

CHAPTER 5

The scholars as regional notables

The existence of a status group known as the notables (*ʿayān*), among whom scholars occupy a prominent position, is an urban phenomenon which is quite widespread in Islam. The significance of the phenomenon has tended to vary vastly from one region to another depending upon local traditions of social structure and administration in each case. Among the towns and commercial centres which arose south of the Sahara, Timbuktu perhaps exhibits the closest parallels to the Muslim cities of North Africa and the Middle East. Certain aspects of its organization were in a sense an extension of North African urban culture into the northern reaches of West Africa. Nonetheless, the role of its scholars was conditioned by ideological, economic and social considerations which cannot simply be attributed to the influence of Islam from across the Sahara. Some factors were deeply rooted in local custom and civilization while others, especially pertaining to the influence of learning as a criterion of social advancement and status, are simply to be recognized as universal. In mediaeval and early modern Europe, for example, there was at one point an awareness of semi-official status defined to a large extent by jurisprudential learning: thirteenth-century Erfurt measured its prestige by the number and standing of its scholars.¹ Similarly, in connection with mediaeval Bologna, *Habita* was granted to 'all scholars who travel for the sake of study and especially to the professors of divine laws'.² Other examples could be found elsewhere, but these are overshadowed by a major transformation which took place in Europe: namely, the distinction between clergy and learned laity which did not materialize in Islam.

Perhaps under the influence of the European model, the study of scholars everywhere continues to be concerned primarily with intellectual history, or the evolution of ideas and ideologies. In the wider Islamic context there already exists some work which looks upon the scholars both as a status-grouping and as a social-structural body. The affiliations of scholars with the larger configurations of notables remain problematical however. S. M. Stern, for example, implicitly saw the notables as

patrician elements who, irrespective of the presence of scholars among them, amounted as a group to a pre-modern bourgeoisie.³ An extension of the same thesis, somewhat modified, was offered by Richard Bulliet in his study of Nishapur. According to Bulliet, the learning of an individual affirmed his patrician status but did not define it.⁴ This model is relevant to the case of Timbuktu because it is quite clear that the acquisition of full-fledged learning, through years of almost exclusive devotion to study, was open primarily to the wealthy. In our case however, we have to contend with the fact that learning could be passed on from one generation to another within the family, through tutorships under relatives, even though that family may have declined over the passage of time on the scale of wealth. The content of the learning process, and especially insofar as law and administration were concerned, was likewise an important factor. Additionally, as Carl Petry has pointed out in a study on the fifteenth-century scholars of Cairo, the elements of piety and veneration which attached to learning, were crucial in sustaining the leadership position of scholars over the affairs of the public.⁵

One additional model which may be relevant to our case, certainly on the methodological scale, is that of the Mandarins of Imperial China. There we have a highly formalized socio-educational order in which learned status was confirmed through standardized examinations and degrees often corresponding to specific grades in the Imperial and provincial bureaucracies. We need not claim that this example is fully pertinent to the case of Timbuktu. As we shall see in the concluding section of this chapter however, it helps provide a framework of reference for understanding the wider roles of scholars and their circulation as religio-learned elites throughout the Sahelo-Sūdān.

We should perhaps explain at this point that the outlook of scholars was characterized by a certain duality concerning their own sense of identity. On the one hand they belonged to a larger body of urban notables whose terms of reference rested upon allegiance to, and custodianship of, the interests of Timbuktu. Naturally, we may assume that a similar orientation existed among scholars in Jenne, Walāta and even Gao. In the latter case, at the time of the Moroccan conquest, the Songhai military and administrative hierarchy fully evacuated the city. But the scholars and the merchants stayed behind and, under the leadership of the *Khaṭīb*, they tendered their submission to the conquerors.⁶ Similarly, in Jenne and Timbuktu, after considerable reluctance, the sovereignty of the Ruma was duly acknowledged and accepted. The allegiance of scholars and notables was principally reserved for their city itself and only theoretically to the state which incorporated it.

At another level of association, the scholars of each city and settlement felt a sense of solidarity with scholars elsewhere in the Sūdān. If there existed any sense of 'patriotism' as such, it pertained to all the Muslim

regions of West Africa, an area designated by the ill-defined name of Takrūr.⁷ There was a distinction between the northern and southern reaches of this area, the inhabitants of the former being generally looked upon as Whites (Bīdān) while those of the latter were considered Blacks (Sūdān).⁸ Besides the common subscription to Islam and Muslim learning however, this distinction was subordinate to other factors. Among the non-Saharan, the Songhai and Fulānis, at least, held traditions of Middle Eastern origins.⁹ Moreover, even Tuāt and Ghadāmis, across the Sahara, were integrated by traditionists into the 'Takrūrī' culture complex. According to al-Sa'dī, the town of Tuāt, always a main link in the commercial intercourse with North Africa, was founded by Mālinke who had accompanied Mansa Mūsā on his pilgrimage.¹⁰ Equally important on the ideological scale, and somewhat more credible, is the current tradition in Ghadāmis that the Kel al-Sūq there migrated across the Sahara from Timbuktu around 1600. The tradition might strictly implicate the Ghadāmis of Timbuktu who were displaced when their quarter was taken over by the conquering Ruma. In other words, their designation as Kel al-Sūq (a reference to ancient Tadmekka) does not reveal their ethnic identity any more than in the case of their distant kinsmen, both Kel al-Sūq and Kel Tadmekkat, who remained south of the Sahara. The Kel Infoghas, whom they joined in the region of Tuāt, became the major transporters of goods across the Sahara during the nineteenth century.¹¹ Further evidence of ethnic intermixture comes from a statement by al-Sa'dī to the effect that the Sanhāja Ajir, of the Timbuktu area, were originally from Shingī while 'the origin of the people of Massina is Tishit'.¹² It is most difficult to arrive at any conclusion concerning the relationship between Sanhāja and Fulānis in the Niger bend area. We have, however, for example, a reference to a *qādi* of Tishit who died in 1180 A.H. (1766/7 A.D.) as Muḥammad b. Yadhur b. Aḥmad b. al-Shaikh b. al-Amin b. Muḥammad b. Gāb (Kāb) al-Masini al-Gābi.¹³ This suggests a relationship to the Kāb family of Jenne whose member, Muḥammad Kāb b. Jābir Kāb, became Khatib of Gao in 973 A.H. (1566/7 A.D.).¹⁴ Jenne, for the most part, was looked upon as a Sudani settlement while Walāta was principally the abode of Saharan scholars. Yet despite the psychological precedence of Whites in Islam, Jenne was always venerated as a virtuous Muslim city. By contrast, Walāta fell victim in the late nineteenth century to a charge of 'enemies of the faith' directed against its notables from the recently Islamized Umanian capital of Segou. The Jamā'a of Walāta felt obliged to declare that their relationship with non-Muslims was restricted to trading with them 'as all Muslims do, in the east and the west, the 'Arab and the 'Ajam'.¹⁵ Naturally, the *jihāds* in the nineteenth century tended to heighten the awareness among scholars in each area of the activities and attitudes of their colleagues elsewhere in the Sahelo-Sūdān. But long before that, the pedagogical links resulting from the travels and migrations of scholars, and

especially merchant-scholars, strengthened the sense of belongingness to an extensive 'Takrūrī' homeland.¹⁶

Before proceeding we should perhaps explain that comparison between the various towns and commercial settlements in the Sūdān is hampered by the scanty of the evidence. Timbuktu is the only city whose internal organization is documented over several centuries more or less without interruption. In some of the Hausa city-states we learn of an appreciable presence of scholars just before and after 1500 A.D., but from then on the evidence concerns only the most accomplished authors whose writings are quoted by the nineteenth-century *jihādists*.¹⁷ A similar pattern is observed in Massina where the literature of the *jihāds* more fully superseded earlier chronicles and jurisprudential writings. Even Jenne, which for centuries had the strongest familial, commercial and pedagogical links with Timbuktu, has left us no substantial chronicle of its own. Accordingly, in this and in other cases, we often have to rely on the limited information supplied by Timbuktu chroniclers.

So far as we can tell, the organization of Jenne differed from that of Timbuktu in one major respect. Namely, the criteria of order surrounding the kingship tradition of the Jennekooy almost always served as an alternative for leadership by scholars. This was because the kingship originated long before Islamic learning made an impact upon the city. By the Songhai period there was considerable integration between the two traditions. We note some evidence of a patrician tendency among the Baghayughu, Turfu, Kāb and Dābu scholars of Jenne. The parochial organization appears to have been very influential, especially since the topography of the city, concentrated in a relatively small space on a riparian island, was dominated by its Main Mosque.¹⁸ The office of the Jennekooy survived long after the Moroccan conquest but, in a development which may also have affected the post of *qādi*, it seems to have lost considerably in prestige from the mid-seventeenth century onwards.¹⁹ There have survived a series of obituaries from the eighteenth century which feature for the most part a number of notable Ruma families. These need not reflect the actual patterns of precedence any more than in the case of the *Tadhkira* and the *Diwān* of Timbuktu.²⁰ It seems that the Ruma, at the time of their final absorption into the ranks of notables and commoners patronized some *ulfas* to record the obituaries of their grantees. Subsequent developments were much the same in Jenne as at Timbuktu; the Fulāni Dikko clan established themselves as a regional power comparable to the Kel Tadmekkat. The *jihād* of Ahmadu Lobbo overthrew the Ardo, and this, among other factors, reasserted the ascendancy of scholars.²¹

The closest-documented parallels to the case of Timbuktu are, in fact, those pertaining to the scholars of Walāta. This city was virtually abandoned at some point during the Songhai period, as already mentioned in

Chapter 2, but it recovered its importance very swiftly in the wake of the Moroccan conquest. It is interesting to learn, for example, that Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī Sili, whose ancestors had migrated to Timbuktu in the fifteenth century, returned to Walāta in the early seventeenth century and became Judge there. Since the previous history of the settlement has essentially been lost to traditionists, he is in fact the first known Judge of Walāta.²² He had a partner in the leadership of the town in a certain 'Umar al-Walī al-Mahjūbi who is described as 'the pillar of learning' in his time. This scholar too may have migrated from Timbuktu, or else grew up there, for he is recorded to have studied under al-Qādi 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Ahmad Maghia.²³ The town of Walāta lay beyond the reach of the Ruma regime and offered to the scholars and the merchant-scholars a continuation of the virtual autonomy previously enjoyed in Timbuktu. A similar pattern is observed in the case of Arwān, well inside the Sahara to the north of Timbuktu, which was transformed into a virtual town in the seventeenth century. The weakness of Ruma authority there, and its complete absence in Walāta, indirectly compensated Timbuktu for its loss of independence. That is because the same merchant families often had branches in all three places, besides Jenne. In Walāta, as at Timbuktu, leadership devolved on *qādis* and *imāms*, and these posts seem to have been held in alternation by a small circle of families. The biographies assembled by al-Bartilī suggest that these families, including al-Bartilī's own, amounted to a stable patriciate over several generations. The main distinction is that the family tended to be a more extended one, almost a clan, in the case of Walāta.²⁴ In both cases, however, the scholars associated with their own ranks as notables the chiefs of the nearby clerical clans. Max Weber advanced the concept of the 'precommunal patrician city' to characterize the similar situation of Mecca in pre-Islamic Arabia.²⁵ In our case too, the economic and kinship factors were pronounced, but the presence of scholars among the notables contributed an important legitimizing and integrative role.

Wealth, status and influence

As partly suggested above, the status of town-based scholars in the Sahelo-Sūdān lends itself to two distinct analytical approaches. The first takes the notables (*a'yān*) as a starting point and views their learning as a factor which confirmed their status. This approach is justified by the fact that the term *a'yān* is a vague one which is often interchangeable with '*ulamā*'. The second approach, which we have adopted in this study, takes the scholars as a starting point and proceeds to show that their status and influence was strengthened both by economic and ideological factors. The present discussion is concerned with the economic factors, a subject which, however, is not as well documented in our sources as we would have hoped.

