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The Hisbah System in the Markets of the Islamic Emirate of Sokoto: The Reign of Sultan Muhammad Bello as a Model (1232–1253 AH / 1817–1837 CE)

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Abstract

This study examines a central, yet rarely treated, theme in the Islamic history of the Fulani polity in the Hausa lands, a topic that has often been addressed only in passing and seldom through a dedicated inquiry. The present contribution therefore seeks to clarify the institutional sophistication and Islamic normative orientation attained by the Islamic Emirate of Sokoto in the management of economic, and by extension social, affairs, through the hisbah system, a regulatory institution established in Islamic governance since the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphate.

Within this historical trajectory, the reign of Sultan Muhammad Bello stands out as a particularly dynamic period of economic expansion and prosperity. The study first situates the Emirate of Sokoto under Muhammad Bello, then considers his life and the reforms he pursued to strengthen the emirate's structures. It also draws on a corpus of historical documents on hisbah authored by Fulani rulers and Sultans, notably Muhammad Bello and Abd Allah ibn Fudi. Building on these sources, the analysis turns to the hisbah system in Sokoto's markets, with the aim of reconstructing a more concrete picture of market life in the emirate, the mechanisms of Sharia oversight, and the practical instruments used to extend hisbah across the emirate's territories.

The findings indicate that the hisbah system contributed to organizing the Emirate of Sokoto economically and socially. It also appears as a comparatively innovative institutional arrangement in West Africa, one that reinforced the emirate's Islamic character. The emirate's legal and regulatory framework is further shown to be distinctive, while remaining closely aligned with the social realities of African communities that sought to implement the principles of Islamic law (Sharia).

Keywords: Fulani Kingdom; Hausa lands; hisbah system; muhtasibs; market; Muhammad Bello.

1. Introduction

The Islamic Emirate of Sokoto is among the most significant emirates of the Fulani Kingdom in the Hausa lands of Northern Nigeria. It emerged from the Islamic jihad movement in West Africa led by Shaykh Uthman ibn Fudi, his brother Abd Allah, and his son Muhammad Bello, against the rule of the pagan Hausa kingdoms. In this process, they established an Islamic political entity under the Fulani Kingdom, within which Sokoto became a principal emirate. In its institutional and civilizational dimensions, Sokoto's governance resembled the legal and administrative arrangements prevalent in the broader Islamic world during the medieval period, including the hisbah system.

In this context, hisbah constitutes a major Islamic institution intended to regulate markets, secure justice, curb fraud and hoarding, and protect the rights of both merchant and buyer. It assumed a notable function in the Islamic Emirate of Sokoto, particularly under Sultan Muhammad Bello, who sought to organize markets in accordance with Sharia principles so as to uphold economic and social justice.

The central problem addressed in this study is to trace how the hisbah system was applied in the markets of the Emirate of Sokoto and to assess its effectiveness in achieving its intended aims. Several questions follow from this problem :

- What mechanisms did Sultan Muhammad Bello rely on in implementing hisbah?
- What role did the muhtasib play in supervising markets, regulating prices, and preventing fraud?
- How did hisbah shape commercial and economic activity within the emirate?

This study aims to analyze these dimensions in order to evaluate the extent to which the hisbah system contributed to economic and social stability in Sokoto's markets during Muhammad Bello's reign. It also seeks to highlight the role of Islamic reform politics in West Africa in emulating the pious predecessors, both to secure social justice and to orient conduct within society.

Methodologically, the study adopts the historical approach grounded in analysis, critique, and comparison, drawing on manuscripts and printed studies relevant to the period under examination.

It should be noted that prior scholarship on this topic is extremely limited, aside from dispersed discussions in broader works and manuscript sources authored by Shaykh Abd Allah ibn Fudi, or by Sultan Muhammad Bello himself, addressing the state's economic order. Among these manuscripts are: *Taqrib Masa'il al-Bay' lil-'Ammah* (Bringing the Issues of Sale Closer to the General Public), *Tanbih al-Sahib 'ala Ahkam al-Makasib* (Admonishing the Companion on the Rulings of Earnings), and another work by Shaykh Abd Allah ibn Fudi entitled *Kifayat al-'Awwam fi al-Buyu'* (Sufficiency of the Common People in Sales).

There is also a verified manuscript by Sultan Muhammad Bello known as *al-Ghayth al-Wabil fi Sirat al-Sultan al-'Adil* (The Abundant Rain on the Biography of the Just Sultan). This work is among the most significant texts in which Muhammad Bello documented the institutional and civilizational regulations that distinguished his state, foremost among them the hisbah system.

Finally, it should be clarified that the materials used in this study include both printed and manuscript sources. They also extend to texts on prominent figures of the Sokoto polity, including the manuscript of Ghdad ibn Lim, one of the emirate's most important ministers, entitled *al-Kashf wa al-Bayan 'an Ahwal al-Sayyid Bal ibn al-Shaykh 'Uthman* (Disclosure and Clarification on the Conditions of al-Sayyid Bal, son of Shaykh Uthman).

2. The Emirate of Sokoto under Sultan Muhammad Bello

Before turning to the hisbah system during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Bello (Bello, in Fulfulde, conveys the sense of "the appointed aide" or "designated assistant"), it is important to reconstruct, in brief, the conditions under which his Islamic emirate took shape. In the Hausa lands, Islam and the institutional forms through which it had been expressed had weakened, a trajectory intensified by the Moroccan invasion whose effects proved deeply disruptive across the polities of the Western Sudan¹. Against this backdrop, a focused introduction to Muhammad Bello and to some of his principal reforms becomes essential. It clarifies the administrative and normative environment within which Sokoto's market regulation later operated. Among the most salient arrangements attributed to his rule are the organization of a military ribat, the establishment of diwans, and the structuring of a ministerial apparatus, alongside other measures that shaped the emirate's civilizational profile and governance capacity.

