



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Islamic Military Strength in the Era of the Songhay Kingdom in West Africa in the 15th And 16th Centuries C.E.

Ezad Azraai Jamsari¹, Wan Mohd Amiroi Ashraf Wan Mohd Badruddin², Mohd Hafiz Safiai^{3,4}, Mohamad Zulfazdlee Abul Hassan Ashari¹, Anwar Muttaqin¹, Md Yazid Ahmad³ & Ibnor Azli Ibrahim⁵

¹Research Centre for Arabic Language and Islamic Civilization, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

²Sekolah Kebangsaan Bandar Baru Sungai Buloh, Jalan BRP 1, Sungai Buloh, Selangor, Malaysia

³Research Centre for Sharia, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

⁴Institute of Islam Hadhari, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

⁵Faculty of Shariah, Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali, Simpang 347, Jalan Pasar Gadong, Negara Brunei Darussalam

ARTICLE INFO

Received: NOV 5, 2024

Accepted: Dec 25, 2024

Keywords

Songhay Kingdom, West Africa, Military History, Political History, Good Governance

***Corresponding Authors:**

ejajsti@gmail.com

ezad@ukm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The Songhay Kingdom was an Islamic kingdom located in West Africa. It emerged beginning as a dominant political power in the western African region around the middle of the 15th century following the decline of the Empire of Mali. Many of the kingdoms in western Africa built their military strength with the purpose of enlarging their territories and maintaining their dominance, such as the Songhay Kingdom. This study was carried out with a purpose of analysing the military strength of the Songhay Kingdom. This study employed a qualitative study approach using historical design study and content analysis. For the purpose of data accumulation, information was gathered using document analysis by examining the relevant primary and secondary sources while for the method of data analysis, this study subsequently used internal and external critical approaches which are suitable with the historical method. Findings of this study argued that Songhay Kingdom's military strength was prominent through retrospective analysis concerning the state of military nuances in West Africa, the system of military organization of the Songhay Kingdom, military reformation during the era of Askia Muhammad and war strategies of the Songhay Kingdom. This study is capable of providing knowledge support among researchers of history and Islamic civilization in West Africa concerning descriptions of the Songhay military strength. This study also provides clarification and description on relative and significant issues in the field of Islamic military history during the Songhay Kingdom era.

INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Songhay was a kingdom which was located in West Africa. Its rulers were among the earliest rulers who accepted Islam in the western African region. Based on al-Sa'di (1981: 3), the first ruler of the Songhay Kingdom to embrace Islam was Dia Kossoi (Zuwa Kusoy). He was said to embrace Islam circa 1010CE. Other than historical notes, there was a discovery of a tombstone inscription dated 494AH/1100CE. The tombstone provided information on a king who ruled the city of Gao. The king's name was Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad and died around 494AH/1100CE. This

proves that around the 5th/11th century AH/CE, the Songhay Kingdom was ruled by a king who was of the Islamic faith. Discovery of the tombstone also proved the existence of trade relation between the city of Gao and northern African territories and al-Andalus. It was because tombstones as such were only found in regions of al-Andalus and North Africa (Davidson 1985: 68).

The Kingdom of Songhay in the early stage was a small kingdom centred around Kukiya. Circa the 11th century CE, the centre of administration of the kingdom shifted to Gao (Niane 1984). After that, the city of Gao expanded to become an important trade centre in the Trans-Saharan trade route. Due to its economic importance and value, the Empire of Mali took control of the city in the 14th century CE and put the Songhay Kingdom under its dependence. However, in the 15th century CE, rulers of the Songhay Kingdom liberated their territory from influence of the Malian Empire. The event became a transition point in political development in West Africa. The influence of the Malian Empire started to weaken in West Africa while the Songhay Kingdom transform into a dominant political power in the region (Davidson 1985: 72).

The Kingdom of Songhay was ruled by three dynasties which were the dynasty of Dia (Za or Zuwa), the Sonni (Sunni) dynasty and the Askia dynasty. The Dia dynasty had 31 rulers out of whom 17 were Muslims. The Dia dynasty reigned over the Songhay Kingdom around the year of 80AH/700CE until 736AH/1335CE. The Sonni dynasty had 18 kings who ruled from the year 736AH/1335CE until 898AH/1493CE. The last dynasty was the Askia dynasty who ruled from 898AH/1493CE until 999AH/1591CE (al-Sa'di 1981: 4; Hunwick 2003: 337), Thornton (1992: 104; 2020: 312) stated that the Songhay Kingdom in its golden era was among empires with the largest territory in West Africa. The kingdom was estimated to have an area between 500,000 and 1 million square kilometres. The territories under the Songhay Kingdom were generally around the Niger River. The golden era of the Songhay Kingdom can be attributed to several of its rulers such as Sonni Ali, Askia Muhammad and Askia Dawud. The three rulers were responsible for expanding the empire and its influence through military campaigns (Cissoko 1984).

Territorial and influence expansion of the Songhay Kingdom were achieved through military strength which the kingdom had. Therefore, military might of the Songhay Kingdom shall be explained in terms of military organization which existed in the kingdom and transformation processes in the military organization of the Songhay Kingdom as well as the war strategies employed in military campaigns carried out. In general, military strength which existed in West Africa was shaped by its huge size and numbers. The strength of the army basically consisted of cavalries and infantries. This study found that the infantry, together with the cavalry, were the main backbone of the military of the Songhay Kingdom. Equipped with the strength of both teams, Songhay rulers carried out territorial expansion in the West African region.

This study was carried out with a purpose of analysing the military strength of the Songhay Kingdom. This study employed a qualitative study approach using historical design study and content analysis. For the purpose of data accumulation, information was gathered using document analysis by examining the relevant primary and secondary sources while for the method of data analysis, this study subsequently used internal and external critical approaches which are suitable with the historical method. Findings of this study argued that Songhay Kingdom's military strength was prominent through retrospective analysis concerning the state of military nuances in West Africa, the system of military organization of the Songhay Kingdom, military reformation during the era of Askia Muhammad and war strategies of the Songhay Kingdom. This study is capable of providing knowledge support among researchers of history and Islamic civilization in West Africa concerning descriptions of the Songhay military strength. This study also provides clarification and description on relative and significant issues in the field of Islamic military history during the Songhay Kingdom era. Hence, studies relating to the excellence of contemporary issues in Islamic history and civilization are also assayed by local scholars, covering various issues such as discussion of the the

role of harem in Ottoman social and political institution (Rosman et al. 2021), the history of military technology development of the Marinid Kingdom in the Maghreb (Ashari et al. 2020), as well as the military history of the Tulunid Kingdom (Jamsari et al. 2018).

