also judges (qadis) of Timbuktu. Muhammad Aqit was a celebrated teacher, and is said to have popularized the teaching of the Mukhtasar of Khalil ibn Ishaq in Timbuktu. The Tarikh al-sudan says of him that "Jurisprudence from his mouth had a sweetness and elegance, his easy turn of phrase, making the subject wonderfully clear without affectation."

**Anda ag Muhammad** (d. 1446)

One of the great Sanhaja scholars and teachers, Anda ag Muhammad was qadi of Timbuktu during the Tiaureg rule of the mid-15th century. After his death his family suffered the persecutions of Sonni Ali in 1468, when two of his sons were killed and his daughter, who was married to the son of Muhammad Aqit, was imprisoned. His son, Mahmud b. Umar, fled to Walata, but eventually returned to become qadi of Timbuktu in 1480. Many of Anda ag Muhammad's other descendants lived to be imams of the Sankore Mosque, responsible for reciting the Kitab al-Shifa of Qadi Iyad – a devotional work on the attributes of the Prophet – at the Sankore during major religious festivals. However, they left the leadership of Timbuktu in the hands of the Aqit, who maintained that role until the Moroccan invasion in 1591. During the Arma administration they acted again as qadis. Between them, the two families provided the intellectual and religious leadership of Timbuktu for some two centuries.

Anda ag Muhammad and his family were known for excelling in the realm of grammar. His own son was known as al-Mukhtar al-Nahawi (al-Mukhtar the grammarian). One of his descendants, Sayyid Ahmad, wrote a commentary on a famous work on grammar which was used extensively in learned circles in Fez. Copies have been preserved in Morocco and Egypt and the work was apparently still being consulted in the late 19th century since it was part of the Umarian library in Segu.
Ahmed Baba (1556–1627)

Ahmed Baba was undoubtedly the most acclaimed member of the Agit family. He studied with his father, with his uncle, and then with Muhammad Baghayogho al-Wangari. Ahmed Baba wrote some seventy works in Arabic, many on jurisprudence, and some on grammar and syntax. One of his most famous writings was the Nafy al-Ibtihaj, a collection of biographies of Maliki scholars. This contains a description of his own father as ‘an understanding scholar, highly accomplished, knowledgeable and versatile – a specialist in Hadith, in jurisprudence, rhetoric and logic.’ The description then relates how his father in 1549 made a pilgrimage to Mecca where he met a number of renowned scholars. This work provides first-hand information both about the Timbuktu scholars and scholars from abroad who influenced them. Ahmed Baba also wrote a book replying to questions on slavery sent to him from the Tuwat oasis far north of Timbuktu where slaves were assembled and scrutinized before being sent to North Africa. He decreed that if they were judged to be true Muslims, then they should be set free.

Ahmed Baba spent the first half of his life in Timbuktu. In 1593, he was expelled and transferred to Marrakesh, where he was imprisoned for two years. Even after his release he was forced to stay in Marrakesh until 1608. During his stay he taught in the Mosque of Nobles (Jami’ al-Shurafa), and was asked to give many fatwas. Among his students were the qadi of Fez, the mufti of Meknes, and the celebrated Andalusian historian Shihab al-Din al-Maqqari. Some Moroccans even claim him as one of their scholars. But while in Marrakesh Ahmed Baba expressed his affection and longing for his city in these poignant lines of verse: ‘O traveller to Gao, turn off to my city, Murmur my name there and greet all my dear ones, With scented salams from an exile who longs For his homeland and neighbours, companions and friends.’
Of all the Timbuktu scholars exiled to Marrakesh, Ahmed Baba was the only one to survive; the others died in an epidemic of plague. Upon his return to the beloved city of his birth, he continued to teach and write, but he held no public office. His own library had been confiscated and many of his works can still be found in the National Library in Rabat. In 1970 a centre for conserving manuscripts of the Timbuktu tradition was created in Timbuktu in Ahmed Baba’s name.

