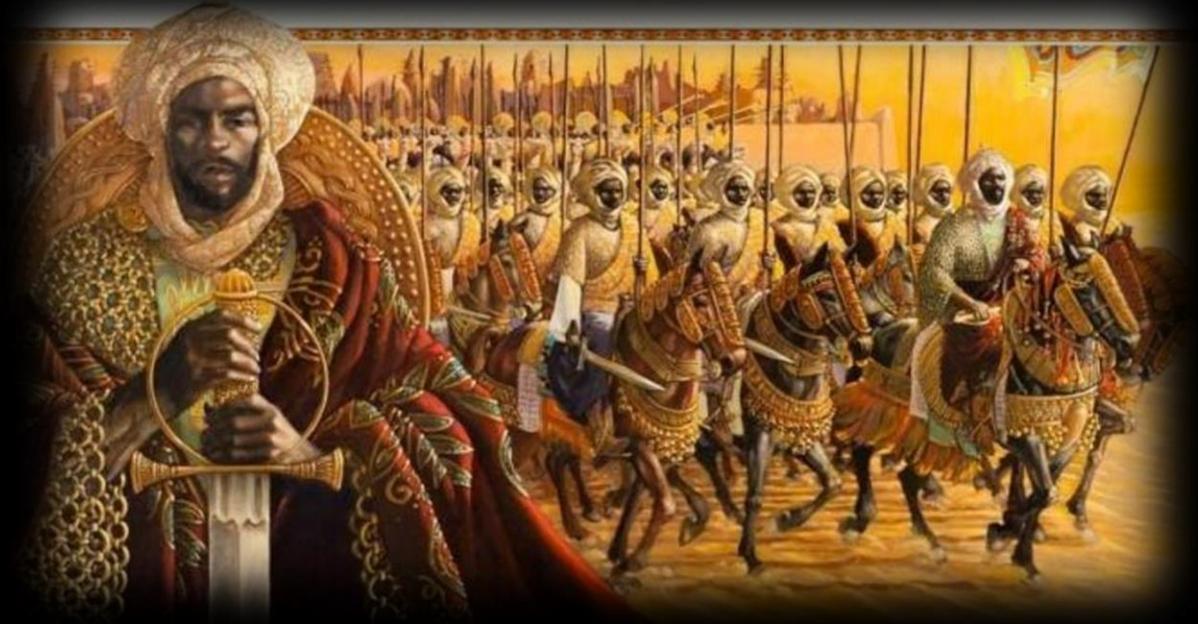


The Golden Caravan a poem

I learned something new during Black History Month. I came across a podcast on YouTube about ancient civilisations. One of the episodes was about the empire of Songhai. I had never heard of this before and was intrigued to find out about it. Two and a half hours later, I had learned all about the empires of West Africa, dating back more than a thousand years. Ghana, Mali and Songhai were all the sites of immensely wealthy and powerful kings.

One figure who fascinated me was Mansa Musa, the ruler of the empire of Mali from 1307 to 1332. He was one of the wealthiest people in human history. In 1324, he embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca that was to go down in history as one of the most extravagant displays of wealth the world has ever seen. He was accompanied by an entourage of sixty thousand, along with thousands of camels. His own personal baggage train was made up of 80 camels, each of which carried over 130kg of gold, worth around £500million in today's money.

Musa distributed this gold with great generosity as he passed through towns and cities along his route. Indeed, he gave out so much that it caused economic chaos in the region, with the value of gold dropping substantially. Seeing his folly, Musa took great pains to try to sort these problems out by loaning back his own gold on his return journey.



Musa's reign in Mali was a very influential one. He founded Universities, expanded trade around Africa, presided over great advancements in architecture, and left a moral and religious legacy behind that endured for many years, even after the empire of Mali fell.

I was inspired by the tale of Mansa Musa's hajj to write a poem, which I am pleased to share with you.

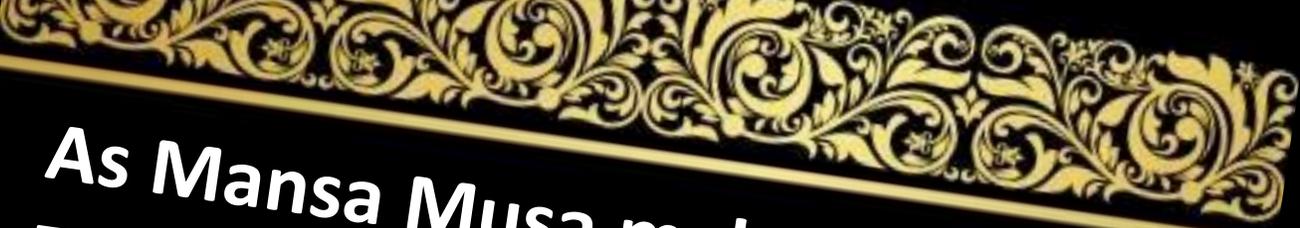




The Golden Caravan

**The train stretches on mile after mile,
Camels by the thousand in single file,
Bearing across the shifting sands,
Gold by the ton through foreign lands.**





**As Mansa Musa makes his way,
To holy Mecca day after day,
Sixty thousand men they march,
Hunger aches and lips they parch.**





**Dressed in finest silk brocade,
Every soul is on parade,
A banded snake that winds along,
Through towns attracting a mighty throng.**





**Travellers from Arab lands,
Shield their eyes with upraised hands,
While scribes from far Timbuktu,
Write lines about this retinue.**





**The greatest procession ever seen,
A caravan of wealth obscene,
Makes its way 'cross baking dunes,
To be remembered in griots' tunes.**



**Gold he sprinkles on every town,
Enough to bring them crashing down,
Leaving chaos in his wake,
Generous but destructive mistake.**





**The richest king in all the world,
From Mali comes with flags unfurled,
An empire built on the Niger river,
In whose vast shadow others shiver.**





**Eyes look on around the globe,
Fixed on this man in his golden robe,
Mansa Musa; King of kings,
Whose reign will pass as do all things.**



Thank you for reading,

Mr Austin