

The meanings of
timbuktu

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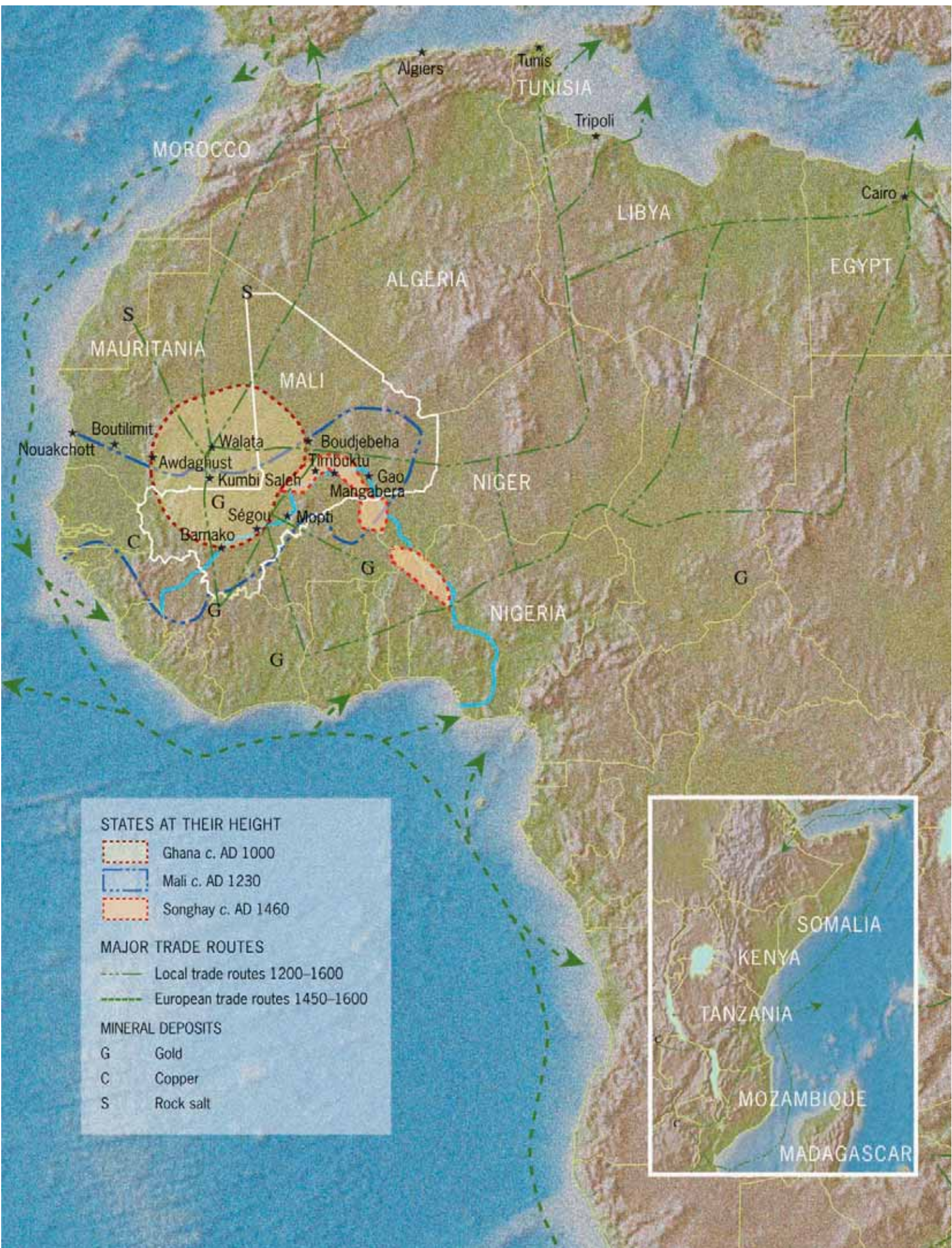
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 في بيلته وفتح له البانث ملكة
 رزم ومشي الي عجره بيلته وغفر
 الثلثس محصور بها ثلثة اشهر
 واصطاحوا مع النوارق وصادق
 اصالح خمس وعشرون يوما ورضوا
 كلما يباع ويشتتر، وليلة
 جمادى الاولى ليلة الخميس من
 مطر وابل جاد نزل الميلة
 جاء هبتين في تلك الصبح وبعث
 علفن وطلبا واعطى للطلبا
 ٤٥