MILITARY NUANCES IN WEST AFRICA

Thornton (1999: 19) stated that the West African territory can be divided into several parts according to geographical and climatic conditions in the region. Some areas in the West African region experience tropical climate and are full of thick jungles. There is also Savannah plains covered by grass and trees which grow sporadically. There are also a few areas which have a semi-dry hot climate such as the region of Sahel as well as some dry climate regions like the Sahara Desert. The different geographical and climatic conditions had an effect on the configuration of the military strength for the kingdom in West Africa. The differences of geography and climate gave certain advantages as well as limitations in the formation of military strength in West Africa.

Geographical and Climatic Factors in Military Strength Formation

The existence of rivers such as the Niger River and the Senegal River allows for the creation of naval military powers in West Africa which constituted one of the important branches of the military in the territory. This contingent mostly used boats to navigate, patrolling the areas as well as carrying out military campaigns along the rivers. Apart from that, areas with rivers such as the Niger and the Senegal enable the use of boats, small watercrafts and huge vessels in battles. The existence of rivers also made it possible to carry out agricultural activities, with the rivers being a mode of transportation linking important cities throughout West Africa located within the proximity of the rivers.

The geographical and climatic factors very much influenced the configuration of the military strength and the war methods in the West African region. Geographical conditions such as desert areas and semi-arid lands which received less rainfall rendered the population to be unable to carry out large-scale agricultural activities. This state of affair caused the people in the area to focus more on nomadic lifestyles and livestock rearing such as goats, horses and camels. Due to the lifestyle of constantly moving from one place to another, they had an ability and advantage of forming military powers which concentrated more on cavalries such as horse or camel regiments. In fact, their modes of fighting were characteristically guerrilla warfare and ambushes (Thornton 1999: 19).

The Savannah plains had a denser population compared to Sahel. Its people lived near rivers or areas which had sufficient water sources. They lived in a social unit and in the same village based on their respective tribe. Due to the geographical advantage that they had the configuration of military strength was emphasized on infantries with a large size following the larger number of human resources. Residents in these areas were capable of building horse cavalries because they have the ability and the resources to implement it. Normally horse regiments in these areas are for patrols especially at the borders of the Sahel territory. The areas were open areas and very much exposed to guerrilla-type attacks especially from the nomadic tribes.

Political Factor in Military Strength Formation

In areas of Sahara and Sahel, the people did not have a fixed system of governance, political organization or military strength. Military might capacity available in the region were mostly private by nature and generated through personal properties, status or even wealth of the nomadic tribal chiefs in the area. The individual political influence of the tribal leader was determined by his personal wealth, the wealthier he was the more followers he had and hence the stronger army he possessed. The military dominance of the nomadic tribes could be seen in Sahel and the Sahara. Military activities which were carried out were mostly in the form of attacks or robberies on villages or cities in the surrounding area. It was from these attacks that they gained wealth and attained their

economic source. Attacks which were carried out had the purpose of obtaining supply of slaves who were normally sold in North Africa (Thornton 1999: 20).

One of the nomadic tribes which had a mighty political and military influence in the Sahel territory was the Tuareg. Through military might that they had, the Tuareg tribe frequently attacked cities nearby such as raids on the city of Timbuktu. At that time, the city was under the influence of the Empire of Mali. Mali rulers initially managed to thwart attacks from the Tuareg tribe but, because of the tribe's increasing strength, they became incapable of defending the city of Timbuktu from Tuareg raids. To avoid raids from the tribe, the people of Timbuktu finally had political cooperation with them. The relation was sealed with a tributary payment to the tribal leader of the Tuareg. The achievement of the Tuareg to take control of Timbuktu further increased their political influence in the central region of Niger. However, the Tuareg tribe was not directly involved in the governance of the city of Timbuktu, appointing people who were usually the locals to manage and administer the city on their behalf.

Political circumstances in the Sahel province were starkly different from those in the Savannah. This region had a more systematic and better-arranged administrative system. This enabled rules and regulations to be implemented more strictly and firmly. Political units in this province initially consisted of ones which were tribal in nature and based upon the residency of the tribes. This province usually comprised residence settlements which could be equated with cities or towns which could be found in Europe or North Africa. They were then ruled and governed by the most influential clan or tribe.

From a system of governance which was naturally basic involving respective tribes, a government then formed when union of administrative tribal units occurred under a single authority. Such authority was later improved and consolidated further using a variety of available resources and existing potentials with the existence of rivers such as the Senegal and the Niger. With that, the government in this province had the potential of preparing a larger military strength. The series of wars in this province were mostly characterized by military expeditions to expand influence and territorial control. There were also campaigns which were launched as retribution upon states or protectorate provinces. Such actions were meant to consolidate power simultaneously ensuring undivided loyalty from the protectorates (Thornton 1999: 21).

MILITARY ORGANISATION OF THE SONGHAY KINGDOM

Military strength possessed by the Songhay Kingdom will be explained in terms of military organisations which existed in the kingdom. Generally, military strength which existed in West Africa was shaped in terms of the large size and number. The strength basically consisted of cavalries and infantries. This study found that infantry teams as well as cavalries were the backbone of the Songhay military strength. Equipped with the potency of both troops, Songhay rulers carried out territorial expansion around West Africa.

Infantry and Cavalry Troops

The strength of Songhay military much aided in the efforts of territorial expansion which were carried out by its rulers. Territorial enlargement exercises were actively pursued in the era of Sonni Ali, Askia Muhammad and Askia Dawud. The age of Askia Muhammad witnessed the influence of the Songhay Kingdom being at its peak following territorial expansion campaigns which were carried out during that time (Stoller 1981).

The process of territorial expansion of the Kingdom of Songhay employed much of its military power which comprised troops such as the infantry and cavalries. The mightiness of the infantry could be seen from the amount of weaponry used by the troops. In general, infantry armies which existed in West African provinces were mostly equipped with shields and other types of weaponry. The types

of weaponry that they used had many similarities between one kingdom and another. The main weaponry used by infantries in the West African regions was arrows (Reid 2012: 22). Military history of West Africa witnessed battles in the region being dominated by the use of bows and arrows as the main weapon in the infantry troops. The bows used in the provinces were generally of simple and uncomplicated technology to manufacture. The arrows used were normally of the fletch-less type, and had an effective of around 54 meters. For wide and open spaces in much of West Africa, use of such weapon had a bigger advantage compared to other types of weapons. Arrows that were used by them were normally laced with poison (Law 1976). Other than bows, Songhay infantry regiments also had equipment such as javelins, swords and shields made of hard leather.

