



## The Mali Empire: How Mansa Musa's Gold Changed the World

Hear the story of one of the greatest rulers of all time. Mansa Musa ruled the mighty Mali Empire. Mali's vast gold mines made his empire incredibly wealthy. During his reign, he built huge mosques, imported Islamic scholars, conquered new lands, and forged new trade routes. In 1324, he set out on an epic pilgrimage to Mecca. He traveled with 60,000 servants and soldiers. He was so generous with his gold on his travels that he caused inflation and accidentally ruined the Egyptian economy.

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*Illustrations featuring a gold coin with a king's profile, gold staff, colorful gemstones, social media icons, rocket, red celestial body, clock faces with moving hands, stylized portrait of Mansa Musa against an African cloth pattern surrounded by gold coins with masks, large palace under a blue sky.*

**0:43**

*African cloth pattern with text 'The Pilgrimage That Shocked the World'; '1324' overlaid on a scene of Musa in a turban riding a camel and leading horses pulling carts with gold; map with red line routing the Islamic pilgrimage from Timbuktu to Mecca; winding path ascending a hill filled with numerous figures in various colors including people, horses, camels, and pull carts.*

**1:40**

*Illustration of gold coins being dropped into a large red hand; scene of three orange pyramids and a pink Great Sphinx all turning into gold as a downward-trending red arrow is sketched; stylized portrait of Musa in a gold frame with the text '400 billion' alongside it and stock market data behind it; graphics of a golden world globe, mound of salt, and ivory tusk.*

**2:38**

*African cloth pattern with text 'A Kingdom Transformed'; map of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula turning to gold; arrows pointing to the Mali Empire on a map; illustration of Musa seated on a throne surrounded by gold, holding a golden nugget and scepter; illustration of several famous Islamic landmarks side by side; graphic of Sankoré Madrasa.*

Who do you think is the richest person in all of history? No, it's not someone who invented a social media platform or a CEO trying to colonize Mars. Believe it or not, the richest person of all time isn't around anymore, and hasn't been for a few centuries. He didn't live in Silicon Valley either. He was a West African emperor named Mansa Musa. And he owned so much gold that he could upend entire economies, and on one occasion, he did exactly that.

But being rich wasn't enough on its own. He wanted to make his kingdom a center of learning and commerce, respected by rulers in distant lands.

So, in 1324, he hit the road with an entourage of tens of thousands, several tons of gold, and a determination to put the Mali Empire on the map, and introduced the world to the powerful Mansa Musa.

It all started with religious obligation. By the 14th century, Islam had become the predominant religion in West Africa, brought by Arab merchants crossing the Sahara. One of Islam's central tenets is a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca. A devout Muslim, Mansa Musa wanted to make the 4,000 mile journey in style. He assembled a caravan of 60,000 people, including officials, soldiers, enslaved people, dozens of horses and camels—each carrying hundreds of pounds of gold.

Along the way, he spent lavishly, gave gifts to local leaders, and handed out gold to almost everyone he met. When he passed through Cairo, he gave away so much gold that he accidentally cratered the price of it, causing a decade long inflation crisis in Egypt. How rich was he really? Some historians estimate his wealth at around 400 billion dollars in today's money. We don't have bank statements, so that number is fuzzy. What we do know is that Mansa Musa didn't get rich from tech stocks or startups. As emperor, he controlled a kingdom twice the size of Texas, half of the world's gold supply, and over 2,000 miles of trade routes, plus salt, ivory, and other natural resources. Even if we never know his exact net worth, one thing is certain, his fortune was staggering.

But Mansa Musa's pilgrimage wasn't just spiritual, it was a show of force. Word of his wealth and generosity spread fast. Merchants from Spain and Italy flocked to the Mali Empire. European maps even started depicting Mansa Musa sitting on a throne covered in gold. And he didn't just flex his riches, he brought back scholars, architects, and thinkers from across the Islamic world. Cities like Timbuktu and Gao exploded with culture. Mosques, schools, and libraries sprang up, some so advanced they rivaled the great centers of the Middle East. The Sankoré Madrasa in Timbuktu grew to more than 25,000 students, and held half a million manuscripts, making it one of the largest libraries in the world.

Mansa Musa wasn't content with economic power alone; he wanted intellectual dominance too.



**3:41**

*African cloth pattern with text 'The Empire's Fall'; empty gold throne with coins dropping from above; map featuring Africa with multi-colored lines representing trade routes, and colorful blobs in West Africa representing provinces; illustration depicting the Songhai Empire; text 'Lasting Legacy'; illustration of the Great Mosque of Djenné in Mali; portrait of Musa in a gold frame with gold coins on each side.*

By the time Mansa Musa died in 1337, Mali was at its peak, but in the decades that followed, economic decline set in as new trade routes bypassed the empire. Internal disputes among heirs weakened the government, leading provinces to break away and invasions from neighboring powers. By the early 1600s, the Mali Empire fell to the Songhai Empire. The Songhai state became even stronger, building on the foundations Mali left behind. Even today, the legacy of Mansa Musa endures throughout West Africa. The iconic mudbrick mosques, with their tall minarets, still stand. Reminders of a mighty empire and a man who used his unimaginable wealth to spread faith, knowledge, and culture.