

## Should I Remove My Kippah?

### A Jewish Perspective of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

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#### *Background*

On Shabbat I worship at Beit Hallel, a messianic congregation in Tacoma. As one of the teachers in this congregation, I field questions and concerns, especially from those who regularly visit our services or festival celebrations. Usually the questions of on-lookers have to do with Judaism in general, and the matters of the Torah in specific. It is not uncommon, however, to be asked about Paul's instructions in 1 Cor 11 and how we justify men wearing *Kippot* or *Yarmulkes* (the Yiddish equivalent).

Recently I was asked to listen to a message delivered by a popular radio preacher who was teaching a series on 1 Corinthians. What troubled the person who suggested I listen was the manner in which this radio teacher belittled Jewish men for wearing "beanies" on their heads when they came into a synagogue. (He informed the people that the word "they" use for these "beanies" is too difficult to pronounce.) He went on to teach his listeners that Jewish men wear something on their heads as a sign of shame and guilt, which is why Paul, in 1 Cor 11, commands the Christian men not to wear anything on their heads—they've been forgiven by the blood of Christ. Obviously, anyone believing what this teacher said and then visiting Beit Hallel would be either very confused or very put-out, because "beanies" abound!

Aside from the somewhat off-handed mannerisms of this radio preacher, the fact remains that if Paul commands men not to wear anything on their heads when praying or prophesying, then Jewish or not, those who follow Yeshua as Messiah should follow the *halakah* of His apostle. The issue is, does Paul, in fact, prohibit a man from wearing anything on his head when he prays in the assembly?

A number of questions immediately arose in my mind. (1) Was the Corinthian congregation exclusively Gentile, or was there a Jewish constituency in the believing community? If there were a strong Jewish segment of the Corinthian congregation, was it a 1st Century practice for men to cover their heads in the place of worship, or was this only a later custom? What about the tallit (prayer shawl)? Was it customary in the 1st Century to put the tallit over the head while praying? (2) If Paul is prohibiting a man from wearing anything on his head while worshipping in prayer or prophecy, what about the priests who wear hats when they minister in the Temple? And, if the priests wear hats as instructed by God Himself, how could an argument from the creative order of male and female be used to ban headgear for men? (3) What is the terminology for "veil" or "covering"? Why is Paul concerned about a woman's hair if he expects it to be covered? Why does he end the argument by stating that a woman's hair is given to her for (*ἀντί*, instead of?) a covering if all along he has commanded the woman to wear a covering?

1. Was the Corinthian congregation primarily made up of Gentiles or was there a significant Jewish element within the congregation?

The question of whether or not there was a Jewish constituency in the Corinthian congregation is an important question for a number of reasons. First, a Jewish presence in the assembly would automatically mean that Jewish questions would be raised in any halachic discussion. The subject of 1 Cor 11 would certainly fall in this category. Secondly, one would presume that at least some Jews (and probably most) from the community would make trips to Jerusalem for festivals and other important days, strengthening the ties with the Temple and the functioning priesthood there. Finally, Paul's view of the Torah is that it is God's eternal instruction for His people (Acts 21:24; Romans 2:13; 7:12; 1Cor 7:19). If the Torah prescribed head gear for the priests, it could hardly be reasoned that men wearing something on their heads was fundamentally wrong. What is more, the long traditions of the Jewish community could hardly be overlooked in the Apostolic halachah if these traditions did not violate Torah and the Gospel it carried.

The history of Corinth and her population is not completely clear. Philo, in mentioning Corinth by name, might well imply a strong Jewish population there.<sup>1</sup> Acts 18:2 might indicate that Jews fled to Corinth when Tiberius expelled them from Rome in 19 C.E. We know that a synagogue existed in Corinth (Acts 18:4) and a lintel from a synagogue doorway has been recovered.<sup>2</sup>

Bauer had suggested that the division in the Corinthian congregation was between Jewish and Gentile factions, but this view was mostly abandoned in subsequent years for a theory that the opponents comprised some form of early Gnosticism. Schmithals suggested that they were Jewish Christian Gnostics.<sup>3</sup>

