LET HER BE SHORN:
1 CORINTHIANS 11 AND FEMALE HEAD SHAVING IN ANTIQUITY

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In 1 Corinthians 11:3-15, Paul writes that if a woman is to be so immodest as to wear her hair uncovered while praying or prophesying in a Christian assembly she might as well shave her head. Paul instructs the Corinthians that it is “one and the same” for a woman to have her head shaved and for her to unveil her hair. There is a large body of works cataloging the modesty standards in Hellenistic Greece but Paul’s reference to head-shaving remains obscure. This thesis looks to find the best explanation of Paul’s instructions.

Research in this topic began as an investigation of a popular modern view. It can be found in conversation or a simple Google search, that women in Ancient Greece with their head shaved were prostitutes. Beyond being prostitutes, they were probably temple prostitutes. The evidence does not bear this out as there is no artwork depicting prostitutes, or indeed any women, with their heads shaved. Instead prostitutes are shown in Greek erotic art with both long and short hair, some with and some without head coverings.

Literary sources do offer several different examples of women who had their hair cut off. There are examples of women shaving their hair off in Lucian’s *The Syrian Goddess,* Tacitus’ *Germania,* Plutarch’s *Lycurgus* and *Roman Questions,* several Talmudic sources, and *On Fortune II,* formerly attributed to Dio Chrysostom. By examining these sources in tandem with 1 Corinthians 11, the most probable impetus behind Paul’s writing relates to punishments for adultery.
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INTRODUCTION

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair was given to her for a covering. But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

This passage in 1 Corinthians 11, written by the apostle Paul in the first century CE, has remained a source of contention for Christian theologians and lay people since the early days of the church. The practices of veiling a woman’s face or covering a woman’s hair, both common

1-3 Θέλω δὲ ὡς εἰδέναι ὅτι παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ᾗ κεφαλὴ ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστίν, κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνήρ, κεφαλὴ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ Θεός. ἴνα ἀνήρ προσευχόμενος ὁ προφητεύοντα κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχον κατασχέτω τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ. οὕτως δὲ γυνὴ προσευχομένη ὁ προφητεύσας ἀκατακαλύπτω τῇ κεφαλῇ κατασχέτω τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτής: ἐν γὰρ ἔστιν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῇ ἐξυρημένῃ. ἥ τι γὰρ ἂν κατακαλύπτεται γυνῆ, καὶ κεφαλῆς, εἰ δὲ αὐχέροις γυναικὶ τὸ κεφαλῆς ἔχον ἔρχεται, κατακαλυπτέσθω. ἵνα μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ὀφείλει κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν, εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα Θεοῦ ὑπάρχον· ἡ γυνὴ δὲ δόξα ἀνδρὸς ἐστίν. ὅ τι γὰρ ἔστιν ἀνήρ ἐκ γυναικὸς, ἄλλα γυνῆ ἐκ ἀνδρός· ἀλλὰ γὰρ οὐκ ἐκτίθη ἄνὴρ διὰ τὴν γυναῖκα, ἀλλὰ γυνὴ διὰ τὸν ἀνδρα. διὰ τὸ τοῦτο ὀφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς διὰ τοῦς ἄγγελους. οὐ γὰρ γυνὴ ἐκ ἄνδρος ὁμοίως ἕξετε ἄνηρ ὁμοίως γυναικὸς ἐν Κυρίω. ὅσπερ γὰρ ἡ γυνὴ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνήρ, οὕτως καὶ ὁ ἄνηρ ἐκ τῆς γυναῖκος· τὸ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ. ἐν πάντι δὲ τοῦτο κρίνετε: πρέπει ἐστὶν γυναικὸς ἀκατακαλύπτων τὸν Θεόν προσευχήσασθαι; οὐδὲ ἡ φίλος αὐτή διδάσκει ὡς ὡς ὃν ἄνηρ μὲν ἐάν κυρία, ἄτιμα αὐτῇ ἐστίν. ὡς δὲ εὰν κυρία, δόξα αὐτῇ ἐστίν; ὡς ἂν κύρια ἄντι περιβολαίου δέδοται αὐτή. Εἰ δὲ τὲς δοκεῖτε φιλόνεικος εἶναι, ἡμεῖς τοιαύτην συνήθειάν οὐκ ἔχομεν, οὐδὲ αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ Θεοῦ. 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted. The verb used for “cut off her hair” is keirō.

2 There is some contention over whether Paul is the actual author of this passage but the question over female head-shaving remains whether or not this is an authentically Pauline passage. For a broad overview of the theological debate see: David E. Garland, 1 Corinthians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 512-530.
in the Ancient Near East, have, to some extent, been preserved to this day. Jehovah’s Witnesses, Eastern Catholics and Orthodox Churches, as well as traditional Roman Catholic masses, all still require women to wear head coverings in church services. \(^3\) Debate over whether this passage is cultural or to be universally applied continues; this argument, however interesting, is not the subject of the current investigation. What is often glossed over is the statement that if a woman refuses to wear a veil, she might as well shave her head. \(^4\) While the theological debate over women’s head-coverings continues, as it has for many centuries, it may be possible to shed some light on the reasons that a woman shaving her head was a symbol of ignominy and viewed as disgraceful.

Modern church culture supplies a ready answer to the question. If a woman in the first century shaved her head, she was a prostitute, and probably a temple prostitute at that. She would be found serving at the temple of Aphrodite with a portion or all of the proceeds going to the temple as an offering to the goddess of love. A simple Google search for “Why was it shameful for a woman to shave her head?” will bring lay theologians’ websites to the front page. Here one can find statements that simply assume that this type of temple prostitution took place with shaven-head prostitutes the norm. Cooper Abrams, writing for AllExperts, casually writes, “I am sure there were temple harlots who shaved there [sic] heads, but I do not think that is what Paul was addressing.” \(^5\) Another example is found on GotQuestions.org, where the author states that shaving their heads or discarding their veils was “something that only pagan temple prostitutes or other rebellious women would do.” \(^6\) It will be shown that there is no substantive evidence to

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\(^4\) 1 Corinthians 11:5-6.


support the theory that temple prostitutes would have shaved their heads as a mark of their piety or their trade.

Modern interpreters remain in conflict over the symbolism of a woman with her head shaved in the ancient world, though there is agreement that a woman with her hair shaved would be looked down upon in many ancient cultures. By looking at Tacitus’ *Germania* and Dio Chrysostom’s sixty-fourth *Discourse, On Fortune II*, in tandem with other near-eastern sources, an answer may be found. It becomes clear that shaving a woman’s head was shameful because it removed her beauty, which was seen as residing in her hair, and showed that she was unworthy of wearing the veil or head-covering of a respectable wife or widow. The most common impetus for shaving a woman’s head was probably being found guilty of, or being caught in, adultery; when the right to wear the veil was revoked the hair was punitively removed as well. In order to reach such a conclusion, it is necessary to examine aesthetic standards in the ancient world, the few examples we have of a woman’s hair being cut short or shaved, and the practice of veiling or head-covering at this time period, circa 100 BCE-100 CE. The testimony of early writers will be considered, as will the opinions of modern historians and theologians.

As an aside, some authors have posited that Paul does not mean for women to wear veils but that they should have long hair. William Martin, in “1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation,” which appeared in *Apostolic History and the Gospel* argues just this. He notes

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8 It is has been argued by some that Dio Chrysostom is not, in fact, the author of the sixty-fourth Discourse. I will not venture an opinion on the author of the discourse, *On Fortune II*, instead I will refer to the author of *Discourse 64* as “the author of…” For doubts on authorship see Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, Volume 5. Translated by H. Lamar Crosby. (Harvard University Press, 1932), Vol 5, 45.
that Paul does not use any word which specifically refers to a “material veil or head-dress.”9 In fact he argues that “to annul the state of being shorn you must be the opposite…and that is to have long hair,” as the only logical meaning of this text.10

I reject this interpretation; the cultural context of Corinth would suggest strongly that a head covering—which in Corinth likely included a veil—was worn and Paul’s meaning is made clearer if he actually means for the women to wear head-coverings.11 It would be an awkward argument to say, in verse 6 “if a woman will not wear her hair long, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for her to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear her hair long.” If her hair was not worn long then it would be cut off and Paul would be repeating himself in a rather confusing fashion. Martin’s confusion hinges on the preposition anti in verse 15, which can mean “in place of,” “as,” or “instead of.”12 If we look at the phrase “hē komē anti peribolaïou dedotai autē and we interpret anti as “for,” or “as” a covering it seems as if the need for a covering could be removed. If instead, however, we interpret anti as “in place of,” or “as a substitute for” a covering then the passage in 1 Corinthians 11 is more cohesive. This is the position taken by Preston T. Massey; he argues that the veil serves the dual purposes of reflecting the hair’s beauty, which is a woman’s glory, and preserving female modesty.13 Jason BeDuhn likewise assumes that the issue being discussed has to do with the wearing of veils and

10 Martin comments, in a footnote, that “there does not seem to be enough evidence…to suggest that ‘shorn hair’ was the mark of a prostitute.” Martin, 233.
11 I likewise reject the interpretations that Paul is making a rhetorical flourish only and not referring to a real practice. The evidence points too strongly to the existence of a practice of head shaving in Greece at this time period to take Paul’s reference as purely metaphorical or hyperbolic.
12 ἡ κόμη ἀντὶ περιβόλαïου δέδοται αὐτῇ 1 Cor 11:15. Martin, 233. “In v. 15 Paul states unequivocally that a woman’s long hair takes the place of an item of dress.” This interpretation is too narrow given the large range of translations the preposition anti can take.
not hair length.\textsuperscript{14} While some of these positions come close to the truth, the reality is that a shaved head on a woman signified guilt in regards to adultery.

CHAPTER 1

WOMEN AND DRESS IN ANCIENT GREECE

The Woman at the Well

In the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at a well. It is the middle of the day and the woman is there alone drawing water for herself. Jesus broke custom and spoke with her, asking her for water. During his conversation with this Samaritan woman Jesus discusses her five previous marriages and the illicit relationship she is currently involved in.\(^{15}\)

This episode in the Gospel of John highlights an important point in studying women in the ancient world, especially when their social status comes into question. The Samaritan woman is not in a clearly defined marriage when Jesus speaks to her. Her previous marriages ended in ways that are unknown to the reader. Whether she was divorced from her most recent husband or simply separated from him and living in an adulterous relationship is an open question. This woman was clearly not, at the time Jesus spoke with her, a “respectable wife,” but this may not have always been the case. It is difficult to speak of cultural norms without painting with broad strokes upon the past. The story of the woman at the well helps to highlight that cultural standards were not always clear, and that the status of any individual or group of individuals 2,000 years ago may have been somewhat nebulous. It is with this in mind that we begin.

The Significance of Veils

An investigation into the normal modes of dress for women in ancient Greece must be made in order to contextualize some of the punishments for adultery. The office and status of “wife” was a coveted one in Greek society. Women were expected to enter adulthood already

\(^{15}\) John 4:4-30.
married, and, in the event of their husband dying, ideally they would remain single as a widow.\textsuperscript{16} While laws varied from city to city, rarely, if ever, could an adulterous woman, or a prostitute, or even a woman who once was involved in prostitution but no longer, garb herself in the same manner as a faithful and loyal wife. Women were barred from public sacrifices and other religious events due to the irremovable impurity they had gained through their adultery or prostitution.\textsuperscript{17} For a society and culture that freely allowed prostitution to exist as a profession, the consequences for practicing the profession could be profound in the way it affected religion and respectability. K. Dover remarks on the subject of respectability:

Greek girls were segregated from boys and brought up at home in ignorance of the world outside the home; one speaker in court seeks to impress the jury with the respectability of his family by saying that his sister and nieces are "so well brought up that they are embarrassed in the presence even of a man who is a member of the family." Married young, perhaps at fourteen (and perhaps to a man twenty years or more her senior), a girl exchanged confinement in her father's house for confinement in her husband's.\textsuperscript{18}

Dover's commentary relates in particular to late Archaic and early Classical Greece and it may be argued that standards had changed somewhat by the first century CE. New Comedy was set out of doors, Pomeroy reports, and the primary female characters in New Comedy were women of ill-repute. This was the case because respectable women and unmarried girls would still have been required to stay indoors; where they went outdoors they were still required to cover themselves, as such respectable women could not be easily portrayed in the New Comedy.\textsuperscript{19} Sarah Pomeroy notes that married daughters had more rights during the Hellenistic

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} Plutarch, \textit{Greek Questions}, 49. Plutarch’s remarks here suggest strongly that remaining a widow was preferable to remarrying. Some of the women of Chalcedon, after the war against Bithynia, chose to remarry of necessity freedmen and foreigners; these women viewed, according to Plutarch, those who remained unmarried as a better class of woman, though this does not imply that the women who \textit{did} remarry were stigmatized.

