

government. The event that led to the revolt was the adoption by the National Assembly of a proposal to reduce the salaries and perquisites of the civil servants, most of whom lived in Ouagadougou. The introduction of austerity measures was the result of a decline in external aid, particularly from France, and the heavy strain of paying the salaries of civil servants and temporary technical personnel. A nationwide strike protest was organized by the labor union. On January 3, 1966, the government declared a state of emergency, but protests and the workers' strike continued. The people insisted that the president, Maurice Yemeogo, must go and that the army should take over power. Finally, Colonel Aboubakar Sangoulé Lamizana, the army chief of staff, announced to the crowd that the army "has assumed its responsibilities." The people of Ouagadougou had brought down the government of the republic through bloodless mass uprising.

Instability and unrest continued to mark much of the history of Upper Volta. In 1983 Captain Thomas Sankara, a member of the army, became president and introduced widespread reforms such as literacy and gender equality. Also, Sankara changed the name of the country from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso in 1984. Sankara was assassinated in 1987, and Blaise Compaoré, also a member of the military, became president. Unrest continued throughout Compaoré's administration both for economic issues and his attempt to extend his 27 years of rule. In October 2014, thousands of protestors gathered in Ouagadougou to demand that Compaoré resign the presidency. He consequently gave in to the pressure and resigned as president of Burkina Faso on October 31, 2014.

Aribidesi Usman

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Oyo (Old Oyo)

The Old Oyo Empire, located north of the modern-day town of Oyo in southwestern Nigeria, rose to prominence in the 17th century and reached its peak in the 18th century. When the empire finally collapsed in 1835, it was territorially the largest and the most politically powerful Yoruba kingdom ever. Scholars do not agree on the extent of the size of the Old Oyo Empire. However, what is certain is that at the height of its power in the 18th century, the eastern end of the empire extended from the coast near Badagry northward along the western boundary of Ijebu territories,

The Oyo Crisis of 1954

From the early 1950s, administrative reforms at the local government level across Nigeria introduced new conflicts between and among different classes of elites, political parties, and the colonial government. In Oyo, local government reforms by the Action Group, the ruling political party in the Western Region, and the central Nigerian government drastically curtailed the power of the *alaafin* (king), Adeniran Adeyemi II, who had previously amassed enormous political and economic resources under the indirect rule system that flourished until the early 1950s. The new reforms prevented Adeyemi from collecting taxes, introduced new levies, and elected councilors, who vied for political power with the king. In response to the unfavorable actions of the ruling party, the king allied with the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, the opposition party in the Western Region. The uneasy situation between the Action Group and Adeyemi led to serious violence, culminating in the exile of Adeyemi in 1954.

covering such places as Apomu, Osogbo, and Ede. Oyo was bounded in the north by the Niger and Moshi Rivers. Oyo's western and southern borders reached Dahomey in the present-day Republic of Benin, and its capital was approximately 40 miles northwest of Ilorin. The oval-shaped town wall built for the defense of the capital was about 15 miles in circumference and about 4 miles in diameter one way and 6 miles in diameter the other way. The palace of the empire itself was protected by a 1-square-mile wall.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Oyo civilization was its elaborate political institution centered on the monarchical system of government headed by the king (*alaafin*). In theory, the *alaafin* was an absolute and divine king. He was the second-in-command or deputy of the gods who could do as he wished—thus the praise name *iku baba yeye, alase ekeji orisa* (the almighty, the ruler and companion of the gods). However, his power was regulated by a council of chiefs called the Oyo Mesi, composed of the eight most senior chiefs in the capital city. Headed by the *basorun*, the Oyo Mesi advised the king on domestic and foreign economic and political matters. They were required to assemble at the palace on the first day of every Yoruba week, which consisted of only four days. This weekly meeting also allowed the *alaafin* and the Oyo Mesi to collectively worship Sango (the Yoruba god of thunder), one of the empire's most important gods. Thus, like many Yoruba societies, rituals and spirituality fused with politics. In all senses, Oyo was a theocratic society. In the advent of interpersonal or popular conflict, the Oyo Mesi also had the power to compel the king to commit suicide by uttering the statement “The gods reject you, the people reject you, earth rejects you.” Another group of highly important title holders (*omo obas*) moderated relations between the *alaafin* and the Oyo Mesi, ensuring that divisive political opinions did not degenerate into a massive crisis that could threaten public peace and the political process. But on several occasions, this group could not successfully resolve conflict between the *alaafin* and the Oyo Mesi. For instance, all the *alaafins* who reigned between circa 1658 and 1754

were compelled to commit suicide by the Oyo Mesi. Popular Yoruba history and oral tradition established that this unusual situation was made possible by the autocracy of a particular *basorun* called Gaa.