We know that there were non-Jews in the Corinthian congregation, for their idol-worshipping days are referred to (1 Cor 12:2). Likewise, it seems highly unlikely that Paul would spend the amount of time he does (1 Cor 8-10) on a discussion of meat offered to idols if the group he was writing to were primarily Jewish. Yet there is every indication that a Jewish population was also extant in the congregation at Corinth. Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, was one of the recognized teachers. Likewise, Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish couple according to Acts 18:2, arrived at Corinth shortly before Paul's visit. Moreover, the epistle is full of language and themes which parallel the Judaism of Paul's day. The Torah is appealed to in supportive ways,<sup>4</sup> the use of

<sup>1</sup> Legatio ad Caium xxxv1.281. See comments of J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Corinth" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., (Doubleday, 1992), 1:1138.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, (London, 1927) p. 16, n.7; G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Phil, 1957), p. 261. (Wright does not consider it to be from the 1st century synagogue in which Paul taught.) The inscription on the lintel reads [ΣΥΝΑΓΩΓΗ ΕΒΡΑΙΩΝ]. ,

<sup>3</sup> Die Gnosis in Korinth. Eine Untersuchung zu den Korintherbriefen (1956); noted in Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (InterVarsity, 1973), p. 422.

<sup>4</sup> as upholding Paul's right to be sustained by the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:8); as requiring order in the church (1 Cor 14:12); as requiring silence of women in specific circumstances (1 Cor 14:34).

“tradition” as a binding aspect is appealed to,<sup>5</sup> and halachic decisions given to the Corinthians parallel Jewish halachot of Paul's day.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, Tomson<sup>7</sup> has shown that the epistle contains a great deal of Jewish traditional law and that in many instances Paul is establishing halachah for the believing community after the pattern of Jewish halachah. Paul appears to quote Ben Sira (Sir 37:28) in the twice repeated “all things are lawful, but not all things edify”,<sup>8</sup> a work which enjoyed wide rabbinic discussion.

The text itself also suggests the presence of a Jewish segment in the Corinthian congregation. Note the following:

- 1:23,24 Paul preaches gospel to Jews and Gentiles
- 5:7ff Remove leaven; celebrate the feast; Messiah is our Passover (16:8, Paul going to Shavuot Feast)
- 7:18f If circumcised, remain so; if uncircumcised, remain so
- 10:32 “give no offense either to Jew or to Greek or to the congregation of God”
- 12:13 “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks”

### *Summary*

It appears most likely that there was, in fact, a strong Jewish presence in the congregation at Corinth and from this we ought to conclude that Paul would have taken this into account as he structured the halachah of worship for the assembly.

2. *What was the common practice of Jewish men in 1st Century synagogue worship? Was it traditional to cover the head with some kind of hat or with the tallit (prayer shawl)?*

Once we have accepted the fact that there was a Jewish constituency in the congregation at Corinth, it seems logical to ask whether or not the men would have covered their heads in worship as a matter of their Jewish tradition.

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<sup>5</sup> 11:2; 15:3; cf. 7:10; 9:14; 11:23; 14:37.

<sup>6</sup> cf. D. Daube, “Pauline Contributions to a Pluralistic Culture” in *Jesus and Man's Hope*, D. G. Miller & D. Y. Hadidian, eds. (Pittsburgh, 1971) in which he shows that 1 Cor 7:12-16 is nothing more than a reworked section of what became the Mishnah.

<sup>7</sup> Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law in Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* (Van Gorcum/ Fortress, 1990), 73-86.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

We may begin by reminding ourselves that the priests in the Temple were required to wear a turban of cloth on their heads<sup>9</sup> the High Priest having an additional golden plate, called קָצֶצֶת (“ornament?”)<sup>10</sup> and described as כִּיָּוֶה, (“crown”)<sup>11</sup> attached to the band of the miter with a cord of *techelet*. Obviously, these priestly garments were in use during the 2nd Temple period.<sup>12</sup> On this fact alone it seems incredible that Paul would argue on the basis of creative order that men wearing something on their heads while engaging in worship are doing something dishonorable.<sup>13</sup> Murphy-O'Connor agrees:

Since Paul grew up in a tradition where priests prayed with turbans on their heads, it is impossible to imagine him being disturbed to the extent indicated by the emotional tone of this passage simply because a man prayed with something on his head.<sup>14</sup>

The *tallit* or prayer shawl has its roots in antiquity, though most likely the four-cornered garment to which the *tzitzit* (תְּצִיִּצִית)<sup>15</sup> were attached was simply the common outer garment worn by men in the ancient Near East. The commandment of Num 15:37-41 and Deut 22:12 instructed Israel that tassels or *tzitzit* were to be worn on the four-corners of the garment. It was common in ancient societies for men to wear the outer garment wrapped around the body with the access thrown over the left shoulder.<sup>16</sup> On the “Black Obelisk” of Shalmaneser III (858-824 BCE), Jehu king of Israel is shown wearing a fringed outer garment with tassels on a section thrown over the shoulder.<sup>17</sup> Oesterley<sup>18</sup> suggests that the “hem” of Yeshua’s garment that the woman

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<sup>9</sup> Ex 28:4, 39; 39:28; Lev 16:4.

