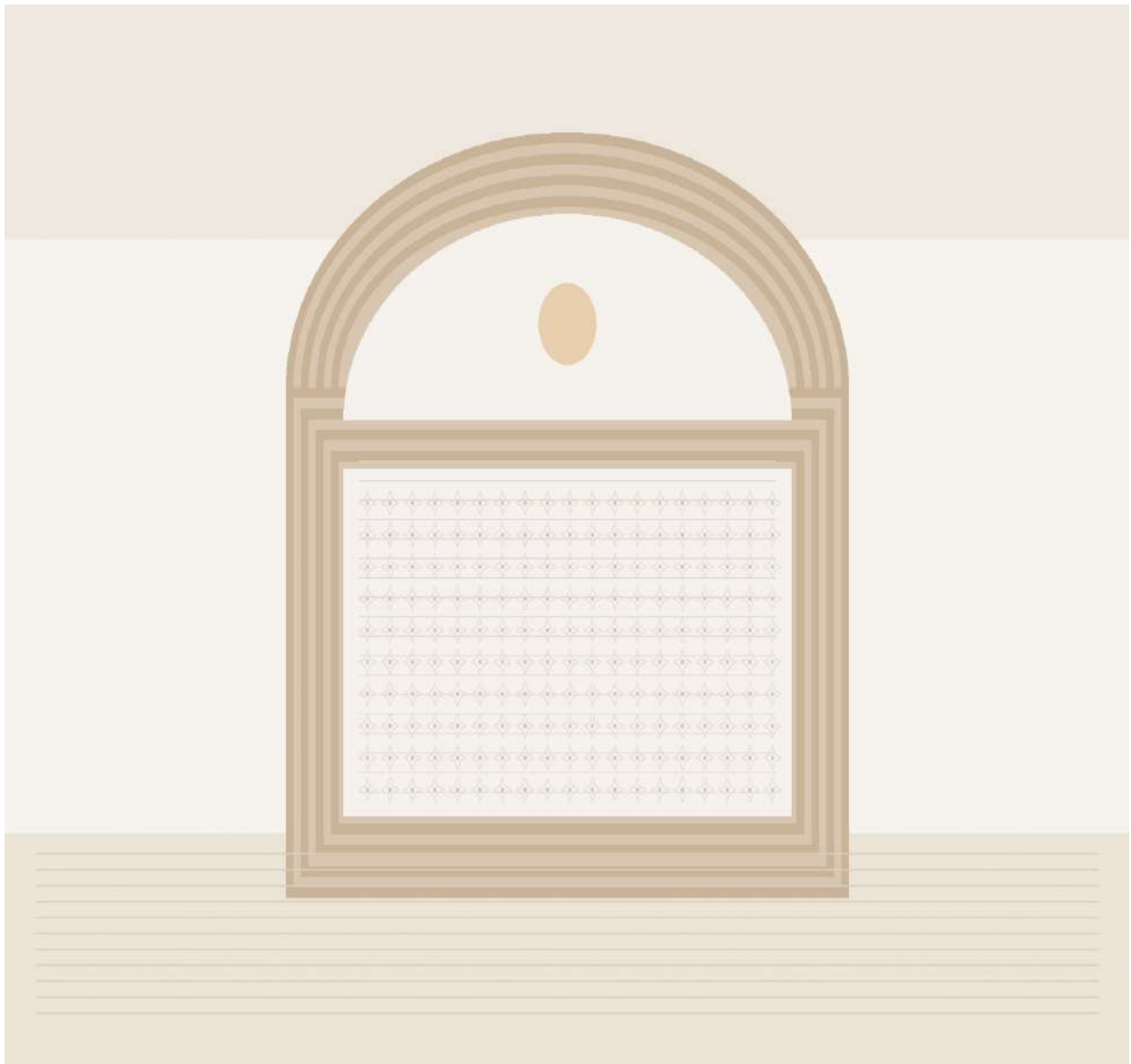


Rewriting Remembrance in Cottbus:

Ahmed Baba al-Timbukti (1556–1627)

Scholarship, Exile to Morocco, and a Campus Remake



- BTU4Future (Summer Semester 2025)
- Student: Yasmine Mezraoui (Matriculation No. 5005522)
- Brandenburg University of Technology (BTU) Cottbus–Senftenberg
- Supervisors: Luisa Stuhr, Prof. Melanie Jaeger-Erben

Abstract

This report identifies Ahmed Baba al-Timbukti as a significant individual for a Moroccan student residing in Cottbus. A prominent Maliki legal expert and academic from Timbuktu, he was exiled to Morocco in 1594 following the Saadian takeover of Songhai, residing for years in Marrakesh and Fez before coming back to Timbuktu in 1608 (Britannica, 2025). During his time in Morocco, he created significant works, such as the *Mi'raj al-Su'ud*, a legal document that contested the racialization of slavery and asserted that Muslims irrespective of skin color could not be subjected to enslavement (Cleaveland, 2015; Barbour & Jacobs, 1987/2014).