The evidence at hand suggests rather strongly, though indirectly, that the scholars at all times had people of great wealth among their ranks. The learning process itself, in its combined religio-legal aspects, placed the scholars in a position of advantage for participating in commerce. First of all, even aside from full-fledged scholarship, the factor of literacy had important psychological and practical implications. The clerics of the Sūdān (*malams* in Hausaland, *alfas* elsewhere, and *marabouts* in the Senegal regions) were represented virtually everywhere in the towns which lay along the main trade-routes in West Africa. Knowledge of Arabic, even though it was sometimes imperfect, facilitated and sustained the relations between towns over long distances through the agency of the clerics. Recent studies have sometimes emphasized the supernatural or magical powers attributed to clerics because of their command of literacy and their ability to write charms.²⁶ Above and beyond that, the clerics projected an image of neutrality between states, especially since the Suwarian tradition among the Jahanke and the Dyula had rested upon peaceful diffusion of Islam.²⁷ The result, as the English merchant Jobson observed in the early seventeenth century, was that the clerics

... have free intercourse through all places, so that howsoever the kings and countries are at warres, and up in arms the one against the other, yet still the Mary-bucke (*marabout*) is a privileged person, and may follow his trade or course of travelling, without any let or interruption of either side.²⁸

And, indeed, we learn from al-Sa'di that he himself had lived briefly and taught in a village called Shibli, southwest of Jenne, which was subsequently razed to the ground in a local war. He mentions, somewhat incidentally, that the house in which he had lived, belonging to a certain al-Faqīh Abu Bakr San'atar, was the only structure besides the village mosque which was spared.²⁹

A second factor was that Muslim Māliki law, inasmuch as it pertained to commercial transactions and contracts, imparted a measure of uniformity and predictability to the procedures of long-distance trade. In the mid-nineteenth century, Barth commented on the Tuareg scholars of Air by saying: 'Under the authority of these learned and devout men, commerce is carried on with a security which is surprising'.³⁰ Indeed, in Walāta the seasonal caravan which was mounted across the Sahara to Tuāt was led by a full-fledged scholar (Shaikh al-Rakab) who 'was dreaded by robbers and feared by tyrants'.³¹ Likewise, the internal market of Walāta was at one time regulated by an overseer (an *amin*) who received an obituary among the '*a'yān al-'ulamā*' (the most notable scholars) because he acquitted himself admirably in his post. He did not himself rank among the scholars, but acquired ample knowledge of commercial law through constant recourse to their views and advice.³² In Timbuktu, the expert measurers acted in lieu of an *amin*, a title equivalent to the *muhāsib* of Muslim Spain

and the earlier Middle East. The function in this case pertains strictly to the commercial urban context and is not to be confused with the *amin* established under the early Ruma to represent the fiscal interests of the Sultān of Morocco.³³

The present-day situation in Timbuktu suggests a strong divorce between the leading merchants, who are exceptionally wealthy, and the scholars or *alfas*, whose leading men enjoy moderate prosperity. This, however, might pertain to developments in the twentieth century; the sons of scholar-merchant families have tended to favour a secular Western education with the result that the body of *alfas* has become rather restricted. Traditions mention, for example, that Abu'l-'Abbās, the father of the late-nineteenth-century al-Qāḍi Ahmad Bāba, was noted for his extreme wealth. Other indications may suggest that wealth had for a long time been competing with learning (and with descent from the learned) as a criterion for high status. Yet, it seems that a close relationship with the Kunta, who were at once venerated, learned and wealthy, was responsible for raising Abu'l-'Abbās' son to the judgeship.³⁴ Around the turn of the century, one of the earliest French military commanders over the region, Marc-Shrader (a 'Mayor of Timbuktu', as he called himself), observed that the lucrative salt-trade was in the hands of 'Moroccans' and a few indigenous merchants. He added, however, that there was a diffusion of profits from this trade because the Arabs (meaning in this case principally the Barābīsh) gave up the salt on arrival at Timbuktu to the local families which housed the caravaneers and supplied them with goods imported from the south. Otherwise, Marc-Shrader indicated that the 'erudites' themselves each controlled a portion of the commerce which was quite 'agreeable'.³⁵

A problematical theme in the European sources of the nineteenth century results from the fact that they often give the impression that the commerce of Timbuktu was dominated by North African settlers (or more vaguely by the 'Moors') who are said to have periodically repatriated their profits. We have no reason to doubt that merchants from the main urban centres of North Africa (and even the Middle East) frequently found their way to Timbuktu and often ventured further south where the prices for their goods were appreciably higher. Such merchants, however, had little knowledge either of the patterns of supply or of the fluctuations in prices. The recorded travels of the Astrakhani Muslim merchant, Wargee, are a case in point; after traversing virtually the whole West-Central Sudan, this enterprising merchant arrived in the Kingdom of Asante quite destitute.³⁶ A development which began in the fifteenth century at least had resulted in a complex system of relays whereby the bulk of the trans-Saharan commerce was carried by proxy between the Saharan settlements on both sides. The French seem to have been unaware of this complexity and, additionally, the sources often

confront us with a general misunderstanding of the actual ethnic and geo-economic configurations.³⁷ Leaving aside the very earliest accounts, based on hearsay, we find that René Caillié, after his visit, somehow came to the conclusion that the Songhai-speaking majority in the city belonged to one ethnic Sudanic group which he described as the 'Kisoor nation'.³⁸ Otherwise, he represented the Whites, under the general title of 'Moors', as though they were all temporary settlers who dominated the city's commerce. He wrote: 'They are engaged in trade and, like Europeans, who repair to the colonies in the hope of making their fortunes, they usually return to their own country to enjoy the fruits of their industry. They have considerable influence over the inhabitants ...'.³⁹ Even at a much later time, Oscar Lenz, who also actually visited the city, reported that the Moroccan Jewish Mordekhai family traded directly with Timbuktu and enjoyed specific rights there. Yet, a description of the city by a member of this family, being inaccurate and based on outdated information, shows no evidence of direct contact.⁴⁰ Immediately after their conquest of Timbuktu, the French established, or rather recognized, a certain Milād b. Bu Jmā'a as spokesman of a group vaguely identified as the 'white' or 'foreign' merchants.⁴¹ The group included mostly Saharans from the Barābīsh, Tajikant and other Hassāni clans, besides Kunta and Tuareg, who had always contributed permanent settlers to Timbuktu.⁴²

So far as we can tell, the long-established and influential North-African merchant families in Timbuktu were few in number and were principally drawn from the northern Saharan settlements of Tuāt and Ghadāmis. We likewise find individual reference to Filālis and Balbālis (originally from Tafilt and Tabalbalat) but the *nīshas* do not always designate the actual provenance of such settlers. The Ghadāmis may have been partly looked upon as foreigners since they do not seem to have contributed *imāms* to any of the mosques. After the Moroccan conquest, there arose a reverse migration to Ghadāmis which tends to complicate the picture. It seems that northern-Saharan merchants from several settlements came to relocate in Tuāt and were represented in Timbuktu. In the nineteenth century, we have some evidence that the Ghadāmis especially identified with their original hometown and repatriated their profits.⁴³ Under the auspices of the Kunta, they were very visible in the city at the time of Barth's visit. The traveller formed the impression that, by European standards at least, their wealth was not considerable, 'the greater part of them being merely agents for other merchants residing in Ghadāmis, Swera (Mogador), Marākesh (Morocco) and Fās'.⁴⁴ This, however might simply mean that the Ghadāmis linked the trade of the main North-African cities with the Sahara, much as the merchants of Timbuktu linked the Sahara to the trade of the Sūdān. At a shortly later time, we find al-Bakkā'i referring to the Ghadāmis and other northern Saharans altogether as Tuātis.⁴⁵

Representation of the same family both north and south of the Sahara

appears to have always been a strong factor in the case of the Tuatis. Beginning with the time of Sidi Abu'l-Qāsim, *imām* of Jingerebir in the fifteenth century, we seem to be dealing with a restricted number of families who were certainly not looked upon as foreigners or outsiders.⁴⁶ The most prominent and influential were two families who ranked among the scholars and are identified by a Waddāni *nisba*, in addition to a third whose members were also sometimes learned and are identified as Kūri (or Gūri). These would appear to have been the most permanently involved in the trans-Saharan trade and it is almost certain that they ranked among the most wealthy. Unfortunately, the evidence as it stands concerns the scholars among them with barely any information being available on their commercial activities or those of their kinsmen.⁴⁷

The wealth of Timbuktu rested upon its position as a depot for the storage of goods and their subsequent distribution north and south depending upon the conditions of supply and demand. Huge fluctuations in prices were a yearly, and sometimes a monthly or a daily feature, which required constant knowledge of the markets elsewhere. Thus, we know that in one instance two boatloads of salt fetched virtually a fortune in Jenne at a time when the commodity had been absent from the market for only a short period.⁴⁸ The English Consul in Morocco, James Jackson, who also traded in gum arabic imported from Timbuktu, has left us a most remarkable document in the form of an invoice sent to North Africa by the Timbuktu merchant, 'L'Hage Hamed Elwangaree'. Among other things to be mentioned below, the Timbuktu merchant told his North African correspondent 'I will inform you by the spring caravan what merchandise to send here next autumn'.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, we are not able to identify this Hamed al-Wangari, especially since Jackson's information on Timbuktu, controversial in its own right, is surrounded by riddles.⁵⁰ In all probability, Hamed was a member of the Wangara Baghayughu family whose kinsmen, besides being *imāms* of the Sidi Yahya Mosque, were to be found virtually in all the settlements along the way to the Akān goldfields. Besides gum arabic, an important product of the Timbuktu area by this time in the late eighteenth century, he exported gold-dust, gold-bars and locally-manufactured bed-covers, all in one consignment across the Sahara. The name Ahmad, with the variants Hāmad and Hāmmey, was too common in his family to allow a full identification without knowing his parentage.⁵¹

In his study on the Dyula-Suwarian tradition of learning, Ivor Wilks has pointed to the important fact that each family tended to devote only one son to a career of full-fledged scholarship.⁵² This model is quite applicable to Timbuktu although among the major families we frequently find two or more brothers who were fully learned. The case of Maḥmūd b. 'Umar Aqīt's sons is an exceptional one whereby we find a sequence of several brothers all ranking among the scholars. This perhaps is what

caused one traditionist to say: 'We favoured Maḥmūd b. 'Umar only on account of his virtuous sons'.⁵³ Far more commonly, each nuclear family produced only one or two scholars so that, for example, when we speak of several And-Agh-Muḥammad scholars all in one generation, we are really dealing with several families all descended from And-Agh-Muḥammad al-Kabīr. In their own time, the Baghayughus, Maghās and Gidādus each amounted to a whole clan, but the scholars among them were a minority. Indeed, Aḥmad Bāba's branch of the Aqīt family, which remained important for almost three centuries, produced no more than six or seven known scholars. In this case, the high reputation of al-Hājj Aḥmad, ancestor of this branch, and the extraordinary impact of Aḥmad Bāba, secured for the lineage a position of high prestige.⁵⁴ A difficulty, however, arises from the fact that the scholars alone are usually featured in the sources while their brothers and cousins, even though they may be wealthier merchants or plantation owners, are barely ever mentioned. Thus, among the sons of Muḥammad Gurdu, both Alfa 'Alī and Isma 'il Yoro are known only from the pedigrees of their descendants who, in their own time, deserved mention in the chronicles because they were scholars.⁵⁵ At an earlier time, we may perhaps assume that the illustrious sons of Maḥmūd b. 'Umar had a whole array of non-learned brothers. One of these brothers, Alfa 'Abdu, is mentioned in connection with the uprising against the Moroccans solely because a fire which was put to a part of the city by the Maghsharen chieftain Awasbu reached his home. This Awasbu had grown up among the Aqīt brothers and al-Sa'di mentions the incident simply to illustrate how he treacherously turned against them.⁵⁶ Similarly, we learn only incidentally that Ibrāhīm b. 'Abdullāh b. Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad Baghayughu al-Wangari, *imām* of Sidi Yahya in the mid-eighteenth century, had a brother in a certain Alfa Aḥmad who was apparently a merchant who traded between Timbuktu and Jenne. The detail in this case is mentioned because Aḥmad's boat, with everything in it, sank on one of the return journeys to Kabara. It seems that many people died in the incident, including Aḥmad himself, his son, his concubine and his slaves.⁵⁷

The work ethic which permeated Timbuktu society saw nothing wrong with the accumulation of personal wealth and often looked upon it as a sign of *baraka*. However, this basic orientation was surrounded by numerous qualifications, especially insofar as the conduct of scholars was concerned. Traditions which flourished some two centuries after the death of Sidi Yahya al-Tadulsi, for example, recalled that he began his career as a merchant of some sort who derived his livelihood, while already a scholar, from participating in commercial transactions (*mu'āmalāt*). Later, in his middle years, he forsook such transactions altogether and apparently relied on his previous earnings. We are told that at this time he came to be favoured by numerous apparitions in which the Prophet Muḥammad, in

the conventional psychological mystic sense, visited him very frequently. Later in life still, his limited means forced him to return to *mū'āmalāt* and, as a result of this, the apparitions became less frequent. This story projects an ethic whereby participation in the day-to-day affairs of commerce deprives the scholar of some of the benefits of his piety. Nonetheless, when Sīdī Yahya was asked why he would not give up his commerce, he said: 'I would not like to be needful of other people's aid'.⁵⁸

Somewhat similar to the case of Sīdī Yahya was that of al-Mukhtār b. Muḥammad Zakanu. This scholar could not have been very wealthy for, although he patronized the *muddāh* on a yearly basis, he personally had to undertake the journey to Jenne on the occasion of each Ramaḍān in order to purchase the necessary supplies at favourable prices. In old age, we are told, his sons urged him to give up these journeys as they themselves would provide the supplies. The old man repeatedly refused, it seems, and he actually died on one of his journeys. Of the sons themselves, only one is specifically named in our sources; he is Muḥammad b. al-Mukhtār who became *Qāḍī*.⁵⁹

Wealthier than al-Mukhtār, though not necessarily among the wealthiest, was al-Ḥājj al-Amin Kānu (or Gānu). This scholar virtually had to force his hand against al-Qāḍī al-ʿAqīb so as to contribute his share towards rebuilding and widening the mosques. The practice, it seems, was that each notable would contribute the expenses of one day's work. Al-Amin contributed the expenses of three days, amounting to a total of some 250 *mithqāls*.⁶⁰ Most of the expenses at that time appear to have been borne by the Aqīts themselves: Al-ʿAqīb 'spent sums on the building of the three mosques which God alone can count'.⁶¹ We have no reason to doubt that the Aqīts in their heyday were the wealthiest in the city, though perhaps equalled by the Ḥājj family and the And-Agh-Muhammads. Descriptions of the audiences of al-ʿAqīb, surrounded by his *shuhūd*, his retinue and his servants, invoke an image of great wealth. Similarly, we learn that among those who fell in the struggle against the Moroccans were two *harrāṭīn* (client farmers) 'who belonged to Awlād Sīdī Maḥmūd'.⁶² Besides participating in agricultural projects and, as we shall see, in the raising of cattle, the Aqīts almost certainly had a hand in the salt-trade and the trans-Saharan commerce. We learn incidentally, for example, that Aḥmad Bāba was born in the then-growing Saharan settlement of Arwān. At that time, in 1556, his father, still in his early thirties, probably secured a small fortune for his family, before rising to the top ranks of scholar-notables.⁶³ Aḥmad Bāba indicates that some of his Aqīt kinsmen were people of 'high finance' (*mutamawwiliin*), but this seems mainly to refer to the sons of Maḥmūd b. 'Umar.⁶⁴

