



QĀNUNI, RAḤIM

QĀNUNI, Raḥim Širāzi (b. Shiraz, 1234/1871; d. Shiraz, 5 Farvardin 1323/26 March 1944; these dates are according to official family documents), innovator, master of Persian classical music, and teacher. He was the son of an itinerant Jewish merchant named Āvrām. At the age of fifteen, he joined his father on an eight-year journey through Beirut, Damascus, and Egypt. In Damascus, he saw a *qānun* (trapezoidal zither) for the first time and, with the encouragement of his father who himself played the *tār* (a kind of lute with a long fretted neck), he began to study the instrument. Though his lessons were based exclusively on Arabic melodies, Raḥim was by then familiar enough with traditional Persian music to transpose his knowledge successfully into the Persian modal system (*dastgāh*). Upon his return home in around 1900, he brought a *qānun* back to Shiraz, thus reintroducing into Persia an instrument that had not been played there since the reign of the second Safavid ruler Shah Ṭahmāsp I (r. 1524-76; Mašḥun, pp. 523-24). This earned him the accolade “Qānuni,” and his mastery with the *qānun* quickly spread beyond Shiraz (Kāleqi, I, pp. 191-93). In 1926, his family officially adopted Qānuni as a surname. From 1940 to 1945, Raḥim Qānuni performed on a number of occasions on Radio Tehran (est. 1940, later named Radio Iran), though no recordings were ever made of these performances. During his lifetime, he remained the sole master of the *qānun* in Persia, and while he had some pupils, none surpassed him in skill before his death in Shiraz on 26 March 1944 (Behbudi; Chaouli, p. 103; Ghanuni).



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(Houman Sarshar)

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