As mentioned earlier on, the strength of the infantry lies on two main factors which are weaponry and the total number of soldiers in the regiment. Al-Sa'di (1981: 73) recorded the number of infantry troops utilised in any campaign or certain events. Among them was during Askia Muhammad's hajj pilgrimage, when he brought along some 1,000 infantry soldiers and 500 horse cavalymen for safety reasons. Next, in the Tondibi clashes, Songhay Kingdom's army led by Askia Ishaq II reportedly comprised 30,000 infantrymen and 12,500-strong cavalry troops. Al-Sa'di however did not elaborate in detail the total number of infantrymen possessed by the Songhay Kingdom. Nevertheless, based on al-Sa'di's record, this study found that by the end of the Sonni dynasty's era and the era of Askia dynasty's reign, the infantries and cavalries of the Songhay Kingdom were divided with respect to provinces and respective army generals. This created provincial armies which were manned by their own infantry and cavalry soldiers. The total number of infantrymen or cavalymen stationed in Songhay Kingdom's provinces could not be determined but their number would not have exceeded the total number of infantrymen and cavalymen who were under direct command of the Songhay ruler headquartered in the city of Gao. The number of infantry and cavalry troops centred in and around Gao was said to stand at around 42,500 men. According to Thornton (1999: 27), this number was based on the total number of soldiers mobilised by Askia Ishaq II in the clash at Tondibi which was located not far from the city of Gao. Diop (1987: 120) called the army contingent headquartered in Gao as the royal regiment due to their unwavering loyalty to the ruling Askia.

Songhay infantries had an important role in a number of military campaigns of the kingdom. This can be seen during the era of Askia Muhammad Bonkana 928-944AH/1531-1537CE. In one of the battles against enemy troops, the general of the Songhay infantry managed to lead his troops to disintegrate enemy troops formation, awaiting the arrival of the enemies and attacking them at a precise time until their formation was split up. Hence, Songhay cavalries could then launch an ultimate demolishing assault on the enemy troops (Thornton 1999: 28). What is more interesting is that Diop (1987: 118) stated that there was a signals troop in the Songhay infantry regiment. They utilized musical instruments consisting of drums, *kakaki* (trumpets) and cymbals. Hunwick (2003: 108) stated that musical instruments such as *kakaki* were first used by the troop after their victory over Agadez and the musical instrument was part of the war spoils.

Other than infantries, the Songhay Kingdom also had cavalries in their military assets. Generally, most of the kingdoms in West Africa including the Kingdom of Songhay placed priorities on their cavalries in their military organisations. Smalldone (1977: 8) in his writing explained the importance of cavalries in the establishment of kingdoms such as Takrur, Ghana, Mali, Songhay, Hausa, and Kanem-Bornu in *Bilad al-Sudan*. He asserted that iron technology and cavalry were exploited by the kingdom rulers in order to preserve their political dominance. Ability to organize a cavalry regiment was a huge advantage and privilege of the kingdoms. Reid (2012: 2) stated that not all kingdoms in West Africa were capable of creating cavalry troops. This was due to the obstacles posed by geographical, climatic and financial factors which existed in any kingdom in West Africa. Geographically, kingdoms along the Sahel strip had a huge advantage in forming cavalries. Such geographical locations evaded their regions from disease commuted by tsetse flies which were normally found in tropical climate areas. Communicable disease by the fly could cause fatalities in

ridden animals of war such as horses and camels. Consequent to that, kingdoms located in the tropical areas faced a huge hurdle to form their own cavalry.

With the advantage at hand, rulers of the kingdoms along the Sahel Strip placed an emphasis on building cavalry strength for the purpose of territorial expansion and broadening influence. This was explicated by Fisher (1973) who stated that the use of horse played an important role in the territorial and influence expansion. Furthermore, according to him, military strength of kingdoms in West Africa was also measured with the strength of their cavalries. Another factor which brought about the formation of cavalries in the West African region was due to the advantage held by the infantries armed with bows and arrows. Law (1976) in his writing noted that bows which were used by infantries carried a huge advantage in battles in open spaces such as in West Africa. Therefore, several innovations were made to overcome the advantage of such troops, among them being the use of cavalries which used swords and spears as the main weapon.

Law (1976) stated that to establish a cavalry, each ruler in West Africa needed to obtain supplies of suitable horse for war purposes. In the early stage, horse breeds in West African regions were not of local breeds. These horses were mostly imported via Trans-Saharan trade. For example, in the 6th/12th century AH/CE, the Mali Empire brought in horse breeds from North Africa. By the end of the 8th/14th century AH/CE, many of the types of horse breeds from Egypt and North Africa were brought into the provinces of Kanem and Bornu. Only around the 10th/16th century AH/CE were efforts to rear ponies initially made within the Songhay territories. Law (1976) stated early records on the use of horses in West African regions started around the 4th/10th century AH/CE. This was based on records by Arab historians such as al-Muhallabi (2006: 55) who recorded on the use of horses in the city of Gao.

Historical use of horse in West Africa witnessed two different eras. First is the use of pony breeds which were brought in from North Africa. The ponies usually had a height of not more than 13 hands which is equivalent to 52-54 inches or 132-136 centimeters. Beginning from the 8th/14th century AH/CE, military revolution occurred in West Africa in which larger horse breeds were used for battle purposes. Most of the horses from the pony breeds began to be replaced with Dongola horse breeds which were imported from the Nile Valley as well as Berber horse breeds from North Africa. Horses from the Dongola breed were used a lot in the eastern part of West Africa like in Kanem province and others. Berber horses meanwhile were mostly used in the western part of West Africa. Both breeds had a height of around 14 up to 15 hands which is equivalent to 56-62 inches or 142-157 centimetres (Law 1976).

