Weaponry and Warfare in Benin during the Reign of Oba Ovonramwen

By

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Abstract

This paper examines weaponry and warfare in Benin during the reign of Oba Ovonramwen and opine that before Ovonramwen's regime, the Benin kingdom had advanced from the crude weapons of war into the more deadly metal weapons associated with the Iron Age. Thus, Oba Ovonramwen, though initiated some reforms including a standing army, did not start from the base as the foundation was already laid through the military reforms introduced by Oba Ewuare the Great of Benin. The use of iron for military weapons had developed in Benin kingdom and had influenced the state-building process. Iron technology had already led to the development of weapons, which changed the character of war and the composition and structure of the state before Ovonramwen regime. Oba Ovonramwen was therefore left with the perturbing political division in army which has often resulted in a civil war to content with. He reacted by establishing a military camp, a standing army and a kind of a military school. The evidence of these historical facts is glaring and can be deduced through the analytical method of research in history from primary and secondary sources such as oral traditions, the available archival materials, published and unpublished essays among others. Also, in the study of weaponry and warfare in Benin a knowledge of the terrain in which battles were fought, the type of weapons and equipment used, made it possible to reconstruct war strategies and tactics in a logical manner from oral history and documentation by local historians of Benin and foreign writers.

Introduction

The name 'Benin' has three connotations. It represents the capital city of the Benin Empire and Kingdom, which was the seat of the Oba's government. The term also stands for the kingdom, which is the Benin section of the Edo speaking people as distinct from the Esan, Etsako, Afemai and other groups who are linguistically classified with the Benin people. Thirdly, it refers to the 'unwieldy but fluid empire,

which was made up of a loose conglomeration of various peoples that include parts of North-Eastern Yoruba as well as parts of Western Ibo, brought together mostly by force of arms to acknowledge the suzerain of the Oba.[1] While the size of Benin Kingdom was constant, the empires shrink and enlarges primarily in response to the military capability of the reigning Oba. Thus, the boundaries were fluid as there were areas that came under Benin's effective influence and total political control, while others merely and tacitly acknowledge Benin's political sovereignty and some just had a strong sentimental attachment and religious ties, which generated a corresponding acknowledgement of the Oba's spiritual authority.[2] His powers covered a very wide geography areas brought together by the military might.

The Benin military technology blossomed at from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a result of the industrial and manufacturing activities that were safeguarded with state powers. These industrial and manufacturing activities were organised under the professional guild system for which the people of Benin are famous. The various craft industries functioned and developed as integral parts of the state's economic structure and the household was the most important economic unit in Benin society and the guilds in which more than one household was represented, exercised control in most craft production and other manufactures. Guilds exercised control over entry to a craft, methods of production, standards of workmanship and prices. The guild system is crucial in the discussion of weaponry and warfare in Benin because they supplied all the needs of the Benin army from the reorganization of the industrial activities into guilds by Oba Ewuare in about 1440 till the collapse of the Kingdom and loss of state sovereignty on February 10th, 1897. There were the guild of blacksmiths and ironsmiths and they supplied the weapons of war and other implements, while the guild of bronze casters and carvers supplied all objects required by the palace; so were the guilds of doctors,

[1] Igbafe, P. A. 1979, *Benin under British Administration: the Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom, 1897-1938.* Ibadan: Longman, p. xi.

[2] Igbafe, P. A. 1980, the Pre-colonial Economic Foundations of Benin. I. A. Akinjogbin and S. Osoba eds. *Topics on Nigerian Economic and Social History*. Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, p. 19.

leather-workers who supplied protective vest for the soldiers, drummers, leopard hunters, dancers and carpenters among others.[3]

Weaponry and Warfare in Benin before Ovonramwen

Before Ovonramwen's accession, the Benin kingdom had advanced from the crude weapons of war into the more deadly metal weapons associated with the Iron Age. The use of iron for military weapons had developed in Benin kingdom and had influenced the state-building process. Iron technology led to the development of weapons which changed the character of war and the composition and structure of the state. The evolution of the Benin military technology and weaponry had continued since the reign of Ewuare the great. The co-ordination of the army in terms of authority structure, weapons, logistics, strategic thinking and war plans, matters of surveillance and collaboration, combined to produce a military system which had the logic of its own in advancing the aims of the state'[4] at this early age. This is because weapons were constantly been improved upon in the kingdom by the professional guilds responsible for it. The resultant advances in military technology led to new weapons capable of incapacitating the enemies of the kingdom. The Benin army over the centuries also proved to have the capacity to borrow and adapt ideas from elsewhere. The most sophisticated warring weapons of the time were the *Umozo*, a type of machete designed to attack, poisoned arrows and poisoned spear.[5] There were also spears with barbed heads, short swords for hand-to-hand fighting. These swords were worn inside ornamented scabbards and

