



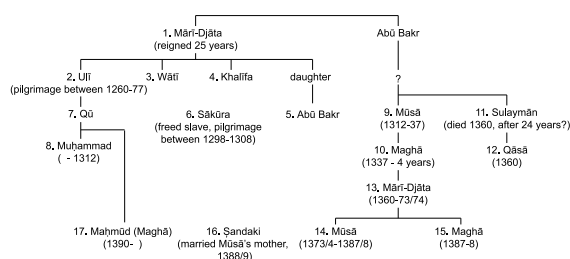
# Musa I of Mali

**Musa Keita I** (c. 1280 – c. 1337) was the tenth *Mansa*, which translates as "King of Kings" or "Emperor", of the wealthy *Mali Empire*. At the time of Musa's rise to the throne, the Malian Empire consisted of territory formerly belonging to the *Ghana Empire* in present-day southern *Mauritania* and in *Melle (Mali)* and the immediate surrounding areas. Musa held many titles, including *Emir of Melle*, *Lord of the Mines of Wangara*, *Conqueror of Ghanata*, and at least a dozen others.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 1 Nomenclature

Musa Keita was referred to (and is most commonly found as) *Mansa Musa* in Western manuscripts and literature. His name also appears as *Kankou Musa*, *Kankan Musa*, and *Kanku Musa*, which means "Musa, son of Kankou".<sup>[note 1]</sup> Other alternatives are *Mali-koy Kankan Musa*, *Gonga Musa*, and the *Lion of Mali*.<sup>[2][3]</sup>

## 2 Lineage and accession to the throne



*Genealogy of the kings of the Mali Empire based on the chronicle of Ibn Khaldun*

What is known about the kings of the *Malian Empire* is taken from the writings of Arab scholars, including *Al-Umari*, *Abu-sa'id Uthman ad-Dukkali*, *Ibn Khaldun*, and *Ibn Battuta*. According to *Ibn-Khaldun's* comprehensive history of the *Malian kings*, *Mansa Musa's* grandfather was *Abu-Bakr Keita*(the Arabic equivalent to *Bakari* or *Bogari*, original name unknown – not the *sahabiyy* *Abu Bakr*), a brother of *Sundiata Keita*, the founder of the *Malian Empire* as recorded through oral histories. *Abu-Bakr* did not ascend the throne, and his son, *Musa's* father, *Faga Laye*, has no significance in the *History of Mali*.<sup>[4]</sup>

*Mansa Musa Keita* came to the throne through a practice of appointing a deputy when a king goes on his pilgrimage to *Mecca* or some other endeavor, and later naming the deputy as heir. According to primary sources, *Musa* was appointed deputy of *Abubakari Keita II*, the king before him, who had reportedly embarked on an expedition to explore the limits of the *Atlantic Ocean*, and never returned. The Arab-Egyptian scholar *Al-Umari* quotes *Mansa Musa* as follows:

The ruler who preceded me did not believe that it was impossible to reach the extremity of the ocean that encircles the earth (the *Atlantic Ocean*). He wanted to reach that (end) and was determined to pursue his plan. So he equipped two hundred boats full of men, and many others full of gold, water and provisions sufficient for several years. He ordered the captain not to return until they had reached the other end of the ocean, or until he had exhausted the provisions and water. So they set out on their journey. They were absent for a long period, and, at last just one boat returned. When questioned the captain replied: 'O Prince, we navigated for a long period, until we saw in the midst of the ocean a great river which was flowing massively.. My boat was the last one; others were ahead of me, and they were drowned in the great whirlpool and never came out again. I sailed back to escape this current.' But the Sultan would not believe him. He ordered two thousand boats to be equipped for him and his men, and one thousand more for water and provisions. Then he conferred the regency on me for the term of his absence, and departed with his men, never to return nor to give a sign of life.<sup>[5]</sup>

*Musa's* son and successor, *Mansa Magha Keita*, was also appointed deputy during *Musa's* pilgrimage.<sup>[6]</sup>

