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Geographical and Economical Role of Timbuktu in Desert Commerce*

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Timbuktu is considered one of the sanctuaries of Islam in the west of the African continent. A minaret for knowledge and culture emitted rays of light of the Merciful that spread in the regions of black Africa. Its spiritual position caused it to be the metropolis of the country where culture and commerce flourish and enabled it to occupy its scholastic, cultural and religious.

Timbuktu is a blessed city which never experienced polytheism. It became a gathering place for ascetics and the worthy. In addition, it attracted merchants and scholars from all over Western Sudan, Arabic Maghrib and Egypt. People came to it from all directions which led to its flourishing, extension of boundary and buildings. Timbuktu was located in an important strategic center, which was the crossroads where the commercial caravans passed across the desert. It also faced the river Niger that flows into the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, Timbuktu enjoyed both sea caravans and river navigation and that made it a meeting place for a commercial movement that came to it from Egypt, Maghrib and Tripoli through the desert. This city also attracted the attention and description of globetrotters and merchants who described it as the best greatest place because of its unflagging movement, full freedom and the luxury life, which people led. Timbuktu had a big market with

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Flourishing commerce, which satisfied the needs of people.

Timbuktu was the meeting point of all travelers by caravans or boats. Exchange between the North and south became basic. The city played a big role in uniting Berbers and Arabs with the world of Negroes. This role was made easy due to the unique location of Timbuktu that was located on the outlets of the scheme of the tributary streams at the loop of the Niger. There, the Sudanese could collect many products. The caravans that came from the coast were loaded with European commodities such as cotton, gum, silk, gunpowder, spices, sugar, coffee beans, perfume, and tobacco.

Timbuktu used to admit annually a number of small caravans that comprised about sixty, to hundred camels. The commercial fleets were loaded with rice, corn, honey, cola, tobacco, flour, Tamarind, onions, dried fish, and earthen manufactures. The camels carried their loads to the boats, the boats carried their loads to the camels, and thus the city became a meeting axis for commerce between the desert and the river valleys.

To sum up, the city rose because of the journeys made by the Moslem Arab merchants from North Africa to the West of the desert and it became an intersection for the roads coming from the north of the continent to the south. There were roads coming to it form Tafaza, Walato, Jow, Agadeese, Namat, and Egypt.

This study aims for studying the role of Timbuktu in desert commerce through the following axes:

1- The rise and development of Timbuktu.
2- Commercial routes through Timbuktu.
3- The exports and imports through Timbuktu.
4- Commercial processes in Timbuktu.
(1) The rise and Development of Timbuktu

Historians disagreed about the date of Timbuktu’s rise. Some historians link it with the days of the Moslem warrior Abdullah bin Yassin in the eleventh century A.D. He chose it as a place for worship and a league preparing for the spread of Islam in that area. The choice of this place may be for founding Timbuktu was due to well available facilitated residence and gathering of traders who came form North Africa to the south. This city was erected by a group of nocturnal visitors namely nocturnal visitors of Magshar in the year 490 A.H.(1096 A.D.) after the decline of the reputed kingdom of Ghana and the city of Walata. Timbuktu was built as a gathering point for rest \(^{(1)}\) but it developed into a big trading market.

It widened and its buildings extended. Life in it flourished and was always full of new comers and those who depart. It was visited by travelers and explorers like Alhassan ben Alwazan who said that the city was located twelve miles from the river Niger\(^{(2)}\).

The city of Timbuktu was a blessed one, which experienced no polytheism. It appeared as an Islamic city that became the meeting point for abstinent and the worthy. It became the sanctuary of Moslem’s hopes in West Africa. In addition to that, it became the object of attention for scholars, intellectuals from west Sudan, Arabic Maghrib, Egypt and the Islamic World. People came to it form everywhere which helped developing and promoting it.

Timbuktu was located in an important strategic center and it was the meeting point for the roads along which the commercial caravans passed across the desert. It faced the•
river Niger that flows into the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, Timbuktu enjoyed both sea caravans and river navigation. It became a meeting point for a commercial movement coming from Egypt, Maghrib and Tripoli across the desert.

