



THE TAWQĪ'ĀT (OFFICIAL MARGINAL ENDORSEMENTS) OF CALIPH HĀRŪN AL-RASHĪD: A RHETORICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This study examines the genre of *tawqī'āt* (official marginal endorsements), an Arabic prose form characterized by stylistic density yet limited rhetorical analysis. Focusing on the *tawqī'āt* of Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, the research treats them as mature models where administrative functions intersect with rhetorical construction. The primary aim is to uncover the mechanisms transforming these directives into influential discursive acts capable of shaping recipient behavior. Adopting a descriptive rhetorical methodology, the study analyzes the reliance on extreme concision, rational argumentation, and ethical authority. It demonstrates that concision is a functional strategy based on deliberate omission, forcing the recipient to mentally reconstruct meaning, thereby creating psychological pressure that often exceeds extended prose. Additionally, rhetorical imagery and rhythmic structures serve central argumentative roles, condensing abstract concepts into memorable images that facilitate circulation. The findings indicate that al-Rashīd's *tawqī'āt* reflect a sophisticated authority grounded in balance -navigating between power and justice, coercion and persuasion- depending on the context. Ultimately, the study argues that *tawqī'āt* constitute an effective form of "operative rhetoric", wherein brevity, persuasion, and authority converge to produce immediate and tangible impacts

Keywords: Tawqī'āt, Hārūn al-Rashīd, Arabic Rhetoric, Persuasive Discourse, Concision, Authority and Language.

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1. Introduction

The genre of *tawqī'āt* (official marginal endorsements or brief rulings) is among the prose arts that has not received adequate scholarly attention or systematic analysis, despite its possession of powerful stylistic elements that enhance its rhetorical standing as well as its persuasive and influential capacity. (Abdelghany, 2017, p. 158) This neglect is striking given the public fascination with such texts and the eagerness to obtain copies of them. It has been reported, for instance, that the *tawqī'āt* of Ja'far al-Barmakī were copied, sold, and competed over by people, to the extent that:

“Ja'far b. Yaḥyā used to write endorsements on petitions in the presence of al-Rashīd and throw the petition back to its owner; his *tawqī'āt* were so sought after by eloquent men that they competed in acquiring them in order to study the rhetorical styles and arts embodied in them, to the point that it was said that each such petition was sold for a dinar.” (Ibn Khaldūn, 2005, p. 305)

The subject of the present study is the *tawqī'āt* of the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. This research seeks to shed light on the stylistic elements within these *tawqī'āt* that render them effective on the one hand and persuasive on the other. The researcher has chosen the *tawqī'āt* of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd for several reasons, including the following.

1.1. Reasons for Choosing the Topic

- *Tawqī'āt* as a genre, in general, have not received scholarly attention comparable to that accorded to other literary genres.
- They provide insight into a form of persuasive discourse characteristic of the period and reflect the strength of the Abbasid state at the height of its political, military, and administrative power-parallel to the flourishing of Arabic literature during the same era.
- They demonstrate that the caliphs were not merely political figures but were also masters of language, literature, and rhetoric.
- *Tawqī'āt* represent one of the prose genres most clearly marked by coherent and recurrent stylistic features across their samples.

1.2. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive rhetorical approach in analyzing *tawqī'āt* as a literary and linguistic phenomenon grounded in condensation and persuasion. This approach is manifested through the following analytical steps:

a. Analysis of the Persuasive Structure

The descriptive method focuses on the *persuasive dimension*, explaining how the *tawqīʿ* transforms from a mere “authoritative command” into a “logical argument.” It examines logical devices such as analogy, causal reasoning, religious evidence, and ethical standards, thereby revealing the mechanisms of psychological and rational influence exercised by the issuer (*al-muwaqqiʿ*) over the recipient.

b. Analysis of Rhetorical Devices

The method proceeds to describe rhetorical techniques as functional tools, such as:

- Quotation (iqtibās) as a ready-made argument deriving its authority from a sacred source.
- Figurative imagery—including metaphor and metonymy—as tools of extreme concision, whereby extended meanings are compressed into a single expressive flash.
- Rhythmic structures, analyzing the effect of antithesis and parallelism in producing a musical balance that facilitates memorability and circulation.

c. Linking Function and Aesthetics

The descriptive approach demonstrates that rhetorical beauty in *tawqīʿāt* is not ornamental but rather a rhetorical necessity that exerts pressure on the recipient, making rhetoric here an *operative rhetoric* aimed at immediate transformation of reality.

1.3. Scope of the Study

- Temporal and spatial scope: The Islamic state during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd.
- Thematic scope: The genre of *tawqīʿāt*.
- Corpus: The *tawqīʿāt* attributed to Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.

