

# Warrior Peoples of East Africa 1840–1900





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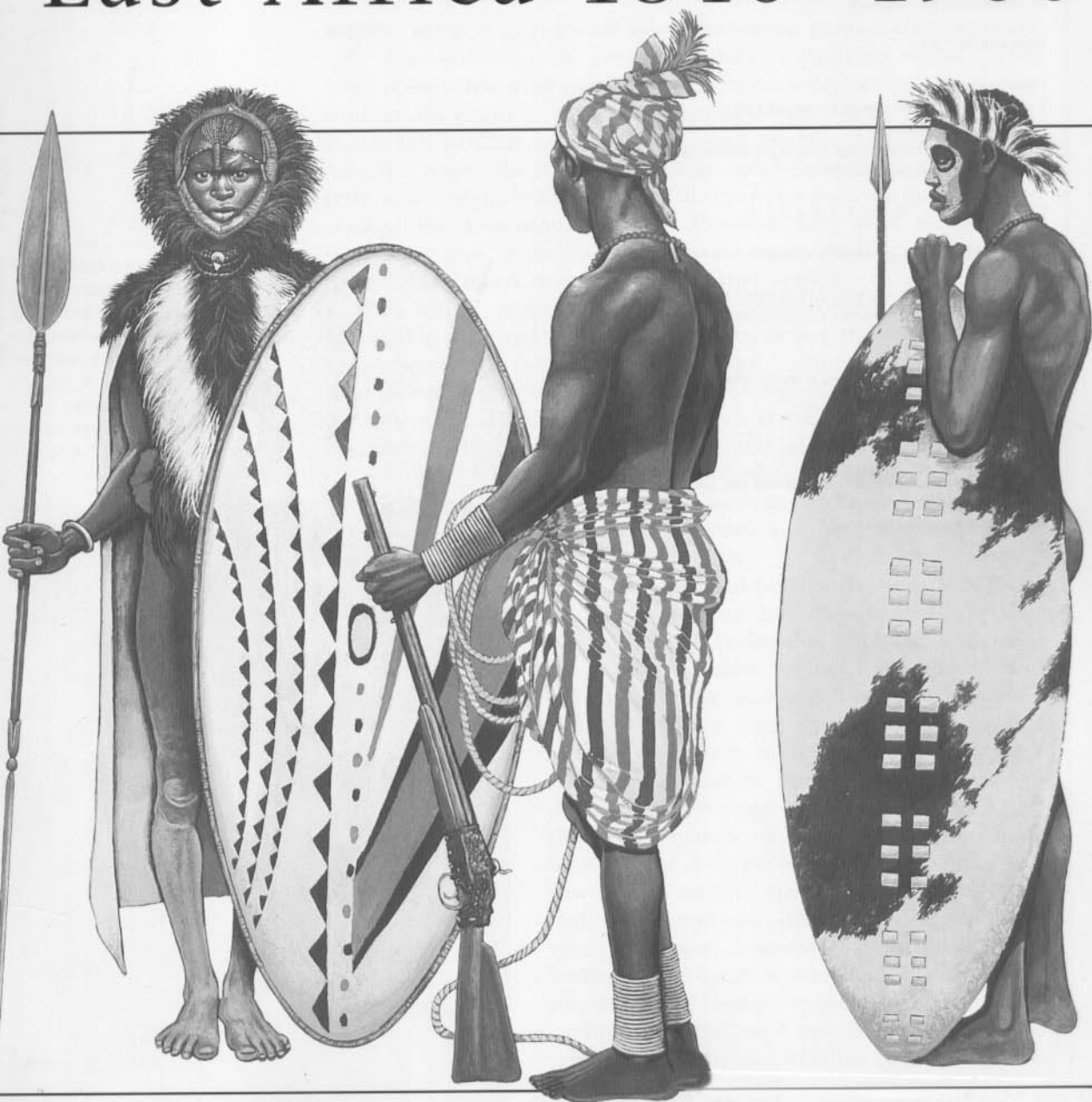


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# Warrior Peoples of East Africa 1840–1900



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# WARRIOR PEOPLES OF EAST AFRICA 1840-1900

## INTRODUCTION

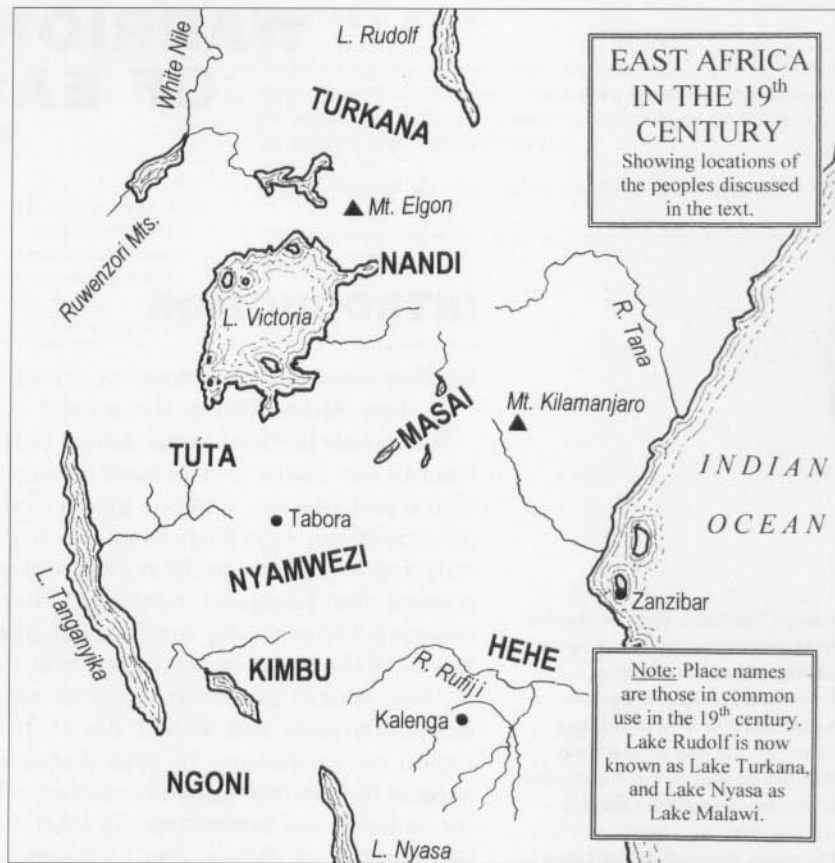
**T**HE SUBJECTS OF THIS BOOK are the six warrior peoples who dominated East Africa during the second half of the 19th century. They include five traditional 'tribes' (a term used here for convenience, without any claim to a precise meaning) – the Masai, Ngoni, Hehe, Nandi and Turkana; and one group which might be better described as a warrior caste – the Ruga-Ruga. These peoples were not, of course, the only notable fighters in the region, and were far from the only ones who resisted the European conquest. However, they were regarded by contemporaries as the most skilled, the most ruthless and the most feared of the native military powers of their region.

'East Africa' as defined here corresponds roughly to present-day Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi. For 50 years before the colonial era the region was fought over by Arab slavers and European explorers as well as by its indigenous human predators, who together gave it a reputation for violence and lawlessness. By 1900 it had been partitioned between the empires of Britain and Germany, and all of its inhabitants had lost their independence (although it was to take nearly two more decades before the Turkana of Kenya's remote northern frontier finally accepted that fact).

All too many European writers regarded African armies as no more than disorganized hordes of 'savages', but in reality they were well adapted to the conditions under which they operated, and were often organized with considerable sophistication. Warfare here was different from that in most other parts of the world in a number of respects. Because of infertile soils and unpredictable climate it was seldom possible to collect the food surpluses which were needed to sustain large armies. This problem was compounded by the difficult terrain, the lack of navigable rivers, and the ever-present threat of disease, which made it almost impossible to maintain large bodies of European troops in the field for any length of time. Disease made the deployment of cavalry impossible, and only the lightest of field artillery could be manhandled over the uneven tracks. The outcome of all these factors was that war was waged on a very small scale; even the most powerful of the peoples discussed here could not

Joseph Thomson and two Swahili companions before the departure of their expedition across Masailand in 1883. It was the appearance of breech-loading rifles like the one shown here that put an end to the dominance of the traditional East African warrior peoples. (Joseph Thomson, *Through Masai Land*)





put forces of more than a couple of thousand men into the field for more than a few days. Both British and German East Africa were brought under colonial control by 'armies' consisting of two or three companies, usually of locally recruited infantry.

On the other hand, the native peoples of East Africa lived in an almost permanent state of low-intensity hostilities. 'In Africa', said Captain Stairs of the Royal Engineers in 1891, 'the only cause of war is simply fear.' Often this was true, but economic motives were also important. With so few resources to go round, conflict with neighbours was inevitable. In most cases it took the form of raids for cattle, which were the only significant form of moveable wealth. The economies of all the warrior tribes discussed here were based to a great extent on cattle, and for the Masai especially they were a national obsession. Not all East Africans, however, were equally adept at war; travellers noticed a sharp distinction between the ordinary villagers, who lived in a constant state of insecurity, and the minority of tribes which might be regarded as 'net exporters of fear'. For one reason or another some peoples had become a source of terror to their neighbours, in the process incidentally guaranteeing their own security.

F.D.Lugard writes of the 'intolerable tyranny of the dominant tribe' in each area as being as great a menace as the Arab slave-raiders. They achieved this dominance for a variety of reasons. The Turkana of the northern deserts, for example, depended totally on their livestock, which was extremely vulnerable to drought, so had no choice but to replace their losses by raiding other tribes. The Nandi, a small tribe surrounded

by enemies, must have faced the early choice either of becoming great warriors or of being annihilated. The Masai and Ngoni were descended from migrant conquerors who for generations had developed aggressive warfare into a way of life. The Hehe and Ruga-Ruga of Tanganyika owed their victories to the leadership of a handful of remarkable men who consciously set out to turn them into fighting nations. Whatever the reasons for taking the course they did, this handful of warrior peoples stood largely aloof from the chaos which engulfed most of late 19th century East Africa. The Arab slave-raiders gave them a wide berth, the white explorers treated them with respect, and even when they were finally brought under colonial authority they often continued to regard themselves as allies rather than subjects of their new overlords. The Masai, Ngoni and Hehe especially provided many of the native soldiers or auxiliaries which the new colonial armies deployed against neighbouring tribes, thus perpetuating the old patterns of warfare under different flags for at least another generation.

## CHRONOLOGY

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- 1835 The Ngoni under Zwangendaba cross the Zambezi into East Africa.
- 1848 Death of Zwangendaba. Ngoni split up into numerous independent bands.
- 1857 Explorers Burton and Speke discover the route to Lake Tanganyika.
- 1859 The Masai sack Mombasa.
- 1871 Rise to power of the Ruga-Ruga leaders Mirambo and Nyungu-ya-Mawe.  
H.M.Stanley involved in Arab campaign against Mirambo.
- 1875-77 Stanley's trans-Africa expedition.
- 1883 Thomson makes the first successful crossing of Masailand by a European.
- 1884 Deaths of Mirambo and Nyungu-ya-Mawe.  
Germany annexes the coastal region of Tanganyika.
- 1885 Berlin Conference precipitates the 'Scramble for Africa'.
- 1888 First European encounter with the Turkana.
- 1890 Anglo-German agreement partitions East Africa between the two powers.
- 1891-98 Hehe war of resistance against the Germans.
- 1895 First British campaign against the Nandi.
- 1896 Ngoni of Nyasaland brought under British control.
- 1897 Final conquest of Ngoni in German East Africa.

## THE MASAI

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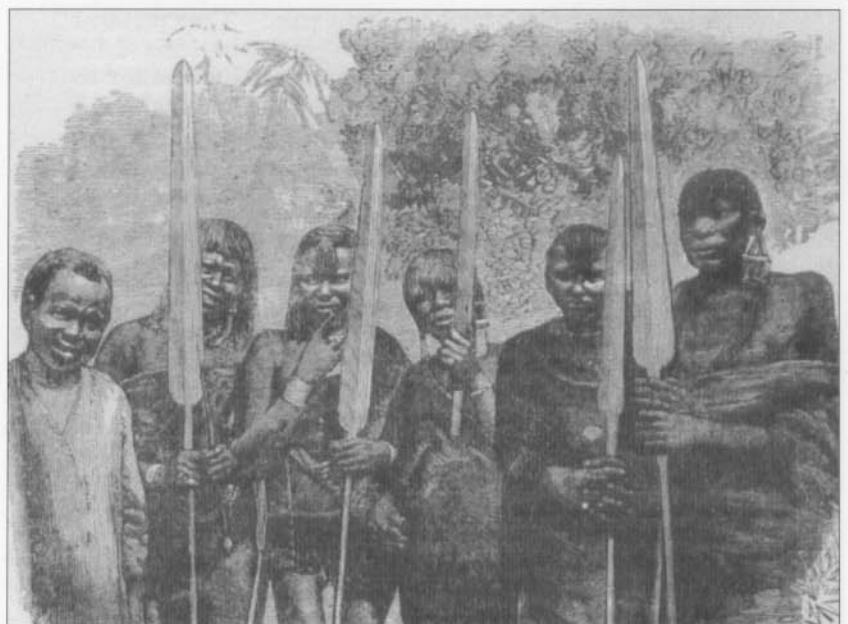
The Masai were unique among the tribes of East Africa in the fear that they inspired in Europeans, Arabs and other Africans alike. In the words of Charles New, who encountered them in the early 1870s, 'Physically they are a splendid people; and for energy, intrepidity and dash they are without their equals in Africa; but they are cruel and remorseless to the



From the frontispiece of Joseph Thomson's *Through Masai Land*, this is the classic image of a late 19th century Masai warrior in full war gear, with feather headdress and neck ruff, *naibere* cloak and goat hair leg ornaments, here with spur-like horizontal extensions (see Plates A and B). The weapons of the *moran* warriors were the spear, the *olalem* short sword and the club or knobkerrie.

Another of Thomson's illustrations of Masai warriors, this time based on a photograph taken in 1883, showing men of the Laikipiak clan in their ordinary day-to-day attire. The warriors invariably carried their spears even when not on the warpath, because of the constant need to protect their herds from lions and other wild animals.

now in the possession of others were descended from herds stolen from the Masai. It was therefore not just a quick way of gaining wealth, but almost a religious duty, to try to get them back. These raids affected almost the whole of East Africa to some extent, as far north as the

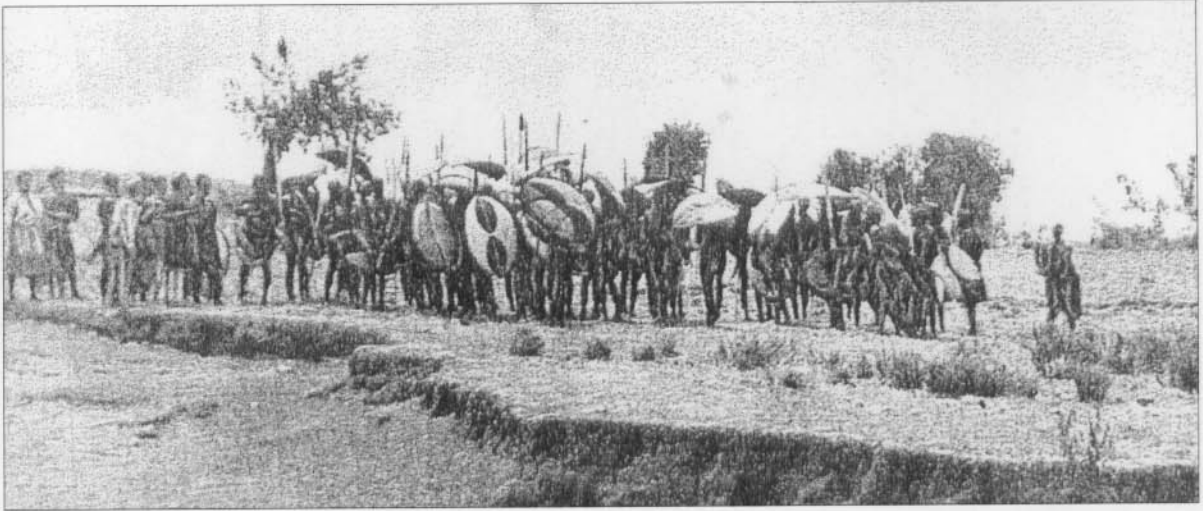


last degree.' They had migrated into East Africa from the north about 300 years earlier, subjugating or driving out the earlier inhabitants of the region, and now occupied the prime grazing lands of the Kenya Highlands, extending south into what is now Tanzania.

Nineteenth century writers believed that there were two major subdivisions of the Masai nation – the Masai proper, and the 'Kwavi'. The latter term, however, did not refer to a distinct people, but was used to describe those tribesmen who had lost their cattle and been forced – usually temporarily – to take up farming. In fact the Masai were divided into 16 major clans, of which four – the Kaputiei, Loitai, Purko and Kisongo – were predominant, and formed the cores of loose, semi-permanent power blocs.

By the beginning of the 19th century the main phase of Masai territorial expansion was over, but all the clans fought constantly against each other as well as their non-Masai neighbours. In fact the people suffered far more casualties in these civil wars than in all their external campaigns put together. The main motive for this warfare was cattle-raiding: according to Masai myth, God had originally given their people ownership of all the cattle in the world, so it followed that all the beasts





country of the Turkana around Lake Rudolf and south to the borders of the Hehe kingdom beyond the Ruaha River.

The Masai were not always victorious, however, and south of Mount Kilimanjaro a series of disasters had prevented them expanding further in that direction. Joseph Thomson says that in about 1830 a raid by the 'Wa-kwafi' into Ugogo met with defeat, with 'great numbers' of warriors slaughtered. Fifty years later they suffered another major setback at the hands of the Hehe. Masai fighting tactics were best suited to the open plains, so wherever their enemies could find a refuge in difficult country they managed to hold their own. Thus the Kikuyu, Kamba and Chaga held out in the mountains and forests on the edges of Masailand until the colonial period. On the eastern frontier there was less resistance from the unwarlike tribes, and the raiding parties were obstructed only by scattered Zanzibari garrisons.

The first Arab and Swahili traders had managed to traverse the Masai country as far as Lake Baringo as early as the 1840s, but this was by far the most dangerous of the three main routes from the coast into the interior. From the 1850s white explorers accepted that the direct route to Lake Victoria was impassable because of the Masai. Some suspected that the Arab pioneers had exaggerated the risks in order to discourage competitors and keep the lucrative ivory trade with the north for themselves, but there was plenty of evidence to the contrary. J.M.Hildebrandt, for example, reported to the Berlin Geographical Society in 1877 that he had been invited to join a caravan of 2,000 ivory traders travelling to Lake Victoria, but had declined – luckily for him, since 'A year later I learnt that this very caravan was attacked by the Masai, and that very few of the number escaped'. At the beginning of 1877 the same writer was forced to turn back only three days' march from Mount Kenya because 'a short time before my arrival the Wakwafi [probably Laikipiak Masai, whom Thomson also refers to as "Kwavi"] had to the last man destroyed a caravan of 1,500 armed men'.

