**al-Bakri**

**11th century description of Ghana**

*This passage is a description of the kingdom of Ghana.*

            The following description of the Kingdom of Ghana was written by Al-Bakri, a member of a prominent Spanish Arab family who lived during the 11th century.

            The city of Ghana consists of two towns situated on a plain.  One of these towns, which is inhabited by Muslims, is large and possesses twelve mosques, in which they assemble for the Friday prayer.  There are salaried imams and muezzins, as well as jurists and scholars.  In the environs are wells with sweet water, from which they drink and with which they grow vegetables.  The king’s town is six miles distant from this one….

            Between these two towns are continuous habitations.  …In the king’s town, and not far from his court of justice, is a mosque where the Muslims who arrive at his court pray.  Around the king’s town are domed buildings and groves and thickets where the sorcerers of these people, men in charge of the religious cult, live.  In them too are their idols and the tombs of their kings.  These woods are guarded and none may enter them and know what is there…. The king’s interpreters, the official in charge of his treasury and the majority of his ministers are Muslims.  Among the people who follow the king’s religion only he and his heir apparent (who is the son of his sister) may wear sewn clothes.  All other people wear robes of cotton, silk, or brocade, according o their means.  All of them shave their beards, and women shave their heads.  The king adorns himself like a woman (wearing necklaces) round his neck and (bracelets) on his forearms, and he puts on a high cap decorated with gold and wrapped in a turban of fine cotton.  He sits in audience or to hear grievances against officials in a domed pavilion around which stand ten horses covered with gold-embroidered materials.  Behind the king stand ten pages holding shields and swords decorated with gold, and on his right are the sons of the (vassel) kings of his country wearing splendid garments and their hair plaited with gold.  The governor of the city sits on the ground before the king and around him are ministers seated likewise.  At the door of the pavilion are dogs of excellent pedigree who hardly ever leave the place where the king is, guarding him.  Round their necks they wear collars of gold and silver studded with a number of balls of the same metals.  The audience is announced by the beating of a drum which they call *duba* made from a long hollow log.  When the people who profess the same religion as the king approach him they fall on their knees and sprinkle dust on their head, for this is their way of greeting him.  As for the Muslims, they greet him only by clapping their hands….

            Their religion is paganism and the worship of idols….

            On every donkey-load of salt when it is brought into the country their king levies one golden dinar and two dinars when it is sent out. … The best gold is found in  his land comes from the town of Ghiyaru, which is eighteen days’ traveling distance from the king’s town over a country inhabited by tribes of the Sudan whose dwellings are continuous…

            The king of Ghana, when he calls up his army, can put 200,000 men into the field, more than 40,000 of them archers.

<http://www.bu.edu/africa/outreach/materials/handouts/k_o_ghana.html>

**al-Umari**

**14th century description of Mansa Musa’s visit to Cairo**

*This passage is a description of Mansa Musa’s [Mali’s second emperor] visit to Egypt on his way to Mecca.*

            From the beginning of my coming to stay in Egypt I heard talk of the arrival of this sultan Musa on his Pilgrimage and found the Cairenes eager to recount what they had seem of the Africans’ prodigal spending.  I asked the emir Abu…and he told me of the opulence, manly virtues, and piety of his sultan.  “When I went out to meet him {he said} that is, on behalf of the mighty sultan al-Malik al-Nasir, he did me extreme honour and treated me with the greatest courtesy.  He addressed me, however, only through an interpreter despite his perfect ability to speak in the Arabic tongue.  Then he forwarded to the royal treasury many loads of unworked native gold and other valuables.  I tried to persuade him to go up to the Citadel to meet the sultan, but he refused persistently saying: “I came for the Pilgrimage and nothing else.  I do not wish to mix anything else with my Pilgrimage.”  He had begun to use this argument but I realized that the audience was repugnant to him because he would be forced to kiss the ground and the sultan’s hand, which he didn’t want to do.  I continue to cajole him and he continued to make excuses but the sultan’s protocol demanded that I should bring him into the royal presence, so I kept on at him till he agreed.

            When we came in the sultan’s presence we said to him: ‘Kiss the ground!’ but he refused outright saying: ‘How may this be?’  Then an intelligent man who was with him whispered to him something we could not understand and he said: ‘I make obeisance to God who created me!’ then he prostrated himself and went forward to the sultan.  The sultan half rose to greet him and sat him by his side.  They conversed together for a long time, then sultan Musa went out.  The sultan sent to him several complete suits of honour for himself, his courtiers, and all those who had come with him, and saddled and bridled horses for himself and his chief courtiers….