<sup>10</sup> Ex 28:36.

<sup>11</sup> Ex 29:6.

<sup>12</sup> Josephus, himself a priest, describes the priestly garments of the 2nd Temple in detail, and includes the turban, *Antiq.* 3.153, 156, 157. Note the fine discussion in E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE* (Trinity Press International, 1992), 92-102.

<sup>13</sup> The fact that this is the standard and widespread interpretation of the 1 Cor 11 text underscores once again that the Apostolic Scriptures (NT) is often interpreted through Gentile eyes, when it ought to be read as much as possible through the eyes of the Jewish culture and mindset that authored it in the first place.

<sup>14</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, “Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16”, *CBQ* 42(1980), 485.

<sup>15</sup> In Deut 22:12 the term תְּדָלִים, “tassel” is used rather than תְּצִיִּצִית, “tuft, group of threads, tassel.” The two terms doubtlessly describe the same item. The Lxx uses κράσπεδα to translate תְּצִיִּצִית while Onkelos employs כְּרוֹספִּדִין.

<sup>16</sup> Douglas R. Edwards, “Dress and Ornamentation” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (Doubleday, 1992) 2:233; cf. Shab. 147a.

<sup>17</sup> *ANEP*, 120-22, 290-91.

with the flow of blood touched (Matt 9:20, cf. 14:36) was a similar garment<sup>19</sup> with fringes attached. Such an outer garment (הַחֲרִית) was large enough to cover the head (1 Ki 19:13), and in some instances carried with it the symbol of office or power, as in the mantle of Elijah (1 Ki 19:19).

In 1st Century Israel the Roman citizen was allowed to wear the toga, a large, semicircular garment draped around the body. Often, however, only the wealthy could afford such a cloak. The Greek *himation* was the more common outer garment for men and women, including the Roman citizens.<sup>20</sup> Color and design of the *himation* distinguished the male and female variety, along with stripes of different widths and color that ran around the edge draping the neck. Yadin discovered garments of this type in the Cave of Letters near the Dead Sea which he dated ca. 90-135 CE, as well as wool dyed with *techelet* for use in the *tzitzit*.<sup>21</sup> He argues that the stripe framed the face when the *himation* was pulled over the head for prayer or sacrifice.<sup>22</sup> Similar garments have been found at En-Gedi and on some of the clothing piled and burned by the last defenders of Masada.<sup>23</sup> Examples of the *himation* may also be seen in the murals of the Dura Europos synagogue.<sup>24</sup>

The Rabbinic sources indicate that the *tallit* was wrapped around the worshipper while praying. The story is told of Mordechai, who when he saw Haman coming toward him, wrapped himself in his tallit and stood before the Holy One in prayer.<sup>25</sup> The same is reported of Nakdimon ben Gurion who wrapped himself in a tallit as he entered the Beit HaMidrash to pray to God for rain at festival time (so the masses would have drinking water).<sup>26</sup> In another place the Midrash asserts that the Rabbis and Sages are known by their wrapping themselves in tallitot.<sup>27</sup> This most likely accords with Matt 23:5 where Yeshua rebukes the Pharisees for broadening their tephillin<sup>28</sup> and

<sup>18</sup> W. O. E. Oesterley and G. H. Box, *The Religion and Worship of the Synagogue* (Pitman, 1911), 451.

<sup>19</sup> Greek ἱμάτιον.

<sup>20</sup> Edwards, *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>21</sup> Note the scientific discussion of the dye in Irving Zideman, "First Identification of Authentic Tekelet," *BASOR* 265, 25-33.

<sup>22</sup> Y. Yadin, *The Finds from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of the Letters* (Jerusalem, 1963), 223.

<sup>23</sup> Y. Yadin, *Masada* (Random House, 1966), 154.

<sup>24</sup> Marie-Henriette Gates, "Dura-Europos: A Fortress of Syro-Mesopotamian Art", *BA* 47.3 (Sept., 1984), 175.

