

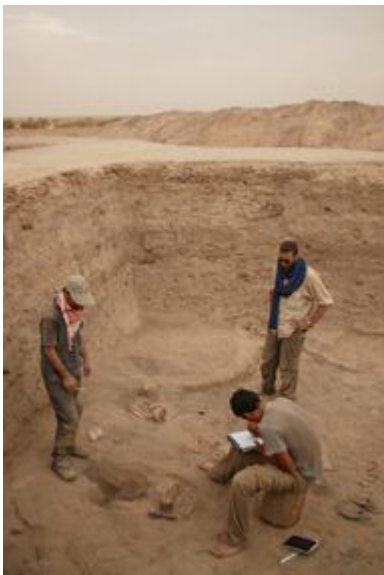
Ancient Mali Empire Sources



This picture shows where the Mali empire was located in West Africa. Mali was located on the Atlantic and near the Niger River. This means that Malians could trade with other societies by using ships to trade their valuable natural resources. The natural resources they traded included gold and salt. Sale of these valuable products helped make Mali very rich. As Mali grew wealthier, it could afford a larger army. As a result, the army conquered new territories and protected trade routes.



This is an image of a carving found in Mali. The carving shows how the Dogon people, a group that lived in Mali, learned astronomy. Astronomy is the study of the moon, stars, and space. In this carving the Dogons are receiving information about the Earth's solar system from a structure with wings that is seen at the top of the carving. On either side of this structure are space alien creatures called "Nommos," who looked like fish-people. The Dogon people believed that the Nommos taught them all about the solar system. The Dogons thought that there was a secret star in the sky next to a star called Sirius. They believed that the secret star could not be seen by the human eye. Scientists in the 20th century later discovered that the Dogons were right! There really was another star near Sirius! The Dogons claimed that they learned information about outer space from the Nommos, such as the idea that Saturn has rings around it. Scientists later discovered that this was also true. No one knows how the Dogons really learned all of this astronomy.



In Mali, archaeologists discovered traces of trade routes and trade items that showed the immense wealth of the Mali empire. Archaeologists have discovered that the trade routes went all over northern Africa and even to the Mediterranean Sea in the north. Although salt was the main item of trade in Mali, it was through the gold trade that the Mali people earned their wealth. They traded it with many other civilizations. The Mali traders traveled on camels across the Sahara Desert to sell gold. This was because gold was used for many different items from making coins to jewelry and gold ornament for clothing. The gold trade helped Mali become rich and powerful. In Mali, evidence of the gold trade was seen everywhere, from gold saddles, caps made with gold ornament, gold weapons, and even gold dog collars!

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This is a picture of a burial site in Dogon Country, Mali. The Dogon people hold a ceremony called a dama to honor their dead. The ceremony is to help the spirits of the dead cross from the world of the living to the spiritual worlds. The ceremony consists of two parts. The first which takes place the day after a person has died included chanting, and dancing. There is also a pretend “battle” in which a person chases away evil spirits, so the dead can rest in peace. After the person is buried, another ceremony is held which lasts several days. There is dancing and drumming. The dancers wear elaborate masks. The social status of the deceased often determined how many dancers performed. For example, a wealthy person could have as many as 100 dancers!



This is a picture of a group of Mali griots with traditional African instruments. A griot is a storyteller. In the Mali culture, there were very few written accounts. This was because the Mali used their art, written symbols and signs to tell stories. As a result, the history of the Mali empire, its villages and people were kept alive through oral history. Oral history is spoken history. Griots would perform stories and poems, often accompanied by music. For example, the founding of the Mali Empire is told in an epic poem called “Sundiata.” Griots would recite this story to people. Griots were very important people in Mali society. Young men and women would train with older griots to learn how to keep alive the oral history tradition.



This is a picture of glass beads found in Mali. Even though the beads were found in Mali, they were originally made in Europe. Europeans traded beads for gold, salt, and other items with Malian traders. The discovery of these glass beads helped show how large the Mali trade empire extended. The beads proved that trade goods from Europe were also part of the trade empire of Mali. As a result, the trading network not only included the countries of African and the Middle East, but Europe as well.

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This is the Sankore Mosque. It is located in Timbuktu, one of the great cities of the Mali Empire. Architects in the Mali Empire had a great challenge: there was little stone to work with. To build their great mosques, libraries and other buildings, the Mali used a special mixture called banco. This is mud mixed with rice husks and poured into molds in the shape of bricks. After the bricks harden, they were used for building. The posts sticking out of the building on the left are large wood beams from trees. The mosque is one example of how the Mali people used resources in their environment to construct their buildings.



This is a sculpture of a Mali Warrior, made sometime between the 13th and 15th centuries. Mali sculpture was one way that the people captured their daily, religious and cultural lives. For example, this sculpture is thought to represent a cavalry soldier of the great emperor Mali king Mansa Musa. The sculpture shows great detail of the soldier and the horse's equipment. Art historians believe this shows the wealth of the empire at this time to be able to support craftsmen who worked to outfit Musa's army with such fine equipment. The horse is also important because there were not many horses in Africa. Those that came to Mali came through Arab traders and they often very expensive. This also suggests an economy that could afford resources such as these.