Muhammad Baghayogho al-Wangari (d. 1594)

Muhammad Baghayogho al-Wangari was perhaps the most celebrated teacher of his generation. He was a scholar whose family originated from the Juula, a Mande group who were both scholars and long-distance merchants. Muhammad Baghayogho was born in Djenne, and in his youth in the mid-16th century migrated to Timbuktu along with his brother Ahmad. He studied with Ahmed Baba’s father, and then taught Ahmed Baba himself, who considered Baghayogho to be his shaykh and admired him tremendously. As is apparent from his description:

“Our shaykh and our [source of] blessing, the jurist, and accomplished scholar, a pious and ascetic man of God, who was among the finest of God’s righteous servants and practising scholars. He was a man given by nature to goodness and benign intent, guileless, and naturally disposed to goodness, believing in people to such an extent that all men were virtually equal in his sight, so well did he think of them and absolve them of wrongdoing. Moreover, he was constantly attending to people’s needs, even at cost to himself, becoming distressed at their misfortunes, mediating their disputes, and advising them to have love for learning and to closely follow his teaching. He spent most of his time doing this, with affection for those concerned, with his own utter humility, helping them and caring for them, and his lending them of the most rare and precious books without searching for them again, no matter what discipline they were in. Thus it was that he lost...
a [large] portion of his books – may God shower His beneficence upon him for that! Sometimes a student would come to the door of his house and send him a note listing the book he was looking for, and he would take it out of his library and dispatch it to him without even knowing who the student was. In this matter he was truly astonishing, doing this for the sake of God Most High, despite his love for books and his zeal in acquiring them, whether by purchase or copying. One day I came to him asking for books on grammar, and he hunted through his library and brought me everything he could find on the subject.”

Ahmed Baba’s description not only conveys his admiration; it also informs us of the existence of a large library in Timbuktu, and the distribution of its books among students and scholars. This library was inherited by the descendants of Muhammad Baghayogho al-Wangari following his death in 1594; now, more than four centuries later, a collection of manuscripts belonging to his descendants survives in Timbuktu. Known as Al-Wangari Library, it is looked after by Moctar Sidi Yahia al-Wangari in a building on Rue Heinrich Barth, just north of the Sidi Yahia Mosque (see page 142).

**Abd al-Rahman al-Sadi** (1594–c. 1636)

Abd al-Rahman al-Sadi, author of the *Tarikh al-sudan*, was a former imam in Djenne who was employed by the Arma administration of Timbuktu. In 1646 he became chief secretary to the Pashalik in Timbuktu. The *Tarikh al-sudan* mainly concerns the history of the Songhay Empire from the mid-15th century to the Moroccan invasion in 1591 and then from that date down to 1655. The early chapters are devoted to brief histories of earlier Songhay dynasties, of imperial Mali and of the Tuareg, and to biographies of the scholars and saints of both Timbuktu and Djenne. Al-Sadi relies mainly on personal knowledge supported by notes and on records of the Moroccan Arma administration. He is not without bias: his approach to history reflects his training as a member of the scholarly class. What benefits this
group meets with his approval; what is to their detriment is deplored. This is most clearly seen in his denigration of Sonni Ali, who sacked the city of Timbuktu, and his highly flattering portrait of the more benign Askia Muhammad. While he looks back with some nostalgia to the era of the Songhay Empire, he is careful not to present any outright criticism of the Moroccan invasion, or of the Arma regime by which he was employed. Rather than condemning the Moroccans for their overthrow of the Askia dynasty, he attributes this change of fortune to the decadence of the ‘Songhay folk’, representing it as just divine retribution. Little is known about al-Sadi’s life, but perhaps this information is another hidden treasure that will one day be rediscovered.