\textsuperscript{17} Stephanie Budin, \textit{The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity}, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 76.


\textsuperscript{19} Pomeroy, \textit{Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves} 139 and Ruden. \textit{Paul Among the People} 85-86.
\end{flushright}
and Roman periods than their ancestors were accustomed to.\textsuperscript{20} Despite these new-found legal privileges, like the right to divorce or to act, in some circumstances, without a guardian, modesty standards in Corinth do not seem to have changed in most respects.

To truly understand the importance of the veil or head-covering, one must first understand something of the Greek mind-set in this area. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, in his article “House and Veil in Ancient Greece,” examines in detail the form of head covering common throughout Greece during the classical period known as the \textit{tegidi}. The word \textit{tegidi}on derives from \textit{tegos}, which means “roof.” \textit{Tegidion}, then, meant little roof; Llewellyn-Jones argues that this is a reference to a type of head covering.\textsuperscript{21} For the Greeks there was an intrinsic connection between one’s clothing and one’s shelter.\textsuperscript{22} The terminology of veils was also based in the language of architecture as \textit{kredemnon} can translate to either “veil” or to “city walls.” A woman’s veil, Llewellyn-Jones argues, was her house away from home. The exact form of a \textit{tegidi}on would vary from \textit{polis} to \textit{polis}, as would the manner of wearing it, but, in general, it was a rectangular cloth worn over the face with holes cut out for eyes. In private the \textit{tegidi}on could be pulled back over the head to reveal the face. It was bound around the head by a fillet and fastened at the forehead with a brooch.\textsuperscript{23} The women of Thebes, in particular, were noted for covering their whole face, with only the eyes showing through, a practice which Plutarch

\textsuperscript{21} Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, “House and Veil in Ancient Greece,” \textit{British School at Athens Studies} 15 (2007): 252. Llewellyn-Jones bases his argument in part on an entry in Hesychios’ Lexicon. Hesychios of Alexandria was a Greek writer who wrote at the end of the fourth century CE; he wrote a Greek lexicon which included more than 50,000 entries.
\textsuperscript{22} Llewellyn-Jones, “House and Veil in Ancient Greece,” 251.
\textsuperscript{23} Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, “House and Veil in Ancient Greece,” 252; and \textit{Aphrodite’s Tortoise: The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece} (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2003), 62-64. In the latter work, Llewellyn-Jones reproduces several examples of women wearing the \textit{tegidi}on from various Greek cities such as Alexandria and Pergamon.
comments upon as being beautiful.\textsuperscript{24} While Llewelyn-Jones makes a strong case concerning the \textit{tegidion} being worn by respectable Greek women he does not mention any laws or regulations enforcing such a dress code, whether in the public or private sphere. It would appear that modesty standards, such as married women veiling in public, were strong cultural norms rather than legally mandated requirements.

The veil would first be “worn at the wedding, then second when a wife exits her home and goes out in public, and then finally it is removed at the death of her husband. The veil, therefore, represents the beginning, the middle, and the end of the marital relationship.”\textsuperscript{25} With a veil a woman could walk outside of her house and proclaim to the world that she had a protector; she was not unattached. From at least the fifth century BCE through the second century CE, prior to marriage girls would be sequestered, brought out only at special public occasions.\textsuperscript{26} After marriage women would remain sequestered in their homes, going out only with some form of hair, and often facial, covering. This was, in most Greek and other Near Eastern cities, the practice for respectable women. A number of Church Fathers describe a veiling ceremony leading all the way up to the fourth century CE; the practice of veiling in the Christian community to demonstrate and preserve feminine modesty, at least, seems to have continued for quite some time.\textsuperscript{27}

At the point of marriage the woman would put on the veil in the presence of strangers, though she would not normally wear a veil when at home with just her husband and children;

\begin{footnotes}
\item[24] Llewellyn-Jones, “House and Veil in Ancient Greece,” 253. Plutarch, \textit{Greek Questions}, 49. This question states that the women of Chalcedon had the practice of, in the presence of strange men, veiling only one half of their face, we can assume with a modified form of the \textit{tegidion} that Llewellyn-Jones describes. It is unclear why Plutarch found the Theban practice as particularly beautiful, since there is evidence for the \textit{tegidion} being worn elsewhere.


\item[26] Budin, \textit{The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity}, 75.

\item[27] Kristi Upson-Saia, \textit{Early Christian Dress: Gender, Virtue and Authority} (New York: Routledge, 2011), 52. Upson-Saia discusses accounts from Ambrose, Siricius, Jerome, and Basil of Ancyra describing a ritual veiling ceremony for dedicated virgins that imitates the conventional wedding rites symbolizing the virgin’s marriage to Christ.
\end{footnotes}
home practices probably varied from home to home as well as *polis to polis*, and were governed by the husband’s desires and proclivities. By wearing a *tegidion*, however, a woman could take her “house” with her. She took the symbol of the protection offered by her husband into the city and, therefore, was able to move around freely, at least in comparison to a prostitute, slave or freed-woman, and a woman, thus covered, could conduct some forms of trade. A woman without such a covering would be known as a prostitute or an adulteress, or, at the very least, an extremely immodest and unruly wife.\(^{28}\)

Prostitutes in Ancient Greece

Knowing that the *tegidion* was the mark of a respectable woman, the question arises: What was the mark of a disreputable woman? It will be shown that head shaving was not a mark of ancient prostitutes. A man looking for a prostitute in Greek cities would have looked instead for other distinguishing characteristics. Greek *pornai* might wear semi-transparent clothing and *hetairai* elaborately done clothing, designed to accentuate their most sensual features according to the current trends.\(^{29}\) The now famous sandals with “follow me” written on the bottom in such a way that the words were left in the mud, leading customers to the prostitute who wore the shoes, are another identifying feature.\(^{30}\) As has been noted, some scholars think that short hair or bare-headedness were signs of prostitutes; the evidences against such a belief are found in both Greek writings and artwork. How a prostitute could actually be recognized would be different from city to city.

\(^{28}\) Llewellyn-Jones, “House and Veil in Ancient Greece,” 257.
\(^{29}\) Andrew Dalby, “Levels of Concealment: The Dress of *Hetairai* and *Pornai* in Greek Texts,” in *Women’s Dress in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones (London: Duckworth) 118 &121. Andrew Dalby’s discussion of the typical trappings of Greek prostitutes is truly excellent in its entirety.
The main two classes of prostitutes in Greece—and there was overlap between them at times—were *pornai* and *hetairai*. *Pornai* were low class prostitutes, typically slaves or poor free-women. The free-women would have had little option to sustain themselves other than to become prostitutes and the slaves would have had no option at all, if the wishes of their owners were to prostitute them; the punishment for disobedience could be death. *Hetairai*, on the other hand, were more like courtesans. Of course sexual favors were expected of a *hetaira*, but they were also expected to provide companionship and amusement of a more intellectual nature; their services were purchased for an event or an evening, rather than just the act of intercourse.\textsuperscript{31} Llewellyn-Jones notes that lower-class prostitutes, *pornai*, were at the “call of all men and [did] not enjoy the protection of a guardian.”\textsuperscript{32} *Hetairai*, however, were more respectable. *Hetairai* were more often free than *pornai*, whether they were born free or made enough money as a prostitute to purchase freedom. *Hetairai* were also better educated.\textsuperscript{33}

Debra Hamel’s book *Trying Neaira*, which comments on the trial of the *hetaira* Neaira, in the fourth century BCE, is an excellent source for understanding the differences between *pornai* and a *hetaira*. *Hetairai* were discreet and expensive. The word itself means “female companion,” and a man purchasing the services of any *hetaira* would certainly expect more than intercourse.\textsuperscript{34} The most successful *hetairai* could even turn down men, having reached a level of prestige, fame and financial stability that they could select who would and would not be allowed

\textsuperscript{31} Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, “Sex for Sale? Interpreting Erotica in the Havana Collection,” in *Greek Prostitutes in the Ancient Mediterranean, 800 BCE-200 CE*, ed. Allison Glazebrook and Madeleine M. Henry, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 140. See also Figure 1 & 2 for *Hetairai* performing music and dance at a dinner party.

\textsuperscript{32} Llewellyn-Jones, “House and Veil in Ancient Greece,” 255. An examination of Greek artwork will allow us to see the stark difference between how the two classes practiced their trade. One cup shows on the inside a smiling female in conversation with a man and on the outside a woman involved in intercourse with more than one man. She seems to be in discomfort as she performs fellatio on one man, suggested by the lines around her mouth; the raised sandal another man has threatens her if she does not perform well; her girth also suggests more advanced age and a decline in her physical beauty.

\textsuperscript{33} Kilmer, *Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases*, Plate R514.A & Plate R514.B. This cup shows three women, all presumably *hetairai* playing flutes while clothed in the presence of men. See Figure 1 & 2.

\textsuperscript{34} Debra Hamel, *Trying Neaira*: 12.
to purchase their “companionship” for a time.\textsuperscript{35} Hetairai were as distinct from pornai as a high-class escort is from a street-prostitute. A person engaging either for a time might very well have expected sexual favors to be performed, but there was a thin veneer of class attached to the escort, a veneer lacking with the street corner variety of prostitute; the same was true of hetairai and pornai. A man engaging the services of a pornê had no plausible deniability of his intentions, not that it was necessarily needed in Greek culture, as engaging the services of a prostitute was not viewed particularly unfavorably. He was explicitly purchasing sexual favors, whereas a man engaging the services of hetairai could put forth the idea that the music was what he desired for his dinner party. What went on after the music stopped may be assumed, but it was not plain for all to see, at least on the surface.

Artwork

If, having established that the veil was often or always the sign of a respectable woman, and that the lack of it accompanied the disreputable women, what evidence is there that a shaved head was not the mark of a prostitute? A brief examination of Greek erotica can serve to prove this point. The artwork, both erotic and otherwise, fails to show any woman with shaved hair. Only one sculpture from Corinth evidences short hair on a woman and none at all show a woman whose head had been shaved.\textsuperscript{36} In fact, there is not even a perfect correlation between having short hair and being a prostitute. One cup, shown in Figure 1 and 2, discussed in Martin Kilmer’s book, \textit{Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases}, has two long-haired women and one short-haired woman playing flutes to entertain men.

\textsuperscript{35} Hamel, \textit{Trying Neaira}, 13.
Figure 1 Brygos Painter, Symposium, Attic Red-figured Vase. The British Museum, London. From Vulci. Side A. Kilmer, *Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases*, London: Duckworth, 1993. Plate R514.A.
Since all three were likely to be *hetairai*, prostitutes who were also expected to provide enlightened conversation and companionship, as well as music, and yet they wore their hair in different ways, identifying prostitutes by their hair length is shown to be, at best, unreliable and problematic.\(^{37}\) What is intriguing about the Greek pottery is that few men and no women appear bald. Some women, even those engaged in sexual acts, have their hair covered over, bringing their marital status into question. Figure 3 shows an older woman watching a youth stimulate his penis; this woman almost certainly cannot be his wife, as Greek women were married at a young age to older men.\(^{38}\)

\(^{37}\) Martin F. Kilmer, *Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases*, (London: Duckworth, 1993), Plate R 514 (Figures 1 & 2) & Plate 160 (not shown).

\(^{38}\) Kilmer, *Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases*, Plate 47.1 B (Figure 3).
Figure 3 Phintias, Tondo: Old Courtesan and Youth, Attic Red-figured Vase. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu. Kilmer, *Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases*, London: Duckworth, 1993. Plate 47.1 B.