His memory is commemorated in Mali through the Ahmed Baba Institute (IHERI-AB), established in 1973 and enlarged with a new structure donated by South Africa in 2010 (Gov.za, 2010). In 2012, that collection faced endangerment, resulting in thousands of manuscripts being either destroyed or stolen; by August 2025, the first major shipment returned to Timbuktu after 13 years in Bamako (UNESCO; AP, 2025; Guardian, 2025).

This report reviews current memorials and suggests a reading-and-listening micro-monument for BTU's campus spine connecting Morocco ⇄ Timbuktu ⇄ Cottbus via Ahmed Baba's life and teachings. The proposal highlights ethics (context, permissions, multilingual access), accessibility, and practicality.

Keywords: Ahmed Baba; manuscripts of Timbuktu; Saadian takeover; Marrakesh; Fez; Cottbus; commemoration; decolonial curation; enslavement; Maliki jurisprudence.

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1. Personal Positioning & Why Ahmed Baba

I grew up in Morocco and now study in Cottbus. Choosing Ahmed Baba al-Timbukti feels personal because he literally links Morocco and West Africa: arrested in Timbuktu after the 1591 Saadian invasion and taken to Marrakesh in 1594, he taught and wrote in Morocco before returning to Timbuktu (Britannica, 2025). His exile and scholarship touch my own story; the manuscripts that carry his ideas speak to the questions memory, archives, language, and justice that shape my studies and everyday life in Brandenburg.

That connection became even clearer with the news that Timbuktu's manuscripts began returning home in August 2025 after their evacuation during the 2012 crisis proof that remembrance is both fragile and ongoing (AP, 2025; Guardian, 2025; UNESCO). As I walk the BTU campus spine past the new FrauenOrt Bilillee Machbuba, I see space to add a distinctly African scholarly perspective to Cottbus's memory landscape. Bringing Ahmed Baba's words into a small reading-and-listening point on campus would let his voice travel from Timbuktu and Marrakesh into the rhythms of student life here.

2. Biography & Historiography of Ahmed Baba

2.1 Micro-history: key dates, places, works

- Ahmed Baba al-Timbukti was born in 1556 in Arawān (Araouane), near Timbuktu, and died in 1627 in Timbuktu (Britannica, 2025).
- He was deported to Morocco in 1594 and spent years teaching in Marrakesh and Fez, returning to Timbuktu in 1608 (Britannica, 2025).
- His key works include *Nayl al-Ibtihāj* and *Mi' rāj al-Su'ūd*, which argues that enslaving Muslims is unlawful and challenges the racial conflation of "Black" and "slave" in Maghribi practice (Cleaveland, 2015; Barbour & Jacobs, 1987/2014).

2.2 The Moroccan conquest & deportation context

Between 1590 and 1591, Sultan Aḥmad al-Manṣūr launched a trans-Saharan campaign that defeated the Songhai army at Tondibi and brought Gao and Timbuktu under Moroccan control, led on the ground by the commander Judar Pasha. In the aftermath, Moroccan authorities exiled leading scholars including Ahmed Baba to Marrakesh to tighten their grip on the Niger trade and to silence local intellectual resistance (Britannica, 2025; Nobili, 2022).

2.3 Historiography and debates

Reference works like Britannica lay out the basic arc of Ahmed Baba's life and exile. Specialist studies add nuance: rather than calling for abolition, *Mi' rāj al-Su'ūd* ties freedom to religious status arguing that Muslims, whatever their skin color, cannot be enslaved which critiques the racial equation of "Black = slave" while still allowing the enslavement of non-Muslims within Mālikī law (Cleaveland, 2015).

Recent textual histories also connect his deportation to the Saadian political economy control of trade routes and state prestige and to the circulation of books and scholars between Timbuktu and Moroccan centers such as Marrakesh and Fez (Nobili, 2022).

