

AL-IŞFAHĀNĪ'S FANDOM IN THE *KITĀB AL-AĠĀNĪ* (*THE BOOK OF SONGS*): AN ANALYSIS OF THE BIOGRAPHY OF IBN SURAYĠ

(Al-Işfahānī's Fandom dalam *Kitāb al-Aġānī* (Buku Lagu): Suatu Analisis Biografi Ibn Surayġ)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the biography of the musician, Ibn Surayġ (d. c. 96/714), in the *Kitāb al-Aġānī*, with regard to how the compiler, Abū al-Faraġ 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Işfahānī (d. after 356/967), edits his source material (*aḥbār*) in order to articulate his admiration for the musician, Işhāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawşīlī (155–235/772–850). Through an investigation of al-Işfahānī's repetition and juxtaposition of *aḥbār*, his fandom is revealed in the article on Ibn Surayġ, where al-Işfahānī shapes the narrative that problematizes a report unfavourable towards Işhāq while elevating his musical achievement. Although the *Kitāb al-Aġānī*, as an *aḥbār* compilation, seems void of authorial voice, and, thus, of originality, examination of the compiler's editorial work shows his articulation of his own perspective.

Keywords: Abū al-Faraġ al-Işfahānī; *Kitāb al-Aġānī*; Ibn Surayġ; Işhāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawşīlī; authorial voice; *aḥbār* compilations

ABSTRAK

Makalah ini mengkaji biografi ahli muzik Ibn Surayġ (meninggal abad ke-96/714) dalam Kitāb al-Aġānī tentang bagaimana Abū al-Faraġ 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Işfahānī (meninggal selepas 356/967) menyunting sumber bahan (aḥbār) dalam kitab al-Aġānī bagi menyuarakan kekagumannya terhadap ahli muzik bernama Işhāq b. Ibrāhīm

al-Mawṣilī (155-235/772-850). Melalui analisis yang dibuat oleh al-Iṣfahānī's berdasarkan pengulangan dan perbandingan dalam aḥbār, fandom beliau ditemui dalam makalah berkaitan Ibn Surayḡ, yang mana al-Iṣfahānī membentuk naratif yang menyelesaikan kekeliruan daripada laporan berkenaan Iṣḥāq yang kurang memuaskan, di samping mengiktiraf pencapaian beliau dalam bidang muzik. Walaupun Kitāb al-Aḡānī adalah kompilasi aḥbār yang tidak mengutarakan suara pengarang, namun keaslian analisis daripada kerja-kerja editorial yang dibuat oleh penyusunnya menunjukkan gambaran atau ekspresi daripada perspektifnya sendiri.

Kata Kunci: *Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī; suara pengarang; kompilasi aḥbār*

INTRODUCTION

The classical Arabic literary tradition, to a large extent, is shaped by transmission, rather than originality, “since the author himself, rather than expressing his views with his own words, hands down materials quoted from earlier authorities” (Leder 1998, 67). While there are exceptional cases such as poetry or *maqāmāt*, the majority of classical Arabic works comprise the collection of reports (*aḥbār*, sing. *ḥabar*), aphorisms, letters, orations, or eloquent expressions (Leder and Kilpatrick 1992). The unit of such a composite collection is a *ḥabar*, a report, narrated from an authority, identified in the chain of transmission (*isnād*) or remaining in anonymity. Numerous *aḥbār*, whether arranged in a particular way or not, form the narrative of a work. Thus, the authors of such works appear to be no more than collectors and compilers. Nevertheless, recent studies have shown that examination of a compiler's editorial intervention — selection, arrangement, juxtaposition, and reshaping of the material — can reveal authorial ingenuity. In such studies, a redactional analysis of *aḥbār* compilations is applied to specimens from different genres and generates thought-provoking conclusions: although the compilers' voice is often buried in the cited reports, their works consciously engage with issues central to their theological, sectarian, religious, literary, and historical views and values (Leder 1990, 1992; Donner 2001; Fahndrich 1973; Fedwa 1981; Frolow 1997; Stewart 2007; Newman 2000; Burge 2011).

