

Preliminary Draft¹

**Edward Westermarck, the Developmental Paradigm, Reading History
Sideways, and Family Myths**

by

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Edward Westermarck, the Developmental Paradigm, Reading History Sideways, and Family Myths

One of the most influential family scholars of the late 1800s and early 1900s was Edward Westermarck. As I suggest elsewhere (Thornton 2005a), Westermarck was an important contributor of the view that marriage had been young and universal in the Northwest European past, with age at marriage and celibacy increasing during the centuries before he wrote. This was not a new idea, as it had been promulgated nearly a century earlier by Malthus and reinforced by subsequent scholars (see Thornton 2005b). Nevertheless, Westermarck confirmed the idea that increasing civilization reduced marriage and added new ideas about marital timing and prevalence as well as marriage and family processes (also see Thornton 2005c). Most of the ideas that Westermarck formulated were discovered to be myths in the 1960s (see Thornton 2005a).

My identification of Edward Westermarck as an important creator of family myth would have greatly startled his contemporaries in the late 1800s. Westermarck published his book, The History of Human Marriage, in 1891 to challenge one of the most widely accepted beliefs about the nature of evolutionary change in human family life. At the time of the publication of Westermarck's book it was widely believed that in the distant past humans had been promiscuous, lived in group marriages, and later were universal practitioners of matriarchal family systems. It was believed that patriarchal families evolved later, with this system eventually giving way to the family structures of Western Europe in the 1800s. Westermarck argued that, even within the conceptual and methodological assumptions of the social development paradigm, the ideas of early societies having promiscuity and group marriage were misinterpretations of the ethnographic record. Westermarck's thesis was very successful, and by the middle of the 1900s these earlier ideas no longer had any significant credence in family

scholarship. Thus, during the early 1900s Westermarck was widely known as an important myth breaker.

With Westermarck's well-deserved reputation as a myth breaker, why I am presenting him as a myth maker in this paper? The reason is that the second half of Westermarck's The History of Human Marriage was devoted to such topics as "marriage and celibacy," "the courtship of man," "the means of attraction," and "the liberty of choice." In these chapters Westermarck formulated numerous propositions about the history of the timing and prevalence of marriage. As I noted earlier, he concluded that marriage had been both universal and young in the past. He argued that civilization had been bad for marriage and that age at marriage and the fraction never marrying had increased across Western history. It was only in the last half of the twentieth century that these ideas became controversial, and by that time Westermarck's role in formulating them had largely faded from the collective memory.

It is important to note that Westermarck's conclusions in The History of Human Marriage were based on a remarkable array of empirical data. In his preparation for his book he had read numerous accounts of marriage in many societies around the world and had a good understanding of cross-cultural differences in the prevalence and timing of marriage. As with Malthus before him, Westermarck documented that marriage was relatively late in Western Europe, and many Western Europeans never married. This cross-cultural information and the methodological framework of the developmental paradigm and reading history sideways provided Westermarck the intellectual tools to conclude that in the Western European past marriage had also been universal and young.

Conceptual Framework

It is important to understand that Westermarck received extensive formal training in the social developmental paradigm. As an undergraduate student in philosophy in Helsinki in the 1880s, he read the classic social developmental work of his day.² He wrote in his autobiography that his graduate studies “were, of course, to be pursued on evolutionary lines” (Westermarck 1929/1927:67).

At the time that Westermarck began his graduate studies in 1886, questions concerning the origin and history of marriage were central issues in the social sciences. Several scholars had formulated detailed schemes about how marriage originated and how it had proceeded through several stages to the marriage system of nineteenth century England. While there was much disagreement about the exact stages and their sequencing across social development, many of these scholars believed that early human heterosexual relationships were characterized by promiscuity, group marriage, and female centered families (Lubbock 1889/1870:69-161; McLennan 1886/1865; Tylor 1889:256).

