

In the fourteenth century, a descendant of Sunjata, Mansa Musa, carried imperial Mali to even greater heights. From 1312 to 1337 this remarkable member of the Keita dynasty ruled an empire comprising much of what is now francophone Africa. The people of Mali were predominantly agricultural, but a substantial number were engaged in various crafts and mining. The fabulously rich mines of Bure were now at their disposal and served to increase the royal coffers.

Mansa Musa's Pilgrimage Mansa Musa, an ardent and pious convert to Islam, embarked upon his hajj or religious pilgrimage to Mecca with spectacular fanfare in 1324. His motivations were also political. Mansa Musa first visited various parts of his kingdom to show his subjects and vassals his tremendous wealth and to demonstrate his benevolence. He then proceeded to Tuat in the land of the Berbers and from there crossed the desert, visited Cairo, and finally went to the holy places of Mecca and Medina, all along the way displaying his kingdom's wealth and power to the Muslim world. Cairo's El Omari described the historic pilgrimage as composed of an entourage of thousands of people, a large portion of which constituted a military escort. Gifts were lavished on the populace, and mosques were built where they were needed. Mansa Musa brought the grandeur of West Africa to international attention, specifically to the notice of Egypt, Arabia, and Europe.