The wealthy scholars, like other notables, probably exhibited their wealth in terms of aggrandizing and embellishing their homes. There is no evidence of sumptuous dwellings being built or of virtual palaces staffed by

domestic servants. The stone quarries in the area were far from the trade-routes and, besides being soft, they cost a fortune upon arrival in the city. We know from as late as the nineteenth century that the lime which was used for whitewashing the houses of the rich cost four times as much at Timbuktu as at Jenne.⁶⁵ In any case, the fragile nature of the building materials have left us little or no evidence as to what the old houses and mosques used to look like.⁶⁶ We know, for example, that Aḥmad Maghia fell well inside the city and the house near which he was killed was transformed to become his tomb. Yet, today the tomb is represented by a small structure standing at quite a distance from the city with barely any evidence of previous habitation around it.⁶⁷ A trace of the previous wealth is found in the copies of voluminous books, extant in Morocco, which used to belong to the Aqīts and And-Agh-Muhammads. We are inclined to believe, in fact, that investment in books was one of the most socially accepted media for exhibiting one's wealth. Furniture, besides valuable cloths, and even silver cutlery, were luxuries which were also imported for local consumption by the wealthy. Thus, when the Aqīts were arrested, before being exiled,

The Pasha Maḥmūd entered their homes and carried away everything that was in them, including funds, goods and furniture. God alone could assess their properties at the time and those of the people who had deposited their goods for safety with them.⁶⁸

An indication of the wealth involved is evident from the statement that Maḥmūd sent the Moroccan sultan only a fraction, amounting to 100 000 *mithqāls*, from the value of the goods thus plundered.⁶⁹ Strangely enough, Askia Ishāq had almost succeeded in buying off the entire Moroccan expedition for an equal sum, even though he made the offer rather too late after the first Songhai defeat by the Ruma.⁷⁰

Our sources sometimes tend to confuse us concerning the reconcilability of learned piety and the acquisition of wealth. Thus, we are told that Maḥlūf b. Ṣāliḥ al-Balbālī was a merchant who had little interest in learning until, at an advanced age, he started studying the *Risāla* of Ibn Abi Zaid under 'Abdullāh b. 'Umar Aqīt. The latter allegedly urged him 'to take up learning and to forsake commerce' when he saw that he was gifted with special intelligence.⁷¹ Yet, as we know from elsewhere, 'Abdullāh himself was a wealthy person who indirectly participated in the local commerce. It seems that he owned a rather large number of milk cows whose daily produce was taken to the market by his slaves or servants. Aḥmad Bāba mentions that on a certain day the servants were late in selling the milk and continued to do so after sunset. 'Abdullāh objected to this practice as contrary to Muslim law and, since the money earned in the daytime was mixed with that which was collected in the evening, he felt obliged to distribute the whole income of that day to the

poor. Ahmad Bāba mentions the episode solely to illustrate the old Shaikh's strict adherence to the letter of the law. We learn incidentally in the process, however, that the Shaikh was a large-scale cattle owner whose income on a daily basis from the sale of milk alone was a 'consequential sum'.⁷²

Ownership of cattle and camels was one among several sources of wealth which were open to scholars in the vicinities of Timbuktu, Arwān and Walāta. Up to recent times, cattle have continued to be exported on a large scale both to Hausaland and to various regions southwest of Massina.⁷³ Another important source of wealth was ownership of plantations at the outskirts of Timbuktu and along the Niger. Our evidence on this point, as on many other economic factors, is not detailed. We have from the mid-eighteenth century two contracts concerning the transfer of plantations from one owner to another. One of these was sold by the Ruma notable Abu Bakr b. al-Qā'id Bāhaddu al-Drāwī, for a sum of 10 000 *mithqāls*, to a certain Hungudu b. al-Murdu. It is remarkable that the contract in this case took the form of a proclamation by both parties addressed to 'the attention of the judges, the jurists, the *talba*, and the generality of Muslims'.⁷⁴ The other plantation was sold to al-Qā'id Bāba b. al-Qā'id al-Bakr (or Abkar) by the heirs of a certain Alfa Juma b. 'Abdallāh. Unfortunately, we have no definitive clue to the identity of al-Qā'id Bāba even though the document is dated 1174 A.H. (1760/61 A.D.).⁷⁵ There is a strong possibility, however, that the contract, which is extant only in a secondary copy, involves a scribal error. The purchaser would seem to have been al-Qā'id Abkar b. al-Qā'id Bāba al-Mukhtār, of the Zankanu family, who formally became Judge in 1764/5 A.D.⁷⁶

Considering the emphasis which has always been placed on the question of slavery in the Niger bend area it is rather tempting to consider that ownership of slaves was a major source of wealth for scholars and other notables. This subject is surrounded by an extraordinary set of complications however. First, although assertions that slaves were exported from Timbuktu in large numbers across the Sahara have continued to be made up to the present century, these have rarely been based on substantive information.⁷⁷ René Caillié, the earliest European to leave a first-hand account of Timbuktu had little to say on the subject of slaves besides the following:

In general, the slaves are better treated at Timbuktu than in any other countries. They are well clothed and fed, and seldom beaten. They are required to observe religious duties, which they do very punctually; but they are nevertheless regarded as merchandise, and are exported to Tripoli, Morocco and other parts.⁷⁸

Henry Barth was equally non-committal in his information except to say that reports which were current in his time concerning the extensiveness of the trans-Saharan slave-trade generally were 'certainly mistaken'. So far as

he could ascertain, 'Ivory and slaves . . . seemed not to be exported to any considerable amount' from Timbuktu itself.⁷⁹ His evidence and that of Caillié together left open the possibility that slaves were taken by the Saharan warrior clans, both Tuareg and Hassāni, sometimes via Arwān, to North Africa. This same impression is, in fact, created by the queries sent to Ahmad Bāba from Tuāt concerning the whole question of sub-Saharan slavery. It seems that slaves were taken by various routes to Tuāt and, there they often proved to be Muslims, not subject according to Māliki Law to enslavement. Pious Muslims, at Tuāt as at Timbuktu, feared retribution for the sale or purchase of anyone who claimed to be Muslim and could perform the prescribed prayers. Other views, however, maintained that the practice was lawful provided that the person was non-Muslim at the time of his original capture and enslavement. This, it seems, a rather legalistic question, formed the basis of Caillié's remarks as quoted above.⁸⁰

Our sources do not help us to assess the role of the trans-Saharan slave-trade in the economy of Timbuktu with any sort of precision. The restrictions imposed by the rulings of scholars and judges may have discouraged slavers altogether from bringing their trade to Timbuktu. We know, for example, that one of the officials of Askia Ishāq dealt heavily in the slave-trade besides being a merchant in horses. Al-Qā'id Maḥmūd b. 'Umar warned him on one occasion, 'Why do you sell free people? Are you not afraid they will sell you?'⁸¹ It seems, however, that during the periods of politico-military upheaval captives were brought in large numbers to Timbuktu to be sold as slaves. This happened in 1591 to the Zaghārānis of Yurwa when the Moroccan commander Māmi, after defeating them, sold them at Timbuktu for as little as 200–400 cowries each. This was a tiny fraction of the normal price of a slave; merchants were probably not inclined to purchase the captives.⁸² The recent uprisings in Jenne and Timbuktu had made the prospects for the Ruma rather uncertain at this point and there was always the fear of retaliation from the Zaghārānis. Indeed, shortly after the reduction of Yurwa, the Zaghārānis became a junior partner in a campaign led by the Western Maghsharen and the Sanḥāja of Massina. The warriors fell upon the Ruma garrison at Rās al-Ma' and killed all its members, 70 in all.⁸³ It is almost impossible to ascertain the fate of the Zaghārāni captives, mainly women and children, at Timbuktu. However, the activities of the scholar Muhammad 'Aryān al-Ra's in purchasing slaves to free them seem to pertain to this period. Subsequently, some of the Ruma commanders themselves perceived the public opinion advantage of freeing their captives and, in time, Muhammad attained the status of a *walī* whereby the Pashas themselves visited him most frequently for blessing.⁸⁴

We may perhaps safely conjecture that the scholars and notables of Timbuktu, much as at Jenne, Walāta and the Hausa towns, saw no

particular interest in the depopulation of villages within the range of their commercial contacts simply to satisfy the demands of slavers.⁸⁵ Other captives, originating in areas remote from Timbuktu, often passed through the local market on the way to North Africa, but this appears to have been a sporadic rather than a constant, or economically dependable, factor. Perhaps we are deceived by the sources, for they tend to cover only the controversial cases. One such case was the sale at the market of Timbuktu in 1075 A.H. (1664/5 A.D.) of certain descendants of the ancient scholar Mūr Hukār. That this was an exceptional case is evident from the fact that it is the only piece of information dating to the seventeenth century which is included in the authentic copies of *Tārīkh al-Fatāsh*. With one minor exception, all other events mentioned in this source date prior and up to 1599 A.D.⁸⁶ Indeed, an opening paragraph included in one of the authentic copies (MS A) mentions among the policies of Askia Muḥammad the following:

He established for the Muslims certain rights, taking upon himself that their inviolability would be observed. He ordered that the people of Mūr Kuyra would marry anyone they wished and that their sons [even from slave or servile wives] would inherit those rights [as free men]. These rights are still observed to this day and have not changed because of his (Askia Muḥammad's) *baraka*.⁸⁷

It seems that violation of the special rights of Ahl Mūr Kuyra invited the first additions to the text of *Tārīkh al-Fatāsh*, a work which so far as we can tell was drawn from the notes of Maḥmūd Ka't by his son Isma'īl.⁸⁸ Subsequently, in the early nineteenth century, numerous additions were made (known from MS C) which tried to justify the servile status of several groups along the Niger on the basis of alleged historical precedent. The text of the original document which was drawn by Askia Muḥammad for the benefit of the grandsons of Mūr Hukār, a document now extant in separate copies besides being originally included in *Tārīkh al-Fatāsh*, became the centre of a controversy, as we shall see further in Chapter 6.

The presence of slaves at Timbuktu itself tended to be minimal as a result of a practice whereby their owners tended to free them or free their sons while retaining them as clients and protégés among the ranks of the Ghabibi (including the Haddādin = Smiths) and the Harrāfin. These semi-servile ranks included some who were fully independent and others, impoverished though originally free, who actively sought a prestigious patron. It is remarkable that the same Gurdu scholar who, as we shall see, allegedly stopped the slave-trade, is also remembered in connection with a legend which suggests that scholars actively sought to enhance the interests of their Ghabibi. The legend concerns a Ghabibi who belonged to Gurdu and another who belonged to an unnamed *imām* of Sankore. The story need not be related in full except to say that while the two clients competed over the hand of a maiden the main actors in the competition were actually

their masters.⁸⁹ The legend in the defective MS C of *Tārīkh al-Fatāsh* that the Ghabibi are descended from slaves originally belonging to al-Qāḍi al'Aqib suggests that scholars during Songhai times were the principal patrons. By the eighteenth century, however, Ruma and other notables joined the ranks of urban patrons.⁹⁰

It seems that similar patterns of patronage characterized the relations between urban-based scholars and notables and the servile agriculturalists who worked their plantations along the Niger. The agriculturalists enjoyed a customary right to working the land, in return for a portion of the produce, and there are indications indeed that the rights of absentee owners often lapsed. The Harrāfin, for their part, were principally urban-based and they do not seem to have carried the bulk of the agricultural work, even in the immediate vicinity of Timbuktu. For, as Barth observed, 'All the people of the town who did not belong to any trade or profession, together with the inhabitants of the neighbouring districts, were . . . employed in the rice harvest'.⁹¹ It is possible that the Harrāfin acted as agents for their masters in providing seeds to the agriculturalists and in overseeing the harvest. At the outskirts of Timbuktu, where the seasonal inundations were extensive enough to allow limited agriculture, vegetable and melon gardens were planted which sometimes were owned by the Harrāfin themselves.⁹²

An important source of wealth, and perhaps the most important for scholars, was ownership of urban property which was used for storage. As already suggested, the wealth of Timbuktu as a whole rested on its being a depot for the transit of goods between the peoples of the Niger and the Sahara. One arm of this depot was Arwān in the north, while the other was Kabara which adjoined Timbuktu on the Niger. Of Kabara, Barth wrote:

While traversing the village, I was surprised at the many clay buildings which are to be seen here, amounting to between one hundred and fifty and two hundred; however, these are not so much the dwellings of the inhabitants of Kabara themselves, but serve rather as magazines for storing up the merchandise belonging to the people of, and the foreign merchants residing in, Timbuktu and Sasandi.⁹³