The present study illustrates the usefulness of analysis of the compiler's repetition and juxtaposition of the *aḥbār* by examining how Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī (d. after 356/967¹) edits reports to articulate his admiration for the musician, Iṣḥāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (155–235/772–850), in the article on Ibn Surayḡ (d. c. 96/714), in his monumental compilation, the *Kitāb al-Aḡānī* (hereafter, the *Aḡānī*). The *Aḡānī*

¹ For the controversy over the date of al-Iṣfahānī's death, see: (Su 2016, 61-62).

is one of the most important sources for Arabic literature, classical Arabic music, and early Islamic history.² Besides abundant information on the poets, musicians, and men of letters before the tenth century, the detailed citation of the chains of transmissions by al-Iṣfahānī also facilitates source studies (*Quellenforschungen*), which provide important insights into the transmission and dissemination of knowledge within mediaeval Islamic society (Zolondek 1961; Fleischhammer 2004; Sezgin 1984; al-Ṣāliḥī 2013). Recent studies, by Sallūm and Kilpatrick, on the *Aġānī* address its structure, al-Iṣfahānī's conception of his own work, and his treatment of source material (Kilpatrick 2003, 1997; Sallūm 1985). Following on from these works, which reveal al-Iṣfahānī's authorial ingenuity, this article engages with the compiler's editorial concern and its impact upon his re-presentation of the past, in hope of furthering our understanding of this great *Book of Songs*, and, in general, of classical Arabic textual culture and editorial convention.

In what follows, this article first introduces the compiler, al-Iṣfahānī, and the work, the *Aġānī*, with reference to al-Iṣfahānī's favouritism towards the musician, Iṣḥāq. Then, it analyses the impact of the compiler's fandom in the article on Ibn Surayġ.

ABŪ AL-FARAĠ AL-IṢFAHĀNĪ AND HIS *MAGNUM OPUS*, THE *AĠĀNĪ*

Abū al-Faraġ 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. al-Hayṭam al-Umawī al-Iṣfahānī was a litterateur, mastering a number of Arabic sciences, including history, genealogy, music, and poetry. His reputation for erudition is best illustrated by Abū 'Alī al-Muḥassin al-Tanūḥī's (329–384/941–994) comment:

Amongst the Ši'ī narrators whom I have known, none has learnt poems, melodies, reports, traditions (*al-āṭār*), *al-aḥādīṭ al-musnada* [narrations with chains of transmission, including the Prophetic *ḥadīṭ*], and genealogy by heart like Abū al-Faraġ al-Iṣfahānī. Very proficient in these matters, he is also knowledgeable in the military campaigns and the biography of the Prophet (*al-maġāzī* and *al-sīra*), lexicography, grammar, legendary tales (*al-ḥurāfāt*), and the sciences desirable in the court (*ālat al-munādama*), like falconry (*al-ġawāriḥ*), veterinary science (*al-bayṭara*), something about medicine (*nutafan min al-tibb*), astrology, drinks (*al-ašriba*), and other things (Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī 2001, vl.13, 339; Ibn Ḥallikān 1972, vl.3, 307; al-Ḍahabī 2004, 2774; al-Qifī 1986, vl.2, 251).

² As the *Aġānī* is structured around the songs and contains abundant information about songs, melodies, singers and musicians, it is one of the most crucial sources for the classical Arabic music, see: (Sawa 2009, 1985, 2015, Farmer 1961, 1940, 1929). A summary of the musicological studies related to the *Aġānī*, see: (Bū Ḥasan 2003).