It also enjoyed the description of travelers and traders. Those who inhabited it described it as the best greatest place because of its continuous movement, full freedom and luxury\(^{(3)}\).

This city, acquired a respectable position, and its Moslem inhabitants were respected, honored. It was a city with a multitude of scholars and traders. The names of the other cities became extinct and were forgotten because of Timbuktu\(^{(4)}\).

Delegations of traders and scholars were oriented towards it from all sides of western Sudan where they found their cherished goal, fortified refuge, justice and security. Tribes of different customs united in one bunch. Islam came to Timbuktu pure, unblemished and free from the deeds of paganism and obscurities. That added to its glory and strengthened the bond of intimacy, especially when Arabic language became the means of communication\(^{(5)}\).

There was a big market in the city that was full of commerce and traders from everywhere and it provided all the needs of the citizens. A huge fence surrounded the city to protect it from invaders, as it was located on the edge of the desert. The fence had gates that usually closed after sunset prayers.

The houses were surrounded with orchards of palm trees that added beauty to the city. There were also fascinating halls that attracted people from everywhere who
were seeking knowledge and culture and were enjoying the nice weather. Architecture flourished in Timbuktu during the reign of Mansi Musa who ruled the state of Mali between 712-738 A.H. (1312-1337 A.D.). He happened to bring with him in the aftermath of the famous journey of pilgrimage the Great architect Ishag ben Altowaigan. Because of this architectural movement, which continued during the reign of Askia Dawood, architecture, Arabic language and Maghriban engineering and modern buildings were introduced. The globetrotters and explorers were impressed by the greatness of this city and they described it in their annals referring to the secure quiet life in the city. The globetrotter Deebua who mentioned that its buildings were well organized and based on modern ways expressed the most eloquent description of it.

The above-mentioned facts make clear the commercial fame that Timbuktu acquired and the flourish that it achieved in that arena. That fame attracted traders and travelers from everywhere who came to watch its magic, beauty, wealth and its Islamic grandeur. In all that, it excelled the neighboring cities and became the pearl of country in those middle ages. It became the center of civilization wealth and cultural radiation in the African world and Western Sudan.

Timbuktu continued development until it reached the peak of promotion and wealth in the domains of flourishing commerce and advanced culture. That was due to its location at the meeting point of those desert roads where the commercial caravans from North Africa gathered and met or those ones, which came via the Niger. All that gave
Timbuktu its good reputation and prestige. The flourishing commerce of Timbuktu in salt, gold and copper added to its renown. Commerce and products were transferred from other neighboring cities to Timbuktu that assumed the form of big commercial stores for the commerce of West Sudan. It became one of the biggest Islamic markets in the west of the African continent\textsuperscript{(11)}.

Those caravans used to exhibit their commercial articles in Timbuktu’s multi and specialized commercial shops. Focus was especially on shops owned by artisans, tailors and cloth sellers. Timbuktu also became famous for the commerce of Ostrich feathers; Sudanese textiles and also textiles from Europe which was imported easily due to the city’s location on the river Niger. It became a seaport as well as a land port on the edge of the desert. The rulers of the two states Mali and Sunghai succeeded in dominating it and making its commerce marketable. They could safeguard the means of transport and routes for caravans\textsuperscript{(12)}.

The importance of Timbuktu as a commercial station that exported and imported gained the respect of Magrib and European countries that placed it in the level of international commerce. Commercial articles and products from Europe were sent to it. All that caused Timbuktu to be a source of pride due to its status, location and rank in the Islamic World\textsuperscript{(13)}.

The unique geographical location of Timbuktu between the north and south spelled the growth of commerce in the desert and the organization of commercial caravans that were the outcome of collaboration and contact of nomadic Arab Moslems and Maghribans with western
Sudan, which was frequented, by organized commercial caravans\(^{(14)}\).

