

# The BEKA recording trips to Turkey and Egypt

👉 HUGO STRÖTBAUM 👈

When Heinrich Bumb and his team, consisting of his wife Elisabeth and recording engineer Willy Bielefeld, left Berlin on October 5th, 1905 for the BEKA company's Oriental recording expedition, their first stop was Constantinople. After making a number of recordings there, the team continued by ship to Egypt, where recordings were also made.

We learn this from a series of articles entitled *UNSERE REISE UM DIE ERDE* written by Heinrich Bumb and published in the German trade journal, *PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT*.<sup>1</sup> These articles appeared immediately after the BEKA team had returned to Berlin on 17 June 1906.

Beka was by no means the first company to make recordings in this region. In fact the GRAMOPHONE COMPANY'S recording engineer W. Sinkler Darby had already visited Constantinople in the spring of 1900, and since then, the company had been there three times. Other companies, like BEKA, ODEON, FAVORITE and LYROPHON, all came later.

## The first recording trip (January/February 1905)

Nowhere in his articles in the German trade journal, *PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT*, does Heinrich Bumb explicitly refer to an earlier visit of representatives of the BEKA company to Egypt, prior to the Big Tour of October 1905 – June 1906. The only clue of an earlier visit to Cairo can be found in Bumb's first article: at some point he remarks that some nine months earlier negotiations about a recording contract with the famous Cheikh Yusuf el-Manyalawi, "the Caruso of the East", had been held, but that these negotiations had been unsuccessful. Counting back nine months starting from November 1905, these negotiations must have taken place around January/February 1905.

Fortunately there is other even more convincing evidence that Beka visited Cairo in early 1905. In the *PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT* of 8 March 1905<sup>2</sup> we find a picture of the BEKA people at the foot of the Great Pyramid (*Sprechmaschinen-Aufnahmen unter den Pyramiden*), which unequivocally proves BEKA had been in Egypt prior to the 1905-1906 expedition. And jubilant advertisements in the *PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT* of 15 March 1905 and 22 March 1905 leave little room for doubt: *In 9 Monaten Europa erobert haben die "BEKA-RECORDS. Das BEKA-RECORD-Repertoire enthält Aufnahmen in deutscher, englischer, französischer, italienischer, österreichischer, ungarischer, russischer, skandinavischer,*

*schweizer, türkischer und arabischer Sprache.*<sup>3</sup>

Both advertisements show a map of Europe and North Africa on which no less than 31 cities are marked as locations where BEKA had secured representations! Quite a hype.

Finally, in the *PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT* of 17 May 1905 we find another indication that BEKA had visited Egypt in ca. January/February: *While the catalogue was being printed, new recordings made in Nuremberg and Munich have been added to the German repertoire, and these will soon become available, together with Portuguese, Spanish and Arabian recordings...*<sup>4</sup>

The *Turkish* recordings (only 24!) are not mentioned here. They may not have been yet ready by that time or were not considered as important as the 176 (!) Arabian recordings. It is possible that the BEKA team on its way to Egypt also visited Constantinople, but in none of the early 1905 *PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT* editions, we find a reference to a recording session of BEKA in Constantinople. Still, in itself that does not mean they did not go and record there.

The March 1905 advertisements seem to suggest BEKA made recordings in Constantinople and Cairo (*Aufnahmen in ..., türkischer und arabischer Sprache*), but as a fellow researcher pointed out to me that these so-called *Constantinople* recordings might not have been made in Constantinople at all, but in *Cairo*. Indeed, once you give up the tunnel-vision idea that Turkish recordings can only have been made in Constantinople, things suddenly make perfect sense. My earlier theory had been that recordings with matrix numbers 1001-1076 were made in Cairo, 1077-1100 in Constantinople and 1101-1200 again in Cairo. With hindsight one cannot help thinking that this would certainly have been a very complex way of organizing things and therefore not the most plausible scenario. Now this theory had to be replaced by a more logical version: one solid uninterrupted Cairo session with a matrix number sequence running from 1001 to 1200. A total of 200 recordings, out of which 176 were Arabian and 24 Turkish. In other words, no early 1905 Constantinople recording session at all!

The reader may wonder what those two Turkish artists were doing in Cairo. It is good to realize that Egypt had been part of the Ottoman Empire for ages and in 1905 nominally still was. Economically, politically and culturally speaking, Egypt was in a sense nearer to Turkey in those days, than it is now. So, two Turkish artists in Cairo was in no way unusual. It is possible that the artists in question, İbrahim Bey and Eftalya Hanım, were already in Cairo at the time. Another possibility

is that they were picked up by the BEKA team on its way to Egypt, assuming, of course, that the BEKA people travelled to Egypt via Constantinople.

