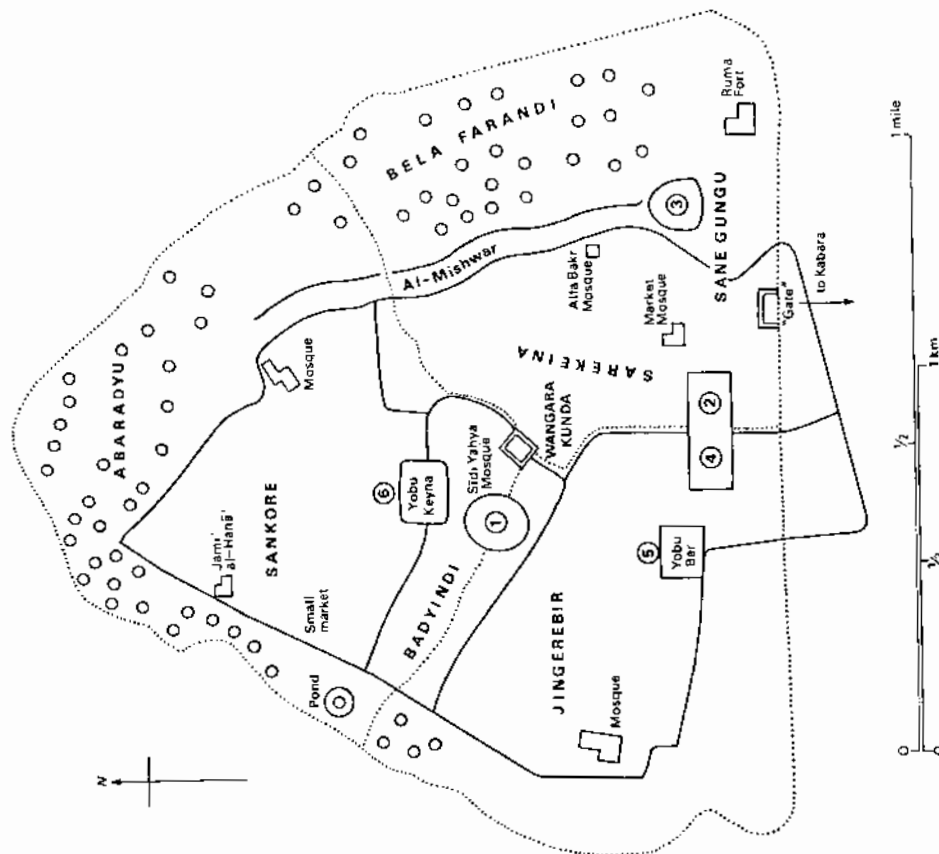


CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The once-fabled city of Timbuktu holds a special place in the consciousness of people who are concerned with Africa, its past and its future. Particularly within the West African context, Timbuktu is one of several cities and states which affirm that the region had as much as any other, a long history of its own. For the historian, the special interest of Timbuktu lies in the fact that the city has left us a tolerably detailed record, not only of its own experience over several centuries, but also of the experience of its neighbours. This record derives principally from the well-known Arabic chronicles, or *tārīkhs* of Timbuktu, which have come down to us from various periods, beginning as early as the late sixteenth century. The history of Timbuktu is known to us almost exclusively from these chronicles. Indeed, it is also of considerable interest that the history of the area, namely the West African Sudan, is known to us in greater detail from the Timbuktu chronicles than from any other corpus of source materials pre-dating the nineteenth century.

The place of Timbuktu in West African history must be a point of emphasis in any study on the city. This is particularly true of the present study, for in approaching Timbuktu from the standpoint of its Arabic sources and its Islamic traditions, we risk conveying to the reader the sense that the city has historically belonged to a realm other than the sub-Saharan or Black African. The risk is not contingent upon our approach *per se*, for Timbuktu conceived itself as an Islamic city throughout its history. Rather, the risk is contingent upon the widespread misunderstanding which still persists even in academic circles concerning both Islam and Africa. For one thing, we have to contend with the conventions of East and West (now West and 'non-West') which for a long time left Africa out of the world historical picture. Other conventions have tended to project even stronger barriers against the historical processes of interaction between cultures. We frequently encounter notions of 'cultural' antithesis (as between the 'Islamic' and African, or between the 'Islamic' and Indonesian) when the evidence points more strongly to synthesis. In our case, the synthesis of Muslim and African pertains to the West African



MAP OF TIMBUKTU

Note: Dotted lines show the older (sixteenth and seventeenth century) limits of the built-up sections. The northern and eastern sections later became suburbs where straw huts (represented here by the little circles) predominated until recently. The connected lines show the limits and divisions of the built-up core of the city today. The locations designated by numbers are places (in that order) in which the main market was held. The transfer from no. 1 to no. 2 took place at an obscure period. At the Moroccan conquest, the Ruma transferred the market closer to the Qasba, but it later reverted to the old place and gradually moved westwards during the eighteenth century. In the present century it was transferred to Yobu Keyna by the French.

Sudan generally rather than just Timbuktu. We must likewise remember that the division between northern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa (White and Black) is no more than a convention. Otherwise, we will fail to see how Timbuktu was at once Saharan and sub-Saharan, quite besides being at the same time African and Islamic.

Aside from the conventions mentioned above, or perhaps because of them, Timbuktu has long been the subject of an unusual lore of mystery and enigma. The name now often invokes the image of a remote, inaccessible place which never at all existed, any more than the fabulous City of Brass of the *Arabian nights*. Horace Miner's ethnographic study of 1953, which characterized Timbuktu in the present century as an example of the so-called 'primitive city', certainly brought our subject closer to the realm of reality. Timbuktu was never the sumptuous or idyllic place which floated in the imagination of Europe up to the early nineteenth century. However, the place of Timbuktu in history is far from inconsequential. For here, just south of the great Sahara, was a substantial dynamic city by the sixteenth century when urbanization was still at a nascent stage in many parts of Europe. Moreover, the region of Timbuktu (or the Western Sudan) was remarkable for its large cities, including the metropolis of Gao, capital of the Songhai empire to the east, and the city of Jenne, the commercial centre of the Middle Niger Delta to the south. By the nineteenth century, these cities were no longer what they used to be, but to the historian at least they do not quite exemplify the theoretically formulated concept of the 'primitive city'.

The research of the past two decades has allocated to Timbuktu an important place in African history. The city is now famous as an ancient centre of commerce where a sophisticated tradition of learning flourished in the medium of classical Arabic, the language of Islam as a whole from Indonesia to Hausaland. Among the products of the Timbuktu tradition of scholarship, the best known are the chronicles because they have been widely utilized to reconstruct the outlines of early West African history. Although Timbuktu itself has not been the subject of concerted study, nonetheless the chronicles have contributed towards giving the city a new sort of fame more consistent with its real history than the earlier legends which circulated outside the area about Timbuktu.

