

Mansa Musa Reading

Mansa Musa is mostly remembered for his extravagant *hajj*, or pilgrimage, to Mecca with, 100 camel-loads of gold, each weighing 300 lbs.; 500 slaves, each carrying a 4 lb. gold staff; thousands of his subjects; as well as his senior wife, with her 500 attendants.. Mansa Musa and his officers gave out so much gold that they depressed its value in Egypt and caused its value to fall.

However, attention should be focused on the effects of the *hajj*, rather than the pilgrimage itself. The *hajj* planted Mali in men's minds and its riches fired up the imagination. In 1339, Mali appeared on a "Map of the World". In 1367, another map of the world showed a road leading from North Africa through the Atlas Mountains into the Western Sudan. In 1375 a third map of the world showed a richly attired monarch holding a large gold nugget in the area south of the Sahara. Also, trade between Egypt and Mali flourished.

Mansa Musa brought back with him an Arabic library, religious scholars, and most importantly the Muslim architect al-Sahili, who built the great mosques at Gao and Timbuktu and a royal palace. It is said that his style influenced architecture in the Sudan where, in the absence of stone, the beaten earth is often reinforced with wood which bristles out of the buildings.

Mansa Musa strengthened Islam and promoted education, trade, and commerce in Mali. The foundations were laid for Timbuktu becoming the cultural and commercial centers of the Western Sudan, eclipsing those of North Africa and producing Arabic-language black literature in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Diplomatic relations were established and ambassadors were exchanged between Mali and Morocco.

For the forty-seven years between the time of the death of his grandfather's brother, Sundiata, and Mansa Musa's accession to the throne, Mali endured a period of political instability. Mansa Musa ruled for 25 years, bringing prosperity and stability to Mali and expanding the empire he inherited.

Mali achieved the apex of its territorial expansion under Mansa Musa. The Mali Empire extended from the Atlantic coast in the west to Songhai far down the Niger bend to the east: from the salt mines of Taghaza in the north to the legendary gold mines of Wangara in the south.

Mansa Musa died in 1337. He had brought stability and good government to Mali, spreading its fame abroad and making it truly remarkable both for its extent and for its wealth and a striking example of the capacity of the West African people for political organization.