

## 5.17 Ibn Battuta Visits the West African Kingdom of Mali

Source: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1354-ibnbattuta.html>, accessed June 7, 2010

**Instructions:** Read sections A – D from the journals of Ibn Battuta and answer the questions 1 – 4.

### Questions

1. Why does Ibn Battuta think Mali is such an important city?
2. What do we learn about Mali from the meeting between Ibn Battuta and the Sultan or Mansa?
3. What is Ibn Battuta's opinion of the people of Mali?
4. There is some disagreement over whether the Kingdom of Mali should be learned about in the global history curriculum. Based on what you read here, what is your opinion? Why?

### A. Ibn Battuta arrives in Mali

Thus I reached the city of Mali, the capital of the king of the blacks. I stopped at the cemetery and went to the quarter occupied by the whites, where I asked for Muhammad ibn al-Faqih. I found that he had hired a house for me and went there. His son-in-law brought me candles and food, and next day Ibn al-Faqih himself came to visit me, with other prominent residents. I met the qadi [judge] of Malli, 'Abd ar-Rahman, who came to see me; he is a negro, a pilgrim, and a man of fine character. I met also the interpreter Dugha, who is one of the principal men among the blacks. All these persons sent me hospitality-gifts of food and treated me with the utmost generosity – may God reward them for their kindnesses!

### B. Ibn Battuta meets the King of Mali

The sultan of Mali is Mansa Sulayman, “mansa” meaning sultan [in Mandingo], and Sulayman being his proper name. He is a miserly king, not a man from whom one might hope for a rich present. [H]e held a banquet in commemoration of our master [the late sultan of Morocco] Abu'l-Hasan, to which the commanders, doctors, qadi [judge] and preacher were invited, and I went along with them. Reading-desks were brought in, and the Koran was read through, then they prayed for our master Abu'l-Hasan and also for Mansa Sulayman. When the ceremony was over I went forward and saluted Mansa Sulayman. The qadi, the preacher, and Ibn al-Faqih told him who I was, and he answered them in their tongue. They said to me, “The sultan says to you 'Give thanks to God,'” so I said, “Praise be to God and thanks under all circumstances.”

### C. The Sultan

On certain days the sultan holds audiences in the palace yard, where there is a platform under a tree, with three steps; this they call the “pempi.” It is carpeted with silk and has cushions placed on it. [Over it] is raised the umbrella, which is a sort of pavilion made of silk, surmounted by a bird in gold, about the size of a falcon. The sultan comes out of a door in a corner of the palace, carrying a bow in his hand and a quiver on his back. On his head he has a golden skull-cap, bound with a gold band which has narrow ends shaped like knives, more than a span in length. His usual dress is a velvety red tunic, made of the European fabrics called “mutanfas.”

### D. The character of the people of Mali

The negroes possess some admirable qualities. They are seldom unjust, and have a greater abhorrence of injustice than any other people. Their sultan shows no mercy to anyone who is guilty of the least act of it. There is complete security in their country. Neither traveller nor inhabitant in it has anything to fear from robbers or men of violence. They do not confiscate the property of any white man who dies in their country, even if it be uncounted wealth. On the contrary, they give it into the charge of some trustworthy person among the whites, until the rightful heir takes possession of it. They are careful to observe the hours of prayer, and assiduous in attending them in congregations, and in bringing up their children to them.