Westermarck was introduced to these ideas about family history through Charles Darwin’s book, the Descent of Man. These ideas proved to be of great importance in Westermarck’s scholarly career. In his autobiography he wrote:

From Darwin’s book I discovered that several scientists held the view that primitive man lived in a state of promiscuity—in other words, that in the earliest ages of our race individual marriage relations did not exist and all men had access to all women without distinction. He himself thought that in those times the men’s jealousy would prevent such a condition, but

² Edward Westermarck was born in Helsingfors (now Helsinki), Finland in 1862 and died in 1939. He was an undergraduate student at Helsingfors from 1881 through 1886 where he took a Bachelor of Philosophy degree. In his autobiography he wrote about working assiduously at Greek and general history. He reported receiving great benefit as an undergraduate from the writing of such people as Buckle, Macaulay, Spencer, Mill, and Kidd, whose works had been translated into Swedish. He wrote an honors thesis with the title “Does Civilization increase the Happiness of Mankind”. (Westermarck, 1929/1927:27-50). The question was answered in the affirmative.

took for granted—on the ground of Morgan’s, McLennan’s, and Lubbock’s investigations—that promiscuity or something similar had at a later date, been general amongst the human race. I went to the authorities he quoted, and thus at last—at twenty-five years of age—found it necessary to learn to read an English book. In the material I collected concerning the manners and customs of different peoples, I also thought I could trace remnants of earlier promiscuity; thus I began by supporting a theory which I was to dispute later on. But I had not got far before I found that I was on the wrong track...

Thus passed the academic year 1886-87. I began to feel that something might come out of my studies. I saw clearly that I should have to write a book on the history of marriage (Westermarck 1929/1927:67-68).

The social development nature of Westermarck’s work is further attested to by the fact that Edward Tylor, a central figure in social development thought, helped to arrange publication of The History of Human Marriage. In addition, Alfred Russell Wallace, who with Charles Darwin developed the idea of natural selection so important to biological evolutionary thought, wrote the introductory note.³

Methods

Westermarck was a thoughtful and careful sociologist who paid close attention to his data and methods. He began The History of Human Marriage with a thoughtful introductory

³ Wallace introduced Westermarck and his book to English readers by saying:

I have seldom read a more thorough or a more philosophic discussion of some of the most difficult, and at the same time interesting problems of anthropology.

The origin and development of human marriage have been discussed by such eminent writers as Darwin, Spencer, Morgan, Lubbock, and many others. On some of the more important questions involved in it all these writers are in general accord, and this agreement has led to their opinion being widely accepted as if they were well-established conclusions of science. But on several of these points Mr. Westermarck has arrived at different, and sometimes diametrically opposite, conclusions, and he has done so after a most complete and painstaking investigation of all the available facts.

With such an array of authority on the one side and a hitherto unknown student on the other, it will certainly be thought that all the probabilities are against the latter. Yet I venture to anticipate that the verdict of independent thinkers will, on most of these disputed points, be in favour of the new comer who has so boldly challenged the conclusions of some of our most esteemed writers (Wallace, in Westermarck, 1894/1891: v-vi).

chapter entitled “On the Method of Investigation.” Published in 1891 at the height of the dominance of the social developmental paradigm Westermarck made a simple and straightforward statement about how he would write history from cross-sectional comparative ethnographic data. Quoting from the initial pages of The History of Human Marriage will provide useful insights into Westermarck’s goals for writing history and the comparative methods he planned to use to accomplish this goal.

It is in the firm conviction that the history of human civilization should be made an object of as scientific a treatment as the history of organic nature that I write this book...

Descriptive historiography has no higher object than that of offering materials to [the science of Sociology]. It can, however, but very inadequately fulfil this task. The written evidences of history do not reach far into antiquity. They give us information about times when the scale of civilization was already comparatively high—but scarcely anything more. As to the origin and early development of social institutions, they leave us entirely in the dark. The sociologist cannot rest content with this. But the information which historical documents are unable to afford him may be, to a great extent, obtained from ethnography.

