Timbuktu

No name brings ancient Africa to mind more than Timbuktu, a great city that flourished on a bend in the Niger River for more than four hundred years. Timbuktu was at the end of the camel caravan route that linked sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and Arabia. Gold, ivory and kola nuts passed through the city, but the most important commodity was salt. Timbuktu was located near several salt mines in the Sahara Desert. Caravans hauled salt from the mines to trade for gold.

Timbuktu began as a trading city, but in time it developed into the educational and spiritual center of West Africa. By 1330, Timbuktu became part of the Kingdom of Mali. Mansa Musa built a great mosque, or Islamic place of worship, in Timbuktu. The mosque attracted scholars from as far away as Saudi Arabia.

Timbuktu began to decline in influence when the Portuguese demonstrated that it was easier to sail along the coast of Africa than travel through the desert. The city was destroyed at the end of the sixteenth century by the war between Morocco and Songhai. At one time, historians estimate that more than 100,000 people lived in Timbuktu, but today it remains a shadow of its former self, a mud-built town of 20,000 people on the edge of the Sahara Desert.

Fill in the Blanks

Today Timbuktu is a small t______ on the e________ of the S_________ Desert, but it was the greatest t___________ city in sub-Saharan Africa for more than four h___________ years. Timbuktu was l___________ on a b______ in the N________ River. Traders would mine s______ in the nearby d__________ and carry it to T_____________. Merchants in the city would then *t__a__s__o__t the salt to far away places.

Timbuktu was also known as an *i__t__ll__ct__al and r____________ site. Mansa Musa built a great m__________ in the city. Timbuktu’s influence began to d____________ when the P______________ demonstrated that it was easier to s_______ along the c_________ of Africa than to t____________ through the d___________. The city was also damaged in the w______ between M_____________ and S_____________.

Answer in Complete Sentences

*1. How did the location of Timbuktu help it to become a great trading city?

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2. What was Timbuktu known for in addition to trade?

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3. Why did Timbuktu decline in influence?

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*This is a higher order learning question. Any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.