Preface

Marriage Customs of the World: An Encyclopedia of Dating Customs and Wedding Traditions contains over 340 alphabetically arranged entries on both historical and contemporary customs, traditions, and practices surrounding courtship and marriage in many cultures, countries, and societies around the world. In this encyclopedia, the major customs, traditions, and marriage practices covered will assist readers in understanding contemporary marriage practice. Almost 200 entries in these two volumes were drawn from the first edition of this work, Marriage Customs of the World: From Henna to Honeymoons (2004) and have been thoroughly updated and revised. Almost 150 new entries have been added to this edition to expand its global coverage and provide more current and detailed information on how marriage is viewed and practiced by different groups and peoples. The entries have been built from different accounts and descriptions of customs and practices from a number of sources. The entries demonstrate aspects of the concept of continuity and change in tradition and performance, allowing readers to see a continuation of the reason for a tradition at the same time that the performance is being updated. Averaging about 1,000 words in length, most entries include cross-references to related entries in a “See also” line at the end of the text, and all entries conclude with a list of additional print or electronic resources on the topic.

Written for high school students, undergraduate college students, and other interested nonspecialists, Marriage Customs of the World is an excellent resource for classroom papers or reports, or for finding or confirming basic facts on any aspect of marriage practice or tradition from around the globe. It is also a useful resource for public library patrons or others who simply want to know more about the history and development of current marriage practices and customs in their own culture or in other cultures and countries.

Marriage Customs of the World includes an Introduction that offers a general discussion of the practice of marriage and a Guide to Related Topics that breaks the entries down into broad categories that will allow readers to quickly trace broad topics or themes across the entries. The general bibliography also supplements the entry bibliographies by providing quick access to the most important general information resources available on the topic of marriage. A detailed subject index provides ready access to names, terms, and concepts mentioned in the entries that do not have separate entries of their own.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has helped and encouraged me in the preparation of this book with information and advice, particularly the editors and readers at ABC-CLIO, my good friend the late Jennifer Westwood, and last, but not least, my wife Eileen.

(c) 2013 ABC-Clio. All Rights Reserved.
ABDUCTION, MARRIAGE BY

Marriage by abduction was a theory suggested by some nineteenth-century anthropologists, notably John F. McLennan (1865). Others have considered this to be a rare form of marriage, and some have even doubted that it ever occurred as a widespread and valid marriage form.

In the Hindu Laws of Manu, of eight forms of marriage recognized, four are considered blessed, and the other four are condemned as “blamable” unions. One of these is known as rākshasa, a union by forcible abduction of a maiden from her home, either by stealth or by breaking into her house and slaying or wounding her kinsmen. There are some cases in Britain that appear to have been genuine cases of abduction. Abduction, especially of heiresses, was a problem in Britain. Legislation was enacted to prevent the practice. A statute of 1487 (at the time of Henry VII) ranked abduction as a felony, and an Elizabethan act of 1596 denied those found guilty of abduction the benefit of clergy. There were some high-profile cases of abduction, such as that of the daughter of Sir Thomas Puckeringe, Jane, who was abducted in 1649 by a group of mounted men led by one Joseph Walsh whilst walking with her maid in Greenwich Park, London. She was carried off to Dunkirk and then to a religious house at Nieuport, Flanders, at that time under Spanish rule. Although steps were taken immediately to secure the release of Jane Puckeringe, it was not until some eight years later that this was achieved. Joseph Walsh and his associates were apprehended, handed over to the British authorities, and indicted for a felony.

Another case that occurred in the early nineteenth century involved an elaborate plot to abduct and marry a 16-year-old heiress, Ellen Turner. The plot was hatched by one Edward Gibbon Wakefield and his brother, William. A note was sent to the girl at school in Liverpool saying that her mother was ill in London and that she was to accompany the servant, who delivered the letter in the carriage provided by the physician attending her mother. At a carriage stop in Manchester, she was persuaded to accompany Edward and William Wakefield to Carlisle to meet her father. They drove through Gretna Green, where Edward was married to Ellen. After the marriage, the couple traveled south at considerable speed to catch a boat to cross the English Channel to Calais. The headmistress at Ellen’s school became suspicious and went to Ellen’s family home. Realizing that the school had been duped, the school authorities set the law onto William, who was apprehended in Calais and brought back to England. The bride was returned to her parents, and the marriage, which had not been consummated, was annulled by act of Parliament. The Wakefield brothers were imprisoned for three years by the Lancaster Spring
Assizes in March 1827 for conspiracy. There are occasional contemporary accounts of abduction of women for marriage. For instance, in 1995 in China, where there is a shortage of marriageable women, due to the government policy of allowing only one child per family and the cultural imperative for that child to be a boy, 200 women, who had been abducted and sold as wives to farmers, were rescued in one province.