3. Mapping Black History in Cottbus: Sites of Resonance

3.1 Why Cottbus, why now

Every day, people move along Konrad-Wachsmann-Allee to studios, the library, the Mensa. In July 2025, the FrauenOrt Bilillee Machbuba joined that daily path and quietly changed how Cottbus remembers. It gave us a place to pause, read, and think. On the campus map (*Figure.1*), you can see the FrauenOrt set at (51.767477, 14.323706).

A short walk (~180 m) west along the same corridor (*the red pin in Figure.1*), we propose a small Ahmed Baba Reading & Listening Point. Together the two sites make a pair: you read with Machbuba; you listen with Ahmed Baba. Reading and voice. Text and presence. Two moments on one path.

Why here? Because this is where campus life flows. Placing memory on the spine means people meet it on the way to class, not only on special occasions.

Why now? Because the FrauenOrt has opened a door. People are paying attention; partners are engaged. Adding a gentle, low impact listening node while the energy is high helps turn one success into a corridor of remembrance, not just a single point.

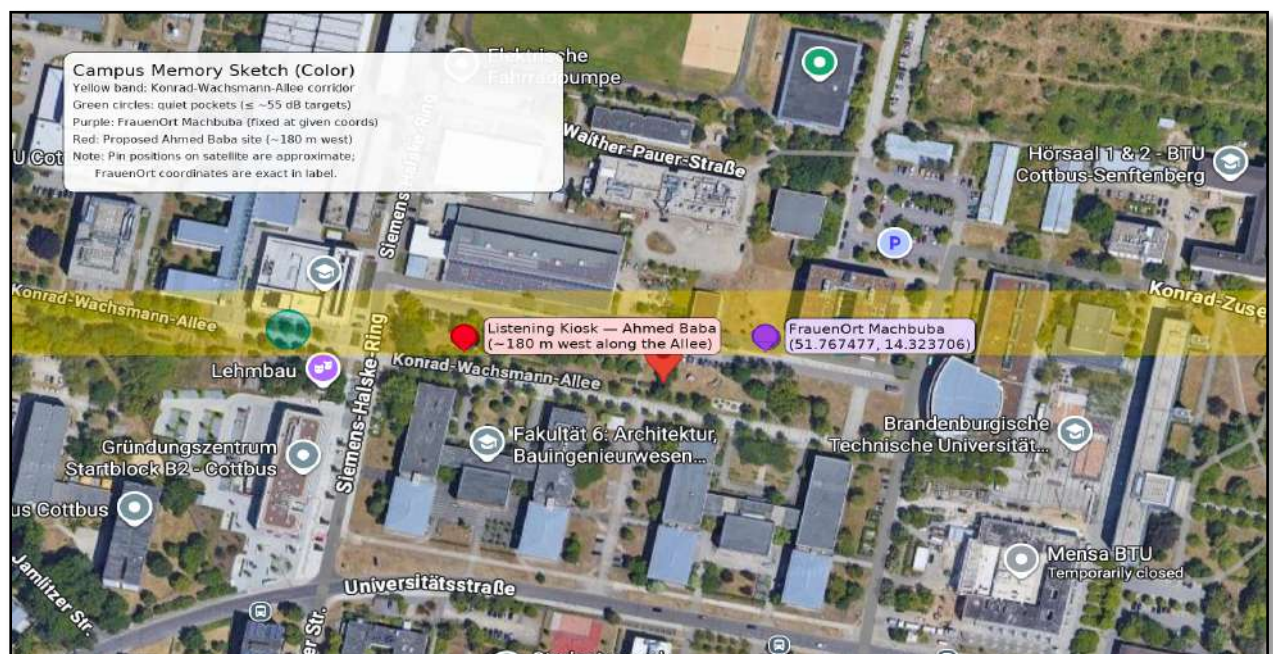


Figure 1 Ahmed Baba Kiosk — FrauenOrt Machbuba Site

3.2 Reading the campus spine as a memory corridor

In (*Figure.1*), the yellow band marks the Allee. Trees and small greens line both sides. The green circles are “quiet pockets” spots that feel calm enough for soft sound. In simple terms: the background noise is low, so a small speaker can be heard without disturbing passers-by (think library-voice, not loudspeaker).

Now translate the map into experience. (*Figure.2*), shows the proposed node: a semi-circular wooden bench around a compact, permeable circle edged in light stone. A slender weathering-steel post holds a small push-button and near-field speaker. A low “open book” plinth gives the title and a QR for transcripts and sources. A single solar bollard makes the place safe at dusk without glare. Bikes and pedestrians still flow past; you step in, sit, press, listen, and step back into your day.