Al-Iṣfahānī also composes poems, some of which are preserved in al-Ta‘ālibī’s anthology (Al-Ta‘ālibī 1983, vl.3, 127). His broad interests are reflected in the wide range of different literary topics covered by his works. Besides the *Aḡānī*, among thirty works attributed him, the ones which still exist today, either in fragment or in complete, are: *the Monasteries (al-Diyārāt)*, *the Extract of the Songs (Muḡarrad al-aḡānī)*, *the Singing Girls (al-Qiyān)*, *the Ṭālibid Martyrs (Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyīn)*, *the Poetess Maids (al-Imā’ al-šawā’ir)*, and *the Etiquette of the Strangers (Adab al-ḡurabā’)*.³

The *Aḡānī* is a huge *aḥbār* compilation extending to twenty-four volumes.⁴ It consists of articles on people (especially poets and musicians) and events (from pre-Islamic tribal sagas, the Prophet’s *maḡāzī*, and others) of different times and places related to songs. The *Aḡānī* preserves the songs, their melodic modes, their composers, and the biographies of the poets whose poetry serves as the lyrics of the songs, either in their original form or following their adaptation by the composers.

In the preface to the *Aḡānī*, al-Iṣfahānī explains the reason behind his compilation: “[...] one of the chief men (*rāīs min ru’asā’inā*) commissioned me to collect this work for him. He informed me that he had heard that the book attributed to Iṣḥāq, which is worthless, is not really his work and that he doubted its attribution, since most of Iṣḥāq’s companions reject it, including Iṣḥāq’s son, Ḥammād. By my life, he is honest in what he mentions and correct in what he denies (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vol.1, 16).” This *rāīs* is most likely to be the Būyid vizier, al-Muhallabī (291–352/903–963) (Su 2016, 68–72). This not only accounts for the motivation driving al-Iṣfahānī to undertake this monumental work, but also highlights the fact that the *Aḡānī* is a product of the ‘Abbāsīd court culture, anticipating the court elite who appreciates music and literature as its readers (Kilpatrick 2003, 15).

The *Aḡānī*, as a whole, is divided into three parts: first, the Hundred Songs (*al-mi’a al-šawt al-muḥtāra*) – which presents al-Iṣfahānī’s endeavours to reconstruct the collection of songs originally compiled by Iṣḥāq; second, the musicians in the caliphal families (*aḡānī al-ḥulafā’ wa-awlādihim wa-awlād awlādihim*); third, a selection of songs, possibly of al-Iṣfahānī’s own choice (Kilpatrick 2003, 258–267). The first part – consisting of the Hundred Songs and other collections of songs – begins with the article on Abū Qaṭīfa and ends with the Seven Songs of Ibn Surayḡ (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vol.1, 22–vol.8, 199). It is structured around The Hundred Songs, a list of exquisite songs revised by Iṣḥāq on the order of al-Wāṭiq (al-Iṣfahānī 2000,

³ For a list of al-Iṣfahānī’s works, see : (Kilpatrick 2003, 23-35). The authorship of *Adab al-ḡurabā’* remains debatable, see: (Su 2016, 61).

⁴ The number, twenty four volumes, is based on the edition published by Mu’assasat al-‘Alamī li-l-Maṭbū’āt, which I use in this study.

vol.1, 16–21). The normative structure in this part is Song-Poet-Musician. A song is placed at the beginning of each section. It then introduces the articles on its poet and its composer (Kilpatrick 2003, 259–262). For instance, the very first song of the *Aġānī* is presented as follows:

Al-qaṣru fa-l-naḥlu fa-l-ġammā'u baynahumā ašhā ilā al-qalbi min abwābi Ġayrūnī [...]

Its metre is *Basīṭ* the first [...] The poem is by Abū Qatīfa al-Mu'ayyī, the musical setting by Ma'bad. It has two melodic modes: one is *ḥafīf taqīl awwal bi-l-wuṣṭā fī maġrāhā*, according to the narration of Iṣḥāq, which is the setting of the selected song [the song on the list of The Hundred Songs]; the other is *taqīl awwal bi-l-wuṣṭā* in Iṣḥāq's system (*maḍhab*), according to the narration of 'Amr b. Bāna (al-Iṣfahānī, 2000, vol.1, 13–14).