2. Definition of *Tawqīʿāt* Linguistically and Terminologically

2.1. *Tawqīʿ* in Language

The term *tawqīʿ* derives from the root *waqaʿa* (وَقَعَ), which conveys meanings such as falling, descending, striking, or occurring. Ibn Manẓūr notes that the term is used for physical impact (e.g., the fall of rain, the strike of a sword) as well as for obligation and inevitability, as in the Qurʾanic verse: «وَإِذَا وَقَعَ الْقَوْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ» (Qurʾan 27:82)

“And when the word falls upon them...” (Ibn Manẓūr, n.d., s.v. وقع)

al-Zajjāj interprets this as “when the word becomes binding or obligatory.” Ibn Manẓūr further explains -citing al-Azharī- that the *tawqī'* of a scribe in a written petition consists in summarizing the core intent between the lines while eliminating excess, likening it to the mark left on a camel's back (*tawqī' al-dabar*), as it leaves an effect that confirms the matter (Ibn Manẓūr, n.d., s.v. وقع).

Al-Zabīdī adds that this “effect” may be sensory or semantic, stating:

“It is called *tawqī'* because it effects change in the document physically or in the matter meaningfully, or because it causes the occurrence of the matter mentioned.” (al-Zabīdī, 2001, s.v. وقع)

Another possible derivation lies in the sense of obligation (*wujūb*), as *tawqī'āt* typically emanate from those whose words are binding-caliphs, ministers, and governors (al-Yūsī, 1981, p. 220).

2.2. *Tawqī'* in Terminology

Ibn Khaldūn defines *tawqī'* as follows:

“Among the functions of writing is the *tawqī'*, which consists in the scribe sitting before the ruler in sessions of judgment and decision, endorsing the petitions presented to him with rulings and resolutions, conveyed from the ruler in the briefest and most eloquent form.” (Ibn Khaldūn, 2005: 1/334)

While Ibn Khaldūn restricts *tawqī'āt* to rulers, historical practice shows that ministers and governors also issued them. His definition, however, insightfully emphasizes concision and rhetorical competence as essential requirements.

Al-Qalqashandī defines *tawqī'* as:

“Writing on petitions and documents concerning appointments, correspondence, grievances, and matters of governance an eminent office through which granting and withholding, appointment and dismissal, are effected.” (al-Qalqashandī, 1987, p. 145)

Among modern scholars, Shawqī Ḍayf defines *tawqī'āt* as concise eloquent expressions used by Persian kings and later adopted by Abbasid caliphs (Ḍayf, 1989, p. 489). This claim, however, is refuted by earlier evidence from the Rashidun period.

Aḥmad Mukhtār ‘Umar acknowledges this earlier presence, stating that *tawqī‘āt* existed before the Abbasids but flourished during their era (‘Umar, 2008, s.v. رقع).

Aḥmad Amīn defines *tawqī‘* as a ruling, comment, or annotation written or dictated by the ruler on matters of state, grievances, or reports from governors (Amīn, 1961, p. 187).

3. Historical Overview

3.1. In the Pre-Islamic Period

Tawqī‘āt were not known among the Arabs in the pre-Islamic period, due to their limited familiarity with writing. The genre of *tawqī‘āt* is intrinsically linked to writing and the ease of written communication-conditions that were largely unavailable to pre-Islamic Arabs. Moreover, literary production in the Jāhiliyyah period was predominantly oral rather than written, and thus prose genres dependent on documentation and written correspondence had not yet emerged.

3.2. In the Islamic Period

With the advent of Islam, *tawqī‘āt* did not appear in the early phase of this era either. This can be attributed to several factors, including the nascent stage of the Islamic state itself. At that time, there were no vast or far-flung provinces necessitating sustained official correspondence between provincial administrations and the central authority. Writing was also not yet widely disseminated during the early Islamic period.

However, as the Islamic state expanded and provinces were established, the responsibilities of the caliphs increased accordingly. Extensive correspondence emerged between governors and the caliph, and given the caliphs’ limited time to respond with detailed letters to each incoming communication, *tawqī‘āt* began to appear as a practical administrative solution. This development coincided with the emergence and gradual spread of writing, as well as the establishment of official state bureaus (*dīwāns*).

It has been reported that the earliest recorded *tawqī‘* in the history of Arabic literature is that written by Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (may God be pleased with him) to Khālīd b. al-Walīd (may God be pleased with him). When Khālīd sent a letter from Dūmat al-Jandal seeking instructions regarding the enemy, Abū Bakr endorsed it with the statement:

“Advance toward death, and life will be granted to you.” (al-Jāḥiẓ, 1968, p. 471)

This historical evidence refutes the claim made by Shawqī Ḍayf, who argues that *tawqī‘āt* are “concise eloquent expressions that Persian kings and their ministers

were accustomed to writing on petitions presented to them by subjects seeking redress, and that the Abbasid caliphs and their ministers merely imitated them in this practice" (Ḍayf, 1966, p. 489). In fact, *tawqī'āt* appeared during the era of all the Rightly Guided Caliphs. These endorsements can be traced in classical Arabic prose sources, and they were later collected systematically by Aḥmad Zakī Ṣafwat from their original references (Safwat, n.d., p. 491).

The use of *tawqī'āt* expanded further during the Umayyad period, when all Umayyad caliphs -as well as their ministers and governors, such as al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafi- made frequent use of them.

With the establishment of the Abbasid state, *tawqī'āt* were no longer confined to correspondence between caliphs, ministers, and complainants. Rather, they became a public cultural phenomenon: people showed keen interest in them and sought to obtain copies of the *tawqī'āt* of prominent statesmen for the enjoyment of their rhetorical excellence. It was reported that the *tawqī'āt* of Ja'far al-Barmakī were copied and studied for their rhetorical qualities (al-Jahshiyārī, 1938, p. 204).