<sup>25</sup> Mid. Rab. *Lev* xxiii.6 (p. 365-66 in the English edition).

<sup>26</sup> Judah Goldin, trans. *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* [Abot de Rabbi Natan], (Yale, 1955), 45.

<sup>27</sup> Mid. Rab. *Ecc.* II.15 [p. 66]; IV.1 [p. 111].

<sup>28</sup> On the term "phylactery" (φυλακτήριον) as misapplied to tephillin, see my paper "The Term Rabbi in

lengthening their tassels. The Midrash indicates that the tallit with its fringes was a mark of privilege and office<sup>29</sup> and could denote rank or act as a mark of piety. The Talmud explains that the wearing of the tassels distinguished between a *haver* and the *am ha-aretz*.<sup>30</sup>

Hurley states it in these terms when discussing the common four-cornered garment to which was attached the fringes:

This garment, the Tallith of the Talmud and modern Judaism, was spread as a sign of reverence over the head of a Jewish man when he prayed and over a body in the grave. The purpose was that the person might “appear white before God.” A similar understanding of purity, white garments, and reverence may be seen throughout both Testaments.<sup>31</sup>

Lightfoot<sup>32</sup> claims that the act of covering one's head while praying had a twofold significance: (1) showing reverence to the Holy One, and (2) to show oneself ashamed before God and unworthy to look upon Him. He bases his idea of a covering denoting shame from the Aramaic rendering (in Onkelos) of Hebrew *בְּיָד רָמָה*, “with a high hand.” Onkelos has *בריש גלי*, “with an uncovered head”.<sup>33</sup> From this it is deduced that a covered head must denote “ashamed, without confidence.” Jastrow<sup>34</sup> suggests that the meaning of the Aramaic phrase *בריש גלי* is simply “openly,” making the converse to be “privately.” In fact, while the tallit may be used in prayers of repentance and sorrow, there is no indication that its primary meaning when covering the worshiper was to portray him as “ashamed.” In fact, just the opposite is true. Elbogen writes:

The covering of the head during prayer was related to the wearing of the *talit*, which had a hood attached to it. It was understood as an expression of submissive respect for the divine majesty; it was also seen as the privilege of a free man that he could remain with covered head. It is Israel's privilege to participate in the revelation of the King of kings [that is, the *Shema*] sitting comfortably with covered head, while the servants of earthly powers must hear all royal

the Gospels” (read at the NW Regional ETS Meeting, 1992), 7-9.

<sup>29</sup> Mid. Rab. *Exodus*. 27; Mid. Rab. *Num* 8.

<sup>30</sup> b.*Ber.* 47a; b.*Sotah* 22a.

<sup>31</sup> James B. Hurley, “Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 and 1 Cor 14:33b-36”, *WTJ* 35 (1973), 195. He basis this statment primarily on the work of E. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (Bollingen Series), (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 10 vols.

<sup>32</sup> John Lightfoot *Horae Hebraicae Et Talmudicae*, 4 vol. (Oxford, 1859), 4:232ff. [Baker Reprint, 1979]

<sup>33</sup> cf. Ex 14:8; Num 15:30; Jud 5:1.

<sup>34</sup> M. Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Talmud* (Horev, 1903),

proclamations bareheaded in fear and trembling.<sup>35</sup>

The rabbinic comments which relate the wrapping of oneself “in fear” (Aramaic אַימָה Hebrew יִרְאַה) should be understood in the sense of “fear of God,” that attitude of coming before a great and mighty King. To suggest (as Lightfoot does) that Paul prohibits men from worshipping with heads covered because now, as the redeemed of Christ, they no longer need to be ashamed, is to miss the point. From a Jewish perspective, prayer is an invitation to communion with the King, and such communion should be entered in עֵת רִצּוֹן, at an appropriate time, and בְּיִרְאַתְךָ, in awe of You.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, the tallit allows private communion (if desired) within the context of congregational worship.