الشمس ربيع الاول فوم عبر المعجم
 عناء وكند وع هذا الاعلى
 الهنا عبر البحر بواجب برع
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 عتار الصبحور وتوا الاصطع
 برع عتق ومكتبة الامانة
 وعشرون سنة وجر حله العنتنة
 العنتنة العنتنة او، وفي
 اربع الاثنا واصلح العادش
 والعشرون سنة او العنتنة
 عتق من الخيل من خيل
 والعشرون سنة من اليا
 ٥٥

القراب وهو يصفه في
 عبره تنبكت من مشي
 البانث احمد ان يترك الع
 طابج ورد المصنوع
 وشمس من وعشرون
 نومي الكاهن علي
 يعع العباد وعشرون
 نومي من غير من الع
 وتما بين العباد
 نومي محمد البانث
 الاولي سنة اربع
 الصبح بر محمد
 جمادى الاولى
 الكاهن علي
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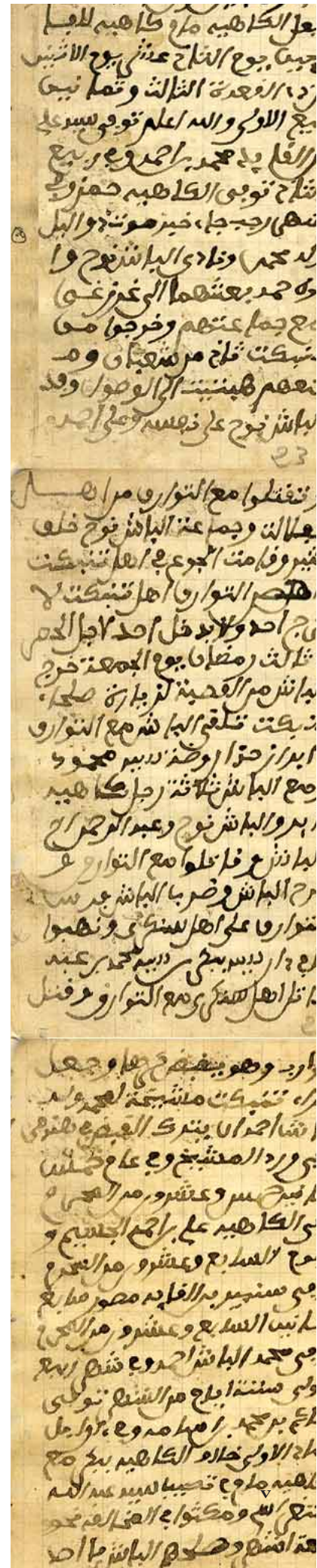
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Preface

We are pleased finally to be able to present this volume of essays to the reading public in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent. The essays were, with one exception, all originally read as papers at a conference of the *Tombouctou* Manuscript Project of the University of Cape Town in August 2005. On that occasion, they were prepared and presented in one of three languages – Arabic, English and French – and we are delighted to give English-language readers the opportunity to now read them all in one volume. Simultaneous translation was available at the conference, and publication of the papers in all three languages in separate volumes was our original and rather idealistic ambition, but funding for such a publishing project was unfortunately, if understandably, not obtainable; Furthermore, the logistics of editing a single volume has been a sufficient challenge: with the two editors living at great distances from each other, and authors who are spread across three continents, and many of them often away from desk and classroom. Simultaneity in this case was a most fanciful idea, but it is hoped that now that this collection of essays is in the public realm, the resources will be found to translate the volume into the other languages. We are confident that we have original essays of value here that deserve to be widely read in South Africa, Africa and beyond. It is our hope that, in the near future, readers other than those within the normal reach of the market of this Press – French and Arabic speakers, if not other regional languages – will have the book to hand.

The African traditions of scholarship, articulated in the Arabic language, and in African languages written in the Arabic script (the so-called *ajami*), that most of the chapters in this volume address, have to date been studied by a very small group of scholars – Arabists and historians or anthropologists, very largely, of course, trained to research and focus on the western regions of the continent. Modern scholarly research on this African Islamic tradition of learning has a presence in a few scattered places in Africa, Europe and the United States of America. While there is a colonial tradition of scholarship particularly focused on translating key texts relevant to the colonial policy-makers, later, ‘scientific’ research about African pre-colonial writing has grown steadily if lethargically since the 1960s.

