

SANKORE'



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلَّمَ تَسْلِيمًا

CHAPTER VII

THE GENESIS OF THE CITY OF Tinbuktu

The city of Tinbuktu was first founded by the Maghsharen Tuaregs¹ at the end of the fifth century *hijra*². They originally took up quarters there to annually graze their livestock. During the summer they would put down on the coast of the Niger River in the village of Amdagha³. During the autumn they would move until they had reached Arawan⁴, making it a place of disembarkation. Thus, throughout the year the Maghsharen were constantly commuting between these regions, making it their terminal point in the north. Eventually, the Tuaregs chose Tinbuktu as a final settlement. It was a pleasant, virtuous and splendid land endowed with much *baraka*⁵, wholesome favors and uninterrupted advantages.

Tinbuktu was my birthplace and the sole object of my desires. It had never been defiled with the worship of idols and prostration had never been made to any deity on any of its surface except to the All Merciful Being. It was a retreat and abode of scholars and pious worshippers, a crossroad for the *awliyya*⁶ and ascetics, and an intersection for ships and caravans. They made it the coffer of their goods, merchandise and agricultural produce until it became a way station for travelers coming and going. This fine metropolis became their treasurer and starting point which they named *Tinbuktu*, which in their Maghsharen language means the "the well of an elderly women, named Buktu". It was this name which they gave to this blessed place. Then the people took it as a place of residence and it grew by the power and will of Allah ta'ala into a flourishing and thriving metropolis.

People came to it from every direction and region until it became a commercial market. The majority of the people who arrived to trade in its market

¹ The *Maghsharen* owe their origin to the Berbers who resided in the southern region of the Sahara desert. These people who spoke the Tamashegh tongue and were divided into three groupings: the Lamtuna, Judala and Masufa. They later broke into more numerous confederations known as: Kel Tadmekkat, Barabish, Kel Antasar, Kel Aghlaal and the Kel 'l-Suuq. Presently, they reside in the regions between present day Mauritania and Tinbuktu, the countries of Algeria, Niger and northern Nigeria.

² This coincides with 1100 C.E..

³ This town is about 25 kilometers south west of Tinbuktu.

⁴ This region is about 250 kilometers north of Tinbuktu. In the beginning of the 14th century Arawan (also known as Inshakga) became a renown center of Islamic learning and is presently a center for the Qadiriya Sufic brotherhood.

⁵ The concept of *baraka* (divine blessings) is a subtle spiritual energy force which Allah causes to pervade certain individuals, towns and inanimate objects.

⁶ The *awliyya* (protected friends) are individuals who are chosen by Allah for his service and worship. They include the Messengers and the Prophets, who were chosen and others who have earned it through the spiritual discipline (*riyaada*).

were the people of Waghadu⁷. Then people started coming to it from every direction. Prior to this people used to do all of their trading in the town of Biru.⁸ Groups of caravans arrived to this town from all over the horizons. The most elect of scholars and people of virtue, along with the people of wealth from every tribe and land, settled within its walls. They came from Egypt, Wajal, Fezzan, Ghadamis, Tuat, Dira`at, Teflalet, Fas, Sus 'l-Aqsa, Bitu and others. They all gradually relocated to Tinbuktu, until the city reached its perfection. All of the diverse tribes of the Sanhaja⁹ began to augment their number in the city. Thus, the prosperity of Tinbuktu was the ruin of Walata.

The techniques of town-buildings came to Tinbuktu from nowhere except the *Maghrib*, and the same holds true for the tenets of religion and the procedures of commercial transactions.¹⁰ The early condition of the habitations of the people, were grass huts made from branches of thorn bushes and homes roofed with grass. Then the grass huts were converted into homes of mud brick. Later, these were built with very low walls which enclosed them. The walls were so, low that if one were standing outside the wall he could look right into the homes. They then had the central mosque built in accordance with their capabilities.¹¹ Then the **Sankore'** mosque/university was rebuilt the same way¹².

⁷These were Mande speaking people known sometimes as Manding, Mandinke', Mandingo and Malinke'. Among other peoples they were called Marka, Yarse, Dafin and among the Arabs as Wangara. When they accepted Islam and combined commerce with religious preaching they became known as the *Dyula*.

⁸ This town is identified with Walata about 475 kilometers west of Tinbuktu. The migration from Biru (Walata) took place around the 13th century. Throughout the text I have taken the liberty of exchanging the name Biru for the name which is commonly used today, Walata.

