

Document 9: Al-Umari

Background: Al-Umari was an Arab historian from Damascus, Syria. He visited the city of Cairo in Egypt several years after Mansa Musa passed through there on his pilgrimage in 1324 CE. He then wrote this account of Mansa Musa's visit, as told to him by the people of Cairo.

From the beginning of my coming to stay in Egypt I heard talk of the arrival of this sultan Musa on his Pilgrimage and found the people of Cairo eager to tell what they had seen of the Africans' extravagant spending. I asked the emir Abu and he told me of the opulence, manly virtues, and piety of his sultan. Abu said, "When I went out to meet him, Musa did me extreme honor and treated me with the greatest courtesy. He addressed me, however, only through an interpreter despite his perfect ability to speak in the Arabic tongue. Then he sent to the royal treasury many loads of unworked native gold and other valuables. I tried to persuade him to go up to the Citadel to meet the sultan of Cairo, but he refused persistently saying: 'I came for the Pilgrimage and nothing else. I do not wish to mix anything else with my Pilgrimage.'" Mansa Musa flooded Cairo with his gifts. He left no emir or holder of a royal office without the gift of a load of gold. The people of Cairo made incalculable profits out of him and his caravan in buying and selling and giving and taking. They traded away gold until they depressed its value in Egypt and caused its price to fall. This has been the state of affairs for about twelve years until this day by reason of the large amount of gold which they brought into Egypt and spent there.

Vocabulary

- Sultan = king
- Emir = a high ranking title
- Opulence = great wealth, especially shown by extravagant living
- Piety = religious devotion
- Incalculable = huge
- Depressed = lowered