



The Civilizational Impact of Scholarly and Pilgrimage Journeys from the Western Sudan during the middle Ages: An Analytical Study through Three Selected Cases

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Abstract :

This study examines the civilizational impact of the scholarly and pilgrimage journeys undertaken by scholars from the Western Sudan during the Middle Ages, highlighting their role in enriching the cultural and religious landscape and strengthening connections with the Islamic world. The study focuses on three main cases: the journey of Yahya ibn Ibrahim al-Juddali, which contributed to the dissemination of religious knowledge and laid the foundations for a reform movement that paved the way for the establishment of the Almoravid state; the famous pilgrimage of Mansa Musa, which demonstrated the political and economic standing of the Mali Empire at the international level; and the journey of Askia al-Hajj Muhammad, which reinforced the religious authority of the Songhai Sultanate and contributed to strengthening its relations with the Islamic East. The study demonstrates that these journeys transcended their religious and scholarly dimensions, playing a pivotal role in the transmission of knowledge and the exchange of cultures, thereby consolidating the position of the Western Sudan in the history of Islamic civilization during the Middle Ages.

Keywords: Yahya ibn Ibrahim al-Juddali; Mansa Musa; Askia al-Hajj Muhammad; journeys; pilgrimage; Western Sudan; cultural communication; civilizational impact; Islamic civilization.

Received: 02 July 2026

Revised: 06 August 2026

Accepted: 29 August 2026

Introduction

The journey is one of the human phenomena that played a prominent role in the transmission of knowledge and the exchange of cultures among peoples. Its importance increased during the Middle Ages, when it served as a means of scholarly and religious communication and provided a window through which people could gain insight into ways of life in different societies. Journeys were not limited to scholars and jurists; they also involved rulers and merchants, making them a pivotal element of cultural, economic, and social life.

Within this context, scholarly and pilgrimage journeys in the Western Sudan during the Middle Ages emerged as part of a historical and civilizational movement that provided the inhabitants of the region with opportunities to communicate with the wider Islamic world. In view of their diverse dimensions, this study raises the following research problem: How did the scholarly and pilgrimage journeys of scholars from the Western Sudan during the Middle Ages contribute to enriching the region's civilizational and cultural landscape, and what were the religious, scholarly, and political dimensions that characterized them?

To address this research problem, the researcher adopted a plan based on the study of three main cases. The first examines the journey of Yahya ibn Ibrahim al-Juddali, focusing on its motivations and its impact on the dissemination of religious knowledge. The second examines the famous pilgrimage of Mansa Musa and the political and cultural significance it carried. The third is devoted to studying the journey of Askia al-Hajj Muhammad and its impact on consolidating religious authority and strengthening ties with the Islamic world.

The study was based on the descriptive approach to analyze the historical and social contexts associated with these journeys, alongside the analytical approach to identify their various dimensions and civilizational significance. The inductive approach was also employed in some instances to infer the impact of these journeys on Western Sudanese society. This contributed to providing a comprehensive reading that highlights their significance within the trajectory of scholarly and religious activity during the Middle Ages.

First: The Journey of Yahya ibn Ibrahim al-Juddali

Yahya ibn Ibrahim al-Juddali¹ belonged to the Judala tribe, one of the tribes of the Western Sahara Sanhaja confederation. This tribe, together with two other Sanhaja tribes, the Lamtuna² and the Massufa,³ succeeded in forming a kind of Saharan confederation in the 3rd century AH/9th century CE. This confederation continued until the 5th century AH/11th century CE, when its leadership was assumed by Yahya ibn Ibrahim al-Juddali.

Yahya ibn Ibrahim attracted the attention of numerous geographers and historians, primarily because of his pilgrimage to the House of God Almighty and the immediate and long-term consequences of this journey in the Maghreb, the Sahara, and the Western Sudan.⁴

Upon assuming leadership of the Saharan Sanhaja confederation, Yahya ibn Ibrahim set out on pilgrimage, as recorded by his contemporary, the geographer al-Bakri,⁵ and subsequently confirmed by those who wrote about Yahya ibn Ibrahim after him. As for determining the exact date of this journey, it cannot be established with certainty because of discrepancies among the accounts. It is most likely that the journey took place in 430 AH/1038 CE.

The leader of the Saharan Sanhaja confederation, Yahya ibn Ibrahim al-Juddali, set out to perform the pilgrimage, accompanied by a group of the leaders of his people. He departed from the Sahara, crossing the territories of his Judala tribe along the trans-Saharan trade caravan route,⁶ which was also used by pilgrims. The route proceeded northward toward the far western Maghreb, then the central and eastern Maghreb (Ifriqiya), and from there to Egypt and the Hijaz, both on the outward and return journeys. Along this pilgrimage route, pilgrim caravans would stop in renowned cities to rest and provision themselves.