This practice, in a broad sense, continues to the present day, as *tawqī'āt* -or their functional equivalents- are employed by officials within their institutions. However, in contemporary usage they have become an administrative necessity characterized by rigid legal and bureaucratic language rather than literary expression, relying on repetitive and standardized templates that are widely known in advance (Abdelghany, 2017, p. 160).

4. The Rhetoric of *Tawqī'āt*

4.1. Elements of Discourse

- Sender: The caliph as the supreme authority, shaping a tone of command and legitimacy.
- Receiver: Governors, officials, or common subjects, with the tone varying accordingly.
- Medium: The written petition itself, which anchors the *tawqī'* to its immediate context.

Context: The preceding request or complaint that necessitates the endorsement (Abdelghany, 2017, p. 160).

4.2. Concision as a Defining Feature

Concision is the most salient rhetorical feature of *tawqī'āt*, due to:

- Their attachment to a prior narrative that renders elaboration unnecessary.

- Spatial constraints of writing in margins.
- The caliph's limited time.
- The rhetorical challenge of conveying dense meaning with clarity and force.
- The urgency of resolving grievances swiftly (Abdelghany, 2017, p. 160).

4.3. Persuasive Dimension of *Tawqī'āt*

One of the most salient characteristics of *tawqī'āt* is their reliance on persuasion grounded in argumentation and proof. Although a *tawqī'* may contain a command or a prohibition, such an imperative or restrictive statement nonetheless requires supporting evidence to reinforce its authority and effectiveness. Consequently, persuasive proofs in *tawqī'āt* take diverse forms, including logical reasoning, religious (legal) evidence, and appeals to ethical standards. These dimensions will be examined in the following sections.

(A) Logical Instruments (Rational Argument)

Hārūn al-Rashīd frequently relied on what may be termed *declarative logic*—a form of reasoning that compels the petitioner or official to reassess their position and to recognize the impossibility or error of their request.

This approach is evident in his *tawqī'* addressed to Maḥfūz, the official in charge of Egypt's land tax:

«يا محفوظ، اجعل خرج مصر خرجاً واحداً، وأنت أنت» (Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296)

"O Maḥfūz, make the revenue of Egypt a single revenue - and you are you."

Here, al-Rashīd employs a logical device grounded in *identity and responsibility*. The phrase "and you are you" conveys an implicit rational argument: *you are the person chosen for your competence; if you are unable to regulate the tax system, it is as though you are no longer the person you claim to be*. Persuasion here is achieved by appealing to the official's self-confidence and rational awareness of his own qualifications.

A similar rational structure appears in his *tawqī'* to his governor in Khurāsān:

«داو جرحك لا يتسع» (Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296)

"Treat your wound before it widens."

This statement rests on a causal logic of *cause and effect*. Reason dictates that a minor wound, if left untreated, will expand and ultimately destroy the body. Al-Rashīd thus persuades his governor intellectually that delaying the suppression

of unrest is not mere negligence, but a form of inevitable political self-destruction with predictable consequences.

(B) Reliance on Religious Evidence

Al-Rashīd also employed Qurʾānic texts and religious conscience to refute the claims of adversaries and to strengthen the authority of the caliphate. The persuasive force of such evidence lies in the fact that it constitutes *ready-made arguments* whose power derives from their source, public acceptance, and widespread transmission (al-ʿUmrī, 2005: 90).

An example of this is his *tawqīʿ* to al-Sindī b. Shāhāk:

«خَفِ اللَّهَ وَإِمَامَكَ، فَهُمَا نَجَاتُكَ» (Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296)

"Fear God and your Imam, for they are your salvation."

Here, the caliphal position is reinforced through an appeal to obedience to God. Persuasion is explicitly religious: the official's salvation in both this world and the hereafter is linked to fear of God (the primary religious principle) and obedience to the Imam (the secondary principle derived from it).

Another example is his response to the Byzantine ruler:

«وَسَيَعْلَمُ الْكُفَّارُ لِمَنْ عُمِّي الدَّارُ» (Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296)

"And the disbelievers will come to know to whom the ultimate abode belongs."

In this instance, al-Rashīd strips the Byzantine emperor of any real power by invoking a definitive religious truth: ultimate victory does not belong to those who command armies and crosses, but to the righteous. This religious proof effectively closes the door to political debate, transforming the confrontation into an irrevocable divine judgment.

(C) Reliance on Ethical Standards

Al-Rashīd further employed ethical norms -such as honor, chivalry, and justice- as persuasive tools to legitimize his decisions in the eyes of both subjects and officials.

This is evident in his *tawqīʿ* to Khuzayma b. Khāzim:

«لَا أُمَّ لَكَ! تَقْتُلُ بِالذَّنْبِ مَنْ لَا ذَنْبَ لَهُ؟» (Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296)

"May you be bereft of a mother! Do you kill, for a sin, one who has no sin?"

