



## Lesson 2: Mansu Abu Bakr II

Objective: Describe Mansa Abu Bakr II's and his trip to America.

Vocabulary:

**Mansa Abu Bakr II:** Wealthy Malian King who gave up his rule to become an explorer and come to America.

**Mansa Musa:** Abu Bakr II's successor. He is considered to be the richest man who ever lived.

**Mandinkan:** African Muslims from West Africa.

**Malian Dynasty** – A Mandinkan empire that ruled between 1235 – 1600 known for its schools and wealth from gold.

**Tupis** – Native people of America that now inhabit Brazil and much of South America when the first Europeans arrived there. These people are believed to be the descendants from the Mandinkans.

### The Mandinka

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the people of Mali had acquired great wealth by trading gold that was abundant in their land with Europe due



to the establishment of new trade routes. This civilization is regarded to have produced the richest man who ever lived, Mansa Musa. Mansa Musa was reported to have traveled in large



caravans of over 60,000 men, and 80 camels that carried 300 lbs of gold each. He became the leader of the Mandinka people only after his predecessor, Mansa Abu Bakr II, gave up all of the wealth to explore the vast oceans of the Atlantic in search for new lands (Bukari, 2004). Masna Musa told the story of his predecessor to a scholar in Egypt named, al-Umari in 1324 on his way back from a famous pilgrimage (Bukari, 2004), thus recording one of the few historical documents used to support the claim that Mansa Abu Bakr II and his crew had reached the New World. The other early sources of this story come from the Malian scholar named Gaoussou Daiwara, who researched the life of Mansa Abu Bakr II (von Fleischer, 2013).

### **Who Was Mansa Abu Bakr II?**

**Mansa Abu Bakr II** was the Emperor of the Malian Dynasty in the early 1300's, and is credited by some to have discovered America almost 200 years before Columbus. The Malian Empire contained over 24 cities that are now located in Mali, Mauritania, and some parts of other West African countries. According to Mansa Musa's report, Mansa Abu Bakr II commissioned a fleet of 200 ships to sail to the end of the ocean. Soon after, the captain returned and reported that they had run out of supplies and that several ships had been drawn in by a strong current. Abu Bakr II decided to abdicate his throne to join other explorers who reported to have landed in the Americas, but had returned back after becoming drawn in by a heavy current. Upon hearing this news, Mansa Abu Bakr II decided to abdicate his throne and join the exploration, this time appropriating 2,000 ships, 1,000 with men and the



other 1,000 for supplies. Mansa Musa reported that Mansa Abu Bakr never returned from his voyage (Bukari, 2004).

According to Diawara, Mansa Abubakr II departed from present day Gambia landed on the coast of Brazil in 1311. The people of the fleet settled among the local people who were known as **Tupis**. The chief of the Tupis was reported to have accepted Islam and married his daughter to Abu Bakr II. Abu Bakr II sent ships back to Mansa Musa to ask for more supplies. He sent crops back to Mansa Musa, who was impressed by what he had received Columbus also reported that he had encountered African traders in South America (von Fleischer, 2013).



To this day, archeologist Barry Fell of Harvard University reported that he have found ancient Mandinkan script in Brazil, Peru, and Arizona (Fell, 1980). Some of these scripts include the word “Muhammad,” or other Islamic references (Fell, 1980). One inscription near four corners in Arizona even says that the Mandinkas





brought elephants to help explore North America. Spanish explorers were also reported to have reported in their romance novels about African people living in the Baja Coast (Putnam, 1917). Several others provide proof of the Malian early settlement in South America by citing common cultural practices. For example, there are some groups of Native Americans who claim to have been Muslim from a time before Columbus arrived. In addition, some tribes, such as the Cherokee wear Arab clothing such as turbans (Zeghoudi, 2003). Some scholars study the words used by the Native Americans the genetics of various crops to prove that the Mandinkas were in the Americas before Columbus and that they brought crops such as cotton and tobacco from North America to Africa (Wiener, 1992).



### **What is Mali like today?**

Today, Mali is known for its famous Sankore Madrasa located in Timbuktu. The school is most well known for being a center for learning Qu'ran, Islamic Law, literature, medicine, surgery, astronomy, mathematics, geography, history, physics, and several other types studies. The highest graduates were required to study for ten years and write a *Risaleh*, which is was much like a doctoral thesis is today (Al-Hassani, 2012). Malians were also known for their focus on trade and the development of trade schools, which put a strong emphasis on business ethics as well as the art of the trade (Al-Hassani, 2012).

Study Questions:

1. Where do the Mandinkan people come from? Which current countries make up the ancient Malian Dynasty?
2. Describe the relationship between Mansa Abubakr II and Mansa Musa.
3. What is the legendary title of Mansa Musa?
4. How did people come to know about Mansa Abubakr II's voyages?
5. What evidence is there that Mandinkan people came and settled in the New World?
6. How did Mansa Abubakr II's fleet compare to Columbus' fleet?

Activities:

1. Research lists of English words that come from Arabic. See if you can find at least 5 words.
2. Mandinkans are known for a game called Mancala. Use an egg carton and some stones to make your own Mancala game.
3. Pretend that you are Columbus and you come upon the Topi Indians. What kinds of conversations would you have? Write a skit between Columbus and a Topi Indian that you imagine may have happened.
4. Boats of the Mandikas were made of Papyrus. Research Papyrus and how boats are made from this material.

