Fig. 25.1: Hilma Granqvist in local costume together with two children. © Palestine Exploration Fund.

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Chapter 25

Hilma Granqvist's Discovery of the Holy Land

At a time when the Jerusalem code still dominated perceptions of Palestine in various European countries, the Swedish-Finnish scholar Hilma Granqvist travelled to Jerusalem in search of living evidence of biblical times in the everyday lives of Palestinians. The realities she was met with, however, transformed her perception of Palestine and transformed Granqvist herself from bible scholar to ethnologist. This article places this transformation in the context of Granqvist's meeting with Palestinian folklorists, underlining how breaking with the Jerusalem code opened up Granqvist's work to later Palestinian scholars who were interested in her work precisely because it resonated with their storyworlds about the Palestine they lost in 1948.

In 1925, the Swedish-Finnish scholar Hilma Granqvist (1890–1972) arrived in Palestine for her research (Fig. 25.1). Granqvist had initially intended to study the women of biblical times, and she sought primary material in Palestine. According to an Orientalist worldview, the Holy Land, much like the rest of the “Orient,” was not subject to the progressive notion of time and as such belonged to another time. Various linguists, adventurers, cartographers, photographers, archaeologists, and biblical scholars – or any combination of those categories – looked for and therefore found in the Holy Land the very images they were looking for: remnants of the biblical past. Thus, Granqvist, like many before her, set off on a research trip to Palestine seeking primary material for her research. During her stay in Palestine, however, she underwent a sort of “conversion,” by which she became more interested in the village of Artas as a living culture rather than a biblical remnant.

Working under the direction of Gunnar Landtman – a student of Edward Westermarck's – at Helsinki University, Granqvist initially took up the topic of “Women in the Old Testament” at the suggestion of her supervisor. In preparation for her research, she took courses in theology and archaeology in Leipzig and Berlin before she joined an archaeology course in Jerusalem organized by the German Evangelic Institute. While in Jerusalem, she made the acquaintance of Louise Baldensperger, the daughter of a missionary family based in Artas since 1849.¹ Baldensperger, known in Artas as Sitt Louise, was key in introducing

¹ Falestin Naili, “Hilma Granqvist, Louise Baldensperger et la “Tradition de Rencontre” au Village Palestinien d'Artas,” *Civilisations* 57, no. 1/2 (2008): 127–38, 107.

Granqvist to the village and providing contacts and board at the family home there. Granqvist decided to remain in Palestine after her course ended in October and carry on with her research on Artas, where she became known as Sitt Halime. According to Granqvist, it was her initial stay in the village, especially her contacts with the women, that made her shift her topic of study.²

Consequently, Granqvist's research focus shifted to ethnological work that linked to what was then a recent current in anthropology: functionalism.³ She ended up with two long research stays in Palestine in 1925–1927 and 1930–1931; together adding up to three years. In addition, she had a shorter sojourn of four months in 1959, when Artas was under Jordanian rule after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Based on this research she published five main works in English: *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village* (vol. I in 1931 and vol. II in 1935), *Birth and Childhood among the Arabs* (1941), *Child Problems among the Arabs* (1950), and *Muslim Death and Burial: Arab Customs and Traditions Studied in a Village in Jordan* (1965).⁴

Two tendencies stand out when discussing Granqvist and her work. First, as a result of the shift in and the nature of her work, much of the discussion underlines to what extent she diverged from the Orientalist stereotype. Annelies Moors, for example, scrutinizes Granqvist's writing in *Marriage Conditions* to conclude that, notwithstanding the biblical references, Granqvist's depiction of village life in Artas is nuanced and weary of generalizations. In the end, Granqvist's work presents a "strong critique of contemporary representations of women in Palestine."⁵

Another aspect that has also attracted scholarly attention is the lack of recognition during her lifetime, particularly in Finland. These two aspects – Granqvist's discovery of the Holy Land and the belated recognition – are linked. Her decision to depart from her initial project and embark on a study of actual lives in the Holy Land led to a break with her supervisor. An advocate of the comparative method, Landtman did not consider the in-depth study of one village sufficient for approving her work. Granqvist thus turned to Westermarck, who at the time was professor

2 Hilma Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*, vol. 1 (Helsingfors: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1931), 2–3.

3 Kirsti Suolinna, "Hilma Granqvist: A Scholar of the Westermarck School in Its Decline," *Acta sociologica* 43 (2000): 317.

