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Rulers, Scholars, and Invaders: A Select Bibliography of the Songhay Empire

The Songhay Empire was a remarkable West African state, flourishing in several areas, including: territorial and trade expansion, development of a strong military and centralized government, unprecedented support for learning and scholarship, and skilful relations with the greater Sudanic and Islamic lands. Songhay arose out of the remains of the Mali Empire under the rule of Sonni Ali in 1464. Yet, it was the empire's second ruler, Askiya Muhammad, who initiated the century long Golden Age of peace and stability, bringing Songhay to its zenith. This era was particularly fruitful for the cities of Gao, Timbuktu, and Jenne, the empire's administrative, scholarly, and trade centers respectively. Timbuktu soared to preeminence in the Sudan and became known in other parts of the Muslim world, producing respected many scholars. However, by the later part of the 16th century fractious disarray amongst the descendents of Askia Muhammad weakened the state, ultimately leading to the Moroccan invasion of 1591. Songhay's capitulation to the invaders ended the age of the great medieval West African states.

The purpose of this bibliography is to collocate the major scholarly resources, providing a solid introduction to researching the Songhay Empire. The included works are books, book chapters, journal articles, and conference proceedings published through 2002, as well as a small number of significant unpublished dissertations. The citations represent scholarly research on the topic in: English, French, Arabic, Spanish, Italian, German, and Polish. Also included are several published primary resources in many languages often incorporating: dual text translations, transcriptions, and transliterations of the original documents. The included resources are limited to those that focus on or contain discreet chapters or sections pertaining to the Songhay Empire. General works about African history not meeting these criteria, or other sources that mention the Songhay Empire merely in passing are omitted. The arrangement of citations is from general to specific, after primary materials and general history categories, the works are ordered by topic and further broken down by subtopics where applicable. Notes have been included for clarification, content description, or reference to other publications where an item has been published.

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