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

CHAPTER V

THE CITY OF Djenne'

Mention will be made here of the city of Djenne' along with a small fragment concerning its affairs. Djenne' is a great, prosperous, blessed, opulent and spacious metropolis, full of elegance and mercy. Allah ta'ala has generously placed these characteristics in its land. Allah has also placed love, mutual respect, affection and beneficence within their physical constitution, natural disposition and innate characteristics. However, in their character they exhibit extreme competitiveness for this world's life; in as much as when one from amongst them increases in rank, they all gather together in hatred against him. They do this without making it obvious and it never becomes clear until something unfortunate happens to him. (we seek refuge with Allah). Then each person starts manifesting words and deeds which openly demonstrate their hatred.

The city of Djenne' has a prominent market place among the commerce markets of the Muslims. In its market there converge the masters of the salt mines of Taghaaza and the masters of the gold mines of Bitu¹. The like of these blessed mines cannot be found in the entire world. The people have come across these vast blessings by means of commerce and trade which is drawn to it in large quantities; resulting in wealth, the amount of which only Allah knows is accumulated in Djenne'. It is by reason of this blessed metropolis that many affluent caravans come from every direction of the east, west, north and south towards Timbuktu. For the city of Djenne' is to Timbuktu just beyond the two rivers between the west and the east of the rivers on an island. On this island city whenever the river rises, it surrounds the town and whenever it descends it moves far from the shore of the town. The time the water surrounds the city is in August and the time it moves far from the shore of the town is in February. The town was originally built in a place called Zuburu. It was then transferred from that place to the locale where it is now. The original site is located near it just to the south. The town is surrounded by a wall which had ten gates. However, two of the gates were closed permanently and today there remains eight gates. If one is far from the city and you were looking on from outside you would think you were looking at a forest because of the large amount of vegetation in the municipality. However, if one enters the metropolis it would be as if there were no trees at all.

¹ Bitu was also known as Be'o and was the southern trading center of the Wangara Mande gold traders about 1000 kilometers south of Timbuktu and about 250 kilometers from the Gulf of Guinea in the Akan regions.

This town first began in a state of disbelief (*kufr*) in the middle of the second century of the *hijra* of the Prophet², may Allah bless him and grant him peace. The people of the metropolis then accepted Islam at the end of the sixth century of the *hijra*³. The ruler named **Kanburu** was the first to accept Islam and the people of the city accepted Islam with him. When he was determined to enter into the faith of Islam, he ordered a gathering of all of the Muslim scholars of the metropolis. There came together more than four-thousand and two-hundred scholars. Kanburu then accepted Islam at their hands and he then commanded them to make three supplications to Allah ta`ala on behalf of the metropolis. They were:

[1] that whoever flees to it from his land, fleeing poverty and hardship that Allah would change his condition to prosperity and ease so that he forgot his own land;

[2] that Allah would make the foreigners in the town be more numerous than its local people; and

[3] that Allah would remove the patience from the hearts of those who came to the metropolis for commerce and trade and that they became so wearied that they would sell their goods at a cheaper price to the people of the city so that they can make a profit.

The scholars then recited the *Fatiha* over these supplications. These supplications were accepted by Allah ta`ala and the city is in that condition up until the present which can be witnessed openly. When the people accepted Islam, they destroyed the royal palace and turned it into a mosque for Allah ta`ala and it was made into a Friday congregational mosque. They then built another palace in order for the ruler to live in adjacent to the mosque on the east side.



The famous Friday *Masjid* of Djenne'

The municipality of Djenne' is a blessed land full of buildings and beautiful structures and furnished with flourishing markets which remain bustling throughout the week. It is said that in Djenne' there are seven-thousand and seventy-seven villages built next to one another consecutively.

The utility of these villages being adjacent to one another was that the *sultan* whenever he needed a certain person to be present who lived near the river Dabu, he would send a messenger to one of the gates of the wall and he would call whoever it

² Around 800 C.E..