In 1893 Sir Gerald Portal, on his way to Uganda, saw the site of a battle 12 years before, in which 300 Swahilis had held off the warriors until their ammunition ran out and had then been massacred, leaving only three survivors. And according to Carl Peters, in 1887 the Masai 'cut

**Dating from the late 1880s, this is one of the very few surviving photographs of a 19th century Masai war party in the field. While unfortunately not very clear, it does show several points of interest. Note especially the variety of shield patterns, and the way in which many of the warriors are holding their shields over their heads. Here this is probably being done to provide shade from the sun, but other observers confirm that they could be held in this way when in action to ward off arrows. (Ludwig von Hohnel, *The Discovery of Lakes Rudolf and Stefanie*)**



ABOVE An incident during the fight at Elbejet in December 1889. Having provoked the Masai into attacking him, the German explorer Carl Peters managed to extricate his caravan only after several days of hard fighting. (Carl Peters, *New Light on Dark Africa*)

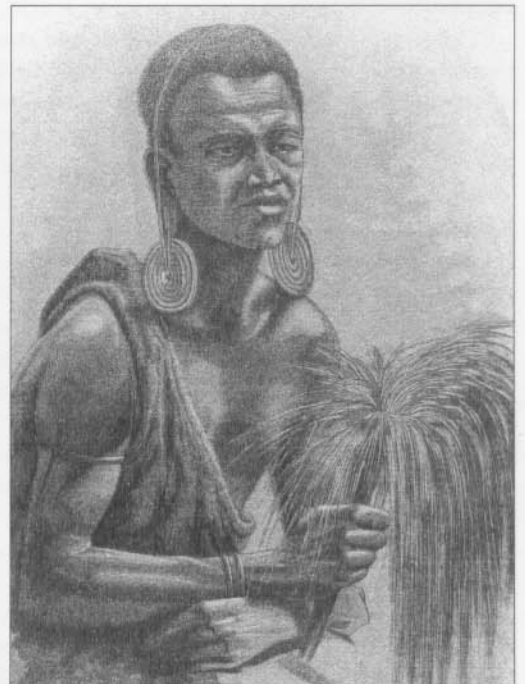
down, to the last man, an Arab caravan numbering two thousand guns, laid all the corpses in ranks and rows side by side, and in scorn put each man's gun across his shoulder'. Even those parties which did get through seldom did so without fighting. Thomson was told that the last three caravans to attempt the journey before his own 1883 expedition had each lost more than 100 men in battle.

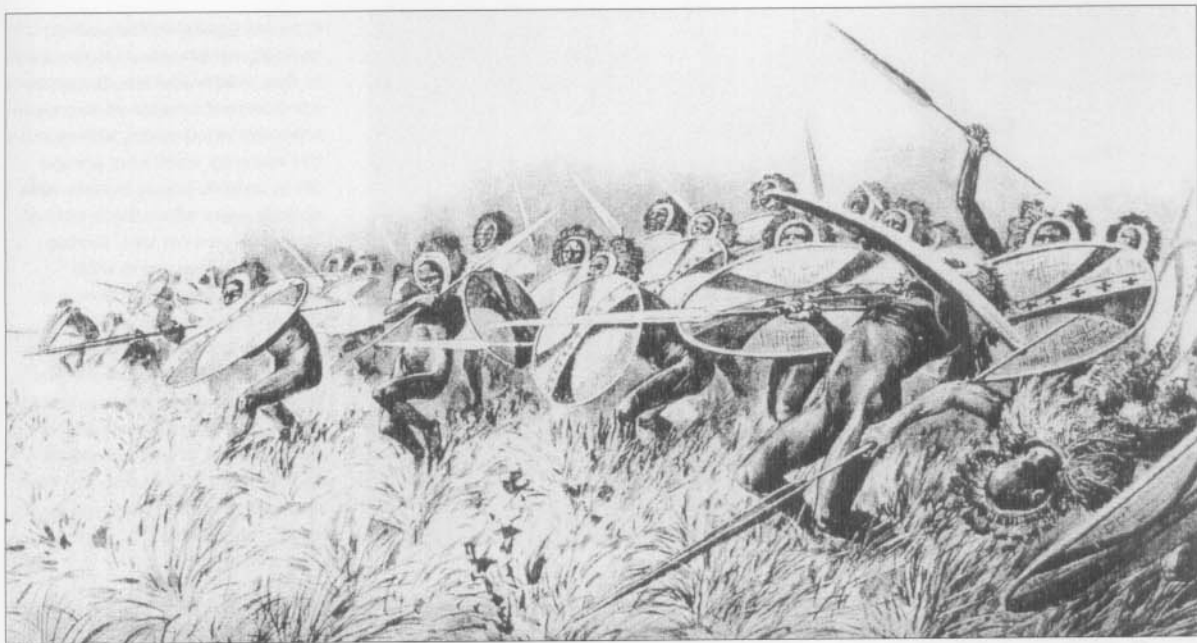
The Masai were not generally hostile to white men, however, but saved their real hatred for the Arabs. In the 1890s many British administrators felt that most of the attacks on the Arabs and Swahilis had been provoked by the traders, who, believing that their guns would intimidate the tribesmen, had looted Masai villages and attempted to abduct the women.

### Conflict with Europeans

It was not until 1883 that Joseph Thomson made the first successful crossing of the country. He experienced no serious resistance, although bands of warriors repeatedly appeared to demand 'presents' or impose arbitrary fines. They showed no fear of the white men's weapons, and Thomson later admitted that he had been lucky, as many of the most intransigent bands were away raiding at the time of his visit.

The first clash between the Masai and the whites came in 1889, when the German Emin Pasha Relief Expedition, led by Carl Peters, crossed northern Masailand on its way to Uganda. His force comprised two white men, 21 Somali askaris (nine of whom had repeating rifles), and 85 porters, an unknown number of whom were armed. Peters was determined to provoke conflict with the Masai. He refused to pay tribute, and relied on seizing food and livestock to supplement his





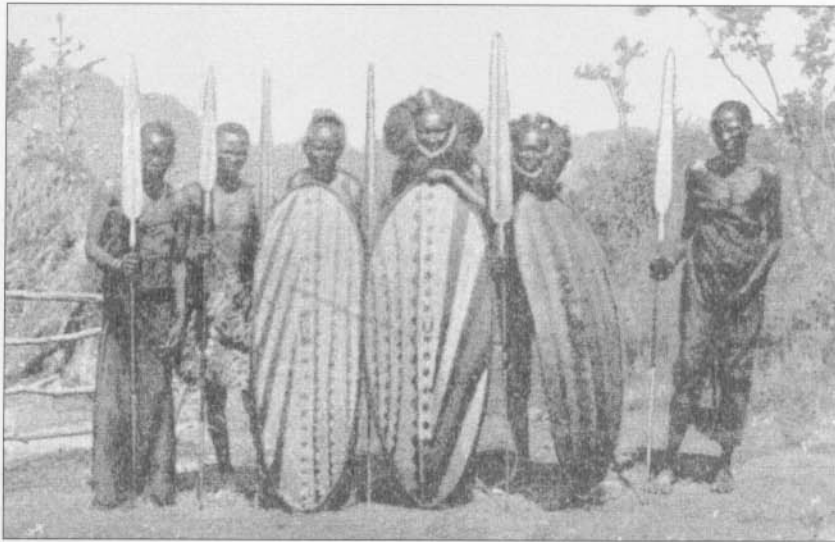
**A Masai charge at Elbejet. In this and the previous drawing, most warriors are shown carrying identically patterned shields, but photographic sources never show this uniformity. It is almost certainly an error on the part of the illustrator, who perhaps had only one shield to work from. (Peters)**

inadequate supplies. In December he attacked the hilltop village of Elbejet early on a cold morning, when most of the warriors were still asleep. However, a sentry was shot when he challenged the attackers, and the sound woke the people in the village. The women and children fled down the far slope of the hill, while the men rushed out to counter-attack. They moved round the base of the hill and threatened Peters' camp, forcing him to retreat from the village and concentrate his men to defend the encampment. When his ammunition began to run low, he ordered the camp to be struck and retreated into a nearby forest.

The caravan had been marching for only a few minutes when hundreds of Masai were seen approaching. Peters remarks that the tribesmen had never before seen repeating guns, which 'must have appeared to them supernatural'. Several times the attackers hesitated in the face of his rapid fire, giving his men time to reload, although they very quickly adapted their tactics, advancing in short rushes from tree to tree, 'always with caution, to cover themselves from the bullets'. Meanwhile the expedition's rearguard was also under attack, but held on long enough for the armed porters to deploy into line and support them. The Masai eventually withdrew, leaving 43 dead behind them. Peters had lost seven men, and most of the ammunition had been used up.

Over the next few days he led a fighting retreat, shadowed by large bodies of warriors. Two days later the Masai attacked his camp at night. They were only beaten off by firing a salvo of signal rockets, which failed to break their morale as intended but provided the defenders with just enough light to shoot by. Finally the expedition reached safety at the Arab trading post of Kamasia. In fact the encounter had been at best a qualified victory for Peters. He did bring away some cattle, but he had only saved his expedition by a hurried withdrawal, and even this was only possible because the Masai had been weakened by an epidemic of cattle disease, probably introduced by the whites. On the retreat from Elbejet the expedition had passed numerous deserted kraals, and Peters found

**LEFT Masai elder with a fly switch, which appears to have been used as an informal mark of rank. See Plate B2 for a reconstruction of a more typical elder. (Von Hohnel)**



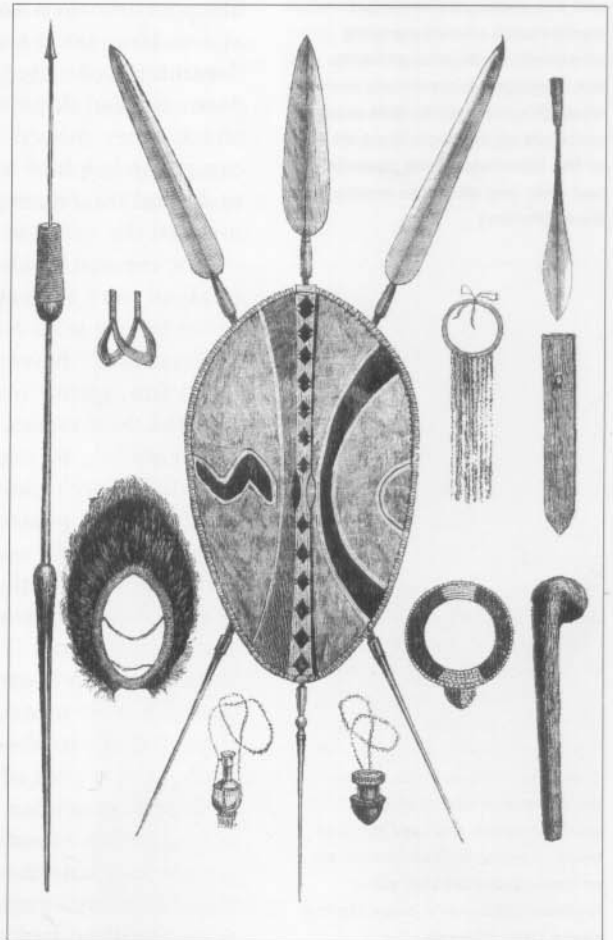
A posed group of Wakwafi or agricultural Masai, photographed in the 1890s. Written accounts confirm that shields of this size were not uncommon, although the majority were only around 3ft in height. Masai buffalo-hide shields were often thick enough to stop a musket ball. During their first encounters with Europeans their confidence in these shields encouraged the Masai to take a defiant attitude, which quickly dissipated when they encountered breech-loading rifles. One warrior challenged Count Teleki to use his shield for target practice, only to retire discomfited when the first bullet went right through it. (Ernest Gedge)

that many areas which had been densely populated in Thomson's day were now uninhabited. If he had launched a similar rash attack only a few years before his party would probably have been swiftly annihilated.

By the early 1890s the Masai were recovering their strength, but openly admitted that they did not want to fight the whites, as by now they had learned to appreciate the power of their guns. There were no major clashes with the British, although in 1894 a war party unsuccessfully attacked the IBEA Company fort at Machakos. A more serious war scare briefly followed a clash with some unruly porters in British employ in 1895, but during the 1890s many Masai were recruited to fight alongside the British, especially for their campaigns against the Kikuyu. In contrast, the Germans on the other side of the frontier were often on bad terms with the Masai, and most of those who found themselves in German territory eventually moved north and made peace with the British.

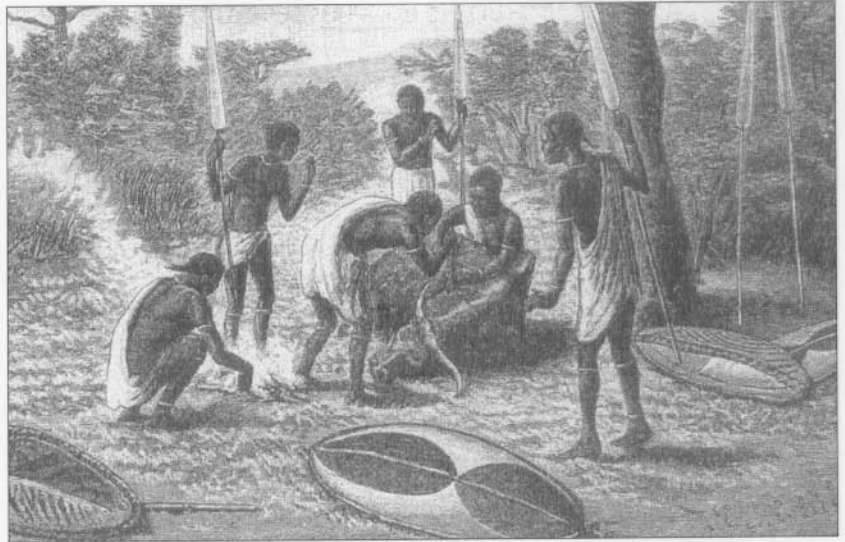
### Organization and tactics

Like most of the related tribes of the northern part of East Africa, the Masai based their military organization on the age-set system. The young men were initiated into these sets en masse, at a ceremony which was held about every seven years, so that an entire age group would go through the process together. They were initiated as *moran*, or warriors, in about their late teens. Because herding the cattle on which they depended was not labour intensive and the work was easily performed by the young boys and older men, it was possible to spare the entire





Masai warriors painting their shields – see page 43 for pattern diagram. Cow's blood was an important constituent of the red pigment used. (Von Hohnel)



warrior age group from economically productive activity. For the next 15 years or so they would form what was in effect a professional standing army, whose only employment was fighting.

The known age-sets from which the *moran* were recruited during the 19th century, with their approximate dates, were:

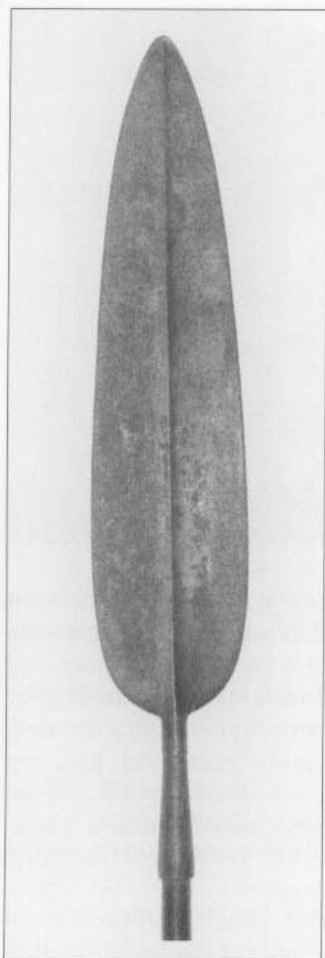
Tiyioki	(c.1791–1811)
Merishari	(c.1806–26)
Kidotu	(c.1821–41)
Tuati I – ‘The Rich Ones’	(c.1836–56)
Nyangusi I – ‘Those Who Take For Themselves’	(c.1851–71)
Laimer – ‘The Pursuers’	(c.1866–86)
Talala	(1881–1905)
Tuati II	(1896–1917)

Each of these sets was divided into two sections – the ‘right hand’ or senior group, and the ‘left hand’ or junior. Each section would take a name, and some of those recorded include: Il-Kupai, meaning ‘The White Swords’; Il-Kieku, ‘The Long-Bladed Spears’; Il-Churunye, ‘Those Who Fight By Day’; Il-Ngarbut, ‘The Gluttons’; and Il-Meitaroni, ‘The Unconquerables’.

Each of these groups was further subdivided into three parts, according to the precise dates on which their members had been circumcised. These subdivisions were known as Il-Changen-opir, or ‘The Big Ostrich Feathers’; Il-Tareto, ‘The Helpers’; and Il-Paringotwa-lang, or ‘Our Swift Runners’. This system could identify each warrior fairly precisely according to seniority. It is not clear, however, whether these divisions deployed and fought together in battle, or whether clan or village-based units were more usual.

The *moran* slept in their own warrior camps or *manyattas*, and lived on beef, blood and milk, as other foods were believed to make them soft. Junior warriors were not allowed to marry, drink alcohol, smoke, or eat vegetables, although some of these rules were relaxed for the senior men. Another means employed to induce courage was the use of a brew

LEFT Masai weapons and war gear. The spearhead in the centre is described as typical of the southern clans, while the longer and narrower types on either side belonged to the northern branches of the tribe. Note the exaggerated ‘spoon’ shape of the sword at top right, and the crude wooden club at bottom right. The spear at far left was used by the allied Dorobo tribesmen for hunting elephants. (Thomson)



**Masai spearhead of traditional design; the blade of this example is 17½in long and 4in wide. The author's experiments with this weapon suggest that although it appears unwieldy and poorly balanced, it would be very effective for delivering an underarm thrust to disembowel an opponent. A craftsman who made such weapons demonstrated a similar manoeuvre to Mrs French-Sheldon, confirming that Masai spears were normally employed in this way. The spear associated with the Masai in more recent times is of a different type, with a much longer, narrower blade, which was probably borrowed from the neighbouring Chaga of Mount Killimanjaro. The transition to this new design took place around the end of the 19th century. (Mark Copplestone)**

made from bark and herbs, which was sometimes drunk before a battle and is said to have combined the effects of amphetamines and cannabis, making the men immune to both fear and fatigue.

The highest authorities in Masai society as a whole were the *bejanis* or civil chiefs, and the hereditary *laibons*, who combined the roles of diviners and medicine men. An influential *laibon* like Mbatiany, who held office from about 1866 to 1890, might organize large coalitions of clans, but these medicine chiefs do not seem to have had a formal military command function. In fact there was little trace of any command system in Masai armies, although the organization by age-sets did provide a rough hierarchy. Each camp had a group of *embikas*, picked warriors who acted as a sort of military police to impose rudimentary discipline in camp and on the march. Nevertheless, there appear to have been no formal sanctions preventing the warriors from running away, and no system of punishments apart from the contempt of their peers. The advice of respected elders might be sought, but their orders were not binding.

