

# **CHAPTER 2 SAMOURI TOURE AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MANDINKA EMPIRE**

## **Objectives**

After studying this chapter, students should be able to:

- examine the religious, economic and political activities of Samouri toure;
- discuss the rise and fall of Mandinka empire;
- examine samouri's conflict with French and the fall of the empire.

## **Introduction**

Samouri Toure's origin can be traced down to what is known today as modern day Guinea along the Upper Niger. He was a great warrior who fought imperialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He resisted and refused to submit to French colonization which made him chose the path of confrontation using warfare and diplomacy.

### **2.1 Religious, Economic and Political Activities of Samouri Toure**

The life and times of Samouri Toure was occupied with religious, economic and political activities that brought him to limelight. All these will be treated below:

#### **(a) Religious Activities**

Samouri was born in the Guinea area around 1830. He belongs to the Dyula clan of the Madinka people. Samouri did not practice Islam strictly in his youth. He only learned the practices of Islam from some Muslim traders in the 1850. From then, he adhered strictly to the practice of Islam. His newly found faith was introduced when he established his empire.

#### **(b) Economic Activities**

At an early age Samouri started trading activity. This is due to the fact that he came from Oyula clan who were expert traders that moved to all parts of West Africa selling variety of goods such as gold items and European goods such as textiles, iron goods, textiles. They also manufactured iron tools such as hoe, cutlass, etc.

#### **(c) Political Activities**

Samouri Toure grew in an area where there were changes and transformation of the society from villages into towns and towns grew into cities and small states. The changes in the society occurred due to the trading activities of the Dyula. This led to capital and wealth

accumulation by powerful merchants as well as the developments taking place in the neighbouring empire of Tukolor. Thus, these changes partly influenced Samouri Toure to build his empire.

## 2.2 Rise and Growth of Mandinka Empire

Samouri lived as a trader who traded in gold and cattle until his mother was captured as a slave by the Sise (a Dyla Clan) in 1853. He was required to serve the Sise army to secure his mother's release. Thus, it was while serving the Sise army that he acquired all the necessary military training. By the time he left the Sise army in 1861, he thought of establishing his own empire so that he can enlarge and protect trade and commerce which was the practice in the area for centuries.

By 1866, the forces of Samouri Toure defeated the chief of Kamadugu and put the area under his control. Samouri also conquered Toron, Wosulenke and Kankan which made his empire to expand greatly. He adopted the policy of taking over the armies of conquered territories and enlisting them into his own army; which made his army to increase greatly. He maintained calvary and foot soldiers consisting of over 30,000 all together.

Samouri used the soldiers efficiently to maintain his empire. This was made possible because following the establishment of his empire, he divided it into five provinces. Samouri was the executive head of the central administration. The five provinces were governed by army officers called Kelitigi who controlled the provinces. The capital of Samouri was Bissandugu. Samouri was bent on establishing in empire in order to have control of the trade routes in the area. Trade routes were a great source of revenue to his government. In fact, the empire building was paramount to Samouri; that was why he established an armoury where guns were manufactured as well as repaired. He also bought arms and rifles from Sierra Leone and Guinea Coast with which he used in forming a strong army. At the peak of the empire, extended to the border of Sierra Leone and Liberia in the South, Futa Jallon to the West and Tukolor empire to the North-West.

As economic activities were important in Mandinka empire, so also was agriculture in the lives of the people. These soldiers were used on the battle field as well as on the farms where they worked hard to produce food for the empire. Also, each village was made to produce food for the state. Most of the food produced was rice which was used to support the population.

Samouri Toure derived the greater part of his revenue from trade. Revenue was generated from the sales of gold produced in Bure. Slaves and ivory were also exported which provided revenue to the state. All these enabled Samouri Toure to maintain his army to withstand external attacks.

Although, Samouri did not establish the empire on the basis of Jihad, he made Islamic practices important in the empire. Schools and mosques were built everywhere in the empire. He also invited scholars and gave them important positions in the empire. He also enforced the practice of Islam, such as prayers, fasting, Qur'anic education and prohibited the drinking of alcohol.

## 2.3 Samouri Toure's Conflict with the French and the Fall of the Empire

Samouri Toure came in contact with the French in the course of territorial expansion. In the year 1882, a French expedition attacked Samouri armies. Although the attack was unsuccessful but he wondered at the discipline and the firearms used by the French. In curbing the invading of his empire by the French, Samouri sought for help in Liberia. In January 1885, he sent an emissary to Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone seeking to submit his kingdom under the British protection. The British who were not interested in controlling empires in the French territory at that time turned down the offer but provided Samouri's army with modern weapons and rifles with which they fought the French.

