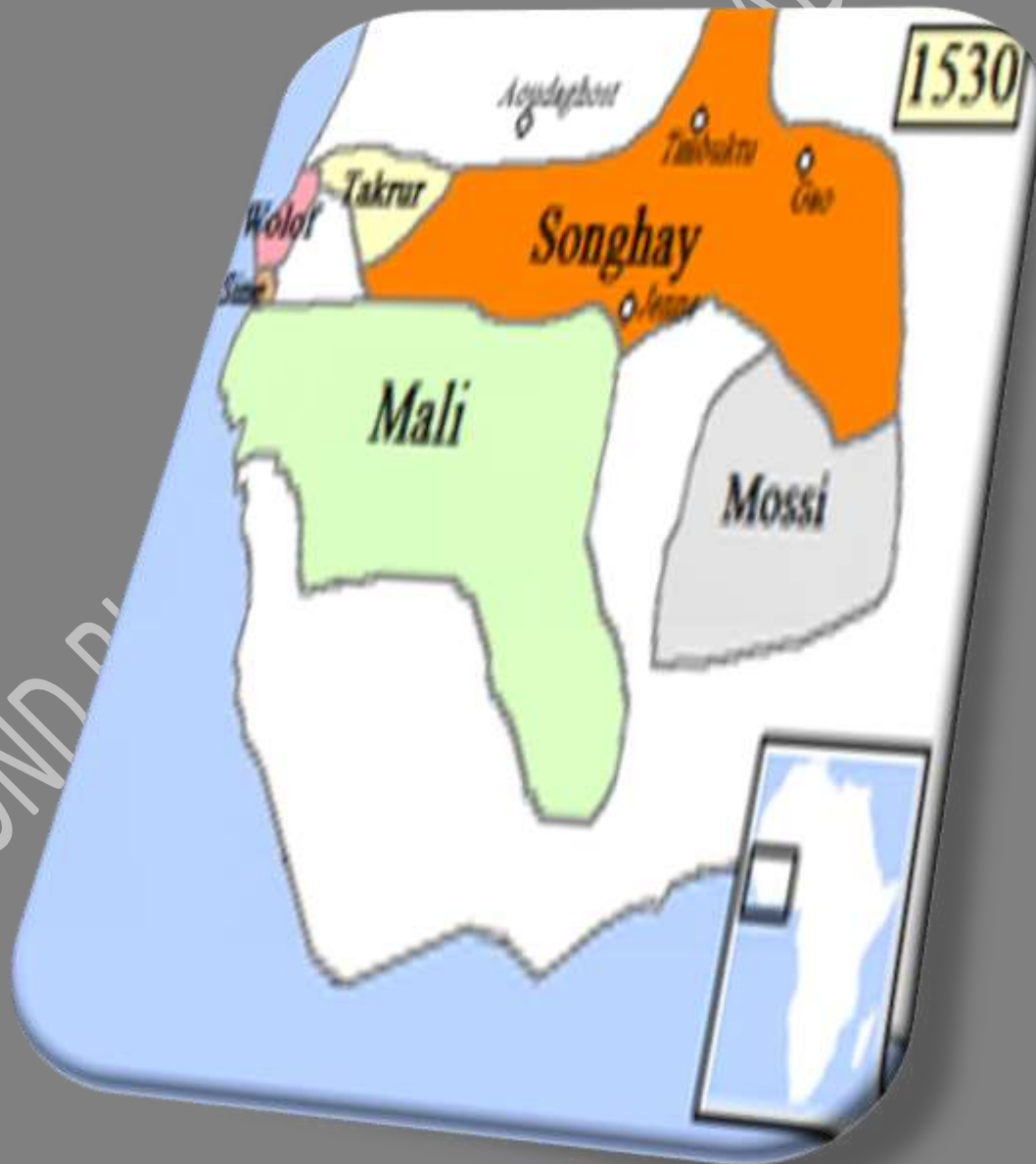


BABILANIBARO

THE GREAT MANDINGUAL AND HIS GREAT EMPIRES

TOME I



THE GREAT MANDINGUAL AND HIS GREAT EMPIRES

Empire of Ghana

(Ouagadou Empire)

IV^e century - XIIIth century



Map of the Ghana Empire at its peak

General informations

Capital city

Kumbi

Language

soninké , mandated languages

Religion

African traditional religions , Islam

History and events

it. 350 BC AD

Foundation

it. 300

Conquered by Sosso

it. 1200

Submitted to the Empire of Mali

Previous entities :

- Kingdom of Ouagadou

Next entities :

- Almoravids
- Kingdom of Sosso

The **empire of Ghana** is an ancient African kingdom that existed from III^e the XIIIth century of our era whose center is in the current border area between Mali and Mauritania. His capital was Koumbi-Saleh . He is the first of the three great empires marking the imperial period West African .

Designated by its inhabitants under the name of Ouagadou (Wagadou) empire , it is known in Europe and in Saudi like the empire of Ghana. From the kingdom of Ouagadou , the Ghanaian empire grew VIII^e century with the export of gold and salt. He knows his heyday at X^e century , when it then extends over a territory straddling the current border between the Mauritania and the Mali , including, in addition to Ouagadou , the provinces of Tekrur (Current Senegal), Sosso , from Mande and of Diarra , the gold

regions of [Bouré](#) and [Bambouk](#) and [Oualata](#) . In 990, [Aoudaghost](#) , a great Berber city, the nerve center of trade between north and south, is annexed ^[1] .

The empire of Ghana declines from [XI^e century](#) , successively under domination [almoravides](#) , then under the tutelage of [Sosso](#) , and finally under that of the [empire of Mali](#) .

Summary

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Origin of the name

The first reference to the kingdom of Ghana by historians is attributed to the Arab astronomer [Muhammad al-Fazari](#) , at [VII^e century](#) cited by [Al-Masudi](#) in his book *Muruj adh-dhahab* (*The golden meadows*). He talks about " Ghana, country of gold " ^[2] .

[Al-Bakri](#) , in his *Geographical description of the known world* written to [XI^e century](#) , specifies that " Ghana is the name worn by the kings of this people ; the name of their country is Awkar " ^[3] . However, in the text, he uses the term of Ghana systematically to evoke the country. In the same way, Europeans and Westerners have generalized the name " Ghana empire " In reference to the title of the king. The term Ghana, comes from the *sonninké nwana* meaning " hero / warrior " . The inhabitants of the kingdom and the empire, for their part, used, according to oral tradition, the term " Wagadou " (or " Ouagadou "). The term Wagadou means " herd city " Or according to another hypothesis " Land of the Wagué " . The suffix *from where* Is a term of the languages of the [Mande](#) (of which Soninké is one) which means " city »/« territory " And found in many places in West Africa (such as the capital of [Burkina Faso](#) , [Ouagadougou](#)). Word *waga* can mean herd " Or refer to the Wagué clan (ruling families).

Evolution of the empire

The origins of the kingdom

Two theses exist on the origins of [Kingdom of Ouagadougou](#), which will later become an empire.

According to the West African oral tradition, the Wagadougou Core of the empire, was founded towards the III^e century BC. AD and an armed population from the East led by a man named Dinga Cissé.

According to medieval sources written by Arabic-speaking chroniclers, the kingdom was founded by the [Soninkés](#), people [animist](#) living at the southern limit of the Sahara. The kingdom of Ghana then grew to become an empire by dominating the leaders of the chieftaincies located nearby.

According to the [Tarikh es-Sudan](#), " history of Sudan In French, Ghana would have been founded in III^e - century by the black people of farmers, the [Soninkés](#).

In 734, the first Arab-Berbers enter Ghana, where Soninke rulers are in power. The occupation of [Maghreb](#) by the Arabs favors the trafficking of gold and [slaves](#) between Ghana and [Sijilmasa](#), and at the same time, its expansion and wealth.

Towards the climax, under the Cisse Tounkara dynasty



Map of the main roads of [trans-Saharan trade](#) between the year 1000 and 1500. The main gold regions are indicated in brown.

But at the end of VIII^e - century the king of [Wagadougou](#) [Kaya Magan Cisse](#)^[4] push back the Berber foreigners. At the beginning of the reign of the first Cisse Tounkara ruler, his kingdom extends only to Wagadougou and [Awkar](#) (or Aoukar), but a few years later, he realizes the unity of all Soninke.

The " Ghana Arabic-speaking chroniclers is the name of the sovereign. This term comes from soninke *nwana* (which reads *ghana* or *ghana* for a non-Soninke-phone speaker). It means hero / great warrior. Among other titles of the king, figure *Kaya Maga* " (more precisely " *Kanɛ Mahan* In Soninke, that is to say the " master of gold "). [Mahmud Kati](#) in his [Tarikh el-fettach](#) speaks of this etymological origin ^[5]. Indeed, in this region, the nuggets are considered evil and only the king has the power to ward off the fate. ^[ref. - necessary] For Charles Monteil, this is a misinterpretation. For him the term "Kaya Magan" (*Xa ñe Maha* ") That means " mighty hunter " ^[6] ".

Gold is closely linked to the birth and importance of Ghana. The generalization of the use of [dromedary](#) from the end of [II^e century](#) facilitates links with North Africa. The "gold country" corresponds to the gold regions of the [Bambouk](#) and [Bouré](#), on which extends the authority of the rulers of Ghana, whose capital was located in [Kumbi Saleh](#), south of present [Mauritania](#).

At the end of [IXth century](#), the rulers of Ghana extend their authority to the west over the gold-bearing region of [galam](#) and on the [Tekrou](#), close to [Djenne](#) and of [Timbuktu](#), and to the north on some Berber tribes [Sahara](#).

the [X^e century](#), the Berbers of [Aoudaghost](#) revolt against the authority of the tounka (king) of Ghana, who is put to death by the leader of the insurgents. Towards [990](#), a successor of the assassinated king of Ghana seizes the kingdom of [Aoudaghost](#), which is placed under the authority of a civil servant.

The pinnacle of Ghana lies in [XI^e century](#). The country is very rich. The federation of kingdoms was gradually centralized around the king, holder of all the religious, military and judicial powers. The capital of the kingdom, [Koumbi Saleh](#), populated with 20 000 inhabitants ^[ref. - necessary], is shared between Muslims and Soninkees, animists.

The decline



The Kingdom of Ghana is weakened by the surge of Saharan Muslims [Almoravids](#) ([XIth century](#)) and the partial destruction of Koumbi Saleh ([1076](#)) but it is especially the drought linked to an intensive exploitation of the forest resources which leads to the dispersion of Soninkés (according to the legend, this drought is linked to the death of the snake [Bida](#)).

The kingdom of Ghana then declines progressively : the [Kingdoms of Diarra](#), of [Sosso](#), from Mali acquire their independence and the vast empire of Ghana is soon limited only to its original nucleus, the small [kingdom of Ouagadougou](#) ^[1].

[Soumaoro Kanté](#), at the head of [kingdom of Sosso](#), seizes Ghana in 1203. It loses its independence definitively after its integration in the [empire of Mali](#) of [Sundjata Keita](#) after [1240](#).

Organization of the empire at its peak

King's succession and funeral

Ghana's succession was matrilineal : the successor of the king was thus the first son of his sister ^[2] thus preserving with certainty the family lineage. Because, as Al-Bakri writes, the inhabitants of Ghana think that "the sovereign is certain that his nephew is indeed the son of his sister ; but he can not rest assured that he whom he looks upon as his own son is in reality " ^[3] In the Wolof language this sister is called [Linguère](#). His first daughter becomes *Linguere* imperial in turn.

Al-Bakri writes that when the king died, a large dome was built of wood, at the place that would serve as a tomb, in which the corpse was placed on a large sofa with cushions and carpets. The ornaments, weapons, dishes and cups he had used were placed beside the body, as well as food and drink. Many of the cooks and beverage makers were also locked in the dome. The building was then covered with mats, canvases, and finally earth until the dome a hill. A ditch was dug around the this hill, leaving only a single access passage ^[9] .

Religious organization

The [animism](#) was the official religion. The inhabitants of the Ghanaian empire worshiped the serpent [Bida](#) .

The [Islam](#) was also tolerated and practiced by many foreigners from the Maghreb and some indigenous people. Kan Mer, son of Emperor Bessi, converted to Islam ^[1]. Al-Bakri points out that the treasury steward was systematically chosen from among Muslims, as were most ministers ^[10] . According to these writings (but also those, later, [Ibn Battûta](#) and from [Ibn Khaldun](#)) the animists had to kneel and sprinkle their heads with dust. On the other hand, the Muslims saluted the king while clapping their hands ^[11] .

The capital Koumbi Saleh consisted of two neighborhoods : one animist, the other Muslim with 12 mosques ^[12] .

The capital Koumbi Saleh

Detailed article : [Koumbi Saleh](#) .

The organization of the capital has been described by Al-Bakri from stories he has collected from travelers and merchants. He writes that "Ghâna is composed of two towns situated in a plain ^[13] inhabited by Muslims, which is very large and contains twelve mosques, in one of which Friday prayers are celebrated. (...) In the vicinity there are several wells of fresh water, which provide the drink of the inhabitants and with which one cultivates vegetables.

" The city inhabited by the king is six miles from it and bears the name of El Ghaba "the forest, the grove". The territory that separates them is covered with dwellings. The buildings are built with stones and acacia wood. The residence of the king consists of a castle and several huts with rounded roofs and the whole is surrounded by a fence similar to a wall. "

" The city of the king is surrounded by huts, masses of trees and grove, which serve as homes for the wizards of the nation, responsible for religious worship ; it is there that they placed their idols and the tombs of their sovereigns. Men guarding these woods prevent anyone from entering or becoming aware of what is going on there. This is also where are the king's prisons ^[14] . "

The archaeological site of Koumbi Saleh was discovered in 1914 by [Bonnel de Mezieres](#) . It was excavated in 1939 by Thomassey, Mauny and Lazartigues, then again in 1960 by Serge Robert and Sophie Berthier. It was inscribed in 2001 on the indicative list of [Unesco](#) ^[15] .

Army

according to [Al-Bakri](#) , Ghana's army was made up of 200,000 warriors, including more than 40,000 archers ^[16] . It consisted of the imperial guard, but also many men from the vassal territories. There were riders (the horses were "of a very small size") and Berber camel ^[17] .

Justice

According to Al-Bukri, the royal court was located in the animist district of [Koumbi Saleh](#) where the king resided. The king's prisons were located in the woods of this same district. He specifies that "as soon as a man is locked up there, one does not hear any more about him" ^[10] .

