

Name: _____

Date: _____

The Mali Empire

Instructions: Read the article. Define the terms in bold using context clues or a dictionary. Then answer the questions that follow.

The Mali trading empire of West Africa began its rise upon the collapse of the empire of Ghana. It developed from the kingdom of Kangaba, which was established along the upper Niger River by the Malinke people possibly as early as 1000 CE. Kangaba was originally part of ancient Ghana. Following a brief occupation by the Muslim Almoravids in the late 1000s, the vulnerable Ghana Empire saw its kingdoms assert their independence. In the early 1200s a kingdom led by the Susu people laid claim to the remnants of the empire. The **tyrannical** rule of Sumanguru, the Susu chief, incited the Malinke of Kangaba to revolt. By 1240 the Malinke, under the leadership of Sundiata, had captured Kumbi, the capital of Ghana.

The kingdom, now known as Mali, began to grow into an empire under Sundiata. The king sent his armies to subdue neighboring peoples while laying the economic foundations for the empire by taking control of the region's **lucrative** gold and salt trade and encouraging agricultural development.

In the early 1300s, under the rule of the emperor (mansa) Musa, the Mali Empire reached the height of its power and influence, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the city of Gao in the east. It encompassed the city of Timbuktu, which grew famous both as a trading center and as a showcase of Islamic culture. The renown of the lavish empire—the first great Muslim state in the Sudan region—spread throughout the Muslim world and in Europe when Mansa Musa made a spectacular royal **pilgrimage** to Mecca, via Egypt, in 1324. Leading a caravan of 60,000 subjects and 80 camels loaded with gold, Mansa Musa touched off a grand celebration upon his arrival in Cairo. There, the emperor impressed the sultan and the people with his generosity and his devotion to Islam. From Cairo, Mansa Musa continued on to Mecca.



Location of the Mali Empire



The emperor of Mali, Musa I, seated on his throne, with a Tuareg on camelback facing him, detail from the Catalan Atlas (1375).

During the pilgrimage, one of Mansa Musa's generals extended the Mali Empire by capturing Gao, the capital of the Songhai people. The conquest brought the western part of the Songhai kingdom under Mali's control, adding a vast territory to the empire. The 14th-century traveler Ibn Battutah noted that it took about four months to travel from the northern borders of the Mali Empire to Niani in the south. It was one of the largest empires in the world at that time.

Under Mansa Musa's rule, Timbuktu grew to be a very important trading city. It developed caravan connections with Egypt and with all other important trade centers in North Africa. Mansa Musa also supported learning and the arts. Scholars interested in history, Islamic **theology**, and law made Timbuktu's Sankore **mosque** a teaching center. As the mosque grew in significance, it became known as the University of Sankore. The university remained a center of Islamic scholarship until the late 16th century.

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After Mansa Musa’s death in 1332, the Mali Empire began a steady decline. A string of weak rulers in the late 1300s was unable to stop outlying provinces from declaring their independence. Military attacks on the eastern part of the empire by the Mossi and Tuareg peoples took their toll as well. The fall of Timbuktu to the Tuareg in the 1430s signaled the final decline of the empire. In the late 1400s Mali gave way to the rising Songhai Empire, which had its capital at Gao.

The Great Mosque (Djinguereber) in Timbuktu, Mali, was built in the 1300s, under the Mali emperor Mansa Musa.

Term	Definition
tyrannical	
lucrative	
pilgrimage	
theology	
mosque	

1. Where was the Mali Empire located?

The Mali Empire Answer Key

Term	Definition
tyrannical	<i>using power over people in a way that is cruel and unfair</i>
lucrative	<i>producing money or wealth</i>
pilgrimage	<i>a journey to a holy place</i>
theology	<i>the study of religious faith, practice, and experience</i>
mosque	<i>a Muslim place of worship</i>

1. Where was the Mali Empire located?
The Mali Empire was located in West Africa. It stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the city of Gao.
2. Who led the Mali Empire?
Early expansion was led by Sundiata, who founded the empire, and it reached its height under Mansa Musa in the early 1300s.
3. How did the Mali Empire expand?
The Mali Empire expanded through military conquests, gaining control of neighboring peoples and trade routes.
4. What were some major accomplishments of the Mali Empire?
During the Mali Empire, Timbuktu became a major trading city and a center for Islamic learning. The Sankore mosque attracted scholars and became a university.
5. What led to the fall of the Mali Empire?
After Mansa Musa's death, weak rulers, provinces breaking away, and military attacks by the Mossi and Tuareg contributed to the empire's decline. In the late 1400s, the Mali Empire was replaced by the Songhai Empire.