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Abbasid Politics and Performative Panegyric: The Poetry of ʿAli ibn Jabala

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Abstract

The poet ʿAli ibn Jabala, also called al-ʿAkawwak, was a little known but significant poet who lived during the late 8th and early 9th centuries. This article examines his poetry in its political and cultural context to delineate the literary devices exploited by the poet in his poems of praise. Moreover, this paper interprets existing prose anecdotes claiming that al-ʿAkawwak's panegyric poem to the caliph al-Maʾmun's commander, Abu Dulaf al-ʿIjli, made the caliph so furious that he ordered the poet's execution, despite the poet having never composed any verses overtly criticizing the caliph. The argument is made that, within the tense political atmosphere of the time, the style that the poet embraced in praising the two commanders, Abu Dulaf al-ʿIjli and Humayd al-Tusi, intensified al-Maʾmun's anger toward the poet.

Keywords: Abbasid Caliphate; ʿAli ibn Jabala; Arabic Poetry; Hyperbole; Panegyric; Patronage

A number of recent scholarly works have made significant contributions to our understanding of the performative aspects of the Arabic ode in its political, social, and literary contexts. Scholars such as Suzanne Stetkevych, Beatrice Gruendler, Raymond Farrin, Jaroslav Stetkevych, and Stefan Sperl have shown how the *Jāhilī* (pre-Islamic) and early Muslim poets manipulated themes, motifs, and the structure of the classical Arabic qasida to achieve a variety of social, political, intellectual, cultural, and poetic goals.[1] This paper similarly aims to demonstrate the poetic and political functions served by the poems of the obscure but important 8th- and 9th-century poet ʿAli ibn Jabala, also known as al-ʿAkawwak. My analysis of his poems, in which he praises two well-known military commanders serving the caliph al-Maʾmun (r. 813–33) during the Abbasid historical period, attempts to reveal the nature and motivation of the caliph's harsh reaction to the poet's praise of the two commanders.

Previous scholarship has understood the qasida as a means to explore the effects of a given poem on the poet and his patron. That is, panegyric poems have been interpreted by scholars as a negotiating tool in the relationship between the poet and the patron. The poet's "benefit rather derived from an exchange of his literary services for protection and compensation from the patron. The poet invested his talent and renown to justify his patron's claims to rank and merit and to portray him favorably, and the patron accepted and rewarded this portrayal of himself."[2] As long as the two parties were satisfied with each other, such a mutual exchange might last far into the future and constitute a long, successful patronage system.

However, this approach to the Arabic qasida has its limitations. That is, we should explore the performative aspects of a given poem or selected verses not only with regard to the hierarchy of the poem's official and immediate addressee. Scholars also must consider the attitudes and status of other parties involved in that hierarchy, whether they are peers, superiors, or subordinates of the poet's patron.

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[1]Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002); Beatrice Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry: Ibn Al-Rūmī and the Patron's Redemption* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003); Raymond K. Farrin, "The Poetics of Persuasion: Abū Tammām's Panegyric to Ibn Abī Duʾad," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 34, no. 3 (2003): 221-51 ; Jaroslav Stetkevych, "A Qasidah by Ibn Muqbil: The Deeper Reaches of Lyricism and Experience in a Mukhadram Poem; An Essay on Three Steps," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37, no. 3 (2006): 303-; Stefan Sperl, "Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the Early 9th Century," in *Early Islamic Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Suzanne Stetkevych (Surrey, UK: Ashgate/Variorum, 2009).

[2]Gruendler, *Praise Poetry*, 9.

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There are an abundance of cases in Arabic poetry that can be analyzed using this approach. For example, it is fruitful to focus on the exaggerated and dedicated praise of the Abbasid poets to the Barmakids and the role of that praise in provoking the caliph al-Rashid (r. 786–809), ultimately leading him to turn against them. In addition to the political tyranny of the Barmakids, it is likely that literary tyranny led to their downfall.[3] The same could be said about the relationship of the Banu Sahl with the caliph al-Ma'mun. It may be argued that the poems that praised the Banu Sahl and demonstrated their massive power may have contributed in some way to their downfall. Ahmad F. Rifa'i comments on the following verse,

<div dir="rtl">

أَقَمْتَ خِلافَةً وأَزَلْتَ أُخْرى   جَليلٌ ما أقَمْتَ وما أزلْتا

</div>

> You established a caliphate, and overthrew another,
> what a majestic thing that you established and overthrew!

saying that it would be impossible for al-Ma'mun to hear this verse and not be hurt, in exactly the same way as the caliph al-Rashid was extremely annoyed when he heard the exaggerated panegyrics of poets praising their Persian patrons, the Barmakids.[4] It is important to note that the verse above was composed by the poet Muslim ibn al-Walid in praise of al-Fadl ibn Sahl, and was a part of a longer poem. Only this verse remains.[5] According to one version of a prose narrative about Fadl ibn Sahl's death, he was murdered by the caliph al-Ma'mun in the year 817.[6]

This approach, widely adopted in modern scholarship, depends primarily on prose anecdotes to demonstrate the effects of a given poem. Prose anecdotes should not be interpreted as reflections of historical facts, but rather as an analytical tool to help us perceive the role of poetry in the political and social milieu of the Abbasid historical period. In literary analysis, our goal is not to discern the historical events surrounding a given poem, but rather to understand poetry as described in its associated prose narratives. Given that these prose narratives were written at a later time, we can clearly perceive how scholars, especially Abbasid scholars and critics, evaluated a given poetic text and "how it was remembered" by scholars and critics.[7] These prose works are valuable because they give us insight into how scholars and critics understood and interpreted a given poem.[8]

In a recent article, 'Abd al-Mu'in Balfas compares a poem by al-'Akawwak with one by A'sha Hamadan (d. 702).[9] The poem by al-'Akawwak begins with the verse below:

<div dir="rtl">

ذَادَ وِرْدَ الغَيِّ عن صَدَرِهْ   وَارْعَوَى واللَّهْوُ مِنْ وَطَرِهْ

</div>

> He drove away sin from his chest,
> and abstained [from transgression], while desiring pleasure.

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[3]For the political tyranny of the Barmakids, see Ali al-'Amr, *Athar al-Furs al-Siyasi fi al-'Asr al-'Abbasi al-Awwal* (Cairo: Matabi' al-Dajwi, 1979), 241–67. By "the literary tyranny of the Barmakids," I mean their domination of the literary milieu by an ability to attract and win the talented and best poets of their time, so that they basked in the poets' praise and pressured the poets to favor them politically.

[4]Ahmad Farid Rifa'i, *'Asr al-Ma'mun*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Hindawi Foundation for Education and Culture, 2012), 288.

[5]Shams al-Din Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-A'yan wa-Anba' Abna' al-Zaman*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar Sadr, 1994), 43. See the biography of the Abbasid poet Muslim ibn al-Walid in Abu al-Faraj 'Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Isfahani, *Kitab al-Aghani*, ed. Ihsan 'Abbas, Ibrahim al-Sa'afin, and Bakr 'Abbas, 3rd ed., vol. 19 (Beirut: Dar Sadr, 2008), 25–56. The famous vizier of the caliph al-Ma'mun, Abu al-'Abbas al-Fadl ibn Sahl al-Sarakhsi was born and died in Sarakhs in Khurasan. He was nicknamed "dhū al-riyāsatayn" (the man of two posts) because he had been appointed to two positions, the ministry and the army leadership. See Khayr al-Din al-Zirikli, *al-A'lam: Qamus Tarajim li-Ashhar al-Rijal wa-l-Nisa' min al-'Arab wa-l-Musta'rabin wa-al-Mustashriqin*, 15th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li-l-Malaiyin, 2002), vol. 5, 149.

[6]As for the prose narrative regarding al-Fadl ibn Sahl's death, the sources do not tell us the exact reason behind the caliph al-Ma'mun's took the step of murdering Ibn Sahl. It was said only that the caliph murdered Ibn Sahl due to the increasing annoyances and indignations that he experienced because of the political behavior of Ibn Sahl. See Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-A'yan*, vol. 4, 44; al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani*, vol. 10, 52.

[7]Pamela Klasova, "Reacting to Muḥammad: Three Early Islamic Poets in the *Kitab al-Aghani*," *Journal of Middle East Medievalists*, 27 (2019): 42.

[8]Mohammad Alqanaei, "Poetry and the Destabilization of the Umayyad State" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2013), 21–22; Fahd Alebdha, "Arab and Persian Ethnicities in Arabic Poetry: Negotiating Political and Social Status in the Umayyad and Abbasid Periods" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2017), 6; Klasova, "Reacting to Muḥammad," 42.

[9]See the biography of the Umayyad poet A'sha Hamadan in al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani*, vol. 6, 27–49.

