An Anthropological Study of Indigenous Weapon Production Among the Anufor of Northern Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Weapon production and warfare are unavoidably linked, as the former is needed to prosecute the latter. It was essential for the protection of the ego and image of a group, and this urge was strong enough to plunge states into endless warfare. During pre-colonial times, West African states like the Dagomba, Gonja, Mamprusi, and allies, including the Anufor, were preoccupied with wars of expansion and consolidation of acquired territories. In most cases, these wars involved the seizure of territories, as the ownership of territories showed the extent of one’s power and influence. Several traditional armies were thus engaged in warfare to control territories and the resources therein, including trade routes and markets. The strength of an army partly depended largely on the efficacy and level of sophistication of their weapons. The Anufor, who were very efficient in the war enterprise as mercenaries, were equally efficient in producing various weapons, including physical handheld weapons, plant venom, and spirituality. This paper uses oral histories and traditions among the Anufor and their allies in Ghana and Togo, as well as archival sources. Critical analysis of relics of war accouterments and Arabic manuscripts at the Institute of African Studies, Legon, was enriching.

Keywords: Anufor bazooka, mercenary, warfare, weapon production.

1. Introduction

The majority of pre-colonial Africa saw significant state development as a result of conflicts. The conquest of new lands, the use of power, and the formation of identities were all highly evident. The majority of pre-colonial Ghanaian nations, including Asante, Mamprusi, Dagomba Benin, and Gonja, most likely used the military to bolster state authority by controlling or subjugating other states (Illiasu, 1971; Kea, 1974; Osadolor, 2001; Staniland, 1975). Due to tribute payments, control over important trade routes, territorial defense, internal state harmony, and other factors, the country was brought under servitude. Of course, slavery and the slave trade were also sparked by wars in a variety of ways.

The Anufor have battled for several ethnic groups over the years. Oral and written records demonstrate the Anufor’s involvement in conflicts with other people, including the Gonja, Dagomba, and Mamprusi, at different points in their territorial expansion and conflicts with their adversaries. Since the Gonja, Anufor, and Mamprusi’s respective governments profited from these alliances in pre-colonial times, oral traditions among these people emphasize the significance of interethnic interactions in warfare or state creation.

There is sufficient evidence to conclude that warfare played a significant role in West African society prior to colonization (Aboagye, 2010; Law, 1976). It played a crucial role in the establishment of traditional states, which were always changing and growing. Therefore, even though the methods and techniques may have changed, warfare should be seen as an independent instrument of state policy rather than as a subservient one, as it serves as a tool of aggression or defense. Even in
the modern day, the enduring impact of pre-colonial violence cannot be ignored because numerous conflicts around the world, including those in Northern Ghana, have historical roots. Chereponi (a portion of the study area) has frequently been considered a “hotspot” in Ghana’s sociopolitical history, making it vulnerable to political unrest, particularly during election seasons. Investigations reveal splits, particularly between clans formed up of the descendants of military commanders and their counterparts who fought on opposing wings during wartime, which has left the formerly cohesive and formidable war apparatus looking “disunited.”

The emergence of trade, state formation, and warfare are key factors in the political economics of warfare, highlighting the strategic significance of interdependence in the development of military organization and conflict in pre-colonial times (Kea, 1982). A motive for reward and eventual disengagement, mercenary operations in the savannah woodlands over four centuries ago would prove to be crucial to the geopolitics of the region as this fed into the socio-political and military order of the Anufor. It is crucial to remember that maintaining a stable society requires them to engage in economic pursuits that give them an advantage over others. Control over trade routes and marketplaces was one of the causes of violence in pre-colonial periods. After moving to their current position and establishing Sansanne Mango (War Camp of the Mango) as their traditional capital, the Anufor seized control of a significant kola trade route. This was a crucial route for the trading of kola and other goods between the Sahelian regions and the coastal and forest regions. Even though the Anufor were focused on “helping others,” their socio-political organization may have contributed to their military victory. Therefore, their state-formation processes were also taken into consideration. In effect, economic activities and/or rewards thereof, as well as social differentiation and clan or town formation, provided the fuel (material and division of labour) to a potent military and political organisation that went on to undertake escapades in various forms.

