



The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa (Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks)

By Rudolph T. Ware



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Spanning a thousand years of history--and bringing the story to the present through ethnographic fieldwork in Senegal, Gambia, and Mauritania--Rudolph Ware documents the profound significance of Qur'an schools for West African Muslim communities. Such schools peacefully brought Islam to much of the region, becoming striking symbols of Muslim identity. Ware shows how in Senegambia the schools became powerful channels for African resistance during the eras of the slave trade and colonization. While illuminating the past, Ware also makes signal contributions to understanding contemporary Islam by demonstrating how the schools' epistemology of embodiment gives expression to classical Islamic frameworks of learning and knowledge.

Today, many Muslims and non-Muslims find West African methods of Qur'an schooling puzzling and controversial. In fascinating detail, Ware introduces these practices from the viewpoint of the practitioners, explicating their emphasis on educating the whole human being as if to remake it as a living replica of the Qur'an. From this perspective, the transference of knowledge in core texts and rituals is literally embodied in people, helping shape them--like the Prophet of Islam--into vital bearers of the word of God.



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- Sales Rank: #368091 in Books
- Published on: 2014-06-16
- Released on: 2014-06-16
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x .88" w x 6.13" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

An excellent and needed contribution to understanding classical Islamic learning methods.--*American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*

A fascinating new account of the history of taalibes.--*Book and Ideas*

Outstanding...With [this] publication, Ware has established his reputation as an authority on West African history and Islamic epistemology.--*Harvard Divinity Bulletin*

Full of bold moves....An important book whose provocative and controversial exploration of the phenomenology and epistemologies of West African Islam...succeeds in reopening the scholarship and public debate about Islam, not only in West Africa but also in the Muslim world.--*Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*

A compelling account of Muslim epistemology and a strong contribution to African history.--*Journal of Africana Religions*

Review

Ware's astute historical analysis of the teaching and memorization of the Qur'an in the wider Senegambia region, stretching over the second millennium C.E., serves as a lens to rewrite the story of Qur'an schooling and West Africa, offering new and compelling perspectives on the social, political, economic, and religious history of the area. This book will do a great service to and have a lasting impact on the field of African history and the study of Islam in Africa." --Ruediger Seesemann, University of Bayreuth

Ware truly throws down a gauntlet in this bold and brilliantly argued volume, clearly practicing what he preaches along the way. No one who reads this important book will fail to lament the stubborn boundaries between Islamic Studies and African Studies that continue to deny us the fullest riches of both.--
Sherman A. Jackson, University of Southern California

Full of original ideas and interpretations, Ware's model of embodied Qur'anic learning is an important contribution to our understanding of Islam in Africa.--Nile Green, University of California, Los Angeles

Ware's treatment of the body and bodily encounters in the transmission of knowledge and construction of authority in Islam is truly path-breaking. This book is a major contribution to African history and Islamic epistemology.--Ousmane Kane, Harvard Divinity School

About the Author

Rudolph T. Ware III is assistant professor of history at the University of Michigan.

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