She must have been a prostitute, but she wears a head covering and nothing else, which should cause historians to hesitate before drawing any definitive conclusions on the matter of head coverings. It is definitely possible that the erotic material is showing some sort of deviant material. Alternately, it is conceivable that the material shows a passing fad among the prostitutes of the day. The aforementioned cup, shown in Figures 1 and 2, with two long-haired woman and one short-haired woman playing flutes, proves that prostitutes could have hair, while the vase in figure 3 shows that prostitutes might wear head coverings, at least while entertaining a customer. The vase in Figures 1 and 2 also offers a convincing argument--since it is likely that the *hetairai* with long hair was a free woman--that free women could be prostitutes or *hetairai*, though we also know this from Neaira’s trial, a free woman in Athens whose trial is briefly examined below.
Figure 4 shows a woman, identified on the cup as Kalisto, with a garland in her hair dancing for Pilipos. A dancer on the vase shown in Figure 5 dances naked; she has short hair but is definitely not bald or shaved. Figure 6 shows a flute girl being threatened by an excited youth with a sandal; she too has hair, and even some sort of head band or covering. Figure 7 shows a couple copulating a tergo, the woman not only has hair but a head covering, similar to the woman in Figure 3. What is particularly noteworthy of Figure 7 is the purse found in the background; this was clearly a female prostitute with a client. Even such a cursory glance at Greek erotic art makes it clear that prostitutes did not shave their heads.39


39 Kilmer, *Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases*, the plates mentioned are: R514.1, R527.2 (ii), R679 and R864, Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7 respectively, commentary on the plates is mine.

Figure 4 The Wedding Painter, A Man and a Hetaira, Attic Red-Figurd Kylix. Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich. Kilmer, *Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases*, London: Duckworth, 1993. Plate 864.

With the possible exception of the Spartans, a woman with her head shaved would not have been attractive to men. From Mycenaean times to the writing of Homer it was common for both men and women to wear their hair long. Eventually, though, styles and modesty standards changed until they became strong social norms; men were to have short hair and women long. Sarah Ruden asserts that men would reject a woman without long hair outright. In fact, as Hans Licht points out, a boy’s chief beauty also resided in his hair, though the length of the boy’s hair is not specified. When Anacreon stayed at the court of Polycrates, he was

40 Licht, *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece*, 61. The supposed Spartan preference for short-haired women is further discussed in the section on Plutarch below.
42 Ruden, *Paul Among the People*, 92.
besotted with a young boy and spent his time gazing at his hair.\textsuperscript{44} It is, quite simply, inconceivable for prostitutes, male or female, whose very existence relied upon men providing them with coin in exchange for their body, to have shaved their heads. This would have made them repulsive to men, the exact opposite of what their profession required of them.

As we conclude our cursory look at Greek erotic artwork we will compare an orgiastic scene and a plate which seems to depict a husband and wife in bed together. The orgy shows forceful fellatio, as well as what should be termed as violent sexual activity. It is safe to assume that the women depicted in Figures 8 and 9 are prostitutes, hired for the entertainment of the youths engaging in sexual activity with them on the bowl. Figure 10, in contrast, shows a couple copulating face to face, with their lips almost touching; this seems to be a loving embrace rather than a bought and paid for transaction. All of the women, in both pieces of pottery, are shown wearing hair. Many of the women have some sort of binding on their hair, though none wear a veil or any other clothing. One would expect to find, if there were any substance to the belief that prostitutes shaved their head, to see at least one of the women in Figures 8 and 9 with a shaved head.

\textsuperscript{44} Licht, \textit{Sexual Life in Ancient Greece}, 433.
Figure 5 Pedieus Painter, Erotic Scene, Attic Red-figured Kylix. The Louvre, Paris. Side A. Kilmer, *Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases*, London: Duckworth, 1993. Plate R156.A.

Figure 6 Pedieus Painter, Erotic Scene, Attic Red-figured Kylix. The Louvre, Paris. Side B. Kilmer, *Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases*, London: Duckworth, 1993. Plate R156 .B.
Cynthia Thompson argues that, since most women’s portraits from archaeological finds in Corinth show women without their hair covered, going without a head covering was not, in itself, a sign of a disreputable woman.\textsuperscript{45} David Gill makes a similar argument, though he anchors the cultural context of Corinth during Paul’s time to Rome due to the colonial status of Corinth rather than to Greek culture. Gill suggests that because there were public marble portraits of women at Corinth, “presumably members of wealthy and prestigious families” who are shown bare-headed it was “socially acceptable in a Roman colony for women to be seen bare-headed in public.”\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{45} Thompson, “Hairstyles, Head-Coverings, and St. Paul,” 112.
\textsuperscript{46} David W.J. Gill, “The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” \textit{Tyndale Bulletin} 41 (1990): 251. It is beyond the scope of this work to cement Corinth’s cultural practices in the Greek background of the city rather than that of a Roman Colony but it is assumed throughout that the practice of veiling is a holdover from the Greek rather than Roman cultural influences.
The activities of the “women’s police,” which, according to Ruden, was an informal group of women who made it their business to ensure that unfavorable women were not wearing the *tegidion*, shows how flawed such an argument is, even during the first century CE. Furthermore, in art throughout history humans have been shown in the nude, both male and female. Daniela Ziegler remarks, in her book *Frauenfrisuren der römischen Antiken*, that historians should keep in mind that when we look at statues, paintings, and pottery we see “keine Person, sondern nur die Darstellung” of that person and Elizabeth Bartman notes, in her article “Hair and the Artifice of Roman Female Adornment,” that public portraits “aimed to depict the sitter in a positive mode, as a virtuous individual as well as an example of the best of her sex.”

The particular styles of artwork represented in Greek erotica, and in Corinthian sculpture, should be understood through these filters. These are representations in the minds of the artists, and not necessarily historical scenes being accurately reproduced. These portraits should be considered a different genre than the pornographic vases, not only because they are from a different time period, but because they had a different intended audience and purpose. Portraiture is intended, generally, to honor the subject. As such it is emphasizes honorable traits while deemphasizing dishonorable ones. This is the point being made by Ziegler—the marble portraiture shows an idealized version of the subjects portrayed, rather than the individuals in their reality.

Being in the nude has rarely been socially acceptable in public, and artwork depicting nude men or women would not, in other cultures, be seen as a sign that nudity was socially

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47 Ruden, *Paul Among the People*, 87.
acceptable; instead Pomeroy would attribute it to male voyeurism.\textsuperscript{49} Beyond the fact that artwork does not, of necessity, reflect respectable social practices is the very existence of laws prohibiting women from appearing in public or wearing the veil if they have prostituted themselves or become adulteresses; such laws would be superfluous if it were not the normal practice of respectable women to wear a veil. This examination of Greek erotic artwork should be understood with the caveat that most of these vases were found in \textit{Magna Graeca} or Sicily, and date to the early Iron Age, sometime between the 6\textsuperscript{th} and 5\textsuperscript{th} centuries B.C.E. and not to a time contemporary with Paul’s writing. Despite these cautions, we can conclude, rather safely, that Greek prostitutes, whether the common \textit{pornê} or the high-class \textit{Hetaira} would never have shaved their hair as a mark of their profession.

\textsuperscript{49} Pomeroy, \textit{Goddesses, Whores, Wives}, 142-146. In these pages Pomeroy discusses particularly the increase in depictions of naked women during the Hellenistic period.
CHAPTER 2

ANCIENT SOURCES

The Writings of Plutarch

Plutarch is a useful source when examining practices concerning hair among the Greeks and Romans. Mestrius Plutarch was born around 50 CE in Chaeronea and died around 120 CE. Plutarch was well traveled throughout Greece and the Mediterranean and wrote various essays and biographies during his life. Some of these have been lost but 78 works of various kinds are extant. He records, in the Life of Lycurgus, that Spartan women had their hair cut short on the night of their wedding. While Plutarch’s veracity in this case is somewhat questionable—there is evidence that Lycurgus was a legendary figure as opposed to an actual historical person—it is clear that hair was at the center of quite a few Greek and Roman practices. The Romans, for example, supposedly parted the hair of the bride with a javelin. Plutarch traced this practice back to a number of possible sources, but, whatever the origin, this peculiar practice highlights the importance of a woman’s hair to the Romans’ ritual practices. In some places, such as Chalcedon, the women would only wear the veil over one cheek, rather than over the entire face. While the origin of this practice among the Chalcedonians, as given by Plutarch, is probably legendary, the practice itself is illuminating as far as the prestige of the veil is concerned.

51 Plutarch, Lycurgus, 15:3-6. They were then placed in a man’s clothing and left alone in the house. The house was kept dark and the husband would come in, have intercourse, and leave without having seen his wife’s face. It was common, Plutarch reports, for a Spartan man to have children before he ever saw his wife’s face in daylight.
52 Plutarch, Roman Questions, 87.
53 Plutarch, Greek Questions, 49.
The story goes that the practice of veiling just one side of the face was originally practiced only by women who were widowed after a great number of men were slain in a war and then remained widowed. These women still had to provide for themselves and interact with other citizens in their town. By veiling only one half of their face, the women made a statement that they had become at least semi-autonomous. They recognized that they were still women and not the equal of a man, which was what going without the veil would have suggested, but they also asserted that they had more autonomy and deserved more respect from the city than the women who remarried. Plutarch notes that eventually the women who did remarry, most to freedmen or non-citizens, copied this style of wearing the veil over only one half of the face. He says this was to their “very shame.”

Examples of punishment for adulteresses can be found in Plutarch’s writings as well. In the *Greek Questions*, he cites the “woman that rode on a donkey at Cumae.” Any woman who was caught in adultery would be stood on a stone in the center of Cumae, and then she would be led around the city on a donkey, facing its tail. Finally the women would be brought back to stand upon the stone; she would thereafter bear the name “donkey-rider.”

In the *Roman Questions*, Plutarch also notes some Roman religious practices, involving the veiling and unveiling of the head. Question 11 is concerned with the fact that Romans sacrifice to Saturn with “uncovered head.” He marked this as noteworthy because the Romans would cover their heads when worshipping the other gods, and on meeting honorable men they would uncover their heads. A last mention of hair by Plutarch comes in Question 14 of the

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56 Plutarch, *The Roman Questions*, 10 & 11. “Perhaps the Romans uncovered their heads when meeting honorable men so as to not put them on the level of gods; perhaps they uncover their head in worship of Saturn because he is a chthonian deity, residing under the ground. Perhaps it was because Saturn is the father of Truth and Truth is never covered.”
Roman Questions and is in reference to burial rites. In this instance sons would go uncovered and women covered; Plutarch’s answer is that a mourning period should show the mourners doing that which is unusual. He notes that Greek women would cut their hair short and men would grow their hair long “because the latter usually cut it, while the former wear it long.”

In Plutarch, therefore, we have two references to women cutting their hair short, though not necessarily shaving it, a distinction that should possibly be viewed as merely semantic. The cutting of a woman’s hair short, in the style or length of a man’s, or shaving her head bald would have similar effects upon her appearance and reception, namely making her unattractive, and, as it will be shown, both would be shameful in most circumstances. It should be noted that, even if Plutarch is accurate in his Life of Lycurgus when relaying Spartan practices, Spartans supposedly had different standards for their women in all areas of life than the other Greek city-states. If such practices ever existed, they were not common to all Greeks.

What does seem to have been common to the Greeks in general, and not particular to any one specific city state, was the practice of cutting the hair of a woman during mourning, and this reference is more relevant to the issue at hand. Could it be argued that Paul is instructing the church at Corinth that if a woman is to go with her hair uncovered she might as well be in mourning? Such an argument stretches credulity in the context of 1 Corinthians 11; why would Paul imply that if grieving was shameful then immodesty was shameful? Though an understanding of the importance of women’s hair can be gained by a careful reading of Plutarch, the reason it was shameful for a woman’s head to be shaved cannot be found in his writings.

Lucian and Tacitus

References to women shaving or cutting their hair are rare in the available primary sources and the search for the impetus behind this practice cannot be limited to just Greek texts.