The 'mystery' of Timbuktu

Our study approaches Timbuktu more from the standpoint of the chronicles and documentary records than of its legend or its present-day ethnography. Indeed, it might perhaps be said that the legend of Timbuktu and its mystery (including at the latest Miner's notion of the primitive city) pertain principally to the European approach to Timbuktu rather than to the actual history of the city. The history of European knowledge and exploration of Africa has been well written, and the 'discovery' of Timbuktu

has received its share of attention. In the process, Timbuktu became famous for many things, ranging from its fabled slave-trade to its so-called Sankore University. However, any serious look at the city's legend will show that Timbuktu became famous merely for being 'famous'.

The mystery of Timbuktu is perhaps primarily the mystery of the full-fledged city which flourished south of the Sahara, in a continent which is not widely reputed for having historically had extensive urban centres. Secondly, the *real* mystery of Timbuktu pertains primarily to its relatively unknown origins and to the enigma of its early periods, when Timbuktu began acquiring the status of a metropolis which flourished almost in the desert, instead of at the centre of an agriculturally rich and well-populated region. Thirdly, and as far as the social scientist is concerned, the mystery of Timbuktu is that of the city which was not the modern European township, governed and thought to have been shaped by its municipal institutions, nor a mere conglomeration of villages, as some 'non-Western' cities have been described. Like many Asian and African cities yet to be studied seriously, Timbuktu was not necessarily shaped by the experience of a powerful kingdom, nor can its history be assimilated under that of the empires which successively controlled the area. Yet Timbuktu was a cosmopolitan city which attracted countless ethnic groups to become its sons and citizens.

Let us reaffirm at this point that Timbuktu is not historically the 'city' *par excellence* in sub-Saharan Africa. At most it can be said that no other town in sub-Saharan Africa has so far presented us with historical detail sufficient to make possible an internal view of the organization of the city over an extended period prior to the colonial era. The historian of urbanism in Africa may perhaps legitimately find more substantive basis for focusing on such major cases as Kano in Northern Nigeria, Jenne in the Middle Niger Delta, or Kumasi in modern Ghana. These settlements, too, are of great interest, for although they became the capitals of important kingdoms, we simply do not know whether city preceded state or *vice versa*. Other settlements of greater antiquity are attested by the remains of Zimbabwe in southern Africa, or by the art remains of Ife in Yorubaland. Remotely, the proliferation of ancient town-kingships affiliated to Ife by tradition may have a corollary in the phenomenon of city-states in the history of Hausaland. But in all these cases, and others, the research and documentation available so far has not yielded a body of evidence sufficient for a comparative approach in our study of Timbuktu. At most, we can readily arrive at comparisons with the nearby towns of Gao, Jenne and Walāta, all in the Western Sudan, though in these cases we have to rely to an appreciable extent on the documentation available in the Timbuktu chronicles.

Similarly, we should affirm that Timbuktu was not the Islamic city *par excellence* in sub-Saharan Africa. Here, we need hardly emphasize the differences between the various African Muslim towns and cities, a theme which is often reiterated by Islamicists concerning the cities of North

Africa and the Middle East. Kano in Hausaland, Harar in Ethiopia and Kilwa on the East African coast have historically been different from Timbuktu and from each other. The role of scholar-notables was probably quite as strong in the case of Harar, an otherwise unique city which Richard Burton once described as the 'Timbuktu of East Africa'. What might be said of Harar need not be true of either Kano or Kilwa, though all three were Islamic cities and Islam played an important role in their history. Certainly, the Islamic factor was very strong in the organization of Timbuktu, and indeed one might even say that at times it loomed stronger than in the older cities of North Africa and the Middle East.

Given the importance of Islam in the history of Timbuktu, the risk is quite great that the city might somehow be seen as characteristically 'Arab' or more vaguely as 'Moorish'. We have already alluded to this problem, but we might perhaps further explain it when we recall that the Islamic cities of the East-African coast, for example, were thought until recently to have been the product of importation and settlement from southern Arabia and Persia. Indeed, writers on East Africa, till recent decades, tended to refer to African Muslims quite ambiguously as Arabs, just as the Portuguese, three or four centuries earlier, used to designate them 'Moors'. Fortunately, historians of West Africa have not had to contend with problems of nomenclatural ambiguity quite so commonly. For it was realized from an early date that Islam achieved an independent growth in West Africa, a fact which now increasingly appears to have been true of the mediaeval East-African coast as well. In both cases, one of the more significant findings of the historian is that we can identify no single event which accounts either for the introduction of Islam in mediaeval times nor for its subsequent growth locally. The 'mystery' in this case becomes in and of itself an important historical datum. It simply suggests that Islam was introduced gradually and informally as a result of processes of commercial intercourse whose origins would seem to pre-date the Islamic era in both cases. In East Africa, Islam remained for the most part restricted to the coastal regions, the area of Harar being an exception, while in West Africa Islam diffused widely, especially among mercantile communities of the Sahelo-Sudan. The process began long before Timbuktu came into being around 1100, and indeed even a full-fledged tradition of Islamic learning had witnessed considerable local development further to the south before the rise of Timbuktu to importance in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Indeed, the very growth of Timbuktu to importance cannot properly be understood without appreciating the scope and nature of the southern influence.

Niger, Sahara and Sudan

Timbuktu belongs in the middle between two worlds which elsewhere in the Sahelo-Sudan are more distinct from each other. One is the world of the

Sudanic black peoples of the Savannah belt of West Africa, who have been characteristically agriculturalists, while the other is the world of the nomadic pastoralists of the southern Sahara, the 'whites' of the Sudan, who ultimately owe their origin either partly or fully to a pre-historic (and pre-Islamic) migration from North Africa. These two worlds come together along the Sahelian belt which separates the Sahara from the Savannah. However, the two worlds nowhere come so close as they do in the region of Timbuktu. The main factor is the unusual course followed by the great Niger river in its archlike journey across the West African sub-continent.

Much as Egypt was long ago described as the 'gift of the Nile', so Timbuktu and the cities and states of its region may perhaps be described as the gifts of the Niger. From its sources far to the south, the great Nile of the Sudan (as the Niger used to be called by the Arab geographers) bears resemblance to the Nile of Egypt in that it flows due north towards the Sahara. In the process, the Niger brings the more thickly populated regions of West Africa into the southern Sahara and, hence, closer to North Africa. Timbuktu's indebtedness to the Niger will become apparent when we consider that the great river changes its course eastwards precisely in the region of Timbuktu. From there, it takes a long journey through territories which would have been barren and uninhabitable until, in the regions of Bourem and Gao, it changes its course again, southeastwards, and from there flows along the longest part of its journey via Hausaland and Nupe to the Atlantic.