Apart from shielding their neighbors from slave raids and other forms of aggression, the Anufor is said to have played a role in the establishment and maintenance of well-known states such as the Gonja, Dagomba, and Mamprusi (Illiasu, 1971; Rattray, 1932; Tranakides, 1953), even as these states changed and developed. However, some of the battles resulted from competing state ambitions and moral interests (Aboagye, 2010). Territorial economic consolidation and growth occasionally served as catalysts for these conflicts. Given their unique battle order formation, strategy, and weaponry, which provided them an advantage over their opponents, it's possible that the Anufors' use as mercenaries between the 17th and 19th centuries was made easier. The manufacture, distribution, and use of weaponry are the main topics of this essay. The availability and timely supply of weapons continue to be essential components of a successful military campaign. The cultures that armies originate from are reflected in them (Vandervort, 1998). According to field interviews, Anufor have effectively used a variety of weaponry. Typically, among them was the mass-destructive Anufor Bazooka created by blacksmiths in Anufor and employed in combat as shown in Fig. 1.
2. **Methodology**

2.1. Research Design

The research was primarily conducted using ethnographic methodologies, with interviews serving as the primary mode of data gathering. Key informants included people from a range of occupations and social responsibilities within the Anufor society, including blacksmith castes, earth priests, bow and arrow manufacturers, and chiefs. In traditional African communities, the blacksmith caste was essential to the manufacture of weapons and other metalworking operations, as demonstrated by this study of weapon production in Northern Ghana. In their communities, blacksmiths occupied significant roles and were well-respected. Their proficiency with metallurgy was crucial for producing a variety of items, such as domestic utensils, weaponry, and agricultural implements. It is especially significant as blacksmiths were in charge of making many kinds of weapons, including axes, swords, shields, spears, and arrowheads.

2.2. Study Area

Among the settlements that were investigated, Nambiri attracted attention due to its significant role in Anufor's history. All that remains of the camp is evidence of Nambiri's historical importance as the site of a German military camp. The Nambiri earth priests were crucial informants who offered invaluable insights into the tribe's history and resistance during the colonial era.

2.3. Sampling Procedure

Contributing to the conversations were members of the Fomboro clan in Nambiri, who were well-known for their proficiency in making bows and arrows and for emphasizing how deadly their weapon was.

Because the interviewees preferred to include other elders and relatives in focus group conversations, the researchers frequently found themselves mediating these discussions instead of the one-on-one interactions they had originally planned. Transferring information between generations was made possible by this cooperative method. The substantial impact that European colonial powers had on Anuforland is also acknowledged in the report.

2.4. Data Collection Methods and Analysis

In order to preserve pieces of Anufor's history for future generations, the researchers had the honour of taking pictures of a variety of artifacts and locations throughout the study. Images of bows and arrows, Dane cannons allegedly taken from the Germans, and plant branches used to make poison for arrow points are all included in this material. Among the Anufor, chiefs, drummers, and fiddlers made substantial contributions to the manufacture of weapons. The ethnographic study of the Anufor's oral traditions and historical dynamics revealed the community's resilience in preserving its unique heritage. The strong tradition of oral history, complemented by insights from the colonial era and key informant villages like Nambiri, offers valuable insights into the Anufor's past and cultural identity. The documentation of artefacts and historical sites ensured the continuity of their traditions for generations to come.

These weapons were essential for both hunting and communal defense against outside threats. Many northern societies, such as the Anufor, undoubtedly had complex traditions of making weapons, with certain families having expertise in aspects like tuning.

3. **Results and Discussion**

3.1. Military Technology

Studies in African military or warfare began with early anthropologists like Goody, who sought to use African sources in their scholarly work. History scholars such as Kea (1974, 1982), Law (1976), and Thornton (1998) have also studied the subject of warfare. Kea and Law particularly focused on the role of Europeans in promoting African wars and supplying African armies with the tool of destruction, which became very useful in the cycle of the ’gun-slave trade.’ Kea (1974, 1982) studied the changing military systems of the Gold Coast in ‘Firearms and Warfare on the Gold and Slave Coasts from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries.’ He reveals that the use of missile weapons had placed archers behind soldiers carrying javelins and those equipped for hand-to-hand fighting. He further asserts that the revolution in weapons changed the type of weapons used and tactics and affected the basis for recruitment.