57 Plutarch, Roman Questions, 14.
by Greek authors. Tacitus, a Roman historian who lived from about 56 CE to around 118 CE, writes in *Germania* that a German man, upon finding his wife with another man, shaved her head. The German then stripped her naked and beat her as he drove her through the streets of the village. Fidelity was as vitally important among the Germanic peoples, according to Tacitus, as it was to the Greeks and at least some Romans. Tacitus’ various positions within the Roman government allowed him to encounter various tribes and peoples on the outskirts of the Roman Empire. While Tacitus is discussing the German tribes in this work scholars may extrapolate certain conclusions from this work. First, it is possible that Tacitus is relaying an actual event. If this is the case he clearly believes his audience will view the act with approval. Second it is possible that Tacitus has created this event out of whole-cloth and no actual experience, whether with the Germans or otherwise. In this case he still presents this as fact, and expects it to be believed by his readers. Third, and most likely, Tacitus has seen this practice in Greek culture and attributes it to the Germans. Since the German tribes were viewed as ”Noble Savages,” by Tacitus in *Germania*, whose morality was to be emulated, even while their primitive tribal way of life was looked down upon by general Roman society, attributing such a laudable practice to the Germans, rather than to the Greeks, would serve as a more poignant chastisement of the Romans’ lax views on adultery, as seen by Tacitus.

Fritz Mezger wrote, in 1948 of Germanic rule concerning adultery found in Germanic law codes: “The rule that both culprits, the adulterer as well as the adulterous wife, have to be punished equally is found in the Burgundian and the Visigothic laws, as well as in the code of Hammurabi, the Assyrian code and the Hittite code. The Visigothic and Burgundian regulation

does not conform with the tenor of Germanic law on adultery.” Mezger goes on to discuss some of the different ways societies have viewed adultery and have treated those who commit adultery. His conclusion is that the law is not Germanic in origin, but was adopted by the Germanic tribes from their neighbors around the Mediterranean Sea, such as the Romans and Greeks, and earlier the Hittites and Assyrians. If this law did travel from its Ancient Near Eastern origins into the Germanic laws then certainly a law or practice concerning shaving the head of a woman caught in adultery could have made the same type of journey. In fact Christian Bromberger writes “‘Cutting off the braid’ (gis boridan) was one of the traditional sanctions for adulteresses in Iran, and promiscuous women or shameless girls were frequently referred to as gis boride (cut braids).”

Another obscure example of women shaving their heads is less useful in interpreting Paul, as this case is restricted to an even more select group of people. Lucian, a satirist from Samasota, reports in The Syrian Goddess that the women of Byblos, a coastal city in what is now Lebanon were required to shave their heads every year. Lucian’s works are best seen through the light of social commentary rather than as serious histories. His native language was probably Aramaic, though he later became fluent in both the Greek language and culture. Lucian writes that the people of Byblos would sacrifice to Adonis, then, after proclaiming Adonis again to be alive, having come back from the dead, the women of Byblos would keirasthai, which is to

61 Mezger, “The Origin of a Specific Rule on Adultery in the Germanic Laws.” 147-148. Mezger’s analysis of the adoption of Near Eastern law by the Germanic tribes goes into greater detail on the specific route the law would have traveled, from society to society. He also discusses the differences in laws in places like Japan and among the Jews.
shave their heads “like the Egyptians at the loss of their Apis.” Those who refused would be forced into prostitution for a day at the temple of Aphrodite. It is interesting to note that the women being prostituted were specifically those who did not shave their heads. In Byblos, according to the account presented in *The Syrian Goddess*, looking for prostitute would not entail looking for women with no hair; rather the opposite was true, at least immediately following this religious festival.

*Peri Tykes Deuteros—On Fortune II*

Yet another reference to head shaving by an ancient author is found in one of the *Discourses* originally attributed to Dio Chrysostom. The author of *On Fortune II* was probably Favorinus, one of Dio’s students who lived c. 85-155 CE. Favorinus writes that “Demonassa, a woman gifted in both statesmanship and law-giving,” gave the people of Cyprus three laws. These three laws concerned the treatment of adulteresses, the burial rites of suicides, and a law forbidding the slaughter of plough-oxen. The second and third laws do not concern the present study, but the first is germane to the discussion at hand. “A woman guilty of adultery shall have her hair cut off and be a harlot”; indeed, Demonassa’s own daughter, the author claims, became an adulteress and suffered this fate. Her hair was cut off, “according to the law,” and she “practiced harlotry.”

If this is a factual account then our search for an explanation of Paul’s reference is ended. Bruce Winter, in fact, accepts this claim at face value; in his book *After Paul Left Corinth*, Winter writes “It is known, e.g., that in Cyprus the law prescribed that ‘a woman guilty of

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64 Lucian, *The Syrian Goddess*, 60.
65 Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 64.2–4.
67 Nothing is known of Demonassa of Cyprus beyond what is quoted in *On Fortune II*.
68 Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 64.2–4.
adultery shall have her hair cut off…” Here he quotes the author of On Fortune II attributing the passage to Dio Chrysostom in his endnote without comment. Unfortunately, for the current pursuit, this matter is not so simply solved, as a number of concerns immediately present themselves.

First is the issue of authorship. Were Dio universally accepted as the author of this Discourse we might, at once and without hesitation, accept this as an explanation for head shaving in Greece; such is not the case, and the authorship of the passage is disputed. Secondly is the nature of the author’s claim; the law, supposedly handed down by Demonassa, is not referenced elsewhere. Instead, like many of the laws of Solon, which are mentioned in secondary writings, like the transcripts of court cases, by third parties, this law concerning Cypriot adulteresses is only referenced, so far as I have been able to tell, in Discourse 64. Thirdly Winter’s suppositions and expertise in interpreting ancient Greek culture in general, and Corinthian culture in particular, have been called into question by various authors. M. J. Edwards, in his review of Winter’s book, notes Winter’s “carelessness…to say that Clodia was the paramour of Sallust (p. 126),” as well as accusing Winter of “conjuring evidence,” in some sections of the book. In the same review, however, Edwards compliments Winter’s discussion on 1 Corinthians 11 and his establishment of head shaving as the punishment for adultery. Similarly Will Deming writes in his review that “Winter’s book, sadly, adds little to our understanding of ‘secular ethics and social change’” in Corinth after Paul’s departure thence.

While I hesitate to call Winter’s credibility into question on my own, these reviews suggest, strongly, that his casual acceptance of the author’s account in On Fortune II as factual is premature, at least without the corroborating evidence found in the present work. This lack in Winter’s argument is exasperated by the nature of the primary text; a text with questionable authorship, referencing a quasi-historical figure, and lacking in independent primary verification, should not be taken as the final word in such a conversation. With these caveats in mind, Winter’s conclusion agrees with my own, and is more firmly established with the evidence presented in this work.

The Jewish Perspective

There are several passages by Jewish authors from the late first and early second centuries CE relevant to the question at hand. Jewish constructions of female modesty during the first and second centuries CE bear a striking resemblance to those of the Greeks to whom Paul was writing. Michael Satlow, in his article “Jewish Constructions of Nakedness in Late Antiquity,” relates that it was dishonorable for a man to uncover a woman’s hair in public; the guilty man would be liable for the payment of shame damages to her. He also discusses a story in the Palestinian Talmud where a woman is recorded defending her honor and modesty saying, “May ruin come upon me if the rafters of my house have ever seen the hair of my head or the hem of my undergarment.” If the wife did uncover her hair in public, she was not primarily the person shamed; her husband was viewed as the primary victim. If a woman voluntarily

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73 Palestinian Talmud B. Sadd 118 B., as cited by Satlow, in “Jewish Constructions of Nakedness in Late Antiquity,” 444.
uncovered her own hair, her husband had the right to divorce her.\textsuperscript{75} The parallel between Greek and Jewish practices is plain; the true victim of a wife’s immodesty is her husband.

In addition to the traditions and regulations keeping Jewish women’s hair covered in public, there are mentions of head-shaving in some Jewish writings. It is clear that the Jews held similar views on modesty as it pertained to women’s hair.\textsuperscript{76} It is less clear whether the shaving of a woman’s head was seen as wholly degrading to the Jews. Josephus recounts that Berenice, when taking a vow to God, shaved her head. This, he tells his Roman audience, was the practice when a person “who are being worn out by disease or by some other stresses to make a vow.”\textsuperscript{77} It is interesting to note that Paul himself, as recorded in Acts 18:18, cut his hair because “he was under a vow.” According to J. Derrett, this Jewish practice was the impetus behind Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 11.

A woman who had shaved her head, Derrett claims, had taken a vow, and since all vows made by women must be ratified by a male authority her husband had the right to nullify her vow. If she was to wear her hair uncovered in church it would be just as disrespectful as if she had taken a vow without her husband’s approval; she was, according to this argument, flaunting her rejection of her husband’s authority.\textsuperscript{78} This explanation is problematic for two reasons. Derrett’s argument assumes that the church in Corinth, which would have consisted largely of Gentiles, was familiar with this particular Jewish custom concerning vows and that Paul was espousing Jewish normative customs, as opposed to universal standards or adherence to local customs. There is, however, little or no evidence that the Greeks at Corinth—the church in Corinth would have been primarily made up of Gentiles—were familiar with the custom of

\textsuperscript{75} Satlow, 442.
\textsuperscript{76} Leila Leah Bronner, “From Veil to Wig: Jewish Women’s Hair Covering,” Judaism 42 (1993): 465.
\textsuperscript{77} Josephus, BJ 2.313. Josephus uses the phrase xuresesthai tas komas to describe Berenice cutting off her hair.
\textsuperscript{78} Derrett, “Religious Hair,” 102.
shaving a head to make a vow and Josephus clearly assumes his Roman readers were not familiar with the practice. While this does not rule out Derrett’s interpretation, the lack of evidence renders the explanation less plausible. Furthermore, Paul’s other writings make it abundantly clear that he does not endorse obedience to Jewish laws and customs for non-Jews. Derrett’s interpretation also ignores the increased legal rights Greek women enjoyed during the Hellenistic period.79

Looking beyond Josephus’ account, there is more information in Jewish sources about women with shaved heads. David Stern discusses two rabbis, Akiva b. Joseph, who lived circa 17-137 CE, and Eliezer B. Hyrcanus, who lived in the latter first and early second centuries CE. According to Stern these two rabbis came to different conclusions when examining Deuteronomy 21:10-14. This text in Deuteronomy commands the armies of Israel that to take a wife from a conquered people the Israelite man must “shave her head, pare her nails, discard her captive’s garb” and allow her to mourn her parents and family for a month; only after this could he take her as his wife.80 If she did not please him after this time period he must allow her to leave, not as a slave, but as a free woman. Stern relates that Akiva, who would later become Eliezer’s teacher, saw the Gentile women as a danger and the rule in Deuteronomy was designed to make them ugly and undesirable. In this way the Israelites could be sure to weed out any women who retained their pagan loyalties.81

Eliezer, again according to Stern, believed that the commands in Deuteronomy were intended to give some basic rights to the captured woman. She should be allowed to mourn and recuperate. Furthermore, the Israelite must only take her as his wife if he has shown enough

79 Sarah B. Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves, 125-129.
80 Deuteronomy 21:10-14.
commitment to treat her with respect and honor, despite her disfigurement."\textsuperscript{82} Clement of Alexandria, in his \textit{Stromata}, calls this “humanity combined with continence. The master who has fallen in love…is not allowed to gratify his pleasure, but puts a check on his lust…and further, cuts off the captive’s hair…for…he will cleave to her even after she has become disfigured."\textsuperscript{83} When taking the disparate views and examples in Jewish literature into consideration Derrett’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians cannot be substantiated. Three authors offered three different theories on why a woman would have her head shaved and, without some sort of corroborating evidence, whether it be related to the taking of vows or to the marriage of captives; it is much more likely that the practice Paul is referring to is that of shaving a woman’s head as a punishment for adultery.

\textit{A Ritual concerning adultery in the Old Testament}

There is a biblical ritual for determining if a woman who is suspected of adultery is guilty. Women who were caught in adultery would be put to death according to the law in Leviticus 20, but those whose husbands merely suspected them of adultery would be subject to the ritual described in Numbers 5:11-31.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites and say to them: If any man’s wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him, if a man has had intercourse with her but it is hidden from her husband, so that she is undetected though she has defiled herself, and there is no witness against her since she was not caught in the act; if a spirit of jealousy comes on him, and he is jealous of his wife, though she has not defiled herself; then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. And he shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley flour. He shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense

\textsuperscript{82} Stern, “The Captive Woman,” 105.

