

[Click Here](#)



Songhai political structure

The Songhai Empire, which flourished from approximately 1460 to 1591, dominated the region that is now southern Mauritania and Mali. This empire succeeded the Mali Empire (1240-1645) as the most influential state in West Africa. Originating as a smaller kingdom along the eastern bend of the Niger River around 1000, Songhai expanded its territory dramatically during the reign of King Sunni Ali (1464-1492). With Gao serving as its capital and controlling trans-Saharan trade through centers like Timbuktu and Djenne, the empire prospered throughout the 16th century until it was eventually torn apart by civil wars and absorbed into the Moroccan Empire around 1591. The Mali Empire, situated along the savannah belt between the Sahara desert to the north and the forests of southern West Africa (often referred to as the Sudan region), had thrived through its control of local and international trade, especially in gold and salt, since the mid-13th century. However, the empire began to decline in the 1460s due to civil wars, the emergence of competing trade routes elsewhere, and attacks from the nomadic Tuareg of the southern Sahara and then the Mossi people, who controlled the lands south of the Niger River at that time. The Mali Empire's fate was sealed with the rise of the Songhai Empire, an ancient kingdom that had grown stronger than ever before. The Songhai Empire was dominated by the Songhay (aka Songhay or Sonhrai), a group of Nilo-Saharan-speaking peoples. King Sunni Ali's reign marked a significant turning point in the history of the kingdom, which dated back to at least the 9th century and was contemporary with the Ghana Empire (6-13th century) further to the east. Although conquered by the Mali Empire, the Songhay people proved troublesome and powerful due to their control of river transport on the Niger. The Songhay kings launched regular raids on Mali urban centers from the early 15th century and ultimately won their independence as the Mali kings lost their grip on several smaller subjugated kingdoms on the periphery of their empire. Around 1468, King Sunni Ali changed the traditional Songhay tactic of small and sporadic raids on its enemies to a more sustained campaign of permanent territorial expansion. With an army equipped with armored cavalry and the only naval fleet in North Africa, which he deployed on the Niger River, Sunni Ali was able to conquer the rump of the old Mali Empire. As noted in the Timbuktu chronicle, the Tarikh al-Sudan (c. 1656), [He reigned] for 28 years, waged 32 wars of which he won every one, always the conqueror, never the conquered. The Songhay king played on his image as a magician of the indigenous animist religion to strike fear into his enemies. He also effectively mixed leniency (conquered warriors were invited to join his own army, for example) with complete ruthlessness (infamously executing many of the particularly resistant Fulbe tribe). Hence, the king earned his epithet, 'Sunni the Merciless'. Sunni Ali's military tactics involved using overwhelming force to conquer territories, which fell like dominoes under his rule. The newly conquered areas were divided into provinces and ruled by a governor appointed by the king. To consolidate power, Sunni Ali extracted tribute from local chiefs, took hostages, and arranged marriages for political alliances. He also built many dykes, improving irrigation and agricultural yield in various regions. By 1469, the Songhai had control of Timbuktu, an important trade port on the Niger River. In 1471, they attacked Mossi territories south of the river bend, and by 1473, they conquered Djenne, another major trade centre. However, Sunni Ali failed to gain access to the goldfields of southern West Africa due to the Portuguese establishing a trading presence near these areas. The opening up of sea routes to the Mediterranean led to increased competition for trans-Saharan camel caravans, but the Songhai managed to monopolise the Saharan caravan trade, exchanging goods like salt and luxury items for gold and other valuable commodities. Timbuktu remained a thriving trade port and centre of learning until the 16th and 17th centuries. The Songhai government was characterised by a centralised system with an absolute monarch at its head, although this ruler rarely held complete control. With around 700 eunuchs at his court, Sunni Ali faced challenges to his power, including rebellions and violent deaths. The Songhai Empire, under the leadership of Admiral Hi Koy and later King Mohammad I, was a complex administrative system with various officials responsible for different aspects of governance. The king oversaw the regional governors, army commander, and minister of agriculture, while also