The usual tactic in a pitched battle was for the bravest warriors to form a wedge in the centre, supported by a rearguard and a flank guard on each side, and charge straight through the enemy line. This formation was known as the 'eagle's wing'. Unlike most African armies the Masai did not use drums or other musical instruments in battle, although they did employ chants and war-cries.

According to Richard Burton they had once been afraid of guns, but came to appreciate their disadvantages after a battle in 1857 in which 800 *moran* had defeated 148 Arab and Baluchi matchlock men. The Masai allegedly fled at the first volley, but when the Arabs rushed forward to round up their cattle the tribesmen turned and routed them. 'Until this year they have shunned meeting Moslems and musketeers in the field,' wrote Burton: 'having won the day, they will, it is feared, repeat the experiment'. In fact it sounds as if the Masai had already understood that the guns took a long time to reload, and their apparent flight was probably a ruse designed to tempt the enemy to break formation. They did repeat the experiment, and – until they encountered European expeditions armed with breechloaders – almost always successfully. Carl Peters described their tactics against musket-armed enemies thus:

'The Massai [sic] knows how to protect himself from the first shot by throwing himself on the ground, or sheltering himself behind a tree; and long before the muzzle-loader has been made ready for a second discharge, he has come bounding up, to finish the matter with a thrust of his lance... Generally, in fact, the caravans fire their guns once, and then immediately take to flight, whereupon they are regularly massacred to the last man by the swift-footed Massais.'

## THE NGONI

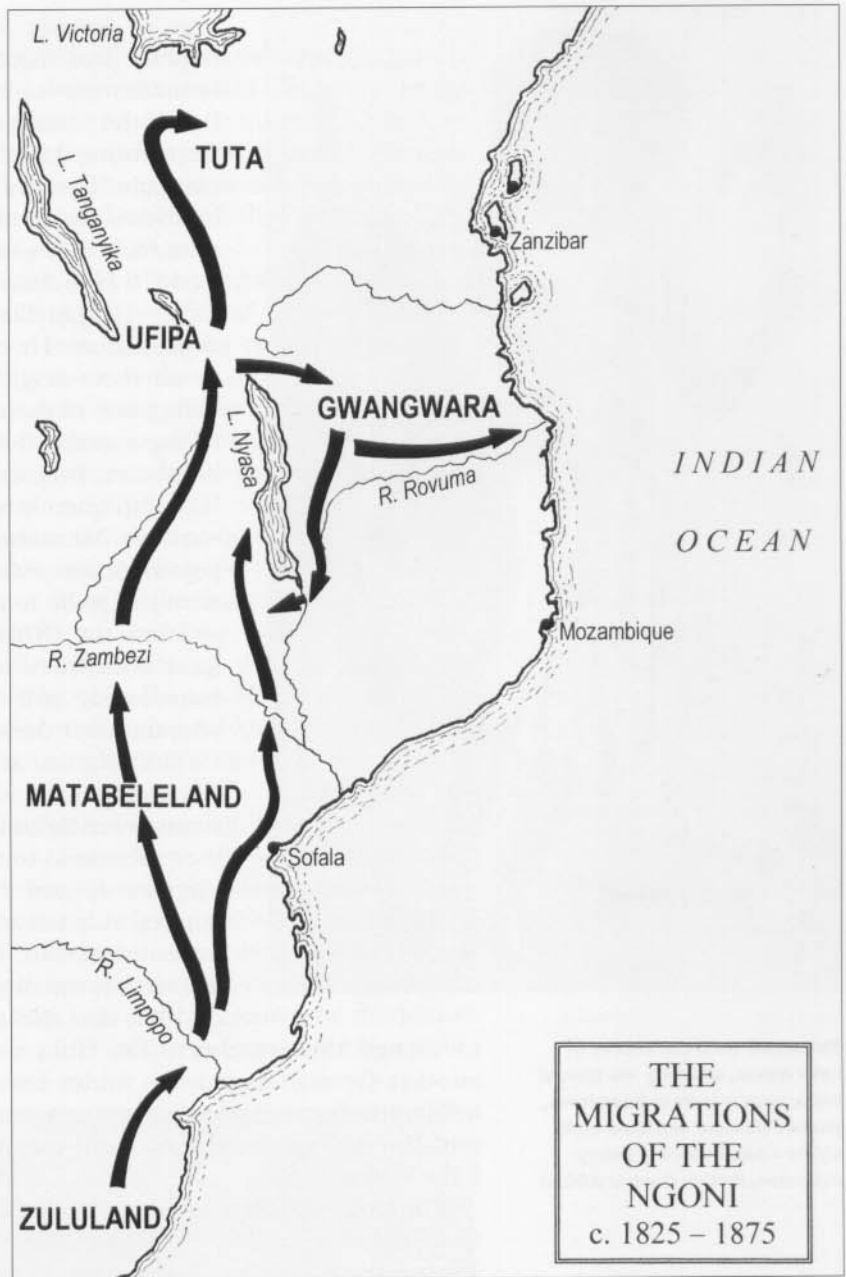
During the 1830s–40s warfare in the southern half of East Africa was transformed by the arrival of the Ngoni, who brought with them many of the reforms which had been introduced by the Zulu king Shaka at the beginning of the century. The Ngoni were originally a splinter group of the Ndwandwe, northern neighbours of the Zulus, who had been defeated by Shaka's *impis* in the 1820s and driven north into what is now Mozambique.

Most of them settled in that region, but one *nkosi* or chief, Zwangendaba, led his section of the tribe on an even more ambitious march. Moving through Mashonaland, they crossed the Zambezi River in November 1835. The Ngoni, as they now came to be known, then split into two groups and advanced northwards along both shores of Lake Nyasa. Their Zulu-inspired battle tactics gave them a crucial advantage over the local tribes, most of whom either fled into mountain refuges, were defeated and incorporated into the Ngoni forces, or eventually copied these tactics themselves. Zwangendaba himself took the western route and settled on the fertile plateau of Ufipa, east of the southern tip of Lake Tanganyika, where he presided over a relatively stable kingdom until his death in 1848.

Thereafter his successors quarrelled, and several groups resumed their wanderings. Those who remained in Ufipa were known as the Mafiti, Maviti or Mazitu. A second group settled in the mountains on the western shore of Lake Nyasa, where they were often referred to as Angoni.

There they founded two large and two smaller kingdoms, the most powerful ones being at the north end of the lake and half-way up the western shore. A third section, commanded by a chief called Zulugama, was the Gwangwara. They migrated east towards the Indian Ocean, wreaking havoc among the peaceful tribes of the Rovuma valley, and inflicting on the region a reign of terror which lasted well into the 1880s.

The fourth division, the Tuta or Watuta, marched still further to the north, and arrived on the southern shore of Lake Victoria early in the 1850s. According to Richard Burton, they were originally invited into the region to help a local chief against his Sango enemies. The Sango drove the Tuta off, whereupon the thwarted invaders embarked on an





**An Angoni from the shores of Lake Nyasa, showing the typical black cock's-feather headdress, plumed assegai and Zulu-style shield - see Plate C2. (Harry Johnston, *British Central Africa*)**

orgy of looting and cattle-rustling across the region. The Tuta finally settled into a semi-nomadic way of life, living on cattle acquired from the Nyamwezi and other tribes, and augmenting them by raids on villages and passing caravans. Their raiding parties often numbered in thousands, and would besiege a village for months if they were unable to take it by assault. In 1876 H.M. Stanley found the country east of Lake Tanganyika entirely ruined by their depredations. He says that the raiders were hated by all their neighbours, and that to the Arabs killing one of them was 'far more necessary than killing a snake'. However, the Arabs occasionally hired the Tuta as mercenaries; and groups of Ngoni frequently fought alongside the Nyamwezi warlord Mirambo and his Ruga-Ruga (see below). Some of Zwangendaba's original veterans were still to be found among these Ngoni bands well into the 1870s, but they now included many local tribesmen who had been captured and assimilated, and others who had voluntarily adopted their dress and style of fighting.

The Ngoni of Tanganyika came under German control during the 1890s. There was some fierce fighting in the south in 1897 before they submitted to an expedition under Captains Engelhardt and Fuleborn. The stronghold of Songea only fell after a number of Ngoni chiefs were lured out under a flag of truce and arrested. It was not until the Maji Maji Rebellion of 1905 that the tribe made a serious attempt

to avenge this treachery. The Tuta were nominally subjugated by another German expedition under Emin Pasha in 1890, but escaped military defeat by avoiding contact, and continued their customary raids for several more years until they were forcibly settled south of Lake Victoria.

The Lake Nyasa kingdoms came within what became known as British Central Africa, and were brought under British rule during the 1890s. The northern kingdom was friendly to the British, mainly thanks to the influence of the Commissioner, Dr Laws. They welcomed missionaries and voluntarily gave up raiding. In the central kingdom, a chief named Chikusi accepted British protection in 1890, but during the reign of his successor Gomani a group of anti-British headmen gained influence. In 1896 they attacked a mission station, and in response a punitive expedition defeated an Ngoni *impi* and sacked Gomani's village. The central Ngoni lost most of their cattle and submitted to the British administration. Further west, on the plateau between the lake and the Luangwa River in what is now north-eastern Zambia, the smaller kingdom ruled by Mpezani was brought under the control of the British South Africa Company in 1898, and the last free Ngoni lost their independence.



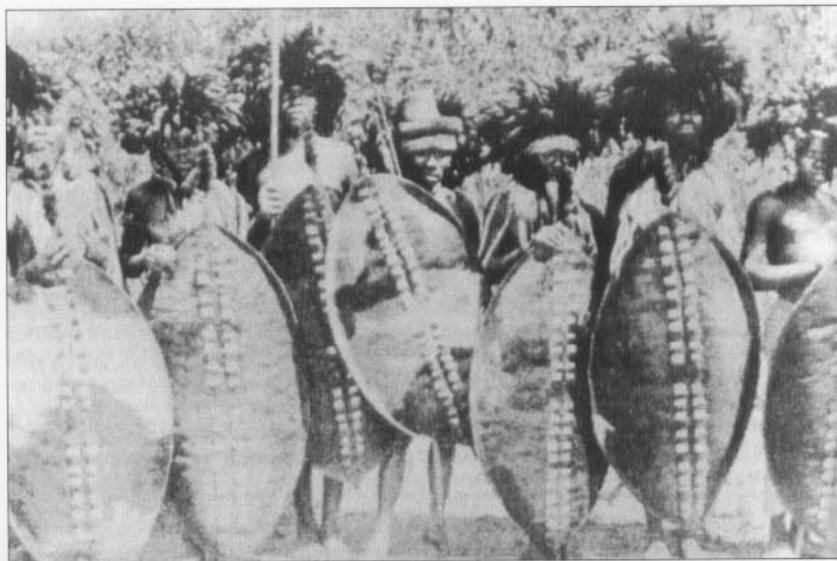
## Organization and tactics

The Ngoni inherited a very strong military tradition from their origins as a migrating army. In the words of their historian Y.M.Cibambo, 'To the Ngoni war was like work and his heart rejoiced to think of it.' At least some groups seem to have retained the Zulu system of organizing their warriors into regiments based on age, although most units were based on territorial divisions, and warriors tended to live in their villages rather than in separate kraals as they did in the Zulu army. In Nyasaland, young men were often formed en masse into a new regiment known as a *libandla*, of which each large village or prominent chief might have several. Each *libandla* was divided into companies called *libuto*, which varied in strength up to 100 men or more, and would be allocated to one of the two major divisions of the army – the younger men, or *amajaha*, and the veteran *amadoda*. Each regiment and company was led by an officer known as an *induna*, who was responsible to the overall leader or 'war *induna*', appointed by the *nkosi* or chief.

An independent army of any size continued to be known by the Zulu term *impi*. There is little reliable information on the size of Ngoni armies, although it seems that at least in the fertile country around Lake Nyasa exceptionally large forces could be raised. The *British Central Africa Gazette* of December 1894 was no doubt exaggerating when it claimed that the central Ngoni could put 50,000 men into the field, but in 1878 W.A.Elmslie reported seeing a 10,000-strong army of northern Ngoni. Burton gives an interesting account of the fighting methods of the Tuta:

'Their thousands march in four or five extended lines, and attack by attempting to envelop the enemy. There is no shouting or war-cry to distract the attention of the combatants: iron whistles are used for the necessary signals.' (Lugard, however, refers to the 'unearthly yells, grunts, and groans with which they accompany their attack.')

What signals were actually given in battle we are not told, and Burton implies that there was very little in the way of central control or discipline: 'During the battle the sultan, or chief, whose ensign is a brass stool,



Group of Ngoni warriors  
photographed in the 1890s.  
(W.Elmslie, *Among the  
Wild Ngoni*)



**Tuta Ngoni, showing a different style of feather headgear which was particularly associated with this tribe. Plate C3 is based on this drawing and on written descriptions by Stanley. (H.M. Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*)**

sits attended by his forty or fifty elders in the rear; his authority is little more than nominal, the tribe priding itself upon autonomy. The Watuta rarely run away, and take no thought of their killed and wounded.'

It is generally agreed that the secret of the dramatic success of the Ngoni in East Africa was their introduction of close combat tactics, using the short Zulu *ikhwa* or stabbing assegai, into a region where warriors had traditionally thrown their spears from a distance. Perhaps more important, however, was the moral ascendancy which they achieved over most of their opponents, with what Lugard described as their 'character for invincible courage'. Nevertheless, by the second half of the 19th century most accounts suggest that Ngoni war parties were actually fairly cautious, and preferred ambushes and night attacks to open battle. The Tuta were very wary of firearms; Burton says that they would 'decamp

without delay' if they encountered a caravan headed by a red Zanzibari flag, knowing that it would be accompanied by askaris with muskets. It is probably this fear of guns which accounts for the fact that Speke and Stanley both traversed the Tuta country at the height of their depredations without having to fight.

According to Cibambo, an army would march out to war very slowly, sending out scouts in all directions. Boys and girls from the warriors' households accompanied them to carry food and water, and sections of men were detailed to protect them from attack. When they neared an enemy village the men would sit and rest while their *indunas* reconnoitred carefully, meanwhile taking snuff or smoking hemp, which 'maddened the warriors and gave them hearts without fear'. Even if the enemy had detected them, preparations would not be hurried: 'In the enemy stockade the drums would be beating to show that their enemies were angry, but the army of the Ngoni sat and rested as though there were no enemy.'

Eventually their commander called them to arms by performing his own praise-dance, and the companies deployed into their 'horn' formation, blowing horns and whistling to drown the sound of the enemy's drums. At last the command was given - 'Let the bulls fight!' Then every warrior would race to be the first over the stockade, because to do so earned not only great prestige but the first choice of the captured livestock. After the fight each *induna* would report to the commander the names of those who had been at the front, as well as those of any other men who had especially distinguished themselves. These men were singled out for praise at the victory dance held before the *nkosi* on their return.

From the reports of European observers, however, it seems that surprise attacks under cover of darkness were at least as common as set-piece assaults. Under these circumstances the victims were usually too terror-struck to offer any resistance. Lugard quotes a report of a raid on Lake Nyasa in 1893, in which 'the Angoni came down to the lake shore in great numbers, and attacked the village of Kayuni. They entered the

village silently, and each warrior took up his position at the door of a hut, and ordered the inmates to come forth. Every man and boy was speared as he emerged, and every woman was captured.' Many of the tribes living along the shore were forced to build their huts on stilts out in the lake for fear of such raids.

Pitched battles in the open were rarer, but the German trader Carl Wiese describes one encounter which took place in northern Mozambique in the late 1880s, between an Ngoni raiding party and a 400-strong Arab caravan. The Ngoni divided themselves into three divisions: first, the newly formed Kabaenda regiment, which was made up of youths between 14 and 18 years old; then the Mahora and Mabema regiments, comprising men in their twenties; and finally the Amadoda or veterans. The Kabaenda opened the battle by charging the Arabs, but fled when the latter fired a volley from their muzzle-loading muskets. Wiese does not say so, but it is likely that this retreat was part of the Ngoni plan. The Arabs pursued the youngsters recklessly, not even stopping to reload, and were ambushed by the Mahora and Mabema who were lying in wait. The Kabaenda then returned to the attack, and the Arabs were surrounded. The Amadoda had been stationed in ambush along the road in the opposite direction in case the enemy resumed their march after driving off the attack, but now hurried up and joined in the slaughter. Most of the Ngoni casualties occurred among the youngsters of the Kabaenda. Very few Arabs survived the battle, and those of their leaders who escaped later committed suicide in disgrace.

## THE HEHE

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The Hehe were a confederation of about 30 small tribes living in and around the Iringa Highlands in what is now southern Tanzania. The name Hehe was not recorded until the 1860s, and is said to be derived from their war-cry: '*Hee! Hee! Vatavagu twihoma! Ehee!*' The disparate tribes were welded into a unified kingdom by two exceptional rulers, Munyigumba and his son Mkwawa, who reigned during the last third of the 19th century. Burton says that in the late 1850s the Hehe were afraid of their neighbours the Sango, and dared not face them in open warfare, but by the middle 1870s this situation had changed. In 1873 Lt Verney Cameron reported that 'Such is their reputation for courage and skill in the use of their weapons that none of the tribes on whom they habitually make their raids ever dare to resist them'. During the German colonial period they became famous as the dominant military power of the region, who at the Rugaro River in August 1891 inflicted on the Germans the worst defeat that they ever suffered during their conquest of East Africa.

### **The campaigns of Mkwawa**

During the 1860s Munyigumba had led the Hehe to victory against most of their neighbours, including the Sango. His last campaign, in the late 1870s, was against a band of Ngoni who had fought as allies of the Sango, and who now launched an invasion of Hehe territory on their own account. They were defeated at the battle of Nyamulenge, which was remembered for an epic single combat in which the Hehe king killed a



There are few representations of Hehe warriors from before the late 1890s, and it is likely that most of them closely resembled their Ngoni or Gogo neighbours. This illustration shows a party of Gogo spearmen encountered by Stanley in 1872. (Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*)

prominent Ngoni chief, Chipeta. Soon afterwards Munyigumba died, and after a bloody civil war his son Mkwawa succeeded to the throne. The Hehe now began another series of expansionist campaigns, sending out raiding parties in all directions.

The main caravan route inland from Zanzibar was almost closed by the combined effects of attacks on caravans and the depopulation of the villages on which they depended for supplies. In about 1887 Mkwawa further consolidated his position by moving his capital to a new stone fort in the hills at Kalenga.

