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Al-Iṣfahānī's Fandom in the *Kitāb al-Aġānī* (*The Book of Songs*): An Analysis of the Biography of 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 l-Faraġ 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Iṣfahānī (d. after 356/967), edits his source material (*aḥbār*) in order to articulate his admiration for the musician, Iṣḥāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (155–235/772–850). Through an investigation of al-Iṣfahānī's repetition and juxtaposition of *aḥbār*, his fandom is revealed in the article on Ibn Surayġ, where al-Iṣfahānī shapes the narrative that problematizes a report unfavourable towards Iṣḥāq 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: *Kitāb al-Aġānī*; Iṣḥāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī; authorial voice; *aḥbār* compilation; Abū al-Faraġ al-Iṣfahānī

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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-Faraġ al-Iṣfahānī (d. after 356/967¹) edits reports to articulate his admiration for the musician, Iṣḥāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (155–235/772–

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

850), in the article on Ibn Surayġ (d. c. 96/714), in his monumental compilation, the *Kitāb al-Aġānī* (hereafter, the *Aġānī*). The *Aġānī* 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 Ṣī'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-ṭibb*), astrology, drinks (*al-aṣriba*), and other things (Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī 2001, vl.13, 339; Ibn Ḥallikān 1972, vl.3, 307; al-Ḍahabī 2004, 2774; al-Qifṭī 1986, vl.2, 251).

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

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).

topics covered by his works. Besides the *Aġānī*, 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* (*Muġarrad al-aġānī*), *the Singing Girls* (*al-Qiyān*), *the Ṭālibid Martyrs* (*Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn*), *the Poetess Maids* (*al-Imā' al-šawā'ir*), and *the Etiquette of the Strangers* (*Adab al-ġurabā'*).³

The *Aġānī* 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 *maġāzī*, and others) related to songs. The *Aġānī* is divided into three parts: first, the Hundred Songs — a collection of songs compiled by Iṣḥāq; second, the musicians in the caliphal families; third, a selection of songs, possibly of al-Iṣfahānī's own choice (Kilpatrick 2003, 258–267). Whereas the second part mainly follows the musicians in chronological order, the first and the third parts are arranged around songs. The text of a song usually introduces one or more articles about the source of its lyrics, its composer, or any other relevant issue. Each article usually also 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 biographe'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). In the preface to the *Aġānī*, al-Iṣfahānī explains the motivation behind his compilation of a book of songs: a *ra'īs* heard that Iṣḥāq's book of songs, which was in circulation, was not really his own work, but a forgery attributed to him (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 16).⁵ Al-Iṣfahānī agrees with this *ra'īs* and corroborates his view with two *ḥabars*, one of which contains the testimony of Iṣḥāq's son, Ḥammād (al-Iṣfahānī 2000, vl.1, 16). Upon the request of this *ra'īs*, 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).

³ For a list of al-Iṣfahānī's works; see: (Kilpatrick 2003, 16–17). The authorship of *Adab al-ġurabā'* remains debatable; see: (Su 2016, 61).

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

⁵ This *ra'īs*, in all likelihood, is identifiable with al-Iṣfahānī's patron, Abū Muḥammad al-Muhallabī (291–352/903–963); see: (Ḥalafallāh 1962, 98–120)

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)

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 Hiṣām (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

between Ishāq and Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī. According to Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm, Ishāq once claimed that Ibn Surayġ imitated Ma‘bad’s style in a melody (*hādā sawt qad tama‘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 Ma‘bad, while Ma‘bad, whenever performing well, claims: ‘I became Surayġī.’ God has made Ibn Surayġ 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 warafa‘a qadrāhu ‘an miṭlihi wa-u‘īduka bi-llāh an tasta‘ir 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 Ma‘bad 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 Ma‘bad 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 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 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-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 *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

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 yaḥḍulu 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

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

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

As Kilpatrick remarks on al-Işfahānī'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-Işfahānī's building up of narrative is meaningful and far from "arbitrary". As shown above, one underlying *leitmotif* that governs al-Işfahānī's editorial concerns - his fandom for the musician, Işhāq — indeed impacts upon his treatment of *aḥbār*. Işhāq's influence can be extrapolated from his compelling presence in the *Aġānī*, whose compilation was initiated partly because of Işhāq and among whose sources Işhāq is a ubiquitous presence. In addition, al-Işfahānī 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-Işfahānī subtly contextualises the report of the debate that presents Işhāq in a negative light. Disagreeing with the validity of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's denial that Ibn Surayġ ever imitated Ma'bad's style and aware of the tendentiousness of Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm's narrations, al-Işfahānī, 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 Işhāq's superiority over Ibn Surayġ, one of the founding fathers of Arabic classical music, al-Işfahānī not only presents Işhāq 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 *Aḡānī*, specifically, his partisanship for Iṣḥāq. 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 *Dīwān al-'arab*.⁹ This approach - an examination of the compiler's editorial activities - can be used to explore different perspectives in the *Aḡānī*, 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 *Aḡānī* 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.

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⁹ To use Ibn Ḥaldūn's depiction: (Ibn Ḥaldūn 2004, vl.2, 377).

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