

# Sunni Ali

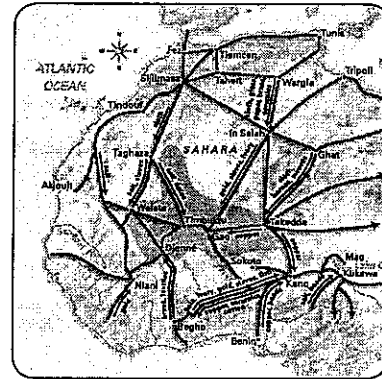
?-1492



**HOW HE AFFECTED THE REGION** Sunni Ali was a king of Songhai. During his reign, he built the small kingdom into the largest and most powerful empire in West Africa.



*As you read the biography below, consider how Sunni Ali's determination helped him convert his small kingdom into a powerful empire.*



Sunni Ali became the king of Songhai in 1464. When he came to the throne, the Songhai kingdom occupied a small area in central West Africa. The great West African empire of Mali had declined. Sunni Ali wanted to expand his small kingdom. He began a series of conquests, at first in Mali, that expanded his kingdom into the largest and most powerful empire in West Africa.

Sunni Ali began his military career with the conquest of Timbuktu, which had been conquered by the Tuareg peoples. Timbuktu's Muslim leaders asked Sunni Ali to help overthrow the Tuaregs. Sunni Ali and his forces stormed into the city and defeated the Tuaregs. He then looted the city, however, and killed much of its population. This act gave Sunni Ali a reputation among the Muslims as being a brutal and impulsive tyrant. The Muslims also distrusted Sunni Ali because he respected and continued many Songhai religious beliefs, even though he also practiced Islam.

During his reign, Sunni Ali conquered the trading cities along the Niger River system. With these conquests, he controlled trade in the

## VOCABULARY

**prosperous** marked by success and economic well-being

**cavalry** combat troops mounted on horses

**flourish** enjoy vigorous and healthy growth, especially economic growth

region. This trade made his empire **prosperous**. But Sunni Ali's empire was constantly under attack. His use of military strategy and his **cavalry** enabled Sunni Ali to defeat the attacks and prevent raiding of his cities. Altogether, Sunni Ali fought 32 military campaigns—and won 32 victories. As a result, he greatly expanded his empire and spread traditional African culture in the region.

One reason for Sunni Ali's success was that he was a strong administrator. For example, his military consisted of tightly organized cavalry, infantry, and river-based naval units. Sunni Ali's government was centralized. He divided lands that he conquered into provinces. Sunni Ali then appointed military governors to rule these provinces. Along with the governors, advisers and **specialized units** in the government ran departments such as agriculture and the treasury. In addition, efficient tax collection helped the Songhai economy **flourish**.

Sunni Ali fought in military campaigns up until his death in 1492, when he died in an accident on his way home from a campaign.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Describe** What kind of government was established in the Songhai Empire?

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2. **Draw a Conclusion** How did Sunni Ali control trade in the region?

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### ACTIVITY

Imagine that you are one of Sunni Ali's government planners. Make a diagram of the government layout. Start with Sunni Ali as emperor. Add the governors of each province. In addition, add the different advisors, department heads, and so on.