

OH, THOSE MYSTERIOUS WORDS !

A rough guide to Turkish and Greek terminology on 78rpm records

By Hugo Strötbaum

What this guide is about

This article is an introduction into the strange *Turkish* and *Greek* terminology, as found on the labels of 78rpm records, in old record catalogues and in contemporary advertisements.

The article consists of an *introduction* and a *bi-lingual glossary*, listing Turkish and Greek terms, together with a concise translation or explanation in English. It should serve as a guide for quick reference, where one can look up the most common Turkish and Greek terms that were used in early commercially recorded music between 1900 and 1940. Here he will find the bare minimum of what there is to know about Turkish and Greek texts on record labels of 78rpm gramophone (or phonograph) records. It is not meant to provide an exhaustive detailed description of each item. Of course, having read the introduction and having consulted the glossary, the reader will not be much the wiser about the music itself. Hopefully, with these Turkish and Greek terms explained and put into perspective, the reader will have a better understanding of what these strange words on labels and in catalogues are all about. As a matter of fact, the title of this article might just as well be: "*How to bluff your way through vintage Turkish and Greek music*".

For whom?

My target group this time is not so much the learned fraternity, the (ethno)musicologists or the *rebetika* experts. This time I focussed on the people who know little about Turkish or Greek music, but who are wondering what is says on the labels of Turkish and Greek gramophone records or on the much rarer cylinder boxes.

In compiling this glossary I had several groups of people in mind. First of all people who happen to own Turkish or Greek gramophone records and would like to find out more about what is printed on the record labels. Secondly, record dealers who are putting Turkish or Greek records up for sale, but are not familiar with the musical genres involved. This guide may also be useful for discographers who are dealing with recordings of multiple language groups (people like Alan

Kelly, Richard Spottswood and Christian Zwarg) and have to process original company documents, while not being familiar with Turkish or Greek, nor with the repertoire that was recorded. I imagine it may even be a handy tool for sound archivists and curators of institutions holding record collections. And, I guess, Turkish record collectors who want to know more about the *Greek* records in their collection, will probably welcome this guide. And, vice versa, Greek record collectors who own *Turkish* records will also find something to their taste. Of course, collectors of rare ethnic recordings in general may also take an interest. And, last but not least, there are the specialists – dedicated music lovers, musicians or (ethno)musicologists – who may find something useful here, although I suspect the latter group will have problems with the concise, often vague definitions of a number of items on the list. But then, they were not my target group.

Needless to say that this manual can in no way be considered the ultimate handbook for looking up Turkish and Greek terms. Nor is it anywhere near complete. At best it is the first step towards a more comprehensive and explicit lexicon.

How it came about

The idea of making a bi-lingual glossary of Turkish and Greek ('oriental') terms goes back a long time. Years ago, Alan Kelly was working on the (not yet finished) HMV Oriental Catalogue. For those who do not know the man, the indefatigable Alan Kelly has published over the years a handful of HMV discographies: the German, the French, the Italian, the Russian and the Dutch HMV Catalogue.

And when Alan Kelly once wrote me, saying "*it was all Greek to him*", I made him a small list of Turkish and Greek terms he no doubt would encounter. But that was as far as it went.

Last year I wrote an article entitled '*Goulash, wiener schnitzel and şiş kebab: Premier Record*', which appeared in Volume 4 of 'The Lindström Project'. The article was about the Turkish recordings made in 1911 in Constantinople by the *Hungarian Elsö Magyar Hanglemezgyar* (First Hungarian Record Factory), which were subsequently issued on their *Premier Record* label. Part of that article (pp. 132-133, 139) was devoted to explaining what could be read on the labels of those (predominantly Turkish) Premier Records.

In a way, the present article can be seen as a logical follow-up to that earlier article. Only this time I have put things into a broader, more

complete perspective, linking up Turkish with Greek repertoire and gathering data from all relevant record labels.

Why Turkish and Greek?

The reason for combining and comparing the music of these two language groups can be easily explained. Both countries have been at loggerheads with each other in the past frequently, to put it mildly. But this is not the place to discuss the traumatic history of Turks and Greeks. With hindsight - always easy - we can conclude that the often fateful combination of geographical, historical, political, cultural and religious contacts also led to an *overlapping* and sometimes even *common fabric of cultural features*. Especially in those regions where Turks and Greeks - for geographic or commercial reasons - were in close contact with each other, both cultures became to a large extent interwoven. This especially holds true for the bustling urban centres and seaports of the Ottoman Empire, where people of many different ethnicities had to rub along. *Music* was one of these cultural features which Greeks, Turks, Armenians and Jews shared. This no doubt resulted in a large amount of mutual borrowing and cross-fertilization, something which also must have been stimulated by the fact that for a long time the entertainment sector was a no-go area for Muslim women. Their place as singers and dancers was taken by Greek, Gypsy, Armenian or Jewish women performers.