After having done some research into the person of singer Ibrahim Bey, things became even clearer. **İbrahim Bey/Efendi**, who recorded for Beka in 1905, was an oud-player and singer (*hanende*). One of his aliases was *The Egyptian (Mısırlı)*. According to Yılmaz Öztuna, **İbrahim Efendi (Mısırlı Udi Avram)** (1872-1933) was a Syrian-Arabic Jewish composer, born in Aleppo. He worked in Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, but predominantly in Istanbul in the *piyasa musikisi* (popular Turkish music) scene. He also made records.<sup>5</sup>

He was also known as **Şamlı İbrahim/Avram** aka 'Udi Mısırlı ve hanende İbrahim Efendi aka Udi İbrahim el-Mısıri aka Mısırlı udi İbrahim aka Udi Mısırlı Arap İbrahim Efendi. The conclusion is inevitable: if ever there was a Turkish artist who had strong ties with Egypt and knew his way about in Cairo, it must have been this Ibrahim Bey. In Ruhi Kalender's article about the musical scene in Constantinople between 1895 and 1916, *Yüzyılımızın Başlarında İstanbul'un Musiki Hayatı*, Ibrahim is also frequently mentioned.<sup>6</sup> There we see that Ibrahim was very active in the period 1902-1913.

The fact that Ibrahim apparently had such strong ties with Egypt further supports the new and - with hindsight - most logical theory that these Turkish recordings were indeed made in Cairo.

LOCATION	PERIOD	"MATRIX" SERIES	LANGUAGE	NUMBER
EGYPT (Cairo)	Jan/Feb 1905	1001 - 1076 (20,5cm/27,5cm)	Arabian	76
EGYPT (Cairo)	Jan/Feb 1905	1077 - 1100 (27,5cm)	Turkish	24
EGYPT (Cairo)	Jan/Feb 1905	1101 - 1200 (20,5cm/27,5cm)	Arabian	100
Turkish record 1100 shows 'Bfd' (=Willy Bielefeld) scratched into the wax.				
TURKEY (Constantinople)	Oct 1905	1201 - 1240 (27,5cm)	Turkish	40
EGYPT (Cairo)	Oct-Nov 1905	1241 - 1354 >... (27,5cm)	Arabian	114 > ...
INDIA (Bombay)		(...< 1374 >...) 1415	Earliest testified copy?	
Then follow Burma (Myanmar), Dutch East Indies, Straits Settlements, China and Japan.				
EGYPT (Cairo)	June/July 1907	17001 - 17033 >... (27,5cm)	Arabian	33 > ...
TURKEY (Constantinople)	June/July 1907	18001 - 18330 >... (25,4cm)	Turkish	330 > ....
Single recording session?				
TURKEY (Constantinople)? or GREECE (Athens) ?	1907/1908	50001 - 50011 >... (no names of artists on labels!)	Greek	11 > ....

About woman singer Eftalya Hanım – no doubt of Greek origin – we know considerably less. We have two Cairo 1905 recordings and one 1907 recording from Constantinople (18313). This could mean that Eftalya was Istanbul-based and it seems logical to assume that the Eftalya on these three recordings is one and the same person. The conclusion seems justified that we are dealing with an artist who, like Ibrahim Bey, was active in Cairo and Constantinople, although Eftalya was no doubt less famous. We do not come across the name EFTALYA on contemporary recordings by other companies.

This Eftalya is probably not the well-known Turkish singer "Deniz Kızı" Eftalya (1891-1939), although that cannot be ruled out altogether. As far as we know, "Deniz Kızı" Eftalya was first recorded by Pathé (between 1927 and 1928), but she may have been recorded prior to that: there exists an Egyptian SETRAK MECHIAN record with two titles by a certain Eftalia Hanoum (matrix nos. m 957/958), which must have been recorded sometime between 1915 and 1925. This could be

either the BEKA singer Eftalya or the aforementioned Turkish singer "Deniz Kızı" Eftalya.

Another indication that BEKA did not record in Constantinople might be that Bumb in his first article of the REISE UM DIE ERDE (second recording trip), while describing the BEKA team's visit to Istanbul, nowhere refers to a previous visit to that city. If BEKA or Bumb had been in Istanbul before the Big Tour, one would have expected him to make a reference to that visit. On the other hand, Bumb often does not mention things we might consider very relevant. The name of recording engineer Willy Bielefeld is never mentioned, except as a signatory on a telegram which was reproduced in the PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT<sup>7</sup>. Nor does Bumb ever mention the presence of his wife Elisabeth. He even fails to tell us that recording engineer Wilhelm Hadert joined the team at Port Said, after they had finished the Cairo recordings. Heinrich Bumb occasionally uses words like "we", "us" and "our", indicating he is not alone on this trip, but he *never* explicitly gives the complete line-up of the Beka team. However, their presence is confirmed by a number of original photographs taken at the various stages of the round-the-world tour.