2.1. The Emergence and Development of the Emirate

The Emirate of Sokoto lies approximately between 10° and 14° north latitude and between 4° and 6° east longitude. It is named after the Sokoto River that runs through the region. In climatic terms, it resembles much of the Sahel: high temperatures prevail for most of the year, and winds carrying desert sand sweep across the area between December and March. Its agriculture included rice, cotton, sugarcane, and dates. The emirate's area is estimated at around 4,000 km². During the period of Fulani rule in the Hausa lands, Sokoto was regarded as one of the major Nigerian capitals. It functioned as the kingdom's first capital and as the seat of the sultan's authority. It was established on the ruins of the pagan emirate of Gobir, and its strategic significance was reinforced by its proximity to the Sokoto River, one of the tributaries of the Niger.

The Fulani tribes who founded the Islamic Emirate of Sokoto are commonly counted among the largest populations of the Western Sudan. Their settlements extend from the Atlantic coast and the Lake Chad basin to Cameroon. They are reported to have embraced Islam in the fifth century AH (eleventh century CE), and they are frequently treated as a major force in the regional diffusion of Islam.

The emirate's foundation and consolidation are associated with early Fulani leaders who launched a jihad movement against the pagan Hausa kingdoms toward the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries AH (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries CE). Shaykh Uthman dan Fodio stands out in this narrative as a leading figure in the intellectual and reformist history of Islam in West Africa. He was raised in a Fulani household marked by religious learning and a Sufi milieu. His son, Muhammad Bello, also played a prominent role in the campaigns through which the emirate was constituted. Among the engagements cited are the Battle of Kang (1219 AH / 1804 CE) and the Battle of Kato (1219 AH / 1804 CE). Muhammad Bello described the latter as a decisive confrontation, presenting it as a "Day of Criterion when the two hosts met", and thereby framing it, in moral and symbolic terms, through a comparison with the Battle of Badr, where truth prevailed over falsehood. On the opposing side stood Yunfa, the pagan ruler of Gobir, supported by the emirs of Katsina, Kano, Zaria, and Daura. On Muhammad Bello's side, his uncle Shaykh Abd Allah ibn Fudi is noted as a leader, and the participation of Muhammadan ibn Shaykh Jibril ibn Umar is also recorded.

¹ Ahmad al-Mansur al-Saadi sent two letters to one of the Hausa kings, in which he reminded him of their standing and of the good care they had extended to them. See: Muhammad al-Gharbi, *Moroccan Rule in the Western Sudan*, Vol. 2, Mu'assasat al-Khalij, Kuwait, pp. 658–660.

From that moment, Sokoto became one of the most important ribats within the Fulani state in the Hausa lands. It began as a small village; however, after the collapse of pagan rule in the region, Shaykh Uthman ibn Fudi relocated there and instructed his son Muhammad Bello to establish the diwans of the state in the settlement. Bello subsequently built a small fort to serve as a base for ribat and defensive stationing. Construction then expanded steadily, and Sokoto developed into an Islamic urban center with a growing architectural footprint, as well as a cultural and commercial hub that could rival several African capitals and emirates of the period.

In political terms, Sokoto served as the capital of the eastern emirate during the era of Shaykh Uthman. Muhammad Bello developed the city further and invited his father to reside there, teach the population, and guide them. In *Infaq al-Maysur fi Tarikh Bilad al-Takrur* (The Spending of the Affluent in the History of the Lands of Takrur) Muhammad Bello records the construction of the emirate's first fortress and introduces this account through the following lines:

"How fortunate I am: dwellings, what splendid abodes, in Sokoto, set on the hill, before the watering places. A land desired beforehand by people of sound judgement, and every dark, drenching cloud has poured its rain upon it."

On this basis, Sokoto became one of the cities to which Muhammad Bello directed sustained attention, not only to fashion a capital commensurate with the new state but also to stabilize its urban order in practical terms. Accounts emphasize his concern with the cleanliness of streets and roads, as well as his encouragement of construction and settlement. Within a relatively short period, Sokoto is described as *Umm al-Mada'in* (the mother of cities) and as a commercial center whose prominence surpassed Kano and Katsina. It is also portrayed as a focal point of scholarship and letters and, at the same time, as a source of wealth and prosperity within the emirate's political economy.

2.2. Sultan Muhammad Bello: Life and Administrative Arrangements

Sultan Muhammad Bello's name and lineage are traced to Shaykh Uthman ibn Fudi ibn Muhammad Fudi ibn Salih ibn Harun ibn Muhammad Ghurṭ ibn Jabb ibn Muhammad Thanb ibn Masran ibn Ayyub ibn Bab ibn Bakr ibn Musa Jakkal. His family was a respected household, known for piety, reconciliation, and charitable conduct, and distinguished by Qur'anic memorization. Learning was a sustained family disposition transmitted over generations, culminating in the emergence of the father of Shaykh Muhammad al-Fudi². Within this environment, Muhammad Bello is said to have drawn particular benefit from his father's instruction and moral formation, despite his youth in comparison with some of his brothers³.

He was born on a Wednesday in Dhu al-Qi'dah, 1195 AH (1779 CE), at Taghl, described as the "Grand School". In early childhood he was raised by his maternal grandmother, Hasnah, with whom he learned to read⁴ and to write the Qur'an⁵. More broadly, his household is marked by scholarship, teaching, and da'wah. This intellectual and religious ethos shaped Bello's trajectory: he developed into a learned preacher and, during his father's reign, assumed multiple responsibilities, including ministerial duties, advisory functions, secretarial work, and military command. However, his appointment over the eastern division of the state was the key factor that prepared him to succeed his father as the second sultan⁶.

² Ghazali Bello, "Critical Edition of the Manuscript Recording the Collected Extracts in Dispersed Reports from Various Works," Master's degree (Arabic Language), Usman Dan Fodio University, Nigeria, 1434 AH, pp. 65–66.

³ Adam Bello Muhammad Fatha, "Factors Behind the Prosperity of the State and Society and Their Renaissance in the Thought of the Commander of the Faithful, Muhammad Bello, through his work A Satisfying Reply and a Sufficient Address to Muhammad al-Jilani," International Conference on Islamic Thought and the Development of Society, 4–6 February 2020, Yobe State University, Department of Islamic Studies, Nigeria, p. 2.