[3] Uyilawa Usanlele, "Precolonial Benin: A Political Economy Perspective" in Akinwumi Ogundiran (ed.) *Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Toyin Falola* (New York: African World Press, 2005), p. 265. See also Egharevba, a *Short History of Benin*, p. 8; Bradbury, *the Benin Kingdom and the Edo Speaking Peoples of South Western Nigeria*; P. A. Igbafe, "Benin in the Pre-Colonial Era" In: Obaro Ikime and S. O. Osoba (eds.) *Peoples and kingdoms of West Africa in the Pre-Colonial Period*, London: Longman, 1974.

[4] Osarhiemen Benson Osadolor, *the Military System of Benin Kingdom, 1440-1897*, submitted to the Department of Philosophy and History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Hamburg, 23 July, 2001, p.23.

[5] Osaren S. B. Omoregie, "Ogiso Odoligie and the Creation of the Benin Army", an anniversary lecture delivered on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary Celebrations of the Edo Club, Benin City, at Urhokpota Hall, Ring Road, Benin City, on Friday, 10th June 1988, p.9.

left hanging from decorated shoulder belts. There was wide blade sword with double-curved edges. This was carried by very senior officers and senior warriors as a symbol of authority. Later in the close of the fifteen centuries, following the contact and exchange with the early Portuguese, there was a significant improvement in weaponry of the Benin army and they became the first in sub-Sahara Africa to use firearms such as the breech-loading rifles, bows and arrows, but commonest were muzzle-loading smooth-bore guns, known as Dane-guns firing iron bolts or broken metal, when proper bullets were not available.'[6]

As the political exigencies of the period continued towards the end of the century, Oba Adolo (1848-1888) was compelled to restrict the sale and acquisition of firearms from European traders. This had two interrelated dimensions: the first was to enable the Oba acquire more firearms, and therefore build-up the arsenal in the palace; the second aspect was to limit the distribution of firearms and gunpowder as the pressures of military necessities dictated that the military effect of new weapons could decisively determine the strength of a fighting force and consequently the success or failure in campaign.[7] During this period of political exigencies, the nineteenth century Obas controlled the distribution of firearms and gunpowder. It is not known when the initiative was taken to produce firearms locally. Oba Akengbuda was already conscious of the implications of dependency on European sources of supply of firearms, which was the driving force that impelled him to encourage and support the local production of firearms.

The evidence of this attempt is suggestive from one of the colonial Intelligence Reports. The report states that Ekhuele village in the Esan chiefdom of Urohi was founded by Ekenuhan, one of the warriors of the Oba of Benin who 'requested the Oba to give him a blacksmith to repair his gun and make bullets,' and that 'a man called Inele came who formed an Idumu, while' the ethnographic studies of the Esan people by Christopher Okojie supports the claim that Ekhuele was founded

[6] Osadolor, *the Military System of Benin Kingdom*, *1440-1897*, p 198.
[7] Osarhiemen Benson Osadolor, the Military System of Benin Kingdom, 1440-1897, submitted to the Department of Philosophy and History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Hamburg, 23 July, 2001, p.210.

by some Benin warriors under the leadership of Ekenuhan. He argues that 'Urohi Village Group had no intercourse with even the nearest district of Ekpoma let alone the rest of Esan,' being a military outpost founded by Benin warriors in 1516 for the repair and manufacture of fire arms. Butcher's report agrees with this view, and explains further how Urhohi was originally founded as a military settlement by warriors from Benin.[8]