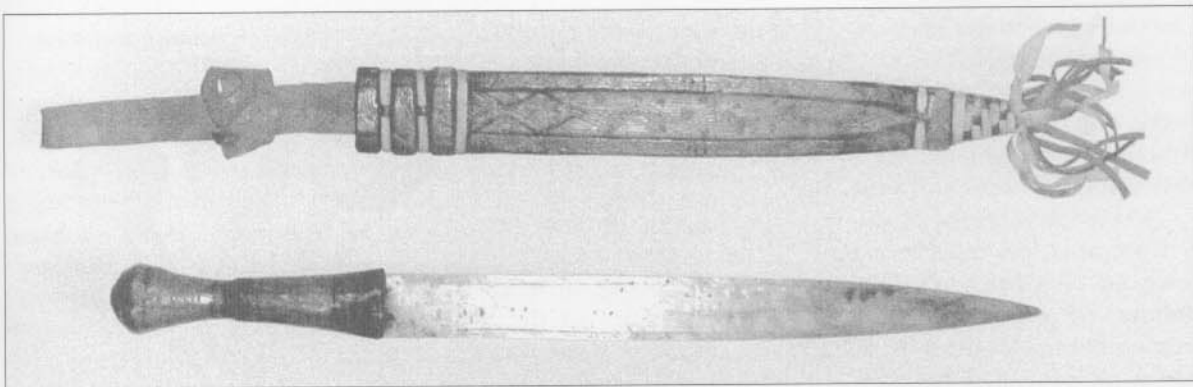
In 1890, in the aftermath of the recent war against the coastal Arabs, the governor of German East Africa established forts at Mpwapwa and Kilosa to protect the caravan route. The Hehe nevertheless continued their raids, and the German authorities were even afraid that they might advance as far as the coast. The governor therefore opened peace negotiations, but before these could come to fruition an apparently unauthorized military adventure brought open conflict with Mkwawa.

### **War with the Germans**

The commander of the German Protection Force or Schutztruppe, Hauptmann von Zelewski, was sent out in June 1891 on a limited expedition with the aim of pacifying a local Hehe chief who was raiding for slaves, but then took matters into his own hands and advanced on Kalenga. Zelewski's force consisted of five companies each comprising about 90 askaris, plus three field guns and a couple of Maxim machine guns. There are several widely differing accounts of what happened in the ensuing battle near the Rugaro River.

At dawn on 17 August the Germans set out in a long column through an area of dense bush, with Zelewski at their head, advancing towards a hill covered with rocks and thick vegetation. There appear to have been no scouts deployed. The artillery and the Maxims were being carried on pack animals, and some of the askaris allegedly had not even loaded their rifles. Suddenly a single shot was fired and some 3,000 Hehe warriors charged out of the bush, overwhelming the leading companies. Zelewski





was speared in the back as he fired at another group of attackers. However, because the ambush had apparently been triggered prematurely, those at the rear of the German column were able to organize some resistance. The expedition's doctor and a handful of askaris got one Maxim into action and fought off their assailants until nightfall. This rearguard retired to a small hill and formed a defensive position there, which the enemy did not seriously threaten. They waited for two days to collect survivors, then retreated to Mpwapwa. Among the bodies left on the battlefield were ten Germans, 250 askaris, and around 100 porters. About 260 Hehe had been killed or died of their wounds.

The Germans were forced to go temporarily onto the defensive, but Mkwawa failed to follow up his advantage. Instead he concentrated on strengthening his fortress at Kalenga in preparation for the inevitable counter-offensive. It appears that despite this victory, Hehe morale was sustained mainly by their confidence in the strength of their fort, which was nicknamed Lipuli or 'Great Elephant'. It was probably inspired by Arab fortifications, as the king had at some unknown date sent an officer to the coast to study the buildings there. By 1894 the stone wall surrounding Kalenga was about 2 miles long, 8 feet in height, and up to 4 feet thick. The fort was not, however, as strong as Mkwawa believed: the perimeter was too long for the 3,000-man garrison to defend properly, and the walls were vulnerable to artillery.

Tom Prince, who served with the German expeditionary force, later admitted that if they had made a stand outside the fort the Hehe would probably have won another victory, but Mkwawa would not allow this. By now he had a sizeable stock of captured rifles (as well as a Maxim, which the Hehe proved unable to operate), but he kept them all under his own control, and had only issued 100 weapons when the German attack came. One tradition says that Mkwawa had gone mad and told his warriors to load their guns with blank charges, instead placing his reliance on magic charms laid on the paths to stop the German advance.

A German column comprising three companies of askaris and a number of field guns arrived outside Kalenga in October 1894 and built a stockade 400 metres from the walls. For two days the artillery fired on the defences; then Tom Prince led a storming party into the fort. The walls themselves were only lightly defended, but four hours of fighting inside the stronghold followed, with the Hehe shooting from the roofs and doorways of the huts. One German officer and eight askaris were killed, and three Germans and 29 askaris wounded. According to the

**A knife or short sword of typical East African type, as traditionally worn by Masai and Hehe warriors, with its leather sheath. It is undated, but the slight ridge running down the centre of the 13½ in blade is a feature associated with traditional weapons rather than modern copies. The short sword was already in use by the Hehe in the 1850s, when Richard Burton described it as 'from one to two feet long, broadening out from the haft, and rounded off to a blunt point at the end'. It was usually carried with the blade protruding half-way out of the short scabbard – see Plate D2. (Mark Copplestone)**

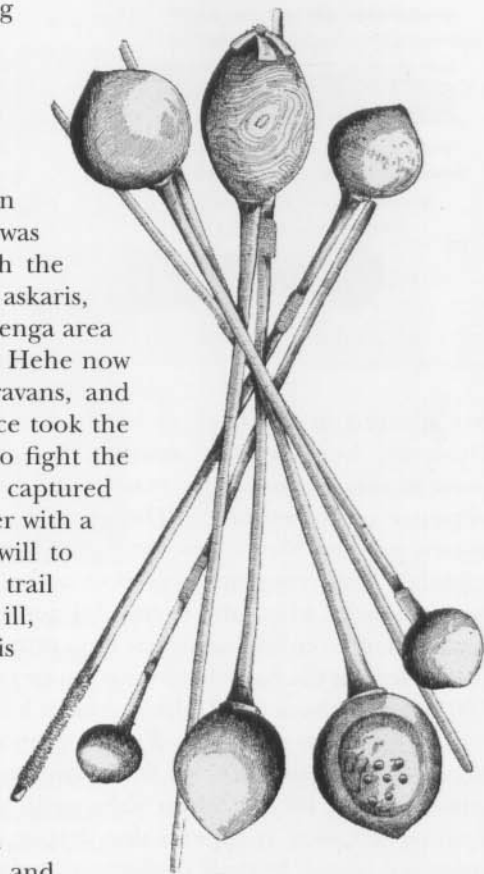
German commander's report, 150 Hehe died in the fighting or were burnt inside the huts. When he saw that the battle was lost, Mkwawa apparently tried to blow himself up inside one of the houses, but was led away by his advisors. Among the booty taken by the Germans were the royal stores of gunpowder and ivory.

Nevertheless, Hehe resistance was still not broken. On 6 November, on its return march, the German column was attacked by a force of 1,500 warriors, who broke through the column of porters but were stopped by the fire of the askaris, leaving behind 25 dead. In 1896 Prince returned to the Kalenga area and built a fortified station a few miles away at Iringa. The Hehe now resorted to guerrilla warfare, ambushing patrols and caravans, and attacking those villages that had already surrendered. Prince took the field with two companies each consisting of 150 askaris, to fight the enemy with his own methods. Several times they nearly captured Mkwawa, and gradually their scorched earth tactics, together with a famine which swept the region, wore down the enemy's will to fight. Then, in July 1898, a patrol intercepted Mkwawa's trail near the River Ruaha and tracked him down. The king was ill, and committed suicide rather than risk capture; with his death, all Hehe resistance ceased.

### Organization and tactics

After the German conquest it was estimated that the Hehe 'nation' numbered about 50,000 people altogether, but this does not include many non-Hehe who had been incorporated into the realms of Munyigumba and Mkwawa, and who sometimes fought in their own styles alongside the Hehe proper. Munyigumba's kingdom included at least 15 previously independent chiefdoms, whose rulers either declared allegiance to him or were replaced with his appointees. These subordinate chiefs were known as *vanzagila*, and were responsible for raising their own regiments in time of war. The king and many of these chiefs maintained small standing armies, which were recruited from two categories of warriors: veterans or *vatambule*, who served as subordinate officers, and the young men in training or *vigendo*. Munyigumba also established military colonies of young men of between 12 and 20 years of age in the territories of subjugated tribes.

These troops formed the nucleus of permanent regiments or *wajinga*, into which all the unmarried men would be enrolled in time of war. Some of the Hehe regimental names, such as the Vanamwani, Valambo and Vatengelamutwa, were identical with those of the Sango, from whom the Hehe warriors are thought to have borrowed the Zulu-style shield and stabbing assegai, and so they may also have been the model for this regimental organization. One senior unit, the Vatengelamutwa, 'Those Who Stand Firm by their Chief', acted as a royal bodyguard in battle. Regiments were subdivided into companies known as *fipuka*. Each unit consisted of the men of a particular age group, who were not allowed to marry until they had proved themselves in battle. Those who distinguished themselves were rewarded with cloth, slaves and cattle, while cowards were humiliated by being forced to work as porters.



Wooden war clubs from the Kilimanjaro area. Similar weapons were found throughout the region, and were used by the Masai, Nandi and Ruga-Ruga as well as by many other tribes. (After M.French-Sheldon)

Supply columns and medical services were also well organized. Hehe armies took the field in both the dry and wet seasons, and often campaigned in several theatres simultaneously. An expedition would be preceded by scouts or *vatandisi*, who might operate several days ahead of the main body. Then came an advance guard, the *vandagandaga*, which might carry out surprise raids or pursue a fleeing enemy on its own, but could be quickly supported by the main body in the event of serious resistance. This main body would consist of one or more regiments, escorting the supply train. Large numbers of prisoners of war or *vanyawingi* accompanied the armies as labourers and porters. In Mkwawa's day a commander was not normally expected to lead the army into battle in person, but remained in the rear with his bodyguard, as the Hehe seem to have believed that the troops would be demoralized if they saw a chief's blood spilt. Joseph Thomson pays tribute to the stamina of the warriors, and says that if necessary they could travel at a trot for days without food.

The Hehe possessed at least some guns from the 1870s onwards, and J.F. Elton describes them skirmishing with muskets against the Sango in 1877. However, they seem always to have been in short supply, and were mostly hoarded by the chiefs, who distributed them when required to favoured followers. In a group of warriors encountered by Tettenborn in the early 1890s a minority carried muskets while the rest had only spears. At the Rugaro River ambush only one gun was fired – presumably by a chief – as a signal for the attack, which was carried out entirely with spears.

In Mkwawa's reign the Hehe generally preferred to advance to close quarters in dense formations, Zulu-style, rather than attempting to skirmish. If musketeers were present, they would fire a single volley at close range before charging. However Elton, in his account of the war against the Sango in 1877, describes much more cautious tactics. On that occasion a Hehe army besieged a fortified village for several days, trading abuse and long-range musketry, advancing only under cover, and even entrenching themselves for protection against the defenders' bullets. Each night they lit fires, apparently to make the Sango think that they had burnt their temporary huts and left. After a few days they really broke off the siege and retired, pursued by the Sango. It may be that it was their relative lack of aptitude for sieges that encouraged the Hehe to rely on their own fortifications against the Germans.

## THE RUGA-RUGA

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In 19th century East Africa the word 'Ruga-Ruga' was originally used to describe the rootless young hooligans – often orphaned or displaced by war or slave-raiding – who roamed the country making a precarious living as mercenaries, bandits or elephant-hunters. These first made their appearance among the Nyamwezi, who inhabited the high plateau of what is now central Tanzania and became the principal long-distance traders of the region. The term also came to be used for the semi-professional militia of local origin which some Nyamwezi groups raised to defend their villages.

Also referred to as Ruga-Ruga were the followers of leaders like Mirambo and Nyungu-ya-Mawe, who during the second half of the century established the first centralized states among the Nyamwezi and



**The Arab attack on Mirambo's stockade at Zimbizo, August 1871. Note the difference in dress between the Arabs and their Swahili followers. (Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*)**

other tribes of the region. The explorer H.M. Stanley was an admirer of the Nyamwezi, praising their 'great strength and endurance, skill in war, tenacity of purpose, and determination to defend the rights of their chiefs against foreigners'. They therefore made excellent soldiers, whose ready availability was one of the main foundations on which these states were built. The other was gunpowder; both Mirambo and Nyungu understood the value of guns and acquired as many of them as they could, so that eventually the name Ruga-Ruga became almost synonymous with hired gunman.

### **The warlord Mirambo ('Heaps of Corpses')**

Mirambo was perhaps the most famous of all the native military leaders of 19th century East Africa, both in his own time and later. His background is obscure, but he was said to have been of Nyamwezi royal blood. Mirambo was not his real name but a nom de guerre, meaning 'Heaps of Corpses'. He first came to prominence in 1871, when Stanley witnessed the opening moves of his war against the Arabs of Tabora. By this time Mirambo was already leading an army of several thousand Ruga-Ruga, and was successfully disputing control of the trade routes with the Arabs who had previously dominated them.

Stanley, who was passing through Tabora on his expedition in search of Livingstone, accompanied the Arab army when it marched to attack Mirambo's frontier village of Zimbizo. The village fell after a brief skirmish and Stanley and most of the Arabs then went home, leaving only 20 Arabs and about 500 Swahilis to advance on their opponents' main base at Wilyankuru. Mirambo, who had several hundred men in Wilyankuru, withdrew them from the far side of the village, circled round, and concealed them in the tall grass on both sides of the path leading back towards Zimbizo. The Arabs plundered the village, and were starting on their return journey, loaded down with loot, when the Ruga-Ruga emerged from ambush and attacked them at close quarters with spears. There is no mention of Mirambo's men using firearms in this engagement, although many of them certainly possessed them. All the Arabs and about half of the Swahilis were killed in the ambush, and the rest fled.



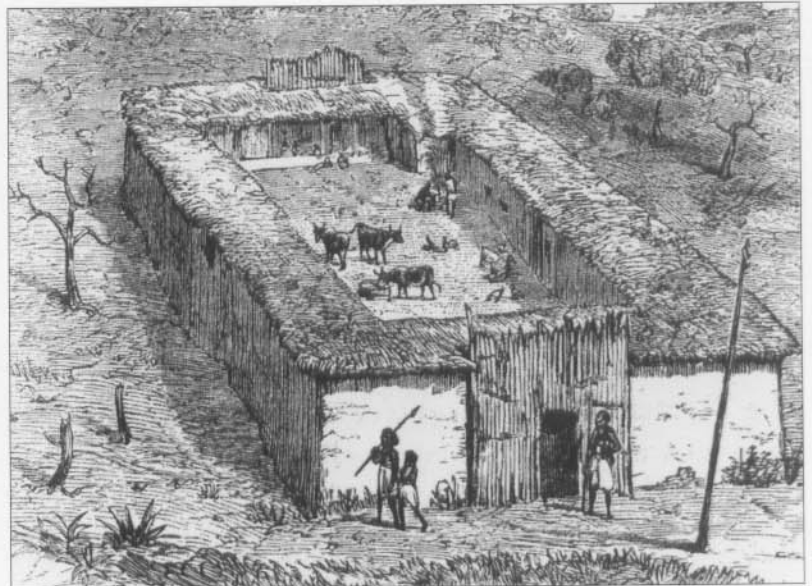
Two weeks later Mirambo advanced on Tabora with 2,000 Ruga-Ruga and 1,000 Tuta Ngoni. On seeing 'the plain around Tabora filled with approaching savages', as Stanley puts it, five Arabs and 80 armed slaves went out to meet them. Mirambo's men were at first ordered to fall back, luring the enemy into a rash advance, but when the Ruga-Ruga finally charged all the slaves ran away, leaving their Arab masters to be shot down. After this the war lapsed into stalemate. Mirambo continued to disrupt the Arabs' trade, causing the price of ivory on the coast to double, while in retaliation the Arabs cut off his supply of gunpowder.

Early in 1872 the Arabs were so hard pressed that they asked the Sultan of Zanzibar for aid. A small force was sent under Amir bin Sultan, but rivalry among the different Arab leaders prevented them agreeing on a co-ordinated strategy, and so Amir was withdrawn. Mirambo had survived the military threat, but an embargo on gunpowder imports from the coast caused difficulties until he found a new source of supply, via the Portuguese in Mozambique. Trade eventually resumed, and by the time of Stanley's second visit in 1876 Mirambo and the Arabs of Tabora were at peace.

Mirambo had not abandoned his warlike ambitions, however. The missionary Southon, who visited him a few years later, reported that he and his officers 'spend their whole time planning, preparing for or actually engaging in a war of greater or lesser magnitude'. From his capital at Urambo, west of Tabora, Mirambo's 'empire' was extended to cover the whole region between Lakes Victoria and Tanganyika. He always tried to remain on good terms with Europeans; he made a friendly visit to Stanley in 1876, and three years later he claimed to have called off a planned attack on Ujiji when he discovered that there were English missionaries there. The British Consul at Zanzibar, John Kirk, was sympathetic to him, and moves were begun to commence formal relations with the British government.

These plans came to grief in 1880, when an exploring expedition blundered into the middle of one of Mirambo's wars and two Englishmen were killed by the Ruga-Ruga. Mirambo later expressed regret for the killings, and was genuinely shocked to find that he had alienated his British allies. One theory was that his men had mistaken the Englishmen for the universally hated Belgians. Nevertheless, Kirk immediately broke off relations with him, and two expeditions set off from the coast to avenge the victims. One was despatched by the Sultan of Zanzibar, who was anxious to placate the British, but no fighting took place because most of the Zanzibaris deserted when they realized that they were being sent to

**A Nyamwezi tembe. In defence the Nyamwezi relied heavily on these large rectangular buildings surrounding a central courtyard. The walls could be up to 3ft thick and would stop even a rifle bullet, although the flat thatched roofs were naturally vulnerable to fire. Access was by a narrow gate in one or two of the sides, while all the other doors and windows opened inwards on to the courtyard. The interior was divided into numerous small rooms, thus enabling a determined defender to fight on even if the outer walls were breached. Often an entire village and its cattle would be enclosed within one or more large tembes. (Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*)**





**Group of Ruga-Ruga photographed at Ujiji in the 1890s. Note the drums, and the mask worn by the seventh figure from the right. (Fred Moir)**

fight Mirambo. This episode put an end to any hope that Mirambo's fledgling nation would be officially recognized by the European powers. In 1884 he became ill and handed over command of the army to his brother Kirunga, who succeeded him on his death in December of that year.

Kirunga lacked his predecessor's military talents, and much of the empire which he had inherited broke away. He was killed in 1890 fighting the Ngoni, and when a German expedition arrived soon afterwards it encountered little resistance. Urambo was occupied and the country brought under German rule.

### **Nyungu-ya-Mawe**

The other outstanding leader of Ruga-Ruga was Mirambo's contemporary, Nyungu-ya-Mawe. Nyungu's first recorded campaign took place at the same time as Mirambo's, in 1871, when he was the leader of a band of Ruga-Ruga based near Tabora. As a young man he led his men personally in battle, but in later life he preferred to remain at his headquarters and delegate operations to his subordinates. Nyungu had a reputation for cruelty and treachery, and a traditional African story was told about him to illustrate this. He invited a rival chief into his camp, and persuaded him to sit on a stool which had been placed over a hidden pitfall trap. When the victim fell in, Nyungu ran up and stabbed him to death with a spear.