According to al-Bukri, the king regularly gave hearings to the people in order to listen to their grievances and to remedy them. For this, says Al-Bukri, "he sits in a pavilion around which are placed 10 horses covered with golden caparison, behind him stand 10 pages bearing shields and swords mounted in gold, on his right are the son of the princes of his empire, dressed in magnificent garments, and having their hair braided and intermingled with gold, the governor of the city sits on the ground in front of the king, and all around him stand the [viziers](#) in the same position. The door of the pavilion is guarded by dogs of excellent breed, who almost never leave the place where the king is; they wear necklaces of gold and silver, garnished with bells of the same metals. The opening of the royal session is announced by the sound of a kind of drum, which they call *deba* , and which is formed of a long piece of hollowed out wood. At the sound of this instrument the people assemble " ^[18] .

Justice was regularly rendered with the [test of water](#) . Al-Bukri writes that "the man who denies a debt, who is accused of murder or any other crime, is brought before the provost, who takes a very thin piece of a kind of wood, whose taste is pungent. and bitter, it infuses it into as much water as it pleases, and it obliges the accused to drink it. If the stomach of this man rejects the beverage, it is recognized that the accusation is unfounded; on the contrary, the liquor remains there, we look at the prisoner as guilty " ^[19] .

The different rulers over time

Kings of Awkar

- [Kaya Magan Cisse](#) : ? -350
- Wagué kings, unknown names 350-750

"Ghanas" of Wagadou

- Majan Dyabe Cisse or Dinga Cisse : 750 approx
- Ghanas with unknown names : aprox. 800-1040
 - Riyo : 1040
 - Bassi : 1040-1062
 - Menin : 1062-1076

Almoravid Occupation

- [Abu Bakr Ibn Omar](#) 1076-1087

"Ghanas" of Wagadou

[Dynasty of Diarisso](#) :

- Kambine Diaresso : 1087-1090
 - Suleiman : 1090-1100
 - Bannu Bubu : 1100-1120
- Majan Wagadou : 1120-1130
 - Gane : 1130-1140
 - Musa : 1140-1160

- Birama Sacko: 1160-1180

Occupation Kaniaga

- Diara Kante : 1180-1202
- Soumaba Cisse, Vasal of Soumaoro Kante : 1203-1235

Alliance with the Mali Empire

- Soumaba Cisse allies with Sundjata Keita : 1235-1240

Mali Empire

1230 - 1545



The empire of Mali at the beginning of [XIVth century](#) .

General informations

Status	Monarchy
Capital city	Niani then Kangaba
Language	Mandingo
Religion	Islam , African traditional religions
Change	Gold

Previous entities :

- [Empire of Ghana](#)

Next entities :

- [Songhai Empire](#)

The **Empire of Mali** is a state [African medieval](#) . Founded at [XIIIth century](#) by [Soundiata Keita](#) , he had his heyday at [XIVth century](#). He would be at the origin of the [charter of the Manden](#) .

Summary

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sources

The sources concerning the history of the empire of Mali are few, equivocal and incomplete, which explains why its history is still debated.

written

They are of two types : external written sources, the only ones up to XVIth century and local written sources from the XVIth century that emanate from the literate circles of the [Niger loop](#) . The first include the writings of Arab and Berber travelers and compilers, essentially [Al Bakri](#) XIIth century [Al Umari](#) , [Ibn Battuta](#) and [Ibn Khaldoun](#) XVIth century. The seconds are [Tarikh es-Sudan](#) and the [Tarikh al-Fattach](#) , Chronicles / History of Blacks and Chronicle of the Seeker, which appear after the conquest of the [Songhai Empire](#) by the Moroccans and who treat a little of Mali.

The stories of Portuguese and Spanish travelers bring information about a kingdom of Mali later ^(When . 2) and who then regressed a lot.

oral

In view of the place occupied by [Iread](#) At the Malian court, and since this social function still exists, oral traditions occupy a large place in studies on ancient Mali. They

have not been the subject of a general collection and a group publication which would allow comparative studies. They are supposedly fixed and transmitted from generation to generation in a formalized way but they vary from one village to another, from one region to another and thanks to the early collection of these traditions in the first hours of colonization it is possible to see that they have also undergone alterations over time.

They are therefore unreliable and should not be seen as a raw reservoir of historical information because they reflect social issues and provide more information on the representations of the societies in which they emerged. The best-known tradition is that of the ascension to power of [Soundiata Keïta](#) which has been the subject of numerous publications, notably by DT Niane *Sunjata or the Mandingo epic*. See also the works of Youssouf Tata Cisse with the griot Wa Kamissoko and Siriman Kouyaté for writings of the [Manden Charter](#), a UNESCO World Heritage Site but whose seniority is disputed.

Archaeological studies

Few archaeological studies are available. The most important, the excavations of Filipowiak to [Niani](#), in 1965, 1968 and 1973, did not give conclusive results for the medieval period (XIII-XVI).

Etymology



The [Great Mosque of Djenné](#) - World Heritage.

The etymology of the name "Mali" is not clear. The inhabitants of the Empire have always called their country [Mande](#) or [Mande](#) and not Mali. "Man" Means the [manatee](#) in Bambara-Malinké and "den" Means "child", is "Mandingo" = Manatee child. In Arabic sources, reference is made to the Malel Empire, Malal, Melli, Mali^[1], without any indication of the meaning of this term. However, the word "Mali", In Bambara-Malinké means hippopotamus [\[ref. - necessary\]](#).

The [Peul](#) (nomadic ethnic group present in Mali since the creation of the empire) call the inhabitants of Manden : *Malinké*, literally "good luck". It is deduced that the Mandenka themselves call their country *Mande* and the Fulani call this country : *Mali* ("conclude an arrangement »,« bring luck ») And its inhabitants *Malinké*, "those who bring good luck". Mali, in Bambara, also means "hippopotamus". It turns out that this animal is particularly popular in the south of the country, where dwell the Malinkés and Bambara.

Geography

The empire of Mali stretched between [Sahara](#) and the equatorial forest, the [Atlantic Ocean](#) and the [Niger loop](#) on the current ones [Mali](#), [Burkina](#)

[Faso](#) , [Senegal](#) , [Gambia](#) , [Guinea](#) , [Guinea-Bissau](#) , [Mauritania](#) and a lot of the [Ivory Coast](#) ^[1] .

It was an important crossroads between the nomadic peoples of the Sahara and the peoples of equatorial black Africa.

Its economy was based on [agriculture](#) , [handicrafts](#) , mining of [gold](#) mines , sales of [slaves](#) and the [ivory trade](#) towards the Mediterranean basin.

Capital of the Mali Empire

The capital of the Mali Empire was Niani, currently a small village in the Republic of Guinea, more precisely in the Siguiri prefecture in the far north-east of the country.

Sources related to the capital of the kingdom of Mali

There are several types of sources that tell us about the capital.

The written sources of Arab geographers and Tarikh

For the period of the climax of the kingdom (XIII - XV century) we have the stories of three geographers and Arab travelers. First of all, Umari ^[2] (1301-1349) gives us information about the city that dates back to before 1340 through an informant. The next geographer is [Ibn Battuta](#) (1304-1368). His relationship is the most important concerning the history of the kingdom of Mali in general. He was the only one to visit the Sahel during a trip that began in February 1352 and ended in December 1353. He spent eight months in the capital and gives us very precise information on the structure of the city. The description of its journey to get there has many shadows and remains the point most interpreted by historiography ^[3] . Finally the last great author for this period is [Ibn Khaldoun](#) (1332-1406) who collected information from Cairo. Let us note that the translations and editions of the manuscripts, when they give it to us, all include a different name to designate the capital.

We find the same problem in the chronicles (*Tarikh*) of XVIth and 17th century century, respectively the [Tarikh es-Sudan](#) of [Abderrahmane Es Saâdi](#) and the [Tarikh el-fettach](#) of [Mahmud Kati](#) that tell the story of the [Songhay Empire](#) but gives a small place to the history of Mali.

So finally for the name of the capital we have several translations and vocalizations for the name of the capital (Malli, Byty, Bini, Bani, Yani ' , non exhaustive list). Since then do all these names return to the same place or do they designate the same capital? ?

Oral and archaeological sources

It is not correct to speak of archaeological sources for the capital since to date it has not been found yet. However, several sites appear in historiography. Niani-Madugu, Mani-Koura or Mali-Tombo, and finally Niani, a small village near the river [Sankarani](#) whose archaeological site was excavated during three campaigns in 1965, 1968 and 1973. This last site is the subject of a development below.

Finally, the last type of source concerns oral traditions, formalized narratives whose transmission is ensured by the caste of *I read* already present under the kingdom of Mali and still present in some villages of Mali today, the best known is Keyla.

The first hypotheses (1841-1912)

Cooley ^[4] , an English geographer, is the first to issue in 1841 a hypothesis on the capital. It is located near the village of Samee, near the Joliba River. [Binger](#) , a French officer who crossed the Sahel, gave in 1892 a very different locality, the site of

Nianimadougou, near Yamina. These assumptions have in common the left bank of the [Niger river](#) . They have not been taken up by historiography ^[5] . It is [Maurice Delafosse](#) which first gives a real consistency to the subject. In 1912, in his work *Upper Senegal-Niger* he agrees with Binger at first, before turning to a new hypothesis that has emerged as a paradigm on the issue.

Niani is the capital of Mali (1923-1958)

This is the period when publications on the capital issue reach their peak. The colonial administrators, Delafosse first, then Vidal and Gaillard thereafter, establish, by a series of articles, a formal link between the name of Niani of the site near the [Sankarani](#) , and the present name ^{[What?] [Not clear]} in the written sources. A paradigm has emerged and it is clearly a strong causal link of the archaeological excavations that took place in Niani.

Archaeological campaigns in Niani (1965-1973)

The Polish Filipowiak conducted the excavation campaigns on this site. He was assisted by the specialist of the history of Mali, DT Niane and maintained a correspondence with [Raymond Mauny](#) the French specialist in medieval Sudan, professor in the Sorbonne. After the excavations he published in 1979 a book presenting the conclusions of his work, *Archaeological studies on the medieval capital of Mali* . He claims to have found the capital of the kingdom of Mali.

The questioning of Filipowiak's results comes quickly. Indeed, the conclusions of his work are known before the release of his book. Meillassoux and Hunwick, taking the route of Ibn Battuta, propose new locations. Mauny before them ^[6] pointed out the contradictions of Filipowiak's writings with the results of carbon-14 analyzes.

Towards the challenge of the site of Niani as capital, the renewal of the hypotheses

Faced with this impasse of attempts to find the capital in the golden age, historians turn to the primitive capital (Conrad, Green) and now use more neutral terms, such as Mansa Court or Royal Mansa Court, for to supplant the term capital since the last hypotheses tend to consider the mobile or nomadic nature of the court between several cities (idea conveyed by the Anglo-Saxon historian community ^[7]). The question remains unresolved, the sites having been studied did not give convincing results. The heuristic capacity of the work of the sources seems to have begun, which explains a certain abandonment of the question. It may be necessary to redefine space and studies to relaunch prospections on new areas.

Organization

On the politico-administrative level



Constituent Assembly of the Mande Empire , anonymous, 2010, [Siby](#) ([Mali](#))

The empire of Mali was a confederation made up of tributary states and provinces. The provinces were headed by governors called Farins or Farba, and there was a [Vizir](#), who was prime minister. The emperor was seconded by a council of elders (military leaders, civilians and marabouts). All political and administrative decisions were taken in council.

There were no precise rules of succession to power, sometimes it was the brother, sometimes the son of the deceased sovereign who succeeded. But very often a prestigious warrior came to power.

- Constituent Assembly of the Mandé Empire, details



On the economic plan

The Empire had become prosperous thanks to gold mines, copper mines and a large trans-Saharan trade. This prosperity led to the progress of cities such as Oualata, Timbuktu, Djenne and Niani.

On the social plan

The extended family was the basis of social organization.

On the religious level

There was no official religion. The emperor was a Muslim, but most people living in Mali were animists. The people accepted the Emperor's Islam as an attribute of his magical power. For its part, the emperor never had the will to convert to the people. Indeed, slavery was a social reality in medieval Malian society and was a source of income during

wars, and a Muslim can not reduce another Muslim to slavery, hence the interest of the rulers not to convert the majority of the people.

History

The origins



Manding (here in the region of [Siby](#)) is the cradle of the Mali Empire

The region of [Manding](#) (or [Manden](#)) was divided into three provinces headed by the clans [Malinke](#) : Conde reigned over the province of Do, the Camara on the [Bouré](#) and the [Keita Konate](#) allied to Traore in Kiri. [Around 1050](#) , the clan [Keita Konate](#) outweighs others. They convert to [Islam](#) and refuse submission to the [empire of Ghana](#) .

At the end of [XIIth](#) _ [century](#) reign on the manding [Naré Maghann Konaté](#) , father of [Keita Soundiata](#) . His residence [Niani](#) located in the region of [Siguiri](#) (old Manding) in the present [Guinea](#) . He seeks to ally with neighboring kingdoms to oppose nomads from the Sahara to capture slaves.

North, [Soumaoro Kanté](#) , King of [Sosso](#) conquers the small neighboring kingdoms to [XIIIth](#) _ [century](#) and is a very disciplined army. Wanting to control the gold mines, Soumaoro Kanté attacks Manding.

Sundiata Keïta

The life of Soundiata Keïta is known to us from the oral traditions reported by the [griots](#) : in the form of a legendary epic, they make it a founding hero. Nevertheless brief mentions of the character and the geopolitical context at the time of his reign in two Arab-Berber authors of the [XIVth](#) century ([Ibn Khaldun](#) and in a lesser extent [Ibn Battuta](#)), as well as in the written chronicles of [17th](#) century , confirm that he was indeed a historical figure and corroborate some facts evoked in the oral sagas.

In difficulty in front of Soumaoro Kanté's attacks, the Malinkés appealed to [Keita Soundiata](#) . According to the tradition told by [griots](#) , Soundiata Keïta was born handicapped and it was only later that he could have walked. He was allegedly persecuted by his elder brother Dankaran Tuman, which would have pushed him into exile in Nema.

