

**Complete Essay on  
The Kingdoms of Mali  
(13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries) and  
Songhai (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries)  
in Mali**

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In the 1950s, parents of misbehaving American children would threaten to send them to faraway Timbuktu if their attitudes did not improve. The implication was that Timbuktu was the most remote place on the globe and a fearsome one at that. Little did those scolding parents know that only four centuries earlier Timbuktu – then in the Kingdom of Songhai – had been a major entrepôt for trans-Saharan trade.

The thrust of this essay is to show how the contemporary country of Mali has evolved from poverty to wealth and back to poverty through the past two millennia. The focus is on the heyday of the region – the 13<sup>th</sup> through 16<sup>th</sup> centuries – when two large and powerful regional kingdoms, Mali and then Songhai, ruled much of interior West Africa and prospered by controlling the gold-for-salt trade across the Sahara Desert. The essay is divided into three parts to allow readers to explore the background to the rise of those two intriguing kingdoms, to understand how the Sudanic kingdoms were organized to generate wealth and tax

much of it for the benefit of the ruling class, and to see how things fell apart in Mali for four centuries thereafter. A time line, an annotated bibliography, and a description of sites visited in Mali and West Africa are appended at the end of the essay.

The first part of the essay sets the stage. It looks at the geography, people, and agriculture of the region to investigate how the medieval Sudanic kingdoms were organized. Location at the southern edge of the Sahara Desert was critical for the ancient Malian kingdoms. A thousand years ago, the ability to lock up and control all of the southern termini for the trans-Saharan trade routes – and there were not many of them – was the basis for regional wealth. West Africa then had much going for it. Agriculture was well developed, at least by medieval standards. West African agriculture could not support dense populations, but it was productive enough to provide surpluses to provision trading cities in the Sahel, the southern edge of the Sahara Desert.

Camel caravans across the desert were expensive and risky. Successful trade required high demands for transportable goods

and provisioning centers at both ends of the trading chain. The main interest of this essay is at the southern edge of the desert, the trading entrepôts of Timbuktu and Gao, and how the Mali and Songhai Kingdoms used and benefited from them. The trans-Saharan trade primarily involved the exchange of salt for gold. Berber and Arab merchants from Morocco produced the salt at Taghaza in the Saharan Desert, transported it by camel caravan south to Timbuktu or Gao, traded it for gold, moved the gold north across the desert, and sold it in Morocco or Europe. Two Berber Empires, the Almoravid and the Almohad, arose in the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries by controlling the northern edge of the trans-Saharan trade routes and then went on to take over Islamic Spain and Portugal as well. An appreciation of how those empires rose and fell aids understanding of the subsequent success of the Sudanic kingdoms in West Africa.

The second section of the essay looks in depth at the sources of wealth of the two Sudanic kingdoms. To understand how Mali and Songhai got rich, it is necessary to learn a great deal about the

intriguing trade across the Sahara Desert – camels, oases, salt, gold, taxation, and Islam. Once the Berber or Arab merchants arrived in Timbuktu or Gao, the Sudanic entrepôt cities, the Mande and Songhai people did not permit them to go further. The alien merchants paid their trade taxes and rested. West African merchants went into the rainforest to exchange the Saharan salt for gold produced by secretive, stateless peoples and brought the gold back to Timbuktu or Gao. Officials of the Mali (and later) Songhai Kingdoms taxed the merchants there. The West African traders then exchanged the gold for salt, and the process began all over again. The key to generating and taxing wealth, therefore, was to control the Sahelian entrepôt cities and to tax trade there. Both Mali and Songhai aimed to control the southern edge of the Sahara Desert from the Atlantic Ocean to the northern bend of the upper Niger River so that they could monopolize trans-Saharan trade.

The last part of the essay summarizes the aftermath of the Mali and Songhai Kingdoms. That story is not altogether a pretty one. It began with 4,000 Moroccans invading across the Sahara

Desert in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and destroying the Songhai Kingdom with firearms and artillery. The Moroccans then set up a parasitic ruling class in the Sahelian cities that ruled weakly for nearly two centuries. In the Sudanic region of West Africa, the Moroccan invasion engendered three centuries of chronic warfare between small kingdoms, rebellious subjects, nomadic raiders, and Islamic jihadists. The death knell for the trans-Saharan trade routes was the southward shift of the gold trade to Portuguese and other European maritime traders.

The trans-Saharan trade wound down and finally ended in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, French imperialists carried out a brutal conquest of much of West Africa and began six decades of exploitative colonial rule. The aftermath ends with more than half a century of independence. The governments of independent Mali have covered the spectrum – eight years of disastrous one-party socialism, 23 years of ineffective military dictatorship, 21 years of hopeful democratic reform, and eight years of jihadist-based

uncertainty. Malian history is thus an exciting roller-coaster of events, patterns, and paradigms.

## Ancient Mali before the Mali and Songhai Kingdoms (3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE-12<sup>th</sup> century CE)

**The Geography of Mali.** Contemporary Mali is a landlocked country in West Africa – large in size (497,000 square miles), but modest in population (19.7 million people).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Un-mali.png>

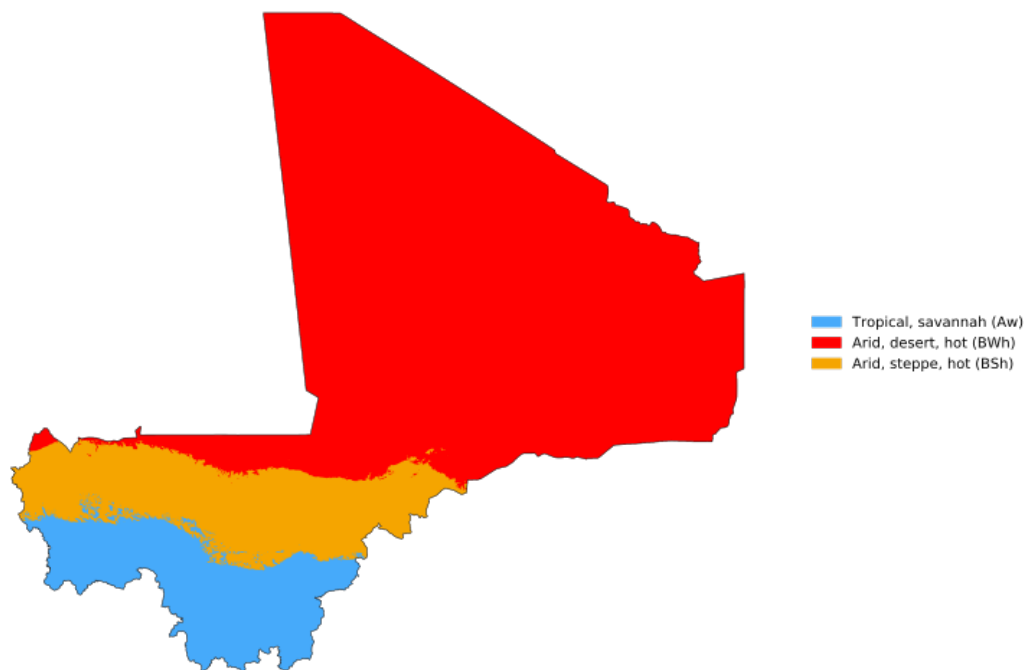
### Contemporary Mali

The current nation of Mali formerly was the heart of the once-powerful Kingdoms of Mali and Songhai, containing both kingdoms' capitals, Niani and Gao, and major population centers as well as Timbuktu, the leading trade Sahelian entrepôt for both of the Sudanic kingdoms. Sahel (coast) and Sudan (south) are Arabic terms. The Sahel is the region located at the southern edge (“coast”) of the Sahara Desert all across Africa. The Bilad as-Sudan is the southern country (from the perspective of the Arabs residing in North Africa) and refers to the grassland or savanna region sited just south of the Sahel and stretching across the entire continent of Africa from the Atlantic coast in Senegal to the Red Sea in the contemporary country called Sudan.

The geography of Mali consists of three regions – savanna grassland (the Sudan), semi-desert (the Sahel), and desert (the Sahara) – which are differentiated by rainfall. The rainfall pattern in West Africa is monsoonal. In the summer months, the prevailing winds blow from the Atlantic Ocean onto the African landmass in a northeasterly direction. The amount of precipitation



decreases with distance from the coast. Mali thus receives virtually all of its rain during the months of June through September. Southwestern Mali, including the area around the capital, Bamako, is the best-watered part of the country because it is closest to the Atlantic coast. Timbuktu, located in the Sahelian region of northeastern Mali, typically gets its meager few inches of rainfall mostly in August.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Koppen-Geiger\\_Map\\_MLI\\_present.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Koppen-Geiger_Map_MLI_present.svg)>

*Physical Geography of Mali – Sudan (Savanna, Blue), Sahel (Steppe, Tan), Semi-desert and Desert (Red)*

A second geographic feature is Mali's system of rivers. The Niger River rises in the Futa Jallon highlands southwest of Mali and then flows for hundreds of miles through Mali's heartland before meandering eastward and eventually southward to empty into the Atlantic Ocean in Nigeria. The Niger River and its tributaries, especially the Bani River, have been critical sources of water and transportation throughout Mali's history. The Niger system also forms an interior delta in southern Mali, providing natural irrigation.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mopti\\_Fishing\\_Boats.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mopti_Fishing_Boats.jpg)>

*Fishing Boats on the Niger River – Interior Delta, Mopti, Mali*

A second river, the Senegal River, flows through western Mali on its westward journey from the Futa Jallon highlands to the Atlantic Ocean in Senegal. Most of Mali's people inhabit the fertile Sudanic riverine valleys in the southwestern portion of the country or live along the Niger River in the Sahel.

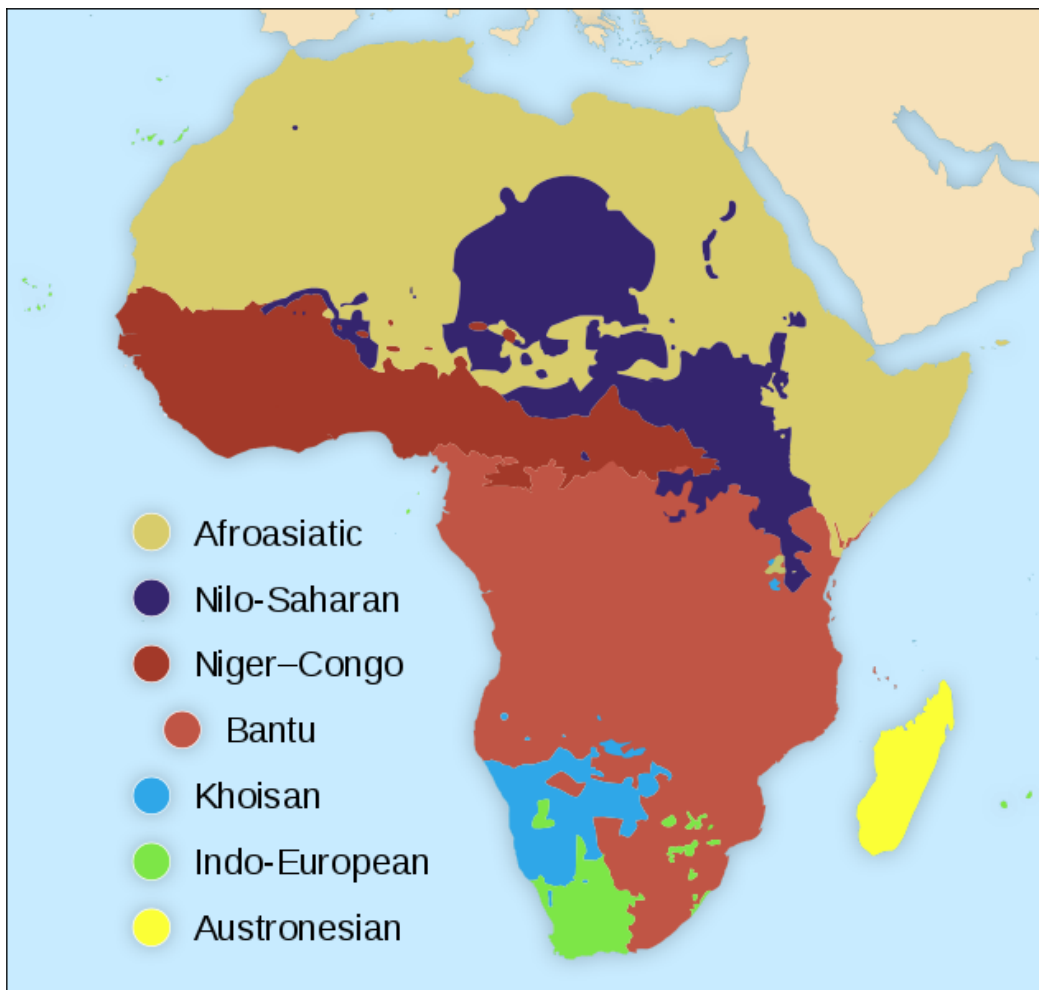


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_River\\_Niger.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_River_Niger.svg)>

*The Niger River – Rises in Guinea, Flows Through Mali and Niger, and Enters the Atlantic Ocean in Nigeria*

**The Peoples of Mali.** Contemporary historians, anthropologists, and linguists often group the early peoples of Africa into six categories – Afroasian, Nilo-Saharan, Black

African, Khoisan, Indo-European, and Austronesian. Mali, a melting pot in the heart of West Africa, was populated by representatives of the first three of those groups.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_African\\_language\\_families.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_African_language_families.svg)>

*Peoples of Africa Today – Afroasian, Nilo-Saharan, Black African (Niger-Congo), Khoisan, Indo-European, and Austronesian*

The Afroasian peoples lived in Africa north of and within the Sahara Desert and in northeastern Africa. That group included the

Berbers of North Africa, the Tuaregs of the Sahara region (including northern and central Mali), the Egyptians, and the Cushites and Semites who inhabited Ethiopia. The Nilo-Saharanans lived originally in the upper Nile River Valley (in contemporary Sudan), and by 1,000 BCE they had spread westward across the Sudanic region south of the Sahara Desert to occupy the savanna grasslands as far west as contemporary Mali.

The Black Africans – the speakers of the Niger-Congo family of languages – inhabited only West Africa, including Mali, prior to the Bantu expansion across the central and southern parts of the continent that began about three millennia ago. The Khoisan – including the San, once termed Bushmen, and the Khoikhoi, formerly called Hottentots – populated the grasslands of central, eastern, and southern Africa and thus occupied the most territory in Africa 3,000 years ago. The Indo-Europeans are represented by the European white settlers who reside mainly in South Africa and Kenya. The Austronesian-speakers are the Malagasy people who emigrated to Madagascar from Indonesia thirteen centuries ago.

Mali's diverse settlement pattern has led to prolonged ethnic rivalries throughout much of the country's history. The Nilo-Saharan speakers in Mali mainly inhabit the regions surrounding the Niger River in the eastern part of the country. They migrated to Mali from the upper Nile region via the Sahara Desert about 3,000 years ago. The most renowned group from that language family is the Songhai, who established the Kingdom of Songhai that dominated the region in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khaira\\_arby\\_2012.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khaira_arby_2012.jpg)>

*Malian Singer Khaira Arby (1959-2018), The Nightingale of Timbuktu – She Had a Tuareg Father and a Songhai Mother*

Most Malian people are Black Africans who speak Niger-Congo languages – Bambara town-dwellers, Malinke traders, Soninke farmers, Dogon cliff-dwellers, Bozo fishermen, and Fulani herders. Soninke leaders established and ruled Ghana, the first Sudanic kingdom in West Africa between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Mande (Bambara and Malinke) speakers reigned in the Kingdom of Mali during the 13<sup>th</sup> through 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The best known and most numerous of the Afroasian-speaking peoples in Mali are the blue-veiled Tuaregs, a Berber group whose name in Arabic means the Abandoned of God but who refer to themselves as the Kel Tagelmoust (The People of the Veil). The Tuaregs are nomadic camel herders and raiders who have controlled much of the western Sahara Desert for centuries and live in Mali between the arc of the middle Niger River and the Saharan massif of Adrar of the Iforas in the far north.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Twareg\\_woman\\_from\\_Mali,\\_2007.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Twareg_woman_from_Mali,_2007.jpg)>

### *Afroasian-speaking Tuareg Woman – Northern Mali*

The early people inhabiting the Sahara Desert and North Africa were called Berbers by the Romans (from the Latin, *barbarus*, those speaking a language other than Latin or Greek). The Berber peoples live in a wide range of northern and western Africa – in modern Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia and elsewhere in the western and central Saharan Desert, including Mali. Of the sub-groups of Berbers, most Zenata and Masmuda were sedentary



farmers in the plains and hills of Morocco whereas most Sanhaja and Tuareg were nomadic pastoralists in the Sahara Desert.

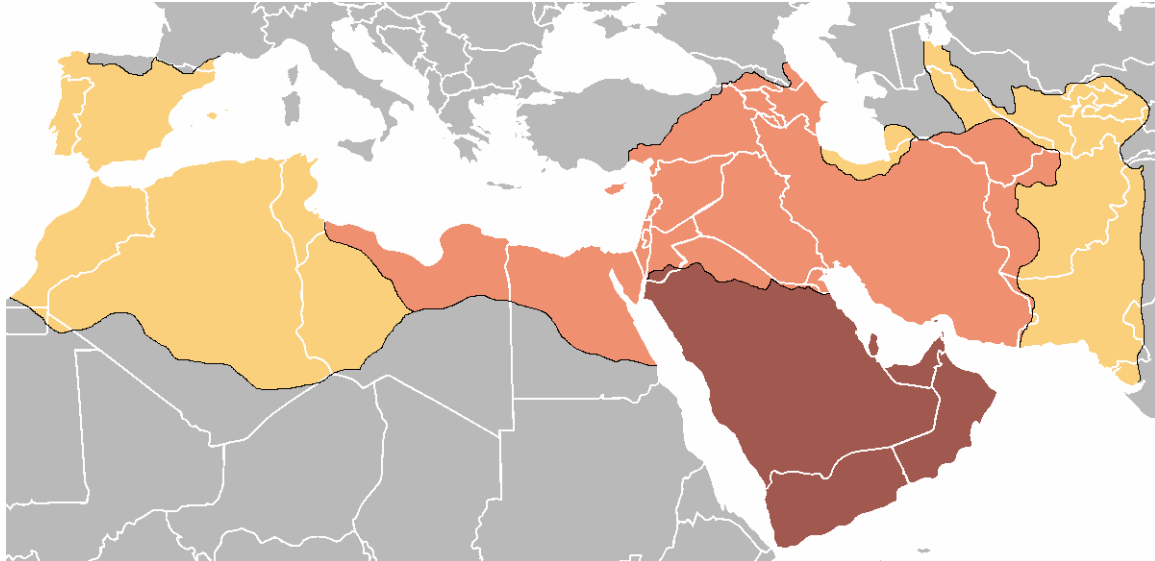


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<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:COLLECTIE\\_TROPENMUSEUM\\_Dansgroep\\_uit\\_de\\_westelijke\\_Sahara\\_tijdens\\_het\\_Nationaal\\_Folkore\\_Festival\\_te\\_Marrakech\\_T\\_Mnr\\_20017655.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:COLLECTIE_TROPENMUSEUM_Dansgroep_uit_de_westelijke_Sahara_tijdens_het_Nationaal_Folkore_Festival_te_Marrakech_T_Mnr_20017655.jpg)>

### *Sanhaja Berber Women – Folklore festival, Marrakech, Morocco*

In the late 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Islamic jihad of the Beduin Arabs rapidly spread across North Africa. Most Berbers, many formerly Christian, converted to Islam, and some Berber groups became Arabized by adopting the Arab language and customs. The Tuaregs were reluctant and slow converters to Islam, although

most eventually did so at least nominally. But they refused to adopt Arab culture.

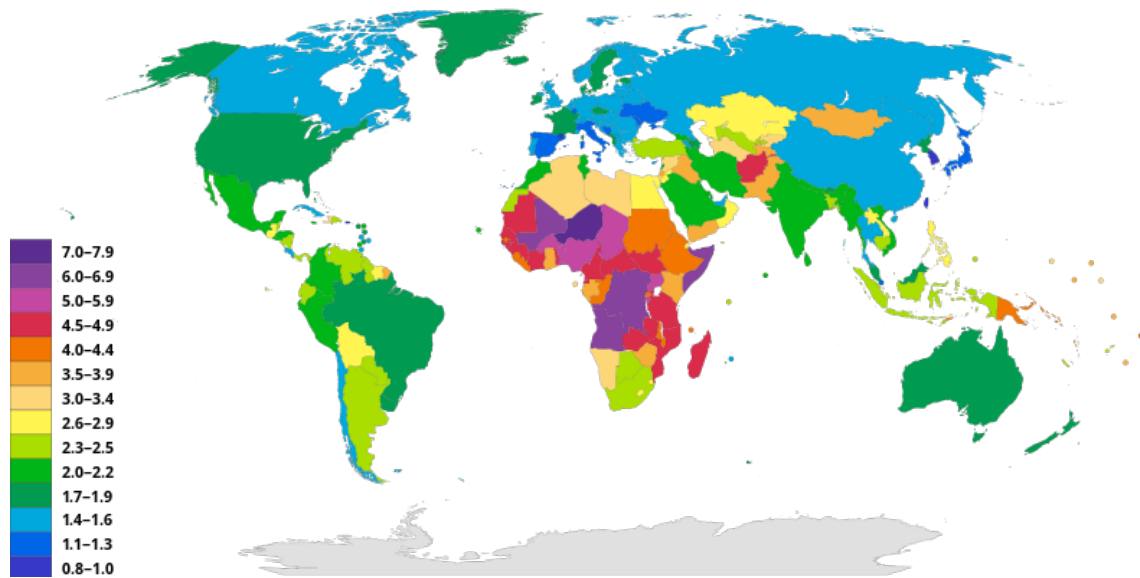


Source: Wikimedia Commons available at  
< <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Age-of-caliphs.png> >

*The Muslim Arab Diaspora, 622-632 (Dark Red), 632-661 (Light Red), 661-750 (Yellow) – Most Berbers, Except the Tuaregs, Converted Rapidly To Islam*

Today, sub-Saharan Africa's 1.1 billion people speak 1,500 separate languages, and the most dominant language family by far is the Niger-Congo group. Colin McEvedy has compiled estimates of the changing population of Africa since 200 CE. McEvedy estimates that about 20 million people lived in the African continent in that year, including 4 million in West Africa. By

1600, Africa's total population had nearly tripled to about 55 million and West Africa's numbers had grown to perhaps 15 million. In spite of the devastation of the Atlantic slave trade, by 1800 Africa's total population grew to an estimated 70 million and West Africa's to 20 million. That growth most likely resulted from increased food supplies made possible by the introduction of new food crops from the Americas – maize, cassava, beans, and peanuts. During the next two centuries, a combination of the cessation of the slave trade, the imposition of political stability, the improvement in living standards, and the introduction of improved public health, water, and sanitation triggered a population explosion in Africa.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Total\\_Fertility\\_Rate\\_Map\\_by\\_Country.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Total_Fertility_Rate_Map_by_Country.svg)

*Total Fertility Rates in 2020, Highest in Sub-Saharan Africa – Women in Mali Have An Average of Six Children During Their Lifetimes*

**The Rise of Agriculture in Ancient Mali.** Agriculture – the domestication of wild plants and animals – was developed independently in perhaps nine places in the world, beginning about 10,500 years ago. Three of those pioneering zones were in Africa – Ethiopia, the Sahel in West Africa, and the West African savanna/forest zone. Agriculture was practiced first in the Fertile Crescent of Southwest Asia, then in China, and later in the

Americas (the Andes, Mesoamerica, and the Eastern United States) and in New Guinea. Agriculture in Egypt began seven thousand years ago and was imported from the Fertile Crescent, not developed independently.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fertile\\_crescent\\_Neolithic\\_B\\_circa\\_7500\\_B\\_C.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fertile_crescent_Neolithic_B_circa_7500_B_C.jpg)

### *The Fertile Crescent, c. 7500 BCE*

For five millennia, beginning in 9000 BCE, the Sahara region was humid and filled with lakes and wild animals. Saharan people hunted and fished, but they also domesticated cattle, imported sheep and goats from the Fertile Crescent, and might have begun to

domesticate two indigenous cereals – pearl millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*) and sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grain\\_millet,\\_early\\_grain\\_fill,\\_Tifton,\\_7-3-02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grain_millet,_early_grain_fill,_Tifton,_7-3-02.jpg)

*Pearl Millet (Pennisetum glaucum) – Indigenous to West Africa and Primary Food Staple in the Sahel Agricultural Package*

The Sahara began experiencing a gradual climate shift in about 4000 BCE, rainfall decreased, and the region became desertic by about 2500 BCE. The Saharan people were forced to migrate out of their desiccated homelands, and many moved south

into the Sahel zone. Later, some migrated even further south into the savanna grassland and forest region of West Africa. New food systems had to be developed for those migrants to survive.

Two very different agricultural systems then arose in the Sahel and in the West African savanna/forest zone, beginning about 2500 BCE and becoming widespread by the middle of the second millennium BCE. Both systems required plants that were adapted to the climate of the Sahel and the Sudan – summer rainfall, winter drought, and little variation in day length. Neither could depend much on indigenous domesticated animals, since the guinea fowl, a tasty partridge-like bird, was the only West African bird or animal that entered those food systems.

The primary food staples in the Sahel system were pearl millet and sorghum (sometimes called guinea corn) supplemented by another small-grained indigenous cereal, fonio (*Digitaria exilis*). Pearl millet and sorghum later diffused and became leading staples for much of Africa before the introduction of cassava and maize from the Americas in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sorghum\\_bicolor03.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sorghum_bicolor03.jpg)>

*Sorghum (Sorghum bicolor) –  
Primary Food Staple in the Sahel Agricultural Package  
and Today the World’s Fifth Most Widely Produced Grain*

Farming techniques included the use of hoes to turn the soil and the sowing of seeds by hand-broadcasting. The Sahel agricultural system also depended heavily on domesticated cattle, sheep, and goats brought from the Sahara. The earliest archaeological evidence of the Sahelian farming system dates to



the second millennium BCE and comes from a dig at Dar Tichitt in southern Mauritania (near the site of Kumbi, the capital of the Kingdom of Ghana). Archaeological and linguistic evidence indicates that the practitioners of the Sahelian agricultural system were the ancestors of the later Nilo-Saharan speaking peoples in West Africa.

West Africa's second independent agricultural system arose in the savanna/forest zone in the southern part of the Sudan region of contemporary Mali, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Ghana. Because of tse-tse fly infestations, no animal agriculture was possible (except the rearing of goats) and animal protein came mostly from fishing supplemented by the hunting of wild animals. The Sahelian cereals – pearl millet, sorghum, and fonio – did not grow well in the wetter, more shaded savanna/forest zone. Food energy instead was supplied by two other endemic plants – African rice (*Oryza glaberrima*) and African yams (*Dioscorea* spp.) – both domesticated independently of Asian rice (*Oryza sativa*) and Asian yams (*Dioscorea alata*).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MS\\_1960.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MS_1960.JPG)>

*African Yams (Dioscorea spp.) –  
Primary Food Staple in the Savanna/Forest Agricultural Package*

Although African yams later spread widely throughout Africa, African rice never caught on beyond the interior delta of the Niger River and the Atlantic coastal region running from southern Senegal through the western half of the Ivory Coast.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African\\_rice\\_niger.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African_rice_niger.png)>

*Growing African Rice (Oryza glaberrima) Along the Niger River –  
Primary Food Staple in the Savanna/Forest Agricultural Package*

Two supplemental tree crops in the savanna/forest system – palm oil (from the oil palm tree, *Elaeis guineensis*), used for cooking, and kola nuts (from the kola tree, *Cola nitida*), which provided addictive stimulants and were an original ingredient in Coca Cola – later spread throughout the tropical world. Farming techniques stressed clearing of the forest, direct planting of seeds, and weeding around the cereal, root, and tree crops. The evidence

from archaeological digs and linguistic analysis shows that the people who practiced the savanna/forest agricultural system were the ancestors of the modern speakers of the Niger-Congo languages.

Both West African agricultural systems evolved significantly when West Africa entered the Iron Age after about 600 BCE. Iron was first made by the Hittites in Anatolia in the second millennium BCE. When iron metallurgy spread to West Africa, it provided better agricultural implements and deadlier weapons. Iron-headed hoes were a great improvement over stone or wooden hoes, and iron-headed axes allowed workmen to cut down trees, clear forests for farming, and shape wood much more efficiently than they could do with stone or bronze axes. Iron-pointed spears gave advantages in warfare and in protection from animal attacks. With the appearance of iron tools and weapons, West African farmers could penetrate more deeply into forests, open new agricultural areas, and defend themselves against attacks by wild animals.

The African peoples who combined the technologies of agriculture and iron metallurgy were able to increase their populations and territories at the expense of other peoples who were foragers (hunters and gatherers). The most dramatic example was the diaspora of the Bantu, a Niger-Congo speaking group of agriculturalists who, beginning in the first millennium BCE, spread out of the eastern edge of West Africa (contemporary Nigeria and Cameroon) and gradually took over most of central, eastern, and southern Africa from Khoisan and Pygmy foragers.

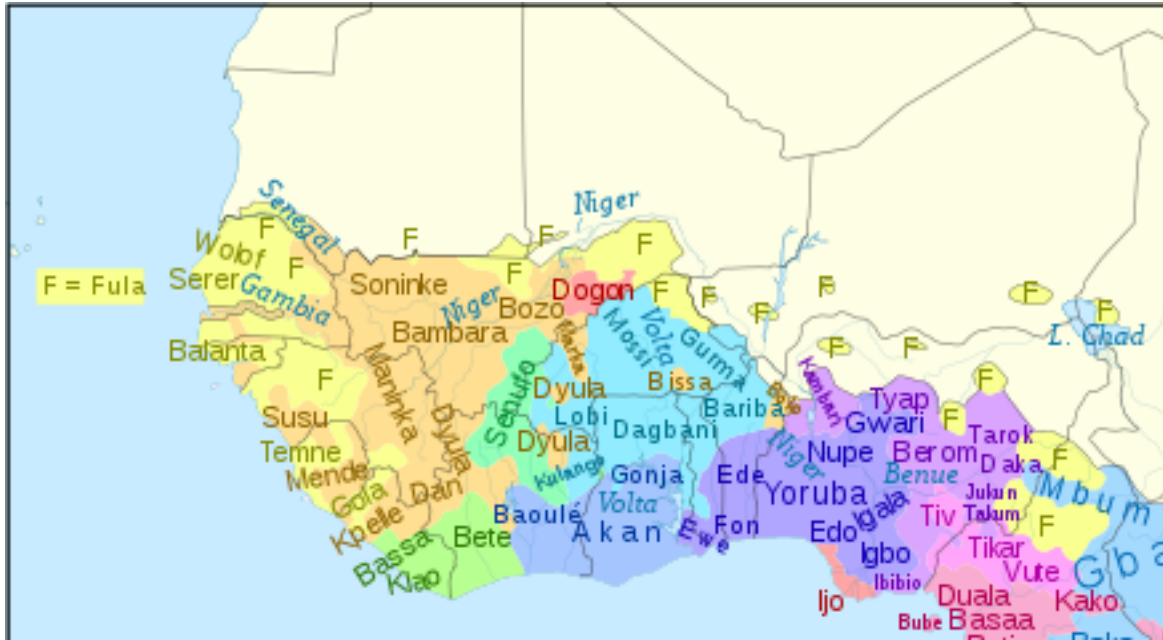


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bantu\\_Phillipson.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bantu_Phillipson.png)>

*The Bantu Migrations from West Africa – c. 1000 BCE-500 CE*

**Early Sudanic Kingdoms in Mali (1<sup>st</sup> century BCE-9<sup>th</sup> century CE).** Armed with agriculture and iron tools and weapons, the peoples of Mali began to form small states that evolved in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE into what Roland Oliver and his colleagues have called Sudanic kingdoms. Those kingdoms arose, as did most of their ancient counterparts, to facilitate trade and provide security. By that time, the West African region that was later to house the Mali and Songhai Kingdoms was populated by groups speaking three principal families of Niger-Congo languages.