The Benin kings of the eighteenth century were conscious of the implications of dependency on European sources of supply of firearms, which in all cases involved the security of the state, no matter the economic gains arising from commerce. To them, the issue of security was fundamental to all other problems of government. This may have been the driving force which impelled Oba Akengbuda, 1750 to 1804, to encourage and support the production of light firearms. The Oba reorganized the guild of blacksmiths, *Igunematon*, who were specialists in iron-casting by creating a new quarter at Igun n'Ugboha.[9] The new quarter was headed by the Okaigun, whose title possibly became the Obasogie n'Ugboha although the overall head of the blacksmiths was the Ine N'Igun Nekhua. Colonial Intelligence Report describes the guild as having simple instruments and yet do clever work.[10] The other two groups of blacksmiths were the Igun N'Ekhua founded in the time of Oba Oguola (ca. 1250 to 1295) and the Igun N'Eyaen-Nugie established during the reign of Oba Esigie (ca. 1504 to 1550). All the three groups were specialists in the production of weapons used for war, especially the sword, and iron spearhead. It is not known when a fourth group of blacksmiths at Igun N'Iwegie was established to produce metal weapons for the soldiers. The emergence of new military leaders and improvement in the organization of Benin army were major developments that were primarily due to the growing importance attached to the consolidation of the fluctuating military power of Benin in the eighteenth century by Akenzua I, who also showed considerable interest in the weapons used by Benin

[8] For details on these early military camps and the production of fire arms in Benin during the sixteenth and seventieth centuries, R. H. S. Bacon, *Benin: The City of Blood*, London, 1897., p.68. National Archives Ibadan, Chief Security Officers Report, 26/3. 31228; H. L. M. Butcher, 1935. "An Intelligence Report on the Urohi Village Group of the Ishan Division, Benin Province", pp. 17.
[9] National Archives Ibadan, Ben Prof. 4/3/4. 1932. *Intelligence Report* p.140.

[10] E. B. Eweka, 1992. Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles. Benin City: Uniben Press, p.42.

warriors. The possession of arms, basically the firearms acquired through trade with Europeans was considered a factor in the strength of the army. This thinking may have been due to the decisive outcome of the eighteenth-century civil war. As noted by Alan Ryder, the ultimate success of Oba Akenzua I in the civil war, other wars and indeed in the general restoration of his authority "possibly owed something to the firearms with which he was able to equip his forces once European traders, led by the Dutch, began to sell them to Benin in large quantities.

Military Weapons in Benin under Oba Ovonramwen

Oba Ovonramwen consolidated and improve the production and use of fire arms which was started by his predecessors. He consequently had a large arsenal of weapons to equip the warriors in times of war. Each warrior wore a quadrangular bell, egogo. The clanging of hundreds of these bells accompanied by blasts by the military horn blowers, increased the psychological impact of the army's approach as they entered enemy territory, and gave them courage. The helmet were worn by senior officers (chiefs) as well as highly decorated warriors (non-commissioned officers). They were made of padded basketwork or of hard crocodile skin and wood. The body armour, which consisted of a top and a bottom reaching down to the knees was made of quilted ponchos covered with leopard skins, firm enough to prevent the penetration of an arrow or spear The universal weapon of protection was a big shield, made from hide, wood, and basketwork. It had a curved top and was straight at the bottom – apparently designed to be placed on the ground in order to cover an adult sized man when kneeling. Although the warriors had responsibility to own their weapons but in the king's palace, there was a huge arsenal of iron weapons produced in readiness for war. In the arsenal were bows and arrows, swords and spears.[11] The guns which were imported into Benin were the hand-guns of three types: the matchlock, the wheellock and from 1635, the flintlock. Flintlock firing mechanisms were used on firearms from the 1600's to about 1850. Its technology was an improvement on the first type of firearms as it had a piece of flint in the cocking hammer. When the trigger was pulled, the flint struck a piece of steel. This made sparks, which set off the powder charge and fired the bullet.

[11] Edo Delta Movement, The Benin British Wars: Clash of two Empires retrieved from https://edodeltamovement.wordpress.com/benin-british-war on July 5, 2019.

