

## Lesson 3 The Empire of Mali

### BEFORE YOU READ

In this lesson, you will learn about the growth and decline of the Mali and Songhai empires.

### AS YOU READ

Use this chart to take notes about the similarities and differences between the Mali and Songhai empires. Answering the questions at the end of each section will help you fill in the chart.

	Mali	Songhai
Trade		
Religion		
Decline		

### TERMS & NAMES

- **Mali** a West African empire that thrived from about 1240 to the 1400s
- **Sundiata** chief of the Malinke people, established the Empire of Mali
- **Timbuktu** West African city that developed into a center of trade and culture during the 1200s.
- **Mansa Musa** king of Mali's empire from 1307 to 1332
- **Songhai** West African empire that thrived from the mid-1400s to the late 1500s
- **Askia Muhammad** king of the Songhai Empire from 1493 to 1528

### Mali Builds on Ghana's Foundation

(pages 165–166)

*How could Mali build on Ghana's empire?*

The empire of **Mali** was formed around 1240. It was located in the southern area of what had been Ghana's empire. The Malinke people founded the empire of Mali. A great chief named **Sundiata** led the Malinke.

In 1240, Sundiata and his army captured the former capital of Ghana. He expanded his empire beyond Ghana's old border. Sundiata also reestablished the gold-salt trade and expanded trade routes.

Sundiata developed the city of **Timbuktu** as a center of trade and culture. He also supported the development of food crops, cotton farming, and cotton weaving. Sundiata balanced his Islamic belief with his traditional religious beliefs. In this way, he was similar to the kings of Ghana.

After Sundiata's death, the rulers of Mali continued to expand the empire. In 1307,

**Mansa Musa** became king of Mali. He was a devoted Muslim. He allowed his subjects to practice other religions.

In 1342, Mansa Musa began a pilgrimage to Mecca. On his pilgrimage, he brought 12,000 slaves, 80 camels, and 300 pounds of gold with him. Mansa Musa's pilgrimage greatly impressed those who saw it. It also increased trade for Mali. More merchants wanted to travel to the empire of Mali.

Mansa Musa brought with him an architect and Arab scholars on his return trip to Mali. The architect designed the Sankore mosque in Timbuktu. The scholars taught history, theology, and law in Timbuktu.

Mansa Musa continued to expand the empire until his death around 1332.

1. How did Sundiata improve Ghana's trade?

---



---

## READING STUDY GUIDE CONTINUED

**Decline of Mali**

(pages 166–167)

*How did weak rulers lead to Mali's decline?*

The descendants of Mansa Musa argued about who should be the next ruler of Mali. This internal fighting greatly weakened the empire. Eventually, Timbuktu was raided and burned.

Newly conquered regions of Mali's empire began to rebel. In the east, the **Songhai** people gradually gained strength. Led by the Songhai, the city of Gao declared its independence from Mali in 1400.

In the north, Berber nomads seized much of Mali's territory. They captured Timbuktu in 1431. In the south, bandits began to raid trading caravans and military outposts.

By 1500, rebels and invaders had greatly reduced Mali's territory. Mali was no longer a strong empire.

2. What external factors led to Mali's decline?

---



---



---



---

**The Empire of Songhai**

(pages 167–169)

*What happened to the Songhai Empire?*

During the first half of the 1400s, the Songhai were unsuccessful in forming a strong kingdom.

Since 1431, the Berbers had controlled Timbuktu. In 1468, Muslim leaders asked the Songhai king, Sunni Ali, to help overthrow the Berbers. Sunni Ali agreed. He captured Timbuktu and drove out the Berbers. He also killed many people who lived in the city. Soon Sunni Ali became known as a powerful, harsh leader. He went on to conquer neighboring lands.

Sunni Ali died in 1492. His son was declared ruler. But a leader named **Askia Muhammad** wanted to seize the throne. He and his followers had felt that Sunni Ali did not practice Islam correctly. In 1493, Askia Muhammad defeated Ali's son. He then became ruler of the Songhai Empire.

Askia Muhammad conquered the salt mines to the north. He also expanded Mali's other borders. Soon, the Songhai Empire covered an area larger than the empire of Mali had.

Askia Muhammad organized the government of this vast empire. He began by dividing Songhai into provinces. He then put a governor in charge of each province. Askia Muhammad also set up an organized tax system.

Under Askia Muhammad's rule, Islam spread throughout the empire. Muslim scholars converted many people in the cities to Islam. In rural areas, Islamic beliefs were often blended with traditional religious beliefs.

Askia Muhammad's son removed his father from the throne. The rulers of Songhai after Askia were weak. Using guns, Moroccan forces captured Timbuktu and Gao in 1591. Soon after that, the Songhai Empire collapsed.

3. How was Islam spread during Askia Muhammad's rule?

---



---