

Masks of Mali

by Nic McDougal

Can you spot the 14 differences between the two panels?

Answers on page 48



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FACES[®]

People, Places, and Cultures

Journey to **Mali**



MARCH 2020

MYSTERY PHOTO



↑ **Do you know what this is?**

See page 48 for the answer.

← About the Cover

More than 18 million people live in the West African country of Mali.

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Located in West Africa, Mali was once part of a vast empire. Malians are proud of their culture and place in history. Here are five fun facts to get you started on your journey.

A Mali fisherman works on his boat on the Niger River.

Saturn, would
you like to
come greet the
sun with me?



Namaste here,
thanks.



1 The Mali Empire reached its height in the 13th century. Its emperors were called *mansas*, and they controlled the Trans-Saharan trade routes that transported salt and gold.

2 Salt was once so valuable that an ounce of it was worth an ounce of gold. During the time of the Mali Empire, salt was used to preserve meat and season food. It was highly valued in parts of Africa where it did not occur naturally.

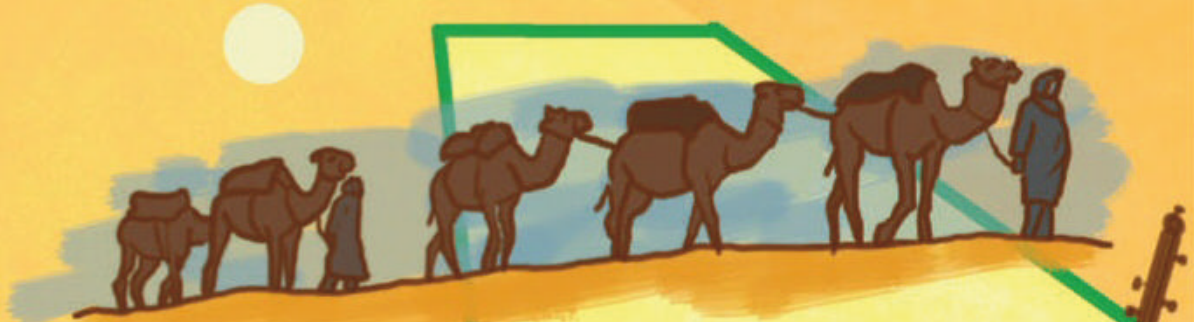
3 The Great Mosque of Djenne is the world's largest adobe building. Located in the city's large market square, the mosque is actually the third to have been built on that site.

4 The Niger River is Africa's third-longest river. It begins in Guinea and runs through Mali, Niger, and Nigeria.

5 Mansa Musa, who ruled the Mali Empire from 1312 to 1337 C.E., was the richest man who ever lived. Economists estimate that he was worth more than \$400 billion in today's money.

AT A GLANCE

illustrated by Sophie Kittredge



Taoudenni •

MALI



MAURITANIA



Sahara Desert



Timbuktu
Kabara



SENEGAL

- Kayes

Mopti●

Segou

Djenne
San ●



Dogon Plateau

Kati●

Bamako

Koutiala ●

Sikasso ●

GUINEA

BURKINA FASO

COTE D'IVOIRE





ALGERIA

Sahara Desert



Adrar des Ifoghas

• Kidal



Niger River

• Gao



NIGER

I've Benin
Timbuktu.

NIGERIA

I'm Ghana be sure
Togo to Mali.



GHANA

TOGO

BENIN



OFFICIAL NAME: Republic of Mali

LOCATION: Mali is a land-locked country in Western Africa. It is southwest of Algeria, north of Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso, west of Niger, and east of Mauritania and Senegal.

AREA: 478,800 square miles (1,240,192 square kilometers)

CAPITAL: Bamako

TERRAIN: mostly flat to rolling northern plains covered by sand; savanna in the south, rugged hills in the northeast

POPULATION: 18,429,893 (July 2018 estimate)

PEOPLE: Bambara 33.3%, Fulani 13.3%, Sarakole/Sonike/Marka 9.8%, Senufo/Manianka 9.6%, Malinke 8.8%, Dogon 8.7%, Sonrai 5.9%, Bobo 2.1%, Tuareg/Bella 1.7%, other Malian 6%

RELIGION: Muslim 93.9%, Christian 2.8%, Animist .7%, none 2.5%

LANGUAGES: French (official), Bambara 46.3%, Peuhl/Foulfoulbe 9.4%, Dogon 7.2%, Maraka/Soninke 6.4%, Malinke 5.6%, Sonrhail/Djerma 5.6%, Minianka 4.3%, Tamacheq 3.5%, Senoufo 2.6%, Bobo 2.1%, unspecified 0.7%, other 6.3%

CURRENCY: West Africa CFA Franc





A boomslang's large eyes set it apart from other snakes. It gives the species superior vision.

I hope your eyes are bigger than your stomach.

BOOMSLANG

DEADLY AFRICAN TREE SNAKE

by Pat Betteley

The boomslang is an extremely dangerous, venomous snake found south of the Sahara Desert. Its name means “tree snake” in Afrikaans and Dutch. This quick-moving snake is **diurnal** (active during the day). It lives and hunts mostly in trees.

Dangerous Venom

Researchers estimate that between one and five million people are bitten by snakes each year. About one-fifth of those bites will result in death. That number is a lot lower than it was 60 years ago. Since then, antivenoms have become more widely available. Consider the case of Karl P. Schmidt. He was an expert **herpetologist** who worked for the American Museum of Natural History in New York and the Field Museum in Chicago. He was used to handling deadly snakes. In 1957, a zoo director gave him a snake to identify. It was a young boomslang. Schmidt was not afraid to take the snake from the bag because snakes with fangs in the rear of their jaws were not considered dangerous at that time. Although he was bitten on the thumb with one fang during the examination, Schmidt was not worried. He

A **herpetologist** is a scientist who studies reptiles and amphibians.

went about his daily routine. The next day, when Schmidt returned to work, he felt fine in the morning. By afternoon, he was dead from respiratory arrest and internal bleeding. Because of Schmidt's experience, we now know that a young boomslang is not like other members of its snake family, *Colubridae*. It can open its mouth to almost 180° and has very long fangs. Its venom is slow acting, but causes bleeding inside and outside of the body. Zoos and research centers that keep venomous snakes have antivenom ready, just in case.

Description

The boomslang is a long, slender snake. It has a small, egg-shaped head and very large eyes. Females are usually greenish-brown with a light

STATS

» **Scientific Name:**
Dispholidus typus

» **Range:** Sub-Saharan Africa in central and southern regions of the continent, such as Mali, Botswana, Swaziland, Namibia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe

» **Ecosystem:** Areas with trees, such as wooded grasslands, dry savannas, and lowland forests.

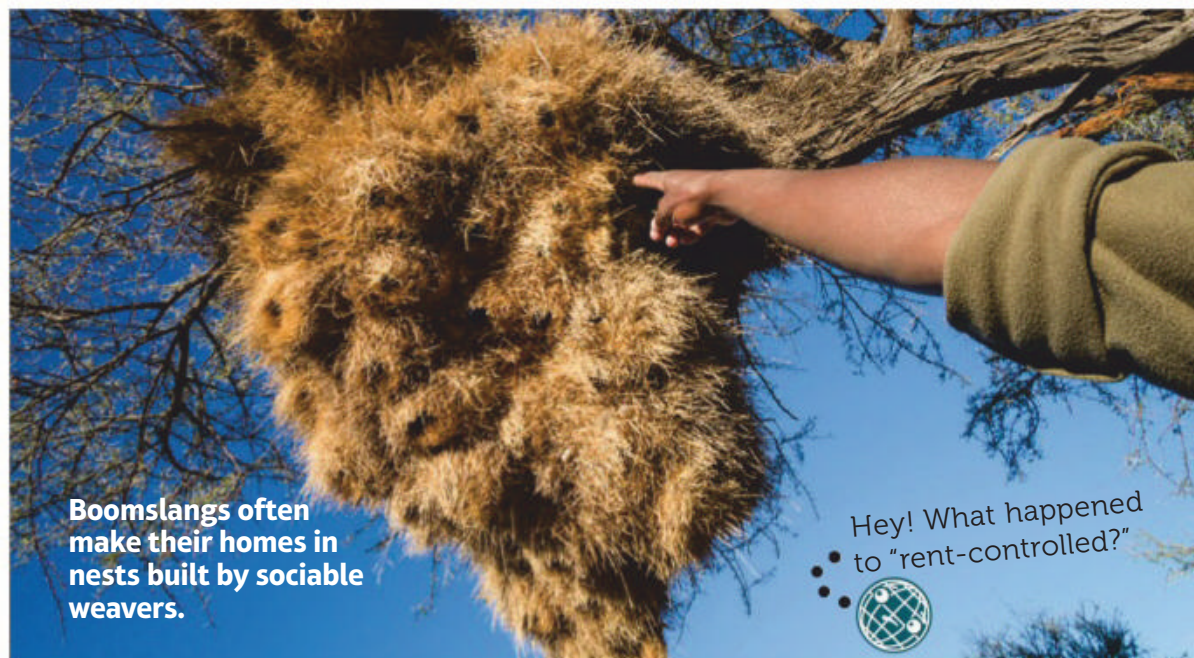
» **Size:** 3-6 feet long

» **Diet:** Chameleons, tree-dwelling lizards, birds, small rodents

» **Lifespan:** About 8 years in the wild



It strikes without warning. It usually captures its prey without ever being seen. After it injects its prey with venom, the snake swallows the animal whole.



shade of brown on their bellies. Males can be found in many colors, depending on their age. From deep olive or bright green with black outlining their scales to dark brown or black with bright yellow bellies, their color helps to camouflage them. The characteristic that sets the boomslang apart is its large eyes, which are shimmering green in young snakes. They give the snake superior vision to spot its prey.