Songhay cavalry strength can be seen in terms of numbers, types of horse and the weaponry being used. Cavalry regiments which existed in the Songhay Kingdom were said to be well-trained and sufficiently-equipped for wars. Based on the above statements, this study concludes that Songhay cavalries possibly used Berber or Dongola horse breeds. Horses of these two types of breeds were most commonly used for battle purposes. This study also found an interesting fact about cavalry troops which existed in Songhay Kingdom. Within Songhay cavalries, there was a troop composed of Songhay noblemen from the people of Zuwa Berbanda. Al-Sa'di (1981: 76) did not provide details on their number because the contingent was not of permanent nature, being voluntary or mobilised. Its membership consisted of those from nobilities and their families as well as their followers. The team actively participated in Songhay military expeditions especially during the reigning era of Sonni dynasty. When Askia Muhammad took over leadership of Songhay from the Sonnis, he decided to abolish the team. Askia Muhammad considered the Zuwa Berbanda people to be political rivals of the Askia dynasty. This matter prompted Askia Muhammad to recruit them in every highly risky campaign such as the one to the Borgu province which occurred around 912AH/1506CE. In that expedition, Askia Muhammad placed the troop on the frontline. This matter caused the death of many of them in the said battle.

Apart from that, there was also a team of cavalry constituted by castrates from the palace led by a Hugu-koray-koi. Hugu-koray-koi was a main designation in the palace of the Songhay Kingdom Songhay. They were put in charge of matters concerning internal administration of the palace. However, in certain circumstances, Hugu-koray-koi was also tasked with military duties by leading a team of cavalymen consisting of palace castrates. This team reportedly had as many as 4,000 men. The regiment that he led would act as assisting team under certain conditions. This team was mobilized a few times such as in the campaign onto a Malian province which occurred in 917AH/1511CE. In that campaign, Hugu-koray-koi Ali Fulan and his team were dispatched to aid in the campaign (Gomez 2018: 246).

The equipment and weaponry used by the Songhay cavalries were said to have many similarities with their counterparts in other West African kingdoms (Thornton 1999: 25). Horses, equipped with basic saddles without stirrups were used. Such use of technology spread throughout West African regions in stages. In fact, there were cases where riders intentionally injured the back of their rides which caused controlled bleeding. The blood which oozed acted as a glue which assisted in attaching the riders to their ride (Reid 2012: 22). Law (1976) stated that the use of saddles and foot rests was introduced in West Africa by the Muslims. Before the 8th/14th century AH/CE, saddles with stirrups were not used while riding horses in West Africa. This started to change around the 9th/15th century AH/CE when West African cavalries started to use basic saddles without foot rests. Foot rest was first used in West Africa around the 11th/17th century AH/CE (Thornton 1999: 25). This study found that the use of saddles as well as stirrups was very important while riding horses, enabling diversification of their fighting techniques. With the use of saddles, cavalry troops could fight at close range using swords and spears.

Songhay cavalries were also equipped with shields made from hard leather. Most horse riders used shields such as those to protect themselves in battles. Other than shields, there were also armour suits, iron cuirass and helmets. Their use was probably limited to those of higher ranks in Songhay cavalries as can be seen in an event during Askia al-Hajj's period. In that event, he managed to quell a revolt by Kurmina-fari al-Hadi who was his own relative. Kurmina-fari al-Hadi's failed rebellion resulted in him being captured and brought before Askia al-Hajj. In that event, Askia al-Hajj instructed that the helmet and armour suit worn by Kurmina-fari al-Hadi be taken off first (al-Sa'di 1981: 119). This episode proved indirectly the types of equipment used by highest ranking army commanders in the Songhay Kingdom.

Other kinds of weapons used by Songhay cavalries were javelins, spears and *samsir* swords. Spear was a main weapon used by horse cavalymen of the Songhay Kingdom (Thornton 1999: 26). For example, Askia Musa Bonkana was said to own a few sets of javelins whose tips were dipped in poison to enhance the weapon's capability. Thornton (1999: 26) stated that there was a battle which involved the use of weapons such as javelins and spears by the cavalymen. The battle was a one-on-one fight between Kurmina-fari and Balma'a. Their clash involved javelins as the main weapon while riding a horse which was won by Kurmina-fari when he succeeded in felling his opponent with a mighty javelin throw.

The Tuareg Cavalry

Tuareg cavalries were one of the cavalry troops in Songhay military organisation. They used camels as well as horses as the main rides. During Sonni dynasty's periods, the Kingdom of Songhay were enemies of Tuareg tribes. At that moment the tribe of Tuareg posed a security threat to the prosperity of Songhay trades. They were also in control of the city of Timbuktu and were a hindrance block for Sonni Ali from conquering the city. During his reign, the Tuareg became targets of Songhay's military campaigns. Military expeditions which targeted the Tuareg tribe were the campaigns of conquering Timbuktu and that to Walatah or Biru province. After capturing Timbuktu, Sonni Ali directed his men to chase after the Tuareg and Timbuktu residents who fled to Walatah.

Their enmity later changed during the era of Askia dynasty's reign. Songhay rulers from the Askia dynasty took a more pragmatic and realistic step in facing the Tuareg. They forged a cooperation and political alliance with the Tuareg tribes. Political alliances among them were sealed through marriages. The reason for this was that the Songhay Kingdom required military strength held by the Tuareg. Even though Songhay had its own cavalries, those of the Tuareg held a bigger advantage especially for battles in the Sahel and Sahara territories. During Askia Dawud's period, he sent his daughter Bita binti Askia Dawud into a marriage with a Tuareg leader named Maghsharan-Koi al-Hajj Mahmud Ber bin Muhammad (al-Sa'di 1981: 128).

The matrimony strengthened political and military cooperation between Songhay rulers and the tribe of Tuareg. As such, Tuareg's military might could be utilized by Songhay rulers. They became reserve army or supporting troops which can be recalled at any time when needed (Diop 1987: 119). During the reign of Askia Dawud, he launched campaign to Sura Batanba which was located at the border of the Mali Empire. The campaign was led by his son Koray-farma al-Hajj and was assisted by Tuareg cavalries led by Maghsharan-koi al-Hajj Mahmud Ber and Indasan-koi al-Miski. In that campaign, cavalries led by Maghsharan-koi Mahmud and Indasan-koi numbered around 24,000 men.

