

Mansa Musa Travels to Mecca

History

Lesson 2 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

Enquiry: What does the life of Mansa Musa reveal about medieval Mali?



Hajj

The Hajj (حَجّ in Arabic) is an Islamic **pilgrimage** to Mecca (Saudi Arabia) which happens every year.

Mecca is a very holy place for Muslims. The Hajj should be carried out at least once in a lifetime by every Muslim who is able to make the journey.



Mansa Musa prepares for the journey

We are not certain why Mansa Musa decided to go on the Hajj. Mansa Musa was Muslim, so it may just reveal that he was a committed follower of Islam.

Other historians have argued that Musa might have gone because he wanted to show the world how wealthy Mali was. Others believe it was because Musa was **ambitious** and wanted to raise Mali's status.

Historian Michael Gomez has tried to work out how long it would have taken Mansa Musa to prepare for the journey.

The amount of gold and enslaved people that Mansa Musa took with him on his journey suggests it took years of preparation. To get that many enslaved people, Mali would have spent years fighting neighbouring groups and taking people as slaves when they won.



Mansa Musa arrives in Cairo

Several accounts suggest he arrived in Cairo with over 15,000 people.

Many people wrote about Mansa Musa's stay in Cairo, which was one of the world's most important cities.

According to one account, 500 of Mansa Musa's slaves had a golden **staff**.

In total, he might have brought 18 tons of gold with him to Cairo.

In fact, he brought so much gold, he caused a crash in the price of gold in Egypt for years.



Mansa Musa arrives in Cairo

Al Umari wrote down what he had heard about Mansa Musa's time in Egypt:

From the beginning of my stay in Egypt I heard talk of the arrival of this Sultan Musa on his pilgrimage and found the Cairenes (people who lived in Cairo) eager to tell what they had seen of the Africans' spending. I asked the emir Abu...and he told me of the wealth, manly virtues, and piety of his sultan. I tried to persuade Mansa to go up to the Citadel to meet the sultan, but he refused saying: "I came for the Pilgrimage and nothing else. I do not wish to mix anything else with my Pilgrimage."

I realised that he hated the idea of meeting the sultan because he would be required to kiss the ground and the Sultan's hand. I continue to persuade him and he continued to make excuses but the Sultan's rules demanded that I should bring him into the royal presence, so I kept on at him till he agreed.



Mansa Musa arrives in Cairo

Abu continued: When we came in the sultan's presence we said to Mansa Musa: "Kiss the ground!" but he refused right away saying: "How may this be?"

Then a clever man of Mansa Musa's whispered to something we could not understand and then he said: "I pay respect to God who created me!" then he bowed and went forward to the Sultan.

The Sultan half rose to greet him and sat him by his side. They talked together for a long time, then Musa went out. The Sultan sent to him great gifts himself, his courtiers, and all those who had come with him.



Questions

1. Who was Mansa Musa?
2. What is the Hajj?
3. In Cairo, how did Mansa Musa show off how wealthy he was?
4. Mansa Musa is reported to have refused to kiss the ground in front of Sultan al-Nasir of Cairo. What could this reveal about him?
5. What does Mansa Musa's journey to Mecca reveal about medieval Mali?



Extension activity

What does Mansa Musa's journey to Mecca reveal about medieval Mali?

Use the sentence starters below to write a paragraph answering this question.

Sentence starters	Key words
Mansa Musa travelled to Mecca because...	Hajj
When he arrived in Cairo he...	wealthy
This could reveal that medieval Mali was...	Muslim ambitious



Glossary

Pilgrimage - religious journey, normally to a holy place

Ambitious - determined to succeed

Staff - long stick which is used to show someone has an important position

