The Lindström Project

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Persian Records by the Lindström Company: Triangle of Political Relationships, Local Agents and Recording Company

Abstract

The earliest engagement of German gramophone companies in recording Persian music dates back to 1906-7, when three tracks were recorded for the Beka Company and a dozen recordings were issued on the Globophon label. About twenty years later the Lindström company was engaged in the process of recording music in Persia through a subsidiary company, Baidaphone. Recording activities of Persian music by German companies reached their peak during the 1930’s. This can be explained as a result of intensified political relations between (Nazi) Germany and Persia, which eventually caused changing the international name of Persia to the local name of Iran. During this period, local agents and traders had a determinant role in connecting native musicians with German recording companies. Finally, the Lindström company’s multinational nature and policy ensured penetration of the Lindström labels far into the East including Persia.

Keywords: Lindström, Persia, Germany, Aghassi, Badizadeh, the recording industry, Persian music, Odeon, Baidaphon, Parlophon.

Foreword

The history of recording Persian music1 dates back to the 1880’s. In 1889, Thomas Edison’s representative in Europe, colonel George Edward Gouraud (1841-1912), presented the newly invented Phonograph to Nāser al-Dīn Shah (1831-1896), the King of Persia during the third and last of the monarch’s visits to Europe. Although British newspapers reported that he had never seen a recording machine (Courier 1889), His Majesty himself admired the improvement of the new model compared to the one he had in Tehran (Nāser al-Dīn Shah 1891: 189). We may conclude from this that the first recording machine had entered Persia some years before 1889. There was no local agent for a phonograph company in Persia, however; phonographs were purchased by the Shah or the Persian ruling elite during their overseas trips (Sepanta 1998: 85), unless they were imported and sold by Western traders (Pater 1899: 965).

Later, in 1899, a dozen of discs were recorded in London by an Indian scholar, Habib Ahmad, who recited Persian poems for the Gramophone Company. These recordings were issued under the Berliner gramophone label marked as “Persian” (Kinnear 2000: 29-31). The Gramophone Company in turn sent a recording expert on a recording tour of the Tsarist Empire, which included making recordings at Baku (Azerbaijan) and Tiflis (Georgia). Since Tiflis and especially Baku were historically connected to The Kingdom of Persia, those records were also labeled as Persian (Ibid: 4-5). Other discs, such as recordings taken in Persian-speaking state of Afghanistan were also labeled “Persian” (Ibid: 15). The Kingdom of Persia itself was also mentioned in a 1905 report as one of the states of “the Orient” where the Gramophone Company had conducted recording sessions (Washington Times 1905).

“Persian” records from neighboring countries may have acquired this qualification because they had Persian lyrics, or the music recorded might have been close stylistically to Persian music. Alternatively, the recordings may also have been recorded in lands that were historically related to The Kingdom Persia such as south Caucasus (Azerbaijan or Georgia). They were not recorded in Persia or for marketing inside Persia. These records, however, in the following are considered marginal to the main stream of recording Persian music, which is defined as recordings made primarily for distribution among the Persian society.

The record industry entered Persia in 1906 when The Gramophone Company’s representative had the honor to enter the Shah’s palace and to record “His Majesty’s Voice”. Later more recording companies sought their benefits by making Persian records; among them was the Lindström company.

Early Persian records by German recording companies

The earliest Persian records made by a German company must have been the three “Beka record” tracks which were recorded in Paris in November 1906. There is also a French local brand written in bigger letters on the label: “Disque Idéal Symphonie”. The Beka Company must have provided the technical facility and services. Tracks were recorded by the French band, “Garde Républicaine” (Fig. 1). According to contemporary advertisements, the records had a spoken introduction by the Persian Ambassador in Paris; the musical genre or style is still unknown as the records are not available (Zwarg 2010). Mansour who has a copy of one of these records reports that there was no vocalization on that track (2007: 24).