On his return from pilgrimage, Yahya ibn Ibrahim al-Juddali and his companions visited the city of Kairouan,⁷

¹ Ibn al-Khatib, L. (1964). *History of the Maghreb in the Middle Ages* (Part Three of *Deeds of Notables*). Edited and annotated by A. M. Al-Ayadi & M. I. Al-Kettani. Dar al-Kitab, p. 226. See also: Hajiyat, A. H., et al. (2007). *A reference book on the history of Algeria in the Middle Ages*. National Center for Studies and Research on the History of the National Movement and the Revolution of November 1, 1954, p. 164.

² Al-Qalqashandi, A. A. A. ibn A. (1982). *Necklaces of Pearls: An Introduction to the Tribes of the Arabs of the Age*. Edited and introduced by I. Al-Abyari. Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 2nd ed., p. 171

³ Musofa, or Imsoufa, was a Berber tribe and one of the prominent branches of Sanhaja, the large Amazigh confederation that played a central role in the history of North Africa. The tribe was particularly influential in religious and political movements, especially during the Almoravid period, when it contributed significantly to the unification of the Islamic Maghreb and participated in the conquest of al-Andalus under Yusuf ibn Tashfin. The Musofa initially settled in the desert regions extending across present-day southern Algeria, northern Mali, and Mauritania, particularly around Takrur and Timbuktu. Its members became renowned for their expertise in trans-Saharan trade, making the tribe an important link in the movement of commodities such as gold and salt between North and West Africa.

⁴ A vast region of West Africa was historically known as *Bilad al-Sudan*. Its boundaries extended clearly westward and southward to the Atlantic Ocean, giving it considerable strategic importance. To the east, however, its boundaries were not clearly defined and were subject to natural and demographic changes. To the north, the region gradually merged into the Sahara, where clear geographical divisions disappeared and were replaced by a vast continuous space encompassing diverse natural and climatic environments. See: Trimingham, J. S. (1964). *Islam in West Africa*. Oxford University Press, p. 1.

⁵ Al-Bakri, A. U. A. ibn A. ibn M. (1992). *The Routes and Kingdoms*. Translated by A. van Leeuwen & A. Ferré. Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Vol. 2, p. 352.

⁶ See Appendix No. (1).

⁷ Kairouan is an Islamic city in North Africa, founded by the famous Arab commander Uqba ibn Nafi al-Fihri in 50 AH. It was the first major station in the Islamic conquest of the Maghreb. The early conquerors made it a principal base for expanding the conquest, which later enabled it to become an

which was at that time a major center of culture and intellectual life in the Maghreb. There, specifically in its ancient mosque, known as the “Mosque of Kairouan,” Yahya ibn Ibrahim attended a scholarly gathering held by the Maliki jurist Abu Imran al-Fasi al-Ghafjumi.¹ Al-Bakri, who was a contemporary of this journey, and a number of later traditional historians recorded what transpired during this encounter between Yahya and Abu Imran. Of particular relevance here is the outcome of this meeting: Yahya came to realize the limited knowledge he and his people possessed of Islamic doctrine. He therefore urged Abu Imran to send one of his disciples with him to teach him and his Sanhaja people the correct principles of Islam. Abu Imran found none of his disciples willing to undertake this task. He therefore directed Yahya to one of his disciples, the jurist Wajjaj ibn Zallu (Zalwi) al-Lamti, who headed a school of Maliki jurisprudence known as Dar al-Murabitin in Melkus, in the Sous region of the far western Maghreb, and asked him to assist Yahya in fulfilling his request. Yahya ibn Ibrahim then travelled to Wajjaj, where he found what he was seeking. Wajjaj recommended the jurist Abdullah ibn Yasin al-Jazuli² to accompany Yahya to the territories of the Sanhaja tribes³ in the Sahara in order to teach them the correct principles of Islam.⁴ In 434 AH/1042 CE, Abdullah ibn Yasin and his followers—who had been given the name “Almoravids”—launched an active movement to call the neighboring tribes to Islam.⁵

It is worth noting that after Abdullah ibn Yasin encountered strong opposition in Shinqit, he moved to an isolated island in Senegal with Yahya ibn Ibrahim and some of his followers, where he established a ribat (religious retreat) that became a center for his reformist mission. It soon attracted supporters, who came to

important destination for scholars from various parts of the Islamic world. Its reputation flourished as a center of civilization and scholarly and cultural development within the context of Arab and Islamic culture. See: Al-Masudi, A. A. ibn A. (1985). *The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*. Edited by A. A. Al-Turki. Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1st ed., Vol. 1, London, p. 112.

¹ Abu Imran was the eminent imam and scholar of Kairouan, Musa ibn Abi Hajaj al-Barbari, al-Ghafjumi, al-Zanati, al-Fasi, and al-Maliki, one of the leading scholars of his age. According to Ibn Abd al-Barr, he was born in 368 AH. He studied under Abu al-Hasan al-Qabisi, one of his foremost students. After traveling to al-Andalus, he studied under Abu Muhammad al-Asili, attended the scholarly sessions of Abd al-Warith ibn Sufyan, and studied under Sa'id ibn Nasr and Ahmad ibn al-Qasim al-Taharti. He subsequently settled in Kairouan, where he taught, issued legal opinions, and transmitted Prophetic traditions. He died on 13 Ramadan 430 AH. See: Al-Dhahabi, S. D. M. ibn A. ibn U. (2001). *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Noble Figures*. Al-Risalah Foundation, Vol. 17, pp. 545–546.