*Mahmud Kati* (d. 1595)

Another celebrated historian was Mahmud Kati, principal author of the *Tarikh al-fattash*. Mahmud Kati’s father was Ali bin Ziyad al-Quti, *qudd* meaning Visigoth, the Germanic people who settled in France and Spain after invading the Roman Empire in the 4th century CE. Ali bin Ziyad migrated from Toledo in Spain towards West Africa in the mid-1460s. We know this from a note he made on the final, blank page of the first volume of a copy of the *Kitab al-Shifa* by Qadi Iyad, where he records purchasing the book in the oasis of Tuwat in 1468 on his way to the ‘land of the blacks’:

‘I bought this illuminated book called al-Shifa by the Qadi Iyad from its first owner Muhammad b. Umar in a [legally] valid sale, for the sum of 45 mithqal of gold cash paid in its entirety to the one from whom it was purchased with the witness of our companions. This took place two months after our arrival in Tuwat coming from our land (hilad) of Toledo, capital of the Goths. And we are now on our way to the Bilad al-sudan, asking of God Most High that He should grant us repose there.’

Toledo had effectively come under Christian rule in 1085, but some Muslims continued to live there, at least until 1502, when a royal decree
gave them the option of Christian baptism or exile. However, pressure was likely mounting on Muslims not only in Toledo but throughout Spain in the decades preceding that decree. Thus it is no surprise that Ali bin Ziyad should have decided to emigrate, presumably not very long before 1468. Why he should have decided to head for the Bilad al-sudan is unclear. Indeed, we do not know whether Ali bin Ziyad’s decision to go to sub-Saharan Africa was taken before he and his companions left Toledo, or after they arrived in Tuwat, where they might have learned something about Timbuktu as a city of commerce and Islamic learning. However, they settled in West Africa and married local Songhay women.17

The Kounta (18th and 19th centuries)

Today the Kounta in Mali live predominantly along the River Niger east of Timbuktu. Some are in the city of Timbuktu, where they have mixed with the local population. Since the drought in 1984, many have moved to Bamako or dispersed throughout the region where one finds them in Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Niger and Nigeria.6

The Kounta have been associated with religious learning for a number of centuries, with the result that many have become renowned saints or wali, in the Sufi tradition. One of the best known of the Kounta in the region was Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kabir al-Kounti who lived in the 18th century. The position of spiritual leader in the Kounta tradition is transmitted from father to son, and eventually the leadership was passed on to Ahmad al-Bakkay al-Kounti, who was a man of many abilities. Not only was he a great scholar, a poet, and the leader of the Qadiriyya, he was also a politician and a military man (see pages 58–60).

Partly thanks to their nomadic lifestyle, the Kounta are the people in northern Mali who have been best able to protect their manuscripts despite political and climatic turbulence. Each time there was an invasion or a drought, the Kounta moved with all their manuscripts, or entrusted
them to other members of their clan. Today they are doing everything in their power to protect this substantial patrimony.  

**Shaykh Sidiyya al-Kabir** (1773–1868)
One of the most illustrious disciples of Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kabir was Sidiyya al-Kabir from Boutillimit in Mauritania, who spent a year with al-Mukhtar before he died, then twelve years with his son, Sidi Muhammad al-Kounti. While with the Kounta he rose to a role similar to that of a chancellor, keeping careful copies of all their correspondence, as well as building his own library of manuscript books. Soon after his return to southern Mauritania in 1825 he set off for Morocco, where he purchased over two hundred books and book-fragments, carefully recording each acquisition and its source. This became the foundation of his own library. During his life he attempted, with some success, to replicate the religious and mediatory influence wielded by the Kounta in his own region of southwestern Mauritania. One indication of the influence he achieved was that the first president of independent Mauritania hailed from his clan. Shaykh Sidiyya’s library, and that of his son and grandson, was reconstituted in the 1960s by a great-grandson and bibliophile, Haroun, and its 2,000-odd volumes stand as testimony to the legacy of Kounta (and Timbuktu) influence across the Sahel at dozens of similar sites where library collections comparable to those in Timbuktu were built.  

