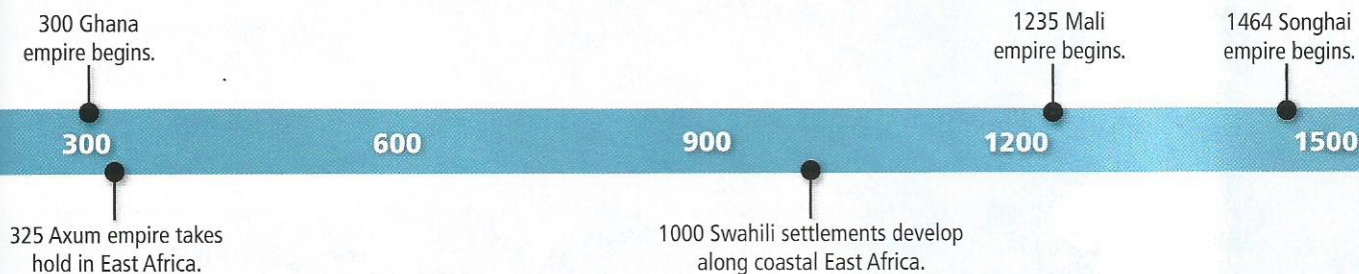


African Empires and Settlements

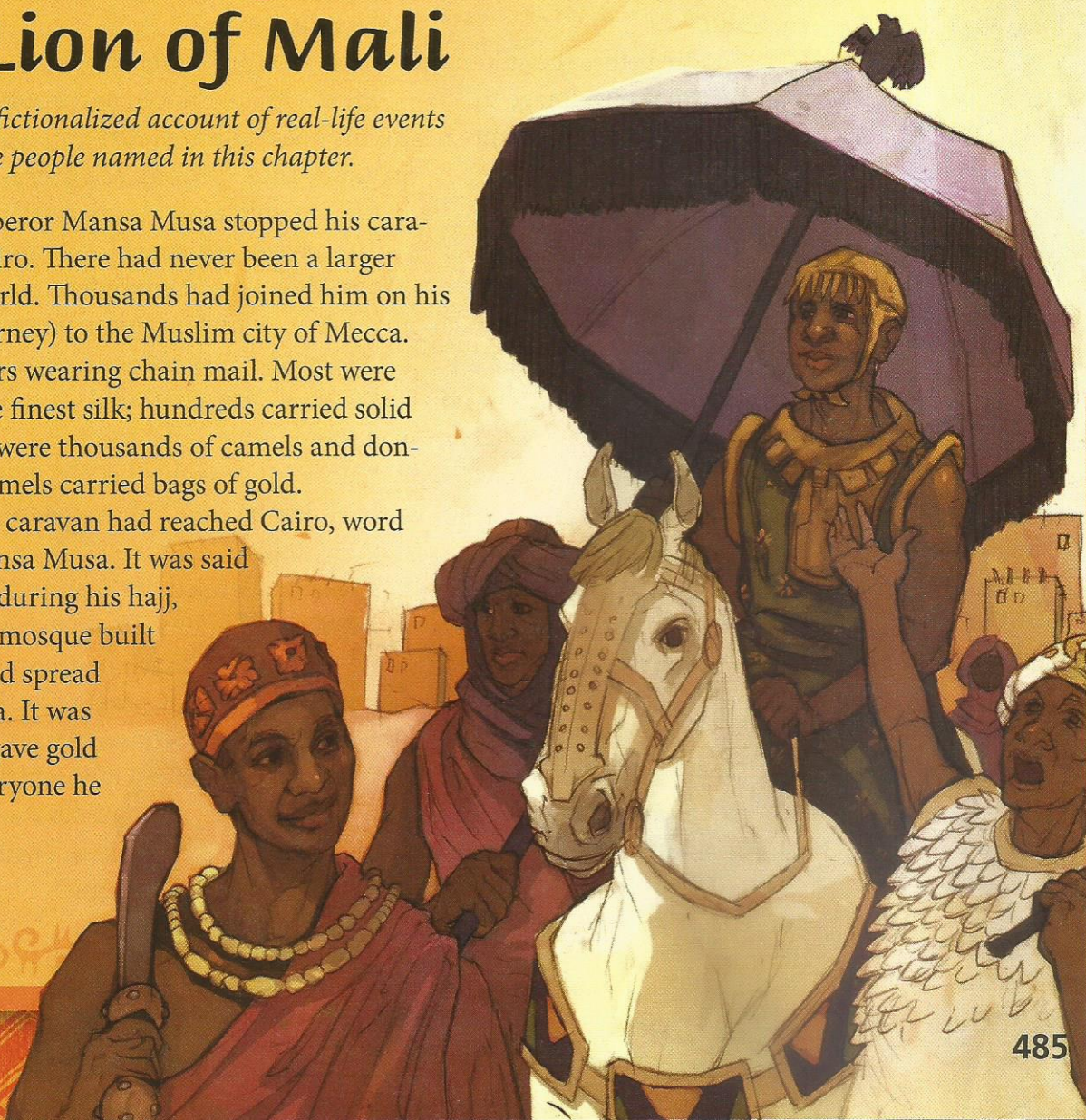


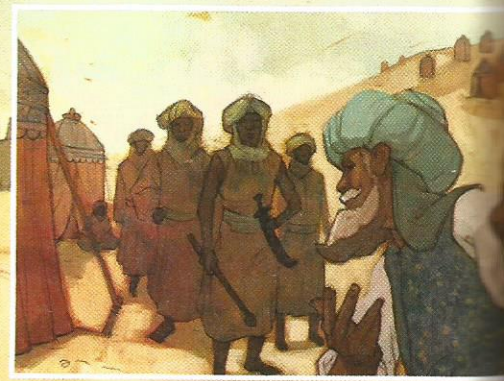
Mansa Musa: The Lion of Mali

This myStory is a fictionalized account of real-life events experienced by the people named in this chapter.

In 1324, Mali emperor Mansa Musa stopped his caravan outside of Cairo. There had never been a larger caravan in the world. Thousands had joined him on his hajj (religious journey) to the Muslim city of Mecca. Many were soldiers wearing chain mail. Most were slaves wearing the finest silk; hundreds carried solid gold staffs. There were thousands of camels and donkeys. About 80 camels carried bags of gold.

By the time the caravan had reached Cairo, word had spread of Mansa Musa. It was said that every Friday during his hajj, he ordered a new mosque built so that Islam could spread throughout Africa. It was also said that he gave gold dust to nearly everyone he met on his hajj.





About 60,000 followers joined Mansa Musa on his hajj. When they reached Cairo, the sultan sent a messenger to invite Mansa Musa to a meeting.

It did not take long for the sultan of Cairo to send a messenger to Mansa Musa. "The sultan wishes to meet you," the messenger said.

Mansa Musa sighed. To appear before the sultan was a distraction from his spiritual pilgrimage to Mecca. But Mansa Musa decided he did not want to offend the sultan. To do so could disrupt trade between Mali and Egypt. He told the messenger that he and his advisors would visit the sultan.

In the sultan's palace, the messenger announced Mansa Musa to the sultan. The sultan sat upon a large throne. He did not move. Neither did Mansa Musa. The messenger said to Mansa Musa, "All who appear before the sultan must fall to their knees."

Mansa Musa frowned. He did not want to kneel before the sultan. In Mali, when people came before him, they first sprinkled dust on their heads to express humility and respect. Mansa Musa whispered to an advisor, "I do not understand. Should not the sultan fall to his knees before me? After all, who controls the salt and the gold trade routes throughout West Africa?"

"You do, Your Highness," whispered his advisor.

"Who has united his kingdom and made it orderly and just? Who has spread Islam throughout his empire?"

"None other than you, Your Majesty."

"Who travels among the world's largest caravan across the Sahara?"

"You do, Your Excellency."