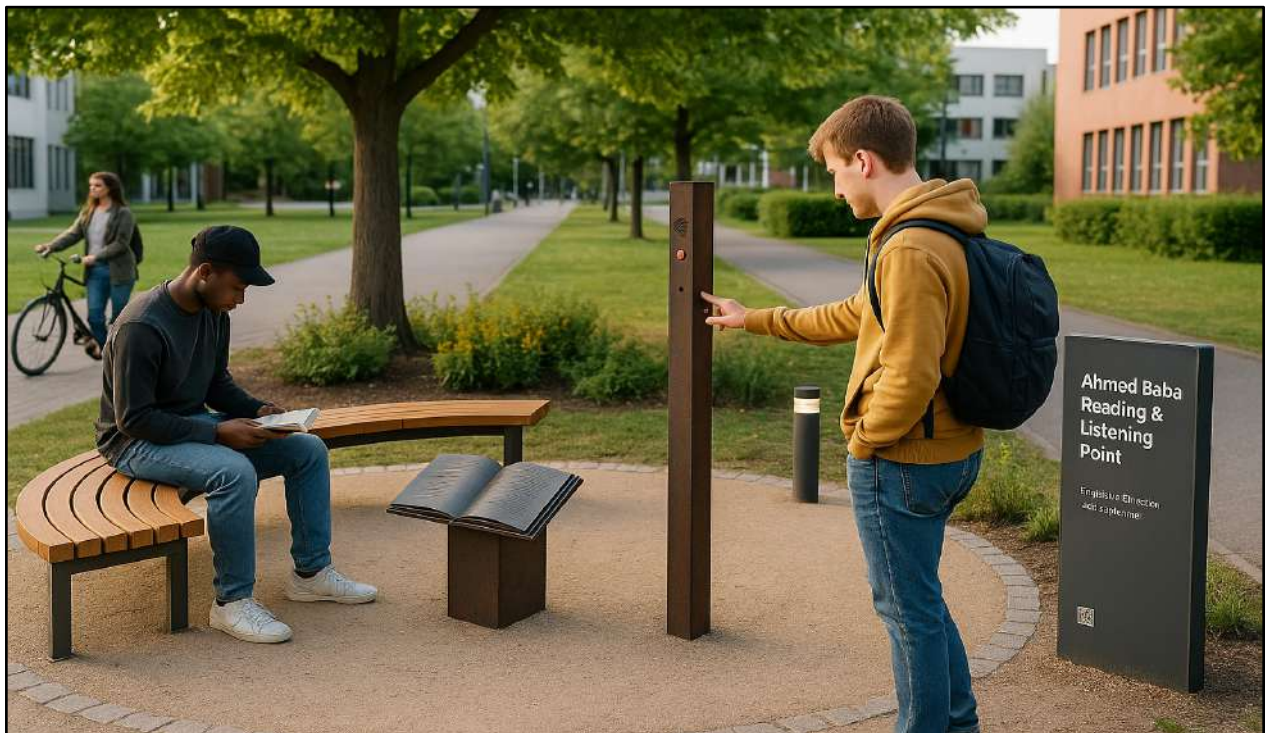


Figure 2 Ahmed Baba Reading and Listening point

3.3 Preferred site

Preferred site (*Figure.1*) ~180 m west of the FrauenOrt on the south side of the Allee, near Fakultät 6.

- People naturally pause here. It sits between studios, the library, and the Mensa, with a green edge that invites short breaks.
- The sound feels calm. Planting and tree trunks soften noise; fewer driveway crossings mean fewer sudden peaks.
- Strong academic links. Close to architecture and library routes—ideal for course-curated audio.
- Easy to deliver. A solar bollard and a battery-powered post mean no trenching; QR points to BTU Library pages.

3.4 Thematic throughlines

- **Morocco ⇌ Timbuktu ⇌ Cottbus**

Ahmed Baba's life and manuscripts traveled; the QR ties that story to BTU holdings, so scholarship feels close and local.

- **Text ⇌ Voice**

FrauenOrt invites reading, the listening point invites hearing. In (*Figure.2*), a student presses the lit button moving from silent text to a spoken moment.

- **Ethics ⇌ Access**

An induction loop, bilingual panel, and transcripts via QR keep the content open. The bench has wheelchair gaps and an armrest to help people stand access by design.