This world of African scholarship before the appearance of European colonialism is, however, generally not as widely known or incorporated into school or university curricula about Africa as, say, aspects of the continent’s archaeology or oral traditions. Yet the corpus of materials to study is vast and, excluding North Africa above the Sahara, extends across West Africa and down the East African coast and there even exists a small body of materials in Cape Town, South Africa. In recent years some intermittent

international media attention to these traditions of writing has led to a popular focus on them; but like so much that is pursued by the media there is instant, intense and often sparkling light thrown on the subject, only for it to be soon relegated to make way for the next big scoop.

The written heritage of 'mysterious Timbuktu' has attracted this kind of attention from time to time for a short while until 'the next big thing' came along. So that desert town has had its 15 minutes of fame. However, we believe that Timbuktu's recent fame should be kept alive for a bit longer among scholars interested in the past of books and libraries; it should remain prominent among those concerned with at least a part of Africa's last few hundred years of written history. An ongoing scholarly investigation across disciplines, and a broadening of the present narrow base of specialists concerned with this rather neglected aspect of the history of Africa, remains imperative. We hope that this volume reaches a wide audience with an interest in this fascinating aspect of African history.

This collection is a selection of over twenty studies, which combine specialist expertise and accessibility about the extensive institutions of scholarship spread over parts of the Sahara and the Sahel – that region on the edges of the Sahara stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, also known as *Bilad al-Sudan* since the medieval period. We also include two essays on the regions beyond, which is by no means comprehensive but merely an indicator of what exists outside the focus area of this collection. Altogether, these studies should whet the appetite of any educated reader or student interested in the transmission of learning and book production. We do not make any claim to comprehensiveness or definitiveness but cumulatively the essays provide concise introductions that are solidly researched and reliable and offer multiple perspectives on the worlds and meanings of scholarly reading and writing in Timbuktu and beyond.

This is not a collection of essays composed only of the work of scholars from universities outside the regions under study. We have scholars from within the region who continue to work in, manage or own the libraries under discussion. We also have scholars whose style of composition still has something of the classical modes of expression still taught in some tutorials and classes in the Sahel. Even though the book does not contain essays on the aesthetics of the written materials themselves, except for one on aspects of calligraphy, there are enough images in the following pages to give an impression of what future research is possible in fields such as West African arts and design, for example. It was therefore a conscious decision to include a generous selection of images of texts and their contexts from the regions addressed in this volume.

Outline of the volume

The Prolegomena has two essays by the editors providing a background and context to the collection. The first sets the current South African initiatives on the conservation of Timbuktu's manuscripts in context; the second examines the meanings of an intellectual history of the region and why Timbuktu is a symbol of a much more extensive African scholarly tradition.

Part I, an Introduction to the Timbuktu region, offers a historical perspective and a geographical frame central to an understanding of the region but broader and wider than the manuscripts alone provide. In his chapter, Roderick J. McIntosh systematically unravels the deeper archaeological past of the Timbuktu region and its immediate surrounds, the Azawad. The issues of paper and calligraphy are foundational to any discussion of Timbuktu's written heritage; chapters by art historians Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair look, respectively, at the history of paper and its introduction into the region, and at Arabic calligraphic styles in relation to the older West Asian and North African calligraphies. The last essay in this section is by Timothy Cleaveland on Timbuktu's tradition of higher education and its regional setting. He stresses the importance of attending to the unique features of 'traditional' forms of schooling and individual student–teacher relations, while pointing to the role and importance of the often forgotten town of Walata. He also offers insight into the genealogies of certain families and their broader scholarly networks over wide parts of the region.