The interest of the Oba in the military outpost was demonstrated by his response to the request for a blacksmith to support local initiative in the production of firearms. If there was need to establish a guild of blacksmiths outside Benin City for weapons production, this can also be interpreted to mean that Benin blacksmiths were already making progress in the local production of firearms in the capital city. The raw materials they needed included iron ore and this was available in the north of Benin Empire as well as almost everywhere in West Africa. Philip Curtin points out that 'many European travelers described African smelting in the nineteenth century.' According to him, 'African iron production appears, in fact, to have held its own relatively well in the face of European competition.'[12]

Dutch sources have pointed out that the Oba of Benin could mobilize twenty thousand soldiers in a day, and raise an army of eighty thousand to one-hundred eighty thousand men. His authority stretches over many cities, towns, and villages. There is no King thereabouts who is in the possession of so many beautiful cities and towns, or is his equal. The swords produced in Benin were the curved single-edged swords, umozo, which is remembered in Benin tradition as one of the oldest of all fighting weapons. It was broad bladed and short, which was better for attack than defence. Benin warriors also used two types of spear (asoro) – the long and the short – which ranked next to umozo as the chief weapon used in battle. Among the spearmen were those who were famous for their skill in using the assegais – a type of slender iron-tipped spear of hardwood. Benin warriors also used bows (uhanbo) and arrows, ifenmwen, long before the crossbow was introduced. The crossbow, ekpede, fired heavy arrows which made it a significant weapon of war. To successfully use the bow and arrow, and the crossbow, the warriors had training in target and field archery. The weapons produced enabled Benin warriors to use a variety of weapons such as bows and poisoned arrows, spears, swords, assegais and the crossbow. The variety of weapons used for war made it possible to compose the warriors into divisions of swordsmen, archers, spearmen and

[12] Philip D. Curtin, 1975. Economic Change in Precolonial Africa. Madison: The University of Wisconsin
Press, pp. 209-210.

crossbowmen,[13] up to the end of the 15th century, when Benin expanded without firearms.

The military was also equipped with spiritual amulets believed to offer protection to the soldiers and consequently boost morals. Its psychological potency for the warriors explains why they had to seek the services of 'traditional doctors' before any campaign. The priest of Okhuahe was responsible for the state army. The Ewaise, a guild of 'traditional doctors' who controlled the shrine of Osun-okuo, war divinity also played a prominent role. 'Medicines' for war were prepared in egba (armlet) or in ukokogho (small calabashes) for individual warriors by different traditional doctors, and the presence of each warrior was required in the preparation process to ensure its effectiveness. The armlets had the potency of diverting weapons and protecting the warrior from premature death in war. The top commanders in Benin City had personal traditional doctors but usually had consultations with the Ewaise or any other traditional doctor who was well known in any part of the empire. Bradbury's interpretation of the Ezomo's Ikegobo, which is a historical war document from eighteenth century Benin, explains the significance and value of magical protection.[14] In the Ikegobo, for instance, a symbol on the front of Ehennua's cap is onwe vb'uki, 'the sun and the moon.' It was a protective charm for the Ezomo. The explanation for it is that just as the sun and the moon always reach their destinations in the evening and return the next day, so will the warrior return safely from his military campaign. The warriors believed in such magical protection and would not go to war without it.

Military Reforms and the Formation of a Standing Army under Oba Ovonramwen

There was process of military reorganizations which led to the establishment of a standing army by Oba Ovonramwen in Benin kingdom. The reorganization was aimed at reducing the problem of political divisions in the army that has often

[13] Edo Delta Movement, The Benin British Wars: Clash of two Empires retrieved from https://edodeltamovement.wordpress.com/benin-british-war on July 5, 2019.
[14] R. E. Bradbury, 1973, *Benin Studies*, P. Morton-Williams (ed.). London: Oxford University Press; 1973, pp.255-261.

resulted to civil wars. Each warring chief had his own army and although they were subservient to the Oba, whenever there were disagreements and division among the chiefs, the army became equally divided. Also, institutions were shaped in accordance with military needs; and therefore, military reforms were in accordance with continually changing political circumstances[15] whose influence on the army became bothersome. In addition to this, was the political turbulence in last decade of the nineteenth century, which was critical in the history of Benin. External pressures from the European and Itsekiri traders threatened to undermine the south-west territorial boundaries of the empire. Domestic political crisis led to the assassination of the Uwangue, *Egiebo*, the Chief Adviser to Oba Ovonramwen, which in turn triggered off a bloodbath by the middle of the decade. The empire was on the verge of collapse due to unending revolts and insurrection.