Towards [1230](#) he becomes king and he reunites the Malinke clans to [Siby](#) . According to oral traditions, he organized an army of ten thousand horsemen and one hundred thousand infantrymen and began the war against the king of Sosso. After several battles, it's towards [1235](#) that Soundiata Keïta defeats the army of [Soumaoro](#) at [Kirina](#) . According to legend, Soumaoro disappears in the mountains around [Koulikoro](#) . Sundjata Keïta then conquers all the kingdoms of the region that he unifies to form the Empire of Mali. He is proclaimed [Mansa](#) " which means " King of

Kings ". It sets up an administrative and military organization. The population is divided into 30 clans : 16 clans of free men; 4 clans of griots; 5 marabout clans, and 5 artisan clans. To gather these clans, he sets up the system of [joking kinship](#) system . It sets up two military governments in the North in Soura and South in Sankaran. He established the capital of the Empire in [Niani](#) .

After these conquests, the reign of Sundiata Keita is known to be an era of peace, prosperity and freedom as a result of the proclamation of the [Charter of Mande](#) ^[8] .The Malian empire then brought together people from different ethnic groups ([Malinkés](#) , [Bambaras](#) , [Wolofs](#) , [Toucouleurs](#))

Soundiata Keita dies around [1255](#) , presumably by drowning. Legend has it that he turned into a [hippopotamus](#) .

The successors of Soundiata Keita



Sundjata Keita at the constituent assembly

On the death of Soundiata Keita, several of his sons succeeded him : Ouali Mansa wullen (around 1255 - around [1270](#)), Ouati (around 1270 - around [1274](#)), Khalifa (around 1274 - around [1275](#)). Then, it is Abu Bakr (Abubakar I) (around 1275 - [1285](#)), grandson of Soundiata Keita who takes the throne.

After the death of the latter, Sakura, who is not part of the line of Keita, seized the throne and reign for 15 years, from 1285 to [1300](#) during which he will consolidate the Empire.

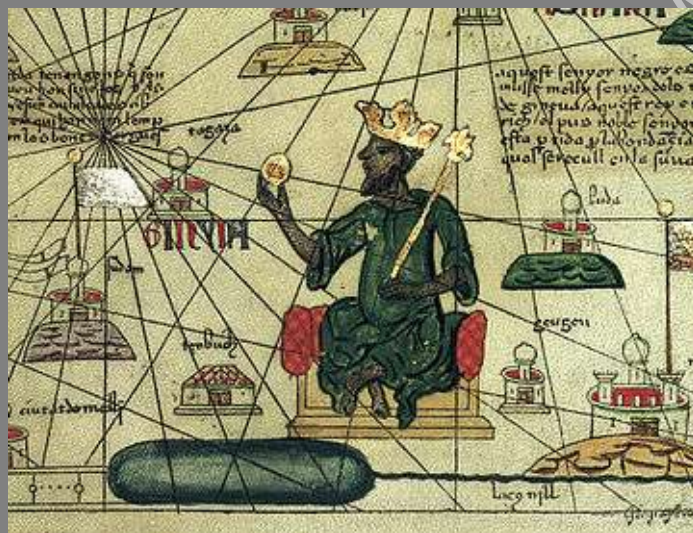
At his death, the descendants of Sundiata Keita found power with Gao (circa 1300- [1305](#)) and the latter's son, Mohammed ibn Gao (circa 1305- [1310](#)), and finally his nephew [Aboubakri II](#) (circa 1310- [1312](#)).

Aboubakri II became famous by launching two expeditions to know the limits of the ocean. Indeed, Ibn Fadl Alla Al Omari ^[9] reports that Aboubakry II first equipped two hundred " ships " to explore the other side of the Atlantic Ocean ; which no crew would have returned. Then he chartered two thousand others which he took command, but never returned from his expedition ^[10] . The Malinke tradition considered him dead, which

justified the succession, in this case, by his son Kankou Moussa or Kangou Moussa or KanKan Moussa.

- [Soundiata Keita](#) (1240-1255)
- [Ouali Keita](#) (1255-1270) his son ;
- [Ouati Keita](#) (1270-1274) his brother ;
- [Khalifa Keita](#) (1274-1275) his brother ;
- [Abu Bakr](#) (1275-1285) his nephew ;
- [Sakura](#) (1285-1300)
- [Gao](#) (1300-1305), son of Ouati ;
- [Mohammed ibn Gao](#) (1305-1310) his son,
- [Abubakri II](#) (1310-1312) grandson of Soundiata.

Kankan Moussa



Portrait of Mansa Moussa on a map from 1375

Around [1312](#) , [Kankou Moussa](#) (also called Kango Moussa, Kankan Moussa or Mansa Moussa) came to power. It was during his reign that the Empire of Mali reached its peak : from the [Adrar of the Ifoghas](#) to the estuary of [Gambia](#) .

In [1324](#) , he makes a pilgrimage to [Mecca](#) whose tradition and Arabic sources ^[9] will keep the memory of the pomp : accompanied by thousands of servants and slaves, he would have taken away so much gold (about 10 tons) that the course precious metal would have fallen for several years. His generosity would have struck the spirits. Nevertheless, according to Elikia Mbokolo, Mansa Moussa would have sold most of the slaves (8,700 to 14,000 according to sources) in Egypt and Arabia ^{[11], [12]} .

However, Serge Daget and François Renault observe that in this regard Arab sources are not unanimous, nor on the number (from 8,000 to 14,000) of the procession of Kankou Moussa, nor on their status : sometimes we speak of " slaves ", sometimes" topics "Or" people " ; without always knowing if they were sold by Mansa Mali ^[13] .

Kango Moussa returns to Mali accompanied by several men of science and culture including [Abu Ishaq es-Saheli](#) , a native of [Granada](#) who was the architect of the [Djingareyber Mosque](#) built in 1328 in [Timbuktu](#) . Mansa Moussa probably died in [1337](#) .

The successors of Kankou Moussa and the decline of the Empire of Mali

Several successive emperors : Mansa Maghzen (1337- [1341](#)), Mansa Souleymane, brother of Mansa Musa (circa 1341- [1360](#)), his son Tassa (1360), Mari Diata II, son of Mansa Maghan (circa 1360- [1374](#)) his son Moussa II (about 1374- [1387](#)), Magha II (about 1387- [1389](#)), and Sandaki usurping (about 1389- [1390](#)).

After the death of Mansa Souleymane, quarrels of succession weaken the Empire. It is attacked by the [Mossi kingdoms](#) , the [Tuareg](#) , who burned [Timbuktu](#) in 1431, then the [Songhai](#) , which secedes in 1464. This does not prevent the development of trade, carried by the [Dioulas](#) , and even a territorial extension reoriented towards the south, Mali pushing the coast the [Ashanti](#) and annexing the middle of the [XVIth century](#) Begho, the main town south of savannah located in what is now the [region Brong Ahafo](#) ^[14] . From the end of the [15th century](#) — [16th century](#) the [XVIIth century](#) , Mali was reduced gradually to its original dimensions.



Mali around 1530 .

- [Kanga Moussa](#) (or Kouta Moussa) (1312-1337)
 - [Maghan](#) (1337-1341), his son ;
- [Mansa Souleymane](#) (1341-1360), his uncle brother of Kanga Moussa ;
 - [Kassa](#) (1360), his son ;
 - [Mari Diata II](#) (1360-1374) son of Maghan ;
 - [Moussa II](#) (1374-1387) his son,
 - [Maghan II](#) (1387-1389) his brother
- [Sandaki](#) (1389-1390) marries the mother of previous
- [Mahmud](#) (1390-1400), descendant of Gao ;
- Unknown [Mansas](#) (1400-1546) Of which:
 - [Moussa III](#) ;
 - [Mansa Ouali II](#) ;
 - [Mamadou I](#) (about 1481 -1496) ;
 - [Mamadou II](#) (about 1496 1559).
- Mansa unknown (around 1559-1590)
- [Nani Mansa Mamadou](#) (around 1590-1610)

Kingdom of Sosso

The **Sosso Empire** (sometimes written **Soso**) was, at the XIIth century, a kingdom of [West Africa](#) , in the region of [Koulikoro](#) (now [Mali](#)).

After the fall of the [Empire of Ghana](#) , a [Sarakolé](#) chief founded the kingdom of Sosso further south and established the [Diarisso dynasty](#) which reigns there until [1180](#). On that date, Kante, clan of smiths hostile to [Islam](#) , will dominate the region. Sosoe Kemoko unifies [Kaniaga](#) and Sosso. His son [Soumaoro Kanté](#) who succeeds him around [1200](#) , conquers the small neighboring kingdoms and makes reign terror. Defeated by [Sundjata Keita](#) at the [Battle of Kirina](#) in [1235](#) , he disappears in the mountains of Koulikoro. Sundjata shaves the capital of Sosso. The kingdom is integrated in the [empire of Mali](#) .

According to the Manding researcher [Solomana Kante](#) , it was after this battle that a group of Sosso, who spoke the same language as the [Malinke](#) , fled from Sosso and headed west to settle in Jalon. (future [Fouta Djallon](#)) near the [Jalonkees](#) , at the end of the XIIIth century. It's the arrival of the [Fulani](#) the XVIth century Islam that would have pushed even more to the west. It is all these changes of regions and all the mixing with the natives of the regions traversed during seven centuries which made them abandon most of the words of their language in favor of the [milestone](#) and coastal languages of [maritime Guinea](#) .

<i>Epic of Soundiata</i>	
Author	Collective
Country	Mandingo empire
Kind	oral epic
Original version	
Language	Malinké , Bambara
Release date	from the XIIIth century _

The **epic of Soundiata** (or Soundjata, or Sun - Diata) is an [epic poem](#) in [Mandingo](#) language , recounting the founding of the [Empire of Mali](#) by King [Soundiata Keita](#) the XIIIth century. Based on this historical base to which it adds marvelous elements, the epic has been transmitted by [oral tradition](#) since then, in many versions and in several other languages of [West Africa](#) . It then spread more widely in the world in the XXth century, thanks especially first translations in French and English. The epic of Soundiata occupies a very important place in the West African culture. It is a primary source for historians of the [Malian Empire](#) , and continues to inspire artists (writers, musicians, filmmakers, etc.).

Summary

- [1 frame of the epic](#)
 - [1.1 Bilali Bounama, ancestor of Keita](#)
 - [1.2 The buffalo of the Dô](#)
 - [1.3 Birth and childhood of Soundiata Keita](#)
 - [1.4 Exile](#)
 - [1.5 The war against Soumaoro](#)

The buffalo of the Dô

Soundiata is the son of [Naré Maghann Konaté](#), king of Manding (or Manden), and [Sogolon Kondé](#), an ugly and hunchbacked woman (hence his nickname "Sogolon Kèdjou", "Sogolon the ugly"), but with powerful magical powers. The origin of this surprising union is related by the episode of the buffalo of the Dô.

The king of the Do region, Gnèmo Diarra, also called Dô-Moko Niamoko Djata (" Djata, the guide of the Do people "), has an elder sister named Dô-Kamissa. At one point, when she is already an old woman, Dô-Kamissa is hurt by her brother, in a way that varies by version. In the version of Mamadou Kouyaté and DT Niane, Dô-Kamissa is deprived of his inheritance by his brother ^[6]. In the version of Cissé and Kamissoko, the reason for conflict arises on the accession of the king to the throne. The king is advised to perform a sumptuous sacrifice, the sacrifice of a white bull stained with black, to ensure the prosperity of his reign. Knowing his sensitive sister, the king will first offer him in his house the sacrifice of a beef of extraordinary size. But later, Dô-Kamissa, warned by a shoemaker, learns that the other sacrifice, even more lavish, took place without it being invited or receiving a part. To avenge this testimony of contempt, Dô-Kamissa metamorphoses regularly into buffalo and devastates the region ^[2].

Two hunters, [Dan Massa Woulani](#) (in other words [Tiramakhan Traore](#)) and Dan Massa Woulamba, reconcile Dô-Kamissa by multiplying offerings and expressions of respect for him. She then reveals to them how to kill her in her form of buffalo, which is otherwise invulnerable. It does, however, have one condition : when King Gnèmo Diarra offers them the choice of rewarding a wife among the girls of the country, they will have to choose the ugliest, [Sogolon Kondé](#), and hand it over to the King of Manden. Sogolon is the double or reincarnation of Do-Kamissa, hence his nickname Buffalo Woman.

The hunters obey and will offer the girl Naré Maghann Konaté, also called Maghan Kon Fatta, king of Manding, resides in [Niani](#), in the region of [Siguiri](#), in the present [Guinea](#). This is how Naré Maghann Konaté marries Sogolon, who will give him several children including Soundiata.

Birth and childhood of Soundiata Keïta

Naré Maghann Konaté marries Sogolon. But the first wife of the king, [Sassouma Berete](#), does everything to belittle Sogolon and to put forward his own son. Things get worse after the birth of Sogolon's child, Soundiata, because Soundiata stays a long time without speaking and still does not know how to walk to ten years, so that Sogolon becomes the laughing stock of all women, Sassouma in the lead. One day, after an ultimate insult of Sassouma, Soundiata awakes finally, manages for the first time to stand up to walk and even reveals a colossal force : he will uproot a [baobab](#) with his bare hands to bring the leaves to his mother, who needs it to cook. Soundiata immediately becomes the designated heir of the king and binds with [Balla Fasseke](#) who becomes his appointed [griot](#).

exile

However, at the death of Maghan Kon Fatta, Sassouma plays his influence and the wishes of the deceased ruler are not respected. Sogolon and Soundiata are sent into exile, as well as Soundiata's brother, Manding Bory, and his sister, Djamarou. In addition, Soundiata and his griot are separated, because [Balla Fasseke](#) is sent to embassy in the [kingdom of Sosso](#) in the cruel witch king [Soumaoro Kanté](#). Soundiata, his brother and sister and his mother leave Niani, the capital of Manding, and go first to Djedeba, at King Mansa Konkon, where they stay for two months until Soundiata discovers and foils a Mansa betrayal Konkon, who, unmasked, does not kill him, but hunts him at the same time as his family. The exiles

then stop in the fortified town of Tabon, at King Fran Kamara, where they are excellently received : Fran Kamara and Soundiata become friends and allies. Soundiata and his family then follow a caravan of merchants to Wagadou, at King Soumaba Cisse, King of Cisse, where they are treated well. After a year, the king sends them to Mema, at the court of his cousin Moussa Tounkara. The children of Sogolon are finishing their growth : Soundiata and Manding Bory take part in their first fights. After three years, Soundiata was named Kan-Koro-Sigui (Viceroy) at the age of eighteen.

