



Warfares and Weaponry of Pre-Colonial Igala Land 1500-1900: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract. It is gratifying to know that the study on warfare and weaponry in pre-colonial times is receiving attention globally and not just limited to African studies within Africa as a continent alone, but cuts across the globe. Global War Studies is indeed a study of warfare right from pre-colonial times to the present. Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, Africans had no means of recording their histories in written form. By the 1800s the art of writing in Arabic was introduced to them and some Islamic scholars could record their histories in Arabic language and could record their military histories in written form too. Even the widely acclaimed works of Arabic scholars were restricted and obviously too, to just certain parts of Africa. In analyzing the mode of pre-colonial warfare fought at the time, certain factors were considered such as the strategies and tactics adopted by the people and how such strategies and tactics contributed to the defeat of their enemies. The Euro - Centric Scholars on the other hand have written their historical records to sooth their side of the story, their records of war fought against Africans were mostly biased. European scholars especially were inclined to believe that in pre-colonial times the peoples of the West African sub-region were too weak to defend themselves or too timid to launch offensives, against offending neighbours. This assumption was considered as misrepresentation and misunderstanding of historical realities. This work unveils various warfare fought in pre-colonial Igala-land with a view to clearing doubts regarding the factors that makes up the history of the Igala more complete. Warfare is very important function of state formation. This paper examines the peopling of Igala land, their traditions of origins, oral tradition. Their social, political, economic and religious institutions in pre-colonial times. Other issues include rules and conventions of wars, liability to military service. The organization and role of the military, weapons and how they were acquired, administrative and logistic support and the fate of prisoners of war among others. The paper also assesses some major wars fought by the Igala, the Igala-Benin

war, the Igala-Jukun War, the aftermath and consequences of such wars, Lessons learnt, peace initiatives and processes, termination of hostilities and the relations in the Igbo-Igala borderland. Oral tradition of origin was mostly consulted and used in reconstructing the histories of Pre-colonial Warfare in Igala land as a reference material in the histories of Pre-Colonial Warfares and Weaponry in Igala land and Africa at large. This paper has adopted both primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: Warfare, Weaponry. Pre-Colonial, Oral Tradition, Socio- Economic and Cultural Norms and Values, Political Structure.

1. Introduction

Igala land according to Ukwedeh is regarded to be the territory and from the people speaking the Igala language, which belong to the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo family of languages are demographically and culturally dominant and whose common political identity, under the Attah Kingship, started in the first half of the 17th Century, under the Attah of Igala land, Attah Ayegba Om' Idoko. The bulk of the territory of the Igala, which lies within the lower Niger Basin is bounded by the River Niger in the west and the River Benue in the north.

Ukwedeh further states that:

Along the Niger, *Ane Igala*, Igala Land begins at Adamugu, a few kilometers north of Onitsha and continues up to the confluence from where it protrudes linearly north-east wards along the Benue, terminating at Amagede in the Igala –Agatu boundary. The eastern boundary is demarcated by the Idoma polities of Onyagede and Otukpa and the Northern Nsukka areas of Eteh, Enugu-Esike, Itchi, Edem, Uvuru, Adani, and Ogurugu on the River Anambra.

The present area of Igalaland in Kogi State of Nigeria is about 13,150 Square kilometer with an approximate population of 684, 880 people according to the 1963

population census figure, though the present population of the Igala people is a lot higher now. An obvious significance of Igalaland's location on both sides of the Niger and Benue, and around the confluence, was that it brought the Igala into contact with a great variety of people and culture., such as the Igbirra, the Idoma, the Igbo, the Edo, the Yoruba and the Nupe.

Boston posited that:

If we assume as we surely can, that the Niger and Benue rivers played an even more strategic Role in the Nigerian past than they do today. Then it is clear that the Igala area holds the key to an important chapter of Nigeria History, a chapter which particularly concerns the problem of interrelations between different groups in Nigeria. The Igala are located at one of the natural crossroads in Nigerian geography, the Niger-Benue confluence and this has brought them into conflict with wide range of peoples. The confluence area, like Poland in Europe, seems to have been polled in different directions at different periods. At times, the Igala have been orientated towards the Yoruba, at other times towards Benin or again. Later on, towards the Jukun empire and they themselves have exercised considerable influence on surrounding peoples such as the Idoma, the Northern Igbo and the Nupe. The vast range of contact between Igala and other peoples creates various dimensions in historical analysis, since so many threads have gone into the fabric of Igala culture, and Igala culture itself spreads outwards beyond the boundaries of the Kingdom.

This paper discusses the geography and peopling of Igalaland, the developments and growth of Igala political and Social system. Warfare and weaponry in the pre-colonial Igalaland are well analyzed in this paper.

To simplify many problems accrued to analyzing oral tradition certain investigations were carried out by Boston, first there was the problem of variants in the traditions, particularly the problem of divergence on the question of origins. The second problem was chronology, which can be summarized in this paper, the oral traditions seem to cover only a fraction of the total time span of Igala history. The third was the problem of separating the political facets of the traditions from their historical functions. This third problem is the one that holds the key to the other two. The shortcomings of oral traditions in terms of diversity and in terms of chronological inadequacy can probably be explained by the fact that oral traditions perform a political as well as historical function in Malinowski's phrase, they provide charters of institutions. When we look at them as supposedly

objective records of the past, are perhaps distorting their perspective and failing to grasp something of the essential function of oral tradition.

1.1 Political Structure of the Igala Kingdom

The Igala form a kingdom whose ruler the Attah had his capital at Idah. Boston points out that,

Constitutionally, the king's position was more like that of a Yoruba Oba, than that of a strong ruler like Oba of Benin. The Igala Attah ruled over a loosely federated kingdom in which the major provinces were organized like petty kingdoms. The provincial Chiefs were relatively autonomous in their provincial capitals and were only subject to the king in certain sovereign matters such as the payment of tributes.

Igala land is divided into clans and its political structure is based on a system in which clans perform political function at either the central level in the capital at the provincial level or at the local level in the districts. Each clan has its own tradition and in each case the tradition is partly concerned with justifying and validating the clan's political function. According to Boston, the indigenous population of Igala was represented politically and in the oral traditions by a group of clans called the Igala Mela who had occupied Idah from the beginning. This paper has revealed that, the political structure of the Igala kingdom was well structured according to the traditional beliefs and practices of the Igala people and cultural beliefs and practices and social norms and values were strictly adhered to. Details are well discussed in the context of this paper, though, the focus of this paper is centered more on warfares and weaponry in pre-colonial Igala land.

1.2 Weaponry of Pre-Colonial Igala land

In pre-colonial times the Igala relied heavily on the use of bows and poisoned arrows (*Ofa olo*), slings or (*inacha*) spears or (*opiolo*) swords or (*okwo*) cutlasses or (*opia*) and knives or (*obe*) The most popular and most extensively used during this period was the poisoned arrow. It had a deadly effect on contact and killed instantly. Due to the deadly nature of the poison, arrows were poisoned in peacetime in the bushes far away from home so that the possibility of some of the poison finding its way into any consumable item was ruled out! They were then given to elders who kept them in safe custody and brought them out only in situations of emergency.