Thus, the rabbinic sources take the general view that covering one's head while praying, whether with hat or *tallit*, is a sign of respect to God in Whose presence the congregation has gathered. The Talmud gives this viewpoint:

“Rav Huna did not walk four amot bareheaded; he would say, ‘The Shekhina is above my head.’”<sup>37</sup>

“Cover your head so that reverence for God be upon you”<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, as far as the Talmud is concerned, it would have been the norm for a person reciting the *Shema* to cover his head with the *tallit*. In a discussion of what constitutes an interruption in the reciting of the Shema such that one needed to begin again, the Talmud notes:

“And R. Hanina said, ‘I saw Rabbi [while reciting the Prayer] belch and yawn and sneeze and spit and adjust his garment, but he did not pull it over him; and when he yawned, he would put his hand to his chin.’”<sup>39</sup>

The interpretation given to the phrase “he did not pull it over him” by Rashi is that “he did not pull it over him if it fell off his head while reciting the prayer, for this would constitute an interruption.” R. Hananel suggests, however, that the interpretation should be that “he arranged his garments so that the tallit would not fall off of his head.” Whatever the case, having the head covered with the cloak (*tallit*) was taken as

<sup>35</sup> Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, Raymond Scheindlin, trans. (JPS, 1993), 380.

<sup>36</sup> From the verses recited when entering the synagogue: Num 24:5; Ps 5:8; 26:8; 69:14.

<sup>37</sup> b.Kid. 31a.

<sup>38</sup> Shab. 156b.

<sup>39</sup> b.Ber. 24b.

normative for reciting the prayers.<sup>40</sup> The actual phrase in question is אַבֵּל לֹא הָיָה מִתְעַטֵּף.

### Summary

There appears to be sufficient evidence to suggest that covering the head while praying was not uncommon for men in the early centuries of the Common Era.<sup>41</sup> Though it was not a stated halachah *per se*, as was the case in later times, it was, nonetheless, practiced by Jews in their places of prayer and was common enough to be considered traditional. As such, we should attempt to see how Paul's directives in 1 Cor 11:2-16 can be understood in light of the Jewish segment of the Corinthian congregation and the traditions they doubtlessly practiced.<sup>42</sup>

### 3. What is the terminology that Paul uses to describe the "veil" or "covering" in 1 Cor 11:2-16?

It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the entire passage and the exegetical problems it presents. My specific purpose here, however, is to look at the terminology that is universally translated by such words and phrases as "have something on the head", "uncovered", "covered", "veil", "head covering", etc.

We may begin in verse 4. The NASB translates:

"Every man who has *something* on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head."

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<sup>40</sup> I recognize the danger in attempting to describe 1st Century practice by citation from the Talmuds. However, in the face of very little extant literature that would describe synagogue practice of the 1st Century, we are often left to the suggestions which the later Mishnah and Talmuds make. If these suggestions parallel other extant data, then we may assume they are corroborative.

<sup>41</sup> Note the comment of Derret: "First, men and women kept the head covered in prayer (we must leave aside the practice during mourning, as it is irrelevant), until (as is evident) the church broke away from the synagogue, and, on doctrinal grounds, took up the custom (which the Greeks would welcome) of praying bareheaded: that is to say, the males did." J. Duncan M. Derret, "Religious Hair" in *Studies in the New Testament* (Brill, 1977), 171.

<sup>42</sup> The work by Richard Oster ("When Men Wore Veils to Worship: The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 11.4", *NTS* 34 (1988), 481-505) in which he asserts, "Efforts to view the Corinthian men as wearing the Jewish tallith or yarmulke distort the historical use of the prayer shawl by Jewish men" (p. 487) is not convincing. His only source of information for such a bold statement is Strack and Billerbeck, who, though often cited, have been shown to be less than reliable. (See E. P. Sanders, "Defending the Indefensible", *SBL* 210/3 (1991) 463-477 in which he gives many examples of Strack and Billerbeck's errors.) Furthermore, to attempt to understand the Corinthian situation from strictly Roman and Greek sources is to forget that though Corinth was a thorough-going Roman city, the congregation in Corinth was still very Jewish in its theology, perspective, and worship. It seems incredible that anyone should suggest that Homer and Plutarch have more to say by way of exegesis of this passage than do the Jewish sources out of which it was born.

The Greek for “has *something* on his head” is *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων*. First, note that there is no direct object for the verb *εχω* and thus the supplied “something” of the NASB. In fact, nowhere in this passage is the noun for “covering” or “veil” used except in v. 15, where Paul says that “her hair is given to her for a covering” (*ἡ κόμη ἀντὶ περιβολαίου δέδοται [αὐτῇ]*). Murphy-O’Conner, after noting the 12 other times Paul uses *κάτα* with the genitive, concludes that “it [is] unlikely that he would have employed this preposition with the genitive to designate something ‘resting upon’ the head,”<sup>43</sup> It would be preferable to retain the regular sense of *κάτα* with the genitive unless something in the context suggests otherwise. This normal usage would suggest an “adversive” sense, and with regard to motion, movement away from. This would indicate “something coming down from the head.”