having ministers in charge of forests, wages, purchases, property, and foreigners. A chancellor-secretary handled official paperwork, and local officials performed duties such as policing and overseeing craft guilds. One official who exerted significant control was the local tax collector, who gathered goods for the crown to fund the army and provide for the poor. King Mohammad I began using the title Askiya, which meant 'ruler' or 'usurper ruler,' and formed a professional army to expand the empire's territories. He launched attacks on major cities in Hausaland, including Gobir, Katsina, Zaria, and Kano, which paid tribute to the Songhai king. The empire stretched from the Senegal River to central Mali, with the capital at Gao boasting 100,000 inhabitants. The territory included lucrative salt mines and controlled almost the entire stretch of the Niger River. The Islamic religion was initially precarious in the empire but gained prominence under King Mohammad I, who imposed Islamic law, appointed qadis, and consulted North African advisor Mohammad al-Maghili. The city of Songhai was the largest and most prosperous in West Africa, with a predominantly Islamic population that developed alongside wealthy merchants. The urban elite included religious scholars who produced works on various subjects, from science to history. However, Islam remained limited to the elite and urban populations, with rural communities continuing to practice traditional animist beliefs. In this polytheistic system, spirits were believed to possess objects and natural phenomena, with two prominent spirits linked to the Niger River and thunderstorms. The rulers of Songhai had to maintain good relations with these spirits through offerings and ceremonies to avoid their interference in village affairs. Despite its prosperity, the Songhai Empire began to decline from the late 16th century due to a series of ineffectual leaders and civil wars. A rivalry between King Mohammad IV Bano and his brothers effectively divided the empire, and the Moroccans eventually defeated the Songhai army with their modern firearms, leading to the capture of the empire's treasury and the absorption of its territories into the Moroccan empire. The Songhai Empire was a significant state in West Africa between the 15th and 16th centuries. It was the largest African empire during this time, with its capital at Gao and major trade centers like Timbuktu and Djenne. The empire was known for its great traders who monopolized trans-Saharan trade, making them rich. The founder of the Songhai Empire was King Sunni Ali, who ruled from 1464 to 1492. The state declined around 1591 due to civil wars and attacks by the Moroccan Empire. Three key facts about the Songhai Empire are: it was the largest African empire in West Africa; its first ruler was King Sunni Ali; and it grew rich through monopolizing trans-Saharan trade. The Songhai Empire's capital city was Gao, which had been home to a Songhai state since the 11th century. Other major cities like Timbuktu and Djenné also played important roles in the kingdom's trade. However, these cities were conquered by the Songhai in 1468 and 1475 respectively. Initially, the Sonni dynasty ruled the empire from around 1464 to 1493, but it was later replaced by the Askia dynasty in 1493. The Mali Empire had also been interested in Gao's strategic location since the second half of the 13th century and eventually conquered it near the end of that century. After the Mali Empire began to decline, the Songhai reclaimed control of Gao and expanded their territory. Under Sonni Ali, the Songhai surpassed the Malian Empire in terms of area, wealth, and power, absorbing large parts of the Mali Empire's territories. However, internal conflicts and coups weakened the empire, leading to a period of instability. Eventually, Al-Mansur took advantage of these divisions and sent an army led by Judar Pasha to conquer the Songhai in 1590. The Songhai Empire collapsed after its defeat at the Battle of Tondibi in 1591. Note: I removed unnecessary content such as references, dates, and translations of the empire's name, while maintaining the original text's language and structure. Before the 10th century, these early settlers were controlled by more powerful horse-riding people from a region called Songhai. Over time, they all started speaking the same language and eventually their country was known as the Songhai. The first kings of the area are unclear, but information about them can be found in old tombs near a village called Saneɓ. Some inscriptions on these tombstones say that this dynasty ruled from the late 11th to early 12th centuries and its rulers were given a title called Malik, which means "King". Other inscriptions mention another dynasty