The remains of buildings well to the north of Timbuktu suggest that the city itself had a considerable storage capacity in Songhai times. Later, however, Arwān became a major centre for the distribution of goods and some of the commerce went from there directly to Walāta and Sasanding.⁹⁴

It is important to emphasize that the Saharan crossing itself had, as a result of a gradual development, lost much of its initial profitability. Thus, one of the late-eighteenth-century invoices published by Jackson shows that 200 loads of gum arabic fetched some 4500 Mexican dollars in Morocco though their original cost at Timbuktu was only 800. However, fully 3600 dollars was expended for the hire of the camels alone.⁹⁵ This had always been an immense expense for merchants because the Saharan

crossing taxed the life-span of these beasts of burden. In the salt-for-grain commerce between the Niger and the Sahara, the bulkiness of the merchandise meant also that the greatest expense went to the owners of boats and keepers of the camels. In 1917, the French established a commission of enquiry concerning the trans-Saharan trade; its findings tend to confirm the evidence preserved by Jackson. It was discovered that six loads of tobacco cost only 240 francs at Tuât and fetched as much as 2700 francs at Timbuktu. The sum could then be used for purchasing goods which fetched 5400 francs at Tuât; however, the camel wear was estimated at 1050 francs for such a journey, while the upkeep and losses amounted to 1000 francs. In other words, the net profits for a small caravan accompanied by two persons barely exceeded 3000 francs. The round-trip journey lasted fully five months and very few people could pursue the arduous career of caravaneering across the Sahara for very long.⁹⁶

By contrast, the merchants at Timbuktu who owned good storage depots and were aware of developments in the markets could amass virtual fortunes without any great physical exertions on their part. The arrival of small caravans at various seasons was a feature which perhaps began in the seventeenth century with the growing importance of clerical clans. This tended to reduce the scale of the price fluctuations but not their frequency. Thus, Barth observed during his extended stay that the price of a piece of *khâm* (unbleached calico) rose from 5700 to 7200 cowries all in a matter of a few days between January and February. One of the causes for this, so far as we can tell from the traveller's account, was that the rise of the Niger had brought the merchants from Jenne and elsewhere with their boats. They had already unloaded their boats and were ready, it seems, for their return journey. For, as Barth recorded:

It was on January 4th, that the first boat from Kabara approached close to the walls of the town of Timbuktu; and, as the immediate result of such a greater facility of intercourse, the supply of corn became more plentiful and, in consequence, much cheaper.⁹⁷

'Meanwhile', as we read elsewhere, 'the price of the merchandise from the north went on increasing', despite the arrival of two small caravans, one from Tuât carrying dates and tobacco, and 'a small group of Tajakant traders with 80 camels' who carried tea and sugar, besides even pomegranates and other products. To Barth also we owe the detail that the average price of a slab of salt fluctuated between 3000 and 6000 cowries in a short period, 'the price always rising towards Spring'. The main Azalai (salt caravan), usually including 10000 or more camels, used to arrive at Timbuktu during May and sometimes as late as June. The prices then fell but they rose gradually again until the appearance of the first small caravans in November or December. The fluctuations became 'the profit

of the merchants, who buy their supplies on the arrival of a caravan and store it up'.⁹⁸

From more recent evidence we know that a load of salt, or four slabs per camel, cost five times as much at Timbuktu as at the mines of Taoudenni. The profits of the transporters were, however, consumed in the upkeep and the wear and tear to the camels, whose value was equivalent to 100 slabs of salt each or more. By contrast, a merchant who was able to store up 1000 slabs could turn these over, under favourable circumstances, at a profit of 1000 *nithqâls* in one season. It is this factor perhaps which led one of the early French administrators to conclude from a distance that the population of Timbuktu was 'parasitic'. The city, in fact, was crucial for the economy of the Sahelo-Sahara and the risks of losses were always great. Naturally, the local notables diversified their investments to include gold and grain from the south, cattle and hides from the north, besides cloths from North Africa and Hausaland, and sometimes even guns from the Asante trade.⁹⁹ Goods exported to Tuât included such ephemeral products as incense (*bakhûr*), herbal medications and female make-up products, besides wooden utensils, basketry, Tuareg cheese, rugs, sandals (manufactured especially by the Ruma) and hides of all sorts.¹⁰⁰ The imports from North Africa, ranging from dates to European cutlery, have for the most part already been mentioned. These were traded further south in return for the kola nut, vegetable butter, pepper, ginger, cotton, limes, silver (cheaper at Sasanding) and numerous other items.¹⁰¹ The main balance of the north-south trade, however, rested on the exchange of cloths, salt and cattle in return for grain and gold, allowing an undetermined role for the passage of slaves through Timbuktu. Today, the exchange of cattle and salt for grain (the latter on the scale of 2000 tons per year) lies at the backbone of the local economy.

The economic system which prevailed in Timbuktu made it possible for scholars to participate in the commerce of the area without occupying a visibly prominent role as merchants. We may recall that the wholesale exchange of goods at Timbuktu was largely an 'invisible commerce' which was carried through the agency of the hoteliers and *teifa* who acted as commercial brokers. We are inclined to believe that the scholars invested primarily in the ownership of urban property at Timbuktu and Kabara and in the storage of goods. At the very least, they were able to purchase the yearly supplies for their own families and for their clients in bulk quantities at favourable prices. Additionally, the wholesale storage of goods could serve as a basis for setting up a son in business or for financing a student or a *protégé* who acted as a small merchant or a retailer. We know, for example, that Sidi al-Mukhtâr al-Kuntî al-Kabir himself resided for some time at Timbuktu in his youth and was patronized there by a local notable who was not exceptionally wealthy.¹⁰² An indication of how the system operated is provided by René Caillié who made his appearance at

Timbuktu in the guise of a Muslim returning from European slavery. Being nearly destitute on arrival, the French traveller was well received and patronized by a certain Sidi-Abdallahi Chebir (presumably al-Kabir), a notable who is otherwise unidentifiable. Caillié later wrote:

Sidi-Abdallahi daily lavished on me marks of his kindness; he even went so far as to urge me to remain in Timbuktu. He said he would give me merchandise to trade on my own account; and, observed, that when I should have accumulated sufficient profit, I might return to my own country without assistance from any one.¹⁰³

It seems that a complex system of patronage permeated the whole society and linked, by various means, the wealthiest to the very poorest. This explains Marc-Shrader's assertion that the profits of the salt-trade, for example, diffused to the entire population of Timbuktu. Similarly, diffusion of profits from the cloth trade helped sustain an extraordinarily large number of tailor-alfas. Even the trade in hides had an important impact because the Ruma commoners tended to specialize in the manufacture of sandals.¹⁰⁴ According to Dupuis-Yakouba, fully two-thirds of the population derived their livelihood around the turn of the century from commerce.¹⁰⁵ The system of patronage extended to the long-distance trade as well as to the local retail market. The retailers were for the most part drawn from Ghabibi clients and slaves who received their supplies from their patrons and masters but nonetheless traded on their account. The participation of a slave in the market, and especially if successful, raised him and his sons to the status of a free Ghabibi protégé.¹⁰⁶

In some cases it is possible to find evidence of direct participation by scholars in commerce. Thus, in the 'spiritual' chain of transmission of the Kunta Qādiri *wird* we find reference to al-Sayyid 'Urwa b. Sidi Muhammad who was a man 'of finance' at Arwān. Another scholar, al-Shaikh Sidi al-Amīn, enjoyed ownership rights at the salt-mines of Taghāza and apparently resided at that place in the middle of the Sahara. A third scholar yet, Sidi al-Hājj Abu Bakr, 'used to organize the Azalai himself [at Arwān] and used to travel to Taghāza and Tuāt'.¹⁰⁷ The Kunta merchant-scholars were perhaps the most dynamic that ever flourished in the Sahara, but a similar role, with more extensive contacts in Massina and the rest of the Niger bend area, appears to have been characteristic of the al-Hājj family, the Aqits and the And-Agh-Muhammads at a much earlier time.

The families which traded with Jenne and further south during the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries are not as well documented as the Saharans who traded via Arwān. Nonetheless, we find a representative though recent case in Muhammad 'Umar b. 'Umar b. Alfa Sa'id b. Bāba. Born at Kabara around 1848, this scholar became very influential at the time of the French conquest and, possibly because he was a descendant of the illustrious Gurdu family, he acquired the honorary title of *imām*. As Marty later wrote:

Mamadou Omar is intelligent, active and energetic. He is a large-scale merchant whose commercial affairs often require him to travel very far south. Other than that, he is at the same time a tailor, an owner of many buildings, an *imām* of the great mosque of Jinguerebir and chief of the Badyindi quarter.¹⁰⁸

The combination of learning and wealth in the same family is attested at a much earlier time in the case of the chronicler 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sa'di himself. The Sa'di family is sometimes vaguely thought to be originally Moroccan while, for our part, we have identified it as principally southern Saharan Tuareg. In fact, the recorded kinship ties include Saharan Balbālis, Fulānis, Wangara, Anšāris (presumably Kel Antasar), Hausa or perhaps Tuareg Kel Housa, besides Sharifs from the Ṣaḥāli family.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, while the Sa'dis entertained strong relationships with the judges of Massina, they also had a permanent branch established at Jenne. This made it possible for 'Abd al-Rahmān to attain the imamate of the Sankore Mosque of Jenne at an exceptionally young age; he was later dismissed from this post in a move which was equally as exceptional, and became *kātib* (or secretary) to the Pashas though no scholar of his calibre had previously accepted such a post. It is not clear to what extent the Sa'dis were representative of the Timbuktu-Jenne merchant-scholars. 'Abd al-Rahmān himself, being a full-fledged scholar, did not play a pronounced role in the commerce of the family. In the autobiographical sections of his study however, he mentions certain events which indicate that he got embroiled both in the politics and in the commercial affairs of Jenne. For one thing, he acted for a long time in conjunction with the *Qāḍi* Ahmad b. Mūsā Dābu as a mediator between the Ruma regime and the Ardo of Massina, Hammādi Amina. Secondly, his dismissal from the imamate came in the wake of a disagreement between local governor and notables whereby 'all the merchants left Jenne to Bina'.¹¹⁰ We can assume that al-Sa'di's brothers played a leading role in precipitating this exodus, for we find them involved in a similar episode which took place two years earlier in 1043 A.H. (1633/4 A.D.). At that time, the reigning Pasha Sa'ud b. Ahmad 'Ajrud al-Sharqi alienated the merchants of Jenne and became subject to charges that his conduct was 'ruinous to the country'.¹¹¹ Among other things, he had apparently extorted 200 *mithqāls* from Muhammad Sa'di, brother of the chronicler 'Abd al-Rahmān. Later, the Pasha complained to the same Muhammad by saying: 'You, Alfa Sa'di, have no other work except assembling the merchants at your house every day . . . to discuss our [alleged] ills and misdeeds'.¹¹² At a later juncture, we find Muhammad Sa'di being highly honoured on one of his visits to Timbuktu by a subsequent Pasha.¹¹³

The wealth of the scholars, whether owned individually or shared by kinsmen, gave strength to the influence which they otherwise exercised by virtue of their learning. Wealth on its own was not sufficient as a criterion of status, possibly because its owner could be stigmatized for his preoccu-

pation with worldly affairs. Thus, we know that among the merchants who supported the rebellion of Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, a leading position was held by a certain al-Gīd b. Ḥamza al-Sanāwī who was apparently one of the wealthiest in Timbuktu at the time. Yet, in retrospect, this non-learned person was looked upon as a 'poor and meddlesome merchant who had no influence and not to be heeded'.¹¹⁴ By contrast, when al-Qāḍī 'Umar b. Maḥmūd Aqīt was implicated in the rebellion against the Moroccans a few years later, the Pasha Maḥmūd b. Zarqūn wrote him saying:

How is it, when you are the *qadwa* (a man who is emulated) in this Sudanic region, and when your word is heeded throughout, that you allowed such disturbances to occur in your presence? . . . You allowed the commoners to carry out their desires despite the fact that you were able to put a stop to the strife . . . In short, you are the pillar upon whom this matter rests.¹¹⁵

The Aqīts dispensed not only of wealth and patronage of their own, but they also acted as protégés for the wealthy Ghadāmsi and Tuāti merchants established in the city. A similar role is documented for the Kunta in the nineteenth century; they acted as spiritual protectors for the Saharan and North African merchants as well as for the Tuareg Kel Inkundar, a fraction of the Kel Idnan, who encamped in the region of Timbuktu.¹¹⁶ It is almost certain that the main scholar families of the intervening period, namely the Maghia, Guidādu, Baghayughu and Gurdu, also protected the rights of lesser merchant families from both north and south. For although we find reference to Ruma families who adopted a similar posture, the properties of their protégés were far from inviolable. The Dara'is, Tazarkinis, Tilimsānis and Mas'ūdis, the main Ruma families, sometimes plundered each other and each other's protégés.¹¹⁷ By contrast, the position of the Baghayughus, for example, was never threatened. Their monopoly over the imamate of Sīdī Yahya was no doubt a very important factor which gave them a highly venerated status. Additionally, any threat against them might have caused them, in conjunction with their kinsmen further south, to divert a substantial portion of the gold-trade away from Timbuktu. For it seems that the Baghayughus, probably in conjunction with the Guidāus and Gurdus, predominated in the southern commerce. Additionally, the boatmen and merchants from the south probably looked to the latter three families as spokesmen and as representatives of their interests, much as the Saharan caravaneers and northern merchants looked to the Aqīts and Maghias and, later, the Kunta.¹¹⁸

Although the scholars were in a position to intervene in the daily affairs of the military-fiscal hierarchy, and in the selection of Pashas and Hukkām (provincial governors), the evidence on this point is essentially lacking except in the above-mentioned case of the Sa'di family. The reticence of the chroniclers, and even al-Sa'di himself, pertains to two factors which are closely related. First, the attitude of the scholars was always reserved and

they seem to have exercised their political influence through the agency of non-learned (or less-learned) kinsmen. Thus, it was only at times of the gravest crises that scholars came to the forefront of political events. Secondly, the ideological orientation of scholars, which forms the subject of the following discussion, fully distinguished them from all temporal authorities. This meant, in turn, that direct influence over the rulers, through constant interaction, was not necessarily desirable. For it threatened to rob the scholars of the image of neutrality which they projected throughout the Sahelo-Sudan.