In the Chechen Republic, abduction or kidnapping a woman from the street and holding her for subsequent marriage is still practiced as a continuation of a cultural tradition that confers a national identity to a people who have been subjugated by other nationalities for many years.

It is doubtful that there can be a true marriage by capture. Forcible abduction and the subsequent unwilling consummation would be rape and the relationship at best more like concubinage. Apart from the Laws of Manu, the major examples to support the concept of marriage by abduction or capture are practices where there is an outward sign of resistance on the part of the bride to going with the groom so that there may be a ritualized battle between the groom and his followers and the bride’s attendants. Plutarch (a Greco-Roman writer and historian from about 90 CE) wrote of the Spartans that the bride might have been carried off by force, and there might have been some violence, but the abduction was planned by the couple. Similarly, some form of reluctance and force on behalf of the bride and of the groom, respectively, has often been noted among the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Burckhardt (1831) noted that, among the Bedouins and Wahabys a young woman returning with the cattle in the evening might be met and abducted by her future spouse and his supporters, and carried to her father’s tent. She might defend herself with sticks and stones; the more she fought, struggled, and hit her assailants, the more her peers applauded her. A common practice in Gypsy marriage is for the couple to elope, which could be interpreted as deriving from capture or abduction. However, in this, as in most recorded marriage practices where there is an apparent abduction or some form of mock battle or contest between the supporters of the bride and those of the groom, the event is prearranged and the marriage agreed to by the bride and groom. It is probably means for the bride to show modesty as well as reluctance to lose her virginity and to leave her family and friends. In eighteenth-century Connecticut, it was the practice for a group of young men to abduct the bride immediately after the wedding and take her to a country tavern. The bridegroom and his supporters would ride after the abductors and gain the release of his bride by providing them with a meal. This apparently happened in 1783 in Hadley to a Mrs. Job Marsh. Alice Morse Earl, writing on the customs of New England in 1893, noted that even then in parts of Rhode Island, the young men would break down the door of the bridal chamber and abduct the bride, forcing the young husband to rescue her. During the wedding reception in modern Russia, the groom’s friends abduct the bride and extract a ransom from him for her return.

See also Bed, Marriage; Capture, Marriage by; Concubine; Consummation; France; Gretna Green
References

ABORIGINES (AUSTRALIAN)
Western writers have written that there seems to have been little, if any, ceremony in the aboriginal method of marrying. Westermarck (1894) wrote: “In Australia, wedding ceremonies are unknown in most tribes, but it is said that in some there are a few unimportant ones” (418). The Kaurna aboriginal group from South Australia provides a model of Australian aboriginal society and mores, and demonstrates that Westermarck’s preceding remarks were simplistic. They were based on a misunderstanding of the society and were written from a European viewpoint. Observers viewed the practices of Aborigines from the viewpoint of nineteenth-century white Christian morality. Westermarck (1894) also quoted Fison and Howitt, writing of the South Australian group in 1880, who said that marriages were brought about “most frequently by elopement, less frequently by captures, and least frequently by exchange or by gift” (388).

The organization of Kaurna society involved independent family groups working and traveling a specified territory known as a *pangkarra*; these territories were grouped into larger units called *yerta*—meaning earth, land, or country and derived from words meaning earth and mouth—so that the overriding concept portrayed by the term is one of an area that can sustain the group. Of great importance to the study of marriage customs are the differing moral views of sex and sexual relations. In Kaurna society, marriage was not seen as a barrier to sexual relations, and sexual intercourse with a member of the family group was offered as a part of hospitality. Adultery was not a concept recognized or understood by the Kaurna, and indeed it was common for a woman to have sexual relations with a number of men with the full approval and encouragement of her spouse. To the British settlers, this exemplified the low moral standards of the Aborigines. In 1819, the assistant chaplain in New South Wales wrote in a letter to the secretary of the New Zealand Mission that the natives were “the most degraded of the human race. . . . as they increase in years, they increase in vice” (Woerlee 2003). Other Christian ministers in Australia writing to friends were no less denigrating. Well into the late nineteenth century, the Aborigines were portrayed as brutal savages. An anonymous writer in the *Chambers Journal* of October 22, 1864, described the ways of the Aborigines:

In nothing is the brutality of their nature more clearly shown than in their treatment of females. Among them, women are considered as an inferior class, and are used almost as beasts of burden. . . . Courtship, as the precursor to marriage, is unknown among