Prior to those three Persian records by Beka, the first recording session of Persian music was held in January 1906 in Tehran by the Gramophone Company. These early commercial recordings of Persian music were first pressed at Hanover, Germany, at the factory of Deutsche Grammophon AG (Kinnear 2000: 7).

The greatest problem for recording music in Persia was transportation of blank and recorded matrices, as well as the necessary recording equipment and pressed copies for thousands of kilometers. This was quite
The following recordings released by Lindström were recorded on two matrix series, 090XXX and 092XXX. These series were used to record Persian music during the late 1920’s and 1930’s. The second series is briefly mentioned in the Lindström company’s matrix table, referring to two single numbers with the assumption that they were recorded between 1927 to 1937; the first series is not mentioned at all (Lotz & Englund 2009). The only source of information on these would be a few remaining records that are held in private or public collections; they are almost inaccessible. The available labels present different musicians. This may lead to the conclusion that the two series were not used for the same recording session, even though the sessions may have been executed during the same year.

We may guess that the 090 series was used to record Persian music in the late 1920’s (after Baidaphon 084 matrix series or Odeon xPe matrix series) to the early 1930’s; the 092 series was used at the same time or later, but not after 1937 when a Persian singer was employed and invited to Berlin to record his songs. Considering the fact that various musicians had made recordings on the 090 and 092 series and many of them are known never to have traveled abroad to record music, the recording session must have been held in Persia. Amir Mansour, who owns the biggest private collection of Persian 78 rpm records, stated that the series extended from 090200 to 090450, and it was followed by more recordings in Baghdad starting from 090500. Recordings are believed to be taken by the Baidaphon company; they were later transferred to the other Lindström labels, Odeon and Parlophon (phone conversation with Amir Mansour in Tehran, December 23, 2010, Utrecht).

The local agents of Baidaphon or Lindström are not known. Nicolas Kfouri, the agent of the Société Nationale Pierre & Gabriel Baida in Iraq in 1926, could still have been representing Baidaphon; he might also have been representing Lindström. The Polyphon agent, Ezra Hakkāk, could be another guess. Another reasonable guess would be Aghassi brothers company which were Lindström’s agent for Persia in the late 1930’s. Recordings on the 090 series were released on three labels: Baidaphon (gold), Parlophon (green) and Odeon (red). The First and second labels from the left (090219) present the same recording track and show the simultaneous use of two of the three labels (Fig. 7).

Recordings on the 092 series were released on the same three labels: Baidaphon (red), Parlophon (green) and Odeon (purple, magenta). The Second and third labels from the left (092268) present the same recording track and show the simultaneous use of two of the three labels (Fig. 8).

Apart from commercial recordings destined for the Persian market, some recordings of Persian music were issued for Western use. One such recording is found among the collection “Musik des Orients” which was prepared by the pioneer ethnomusicologist, Erich Moritz von Hornbostel (1877-1935). It can be regarded as one of the earliest ethnomusicalogical collections. The collection was released in 1931 and reissued in Britain in 1934 under the title of “Music of the Orient” (Ziegler 2010: 101). The only Persian record in “Musik des Orients” is titled as “Volkstümlicher Gesang” (Ibid: 19), which was translated into “Popular Song” for the English version; but it presents the classical style of vocal / instrumental improvisation. It is said to have been recorded in 1927 (Lotz & Englund 2009) (Fig. 9).

**Lindström organizes a recording trip to Berlin**

In 1937, the Aghassi Co. was Lindström’s agent in Persia. They had just executed a recording trip to Syria in 1936. A group of four musicians, including violinist Abolhasan Sabā (1902-1957), tar player...
Esmā‘īl Mehrāsh (1904-1980) and singer Seyyed Javād Badī‘zādeh (1902-1979), were sent to Aleppo for recording (Badī‘zādeh 2001: 200-220). The repertoire chosen for this recording trip reflected Persian society’s movement towards the new popular and comic songs, which were substantially different from the Persian records from the previous recording session by the Lindström company (xPe, 090 and 092 matrix series). Both Mehrāsh and Sabā had comic compositions; Badī‘zādeh himself had a passion to compose new songs and had recorded some of his own songs for the Gramophone Company in 1931 and 1933 (Kinnear 2000: 111, 121-3, 126, 133-40). The new popular genre was a mixture of Persian classical music, Persian light music (Mehrāsh), and western light music. Although the records sold very well, they are reported to have been of poor quality; Badī‘zādeh himself found both the recording device and recording operator “inadequate” (Badī‘zādeh 2001: 254).