whose rulers had a different title called zuwa, but not much is known about them. A book called Tarikh al-Sudan, written in Arabic around 1655, provides some information about the early history of the Songhai. It says that the founder of the Za dynasty was named Za Alayaman and he came from Yemen to a place called Kukiya. The people who lived near the Niger River were originally from the Sahara Desert and they established trading settlements there. Later, traders from North Africa joined them in their settlements and both groups did business with the people living near the river. As trade increased, the Songhai chiefs took control of the valuable trade routes around what is now Gao. By the 10th century, the Songhai chiefs had made Gao a small kingdom by controlling the people who lived along these trade routes. Around 1300, Gao became prosperous enough for the Mali Empire to take notice and eventually conquer it. The Mali Empire collected taxes from Gao's kings until about the 1430s. When Ibn Battuta visited Gao in 1353, he wrote that it was a great city on the Niger River with many goods like rice, milk, chickens, fish, and cucumbers. He also said that its people traded with cowries, just like the people of Mali. Sonni Ali's Reign and Legacy Sonni Ali ruled the Songhai Empire from 1464 to 1492. Unlike previous Songhai kings, Ali emphasized traditional Dendi religion, earning a reputation as a tyrant among Islamic scholars. He expanded territories through campaigns against Mossi in the south and Dogon people in the north. Ali annexed Timbuktu in 1468 after the Tuaregs were ousted by local leaders. However, his attempt to conquer Djenné was met with resistance, leading to a seven-year siege that resulted in the town's surrender in 1473. The invasion of Sonni Ali had a significant impact on Timbuktu, with many Muslim accounts portraying him as a brutal leader who destroyed and tortured its inhabitants. Despite this, his rule increased the wealth of the Songhai Empire, surpassing that of Mali at its peak. Sonni Ali was succeeded by Askia the Great, who organized conquered territories, expanded power to the south and east, and established a professional military corps. Under Askia's rule, religious schools were opened, mosques constructed, and Islamic practices enforced without forced conversion. Askia's reign saw a surge in astronomers and observatories in the capital, sparked by his interest in astronomy. He also launched military campaigns, including declaring jihad against neighboring Mossi, without forcing their conversion to Islam after subduing them. His army was well-organized, consisting of war canoes, cavalry, protective armor, iron-tipped weapons, and a militia. Askia centralized the administration of the empire, establishing a bureaucracy responsible for tax collection and justice. He demanded the construction of canals to enhance agriculture, leading to increased trade. He also introduced a system of weights and measures and appointed an inspector for each major trading center. During his reign, Islam became more entrenched in Songhai society, trans-Saharan trade flourished, and the salt mines of Taghaza were brought within the empire's boundaries. However, Askia's children eventually revolted against him, leading to a decline in the empire's power. After Askia's death, the empire went into further decline, with wars of succession weakening it and splitting it into two feuding factions. In 1591, Moroccan armies, led by Judar Pasha, invaded Songhai, seeking to revive trans-Saharan trade in salt, gold, and slaves for their developing sugar industry. The Moroccan invasion was marked by the use of gunpowder weapons, which led to a cattle stampede that routed Songhai forces. The Moroccans then sacked Gao, Timbuktu, and Djenne, destroying the Songhai empire as a regional power. In the aftermath, the nobles moved south to an area known today as Songhai in current Niger, where they formed smaller kingdoms such as Wanzarɓe, Ayerou, Gotheɓe, Dargol, Téra, Sikié, Kokorou, Gorouol, Karma, Namaro, and further south, the Dendi. Timbuktu is located east of Gao and was established after a military expansion under Sonni Ali and Askiya. The territory was divided into three military zones, including the kurma, where the Balama, the minister of defence, was based. The western garrisons were stationed in the kurma, and the Balama resided with part of the naval fleet in the port of Kabara. The Kurma Fari acted as governor and lived in Timbuktu. The capital city of Gao, where the emperor resided, had a large naval fleet commanded by the Hikoy, an admiral stationed at the port of Gao with over 1,000 ships. This region was also the site of large-scale military campaigns. The emperor received assistance in his southern