In the west, stretching to the Atlantic coast, were the Wolof and Fulbe (Fulani) in the West Atlantic language family, in the center-west (the upper Senegal River-upper Niger River region) were the Mande speakers – Soninke, Malinke, and Bambara, and in the center-east (the upper Volta River region) were the Voltaic-speaking groups, dominated by the Mossi. The Nilo-Saharan speaking Songhai people lived east of the great bend of the Niger River, and the Tuaregs and Berbers controlled the Sahara Desert region in the north.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
 <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_the\\_Niger%E2%80%93Congo\\_languages.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_the_Niger%E2%80%93Congo_languages.svg)>

*Niger-Congo Languages in West Africa – The Primary Languages in Mali Are Soninké, Bambara, Dogon, Songhai, and Tuareg*

The Sudanic kingdoms of Mali ruled over a region that had the highest population density of any part of Africa outside of the Nile River Valley. They featured mud-built towns, crop and animal agriculture, advanced systems of commerce, handicraft industries, standing armies, and creative artists. Their farmers lived mostly in the productive river valleys of the Niger and Senegal River systems, and their herders grazed their cattle, sheep, goats, and camels in the outlying pasture areas. Blacksmiths

produced iron agricultural implements and iron weapons for hunters and soldiers.

The armies of the Sudanic kingdoms had skilled horsemen for defense and slave-raiding. Their system of government was based on divine kings, privileged nobles, and ancestor-worshipping priests. The largest group was the Mande-speaking peoples who inhabited the fertile upper Niger Valley and the interior delta of the Niger River between the Sahara Desert to the north and the equatorial rainforest to the south. Each divine Mande king, called a *mansa*, ruled over a *kafu*, a set of villages numbering up to 50,000 people. The *mansa* had complete secular and religious authority. His subjects treated him as if he were super-human, crawling before him and throwing dust over themselves in his presence. Exceptionally strong kings could form regional empires by conquering other *kafus* or confederations of *kafus* through diplomacy.

Three such confederations had been put together in Mali by the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In the west on the middle Senegal River, Fulbe



leaders established the Takrur Kingdom. Their farmers grew millet, sorghum, and cotton in riverine areas, and their craftswomen made cotton textiles that they traded to nomadic herders for milk and meat. The merchants imported salt from the Saharan salt mines and sold gold obtained in the southern forest region. The Takrur rulers converted to Islam in the 1030s, and most of their subjects subsequently followed.



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<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wassu\\_Stone\\_Circles\\_shaunamullally\\_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wassu_Stone_Circles_shaunamullally_02.jpg)>

*Stone Circles – Takrur Kingdom, 9<sup>th</sup> century*

A second confederation ruled along the Niger River Valley in the eastern part of the Mali region. The Songhai people developed a kingdom, which they called Songhai, around the city of Gao on the Niger River. As in Takrur, the economy of the Songhai Kingdom was based on its riverine location.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Songhai\\_man\\_near\\_Timbuktu,\\_Mali\\_2012.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Songhai_man_near_Timbuktu,_Mali_2012.jpg)  
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*Songhai Man in Gao, 2012 –  
Capital of the Songhai Kingdom, 9<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries*

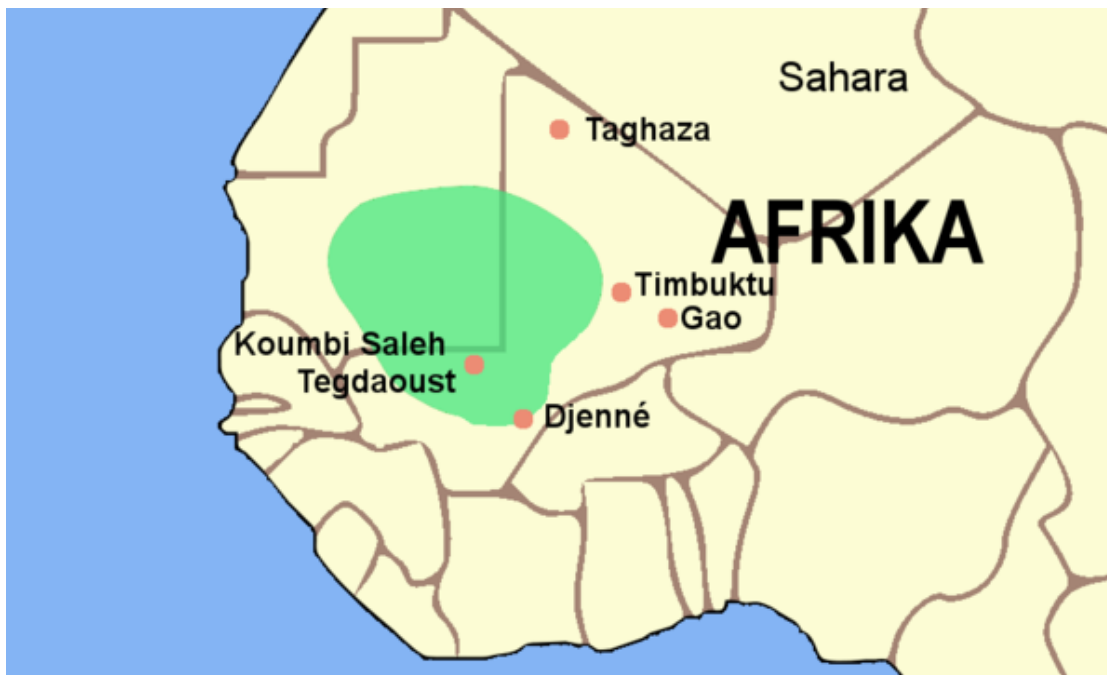
The bountiful Niger provided irrigation water and fertilizing silt for agriculture and marine resources for fishing. Unlike Takrur, however, the Kingdom of Songhai did not benefit from

transshipping gold in that early period. The trans-Saharan gold-for-salt trade from Songhai became established only in the 14<sup>th</sup> century with the discovery of gold deposits closer to Gao. The rulers of Gao also converted to Islam in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, but they made little effort to convert their subjects to the new religion. The third Sudanic kingdom, Ghana, was located in the center and was easily the most important polity of its era.

**The Kingdom of Ghana (9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries).** The origins of Ghana – the first large Sudanic kingdom in Mali – are obscure. By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, before the principal chroniclers of its history – Islamic travelers, merchants, and scholars – had visited, Ghana was already an expansive kingdom. Some historians claim that Ghana was a thriving kingdom in the 8<sup>th</sup> century or even earlier. The Soninke people of Ghana were mostly animists, although some had converted to Islam by the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

The empire's capital, Kumbi (or Kumbi Saleh, located about 300 miles west of Timbuktu in modern Mauritania), was divided between an animist quarter that included the court and a Muslim

quarter that housed the traders. Kumbi became the leading city in the western Sudan. At its peak, Ghana was bordered by the Niger River on the east, the Senegal River on the south, and the Sahara Desert on the west and north.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ghana\\_empire\\_map.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ghana_empire_map.png)>

*The Kingdom of Ghana At Its Greatest Territorial Extent, c. 1000*

Ghana's people farmed millet and sorghum, fished, traded, and supplied merchants. A Muslim visitor claimed that Ghana could muster an army of 200,000 men – 40,000 armed with bows and arrows and the rest with iron spears.

Ghana's economic strength was based on control of the region between the goldfields in the south and the desert routes to the north, allowing it to tax the trans-Saharan trade. After taking the Sanhaja Berber city of Awdaghost in 990, Ghana controlled virtually all north-south trade in the western Sudan.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:OuadaneOldTown1.jpg>>

*Ouadane, Oasis Town in Ancient Ghana, Now In Mauretania – Sited on the Trans-Saharan Trade Route from Ghana to Morocco*

The Sanhaja Berbers converted to Islam shortly thereafter. A sect of the Sanhaja, the Almoravids, resisted Ghanaian rule, and in 1055, they regained Awdaghost. A year earlier, the Almoravids

had taken control of Sijilmasa, the city in southern Morocco that served as the northern terminus of the main western trans-Saharan trade route. In Ghana, the Almoravids defeated the Soninke and claimed Kumbi in 1076.

Ghana's empire then disintegrated. The Almoravids lost control of Kumbi and Ghana in 1087, following the death of their leader, Abu Bakr. But the Soninke were unable to reassert control, and the kingdom stagnated. In 1203, the Susu people captured Kumbi. The Soninke and Berber/Arab merchants then set up a new entrepôt at Walata, 100 miles to the northeast, to serve as the southern terminus of the main trans-Saharan trade route. Kumbi – and ancient Ghana – disappeared into history.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oualata\\_03.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oualata_03.jpg)>

*Walata Today, Oasis Town In Southeastern Mauretania –  
Former Trade Center and Current UNESCO World Heritage Site*

**The Almoravid Empire (1062-1142).** In the mid-11th century, a prince of the Sanhaja, a Berber-speaking nomadic group akin to the Tuareg, brought a religious scholar, Abdullah ibn Yasin, to Sijilmasa, a trade center at the edge of the Sahara Desert in southern Morocco. The Sanhajas were camel breeders and traders. That scholar, or *faqih*, initiated a puritanical, revivalist, and militant Islamic religious movement. The Almoravids (meaning people of the fortified monastery) first subjugated neighboring peoples in the kingdom of Ghana to impose their strict

form of Islam. They captured the important entrepôt of Awdaghost from Ghana in 1055 and thereafter controlled both ends of the western trans-Saharan trade route.

In 1061, leadership of the movement passed to Yusuf ibn Tashfin who proved to be a pious, courageous, and capable leader during his nearly half century of rule. He founded Marrakech as the Almoravid capital in 1062, conquered Fez in 1069, and constructed impressive and lasting religious monuments in both cities. The new Almoravid Empire then included Ghana in the south and Morocco in the north and controlled the major trade route across the Sahara Desert.





Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yusuf\\_Ben\\_Tasfin\\_dinar\\_22562.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yusuf_Ben_Tasfin_dinar_22562.jpg)>

*Gold Dinar Coin Issued By Yusuf ibn Tashfin (Ruled 1061-1106) –  
Expansionist Almoravid Leader*

After reunifying Morocco, Yusuf expanded the Almoravid Empire eastward across modern Algeria by 1082. The Almoravids spread northward as well, in response to an impending Christian re-conquest of Iberia, and following a series of impressive military successes, they controlled Islamic Spain and Portugal by 1103. The Sanhaja descendants of camel-breeders were astounded by the wealth of Andalusia and the booty that they appropriated there.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Almoravid\\_Empire.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Almoravid_Empire.png)>

*Almoravid Empire At Its Greatest Territorial Extent, c. 1140*

Following Yusuf's death in 1107 at age 90, the Almoravids were no longer able to govern well. The movement lost its religious zeal, and its leaders became corrupt and decadent. After

less than a century of Almoravid power, in 1147 the Almohads, a new Islamic revivalist group, ended Almoravid rule and created a new Moroccan empire – one that included a large swath of the Sahara Desert but excluded the region south of the Sahara that had formerly housed the kingdom of Ghana.

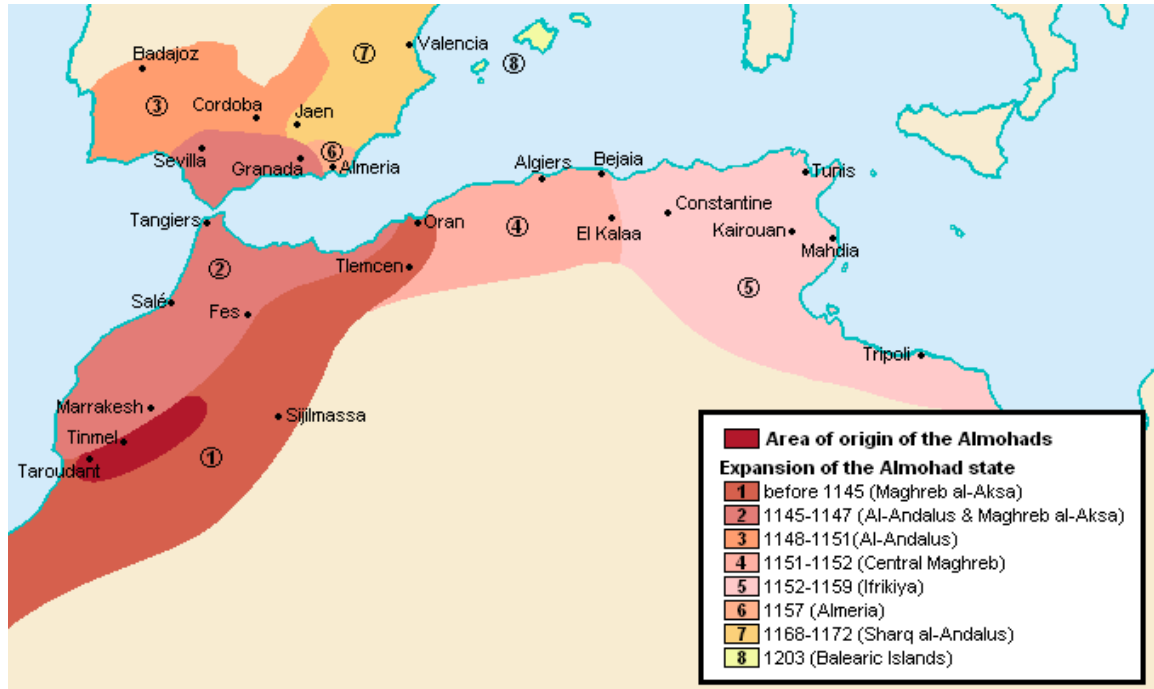


*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Djemaa\\_el\\_Fna.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Djemaa_el_Fna.jpg)>*

*Jemaa el-Fnaa, Main Square In Modern Marrakech, Morocco –  
Former Almoravid Capital (1062-1147)*

**The Almohad Empire (1147-1269).** The Almohad (“monotheistic”) movement began in a monastery to renew Islamic zeal. Muhammad ibn Tumart, a Masmuda Berber and learned

theologian, started the reform movement about 1125 in Morocco's Atlas Mountains. In 1130, ibn Tumart died and was succeeded by Abd al-Mumim, a capable Zenata leader who forged an alliance between the sedentary Zenata and Masmuda Berbers in opposition to the nomadic Sanhajas who led the Almoravids. The Almohads won the civil war in 1147 and henceforth an Almohad Caliph ruled Morocco from Marrakech. The Almohads recovered Spain, taking Algeciras in 1145, Seville and Malaga in 1146, and Cordova and the remainder of Andalusia by 1150. The new empire expanded the former Almoravid frontier eastward to Tunis and Tripoli and administered its territories with a professional civil service largely recruited from the educated classes of Muslim Spain and Portugal.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
 <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Almohad\\_Expansion.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Almohad_Expansion.png)>

*Expansion of the Almohad Empire, 1152-1203 –  
 Northward Into Iberia, Eastward Through Tunisia*

The Almohads excelled in architecture, building the spectacular, tall minaret towers of Kutubiyya in Marrakech and the Giralda in Seville and the great mosque of Cordoba, notable for its straight pillars and horseshoe arch.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marrakesh,\\_Morocco\\_\(8999234830\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marrakesh,_Morocco_(8999234830).jpg)>

*Kutubiyya Tower (Minaret), Marrakech –  
Constructed by the Almohad Leader, Abd al-Mumim, in 1147*

Under Almohad rule, Andalusia reached its peak of scientific and medical creativity and Muslim scholars wrote university texts that were used for centuries thereafter throughout Europe. But the Almohad rulers failed to cultivate the allegiance of the tribes they subjugated, resulting in internal weaknesses that left the empire ill-equipped to face military threats from Arab Bedouins to the east

and Spanish and Portuguese Christians to the north. In 1212, a decisive Christian victory at Las Navas de Tolosa, west of Toledo, initiated the disintegration of the Almohad Empire. The rulers splintered into tribal factions and faced succession disputes.

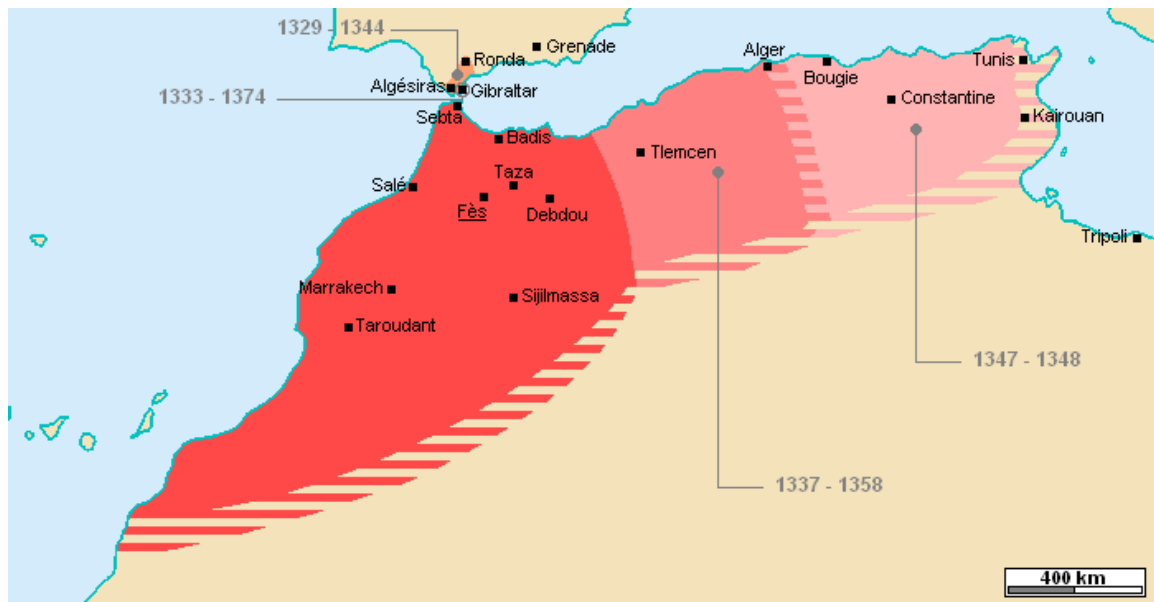


*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Battle\\_of\\_las\\_navas\\_de\\_tolosa.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Battle_of_las_navas_de_tolosa.jpg)>

*Spanish Christian Kingdoms Defeated Almohad Morocco In the  
Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa –  
19<sup>th</sup>-century Painting By Francisco de Paula Van Halen*

In 1269, the Merinid Empire took over Marrakech to mark the end of the Almohad dynasty. Thereafter, the Merinids, like the Almohads, focused on North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, and

Tunisia) and made no effort to regain the areas formerly controlled by the Almoravids in the southern Sahara and the West African Sudan.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Empire\\_m%C3%A9rinide\\_-\\_XIVe.PNG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Empire_m%C3%A9rinide_-_XIVe.PNG)>

### *The Merinid Empire, After the Loss of Spain and Portugal – 1269-1465*

**Agricultural Wealth in the Berber Empires.** Agriculture was the primary source of wealth in the Berber Empires. The traditional patterns of agriculture differed according to rainfall. In the arid zones in and around the Sahara Desert, agriculture was based on herding camels (for milk, meat, hides, and transport) and



growing dates in oases. In the areas of higher rainfall, the main crops were barley, wheat, and olives whereas sheep, goats, and cattle were raised for milk, meat, hides, and wool. Farming and herding were especially important in fertile Andalusia. During the rule of the Visigoths prior to the Muslim invasion, Spanish agriculture had been reduced to a basic production system of wheat, meat, and wine.

An agricultural revolution based on scientific methods accompanied the arrival of the Muslim Arabs and Berbers, leading in the 11<sup>th</sup> century to what became known as the Andalusí Agronomic School. Those agricultural scientists introduced new crops (hard (durum) wheat, sorghum, rice, sugar cane, several citrus fruits, bananas and plantains, coconut palms, watermelon, spinach, artichokes, taro, eggplant, and mangoes), improved cultivation of existing crops such as cabbage, intensified cropping rotations and use of farm labor, and developed sophisticated irrigation systems. Modern writers refer to this package of

agricultural innovations as the “Medieval Green Revolution”  
because it led to significant increases in agricultural productivity.



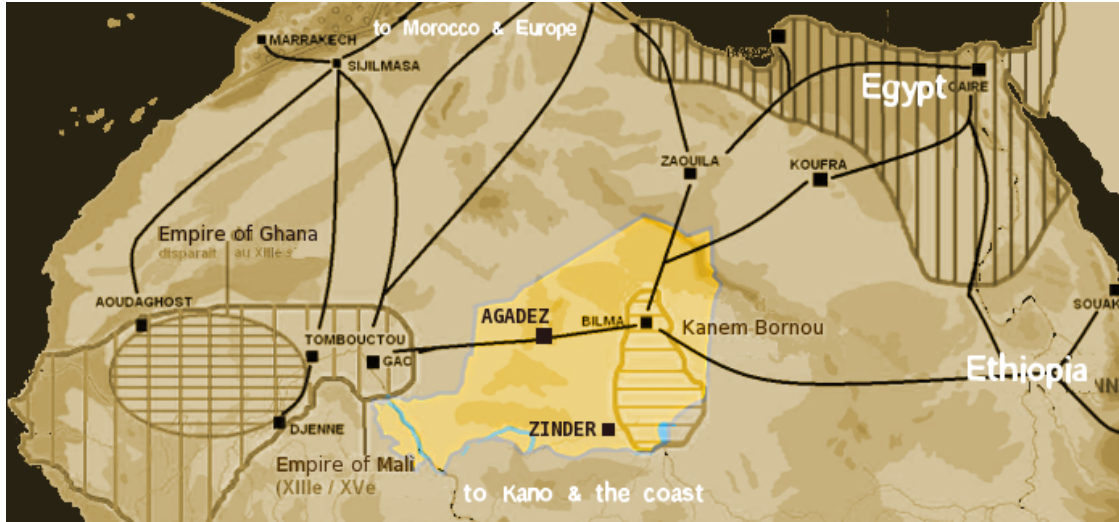
Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Albolafia\\_Water\\_Mill\\_\(10823918983\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Albolafia_Water_Mill_(10823918983).jpg)>

*The Islamic Medieval Green Revolution, 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries –  
Albolafia Water Wheel and Roman Bridge, Cordoba, Spain*

From this large increase in agricultural output and income came a steady expansion of food supplies, agricultural trade, population, urbanization, and the standard of living. Since land-taxes were assessed on the basis of productivity throughout the Berber Empires, the agricultural improvements directly contributed to

imperial Berber coffers as well as to farmer or herder family incomes.

**Wealth from Foreign Trade in the Berber Empires.** The Berber empires occupied strategic positions on two major trade systems – the northern end of trans-Saharan trade routes and the western end of Mediterranean trade routes. The importance of trans-Saharan trade arose from complementary demands north and south of the Sahara. The Berbers and Arabs in the Maghrib (north) sought gold from West African gold fields, and African peoples in the western Sudan (south) prized salt from mines in the Sahara. The Moroccans brought cloth, cowrie shells, and dates, and the West Africans bartered kola nuts, other forest products, and slaves. Moroccan towns at the northern end of that trade route benefited from access to the Arab world by Mediterranean sea-routes.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Niger\\_saharan\\_medieval\\_trade\\_routes.PNG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Niger_saharan_medieval_trade_routes.PNG)

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### *Trans-Saharan Trade Routes, c. 14<sup>th</sup> century – Moroccan Merchants Traded Saharan Salt for West African Gold*

Trade between Iberia and North Africa flourished, exchanging Spanish olive oil, dried figs, and salt from the Balearics for the Maghrib's dates, almonds, hazelnuts, honey, salted tuna, rice, and wine. Spices, silks, and other luxuries came from Arab centers in Egypt and the Middle East, while Iberian manufacturing centers supplied high quality iron and brass as well as various mineral ores. Iberia also provided a rich array of artisanal goods, such as leather and wool goods, fine sashes, carpets, glass, pottery, and jewelry.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oliven\\_V1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oliven_V1.jpg)>

*Olive Oil – Major Export from Southern Spain, Eight Centuries Ago and Today*

The Berber empires did not seek to control or monopolize Mediterranean or trans-Saharan trade, but prospered from taxes levied on vigorous merchant activity. To generate wealth for Morocco and to transfer that wealth to the state, Almoravid, Almohad, and Merinid rulers imposed a strict system of taxes on imports and exports of commodities moving through the Moroccan empire. In the absence of convincing data, economic historians

guess that agriculture provided most wealth for the Moroccan people but the rulers relied heavily on taxes on foreign trade.

### **Wealth from Foreign Conquest in the Berber Empires.**

Taxes imposed by conquering Berber Muslim forces were generally light. In Muslim Spain and Portugal, citizens were subject only to a poll-tax, levied on non-Muslims (Christians and Jews) graduated by status, and a tax on cultivable land based on the productivity of the soil, paid by all land-owners. With the exception of Christian church lands, following conquest properties were generally left to their original owners. The lands of former owners who had fled to northern (Christian) Iberia also were taken over by the conquerors. The few confiscated lands were distributed to soldiers to settle as farmers, so as to expand the revenue base of agricultural lands. Over time, taxation increased, but in the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Almoravids reduced taxation in conquered territories in Morocco and in Andalusia. However, the riches of vanquished ruling classes were confiscated as tribute and distributed as spoil to conquering forces.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mosque\\_of\\_Cordoba.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mosque_of_Cordoba.jpg)>*

*Interior of the Great Mosque at Cordoba, Constructed Prior To  
the Moroccan Invasion of Spain –  
Illustrates Muslim Spanish Wealth and Creativity*

Tribute collection was centered on trading towns, including termini of the trans-Saharan trade routes and the maritime ports on the Mediterranean Sea. Foreign conquest provided an important source of wealth for the Almoravid and Almohad empires. Most of that wealth derived from agricultural and trade taxes in Andalusia, and some came from similar taxes in the central and eastern Maghrib (modern Algeria and Tunisia). Both the

Almoravids and the Almohads also appropriated much booty from their invasions of southern Iberia. Merinid wealth declined significantly from the loss of Andalusia. Although taxes on trans-Saharan trade were a major source of income for the Berber empires, none was able to gain permanent control through foreign conquest of the southern termini on that key trade route.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Almohad1200.png>>

*The Moroccan Almohads Versus the Five Iberian Christian Kingdoms, c. 1200 – Portugal, Leon, Castile, Navarre, and Aragon*



## **The Mali and Songhai Kingdoms in Mali (13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries)**

**The Theocratic Basis of Sudanic Kingdoms.** Political organization in West Africa evolved from a kinship-based, village-level system in which there was no standing army and little territorial expansion. On occasion, a particularly influential clan-head might assert authority over a collection of villages. But initially there was no tradition of powerful kingdoms. Village economies were largely self-sufficient, with a small amount of barter trade in highly desirable goods such as salt between coastal and inland villages. By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, an Islamic political organization had evolved in North Africa, based on quite sophisticated governmental bureaucracies and standing armies, which permitted the development of city-states, kingdoms, and empires. Those concepts filtered down to West Africa on the trans-Saharan trade routes.

Islamic political organization gradually spread southward along with Islamic religion and culture, and those new concepts made possible the bureaucracies, standing armies, and territorial

expansion necessary to establish great regional kingdoms. Before the introduction of Islam, Sudanic leaders gained political legitimacy beyond extended families or clans by acting as intermediaries between the secular and spiritual worlds. The village heads – and later the kings – played important religious as well as political roles in their societies. That theocratic system, in which the rulers gained political legitimacy in part through religious responsibilities and powers, formed the basis of the large Sudanic states.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mopti\\_Grand\\_Mosque,\\_WikiChallenge\\_African\\_Schools\\_Events\\_2019.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mopti_Grand_Mosque,_WikiChallenge_African_Schools_Events_2019.jpg)>

*Theocratic Rule in the West African Sudan –  
Friday Mosque, Mopti, Mali*

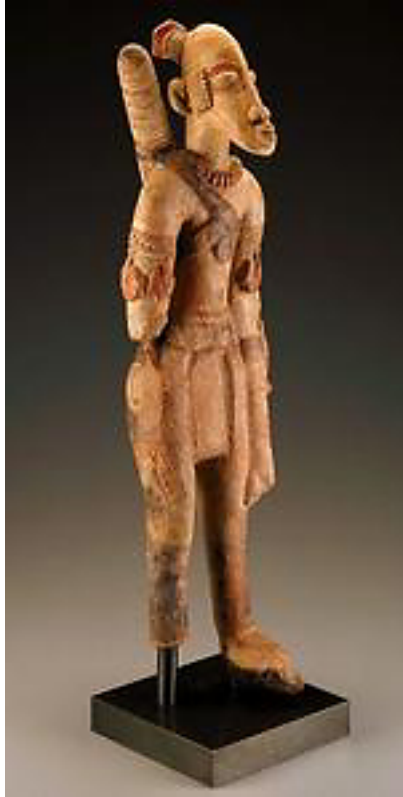
The rulers in the Sudanic kingdoms desired to control people, not territory, and so their territories rarely had precise boundaries.

Their secular aims were to promote, protect, and tax agriculture and trade and to extract labor and military services for the state.

**Kingdom of Mali (13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries).** The demise of the Ghanaian Kingdom in 1087 and of the Almoravid Empire in 1142 left a power vacuum in the West African Sudan for nearly a century. Many rival clans and minor political units vied for control over the trade routes. In 1230, Sundiata Keita became king of the Mande peoples, reorganized the bureaucracy, and created a disciplined standing army. By 1240, his forces controlled all of former Ghana.

Sundiata ruled his kingdom from Niani (in contemporary Guinea-Conakry, just across the border from contemporary Mali), and the new state came to be called Mali, meaning where the king lives. Trade with the north began to flourish again, and Niani became a wealthy, influential center of power. More than seven

centuries after his death in 1260, Sundiata is still regarded as a national hero by most Mande people.

