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IMPACT OF CONVERGENCE OF GROUPS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ILORIN MILITARY TECHNOLOGY, 1800-1900

Oladimeji Mohammed ALABI

Abstract

Ilorin's location between the northern and southern fringe of the territories that later became Nigeria placed her in a position to be actively involved two remarkable events of the Nineteenth Century: first as major participant in the Yoruba warfare, and second as one of the frontier emirates in the caliphate system. In the course of the Nineteenth Century, Ilorin recorded waves of migration and settlement of different groups, which speedily transformed her society to a heterogeneous community. This study explores how different groups contributed to the emergence and development of the Ilorin military technology and its impact on the city in the Nineteenth century. It employed the historical research method, which comprised the use of primary and secondary sources. The approach began with the perusal of literature to ascertain the extent of work on Ilorin military history, and it was discovered that more information was exigent on the impact of plurality of groups on her military technology; hence the significance for this study. Furthermore, Ilorin's location favoured the settlement of different groups, whose impact were felt not only in the area of recruitment of soldiers but also in the supply of weapons for prosecuting wars. This was also evident in the activities of blacksmiths, Islamic scholars, hunters, militia and other related groups in different localities in the city. In this regard, the city's weapons were of both physical and spiritual nature, which gave significant roles to the blacksmiths, and Islamic scholars through the use of Quran as a faith-based instrument of war. Blacksmithing, with time, also became broadened with Yoruba and Nupe engaged in specific aspects of the vocation. The Yoruba smiths, for instance, concentrated on the production of long and short-range iron weapons such as spears, arrows, lances, swords, and knives while Nupe smiths specialized on cavalry and horse keeping accoutrements. Groups like Yoruba, Hausa, Nupe Bariba and Kanuri contributed to spiritual weapon system. With the emergence of the emirate in the city, the faith-based weapon was developed. This involved the use of texts of the Quran as potent war instrument in attack and defence. This was facilitated by the development of Islamic teaching and scholarship in the town. It can therefore be concluded that Ilorin's heterogeneous nature had a significant impact on her military in the aspects of recruitment, technology of war and tactics, spiritual elements and the naming of compounds.

Keywords: Ilorin, groups, military, technology, weapons, Islam

Introduction

Aare Afonja's incorporation of a number of previously scattered settlements into Ilorin contributed immensely to process which turned the town into a military domain in the Nineteenth Century. Several towns and villages around Ilorin such as Kanla, Oke-Suna, Ganmo, Elerinjare, Idofian, Oke-oyi, Ibare, Igbon, and Iresa were captured by the Aare and

their able-bodied men were enrolled in his army. Consequently, the Ààrè laid a military foundation in Ilorin, which was inherited and transformed after the establishment of the emirate system. Thus, the military became an important factor in the life of the city's inhabitants. Indeed, Ilorin's significance as a city of soldiers became more visible when the forces of the *Jihad* gradually streamed southwards of what later became Nigeria from the 1820s. This is perhaps why some scholars describe Ilorin as a city of soldiers in the period.² Ilorin thereafter developed a military base, which became the first real source of her wealth for the better part of the first half of the Nineteenth Century.³

Meanwhile, the transformation of Ilorin into a formidable military environment was partly facilitated by technology, particularly, the availability of iron weapons. Indeed, R. A. Olaoye, maintains that blacksmithing, which is an essential aspect of iron and steel technology, was an important Nineteenth Century Ilorin indigenous craft.⁴ Iron technology provided arrows, bows, spears, swords, daggers and later, guns with which state formation was accomplished generally in several Nigerian societies, specifically, Yorubaland including Ilorin, in the Nineteenth Century. However, unlike other parts of Yorubaland, where the military and weapon system were largely of the Yoruba standard, Ilorin's military comprised diverse groups. Several studies have been conducted on different themes in Ilorin, across the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Few of these are, "*The Ilorin Textile Industries 1850-1960: A Case Study in the History of Technology*" by R. A. Olaoye; "*The Frontier Emirate: A History of Islam in Ilorin*" by H. O. Danmole; "*The Origin and British Colonial Impact on the Cosmopolitan Community of Ilorin in the 20th Century*" by S.Y. Omoiya; *Managing Ethno-Political Relations in Nigeria: the Ilorin Example* by A.L. Olumoh.⁵ These works traversed various aspects of Ilorin's history in the two centuries but factors like migration and multiplicity of groups, religion and spiritual elements, blacksmiths and weapon production with respect to military technology have not enjoyed significant coverage. This study thus seeks to fill this gap as a contribution to existing knowledge on Ilorin history.