- **Scholarship ⇌ Everyday life**

Because the node sits on the spine, it meets you in the middle of your day between a seminar and lunch, so African scholarship becomes part of the everyday rhythm, not an occasional event.

4. Remembrance Audit: How is Ahmed Baba remembered now?

4.1 Forms and media of remembrance

When most people “meet” Ahmed Baba today, it’s through institutions and archives rather than statues or plazas. In Timbuktu, the Ahmed Baba Institute (IHERI-AB) anchors his legacy in scholarship and care for manuscripts (founded 1973; a new building opened/handed over in 2010) (Gov.za, 2010). Around the city, thousands of manuscripts connect everyday life to written learning, yet the 2012 attacks scarred that memory, with roughly 4,203 items burned or stolen (UNESCO). More recently, headlines have carried hope: in Aug 2025, the first batch of manuscripts returned to Timbuktu after thirteen years in Bamako (AP, 2025; Guardian, 2025).

- **Implication for BTU:** our listening point should sound like a library made public short, careful clips that invite curiosity and point to sources, not a monumental “speech.”

4.2 Authorship & perspective

In Mali, remembrance centers scholarship and preservation: cataloging, conserving, teaching work that happens in stacks, labs, and classrooms (IHERI-AB). In Morocco, Baba’s years in Marrakesh/Fez surface mainly in scholarly narratives about the Saadian period and the movement of texts not in street-level memorials (Nobili, 2022). In other words, institutions tell most of the story; city spaces tell it unevenly.

- **Implication for BTU:** credit the institutional keepers (IHERI-AB, librarians, conservators), but also bring in human voices—a student, a caretaker, a reader—so authorship feels shared.

4.3 When were memorials done?

The naming of the institute (1973) and the new building (2010) act as scholarly memorials. The 2012–2013 crisis and the 2025 returns added punctuated, global attention moments when the world looked up from its routines to notice manuscripts, couriers, and courage (UNESCO; AP, 2025; Guardian, 2025). (*Figure.3*)

- **Implication for BTU:** curate a short timeline audio (≤ 90 s): founding → building → crisis → return, each step voiced briefly, with a gentle prompt: “What does it mean to care for knowledge together?”

4.4 Gaps & ethics

- **Geography:** there is little public-facing remembrance in Morocco, despite Baba’s exile and teaching there. Our Cottbus node can acknowledge that gap without speaking for Moroccan communities.

- **Mediation:** Arabic legal and scholarly terms don't always carry cleanly into German/English. Translate with context, avoid cherry-picking striking lines, and offer transcripts beside audio.
- **Use rights & care:** manuscripts, photos, and audio require permissions, provenance, and proper credit. Where items are sensitive or contested, explain why a clip is paraphrased or omitted.
- **Implication for BTU:** adopt a simple care protocol at the listening point—source line + permission note on the QR page; bilingual phrasing; an ethics sentence in plain language (e.g., “Shared with permission from IHERI-AB; translation reviewed for context and clarity.”).

Ahmed Baba — Remembrance Timeline (1973–2025)