Balfas claims that the poem is the sole reason for the deterioration of the relationship between the poet and the caliph, as the poem aims to positively affect the rank of his patron, the commander Abu Dulaf al-Qasim ibn ʿIsa al-ʿIjli, within the community. The poem lowers the status of the absolute authority, the caliph, by conferring absolute preference on the patron. Al-ʿAkawwak composed a panegyric poem in a tone suitable for speaking of the caliph, but instead devoted it to an authority inferior to the caliph in power and status. Balfas concludes that the covert message of al-ʿAkawwak's poem was to reorder power relations between leading political figures within the society. To support his argument, Balfas refers to Peter Brown's assertion that the role of the literary elite and poets in late antiquity was to establish a fixed and stable relationship between the political authority and the people. Balfas also refers to Suzanne Stetkevych's understanding of the classical Arabic panegyric ode and its ritual role in negotiations within the Islamic caliphate court.[10]

Although Balfas's article approaches a topic related to this study, he does not actually provide any analysis of the poem, only of the events surrounding it. Balfas does not engage with the structural and thematic elements of al-ʿAkawwak's poem, preventing him from properly revealing the rift that he claims existed in the relationship between the poet and the caliph. In this study I provide the historical background of political events that occurred during al-ʿAkawwak's lifetime, with an intense focus on the relationship between the poet and the Abbasid caliphs and their commanders. Then, I further explore the poetry of al-ʿAkawwak, providing structural and thematic analysis of representative poems to clarify the nature of the deterioration of the poet's relationship with the caliph. My study begins with a brief biography of al-ʿAkawwak.

The poet's full name was Abu al-Hasan ʿAli ibn Jabala ibn Muslim ibn ʿAbd al-Rahman.[11] However, in *Kitab al-Aghani* (The Book of Songs), the poet's name is given as ʿAli ibn Jabala ibn ʿAbd Allah, from the *abnāʾ* (the sons) of the Khurasani Shiʿa.[12] It is said that the poet was born in Baghdad in 777, where he lived up until his death in 828.[13] It is further stated that the poet was born blind, although his family claimed that he became blind during his childhood.[14] The poet is described by several early scholars as a *maṭbūʿ* (naturally gifted) poet and a talented panegyrist.[15] As I will describe later, some of his poetry has been lost.

During his youth, al-ʿAkawwak managed to enter the court of the caliph al-Rashid and recite a poem that gained him the caliph's admiration. That, in turn, made the famous linguist al-Asmaʿi (d. 831) jealous of al-ʿAkawwak, causing al-Asmaʿi to insult him, saying: "yes, O al-ʿAkawwak [short pudge]."[16] However, there are no poems or scattered verses addressed to the caliph al-Rashid in al-ʿAkawwak's *Diwan*. In addition, there is no record of any communication between the poet and the caliph al-Amin (r. 809–13), although it is said that the family of al-ʿAkawwak sided with al-Amin against

[10]Abdulmueen Balfas, "Tashfir al-Qasida: Qasidat al-Madih wa-Iʿadat Tashkil Haram al-Sulta," *al-Majalla al-ʿArabiyya li-l-ʿUlum al-Insaniyya* 34, no. 136 (2016): 196–98.

[11]Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn ʿAli al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad wa-Dhuyuluh*, vol. 11 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), 395.

[12]Al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani*, vol. 19, 233. The term *al-abnāʾ* circulated during the civil war between al-Amin and al-Maʾmun and was associated with the people of Khurasan. The sons of the people of Khurasan were those whose fathers fought for the Abbasids against the Umayyads; they are known as Ahl al-Dawla (the people of the revolution). *Al-abnāʾ* refers to those who were born in Khurasan but grew up in Baghdad, which was home to them. They were a distinguished group who were used to seeing themselves as superior to the Arabs, the bedouins, and *mawālī* (clients, or non-Arab freedmen). Faruq ʿUmar Fawzi, *Qiraʾat wa-Murajaʿat Naqdiyya fi al-Tarikh al-Islami* (Amman: Dar Majdalawi, 2007), 200; Michael Cooperson, *al-Maʾmun: The Revival of Islam* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2005), 45.

[13]Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad,* vol. 11, 359.

[14]Al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani*, vol. 19, 233.

[15]Ibid.; al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad*, vol. 11, 359. For more about the poet, see ʿAli ibn Jabala, *Diwan ʿAli ibn Jabala "al-ʿAkawwak,"* ed. Shakir al-ʿAshur (Damascus: Tamuz, 2014), 7–10.

[16]Abu ʿUbayd al-Bakri, *Simt al-Laliʾ fi Sharh Amali al-Qali*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1935), 330. Al-ʾAsmaʿi is ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Qurayb ibn ʿAli ibn Asmaʿ al-Bahili, a well-known narrator and linguist. He was born and died in Basra. See al-Zirikli, *al-Aʿlam*, vol. 4, 162.

al-Maʾmun. The commander ʿAbd al-Rahman ibn Jabala, one of the poet's relatives, fought valiantly up until his death, defending al-Amin against al-Maʾmun's army.[17]

Historically, the main dispute between al-Amin and al-Maʾmun was related to the controversy of centrality versus independence. ʿAli ibn ʿIsa ibn Mahan, the representative of the *abnāʾ*, was assigned by al-Amin to restore the caliphial authority over Khurasan. Importantly, their privileges were threatened by the success of territorial self-independence. It is no surprise that a large number of the *abnāʾ* joined al-Amin's army to fight against his brother's army.[18] However, their defeat by the army of Tahir ibn al-Husayn and the killing of their representative, ʿAli ibn Mahan, was a colossal disaster for them. That is, "their prestige and power were damaged beyond repair and their most experienced and dynamic leader was dead. From this point, they were struggling for survival."[19]

Under the pressures of consecutive defeats, the relationship between al-Amin and the *abnāʾ* started to deteriorate. During the siege of Baghdad, al-Amin showed compassion toward the people of Baghdad, the ʿayyārūn (vagabonds or scoundrels), giving them gifts, weapons, and supplies at the expense of the *abnāʾ*. The *abnāʾ* believed that al-Amin had abandoned them, and subsequently they joined the army of Tahir ibn al-Husayn. This cooperation between, on one side, Tahir and his family, and, on the other, the *abnāʾ*, lasted for a long time after the end of the civil war.[20]

Between the years 814 and 819 (the year in which al-Maʾmun entered Baghdad), the regions in the Near East that had been living in peace for a half-century, and in particular Baghdad witnessed a series of protracted conflicts and devastating wars in the pursuit of new power and influence. This chaos did not erupt in other regions, such as Khurasan and other states bordering the Byzantine Empire. These disputes were due to the policies of al-Fadl ibn Sahl, who was trying to convince al-Maʾmun to declare Marw the capital city of the caliphate instead of Baghdad. Such a declaration would diminish the influence of groups who had been powerful in the past, such as the *abnāʾ* and the Qaysi Arabs. Baghdad, in this new order, would be no more than a town.[21]

During the years before al-Maʾmun's arrival in Baghdad, the *abnāʾ* had been demanding that political authority remain in the capital city of Baghdad. They had supported al-Maʾmun, while also demanding that he remove his advisers and repeal some of his policies. However, from the year 817 onward, they pledged their allegiance to al-Maʾmun's competitor, Ibrahim ibn al-Mahdi. The latter's caliphate did not gain popular support. Al-Fadl ibn Sahl had tried to confront revolts in the region, but he did not fully succeed in his mission.[22]

In 817, al-Maʾmun realized that the policies of al-Fadl ibn Sahl were causing chaos and endless disputes. As a result, he disposed of al-Fadl ibn Sahl and set off for Baghdad. Upon al-Maʾmun's arrival in Baghdad, all the disputes dissipated. He also annulled all controversial policies. However, al-Maʾmun was facing difficulty establishing a loyal and powerful army, so he began negotiating to win military support. He found a solution in Tahir ibn al-Husayn and his family. A series of agreements made between Tahir and the *abnāʾ* during the siege of Baghdad made it possible for Tahir to successfully pressure the *abnāʾ* into supporting al-Maʾmun.[23] But their support of al-Maʾmun did not guarantee them an elevated status: "Many of the groups who had sustained the caliphate during the early years now disappeared from the scene. The most important of these were the *abnāʾ* of Baghdad."[24]

This historical context reminds us that the region at the time was subject to quickly shifting alliances and changing political attitudes. Indeed, the relationship between the *abnāʾ* and al-Maʾmun shifted back

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[17]Abu Jaʿfar Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa-l-Muluk*, 2nd ed., vol. 8 (Beirut: Dar al-Turath, 1967), 412–17; ʿAli ibn Jabala, *Shiʿr ʿAli ibn Jabala al-Mulaqqab bi-l-ʿAkawwak*, ed. Husayn ʿAtwan (Cairo: Dar al-Maʿarif, 1972), 12. I chose this edition of the *Diwan* as a default edition; when I use the word *Diwan* alone, I refer to this edition.

[18]M. Rekaya, "al-Maʾmūn," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al., 2012, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4889.

[19]Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, 3rd ed. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2016), 129.

[20]Ibid., 130.

[21]Ibid., 131.

[22]Ibid., 132.

[23]Ibid., 132–33.