The war against Soumaoro



Military rider of medieval Mali. Figure in terracotta found in Djenné (inland Niger Delta). [XIIIth century](#) - [XVth century](#).

The epic then recounts the return of Soundiata to Manding, and then the way he defies the Sorcerer King [Soumaoro Kanté](#), who reigns in Sosso. The war is triggered when Soumaoro, after multiple abuses against his people, forcibly marries Keleya, the wife of his own nephew, [Fakoli Doumbia](#), which is considered incest : Furious, Fakoli leaves Sosso with his tribe and calls the other tribes to sedition. Revolts burst, cruelly repressed by Soumaoro, who shaves Niani and proclaims himself king of Mandingo. Malinké envoys will then find Soundiata in Mema to ask him to go to war against Soumaoro. The same day, Sogolon, very ill, dies and Soundiata must negotiate with the king of Mema to be able to bury him on the spot, because Soumaba does not see leaving his subordinate with a good eye. Soundiata then returns to Manding and raises an army made up of the allied tribes, starting with that of Fran Kamara.

Soundiata and his forces inflict a first defeat at Soumaoro in Tabon, where Soumaoro is not present in person during the battle. As Soundiata marches on Sosso, Soumaoro and the bulk of his forces come to meet him and the two armies clash in the Negueboria Valley. Soundiata wins, but despite his repeated attacks on Soumaoro himself in the fray, he can not kill him or even hurt him, because Soumaoro uses his magic to avoid his blows and move instantly from one point of the battlefield to another. Soumaoro tries to harass the troops of Soundiata by having his cavalry give up against the camp of Soundiata that same evening, but Soundiata manages to turn the skirmish to his advantage and to continue Soumaoro until Kankigné. Soundiata then joins his allies in Sibi (today [Siby](#)) where all are grouped under his orders. He is also joined by [Balla Fasseke](#) and another of his sisters, Nana Triban, who fled the Soumaoro camp. Nana Triban, forcibly married by Soumaoro, knew how to extract from him the secret of his power : a Tana, a sort of protective genius, which he preserves in the form of a cock's spur.

When the two armies met again at the [battle of Kirina](#) (or Krina), in the Djoliba valley, Soundiata fixed at the tip of one of his arrows cock cock that Nana Triban flew to Soumaoro, and when the ergot hurts the king, Soumaoro instantly loses his powers. From then on, the king of Sosso only fled before Soundiata. Soumaoro himself and his son flee to the region of [Koulikoro](#) and climb the mountain, pursued by Soundiata, but manage to escape. The Battle of Kirina is a complete success for Soundiata and marks the end of the Sosso Empire. Soundiata then besieges the city of Sosso itself and seizes it in a morning, then shaves it.

Kouroukan Fouga and the beginnings of the empire



The [empire of Mali](#) and neighboring kingdoms around 1530 during the reign of Soundiata.

Soundiata then works to build his empire. He takes the city of Kita and climbs the mountain to ensure the protection of geniuses who live there, while his armies wars throughout the region. Returning to Manding, he gathered all his allies in [Kouroukan Fouga](#) , where all swore allegiance to him and where is established a charter regulating the ethics and the great principles of the laws of the empire, the [charter of Manden](#) . Soundiata becomes the [mansa](#) (king) of the Mali empire.

The epic version of [Wa Kamissoko's](#) epic focuses on the conflicts following the defeat of Soumaoro : many of the former allies of Soundiata, after relying on him to defeat Soumaoro, try to evade his authority once the common enemy has disappeared. Sundiata must suppress their desire for independence, and does so with the help of his two main allies remained loyal, [Tiramakhan Traore](#) and Fakoli Mande, who undertake to fight and defeat the allies revolted ^[8] .

Death of Soundiata

There are several variations in the epic about the death of Soundiata.

According to a widespread variant reported by [DT Niane](#) , Soundiata drowns in the [Sankarani](#) River and is buried near the stream ^[9] .

In [Wa Kamissoko's](#) version , Soundiata dies of old age in his palace in [Dakadjalan](#) , after having taken all his testamentary dispositions and made his recommendations to his two main vassals, [Tiramakhan Traore](#) and Manden Fakoli ^[10] . He is buried with great pomp in Dakadjalan ; his body is then placed in a large jar (*cho doun*) itself buried deep in the bottom of a well which is then plugged ^[11] . The funeral of Soundiata is celebrated in the capital by all the thirty-three clans of [Mande](#) ^[12] . [Yousouf Tata Cissé](#) specifies that " Believes " say that when Soundiata died, a huge [hippopotamus](#) rises from the waters of the [Sankarani](#) river between Niani and Balandougouba, and that this animal, which still lives, embodies the spirit of Soundiata ^[13] .

YT Cissé also reports another variant spread by [Fulani](#) of Wassouloun (or [Wassoulou](#)) according to which the *mansa* was shot down by an arrow Fulani, a blind slave : it is according to Cissé a revancharde variant due to the hostility that Soundiata had attracted from the Peul slavers after having instructed one of his servants (a *djon ba*) to administer the Wassouloun and to fight against the slavery practices that *prevailed* there ^[13] .

The death of Soundiata is followed by a troubled period, the interregnum, during which quarrels break out for the succession of the king ^[14] . Moreover, Mandé is attacked by neighboring kingdoms ; it is finally Niani Massa Mamourou Koroba who takes again the title of *mansa* that had carried Soundiata ^[15] .

Date and authors

The Epic of Sundiata's main character King [Sundiata Keita](#) , who lived in the XIIIth century: at first glance, it seems to have formed at that time or later. However, according to Daniel P. Biebuyck, it is not impossible that part of the material that it brews is prior to the historical existence of Soundiata itself, because the epics of hunters that exist in the same regions could be previous to the epic of Soundiata and have influenced its different episodes ^[16] .

The first author or authors of the epic of Soundiata are unknown, because the oral traditions have not kept their names : the griots know the names of the principal predecessors and professors of whom they hold their own knowledge, but do not grant any particular importance to what the very first version of the epic could look like or in the name of his or her first creators ^[17] . Moreover, variation is the rule in an oral epic of this type, each representation or " performance " operates a different choice and formatting that depend on the griot, the current of tradition to which it is attached, the public to which it addresses and circumstances in which the session takes place ^[18] .

The oral tradition

Modalities of oral tradition

As an epic of oral tradition, the epic of Soundiata was first transmitted and diffused without recourse to writing, that is to say that it was preserved by [griots](#) who learned by heart the various episodes in their youth and transmitted it in the same way to their apprentices thereafter. This oral tradition is still alive in the territories of the ancient empire of Mali ^[19] and coexists with the more recent written diffusion of the epic.

In the oral tradition episodes of the epic are the subject of sessions that Anglo-Saxon scholars often call " [performances](#) " (of English *performance* , " representation "). These sessions, during which the word of the griot is always accompanied by music, combine recitation and improvisation, but also sometimes singing, mime and dance. ; they give rise to frequent exchanges between the griot and his audience, be it dialogues or repetitions of a chorus ^[20] . The epic speech is not confined to narration alone, but may include considerations about the griot, his teachers and his ancestors, or about certain members of the public, about the community ; it mixes with praises, anecdotes and philosophical and moral reflections.

Style

According to Charles Bird, the epic of Soundiata consists of verses defined not by rhymes, accents or a given number of syllables, but by the musical rhythm that accompanies the recitations systematically. He puts forward the hypothesis of a correspondence between the poetic verse and a rhythm of four accentuated beats ^[21] .

Written versions and translations

The scientific editions of the epic are all writings of variants of the oral tradition told by [griots](#) or *djeli*. The first written down are in Arabic manuscripts that French settlers in West Africa translated at the turn of the XIXth-XXth centuries ^[22]. From the 1890s, administrators of the colonies and the military, mostly French, collect versions of the epic which are published in French and German from 1898 ^[22]. At the beginning of XXth century __, especially from the 1930s, West Africans educated in the European way produced literary versions of the epic ^[22]. An important role seems to have been played during this period by the [William Ponty Normal School](#), founded in 1903 in Saint-Louis, Senegal : the French colonial strategy of then seeking to create a French-African culture on the spot, the establishment favors the collection of information on the epic and its dissemination in the form of written versions and a play ^[23].

It is however in 1960 that appears one of the first works to make known more widely the epic of Soundiata in French : *Soundjata or the Mandingo epic*, in which the African historian [Djibril Tamsir Niane](#) writes a brief and reworked version of the epic that griot [Mamadou Kouyaté](#) told him in the village of Siguiri, [Guinea](#), in the 1950s ^[24]. This book raises a broad interest in the saga of the researchers, in Africa and outside Africa, and plays a decisive role in the development of research in the subject ^[22].

A much larger version, including a transcript of the original [Malinke story](#) in addition to the French translation, is produced jointly by the Malian ethnologist [Yousouf Tata Cissé](#) and the griot [Wa Kamissoko](#) : this time it records the version of [Wa Kamissoko](#), which is one of the oral traditions circulating in the region of Krina in [Mali](#). This version is the result of the long cooperation between Cissé and Kamissoko, and leads to two symposia organized in [Bamako](#) by the SCOA Foundation for Scientific Research in Black Africa in 1975 and 1976, symposia in which European researchers and African traditionalists meet, discuss and exchange in order to develop together a history of medieval Mali. During these colloquiums, Cissé made several recordings of Wa Kamissoko's words when declaiming the epic, and notes the question-and-answer exchanges between the griot and the other researchers ^[25]. The resulting version of the epic of Soundiata is published for the first time in 1975-1976 in two volumes in the form of proceedings of the symposium of the association SCOA, under the title *The Empire of Mali* ^[26]. It is then the subject of another book by the same authors, *La Grande Geste du Mali*, also in two volumes, in 1988 and 1991.

American Africanist John William Johnson collects and translates two versions of the epic. The first, collected from the griot Magan Sisoko, is published under the title *The Epic of Sun-Jata according to Magan Sisoko* in 1979. The other is collected from the griot Fa-Digi Sisoko, father of Magan Sisoko, in the region of Kita in 1968, and is published in the book *The Epic of Son-Jara: A West African Tradition* in 1986 ; Soundiata appears there under the name Son- Jara ^[27].

Context and historical relevance

Few written sources exist on the history of the [Mali empire](#). Among the main written sources are the Arab travelers' tales of the XIVth century, the most famous is [Ibn Khaldun](#) __ which mentions Soundiata. As a result, the epic of Soundiata and, more generally, oral traditions still alive, are important sources on the history of the region. But their relevance and reliability as historical sources are debated among historians, because tradition has necessarily undergone transformations over the centuries. Some historians, however, try to discern elements of historical truth in the epic, but with caution. The American historian David C. Conrad was able to undertake this approach about the character of [Fakoli Doumbia](#) ^[28].

The historical existence of Soundiata Keïta and the outlines of his political career are clear : his victory over Soumaoro Kanté in Kirina seems to have taken place around 1235 ^[29] . [Ibn Khaldun](#) indicates that Soundiata establishes his authority " over the kingdom of Ghana to the ocean from the west ^[30] ". The name and location of the capital chosen by Soundiata have not been identified with certainty by historians, ethnologists and archaeologists ^[31] .

Recent dissemination and posterity

Until the end of the XIXth century, the diffusion of the epic of Sundiata was solely or almost solely oral. During the XXth century, the diffusion of the epic follows a growing number of other media in addition to the oral traditions still active : written versions and literary retellings, but also radio broadcasts or recordings on [audio cassette](#) then [CD](#) performances of [griots](#) , theatrical, television, etc. ^[32]

Literature

The griot and Malian writer [Massa Makan Diabaté](#) evokes the epic of Soundiata in several of his books : *Janjon and other folk songs of Mali* (1970) and especially *The Eagle and the Sparrowhawk or the Gesture of Soundjata* , published in 1975. The Guinean writer [Camara Laye](#) gives a version of the epic of Soundiata in *The Master of the word* in 1978, after an investigation of the epic in Upper Niger (in Guinea, Mali and Senegal) where he collected and translated the songs of the griot [Babou Condé](#) ^[33] . The French novelist [Raphaël Chauvancy](#) developed this epic in the form of [a historical novel](#) in *Soundiata Keïta, The Lion of the Manden* , which earned him the award of the special prize of the jury of interculturality in 2015 ^[34] .

In the theater, the epic was adapted by Patrick Mohr in the *Soundjata* play represented between 1989 and 1991 in Australia (in 1989 at the Sydney Festival, in English), in Switzerland (in 1990 at the Théâtre du Grütli for La Bâtie Festival in Geneva , in a French version played by the company Spiritual Theater created for this purpose by Mohr) in France (in 1991 at the Festival d'Avignon), then elsewhere in Europe and finally in Mali and Burkina Faso, according to a story told to Mohr by [Mamadou Kouyaté](#) ^[35] . In 2010, the Guinean writer Issiaka Diakité-Kaba publishes a rewrite of the epic in a play, *Sunjata, The Lion: The Day When The Spoken Free Word Was Set / Soundjata, The Lion : The day when speech was released* , which appears in the United States at Outskirts Press. The piece is written in free verse, in French and English, and is intended to be staged with [a jazz](#) musical accompaniment . It highlights the role of women and the question of the abolition of slavery by Soundiata, while departing from the usual denouement of the epic to feed a reflection on the careers of political figures in Africa ^[36] .

Painting and illustration

Short versions of the epic, often illustrated, are regularly published in collections for youth. A fictionalized version for youth written by the Africanist [Lilyan Kesteloot](#) and illustrated by [Joëlle Jolivet](#) , *Soundiata, the child-lion* , was published by Casterman in 1999. In 2002, the painter and illustrator Dialiba Konaté publishes in Seuil *The epic of Soundiata Keïta* , a large format album made in collaboration with Martine Laffon, which includes his paintings on episodes of the epic ; Dialiba Konaté is one of the first to attempt to make illustrations directly adapted to the word of the [griots](#) and the traditionalists, and conducts for this research that reconcile the historical works on the empire of Mali and the more legendary details given by the griots ^[37] . A short album written by [Modibo Sidibé](#) and illustrated by Svetlana Amegankpoe was published in 2005 by Donniya editions in [Bamako](#) .

Music

A musical version of the epic, *Sunjata or the Manding epic*, was produced by the Mali Instrumental Ensemble and published in Mali by the Ministry of Youth, Sports, Arts and Culture in 1976 ^[38]. A musical [slam](#) show, *Soundiata Keita, when an African man enters history*, was created by French-Senegalese musician Tidiane Sy in France in 2009 and later given to Bamako in [Mali](#) and [Djibouti](#) ^[39], ^[40].

