

COBA REFERENCE: SENEGAL EARLY HISTORY

The Republic of Senegal is the most westerly state of Africa. It covers an area of 196,722 sq. km (75,955sq miles). The May 1988 population census of Senegal stood at 6,896,808 and an estimated 8,152,000 at mid-1993. The southern border of Senegal is first with Guinea-Bissau and then with Guinea on the northern edge of the outcrop of Fouta Djallon. It shares its eastern border with Mali, the northern border with Mauritania and Gambia forms a semi-enclave between part of southern Senegal and the sea. It is bordered on its western side by the Atlantic Ocean.

It is now known that Senegal has been inhabited since Paleolithic and Neolithic period. This has been evidenced by the discovery of household implements and tools and stone circles. Added to these discoveries are copper and iron objects, which have been discovered in the Sine-Saloum region. One of the major ethnic groups the Tukolor occupied the lower Senegal Valley since the 11th century. It is now widely believed that the name of the country is derived from the Zenega Berbers of Mauritania and northern Senegal. Just before 1040, the Zenega Berbers established what is now widely accepted as a Muslim Monastery, which eventually became the base of the Almoravids. These Almoravids eventually converted the Tukolor to Islam. Interestingly enough, these Almoravids managed to defeat all the major Kingdoms – Ghana and Morocco – and entered Spain. Between 1150 and 1350, the kingdom of Jolof was established. However, in the 16th century, it became factionalised into four kingdoms, which competed with each other. These are: the Jolof, Walo, Cajor (Kajor) and Bawol (Baol) kingdoms. Senegalese exposure to European trade started in 1444 when the Portuguese established trading posts along the coast on the river Senegal, Goree (which eventually became a major slave transit post) Rufisque and along the south as a whole. Reflective of the European struggles for power along Africa's coast, the Portuguese were displaced by the Dutch and eventually the French. French hegemony eventually resulted in the establishment of a factory in 1659 at N'dar and eventually became the town of Saint-Louis. The eventual decline of Dutch influence in Senegal was the French conquest of Goree in 1677 resulting in an increased French trade in slaves, gold and gum. While these struggles for power among the European powers were going on, the Serer of Sine and Saloum also used this period to establish independent kingdoms. With the spread of Islamic influences in the Kingdoms, Islam gained strength and finally in 1776, Tukolor Muslims established a theocratic confederacy in Fouta Toro.