

Marriage

Many cultures have legends concerning the origins of marriage. The way in which a marriage is conducted and its rules and ramifications have changed over time, as has the institution itself, depending on the culture or demographic of the time.

The first recorded evidence of marriage ceremonies uniting a man and a woman dates back to approximately 2350 BC, in ancient Mesopotamia. Wedding ceremonies, as well as dowry and divorce, can be traced back to Mesopotamia and Babylonia. According to ancient Hebrew tradition, a wife was seen as being property of high value and was, therefore, usually, carefully looked after.

Early nomadic communities in the Middle East practiced a form of marriage known as *beena*, in which a wife would own a tent of her own, within which she retained complete independence from her husband; this principle appears to survive in parts of early Israelite society, as some early passages of the Bible appear to portray certain wives as each owning a tent as a personal possession (specifically, Jael, Sarah, and Jacob's wives).

In ancient Greece, no specific civil ceremony was required—only mutual agreement and the fact that the couple must regard each other as husband and wife accordingly. Men usually married when they were in their 20s and women in their teens. It has been suggested that these ages made sense for the Greeks because men were generally done with military service or financially established by their late 20s, and marrying a teenage girl ensured ample time for her to bear children, as life expectancies were significantly lower.

In Europe, from the early Christian era (30 to 325 AD), marriage was thought of as primarily a private matter, with no uniform religious or other ceremony being required. However, bishop Ignatius of Antioch writing around 110 to bishop Polycarp of Smyrna exhorts, "It becomes both men and women who marry, to form their union with the approval of the bishop, that their marriage may be according to God, and not after their own lust."

In 12th-century Europe, women took the surname of their husbands and starting in the second half of the 16th century parental consent along with the church's consent was required for marriage. With few local exceptions, until 1545, Christian marriages in Europe were by mutual consent, declaration of intention to marry and upon the subsequent physical union of the parties. The couple would promise verbally to each other that they would be married to each other; the presence of a priest or witnesses was not required. This promise was known as the "verbum." If freely given and made in the present tense (e.g., "I marry you"), it was unquestionably binding; if made in the future tense ("I will marry you"), it would constitute a betrothal.

One of the functions of churches from the Middle Ages was to register marriages, which was not obligatory. There was no state involvement in marriage and personal status, with these issues being adjudicated in ecclesiastical courts. During the Middle Ages, marriages were arranged, sometimes as early as birth, and these early pledges to marry were often used to ensure treaties between different royal families, no-



bles, and heirs of fiefdoms. The Church resisted these imposed unions, and increased the number of causes for nullification of these arrangements. As Christianity spread during the Roman period and the Middle Ages, the idea of free choice in selecting marriage partners increased and spread with it.

The average age of marriage for most of Northwestern Europe from 1500 to 1800 was around 25; as the Church dictated that both parties had to be at least 21 years of age to marry without the consent of their parents, the bride and groom were roughly the same age, with most brides in their early twenties and most grooms two or three years older, and a substantial number of women married for the first time in their thirties and forties, particularly in urban areas, with the average age at first marriage rising and falling as circumstances dictated. In better times, more people could afford to marry earlier and thus fertility rose and conversely marriages were delayed or forgone when times were bad, thus restricting family size; after the Black Death, the greater availability of profitable jobs allowed more people to marry young and have more children, but the stabilization of the population in the 16th century meant fewer job opportunities and thus more people delaying marriages. The age of marriage was not absolute, however, as child marriages occurred throughout the Middle Ages and later.

Since the late twentieth century, major social changes in Western countries have led to changes in the demographics of marriage, with the age of first marriage increasing, fewer people marrying, and more couples choosing to cohabit rather than marry. For example, the number of marriages in Europe decreased by 30% from 1975 to 2005. As of 2000, the average marriage age range was 25–44 years for men and 22–39 years for women. [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage#History>]

The longest marriage recorded (although not officially recognized) is an emerald wedding anniversary (90 years) between Karam and Kartari Chand, who both lived in the United Kingdom, but were married in India. Karam and Kartari Chand married in 1925 and died in 2016 and 2019 respectively. On the other hand...A couple in Kuwait reportedly got divorced after just three minutes in Kuwait in January 2019, in what is believed to be the shortest marriage on record.

Within the hobby, marriage is represented by Wedding/Anniversary covers. Donna Longenecker, PA, reported having 11,458 as of December 2020.