After the preface, the above verses (*al-qaṣru...*) are presented with musical indications. The song first introduces the article about its lyricist, or poet, Abū Qatīfa, and subsequently that about Ma'bad, the composer of the song. The Song-Poet-Musician pattern has variants and exceptions, but the overall organisational schema in the first part conforms to this pattern (Kilpatrick 2003, 259–262).

The second part of the *Aġānī* centres on the members of the Umayyad and Abbasid families who were known as musicians or to have composed refined songs. It begins with an introduction and ends with the article about 'Abdallāh b. al-Mu'tazz (al-Iṣfahānī, 2000, vol.9, 209–vol.10, 228). The organisational pattern here is different from that of the first part. Al-Iṣfahānī names the royal musicians in chronological order, quotes their songs, and then compiles articles on lyricist-poets related to their songs (Kilpatrick 2003, 263). For instance, this part begins with 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (r. 99–101/717–20), reports concerning him, and his musical works. 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz's song then introduces the article on the poet, Ašhab b. Rumayla, the poet behind the lyrics of 'Umar's song. After this, al-Iṣfahānī follows up with the next caliph known for composing songs, al-Walīd b. Yazīd (r. 125–126/743–744) (al-Iṣfahānī, 2000, vol.9, 212–228).

The third part, possibly framed by al-Iṣfahānī's selection of songs (Kilpatrick 2003, 259), unlike the first and second parts, is not preceded by a preface and its organisational pattern is less regular. However, it is separated by a transition in era and in the subjects of the articles, beginning with Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā and followed by a number of pre-Islamic poets, who are apparently not members of the caliphal houses (al-Iṣfahānī, 2000, vol.10, 238–vol.11, 39). The organisational pattern of articles in the third part of the *Aġānī* is similar to its counterpart in the first part, *viz.*, songs serving as the introductory tool for articles (Kilpatrick 2003, 263–264).

Although the articles in each of the three parts of the *Aġānī* are organised in different ways, each article is an integral unit. An article usually comprises a summary by al-Iṣfahānī of the subject's name, genealogy, and other important themes in his or her life; reports juxtaposed with poems and songs; and, more often than not, an account of the biographee's demise.

AL-IṢFAHĀNĪ'S FANDOM

As a book of songs, the *Aġānī* unsurprisingly takes a certain stance towards different approaches to the performance and interpretation of music, and, here, al-Iṣfahānī goes for Iṣḥāq and his *madḥab*. Al-Iṣfahānī's inclination towards Iṣḥāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī is noted by Ḥalafallāh and Kilpatrick (Ḥalafallāh 1962, 72–73; Kilpatrick 2003, 16–17). As noted above, upon the request of this *raʿīs*, al-Iṣfahānī sets out to reconstruct the original song list selected by Iṣḥāq (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 16). In the preface, al-Iṣfahānī states that, for the description of musical settings, he uses Iṣḥāq's terminology for melodic modes, as opposed to that of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī (162–224/779–839) (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 15–16). That is, the very *raison d'être* of al-Iṣfahānī's compilation of the *Aġānī* is partly to do with Iṣḥāq, and Iṣḥāq's nomenclature for musical modes lays the foundation for it (Kilpatrick 2003, 16–17).

Iṣḥāq offers al-Iṣfahānī not only musical nomenclature but also a mine of information about music, musicians, and poets (Fleischhammer 2004, 89–91).⁵ Al-Iṣfahānī admires Iṣḥāq's versatility in various disciplines and asserts his nonpareil standing among musicians:

His place in knowledge, *adab*, transmission, poetry, and the remaining commendable things is too well-known to need further illustration. As for music (*al-ġinā'*), it was the least remarkable expertise of his [...] While there are his matches and equals in other fields of his learning, no one can be his match in this regard [music] (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.5, 190).

