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Unknown to many, Timbuktu was just one of numerous Islamic educational institutions in pre-colonial West Africa. As a result, the study of the intellectual history of Islam in Africa, also known as Timbuktu studies, emerged. This topic is presently receiving a lot of attention and interest. And that is precisely the need that Timbuktu expert Ousmane Kane hopes to fill with this book. From the sixteenth century through the colonial era and into the twenty-first century, it examines the emergence and development of Arabo-Islamic scholarship in West Africa. It draws attention to the role played by Muslim academics in the creation and dissemination of knowledge as well as the development of the West African state and society. It challenges the idea of a predominating post-colonial Western epistemological order and contends that without consideration of this intellectual legacy, no study of the history of education or knowledge creation in West Africa can be considered comprehensive.

A thorough framework for the development of Timbuktu studies was offered in the first chapter, a stand-alone but incredibly important textual history. The gathering, archiving, cataloging, digitization, and translation of the Islamic archives of West Africa into European languages are the author's main areas of intellectual interest. The majority of translated texts were written by well-known intellectuals or religious/political figures. The translations have mostly been ignored by philosophers and intellectual historians who write in European languages. He maintained that until recent advances in the early twenty-first century, Bilad al-Sudan was virtually unknown in the academic study of Islamic concepts in the West, and he placed a strong emphasis on how much colonialism was to blame for this neglect. Ousmane did a fantastic job of tracing the history of Islamic education to when it first arrived in West Africa. He investigated the routes by which Islamic influences entered the Bilad al-Sudan from North Africa through the Sahara in this way, using the writings of medieval geographers and travelers. He paid particular attention to the material culture and political economy of learning and writing Arabic before colonialism. And only by recognizing Arabic professors who were Islam's messengers in West Africa does this make sense intellectually. The creation of an Islamic clerisy, which was also a story of racial, linguistic, and ethnic reconfiguration, is prominently highlighted. The book demonstrates that Saharan Berbers, black Africans, and Arab immigrants and their descendants were the primary participants in this process with several examples of Ibadi berbers, Wangara, etc. This mingling produced new lineages, some of which were learning-focused. Before European colonisation, they were in charge of disseminating knowledge in Arabic and/or Ajami.

The account of how Mallam Nasiru Kabara, a renowned scholar and Sufi leader from Kano, gave the late historian Muhammad al-Hajj of the Republic of Sudan the only copy of a local but anonymous 17th century chronicle tracing the origins and missionary activities of Wangarawa in Hausaland was an intriguing discovery in the book related to the aforementioned. The anonymous chronicle places the introduction of the Wangara in Kano during the reign of Emir Muhamad Rumfa (1463–1499), in contrast to the Kano Chronicle, which places it during the tenure of Sarkin Kano Yaji (1349–1385).

Without going too far into spoiler territory, the book went on to analyze the key topics that made up Islamic knowledge, the major intellectual influences, and the ways that a recognizable group of core texts have been taught and are still being taught in the southern Sahara, North Africa, the Niger Bend, and the central Sudan. But in order to reach a convincing conclusion, it was necessary to critically highlight how colonialism affected education in West Africa. This time in West Africa's educational history is significant. A wide variety of educational institutions were established; some only offered instruction in European languages, while others offered instruction in Arabic and French or English. Despite their growth, the traditional Islamic two-tier system of education still remains and continues to draw students and teachers from many backgrounds, including those who have attended schools that use the English language.

This is my first book by Ousmane Kane but I must confess how engaging he writes and doesn't require academic inclination to decipher the meat of the discussions. Ousmane Kane, a prolific scholar and maternal grandson of Shikh Ibrahim Niasse, works at the Harvard Divinity School and the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization at Harvard University, USA

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