## 3 Islam and pilgrimage to Mecca

*From the far reaches of the Mediterranean Sea to the Indus River, the faithful approached the city of Mecca. All had the same objective to worship together at the most sacred shrine of Islam, the Kaaba in Mecca. One such traveler was Mansa Musa, Sultan of Mali in Western Africa. Mansa Musa had prepared carefully for the long journey*

*he and his attendants would take. He was determined to travel not only for his own religious fulfillment, but also for recruiting teachers and leaders, so that his realms could learn more of the Prophet's teachings.*

**Mahmud Kati**, *Chronicle of the Seeker*

Musa was a devout Muslim and his pilgrimage to Mecca, a command ordained by Allah according to core teachings of Islam, made him well-known across northern Africa and the Middle East. To Musa, Islam was “an entry into the cultured world of the Eastern Mediterranean”.<sup>[7]</sup> He would spend much time fostering the growth of Islam in his empire.

Musa made his pilgrimage in 1324, his procession reported to include 60,000 men, 12,000 slaves who each carried four pounds of gold bars, heralds dressed in silks who bore gold staffs, organized horses and handled bags. Musa provided all necessities for the procession, feeding the entire company of men and animals.<sup>[8]</sup> Also in the train were 80 camels, which varying reports claim carried between 50 and 300 pounds of gold dust each. He gave away the gold to the poor he met along his route. Musa not only gave to the cities he passed on the way to Mecca, including Cairo and Medina, but also traded gold for souvenirs. Furthermore, it has been recorded that he built a mosque each and every Friday.

Musa's journey was documented by several eyewitnesses along his route, who were in awe of his wealth and extensive procession, and records exist in a variety of sources, including journals, oral accounts and histories. Musa is known to have visited with the Mamluk sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad of Egypt in July 1324.<sup>[9]</sup>

Musa's generous actions, however, inadvertently devastated the economy of the region. In the cities of Cairo, Medina and Mecca, the sudden influx of gold devalued the metal for the next decade. Prices on goods and wares greatly inflated. To rectify the gold market, Musa borrowed all the gold he could carry from money-lenders in Cairo, at high interest. This is the only time recorded in history that one man directly controlled the price of gold in the Mediterranean.<sup>[10]</sup>

## 4 Later reign

*Whenever a hero adds to the list of his exploits from conquest, Mansa Musa gives them a pair of wide trousers...The greater the number of a Dogari's exploits, the bigger the size of his trousers.*

**Al-Dukhari**, *observation of the court of Mansa Musa in Timbuktu*<sup>[11]</sup>

During his long return journey from Mecca in 1325, Musa heard news that his army had recaptured Gao. Sagmandia, one of his generals, led the endeavor. The city

of Gao had been within the empire since before Sakura's reign and was an important – though often rebellious – trading center. Musa made a detour and visited the city where he received, as hostages, the two sons of the Gao king, Ali Kolon and Suleiman Nar. He returned to Niani with the two boys and later educated them at his court. When Mansa Musa returned, he brought back many Arabian scholars and architects.

### 4.1 Construction in Mali

Musa embarked on a large building program, raising mosques and madrasas in Timbuktu and Gao. Most famously the ancient center of learning Sankore Madrasah or University of Sankore was constructed during his reign. In Niani, he built the Hall of Audience, a building communicated by an interior door to the royal palace. It was “an admirable Monument” surmounted by a dome, adorned with arabesques of striking colours. The windows of an upper floor were plated with wood and framed in silver foil, those of a lower floor were plated with wood, framed in gold. Like the Great Mosque, a contemporaneous and grandiose structure in Timbuktu, the Hall was built of cut stone.