⁹ The Sanhaja are 'the Berbers of the viel' and included the Judala, the Masufa, the Arusiyn, the Lamta, the and Idaw Mribit. They later became known as the Zawaya and were the central cause for the diffusion of Islam throughout the region.

¹⁰ The person to whom this is attributed is Abu Is'haq 's-Sahili, the Andalusian, poet, mathematician, jurists and architect, who came to Tinbuktu with Mansa Kankan Musa in 1324. The present view is that the *maghribian* style of building fused with the indigenous Sudanese style of building which is reminiscent of the monumental earthen constructions which characterized ancient Egyptian dynastic architecture.

¹¹ This mosque was and is still named Jenkebire or Jengerebir and is located in the Jingerebir Quarter of the city, which is the southwestern section of the city.

¹² The Sankore' mosque was an ancient mosque which was first established by the Mande speaking people. It is located in the north eastern quarter of the city of Tinbuktu. This quarter is called today Sankore'. During the 12th century an unknown Manding women gave an endowment for the mosque making it into the leading center for learning and erudition throughout Islamic Africa. Later during the 13th century the Moors and Sanhaja peoples settled in this quarter enhancing the intellectual life of the mosque/university.



The Sankore' Masjid/University

At that time, anyone who stood at the gate of the city could see who entered the central mosque, because the town was devoid of walls and solid buildings. The prosperity of the town was established only at the end of the ninth century *hijra*¹³. Its construction, the joining of all its parts together, was completed only in the middle of the tenth century *hijra* during the period of *Askiya* Dawud ibn *Amir Askiya* al-Hajj Muhammad.¹⁴

The first of the kingdoms to initiate rule of the municipality of Tinbuktu, as previously mentioned, were the people of Mali. Their government lasted one-hundred years from the year 737.¹⁵ Then the Maghsharen Tauregs dominated and governed the city for forty years from the year 837.¹⁶ Then came the rule of Sonni Ali, whose government began in the year 873 and lasted twenty-four years.¹⁷ Then came the government of *Amir 'l-Mu'mineen Askiya* al-Hajj Muhammad, whose government ruled Tinbuktu until its termination for one-hundred and one years, from 14 *Jumad 'l-Akhir*, 898 until 17 *Jumad 'l-Akhir*, 999.¹⁸ Then came the government of the Hashimi Sharif Mulay Ahmad ad-Dhahabi, whose rule began from the extinction of the

¹³ This period coincided with the large influx of Soninke and Fulani people during the 14th century.

¹⁴ *Askiya* Dawud was the most illustrious of the rulers of Songhay after his father. According to the *Tarikh 'l-Fattash* of Mahmud Ka'ti, *Askiya* Muhammad said about Dawud, that he 'would eclipse all my sons, grandchildren and descendents. His renown will erase theirs, so much so that people will speak only of him.' He knew the entire Qur'an from memory and was well versed in the *Risala* of Ibn Abi Zayd. He was the first to employ scribes (*al-kutaab*) to copy rare manuscripts which he gave to scholars. He was responsible for initiating the building of public libraries, treasury houses and highly productive agricultural schemes.

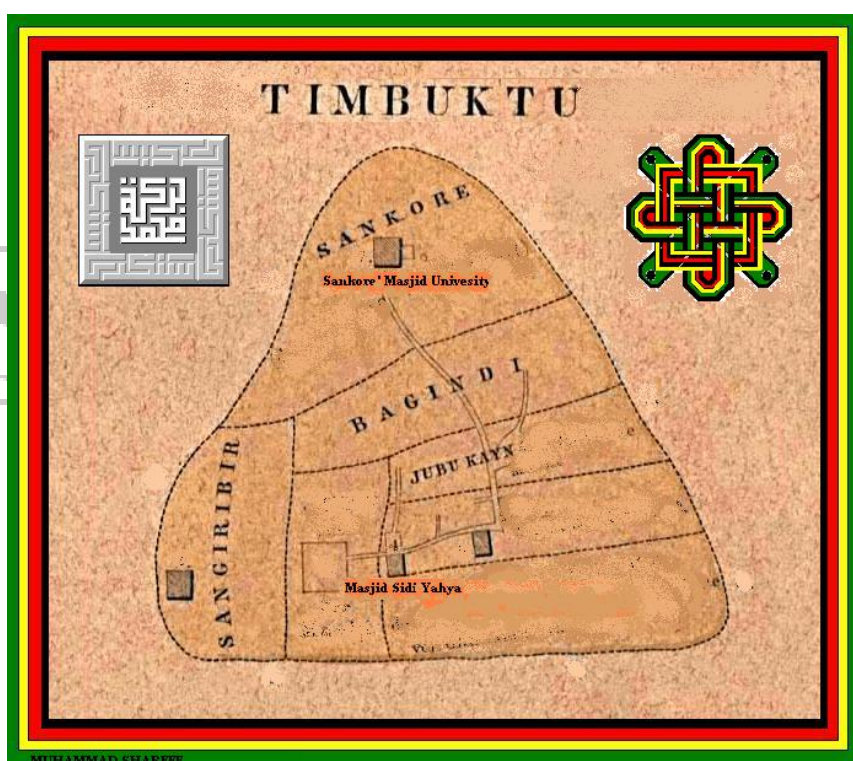
¹⁵ From 1336/37 - 1433/4 C.E.. The first of the Malinke rulers to govern the city was Mansa Kankan Musa who made his famous pilgrimage to Mecca and brought back scholars and architects who designed and rebuilt the first mosque.