Perhaps it could be said that the Niger attempts the formidable feat, accomplished by the Nile, of actually crossing the Sahara. Even as it dissipates its strength in its course northwards, the Niger produces an inland delta on a scale which has no match elsewhere. The Middle Niger Delta, as the region south of Timbuktu is called, is a vast floodplain seasonally transformed into an immense shallow lake by the Niger inundations. The result is historically one of the richest regions in Africa, both agriculturally and in fishery. The area has aptly been described as the bread-basket of the Sudan, but the full impact of the floodplain upon the history of West Africa is far from satisfactorily understood.

Timbuktu owed its existence, as well as its long historical *floruit* as a commercial town, largely to the Niger and its inundations. Certainly, the same must also be said of the ancient city of Jenne which, along with the two important towns of Dia and Kābura, flourished in the midst of the Niger floodplain. Similarly, the city of Gao owed much of its history to its location along the eastern bend of the Niger. Timbuktu itself enjoyed the advantage of being located precisely at a point where the Niger inundations reach furthest north into the Sahara. Hence, for a portion of each year, some of the outskirts of the town are transformed into a cultivable region. More importantly, the rise of the Niger for a few months each year

made it possible for boats of considerable capacity to navigate the river from Gao, *via* Timbuktu, to Jenne and beyond. Though not itself at the main course of the Niger, Timbuktu was nonetheless able, through its port at Kabara (to be distinguished from Kābura), to occupy an axial position in the commerce of the Niger bend area. The city linked various parts of the Niger with each other, besides standing at a particularly strategic location for linking the Sudan with the Sahara and, through the Sahara, with North Africa.

Seen from the vantage point of the Sahara, Timbuktu itself could perhaps be described, though in a special sense, as a 'port-town'. It is relatively well known that the mediaeval Arabs looked upon deserts as seas, and indeed the great Sahara separating northern Africa from the rest of the continent came to be known as *the* desert (*al-sahrā*). That is precisely why the two belts immediately to the north and south of the Sahara earned the name Sahel (*sāhil*, literally coast). Timbuktu was as much a port-town along the West African Sahel, as Kilwa was a port-town along the coasts of East Africa. The main difference appears to be the fact that, while Kilwa interacted principally with other coastal regions, Timbuktu interacted most with, and probably owed much of its origin to, areas further 'inland' or further south.

The origins of Timbuktu are obscured in part by the scantness of the evidence, but they are perhaps more thoroughly overshadowed by certain conventions which have evolved around the earliest periods in West African history. Foremost among these conventions is a tendency to see history in the Sudan as proceeding from north to south, as it were, from North Africa, *via* the Sahara, to the Sudan. Among other things, it is quite widely stated that the early great empires of the Sudan, including ancient Ghana, Mali and the Songhai, owed their wealth and greatness predominantly to the stimulus of the trans-Saharan commerce in gold with North Africa. Indeed, we ourselves set out from the standpoint of a similar assumption about Timbuktu (especially in view of the predominantly commercial character of the city), but it soon became clear that the origin of the town, much like its continued existence today, rested upon a local commerce, mainly between the Middle Niger Delta, on the one hand, and between the pastoralists of the Sahara. We need not de-emphasize the role of the trans-Saharan trade in stimulating the further growth of Timbuktu, especially during the sixteenth century when the city became the emporium for West Africa *par excellence*. Nonetheless, there is a distinction between the influences which gave rise to Timbuktu (including the impact of the salt-mines in the middle of the Sahara) and between those which gave added prosperity and importance to the city during long periods of its history. This distinction has not been observed by writers on the Sudanic empires with the result that even the origins of state-formation are associated with the influence of trans-Saharan commerce and, indeed, with

a 'civilizing mission' said to have been exerted on the Sudan by the southern Saharans.

Technically speaking, the central difficulty which has emanated from this sort of approach pertains to our inability to determine the location of the earliest kingdoms of the Sudan (as mentioned by the Arab geographies) and most especially the kingdom of Ghana. This ancient kingdom was the first in the area to assume an imperial stature, but neither its original core nor the extent of its expansion is known with precision. Most frequently, the core of the kingdom, known in local traditions as Wagadu, has been associated with a rather tenuous Sahelian location skirting the Sahara in the region of Walāta and Kumbi Saleh, some 400 miles to the west of Timbuktu. There, the kingdom may well have participated directly in the trans-Saharan commerce, as is frequently suggested, but there exists equally as much evidence that Ghana was located in or along the Niger floodplain. Indeed, it would appear quite possible that the commerce of Ghana was instrumental in giving rise to Timbuktu as an emporium (much as earlier in the case of Kumbi Saleh) from somewhere around 1100 onwards.

For the most part, we have avoided the complexities surrounding the history of ancient Ghana largely because they fall outside the scope of this study. Nonetheless, the reader should take note of a detail (in Chapter 2), for example, that the people of Wagadu (ancient Ghana) were among the earliest merchants to come trading at Timbuktu. The seventeenth-century chronicler, al-Sa'di, who records this information, also attributed Timbuktu's rise to prominence to its commerce with the city of Jenne, in the Niger floodplain. The interesting feature about both details lies in the fact that al-Sa'di confused the town-kingdom of Jenne, in an early phase of its history, and the kingdom of Ghana. Indeed, similar confusion is to be discerned in the sixteenth-century text of Leo Africanus, a source which exaggerated the extensiveness of the territories of Jenne while describing the town as Genni, Ghenoa and Ghinea.

One of the more fruitful lines of research pursued in this study concerns the chains of transmission of Islamic learning in the Sudan, a technical field of research (see Chapter 3) whereby the precise chains of transmission can be traced for many generations from teacher to student. We discovered that the chains of transmission at Timbuktu led us backwards, at the earliest, to a certain Muhammad al-Kāburi, a black scholar who along with others bearing a Kāburi *nisba*, originated in the town of Kābura in the Niger floodplain. Beyond this scholar, the precise origins of Islamic learning in the Sudan are still not known. At most, the researches of Ivor Wilks (and partly those of Lamin Sanneh and Tom Hunter) have shown that many West-African Muslim clerics traced lines of transmission of learning which converge backwards upon a semi-legendary figure known as Sālim al-Suwari (Suware). It is of considerable interest that the origin of

this scholar is associated with the town of Dia (Diakha, also Zāgha), a town near Kábura, where Ibn Baṭūta noted the existence of an Islamic learned tradition of long standing, already in the mid-fourteenth century. Remarkably, Suware is sometimes identified as son (almost certainly a putative son) of the Soninke founder-ancestor Dinga (Dinya) of ancient Ghana. Indeed, the traditions of ancient Ghana which are extant among the Soninke begin with relating the saga of travel for Dinga whereby the first places in which he resided in the Sudan are identified as Jenne and Dia (cf. Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana and Mali*, especially p. 15). This perhaps suggests that the ancient kingdom of Ghana flourished in the Niger floodplain or at least that it left an important legacy there at Jenne, Dia and Kábura. Timbuktu inherited the legacy to the extent that even its tradition of masonry is sometimes said to have been introduced from Jenne, a town which in turn is said to have been founded from Dia. There is no question that Dia was once a major metropolis, for it is indeed especially associated with masonry and masonry, besides being an ancient centre of Islamic learning. Hence, although the evidence is neither complete nor fully reliable, it seems that the influences received by Timbuktu from the Niger floodplain had considerable impact upon the character of the city from its earliest periods.