² Abd Allah ibn Yasin ibn Makuk ibn Sirin ibn Ali al-Jazuli is said, according to Al-Bakri, to have originated from the town of Tamamanawt, located on the outskirts of the Ghanaian desert. He studied under the Soussi jurist Wajjaj ibn Zallu al-Lamti and later traveled to al-Andalus during the period of the Taifa kingdoms, where he remained for seven years studying the religious sciences. He became one of Wajjaj ibn Zallu's most distinguished students. When Abu Imran al-Fasi asked his student Wajjaj to send a jurist with the leader of the Jadala tribe, Yahya ibn Ibrahim, to teach his people the principles of their religion, Abd Allah ibn Yasin was selected because of his knowledge of his tribe's traditions and customs and of the desert environment. According to Ibn Abi Zar, Abd Allah ibn Yasin died on Sunday evening, 24 Jumada al-Awwal 451 AH/1059 CE. He was buried at a place known as Karifla in Tamesna, near Rabat, where a mosque was later built over his grave. See: Al-Bakri, A. U. A. (n.d.). *Morocco in the Account of the Lands of Ifriqiya and the Maghreb*. Dar al-Kitab al-Islami, p. 165. See also: Ibn Abi Zar, A. H. A. ibn M. ibn A. ibn U. (1917). *The Entertaining Companion in the Garden of the Pages: An Account of the Kings of Morocco and the History of Fez*. Edited by J. Tornberg. Uppsala, p. 132.

³ Sanhaja is considered one of the largest Berber tribal confederations and is divided into numerous branches, including Balkana, Anjafa, Shurta, Lamtuna, Musofa, Jadala, Mandlasi, Banu Wart, and Banu Yatin. The Anjafa branch itself included subdivisions such as Banu Mazwat, Banu Tathlib, Qastala, and Malwaqa. According to some Berber genealogists and historians, these branches numbered approximately seventy. According to Ibn al-Kalbi and al-Tabari, the land of Sanhaja extended into the Sahara and required approximately six months of travel to reach. The most important of its branches was Balkana, from which the first king of Sanhaja emerged. These tribes were active in various areas of the central Maghreb and Ifriqiya, with some branches, such as Balkana, inhabiting mountainous and settled regions, while others, such as Musofa, Shurta, and Jadala, inhabited desert regions and became known for camel breeding in arid environments. See: Ibn Khaldun, A. R. (1981). *The Book of Lessons and Record of Beginnings and Events in the History of the Arabs, Persians, Berbers, and Their Contemporaries of Great Authority*. Revised by S. Zakkar. Dar al-Fikr, 1st ed., Vol. 6, Beirut, p. 202.

⁴ Al-Bakri, A. U. Op. Cit., Vol. 6, pp. 574–575.

⁵ Atta Allah, S., & Abd al-Razzaq, A. (2012). *Modern and Contemporary History of North and West Africa*. Dar al-Ma'rifa al-Jami'iyya, p. 19.

be known as the Almoravids (al-Murabitun) because of their adherence to this ribat. He later called upon them to engage in jihad in the cause of God to spread the religious mission and combat tyranny. They succeeded in subjugating several tribes, including the Judala, Lamtuna, and Massufa. Following the death of Yahya ibn Ibrahim in 447 AH, Yahya ibn Umar of the Lamtuna tribe was appointed leader of the Almoravids, who continued their conquests and the propagation of their mission.¹

Second: Mansa Musa's Golden Pilgrimage (724 AH/1324 CE)²

Sultan Mansa Musa was one of the greatest sultans of the Mali Empire. Ibn Khaldun described him as a righteous man and a great king whose reputation for justice was widely known. The kingdom reached unprecedented greatness during his reign; he conquered many lands and spread Islam throughout them.³

His pilgrimage caravan is regarded as one of the most spectacular pilgrimage processions to have arrived in Egypt during the eighth century AH.⁴ The number of people accompanying the caravan exceeded ten thousand,⁵ including five hundred enslaved persons, each carrying a staff made of gold, collectively valued at approximately four million pounds.⁶ The reason for bringing such a large number of enslaved persons was that they served the sultan and his entourage along the route and assisted the soldiers in protecting the caravan in the event of potential attacks. It was customary among the people of the Sudan to take enslaved persons with them for these same reasons, but primarily to exchange them in the markets of Egypt—and perhaps those of the Hijaz as well—in order to obtain currency with which they could cover the expenses of their pilgrimage journey in Egypt and the Hijaz.⁷

The pilgrimage caravan of Mansa Musa departed from Niani, the capital,⁸ passing through Mema, Walata, Taghaza, Tuat, Ouargla, Ghadames, Tripoli, Alexandria, and finally Cairo, where the Sudanese caravan joined the Egyptian pilgrimage caravan to Mecca. On the return journey, the route ran from Cairo to Ghadames, then to Kukiya, followed by Timbuktu, and finally to the capital, Niani. The author of *Tarikh al-Fattash*, Mahmud Kati, states that Sultan Musa was accompanied by his wife during this pilgrimage journey.⁹