Part II explores various kinds of Arabic writing from Africa as sources for the writing of African history. In his chapter, Paulo Moraes de Farias compares various genres of historical representation from the region and calls for a critical re-examination of the *tarikh* (chronicle), a genre which forms the foundation of most of the historical writing about the Mali and Songhay states. He sets the well-known chronicles beside the rather under-studied epigraphic evidence and invites scholars to see the authors of the chronicles as more than merely recording disembodied 'facts' about the past. Two essays follow on the use of Arabic script in the writing of African languages. Moulaye Hassane offers a survey of the issue within the broader question of the Arabic transcription of African languages and discusses the relationship between Islamic and pre-Islamic cultures in West Africa. Hamid Bobboyi surveys the *ajami* library of the nineteenth-century Sokoto Caliphate of northern Nigeria. Murray Last's chapter looks at the book economy of the Sokoto state, opening up, in a most fascinating way, an array of questions related to the circulation of written materials in nineteenth-century West Africa. Writing on the same period and region, Beverly Mack focuses on the canon of Arabic sources used by women scholars; she also goes beyond Sokoto to look at women writers from Morocco. The last essay in the section is by Mohamed Shaid Mathee and Aslam Farouk-Alli, who address the way that legal texts (more specifically, legal *responsa* or *fatawa*) could be

used as a source of historical inquiry; they introduce us to a few of the cases currently being studied as a way into the social history of Timbuktu.

Part III is almost exclusively devoted to the influential family of Kunti scholars of the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century. It is an expression of their scholarly authority and contribution to the intellectual life of Timbuktu and the region, that three essays cover the lives and works of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti (1729–1811) and Shaykh Sidi Muhammad al-Kunti (d.1826). Yahya Ould el-Bara and Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh offer two readings of the careers of the elder and younger Kunti. The essay by Mahamane Mahamadou, a leading scholar and resident of Timbuktu, who has been trained in the traditional Islamic sciences, was originally written in Arabic and follows traditional Arabic rhetoric and style. Somewhat similar in style is the chapter by Muhammad Diagayete on the twentieth-century scholar Shaykh Abu al-Khayr al-Arawani.

Mali has dozens of private manuscript collections and Part IV of the volume focuses specifically on Timbuktu's the libraries and private manuscripts collections. The chapters in this section were written by people who work, own or curate these libraries; thus their first-hand knowledge of the manuscripts provides invaluable information on Timbuktu's written heritage. Abdel Kader Haidara, of the Mamma Haidara Memorial Library, presents an overview of the history of the manuscript collections in Timbuktu, dealing more specifically with the private libraries under the Society for the Preservation of Manuscripts in Timbuktu. This is followed by an overview of the different libraries in Timbuktu with a specific focus on the Fondo Ka'ti private library written by Ismaël Diadié Haidara and Haoua Taore. The next chapter focuses on one of the great scholars of Timbuktu, Shaykh Muhammad Baghayogho al-Wangari, and the library he founded, the Wangari Library for Manuscripts. The chapter is written by one of his descendants, Mukhtar al-Wangari. The next chapter, written by Muhammad Ould Youbba, on the Ahmed Baba Institute, gives an overview of the history of the archive, the challenges it faces, as well as of the kinds of manuscripts it conserves. John Hunwick, one of the pioneers of the study of Timbuktu's history, then gives a crisp and comprehensive overview of the Arabic literature of the region, while Charles Stewart describes an initiative undertaken by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where a database of West African manuscripts has been developed that could become a universal, on-line resource for Sahelian Arabic-script manuscript identification.

The last part of the volume goes beyond Timbuktu and the West African region to consider the written legacy of the eastern half of Africa – a good comparison to Timbuktu and its surrounds. Sean O'Fahey gives an overview of the Arabic literature in the eastern half of Africa, including Sudan, the Horn countries and finally Swahili literature written in the Arabic script. The last chapter, by Norwegian scholar Anne Bang, concentrates on the manuscripts found at the Zanzibar National Archives in Tanzania.

Acknowledgements

Many individuals and institutions deserve our thanks for supporting us in the publication of this work. Dr Palo Jordan, the Minister of Arts and Culture, apart from regular queries as to its progress, provided a publication subvention that allowed this book to take its present form. Dr Essop Pahad, the Minister in the Presidency, has also been a keen supporter of this work as is to be expected given his role, on behalf of President Mbeki, in championing the building of the new premises for the Ahmed Baba archives in Timbuktu. The Malian Ambassador in South Africa, Mr Sinaly Coulibaly and the South African Ambassador in Bamako, Dr Pandelani Thomas Mathoma have assisted through their offices and personally with transport arrangements of participants in the conference and the regular visits of researchers between the two countries. John Butler-Adam, and before him Ahmed Bawa, at the Ford Foundation (Johannesburg) have been keen supporters of this and the larger project.