Any useful study on the military establishments of traditional societies in West Africa should, as a matter of necessity, discuss the issue of weaponry, of which firearms remain central. From the use of very rudimentary weapons like spears, swords, bows, and arrows, among others, on the rugged
West African battlefield, the introduction of the maxim gun by European explorers, traders, and later colonialists revolutionized warfare in West Africa. The study of mercenary activities and the use of lethal weapons, which leads to the grisly spilling of blood and loss of lives, makes it appear a callous investigation in the academic discipline of history (Dolman, 2004). However, it is an ardent enterprise, yet highly suitable for impartial scientific investigation.

From their introduction into Africa through various avenues (trade, explorations, and colonialism), firearms later became the most lethal and choicest of weapons in warfare. Their efficacy and reliability in wreaking havoc remained unmatched. Literature on firearms has changed since they were introduced in pre-colonial times, with their attendant dramatic social, economic, and political ramifications. Despite being pivotal in warfare and the traditional military, much remains to be uncovered about the extent and influence of firearms.

Thornton cautions that before embarking on any developmental approach to African warfare, one must consider both the military and social aspects of the deployment of armies. He further postulates that “technological determinism follows organizational development.” To him, the gun-slave cycle was based on the idea that the use of firearms helped to defeat equal or even larger forces that were deficient in similar weapons. Nonetheless, one cannot discount the relevance of expertise and efficient use of such weapons; other factors such as range, terrain, knowledge, and adaptability were equally crucial. Goody (1971) describes military technologies associated with political structure:

i) Bow and arrow (democratic weapons since access to material and technology was not restricted or monopolized),

ii) Spear and sword (transitional stage with the discovery of iron),

iii) Horse and guns (horse and gun represented different political patterns; whilst horses were seen as items of conspicuous consumption and means of destruction, firearms characterized centralized states).

Thornton (1998) and Kaba (1981) provide enormous insights into the impacts of firearms in pre-colonial Africa. They also reveal their influences on warfare architecture and traditional state formation processes. Thornton's work provides a useful analysis of the impact of European trade interactions with Africa. It is worth noting that trade in humans, particularly between Africa and Europe, was the main item of utmost interest. Conversely, firearms constituted a large proportion of imports and the principal means of exchange that entered Africa. These weapons played a role in the cycle of trade in humans for weapons as captured slaves were sold for more weapons. Law (1976) assessment of the 'slave-gun cycle' corroborates the destructive and negative effects of firearms. He adds that state formation and trade were not predicated on technologies such as firearms and horses.

Undoubtedly, legitimate trade and demand for raw materials from Africa due to high demands to feed industries in Europe led to technological advancements with a huge bearing on the efficacy of firearms (Freund, 1998). The subsequent sophistication in weaponry fueled many wars and conflicts across the West African sub-region. The Anufor Mercenaries may have benefited from the strategic proliferation and acquisition of these firearms to prosecute their war agenda. Oral traditions among the Anufor and Dagomba point to the use of firearms in their respective battles. As discussed in this article, the Anufor, unlike states like Gonja and Dagomba, were free to obtain firearms without surveillance from Asante (Norris, 1984).

The Anufor military thus perfected the art of using firearms. Thus, they ensured their blacksmith castes acquired the skill of production and repair. The Anufor are believed to have been exposed to guns even before they embarked on their mercenary activities in 1751. As was gathered from oral interviews, the Anufor who migrated from the “Akan Region,” stretched from Kumasi into Ivory Coast, may have had access to guns from the area. According to key field informants in Nambiri, the Dane gun (called lanta by the locals) was common during the period of German Colonial presence. It is, thus, thought to have been introduced into Anuforland in the late 19th century. Apart from using it to quell uprisings among subjects and servants and offensive battles, it was also very useful in hunting games. As depicted beneath the butt of the gun, the animal tail/fur or bristles are indicative of the number of elephants killed with the gun. These additions did not come with the gun or from the manufacturers.

The supply and regulation of arms during the colonial era led to the introduction of short and flintlock guns and ammunition into the mandated area, which included Anuforland. A field survey across the research area reveals the presence of these weapons, with some still in use for hunting purposes. A report on the Togoland under British mandate for the year ended 31st December 1938 reveals the supply of these weapons by the colonial administration. The number of firearms licensed during the year under review is presented in Table 1.