Mansa Musa, Sultan of the Mali Empire, departed for Mecca in 1324 CE.¹⁰ His pilgrimage demonstrated the extent of the wealth that a privileged minority could acquire through such means. His lavish spending during his passage through Cairo caused considerable disruption to the currency market. As al-Umari states: "Gold had been highly valued until Mansa Musa came to Egypt that year, when the mithqal was worth no less than twenty-five dirhams, and generally more. From that time onward, however, its value declined and its price

¹ Ibn Abd al-Nasir, M. ibn R. (1426 AH). *Qur'anic Exegesis and Its Exegetes in West Africa*. Dar Ibn al-Jawzi for Publishing and Distribution, 1st ed., Vol. 1, Saudi Arabia, p. 83.

² Al-Shukri, A. (1999). *Islam and Sudanese Society: The Mali Empire, 1230–1430 AH*. Cultural Foundation, 1st ed., Abu Dhabi, p. 193.

³ Al-Qalqashandi, A. A. (1922). *The Dawn of the Blind: A Manual for the Art of Composition*. Egyptian General Book Organization, Vol. 5, Cairo, p. 294. See also: Ibn Khaldun, A. R. (1992). *The Lessons*. Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Vol. 6, p. 144.

⁴ Mahmoud, H. A. (1999). *Islam and Arab Culture in Africa*. Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, Cairo, p. 189.

⁵ Ibid., p. 190.

⁶ Al-Elori, A. A. (2014). *Islam in Nigeria and Sheikh Uthman ibn Fodio al-Fulani*. Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 1st ed., Egypt, p. 35.

⁷ Kati al-Timbukti, M. (2014). *The Chronicle of the Seeker: An Account of Countries, Armies, and Eminent People*. Study and commentary by Adam Bamba. Al-Risalah Nashirun, 1st ed., Damascus, pp. 34–35.

⁸ Niani is a historic city in West Africa and served as the capital of the Mali Empire during its period of prosperity in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE. Its strategic location near the Niger River made it an important political, economic, and commercial center in West African history. It was a center of gold and salt trade and of the spread of Islam, but lost its importance after the fall of the empire. See: Levtzion, N., & Hopkins, J. F. P. (2000). *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West Africa*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 341–345.

⁹ Al-Shukri, A. Op. Cit., p. 243.

¹⁰ According to Ibn Khaldun, the foundation of Mali is attributed to Sundiata, or Mari Jata, sometime between 1230 and 1255 CE. He states that the greatest king among them was the one who defeated the Susu, conquered their lands, and seized power from them, known as Mari Jata, meaning "the Lion Prince." See: Ibn Khaldun, A. R. (1981). *The Book of Lessons and Record of Beginnings and Events in the History of the Arabs, Persians, Berbers, and Their Contemporaries of Great Authority*. Dar al-Fikr, Vol. 6, Beirut, p. 413.

fell, remaining at that low level until the present, with the mithqal not exceeding twenty-two dirhams or less..." This was due to the large quantities of gold that they brought into Egypt and spent there. As a result of the enormous sums spent by Musa from the vast amount of gold he had brought with him, he was compelled to borrow money on his return journey. He also encountered serious political difficulties upon his return to West Africa.¹

An interesting aspect of this pilgrimage mission is that, during his journey, the Malian sultan sent a message to the Moroccan sultan informing him that his caravan would pass along the route near the Mediterranean coast. In response, the Moroccan sultan ordered that the Malian sultan's caravan be provided with security as it crossed the desert. The Moroccan kingdom also prepared itself to receive this distinguished guest, sparing no effort in organizing elaborate decorations and celebrations characterized by grandeur and reverence.²

The caravan was accompanied by valuable gifts presented to the royal court in Fez, leaving a profound impression on the Moroccans, who received the travellers with great respect and appreciation. When the caravan departed from Mali toward Tlemcen, it was accompanied by a contingent of Moroccan cavalry whose task was to ensure the continuation of the ceremonial reception as the caravan passed through Bejaia and the outskirts of Tunis.³

Most historical sources agree that the royal caravan of Mansa Musa reached Egypt in 724 AH/1334 CE. Al-Maqrizi, however, was able to specify the date more precisely, stating that it arrived on the night of Sunday, 15 Jumada al-Awwal 724 AH, corresponding to 10 May 1334 CE.⁴

During his journey, Sultan Mansa Musa became renowned for his generosity and munificence. While passing through Egypt, he presented al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun⁵ with a lavish gift amounting to fifty thousand dinars. He also gave al-Himandar,⁶ who was responsible for overseeing his reception in Egypt, a substantial quantity of raw gold. Numerous other examples likewise demonstrate Sultan Mansa Musa's generosity, charity, and commitment to benevolence.

