

THE HISTORY OF MANSA ABUBAKARI II

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Mansa Abubakari II is traditionally remembered as a ruler of the Mali Empire who organized one of the most remarkable maritime expeditions in African history. He is associated with an ambitious attempt to explore the Atlantic Ocean and discover what lay beyond the western horizon. His story is closely connected with the rise of Mansa Musa, one of the most famous rulers of the Mali Empire.

According to the historical account recorded by the Egyptian scholar al-Umari, Mansa Musa explained how he became ruler of Mali while visiting Cairo in 1324 AD during his pilgrimage to Mecca. Musa described how his predecessor had become determined to discover the limits of the Atlantic Ocean. The ruler believed that it was possible to travel across the great ocean and discover what existed beyond it.



The first expedition consisted of a large fleet of ships carrying men, together with additional vessels carrying provisions, water and supplies. The expedition was instructed to continue across the Atlantic until it reached the end of the ocean or exhausted its provisions. The fleet departed from the western coast of Africa and disappeared from sight.

After a considerable period, one ship returned. Its captain reported that the expedition had travelled for a long time before encountering what appeared to be a powerful current in the middle of the ocean. The other ships continued into the current and disappeared. The captain turned back rather than following them.



Rather than abandoning the undertaking, Mansa Abubakari II reportedly decided to organize a second and much larger expedition. He prepared approximately 2,000 ships, with half carrying people and the other half carrying water, food and other provisions. This time, the ruler personally joined the expedition and appointed Mansa Musa to govern the empire during his absence. The fleet then sailed westward into the Atlantic Ocean, and the ruler never returned to Mali.

THE ATLANTIC EXPEDIATION

The expedition associated with Mansa Abubakari II represents an extraordinary example of maritime ambition in medieval West Africa. The Mali Empire was already one of the most powerful states in Africa, controlling extensive territories and participating in major commercial networks that connected West Africa with North Africa and the wider Islamic world. The Atlantic Ocean formed the western boundary of the Mali Empire, and the empire's coastal regions provided access to the ocean.

West African societies possessed considerable knowledge of rivers, waterways and coastal environments, while merchants and sailors regularly travelled along the Atlantic coastline. The decision to organize a major expedition into the open ocean therefore represented an extension of an existing African maritime environment.



The scale of the reported second expedition is particularly remarkable. The account describes approximately 2,000 vessels, with 1,000 intended for the people accompanying the ruler and another 1,000 carrying water and provisions. Such an expedition would have required enormous quantities of food, drinking water, equipment and manpower.

Mansa Abubakari II's decision to personally accompany the expedition also demonstrates the importance that he placed upon the undertaking. Rather than sending another commander, he chose to lead the expedition himself. Before departing, he left Mansa Musa to govern the empire in his absence.

The fleet sailed westward into the Atlantic, but it never returned. Mansa Musa subsequently became the ruler of Mali and later travelled to Cairo during his famous pilgrimage. It was during this journey that the story of his predecessor's expedition was recorded by al-Umari.

The account provides an important historical record because it demonstrates that a ruler of the Mali Empire was interested in exploring the Atlantic and believed that the ocean could potentially be crossed. It also provides evidence of the considerable organizational and economic resources available to the Mali Empire during this period.

THE LEGACY OF MANSABUBAKARI II

The story of Mansa Abubakari II has become one of the most fascinating traditions associated with the medieval Mali Empire. His reported expedition has attracted particular attention because of the possibility that the fleet may have travelled much farther across the Atlantic than previously imagined.

Some interpretations have proposed that the expedition reached the Americas before the voyages of Christopher Columbus. However, there is no conclusive archaeological or documentary evidence establishing that the Malian expedition reached the Americas.

Historical evidence establishes that Mansa Musa described a major Atlantic expedition by his predecessor, but the ultimate fate and destination of the fleet remain unknown.



The story is nevertheless significant because it challenges the assumption that medieval African civilizations were isolated from maritime exploration or lacked an interest in the wider world.

The Mali Empire was an intellectually active and internationally connected civilization. Its rulers interacted with scholars, merchants and political leaders across Africa and the wider Islamic world.

Mansa Abubakari II's story also demonstrates the importance of curiosity and exploration within African history. His reported determination to discover what existed beyond the Atlantic illustrates the willingness of medieval African rulers to undertake ambitious projects that required substantial resources and organization.

The story is closely connected with the extraordinary reign of Mansa Musa, who became one of the most famous rulers in African history. Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 AD brought the wealth and importance of Mali to the attention of scholars and political leaders in North Africa and the Middle East. His account of his predecessor's Atlantic expedition provides an additional insight into the ambitions of the Mali royal court.

Mansa Abubakari II is therefore remembered as a ruler associated with one of the greatest maritime adventures in African history. His reported decision to organize successive fleets and personally lead the second expedition demonstrates the ambition and resources of the Mali Empire. Although the final destination of the expedition remains unknown, the story has continued to inspire interest in African exploration, maritime history and the remarkable achievements of medieval West African civilization.