Most translators, however, look to v. 7 to find a direct object for the “dangling” *εχω* of v. 4. Seeing in the verb *κατακαλύπτεσθαι* the sense of “covering upon,” the gap is filled in for v. 4 to make the two verses parallel. The *καλύπτω* word group, however, needs to be investigated more closely.

If we look first to the Lxx we can see the range of meaning afforded Paul as he used this term with which he was familiar. Leviticus 13:45 describes the signs which publicly show a leper to be unclean. One of these is loosed hair. The Lxx renders the Hebrew *קרוני* by *ακατακαλυπτος*, the same word used in 1 Cor 11:5 rendered “uncovered” by most translations. Here is a valid parallel that shows *ἀκατακάλυπτος* could be referring to *hair that was let down*. The Talmud uses the same Hebrew term, *קרוני* to describe long hair on a priest that was forbidden under penalty of death.<sup>44</sup>

The Mishnah clearly teaches that it was forbidden for a woman to be in a public place with her hair down. In fact, such an act was grounds for divorce:

And these are they that are divorced without their *marriage settlement* : she who transgresses the Law of Moses and Jewish custom. . . And what is here meant by Jewish custom?—If she go forth with her hair loose [*יוצאת וראשה קרוני*] . . .<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, a shorn woman was despised, since the cutting of the hair was considered a sign of object uncleanness. In a Mishnah concerning the annulling of vows, the right of a husband for his wife, we read:

. . . but concerning the cutting off the hair in uncleanness he may nullify, because he may say, ‘I have no pleasure in an untidy woman.’ Rabbi says, He may absolve even in the case concerning the cutting off the hair in cleanness, since he

<sup>43</sup> Op. cit., “Sex and Logic”, p. 484.

<sup>44</sup> b.Ta’an. 17b.

<sup>45</sup> m.Ketubot 7.6.

may say, 'I have no delight in a shorn woman.'<sup>46</sup>

The Lxx of Numbers 5:18 may also be instructive for our study. In the water ordeal for a woman accused of adultery, the Torah commands **וַיִּפְרֹעַ אֶת־תְּהִי אֶת־רֹאשָׁהּ**, "uncover her head." The Lxx reads **καὶ ἀποκαλύψει τὴν κεφαλὴν τῆς γυναικὸς**. Hurley states that "**ἀκατακαλύπτos** occurs only in the adjectival form. Verbal forms of **פָּרַע** must therefore be rendered by alternative verbs. The Greek translator of this section has chosen **ἀποκαλύπω**."<sup>47</sup>

Here we have an indication that in the Hebrew culture a woman with hair kept up on her head was marked as married and under the authority of her husband. Letting her hair down in the water ritual marked her as indecent in her relationship of marriage. If she were found innocent, her hair would again be put upon her head. Once again, the Mishnah corroborates this cultural custom. In a section dealing with marriage settlements, the dispute of whether a woman was wed as a virgin or not is settle by consideration of her hair as she was carried to the ceremony:

If a woman became a widow or were divorced and says, 'Thou hast wed me as a virgin,' and he says, 'Not so, but I wedded thee when thou was a widow,' if there be witnesses that she had gone forth in the virginal bridal litter and with the hair of her head loose [**פָּרַע**], her *marriage settlement* is two hundred.<sup>48</sup>

Hair that was loose or disheveled marked an unmarried women. Conversely, a married woman maintained her hair braided upon her head as a sign of her position as a wife in the community. The Talmud records the testimony of a pious mother of two priests who confessed that "the beams of my house have never seen my bare head."<sup>49</sup> If it is wrong to go out in the street with one's hair loosened, then the fence around the Torah would be to always have one's hair up in braids. Such was the thinking of this pious woman.

The data thus far gathered gives a basis for suggesting that what Paul is dealing with in this entire passage is hair and not head coverings. **ἀκατακαλύπτos** of v. 5 would correspond to the same word used by the Lxx in Lev. 13:45 for *hair that is let down*. Conversely, **κατακαλύπτομαι** of v. 6 would envision a woman with her hair upon her head, a symbol of the authority she has as a married woman (v. 10). A man, however, is not allowed to have long hair, whether hanging loose or braided (v. 7). In a pagan

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<sup>46</sup> m.Nazir 4.5.