Due to all these facilities, Timbuktu became the meeting place for traders and scholars who came to it by land or sea from the desert, or those who came from the two sides of the Niger. There were also those who met to exchange salt and dates. Corn came form Maghrib. Cola and raw gold came form western Sudan. The city soon became the most important market for western Sudan. Trade and the movement of inhabitants and building flourished in it. It became famous as a centre for gathering traders from all directions. All that took place in the aftermath of the spread of Islam in the area of western Sudan which had a great impact on Timbuktu and other cities like Jou, Jeni and others\(^{(15)}\).

The rising city of Jeni turned into huge stores for goods from Maghrib and Europe. It became the first commercial city and the most important market in the Empire of Mali and it became a satellite of Mali after the development of Timbuktu's commerce and markets on which the state depended to support its finance\(^{(16)}\).

Timbuktu reached the zenith of promotion, development and luxury and became a trustworthy commercial market visited by traders and travelers via the river mainly from Tripoli, Morocco and Maghrib. The overgrowth of its markets resulted in the diminishing of other cities and commercial markets like the market of Beer\(^{(17)}\).

Timbuktu's markets were, revived and enriched by those sects and commercial caravans that flowed into them through all directions by day and night. All the routes,
whether they were desert or not, were very important to Western Sudan (18) especially sea and river routes. The location of the area is between the Atlantic Ocean and Lake Chad. River routes link Timbuktu with the outside world through Kibra (or Kabara) which was the main port in Timbuktu. Those routes made easy the speedy passage of caravans and gave them security until they reached the markets of Timbuktu (19).

The best evidence that reflects the respectful status, which the city achieved in economical arena, commercial renown, and peace, are the writings of historians (20).

Commerce developed. Cities and commercial stations spread on the sides of the vast desert. There were a lot of shops and hotels that were erected for traders from every race and color (21).

These hotels, lodgings and squares were meant for merchants and newcomers who did not get permanent houses or special lodgings. That was possible because of the abundance of oases in the desert and the presence of Sinhaj and Limtona tribes who used to loaf in the desert and dominate it. The vivid activity of Timbuktu in all fields drew the attention of rulers and traders in all other countries, especially Maghrib. The traders of Maghrib left their home countries for Timbuktu where they stayed with their families. They prospered there and their commercial activities flourished (22).

The rulers of Timbuktu and Western Sudan in the two empires of Mali and Sunghai appreciated the importance of Timbuktu. They organized their commercial journeys to it and enhanced them with promoted disciplines in administration and security of roads. They achieved a high
status of development in the Sudan. They owned a great commerce in all domains that supplied them with great wealth that became like an imperishable treasure, which would never come to naught. They could reserve that and they could practically dominate the commercial activity and commercial routes. The existence of wells was also a precious thing. They attracted traders and rendered Timbuktu a big station for commercial caravans.

Timbuktu displaced the cities, which were previously flourishing like Jeni, Jou and others. That was due to a rainbow commercial activity in Timbuktu, which helped Timbuktu excel those cities. Timbuktu could send its commercial radiation through the peaceful routes, which were safeguarded by men at different points.

The rulers preferred it to other cities and sates. It became the pearl of the country because of its noted wealth in all fields that the kings and rulers founded in the two empires of Mali and Sunghai.

They founded adequate lodgings and hotels for the accommodation of traders coming from outside Timbuktu.

2- Commercial Routes through Timbuktu:

Commercial routes in the desert multiplied carrying goods to and from Timbuktu. These routes branched off from that coastal route which was used by garrisoned troops. It is the route through which, they spread Islam in that country. Timbuktu is the base of those commercial routes through which traders entered that country. Moved about, in its markets in peace and spread Islamic call.
These routes, which were described by historians, resembled an important luminous aspect in the domain of commerce and traders. They stand for the most important side of Timbuktu’s life and finance. One of these routes is the one that came out of Tunisia, proceeded past the city of Hajara, and then ended in Timbuktu. Then there was the route that started in Maghrib, proceeded past Sijlimasa, Tuwat and ended in Timbuktu\(^{27}\).

There was another route that started at Tagaza and proceeded from Tambukto eastwards to Jou, Agandees, Gat, and to Egypt through Pilgrimage route\(^{28}\).