Here, al-Rashīd appeals to a universal moral and human principle encapsulated in the Qurʾānic maxim *"No bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another"*

(Qurʾān 6:164). Persuasion is achieved through *moral reproach*: how can a commander representing the caliphate transgress the bounds of honor and kill an innocent person for the crime of another? This *tawqīʿ* strips the commander of moral legitimacy and compels him to return to justice.

A similar ethical appeal appears in al-Rashīd's *tawqīʿ* to Sulaymān b. Abī Jaʿfar regarding the events in Damascus:

«...استحيث بشيخ ولده المنصور أن يهرب» (Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, 1983, p. 297)

"I was ashamed, for one whose father was al-Manṣūr, to flee..."

Here, persuasion is based on *honor and status*. Al-Rashīd reproaches Sulaymān with severe moral criticism, reminding him of his lineage (as the son of al-Manṣūr) and invoking the bravery of Marwān b. Muḥammad. Through this comparison, al-Rashīd seeks to convince him that retreat is not merely a political option, but a moral failure unworthy of his Hāshimite heritage.

Likewise, in his *tawqīʿ* concerning a complainant, he states:

«...لا يجاوز بك العدل، ولا يقصر بك دون الإنصاف» (Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296)

"Justice shall not carry you beyond measure, nor shall it fall short of fairness."

This statement appeals to the ethical standard of *equity* in order to persuade the public that the state is neither tyrannical nor weak. It functions as both psychological and moral persuasion, reassuring the complainant and instilling trust in the state's steadfast ethical principles.

4.4. Rhetorical Analysis of Hārūn al-Rashīd's Marginal Notes (Tawqīʿāt)

1) «وقع إلى صاحب خراسان: «داو جرحك لا يتسع» (Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296)

"He wrote to the governor of Khurāsān: 'Treat your wound before it widens.'"

This note is a striking example of concision: it compresses an entire doctrine of crisis management into a single line. The utterance is an imperative «داو» ("treat")- yet it is not a literal medical instruction; it is an administrative command delivered through a concrete sensory image. The "wound" «جرح» is not physical but functions as a representative metaphor for an incipient problem (unrest, administrative dysfunction, or corruption) whose beginnings are still limited. "Treatment" therefore signifies rapid corrective action -restoring order, extinguishing sedition, or repairing institutional failure- rather than medicine in the literal sense. The rhetorical power lies in the refusal to state the abstract idea ("fix the problem before it escalates") and instead to present escalation as a

natural, uncontestable consequence of neglect: wounds spread if left unattended. The clause «لا يَتَّسِعُ» (“before it widens”) subtly personifies the figurative wound by attributing to it organic expansion, and it also supplies an implicit causal logic: act now, because delay necessarily produces enlargement. Finally, the utterance relies on strategic ellipsis: it specifies neither the “remedy” nor the “method,” because the point is not technical detail but the principle of immediate initiative—an omission that intensifies the warning by implying that any neglect will be culpable.

2) «وإلى عامله على مصر: «احذر أن تُخرب خزانتي وخزانة أخي يوسف فيأتيك مني ما لا قبل لك به، ومن الله أكثر منه» (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983: 4/297)

“And to his governor in Egypt: ‘Beware of ruining my treasury and the treasury of my brother Yūsuf; otherwise, there will come upon you from me what you cannot withstand—and from God far more than that.’”

The rhetoric here carefully blends sovereign authority with moral admonition. It opens with the warning formula «احذر» (“beware”), an imperative that is stronger than mere prohibition because it demands vigilant restraint. The statement then advances in a quasi-conditional causal logic: if the treasury is damaged - «أن تُخرب» - punishment follows. The phrase «ما لا قبل لك به» (“what you cannot withstand”) intensifies the threat through rhetorical magnification, portraying the coming sanction as beyond human capacity. The closing clause «ومن الله أكثر منه» (“and from God far more than that”) creates a deliberate semantic escalation: after invoking the ruler’s coercive power, it elevates the ultimate deterrent to divine accountability. The line therefore produces a double restraint—political and eschatological—while also establishing an implicit contrast between human punishment and God’s. The parallelism in «خزانتي وخزانة أخي» (“my treasury and my brother’s treasury”) adds rhythmic weight and underscores that this is not private wealth but public property whose violation is a major offense.

3) «ووقع في قصة رجل من البرامكة: «أنبته الطاعة وحصدته المعصية» (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296)

“And in the case of a man from the Barmakids: ‘Obedience made him grow; disobedience reaped him.’”

This note exemplifies the proverbial density characteristic of tawqī'āt: one agrarian image yields a complete moral and political judgement. The clause «أنبته

«الطاعة» (“obedience made him grow”) treats obedience as a cultivating force that produces flourishing, as seed or rain produces crops. The counter-clause «وحصدته» («المعصية» (“disobedience reaped him”) mirrors the first image, turning sin into a sickle that cuts down what has already matured. The structure is powered by explicit antithesis «الطاعة/المعصية» (“obedience/disobedience”)- and by a corresponding verbal pair «أُنبتته/حصدته» (“made him grow/reaped him”)- all within a single semantic field (agriculture) that ensures coherence. Obedience and disobedience are also cast as active agents, giving the line a vivid sense of causality. The parallel morphology (verb + pronominal suffix) yields a memorable cadence, allowing the statement to circulate like a maxim. Beneath the ethical surface lies a political implication: loyalty elevates; defiance cuts off one’s standing.

