



GREAT KINGS & QUEENS OF AFRICA

KING

SUNNI ALI



The Songhai Empire grew out of the region called Gao which was located in west Africa near the Niger River in Mali south-east of Timbuktu. The Songhai Empire was established in 1464 AD by a west African Muslim called Sunni Ali although he was born with the name Ali Kolon. As the Mali Empire began to decline, the Songhai Empire under the leadership of King Sunni Ali began rising in power and influence. Sunni Ali is considered one of the most effective military strategists in African history as he was never defeated in any war that he undertook during his reign. Sunni Ali began the expansion of the Songhai Empire first by assisting the Muslim leaders of the city of Timbuktu which had previously been under the control of the Mali Empire. He soon took control of Timbuktu bringing it under the rule of the expanding Songhai Empire. Later, after a series of battles over a seven year period Sunni Ali and his army were successful in taking control of the city of Djenne in modern-day southern Mali in 1475 AD. The king was well

known for using a fleet of 400 boats to patrol the Niger River and he ruled the growing empire from the capital city of Gao. Legends regarding Sunni Ali refer to him being a Muslim but also well versed in magic and the traditional beliefs of the local people. Sunni Ali being an effective war strategist often changed his residence, re-organized his armies and launched numerous military campaigns gradually consolidating power for the new empire in the west African region. King Sunni Ali divided the territory into provinces and established local rulers to oversee each area. Although Sunni Ali consulted with his judicial advisors named “the house of scholars”, he retained final judgement in all affairs. The Empire of Songhai which King Sunni Ali founded would eventually grow to become one of the largest empires in west Africa controlling a territory of over 1,400,000 kilometers. Sunni Ali eventually died in battle in 1492 AD and was mummified as part of his burial, he is remembered as a great military strategist and undefeated warrior.