



The Prophet Muhammad's (s) marriage to the young 'Āisha

The marriage of the Prophet Muhammad to Aishah bint Abu Bakr when she was at a young age has been the focus of intense criticism in the West. Islamaphobes claim that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a paedophile, and that Islamic Law (Sharee'ah), condones paedophilia by allowing marriage to children.

Aishah was the daughter of Abu Bakr, one of the Prophet's closest friends and devoted followers. Abu Bakr was one of the earliest converts to Islam and hoped to solidify the deep love that existed between himself and the Prophet by uniting their families in marriage. The Prophet's marriage to Aishah was an exceedingly happy one for both parties, as she often attested during his life, and after his death.

The marriage of Aishah at a young age is not unique to Islam. As we shall prove in this leaflet, Jewish Law sets the minimum age of marriage at three years of age, whereas Christian Law asserts that the absolute minimum age of marriage is seven years old.

Historically, the age at which a girl was considered ready to be married has been puberty. Puberty as a biological sign shows that a woman is capable of bearing children. Christians from a very early time criticized the Prophet's practice of polygamy, but *not* the marriage to Aishah, since according to them, nothing immoral took place. It is "modern" Westernized Christians who began to criticize Muhammad on this point, not earlier "pre-Enlightenment" ones.

In this leaflet we will cite the Jewish and Christian Law and establish the historical proof that Jews and Christians routinely married their daughters off at an extremely young age—*younger* than Aisha. We shall then shift our focus to the rest of the world, proving that marriage at such a young age was something considered normal in all ancient civilizations.

Jewish Marriage Practices

The Jewish website, Jewfaq.org, says: The minimum age for marriage under Jewish law is 13 for boys, 12 for girls; however, the betrothal can take place before that, and often did in medieval times. (JewFaq.org, <http://www.jewfaq.org/marriage.htm>) Also a man who marries off his sons and daughters near the period of puberty will receive the scriptural blessing: "you shall know that your tent is in peace" (Job 5:24), 101 evidently understood to mean that if one's children were married, they would not succumb to sexual temptation" (Biale, 1997: p49-50)

Rabbi Naftali Silberberg states: "...In ancient (and not so ancient) times however, marriage was often-times celebrated at a rather young age. Although we do not follow this dictum, technically speaking, a girl may be engaged the moment she is born, and married at the age of three. [Shulchan Aruch, Even Haezer 37:1.] A boy may betroth and marry at the age of thirteen. [ibid 43:1] (<http://www.askmoses.com/article.html?h=573&o=2488>)

Mark E. Pietrzyk states: According to the Talmud, the recommended age for marriage is sometime after twelve for females, and thirteen for males. ... However, a father was allowed to betroth his daughter to another man at an earlier age, and sexual intercourse was regarded as a valid means of sealing an engagement. According to the Talmud, "A girl of the age of three years and one day may be engaged by intercourse." (http://www.internationalorder.org/scandal_response.html)

The minimum age for marriage according to the Christian law?

Although twelve was the general guideline, Christian fathers were allowed to marry their daughters off even before that. We read: "Medieval Christianity continued to maintain the age of twelve as a minimal age for females to enter into marriage. However, even this low age limit was not absolute. Using natural law logic, Catholic authorities argued that the decisive factor which determined a child's readiness for marriage and sexual relations was the onset of puberty, and not necessarily age as such." (Mark E. Pietrzyk, http://www.internationalorder.org/scandal_response.html)

Age of Consent: A Historical Overview

Age of Consent throughout history has usually coincided with the age of puberty; sometimes it has been as early as seven. The Roman tradition served as the base for Christian Europe which, based upon biological development, set it at 12 or 14 but continued to set the absolute minimum at seven. In the past century, the age of consent has been raised, but the reasons for the change are not clear. The issue has been further complicated by the reluctance of many contemporary historians to recognize what the actual age of consent was in the past. This failure has distorted the importance of biology on age of consent in the past. (Age of Consent: A Historical Overview, <http://www.haworthpress.com/store/ArticleAbstract.asp?sid=XH16E3FKBF7Q9P3MKLPC82LUJNKC41U5&ID=87429>)

The table below shows the age limit in *Age of Consent Laws* in selected countries.

	1880	1920	2007
Denmark	12	12	15
England & Wales	13	16	16
France	13	13	15
Portugal	12	12	14
Russia	10	14	16
Scotland	12	12	16
Spain	12	12	13
Canada	12	14	14
United States			
Alabama	10	16	16
Arkansas	10	16	16
Connecticut	10	16	16
Delaware	7	16	16
Georgia	10	14	16

"Age of Consent Laws [Table]," in Children and Youth in History, Item #24, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/primary-sources/24>

In England, in the 1880's one could marry a girl aged 12. In Delaware, USA, the age was seven! So to solely focus on the Prophet Muhammad and to ignore European practices is pure dishonesty. Remember, throughout many cultures and civilisations: Puberty = Maturity = Marriage. The criticism of Muhammad's marriage to Aishah is something relatively new, in that it grew up out of the values of "Post Enlightenment" Europe. This was a Europe that had abandoned its religious morality for a new set of values where people used their own opinions to determine what was right and wrong. Schools still teach the classic Shakespeare text, Romeo and Juliet. In this story we read that Juliet's father as saying: My child is yet a stranger in the world. She hath not seen the change of fourteen years" (Act 1.Scene 2) i.e. Juliet was only 13 years old in the story.

Marrying girls at a young age – examples from Europe.

1. King Richard II, at the age of thirty, married a seven years old French princess Isabella (royalcentral.co.uk/interests/history/isabella-of-valois-the-child-bride-of-richard-ii-52048)
2. King Baldwin III married Theodora Comnena when she was thirteen. (womenofhistory.blogspot.com/2008/06/theodora-comnena.html)
3. Edward I married the ten year old Eleanor of Castile. (britishheritage.com/history/edward-i-romantic-royal)
4. Prince Edward of Wales married the French king's daughter, Isabella, who was twelve years old. (bl.uk/collection-items/the-wedding-of-king-edward-ii-and-isabella-of-france)

We have firmly established the fact that marriage at or around puberty was the norm amongst ancient civilizations. The Prophet Muhammad's marriage to Aishah, viewed both in the light of *absolute morality* (i.e. God's law) and in light of the cultural norms of his time, was not an immoral act. His enemies never would hesitate to criticize or attack him. Yet no one from the society at that

time criticized this marriage due to Aishah's young age. Is it not justice that we judge him by the standard of his time and not the cultural norms of today? In any case, such a marriage is valid according to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law. As such, there is no issue.