\textsuperscript{83} Clement, \textit{Stromata}, 2.18 For some reason, whether she is unaware of Eliezer B. Hyrcanus’ interpretation of Deuteronomy 21:10-14 or has discounted it as an argument, Daniela Ziegler calls Clement’s interpretation, which agrees completely with Eliezer’s interpretation so closely that the two texts could be referencing one another, into question: “Es bleibe dahingestellt, inwieweit Clemens die Passage im Deuteronomium richtig interpretiert hat. Wesentlich ist, daß er das Haar der Frau zur Sinnlichkeit des Mannes, in dessen gewalt sie sich befindet, in Beziehung setzt. Daß eine Frau mit geschnitten Haar weniger schön ist und das sexuelle verlangen des Mannes hemmt, stimmt im Grunde mit Apulejus überein, für den das lange Haar der Photis ein Wesentlicher sexueller Anreiz ist.” \textit{Frauenfrisuren der römischen Antike}, 231.
on it, for it is a grain offering of jealousy, a grain offering of remembrance, bringing iniquity to remembrance.

Then the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the Lord; the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water. The priest shall set the woman before the Lord, *dishevel the woman’s hair*, and place in her hands the grain offering of remembrance, which is the grain offering of jealousy. In his own hand the priest shall have the water of bitterness that brings the curse. Then the priest shall make her take an oath, saying, “if no man has lain with you, if you have not turned aside to uncleanness while under your husband’s authority, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings the curse.

But if you have gone astray while under your husband’s authority, if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has had intercourse with you,” — let the priest make the woman take the oath of the curse and say to the woman—“the Lord make you an execration and an oath among your people, when the Lord makes your uterus drop, your womb discharge; now may this water that brings the curse enter your bowels and make your womb discharge, your uterus drop!” And the woman shall say, “Amen. Amen.”

The woman in question proceeds to drink the water and suffer the consequences according to her guilt or innocence. What is interesting is that the woman’s hair is disheveled during the ritual. While the veil may have had similar weight in the Jewish community as in Corinth, the ritual punishment of adulteresses was clearly different.

**Leucippe and Clitophon**

Beyond establishing the veil as a prestigious symbol, it is also possible, through one of the Greek novels, to connect a woman’s shaven head to a degraded status. The story of *Leucippe and Clitophon* gives evidence for the shameful status of a woman with her head shaved.

Leucippe, one of the main characters in the late second century CE novel by Achilles Tatius, of Alexandria, is a woman “beaten, shaved, and much abused.” Her status is referenced both in a

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84 Numbers 5:11-22.
85 Susan Niditch, “*My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man*”: Hair and Identity in Ancient Israel, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 121-124. Susan Niditch discusses in more detail the symbolism of the “trial by bitter water” prescribed in Numbers 5:11-22 as well as how it was practiced and modified in later Jewish communities. See Bronner, pages 468-474, for more details on how Jews would handle issues of modesty during the Tannaic and later periods.
poem in the *Anthologia Palatina* and the Greek novel *Leucippe and Clitophon*.\(^8\) The novel does not give the reason for Leucippe’s head being shaved but it is clear that it was inflicted upon her during enslavement. It is equally clear that the shaving of her head was a shameful act. When first described Leucippe is in “heavy irons bound around her ankles, a workman’s hoe in her hands, her head was shaved, her body was all grimy, her miserable clothing was hitched up for work.”\(^8\) In no way did she resemble the beautiful woman from earlier in the story. This novel does not shed light on the reason women’s heads might be shaved in ancient Greece—in this case her hair could have been shaved due to her slavery—but it does reinforce the fact that shaving a woman’s head shamed and degraded her, which is integral to the plot of *Leucippe and Clitophon*. Leucippe’s beauty was marred by her captors. The fact that this imagery comes from an Alexandrian Greek illustrates how widespread the shame associated with a shorn head was during the early centuries CE.

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\(^8\) Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 5.17.
CHAPTER 3

PUNISHMENTS FOR ADULTERY

Sarah Ruden discusses what types of modesty laws existed and notes that the “women’s police” would wander the public festivals, assuring that no woman of ill-repute was present, or, if they were allowed to be present, that none of these women had assumed the coveted mantel of wife. These women were known, at least in some cities as *gynaikonomoi* and their actions were meant to constrain the dress of women in public places, particularly at religious occasions. In Athens, at least, these actions seem to be in enforcement of a law mentioned by Demosthenes that “it shall not be lawful for the woman who is taken in adultery to attend public sacrifices.”

The law—supposedly written by Solon—mentioned by Aeschines in his speech “Against Timarchus,” given in 346 BCE, states: “the woman may put on no ornaments and may not visit the public temples, lest she should corrupt women who were beyond reproach; but if she does so or adorns herself, then the first man who meets her may tear her clothes from her body, take her ornaments from her and beat her; but he may not kill her or make her a cripple.”

These consequences of adultery seem to equate to Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, a public way of immediately identifying adulterous women. Some consequences from earlier periods were even worse. In order to understand the role of women in enforcing these rules and the origin of the practice it is important to recognize the nature of Greek communities. Marilyn Katz describes the Athenian city-state as a sacrificial

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88 Daniel Ogden, “Controlling Women’s Dress: Gynaikonomoi,” in *Women’s Dress in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones (London: Duckworth, 2002) 203; Louis Cohn-Haft, “Divorce in Classical Athens,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 115 (1995): 9; Demosthenes 59.87 reads: “When he has caught the adulterer, it shall not be lawful for the one who has caught him to continue living with his wife, and if he does so, he shall lose his civic rights and it shall not be lawful for the woman who is taken in adultery to attend public sacrifices; and if she does attend them, she may be made to suffer any punishment whatsoever, short of death, and that with impunity.” Louis Cohn-Haft discusses the Athenian law, relayed by Demosthenes, concerning adultery which required any man who caught his wife in adultery to divorce her.

community, one in which “ritual and religion were central to all forms of both private and communal life.” With ritual being so important to the Greeks, at least in Athens, ritual purity and the maintenance of that purity became increasingly important. These women enforced the law of Demosthenes concerning the purity and holiness of the rituals by removing polluted women from the public rituals.90 Such women were also, writes David Schaps, excluded “forever from the normal society of free women.”91

For an early example of the Athenian legal process concerning adultery the trial of Euphiletus, ca. 400 BCE, is helpful. In this trial Euphiletus claims to have caught his wife in the arms of Eratosthenes. Rejecting the offer of a monetary repayment, which was allowable under the Law of Solon, Euphiletus kills Eratosthenes outright. At his trial, of which we have a partial record written by Lysias, Euphiletus cites his words to Eratosthenes before the killing: “It is not I who am going to kill you, but our city’s law, which you have transgressed and regarded as of less account than your pleasures, choosing rather to commit this foul offence against my wife and my children than to obey the laws like a decent person.”92 While we do not know the outcome of this trial, it is clear that Euphiletus expected to be exonerated since he acted within the law. He also claimed that the “lawgiver,” Solon, considered rape a lesser offense than seduction.93 Rape was a one-time occurrence, a savage crime, but it was not considered the same, Lysias argues, as stealing a wife’s affection away from the husband while also casting doubt upon the legitimacy

91 David M. Schaps, “What Was Free about a Free Athenian Woman,” Transactions of the American Philological Association 128 (1998): 175. This article is useful for understanding the overall status of women in Athens. Schaps argues persuasively that an Athenian woman of free status would have considered herself completely free, and our views to the contrary are anachronistic.
93 Lysias, On the Murder of Eratosthenes, 1.31.
of his children; Euphiletus is very particular, for this reason, in asserting that his son was born before his wife’s adultery.

What is of particular interest in this case is that the graphe moicheias, or adultery laws, are not referenced by Lysaias. Instead Lysias makes an appeal to exculpate Euphiletus of guilt on the basis of the laws concerning justifiable homicide. As C. Carey points out in his article on “Rape and Adultery in Athenian Law,” there were adultery laws which have not been explicitly cited in any extant court cases; most of the laws that are cited in court cases concern punishment of the male adulterer rather than the adulteress. Without access to these laws scholars must piece together a picture of Greek views and practices concerning adulteresses.  

How rape could be distinguished from adultery was a matter of some discussion, particularly if no obvious physical force was involved. It may not have made a great deal of difference to the male rapist or adulterer, but whether a woman was an adulteress or a rape victim mattered greatly to her. Susan Cole suggests that an unmarried woman who had been sexually assaulted might not be subject to all of the same types of sanctions as a woman who had committed adultery. The man who committed rape or had an affair with a married woman could be killed in either case, according to Edward Harris. It should also be noted that a husband who caught his wife in adultery might, if he were able, overlook the adultery in order to avoid the shame that would otherwise be brought to his family. This could be a risky proposition

95 Carey, “Rape and Adultery in Athenian Law,” 409.
96 Susan Guettel Cole, “Greek Sanctions against Sexual Assault,” Classical Philology, 79 (1984): 107. Cole allows that a female victim of sexual assault was probably subject, in many cases, to some sort of punishment. Married victims of rape might, in fact, be divorced in the same manner as an adulteress. An unmarried woman, however, might be allowed to marry her assailter as a wife.
97 Edward M. Harris, “Did the Athenians Regard Seduction as a Worse Crime than Rape?” Classical Quarterly, 40. (1990): 372. Harris examines the trial of Euphiletus and the law set down by Demosthenes. His conclusion is that Euphiletus distorts the law of Solon to make the crime of Eratosthenes seem to be even greater than that of rape so as to strengthen his defense of his own actions, namely the killing of Eratosthenes. Demosthenes, at least, allowed for the killing of any man found in intercourse with a man’s wife. Lysias 1; Demosthenes 23.53. For further discussion of Lysias 1 see also Andrew Wolpert, “Lysias 1 and the Politics of the Oikos,” Classical Journal, 96 (2001): 415-424.
according to J. Roy, since he could lose his citizenship if he did not divorce the adulterous wife. Still, Roy believes that adultery was common enough, and commonly enough covered up, to be a relatively normal phenomenon in ancient Athens.  

Phintys, in particular, viewed the betrayal of adultery as a wronging of the gods, one which produced illegitimate offspring. She claimed that to perpetrate such a crime was “unlawful and unforgivable,” and it deserved swift punishment. Throughout most of Classical Greek history, as opposed to the Hellenistic or Roman Greek eras, though, the woman caught in adultery was viewed not as a culpable individual, but as the adulterated. The seducer was the only one termed as adulterer, as the woman was not considered to have the mental capacity to reject the advances of a skilled seducer, nor was she capable of instigating such a crime on her own; instead, she was purely the victim. This state of affairs, where women were viewed as partial victims in adultery, was not the case at the time of Paul’s writing; a woman was not as culpable as her seducer, but she was still viewed as partly to blame. Eventually, however, death was a possible punishment for both the man and woman caught in adultery, though the laws could be convoluted and were not practiced universally.

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100 Eva Cantarella, *Pandora’s Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, trans. Maureen B. Fant (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987) 41-42. “The law concerning *moicheia* contains a provision that strikes us at first glance as unusual: though it allowed killing a man who had committed adultery (as we will call illicit sexual relations for convenience), it did not allow the killing of the woman. She was subject to another punishment, namely, repudiation (if married) and being forbidden to participate in sacred rites. Moreover, if she should participate in rites, any citizen could punish her at his pleasure, as long as he stopped short of killing her. But this provision is unusual only at first glance. From Helen to Clytemnestra and on until the fifth century B.C. and the wife of Euphiletus (accused of having killed Eratosthenes, his wife’s lover, and defended by Lysias, who invoked the sanctity of the law of legitimate homicide), the woman was never considered an adulterer but rather the ‘adulterated.’ She was *moicheutheisa*, or ‘corrupted’ as Lysias says, which is to say seduced. She was a victim even if she had consented, because in the final analysis she was unfit to make up her own mind, whether for good or bad.”