To make for quick and accurate shots, combatants wore the *ahiagba* or the *Ikpalaka* that is quivers on the

shoulders and arrows were kept in them. They also wore the *Ugwecha* around the wrist and this was a thick leather design to reduce the effect of the blast of the arrow on the wrist as it leaves the bow.

As earlier pointed out elsewhere in this presentation, the Ata orders his corps of royal blacksmiths to mass produce these arrow heads. They are then issued to the combatants in event of war. Every male adult however had his own bows and arrows which he kept with him and could use for ordinary purposes other than war like hunting and also for self-protection against wild animals. These however could be employed for war in situations of emergency.

The Igala also used double edged swords which were believed to be of Hausa origin. They were brought by the Hausas known as *Jakali* who raided the area for slaves. These swords were sharp enough as to be capable of beheading human beings at a stroke “*Okwo Chageli*” as they were called in Igala also lends credence to the fact that they were of Hausa origin as the Hausas were known then as *Jakali (Chageli)*. This “*Okwo chageli*” or *Jakali* as the case may be, may aptly refer to the Hausa sword.

The spear was also an important weapon used by the Igala during this period. The ‘*Opiolo*’ as it was known among the Igala has a head like the arrows but a long base. It was not fired from the bow as a projectile but was thrust at the enemy essentially as a shock weapon. Thus, it was used extensively during close quarter battles. A.J. Shelton buttresses this point further when he rightly said that “the Igala had bows and arrows and special spears which were very good for war...” These spears were made mostly by blacksmiths within the Igala area during this period.

Another important weapon whose arrival into Igala land has been timed roughly with the arrival of the Europeans at the coast is fire arms especially the Dane gun. They were used by Portuguese missionaries and allies of Oba Esigie during the Igala-Bini encounter of 1515-1516 against the Igala. Initially the Igala got these guns by exchanging slaves for them until much later when Igala blacksmiths started producing them. In event of war however, the Onus of provision of gunpowder fell on the Ata. Warriors who already had their guns used them but those who hadn’t looked unto the Ata for provision. In the same vein, wealthy individuals who could afford more than one gave their sons or wards or even neighbours. The effect of the introduction of fire arms into pre-colonial warfare was that it considerably increased the rate of casualty. That is to say, war became bloodier in nature.

1.3 Igala Concept of War

The Igala concept of war or what war meant to the Igala is not radically different from how other people in other part of the world view or understand war. According to Theodore Roosevelt a former American President, “...war was necessary to preserve the manly and adventurous qualities in a nation” Field Marshal Von Moltke and Heinrich Von Treitschke of the German General Staff saw in military conflict one of “the divine elements of the universe and a terrible medicine” for the human race. In the same vein, the French philosopher Ernest Renan, justified war as “a necessary condition of progress. The sting which prevents a country from going to sleep”.

To the Igala therefore, war meant the settlement of hostilities through armed force. According to Omiachi, “once amicable resolutions were not reached, the ultimate then was war.” The Igala also believed that war was a way of compelling their neighbours or adversaries to do what they would not have ordinarily agreed to do. Such things included payment of tributes, or cession of parts of their territories to the Igala mainly for economic reasons. The important point here however is the use of armed force.

The Igala clearly recognized two types of wars – offensive and defensive wars. In the case of the former, the Igala believed that someone has tried or offended them beyond human endurance and so launch an attack. The latter has to do with a situation where an enemy attacks the Igala for reasons best known to them. The Igala however engaged in war only as a last resort. That is to say, they were essentially peace loving but became hostile and warlike when occasion demanded.

2. Rules and Conventions of War

There were no universally agreed upon rules or conventions guiding warfare in pre-colonial Igalaland. Ukwedeh however believes that the exchange and acceptance of the “*Udulugbo*” (a flat fairly long piece of metal) was a necessary precondition for war. According to him “it was customary for example that the exchange and acceptance of the “*Udulugbo*” by two rival groups meant that war was inevitable.¹¹ The war between Ata Idoko Adegbe (c 1774 – 1794 AD) and Abah Ikaku an *Onu – Ife* at Iga was heralded by Abah Ikaku’s acceptance of the “*Udulugbo*” sent to him at the peak of their quarrel”. This exchange and acceptance of the *Udulugbo*, as a necessary prelude to war is however not popular. It may have been restricted to minor internal squabbles or of gross

ancient antiquity. At least no tradition exists to show that there was an exchange and acceptance of *Udulugbo* between the Igala and the Bini or between the Igala and the *Apah* (Jukun) in the famous wars they engaged in within the period.

Ayegba Omachoko believed however that what obtained was different. According to him, messages were sent to the enemy that they should meet on an agreed day, at a specified time, in a given place. It was commonly agreed by both sides that the messengers come and deliver their messages and go back unscathed. When however, a chosen time is not convenient for the enemy they send a message back proposing another day. It goes on like that until an agreement was reached. This tends to support however that all wars were predetermined and rules out or grossly undermines the usage of surprise attack which was a common phenomenon in Igala warfare history. If we agree with Omachoko, then the issue of raids and counter raids becomes inexplicable. The emphasis here is that rules and conventions were not the same for all parts of Igala land at different times. What obtained in a particular place at a time might not obtain in another place at the same time or even at different times. However, the point must be clearly made that surprise attacks were an important phenomenon which reoccurred through all phases of pre-colonial Igala warfare.

2.1 Preparation for War

The Igala are very articulate people. They are also very proud and self-asserting thus they hate being defeated in battle. So, they prepared extensively for any war that came their way. This preparation should be viewed especially from two perspectives and these were physical and structural preparations on one hand and supernatural preparations on the other. First the physical and structural preparation. When the threat of war loomed large, a lot of preparation was undertaken. As regarded arms, the Igala depended largely on bows and poisoned arrows, spears, cutlasses, swords and clubs. Thus, the royal blacksmiths were commissioned to produce these weapons on masse to arm the combatants. Thus, there was a rapid militarization of the populace and the society in general. According to Okwoli, “arrows were poisoned in peacetime far away in the bushes and given to elders to keep and when there is war, they just go and get them... when there is threat of war, the Ata simply commissions his score of blacksmiths to mass produce these arrows and they are distributed to his soldiers”.

Dr. Omiachi agrees with Okwoli on this issue and says that “there were also the royal blacksmiths in and

around Idah. It was possible that the Ata will commission them to mass produce these arrows and spear heads or even dane guns in an emergency, but to what degree we cannot possibly say”.¹⁴ There was also the issue of the combatants themselves. Since the Igala had no regular professional army, conscription was resorted to. According to Omiachi, the *Onu’ates* were levied for specific number of soldiers and most often because the Igala were patriotic and essentially nationalistic (a fact often misunderstood for pride).