Geographical and Cosmopolitan Factors in the Composition of Ilorin Military

Ilorin is situated in the transitional zone between the forest of the south and the savannah to the north of what later became Nigeria. Thus, the town is fondly referred to as the gateway between northern and southern Nigeria. The town lies on latitude 8.30° North and Longitude 30° East.⁶ Its middle belt position and relative ease of access were strong attractive assets. These factors are largely tied to Ilorin's location as a geographical confluence in the Nigerian area, with a part of its land falling in the savannah belt while the other falls in the tropics. Thus, for Ilorin, the grassland provided pasture for livestock such as cattle, goats and sheep, while the tropical part favoured the cultivation of different crops such as guinea corn, maize, millet, yam, cassava, potatoes and variety of fruits.⁷ Ilorin was also a major commercial centre since in the days of the Trans Saharan trade. When the Trans-Atlantic trade pattern started, the city also became a meeting point for commodities emerging from deeper hinterland of the Nigerian area. Articles of trade like slaves, weapons, horses as well as northern leather works found their way into Yorubaland via Ilorin. Commodities from Yorubaland such as kolanut and gun-powder also changed hands at Ilorin before ending up

in Hausaland.⁸

Primarily therefore, Ilorin's attraction of different groups cannot be divorced from this economic significance of its environment, which was fundamentally enhanced by the geography. The Fulani, for instance, enjoyed the area for pastoralism; the Hausa and Kanuri were engaged in commercial enterprise; the Yoruba relished agriculture, hunting, crafts and later, military enterprise; other groups such as Nupe, Bariba, and Ebira also participated in various productive activities. Consequently, trade, evangelism (religion), nomadism and agriculture were among the prominent factors, which drew people to Ilorin before migrations of groups increased its population with the fall of Old Oyo and the outbreak of the *Jihad* in 1804.⁹

Broadly speaking however, two important factors had impact on the sources and weapon system of Ilorin military in the Nineteenth century. The first was the cosmopolitan nature of the town, comprising Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani, Nupe, Kanuri and Bariba. Secondly, by the time of the Ilorin campaigns, major wars in the main theatres of the *Jihad* in Hausaland had been concluded, paving way for greater number of people to participate and Ilorin became major destination.¹⁰ Truly, the *Jihad* in Hausaland came to an end in 1809, but fighting for the establishment of emirates as part of a wider caliphate continued in few areas throughout the first half of the Nineteenth Century. In the 1820s, for instance, the emirates of Nupe and Ilorin were established, a decade later, Misau and Jama'are emerged and finally, Kontagora was founded in 1859.¹¹ Therefore, groups from various parts of the north moved with the *Jihad* team to southward locations, including Ilorin.

Ilorin's inhabitants included natives of those villages like Idi-Ape, Okelele, Oke-Erin, Oloje, Ogidi, Okesuna, and Gambari.¹² They were mostly Yoruba, Hausa and Fulani. Others were natives of surrounding villages such as Amoyo, Kuwo, Reke, Laduba, Ogele, Ejidogari, Ila-Oja, Ogbondoroko and several others in the present Asa and Moro Local Government Areas of Kwara State. Other groups followed Sheik *Al Salih* (Alimi) and his two children, Abdulsalam and Shitta to Ilorin; Balogun Ajikobi from Iseyin; the first Magaji Oju-ekun from Kuwo. They comprised mainly of Hausa, Fulani, Gobir, Kanembu, Bariba, Kanuri, Nupe and some Malians, who resided at a place henceforth, called *Oke-Imole* in the town. Yet others came from Old Oyo Empire towns like Iseyin, Saki, Ikoyi, Igboho and Old Oyo itself. There were also Yoruba from nearby Igbomina, Ekiti and Ibolu Areas. The cycle was completed by captives from wars.¹³ This conglomeration aided the military in recruitment, weaponry and strategy.