From April to March 1937, the repertory of the Syrian trip was simply repeated in Germany for The Lindström company, but only one instrumentalist was sent to accompany the singer. Esma‘īl Sāterī was a tar and violin player; he joined a German band to accompany Badī‘zādeh. It was either to cut the expenses or to avoid the disagreement between instrumentalists; the problem that Badī‘zādeh had experienced in Syria (Ibid: 209 & 254). Repertory was recorded on “per” matrix series from per1 to per52, the records were released on blue Odeon labels with catalogue numbers from A243509a to 34b (Figs. 10-12).

After World War II, Lindström recorded some popular Persian songs. These records were manufactured in Britain and apparently are the last Persian records on Lindström labels. Mansour believes that they were recorded in 1947 (2010) while Lotz concludes that recordings were taken between 1948 and 1950 (2009). Lotz also mentions that the recordings were taken in Berlin which is unlikely. The Lindström company could not have brought many musicians to Berlin for recording sessions of Persian music during these two years; there is also no clue that such a recording trip was conducted. Tracks were recorded on HOO matrix series and were released on PLP catalogue number series (Fig. 13).

German-Persian relations in early 20th century

From the early 19th century, the independence of Persia was threatened by Russia in the North and later by Great Britain in the South and Southeast. After the dreadful shock of losing the South Eastern Caucasus in early 19th century to the Russian Empire, Persian rulers faced the reality that they were no longer “the King of the Kings” (Shāhanshāh, official title for the Persian kings). Seeking alliance with a third European power was one of their strategies which served French colonial designs and provoked a series of correspondence between Fat’h-All Shah (1772-1834) and Napoléon Bonaparte (1769-1821) in the early 19th century. This correspondence eventually resulted in the Treaty of Finckenstein between Persia and France in 1807 (Amini: 90-103).

Having experienced the nicer side of France as a European state, Persians also were keen to have closer ties with Germans, when the German Empire started playing a global role in the late 19th and the early 20th century. The Persian-German relationship reached its warmest point between the World War I and II. For the Persians, Germany was one of the world’s most developed and modern nations, able and ready to provide assistance for developing infrastructure, a rich source of importing machinery, and a rival of Great Britain and Russia – the two states which had been making trouble for Persia since modern time (Hambly 2007: 241).

Since the Arab conquest of Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sassanid Empire (224-651), archaism was a constant tendency among Persian elite and rulers. This archaism turned to the new concept of nationalism in modern time which tried to downplay the role of Islam in Persia and highlight the ancient Persian empires. Subsequently, Anti-Arabism developed among secular elites. The new Persian nationalism and Anti-Arabism matched the Nazi concept of a “master race” and European Anti-Semitism, since Persians are regarded as a branch of Aryan immigrants (Aryan 2010). It seems to have been one of the motivations for changing the official name of the country in 1935. Suggested by the
Persian ambassador to Germany, the globally known and historical name of Persia was replaced by the local name of Iran, which literally means land of Aryans (Yarshater 1989: 62). Thus, the new king of Persia, Reza Shah (1925-41) and the Chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler (1933-45) developed a close relationship between the Wars. The Persian queen was received by the German dictator in 1933. During this official reception, Persian carpets and pistachios were presented, and the German chancellor, Adolf Hitler, signed three photos in return, with the excuse that he was not rich like the Shah of Persia to give valuable gifts (Ayromlû 2001: 96-7).