4 Hilma Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*, vol.1 (Helsingfors: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1931); Hilma Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*, vol. 2 (Helsingfors: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1935); Hilma Granqvist, *Birth and Childhood among the Arabs: Studies in a Muhammadan Village in Palestine* (Helsingfors: Söderström, 1947); Hilma Granqvist, *Child Problems among the Arabs: Studies in a Muhammadan Village in Palestine* (Helsingfors: Söderström, 1950); and Hilma Granqvist, *Muslim Death and Burial: Arab Customs and Traditions Studied in a Village in Jordan*, in *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum*, vol. 34, no. 1 (Helsingfors: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1965).

5 Annelies Moors, "From Travelogue to Ethnography and Back Again? Hilma Granqvist's Writings and Photographs," *Science and Video* 3 (2011): 306.

at both Åbo Akademi University and the London School of Economics. Based on Westermarck's evaluation, her dissertation was finally approved by Åbo Akademi. Westermarck continued to support Granqvist in her career, but even after publishing her second book on Artas in 1935, her application for a post as a Docent at Helsinki University was rejected.⁶

Granqvist's work was appreciated at the time by leading figures in the field of anthropology, such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Margaret Mead.⁷ Nevertheless, a combination of circumstances blocked her academic advancement within the Finnish academe. Her use of new anthropological approaches came at a time when many still clung to comparative methods. So instead of the international recognition she received translating into the career she was hoping for, Granqvist continued to work alone without an official position in Finnish academia.

No doubt, both the Finnish national and scholarly international contexts are crucial to understanding Granqvist's life and the production and reception of her work. Yet curiously, in what has been written on Granqvist, her network comes across as devoid of Palestinians, despite having spent long research stays in Palestine. Granqvist's scholarly network included not only scholars passing through Jerusalem – of whom there was no dearth – but also members of the *Palestine Oriental Society*. Founded in 1920, the society had its own publication, *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* (JPOS), and although dominated by French and German biblical scholars, it also included a number of significant Palestinian Arabs and Jews. Particularly the Palestinian Arabs of the Society were more focused on living folklore.⁸ Granqvist was not only aware of the existence of the Society, but also personally knew many of its members and their circles. In her diary she describes attending the 45th General Meeting of the Society on January 20, 1931, during her second extended stay in Palestine. There she had conversations with members of the society, among others, and remarked on “knowing a great deal of Jerusalem's inhabitants.”⁹

Among the prominent Palestinians in the Society was Taufik Canaan. Granqvist knew him both in a professional and personal capacity. Granqvist visited Canaan at his home at least twice, once in 1931 and another during her shorter trip to the West Bank in 1959.¹⁰ Canaan himself published works in English and German on cults of Muslim saints, belief in demons and spirits, and other aspects of the folklore of Arab

6 Suolinna, “Hilma Granqvist: A Scholar of the Westermarck School in Its Decline,” 319.

7 Suolinna, “Hilma Granqvist: A Scholar of the Westermarck School in Its Decline,” 322.

8 Albert Glock, “Archaeology as Cultural Survival: The Future of the Palestinian Past,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 3 (1994): 76; Salim Tamari, “Lepers, Lunatics, and Saints: The Nativist Ethnography of Tawfiq Canaan and His Jerusalem Circle,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 20 (2004): 348.

9 Hilma Granqvist, *Palestina dagbok 1930–1931/IV* (Folder 21). Hilma Granqvist Collection, Manuscript Collections, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland, January 29, 1931.

10 Granqvist, *Palestina dagbok 1930–1931/IV*, February 1, 1931; Hilma Granqvist, *Utkast til artiklar från Palestina* (Folder 8), Hilma Granqvist Collection, Manuscript Collections, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland, no date.

Palestinians.¹¹ Canaan reviewed both volumes of Granqvist's *Marriage Conditions* in the JPOS.¹² Although his review of the first volume was critical of the absence of references to the articles published on Palestinian folklore in the same journal, his second review was positive and noted the importance of the work in terms of documenting what he regarded as a culture rapidly vanishing as a result of modernization. Another contact of Granqvist's was a Palestinian folklorist and Bethlehem native by the name of Issa Massou, who received his doctoral degree from the University of London in 1963 and was meant to continue his studies in Finland on that country's folklore before a change in his plans.¹³ Granqvist kept in contact with Massou until at least 1970, and when the Jordanian Ministry of Information wrote asking for permission to translate her works into Arabic, she recommended him as a translator.¹⁴

