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# Abdessalam El-Baqqali as a key person and friend of Edward Westermarck

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## Introduction

Edward Westermarck first arrived in Morocco in 1898. His intention was to continue his journey to East Asia, but he got absorbed in Morocco, which became a life-long project. Westermarck learned Arabic and many Berber dialects, he travelled throughout the country and his books about Morocco comprise thousands of pages.

Westermarck belonged to the pioneering generation of field anthropologists whose methods and rules of method were rudimentary. He made use of many informants and experts in order to learn the languages and customs in different parts of the country. Although his methods in collecting data were quite simple, he was one of the first anthropologists who worked hard to learn his research subjects' languages. He always asked for local informants, to tell him about customs and beliefs. Every custom should be described by a member of the local group or tribe, and not by any outsiders if possible (Westermarck 1926, 8-10).

During his first journey in Morocco from Tangier and Tetuan to Fez, Westermarck travelled with an English nobleman. In addition to these, the company consisted of a Syrian interpreter, four Moroccan servants and a personal servant of the Englishman (Westermarck 1918, 22-37, Westermarck 1927, 170).

Among the Moroccan servants was Abdessalam El-Baqqali, who made a very good impression on Westermarck as he was trustworthy in matters of money and keen on helping the foreigners in their pursuits (Westermarck 1918, 65-66). The relationship was to last for forty years, and Westermarck always travelled thereafter in the company of El-Baqqali. In Fez they left the nobleman, who felt too tired to travel further, and continued to other parts of Morocco. At the end of this journey to Morocco, El-Baqqali, on his own initiative, followed Westermarck to London.

When Westermarck was doing his research in Morocco, the country according to him resembled Europe in the Middle Ages. Westermarck (1927, 180) found in Morocco a medieval atmosphere that he liked. Its political organisation had weaknesses as the society was a sultanate that loosely united different tribes and regions. It was a sultanate in crisis, and this crisis gave France and Spain the opportunity to divide the country into two protectorates. This happened in 1912, but before and after this event there were many outbursts of unrest in the country.

In this paper I intend to look at how Edward Westermarck developed his relationship with his key person Abdessalam El-Baqqali. As is known, the balancing of the anthropologist in his/her use of key persons and their information is a delicate problem that has no simple solutions. Paul Rabinow (1977) has described this problem area in his description of fieldwork in Morocco in the 1960s and 1970s, and there are some resemblances between his experiences and Westermarck's. For example the parties had to find out how to balance the interests of the researcher and those of the key person.

## A Key Person and Friend

It seems to me that Westermarck followed a code of the English gentleman in his dealings with El-Baqqali. El-Baqqali for his part came forward with his own suggestions. If on the one hand Westermarck was pleased with El-Baqqali, the Moroccan informant could with the help of Westermarck also widen his own world and view of the world. He followed Westermarck not only to London but also to an oriental conference in Rome (Westermarck 1927, 195). During the summers of 1899 and 1907 he visited Sweden and Finland (Westermarck, 1927, 184, Westermarck, H. 1941, 304-307, 359).

Through his visits to Finland and Sweden El-Baqqali became quite known as a key person and friend of Westermarck. In a popular book about Morocco *Six år i Marocko* (Six years in Morocco) Westermarck devoted one chapter to El-Baqqali (Westermarck 1918, 61-74). There is some information about El-Baqqali also in Westermarck's *Memoirs* as well as the biography on Westermarck written by Rolf Lagerborg, a friend and colleague (Lagerborg, 1951, 85-93). When Westermarck was in Finland or in England, El-Baqqali wrote letters to him. He wanted to learn English but the letters tell that he never became quite fluent in the language. Nevertheless they give a lot of information about him as a person and his living conditions as they cover a period of almost forty years. There are over 200 letters from El-Baqqali to Westermarck but only two from Westermarck to El-Baqqali in the Archive of Åbo Akademi University Library. There are also many letters Westermarck wrote from Morocco to his relatives and

friends in Finland.