Record labels, catalogues and advertisements

It cannot be denied that there is not much space for detailed information on a record label, in a record catalogue or in a newspaper advertisement. To advertise and sell their products, record companies had to limit themselves to the most essential information. And, no doubt, their customers - apart from a few exceptions - will also have been more interested in the music itself than in finicky details and academic niceties.

Of course, the most basic information that had to be provided was *what was on the record (the title)* and *who the performing artist(s) was/were*. In most cases this was done in the original language script of the performing artist(s) and in a transliteration in Latin script of that same data. To this - often but not always - the recording location or the place where the artist(s) came from was added. However, the texts on various

record labels show this 'principle' was not always blindly adhered to. Academic consistency, completeness or preciseness just was not what the record companies had in mind in those days.

Descriptions were rather crude and primitive and things were often seen through the eyes of the foreigner. They seemed more directed to the tastes and culture of the higher Europe-orientated classes. It took some time before the European record companies adjusted themselves to the local vernacular. Over the years descriptions on labels became more accurate and to-the-point. What in the early days used to be described - rather inadequately - on a label as '*Turkish guitar*', later took on its true local colour and became '*oud*'. And the even more inappropriate '*Turkish zither*' finally shook off its ill-fitting clothes and became, what it had been all along: a '*tanbur*'.

The development of nationalism and, as a result, the forming of new states, must have contributed considerably to the growth of a new cultural identity, of a newly developing interest in one's own native culture. For better or for worse...

What may be found on a label?

- (1) titles of songs, instrumental pieces or other repertoire
- (2) sometimes accompanied by the corresponding tonal scale (*makam* or *dhromos*)
- (3) to denote the target group (e.g. *Greek, Turkish*)
- (4) a clue about the character of the recording (e.g. *duet*) or of the instrument(s) involved
- (5) name of the artist(s), ensemble or band
- (6) name(s) of soloing or accompanying instrument(s)
- (7) recording location or place where the artist(s) came from
- (8) name of composer (from late twenties onwards)

Greek and Turkish 'generic terms'

The glossary contains a number of '*generic terms*' to indicate certain commercial musical genres or styles. Greek terms like *kleftiko, rebetiko, hasiklidiko, mangiko, mortiko, mourmouriko, bordhello* and the Turkish term *kerisse/keriz*. These generic terms may create the impression of being clear-cut notions, but in reality often are not as clearly defined as one would wish and certainly open to interpretation. In circles of musicians, record companies and the listening public *in-crowd talk, subcultural slang,*

commercial jargon, argot, fashionable buzzwords and what have you, were and are a normal phenomenon. What is understood by these terms, however, depends on the social circles in which one moves. Some would characterize a person as a '*down-and-out bum*', while others would call that same person a '*streetwise philosopher*'.

Generic terms may start out as a kind of *promotional term* for a new, until then unrecorded type of music, and over the years evolve into a fully-fledged generic term. Such is the case with the term '*rebetiko*', which has remained in use to this very day, although its musical 'content' has undergone some changes over the years.

Rebetika may have started as a rather harmless bohemian, non-traditional, un-orthodox, revue-type of light Greek vocal music, possibly in certain social circles of the day considered as a *risqué* or frivolous, frowned-upon, but at the same time exciting. But since then, the genre, like jazz and blues, has come of age and become a generally accepted musical genre, encompassing a vast collection of (mostly) songs and instrumental pieces in varying styles! The 'standard' instrumental line-up consists of *bouzouki, guitar* and *baglamas*.

But before *rebetika* became a socially acceptable musical genre, it had to get rid of its dubious reputation of *nightlife, sex, drugs* and *rock'n'roll*, which it had acquired in the meantime, and had to become 'respectable'. And although it is nowadays even being performed in concert-halls, its real habitat still is the informal atmosphere of obscure smoky cafés, bars, tavernas and small clubs, where time is not of the essence.

More specific terms, like *hasiklidiko, mangiko, mortiko, mourmouriko*, however, never really made it to the 'civilized' outside world and stayed within the confines of the subculture where they originated and flourished.