One of the historians, who lived for sometime in Timbuktu during the reign of Askia Mohammed in Sunghai state, mentioned that one of the routes that led to Tambukto was the route that entered Egypt and then Walata through the south of the desert. It joined Alarbaeen route. The journey along that rout took forty days from Darfur in Eastern Sudan to Asyoot in Southern Egypt. This route was not smoothed but it might be much frequented by traders and pilgrims at that time. The historian asserted that he hadn’t seen that route but he was informed about it by Arab globetrotters who came to Tambukto\(^{29}\).

Barth said that: the commerce of Tambukto had three great routes, they were as follows:

The route that was parallel to the river from the western south side of the river. Commerce imported from other areas came to Tambukto through it. The two other routes were from the north: one from Maghrib and the other from Gadamsis. The river referred to might mean the area of river Niger\(^{30}\).
Caravans loaded with Egyptian manufactures to western Sudan frequented these routes. The caravans were welcomed there. The Egyptian traders brought to Tambukto products, commodities, cloths, textiles, a manufacture which the Egyptian mastered whether they made them themselves or employed agents and businesspersons. The textiles admired in Tambukto and other cities of Western Sudan and were available.

People of Tambukto liked Egyptian textiles very much. One of the traveling historians, who visited Mali in 754 A.H. (1354 A.D), mentioned that they were found even in the bureau of Sultan Mansa of Mali Empire who used them as a distinction and as a sign which he held to show his presence in the Sultan residence.

The Egyptian commercial articles invaded Tambukto’s markets because of their high quality. Likewise, the national products in western Sudan, were highly demanded and admired in Egypt. The most important ones were the products that included gold and copper manufactures, ostrich’s feathers and eggs, ivory, ambergris, and other products that were peculiar to Tambukto like spices, cola plant that was the specialization of some traders from Tambukto and Jeni.

Tambukto enjoyed commercial relations with Maghrib, which was the nearest country to Tambukto because of mutual boundaries. People of Maghrib were the most important agents for Tambukto. There was an active commerce and exchange of finances during the reigns of Mali and Sunghai under the rule of Mansa Musa. The relations were strengthened when Mansa Musa sent a delegation to Sultan Abu Alhassan Almuraini (7442-762...
A.H.) to congratulate him on his victory over Ali ben Zayan\(^{(35)}\). They exchanged precious presents. There was an embassy in Tambukto resembling the Sulatan of Maghrib Abu Alhassan chaired by ben Ghana. Mansa Musa passed away and was succeeded by Mansa Sulaiman (742-762 A.H.-1341-1360 A.D.) who built a strong friendship with Sulatan Abu Alhassan Almoraini.

The commercial routes facilitated commerce between Maghrib and Tambukto. In very Sudanese town, many Mahbribans were either scholars or teachers\(^{(36)}\).

The commerce consisted of salt, the precious metal that people could not do without it. They were brought in the form of slates from Tagaza through secure routes. There were also slates carrying beads, ornaments, dates, textiles, wool and ivory. Copper and cattle were also imported. Traders took from Tambukto gold, metal products, agricultural products and slaves to serve in Maghrib\(^{(37)}\).

Commerce relations developed and crops, commodities and products were taken from Tambukto to other markets. Those exports transcended local markets to European markets which also used to send their commodities to Western Sudan and Tambukto in private\(^{(38)}\).

Italy was one of the European countries which were impressed by Tambukto when the Italian traders watched the pilgrimage journey of Mansa Musa (724 A.H.-1324 A.D.) in Cairo. Those were traders from Florence, Genoa, and Venice. Italy was linked with Northern Africa (Egypt and Maghrib) through the Mediterranean Sea; and with Tambukto through the Atlantic Ocean and the river Niger. The Italians Manufactures were famous and desired in Tambukto specially those imported from Genoa, Venice and
Florence. A famous European globetrotter Florenteen Bindtodi, who visited Tambukto in 875 A.H. (1470 A.D), described its relation with Europe and its cultural, commercial activities

3. Important Exports and Imports of Timbuktu:

    Timbukto was famous for being rich because of abundance of raw gold which came to it form Wungara south of Tambukto; and copper metal form Takda east of Tambukto. Sometimes salt, the important product, came to it form salt mines in Tafaza in the desert which yielded to sunghai rule during the rain of Askia Mohammed

    This mountainous salt played a primary role in the promoting of commerce and finance of Tambukto. Many wars broke between rulers of Tambukto and the rulers of Maghrib because of salt. The most famous war was the invasion of Tambukto in the year 999 A.H. (1590 A.D) by the Sultan of Maghrib Almansoor Althahabi for the seizure of salt mines.