The fact that Bumb in the "Istanbul section" of his first article does not refer to an earlier visit by Beka to Istanbul does not necessarily rule out the possibility that Beka in January/February 1905 first went to Istanbul by train and from there went to Egypt by boat. And like we remarked earlier on, it is even thinkable that Ibrahim and Eftalya plus a few instrumentalists were invited to come along to be recorded in Cairo.<sup>8</sup>

In his articles Heinrich Bumb is rather vague about the artists who took part in the October-November 1905 Constantinople recording session: *We had soon found a house in a street off the Grand Rue de Pera, which was suitable for our purposes, and, without much loss of time, we could begin our recordings. The performances of the various male and female singers were recorded complete with the original Turkish musical instruments.*

And as paperwork of the Beka company no longer exists and actual records are rare, we are entirely dependent on secondary sources.

Fortunately, in the PHONOGRAMM-ARCHIV in Berlin is an (undated) BEKA-RECORD catalogue, which lists both the Arabian and Turkish Cairo recordings made ca January/February 1905, as well as those made during the October-November 1905 sessions. It must therefore date from 1906. The catalogue does not make a distinction between what was recorded during the first and what was recorded during the second Cairo session. Otherwise we would have known for certain which group of recordings belonged to the first and which group to the second session. Perhaps one day this first Turkish-Arabian catalogue (from mid-1905) with only recordings of the first recording trip turns up!

THE FIRST BEKA EXPEDITION		
LOCATION	DATE	ARTIST(S)
EGYPT (Cairo)	Jan/Feb 1905	Tu İbrahim Bey, Eftalya Hanım + oud, kanun, kemenche, clarinet
		Ar Farahat (orchestra), Hag İbrahim, Sayyid Ishta, Youssef Rachidi, Youssef Nahasse, Süleyman Abu Davut, Cheikh Mohamed Selim, Cheikh Mohamed Telgrafci
		+ tabl baladi, shawn(s), kettledrums, oud, kanun

The second recording trip:

**The BEKA Round-the-world Expedition**  
(October 1905–June 1906)

In the autumn, the number of recordings made by the Bumb team at Constantinople and Cairo was over 250. As early as August 1905 the international chain store Orosdi-Back, with its seat in Paris, were the local agents for BEKA in Turkey and Egypt.<sup>9</sup> Only 40 of the recordings made were Turkish, the majority (Egyptian) Arabic. This time a much larger number of artists was recorded. The most important of these was no doubt the celebrated Cheikh Yusuf el-Manyalawi, who after prolonged negotiations agreed to make 50 recordings for BEKA. A number of these recordings survived today at the BERLIN PHONOGRAMM-ARCHIV and in private collections. They were released on a special CELEBRITY label, *Sama al-Muluk* (*What Kings listen to*)<sup>10</sup>. The text on the labels is in Arabic only, but the connection with Beka is confirmed both by the *make* of the records and the numbers on the records which fit perfectly into the numerical sequence of Egyptian BEKA recordings.

Cheikh Yusuf had a two-year contract with Orosdi-Back. In the archives of EMI there is an interesting letter, which shows that THE GRAMOPHONE COMPANY was very interested in getting Manyalawi to record for them: ... *that the ODEON people are bringing out a fresh series of 150 double-sided records this autumn, that it is urgent that records [= recordings] we have to take of Abdul-Hai [Abd al-Hayy Hilmi], who is the next best singer after Jussuf, should be taken as early as possible, and lastly that, as the BEKA people have not kept their engagement to Orosdi-Back to send out [again – HS] an expert to take the Jussuf records and as Orosdi-Back are themselves anxious to be rid of the Beka people, it is practically certain that we will come to an agreement with Orosdi-Back and make the records in question, provided our recording expert is on the spot as early as possible, whereas, if we put off the recording to the end of November we are giving a fresh chance to the BEKA people to carry out their engagement.*<sup>11</sup>

Apparently BEKA was bound by contract to record Yusuf el-Manyalawi again later in 1906. Manyalawi's contract with Orosdi-Back expired in November 1907. In spite of this, The Gramophone Company's recording engineer Fred Gaisberg visited Cairo in April 1907 to make recordings. Among the recordings he made were 50 (twelve-inch/30cm) Manyalawi sides. It is not known to me if this was done with or without the approval of Orosdi-Back. Twenty of these recordings turned out a failure and had to be repeated in the spring of 1908.<sup>12</sup>