⁴ Junayd ibn Muhammad al-Bukhari, manuscript, *The Gift of the Brethren: What Appears in Disclosure and Clarification Concerning the Conditions of Sayyid Muhammad Bello, son of Shaykh Uthman*, private library of Mr. Mustafa Sarduna Bella Muhammad al-Tahir, Sennar, Sudan, p. 2..

⁵ Moukhtar Umar Bumza, *Mouhammade Bello Ibn ShejuVsmanDanfondio 1817 – 1837*, Alkasyil Abba and Othes, sultans of Sokoto, university Osman Danfodio, Sokoto, Nigeria p. 75

⁶ Muhammad Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sakkakir, "The Sokoto Caliphate during the Reign of Muhammad Bello (1232–1252 AH / 1817–1837 CE)," PhD dissertation, Islamic Sharia Sciences, Umm al-Qura University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2011–2012, p. 6

Beyond these posts, he also served as a diplomat, a leader of teachers, and a trusted custodian of his father's state⁷. Ghdad ibn Lim⁸, for instance, emphasizes his closeness to his shaykh and his role in managing major affairs of government, portraying him as a figure who relieved the ruler of burdensome responsibilities⁹.

Within this broader state-building context, Sultan Muhammad Bello is credited with consolidating the emirate's foundations and extending its institutional capacity. A prominent illustration is his handling of the revolt of Abd al-Salam, who belonged to the Ariwa group and was one of Shaykh Uthman's students. Abd al-Salam initially participated in preaching and calling to Islam alongside the shaykh; his pre-conversion name was Mikabil, after which he was renamed Abd al-Salam. After the establishment of the Fulani state in Sokoto, however, he is said to have repudiated his pledge, broken allegiance to the Islamic community, and aligned himself with the agents of Nafata, the tyrannical pagan ruler of the Emirate of Gobir. Muhammad Bello had managed this alliance with political acuity, and the episode ended with Abd al-Salam's death after a series of unsuccessful campaigns¹⁰.

Among his civilizational contributions to the construction of his emirate's political capital was his sustained efforts to suppress apostasy-driven uprisings in order to safeguard the cohesion and security of the polity. He personally led troops against opponents and challengers to his authority, and he dispatched numerous military expeditions and raiding detachments¹¹.

Sultan "Muhammad Bello" also made commendable efforts to expand the territorial reach of his state. His aim in doing so was to eradicate paganism and to disseminate Islam and Arabic culture. During his reign, local emirs have played an active role in jihad against neighboring pagan kingdoms and emirates, acting under his guidance and encouragement. On this basis, several emirates expanded during his rule¹².

On the administrative plane, one of the most consequential arrangements attributed to Muhammad Bello is the institutionalization of a ministerial system, which was a mechanism for realizing social justice. Among his principal ministers was Ghdad ibn Lim¹³, to whom wide-ranging authority was delegated, including the appointment and dismissal of provincial governors¹⁴.

Sultan "Muhammad Bello" also established a system of *dawawin* (administrative bureaus). Each *diwan* had a presiding *amir* who oversaw the group's affairs, attended to their interests, and supervised their stipends. He conveyed the sultan's directives to them and held them accountable, whether their entitlements derived from salaries or from land grants (*iqta*)¹⁵. Through this system, the sultan sought to identify the injustices committed by officials and to monitor how they

⁷ Muhammad Bello, from the introduction to the book *Selections...*, *ibid*, p. 2.

⁸ He was born in 1196 AH (1776 CE). He belonged to the Fulani tribes, and learning held a high status in his family. He grew up in this scholarly milieu. Among his most important teachers was Shaykh Uthman dan Fodio, and among his closest friends was Muhammad Bello. He married Nana Asma, daughter of Shaykh Uthman. His contribution to the development of the Sokoto state was also substantial, especially in the political, administrative, and educational domains. For more, see: Sambu ibn Junayd ibn Muhammad al-Bukhari, *The Concept of Leadership in Islam and Its Application in the Sokoto Caliphate*, in *The Sokoto Caliphate: Scholarly Heritage and Good Governance*, proceedings of the scholars' conference commemorating two hundred years since the founding of the Sokoto Caliphate, edited by Ali Gundo, Wali Junayd, and others, Sokoto, Nigeria, p. 164.

⁹ Junayd ibn Muhammad al-Bukhari, manuscript, *The Gift of the Brethren: What Appears in Disclosure and Clarification Concerning the Conditions of Sayyid Muhammad Bello, son of Shaykh Uthman*, private library of Mr. Mustafa Sarduna Bella Muhammad al-Tahir, Sennar, Sudan, p. 1.

¹⁰ Muhammad Bello. *Sard al-Kalam fima Jara Bayni wa Bayna 'Abd al-Salam (An Account of What Occurred between Me and 'Abd al-Salam)*. Manuscript. Printed at the expense of Malam Muhammad (Buz/Duqqan) al-Sa'd, Sokoto. Private Library of al-Sayyid Mustafa Sarduna Bello Muhammad al-Tahir, Sennar, Sudan, p. 1.

¹¹ Muhammad Bello. *Ibid*.

¹² Muhammad Bello. *Sard al-Kalam fima Jara...* (opcit), p. 80.

¹³ Ayman 'Ali Muhammad al-Sisi. "Al-Fikr al-Dini wa al-Ijtima' i li'l-Shaykh 'Uthman ibn Fudi (1167–1222 AH / 1854–1817 CE)" (*The Religious and Social Thought of Shaykh 'Uthman ibn Fudi*). MA thesis (African Studies, History), Cairo, 2012, p. 205.

¹⁴ Ghdad ibn Lim. *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayan 'an Ahwal al-Sayyid Muhammad Bello ibn al-Shaykh 'Uthman (Unveiling and Clarification on the Life of Muhammad Bello, Son of Shaykh 'Uthman)*. Manuscript. Private Library of al-Sayyid Mustafa Sarduna Bello Muhammad al-Tahir, Sennar, Sudan, n.p.

¹⁵ Muhammad Bello. *Al-Ghayth al-Wabil fi Sirat al-Imam al-'Adil (The Abundant Rain: On the Life of the Just Imam)*, *ibid*, p. 16.

administered equitable regulations as laid down in the *dawawin* of the imams. He also appointed the clerks of the *dawawin* and entrusted reliable officials to supervise the *Bayt Mal* of the Muslims¹⁶.