According to the report, the total number of licensed firearms in the district at the time, including those registered in previous years, were as follows: short guns, 25, and flint guns, 337. This meant a huge leap from previous years. This regulation was very important for the maintenance of law and
order. This is because whilst the colonial administration had a hard time maintaining law and order in the inception of colonialism, especially as the more democratic bow and arrow were difficult to check, the supply of firearms from Ashanti and the coastal areas was not adequately monitored. With the introduction of the Maxim gun in a relatively unstable region bedevilled with intra and inter-ethnic conflict, it was prudent to put in place a licensing regime to track the use of arms and ammunition. Those licensed arms could only be used for personal protection, hunting, and funerary purposes.

3.2. Weapons Production Among the Anufor

Generally, states in West Africa that rose to power and dominated other ethnic groups or communities did so partly because of the advantages of iron technology development. The Anufor Tunzunu (blacksmith) had an indigenous capacity to work the iron material into weapons of war. This indigenous capacity, which possessed iron smelting knowledge, was probably acquired through training and apprenticeship with older members of the clan.

Iron technology, which fed the weapon production industry, especially during pre-colonial times, is known to have led to the rise of many kingdoms in West Africa, and rightly so because it changed the dynamics and character of warfare. Several pre-colonial states, including Ashanti, Dagbon, Gonja, and Benin, had access to iron technology, and a specialized percentage of the society focused on producing metal wares. It is thus right to suggest that, generally, in West Africa, the states that rose to power between 1400 and 1700s dominated others partly because of the advantages of the development of iron technology (Osadolor, 2001).

The development of iron and its technology among the Anufor mercenaries facilitated warfare and influenced state-building processes. Iron smelting made state formation in tropical Africa possible; without advanced iron technology, the weaponry that made political expansion possible could not have been manufactured (Barnes, 1997). The Anufor was known to have a special reverence for traditional weapons, and its producers or manufacturers tended to occupy a special place in society. In the cosmology and belief systems of the Anufor, the ‘num’ (blacksmiths) possessed special powers needed to subdue the uninhabited spirits. As a result, they were feared and revered. It is a general belief among the Anufor and groups like the Dagomba and Kotokoli that no metal could harm the blacksmith as they are deemed to have ‘overcome it’ through spiritual fortification.

Apart from arms available to the Anufor due to their association with the Ashanti and those firearms seized during wars, the Anufor army had its own firearms industry. Hundreds of blacksmiths worked permanently to produce arms for warfare and other needs of the society, including farm implements and hunting tools. Apart from specific weapons needed in war, the blacksmith clan produced other implements based on requests and specifications from patrons. The processes were quite organized, from acquiring raw materials and manufacturing tools to testing weapons. Whenever needed, the Anufor blacksmiths could produce hundreds of blades or metal tips for arrows, spears, and swords within a week. The processes of producing firearms were slower, owing to the sophistication involved in their production. Nonetheless, those guns produced were useful for the period and terrain, especially when firearms were uncommon in the area.

Due to the low technology in treating iron ore for gun manufacture, the guns easily heated up after a few shots and had to be rested to cool. In a sense, the blacksmiths had to produce more guns to be re-supplied. The Anufor war strategy was fashioned to deal with this heating problem by launching or making an advanced warrior attack and withdrawing for another to advance. More democratic weapons like bows and arrows, spears, and javelins were commonplace and played significant roles in battles.

Metalwork was the sole preserve of a select few, strictly men, as the metal used for weapon production was known to be the domain of more ‘vicious and powerful spirits’ that could only be controlled or tamed by the male caste. As noted, weapon production was an intricate component of the Anufor

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1According to Norris (1984), in contrast to Gonja, Dagbon and Bimbila, all of which states were under Asante hegemony, subject to the payment of an annual tribute and obtained firearms only under the strictest surveillance of Asante (and whose gun men, the Kambons, were trained and directed by Asante military advisers), the Anufor seem to have enjoyed greater freedom due to their special relationship with rulers of Asante in Kumasi.
mercenary ‘system.’ It was central to the movement of Sansanne Mango because production and supplies of war accoutrements remained vital to the expedition. As discussed, the Anufor clan system was designed to aid warfare, and the detachment responsible for producing weapons was the ‘tunzunu’ (plural: ntumim; that is, the Anufor blacksmiths). The Asadoro clan was responsible for producing and supplying ‘atu-yiri’ (gunpowder) to fighting soldiers on the battlefield. This clan is believed to have originally been composed of Ashanti gunmen.