Behavior

Watching a boomslang stalk its prey is fascinating. When the snake spots its dinner, it glides slowly toward it. Sometimes it stops to sway gently as though it were a branch in the breeze. The snake continues to move slowly until it is within striking

range. Then, SNAP! It strikes without warning. It usually captures its prey without ever being seen. After it injects its prey with venom, the snake swallows the animal whole. It can unhinge its jaws, if necessary, and then use muscles throughout its body to move food through its digestive system.

Boomslangs have a positive impact on the ecosystem. They are important prey for large predator birds such as falcons, kestrels, eagles, and vultures. On the negative side, their venom injures humans, although they typically only strike if handled. The good news for snakes and conservationists alike is that boomslangs are at no risk of becoming endangered.

Mali

An Ancient Empire

The Republic of Mali was once part of the Mali Empire, an ancient empire that controlled a large portion of West Africa. A West African prince named Sundiata Keita established the empire in 1235. He united a group of indigenous groups

and waged war against the Sosso people who controlled the region at the time.

The Mali Empire expanded rapidly and reached its height in the 13th century. Mali's emperors (called *mansas*) grew rich and powerful because they controlled the Trans-Saharan trade routes. These routes were used to transport salt from the Sahara Desert and gold from the gold mines of West Africa. At the time, salt was considered as valuable as gold. It was used to preserve meat and season food. Salt was

highly valued in other parts of Africa where the mineral did not occur naturally.

Because of its location near the Niger River, the Malian city of Timbuktu became a major center for African trade. When camel caravans arrived in Timbuktu from the north, the goods they carried were loaded onto boats and transported south on the river. All goods that passed through the Mali Empire were heavily taxed, and the empire prospered.

Because of trade, Timbuktu became the empire's most important city. It was a center of culture, education, and the Islamic religion. Islam was



Most Malians live along the Niger River.



A pair of women shop in a market in Segou, Mali.

introduced to the Malian people by the mansas, and it remains the predominant religion in Mali. Before the introduction of Islam, animism was widely practiced. People who practice animism believe that every person and thing have spirits or souls.

As the Mali Empire grew stronger, it took over surrounding kingdoms and became the largest empire in West Africa. After the death of Mansa Musa around 1337, it began to decline. Musa was a powerful ruler, and his successors were not able to retain control over the vast empire.



After repeated attacks by neighboring armies, the Mali Empire began to crumble. By 1500, it had lost all but a small portion of its land. The Mali Empire came to an official end after the death of its last mansa in 1610. By that time, the Moroccan army had conquered many of its cities, including Timbuktu.

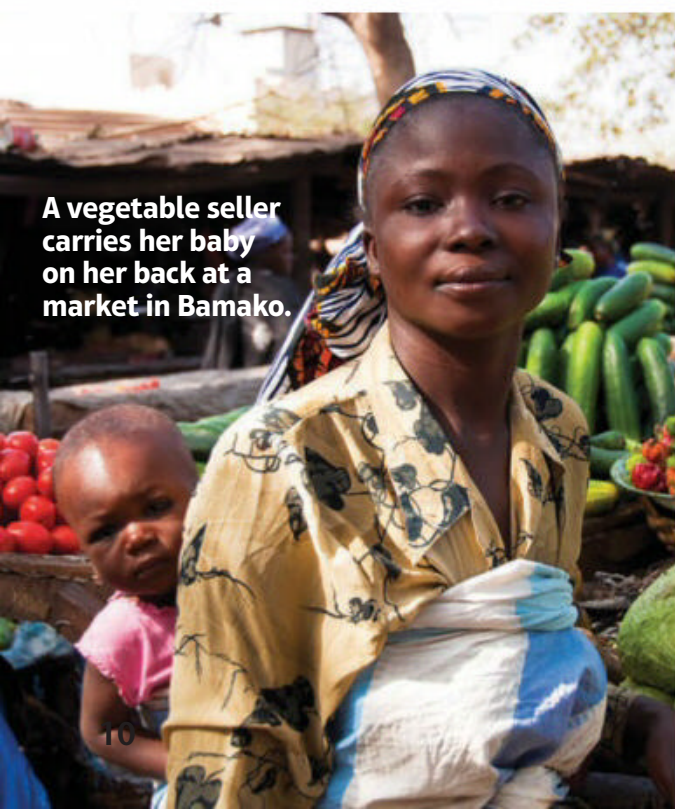
The region came under French control in 1898, and it wasn't until 1960 that the Republic of Mali gained its independence. Since that time, the country has experienced a great deal of political instability. There have been numerous rebellions, and Mali's president was overthrown in a 2012 coup.



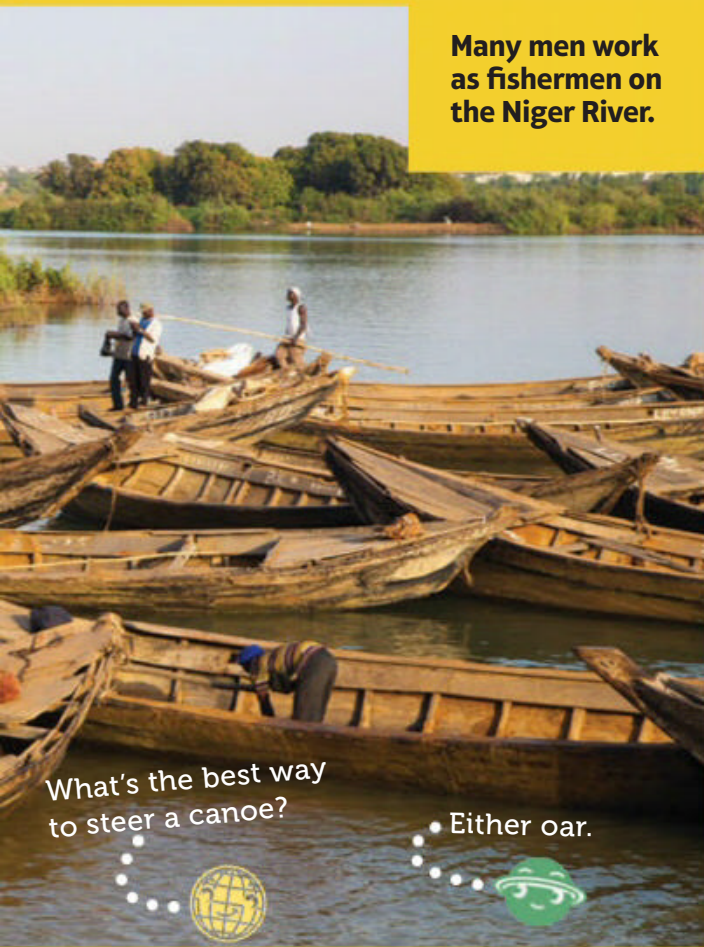
After the coup, France sent in troops to restore order to the country.

Presently, Mali is plagued by ethnic violence. Islamic extremists control parts of the country, and thousands of United Nations peacekeeping troops have been sent there to help restore order. The Mali peacekeeping mission is extremely dangerous, and more than 200 peacekeepers have been killed. The United States government has warned Americans not to travel to Mali.

Mali is one of the world's poorest nations. More than 40 percent of Malians live in extreme poverty. The majority of the country's people depend on fishing and agriculture for their livelihoods. Mali's best farmland is situated near the Niger River, where the country's population is



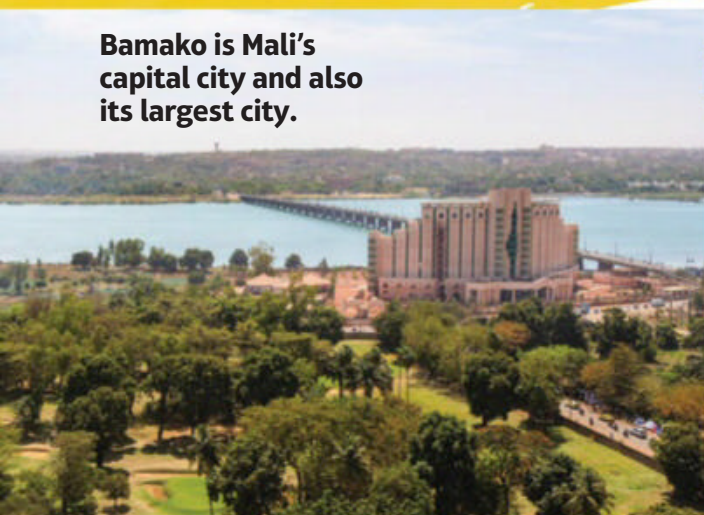
A vegetable seller carries her baby on her back at a market in Bamako.



Many men work as fishermen on the Niger River.

What's the best way to steer a canoe?

Either oar.



Bamako is Mali's capital city and also its largest city.

centered. The river floods during the wet season (June through October) and deposits fertile soil that is essential for farming along its banks. The Niger is described as Mali's "lifeblood" and is a vital source of food, drinking water, irrigation, and transportation.

Gold mining is also very important to the country's economy. Mali is the third-largest gold producer in Africa, and much of its gold-rich land has yet to be explored. Most of the country's gold is mined at large commercial



For many, the Niger River is the most accessible source of water.

FAST FACTS

- » Rock paintings found in Mali date back to around 50,000 B.C.
- » The majority of land in Mali is arid or semi-arid and is not suitable for farming.
- » At its peak, the Mali Empire included parts of Niger, Senegal, Mauritania, Guinea, and The Gambia.
- » The prime meridian marker runs through Gao, Mali. A person who stands at the marker can place one foot in the eastern hemisphere and one in the western hemisphere.
- » Malians have an average life expectancy of 59. It is one of the world's lowest life expectancies.

mines, but some is mined in small mining operations (called artisanal mines) that use low-tech methods. They operate in poor, rural areas of Mali and rely heavily on child labor.