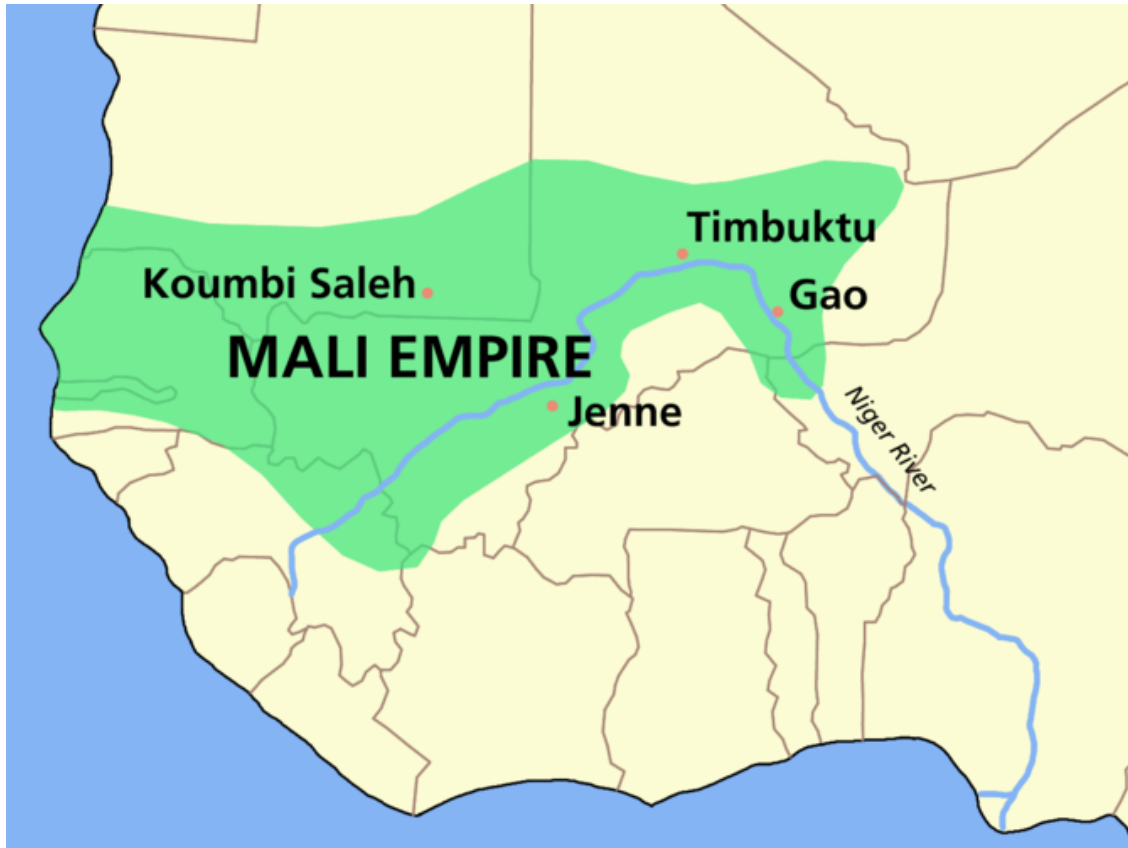


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Djenne\\_Terracotta\\_Archer\\_\(13th-15th\\_cent\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Djenne_Terracotta_Archer_(13th-15th_cent).jpg)>

*Terracotta Archer from the Kingdom of Mali, 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries –  
Bow and Arrows Were Symbols of Imperial Power in Mali*

The Kingdom of Mali reached its peak in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century under two brothers, Mansa Musa (ruled 1312-1337) and Mansa Sulayman (ruled 1337-1360). In 1325, Mansa Musa's

army made vassals of the Kingdom of Songhai, whose people monopolized fishing and trading along the middle Niger River.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MALI\\_empire\\_map.PNG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MALI_empire_map.PNG)>

*The Kingdom of Mali At Its Greatest Territorial Extent, c. 1360*

The main goal for Mali was to gain access to Timbuktu and Gao, key Niger River ports. Mali's control thus extended in the east beyond the Niger River bend, and the terminus of the key trans-Saharan trade routes shifted eastward from Walata to

Timbuktu and Gao. In the west, Mali expanded down the Gambia and Senegal Rivers to the Atlantic Ocean, thus controlling all the areas between the Sahara Desert and the goldfields. As a result, the Kingdom of Mali extended much further east and west than the Kingdom of Ghana had done.



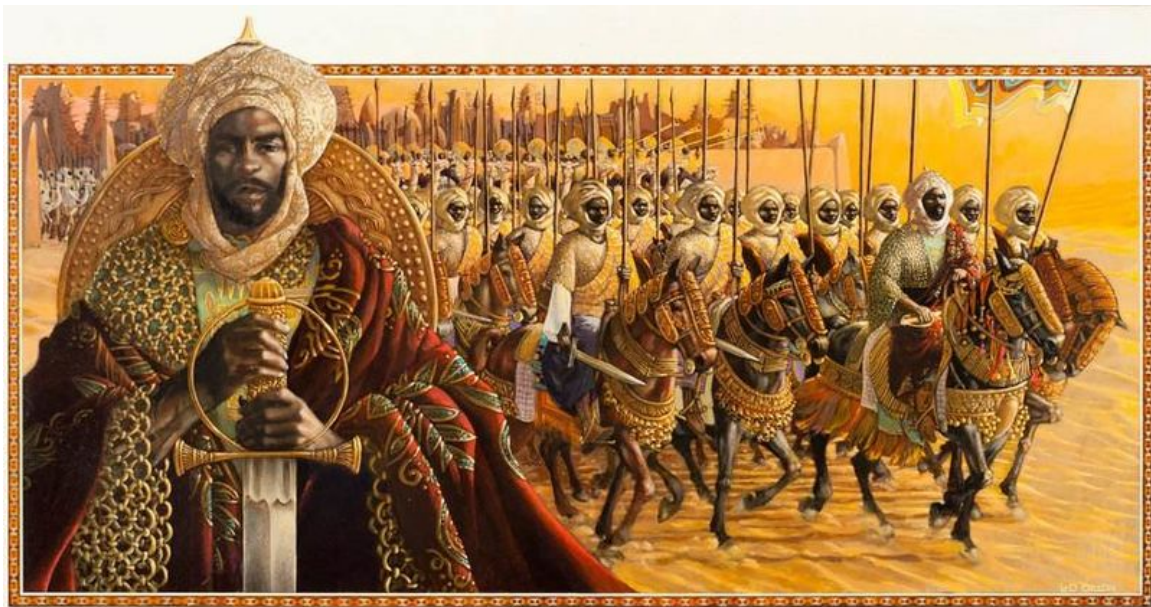
Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Djenne\\_Terracotta\\_Equestrian\\_\(13th-15th\\_cent\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Djenne_Terracotta_Equestrian_(13th-15th_cent).jpg)>

*Mali Terracotta Horseman Figure, 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries –  
National Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C.*

The objective of that vast territorial expansion was to take over all of the termini of trans-Saharan trade in the Western Sudan. The

Kingdom of Mali thus controlled the north-south trade across the Sahara Desert and the east-west trade on the Niger River.

Malian wealth was based on the gold-for-salt trade across the Sahara and on agriculture. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Mali was the largest regional kingdom to exist in the Western Sudan, rivaling European kingdoms in size, wealth, scholarship, and stature. The population of Mali was probably much less than those of contemporary European kingdoms, but no reasonable estimates of the Malian population exist.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Empire\\_mansa\\_musa.jpeg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Empire_mansa_musa.jpeg)>

*Mansa Musa (1280-1337) – King of Mali (1312-1337) at Its Peak*

In 1324-1325, Mansa Musa, then King (*Mansa*) of Mali, made his Islamic pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca. Exaggerated contemporary accounts report that he rode on horseback across the Sahara Desert, preceded by 500 slaves, each carrying a staff of gold weighing more than 60 ounces and that he had 100 camels each reputedly loaded with 300 pounds of gold dust. Mansa Musa distributed so much gold in Cairo and Mecca that the price of gold declined by 10-20 percent. He cut such a wide swath in Cairo that his likeness adorned future maps that included western Africa.

Mansa Musa returned from Egypt with an entourage of scholars. Many of them settled permanently in Timbuktu and launched that city as an influential seat of learning. Mansa Musa later turned his attentions to monumental construction and built great mosques in both Timbuktu and Gao, the former (and later) Songhai capital.





Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kanga\\_Moussa\\_Atlas\\_Catalan.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kanga_Moussa_Atlas_Catalan.jpg)>

*Catalan World Atlas, 1375 –  
Featuring A Depiction of Mansa Musa of the Kingdom of Mali*

After Mansa Sulayman's death in 1360, the Kingdom of Mali entered a period of steady decline. Leadership crises and dynastic quarrels led to civil strife and internal weakness. The kingdom's strongest tributary states were quick to take advantage. Tuareg Berber raids from the north, competition from recalcitrant Songhai people to the east, attacks from the unconquered Mossi people from the south, and a declaration of independence by the Wolof

people of Takrur resulted in the decline and shrinkage of the Mali Kingdom. The tottering and shrunken edifice was able to maintain control in its Mande heartland for another century. The Mali Kingdom disappeared after it was defeated by Songhai in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, although a remnant of the Mande kingdom struggled on for more than two centuries.

**Kingdom of Songhai (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries).** The Songhai Kingdom was a prosperous trading state in the Middle Niger region for 700 years beginning in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The Nilo-Saharan-speaking Songhai peoples consisted of diverse tribes, including farmers (mostly of millet), fishermen, cattle herders, traders, and caravan suppliers. Songhai's capital was Gao, on the Niger River east of Timbuktu, which became a major terminus for trans-Saharan trade routes across the western and central Sahara. The Kingdom of Songhai was conquered by Mali in 1325, but regained its nominal independence 50 years later and thereafter paid tribute to Mali for nearly a century. As Mali weakened,

Songhai grew and the revitalized kingdom benefited from the eastward shift of the major trans-Saharan trade routes.

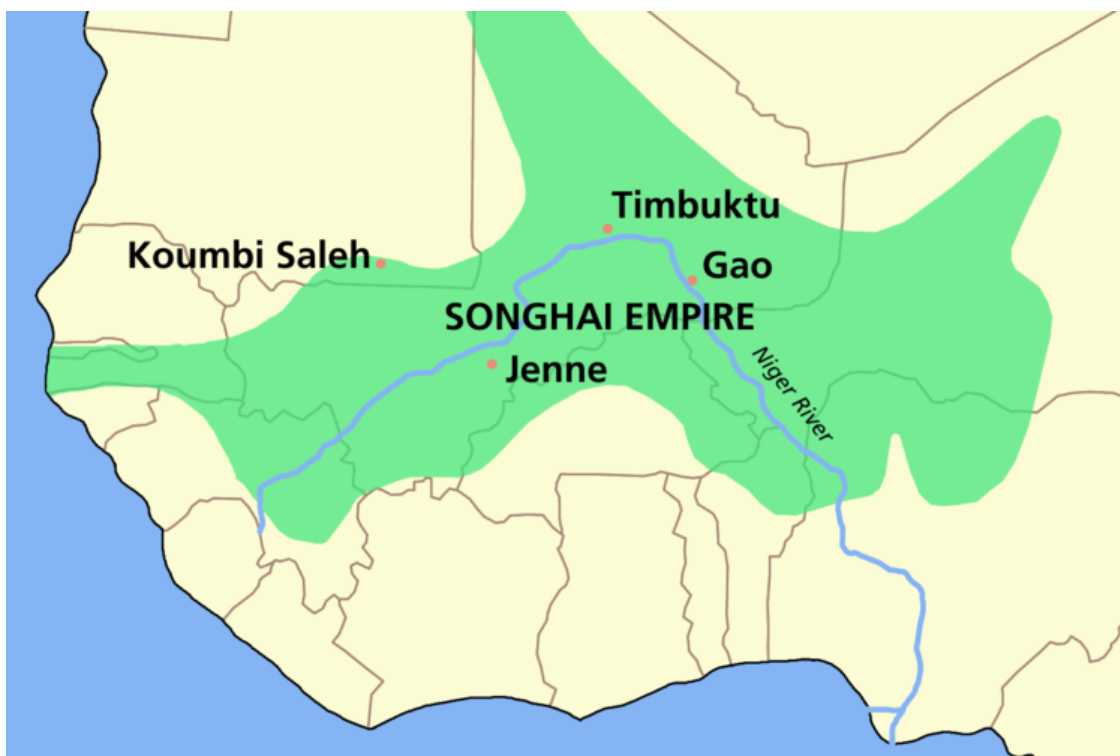
Songhai regained its full independence after 1464 when Sonni Ali (ruled 1464-1491) organized a strong government and a professional army. In 1468, Sonni Ali regained Timbuktu, which had been a Songhai city before Mali captured it. In 1473, he conquered Djenné, another key center of trade and scholarship which had stayed free of Malian control, following a lengthy siege attack.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Donkeys,\\_Timbuktu.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Donkeys,_Timbuktu.jpg)>

*Sonni Ali of Songhai Conquered Timbuktu in 1468 –  
Jingereber Mosque, Timbuktu, Constructed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century*

Songhai reached its peak under a member of the minority Soninke tribe who took the throne in a military coup. Askia Muhammad was a highly capable political and military leader, reputed by many historians to have been the most effective of all kings in the Western Sudan. Askia made a renowned *hajj* in the 1490s, carried 300,000 pieces of gold in his caravan, and gave 100,000 of them to charity in Mecca.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SONGHAI\\_empire\\_map.PNG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SONGHAI_empire_map.PNG)>

*The Songhai Kingdom At Its Greatest Territorial Extent, c. 1540*

After Leo Africanus, the renowned travel writer, visited Gao, he wrote that the city did not have or need walls for protection and that gold was so abundant that sellers of gold sometimes could not find things to purchase with it in local markets. Under Askia's leadership, Songhai extended its control westward to the Atlantic Ocean and eastward to include the rich agricultural region of Hausaland (modern northern Nigeria). The kingdom developed skilled artisans to craft products from locally produced iron and copper. The Islamic universities at Timbuktu and Djenné became even more accomplished during the Songhai period.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Askia.jpg>>

*Tomb of Askia Muhammad (ruled Songhai 1493-1528) –  
Gao, Mali*

**Kingdom of Kanem/Bornu (9<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries).** To the east of Mali and Songhai, another large kingdom ruled in the central Sudan. The power of the Kingdom of Kanem/Bornu ebbed and flowed for a millennium, starting in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The Nilo-Saharan-speaking Kanuri people were the rulers of Kanem and of its successor kingdom, Bornu. Wealth from trans-Saharan trade was the basis of those kingdoms.



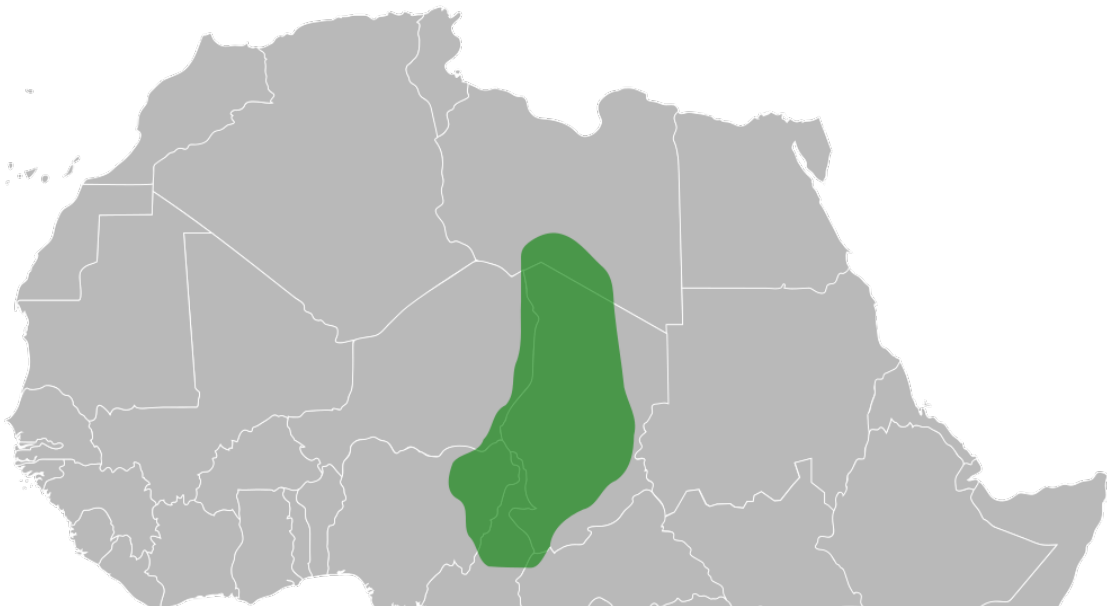
*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ali\\_Modu\\_Sheriff\\_crop\\_2007.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ali_Modu_Sheriff_crop_2007.jpg)>

*Ali Modu Sheriff, Kanuri Politician and Former Governor of Bornu State, Nigeria, 2007 – Maiduguri, Northern Nigeria*

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when the Kanuris formed the Zaghawa kingdom of Kanem, they were nomadic pastoralists who herded camels in the central Sahara Desert. Over time, the locus of the Kanuris and their kingdoms shifted southward. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, under the strong leadership of Mai Dunama Dibbalemi (1221-1259), Kanem moved southward to a region just north of Lake Chad and expanded to become a slave-raiding and trading empire linking the Sahara Desert with the West African savanna. Two centuries later, the capital of the empire moved again, this time to Bornu, southwest of Lake Chad, and from there the Kanuris expanded their trading activities. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it succumbed to British colonialism, Bornu had shrunk to a small kingdom (in the northeast of contemporary Nigeria) based on farming and craftsmanship.

Kanem/Bornu reached its height in the 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, contemporaneous with Mali and Songhai, and controlled the key trade routes in the central Sahara Desert. The vast central Sudanic kingdom also governed much of the territory along those routes.

The shortest way to cross the Sahara Desert was to go directly north from Kanem/Bornu to Bilma, Fezzan, and the Mediterranean coast. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Mai Idris Alooma (1580-1603) extended Bornu's control to Darfur (in modern Sudan) on the northeastern trade route – Bornu-Darfur-Nile Valley-Egypt-Red Sea.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kanem-Bornu-cropped.svg>>

*Kingdom of Kanem-Bornu (Green Area) – c. 13<sup>th</sup> century*

The Kanuris traded north-bound slaves, ivory, kola nuts, and ostrich feathers for south-bound salt, cloth, horses, and swords.

Whereas Mali and Songhai relied on gold as their mainstay export on the trans-Saharan trade route, Kanem/Bornu depended on



selling slaves. The culturally-advanced but militarily-weak Sao people, who farmed south of Lake Chad and excelled in metallurgy, were the main victims of Kanuri slave-raiding.

**Sources of Wealth in the Sudanic Kingdoms.** The Sudanic regional kingdoms, like most pre-industrial societies, benefited from three potential sources of wealth – foreign trade, agriculture (plus fishing), and foreign conquest. The rulers transferred some of that wealth to the central government by imposing taxes on trade and local agriculture and by extracting tribute from conquered territories. Foreign trade included imports that came from North Africa or the Sahara, such as salt and textiles, and exports that were produced in the forest regions of West Africa (outside of the regional kingdoms), such as gold and slaves. At its peak in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, for example, the Kingdom of Mali transshipped two-thirds of the world's gold supply although none of that gold was produced in Mali.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gold\\_nugget\\_\(Australia\)\\_4\\_\(16848647509\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gold_nugget_(Australia)_4_(16848647509).jpg)>

*Gold Nugget, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois –  
Trans-Saharan Trade Created Wealth for the Sudanic Kingdoms*

Historians of the Sudanic kingdoms have not been able to venture quantitative estimates of the relative contributions of trade, agriculture, and conquest to wealth and tax revenues. The strategy of the rulers in all four of the major kingdoms in the western and central Sudan was to attempt to control as much of the Sahelian territory as possible and thereby to gain command of the southern termini of the trans-Saharan trade routes. Foreign and regional

trade probably constituted the primary source of wealth for Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and Kanem/Bornu. But trade wealth was based in important part on a strong agriculture to feed itinerant merchants and caravan animals, and it is not possible to discern whether agriculture might have provided as much wealth as trade did.

Most residents in all of the Sudanic kingdoms were crop and animal farmers, nomadic herders, or fishermen. Agriculture and fishing most likely contributed relatively more to wealth in Mali because that kingdom was located south of the desert and centered in the fertile interior delta of the Niger River. Farming and fishing were a secondary source of wealth – after trade – in Songhai and Kanem/Bornu, both centered in the savanna grasslands, but provided less wealth in desert-based Ghana.

Ghana was the only one of the four Sudanic kingdoms that relied importantly on tribute from foreign conquests. The three other states tended to incorporate conquered territories directly into their systems of rule. None of the large Sudanic kingdoms was successful in mining gold or salt or in directly controlling their

production. The three Western Sudanic kingdoms depended on gold exports and thus used Islamic political organization to spread their control across the Sahel. In contrast, Kanem/Bornu in the central Sudan depended on slave exports and created political instability in the animistic savanna cultures through slave-raiding.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grain\\_storage\\_structure\\_with\\_stone\\_supports,\\_southeast\\_S%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal\\_\(west\\_Africa\)\\_2401719222.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grain_storage_structure_with_stone_supports,_southeast_S%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal_(west_Africa)_2401719222.jpg)>

*Grain Storage Bin, West African Sudan –  
Agriculture Was a Secondary Source of Wealth*

**Agricultural Wealth in Mali and Songhai.** During the 13<sup>th</sup> through 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the era of the Kingdoms of Mali and Songhai, agriculture in the West African Sahel and Sudan was

practiced much as it had been for more than a millennium. Most people resided in villages and farmed, fished, or herded. The Mande peoples – Malinke, Soninke, and Bambara – lived in the woodland savanna and interior Niger delta in southern Mali. That region received 30 to 50 inches of rainfall annually, and its farmers grew cereals – pearl millet, sorghum, fonio, and African rice – and cotton, which was crafted into textiles in the towns.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SEN\\_Village\\_Chief\\_Theodore.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SEN_Village_Chief_Theodore.jpg)>

*Fonio (*Digitaria exilis*) Production, Boula Téné, Senegal –  
Centuries-long Grain Staple in the West African Sudan*

In the drier northern regions of Mali, Fulbe people and other pastoralists herded cattle and goats. On the Niger River banks, the

Sorko and Bozo peoples fished. All three groups – farmers, herders, and fishermen – lived near each other and exchanged their produce with one another or sold it into the Sahelian cities, most often using the Niger River system for convenient transportation. Some cereals and dried fish were exported to the gold-producing regions in the rainforest or to Taghaza, the salt-producing oasis in the Sahara Desert.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali\\_ricefarmers.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali_ricefarmers.jpg)>

### *Planting Rice in Mali – Key Food Crop in Mali for Two Millennia*

The rulers of Mali and Songhai made two major contributions to increasing agricultural output. By far the most

important one was the imposition of political and economic stability. Although occasional civil unrest occurred, for the most part the three centuries of the Mali/Songhai era were relatively secure for agriculturalists. Most did not suffer from nomadic raids, scorched-earth fighting, being battlegrounds, or excessive taxation by temporary alien rulers. Even though the Mali and Songhai governments did not introduce any new agricultural techniques, they were able generally to guarantee peaceful opportunities for agricultural production and trade.

The second contribution to agricultural production by the royal governments was much less noble. They captured slaves as prisoners of war, usually in skirmishes with groups living in the forests to the south, and resettled the captives in agricultural communities sited along the Niger River and its tributaries. Those slave settlers were forced to meet production targets and supply food and other produce to help provision the cities and armies.

Agriculture alone could not serve as the basis for large regional kingdoms. But agriculture was central to imperial power

because strong kingdoms required a rural food surplus to transfer to the towns and cities and feed the nobility, soldiers, bureaucrats, craftsmen, and itinerant merchants. Provincial officials of the Sudanic kingdoms regularly collected taxes from farmers, fishermen, and herders. The tax payments generally were made in-kind and consisted of shares of the harvests or of marketed produce. In that manner, an unknown portion – probably not more than ten or fifteen percent – of the primary production of the kingdoms was transferred from the producers to the government.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Great\\_Mosque\\_of\\_Djenn%C3%A9\\_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Great_Mosque_of_Djenn%C3%A9_1.jpg)>

*Mali and Songhai Created Wealth to Support Islamic Religious Centers – The Great Mosque, Djenne*



**Importance of Trans-Saharan Trade.** Four historical phases mark the more than two millennia of trans-Saharan trade, the primary source of wealth for both Mali and Songhai. The earliest evidence of trans-Saharan commerce dates to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE when Carthaginians (Phoenicians from Carthage in modern Tunisia) engaged in a small amount of horse-drawn, wheeled trade with West Africans. That first phase was of minor importance, and trade did not increase much in the period of Roman rule in North Africa (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE-5<sup>th</sup> century CE). The Romans introduced the dromedary (one-humped) camel into the Sahara Desert from Arabia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and greatly improved the prospects for trans-Saharan trade.

During the second phase of trans-Saharan trade, between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, the desert caravans were camel-based and no longer used wheeled vehicles. Although commerce increased in that period, its value was moderate, reflecting the lack of large states on both ends of the trade routes.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:07.\\_Camel\\_Profile\\_near\\_Silverton,\\_NSW,\\_07.07.2007.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:07._Camel_Profile_near_Silverton,_NSW,_07.07.2007.jpg)>

### *Dromedary Camel – Caravan Beast of Burden*

The third phase, between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, was the highpoint of trans-Saharan commerce, and powerful trade-based kingdoms or empires arose on both sides of the Sahara Desert. Thereafter, in the final phase, during the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the major trade routes shifted from land to sea. Trans-Saharan trade –

still camel-based – declined steadily before ending in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

At the peak of trans-Saharan commerce, perhaps 70,000 camels in six major caravans annually crossed the Sahara Desert. Trans-Saharan trade then formed the basis of the Berber empires in North Africa and the Sudanic kingdoms in West Africa. Berber and Arab merchants imported gold – along with slaves, kola nuts, ivory, ebony, and leather – from West Africa and re-exported much of those commodities to Europe. West African merchants imported salt and dates from the Sahara, textiles, ironware, and other manufactures from Europe or North Africa, and spices and cowrie shells from Asia – all brought across the Sahara on camel caravans by Berber or Arab traders. Some of those goods then were re-exported to forest peoples in West Africa. Intermediary trade thus was the key for large state-building on both sides of the Sahara Desert.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caravan\\_in\\_the\\_desert.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caravan_in_the_desert.jpg)>

*Camel Caravan in the Sahara Desert, Morocco –  
70,000 Camels Crossed Annually at the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Peak*

**Location of Trade Routes.** The locations of the trans-Saharan trade routes depended on the availability of water in oases, the distance between oases, and the location of salt and copper deposits. The introduction in the 4<sup>th</sup> century of camels and dates revolutionized long-distance trade across the Sahara Desert. A significant desert oasis had to provide several needs for camel caravans. The most important were water and food for humans and camels. Dromedary camels could go without water for four

days and cover about 25 miles per day, fully-loaded, during that period. Trade routes thus had to have oases located no further than 100 miles from each other. Dates grew well in oases and provided food for humans and trade goods for imported grains. Camels required grazing grounds in oases.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hoggar8.jpg>>*

*Saharan Oasis – Ahaggar Mountains, Southern Algeria*

Oases also had to offer caravanserai services – lodging, provisioning, and banking – for merchants and camel drivers.

Some oases, such as Sijilmasa in southern Morocco and Walata in western Mali, developed into urban centers, evolving from watering holes into important trade and craft centers. Oases in the Sahara also were crucial to the spread of Islam. Every oasis had a mosque and religious teachers (who moved south with the traders).

During the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the main trade routes ran along the western side of the Sahara – from Awdaghost or Walata in Ghana (at the southern edge of the Sahara) to Taghaza (the center for salt mining) and on to Sijilmasa (in Morocco, at the northern edge of the Sahara) and the Mediterranean coast (usually Tangier via Fez). As more goldfields were developed further east, new trade routes were opened, and the Sudanic empires shifted eastward. (See map below.)

For Mali (13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries), the main route ran from Timbuktu via Taghaza and Sijilmasa to the coast. Further to the east, the key trans-Saharan route for Songhai (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries) went from Gao via Takedda (which produced copper), Ghat, and Ghadames to Tunis or Tripoli.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
 <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trans-Saharan\\_routes\\_early.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trans-Saharan_routes_early.svg)>

*Location of Trans-Saharan Trade Routes and Sources of Gold in West Africa (Bambuk, Bouré, Lobi, and Ashanti) – c. 1500*

**Gold in West Africa.** West African gold was an elusive commodity. For centuries, empire-builders and traders in both

North Africa and West Africa desired to control the sources of gold, but they never were successful in achieving that goal. The gold was believed to originate from a mysterious land called Wangara, but no such land existed. Instead, the gold in West Africa came from four main production areas – Bambuk, on the upper Senegal River (in modern Senegal), Bure, on the upper Niger River (in modern Mali), Lobi, on the upper Volta River (in modern Burkina Faso), and Akan, the Ashanti region in what once was called the Gold Coast (in modern Ghana).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trans-Saharan\\_routes\\_early.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trans-Saharan_routes_early.svg)>

*Principal Sources of Gold in West Africa, 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries –  
Bambuk, Boure, Lobi, and Ashanti (From Left To Right)*



The gold occurred in placer deposits. Forest peoples living in stateless societies – not under the direct control of the Sudanic kingdoms – carried out the production of the alluvial gold by hand and jealously guarded access to their valuable natural resource.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guinea\\_Siguiro\\_miner\\_woman.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guinea_Siguiro_miner_woman.jpg)>

*Panning For Gold in Guinea – Near Site of Boure Gold Deposits*

The gold-producing peoples took great pains to guard their independence. They carried out their trading activities at considerable arms' length. The local producers often engaged in “silent trade” – a form of barter without personal contact – to keep

traders away from their gold sources. Traders wishing to obtain gold would beat a drum, place piles of trade goods on a designated riverbank, and depart. The gold producers then would place amounts of gold next to each pile of trade goods, beat a drum, and depart. The traders would return. If satisfied, they would take the gold and leave. If not, they would leave and hope that the producers would return and add more gold to the bargain.

Gold output in West Africa expanded steadily throughout the main period of trans-Saharan trade (9<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries). Annual production of gold is estimated to have peaked at nine tons in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At least two-thirds of that gold was exported out of West Africa. West Africa then provided much of the gold supply in North Africa and Europe.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pectoral,\\_Ghana,\\_Asante\\_\(Ashanti\),\\_early\\_20th\\_century\\_AD,\\_gold\\_-\\_Ethnological\\_Museum,\\_Berlin\\_-\\_DSC02269.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pectoral,_Ghana,_Asante_(Ashanti),_early_20th_century_AD,_gold_-_Ethnological_Museum,_Berlin_-_DSC02269.JPG)>

*Ashanti Gold Pectoral, Early 20<sup>th</sup> century –  
Ethnological Museum, Berlin*

The Europeans and North Africans desired West African gold to make coins for currency (along with silver coins) and to pay for luxury imports, such as silk from China and spices from Southeast Asia and India. Because craft industries at that time were more highly developed in China and India than in Europe, the European kingdoms needed specie – gold or silver – to pay for their desired luxury imports from the Orient.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spice\\_Market,\\_Marrakech\\_\(2242330035\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spice_Market,_Marrakech_(2242330035).jpg)>

*Spices from South India, Market In Marrakech, Morocco –  
Traded for West African Gold*

**Salt in the Sahara Desert.** Salt was the critical commodity moving southward on the trans-Saharan trade routes. From the 10<sup>th</sup> through the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Taghaza was far and away the leading producer of salt in the western Sahara region. Earlier, Idjil, located to the west of Taghaza, had produced salt that was traded to the Kingdom of Ghana. When the Songhai army invaded Taghaza in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, its inhabitants fled and so the takeover

proved futile. Songhai then opened a new salt-mining area in Taodeni, 100 miles further south and thus closer to Timbuktu. Taodeni has produced salt to the present day. A separate salt-producing region further east was the basis of trans-Saharan trade to the Central Sudan. Bilma, sited north of Lake Chad in the central Sahara region, was the leading salt producer for the Kanem-Bornu Empire.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salt\\_selling\\_Mopti\\_Mali.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salt_selling_Mopti_Mali.jpg)>

*Salt Slabs and Packages, Market in Mopti, Mali –  
Produced in Taghaza and Transported by Camels to West Africa*

Salt production in Taghaza took place under extreme conditions. Ibn Battuta, the well-traveled Berber-Arab adventurer and writer, visited Taghaza during his extensive travels to West Africa in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century and described how the salt was produced. The Massufa (Berber) desert tribe ran the operation with slave laborers. The slaves had a miserable existence and lived on dates (imported from Sijilmasa), camel meat (brought on the hoof by transient caravans), and millet (imported from the Western Sudan). Enormous slabs of rock salt were available in Taghaza. The slave laborers dug the huge salt slabs from the ground. They were so heavy – each salt slab weighed about 200 pounds – that a camel could carry only two slabs at a time. The town of Taghaza was extraordinarily bleak. There was intense heat, there were no trees, and the homes and mosque were constructed from salt slabs and covered with camel-skin roofs.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mopti\\_sel.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mopti_sel.jpg)>*

*Salt Slabs from Taodeni in the Sahara –  
Alongside the Niger Rive, Mopti, Mali*

Arab or Berber merchants brought the salt from the miserable production areas in the Sahara to the flourishing entrepôt cities, such as Timbuktu and Gao, at the southern edge of the Sahara Desert. Merchants from the Sudanic kingdoms then fulfilled the intermediary function of moving salt from the entrepôt cities to the gold-producing regions.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Billma-Salzkarawane1.jpg>>

### *Salt Caravan With Tuareg Camel Caravan Drivers*

The salt was worth its weight in gold when it reached West Africa. Consumers desired salt to season food, preserve meat, and fulfill human nutritional needs. Salt was produced by evaporation in maritime regions in West Africa, but the trade in marine salt was mostly local. Marine salt supplies were not sufficient to meet the demand for salt in the interior. West Africans living at a distance from the coast thus relied on desert salt.