When John Daniel was Chair of the Editorial Board at the HSRC Press, he enthusiastically agreed to look at our proposal and urged us to get it all going; and the team at the Press that has worked on turning an unwieldy collection of papers into this more-or-less coherent collection has demonstrated their customary professionalism and good humour throughout. Mary Ralphs has been a wonderfully tolerant editor; but she also quietly makes demands and has pursued us and our authors all over the world for responses on the tiniest and thorniest questions of translation and transliteration, among other problems we gave her! Garry Rosenberg plotted the bigger game plan for this work and has helped to shape a new series of titles, of which this volume is the first. Utando Baduza chased us with paperwork, and Karen Bruns has been imagining and then working hard on marketing this collection for many months already. Designer Jenny Young and copy-editors Lee Smith and Mary Starkey all gave us the benefit of their professionalism and care.

The team of Timbuktu researchers all crammed into one office in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town have been wonderful in their eager responses to being mobilised into assisting with multiple aspects of this work – from assistance with translation to sourcing images and so much more. They have certainly gained much insight into various aspects of publishing; without them this collection would have had to wait even longer. Susana Molins-Llitas has been an energetic assistant and a committed and cheerful intermediary between the editors, the Press and

the authors. Mohamed Shaid Mathee, Ebrahiem Moos, Nurghan Singh and Naefa Kahn all generously gave of their time. Present and former colleagues in the South–South Exchange Programme in the History of Development and the Council on the Development of Research in Africa, with which we have long-established ties, have been supportive of this project throughout. Members of the broader South Africa–Mali Timbuktu Manuscripts Project also played their part; they are Dr Graham Dominy, Nazeem Mahatey, Alexio Motsi, Mary Manicka and Riason Naidoo.

All the authors in this volume have been cordially co-operative and most patient when they could easily have given up on this project. Their forbearance gives us faith in those scholars in and outside the continent who have a commitment to seeing work on Africa actually published and circulating on the continent; one of the reasons why this is so important is the cost of important books into the continent, so at least with this collection there is no need to convert from euros or dollars!

This work is founded on the historic legacy laid down by the peoples of Timbuktu. Contributions in this collection by library owner–scholars from Timbuktu are but a small reflection of this heritage. Furthermore, this work would not have been possible without their co-operation and collaboration, and we are ever thankful for opportunities to work at various locations in their town. Many of them play a vital role in assisting visiting researchers; the names of Abdel Kader Haidara and Dr Muhammad Dicko deserve special mention; our gratitude to them also for allowing us to photograph and publish images of manuscripts in their collections.

Our families suffered through yet another bout of our obsession with books and handled calls by editors, copy-editors, designers and others. As ever, I, Shamil, thank Gigi, Mazin and Haytham and I, Souleymane, thank Mariame, Sijh, Mouhamadou, Abdallah and Moimouna for their patience and support.

Shamil Jeppie
Cape Town

Souleymane Bachir Diagne
Chicago

Key dates in the history of the western Bilad al-Sudan

covering present-day Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso and parts of northern Nigeria

