

## Document A: Blog Post

*The following is an excerpt from a blog post that appeared in The Huffington Post on October 17, 2012. It describes a study on the wealthiest people in world history done by Brian Warner, the founder of Celebrity Net Worth, an online publication that investigates the lifestyles of the rich and famous.*

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### **Mansa Musa of Mali Named World's Richest Man of All Time; Gates and Buffet Also Make List**

You've probably never heard of him, but Mansa Musa is the richest person ever.

The 14th century emperor from West Africa was worth a staggering \$400 billion, after adjusting for inflation, as calculated by *Celebrity Net Worth*. To put that number into perspective – if that's even possible – *Net Worth's* calculations mean Musa's fortune far **outstrips** that of the current world's richest man Carlos Slim Helú and family. . . .

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, when Musa died sometime in the 1330s, he left behind an empire filled with palaces and mosques, some of which still stand today. But the emperor really turned historic heads for the over-the-top extravagances of his 1324 pilgrimage to Mecca.

The trip, which he embarked upon during the 17th year of the monarch's glittering reign, was hosted by the leaders of both Mecca and Cairo and apparently was so brilliant, it "almost put Africa's sun to shame."

Musa's wealth was a result of his country's vast natural resources. The West African nation was responsible for more than half of the world's salt and gold supply, according to *Net Worth*. Of course, the entry also notes that the fortune was also fleeting. Just two generations later, his net worth was gone – wasted by invaders and infighting.

**Source:** The Huffington Post, October 17, 2012.

### Vocabulary

<u>outstrips</u> : exceeds
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According to Forbes, the Mexican telecom giant's net worth is \$69 billion. Slim edges out the world's second wealthiest man, Bill Gates, who is worth \$61 billion, according to Forbes.

Some of the oldest fortunes in question date back 1,000 years. No. 7 on the list, for example, is William the Conqueror. The illegitimate son of the Duke of Normandy, William lived between 1028-1087 and gained infamy for invading and seizing England in 1066.

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As The Independent points out, while the numbers bandied about by this newest list are shocking, many aspects of the run-down aren't surprising: there are no women included, for example, and only three of the richest men are still alive today. Americans dominate the list, however, taking 14 of the 26 spots, including slots two and three.