The southern background of Timbuktu has been of interest to us in this introduction because it helps to amplify the African background of Timbuktu's traditions, including its tradition of Islamic learning. The world to which Timbuktu belonged did not see things in terms of a sharp distinction between Saharan and sub-Saharan, or between Black and White. Indeed, nor did it see civilization or history in terms of a movement from north to south. The traditionalists of Timbuktu believed, for example, that the town of Tuat, across the Sahara in North Africa, was founded by Malinke from the empire of Mali. For all we know, the traditions may be correct, because the twelfth-century geographer, Abu'l-Ḥamīd al-Gharnāṭī, counted the town of Ghadāmis, also an emporium north of the Sahara like Tuat, as among the countries of the Sudan (*Sūdān*, Black people). Indeed, it is remarkable that people from Ghadāmis and Tuat have always been represented by settlers at Timbuktu. Other settlers from North Africa established themselves in the city at various times, but none contributed permanent settlers as much as the people of Tuat and Ghadāmis.

Perhaps the most interesting feature about Timbuktu historically is the great variety which characterized its settlers and its inhabitants. This factor is no longer apparent in the city today, because the majority speak the Songhai language. Indeed, Horace Miner saw Timbuktu as a city (albeit in his view a 'primitive city') because it was a multi-ethnic entity of Songhai, Arabic and Tamashagh speakers. In practice, the Songhai-speaking groups include Fulānis and Wangara besides Soninke and Sanhāja. Other groups

who have gradually lost their ethnic identity include a variety of Tuareg and Hassāni settlers, besides Songhai and Ruma. We may note that southern Saharan 'whites' became more strongly associated with the northern Sankore quarter. However, it is interesting that other 'whites' from across the Sahara, including settlers from Tuat and Ghadāmis, historically settled in the southern parts of the city, at Jingerebir and Sarekeina.

The ethnic diversity of Timbuktu is historically the outcome of the fact that the city belongs to one of the most ethnically diversified regions in Africa. The Middle Niger Delta has historically been the home of Soninke and Malinke, Wa'kuri and Wangari, while Fulānis have figured prominently in the history of the region, alongside southern Saharan Sanhāja Berbers. Arabs and North African Berbers might well have settled in the region, as individual merchants or merchant families, since the eleventh century when al-Bakri wrote the first detailed account of the countries of the Sudan. The area was likewise home for Songhai, not to mention other less-powerful groups, like the Bozo fishing communities and the semi-nomadic Zaghānis. Owing to long processes of intermarriage, the colour lines in the region of Timbuktu are not clear-cut any more than elsewhere in the Niger bend area. By tradition, the Soninke, Fulāni and Songhai belong as much to a Sahelian as to a Sudanic background. What appears to be quite sharp, in any single period at least, is a distinction between settled townsmen and nomadic pastoralists. The latter in the expanse of the Sahara region adjoining Timbuktu are today divisible into Tamashagh-speaking Tuareg and into Hassāni Arabic speakers, often identified as Moors, Arabs or, earlier, as Barābīsh. Historically, both Tamashagh and Hassāni speakers owe their origin to the Berbers of the southern Sahara who are first known as Masūfa, Lamtūna and Judāla and who later make their appearance as Maghsharen, Kel Aghlāl, Kel Antasar, Kel al-Sūq, Barābīsh, Kel Tadmekkat etc. In the chronicles, these groups are identified by their clan and confederation names, rather than by any linguistic, ethnic or cultural criteria. Over the centuries Timbuktu has received (and indeed 'naturalized') settlers from all these groups, but more from among the settled peoples of the Niger than from among the pastoral southern Saharans.

The 'history' of Timbuktu

Conventionally, the history of cities, and especially of non-Western cities, is assimilated under the history of states, dynasties or empires which founded these cities, incorporated or dominated them. In regions which witnessed the rise and fall of several empires, like the Western Sudan, North Africa or the Middle East, this approach has the effect of projecting an idea of city (and especially of the 'Muslim city') as an entity whose

character changes periodically. No one would seriously suggest that Mamluk Cairo was fundamentally different from Ottoman Cairo, but the studies available approach Cairo more from the standpoint of Mamluk and Ottoman than from the standpoint of factors which were constant and stable in the organization of the city. At most, the factors of stability are implicitly assimilated under the vague notion of changelessness which is said to characterize 'traditional societies'.

A good example of the emphasis on state, even in studies on the city, is Le Tourneau's *Fez in the age of the Marinids*. Fez has historically been an important North African city which could be an adequate subject for comparisons with Timbuktu, first because of the common factors of Islamic learning and Māliki jurisprudence, and secondly because of comparable economic features on both sides of the Sahara. Le Tourneau's study is one of a few important contributions in the field of Islamic (and indeed 'non-Western') urban history. The difficulty is that the work purports to study mediaeval Fez under the Marinids when, in fact, it is equally as frequently documented on the basis of much later data and, indeed, on the basis of contemporary observation of the organization of the city in the present century. Is it that Fez has remained the same over the centuries (in which case we should be interested in the factors of stability), or is it that Fez has remained Marinid?

In our own study we faced the difficulty that the entire corpus of historical data which is available on Timbuktu, though quite substantial by the standards of other sub-Saharan African cities, is nonetheless quite limited in comparison to the documentation available on North African, Middle Eastern or European cities during a comparable span of time. Particularly problematical is the fact that much of our information comes from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, while the best details available on the commerce of Timbuktu, for example, pertained to the nineteenth century. It was quite tempting from the beginning to focus on one particular period while drawing upon data from other times. However, it proved quite important to focus precisely on the factors of stability over an extended period of time. Indeed, it was found more feasible to generate data around the theme of stability (and persistence of traditions) than around any other theme which could have constituted an adequate syncretical framework for a historical study of Timbuktu.

If we were to identify Timbuktu with one of the powers which controlled it over the centuries, the obvious choice would be the Songhai empire. The period of the Songhai empire was a relatively short one (c. 1468-1591), but it lies at the fulcrum of the city's own consciousness of its history, not only because the people of Timbuktu speak mainly the Songhai language today, but also because the sixteenth century was unquestionably the city's golden age. The difficulty is that the achievements of Timbuktu at that time cannot be credited to the Songhai empire, any more than the achievements

of the Songhai empire can be credited to Timbuktu. Indeed, the key factor appears to have been a symbiosis between the two (following an initial period of extreme conflict) whereby both interacted to mutual advantage while observing a psychological distance from each other. This pattern had its precursors in the Sudan and it extended under the Songhai empire to the city of Jenne as well as Timbuktu.