The cosmopolity also had impact on the soldiers' use of specific weapons. For instance, the Yoruba fought with variety of weapons including swords, lances, bow and arrows; the Hausa were strong in the use of spear, bow and arrows; the Fulani were good in swords while the Nupe and Bariba combined excellence in swords, spear and arrows. The Bariba were particularly renowned for their marksmanship in archery and they brought this to bear in the battles they participated for Ilorin. According to a respondent, Suleiman Yahaya, Bariba gift in the use of bow and arrow was so great that at times during encounters, their archers would merely shoot arrows into the air and the opponents would be struck.¹⁴ Furthermore, various spiritual weapons such as amulets, bindings and other related aids for warriors were made available in Ilorin due to the multitude of groups in the town. This enhanced interdependence

in spiritual weaponry, because, each time there was an encounter, warriors assembled weapons and charms to prosecute the battle. Moreover, with Sokoto's recognition of the Ilorin Emirate, through Gwandu, under whose watch the southern Emirates fell, Ilorin began to relish the support of the caliphate for military assistance, which included the supply of soldiers, logistics, weapons and diplomatic support.¹⁵

Another significant group dimension was trade in both intra and inter region commodities. Locally, the Gambari quarter, abode of the Hausa in Ilorin, was a popular trade centre, which attracted numerous merchants from the north. Indeed R. J. Gavin describes the Gambari quarter in the Nineteenth century as an international market, where northern caravans discharged their goods.¹⁶ This influx of traders of northern origin also brought with it an opportunity for new weapons and implement of war to be obtained by Ilorin soldiers. Group consideration also had impact on the Ilorin military leadership system. For instance, two of its *Baloguns* were appointed among the Yoruba groups, these were *Baloguns* Alanamu and Ajikobi, the Hausa were led by *Balogun* Gambari, while *Balogun* Fulani headed the Fulani military group. This promoted solidarity in military service and enhanced the procurement of weapons among the diverse groups.

Spiritual Element in Ilorin Military in the Nineteenth Century

Ilorin's geographical and heterogeneous factors also played a prominent role in her access to, and the use of metaphysical weapons of various kinds. The town's proximity to Old Oyo and several Yoruba communities gave her access to several metaphysical weapons. The personality of Aare Afonja as a military leader, who achieved independence for the city, as well as populating it with people from neighbouring communities, also attracted spiritual military weapons into the town. The *Kakanfo* himself relished the efficacy of spiritual weapons as an important element in fortifying him as the Commander-in-chief of Oyo army.

After Afonja, the spiritual element continued to feature in Ilorin wars of survival, consolidation and expansion, under Fulani leadership. For instance, Yusuf Baale, the ancestor of the present Alanamu family was reported to be a great warrior, renowned for his special whip, which he used against his opponents. Yusuf always beat the enemy with his charms-coated whip before capturing them, hence, he received the appellation '*Alanamu*', which literally translates as "beat and capture the enemy". Baale, who arrived Ilorin from Reke, before the *Eleduwe* war, also put his herbal medicine to test by preparing a mixture, which healed the wound inflicted on Shitta, one of the sons of Shehu Alimi during the war against Oyo-Borgu forces at the battle of *Ita-kudimo*.¹⁷ Furthermore, legends on Ilorin military gave account of *Balógun* Gambari Danmurogo, one of the most spiritually inclined leaders in Ilorin. He was reported to have kept a specially fortified and circumscribed weapons room in his compound, which only himself could enter and make use of the items therein.¹⁸