Alliance between Songhay rulers with the Tuareg sides had increased the tribe's influence in Songhay Kingdom's governance. Furthermore, there were even meddling by the Tuareg into power struggle among heirs to the Songhay throne. This occurred during the period of Askia Ishaq II. At that time Balma'a Muhammad al-Sadiq obtained assistance and supports from Maghsharan-koi Tibirt to become Askia. Maghsharan-koi Tibirt was the tribal chief of the Tuareg centred in the city of Timbuktu. After that, Muhammad al-Sadiq's troops departed for the city of Gao to capture the throne of the Songhay Kingdom. In that journey, their group camped at a place named Kunbu-Koray. Soon after, their troops were attacked by group of Askia Ishaq II's army led by Maranfa al-Hajj. The ambush caused Balma'a Muhammad al-Sadiq's side to retreat. Not long after that, Songhay cavalries with the aid from Tuareg parties who remained loyal to Askia Ishaq II encircled and later defeated Balma'a Muhammad al-Sadiq's team (Gomez 2018: 362).

Tuareg cavalries also helped Songhay Kingdom a lot to expand their influence to the north regions. Circa 946AH/1539CE, the Tuareg allied with the Songhay Kingdom launched an attack on Wadi Dar'ah which was located to the south of al-Maghrib. They also dominated salt mines in Taghazah in the central areas of Sahara. This caused the Sa'diyyah Kingdom to launch a counter-attack in 963AH/1556CE by recapturing the mines from Songhay control. Taghazah was a province which became land grab between the Sa'diyyah and Songhay (Loimeier 2013: 68).

Sorko Flotilla

The Sorko were people whose life connection was strong with the Niger River. The Niger River and its yields were their lifeline. Sorko people were extensively skilled in fisheries and small boat and watercraft manufacture. They were also skilful in conversing the Niger River water current which enabled them to navigate small vessels and boats along the river. The Sorko community later integrated as a unit in the Songhay community when they accepted the kingdom's influence (Asante 2019: 138). Around the middle of the 9th/15th century AH/CE, Sonni Ali and Askia Muhammad placed the Sorko directly under the influence of Songhay rulers (Lange 1994). With their influence over the Sorko community, Songhay successfully dominated trades which used the Niger River as a mode of transportation. Songhay rulers' influence over Sorko community empowered the Songhay Kingdom authority over water routes along the Niger River and its ports. This fact was admitted by Hall (2011: 215), but it was also asserted that Sorko's military and administrative services towards Songhay rulers were not known in depth except for what was stated by sources like *Tarikh al-Sudan*.

Diop (1987: 119) explained that Songhay flotilla used outriggering boats which were difficult to sink. This indirectly gave a lot of advantages to Songhay Kingdom's fleets to navigate along the Niger River.

He further explained that such boats could also be found around Lake Chad and Lake Victoria. Furthermore, Andoh (2004) stated that Sorko flotilla also used canoes to travel through the Niger River for various purposes such as fisheries, wild animal hunts and even battles. Yates (2004) explained that the type of canoes typically used in the Niger River are of the dugout types made from large tree trunks shaped by craftsmen into canoes. It was also stated that canoes were an essential in the Niger River areas in between Timbuktu and Jenne. These parts of the river had a shallower depth compared to other areas causing ships and yachts to be unable to navigate through the areas.

This study discovered that during the period of Sonni Ali's reign he was too reliant on Sorko flotilla in his quest for territorial expansion. The fleets were used to mobilise infantries through waterways. Sorko fleets were used in a number of campaigns during the period of Sonni Ali to put a blockade on the city of Jenne. The most likelihood was that it was them who were responsible for digging out a canal which linked *Ra's al-Ma'* (Raz al-Ma) with Walatah or Biru.

However, this study also discovered a view of Smith (1970) who clarified that Sorko flotillas were not an individual fleet on its own but rather an additional or extension unit to Songhay Kingdom's infantry. He further explained that naval warfare then could be measured with regards to the use of canoes, boats and naval warfare tactics. On the basis of that argument, he discovered that Sorko fleets were not directly involved in battles and were merely assisting in moving Songhay troops around Niger River ports. He further explained that formation of the corps as a supporting apparatus to Songhay Kingdom's infantry was consequent to the importance of water routes and reachability mode by the rivers in territorial expansion efforts. Refuting that view, Diop (1987: 119) asserted that Sorko flotillas were part and parcel to the Songhay military organization and not merely an extensional unit to the infantry because there were instances where Sorko flotillas were used a number of battles and military campaigns. It was even stated that the commander of the troops had an important role in the Songhay military organisation.

Military Post

In the Kingdom of Songhay's military organisation, there were several important posts. These posts carried certain duties and responsibilities in the government and military. Most of them were continuation to previous system but there are also positions newly created due to the necessity of the era. There were a number of army general positions which were tasked with administrative matters as a governor in certain provinces. In the same time, they also had their own army contingents to safeguard peace and protect the defences in the province. The following are positions which existed in military organization of the Songhay Kingdom:

(a) Kurmina-fari (West Songhay Province Viceroy)

Kurmina-fari was the most senior position in the administration and military during Askia dynasty's reign. Kurmina-fari was a position created during the period of Askia Muhammad and he appointed his kin Umar Komadiakha as the first Kurmina-fari known as Kan-fari Umar Komadiakha. He was tasked with leading Songhay armies which were headquartered in Tindirma. In the age of Askia Dawud, Kurmina-fari was responsible as a viceroy of the Songhay Kingdom to govern Songhay western province. There were advantages and privileges as Kurmina-fari in Songhay military hierarchy; one of them being able to have an audience with Askia without having to take off the helmet adorning their head. It was also not necessary for them to smear the forehead with soil while having an audience with Askia as other officials would have to. Kurmina-fari's accompanying staff were also allowed to blow *kakaki* trumpets to announce his arrival to any ceremony, a privilege which was also afforded to the position of Kurmina-fari which was basically a prerogative right of the ruling Askia only (Hunwick 2003: xlvii).

Other figures had assumed this post other than Umar Komadiakha such as Kurmina-fari Yahya ibn Abu Bakr. He was appointed by Askia Muhammad after the death of Umar Komadiakha. Later during

the reign of Askia Musa ibn Askia Muhammad, he appointed his cousin Muhammad Bonkana ibn Umar Komadiakha as Kurmina-fari. Muhammad Bonkana later on staged a coup from Askia Musa and became the ruler of Songhay in 938AH/1531CE. Then during his rule, Askia Ismail appointed Hammad ibn Muhammad Kiray as Kurmina-fari. Askia Ishaq I meanwhile appointed his relative Dawud ibn Askia Muhammad as Kurmina-fari to replace Hammad ibn Muhammad Kiray. Dawud held the post for eight years before becoming Askia himself after the demise of Askia Ishaq I (Hunwick 2003: 140).

