

The wealth of Africa The kingdom of Mali

1: How Important was Trade to Mali?

The geographic location of Mali was an important clue as to its wealth and power it occupied a strategic position on the trade routes which linked the countries north of the Sahara with those to the south.

Source 1

The Black men come up from their country and take away the salt from Taghaza town of Mali [Mali] it sells for twenty to thirty mithqals, and sometimes as much as forty. 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 1998: 30

Source 2

Most historians of Africa agree that an economy of buying and selling was the driving force in the development of Sahel states from as early as 500AD onward. Trade led to the rise of the cities of the Sahel. It gave traders a crucial role to play in the exercise of influence and power in these states.

Rotondo-McCord 1998

Source 4

Between the 11th and the 17th centuries West Africa was the leading supplier of gold to the international economy African gold contributed to the functioning of the domestic economy in Europe....And it contributed to the wealth of the great states of the Western Sudan.

Hopkins 1973: 82

Source 5

A traveller in this country carries nothing but pieces of salt and glass ornaments, which people call beads, and sweet-smelling goods. When he comes to a village the womenfolk of the blacks bring out chicken, millet, milk, fruit, pounded haricot beans. The traveller buys what he wants of these.

Ibn Battuta on trade within Mali (1352), in Hamdun & King 1998: 40-41

Source 6

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



Source 3: West African gold, made into coins and jewelry in Morocco, shipwrecked off the coast of England British Museum