The Malian singer [Rokia Traoré](#) has worked several times on the epic of Soundiata. In 2008, she refers to Soundiata, Sogolon and Maré Makan Diata in her song "Dounia" on the album [Tchamantché](#): she mentions Soundiata as "one of those who built a dignified and hopeful Africa, an Africa we miss." In July 2017, at [the Avignon Festival](#), Rokia Traoré creates the show *Dream Mande Djata*, where she presents the epic of Soundiata Keita, but also the story of the real Soundiata, highlighting the importance of the [Manden charter](#) in the cultural history of Africa before colonization ^[41], ^[42]. Having worked especially with the cherry [Bako Dagnon](#) on the epic, it is assisted in the performing player Cora Mamadyba Camara and Mamah Diabaté ngoni player and sings sometimes in French, sometimes in Mandingo ^[43].

Cinema

Released in 1994, Disney's animated film [The Lion King](#), though primarily inspired by other works, has been brought closer by its structure to the epic of Soundiata ^[44].

In 1995, [Burkinabé](#) filmmaker [Dani Kouyaté](#) directed [Keita! The legacy of the griot](#), in which a young boy, Mabo Keita, truant to listen to the old [griot](#) Djeliba explain the origin of his name by telling him the epic of Soundiata. The film evokes both the epic itself and the endangering of the transmission of the oral tradition because of the degradation of the social status of the griots ^[45]. He reuses the traditional African aesthetic and puts forward a narrative supported by orality, made accessible by the work of the image ^[46].

In the animated film [Kirikou and Men and Women](#) of [Michel Ocelot](#) (2012), the [griotte](#) tells Kirikou the epic of Soundiata, which Kirikou in turn transmits to the villagers by modifying it to his taste.

In 2014, an Ivorian animated feature film adapted from the epic : [Soundiata Keita, the awakening of the lion](#), produced by the studio [Afrikatoon](#) ^[47].

Songhai Empire

approx . 1464 - 1591



Extent of the Songhai Empire around 1500.

General informations

Status

[Empire](#)

<u>Capital city</u>	<u>Gao</u>
<u>Language</u>	<u>Songhai</u>
<u>Change</u>	Cowry (<u>in</u>)
Area	
Area 1500	1.4 million km ² ^[1]

Previous entities :

- [Gao Empire](#)

Next entities :

- [Kingdom of Timbuktu](#)
- [Kingdom of Dendi](#)



Map of the Songhai Empire in the sixteenth ^{century} century.

The **Songhai Empire** , or **Empire of [Songhai](#)** , is a [State](#) of [West Africa](#) that existed between the XVth and XVIth century.

Summary

- [1 From Gao's kingdom to the Songhai Empire](#)
 - [1.1 The kingdom of Gao \(VIIth - XIIIth century\)](#)
 - [1.2 A vassal State of Mali](#)
 - [1.3 The Sy dynasty and the birth of the Songhai Empire \(1464-1492\)](#)
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From the kingdom of Gao to the Songhai Empire

The Songhai Empire is initially a small kingdom spread along the Niger River. the VIIth century, the kingdom of Gao, becoming the vassal following empires of Ghana and Mali ^[2] . It becomes an empire during the XVth century ^[3] . At its peak the Songhai Empire spreads over part of [Niger](#) , [Mali](#) and part of [Nigeria](#) current.

The kingdom of Gao (VIIth - XIIIth century)

Detailed article : [Empire of Gao](#) .

The Songhai State is founded in [Koukia](#) the VIIth century, as a result of interbreeding that take place between the [Songhai](#) and [Berbers](#) led by chief [Za el Ayamen](#) . They flee the Arab conquest of North Africa and the Maghreb. This interbreeding between Songhai and Berbers gives the Dia dynasty ^[41]^[5] . The capital is then in Koukia, downstream of Gao, current Mali. Around 1010, the Kikia kings settled in [Gao](#) and converted to [Islam](#) ^[6] . Some marble stelae are still visible on the pediments of Gao's administrative buildings, most often taken from the Sané necropolis, north-east of Gao. The marble comes from Spain, the inscriptions in Arabic are made in Andalusia in the surroundings of Almeria. The stelae were then transported across the Sahara to the Songhai court of Gao. The oldest dates from 1014.

A vassal state of Mali

Around the year 1300, the Songhai passes under the thumb of the [empire of Mali](#) . It is then one of the components of this constellation of subjugated kingdoms which usually constitute the empires of West Africa in the Middle Ages.

The Sy dynasty and the birth of the Songhai Empire (1464-1492)

It regains its independence under the reign of [Sonni Ali Ber](#) (Sonni Ali the Great) of the Sy dynasty (1464-1492), which fights the [Fulani](#) and [Tuareg](#) , as well as the Muslim scholars of the holy city of [Timbuktu](#) ^[7] . Sonni Ali tries to preserve the non-islamic culture of his kingdom ^[8] .

The Askias dynasty (1493-1595)

The death of Sonni Ali Ber opens a short period (1492-1493) of instability within the Songhai Empire. Sonni Baare, presumed to succeed him, refuses to convert to Islam. Mohammed Sylla, of the Toure clan, regional governor, takes power with the help of the ulema of Djenné, Timbuktu and Gao. He founded a dynasty called later [Askias dynasty](#) .

[Sarakollé Mohammed Touré](#) (1493-1528), [Soninke](#) (and therefore not Songhai), from the [Tekrou](#) , takes the opposite of the religious policy of Sonni Ali Ber. He finished Islamizing the kingdom through several battles reported by the traveler [Leo the African](#) ^[9] . The Songhai Empire, largely Islamized, at least in the big cities, knows its peak during the Muslim dynasty of [Askia](#) ^[10] .

The Songhai collapsed in 1591 following the invasion of the armies of [the Moroccan sultan Ahmed IV el-Mansour](#) , led by the Iberian mercenary [Yuder Pasha](#) . Defeated after the [battle of Tondibi](#) , in 1591, the Songhaïs tried to negotiate with the Moroccan sultan, and before his refusal, organized a guerrilla against the Moroccan expeditionary force. The last independent Songhai Asians are forced to swear allegiance to the Moroccan pashas, before retreating downstream of the Niger River, around [Sikieye](#) , the new capital, located today on the site of [Niamey](#) (Niger) ^[11] . The Empire breaks out in a dozen principalities ^[12] . In Timbuktu, Moroccans appoint a payroll in their pay ; his authority scarcely exceeds the limits of the city.

Culture

The city of [Timbuktu](#) is, when the weakening of the [empire of Ghana](#) , the XIth century, the point of consolidation of [caravans](#) and the center of [trans-Saharan trade](#) , making it not only the economic metropolis of empires of Mali and Songhai, but also the main religious and intellectual center ^[13] . Many [adobe](#) monuments ^[14] are then erected, such

as [Djingareyber mosques](#) , built under the reign of the Emperor of Mali [Kankan Moussa](#) , [Sidi Yaya](#) and [Sankore](#) ^[ref. necessary] . The French explorer [René Caillié](#) entered it much later, in 1828, and found only remains of its medieval splendor ^[15] .

Knowledge, books and education hold great place in the Empire ; it is a heritage of the empire of Mali that the Askia Mohammed Sylla will protect and develop. Students and scholars come from Egypt, Morocco, Andalusia or [Allada](#) to take courses in mathematics, grammar or literature at Sankore University or other [madrassah](#) ^[16] .

The Askias surround themselves with scholars. Many foreign doctors come to settle in Gao and Timbuktu, the latter being the cultural capital of the state. They bring the academic traditions of [Chinguetti](#) , [Djenné](#) but also [Mecca](#) and [Cairo, of](#) which [al-Azhar University](#) is, at that time, the largest [Islamic science](#) teaching center . From the second generation, scholars of Timbuktu develop their own teachings and criticize in their comments some works of masters of Cairo. The freedom to teach is great, just have a degree to open a school ^[17] . Signs of intellectual power are found in teachers' clothes : specific [boubou](#) , white turban and long pointed-pointed cane ^[ref. necessary] . Ahmed Baba, scholar of Timbuktu, deported during the Moroccan conquest and found freedom at the death of Sultan Ahmed el-Mansour, around 1605, is illustrated in Marrakech by the depth of his knowledge.

The coming to power of the Askias, however, entails a rigorous turn of the religious policy of the Empire. The arrival of al-Maghili, for example, leads to the destruction of the Jewish communities of the oases of the Sahara, those of the Touat in particular. Islam does not penetrate the rural world ; the Songhai Empire remains an urban civilization and the efforts of the ruling classes in the organization and administration of the Empire remain focused on the urban trading society. However, the end of the Empire leads an exodus of imams in rural chapels around which organizes one second Islamization of Sudan Islamization campaigns (xviith and XVIIIth centuries).

Economy



Conquests of the Saadians.

The Songhai Empire prospered rapidly thanks to the [trans-Saharan trade](#) and its mines, shipping to North Africa [salt](#) and [gold](#) but also [kola nuts](#) , [ambergris](#) , [gum arabic](#) , skins of [leopards](#) and [slaves](#) . It also exports hippos skins, cut and tanned to make shields, reputed to Morocco. Gold, which fascinates both Europeans and Moroccan rulers, is not produced in the Songhai but in mines, mainly located in [Akan](#) country since

the 16th century. Like Mali, Songhai serves as a hub for trade in goods that it does not produce : gold comes from the forest and salt from the Sahara.

The Songhai Empire receives from the [Maghreb](#) , in return, manufactured products such as [jewelry](#) , weapons, [fabrics](#) or [mirrors](#) , as well as agricultural products such as [wheat](#) , dates or [horses](#) ^[18] . From the middle of the XVIth century, the Songhai eventually conflict with the [Saadian](#) for possession of desert salt mines and, in particular, the great salt mine [Teghazza](#) ultimately abandoned by the Tuareg after its annexation in 1582 by the Saadian sultans ^[19] .

Mandingo



Mandingo children in [Kedougou](#) ([Senegal](#))

Significant populations by region

Total population	10 to 20 million
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Other

languages	Mandingo
------------------	--------------------------

religions	traditional religions, islam , christianity
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Related Ethnies	Peuls , Wolof , Senufo, Sonrhais
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Distribution map

The **Mandingos** ^[1] are a [West African](#) people belonging to the Mande people.

They are known by other names such as **Bambara** the [Mali](#) , the [Dioulas](#) in [Ivory Coast](#) and [Burkina Faso](#) and the [Malinke](#) in [Guinea](#) , [Senegal](#) and in [Gambia](#) .

If they speak related languages and form a linguistic group, they manifest quite different cultures and traditions ^[1].

Summary

- [1 History](#)
- [2 Religions](#)
- [3 Distribution](#)
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- [5 Oral literature](#)
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History



Mandingue du [Bambouk](#)(1846)



Mandingue de la rive droite du haut Niger ([1890](#))

The [Mandé](#), in the south of Mali, is considered as the country of origin of the Mande peoples, composed of many ethnic groups, including Mandingo, [Soninké](#), Vaïs, Konos, [Soussous](#), Dialonkés, Mendés, Kpellés, the [Bobo](#), the Samoghos, the In, the Samos Bissa and ^[2].

Soninkés establish the [Ghana Empire](#) from the IIIth century ^[3]. Between the [XIth](#) and XIIth century, the clan of [Keita](#) unifies Mandingo tribes and early XIIIth century, the Mandingo build the [Mali Empire](#), under the leadership of [Sundiata Keita](#) freeing them from the domination of [the United from Sosso](#) of [Soumangoro Kanté](#) and proclaims the [Manden](#)

Charter . Mandingo formed many kingdoms that lasted until the end of the XIXth century and the beginning of European colonization, the best known are :

- the [Bambara kingdoms of Segou](#) and [Kaarta](#) , Mali.
- the [Kaabu](#) , between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau.
- the [Kingdom of Diarra](#) , between Mauritania and Mali.
- the [Galam](#) , or Gadiaga, at the level of [the Senegal River](#) .
 - the [Khasso](#) , west of Mali.
- the [Niani](#) , [Woulli](#) , [Bambouk](#) , Eastern [Senegal](#) .
- the kingdom of Wassolo, from Guinea to Burkina Faso.

religions

Originally the Mandinka all practiced [traditional religion](#) .

Between the VIIIth and Xth centuries , Soninke are the first Mandingo to turn to the [Islam](#) , especially those of the nobility of the [Empire of Ghana](#) . It was the Arab-Berber traders from the north who brought Islam home. During the Mali Empire, Soundiata Keïta converted to Islam, resulting in the conversion of many Mandingo groups. But Islam still remained the religion of the nobles. With Islam, maraboutic Mandingo communities will be born, especially the Dyula and the [Diakhanke](#) . However, the traditional religion of origin remains much practiced by the majority Mandingo until XIXth century. Today almost all Mandingos are Muslims, but according to various groups, traditional rites and beliefs have been more or less preserved.



[Kankourang](#) at the Mandingoes of Haute-Casamance

In the traditional Mandingo religion, God is called *Maa Ngala* . In the traditional religion, God being too high to invoke Him directly, ancestors and spirits are the entities to whom prayers are addressed ; they are the intermediaries between god and men. God is present in the totality of creation. In the Mandingo, the *Komotigui* are the men or women who have reached the highest levels of spiritual knowledge. To become *Komotigui* , initiation is a condition [sine qua non](#) . According to the different initiatory groups, like that of *Komo* or *Nama* , the duration of the initiation is more or less long. In general it is a cycle of seven times seven years, then a new cycle of the same duration. To benefit from the benefits of creation, the respect of the interdicts, the tribute to *Maa Ngala* . Prayers, offerings to intermediate entities (ancestors and spirits), individually, in family, or during various religious ceremonies, are the acts that punctuate the Mandingo spiritual life. Man is not considered as such if he has not gone through the rite of circumcision. In

traditional spirituality, there is no separation between spirituality and the layman, everything is governed according to the spiritual laws, from birth to death, where the soul of being has been exemplary on earth joined the world of God and ancestors. Each family is connected to an animal totem, which is part of the respect for beings, creatures of God possessing the divine plot. This is according to the age groups *Ton* that one learns the various aspects of life and the rules of life, always according to the spiritual rules, in order to be an accomplished individual in society.