[24]Ibid., 135.

and forth between hostile resentment and friendly alliance. One may surmise that this influenced the fluctuating stances held by both the caliph and the poet as a member of the *abnāʾ*; this relationship is a key to understanding the attitude of the poet toward the caliph and vice versa. It was feelings of resentment that heavily informed the relationship between the caliph and the *abnāʾ*. Likewise, the nature of the relationship between al-Maʾmun and al-ʿAkawwak was uncertain, as both parties held deep doubts about each other. Al-Maʾmun's army had killed the poet's brother, the commander ʿAbd al-Rahman ibn Jabala. Al-ʿAkawwak's cautious if not adversarial attitude toward al-Maʾmun is reflected in the fact that he refrained from praising al-Maʾmun until later, as I discuss below.[25]

Al-ʿAkawwak's stance toward al-Maʾmun is unrelated to the caliph's personality or morals. In fact, al-Maʾmun was known for his generosity. It was said that "al-Maʾmun said to Muhammad ibn al-Jahm, 'Recite to me three verses in praise, satire, and elegy, and I will give you for each verse a district.'"[26] One of his governors also described him as "more generous than the cloud full of water and a blast of wind," although the governor's objectivity was questionable.[27] Ahmad Rifaʿi also presents an image of al-Maʾmun as generous in his book *ʿAsr al-Maʾmun* (The Reign of al-Maʾmun).[28] In addition to being generous, al-Maʾmun was interested in literature and poetry. Indeed, he supported poets and encouraged them to compose excellent verse. It was said that al-Maʾmun was a caliph who possessed superior knowledge of language and its secrets. He frequently asked about particular poets and showed his admiration for certain poems and verses, and held a literary council where poetry was recited before him.[29] One anecdote states:

> One day in his majlis, al-Maʾmun said, where there was a group of people from Quraysh: "Who among you has memorized the verses by `Abd Allah ibn al-Zibʿara in which he apologized to the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon Him." "I did, O Commander of the Faithful," Mus`ab ibn `Abd Allah al-Zubayri replied. [Al-Maʾmun] replied: "Recite it for us." [The man] recited the poem. . . . [When the man finished reciting the poem] al-Maʾmun rewarded him with thirty thousand dirhams, and said, "The Qurayshi man should be like you."[30]

This anecdote demonstrates the caliph's literary acumen. According to al-Tabari in *Tarikh al-Rusul wa-l-Muluk* (History of the Prophets and Kings), the poet "ʿUmarah ibn ʿAqil said that I recited a panegyric poem of one hundred verses before al-Maʾmun, but when I started a verse, he preceded me to its rhyme, as I rhymed it."[31] On this point, it is helpful to refer to Rifaʿi's book, mentioned earlier, that contains prose narratives about al-Maʾmun that attest to the caliph's encouragement of poets and illustrate his nuanced ability to discriminate between good and bad poetry.[32] Generally speaking, "the Abbasid patron was no longer only an *object* of poetry but an *active* partner and participant."[33] In the aforementioned narrative, al-Maʾmun assumes the role of a partner to the poet and participates in composing a poem. This active role taken by al-Maʾmun would lead other poets to try their luck and stand before the caliph.

It seems likely that the surrounding atmosphere encouraged al-ʿAkawwak to praise al-Maʾmun and receive gifts and support from him. However, for a long time the poet refrained from visiting al-Maʾmun and praising him, possibly indicating that the poet was concealing an antagonistic political attitude toward the caliph. Indeed, this was exactly what the caliph felt about the poet, a result of the mere fact that the poet praised his two powerful commanders. The first anecdote that leads us to this conclusion tells us that the poet, during a later stage in his life, expressed his desire to connect with the caliph by first composing a panegyric poem for the caliph and reciting it to the commander

[25]Ibn Jabala, *Shiʿr ʿAli ibn Jabala*, 11; al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani,* vol. 19, 239–40.
[26]Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul*, 653.
[27]Ibid., 665.
[28]Rifaʿi, *ʿAsr al-Maʾmun*, 319–24.
[29]Ibid., 106.
[30]Abu al-Fadl Ahmad ibn Tayfur, *Kitab Baghdad*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 2002), 53.
[31]Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul*, 657–58.
[32]Rifaʿi, *ʿAsr al-Maʾmun*, 338–43.
[33]Gruendler, *Praise Poetry*, 10. Emphasis in original

Humayd ibn ʿAbd al-Hamid ibn Ribʿi al-Taʾi al-Tusi. Subsequently, the poet asked him to mediate between him and al-Maʾmun so that he could recite the poem before the caliph. The caliph accepted the commander's intercession, allowing the poet to recite his poem. However, the caliph gave the poet two options. The first option was to compare this poem with those poems the poet had composed in praise of al-Tusi and Abu Dulaf. If this poem was found to be of better or higher quality than those poems, the caliph would reward the poet generously, but if this poem failed to surpass said poems the poet would be subject to a harsh punishment. The second option was to quit praising the caliph. Due to the distinctive and exalted nature of his praise of the two commanders, the poet chose the second option.[34]

The second anecdote attests to the caliph's deep understanding of al-ʿAkawwak's poetry and his political attitude, ultimately leading to the execution of the poet. According to *Kitab al-Aghani*:

> One day, al-Maʾmun said to some of his companions: "I adjure him, he who is attending now and memorizing the blind ʿAli ibn Jabala's [panegyric poem to] al-Qasim ibn ʿIsa, [Abu Dulaf], to recite it to me." One companion said: "The Commander of the Faithful has adjured, so his oath must be fulfilled; I did not memorize the poem, but I have it written." [The caliph said:] "Go and bring it to me." So the man went and brought the poem and recited it to him. . . .[35] [After the poem was recited,] al-Maʾmun became furious. He said: "I do not belong to my father if I do not cut [al-ʿAkawwak's] tongue or shed his blood!"[36]

Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 967) presented a prose narrative similar to the one above. He recounts that when al-Maʾmun heard the following two verses by ʿAli ibn Jabala praising [Abu Dulaf] al-ʿIjli, the caliph became furious.

<div dir="rtl">

كُلُّ مَنْ في الأَرْضِ مِنْ عَرَبٍ   بَيْنَ بَادِيهِ إلى حَضَرِهْ

مُسْتَعِيرٌ مِنْكَ مَكْرُمَة   يَكْتَسِيها يَوْمَ مُفْتَخَرِهْ

</div>

> Every Arab on earth,
> whether nomad or sedentary,
>
> Is borrowing a virtue from you
> to wear it on the day of boasting.

In response to hearing these verses, the caliph ordered his people to "bring him wherever he was." When the poet was presented before the caliph, the latter said:

> O son of a stinking mother, are you the one who said to al-Qasim ibn ʿIsa [Abu Dulaf] [the two verses above]?! You made us as those who borrow a virtue from him! The poet said to him: "O Commander of the Faithful, you are the family of the House, no one is compared to you because almighty Allah prefers you over His creatures and chose you for Himself. Therefore, what I meant in my praise of al-Qasim ibn ʿIsa was [just meant to refer to] his equals." [The caliph] said: "I swear by Allah you did not exclude anyone. Pull his [the poet's] tongue from its back [al-Maʾmun ordered his people]."[37]

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[34] Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul*, 659–60; al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani*, vol. 19: 239–40.

[35] The opening verse of the poem is

<div dir="rtl">

ذَادَ وِرْدَ الغَيِّ عن صَدَرِهْ   وَارْعَوَى واللَّهُوُ مِنْ وَطَرِهْ

</div>

> He drove away sin from his chest,
> and abstained [from transgression], while desiring pleasure.

[36] Al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani,* vol. 19, 236–38.

[37] Ibid., 253–54.

The prose narratives recounting how the poet died differ widely. Al-Isfahani lists different narratives about the poet's death. The first narrative, presented above, claims that the poet was killed by al-Maʾmun in retaliation for his praise of the commander Abu Dulaf.[38] The second narrative, preferred by al-Isfahani, indicates that al-Maʾmun was irate at the poet for his exaggerated praise of Abu Dulaf, and that the poet died during an attempt to escape from al-Maʾmun.[39] The last narrative claims that al-Maʾmun killed the poet only because he was deemed an infidel for his encroachment on the prerogative of Allah. That is, he praised Abu Dulaf with a tone suitable for addressing Allah only, not his creatures. The poet writes:

$$\text{وتَنْقُلُ الدَهْرَ مِنْ حَالٍ إلى حَالٍ} \qquad \text{أنتَ الذي تُنْزِلُ الأيّامَ منزلِها}$$

$$\text{إلّا قَضَيْتَ بأرزاقٍ وآجالِ} \qquad \text{وَمَا مَدَدْتَ مَدَى طَرْفِ إلى أَحد}$$

You are the one who holds the destinies of the days,
and changes the world from one state to another.

And each time you cast your eye on someone,
you destine him for boons or death.[40]

Balfas comments on the last narrative, stating that it was the political cunning of the caliph that led him to seek a good religious reason to execute the poet, which he did because, if he had killed him only because the poet had praised the commander in a way that downgraded the caliph, he would be blamed by society and his status as a just ruler would be greatly affected.[41]

ʿAbd Allah ibn al-Muʿtazz (d. 908), who served as a caliph for only a whole day or some hours, presents several narratives about al-ʿAkawwak's death in his book *Tabaqat al-Shuʿaraʾ* (The Classes of Poets). The first narrative, which Ibn al-Muʿtazz prefers, claims that al-Maʾmun was mad at the poet for his exaggerated praise of Abu Dulaf, but that the caliph ultimately forgave him and spared his life. In other words, the poet died a natural death. The second narrative claims that the caliph murdered the poet in retaliation for his violation of the prerogative of Allah, not due to his exaggerated praise of Abu Dulaf.[42]

Regardless of how the poet died, the most important point here is that al-Maʾmun was undoubtedly extremely irate at the poet for his dedicated praise of the two commanders. Indeed, all the prose narratives in the primary sources agree on this point. However, we should not limit our search for reasons for the caliph's anger to particular verses or even a whole poem. Rather, we must look at the entire picture, considering the political context and poetic oeuvre of al-ʿAkawwak.

