

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910814959003321
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Titolo	Doubt, scholarship and society in 17th century central Sudanic Africa / / Dorrit van Dalen
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Leiden ; ; Boston : , : Brill, , [2016]
ISBN	90-04-32448-8
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource
Collana	Islam in africa ; ; v. 20
Disciplina	297.092
Soggetti	Muslim scholars - Sudan Sudan Intellectual life 17th century
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Bibliographic Level Mode of Issuance: Monograph
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and index.
Nota di contenuto	Front Matter -- Introduction -- Dramatis loci -- Muammad al-WI -- The Scholar's Habitat -- Method and Message -- Demonising Smokers -- On Writing -- Certainties in Times of Choice -- Al-adilla al-isn f bayn tarm shurb al-dukhn. An Edition of the Arabic Text -- English Translation of Al-adilla al-isn f bayn tarm shurb al-dukhn: Valid Proofs to Proclaim Smoking Forbidden -- Awsikum y mashar al-ikhwn. An Edition of al-WI's Poem -- Bibliography and References -- Index.
Sommario/riassunto	The seventeenth century was a period of major social change in central sudanic Africa. Islam spread from royal courts to rural communities, leading to new identities, new boundaries and new tasks for experts of the religion. Addressing these issues, the Bornu scholar Muammad al- WI acquired an exceptional reputation. Dorrit van Dalen 's study places him within his intellectual environment, and portrays him as responding to the concerns of ordinary Muslims. It shows that scholars on the geographical margins of the Muslim world participated in the debates in the centres of Muslim learning of the time, but on their own terms. Al-WI's work also sheds light on a century in the Islamic history of West Africa that has until now received little attention.