Ideological factors

Perhaps the most important criterion which influenced the status of scholars was their own ideological emphasis on their distinctiveness from state hierarchies. Seen in conjunction with the potential bearing of Muslim jurisprudence on matters of state organization and policy, this ideological emphasis tended to exert an enormous pressure upon the rulers. We need only note that, as a result of this, several rulers, both Songhai and Ruma, sought to enhance their image by adopting even if only partially the posture of scholars.

The ideological emphasis on the distinctiveness of scholars may to an extent have been inherited from across the Sahara and, especially, in the wake of the strong fifteenth-century contacts with Egypt. There, the position of scholars was strengthened by the fact that the Mamluk military elite was foreign and somewhat marginal to the organization of urban society. In Morocco, the distinction was not as clear-cut, but the state and military hierarchy, partly modelled along Ottoman lines in the sixteenth century, was increasingly made up of Christian renegades, Andalusian fugitives and recruits from the East.¹¹⁹ This factor requires being emphasized because of its bearing on the role and status of the Moroccan Ruma who conquered the Sudan. Their differentiation from the rest of the urban population, in the earliest stages at least, was perhaps predetermined by their previous standing in Morocco. In the Sudan, they tended to adopt most of the practices of their Songhai predecessors, who indeed became their partners. Together, the two groups amounted to a military class or even caste which continued to acknowledge the separate religio-legal authority of the scholars.

In the Sahelo-Sudan region generally, there were two important local factors which sharpened the distinction between military and religio-legal elites. The first was the tradition of Muslim autonomism, already discussed in Chapter 2, which was rooted in the fact that Muslims were in the earliest times foreign to Sudanic society and quite marginal. An outcome of this tradition, which outlived the processes of conversion and intermarriage, was the special status accorded to Muslim communities, first within the

state capitals and later in their own settlements and towns. We have mentioned the case of Zāgha, but it seems almost certain that the first Wangara towns along the way to the Akan gold-fields were also autonomous. We have a glimpse of the first appearance of the Wangara in the city-states of Hausaland and, there too, the norm appears to have been communal autonomy for Muslims.¹²⁰ In the Bambuku region, Sālim al-Suwāri is associated with the establishment of several exclusively Muslim settlements which were centred around a town given the name of Diakha (a variant upon Zāgha).¹²¹ Finally, we might mention that in the Futa regions of present-day Senegal there existed a town named Kunjur (which may have given its name to the later state of Kaĵoor) where *qādi* and scholars were fully autonomous.¹²²

At a later stage the distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims in all the above-mentioned regions tended to give way to a more technical one between *literati* (clerics and clerisy) and between various shades of Muslims and Islamized groups in the Sudan. What concerns us in this development is that the special status accorded to the clerics tended throughout to carry pseudo-ethnic connotations. Thus, we often speak of the Dyula merchant clerics as descendants of the Wangara, but while the Wangara themselves were of mixed Soninke and Mālinke origins, the Dyula have over the centuries absorbed recruits into their clerical tradition from a multitude of other groups as well. In the Upper Volta Basin, for example, the clerics have been seen more or less as an ethnically differentiated middle estate which stood in an intermediate status position between the 'nobles' or rulers on the one hand and the commoners relegated to an inferior status.¹²³ This model is sometimes also extended to the Torodbe clerisy of the Futa regions, though a series of religious movements there often gave actual rulership to scholars beginning perhaps with the early fifteenth century.¹²⁴ Willis has emphasized the mixed ethnic origins of this 'Fulāni' clerisy, but the tendency to identify the clerics of the Sudan with a rather limited set of ethnic entities remains an important consideration.¹²⁵ It means that initiation into the circles of the clerics amounted, especially insofar as the non-learned could perceive it, to a separate way of life.¹²⁶ This perhaps helps explain why we have no specific reference to Songhai scholars in Timbuktu, Jenne or Gao. This did not mean that the ethnic group did not contribute to the ranks of the learned; we know of many scholars whose ethnic identity is not specified. Rather, it seems that Songhai, like Ruma at a later time, became synonymous with a profession, namely the military. The scholars, by contrast, were not ethnically differentiated in Timbuktu from the mass of free and respectable citizenry. Nonetheless, the earliest French observers tended to look upon them as a class on its own and sometimes even described them as a *caste of alfas*.¹²⁷

The second factor is not much different from the first, but it pertains especially to the southern Saharan region, an area which ultimately had greater influence on Timbuktu than the rest of the Sahelo-Sūdān. Here there arose a distinction nearly everywhere among the nomadic populations of the

Saharan fringes whereby whole clans identified themselves on the basis of the preoccupations of their chiefs either as 'warrior clans' (Imoshagh among the Tuareg) or as 'scholar clans' (Ineslemen, Zwaya, Tuiba or Fuqaha). In a recent article C. C. Stewart has related this development to transformations which took place in the Sahara during the second half of the seventeenth century.¹²⁸ This view finds some support in the fact that our first reference to the Kel al-Sūq as 'Fuqaha' dates to 1106 A.H. (1694/5 A.D.).¹²⁹ The model had much earlier roots, however, and it is not clear that the warrior clans, or their ruling lineages, were the ones who 'carefully preserved it'.¹³⁰ We know, for example, that Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī Sili al-Tunbuktī al-Walāti, who died in 1050 A.H. (1640/41 A.D.), ruled it permissible to take interest on credit (or practise usury, *riba*) from the warrior clans of the Sahara who 'were steeped in unlawful practices (*dhiḥām*)'.¹³¹ At an even earlier time, Aḥmad Bāba made a distinction between due observance of the law (*shar'*) and its manipulation through *siyāsa*, or politics. He insisted on the preferability of the former but had recourse nonetheless to a law all on its own which he described as the 'law of warriors' (*ḥukm al-muhārribīn*).¹³² It seems almost certain that the orientation of the scholars themselves was a contributing factor to the distinction between warrior and learned clans.

The distinctions, though emphasized by the clans themselves, were never as clear-cut or stable as some modern scholars have viewed them. Certainly, they did not give rise to a class system as such, whereby Imoshagh lorded over Ineslemen who, in turn, enjoyed higher status than the dependent Imghad clans.¹³³ The noble status of Imoshagh among the Tuareg, recently extended only to the Tingeregif, a fraction of the Kel Tadmekkat, defined their relationship to their Imghad clients but not to the Ineslemen. Indeed, it is possible that the term Ineslemen corresponds to the 'Muslimi' *nisba* which appears in the nomenclature of a specific group of Saharan scholars.¹³⁴ Among other groups it seems almost certain that the fragmentation of Tuareg society into warrior and scholar clans, and possibly the earlier distinctions between matrilineal and patrilineal Sanhāja, resulted from the conflict between the matrilineal and patrilineal systems of succession. Recently, H. T. Norris has recorded certain traditions which indicate that the split of the Wulmdān from the rest of the Kel Tadmekkat resulted from such a conflict in the seventeenth century.¹³⁵ In this case, as later among the Tingeregif, the 'secessionists', so to speak, became the dominant force and gained over the majority of the Imghad clans. Similar criteria might have caused the split earlier on between the learned Kel al-Sūq and the rest of the Kel Tadmekkat. We observe the conflict among members of the chief lineage of the Maghsharen in the early seventeenth century, though the scholars in this case probably lost their Tuareg identity and did not become the founders of scholar clans.¹³⁶ Elsewhere, the traditions of Arwān are overshadowed by a constitutional

legend surrounding a certain Ahmad b. Adda (or Ahmad Ag-Adda, sometimes simply Agadda).¹³⁷ This scholar-chieftain appears to have had intermarriage links with the chief lineages of Maghsharen, the Kel Idnan and the Kel Antasar. He is alleged to have been a Sharif 'beyond the shadow of a doubt' but, as he is associated with al-Sūq, 'before its ruin', he probably belonged to the Kel al-Sūq.¹³⁸ His sons and grandsons inherited two chieftaincies, one vested in the judgeship of Arwān, while the other was a temporal one, possibly based upon matrilineal descent from a chief lineage of either the Maghsharen or the Antasar-Idnan.¹³⁹ Ultimately, the judgeship reigned supreme in Arwān, especially under al-Wāfi b. Ṭalībna b. Agadda and his son Sanbīr. The sources somehow lose track of the temporal chieftaincy which perhaps later merged through intermarriage with an already existing patrilineal chieftaincy among the Barābīsh.¹⁴⁰

The warrior chieftaincies sometimes looked down upon the scholar clans and especially the term *tulba* acquired a low-status connotation. While scholar-chiefs had their own clients among the *tulba* fractions however, they regarded the warrior chiefs as 'tyrants' and 'thieves' and generally represented them in a derogatory light. This was rationalized in terms of the abhorrence among scholars of all authority based on military might and brute force. Thus, concerning a sequence of Kunta chieftains, themselves matrilineally linked to the Tuareg, we read:

All of these were not sultans but, rather, people of virtue, *baraka* and good organization. The kings or sultans (*ahl al-mulk*) among the Wulmdān, the Massina, the Futa, the people of Air, and the Fulani of Sokoto, kinsmen of 'Uthman b. Fūdi, honored them greatly. They themselves gave presents to some of the tyrants such as the Wulmdān. These presents they called *al-baraka* and were given to them to ward them off. Sometimes they gave presents also to the Huggār, for the same purpose, but to no other group.¹⁴¹

It is notable that the Kunta who acquired a reputation for scholarly and even 'saintly' status did not refrain from military undertakings.¹⁴² More interestingly yet, the Kel Antasar, a Tuareg clan held to be descendant from the Ansar (companions of the Prophet), at one point evolved a separate military chieftaincy, besides its traditional Ineslemen chieftaincy, in order to defend itself against the encroachments of the Kunta.¹⁴³ The Kel Antasar may perhaps be the Yantasar mentioned by al-'Umari in the fourteenth century among the independent Berber clans north of the empire of Mali.¹⁴⁴ Oral tradition suggests strong links between them and the warlike Kel Idnan, including intermarriage and cross-over of chiefs, resulting it seems from differences in their succession systems. Among the Barābīsh, who partly absorbed the Maghsharen and succeeded them as the main regional power in the seventeenth century, the scholars of Arwān acted in lieu of an Ineslemen chieftaincy. These scholars, though

led by descendants of Agadda, were diverse in origins and generally tended to lose their specific clan or ethnic identity.¹⁴⁵

The status of scholars in Timbuktu, therefore, must be viewed against a much wider configuration which distinguished the learned elites throughout from the military elites. Warlike clans did not rely for their livelihood on plunder or on the tributes which they imposed upon clients and semi-clients. Likewise, the scholar clans, excepting in recent times the case of the Kel al-Sūq, were not uniformly learned and could not rely on teaching or alms.¹⁴⁶ In both cases, raising cattle and participation in long-distance trade were the main sources of wealth. The status distinctions, however, imparted a sense of order upon the relationships between clans and with the commercial centres. The Wulmdān, for example, were held supreme among the Tuareg who interacted with Timbuktu from the seventeenth century onwards, though the Kel Tadmekkat were at times probably more powerful. The Wulmdān exacted a tribute from the Barābīsh which, however, originated as 'blood-money' given to them after the defeat and massacre of one of their raiding parties.¹⁴⁷ The scholar clans held their own against the warriors by virtue of a much more dynamic and organized participation in commerce. Partly because of this, they were held in high esteem in the commercial centres and acted as mediators and settlers of disputes throughout the Sahara.