The admirable works of Dr. Tylor, Sir John Lubbock, and Mr. Herbert Spencer have already made us familiar with the idea of a history of primitive civilization, based on ethnographical grounds. This new manner of treating history has, since the publication of their writings on the subject, gained adherents day by day. Immeasurable expanses have thus been opened to our knowledge, and many important results have been reached (Westermarck 1894/1891:1-2).

When The History of Human Marriage was rewritten for its fifth edition in 1921, social developmental thought and the comparative method for documenting history no longer had unquestioned dominance, but were under serious attack from many sides. The critics of social developmental thought and its method of reading history sideways, however, had not been able to convert Westermarck, and the revised edition began with the simple statement that “the method followed in the present work is the comparative method, which for half a century has been dominant among British students of social anthropology” (Westermarck 1922, Vol. 1:1).

Nevertheless, Westermarck gave the reader of the fifth edition a thoughtful twenty-five page discussion of the various critiques that had been made of the comparative method. Westermarck carefully examined many of the key methodological and conceptual issues of the day, including: the difficulties of determining whether similar traits in different people originated from diffusion, independent invention, or common ancestry; the problems of obtaining valid ethnographic information from unfamiliar cultures; and the weaknesses inherent in studying a cultural phenomenon detached from the whole of which it is a part. Thus, while Westermarck was quite aware of the “weaknesses and pitfalls” of the comparative method for writing history, he was also convinced that “...the many important results achieved through it bear ample testimony to its merits” (Westermarck 1922, Vol. 1:21).

In his autobiography Westermarck returned again to the issue of using comparative information for studying history. He noted again that “the comparative method has its defects,” and again provided a thoughtful summary of many of those problems. “But,” he added, “in spite of the indisputable deficiencies of the comparative method I think it has been of the greatest benefit to ethnology and cultural history. It has saved them from falling into a great number of fragments without any inherent connection. What, for example, would the study of human marriage...be if it were confined to an inquiry into their occurrence in one group of people after another, without any kind of connecting syntheses...? It is undeniable that the comparisons have spread an unexpected light over much that would otherwise have remained obscure” (Westermarck 1929/1927:299-300). The reading history sideways, or comparative, method of documenting history from cross-sectional data was clearly endorsed by Westermarck throughout his career.

Data

Westermarck traveled from Helsinki to London to do his dissertation research in the Library of the British Museum. After the completion of his dissertation, he continued his work in the museum to collect the material for his book on human marriage.⁴ He found the work in London to be very stimulating and reported being particularly impressed by a new book, the Life and Letters of Charles Darwin. He wrote that “this book was a lesson both in humility and in strict scientific method... [Darwin] pointed out that the greatest danger in science is not to be found in wrong theories but in wrong facts” (Westermarck 1929/1927:77). And with untiring energy Westermarck committed himself to getting the facts right concerning the origins and history of human marriage. He reported that his “principal occupation” in London “was my work in the Reading-Room of the British Museum.” He said that the museum “proved not only an island of bliss, where I could read undisturbed and make my notes from morn to eve, but a very temple as well” (page 79). The result of this work in the British Museum was the collection of an enormous amount of information about numerous aspects of human marriage. The original editions of his book included nearly 30 pages of bibliographical citations and that number multiplied to over 100 pages by the fifth edition.

In addition to his work at the British Museum Westermarck sent questionnaires to about 125 people living in various parts of the world. About twenty percent of these questionnaires were returned, thereby providing Westermarck additional information on non-European people (Westermarck 1929/1927:79-80; Granqvist 1968:530).

⁴ By 1889 Westermarck had finished a draft of his book and published its beginning chapters as The Origin of Human Marriage for his doctoral dissertation at the University of Helsingfors (Westermarck, 1929/1927:84). He then added more material to the book, polished its contents, and published it as The History of Human Marriage in England in 1891.

Westermarck also did a significant amount of field work in Morocco, although that followed the publication of the first edition of The History of Human Marriage. He lived there for several years and subsequently published several books about Morocco (Westermarck 1929/1927:530-531).

