



ESHĀQ MAWŞELĪ

ESHĀQ MAWŞELĪ, ABŪ MOḤAMMAD, prominent musician at the ‘Abbasid court in Baghdad (b. 150/767-68; d. 235/850) and the successor of his equally famous father Ebrāhīm Mawşelī (d. 188/803-4, q.v.) as leader of the conservative school of musicians of the time. He was born in 150/767-68 in Ray, where his father, who was pursuing his musical training, had met and married his mother Šāhak (*Aḡānī* V, pp. 3, 50). Soon thereafter Ebrāhīm was summoned to the caliphal court, and Eshāq grew up among the cultured elite of Baghdad, acquiring a superb education from such leading literary figures as Abū ‘Obayda Ma‘mar b. Muṭannā and Abū Sa‘īd ‘Abd-al-Malek Aşma‘ī, as well as, in music, the celebrated ‘ūd player Zalzal (d. after 227/842) and his own father (Yāqūt, *Odabā’* VI, pp. 7-8). In recognition of his erudition, he was permitted by the caliph al-Ma‘mūn to attend court sessions in the company of belletrists and even legal scholars, rather than musicians, but his fame in fact rested solidly on his musical accomplishments (*Aḡānī* V, pp. 56-57).

Eshāq was patronized by all the caliphs from al-Rašīd (170-93/786-809) through al-Wāteq (227-32 /842-47), as well as their viziers and other prominent figures. Musically, he insisted, like his father, on maintaining the classical tradition of the Ḥejāz, which put him into conflict with Ebrāhīm b. al-Mahdī, the dilettante ‘Abbasid prince who championed various forms of musical innovation. Our sources preserve many anecdotes about the rivalry between the two men, stressing in particular Eshāq’s greater expertise (he once showed up Ebrāhīm by playing perfectly on an ‘ūd that had been deliberately mistuned), as well as his extraordinary ear (he was able to pick out a single mistuned string among



twenty *ʿuds* played in unison; *Aḡānī* V, pp. 54, 56). Yet the best of his colleagues and students, *ʿAllūya* and *Moḳāreḡ*, deserted him for the more progressive *Ebrāhīm*, and it seems clear that the future lay with the latter. The one successful innovation that was attributed to *Eshāq* was his introduction of the singing technique of head voice (or perhaps falsetto—*taknīt*), which served to mask his one natural disadvantage, a relatively unattractive voice quality (*Aḡānī* V, p. 75).

Eshāq is also important for his writings, all of them lost but extensively quoted in later works. In musical theory, he fixed the classical terminology for rhythmic patterns and musical modes, although later theorists such as *Abū Naṣr Fārābī* (d. 339/950; q.v.) criticized him for the imprecision of his exposition (*Sawa*, pp. 16, 37, 40, 73-75). Many of the thirty-two titles attributed to him by *Ebn al-Nadīm* (ed. *Tajaddod*, pp. 157-59) are accounts of earlier singers and collections of their songs. He also published his own songs, said to number between 200 and 400, and his own collected poetry ran to fifty folios. At the request of the caliph *al-Wāteḡ* he revised the collection of one hundred famous songs that his father and two colleagues had made for *al-Rašīd*, but this work was apparently superseded by another collection, the *Ketāb al-aḡānī al-kabīr*, compiled after his death and falsely attributed to him. All these collections were in turn displaced by the *Aḡānī* of *Abu'l-Faraj Eṣfahānī* (d. 356/967, q.v.), which remains our chief source on *Eshāq*, his contemporaries, and his predecessors.

Eshāq stopped composing during the caliphate of *al-Wāteḡ* and suffered from blindness in his old age. He died in 235/850.

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