Among Bello's further reforms was the establishment of ribat towns for military defense, distributed across the state's territories to protect its rear from enemies. The emphasis on ribat is due to its broad significance across military, religious, scholarly, and social domains¹⁷. In Muhammad Bello's conception, ribat was not restricted to defensive functions. It was also a space of devotion that protected communities from attack while concentrating religious merit. This merit is linked to the performance of Islamic obligations in ribat settings, including fasting, prayer, and zakat, thereby combining vigilance with the safeguarding of Islam's collective integrity. Bello's stated objective in instituting ribat was emulation of the pious predecessors among the prophets and the Companions. This is evidenced by his statement: "Ribāṭ was dearer to the leading figures among the Successors, their imams and their devout worshippers. Its merits are immense and its legacy weighty. Whoever seeks an exemplar, let him take as his model one like Ibrahim"¹⁸

3.2. Historical Documents about the Hisbah in the Emirate of Sokoto

Muhammad Bello's treatise *Taqrib Masa'il al-Bay' lil-'Ammah* (*Clarifying the Rules of Sale for the General Public*) constitutes one of the most significant historical sources for the study of the hisbah system¹⁹ in the Emirate of Sokoto. In this work, Bello sets out the legal foundations governing transactions between sellers and buyers in accordance with Islamic law. He also identifies categories of goods that must not circulate in the marketplace. These include the sale of copies of the Qur'an to non-Muslims, the sale of Muslim slaves, the sale of military equipment to enemy combatants, and the sale of weapons to individuals likely to use them for unjust killing.

He further addresses the circulation of impure or contaminated goods, referring to substances such as oil, ghee, and honey when rendered impure. Most importantly, he explicitly prohibits the sale of wine in the marketplace, emphasizing its absolute prohibition under Islamic law. Across several sections, Bello underscores the necessity of relying on standardized measures, particularly volumetric measures for grains and weight-based standards for currency. He also insists on the ethical obligations of the seller, notably the duty to disclose any defect in the merchandise and to refrain from deception, misrepresentation, and false claims²⁰.

In another work, *Shams al-Zahirah fi Minhaj Ahl al-'Ilm wa al-Basirah* (*The Midday Sun on the Path of the People of Knowledge and Insight*), Muhammad Bello extends his regulatory concern beyond market transactions to labor relations. He stresses the obligation to protect the rights of hired workers and tenants and to ensure that wages are paid in proportion to the work performed²¹.

In a further manuscript, *Tanbih al-Sahib 'ala Ahkam al-Makasib* (*Admonition to the Companion on the Rules of Lawful Earnings*), Bello elaborates the moral foundations of economic activity. He emphasizes the necessity of productive labor and calls for the provision of sustenance for every able-bodied adult. He warns against theft and unlawful gain in markets and along public roads, arguing that lawful earnings spare the poor from begging, meet the needs of society, and contribute to social welfare and collective stability²².

¹⁶ Muhammad Bello. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁷ Muzdalifah Abkar Muhammad Tur. *Mamlakat Sokoto (The Kingdom of Sokoto)*. Supplementary BA research paper, Red Sea University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, 2010, p. 55.

¹⁸ Muhammad Bello. *Al-Ribat wa al-Hirasah al-Siyasiyyah* (Ribat and Political Guarding). Manuscript no. 74, Arewa House Centre, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, pp. 1–61.

¹⁹ Saad ibn Abd Allah ibn Saad al-Arifi. "Al-Hisbah wa al-Niyabah al-'Ammah: Dirasah Muqaranah" (Hisbah and the Public Prosecution: A Comparative Study). MA thesis, College of Da'wah and Media, Department of Da'wah and Hisbah, Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, 1404–1405 AH, pp. 15–17. (Definition of hisbah as a religious office and Shar'i authority linked to commanding right and forbidding wrong, including combating usury and hoarding, verifying weights and measures, supervising stored goods and public spaces.)

²⁰ Muhammad Bello. *Taqrib Masa'il al-Bay' lil-'Ammah* (Clarifying the Rules of Sale for the General Public). Sokoto, Nigeria: Maktabat al-Jundi, 2009, pp. 3–10.

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Muhammad Bello. *Shams al-Zahirah fi Minhaj Ahl al-'Ilm wa al-Basirah* (The Midday Sun on the Path of the People of Knowledge and Insight). In *Mukhtarat min Mu'allafat Amir al-Mu'minin Muhammad Bello* (Selections from the Works of Amir al-Mu'minin Muhammad Bello), ed. and corrected by Yusuf Brenner Ted and 'Ali Gundu. Sokoto, Nigeria: Usman Dan Fodio University, Centre for Islamic Studies, Dar Iqra' Publishing, 1434 AH / 2013 CE, vol. 1, p. 87.

²² Muhammad Bello. *Tanbih al-Sahib 'ala Ahkam al-Makasib* (Admonition to the Companion on the Rules of Lawful Earnings), followed by *Al-Jawab 'ala Sunan Man 'Khuruj al-Nisa'* (A Response Concerning Practices

Within the same intellectual framework, Shaykh Abd Allah ibn Fudi authored *Kifayat al- 'Awwam fi al-Buyu'* (*Sufficiency of the Common People in Matters of Sale*), which is regarded as one of the foundational texts on hisbah in the Fodio state. In this work, he discusses the virtue of lawful income and identifies agriculture as one of the most commendable forms of livelihood. He also sets out the legal conditions governing trade and commercial exchange and specifies goods that may not be sold in markets, such as dogs and birds sold before capture or effective possession²³.

Ibn Fudi further examines the legal ruling on a Muslim hiring himself out to a Christian or a Jew, as well as the permissibility of selling copies of the Qur'an and books of hadith and jurisprudence to non-Muslims. He addresses the prohibition of selling weapons, military equipment, or riding gear to enemy combatants, and forbids selling goods to individuals who are likely to use them in acts of disobedience. He also discusses specific cases, such as selling grapes to someone who will press them into wine, or selling wood to someone who will fashion it into a cross. Additionally, he prohibits both the sale and possession of poison and forbids deceptive practices such as the sale of pebbles²⁴.

