

# MANSA MUSA OF MALI

## The Mali Empire Under Mansa Musa

Mansa Musa was the king of the Mali Empire, located in West Africa, during the years 1312 to his death in 1337. Mansa was the traditional title meaning king in the Mali Empire. Under Mansa Musa's leadership, the empire was at its largest and made-up parts of present-day Mali, Senegal, Mauritania, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad. Two cities that Mansa Musa brought into the Mali Empire during his reign, Timbuktu and Gao, became important trade locations. The kingdom of Mali was wealthy when Mansa Musa came to power, but he turned the empire into an advanced center of learning in the Islamic world.

## Trade in the Mali Empire

The Mali Empire included important trade cities that were located near the Niger River. The location was beneficial to trade because it was located where major land and waterways intersected. This made cities such as Timbuktu and Gao an important trading hub for people coming from the Sahara Desert. The Mali Empire gained enormous wealth from the trade that occurred in these cities. The Mali Empire controlled large numbers of gold mines and the gold was traded for other items that were needed by the king and people. One important item traded in the Mali Empire was salt. Salt was extremely important because it was used to preserve food at a time when refrigeration did not yet exist. When merchants traded gold, salt, or other items, it was taxed by Mansa Musa, which created large amounts of wealth for the empire. Mansa Musa used this wealth to create centers of learning in his empire.

## Religion in the Mali Empire

The main religion in the Mali Empire was Islam. Islam came to West Africa in a unique way. Traders from East Africa, known as Berbers, would travel to West Africa to trade. When Berbers, who were Muslim, interacted with people in West Africa, they shared their religion with other traders, resulting in many people converting to Islam. Gradually the kings of the region became Muslim as well. Kings combined Muslim beliefs with indigenous beliefs to convince the people in the empire to convert to Islam. Mansa Musa placed importance on his religion and used his wealth to increase Islamic knowledge. He built several mosques including the Grand Mosque at Djinguereber in Timbuktu, which still stands today. Mansa Musa brought scholars to Timbuktu to write manuscripts about Islam. These manuscripts are still studied today. The mosque became a center of Islamic learning and helped increase the spread of Islam in Africa.

## Mansa Musa's Lasting Legacy

Mansa Musa also used his power and wealth to bring scholars from many other academic areas to Timbuktu. The Sankore Mosque, built during his reign, later became the University of Sankore. Experts in areas such as arithmetic, history, and law came to Sankore to teach and record information that can still be read today. Although Mansa Musa is most known for his extravagant hajj to Mecca, his impact can be seen in other areas today.

## Resources

*Cartwright, M. (2021, April 18). Mansa Musa I. [https://www.worldhistory.org/Mansa\\_Musa\\_I/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Mansa_Musa_I/)*

*Daley, J. (2019, February 05). New exhibition highlights story of the richest man who ever lived. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/richest-man-who-ever-lived-180971409/>*

*National Geographic Society. (2020, March 04). Mansa Musa (Musa I of Mali). <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/mansa-musa-musa-i-mali/>*