Like Mirambo, Nyungu lost any chance of an alliance with the whites through an attack on a party of explorers, although in his case there is little doubt that the killings were deliberate. In December 1878, some 400 of his Ruga-Ruga ambushed a party led by William Penrose. The caravan was escorted by only six askaris, who were soon either killed or ran away; Penrose made an heroic last stand with his back to a tree, which was riddled with bullets before his gun was shot from his hand

*(continued on page 33)*

MASAI RAID, 1857

1 & 2: Masai moran

3: 'Baluchi' mercenary





THE BATTLE OF ELBEJET, 1889

1: Somali askari

2: Masai elder

3: Masai warrior





NGONI WARRIORS

1: Gwangwara, southern Tanganyika

2: Angoni, Nyasaland

3: Tuta, northern Tanganyika

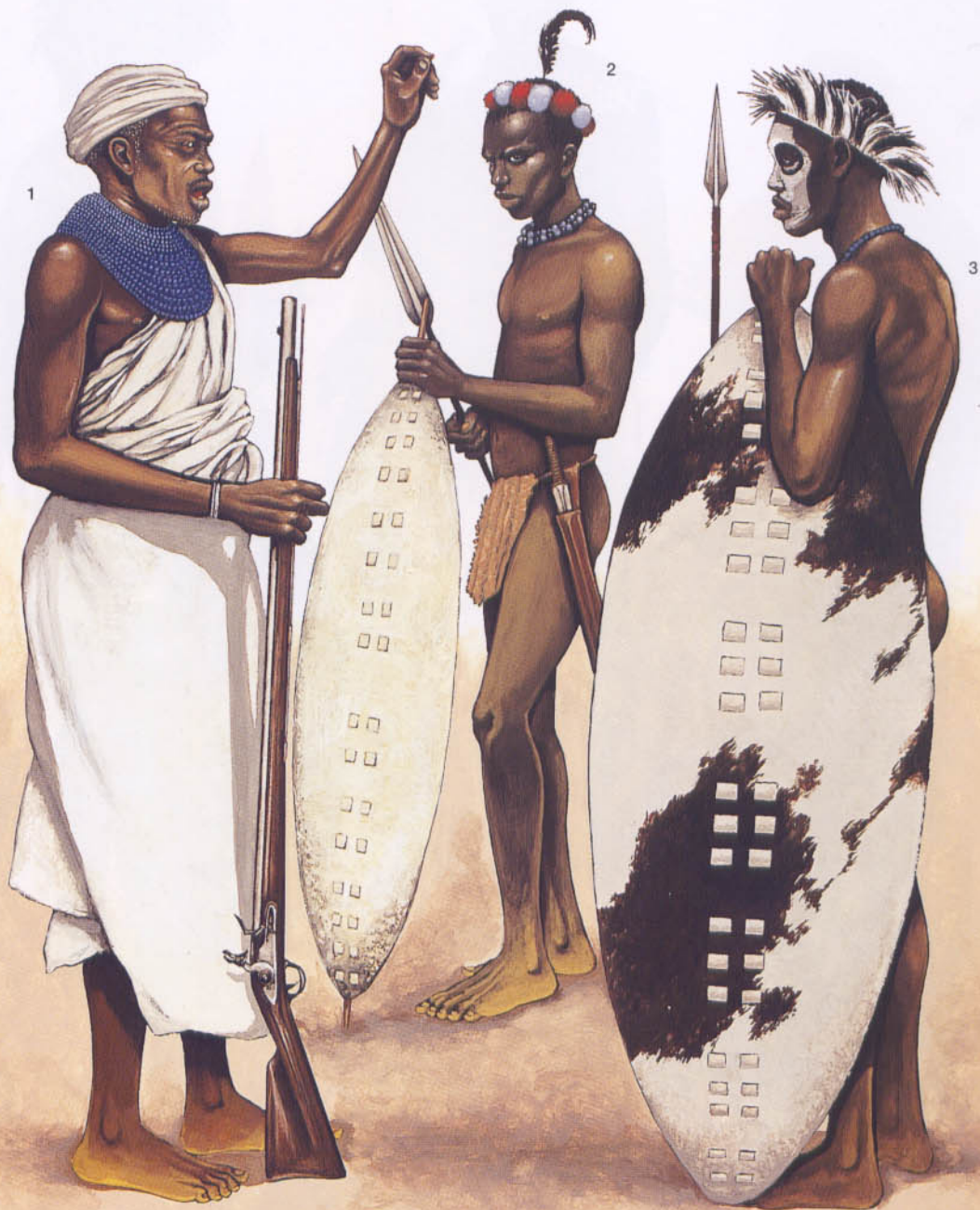


THE HEHE

1: Chief

2: Wajinga spearman, c.1891

3: Warrior, c.1880





MIRAMBO'S RUGA-RUGA, 1876

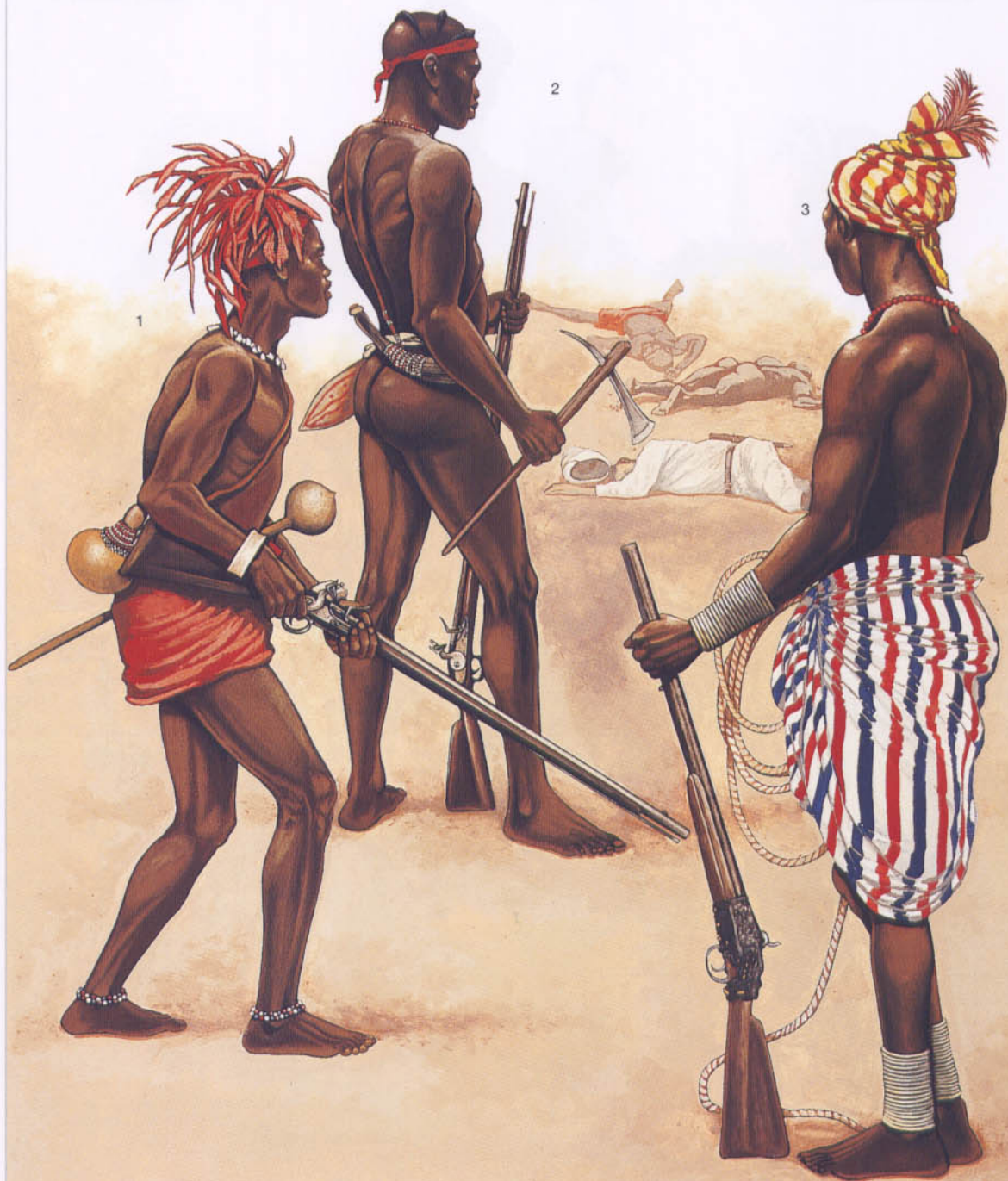
1: Mirambo

2: Officer of Mirambo's army

3: H.M.Stanley

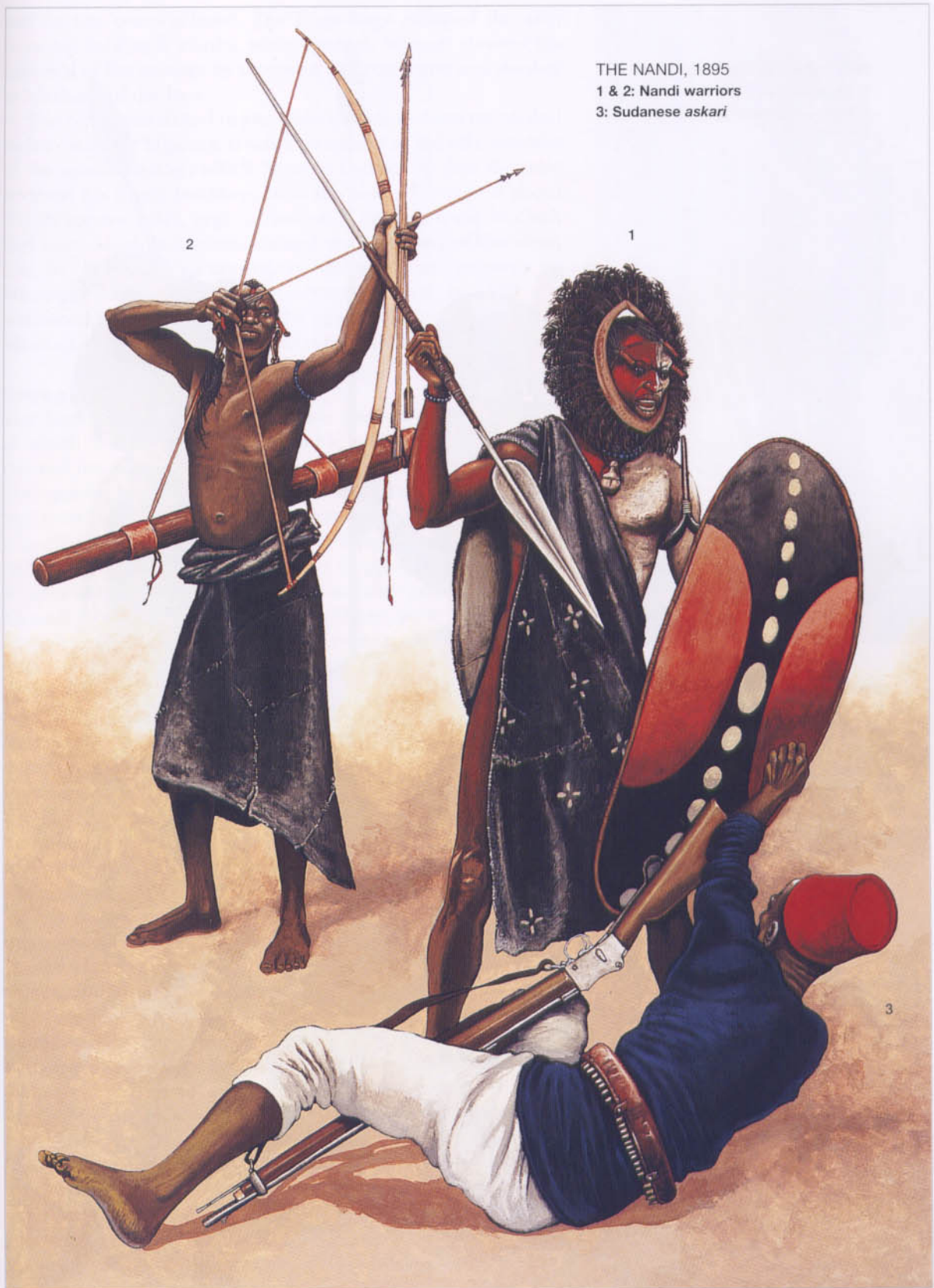


NYUNGU-YA-MAWE'S  
RUGA-RUGA, c.1880  
1, 2 & 3: Ruga-Ruga warriors





THE NANDI, 1895  
1 & 2: Nandi warriors  
3: Sudanese askari

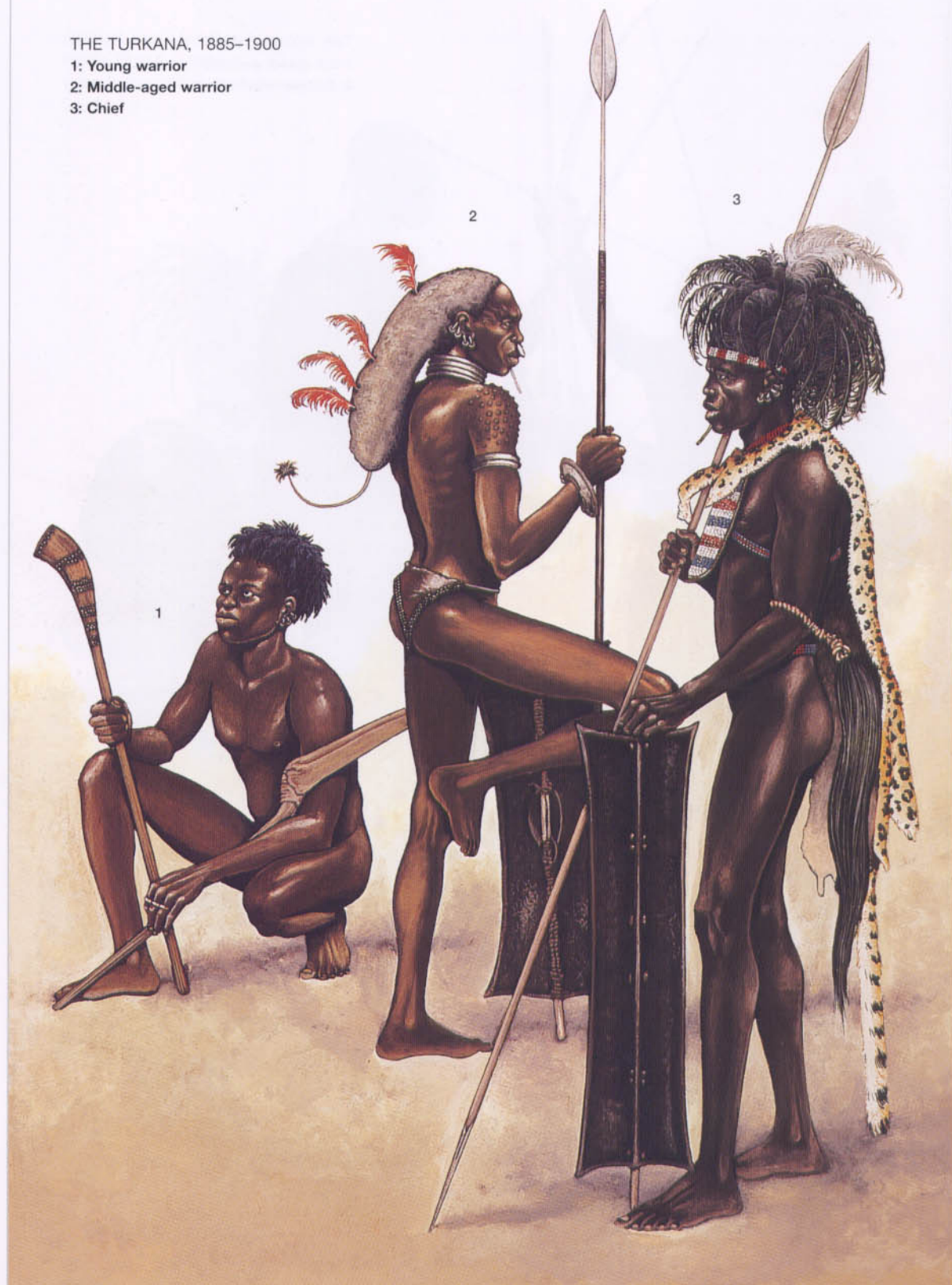


THE TURKANA, 1885–1900

1: Young warrior

2: Middle-aged warrior

3: Chief





and he was overwhelmed. The Ruga-Ruga stripped the skin from his face as a trophy, while Nyungu himself showed his approval of the murder by accepting Penrose's gun and donkey as his share of the loot.

The old warlord died in December 1884, and was succeeded by his daughter Mgalula. It was a testament to the effectiveness of the administration which Nyungu had set up that the state survived his death for more than ten years. It covered about 20,000 square miles, and carried on a thriving trade in cloth and ivory. Mgalula also maintained the efficiency of the army, and in 1893 she succeeded in defeating an invasion by Mkwawa's Hehe. When the Germans arrived in 1895 she welcomed them as potential allies against their mutual enemy Mkwawa, and so submitted without resistance.

### Organization and tactics

The basis of Mirambo's strategy was the extraordinary speed at which his armies could assemble and manoeuvre. Until the last few years of his life he led his Ruga-Ruga in person, distinguished by an umbrella which always accompanied him, and invariably setting a punishing pace. As Southon wrote: 'He himself has told me that he would frequently run 15 or 16 miles, capture a village and without stopping for a rest make a rapid march of 30 miles more to another place... he never allowed anyone to outrun him.' There were never many stragglers, as to fall behind meant to miss the fighting, and hence a share in the loot. Southon explained the effect of this mobility on Mirambo's enemies:

'The celerity of his movements, the sagacity of his plans and the ferocity with which his onslaughts were made, struck terror into the hearts of all the people for many miles around. No one could tell in what district he would appear next: today he was at one place, yet yesterday he was 40 miles south of it.' Mirambo's preferred campaigning method was to make a forced march to the nearest enemy village, using unfrequented routes and aiming to achieve surprise by arriving at night. Then, an hour before dawn, the Ruga-Ruga would storm the weakest section of the defences, climbing over the palisades and tearing the gates from their hinges.

Although Mirambo was well aware of the value of muskets, and made efforts to equip as many of his men with them as possible, most accounts of his battles suggest that a rush to close quarters was his favourite tactic. All of the Ruga-Ruga who accompanied Mirambo on his visit to Stanley in 1876 were equipped with guns, but it is not certain that the entire army possessed them at this date. Stanley's account of the ambush at Wilyankuru mentions only spears, though many warriors undoubtedly carried both weapons.

After a victory, Mirambo himself took control of all the loot. He then returned half of it to his defeated enemies, and shared out the rest among the bravest of his followers. The enemy chief was usually executed and replaced with a local puppet ruler, but Southon believed that the conquered tribes were actually better off under Mirambo, since he did not impose taxes but required only recruits for his army.