Although the national language of Mali is French, it is spoken by only a small percentage of Malians. About 80 percent speak Bambara, the



Students concentrate on their work in a classroom in Bamako.

language of the Bambara people. The Bambara are the country's largest ethnic group and make up about one-third of the population. Mali is also home to numerous other ethnic groups, and more than 40 African languages are spoken. Each group has its own unique customs and traditions.

Life is not easy for many Malians, but they are proud of their culture and their place in history. Through their rich heritage of storytelling, they pass down stories of their ancestors who built one of Africa's great empires.

WHITE GOLD:

The Sahara Salt Trade

by Jane Scherer

During the cool months from October to March, camel **caravans** arrive in the desert city of Timbuktu every few days.

Led by Tuareg and Arab traders, the caravans have traveled from the salt mines of Taoudenni—an oasis in Mali. It's a trade that has not changed in hundreds of years.

You may take salt for granted, but long ago, people in the deserts and forests of Africa could not obtain it easily. Salt was so valuable that one ounce of salt was worth one ounce of gold.

Nowadays, each salt caravan has from 60 to 300 camels. Each camel carries four to six slabs of salt, with each slab weighing more than a man. The journey from the salt mines to Timbuktu takes about 15 days. To avoid the hot sun, the caravans travel only at night.



Mining for and preparing salt is a tough job.



There's plenty of spots
over this way.

Camels are still used
to transport salt slabs,
but trucks are starting
to replace them.



The Mines

At Taoudenni, salt is mined from ancient lakebeds that dried up millions of years ago. The mines lie deep below Earth's surface and are reached by trenches and tunnels. Large blocks of salt are dug out and then cut into slabs above ground.

The Miners

Mining salt is a hard and dangerous job. At Taoudenni, people of the Bella and Haratin groups do the work. Their wages are so low that they are treated little better than slaves to the Tuaregs and Arabs who control the mines. Although the miners are allowed to keep one out of every four salt bars that they mine, they must use salt to pay for the water that they need.

Timbuktu

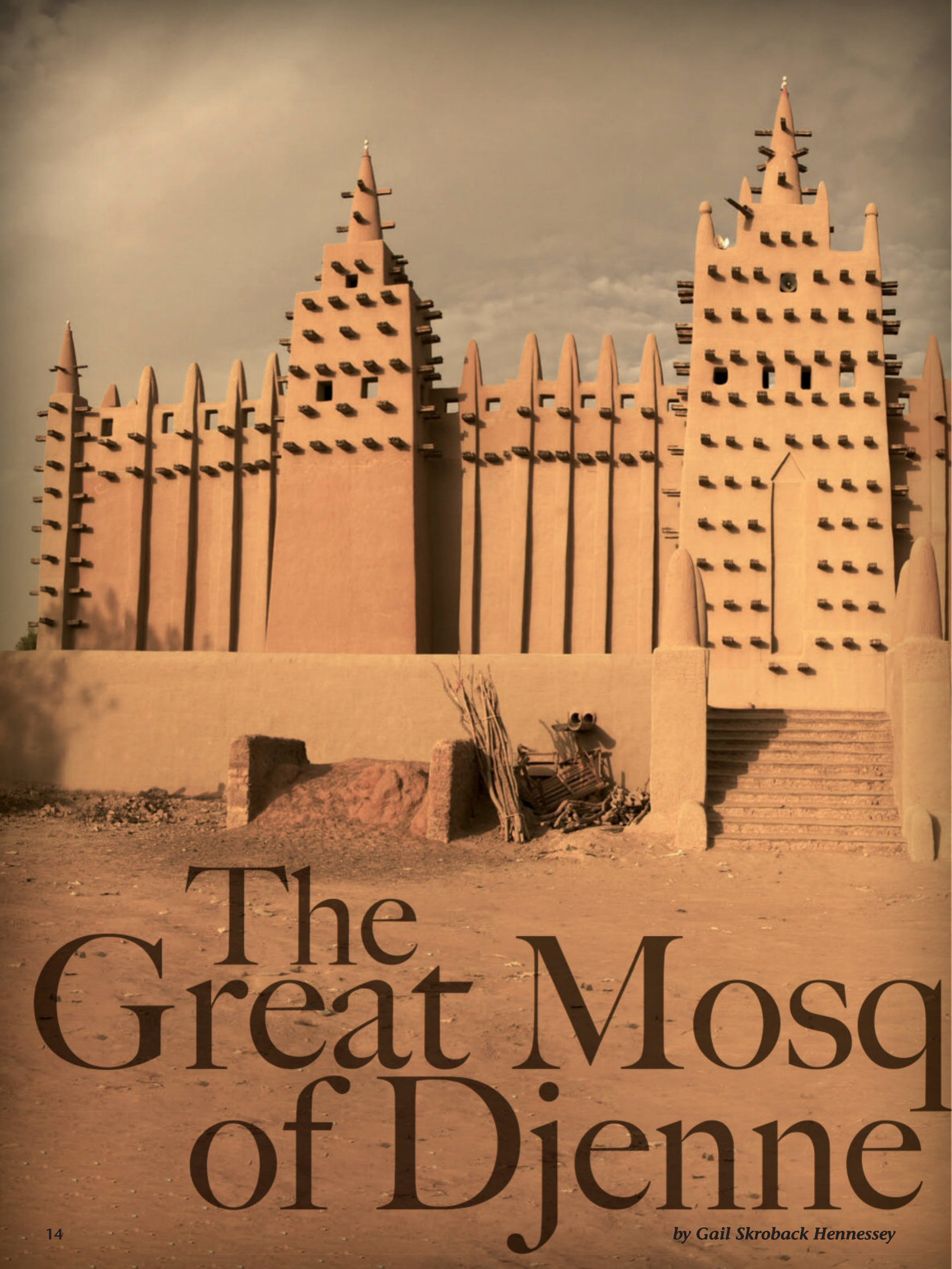
Timbuktu lies near the Niger River at the crossroads of three trade routes. Here the salt is sold and carried downriver to other parts of West Africa. Timbuktu is an important meeting place for desert travelers. It also was once a center of Muslim education, with schools and a university that drew scholars from all over the world.

The Future

Trucks are taking the place of camels for carrying salt. One truck can carry hundreds of bars of salt; a camel can carry only four to six. And a truck can make the 900-mile round trip in about a week. The days of the camel caravans are coming to an end.

FAST FACTS

» Human beings cannot survive without salt. If we lose too much salt through perspiration, we can become sick. Long-term loss of salt can lead to dehydration (loss of water), coma, and death.



The Great Mosque of Djenné



ue

The Great Mosque of Djenne is the largest adobe building in the world.

Looking like a giant sand sculpture, the Great Mosque of Djenne (JEH-nay) is the world's largest adobe building. It is also one of the most famous landmarks in Africa. Located in the city's large market square, the mosque is actually the third to have been built at the site. The most recent mosque was constructed in 1907.

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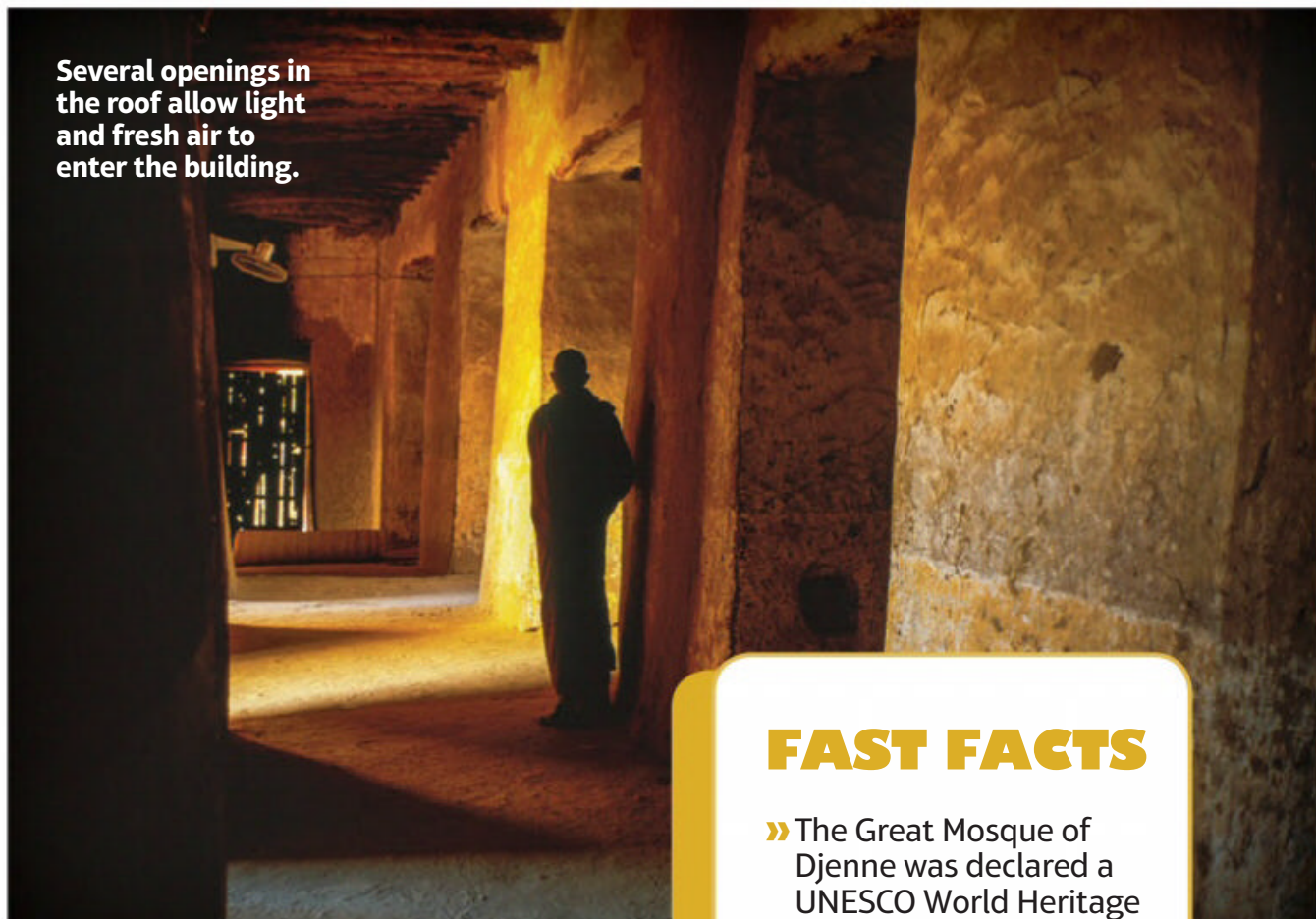
Built using mud bricks (called *ferey*), the mosque has unique architecture. It is reinforced with large logs of wood (torons) that stick out from the building. The wood pieces extend about two feet. The walls are between 15-23 inches thick. Part of the mosque, which stands on an almost 10-foot-high large platform, is an open prayer courtyard. Several openings in the roof allow for light and fresh air. During the rainy season, terracotta (clay) lids are used to close the openings. There are three tall minarets (prayer towers). If you look at the very top of the different minarets, you can see the shapes of ostrich eggs, symbols of purity and fertility.



