The wealth of Africa
The kingdom of Mali
Presentation

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How did the kingdom of Mali become so wealthy?
What does the map tell you about the wealth of Timbuktu, and Mali?
TIMBUKTU

Source 1
Timbuktu was one of the most important centres of trade and intellectual life in West Africa in the later Middle Ages, flourishing through participation in long-distance trade networks directed north across the Sahara.

Insoll 1998: 413

Source 2
There are many wells containing sweet water in Timbuktu; and in addition, when the Niger is in flood canals deliver the water to the city. Grain and animals are abundant, so that much milk and butter is consumed. But salt is in very short supply because it is carried here from Taghaza, some 500 miles from Timbuktu.

Food and water in Timbuktu, described in around 1530 by Leo Africanus c. 1526

Source 3
The houses of Timbuktu are huts made of clay-covered sticks with thatched roofs. In the centre of the city is a temple built of stone and mortar, built by an architect named Granata, and in addition there is a large palace, constructed by the same architect, where the king lives. The shops of the craftsmen, the merchants, and especially weavers of cotton cloth are very numerous. Fabrics are also imported from Europe to Timbuktu, carried by Berber merchants.

Buildings in Timbuktu, described in around 1530 by Leo Africanus c. 1526

What was Timbuktu like, according to these sources?
Mansa Musa, King of Mali

This is a picture from a medieval atlas, drawn in modern day Spain. It shows the King of Mali, Mansa Musa, who reigned between 1312 and 1327.

The artist has highlighted certain things about him. What are they?
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Gold crown

Source 5: Catalan Atlas (detail)
© Bibliothèque Nationale de France
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- Gold crown
- Gold ingot

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- Gold ingot
- Gold sceptre

Source 5: Catalan Atlas (detail) © Bibliothèque Nationale de France
MANSA MUSA, KING OF MALI

Source 6
This Black lord is called Musa Mali, Lord of the Black people of Guinea. So abundant is the gold which is found in his country that he is the richest and most noble king in all the land.
Catalan Atlas inscription

Source 7
This man [Mansa Musa] flooded Cairo with his gifts. He left no court emir nor holder of a royal office without the gift of a load of gold. The people of Cairo made incalculable profits out of him and his men in buying and selling and giving and taking. They exchanged gold until they depressed its value in Egypt and caused its price to fall.
Mansa Musa described by al-Umari, quoted in Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 270–271

What impression of Mansa Musa do you get from the Catalan Atlas?
What does this source reveal about Mali’s wealth?
TRADERS AT THE MARKET
IN TIMBUKTU

What can you see going on in this picture?

Source 8: Tuareg traders at the market in Timbuktu
Illustration by Tayo Fatunla
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What can you see going on in this picture?

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- Copper rods used as payment

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What can you see going on in this picture?

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- Kola nuts
- Malian with writing board
- Islamic books

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TRADERS AT THE MARKET IN TIMBUKTU

What can you see going on in this picture?

Mosque
Copper rods used as payment
Tuareg trader
Donkey carrying salt
Kola nuts
Malian with writing board
Islamic books
Malian cloth

Source 8: Tuareg traders at the market in Timbuktu
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TRADERS AT THE MARKET IN TIMBUKTU

What can you see going on in this picture?

How important was trade in Mali?

Mosque
Copper rods used as payment
Tuareg trader
Donkey carrying salt
Kola nuts
Malian with writing board
Islamic books
Malian cloth

Source 8: Tuareg traders at the market in Timbuktu. Illustration by Tayo Fatunla
TRADE IN MALI

**Source 9**

After twenty-five days we reached Taghaza...
In the sand is a salt mine; they dig for the salt, and find it in thick slabs, lying one on top of the other, as though they had been tool-squared and laid under the surface of the earth. A camel will carry two of these slabs.

The Black men come up from their country and take away the salt from there. The negroes use salt as a medium of exchange, just as gold and silver is used [elsewhere]; they cut it up into pieces and buy and sell with it.

Ibn Battuta describing the salt trade (1352), in Hamdun & King: 30

**Source 10**

Gold from Mali’s southerly neighbours, taxed as it passed through Mali, carried across the Sahara to north African cities, and taken from there across the Mediterranean to European ports, fuelled Europe’s economies for centuries
Rotondo-McCord 1998

**Source 11**

Copper mined in Mali came to be a crucial element in trade patterns. It could be exchanged with the peoples to the south who controlled the sources of gold. Kola nuts, animal skins, slaves, grain, meat, and even dairy products were also transported by trading networks.
Rotondo-McCord 1998

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**What did traders from the north bring into Mali?**

**How did Mali become so rich?**

**How did Mali make a profit on gold from the south?**

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Source 12: Sankore Mosque, Timbuktu © Jeremy Meyer
THE SALCOMBE TREASURE

This treasure was found by divers in Salcombe in Devon. The coins and jewellery are from Morocco, but some of the other objects are from Europe.

What objects of gold can you see in this picture?

Source 13: Some of the objects from the Salcombe treasure, lost in a shipwreck off the coast of Devon in the 1630s. British Museum.
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Buckle
Brooch
Coins
Ingot

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What objects of gold can you see in this picture?

What is the connection between this treasure and West Africa?

Why was the ship carrying a mixture of European objects and African gold?

Source 13: Some of the objects from the Salcombe treasure, lost in a shipwreck off the coast of Devon in the 1630s. British Museum.
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www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk

The CarAf Centre

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