

Ishāq offers al-Iṣfahānī not only musical nomenclature but also a mine of information about music, musicians, and poets (Fleischhammer 2004, 89–91).⁶ Al-Iṣfahānī admires Ishāq’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 Ishāq is also expressed in his preference for Ishāq’s *madhab* 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, Ishāq and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī made their names for posterity as literati of versatile talents, above all in their musical achievements (Bencheikh 1975). Ishāq’s *madhab* 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, 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).⁷

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).⁸ 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 Ishāq: “[...] 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-tarā’iq*) is abandoned and Ishāq’s *madhab* is followed” (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.10, 124). As the authority of Ishāq’s *madhab*, through the test of time, has been established, al-Iṣfahānī, with his use of Ishāq’s terminology, hides nothing of his affiliation with this musician.

⁶ See also the impressive number of references to Ishāq in the indices: (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.25, 45–46)

⁷ On the meaning of *adwār*, see: (Sawa, 2015, 141–144).

⁸ On the meaning of “*ġins*”, see: (Sawa 2015, 66–67)