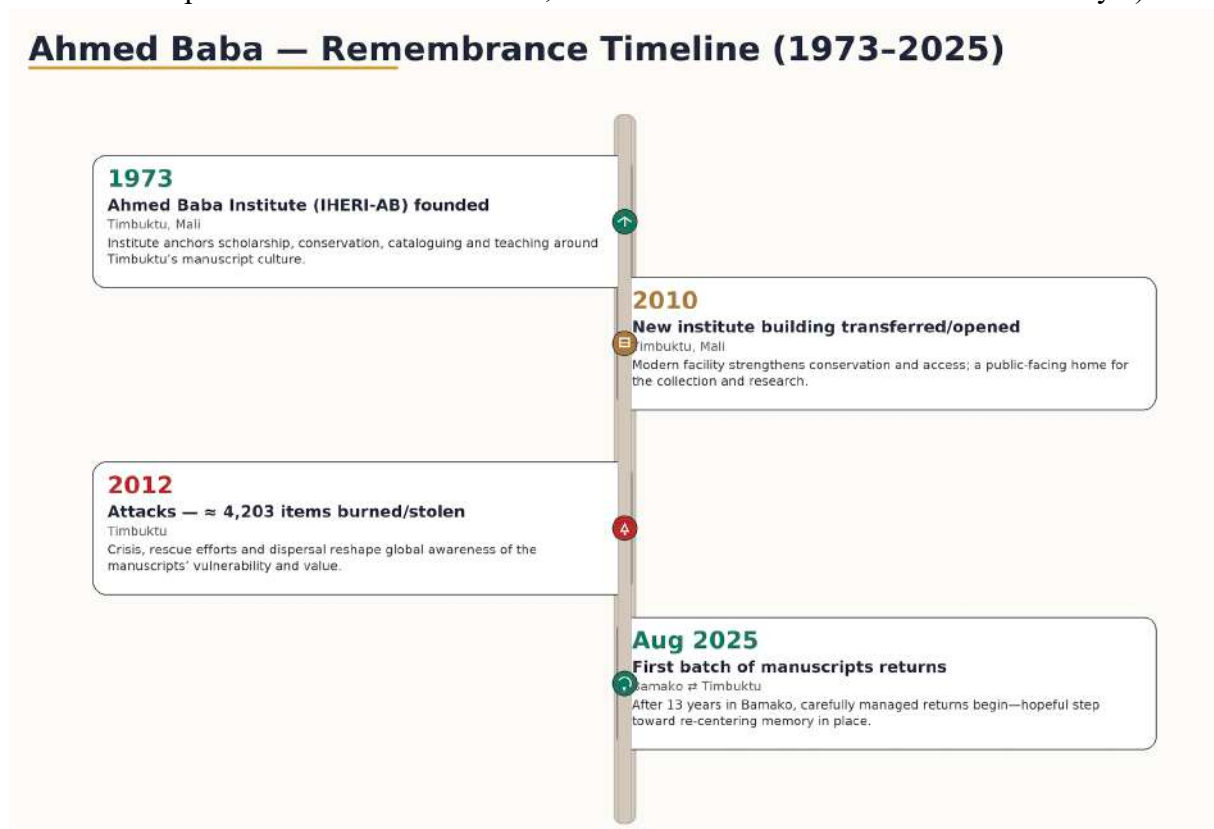


Figure 3 Ahmed Baba Remembrance Timeline (1973–2025)

5. Rewrite/Remake Proposal for Cottbus

5.1 Curatorial intent

Turn Ahmed Baba's ideas into something you can meet on campus. A small Reading & Listening Kiosk lets visitors see and hear short excerpts from *Mi'rāj al-Su'ūd* in Arabic, German, and English. A brief context panel explains his exile between Timbuktu and Morocco. The tone is quiet, welcoming, and accessible for everyone.

5.2 Two format options

- **Option A: Scholar's Bench + QR (outdoor).** A 2.0 m bench with a discrete, directional speaker plays a soft daytime reading. A caption plate shows key dates and routes, and a QR/NFC tag opens a parallel-text micro-site on your phone.
- **Option B: Micro-Exhibit (library foyer).** Two simple panels (context + translated excerpts), a headset station with a hearing loop, and a compact route map (Timbuktu → Marrakesh → Fez → Cottbus). (Figure.4)