The Great Mosque needs to be replastered each year before the rainy season.

The Great Mosque of Djenné dates to the 1300s. King Koi Kunboro (also spelled Kunburu) became a follower of the Islamic faith. He tore down his palace and built the mosque. It was in disrepair when French explorer Rene Caillie came upon it in 1828. He wrote that he saw thousands of swallows nesting in the ruins of the mosque.

Because it is made from mud and straw, the annual rainy season causes much damage to the Great Mosque. Before the rainy season begins, the structure is replastered to repair cracks and holes. Called the *Crepissage de la Grand Mosquée* (plastering of the Great Mosque), the April festival brings the local community together. The night before, *La Nuit de Veille* (The Waking Night), thousands of people dance



Several openings in the roof allow light and fresh air to enter the building.

and sing. Around 4 a.m., a whistle announces the beginning of the main activity. Men, women, and children all participate. The men mix the plaster, called *banco*

FAST FACTS

- » The Great Mosque of Djenné was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1988.
- » Only those practicing the Islamic faith can enter the mosque.
- » For a time, the ruins of the first mosque were used as a graveyard.

Markets and other gatherings are held in the shadow of the Great Mosque.



A woman heads to market with a joyful smile on her face.

(bang-ko), which is made from mud, water, rice husks, baobab powder, and shea butter. The banco needs to sit for a couple of days before it can be used. Boys are

usually tasked with stirring the mixture before it is used. The men climb the wood poles that stick out of the structure like ladders. They carry the mud mixture in wicker

baskets and begin the repairs. The women and girls carry water from the nearby Niger and Bani rivers to add to the mixture, which keeps the plaster from hardening in the hot sun. Older community members sit in a place of honor, watch the repairs, and are asked for advice.

Competitions are also part of the festival. There is a race to see which group can make the plaster the quickest or which group can plaster their area the fastest. Prizes are awarded. Musicians perform to entertain those attending the festival, and lots of food is prepared. It's lots of work, but it creates a sense of accomplishment that keeps this famous mosque standing.





Saving Mali's Migrating Desert Elephants

by Colette Weil Parrinello

Eco-guardians spread the word to the Tuareg villagers, “The elephants are coming.” Many villagers already know. They will stay out of the thick bushes and trees so they don’t surprise the elephants. Villagers believe that when the elephants come, the land and life are healthy. The elephants are *baraka*—a blessing to the people and environment of Mali’s Gourma region.

Once there were many thousands of Gourma Desert elephants, but now, there are fewer than 400. The elephants live under constant threat from droughts, militant violence, poachers who want their tusks, loss of water from expanding herds and farms, and encroaching human settlement. Through the dedicated efforts of the Mali people and many worldwide organizations, the elephants have a fighting chance to survive.

The Elephants’ Extraordinary Journey

Every year for hundreds of years, the elephants walk a 350-mile circular migration route in northern Mali, moving around back and forth within the route. This is the longest,

There are fewer than 400 Gourma Desert elephants in existence.

most treacherous trek of any elephant in the world. These tough animals brave sandstorms, water shortages, and extreme heat of more than 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

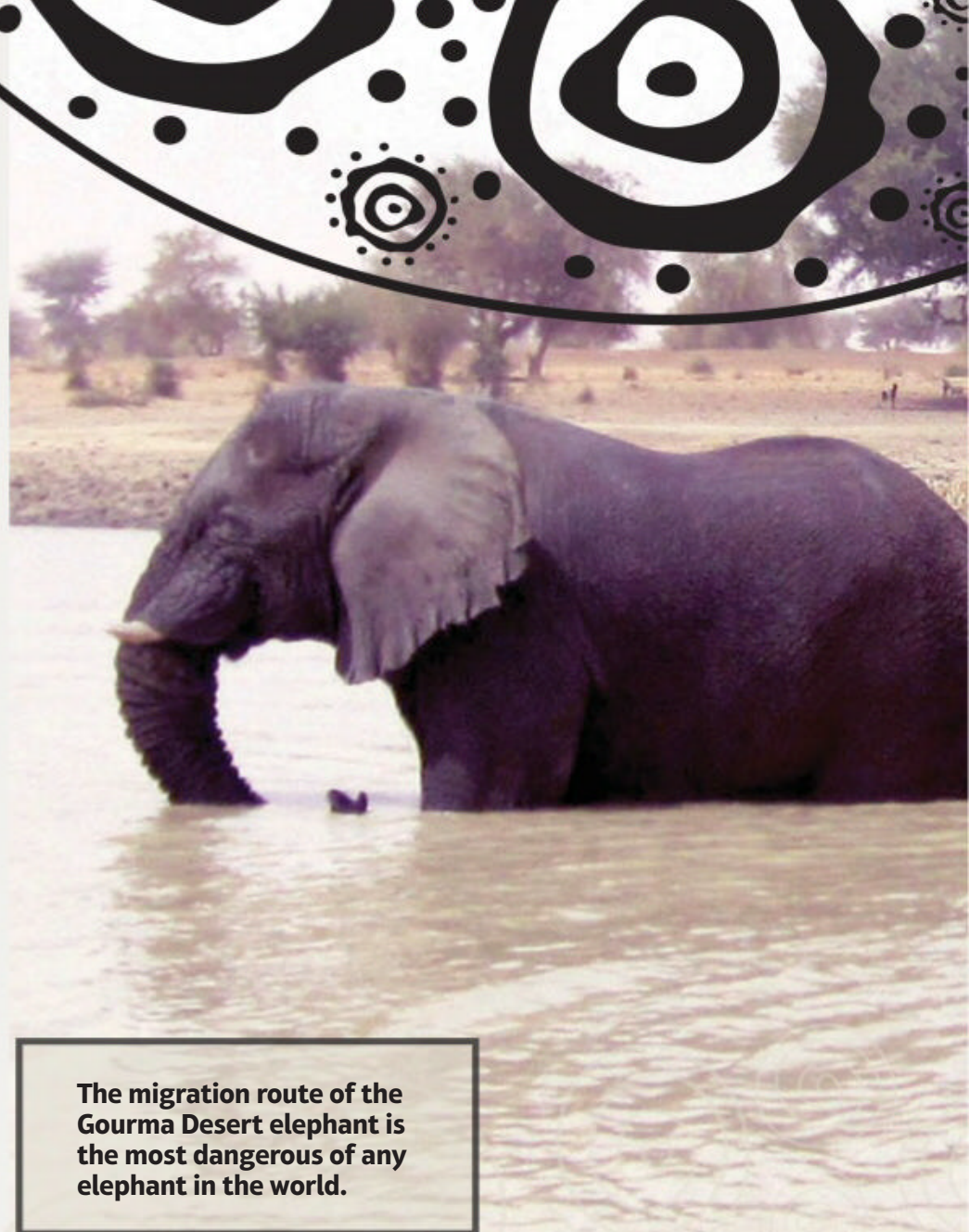
They inhabit a 12,400-square-mile range across the harsh land south of the Sahara Desert in the Gourma region. Following a counterclockwise route, the elephants spend their time in the dry season in the north of the range, moving between lakes and rivers as each dries out. In June when the rains start, they move southwards to the border Mali shares with the country of Burkina Faso because the food supply is better. But there are no lakes or surface water, so when the rains stop and the water dries out, they continue back north.

The Mali Elephant Project

In 2003, The WILD Foundation (Boulder, Colorado, U.S.A.), Save the Elephants (Nairobi, Kenya) and The Environmental Development Group (Oxford, UK) came together to study the elephants and understand their migration. They fitted the pachyderms with GPS so they could track their migration. Based on their findings, the Mali Elephant Project (MEP) was launched in 2007.

In 2009, the elephants' main lake dried up as huge herds of cattle belonging to wealthy people descended on the elephants' only source of water at the end of the dry season. People, livestock, and elephants competed for the water. The land was overused by crops and livestock.

MEP met with local people and helped them make land and water use rules to protect elephant habitats and help restore degraded areas. The result was more food, forest, and pasture to share with everyone. Patrols by young men called eco-guardians made sure everyone obeyed the rules. They reported land use abuse and protected the elephants by detecting and reporting poaching. Land management improved, livestock numbers were controlled, crop performance improved, and the elephant habitat and migration routes were protected.



