance of bows and arrows as hunting and warfare weapons in Yorubaland was noted in the appointment of Timi of Ede by Alaafin Kori, to checkmate the activities of the troublesome Ijesa who kidnapped Oyo in their farms and molested traders' caravan from Apomu.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps, this conferred on Timi, the title of the most renowned Yoruba archer of his era. His appointment as the protector of the ancient town of Ede, and his skill as perhaps the best marksman in Yorubaland created a valorous image for, and contributed to the roles the town would play in overall security of Yorubaland in the nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup>

Although there were few instances of early use of snider rifles in Yorubaland,<sup>59</sup> the Dane guns (check figure 18) were predominant among the Yoruba before the Kiriji war. During the war, the Ijesa received Snider rifles from their people in Lagos "for the defence of the fatherland."<sup>60</sup> When the Snider rifle was first introduced, it was received with admixture of uncertainty and jest. Ignorant of its deadly character, the Ibadan mocked the Ijesas and compared the snider gun with tobacco pipe. The loading of Dane gun is a complex process and time consuming. Three objects, viz: *etu* (gun powder), *aje* and *aya* are loaded to form the gun bullets (check figure 20). These three objects are pressed down the gob of the gun pipe with the aid of gun rod (*opaibon*). This process is known in Yorubaland as *ibonkiki*.<sup>61</sup> Despite its disadvantage, Dane gun is still the most popular gun among the Yoruba hunters. This perhaps is as a result of its ease of manufacture locally due to its technological simplicity and probably because the materials of manufacture, metal and wood, were easily and locally obtainable (see figures 19 and 20).<sup>62</sup> Unlike the Dane gun, snider rifles are breech loaded and thus save time in loading. These weapons of precision soon struck terror in the heart of the Ibadan army.<sup>63</sup> After suffering defeats, it soon dawned on the Ibadan that the new weapons were deadlier than imagined.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 92.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 102.

<sup>58</sup> Timi is praised as 'Agbale Olofaina' (an archer with burning arrow).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 459. The Snider rifles were probably first used in Yorubaland during the Egba-Dahomian war of 1848. When the weapons were introduced to the Ijesas, few Egba men such as Gureje and Apará of Abeokuta and Labirinjo of Lagos went to Ilesa to train the Ijesa soldiers how to handle the new weapon.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 480.

<sup>61</sup> Oral interview with Pa Samson Oromakinde (traditional hunter, 68), Ile Igbodo, Ile-Ile Ife, on 28 December, 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Examples of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Dane guns could still be found at the Owo Palace Museum and the Institute of Cultural Studies Museum, in Obafemi Awolowo University. These guns are not different from the locally made Dane guns.

<sup>63</sup> Samuel JOHNSON: *op. cit.*, pp. 490-491. In a desperate move, the Ibadan under Are Latosa addressed a letter to the Oyo in Lagos, particularly I. H. Willoughby Esq., D. C. Taiwo Esq., Sunmonu Animasawun Esq., and Shitta Esq., to bring the matter to the notice of Government of Lagos. In another letter to D. C. Taiwo and Sunmonu Animasawun, on 26<sup>th</sup> May and 6<sup>th</sup> June 1884 respectively, Are Latosa promised to pay in palm oil and palm kernels «for a supply of Snider rifles with cartridges».



**Figure 18:** Dane gun (courtesy Samson Oromakinde, traditional hunter Ile-Ife). The length is approximately 4.56 ft.



**Figure 19:** *Ibon ilewo* (short or hand gun) Image source: Institute of Cultural Studies Museum, in Obafemi Awolowo University



**Figure 20:** *aya*, *aje* and *etu* respectively

There were also secondary weapons such as charms, clubs and slings. It is significant to note that the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba armies strongly relied on the use of charms in the prosecution of war. Charms were obtained from the traditional diviners, charm makers or Muslim clerics for personal protection against harms and to incur success during the wars.<sup>64</sup> Such charms might include *ayeta*, *afeeri*, *egbe*, *afobon*, *Ogunbanki*, *okigbe*, *ayipaida*, to mention just a few.<sup>65</sup> Most Yoruba soldiers attached strings of charms for protection on their doublet as means of protection. A brief explanation

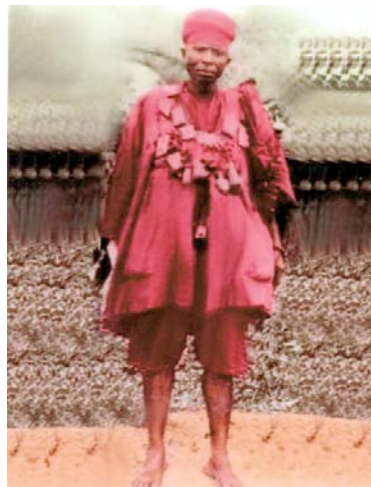
<sup>64</sup> Ade AJAYI and Stephen AKINTOYE: op. cit., p. 293.