In addition, al-Iṣfahānī's veneration for Iṣḥāq is also expressed in his preference for Iṣḥāq's *madḥab* of musical performance over Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's. Baghdad in the ninth century AD was not only a flourishing centre of studies but also a land of opportunities for men of letters, poets, and musicians. In this context, Iṣḥāq and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī made their names for posterity as literati of versatile talents, above all in their musical achievements (Bencheikh 1975). Iṣḥāq's *madḥab* adheres to the original performances of the composers and condemns any modification (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.10, 59). On the other hand, Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī and his partisans,

⁵ See also the impressive number of references to Iṣḥāq in the indices: (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.25, 45–46).

such as Muḥāriq or Šāriya, hold that they can alter the performance of the traditional songs (*al-ġinā' al-qadīm*) in whatever way they like (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.10, 59–60). Al-Iṣfahānī's attitude towards the disputes between the two camps is clear: "He [Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī] is the first who corrupted the traditional songs. He paved the way for people to audaciously change them" (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.10, 59). Al-Iṣfahānī criticised Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's innovation as follows:

He [Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī] found his supporters amongst those who want to ease the acquisition of songs, hate its hardship and its difficult particulars of compound modes (*adwār*), and opine, out of ignorance, that to learn the original performance of the refined songs is time-consuming (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.10, 60).⁶

As a result of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's and his supporters' innovation, al-Iṣfahānī laments, the traditional songs are modified generation by generation and are thus no longer performed in the original way (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.10, 60). Despite Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's musical talents and extraordinary sound, al-Iṣfahānī is convinced that the victor of the competition between the two is Iṣḥāq: "[...] Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's corpus is hardly known or transmitted, except for a few items. What he [Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī] said about the comparability of the modes (*taġnīs al-ṭarā'iq*)⁷ is abandoned and Iṣḥāq's *madḥab* is followed" (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.10, 124). As the authority of Iṣḥāq's *madḥab*, through the test of time, has been established, al-Iṣfahānī, with his use of Iṣḥāq's terminology, hides nothing of his affiliation with this musician.

As al-Iṣfahānī explicitly articulates his admiration for Iṣḥāq and his approval of his *madḥab*, it can be argued that his fandom also determines his editorial decisions, especially when it comes to the *aḥbār* disavouring Iṣḥāq. In what follows, we will see how al-Iṣfahānī, through juxtaposition and repetition of the reports, offsets the effect of the unfavourable account to leave Iṣḥāq's aura impeccable in the biography of Ibn Surayġ.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE BIOGRAPHY OF IBN SURAYĠ

ʿUbayd b. Surayġ, a *mawlā* of Turkish origin, was a Meccan singer, active from the time of ʿUṭmān (r. 23–35/644–655) to the reign of Hišām (r. 105–125/724–743) or until after the death of al-Walīd b. Yazīd (r. 125–126/743–744). His clientage (*walā'*) is disputed, but it is certain that he was associated with Qurašī notables, such as al-Ḥakam b. al-Muṭṭalib al-Maḥzūmī. He learnt singing from Ibn Miṣġaḥ and was the first singer to play Arabic music with Persian lutes. He is regarded one of the

⁶ On the meaning of *adwār*, see: (Sawa 2015, 141-144).

⁷ On the meaning of "ġinās", see: (Sawa 2015, 66-67).

founding fathers of classical Arabic music, along with Ma‘bad, Mālik b. Abī al-Samḥ, and Ibn Muḥriz (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 194–197; Fück 2012).

The biography of Ibn Surayḡ in the *Aḡānī* begins with genealogical information on the subject — the clarification of his *walā’* — as well as his physical appearance, and then proceeds to his professional career and his status amongst the musicians (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 194–207). A discussion between Iṣḥāq and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī on the number of Ibn Surayḡ’s songs is interposed, before the article returns to reports about the subject (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 208–211). Following this is Ibn Surayḡ’s association with his contemporaries, most prominent of whom are ‘Umar b. Abī Rabi‘a, Ġarīr, al-Aḥwaṣ, al-Ġarīḍ, Ma‘bad, and two caliphs, al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 86–96/705–715) and Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 101–105/720–724) (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 211–234). Then, the article focuses on the reception of Ibn Surayḡ’s songs, with an emphasis on the legality of music (*ruḡṣat al-mūsīqā*) (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 234–246). Finally, it ends with the account of Ibn Surayḡ’s death and the story of two Marwānid men visiting his tomb as an act of pilgrimage (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 246–249).

