

History of songhai empire

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The Songhai Empire Alex Beffa Global History April 9, 2012 Beffa 3 The Songhai, also known as the Songhay, was not only the last, but also the largest and greatest empire of western Africa between 1000 and 1600 ce. i The previous empire was the Mali empire. Songhai was just a client state at the port of Gao, which was a major trading port for trans-Saharan trade especially since it is located on the Niger river. When the Mali empire started to decline in the 14 th century, the Songhai king declared independence. i The Songhai empire was the most thriving west African empire for many reasons but major ones are: the kings Sunni Ali and Muhammad Ture as well as the conquering of the city of Timbuktu. Sunni Ali became ruler in 1464. He did not waste any time waiting to begin expanding. Shortly after coming to power, he went to conquer the great trading port of Timbuktu from the Tuareg raiders. After Timbuktu was his, Sunni Ali's armies went south to the port of Jenne. In 1480, he attacked the Mossi states south of the Niger river. He had a strong military background which helped him become one of the best conquerers and leaders in African empire history until this point. His best asset was his naval skills which is mostly likely why he typically conquered ports along the Niger river. One of his major advancements was the the creation of a bureaucracy. This allowed the Songhai to be a more centralized empire than the previous empires of Ghana and Mali. To help get the Muslim support, Sunni Ali claimed to be a Muslim, though he never truly left the old traditional religions supposedly due to the belief that it was the source of his supernatural powers in battle.

In 1492, after a successful conquest, according to some oral traditions, Sunni Ali drowned while crossing the Niger river. Still others refuse to accept this

theory, insisting that he died in battle. His reign was from 1464-1492. When Sunni Ali died, one of his sons named Sunni Barou took over. iii Unfortunately, unlike his father, Sunni Barou did not claim to be Muslim but rather embraced the old tradition. This did not go over very well with the Muslim community in the empire. Not long after taking the throne, Sunni Barou was overthrown by a very faithful muslim named Muhammad Ture.

Born around 1440, he was a very ruthless Beffa 4 killer. He even went so far as to eliminate the rest of Sunni Ali's family members. As for his way of governing, the Islamic religion played a big role. He believed that the spread of Islam was very important for two reasons. One, he was a devout muslim and felt that everyone should be. And second, he saw Islam as a way to unify the empire. He organized his own bureaucracy with 10 provinces and an administrator for each. This allowed him to rule very effectively over a vast empire.

To lower chances of a rebellion, Muhammad Ture would not allow the kings of the conquered to keep their power but instead he would replace them with members of his own family. In 1495, Muhammad decided to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Unlike other rulers, he was able to leave for long periods of time due to how incredibly stable his government was. After his journey, he felt the need to expand the empire. When Sunni Ali had died, a good number of the states Sunni Ali had conquered had declared independence.

It was up to Muhammad to reassert the Songhai's control over these territories. He had no problem with going on an almost continuous military conquest for close to two decades. Like Sunni Ali, Muhammad Ture also

expanded the navy. After a military life like that, he was lucky to be around to experience old age. In 1528 Muhammad was so well aged that he had lost the drive to continue the conquests. Also he began to go blind, so his son Farimundyo Musa took over. Farimundyo Musa changed his name to Askia Musa which is where the Askia dynasty comes from.

Askia Musa was assassinated in 1531 by one of his brothers. Since Muhammad Ture was Islamic and education is a big part of Islam, Muhammad obviously supported education. The University of Timbuktu was one of the first universities in all of Africa. It attracted many scholars, mainly Islamic. Trade helped bring prosperity to the Songhai Empire as well as these other advances. iv Timbuktu was not only, a major trading spot, but also an educational capital. It had a big effect on the Songhai empire.

By conquering this major port early on in the Songhai empire's life, it established a sort of foundation. By controlling this port along with a few other key cities, they basically dominated the trans-Saharan trade. Timbuktu Beffa 3 was founded by nomads of the Tuareg in the early 12th century. In its early days, Timbuktu was thought to be inferior to other major trading ports for trans-Saharan trade such as the cities of Ghana or Walata because they were more impressive. It did not take long to change people's minds.

Timbuktu and its sister city Jenne, which was also soon conquered by the Songhai, were in much better position to the gold field than Walata. Another factor in the rise of timbuktu was the nomad arabs that had been raiding caravans along the western routes. In turn, more people had been taking the eastern routes through Timbuktu. Finally, probably the most significant reason timbuktu was such a major port, Timbuktu was on a point where

three major trans-Saharan routes went: the Mauritanian, Taghaza salt road, and the route to In Salah by way of Arawan. Two of the most important major imports and exports of the Songhai empire were salt and gold, but other items included slaves, ivory, cotton fabrics, grains, and ostrich feathers. vi To Timbuktu in particular, the major ones were gold, salt, slaves, and kola nuts. The salt came from the salt mines in the Sahara. The gold came from Bure, Bambuk, and Akan. The others, kola nuts and slaves were kinda of wide spread, coming from several places and in demand at many more. Naturally as a major trading port, Timbuktu had cultural diffusion.

Islamic ideas were passed around especially when Muhammad Ture was in power. vii In 1591 a Moroccan force overthrew the last king of the Songhai empire, thus ending the reign of the greatest western African empire between 1100 and 1600. viii They took the capital at Gao and then moved on to timbuktu. ix It would make sense that trade would be the Songhai's forte since when the Mali empire was still in power, the Songhai was a major trading spot at the city of Gao. And the big emphasis on having a great navy would also make sense considering they are located on the Niger river.

The major reasons for such an enormous and thriving empire were the well-organized government, combined with outstanding kings, and never having a financial crisis since they conquered cities like Timbuktu and Jenne right from the beginning. Beffa 4

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