<sup>65</sup> Oral interview with Pa Samson Oromakinde (traditional hunter, 68), Ile Igbodo, Ile-Ile Ife, on 28 December, 2015.



of few of these charms could be instructive. While *ayeta* was meant to prevent gun bullets from reaching the soldier, *afobon* could help explode the enemies' gun barrels in the course of battle. *Afeeri* provided the Yoruba soldier the power of invisibility before his enemies while *egbe* could be deployed in the heat of battles to escape by tele-transportation from the battle front. Unlike *afeeri* and *egbe*, *ayipaida* could be used by the warrior to turn into ferocious animals or other objects that could scare off the enemies. While reality of efficacy and potency of these charms defy scientific explanations, most of these charms are still in deployment by Yoruba hunters.

Usually, the Yoruba war dress consisted of either baggy trousers (*sokotokembe*) or knee trousers (*agadansi*), war jackets and caps.<sup>66</sup> From available evidence, it would seem that red was the favoured colour of the Yoruba war dress (see and compare figures 21 and 22). Samuel Johnson records that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the use of red uniforms had gained acceptance among the Ibadan army.<sup>67</sup> He notes that most Ibadan war leaders dressed their pages known as *baba ni n' masa* in red uniforms. This custom was reported to have been started by Balogun Ibikunle and Ogunmola during the Ijaye war.<sup>68</sup> Figure 21 illustrates the nineteenth century Yoruba war dress. The colour red was favoured as war dress by the warriors during this period because it made it easier for identification of their war boys even from afar.

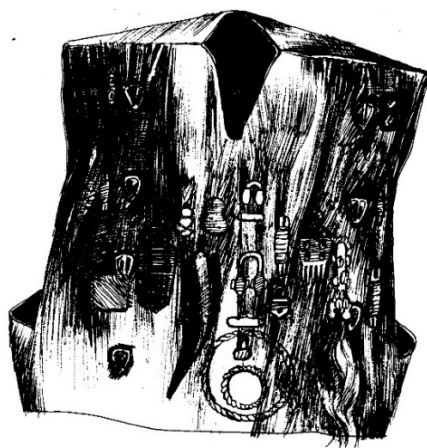


**Figure 21:** (Ogedengbe, the Military warlord of the Ekitiparapo) Image taken by: Akin Adejuwon at Obanla Palace in Ilesha.

<sup>66</sup> Oral interview with Alhaji Olatunbosun Makinde (77 years), Idi Osan, Iwo Road, Ibadan, 28 December 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel JOHNSON: op. cit., p. 496.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibídem*, p. 498.



**Figure 22:** Hunter's doublet with charms. Source: Dennis Williams "Icon and Images" 1974.



**Figure 23:** closer look of the charms on the hunter's doublet. Source: Dennis Williams "Icon and Images", 1974.

Figures 22 and 23 illustrate a hunter's doublet with medicines and charms. The use of the doublet alongside the various charms and incantations was a common feature of traditional warfare in Yorubaland. Together, they are believed to be effectual in meeting hazards of war or hunt.<sup>69</sup> The double prolonged iron stuck into a piece of wood in fig. 23 is called 'Aba'. This instrument is used to force enemies to surrender or into flight. This is done by reciting incantations over the iron, unclasping it from the wood and pointing in the direction of the adversary. The large iron torque (*Ifunpa*) have similar functions. The *Ifunpa* is worn on the upper arm and can be used to choke an enemy. Also important is the ring which is said to confer power to the warrior during hand-to-hand combat.<sup>70</sup>

War paraphernalia formed symbolic connections between both Yoruba soldiers/fighters and their fellow countrymen across the Atlantic Ocean. Such are found among the umbrellas, charms, musical instruments, flags, war colours and so on. For instance, in Bahia, Brazilian authorities confiscated a large number of charms after the defeat of the insurgency of January 1835 in Salvador (a major local enclave of Yoruba slaves). Most of them constituted small pieces of paper with Arabic writing on them. In fact, charms were so usual among West Africans taken to Bahia that in 1807

<sup>69</sup> Williams DENNIS: op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibídem*, p. 84.

the governor of the province, the Count of Ponte, referred to them in a letter as ‘sham amulets.’<sup>71</sup>

