family that had been slain by the ruler of the Susu, a rival group. The chief of the Susu had invaded Sundiata's homeland when he was a child. The Susu had killed Sundiata's 11 brothers, but let Sundiata live because he was only a sickly child. When Sundiata grew to manhood, he sought revenge, and, by 1235, he had vanquished the Susu and founded Mali.

**Mansa Musa**

The greatest of Mali's emperors was Mansa Musa, who reigned from 1312 to 1332. Mansa means "emperor." Mansa Musa was a nephew of Sundiata and a devout Muslim convert. In addition to controlling gold mines, Mansa Musa expanded the empire to control the salt mines in the desert to the north. He established an efficient system of government for his huge empire.

In 1324, Mansa Musa undertook a 4,800-mile (7,725 km) pilgrimage to Mecca. As students should know from the section on Islam, one of the Five Pillars of Islam is to make a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca at least once in one's life. Mansa Musa's pilgrimage was noteworthy for the wealth that he displayed on his journey. His party is said to have included 60,000 people. Of these, 12,000 were his personal slaves. Five hundred of them carried gold staffs weighing six pounds each. Eighty of the hundreds of camels carried 300 pounds (136 kg) of gold dust each. Mansa Musa was so generous in giving away his gold that he caused a devaluation of gold in Egypt, where he stopped on his way to Mecca. In addition to fulfilling his religious duty, Mansa Musa used the pilgrimage for diplomatic and economic purposes. He created bonds with other Muslim rulers and publicized the riches and splendor of Mali.

Word of Mansa Musa's trip even reached across the Mediterranean. A map of Africa drawn in Spain in 1375, long after Mansa Musa's death, for the first time showed Mali—represented by an emperor on a throne with a golden scepter.

**Timbuktu**

One of the beneficiaries of Mansa Musa's efforts to advertise Mali was the trading city of Timbuktu on the Niger River. Mansa Musa brought back the Muslim architect es-Saheli from Granada, in Spain, to design mosques and palaces in Timbuktu. Es-Saheli's most lasting accomplishment, however, was the use of burnt-brick in construction. This became standard building material in West Africa.

Muslim scholars followed the trade routes to Timbuktu, and the city became a leading center of Muslim intellectual development, attracting students and scholars of law and Islam from across North Africa and the Middle East. A great university grew up in the Sankore district of the city, training scholars, doctors, judges, and clerics who took their knowledge to other cities. By the 1500s, when the writer Leo Africanus (Hassan ibn Muhammad) visited Timbuktu, the city had 150 schools teaching the Qur'an. Although the empire of Mali disappeared, Timbuktu continued to thrive as part of the empire of Songhai.

**Ibn Batuta**

Ibn Batuta [IH-uhn bat-TOO-tah] (also spelled Ibn Battuta or Ibn Battutah) was an Arab born in what is today Morocco. One day he left home to see the world. In 30 years Ibn Batuta visited every Muslim land as well as many parts of the world beyond. In addition to Africa and the kingdoms of the Middle East, he...