

# WAS MANSA MUSA THE WEALTHIEST MAN EVER?

By John Isabu



When asked about the wealthiest person in history, our minds usually travel to more contemporary figures like Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Bill gates, or sometimes the more political figures like the Saudi Prince, the King of Spain, or even legendary money bags like Saddam Hussein. Historically the world has experienced some vast wealth displayed by one person, examples like the emperors of Rome, Alexander the great, or Napoleon Bonaparte, however the

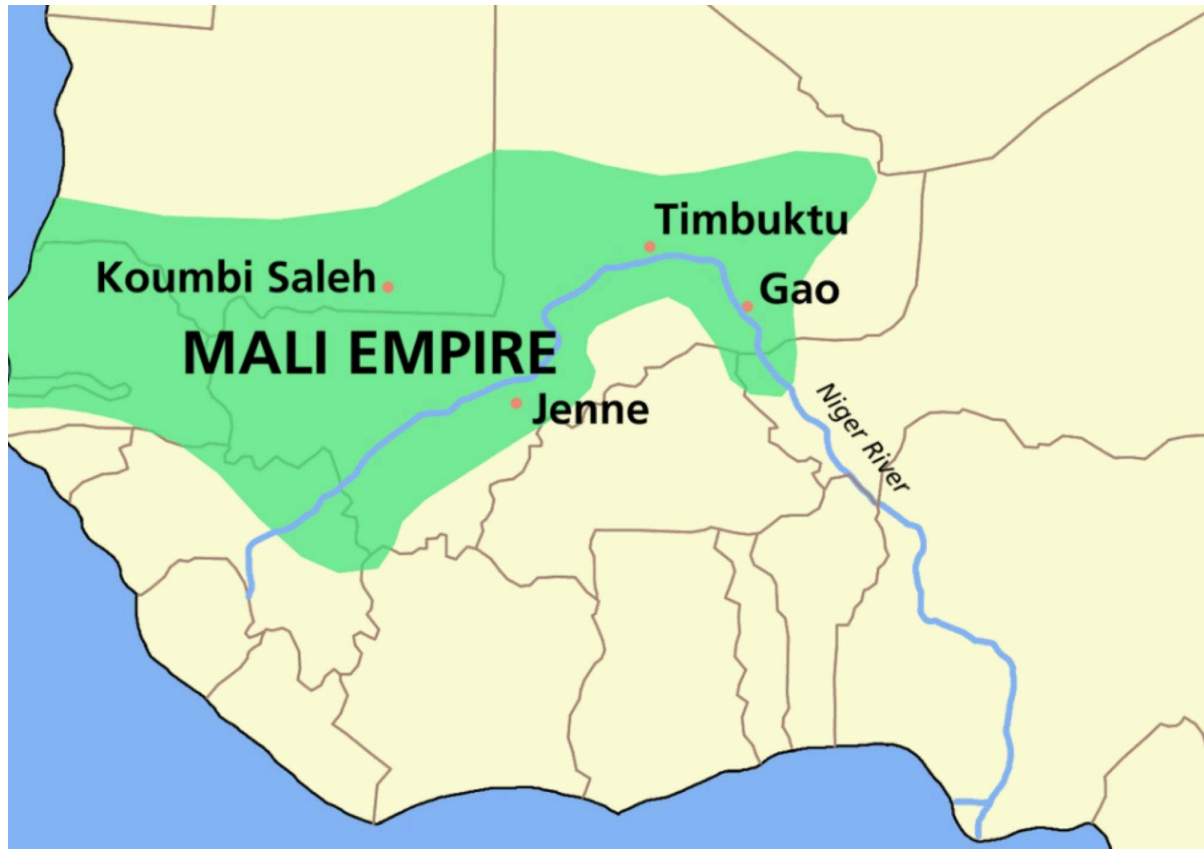
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ultimate herald of the ambiguous title is Mansa Musa of Mali. It would come as a shocker to most people when they learn about Mansa Musa's vast wealth for the first time, the ultimate amount of achievable wealth belonging to a 14th century African.

The African monarch had so many resources in his empire, his praises have been passed from generation to generation through poems and references in historical books.

Mansa Musa (Musa I of Mali) ruled Mali from 1312 C.E. to 1337 C.E. During his reign, Mali was one of the richest kingdoms of Mali, and Mansa Musa was among the richest individuals in the world. The ancient kingdom of Mali spread across parts of modern-day Mali, Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso. Mansa Musa developed cities like Timbuktu and Gao into important cultural centers. He also brought architects from the Middle East and across Africa to design new buildings for his cities. Mansa Musa turned the kingdom of Mali into a sophisticated center of learning in the Islamic world.



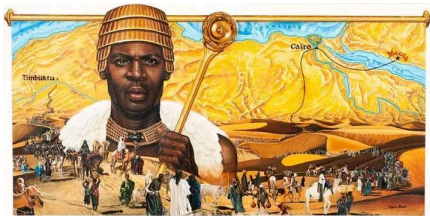
When Mansa Musa went on a pilgrimage (hajj) to the holy city of Mecca in 1324 C.E., his journey through Egypt caused quite an uproar. Arab writers from the time said that he travelled with an entourage of tens of thousands of people and dozens of camels, each carrying 136 kilograms (300 pounds) of gold. While in Cairo, Mansa Musa met with the ruler of Egypt, and his caravan spent and gave away so much gold that the overall value of gold decreased in Egypt for the next 12 years.



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Stories of his fabulous wealth even reached Europe. The Catalan Atlas, created in 1375 C.E. by Spanish cartographers, shows West Africa dominated by a depiction of Mansa Musa sitting on a throne, holding a nugget of gold in one hand and a golden staff in the other. Mali was also put on the official map of the world.

After the publication of this atlas, Mansa Musa became cemented in the global imagination as a figure of stupendous wealth. Historians estimate that the Mali Empire was at that point the largest gold producer in the world, owning more than half the world's total supply, according to the British Museum.



According to several scholars and students of west African history, his wealth was termed 'incomprehensible', as the amount of gold and precious stones accumulated by him in that period were quite absurd to come up with a grand figure. Some historians actually debate on the topic. Some say that with the data available for research, his wealth can be summed up to four hundred million dollars today, the figure solely based on the reported gold.

With Musa on the throne, the kingdom continued to expand phenomenally, thanks to his work in expanding trade in the region. His wealth continued to skyrocket from mining significant salt and gold deposits, as well as trading elephant ivory, as stated by National Geographic.

Mansa Musa died in 1337 and was succeeded by his sons. His skillful administration left his empire well-off at the time of his death, but eventually, the empire fell apart. Mansa Musa

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remained iconic in the imagination of the world as a symbol of fabulous wealth. However, his riches are only one part of his legacy, and he is also remembered for his Islamic faith, promotion of scholarship, and patronage of culture in Mali. He was indeed an empire builder.

The legacy of Mansa Musa is totally fascinating, not only was he emperor of one of the largest and greatest African empires, he also possessed the greatest achievable wealth in history, all this feat in the 14th century BCE. Will anyone from our era build his/her resources enough to challenge the amazing legacy of the greatest Mansa of Mali? It would be an interesting turn of event for everyone around the world.

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