In Timbuktu itself, the scholars consciously set themselves apart from the temporal authorities of the area. They stood somewhere in the middle between the organized states of the Niger bend and the confederations of nomadic chieftaincies of the southern Sahara. Depending upon the circumstances at any one given time, they leaned towards one or the other of these forces. Their general preference was for the organized and stable state, and this ultimately determined their acceptance of the Ruma. For, as al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī expressed their view, they believed for example that:

The dynasty of the Arma (Ar-Rūma) was better than that of the Tuaregs because they adhered to the policy of a kingdom. As for the Tuaregs, they conquered without knowledge of the policy of a kingdom and the establishment of offices according to the Sharī'a. They ruin and do not build and construct.¹⁴⁸

This view is representative of the prevalent attitude among scholars but should not be understood to be the last word on the subject. Thus, when al-Ḥājj 'Umar threatened the autonomy of Timbuktu in the mid-nineteenth century, al-Bakkā'i argued that 'Timbuktu could not have any prosperity without the [cooperation] of the Tuareg'. The jurist in this case was alluding to economic besides political factors, for he added: 'People of the deserts and of cattle are important for the prosperity of towns and villages'.¹⁴⁹

The ambivalent attitude of scholars towards the Saharan warrior clans extended with some reservations to politico-military elites generally. This is illustrated by numerous anecdotes concerning Songhai and early Ruma

times. But the best expression of this attitude comes from Ahmad Bāba's *Jalb al-Ni'ma wa-Da' al-Naqma bi-Mujānabat al-Wulāt al-Ḥalima*.¹⁵⁰ This treatise, described by the North African al-Maqqari as one of the best on its theme in Muslim jurisprudence, is levelled against rulers and state officials generally and calls upon Muslims (and, implicitly, the scholars) to avoid all dealings with them.¹⁵¹ Since Ahmad Bāba and his Aqīt kinsmen were exiled to Morocco by al-Sultān al-Manṣūr, it has always been tempting to see this composition as a retaliation: it may have been intended to stigmatize al-Manṣūr in Morocco and to warn local scholars in the Sūdān against cooperating with his officials.¹⁵² Alternatively, the document may have some indirect bearing upon the civil war which erupted in the Songhai empire at the time of Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq's rebellion. The involvement of some scholars, along with Timbuktu merchants and tailor-alfas, in al-Ṣādiq's rebellion might have inspired a reassertion of the distinction between learned and military elites in retrospect. All copies which mention the date of this composition assign it to 997 A.H. (1588 A.D.).¹⁵³ This corresponds to some two years after the Songhai civil war and three years before the Moroccan conquest. The chronological factor is somewhat obscured, however, by the fact that Ahmad Bāba returned to the same theme in a treatise entitled *Ma Rawāh al-Ruwāt fi Mujānabat al-Wulāt*. This document has survived only in a truncated form but enough remains to show that it was written ten years after *Jalb al-Ni'ma*, while the author was in exile in Morocco.¹⁵⁴

Ahmad Bāba documented his views with reference to the Qur'ān, the Ḥadīth and the authority of the earliest Mālikī jurists but he did not offer a systematic treatment of the relations between scholars and state. Citing incidents from Ibn Khaldūn's history and elsewhere, he prefaced his *Jalb al-Ni'ma* as follows:

This is a work in which I have brought together some of what has come down to us by way of warnings against being close to tyrants and befriending them or seeking them out and entertaining companionship with them. Such quest after the rulers of this passing world and its lowly and waning rewards is reprehensible.¹⁵⁵

It is interesting that Ahmad Bāba's 'tyrannical rulers' are designated as *wulāt*, a term which applies to officials of high rank but is rarely applied to supreme rulers in Islam. Since the author does not distinguish any ruler of his time as being other than tyrannical, however, his treatise could be construed as levelled against state hierarchies in general. As we know from another one of his works, Ahmad Bāba did not go as far as to deny the need for sovereignty in the organization of Muslim society. On the contrary, he advised that a Muslim community governed autonomously by its own *Jamā'a* should of necessity acknowledge the sovereignty of a *sulṭān* to satisfy the full requisites of Mālikī law.¹⁵⁶ Beyond this highly theoretical premise, however, he relegated state authority to an extremely marginal

position in the affairs of Muslim society. Muslims in general, but by implication especially the scholars, should shun state service and refrain at all costs from court life. Gifts and wages should never be accepted from any official other than the *khālifa* himself or the deputy-*khālifa* who is lawfully qualified to disperse revenue at his own discretion. Even then, Ahmad Bāba sought to bypass this technicality in Muslim Mālikī law. He surveyed a whole spectrum of early Mālikī opinion which, as he saw it, allowed that the Judge alone could, like governors (*tukkām*), lawfully receive wages from the state.¹⁵⁷ The main implication of this argument, of course, is that the relationship between Muslim society and the Muslim state should be channelled almost solely through the judgeship.

It is rather difficult to see any specific relationship between the views expressed by Ahmad Bāba and the circumstances surrounding Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq's rebellion against Askia al-Hājj. That was a case in which some scholars, and especially the merchants, supported a royal candidate against the reigning monarch. As we know from al-Maghili's answers to Askia Muḥammad, the prevalent view was that no one could contest the sovereignty 'of an *amīr* who discharged the affairs of his subjects to the best of his abilities'.¹⁵⁸ Askia al-Hājj had essentially alienated the scholars, while Ahmad Bāba is more concerned with a situation in which the scholars allowed themselves to become clients patronized by the monarch. This, more than anything else, suggests implicit reference to the court in Morocco where al-Manṣūr indeed enhanced his image by drawing to his audiences some of the most prominent scholars of the time.¹⁵⁹

Whatever the case may be, the relationship between Timbuktu and the Songhai state, channelled primarily through the judgeship, certainly lies at the background of Ahmad Bāba's thought. The scholars had recognized Askia Muḥammad as a true *khālifa*, or alternatively as a deputy-*khālifa*, and this recognition more or less extended to his successors. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the chronicles give the impression that an ordered and mutually satisfactory relationship emerged from the beginning of Muḥammad's reign. This, as we should point out here, partly reflects the biases and constitutional legends of later times and is not altogether true. In his queries to al-Maghili, Askia Muḥammad went as far as to accuse his scholars of 'ignorance' and further complained:

They have books which they study and traditions which they relate, and among them are to be found judges and interpreters who expound God's religion. They claim that they rank among the scholars who are the heirs of the prophets and that we are obliged to follow their views. God help me support this burden which the heavens and the earth could not support.¹⁶⁰

So far as we can tell, this pertains to an early period of tension, shortly after Muḥammad's accession, prior to his pilgrimage, after which, as

Tārīkh al-Fatāsh puts it, the Askia 'changed all that and started asking the scholars about the *sunna* of the prophet and following their views'.¹⁶¹ The main factor which distinguished Muḥammad's reign was an earnest attempt evidenced from the very beginning to reconcile the interests of scholars and state. It was this which ultimately transformed him into a legend, and especially at the time of the nineteenth century *jihāds*. His successors, however, and certainly the first two, who usurped the throne in his old age, did not gain the proper recognition as *khalīfas*.¹⁶² The role and influence of scholars in Gao gradually became restricted and this differentiated the Songhai capital both from Jenne and Timbuktu.

The custom which emerged was one in which the state and the scholars, in Timbuktu, observed a mutual distance from each other. Thus, when the Askias visited Timbuktu, they came accompanied by their grandees, and struck camp outside the city at a place called Balma'a Jindi, possibly to the west of Badyindi.¹⁶³ Then, after a short while, as *Tārīkh al-Fatāsh* describes the formalities of a visit by an Askia:

He would proceed to the house of the *qāḍī* and find him in the presence of his *shuhūd*, the aids of the *shar'* and his servants. They met at the door, and then the *qāḍī* played host, providing food and drinks and called blessings according to custom. Then they all went to the Main Mosque where the prominent scholars of the city and the *imāms* greeted him . . . Afterwards at Balma'a Jindi the merchants of Timbuktu and its grandees came to him and played host to him by giving him many presents in the evening. He usually spent only one night there.¹⁶⁴

The most striking feature of this formality is that the monarch came to the scholars while merchants and other grandees came to him. And, indeed, we know of only two cases of scholars who visited the Songhai court. One was Maḥmūd Ka't who is encountered at the court at the crucial moment when measures for confronting the Moroccan expedition were being discussed. Maḥmūd was *Qāḍī* of Tindirma, the capital of the eastern provinces, whose forces had been decimated during the Songhai civil war. Being informed of the true state of affairs north of the Niger, he counselled that the whole population of Gao should be immediately evacuated across the river to preempt a full collapse of the state under the impact of Moroccan firearms. His opinion was snubbed by one of the generals, and the measure was not taken until it was too late.¹⁶⁵ Maḥmūd Ka't probably acted as counsel to the Askias at other times but he did so through the intermediacy of Aski Alfa Bakr Lunbari, long-time *kātib* (secretary) at the Songhai court.¹⁶⁶

The only other scholar who is specifically recorded to have visited the Songhai court was himself teacher of Maḥmūd Ka't, the illustrious Ahmad b. Muḥammad Sa'īd. There exists a treatise, extant in at least one copy at Dakar, which deals with the difference between appeasement of rulers (*mudārāt*), to avoid conflict with them, and the pandering to their wishes

(*mudāhāna*) to gain favours from them. This treatise bears the name of our scholar but, although the nomenclature in this case should not be too common, we can only tentatively associate him with its authorship.¹⁶⁷ He travelled to Gao only on one occasion to intercede on behalf of his ex-students, the brothers Muḥammad and Ahmad Baghayughu. Askia Daūd had called upon one of them to take over the judgeship of their native Jenne, apparently at the death of their father, but neither would accept the post. Significantly, the two accompanied their Shaikh to Gao but did not proceed with him to court. Rather, they stayed at a house by the port where, eventually, the Askia himself came to greet them. Al-Shaikh Ahmad, on the other hand, used the occasion of his visit to chide Daūd for practices at court which humiliated the monarch's retainers.¹⁶⁸ A parallel is found in the case of Ahmad Bāba who, though in exile, virtually defamed al-Manṣūr for his court practice in Morocco of addressing his visitors from behind a veil.¹⁶⁹

As will be seen in Chapter 6, the Ruma Pashas fell under the same type of pressure as the Askias, and especially during the first few decades of their regime. Ultimately, certain conceptions of continuity between Songhai and Ruma became part and parcel of local Songhai legend. Traditions, for example, affirm that the commander of the Moroccan expedition, Pasha Jūdār, never defeated the Askias until he received samples of the traditional Songhai charms from one of their youths.¹⁷⁰ As if to confirm the differentiation of the Ruma into a military class, there arose a custom whereby they were for a long time prohibited from donning the turban, the traditional headdress of scholars. Indeed, it is sometimes asserted by popular legend that Ahmad Maghia was killed by the Ruma because 'he stole their turban'.¹⁷¹ This might pertain to a ruling by the celebrated *mufī* which rejected the claim by al-Manṣūr that he conquered the Sūdān to unify the realms of Islam.¹⁷² The 'martyrdom' of Ahmad Maghia made a strong impression upon traditionists because, as already mentioned in Chapter 3, he ranked very high among the leadership of the scholars at the time of the Moroccan conquest. The 'Ulūj, who were responsible for his death, came to be seen as the vilest and the lowest in status among the Ruma. Popular legend still asserts that the 'Ulūj cannot come anywhere near the tomb of Ahmad Maghia, just outside the city, or else they would lose their sight.¹⁷³ The Alfās today offer a variant on this tradition and maintain that all evil people cannot visit the *walī's* tomb, even if they wished to do so, because something would come up to hinder them.¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, the integration of Ruma leaders among the ranks of notables is expressed in terms of a legend in which the turban also makes an appearance. It is alleged that, at a time unknown, the leaders of the Ruma were assembled in one spot for the purpose of choosing one of them as *Amīr* of Timbuktu. A turban was thrown in the air and, since it fell on a representative of the Mas'ūdīs, the choice fell upon him. This legend,

outside the circles of the scholars, is usually offered to explain why the Mas'udis were the last Ruma to contribute to the chieftaincy of Timbuktu before the French conquest.¹⁷⁵

Not all the historical legends which are extant in Timbuktu are reconcilable with the documentary evidence. It is held, for example, that Gurdu (*sic*) put a stop to the slave-trade in Timbuktu with the aid of supernatural powers which he enjoyed. The story goes that he sent the youngest and the brightest of his 'ifrits' to the Moroccan sultan and made him sign a document in which the sultan undertook never to ask again for yearly dispatch of slaves from Timbuktu. This may somehow hark back to the policy of Mawlāy Isma'il and his successors in the eighteenth century of raising an imperial guard from West African slave recruits.¹⁷⁶ Accordingly, it may hinge upon a *fatwa* by Muhammad Baghayughu b. Muhammad Gurdu, or else by his son Muhammad, concerning the always-controversial problem of slavery. So far as we can tell, Timbuktu may still have sent an occasional tribute to Morocco up to somewhere around 1700 both in gold and slaves. Thus, the hypothetical Gurdu ruling may have formalized and finalized the revocation of Moroccan sovereignty which actually began in the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁷⁷

The views and writings of scholars from the mid-seventeenth to the early nineteenth century are almost fully obscured by the scarcity of extant documents. We have no reason to doubt that local *fatwas* and legal compositions continued to be written, though never as prolifically as in the case of Ahmad Baba. The latter's ruling on the lawfulness of tobacco was apparently made a subject of commentary some two generations later by al-Sharīf al-Shāb, but this influential scholar is himself ill-documented and none of his writings have survived.¹⁷⁸ What has survived is a collection of writings on the subject of tobacco and tea by al-Imām Sa'd b. al-Ḥabīb Bābā b. Muhammad al-Hādī al-Waddāni. This document is more literary than legal and is extant in a copy from Tuāt which also bears the name of Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Ahmad al-Mujtahid.¹⁷⁹ The author, Sa'd b. al-Ḥabīb Bābā, was almost certainly an *Imām* of Sankore: his father or uncle, Santā'u b. al-Hādī b. al-Waddāni, was in occupation of that post when al-Sa'di completed his chronicle in the mid-seventeenth century. The sons of Sa'd and his grandsons are known from later times as *Imāms* of Jāmi' al-Hanā' and Sankore.¹⁸⁰ The family, originally from Tuāt and having probably a branch there, seems to have participated in the important trans-Saharan tobacco trade.

