



## The Kanem-Bornu Empire (800-1894 AD)

At the height of influence, the Kanem-Bornu encompassed what is known as present day Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Libya (Figure 1). Kanem-Bornu followed the Songhai Empire as the most influential in the region. The rulers/kings of Kanem-Bornu were referred to as Mais. The Empire was ruled by two dynasties, Dugawa (800-1075 A.D.), and Seifuwa (1075-late 1800s).

The most notable ruler was Mai Idris Allooma. A devout muslim, Allooma instituted the judicial system under Sharia Law, and encouraged scholarship. Allooma was known for his military strategy. His main adversaries were the Hausa (west) Tuareg and Tooubou (north) and the Bulala people (east). His strategies included fixed encampments with walls, scorched earth tactics, armored horses with quilted padding to buffer arrow attacks, Berber camelry, Kotoko boatmen, and iron-helmeted musketeers (figures 2-4). His diplomatic ties included Tripoli, Egypt, and Turkey.

German scholar, Dr. Henry Barth documented in 1857 that the city of Murzuk had multi - story buildings, truncated pyramids. In 1826, a British scholar wrote, "Denham and Clapperton were astonished to find among the Negros magnificent courts, regiments of calvary, horses caparisoned in silk for gala days, and clad in coats of mail for war."



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

Sources:

Walker, Robin, If you want to learn African History, Start Here

<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/africa/kanem-bornu.htm>

<https://answersafrica.com/african-empires-that-have-become-unfairly-infamous.html>

(Author's note: the truncated pyramid roof-top is utilized today in rural regions across West Africa (figures 5 and 6). While Konem-Bornu not known to trade much in gold, it gained wealth due to proximity to the Trans Saharan trade routes. Exports included natron (sodium carbonate), cotton, kola nuts, ivory, ostrich feathers, perfume, wax, and hides, enslaved persons. Imports included salt, horses, silks, glass, muskets, and copper.

After the death of Mai Allooma, the empire began to decline due to increased military attacks from the Fulani, drought, internal disagreements, and the final blow came in 1893, when 1893 Rabih Fadlallah, invaded and conquered the already weakened Konem-Bornu, with his army, from eastern Sudan.