4) «وإلى عامله على فارس: «كُنْ مِنِّي عَلَى مِثْلِ لَيْلَةِ الْبَيَاتِ» (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296)

“And to his governor in Fārs: ‘Be toward me as on the night of a sudden raid.’”

The rhetoric here is built on allusive compression rather than explicit instruction. In Arabic military imagination, «ليلة البيات» denotes a night of surprise attack, the moment when one is most vulnerable to being taken unawares. The directive therefore asks not merely for obedience but for a sustained posture: vigilance, readiness, caution, constant watchfulness, and refusal to “sleep” on danger. The phrase operates as a representative simile: the governor’s required state is compared to that of a fighter living through a raid-night - yet the comparison is delivered economically through «على مثل» (“like”), without extended exposition. The compact image functions as a semantic key: it activates an entire cluster of security measures in the addressee’s mind without listing them, which is precisely the distinctive rhetorical economy of tawqī‘āt.

5) «وإلى عامل خراسان: «إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ يُؤْتَرُ عَنْهُمْ الْخَزَمُ» (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296)

“And to his governor in Khurāsān: ‘Indeed, what is transmitted of kings is firmness.’”

This statement reads as a political maxim. It is declarative yet emphatically reinforced by «إِنَّ» (“indeed”), presenting the claim as a stable rule rather than a negotiable preference. The expression «يُؤْتَرُ عَنْهُمْ» literally suggests “it is narrated/reported of them,” implying that royal virtues are “traces” that remain

in collective memory; and what is most memorably associated with kings, the note asserts, is «الحزم» (“firmness, decisiveness”). The effect is normative: firmness is not described as optional but as constitutive of kingship—so that laxity becomes a political disgrace. The rhetoric thus constructs a standard through a compact, authoritative assertion.

6) وإلى خزيمة بن خازم إذ كتب إليه أنه وضع السيف حين دخل أرض أرمينية: لا أم لك! تقتل بالذنب من لا ذنب له؟ (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296)

“And to Khuzayma b. Khāzīm -when he wrote to him that he had sheathed the sword upon entering the land of Armenia- [he wrote]: ‘May you be bereft of a mother! Do you kill, for a sin, one who has no sin?’”

The note is intentionally harsh in tone, using shock as a rhetorical instrument. The expression «لا أم لك» is a conventional Arabic rebuke, an emotive performative intended as severe censure rather than a literal supplication. The question «تقتل...؟» (“do you kill...?”) is not genuine inquiry but a repudiating interrogative—an indignant rhetorical question that condemns the act as morally indefensible. The condemnation is sharpened by explicit antithesis: «بالذنب / من لا ذنب له» (“for a sin / one who has no sin”), which exposes the injustice in the starkest possible terms. Structurally, the line resembles a judicial ruling: it states the charge (killing innocents), provides the ethical proof (their innocence), and delivers a verdict through emphatic reproach—thereby codifying the governing principle that the innocent must not be punished for another’s guilt.

7) «وَفِي قِصَّةِ مَحْبُوسٍ: «مَنْ لَجَأَ إِلَى اللَّهِ نَجَا» (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296)

“And in the case of a prisoner: ‘Whoever seeks refuge in God is saved.’”

Addressed to a prisoner, this note shifts the addressee from the constriction of confinement to the expansiveness of spiritual meaning. Its authority derives from universal form: «مَنْ...» (“whoever...”) frames the statement as a general rule rather than a private consolation. The phrase «لَجَأَ إِلَى اللَّهِ» (“seeks refuge in God”) stands metonymically for reliance, surrender, and protective attachment to the divine; and «نَجَا» (“is saved”) is a brief, decisive predicate suited to a distressed listener. The compactness avoids sermonizing while still offering maximal reassurance, embodying the tawqī’s hallmark economy: few words, enduring effect.

8) (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 296) «وفي قصة متظلم: «لا يجاوز بك العدل، ولا يقصر بك دون الإنصاف»

“And in the case of a complainant: ‘Justice shall not carry you beyond measure, nor shall it fall short of fairness.’”

This is a refined juridical formulation built on calibrated balance between excess and deficiency. The first clause «لا يجاوز بك العدل» (“justice shall not carry you beyond measure”) warns against an overextension of “justice” that becomes harshness or oppression under the guise of principle. The second clause «ولا يقصر بك دون الإنصاف» (“nor shall it fall short of fairness”) guards against under-enforcement and the erosion of rights. The paired structure (“neither... nor...”) creates strong parallelism, while the antithetical verbs «يجاوز/يقصر» (“go beyond/fall short”) depict judgement as movement along a measurable line. The coupling of «العدل/الإنصاف» (“justice/fairness”) is purposeful: justice is the principle, fairness its realized application. The note’s central rhetorical achievement is reassurance: the complainant will neither be overruled nor deprived, and the “middle measure” produces confidence.

9) (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983: 4/297) «وإلى صاحب السِّند إذ ظهرت العصبية: «كل من دعا إلى الجاهلية تعجل إلى المنيّة»

“And to the governor of al-Sind, when factionalism had appeared: ‘Everyone who calls to jāhiliyya hastens to death.’”