The migration route of the Gourma Desert elephant is the most dangerous of any elephant in the world.

Changes Threaten the Elephants

The elephants have co-existed with the region's many cultures, the Tuareg, Peul, Songhai, Bellah, Rimaibe, Tellem, Maure, and Dogon, but growth in human settlements and increased overgrazing continued to pressure the elephants' survival.

From 2012 to 2015, militant violence and lawlessness broke out along the northern Mali border. Poaching by international trafficking networks skyrocketed. Eighty-three elephants were lost in 2015 alone.

Elephants and local communities were suffering. Families watched their young men being paid to join armed groups. The crises to protect young men and save the elephants brought local communities, international organizations, and the Mali government together to find solutions. MEP helped distribute food aid by donkey cart to prevent it from being stolen via vehicle hijackings. They also trained 520 young men to act as information networks to report and protect the



elephants. Fifty-one elephants were killed in 2016. By 2017, MEP struggled as funding was running out. “At this rate, the Gourma elephants will be wiped out by 2020,” predicted Dr. Susan Canney, Gourma Desert elephant expert and director of the Mali Elephant Project.

A Global Plea for Help

The plea was heard, and more organizations got involved, most notably the United Nations peacekeepers in Mali, called MINUSMA. The Chengeta Wildlife nonprofit professionally trained Mali’s first anti-poaching unit. The unit learned anti-poaching strategies and received radios, cellphones, surveillance equipment, weapons, and more. Once the unit became fully operational, elephant poaching dropped to extremely low levels.

Gourma Desert Elephants Today

“Poaching is under control,” says Dr. Canney, “and the elephants avoid areas where there was

poaching in 2015. This means that the elephants are living closer to humans and we continue our work with these villages to show them how to live safely with elephants—for example, when a person goes into the dense bush where an elephant might be, they are to be careful and not surprise the elephant as she might think you are a poacher wanting to kill her.”

The devoted work by many organizations, the Mali people, and the Mali government helps communities peacefully coexist with the elephants and prosper on the land. These united efforts stop the annihilation of one of the world’s most important animals, the migrating Gourma Desert elephant—a global treasure we can all watch and enjoy.

Colette Weil Parrinello is a frequent contributor to children’s magazines. She’s a nature and animal lover, traveler, and former regional advisor for the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators.



Life Behind the Mask



Large, colorful masks are part of many Dogon rituals.

In the central region of Mali and spread out as far as the land of Burkina Faso, there lives a mysterious people known as the Dogon (do-gän). Many centuries ago, they moved into seclusion where they have continued to live in ancient villages in the plateau, plains, and cliffs of a land known as the Bandiagara Escarpment. They moved hoping to avoid invading forces and to maintain their ancient traditions. That is difficult when invaders enter the region, but the Dogon persist. Their seclusion and strong determination have helped them not only preserve their culture and traditional farming lifestyle, but also ensures a certain amount of physical safety from dangers that threaten them daily.

With a population of several hundred thousands, the Dogon are not the biggest group, but they are one of the better known. Their distinctive woodcarvings have attracted collectors for nearly a century. Many tourists made the journey to watch the Dogon perform their ancient ceremonies. As part of the rituals, the Dogon dance on stilts while

K: THE DOGON

by Jacqueline Warner

For the Dogon, life centers around the community.



wearing large, colorful masks. Violence in the area makes it near impossible for people to visit the area now.

The Dogon have escaped invaders by settling in an area that is difficult to reach. This area is known by several names—the Bandiagara Escarpment, the cliffs

of Bandiagara, or Land of the Dogon. The Dogon arrived there around the 14th century and pushed out the Tellem. The Tellem lived high in the caves and crevices of the cliffs, and remnants of their dwellings are still visible. In 1989, the site was recognized as a cultural and

natural sanctuary by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), making it a World Heritage Site and attracting international attention.

The Dogon see the world in a unique way. Their world doesn't include shopping malls, the Internet, or electricity. They live a life based around their community, not based on the individual. Villages are

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constantly buzzing with laughter and song when work is being done or an event is celebrated. The harvesting of fields, smashing of onions, or grinding of millet is carried out happily with song, thankful hearts, and maybe a sacrificed chicken here and there.

The Dogon face a variety of environmental issues such as a limited and shared water supply, herds of domestic and wild animals eating their crops, and even dangerous wildlife lurking nearby. The Dogon believe some come bearing a spiritual message or prediction of the future. A visit from the sacred pale fox is anxiously awaited each night, and only the village *hogon* (spiritual leader) can read its messages in the sand. The Dogon believe that their creator God Amma created the pale fox by committing something disgraceful against Mother Earth. Since the pale fox was the first being created with shame, it is doomed to live a life alone but with great spiritual insight and prophecy to share with the Dogon.

The Dogon religion is very complex and connected to nature, the stars, and their ancestors. Their masks represent

these elements in their elaborate ceremonies. Every Dogon boy dreams of the day he will get to dance wearing the ancient regalia, thereby becoming a man in his community. Their traditional belief system shocked

the modern world when French anthropologists visited the Dogon in the 1930s. They realized that the Dogon knew about Sirius B, a dying star that most didn't know existed until 1862. But the Dogon knew about this star, which is not visible to the naked eye.

For thousands of years, the Dogon have celebrated the arrival of the Nummo on Earth from Sirius B. They believe the Nummo are perfect beings, half man and half fish, and bringers of knowledge and order to man. The Nummo live in the water on Earth, but visit the land to teach and guide mankind, much like the legendary tales of mermaids.

The Dogon are living examples of ancient history in the modern world. Despite forces that want to convert them, force them into slavery, or kill them, they persist in their traditions. Protected by their geographical location and World Heritage status, the Dogon are an ancient people with an ancient knowledge and a chance to continue living in an ancient world.

Jacqueline Warner is a historian, genealogist, and freelance writer. She enjoys a daily life in the country while embracing her German Appalachian culture with her family.

FAST FACTS

- » Dogon boys go to live in community bachelor quarters between the ages of 8 and 10. They continue to live there even after they marry, until their first child is born.
- » Dogon girls live with their parents until their first baby is born. The daughter leaves the baby with her parents to compensate them for their loss of her, and then she moves with her husband to a vacant house in his family's village.
- » Millet is an important staple in the Dogon diet. It is a fast growing, small-seeded cereal grass that is easily grown in the Dogon's semiarid conditions.
- » The *acridocarpus monodii* is an endangered plant that can only be found on the Bandiagara Escarpment. Its presence indicates to the Dogon underground water sources within the cliffs.

by Barbara J. Tuttle

The Brave Librarians of Timbuktu

“Salt comes from the north, gold from the south, but the word of God and the treasures of wisdom are only to be found in Timbuktu.”

—15th century West African proverb

This European drawing depicts Timbuktu in the 1800s.

Ever hear the expression “from here to Timbuktu”? People use the word “Timbuktu” to mean a faraway, remote, and possibly mythical place. But not only is it a real city in the north of Mali, it was once the crossroads of the world. Hundreds of years ago, caravans passed through Timbuktu, trading gold, salt, and other goods between the Middle East and Morocco. Timbuktu became a city of wealth, not just in material riches, but also in learning and ideas.

Until recently, many people, even some scholars, believed that Africa had no written language until the arrival of the European colonizers. But Timbuktu proves that to be false. While Europe was still in the Middle Ages, the scholars of Timbuktu created hundreds of thousands of manuscripts in beautiful calligraphy (decorative

handwriting) that discuss every possible subject: astronomy, poetry, mathematics, medicine, botany, religion, law, politics, and history. These manuscripts, which date back to the 1100s, are fragile and written on dried animal skins. The residents of Timbuktu guarded them in their homes for centuries.

In 2012, their existence was threatened by an invading group

of *jihadis* (jee-hah-dees), warriors from a branch of Al Qaeda, the group responsible for the 9/11 attacks on New York City’s World Trade Center in 2001. They set fire to 4,200 manuscripts they found. But thanks to a brave group of librarians and their helpers, all the other manuscripts, 377,000 in total, were evacuated to safety.



Alhousseini Ould Alfadrou, 16, sings verses from crumbling ancient Islamic manuscripts in a house in Timbuktu.

Timbuktu lies in a region called the Sahel, which means “shore.” It’s a band of land along the south border of the Sahara Desert, which people thought of as a sea, a sea of sand. The Sahel is a crossroads of ethnic groups. Because Timbuktu sat on the great trading route, scientists, poets, philosophers, and engineers gathered there to exchange and debate ideas. Teachers and students met in the mosques to learn and debate, and together these mosques became one of the world’s first universities. Of the 100,000 people who lived in Timbuktu in the 1600s, one-quarter were students. Everyone could read, including women, children, and slaves.

Eventually, Timbuktu was conquered by Morocco and occupied by other civilizations. Trade across Africa declined with the European discovery of America. Timbuktu faded in population, wealth, and importance and was forgotten. But the treasured manuscripts remained in the care of various families.

Abdel Kader Haidara comes from one of those families. His grandfather, a well-known scholar, chose Abdel to take care of all the family’s manuscripts. But Abdel came to see that all the manuscripts of Timbuktu should be collected and placed in a library where they would

be stored properly. Many of them were falling apart from water and termite damage.

He raised lots of money and traveled throughout north Mali, asking families if he could buy their manuscripts. He placed them in the newly built Ahmed Baba Institute, named for a great Timbuktu scholar of the 1600s.

In the 2000s, the world began noticing Timbuktu again. This was because of the document collection, which had gained some fame, and because of the new international popularity of the music of the Sahel. The annual Festival in the Desert drew musicians and fans from around the world.

But when Al Qaeda overtook all of north Mali in 2012, they enforced a rigid version of

Islamic law. Women had to be completely veiled, and no music was allowed on the radio, only recitations of the Quran, the holy book of Islam. It was only a matter of time before they came to destroy the manuscripts, which didn’t fit with Al Qaeda’s idea of Islam.