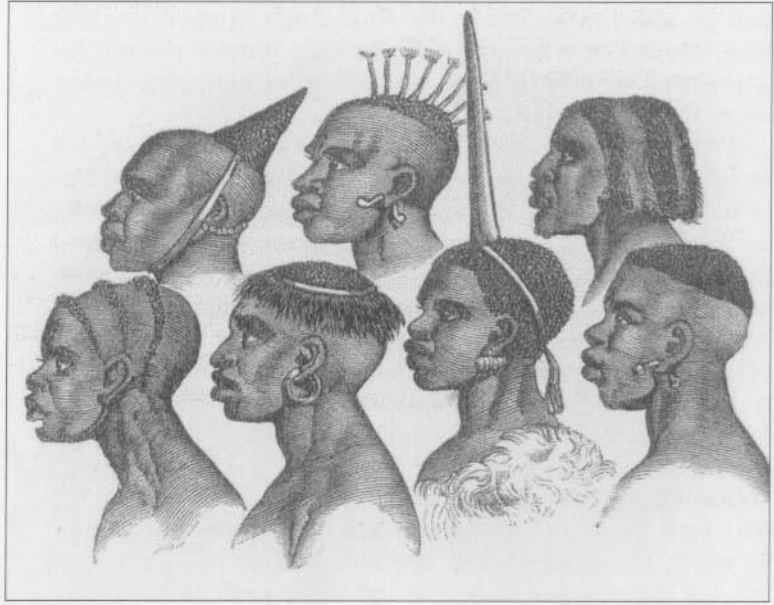
**A Ruga-Ruga or slave raider from the Lake Nyasa region. He carries a coil of rope for tying up slaves, and wears the head and beak of a hornbill fixed to his turban. This figure is one source for the reconstruction at Plate F3. (Johnston)**

'On these young men', he says, 'Mirambo bestowed considerable care and attention; he armed them with guns and taught them how to use them; he conspicuously rewarded the brave and the loyal.'

Mirambo preferred to recruit very young men for his army; he believed that they were more prepared to risk their lives than the older men with families, who by contrast were steadier and better suited to defence. He told Stanley that the unmarried youths '...have sharper eyes... and a few words will give them the hearts of lions. In all my wars with the Arabs, it was an army of youths that gave me victory, boys without beards. Fifteen of my young men died one day because I said I must have a certain red cloth that was thrown down as a challenge. No, no, give me youths for war in the open field, and men for the stockaded village.'

Apart from the Nyamwezi who constituted the core of his army, Mirambo made use of troops from various other sources. He had a personal bodyguard of armed slaves known as the *waniakuru*, who may have been the same as the 100 uniformed men whom Stanley's scout Mabruki saw in 1875. The governors of strategic frontier districts were drawn from this unit; they were called *m'gahue*, and wore as a badge of rank a shell suspended from their necks by a strip of lion skin. For most of Mirambo's reign the Tuta were friendly, and they sent contingents to support him on numerous occasions. However, in 1883 war broke out with them, and he turned instead to the Masai to supply him with allies. Cameron says that some Arabs defected to him during the war of 1871-72, but he did not trust them and so had them killed. After the war, however, he granted asylum to Said ibn Salim, the deposed governor of Tabora, and even planned to restore him to his position. Mirambo was also on good terms with the Zanzibari slaver Tippu Tib, and when an earlier dispute with the Tuta in 1881 seemed about to lead to war, he even negotiated unsuccessfully for support from Zanzibar.

Like Mirambo's, Nyungu's army consisted of professional Ruga-Ruga, who were mostly young unmarried men. They were recruited from various sources, including runaway slaves, deserters from caravans and prisoners of war, although most of them were probably of local Nyamwezi origin. No estimate appears to exist of their overall numbers, but they must have been comparable to the forces of rivals like Mirambo, and so probably totalled several thousand. They were organized into companies which varied greatly in size, from about 20 to as many as 500 men. Each company was led by an officer called a *mutwale*, and was known by its commander's nom de guerre, of which several picturesque examples are recorded: Kafupa Mugazi ('Spitter of Blood'); Pundu ya Mbogo ('Buffalo



Some of the extravagant hairstyles associated with the Nyamwezi tribesmen who provided most of the manpower of warlords like Mirambo. (Richard Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*)



Bull'); Itovela Mbesi ('Feeder of Vultures'); Kadele ka Nsimba ('Lion Skin'); Nsikine ('Grinder'); and Nzwala Mino ga Vanhu ('Wearer of Human Teeth'). These military officers were distinct from the territorial chiefs whom Nyungu left in control of the districts of his empire – a system of divided command which was intended to prevent any subject chief from becoming too powerful.

Discipline within the companies was very strict, and the loyalty of the men to their commanders was encouraged by their youth and lack of family ties. Plunder taken after a victory could only be distributed by Nyungu himself, as a reward for courage. Men were often executed for minor infringements of his orders, the signal for which was the dropping of a piece of cloth. It was said that Nyungu never referred to a soldier as a man until he had distinguished himself by valour in battle; until then, recruits were called *mapimpiti* or 'logs' – and when committing his reserves to battle, he would call out, 'Pile on more logs!' Reckless bravery was encouraged by the smoking of hemp, and by the use of a war medicine which was supposed to make men invulnerable.

Most of Nyungu's Ruga-Ruga were armed with muskets, but in the 1870s a proportion of them still lacked firearms, and in 1878 the French White Fathers saw Ruga-Ruga carrying bows and spears, either in addition to or as a substitute for guns.

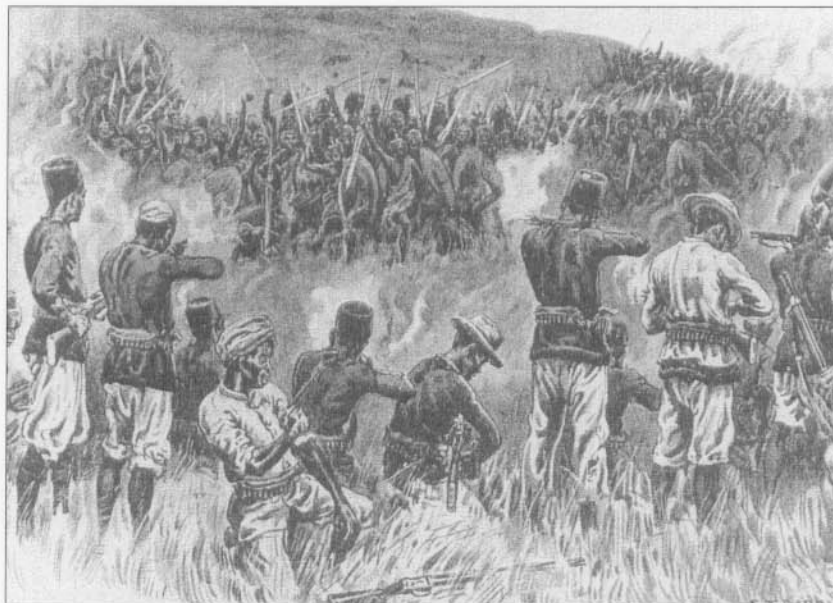
## THE NANDI

The Nandi were one of a group of related tribes who lived in the forested hills around Mount Elgon in northern Kenya. They called themselves Chemwal or 'cattle-raiders'; the name Wa-nandi was a Swahili insult, meaning 'cormorants' and referring to their rapacity. Few outsiders visited the area before the 1880s, although some Arab or Swahili traders may have arrived in the 1850s. The tribe was not interested in foreign goods, however, and attacked the caravans instead of trading with them. Kapchumba or 'place of the Swahili' was a commonplace name in the Nandi country, which was said to commemorate locations where the foreigners had been lured into ambushes and massacred.

During the 1890s the Nandi began to raid the telegraph line which the British authorities were building on their borders, mainly because they valued the wire as ornaments for their women, and later the heavy iron bolts securing the rails of the Uganda Railway were stolen for use as weapons. This led to a series of British punitive expeditions, the first of which took place at the end of 1895. It operated as several independent company-sized columns, which quartered the country with the intention of rounding up the cattle. Lieutenant Seymour Vandeleur, who fought in the campaign,

A rare photograph of a Nandi warrior, taken in the early years of the 20th century. The only garment worn by Nandi men was the *kipoiet*, a longer version of the kid-skin Masai 'toga', which was made from black goat or calf hide with the hair left on. This was tied over one shoulder (usually, but not always, the right) with a strip of leather. A leopard's tail, with the white tail of a Colobus monkey fixed to its tip, was sometimes suspended from the shoulder as a mark of bravery. (A.C.Hollis, *The Nandi: Their Language and Folklore*)





The charge of the Nandi at the Kimonde River, 1895. The British officer commanding in this action, Lt Seymour Vandeleur, confirmed that this picture gives a fairly accurate impression of the fighting. The Nandi got within 30 yards of the British line before the charge was stopped by Martini Henry rifle fire and a Maxim gun. (S.Vandeleur, *Campaigning on the Upper Nile and Niger*)

gives a description of a battle on the banks of the Kimonde River which is probably the first eyewitness account of the Nandi in battle. His company of Sudanese was attacked by about 500 warriors, 'apparently excellently organised, and formed in three sides of a square, above which a dense thicket of long-bladed spears flashed in the sunlight'. They charged in good order, wiped out an isolated detachment of 14 men, and then advanced to within 30 yards of the main Sudanese line before the fire of the Martini Henry rifles and a Maxim gun finally broke them.

Vandeleur was certain that if his unit had been surprised while in column of march it would have been overrun. He commented that 'This charge was a revelation to us... and at once accounted for the warlike reputation... which the Wa-Nandi possessed'. The Nandi had learned



Group of Nandi warriors in battle array, organized into columns by clans. Although this early 20th century picture is of poor quality, it is interesting in that - contrary to the statements of most eyewitnesses - few of these men have adopted either Masai headdresses or the practice of painting their shields. (Hollis)

from their defeat, and two days later they attacked the British camp at night. They reached the thorn fence surrounding it, but they were unable to scale it in the face of the defenders' rifle fire and were again repulsed. Subsequently they contented themselves with shadowing the column, cutting off stragglers, and rolling down boulders on to the track. The British burned a few villages, drove off the cattle, and proclaimed the area pacified. In fact three more expeditions were required, in 1900, 1903 and 1905, before the tribe submitted, making the Nandi Wars as a whole the most serious opposition which the British encountered in Kenya.

### Organization and tactics

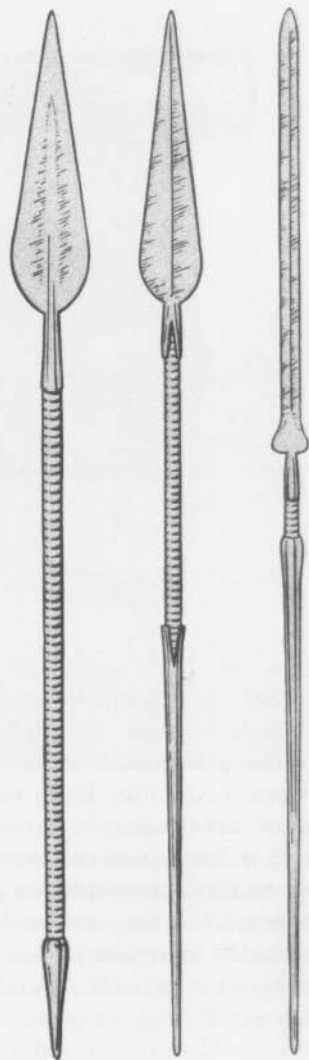
Despite their small numbers (their total fighting strength was around 5,000, but most war parties were far smaller than this) the Nandi had a fearsome reputation as fighters, and the Masai were said to have been the only people who dared to attack them. Traditionally their warfare consisted of small-scale raids for cattle and prisoners. After the 1880s, when they seized the grazing grounds of the Uasin Gishu plateau from the Masai, the Nandi showed no further interest in territorial conquest. They did not keep slaves; prisoners were usually ransomed for cattle, though Masai captives were sometimes adopted into the tribe.

An important strength of the Nandi military system was the role of the *orkoiik* (singular *orkoiyot*), part-prophets and part-war leaders, who first came to prominence in the mid-19th century, and were undoubtedly inspired by the Masai *laibons* or medicine chiefs. The whole Nandi people recognized the authority of a single *orkoiyot*, or at most two at any one time. They were feared and respected for their magical powers, and made use of this prestige to impose a degree of cohesion on the tribe. This may be one reason why, despite their lack of formal political unity, the Nandi are never known to have fought among themselves.

The main subdivisions of the tribe were 15 territorial districts, each ruled by a council of elders. Each raised its own regiment of warriors, which was called a *luket* (meaning literally 'a raid'), and undertook its own military operations, either alone or in alliance with other districts. Like the Masai the men were organized into age-sets, with the younger sets providing a class of more or less full-time warriors. Every seven years or so a ceremony was held, at which responsibility for the defence of the tribe was formally handed over from one age-set to another.

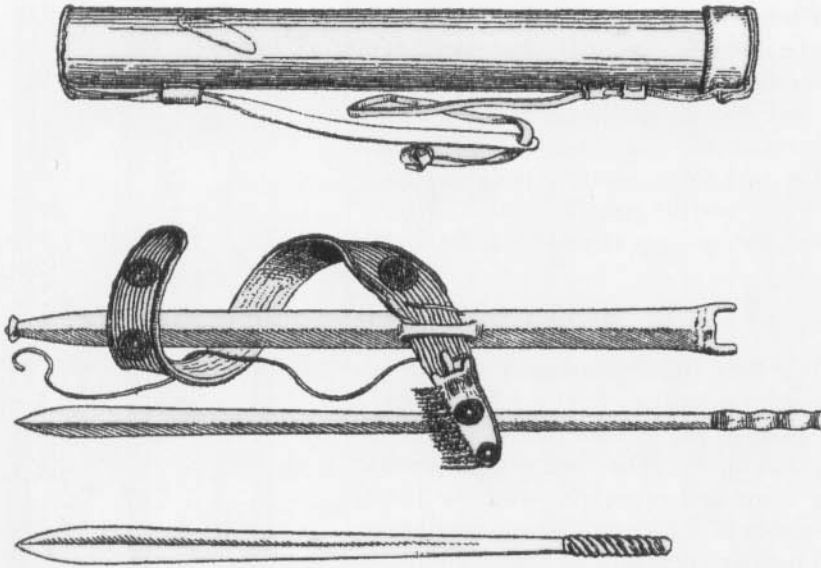
It was customary to first ask the *orkoiyot* for permission to send out a raiding party. Then a horn would be blown to summon the warriors; the authority of the *orkoiyot* was symbolized by a club which he had blessed, and which was carried at the head of the force. The Nandi believed that a prophet could detach his head from his body and send it to keep an eye on the performance of the warriors in battle – an idea which was obviously useful for maintaining discipline.

Each *luket* was divided into a varying number of sub-units or *siritaiik*, each comprising anything between 20 and 50 men. The leaders of each of the individual *siritaiik* held the title of *kirkil* or 'bull'. Parallel to the territorial organization was a system of 17 clans or families, each of them associated with a particular totem animal. Some clans had specific military roles; the lion clan, for example, always deployed on the right wing in battle. The hyaena clan was responsible for providing a



Two types of traditional Nandi spears, and (at right) an example of the modern type adopted c.1900 – this is virtually identical to its Masai equivalent, and was almost certainly copied from the Masai. (After Huntingford)

Nandi quiver, scabbard with leather belt, and two swords. See also page 46 for drawings of bows and arrows. (After Hollis)



rearguard to cover a retreat, and for blocking the tracks through the forest to frustrate an invader.

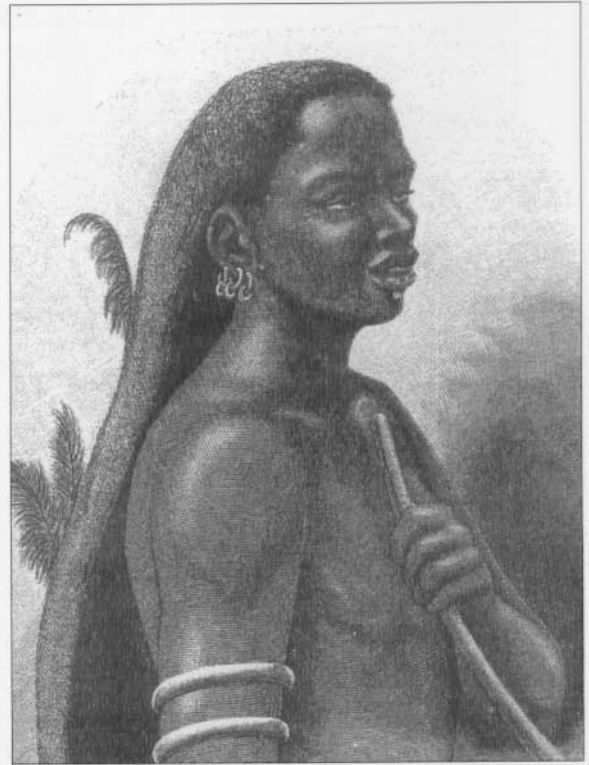
The preferred time for campaigning was in the dry season, which began in October. Raids were carried out over distances of up to 100 miles, and the people of this region were famous (as they still are to this day) as long-distance runners. A war party would send out scouts to locate the enemy villages and reconnoitre the approach and escape routes. When they returned, the main body was mustered by sounding a horn; the approach march was then made in silence, in single file and making use of cover. Ideally the scouts would have located a spot where they could deploy unobserved within easy reach of the target, in which case the Nandi preferred to wait until after dark before attacking.

The war party then divided into three groups; one would create a diversion, while the second broke into the enclosure where the cattle were kept. Most of the Nandi's neighbours had learned to keep their animals inside kraals protected by thorn hedges or mud walls, so this task often involved demolishing a section of wall or hedge, which was likely to alert the enemy. This second party would then redeploy to cover the withdrawal while the third group – made up of the youngest and least experienced warriors – drove the cattle away.

