
Reviewed by
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Many people do not believe me when I tell them that I have been to

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Timbuctoo. "Go to Timbuctoo" in colloquial English only means 'go to the end of the world.' People are surprised to learn that it not only is the northernmost city of the Republic of Mali, but it has (or had when I was there in 1963) regular air service from Bamako. More surprising is the existence of a comfortable "hotel" where refrigerated beverages and excellent cuisine were made available by the local maitre d'hôtel. A guest-book can serve the visitor to prove to others that he has been to Timbuctoo.

Not too long ago Europeans (i.e., "Christians") took their lives in their hands trying to approach this legendary city. Before the French forcefully took possession of it in 1894, there had been only three secretive and brief visits (1828, 1853, 1880). No wonder Félix Dubois entitled his book *Tombouctou la Mystérieuse* 1897).

The inaccessibility of Timbuctoo is precisely why Miner and his wife chose this city for field work in 1940. He had assigned himself the task of testing the validity of a certain definition of urbanism. He wanted to know, for example, if the secularism and impersonalism of Euro-American civilization was due to the culture or to the cities. Timbuctoo satisfied his requirements in being a city virtually untouched by Euro-American civilization. Its "city-ness" is judged by its being a relatively large (about 6000 people), dense, permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals. The goal was put thus: "...we are interested in discovering if the society is well-organized, sacred, and personal like the folk societies or if it is disorganized, secular, and impersonal like our urban society" (p. xv).

Miner concludes that Timbuctoo does indeed illustrate "primitive urban life." (The expression occurs on p. xi—hence the title of the book—but it is not clear what "primitive" means to him.) In Timbuctoo there was a disregard for tradition (p. 293), internal disorganization, impersonalism, economic and politico-religious differentiation (p. 304). The origin of the urbanism of Timbuctoo he attributes to division of labor and culture contacts; ethnic heterogeneity is not the cause but the result of urbanism (p. 305).

Miner is not very convincing. To put it differently: it is not very clear what he has proved. He, himself, admits various degrees of urbanization in Timbuctoo (p. 293ff.). It will take a considerable amount of comparative work, I feel, before we can distinguish between cultural characteristics which come from the city itself and those which come from other cultural factors.

As an anthropological sandwich, the filling may be more to one's liking than the bread, for between the introduction and concluding chapter is a good ethnographic monograph. This is probably the reason the book was republished. Although it is advertised as a revised edition, the author admits that little was changed or added. The most obvious addition is a reevaluation of his thesis in the light of studies by Bascom, Sjoberg, and others.

There is only one significant mention of Christian missions at Timbuc-
too (pp. 78-89), pointing out their failure. The Roman Catholic work had ended some years earlier when the missionary "became the consort of a Songhoi woman;" the Protestant work had been maintained for 16 years without a single convert being made in the city. Miner does admit that a Muslim Songhoi was converted elsewhere on hearing a Christian Negro preach, but since that time, "not even his own family had been willing to share their food with him." It was this man, I believe whom I met in 1963, now a dignified elderly gentleman who was still active in interpreting the Gospel to his brethren.

The former Catholic missionary was an important source of information, for he had "become a recognized member of Timbuctoo native society." No recognition is given the Protestant missionary. There is a "Mr." Floyd Bowman, however, who showed many courtesies and "aided materially in pulling [the anthropologist] through a severe case of black-water fever." Mr. Bowman happens to be a missionary of great charm serving under the auspices of The Christian and Missionary Alliance. This is probably not the first time—nor the last—that an anthropologist's life was saved by a missionary.