

to have a polemical purpose. That is, through Ishāq'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 marṣūfan raṣf Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī wa-manzūman nazm manṭiqihi*). In these [reports] are ferocious prejudice against Ishāq (*fihā taḥāmul 'alā Ishāq ṣadīd*) and stories whose transmitters reveal [their] ignorance of his [Ishāq's] proficiency (*wa-ḥikāyāt yansubu man naqalahā ilā al-ğuhl bi-ṣinā '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-našrihi fī al-nās li-yadūra fī aydīhim dīkr lahu yaḥdulu bihi*) (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.10, 124).

Furthermore, there is a reference to al-Iṣfahānī'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-Iṣfahānī 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-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.9, 206). Then, al-Iṣfahānī cites one example to demonstrate that Ibn Surayğ did learn something from Ma'bad and availed himself of the latter's style (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.9, 206). That is, al-Iṣfahānī'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-Iṣfahānī asserts the superiority of Ishāq by his inclusion of the following report in the article on Ibn Surayğ. According to Ğaḥḥza, 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, "*tašakkā 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 nafsīhi*), as he does not let go of his partisanship for the old school (*al-qudamā*)" (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 197). Then, Ğaḥḥza 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 Ishāq and Ibn Surayğ's is