

The wealth of Africa The kingdom of Mali

2: HOW POWERFUL WERE THE KINGS OF MALI?

Little is known about most of the kings of Mali, but thanks to Arab historians we have a few details about the ones described here. As you read the extracts, try to decide whether each one might have been a strong or weak ruler. First you will have to decide what makes a strong ruler.

Source 1

He [Sunjata] was a lad full of strength; his arms had the strength of ten men and his biceps inspired fear in his companions. He had already that authoritative way of speaking which belongs to those who are destined to command.

Niane, 1994

Source 2

This king is the greatest of the Muslim kings of the Sahel. He rules the most extensive territory, has the most numerous army, is the bravest, the richest, the most fortunate, the most victorious over his enemies, and the best able to distribute benefits.

Mansa Suleiman described by al-Umari (c. 1350) in Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 261

Source 3

This man 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 (c. 1350) in Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 270–271

Source 4

[Mansa] Khalifa was weak-minded and used to shoot arrows at his people and kill them for sport. So they rose against him and killed him.

Mansa Khalifa described by Ibn Khaldun (c. 1380) in Levtzion 1973: 64

Source 5

Thanks to [Sakura's] powerful government the territory of the people of Mali was expanded and they overpowered the neighboring nations... Their authority became mighty. All the nations of the Sahel stood in awe of them, and the merchants from North Africa traveled to their country.

Mansa Sakura, a freed slave who took over the throne in a rebellion around 1300, described in Levtzion 1963: 345



Source 6: Mansa Musa holding a gold ingot from the Catalan Atlas, 1375

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