Here is another letter which refers to Manyalawi's BEKA records: *There remains the other record manufacturers, but these need hardly be taken into consideration as the probability is that the records would turn out badly, as we have already seen here in Egypt in the case of the Sheick Youssef records made by the Beka Company.*<sup>13</sup>

A few records from the round-the-world expedition were reviewed by Max Chop in his column PHONOKRITIK under the heading MORGENLÄNDISCHE MUSIK. BEKA-GRAND-RECORD. One Turkish record # 1209 (by Eugénie Hanım) and two Arabian recordings: # 1244 (by Cheikh Yusuf el-Manyalawi) and # 1336 (by Cheikh Mohamed Selim).<sup>14</sup>

And in the same column PHONOKRITIK under the heading *Orientalische Beka-Aufnahmen* in a subsequent issue of the PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT Max Chop reviewed another Turkish record # 1227 (by Hafız Ahmet Bey) and an

Arabian recording # 1261 (again by Cheikh Yusuf el-Manyalawi).<sup>15</sup>

From Egypt, the expedition continued to India. At Port Said another recording engineer called Wilhelm Hadert joined the team, as we can read in the PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT of 8 November 1905<sup>16</sup>: *On November 2nd Mr. W. Hadert of the BEKA-RECORD G.M.B.H. left Berlin to go via Brindisi to Port Said. There he will meet Mr. Bumb and Mr. Bielefeld, who recently have made recordings in Budapest, Constantinople and Cairo.*

The first identified Indian recording, made in Mumbai (Bombay), is numbered 1374. Other articles in this volume contain a detailed overview of the expedition's activities in India, Burma (Myanmar), the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), the Straits Settlements (Malaysia), China and Japan.

THE SECOND ROUND-THE-WORLD BEKA EXPEDITION		
LOCATION	DATE	ARTIST(S)
TURKEY (Const'ple)	Oct 1905	Tu Eugenie Hanım, Karakaş Efendi, Hafız Ahmet Bey, Civan Efendi, Agopos Efendi, Hafız Aşır
		+ oud / violin / kemenche / kanun
EGYPT (Cairo)	Oct-Nov 1905	Ar Cheikh Yusuf el-Manyalawi, Sayyid Ishta, Mohamed Sadic, Cheikh Mohamed Selim
EGYPT (Cairo)	Oct-Nov 1905	Ar Cheikh Yusuf el-Manyalawi, Sayyid Ishta, Mohamed Sadic, Cheikh Mohamed Selim
		+ oud / flute (nay) / violin / kanun / tambourine

The above-mentioned Turkish artists (Eugenie Hanım, Karakaş Efendi, Hafız Ahmet Bey, Civan Efendi, Agopos Efendi and Hafız Aşır) were all well-known artists who were regularly recorded by the major companies. Invaluable is the article *Yüzyılımızın Başlarında İstanbul'un Musiki Hayatı* by Ruhi Kalender.<sup>17</sup> It lists performances and venues of musicians in Constantinople between 1895 and 1916. It shows which artists (both singers and instrumentalists!) performed together and also mentions the places of entertainment; female artists are not mentioned by name. There are three instances in which the name of the male artist is followed by the words 've refikası', which means 'and his wife' or 'and his female companion'. In view of the dominant muslim culture – muslim women were not allowed to act as singers and/or dancers – we can be certain that female companion is what is meant here. Women who worked in the entertainment sector were always Greek, Armenian or Jewish, and can easily be recognized by their non-Turkish names: Eftalya, Eugenie, Virginie, Roza, Marika, Viktorya, Amelya, Peruz, Eleni etc..

**The third recording trip (June/July 1907)**

In the summer of 1907, BEKA embarked on yet another recording expedition to the Orient. The business had expanded considerably both in Germany and abroad, and the company now found it necessary to revise its numerical system. Separate series were earmarked for individual countries or regions, with a 17001 series for Egypt and a 18001 series for Turkey. Apparently this time most of the activity took place in Turkey, where over 300 recordings were made, featuring more than ten different artists. So far, only about 30 Egyptian recordings in the 17001 series have been traced.

There is also an obscure Greek series starting at 50001, which seems to be connected with this expedition. Only two records (= four recordings) in this series have turned up so far, 50011 being the highest known number. One of these

records has a second number (hardly visible under the label), which looks like a five-digit number beginning with 18. It is not unlikely that these recordings were not made in mainland Greece, but in Constantinople (in other words, in the TURKISH 18 000 series) and later renumbered and issued as a separate Greek series. At that time Turkey had a considerable Greek population, and traditionally all other record companies also recorded Greek music in Constantinople. Years later Salonica and Smyrna were added as the recording locations.