Timbuktu does not lend itself to a conventional sort of historiography which relates the fortunes of the city to the rise and fall of dynasties and states in the region. For one thing, the town was clearly self governed during the first two centuries of its existence, though the settlers probably had to accommodate themselves to the nearby Tuareg confederations of the Masūfa. Subsequently, the city formed part of the empire of Mali for about a century, beginning around 1325, but the outstanding feature of the city's history during this period was its internal autonomy. During its period of decline, the empire of Mali finally relinquished its sovereignty over Timbuktu in 1433. There followed a period of continued autonomy for Timbuktu for a few decades, this time under the suzerainty of the chieftain of the nearby Maghsharen.

A great threat to the autonomy of Timbuktu in the early part of its history took place at the rise of the Songhai empire, and more specifically in 1468 when Sunni 'Ali conquered the city. The conquest was followed by a period of severe conflict and upheaval which came to an end only at the death of Sunni 'Ali in 1492. Subsequently, Askia Muḥammad established a new order of things which was as favourable to the interests of Timbuktu, as to those of other commercial centres in the empire. It was as part of this order that Timbuktu achieved its greatest prosperity, owing as much to the dynamism of its own leaders as to the accommodating attitude of the Songhai monarchs. During this period, Timbuktu was part of the Songhai empire, but it was not strictly ruled or dominated by the Songhai.

The most dramatic change in the history of Timbuktu took place in 1591, when the Moroccan Sultān al-Manṣūr sent an unprecedented expedition across the Sahara. The Moroccans put an end to the Songhai empire and established a new political order (patterned along Songhai lines) which controlled the Niger bend area. Henceforth, and for at least a century or so, Timbuktu enjoyed the dubious privilege of being the capital of an empire. The Ruma soldiery (as the Moroccans came to be known by their professional name locally) lost their connection with Morocco shortly after the conquest and, by around 1700, it was rare to find anyone among them who spoke Arabic, though the scholars of Timbuktu who were predominantly of non-Arab background continued to utilize that language in their scholarship, legal procedure and commercial correspondence. The assimilation of the Ruma by the Songhai whom they defeated is certainly an interesting phenomenon. Both remained for a long time distinct in Timbuktu as a military class, but the eighteenth century saw an erosion

even of that distinction. The decline of the Ruma pashalik at Timbuktu was a long and gradual process, though it has often been said that the regime was destroyed in 1737, following a defeat of the main Ruma army at the battle of Tuwa by the Tuareg confederation of Kel Tadmekkat.

The 'political' history of Timbuktu during the rest of the eighteenth century continues to be quite fascinating. The early nineteenth century saw the rise of the famous *jihāds* (Islamic militant movements) in various parts of West Africa. One *jihād* gave rise to the caliphate of Massina, an empire based along the Niger floodplain at Hamdullāhi. This empire incorporated Timbuktu, at least from around 1825 until 1844, but again the key feature in this period is the autonomy of Timbuktu. The autonomy of the city was most threatened in 1862 when the jihādī al-Hājj 'Umar sought to bring Timbuktu more firmly under his authority. This gave rise to a counter *jihād* led by the Timbuktu scholar Ahmad al-Bakkā'i, which put an end to Hājj 'Umar's caliphate at Hamdullāhi, though it did not give rise to an imperial theocracy based at Timbuktu. When the French conquered the city in 1894, they found it essentially autonomous, though reluctantly acknowledging the authority of the Kel Tingeregif, a Tuareg confederation which had succeeded the Kel Tadmekkat in supremacy over the Timbuktu portion of the southern Sahara.

Absorbing as the above outline may seem, by far the most interesting factor in the history of Timbuktu is its autonomy. Indeed, if we may except the first half-century or so following the Moroccan conquest, we can say that Timbuktu was always autonomous. Under the vast empire of Mali, the rulers were simply too distant, based to the southwest of the Niger floodplain, to influence the character of the city strongly or directly. Later, the Maghsharen ascendancy during the mid-fifteenth century could not have shaped the character of Timbuktu in any fundamental way, because the city was in a greater position to influence the nomadic Maghsharen (as later the Wulmdān, Tadmekkat and Tingeregif) than *vice versa*. Indeed, the same holds true both for Songhai and Ruma, for while it is undeniable that Timbuktu exerted appreciable influence on the Songhai empire, it goes without saying that the city subsequently assimilated both Songhai and Ruma. Indeed, the reader will be surprised to find us suggesting (in Chapter 6) that Timbuktu even exerted an influence upon Morocco in the period immediately following the Moroccan conquest.

There is an unmistakable sense in which Timbuktu has its own character and its own history. In practice, this should be true of any city (or at least of most cities), whether Eastern or Western, African or European. We should not necessarily generalize from an example such as London, a city which has witnessed almost constant growth since the sixteenth century when, at that time, its size and possibly the scale of its commerce was not incomparable to that of Timbuktu. The point is not that such comparisons should not be made, for they are made implicitly in any case. The problem

is that the present character and status of London (like Paris, etc.) is projected upon its past with the result that, when we turn to a case like Timbuktu, we gain the erroneous impression that we are dealing with a different sort of reality altogether in the phenomenology of human experience.

Naturally, a study of Timbuktu cannot be an adequate forum for discussing the varieties of urban experience in history. Indeed, it may be doubted that any systematic social scientific approach is yet possible on this profound dimension in history. Almost all generalization which has been made so far by the various writers and theorists remains subject to qualification. It has been said by Janet Roebuck, for example, that the Roman city (in the days of imperial Rome) depended on the empire for its existence. Similarly, and in a different context altogether, it has been said that the Chinese city had no personality of its own – that its personality was imparted to it by the Chinese empire and the imperial bureaucracy. These views (if valid in their own contexts) do not apply to Timbuktu, not only because of the city's 'internal' character but because the empires and states of the Western Sudan do not bear much comparison to the Roman or Chinese empires. Certainly, the Sudanic empires did not exert the centralizing stable influence of the Chinese imperial institution. As suggested earlier, there is greater scope for comparison with the Muslim cities of the Middle East and North Africa where the politico-dynastic feature of rise and fall stands to an extent in contrast to the relative stability of the city and of 'Muslim urbanism' generally.

Nonetheless, both in the case of Timbuktu and elsewhere, the personality of the city cannot be divorced from the impact of its region. In the most important respects, the character of Timbuktu was, indeed, imparted to it by the urban and mercantile traditions of its region. The city inherited its traditions from nearby commercial settlements and communities while, in turn, Timbuktu's own evolving traditions had appreciable influence upon those of its neighbours. In both respects, we must be aware of a certain sharing of traditions rather than overemphasizing a sharp distinction between the urban character of Timbuktu and the rest of the cities and societies of the Niger bend area.