## THE TURKANA

The Turkana came originally from the hills to the north of Mount Elgon, in what is now northern Uganda. During the 18th century they migrated towards Lake Rudolf and took over most of the territory east and south of the lake, which they called Eturkan. This was one of the driest regions of East Africa, and it has been argued that the wars of the Turkana were not intended to conquer territory – although this was often the eventual outcome – but merely to capture cattle to replace their losses in the





ABOVE LEFT **A Turkana warrior encountered by Teleki and von Hohnel in 1888. This picture shows most of the distinctive features of the Turkana, including the stiffened hair bag, nose and lip ornaments, iron neck rings, and the pattern of raised scars on the right shoulder. Note also the circular wrist 'knife' with its leather cover to protect the razor-sharp edge. (Von Hohnel)**

ABOVE RIGHT **A 'middle-aged Turkana warrior' – see Plate H2 – showing a variation on the hair bag. (Von Hohnel)**

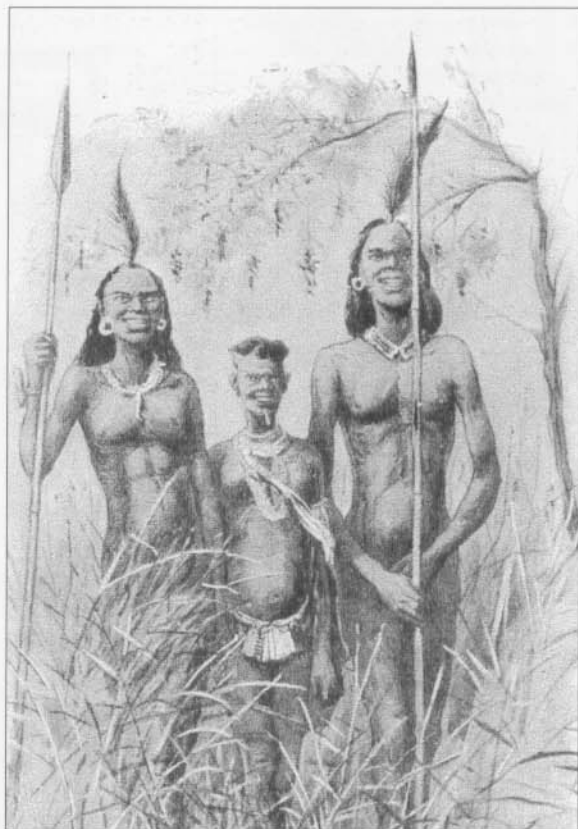
frequent droughts. Nevertheless, they drove out the original inhabitants of the area and quickly gained a reputation as deadly fighters. Unlike most of their neighbours, the Turkana did not suffer much from the cattle plagues of the 1880s, probably because of their remoteness from any trade routes along which the infections could have spread. However, their expansion was coming to a halt by this time, due mainly to over-extension of their limited manpower, which was made worse by an outbreak of civil war.

The first outsiders to penetrate their territory were Abyssinian and Swahili ivory traders, who arrived about 1884, followed by the first Europeans – Count Teleki and Ludwig von Hohnel – in 1888. Exploring expeditions often had to fight continual minor skirmishes with the isolated and suspicious tribesmen, and although pitched battles were rare, the troops invariably suffered great hardships from lack of food and water. This was the main reason why the authority of the British – who on paper had annexed the entire region in 1890 – was not established in many places until after World War I.

By 1900 the Turkana totalled around 30,000 people, and dominated an area of about 24,000 square miles. The process of expansion had actually led to a reduction in military activity, as the tribesmen became too thinly spread over this vast region to be able to amass large armies. Furthermore, the aridity of their territory made it of little interest to potential invaders, so that there was no incentive to maintain standing armies for defence. One 20th century informant described the campaigns undertaken by his predecessors in strictly practical terms: 'the Turkana fought to get food'. By this time, if not earlier, the warriors tended to prefer skirmishing and sudden raids to massed battles. In their



ABOVE LEFT This portrait is described as that of a Turkana youth, who has decorated his hair with short black feathers stuck all over it – see Plate H1. It took many years to grow and tangle the hair sufficiently to produce the 'bags' worn by the warriors in the two previous illustrations. (Von Hohnel)



ABOVE RIGHT This strikingly naive drawing published in *Wide World Magazine* in 1902 shows the different hairstyle worn by the Turkana who attacked the British Austin expedition. The tall red feathers were said to be a sign that the warriors were on the warpath. (Major R.G.T.Bright)

careful use of scouts, their emphasis on surprise, and their desire to minimize casualties while emphasizing the capture of livestock and other booty, they might be compared to the Apaches. They invariably resisted outsiders passing through their territory by raiding camps and cutting off stragglers rather than by large-scale attacks. This approach was encapsulated in the traditional saying that the secret of success in war was 'not power, but knowledge'.

### Organization and leadership

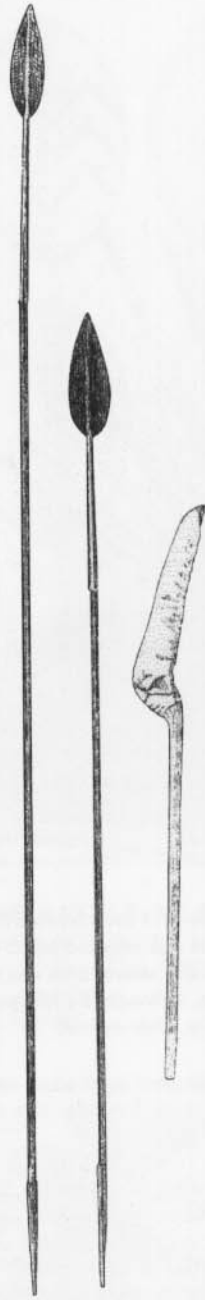
What military organization existed was based on age-sets or *asapanu*, which were sub-divided into territorial sections, and may once have formed units on the battlefield on the rare occasions when large armies were assembled. By the late 19th century this system was giving way to a loose collection of locally based forces, and the authority of the elders was declining.

Political leadership was provided by ritual diviners or *ngimurok*. Each of these men normally controlled one territorial section, but a few outstanding figures rose to positions of influence in the tribe as a whole. This institution may have been inspired by the Masai *laibons*, but among the Turkana the *ngimurok* had a much more clearly defined military role. During the 19th century three outstanding diviners were recorded: Lokerio, who led the early wars of expansion and lived until the 1880s; Lokorikeny, who flourished around the middle of the century; and Lokorijam, who in the 1890s is said to have come closer than any of his predecessors to uniting the Turkana.

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Turkana spears and war club. The *akwara* spear averaged about 8ft in length; the blade was relatively small but was kept very sharp. One reason given for the superiority of the Turkana over their enemies was their acquisition of better quality spearheads from the neighbouring Labwor, who were well known as skilled ironworkers. (Von Hohnel)

## THE PLATES

### A: MASAI RAID, 1857

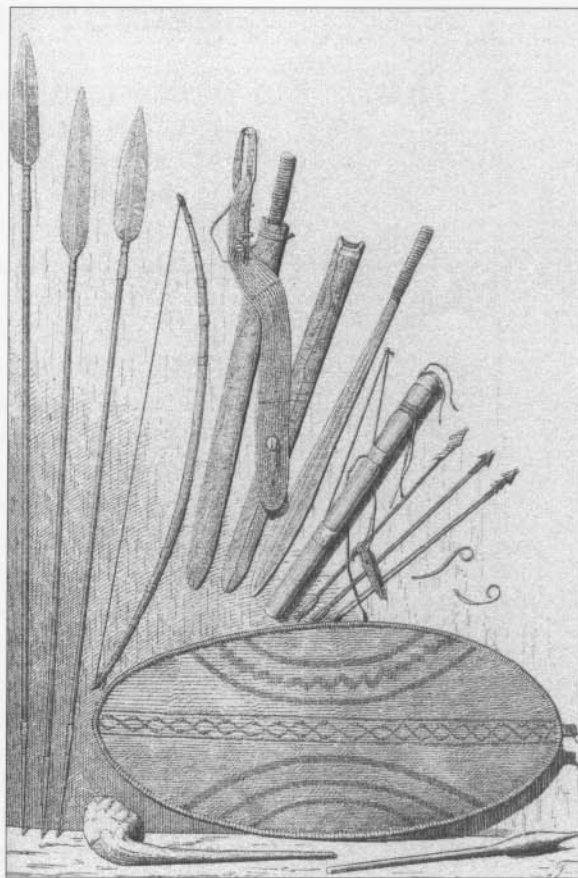
The explorer Richard Burton described a Masai victory over the Baluchi mercenaries of the Sultan of Zanzibar in 1857, which is the basis for this reconstruction.

#### A1 & A2: Masai moran

Most Masai warriors wore only a short garment made of kid skin, which was normally worn tied over one shoulder. When on the warpath, however, it was rolled up around the waist to keep the sword in place, and also in order not to impede the warrior's legs when running. The *moran* grew their hair long, coated it with red ochre, and plaited it into pigtails – usually one large one at the back and two or three smaller ones at the front. The most common type of headdress was made from black and white ostrich feathers fixed into a leather oval which framed the warrior's face, like that of **A1**, but a variety of other styles were also used. In 1893 Sir Gerald Portal encountered a group of Masai among whom were men wearing 'an edifice like a guardsman's bearskin made of hawk's feathers... or in some cases the horns of an antelope, or a contrivance of iron wire covered with wool in the shape of immense buffalo horns'. On his upper arm **A1** wears an arm clamp made of horn, which often fitted so tightly that it was almost impossible to remove. Red, white and black beads, supplemented towards the end of the century by blue, were extensively used for decoration. The iron bell strapped to his thigh is also mentioned by von Hohnel. It might be stuffed with grass for a surprise attack or a night raid, but when the warriors were on the march their presence was often advertised by the clanging of these bells. Knee bands were made of white goat hair.

The warrior **A2** is wearing the well-known 'busby' made from a lion's mane; this was primarily an item of ceremonial dress, restricted to men who had killed a lion with the spear, but was apparently sometimes worn in battle. A warrior would often cover his head and shoulders, the blade of his spear, and sometimes his whole body with a smeared layer of red ochre mixed with fat, which was applied on top of all the clothing and accoutrements and, in von Hohnel's words, 'makes him look as if he were dripping with blood'. An illustration in Thomson's *Through Masai Land* shows these unwieldy-looking backward projections of white goat hair apparently fastened to the leg bands.

The traditional war spear was about 5½ feet long, and consisted of a short wooden handle and a broad, heavy iron blade. The exact shape of the blade varied from one clan to another: according to Thomson, the northern Masai used longer, narrower blades, while the southern clans preferred a broader pattern. Numerous slight variations in design are recorded; that carried by **A2** has a small central grip and a very long butt spike, and is derived from a drawing in Mary French-Sheldon's *Sultan to Sultan*. The *moran* were not allowed to carry bows or other missile weapons since it was thought that these would make them reluctant to fight at close quarters, but they frequently threw their clubs as they charged. Swords were usually about 18ins to 2ft in length, and were often manufactured by grinding down old European machete blades. The blade generally widened out towards the tip into a 'spoon' shape, although the extent varied considerably. Shields varied in size between about 3ft and 5ft tall. They were made of buffalo hide, which is much thicker and tougher than ordinary cow hide, and must have



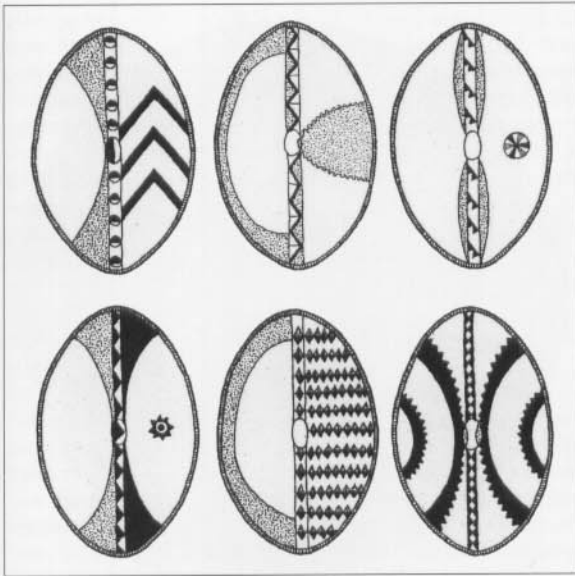
This illustration depicts the weapons of the Kikuyu tribe, who were neighbours of the Masai and adopted much of their military technology. The spears, sword, club and shield are all very similar to Masai types, although the Kikuyu also made much greater use of the bow. (Von Hohnel)

made formidable weapons in their own right when used to knock an enemy off balance before finishing him with a spear thrust.

#### A3: 'Baluchi' mercenary

The 'Baluchis' were mercenaries who fought for the Sultans of Zanzibar. They came mostly from western Asia and the Arabian Peninsula, but also included individuals from various parts of Africa. Burton describes the typical mercenary of the 1850s, 'distinguished from the Arab by the silkiness and the superior length of his flowing beard... made glossy with henna and indigo. He adheres to his primitive matchlock, a barrel lengthened out to suit the weak powder in use, damascened with gold and silver, and fastened to the frail stock by more metal rings than the old French "Brown Bess" ever had'. According to Burton, 'the wildest and most picturesque' of the Baluchis, whose 'unkempt elf-locks fall in mighty masses', were Arabs from the western shores of the Persian Gulf. One of these Omanis is reconstructed here, based on his description. They favoured a long saffron-coloured gown, which was often the only garment they wore. This implies that they might have gone bareheaded, as some Arabian tribes still did, though no illustration from Africa appears to confirm





**Masai shield patterns.** These examples show only a few of the enormous variety of possible designs, known as *sirata*. The great majority followed the same basic principles. The surface was stripped of hair, polished, and painted white. It was then divided into two halves by a pattern called *es segira*, running from top to bottom, which – although varying in the details of its design – was supposed to represent cowrie shells. Like the rest of the shield, this pattern was painted in black, white, red, and occasionally grey. On the left half of the shield as viewed were elliptical designs indicating the clan and age-set of the bearer, which were usually in red. On the right side there were sometimes patterns (generally in black), which were specific to individual warriors, or related to sub-clans or families. Otherwise the right half might either be left plain white, or repeat the pattern on the left side. Shields which were plain white on at least one side appear to have become more common towards the end of the 19th century.

this. Big Indian-style turbans, robes in red, blue or white, and baggy trousers were popular with men from other areas. Burton says that the officers or 'Jemadars' were much better dressed than their men, and often appeared in scarlet coats and silk turbans. Apart from their matchlocks the Omanis were armed with long, straight swords worn on a strap over the left shoulder, and daggers on their right hips. Their small round shields were made from the hide of the hippopotamus, rhinoceros, elephant or addax antelope – the latter being popular because of its natural whiteness.

#### **B: THE BATTLE OF ELBEJET, 1889**

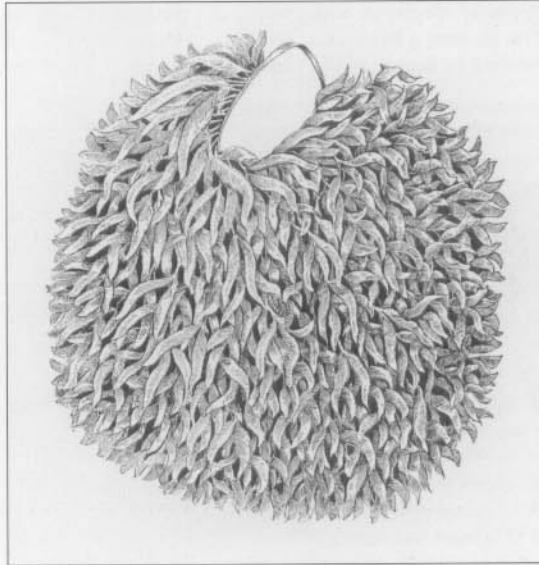
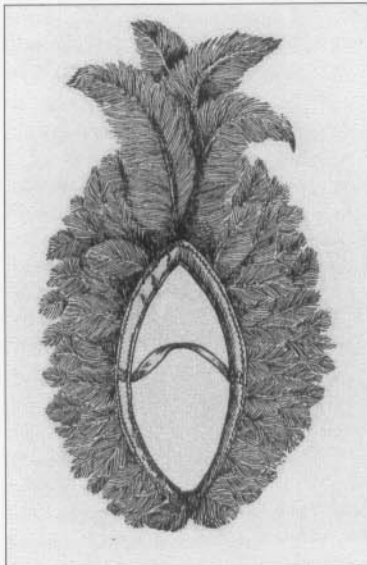
This plate reconstructs some of the participants in this battle, in which Carl Peters' German expedition inflicted heavy casualties on the Masai while extricating itself from hostile territory.

#### **B1: Somali askari**

This man is based on illustrations in Peters' account *New Light on Dark Africa*, and represents one of the elite corps of Somalis recruited for this expedition. He is dressed in a uniform similar to that issued to the askaris of the contemporary German East Africa Company (note the black, white and red tape trim on his white smock), and is armed with a breech-loading rifle. During his escape from Elbejet, Peters also improvised headgear for his porters out of red cloth in order to make them look like askaris and so increase the apparent strength of his force.

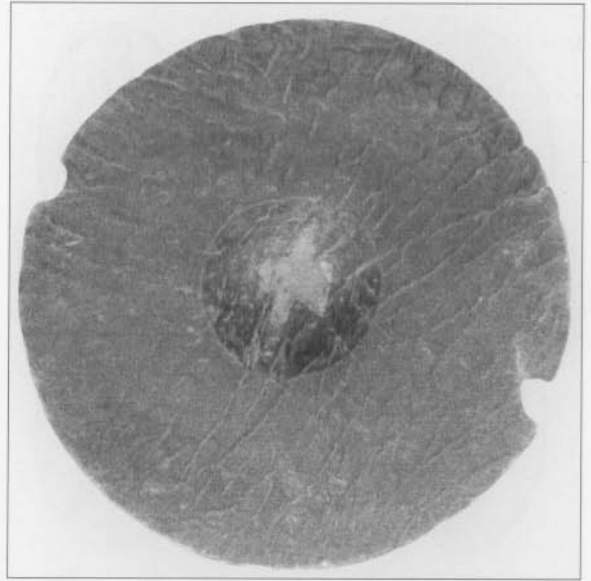
#### **B2: Masai elder**

This figure illustrates the appearance of those Masai men who were no longer part of the warrior class, and now fought only in defence of their homes and property. After graduating to elder status the members of each age-set were no longer



**Masai warrior's ostrich-feather headdress – see Plates A & B; and vulture-feather ruff, worn around the neck – see Plate A1. (After M.French-Sheldon)**

**Round shield with a central boss, probably of elephant hide.** This type of shield is usually associated with the Horn of Africa and the Sudan, but was introduced into East Africa by the Arabs and Somalis, and was carried by many of the Baluchis of Omani origin who fought for the Sultan of Zanzibar – see Plate A3. The diameter of this example is 22 inches. (Mark Copplestone)



subject to the rules which governed the *moran*, and were free to adopt whatever hairstyle, dress and ornaments they chose. The majority of the elders shaved their heads, and probably dressed like this figure, in blankets acquired by trade with the Arabs. Unlike the young warriors, elders frequently fought with bows.

**B3: Masai warrior**

Based mainly on a photograph taken in the 1890s by Ernest Gedge of the British East Africa Company, this figure illustrates a number of differences from the earlier figures on Plate A – notably the substitution of cloth for animal skins. Red cloth was available in fairly large quantities by the 1870s, when Arab caravans began to penetrate Masailand, and *moran* often swathed themselves in as much of this new material as they could get – though here, for war, it is limited to the usual tightly wound piece around the waist. This warrior's cloak or *naibere* is also made from trade cloth; these were almost invariably white with a red central stripe, as just visible here. The cape around his shoulders is made from the fur of the black and white Colobus monkey. The size of his shield is unusual but by no means unique; and his spear, reddened with ochre, is from an illustration by Thomson.

