



World History

Case Study: Mansa Musa

Name: _____
Section: _____
Score: ____/5

Directions: As a class we will be reading through the Introduction to Mansa Musa written by Joe Palumbo and differentiating between assertions, reasoning, and evidence. On the bottom of each page there is an A.R.E. chart to fill out as we go along. Once finished answer the questions at the bottom of the second page.

Introduction to Mansa Musa: African King of Gold

Joe Palumbo

The great political problem in the western region of the Western Sudan was how to bring peace and order into the confusion that had followed the collapse of Ghana. The problem was tackled, and largely solved, by a Mali emperor whose name became more famous even than that of Sundiata, the king who established the new empire of Mali. This was Mansa Kankan Musa, who carried Mali to the height of its power and enjoyed a reputation at home and abroad as an able and pious king. Mansa was his title and means “ruler” or “sultan.” Musa is Arabic for “Moses.”

Mansa Musa came to power around 1312. By the time of his death in 1337, Mali had grown into one of the largest empires in the world.¹ What Mansa Musa accomplished was to repeat the success of Ghana on a more ambitious scale. He already had firm control of the trade routes to those lands. Now he brought the lands of the Middle Niger under his control and enclosed the key trading cities of Timbuktu and Gao within his empire. He imposed his rule on southern Saharan trading cities like Walata, and pushed his armies northward until their influence was felt as far as the salt deposits of Taghaza in the north central desert. He sent them eastward beyond Gao to the very frontiers of Hausaland (today northern Nigeria) and westward down the Gambia and Senegal River valleys to the Atlantic Ocean.

Through twenty-five successful years Mansa Musa progressively enclosed a large part of the central and western regions of the Western Sudan within a single system of law and order. He did this so well that Ibn Battuta, traveling through Mali some twelve years after the great emperor's death, could find “complete and general safety in the land.”

Assertions	Reasoning	Evidence

¹ *The year of Musa's death is often given as 1332. But the great North African historian, Ibn Khaldun, whose writings remain the best source of information on the dates of the rulers of Mali, has recorded that Musa was still alive in 1337.

Muslim merchant groups, notably the Dyula and Wangara grew in strength with the widening power of Mali. Their trading operations began to spread into many parts of West Africa, pushing their enterprises far down into the forest lands as well as across the plains of the north.

This was also a period of Islamic expansion in the Western Sudan. Unlike the rulers of Ghana, Mansa Musa accepted the new religion. Many members of his royal court, as well as provincial chiefs and officers, followed him. So did some of their subjects. Other rulers and peoples remained loyal to their own religions, but Islam steadily widened its influence. More and more West Africans went on pilgrimages to Mecca. More and more North Africans and Egyptians visited Mali. Trade and Islam grew together, and both prospered.

Mansa Musa himself made a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324. His journey through Egypt was long remembered with amazement because Musa took with him so much gold and gave away so many golden gifts that “the people of Cairo earned incalculable sums.” So lavish was Musa with his gifts that he upset the value of goods on the Cairo market. Gold became more plentiful and therefore less valued, so prices rose accordingly. The North African scholar al-Umari, who lived in Cairo a few years after Mansa Musa’s visit declared that of all the Muslim rulers of West Africa Musa was “the most powerful, the richest, the most fortunate, the most feared by his enemies, and the most able to do good to those around him.” Behind these words of praise one may glimpse the power and reputation that Mali drew from its control of a very wide region of trade in precious goods such as salt, ivory, kola nuts, and especially gold.

Under Mansa Musa, Mali ambassadors and royal agents were established in Morocco, Egypt, and elsewhere. North African and Egyptian scholars visited Mali’s capital. On returning from pilgrimage, Mansa Musa brought with him a number of learned men from Egypt. One of them, called al-Saheli, is said to have designed new mosques at Gao and Timbuktu and built a palace for the emperor. The fashion of building houses of brick became popular among wealthy people in the cities of the Western Sudan.

Niani, the capital of this empire, has long since disappeared. Yet as late as the sixteenth century, the Moroccan traveler Leo Africanus could still describe it as a place of “six thousands hearths,” and its inhabitants as “the most civilized, intelligent, and respected” of all the peoples of the Western Sudan.

Palumbo, Joe. "Mansa Musa: African King of Gold." Mansa Musa: (1991): n. pag. National Center for History in the Schools, 2010. Web. 28 June 2014.

Assertions	Reasoning	Evidence

Follow-Up Question

1. What is the main purpose of this article? (Is it trying to prove an argument, explain information, or get you to believe something?) Explain what led you to determine that on a separate sheet of paper to be handed in.