Continuation of the Second Section: Mansa Musa's Golden Pilgrimage

As for the Hijaz, from the very first moments his feet set foot in that land, he showered the pilgrims of the Sacred House of God and the inhabitants of the Two Holy Sanctuaries with acts of generosity and benevolence. The total amount of his donations was estimated at twenty thousand gold pieces, according to the account of Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'di.⁷

His companions also proceeded to purchase enslaved women of Turkish and Abyssinian origin, female singers, and clothing, causing the price of gold to fall by six dirhams.⁸

¹ Hopkins, L. G. (1998). *An Economic History of West Africa*. Introduction by M. A. Saudi; translated by A. F. Balbaa. Supreme Council of Culture, Cairo, pp. 91–92.

² Atta Allah, S., & Abd al-Razzaq, A. Op. Cit., p. 22.

³ Ibid., pp. 22–23.

⁴ Al-Shukri, A. (1999). Op. Cit., p. 245.

⁵ He was Sultan Muhammad al-A'zam, al-Malik al-Nasir, son of Sultan al-Malik al-Mansur Sayf al-Din al-Salihi. Born in 684 AH/1285 CE, he was one of the greatest rulers of the Bahri Mamluk state. He assumed power following the assassination of his brother al-Ashraf ibn Qalawun in 1293 CE, at only fourteen years of age. He belonged to the distinguished Qalawunid Turkish family, which ruled the Mamluk state for more than a century. His reign was characterized by important administrative, economic, and political reforms. He died in 741 AH/1341 CE. See: Al-Safadi, S. D. K. ibn A. (1998). *Notable Figures of the Age and Supporters of Victory*. Edited by A. Abu Zayd et al.; introduction by M. A. Al-Mubarak. Dar al-Fikr al-Mu'asir, 1st ed., Beirut, p. 73. See also: Al-Asqalani, S. ibn A. al-Misri. (1998). *The Recorded Virtues from the Biography of Sultan al-Malik al-Mansur*. Edited by U. A. Tadmir. Al-Maktaba al-Asriyya, Beirut, p. 25.

⁶ The *Himandar* referred to here was Amir Salar, who was responsible for organizing the reception of delegations and coordinating affairs between the sultan and his subjects. He was also a prominent military commander and one of the close associates of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun.

⁷ Al-Shukri, A. Op. Cit., pp. 246–247.

⁸ Al-Maqrizi, T. A. ibn A. (2000). *The Cast Gold: An Account of Those among the Caliphs and Kings Who Performed the Pilgrimage*. Edited by J. Al-Shayyal. Maktabat al-Thaqafa al-Diniyya, 1st ed., Port Said, p. 143.

Sultan Mansa Musa, together with the caravan that accompanied him, performed the pilgrimage rites and visited the grave of the Prophet, peace be upon him. As mentioned above, he gave large amounts of money and gold in charity to the inhabitants of the Two Holy Sanctuaries. He also managed to bring four members of the Quraysh from Mecca back with him to Mali. By coincidence, during that pilgrimage season he met the renowned scholar, poet, and celebrated architect of the time, Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Sahili, who in turn joined the caravan returning to Mali. This outstanding scholar eventually settled in Timbuktu, where he died in 748 AH/1340 CE.¹ Throughout his stay there, he enjoyed a prestigious position in Western Sudanese society because of his mastery of architectural arts in the Arab-Islamic style.

The influence of the architect Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Sahili extended to the construction of numerous royal palaces in the Mali Empire. Among the most prominent was the palace of Mansa Musa, which served as the seat of government and the royal residence and was known by the local population as the "New House." Mansa Musa wished to build a private palace to serve as the center of his rule in his capital, Timbuktu. Among his aspirations was for the palace to be not only structurally solid but also imposing, magnificent, and distinctive in its design. Mansa Musa found what he was seeking in al-Sahili, whom he accompanied to his kingdom in order to fulfill this royal ambition and commissioned to construct the palace. Al-Sahili drew upon all his architectural expertise to fulfill the sultan's request and succeeded in constructing a unique and unusual palace in its form and design, one that harmonized with the distinctive characteristics of the surrounding desert environment.²

During this pilgrimage season, he also met Muslim leaders and was influenced by the sophisticated systems of government and flourishing Arab culture that he observed in Egypt. He established contact with Imam al-Suyuti³ and other scholars of his time, and received an official authorization from the Abbasid caliph.⁴ He returned to his homeland deeply influenced by the pure Islamic spirit he had encountered and sought to apply the ideas and experiences he had acquired. It is said that, in organizing his administration, he drew inspiration from the systems he had observed in Egypt.

He further surrounded himself with a circle of scholars. The authors of *Tarikh al-Sudan* and *Tarikh al-Fattash* provide numerous details concerning this sultan's esteem for knowledge and its scholars. Whenever they entered his presence, he would seat them beside him on his throne and draw them close. He also ordered that no one should eat with him except scholars, pilgrims, sharifs, and their children. He constantly asked them about the Sunnah of God and His Messenger.