Women were also mobilized to cook food and brew local wine for the combatants and because they were often times, many combatants, the cooking had to be done on a large scale. Food stuffs were sent in also from the various *Onu’ates* and the Ata supplements. It was all part of the *Onu’ates* contribution to the war effort. If the war is won, the Ata might host them to a feast which might last a few days. Apart from the looting that the soldiers might have carried out, this was the nearest they ever got to remuneration although as Ukwedeh has pointed out rightly, the outstanding commander could be given pieces of land or chieftaincy titles which carries with it immense political authority and responsibility.

To all these must be added the structural defensive forts erected and trenches dug to halt enemy advance on Igala territory. According to Omiachi, these were found mainly in the Ogugu area where threat of Igbo invasion was high. Moreover, Ogugu was not naturally protected like the Idah plains which was adequately protected by natural phenomena like the Benue and Niger rivers, the “*Ubi-Ogba*” cliff and the wet marshy grounds towards the Ibaji. Abiye Ichaba analysed some defensive forts as well as trenches built or dug respectively around Alloma to halt the Igbo invasion of that part of the kingdom.

Okwoli later reiterated this point when he said that trenches were dug called “*Okpe*”. Stones and pieces of dangerous metals were through inside and sometimes thorny buses were planted in them. These were to serve as traps to the invading enemy with a view to totally halting or delaying their advance for a considerable period of time. On many occasions defensive walls were built like in Alloma. As a rule, also, all Igala villages during the period were not situated in the plain land but in the forest. This made defense easy and also took care of the risk of grass catching fire.

Professor Shelton also talks of the ruins of an old fort on the grounds of present-day University of Nigeria Nsukka, which he said ran from Unadu to Ogugu and is now referred to by the people of the area as the “*Okpe gara*” or Igala wall. Then of course is the

supernatural aspect of preparation. The role of the supernatural in Igala warfare cannot be over emphasized. The Igala view this aspect of preparation very importantly. Their ancestors, they believe, were invisible war captains and so had to be consulted before any action could be taken. This was the job of the diviners. According to Omiachi, “preparations were dictated by divinations”. For example, it is believed that the ancestors told them to sacrifice Princess Oma doko and then poison the *Nachalo* river to check Jukun invasion. So also, was Princess Inikpi sacrificed for the cause of the Igala Bini war”.

Omachoko also talks of the “*Eeju*” a charm which waives away enemy arrows and make them miss the soldiers by often, a hairs breath. There was also the “*Uya*” or fastness or agility, which helps the soldiers to dodge enemy arrows and spears even before it reaches where they were standing. There also exists the “*Eetu*” or futility which makes enemy weapons ineffective on the soldiers. Thus, if you are wearing the “*Eetu*” all enemy efforts to get at you are mere exercises in futility. All these were charms made to render the soldiers supernatural. Professor Shelton was told while interviewing a group of Igala elders at Ankpa that “our fathers had a special war uniform made of ordinary cloth (*Ili*), made magical with a medicine called “*Echi*” so that their enemies could not see them and thought they were spirits..

At first the Igala had their own war medicine “*Ogwu-Ogwu*” but when they joined with the Yoruba who hunted with them the Igala learned more medicine from them and in turn gave some of their secrets to their Yoruba friends”. All these go to point out the importance the Igala attached to medicines and charms and the supernatural in their warfare in pre-colonial times.

Clifford also explains this phenomenon further in the following words. The Ata of Igala Ayegba Om;Idoko invited Muslims from Bebeji and Kano to prepare “*Ogwu*” or charms for him to win wars. Often, he won and so persuaded these *Mallams* to stay. He gave them wives and pieces of land on which to settle. Similar developments took place in Ankpa and other parts of the kingdom and this can explain the presence of people of Hausa descent in many parts of Ankpa, Idah and other parts of the kingdom. He also talks of the existence of “*Ogwu-Echubi*” literarily charm of darkness, that supposedly renders the warriors invisible to his victim and the warriors that had it were held in high esteem.

Added to all these were the fact that the kingdoms was well defended naturally. There was the Niger to the

West, the Benue to the North, the Anambra to the South East and the precipitous “*Ubi-Ogba*” cliff on which the Atas palace was situated which was insurmountable to human efforts at least during this period. There were also the marshy grounds towards the Ibaji which served as a deterrent to many potential enemies.

From the foregoing it can be seen that the Igala took the issue of warfare seriously and as such engaged in preparations vigorously and this obviously made for the many successes they recorded in their conflicts with their neighbours. As regards the supernatural aspect however we can't say whether the different charms were effective and to what degree or not. But although such issues are a “heap of rubbish” in so far as they cannot be explained by modern science it must be pointed out that since the Igala always resorted to their use for successive encounters, we can confidently say that to them it was effective.

2.2 Causes of Wars

Causes of war between the Igala and their neighbours were many but often it bordered on territorial expansion. Territorial expansion however was not an end in itself but a means to acquire more economic power because the larger the territory, the larger the area from which tributes were collected.

In the case of the Igala war with the Jukuns (*Apah*), the Igala were fighting to break the yoke of Jukun overlordship. According to Dr Omiachi, the Igala were conquered and became a vassal state of the Jukun paying tributes annually to the Jukun court at Wukari. The ruling Ata then, Ayegba Om'Idoko could not tolerate that kind of situation and so not only refused to pay tributes but gave the Aku-uka at Wukari human faeces as tributes, the Aku-Uka felt insulted and vowed to teach the Igala a lesson. The Igala knew the enormity of the consequence of their action and prepared for war.

As regards the Igala-Bini war Okwoli explain that the Ata was controlling the Riverine trade on the Niger from Lokoja to Okene and down the Niger as far as Onitsha but could not make considerable headway across the Niger opposite Igala around present day Agenebode an area being controlled by the Bini. It was an attempt to make his presence felt in that area that he waged a war against the Bini. Thus, according to Okwoli all wars had economic interests behind them. 21 Omachoko however sees the causes of war as ranging from snatching of wives, indiscriminate murder, kidnapping, assault and land disputes.

According to him, people did not go to fight for land for the sake of it, but because of the economic potentials contained therein. These included economic trees like palm trees, kolanuts, cocoanuts and valuable animals like elephant killed for its tusks or leopard, wanted for its skin.

From the foregoing therefore, it can be concluded that most wars fought by the Igala at least had economic or commercial undertones where they were not the immediate causes. To this must be added provocations ranging from kidnappings of Igala men travelling in foreign territory or even their murder. Even the wars of expansion had economic undertones as richer territories were taken and more tributes collected.

3. Liability to Military Service and Command

In pre-colonial Igala land, the concept of standing armies was non-existent. Armies were mobilized as hostilities arose and demobilized immediately thereafter also during this period there was no exception in those who went to war. All able bodied Igala men were required to defend their fatherland. The responsibility for mobilizing the combatants rested heavily on the titled councilors. According to Ukwedeh, "...also of importance was the titled councilors' responsibility for mobilizing the royal army in time of war and no major expeditions, accompanied the Ata into the field at the head of their own contingents. It should be pointed out that since the Igala State did not maintain a regular army of professional soldiers, period of crisis was managed by the state imposing specific levies of contingents on the titled fiefholders. Furthermore, the issue of command was viewed very seriously and thus only the best were chose as commanders. As shown above, titled councilors led contingents into battle. At other times commanders were chosen by the Ata himself and a lot of factors were taken into consideration. According to Omiachi certain factors varying from physique, ability to maneuver, valour to courage among others were taken into consideration in choosing a commander. The point to emphasis however is that they were chosen essentially on merit. Omiachi pointed out Ata Abe's view thus. "a commander has to be a mighty man of valour, an authority on medicine and a fearless and courageous warrior.