A notable feature in this article is the recurring reference to Ibn Surayḡ’s singing style being imitated by Ma‘bad, another renowned musician contemporary with him. There are four *aḥbār*, scattered throughout this article, set in different contexts but all relaying that, whenever Ma‘bad performs well, he says: “I am Surayḡī today (*anā al-yawm Surayḡī*)!” (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 196 [the first report], 214–215 [the second], 227 [the third], 228 [the fourth]) No doubt, this repetitive element reiterates Ma‘bad’s reverence for Ibn Surayḡ and, thus, underscores the latter’s musical proficiency and status. However, the function of this repetition extends beyond this and relates to a report concerning the debate between Iṣḥāq and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī over whether Ibn Surayḡ ever imitated Ma‘bad’s style.

The third report in the biography of Ibn Surayḡ, in which the key phrase “I am Surayḡī today” is found, features in the debate narrated by Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm (d. 265/879), the witness to the dialogue between Iṣḥāq and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī. According to Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm, Iṣḥāq once claimed that Ibn Surayḡ imitated Ma‘bad’s style in a melody (*hādā ʿawṭ qad tama ‘bada fihi Ibn Surayḡ*). In response to Iṣḥāq’s statement, Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī refutes:

I cannot believe, O Abū Muḥammad [the agnomen of Iṣḥāq], with your mastery of music and your knowledge, that you just said that Ibn Surayḡ imitated Ma‘bad, while Ma‘bad, whenever performing well, claims: “I became Surayḡī.” God has made Ibn Surayḡ too good to do that [that is, imitating Ma‘bad] and elevated him above from such a thing. I seek the shelter of God

for you, who thinks like this concerning Ibn Surayġ (*qad aġnā Allāh Ibn Surayġ 'an hādā wa-rafa 'a qadrahu 'an miḷlihi wa-u 'iduka bi-llāh an tastaš 'ir miḷlahu fī Ibn Surayġ*).

In Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm's account, Iṣḥāq did not defend himself nor rebut Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's response, and did not say anything more than: "This is what people said. I did not say that because I believe so, but spoke it as a custom" (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 227).

The recurrent motif in all these four reports seems to confirm the prominent position of Ibn Surayġ, which is already accentuated in other reports (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 197, 206, 225, 228–230, 234–235, 242–246). When read together with the debate between Iṣḥāq and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī — in which Iṣḥāq is left defenceless in the face of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's reprimand — it seems, at first glance, that al-Iṣfahānī concurs with his idol's opponent. That is, it is Ma'bad who imitates Ibn Surayġ, not the opposite, as Iṣḥāq claims. As a result, Iṣḥāq is wrong, and thus inferior to his interlocutor, Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī.

However, a careful examination of these reports, including their *isnāds*, reveals that Iṣḥāq knows this fairly well. Iṣḥāq is well-informed of the fact that Ma'bad used to exclaim "I am Surayġi today" when he was satisfied with his performance, because the first and second reports, in which this key phrase occurs, are narrated by Iṣḥāq. By juxtaposing these two reports derived from Iṣḥāq before the report by Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm about debate between Iṣḥāq and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī, al-Iṣfahānī stresses Iṣḥāq's awareness that Ma'bad is second to Ibn Surayġ and thus undermines the reliability of the third report by Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm. In other words, given al-Iṣfahānī's admiration for Iṣḥāq, as mentioned above, it may be argued that the placement of these reports is designed to mitigate the effect of Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm's account.

