

between Ishāq and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī. According to Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm, Ishāq once claimed that Ibn Surayġ imitated Maʿbad’s style in a melody (*hādā sawt qad tamaʿ bada fīhi Ibn Surayġ*). In response to Ishāq’s statement, Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī refutes:

I cannot believe, O Abū Muḥammad [the agnomen of Ishāq], with your mastery of music and your knowledge, that you just said that Ibn Surayġ imitated Maʿbad, while Maʿbad, whenever performing well, claims: ‘I became Surayġī.’ God has made Ibn Surayġ too good to do that [that is, imitating Maʿbad] 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 ʿan hādā wa-rafaʿa qadrahu ʿan miṭlihi wa-uʿīduka bi-llāh an tastaʿir miṭlahu fī Ibn Surayġ*).

In Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm’s account, Ishāq 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 Ishāq and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī — in which Ishāq 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 Maʿbad who imitates Ibn Surayġ, not the opposite, as Ishāq claims. As a result, Ishāq is wrong, and thus inferior to his interlocutor, Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī.

However, a careful examination of these reports, including their *isnāds*, reveals that Ishāq knows this fairly well. Ishāq is well-informed of the fact that Maʿbad used to exclaim “I am Surayġī today” when he was satisfied with his performance, because the first and second reports, in which this key phrase occurs, are narrated by Ishāq. By juxtaposing these two reports derived from Ishāq before the report by Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm about debate between Ishāq and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī, al-Iṣfahānī stresses Ishāq’s awareness that Maʿbad 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 Ishāq, 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-aṭṭibāʾ* 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 *madhhab* of innovative musical style, as opposed to the traditional one advocated by Ishāq, according to al-Iṣfahānī’s musicological epistemology, the third report in question seems