Division



The Manding country on a map of [1900](#)

The Mandingo group includes a cultural group that has 27 dialect variants of the [Mandinka](#) language classified into two major groups :

- Western Mandingo : Malinké ([Guinea](#) , [Senegal](#) , [Gambia](#)), Pakawunkés (Senegal), Badibunkés (Gambia) and Woyinkés ([Guinea-Bissau](#)) ;
- Eastern Mandinka : Malinké ([Ivory Coast](#) , [Burkina Faso](#)), [Bambara](#) ([Mali](#)) and [Khassonké](#) (Mali).

The Malinke people of Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso are also called [Dioulas](#) , which means " trader " in Mandinka. Malinkés are also present in [Sierra Leone](#) and [Liberia](#) , but they are few.

The Malinke people of eastern Senegal are [Diakhanke](#) . They are settled in the current territory of Senegal for several centuries. In Senegal, the Mandingoes are called [Sossés](#) by the [Wolofs](#) and the [Serer](#) . The [Jalonkes](#) are present in Guinea. The Malinke and Bambara speak the same language, but some words differ. Their hunters are called [Dozos](#) .

languages

The [Mandingo language](#) is one of [the mandated languages](#) spoken by more than ten million people in some fifteen [West African states](#) .

Oral literature

In Mandingo societies, much of the culture was constituted, disseminated and transmitted without recourse to the written word, through the [oral tradition](#) . This resulted in an [oral literature](#) comprising many different genres. There are [epics](#) of various types, some semi-historical like the [epic of Soundiata](#) . Some long stories are true romances of love like that of Lansinet and Soumba ^{[4], [5]} .

Social organization

Traditionally it is a society :

- of [castes](#) including nobles, caste men ([griots](#) , [blacksmiths](#) , [shoemakers](#)) and captives ;
- clans defined by a surname, an ancestor, a motto and a forbidden.

Surnames



Jali Fily Sissokho a player of [Kora](#) Manding

The common Mandingo surnames are : Bagayoko, Bakayoko, Bamba, Bathily, Bayo, Berthé, Camara, Cisse, kCissokho, Conde, Coté, Coulibaly, Danfa, Dansohko, Darry, Dembélé, Diaby, Dicko, Diakhaby, Diakho, Diakité, Diaouné, Diarra, Diawara, Diomandè, Djitté, Doucouré, Doumbia, Doumbouya, Drama, Fadiga, Fatty, Fofana, Gakou, Gassama, Gnabaly, Guirassy, Ira, Kaba, Kamissoko, Kante, Kebe, Keita, Koita, Konate, Kone, Konte, Koté, Magassa, Mandiang, Mané, Marga, Minted, Meité, Ouattara, Sakho, Samaté, Sané, Sangare, Sano, Sanogo, Samassa, Sawane, Sy-Savane, Sidibe, Sima, Sissoko, Souane, Souare, Soumah, Soumaré, Sylla, Timité, Toure, Traoré, Youla, Yattara, Yra ... There are still more than thirty.

These surnames are found in all the communities formed by the Mandingo whether they are Francophone, Anglophone or Lusophone. The writing of surnames will however change according to the country : for example, the name Cissé is written as it is in the French-speaking world, but in Gambia (English-speaking), it is written Ceesay or Sesay. The same goes for many other surnames, like Diaby (Jabbi in The Gambia), Souané (Suwanneh) ...

Some communities are gradually deforming family names, and as a result, certain surnames are thus simplified or pronounced in another way : Diakité, Sanogo or Bakayoko thus become Diaité (or Jaiteh), Sano (Sanoé), and Bayo (Baryoh). This simplified form is used in particular by the Mandingos of Senegal, Guinea and Gambia.

Some other less common surnames are nevertheless carried by descendants of chiefs : Aïdara in Ivory Coast in particular (Malinkés) and in Senegal ; the name Aïdara is of Moorish origin.

The [marabout](#) classes , called *Maninka Mori* and *Mandé Mori* (' marabout du [Mandé](#) "), generally bear the following names : Kaba, Toure, Cisse, Dramé, Dabo, Diané, Berete (equivalent of Souane in Senegal), Sakho, Sylla. They are all from Soninke.

The [Griots](#) , called *Dyeli* , often bear the names : Cissokho, [Kouyate](#) , [Diabate](#) , Kamissoko, Soumano. However these surnames are often found through many castes.

Soussou Soumahoro while coming to Guinea took Soumah to keep the family link with Soumahoro Kanté their ancestors.

Individuals of the *Nyamakhala* caste (artisans), especially blacksmiths, bear the names :
Kanté, Diankha, Fané.

The *Horo* nobles bear the majority of the names : Aïdara, Doumbia, Fakoly, Kaba, Condé, Cisse, Keïta, Koita, Konaté, Diarra, Fofana, Bathily, Sissoko, Traore, Sokhna, Camara, Bakayokho, Sinayoko, Kébé, Dramé, Sylla, Niakhaté, Diagouraga, Minté, Soumaré, Souané (equivalent of Berété in Mali).

The frequency of names, relative to castes, can not really indicate the origin of these, because each surname can be found in all social strata.

Many families belonging to the neighboring ethnic groups have integrated the Mandingo world over the centuries, and vice versa. Thus we can notice Mandingo families with surnames of [Wolof](#) origin (Ndiaye, Diop, ...), [Peul](#) (Diallo, Diakhité, Sangare, Sidibé, etc.), or [Mossi](#) (Ouedraogo).

Sanankouya

Detailed article : [Relationship to joke](#) .

The *Sanankouya* or *Sounangouya* is a system of cousin, a form of " alliance " that played the role of " pact of non-aggression " between the components of the Empire of Mali under [Soundiata Keïta](#) . All Mandingo clans were concerned by this alliance, whose origin originated in the valley of the [Nile](#) and extended to all the kingdoms of the Empire of Mali, under the reign of Soundiata Keïta. The real purpose of this pact was to avoid clashes, conflicts, wars and also to calm even internal tensions.

The *Sanankouya* is widely known as " joking kinship ", obliging the various clans to assist, help each other, respect each other, but also to criticize and tease each other. These alliances exist, for example, between the Traore and Diarra clans, between the Keita and the Souane, or between the Keita and the Coulibaly. The *sanankouya* also applies between two members of different ethnic groups. The Mandingoes and the Wolofs maintain this link, the same is true of the Peuls. The prohibitions of *sanankouya* were to make or to see suffering, to pour or to have blood poured from one's *sanankou* .

Discography

- *The kora of Mandingo griots : Kemba Sussoko* , VDE-Gallo, Lausanne, 1994, 67 min (CD)

Filmography

- *Keïta, the legacy of the griots* , a fiction film by Dani Kouyaté, Burkina Faso, 1994, 95

Sogolon Kondé

Sogolon Kondé or **Koné** , also called **Sogolon Kèdjou** or **Kèdjougou** (' Sogolon the ugly '), **Sogolon Koudouman** (' Sogolon the wart maker ') or **Sogolon Kondouto** (' Sogolon the hunchback ') because of its ugly and misshapen appearance, is the mother of [Soundiata Keïta](#) , the founder of the [Mandingo empire](#) in West Africa in the 13th century . It plays an important role in the [Soundiata epic](#) transmitted by the oral traditions and which mixes real historical events and legendary elements. In the epic, Sogolon appears endowed with magical powers and advises his son.

Summary

- [1 In the epic of Soundiata](#)
 - [1.1 Sogolon's wedding](#)
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 - [1.3 Childhood of Soundiata](#)
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- [2 In the posterity of the epic](#)

In the epic of Soundiata

Sogolon's wedding

In all the variants of the [Soundiata epic](#), Sogolon Kondé plays an important role in the birth and youth of [Soundiata Keïta](#). In the version reported by [Wa Kamissoko](#), Sogolon is sought after by two hunter brothers, [Dan Massa Woulani](#) (aka [Tiramakhan Traore](#)) and Dan Massa Woulamba, the winners of Dô-Kamissa, the buffalo woman who ravaged the region of Dô in the form of a wild [buffalo](#) ^[1]. As a reward for ending this scourge, both hunters are invited by local people to choose a wife among the country's young women. But, advised before their expedition by the patriarch of the soothsayers, the two hunters ask the king of the Dô, Dô Moko Niamoko Djata (" Djata, the guide of the people of the Dô "), also called Gnèmo Diarra, or Do Mansa Gnèmo Diarra, " Gnèmo Diarra, king of the Dô " ^[2], to also get out of his box Sogolon Koudouman, despite its exceptional ugliness that prohibits a priori marriage. The two brothers take Sogolon and give it to the king of [Niani](#), Fara-Koro Makan Kègni ([Naré Maghann Konaté](#) in the version of DT Niane ^[3]) who marries her ^[4]. She gives him six sons, including [Soundiata Keïta](#) who is the fourth born, and a daughter, Sogolon Kolonkan ^[5].

Gestation and birth of Soundiata

The gestation and childhood of Soundiata have many wonderful elements. In the version of [Wa Kamissoko](#), the night that Soundiata is conceived, the entire kingdom of [Manden](#) is warned by a dream and press the great destiny of the unborn child ; gestation lasts seventeen years, and the day of birth, all Mande dream again Soundiata ^[6]. During the gestation, the little Soundiata had the ability to get out of the belly of her sleeping mother to hunt for [lambs](#) (small lizards), grill them and eat them, before entering the maternal womb to end the night. Having noticed this ride one night, Sogolon is going to be advised by Djéli Moussonin Toumoun Maninyan (" Toumoun Maninyan, the little lady-sour [cherry](#) "), who tells him how to give birth : during the absence of the child who went hunting the lambs, Sogolon will warn Toumoun Maninyan, who helps him back to bed and places a [mortar](#) between his legs, so that when Soundiata returns and tries to get into his mother's womb, he collides with the bottom of the mortar, where the mother and the midwife can seize it ^[7].

In the version of Babou Condé transcribed by [Camara Laye](#), where these episodes do not appear, the birth of Soundiata is announced by two cyclones that meet in the sky above Niani in the dry season. Sogolon gives birth alone, without any help : the maids do not discover the birth until the childbirth is over and will announce it to the king ^[8].

Childhood of Soundiata

Soundiata's childhood, however, is unfortunate : paralyzed legs, the child remains unable to walk to an advanced age, seventeen years in the version of [Wa Kamissoko](#) ^[9]. Meanwhile, Sogolon Kedjoukou is exposed to the jealousy and hatred of [Sassouma Béréte](#) (or Tassouma), the king's previous wife, who also has sons. One day, Manden Bogori, son of

Sassouma, goes to look for baobab leaves for his mother ; Sogolon, whose son is unable to render him the same kind of services, is forced to beg a few leaves with his rival, but Sassouma refuses them and publicly insults him. In front of the lamentations of Sogolon, the young Soundiata decides to get up : he asks his father to order the blacksmiths (whose mythical ancestor is Noun Fayiri) to sink an enormous iron bar to deliver it to him. Soundiata leans on this bar of iron, which he bends under his force, and thus manages to stand up and walk. This is the end of his paralysis : he immediately goes to a [baobab tree](#) and pulls the whole tree to deliver it to Sogolon ^[10] .

Old age and death of Sogolon

After the death of Fara-Koro Makan Kègni, Sogolon is exiled with all his family, including Soundiata. After several stages, all find a lasting and benevolent welcome to Mèma (or Nèma), with King Faran Tounkara ^[11] . They live there until the arrival of messengers from the Manden to seek help to Soundiata, the only able to stand up to [Soumaworo Kanté](#) , king of Sosso, who conquered the Manden and the remains of his wealth. Sogolon meets the messengers at the market and recognizes their origin to the varieties of vegetables that they came to sell and that are typical of the Manden (the big [okra](#) , the [eggplant](#) and the bean said *mògòtigi* , " the popular ") She then brings them to the palace, where they pass on their message to Soundiata and urge him to return to Manden ^[12] . Sogolon then gives indications to Soundiata that allow him to predict the turn that will take his war against Soumaworo by performing a divination rite in front of a dead [shea](#) ; Soundiata performs the rite, which augurs for his victory, and he decides to leave the next day. In the night, Sogolon dies. The next day, Soundiata wants to bury him on the spot, but King Faran Tounkara is opposed at first, then tries to make him pay the price of the land where the queen would be buried. Soundiata reply to this iniquitous demand with a threat, and, on the advice of his counselors, the king finally accepted that Sogolon be buried NEMA ^[13] .

In the posterity of the epic

Sogolon appears in many of the rewrites and adaptations of the epic of Soundiata. In the cinema, she appears in the movie [Keïta! The Legacy of the griot](#) directed by [Burkinabé](#) filmmaker [Dani Kouyaté](#) in 1995, where it is played by Blandine Yaméogo. At the theater, it gives its name to a show of the Ivorian company [Ki Yi M'Bock](#) , *Sogolon, the pan-African epic* , created in 2006.

Sosso Bala

The cultural area of Sosso-Bala *

Intangible cultural heritage



In 2017, the current balatigui, El Hadji Sékou Kouyaté, plays Sosso Bala during a solemn ceremony .

Country	Guinea
Listing	Representative list
Plug	00009 [archive]
Registration year	2008
Year of proclamation	2001
* Official UNESCO description	

The **Sosso Bala** (' balafon du Sosso "in [Malinké](#)) is a sacred sacred [balafon](#) preserved in the village of [Niagassola \(in\)](#) , in [Guinea](#) ([Siguiri prefecture](#) , [Kankan region](#)).

This balafon is reputed to be the first of all balafons, the *original balafon* , the stallion of which all the others are only copies.

Summary

- [1 Tradition](#)
- [2 Conservation](#)
- [3 Description](#)
- [4 Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity](#)

Tradition

After the [epic of Soundiata](#) , transmitted by the [oral tradition](#) of the [Mandingo](#) , this instrument dates from at least the beginning of the [XIIIth century](#) and was the property of [Soumaoro Kanté](#) , the king [Sosso](#) . The sovereign had entrusted it to his prisoner [Balla Fasseke](#) , sent by [Soundiata Keita](#) . This unfortunate delegation of the magic instrument would be part of the various causes leading to the defeat of the king of Sosso against the future founder of the [empire of Mali](#) . After [Krina's](#) victory , Soundiata gave herself the instrument and left her guarded by her [griot](#) Balla Fasseke Kouyate ^[1] . _

retention

The location of this balafon has changed over time, being regularly moved between the present [Mali](#) and [Guinea](#) . It is today in Guinea, in the village of [Niagassola \(in\)](#) , near the [border between the two countries](#) . It is preserved there by the descendants of Balla Fasseke Kouyate ^[2] in a sacred [hut](#) ^[3] . It is under the responsibility of the patriarch who bears the title of *balatigui* (' master of balafon ") and who only plays it to teach children or on special occasions. In August 2018, a building was inaugurated in Niagassola by Sanoussy Bantama Sow, Guinean Minister of Culture, Sports and Heritage, to house the Sosso Bala ^[4] .