The fact that copies of Oriental BEKA records are scarce has been mentioned before. How then is one to know the names of all the artists who took part in these recording sessions and the titles they recorded?

Fortunately, the Turkish-Arabian BEKA record catalogue in the Phonogramm-Archiv in Berlin has solved the problem of the first two recording trips. This undated catalogue contains the combined repertoire of Beka's first and second recording trip, which is how we came to know the names of all Turkish and Egyptian artists and the titles from the first and the second (round-the-world) tour. Alas, the catalogue does not give us information about the identity of the accompanying artists and band members.

In the case of the third trip we have to rely entirely on copies of records that have been traced so far. No catalogue containing the complete Turkish/Egyptian/Greek repertoire of the 1907 trip has surfaced yet. Meanwhile a sufficient number of record copies have been traced, to give us some idea of which artists were recorded. However, there is no guarantee that the list of artists as presented in the survey is complete.

THE THIRD BEKA EXPEDITION		
LOCATION	DATE	ARTIST(S)
TURKEY (Const'ple)	June/July 1907	Tu Osep/Hovsep Efendi, Ağopos Efendi, Karakaş Efendi, Nafi Bey, Madam Viktorya, Sisak Efendi, Sisak Efendi, Ali Hüsnü Bey, Madam Eftalya, Nasib [...], Meddah Sururi and unknown artist(s) + oud / violin / Anastas (kemenche) / kanun
		Gr artists unknown
EGYPT (Cairo)	June/July 1907	Ar al-Sitt Munira al-Mahdiyya, Ibrahim Mekavi

## Epilogue

As other articles in this volume show, Beka continued to expand its business further east. New regions such as Siam (Thailand) were opened for business, but after 1907 the company's activities in Turkey and Egypt seem to have declined. This may have been due to increasing competition in the region. In 1911 H. & J. Blumenthal Frères had started a local record company, BLUMENTHAL RECORD and TALKING MACHINE COMPANY (ORFEON), in Constantinople. The company was also active Egypt.

*A special word of thanks to Pekka Gronow and Christian Zwarg.*

- 6 *Yüzyılımızın Başlarında İstanbul'un Musiki Hayatı* by Ruhi Kalender (in: ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ İLAHIYAT DERGİSİ, 23. cilt).
- 7 PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT, 6. Jahrg., No 42, p. 925 and 7. Jahrg., No 27, p. 562. Also reproduced in *50 Jahre Carl Lindström GmbH*.
- 8 Out of a total of 24 recorded titles, singer Ibrahim Bey recorded 20 titles. Eftalya Hanım only 4.
- 9 DIE SPRECHMASCHINE, No 2, p. 19 (of 15 August 1905).
- 10 A number of Cheikh Yusuf el-Manyalawi records have a golden stamp 'ETORBA' (Etablissements Orosdi-Back). Orosdi-Back was a chain of department stores all over the Levant (Constantinople, Cairo, Beyrouth, Smyrna and further east).
- 11 Letter of 14 August 1906 from Kenneth Muir (The Gramophone Company (Italy) Limited) to Theo. B. Birnbaum of (The Gramophone & Typewriter Ltd (London)).
- 12 Letters of 19 August 1907, 2 September 1907, 3 September 1907, 27 September 1907, 26 October 1907, 26 November 1907, 12 November 1909, 10 November 1909 and 7 October 1911 in EMI archives.
- 13 Letter of 27 November 1907 from Karl F. Vogel (The Gramophone Company (Italy) Limited, Cairo) to T. B. Birnbaum (London).
- 14 PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT, 7. Jahrg., No 26, pp. 547-549.
- 15 PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT, 9. Jahrg., No 3, pp. 61-62.
- 16 PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT, 6. Jahrg., No 45, p. 997.
- 17 In: ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ İLAHIYAT DERGİSİ, 23. cilt (1978). Based on announcements in the Turkish newspaper İKDAM.

- 1 PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT, 7. Jahrg., No 27-37 (5 July - 13 September 1906).
- 2 PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT, 6. Jahrg., No 10, p. 221.
- 3 PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT, 6. Jahrg., No 11, p. 237 and 6. Jahrg., No 12, p. 271.
- 4 PHONOGRAPHISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT, 6. Jahrg., No 20, p. 439.
- 5 BÜYÜK TÜRK MÜSİKİSİ ANSİKLOPEDİSİ, 1. cilt by Yılmaz Öztuna, pp. 379-380 (1990).