As for unique promotional terms, such as '*bordhello*' (Greek) or '*kerisse*' (= Turkish '*keriz*'), these apparently did not catch on. Both notions may have lived on in the *professional* musical circuit.

Why '*bordhello*' did not become a generally accepted term in commercial circles or with the buying public is not hard to imagine. '*Keriz*' (كربز هوزلوس) is a slang word and means a party with music and dance (*eğlenti, eğlence*)¹. There is evidence of a connection with gypsy music and musicians.

¹ The Turkish term '*keriz*' occurs on record labels and in record catalogues and is alternatively transliterated as '*kerisse*', '*guérisse*', "*guiriz*" or '*gheriz*'. Here are a number of sources: a Turkish ZONOPHONE catalogue of ca. 1910 (ZONOPHONE X-2-102268 / mtX 10555 u / rec. in 1907), a Turkish July 1909 GRAMCO catalogue (6-12430 / mtX 12559 b / rec. in 1909), a 1905 BEKA disc (mtX 1094), *Türkçenin Büyük Argo Sözlüğü* (by Hulki Aktunç), p. 175-177, *İstanbul geceleri ve kantolar* (by Ergun Hiçyılmaz), pp. 70, 72, 88, 95.

Musical terms

Certain Turkish musical notions are too complicated to explain within the limited framework of this article. Besides, I must confess that occasionally I was hard put to explain such technicalities, not being a died-in-the-wool (ethno) musicologist or a professional musician with firsthand knowledge of the idiom.

About Greek

The spelling of Modern Greek does not greatly differ from that of old Greek. Admittedly grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation have undergone considerable changes since Homer, but anyone with some elementary knowledge of Classical Greek or just familiar with the Greek alphabet, will be able to read the Greek texts on vintage record labels and in contemporary documents. This lexicon is meant to provide clues about *what* one is reading.

It should at least help the reader *classify* the information that can be found on record labels or in old record catalogues and advertisements.

About Turkish

Although Turkish, as a language, was and is in no way related to Arabic, it was written with *Arabic characters* until 1929. Before 1929 no uniform official spelling of Turkish with Latin characters existed, nor was the need for such a thing felt. What *did* exist alongside this Arabic-script Turkish, was a kind of makeshift Latin-script transliteration, based on the pronunciation of French words. As anyone with a good education could read both Ottoman Turkish and French in those days, this method of transliteration was more or less generally accepted in well-educated Europe-orientated circles. Finally in 1929, this *non-standard* transliteration of Arabic script was replaced by an *official* spelling of Turkish, using letters from the *Latin alphabet*, plus a few extra letters which did not exist in the Latin alphabet (ç/ğ/ı/ş).

Transliterating *Greek* was less of a problem, as the Greek script uses both *consonants* (β/γ/δ/ζ/θ etc.) and *vowels* (α/ε/ι/ο/υ/ω). But as Arabic and Ottoman Turkish - both written with Arabic characters - only make use of characters for *consonants* and have no separate characters for *vowels*, transliteration of these scripts is much more difficult. Fortunately a system of so-called *diacritical symbols* existed: these symbols gave clues as to how a word should be read.

The official introduction of the Latin alphabet in Turkey in 1929 meant a colossal change and solved all interpretation problems, caused by the inadequate representation of Turkish through the use of the Arabic script.

Methods used

This bi-lingual glossary aims at being all-embracing and exhaustive, but at the same time tries to be as concise as possible: an impossible combination. Lengthy explanations are beyond the scope of this article, but the reader should at least get some idea of the meaning or function of things.

While compiling this glossary I was constantly under pressure as to where to draw the line. On the whole I tried to be as consistent as humanly possible as to what should be included and what should be left out. But consistency, if pursued to perfection, becomes boring after a while. So, at a certain point I started including words which will not be found on record labels, nor in old catalogues or advertisements, but are very relevant to the subject at hand.

Strictly speaking, words like '*makam*' or '*δρομος*' do not belong in this glossary, because they do not occur on old record labels. Nor do '*kovan*' (cylinder), *Μεσόγειος Θάλασσα* (Mediterranean Sea) or '*όργανο*' (instrument), just to name a few more items.

To save space, I have listed many Greek words only under the masculine form, although in everyday life these words occur in both masculine and feminine forms. Compare French *ami/ amie* for 'friend/ girlfriend' and *né/née* ('born') for a male/female. In a number of cases I made an exception and listed both the masculine and feminine form of the Greek words, adding the symbols ♂ and ♀ for extra clarity.