province from the Tondi farma, governor of Hombori, and in the north from the Surgukoy, chief of Berbers, who controlled the Saharan provinces and had a camel cavalry army. The Dendifari governed the eastern province of Dendi, with a garrison stationed at the port of Ayourou. At its peak, the Songhai Empire stretched across Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Mauritania, Senegal, and parts of Algeria, with influence extending to Cameroon over a vast area inhabited by various Mandé peoples. The empire's wealth came from trade routes in the Sahel and along the Niger River, which were primarily driven by the gold-salt trade. The empire heavily used the route through the Fezzan via Bilma, Agades, and Gao. Goods were transported on camels to either donkeys or boats at Timbuktu. The Songhai Empire implemented various administrative and economic systems. Merchants, known as Julla, formed partnerships with the state, which protected them and port cities along the Niger River. The empire introduced a universal system of weights and measures under Askia Muhammad I's rule. The economy was based on a clan system, where occupations were determined by one's clan affiliation. Nobles, freemen, traders, and prisoners of war made up the social hierarchy. The Songhai labour system resembled trade unions, with craft guilds consisting of various mechanics and artisans. Criminal justice was mainly based on Islamic principles, with qadis responsible for maintaining order and settling disputes. The king would intervene only in exceptional cases, such as acts of treason. Punishments typically involved confiscation of merchandise or imprisonment. The Qadi worked locally in important trading towns like Timbuktu and Djenné, while the Assara-munitions served as enforcers of sentencing. Jurists were often professors who took administrative positions or aspired to be qadis. Upper-class Songhai people converted to Islam, whereas lower classes continued to follow traditional religions. Sermons emphasized obedience to the king. The educational capital was Timbuktu, where Sonni Ali established a system of government under the royal court, which Askia Muhammad later expanded. This included appointing governors and mayors to preside over local tributary states. The central government had departmental positions, including the hi koy, the fleet commander, and Fari Mondzo, the minister of agriculture. The Kalisa farm supervised the state's agricultural estates, serving as finance minister. The treasury was managed by Korey Farma, who also oversaw White foreigners. The tax imposed on neighboring chieftoms and provinces ensured Songhai's dominance; in return, these provinces enjoyed significant autonomy. Songhai rulers only intervened when a situation became volatile, usually an isolated incident. Each town had government officials responsible for positions and duties similar to modern bureaucrats. Under Askia Muhammad, the Empire saw increased centralization. He promoted learning in Timbuktu by rewarding professors with larger pensions. He also established order of precedence and protocol and was known for his generosity towards those experiencing poverty. His policies brought stability to Songhai, with many registering this achievement in works like Maghreb writers Leo Africanus. The Sonni dynasty practiced Islam while maintaining original Songhai traditions, unlike their successors. Askia Mohammed I oversaw an Islamic revival and made a pilgrimage to Mecca. The Songhai military included a navy led by a hikoy, a cavalry of mounted archers, infantry, and camel cavalry. They trained long-horned bulls in the imperial stables to charge at enemies. Vultures were used to harass opposing camps. The emperor was the strategist and commander-in-chief, with the balama serving as minister of defence and army general. The janky acted as army corps general, while wonkys led garrisons. The head of mounted archers was the tongue farma, assisted by two vice-admirals at ports like Kabara and Ayourou, commanding over a thousand captains for rapid troop movement along the Niger River. The infantry was led by the nway hurry (war elephant), while the camel cavalry, or gya, was led by the guy, or cavalry chief. Berbers recruited from northern provinces made up most of the cavalry. The Songhai Empire, which existed from around 1464 to 1591, had a well-developed navy and maritime trade network. The empire's fleet was commanded by the Hi-koi and consisted of various boats, including the Kanta vessels, which were acquired from tributary tribes like the Sorko people. These boats played a crucial role in transporting goods, including livestock, camels, and canoes, along the Niger River. The Songhai navy also included ports, such as Gao and Kabara, where