Mansa Musa glanced at the sultan, who waited for his guest to kneel. A tremor ran through all in attendance. Nobody had ever refused to kneel before the sultan and lived to tell of it.

The advisor whispered in Mansa Musa's ear. "Your Majesty, you are indeed more powerful than the sultan. But who is more powerful than you?"

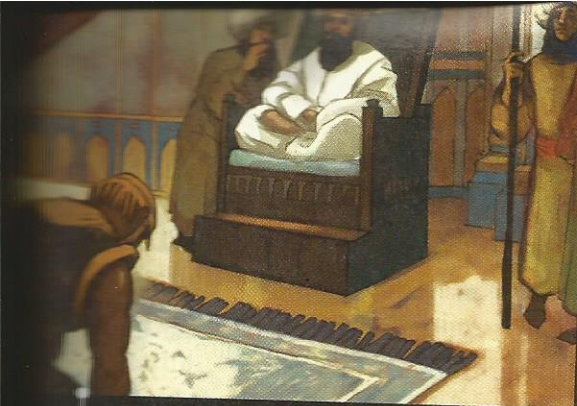
"Only God," said Mansa Musa.

"Then, perhaps, rather than submit to the sultan, you should submit to God."

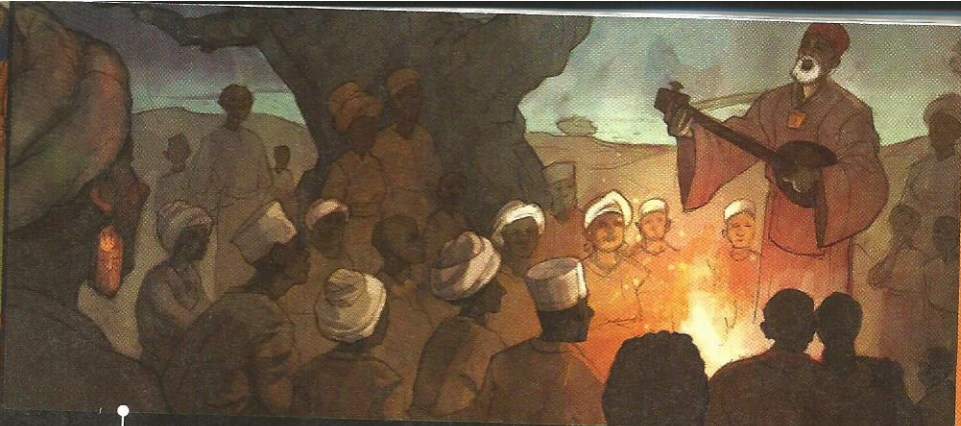
Mansa Musa nodded at his advisor, then dropped to his knees to bow. "I bow before God who created me," he said.

The sultan smiled. He rose and beckoned Mansa Musa to sit with him. Through his translator he told Mansa Musa how much he respected him. "You found a solution that saved us both from humiliation and its terrible consequences. To honor your dignity and our mutual faith of Islam, I will give you horses, slaves, and provisions for your hajj."

"And I," said Mansa Musa, "will give you gold beyond your wildest dreams."



Mansa Musa would bow only to God.



African griots would tell the tale of Mansa Musa long after his death.

Centuries later, everyone in a West African village gathered around a bonfire to hear a griot (storyteller) tell the story of Mansa Musa. The griot told them how Mansa Musa made Mali famous.

The griot's words danced in the firelight. "Mansa Musa made a lasting impression on the world. His wealth had no equal. He made Tombouctou the seat of Islamic scholarship and culture. Europeans respected him and put his picture on their maps. These are all important things to remember. But we must also remember his meeting with the sultan. We must remember the strength of his faith. We must remember that the Lion of Mali bowed before none but God."

In this section, you read about Mansa Musa, the real-life emperor of Mali in the 1300s.

From what you learned in this story, how do you think Mansa Musa's hajj affected trade? As you read the chapter ahead, think about what Mansa Musa's story tells you about life in West Africa during this time.



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Learn more about the life of Mansa Musa.

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