Reviewing the *akhbār* (prose narratives) surrounding the relationship between the poet and the caliph clearly reveals that the Abbasid critics could not construct an integrated and coherent literary narrative regarding the relationship between the two parties, as a comparison of the prose narratives reveals numerous discrepancies and ambiguities. First, the primary sources do not tell us why al-ʿAkawwak took such a risk and asked to recite his poem before al-Maʾmun, especially when he must have known that his extreme praise of the two commanders would irritate the caliph. In addition to what has been said about the changing relationship between al-Maʾmun and the *abnāʾ* which, in one way or another, reflects the relationship between al-Maʾmun and al-ʿAkawwak, another possible interpretation of this action by the poet is possible. As was common for poets, the poet may have thought that once the political situation began to stabilize, the best way to redeem himself after unduly praising the commanders was to recite a panegyric poem to the caliph because this had worked for other poets, as in the story of al-Nabigha al-Dhubyani and the king al-Nuʿman ibn al-Mundhir.[43] Second, the primary sources do not tell us when al-ʿAkawwak asked to recite his poem before al-Maʾmun. The only conclusion that can be drawn from the *akhbār* is that the request happened at a later time, as the refusal of the poet's request

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[38]Ibid., 253.

[39]Ibid., 233.

[40]Ibid., 254.

[41]Balfas, "Tashfir al-Qasida," 196.

[42]ʿAbd Allah ibn Muhammad ibn al-Muʿtazz al-ʿAbbasi, *Tabaqat al-Shuʿaraʾ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Sattar Ahmad Farraj, 3rd ed., vol. 8 (Cairo: Dar al-Maʿarif, 1956), 172.

[43]See Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, ch. 1.

was a response to his exaggerated and dedicated praise of the two commanders. Furthermore, the verses conjured up by the caliph at the time of his refusal of the poet are from the same poem that prompted him to murder the poet at a later date. So, why was the caliph not furious at the poet the first time around?[44] It is possible that the whole poem did not reach the caliph's ears in the first place, or that the caliph did hear the whole poem but it was only when the poem became so well-known by different members of the community that al-Maʾmun was no longer able to tolerate it. At that moment, he may have proceeded to furiously question the poet and killed him, as we have seen.[45]

As is apparent from the poet's *Diwan* and as al-Isfahani also indicates, the poet dedicates most of his poetry to the two commanders, or *quwwād* Abu Dulaf and al-Tusi. A *qāʾid* (pl. *quwwād*) in the early Abbasid historical period was a professional soldier, but also a contractor who was in charge of employing people to serve in the army. The *qāʾid* was a fundamental figure who served as a mediator between the troops and their caliphs and leaders in war field. The *quwwād* were like tribal chiefs from pre- and early-Islamic times in the sense that they were able to recruit people to their armies.[46] The first *qāʾid*, Abu Dulaf, was well known for his chivalry, prestige, and mastery.[47] He had been a prominent and loyal commander for the caliph al-Amin, as evidenced by the fact that he rejected the request of al-Maʾmun's commander Tahir ibn al-Husayn to renounce his pledge of allegiance to al-Amin and give his loyalty to al-Maʾmun. However, consider, the following prose narrative:

> When al-Maʾmun went to al-Rayy, he contacted Abu Dulaf and asked him to join him. When his people and companions saw that Abu Dulaf, who was planning to go to al-Maʾmun, was extremely frightened, they said: "You are the chief of the Arabs, and all of them obey you, so if you are afraid [of al-Maʾmun] stay here, and we will protect you." However, Abu Dulaf did not stay and went to al-Maʾmun. . . . Having done that, al-Maʾmun promised him safety. He, moreover, provided him with a substantial amount of money in order to raise his social status.[48]

According to various prose narratives, al-Maʾmun grimly questioned Abu Dulaf about his opinion of and consent to our poet's praise of him (which was quite exaggerated, as we will see later). Abu Dulaf responded by either denying knowledge of the verses al-Maʾmun recited or defending himself by reciting satiric verses against himself that were composed by his nephew, claiming that "what the poet said about me is merely false testimony."[49] Al-Maʾmun sometimes saw Abu Dulaf as a commander who did not fulfill his duty of loyalty. That is, one day al-Maʾmun said to Abu Dulaf, "are you the one who composes,

<div dir="rtl">

أصيف الجبال وأشتو العراقا   إنّي إمرؤ كسرويّ الفعال

</div>

> I am a man, whose deeds are similar to those of Kisra,
> and I am he, who spends summer in the mountains, and dwells in Iraq during winter. [50]

I do not see you presenting us the right of obedience nor fulfilling the duty of sanctity." [51] The implication of the caliph's response is that conjuring and celebrating a persona who is a cultural and courtly competitor to the caliph, in the form of a figure representing the ideal form of loyalty (a military

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[44]See Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-Aʿyan,* vol. 3, 252–53; and al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani*, vol. 19, 240, 253–54.

[45]See the prose narrative attesting to the poem's fame in al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani*, vol. 19, 239.

[46]Hugh Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* (London: Routledge, 2001), 99, 103, 114.

[47]Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam wa-Wafayat al-Mashahir wa-l-Aʿlam*, 2nd ed., vol. 16 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-ʿArabi, 1990), 332.

[48]ʿIzz al-Din ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-ʿArabi, 1997), 561.

[49]Al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam,* vol. 16, 334–35; al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad*, vol. 12, 417.

[50]The term Kisra may refer not to a particular Sasanian king, but rather represent the entire Sasanian monarchical dynasty. See Michael Morony, "Kisra," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al., 2012, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4407.

[51]Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-Farid*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1983), 39.

commander), serves as a frank violation of the political and social authority of the caliph and a repudiation of the pledge of allegiance.

On the doctrinal level, J. E. Bencheikh claims that the suspicious attitude of al-Maʾmun toward Abu Dulaf was a result of al-Maʾmun adopting a policy that limited cooperation with the ʿAlids at a time when Abu Dulaf was pro-ʿAlid.[52] However, Michael Cooperson explains that for the purpose of affirming the notion that a legitimate ruler of the Muslim *umma* comes only from the members of the Prophet's house, al-Maʾmun was in fact pro-ʿAlid, which is reflected in his adoption of several policies in their favor. Examples of his policies were his plan for the public cursing of the first Umayyad caliph, Muʿawiya ibn Abi Sufyan, and his announcement that ʿAli ibn Abi Talib was the best among men after the Prophet. Cooperson asserts that al-Maʾmun did do away with some of the pro-ʿAlid policies at a later time, as they were seen as possibly making the common people and proto-Sunnis resistant and antagonistic. It is important to highlight that al-Maʾmun never adopted any extreme pro-ʿAlid policies. Moreover, he waited for a long time before deciding to adopt such controversial policies.[53] Finally, it should be recognized that there are certain examples of pro-ʿAlid tendencies in al-Maʾmun's poetry.[54] Based on what has been demonstrated, I assert that the doctrinal factor was not decisive in fomenting or exacerbating the distrust between al-Maʾmun and Abu Dulaf.

Al-Tusi, like Abu Dulaf, also was well-known as a powerful military commander who al-Maʾmun called upon to undertake especially dangerous missions. It is said that al-Tusi's fame as a prominent commander started during al-Maʾmun's caliphate.[55] However, it also has been stated that "Humayd [al-Tusi] often said that: al-Maʾmun has no favor for me. All favors go to Abu Muhammad al-Hasan ibn Sahl [the minister and commander of al-Maʾmun].'"[56] Finally, as Muhammad ibn Habib recounted, al-Tusi was executed as a result of an order given by al-Maʾmun.[57]

Here we should highlight Tayeb el-Hibri's comments on al-Tusi's statement about his relationship to al-Maʾmun and al-Hasan ibn Sahl. El-Hibri discussed the role played by Khurasani leaders in the Abbasid state during al-Maʾmun's reign before his arrival in Baghdad. He claims that this statement by al-Tusi clearly demonstrates the dependence of al-Maʾmun on the Khurasani leaders for securing broad support. Al-Maʾmun's control of political and military affairs during his time in Marw al-Rudh rested on his ability to secure alliances with the Khurasani nobles.[58] Al-Tusi's statement reveals not only the power, leverage, and influence that Khurasani leaders enjoyed, but also how weak and anxious al-Maʾmun was before them. In this context, al-Maʾmun's harsh reaction to the poetry of al-ʿAkawwak dedicated to the two powerful commanders appears more understandable; such poetry exacerbated al-Maʾmun's worries and doubts.

As I have illustrated, al-Maʾmun's attitudes toward Abu Dulaf and al-Tusi injected mutual doubt and distrust into the relationship between the two parties. Even though these commanders made great efforts to defend him and his regime, the caliph was skeptical of his commanders and constantly questioned the veracity of their loyalty. Likely the caliph was right to do so, because, as has been shown, neither of the commanders was truly loyal to him. Al-Tusi denied any favor from the caliph, and Abu Dulaf took the side of al-Maʾmun's enemy and did not join his army until the last moment, when the commander's life was at stake. Al-Maʾmun's suspicions toward the two commanders were also understandable in light of the fact that some of the military leaders at the border regions did actually revolt against al-Maʾmun, such as Mansur al-Tanbadhi in Africa and Abu al-Saraya al-Sari ibn Mansur al-Shaybani.[59]

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[52]J. E. Bencheikh, "al Kasim b. Isa," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al., 2012, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3982.