Finally, Westermarck also used vital statistics and census information. However, he was only able to use such information from a small number of European countries, and for the rest of the world he had to rely on ethnographic data.

Thus, by the publication of the fifth edition of The History of Human Marriage, Westermarck had accumulated a substantial amount of information about marriage in different societies around the world. For his time, he had a thorough understanding of different marriage patterns. He was also sensitive to issues of data quality and the errors that could arise from the difficulties of interpretation. In the fifth edition he clearly recognized the possibility that “many or most of [the ethnographic reports] can only be regarded as approximately accurate” (Westermarck 1922, vol. I:344-345). Nevertheless, he believed that they would be sufficient for the conclusions he was to make.

The Prevalence and Timing of Marriage

Westermarck’s comparative review of marriage in many different populations around the globe convinced him that marriage was young and universal outside of Europe. He wrote that:

As regards savage and barbarous races of men...nearly every individual strives to get married as soon as he, or she, reaches the age of puberty. Hence there are far fewer bachelors and spinsters among them than among civilized peoples...

Indeed, so indispensable does marriage seem to uncivilized man, that a person who does not marry is looked upon almost as an unnatural being, or, at any rate is disdained...

It may also be said that savages, as a rule, marry earlier in life than civilized men” (Westermarck 1894/1891:135-137).

Westermarck also concluded that age at marriage was low and the prevalence of marriage high among Slavic populations. He observed that “...among the Russian peasantry celibacy is even now unheard of” and that “when a youth reaches the age of eighteen, he is informed by his parents that he ought to marry at once” (Westermarck 1894/1891:143). In the fifth edition Westermarck also noted a young age at marriage in Serbia, Montenegro, and Albania (Westermarck 1922, vol. I:386-387).

When Westermarck shifted his attention to Western and Central Europe he found evidence of an old age at marriage and many people never marrying. This led him to his classic conclusion that “...modern civilization has proved very unfavourable to the number of marriages” (Westermarck 1894/1891:145). Elaborating on this fundamental conclusion later in The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas, Westermarck wrote that:

Modern civilization looks upon celibacy in a different light...It is said, in a general way, that marriage is a duty to the nation or the race, but this argument is hardly applied to individual cases. According to modern ideas the union between man and woman is too much a matter of sentiment to be properly classified among civic duties. Nor does the unmarried state strike us as particularly unnatural...

Nay, far from enjoining marriage as a duty incumbent upon all, enlightened opinion seems to agree that it is a duty for many people never to marry” (Westermarck 1971/1908, Vol.II:404-405).

As evidence for this conclusion Westermarck reported that in “civilized Europe” in 1875 more than a third of the men and women of marriageable ages were not married. “Excluding Russia,” he reported that “the number of celibates varied from 26 per cent in Hungary to 45 per cent in Belgium” and that “among them there are many who never marry” (Westermarck 1894/1891:145-146). He also observed that the mean age at marriage among

bachelors in England was 26 and among spinsters it was 24. In France, the numbers were even higher, 28 and 25 among bachelors and spinsters respectively.

With the passage of three decades between the first and fifth editions of The History of Human Marriage, Westermarck was able to expand considerably his statistical coverage of European marriage patterns in the latter edition. A summary of the marriage rates and average ages at marriage provided by Westermarck for several different populations at the beginning of the 1900s is provided in Table 1.

The new statistical data made it clearer than ever to Westermarck that there was a marked East-West difference in marriage patterns within Europe, with the tendency to marry being “greatest in the East of Europe” (Westermarck 1922, vol. I:392). All five of the Eastern European societies that Westermarck had empirical data for, including Serbia, Bulgaria, Russia, Rumania, and Hungary, had higher rates of marriage than did all of the Central and Western European societies, including Germany, Austria, France, England, Norway, Scotland, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, and Ireland. Furthermore, at the extremes, the differences were substantial.