**Strategic Importance of the Sahel.** The Sudanic kingdoms were all located in the Sahel (coast, in Arabic), the southern fringe



of the desert. None of the Sudanic states produced gold or salt, the two main staples of the north-south trade. The Sudanic kingdoms profited from the trade rather than the production of salt and gold.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Village\\_Telly\\_in\\_Mali.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Village_Telly_in_Mali.jpg)>

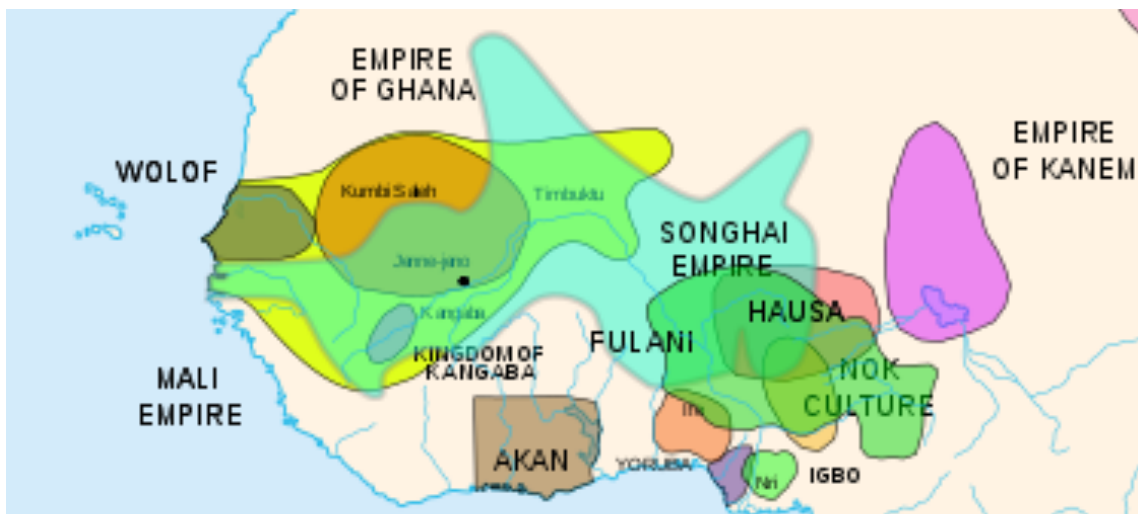
*Telly, Mali, Village in the Sahel –  
The “Shore” of the Sahara Desert*

The Sahelian entrepôts – first Awdaghost, then Walata, later Timbuktu and Gao – used their strategic locations to control trans-Saharan commerce. Upon reaching the Sahel, trans-Saharan traders would be in urgent need of provisioning and at the mercy of whoever controlled the area. Sudanic states prevented the North

African merchants from having access to the gold-producing areas in West Africa, and the Sudanic merchants gained a monopoly over the distribution of Saharan salt within West Africa. Trading cities at the desert's edge thus became the focus of trading activity, much like ports along ocean shores. Monopoly of trade required control over a wide span of territory along the desert's edge. The trans-Saharan trade thus stimulated the creation of large Sudanic kingdoms, which expanded east-west along the Sahel and Niger River to control trade. When those kingdoms attempted to spread north or south to control production, they were unsuccessful.

**Trade Profits in Sudanic Kingdoms.** The creation of the four Sudanic kingdoms – Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and Kanem-Bornu – was integrally linked to trans-Saharan trade. Little that moved in trans-Saharan trade was produced within the main cities of the kingdoms. Trade of transshipped goods produced wealth, and trade taxes transferred some of that wealth to the ruling classes. Rulers levied substantial taxes (often one-fifth of the goods traded) on both foreign and local merchants. In return for

the tax revenues, the rulers provided security, provisions, and route maintenance to the merchants. The small number of trans-Saharan trade routes limited smuggling, making trade taxes easy to collect. The key to successful taxation of trans-Saharan trade was the control of Sahelian towns where exchange took place.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African-civilizations-map-pre-colonial.svg>

### *Principal Kingdoms in West Africa – 10<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries*

North African merchants, Berbers and Arabs, ran most of the camel caravans across the Sahara Desert. The exchange of Saharan salt and other North African goods for gold and other West African goods took place in the Sahelian entrepôts, such as Timbuktu. The principal taxes were levied at that point of

exchange. North African merchants then took gold back north across the Sahara. Sudanic traders distributed the salt and northern goods in the savanna and forest regions of West Africa and purchased gold along with slaves, kola nuts, and ebony to re-sell later to trans-Saharan merchants. The Sudanic kingdoms did not create state monopolies to carry out trade and instead encouraged private enterprise. The bases of trade evolved over time – from barter, to commodity currencies (principally salt), to cowrie shells from India, and eventually to gold – first gold dust (*tibar*, measured in *mithqals*, about 4.5 grams) and later gold coins (*dinars*).



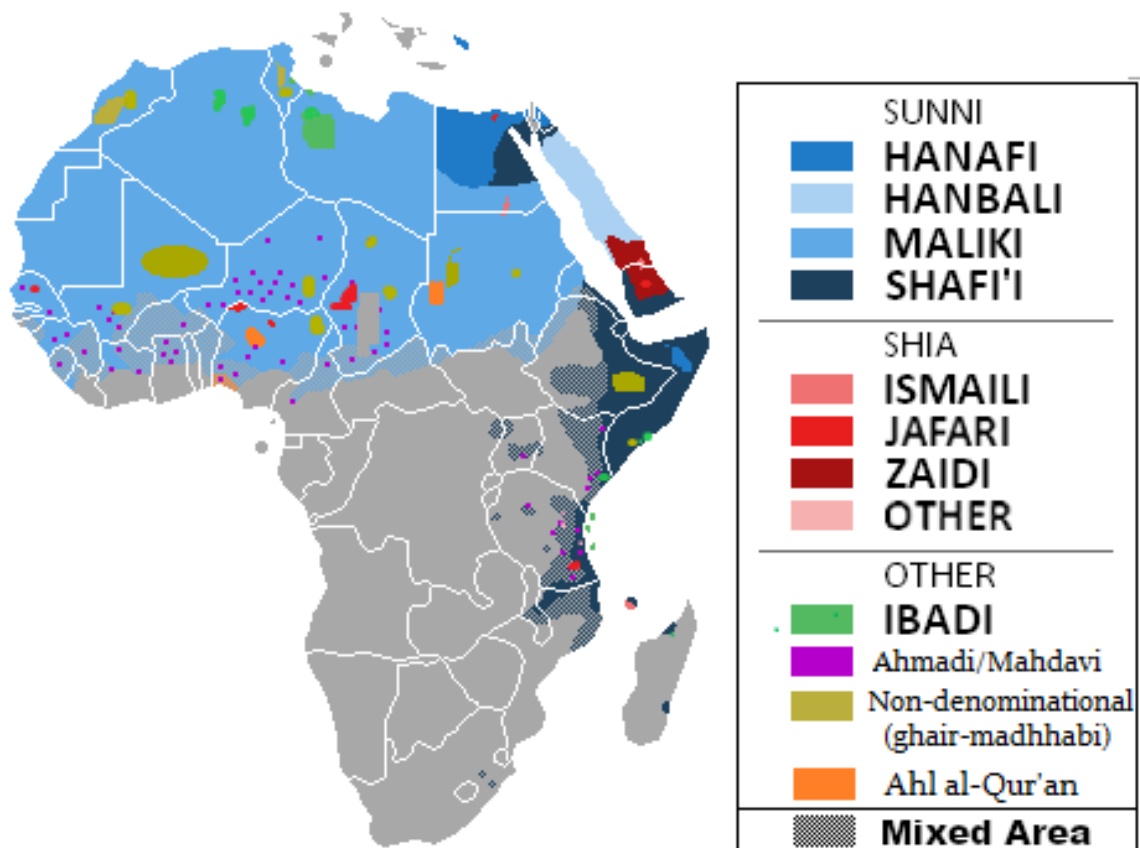
Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yusuf\\_Ben\\_Tasfin\\_dinar\\_22562.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yusuf_Ben_Tasfin_dinar_22562.jpg)>

*Almoravid Gold Dinar, Used In Trans-Saharan Trade –  
Minted Under Yusuf ibn Tashfin In Aghmat, Morocco, 11<sup>th</sup> century*

**Trans-Saharan Trade and the Southward Spread of Islam.** Trans-Saharan trade was instrumental in the spread of Islam south of the Sahara. The conversion of Sudanic leaders and peoples to Islam was a long and gradual process that began in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and is still occurring. Islam spread to West Africa through trade and merchants, in much the same way that it moved to Southeast Asia, rather than through missionary efforts of *ulama* religious leaders or military *jihads* of political conquest. When the Islamic Almoravids conquered Ghana in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, they attempted to convert the animist leaders to Islam, but they had limited success. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Malian emperors adopted Islam as the court religion, facilitating the spread of the new faith, and they also sponsored important centers of Islamic learning at Timbuktu and Djenné.

Because North Africans rarely went beyond the desert frontier, the introduction of Islam further south was largely attributable to Sudanic efforts. Islamic culture reinforced the process of empire building. Islamic governmental institutions, the

adoption of a universal set of laws, and diminished religious roles of local village leaders facilitated imperial control over large areas with heterogeneous peoples.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Self-reported\\_muslim\\_affinity\\_in\\_africa.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Self-reported_muslim_affinity_in_africa.png)

*The Spread of Islam in Africa –  
Along Trans-Saharan Trade Routes into West Africa*

Islamic administration permitted easier collection of taxes, brought better-trained civil servants, and gradually eliminated

religious dissidents. Merchants embraced Islam because it facilitated commerce. The new religion allowed widespread contacts with visiting Islamic traders, introduced Arabic as the *lingua franca* (language of trade), and provided a bond among business people that ensured enforcement of credit arrangements. The spread of Islam thus was the most significant enduring influence in the West African Sudan of trans-Saharan trade.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Modern\\_prayer\\_mat.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Modern_prayer_mat.jpg)>

*Islamic Prayer Rug, Depicting the Kaaba in Mecca*

**Timbuktu and Djenné.** Timbuktu and Djenné were important trading centers in the Western Sudan between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Timbuktu had been a Tuareg camp for 300 years before it became a permanent Songhai town in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Djenné was founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Soninke people who had migrated from Ghana. Mansa Musa of Mali captured Timbuktu during the first decade of his rule, the 1310s, but Djenné remained free from Malian control. Sonni Ali of Songhai regained control of Timbuktu for his revived kingdom in 1468, and he went on to take Djenné five years later. Both cities remained key nodes in the Songhai Kingdom until they fell to the invading Moroccan army in the 1590s.





Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Great\\_Mosque\\_of\\_Djenn%C3%A9\\_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Great_Mosque_of_Djenn%C3%A9_1.jpg)>

*The Great Mosque in Djenné –  
Built In 1906 On the Site of An Earlier Great Mosque*

Both commercial centers benefited from strategic locations for trade, transportation, and defense. Timbuktu was sited at the top of the bend of the Niger River and on important trans-Saharan trade routes to Morocco and Tunisia and thus was at the crossroads of east-west and north-south trading networks. Djenné was located near the Bure, Lobi, and Akan goldfields on the Bani River, a tributary to the Niger River, on a flood plain that was nearly surrounded by water during the flooding season. Timbuktu thus

was more accessible for trade, whereas Djenné was more defensible. Despite its importance as a trading center, Timbuktu never became a capital city because its location put it under constant threat from desert-based Tuareg invaders.

Leo Africanus, the adventurer and travel writer, visited Timbuktu in 1510, when it was at the heart of the Songhai Kingdom, and described the city vividly:

The rich king of Tombuto hath many plates and scepters of gold, some whereof weigh 1,300 pounds: and he keepes a magnificent and well furnished court. When he travelleth any whither he rideth upon a camel which is led by some of his noblemen; and so he doth likewise when he goeth to warfar, and all his souldiers ride upon horses. ... He hath always three thousand horsemen and a great number of footmen that shoot poisoned arrows, attending upon him. ... Here are great store of doctors, judges, priests, and other learned men, that are bountifully maintained at the king's cost and charges. And hither are brought divers manuscripts or written books out of Barbarie, which are sold for more money than any other merchandise.

Leo Africanus went on to visit Djenné and found a rich agricultural region producing barley, rice, cotton, cattle, and fish:

Their cotton they sell unto the merchants of Barbarie, for cloth of Europe, for brazen vessels, for armor, and other such commodities. Their coin is of gold without any stamp or inscription at all. ... The region it selfe yeeldeth great abundance of corne, flesh, and cotton.

Heere are many artificers and merchants in all places: and yet the king honorably entertaineth all strangers. The inhabitants are rich, and have plenty of wares. Heere are great store of temples, priest, and professours, which professors read their lectures only in the temples, because they have no colleges at all. The people of this region excel all other Negroes in witte, civilitie, and industry.

The economic basis of Timbuktu was transit trade; it was an entrepôt without much agriculture. Djenné was also a major commercial center, but it benefited from a fairly rich agricultural hinterland.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Women\\_pounding\\_grain.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Women_pounding_grain.jpg)>

*Women Pounding Millet in Timbuktu – Meager Agricultural Base*

The two cities led the Western Sudan in cultural achievements because they had impressive Islamic bourgeoisies. Timbuktu featured a leading Islamic university, the Sankore mosque, and Jedala scholars who migrated from Walata in the western Sudan – notably Ahmad Baba, who was an eminent scholar in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Djenné had a very good university, Islamic theologians, and outstanding adobe architecture.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Timbuktu\\_Mosque\\_Sankore.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Timbuktu_Mosque_Sankore.jpg)>

*The Sankore Mosque, Timbuktu – Leading Islamic University*

**Decline and Fall of the Songhai Kingdom.** The Kingdom of Songhai reached the peak of its power in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup>

century. Decline set in after religious controversies and fratricidal struggles precipitated succession disputes, palace revolutions, and civil wars. That internal erosion undercut the kingdom's military strength and made it difficult to control dissident subject peoples in remote provinces who detested paying tribute to the Songhai overlords. Concurrently, increasing amounts of the West African gold were sent south to the coast to be exported by the newly-arrived Portuguese, who had established coastal forts to divert the gold trade. Loss of the monopoly over the gold trade put additional economic pressures on the fraying Songhai Kingdom, because it undercut the state's primary source of wealth.

In 1578, the Sultan of Morocco, Mulai Ahmad al-Mansur, decisively defeated the Portuguese at the battle of Alcazar and drove them out of Morocco. Flush with the pride of victory and in need of revenue, the sultan decided to attempt to take control of the trans-Saharan trade and to occupy the West African goldfields. In 1584, a large Moroccan army perished in the Sahara Desert en

route to attack Songhai. But in 1587, a Moroccan force occupied Taghaza, the main source of salt in western Saharan trade.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%CE%9A%CE%B5%CE%BD%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE\\_%CE%B1%CF%85%CE%BB%CE%AE\\_%CE%95%CE%BB\\_%CE%9C%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%AF\\_1127.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%CE%9A%CE%B5%CE%BD%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE_%CE%B1%CF%85%CE%BB%CE%AE_%CE%95%CE%BB_%CE%9C%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%AF_1127.jpg)

*El Badi Palace, Marrakesh – Constructed By Moroccan Sultan Mulai Ahmad al-Mansur in 1578 After His Victory Over Portugal*

Four years later, Sultan al-Mansur mounted a large force to cross 1,500 miles of the Sahara Desert and conquer the Songhai Kingdom. The leader of the Moroccan force was Judar, a palace eunuch and close confidant of the sultan. The trans-Saharan expedition was massive – 4,000 troops (half infantry and half light-cavalry), 1,000 camel drivers, 8,000 camels, and 1,000 pack-

horses. The sultan anticipated that his 2,000 firearms (arquebuses) and six large cannons would overwhelm the Songhai army and offset the Moroccans' numerical disadvantage in warfare. The incredible Moroccan invasion across the Sahara took the Songhai leaders completely by surprise. Judar's disciplined mercenaries, with advanced weaponry, easily defeated the uncoordinated Songhai army, using bows and spears, at the Battle of Tondibi, north of Gao, in 1591.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gao\\_Mali\\_2006.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gao_Mali_2006.jpg)>

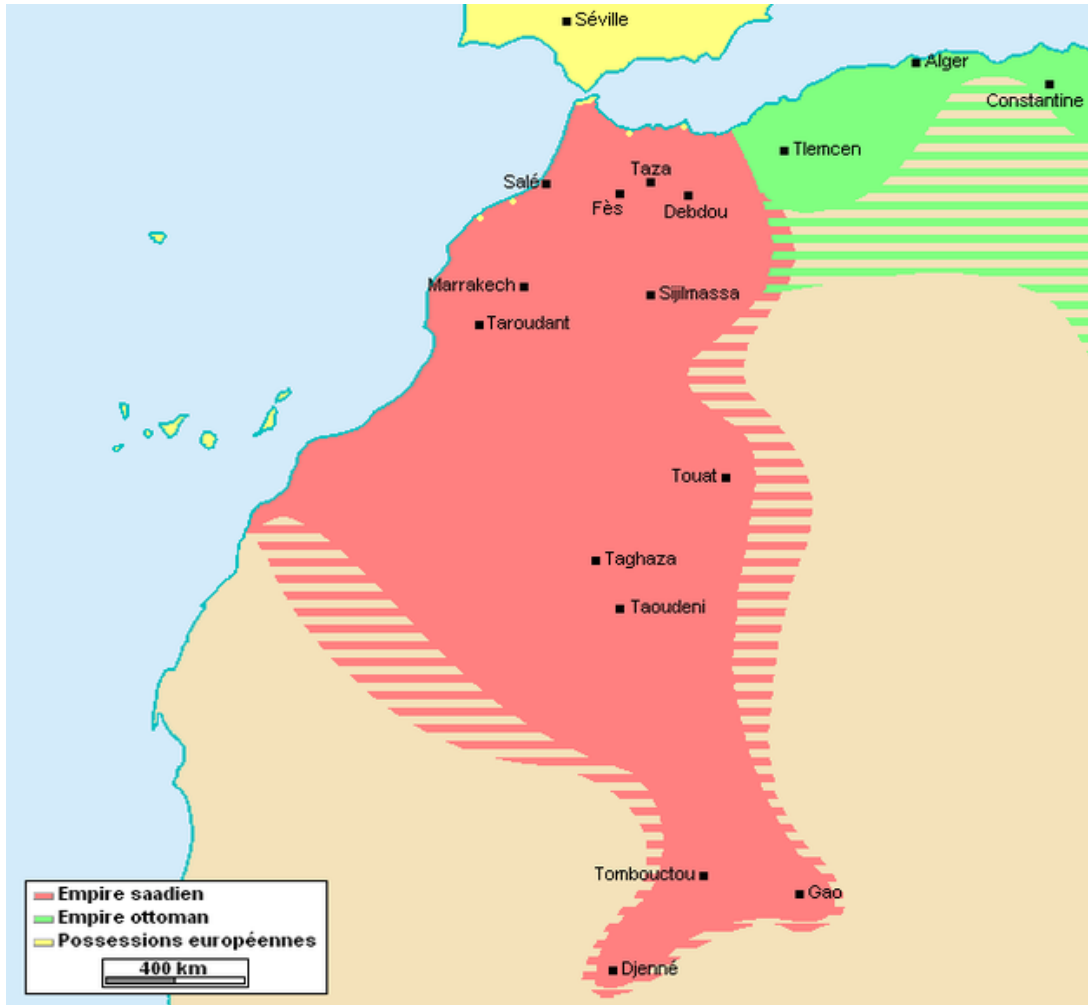
*Gao, Mali, Former Capital of the Songhai Empire –  
The Battle of Tondibi (1591) Was Fought Just North of Gao*

The Moroccan invaders, which came to be called the Arma from the Arabic word for musketeer, occupied Gao and soon afterward

took Timbuktu – the two key trading entrepôts in Songhai. The Arma, however, quickly discovered that they could win the war but could not govern the conquered people.

The Moroccans successfully looted the cities and transferred much wealth to the sultan. But they had difficulty governing even the areas surrounding the three major cities of Timbuktu, Gao, and Djenné. Warlike peoples who formerly had been subjected to Songhai rule – Tuaregs, Fulanis, and Bambaras – raided farming areas and cities. The Moroccans could neither re-create the Songhai Kingdom nor take control of the gold-producing regions. Their commanders became destructive warlords in the three main cities and were virtually independent of guidance from Morocco. The glory days of the Kingdoms of Mali and Songhai were over. The once-powerful western Sudan became a weakened scene of chronic warfare and rapacious raiding.





Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
 <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maroc\\_-\\_fin\\_XVIe\\_si%C3%A8cle.PNG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maroc_-_fin_XVIe_si%C3%A8cle.PNG)>

*Former Songhai Heartland (Timbuktu, Gao, and Djenné) Under Moroccan Rule, 1591-1833 – Succession Disputes Undercut the Songhai Kingdom*

**Decline of the Trans-Saharan Trade.** Beginning in the 1590s, the trans-Saharan trade went into a three-century decline. The eventual demise of the two-millennia-old trade route was brought about by the confluence of four events – the Moroccan

invasion of the Sudan, the shift of gold exports to European maritime trade, the rise of the Atlantic slave trade, and the decline of the Ottoman Empire in North Africa. Those four events combined to create instability and decrease trade in both regions connected by the trans-Saharan trade routes.

The proximate cause of the decline of trans-Saharan trade was Morocco's invasion of Songhai in 1591. The Moroccan force brought down the Songhai Kingdom, but it could control only the key trading cities – Gao, Timbuktu, and Djenné. The Moroccan incursion precipitated a long period of political instability that precluded the creation of new Western Sudanic kingdoms and weakened the security of trans-Saharan trade.

The death knell for camel caravans across the Sahara was the rise of European sea-based trade, which diverted West African gold to the coast. In the 1440s, Portuguese innovators developed the caravel ship. The caravel was an ingenious combination of Mediterranean (three masts), Arab (lateen sails), and northern European (wide hull) design, and it could tack easily into the wind

despite carrying more than fifty tons. Improvements in navigation led to a northwest route via the Azores Islands where sailing ships could use westerly winds to return to Portugal.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portuguese\\_Caravel.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portuguese_Caravel.jpg)>

*Portuguese Caravel Ship, 15<sup>th</sup>-century Innovation –  
Led to the European Age of Exploration and Imperialism*

After the invention of the caravel ship and the discovery of the Azores return route to Portugal, the Portuguese expanded into West Africa. From the 1470s until the 1630s, Portugal pioneered the export of Akan gold from Elmina on the Gold Coast (modern Ghana). Thereafter, the Dutch, English, and French replaced the

Portuguese in exporting West African gold. That shift of gold to the coast undercut the staple of the trans-Saharan trade and the economic basis of the Sudanic kingdoms.

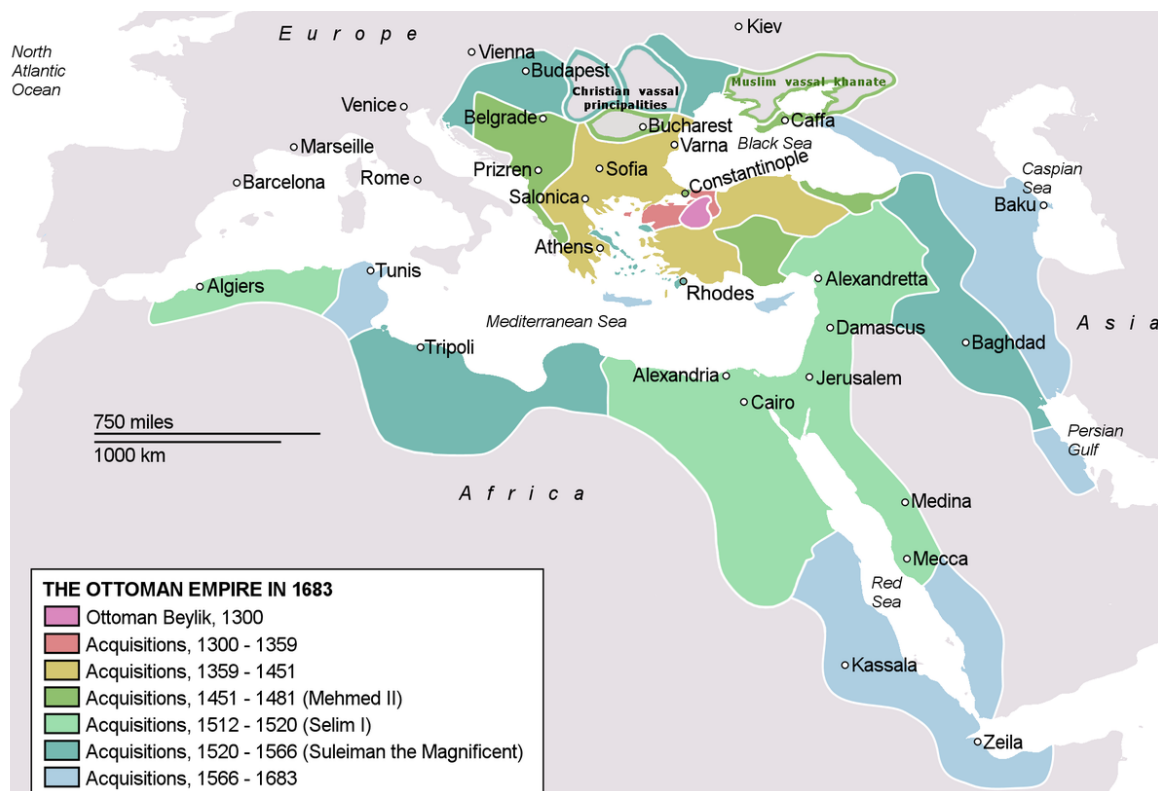


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portuguese\\_discoveries\\_and\\_explorationsV2\\_en.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portuguese_discoveries_and_explorationsV2_en.png)

*Portuguese Exploration and Settlement (Green), 1415-1543 – Shifted the Gold Trade from the Sahara Desert to the Atlantic*

From the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the nefarious European slave trade created instability throughout Africa, especially in Western Africa. The western Sudan region fell into political disarray for three centuries until the uninvited imposition of French and British colonial control. In the Mediterranean

region, the rise of strong Christian European kingdoms gradually eclipsed the Islamic power in North Africa of Morocco and the Ottoman Empire, leading to instability and piracy on the Barbary Coast – the northern terminus of the trans-Saharan route. The once-fabled trans-Saharan trade quietly disappeared at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when its gold and salt were replaced by peanut exports that moved by colonial railroads to coastal ports.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_Ottoman\\_Empire](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas_of_the_Ottoman_Empire)

*The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923 – Lost Control of North Africa to European Imperialists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*

## **Mali after the Mali and Songhai Kingdoms (16<sup>th</sup> century-present)**

**Mali between the Moroccans and the French (17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries).** Following the Moroccan invasion in 1591, Mali began three centuries of political instability and chronic warfare that ended only with the unwanted invasion and occupation by imperial France in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Enormous changes occurred in those 300 years, yet the potential benefits bypassed Mali.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Berber\\_Trade\\_with\\_Timbuktu\\_1300s.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Berber_Trade_with_Timbuktu_1300s.jpg)>

*Timbuktu, Mali, Ill-governed by Moroccans –  
Caravan Approaching Timbuktu In 1853, By Heinrich Barth*

Portugal's maritime revolution led to the decline of trans-Saharan trade, but it also opened huge new opportunities in international trade between Africans and Europeans.

Unfortunately for Mali and much of the rest of Africa, during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the principal item that the Europeans wanted from Africa were able-bodied slaves to sell in the Americas. Most of Africa then missed out on the technological innovations and new economic institutions following the agricultural and industrial revolutions that emerged in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In Mali and the rest of the West African Sahelian zone, the missed opportunity for economic progress was exacerbated by unusual climatic shocks. The periodicity of drought increased so that the rains and cereal harvests failed in one of every five years. Famine and depopulation, comparable to the Sahelian disaster in 1969-1973, struck twice earlier – in 1639-1643 and in 1738-1756. The West African Sahel suffered miserably.