[53]Cooperson, *al-Maʾmun*, 73–74.

[54]Al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam,* vol. 15, 238; Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Muntazim fi Tarikh al-Muluk wa-l-ʾUmam*, vol. 10 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992), 128.

[55]Abu al-Mahasin Yusuf ibn Taghri Bardi, *al-Nujum al-Zahira fi Muluk Misr wa-l-Qahira*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Wizarat al-Thaqafa wa-l-Irshad al-Qawmi, Dar al-Kutub, 1963), 190; Ahmad Nasif al-Janabi, "Humayd al-Taʾi Aʿzam Quwwad al-Maʾmun," *al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmi al-ʿIraqi* 205, no. 4 (1980): 223–25.

[56]Muhammad ibn Habib al-Baghdadi, *Asmaʾ al-Mughtalin min al-Ashraf fi al-Jahiliyya wa-l-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2001), 190.

[57]Ibid., 191.

[58]Tayeb el-Hibri, "The Reign of the Caliph al-Maʾmun (811–833): The Quest for Power and the Crisis of Legitimacy" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1994), 177–78.

[59]Muhammad ʿAbd al-Hafiz al-Manasir, *al-Jaysh fi al-ʿAsr al-ʿAbbasi al-Awwal* (Amman: Dar Majdalawi, 2000), 473.

In the context of al-Maʾmun's suspicions regarding the loyalties of his commanders, we also must consider al-Maʾmun's paranoia about his own rule. For example, in the "Mecca documents" laid out by the fifth Abbasid caliph, al-Rashid, and signed by the brothers al-Amin and al-Maʾmun in 802, there is an unusual order in which al-Maʾmun takes complete power over the province of Khurasan without the intervention of his brother al-Amin.[60] Michael Cooperson presents historians' explanations for the existence of this order in the succession documents. One explanation is that this portion of the documents was a mere forgery inserted later to cast al-Amin as a criminal.[61] If true, this fact alone says much about al-Maʾmun's increasing worry about his rule. That is, he went to great lengths to secure and legitimize his rule against potential challengers. Furthermore, the controversial policies of al-Maʾmun were resisted by a large portion of the population, who saw him as a dangerous innovator radically different from his father al-Rashid, who was deemed "a loyal champion of ḥadīth ."[62] This popular opposition to al-Maʾmun led him to be suspicious and anxious concerning anything that might disrupt his rule. Put simply, al-Maʾmun's stance toward his followers was characterized by mistrust and suspicion.

It is essential to place the poet's works within their political context. Indeed, when viewed within this particular political context, the very manner of praise adopted in the poet's dedicated panegyric to the two commanders articulates the tensions pregnant in the relationship between the poet and al-Maʾmun. Qudama ibn Jaʿfar (d. 948) illustrates the ideal panegyric for a patron based on his status. He says that:

> For a military commander, he should be praised for his strength, succor, ability to attack with violence, and valor. If the poet adds in his panegyric praise of the patron for his generosity, magnanimity and breaking limits in giving boons, that would be a perfect praise and a complete work because generosity and bravery have been seen as brothers.[63]

Therefore, deviating from this standard when praising a military commander should be undertaken with great caution to avoid unexpected reactions not only from the patron, but also from other officials in the hierarchy.

So the patronage relationship between a poet and a military commander took place under confined and restricted conditions; violating these conditions could lead to suspicion or punishment for the parties of that relationship. Here, it is worth reminding readers that the Abbasid caliphs adopted the Sasanian Iranian practice of kingship, which was based on a total and absolute authority.[64] In his article "The Rise of the Abbasid Public Sphere," Samir Ali states:

> The Abbasids in 750 did not bring salvation. Rather, a new form of Islamic kingship emerged, modeled on Sasanian Iranian rulership, which paradoxically preserved the ceremonials of absolute authority for the caliph, while requiring him tacitly to earn the legitimacy of subordinates who could promote or demote his reputation in life, as well as his legacy after death. Nevertheless, this Sasanian model of kingship enabled a measure of absolutism.[65]

For al-Maʾmun, al-ʿAkawwak's praising of two figures who were beneath the caliph in status violated his absolute authority. In response, he reacted harshly to this patronage relationship between the poet and the two military commanders. In the 9th century and earlier, the Abbasid caliphs enjoyed absolute power, appropriating the praise ode to legitimize their authority and increase their power.[66] Therefore,

[60]Cooperson, al-Maʾmun, 43.

[61]Ibid., 43.

[62]Tayeb el-Hibri, "The Empire in Iraq, 763–861," in The New Cambridge History of Islam, ed. Chase F. Robinson, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 283.

[63]Abu al-Faraj Qudama ibn Jaʿfar, Naqd al-Shiʿr (Constantinople: Matbaʿat al-Jawanib, 1885), 27.

[64]ʿAbd al-ʿAziz al-Duri, "al-Dimuqratiyya fi Falsafat al-Hukum al-ʿArabi," Majallat al-Mustaqbal al-ʿArabi 2, no. 9 (1979): 60–76, 64; Daniel W. Brown, A New Introduction to Islam, 2nd ed. (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 140.

[65]Samer Mahdy Ali, "The Rise of the Abbasid Public Sphere: The Case of al-Mutanabbī and Three Middle Ranking Patrons," al-Qantara 29 (2008), 484.

[66]See Stetkevych, Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy; and Ali, "Rise of the Abbasid Public Sphere," 484.

after fully restoring his power, al-Maʾmun was no longer able to tolerate this improper patronage relationship between the poet and the two commanders. He could not tolerate the relationship because it enabled the commanders to appropriate the panegyric poem and thereby exercise influence and redefine the values of idealism, principles of governance, and standards of leadership. This is clearly demonstrated in the previous prose narrative, in which the caliph angrily questions Abu Dulaf about his approval of the exaggerated praise the poet dedicated to the two commanders.

The very manner of praise the poet adopts in his dedicated panegyric to the two commanders lies in his repeated usage of different forms of hyperbole and exaggeration. At this point, it will be helpful to present a quick theoretical and historical background of this literary device. There are several definitions of the poetic term *mubālagha* (hyperbole), but all of these definitions are rooted in a recognition that the poet's words exceed the limits of logic or permissibility.[67] The early scholars divide *mubālagha* into three different types: *tablīgh* (mild), *ighrāq* (moderate), and *ghuluww* (extreme). Whereas *tablīgh* means being possible in both the mind and daily life, *ighrāq* means being possible only in the mind and not in daily life. The term *ghuluww* means being possible in neither the mind nor daily life.[68]

The early scholars and critics differ in their acceptance and rejection of the divisions of *mubālagha* mentioned above. Applying the adage "*aḥsanū al-shiʿrī akdhabuh*" (the best poetry is at its extreme lie), Qudama ibn Jaʿfar prefers *ghuluww,* the most extreme of the three, claiming that it is the most superior form among the three kinds of the *mubālagha*.[69] However, ʿAbd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (d. 1078) rejected the interpretation of the adage above, stating:

They did not say *aḥsanū al-shiʿrī akdhabuh*, meaning stupid simple speech in which the speaker simply lies and exaggerates, such as when he describes a guardian with descriptions suitable for a caliph, or praises a poor miserable man by saying you are the prince of al-ʿIrāqayn (Kufa and Basra). [Rather, the adage refers to] that speech having Ṣanʿa [artificiality or complexity] and subtlety in meanings, which, in turn, need cleverness, profound grasp, and exhausting digging.[70]

ʿAbd Allah ʿAsilan comments on this, claiming that it seems that ʿAbd al-Qahir al-Jurjani "rejects the *mubālagha* that contradicts truth and established facts."[71]

Other scholars, including al-Qadi al-Jurjani (d. 1001), Ibn Rashiq al-Qayrawani (d. 1063), and Ibn Sinan al-Khafaji (d. 1078) did not reject the *mubālagha* as long as it did not go too far and exceed the limit of possibility or enter the domain of the unthinkable.[72] A verse by the *Jāhilī* poet al-Aʿsha (d. 628) demonstrates the regular level of acceptable hyperbole:

عَـاشَ وَلم يُنقَلْ إلى قابـر   لـو أسندَتْ ميْتاً إلى نَحْرِها

If she were to lay a dead man on her chest,
he would be alive, and not be carried over to the cemetery.[73]

Here, the poet describes a woman that can resurrect a dead man through her beauty. However, he imposes several restrictions to render such hyperbole acceptable. First, the poet forms a conditional sentence using the term "if" (*law*) to introduce a hypothetical clause. Secondly, the conditional clause is followed by the past form of the verb *asnadat* (leaned someone/something on); present form: *tusnidu*),

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[67]ʿAbd al-ʿAziz al-Shubayli, *al-Mubalagha fi al-Shiʿr al-ʿAbbasi* (Riyadh: al-Nadi al-Adabi, 1980), 15.

[68]Ibid., 21–22. Al-Shubayli also presents an example for each type of hyperbole.

[69]Ibid., 24.

[70]ʿAbd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, *Asrar al-Balagha*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1991), 275.

