



# Timbuktu Chronicles 1493-1599, Ta'rikh al Fattash

*Christopher Wise, translator*

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Some five hundred years ago, the Askiya Muhammad founded the Songhay Dynasty of the Askias, which flourished for more than a century in Sahelian West Africa. The Askiya Muhammad administered his kingdom from Gao, Mali, although many of his most loyal followers were located in Timbuktu, Mali. The Timbuktu based scribe al hajj Mahmud Kati was a close friend of the Askiya Muhammad, who accompanied the famous Songhay leader during his pilgrimage to Mecca. The *Tarikh al fattash* is an eyewitness account of the rise and fall of the Songhay Empire, told from Kati's perspective as a key participant in many of the most important events in the era of the Askias. Wise's *The Timbuktu Chronicles, 1493-1599* is a translation of the Octave Houdas and Maurice Delafosse's rendition of the *Tarikh al fattash*, which was compiled from three versions of the text that surfaced in the early twentieth century, and that were edited by Houdas and Delafosse in 1913. It includes a new introduction by Wise, as well as the original introduction and scholarly notes of Houdas and Delafosse. Although long valued as the most important historical document of the medieval period, Kati's chronicle is also a literary achievement that is comparable to the writings of figures like Chaucer, Rabelais, and Montaigne. Wise's introduction and study questions accompanying this translation provide contextualizing information for the non-specialist. The *Tarikh al fattash* is essential reading for all students of African literature and history.

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