

The Rise of Mali

Mali gained power in the same way as the Empire of Ghana. It controlled trade routes across Africa. Mali was in the same region as Ghana. But, Mali was much larger than Ghana.

Sundiata (soon-JAH-tuh) was the first ruler of Mali. He made the salt-gold trade even more successful than before. He also built Niani (nih-AW-nih), which was the capital of ancient Mali. This city was near the major trade routes along the Niger River. Timbuktu (tim-buhk-TOO) was the cultural (KUHl-chuh-ruhl) center of Niani. The city was also the last stop for **caravans** heading across the Sahara Desert. Farmers came to Timbuktu to sell their crops in the markets. And, merchants traded their goods there.

Sundiata made an important decision for his empire. He chose to convert to Islam (is-LAWM). Once he became a Muslim, he was called Mansa Sundiata. The word *mansa* (MAHN-suh) means “emperor.” All of the Mali rulers were Muslims. The most famous Mali ruler was Mansa Musa (MOO-suh).



◀ Huge salt pile in Mali

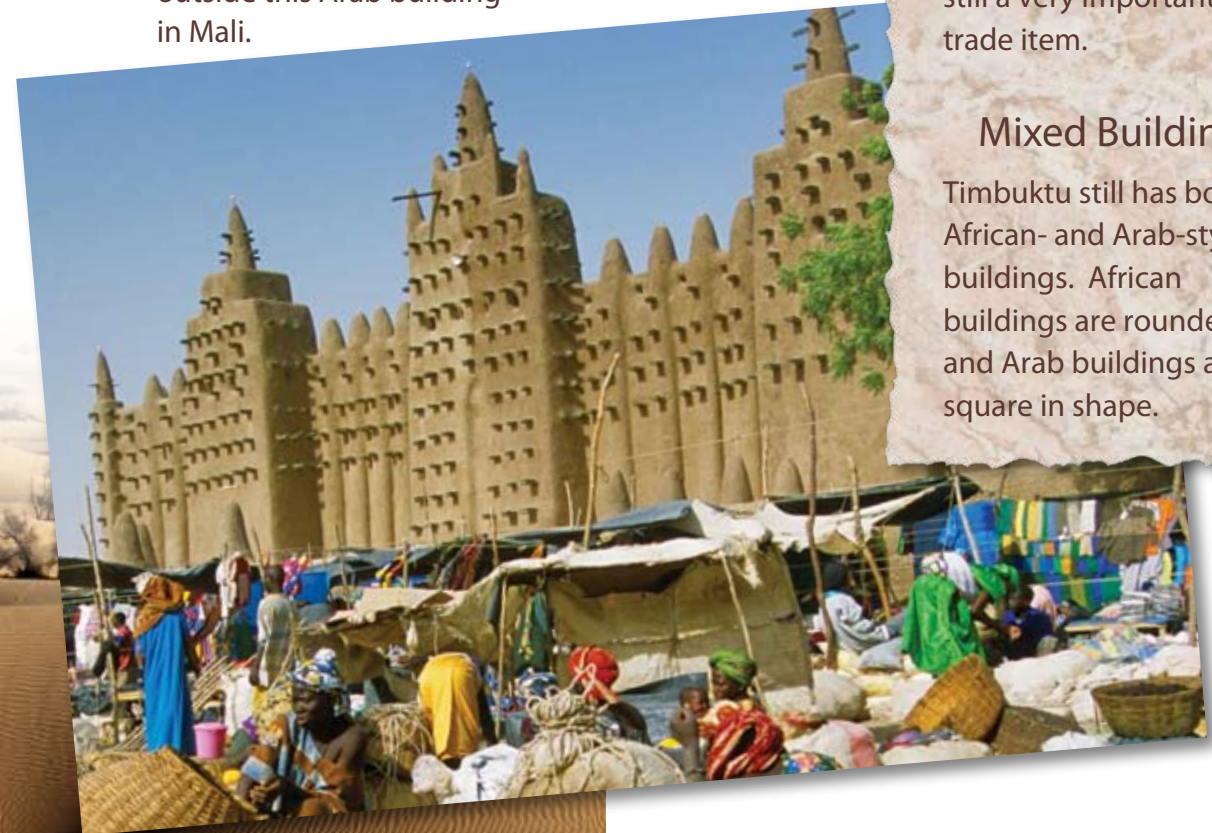
Still Trading

The trade that was strong between Africans and Arabs (AIR-uhbz) in Timbuktu continues today. Salt is still a very important trade item.