This man [Mansa Musa] flooded Cairo with his benefactions.  He left no court emir nor holder of a royal office without the gift of a load of gold.  The Cairenes made incalculable profits out of him and his suite in buying and selling and giving and taking.  They exchanged gold until they depressed its value in Egypt and caused its price to fall.” …

            Gold was at a high price in Egypt until they came in that year.  The mithqal did not go below 25 dirhams and was generally above, but from that time its value fell and it cheapened in price and has remained cheap till now.  The mithqal does not exceed 22 dirhams or less.  This has been the state of affairs for about twelve years until this day by reason of the large amount of gold which they brought into Egypt and spent there. …

<http://www.bu.edu/africa/outreach/materials/handouts/k_o_mali.html>

**Ibn Battuta**

**14th century description of Mali**

*This passage is a description of the kingdom of Mali.*

"[The sultan] has a lofty pavilion, of which the door is inside his house, where he sits for most of the time. . . . There came forth from the gate of the palace about 300 slaves, some carrying in their hands bows and others having in their hands short lances and shields. . . Then two saddled and bridled horses are brought, with two rams which, they say, are effective against the evil eye. . . . Dugha, the interpreter, stands at the gate of the council-place wearing fine garments of silk brocade and other materials, and on his head a turban with fringes which they have a novel way of winding. . . . The troops, governors, young men, slaves, the Masufa, and others sit outside the council-place in a broad street where there are trees. . . . Inside the council-place beneath the arches a man is standing. Anyone who wishes to address the sultan addresses Dugha and Dugha addresses that man standing and that man standing addresses the sultan. If one of them addresses the sultan and the latter [the Sultan] replies he uncovers the clothes from his back and sprinkles dust on his head and back, like one washing himself with water. I used to marvel how their eyes did not become blinded."

<http://www.eduplace.com/ss/hmss/7/unit/act3.1blm.html>

**Leo Africanus**

**16th century description of Timbuktu**

The name of this kingdom is a modern one, after a city which was built by a king named Mansa Suleyman in the year 610 of the hegira [1232 CE] around twelve miles from a branch of the Niger River.

The houses of Timbuktu are huts made of clay-covered wattles with thatched roofs. In the center of the city is a temple built of stone and mortar, built by an architect named Granata, and in addition there is a large palace, constructed by the same architect, where the king lives. The shops of the artisans, the merchants, and especially weavers of cotton cloth are very numerous. Fabrics are also imported from Europe to Timbuktu, borne by Berber merchants.

The women of the city maintain the custom of veiling their faces, except for the slaves who sell all the foodstuffs. The inhabitants are very rich, especially the strangers who have settled in the country; so much so that the current king has given two of his daughters in marriage to two brothers, both businessmen, on account of their wealth. There are many wells containing sweet water in Timbuktu; and in addition, when the Niger is in flood canals deliver the water to the city. Grain and animals are abundant, so that the consumption of milk and butter is considerable. But salt is in very short supply because it is carried here from Tegaza, some 500 miles from Timbuktu. I happened to be in this city at a time when a load of salt sold for eighty ducats. The king has a rich treasure of coins and gold ingots. One of these ingots weighs 970 pounds.

The royal court is magnificent and very well organized. When the king goes from one city to another with the people of his court, he rides a camel and the horses are led by hand by servants. If fighting becomes necessary, the servants mount the camels and all the soldiers mount on horseback. When someone wishes to speak to the king, he must kneel before him and bow down; but this is only required of those who have never before spoken to the king, or of ambassadors. The king has about 3,000 horsemen and infinity of foot-soldiers armed with bows made of wild fennel [?] which they use to shoot poisoned arrows. This king makes war only upon neighboring enemies and upon those who do not want to pay him tribute. When he has gained a victory, he has all of them--even the children--sold in the market at Timbuktu.

Only small, poor horses are born in this country. The merchants use them for their voyages and the courtiers to move about the city. But the good horses come from Barbary. They arrive in a caravan and, ten or twelve days later, they are led to the ruler, who takes as many as he likes and pays appropriately for them.

The king is a declared enemy of the Jews. He will not allow any to live in the city. If he hears it said that a Berber merchant frequents them or does business with them, he confiscates his goods. There are in Timbuktu numerous judges, teachers and priests, all properly appointed by the king. He greatly honors learning. Many hand-written books imported from Barbary are also sold. There is more profit made from this commerce than from all other merchandise.

Instead of coined money, pure gold nuggets are used; and for small purchases, cowrie shells which have been carried from Persia, and of which 400 equal a ducat. Six and two-thirds of their ducats equal one Roman gold ounce.

The people of Timbuktu are of a peaceful nature. They have a custom of almost continuously walking about the city in the evening (except for those that sell gold), between 10 PM and 1 AM, playing musical instruments and dancing. The citizens have at their service many slaves, both men and women.

The city is very much endangered by fire. At the time when I was there on my second voyage, half the city burned in the space of five hours. But the wind was violent and the inhabitants of the other half of the city began to move their belongings for fear that the other half would burn.

There are no gardens or orchards in the area surrounding Timbuktu.

<http://public.wsu.edu/~wldciv/world_civ_reader/world_civ_reader_2/leo_africanus.html>