In choosing commanders, due cognizance was taken of the role of hunters. According of Okwoli in choosing war commanders the Ata preferred the *Onojis* – 'eunuchs' because they were loyal to him and sometimes good hunters were choosen where they existed. Ukwede also buttressed this point further

when he said "a hunting community was invariably famous in war tactics since both were clearly related. Hunters who distinguished themselves were not only made war leaders but simultaneously given tradition titles of immense political power."

What is clear from the foregoing is the fact that war commanders were chosen essentially on merit since the success or failure of the encounter depended to a large extent of them.

3.1 Organization and Role of the Traditional Military

As has been shown earlier the Igala had no standing armies and so there was no permanent military organization. The Igala had no equivalent of the Yoruba "Balogun" in practice. What the Igala had was the '*On' ogun*' – war chief who had no administrative powers at the centre like the Balogun had in the case of the Yoruba. That is to say there was no chief whose duty it was to mobilize troops for the Ata's militia or once troops were mobilized lead them into battle for the prosecution of the war. In fact, the '*On' ogu*' title stopped at the village level and was mostly in recognition of the recipient's contribution to safety and security in the village.

There was no exclusive military class and thus no peacetime role for the military as a group. When there is no war, individuals went about their different normal businesses and were called only when war was imminent.

There was also no formal training for the warriors in pre-colonial Igala land, there were no military or Defence Academies where warriors were given basic military training or any form of military training whatsoever to prepare them for exigencies of war. Men however picked the rudiments of war tactics from their everyday living. However, explain Dr. Omiachi people were trained to be able bodied or physically fit through the *Ogba* dance festival which entailed a lot of strenuous physical exercises.

Winners in such dance competitions were given a red feather '*Uloko*' which was a sign of royal recognition. There was also the *ogilova* which is essentially a war dance carried out by hunters. Young men who took part in such dances were kept continuously in a state of physical fitness and alertness. Combatants were not remunerated as the fact that they were fighting to save their fatherland was enough satisfaction for them. Large pieces of land however as well as chieftaincy titles could be given to able and deserving commanders but here again there is no hard and fast rule. It all depends on the Ata's discretion.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the military, once mobilized had the role of defending the kingdom and could also be used for wars of expansion. That is to say, the army was a defensive as well as an imperial army. Sometimes titled councilors led the men into war and at other times the Ata appointed war commanders who were men who excelled in the art of warfare.

3.3 Administrative and Logistical Support

For any army to go to war and win, it had to be backed by a sure and never failing administrative and logistic support. This has to do with things like ammunition especially gun powder in this context, weapons, rations, transportation, clothing and such other things that will aid the combatants in the effective execution of their duty. The issue of weapons and ammunition has been taken care of elsewhere in this presentation. Others will however be dealt with presently.

As regards ration or food for the combatants in action the Ata was responsible. But then the food was not got from the Ata's farm or barn alone. According to the reigning Ata, His Royal Majesty, Alhaji Aliyu Obaje, in event of emergency "food is got from the domains as their contribution to the war effort". Women were then chosen by the Ata and commissioned to cook for the soldiers in action. They were sworn on oath and also strictly warned not be engaged in any form of sexual intercourse with the soldiers as this would render the supernatural powers invested in the soldiers ineffective. The purpose of the oath was also to guide against acts of sabotage. The women might in a fit of gross lack of patriotism poison the food meant for the combatants to the enemy's advantage. Thus, oath taking was viewed seriously.

Transport during this period was not a very important issue in war, soldiers trekked or marched to the war front. Canoes were however used if the war front is accessible to sea. War canoes were also used in distant engagements to ferry combatants across rivers where they existed but there is no record of any important Naval warfare involving the Igala in this period. There were also the use of horses. Shelton has established without reasonable doubt the existence of horses in Igala land within this period. According to him, "The Igalas had bows and arrows and special spears which were very good for war and most importantly, they had horses". Thus, we can confidently say that horses were used extensively during this period in Igala warfare.

Unlike weapons and ammunition which were provided mainly by the state, clothing was got through the effort of individual combatants. According to Shelton and as

his already been pointed out" the Igala had special war uniforms made of ordinary cloth but made magical with medicine called "*echi*", so their enemies could not see them and thought they were ancestral spirits – '*a'begwu*". There is no record of state provision of such special uniforms as individual possessed their or wealthy parents bought for their sons or wards. These uniforms were not radically different from hunting attires so individuals always possessed theirs.

It has also been pointed out that the combatants were not entitled to any remuneration during or after the war, as they believed they were fighting to protect the independence and territorial integrity of their kingdom. However, *Oje ogwu* or war feast was organized by the Ata for the warriors after a successful or victorious war.

3.4 Mercenaries and Special Forces

The Igala never employed the services of mercenaries in the prosecution of the wars and this view is of no other person than the ruling Ata of Igala Alhaji Aliyu Obaje. Mercenaries are specialists in the art of warfare but not answerable to anybody, who are available for hire, for efficiency or for expert advice or touch in warfare. They are in essence, soldiers of fortune and could be very costly to recruit. They are usually recruited where conventional armies are lacking either in professional touch or in numerical terms.

The Igala could always mobilize enough troops for their encounters and where by no means lacking professional touch as regards warfare, as evident from the large expanse of their kingdom and the far-reaching influence of the Ata in the period preceding the advent of colonialism.

We are well aware of the presence of special forces however within this period. This was the cavalry forces. Horses were used extensively in pre-colonial Igala land. In fact Igala land was a major market for horses from the North and a major source of supply of horses to the Nsukka Igbo area. These horses were sometimes sold to the Igbo tribesmen around the Nsukka area who used such horses for their sacrifices. Although there is no conclusive evidence to show that the Igala employed the services of cavalry forces in either the Igala-Bini or the Igala-Jukun wars we are aware of the presence of cavalry forces, for the advantages of the use of horses as a very important "war machine could not have escaped the military strategists and commanders of a people such as the Igala within this period. We also know that such cavalry forces were used extensively against the Igbo in the Igbo-Igala borderland especially in the period

preceding the arrival of the Jihadists influence in Igala land.

3.5 Role and Security of Non-Combatants

One thing that has become of immense interest to military historians is the issue of the role and security or insecurity as the case may be, of non-combatants. By non-combatants, we mean the aged or people too old to fight; the children or those too young to fight and the women. It also includes those who are naturally qualified to fight but are sick, injured or critically wounded at the time of encounter.

As regards women, some are detained to cook for the main fighting forces while others stay back to take care of the children and look after the farms while their husbands are away in the battle front. In situations however in which the Igala are expecting to be attacked, makeshift villages are created far away in the forest for the non-combatants to go and hide until the war is over.³² In such circumstances, adequate preparations are made for the non-combatants to have all they might need especially food stuffs to last them throughout the expected period of war which usually is not too long. People who are wounded in active service that is in the war from are also evacuated to this temporary village where the village herbalists and medicine men are handy to take care of them.

