

As al-Iṣfahānī explicitly articulates his admiration for Iṣḥāq and his approval of his *madhhab*, 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 (*walāʾ*) is disputed, but it is certain that he was associated with Quraṣī 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 founding fathers of classical Arabic music, along with Maʿbad, Mālik b. Abī al-Samḥ, and Ibn Muḥriz (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 194–197; Fück 2012).

The biography of Ibn Surayġ in the *Aġānī* begins with genealogical information on the subject - the clarification of his *walāʾ* - 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 Surayġ's songs is interposed, before the article returns to reports about the subject (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 208–211). Following this is Ibn Surayġ's association with his contemporaries, most prominent of whom are ʿUmar b. Abī Rabīʿa, Ġarīr, al-Aḥwaṣ, al-Ġarīḍ, Maʿbad, and two caliphs, al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 86–96/705–715) and Yazīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 101–105/720–724) (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 211–234). Then, the article focuses on the reception of Ibn Surayġ's songs, with an emphasis on the legality of music (*ruḥṣat al-mūsīqā*) (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 234–246). Finally, it ends with the account of Ibn Surayġ'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 Surayġ's singing style being imitated by Maʿbad, another renowned musician contemporary with him. There are four *aḥbār*, scattered throughout this article, set in different contexts but all relaying that, whenever Maʿbad performs well, he says: “I am Surayġī today (*anā al-yawm Surayġī!*)” (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 Maʿbad's reverence for Ibn Surayġ 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 Surayġ ever imitated Maʿbad's style.

The third report in the biography of Ibn Surayġ, in which the key phrase “I am Surayġī today” is found, features in the debate narrated by Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm (d. 265/879), the witness to the dialogue