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There is no doubt. Muslim scholarship and society in 17th-century Central Sudanic Africa

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In central sudanic Africa, the seventeenth century was a period of upheaval and major social change. Relations of power shifted, as did trade-routes and the meaning of Islam for ruling elites. Islam spread from royal courts to rural communities, leading to new identities, new boundaries and new tasks for experts of the religion. In theology two movements stand out: one that gave priority to a return to scriptural sources and the verification of knowledge, another of the increasing importance in the region of Sufism.

In this context, the Bornu scholar Muḥammad al-Wālī acquired an exceptional reputation because his work addressed issues that were apparently important to his audience. Combining approaches from intellectual history, philology and the study of Arabic manuscripts, this study places al-Wālī within his intellectual environment on the one hand, and it portrays him as someone who responded to the concerns of ordinary Muslims around him on the other. It shows that scholars like al-Wālī, on the geographical margins of the Muslim world, participated in the theological debates in the metropolitan centres of Muslim learning of the time, but did so on their own terms. At the same time, al-Wālī's work sheds additional light on a century in the Islamic history of West Africa that has received little scholarly attention.

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MUSLIM SCHOLARSHIP AND SOCIETY
IN 17TH-CENTURY
CENTRAL SUDANIC AFRICA

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