Finally, he devotes an entire section to the legal pillars of sale, its conditions, and its classifications. Transactions are categorized as obligatory, recommended, permissible, reprehensible, or forbidden. Examples include the prohibition of selling grain while still on the stalk. He also examines transactions involving money and precious metals, such as gold and silver, including currency exchange and barter. In all such dealings, he categorically condemns fraud, concealment, deception, and manipulation, and reiterates the binding obligation of the seller to disclose any defect in the commodity to the buyer²⁵.

2.4. The Hisbah System in Sokoto's Markets and the Instruments of Sharia Oversight

Sultan Muhammad Bello placed sustained emphasis on the hisbah system and on market organization. In pursuing this agenda, he abolished some of the markets that had existed prior to the jihad and the establishment of his state, then created new ones aligned with the political order of the period. These markets were intended to operate within the parameters of Islamic commercial law, governing purchase and sale while curbing fraud, adulteration, and other forms of misrepresentation²⁶.

To administer this domain, Bello appointed a market official described in the sources as the "market accountant" or the "wali of hisbah", a supervisor responsible for market administration and price-related matters. This official mediated, institutionally, between the judge and the authority charged with adjudicating grievances. His core duties included preventing underpricing that deprived sellers of their due, suppressing short-measuring and false weighing, and paying close attention to bread, especially loaves that were underweight or insufficiently baked. He also inspected spoiled and adulterated goods²⁷. These functions were anchored in Qur'anic injunctions for His saying, Exalted is He, in His clear Revelation:

'And to Midian We sent their brother Shu'ayb. He said: O my people, worship God; you have no deity other than Him. Do not give short measure or weight. Indeed, I see you in prosperity, and I fear for you the punishment of an all-encompassing Day. O my people, give full measure and weight with justice, do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs, and do not spread corruption in the land.'²⁸

Muhammad Bello further assigned assistants to the market supervisor to support implementation. Their tasks included preventing bribery in market transactions and addressing debtors who delayed payment to sellers. The supervisor and his aides were also expected to enforce public-order norms, including preventing the mixing of men and women in market spaces and discouraging unnecessary conversation between them in public thoroughfares²⁹.

In Bello's emirate, hisbah did not remain confined to the regulation of exchange. It also incorporated social and ethical supervision aimed at reforming conduct and maintaining public welfare. The sources indicate attention to order on roads, humane treatment of animals by prohibiting overburdening them, monitoring taverns, and supervising forms of public display regarded as morally harmful³⁰.

Restricting Women's going out). Manuscript copy in the private library of al-Sayyid Mustafa Sarduna Bello Muhammad al-Tahir, Sennar, Sudan,

²³ 'Abd Allah ibn Fudi. *Kifayat al- 'Awwam fi al-Buyu'* (*Sufficiency of the Common People in Matters of Sale*). Ed. Muhammad al-Kharshi Muhammad Bello Ghulghul. Nigeria: Ihsan for Printing and Publishing, n.d., 1st ed., pp. 15–56.

²⁴ 'Abd Allah ibn Fudi. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–95.

²⁵ 'Abd Allah ibn Fudi. *Ibid.*, pp. 96–150.

²⁶ Moukhtar Umar Bumaza. *Op. cit.*, p. 246.

²⁷ Muhammad Bello. *Al-Ghayth al-Wabil...* (opcit), p. 74.

²⁸ The Qur'an, Hud 11:84–85.

²⁹ Muhammad Bello. *Al-Ghayth al-Wabil...* (previously cited), p. 155.

³⁰ al-Sadd Ahmad al- 'Iraqi. *opcit*, p. 115.

One striking feature of Bello's regulatory approach is that he instructed the market supervisor to require craftsmen and bakers to adopt individualized stamps bearing their names and commercial marks. Each producer was to imprint this stamp on his output so that products could be traced back to their maker³¹.

Hisbah manuals commonly stress that the market supervisor should be legally literate, committed to truth, and personally upright. He should be known for probity and justice, possess practical discernment, and understand both the granular details of daily transactions and the broader management of public affairs³². The duties assigned to the market supervisor in Sokoto suggest that Muhammad Bello was particularly attentive to appointing inspectors who combined competence with scholarly and ethical credibility.

Within the same regulatory landscape, Abd Allah ibn Fudi, Muhammad Bello's uncle and his father's brother, set out detailed principles distinguishing what may and may not be traded in the market, and governing commercial relations between Muslims and protected non-Muslim communities. He held that hiring a non-Muslim worker could be permitted in cases of necessity when no Muslim was available. He also permitted selling bees within their hives and recognized agency-based sales provided the agent was not under suspicion. At the same time, he prohibited exchanging a commodity for the same commodity, for example dates for dates, on the grounds that such a transaction constituted usury. He further forbade selling the property of minors, the mentally incapacitated, or the unconscious, since legal capacity and sound judgment were absent³³.

The importance of the market supervisor in Sokoto, as the sources frame it, lay in safeguarding public resources held in the treasury and in encouraging merchants to invest, thereby generating revenues that supported the emirate's prosperity and development³⁴. On this basis, Bello sought to standardize measures, regulate market practice, and suppress fraud in commercial exchange, consistently grounding this agenda in Qur'anic commands to weigh with justice, avoid diminishing people's rights, and refrain from spreading corruption³⁵.

Those who violated the market supervisor's orders or contravened the hisbah regulations, such as thieves operating in the market, were subject to prescribed penalties under Islamic law³⁶. At the same time, Bello is presented as attentive to public grievance. He listened to complaints from those who had been wronged, deprived of their rights, or had their goods stolen or manipulated. Support for this depiction appears in the account of the English traveler Hugh Clapperton, who reported, upon visiting, the presence of a residence, a mosque, and a garden. He noted that the residence functioned as a designated venue for receiving people's complaints and petitions³⁷.