In the history of war in north-eastern Yorubaland, there were instances in which military generals or members of the royal families were clad in special tunic to the war front.<sup>72</sup> One such evidence was the iron mail (*ewu irin*) found in the Owo Palace Museum (see figure 24). This iron mail was reported to have been acquired by an eighteenth century Olowo from itinerant Hausa traders from the north, possibly from Borno or Ottoman Empire.<sup>73</sup> The origin of the iron mail is not known, but one may hazard that it was part of articles of trade from the far North of Africa through the Sahara trade route. The iron mail was made of chains carefully and closely knitted together. The principal aim of this chain mail, no doubt, was to prevent the penetration of iron weapons into the body of the soldier/ wearer. In spite of its weight (20lb.), this chain mail still provided room for ventilation to the wearer.



**Figure 24:** Iron Mail (Ewu Irin). Image source: Akin Adejuwon, Owo Museum

The engagement of Musical Instruments and subsequently the attendant art and craft of drums in Yoruba warfare cannot be ignored. To the Yoruba, the drum is elevated almost to the position of a deity, hence its presence in almost every facet of Yoruba life in various forms and shapes. Musical instruments were therefore commonly associated with West African insurgents’/ slaves in Cuba and Bahia as well. In Cu-

<sup>71</sup> Manuel BARCIA: op. cit., pp. 488-489.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibíd*em, p. 17.

<sup>73</sup> Image description at the Owo Palace Museum.

ba, references to musical instruments, especially war drums, were even more numerous. War drums were played during some of the major West African armed insurgencies of the period, including those of 1825 in Guamacaro, 1833 in Guanajay, and 1843 in La Cidra and La Guanábana. Drums were carried to the battlefield to encourage troops to advance and to communicate and convey messages. We also know that in at least one case, a West African man, José María Gangá Longobá, was given a seashell together with precise instructions to play it on ‘the day of the war. Among the items seized from a defeated West African force in Cachoeira in August 1826, was a red flag – the color of the ancestral ruler of Oyo and orixá, Shangó.<sup>74</sup> Most times warlords during the era of the Yoruba wars were known to have used drums to announce their arrival to the theatre of war. There were even specific songs the drummers played for their warriors to announce such arrival. Most times enemies used this war music to entrap such warlords for attack especially when their war-boys were not with them.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

For a very long time, research on Yoruba civil wars had focused on the wars itself and substantially ignored the weapons deployed during the war, perhaps this is owing to the paucity of source materials. This paper has attempted to trace the evolution of the weaponry system in pre-colonial Yorubaland. It has also identified the major weapons deployed during the war, particularly from museum evidences, and as recorded in current literature, though some of these weapons such as the throwing club had been in use long before the 19<sup>th</sup> century wars. Also, the contact with Europeans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought revolutionary changes as it introduced weapons that changed the patterns and methods of prosecuting war in Yoruba land.

This work departs from the focus of earlier studies on the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba wars by detailing the place of visual and performative arts in the history of precolonial Yoruba warfare. On the other hand, the contact with Europeans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which brought revolutionary changes receives attention, as this contact introduced weapons that were modern at the time, and changed the patterns and methods of prosecuting wars altogether in Yorubaland.

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<sup>74</sup> Manuel BARCIA: *op. cit.*, p. 490.

<sup>75</sup> Johnson explained in details these entrapments by enemies using the war songs of the warlords during the Ijaye war when Basorun Ogunmola entrapped many Ijaye warriors who had gone into hiding by ordering his drummers to play Aare Kunrunmi’s war-song to deceive and lure out hundreds of Ijaye war boys who on hearing the song came out thinking their master had come to their rescue. See Samuel JOHNSON: *op. cit.*, p. 349

Therefore, we can say that the contact with the Europeans not only changed the nature of the war, but also gradually relegated a number of pre-colonial weapons to the museum. Contact with the West brought sophisticated weapons which eventually determined the course of such wars. Hence, the decision to go into the museums and identify such weapons, look at their forms and shapes, look at surviving images, analyse such to provide new knowledge about war weaponry and their use just before the 19<sup>th</sup> century wars and also their deployment in that war before the acquisition of expensive, rare and sophisticated weapons from Europe.

We can safely say that contact with the Europeans heightened the severity of the war because of the lethal effects of such weapons and because they were weapons that could deliver more massive destruction than the indigenous weapons that existed before the 19<sup>th</sup> century wars. Ultimately the contact with the Europeans not only heightened the severity of the war but also ended the rivalry between the various kingdoms for authority. At the end, the British colonisers used the opportunity provided by the disunity among the Yoruba kingdoms to declare protectorate over the entire region.