³ This coincides with 1201 C.E.

was the king wanted to be present. Then people would call out his name from village to village until the call reached the one desired in a short time.

The boundaries of the region of Djenne' in width is from Kikay, a village near lake Dabu in the south until the Yao a region which lies adjacent to the lands of *Wuaron-Koy*; and in length from Tini, a region bordering the lands of the ruler of Kabura until beyond the mountain in Tunbula, wherein resides a tribe who are specialists in magic.

The *sultan* of Djenne' has twelve *amirs* over twelve separate military detachments in the westerly direction in the lands of Sanaa which are kept ready only for war against the *Mali-Koy*. They are trained to fight his forces wherever they go without having to seek the sanction of the ruler. Among these officers are *Yauso*, *Sunaasuru*, *Mati-ghu*, *Karimu*, and others; and *Sana-Faran* is their chief. Likewise the *sultan* of Djenne' has twelve military detachments in the regions of the east beyond the river in the area of Tinili.

At the death of the *sultan* Kanburu, may Allah be merciful to him, who during his reign built an observatory upon the central mosque; he was succeeded by the one who was responsible for building the wall which surrounded the central mosque of Djenne'. As for *sultan* Adamu, he was the best of the rulers of Djenne'. From that time the city of Djenne' and its people had never been conquered by any kingdom except Sonni Ali. He was the one who subjected and dominated them after he had besieged the city for more than seven years, seven months and seven days.⁴ This is based upon what the people of Djenne' have related. Sonni Ali made his camp in a place called Zubru from which he would fight them every day until the flooding of the Niger completely surrounded the town. He then transferred his forces to a place called *Nubkatu-Sonni* ('the campsite of Sonni'). It was named that because of the fact that they had camped there. They camped there until the river bed around Djenne' dried up. They then returned to Zubru and recommenced their fighting and siege of the city. This continued for the extent of the years mentioned above.

The *sultan* Abdallah ibn *sultan* Abu Bakar⁵ informed me of what had occurred and said; "At that time the populace of Djenne' were afflicted by famine and the depletion of their food. In spite of that, they remained intractable and obstinate due to the fact that Sonni Ali had no knowledge of their condition. Sonni Ali took whatever actions necessary and then out of frustration was determined to return back to Songhay. Then one of the army officials of the *sultan* of Djenne', (who some say was the grandfather of Ansa Maane'), Surya Muhammad was dispatched to Sonni Ali to inform him of the horrendous condition of the people in the metropolis. Sonni Ali prevented him from returning until he himself beheld what would happen to them. Thus, the siege continued and the people remained patient. Later, the *sultan* of Djenne' took counsel with his generals and the dignitaries of his army concerning surrendering to Sonni Ali. They all agreed upon that and a messenger was sent out to inform him their decision. He delighted in their decision and accepted it. The *sultan* of Djenne' came out to him to surrender accompanied by the dignitaries and leaders of his army. As they approached Sonni Ali, the *sultan* descended from his mount and proceeded on foot. He greeted him with welcome and respect. When Sonni Ali saw that the *sultan* was a youth, young in years, he grabbed him and sat him next to himself on his royal rug. He then said; "All this time I Have been fighting a boy!?"