The blacksmith clan was deployed in various ways during war and peacetime. While stationed in the community and a section devoted to their activities, they also joined the army on long expeditions. The fighting force always went ahead of them, whilst they followed with their tools until a community had been completely captured. Accordingly, they moved in after the capture to set up for work to begin. Arms, especially bullets or pellets for purposes other than warfare, were made on demand from hunters and farmers. The hunter’s gun type and the animal to be hunted were ascertained before production began. The ones in Nambiri, Famesa, and Nawieku still produce firearms to date. The group in Sansanne Mango has been under strict surveillance from the Togolese government and, hence, prohibited from manufacturing firearms.

Not every Anufor warrior used a firearm during battle as the ‘easy to use and produce’ bow and arrow came in handy. Bows and arrows were equally effective in prosecuting the Anufor war agenda. This notwithstanding, guns were more effective and preferred. Information on the total or average number of firearms used at any time is very sketchy, as this may only be estimated based on the number of warriors unleashed during battles. With thousands of warriors used in a battle in aid of a Mamprusi Prince around 1760, not less than half of them had firearms. Also, Anufor’s assistance to a Galwe vassal chief, in which the Dagomba warriors used their full armory strength, only indicates their challenge. This, thus, presupposes that the Anufor army possessed a considerable quantity of firearms they often took to battle.

Other sources for acquiring firearms, munitions, and other military equipment existed. The supply of ammunition from their benefactors and allies was a source they could count on. It was the case that the Anufor allies were ever ready to supply their needs, including food and weapons. The control over a lucrative trade route and sale of booty brought in enough revenue to purchase arms. Bullets and cartridge cases were also manufactured or recycled. After each battle, empty cartridge cases, including those of the opposing force, were usually collected for reassembly. This was a line of least effort as it saved time and was easy to recycle.

The ntumim were able to meet the needs of the ever-growing army. They were very talented and could fabricate or reproduce nearly every weapon of war they came into contact with during pre-colonial times. The weapons produced enabled Anufor fighters to use weapons such as bows, poisoned arrows, spears, swords, and guns. The variety of weapons used for war made it possible to compose the warriors into detachments of calvary, in which the commanders were known to be part of archers, spearmen, and gunmen commonly referred to as the njem. Iron ore in the area made it strategic for producing spears and arrows, later laced with the venom from a plant growing in the community. Those weapons were quite common, hence called more democratic weapons (Goody, 1971). According to Goody, the bows and arrows that came before spears were described because ownership was not limited or restricted to a select few, such as the Dane guns and automatic rifles, among other sophisticated weapons. It is imperative to note that, besides fabricating and repairing parts of the firearms locally, an army’s ability to supply consumables like bullets or pellets was vital. The pellets were made way in advance in anticipation of hostilities and in enough quantities to meet the needs of the various sections of the army.

The spears and swords produced by the ntumim were pointed, single-edged spears and swords. These were broad, long, and better for attack and defence. Among the spearmen were those who were famous for their skills in riding horses. The use of these weapons was well coordinated to ensure total victory. It is important to note that the sources of raw materials were kept very secret, and only caste members knew where to find them.

Linguistic and sociological data and oral traditions referring to relatively recent times combine to show that caste institutions were independently founded by at most three peoples: the Wolof, the Soninke, and the Mande/Manding speakers (Tamari, 1991) in West Africa. The Anufor had in their fold some Mande warriors (Kirby, 1986) and may have picked up some of their characteristics as far as metalwork was concerned. However, such skills could have been picked midway through their expedition—oral interviews in Sansanne Mango indicate Anufor’s association with Tanpulima blacksmiths. Caste characteristics evolved with time and space; the exigencies of the time influenced the type of artisanal works produced. With their special creative endowments, they could fit into and easily adjust to diverse modes of production.

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2Though they are prohibited, my informants revealed that they can still teach their young ones how to produce these weapons to keep the tradition of weapon production alive. These weapons are thus not for war purposes and are not sold to outsiders.
Learning the art of blacksmithing, or as the Anufor would often put it, “working with ashes’ one must be a member of the caste, which is attained by birth, and be ready to submit to painstaking apprenticeship till one is ready and old enough to start his family. Only after marriage may one be seen as independent to ready and transfer the skill to his offspring. This was to ensure that the skills were passed on from generation to generation, as weapon production was vital as far as the army’s future was concerned. Training was mostly by observation and constant practice.