**Ahmad Boularaf** (1864–1955)
One of the most significant migrants to Timbuktu in the 20th century was known as Boularaf. He came from the town of Gulimim in Darfla in southern Morocco, and moved to Timbuktu in 1907. Although not a professional scholar, he was a man of independent wealth, acquired through trade, a bibliophile and a patron of the learned. His love of books brought him to collect a large number of manuscripts after his arrival in Timbuktu. He
enriched his collection through trade with other libraries and publishing houses including eleven libraries in the Timbuktu region, two in Bamako, and others in Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria. He also had relations with publishing houses in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

Boulaaraf is perhaps best known for his revival of the book arts in Timbuktu, where he established a workshop for manuscript production. This appears to have been very well organized, employing a group of trained copyists and copy editors, as well as individuals responsible for preparing the paper and making covers. He not only reproduced manuscript books but also used his influence to promote and publish contemporary scholarship. He himself wrote approximately forty works, most of which were verifications or abridgments of texts by others, but which included an important original work entitled Izalat al-Rayb that contains biographies of scholars of the Middle Niger. Similar to Ahmed Baba’s Nayl al-Ibtkhaj written about three hundred years earlier, this book covers the lives of scholars who lived during that long intervening period."

Boulaaraf’s publishing house no longer exists and his collection is largely dispersed. However, after he died, his library was inherited by one of his sons, and around 1970 most of his manuscripts were donated to the newly founded Ahmed Baba Institute, where they are to be found today.

Ahmad Baber al-Arawani (d. 1997)
Among the eminent scholars of the second half of the 20th century was Ahmad Baber al-Arawani, who was born in Arawan, a trading town about 125 miles (200 km) north of Timbuktu. He studied under another Arawani scholar and went on to become one of the leading teachers of Timbuktu, renowned as a historian, an exegete, a muhaddith (transmitter of the Hadith) and a recognized expert in matters of inheritance. He was also imam of a zawiyah and qadi of the people of Arawan resident in Timbuktu. He is buried close to the mausoleum of Muhammad Agit, just north of the city.
Ahmad Baber wrote about fifteen original works, among them biographies of scholars of Timbuktu and historical works, including the *Tarikh Azawad*, a chronicle of the Azawad region. This is an edited version with footnotes of a history of the Barabish of Azawad by Mahmud b. Dahman, written in 1948.

**Mohamed Tahir (d. 1969)**

One of the great scholars and teachers of Timbuktu in modern times, Mohamed Tahir was born in Arawan, where he studied with several scholars. When Mohamed Tahir migrated to Timbuktu he established Koranic schools both in the city and the surrounding rural areas. He had students throughout the region, and any number of students came to study with him each morning. He was also a copyist at Ahmad Boularaf’s library, and was known to be the best copyist in the Azawad in his time. Often other scholars would send him their texts to correct. His annotations can be found in the margins of many manuscripts from the area. His own house contained the fruits of his labour. He had five closets full of books including manuscripts treating the subjects of Sufism, law, comments on the Koran, and on grammar. There are also fragments on traditional medicine, poems and documents on the history of Arawan.

**Mahamane Mahamoudou (known as Hamou) (b. 1955)**

Born in Timbuktu in 1955, Hamou studied under several teachers, including Muhammad Boularaf (son of Ahmad) and Mohamed Tahir, from whom he obtained certificates (*ijaza*) to teach the *Hadith* and other Islamic sciences. Hamou’s father and Mohamed Tahir were very close friends. As a child, Hamou was often at Tahir’s house and would be treated like a son. In the evening he would go there to borrow books. He would not be allowed to take a new book before he had read and understood the previous one. Then sometimes, before setting out on an expedition, Tahir would give him...
thirty or forty manuscripts at once. Upon his return, he would ask Hamou what he had learned and would tell him to make his own copies by hand.

After Mohamed Tahar’s death, Hamou studied under a succession of other teachers. He later set up a Koranic school and today has his own teaching circle which meets at his house. He also obtained a certificate in calligraphy and continues to copy manuscripts. He is today one of the experts in the field of Arabic manuscripts of Timbuktu and has been assistant to several researchers as well as prospector and curator at the Ahmed Baba Institute. 

