



GREAT CITIES OF AFRICA

THE ANCIENT CITY OF TIMBUKTU



The Empire of Mali was established in western Africa in 1235 AD by the indigenous Mandinka west Africans of the region. The richest man in the world at this time was Mansa Musa the king of the Empire of Mali who took control of the city of Timbuktu and constructed his royal palace there.

Under his leadership the city of Timbuktu rose to become one of the premier centers for knowledge and trade in the whole of the continent of Africa and indeed the world at that time. The city also became a well-known center for Islamic learning and was the location of the University of Sankore Mosque where scholars and students came to learn the Quran and Islamic theology as well as mathematics, medicine, law and astronomy. Timbuktu became a place where many of the premier Islamic scholars from Bagdad in Iraq, Cairo in Egypt and Persia came to learn and to teach, it was home to several hundred thousand manuscripts. Mansa Musa also constructed the three great mosques and madrasas of Mali named Sidi Yahya, Djinguereber Mosque and Sankore Madrasah all of which combine to formulate the

University of Timbuktu which is still operational to present day. By 1400 AD the Sankore Madrasah had one of the largest collections of books in Africa with over 700,000 books in its collection. Although all forms of goods and services were traded within the city some of the most popular were gold, salt and books. The historian Leo Africanus reported the following regarding Timbuktu:

“IN TIMBUKTU THERE ARE MANY JUDGES, PROFESSORS AND HOLY MEN, ALL BEING GENEROUSLY HELPED BY THE KING WHO HOLDS SCHOLARS IN MUCH HONOUR. MORE PROFIT IS MADE FROM SELLING BOOKS IN TIMBUKTU THAN FROM ANY OTHER BRANCH OF TRADE”.

The city of Timbuktu contained copious sweet water wells as it had close proximity to the Niger River. By 1450 AD the population of the city of Timbuktu had swelled to over 100,000 inhabitants with over 25,000 scholars.