The persuasive force of this note lies in its generalization and moral framing. The universal quantifier «كل» (“everyone”) elevates the statement into a standing rule. The phrase «دعا إلى الجاهلية» (“calls to jāhiliyya”) is a civilizationally charged expression used metonymically for tribal chauvinism, blind factionalism, and the revival of pre-Islamic divisiveness. The clause «تعجل إلى المنيّة» (“hastens to death”) is figurative: death becomes a destination toward which the agitator rushes, as though inciting faction accelerates one’s own destruction. The note therefore does more than threaten; it links a social behavior (partisanship) to its historically plausible end (strife, ruin, killing), producing both moral admonition and political realism in a single compact line.

10) (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 297) «وإلى عامله على خراسان: «كل من رفع رأسه فأزله عن بدنه»

“And to his governor in Khurāsān: ‘Whoever raises his head, remove it from his body.’”

This is an archetype of uncompromising deterrence. The phrase «رفع رأسه» (“raises his head”) is not literal; it functions metonymically for rebellion, insolence, and contesting sovereign authority. The response «فأزله عن بدنه» (“remove it from his body”) is a stark metonymy for execution by beheading, signifying the complete eradication of sedition at its source. The brutality is rhetorically purposeful: it leaves no interpretive space for negotiation. The conditional-like formula “whoever... then...” gives the utterance the character of an impersonal penal statute, turning the tawqī' into a miniature constitutional rule of deterrence. The emphasis on “the head” is symbolically apt: rebellion begins with a “head” that leads, and severing it signifies eliminating leadership itself.

11) وفي رقعة متظلم من عامله على الأهواز، وكان بالمتظلم عارفا: قد وليناك موضعه، فتنبك سيرته (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 297)

“And in a petition from a complainant against his governor in al-Ahwāz -whom he knew personally- [he wrote]: ‘We have appointed you in his place; therefore, avoid his course.’”

This note exemplifies insinuation at its most effective. The caliph does not explicitly denounce the former official, yet the command to avoid his “course” «قد وليناك موضعه» functions as an implicit judgement upon it. The clause «قد وليناك موضعه» (“we have appointed you in his place”) is a confirmed report that establishes authority and finality, and the immediate transition to «فتنبك» (“therefore avoid”) signals that appointment entails prompt rupture with the predecessor’s conduct. The phrase «تنكب سيرته» employs a spatial metaphor: conduct is a road, and avoidance is veering away. Rhetorically, the note undermines the predecessor without invective; a single terse directive suffices to announce that the old “path” is shameful and must be replaced.

12) وفي كتاب بكار الزبيري إليه؛ يخيره بسر من أسرار الطالبين: جزى الله الفضل خير الجزاء في اختياره إياك وقد أثابك أمير المؤمنين (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 297). مائة ألف بحسن نيتك

“And in a letter from Bakkār al-Zubayrī to him, in which he offered him a secret from among the secrets of the Ṭālibids, [he wrote]: ‘May God reward al-Faḍl with the best of reward for choosing you; and the Commander of the Faithful has granted you one hundred thousand for the excellence of your intention.’”

This note deploys the rhetoric of dual recompense: divine and sovereign. The opening «...جزى الله» (“may God reward...”) frames the action as ethically meaningful rather than merely politically expedient, while also praising the intermediary «الفضل» (al-Faḍl). The second clause «وقد أثابك أمير المؤمنين مائة ألف» (“and the Commander of the Faithful has granted you one hundred thousand”) confirms worldly reward with an air of completion and certainty. The final justification «بحسن نيتك» (“for your good intention”) is rhetorically subtle: it makes intention- not only action- the basis of merit, elevating the exchange from transaction to virtue. The cumulative effect (prayer + reward + sincerity) persuades by portraying the state as just and appreciative of loyal, ethically framed service.

13) (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 297) «وإلى محفوظ صاحب خراج مصر: «يا محفوظ، اجعل خراج مصر خرجاً واحداً، وأنت أنت

“And to Mahfūz, the superintendent of Egypt’s land tax: ‘O Mahfūz, make the revenue of Egypt a single, unified revenue and you are you.”

Although administrative in subject matter, the note is rhetorically forceful. The vocative «يا محفوظ» personalizes the charge, addressing the individual rather than the office. The directive «اجعل خراج مصر خرجاً واحداً» (“make Egypt’s revenue a single revenue”) employs deliberate derivational repetition (خرج/خرجاً) to reinforce consolidation metonymically suggesting unified accounting, reduced fragmentation, and curtailed corruption. The closing «وأنت أنت» (“and you are you”) is especially striking: it is emphatic affirmation of identity and competence, implying, “I need not elaborate; you are known for the capacity to do this.” It functions simultaneously as motivation and as a subtle restriction: you are precisely the person intended for this reform.

14) (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 297) «وإلى صاحب المدينة: «ضع رجليك على رقاب أهل هذا البطن فإنهم قد أطالوا ليلي بالسهاد، ونفوا عن عيني لذيق الرقاد

“And to the governor of Medina: ‘Set your feet upon the necks of the people of this clan, for they have prolonged my night with sleeplessness and driven from my eyes the sweetness of sleep.”