¹⁶ This took place at the hands of Akillu Akamalwal, the chief of the Tuareg in 1433/4 C.E.. After conquering the city Akillu reappointed the former governor of the city, a Sanhaji, Muhammad Naddi to administer on his behalf.

¹⁷ Sonni Ali conquered the city in 1468 C.E. and persecuted the Muslim clergy and the Fulani inhabitants.

¹⁸ From 2 April, 1493 C.E. - 12 April 1591 C.E..

government of the people of Songhay in 17 *Jumad 'l-Akhir*, 999, and it has lasted to this day for sixty-five years.



The City Plan of the Sacred City of Tinbuktu

The Rule of Akillu

As for Akillu the *sultan* of the Tauregs, during his rule over the city of Tinbuktu, the Tauregs remained in their nomadic state as they had been in ancient times, living in the open desert and searching for grazing lands¹⁹. For this reason he entrusted the governance of the country over to the Tinbuktu-*Koy* ('the governor of Tinbuktu'), Muhammad Naddi, who was from the Sanhaja Berber from the tribe of Ajir who originated from Shingiti.²⁰ And Shingit was the origin of this entire tribe, just as the origin of the people of Massina and the people of Tafariast-Walata²¹ were from Tishit after being driven from the West. The mother of Muhammad Naddi was the daughter of Suma Uthman. Muhammad Naddi was among the original masters of the land and was made earlier on a part of the government of the people of Mali. And the term *Koy* changed with the change of the government. Under the jurisdiction of the *Koy* was the right to command, forbid, collect finances, expenditure, and other than this. In short, the *Koy* was the governor of the land.

It was Muhammad Naddi who built the well known mosque (Mosque Sidi Yahya) and placed his beloved companion, the eminent *waliy* and perfect *Qutb*²², Sidi

¹⁹ Akillu was the chief of the Maghsharen Tuaregs who center of operation was the region Amdagha.

²⁰ The town of Shingiti (Chinguetti) in the Adrar province of Mauritania, has been and remains the source of the most renown scholars, poets, jurists in the Muslim world.

²¹ These were Tuaregs members of the Massufa who settled in the region of Mauritania.

²² The concept *qutb* (pole - axis) in the technical terminology of the scholars means a single person who is the *khalif* (vicegerent) of Allah to the whole of creation. He is upon the heart of the Angel *Israfeel*, upon him be peace, which means just as *Israfeel* is the means by which Allah causes the vital pattern of the universe to emerge; likewise the *qutb* is the means by which Allah causes the the vital meanings of the universe to emerge. The *qutb* is the complete inheritor of the inner station of Muhammad, may

Yahya at-Tadalasi as the *imam* in it. Both Sidi Yahya and Muhammad Naddi died together in the last years of the rule of this government of Tauregs. It was reported that one night during his final years *Shaykh* Muhammad Naddi saw in a dream that the sun had set and then the moon set immediately after it. He told this story to Sidi Yahya, who informed him; "If you will not be afraid, I will notify you of its meaning." Muhammad Naddi said; "I will not be afraid." He said; "I will soon die and you will die shortly after me." At that moment Muhammad Naddi became saddened. Sidi Yahya said; "Did you not say that you would not become afraid?" He responded; "This sadness that you see is not from fear of death. It is from the compassion and pity that I have for my small children." Sidi Yahya then said; "Leave their affairs over to Allah t'a'ala." Eventually, Sidi Yahya died and soon after that Muhammad Naddi died, may Allah ta'ala be merciful to both of them.²³ Muhammad Naddi was buried adjacent to Sidi Yahya in the same mosque. It is said that Muhammad Naddi lost his eyesight near the end of his life. The people were unaware of this until the night Sidi Yahya died because of the huge crowd which had gathered for his funeral. In order for Muhammad Naddi to get near the body he took his whip and swung it back and forth striking the people. Had he had his sight he would not have had to strike the people. After the death of Muhammad Naddi, the *sultan* Akillu appointed his eldest son, Umar, in his place.



