

Timbuktu

Leo Africanus, a Spanish Muslim who converted to Christianity, description of Timbuktu based on his travels, 1510

“Here are shops of artificers and merchants, and especially of such as weave linen and cotton cloth. And hither do the Barbary (North Africa) merchants bring the cloth of Europe. All the women of this region except maid servants go with their faces covered, and sell all necessary victuals (foodstuffs). The inhabitants, and especially strangers are exceedingly rich. Here are many wells containing sweet water; and so often as the river Niger overfloweth they convey the water thereof by certain sluices (floodgates) into the town. Corn, cattle, milk, and butter, this regions yields in great abundance. The inhabitants are people of a gentle and cheerful disposition, and spend a great deal of the night in singing and dancing through all the streets of the city. Here in Timbuktu are great store of doctors, judges (qadis), priests (imams and mullahs), and other learned men, they are bountifully employed at the king’s cost and charges. And hither are brought diverse manuscripts or written books out of North Africa, which are sold for more than any other merchandise.”

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