

# The effect of the portuguese encounter on the songhai empire research papers exam...

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The Songhai Empire was a major force in the west territory for nearly a millennium. The Songhai Empire developed from a small kingdom that existed in the Gao region. Sonny Ali was the creator of the Empire and also the one who expanded the borders of the state. The welfare of the ancient Songhai Empire was based on customs fees with the caravan trade. The empire drove gold, copper, salt and slaves across the Sahara. Caravan routes transported ivory, kola nuts, ostrich feathers, leather and some luxuries. The Songhai Empire proved to be a very strong trading kingdom, known for its production of practical crafts and religious artifacts.

Main sources on the history of the Empire mainly come from the Arab world. Among them are the Arab chronicles " Tarikh al-fattash", " Tarikh es-Soudan" and " Tedzkiret en-Nisian". The book " Tarikh al-Akhbar fattash fi al-Buldan wa-l-dzhuyush on Akabira en-us" (" History of the crawler countries, armies and prominent people") was written in 1519 by the lawyer Mahmoud Kati and completed by his grandson in the middle of 17th century. The book contains the history of the Songhai state in 15th and 16th century, with a brief excursion into the preceding period.

In 1460, when the Europeans entered Africa, the continent was divided into a number of states and kingdoms. Legend says that the kingdom of Songhai was founded on the banks of the Niger by a Berber-Christian named al-Yaman. By 1200, the rulers moved to the Gao, upstream of the Niger, and converted to Islam. In 1325, the Songhai became a part of the Mali, after the capture of the Gao by a Muslim ruler Moussa. In 1464, the governor Ali made Mali a vassal of the Songhai state (Ohaegbulam, 1990).

Songhai became a rich and powerful nation, dominant in the West Africa.

Sonny Ali glorified himself with the violence and religious intolerance. In 1492, he drowned, and a new ruler Muhammad I founded a dynasty of rulers with the title of Askia. Under his power, the state got a fortune on the gold trade with the Arabs and the Portuguese. Askia patronized Muslim spiritual nobility of the Timbuktu that became a major cultural center. In 1529, Askia Mohammad I was deposed by his son, followed by a series of weak and corrupt rulers. The break-up of the Empire was accelerated by Moroccan invasion (Alexander & Rucker, 2010). The Songhai collapsed under the onslaught of the Moroccans in 1591. By that time, the Songhai was not the only country in Africa that was captured by the Moroccans (Ohaegbulam, 1990).

In 1415, the Portuguese took the fortress Ceuta on the African bank of the Gibraltar, and it was their first colony in Africa. The Portuguese invaded the country that traded with southern countries and received gold, ivory, spices and slaves. Numerous Arab and Maghreb merchants regularly visited Sudan, bringing out rare items. These goods, mainly gold, arrived to Europe.

Naturally, after capturing the Ceuta, the Portuguese have set out control over all trade with Sudan (Hunwick, 2003). Gold was one of the main reasons to motivate the Portuguese to the Africa colonization. In 1441, the first convoy with gold and slaves arrived to Portugal. The Portuguese sailors were constantly competing with the Castilians. On March 13, 1456, a new Pope, Calixtus III, published a new bull that granted all rights to the new discoveries in Africa to the Order of Jesus (Millar & Walker, 1999).

Later on, the Portuguese organized a new trading point, called Elmina. The major advantage of it was the location beside the area of Akan gold. Earlier,

the gold was transported to the Europe by Malian traders. Since the establishment of Elmina, the trade went directly to the Europeans. At this time, the Songhai Empire has survived a serious economic crisis. The Portuguese widely used the experience of the Arab navigators in the North Africa, improving maps and navigation tools. They have also learned the scientific achievements of the scientists and merchants from the Mallorca. In 1484, the Portuguese entered Benin, and have started a rapid trade with it. Portugal began to develop the slave trade, which gained a special prominence in the 16-17 centuries, when the export of slaves expanded to the West India, South America, and to Florida and Louisiana. Portuguese trading posts and forts covered all Africa's western and eastern coasts by the middle of the 16 century. Lots of trading posts were based in North and West Africa. Portuguese established trading posts in the former Arab-Swahili cities Kilwa, Mombasa, Lamu etc. In 1544, they built a factory at Quelimane. The Portuguese government conducted an aggressive, secretive and cautious policy in Africa. After discovering the path to India along the coast of Africa, the Portuguese sailors carefully concealed all the data about the expedition, and about all occupied territories. Lots of the Portuguese spies were collecting the information about the African countries - the size, the number of inhabitants and the army. The 16th century was the century of the greatest glory of the Portuguese Empire. At this time, other powers were experiencing severe wars, so they had no time to intervene in these events. The Portuguese trading points caused a major blow to the trans-Saharan trade in 15-16 centuries. This trade was conducted by Arab merchants and allowed the Portuguese ships and trading posts to take a significant part in it.

Large trade empires, like the Songhai Empire, lost the fight against trafficking in West Africa. The Elmina fort construction was the significantly strong stroke for the Arab trading. As a result of the hard Portuguese-Arab struggle, the Portuguese crushed Arab trade monopoly in the gold transportation area and took over their caravels for 100 years (1450-1550). During the reign of Manuel I, Elmina's gold was annually exported at the average of 170 thousand kilos.

Ambitions of the Moroccan sultan Ahmad al-Mansur seemed so obvious, that it was difficult for historians to explain the reason why the Songhai rulers were so indifferent to the political danger from the north. There are many factors that can explain this situation. One of the most plausible is the Sahara, as the Songhai kings, apparently, couldn't imagine that someone will send the army across the desert. Previous military defeats of Morocco reinforce this factor. It is very likely that the Songhai kings relied on the numerical superiority of their troops and knowledge of local conditions. They did not realize that with the firearms being used in the battle, the number of people with bows and arrows in the army began to lose its importance.

The main battle between the Moroccans and the Songhai army happened on the March 12, 1591 in Tandikondi-Boke, near Tondibi. The fight itself was short. Al-Mansur correctly assessed the effectiveness of firearms compared with bows, arrows and spears. The king and the army retreated, except for a small amount of the troops (suna) that consisted, according to the chronicle, of 99 people. They bound themselves to each other, and continued to shoot at enemies until they all collapsed under the attack of the Moroccans. The end of the empire is considered to be the fall of the last dynasty of its rulers.

With the help of his army of 3, 000 men, the Mansur Pasha of Morocco managed to beat the Nuh of the Songhai and take many prisoners while the Nuh was killed in battle. His death can be seen as the end of the Songhai resistance.

What effect did the Portuguese have on the Songhai Empire? Was this effect good or bad? All trading empires of the Northern Africa experienced major crisis from the Portuguese influence on the continent, and the Songhai Empire is not an exception. The empire survived the economic crisis that led to political problems and civil war. So the Portuguese effect on the Songhai Empire can be considered as negative.

## **Works Cited**

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