A similar metaphysical instrument was the *Kaho*, a special charm-coated horn, usually blown to weaken the enemies and often rendered them defenceless. *Kaho* was particularly popular with, and a specialized instrument of the Mayaki (*Maiyaki* or Warrior) family of Ilorin. This weapon, the horn, is said to date back to the period of Shehu Alimi, and was fundamental to Maiyaki's war efforts. The progenitor of the Maiyaki was said to have

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migrated with the Shehu to Ilorin from Gobir in Kebbi area.¹⁹

The Religious Factor in Ilorin Military

After the establishment of Ilorin as an emirate, Islam became a strong factor in the life of its people. The city became geared towards Islamic jurisprudence and *Shari'a* in carrying out its day to day affairs like other classical emirates. She relied heavily on Gwamdu emirate, which was in charge of emirates south of the caliphate for logistics and suggestions on administrative matters. At the start, Islamic scholars in Ilorin lived in scattered settlements in such places as Okesuna, Ikokoro, Ojagboro, Akalanbi and Agbaji.²⁰ However, from the arrival of *Sheik Alimi*, they became united, particularly, in the course of defending Islam. They engaged in spiritual activities in protecting and spreading Islam to other parts of Yorubaland. Islam thus became a strong factor in the Nineteenth century Ilorin society.

Meanwhile earlier, the religious factor had an impact in the revolt of Aare Afonja in Oyo. Inded, a considerable proportion of his fighters, after the rebellion against Oyo, came from the Muslim Hausa slaves. According to Johnson, before the crisis which led to the fall of the Old Oyo Empire, Ilorin and her environs had attracted a large number of Hausa and Hausa slaves, most of who were engaged as barbers, cattle-herders, and rope makers.²¹ They became ready recruits for Afonja in his enterprise to sever Ilorin from the rest of the Old Oyo Empire.²² This revolt marked a significant turning point in the lives of the Muslim slaves and the history of Ilorin. The revolt coincided with the arrival of *Mallam Al-Salih's* arrival in Ilorin and increased its momentum as it was a golden opportunity for the Muslims to practise their religion. The Muslim slaves revolt was also the beginning of the process, which turned Ilorin into an emirate six years later.²³

In fact, religion played a prominent part in the zeal with which people joined the army during the period. For example, within six years of *Al-Salih's* stay in Ilorin, Afonja's influence declined considerably as most of the people he used to sever Ilorin from Old Oyo switched allegiance to *Al-Salih* and his sons, *Abdulsalam* and *Shitta*. After *Al-Salih's* death in 1823, it was easier therefore for *Abdulsalam* to turn Ilorin into an emirate, of course with the support of Hausa, Fulani and Yoruba Muslims, led by *Sholagberu*.²⁴ Thus, aspects of Ilorin military such as recruitment of soldiers and weaponry were positively influenced by this relations with the Muslims traders and slaves.

Furthermore, because Ilorin comprised groups with different religious backgrounds, especially before the *Jihad*, there were traditionalists, who believed in the efficacy of charms like bindings, amulets, incisions and other related items, as protection during war. Simultaneously, Islamic clerics were patronised for similar protective items based on the use of the Quran verses and chapters, which warriors believed, served as back-up to their physical weapons. This inter-dependency between warriors and the charms makers also enhanced the level of socialization among the diverse groups in Ilorin at the period. Muslim clerics, herbalists, and charms-makers became important aids to the warriors and they were prominent in the city. Muslim charms were also highly prized by Yoruba warriors, and it was for this reason that *Aare Afonja* had to establish connections with Muslims within the *Alafinate* and their colleagues in Nupeland.²⁵