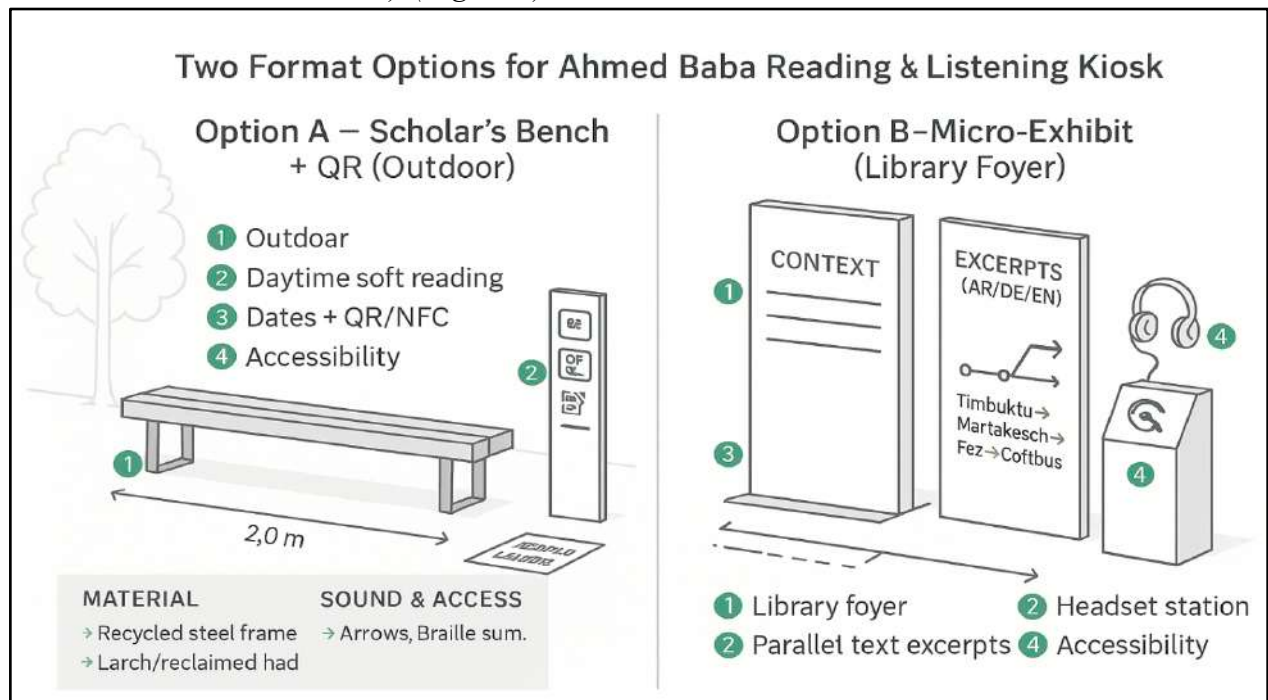


Figure 4 Reading & Listening Kiosk Options

5.3 Design moves

- **Materials.** Recycled steel frame with larch/reclaimed hardwood; protective anti-graffiti finish.
- **Sound & hardware.** Weather-sealed enclosure; tight-dispersion speaker; volume capped at $\leq 60\text{--}65$ dB at 1 m; motion sensor with a 90-second fade-out; dusk sensor turns audio off in the evening.
- **Access & language.** Caption plate in DE/EN/AR with a short Braille summary; the website provides alt-text for all content.
- **Wayfinding.** A subtle floor decal “READ & LISTEN” guides people without shouting.

5.4 Sample excerpt for display (parallel text)

Arabic (paraphrase from Mi‘rāj al-Su‘ūd):* “It is unlawful to enslave a Muslim, whether Black or non-Black; enslavement is tied to religious status, not color.”

Public text will use a licensed translation. The kiosk will clearly note the historical limits of this argument and avoid present-day oversimplification (see Cleaveland, 2015; Barbour & Jacobs, 1987/2014).

5.5 Participation & program

- **Reading circle.** Students and residents read a short excerpt in AR/DE/EN and discuss what it means today.
- **Morocco–Mali dialogue.** A hybrid roundtable with scholars and diaspora voices.
- **Care practice.** Monthly volume checks, translation updates, and anonymous visitor feedback.

5.6 Budget (12-month pilot)

- Fabrication €2,800–3,500;
- permissions/translations €700–1,200;
- graphics/web €900;
- contingency €500.
- Total $\approx$ €4,900–6,100 (target €5,000). (Figure.5)

5.7 Timeline

- Months 1–2: permissions and translations.^{[1][2]}
- Month 3: fabricate kiosk and build micro-site.^{[1][2]}
- Month 4: install and soft-launch.^{[1][2]}
- Months 5–12: run the pilot and evaluate. (*Figure.5*)