The author of *al-Fattash* points to some of the reformist views attributed to this sultan, stating: "He abolished innovations, wrongdoing, and bloodshed, and established religion and religious doctrines." He also devoted greater care and attention to the University of Timbuktu, which flourished during his reign and reached a level it had never attained before.⁵

This pilgrimage also resulted in the departure of many Egyptian scholars for Timbuktu and of Timbuktu scholars for Egypt. Indeed, Ibn Battuta encountered an Egyptian physician there, while the entourage of Sultan Mansa Musa included thirty mamluks from Cairo.⁶

It should also be noted that the civilization of Mali during this period witnessed the height of its political and cultural brilliance, thanks to the wise leadership of Sultan Mansa Musa, who succeeded in establishing an extensive diplomatic network with major regional powers such as Cairo and Morocco. These relations were manifested in the exchange of official ambassadors between his court and these capitals, reflecting the depth of interaction and mutual influence. In addition, Mansa Musa's pilgrimage played a pivotal role in introducing Mali's wealth and civilizational status to the wider world. It contributed to establishing the kingdom's name and reputation within the historical and civilizational record, allowing its fame to spread throughout the entire Islamic world, from al-Andalus in the west to Khurasan in the east, thus constituting a unique model of

¹ Al-Shukri, A. Op. Cit., p. 251.

² Al-Najmi, K. ibn A. (2022). The Andalusian architect Abu Ishaq al-Sahili (d. 747 AH/1346 CE): His architectural legacy and its familial extension in Western Sudan. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 66, 270.

³ Imam and hadith scholar Jalal al-Din Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr al-Suyuti was born in Egypt in 845 AH. He authored more than six hundred works in various fields and died in 911 AH. See: Al-Elori, A. A. (2014). *Islam in Nigeria and Sheikh Uthman ibn Fodio al-Fulani*, Op. Cit., p. 12.

⁴ He was most probably the Abbasid caliph al-Mustanjid Billah Yusuf, who was proclaimed caliph of the Muslims in 859 AH/1455 CE and was the last of the Abbasid caliphs.

⁵ Mahmoud, H. A. (1999). Op. Cit., p. 196.

⁶ Ibid., p. 195.

cultural and political influence during this important historical period.¹

Trade and literature also flourished during his reign in the city of Timbuktu, particularly following the urban development that the city experienced with the construction of the new mosque and the royal palace. Timbuktu came to be described as the largest city in the world for the trade in tibr (raw gold), attracting merchants from various regions, including Souss, Draa, Sijilmasa, Fez, Tuat, Ghadames, Fezzan, Awjila, and even Egypt. The latter strengthened its commercial relations with Mali, taking advantage of Mansa Musa's visit to Cairo. The merchants were accompanied on their journey to Timbuktu by jurists, men of letters, scholars, and others.²

Mansa Musa left behind an expansive empire radiating the light of Arab-Islamic civilization and embodying a magnificent civilizational legacy. However, the rulers who assumed power after him failed to preserve the unity and stability of the Mali Empire, owing to their lack of Mansa Musa's far-sighted vision and political wisdom, which combined tolerance and diplomacy.³

Third: The Pilgrimage Journey of Askia al-Hajj Muhammad

Askia al-Hajj Muhammad (898–934 AH/1493–1528 CE), Sultan of the Songhai, was the first to establish a regular army in the Sudan.⁴

Al-Sa'di described him as: "the most fortunate and rightly guided, Commander of the Faithful and Caliph of the Muslims, through whom God relieved the Muslims of their hardships and removed their afflictions and calamities. He exerted himself in establishing Islam, reforming the affairs of the people, and supporting the scholars."⁵ The author of *al-Kashshaf* also praised him, describing him as a just imam and virtuous sultan.⁶

Hasan al-Wazzan ⁷ states in his book *Description of Africa* that Askia al-Hajj Muhammad, king of Gao (Songhai), the capital of the Songhai state, succeeded in overthrowing the king of Hausaland and annexing the territory to his kingdom in 918 AH/1512 CE. He adds: "He succeeded in taking control of it, and the provinces failed to defend themselves, falling one after another. The kings of Gobir, Katsina, and Zazzau were killed, while the king of Kano was captured after the fall of his state. However, he returned after pledging to pay taxes amounting to one-third of the country's annual revenue." Thus, all the provinces became subject to Askia Muhammad, who reorganized the administration under his authority, appointing one of his followers as governor over each province and imposing heavy taxes on the population.⁸

He is regarded as the founder of the Askia dynasty. The sultans of the Askia dynasty remained committed to Islam, which increased the people's attachment to them. The first of the Askias, Askia al-Hajj Muhammad ibn

¹ Al-Arabi, I. (1983). *The Great Sahara and Its Shores*. National Book Foundation, Algiers, p. 304.

² Ibid., p. 305.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Al-Shukri, A. (1999). Op. Cit., p. 195.

⁵ Al-Sa'di, A. R. ibn A. ibn I. ibn A. (1898). *History of the Sudan*. Bordin Press, Anji, pp. 64–65.