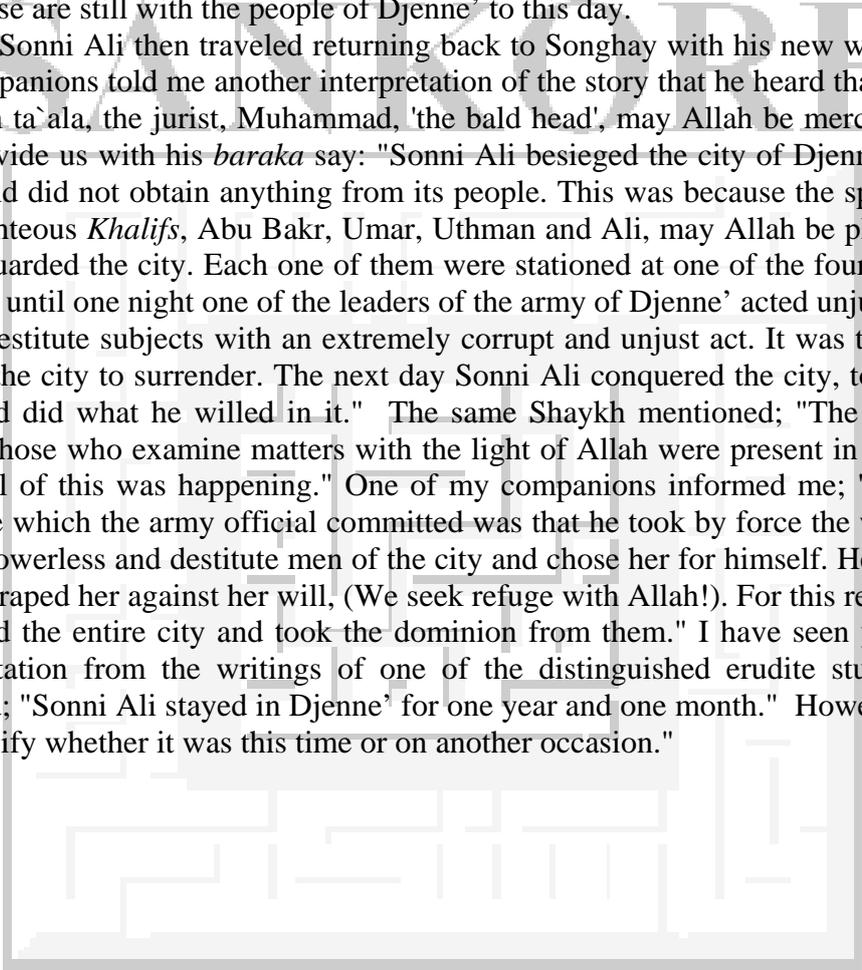
⁴ This took place 1492.

⁵ He was the *Jenne-Koy* or governor of Jenne during the time of the author, as-Sa`di.

One of his servants informed him that his father had been killed during the ordeal which the people of Djenne' suffered and his son succeeded him in the authority.

This was the origin of the sitting of the *sultan* of Songhay and the *sultan* of Djenne' upon one royal rug until the present. Sonni Ali then made an engagement to the *sultan's* mother in order to marry her. *Sultan* Abdallah said to me; "This marriage was what caused Sonni Ali's stay in Djenne' to exceed seven years and seven months by seven days." During these seven days Sonni Ali had a well saddled stallion dispatched into the city for his new wife to be carried to him. When she arrived, he had the stallion with all of its finery returned to the young *sultan* of Djenne' as a gift. And these are still with the people of Djenne' to this day.

Sonni Ali then traveled returning back to Songhay with his new wife. One of my companions told me another interpretation of the story that he heard that the *waliy* of Allah ta'ala, the jurist, Muhammad, 'the bald head', may Allah be merciful to him and provide us with his *baraka* say: "Sonni Ali besieged the city of Djenne' for four years and did not obtain anything from its people. This was because the spirits of the four righteous *Khalifs*, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali, may Allah be pleased with them, guarded the city. Each one of them were stationed at one of the four corners of the city, until one night one of the leaders of the army of Djenne' acted unjustly to one of the destitute subjects with an extremely corrupt and unjust act. It was this act that caused the city to surrender. The next day Sonni Ali conquered the city, took control of it and did what he willed in it." The same Shaykh mentioned; "The masters of hearts, those who examine matters with the light of Allah were present in that region when all of this was happening." One of my companions informed me; "The act of injustice which the army official committed was that he took by force the wife of one of the powerless and destitute men of the city and chose her for himself. He overcame her and raped her against her will, (We seek refuge with Allah!). For this reason Allah punished the entire city and took the dominion from them." I have seen yet another interpretation from the writings of one of the distinguished erudite students who reported; "Sonni Ali stayed in Djenne' for one year and one month." However, he did not specify whether it was this time or on another occasion."



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