THE LIBRARIES OF TIMBUKTU TODAY
Foremost among the collections in Timbuktu today are those of the national Ahmed Baba Institute (HERIAB) and of private libraries including the Mamma Haidara Library, the Fondo Kati and Al-Wangari Library. There are, however, many other libraries in the city of Timbuktu including the Library of Imam Abdraman ben Essayouti of the Djingereber Mosque, the Maigala/Almoustapha Konaté Library, the Boularaf collection and the Library of Mohamed Tahar. Further afield in the region there is the library in Boujebeha and the library of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kabir al-Kounti in Gao. Most of these libraries have received funding to construct buildings for their collections, and many have recently opened to the public.

The Ahmed Baba Institute, Timbuktu
The Ahmed Baba Institute (HERIAB) was established in 1970 through an initiative by UNESCO. It was created to fulfill a need for a national repository and conservation centre for the historic manuscripts of the region. With financing from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the building was officially opened in 1973. At the time, the Institute had no manuscripts, and had to borrow them from private collections for its inauguration. Today the Ahmed Baba Institute houses nearly 30,000 manuscripts ranging...
from one to 400 pages collected from across the region. The Timbuktu Manuscripts project was launched in the year 2000 with funding from the government of Norway channelled through the University of Oslo. In cooperation with UNESCO, with funding from the government of Luxembourg, laboratories have been equipped at the Institute and staff have been trained to carry out research, promotion and conservation. Researchers have been trained to catalogue the collection and to undertake studies of its content. Technicians have been trained to digitize and retrieve manuscripts and create promotional websites. Artisans have mastered restoration techniques and learned how to create a secure environment for the manuscripts, including the fabrication of handcrafted storage boxes. By 2008, over 4,500 manuscripts had been catalogued, 15,000 manuscripts digitzed, and more than 12,000 lodged in storage boxes handcrafted at the Institute. Several articles written by researchers at the Institute are ready for publishing. The South African government is constructing a new building for the Ahmed Baba Institute to accommodate the growing collection as well as the level of ambition for preserving it.

Al-Wangari Library

Based on the manuscript collection of Muhammad Baghayogho al-Wangari, Ahmed Baba’s teacher, Al-Wangari Library is probably one of the oldest libraries in Timbuktu.

Over one thousand manuscripts have so far been identified as part of the collection; however, as the Tarikh al-sudan tells us, Baghayogho would lend his books very freely (see pages 134–35), and as a consequence his manuscripts were dispersed all over the region. Today, one of Baghayogho’s descendants, Moctar Sidi Yahia al-Wangari, has taken the initiative to reassemble what survives of the collection from various family members and reconstruct Al-Wangari Library, with assistance from the Ford Foundation, on the site of Baghayogho’s former house.”

142 SCHOLARS AND LIBRARIES PAST AND PRESENT
The Mamma Haidara Library

One of the largest private libraries of Timbuktu is that of Mamma Haidara. The collection from which this library partially originated was that of Muhammad al-Mawld, who came from Bamba, a village about 120 miles (195 km) southeast of Timbuktu. As the collection was passed down from generation to generation, it suffered great losses and damage from pillaging, fire, flooding and termites, and again when the family’s house collapsed. Many of the manuscripts still show traces of these disasters and containers of the destroyed manuscripts are still preserved today.

In the late 20th century, the collection was handed down to Mamma Haidara who invested in the purchase of new manuscripts and reorganized the library. He travelled and studied throughout the region of Timbuktu, including Arawan and Boujebeha, and also went to Mauritania, Sudan and Egypt, from where he brought back many manuscripts that have enriched the original collection. Eventually, he settled in Timbuktu and created a new library, combining purchases with his ancestors’ collection and his own copied works. Mamma Haidara promoted the manuscripts through research, prospecting, exchange, correspondence and copying; all of which he did with great vigour, working together with twenty-five libraries in the region. Now the library created in Timbuktu surpasses the original library in Bamba.