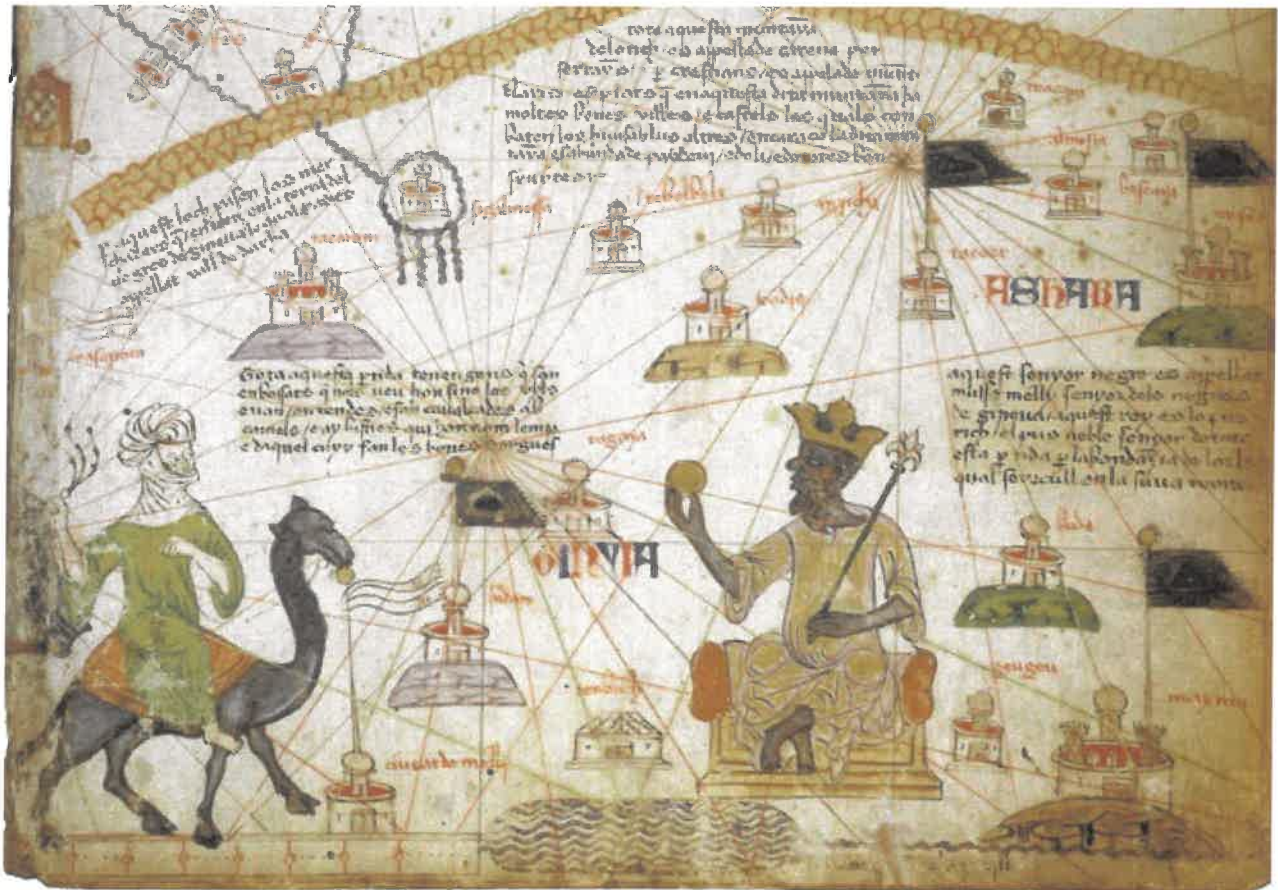
The "poorest" man on the list is Warren Buffet, who had a peak net worth of \$64 billion. Buffet, a noted philanthropist, has since given billions of his fortune away, and Forbes now lists his net worth at closer to \$44 billion.

**Source:** The Huffington Post, *October 17, 2012.*



## Document B: Catalan Atlas

The Catalan Atlas is a medieval map from Spain drawn in 1375 by a mapmaker named Abraham Cresques. Cresques had never visited West Africa but relied on the accounts of travelers and traders to make his map.



“This Black lord is called Musa Mali, Lord of the Black people of Mali. So abundant is the gold which is found in his country that he is the richest and most noble king in all the land.”—*Catalan Atlas inscription*

**Source:** Abraham Cresques, 1375.

## Catalan Atlas: Guiding Questions

1. (Sourcing) What kind of document is this? Who created it? When?
2. (Corroboration) How does the Catalan Atlas compare to *The Huffington Post* blog post in terms of its depiction of Mansa Musa?
3. Do you think this is an accurate depiction of Mansa Musa? Why or why not?

## Document C: Al-Umari

*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.*

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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.

**Source:** *Al-Umari*, Pathways of Vision in the Realms of the Metropolises, 1337-1338.

### Vocabulary

**sultan:** king

**emir:** a high ranking title

**opulence:** great wealth, especially shown by extravagant living

**piety:** religious devotion

**incalculable:** huge

**depressed:** lowered

## Document C: Al-Umari

The emir Abu 'I-Hasan 'Ali b. Amir Hajib told me that he was often in the company of sultan Musa the king of this country when he came to Egypt on the Pilgrimage. He was staying in [the] Qarafa [district of Cairo] and Ibn Amir Hajib was governor of Old Cairo and Qarafa at that time. A friendship grew up between them and this sultan Musa told him a great deal about himself and his country and the people of the Sudan who were his neighbours. One of the things which he told him was that his country was very extensive and contiguous with the Ocean. By his sword and his armies he had conquered 24 cities each with its surrounding district with villages and estates. It is a country rich in livestock – cattle, sheep, goats, horses, mules – and different kinds of poultry – geese, doves, chickens. The inhabitants of his country are numerous, a vast concourse, but compared with the peoples of the Sudan who are their neighbours and penetrate far to the south they are like a white birth-mark on a black cow. He has a truce with the gold-plant people, who pay him tribute. . . .

