

AFRICAN HISTORY: MALI EMPIRE

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During the early 13th Century, the Mali Empire came into existence. Sundiata Keita's victory against the great King Sumanguru at the Kirina battle led to the rise of the Mali Empire at the expense of King Sumanguru's Ghana Empire. Afterward, the Mali Empire grew to become the wealthiest empire in Africa. This paper explores the great achievements and the factors that, at the end, which led to the fall of the Mali Empire.

Great Achievements

At its peak, the Mali Empire accomplished important things that have made African history scholars consider among the wealthiest empires at the time. The achievements are threefold. These are religion, cultural heritage and wealth creation through trade. A notable accomplishment came during Emperor Musa I's reign. In blunt terms, the Malian ruler introduced Islam into Mali.¹ The success of Islam in the Mali Empire, during the mid 14th century, was evident when Emperor Musa I led a procession of several hundreds of followers to Mecca while carrying gold.² At the same time, Timbuktu became a religious hub for Islam scholars, not only in Africa but the Middle-East and beyond.

Concerning cultural heritage and trade, the Mali Empire established a regional capital for business, Timbuktu. Here, traders exchanged salt, gold, and other commodities. Trading activities fostered the creation of wealth which, consequently, led to the expansion of African empires.³ The focal point of all trading activities was Songhai. The kingdom also instilled a culture of discipline among all members of the empire. This achievement was attained through

¹ Agyepong, Stephen, "A Glorious Age in Africa: Ghana, Mali, and Songhay, The Story of Three Great Empires by Daniel Chu, Elliott Skinner (review)," *Africa Today* 60, no. 1 (2013): 133.

²Ibid., 134.

³ Kevin Shillington, *History of Africa* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 122.

the promoting education following the building of the University of Sankore at the kingdom's headquarters.

The Fall of the Empire

The fall of the empire started at the time when Songhai, a powerful epicenter of trade, founded its independence and used in its influences to rise to power at the expense of the greater Mali. Later, during the 16th century, the riches of Songhai attracted Moroccan invaders who invaded the empire. Drame and Mohammad mentions that the capture of Timbuktu acted as the empire's final death knell.⁴ In Africa, the capture of the main cities was a sign of victory for the conquerors.⁵ Prior to the independence of Songhai, the sons of Mansa Musa mismanaged the affairs of the empire grossly. For this reason, the leadership began crumbling after smaller states that were loyal to the emperors broke off. These were those states that Emperor Keita had conquered when the empire first asserted its rule in medieval West Africa. Therefore, the in-house political juggles of Emperor Mansa Musa's sons influenced the fall of the kingdom significantly. In essence, the mismanagement of vital activities of the territory, political juggles, and the independence of the Mali kingdom are notable factors that ultimately led to the decline of Emperor Sundiata's Mali Empire. The fall of this empire was not inevitable. The leaders, who ruled during the decline period, should have used the lessons about the conquest of Mali to foresee that the rise of Songhai could threaten the dominance of the Empire in its entirety.

⁴ Drame, Chaibou Fodie Makan, and Mohammad Redzuan Othman, "THE VICISSITUDES OF MALI'S EMPIRE," *Jurnal Sejarah* 21, no. 2 (2015): 3.

⁵ John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 105.

Conclusion

The Mali Empire has a unique place in African history. The empire is among the greatest kingdoms that existed in Africa. The rise to prominence, wealth, and power are attributable to the charisma of gifted leaders such as Sundiata Keita and Mansa Musa who embarked on powerful strategies of shaping the empire's economy. The fall of the Mali Empire was seemingly inevitable just as it was for the Kingdom of Ghana.

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