101 Cantarella, *Pandora’s Daughters*, 123.
Yet another example is the story of a woman, who, caught in adultery, was shut into a house with a horse. The horse supposedly ate her when it became maddened with hunger, and then died of hunger itself. While this story is probably legendary, it clearly shows the harshness with which women caught in adultery were treated, and was therefore able to be passed off as true by Aeschines.\footnote{Licht, \textit{Sexual Life in Ancient Greece}, 62. Aeschines, \textit{Kata Timarkhou}, 182-183.} Further we have the account, discussed above, where Tacitus records a German husband shaving the head of his adulterous wife and beating her naked through the streets.\footnote{Tacitus, \textit{Germania}, 19.} Even if Tacitus’ account does not depict an actual historical occurrence he clearly believes his audience would accept, and even applaud, such a punishment. In addition, the alleged Cypriot law concerning adulteresses may be conservatively interpreted in a similar manner; the author of \textit{On Fortune II} clearly believed that his audience would accept such a punishment for adultery as fitting.\footnote{This interpretation, as mentioned in the previous section—\textit{On Fortune II}, stands in contrast to Bruce Winter’s. See Winter, \textit{After Paul Left Corinth}, Kindle Locations 1462-1465, for comparison.}

The distinction between proper wives or widows and adulteresses or prostitutes is clear, both in the laws of the Greeks, and also in the manner of dress the women were allowed to wear. Adulteresses could be punished severely, and no small part of that punishment was the loss of the right to the veil; this was in spite of the relative freedom women enjoyed during the Hellenistic Era.\footnote{Ruden, \textit{Paul Among the Peoples}, 87.} The difference between wearing a veil or head covering is remarkable. The loss of the veil would also have signified the loss of sexual freedom, which David Schaps remarks was the “freedom most often mentioned is \textit{freedom from sexual abuse}. Greek men considered modesty the hallmark of a free woman, promiscuity the sign of a slave.”\footnote{David M. Schaps, “What Was Free about a Free Athenian Woman?” \textit{Transactions of the American Philological Association}, 128 (1998): 173. Schaps mentions the writings of a number of Greek authors such as Plutarch, Demosthenes, and Aeschines.} It is also clear, therefore, that shaving a woman’s head as a punishment for adultery would not have been,
to the Greek mind, a heinous or barbarous treatment. Such a treatment would in fact have been rather humane compared to some of the older alternatives.

Despite customs prohibiting such disreputable women from wearing the veil, it has not been suitably answered whether the women themselves would feel that this was a punishment. Was the removal of the veil a harsh punishment, one which would dissuade women from committing the crime of adultery? Or was it a meaningless token of disapproval? The laws seem to suggest the former, and strongly, but the question bears closer examination. Thompson, for instance, suggests that bare-headedness may not have been a sign of a socially disapproved lifestyle.\textsuperscript{107} When Thompson’s argument is compared with one of the \textit{Greek Questions} of Plutarch, her argument loses credibility. Remembering that Plutarch vilified the remarried women of Chalcedon, we can safely declare that the veil was a widely considered a prestigious symbol, which was the case in Corinth at the time of Paul’s writing.\textsuperscript{108}

The common trend in ancient punishments for adultery is shame.\textsuperscript{109} In Lepreæ, for instance, women caught in adultery were required to stand in transparent clothing for eleven days in the market place, their all but naked bodies bared for all to look upon.\textsuperscript{110} Egyptian records also suggest shaming punishments for adulterers. One story, related by James Reynolds, tells of an adulterous wife and her lover being killed in ways that would prevent them from entering the afterlife; the man was fed to a crocodile and the woman is burned. Another account is that of

\textsuperscript{107} Thompson, “Hairstyles, Head-Coverings, and St. Paul,” 112. Thompson’s argument, it may be recalled, is that since women were often shown in Greek artwork with unveiled faces and uncovered hair, it was socially acceptable for them to move about freely without a covering.

\textsuperscript{108} Plutarch, \textit{Greek Questions}, 49. Though Plutarch commends the widowed women for remaining unmarried, and condemns those who remarried for unveiling half of their face, he does not claim the women broke any laws.

\textsuperscript{109} An interesting exception to the shaming of adulteresses seems to be the Neo-Babylonians. Martha Roth, in an article titled “‘She Will Die by the Iron Dagger’: Adultery and Neo-Babylonian Marriage,” relates that the Neo-Babylonian punishment for an adulteress was to die “by the iron dagger.” Few shaming measures are prescribed or mentioned by Roth in the text except for the public nature of the execution. Martha T. Roth, “‘She Will Die By The Iron Dagger’: Adultery and Neo-Babylonian Marriage,” \textit{Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient}, 31 (1988): 186-206.

\textsuperscript{110} Andrew Dalby, “Levels of Concealment: 115. It should be noted that I have been unable to find the incident cited by Andrew Dalby. The work given source is Heracleides Ponticus, \textit{Constitutions} 14.
King Pheron, who burned his unfaithful wives, destroying their bodies and thus their chance at an afterlife.\textsuperscript{111} Yet another Egyptian punishment was to cut off of the nose of the guilty woman, destroying any beauty she might have once possessed.\textsuperscript{112} The man who cast doubt upon the legitimacy of another’s children was shamed, and could be killed for his transgressions. The woman who was faithless to her husband was subject to extremely shaming punishments. Many of these punishments—like riding backwards through town on a donkey or having the right to wear the veil removed—involved a public aspect of shame. Shaving a woman’s head was no different, and, in fact, fits the archetype of punishments for adultery seen in much of Greek history.

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Because the issue of a woman’s shorn head is cast by Paul in the context of a Christian theological debate, it is helpful, even necessary, to examine early Christian writings in regards to the significance of a shorn head in Antiquity. There are certain caveats, however, that must be made first. First, only the ante-Nicene Fathers will be considered, in order to maintain a chronological proximity to Paul. Secondly the writings will be considered chronologically as those closest temporally to Paul should have the most insight into the culture to which Paul was writing. The origins of each author will be considered in addition to their words; a Father whose upbringing was far removed from the Greek world might have very different cultural views than one who was raised and educated in the Greek East.

After consulting the ante-Nicene Fathers a few perspectives of modern historians will be considered. Particularly interpretations of Paul’s argumentation from nature, an interesting and important theory proposed by Sarah Ruden, and the question of whether or not there was ever a practice of sacred or religious prostitution in the ancient cultures surrounding the eastern Mediterranean Sea will be discussed.

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons

The first Father under our consideration is Irenaeus. Irenaeus is thought to have been a Greek from the city of Smyrna. Irenaeus was a priest of the Church of Lyons, in Gaul, before becoming the second Bishop of Lyons.113 His most significant writing, On the Detection and

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Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis, or, in its short form, Against Heresies, was produced c. 180 CE. Irenaeus’ purpose in writing was to refute various Gnostic groups and their teachings, but his commentary upon 1 Corinthians 11 are of some relevance. First, Irenaeus follows Paul in allowing that women could prophesy alongside men. Secondly he mentions the Gnostic heresy of Valentinianism, wherein Sophia Achamoth is viewed as chaste because of her donning of a veil. Unfortunately there is not a wealth of information in Against Heresies itself in regards to the practice of veiling or of head-shaving. The references to 1 Corinthians 11 remain of interest for their proximity to Paul in a temporal manner; such an early reference to the passage in which Paul mentions head-shaving is relevant in establishing its authentic place in the epistle, if nothing else.

Clement of Alexandria

Fortunately a more significant quantity of works has survived from the next Church Father under our consideration, Clement of Alexandria. Clement, a younger contemporary of Irenaeus, was born sometime around 150. His parents were pagans and Clement converted to Christianity after rejecting the Greek gods in whose worship he had been raised. Clement’s birthplace is, ultimately, unknown. We do know, however, that he traveled in Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine and Egypt. In his work The Instructor, the second of a trilogy of works, Clement lays out instructions for daily life and practices for Christians; he bases his exhortations

115 Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 1.8.3.
116 I have included this section on Irenaeus because of the very early time of his writing. His sheer proximity to Paul, temporally, would require any work Paul to at least consult Irenaeus. Unfortunately Irenaeus did not show interest in the issue of head-shaving in his writings.
on Scripture. Clement recommended that men keep the hair on their heads shorn, unless it is tight
and curly; they are not, however, to shave their beards smooth as this would be too effeminate.\footnote{Clement of Alexandria, \textit{The Instructor}, Ante-Nicene Fathers Series, 3.11, Clement goes on at length here about appropriate hair styles for men. Being clean shaven and having a long enough beard to produce ringlets are both prohibited. The hair should be cut round on the head with scissors instead of with a razor because such a hairstyle would be noticeable, which would prohibit the man from doing something in secret. Knowing that he was being observed and his identity marked would help keep the man from committing a sin.}

After explaining the proper hair-styles for men Clement discusses what is appropriate for
women. First he discusses the hair itself and second the veil. Women are to “protect their locks,
and bind up their hair simply…with a plain hair-pin,” as the key to true beauty. This is in
juxtaposition to the elaborate coiffures we see in contemporary statues, whether the subject was
of high status or low. He specifically commands against plaiting, or braiding, “putting it up in
tresses.”\footnote{Clement, \textit{The Instructor}, 3.11.} Styling the hair in such a manner would make the woman afraid to touch her hair, lest
she make herself ugly by misplacing it. Elaborate hairstyles would also, he argues, keep them
from sleeping well, as they would fear misplacing the shape. These seem to be his attempt at a
more practical justification than modesty for commanding women to wear their hair plainly,
arguing that, beyond being proper, it was easier to care for. This secondary justification seems to
show that Clement knew his commands concerning modesty were counter-cultural.

Clement goes on to command against any sort of wigs or hair extensions, whether they
come from another person or from animal hair. The priest, he argues, lays his hand upon the hair,
which sits upon the head; if the hair is not the natural hair of the individual, but, instead, that of
someone else, to whom does the blessing go? Does it go to the original owner of the hair? Does
God bless the hair itself? This is a deception of men, for those who see a woman with hair
extensions or a wig would not know that the woman in fact had less hair, or hair of a different
color. It is also, Clement argues, a rejection of modesty for ostentation. Why would you wear the
wig if not to be looked upon with favor? He also states that hair should not be dyed, particularly in the context of old age. Graying hair marks wisdom and honor and as such should not be covered up but should be shown so that young men and women can recognize those who are wise and revere them.  

The next explicit command Clement gives in regards to women’s modesty is that they should go veiled. “Women and men are to go to church decently attired…Let her be entirely covered, unless she happens to be at home.” It will be immediately apparent to the reader that Clement’s command here conforms completely to our early assessment of normal dress in Roman Corinth; a woman would carry the symbol of her house with her wherever she went in the form of a veil. Clement commands this both to protect others from temptation and to go forth in a modest way. “She will never fall, who puts before her eyes modesty,” he writes, his reasoning being that if a woman is to pray this way then she should go from her house at all times in this way, modest and dignified. Finally, in his, The Miscellanies, Clement allows for women to philosophize “equally with men, though the males are preferable at everything.” This is a remarkable command, as it puts women on a near equal footing with men, something quite rare at the time period.

Nowhere does Clement clearly address punishments for adultery or the practice of female-head shaving, but certain themes carry over from the Pauline epistle. Modesty is prized, and maintaining modesty required wearing a covering over the hair. Sexual temptation and the adultery that could lead from immodesty were connected integrally with the display of a woman’s hair. The form of the hair covering is not clearly defined, but women were to be

120 Clement, The Instructor, 3.11.
121 Clement, The Instructor, 3.11.
123 Clement, The Instructor, 3.11.
“entirely covered,” which implies a veil, similar to the *tegidion* we see in Greece. Finally the overall importance of hair can be seen in the culture Clement found himself in by viewing all of these connections together.

*Tertullian*

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus represents something of a turning point in early Church history; he was the first Christian author to produce significant theological works in Latin, as opposed to Greek. Tertullian lived c. 160-225 and his works are dated to the early third century. He was born in Carthage and raised with a Roman education. Kristi Upson-Saia makes the point that Tertullian’s arguments concerning veils are based in the rhetoric and example of the Greek churches; this makes his works particularly helpful in looking backwards and developing a more holistic view of the Corinthian culture concerning veils.

In his *De Corona Militis* Tertullian writes that women should not wear a crown on their head. They ought not to go uncovered, “because of the angels,” and as a result of their seduction of the angels they ought, further, not to make themselves seductive, which would be the result of a crown or band on their head. Ziegler interprets Tertullian to say that a woman was not just shamed to see a man but was shamed to be seen by a man. Tertullian goes on to elegantly argue that since Christ submitted himself to a modest crown, one made of thorns and brambles, women should crown themselves likewise in modesty, with a veil and not a crown.