Seen within the context of the history of the Western Sudan, Timbuktu over the centuries witnessed two main phases – gradual growth followed by gradual decline – rather than several phases corresponding to the dynastic or politico-military history of the area. The first phase, from 1100 to around 1600, was a period of constant growth, though the process clearly witnessed interruptions. In turn, this period may be divisible into Malinke, Maghsharen and Songhai, provided these are recognized merely as guidelines towards investigating the internal outlines of the city's history. Similarly, the second phase, from around 1600 to around 1900, may be subdivided into Ruma, Tadmekkat and Lobbo, but these subdivisions are even less coherent than the earlier ones.

At this point, we are able to pose coherently the central question raised in our study. Namely, what is the essential character or personality of Timbuktu? Naturally, it is not enough to say that Timbuktu was an African or Islamic city, or a diversified commercial centre or 'port-town'. The same could well be said of Kano, though the latter was not as much a 'port-town' nor was it quite as diversified as Timbuktu. Yet the fundamental character of Kano, unlike Timbuktu, was one of a capital city, the centre of a small kingdom or a city-state. Even after the nineteenth century *jihād*, which gave rise to a large territorial caliphate in Hausaland, the small kingdom or city-state tended to preserve much of its individual character in the area. The kingship tradition played a predominant role in the ordering of society at Kano and in securing for the city its relative stability. Similarly, we must seek the character or personality of Timbuktu in those factors which contributed most to the ordering of society and which provided a framework for stability.

City and scholars

Basically, the records and chronicles of Timbuktu do not leave us much scope to wonder about its personality or character. Most of what is known about the internal composition of the city historically, and even about its external relations, pertains to the scholars and to the structure of the learned hierarchy. To be sure, the chroniclers have left us a mass of detail about the Songhai empire, but this informs us about the structure of the Songhai state (and to a lesser degree about the capital city of Gao) rather than about the impact of the Songhai empire on Timbuktu. Similarly, the chronicles have left us much detail about the swift and long sequence of Pashas who 'reigned' at Timbuktu itself. Yet, even this body of detail does not tell us much about the ordering of society at Timbuktu. Instead, it highlights the existence of a distinct and separate military hierarchy – a hierarchy which coexisted with the religio-learned hierarchy of scholars and jurists. In the long run, the hierarchy of scholars and 'notables' (including civilian 'grantees' or *kubarā'*) absorbed the topmost ranks of Songhai and Ruma families rather than the other way around. In this respect, the foremost consideration is a 'patrician' one, though the leadership of the patriciate (or 'upper bourgeoisie') in Timbuktu was primarily in the hands of scholars and jurists.

The status of scholars and jurists at Timbuktu was not divorced from the traditions of the city nor from those of its region. Indeed, in this sense the personality of Timbuktu (which was shared to an extent by other cities in the area) is to be found in its traditions generally, and more especially in the one tradition which revolved around the status and role of scholars and jurists. At an elementary level of analysis, this tradition was none other than the tradition of Islamic learning (and literacy) which flourished in the

city. At another level of analysis, however, the impact of this tradition was felt most at the level of status and social stratification, besides parochial-type organization and administration. Hence, the varied factors which influenced and shaped the character of Timbuktu fell essentially within the framework of a special type of tradition – a social tradition.

Perhaps it would be accurate to say that every tradition has a history of its own, including a period of genesis and growth, followed either by decline or persistence. A key factor about the tradition which gave personality and character to Timbuktu is a dual feature in its formation. In part, the tradition came to the city with the immigrants who brought with them varying levels of subscription to Islam and Islamic learning from other Islamized mercantile settlements in the region. So long as Timbuktu was made up principally of immigrant settlers, the early periods in the history of the city are intertwined with those of the region. In another part, however, the tradition of leadership and autonomy under scholars was the product of local evolution at Timbuktu itself, especially in the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. The tradition achieved its period of maturity and its 'golden age' during the sixteenth century when Timbuktu interacted advantageously with the Songhai empire.

Another key element about the tradition which gave character to Timbuktu was that it persisted strongly, even when the city subsequently experienced a long and slow process of economic and demographic decline. The relative decline of Timbuktu relates in large part to shifts in the networks of commerce, both locally and internationally. Locally, it was principally the product of the periodic migrations of Timbuktu merchants (and scholars) to various other locations which became more favourable for commercial enterprise. The 'dispersal' from Timbuktu (if we can apply the term dispersal to a very slow and gradual process) led to the partial diffusion of Timbuktu's social traditions both in the Sahara and the Sudan during the long period from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.

Naturally, it may be asked to what extent Timbuktu derived its social tradition (and hence its personality and character), along with its tradition of Islamic learning, from the 'mainlands of Islam', that is from North Africa and the Middle East. In essence – and against the background of generalization about the 'Islamic city' – this is to ask whether Timbuktu should be seen typically as an example of the Islamic city. The social tradition which characterized Timbuktu amounted to a pattern of urban autonomy and autonomous leadership by scholars. There is little doubt that elements of this picture are found in the cities of Islam elsewhere. Indeed, the phenomenon of autonomous urban leadership by scholars and notables (*'ulamā'* and *a'yān*) may be a feature of Muslim urban history everywhere. Albert Hourani has written, for example, that 'the close connection of the *'ulamā'* with the bourgeoisie gave a distinctive shape to

the urban society of the Islamic world'. To the extent that the leading merchant families of Timbuktu could be seen as a 'bourgeoisie' (or an upper bourgeoisie), their links to the upper ranks of scholars and jurists were most pronounced. Indeed, Hourani indicated that the leadership of the 'ulama' in Muslim cities generally tended to be drawn from the upper bourgeoisie and, for this and other reasons perhaps, they were the 'active leadership of the bourgeoisie'. In Timbuktu, and especially in the earlier periods, the scholars were unquestionably drawn from the wealthier merchant families and they were seen as *the* notables of the city *par excellence*.