As one would expect from the differentials in reported marriage rates, there were also great differences in age at marriage. Westermarck’s data showed that mean age at marriage for Serbian men was 22 and for Serbian women 20. For the six Western European countries for which Westermarck included data, mean ages at marriage ranged from 27 to 29 for men and from 24 to 26 for women. Thus, according to Westermarck’s data there was an approximately five year difference in age at marriage between Serbia and Western Europe for both women and men—a nontrivial difference by any standard of comparison.

Westermarck appeared to be particularly impressed by the low age at marriage in Russia. He noted that an extraordinarily large number of the Russian men married before age twenty and that more than half of the women married by then (Westermarck 1922, vol. I:392).

Thus, after examining a large amount of information about the prevalence and timing of marriage, Westermarck could see a very clear geographical distribution of marriage. While he, of course, noted in his detailed descriptive material important differences among the marriage patterns of non-European peoples, the important conclusion for him was that, in general, the prevalence and rapidity of marriage was lower in Europe than elsewhere. And, within Europe there were very substantial differences, with the rate and prevalence of marriage being lower in Western than in Eastern Europe.

Once Westermarck had established the general geographical distribution of the timing and prevalence of marriage, it was possible for him to use his comparative information for the purpose of making historical conclusions. As we have already seen, it was common for developmental schemes to rank societies from low to high levels of development and maturity beginning in non-European societies, moving through Eastern Europe, and ending with Western Europe. With that ordering of societies, Westermarck undoubtedly thought that he could be confident in using his geographical data to read the history of marriage prevalence and timing from East to West. As a result, he concluded that there was a general tendency for advancing civilization to be accompanied by lower marriage rates, higher age at marriage, and greater celibacy.

Although it is clear from Westermarck's introductory chapter and from his language and presentation in his publications that he was relying on the comparative method for the writing of history from cross-cultural data, he also used other types of data when they were available. One

approach was a modification of the comparative method that used cross-sectional within-country data to suggest social change. Westermarck reported that “...in country districts...marriage is generally concluded earlier in life, than in towns” (Westermarck 1894/1891:146).

Westermarck also cited evidence about “...the proportion of unmarried people...gradually increasing in Europe...and the age at which people marry has risen” (Westermarck 1894/1891:146). He also noted a recent increase in the deferment of marriage within England. Thus, Westermarck’s reading of within country cross-sectional data and the historical data he had available to him at the end of the century buttressed the conclusions that he reached using the cross-cultural material and the comparative method for documenting history.

In the 1922 edition he reported even more information supporting the view that “the proportion of unmarried people is known to have increased in various European countries and the marriage age to have risen” (Westermarck 1922, vol. I:389). He reported such longitudinal information for Hungary and England and Wales.

In a later publication Westermarck (1970/1936:153-155) reported that while marriage had been declining in England between about 1880 and 1910, it had increased after World War I. He also reported that the trend in the United States had been to a greater prevalence of marriage between 1890 and 1930. Westermarck, however, did not use this information to question his basic conclusions about the decline of marriage with civilization. Instead he opined about how rising marriage rates in England might simply be the result of changing age composition and how increasing acceptance of divorce and contraception might cause marriage to become more prevalent in the United States.

Explanations of Marriage Decline

Although it may have been possible for Westermarck to have been content with the general conclusion that civilization or development caused later and fewer marriages, he went on to suggest what dimensions of civilization were important in bringing about these trends. The consumption aspiration arguments used by Malthus, Ferguson, Senior, and Jones and discussed in my paper on Malthus and these other scholars (Thornton 2005b) played a central role in Westermarck's theorizing.

Westermarck began by mentioning the "difficulty of supporting a family in modern society" (Westermarck 1922, vol. I:390). But then he reviewed several studies suggesting that marriage increased with prosperity and introduced the concept of "...ever-increasing standard of comfort among all classes" (Westermarck 1922, vol. I:393). Westermarck suggested that consumption aspirations might increase faster than income levels with social and economic development, which would cause people to postpone and even to forego marriage.

