



# Songhai Empire

By David wu

# Songhai Empire

- Songhai people found Gao around 1800
- Gao broke free from Mali Empire in 1375
- Empire lasted from 1401-1600
- Centered around the Niger River and extends west to the Atlantic Ocean and east into Niger



# How do we know about the Songhai Empire?

Knowledge of the Songhai Empire comes from 3 sources

- **Griot Storytellers**
  - West African storytellers who pass down oral traditions. Hold high leadership roles in community. Mixes history with myth
- **Timbuktu Scribes**
  - The islamic scribes of Timbuktu wrote historical records under supervision from the king





# Travellers to Songhai

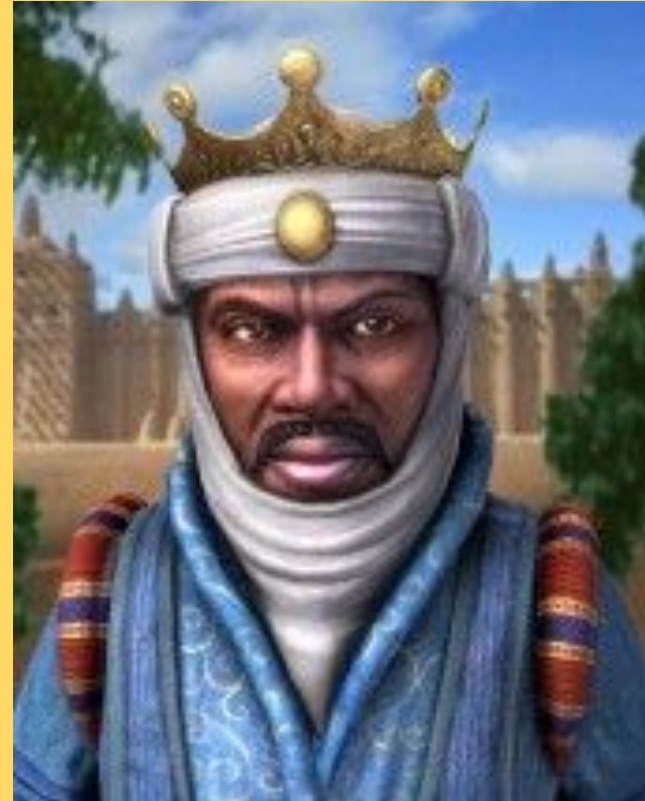
- Ibn Battuta and Leo Africanus
  - Ibn Battuta is one of the world's greatest travellers, travelling twice as much as Marco Polo. He visited Gao in one of his trips
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  - Leo Africanus was an Islamic scholar. He travelled the world and wrote *Descrittione dell'Africa* (1550; *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, 1600)



Picture of Ibn Battuta, A man who's travelled more than Marco Polo

# Sunni Ali (1464 to 1492)

- Powerful undefeated Military Leader
- Greatly expanded the Songhai empire.
- Took over Timbuktu, Djenne, and various other cities
- Very strong Navy force and strong cavalry with horse breeding
- Extreme distrust of scholars and elites. Would order the death of his own soldiers during temper tantrums



## Sunni Ali (cont.)

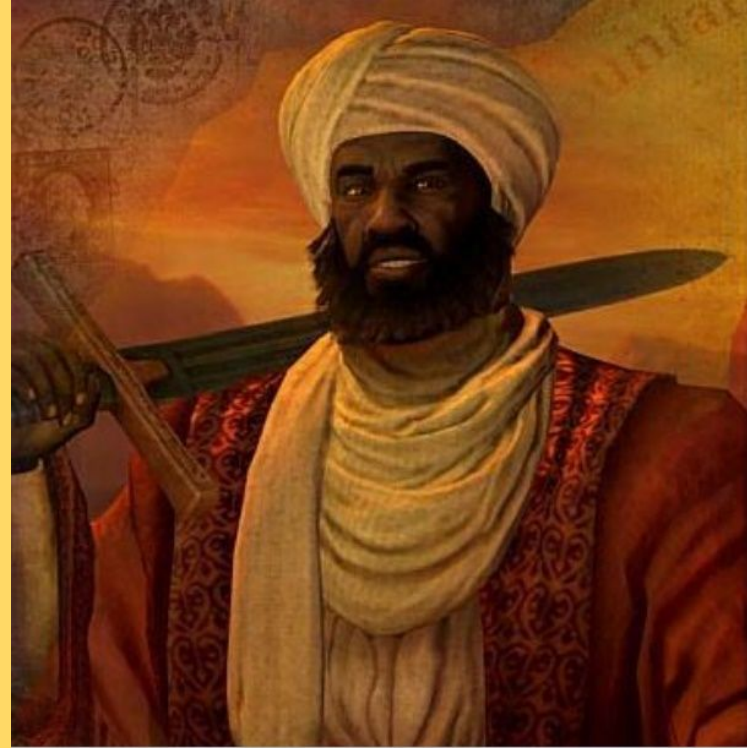
Sunni Ali is a very controversial character.

- Griots sang of his greatness in expanding the empire and lowering taxes.  
View as a mystical powerful king
- The Great Chronicles of Timbuktu, a different source, called Sunni Ali various horrific names. “Ali the Godless”, “The Arrogant One”, “The Notorious Evildoer”
- Upon taking over Timbuktu, Sunni Ali ordered all muslims scholars to leave. The ones that remained were murdered.

# Askia Muhammad Toure

Another important leader of the Songhai Dynasty

- Continue to expand the Songhai Empire by announcing Jihad against enemies
- Allowed muslims to return to the cities of Gao, Djenne, and Timbuktu
- Askia established standardized trade measures and regulations
- Diplomatic relations with Timbuktu's scholars



## Askia (cont.)

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- Created a Centralized Bureaucracy
  - Governors managing 5 provinces
  - 24 clans providing various goods and services to Toure, such as bodyguards, slaves, crops, dried fishes, spears, boat rides and arrow tips
  - Increase in tax collectors for more revenue



# Gao

Gao is the capital of Songhai

- Economic Center of Songhai
- Gold is the main currency, cowry shell for smaller trades
- Gold, ivory, nuts, palm oil, precious woods, and slaves were traded for mediterranean goods like salt, textiles, weapons, horses, and copper.
- Al-Kati, a west African Scholar, called Gao an artisan' paradise, with goldsmiths, potters, leatherworkers, and weavers bring fortune to the Songhai empire.



# Jenne

- Leading Medical Center of West Africa
- They removed cataracts from human eyes, discovered mosquitos caused malaria, and told wives to have babies three years apart to ease child birthing
- Traded crops of rice, millet, fish, cattle and cotton



# Timbuktu

- Scholarly Capital of Africa
- Timbuktu flourished from the trade in salt, gold, ivory, and slaves
- the town's numerous Islamic scholar and extensive trading network supported an important book trade



## Citations

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