

WEEEK 7 & 8

TOPIC: THE SONGHAI EMPIRE

HISTORY OF SONGHAI EMPIRE

Songhai Empire was the largest and last of the three major pre-colonial Empires to emerge in west Africa. In ancient times, there were several groups of people that collectively formed the Songhai nation. They include, the **sorko people** who settles in the reign of **Gao** and establish small settlements on the banks of the Niger River. The sorko people were boats and canoe builders. The next set was the **Gow** people who were hunters. Third group were the **DO people** who were mainly farmers. All these groups of people gradually began to speak same language and they eventually became Songhai people.

Before the people of Songhai settled in Gao ,it is believed that their original home was around Dendi and Bassa they later migrated to Gao from the above places when they discovered that Gao was an important cross roads in west Africa at about the 7th century AD. The Songhai Empire lasted from 1464 to 1591

According to oral tradition, Kossi took Gao from the sorko and established the Songhai empire, Also many historians had the opinion that Songhai had its organization beginning in the region of Dendi and that her civilization as it was in Ghana and Mali Empires

At the peak of the Songhai Empire, it was located in the west Africa, south of the Sahara desert and along the Niger river. It stretched from its capital Gao on the Niger river to Atlantic coast towards modern day Niger and Nigeria.

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF THE SONGHAI EMPIRE

At the top of the system, we have the emperor and his family, surrounded by wealthy, political and knowledgeable individuals. Common citizens and slaves at the lower end of the structure also contributed.

- Ruler (Emperor)
- Elite(political advisers, ministers, governors)
- Common citizens (intellectuals,artisans,educators, religious leaders)
- Slaves.

FACTORS FOR THE RISE OF SONGHAI EMPIRE

1. Geographical factor: the Songhai people along the middle region of river Niger. The river therefore served as a means of transportation and communication between cities and helped military expansion. The fertile bank of the river also provided agricultural wealth to the people.
2. Political factors: the role of prominent leaders like Sonni Ali and Askia Mohammed Toure led to the rise of the empire these leaders expanded the territory, conquered the whole kingdom of Mali and other surrounding lands.
3. Religious factors: Islam religion was practiced in Songhai. Sharia laws and the Muslim Quran were followed. This brought about peace, unity and togetherness.
4. Economic factor: economically, Gao attracted Muslim business men and scholars and became the most important commercial center for trans-Sahara trade. Gold and salt in addition to taxes, became a source of wealth and facilitated the rise of the empire.

FACTORS FOR THE FALL OF SONGHAI EMPIRE

1. The situation in Songhai became worst after the death of Askia Mohammed I in 1528 when the empire lost its stability owing to the rebellion put forward by the eldest son Askia.
2. lack of good leadership, ineffective central government and the revolts by vassal states led to the weakness of Songhai army.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Briefly explain the early history of Songhai before the reign of sonni Ali
2. Mention three factors that led to the rise of Songhai Empire