**C1: Gwangwara from southern Tanganyika**

This figure has been reconstructed mainly from a written account by Joseph Thomson. He wears a headdress made from the mane of a zebra, tied around the head so that it stands up in a fan shape. This headgear was characteristic of the tribes of southern Tanganyika, being also popular among the Gogo, Hehe, Sango and Nyamwezi. He wears Zulu-style white goat hair leg bands, and a cape made from the skin of a serval cat. Thomson describes some Ngoni as wearing a 'heap' of wildcat skins piled around their necks and hanging down their backs. The spear shown here is a conventional Zulu-style stabbing assegai.

**C: NGONI WARRIORS**

This plate shows representatives of three of the major sub-groups of the Ngoni, illustrating some of the wide range of variation in the appearance of their warriors. However, these groups were not always easily distinguishable from each other, and men resembling all of these figures might be found in any Ngoni war party.

**C2: Angoni from Nyasaland**

Based on a photograph in Harry Johnston's *British Central Africa* (1897), he wears the black cock's-feather headdress which was the commonest distinguishing feature of the Ngoni north of the Zambezi. The traditional Zulu head ring was sometimes worn by married men of Zwangendaba's generation, but had virtually disappeared by the 1880s. Round his neck is a fringe made of strips of leopard skin and red trade cloth; almost hidden here, wildcat skins might be

**Ruga-Ruga headdresses: (left) one of Mirambo's bodyguards, encountered by Stanley in 1876; (centre) a Nyamwezi, also by Stanley; (right) a porter sketched by Burton in the 1850s.**



attached round his waist; strips of monkey skin, plaited to look like cats' tails, were sometimes used instead, and Johnston adds that a strip of red cloth was commonly worn tied around the waist. This man's spear is described in the original source as a stabbing assegai, despite the plume on the shaft, which might seem to be more appropriate for a throwing weapon. Shields were made from bull hide, and like those of the Zulus usually retained the natural colouring of the animal. It is unlikely that the old Zulu system of distinguishing regiments by shield colour survived among the Ngoni, but some war parties did carry shields of more or less uniform colour – a photograph of around 1900 shows a group of about 20 warriors all of whom carry these all-black shields with white stitching.

### **C3: Tuta from northern Tanganyika**

Reconstructed from a description by H.M. Stanley, this man is naked apart from a string of beads around his neck, and a headdress consisting of fewer and longer feathers than the type worn by C2. He is armed with a crudely carved wooden knobkerrie. Some sources claim that the Tuta women carried bows and fought alongside their men; if so, their costume was probably no more elaborate than that of this figure.

## **D: THE HEHE**

### **D1: Chief**

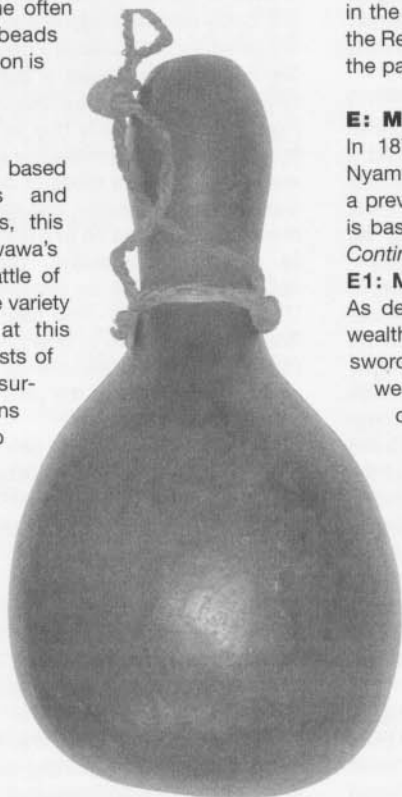
Eminent Hehe men wore a voluminous toga-like garment, the *mugolole*, as illustrated by this figure. This was basically a length of cotton cloth wound several times around the body, and could be very bulky. Mkwawa sometimes gave such *mugolole* to his warriors as a reward for performance in battle, but they were not a formal sign of military rank, and in fact were also worn by women.

Thomson says that the Hehe often wore 'pounds' of blue beads around their necks. His weapon is a flintlock trade musket.

### **D2: Wajinga spearman, c.1891**

A composite reconstruction based on German descriptions and illustrations from the 1890s, this man represents one of Mkwawa's *wajinga* regiments at the battle of the Rugaro River. A very wide variety of headgear was in use at this period; that worn here consists of a cock's-feather plume surrounded by a ring of pompons in alternating colours. Also popular was a Masai-style 'busby' made from either a lion's mane or an imitation mane made from the skin of a monkey or some other animal. The fur

**A gourd of the type used by the Ruga-Ruga and other gun-armed Africans for storing powder; length, 14 inches. (Mark Copplestone)**



apron shown here was almost universal by this time; in some illustrations it appears to consist of a single piece in the form of a short kilt extending half-way down the thigh, while in others it looks like an arrangement of small strips hanging from a belt – either as shown here, or extending all the way around the waist. The throwing spear no longer appears in accounts of the war against the Germans and may have largely gone out of use by this time, but broad-bladed stabbing spears were still widely used. Very large shields like that of D3 – some as tall as the bearer – were still in use alongside the smaller versions. It seems that in Mkwawa's day units could be distinguished by the colours or patterns on their shields, and at least one of the elite Hehe regiments in the wars of the 1890s carried plain white shields.

### **D3: Warrior, c.1880**

This figure is derived mainly from an illustration by the French traveller Revoil, dating from the early 1880s. Apart from his zebra-mane headdress he is naked. Verney Cameron describes a group of Hehe he met in 1873 as wearing 'very little clothing', many being entirely naked apart from the occasional string of beads around their necks or wrists. The spear is of a traditional type also used by the neighbouring Gogo. According to Cameron and Thomson, each man was equipped with a heavy spear for use as a thrusting weapon at close quarters, and between six and eight lighter javelins for throwing. These are not described in detail, but probably resembled the weapon carried by C2. Hehe shields were similar in shape to those of the Ngoni, from whom they are thought to have been copied originally, but varied widely in size. The warriors seen by Cameron carried huge bull-hide shields, up to 5ft tall by 3ft wide, with a piece of wood running down the centre as a stiffener and curved outwards in the middle to act as a handgrip. The face of the shield in the Revoil illustration is plain, though other sources show that the pattern of the original hide was often retained.

### **E: MIRAMBO'S RUGA-RUGA, 1876**

In 1876 H.M. Stanley had an interview with the famous Nyamwezi warlord Mirambo, against whom he had fought on a previous expedition while accompanying Arabs; this plate is based on the descriptions in Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent*.

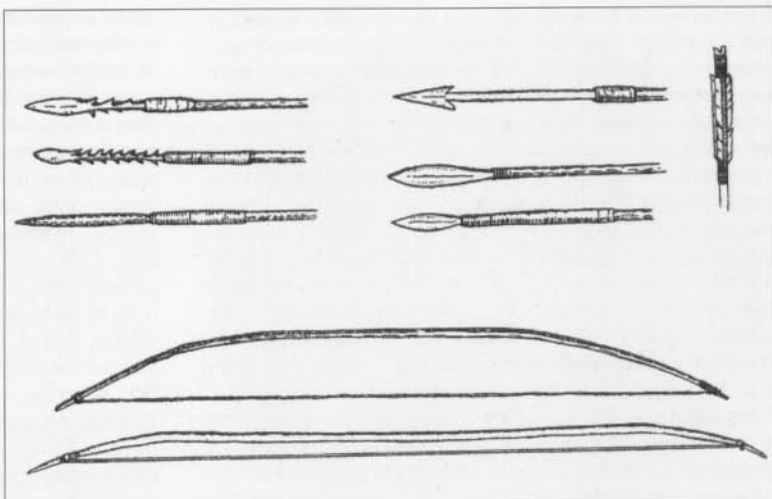
### **E1: Mirambo**

As described in Stanley's book, Mirambo is dressed as a wealthy Arab in a long embroidered coat and carries an Arab sword. According to Stanley's messenger Mabruki: 'He wears the turban, fez, and cloth coat of an Arab, and carries a scimitar. He also wears slippers, and his clothes under his coat are very white.' At that time Mirambo wore a beard, and must have closely resembled an Arab sheikh. A photograph and portrait from the early 1880s, however, show him clean-shaven and bareheaded, with this unruly shock of hair.

### **E2: Officer of Mirambo's army**

This man is wearing the Arab-style costume of Mirambo's personal bodyguard. Stanley describes three of the officers who visited him as 'handsomely dressed in fine red and blue cloth coats, and snowy white shirts, with ample turbans around their heads'. It is not clear whether he meant 'either red or blue coats', or whether each garment

Nandi bows and arrowheads, with (right) the method of fletching arrows. Hollis implies that only a minority of warriors carried bows, and while Lt Vandeleur writes of arrows being shot from ambush, his accounts of battles in the open refer only to spears. Early in the 20th century Richard Meinertzhagen persuaded some Nandi men to demonstrate the use of their missile weapons. He found that the maximum range of their bows was an impressive 134 yards, while the club or *rungu* could be thrown to half that distance, and the spear (the modern version, rather than the heavier and less well-balanced older type) to about 40 yards. (After Hollis)



was patterned in both colours. Mabruki reported that 'We have beheld the Ruga-Ruga, and there are many of them... About a hundred are clothed in crimson cloth and white shirts'. These descriptions do not quite amount to evidence for a uniform, but it is obvious that a section of Mirambo's army was distinguishable from other Ruga-Ruga by its fine dress, and that the predominant coat colours were red, and perhaps to a lesser extent blue. Turban colours are not given, but – assuming that they followed Arab fashion – they were probably mostly white, or blue-and-white checked. This man's weapon is a muzzle-loading 'three-band' Enfield percussion rifle, of which large numbers were imported into East Africa in the 1860s–70s. Other weapons which Stanley saw in use in 1871 included 'flint-lock muskets, German and French double barrels... and American Springfields'.

### E3: H.M. Stanley

This reconstruction of the famous explorer is derived from an illustration of his meeting with Livingstone in 1871, and a series of studio photographs taken about the same time. The cork sun helmet or 'solar topee' was a military fashion first seen in India, which began to appear in Africa during the 1870s. These helmets came in numerous styles, differing in the height of the crown and the width of the brim. Stanley is wearing a cloth *paggri* wrapped around his helmet; this was also an Indian-inspired fashion, which was popular with the British but was less often adopted by explorers from other European countries. In another portrait Stanley is shown with a Winchester repeater rather than this double-barrelled big-game rifle, of the class carried by most explorers. Unlike many of his contemporaries he was a firm believer in the necessity for two types of guns – a heavy one for hunting, and a lighter repeater for defence against hostile tribesmen.

### F: NYUNGU-YA-MAWE'S RUGA-RUGA, c.1880

This scene reconstructs three of the killers of the Englishman William Penrose and his party – an incident which became a *cause celebre*. The figures illustrate only a few examples of the wide range of Ruga-Ruga dress and equipment. The warrior **F1** wears a cock's-feather headdress of Ngoni type, as described by the French White Fathers who were attacked by Nyungu's men in 1878. The feathers might be left in their original black colour, but were probably more often

dyed red. Feathers could also be worn stuck or tied into turbans or other headgear (see **F3**). A necklace of human teeth hangs around **F1**'s neck. Like the belts made from human entrails, the caps made of the skin flayed from a dead enemy's face, and the other items of what was described as the 'ghastly finery' of the Ruga-Ruga, these were believed to possess magical powers to protect the wearer, apart from inspiring terror in the enemy. **F1** has ivory bracelets on his wrists; these, along with certain secret scars or tattoos, were originally the marks of elephant-hunters, which had come to be associated with the Ruga-Ruga. His weapon is a flintlock musket or *gumeh-gumeh*. Any combination of musket, bow and close-combat weapon might be carried. Ruga-Ruga did not generally carry shields – partly because they needed both hands to use their bows or guns, but partly because of the reliance they placed on protective magic.

Figure **F2**'s hairstyle is one of a wide variety of traditional Nyamwezi styles illustrated by Burton. Around his head he is wearing a *ngazia*, a piece of bright red cloth which had an important symbolic role, and may have been the closest that most Ruga-Ruga came to a uniform; they could also be worn as cloaks or loincloths. The warrior would taunt his opponents in battle by pointing to the cloth and shouting 'This is your blood!' This man's axe and dagger are both illustrated by Stanley in *How I Found Livingstone*. A favourite ploy to demoralize the enemy was to make a tremendous noise with drums and the bells which the Ruga-Ruga often wore around their ankles.

Another popular accessory among some groups was a coil of rope for tying up slaves, as carried by **F3**. This figure is based on a drawing by Johnston, and is armed with a large calibre elephant gun, probably acquired by trade or force from a European hunter.

### G: THE NANDI, 1895

This plate is based on a sketch and written account by Lt Vandeleur, whose company of Sudanese was attacked by a Nandi war party during the campaign of 1895.

### G1 & G2: Nandi warriors

During the second half of the 19th century Masai influence became increasingly strong among the Nandi. Individual warriors often copied elements of Masai war dress, such as



the ostrich-feather headdress worn by **G1**, white monkey fur anklets, horn or ivory armlets, bells on the thighs or ankles, white or coloured cloaks and vulture-feather capes – all of which would resemble those worn in Plates A and B. Nandi clothing was traditionally made from black goat skin. Men grew their hair long, and either dressed it in numerous small tags hanging over their foreheads, or plaited it into pigtails – usually one at the front and either one large one or three small ones behind. Richard Meinertzhagen, in his account of the 1905 campaign, mentions warriors wearing red and white body paint; note that **G1**'s face and body are smeared in both colours, divided down the centre. The favourite colour for trade beads among the Nandi was turquoise. Weapons were spears, swords and clubs – all very similar to Masai types – as well as bows and arrows. Note the long, triple-barbed arrows carried by **G2**; the Nandi had once been forest-dwelling hunters, and so had a long tradition of archery which persisted even after the adoption of Masai armament and tactics.

Shields were very similar in shape and construction to those of the Masai, although according to Vandeleur the ones he saw in 1895 were painted 'a dull red colour', and were not so 'finely ornamented' as the Masai ones. Several surviving photographs from the early 20th century portray shields in a single solid dark colour (probably red), while other sources suggest that bold but rather crude approximations of Masai patterns in white, red, black, grey or blue were equally popular.

### **G3: Sudanese askari in British service**

In 1891 several units of Sudanese soldiers were recruited into British service from the Egyptian garrisons which had been cut off in Central Africa by the Mahdist revolt. This man's red fez, blue jersey and white breeches were regulation dress, though by this time he and his fellows had not been properly resupplied for several years, and often took the field in a bizarre assortment of native garments and worn-out uniforms. His Martini Henry rifle is one of a consignment which arrived in 1895 to supplement the old Egyptian Army Remingtons.

## **H: THE TURKANA, 1885-1900**

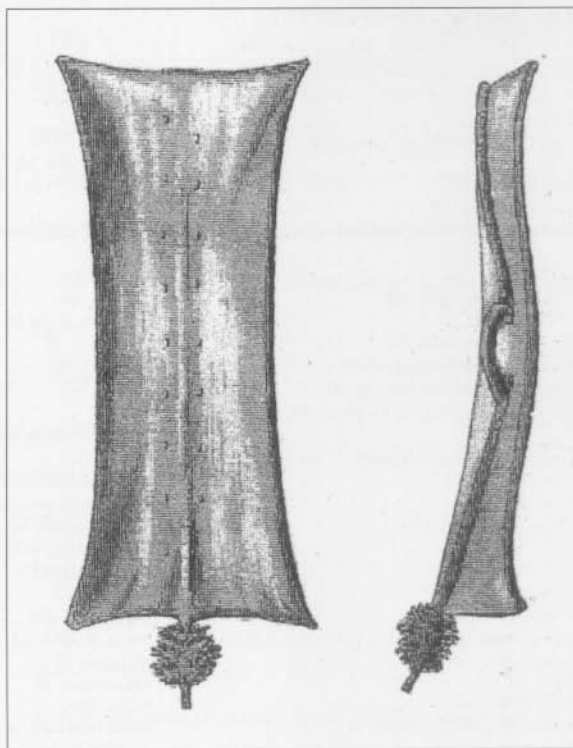
### **H1: Young warrior**

### **H2: Middle-aged warrior**

### **H3: Chief**

Drawings by Ludwig von Hohnel and Major Powell-Cotton, who visited the Turkana in 1888 and 1904 respectively, show a wide variety of hairstyles. The very young man illustrated as **H1**, drawn by von Hohnel, is distinguished by his cropped hair ornamented with short black feathers. He carries only a wooden club and a throwing stick or *aburo*.

The strikingly exotic warrior **H2** is based on another illustration by von Hohnel. He wears his hair in a distinctive 'bag' hanging down his back; this is formed from the man's own hair, deliberately woven into a dense mat, stiffened with grey clay and ornamented with feathers and pieces of bone and metal. This mat of hair could provide considerable protection against a blow from a wooden club. This man has a small brass pendant hanging from his nostrils, and a rod-shaped piece of the same metal protruding from his lower lip; a piece of glass or crystal might be used instead of the lip rod. He wears several iron earrings in each ear, and around his neck a series of iron rings which force him to hold



**Shield decorated with a tuft of ostrich plumes, of a type used by the Turkana, Suk, Karamojong and many other peoples of northern Kenya. (Von Hohnel)**

his chin high – and may have given casual observers a false impression of the warrior's height. Early explorers often described the Turkana as tall: 'men of prodigious size, many of them perfect giants in their build', according to Capt Welby, who visited them in 1899. Von Hohnel, however, describes them as muscular but not particularly tall. The Turkana did not use body paint; but note the massive decorative scarification of this warrior's right shoulder. Popular weapons were long spears, *akwara*; and note around his right wrist the *ararait* or quoit-like wrist-knife, its sharp outer edge with a protective leather cover.

The chief, **H3**, wears an elaborate cap with ostrich-feather plumes, and an entire leopard skin for a cloak. He is based mainly on a portrait painted in the 1950s by Joy Adamson, but 19th century witnesses confirm that similar costumes were being worn then – although leopard skins were harder to come by than they became after the introduction of firearms, and were often reserved as the insignia of high rank. A giraffe tail is fastened to his left arm with a length of rope. Coloured beads were not available until the mid-1880s, when the first Swahili traders brought them into Turkana country, but home-made iron and brass beads were used instead. At the time of Wellby's 1899 expedition the Turkana were eager for red, white and blue beads, but were not interested in other colours. Shields were made of unpainted buffalo hide. They were sometimes decorated with a tuft of black feathers attached to the bottom of the wooden central rib, although not all illustrations show these.

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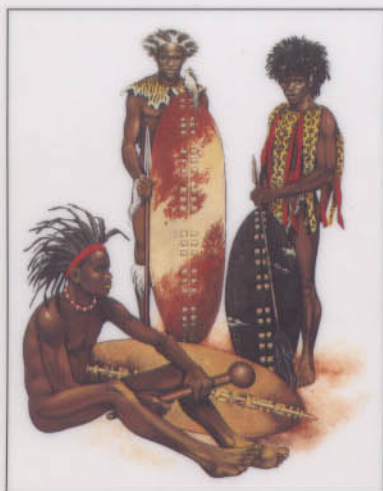
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