This note fuses the rhetoric of domination with a quasi-poetic complaint. The image «...ضع رجليك على رقاب» (“set your feet upon their necks”) is a shocking sensory

metaphor/metonymy for humiliation and total subjugation: the neck is the locus of submission, and stepping upon it is the extreme emblem of coercion. The justification that follows is expressed in literary metaphors: «أطالوا ليالي بالسهاد» (“they have lengthened my night with sleeplessness”) is figurative -night does not literally lengthen, but anxiety makes it feel prolonged- while «نفوا عن عيني لذيق الرقاد» (“they have banished from my eyes the sweetness of sleep”) personifies sleep as something exiled. Both clauses share one semantic field (night/sleeplessness/eye/sleep) and contain an implicit contrast between sleeplessness and sleep, which sharpens the complaint and legitimizes severity.

15) (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 297) «ووقع إلى السندي بن شاهك: «خف الله وإمامك، فهما نجاتك»

“He wrote to al-Sindī b. Shāhak: ‘Fear God and your Imam, for they are your salvation.”

This directive is morally framed yet politically strategic. It begins with the imperative «خف» (“fear”), then binds together two objects: God «الله» and the Imam «إمامك» (the ruling authority). The coupling is politically astute, integrating obedience into the economy of piety rather than treating it as mere human compliance. The closing causal clause «فهما نجاتك» (“for they are your salvation”) gives finality to the argument: safety lies not in cunning or force but in accountable reverence toward these two references. The rhetorical effect is to present “salvation” as the result of a single, clearly bounded principle.

16) وإلى سليمان بن أبي جعفر في كتاب ورد عليه منه يذكر فيه وثوب أهل دمشق :

استحيت بشيخ ولده المنصور، أن يهرب عمن ولده كندة وطيء؛ فهلا قابلتهم بوجهك، وأبديت لهم صفحتك، وبذلت لهم نصيحتك، وكنت كمروان ابن عمك أذ خرج مصلتا سيفه متمثلا ببيت الجحاف بن حكيم

متقلدين صفائحا هندية ... يتركن من ضربوا كمن لم يولد

(Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 297) فجالد به حتى قتل؛ لله أم ولدته؛ وأب أخضه

“And to Sulaymān b. Abī Ja‘far, in a letter received from him in which he mentioned the uprising of the people of Damascus:

‘I felt shame—on account of an aged man whose son was al-Manṣūr—that he should flee from those whose ancestors were Kindah and Ṭayy. Why did you not meet them

face to face, show them your forbearance, offer them your counsel, and be like Marwān, your cousin, when he went forth with his sword drawn, reciting the verse of al-Jahhāf b. Ḥakīm:

"Girded with Indian blades ... leaving those they strike as though they had never been born?"

He fought with it until he was killed—blessed be the mother who bore him, and the father who raised him."

This passage is rhetorically complex because it is not merely a terse note but an extended admonitory discourse. It begins with «...استحييت» ("I was ashamed"), an ostensibly modest phrasing that in context functions as reproach by insinuation: flight is implicitly shamed as unbecoming. The interrogative «...فها!» ("why did you not...?") is not genuine inquiry but a hortatory, reproachful question that urges confrontation while censuring avoidance. The sequence «...قابلتهم... وأبديت... وبذلت» ("meet... show... offer...") is a pressured enumeration of neglected honorable options. The comparison «...وكن كمروان» ("and be like Marwān...") introduces historical exemplarity as an argumentative device, intensifying blame through contrast with a heroic model. The embedded verse—«متقلدين صفاتها هندية... يتركن من ضربوا»—"is a deliberate poetic quotation whose hyperbole depicts the sword's blow as so absolute that its victims appear "as though never born." The closing exclamation «الله أم ولدته؛ وأب أخضه» ("blessed be the mother... and the father...") is a traditional Arabic formula of admiring praise, magnifying courage and turning the message into political pedagogy about leadership and public steadfastness.

17) وكتب ممتلك الروم إلى هارون الرشيد: إني متوجه نحوك بكل صليب في مملكتي، وكل بطل في جندي. فوقع في كتابه: وَسَيَعْلَمُ (الكُفَّارُ) لِمَنْ غَفَى الدَّارِ (Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, 1983, p. 297)

"The ruler of Byzantium wrote to Hārūn al-Rashīd: 'I am advancing against you with every cross in my realm and every champion in my army.' He [Hārūn] wrote on the letter: 'And the disbelievers will come to know whose is the final outcome of the Abode.'"

The rhetorical force lies in answering a concrete military threat with scripture rather than with martial boasting. The reply is a Qur'ānic quotation—«وَسَيَعْلَمُ (الكُفَّارُ)»—"which grants the response sacral authority exceeding that of weapons. It is also maximal concision: the opponent threatens with crosses and

champions, while the caliph answers with a single verse, implying that the adversary's rhetoric is small before divine promise. «وسيعلم» ("they will know") projects deferred but certain reckoning, and «عقبي الدار» ("the final outcome of the Abode") shifts the contest from immediate warfare to ultimate destiny. The note also achieves depersonalization: instead of "I will do," it invokes divine law and final consequence, confronting the enemy with providence rather than a man.