[71]ʿAbd Allah ʿAsilan, "Zahirat al-Mubalagha fi al-Shʿr al-ʿAbbasi wa-ʿAwamil Shuyuʿiha," *Majallat Kulliyat al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya*, no. 8 (1978), 393.

[72]Ibid., 389, 391, 392.

[73]ʿAli ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAziz al-Jurjani, *al-Wasatah bayn al-Mutanabbi wa-Khusumih*, ed. Muhammad Ibrahim and ʿAli al-Bajawi (Cairo: Matbaʿat ʿIsa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1966), 421. See the biography of the *Jāhilī* poet al-Aʿsha in al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani*, vol. 9, 80–95.

which makes this hypothetical statement completely invalid and in turn renders hyperbole at its mildest level.

However, the aforementioned critics were not in favor of extreme hyperbole, such as the famous verse below by the Abbasid poet Abu Nuwas (d. 813):

<div dir="rtl">

لتخافُك النُّطَفُ التي لـم تخلَق   وأخفْتَ أهلَ الشَّركِ حتى إنّه

</div>

And you have frightened the polytheists to such a degree that
the sperm which are not yet created are indeed fearful of you.[74]

In this verse, the poet espouses his patron's power by claiming that each and every polytheist is afraid of him to the degree that uncreated sperm cells also are frightened of him. In rendering the hyperbole more extreme, the poet uses emphasis devices, such as *inna* (indeed) and *lām* before the present tense verb *takhāf* (frighten), all of which render the hyperbole totally unacceptable. Al-Qadi al-Jurjani comments on this verse, stating: "It is among the corrupted and impossible [poetry] . . . and the scholars consider poetry of this kind to be defective, rejected, denied, and repugnant."[75]

There were some examples of *mubālagha* before the Abbasid historical period, but it was rarely used, especially in *Jāhilī* poetry. The early Islamic and Umayyad poets avoided using the *ghuluww* (extreme hyperbole), as it could lead the poet toward infidelity. However, particularly during the Abbasid historical period, *mubālagha* has assumed a more concrete form and taken on various forms and degrees. Unlike previous eras, the extreme type of *mubālagha* (*ghuluww*) was often exploited by the poets of the Abbasid historical period.[76] Therefore, our poet's usage of hyperbole at the time was not innovative or unprecedented; however, his case was particular for its employment of this literary device in a tense political atmosphere, resulting in the caliph's heightened angry reaction to him.

Discussion of the Poems

The first poem I will discuss here was composed sometime between 813 and 823. This same period is relevant to all the poems and other verses discussed later in this paper; Abbasid era scholars have connected some verses of the poem above and other verses discussed later with al-Ma'mun's caliphate through several literary narratives.[77] The poem is composed in *al-madīd* meter (the extended) and rhymed using –*h*. It is a poem with a bipartite structure, comprised of a *nasīb* (prelude) in verses 1 through 16 and a main *gharaḍ* (goal) in verses 17 through 53. The second section praises Abu Dulaf for his generosity, high noble lineage, reformist role on the earth, and bravery and power. The poem ends by mentioning the three insurgents vanquished by the patron. However, the poem reads as if the final section is missing, as it suddenly ends when describing Abu Dulaf's defeat of the mugger Qarqur. Selected verses of the poem are presented below. They are numbered according to the *Diwan*'s order, as I will do in the subsequent poems as well.

<div dir="rtl">

30	جَبَــــلٌ عَــــزَّتْ مَناكِبُـــــــهُ أمَنَــــتْ عَـــدْنَانُ فـــي ثُغَـــرِهْ
31	إنّمـــا الـــدُّنْيَا أبَـــو دُلَــفٍ بَــيْنَ مَغْــزَاهُ ومُحْتَضَـــــــرِهْ
32	فـــإذا وَلَّـــى أبَـــو دلَــفٍ وَلَّـــتِ الـــدُّنْيَا عَلـــى أثَـــرِهْ
33	لَسْـــتُ أدْري مـــا أقُـــول لَـــهُ غَيْـــرَ أنْ الأرْضَ فـــي خَفَـــرِهْ
34	يــا دَواءَ الأرْضِ إنْ فَســـدَتْ ومُـــديلَ اليُسْـــر مِـــنْ عُسْـــرِه
35	كُلُّ مَنْ فـي الأرْضِ مِنْ عَرَب بَـيْنَ بَـاديهِ إلـى حَضَـــرِهْ
36	مُسْـــتعيرٌ مِنْـــكَ مَكْرُمَـــةً يَكْتَسِــيها يَـوْمَ مُفْتَخَـرِهْ
37	صَـــاغَــك الله أبَـا دُلَـفٍ صِـبْغَةً في الخَلْقِ من خَيرِه

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[74]Al-Jurjani, al-Wasatah, 428. See the biography of the Abbasid poet Abu Nuwas in al-Zirikli, *al-Aʿlam,* vol. 2, 225.

[75]Al-Jurjani, al-Wasatah, 428.

[76]Al-Shubayli, *al-Mubalagha,* 41–45.

[77]See Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Tabaqat al-Shuʿaraʾ,* vol. 8, 172; and al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani,* vol. 19, 240, 252–54.

30- A mountain whose sides are well-fortified;
   ʿAdnan is safe in its mountain passes.[78]
31- The whole world is [incarnated in] Abu Dulaf,
   whether in his military expeditions or in his dwelling.
32- So if Abu Dulaf passes away,
   the world will disappear right after him.
33- I don't know what I say to him!
   unless [I say that] the land is under his protection.
34- O remedy of the land [Abu Dulaf], if it is corrupted
   and the one who turns distress into prosperity!
35- Every Arab on earth,
   whether nomad or sedentary,
36- Is borrowing a virtue from you
   to wear it on the day of boasting.
37- O Abu Dulaf, Allah formed you
   in religious faith of the best among His creatures.[79]

In the verses above, the poet alternates between using the mild and extreme types of hyperbole. In verses 30 through 34, he claims that the patron (Abu Dulaf) is the cradle of society's existence and the people, saying that while the patron is alive the world is under his protection, and that if it becomes corrupted he will fix it. However, if he dies, this earthly world will disappear. Also, in verses 35 and 36, the poet claims that all people, including the caliph himself, are a burden on Abu Dulaf, who lends them virtues. In these two verses, others are represented not as competitors of the poet's patron but rather as followers and inferiors receiving and borrowing virtue from the patron. The poet uses the word *istiʿāra* (borrowing) to convey a sense of the deficiency of the other (the caliph). That is, one needs to borrow something only when he lacks it. However, the lack of the other (the caliph) is a lack of moral values, which leads to the conclusion that the personality of the other (the caliph) must be questioned, and by extension a large amount of skepticism should be cast on his legitimacy as a caliph.

The second poem I will examine here is an ideal example of the extreme type of hyperbole. Comprised of eight verses, the poem is composed in *al-madīd* meter (the extended) and rhymed using –*lī*. Aside from the first verse, which is a quick amatory prelude, the verses of the poem are devoted to praising the commander Abu Dulaf. Selected verses of the poem are presented here:

2	لَوْلَا أَبُو دُلَفٍ لَمْ تَحْيَ عَارِفَةٌ	وَلَمْ يَنُؤْ نَوْءُ مَأْمُولٍ بِآمَالِ
3	يَا ابْنَ الأَكارِم مِنْ عَدْنَان قَدْ عُلِمُوا	وَتَالِدِ المَجْدِ بَيْنَ العَمِّ والخَالِ
4	أَنْتَ الذي تُنْزِلُ الأَيَّامَ مَنْزِلَها	وَتَنْقُلُ الدَّهْرَ مِنْ حَالٍ إلى حَالِ
5	وَمَا مَدَدْتَ مَدَى طَرْفٍ إلَى أَحَد	إلَّا قَضَيْتَ بِأَرْزَاقٍ وَآجَالِ

2- If there had not been Abu Dulaf, a favor would have not been alive
   and neither one would carry out one's hopes.
3- O the sons of the nobles, who were famously known, from ʿAdnan,
   and O the inherited glory from [both] the paternal and maternal uncles.
4- You are the one who holds the destinies of the days
   and changes the world from one state to another.
5- And each time you cast your eye to someone
   you destine him for boons or death.[80]

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[78]ʿAdnan and Qahtan are the two Arab groups or tribes from which all Arabs trace their roots. For more on Arab tribes, see ʿAli ibn Ahmad ibn Hazm, *Jamharat Ansab al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1983).

[79]Ibn Jabala, *Shiʿr ʿAli ibn Jabala*, 68.

[80]Ibid., 95.

It is obvious that the verses above employ extreme hyperbole. However, from a radical poetic point of view, such hyperbole is possibly acceptable when devoted to a caliph and not merely a commander. Such a stance can be justified by recalling the celebrated image of the Abbasid caliph as an actual deputy of God on earth.[81] Stefan Sperl identifies three elements that Abbasid poets commonly utilized to legitimize the Abbasid caliphs. The first element employed was the morality of the caliph, including generosity, justice, and nobility.[82] The second element used by poets was divine sanction, which referred to the claim of the Abbasids and their supporters that "the caliph assumes his office by divine sanction."[83] The third element, mythic power, was a classic element of ancient Near Eastern kingship, which held that "the king defeats the forces of darkness and death and brings justice, fertility, and happiness to the world."[84] The Abbasid caliph was always portrayed by poets to possess a mythic power similar to that of the ancient kings.[85] Here, our poet endows a commander, not a caliph, with this mythical power. This indicates that the poet sees his patron as a true caliph empowered by God and granted an extraordinary power on earth. Therefore, at least on a political level, such hyperbole is completely unacceptable and certainly contributed to aggravating the caliph's anger with the poet.