3. Reforms and Programs to Enhance the Muhtasib's Effectiveness

3.1. The Postal and Police Systems

One reform that appears integral to implementing the hisbah system and sustaining its day-to-day performance under Sultan Muhammad Bello was the use of the postal administration as a channel of oversight. In Sokoto, the head of the postal service was not limited to courier functions. He also carried out tasks resembling covert policing. Some of his personnel were described as informants, while their chief was identified as the principal intelligence officer. Their remit included transmitting information relevant to market affairs, particularly when the muhtasib failed to discharge his duties³⁸. Among the most prominent officials who administered the postal system (al-barid) was the minister "Ghdad ibn Lim," who was styled Amir al-Masalih (Commander of Public Interests) and Wali al-Nasa'ih (Custodian of Counsel).³⁹

³¹ Muhammad Bello. *Al-Ghayth al-Wabil...* (previously cited), p. 155.

³² Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Abi Muhammad al-Saqtī. *Fi Adab al-Hisbah* (On the Ethics of Hisbah). Vol. 21. Morocco: Institut des Hautes Études Marocaines, n.d., p. 5.

³³ 'Abd Allah ibn Fudi. *Opcit*, pp. 44–98.

³⁴ Husayn Nashitu. "Ilm al-Maqayis fi al-Maghrib al-Awsat min al-Qarn al-Sadis ila al-Qarn al-Khamis 'Ashar: Dirasah Tarikhiyyah Athariyyah" (Metrology in the Central Maghreb from the 6th to the 15th Century: A Historical-Archaeological Study). MA thesis (Islamic Archaeology), University of Algiers 2, 2012–2013, p. 88.

³⁵ The Qur'an, al-Shu'ara' 26:182–183.

³⁶ Sukayna Bu Baki. "Al-Harakah al-'Ilmiyyah bi'l-Hausa fi al-Sudan al-Gharbi khilal al-Qarn al-Tasi 'Ashar" (Scholarly Activity among the Hausa in the Western Sudan during the 19th Century). MA thesis (Islamic History and Civilization), University of Oran (Ahmed Ben Bella), 2009–2010, p. 128.

³⁷ Hugh Clapperton. *Second Voyage dans l'Intérieur de l'Afrique* (Second Journey into the Interior of Africa), trans. M. Meyries. Paris: Archives, 1829, vol. 3, op. cit., p. 171.

³⁸ al-Sadd Ahmad al-'Iraqi. *Opcit*, p. 45.

³⁹ Yahya Muhammad al-Amin. *Tuhfat Wuzara' Sokoto fi al-Thaqafah al-'Arabiyyah al-Islamiyyah* (A Gift on Sokoto's Ministers in Arab-Islamic Culture). Sokoto, Nigeria: Centre for Islamic Studies, Usman dan Fodio University, 1429 AH / 2008 CE, p. 7.

The police administration likewise played a significant role in supporting hisbah through maintaining public security. Muhammad Bello is portrayed as drawing, in this respect, on the precedent of the early Companions⁴⁰. He defined the police governor's function along two lines. First, the police governor served as an auxiliary to grievance officials and to administrators of the diwans, among other offices. Second, he was responsible for enforcing legally prescribed penalties⁴¹ so as to preserve security and stability, prevent disorder, and protect people in market spaces⁴². Bello also discusses night patrols, presenting them as useful not only for safeguarding public order but also for cultivating moral self-discipline⁴³.

3.2. Commercial Openness with Neighboring Polities

A further reform lay in facilitating regional circulation of trade. Bello encouraged merchants to keep commercial routes open, to establish markets, and to place these commercial spaces under protection. He also called on neighboring states to participate in trade and in the production of goods, with the purpose of enabling exchange in conformity with Islamic legal norms⁴⁴. This openness extended to desert merchants operating at a distance from Sokoto⁴⁵. He also opened markets in the Emirate of Bauchi⁴⁶, whose goods attracted wider demand than those found in the markets of Bornu⁴⁷ and Kano⁴⁸. On this view, Bello's emphasis on adequate production and regulated markets aimed at securing basic needs and improving communal welfare, while curbing commercial exploitation. These measures reduced incentives for theft, fraud, and deceptive dealing.

3.3. Hisbah Between Promoting Lawful Earnings and Expanding Employment

Muhammad Bello also encouraged work and the pursuit of lawful income, a policy presented as easing the practical burden on market inspectors by lowering the incidence of theft and cheating. In parallel, he had promoted employment across a wide range of occupations that served social provisioning, including agriculture, blacksmithing, tailoring, dyeing, carpentry, medical practice, horticulture, butchery, baking, and other trades necessary for meeting communal needs⁴⁹.

⁴⁰ Husam al-Din al-Samarra'i. *Al-Mu'assasat al-Idariyyah fi al-Dawlah al-'Abbasiyyah* (Administrative Institutions in the Abbasid State). Foreword by 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Duri. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, n.d., p. 286.

⁴¹ al-Sadd Ahmad al-'Iraqi. *Opcit*, p. 120.

⁴² Majdah 'Umar 'Abd Allah al-Sayhari. "Al-Siyasah al-Amniyyah li'l-Khulafa' al-Rashidin (11–40 AH / 632–661 CE)" (Security Policy under the Rightly Guided Caliphs). PhD dissertation (Islamic History), Umm al-Qura University, College of Shari'a and Islamic Studies, Department of History, 1436 AH / 2015 CE, p. 292.

⁴³ Muhammad Bello. *Al-Ribat wa al-Hirasah...* (manuscript previously cited), p. 57.

⁴⁴ M. Last. "Dawlat al-Khilafah fi Sokoto wa Bilad al-Bornu" (The Caliphate State in Sokoto and Bornu). In *General History of Africa*, vol. 6: The Nineteenth Century to the 1880s, ed. J. F. A. Ajayi and others. Paris: UNESCO, 1996, pp. 650–653.