    Timbuktu was tantamount to a chief store for commerce which was exported to Egypt, Maghrib and Europe and that was the evidence of Timbuktu’s unique strategic position. It resembled the fortified castle that supplied the treasure of the country with money. Guard points on the sides of the commercial routes safeguarded its commerce.

    Timbuktu’s markets were full of shops and other buildings, which were spacious enough for all the needs of life. There were cotton cloth sellers, weavers’ shops, shoemakers’ shops and hides’ shops.
There were also the sites of doctors, judges, goldsmiths, copyists and sellers of books, and other sites necessary for daily life and cultural activities in Timbuktu. These shops and sites were divided among their users according to their professions.

This showed the level Timbuktu reached in the domains of administration, craft of selling, buying, and good treatment in markets and in life as general. All this was an evidence of good governance and successful administration of the rulers of the two empires of Mali and Sunghai in Tambukto (43).

The commerce comprised the selling of spun and weaved cotton, pearls, hide products, elephant tusks, ivory, ostrich eggs and feathers, which were sold for high prices abroad. Its shops were available in Tambukto that also exported ostrich fats, which were used as a medicine, and imported silk, cotton, and wool fabrics (44).

Timbuktu’s markets also included Sudan plant that was sold or exchanged with salt. It might be eaten fresh or ground. Pearl millet was also found in Tambukto. Pumpkins were also sold in Tambukto for food or for making utensils (45).

The widespread commerce of slavery was practiced in Tambukto. Slaves were brought form pagan tribes in Howsa country or from other Moslem neighboring countries. That class of slaves was treated kindly as Islam preached. Ibn Battota, the globetrotter, happened to buy a slave form there so as to serve him in the city of Tukda (46).

There were shops for the products and derivatives of milk, gee, and butter. They were cheap and found in abundance. They had a nourishing value for children and
adults. There were also the markets of butchers and meat sellers who slaughtered cows, camels. They sold meat fresh or jerked and they made use of hides in manufacture activities such as swords’ sheaths, hide bags, clothes and houses’ roofs.

Hides might be exported in their raw form to Maghrib, specially the hide of the licking animal. Wood commerce existed in Tambukto and it was sold for copper flakes. Traders played a great role in the development of Tambukto finance.

The Sultan’s treasure was enriched with many revenues from taxes. Charity money subscribed by traders reflected the good character of the trader and his respectful position in the society. Traders also presented gifts on many occasions. An example of that were the presents and gifts received by Omer, the judge of Tambukto on the birth of his male baby. Guest traders offered the presents and gifts. Their value was estimated as one thousand muskals of gold (A muskal is equal to 4.68 grams) \(^{(40)}\).

The traders affected the daily social life in Tambukto positively. The Judge Omer ben Mohammed Alnadi married his two daughters to two brother traders and that was because of their social and financial status \(^{(49)}\).

The traders resembled an important agent that helped the ruling regime achieve many installations such as building roads for commercial caravans that developed finance through payment of taxes, head taxes (jizia), and alms. All these resources reinforced finance and security in Tambukto and all the cities of the two empires of Mali and Sunghai \(^{(50)}\).
In other words, these taxes and alms were a source of opulence for both the ruler and the subjects. They enabled Timbuktu to keep its high status and play the great role in the development of Western Sudan.\(^{51}\)

As to the imports of Tambukto, they were the famous original, Arabic horses of good descendant from Maghrib and Egypt. They were brought with the caravans and were left at Tambukto for about twelve days until the king who would choose what suited him from them and would pay the due price\(^{52}\) suit them.

