

Ancient Mali

Mali: The Beginning

The Mali Empire developed along the Niger River which enabled it to control the river trade. Mali's power grew because of the leadership of Sundiata Keita. Meaning "hungering lion," Sundaita was born a sick and crippled child. Through hard work and exercise, Sundiat was able to grow into a strong and powerful man.

Under the leadership of Sundaita, Mali was able to conquer Mali's rival the Sossos. With the Sossos and other tribes under control, Mali was able to control the gold and salt trade. This allowed the empire to become rich. Not just relying on trade, Mali also improved agriculture of Mali, growing beans, onions, grains, and cotton.

How did Sundiata gain power for Mali and how did he improve the empire?

The Growth of Mali

Mansa Musa undertook a pilgrimage to the Muslim holy city of Mecca. With him he took thousands of people and hundreds of animals laden with gold, clothing, food/spices, and art. This made Mali famous worldwide for its wealth and power.

When Mansa Musa returned, he ordered the construction of grand buildings and mosques. Trade and commerce increased. Doctors, scholars, judges, and religious leaders were all drawn to Mali. Soon new schools and universities were created. Mansa Musa stressed the importance of learning and the ability to read. The language was Arabic and because of this Islam became the major religion of Mali and was soon spread across West Africa.

Why did Islam become the major religion of Mali?

Mansa Musa

Sundaita's leadership enabled Mali to grow. However, after his death in 1255 Mali began to decline. Eventually a grand nephew of his became the next great ruler. Under Mansa Musa, Mali reached the height of its power and wealth. He was able to defeat the Songhai Empire which competed with Mali.

Musa valued higher learning and supported education. He built great cities such as Jenne and Timbuktu which became famous for their trade and their universities. These cities became centers for scholars, judges, doctors, and religious leaders. Soon these cities became famous around the world for their knowledge.

How did Mali change under Mansa Musa?

Mali's Fall

After Mansa Musa's death, his son came to power. His son and the other leaders of Mali were not as capable as Mansa Musa.

Raiders attacked from the south and burned the famous city of Timbuktu. Then nomads attacked from the north and captured the remains of the city. Not able to protect its people, many of them decided to break away from Mali. Large portions of the Empire seceded, including the soon to be powerful Songhai Empire. Eventually only a small portion of what was one the great Empire of Mali was left.

What was the reason for the fall of Mali?