Indeed, migration on the basis of religion had positive impact on Ilorin military as some

of the city's warriors of the period were attracted to the town by Islam. For instance, Ajia Gajo was a migrant from the vicinity of what later became Sokoto. Gajo and his younger brother, Kure Ahmeeda, were members of the entourage which accompanied Shehu Alimi to Ilorin.²⁶ Gajo, who was a principal lieutenant of Ali Balogun Gambari and an accomplished warrior was appointed Ajia by Emir Abdulsalami. Opele came to Ajia Gajo in Ilorin by the though *Eesinkin* Agbenawo-Oju-egun of Omu-Aran. As an in-mate of the household, Opele was faithful to Ajia Gajo. He was also a dependable lieutenant to the Ajia in battle. These two attributes endeared him to the entire Ajia household and stood him in good stead for appointment as the Ajia Opele in succession to Ajia Kure Ahmeeda. The title since remained with the Opele lineage while Kure Ahmeeda family, retained the title of Kure.

Usman Ajikobi, migrated to Ilorin as a follower of Shehu Alimi from Iseyin, he was also a steadfast follower and got rewarded with the *Balogun* Ajikobi title. The progenitor of the *Maiyaki* also came with the Shehu and participated in many battles, having migrated to Ilorin from Kebbi area. Yesufu Alanamu, migrated to Ilorin from Old Oyo, first settling at Reke before eventually joining the army being raised by Emir Abdulsalami to face the joint Oyo-Bariba insurgents in their bid to re-capture Ilorin. Zarumi Ogbondonroko's progenitor, Janju, migrated to Ilorin from the north (origin not specified) but settled first at Edidi, from where he moved to Ilorin, first as an entertainer of the Ilorin authority. With time, Janju's magical gifts found application in military enterprise, where he joined the Emir's army in several battles and as a devoted soldier, he got rewarded with the title of Zarumi Ologbondroko, whose role was to first lead the cavalry out at any given battle.²⁸

Muhammed Yahaya, popularly known as *Oju-Ekun*, was another military man of great valour and strength, was a Kanuri from Borno, and migrated to Ilorin from Kuwo, having reached the place from Old Oyo and also participated in many battles. From his name, *Oju-Ekun nseje*, which translates as "one whose face is terrifying like that of a leopard",²⁸ there is no gain saying that his military expertise was one of the high points of the early period in Ilorin. These people brought their skills and powers to bear on the Ilorin army at various times and have become immortalized as great warriors, who contributed to the making of the Emirate.

Blacksmiths and Weapons Production in Ilorin

Smiting is one of the earliest indigenous technologies in Ilorin. Remains of blacksmithing sheds can be seen in different locations in the city while some are still active. Ethnic diversity also enhanced Ilorin blacksmiths' ability to fabricate weapons during the period under consideration. Oral sources trace its emergence in the town to the period of migration of groups into the area. One source maintains that the craft could be traced to Ile-Ife, the cradle of the Yoruba. From Ile-Ife, the craft was said to have moved to Old Oyo, from where scores of its practitioners later migrated, first to Kuwo, a suburb of Ilorin, before finally arriving Ilorin in the early Nineteenth century.²⁹

Another source, given by one Baba Elegbeji, claims that his forefather, Baba Ijesha Jakota Alagbede, popularly known as Ijesa, migrated to Ilorin following constant encouragement from the then Magaji Oju-Ekun. Before then, Baba Ijesa, being a professional blacksmith always supplied iron farm implement to Ilorin people from

Ijeshaland. In addition to his smiting activities, Baba Ijesha was reported to be a powerful hunter, who had great metaphysical powers.³⁰ This, perhaps, was in congruence with the tradition of blacksmith craft being popular among hunters. Some of the places known for the vocation in the early period included *Adangba*, *Oju-ekun*, *Sefura*, *Okelele*, *Oloje*, *Pakata*, *Awodi* and *Baruba* (abode of the *Bariba* people in Ilorin).³¹