18) وكتب إليه يحيى بن خالد من الحبس حين أحبس بالموت: قد تقدم الخصم إلى موقف الفصل، وأنت بالأثر، والله الحكم العدل، وستقدم فتعلم. فوقع فيه الرشيد

الحكم الذي رضيته في الآخرة لك، هو أعدى الخصم في الدنيا عليك، وهو من لا يردّ حكمه، ولا يصرف قضاؤه (Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, 1983, pp. 297-298)

"Yahyā b. Khālīd wrote to him from prison, when he was confined awaiting death: 'The adversary has already advanced to the place of final judgement, and you follow behind; God is the Just Judge, and you too will come forward and then you will know.' Al-Rashīd wrote on it: 'The Judge whose judgement you have accepted for yourself in the Hereafter is the fiercest adversary against you in this world; His judgement is not to be repelled, nor is His decree to be averted.'"

This note is architecturally profound, built on a didactic paradox: one welcomes God's judgement in the Hereafter because it is just, yet that same justice becomes one's most formidable adversary in this world if one commits injustice. Thus, the oppressor who overpowers people discovers that the justice he professes turns against him. The rhetoric hinges on the major contrast between الدنيا/الآخرة (this world/the Hereafter) and on emphatic phrasing «هو أعدى الخصم» ("He is the fiercest adversary"), which conveys an almost restrictive sense: no opponent is harsher than divine justice. The paired negatives «...لا يردّ... ولا يصرف» ("not repelled... nor diverted...") form tight parallelism, while the pairing «حكمه/قضاؤه» ("His judgement/His decree") reinforces inevitability by closing every imagined loophole. The effect is not ornament but recalibration of power: even sovereign authority remains subject to an unanswerable judgement.

5. Discussion

The rhetorical reading of the tawqī'āt of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd reveals a discourse of exceptional density, in which political function and rhetorical aesthetics are so deeply intertwined that separating one from the other becomes impossible. Despite its extreme brevity, the tawqī' is not confined to being a mere

administrative instrument for issuing commands or adjudicating complaints; rather, it is transformed into a fully structured discursive unit endowed with the mechanisms of persuasion and influence, operating simultaneously to reshape the recipient's awareness and behavior.

These *tawqī'āt* further demonstrate that concision is not a defective form of abbreviation, but rather a functional rhetorical concision grounded in deliberate omission, semantic suggestion, and reliance on the contextual framework preceding the endorsement. Meaning is not articulated in its entirety; instead, it is mentally reconstructed by the recipient, a process that grants the discourse a degree of psychological and intellectual pressure exceeding that of extended speech. By omitting details and entrusting them to the intelligence and experience of the addressee, the discourse assigns him responsibility for both comprehension and execution, thereby rendering him an active participant in the production of meaning.

Rhetorical imagery within the *tawqī'* is not a decorative luxury, but a decisive instrument. Metaphor, metonymy, and representative simile function to condense meaning and transform it into a striking or firmly embedded mental image -one that is easily transmitted, memorized, and circulated.

At the level of authority, the *tawqī'āt* of al-Rashīd reveal an advanced conception of governance founded on the integration of authority and justice, deterrence and equity. The caliph does not consistently appear as a figure of absolute coercion, nor as a detached moral preacher; rather, he moves fluidly between firmness and mercy, between law and ethics, and between politics and religion, according to the nature of the addressee and the demands of the context.

6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the genre of *tawqī'āt* -and particularly the marginal endorsements attributed to Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd- constitutes a mature form of functional Arabic prose characterized by remarkable rhetorical density and persuasive efficacy. Far from being merely administrative annotations, these endorsements operate as influential discursive acts that combine sovereign authority with stylistic artistry. Concision emerges as their defining trait, functioning not simply as brevity but as a rhetorical mechanism of pressure: it achieves decisive meaning within minimal space and time while preserving clarity and maximizing impact.

The analyses have shown that al-Rashīd's *tawqī'āt* are typically structured around three interrelated persuasive foundations: rational argumentation (causal reasoning and the logic of identity and responsibility), religious proof

(Qurʾānic citation and moral-religious authority as a supra-discursive source that curtails disputation), and ethical standards (justice, honor, and chivalric norms) as universally compelling frameworks that confer affective legitimacy upon political decisions. Moreover, the study has confirmed that rhetorical devices - metaphor, metonymy, personification, antithesis, parallelism, and implicit rhythmic balance- are not ornamental features; rather, they serve functional purposes: condensation of meaning, vivid visualization, memorability, and the production of immediate compliance or psychological reassurance.

The findings also suggest that *tawqīʿāt*, owing to their high circulation potential, often assume the status of political and ethical aphorisms, simultaneously legislating, deterring, consoling, and educating - depending on context and audience. Accordingly, examining the *tawqīʿāt* of Hārūn al-Rashīd contributes to restoring scholarly attention to this under-studied genre and highlights its value for investigating the rhetoric of concision, the argumentative logic of authority, and the aesthetics of functional discourse in Abbasid literary culture. Future research may profitably extend this inquiry through comparative studies of caliphal and ministerial endorsements, or by approaching *tawqīʿāt* through contemporary frameworks of discourse analysis and argumentation theory.

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