Germany, Russia, Britain and France were different in nature, their time of rise or fall, and colonial strategies. Nonetheless, the relations between Persia and European states usually affected aspects of Persian society. Although Persia was nominally neutral during World War II, The Persian ruler, Reza Shah, was in favor of German chancellor, Adolf Hitler. Because Germany was the rival of Great Britain and Russia; Adolf Hitler also had the same dictator nature as Reza Shah. German companies benefited the warm relation between Persia and Germany in 1920's and 1930's and recording companies were no exception.

Carl Lindström’s Multinational Policy

Carl Ehol Lindström (1869-1932) was a Swedish mechanic and inventor who left his home country in 1892 at the age of 23 and was settled in Germany in 1896. It is likely that this would have given him an international orientation which consequently would have affected his company's activities. He became one of the founders of the three major multinational recording companies; along with the Scottish-American inventor of the Graphophone, Alexander Bell (1847-1922), and German-American inventor of the Gramophone, Emile Berliner (1851-1929). One may think about the possibility of a relationship between the multi-national orientations of the founders with the multi-national nature of recording companies. Nevertheless, the record industry emerged with a multinational nature and Lindström became one of the giant recording companies.

Carl Lindström established his company in Germany, not in his home country of Sweden. The establishment of “Carl Lindström GmbH” in 1904 was itself due to an unsuccessful order from a Russian firm, which forced Lindström to seek outside financing. Later on the Paraphon trademark, which had been registered by Lindström as their record label, adopted an “e” letter at the end for international use; the French branch was essentially registered as “Disque Paraphone”. In 1911 Lindström acquired shares in Fonotipia Company Ltd. in England, the parent company of “Società Italiana di Fonotipia” in Milan and International Talking Machine Co. - Odeon-Werke in Berlin. Later in 1914 Otto Heinemann, a Persian-Armenian merchant, Hambartzoum Hairabetian, whose name was connected to the Gramophone Company's representative in Persia, F.W. Emerson. He was later appointed as the Gramophone Company's agent in Persia (Kinnear 2000: 6-9). Therefore he did

In fact, making records was a means of selling “talking machines” (Gronow 2009: 43); making an Oriental catalogue could open up new markets (Gaisberg 1942: 41). At least for the early stages of recording non-Western music, selling record player devices must have been the primary reason of recording native music. The Gramophone Company, for instance, had established a multinational business (Jones 1985). The international policy of the Gramophone Company is reflected in Fred Gaisberg’s diary, when “Music Goes Round” with him and his recording facilities (1942). The first Oriental catalogue of the Gramophone Company had been released in 1902 (Kinnear 2000: 3-4). It was the same case for other recording companies. A concise study on the global strategy of the recording companies and their activities in the Orient can be found in Pecka Gronow’s “The Record Industry Comes to the Orient” (Gronow 1981).

The Lindström company was primarily active in the field of making record players. In order to establish an international record catalogue, they purchased a couple of recording companies which were already established on a global level; this could help selling more record players. Beka, for instance, had not only made recordings in many European countries, but also had organized a recording trip to Asia in 1905/6 (Gronow 1981: 251). Lindström also purchased the owner of the Odeon label, International Talking Machine Company, which had factories in Austria, Italy, France, Spain and South America. (Gronow 2009: 43). Recording itself, however, became a booming business later. There was a high demand for American records in Europe and European records in America after the World War I; this turned the Lindström-Okeh partnership to a high profit business (Gronow 2009: 45).

In order to have a rough idea about international presence of the Lindström company, one can list a number of previous studies on Lindström labels around the globe. Pecka Gronow touched Lindström's activities abroad (2009), Gabriel Güssel studied Bohemia (2009), Serbia was investigated by Milan Milovanovic (2009), Björn Englund explored Scandinavia (2009), Norway was considered by Vidar Vanberg (2009) and Björn Englund (2010), Frank Phillips examined Britain (2010), Leonor Losa and Susana Belchior had a survey on Portugal (2010), Morten Heln talked about Danish connection (2010), Risto Pekka Pennanen observed Bosnia (2010), Suresh Chandvankar worked on India (2010) and Indonesia was discussed by Alfred Ticoalu (2010) and Philip Yampolsky (2010).