Our study of Timbuktu was greatly facilitated by the questions which have been posed (and by the themes which have been discussed) in the existing literature on Muslim cities. Despite the absence of an adequate Islamicist study, it was quite clear that the stable curricula of learning at Timbuktu – and even the writings of Timbuktu scholars – bore strong comparison to the academic pursuits of Muslim scholars during the 'middle period' of Islam elsewhere, and especially in Maliki North Africa. Similarly, there were certain important grounds for comparison at the level of administration and administrative activities of scholars. In his study of Fez, for example, Le Tourneau noted that the 'administration of the city' tended to revolve around three main posts, namely those of 'governor', judge and *mukhtasib*. At many periods of its history, Timbuktu did have a 'governor' (the Timbuktu-Koy or Timbuktu-Mundhu in Malinke and Songhai times, respectively) while the equivalent of the post of *mukhtasib* was entrusted to special custodians of weights and measures. Even the primacy of the judgeship, which is a strong feature of the organization of Timbuktu, has been encountered by S. D. Goitein in a contribution on mediaeval Cairo ('Cairo: an Islamic city') and has also been suggested by Claude Cahen in an article on autonomist trends in early Muslim cities ('Mouvements populaires'). Additionally, the parochial character of urban organization at Timbuktu, both at the level of quarters and at the city-wide level, was suggested as a feature for early Muslim cities by Oleg Grabar ('The architecture').

Nonetheless, and despite the existence of a number of common themes, the scope for comparing Timbuktu to other Muslim cities across the Sahara remains quite limited. A key consideration is the absence of comparable studies which address themselves to the whole plethora of relevant questions concerning the stable features in the organization of any 'Islamic city'. Richard Bullock (*The patricians*) alluded to this problem when he wrote about 'Islamic Nishapur' that 'an understanding of its character and composition will be little more advanced by a study of Islamic Fez than by an equivalent study of Christian Toulouse and Montpellier'. This may seem to be an exaggeration but it does amplify the difficulties and hazards of generalization about the 'Islamic city'. Many writers have emphasized

the role of the *mukhtasib* while Brunschvig ('Urbanisme médiéval'), for example, noted the absence of any such post in mediaeval Tunis. At best, Louis Gardet contributed a remarkable work on the 'Muslim city' (*La cité musulmane*) which, in fact, had little to do with either the 'physical' or 'sociological' city. His work suggests that generalization is possible only at the level of ideals (an ideal 'Muslim city') whereby the ideals themselves are adaptable in a multitude of different ways in each society. Indeed, the factor of adaptation is also suggested by the emphasis of Muslim scholarship – at the highest levels of learning, on jurisprudence and jurisprudential deduction. The very existence of a large body of accomplished scholars at Timbuktu, besides a broader stratum of lesser literati, is explainable in part by the need for jurisprudential adaptation of Muslim law – both at the level of daily practice and at the higher levels of formal 'interpretation' (or *fatwa*).

Given the factor of adaptation, it is perhaps legitimate to see the social (and even urban) tradition which evolved at Timbuktu and in its region as a variant upon the tradition of Muslim urbanism in the Middle East and North Africa. Nonetheless, the differences between the Middle Eastern and North African cities might themselves be quite appreciable. The entire question tends to be complicated by the extraordinary links which existed between scholars and scholar-notables across vast regions of urban Islam. In its 'classical period' (or its golden age), Timbuktu scholarship had strong links both with the Middle East and North Africa, though more especially with Egypt than the Maghrib. It is because of these links that the writings of Ahmad Bāba achieved some currency in North Africa and the Middle East. Nonetheless, the links between scholars in the Sahelo-Sudan (or the West African Takrur) were much stronger than those which linked them to the mainstems of Muslim scholarship across the Sahara. Just as Timbuktu had unmistakably a personality of its own, so the tradition of Muslim learning and leadership by scholars in the Western Sudan was a local tradition which evolved its own norms and conventions.

Let us be more precise and say that the phenomenon of a 'city of scholars' (which is so perceived as a matter of consciousness of historical experience) presents itself with greater immediacy in the Western Sudan. Elsewhere, as in the work of Lapidus on the 'Mamluk period', the important position of scholars is a matter of inference and analysis. Indeed, despite the superiority of the biographical sources, the integrative impact of the 'schools of law' in the Middle Eastern cities remains subject to varying interpretation. Lapidus, for example, described the '*ulama*' (perhaps principally in Cairo) as 'auxiliaries' of the Mamluk regime. Yet, the same author found it necessary to say in the same work that 'all of the crucial political, economic, cultural, and religious roles of the society were entrusted to a broad and undivided class of professional, religious and commercial notables'. In other words, the relationship between scholars

and other notables remains equally as problematical as the relationship between scholars and 'bourgeoisie' or scholars and 'city'. At Timbuktu on the other hand, the chronicles present us with an elusive sort of equation between city and scholars, as a point of departure for any analysis. Especially in the earlier periods, the scholars of Timbuktu were themselves the city's notables.

Insofar as Timbuktu inherited its social traditions from elsewhere, Timbuktu was not the sole city of scholars in the history of the Western Sudan. Rather, it shared its social traditions with other cities and towns and with mercantile communities in the area generally. The author of *Tārīkh al-Fatāsh* amplified this fact when he recalled the autonomy of Timbuktu prior to the Moroccan conquest. The key consideration was not so much the independence of the Timbuktu judges but a local tradition of jurisprudence which secured a position of primacy for the judge amidst a prominent class of jurists. Earlier, the pattern had been present in the city of Jaghaba (also Zāgha, now Dia) where judiciary authority was contingent upon the status of the city as a 'city of jurists'. Indeed, the author of the *Fatāsh* spoke directly of Dia as 'the town of jurists which had no authority other than that of its judge' in the age of the empire of Mali. The author also mentioned the now obscure city of Kunjuru as a 'town in the land of Kayaka which was the residence of the judge of that region and of its scholars'. By the sixteenth century, Timbuktu was the principal heir to this legacy whereby a whole town would be identified on basis of its autonomous leadership as a 'city of scholars' or a 'city of jurists'. In a sense, Timbuktu became the main point of convergence for scholars and literati in the region. Its reputation as a 'city of scholars' subsequently overshadowed that of other earlier towns and settlements. Nonetheless – and even in much later periods, the social tradition which characterized Timbuktu was well represented outside the 'urban' context of large settlements. The Western Sudan was remarkable for the fact that small settlements (among the Wangara and Dyula, for example) were viewed as 'clerical communities', while whole clans in the southern Sahara came to be seen as 'Marabouitic' clans of literate *tuḥba* or erudite *fuqahā* or jurists.

Given the special nature of the evidence, it is tempting to say that scholars tended to play a far more prominent role in their communities than in the North African and Middle Eastern cities. This, at least, is true at the level of *perception* of the role of literati, scholars or jurists. Our task in this study is to look at the sociological context of this perception rather than to test its validity elsewhere. The sources at our disposal do not bear much comparison to the situation which enabled the Egyptian scholar al-Sakhāwī to compile the biographies of thousands of scholars and scholar-notables all belonging to the ninth century A.H. (the fifteenth century A.D.). Nor do we have the full continuity of evidence which is available on the Middle Eastern and North African cities from the

mediaeval period down to the nineteenth century. Our entire corpus of available biographical evidence covers a body of scholars who number in the hundreds, not in thousands or tens of thousands. Nonetheless, the problem is not really one of scale nor a matter of documentation. At times, we learn much more from a single statement (such as we find in the *Fatāsh*) than from a long biographical entry. In that respect, we might even say that study of Timbuktu is facilitated by the modest size of the city and of its sources, while study of larger Muslim cities is often subject to the hazards of selectivity in the face of a far more extensive body of historical data.