In the third poem examined here, the poet employs hyperbole while ascribing moral qualities to his patrons. The poem is composed of 40 verses in al-rajaz meter (the trembling) and is rhymed using –b. Structurally, it is a bipartite poem consisting of a prelude in verses 1 through 27 and praise dedicated to Abu Dulaf in verses 28 through 40. Selected verses of the poem are presented here:

لَمْ يُؤْتَتَلْ مَجْدٌ وَلَمْ يُرْعَ حَسَبْ	لَوْلَا ابْنُ عِيسَى القَرْمُ كُنَّا هُمَلَا	31
وَلَا قُرَيشٌ غُرِفَتْ وَلَا العَرَبْ	لَوْلَاك ما كانَ سَدًى ولا نَدَى	38

31- If there had not been the chief, Ibn ʿIsa [Abu Dulaf], we would have been neglected [and] glory would not be rooted, and noble deeds would not be appraised.

38- If there had not been you, there would not have been conferment nor generosity nor would the Quryash and the Arabs have come to be known.[86]

Before initiating a discussion of these verses, I will present other relevant scattered verses in the *Diwan*. The following verses are composed in *majzūʾ al-kāmil* meter (the portioned of the perfect):

حَسَبٌ يُعَدُّ وَلا نَسَبْ	لَوْلا حُمَيْدٌ لَمْ يَكُنْ	1
عَزَّتْ بِعِزَّتِهِ العَرَبْ	يَا وَاحِدَ العَرَبِ الَّذِي	2

1- Were it not for Humayd [al-Tusi], there would not have been good deeds to count and [noble] descent.

2- O first/unique one [al-Tusi] among Arabs in whose glory the Arabs became glorious![87]

In *al-kāmil* meter (the perfect), the poet composes the following:

حَيّـــاً إذاً كانـــتْ بِغَيْـــرِ عِمَـــادِ	يا عِصْمَةَ العَرَبِ الَّتي لَوْ لَمْ تَكُنْ

O defense of the Arabs which, were you not alive, would remain without a main tent pole.[88]

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[81]For a detailed discussion of this subject, see Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4–23.

[82]Sperl, "Islamic Kingship," 20.

[83]Ibid., 21.

[84]Ibid., 23.

[85]Ibid.

[86]Ibn Jabala, *Shiʿr ʿAli ibn Jabala*, 32–36.

[87]Ibid., 31.

[88]Ibid., 51.

In all the previous verses, the poet has claimed that his patron represents all the longstanding Arab values of nobleness, decency, generosity, glory, and virtue. Here, the poet adds that society would collapse if his patron did not exist. Indeed, the poet does not just ascribe moral qualities to his patron, but he employs hyperbole to claim that these qualities are exclusive to the patron and are lacking in all other people, which implicitly includes the caliph. Moreover, in verse 38, the poet exaggerates this hyperbolic claim, stating that his patron is the one who has established these values among all Arabs. He is not talking exclusively about the Arabs of the time, but all Arabs throughout time. Instead of just claiming that the patron represents the moral qualities which were held by the early Arabs, he actually asserts that the patron inspired these values in all Arabs, both in the past and now. Therefore, he establishes his patron as the founder of all moral virtue, a claim which is impossible even in the imagination of the mind. The poet aims, by exploiting such hyperbole, to create a distinctive identity for his patron, constructing him as a model that should be imitated and followed. This distinctive identity created by the poet denies the possibility of anyone being equal or superior to the patron (for example, the caliph).

The fourth poem is a short piece composed in *al-basīṭ* meter (the outspread) and rhymed using *–nī*. The poem consists of ten verses, all of which praise the patron al-Tusi. Selected verses of the poem are presented below:

وَسَيْفِهِ بَيْنَ أَهْلِ النُّكْثِ والـــدِّين	حُمَيْـدُ يَــا قَاسِــمَ الـــدُّنيا بنَائِلِــه ٢
عَلـــى الأَنَــامِ بَتَشْـــديدٍ وتَلْيِـــين	أَنْتَ الزَّمـانُ الَّذي يَجْري تَصَرُّفُه ٣
يَـوْمَ الكَرِيهَــةِ جَـدَّاعَ العَـرَانِين	أَصْبَحْتَ لِلْمُلْكِ عِرنِينًا تَقومُ بـه ٩
وتُكْسِـبْنَا عَطـاءً غَيْـرَ مَـوْزُون	نُهْدي لَـك المَـدْحَ مَوْزُونًـا مُحَبَّـرُه ١٠

2- O Humayd [al-Tusi] who is dividing the world by giving boons,
   to the maintainers of covenant, and [hanging out] his sword against the violators of the covenant.
3- You are the time, which dispenses its acts
   of toughness and softness toward the people.
9- You become the chief of the kingship, carrying it on
   in times of war, when you are cutting heads.
10- We gift you embellished measurable [metered] praise
   and you endow us with unmeasurable gifts.[89]

Beatrice Gruendler speaks of the three roles that the Abbasid poets generally ascribe to patrons. First, the patron is described as a ruler who is in charge of his people. In this role, the patron does not discriminate between the poet and the rest of his people. The patron keeps his promises and fosters ties with his people by giving boons and gifts while protecting them from the vicissitudes of the time. He is a qualified ruler, fully conscious of his responsibilities. Second, the patron is a sponsor of the poet, motivating the poet to compose great poems through his generosity. The patron's boons and gifts are exchanged for the poet's panegyrics. Third, the patron is constructed as a model. According to Gruendler, this occurs when harmony is achieved between the poet's words and the patron's acts. In this role, the relationship between the poet and his patron reaches its highest level. The patron provides the necessary support for the poet to create poems while also realizing the positive claims made about him by the poet.[90]

In verse 2 of the poem, the patron is portrayed as a ruler, but not one who rules over a group of people. Instead, the patron rules over the entire cosmos, endowed with the extraordinary power to carry out two oppositional acts: reward his subjects with boons and bring destruction to his enemies. However, in verse 3, the poet compares his patron as cosmic ruler to the time that delivers prosperity and calamity to the people. Here, regardless of the religious judgment of such extreme hyperbole, the poet, in my opinion, does not present a successful comparison on the poetic level. That is, time is usually portrayed as an enemy against which the Arab poet fights and struggles. Time is associated with a sense of danger, tyranny, and authoritarianism. Indeed, during periods of crisis, we see the Arab man used to abuse time, as

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[89]Ibid., 111.
[90]Gruendler, *Praise Poetry*, 105–11.

time is always blamed for any calamity that happens to him.[91] In a Qurʾanic verse, Allah the almighty says: "They say, there is only our life in this world: we die, we live, nothing but time destroys us."[92] This clearly indicates that time is not an element to be used in the context of praise. It is a failure of the poet to praise his patron as a ruler randomly distributing good and bad acts without discriminating between his subjects and his enemies. In verse 9, the poet claims that his patron is a chief or a qualified ruler carrying on the kingship not only during times of prosperity but also in times of hardship. The word ʿarānīn (singular: ʿirnīn) appearing in the second hemistich means noses, but the poet means heads, so although he uses the part, yet he means the whole. The expression is used to convey the idea that his patron kills not only his enemies, but also undermines their dignity, as the nose has always been a symbol of dignity in Arab culture.[93] The poet ends his poem in verse 10 with a description of the second role of the patron, portraying the poet basking in the boons of the patron. The ritual exchange of gifts operates to demonstrate the patron's superiority over the poet.[94]

The next two poems also feature illustrations of the first role of the patron through the hyperbolic usage of the word mālik (king, plural: mulūk). Since the early Abbasid period (roughly 750–847), the word had gradually lost its negative association with tyranny and authoritarianism, a contrast to the word khalīfa (caliph), associated with justice and piety. That is, jurists and the pious accused the Umayyad caliphs of following the path of kings in politics and administrations. The Umayyads, for their part, saw the jurists' religious views in a number of cases as true threats to their political status, and therefore ignored their views and acted according to their own political interests, even if it contradicted Islamic principles and rules. Therefore, Muʿawiya ibn Abu Sufyan and his successors were deemed kings, not caliphs. ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAziz, however, was considered by some religious scholars to be the fifth rightly guided caliph. Additionally, although the era of the four rightly guided was described as a caliphate, the Umayyad state was described as a mulk ʿaḍūḍ (biting kingship). However, as stated, the word mālik in the early Abbasid period started to lose its negative connation. This was reflected in the fact that the caliph al-Maʾmun used it without hesitation in place of the word khalīfa in his commandment to the caliph al-Muʿtasim (d. 842).[95] Also, he used this term in his poetry to refer to him, such as in the verse below:

ولكنّــــــــي بحُبِّـــــــكِ مُســــــــتهام   أنــــا المــــأمونُ والمَلِــــكُ الهُمــــامُ

I am al-Maʾmun and the high-mined king
but I am madly in love with you.[96]

The title mālik was not confined to descriptions of the Abbasid caliphs. For example, the local princes of the Tibetan kingdom in Khurasan were called mulūk (kings). It is said that al-Maʾmun exchanged gifts and presents with some of these kings, who were followers of the Abbasid caliphs in name only.[97] The title mālik also was used to refer to Arab leaders who settled in the lands of Fars, such as the Arab leader ʿAbd Allah ibn Humayd ibn Qurtuba al-Taʾi.[98] Finally, some of the Abbasid poets frequently used the word to refer to the Abbasid caliphs. Others used it to refer to figures under the caliph. For example, Ashjaʿ al-Sulami used the term to refer to the Persian minister Jaʿfar al-Barmaki in the following verse:

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[91]Muhammad al-Hurani, al-Dahr fi Shiʿr ibn al-Rumi: Dirasa Tahliliyya (Amman: Dar al-Yazuri al-ʿIlmiyya, 2018), 18–23.