⁶ Kati al-Timbukti, M. (1913). *The Chronicle of the Seeker: An Account of Countries, Armies, and Eminent People*. Edited by Octave Houdas. Bordin, p. 11.

⁷ Al-Wazzan, H. ibn M., also known as Jean-Leon de Medici or Leo Africanus, was an Andalusian geographer, historian, and traveler. Born in Granada in 888 AH/1483 CE, he moved at an early age with his father and relatives to Fez, where he studied at al-Qarawiyyin Mosque. He witnessed the wars between Portugal and the Saadian state under Sharif Muhammad al-Saadi, known as al-Qa'im bi-Amr Allah. He was captured by an Italian pirate in 923 AH near the island of Djerba and taken to Naples, where he was presented to Pope Leo X. Because of his extensive knowledge, the pope adopted him into his circle and gave him the name "John Leo." He learned Latin and Italian in addition to Spanish and Hebrew. At the pope's request, he translated his travel account into Italian. Although he lived for part of his life as a Christian, many accounts state that he died a Muslim in 957 AH/1550 CE. Among his principal works are *Abridged History of Islam*, *Description of Africa*, *A Collection of Poems on Preaching and Guidance*, *Biographies of Arab Physicians and Philosophers*, *Islamic Theology and Jurisprudence*, and *Islamic Festivals*. See: Al-Zirikli, K. D. (2002). *The Notables: A Biographical Dictionary of the Most Famous Arab, Arabized, and Orientalist Men and Women*. Dar al-Ilm lil-Malayin, 15th ed., Vol. 2, Beirut, pp. 217–218.

⁸ Bobki, S. (2008–2009). *The Scholarly Movement among the Hausa in Western Sudan during the Nineteenth Century* [Master's thesis in History and Islamic Civilization]. Supervised by A. Ben Naamia, University of Oran, p. 25.

Abi Bakr al-Turi, ruled from 1493 to 1528 CE. He organized his country effectively, and approximately three years after assuming power, Askia Muhammad had made considerable progress in reforming and organizing the internal affairs of the country. He subsequently decided to travel to the Hijaz to perform the pilgrimage, which took place in 1497 CE. He was accompanied on this journey by a large number of the kingdom's dignitaries and elders, including scholars and mamluks, as well as five hundred horsemen and one thousand soldiers. He also carried with him three hundred thousand mithqals of gold.¹

Other sources indicate that the great Askia Muhammad took approximately 1,500 soldiers and 800 enslaved persons on his pilgrimage, in addition to his son Askia Musa and a number of regional princes, scholars, and judges. Among his prominent companions were Shaykh Muhammad Tall, Alfa Salih Jow, Kagh Zakariya, and the historian Mahmud Kati al-Timbukti, author of *Tarikh al-Fattash*.²

Askia al-Hajj Muhammad set out on his pilgrimage and passed through Egypt in 899 AH in a magnificent procession that was no less impressive, splendid, and lavish than that of Mansa Musa. Indeed, he spent even more generously than his predecessor. Al-Sa'di, for example, reported that he donated one hundred thousand mithqals of gold in the Two Holy Sanctuaries and purchased orchards in Medina, which he dedicated as a charitable endowment for the people of Takrur.³ In Mecca, he purchased an estate, built a residence on it, and dedicated it as a charitable endowment for the Sacred House of God. He also purchased various goods and gifts from the markets of Mecca.⁴

The Sharif of Mecca received Askia Muhammad with great hospitality. In recognition of his devotion to acts of charity and generosity wherever he travelled, he welcomed him warmly and held a special ceremony in his honor. He also granted him the title of Caliph of the Muslims in Western Sudan, in recognition of his prominent role in serving Islam and Muslims.⁵

Askia Muhammad also met with numerous scholars in Mecca and consulted them on religious matters. On his return journey to his homeland, he passed through Egypt, where he met with its scholars, among them Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, who offered him a number of pieces of advice and guidance. Mahmud Kati mentions in this context: "Then he met many scholars and righteous men, among them Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, and asked him about some religious matters, and they issued the legal opinions he sought."⁶

This journey contributed to reviving the relations between Western Sudan, Egypt, and the Two Holy Sanctuaries through the gifts that Askia presented to the scholars of Al-Azhar and the scholars of the Two Holy Sanctuaries. The Sharif of Mecca had granted Askia Muhammad the title of Caliph, which represented legitimacy and a deep sense of belonging to the Islamic world. The status of students, scholars, and pilgrims from Western Sudan was also enhanced in these regions, to which they travelled either in pursuit of knowledge or to perform the pilgrimage, thereby making the religious journey a strong spiritual link between these areas. The mutual religious and cultural esteem of both sides also gave a distinctive character to the relationship between Western Sudan and the Two Holy Sanctuaries, contributing to the strengthening of their shared Islamic identity.