Generally, blacksmithing in Ilorin, like in other pre-colonial Nigerian societies, served as a tool factory for other industries by producing implement, which facilitated their activities and productivity. Thus, implement like hoes, cutlasses and knives, helped in farming; weavers also relied on the blacksmith for iron implement like iron-spindle, iron-pegs, creel or warping stick, pulley and so on. However, the prevalence of warfare in the Nineteenth Century placed a greater task on Ilorin blacksmiths for the production of iron weapons for the warriors. They worked on iron, producing iron points for arrows, lance head, swords, knives and cutlasses. Blacksmiths worked in close co-operation with the armies, replacing exhausted stock of arrows, mending damaged spears and swords, fabricating iron bullets from pieces of waste iron, and repairing guns. Thus, Ilorin smiths soon gained relevance as an important aid to its military as was the case in the Ekitiparapo camp during the Kiriji war (1877-1886).³² Furthermore, when the cavalry became a distinct and dominant feature of the Ilorin military, tending for horse and its accoutrement, gained greater attention.³³

Another important feature of the Ilorin smiting industry was that it had the opportunity of fabricating both Yoruba weapons and those of other groups and this enhanced city's military in the Nineteenth century. The arrival of Hausa, Nupe, Kanuri and Bariba in Ilorin meant that weapons, which originated from these people started to penetrate the town and soon found their ways into the blacksmith sheds either for repairs or imitation. On the source of iron for the smiths, it is reported that places like Jade Ale, Jabata, Isinland in Igbomina area, are important sources of pit iron, which was the most important raw material, for Ilorin smiths. This also indicates evidence of relation between Ilorin and these areas as sources of raw material for Ilorin smiths. With the advent of gun in the later part of the Nineteenth century, Ilorin blacksmiths also engaged in the fabrication and repair of guns to assist the warriors.³⁴

Social Impact of Military on the Naming of Compounds

Ilorin, like most Yoruba communities adopted the *Agbo-Ile* concept in the structure and naming of its compounds. Names of compound depict the vocations of their progenitors. These names have also become the ancestral monuments of their people since the early periods. Thus, in Ilorin, there are names of compounds such as *Ile-Ologun*, which translates as the House or abode of the warriors; *Ile Esinrogunjo*, which indicate the fundamental role of horses in the cavalry warfare; it translates literally as "house of the dancing war horse"; *Ile-Mayaki*, which is a combination of Yoruba and Hausa words, meaning the "house of warrior", *Ile-Oloko-Ide*, "house of the people with bronze spears", *Ile Alagbede*, "house of blacksmiths", *Ile Asude*, "abode of fabricators of brass implement". In addition, there are several *Ajias*, which also represent compounds of warriors, who participated in Ilorin wars. *Magajis* and *Daudus* are also names associated with some warriors. These titles (*Ajia*, *Daudu* or *Alangua* as they are variously addressed) refer to representatives of the Emir in

conquered territories, which indicates that warriors were widespread in the town in the Nineteenth century.³⁵

Furthermore, the significance of the hunters in the army and their role in Ilorin's warfare in the Nineteenth century is reflected in the names of several localities and compounds in the town. Having participated in various wars, they also took on compound names, which suggested their hunting and military roles in the Emirate. Names such as *Ogun-Oko*, *Ile-Ode*, *Ile-Oluode*, and so on signify the vocation of these people as hunters in the pre-colonial period, and this continued in the emirate during and after colonialism.

Conclusion

Ilorin's location in the transitional zone between the north and south of the territories, which became Nigeria placed her at a vantage position to attract people of different backgrounds. Geographical and commercial potentials contributed to the movement of groups to Ilorin from the late Eighteenth Century. Thus, the city became a heterogeneous domain with groups like Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Nupe, and Bariba. This diversity had positive impact on Ilorin military and its weapon system because several people brought their technological acumen to the town.

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Abstract

This paper shows how the period reduced well as shrink transport system federation began second to Ethio Kwara State of are direct imp road usage a maintenance d study conclude by the effect of Nigerian adop

Keywords: Ro

Introduction

Kwara State longitudes. It h 32,500 sq. km eastern margin Kogi State in t with the Repub indeed a Mid The question of in Kwara State, greatly to the r recurrent phen determined by t sense, road acc colonial period 9,707 deaths in 1563 in 2008. human error al Nigerian transp