Haidara assembled a network of librarians and others they could trust. Secretly, at night, careful not to attract the attention of the Islamic police who patrolled the city, he and his team brought hundreds of



Fatama Bocar Sambala holds crumbling ancient Islamic manuscripts.



Brave citizens were able to save 377,000 manuscripts from destruction.

footlockers to sneak the manuscripts out of the Institute. Then dozens of volunteer drivers, passing through checkpoints manned by police and jihadis with assault rifles, making many dangerous trips back and forth, sneaked them out of north Mali and south to safety in Bamako, the capital.

Every single one of the 377,000 manuscripts made it through safely. Eventually, the French army came to help drive the jihadis out of Mali. Now the manuscripts are digitized on computers and catalogued so that people around the world will always be able to see them. This drama also brought world attention to the fact that hundreds of years ago, Timbuktu had a tradition of writing and scholarship as rich as anywhere.



A worker looks after some of the 20,000 preserved ancient Islamic manuscripts, which rest in air-conditioned rooms at the Ahmed Baba Institute in Timbuktu.

“For some people, when you say ‘Timbuktu’ it is like the end of the world. But this is not true. I am from Timbuktu, and I can tell you we are right at the heart of the world.”

—Ali Farka Touré, Malian musician

by Marcia Amidon Lusted

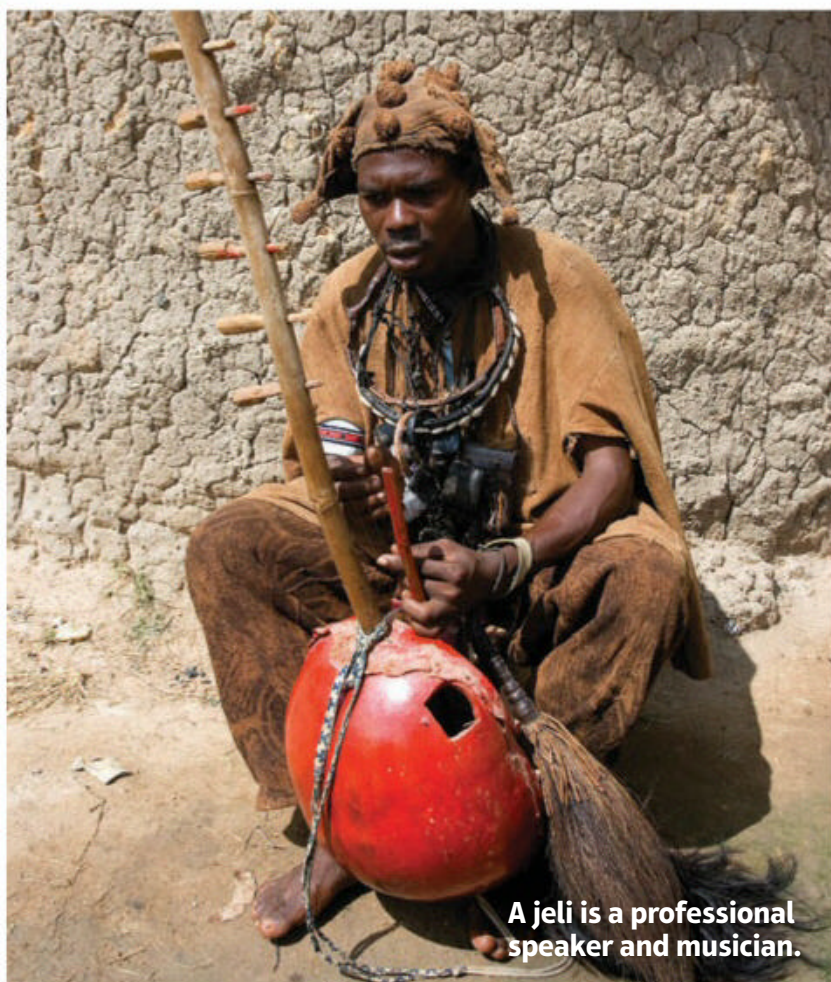
Mali's Music:

A Universal Language



The country of Mali and the U.S. state of Mississippi are more than 5,000 miles apart and very different from each other in almost every way. But many people say that music is a universal language, and in this case, it's true. Mississippi and Mali share a flavor of blues music that connects their modern-day musicians with ancient African musical traditions. How did these two places end up sharing a musical language?

Mali is a country with a long, rich musical history. Music is such a big part of the culture that in 2012, when Islamic extremist groups tried to ban all music in the northern region of the country, there were widespread protests. In some parts of the country, music became a nonviolent way to stand up to oppression. Mali's stories and histories have usually been told through storytelling and songs instead of written books. Professional speakers and musicians, called *jeli* (or *griot* in French), recited or sang stories and histories from memory. Griots used instruments



A jeli is a professional speaker and musician.



Malian singer Fatoumata Diawara performs at the Helsinki Festival in 2018.

such as the *ngoni* (a lute), the *bafalon* (a percussion instrument like a xylophone), and the *kora* (a string instrument much like a harp).

The blues-like melodies of the traditional songs of the jeli were carried with the Africans who were forcibly taken from Mali and sold into slavery in the United States. Music historians believe that those melodies, as well as other African music traditions, became the basis for American blues music. Other musical genres like jazz, rock and roll, salsa, funk, and hip-hop would not have existed without the influence of African music, which enslaved people kept alive as part of their heritage and which gradually filtered into new styles of American music.

Jeli are still an important part of Mali's musical culture. They are sometimes accompanied by instrumental ensembles, known as *sumu* and *sandiya*. Sumu groups usually play at weddings, while sandiya groups play at child-naming ceremonies and events where the music does not need to be amplified. Many of the tunes that are part of the traditional repertoire for jeli or griot singers are hundreds of years old. Some of these traditional and well-known songs include "Lamban" (a song that praises the songs of the jeli), "Sunjata" (which tells the heroic tale of the ruler Sunjata Keita), and "Bambougoudji"



Ali Farka Touré has collaborated with many rock musicians.

(about a 19th century prince from the Bamana kingdom in central Mali). Because these songs are so well known, they have become the basis for improvising, just as jazz musicians often improvise on existing songs. These new versions are being played by Mali musicians and have become popular all over the world.

Other types of modern Mali music also come from the traditions of different groups within the country. In the north, the Tuareg and Songhai people have a distinctive blues-rock style of music, while music from the Wassaulou in the south has a swinging feel to it. Some Malian vocal styles sound like rough blues, while others almost sound like opera. Mali's musicians have adopted some of the instruments of western rock, like guitars and keyboards, but still keep their distinctive sound. There are also Malian rappers and electronic music mixers.

Many American musicians recognized early on that there was a connection between the music roots of Mali and the blues and jazz of the United States. Ry Cooder, an American musician who plays the guitar and likes to collaborate with international musicians, teamed up with Ali Farka Touré, a farmer and musician from Mali, to record an album called *Talking Timbuktu* in 1995. Several other singers and bands collaborated to record an album called *Mali Music*. In 2003, Robert Plant, a former singer for the rock group Led Zeppelin, traveled to Mali

for the annual musical gathering of musicians from Africa, called Festival in the Desert. Plant and a film crew documented his trip, which included sitting around a campfire with Touré and singing American blues songs. Plant's experience became an eight-episode series on YouTube called *Zirka*. He said of his time in Mali, "[It was] a journey that could only reinforce the power and the great gift of music across and between cultures. . . sharing outside of language."

Many American blues artists are exploring these common roots between Mali's music and their own. Jeli from Mali commonly perform with U.S. singers such as Bonnie Raitt. American and Malian musicians often jam together, creating great improvisations on each other's music. Since Malian music is usually accompanied by string instruments, it fits well with American music that relies heavily on guitars. With the creation of the *Afropop Worldwide* radio show, which plays music from Africa and all over the world, many Mali musicians now have an international following. There are now more musicians from Mali signed with U.S. record companies than from any other country. Koite, a singer and guitarist from Mali, said, "African musicians know a lot about American music. But now it's the other way around. They are beginning to know a lot about us. Now we share. I think it can only be good."

MALI

Answers to Mali Crossword on page 48



ACROSS

- 2 scientist who studies reptiles and amphibians
- 5 capital of Mali
- 7 the richest man who ever lived (*two words*)
- 9 important river that runs through Mali
- 10 The Great Mosque in this city is the largest adobe building in the world.

DOWN

- 1 active during the day
- 3 a group traveling together
- 4 group known for their elaborate masks
- 6 white gold
- 8 desert that dominates northern Mali

The Sahara is the world's largest hot desert.



by Marcia Amidon Lusted

The Richest Man Who Ever Lived

This drawing from 1375 shows Mansa Musa sitting on his throne.

Jeff Bezos was the richest man in the world according to *Forbes Magazine* in 2019. His fortune was estimated to be \$131 billion dollars. But Bezos is not the richest man who ever lived. That title belongs to someone who had more money than the top five richest billionaires on the *Forbes'* list combined!

Most economists can't even describe in modern terms how much money Mansa Musa had, but it was probably more than \$400 billion in today's money. As history professor Rudolph Ware said, "Imagine as much gold as you think a human being could possess and double

it, that's what all the accounts are trying to communicate. This is the richest guy anyone has ever seen." Mansa Musa I (Mansa was the traditional Mali title meaning "king") was the ruler of the Mali Empire in West Africa from 1312 to 1337 C.E. His territories were rich in gold and copper, and he also controlled the trade in salt and ivory between the western and northern territories of Africa, so it was easy for him to become very wealthy.