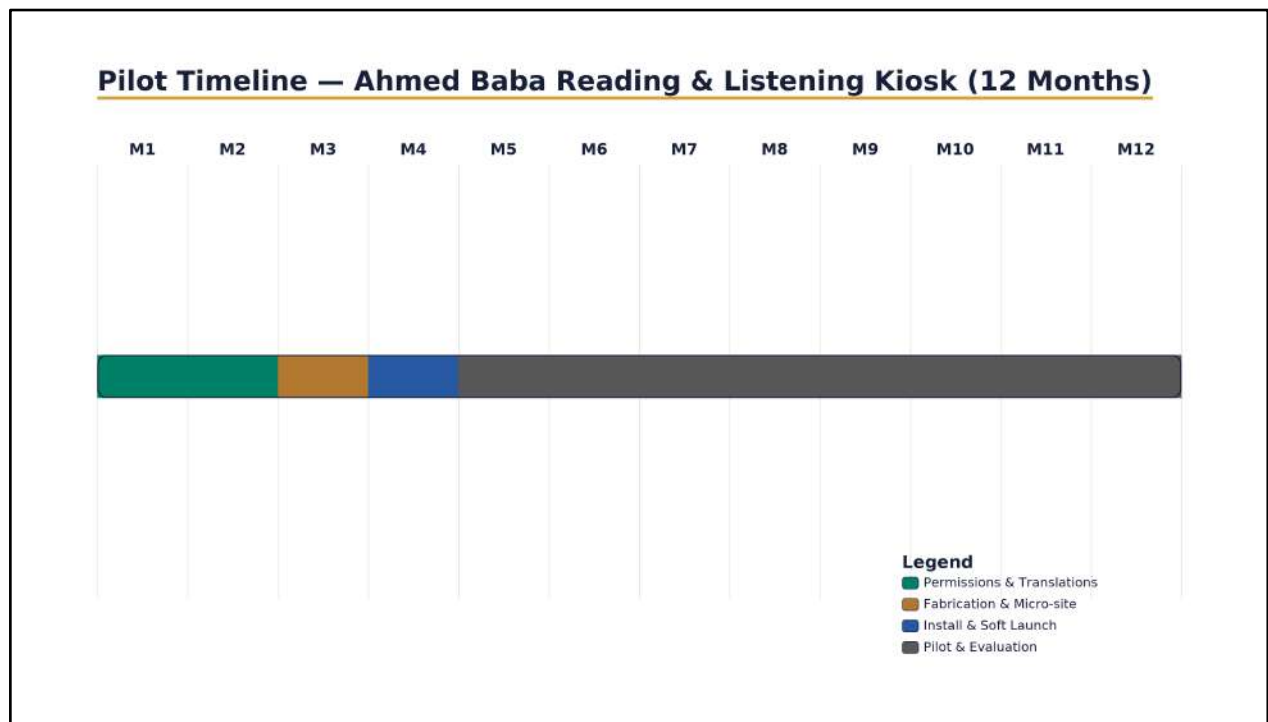


Figure 5 Ahmed Baba Listening Kiosk: Year-One Roadmap

6. Methods

6.1 Sources & cataloguing

- Use reliable overviews plus key scholarship (Baba, Morocco–Songhai, racialization debates, *Mi‘rāj al-Su‘ūd*, Moroccan archives).
- Track everything in a one-line catalogue (title, author, rights, lines used, translator/version).
- On-site: short sourced excerpts + plain note; QR links to full citations. Transparent credits.

• 6.2 Site reading (Cottbus)

- Three walks (AM/noon/PM) along Konrad-Wachsmann-Allee; mapped sound, shade, flow, and services.
- Best pocket: ≤ 55 dB, tree shade, near Fakultät 6/library/Mensa; evidence (dB notes + photos) to Appendix A.

6.3 Ethics & translation

- Two translators (AR→DE and AR→EN) → reconcile → add brief context notes.
- Accessibility: transcripts, bilingual panel + Arabic title, induction loop; permissions and clear source/date on every excerpt.

6.4 Evaluation

- Anonymous usage logs + QR analytics; 2-minute intercept interviews (with consent).
- Success = sound compliance, correct recall of one date/place, positive sentiment across users.
- Limits named: rights, translation nuance, weather; monthly tweaks posted on the QR page.
- **Bottom line:** careful sourcing, a quiet and well-sited kiosk, ethical translation, and lightweight evaluation so visitors can listen, learn, and trust what they’re hearing.

7. Reflective Discussion

Choosing Ahmed Baba lets me place Morocco and West Africa in the same frame. His years in Marrakesh and Fez tie him to Maghribi scholarship, while *Mi 'rāj al-Su 'ūd* pushes back against the lazy idea that “Black = slave,” arguing—within its time—that a person’s religious status, not skin color, shaped legal judgments. It’s powerful and premodern Maliki law, not a modern rights charter. Holding both truths its courage and its limits keeps the past from becoming a simple morality tale.

8. Conclusion

Ahmed Baba al-Timbukti is a real bridge between places Morocco and Timbuktu carried by a life of exile, teaching, and books. Today that bridge is easy to see in Mali's libraries, harder to find in Morocco, and missing in Cottbus.

A small kiosk or bench on the BTU spine can change that. You step off the path, sit, press a button. A short voice Arabic with German and English beside it fills a minute of your walk. It credits the source, names the translators, works with hearing aids, and links to more if you're curious. Nothing is grand; everything is careful.

Next to Machbuba's FrauenOrt, it gives the campus two simple acts: read and listen. Together they make Black and African intellectual histories part of everyday life here not a special event, just something you can meet between class and lunch.

Build the bench. Share the voice. Let a quiet stop on Konrad-Wachsmann-Allee expand who we remember, and how. *"A small place to listen, a larger map to draw"*

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