<sup>47</sup> Hurley, Op. cit., 199.

<sup>48</sup> m.Kethubot 2.1.

<sup>49</sup> b.Yoma 47a.

culture<sup>50</sup> where long hair on a man was a sure mark of sexual deviancy, this is understandable. (I would assume Paul is considering the Nazirite vow as an exception.)

That Paul has hair length on his mind is evident from the passage. In v. 6 he contrasts the woman who has her hair loosened with the woman who has her head shaved. This is understandable if loosened hair was, in the Hebrew culture, a public announcement of virginity and in that sense a statement of availability, while at the same time a woman whose head was shaved was one who was, for one reason or another, dishonorable. V. 14 puts the idea of man's long hair in juxtaposition with a woman whose hair is let loose, both of which are undesirable. V. 15, however, suggests that a woman's long hair (koma), when braided up on her head, functions for her in the place of a cloth for covering. It seems quite possible that Paul's concern in this passage is how men and women wear their hair, and what the hair-styles say within the culture.

Martin<sup>51</sup> has made an interesting suggestion by noticing that there are two forms of the imperative used in v. 6, one aorist and one present. He shows that Paul consistently uses the present imperative to denote an action of unlimited extension or habitual occurrence, while the aorist is used to describe a specific action, limited in duration. Considering that there might well have been those converts who entered the assembly with shorn heads, Martin suggests this translation:

For if a woman is not covered (does not have long hair) then let her remain cropped (for the time being; *κειρασθω*, aorist imperative with cessative force, referring to a particular situation), but since it is a shame for a woman to be cropped or shorn let her become covered (i.e., let her hair grow again; *κατακαλυπτεισθω* (present imperative for a non-terminative, inchoative action)).<sup>52</sup>

Finally, in v. 15 Paul states unequivocally that a woman's long hair takes the place of a head covering, *περιβολαίον* ("cloak," "covering," "wrap") being the only time in the entire section an actual piece of clothing is mentioned. This is in contrast to v. 14 where a man is not to have "long hair" (*κομάω*).<sup>53</sup>

### *Summary*

<sup>50</sup> The Greek *φύσις*, it seems to me, might be stretched to include the concept of "culture" if one considers that the term can describe the natural order of things as inherited from one's forefathers. Cf. *BAG*, p. 877.

<sup>51</sup> William J. Martin, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation" in *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays presented to F. F. Bruce on his 60th Birthday* (Eerdmans, 1970), 231-237.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Ezek 44:18-20 where a number of words parallel to this section are used in describing the hair and headgear of the priests in the New Temple.

Several indications show beyond reasonable doubt that Paul is using *κατακαλύπτω* and related terms to refer to long hair. First, he uses it in contrast to the man who is forbidden to have long hair (v. 4, 14). Secondly, he contrasts *ακατακαλύπτω* with being shorn. There is only one antithesis of being shorn, that is to have long hair. Covering a shorn head does not negate its state of being shorn. On the parallel with the Lxx use of this word, as well as the cultural aspects of women's hair in the Hebrew society, it seems most probable that the meaning is "loosed," "hanging down," which is what Paul prohibits for the man. Thirdly, no where in the passage is any word used for a material veil or head-dress, except in v. 15, where the woman's hair is said to be given in the place of an item of dress. Fourthly, since the forms of the verb *katakaluptw* found in vv. 6 and 7 are not constructed with an indirect object, it is best to take them as passives.<sup>54</sup> Finally, if a piece of cloth or veil is what Paul had in mind, one would expect him to use some more explicit term for "unveiled", such as *γυμνοκεφαλος*, "bear-headed" (cf. *γυμνοπους*, "bear-footed").

### *Conclusion*

Paul is not referring to head coverings in this passage. As such, he was not requiring the congregation at Corinth to abandon the Jewish tradition for men to cover their heads when praying. He was, however, reinforcing a Jewish perspective on the husband/ wife relationship in which the wife receives a position of authority in the community by virtue of her marriage relationship. He also was stressing the importance of marking the distinction between male and female and the God-given roles each is to perform within the believing community. In the Jewish society of the 1st Century CE, these distinctions were marked, in some measure, by how one wore his or her hair.

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<sup>54</sup> Martin, Op. cit., p. 233.