(b) Balma'a (Kabara Provincial Army General)

Balma'a was a post which existed since the rule of Sonni dynasty. This designation was that of an army general commanding the army in a province called Kabara. The post had a huge power authority and influence in the Songhay Kingdom rule especially during the era of the Askia dynasty (Hunwick 2003: 339). Based upon al-Sa'di (1981: 135), there were a few people who were appointed to the post such as Muhammad Kiray, a nephew of Sonni Ali, who was appointed by Askia Muhammad. Askia Muhammad gave his daughter Aryu into marriage with Muhammad Kiray. The marriage between Muhammad Kiray and Aryu bint Askia Muhammad indirectly signified a union of political influence between Sonni family and the Askia family, thus consolidating political stability of the Songhay Kingdom.

During the rule of Askia Muhammad Bani ibn Askia Dawud, he appointed his kin named Muhammad al-Sadiq as Balma'a. Muhammad al-Sadiq who was confident with the strength and influence that he had later on tried to snatch power from Askia Muhammad Bani. Unfortunate for Balma'a Muhammad al-Sadiq, his attempt was foiled by Askia Ishaq II ibn Askia Dawud who replaced Muhammad Bani who recently died. The coup-attempt indirectly showed that Balma'a Muhammad al-Sadiq had the military strength under his leadership enough for him to sneak a peek at opportunity of becoming the ultimate ruler of the kingdom.

(c) Bara-koi (General of Bara Province)

Bara was a territory which was located between Niger River and Bara-Issa. Bara-Koi referred to the governor of Bara province. When Askia Muhammad made a coup upon Sonni Baru ibn Sonni Ali, Bara-Koi Mansa Kura was the one and only governor who backed Askia Muhammad (Gomez 2018: 222). After the death of Sonni Ali, Songhay rulership was succeeded by his son Sonni Baru. Askia Muhammad acted to make a coup after Sonni Baru refused to clearly announce his embracing of Islam. In that campaign, Sonni Baru commanded the majority support of other governors. Askia Muhammad only succeeded to get the backing of Bara-koi Mansa Kura. Despite only being provided with the military power that he had together with the support from Bara-koi Mansa Kura, they managed to defeat Sonni Baru. This clearly showed the strength of the military both teams had which had their own advantages even though their numbers were less than those led by Sonni Baru and his allies (Gomez 2018: 221).

Following the support given by Bara-koi Mansa Kura, Askia Muhammad awarded more privileges to the holder of the post throughout the reigning era of Askia dynasty. Bara-koi was the one and only army general and governor who could veto Askia's decision should they disagree on the decision (Diop 1987: 54). Bara-koi Mansa Kura was among the figures to accompany Askia Muhammad in the pilgrimage to Mecca. Diop (1987: 55) stated that Bara-koi Mansa Kura had used that opportunity to bind loyalty pledge between them. In front of the tomb of Prophet Muhammad PBUH, Bara-koi Mansa Kura had pledged his complete allegiance to Askia Muhammad. In return, Askia Muhammad promised to always follow advices of Bara-koi Mansa Kura.

Bara-koi was among the influential generals and provincial governors in the Songhay Kingdom. Another figure who had assumed that position was Bara-koi Amar. He was appointed during the era

of Askia Muhammad Bani ibn Askia Dawud (995-996AH/1586-1588CE). He allied with Balma'a Muhammad al-Sadiq in a coup plot to overthrow the ruler but their attempt failed.

(d) Dendi-fari (General of Dendi Province)

Dendi-fari was an important position in Songhay Kingdom, being one of the highest positions in Songhay governance and the governor for southern province. Holder of the post had its own advantages including ability to adorn special costume, speaking freely of his thoughts before Askia for which he could not be punished even if the matter was offensive to Askia (Hunwick 2003: 340). The title holder also had unique influence in Songhay political landscape, being in command of an army of considerable size. This was appropriate with the logistic requirement of safeguarding the southern border of the Songhay Kingdom which was often threatened by Mossi raids. During the reign of Askia Muhammad Bonkana Kirya, Songhay throne was held by a second-tier heir of Askia Muhammad's family. Askia Muhammad Bonkana Kirya was the son of Kurmina-fari Umar Komadiakha who in turn was a male relative of Askia Muhammad. Askia Muhammad Bonkana Kirya managed to ascend to Songhay throne after defeating an heir of Askia Muhammad namely Askia Musa Bonkana. This raised a dissatisfaction among other heirs of Askia Muhammad who later plotted to overthrow Askia Muhammad Bonkana Kirya. Askia Muhammad Bonkana Kirya was later defeated by Askia Ismail ibn Askiya Muhammad with the aid from Dendi-fari Muhammad (Mar) Tumzu (Gomez 2018: 328).

(e) Djina-koi (Infantry Commander)

Djina-koi was a frontline army general having special rights in the whole Songhay Kingdom's army corps. He was allowed to sit together with the ruler on the same carpet. When in audience with the ruling Askia, he was allowed to rub his forehead with flour instead of soil or earth as would have been the common custom. It was a form of formality for all other ruling staff to smear soil on their foreheads when meeting the ruling Askia. Such privilege given to the holder of this designation directly indicated the prestige and hierarchy of the position within the Songhay Kingdom's military system (Diop 1987: 54).

(f) Hi-koi (Sorko Flotilla Admiral)

This position had been in existence since the age of Sonni-Ali and they were made responsible to be in-charge of Sorko flotillas. They were also tasked with to control naval in- and out-traffic along the Niger River. Another responsibility that they had was to manage Askia's kanta boats which were manned by Sorko crews. One of the figures who held this position was Hi-koi Bukar (Abu Bakr) Ali Dudu. Other than Hi-koi which was more focused on military duties, there were other designations such as Hari-farma which was responsible for managing all public administrative duties related to Niger River. Hari-farma was a senior officer in Songhay's administrative structure (Smith 1970).

MILITARY TRANSFORMATION IN THE ASKIA MUHAMMAD ERA

During the reign of Askia Muhammad, many changes in the governance and administration of the Songhay Kingdom were made. As a visionary leader of high calibre, Askia Muhammad made numerous new policies on administrative, economic, social, military and territorial expansion matters (Agbese 2004). Prior to his ascension, the strength of the Songhay military was very much dependent upon mercenaries, voluntary armies and personal guards who were conscripted from Songhay noblemen fraternities. This was a common military practice in many places throughout West Africa. Such military strength was temporary in nature and was not permanent at all.

