

GREAT AFRICAN MILITARY LEADERS

ASKIA MUHAMMED THE GREAT

In the year 1464 AD the Songhai Empire was established in West Africa within the region called Gao which was near the Niger River in Mali south-east of Timbuktu. The second king of the Songhai Empire was Muhammed Ture and he rose to power in 1493 AD and became the leader of the empire. Muhammed Ture became the first Songhai king to take on the dynastic title 'Askia' and after him every king of the empire would also assume this title. Under the leadership of Askia Muhammed the Great, the Songhai Empire expanded its territory beyond that of their predecessors The Empire of Mali and became the largest west african empire at that time. Askia Muhammed expanded the Songhai territory north towards the Tagaza region (modern-day Mali) which was the location of an abundance of salt mines. The mines provided high quality salt which was traded in Europe and Askia Muhamed also engaged in trade with Asia and dominated the trans-saharan trade routes. Askia Muhammed also expanded south towards the region of Yatenga and conquered the Mossi Kingdom which was located there. Under the military leadership of Askia Muhammed the size of the Songhai Empire reached over 1,400,000 square kilometers making it the size of western Europe. The Empire of Songahi became the most well organized and effective military western Africa had ever witnessed as well as the wealthiest. In 1496 AD Askia Muhammed made his pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Arabia. Askia Muhammed took with him over 1000 soldiers from his army as well as over 300,000 pieces of gold and met with the Caliph (ruler of the muslim community) of Egypt.

After this meeting Askia Muhammed became the Caliph of the entire region of western africa. Askia Muhammed The Great would again re-establish the city of Timbuktu as the center of learning for Africa and indeed the world at that time. More than 150 Quranic schools were established producing scholars, scientists, jurists and historians. Over 20,000 children of the Songhai were taught at the schools. Askia Muhammed would often refer to the numerous scholars of Timbuktu who were known for their knowledge and wisdom, the reponses to his questions were written down and stored within the libraries of Timbuktu.