Tertullian deals with some of the confusion over prayer and head coverings in the Church in his work *De Oratione*. There was a group which believed that God would not hear their

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128 Ziegler, *Frauenfrisuren der römischen Antike*, 236. “soll sich ein Mädchen nicht nur schämen, einen Mann anzusehen, sondern auch, wenn es angesehen wird.”
prayers if their heads were covered. This was a concern since women were commanded to cover themselves in prayer; was Paul then prohibiting women from praying by commanding them to be covered? Tertullian refutes this with a reference to “the three saints in the Babylonian king’s furnace praying.” If God could hear Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego through a raging furnace certainly he can hear through a cloak or veil.\textsuperscript{130} The fact Tertullian had need to answer these types of questions helps to show how important the practice of covering a woman’s hair remained during his time period.

The second question Tertullian addresses on veils concerns whether or not virgins are to wear veils in the Church. It seems, from Tertullian’s argument here, that some in the Church had drawn a narrow meaning from Paul’s usage of the word “Woman” as opposed to “Female” in 1 Corinthians 11:3-15. Only mature, married women, Tertullian’s opponents argued, were under the command to veil. If we recall that girls in Corinth would go directly from their father’s house to their new husband’s, at which point in time they donned the veil, we will understand the confusion. What was a young woman to do if she was not a wife, whether due to circumstance or because she had decided not to marry in accordance with Paul’s suggestion in 1 Corinthians 7:8? Should such a woman wear a veil when praying in the church gatherings or should she leave her hair uncovered? Since the veil was a symbol of respect, a woman who had decided not to marry, remaining single, would be marked as different in the Church from those who had decided to become married. Tertullian’s conclusion is that Paul’s command that “every woman” should wear a symbol of authority meant just that, every woman. He argues this from a number of vantage points. First is that Paul uses the word every, which seems not to exempt those who are

\textsuperscript{130} Tertullian, \textit{De Oratone}, Ante-Nicene Fathers Series, 15. This is a loose paraphrase of Tertullian’s arguments and that of his opponents’ arguments as deduced from Tertullian’s response. Tertullian’s argument here is interesting when compared with Clement’s distaste for wigs; Tertullian does not think that prayer can be hindered even by a raging furnace, while Clement believes that it can be hindered by wearing someone else’s hair.
unmarried.\textsuperscript{131} Further, if “nature herself” teaches that women should have long hair, does it not seem that nature itself would teach that if some should cover their hair all should. “If,” Tertullian argues, “it is shameful for a woman to be shorn it is similarly so to a virgin too.”\textsuperscript{132} Finally, if God bids, through Paul’s commands in 1 Corinthians, that the brides of men should be veiled to represent the man’s headship over the wife, should not the brides of God be veiled to represent God’s headship over them? Tertullian concludes that though virgins are not compelled to be veiled they are certainly in no way prohibited from being veiled. He allows the unmarried to be veiled, and, in so doing, bestows upon them an honor they have not yet earned, or, perhaps, had lost due to infidelity, social status, or profession.

\textit{Cyprian}

The next Father whose works touch on the subject of women’s hair is Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus, who lived from c. 200 to 258. Cyprian, like Tertullian, lived in Carthage, where he served as Bishop from 249 until his martyrdom in 258, and wrote his works in Latin amid the Decian Persecution and the later persecution under Emperor Valerian.\textsuperscript{133} After the Decian Persecution there was a controversy within the Carthaginian Church over how to treat those who had fallen away from the faith, caving to demands that they sacrifice to the Roman Emperor; should they be allowed back into the flock immediately upon asking? Or should they be required to somehow show true repentance, as judged by the faithful clergy? Cyprian wrote, initially, that true repentance was required. Later, in a letter to Antonianus, Cyprian takes a somewhat more lenient tone towards those known as lapsi, the lapsed. As Cyprian discusses the lapsi, he also

\textsuperscript{131} In the NRSV the word used is “any” as opposed to “every.” The Greek word \textit{pas} can be translated a number of ways, including both “every” and “any.”

\textsuperscript{132} Tertullian, \textit{De Oratione}, 22. The quotations in this section are Tertullian’s quotes of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16.

\textsuperscript{133} John F. Matthews, \textit{The Oxford Classical Dictionary}, s.v. “Cyprian.”
deals with the issue of repentance from other sins, taking up the manner in which those who had fallen into different types of sins could be reconciled with the Church; one of the sins discussed is that of adultery.

In discussing the adulterous Cyprian allows that those who have fallen are to be allowed back into the Church—further, those who do not accept the repentant sinner should be removed from the Church themselves.\textsuperscript{134} At the same time Cyprian draws a distinction between the willful sin of adultery and sins of ignorance; the former were more serious to Cyprian than the latter, but he commanded that both types of sinners were to be allowed back into the Church after showing repentance.\textsuperscript{135} It was precisely to these women that Paul offered the command to veil in the assembly, adulteresses, and other women on the fringes of the ritual community, who might otherwise have been noted for the life-styles they had chosen or had forced upon them by the lack of a veil. Cyprian comments upon the seriousness of their sins, but invites them back into the Church community and condemns anyone who would not accept a repentant sinner back into that community.

In some of his other works Cyprian also had recommendations to offer on dress, both of men and women. In his treatise, \textit{On the Lapsed}, Cyprian writes of head coverings during worship, commending those men who, during the Decian persecution, had not reverted to the Roman practice of covering their heads during worship.\textsuperscript{136} Further, in his treatise \textit{On the Dress of Virgins}, Cyprian commands that the virgin “not only to be so, but also to be perceived and believed to be so”; her dress and grooming should reflect that she is, in fact, a virgin, and not a married woman.\textsuperscript{137} While much of his explanation centers on elaborate hair styles it seems safe

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{134} Cyprian, \textit{Epistle} 51.19-22, Ante-Nicene Fathers Series.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Cyprian, \textit{On the Lapsed}, 3.2 and Plutarch, \textit{Roman Questions}, 10 & 11.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Cyprian, \textit{On the Dress of Virgins}, 2.5; see also Ziegler, \textit{Frauenfrisuren der römischen Antike}, 240-242.
\end{itemize}
to extrapolate from this that Cyprian would disapprove of virgins covering their heads as if they were married, though this remains unclear from his writing.\textsuperscript{138} He goes on to accuse young women who dress immodestly by wearing elaborate hair styles or expensive clothes and jewelry of inflaming the desires of those who would see them. He goes so far as to state that such women could no longer be counted “among Christ’s maidens and virgins, since [they] live in such a manner as to make [themselves] objects of desire.”\textsuperscript{139} These two statements by Cyprian are interesting when considered together. On the one hand he seems to be forbidding the unmarried from donning the veil as if they were married; on the other hand he is specifically condemning those maidens who would dress provocatively. Taken together this suggests that a significant shift in modesty standards had taken place by Cyprian’s time. In juxtaposition to this seeming discontinuity we also have from Cyprian a reiteration of Clement’s commands against dying the hair. Cyprian’s commands here are similar in both their impetus and in their nature; women should not dye their hair because it is artificially enhancing their looks, as such it is immodest and tries to improve upon what God had created.\textsuperscript{140} While some insight into modesty standards during the third century can be gleaned, Cyprian did not touch upon wigs or other false hair in the same manner as Clement, nor does he make any clear references to the practice of head shaving as a punishment.\textsuperscript{141}

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\textsuperscript{138} This is my interpretation of Cyprian’s text here. “Why should she walk out adorned? Why with dressed hair, as if she either had or sought for a husband?” The meaning of this text can be debated, but it certainly seems to suggest that Cyprian disapproved of virgins dressing as if they were married, which we know from Greek culture and Tertullian’s writings involved the covering of the head.
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{The Life of St. Pelagia the Harlot} by James the Deacon and \textit{The Life of St. Mary the Harlot}, which were both written after the Council of Nicea help to illuminate the development of asceticism in the early Christian Church. Both women, at one point in their lives, participated in prostitution. The stories of their repentance are quite different, but one trait is shared—there is no punishment administered for their sins. Both women repent of their own will, and are granted forgiveness. See Helen Waddell, trans., \textit{The Desert Fathers} (New York: Random House, 1998) for complete texts and commentary.
\end{flushright}
Cynthia Thompson suggests that the Syrian custom of ritual head shaving, as recorded by Lucian, may be behind Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 11. In Byblos the women were, according to Lucian, required to shave their heads during a festival celebrating Adonis every year. It is possible that Paul would have known about this practice. An argument that shaving a woman’s head would be akin to idol worship could fit into the greater themes of 1 Corinthians. Chapter 8 speaks of eating food sacrificed to idols; a parallel could be drawn between eating food sacrificed to an idol and shaving one’s head as part of a pagan festival. Paul grants that the practice of eating such food, in itself, is not forbidden but that engaging in it may cause others to sin and therefore it may be wiser to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols.

The Corinthian church was admonished to “take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.” The commentary in The New Oxford Annotated Bible suggests that Paul gives similar latitude in the decision on whether or not women should wear head coverings. Paul writes “Judge for yourselves,” which the Oxford commenters take to mean that the decision is handed over by Paul to the Corinthians. Unfortunately this reading ignores a much more plausible understanding of Paul’s intent. “Judge for yourselves” does not here mean “make a decision for yourselves” but something more like “use your head.” The rest of the argument makes no sense if Paul is giving freedom to the Corinthians in this issue. Why would he state that “Nature itself [teaches] you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory,” and then follow it

143 1 Corinthians 8.
with permission to ignore Nature’s teaching? We should therefore understand him to say, “The answer is so obvious that you should be able to see it in the natural world, I shouldn’t have to tell you what to do. Use your heads!” The Baker Exegetical Commentary on 1 Corinthians by David Garland also takes the view that Paul is using a rhetorical flourish here. Paul assumes the answer to the question “is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled?” is “no.”

Paul’s argument from nature also weakens the connection to Byblos. When discussing meat sacrificed to idols he explicitly states that “no idol in the world really exists.” Since this was the case eating meat sacrificed to idols becomes a personal decision which Paul counseled against for the sake of unity within the Christian community. Each church member, ultimately, decided whether eating meat sacrificed to idols would strengthen or weaken their brethren. Paul left no such latitude in the case of head coverings, but rather commanded that “nature itself” shows that a woman should have long hair and, if that were true, she should also have a covering over her head. If she wore no hair covering she might as well shave her head. This connection to nature rules out Thompson’s interpretation, as does the juxtaposition of a woman wearing a head covering with a woman shaving her head. The issue was not idol worship, but propriety and modesty, as well as proper gender roles and gender-appropriate dress. The practice on Byblos of women shaving their heads as a sacrifice to Adonis cannot be the impetus behind Paul’s commands here.

It is possible that Paul’s command regarding shaving the head of a woman who refuses to cover her hair has to do with gender roles. Ziegler, in fact, assumes this to be the case: “Der Unterschied zwischen männern und Frauen bestünde darin, daß zur Frau ihr langes, zum Mann kurzes Haar gehört. Die Umkehrung von weiblicher und männlicher Identität wäre eine

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146 Garland, 1 Corinthians, 509 & 530.
147 1 Corinthians 8:4.
Similarly, Thomas Schreiner writes that “to keep her hair short is to wear it the way a man does” and that we can conclude that “Paul wants women to wear hair coverings while praying” as a result. Following these interpretations, the argument in 1 Corinthians 11 would then be as follows: If a woman wore her hair uncovered she might as well cut it off. If it should not be cut then it should be covered because it is obvious, from nature itself, that men have short hair and women long. If it shameful for a woman to emulate a man by cutting her hair, she should cover her hair.

In this case Paul might not be addressing an actual occurrence, but engaging, instead, in a similar hyperbolic statement as that found in Galatians 5:12 where Paul suggests that the Judaizers castrate themselves rather than continue to lead astray the Galatian church. This interpretation is certainly possible and even complimentary to my own--though it seems more likely that Paul was speaking of an actual punishment rather than a hyperbolic one--as the act of adultery would be the ultimate in throwing off of the husband’s authority. When a Greek woman forsook fidelity to her husband, she declared to the world that she did not desire to be under her husband’s house; refusing her husband’s authority would certainly constitute a type of gender reversal. The punitive removal of her hair once she was caught in adultery would, then, represent her rejection of her submissive role in the family and, subsequently, the removal of her husband’s protection over her.