A change made in his age was to create an army which seemed to be permanent and full-time (Diop 1987: 116). Apart from that, he also carried out restructuring military organisation by creating new military positions. He also retained several military system and administration which were inherited

from Sonni Ali. Several factors led him to carry out the changes. Among them were change in the ruling dynasty, need for a new governance system and expanding territories of the kingdom.

Permanent and Full-time Military

A permanent full-time army was crucial for political continuity of the Songhay Kingdom. This prompted Askia Muhammad took the initiative of establishing one. He also made efforts to expand military apparatus by raising the number of infantrymen, cavalrymen and the Sorko fleets, enabling the process of power expansion to be carried out more effectively (Hotls 2016: 60).

Many factors led to the establishment of a standing army, such as the area of the Songham Kingdom territories which was increasing. Other than that factor, the existence of a standing army was a necessity due to the centralisation of power which was done during the era of Askia dynasty (Agbese 2004). Additionally, establishing a full-time military was probably viewed by Askia Muhammad as important for political continuity and influence of the kingdom in West Africa. Formation of a full-time military which took place during the age of Askia Muhammad was done to reduce Songhay military's reliance on voluntary or conscripted soldiers. Throughout the military history in West Africa, there were two rulers who made the attempt to develop a full-time army; Mansa Sundiata Keita of the Mali Empire and Askia Muhammad of the Songhay Kingdom. This is because both of them realised the weaknesses posed by an army which was characteristically feudalistic and attempted to replace it with a full-time one (Smalldone 1977: 11).

Establishing a standing army was a brilliant and accurate decision made by Askia Muhammad. He invested the state revenues in establishing a permanent military in terms of weapon production, horse purchase, training and others. His investment bore fruits as an army which was strong and loyal to him was created. Military transformation in the era of Askia Muhammad witnessed a change in Songhay military from one that was amateurish to one that was more professional.

The standing army which was established was divided into two; namely the royal guards and the territorial army. The royal guards were stationed in the city of Gao. This regiment was under the direct control of the Songhay ruler and was estimated to have a strength of 30,000 men. The royal guards were also joined by sons of Songhay aristocracy and princes from protectorate kingdoms (Diop 1987: 120). The second standing army was the territorial army stationed in important provinces and territories of the Songhay Kingdom. The territorial or provincial armies had been in existence since the time of Sonni dynasty and were possibly conscripted. However, during the time of Askia Muhammad, he made the group of soldiers permanent while adding a few more regiments. These regiments were typically led by an army general or commander who were usually appointed from among the relatives of Askia to ensure their allegiance to the ruler. It is rather unfortunate that we are not able to know for certain the total number of soldiers in the territorial army accurately (Thornton 1999: 35).

Among territorial armies which were existent since before Askia dynasty was those in the territory of Kabara and Dendi. The regiment in Kabara was placed under the command of a general designated as Balma'a while that in Dendi was under the supervision of Dendi-fari. During Askia dynasty eras, those positions were maintained. Additional groups of armies during the Askia dynasty included the territorial army in Tindirma and Baghana. Tindirma regiment was under the command of an army general known as Kurmina-fari while that in Baghana was led by Baghana-fari. Thornton stated that Tindirma provincial army had a bigger strength in terms of numbers than those of other territories. This was because the regiment in Tindirma was of the most importance. In fact, Kurmina-fari who led the army there ranked second after Askia in the Kingdom of Songhay's military organisation. Thornton (1999: 35) estimated the size of the cavalry under direct control of Kurmina-fari to be around 4,600 up to 6,000 men. It was rather a huge number that there were a few incidents of power coup attempts by Kurmina-fari on the ruling Askia.

Establishment of the territorial or provincial armies had their advantages and disadvantages. Most provinces which had an army were close to the borders of the Songhay Kingdom. Their positions close to the boundary necessitated the existence of a functioning army able to defend the territory should an attack occur. Besides, their positions also facilitated Songhay rulers to implement the policy of territorial expansion. However, Holts (2016: 170) stated that centralisation of power carried out by the Askia dynasty did not manage to create a strong central government. This was proven by the existence of several other administrative centres led by either a governor or an army general which wielded high influence in the Songhay Kingdom.

Holts (2016) also opined that this situation led to the creation of a governing and aristocracy class which had a military background. This was consequent to a policy of the Songhay rulers especial during the eras of Askia dynasty which put military experience as a priority in the appointment to a governing position. Such policy brought about instability in the internal politics of the Songhay Kingdom itself, resultant from the governors competing with each other for influence and power. This, according to Holts (2016), hindered political progress in the Songhay Kingdom from adapting a more effective administrative system.

WAR STRATEGY

Tactics used in wars in West Africa differed according to the balance between the number in infantries and cavalries in a battle. Songhay rulers exhibited high skills in arranging tactics and strategies in territorial expansion that they carried out. This clearly indicates their mastery and skills as a military ruler. Strategies and tactics which were employed helped them a lot to subdue their opponents. War strategies which were used can be seen in several battles such as the campaign on Jenne and etc. Tactics and strategies used by Songhay rulers included attacks, blockades, and military formations in certain battles.

Offensive Strategy

A battle was typically started with a launch of arrows or spears whereby thousands of arrows were shot toward the enemy. This was initially done early in the battle and this attack could typically last for hours. Such tactic could have been seen during the age of Sonni Ali in his efforts of power expansion. He instructed the attack upon the city of Jenne be started with a launch of arrows when his army attacked and surrounded Jenne in 885AH/1480CE. The battle was called the battle of arrows due to the huge number of arrows thrown towards the city of Jenne (Thornton 1999: 27).

In addition, there were reconnaissance missions such as during the era of Askia Dawud. He sent a team of 24 cavalymen to Katsina for such mission (Hunwick 2003: 147). Askia Dawud also used a strategy of sudden attack in a number of military campaigns. Circa 971AH/1563CE, Askia Dawud instructed Fari-mondyo Bukar (Abu Bakr) to lead a team of soldiers for a military mission. They were not informed of the location and were only directed to follow the orders of Fari-mondyo Bukar. Askia Dawud told Fari-mondyo Bukar only of the purpose of the campaign. Fari-mondyo Bukar was given secret orders to move to Barka to extinguish a rebellion but he was instructed to pass through a mountainous area. This caused their movement to be undetected and the team successfully defeated the rebellion which arose in Barka (Hunwick 2003: 151).