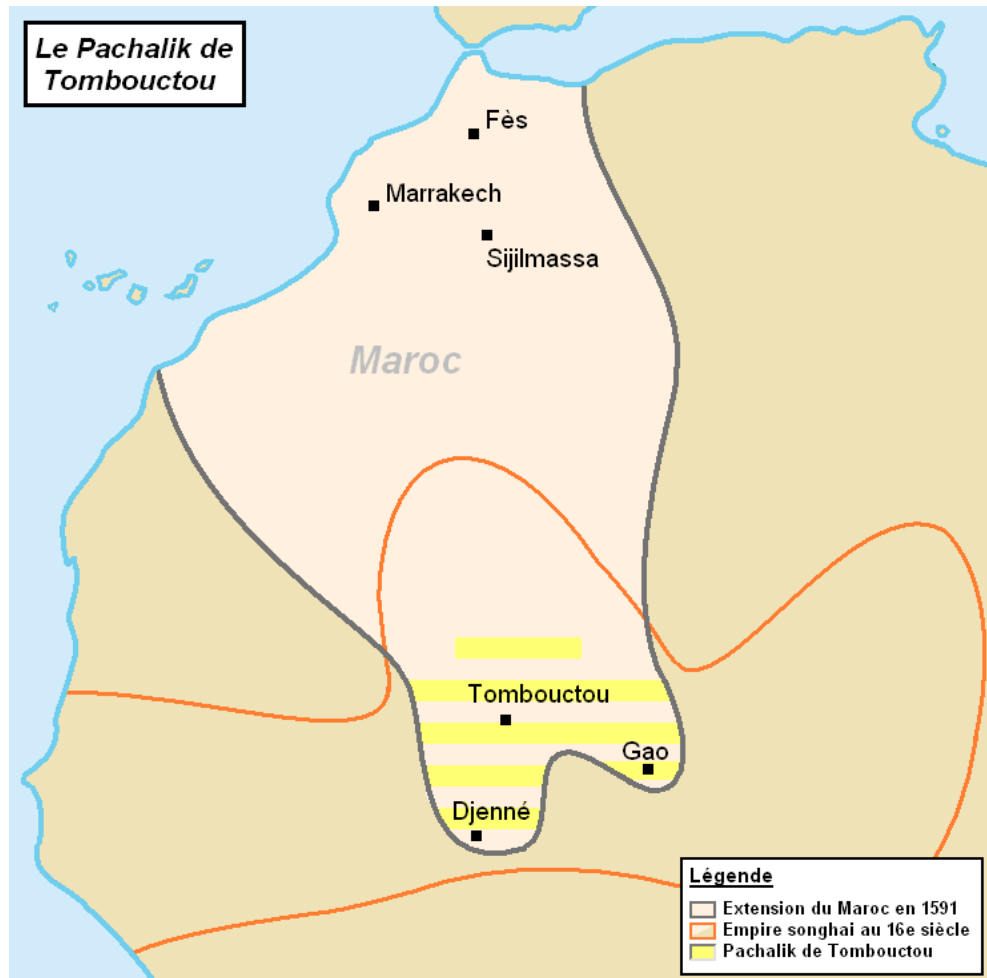
Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%C3%89levage\\_au\\_Mali.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%C3%89levage_au_Mali.jpg)>

*Livestock Grazing in the Savanna in Mali – Region Struck by Severe Drought and Famine (1639-1643, 1738-1756, 1969-1973)*

Unstable politics contributed to – and often caused – Mali’s economic problems. The sultan of Morocco had invaded Mali in 1591 to control West African gold production and trade. When that objective failed, Morocco’s main interest in Mali became supplying a steady stream of slave soldiers for the Moroccan standing army. The Moroccan invading force, the Arma, set up



their capital in Timbuktu, and a Moroccan pasha (governor) ostensibly ruled from there.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TombouctouPachalik\\_4.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TombouctouPachalik_4.png)>

*Moroccan Rule of Timbuktu, Djenné, and Gao. 1591-1833 –  
Triggered Chronic Warfare in the West African Sudan*

The Arma also placed kaid (provincial rulers) in Gao, Djenné, and Bamba. But much of the former Songhai Kingdom was in a constant state of mutiny against Moroccan rule, and the

Arma had difficulty maintaining effective rule. The Moroccans called their new possession a pashalic and maintained the fiction that they were subjects of the sultan of Morocco until about 1660. Their rulers and army established a weak military aristocracy that was interested in little else than enriching themselves through trade, bribes, or blackmail. The Arma lingered on in the Malian cities until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century before being gradually absorbed into the indigenous population.

A new indigenous state arose in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, based on the city of Segou in the interior delta of the Niger River. The founding leader, Mammari Kulibali (ruled 1712-1755), was Bambara and non-Muslim. The Segou Kingdom first consolidated its power over the pastoralist Fulbe people in the Niger interior delta. It then expanded southward toward the forest region and northeastward down the Niger River Valley until it controlled all of the territory between Djenné in the Niger delta and Timbuktu on the edge of the Sahara Desert. In 1760, the Muslim Arma pasha of Timbuktu began paying regular tribute to pagan Segou.



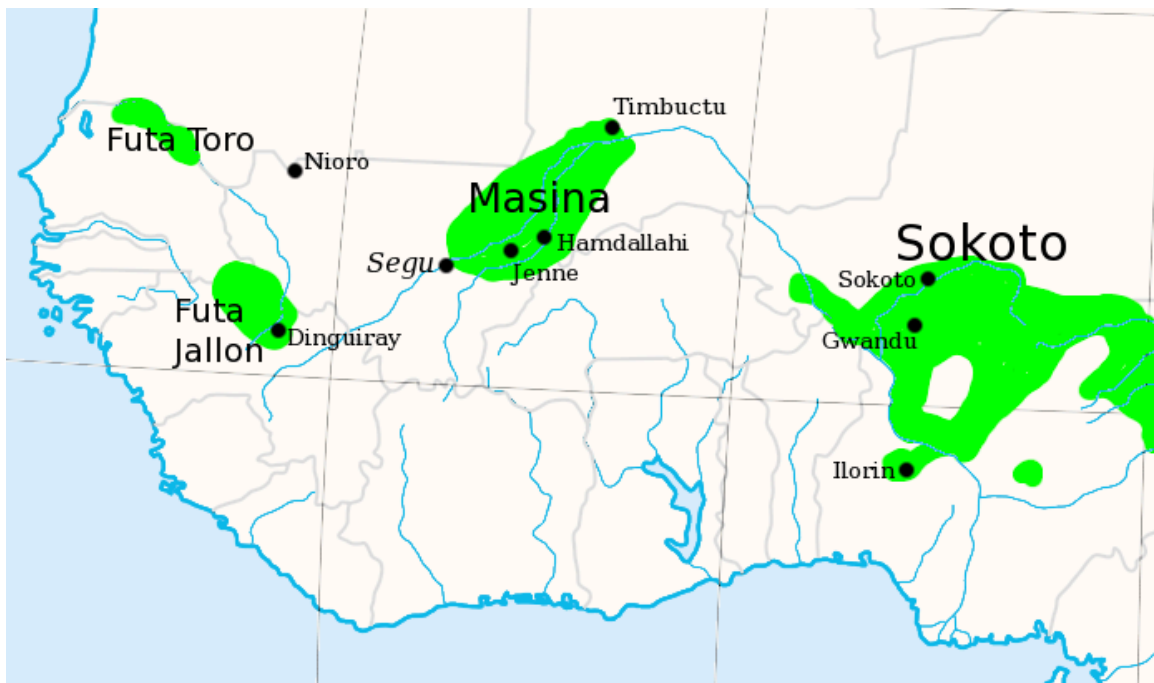
Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tombe\\_Biton\\_Coulibaly.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tombe_Biton_Coulibaly.jpg)>

*Tomb of Mammari Kulibali (ruled 1712-1755),  
Founder of the Segu Kingdom – Near Segu, Mali*

Meanwhile, a dissident group of Bambara people who opposed Kulibali's leadership had emigrated from Segu. In 1753, they formed a second Bambara kingdom, Kaarta, located 200 miles to the northwest of Segu in the area that formerly housed Kumbi, the capital of ancient Ghana. The two Bambara kingdoms fought numerous wars thereafter, and Segu usually won. The center of Kaarta thus moved further to the northwest into harsher and less fertile country. Both Segu and Kaarta relied on slave-soldiers, and

their military dominance permitted the two non-Muslim Bambara kingdoms to survive until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

The first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in West Africa was marked by three Muslim jihads (holy wars), all led by Fulbe (Fulani) clerics who based their desires to conquer on the goals of religious reform and moral austerity. The first jihad, and the largest in population controlled, was Uthman dan Fodio's conquest of Hausaland to the east of Mali (in contemporary Nigeria) in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fula\\_jihad\\_states\\_map\\_general\\_c1830.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fula_jihad_states_map_general_c1830.png)>

*The Fulani Jihad States of West Africa, c. 1830*

One of Uthman's lieutenants, Sheikh Ahmadu Lobbo of Masina, led the second Fulbe jihad, starting in 1818. Masina was a region in the Niger Valley southwest of Timbuktu, populated almost entirely by Fulbe herders. Ahmadu overthrew the traditional Fulbe leaders of Masina, liberated the region from the Bambara of Segu, built a new capital city called Hamdallahi, and established a cleric-run puritanical Muslim state in 1821. He called his new state the Caliphate of Hamdallahi and controlled the Niger Valley between Djenné and Timbuktu for three decades.

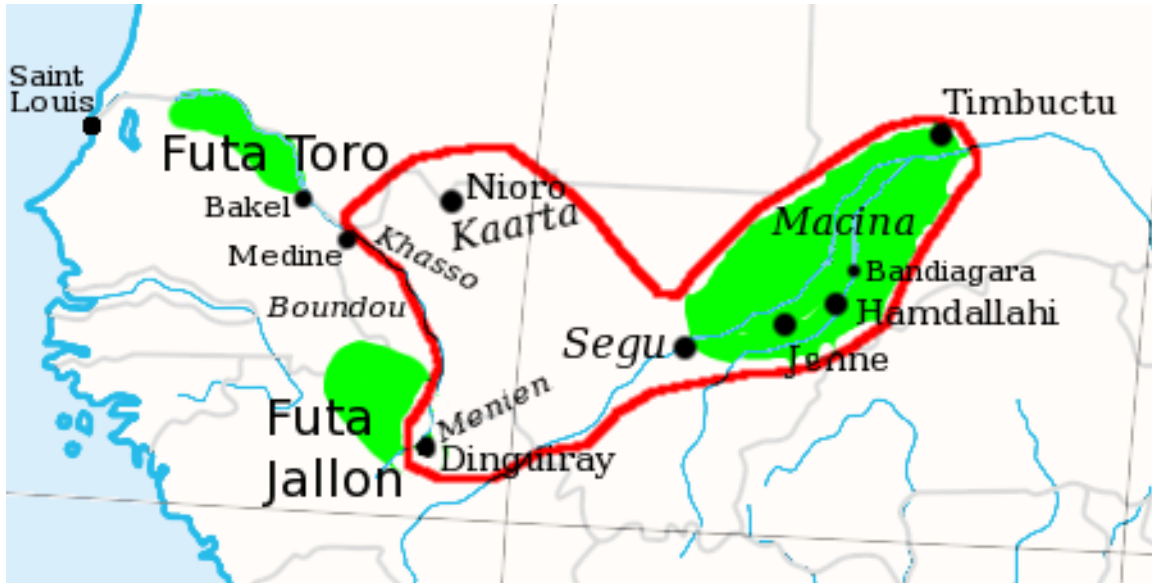
The third Fulbe jihad, and the one that controlled the largest territory, began in 1848 in the far western part of the Sudan. Sheikh Umar Tal was a charismatic Muslim cleric from Futa Toro (in contemporary Senegal). He bought European arms and then recruited numerous Futanke soldiers and migrants from his home region to march eastward and conquer and settle in the pagan kingdoms of Kaarta and Segu. After succeeding in that mission, Sheikh Umar and his followers conquered the Muslim Caliphate of Hamdallahi and took control of Timbuktu in 1863.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chapeau\\_berger\\_Peul-Institut\\_d%27ethnologie\\_de\\_Strasbourg-2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chapeau_berger_Peul-Institut_d%27ethnologie_de_Strasbourg-2.jpg)>

*Traditional Hat Worn by Fulbe (Fulani) People – Founders of  
19<sup>th</sup>-century Jihad States of Sokoto, Masina, and Tukolor*

When rebels killed Umar in 1864, his son, Ahmadu assumed command of the new Tukolor Kingdom, which stretched for nearly a thousand miles from the upper Senegal River Valley to the upper Niger River Valley. Unfortunately for Ahmadu, the vast new kingdom occupied the same territory that expansionist French colonialists in Senegal were eagerly eyeing.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Umars\\_jihad\\_state\\_map\\_general\\_c1864.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Umars_jihad_state_map_general_c1864.png)

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*Tukolor Kingdom (1848-1893) –  
At Its Greatest Territorial Extent (Red-lined Area), 1864*

**French Commerce in Africa (16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries).** French merchants began trading in tropical Africa in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, their principal imports from Africa were gold and ivory. After the opening of labor-intensive plantations in the Americas to produce sugar and cotton, France became involved in the African slave trade across the Atlantic. Slavery in Africa had long predated the Atlantic slave trade. Early African kingdoms practiced slavery widely, and there was a longstanding export of African

slaves to Arab areas. But the enormous demand for African slaves in the Americas greatly accelerated slave-raiding in Africa.

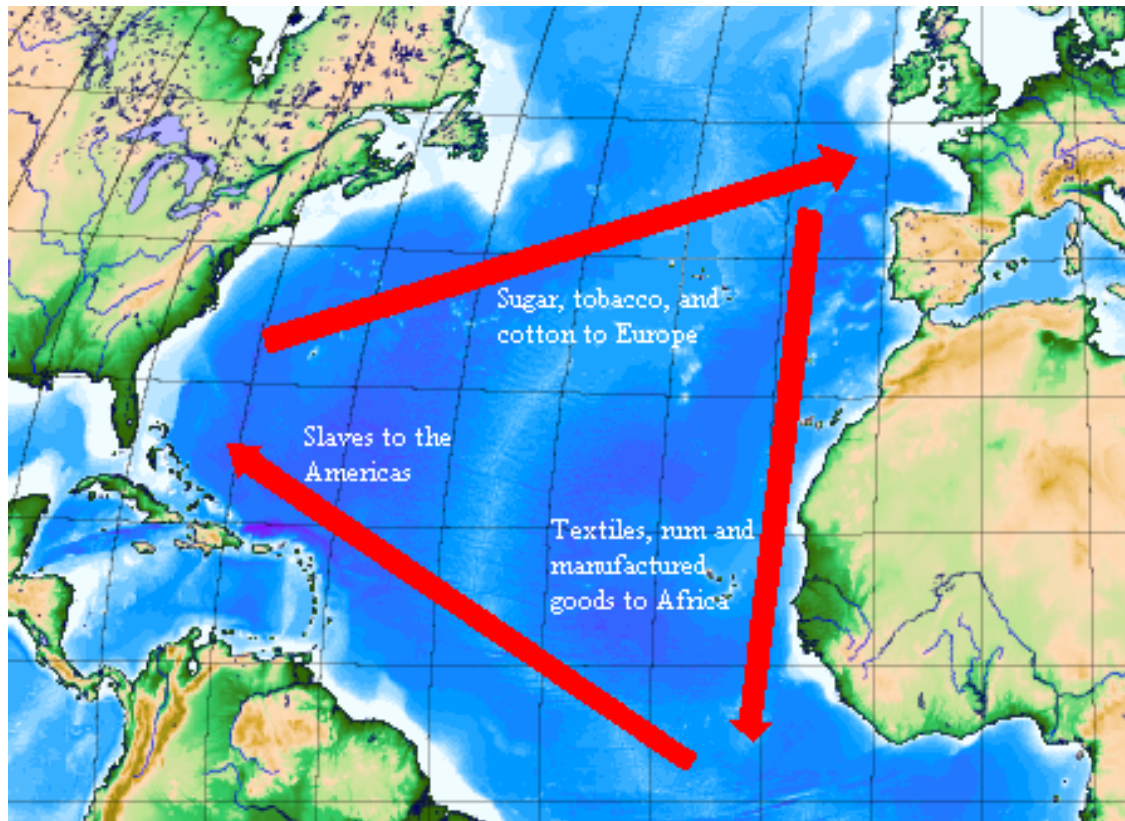


Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Slave\\_Trade\\_by\\_Auguste\\_Francois\\_Biard.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Slave_Trade_by_Auguste_Francois_Biard.jpg)>

*The Slave Trade (Slaves on the West Coast of Africa) –  
By François-Auguste Biard (1789-1882), c. 1833*

The Atlantic slave trade followed a triangular pattern – European cloth, rum, and other manufactures were sent to Africa and exchanged for African slaves, the slaves were shipped to the Americas and traded for sugar, rum, tobacco, cotton, and other American commodities, and the American goods were carried to Europe and swapped for European manufactures.





Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Triangle\\_trade2.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Triangle_trade2.png)>

### *Triangle Trade Route – Europe, Africa, America*

Britain, Portugal, and the Netherlands dominated the Atlantic slave trade, but France also was active in it. The slave trade devastated raided areas – especially the Middle Belt of West Africa and the Congo Basin – and slowed African adaptation of new techniques to produce legitimate exports. The best estimates are that about 9.5 million Africans were shipped to the Americas in the Atlantic slave trade between 1500 and 1870. Of that total,

300,000 Africans were enslaved in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, 1.3 million in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, 6 million in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and 1.9 million in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Among the recipient regions, the Caribbean islands took 3.8 million African slaves, Brazil, 3.7 million, the Guyanas (in northern South America), 1.6 million, and the United States, 0.4 million. In spite of the horrid devastation of the slave trade, the sub-Saharan African population grew to about 70 million by 1800 because of the introduction of American food crops – maize, cassava, beans, and peanuts.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cassava.jpg>>*

*Cassava Roots After Harvest in West Africa –  
Staple Food Crop Introduced from Brazil by the Portuguese*

**France and the Scramble for Africa (1870s-1880s).** By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, European nation states had become the world's leading economic and military powers. The industrial revolution (factory production) and the communications revolution (steamships, railroads, and telegraph systems) triggered a massive expansion of global trade, which was supported by advances in military technology (steamships, rifles, and machine guns).



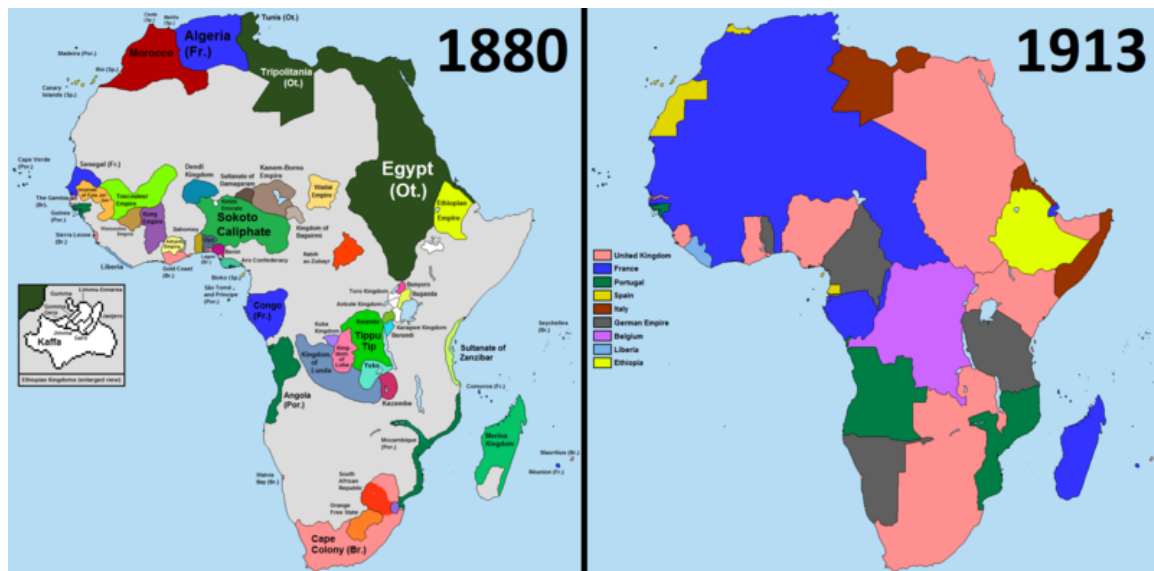
Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Europe\\_1878\\_map\\_en.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Europe_1878_map_en.png)>

*Europe in 1878 – Great Britain, France, and Germany Were Ascending Technically, Politically, and Economically*

A scramble for African colonies among European competitors occurred in the 1870s and 1880s. Britain wanted to control the Suez Canal in Egypt (and thus its trade route to India), establish a Cape-to-Cairo corridor, and gain prime areas in West Africa. France hoped to offset its humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) by establishing an integrated colonial empire in North, West, and Equatorial Africa. Germany wished to divert France's attention away from its losses of Alsace and Lorraine toward colonial gains in Africa and to claim four of its own African colonies in areas dominated by Britain – East Africa, Southwest Africa, Cameroon, and Togo.

French commerce in tropical Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century centered on St. Louis port in Senegal and up-river forts on the Senegal River, Ouidah port in the kingdom of Dahomey, and Libreville and Loango ports in Gabon and penetration inland in the Congo Basin. During the early 1880s, France led the scramble for Africa with aggressive actions in Tunisia, the Niger Basin, and Gabon, Britain took Egypt and expanded in southern Africa, and

Germany claimed its four colonies in West, East, and South Africa. In the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), three longtime powers in Africa – Britain, France, and Portugal – joined two recent entrants – Germany and Belgium – to partition Africa and avoid war.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scramble-for-Africa-1880-1913.png>

*European Colonialism in Africa, 1880 and 1913 – Britain (Pink), France (Blue), Germany (Brown), Portugal (Green), Belgium (Lavender), and Italy (Red)*

The paper annexations were not based on effective occupation. Hence, in the 1890s, the European powers scrambled to define boundaries, especially in the western Sudan, Lake Chad, and the southern Nile. In 1880, only about one-tenth of the

African continent was ruled by European powers, but by 1900, nearly all of Africa was colonized. To control imperial costs, all powers limited their spending on development projects in their new colonies.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Harvest\\_of\\_peanuts.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Harvest_of_peanuts.jpg)>

*Why Fight Over Peanuts? – Key French Cash Crop in Senegal*

**French Conquest of West Africa (19<sup>th</sup> century).** France had only a toehold in West Africa in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century – a small colony at St. Louis on the Senegal River and a tiny port at Grand

Bassam in the Ivory Coast. France gave voters in St. Louis and Gorée (an island near Dakar, Senegal) the right to elect municipal councils and send representatives to the National Assembly in Paris in 1848, but the colonizing power denied those electoral privileges in its later West African areas of conquest.

Between 1854 and 1864, the French Governor Louis Faidherbe introduced peanuts as a cash crop in Senegal, expanded his very effective African army, the Senegalese Rifles (*tirailleurs sénégalais*), used armed steamboats to move up the Senegal River, and fought a standoff with Sheikh Umar, the leader of the Tukolor Kingdom. Sheikh Umar was in the process of conquering the Bambara states of Segou and Kaarta and the Fulbe Muslim Caliphate of Hamdallahi and expanding to rule the region from the upper Senegal River to the bend of the Niger River at Timbuktu.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Faidherbearmee.JPG>>

*Louis Faidherbe (1818-1889) –  
French Governor of Senegal (1854-1865)*

In the 1870s, France began an aggressive strategy of expansion in its Senegalese colony. The French built a new port and administrative center at Dakar and then constructed the first railroad in West Africa to link Dakar with St. Louis to the north, which they completed in 1885. Their plan was to draw commerce from the interior down the Senegal River and to Dakar via the new railroad. They planted peanuts extensively and began large-scale export of that oilseed to Europe. The railroad was a financial



failure and required subsidies, but the peanut exports were very successful.

During the scramble for Africa, France's strategy was to expand from its base in Senegal eastward through the Niger Basin. French leaders proposed to accomplish that goal through military conquest and building an extension of the French railroad from St. Louis to the upper Niger River Valley. France had to defeat two strong African leaders – Ahmadu, the son of Sheikh Umar, and Samori Toure, the Mande leader – before it could control the West African Sudan. Following a long series of battles, in 1893 France and the Senegalese Rifles defeated Ahmadu and took Timbuktu. A year later, the French imperial forces captured Samori Toure's state in the western Sudan after a brutal scorched-earth campaign. But Samori escaped and moved his people and army to the east.

France then created an integrated colony, French West Africa, in 1895 with its headquarters in Dakar, Senegal. In 1897, two young French officers, Paul Voulet and Charles Chanoine, employed a campaign of bloody destruction to defeat the 800-year-

old Mossi kingdom in Upper Volta. France fought another war with Samori Toure in 1898, captured his eastern state, took over areas stretching from modern Guinea to Ghana, and exiled Samori to Gabon where he died two years later. In 1893, France set up coastal colonies in Guinea and Ivory Coast to link with their interior conquests. A year later, the French deposed Behanzin, the king of Dahomey. They established a colony in Dahomey (contemporary Benin) in 1900 after deposing three more kings.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali\\_Dogon\\_Dance.jpg](https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali_Dogon_Dance.jpg)>

*France Linked the Coast with the Interior –  
Dogon Dancers, Bandiagara, Mali*

In 1900-1901, three French military expeditions – from Algeria, Congo, and Senegal – converged in a race to Lake Chad. Voulet and Chanoine (from Senegal) continued their barbarity, rebelled, and were killed. François Lamy (from Algeria) and Emile Gentil (from Congo) together defeated Rabih Zubair, the ruler of Bornu, set up Fort Lamy, and took Chad for France.

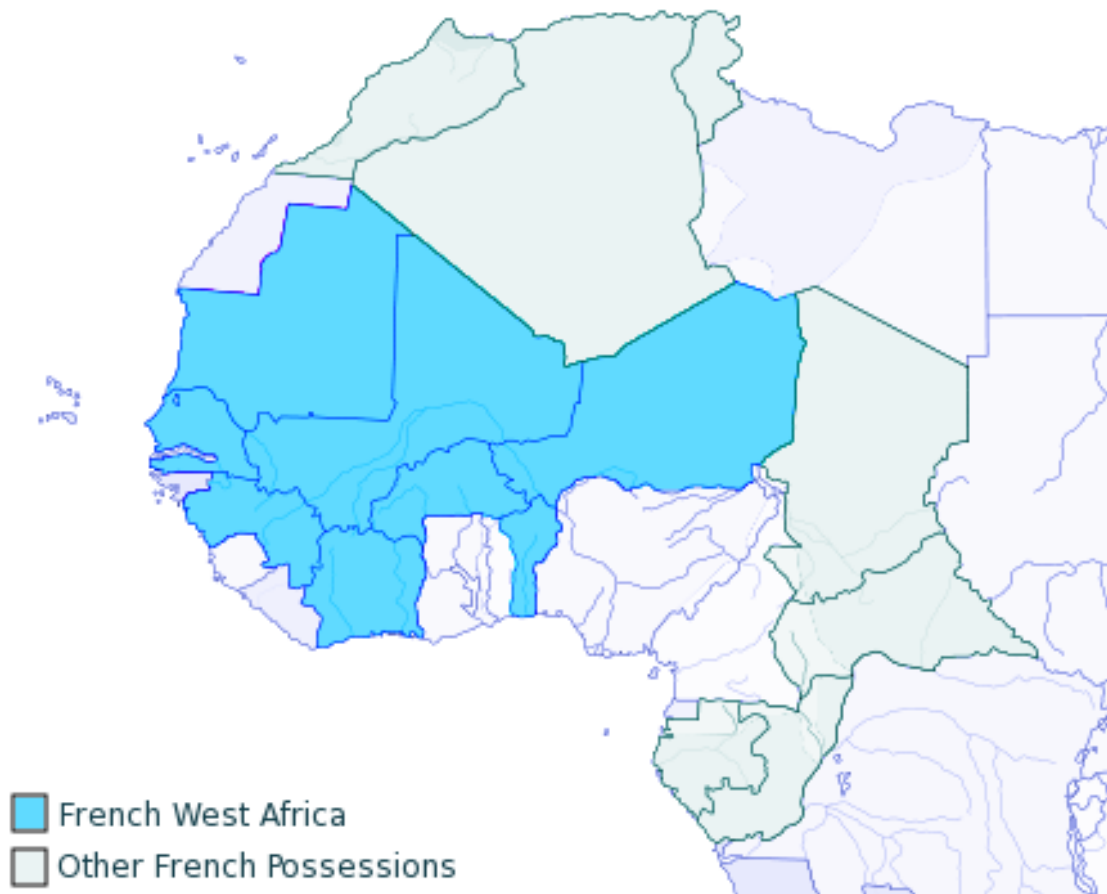


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mission\\_Foureau-Lamy.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mission_Foureau-Lamy.jpg)>

*François Lamy Crossed the Sahara Desert, Travelling From Algiers To Lake Chad, To Defeat Rabih Zubair, 1898-1900*

That military conquest of the Lake Chad region proved to have little economic foundation. The French conquest of West

Africa was excessively brutal because badly-supervised, young French officers took excesses to out-do their rival officers and gain glory and promotion. But by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, France had succeeded in its goal of planting the French flag across the West African Sudan.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:French\\_West\\_Africa\\_1913\\_map.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:French_West_Africa_1913_map.png)>

*French West Africa (Dark Blue Area), 1913*

## **French Conquest of Equatorial Africa (19<sup>th</sup> century).**

French expansion in Equatorial Africa (the region between Lake Chad and the Congo River) was gradual before the scramble for Africa began in the 1870s. Earlier, in the 1840s, France had established a trading post in Libreville, the port in Gabon set up to accept freed slaves, and bought ivory and timber. But French attempts to create plantations using freed slave labor failed.

In 1875, France sent Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, a naval officer, to explore the Middle Congo. De Brazza spent two years working his way up the Ogowe River in search of a trade route to the Congo Basin. He reached the Congo River in 1877, shortly after Henry Morton Stanley had sailed down it from the east. (Stanley had gained international fame in 1871 when, as the leader of the *New York Herald's* expedition, he found the missionary-explorer David Livingstone at Ujiji, on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika in East Africa.) De Brazza bested Stanley in the race to sign treaties with local Congolese chiefs, and by 1880 he had claimed for France the land on the north side of the Congo River.

He served as governor of the French Congo between 1882 and 1897, although his administration was restricted to the ports, rivers, and porterage routes.