The effective governance of provincial towns was central to the preservation of the power of the king and the stability of the region. There were two main types of provincial towns, namely royal towns and ordinary towns. The royal towns were administered by princes from the ruling house in the metropolis of Oyo, who were given the title of king (*oba*) and the opportunity to wear a crown and build their palace to resemble that of the metropolis. The ordinary towns, however, had loose or distant relations with the Oyo metropolis. Their head (*baale*) was of a lower status than the *oba*; a *baale* could not build his palace to resemble that of the Oyo capital or wear a crown, even though his function was exactly that of the *oba*. In short, the symbolisms of power and authority between the Oyo metropolis and the provincial towns (both the royal and ordinary) were meant to define social status, which also influenced social privilege among communities and peoples. To ensure that provincial towns continued to respect the sacred power of the metropolis, the appointment of their rulers was usually ratified by the *alaaḡin*. Provincial towns were also required to send representatives to the Oyo metropolis during important festivals. Similarly, the *alaaḡin* would appoint a local representative (*ajele*) to monitor and oversee the affairs of provincial towns in order to maintain his interest.

Information about Oyo's economic activities is scanty, but like other Yoruba towns, historians generally agree that the people practiced agriculture to produce food to feed the ever-expanding population. Craft work and ironworking were vital domestic industries that supplied the materials needed for diverse social, economic, and aesthetic purposes. Like many West African states of the 18th century, the Oyo Empire also engaged in the transatlantic slave trade. Its sources of slaves included captives of wars of military expansion.

A combination of internal and external factors was responsible for the decline of Oyo after the death of King Abiodun in 1789. One notable external factor was the increasing power of its provincial and vassals states, which began to break away because the central government could not effectively administer the expanding empire. Provincial chiefs and warriors who were required to respect the order of the *alaaḡin* began to carve out part of the empire for themselves. The most consequential of these secessionist projects was that of Ilorin under Are Ona Kakanfo Afonja, the highest-ranked of the military chiefs. After carving Ilorin for himself, Afonja invited the Hausa-Fulani jihadist from the north to help populate his new territory. With time the Muslim jihadist, inspired by the teachings of Usman dan Fodio, a respected Islamic scholar based in Sokoto, the capital of the Islamic caliphate that covered much of present-day northern Nigeria, took over the town from him and launched an onslaught on the Oyo capital. The final end to a once glorious Yoruba empire came around 1835 in the Eleduwe War, when the capital of Oyo fell to the jihadist. It was completely sacked, with the entire population dispersed over other Yoruba territories. Historians of Yoruba agree that the collapse of the Old Oyo Empire left a political vacuum in the region and paved the way for a series of wars and revolutions that did not come to an end until

the last decade of the 19th century, when the British imposed colonial rule on much of Yorubaland.

Saheed Aderinto

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Songhai

The ancient Songhai Empire had its base in the neighborhood of present-day Mali, precisely the city of Gao in the heart of the Sahara desert. The desert of the Sahara in West Africa is the largest in the world, covering about 3.5 million square miles (9.065 million square kilometers). The open nature of the area encouraged a thriving trade across the Sahara, which significantly increased contact between the people of West Africa and Muslim North Africa. Many caravans moved in and out of trade centers across the desert, with high volumes of goods and services exchanged between the Arab traders and people of the West African region. Indeed, the availability of some trade articles, such as gold, salt, and slaves, made trans-Saharan trade a major factor in the socioeconomic and political development of the precolonial West African kingdoms. The scheming to hold on to or secure control of the lucrative trade across the Sahara, especially at the various trade centers, became the essential preoccupation of existing and emerging kingdoms in Sudan. Hence, the various African kingdoms scrambled to dominate and rule over the trading centers within their environs and harness their territorial hegemony through wars and conquests.

The Songhai Empire occupied the whole of the Niger River Bend. The empire shared boundaries with Tripoli in the north, Timbuktu in the west, Kumbi Saleh to the south, and Lake Chad to the east. The Songhai Empire was thus located in the northern plains of the Sahara. It has a hot temperature with swirling winds and shifting sand dunes. The people engaged in fishing and trading activities. Hans Vischer, an explorer, described the Saharan route connecting the West African region to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea as a "death road." This covers more than 1,500 miles, representing 2,414 square kilometers of the Sahara. The desert therefore represents the domain of the Songhai Empire, which succeeded the ancient Ghana and Mali Empires. Essentially, Songhais were predominantly nomads and traders depending on trade routes and finding oases for living.

In the region of the Sahara desert where Songhai was located, there were animals such as donkeys, horses, and camels, which aided the sociopolitical and economic activities of the people. Initially, Berber traders from North Africa carried goods on donkeys and horses in the hot climate, which often killed them. Consequently, the use of camels, also nicknamed "ships of the desert," was introduced by the Romans to revolutionize the trans-Saharan trade between North and West Africa. Some records stated that the caravans to cross the desert going to and

from West Africa used about 12,000 camels. Indeed, the location of the Songhai Empire close to the Niger River and the Mediterranean Sea created an enabling environment for the caravans and the camels to thrive.