A second potential mechanism for explaining falling marriage rates was the changing occupational structure of society. Westermarck suggested that many more people were earning their living by intellectual rather than through material work and that it took longer to become settled in the professional lines of work. While this mechanism clearly suggests the importance of increasing education, Westermarck did not mention schooling as a part of this causal mechanism.

Westermarck explained young age at marriage in Russia by the fact that the country was a land of small agriculturists. He believed that such people would arrange for the marriages of their sons at an early age in order to secure additional laborers for the farm.

Another economic explanation mentioned by Westermarck was the “...increasing economic independence of women. At the lower stages of civilisation a woman is a helpless being who depends on the support of a man, whereas modern civilisation provides her with means of earning her living by her own efforts alone” (Westermarck 1922, vol. I:393).

Westermarck also quoted the 1868 article in The Nation as saying that “by the general diffusion of education and culture, by the new inventions and discoveries of the age, by the increase of commerce and intercourse and wealth, the tastes of men and women have become widened, their desires multiplied, new gratifications and pleasures have been supplied to them. By this increase of the gratifications of existence the relative share of them which married life affords has become just so much less. The domestic circle does not fill so large a place in life as formerly. It is really less important to either man or woman. Married life has lost in some measure its advantage over a single life. There are so many pleasures, now, that can be enjoyed as well or even better in celibacy” (Westermarck 1922, vol. I:393). The Nation writer also talked about people’s standards increasing, making it less easy for them to find a satisfactory mate. There is also, he suggests, more of a sense of how sacred and serious the marital union is, which prevents people from entering marriage from any lower motives.

The Acceptance of Westermarck’s Work

The ideas formulated by Westermarck were well accepted and widely circulated. The History of Human Marriage itself was an “enormous success” (Granqvist 1968 IESS:530). It went into its second edition in 1894, just three years after its initial printing, and by 1921 five editions of the book had been issued, with the fifth edition expanded to three volumes. It was translated into several languages including French, German, Swedish, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish. A pirated version of the fifth edition was published in the United States (Westermarck

1929/1927:297). A shorter and more popular version of the book was written under the title of A Short History of Marriage (1926), and later he published a book concerning The Future of Marriage in Western Civilisation (1936). In addition to his human marriage books, Westermarck also published two large volumes on The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas (1971/1908), which also contained large amounts of information about family and marriage issues.⁵

The central core of Westermarck's views about declining marriage rates and increasing celibacy with the transformation of the West from a rural agricultural society to an urban industrial society went unchallenged for nearly three-quarters of a century. However, in 1965 John Hajnal published his seminal research concerning "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective", which persuasively challenged the long-held beliefs that in the past marriage was universal and young among Western Europeans. In a very short period of time Westermarck's ideas were being labeled myths.

Hajnal placed European marriage patterns in perspective by presenting and examining large quantities of marital status information for numerous countries for the time period around 1900 or as soon after 1900 as possible. Hajnal drew his information from census materials, and used the fraction of men and women who were still single at specific ages as his indicator of marriage timing and prevalence. A partial summary of the data Hajnal used in providing this perspective is shown in Table 2.

⁵ Westermarck was also widely sought after in academic circles. He served as professor of moral philosophy at the University of Helsingfors. He also served as the first head of Abo Academy where he was also professor of philosophy (Granqvist 1968:530). He was also the Martin White Professor of Sociology in the University of London. Many other universities in Sweden and the United States, including Harvard, Brown, Pennsylvania, Columbia, and Wisconsin, attempted to have him join their universities, but were never successful (Westermarck, 1929/1927:247-248). Finally, after his death the Westermarck Society was formed to honor his memory. This society was active for many years and published a journal entitled Transactions of the Westermarck Society (Transactions, 1947:5-6).