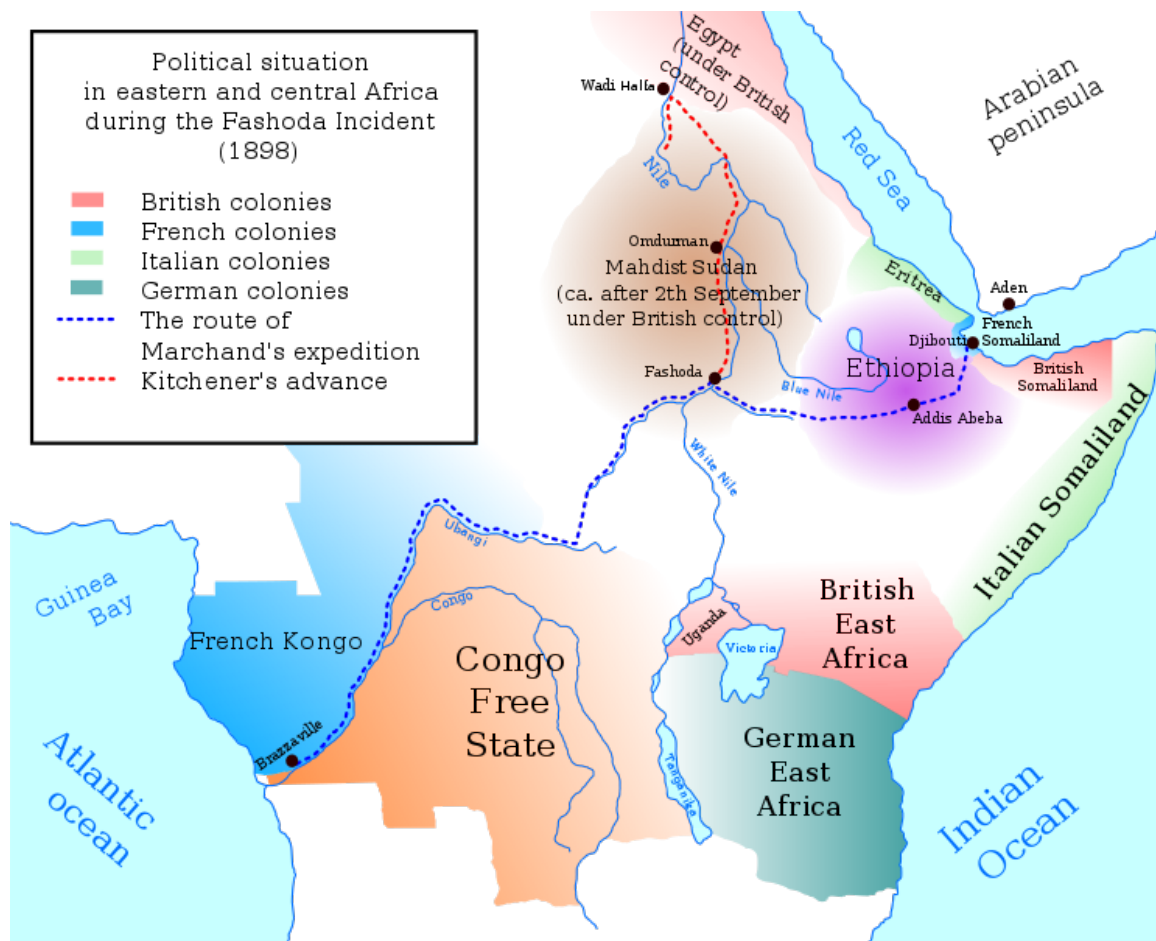


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre\\_Savorgnan\\_de\\_Brazza\\_by\\_Paul\\_Nadar.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre_Savorgnan_de_Brazza_by_Paul_Nadar.jpg)

*Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza (1852-1905) –  
French Explorer and Governor of the French Congo (1882-1897)*

In 1896, Jean-Baptiste Marchand began an incredible two-year journey across Africa – 3000 miles from Loango (on the Atlantic Ocean in Gabon) to Djibouti (on the Indian Ocean in French Somaliland). Marchand’s mission was to claim the upper

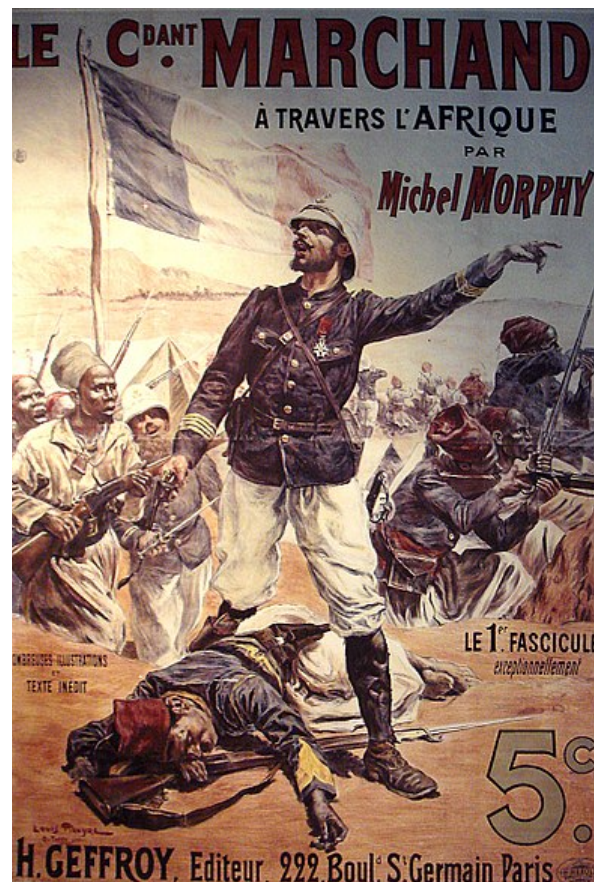
Nile (in today's southern Sudan) before Britain did. He reached Fashoda in 1898, raised the French flag, and nearly caused war between France and Britain. Herbert Kitchener arrived from Khartoum with a large British force, demanded that Marchand leave, and then departed himself.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fashoda\\_Incident\\_map\\_-\\_en.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fashoda_Incident_map_-_en.svg)

*Jean-Baptiste Marchand's Incredible Journey Across Africa (1896-1898) – From Loango to Fashoda to Djibouti*

France gave in, and relations with Britain warmed. In the Entente Cordiale of 1904, France agreed to relinquish its historical rights in Egypt and Britain gave France a free hand in Morocco. France put French Congo and Chad together in 1910 to form French Equatorial Africa and added ex-German Cameroon in 1919.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:LeCommandantMarchand.jpg>

*Jean-Baptiste Marchand, Portrayed On the Cover of a French Publication in 1898 – Musee de l'Armee, Paris*



**French Conquest of Réunion and Madagascar (18th-19th centuries).** Although France's primary imperial focus in sub-Saharan Africa was on West and Equatorial Africa, the French obtained important complementary possessions in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean island of Réunion was uninhabited when the Portuguese discovered it in 1512. Réunion was settled between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by French, Malagasy, African, Indian, and Chinese migrants. In 1715, the French East India Company established a way station on the island to service its trade route to Pondicherry, India. The Company went bankrupt in 1764, and the French crown assumed control of Réunion and encouraged French settlers to plant coffee. Great Britain took control of the island during the Napoleonic Wars (1810-1815) and introduced sugarcane. In 1815, Britain returned Réunion to France. French planters introduced vanilla in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

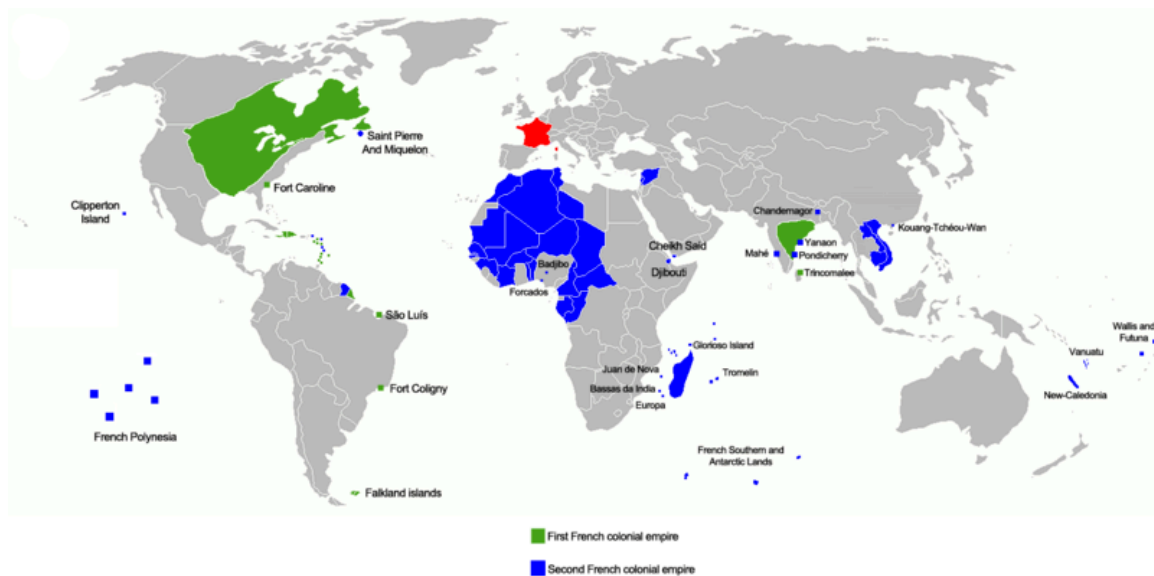


Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vanilla\\_planifolia\\_\(6998639597\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vanilla_planifolia_(6998639597).jpg)>

*Vanilla (Vanilla planifolia), Indigenous to Mexico –  
Major Export of Réunion and Madagascar*

Madagascar was settled first in the 5<sup>th</sup> century by Malagasy – Indonesians who had migrated to east Africa and intermarried with Khoikhoi people. In the 1790s, a Malagasy (Merina) king conquered Madagascar. Three Merina kings and four Merina queens (all unmarried) then ruled during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1817, Great Britain agreed to protect the Merina kingdom if Merina rulers ended slavery. At the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885,

Britain gave France a free hand in colonizing Madagascar in return for French support of British colonization of Zanzibar. In 1896, France abolished the Merina kingdom and colonized Madagascar. The rising imperial power had established its outposts in the Indian Ocean to complement its primary colonies in continental Africa and French Indochina.



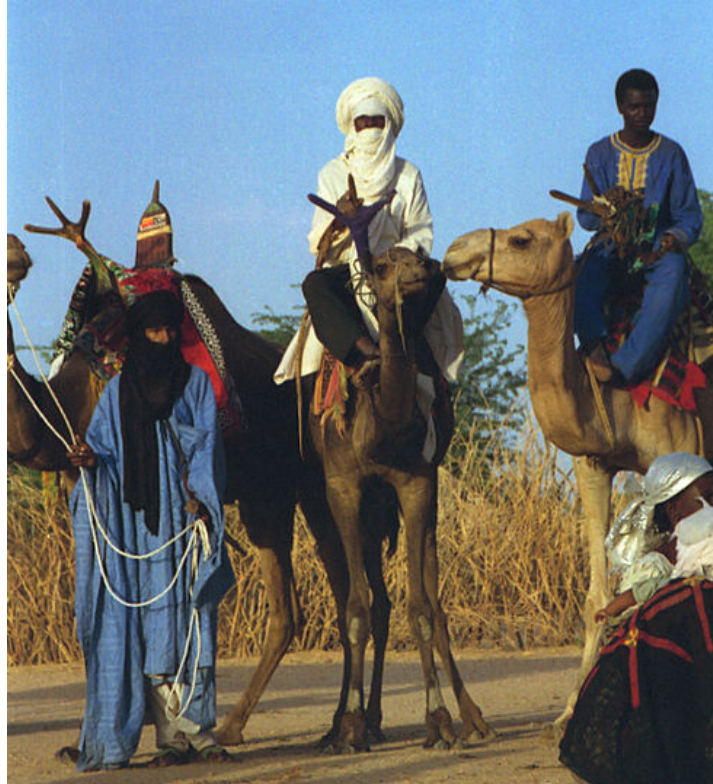
Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:131Etendue\\_de\\_l%27Empire\\_Fran%C3%A7ais.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:131Etendue_de_l%27Empire_Fran%C3%A7ais.png)

*France's Colonial Empire –  
18<sup>th</sup> century (Green), 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Blue)*

**French Conquest of the Sahara (1870s-1900s).** France had conquered and settled Algeria between 1830 and 1872, colonized

Tunisia in 1881, and would later claim most of Morocco in 1912. But why did France want to conquer the Sahara Desert in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century? Few foresaw any economic gain. However, after the humiliating defeat of France by Germany in 1871, French nationalists hoped to restore self-respect through African conquest. They thus wished to fill the power vacuum in north-central Africa and link France's expanding colonies in North, West, and Equatorial Africa.

France faced daunting challenges in attempting to conquer the Sahara, a vast desert stretching 3,500 miles (east-west) and 1,350 miles (north-south). In the middle of the western Sahara was a rugged, mountain wilderness – the Ahaggar Massif – with peaks as high as 9,500 feet. The Ahaggar was the headquarters and inviolate sanctuary of the Tuareg people – fierce, mobile, camel-based Berber warriors and raiders (for slaves and camels). The Tuaregs had ruled the western Sahara for centuries.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1997\\_277-31A\\_Tuareg.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1997_277-31A_Tuareg.jpg)>

*Tuareg Camel Caravan Drivers, Timbuktu, Mali – Tuareg Warriors Formerly Controlled Much of the Western Sahara*

During the race for Lake Chad (1899-1901), France sent Major François Lamy and his *Mission saharienne* from Algiers to Lake Chad via Agadez. Under scientific cover, that heavily armed expedition was the first north-south crossing of the Sahara. It won the race and carried out colonial conquest along the way. But France needed to revolutionize its Saharan army to conquer the

Tuaregs. Henri Laperrine and Théodore Pein hired Chaamba (Arab) desert fighters as mercenaries to match the Tuareg camel-based mobility. They first gained control of the rich Tuat oases to cut off the main sources of Tuareg trade and supplies. In the Battle of Tit (1902), the French *Armée d'Afrique* broke Ahaggar Tuareg resistance. Laperrine and Moussa, the Tuareg leader, signed a treaty of peace at Tamanrasset in 1905. Against heavy odds, France had conquered the Sahara Desert.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caravan\\_in\\_the\\_desert.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caravan_in_the_desert.jpg)>

*In 1905, France Conquered The Tuaregs and Ruled the Sahara –  
Contemporary Camel Caravan in the Sahara Desert*

**French Colonialism and African Independence (1900-1960).** It was difficult for France to break even in its colonial ventures because most of French Africa had limited wealth. France thus formed two federations – French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Française, AOF) and French Equatorial Africa (Afrique Equatoriale Française, AEF) – so that revenues from richer colonies could subsidize poorer ones. In both federations, the French had a strong military presence to maintain order and collect taxes. France amalgamated its eight West African colonies into the federation of French West Africa (AOF) in 1904 and put the federation capital in Dakar.

A governor-general headed the government and reported directly to the Minister of Colonies in Paris. Tax revenues were shared between the federation, which received customs duties and thus the bulk of revenues, and the individual colonies, which kept head taxes and local fees. In the early days of the AOF, the two richest colonies in French West Africa, Senegal and Dahomey,

contributed about three-fourths of the revenue for the federal budget.

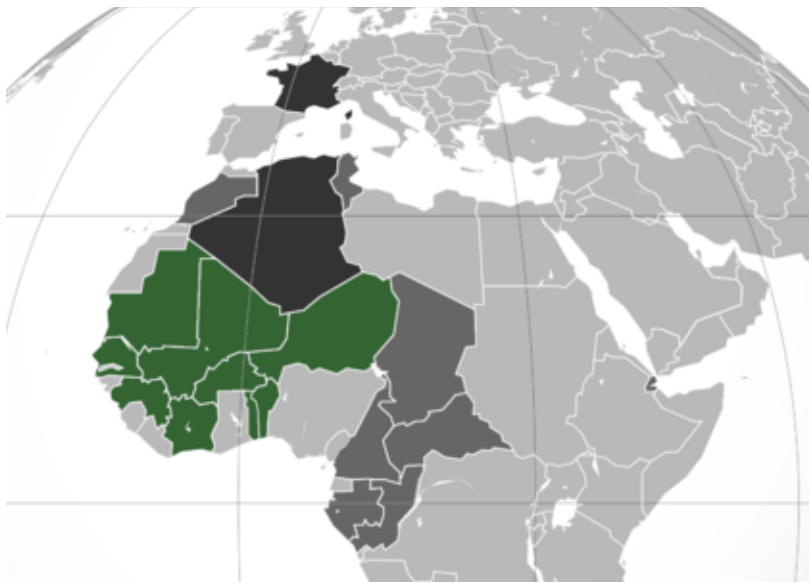


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Africa\\_in\\_1914.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Africa_in_1914.png)

*French Colonies in Africa (Blue Areas), 1914*



France's seven newer West African colonies – French Sudan (contemporary Mali), Mauritania, Upper Volta (contemporary Burkina Faso), Niger, French Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Dahomey (contemporary Benin) – were all offshoots of the mother colony, Senegal. France developed a consistent policy to rule all of them. French policy in French West Africa promoted the expansion of cash crops on small farms to provide incomes for head taxes.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:French\\_west\\_africa.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:French_west_africa.png)>

*France's Colonies in Africa, 1920 – West Africa (Green),  
Equatorial Africa (Gray), North Africa (Blue)*

Small-scale farmers in West Africa could make more productive use of the land than large plantation operators. The

French thus did not attempt to settle French planters in West Africa. The principal AOF cash crops – peanuts (Senegal), palm oil (Dahomey), and coffee and cocoa (Ivory Coast) – were all produced almost entirely by small-scale farmers. The French had introduced peanuts (groundnuts, an oilseed plant indigenous to South America) into Senegal in the 1840s. By the 1920s, after railroads provided access, all of the French colonies in the Sudan region were producing and exporting peanuts.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peanut\\_Collection\\_\(8074787813\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peanut_Collection_(8074787813).jpg)>

*France Introduced Peanuts into Senegal in the 1840s as a Smallholder Export Crop – Harvesting Peanuts By Hand*

Not all French investments worked out as planned. In the 1930s, France constructed dams and canals on the Niger River in southern French Sudan (contemporary Mali) to grow irrigated cotton that would be exported to France. That project, known as the Office du Niger, failed. But after the Second World War, the white-elephant project became viable when farmers found it profitable to grow rice and sugar cane for the domestic market.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali\\_ricefarmers.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali_ricefarmers.jpg)>

### *Rice Farming in the Office du Niger Region in Mali*

The French government built several railroads to connect export-producing regions with ports, but they never joined them to

create an integrated rail network. They completed a railway to link the upper Niger River Valley with the Senegal River Valley and the port of Dakar in 1906 and subsequently extended rail lines into the interior from the ports of Conakry in French Guinea, Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, Lomé in Togo, and Cotonou in Dahomey. French trading firms used the new feeder railroads to transport the crops for export. The two most prominent export-import firms in French West Africa were the Société Commerciale de l'Ouest Africain (SCOA) and the Compagnie Française d'Afrique Occidentale (CFAO).

The French economic policy in West Africa contrasted significantly with that in French Equatorial Africa (AEF). The AEF federation had its headquarters in Brazzaville (in contemporary Congo-Brazzaville). In Equatorial Africa, French officials granted private concessions for the exploitation of land and timber with forced labor. The main AEF cash crops were rubber and timber (Gabon), palm oil (French Congo), cotton

(Ubangi-Shari, contemporary Central African Republic), and cocoa (Cameroon).

France constructed the Congo-Océan Railroad to access the Congo Basin, duplicating transportation services already provided by a railroad in the Belgian Congo. Exporting was carried out primarily by the concessionaires rather than by intermediary French companies.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Railways\\_in\\_Congo.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Railways_in_Congo.svg)

*Congo-Ocean Railway Line In Former French Congo, 318 Miles Connecting Brazzaville With Pointe Noire – Completed in 1934*

In French West Africa, most people were poor, small-scale farmers, living in family units that tried to be as self-sufficient as possible in producing food and household goods. The small farms typically produced enough food to feed the families and often the cash crops that the French taxed for revenue. The food staples differed according to agro-climatic zone. In the savanna grasslands of the Sudan region, millet and sorghum were the principal food grains. Rice was an important food crop in the western rainforests in Senegal, Guinea, and the Ivory Coast and in the interior Niger delta of French Sudan. Yams were a key tuber crop in the better-watered regions of the savanna, usually abutting the forest areas. Two other food crops that were indigenous to the Americas – maize and cassava – gained popularity during the colonial period. The West Africans supplemented their food energy sources with vegetables, fruits, oilseeds, and animal protein – fish, fowl, and red meats – from domesticated or hunted sources.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MaliPicSA.jpg>>

*Millet Farmers, Tingoni, Mali –  
Important African Food Crop, Indigenous to West African Sudan*

French and British colonial policy in West Africa differed in significant ways. The French ruled their colonies directly with many French colonial officials, large armies, regular military expeditions, and severe restrictions on political activity. In contrast, the British indirectly ruled their West African colonies – Nigeria, the Gold Coast (contemporary Ghana), Sierra Leone, and the Gambia. Wherever possible, the British permitted local potentates to rule so long as they abided by British colonial laws

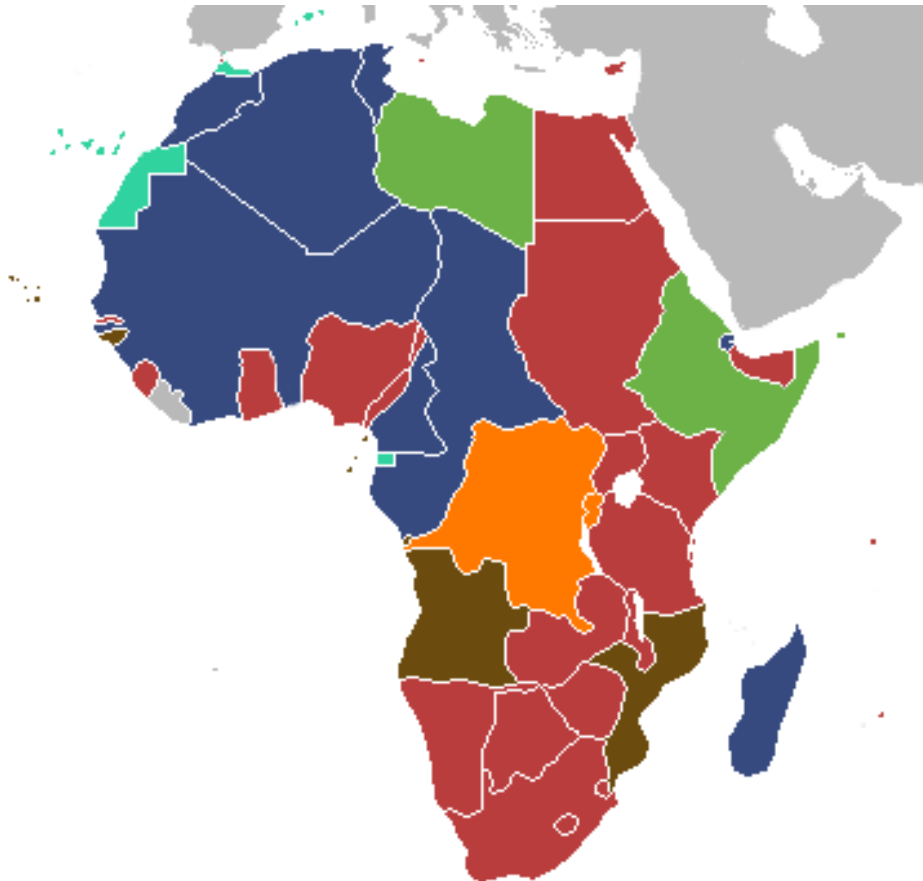
and collected taxes. British colonial rule also featured small regular armies, few military expeditions, and less clamping down on local politics.

France often touted the fact that locally-born citizens of four towns in Senegal – Dakar, Saint Louis, Gorée, and Rufisque – had been French citizens since 1871 and were represented in the French Chamber of Deputies in Paris. But as late as 1936 those four communes had only 80,000 citizens out of a total population of 14 million French West Africans. France also stressed secondary education less than Britain did in its colonies. Nearly all secondary education in French West Africa took place in three schools in Dakar and was intended to train civil servants for local employment. French cultural policy gradually shifted from promoting the assimilation of Africans into becoming Frenchmen to stressing the association of two separate cultures. But the French left no doubt about which culture they felt was superior.

The Second World War (1939-1945) was the beginning of the end for French and British colonialism in Africa. France



emerged from the war with aspirations to continue its colonial rule in Indochina and Africa, but international geo-politics had changed.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_Africa\\_in\\_1939.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Africa_in_1939.png)>

*African Colonies At the Beginning of World War II (1939) – French (Dark Blue), British (Red), Belgian (Orange), Italian (Green), Portuguese (Brown), Spanish (Light Blue)*

An economic boom (1945-1965), created by high world prices for African commodity exports, paved the way for

independence in West Africa. Because of Britain's moves toward granting independence for its colonies, France was under pressure to follow suit. France eventually was forced to permit local political parties. The most powerful of those at the federation level was the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), although its popularity and following were uneven in the eight francophone colonies in West Africa.



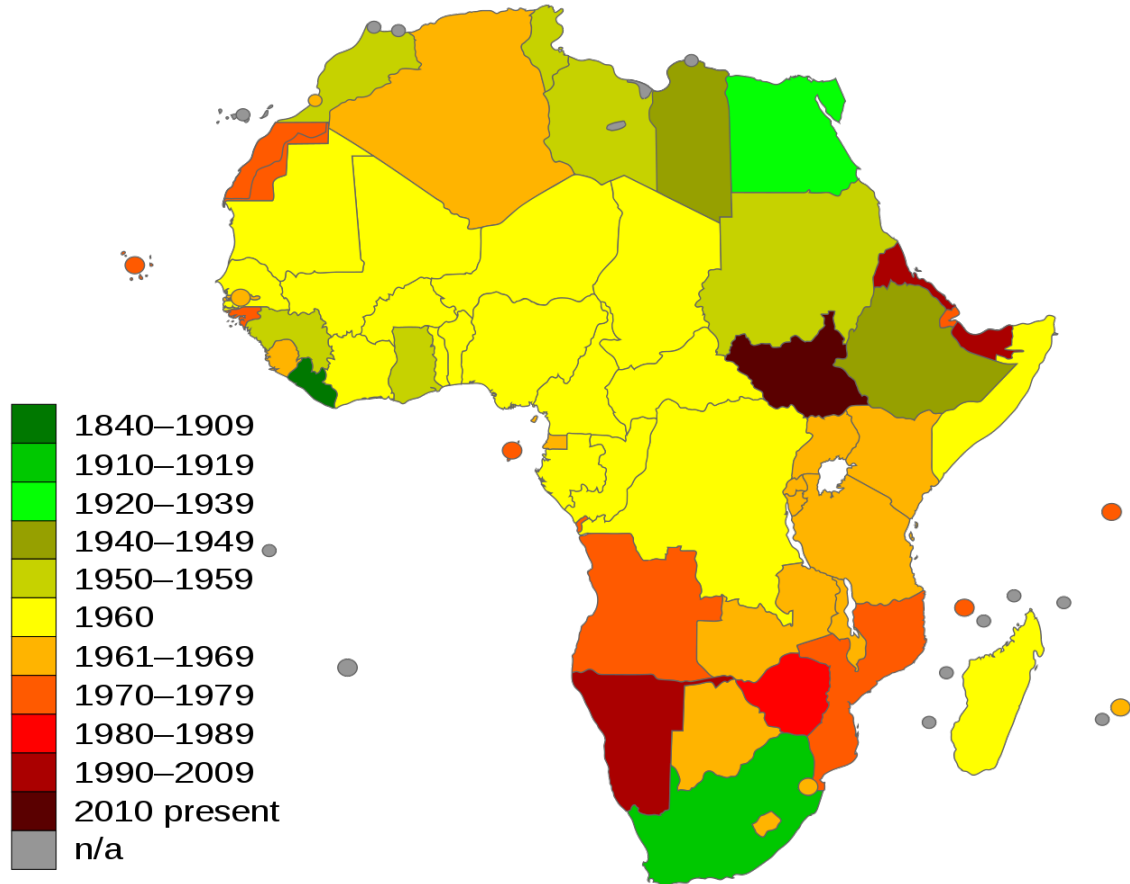
Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kora-Player2.jpg?>

*French Colonialism Was Out of Tune with African Needs –  
Jali Fily Sissokho, Mandinka Musician From Senegal,  
Playing A 21-stringed Kora*

In 1956, France enacted the *Loi Cadre*, creating twelve separate state legislatures in its West and Equatorial African colonies, although France retained control over defense, foreign policy, and economic affairs. In a colony-wide referendum in 1958, eleven former French African colonies voted to join the French Community (guaranteeing continued aid from France) whereas one (Guinea-Conakry) opted for full independence. Significant opposition to continuing close affiliation with France also arose in Niger and Cameroon before they voted affirmatively. But the French Community was very short-lived. In 1960-1961, all of the former French colonies chose complete independence with France's reluctant concurrence and the promise of continuing French foreign aid. The transition to independence was bloodless and mostly democratic.

**Politics in Independent Mali.** Since gaining independence in 1960, Mali has run the gamut of governmental options – an eight-year experiment with disastrous socialism, a 23-year-long

interlude of inept military dictatorship, and, after 1991, an era of fragile democracy, reform, and instability.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Africa\\_independence\\_dates.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Africa_independence_dates.svg)

### *Independence in Africa, 1960 – Former French Colonies in Yellow*

In a prelude to full independence, the former colony of French Sudan became the Sudanese Republic in 1958 and a year later united with Senegal to form the Mali Federation. But after a few months, Senegal seceded from the federation, the Sudanese

Republic was renamed Mali, and the country achieved full independence in 1960.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali\\_map.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali_map.png)>

*Mali at Independence (1960) – Cities and Rivers*

Modibo Keita, the first president, had a vision that Mali – and Africa – could best escape poverty through heavy-handed

socialism and African unity. He instituted one-party rule, based on his party, the Union Soudanaise du Rassemblement Democratique Africain, declared a socialist state and nationalized most assets, and withdrew Mali from the French franc monetary zone.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Modibo\\_Keita\\_1961-09-13.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Modibo_Keita_1961-09-13.jpg)>

*Modibo Keita (1915-1977) –  
Socialist President of Mali, 1960-1968*

After the federation with Senegal failed, Keita experimented with an alliance with West Africa's two other radical new states, Sékou Touré's Guinea-Conakry and Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana, broke with France, and sought aid from the Soviet Union. Keita's

Mali joined the anti-imperialist Casablanca group (Mali, Guinea, Ghana, Egypt, and Morocco) in opposition to the pro-Western Monrovia group (Nigeria, Liberia, and the other francophone African countries). Mali's economy deteriorated rapidly under Keita's socialist leadership, and he was forced to re-join the Franc zone in 1967 to instill monetary discipline and reduce inflation.

In November 1968, a group of young military officers staged a bloodless coup d'état, deposed Keita, and installed a new government. At first, the military government was run by a 14-member committee, the Military Committee for National Liberation. But gradually the president, Lieutenant Moussa Traoré, consolidated his command, and he then ran Mali as a strong-armed military dictator for the following 23 years. During the first decade of the military dictatorship, Mali was struck with a disastrous Sahelian drought and famine and Traoré had to deal with debilitating political opposition. He staged an election in 1979, and in the following year Traoré brutally suppressed student-led protests and survived three coup attempts.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moussa\\_Traor%C3%A9\\_\(1989\)\\_crop.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moussa_Traor%C3%A9_(1989)_crop.jpg).

*General Moussa Traoré, Military Dictator of Mali, 1968-1991 –  
Pictured in 1989*

Malian politics were calmer in the 1980s than in the 1970s because the regime became more effective in suppressing dissent. Mali fought a brief and inconclusive border skirmish with neighboring Burkina Faso in 1985. Traoré and his military colleagues lived a lavish lifestyle that was increasingly resented in the impoverished countryside. In the late 1980s, the Traoré government responded to growing demands for democracy by



freeing the press and permitting independent political associations. But the situation thereafter spun out of Traoré's control.

In the early 1990s, nine countries in francophone Africa, including Mali, experienced an amazing political phenomenon – the sovereign national conference. People throughout most of French-speaking Africa had reached the limit of their tolerance for corrupt and unrepresentative military governments, widespread poverty, huge disparities in wealth, and underpaid (and often unpaid) civil servants. The first national conference of political opponents, which occurred in Cotonou, Benin in early 1990, led to a new constitution and a democratically-elected government in Benin, and the results were widely publicized throughout francophone Africa.

Mali followed suit a year later. Traoré had rejected demands for a national conference. But in March 1991, the Malian military killed more than one hundred civilians, including women and children, while attempting to suppress a student-led, anti-government demonstration. That heartless repression triggered

intense rioting. Seventeen dissident officers, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré, arrested President Traoré and other high-ranking officials and took control of the government. The interim government included both military officers, led by Touré, and civilian representatives, notably Alpha Oumar Konaré, a prominent historian and opposition leader.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amadou\\_Toure.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amadou_Toure.jpg)>

*Amadou Toumani Touré, President of Mali (1991-1992 and 2002-2012) and Leader of the 1992 Coup D'état*

Mali held a national conference in July-August 1991. As in Benin and elsewhere in francophone Africa, in Mali the conference included representatives of all national interest groups – political

parties and associations, the military, labor unions, businesses, agriculture, government agencies, and universities and schools. With the full support of the military, the conference assumed national sovereignty, set up an interim government, planned a new constitution, discussed the appropriate role and funding of political parties, and scheduled national elections with a new electoral code. Mali's national conference was a successful demonstration of participatory democracy.



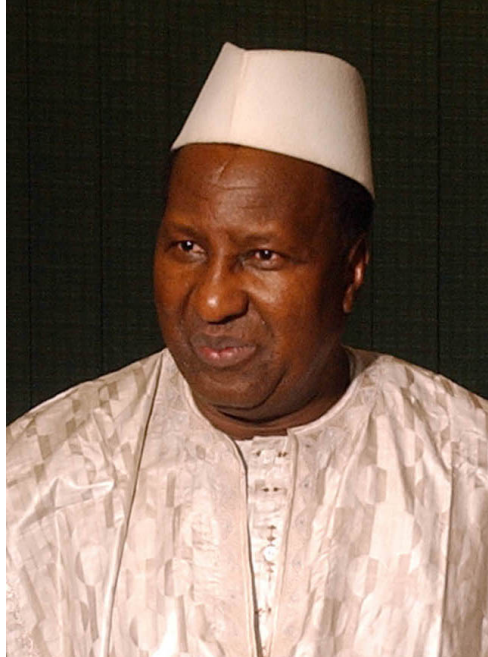
Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bamako\\_ass.nat.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bamako_ass.nat.jpg)>

*National Assembly, Bamako, Mali –  
Mali Overthrew Its Dictatorship in 1991*

The Traoré military government had already been overthrown, the conference was fully representative of political interests in the country, both the military and civilian leaders, Touré and Konaré, were enlightened and willing to compromise, and political parties were permitted to form without restriction. Meanwhile, former President Traoré and a score of his military colleagues were tried, convicted of corruption, and sentenced to death, but their sentences later were commuted to life imprisonment. Traoré was freed in 2002 and died in 2020.