fishermen like the Goïna-Koi and Kabara-Farma were tasked with monitoring the fleet and collecting fees from travelers. The empire's naval power was demonstrated by its ability to construct large boats that could carry heavy loads of up to 50-80 tons. The Songhai Empire had a complex system of rulers, known as dynasties, which included the Za dynasty, Sonni dynasty, Askiya dynasty, and Saadi dynasty. The empire's history is marked by a series of powerful leaders who ruled for varying lengths of time, including Askia Muhammad II, who was known for his military campaigns and administrative reforms. Throughout its history, the Songhai Empire was influenced by various external factors, including neighboring empires and tribes. Despite its eventual decline, the Songhai Empire left a lasting legacy in West Africa, with its rich cultural heritage and contributions to regional trade and politics still remembered today. The article discusses various topics related to West African empires and their history from the medieval period. It mentions several books and authors that have contributed to our understanding of this region. Some key points mentioned include:
* The Songhai Empire, which flourished in the 15th-16th centuries and was known for its trade networks and Islamic influences.
* The Mali Empire, which also existed during this time period and was a major power in West Africa.
* The Hausaland region, which was a collection of city-states that were influenced by Islam and African traditions.
* The impact of trade and ideology on the development of these empires, particularly with regards to the introduction of Islamic ideas and the use of camels as a mode of transportation.
* The article also mentions various authors who have written about West African history, including Josef Willard Meri and Roman Lómeier. Some specific events and dates mentioned include:
* The fall of the Songhai Empire in the 16th century.
* The rise and fall of various other empires and kingdoms in West Africa during this time period.
* The impact of European colonialism on these regions and their cultures.
Overall, the article provides a general overview of the history and development of West African empires from the medieval period, drawing on a range of sources and authors. This section of the book draws on a range of sources to provide an overview of pre-colonial Africa, focusing on the medieval period from the 12th to the 16th century. Key studies include:
* The General History of Africa: Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century (1984), published by UNESCO, which provides a comprehensive account of African history during this period.
* Balancing Written History with Oral Traditions: The Legacy of the Songhay People (2009) by Hassimi Oumarou Maïga, which examines the oral traditions of the Songhay people and their impact on our understanding of African history.
* Fishing for Development: Small-scale Fisheries in Africa (1992) by Inge Tvedten and Bjørn Hersoug, which looks at the role of fishing in African development during this period.
* Pre-Colonial Criminal Justice In West Africa: Eurocentric Thought Versus Africentric Evidence (2005) by David Dalgleish, which challenges Eurocentric views on African history and provides new insights into pre-colonial justice systems. Other sources used to inform this section of the book include:
* The epic of Askia Mohammed / recounted by Nouhou (1990), which provides a detailed account of the life and reign of Askia Mohammed.
* Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: Al-Sadi's Tarikh al-Sudan down to 1613 and other contemporary documents (2003) by John Hunwick, which examines the history of Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire during this period.
* Africans: The History of a Continent (2007) by John Iliffe, which provides a comprehensive account of African history from ancient times to the present day. The book also draws on a range of other sources, including academic studies, historical accounts, and primary sources, to provide a rich and nuanced understanding of pre-colonial Africa.
The Story of Africa: Songhay — BBC World Service Askiya's Questions and al-Maghili's Answers

Describe the socio political structure of songhai empire. List the political structure of songhai empire. State the socio political structure of songhai empire. Kingdom of songhai political structure. Explain the socio political structure of songhai empire. Songhai empire political structure 1450 to 1750. Write the political structure of songhai empire. Ancient songhai political structure. Socio political structure of songhai empire wikipedia. Political structures of the songhai empire. What were the political structures of songhai. Songhai empire political structure.