During this period, there was an advanced level of urban living in the major centers of the Mali. Sergio Domian, an Italian art and architecture scholar, wrote the following about this period: “Thus was laid the foundation of an urban civilization. At the height of its power, Mali had at least 400 cities, and the interior of the Niger Delta was very densely populated.”<sup>[12]</sup>

### 4.2 Influence in Timbuktu

It is recorded that Mansa Musa traveled through the cities of Timbuktu and Gao on his way to Mecca, and made them a part of his empire when he returned around 1325. He brought architects from Andalusia, a region in Spain, and Cairo to build his grand palace in Timbuktu and the great Djinguereber Mosque that still stands today.<sup>[13]</sup>

Timbuktu soon became a center of trade, culture, and Islam; markets brought in merchants from Hausaland, Egypt, and other African kingdoms, a university was founded in the city (as well as in the Malian cities of Djenné and Ségou), and Islam was spread through the markets and university, making Timbuktu a new area for Islamic scholarship.<sup>[14]</sup> News of the Malian empire's city of wealth even traveled across the Mediterranean to southern Europe, where traders from Venice, Granada, and Genoa soon added Timbuktu to their maps to trade manufactured goods for gold.<sup>[15]</sup>

The University of Sankore in Timbuktu was restaffed under Musa's reign with jurists, astronomers, and mathematicians.<sup>[16]</sup> The university became a center of learning and culture, drawing Muslim scholars from

around Africa and the Middle East to Timbuktu.

In 1330, the kingdom of Mossi invaded and conquered the city of Timbuktu. Gao had already been captured by Musa's general, and Musa quickly regained Timbuktu and built a rampart and stone fort, and placed a standing army to protect the city from future invaders.<sup>[17]</sup>

While Musa's palace has since vanished, the university and mosque still stand in Timbuktu today.

## 5 Death

The death of Mansa Musa is highly debated among modern historians and the Arab scholars who recorded history of Mali. When compared to the reigns of his successors, son Mansa Maghan (recorded rule from 1332 to 1336) and older brother Mansa Suleyman (recorded rule from 1336 to 1360), and Musa's recorded 25 years of rule, the calculated date of death is 1332.<sup>[18]</sup> Other records declare Musa planned to abdicate the throne to his son Maghan, but he died soon after he returned from Mecca in 1325.<sup>[19]</sup> Further, according to an account by Ibn-Khaldun, Mansa Musa was alive when the city of Tlemcen in Algeria was conquered in 1337, as he sent a representative to Algeria to congratulate the conquerors on their victory.<sup>[20][21]</sup>

## 6 See also

- Mali Empire
- Timbuktu

## 7 Notes

- [1] where Kankou is the name of his mother.

## 8 References

- [1] Goodwin 1957, p. 109
- [2] Hunwick 1999, p. 9
- [3] Bell 1972, pp. 224–225
- [4] Levtzion 1963, pp. 341–347
- [5] Abbas Hamdani 1994
- [6] Levtzion 1963, p. 347
- [7] Goodwin 1957, p. 110
- [8] Goodwin 1957, p. 110
- [9] Bell 1972, pp. 224

- [10] Goodwin 1957, p. 110
- [11] Mendoza, Ruben G. "Academia.edu | West African Empires, Dates: 400–1591 C.E. | Ruben G Mendoza". Csumb.academia.edu. Retrieved 17 October 2012.
- [12] *Mansa Musa*, African History Restored, 2008, retrieved 2008-09-29
- [13] De Villiers, Marq and Hirtle, Sheila, Pp. 70.
- [14] De Villiers, Marq and Hirtle, Sheila, pp. 74.
- [15] De Villiers, Marq and Hirtle, Sheila, pp. 87–88.
- [16] Goodwin 1957, p. 111
- [17] De Villiers, Marq and Hirtle, Sheila, pp. 80–81.
- [18] Levtzion 1963, pp. 349–350
- [19] Bell 1972, p. 224
- [20] Levtzion 1963, pp. 349–350
- [21] Bell 1972, pp. 224–225

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## 10 External links

- [African Legends page](#)
- [Al-Umari's description of Mansa Musa's 1324 visit to Cairo](#)
- [Mansa Musa, from Black History Pages](#)

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