[Ibn Amir Hajib said], "I saw that this sultan Musa loved virtue and people of virtue. He left his kingdom and appointed as his deputy there his son Muhammad and emigrated to God and His Messenger. He accomplished the obligations of the Pilgrimage, visited [the tomb of] the Prophet [at Medina] (God's blessing and peace be upon him!) and returned to his country with the intention of handing over his sovereignty to his son and abandoning it entirely to him and returning to Mecca the Venerated to remain there as a dweller near the sanctuary; but death overtook him, may God (who is great) have mercy upon him.

"I asked him if he had enemies with whom he fought wars and he said: 'Yes, we have a violent enemy who is to the Sudan as the Tatars are to you. . . . They shoot well with [bow and] arrows. Their horses are cross-bred with slit noses. Battles take place between us and they are formidable because of their accurate shooting. War between us has its ups and downs.'" . . .

Ibn Amir Hajib continued: "I asked sultan Musa how the kingdom fell to him, and he said: 'We belong to a house which hands on the kingship by inheritance. The king who was my predecessor did not believe that it was impossible to discover the furthest limit of the Atlantic Ocean and wished vehemently to do so. So he equipped 200 ships filled with men and the same number equipped with gold, water, and provisions enough to last them for years, and said to the man deputed to lead them: "Do not return until you reach the end of it or your provisions and water give out." They departed and a long time passed before anyone came back. Then one ship returned and we asked the captain what news they brought. He said: "Yes, O Sultan, we travelled for a long time until there appeared in the open sea [as it were] a river with a powerful current. Mine was the last of those ships. The [other] ships went on ahead but when they reached that place they did not return and no more was seen of them and we do not know what became of them. As for me, I went about at once and did not enter that river." But the sultan disbelieved him.

"Then that sultan got ready 2,000 ships, 1,000 for himself and the men whom he took with him and 1,000 for water and provisions. He left me to deputize for him and embarked on the Atlantic Ocean with his men. That was the last we saw of him and all those who were with him, and so I became king in my own right.'

"This sultan Musa, during his stay in Egypt both before and after his journey to the Noble Hijaz, maintained a uniform attitude of worship and turning towards God. It was as though he were standing before Him because of His continual presence in his mind. He and all those with him behaved in the same manner and were well-dressed, grave, and dignified. He was noble and generous and performed many acts of charity and kindness. He had left his country with 100 loads of gold which he spent during his Pilgrimage on the tribes who lay along his route from his country to Egypt, while he was in Egypt, and again from Egypt to the Noble Hijaz and back. As a consequence he needed to borrow money in Egypt and pledged his credit with the merchants at a very high rate of gain so that they made 700 dinars profit on 300. Later he paid them back amply. He sent to me 500 mithqals of gold by way of honorarium. . . . Here ends what Ibn Amir Hajib said.

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 Cairenes eager to recount what they had seen of the Africans'

prodigal spending. I asked the emir Abu 'l-'Abbas Ahmad b. al-Hak the *mihmandar* and he told me of the opulence, manly virtues, and piety of this sultan. "When I went out to meet him (he said), that is, on behalf of the mighty sultan al-Malik al-Nasir, he did me extreme honour 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 forwarded 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, but he refused persistently, saying: 'I came for the Pilgrimage and nothing else. I do not wish to mix anything else with my Pilgrimage.' He had begun to use this argument but I realized that the audience was repugnant to him because he would be obliged to kiss the ground and the sultan's hand. I continued to cajole him and he continued to make excuses but the sultan's protocol demanded that I should bring him into the royal presence, so I kept on at him till he agreed.