It may have been more important than Westermarck or Lagerborg admits that El-Baqqali, in the summer of 1899, lost his heart to a young Swedish girl, who was also attracted to him. El-Baqqali proposed to her, but got a negative answer from the girl's mother. The contact did not break altogether, but they corresponded and twenty years later, when the girl was a woman in her forties he proposed in a letter in September 1928 one more time, but got a nicely worded but negative answer (Lagerborg 1951, 90).

El-Baqqali was born in a north Moroccan village near Tangier, but lived most of his life in Tangier, in a house his grandfather had owned. El-Baqqali's father had died when El-Baqqali was an infant, and he lived with his mother, who treated women and was remunerated for these services in kind or in money. The family owned some land in the home village and received some income from it. The family, but not the household, consisted also of a half-brother and a -sister. The family belonged to the Andrja tribe and it was a family of *shereef* standing, which means that the family's genealogical table begins with the Prophet Mohammed. This fact gave its members *baraka* or holiness.

Westermarck usually called El-Baqqali *Shereef* and addressed his letters "My dear Shereef" (ÅAB, WA:15.8.1900). From El-Baqqali's letters one can read that during his absence Westermarck paid a monthly check to El-Baqqali, which at the beginning was two pounds and later on five pounds. In many a letter El-Baqqali reminds Westermarck about this payment as if Westermarck was going to forget it. El-Baqqali told in a letter that this payment allowed him to buy eggs, butter, sugar, tea and cigarettes (ÅAB, 54:2.5.1914). Quite often he also asked for extra money in order to buy shoes and tunic, or a sheep to be slaughtered at a great feast. Once he told Westermarck that he had sold the mule he had got as a gift from Westermarck (ÅAB, 54:29.9.1910). Westermarck also subscribed to the Daily News for El-Baqqali, who followed the news from England and Europe from it (ÅAB, 54:2.12.1910). During the general strike in 1926 he got nervous when the paper did not arrive (ÅAB, 54:22.6.1926) at the same time Westermarck in England began to write his *Memoirs*.

During the ten year period from 1914 to 1923 when Westermarck was hindered to visit Morocco he all the same paid El-Baqqali. The time of national unrest was also a difficult period in El-Baqqali's life.

In March 1913 he sent letters from the Moorish prison telling he had been imprisoned when handling a rifle that stood unsecured in the house. The charge was that he had been shooting around drunken (ÅAB, 54:10.3.1913, 14.3.1913). Later he also promised Westermarck never more to take "drinks nor drops" (ÅAB, 54:28.10.1913). In this connection he appealed to the authorities as a servant to Westermarck.

In August 1914 he was again imprisoned on the charge of having violated the rules of Ramadan and of an assault against the Spanish consul. The 25 days in prison were like 25 years El-Baqqali told Westermarck (ÅAB, 54:11.8.1914, 3.9.1914). In his letters El-Baqqali tried to keep Westermarck *à jour* with the developments in the country and to collect some complementary information regarding beliefs and customs.

In 1919 Hugo Backmansson, painter and friend of Westermarck, visited Tangier and Morocco, a country he had visited earlier together with Westermarck. Now he wrote to Westermarck about El-Baqqali's drinking habits, which he did not like and he put a word for L-Hadjj, who had served both Westermarck and him (ÅAB, WA:24.12.1919, 20.5.1919). In 1921 El-Baqqali's mother died and he considered marrying someone from his own tribe. But he got caught in a dispute and legal process over landownership, with a cousin as the other party (ÅAB, 54:11.4.1922). He seems to have forgotten the question of marriage.

## Life in Villa Tusculum

The return to Morocco in 1923, after ten years' absence, was the start of a very active period in Westermarck's life. Westermarck rented, and later bought, Villa Tusculum, a house on the outskirts of Tangier. He engaged El-Baqqali and L-Hadjj as his servants. El-Baqqali's position was that of a project leader. Additional younger servants were engaged for shorter or longer periods. The cook, L-Hadjj, had been employed by Westermarck already during his earlier travels (Westermarck 1927, 312). He was a Rif-Berber who El-Baqqali did not trust. Westermarck however insisted on keeping him, as he had a big family.