A ceremony takes place every year with this balafon.

Description

This balafon is composed of 20 slats whose width is between 45 and 75 cm, supported by a table of 1.24 × 0.49 m, for a height of 32 cm at the end ^[5] .

Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Whatever its real history, this instrument is undeniably very old.

In [In 2001](#) , [UNESCO](#) proclaimed among the " [masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity](#) " the *cultural space of Sosso Balla* , including the instrument and related oral and musical traditions ^[6] . In 2008, it was inscribed on the [Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity](#) ^[7] .

There is a rare recording of Sosso Bala, in the album *Guinea : Stories and Epics* , published in 1992 by [Ocora](#) ^[8],^[9] . This recording was made in 1987, and appears in a television documentary by [Yves Billon](#) and [Robert Minangoy](#) , entitled *Musiques de Guinée* ^[10] .

Another documentary was shot for [France 3](#) from 10 to 12 April 1999 during the enthronement of Balatigui El Hadj Sékou Kouyaté ^[11] .

Soumaoro Kanté Soumaoro Diarrasso



Site of Nianankoulou, where, according to tradition, Soumangourou Kanté disappeared in 1235.

Soumaoro Kanté (or **Soumaworo** according to the transcripts, also called **Soumaoro Diarrasso**) is an African king who reigned in the XIIIth century the [Sosso Empire](#) , in the region of [Koulikoro](#) (now [Mali](#)). In the [epic of Soundiata](#) , derived from the real life

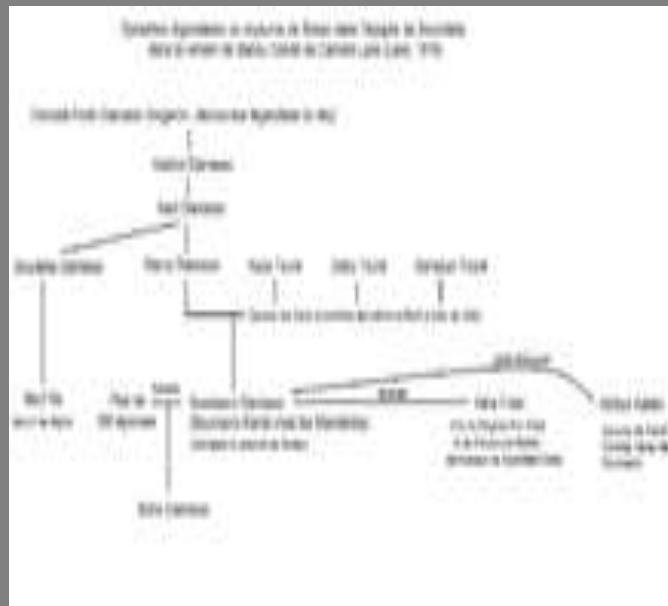
of [Soundiata Keïta](#) , he is the main adversary of the latter and he appears as a wizarding king with powerful powers.

Summary

- [1 Biography](#)
 - [1.1 Ancestry](#)
 - [1.2 Magic powers](#)
 - [1.3 Conquests](#)
 - [1.4 Wives](#)
 - [1.5 War against Soundiata](#)

Biography

Ancestry



Genealogy tree of Soumaoro Kanté in [The Master of the word](#) of [Camara Laye](#) .

According to Laye's 1978 version of Babou Condé and [Camara Laye](#) , this character was called Soumaoro Diarrasso in the [Kingdom of Sosso](#) and Soumaoro Kanté in the Mandénka, inhabitants of the more recent Kingdom of Manden ^[1] . He comes from the line of Diarrisso (the Diarrisso at [DT Niane](#) ^[2]), a lineage of blacksmiths who passed for being the first to tame the fire and to invent the art of the forge. Diarra Diarrasso, Soumaoro's father, is one of Kani Diarrasso's two sons, along with Bourama Diarrasso. Soumaoro knows an extraordinary gestation in the epic : The three wives of Diarra Diarrasso, Kaya Toure, Daby Toure and Sansoun Toure, fall pregnant with him successively, each for three months, and when Sansoun Toure gives birth to the child, the three wives feel the pain of childbirth ^[1] . The uncle of Soumaoro, Bourama, has nine sons, but none reigns, because Soumaoro seizes power in Sosso.

Magical powers

In the version of Mamadou Kouyaté transcribed by [Djibril Tamsir Niane](#) in 1960, Soumaoro Kanté succeeds his father Sosoe Kemoko on the throne of the [kingdom of Sosso](#) . The beginning of his reign would be around [1200](#) . Soumaoro leads campaigns against neighboring small kingdoms. Considered a wizarding king, endowed with magical powers, almost invulnerable, he reigns terror throughout the region. In the version of [Camara Laye](#) , Soumaoro possesses sixty-three totems (instead of only one usually),

which gives him a colossal power, because he could take sixty-three different forms ^[3]. Soumaoro also has a [balafon](#) magnificent also endowed with magical powers ^[4]. During his captivity at Soumaoro, Balla Fasséké, the *djeli* (griot) of [Soundiata Keïta](#), plays this balafon ^[4].

In the version of [Wâ Kamissoko](#) transcribed by [Yousouf Tata Cissé](#), Soumaoro obtains an immense and marvelous army thanks to his sister Kangouba Kanté. Indeed, Soumaoro tries first to exercise all possible trades, but none succeeds. Kangouba then goes in search of an army so that his brother can try the profession of arms. She ends up meeting a male genius that she follows in her family. The father of the genius presents him with a red copper rifle, which he must shoot in precise terms in order to invoke an army. It is this army that Soumaoro uses for his first conquests ^[5]. This version also gives a more humane and less evil view of Soumaoro as a young man, he fought against the slavery practiced by the *mansas* (kings) on the neighboring populations. He had gone to the Manden to recruit allies in this struggle, but he had been scourged by his modest social background (a blacksmith not being expected to become a warlord). which explains his desire for revenge towards the Manden ^[6].

conquests

In the epic of Soundiata, Soumaoro fortifies Sosso by surrounding him with a triple enclosure and is built a huge tower of seven floors where he resides surrounded by his fetishes, out of the sight of ordinary mortals, which is worth the monarch's nickname "untouchable ^[7]". In several versions of the epic, Soumaoro's apartment is lined with human skins and contains the heads of nine kings defeated by Soumaoro. The tower is guarded by several magical guardians : a monstrous snake lodged in a sacrificial vase and two black owls ^[8].

Soumaoro attacked the neighboring kingdoms one after the other : he conquered the kingdom of Wagadou, which previously dominated the Sosso, then the kingdom of Diaghan ^[9]. He then attacks the Manden, where [Dankaran Toumani Keïta](#) reigns, while Soundiata Keïta, exiled, has not yet acceded to the throne. Soumaoro demands the allegiance of Dankaran Touman by threatening to destroy his capital, Niani. Frightened, Dankaran Toumani lends allegiance to Soumaoro and gives him in marriage his sister Nâna Triban ^[7].

wives

The epic lends to Soumaoro more than three hundred wives (according to the version of [Camara Laye](#)) ^[10].

Shortly before the war against Sundiata Keita, Soumaoro authoritatively decided to take over the wife of the chief of his army, [Fakoli Koroma](#). It is an incest, since Soumaoro is the brother of the mother of Fakoli Koroma, Kassia Diarrasso ^[10]. In the version of Camara Laye, Fakoli's wife is called Kéléya Kanko and she has great magical powers : she is able, alone, to cook more than the three hundred women of Soumaoro, which makes her able to supply alone the whole army of Sosso ^[11]. Indignant by the authoritarianism of Soumaoro, Fakoli defected and declared war on Soumaoro : he soon joins forces with Soundiata.

In the version of [Camara Laye](#), Soumaoro only shows contempt for [Fakoli](#) when he defected and he says that his armies will always be victorious, with or without Fakoli at their head. A few months later, during the last lawsuit, Fakoli ironically recalls his statement to Soumaoro, who then confused himself : " N'Kan-side ! ", That is, " I did not say ... ! In Malinke. Soundiata then addresses his enemy by naming him Soumaoro Kanté. Thus this variant of the epic explains the origin of this name of Soumaoro ^[12].

War against Soundiata

After successfully attacking [Mandé](#) , Soumaoro is confronted by [Soundiata Keïta](#) who, allied with the Malinke kings, comes to fight him. After several uncertain battles, Soundiata Keïta defeats Soumaoro Kanté during the [Battle of Kirina](#) in [1235](#) . In the [epic of Soundiata](#) , Soumaoro is wounded by Soundiata thanks to an arrow equipped with a white cock 's spur (the only weapon able to reach it) : he flees, pursued by Soundiata, and disappears in a rocky fault some leaves in the mountains of Koulikoro.

Soundiata Keïta	
title	
Emperor of Mali	
1235 - 1255	
Predecessor	Dankaran Toumani ^[1]
Successor	Mansa Oule
Biography	
Dynasty	Keita
Birth name	Soundiata Keita
Birth date	August 20, 1190 ^[2]
Place of birth	Niani (Kingdom of Manding)
Date of death	1255
Place of death	Sankarani River ^[3] (Empire of Mali)
Father	Naré Maghann Konaté
Mother	Sogolon Kondé
children	Ouled Ouati Khalifa Several other girls
Profession	Religion Traditionally Mandé Convert Muslim Sunnism

Sogolon Diata Keita , whose birth name is Diata Konaté, better known as **Soundiata Keita** , born [August 20, 1190](#) at [Niani](#) in the Siguiri region (in the Kingdom of Manding, now [Guinea](#)) and died in [1255](#) , is a [Mandingo](#) ruler of [medieval West Africa](#) , founder of the [Mali Empire](#) .

Summary

- [1 Origin](#)
- [2 Biography](#)
 - [2.1 Family origins](#)
 - [2.2 Childhood and exile](#)
 - [2.3 Return of exile under the new name of Keïta](#)

- [2.4 Founder of the Mali Empire](#)
 - [3 Family](#)
- [3.1 Unions and descendants](#)
 - [3.2 Ancestors](#)
 - [4 Posterity](#)
- [4.1 The epic of Soundiata](#)
- [4.2 Heroic worship in Senegal](#)
- [4.3 Representations in the arts](#)

Origin

They King [Naré Maghann Konaté](#) and his second [wife Sogolon Konde](#) , he was crowned as the **Mari Diata Ist** and reign between [1235](#) and [1255](#) .

The story of Soundiata is essentially known by [the epic told](#) from generation to generation until today by the [griots as](#) well as the scientists,

" This " epic " with legendary tones is a mix of real memories and storytelling ; it is, in other words, a literary construction that evokes the local history parasitized by the universal theme of the classic hero. ^[4] "

Biography

Family origins

[Naré Maghann Konaté](#) was a king of Manding, a former kingdom of [West Africa](#) (located in present-day [Guinea and Mali](#)). He was visited one day by a divine hunter who predicted that an ugly woman would one day give him a son who would become a great king. Naré Maghann Konaté was already married to [Sassouma Bereté](#) and had a son, [Dankaran Toumani](#) Konaté, heir to the throne.

One day, according to the prediction made a few years earlier, two brothers Traore, hunters from the country of [Do](#) , show him an ugly and hunchbacked woman, [Sogolon Kondé](#) (Sogolon Kedjou or Sogolon " the ugly " ^[5]), that the king wife.

Childhood and exile

This second wife gives birth to a son named " Diata " or " Djata ". The additive " Sogolon " marks its matriarchal membership, in order to distinguish it from all namesake. This addition is also the result of his infirmity. Indeed, the oral tradition reports that Soundiata was born paralyzed and that he walked on all fours until the age of seven years ^[2]). However, according to Mandingo customs, if several children of the same family have the same first name or a child has a specific characteristic (a handicap or a reputation for example), these children add the name of their mother to their family. first name. The name Sogolon Diata means " Diata, son of mother Sogolon " : it became diminutive " Soundiata ^[6] " .

At the death of Naré Maghann Konaté in [1218](#) , his first son, Dankaran Toumani, took power despite the will of the deceased king to respect the prediction. Sundiata and her mother, who had meanwhile given birth to two new daughters and adopted the son of Naré Maghann Konaté's third wife, were therefore the permanent object of the contempt of the new king and his mother.

After an affront to his mother, Soundiata, at the age of seven, managed to get up and miraculously recovered the use of his legs when he touched the royal staff. But the hatred

of Dankaran Toumani and Sassouma Beret led Soundiata, his mother and sisters to exile to the Kingdom of Mema.

[Soumaoro Kanté](#) , king of [Sosso](#) , then attacks the kingdom of Manding. Dankaran Toumani, fearing for his life, eventually fled to [Kissidougou](#) (now Guinea). According to tradition, Soumaoro led a dozen expeditions during which he massacred eleven sons of Naré Maghann Konaté, except Soundiata.

Return of exile under the new name of Keita

The inhabitants of [Manding](#) went then to seek Soundiata in his exile and asked him to take his inheritance either : " *Kien* "(inheritance) and " *Ta* "(take), which became " *Kienta* "(take your inheritance) and thereafter " *Keita* ".

The young prince quickly became very popular with the [Mandingoes](#) who hope that he will one day drive out the invaders of Sosso. His growing popularity worries Soumaoro, the king of Sosso, whom wizards have predicted : " *Your winner will be born in Mali* ". To escape his vengeance, Soundiata takes refuge with a neighboring sovereign and friend, reigning south of his country. There, he awaits the favorable moment to free his kingdom.

Soundiata was seasoned from an early age in hunting, archery and was [mithridatized](#) against poisons. He lived for years with the idea of revenge for the massacre of his family. One day, an emissary teaches him the revolt of Mandé (or Mandingo) against Soumaoro Kanté.

He gathers his warriors (according to the oral traditions, he would have organized an army composed of ten thousand horsemen and one hundred thousand infantrymen), conquers the [Fouta-Djalou](#) , and launches attacks on the Sosso. His sister Nana Triban, whom Soumaoro Kanté had married by force, fled and, according to legend, went to teach her brother that " *only an arrow carrying a white cock's spur can kill the king of Sosso* » . Soundiata does what is necessary with the help of the magicians attached to her service.