Open elections took place in the first half of 1992. Konaré and his party, the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA), were overwhelming victors. ADEMA and Konaré earlier had established widespread support in both rural and urban areas. In March, ADEMA won 73 of the 115 seats in the National Assembly. In June, Konaré was elected President of Mali's Third Republic with 69 percent of the votes, finishing first in every region of the country. Konaré and his wife, Adame Ba Konaré, both had been prominent academic historians and intellectuals in

Mali as well as leaders in forming grassroots political opposition to the Traoré government.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Konare27022007.jpg>>

*Alpha Oumar Konaré, President of Mali (1992-2002) –  
Pictured in 2007*

Konaré became the eloquent spokesman for an alliance of pro-democracy groups, mostly led by urban professionals. As president, he used that ability to conciliate disputes among groups with dissimilar interests. But the military remained powerful, and numerous long-suppressed political factions desired a share of the political spoils. Konaré's most difficult problem was to reach

agreement with Tuareg rebels in the north and east who had resisted government authority in a dispute over land, cultural, and linguistic rights. The conflict began in 1990 and dragged on until 1996 when a peace agreement was celebrated in Timbuktu during a highly publicized and colorful ceremony, called the *Flamme de la Paix* (peace flame). President Konaré faced little opposition and was easily re-elected in 1997. His ADEMA party increased its majority in the legislature to more than 80 percent.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flammetombou.png>>

*Flamme de la Paix Monument, Timbuktu –  
Site of Ceremony Ending the Tuareg Rebellion, 1996*

In 2002, Konaré was constitutionally barred from seeking a third term as president. Without him at the helm, the popularity of the ADEMA party waned. Although ADEMA lost its leadership in the legislature, no other party won a majority. General Amadou Toumani Touré, the former head of state during Mali's transition to democracy (1991-1992), came out of retirement and was elected president convincingly with 64 percent of the vote. Domestic and international observers judged the elections to have been generally free and fair, although some administrative irregularities occurred. Touré, affectionately known as ATT, had gained widespread popularity because of his effective role in smoothing the transition to open elections and his loyal service as head of the army.

The new president appointed a coalition cabinet with representatives from all of the major political parties, and the Touré government took office in 2002. Its platform was a continuation of that of the predecessor government of former President Konaré – a commitment to democracy, deepening economic reform, generally free market policies, a hope for

regional integration, and international cooperation on peacekeeping and counter-terrorism activities.

Touré was re-elected in 2007 in an election judged free and fair by most observers. But Tuaregs in northern Mali resented the concentration of political power and economic progress in the southern regions of the country and demanded greater political decentralization. In January 2012, ethnic Tuareg militias rebelled.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le\\_Mali\\_confront%C3%A9\\_aux\\_sanctions\\_e\\_t\\_%C3%A0\\_lavanc%C3%A9e\\_des\\_rebelles\\_islamistes\\_\(6904946068\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le_Mali_confront%C3%A9_aux_sanctions_e_t_%C3%A0_lavanc%C3%A9e_des_rebelles_islamistes_(6904946068).jpg)

*Tuareg Rebel Militiamen In Northern Mali, 2012 – Supporters of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)*



Frustrated with the government's handling of the rebellion, parts of Mali's military establishment overthrew the Touré government in March. An interim civilian government took power in April. Ansar Dine, an affiliate of the Islamic terrorist group, al-Qaeda, then took leadership of the rebellion from the Tuaregs and assumed control of Mali's three northern regions.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Northern\\_Mali\\_conflict.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Northern_Mali_conflict.svg)

*Maximum Territory in Northern Mali Controlled by Islamist Rebels (Red-bordered Area), January 2013*

In January 2013, the new government sought international help, and a French-led military force defeated the rebels and took control of northern Mali. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was created in July 2013 to replace much of the French force.

Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, a former prime minister and assembly speaker, won the presidential election held in August 2013 with 78 percent of the vote and pledged to re-unify the country after the rebellion, coup, and insurgency. A peace agreement was signed in 2015 by the government and two rebel coalitions (known as the “Platform” and “Coordination” groups), promising political decentralization and a development zone for the northern regions. But jihadist groups continued intermittent attacks on the UN force and on the Malian army and regained control of most of northern and parts of eastern Mali.

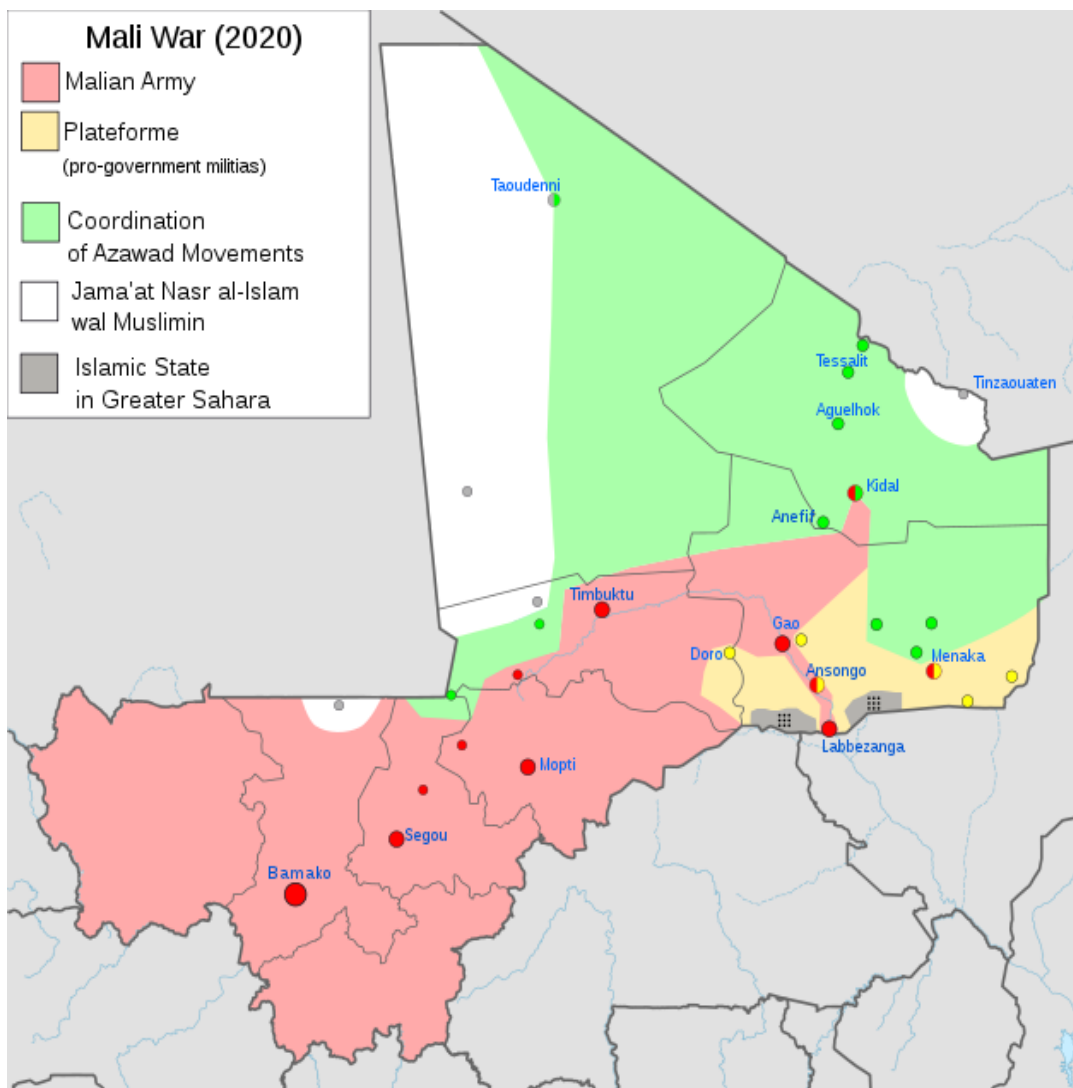


*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ibrahim\\_Boubacar\\_Ke%C3%Afta\\_with\\_Obamas\\_2014.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ibrahim_Boubacar_Ke%C3%A4fta_with_Obamas_2014.jpg)>*

*Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, President of Mali (2013-2020) and First Lady Keita Aminata Maiga With President Barack Obama (2009-2017) and First Lady Michelle Obama – Washington, 2014*

In August 2018, Keita was re-elected president, again defeating Soumaila Cissé, this time winning 67 percent of the votes in an election that international observers declared was fraught with irregularities. Keita's second term was plagued by continuing security problems, a fragile economy, and charges of corruption. In August 2020, Keita was forced to resign following a military coup, which was supported by many in Mali but

condemned abroad. The coup leaders installed an interim president, Bah Ndaw, a retired colonel and former defense minister, and promised to hold elections for a new government within 18 months.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MaliWar.svg>

*Territories in Mali Controlled by the Malian Army (Red), Islamist Rebels (Green), and Pro-government Militias (Yellow), 2020*

**Development in Independent Mali.** Mali is an enigma for practitioners of economic development. After three decades of democracy, reform, growth, and rebellion, Mali remains one of the world's poorest countries and its social indicators, while improving, are still very disappointing. Two-fifths of Mali's people subsist at levels beneath the poverty line, two-thirds of all adults are illiterate, life expectancy at birth is only 59 years, and infant mortality is 60 per 1,000 live births. Four-fifths of the labor force still works in agriculture and fishing, although those activities contribute less than half of national income. The landlocked country's population of 19.7 million people is increasing at the extremely high rate of 3 percent per year.

After stagnating during the Modibo Keita period (1960-1968), Mali's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (measured in constant 2010 dollars) grew at the very modest annual average rate of 1.8 percent under the Moussa Traoré regime (1968-1991). Per capita income (GDP measured at purchasing power parity in constant 2017 dollars) then grew at a rate of 1.9 percent per year

between 1992 and 2011, fell annually 2 percent for two years during and after the rebellion (2012-2013), and recovered to grow at 2.6 percent per year between 2013 and 2019. In 2019, the average annual income earned per person was only \$2,424 on a price-adjusted (purchasing power parity) basis, just 4 percent that of the average in the United States, 14 percent of the world average, and 165<sup>th</sup> of 189 countries listed by the World Bank.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pirogue\\_010\\_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pirogue_010_cropped.jpg)>

*Pirogue Carrying Passengers and Goods On the Niger River In Gao, Mali – River Transport Is Inexpensive For Poor Malians*

Why is Mali so poor, and what have the democratic governments done to improve development prospects? Poverty in Mali has a long history. In the era of the Mali and Songhai

Kingdoms (13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries), the royalty and nobility lived very well but most of the masses remained relatively poor. Africa then missed the opportunity to benefit from European technological advances in agriculture and industry in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries because European merchants focused excessively on the Atlantic slave trade, not on promoting the development of their new African trading partners. French colonialism brought political stability and limited infrastructure to tap cash crop exports, but very little education and grassroots development.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:16th\\_century\\_Portuguese\\_Spanish\\_trade\\_routes.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:16th_century_Portuguese_Spanish_trade_routes.png)>

*Global Trade Routes Linking Europe With Africa, Asia, and the Americas, 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries – Africans Received Few Benefits*

The government of Modibo Keita thus inherited a difficult situation in 1960. Keita's experiment with African socialism was an economic disaster that harmed the poor people, whom it was ostensibly meant to help, even more than the rich, mostly those affiliated corruptly with the government. State ownership and excessive government control led to a swollen, corrupt bureaucracy and military and served as a deterrent to investment by domestic and foreign farmers and businessmen.

The military government (1968-1991), led by Moussa Traoré, did little to ameliorate that situation during the 1970s. Tentatively, it removed some of the worst excesses of government control, but the Malian economy continued to struggle. Under the Traoré government, Mali had the misfortune of suffering two horrible droughts and famines in the Sahelian zone, one between 1967 and 1974 and another between 1979 and 1985.





Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Azawakh\\_52\\_jd.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Azawakh_52_jd.jpg)>

*Mali Suffered Severe Droughts and Famines In the Sahelian Zone  
– 1967-1974 and 1979-1985*

Partly in response to those internationally-publicized afflictions, Traoré's government belatedly began to introduce reforms in economic policy in the early 1980s. In 1982, the government, pressured by foreign aid donors, introduced an economic stabilization program to cut budgetary deficits by reigning in public spending and reducing operating losses in state enterprises. Later on, in 1988, the Traoré government agreed with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to carry out

an economic reform program to end price controls on consumer goods, eliminate import quotas, and facilitate private investment (applications were approved through a *guichet unique* (one window) process in only one ministry). But much more needed to be accomplished.

Economic policy and leadership improved dramatically under the democratically-elected Konaré, Touré, and Keita governments. Starting in 1991, Mali dropped export taxes to promote exports, revised its laws regulating commerce, investment, and mining, and introduced effective commercial courts to handle trade disputes.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Golden\\_Donkey.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Golden_Donkey.jpg)>

*After 1991, Exports of Hand-picked Cotton from Mali Accelerated  
– Children With Cotton Crop, Fama, Mali*

The Konaré government also reformed the bloated set of public enterprises, left over from the Keita and Traoré governments, by privatizing 36 state-owned companies and liquidating 20 others. The Touré government continued the reform policy by privatizing Mali's only railroad company in 2003 and the large cottonseed oil factory in 2005.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali\\_Mali.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali_Mali.jpg)>

### *Mali's Only Railroad Company – Privatized in 2003*

Mali also limited the size of its army to 7,000 troops and curbed military spending, although military expenditures still took 1.5 percent of GDP. Perhaps the most crucial reform taken by the

Konaré government was the 50 percent devaluation of the Malian currency (the CFA franc) in 1994, which greatly improved the competitiveness of Mali's exports and of the ability of Malian producers to compete with imports.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FISHERMEN\\_RIVER\\_WEST\\_AFRICA.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FISHERMEN_RIVER_WEST_AFRICA.jpg)>

*Traditional Malian Fishermen on the Niger River – Benefited From the 50 Percent Devaluation of the CFA Franc in 1994*

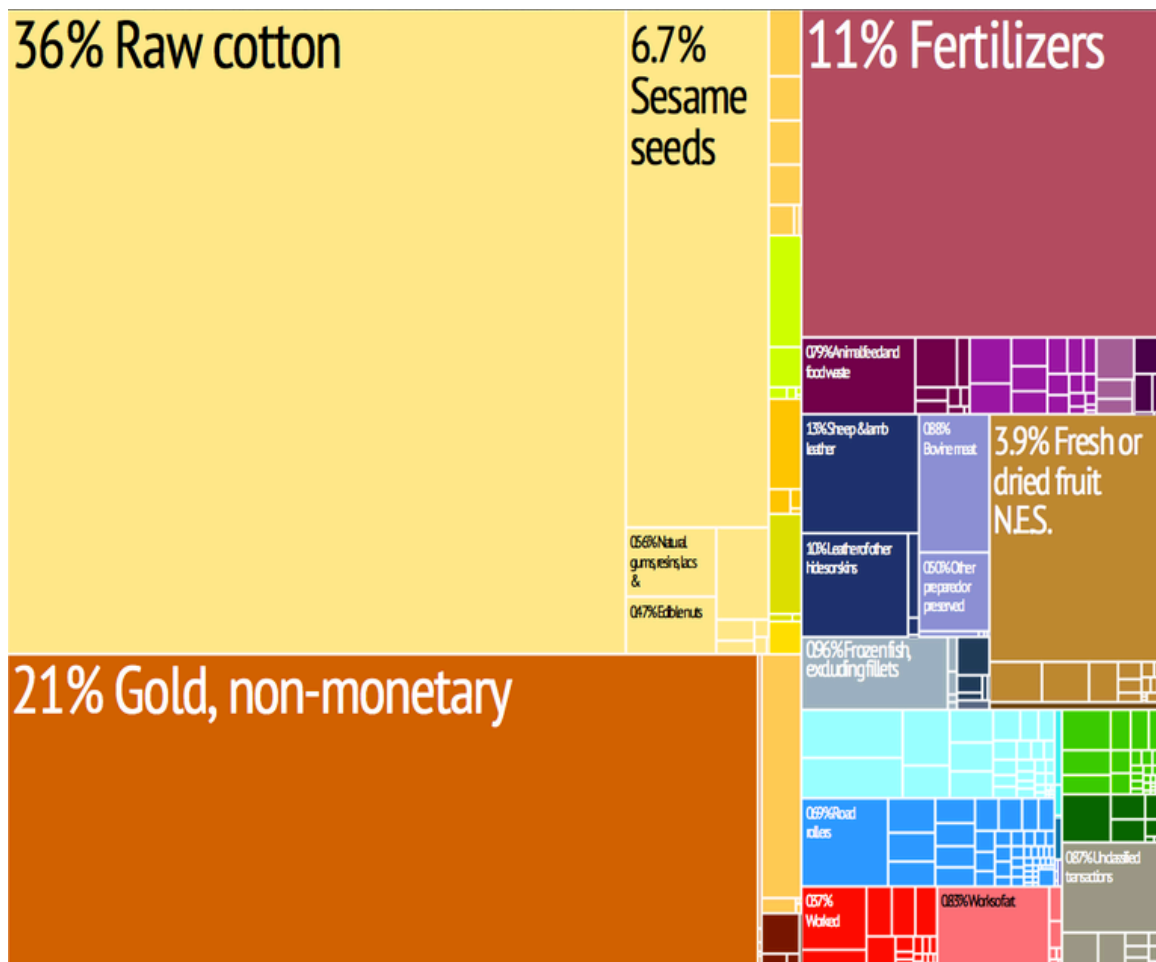
In return for instituting democracy and economic reforms, Mali began to receive expanded amounts of foreign assistance from multilateral institutions (the World Bank, the African

Development Bank, and Arab Funds) and country donors (the European Union, France, China, the United States, Canada, Netherlands, and Germany). Some of that new assistance replaced Soviet aid lost in 1991 when Mali changed political orientation and the Soviet Union broke up. During each of the five years before the rebellion (2007-2011), Mali received official development assistance of about \$1 billion. After democracy was restored in 2013, that amount increased to \$1.4 billion (11 percent of GDP). In 2019, Mali received \$1.5 billion of foreign assistance (9 percent of GDP).

Good policy and expanded aid were reflected in improved economic performance. Because weather-dependent agriculture is such a large part of the Malian economy, year-to-year comparisons of national income are volatile. But on average (as noted above), Mali's per capita income grew at 2.6 percent per year between 2013 and 2019. Mali's extraordinarily high annual rate of population growth, 3 percent, made it challenging for the country to improve its levels of income per capita. Part of that improved

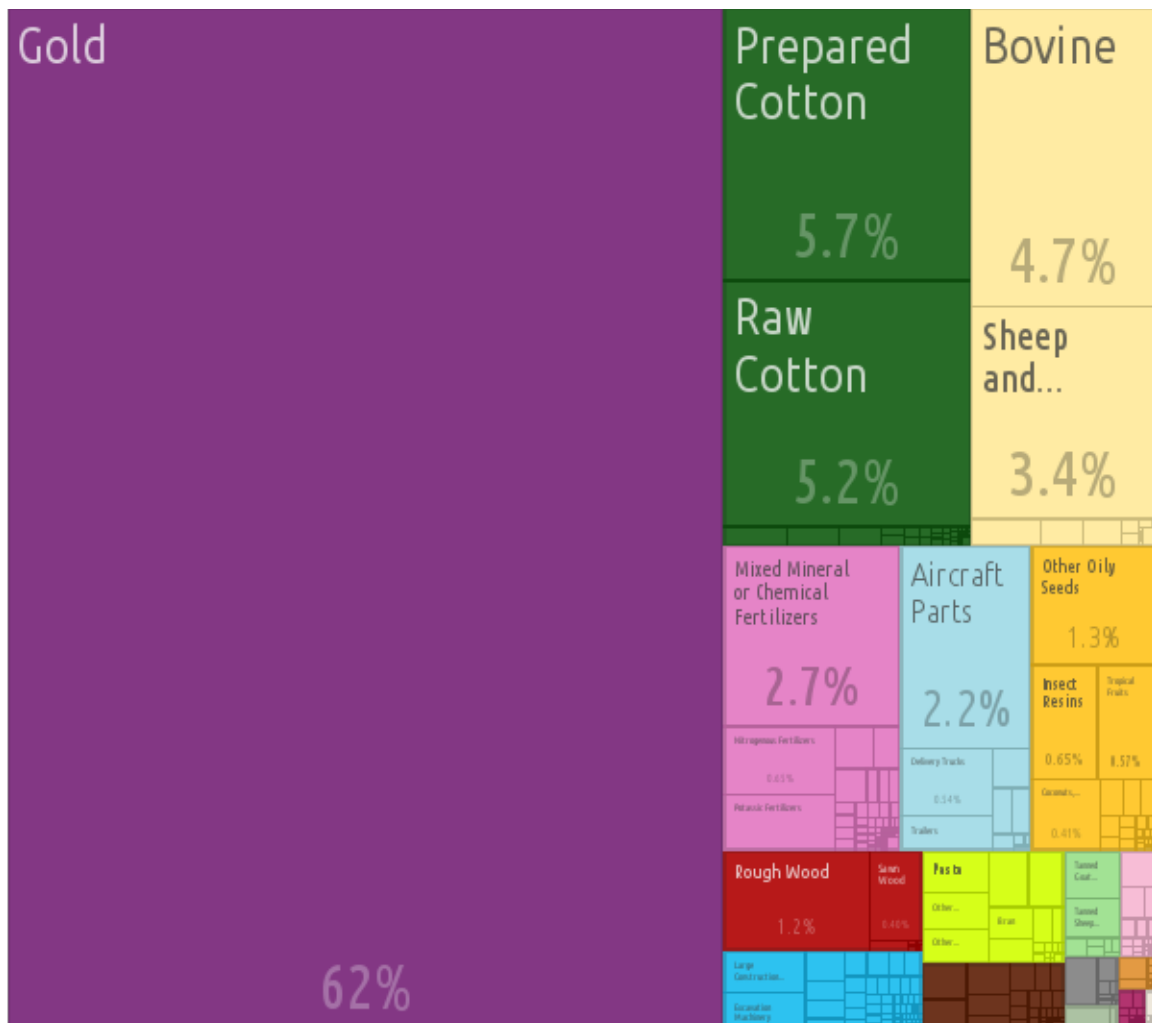
development performance derived from export growth and part from better food crop production.

Cotton traditionally was Mali’s leading export earner. In 2009, about one-third of Mali’s export earnings came from raw cotton, one-fifth from sales of gold, and 7 percent from sesame.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali\\_treemap.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali_treemap.png)

*Proportional Representation of Mali’s Exports in 2009 – More Than One-third of Export Earnings Were From Raw Cotton*



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali\\_Exports\\_Treemap\\_2017.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali_Exports_Treemap_2017.svg)

*Proportional Representation of Mali's Exports in 2017 – Nearly two-thirds of Export Earnings Were From Gold*

The rapid expansion of gold-mining has made gold Mali's leading export product. Gold accounted for 21 percent of Mali's export earnings in 2009, 62 percent in 2017, and 72 percent in

2019. Mali's gold is produced mostly in large mines owned by multinational mining companies, including Barrick, AngloGold Ashanti, Randgold, BC2Gold, and Resolute Mining. In 2019, Mali produced 71 metric tons of gold, mining accounted for 10 percent of GDP, and the Malian government earned \$734 million from gold mining.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yatela\\_mining\\_4\\_big.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yatela_mining_4_big.jpg)>

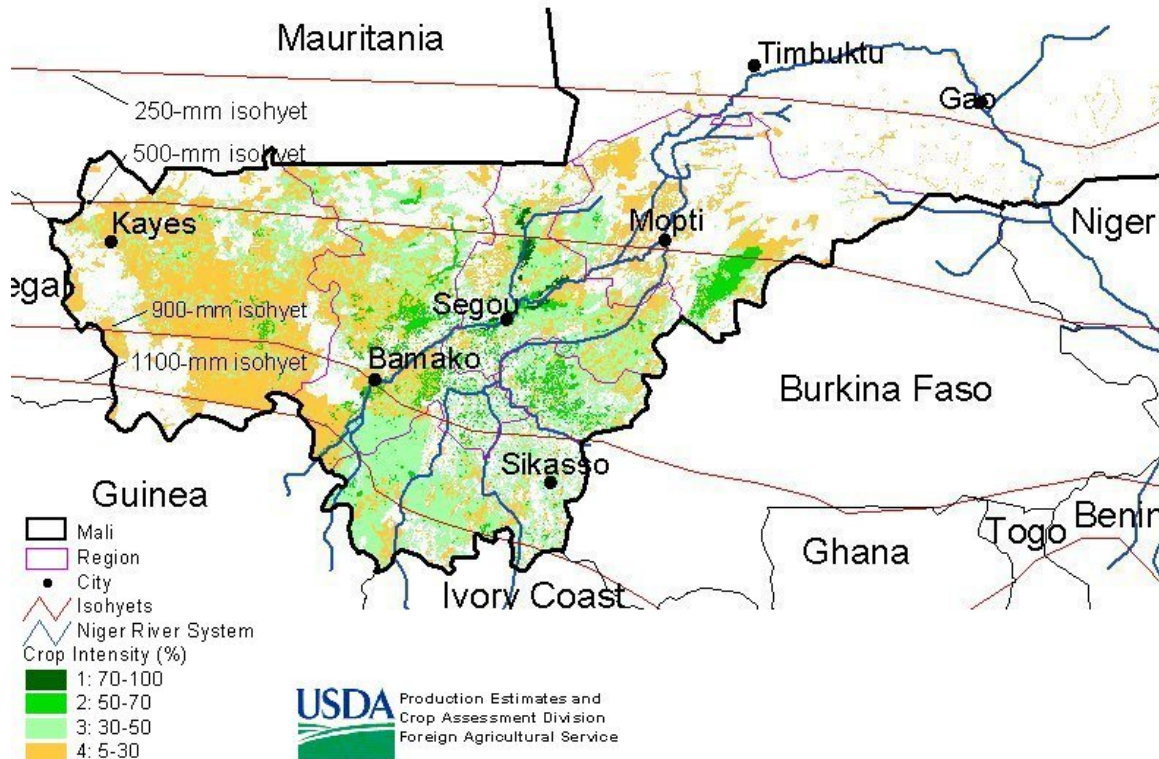
*Yatela Gold Mine, Kayes Region, Mali –  
Jointly Owned By AngloGold Ashanti, Randgold Resources, and  
the Government of Mali*

Cotton production in Mali began to expand in the mid-1970s and then boomed to an annual level of 600,000 tons following the



devaluation in 1994. Mali is now the largest producer of cotton in sub-Saharan Africa and second only to Egypt on the African continent. Malian pastoralists herd millions of cattle, sheep, and goats, but only cattle and beef are important exports. Most of the natural pastures are in or just north of the interior delta of the Niger River. The effects of earlier droughts have shifted the herding areas south into better-watered regions, creating competition in regions that traditionally focused on crop agriculture.

Small-scale farming, using traditional agricultural techniques to produce cereals – millet, sorghum, and maize – is the predominant feature of Mali's agriculture, occupying 90 percent of the 1.4 million hectares (3.4 million acres) under cultivation. The best farmland in Mali is found in the valleys of the Niger River and its tributaries, between the key cities of Bamako and Mopti, and extending southward to the borders of Guinea-Conakry, the Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali\\_ag\\_map\\_2001\\_USDA.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali_ag_map_2001_USDA.jpg)

### *Major Agricultural Regions in Southern Mali, USDA Map, 2001*

Along with the three subsistence cereals, cotton, tobacco, vegetables, tree crops, and rice are produced in that region. The more than doubling of rice production in the 1990s, to above 600,000 tons, allowed Mali to substitute for imports of rice and become nearly self-sufficient in rice consumption. About a third of Mali's rice was produced in the 80,000 hectares (200,000 acres) of the Office du Niger project. The expansion resulted from yield

increases in that project plus a doubling of rice production area in the country, especially along the banks of the Niger River south of Mopti. Farmers responded strongly to the incentives provided by the 50 percent devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994, which caused the price of rice in local currency to increase by about that same percentage.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mature\\_Rice\\_\(India\)\\_by\\_Augustus\\_Binu.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mature_Rice_(India)_by_Augustus_Binu.jpg)>

*Rice Production Expanded in the Office du Niger Project, Mali*

That devaluation also affected all other agricultural commodities in Mali in the same way. But it was only one of a

number of policy improvements that gave farmers better incentives to grow more food. Critical reforms in cereals production and marketing began in the 1980s under the Traoré government. The new policies increased prices that farmers received for selling their surplus produce, liberalized cereals markets, and improved processing facilities. Subsequent policy reforms carried out by the Konaré government reduced head taxes on farmers and removed licensing requirements for imports and export.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Office\\_du\\_niger\\_mali\\_canal\\_construction\\_2006.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Office_du_niger_mali_canal_construction_2006.jpg)>

*Canal Construction at the Office du Niger, Near Niono, Mali –  
Enhanced the Efficient Production of Irrigated Rice*

Those reforms coupled with political stability, the devaluation, good rainfall, successful agricultural development projects in southern Mali, and better management of the Office du Niger brought a surge in cereals production.

The improvements in farm output and rural incomes spread over into two related sectors of Mali's economy. The increase in agricultural output aided the nascent Malian industrial sector, which consists mainly of firms processing agricultural products. Rising rural incomes also led to the improvement of tourist facilities in rural Mali.