Westermarck now worked hard to complete his two large projects, "Rituals and Belief in Morocco", a book in two volumes which was published in 1926, and "Wit and Wisdom in Morocco", which was published in 1930, the same year as Westermarck retired from his position as professor in London. The latter work was completed "with the assistance of Shereef Abd-Es-Salam El-Baqqali".

The purchase of Villa Tusculum (1927) meant that Westermarck could fulfil an old dream of gardening. As it turned out, Westermarck only planned the work, and El-Baqqali with helpers did the actual gardening. Westermarck was a well-to-do man, but nevertheless Villa Tusculum used up his royalties, especially those that he received for the French editions of his works (Lagerborg 1951, 258-262). The letters from El-Baqqali were now filled with information about the progress of the gardening, how roses had been planted and how beans and potatoes were grown. Sometimes there were quarrels between El-Baqqali and L-Hadjj, and on occasion the younger servants disappeared for days. They returned from the Moorish cafe after losing their money and clothes in poker (ÅAB 54: 20.9.1928).

In May 1925, when he was in London, Westermarck received a letter from the Swedish consul in Tangier, Carl Dahl, who informed that "our mutual friend Cherif El-Baqqali has acted stupidly, and has been in jail for ten days". He had, under the influence of alcohol, uttered threats against some Jews. According to Dahl, El-Baqqali's purpose was only to scare them (ÅAB WA:29.5.1925). El-Baqqali himself did not tell Westermarck about this incidence, but simply did not write to Westermarck during the three months he spent in prison. At the time when El-Baqqali was imprisoned there was unrest in the country. Abd-el-Krim, the leader of the Riffs, was at war with Spain. The same autumn El-Baqqali met

the Swedish journalist Hans Langlet, who intended to write about the war, and wanted to observe it on site. El-Baqqali introduced Langlet to the English captain Gordon Canning, who had conducted unofficial discussions with the Riffs in order to mediate in the conflict. With Canning's help Langlet came to Rif, and was able to travel there under Abd-el-Krim's protection. He met the leader of the Riffs and his closest men. Langlet came to appreciate the Riffs, but felt aversion towards the mountaineers in the rest of Northern Morocco.

In his book, Langlet (1927, 32-40) describes El-Baqqali as an elderly, fat and idle man. According to Langlet, El-Baqqali was lazy also politically, "and he was too concerned about his safety and comfort to in any way aggravate the European authorities" (Langlet 1927, 38). Langlet did perhaps not know that El-Baqqali had been in prison the same year. In his letters to Westermarck he also complained about various aches and pains. From Langlet's description it is still worth mentioning that El-Baqqali liked to discuss religion with the Swedish journalist. He was familiar with both the Koran and the Bible, and wanted to explain why Islam as a religion was above Christianity. He did not conduct this kind of discussions with Westermarck, at least not in his letters, because he knew about Westermarck's negative attitude towards Christianity. But he could tease Westermarck on such matters, and religion is always present in his letters.

During the first years of the Villa Tusculum project, El-Baqqali felt happy and content with his life, but slowly he started to feel trapped by the work and the way of life that Villa Tusculum demanded. He made a decision to propose to the Swedish woman he had met in Ulricehamn in his youth. He had corresponded with her now and then. To Westermarck he only told that he had written to her but she wrote Westermarck asking for advice (ÅAB 54:20.9.1928, ÅAB,WA:1.10.1928).

El-Baqqali's awakened interest marriage was perhaps influenced by Westermarck's promise that he would always be entitled to live at Villa Tusculum (ÅAB, PA: 22.7.1927).

El-Baqqali's letters give the impression of an impatient person who waits for the monthly payment or letters from Westermarck. When he heard about a medal awarded him for service to Finland, he was impatiently waiting for it and when he got the medal without the diploma attached to it, he wrote that the medal without the diploma is "like a horse without a saddle" (ÅAB, 54:2.3.1925). When Westermarck had left after a period of work in Morocco he wrote that Villa Tusculum is like "the sultan's palace without the sultan or the troops without its general" (ÅAB, 54:28.9.1928).