Boys who have come of age and the not so critically injured men will be helping to rub poison on the arrows which will be sent to the war front as material reinforcements. They could also help on the farms and act as the first line of defence to the women and whatever they might have in the makeshift village. All these precautions are necessary because in event of defeat, the enemy might like to capture slaves or take away the women, set the houses on fire after looting and carrying away of valuable items or they might even send another force to come and do all these while the main battle is raging on somewhere.

Thus, it was necessary for adequate protection to be ensured for the non-combatants – women, children, the aged, sick and wounded and also for any other item they might have left behind like foodstuff, livestock and agricultural tools among others.

3.6 Nature of Pre-Colonial Igala Warfare

When we talk of the nature of pre-colonial Igala warfare, we are referring essentially to whether the wars fought in Igala land in this period were essentially bloody or not. Of course, we know that all wars are bloody but then here we are referring to the degree. Furthermore, the issue of how many warriors or soldiers, the Igala can put to battle at any time will

also be treated. Here there is a correlation as the number of soldiers that died or whether or not the wars were highly bloody depended often times on the length of the encounter as well as the weapons employed in the encounter.

Omachoko however believes that the wars were highly bloody and he derives his point from the lethality according to him of the poisoned arrow which was the main weapon extensively used. He says when the poisoned arrow strikes you, death is inevitable, it in fact becomes only a matter of minutes and you are dead. One is tempted to believe this fact that the wars were highly bloody especially if the number of soldiers the Igala can put to battle as suggested again by Omachoko is taken seriously. According to him not less than 10,000 soldiers can be mobilized for battle if all the territories send in their quotas. The incumbent Ata, Alhaji Aliyu Obaje agrees that this was possible but that it was highly improbable because some territories will not send in enough men. But if full mobilization is carried out the 10,000 soldiers mark could definitely be attained. There is no evidence however to concretely prove or disprove this fact but then for a kingdom as large as the Igala in pre-colonial times 10,000 troops was not too much for her to put to field for an encounter.

In the Igala-Jukun war it has been reported that the Nachalo river on the banks of which the Jukun camped, was poisoned and that all the Jukun soldiers who ate fish or drank water from the river were afflicted with a mysterious disease the symptoms of which include, swollen stomach, which later burst open. When this happened, the Jukun soldiers died on mass and the ones that resisted death for so long were quickly put to death by the Igala warriors. In fact, it is believed that the Igala pursued the Jukun as far as the outskirts of present day Oturkpo. This account no doubt gives a picture of a highly bloody war. But then when this is juxtaposed with other accounts which say that all the dead soldiers were buried en masse in nine holes known as "*Ogbudu mela*" near the Nachalo river, a phenomenon that exists even up till today, one begins to doubt the truthfulness of this claim more so as one cannot accurately determine or specify, the depth and or width of such holes as they existed then. All our speculations stop at reasoned guesses which are grossly unreliable.

One thing is certain however and that is that casualty rate is a direct function of the weapons used. Thus, we can say that when poisoned arrows, bow and spears were used, casualty rate was considerably lower than when firearms came to be extensively used in Igala warfare. This is obviously due to the gross lethality of the weapon.

In conclusion therefore, a balance has to be struck between the accounts we have, and reality because the fact before us points to an unrestricted massacre of indefensible Jukun soldiers. If this is true, it is also clear that nine holes in the context of pre-colonial Igala land couldn't have been enough to bury all the dead soldiers.

3.7 War Captives and Conquered Territories

What happens to a territory when defeated in war depends largely on the victor's motive for going to war. If they had gone to war over the issue of slaves, then the defeated territory is stripped bare of all available able-bodied men and women.

Looting was also carried out largely and it was believed that this was one of the advantages accruing to people who went to war, that is the opportunity to loot enemy conquered territories of items like food stuff, agricultural tools and other valuable household equipment.

Apart from this, the king of the victorious power can depose the king of the vanquished state, and install another king in his place, often from among his own nobles or war commanders. This is usually done to facilitate easy collection of tributes from such defeated peoples. If not for the above cases, conquest and enforcement of control rarely went beyond the payment of tributes with the victor power being content with maintaining superiority over the conquered people who were left more or less to their own devices. Once a prisoner of war is caught however, he is either sold into slavery or castrated to become a eunuch in the Ata's court. On rare occasions however they were killed and this happened when the prisoner happened to be an important factor in the escalation and prosecution of the conflict and had inflicted heavy losses on the Ata's forces.

This was done usually to act as deterrent to other people not to engage in such activities. They could also be sacrificed to appease the god of the land but mostly at the insistence of diviners.

Possibilities also existed for them to be ransomed depending on the diplomatic fluency between both powers and the status of the prisoner of war. If he is a prince for example or hails from a wealthy family, all necessary machinery will be set in motion to secure his release and the vanquished might be prepared to go to any length to achieve this aim. The victor power may use this also as a condition for achieving a favourable peace, as he will make near impossible demands, knowing fully well that his rival has no choice.

If however, there are captives on both sides, depending again on the diplomatic fluidity of the two powers, they could be exchanged. Thus, war prisoners had few options. They were either sold into slavery, retained as domestic slaves, castrated to serve in the Ata's court, ransomed or exchanged for other prisoners.

3.8 Strategy and Tactics

The Igala employed a lot of strategy and tactics in their wars in pre-colonial times. The most important strategy widely adopted was ambush. Omachoko asserts that ambush was a very important strategy of Igala warfare and according to him such ambush were fairly long. That is to say the soldiers waited sometimes for a considerably long period of time before the enemies arrive. According to him, people billed to carry out such ambushes prepare themselves very well towards it. Dry corn fried and ground into powder with a small amount of water were carried with them. This will be their food for the length of ambush. Such ambushes were not likely to succeed because of the long hours they spend. The members of the ambush party may become tired and therefore become ineffective militarily in event of enemy arrival and attack. Spies were also sent into enemy territory and are mostly disguised. Beautiful women were also used as baits to collect information from enemy territories.

Young boys were also sent as spies and they hid in trees or bushes near the farms of the enemies to get any privileged or valuable information which were sent back to own headquarters for analysis. There was also the *Odogo* which is a tall tower and the tallest building in Igala within this period which was situated in the Ata's palace and from which observers scanned to get a vantage view of enemy activities or get and give early warning of enemy advance. The *Odogo* although slightly modified. Exists even up till today in the Ata's palace.

The Igala also made use effectively of bushes and the thick forest around their villages. They merged into the bushes and hid then launched surprise attacks on the enemy. They believe strongly in surprise attacks and tried seriously to keep the element of surprise with them.

All the above however depends largely on supernatural instructions. They consulted oracles through the help of diviners who told them what to do and this was strictly adhered to. A good example can be got from the Igala-Jukun war in which the diviners said that the Ata had to sacrifice his beloved daughter

a most beautiful princess, to the gods. This was done and that was how the kingdom was saved.