[92]Qurʾan 45:24 (trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[93]Muhyi al-Din Darwish, Iʿrab al-Qurʾan al-Karim wa-Bayanuh, 3rd ed., vol. 10 (Damascus: Dar ibn Kathir, 1992), 172.

[94]See Marcel Mauss, The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies (New York: Norton, 1967); Stetkevych, Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy.

[95]Faruq ʿUmar Fawzi, Tarikh al-Nuzum al-Islamiyya: Dirasa li-Tatawwur al-Muʾassasat al-Markaziyya fi al-Dawla fi al-Qurun al-Islamiyya al-Ula (Amman: Dar al-Shuruq, 2010), 80–81.

[96]Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, al-ʿIqd al-Farid, vol. 8, 114.

[97]El-Hibri, "Reign of the Caliph," 28–29; Cooperson, al-Maʾmun, 47.

[98]Fawzi, Qiraʾat wa-Murajaʿat, 200.

مَلِـك تسـوسُ لــه الَمعــالي نفسُــه و العقــلُ خَيْــرُ سياســةِ الــنَّفْس

A king whose soul leads him to nobilities
so the mind is the best leader of the soul.[99]

To give more examples from poems, the next verses are a part of a short poem consisting of 16 verses in *majzūʾ al-madīd* meter (the portioned of the extended) and rhymed using *–lā*. The poem is composed of an amatory prelude in verses 1 through 9 and praise for the patron in verses 10 through 16. Selected verses are presented here:

لِبَنــــي الــــدُّنْيَا كَفِــــيلَا جَعَــــــــلَ اللهُ حُمَيْـــــــــدَا 10
ـــه لَـــه فِـــيهِمْ عَــديلَا مَلِــكٌ لَـــمْ يَجْعَــل اللــــ 11
مطْمَئِنّـــــين خُلُـــــولَا فَأقَـــامُوا فِــي ذراه 12
يَسْـــأَلُ المُثْـــري فُضُـــولَا لا تَـــرَى فِــــيهِمْ مُقِـــلاً 13

10- Allah made Humayd [al-Tusi]
 a sponsor for the population of the world.
11- A king to whom Allah has not
 created a parallel among them.
12- So, they dwell in his land,
 living permanently with peace of mind.
13- [In a time that] you do not find among them a poor man
 begging a rich man for a favor.[100]

These verses are a clear illustration of the first role of the patron as a cosmic ruler and sponsor, responsible for all the sons of the cosmos. Under his kingship, everybody lives perpetually in peace. Foregrounding the cosmic dimension of his patron as a ruler, the poet claims here that the patron is a king unlike other so-called kings because Allah has not created a being parallel to him. In other words, although it would have been acceptable for the poet to claim his patron to be a king, he provokes the anger of the real king (caliph) when he emphasizes that the patron is a king without equal while ascribing a cosmic aspect to his kingship. In verses 12 and 13, the poet emphasizes that his patron does not differentiate between his people when it comes to his patronage. Under his patronage, social strata become invisible.

The next poem is long, consisting of 60 verses in *majzūʾ al-ramal* meter (the portioned of the running) and rhymed using *–rū*. The poem features a bipartite structure and is composed of a prelude in verses 1 through 24 and praise for the patron in verses 24 through 60. Selected verses of the poem are as follows:

لَمْ يَكنْ فيها فَقِيرُ لَوْ حَمَى الدُّنْيَا حمَيْدٌ 25
بعَطَايَاهُ دَرُورُ مَلِكٌ كِلْتَا يَدَيْهِ 26
وَرحَى المُلْكِ يَدُورُ بِكَ رُكْنُ الأَرْضِ يَرْسُو 43
وَلَكَ اللهُ نَصِيرُ أَنْتَ لِلْمُلْكِ نَصِيرٌ 44

25- If Humayd [al-Tusi] were to protect the world
 there would not be [any] poor person in it.
26- A king, whose both hands
 yield his gifts copiously.
43- Thanks to you, the basis of earth is stable
 and the quern of kingship rotates

[99]Al-Isfahani, *al-Aghani*, vol. 18, 157; Fawzi, *Tarikh al-Nuzum al-Islamiyya*, 82–83. See the biography of the Abbasid poet Ashjaʿ al-Sulami in al-Zirikli, *al-Aʿlam*, vol. 1, 331.

[100]Ibn Jabala, *Shiʿr ʿAli ibn Jabala*, 93–94.

44- You are a supporter for the kingship
   and Allah is a supporter for you.[101]

In verse 25, the poet presents an implicit comparison between the current status quo as represented by the caliph and a hope for change as reflected by the patron's characteristics. He states that if the patron were ruler, there would no longer be poor people in the world. In fact, such a comparison is not confined to this verse, but is found throughout his poetry, such as in the verse below written in *al-ṭawīl* meter (the long) and rhymed using –*bī*:

وَلَا اغْتَـامَ فِيهَـا صَـاحِبٌ فَضْـلَ صَـاحِبِ   وَلَــوْ مَلَــكَ الــدُّنيا لَمَــا كَــانَ سَــائِلٌ

And if he [al-Tusi] were a king over the world, there would not be a beggar [in it]
nor would a man seek another man's favor.[102]

In the first hemistich of verse 43, the prepositional phrase *bika* (thanks to you) is preceded by the verb *yarsū* (to be stable), and at the same time the prepositional phrase precedes the subject *rukn al-arḍ* (the basis of earth), so that the prepositional phrase *bika* precedes all the main constituents of the sentence. Likewise, in the second hemistich of verse 44, the prepositional phrase *laka* (for you) is preceded by the term *naṣīr* (supporter), and at the same time it precedes the subject, the word Allah. Additionally, in the first hemistich of verse 44, the prepositional phrase precedes the predicate *naṣīr*. As established by the early Arab scholars of rhetoric, the precedence of the prepositional phrase conveys encirclement and enclosure.[103] In fact, the first hemistich of verse 43 and the second hemistich of verse 44 have double enclosure or emphasis of enclosure, as the prepositional phrase precedes all the sentence pillars.

The poet, therefore, says something similar: "O, al-Tusi (the patron), by you and not by others (including the caliph), the world is stable and prosperous; and if the patron does not exist, the world will fall into disorder and chaos will dominate." Verse 44 may be interpreted as "you" (the patron) are the one who supports and protects the kingship, represented by the caliph; this verse thereby succinctly reinforces the commander's obedience and subordination to the caliph. In response, it may be said that this interpretation would only have been possible if the poet did not explicitly call the patron *malik* in verse 26. Therefore, the *mulk* (kingship) is represented by the patron himself, and not the caliph. In this way, the obvious interpretation of the verse is that "you" (the patron) are the one who establishes, stabilizes, and supports the kingship.

Through surveying the *Diwan*, it is obvious that the poet's two patrons most commonly inhabit the first role—the patron as a ruler—even though both patrons were merely military commanders. There are few illustrations of the second role of the patron as a sponsor or benefactor of the poet. Moreover, there are even fewer depictions of the third role of the patron, modeling the praise he receives. The following two verses of a short panegyric poem composed in *mukhallaʿ al-basīṭ* meter (the detached of the outspread) and rhymed using –*mī* serve as an example:

إلَّا تَقَدَّمْتَهُ أَمَامِي   وَمَا تَعَمَّدْتُ فِيكَ وَصْفًا
وَانْقَطَعَتْ مُدَّةُ الكَلَامِ   فَقَدْ تَنَاهَتْ بِكَ المَعَالِي

5- And whenever I intend to praise you with a given attribute,
   [I see that] you precede it [my praise] by embodying it before me.
6- For the excellency ended in you
   and the extent of words ran out.[104]

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[101]Ibid., 58–63.

[102]Ibid., 41, 60.

[103]ʿAbd al-Mutaʿal al-Saʿidi, *Bughyat al-Idah li-Talkhis al-Miftah fi ʿUlum al-Balagha*, 17th ed., vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, 2005), 192.

[104]Ibn Jabala, *Shiʿr ʿAli ibn Jabala*, 107.

This verse represents a clear harmony between the poet's words and the patron's deeds. However, in verse 6, the poet declares his failure by portraying his inability to reflect the patron's deeds as they are far too good to be reflected in poetry. In other words, the poet's hyperbolic claim is that the poetry itself is powerless to keep up with his patron's acts, granting his patron a very unique identity. In summary, the dominance of the first role in praising the two patrons indicates that the relationships between the poet and his two patrons were not simply bilateral relationships. Rather, the poet's praise and his use of the first role overwhelmingly and hyperbolically endows the relationship with a broader dimension. The poet's play on this broader dimension is what ultimately led to the caliph's fury against him.