Mansa Musa also had an army of 100,000 men, 10,000 of them on horseback, so he could easily acquire new territory, doubling the size of Mali's

original empire and creating one that was second in size only to the Mongol Empire in Asia. The territories under Musa's control included the Gold Coast of northwest Africa, which was on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea and was an important source of gold.

Musa was Muslim, and he made the traditional Islamic religious pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 CE. He stopped in the city of Cairo, Egypt, on his way. His caravan was so impressive that even Egypt's ruler, the Sultan al-Malik al-Nasir, was amazed. Musa entered the city with tens of thousands of slaves, soldiers, and officials and a hundred camels.

Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca is depicted in this engraving from 1670.





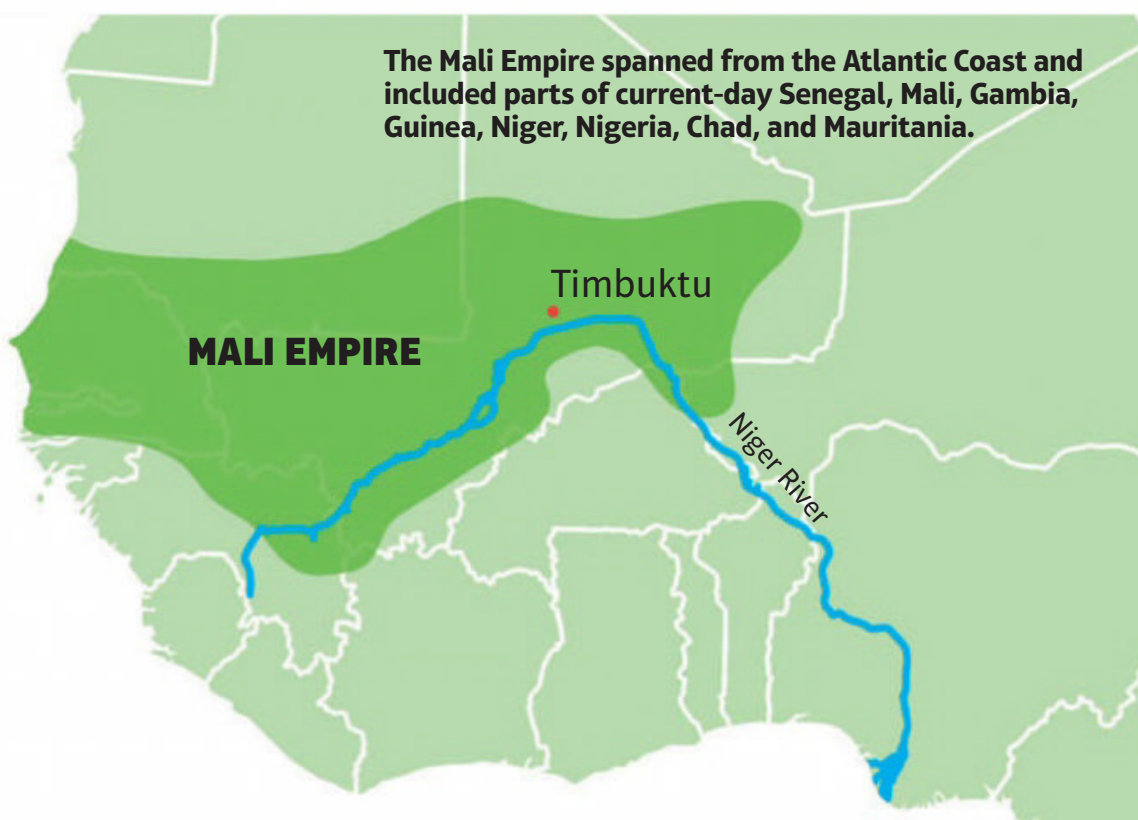
Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is the holiest city in the Islamic religion.

Written records state that each camel carried 300 pounds of gold dust, while 500 slaves each carried a 6-pound golden staff. Soldiers on horseback carried the red and gold banners of Mansa Musa. An Arab historian of that time named Al-Makrizi described him: “He was a young man with a brown

skin, a pleasant face and good figure . . . His gifts amazed the eye with their beauty and splendor.” Musa was also remembered for how generous he was during his trip to Cairo. He gave away so much gold, and his entourage spent even more gold in Cairo’s markets,

that the value of gold bullion actually crashed by 20 percent because there was too much of it in circulation. It took 12 years for the value of gold to recover.

Of course, Musa didn’t just give money away during his trip. He also acquired the territory of Gao within the Songhai kingdom, which extended his territory to the southern edge of the Sahara Desert along the Niger River. Ultimately, his empire spanned several territories, including current-day Senegal, Gambia,



The Mali Empire spanned from the Atlantic Coast and included parts of current-day Senegal, Mali, Gambia, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Mauritania.



Djinguereber Mosque in Timbuktu

Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Mauritania, in addition to Mali. And when Musa returned home, he built many mosques, including the Djinguereber Mosque in Timbuktu. Although there was no stone for construction and Mali's buildings were usually built using beaten earth (banco) reinforced with wood, they lasted for hundreds of years.

Musa made such an impression in Egypt that news of him and his wealth spread quickly to Europe. Years after Musa's death, a mapmaker in Spain drew the first detailed

map of West Africa. It showed Mansa Musa sitting on a throne, wearing an impressive gold crown and holding a golden staff in one hand. His other hand held a huge nugget or orb of gold. This image inspired later European explorers to travel to Africa in search of gold, despite the risk of disease, difficult terrain, and the hostile groups that lived there. Until the 19th century, the city of Timbuktu had the reputation of being a mythical lost city of gold. Scottish explorer Gordon Laing was the first European to find the city in 1826.

Mansa Musa died in 1337, when he was 57 years old. His sons inherited his empire, but they could not hold it together. It crumbled as smaller states broke away. And despite Mansa Musa's indescribable wealth, as well as his support of scholarship, the arts, and architecture, his reputation soon faded. Part of this was due to the efforts of 19th century slave traders, who did not want to present Africa as a place with a vivid literary and artistic culture. Even now, most people outside of West Africa have never heard of Mansa Musa, the richest man who ever lived.

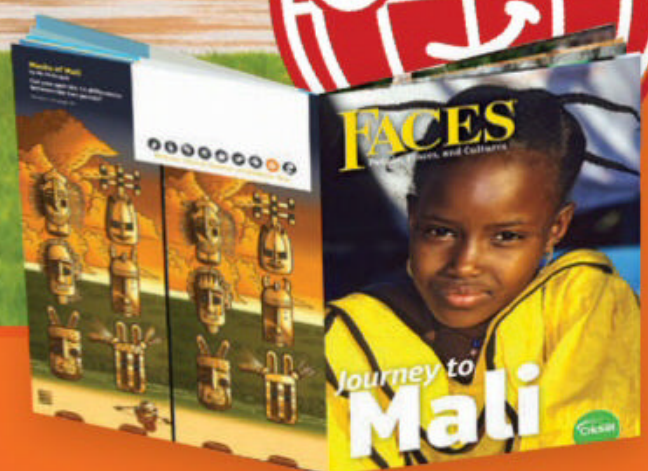
WHERE in the World?



Answer is
on page 48.

**Do you know
where our friend
Globey is enjoying
his copy of FACES?**

Here is a hint: This sand dune near Gao has a flowery name.



A CLOSER LOOK



The Niger River

The Niger River is the largest river in West Africa. It begins in Guinea and runs through three more countries: Mali, Niger, and Nigeria.

The Niger is the third-longest river in Africa. The Nile and the Congo are longer.

Because much of the surrounding land is desert, the river is very important to the countries it runs through. It provides almost all the water used for farming in the region. It is also an important source of fish and hydroelectric power.

The name Niger may come from the Tuareg phrase "*gher n gheren*," which means "river of all rivers."



The river has a very unusual route. In the center, it makes an almost 90-degree bend south. Scientists have discovered this turn is the result of two ancient rivers joining together.

Historically, the river was the center of trade in West Africa. The Mali Empire (circa 1235-1670 C.E.) used the river as a main thoroughfare for carrying its warriors and merchants from city to city.



For people living in towns along the Niger, it's often the only place they can wash their clothes or pots and pans and graze their animals.

The Niger River is also a source of oil. Almost two million barrels of oil are extracted a day in the Niger Delta.



The river is home to many animals. Hundreds of species of birds, fish, and reptiles rely on the river for food and shelter. Hippopotamuses and crocodiles are the largest animals that live along its banks.

Both Nigeria and Niger take their names from the river.

YOUR TURN

Marvelous Masks

The Dogon are known for their traditional masks. What would a mask that represents you look like? Use the space below to draw your mask.

Send your design to FACES Marvelous Masks to Cricket Media, 70 E Lake Street Suite 800, Chicago, IL 60601 or e-mail it to faces@cricketmedia.com by April 16, 2020. Your artwork could appear in an upcoming issue of FACES.



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MEE-AN AND THE MAGIC SERPENT

A Play Based on a Folktale from Mali

Characters:

» **Narrator 1**

» **Narrator 2**

» **Narrator 3**

» **Mee-An:** Beautiful but vain young woman

» **Assa:** Mee-An's younger sister

» **Mother:** Mee-An and Assa's mother

» **Oumar:** Shepherd 1

» **Amadou:** Shepherd 2

» **Serpent**

» **Balakonifin:** Black Bird of the River

NARRATOR 1: Long ago, there lived a beautiful but vain girl named Mee-An. She was looking for the perfect husband without a single scratch or scar on his body. She lived on the edge of the desert along with her parents and younger sister, Assa. Suitors came from far and wide to seek Mee-An's hand in marriage, but she rejected them all.

MOTHER: Be careful, daughter. Seeing a person is not the same as knowing his character.

MEE-AN: Oh, Mother, stop worrying.