Due to Granqvist's sensitivity to giving voice to her objects of study through her method, writing, and photographs, her work became of interest to a new generation of Palestinians; particularly after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. After the dual shocks of 1948 and 1967 and the effect they had on Palestinian society, Palestinians started reaffirming a national identity through both politics and culture. Folklore occupied a prominent place in the articulation of this identity. Two central figures in this movement took up an interest in Granqvist's work and established contacts with her. One of them was Widad Kavar, who collected and published on embroidered Palestinian costumes. Kavar sent a letter to Granqvist after 1967 asking for information as part of her ongoing research, after which the two women kept in touch.¹⁵ The other is Nimir Serhan, author of many books on folklore, including several volumes of an encyclopedia of Palestinian folklore published in 1977–1981. Serhan took up contact with Granqvist in 1969 in his capacity as representative of the Department for Culture and Arts at the Ministry of Information in Amman. He was particularly interested in the material Granqvist had collected since, according to him, it was impossible to collect similar material given the political situation and the

11 Tamari, "Lepers, Lunatics, and Saints," 348

12 T. Canaan, "Review of the book *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*, by Hilma Granqvist," *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, 12, (1932): 267–70; T. Canaan, "Review of the book *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*, vol. 2, by Hilma Granqvist," *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, 12 (1937): 300–1.

13 Hilma Granqvist, "Draft letter to the Finnish Ministry Education's Commission for International Stipends" (Folder 7). Hilma Granqvist Collection, Manuscript Collections, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland, January 4, 1967.

14 Hilma Granqvist, "Letter to Secretary Toivo Heiskanen at the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs" (Folder 15). Hilma Granqvist Collection, Manuscript Collections, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland, September 15, 1970.

15 Hilma Granqvist, "Letter to Secretary Toivo Heiskanen at the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs." Hilma Granqvist Collection, Manuscript Collections, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland, September 15, 1970.

amount of time that had passed.¹⁶ Although Granqvist was hesitant to share an archive she was still using, Serhan obtained a two-month research stipend to travel to Finland in 1970.

Granqvist was placed on the cusp of a change in ethnological research – from the evolutionist and comparative model to the functionalist one. At the same time, Granqvist was placed on the cusp of another kind of transformation, namely writing on the Holy Land. She was not only familiar with the works of, but also in professional contact with Palestinians who were beginning to rethink Palestinian folklore in nationalist terms. Because of her method, her attentiveness to detail, and her sensitivity to the voices of her interviewees, she also became valuable after 1967 for a new generation of Palestinian nationalists who were reconstituting the relationship between folklore and national identity. In 1997, Palestinian folklorist Sharif Kanaana underlined the view expressed by Serhan almost three decades earlier, on the importance of Granqvist's work in the overall project of transmitting the memory and identity of Palestine before 1948.¹⁷ Her work took form not only in relation to Finnish and international academia, but also in relation to a burgeoning field of folkloristics in Jerusalem. Whether directly or indirectly, Palestinian folklorists “rediscovered” Granqvist even before her posthumous rediscovery.

In the room created by different storyworlds about Jerusalem and the Holy Land that were competing with each other around the mid-twentieth century, Granqvist and the emerging Palestinian folklorists met intellectually. Faced with the complex reality of life in Palestine and with the lives of the men, women, and children she encountered there, Granqvist broke with the Christian code that saw even in contemporary Palestine the living proof of the bible. This came shortly before the debilitating effect on Palestinian society of the 1948 war, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the ensuing Palestinian refugee crisis. In the wake of that, Palestinian folklorists saw in Granqvist's work a fund they could draw on to build their own storyworld and to reconstitute what was now seen as a paradise lost of life before exile in pre-1948 Palestine. Between a code broken with and a storyworld in the making, Granqvist and Palestinian folklorists found a common language. It is not surprising then that her work and the memory of her persist in the village of Artas, which today houses a museum dedicated to the Swedish-Finnish ethnographer.¹⁸

¹⁶ N. Serhan, “Letter to the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs” (Folder 15). Hilma Granqvist Collection, Manuscript Collections, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland, December 20, 1969.

¹⁷ S. Kanaana, *Dirasat fi Al-Thaqafa wa-l-Turath wa-l-Hawiyya* (Ramallah: Muwatin, 2011), 174.

¹⁸ Naili, “Hilma Granqvist, Louise Baldensperger et la “Tradition de Rencontre,”” 127–38.