_Ruden’s Theory_

Sarah Ruden asserts that Paul’s command to the Corinthian church, that all women should have their head covered when praying or prophesying, is a direct result of the prestige of the veil. In Corinth, which was a port city, and, therefore, home to many prostitutes, the distinction between veiled and unveiled women would probably have been even starker than in

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other places. In a city where few outsiders visited the faithful, law-abiding women might be less inclined to wear the veil. ¹⁴⁹ In such a city it could be simply assumed that all the women were upright, and the few who were not were known by reputation to all of the small town’s population. In a situation such as this the veil would not be needed to distinguish the upright from the less respectable. In Corinth, however, where so many strange men came through, there were many women whose job it was to please them. This could have caused, according to Ruden, the morally superior wives and widows to wear their veil ostentatiously, proclaiming to all their pristine status. In the first-century Christian church, where equality was supposed to be the norm, this divide between respectable women and the less respectable might have caused inter-church strife. ¹⁵⁰

Ruden’s argument is that “Paul’s rule aimed toward an outrageous equality.”¹⁵¹ By commanding all women, regardless of their pasts, to wear a veil in church, he would have removed the stigma that being unveiled carried. These unattached women, some prostitutes, some freed-women and some adulteresses, none of whom had a traditional right to the veil, were made into honorary wives as part of the bride of Christ; this is clearly Tertullian’s interpretation and reasoning for virgins being allowed to don a veil. No longer would they be hurt or lessened by the presence of the “gorgeously coiffed wives” in the Church gathering; instead, the socially unacceptable women would find acceptance in this radical new type of equality. It would be possible to examine a congregation and not be able to tell the difference between respectable wives and the prostitute who had to “service twenty or thirty men a day,” or the virgin who had decided not to marry, in accordance with Paul’s teachings.¹⁵² This is a reasonable argument, and

¹⁴⁹ Ruden, Paul Among the Peoples, 85-86.
¹⁵⁰ Ruden, Paul Among the Peoples, 87.
¹⁵¹ Ruden, Paul Among the Peoples, 87.
¹⁵² Ruden, Paul Among the Peoples, 87.
seems to fit well with the character of Paul’s other writings, especially considering the number of women Paul mentions by name in his epistles, some of whom are in leadership positions.\footnote{1 Corinthians 1:11; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16: 3-16; Margaret Y. MacDonald, “Reading Real Women through the Undisputed Letters of Paul,” in \textit{Women & Christian Origins}, ed. Ross Shepard Kramer and Mary Rose D’Angelo, (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1999), 200, 202, 207, and 217-218.} Such an interpretation is also in accordance with the later teachings of Tertullian.\footnote{See also pgs. 26-27.} Tertullian’s interpretation certainly does not prove Paul’s intention, but it does help to ground the issue culturally.\footnote{Tertullian, \textit{De Orat.} 22. If Tertullian viewed the veil with respect and allows for those who are not culturally entitled to the veil to wear it, and thus gain the respect associated with the veil, this would be a powerful equalizing force within the Christian community.} Ruden also notes that nowhere in 1 Corinthians does Paul call down prostitutes as he does the men who frequent them.\footnote{Ruden, \textit{Paul Among the Peoples}, 86.}

In addition to her argument about the Paul’s intent behind the command for all women to wear head coverings in church services, Ruden suggests a novel interpretation for the mention of head shaving. Her argument presupposes a play on words on Paul’s part. The only part of a Greek woman that it was culturally acceptable to be shaved, Ruden claims, was her pubis, a practice that is evidenced in both Greek poetry and artwork.\footnote{Ruden, \textit{Paul Among the Peoples}, 93. There are mentions to this in some Greek poetry, though that discussion lies outside of this paper’s scope. Some of the poetry and plays also mock balding men and women, but this should be seen as distinct from intentional shaving.} Women who walked around with their hair uncovered were flaunting themselves, displaying their “glory” for all to see. If Ruden is correct, Paul’s suggestion that the woman who would be in church with her head uncovered “should cut off her hair” is a suggestion that the woman might as well go naked; if she is going to reveal her hair, an undeniably sensual and sexual aspect of her body, she should also reveal her shaved pubic area, or, at least, shave her head to represent it.\footnote{1 Corinthians 11:6.} This interpretation fits better in more modern words, and Ruden suggests that the equivalent would be a father telling his daughter something like the following:
You can't go out in public in such a skimpy outfit! You might as well be naked. You're so beautiful—I can't stand to see you exposed this way. Don't you feel embarrassed? You are different from boys, and that's why you're more restricted, but you're just as important in the big scheme of things. You keep arguing, but this is how this society works.  

This explanation relies on a lost play on words, relating baldness of the head to baldness of the pubic area. A sort of tongue-in-cheek message; “If you want to show off your hair you might as well show off all you have to show.” Ruden’s explanation is certainly novel and thought-provoking, but is both unsubstantiated and, moreover, impossible to prove. Idioms are often identifiable only by their oddity in texts. Finding the meaning of such phrases, even when they are readily identifiable in the text, is difficult in the extreme. If Paul’s suggestion is an idiom, it is well hidden and will probably remain unproven.

Sacred Prostitution: Myth or Reality

The third major school of thought is perhaps also the most influential, at least among lay theologians and historians; women with shaved heads were prostitutes, and probably temple prostitutes. While it has been established that no Greek man would be attracted to a woman with no hair, some case could be made that short hair was the designation of a prostitute, though this too has been demonstrated as a tenuous connection at best. There is also a more radical theory. Some modern historians reject the idea that there was any practice of Sacred Prostitution in antiquity at all. Stephanie Budin argues that the “myth” of sacred prostitution comes from misreading a number of sources, including Paul. In particular, she claims, there is some confusion over the porneia which Paul urges the Corinthians to flee. While porneia was indeed

\[159 \text{ Ruden, Paul Among the Peoples, 94.} \]
\[160 \text{ Ruden, Paul Among the Peoples, 94. For Ruden’s full discussion on 1 Corinthians 11 see pages 85-94.} \]
\[161 \text{ See section on Artwork. See also Kilmer, Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases, 159-160. A stronger correlation can be found between women wearing veils and those not, especially in the city of Corinth, as a symbol of respectability in women, though, once again, this is not a foolproof method of identifying prostitutes during the Classical Era. In fact, Kilmer argues, no such universal rule can be applied as a method of identifying prostitutes in any given Greek city at any given time; in the end generalities must be made, though hesitantly and with the knowledge that exceptions exist.} \]
the word for low class prostitution, *porneia* can also mean, more generally, “sexual immorality.” This is precisely the meaning for which Budin argues.\textsuperscript{162} Her book puts forth an argument which questions the entire corpus of historical works supporting sacred prostitution. This approach certainly forces a new reading of ancient authors like Herodotus and Paul, but, in light of Lucian, and his account of temple prostitution in Byblos, it is unlikely that sacred prostitution was never practiced in the Ancient Near East. While it may not have been present in every city, or at every temple, it seems clear that there was at least some practice of temple prostitution.\textsuperscript{163}

There is, therefore, no evidence to support the theory that a shaved head was the sign of these temple prostitutes. Between the repulsiveness of such a “hairstyle” and the complete lack of artistic or written evidence for such a practice this theory, so popular among lay theologians and historians, must be discarded for a more accurate theory. The best theory is that a woman with a shaved head was a woman who had been caught in adultery.

\textsuperscript{162} Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity*, 265.

\textsuperscript{163} For more information on the history of prostitution in the Ancient Near East see Gerda Lerna, “The Origin of Prostitution in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Signs* 11 (1986): 236-254. Lerna draws a distinction between sacred sexual service and commercial prostitution. She does affirmatively argue that there were sexual services of some kind offered in Ancient Near Eastern temples. Whether this would also be the case in Greece is not definitively proven.
CONCLUSION

When the evidence is considered as a body, it becomes clear that a shaved head was not the sign of a prostitute, whether a temple prostitute, a *pornê* or a *hetaira*. Even uncovered hair may not have been a perfect indicator of “the oldest profession.” Since Paul was not saying “if you go with hair uncovered you are being immodest and might as well shave your head like a prostitute,” he was saying something else. Even suggesting such an interpretation goes against the character of 1 Corinthians, which tended to be harsh on men who were sexually immoral, but had little or nothing to say about the women who plied the trade of prostitution. For Paul to suddenly lambast these women would be shocking in the extreme.

If Paul was not relating bare-headedness to prostitution, the remaining theories must be examined. Surely the ancient, even at Paul’s time, practice of the Spartans’ shaving a bride’s head before her wedding night and the consummation of her marriage could not be Paul’s impetus behind this statement. The supposed Spartan tradition was too specific to the Spartans for it to be an issue to the new Christian churches. The religious practice on Byblos, which in itself helps disprove the theory of the shaved-headed prostitute, is just as unlikely a culprit. If Paul meant to reference the cult of Adonis he surely would have been clearer in his argument. These lines of reasoning do not stand up to scrutiny. Nor are they supported by the writings of the Church Fathers.

Instead, Paul’s reference to head shaving must relate to something else. He said that it was a shameful thing for a woman to go without a covering in the assembly and the best explanation involves Paul’s expectations of gender roles. Paul expected women to be modest.

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1 Corinthians 5:1-2 Paul condemns a man who “has his father’s wife” (ESV). This evil, Paul says, is something that not even the pagans would accept; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Paul condemns those who would “become one body with” a prostitute as having sinned against the body.
Modesty, in part, involved covering the hair, both to hide an erotic feature of the women and to minimize the differences between reputable and disreputable women. It would certainly be inappropriate, whether a slave girl had any say in her being a prostitute or not, for her to advertise her trade in the assembly. Likewise it would be inappropriate for a formerly adulterous wife to be ostracized despite her repentance and turn towards the Church. Paul says, therefore, if a woman were so disrespectful and immodest as to wear her hair uncovered, she might as well shave her hair off, she is showing herself to be a woman of that character.

Here is the crux of the problem: if Sarah Ruden’s theory is correct then Paul’s statement is a crude joke. “If you are going to go with your hair uncovered you might as well show your other erotic parts, the parts that are supposed to be shaved.” Such an explanation certainly captures the imagination but it relies upon the assumption of a lost idiom. If, instead, Paul is referring to the practice of punishing an adulterous wife by shaving her head, the passage comes into crisper focus. Punishments for adultery were severe in ancient Greece and shaving a woman’s head in response to infidelity would actually be less harsh than some of the more ancient punishments available to a father or husband. Shaving her head, in the manner that described by Tacitus in Germania, would show that she no longer had the protection of a husband and that she had lost the right to wear the tegidion; it was public mark of shame and of the husband’s repudiation of his adulterous wife. If, instead, Paul is referring to the practice of punishing an adulterous wife by shaving her head, the passage comes into crisper focus. Punishments for adultery were severe in ancient Greece and shaving a woman’s head in response to infidelity would actually be less harsh than some of the more ancient punishments available to a father or husband. Shaving her head, in the manner that described by Tacitus in Germania, would show that she no longer had the protection of a husband and that she had lost the right to wear the tegidion; it was public mark of shame and of the husband’s repudiation of his adulterous wife. Finally, removing a woman’s hair would remove much of her sexual appeal, making future dalliances less likely; by the time her hair had regrown her shame would be known to the larger community.

Paul’s purpose and meaning, in light of the cultural context of Roman Corinth, is that women who show their hair in the church assembly are being immodest. Their immodesty comes in two forms; dressing as a prostitute or adulteress, and showing off an erotic feature of their

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165 BelHunn, “Paul’s Anthropology,” 299.
bodies. He says that if they insisted upon doing something so shameful, marking themselves as objects to be looked upon and rejecting the symbol of authority which was customary, then they might as well take the next step and shave their heads like an adulteress, which was the path their immodesty could place them on. This would have removed the desire of men to look upon them by making them ugly and repulsive.

The practice of shaving a woman’s head for infidelity is the punishment for adultery to which Paul is referring to in 1 Corinthians 11:5-6, and for this reason it was shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off. Cutting off a woman’s hair removed her beauty, showed that she was disqualified from the protection of family and husband, showed that she was disqualified to wear the veil and marked her as an adulteress for all to see.
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