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

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PROPOSITIONS

1. The image that exists today of Muḥammad al-Wālī as a great ṣūfī is mostly a projection of the all-embracing importance sufism acquired within Islam in central sudanic Africa, in the nineteenth and twentieth century.
 2. In his *Peerless method to understand the science of theology* al-Wālī did not try to attain a synthesis between *taṣawwuf* and *tawḥīd*, as H. Bobboyi has suggested, but rather tried to undo the synthesis that existed between the two in original Fulfulde versions of the kabbe.
 3. The anonymous text of the *Letter of enlightenment and advice to the brothers concerning the prohibition on smoking and on using tobacco as it has appeared in these times* (manuscript Falke 1850) may be a first essay by al-Wālī himself on this subject, written before he composed his better researched treatise *Valid proofs*.
 4. In the absence of many genres of written historical sources other than scholarly works, intellectual history can serve to investigate the social history, popular culture and 'little tradition' of a certain time.
 5. Al-Wālī owes his reputation mostly to his colleagues, to other 'ulamā' of his generation and the next, whose authority he defended in a time when it was challenged.
 6. The threat that tobacco represented to Muslims in seventeenth-century Bornu and Baghirmi, was the threat of the attraction of other, non-Muslim identities. Rejecting smoking and smokers gave them an opportunity to mark the boundary between Muslims and others. That was of crucial importance in this particular region of very intensive slave-raiding, because the firm Muslim identity of one's community was the best defence against enslavement.
 7. The belief that the tobacco plant has sprung from the devil's piss was (and sometimes is) rational in the sense that it represented, in D. Sperber's words, a social truth.
 8. That the art of writing spread relatively late in Africa, cannot explain the fact that specialists of Arabic studies in Africa have not yet taken up the theme of authorship, which has inspired colleagues working on literature and book studies in Europe for the past two decades.
 9. Al-Wālī participated in large trends in global Islam that favoured independent verification of knowledge and a return to the scriptural sources over deductive reasoning. Their relation with comparable trends in seventeenth-century European scholarship has hardly been researched yet. The tension resulting from such trends between the democratisation of knowledge and the need to reinforce the position of traditional religious authorities would be a interesting starting point for a comparison.
 10. People who tell many jokes usually have a limited sense of humour.
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