



Biography

The women soldiers of Dahomey

Elite troops of women soldiers, probably established in the early eighteenth century, contributed to the military power of the Kingdom of Dahomey in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Often recruited as teenagers, the women soldiers lived in the royal palace, isolated from society. Their lives were devoted to weapons training, fighting wars of conquest and protecting the King.



By the end of the nineteenth century, 4,000 women soldiers could be mobilized in the event of conflict. They were divided into different units, each with its own uniform, flag, battle songs and dances.



Seh-Dong-Hong-Beh, leader of the Dahomey Amazons. Drawing by Frederick Forbes, 1851.



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These fearsome women soldiers surpassed their male counterparts in courage and effectiveness in combat.

Women soldiers distinguished themselves on many occasions in the history of the Kingdom of Dahomey, particularly in the battles of Savi (1727), Abeokouta (1851 and 1864) and Ketu (1886), as well as during the two wars against the French, until the fall of Abomey in 1892. This final battle resulted in the dissolution of their army.

They were particularly formidable in close combat and participated in Dahomey's strategy of intimidation of its opponents.