Essentially, whenever the weapon manufacturers did their work, they did it in the presence of their brothers and male children. An informant from Nambiri revealed, “Anytime there is something to be done, all the male children are supposed to take part and observe.” Caution is required to prepare the venom used to lact metal arrowheads. The seeds of this plant are often dried, pounded into powder, and then mixed with water. The mixture formed a thick paste that was boiled with snake venom until it turned black and thick. It was then allowed to cool, after which arrowheads produced by the blacksmiths were dipped inside and made ready for use in battles. Through all the processes, one was expected to mature into the art of weapon production through constant practice and observation.

According to an elder of the Abdulai Tunzunu family (Abdulai Tunzunu Dika), younger family members begin by running errands and fetching items needed for blacksmithing. They also take responsibility for fetching coal and iron-bearing sand/rocks from the bush. They also offer menial services like fanning the coal used to heat up the metal. The apprentices are promoted based on their dedication, respect, and diligence.

Mamah Adamu Yela, pictured in Fig. 2, an 81-year-old blacksmith/weapon manufacturer, gives insight into his family and weapon production in Anufor. As already discussed, the Anufor had various blacksmith groups and held them in high esteem. A close-up interaction with 78-year-old Mamah Adamu Yela reveals the hidden secrets behind his successful blacksmithing career.

Mamah Adamu Yela is the family head of the Kajura-Lobisu household in Ghana and Togo and the oldest surviving blacksmith born in Sansanne Mango (Northern Togo) to the legendary Adamu Yela who lived during pre-colonial times and renowned for his exceptional weapon production and fighting skills. This was uncommon because blacksmiths hardly participated in the war, except the daring ones, and he had participated in several wars on the side of the Dagomba whilst domiciled in Yendi. His name (Yela) in Dagbani means trouble, as he was deemed fearless and untouchable, and no one dared confront him. He said, “My Dad married about 19 wives and had 39 children. Just like the Ya Naa, he could marry any woman of his choice.” According to Mamah Adamu Yela, he was a mature young man of about 25 years when Ghana’s first president was overthrown in 1966, and he continued to serve his father diligently. He currently has three surviving wives, though he had been married to two others who are deceased. He has 24 children: 17 males and 7 females. He lamented the disinterest of his children in blacksmithing and revealed that only two of his male children had ventured into his favourite blacksmithing. He is, however, consoled that many of his grandchildren have become blacksmiths, though he could not tell how many grandchildren he had or the number in blacksmithing:

“Most of my children are disinterested in blacksmithing because it is tough. The fire and heat involved in the smelting make the work environment very hot and unfriendly. Lazy people cannot venture into it because it requires concentration, patience and tact to produce weapons for warfare. War is a severe business; care is needed to get the best of weapons.”

As noted, Mamah Adamu Yela is a member of the Kajura Lobisu sub-clan of the Anufor community in both Ghana and Togo, a clan that had bestowed on him weapon production skills through his father who became a blacksmith from the rather mainly Islamic cleric family. His grandfather was a karamu.
a member of the Muslim advisors who helped the Anufor warriors with accurate advice on routes to take and the best days to launch attacks. He could not teach his biological children the karamo way of life hence his father and others who ventured into blacksmithing excelled so much that Adamu Yela’s services were sought after as far as Kaduna during pre-colonial times. According to Mamah Adamu Yela, his father, who was once domiciled in Yendi, produced weapons there till his services were needed in Anuforland after the coming of the Whiteman:

“In those days, our people consulted soothsayers or fortune tellers before embarking on any venture, including going to war. These soothsayers would then recommend the involvement of certain individuals to bring good fortune. On one such occasion, my father was brought down from Kaduna in present-day Nigeria. Since my father could also fight, he knew how to make the most user-friendly weapons.”

According to Mamah, many different blacksmithing groups in Anuforland, including the Tunzunu, Tunzunu Abdulai Dika, and Gonjas, settled with them in Sansanne Mango. Daaku (1969) indicates the use of blacksmiths within their fold to manufacture nearly every weapon used in warfare wherever they found themselves.