⁴⁵ J. G. D. Fage. *Tarikh Gharb Ifriqiya* (A History of West Africa), trans., intro., and notes by Yusuf Nasr; Arabic revision by Bahjat Riyad Hilli. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1982, 1st ed., p. 293

⁴⁶ The founding of this emirate is attributed to Emir Ya'qub ibn Dat, its conqueror and founder. At the outset of Shaykh 'Uthman's call, its people pledged allegiance to him in obedience. Ya'qub was also regarded as one of Shaykh 'Uthman dan Fodio's disciples. The shaykh entrusted him with the banner of jihad and appointed him over it. From the beginning of his jihad, between 1804 and 1819, Emir Ya'qub succeeded in opening the areas surrounding Fulani villages such as "Yuli," "Liri," and "Siwi." The emirate's prosperity and major victories, however, were realized in their fullest form during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Bello. See: Muhammad Bil Ghulghul, *The Commander of the Faithful Shaykh 'Uthman ibn Fudi and His Banners in the Land of Hausa*, Shaykh 'Uthman ibn Fudi Institute, publisher Usama Khurshi (all rights reserved), Sokoto, Nigeria, p. 99.

Aliyu Marabum and AbduAllahi Tarihi. *The Bulletin of the Sokoto State History of Public Records in the History Bureau*. Sokoto Archives, Nigeria, 2000, pp. 10–18.

⁴⁷ The Bornu Sultanate emerged in the Central Sudan region, southwest of Lake Chad. Its eastern frontier extended as far as Nubia and its western frontier reached the Hausa lands, incorporating parts of them in certain periods. See: Murad Husayn and Abada Suzi, "Factors Influencing Commercial Activity in the Bornu Sultanate from the 8th–10th Centuries AH (14th–16th Centuries CE): Natural Factors and Economic Activities," *Journal of African Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2023, pp. 53–54.

⁴⁸ Aliyu Marabum and AbduAllahi Tarihi. *The Bulletin of the Sokoto State History of Public Records in the History Bureau*. Sokoto Archives, Nigeria, 2000, p. 28.

⁴⁹ Aisha Ghendouz and Nour al-Din Shaabani. "Malamiḥ min al-Tanzimat al-Sina'iyyah li'l-Sultan Muhammad Bello fi Bilad al-Hausa khilal al-Qarn 13 AH / 19 CE" (Features of Sultan Muhammad Bello's Industrial Organization in Hausa Lands in the 13th/19th Century). *Majallat al-Miyar* 27, no. 1 (2023): 656.

In the same register, Abd Allah ibn Fudi emphasizes the prohibition of illicit consumption, including usury, gambling, and usurpation, and insists that valid exchange rests on genuine mutual consent between seller and buyer⁵⁰.

Hisbah manuals also define concrete supervisory procedures. The muhtasib is instructed to maintain a written register of bakers and their shops, to require hygienic handling of water vessels by cleaning and covering them, and to ensure that kneading troughs are washed and kept clean. Bakers are also forbidden from deceiving customers in the type or quality of flour used for bread. Butchers are regulated more stringently. The muhtasib and his assistants are to ensure that the butcher is a Muslim adult of sound mind, that God's name is invoked over the slaughter, that it is oriented toward the qiblah (the direction of prayer), and that different types of meat are not mixed at sale in a way that would mislead the buyer⁵¹. Abd Allah ibn Fudi adds further discussion on selling an animal in exchange for the meat of its own species, as well as rulings concerning the butcher between what is lawful and what is prohibited.⁵²

The program further included appointing a supervisor over each occupational sector⁵³. This official's task was to report any individual who violated professional standards within commercial practice⁵⁴. Alongside this, the public was urged to seek sustenance actively, maintain market integrity, and engage in lawful earning to meet the needs of the poor and close kin⁵⁵.

To counter prohibited sales in markets, Bello promoted lawful earning as a preventive strategy. He invoked the counsel attributed to Luqman to his son⁵⁶, arguing that the pursuit of licit provision cultivates dignity and self-restraint and reduces reliance on begging⁵⁷. He further maintained that the effects of lawful earning extend beyond the individual and generate a broader social benefit that reaches the community as a whole⁵⁸.

In a written directive from Muhammad Bello to Umar Dalaji, the emir of Katsina, he instructed him to distribute merchants across villages and towns, encourage subjects to produce and store food, and avoid plunder and theft⁵⁹.

3.4. Begging and Idleness in the Hisbah Framework: Between Oversight and Reform

Within Sokoto, preventing begging and idleness is presented as closely tied to achieving an effective hisbah system, primarily through incentivizing work and productive activity. In this context, Muhammad Bello sought to persuade persons with special needs to engage in productive labor, and he provided them with access to crafts such as weaving and related textile work. This enabled greater self-reliance and allowed them to contribute to social development, while distancing them from begging in markets and from ethically harmful practices⁶⁰.

Because combating begging and idleness is framed as part of the hisbah mandate to secure economic justice, the sultan is said to have built an institute and a residential facility for the care of blind and disabled persons⁶¹. To generalize the fight against the phenomenon, he treated it as a legitimate right for all ethnic communities living within the emirate. Near his residence he established a care center for the blind and designated for them a neighborhood known as Unguwar Makafi (literally, "the quarter of the blind")⁶².

The aim of this social program was to raise the social standing of blind persons and equip them with crafts and trades so that unethical practices in markets and on roads would decline. In this way, begging and idleness, in their various forms,

⁵⁰ 'Abd Allah ibn Fudi. Previously cited, p. 56.

⁵¹ Abd al-Rahman ibn Nasr al-Shayzari. *Nihayat al-Rutbah fi Talab al-Hisbah* (The Ultimate Rank in Seeking Hisbah). Cairo: Matba'at Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr, 1946, pp. 22–28.

⁵² 'Abd Allah ibn Fudi. Previously cited, p. 150.

⁵³ Ibrahim Mouhamed B. Zagaya. "The Political Thought of Shaykh Usman bin Fodiyo as Actualized by his Son Mohammed Bello, the Amir al-Mu'minin of the Sokoto Caliphate." In Shaykh Usman Bin Fodi: Research Papers of the International Symposium, organized by I.U. in cooperation with ISESCO, Khartoum, 19–20 November 1990, p. 250.

⁵⁴ Hugh Clapperton. Op. cit., p. 173.

⁵⁵ Muhammad Bello. *Tanbih al-Sahib 'ala Ahkam al-Makasib...* (manuscript previously cited), pp. 1–5.

⁵⁶ Muhammad Bello. Ibid.