Holes were also dug and dangerous items like broken glasses, pieces of iron, thorny bushes, stones and pointed or jagged sticks were kept inside. The hole was then fairly covered so that the enemies coming will not know that there is a hole there and fall into it and get wounded. Through such traps they delay the rate of enemy advance considerably.

The Igala therefore, as evident from the foregoing employed a wide variety of tactics and strategies depending on the causes and circumstances of a crisis situation. However, all the ones outlined above were employed in event of an attack on the Igala. As had been pointed out, the Igala relied heavily on using surprise attacks if they had to launch an attack on the enemy and in such attacks enemy houses were set on fire to first of all send them into a situation of confusion and disarray after which they pounce on them mercilessly, kill the ones they could kill and capture the ones they could capture depending on their motive for going to war.

4. Selected Wars in Igala Land

4.1 Igala-Jukun War

As has been pointed out elsewhere in this presentation the Igala-Jukun war was a war fought on the part of the Jukun to bring their Igala subjects back to order while it was on the part of the Igala, a war of independence from continued Jukun economic as well as political domination. It is believed that it was Ayegba Om'Idoko that provoked the conflict between the Igala and the Jukun. Ayegba was heir apparent to the throne and was renowned for his essentially nationalistic and patriotic outlook. He was also grossly self-asserting and dynamic. It was a combination of these rare qualities that made it impossible for him to accept the status quo in Igala-Jukun relations in this period.

According to Omiachi, the Igala were conquered and subjected to Jukun economic domination. That is to say, the Igala had to pay tribute to the Aku-uku at Wukari. Although the Igala were not the only ones because Jukun military influence was felt in distant places like Borno, the ruling Ata at the time of the war, Ayegba Omi Idoko could not tolerate this kind of situation and so he provoked war between the Igala and Jukun in what came to be widely known as the (*Apah War*) in Igala oral tradition because the Jukun were known to the Igala within this period as the *Apah*.³⁵

The immediate cause of the war is thus obvious. The Ata had been paying tributes to the Jukun from a remote period. According to Boston's account "The Jukun came here and made war so that the Igala could give them something, when the Igala became tired they decided to pay tribute to avoid further war and continued paying until the time of Ayegba Omi Idoko. Prior to this time, Idoko was still ruling and his son Ayegba was being trained in the very important art of medicine by a palace eunuch. He later became powerful and made medicines that were outstandingly successful. It was at this point he approached his father who was sick and asked for permission to take the tribute for that year to Jukun court at Wukari himself. His father consented Ayegba then took dried excrement and put it into 9 calabashes and covered it. He also got a wrap of tobacco and travelled with all these loads accompanied by palace servants. He arrived the Jukun court in the evening and said he would rest and present the tributes the following morning

He was shown a place to stay. Moments later the prince of the Jukun kingdom went to Ayegba's residence to talk with him. He met a beautiful young girl there whom he greeted and asked if she was Ayegba's wife. She replied that she was his sister whereupon the prince told her that she was attractive and that he would like to marry her. He then made gifts of food to her but she refused to eat on the grounds that she needed a ritual vessel "*ane*" before she could eat. The prince went and stole his father's ritual vessel after he had eaten and brought it for his new found love, little knowing that it was Ayegba in disguise. He did this with the understanding that the girl would sleep with him. When however, it was time for the girl to meet the prince he fell into a deep slumber, whereupon Ayegba woke his followers, telling them to make haste because he had got what he wanted referring to the ritual vessel of the Jukun king.

They thus ran away and were on the road the next day when the Jukun rose and began to look for Ayegba. When they couldn't find him, they undertook to open the calabashes and pulled a piece of tobacco which they gave to the Jukun king sitting on his box stool. He pulled a drag and swooned and all efforts to revive him prove abortive. They uncovered the other, and saw dry excreta and they became enraged. They searched frantically for Ayegba without success. They sent a messenger to Idah who returned to say that Ayegba had not returned to Idah but that Idoko his father was dead. They asked about the succession and were even more enraged to hear that Ayegba was heir apparent. They then vowed to make war with Igala and to destroy the capital".

Ayegba had gone to provoke war. The problem now lay in whether the Igala could meet the challenge. The military might of the Jukun in this period has already been enunciated. Given these circumstances therefore, Ayegba had to employ the services of a Nupe Mallam to tell him what to do to avert disaster on his kingdom and person. The Nupe Mallam replied, “if you do not want to lose your title and your land, you must sacrifice the daughter you love most to the spirit of this place. When Ayegba heard this, he was overcome with grief and was prepared to lose all he had rather than sacrifice his most beloved daughter, the Princess Inikpi. She however got hint of the issue and went to beg her father to allow her to be killed so that the kingdom could be saved. She was said to have gone nine times before the king finally agreed.

A hole was dug in the market place on the bank of the Niger and she went down into it with nine slaves and with all her jewels and charms. She was buried alive and at this time was unmarried. After her death the *Mallam* supplied the Ata with some charm which were thrown into the River *Nachalo* the banks of which the Jukun forces were to camp. There was a mysterious enlargement and multiplication in the number and sizes of the fishes in the River which fish the unsuspecting Jukuns caught and ate. Their stomachs got swollen and burst open and many died this way. Ayegba and his troops pounced on the survivors and they were mercilessly massacred. Those who could run were pursued as far as the outskirts of present day Otukpo in Benue State.

This account undoubtedly is suggestive of a very high casualty rate on the part of the Jukun forces. A sense of doubt creeps in however when we consider the continuation in which all the dead soldiers were given a mass burial in nine holes known as the “*Ogbudu mela*” which exists even till present times. As has been pointed out elsewhere in this work, we cannot accurately determine the width, breadth and depth of such holes and the casualty rate of which this account is suggestive is one that cannot be possibly swept into any nine odd holes.

The point must be emphasized however that the account narrated here is the most popular and most widely acclaimed anywhere in Igala land. However, a lot of controversy has been generated recently over the issue of which princess was sacrificed for which war. The ruling Ata of Igala Alhaji Aliyu Obaje maintains strongly that Princess Inikpi was sacrificed for the cause of the Igala-Bini war and he maintains that, that was the reason why she was buried on the bank of the Niger which was the natural axis of Bini

advance.⁴⁰ He argues further that Princess Odoko was sacrificed for the cause of the Igala-Jukun war and that is why her tomb is situated near the River Nachalo the natural axis of Jukun advance. Although the Ata’s view appears logical, it is not popular among the generality of the Igala who believe that Inikpi was sacrificed for the Igala-Jukun war. Some others believe that both princess were sacrificed for the cause of the Igala-Jukun war while some are not even aware of the existence and death of a Princess Odoko.

This argument according to Ebikwo, need not bother us here. The point to emphasize is the gross reliance of the Igala on the supernatural to achieve their military aims. Firstly, Ayegba was able to change his form to that of a beautiful young girl to deceive the Jukun prince and to send him to sleep when he wanted to make good his escape. There was a mysterious ring surrounding the tobacco which was given to the Jukun King that sent him to his grave. It must be pointed out that it was the Ifa oracle who advised the employment of the Nupe Mallam and the sacrifice of the princess. However, the degree of success their reliance on the supernatural recorded for them is not for us to measure here.