We know also that the ruling by al-Qāḍī Muhammad Sili which legalized the practice of usury with warrior clans was endorsed a generation later by Muhammad al-Mukhtār al-A'mashī al-'Alawī. Such rulings probably helped integrate some of the Tuareg clans into the Saharan commerce and gave them a stake in it for some time. They were contested, however, and probably superseded by a *fatwa* which objected to the practice. The author

of the new *fatwa* was a certain al-Hājj Hasan, who may be al-Hasan b. Aghbid al-Zaidi, author of several works who died in 1123 A.H. (1711/12 A.D.).¹⁸¹ Unfortunately, all the known writings on this and related subjects are no longer extant. Indeed, we know that Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Mūsā b. Ijl al-Zaidi composed a biographical dictionary in verse which covered the obituaries of many prominent scholars. This composition became one of the main sources for al-Bartili's *Fath al-Shukūr* but no copy of it has survived.¹⁸² The tendency for new compositions to supersede earlier ones may be responsible for the loss of a treatise on the prerogatives of judges and governors (*Fi'l-Qudāt wa'l-Hukkām*) by Muhammad b. Muhammad Baghayughu b. Muhammad Gurdu.¹⁸³ Though this scholar (also known as Muhammad Baghayughu) occupies a central position in the chains of transmission of learning, his career remains rather obscure. He is noted in *Tadhkirat al-Nasyān* for his absence from a hearing in a murder case which was called for by the Pasha in 1126 A.H. (1714/15 A.D.).¹⁸⁴ This may suggest that he objected to the procedure altogether as an infringement by a *hākim* on the prerogatives of a judge. So far as we can tell, his politico-jurisprudential views fell within the bounds of the traditions known in detail from the writings of Ahmad Bābā.

The views of Ahmad Bābā are echoed to a remarkable degree in the writings of Ahmad al-Bakkā'i. The attitudes of al-Bakkā'i pertain to a context in the mid-nineteenth century when the jihādists of Hausaland had for a long time exerted pressure on scholars in various parts of the Sudan to take the initiative in resolving the polarization between military and learned elites in favour of a purely theocratic state. Our scholar, for his part, held firm for a long time to ideas which must have been characteristic of scholars in such stable urban centres as Jenne, Walāta and Timbuktu: namely, that the duality between moral and political power was as inevitable as it was undesirable. He argued against *jihād* during his visit to Sokoto and later in his correspondence with al-Hājj 'Umar on the grounds that it leads to unmitigated political power. It was implicit, furthermore, in his views that rulership and temporal authority had a corrupting effect on the individual. He seems to have felt that the instruments of political power were not necessarily the means for reforming society. He based his ideas on a critical, though broad, view of Muslim history whereby he observed that it was only in rare cases, such as under the earliest four caliphs and the Omayyad 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz, that political power and true Muslim rulership were combined. 'The exceptional [or rare] can serve as no basis for generalization', he concluded in a formalistic jurisprudential vein.¹⁸⁵ This statement is all the more remarkable because its author subsequently got involved in politico-military undertakings and actually assumed the symbols of Muslim sovereignty towards the end of his career.

Learning and status

Over and beyond the factors of wealth and ideological orientation, the extensiveness of the body of scholars in Timbuktu gave them an influence which has no parallels elsewhere in the Sahelo-Sudān. Thus, even in the early years of the present century, Marty observed:

The *Alfas*, or the body of literati in Timbuktu, constitute the aristocratic class which is the most numerous in the city. They are perhaps also the most influential, especially if we include among them the *Shurfa* who are naturally linked to the group.¹⁸⁶

Among the 'aristocrats' specifically listed by Marty there were, in fact, only a few Ruma and Ghabibi merchants who ranked among the notables without being scholars. At that time, the body of scholars amounted to some 30-50 individuals, including some whose learning was rather limited in comparison with earlier times. As already estimated in Chapter 3, the numerical strength of the scholars stood at some 200-300 in the sixteenth century. During that period, the tailor-*alfas* alone may have numbered in the thousands and it seems that most merchants acquired some learning beyond the simple stage of literacy.

The extensiveness of the body of scholars, in a relatively small city, serves as a basis for synthesizing the various factors which affected their status. Firstly, as we have noted elsewhere, the vocation of teaching, though highly regarded, could not itself have stimulated the extraordinary growth of learning which took place in Timbuktu, for it was a profession in the full sense of the word only among the lesser *alfas*, the *mu'allims*, who taught in the elementary Qur'anic schools. Secondly, the personal benefits which could be derived from training in jurisprudence in terms of enhancing one's ability in commerce or in terms of attaining a salaried religio-legal post were largely by-products of the learning process rather than being its main purpose. Thirdly, as we may observe in contrast to other societies, hierarchical positions to which scholars could aspire were almost totally absent, while government service was not desirable among scholars in any case. Finally, as we may recall, state support of scholarship was rather minimal and, indeed, the sustenance of needy students and lesser literati often devolved on the scholars themselves or on their wealthy kinsmen and associates rather than on the rulers.

The problem then is to explain why Timbuktu nurtured such a broad category of accomplished jurists when the sole posts to which their learning qualified them were few in themselves and each was normally a lifetime appointment. This, to our mind, emphasizes more than anything else the pure status criteria which attached to the acquisition of learning. Very few scholars could realistically hope to attain the post of *Qādi*, but the comparable education which they received placed them in the same status

stratum as the Judge. Since the Judge, moreover, often interacted on equal terms with rulers, becoming a learned colleague had immense status and influence ramifications.

The criteria of pure status which attached to learning are of course complicated by the religious component and by the belief system which affected the public outlook towards literati and scholars. Among the illiterate, mere command of literacy was associated with magical or supernatural powers which naturally gave special status even to the least-learned literati. This, among other things, gave rise to a lucrative trade in the writing and manufacture of charms which catered mainly for the visiting Tuareg and was based in the Abaradyu suburb.¹⁸⁷ We need not suggest that this was a principal source of income for the rank-and-file literati, though such a model may conceivably be applicable elsewhere. In Timbuktu, the setting aside of the tailoring craft specifically for the *alfas*, coupled with participation in retail commerce, tended to minimize the reliance of literati on such remuneration or on alms. Nonetheless, it seems almost certain that many *alfas* utilized their literacy by going out to the lesser Saharan clans and the small villages of the Niger where their special skills were conceived mainly in magical terms. In such cases, the *alfa* became a sort of *imām* and *kātib*, combined in one, besides often acting as an advisor or a spiritual *protégé* to a chief.¹⁸⁸ In Timbuktu itself, and especially in the Abaradyu and the Bela Farandi quarters, many literati no doubt also applied their talents to magical and semi-magical spiritual concerns,¹⁸⁹ but the main factor which encouraged the growth of literacy among commoners was the element of social respectability which knowledge of the Qur'an afforded.

At a higher level of learning, it seems that many medium-ranking scholars acquired high status among their specific ethnic groups, or among their clans or sub-clans, without being prominent in the city-wide affairs of Timbuktu. Thus, today the traditionalists boast of a legend that 333 *walis* from various periods are buried in the city and around it. Indeed, even the list of thirteen *walis* whose graves are well known and visited includes seven who are not readily identifiable in the chronicles. Among them, we find the names of al-Shaikh Sidi Muhammad al-Mik, al-Shaikh Muhammad Tanba-Tanba, al-Shaikh Sidi Muhammad Bukka and al-Shaikh Muhammad Sankara, who almost certainly were prominent only in their own quarters and among their own kinsmen.¹⁹⁰ When we take into consideration the fact that some of the earlier *walis*, duly mentioned in the chronicles, are no longer remembered, it becomes apparent that the city's conceptions of learned and venerated status differed from one quarter to another, from one generation to another, and moreover, from one stratum of learning to another.¹⁹¹

Among the most learned, the concept of *wilāya* was essentially a posthumous honour which combined in varying degrees all the elements of status sought after by scholars during their lifetime. Moral rectitude and

piety, to the point of blamelessness, formed as much a part of this concept as the ability of a scholar to settle disputes justly. Learning was the fulcrum around which the whole ideal revolved, but Sufi-related *ma'rifa*, or gnosis, also had a place. Veneration could likewise be derived from charitable acts. To Ahmad Bāba, erudition was paramount and, on that basis, he raised his teacher posthumously to the rank of a *mujaddid* or Renovator of the Faith.¹⁹² The pragmatic author also mentioned apparitions he had seen which told him that his father, after his death, had risen to a status, in the mystic sense, which even surpassed that of the celebrated master Ahmad b. Muhammad Sa'īd.¹⁹³ Society was willing to reward the scholars by holding them in the highest veneration and respect, but over and beyond that, it was willing to concede that God rewarded them directly by special gifts, or *karāmāt*. Muhammad al-Kāburi, the Master of Masters, could walk upon the water because 'his feet had never once trod on an unsure path'.¹⁹⁴ Mūsā 'Aryān al-Ra's could attend the Friday congregation in old age, in the mystic sense, though physically remaining at home.¹⁹⁵ By a reversal of the same principle, al-Qā'id Ba Ḥasan Farīd was jerked off his camel and fell to the ground with a broken neck because, while escorting the Aqīts across the Sahara to exile, he committed the outrage of kicking 'the *walī* of God, the ascetic al-Faqīh 'Abd al-Rahmān'.¹⁹⁶ To the extent that the *karāmāt* of departed scholars were universally accepted as statements of fact, society accorded a high and inviolable status to those living scholars who could potentially become *walīs* as well. Furthermore, the less rigid and defined were the criteria of *wilāya*, the more generally they extended to the body of scholars, and by association to their kinsmen, students and disciples as a whole.

The Chinese case provides a comparative model for our study, though on a limited scale, because some of the salient features of learned role and status in the Sūdān were explicit and formalized among the Mandarins. The strongest component of Chinese formalism lay in the fact that ascent from the rank-and-file literati (*sheng-yuan*) into the intermediate learned status of *chu-jen* and *kung-shen*, and later into the ranks of full-fledged erudites (*chin-shih*), took place primarily through a series of examinations which were held successively at the district, provincial and metropolitan levels.¹⁹⁷ Though certain degrees could in fact be purchased, nonetheless the distinctions between the various grades, ideally based on learned status, were clear-cut. By contrast, the distinction between lesser *alfas*, scholars and jurists, and ultimately among the leadership of scholars at Timbuktu, is an implicit one which is arrived at principally through inference. Indeed, in many cases it is impossible to decide whether an individual, such as Caillie's host, Sidi Abdallahi, was seen by his colleagues primarily as a merchant-notable or as a scholar. Among the poor, the acquisition of a modest level of learning, with the concomitant title of *Alfa*, was an important event because it could eventually pave the way, in later

life at least, towards full recognition as a scholar. Among the wealthy, on the other hand, patronage of needy *alfas*, or pious acts in general, could serve as an alternative avenue towards learned notability status. The ambiguity of the term notable in this case, designating literally 'a man in the public eye', seems to bear comparison to the Chinese term *shen* which often referred vaguely to the 'gentry', especially in the provinces, without specific implications of personal learned status.¹⁹⁸

The ambiguity of the questions of learned status among the wealthy is illustrated in the case of the chronicler al-Sa'di's brother Muhammad. Judging from the few notices available on this merchant-notable, he was not especially learned and did not identify closely with the circles of scholars. Yet, while his brother quotes one of the Pashas as describing him as an '*alfa*', clearly a lesser title at the time, he himself assigns him the title of *faqīh* at a later juncture.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, we have a reference to Askī Alfa Bakr Lunbāri, the last secretary at the Songhai court, being addressed as *faqīh* by his monarch at a critical moment when the *kātib*'s advice was being sought. This, however, is an isolated reference which is counterbalanced, among other things, by the absence of an obituary notice on Alfa Bakr Lunbāri. The evidence suggests that he was a lesser *alfa* who was not accorded the status of scholar, and certainly not by the erudites themselves.²⁰⁰ By and large, the *Kātib*s or the secretaries to the rulers, excepting al-Sa'di in the seventeenth century and Sān Sirfī in the nineteenth century, belonged to the tolerably learned but did not quite rank among the full-fledged scholars.²⁰¹ A third example of the ambiguity concerns the father and uncles of Abu Bakr al-Ḥiddiq, a Timbuktu-Jennc literatus who fell into slavery at Buna in one of the Asante wars and has left us a most interesting account of his background. Abu Bakr's family, which boasted of a Shīrī identity, enjoyed an extraordinary set of links throughout the Sūdān. In this case, preoccupation with commerce seems most pronounced, but the merchants in question seem all to have been scholars of some calibre or another.²⁰²

In the absence of any formal standardization of the various grades of learning, Timbuktu served for a long time as the learned metropolis in which the status of a scholar, if acquired elsewhere, could be most fully confirmed. That is presumably why al-Qā'id Mahmūd Baghayughu of Jenne (father of the two illustrious settlers who founded the Baghayughu Timbuktu family) sought an *ijāza* in *Mukhāsar Khalīl* from Mahmūd b. 'Umar Aqīt. The scholar clearly had other prominent masters but his certification by 'the foremost scholar of Tākūr' ('Alim al-Tākūr) would have left no doubt about his learned status. Even in the late eighteenth century, a period of comparative decline in learning, we find that Ṣāliḥ al-Fulāni of Futa Toro found it advantageous to reside some time in Timbuktu and study there before proceeding to the East where he achieved widespread veneration and fame.²⁰³ Scholars must have come in droves to Timbuktu to acquire further learning and confirm their learned status so that in the late nineteenth

century, the *ulba* (or potential scholars) in the town by far outnumbered the 30–50 established scholars estimated above. Our evidence for the most part concerns those who stayed behind and especially the few, such as Šiddīq b. Muḥammad Ta'alla al-Kāburi, who made a special impact, but it is clear that others returned to their towns, villages and clans and introduced or strengthened the status criteria which attached to scholarship in Timbuktu.