Gathering the forces of different small kingdoms fighting against Sosso, Soundiata Keita formed an army and managed to defeat the army of Soumaoro Kanté in [1235](#) at the [Battle of Kirina](#) . His enemy fled and eventually disappeared into a mountain in [Koulikoro](#) .

Founder of the Mali Empire



Map of the [Mali Empire](#) at its peak.

Soundiata Keita brings together all the kingdoms to form the [empire of Mali](#) . He is proclaimed " *Mansa* " which means " King of kings " , and establishes his capital in [Niani](#) ,

his hometown (now a village in [Upper Guinea](#)). During its enthronement, the Mandé [Hunters' Brotherhood](#) proclaimed the [Manden Charter](#) , which [would abolish slavery](#) and be one of the first human [rights](#) declarations (there is controversy over this).

Around [1240](#) , King Soundiata seized [Koumbi-Saleh](#) , capital of [Ghana](#) , and destroyed the city. He then takes the title of emperor and sends his lieutenants to conquer [Bambouk](#) .

Soundiata is presented as a great administrator who develops the trade, the exploitation of gold and new cultures (introduction of cotton). It organizes politically and administratively the submissive peoples, by implanting a solid military organization. The leaders of his armies are installed as provincial governors. Soundiata, besides his warlike exploits, is known for his wisdom. His tolerance allows the peaceful coexistence of [Islam](#) and [animism](#) in his Empire.

Soundiata Keita died in [1255](#) , drowned in the waters of [Sankarani](#) for some, killed by an arrow by treachery (or accidentally) at a party in Niani according to others. Upon his death, the empire of Mali extends from the [Atlantic](#) the [Middle Niger](#) , and from the forest to the desert.

Family

Unions and descendants



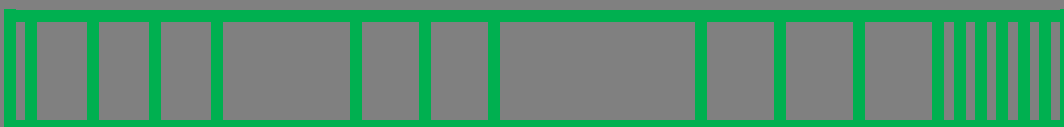
Soundiata Keita during the constitutive assembly .

Soundiata Keita had three sons who succeeded on the throne of the Empire of Mali :

- [Mansa Oule Keita](#) (known as *the Red King*), peaceful and pious sovereign who extends the kingdom of Mali ;
- Ouati Keita ;
- Khalifa Keita.

The successors of Mansa Oule, Ouati, Khalifa and Aboubakari, will lack authority and let rule anarchy in the empire.

Ancestors



4. [Moussa Allakoï](#)

2. [Naré Maghann Konaté](#)

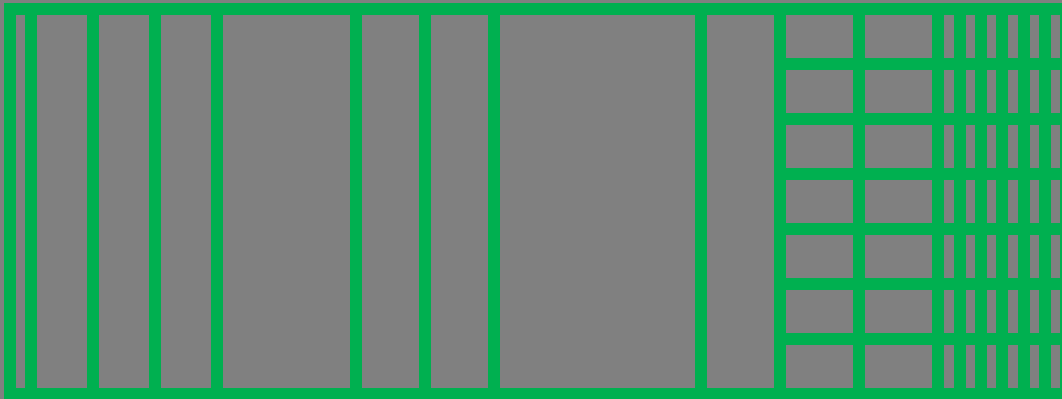
5. [Keita vacaba](#)

1. **Soundiata Keita**

6. [Keita Mamery](#)

3. [Sogolon Kondé](#)

7. [Keita Kabah isaac ismael](#)



Posterity

The epic of Soundiata

Detailed article : [Epic of Soundiata](#) .

An epic develops rapidly from the real life of Soundiata Keïta : diffused and transmitted by oral tradition, it is branched out in several variants in the different regions of [West Africa](#) . During the XXth century, it is in writing and is becoming better known internationally.

The most recent literary work on this epic is that of the novelist Raphaël Chauvancy, *Soundiata Keïta, the Lion of the Manden* ^[1], published in 2015 and winner of the Special Jury Prize for Interculturality.

Heroic worship in Senegal

Badou Sakho since [Bakel](#) still make sacrifices to the memory of Soundiata, who according to the legend would have metamorphosed into a [hippopotamus](#) .

Performances in the arts

Apart from the many forms taken by the [epic of Soundiata](#) and his posterity, the figure of Soundiata Keïta is the subject of representations and references in various forms.

In his song *Sundjata* , [Tiken Jah Fakoly](#) whose ancestor, [Fakoly](#) , nephew of [Soumaoro Kanté](#) , was the ally of Soundiata, pays tribute to the founder of the Mandingo empire.

The *Age of Empires II: The African Kingdoms* video game , released in 2015 for the *Age of Empires II* real-time strategy game : *The Age of Kings* , dedicates one of his campaigns to the life of Soundiata Keïta, the Malian head, one of four playable factions of the extension.

Battle of Kirina

General informations

Dated	towards 1235
Place	Kirina Mali
outcome	Victory of the army of Soundiata Keïta
belligerents	
Mandingo Coalition	Army of Sosso
commanders	
Soundiata Keita	Soumaoro Kanté

Foundation of the [Mali Empire](#)

Coordinates [12 ° 18 '23 " North, 8 ° 09' 06" West](#) _____

Geolocation on the map : [Mali](#)



The at **Battle of Kirina** opposed in [1235](#) the army of [King Sosso Soumaoro Kanté](#) and the army of [Soundjata Keita](#) and his allies.

After the fall of the [Ghana Empire](#) , the Sossos dominated the entire region after militarily defeating small kingdoms. King Soumaoro Kanté was reigning terror.

Sundjata Keita, returning from exile in the kingdom of Mena, allies with the various Malinke kingdoms gathered at [Siby](#) : Kamandjan Kamara, king of Siby, his cousin Tabon wana Fran Kamara, king of the blacksmiths Camara, Siara Kouman Diabate, Faony Diarra Konde (or Koné), king of the land of [Do](#) . He defies Soumangourou Kanté. The Battle of Kirina occurs after several battles. Injury Soumaoro with a [lug](#) of a white cock, his tana, it forces him to flee. Sumanguru disappears in the mountains of [Koulikoro](#) pursued by Sundiata Keita. The capital of the Kingdom of Sosso is razed.

This victory of Sundjata Keita makes him the " [mansa](#) " (emperor) recognized by all the other kings allies. He kept [Niani](#) his hometown, in present-day [Guinea](#) , as capital. It is the beginning of the [Empire of Mali](#) which dominates [West Africa](#) during several centuries.

The battle of Kirina is evoked in the [epic of Soundiata](#) , a legendary ensemble progressively developed by the oral traditions of West Africa after the real life of Soundiata.

Charter of Manden

The Charter of Mandén, proclaimed in Kouroukan Fouga *

Intangible cultural heritage

Country

[Mali](#)

Listing

[Representative list](#)

Plug	00290 [archive]
Registration year	2009
* Official UNESCO description	

The **Manden's charter** , **Mandé's charter** ^[1] , **Kouroukan Fougas's charter** , or [Malinke language](#) , **Manden Kalikan** , is the [transcript of an oral content](#) , which dates back to the reign of the first sovereign [Soundiata Keita](#) who lived from 1190 to 1255 It would have been solemnly proclaimed on the day of the enthronement of [Soundiata Keita](#) as Emperor of [Mali](#) at the end of the year [1236](#) . There is several text of the Charter, the one described below that dates back to 1222 and comes from work carried out from the 1970s by [Wa Kamissoko](#) and [Youssof Tata Cissé](#) , is inscribed in 2009 by [UNESCO](#) on the list of [Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity](#)

This text is considered by the Mandenkas (peoples who share the Mandinka language) as one of the oldest references to fundamental rights. His recognition ^[By whom?] Would confirm his legal value and universal reach.

Summary

- [1 Origin](#)
- [2 Content of the Charter](#)
- [3 National Cultural Heritage](#)
- [4 Controversy on this charter](#)

Origin

Literary work, this oath-shaped text we ^[Who?] is known in two versions : one dated 1222 and comprising seven chapters, the other 1236 and forty-four articles. These two versions were retranscribed from works conducted since the 1960s with [griots](#) depositories of these stories, belonging in particular to the [brotherhood of hunters](#) .

In 1949, the Guinean scholar Souleymane Kante publishes a compilation of 130 legal rules dating from 1236 and located at " Kurukan Fuga " . In 1960, [Djibril Tamsir Niane](#) publishes *Sunjata or the Manding epic* , translation in French of an oral story produced by [Mamadou Kouyate](#) evoking the construction of a corpus of law in " Koroukan fougas " . In 1998, at a workshop on the collection and safeguarding of the African oral heritage, organized in [Kankan](#) (Guinea) by the [Agency for the Francophonie](#) and the CELTHO, Siriman Kouyaté composes a text of 44 articles starting from several oral tales that date from 1236. Finally, [Youssof Tata Cissé](#) publishes the *Testament of Sunjata* then the *Oath of the hunters* , according to stories of [Wa Kamissoko](#) that dates from 1222. The *Oath of the hunters* is renamed *Charter of Mandé* in 2007 ^[2] .

Content of the Charter

After a preamble " addressed to the twelve parts of the world and in the name of the entire Mandé " , the charter mentions seven words, which are so many headings of articles of the charter :

- " A life is not older or more respectable than another life, just as another life is not superior to another life " ;

- " Let no one take his neighbor for free, let no one harm his neighbor, let no one martyrise his neighbor ";
- " The wrong demands redress ";
 - " Practice self-help ";
 - " Watch on the homeland ";
- " Hunger is not a good thing, nor is slavery a good thing ";
- " War will never destroy villages to take slaves; that is to say, no one will now place the bit in the mouth of his fellow-man to sell it; no one will be beaten in Mandé, let alone put to death, because he is the son of a slave ";
- " Everyone is free to act, in accordance with the prohibitions of the laws of his homeland ".

According to the transcribers of the Manden Charter, the [abolition of slavery](#) was a masterpiece of [Soundiata Keïta](#) and the [Empire of Mali](#) . The charter contains the concepts of respect for human life, the right to life, the principles of equality and non-discrimination, individual freedom, justice, equity and solidarity. By challenging slavery, she would identify the violence of situations as preceding the violence of war. ^[ref. necessary]

National Cultural Heritage

The [March 16 , 2011](#) , the [Malian](#) government adopted in the Council of Ministers a draft decree ranking in the national cultural heritage of the Manden Charter ^[3] .

Controversy on this charter

The authenticity of this charter is disputed by academics, such as [Jean-Loup Amselle](#) ^[2] or Francis Simonis ^[4] , who believe that it is a contemporary reconstruction inspired by the [Afrocentric](#) ideology . For Jean-Loup Amselle, moreover, «compare Kurukan Fuga's charter to the" [Bill of Rights](#) "and the" [Declaration of Human and Citizen Rights](#) " "Does not make much sense [...] because this charter does not in any way mark the appearance of an uprising against an absolute monarchy [...] or a concern for the rights of the individual, whoever they may be. [...] This charter concerns exclusively the passing of pacts or alliances between groups " ^[5] .

Seydou Camara wrote about the [epic of Soundiata](#) Keita

" The ideological scheme put in place responds to the dominant situation of those who built it and aims to consolidate it. This model, which gives the social organization a simplified image, divides men into three categories : the hôrôn (free men) specialists of power, war and production, the nyamakala (people of lower caste) to whom the society delegates the care of the safeguarding and the teaching of the history, and the jôn (slaves) with multiple roles. [...] The schema we evoke here reflects above all the global structures of a warlike society and conceals the tensions between the three social categories, under the guise of a balanced exchange of mutual services. Moreover, it justifies, by the performance of these services, the inequalities of fact, the idleness and the opulence of the tenants of the power and the nyamakala their allies, the obligations of labor which weigh on the jôn and the exploitation of which these are the object. Finally, this ideological reflection reassures to the extent that it aims to stabilize the structures whose image it shows in the interest of the elites who occupy their summit. This ideology of society, which is in fact resolutely conservative, conceives the divisions of which it describes the adjustment as "orders", that is to say, groups considered as immutable, delimited by difficult frontiers. to cross ^[6] . "

For Eric Jolly, "a mixture of orality and writing, this neo-traditional text" discovered "in 1998 is as" true "as the other versions or episodes of the Sunjata epic for at least two reasons : those who produced and disseminated had the authority and legitimacy to do so ; and his message betrays neither the original meaning of the corresponding epic episode, nor the current point of view of the Malian or Guinean elites. [...] This text is less a historical chronicle than a political manifesto, a legal code or a Constitution which is a model for the present " ^[7] .

The state of society described in the Sundjata Gesture strongly contradicts the text of the charter. ^[ref. needed] In this respect, the Charter of Kurukanfuga sometimes likened to that of Mande, which dates from ¹²³⁶ , as transcribed by CELTHO (Center for Linguistic and Historical Studies by oral tradition) in 1998 does not mention the abolition of slavery, but only in Article 20 the obligation for teachers to behave humanely ^[8] . The Manden Charter is attracting considerable interest in West Africa, particularly Mali ^[9] . His alleged seniority makes a strong argument for local fight against slavery ^[10] . From a historical point of view, it raises many questions, starting with the reliability of oral sources, their reconstruction and their reinterpretation during history ^[11] .

TRANSCRIPTION AND DEVELOPMENT

Billy Nankouman TRAORÉ

THE WHITE APIN

<< THE + smart of rabbits >>