In order to remedy this and other problems that besieged the army, Oba Ovonramwen carried out series of reforms in the command structure of the army, and the perspective on war also began to change. The assessment of the enemy's combat capabilities, existing and potential, influenced the need for military intelligence and collaboration. Weapons were being accumulated and new strategic plans of military operations were given systematic trials. Towards the end of the last decade of the century, it became imperative for Benin to establish a standing army.'[16] In 1896, Oba Ovonramwen built a war camp at Obadan, a Benin village, 'and ordered every town and village in his domain to send him to send him soldiers.'155 Jacob Egharevba suggests that about ten thousand men were recruited and stationed at Obadan to be trained, so that they might be used in Agbor and other campaigns which he proposed to undertake.156 Ten thousand was probably the estimated number of soldiers to be recruited and trained at Obadan. It is possible that the first group of warriors were about one thousand considering the necessities of food, water and physical structures for accommodation in the camps. In any case, it was a significant development in the military history of Benin. For

[15] Osarhiemen Benson Osadolor, *the Military System of Benin Kingdom*, *1440-1897*, submitted to the Department of Philosophy and History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Hamburg, 23 July, 2001, pp.22-24.
[16] Osarhiemen Benson Osadolor, *the Military System of Benin Kingdom*, *1440-1897*, submitted to the Department of Philosophy and History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Hamburg, 23 July, 2001, p.200.

the first time, a military policy evolved which provided for both a standing army and training school. Until 1896, there was no standing army in Benin. In most pre-colonial African states and societies, there was no standing army; men were recruited from their peacetime occupations on the proclamation of war. The emergence of a standing army with a training programme in 1896, marked a transformation process of the Benin army. Though it evolved as a state policy in manpower development of the army, it was influenced by the pressures of military necessity when Benin was in the last stages of decline.

Improvement on War Strategies under Oba Ovonramwen

The co-ordination of the army in terms of authority structure, weapons, logistics, strategic thinking and war plans, matters of surveillance and collaboration, combined to produce a military system which had the logic of its own in advancing the aims of the state' p. 92 This also influence the strategic adopted in warfare. The strategic imagination of Benin war commanders during this century of political exigencies was reflected in new strategic plans of military operations. In the last century, Benin warriors had adopted the encirclement strategy, *ifianyako,* which was improved upon during reign of Oba Ovonramwen. Encirclement was a strategic offensive action by a contingent of the Benin army which had to split into three wings with two flanks in battle. The Akure war of 1818 was a demonstration of considerable improvement on the strategy of encirclement. Three top Benin war commanders, leading the contingents of Benin army, reinforced by contingents of warriors from other parts of the empire, were engaged in the reconquest of Akure. As Jacob Egharevba reports, the Ezomo went by way of Okearo, the Ologbosere by Okelisa and the Imaran by Isikan and Isinkin.[17] According to him, Akure was taken by assault. The colonial Intelligence Report on Ado also explains how Benin army advanced from the south to attack Akure, Ilawe and Igara-Odo, driving them northwards together with many of the towns of Ewi.[18]The success of the military operation was due, among other factors, to the strategy of encirclement; as Akure after its revolt and insurgent movement. also consolidated plans to resist any

[17] Egharevba, 1968. Short History of Benin, p. 44.

[18] H. L. M. Butcher, 1935. "An Intelligence Report on the Urohi Village Group of the Ishan Division, Benin Province", pp. 17

military threat from Benin. The conduct of the campaign did not suggest crucial changes in weapons and methods of fighting. But the use of gunpowder seems to have been crucial, as Egharevba narrates how Imaran, one of the Benin war commanders escaped been killed but for the use of his pistol.149 If the Akure war was a challenge to the adequacy of Benin's military system, the success of Benin army and their commanders was also due to their ability to maximise the chances for superiority at the decisive point on the battlefield. The improvement on the strategy of encirclement was apparently due to what may be described as institutional contribution of the Benin war council. The council discussed all proposals relating to war, the preparations for any war, and how it should be waged. This means that members of the war council was not devoid of strategic imagination. Its membership included the Oba, all the war chiefs, the Uzama, the Eghaevbo n'Ore and Eghaevbo n'Ogbe. Due to paucity of evidence, the nature of strategic analysis of any military operation by the council is not well known. Suffice it to say that the political exigencies of the period influenced critical appraisals of strategy and tactics, as logistics and reinforcements from Benin City and other parts of the empire, were of primary interests to the council. The war strategy of siege, which was to besiege and sack enemy towns, and the engagement in prolonged wars of attribution.[19] were no longer relevant in the nineteenth century Benin strategic thought on warfare. In the past centuries when enemy territories were besieged or the soldiers were engaged in war of attrition, the purpose was to enslave rather than kill. The political exigencies of the nineteenth century demanded immediate and decisive victory. This can be interpreted to mean that military strategy had evolved in response to prevailing conditions of each period.

