

# The Mali Empire

**OLLI 30219 - The Great West African Kingdoms**

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# Contents

- | **Origins** p. 3
- | **Sundiata Keita** p. 5

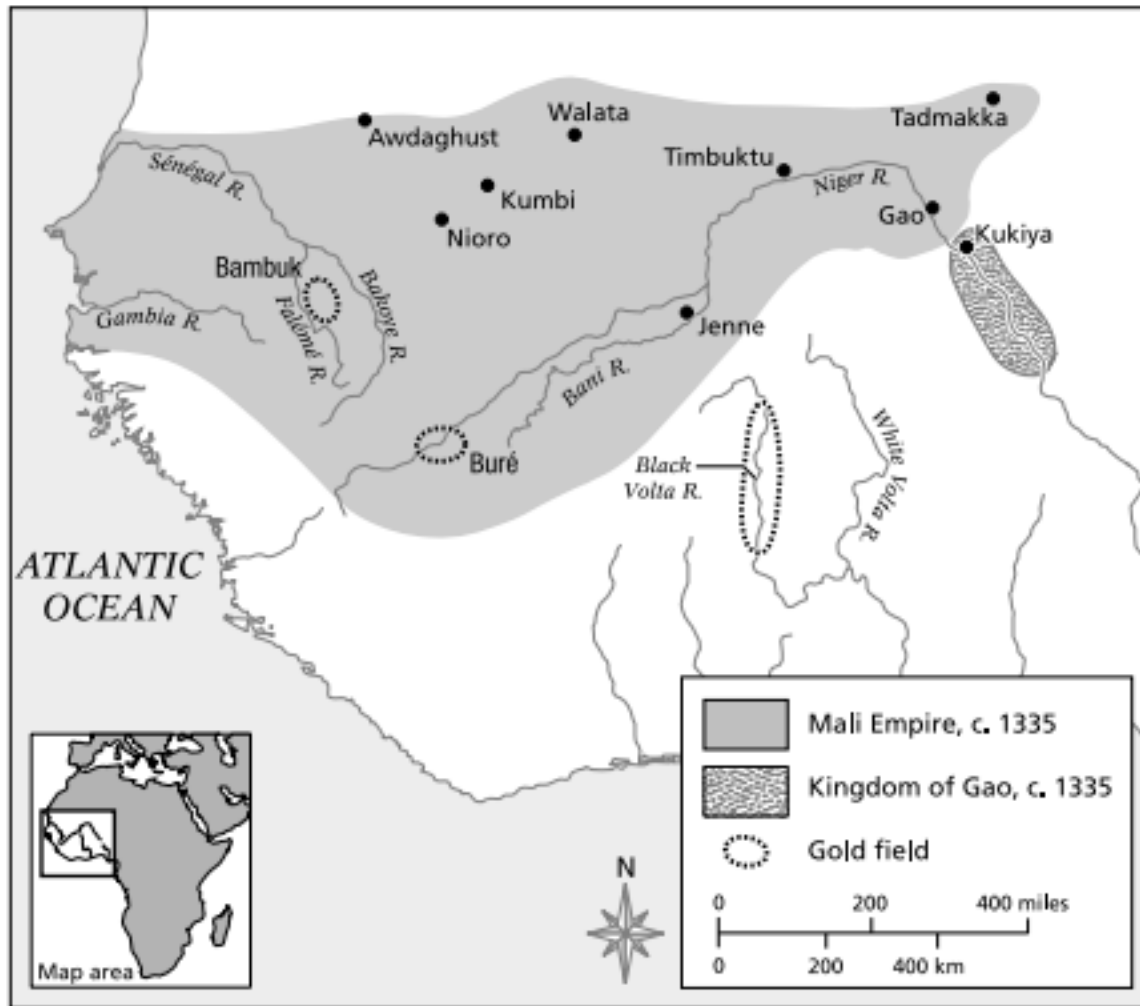
# Origins

*-Mali emerged from a period of disorder after the destruction the Ghana Empire*

- **Time line:** From ~1234 until late 15th century,
- **Location:** Modern Mali, Guinea, Senegal, Southern Mauritania,
- People of ancient Mali were the **Mandingo** also known as Malinkes, Mandinkas. They called their land “**Mande**”. As the Soninkes (founders of the Ghana Empire) they are **part of the Mande tribes**.
- The origin of Mali Empire is usually known as the **Sundiata Epic**.
- As for Ghana, **the vast majority of sources come from Arab travelers and oral tradition**. Many of the events and dates from this time are approximate.

# Map

## THE MALI EMPIRE



### **The Empire of Mali**

*Spreading from the Pacific Ocean in the west to the city of Gao in the east, the Mali Empire roughly followed the Senegal and Niger Rivers. This map shows its approximate extent in 1335.*

# **Sundiata Keita: The Lion King**

# The Epic of Sundiata

*Sogolon's Jara - the lion of Sogolon*

- The epic of Sundiata is about his **life's struggle** and **how he defeated the King of Sosso** (the usurper). It is a great classic of the griots till nowadays.
- Sundiata founded his Kingdom by **uniting the Mande** against a common enemy, the King of Sosso, **Soumaoro Kanté** in ~early 13th century.
- According to oral tradition **the King of Sosso conquered the Mande chiefdoms** in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and added them to the Sosso Empire. He was a great sorcerer and ruthless conqueror.
- Soumaoro Kanté was defeated during the **Battle of Kirina** (~1234/1235).

# Organization within the Empire (1)

*-Similar to a federal state*

- Sundiata was called **Mansa** which means “King of kings“ and ruled for ~25 years (Ibn Khaldun).
- As with the Ghana Empire, a **sophisticated trade tax system** was implemented.
- Sundiata took advantage of the **perfect location in the Sahel** as a crossroad. The **Mali Empire** was controlling the **trade routes** to the Sahara and to the gold regions, same as ancient Ghana.
- **Provinces had governors** representing the King.

# Organization within the Empire (2)

*-Similar to a federal state*

- **Strong military force:** 100,000 men :
  - aristocracy on horseback accompanied by archers or lancers,
  - each province having to provide a contingent,
- Sundiata implemented the **Kouroukan fougá charter** which was the constitution of the Mali Empire. It was created after the Battle of Kirina.
- As with ancient Ghana, **religion was mixed** animism and islam (by nobility mostly for business).
- **Dynasties were both patriarchal and matrilineal** i.e the son of sister of the king inherits the throne.



# From Sundiata to Mansa Musa the Great

- Upon his death Sundiata was succeeded by his sons...
- ...but as any empire, Mali endured **serious leadership problems throughout its history.**
- A military commander named Sakura took the throne from the royal family. He was a great King and brought political stability and prosperity to the empire.
- After his death the **kingship went back to the Keita** dynasty. None of the Mansa succeeding to Sakura left any important memories until **Mansa Musa the Great.**

# References

- Empires of Medieval West Africa *by David Conrad*
- Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali *by Djibril Tamsir Niane*