After several attempts by the French to capture Mandinka empire, it became accomplished in the year 1883 with the conquering of Bamako and two years later they conquered the gold producing area of Bure which Samouri depended on for the greater part of his revenue. In order to prevent further clashes between the Samouri and the French, a treaty was signed in Bissanduu which prevented further expansion for both parties.

However, in 1891 both parties breached the contract which led to another round of battle.

The French needed to occupy all the states around Senegal and Niger rivers in order to block other European powers from taking control of the area. Samouri, being a determined warrior, was not ready to give in to French control; which was why when the French attacked Bissaudugu his capital in 1891. He resisted capture and instead, he adopted the policy of burning down villages, called 'scorched earth policy' in order to prevent the French from having access to food supply. This policy was effective because the French had to withdraw from the area due to absence of food and further attacks on French forces through guerilla warfare.

Samouri relocated his capital away from the French, but unfortunately the new area could not generate enough revenue for his administrative needs. He had to manufacture his guns as he could no longer purchase modern and sophisticated weapons from Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Samouri tried to expand his state further East and came in conflict with another enemy—the British who were in Asante. Nonetheless, the fall of Sikosso and Dioulosso in 1898 greatly affected Samouri's food supply which was why he decided to move to Liberia. In the absence of food supply, his army became weakened and easily fell prey to the French army in 1898. Samouri was eventually captured and deported to Gabon where he died two years later and that ended the great Mandinka empire.

## Summary

- Samouri Toure was born in the Guinea area in 1830.
- He is from the Dyula Clan who were mostly traders. During his trading activities, he came in contact with Muslim merchants who taught him the fundamentals of Islam.
- Samouri served in Sise army to release his mother in 1853.

- When he left the Sise army in 1861 he had acquired the necessary training required for the establishment of an empire.
- He conquered Wasadugu, Kankan and Toron.
- He maintained cavalry and foot soldiers of more than 30,000 soldiers with which he resisted French occupation.
- He established a central administration under his control and further divided his empire into five provinces headed by military officers called Kelitigi.
- He conquered gold producing area of Bure and trade routes which gave him access to revenue.
- He established his capital at Bissadugu.
- He encouraged the practice of Islam such as saying of prayers, reading the Qu'ran and fasting. He also built mosques and schools, and he encouraged scholars to settle.
- He used the scorched earthed policy and guerilla warfare to defeat the French army.
- He was captured by the French in 1898 and deported to Gabon where he died in 1890.

### Revision Questions

1. Samouri built a strong army with which he resisted \_\_\_\_\_ occupation.
  - A. German
  - B. French
  - C. British
  - D. Portuguese
2. Samouri established a centralised government and divided the empire into five \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. states
  - B. centres
  - C. provinces
  - D. localities
3. Sources of revenue to Mandinka empire came from the following except \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. Agriculture
  - B. Gold trade
  - C. Slaves
  - D. silk
4. The capital of Samouri is called \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. Ghana
  - B. Mali
  - C. Bissadugu
  - D. Jenne
5. Samouri used guerilla warfare and \_\_\_\_\_ when he was in war with the French.
  - A. scorched earth policy

- B. bombing  
C. attacks  
D. encounters
6. Samouri promoted the teaching of Islam in \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. Sokoto caliphate  
B. Yukulor empire  
C. Masina caliphate  
D. Mandinka empire
7. Which of the following was not established as a result of the Jihad in West Africa?  
A. Madinka empire  
B. Masina empire  
C. Sokoto caliphate  
D. Tukular empire
8. The French captured Samouri in \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. 1708  
B. 1907  
C. 1898  
D. 1800
9. The French exiled Samouri to \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. Nigeria  
B. benin  
C. Gabon  
D. Dakar
10. \_\_\_\_\_ was the major crops produced in Mandinka.  
A. Rice  
B. Beans  
C. Yam  
D. Cocoyam

### Essay Questions

1. Examine the religious, economic and political activities before the declaration of an empire.
2. Discuss the rise of Mandinka empire.
3. Discuss how Samouri resisted European occupation.
4. Examine political system of Mandinka empire.
5. Discuss the political organisation of Samouri Toure's empire.