Mixed Buildings

Timbuktu still has both African- and Arab-style buildings. African buildings are rounded and Arab buildings are square in shape.

▼ A huge market sets up outside this Arab building in Mali.



◀ These camels are crossing the Sahara. Camels were the main form of transportation in the desert.

Mansa Musa

Mansa Musa controlled Mali from 1312–1337. During his rule, there were 40 to 50 million people within the empire. Mali was at the peak of its power during these years. Musa helped his empire grow in size, knowledge, and culture. He encouraged the arts, **architecture**, and literature.

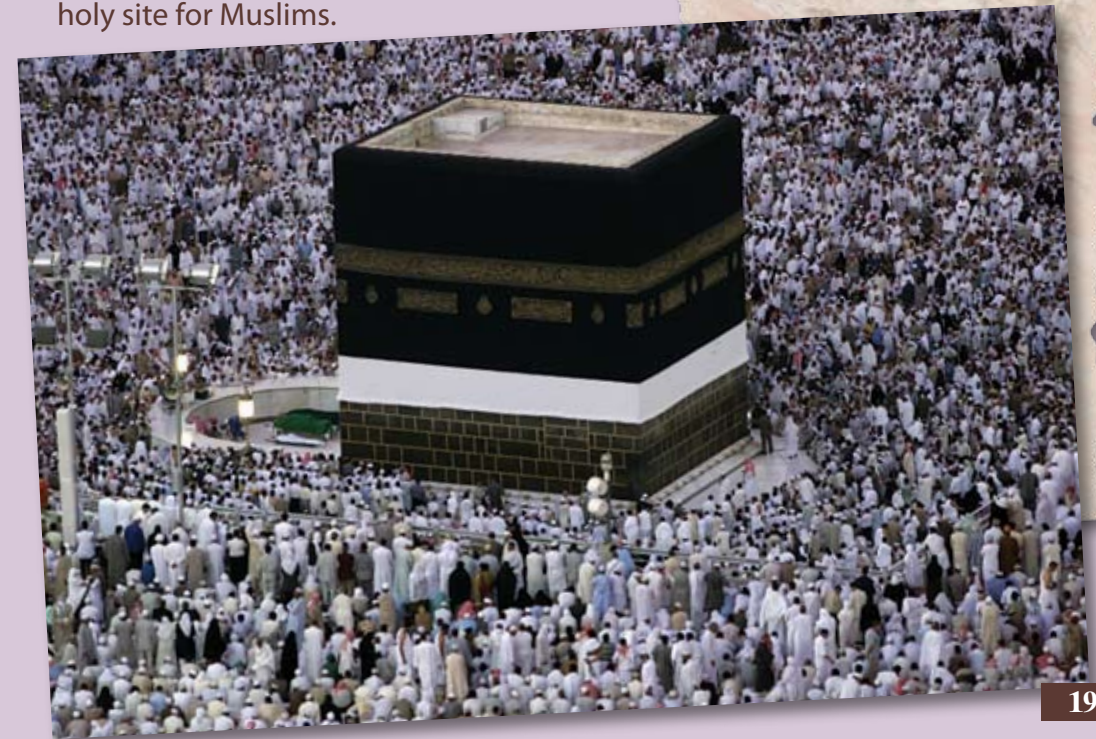
Musa was a loyal Muslim. In 1324, he made a **pilgrimage** (PIL-gruhm-ij) to Mecca (MEK-kuh). Mecca is a holy city for Muslims. It is in current-day Saudi Arabia (SAW-dee uh-RAY-bee-uh). His trip



was called a *hajj* (HAJ). It is said that he traveled with thousands of people. He brought maids, musicians, teachers, and slaves. He also brought a lot of gold. He wanted to show how powerful Mali was by bringing along all of his riches. During his travels, he gave away many gifts.

After one year, he arrived at the holy city. Musa's pilgrimage made him very famous. It also opened up trade between Mali and the Arab world.

- ▼ Mecca's Great Mosque is a very holy site for Muslims.



Remaining Mosque

Mansa Musa built palaces and a **mosque** (MAWSK) in Timbuktu. The mosque still exists today.

Beginning of Islam in Mali

The religion of Islam was very important to Musa. He encouraged scholars to come to Mali and teach about the religion. This region remains a center of Islamic culture today.