Turkish does *not* have separate forms to distinguish between a masculine and feminine person (see *Bornovalı, çingene*). Instead it uses other means to indicate the sex of a person when necessary.

Compare this to the corresponding Greek **masculine** forms *Μπουρνοβαλιός* and *ατσιγγάνος* or *γύφτος* and their **feminine** counterparts *Μπουρνοβαλιά*, *ατσιγγάνα* or *γύφτισσα*.

Matches, near matches and mismatches

It is a well-known fact that languages borrow words and idioms from each other, so-called loanwords. These loanwords may remain

synonyms for some time, but soon go separate ways and acquire *slightly* different or even *completely* different meanings.

Such an example is the word *bağlama*. The Turkish *bağlama* is not the same instrument as the *μπαγλαμάς* in Greece. In Turkish a *bağlama* is any type of *saz*, but in Greek a *μπαγλαμάς* is the smallest type of *bouzouki*.

In other words, an item in the Turkish (1st) column may have a “match” in the Greek (4th) column, but the reader should be aware that in many instances what looks like a “match” is not a real match at all. Often there is only an etymological relation or even no relation at all, but just a rough equivalent.

Let me give another example of this phenomenon. Although it is not directly related to our subject, it is very illustrative of the borrowing of a word and a subsequent shift of meaning. ‘**Fil dişi**’ (literally: elephant its-tooth) in Turkish means ‘*ivory*’. In Greek **φιλντισι** means ‘*mother of pearl*’, whereas the word for ‘*ivory*’ is **ελεφαντόδοντο**. In Turkish ‘*mother of pearl*’ is translated by ‘**sedef**’. By the way, this word also exists in Greek: **σεντέφι...**

Here are two pages from an (undated) Odeon catalogue (ca 1908), with **Turkish** and **Greek** repertoire. On the cover it says: *DISQUES ODEON A DOUBLE FACE. Jouant sur les deux faces. UN AIR DIFFERENT sur chaque face. Les Disques Odeon jouent sur toutes les machines a disques existantes.*

N° D'ORDRE

نمبره نومروسی

2055	Hedjazkiar Nakisch Semai, Bulbul guibi <i>Hafouz Sami Effendi</i> Hedjazkiar Kurdu Charki, Hoch getchen <i>Caracach Effendi</i>	حجازکار نقش سماعی بابل کبی حافظ سامی افندی حجازکار شرق کردی شرق قره قاش افندی	۲۰۵۵
2056	Rast Charki, Andelibi sahn aschka <i>Hafouz Sami Effendi</i> Rast Charki, Bou gun hitch bakmadin <i>Caracach Effendi</i>	راست شرق عندلیب صحن حافظ سامی افندی راست شرق بوگون هیتچ باقندک قره قاش افندی	۲۰۵۶
2057	Ouchak Gazel (<i>avec violon</i>) <i>Hafouz Sami Effendi</i> Hedjaz Gazel (<i>avec violon</i>) <i>Hafouz Sami Effendi</i>	عشاق غزل کچان ایله حافظ سامی افندی حجاز غزل کچان ایله حافظ سامی افندی	۲۰۵۷
2058	Kardjiar Gazel (<i>avec violon</i>) <i>Hafouz Sami Effendi</i> Hedjazkiar Gazel (<i>avec violon</i>) <i>Hafouz Sami Effendi</i>	قرچکار غزل کچان ایله حافظ سامی افندی حجازکار غزل کچان ایله حافظ سامی افندی	۲۰۵۸
2059	Dugiah Gazel <i>Hafouz Sami Effendi</i> Rast Gazel (<i>avec violon</i>) <i>Hafouz Sami Effendi</i>	دکاه غزل حافظ سامی افندی راست غزل کچان ایله حافظ سامی افندی	۲۰۵۹
2060	Husseini Gazel (<i>avec violon</i>) <i>Hafouz Sami Effendi</i> Hedjaskiar Kurdi Gazel (<i>avec violon</i>) <i>Hafouz Sami Effendi</i>	حسینی غزل کچان ایله حافظ سامی افندی حجازکار کردی غزل کچان ایله حافظ سامی افندی	۲۱۶۰
2061	Sabah Taxim (<i>avec tambour</i>) <i>Tambouri Djemil bey</i> Mahour Taxim, (<i>avec tambour</i>) <i>Tambouri Djemil bey</i>	صباح تقسیم طنبور ایله طنبوری جمیل بک ماهور تقسیم طنبور ایله طنبوری جمیل بک	۲۰۶۱
2062	Huzan Taxim (<i>avec tambour</i>) <i>Tambouri Djemil bey</i> Chevk Efza Taxim, (<i>avec tambour</i>) <i>Tambouri Djemil bey</i>	هزام تقسیم طنبور ایله طنبوری جمیل بک شوق افزا تقسیم طنبور ایله طنبوری جمیل بک	۲۰۶۲
2063	Ferahnak Taxim, (<i>avec tambour</i>) <i>Tambouri Djemil Bey</i> Adjem Aschiran Tax m (<i>avec violon</i>) <i>Tambouri Djemil Bey</i>	فرحناک تقسیم طنبور ایله طنبوری جمیل بک عجم آشیران تقسیم تصغیه ایله طنبوری جمیل بک	۲۰۶۳