Hajnal began his discussion by dividing Europe into eastern and western halves with the dividing line roughly extending from Trieste to Leningrad. On the east side of the line, Hajnal identified an “Eastern European pattern” and on the west side, he identified a “European pattern”, which I will refer to here as the “Western European pattern.” The distinctive characteristics of the Western European pattern, as compared to the Eastern pattern, “...are (1) a high age at marriage and (2) a high proportion of people who never marry at all” (Hajnal, 1965: 101). Like Westermarck before him, Hajnal was very impressed at how different the Western European pattern was and wrote that “...so far as we can tell...[this pattern is] unique or almost unique in the world. There is no known example of a population of non-European civilization which has had a similar pattern” (Hajnal, 1965:101).

As Table 2 shows, the distinction between the Eastern and Western patterns is very striking. Looking first at the percentage of women still single at age 20-24, we see that in the Eastern European countries listed the highest number is 36 percent whereas the lowest number in the West is 58 percent. Smaller differences in the same direction also exist for men.

Western Europe also had a much higher prevalence of celibacy than did Eastern Europe. Whereas between 9 and 29 percent of the men and women in the Western European countries had not married by their late forties, five percent or less remained unmarried at the same age in Eastern Europe.

Turning to Africa and Asia, Hajnal drew the same conclusions about marriage outside of Europe that Westermarck had drawn using ethnographic data. These countries, wrote Hajnal, “...are like Eastern Europe, or more so. Percentages single are very low by [Western] European standards, at least for women; in the age group 20-24 there are often fewer than 20 percent

single. Very few women remain single throughout life (not infrequently 2 per cent or less) and for a man to remain a bachelor is not much more common” (Hajnal, 1965:104).

In comparing Hajnal’s and Westermarck’s descriptions of the geographical distribution of marriage patterns between European and non European populations and within Europe itself, one has to be impressed with the striking similarities between their findings, even though there may be differences concerning the details. Instead of Hajnal’s data contradicting those of Westermarck’s, they confirm them. The fact that Hajnal’s better data are generally consistent with Westermarck’s provides support for Westermarck’s assumption that the data were good enough to accomplish his purposes. Additional research has also provided only modest clarification of the general outline of the geographical distribution of marriage timing and prevalence provided by both Westermarck and Hajnal (Sklar, 1974; McDonald, 1985; Jones, 1981; Dixon, 1978; Coale, et al., 1979; D. Smith, 1980). Even Westermarck’s fascination with young and universal marriage in Russia has subsequently been shown to be rooted in reality. Czap, reporting his research in one area of Russia, wrote that when “viewed in a European context, [Russia] represents an extreme case, with certain peculiar features which warrant special attention” (Czap, 1983:118-119). It should be noted, however, that neither Westermarck nor Hajnal were interested in exploring in detail the differentials in marriage within the broad range of countries outside of Europe, and subsequent research has demonstrated rather considerable variations in marital patterns within their non-European category (P. Smith, 1980; D. Smith, 1980; Durch, 1980).

Thus, the contribution of Hajnal’s very important paper needs to be put in historical perspective. Hajnal was not the first to recognize that Western European populations had a different marriage system from societies outside of Europe—Malthus appreciated that difference

at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Thornton 2005b). Hajnal was also not the first to discover the East-West distinction within Europe as that was well understood by Westermarck at the end of the nineteenth century.

So how and where did Hajnal part company with Malthus and Westermarck and what was his unique contribution to understanding the history of marriage? Whereas Malthus and Westermarck had used comparative cross-sectional data to read history sideways, Hajnal eschewed that approach. Instead, Hajnal went backwards in time in Western Europe to discover what the historical rather than the comparative record had to say about the European past. This crucial decision was undoubtedly influenced both by social developmental approaches becoming less popular and by the intense interest scholars had after World War II in pursuing social change through the historical record. In addition, Hajnal had an important historical advantage writing in the early 1960s, approximately three-quarters of a century after Westermarck. He had lived through and documented the very important marriage boom which occurred in many Western populations after World War II (Hajnal, 1953). The fact that the postwar marriage boom went in the opposite direction predicted by earlier thought would contradict any ideas of “civilization being bad for marriage.”⁶