NARRATOR 1: Assa was magical and wiser than her older sister. She turned herself into a fly and buzzed around the marketplace, landing on people to find a perfect man for her sister. Word of Mee-An's quest soon spread far and wide. In a village quite far away, two shepherds sat and talked in the shade of a giant termite hill.

OUMAR: Have you heard of the girl, Mee-An? She thinks that no man is good enough for her.

AMADOU: Yes. They say she is the most beautiful

girl in the world, and she is looking for a husband as perfect as she is.

NARRATOR 2: A powerful serpent that lived in the termite hill heard their entire conversation.

SERPENT: A beautiful young girl looking for the perfect husband? I will use my magic to win her hand.

NARRATOR 2: The serpent, disguised as a handsome young man, arrived in Mee-An's village during a celebration. Assa, as usual, was buzzing around as a fly. She inspected the handsome stranger and made a beeline for home.





ASSA: Mee-An, I have found the perfect man for you. Only, there is something odd about him. He does not smell . . . human.

MEE-AN: No matter. Run back and invite him to our house for dinner while I get ready.

NARRATOR 3: That evening, the perfect young man came for dinner. As the sisters cooked, the walls cracked and cooking pots fell and broke into pieces. Birds sang wildly and the wind howled.

MOTHER: These are signs of evil. Beware, Mee-An.

MEE-AN: Oh, Mother. Stop worrying.

NARRATOR 3: Mee-An and the magic serpent were married the next month. They prepared to move to their new home.

MOTHER: Assa, according to tradition, you will go with Mee-An and her new husband to act as the *konyo-wuluni*, the “little barking dog of the wedding.”

NARRATOR 1: The three walked for many days before they reached their new home—a hut on the other side of a great river that could only be reached by boat. They soon settled into a routine. Every day, Mee-An’s husband went to the river, returning home with a great many fish for dinner.

MEE-AN: Let’s surprise my husband with some lunch on the river.

NARRATOR 1: The girls walked and walked, until they heard a strange noise. They saw a giant serpent in the middle of the river, singing.

SERPENT: I fish all day for Assa and Mee-An. To fatten them up is my master plan. Boiled with mangos and fresh river eel, They will make a delicious meal!

ASSA: (*whispering*) That serpent is your husband. And he is going to eat us!



NARRATOR 2: The terrified sisters crept away. They knew they had to get home quickly. But how to cross the great river? Just then, a shadow passed above their heads. It was Balakononifin, the black heron.

MEE-AN: (*calling to the heron*) Please help us cross this river. The snake will eat us if we do not escape.

BALAKONONIFIN: I do not trust humans.

ASSA: If you take us home, we promise to give you a horse, a cow, a donkey, and sheep for your troubles.

BALAKONONIFIN: Those are pretty words. That magic serpent has certainly caused me problems, stealing all the fish from the river. Very well, get on my back.

NARRATOR 2: The girls scrambled up, and Balakononifin took flight. Seeing his beautiful dinner disappear, the snake launched himself

into the air. He swirled around the heron and the girls in a funnel of ashes and dust, but he fell back into the river, defeated. Ever since, serpents have lived in the water. Balakononifin kept flying, straight back to the sisters' family.

ASSA: We are home! But look at your feathers. They are no longer black. The serpent's dust must have turned you white.

MEE-AN: Thank you for saving us. As we promised, please accept our payment: a horse, a cow, a donkey, and sheep.

NARRATOR 2: The heron was very pleased with his new friends. To this day, when you see animals grazing by an African river, you will probably see a white bird sitting proudly on their backs. As for Mee-An, she learned that "seeing a person is not the same as knowing his character." When she married again, she was able to love her husband in spite of his scratches and scars.

Mali-inspired Terracotta Sculptures

Art can tell us a lot about ancient civilizations. Recent excavations have uncovered the history of Mali. Small figures made from terracotta were discovered in the delta of the Niger River. They are called the Djenne Figures after the city that is near where they were found. They have helped historians uncover clues about what life was like so many thousands of years ago. You can make your own terracotta figure.

STEP 1—Making the Basic Shapes

Soften the clay by working it with your hands. You can roll, pinch, and pull the clay to make it malleable. The warmth from your hands makes the clay much easier to work with. Begin to roll out the basic shapes for the figure you intend to make. The Djenne Figures were often shaped from long sausage-type rolls. Roll out more logs for the arms and legs.

STEP 2—Putting the Shapes Together

Pinch a small amount of clay and add water to it to make a paste. This is called slip. Use it to “glue” the pieces together. Use the slip to smooth any rough areas or cracks that may form. You can also use toothpicks to connect larger pieces. Put a toothpick in between the two parts and then push them together, hiding the toothpick in between. Use the slip to hide the seam.

Materials:

- » Air-drying terracotta clay (available at local craft or art supply stores)
- » Surface to work on such as tile, cardstock, or parchment paper
- » Clay-working tools or household items for mark-making such as knives, spoons, forks, and toothpicks
- » Jar of water

STEP 3—Adding Details

The Djenne Figures are known for the pattern of “buttons” and circles along their spines and backs. They also have patterns and details etched into the clothing or armour on the figures. Use a toothpick or other tool to create patterns and designs on your figure.

STEP 4—Drying the Clay

Once you have completed your project, set it aside to dry. You may need to turn it over so that every part of it dries thoroughly. It could take up to three days for it dry completely. Sometimes an oven can speed up the drying process. Just be careful to keep it at the lowest heat setting. Be sure to put any leftover clay in an airtight container, such as a resealable plastic bag, so that it does not dry out. Clay that is exposed to air will dry out and become unusable.

Once your project is complete, you can paint it or leave it the natural terracotta color. Be sure to display your Djenne-inspired figure.



Terracotta does not deteriorate over time, which is why the Djenne Figures have survived.



This Djenne Figure features “buttons” along its spine.

YOUR TURN: Make a Mali-inspired Terracotta Sculpture

Have your parent or legal guardian send us a high-resolution image of your creation to faces@cricketmedia.com by April 16, 2020. Be sure the email includes your name, age, and address, and states that “Cricket Media may publish the image provided in Cricket’s magazines and online, and that I am authorized to provide the image.”

All submissions become property of Cricket Media and will not be returned.

SAY WHAT?



“Where’s my seventh swan-a-swimming?”

—Florence D.

“Don’t forget to wash behind your ears!”

—Susanna H.

“Swim before all the food runs out!”

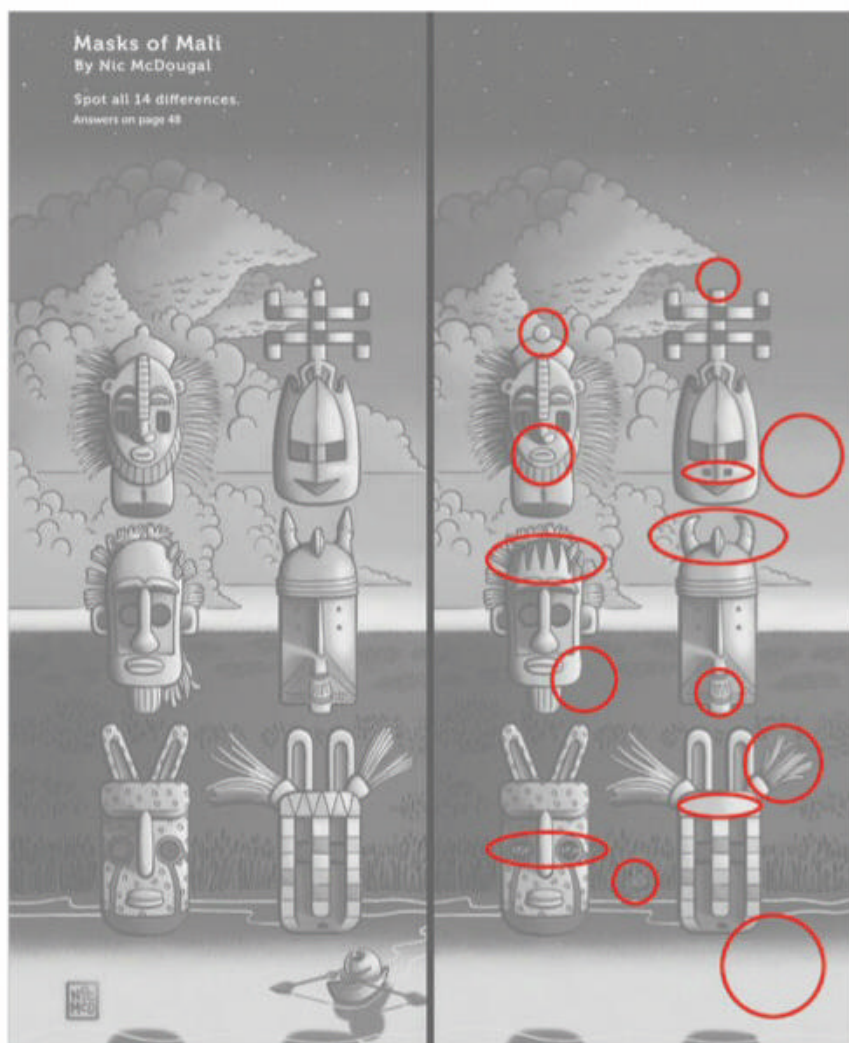
—Ethan A.

“Say cheese!”

—Asher

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Answer Page



ANSWER TO MYSTERY PHOTO ON INSIDE FRONT COVER:

Sodium chloride is the chemical name for salt.

ANSWERS TO MALI CROSSWORD ON PAGE 33:

ACROSS: 2. herpetologist; 5. Bamako;
7. Mansa Musa; 9. Niger; 10. Djenne.
DOWN: 1. diurnal; 3. caravan; 4. Dogon;
6. salt; 8. Sahara.

ANSWER TO WHERE IN THE WORLD ON PAGE 37:

La Dune Rose is found near Gao.

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