

The wealth of Africa The kingdom of Mali

8: Change and Continuity

Source 1

'It's getting more difficult because the rains aren't coming, the oases are drying up and the camels get tired and thirsty and can't continue,' he said. Camel caravans have been plying their trade between Taoudenni and Timbuktu for centuries. Mr Bekay used to do the same journey in a caravan of more than 200 camels. It took 45 days to make the round-trip; by truck he can do it in 10 days - provided his gearbox does not fail again.

Harding 2010

Source 2

After twenty-five days [from Sijilmasa] we reached Taghaza, an unattractive village, with the curious feature that its houses and mosques are built of blocks of salt, roofed with camelskins. There are no trees there, nothing but sand. In the sand is a salt mine; they dig for the salt, and find it in thick slabs, lying one on top of the other, as though they had been tool-squared and laid under the surface of the earth. A camel will carry two of these slabs.

Ibn Battuta (1352). in Hamdun & King 1998: 30

Source 3

The miners spend the milder six months of the year scratching the surface of an ancient sea-bed with homemade axes. They live in salt huts, drink salt water, and die young.

Harding 2009

Source 4

For Tuareg, the salt caravan is not something just for money, it is tradition 'If in your life you do not do it once or twice you are not considered Tuareg. So for me [the trucks mean] the end of Tuareg culture. I am not saying the camels will disappear, but I'm very worried that in three to five years all the salt caravans will be by truck.'

Harding 2010

Source 5

An illustration of Timbuktu was drawn in 1830 by René-Auguste Caillié, the first European to visit the fabled city and survive to describe it.

© The Granger Collection, New York



Source 6

Calligrapher and Copyist Buboubacar Sadeck teaches students the art of ancient calligraphy on a Timbuktu rooftop, September 8, 2009. All of that knowledge has been preserved in manuscripts written out by men like Buboubacar since the 11th century. Since the resurgence of interest in the manuscripts of Timbuktu, students are learning the art of calligraphy as both an artistic and economic exercise.

getty images, Brent Stirton 2009