The war however had one very important consequence and that is the reversal of the status quo in Igala-Jukun relations. The Igala kingdom became independent and free. It also marked the beginning of the Ogbadu festival celebrated annually to commemorate the defeat of the Jukun forces by Igala combatants., Most significantly, it must not escape our notice that for success to be achieved a beautiful Princess was sacrificed for the cause of the war. Princess Inikpi Oma Ufedo Baba sacrificed her Dear life to avert the war that would have been fought between the Igala and the Jukun. Her love for her Father land and the Igala people was enormous. Princess Inikpi , Our Great Princess sacrifice has made a tremendous mark in the annals of the Nigerian Historiography. The lesson to be drawn is that of sacrificial love for her people the Igala and her land. Are we ready to sacrifice for the course of peace in the land.?

In conclusion therefore it can be said that the war ended the yoke of Jukun overlordship in the Igala even though at the exorbitant price of sacrificing a princess and it also led to the independence of the Igala of which they were robbed only in the early 1900’s by Lord Lugard and indeed colonialism.

4.2 The Igala-Bini War 1515-1556

Another major war the Igala fought was the Igala Bini war. There is no consensus as to the causes of the war. Okwoli however believes that the war had economic undertones. According to him the Ata controlled the riverine trade from Lokoja to Okene down to Onitsha but could not make considerable headway across the Niger opposite Idah that is present day Agenebode area-an area under Bini control. The urge to control the riverine trade was not exclusive to the Igala alone. Even Oba Esigie, the ruler of Bini at this time, had a strong urge to control the trade. The Oba was also afraid that the Northernmost part of his kingdom was not secure due to the expanding influence of the Igala into the area. An area the Igala felt was rightly theirs.

According to the reigning Ata, the *Onu Ibini*, the King of Benin brought eight eunuchs to the court of the Ata for castration. 4 were retained and the other 4 were sent back to the Bini court. On this occasion, the trusted royal messenger that the Ata sent didn't come back in time because there was a war on his route back which halted his movement. The Ata not knowing what actually happened though that the messenger had been murdered in the court of the Oba. Thus, in a brief moment of rashful impatience, he mobilized and invaded the Bini. The Ata felt insulted, that his respect and integrity had been tampered with, he therefore charged his soldiers to bring him the Oba of Bini dead or alive. Egavhreba the Bini historian also identified a different cause of the encounter. According to him the Oliha a court noble boasted that he had the most beautiful and faithful wife in the whole of the Bini empire. The Oba wanted to teach him a lesson and so detailed another court official to tempt the Oliha's wife with some beads. She fell to the temptation and had intercourse several times with the court official. The Oba then called the Oliha to come and repeat what he said in court, he did, whereupon the King summoned the court official to come and testify to the unfaithfulness of the Oliha's wife. The Oliha became annoyed and vowed to punish the Oba. He then went to the Ata and told him that the Oba was coming to launch a surprise attack on him. Thus, the Ata mobilized his troops to meet the Oba's troops. The Oliha then went round and told the Oba that the Igala were coming to subdue him. His intention was to set both rulers against each other because he hoped the Ata will capture and execute the Oba.

Thus, all the components' parts of the kingdom supplied combatants who were all briefed about the mission they were to embark upon. Renowned medicine man was called in to prepare the soldiers for war. That was done, food was also contributed from the different parts of Igala land and women were chosen by the Ata, sworn on oath and commissioned

to cook for the warriors. They were then seriously warned not to engage in any form of sexual intercourse with the combatants.

The Igala warriors however were routed by the Bini obviously because the Bini had, fighting on their side, Portuguese missionaries who had fire arms which meant more fire power, the kind the Igala had not seen not to talk of possessing. The Ata however believes that fire arms had nothing to do with their defeat as the soldiers were supposed to be bullet proof, but that the Igala women who were employed as cooks in the course of the encounter engaged in sexual intercourse with the combatants and this spoilt the supernatural preparations undertaken on their behalf.

Thus, they could no longer withstand enemy bullets or arrows which hitherto had no effect on them. Even enemy shock weapons as distinct from projectiles took its toll among Igala warriors. Thus, they ran abandoning their war implements for dear lives. According to Okwoli however, the Igala owed their defeat to the disorganization which followed, the death of their leader, their unfamiliarity with the battle ground and the poor communication and supply route. It is believed that those who survived could not come back to report to the Ata at his court but rather went to settle on the marshy banks of the River South of Idah and their descendants are believed to be the Ibaji people who according to what their name 'Ibaji' implies, live by the River side.

It is obvious from this account that no peace process was employed. The Igala were just overwhelmed and they took to the heels. The Bini pursued and caught as many as they could while the rest escaped. One obvious fact also is that casualty rate was high. In the first-place fire arms were employed on behalf of the Bini by their Portuguese friends. According to the Ata, "war drums which the Igala abandoned are still found in the war museum in Benin today." Many aspects of the culture found in the Ata's palace at Idah no doubt indicate some Benin connections in the past. The royal pectoral brass mask, the Ejubejuailo, meaningbrings, The eye that scares the beholder, to which Ukwedeh describes as, the eye that brings fear to the other eye. , is still part of the Ata's regalia till date dating back to the 16th century was of Benin origin.

The Igala-Bini war had a few consequences. Both Okwoli and Omachi believe that the war led to the rise of such towns as Agenebode in present day Etsako Local Government Area of Bendel State, which were founded to check further Igala incursions into Bini kingdom. Not only were these towns founded they were dominated by the Binis and there was a total estrangement of the Agenebode people from the Igala.

It also showed the Oba of Bini that the Igala too were a force to reckon with even though the Bini kingdom was a powerful one especially at this time when superior arms brought by the Portuguese had swollen the Bini war inventory.

Thus, it can be concluded that the war and the eventual Bini victory put a stop to the expansionist tendencies of the Igala kingdom towards the west bank of the Niger and it also made secure the Northern boundary of the Bini empire.

4.3 The Igbo-Igala Border Land

From the time of Ayegba the Igala grew more powerful and extended their tribute collecting and slave raiding empire. The area that bore the brunt of Igala expansion during this period was eastward and southward towards the Nsukka Igbo plains. According to Shelton, “the Igala conquest of Nsukka were military. ...Most accounts actually point out the existence of actual war between the Igala and various Nsukka villages...” In all these the name of Onoja Oboni an Idah Igala here re-occurred consistently.⁴⁴ Numerous embellishments and mystifications notwithstanding, Onoja Oboni seems to have been a real Igala war leader related probably by uterine ties to the royal family at Idah but who was unable, unwilling or disallowed from staying at Idah. He was in fact a field Marshal in the Igala army and by all means a professional soldier. Due to his political, military and magical powers, many outstanding achievements were attributed to him. He was said to have turned an oak tree upside down at Ogugu, built stone bridges across the Ofu in two places singlehandedly among others. It was because of this extra ordinary strength and his popularity at court that he was disallowed from residing at Idah.