Essentially, the blacksmiths produced weapons regularly. Warriors were already pre-equipped with weapons since some wars were sudden, and not much time was at “our” disposal to mobilise. So, supplies were often made in advance. The warriors were always ready and picked up their weapons after hearing the war drums and rallying calls to battle. According to Mamah Adamu Yela, blacksmiths mainly produced Tacobi (swords), arrowheads, spears, guns, and any metal that would be useful or needed in warfare or for domestic purposes. Though some weapons might have been produced in the heat of warfare, the blacksmiths were preoccupied with repairing or fixing damaged or malfunctioning weapons. According to him, “We also manufactured bullets and replaced parts of guns if need be.” All the weapons produced could be used on mounted horses or ground soldiers.

On the issue of raw materials, Mamah Adamu Yela revealed that it was tough when everything had to be manufactured from scratch, unlike the availability or abundance of metals and weapon pipes and parts in contemporary times. According to Mama, to extract iron ore, we molded sand into sandballs by adding water to hold them. After the balls were dried, we applied intense heat to them whilst hitting them with our metal hammer. One must be tactful in applying the ‘heat and hitting’ to get the ore out. Only the most skilful and experienced blacksmiths had an eye for the sand that could bear more iron. Mamah reveals that, in the production process, one has to essentially:

1. Identify and collect sand,
2. Mould sand into balls,
3. Heat sand-balls till melting,
4. Keep heating and hitting till the ore is separated from the sand,
5. Melt fragments of ore from different sand-balls together,
6. Weapon design and manufacture begins after an appreciable quantity of ore is extracted.

The blacksmith then proceeds to shape the spear, arrowheads or sword. The blacksmiths also take time to carve out a wooden bar to fit the spear. Though several kinds of wood could be used, wood from the shear tree was the hardest and preferred:

“It was also used in the production of the butt of the gun. With the abundance of shea trees, gun butts were never in short supply, even as the shea butter oil acted as a lubricant.”

Mamah Adamu Yela reveals that:

“There are several types and shapes of spears. Some are made of metal, while others have wooden middles or handles. Since extracting iron ore was quite laborious, we often produced the ones with a wooden middle. We made two ends of metal, a flat arrow-shaped front with a side protruding (teeth) and a pointed rear. This meant that either side of the spear could be used in battle. The front part was designed to ensure that maximum damage was caused whenever a target was hit. The arrow cannot be taken out without taking out substantial flesh of the enemy. Though the spear is not usually laced with venom, its weight and length are enough to kill in minutes. We do not apply venom to the spear because it is not easy to handle and is also used in hunting games. The venom is rather applied to the smaller arrowheads of the bow and arrow. This is equally very deadly and has no remedy. It kills in seconds. Once hit, the blood of the victim begins to coagulate till death. But let me quickly say that another group is responsible for lacing the arrowheads; our duty is to smelt them.”

He reveals that making a spear from scratch took about a week. That is because, as was the case, each ball of sand produced just a tiny quantity of iron, which was gathered and reheated. However, making about ten arrowheads in two days was possible. This was before the proliferation of various metals that can be used as raw materials. According to Mamah Adamu Yela, he made his first gun after metal pipes became available. With the availability of guns and pipes, the blacksmiths could easily mould other guns, and this started with Dane guns that used gunpowder. A gun similar to a Dane gun could be produced in two weeks. It takes about four days to carve out the butt. The other smaller parts,
like the trigger and lever, would also take about two days. Other important things include dressing the pipes to ensure they do not break when fired.

According to Mamah Adamu Yela, apart from weapons of warfare:

“We also produce hoes of different sizes for farming purposes (weeding, making yam mounds and regular farm beds among others), and cutlasses for cutting and harvesting, hunters’ cutlasses, and anything metal. Additionally, we can treat severe burns so that no scars are left after treatment. In the past, the weapons we produced were given spiritual potency and some taboos and avoidances were supposed to be observed by its users.”