⁵⁷ Muhammad Bello. *Jala' al-Sudur 'amma Yakhtalij Sada al-Ghurur* (Clarifying Hearts Regarding the Stirring Echo of Delusion). In *Mukhtarat min Mu'allafat Amir al-Mu'minin Muhammad Bello* (Selections from the Works of Amir al-Mu'minin Muhammad Bello), 2nd corrected ed., corrected by Yusuf Burtin Ted; committee head Abu Bakr 'Ali Gundu. Sokoto, Nigeria: Usman dan Fodio University, Centre for Islamic Studies, 26 July 2013, p. 23

⁵⁸ Muhammad Bello. *Tanbih al-Sahib 'ala Ahkam al-Makasib* (manuscript previously cited), pp. 4–5.

⁵⁹ Moukhtar Umar Bumaza. Previously cited, p. 246.

⁶⁰ Moukhtar Umar Bumaza. Ibid., p. 214.

⁶¹ Muhammad Bello. *Muqaddimat Mukhtarat min Mu'allafat Amir al-Mu'minin Muhammad Bello* (Preface to Selections from the Works of Amir al-Mu'minin Muhammad Bello), p. 5.

⁶² Moukhtar Umar Bumaza. Op. cit., p. 252.

could be curbed. Bello is quoted as stating that begging is a harmful activity because the beggar does not receive respect, even if he begs while seated on a horse. The underlying purpose is safeguarding the honor and dignity of every member of society, regardless of social class or ethnicity⁶³.

From another angle, Muhammad Bello aim was to advance a coherent approach to social organization that also reduced the burden on the muhtasib and his assistants. In his view, child begging and idleness produce blameworthy traits that later develop into habitual lying in order to obtain things from others without effort. On that basis, he urged families throughout the emirate to care for their children and to provide sound education so as to prevent, or at least reduce, the spread of these behaviors⁶⁴.

3.5. The Judiciary and Hisbah as Two Mechanisms for Preserving Public Order

In the Emirate of Sokoto, hisbah functioned as more than market supervision. It also operated as a protective mechanism for vulnerable property-holders, particularly orphans, the legally incompetent, and individuals lacking full legal capacity. Judicial authority complemented this role. Judges were expected to take these categories into account while also safeguarding the outward and inward dimensions of religious obligations, ensuring that the conditions attached to lawful practice were properly met⁶⁵. Market disputes, in particular, were brought before the judge, whose rulings were grounded in juristic guidance provided by the mufti⁶⁶.

The emirate maintained a formal court to which claims were submitted, including merchants' complaints and commercial lawsuits⁶⁷. Judges were assisted by scribes who recorded what transpired during hearings. It is also noteworthy that adjudication proceeded in accordance with the Maliki school of law. Alongside these established courts, the sources indicate the existence of itinerant judicial forums, especially during wartime, suggesting that judicial functions were maintained even under conditions of mobility⁶⁸.

The relationship between the grievance authority and the hisbah rested on complementarity and coordination in the pursuit of social justice and rights-protection within Sokoto society. The grievance authority adjudicated the claims of all who sought redress and ensured that judgments were executed against wrongdoers, even when enforcement implicated close associates or the official himself. His duties included recovering unlawfully seized property and returning it to its owners, and ordering the payment of workers' wages when wages were delayed or unjustly reduced⁶⁹.

Conclusion

The present study of the hisbah system in the markets of the Islamic Emirate of Sokoto during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Bello indicates that hisbah served as a central instrument for market discipline and for advancing economic and social justice. Bello sought to operationalize Islamic legal principles in order to protect transactional integrity and to suppress fraud and monopolistic practices. These interventions stabilized market exchange and strengthened trust among merchants and across social groups.

As a ruler who succeeded his father, Muhammad Bello was one of the most significant West African sultans to institutionalize market governance through appointing a wali of hisbah. This measure was important in embedding Islamic ethical norms among populations newly integrated into Islamic governance.

The evidence further suggests that Bello pursued hisbah in a manner explicitly tied to Sharia principles and that this contributed to economic stability within the emirate. He authored works addressing hisbah and the office of the market inspector, and he appears to have prioritized the appointment of muhtasibs who combined social standing with scholarly competence. These appointments served practical objectives: structuring economic activity, regulating trade, and limiting unethical conduct in markets, while affirming principles of justice and equal treatment across social strata.

Within this framework, the muhtasib carried the system's operational weight. By supervising transactions and verifying traders' compliance with Sharia requirements, the muhtasib helped establish a more predictable and equitable commercial environment. In turn, this regulatory order supported market growth and wider prosperity.

The Sokoto case therefore illustrates hisbah as an effective instrument for disciplining commercial behavior and limiting fraud and exploitative practices. Its effects, however, did not remain confined to the marketplace. By reinforcing expectations of honesty and probity, it also shaped social relations and strengthened interpersonal trust.

Proposed Research Directions

Three avenues follow directly from these findings. First, comparative research between Sokoto's hisbah experience and that of other Islamic polities would clarify both shared features and local adaptations in institutional design and enforcement. Second, selected hisbah principles could be adapted into contemporary economic regulation to strengthen

⁶³ Moukhtar Umar Bumaza. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁶⁴ Moukhtar Umar Bumaza. *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁶⁵ al-Sadd Ahmad al-'Iraqi. *Op.Cit.*, pp. 42–90.

⁶⁶ al-Sadd Ahmad al-'Iraqi. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁶⁷ Ayman 'Ali Muhammad al-Sisi. *OpCit*, p. 205.

⁶⁸ al-Sadd Ahmad al-'Iraqi. *Opcit*, pp. 105–111.

⁶⁹ Muhammad Bello. *Al-Ghayth al-Wabil...* (*opcit*), p. 79.

market discipline and consumer protection, particularly in states with Islamic legal reference points. Third, awareness of hisbah, its purposes, and its ethical logic could be expanded through educational curricula and media programming. In parallel, the historical role of the muhtasib could be re-conceptualized to include modern oversight functions, including quality control and monitoring compliance with ethical and commercial standards.

In sum, the experience of hisbah in the markets of the Islamic Emirate of Sokoto during Muhammad Bello's reign offers a historically grounded model of how Islamic institutional arrangements can contribute to justice, equality, and market regulation. It also provides a practical reference point for reflecting on market governance in Algeria.

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