From his base at Ogugu, he led his armies eastwards in wars of conquest, continuing Igala imperial expansion which was probably intended to secure trade routes at the expense of the Aro Chukwu traders, rather than to colonize the area with Igala settlers. This is in line with the economic causes of war as postulated by Okwoli.

Shelton in his book quotes an account rendered to him by some Igala elders near Ankpa that the Igala and Igbo first came together at a place called Ete near Nsukka North of Enugu- Ezike. In the old times, the Igala were of very strong warriors, so the Igbo sometimes still fear us, although this is now past because we now live in peace. The Igala had bows and arrows and special spears which were very good for war and most importantly, they had horses and

medicine. Our father had special war uniforms made of ordinary cloth made magical with a medicine called “echi” so that their enemies could not see them and thought them to be spirits. In these olden days, the Igbo had only cutlasses which they obtained from the Ibibio who lived south of them. There were many forts built in those days and they use to be all over Igala and were built so that the Igala chiefs could be protected from enemies. This kind of construction came originally from the Jukun. That fort at Nsukka was built by the Igbo as a place for them to protect their chiefs from enemies. The fort being referred to here, is the remains of an old fort on the grounds of the University of Nigeria of about 200 metres in diameter which the people around there refer to as “Okpe gara” or Igala wall.

This account has not said anything about the possible dates of this encounter although it has dealt adequately with the issues of weapons and defences.⁴⁵

Ukpabi argues that it is only natural to assume that this invasion which was so effective as to leave its mark on the culture and history of Nsukka must have taken place in the heydays of the Igala empire when the Ata’s word was law and order and his soldiers could be sent to the limits of the empire on wars of conquest. This golden period according to him was the 18th and early 19th century.

He cites the example of one such warrior-Onoja Oboni, the son of the Ata of Igala who after devastating the Okpoto territory, moved southward to establish his base at Ogugu from where he invaded Nsukka and penetrated as far as Opi.

Meek confirmed this when he wrote in the 1930s that there is little traditional evidence in direct contact with Idah. It is stated that most of the Nsukka divisions was at one time overrun by an Igala chief known as Onoja Oboni these attacks penetrated as far south as Opi.

The Igala thus introduced well developed concepts of political and social hierarchy in the conquered areas based upon factors other than personal achievement which were thus foreign to the Igbo but not altogether unfamiliar. The Igala wanted to control the Igbo so that tribute might flow undisturbed. Indeed, Igala appointed chiefs operated in some major settlements like Enugu-Ezike. They also wanted more importantly to prevent the Igbo people from allying probably with Aro mercenaries to attack the Igala side of the frontier which would interfere with Igala trade.

Then they installed in conquered territories ‘Atama’ or shrine priests who became the major agents of Igala social control. It was not a smooth sailing process

however because the introduction of monarchical institutions among a people who had not known centralized political authority and the displacement of Igbo shrine priests by Igala or Igala appointed shrine priests were to lead to serious repercussions which affected the mixed borderland and Igbo culture in general. This however is not our major concern here. But the point must be emphasized that centralized authority existed in some parts of Igboland, especially those on the Niger in proximity to Benin. Therefore, the concept of monarchy though widely unpopular was not altogether unfamiliar to all Igbo people.

5. Conclusion

In concluding this paper has analyzed warfare and weaponry in pre-colonial Igala land and has reveal the fact that the Igala people have an impressive military history blended with rich political and social-economic past. The Igala concept of war was essentially in line with the way many other societies viewed war. The rules and conventions of war as regards the beginning and termination of hostilities in some existing works were basically theoretical. No historical account for instance has presented the aspect of exchange of any metal object for Udulugbo between the warring parties in either the Igala-Jukun or Igala-Bini wars. In both encounters also the peace process was not adhered to. Instead, we had a situation where the defeated side was overwhelming and withdrew in wild dis-array.... From the work also, it is glaringly evident that undue emphasis was placed on the supernatural in preparation for war. The diviners were always consulted and the wishes of the gods and the ancestors as communicated to the diviners were invariable carried out. Thus, for every encounter they engaged in a beautiful princess with her retinue of slaves and all her jewelries must die or indeed be sacrificed to the gods before they could win or avert the attempted war. That was the believed. The traditional military had no form of training. Although no formal training existed, some traditional practices existed which helped to keep men in a reasonable state of physical fitness for example the Ogba dance festival. It can be said also that in spite of the lack of formal training, in the sense of modern techniques, the strategy and tactics of Igala pre-colonial wars showed impressive and tremendous attributes to Nigeria Historiography.

It is also evident from the work, that the Igala had no standing armies, but that armies rose to meet the exigencies of particular circumstances and once these exigencies were overcome, they were disbanded. One thing is clear from this and that is that, there was no peace time role for the army as an establishment. This

appears however to have been the trend in many political communities in Africa during the pre-colonial period. The Igala machinery for the mobilization and transportation of logistic support is commendable, although during the Igala-Bini war it was not effectively harnessed. The use of cavalry was seen to be one of the features of the Igala military institution. But the fact that it was employed only in the Igala-Igbo borderland war and not in the other encounters showed that it did not occupy a significant place in the kingdom's military organization. The use of mercenaries was not a basic trait of the Igala military institution. In fact, the Igala can recall with pride today that they never had recourse to the use of mercenaries to defend themselves. They had more than enough soldiers and their expertise, militarily, was adequate for all their engagements. Compared with other societies like the Bini, firearms were introduced late into Igala land. It was used extensively against the Igala by Portuguese allies for the Bini kingdom. At this time the Igala had answer to this and this was one of the reasons for their defeat. It however made its appearance later in Igalaland and was available in the area during the anti-colonial war although its use had not permeated every facet of society due to its prohibitive cost. It was later even manufactured in Igala land and its importance to warfare was not lost to the Igala. One thing is clear, and that is that, societies which possessed firearms had advantages militarily over such societies who do not possess it. One impressive thing however about the Igala has to do with the importance accorded to the security of non-combatants. Their realization that their success depended on the safety of non-combatants to a large extent and the steps they took to ensure that they were highly protected is commendable.

One problem that has however hampered our clear understanding of this rich military history of the Igala has to do with the conflicting accounts of the oral sources available to us. The case of Princess Inikpi and Odoko immediately comes to mind. No one knows, on the strength of available oral tradition, which of the princesses was killed for which war or whether any princess was sacrificed for the cause of the Igala-Bini war at all. Then again is the case of casualty recorded in the Igala-Jukun war. It is on tradition that all dead soldiers were buried in nine holes. We cannot determine the size of such holes and therefore we cannot say with any degree of certainty, how many people lost their lives. From the foregoing, it can be seen that this work has been concerned mainly with the wars the Igala fought as a people against their external enemies. no mention was made of wars within Igalaland itself. Mention was also not made of the wars of resistance against colonialism. All these on their

own are also exhaustive topics with the hope that researchers on military History would further research on the areas of studies on Warfare and weaponry in Igala land by exploring the vast area of studies of our past.

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