Thinking self-consciously about his methodology, Hajnal said that “if the [Western] European marriage pattern is unique, it is natural to ask, ‘when did it arise?’” “Curiously enough,” he continued, “this question seems scarcely to have been asked, let alone adequately answered. The suggestion has occasionally been made that late marriage is characteristic of urban-industrial societies while agricultural countries have early marriage. The suggestion is certainly unfounded. Eighteenth-century Scandinavia can hardly be described as urban or

⁶ Hajnal’s 1965 article also discusses the changes wrought by the marriage boom. Also see Watkins (1986) and Goode (1970/1963). Interestingly enough, the historical research Hajnal reported in his 1965 paper revealed that the marriage boom following World War II may have been the biggest recorded change in Western marriage up to that time.

industrialized.” Hajnal went on to suggest that “the question about the origins of the specifically [Western] European marriage pattern ought to be answered by historians well versed in Europe’s economic and social history back into the Middle Ages...” (Hajnal 1965:106).

Pleasantly demurring about his credentials, Hajnal plunged into the task. The result was an extensive and detailed account of marriage prevalence and timing in the European past that rivaled Westermarck’s detailed cross-cultural account.

Hajnal’s primary conclusion was impressively straightforward: “the distinctively [Western] European pattern can be traced back with fair confidence as far as the seventeenth century in the general population” (Hajnal, 1965:134). While Hajnal believed that he detected signs of a non-Western pattern in the middle ages and perhaps a transition in the upper classes in the sixteenth century, the pattern of late marriage and high celibacy was very old in Western Europe—certainly too old to fit with Westermarck’s ideas and too old to be explained by such events as the industrial revolution. With that, the idea of universal young age at marriage in the Western past faded into mythology.

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TABLE 1**Marriage Rates and Average Ages at Marriages Reported by Westermarck**

	<u>Marriage Rate</u>	<u>Average age at Marriage</u>	
		<u>Bachelors</u>	<u>Spinsters</u>
Serbia	1386	21.8	19.7
Bulgaria	1223		
Russia	921		
Rumania	873		
Hungary	778		
Germany	569	27.4	24.7
France	539	28.0	23.7
Austria	536		
England	507	27.4	25.7
Norway	418		
Scotland	411	27.8	25.8
Finland	398		
Sweden	367	28.8	26.4
Iceland	335		
Ireland	254		
Italy	—	27.2	23.6

The marriage rate is defined by Westermarck as the “annual number of marriages per 10,000 marriageable persons, that is, males 18 years of age or over and females 15 years or over who are either single, widowed, or divorced.” Data are for various years ranging from 1896 through 1915. The marriage rate reported for England also includes Wales, whereas the average ages at marriage are for England only.

Source: Westermarck, 1922, vol. 1: 389.

TABLE 2
The Percentage of Population Single by Age,
Gender and Country as Reported by Hajnal^a

	<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>	
	<u>20-24</u>	<u>45-49</u>	<u>20-24</u>	<u>45-49</u>
A. <u>Eastern Europe</u>				
Serbia	50	3	16	1
Bulgaria	58	3	24	1
U.S.S.R.	51	3	28	4
Romania	67	5	20	3
Hungary	81	5	36	4
B. <u>Western Europe</u>				
Germany	91	9	71	10
France	90	11	58	12
Austria	93	11	66	13
Great Britain	83	12	73	15
Norway	86	11	77	18
Finland	84	14	68	15
Sweden	92	13	80	19
Iceland	92	19	81	29
Ireland	96	20	86	17
Italy	86	11	60	11
C. <u>Africa and Asia</u>				
Morocco (Muslims)	59	2	8	2
Egypt	69	2	20	1
Mozambique	54	4	17	3
Mauritius	72	5	24	5
Turkey	49	3	18	3
India	35	4	5	1
Thailand	61	4	30	3
Korea	33	1	2	0
Japan	71	2	31	2

^a The data for Europe are from censuses conducted between 1891 and 1926, and the data for Africa and Asia are from censuses conducted between 1920 and 1952. See Hajnal (1965) for more details.

Source: Hajnal (1965)