



Kings and Queens of West Africa (Watts Library)

By Sylviane A. Diout, Sylviane Anna Diout

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A survey of the historical regions and kingdoms of West Africa including biographies of Mansa Musa, Emperor of Mali (c. 1280-1337); Osei Tutu, King of Asante (c. 1660-1717); and Ndate Yalla Mbodj, Queen of Walo (c. 1810-1860).

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Editorial Review

From the Publisher

For many centuries West Africa was a region of powerful kingdoms and large empires. Here are the dramatic stories of some of the region's strongest and most innovative rulers. This series is the definitive collection of informational books for intermediate-middle grade readers.

About the Author

Sylviane Anna Diouf is the author of fiction and nonfiction books for adults and children and of numerous articles for international publications and scholarly journals and books. She specializes in the history of Africa and of people of African origin. Of Senegalese and French parentage, she has lived in various African and European countries and in the United States. Sylviane Diouf is a university professor and lives in New York with her son.

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For many centuries there have been organized states and powerful empires in West Africa. Their wealth came from agriculture and mining, which gave rise to trade through the region and with Central and North Africa. The kingdoms and empires in the area expanded to control the trade activity. The stories of three rulers convey the history of the region and show the important role trade played. Mansa Musa (c. 1280-1337), emperor of Mali established trade and cultural relations with the Islamic World. Osei Tutu (c. 1660-1717) of Asante (Ghana) used commercial ties with the Europeans to expand his territories. Queen Ndate Yalla Mbodj (c. 1810-1860) of Walo (in Senegal) tried to protect the trade and independence of her kingdom from a French takeover.

A Powerful Muslim State

Ancient Ghana was the first important empire to rise in West Africa. It dominated the region in the eighth century but later weakened. Ancient Mali was the second important West African empire. In 1235, its founder, Sundiata Keita and his army conquered the crumbling Ghana. By the mid-eleventh century, the rulers, many of the educated people, and the traders had become Muslims. They were followers of Islam, the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad. The empire of Mali opened trade and cultural relations with other Muslim countries such as Morocco, Egypt, and Arabia. Mali reached its height under Emperor Mansa Musa in the fourteenth century. It was one of the best organized and largest empires in the world at that time.

Europeans and the Slave Trade

In the forest regions of southern West Africa, large kingdoms arose in the fourteenth century. Shortly after, Europeans arrived and built forts on the Atlantic coast, many of them on the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) to control the gold and slave trades. They provided weapons to local rulers who fought each other to expand their territories. They sold their prisoners of war to the European merchants. The prisoners were then shipped to the Americas as slaves. In the seventeenth century, the kingdom of Asante, led by Osei Tutu, became the most powerful state in the region.

The Beginning of Colonization

The nineteenth century was a time of great changes. The slave trade and slavery were abolished by 1848, and the people could live in peace after more than 300 years of devastation. But it also saw the end of a world:

The last African kingdoms disappeared, as the colonial powers -France, Great Britain, and Portugal- took control. The first kingdom to be conquered by the French was Walo, in Senegal ruled by Queen Ndate Yalla Mbodj. By the end of the century, West Africa was totally conquered. Kings Mansa Musa and Osei Tutu, and Queen Ndate Yalla Mbodj reigned during three important eras in West Africa. The stories of their lives help us to understand this region's history.

Users Review

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