What further buttresses this interpretation is the fact that the narrator of the third report, Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm, was an intimate friend of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī (Fleischhammer 2004, 107). Al-Iṣfahānī narrates via al-Ṣaydalānī (d. 324/936) from Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm, whose works include *Aḥbār al-aṭṭibā'* and *Aḥbār Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī* (Yāqūt 1936, vl.5, 154–160; Fleischhammer 2004, 66, 107; Ibn al-Nadīm 1988, 182). Given Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm's close association with Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī, the head of the *maḏhab* of innovative musical style, as opposed to the traditional one advocated by Iṣḥāq, according to al-Iṣfahānī's musicological epistemology, the third report in question seems to have a polemical purpose. That is, through Iṣḥāq's uncritical reception of the misconception and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's rebuttal, Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm is asserting the superiority of the latter. More importantly, al-Iṣfahānī is perfectly aware of this and Yūsuf's advocacy for Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī:

Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm spread reports about what happened between them [Ishāq and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī]. I found that their [Ishāq and Ibrāhīm] words are embellished by Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī and composed in his manner of speech (*fa-wağadtu kalāmahumā marşūfan raşf Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī wa-manzūman nazm mantiqihī*). In these [reports] are ferocious prejudice against Ishāq (*fihā taḥāmul ‘alā Ishāq šadīd*) and stories whose transmitters reveal [their] ignorance of his [Ishāq’s] proficiency (*wa-hikāyāt yansubu man naqalahā ilā al-ğuhl bi-şinā ‘atihi*). Ishāq was far from being something like this. So, I knew that Ibrāhīm made that up, fabricated [those stories, or reports] and ordered Yūsuf to spread them amongst people so that the memory that favours him was circulated in their [people’s] hands (*wa-amara Yūsuf bi-naşrihi fī al-nās li-yadūra fī aydihim đikr lahu yafđulu bihi*) (al-Işfahānī 2000, vl.10, 124).

Furthermore, there is a reference to al-Işfahānī’s disagreement with Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī’s statement that Ibn Surayğ was too good to imitate Ma‘bad. When he later mentions this report, in which Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī refutes Ishāq, in the section on the song collection titled “Seven Songs of Ibn Surayğ (*Sab ‘at Ibn Surayğ*)”, al-Işfahānī comments: “Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī did not do justice to Ma‘bad in this statement, because Ma‘bad, although revering Ibn Surayğ and treating him rightfully, is neither lesser than him nor inferior to him” (al-Işfahānī 2000, vl.9, 206). Then, al-Işfahānī cites one example to demonstrate that Ibn Surayğ did learn something from Ma‘bad and availed himself of the latter’s style (al-Işfahānī 2000, vl.9, 206). That is, al-Işfahānī’s treatment of these reports in the article on Ibn Surayğ not only defends Ishāq’s dignity by discrediting the report from Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm, but also holds his readers back from accepting Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī’s false claim that Ibn Surayğ never imitated Ma‘bad.

Finally, alongside use of repetition and juxtaposition, al-Işfahānī asserts the superiority of Ishāq by his inclusion of the following report in the article on Ibn Surayğ. According to Ğaḥẓa, who heard the report from ‘Alī b. Yaḥyā al-Munağğim, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn sent ‘Alī b. Yaḥyā al-Munağğim to Ishāq to ask whether the latter’s melody is better than that of Ibn Surayğ for the poem, “*taşakkā al-kumayt al-ğary lammā ğahadtuhu*”. Ishāq said that he never reached the level of Ibn Surayğ, in spite of all his efforts. ‘Alī b. Yaḥyā returned with Ishāq’s reply, upon which Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn remarked: “By God, he does know that his melody is better, but he prejudices himself for the sake of Ibn Surayğ (*wa-laqad taḥāmala li-Ibn Surayğ ‘alā nafsihi*), as he does not let go of his partisanship for the old school (*al-qudamā’*)” (al-Işfahānī 2000, vl.1, 197). Then, Ğaḥẓa states in his report that ‘Alī b. Yaḥyā commented:

Muḥammad was right, as it is seldom that a song is sung in two melodies with the better one being dropped. Today, what is in people’s hands is the melody of

Iṣhāq and Ibn Surayġ's is left out. Few hear of his [Ibn Surayġ's] melody except for the old women and the masters of singers (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 197).