Salt was also brought from the cities of Tagaza and Teloduini in Maghrib. It resembles an important element in the commerce of Tambukto’s markets. They did not use money but they practiced barter trade and compensations. They also used gold. Salt was also used for paying like gold and silver. Salt was important because it was brought in the form of big plates for building houses and mosques. Copper, which came from Takda, was also available in abundance.\(^{54}\)

Copper was found in other areas according to Moni, the French archeologist, who discovered ruins of copper mines near Takda.

Cotton, silk, woolen cloth came to Tambukto from Maghrib, Egypt and Europe. Perfumes such as musk were brought from maghrib and they yielded a lot of profit. Tambukto's market also imported dates from Wargala Dukwat and ornaments and glass for making cups.\(^{55}\)

Seashells were also used in Tambukto as a currency and as a commercial article; Maghrhibans brought it from India to Western Sudan.

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Major books that were brought to Tambukto form Maghrib and Egypt were in themselves an important commercial profitable commodity. Sultans in Mali and Sunghai were very keen on knowledge and copying of books. They founded a stationary business and there were shops for that\(^{(56)}\).

Tanned or manufactured hides that were brought to Tambukto in addition to what it already had, were very important for the manufacture of shoes, sandals, and saddles.

Sword and other iron manufactures were also brought by Maghribans and were paid for by gold. Tambukto also imported form Maghrib dried fruits such opuntia and raisins.

Expensive dyes came from Egypt and Maghrib. Corn was brought by Maghriban traders to meet the need of citizens in western Sudan specially in the areas that presented services for commercial caravans. They got free little amounts of it, Tambukto also received great numbers of camels loaded with copper, glass, wool, pearls and perfumes\(^{(57)}\).

Tambukto also imported all kinds of fruits, which were not known before, and it received the exports of Europe; some of them were cotton, blue, cotton cloth, weapons, gunpowder, utensils, paper, scissors, needles, pearls, mirrors, silk, ambergris, corals, daisy, spices, sugar, tea, coffee beans, and tobacco, Teapots, tins of snuff, date, mat, caftans, and cloaks\(^{(58)}\).

A nice phenomenon in Timbuktu’s market was listening to holy Qorran recitors sitting at roads and reciting in their simple way. The markets were always

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crowded with merchants and brokers who worked in the commerce of cattle, dates, cloth and gold.

The most important thing that drew the attention of one who walked in Timbuktu’s markets was the meticulous banking system which was founded by Arab traders. It enabled traders to get guarantee letters, which enabled them to contact countries of North Africa, Egypt and Maghrib (59).

The big market of Tambukto was divided in different shops and there was a small market for selling meat. Women were seen sitting on mats beside baskets and cages for selling vegetables and spices. It was noticeable that the contracts of buying and selling were begun with the bargaining, the ratio of profit be counted according to the legitimate rule of alms.

4- Commercial Intercourse in Tambukto:

The currency in use in Tambukto was pure raw gold which was paid for profitable expensive commodities which enriched the finance of the country specially Mali whose reputation reached Europe (61). Nevertheless, sometimes, raw gold, which was not manufactured or sealed, resembled half the value of exchange by salt when few commercial caravans reached Tambukto (62).

In the case of cheap commodities such as honey, bread, milk, pieces of copper and iron were used as a currency. These pieces were of different weights. They ranged from a quarter or half a pound up to full pound (63).

There was also the material of sea shells which were used in commerce and as an ornament and was called (kodi). Commercial intercourse was through salt, sea shells and smelted copper (64).
Cost of things differed according to prices of different things. Sea shells were used by caravans as a commodity and to buy simple things. It was used as a currency in commercial intercourse and daily life. It was counted in hundreds and thousands. Fathers paid a lot of it to have their children taught the recitation of the holy Koran. Sea shells' number might amount to thousands and it resembled a significant intercourse in the two states of Mali and Sunghai.

Egyptians and Maghriban traders (65) brought it from India and east Africa.