Conclusion

The religious and scholarly journeys undertaken by the scholars and sultans of Western Sudan were arduous experiences, fraught with major challenges that extended beyond natural and geographical factors, such as insecurity and the burden of transit taxes. It was said of those who undertook such journeys: "He who departs is lost, and he who returns is reborn." These journeys were not merely a means of achieving political ambitions, such as conferring legitimacy upon rulers; rather, they represented a genuine expression of the

¹ Imam, M. A. M. (2006). Maliki jurisprudential predominance in sub-Saharan Africa under Islamic kingdoms. In *International Conference: Islam in Africa*, Libya, November 26–27, 2006 / Dhu al-Qi'dah 6–7, 1427 AH, pp. 96–97.

² Kati al-Timbukti, M. (1913). *The Chronicle of the Seeker: An Account of Countries, Armies, and Eminent People*. Edited by Octave Houdas. Bordin, p. 65.

³ Takrur was a vast desert region extending eastward to Adghagh, westward to the Sea of Banu Zanagiya, southward to the region of Bayt, and northward to Adrar. See: Al-Burtuli al-Walati, A. A. A. M. ibn A. B. A. S. (1981). *Opening the Book of Gratitude: An Account of the Notable Scholars of Takrur*. Edited by M. Ibrahim al-Kettani & M. Hajji. Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1st ed., Beirut, p. 26.

⁴ Mahmoud, H. A. Op. Cit., p. 195.

⁵ Abd al-Rahman, Z. (n.d.). *Islam and Muslims in West Africa*. Yusuf Press, Vol. 2, Cairo, p. 52.

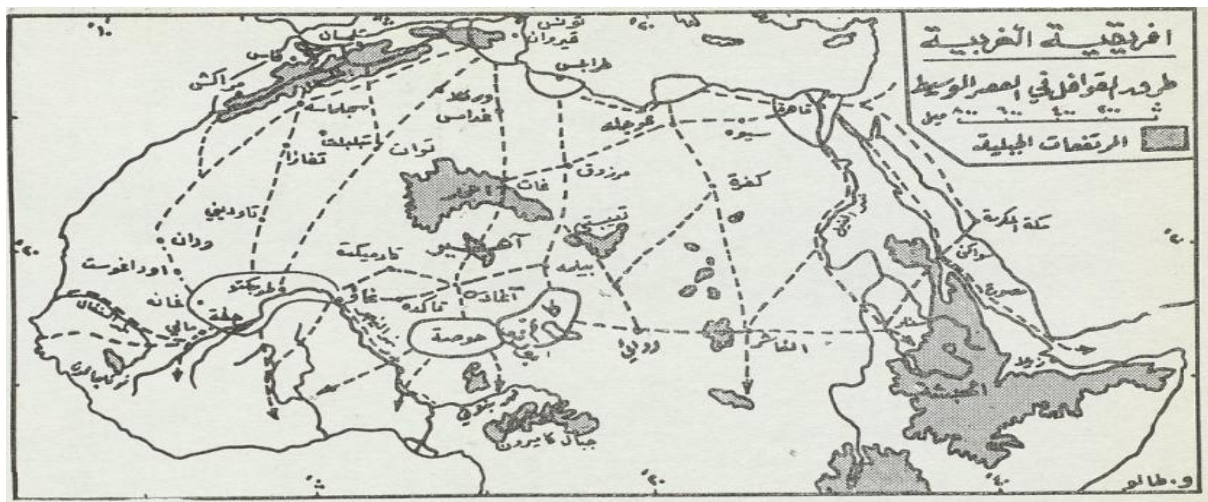
⁶ Kati al-Timbukti, M. (1913). *The Chronicle of the Seeker: An Account of Countries, Armies, and Eminent People*. Edited by Octave Houdas. Bordin, p. 72.

deep commitment of the Muslims of Western Sudan to performing the pilgrimage as one of the five pillars of Islam. On the one hand, God Almighty says: "And proclaim to mankind the pilgrimage; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every distant pass" (Qur'an, al-Hajj: 27). On the other hand, they reflected their eagerness to seek knowledge and enhance their religious standing within their communities. God Almighty says: "Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge by degrees" (Qur'an, al-Mujadilah: 11). At the forefront of those undertaking these journeys were scholars, sultans, and kings. Throughout these spiritual and faith-driven journeys, they were prepared to confront all difficulties, including death, making these journeys more than mere religious visits; they embodied the strength of determination and the depth of faith.

The three selected models have revealed the pivotal role played by scholars and pilgrims in transmitting ideas and enhancing the position of Western Sudan as part of the broader Islamic world. Their journeys contributed to strengthening cultural and religious relations between the peoples of the region and the rest of the Islamic world. These journeys also contributed to the formation of a distinctive scholarly identity in Western Sudan, manifested in the emergence of scholarly centers such as Timbuktu and Djenné, which became destinations for students and researchers from various parts of the Islamic world.

Based on the foregoing, the study of these journeys contributes not only to understanding the cultural and social history of Western Sudan, but also provides a broader perspective on the role of civilizational interaction in building diverse and advanced societies. Accordingly, continued attention to these journeys and the analysis of their impact remain a fruitful field deserving further research and study, particularly in light of the need to highlight the African contribution to the development of Islamic civilization during the Middle Ages.

Appendix No. (1)



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