When Mamma Haidara died in 1981, his son Abdel Kader continued the work of his father in enhancing the collection through the purchase of new manuscripts and assisting other libraries to conserve theirs. Having inherited a love of the written word, he also devoted much of his time to maintaining, cataloguing and organizing the library in Timbuktu. In 1993, he unified the two libraries, bringing the total number of manuscripts to 9,000, of which the oldest is said to date from 1114. With assistance from the Andrew Mellon Foundation and then the Ford Foundation, this library was the first in Timbuktu to be officially opened to the public.
The Fondo Kati

According to Ismael Diadié Haïdara, a descendant of Mahmud Kati, the origin of the Fondo Kati is two-fold. The original collection was brought to the region by Ali bin Ziyad who purchased manuscripts during his travels from Spain to the Middle East before he settled in West Africa. His descendants continued to add to the collection. Through close ties to the royal family of the Songhay Empire, they eventually came to acquire the manuscripts of the royal family, making the Fondo Kati a double library. Over subsequent generations, this collection was dispersed among family members, some of whom lived in Goundam, west of Timbuktu. In the 1990s Ismael Diadié Haïdara reassembled manuscripts conserved by his relatives and brought them to Timbuktu. In 2000 he obtained funding from the Junta de Andalucía in Spain to construct a library in Timbuktu.

Today the manuscripts of the Fondo Kati library are organized according to who originally acquired them, often female members of the family. The collection totals 7,026 manuscripts, of which the oldest is a Koran on vellum copied in 1198 in Ceuta and the most recent a manuscript purchased at the end of the 19th century. It includes a copy of Kitab al-Shifa, a Koran copied in 1423 with a note in Turkish on the colophon page, as well as perhaps one of the oldest copies of the Dala'il al-Khayrat. The collection also features a short treatise written by Alfa Kati Mahmud on the anatomy of the eye, and on various diseases and cures related to eyes, including how to perform a cataract operation.

However, the most significant manuscripts in the Kati collection are those where the margins have been used by various family forebears to write notes recording events, activities, births and deaths from the 15th to the 19th centuries (see pages 94–95). These make the Fondo Kati collection an extraordinary treasure, not only as a record of Islamic culture, but also for its potential for adding a whole new dimension to our understanding of the social and political history of the Timbuktu region. Its 'discovery' is
no doubt the most significant event in the history of recovering the intellectual legacy of precolonial Muslim Africa over the past half century. Ismael Diadié Haïdara informs us that work is in progress to publish three volumes of the marginalia and to conserve the collection.

The Boularaf Collection
The fortune Ahmad Boularaf made from buying, copying and selling books was not only beneficial to the caretakers of the manuscripts and those producing books, but also to scholars who were encouraged to write their own original works. In 1945, his library had 2,076 manuscripts and 6,039 printed books. Today, there are no more than 680 manuscripts and 900 printed books. Boularaf was one of the first to open the doors of his library to visitors, researchers and even to public institutions such as the Ahmed Baba Institute, which acquired many of the works from the collection. Most of the original collection is composed of relatively recent works or copies of works concerning the West African Sahel along the river and the surrounding desert. Among some of the most important works from the collection are the Shifa al-Asqam of Sidi Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Raqçadî, treating traditional medicine and pharmacopoeia, and the Faith al-Shakur of Abu Bakr al-Siddîq al-Bartîli, a bibliography of the scholars of Takrur living between 1650 and 1800.¹²

PRESERVING A UNIQUE LEGACY
Great efforts are now being made to preserve the literary heritage of the Sahel and Sahara, beginning with some of the major collections of the city of Timbuktu. This is an urgent mission, since poverty is leading to the sale of some fine items, while climate and insects continue to take their toll on the fragile paper. The dry climate of the Sahel and Sahara regions has been among the most significant factors in the physical survival of the manuscripts to this day. By contrast, the damp, humid conditions along the