Tourism has been a small part of Mali's economy. It peaked in 2011 with about 200,000 foreign tourist arrivals and has been hindered since then because of the lack of security in key tourist destinations. But if security can be assured, there is much potential for expansion of tourism – the ancient cities and archaeological sites (notably Djenné and Timbuktu), the cultural attractions (especially the Dogon people of the Bandiagara escarpment), the

desert environment and cultures (particularly the Tuareg people),  
cruises on the Niger River, and scenic national parks



*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at*  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali1974-027\\_hg.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali1974-027_hg.jpg)>

*Tourism Potential in Mali –  
Dogon Dancer Wearing A Sirige Mask, Bandiagara Escarpment*

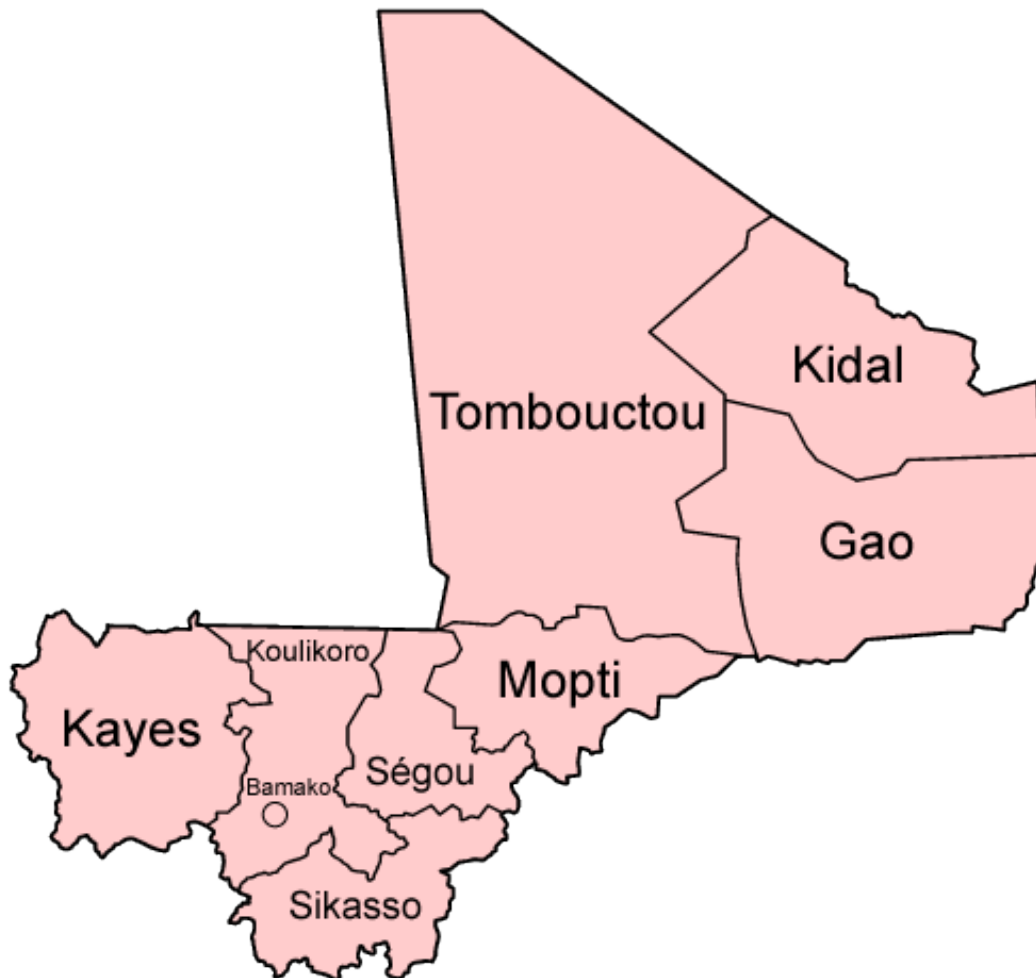
Emerging countries compete to improve their places in three prestigious sets of international rankings, all watched closely by private (foreign and domestic) investors. It is instructive to compare how well Mali ranks in contrast to Ethiopia, a low-

income country in northeast Africa. The gold standard of quality-of-life indicators is the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), because it incorporates income, health, and education data. In 2019, Mali ranked near the bottom – 184<sup>th</sup> of 189 countries in the HDI, whereas Ethiopia had grown rapidly to improve to 173<sup>rd</sup>.

The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index (EDBI) incorporates ten measures of government controls and regulations that can make it difficult to establish and run businesses. In 2019, Mali ranked 148<sup>th</sup> of 190 countries in the EDBI, demonstrating that the country has begun to enact reforms to attract investors. In contrast, Ethiopia (159<sup>th</sup>) has retained more bureaucratic regulations.

The most highly respected measure of corruption is the Corruption Perceptions Index, compiled by Transparency International. Both Mali and Ethiopia suffer from high levels of corruption. In the CPI rankings in 2019, Mali tied with Laos and Myanmar at 130<sup>th</sup> of 198 countries, whereas Ethiopia (96<sup>th</sup>), which

has begun strong efforts to rein in corruption, nearly finished in the top half of countries. Mali's low rankings in all three of these indicators illustrate the difficult challenges ahead for Malian policy-makers to improve the quality of life for their desperately poor people



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali\\_regions\\_named.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali_regions_named.png)

*Administrative Divisions in Contemporary Mali*



## **Lessons for Contemporary Powers**

What lessons for contemporary powers can be drawn from the experiences of the Mali and Songhai Kingdoms and of successor rulers of Mali? The first lesson is a note of caution. Globalization is both advantageous and risky. The generation of wealth and power in the medieval Kingdoms of Mali and Songhai depended heavily on international trade within a global economy. Both kingdoms taxed their farmers. But most of their income came from taxing the merchants who transshipped Saharan Desert salt and West African rainforest gold through the Sudanic kingdoms. Mali and Songhai thus were fully dependent on the international political and economic environment.

For several centuries, everything went well and trans-Saharan trade proceeded profitably. But in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, trans-Saharan trade went into a three-century decline. Mali was already dead, and Songhai perished in the wake of the disastrous Moroccan invasion in 1591. But Songhai would have lost its economic base even if it could have maintained its independence and kept the

kingdom together. Global conditions changed. Portugal opened trade on the Atlantic coast of West Africa and diverted much of the gold exports southward. The Europeans shifted their attention in Africa to the horrendous Atlantic slave trade. The Ottoman Empire lost control of North Africa and the northern termini of the Saharan trade routes became unstable. Countries have to change to maintain their competitive edge in a global economy. That lesson was as true in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as it is today.

Both Mali and Songhai declined and fell due to a combination of internal weakness and external invasion. In both instances, the internal weakness was caused by fratricidal struggles over succession to rule the kingdom. Palace competition distracted officials from governing and taxing, and it turned the focus of the military from enforcing imperial hegemony to fighting civil wars. As in many other early kingdoms and empires, succession struggles debilitated the internal strength of the Malian and Songhai Kingdoms and made them vulnerable to external attack. For Mali, the enemy was near at hand.

The Songhai Kingdom, earlier independent and then a vassal state under Mali, took over its former ruler in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Mali thus lost out to a revitalized neighbor. Songhai emulated Mali and suffered succession fights that weakened the kingdom from within. Lacking strong regional competitors, Songhai fell in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century to a shocking invasion from Morocco. The second lesson from both West African kingdoms is apparent. Defense from external invasion must be predicated on predictable and peaceful succession from one ruler to another.

A third lesson evolves from the Moroccan invasion. On the surface it would seem that the sultan of Morocco was too greedy when, flush from victory over Portugal, he ordered his force of 4,000 very well-armed troops to cross the Sahara Desert and conquer Songhai. He assumed that his powerful army could win the war, rule the region, and control the production of gold. He was right on the first count and wrong on the two others. The Moroccan army used their superior firepower – firearms and cannons not yet known in West Africa – to defeat the Songhai

troops. But the Moroccan invaders never succeeded in ruling effectively. Instead, they established a parasitical aristocracy in the major Sahelian entrepôts and totally destabilized the region. Nor did they ever gain control over the gold mines in the rainforest.

The lesson seems to be that a power should never assume that supreme military capacity will guarantee success in the ruling aftermath: do not conquer unless your officials can rule effectively and make the region pay for the initial costs of conquest and the later costs of rule. However, though the amounts actually transferred are not known, most reports have the sultan of Morocco receiving considerable booty from the original conquest of Songhai. Hence, although his invasion triggered three centuries of chronic warfare and instability in the West African Sudan, the greedy sultan could have profited from his trans-Saharan military adventure.

Mali's experience since 1960, as an independent country, provides a fourth lesson applicable to all countries, rich and poor.

Widespread government ownership of economic assets is a recipe for disaster, especially in countries with limited capability for public management. To many African leaders, including Modibo Keita of Mali, socialism appeared to offer three advantages – anti-colonial freedom, poverty alleviation, and political power. It would free the newly independent country from European (French) colonial domination and fend off neo-colonialism, provide an antidote to poverty by shifting assets from foreigners and domestic elites to fair-minded government officials, and consolidate political power in the hands of the ruling party that could control the nationalized state enterprises.

All three premises were faulty. Mali broke free from French imperialism, but it merely shifted to Soviet domination. Poverty alleviation is a gradual process that results from effective development policies, especially for rural areas, not from the inefficient management of state enterprises. Sustainable political power comes from the effective delivery of government services and maintenance of security, not from creating jobs in inefficient

state-owned enterprises. A radical shift to a socialist economic policy thus did not guarantee international independence, economic growth, or political support. Mali had to suffer through three decades of socialist and military mismanagement before altering its political direction in 1991.

## **Mali Time Line**

9000-4000 BCE Sahara region humid – filled with lakes and wild animals

4000-2500 BCE gradual climate shift in Sahara region – became desertic

from 2500 BCE origins of agriculture in Mali – Sahelian and rainforest systems

1st millen. BCE Nilo-Saharan migrants from Sudan – iron metallurgy

c. 600 BCE beginning of Iron Age – agricultural implements, weapons

3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE first trans-Saharan trade – Carthaginians – horse-drawn, wheeled

1<sup>st</sup> century BCE rise of small Sudanic kingdoms – growing population

1<sup>st</sup> millen. CE Bantu diaspora – from West Africa to Eastern, Southern Africa

4<sup>th</sup> century Romans introduced dromedary camel into Sahara – from Arabia

9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> c. Sudanic confederations – Ghana, Takrur, Songhai

9<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> c. Kingdom of Kanem/Bornu – moved south from Sahara to Chad

10 <sup>th</sup> century	Islam introduced in West Africa – traders, not jihad or ulamas
990	Ghana took Awdaghost – Sanhaja Berber city – controlled trade
11 <sup>th</sup> -13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Almoravid and Almohad Berber Empires– centered in Marrakech
1055	Almoravids, Sanhaja sect – regained Awdaghost from Ghana
1062-1142	Almoravid Berber Empire – West Africa, Morocco, Spain
1062-1107	Yusuf ibn Tashfin led Almoravids – courageous, capable leader
1076	Almoravids captured Kumbi – ended Kingdom of Ghana
1103	Almoravids took Moorish Spain – delayed Christian re-conquest
1145-1150	Almohads captured Moorish Spain – Seville, Malaga, Cordoba
1147-1269	Almohad Berber Empire – Morocco, Spain, Algeria, Tunisia
1212	Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa – decisive Spanish Christian victory
1230-1464	Kingdom of Mali – Mande peoples – salt-for-gold trade



1230-1260	Sundiata ruled as King of Mali – strong founding king, conqueror
12 <sup>th</sup> -16 <sup>th</sup> c.	Timbuktu and Djenné – peak of entrepôt trade, Islamic universities
13 <sup>th</sup> -16 <sup>th</sup> c.	Kingdom of Kanem/Bornu – peak of power, central Sudan/Sahara
1312-1337	Mansa Musa ruled as King of Mali – peak of power and wealth
1324-1325	Mansa Musa’s visit to Cairo and Mecca – reduced gold price
1325	Mali conquered Kingdom of Songhai – became vassal state
1337-1360	Mansa Sulayman ruled as King of Mali – declining power
1464-1591	Kingdom of Songhai – defeated Mali – regional power
1464-1491	Sonni Ali ruled as King of Songhai – founding king, conqueror
1468	Sonni Ali regained Timbuktu – principal entrepôt for Saharan trade
1473	Sonni Ali conquered Djenné – key trading center in Niger Delta

1481	Portugal built fortress at Elmina (Gold Coast) – diverted gold trade
1491-1528	Askia Muhammad ruled as king of Songhai – peak of power
1490s	Askia Muhammad made renowned <i>hajj</i> – 300,000 pieces of gold
1510	Leo Africanus, travel writer – visited Timbuktu and Djenné
late 16 <sup>th</sup> c.	Ahmad Baba, world’s leading mathematician – taught in Timbuktu
1591	Moroccan invasion of Songhai – 4,000 troops – military victory
1591-1780	Moroccan parasitic rule of Songhai – warlords in three main cities
16 <sup>th</sup> century	French merchants began trading in tropical Africa – gold and ivory
16 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> c.	European slave trade – western Sudan region in political disarray
1639-1643	widespread famine and depopulation struck western Sudan region
1712-1850s	Segu Kingdom – Bambara, pagan, agricultural, chronic warfare
1738-1756	massive famine and depopulation struck western Sudan region

1753-1850s	Kaarta Kingdom – Bambara, pagan, agricultural, chronic warfare
1821-1850s	Caliphate of Hamdallahi – Fulbe jihad, Islamic clerics, Masina Kingdom
1840s-1880s	French colony in Senegal – ports, peanuts, eastward expansion
1854-1864	French Governor Louis Faidherbe – introduced peanuts to Senegal
1850s-1893	Tukolor Kingdom – Fulbe jihad, Niger-Senegal valleys
1870-1871	Franco-Prussian War – Germany humiliated France
1870s	end of Atlantic slave trade – 9.5 million African slaves survived Atlantic crossing
late 19 <sup>th</sup> c.	trans-Saharan trade ended – after more than two millennia
1884-1885	Berlin Conference – European powers divided Africa, scramble for control
1893	France defeated Ahmadu, King of Tukuolor – took Timbuktu
1895	France created French West Africa colony – capital in Dakar

- 1897 France defeated 800-year-old Mossi kingdom – in Upper Volta
- 1898 France defeated Samori Touré – claimed West African territory
- 1904 French West Africa (AOF) – integrated colony, capital in Dakar
- 1905 France conquered the Sahara region – defeated Tuaregs, colonized
- 1906 France built railway – connected upper Niger Valley with Dakar
- 1930s Office du Niger Project – failed to produce cotton – shifted to rice
- 1956 France enacted *Loi Cadre* – separate legislatures in colonies
- 1958 French Sudan became Sudanese Republic – in French Community
- 1959 Mali Federation – Sudanese Republic and Senegal, abortive
- 1960 Republic of Mali – full independence
- 1960-1968 Modibo Keita – first president of Mali, socialism, one-party rule
- 1968 coup d'état – bloodless, young military officers, overthrew Keita

1968-1991	Moussa Traoré – military dictator, brutal suppression, some reform
1967-1974	widespread famine struck Sahelian region of West Africa
1979-1985	another widespread famine struck Sahelian region of West Africa
1980	Traoré suppressed student-led protests – survived 3 coup attempts
1985	Mali fought border skirmish with Burkina Faso – inconclusive
1990	National Conference, Benin – sovereignty, constitution, elections
1990-1996	conflict with Tuareg rebels in northeast – land, cultural rights
1991	coup d'état – bloodless – reformist officers overthrew Traoré
1991	National Conference, Mali – sovereignty, constitution, elections
1991-1992	Amadou Toumani Touré – headed interim government, transition
1992-2002	Alpha Oumar Konaré – democratically-elected president, ADEMA
1994	50 percent devaluation of the Malian currency (CFA franc)

- 1996 *Flamme de la Paix* (peace flame) – Tuareg agreement, Timbuktu
- 1997 Konaré re-elected president – ADEMA won 80% of legislature
- 2002 Amadou Toumani Touré – elected president – coalition cabinet
- 2007 Touré re-elected president – continued reforms
- 2012 Tuareg militias in northern Mali rebelled – Touré government overthrown in military coup – interim civilian government installed
- 2013 French-led military force defeated al-Qaeda-linked rebels in northern Mali
- 2013 Ibrahim Boubacar Keita – elected president – pledged to re-unify Mali
- 2015 Peace Agreement between government of Mali and two rebel coalitions – promised decentralization, development zone for north
- 2018 Ibrahim Boubacar Keita – re-elected president – second term plagued by continuing security problems, fragile economy, charges of corruption
- 2020 military coup – Bah Ndaw, former defense minister, installed as interim president – elections for a new government promised within 18 months

## **Bibliography**

I am offering below annotations on selected books that I found particularly helpful in understanding Mali's political and economic history. I have divided my recommendations into five categories – complete histories of Mali, histories of ancient Mali, complementary histories of Mali, special topics in Malian history, and biographical, narrative, and fictional books on Mali. In each category, I list two highly suggested readings and two supplementary readings.

### **Histories of Ancient Mali**

#### Highly Suggested Readings

1. Edward W. Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1995. I recall this remarkable history of trans-Saharan trade from my Peace Corps teaching, and it remains my favorite book on this topic. Bovill demonstrates how the wealth of the Sudanic empires in West Africa and of the Berber empires in Morocco depended on controlling the exchange of Saharan salt for rainforest gold. Marrakech and Timbuktu produced neither yet depended on both. Bovill explains why.

2. Roland Oliver and Brian M. Fagan, *Africa in the Iron Age, c. 500 B.C. to A.D. 1400*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1975. Power and wealth in pre-modern Africa were derived from agriculture and iron. This marvelous little book summarizes the role of iron in African empire building. It is a valuable complement to Oliver and Fagan's short history of Africa. I recommend it for readers who desire to understand how West Africa's early history was different from that of the rest of Africa.

#### Supplementary Readings

1. Basil Davidson, *West Africa before the Colonial Era, A History to 1850*, London: Longman, 1998. For 55 years before his death in 2010, Davidson was one of the most prolific historians writing about Africa. This book provides vivid descriptions and separate chapters on all four of the principal Sudanic kingdoms – Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and Kanem-Bornu. Some of the details are extraordinarily interesting. Its analysis is sometimes uneven and incomplete. But the book is still great fun to read, even quickly.

2. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, New York: Norton & Company, 2005. I think this book is one of the most important of the past decade. It examines why some cultures have been able to overpower others from the perspectives of geography, militarism, epidemiology, and economics. I include it here because it analyzes how agriculture was invented independently in West Africa and how this discovery influenced the Mali and Songhai Kingdoms.

## **Complete Histories of Mali in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

### Highly Suggested Readings

1. Patrick Manning, *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa, 1880-1995*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998. This book is extremely informative and efficiently written. Manning analyses the history of the parts of Africa colonized by France and Belgium with good insight from the perspectives of political and economic development. His argument is both hard-headed and sympathetic to African aspirations. This study is an excellent source on West Africa during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

2. Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore, *Africa Since 1800*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005. This volume is the third of a trilogy of great books on African history, all co-authored by Oliver. The authors updated this book to be



current through 2003. I especially like the discussion of 19<sup>th</sup> century, pre-colonial Africa in the first third of the book. The study covers all of Africa and is organized by region. Readers who enjoyed the shorter book by Oliver and Fage will find more here.

### Supplementary Readings

1. R. James Bingen, David Robinson, and John M. Staatz (ed.), *Democracy and Development in Mali*, East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2000. This fascinating volume is a collection of papers written to honor President Alpha Oumar Konaré of Mali on his receipt of an honorary doctorate degree from Michigan State University in 1998. The quality and coverage of the papers is uneven, as often occurs in edited collections. The contributions by Staatz and Clark are particularly insightful.

2. Bill Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa: the Development of African Society since 1800*, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998. Freund is an economic historian who taught in a South African university and specializes in 20<sup>th</sup> century labor relations in Africa. Freund addresses the myriad problems facing modern African development from alternative ideological perspectives. His book presents an informed view of early industrialization in many parts of Africa.

### **Complementary Histories of Africa**

#### Highly Suggested Readings

1. Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage, *A Short History of Africa*, London: Penguin Books, 1995. This little paperback is deservedly in its sixth edition. I have been using it for four decades, because it is the most balanced history of settlement and change in the African continent. I recommend the book highly because it puts Mali's history into a broader African context. It will help you

appreciate the interactions between the peoples of the Sudan and the Moroccans and the later impact of Europeans in West Africa.

2. Philip Curtin, Steven Feierman, Leonard Thompson, and Jan Vansina, *African History*, London: Longman, 1995. This marvelous volume, written by four leading scholars of African history, is insightful and complete. It covers all of Africa, by region, from the beginnings of agriculture through the colonial era. Curtin's contributions on West Africa and on the impact of the Atlantic are outstanding. This book is a great complement to Oliver and Fage because it provides more analytic detail.

### Supplementary Readings

1. Paul Bohannan and Philip Curtin, *Africa and Africans*, Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1995. Bohannan, an anthropologist, and Curtin, a historian, were renowned specialists on Africa. In this long-popular introduction to Africa, they weave together dimensions of culture – peoples, religions, agriculture, and governance – with evolutionary themes of history – settlement, empire building, colonialism, and independence. I highly recommend this fine book, especially for its thematic syntheses.

2. Jocelyn Murray (ed.), *Cultural Atlas of Africa*, New York: Checkmark Books, 1998. Every bibliography should have one recommendation for a “coffee-table purchase,” and this book is it. This atlas includes three sections – physical geography (geology and climate), cultural themes (such as peopling, empires, European incursions, and architecture), and colored maps and vignettes on each African country. The photographs are outstanding, the maps are nicely detailed, and the text is concise and informative.

### **Special Topics in Malian History**

#### Highly Suggested Readings

1. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010. It is rare that a detailed history book enjoys a long stay on the New York Times bestseller list. This book fully deserves all of the acclaim that it has received. It gives an insightful analysis of the rise and spread of Islam and of its impact on the Arab peoples and the Middle East. This superb book places the history of West Africa during the past 14 centuries in a broad regional context.

2. Basil Davidson, *The Lost Cities of Africa*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987. For 55 years before his death in 2010, Davidson was one of the most prolific historians writing about Africa. *Lost Cities* gives us a comparative analysis of the emergence and decline of kingdoms and empires throughout sub-Saharan Africa. West Africa, including Mali, hosted the Ghana, Mali, and Songhai Kingdoms. Davidson shows how other significant states arose elsewhere in Africa.

### Supplementary Readings

1. John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat, Myth or Reality?*, Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1999. This balanced, well-written essay examines recent Islamic revivalism and explores how it constitutes a threat to Western democracy. The author nicely summarizes the rise, expansion, decline, and revival of Islamic religion, culture, and power. The book is helpful in explaining modern Islamist politics throughout the Muslim world and in placing the tragic events of 9/11/2001 into historical context.

2. Nevill Barbour, *Morocco*, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1965, 228 pages. I recommend this history of Morocco, rather than a newer one, because I like Barbour's insightful treatment of the rise and decline of the early Berber Empires – the Almoravids and Almohads. This volume traces the evolution of Moroccan

dynasties during the past millennium, shows why France colonized the country, and explains how Morocco regained its sovereignty. Though not a page-turner, the book is very readable.

## **Biographical, Narrative, and Fictional Books on Mali**

### Highly Suggested Readings

1. Maryse Condé, *Segu*, New York: Penguin Books, 1996. *Segu* is a block-busting historical novel – a saga of three generations of the Traoré family in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Mali. From it, we learn much West African history – the roles of Timbuktu and Djenné in ancient Mali and Songhai, the consequences of the horrific slave trade, and the impetus of the Islamic jihads that rearranged power structures. Condé is a compelling story-teller and a keen observer of historic cultural relationships. Her book is a “must read.”

2. Said Hamdun and Noel King, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*, Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1998, 106 pages. Ibn Battuta, a Berber and Islamic scholar from Tangiers, was one of the world’s leading medieval travel writers. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, he traveled extensively in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. This brief book is Ibn Battuta’s travelogue of his trans-Saharan journey in 1352-1353, and it describes the Empire of Mali at its height. It teaches us much about Mali and even more about Ibn Battuta.

### Supplementary Readings

1. D. T. Niane, *Sundiata, An Epic of Old Mali*, Hong Kong: Longman, 1992. Sundiata, the lion king, unified the Empire of Mali in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This intriguing story of that process was told to the author by an aged Mandingo griot, an oral historian who formerly would have been the king’s leading advisor and alter ego. The recounted detail of events that occurred 700 years ago is

astonishing. This brief account provides insights into early Sudanic customs that continue to permeate contemporary cultures.

2. Jean-Louis Bourgeois, *Spectacular Vernacular, The Adobe Tradition*, New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 1996, 196 pages. I include this unusual book for two reasons. It has magnificent photographs of Sudanic adobe architecture, and it contains an intriguing essay on Djenné's Friday mosque, probably West Africa's most significant building. Written by an architectural historian, the text also contrasts adobe architecture in Sudanic West Africa with that in Central Asia and the American Southwest.

## **Sites Visited in Mali and West Africa**

### **The World Less Traveled by Private Jet**

#### **Stanford Travel/Study Program**

**January 24-February 16, 2013**

**Airplane-based, Aboard a TCS and Starquest Expeditions Jet**

### **Dakar and Keur Simbara, Senegal**

Senegal's 12 million people inhabit an area on the Atlantic coast of West Africa somewhat smaller than Minnesota. Most Senegalese (94 percent) practice a mystical form of Sufi Islam. France colonized Saint Louis, a port in northern Senegal, in 1659 and Gorée, a slave-trading island off Dakar, in 1677. France conquered the rest of Senegal in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Governor Louis Faidherbe (1854-1864) introduced peanuts as a cash crop and expanded his African army, the Senegalese Rifles, to aid the conquest of West Africa. France created an integrated colony, French West Africa, in 1895 with its headquarters in Dakar. Following independence in 1960, Senegal was governed by the Socialist Party for 40 years and by the Senegalese Democratic Party since 2000.

Our group spent a stimulating day touring Dakar and visiting Keur Simbara, a village in central Senegal. We divided into small groups and took a caravan of four-by-four vehicles into the dry countryside (the rainy season is June-August). Keur Simbara has benefited from long contact with Tostan, a non-government organization (NGO) started by an American woman from Illinois nearly three decades ago. With Tostan's assistance, the villagers have obtained new cooking stoves, solar panels for heating, early education programs and centers, and a village well. They have ended female genital mutilation and early child marriage, and they

have improved human rights, especially for women and girls. The grateful villagers proudly demonstrated these changes to us.

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**Beyond Timbuktu: North Africa by Air**  
**Zegrahm Expeditions**  
**October 28 – November 17, 2006**  
**Airplane-based**

**Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso**

In southern Burkina Faso (which was called Upper Volta until 1984), we experienced three widely differing lifestyles during our three-day visit. Ouagadougou is the bustling capital city of this growing (but still very poor) country of 13 million residents. There, we visited an extensive handicraft center, featuring the crafts of a full range of local artisans from weavers to metalworkers, and a small but very nice museum that contained an impressive collection of large wooden masks and a birth-to-death exhibition of one interesting Burkinabe ethnic group. Because Burkina Faso has recently had good leadership, Ouagadougou is expanding rapidly and much economic activity is centered there.

Bobo Dioulasso is Burkina Faso's second largest city, but it is declining as Ouagadougou captures most economic innovations. We visited Bobo Dioulasso briefly en route to a fascinating neighboring village, Boni. Boni features some of Burkina's best masked sculptors and dancers, and we went there to observe a post-harvest ritual, performed to venerate the spirits of departed ancestors. The wooden masks were painted red, black, and white, and each one represented an animal or insect (butterfly, snake, owl, lion, warthog, and hyena) form of spirits. Unlike the practice in the nearby Dogon culture, each dancer performed individually (rather than in groups) and all of the masks were created by the

village head (rather than by the dancers and their predecessor tutors).

### **Agadez and Timia, Niger**

Our five nights in Niger constituted the high point of the journey. Agadez is a desert oasis town in central Niger of perhaps 100,000 residents, predominantly Tuareg. For centuries, Agadez has been a major mid-point stopover for Trans-Saharan caravans moving between Timbuktu and Tripoli. In recent years, the population of the town has expanded greatly, and Agadez serves as the center of a major oasis agricultural area and the collection point for dates and animal products produced in the desert by nomadic peoples. Most homes are sited in walled compounds, and the walls and buildings are made of adobe and refurbished every year. The town features an adobe mosque and minaret, originally constructed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Agadez was a part of the Songhai Kingdom, a large Sudanic entrepôt kingdom based on the exchange of West African gold for Saharan salt. The Hotel de la Paix is only four years old, but it already is fully depreciated. Three nights there stretched the patience of our passengers, but visits to two good French-operated restaurants made our stay in Agadez pleasant.

Timia is an oasis-based agricultural center in the Air Massif, one of the three principal mountain ranges in the Sahara Desert. Most of the Tuareg people are fiercely independent nomadic camel herders, who ruled the western half of the Sahara for centuries before the French finally subdued them in 1905. But the Tuaregs in Timia are sedentary farmers who produce citrus and vegetables for the Agadez (and other urban) markets in Niger. Timia lies in a huge wadi, a river bed that is dry most of the year and flooded during the brief rains in August. We strolled around the town of about 6,000 residents and saw how the local economy operated and how the adobe homes were constructed. The farmers use ancient methods of water-lifting and irrigation to grow their high-value



crops. Although nominally Muslim, the Tuaregs in Timia retain their beliefs in spirit worship. We observed an exorcism dance, performed at night entirely by women who needed to release an evil spirit from a woman who had fallen asleep in the desert and violated cultural taboos. Once the two dancing women had driven themselves into trances and fallen asleep, the group was assured that the evil spirit had been exorcised.

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**Casablanca to the Cape by Private Air  
Bushtracks Expeditions  
January 19-February 9, 2006  
Airplane-based, Aboard a Chartered Convair 580**

**Western and Southern Africa**

Our expedition focused on gaining an integrated understanding of the geography, people, and wildlife of western Africa. Because we flew in a chartered Convair 580 aircraft from the top to the bottom of western Africa, i.e., from the Strait of Gibraltar to the Cape of Good Hope, we observed all seven of the principal geographic zones of the western side of the African continent – northern Mediterranean (in northern Morocco), northern desert (the Sahara, in southern Morocco and northern Mali), northern savanna grassland (in southern Mali), equatorial rain forest (in southern Benin, southern Gabon, and southwestern Central African Republic), southern savanna grassland (in northern Namibia), southern desert (the Namib, in western Namibia), and southern Mediterranean (near Cape Town, in southwestern South Africa). We thus were able to witness how geographic regions on the western sides of continents form a predictable, symmetric pattern, running both north and south of the equator (although Africa does not extend far enough north or south to encompass coniferous forests, fjords, or tundra).

History and culture held center stage during the first week of our journey, in Morocco, Mali, and Benin. Our heads are still spinning with vivid images of the impressive pasts and challenging futures of Africa's peoples and of the continuing presence of the continent's natural beauty. Several personal experiences are firmly etched in our minds – drinking tea and eating bread and honey with rural Berbers in the Atlas Mountains of southern Morocco, riding camels and barbecuing lamb with nomadic Tuaregs in Timbuktu in the Sahara Desert of central Mali, observing the incredibly energetic dances, complex culture, and cliff-side dwellings of the Dogon in southeastern Mali, being welcomed by canoes of singers and drummers into Ganvié (a town of 25,000 residents living in stilt-houses in the middle of a lake in Benin), cuddling an orphaned and tamed baby gorilla in the rain-forest lagoons of southern Gabon, net hunting with the BaAka (pygmy) peoples for duikers (small antelopes) in the Congo Basin rain forest of the Central African Republic, observing at close hand the lions and elephants in the salt pan of Etosha Park in northern Namibia, watching the rapidly shifting colors as the sun rose on the enormous sand dunes at Sossusvlei in southern Namibia, and marveling at the panoply of *fynbos* flora, especially the protea and birds-of-paradise flowers, in the Kirstenbosch gardens in Cape Town.

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**Africa and the Indian Ocean  
An Expedition by Private Jet  
TCS Expeditions  
January 14-February 7, 1998**

**Timbuktu and Djenné, Mali**

In the interior delta of the Niger River in Mali, we discovered that Timbuktu and Djenné were not merely symbols of remoteness and

locations at the end of the earth. From the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries, these two Niger River ports were significant centers of international trade and Islamic education. Some of the leading scholars in the Medieval world taught in the universities in these two west African cities. Both were key cities in the trading monopolies of the Mali and Songhai Empires, provisioning camel caravans in the trans-Saharan trade (west African gold, ivory, and slaves moving north, Saharan salt and north African artisanal products moving south). The glory of Timbuktu and Djenné gradually declined after the Moroccan takeover of these cities in the late sixteenth century and the opening of west African ports to European shipping, which permitted the gold from west Africa to be exported more cheaply by sea. Now these once important cities are struggling towns of about 15,000 inhabitants each, and Timbuktu seems destined to be overtaken soon by the sands of the encroaching Saharan desert.

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