Recent studies have tended to see the Confucian tradition of learning in China in terms of giving the scholars what has broadly been described as 'a knowledge of the management of human affairs'.²⁰⁴ This recalls the very wording of one of our sources which describes the leaders of the Kunta as people of 'good management' (*taḍbīr*).²⁰⁵ More generally, as Willis has pointed out in his study on the scholars or clerisy of Futa Jallon:

Every community has its clerisy – its poets and philosophers – in short, its learned men. It is the clerisy which frames the nation, lays down its canons and interprets them; it is the clerisy which embodies the nation, inspires its courage, rouses its fury.²⁰⁶

Despite the emphasis on ritual and belief in the Muslim tradition of learning, the factor which distinguished the full-fledged scholars from lesser literati in Timbuktu was precisely their knowledge of legal matters which affected the affairs of the public as a whole. Theoretically, the more purely religious studies took precedence over others and, indeed, stood at the very beginning of most legal commentaries and *ḥadīth* compendia. In practice, however, the training of the modest *alfa* never went beyond reading, and sometimes memorizing, the first sections of each book. The completion (*khatm*) of a major jurisprudential work was an important event duly noted in the biographies. It signified that the scholar had delved into the more controversial aspects of the Muslim laws, including those pertaining to market, tax and land laws, which were often as open to interpretation as the elusive principles surrounding the relationship between society and state. The central role which had been set aside for analogy (*qiyās*) in the jurisprudential method gave the full-fledged scholars, and especially the jurists (*fuqahā*), a rigorous training in the established norms of logical deduction. The deductive method was carried to extremes in the academic debates known under the name of *naẓẓil* which came into vogue especially in more recent periods at Walāta and Arwān.²⁰⁷ By the same token, however, the scholars were seen as especially equipped to deal with conflicts by virtue of their measured and persuasive approach.

The strongest basis for contrast with the highly formalized Chinese case lies in the fact that scholars there were strongly identified with officialdom. Recent studies have tended to de-emphasize this factor by showing that only a small fraction of the overall body of Chinese literati were in fact officials. Indeed, in the provincial and district capitals the presence of

officials was restricted and administration often devolved *de facto* upon the gentry, and especially upon scholars of the *chu-jen* intermediate grade.²⁰⁸ Nonetheless, the *chu-jen* enjoyed a semi-official capacity along with certain legal privileges which were far more pronounced than in the case of scholars in the Senclo-Sūdān. More importantly yet, those who were automatically qualified to the status of officials or potential officials in China were the *chin-shih*, or the holders of the highest academic grade. Additionally, while participation in commerce was considered almost reprehensible, Chinese society associated the highest honours with qualification for official post.²⁰⁹ In sharp contrast to this, we find that al-Bakkā'i ranked the highly honourable position of Judge, along with supreme rulership in Islam, among temporal state functions which were not necessarily desirable nor to be actively sought after by scholars.²¹⁰

The Sudanic states, including the Ruma, with which Timbuktu interacted, did not evolve the centralized bureaucratic machinery which might have afforded a basis for routine participation of scholars in matters of administration. Rather, beginning with the Malian empire, the tendency was to preserve the older chieftaincies and posts and integrate them only loosely with the agencies of the central state. As a result, tensions which led to strife were a sporadic feature which required the intercession of parties least liable to be involved in the conflicts. The distance of the scholars from politics, which amounted almost to a ritual at all but the times of greatest crisis, naturally made them the best suited for this role. We have an interesting example of this feature in the case of the Ardo of Massina, Hammādi Āmina, who in one instance insisted that he would accept no mediator other than the chronicler al-Sa'di, at that time *imām* at Jenne. When some Ruma officials were sent to him as mediators, he refused to see them and said:

What caused these [emissaries] to enter this road which is not their road? This is not a matter to be handled by the people of the sultanate. Rather, it falls only among the functions of the *ulba*, because it involves establishing peace and goodwill (*islāh*) between people.²¹¹

As already indicated in Chapter 4, all scholars in Timbuktu acted as mediators in the disputes which arose in their own quarters and the market. Indeed, al-Barīli goes as far as to single out one scholar for the fact that he refused to mediate between people though he was quite learned and erudite.²¹² In such cases, under the influence of a pronounced mystic orientation, the scholars carried their reserve to its ultimate extreme. More commonly, they exerted their influence through disciples or lesser associates, or through personal intervention, while maintaining as much as possible a disinterested and neutral posture.

In its formative period, Timbuktu had the greatest need for the moderating influence exerted by scholars. At that time, there was little in common between the various groups of Tuareg, Sanhāja, Soninke and

Māinke settlers besides common subscription at one level or another to Islam or Islamic learning. Erudition, therefore, became the most acceptable means for the assignation and sharing of status. Much as in the Chinese case, in the provincial context at least, the rise of an individual to learned status transformed the image of his whole family and sometimes even of his whole clan or ethnic group.²¹³ Under the circumstances it became advantageous for each group to raise as many members as possible to the prestigious ranks of scholars. Indeed, in a pattern which was much more formalized in the Chinese case, the prestige accruing to a scholar could be passed on to his descendants, for a few generations at least, even if they did not especially distinguish themselves in learning.²¹⁴ Ultimately, of course, the learning of a few scholars in each case, or the special erudition of a single ancestor, determined the identity as *ulba*, *Zwaya* or Ineslemen of entire Saharan clans. Prestigious status inherited in this way tended to be diluted from one generation to another much as, in the economic sphere, the greatest fortunes could become fragmented in a matter of two or three generations under Islamic law. Nonetheless, the greatest honour attached to that individual who first raised his family or clan to the status of scholars. Henceforth, a moderate emphasis on learning could sustain the family in its inherited position of prestige.

The factor of upward mobility through learning essentially lies beyond the reach of controlled investigation. The chroniclers simply do not record the background or descent of an emerging scholar unless it was prestigious. Furthermore, the rise of an individual to high erudition raised the status of his ancestors as well. Once again, we find a parallel in the Chinese case whereby scholars of the *chu-jen* grade and above were entitled to have their forebears mentioned alongside their names in the local histories. This privilege did not extend to the modest-ranking literati of the *sheng-yuan* grade 'because as scholar-commoners they had no valid reason to honour their forebears'.²¹⁵ In our case, the pedigree of a rank-and-file literatus, such as Mu'allim Takariyya and Alfa Kunba'ali, rarely forms part of his nomenclature. By contrast, some of the Barūli and Muslimi scholars of Walāta are identified by a long and elaborate nomenclature, though their pedigrees do not terminate in any historically prominent individuals. This phenomenon pertains to the emphasis on lineage among Saharan nomads, but it also attests to the patrician tendency in the towns. The main Ruma notables, along with the Songhai descended from Askia Muhammad and his brother 'Umar Kumzāghu, also boasted of their descent until the late eighteenth century. The scholars were seen as especially qualified to trace their lineage, however, and this feature remained a live factor up to the French conquest. In some cases, such as that of al-Qādi Muhammad b. al-Faqīh al-Mukhtār b. Muhammad Zankanu b. Abkar al-Maddāh, it is possible to find evidence of upward mobility in the nomenclature. While Abkar and his son Muhammad Zankanu seem to have been lesser literati,

al-Mukhtār was probably the first in his family to achieve recognition as a full-fledged scholar, and this no doubt paved the way for his son's ascent to the highest ranks.²¹⁶ In other cases, such as that of the anonymous author of *Tadhkirat al-Nayān*, the pedigrees, which are only partly recorded, suggest that the family ranked among the lesser *alfas* for several generations and never rose beyond that grade.²¹⁷ By and large, the evidence suggests that upward mobility into the ranks of scholars became more and more rare after the sixteenth century. Indeed, even in the sixteenth century, it appears to have been a difficult and protracted process which took place in stages over a period of two or three generations. So far as we can tell, it was simply inconceivable for a poor, servile or semi-servile individual to rise directly to the ranks of scholars. At best, he could attain a modest education as a preliminary for sending one of his sons to one of the accomplished masters.

The numerical decline of the body of scholars after the sixteenth century was not strictly the product of growing disinterest in the cause of learning. The infusion into the population of Timbuktu of a large unlettered body of Ruma and Songhai soldiery was certainly an important consideration. More importantly, however, the corresponding emigration of merchant-scholars to Walāta, Arwān and even to Ghadāmis, reduced the importance of Timbuktu as a learned metropolis while eventually making possible the extraordinary flowering of Muslim scholarship in the Sahara. Traditionists today maintain that the Aqīs actually migrated to the region of Walāta during and sometime after the eighteenth century. We also have it on record that some Shurfa migrated to Tuāt in the eighteenth century.²¹⁸ More specifically affecting the scholars was a migration southwards towards Jenne and beyond, as well as to Hausaland, which began before the Moroccan conquest. The first appearance of members of the Sa'di family at Jenne probably came in the wake of the Moroccan conquest and, indeed, the chronicler 'Abd al-Rahmān himself ventured further into Shībla where he almost settled, after marrying a daughter of al-Faqīh Abu Bakr San'atar, at the invitation of the reigning Sana Koy 'Uthmān.²¹⁹ We can assume quite safely that the emigration of Wangara scholars from Timbuktu, as from Jenne, was a constant factor from the seventeenth century onwards. The growing importance of trade-routes which linked the West African interior with the Atlantic ports stimulated an acceleration in the growth of a number of towns where Muslim scholars had a presence. That includes Sasanding and Segu, to the southwest, as well as Kong, Buna and Salaga, due south and southeast. Traditions of Yendi associate the growth of Islam in the kingdom of Dagbon with the arrival there of al-Shaikh Sulaimān b. 'Abdullāh Baghayughu of Timbuktu sometime during the seventeenth century.²²⁰ Similarly, traditionists of Bubu Dioulasso recall a certain Muhammad al-Musṭafa, an important scholar recorded to have died in 1108 A.H. (1696/7 A.D.), as having originally

migrated from Timbuktu. The latter was apparently nephew of a certain Ahmad who 'in his travel from Timbuktu settled in the town of Dag, between Ghuna and Massina, where a group from the people of Dafi received him respectfully, so he stayed amongst them and they surrounded him, becoming his students'. As if to confirm the wide travels and migrations of these scholars, a son of the above Muhammad al-Muṣṭafa is remembered for saying: 'Fear God alone and do not give a heed to where you might die'.²²¹

It should be emphasized, therefore, that the decline of learning in Timbuktu was for a long time a numerical rather than a qualitative factor which went hand in hand with the growth of scholarship elsewhere in West Africa. The process continued well into the eighteenth and early nineteenth century when the father of the above-mentioned Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, for example, went to Hausaland where he married the daughter of a local scholar, before finally settling to trade in gold and cloths at Buna. Of his uncles, Abu Bakr recalled:

Idriss went to the country of Massina where he dwelt in Diawara, and married a daughter of Mar al-Qa'id Abu Bakr: her name was Umuḡu. 'Abd al-Rahmān travelled as far as the land of Kong. He married the daughter of Abu Thaumā 'Alī, lord of that country, and dwelt there. The name of his wife was Sarah. Maḡmūd travelled to the city of Būna and settled there. His wife's name was Zuhra. Abu Bakr remained at Timbuktu with the rest of the family. He was not married at the time I left our country.²²²

The family of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq is no doubt representative of generations of scholars and lesser literati who contributed to the diffusion of learning from Timbuktu. The extensive migrations of such scholars are fabled, both in living memory and in older records, throughout the Sudan. On balance, Timbuktu was a beneficiary of these movements in its earliest periods, and in its golden age it became a sort of Mecca visited by all, but even in its period of decline, the city, through the dispersal of its scholars, persisted in its role as the main centre for the diffusion of learning in the Sudan.

In short, we may perhaps explain the extraordinary extensiveness of the body of scholars in the sixteenth century as a result of a common quest on the part of diverse ethnic groups to share in the high-status criteria which attached to learning. These same criteria had existed elsewhere in the Sudan before the rise of Timbuktu and, under its influence, they were further strengthened and extended. This meant that although the city itself could not sustain a broad body of erudites and literati in the periods of its slow economic decline, ample opportunities existed both north and south, in the Sahara and throughout the Sudan. In fact, the very migrations which accompanied the economic and demographic decline of Timbuktu from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centu-

ries resulted in wide diffusion of the city's scholastic and social traditions in various parts of West Africa.

Naturally, the diffusion of Muslim learning in other parts of the Sahelo-Sūdān tended to widen the sphere of Timbuktu's affiliations. Indeed, insofar as these affiliations were pedagogical besides being mercantile, they continued to provide the city and its leadership with a source of strength. Indirectly, this made it easier for Timbuktu to preserve its tradition of autonomous leadership by scholar-notables, despite the transformative impact of the Moroccan conquest. Some of the relevant considerations have already been discussed in the previous three chapters—though more in analytical rather than a narrative framework. In the process, we have looked at the varied factors of social stratification, administration and status which affected the standing of scholars in Timbuktu. Together, these factors amounted to what we have described as a *social tradition*. In the next chapter, we shall essentially deal with the persistence of the social tradition in a narrative devoted more directly to the three centuries following the Moroccan conquest.