

The Great Mosque at Djenné

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the Great Mosque at Djenné in Mali, exploring both its history and unique construction. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Original Construction](#)
2. [Rebuild](#)

1. Original Construction

The original construction of the Great Mosque at Djenné in Mali dates back to sometime between 1200–1330 CE. During that time, the first Muslim sultan of Djenné, Koi Konboro, decided to have a mosque constructed using traditional, local building techniques. In 1818, the Fulani took over Djenné, and their leader, Cheikou Amadou, ordered that the mosque could not be rebuilt, letting it waste away almost completely. Eventually it was rebuilt twice during the 1800s, then one last time in 1907, which involved enlarging it and adding the three minarets to the qibla wall.

The mosque sits atop a plinth, or platform, that is almost 3 meters tall. This elevates it and protects it from the rain. The overall layout of the mosque is divided into two main sections, a courtyard and a hypostyle hall, which contains 90 pillars. Instead of feeling light and airy, this interior space is heavy and ponderous, due to the thickness of the pillars. This also limits the number of people that the hypostyle hall can hold. There are mihrab niches where each of the three minarets are located. The mosque's exterior space includes a series of buttresses that help support the weight of the walls. The tops of the walls are decorated with crenellations, or bumps. Each minaret is decorated with a single ostrich egg as a symbol of fertility that predates the arrival of Islam in Mali. The roof has a series of holes that allow hot air to escape, keeping the interior cool.



The Great Mosque at Djenné, Mali

2. Rebuild

The Great Mosque at Djenné is made of **adobe** and needs to be rebuilt every year. If the mosque is not replastered every year, it will melt away during the rainy season, as cracks slowly form in the exterior that can let in moisture. Even under normal circumstances, a particularly heavy rain is sufficient to wash away parts of minarets and other structures. For this reason, one of the biggest festivals in the town of Djenné involves the people of the town replastering the exterior. This takes place in April, several months before the rainy season in July and August. The bunches of palm sticks that protrude from the exterior serve as guides and scaffolding that aid in the replastering. This mosque is the largest structure made out of adobe in the world and the crowning architectural achievement of the Sahel, the region just to the south of the Sahara.





TERM TO KNOW

Adobe

A building material made out of mud and other organic material, such as grass and straw.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the Great Mosque at Djenné in Mali, originally built by the first Muslim sultan of Djenné, Koi Konboro. You learned that its **original construction** was conducted using traditional, local building techniques; after the Fulani took over Djenné and allowed the structure to waste away almost completely, it was eventually rebuilt—twice during the 1800s, then one last time in 1907. As the largest structure made out of adobe in the world, you learned that the Great Mosque needs to be rebuilt every year to avoid melting away in the rainy season; this **rebuild** is at the center of one of the biggest festivals in the town of Djenné, involving the people of the town replastering the Great Mosque's exterior.

Source: THIS CONTENT HAS BEEN ADAPTED FROM [LUMEN LEARNING'S "ECONOMIC THINKING"] TUTORIAL.



TERMS TO KNOW

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