

# The wealth of Africa The kingdom of Mali

## 5: HOW IMPORTANT WAS LEARNING IN THE KINGDOM OF MALI?

Timbuktu was renowned throughout the Muslim world as a center of learning. There was an intellectual Muslim elite in the city, and many people had private libraries and were prepared to pay highly for the books the Tuareg traders brought from the north.

### Source 1

During the 16th century, Timbuktu housed as many as 150 to 180 Qur'anic schools, where basic reading and recitation of the Qur'an were taught. The schools had an estimated peak of 4,000 to 5,000 students.

Singleton 2004: 3

### Source 3

As a centre of intellectual achievement, Timbuktu earned a place next to Cairo and other leading North African cities.

Dubois 1897: 285

### Source 4

At that time Timbuktu came to the level of some of the great Muslim cities in the intensity of its intellectual life. In one [Qur'anic school] 123 writing boards were counted.

Levtzion 1977: 417

### Source 6

There are in Timbuktu numerous judges, teachers and priests, all appointed by the king. He greatly respects learning. Many hand-written books imported from North Africa are also sold. There is more profit made from them than from all other goods.

Leo Africanus c. 1526

### Source 7

Salt comes from the north, gold from the south, and silver from the country of the white men, but the word of God and the treasures of wisdom are only to be found in Timbuktu.

Sudanese proverb, quoted in Singleton 2004: 1



Source 2: Arabic manuscript (20th century)  
British Museum



Source 5: Wooden writing board (20th century)  
British Museum