The remarks of the protagonist in this report, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn, which assert Iṣhāq's superiority over Ibn Surayġ, present a sharp contrast between this report and that of Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm. By including this report alongside the four reports with the recurrent motif, al-Iṣfahānī offsets the effect of Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm's polemical account. Or, at least, he potentially makes all the reports less reconcilable and thus prevents his readers from being misguided by Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm's report.

CONCLUSION

To sum up the results of the analysis above, although al-Iṣfahānī does not explicitly declare his favouritism towards Iṣhāq in the article on Ibn Surayġ, it seems likely that he makes an attempt not to leave readers with the impression of Iṣhāq as ignorant or inferior. This is achieved by the use of repetition and juxtaposition. By placing the first and second reports, which insinuate Iṣhāq's awareness of the relationship between Ibn Surayġ and Ma'bad, before the propagandistic report from Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm, al-Iṣfahānī causes an inconsistency in the narratives, which, to a certain extent, impugns the validity of the third report. Furthermore, with the account that illustrates Iṣhāq's supremacy over Ibn Surayġ, who is considered one of the founders of classical Arabic music, al-Iṣfahānī establishes his idol's invincibility, despite Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm's malicious report.

As Kilpatrick remarks on al-Iṣfahānī's editorial hand, "[...] his placing of the material in the *Aġānī* is not necessarily arbitrary" (Kilpatrick 2003, 278). The article analysed in this study confirms that al-Iṣfahānī's building up of narrative is meaningful and far from "arbitrary". As shown above, one underlying *leitmotif* that governs al-Iṣfahānī's editorial concerns — his fandom for the musician, Iṣhāq — indeed impacts upon his treatment of *aḥbār*. Iṣhāq's influence can be extrapolated from his compelling presence in the *Aġānī*, whose compilation was initiated partly because of Iṣhāq and among whose sources Iṣhāq is a ubiquitous presence. In addition, al-Iṣfahānī explicitly expresses his admiration for this musician and prefers him over his opponent, Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī. The impact of his veneration of this singer can be perceived in the article on Ibn Surayġ, where al-Iṣfahānī subtly contextualises the report of the debate that presents Iṣhāq in a negative light. Disagreeing with the validity of Ibrāhīm b. al-Madī's denial that Ibn Surayġ ever imitated Ma'bad's style and aware of the tendentiousness of Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm's narrations, al-Iṣfahānī, through repetition of a certain element and careful juxtaposition of reports, creates narrative incoherence. Thus, the authenticity of Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm's account is tacitly cast into doubt. Furthermore, with the inclusion of the report that accentuates

Ishāq's superiority over Ibn Surayġ, one of the founding fathers of Arabic classical music, al-Iṣfahānī not only presents Ishāq in a positive light but also reinforces his unfaltering status in face of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's (via Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm) attempted sabotage.

This analysis illustrates how al-Iṣfahānī asserts his perspectives in the *Aġānī*, specifically, his partisanship for Ishāq. By examining al-Iṣfahānī's repetition and juxtaposition of material, this study not only reveals the authorial voice and its impact upon the text, but also a new perspective into this *Diwān al-'arab*.⁸ This approach – an examination of the compiler's editorial activities – can be used to explore different perspectives in the *Aġānī*, which is a work of multi-valence and multi-vocality, as well as other Arabic compilations (Su 2016, 133–250; Kilpatrick 1997, 94–128). Given the importance of the *Aġānī* as a source for Arabic literature and history, it is crucial to recognise al-Iṣfahānī's editorial concerns and principles, which need to be taken into consideration when we use it to reconstruct the past. Furthermore, a detailed investigation into how compilers in general represent and reconfigure the past as such will further our understanding of the nature of Islamic historiography and its development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Andrew Marsham, my PhD supervisor, who once commented on an early draft of this paper. I also thank Dr. Eystein Thanisch, for being an insightful reader and polisher of this paper.

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⁸ To use Ibn Ḥaldūn's depiction: (Ibn Ḥaldūn 2004, vl.2, 377).

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