This system was also used in resisting the British campaign in February, 1897. The British invasion began on 10 February 1897 in a three-pronged attack on Benin City, from Ughoton, Ologbo and Sakponba. The main column under Colonel Hamilton was stationed at Ologbo while the other two were supporting columns. Each of the advancing columns met 'a determined resistance all the way.'74 The battle of Ughoton was a fierce military confrontation, in which many of the British were

[19] Osarhiemen Benson Osadolor, *the Military System of Benin Kingdom*, *1440-1897*, submitted to the Department of Philosophy and History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Hamburg, 23 July, 2001, p.212.

killed.75 The column was also attacked at its base and the commanding officer was killed.76 As Boisragon noted, Benin warriors 'took every advantage of their cover from the bush, and some of them actually climbed trees to enable them to get a better chance of firing at the column.'73 This put Benin warriors in a defensive action, making it difficult to co-ordinate their war methods by which certain results would have been obtained. However, organisation of the resistance involved soldiers and their local commanders recruited from all the regiments of the Benin army for the heroic defence against British imperialism. The exact number of Benin soldiers involved in the war of resistance is not well known, but the men who were recruited by Oba Ovonramwen in 1896 for his standing army project, may have been mobilized for the war. It is important to point out that neither numbers nor weapons influenced the determination of Benin warriors. It was their bold offensive spirit, and the courage to fight the invading British army that sustained the resistance. The defeated British army at Ughoton retreated because Ebeikhinmwin who was the Front Commander of Benin warriors at Ughoton put a heroic defense. 'In fact, so successful the Bini resistance on this route,' argues Obaro Ikime, 'that the British force was unable to contribute anything much to the fall of Benin City.'[20] Alan Ryder's view also supports Ikime's argument. According to him, 'a diversionary attack against Ughoton met with still fiercer opposition - possibly because the Benin military leaders had anticipated that the British attack would come from that direction - and no headway was made there.'[21] When fully mobilized, the Benin Army was capable of mustering 30,000 to 50,000 men, usually organized in Nine Brigades.

Conclusion

From the analysis, is it clear that Oba Ovonramwen, though initiated a standing army, did not start from the base. The foundation was already laid through the military reforms introduced by Oba Ewuare the Great of Benin (c.1440-73), which transformed the character of the kingdom of Benin. Before 1600, the warrior kings

[20] Obaro Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977, p.158.

[21] A. F. C. Ryder, 1969, *Benin and the Europeans 1485-1897*. London: Longman Group, p.290.

were engaged in extensive warfare which expanded the influence of Benin. Representatives of the Oba, accompanied by contingents of the army were sent to ensure the final submission of such states which were conquered. The payment of tribute or war indemnity, usually in the form of slaves or farm products, was prove of submission by those communities. Non-payment of tribute was evidence of revolt against the authority of the Oba of Benin.[22] This was followed by military action from Benin to subdue the recalcitrant states and communities. Unfortunately, those communities were probably too weak and disunited to offer any resistance to the Benin army.

It was this existing system that Ovonramwen reforms to further consolidate the Oba's authority over the fighting force and protect the soldiers from political issues in the Kingdom. The previous reforms established an effective political monopoly over the exertion of military power and laid the foundation for the development of a military system which launched Benin on the path of its imperial expansion that continued up the regime of Oba Ovonramwen. The Oba was in full control, but power conflicts continued, leading to continuous administrative innovation and military reform which culminated in the establishment of a standing army.

[22] Obaro Ikime, 1969.Niger Delta Rivalry. London: Longman Group Ltd., p.14.