The Songhai Empire was the largest empire and became the last of the three major empires in West Africa. The empire existed from circa 1375 to 1591. It was one of the largest Muslim-populated empires in history. The rise of Songhai was due to the decline of the Mali Empire after the death of its last and strongest king, Mansa Musa, in 1337. The decline was traced to the period when Emperor Mansa Musa embarked on an extravagant pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca. The king also failed to stop the invasion of Berber conquerors, who ruled Timbuktu for some time. Subsequently, Sunni Ali in 1468 became the leader of Songhai, invaded Timbuktu, and conquered the Berbers. He began a campaign of conquest and established the capital of the empire at Gao on the Niger River.

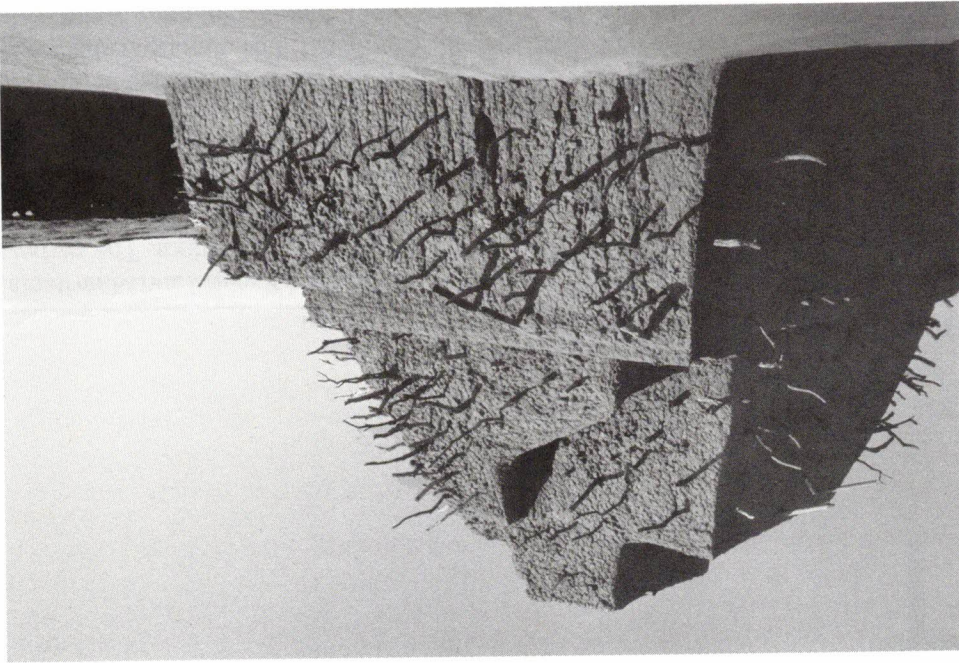
Sunni Ali made use of the Songhai location along the Niger River maximally to his advantage. He ordered a fleet of war canoes to seize control of the river trade. His troops moved inward to the Sahara, where they eventually overtook the Berber salt mines. Songhai became the largest empire in West Africa during his reign. Shortly after the death of Sunni Ali in 1492, his son Sunni Baru, who reigned for 14 months, was conquered in a battle and deposed by a powerful rebel known as Mohammed Ture, who became Askia the Great.

The empire reached its peak during Askia's reign (1493–1528). The merchant caravans from North Africa came to trade goods such as salt, cloth, and horses for gold and slaves. In Songhai at this time, the market cities witnessed more wealth and importance. The empire entered a new stage in its political life. Most of the leaders in the towns were Muslims by this time, and Islam began to make progress among the people of Songhai and other parts of the region. Although Askia ruled strictly as a Muslim, many traditional customs and practices were still observed at his court. Moreover, he developed the political administration and built up a machination of central government beyond Sunni Ali's system and even stronger and more detailed than other empires in western Sudan.

Songhai, having existed for almost two centuries, in 1591 was stormed by armies from Morocco in North Africa who then crossed the entire Sahara. The Arab kingdom soldiers came with more sophisticated weapons, which include cannons, guns, and gunpowder, that were used against and cut down the armies of Songhai soldiers, who were armed with swords, spears, and bows and arrows. Moroccan soldiers eventually destroyed and conquered the Songhai Empire. The Tomb of Askia the Great and evidently the most important of all the emperors of the West African ancient empires was built in Songhai. The mosque in Gao is one of the most notable in West Africa. The empire gained more recognition and importance through the control of the trade routes and the trade in slaves. Songhai eventually took control of Timbuktu and Jenne.

Kabir Abdulkareem

Tomb of Muhammad Ture (who took the name Askia), ruler of the Songhai Empire from 1493 to 1528, at Gao in present-day Mali. (Werner Forman/Universal Images Group/Getty Images)



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