Westermarck's last visit in Tangier occurred late autumn 1938 and the spring of 1939. As usual he worked in Villa Tusculum with some articles. He left Morocco on the first of June. Westermarck knew then that El-Baqqali intended to marry. He married the 8th of June and wrote a letter to Westermarck 27 June. In the letter he tells that he had entertained 150 guests at the wedding and he was now in need of money. About his wife Khadaz, he said that Westermarck had not seen her before. He hoped to get children and he wanted to have someone to do the household chores and to see after him. He would teach her to be like an English lady. In the last letter from 13 August 1939 he thanks Westermarck for a friendly letter.

El-Baqqali's brother and last close relative had died in January the same year and this surely triggered off El-Baqqali's interest to marry. He was in his sixties when marrying.

Westermarck spent this last summer in Finland and he worked as usual on his research and was visited in Lappvik by his friends and relatives. When Germany declared war towards Poland 1 September, Westermarck had a severe attack of asthma and two days later he died (Lagerborg 1951, 363-367).

El-Baqqali always greeted the unreligious Westermarck with the blessings of Allah. In an unorthodox way he in a letter said that Westermarck and he would have the same status in paradise (ÅAB, 54:12.6.1914). El-Baqqali really learned to balance between two different cultures.

## **A Relationship of Mutual Benefit**

Both El-Baqqali and Westermarck must have found some reward in a relationship that lasted for forty years. From Westermarck's decisions one can conclude that he was directed by a deep sense of responsibility, a responsibility few anthropologists have fulfilled like him. One could perhaps even criticize him for assuming too much responsibility. Whatever happened to El-Baqqali, Westermarck seemed to help him (funerals, weddings, feasts to pay and newspapers, clothes, food, housing) . El-Baqqali seems to have used the pioneering anthropologist as a source of income. Rabinow tells about the key persons testing the boundaries of the foreigner, and in his understanding the foreigner has to decide where to set the limits. It is of course important to remember that Morocco was a society that could give few of its inhabitants a secure and good living, and most of them had to seek their bread in difficult conditions. From El-Baqqali's letters we can read about his and the other servants' struggle to get work and money.

El-Baqqali saw in this relationship a means to survive in the Moroccan society. His desire to learn about and taste a culture alien to his own nevertheless seems genuine. In a letter he mentions making his wife into an English lady, and Westermarck was for him the true gentleman, as he often remarked. After El-Baqqali's mother died, he sought new solutions to his life. His economic conditions and legal processes over landownership were maybe real obstacles to marrying and when Westermarck decided to fulfill two big work projects, this offered both parties some advantages. At Villa Tusculum El-Baqqali became the leader of a team, a role he enjoyed. At the same time he saw the relationship develop into a too strong a dependence, especially when his proposal to the Swedish lady had gone wrong. His way of addressing Westermarck was always subservient, but there might also have been a tone of irony in his exaggerations. He knew that Westermarck adhered to his code of honour, but in Moroccan society the gentleman was a naive fool. It is a role one could not, nor should recommend to the anthropologist today.

For Westermarck there was in the relationship much trouble but it also gave him an advantage by providing effective fieldwork conditions, and someone to help him and look after his property while he was away. Especially Villa Tusculum became for him another home, where he could enjoy not only

writing and reading, but also experimenting in gardening and as he grew old, he more and more enjoyed the Moroccan spring.

Ragnar Nummelin, an old friend and pupil of Westermarck, visited Villa Tusculum in the spring of 1960. In a letter he writes that El-Baqqali lived in Villa Tusculum until his death, which according to another source occurred late in the autumn 1942 (ÅAB, WA, 14.12.1942). Now in 1960, relatives of relatives were living in the villa (ÅAB BA: Whitsunday, 1960), which still is owned by Westermarck's relatives in Finland.

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