Despite our attempt to synthesize the entire body of available evidence, it must be said, nonetheless, that those facets of Timbuktu scholasticism which pertain to Islam generally remain beyond the scope of comprehensive analysis. What is the significance, for example, of the fact that scholars in the Sudan, as in Mālikism generally, held study of *Kitāb al-Shifā* as an important component in the education of a scholar? Numerous similar questions arise and, so long as they are not posed in the wider Islamicist context, they cannot be answered in the more restricted sphere of a study of Timbuktu and its region. Indeed, it is the limitations of generalization on Islam which led us to compare the scholars in the Sudan with the Chinese Mandarins. The common theme in this case has little to do with the 'content' of the learning process. Rather, it pertains to a more or less universal theme whereby leadership – along with administrative and quasi-administrative prerogative – was contingent upon learned status. The idea of a combined scholastic and social tradition is at least already quite familiar in the Chinese context. A central distinction lay in the fact that scholars in the Sudan were not strongly associated with 'state administration'. At Timbuktu especially, there appears to have evolved a distinction between the religio-legal hierarchy, including the judiciary post, and between the military-fiscal hierarchy of the state. This bears some resemblance to a delicate sort of balance (suggested by Hourani) between state and 'bourgeoisie' in Muslim urban civilization more generally. But the distinction in the Sudan appears to have been much sharper – and it is pertinent also outside the 'cited' context. Indeed, it helped give the scholars a position of intermediacy between states (even in the large territorial empires of Mali and Songhai) while giving rise in time to a distinction between warlike and clerical clans in the southern Sahara.

Approaching Timbuktu as a city of scholars is justified equally from the methodological standpoint as from the substantive standpoint. At the least, it may be said that the process of situating the scholars in Timbuktu society enables us to arrive at a more complete view of the society at large than an equivalent attempt to situate the rulers (or their representatives) in Timbuktu society. Thus, our treatment of scholars as 'academicians' (in Chapter 3) enables us to look at the wider diffusion of literacy and

learning, a theme which cannot be discussed without reference in turn to the city's social composition and its historical demography. The interesting feature about Timbuktu is that we get our best information about the city's historical demography from data which are available on the literacy schools and rank-and-file literati during the sixteenth century. In this, as in other respects, the role and influence of scholars tells us more about the city than *vice versa*. Indeed, one might almost say that the history of Timbuktu cannot be investigated except from the standpoint of the traditions which evolved (and revolved) around the status and role of scholars.

Our discussion of the 'administrative' role of scholars (in Chapter 4) reveals an appreciable city-wide integrative role, first for the judgeship and secondly for the fluid '*Jamā'a*' of Timbuktu. Otherwise, the city was made up of quarters whereby, in some cases, the various ethnic groups were distinct. However, the ethnic-linguistic or colour distinctions were never strong, and we rarely have a case where ethnic group gives its name to an important city-ward or quarter. Instead, the two most important quarters were given their respective names by their mosques. This, too, is testimony to the influence of scholars who occupied the posts of *imāms* and were parochial leaders at the mosques.

Ultimately (and as seen especially in Chapter 5), the factors which determined the role and status of scholars were quite varied. They ranged from wealth to venerated descent and from erudition to piety. The factor of wealth is sometimes documented directly while in other cases it may be inferred from the city's commerce and commercial links. Nonetheless, it is quite clear that at least from around 1400 onwards, the city was controlled by a patriciate of wealth, learning and descent. As the reader will find, the ideological factors which conditioned the outlook of scholars, and especially their insistence on a distinctiveness and psychological distance from rulership and temporal authority, were likewise determinate of their status. Furthermore, whether in terms of commercial or pedagogical links, the role and status of scholars transcended the local urban 'patriciate' and (while bearing similarity to Marshall Hodgson's non-defined 'Islamicate') it characterized the city in the sense that it shaped the affiliations and status of Timbuktu in its region.

Our treatment of the 'Mandarinat' of Timbuktu and the Sudan in the central three chapters of the study is basically analytical rather than chronological. The data are not distributed evenly over the periods under consideration and hence it was important to feature an analytical framework. Nonetheless, in each of the three chapters, and indeed in each section of these chapters, we have tried as much as possible to present the data following a very rough chronological framework. This, of course, is much easier when one is considering the lines of transmission of learning, generation by generation, than when one is discussing the commercial links

of Timbuktu. In the latter case, we get more information from Barth's account of his short residence in Timbuktu during the mid-nineteenth century (*Travels and discoveries*) than from any other single source. Nonetheless, even on this subject, the chronicles, along with a multitude of fragmentary documents which have survived, enable us to arrive at a reasonably clear picture.

The careful reader will no doubt note that much of our most detailed evidence derives either from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries or from the early and mid-nineteenth century. The well-known mid-eighteenth-century chronicle, the *Tadhkirat al-Nasrān* (*A reminder to the oblivious*) simply does not supply the wealth of detail which we find in al-Sa'di's *Tārīkh al-Sūdān* of around 1655. Indeed, Timbuktu never produced a monument to its own history equal in wealth of detail to al-Sa'di's chronicle. The author has left us a formidable source and his information is supplemented for the period up to the early seventeenth century both by *Tārīkh al-Fatāsh* (a chronicle which has a long history of its own) and by the numerous extant works of Ahmad Bāba. Similarly, the nineteenth century is reasonably well documented by a number of short treatises and by a corpus of correspondence, including especially the correspondence of Ahmad al-Bakka'i. It is not fully clear why the works of the eighteenth-century scholars have not survived. Fortunately, however, some of the material from that time was incorporated into later sources, and especially the *Fath al-Shukūr*, a late-eighteenth-century compendium from Walāta.

The outline which we have adopted in the book is non-conventional in the sense that the chronological sections are to be found at the beginning and at the end. This, in part, is predicated upon the simple periodization which we adopted whereby the earlier periods (up to roughly around 1600) are characteristically seen as periods of growth, including a growth in the social traditions of Timbuktu to 'maturity', while the later periods (up to roughly around 1900) are viewed in terms of a persistence of traditions despite the Moroccan conquest and despite the long, slow process of economic and demographic decline. In writing the research, it proved necessary to analyse the social traditions which persisted, and to analyse the nature of the patriciate, before proceeding to document the sequence of events which made the persistence of the patriciate, and indeed its resurgence, possible. In this way, the organization of Timbuktu, as seen from the standpoint of the role of scholars (in Chapters 3-5), became part-and-parcel of the study, and indeed a central focus of attention from the analytical standpoint.