

**The Charter of Kurukan-Fuga
or
the Constitution of the Mali Empire (circa 13th century AD)**

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I. Social Organization

Article 1: The society of the Mali Empire is sub-divided as follows:

- 16 (sixteen) clans of bowmen
- 4 (four) princely families
- 5 (five) Islamic clerical families
- 4 (four) groups of occupational specialists "*nyamakala*"
- 1 (one) group of slaves.

Each of these groups has a specific role and a specific activity.

Article 2: The "*Nyamakala*" have an obligation to speak the truth to chiefs, to be their enlightened counsellors and to defend, orally, the established rules and order throughout the Empire.

Article 3: The Muslim clerical families are our masters and our instructors in Islam. Everybody owes them respect and esteem.

Article 4: The society is subdivided into age grades. To head of each of these a chief is elected. All individuals (men and women) born during a period of three consecutive years belong to a common age grade. Age grades situated between the young and the elderly must take part in the major decisions affecting the polity.

Article 5: In order to win the battle for prosperity, there is hereby established a system of monitoring to control laziness and idleness.

Article 6: Joking relationships (*sanankunya*) and blood oaths (*tanamanyoya*) are hereby established among the Mandinka peoples. As a result, no dispute which arises among these groups should be allowed to degenerate, respect for others being the rule.

Between brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, between grandparents and grandchildren, tolerance and teasing should be the rule.

Article 7: The Keita family is designated the ruling family of the Empire. Magan-Soundiata is proclaimed the Mansa [paramount chief] of Mali.

II. Rights and Duties

Article 8: In the Mali Empire, every person has the right:

- to life and to the preservation of his bodily integrity (free from torture).
- to move about freely and exercise in complete liberty the trade he selects of his own free will.

Article 9: The whole society bears responsibility for the education of children. Under these conditions, paternal authority belongs to everyone.

Article 10: We should present our condolences to each other. They do not resuscitate the dead, but they strengthen relationships among the living.

Article 11: When your wife or your child runs from you, do not pursue him or her into your neighbor's house.

Article 12: Inheritance being patrilineal, never give power to a son as long as one of his fathers remains alive.

Never accord a minor power simply because he owns property.

Article 13: Never offend men of talent.

Article 14: Never offend women: they are our mothers.

Article 15: Never hit a married woman without having first tried (in vain) to get her husband to intervene.

Article 16: In addition to their daily activities, women should be associated in all our governments. [i.e., age grades, other associations, local government (village) units, as well as imperial governments]

Article 17: Lies that have survived and resisted for 40 years should be considered as truths.

Article 18: Let us respect the principle of seniority.

Article 19: Every man has two sets of parents-in-law: the parents of the woman whom he has married, and his word, freely given. It owes them respect and consideration.

Article 20: Commercial slavery is outlawed in Mali Empire. Cease to mistreat your household slaves. One can be master of a slave, but not of the slave's possessions.

Article 21: Do not flirt with the wives of your neighbor, your friend, your patron, your chief, the magician or the Islamic cleric.

Article 22: Vanity is the sign of weakness and humility the sign of greatness.

Article 23: Let us cease to betray each other. Let us respect our word of honor [commitments].

Article 24: Better refuse than betray, better death than dishonor [shame].

Article 25: It is forbidden to make strangers cry [harm strangers] in the Mali Empire.

Article 26: Diplomats must be allowed to move freely [run no risks] throughout the Mali Empire.

Article 27: The bull lent to another ought not to run the herd.

Article 28: A girl can be given in marriage as soon as she reaches puberty, without regard to her age. The choice of her parents must be followed, however numerous the suitors.

Article 29: The dowry is set at three cows: one for the girl, one for her mother and one for her father.

Article 30: In the Mali Empire, divorce may be pronounced for the following reasons:

- the husband's impotence
- the mental illness of one of the spouses.
- the husband's inability to meet the responsibilities to which the marriage gives rise.

The divorce must be proclaimed outside the village.

Article 31: Let us come to the assistance of those who need it.

Article 32: Let us respect the principles of kinship, of marriage and of neighborliness.

Article 33: You can kill your enemy, but you do not have the right to humiliate him.

Article 34: In large assemblies, everyone should allow his [her] legitimate representatives to speak for him [her].

III. Property

Article 35: Property can be acquired in five ways: purchase, gift, barter, work and inheritance. Any other form of acquisition of property without a credible witness is suspect.

Article 36: Unclaimed objects are not subject to appropriation until four years have elapsed.

Article 37: The fourth calf of a heifer given for safekeeping becomes the property of its guardian. One egg out of four belongs to the guardian of a laying hen.

Article 38: The official rate of exchange is one cow for four sheep or four goats.

Article 39: Relieving your hunger does not constitute theft if you don't carry off anything [food] in your sack or in your pocket.

IV. Environmental Conservation

Article 40: The *bush* [wild land] is our most precious resource; everyone owes it to himself to protect and preserve it for the happiness of all.

Article 41: Before burning bushlands [starting a bushfire], do not look at the ground, look at the tree tops [to check the speed and strength of the wind].

Article 42: Domestic animals must be tied up [kept under strict control?] during the growing season and allowed to roam after the harvest. Dogs, cats, ducks and chickens are exempt from this rule.

V. Final Dispositions

Article 43: Balla Fassèka KOUYATE is designated Chief of Protocol and Mediator-in-Chief of the Mali Empire. His family is authorized to speak freely so long as it is a question of protecting the unity and greatness of the Empire. The [KOUYATE] family is authorized to joke with all Mandinka, above all with the royal family.

Article 44: All who violate these rules will be punished. Everyone is hereby made responsible for seeing to their application throughout the Mali Empire [Mandinka lands?].