Songhay cavalry troops also had their own tactics of attack. A battle technique used was to attack with a throw of javelins first towards their enemy, followed by closing in the enemy and attacking them using spears or swords. In addition, Songhay cavalries also carried out the attacks quickly; so quickly that the enemy did not have the opportunity to prepare an ample defence. As an example, Sonni Sulayman Dama and Sonni Ali used the advantage of cavalries and waterways to mobilise their army efficiently. Their fast and efficient movement had a huge impact onto their power expansion efforts around the Niger River (Asante 2019: 138).

Blockade and Natural Manipulation Strategy

Blockade is a common strategy used in any war. Songhay cavalries also practiced blockade tactics which used their size advantage of larger numbers compared to the number of their opponents in any battle. An example of this was during the civil war between Askia Ishaq II and Balma'a Muhammad al-Sadiq. Askia Ishaq II eventually defeated the alliance of Balma'a Muhammad al-Sadiq armies with the Tuareg who were led by Maghsharan-koi Tibirt. Their attempt to overthrow Askia Ishaq II failed in the end. This occurred around 996AH/1588CE. Army troops of Askia Ishaq II surrounded the Tuareg side with a much bigger size in number like locusts swarming crops and plants (Thornton 1999: 27).

Besides, Hunwick (2003: 20) stated that a military campaign which employed the strategy of blockade included that of the conquest of Jenne. Jenne was a city built in between two rivers. When the raining season came, the area was submerged with water and the city of Jenne which lied on a higher area appeared to be like an island. Knowing this phenomenon, Sonni Ali decided to deploy his army during the raining season as during that time the city would be surrounded due to rising river water level. As the water level increased, Sonni Ali would order his troops to move to a higher area, later named as Nibkat Sooni or Sonni Hill, not far from the city of Jenne. When they moved to that area, they would patrol around the city, intercepting any aid of food supplies or army troops sent to help the city. Such strategy managed to put a blockade to any type of assistance to those entrenched in the city of Jenne (Diop 1987: 121).

Such strategy could only be carried out provided that knowledge on the city's geography and climate was known to Sonni Ali and his army in their quest to control Jenne. He then used Sorko flotilla to put a water route blockade onto the city and infantry and cavalry troops to block land routes. When the water subsided, he would instruct his men to surround the city again, cutting off the city dwellers from food supplies and finally resulting in their surrender. Nature manipulation strategy could also be observed in military actions in *Ra's al-Ma'* (Raz el-Ma). Sonni Ali rallied his troops to construct a canal linking the area up to Walatah.

Military Formation in Battles

Not much is known on Songhay Kingdom's military formation in a battle. Thornton (1999: 28) and Reid (2012: 61) noted that the battle in Tondibi which took place in 999AH/1591CE gave more or less information on cavalry and infantry formations employed by the Songhay military when operating in any battle. The clash in Tondibi was a battle between the Sa'diyyah Kingdom and the Songhay Kingdom. Sa'diyyah army was led by Jawdar Pasha while the Songhay troops were led by Askia Ishaq II himself. In that clash, an infantry of the Songhay Kingdom had been placed in the middle, flanked by cavalries on both left and right sides of the infantry.

In that battle, the cavalry led by Jawdar had attacked both wing sides of the Songhay formation resulting in a chaotic situation. To overcome the attack, the Songhay side had released a thousand cattle to the middle of the Jawdar battalion in order to break their formation and their lines. Songhay infantry then advanced forward behind the cattle. It was unfortunate for the Songhay side when Sa'diyyah soldiers began to shoot rifles at the cattle resulting in the animals to run in havoc and turning around crushing the Songhay infantry behind. This broke the Songhay infantry formation (Reid 2012: 61).

Seeing that Songhay formation was broken, Jawdar Pasha's infantry moved towards the Songhay soldiers, only to be met by a constant shower of arrows by Songhay archers whose feet were chained to prevent them from fleeing the battle scene. This indirectly raised the spirit of Songhay soldiers to keep fighting. Jawdar's men eventually succeeded to overcome Songhay archers and quell the counterattack of Songhay cavalry who was ready at the back. This consequently forced the Songhay army to retreat fully from the battlefield (Thornton 1999: 28).

The battle of Tondibi which occurred between the Sa'diyyah Kingdom and the Songhay Kingdom in 999AH/1591CE was a battle which occurred due to political and economic reasons. A political factor which brought about the clash between the two kingdoms was because of the political ambition of the Sa'diyyah ruler who intended to increase the kingdom's influence. Maulay al-Mansur as the ruler of the Sa'diyyah Kingdom at that time had the ambition of raising his government's influence by uniting al-Maghrib and Songhay territories under a single rulership. He considered that such campaign was necessary as a preparation for retaking al-Andalus. Therefore, they needed all the economic and human resources to realise the ambition. Songhay's defeat in the battle in Tondibi resulted in Jawdar Pasha's successful conquest of the city of Gao, the administrative capital of the Kingdom of Songhay. A month later, Timbuktu was captured by them (Naylor 2009: 127).

CONCLUSION

Military history of the Songhay Kingdom was an interesting topic to study and examine. The military strength the kingdom had can be seen in the armies in the organization of Songhay military. The Songhay Kingdom had infantries as well as cavalries. The troops were initially temporary but later transformed into neo-permanent contingents during the Askia dynasty periods. Songhay infantries and cavalries were later divided according to specific provinces to safeguard the security of the Songhay Kingdom. Songhay cavalries were also formed by giving sufficient equipment and training to the cavalymen. Apart from that, the types and breeds of horse used were also given attention by Songhay rulers. Besides, military organization of the Songhay Kingdom was also equipped with Sorko flotilla and Tuareg cavalries. Sorko flotilla enabled the kingdom to dominate waterways along the Niger River while Tuareg cavalries provided assistance which could be mobilized anytime. Songhay military strength also stood on the use of effective strategies in their military campaigns. One of such strategies frequently employed included initiation of attack with shootings of thousands of arrows and javelins. Tactics of blockade were also used such as in conquest of the city of Jenne.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was financed by the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS/1/2022/SSI13/UKM/02/6), Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia; Geran Universiti Penyelidikan GUP-2022-033 and Geran Universiti Penyelidikan GUP-2024-072 from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia; Dana Pecutan Penerbitan and Dana Insentif Penerbitan from Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

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