European commerce competed with Maghriban commerce in sea shells commerce. Treatment in it increased because it was profitable. It entered financial and social life in Tambukto. In some tribes, marriage would not take place unless the groom paid forty thousand sea shells. (66)

Al hassan ben Al wazan witnessed sea shells used in buying and selling as a local currency. He mentioned that they were snails brought from Persia (67).

Seashells transcended the boundaries of Mali, Sunghai and western Sudan to Egypt and other countries. It was used as a currency in Egypt. Sea shells were also used as a currency versus the gold muskal which as equal to three thousand shells. The historian of Tambukto Judge Ka’at saw the Boskari dates spread on mats for sale. Every ten dates were sold for five shells. Sea shells entered every field even the erection of mosques.

The treasure of the state was placed in the domain of the king in Tambukto. It was a huge treasure containing the currency, which was in the form of ingots. One of them might weigh one thousand and three hundred pounds (68).
Ibn Khaldoon estimated the weight of the gold ingot or stone in the treasure of the Sultan to be twenty kantars where as Almagreezi said that there was gold brick that weighed thirty pounds.

Gold played an important role in the finance of Western Sudan specially during the reigns of Mansa Musa in the empire of Mali and Askia Mohammed in the empire of Sunghai to the extent that a village like Tagaza experienced commercial treatments of kantars of raw gold\(^{(69)}\).

During his pilgrimage journey in 724 A.H – 1323 A.D., Mansa Musa and his procession carried great quantities of pure gold which caused the price of gold in Egypt to decline and that impressed Eastern and European worlds\(^{(70)}\).

Askia Mohammed, the Sultan of Sunghai also went on a pilgrimage journey in 902 A.H. (1496 A.D.). His procession and the gold he took and spent during that holy journey were not less than those of his predecessor Mansa Musa.

Although gold was abundant and always poured into the treasure of the country, Als’ad, a historian and a citizen of Tambukto, mentioned that its kings never touched that metal\(^{(71)}\). They were nicknamed ‘Kings of Gold’. It was said to be grown on the shore of Niger and was harvested like a crop. The sheaths of the swords of the king’s interpreters and hands of women’s head were made of gold\(^{(72)}\).

Because gold was valuable, it was weighed by the Sudanese muskal which was equal to 4.238 grams. One of the historians in Tambukto mentioned that a muskal was
equal to a Roman ounce and that the Roman ounce weighed thirty six Sudanese dinars.(73) 

Another historian and a citizen of Tambukto mentioned that a muskal was equal to 72 weights of barley or one eighth of an ounce of gold. Others said that gold was evaluated by the value of drachmas and that the Roman muskal (solidus) was equal to the dinar(74).

Gold was used to buy everything. Ibn Battota used it to buy a servant for whom he paid twenty-five muskals of gold. Gold enabled Western Sudan to occupy its position in the international map when Mansa Musa went on his pilgrimage journey in 724 A.H.- 1328 A.D. (75). 

One of the oddities about gold was what Mansa Musa said when he came to Egypt. He said that there were tow kinds of gold: one that grew on rocks and its leaves were like grass or herbage, which was the origin of raw gold. It was harvested in spring and was expensive and the best. The other kind existed on trodden areas on the banks of the river Niger and was harvested throughout the year.

Western Sudan was the chief source that supplied Western World with gold. Gold was borne on men's heads form areas of production in Wangara to Jeni and on gold boats from it. It was a circulating currency, which was also used as ornaments and for decoration. This precious metal lost its value upon the Maghriban invasion to Tambukto when people escaped as a result of the attack.

A mother would sacrifice a basin full of gold so as to be protected form Maghriban soldiers but in vain(76).

Gold commerce strengthened the commercial relations between Western Sudan and Maghrib for centuries. Sometimes, it led to the breaking of those relations because
of the competence over obtaining it from mines which resulted in wars and destruction when Almansoor Althahabi’s soldiers occupied Tambukto in 999 A.H. (1590 A.D.) (77).

Commercial interaction in Western Sudan and Tambukto in private comprised the usage of legal instruments. Ibn Howgal witnessed the instruments carried by a trader from Magrib. They were equal to forty two thousand dinars. They were akin to cheques of today. Deboa mentioned that Arab traders introduced the system of treatment of commercial banks so that traders could get guarantee letters which would enable them to contact North Africa commercially (78).

