



Key vocabulary	
Successor	The next person to rule.
Exiled	To be banned from your country.
Tondibi	A place in present-day Mali where the Battle of Tondibi took place in 1591.
Tura	A term for a high-ranking officer or noble in certain empires.
Askia	Ruler of the Songhai Empire.
Sultan	Ruler of an Islamic country or region.
Infantry	Fighters on foot.
Cavalry	Fighters on horseback.
Tuaregs	A group of people who lived in the Sahara Desert, a nomadic people who controlled northern trade routes and were expert camel drivers along the trans-Saharan trade.

The destruction of Timbuktu	The Battle of Tondibi, 1591
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timbuktu was an important trading centre and home to one of the most significant collections of Islamic and African scholarship in the world. When advancing into the city, the Moroccan invaders destroyed some of these important manuscripts. These manuscripts were handwritten, some were centuries old and irreplaceable. Some people hid manuscripts rather than allow the Moroccans to take them. Library buildings were also destroyed, with some being burned to the ground. The Moroccan invasion of Timbuktu disrupted trade in the area, which weakened the city. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Sultan of Morocco, Ahmad al-Mansur, attacked as the Songhai Empire was weak and he wanted to control the trans-Saharan gold trade. The battle took place in 1591 between the Songhai and Moroccan forces. The Songhai were disadvantaged from the start as they relied on traditional weapons, whereas the Moroccans had superior weapons, including firearms and cannons. The battle took place at Tondibi, near Gao. The Songhai cavalry was ineffective when fighting against the cannons and guns, which the Moroccans constantly used throughout the battle. The Songhai were easily defeated. Askia Ishaq II fled the battlefield, and the Moroccans advanced further into the Songhai Empire.

Regional rivalries and military commanders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As there was a lack of strong leadership, some local governors took control of their areas, making decisions for themselves. Cities such as Timbuktu and Djenne began to ignore instructions from the capital, Gao. Groups such as the Tuaregs took greater control over the northern trade routes. Regional rivalries meant that the empire was not running smoothly and became vulnerable to attack. Some military commanders had their own private armies and did not follow the orders of the Askia.

Succession problems after Askia Daoud
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When Askia Daoud died in 1582, he did not name a successor, which led to several people, including his sons, vying for power. Each leader was more concerned with maintaining their position than strengthening the empire, which caused the empire to weaken gradually and become more vulnerable to attack. Askia Ibrahim (1582) was immediately challenged and lost power. Askia Al-Hajj (1582–1586) was opposed by members of the royal family, removed from power and exiled to Tondibi, where he soon died. Askia Muhammad Bani (1586–1588), despite being a military leader, could not retain power. Askia Ishaq II (1588–1591) took over a weak empire; he ruled until its collapse.

The decline of trade routes	The impact of drought and famine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to many leadership problems, control over the trade routes was lost. Regional rulers focused on local issues and did not collaborate with others to maintain the trade routes. The empire's gold reserves were being depleted, meaning there was less gold traded. Moroccan trade routes were becoming more popular. Other countries, such as Portugal, were trading along the West African coast, so trans-Saharan trade was no longer necessary. The decline of the trade routes weakened the Songhai Empire. Cities such as Timbuktu were making less money from trade and, as a result, paid fewer taxes to the Askia. Less tax revenue meant less money to fund the armies, making it difficult for the Askia to maintain control over such a large empire. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As there was not enough rain, crops failed, which meant that there was less food available, leading to famine and starvation. Food prices went up, especially in cities such as Timbuktu and Gao. People who had lived in the countryside often moved to the cities, but life there was just as bad. As people were malnourished, many became ill or contracted diseases. The Songhai Empire could not trade surplus food with neighbouring areas, which caused the Songhai government to lose income from taxes on trade.

The division of Songhai territory
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After the Moroccan victory at Tondibi, some Songhai territories began to break away and become independent. Some of these smaller kingdoms included the Kassena and Mossi Kingdoms. As they were no longer part of the Songhai Empire, they could make their own decisions, trade with whomever they wanted and follow their own rules. The Songhai Empire never regained control of these lands.