DISQUES ENREGISTRÉS A CONSTANTINOPLÉ
ΔΙΣΚΟΙ ΕΓΓΡΑΦΗΣ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥΠΟΛΕΩΣ

N^o D'ORDRE

نمبره نومر و سى

279	Tou Kitsou i mana <i>Yangos Psamatianos</i> Bika mes t'ambeli <i>Yangos Psamatianos</i>	Τοῦ Κίτσου ἡ μάνα Γιάγκος Ψωμαθιανὸς Μπῆκκ μες' στ' ἀμπέλι Γιάγκος Ψωμαθιανὸς	279
280	Fgo kə sy <i>Estudiantina Constantinopolitaine</i> Yia ta matakia sou <i>Estudiantina Constantinopolitaine</i>	Ἐγὼ καὶ σὺ Ἐστουδιαντῖνα Κων/πόλεως Γιὰ τὰ ματάκια σου Ἐστουδιαντῖνα Κων/πόλεως	280
281	To fili mou <i>Estudiantina Constantinopolitaine</i> Lypissou me <i>Estudiantina Constantinopolitaine</i>	Τὸ φίλι μου Ἐστουδιαντῖνα Κων/πόλεως Λυπήσου με Ἐστουδιαντῖνα Κων/πόλεως	281
282	I Modistroura <i>Chryssomalis</i> Don Pietros <i>Chryssomalis</i>	Ἡ Μοδιστρούλα Κ. Χρυστομάλης Ὁ Δὸν Πέτρος Κ. Χρυστομάλης	282
283	Manes Tabahaniotikos <i>Yangos Psamatianos</i> O Bekris <i>Yangos Psamatianos</i>	Μανές Ταμπαχανιώτικος Γιάγκος Ψωμαθιανὸς Ὁ Μπεκρῆς Γιάγκος Ψωμαθιανὸς	283
284	La Tonkinoise <i>Estudiantina</i> Stin evmorfia sou <i>Estudiantina</i>	Ἡ Κικὶ καὶ ἡ Κοκὸ Ἐστουδιαντῖνα Κων/πόλεως Στὴν Εὐμορφιά σου Ἐστουδιαντῖνα Κων/πόλεως	284
285	Minore manés <i>Yangos Psamatianos</i> I Mikropandremeni <i>Estudiantina</i>	Μανές Μινόρε Γιάγκος Ψωμαθιανὸς Ἡ Μικροπαντρεμένη Ἐστουδιαντῖνα Κων/πόλεως	285
286	Chiotikos Manés <i>Yangos Psamatianos</i> Syrto Chiotiko <i>Harmonica solo</i>	Χιώτικος μανές Γιάγκος Ψωμαθιανὸς Συρτὸ Χιώτικο Ἀρμόνικα	286

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Except for a few minor changes the **text of the article** has remained practically the same. However, the accompanying **glossary** has been expanded considerably.

Although initially the glossary was meant to explain words found on old Turkish and Greek record labels or in record catalogues, I have broadened the scope drastically by including also words and expressions used in other areas associated with music. Just as long as there was a connection with music of some sort...

These are the areas of interest which have been added in the meantime:

- technical terms used in connection with the world of sound recording and sound reproduction
- musical instruments and their separate components
- musicians
- builders of musical instruments
- expression and jargon used in musical circles
- ethnic groups
- terms for various places of entertainment
- geographical terms (countries, regions, cities, towns, suburbs and neighbourhoods) referring specifically to the Ottoman Empire, eventually ending up as Turkey and Greece.

And may I remind the visitor of this website that the glossary is **a work in progress.
So, your comments are welcome!**