There was also the system of barter and compensations, which was the exchange of commodities. One of the historians saw that during his visit to Tambukto. He said it was that not necessary for him to carry dinars, drachmas, money or supplies during his journey. He was only to carry pieces of salt or glass or perfum commodities, which were popular among people, especially women.

Thus one could get his needs through barter which people used in Tambukto to facilitate the movement of buying and selling (79).

The forms and styles of treatment in commerce multiplied and they comprised currencies, weights, measures, and dry measures (80).

Conclusion:

The above presentation of Timbuktu’s geographical and financial role in desert commerce and promotion of the two states of Mali and Sunghai, justifies its being one of the
important cultural and commercial cities and an important sanctuary for Islam. It became a minaret for knowledge and culture spreading light in all regions of the African continent, specially the west of the desert. Its mosques acquired a respected scholastic religious position. The value of this city is appreciated at the present.

It is hailed as the capital of Islamic culture this year. It also hosted the celebration of the Prophet’s noble birthday on the twelfth of Rabie the first. The Libyan leader invited thousand of Moslems from all over the Islamic world to come to Tumbukto to revive the grandeur of the city through the celebration of the aromatic anniversary. Big crowds of people responded and performed the prayers of sunset and nightfall collectively.

Thus, Libya assured the greatness of Islam and the grandeur of this city, which gained extra honor from this big Islamic forum under the auspices of the Libyan leader who revived the greatness of the city, which conveyed the Islamic mission and culture to the heart of the African continent. The mosques of this city played a great role in spreading Islam and its culture in those areas.

The city became a big school form that scholars and religious men graduated. Its university acquired a position that was competent with the Noble Azhar, Zaitona’s Mosque and Qarawiyieen college and mosque in Fez.

This cultural and scholastic movement in Tumbukto is more important than its commercial role in the west of the continent. That role can be summed up as follows:

1- The rise of the city was the result of the journeys of the Arab Moslem traders from North Africa to the west of the desert. These
journeys facilitated the rise of the city due to its strategic position.

2- According to this location, Tambukto was the meeting point of the routes from the east and east. These routes facilitated the spread of goods and commodities and the markets were flooded with goods from different areas especially from Egypt. The city became a store for commerce and a site for exports and imports. The fame of the city, the richness of the traders and the revival of commerce added positively to the significance of the city. The settle of the city developed the intellectual and scholastic movement and commercial renown,

3- The flourishing of commerce led to the rise of a meticulous banking system founded by Arab traders. Contracts of selling and buying followed the Islamic system taking into account the legitimate ratio for alms and other issues.

4- Because of the great economical development of the city, globetrotters and explorers frequented it. They described the greatness of the city. Alhassan Alwazan was impressed by the promotion of the city. Travelers, like Henery Barth, praised it. Felix Deboa wrote a book about this obscure city that was wonderful in all fields.

5- The study treated all the aspects of economical life in this city and gave details about the commodities that were exchanged: hide
products, elephant tusk, feathers and eggs of ostriches, in addition to silk, cotton and woolen textiles. Beside that, the city experienced commerce in slavery. Slaves were brought from pagan areas or during attack on the boundaries of local states. This commerce diminished in areas where Tambukto played a main role in the spread of Islam. A combat against this commerce took place because it was contrary to the virtues of Islam.

6- The study asserted the rank of this city that rose as an Islamic bond in western Africa. It developed and its scholastic position flourished through four centuries. The city unique geographical position, was an important factor in the settlement of traders and scholars, who inhabited it and participated in its development until it became a metropolis of an Islamic empire where all enjoyed a prosperous life before the Maghribian invasion in 1591, which put an end to a great city that participated in the development of cultural, commercial and economical life.

Debo referred to all that in detail in his book about this pearl and capital after the Moroccan invasion. Attention and support of Islamic leaderships and the Libyan leadership, which is aware of the importance of the city, are now hoped for.
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