In short, Carl Lindström company's general policy was selling record players around the world and recording local music to improve the market for record players, just like other big recording companies such as Gramophone or Columbia; Persia as a well-known historical name for Western people of early 20th century must have been a major destination.

Role of local agents and traders

Apart from “Air Persan” which was issued on Beka Record label, Giosophon was the first German recording company that recorded Persian music. This recording session was held in Paris in 1907, when a group of Persian musicians travelled to France to make Persian records. The recording trip was co-funded by the travelling musicians themselves and a Persian-Armenian merchant, Hambartzoum Hairabetian, whose name was noted on the labels. Obviously he was responsible for arranging the trip and negotiating with recording companies. Thus, the first involvement of a German recording company, took place through a decision made by a local agent, Hairabetian.

Hairabetian was in fact connected to the Gramophone Company's representative in Persia, F.W. Emerson. He was later appointed as the Gramophone Company's agent in Persia (Kinnear 2000: 6-9). Therefore he did...
notorder more recordings from Paris. Instead, he planned another recording trip for other musicians to make recordings at the Gramophone studio in London; the trip took place in 1909 (Ibid 9). The famous singer Seyyed Ahmad Khan was dissatisfied with the result of the Paris 1907 recording session, and started a court case against Hairabetian, a Russian national, for failing to order pressings of his recordings (Kouhestani Nejad 2005: 340-53), but he could not win the case. Consequently, Gramophone's agent, Hairabetian, ignored him for the following recording sessions. No one has heard of the bulk of Paris recordings which would be quite valuable for studying the history of Persian music. They must have been later destroyed or wiped out. That was the local agent's role; he engaged a German company to make Persian records but eventually left us with very few samples of the first Persian records on a German label.

The Gramophone Company appointed Ezra Mir Hakkāk & Co. as their local agent in Baghdad, and they arranged a recording session there in 1926. When the head office concluded that the Baghdad recording session was a complete failure, Hakkāk was accused of failing to arrange it adequately and interfering with the recording operator's job. Subsequently Hakkāk cut his connection with Gramophone and acquired the agency of a German recording company, Polyphon Musikwerke (Kinnear 2000: 16). This time the German recording company benefited from the local agent's decision. Thus, Polyphon became the first German company and the second recording company which conducted recording sessions in Persia.

The only known recording trip for Persian musicians by the Lindström company was conducted in 1937. During this trip, Javād Badi'zādeh (1902-79), a popular singer and an icon of new comic/light version of Persian songs, was sent to Berlin and recorded more than 50 tracks there. He was accompanied by a German band and a Persian musician who travelled with him (Lotz 2000). The trip was planned by a local corporate, Aghassi Company. The recording trip could have been suggested to Lindström by Aghassi Company, to make high quality recordings of Badi'zādeh's songs. They had previously sent him to Syria and they knew his songs would sell very well. It might also have been Lindström's suggestion to a qualified local company, Aghassi, to collaborate in making Persian records. One may also guess that Lindström had found and approached the famous singer through their own connections or through the German/Persian embassy in Tehran/Berlin; distribution of records was then left to the qualified local corporation, Aghassi Company.

Regardless the third possibility, which is less likely, it had been Aghassi's decision to send Badi'zādeh to this recording trip. He became more famous after recording songs for the Lindström company, his recordings also became more accessible and lasted longer. He himself states that his German records had better quality (Badi'zādeh 2001: 263). Badi'zādeh's records were already popular, and these new shiny blue labels were good enough for “Oden Record” to become well-known and popular among Persians.