The West African bow as shown in Fig. 3 is typically simple, firing normally fletch-less arrows with an effective range of about 60 yards (Law, 1976). It was perhaps not a weapon of great efficacy and accuracy. However, at least in open country, the archers were superior to other weapons or types of warriors before the introduction of the more precise and ruthless fire weapon. Discussing the production of arrowheads and spears, the earth priest of Nambiri noted that:

“...These arrowheads and spears were made here. Formerly, the spears and arrowheads used to be flat but were later re-moulded by our blacksmiths with protruding/inverted ends for maximum efficacy. When one is struck, he cannot take it out easily. It stays in there and causes maximum damage. The blacksmiths here are smart and skilled in re-designing these weapons. These with protruding we call ‘teeth’; when they go into the body, they stay there, and the enemy dies promptly. These are all poisoned before they are taken to war. It has a leather handle made from cow and antelope hide or skin.”

Spears and staffs were weapons used for different purposes and at different times. These as illustrated in Fig. 4, were major warfare weapons, but they were also used for agricultural, hunting, and ceremonial purposes. The spear, for instance, has been used for hunting game and fishing, especially in shallow waters. It is also a weapon for protection against poisonous reptiles and dangerous animals like buffaloes, pythons, lions, and leopards.

It could be used to settle war. Among the Anufor, a messenger was often sent with a spear, which he used to prick a neighbouring chief’s feet while stealing food items and livestock. The messenger continued pressing on the spear until the chief yielded to his demands. It was again an instrument/object of royalty. Several of these spears used for ritual purposes have been used extensively militarily. In some instances, the rituals performed on or with these spears were supposed to possess the bearer with supernatural power and, therefore, to fight as though he possessed a double spear, meaning a double force.

The venom plant (Strophanthus) shown in Fig. 5, called Bolei baka in Anufor, literally means poison plant in English. This has been used for several centuries as venom to turn arrowheads into efficient killing weapons without remedy. Many Anufor communities relied largely on bows and arrows for accessibility and ease of manipulation. The French and British colonial administrations in Togo and Ghana at the northeastern corner had difficulty controlling its usage. A British colonial official in

Fig. 4. Spears collected by German colonialists in West Africa3.

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Tamale, Chief Commissioner W. J. A. Jones, had cause to complain about arms and disarmament within his jurisdiction to the colonial office, especially on the issue of bows and arrows. He noted that:

“It may interest your excellency to learn that in our zone, repeated attempts have been made in the past to disarm sections of the natives, but it was never suggested or supposed that such disarmament carried out as a purely disciplinary measure would have any permanent salutary effect. Administrative officers possessing considerable knowledge of the area are of the opinion that if every bow and arrow were successfully confiscated now, they would be fully armed the next season. The bow and arrow shafts are made of local wood, and the bowstrings of hide, while for the arrowheads, iron locally smelted is used so their disarming cannot be.4 The German colonialists faced with a similar predicament were left with no other option than to chop off the thumb of many young men to make it impossible to use a bow and arrow.”

The Dane gun, called lanta by the Anufor, became common in the area during the period of German Colonial presence (see Fig. 6). It was thus thought to have been introduced into Anuforland in the late 19th century. Long Dane guns were the shoulder arms available and used in the 1870s. Some of these guns were huge, measured 6 feet long, and weighed 20 lb. Most probably, the difficulty in acquiring such firearms, coupled with the initial inability of local craftsmen to replicate them locally, accounted for their low usage. Apart from using them to quell uprisings among subjects and servants and offensive battles, they were also instrumental in hunting games. As shown beneath the butt of the gun, the animal tail/fur or bristles are indicative of the number of elephants killed with this gun.

4. Conclusion

This paper has shed light on pre-colonial weapon production and how it facilitated and ‘fueled’ the war machinery, an advantage the warrior-newcomers had over other indigenous settlers who came face to face with their armies. Vandervort (1998) reveals that firearms first appeared in Africa shortly after debuting in Europe. Though many of the warriors used spears, bows, arrows, and swords, musket-touters of Akan origin (Kirby, 1986) in their midst made them a force to reckon with.

The fact that the Anufor succeeded in their mercenary activities, which attracted others to seek their help, indicates their potent force and efficient logistics regime. The warriors and Anufor blacksmith were not oblivious to the natural transitions from very rudimentary weaponry to more sophisticated ones. The armament evolution from bows, arrows, knives, and spears to guns proceeded more slowly and unevenly. Also, the Anufor army strategized and made mysticism and spirituality core components of their warfare, as consulting oracles before the war was inevitable.

4 PRAAD, Tamale NRG 8/2/70. Konkomba Tribes. 1935.
CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

REFERENCES