300 BC	Jenne-jeno is a growing settlement.
c.AD 600	This century witnesses the early development of the state of Ghana known as Wagadu.
c.600	The Songhay set up markets in Koukaya and Gao on the Niger River.
c.950	Around this time the Arab geographer Ibn Haukal provides a depiction of Ghana and its then capital of Koumbi.
c.990	Awdaghost, an important trading centre, is annexed to the expanding state of Ghana.
c.1000	Ghana is believed to have reached its zenith.
c.1079	The once-prosperous Ghana begins to crumble and in about 1087 devolves into three states.
c.1100	The city of Timbuktu is founded by the Tuareg Imashagan also known as the Kel Tamasheq.
c.1230–1240	Sunjata Keita becomes the king of Mali and in about 1240 conquers and subsequently destroys what is left of the state of Ghana. The state of Mali is then established.
1307	Mansa Musa becomes the new ruler of Mali and successfully extends the reach of the state.
1324	Kankan Musa brings his state to the attention of a much wider Muslim world with his famous pilgrimage to Mecca. He arrives in Cairo with vast quantities of gold and spends lavishly in Egypt.
1325	On his return journey, Kankan Musa stops in Timbuktu and is so impressed with the settlement that he appoints Andalusian architect Abu Ishaq al-Sahili to design Sankore's first mosque, the Jingere-Ber Masjid, as well as a palace for Musa to stay in when visiting. During this period the Malian state also reaches the height of its success and prosperity.
1400	Mali begins to decline.
1465	Sonni 'Ali Ber accedes to the position of ruler of the Songhay state and under his leadership it prospers.
1493–1528	Under Askiya Muhammad Timbuktu becomes a centre of Islamic study and scholarly pursuits while Songhay continues to expand.
1591	The Moroccan army conquers and destroys the Songhay state – chaos and decay ensue.
1660	The Arma, descendants of the Moroccan invaders, sever loyalty to Morocco and begin to rule from Timbuktu.
1712–1755	Rule of Biton Coulibaly over the Bambara kingdom of Ségou.
1766	N'Golo Diarra succeeds Biton after a decade of instability after the latter's death.
c.1800	Diarra conquers Timbuktu.
1810–1844	Chekou Hamadou reigns as head of Masina and establishes a religious state.
1857	Al-Hajj 'Umar Tall invades and conquers the Kaarta state which had been established by Massassi Bambara in the 1400s. Al-Hajj 'Umar conquers the Bambara kingdom of Ségou and Hamdullahi, the capital city of Masina.
1870s–1880s	During this period Senegal assumes the position of France's key African possession.
6 April 1890	Ségou captured by French colonel, Louis Archinard. Later in the same year, the Tukulor army in Kaarta is also defeated.

1897	Timbuktu conquered by the French. The establishment of the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire. The institute is based in Dakar and produced significant research covering what is today known as Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Republic of Benin and Togo.
May 1957	Attacks directed at 'Wahhabis' in Bamako. Most of their property is destroyed. The year of independence: Senegal, Mali, Upper Volta, Mauritania, Niger and Chad all achieve independence from France.
Jan. 1961	Modiba Keita becomes head of government of the newly independent Republic of Mali.
Aug. 1967	Keita introduces the 'cultural revolution', effectively seeking to rid the party of dissenters.
19 Nov. 1968	A coup d'état ends Keita's reign and the Comité Militaire de Liberation Nationale is established, headed by Lieutenant Musa Traoré.
19 June 1979	Elections are held, and Musa Traoré, the only contender presented for the presidency, is subsequently elected president.
1984–1985	Northern Mali experiences severe drought and it is estimated that the Tuareg lose about 70% of their livestock.
9 June 1985	Traoré re-elected.
Dec. 1985	War breaks out between Mali and Burkina Faso over the Agacher Strip. In 1986 the International Court of Justice makes a ruling dividing the strip between the two states.
1990–1991	These years are marked by Tuareg attacks and military reprisals, often on Tuareg civilians. They are also marked by pro-democracy demonstrations.
Mar. 1991	Traoré removed from power through a coup d'état led by Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré.
Aug. 1991	The Swiss are able to confirm that Traoré and his close associates had embezzled \$2 billion.
Mar. 1992	A peace agreement is signed between the government and Tuareg rebels although skirmishes persist.
24 Feb. 1992	Marks the beginning of the electoral process, and on 22 May 1992 Alpha Oumar Konaré is officially declared president.
May 1994	Fearing further attacks by Tuaregs, the Songhay in northern Mali form a militia group.
1995	Peace agreement signed between government and the Tuareg, and thousands of Tuareg refugees return to the country.
May 1997	Mali's second multi-party national elections take place with President Konaré winning re-election.
1998–2002	Konaré wins international praise for his efforts to revive Mali's faltering economy. His adherence to International Monetary Fund guidelines increases foreign investment and helps make Mali the second-largest cotton producer in Africa.
Nov. 2001	President Thabo Mbeki's official visit to Mali and first trip to Timbuktu.
June 2002	Amadou Toumani Touré elected president of Mali. Konaré retired after serving the two five-year terms permitted by the constitution.
2005	A severe locust infestation and drought threatens about 10% of the population with starvation.
June 2006	The government signs a peace treaty ending a Tuareg rebellion earlier in the year. The president promises a significant development and anti-poverty programme for the Tuaregs.
April 2007	Touré is re-elected, winning 68.3% of the vote; his opponent, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, gets 18.6%.



PROLEGOMENA