Masjid Sidi Yahya

In the last period of the rule of the Maghsharen Tuaregs, they began to manifest injustice, increased corruption and widespread tyranny. They continued to spread corruption in the land by forcefully driving the people from their homes and by violently raping their women. Akillu also prevented the inhabitants of Tinbuktu from paying to the *Tinbuktu-Koy*, Umar, what was customarily given to him. Customarily, from the whole of the wealth which came from fines, a third of it went to the

Allah bless him and grant him peace, firmly established upon the Book of Allah and the *Sunna* of His Messenger. Due to the perfection of his inner state, the *qutb* has attained the limits of human perfection. He is perfect in his understanding of the sciences of the *shari'a*, complete in his comprehension of the science of the *tariqa* and perfection of character; and consummate in his realization of the sciences of the *haqiqa* and direct knowledge of his Lord. The *qutb* is the being about whom Allah ta'ala spoke when He says, "When your Lord said, Verily I am placing upon the earth a *khalifa*.'" ²³

²³ This occurred in the year 868 A.H./1463-4 C.E..

Tinbuktu-Koy. Whenever certain situations occurred and people entered into the land, he would provide for them from this wealth by receiving them hospitably and utilizing it to take care of all their conveniences. The other two-thirds would be divided among his slave tribes who were iron smiths. However, one day 3000 mithqals of gold was brought to Tinbuktu. Sultan Akillu took a stick (as it was not their custom to touch gold with their hands) and divided it into three parts and said; "This (first part) is for the price of your clothing. This (second part) is for the price of your whips. And this (third part) was customarily given to the *Tinbuktu-Koy*." Akillu said, "Who is this *Tinbuktu-Koy*?! What does it signify?! And what is his benefit?! Take it for it is for you!" When this happened the *Tinbuktu-Koy* Umar became angry and decided to conspire to take his revenge against him. As a result, Umar sent a messenger to Sonni Ali to come to him in order that he may place the city of Tinbuktu in his hands. He revealed the weakness of the condition of Akillu in every aspect of his authority and his forces. He even sent a pair of his shoes in order that Sonni Ali would know for certainty that Akillu was just a very scrawny and short man. Sonni Ali became delighted with this news. One day when Akillu and *Tinbuktu-Koy* Umar were sitting together upon a hill of Amdagha²⁴. The horsemen of Sonni Ali stationed themselves on the south shore of the Niger River in the direction of Gurma.²⁵ When Akillu became determined to flee; he fled to the town of Walata along with the jurists (*fuqaha*) of **Sankore'**. The authority of the Tuaregs did not originally include beyond the river. Thus, the *Tinbuktu-Koy* Umar enacted a policy of sending boats on the river to cut off the Tuaregs from utilizing the river.



Masjid Jenkebbere'

²⁴ This town is located 25 miles southeast of Tinbuktu on the coast of the Niger river.

²⁵ The region of *Gurma* is located on the western loop of the Niger bend 512 kilometers southeast of Tinbuktu.

The conquering of the Tuaregs by Sonni Ali:

Sonni Ali arrived from the direction of Hausa²⁶. Umar also fled to Walata out of fear that Sonni Ali would indict him for what occurred before the conflict. He said to his brother, al-Mukhtar ibn Muhammad Naddi; "This man will no doubt take revenge against me. You should delay until tomorrow and go to him as an informant, and say, 'We have not seen my brother, Umar, since yesterday. I assume he has fled.' If you precede to him with this news, perhaps he will, Allah willing; make you the *Tinbaktu-Koy*. Then our house will remain under the protection of Allah. However, if you fail to carry out this plan, he will kill me and you, destroy our house and break our unity." The affair occurred by the decree of Allah, just as Umar envisaged. He was extremely intelligent, clever and sensible. Sonni Ali entered Tinbaktu and destroyed it as we will discuss, Allah willing, after mentioning the scholars and pious people residing in the city of Tinbaktu, in order to take *baraka* from them, may Allah give us of their *baraka* in the two worlds.



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²⁶ This region is the northern shore of the Niger east of Amghada.