It is not clear why Aghassi Co. did not continue collaborating with the Lindström company, probably because Lindström was only interested in having a dozen of Persian records to sell more record players. Aghassi's second recording trip was conducted in the following years to Syria; this next recording trip was conducted in the following years to Syria; this was a complete failure, Hakkāk was accused of failing to arrange it adequately and interfering with the recording operator's job. Subsequently Hakkāk cut his connection with Gramophone and acquired the agency of a German recording company, Polyphon Musikwerke (Kinnear 2000: 16). This time the German recording company benefited from the local agent's decision. Thus, Polyphon became the first German company and the second recording company which conducted recording sessions in Persia.

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It is not clear why Aghassi Co. did not continue collaborating with the Lindström company, probably because Lindström was only interested in having a dozen of Persian records to sell more record players. Aghassi's second recording trip was conducted in the following years to Syria; this time more musicians and singers were sent with Badi'zādeh (Mansour 2005: 3) to make a more attractive catalogue. The Lindström company stayed out of the process of recording Persian music and only sold previous recordings as well as record players until the end of The World War II.

The late 1940's Persian recordings on the Odeon label had less to do with local agents than with the parent company of the all labels which were active in Persian market. EMI conducted a recording session in Iran and issued Persian records on the Odeon, His Master's Voice or Columbia labels to encourage the nominal competition which could generate more demand. Local Iranian recording companies and factories emerged in 1940's. This time their role was to put an end on the presence of the all the Western companies, including Lindström, which had previously issued Persian music on shellac records.

Conclusions

The recording industry emerged in the era of a first wave of modern or industrial globalization. As this short study shows, recording music in the Eastern society of Persia was affected by the global policy and multinational nature of recording companies such as the Lindström company. The Lindström company sought their own benefits through recording native music for selling their record players on a global level. Nonetheless, they served Persian culture and helped the recording and documentation of this oral tradition of music.

Local agents of the recording companies had their own impact on the process of recording music in non-Western cultures. They had the role of scouting suitable musicians and connecting them with interested recording companies; hence they had a determinant role in companies' activities and their success in recording music and creating an attractive catalogue suitable to local (national) markets. In the Lindström case, local agents successfully introduced the Baidaphon, Odeon and Parlophon labels in Persia; the right decision of sending a popular singer to make records in Berlin, which most likely was made by the local agent, made the Odeon label even more popular in Persia than the other two labels of the Lindström company.

Political relations also affected the industry of recording music. In Persia, for instance, the warm political relations between Persia and Germany during 1920's and 1930's favored German recording companies such as Polyphon and Lindström. They entered Persia to record Persian music in the late 1920's and challenged Gramophone and Columbia, British/American recording companies that were active “in a Persian market”. This article is not meant to be reductionist; there are more questions to deal with. For instance, one may ask why the Lindström company started recording Persian music in Baghdad (Iraq)? What was the role of cultural confluence between neighboring societies such as Persia and Turkey? Yet, it shows that not only a culture is a coherent structure in and of itself, but it is also affected by other factors such as power and political relations between states, as well as economic and economic agents, both on national and global levels.

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Endnotes

1 By Persian music, here, I mean all kinds and genres of music which were performed or listened inside the land that was called Persia in late 19th and early 20th century.

2 For more information on Persian-German relations until the First World War see: Martin 1959.

3 For more information on archaism in Iranian contemporary history see: Bigdeloo 2001.
Figure 2: Persian records from Paris recording session in 1907. Source: Mohammadi 2010: 225 & 237

Figure 3: Persian music on Polyphon label, recorded in Persia ca. 1927
Source: Mansour private collection

Figure 5: 084 matrix series, recorded in Iraq ca. 1926
Source: Mansour private collection

Fig 12: Sleeves by Aghassi Co. Source: Tafazzoli private collection in Tehran
Figure 7: 090 matrix series recorded in Persia and Iraq ca. late 1920's. Source: Mansour private collection

Figure 8: 092 matrix series recorded in Persia ca. 1930's. Source: Mansour private collection

Figure 6: xPe matrix series recorded ca. 1926 
Source: Mansour private collection

Figure 11: “Per” matrix series recorded in Berlin, 1937. Source: Mansour private collection

13: HOO matrix series 
Source: Mansour private collection