"When we came in the sultan's presence we said to him: 'Kiss the ground!' but he refused outright saying: 'How may this be?' Then an intelligent man who was with him whispered to him something we could not understand and he said: 'I make obeisance to God who created me!' then he prostrated himself and went forward to the sultan. The sultan half rose to greet him and sat him by his side. They conversed together for a long time, then sultan Musa went out. The sultan sent to him several complete suits of honour for himself, his courtiers, and all those who had come with him, and saddled and bridled horses for himself and his chief courtiers. . . . He also furnished him with accommodation and abundant supplies during his stay. . . .

"On his return I received him and supervised his accommodation. The sultan continued to supply him with provisions and lodgings and he sent gifts from the Noble Hijaz to the sultan as a blessing. The sultan accepted them and sent in exchange complete suits of honour for him and his courtiers together with other gifts, various kinds of Alexandrian cloth, and other precious objects. Then he returned to his country.

"This man flooded Cairo with benefactions. He left no court emir nor holder of a royal office without the gift of a load of gold. The Cairenes made incalculable profits out of him and his suite in buying and selling and giving and taking. They exchanged gold until they depressed its value in Egypt and caused its price to fall." . . .

Muhanna' b. 'Abd al-Baqi al-'Ujrumi the guide informed me that he accompanied sultan Musa when he made the Pilgrimage and that the sultan was very open-handed towards the pilgrims and the inhabitants of the Holy Places. He and his companions maintained great pomp and dressed magnificently during the journey. He gave away much wealth in alms. "About 200 mithqals of gold fell to me" said Muhanna' "and he gave other sums to my companions." Muhanna' waxed eloquent in describing the sultan's generosity, magnanimity, and opulence.

Gold was at a high price in Egypt until they came in that year. The mithqal did not go below 25 *dirhams* and was generally above, but from that time its value fell and it cheapened in price and has remained cheap till now. The mithqal does not exceed 22 *dirhams* or less. 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.

**Source:** *Al-Umari, Pathways of Vision in the Realms of the Metropolises, 1337-1338.*



## Al-Umari: Guiding Questions

- 1) (Sourcing) Who is Al-Umari? Do you think he is a reliable source of information on Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca? Why, or why not?
- 2) (Corroboration) How does this document compare to *The Huffington Post* blog post and the Catalan Atlas in terms of its depiction of Mansa Musa?
- 3) (Close Reading) How does the emir Abu describe Mansa Musa to Al-Umari? According to the emir Abu, what traits does Mansa Musa possess?
- 4) Do you think Al-Umari's description of Mansa Musa is accurate? Why or why not?

## Mansa Musa Final Discussion Questions:

1. *Based on all of this evidence, how would you describe Mansa Musa? What type of person was he? Who thinks he was the richest person ever? How might we further investigate these questions?*
  2. *Were the claims made in The Huffington Post about Mansa Musa accurate?*
  3. Return to the question “Why do you think the blog post was written?” that was posed in the Guiding Questions. A possible issue is that many websites create blog posts and articles about sensational topics based on meager evidence or unreliable sources. Because of the captivating headlines, many users will go to the page. An increase in visitors to their website means they can sell more ads. Not all sources that have ads are unreliable (in fact, it’s hard to find a newspaper without them), but that webpages with sensational headlines that cite little evidence or unreliable sources may require extra scrutiny.
  4. *What evidence from the documents suggests that Mansa Musa was the richest person ever? What are the limitations of each of these documents?*
  5. *What further types of evidence would help you to continue investigating whether Mansa Musa was the richest person ever? What are some challenges in locating such evidence?*
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