Witherington & Massey versus Chrysostom & Epiphanius:
Long Hair Prohibited as Covering in 1 Cor 11:4, 7

Bible Faculty Leadership Summit
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πᾶς ἄνὴρ προσευχόμενος ή προφητεύων κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ. …
Ἄνὴρ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἐφελεί κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν εἰκών καὶ δέξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων.
(1 Cor 11:4, 7)

A survey of extant church fathers’ interpretations of 1 Cor 11:4 and 7 exposes two significant interpreters, Chrysostom and Epiphanius, who diverged from the standard “the-covering-is-a-veil” consensus into closer alignment with an emerging modern consensus: the covering is hair. Two recent surveys of extra-biblical Hellenistic data by Ben Witherington III

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1 This essay is an expanded version of a forthcoming article “Chrysostom & Epiphanius: Long Hair Prohibited as Covering in 1 Cor 11:4, 7,” BBR 22.3 (2012).

2 Church fathers whose available comments on 1 Cor 11:2-16 indicate that they understood the covering to be a veil of some sort include: Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Basil the Great, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Pelagius, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ambrosiaster.

and Preston Massey claim that κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων in 1 Cor 11:4 necessarily refers to the wearing of a material head covering. The first section of this essay argues 1) that these surveys misread the extra-biblical data, 2) that examples of κόμη as the object of ἔχω highlight the viability of taking κόμη as the implied object of ἔχων in 1 Cor 11:4, 3) that two significant church fathers understood the covering to which Paul refers to be or include κόμη, and 4) that data in the context of 1 Cor 11:2-16 better supports understanding κόμη as the covering Paul has in mind. The second section 1) provides lexical evidence from hellenistic literature that both κομάω and κόμη may refer to uncut hair, 2) demonstrates that all extent evidence from the church fathers indicates that they understood these terms in 1 Cor. 11 to refer to uncut hair, and 3) concludes by offering an explanation for how why almost all the church fathers understood Paul to be addressing veils and not hair in 1 Cor. 11:4-12.

An Analysis of κατὰ [τῆς] κεφαλῆς in Extra-Biblical Literature

Ben Witherington III and Preston Massey have each argued separately from extra-biblical linguistic evidence that Paul’s language in 1 Cor 11:4-7 cannot refer to anything other than a material head-covering. The following section of this essay addresses the question does the phrase in v. 4 κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων necessarily to refer to a material head-covering?

The phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων reads literally “on/down (the) head having.” This phrase occurs nowhere else in the NT or the Septuagint. A search of the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae and the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri reveals that the exact construction κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων occurs nowhere else in extant Greek literature. This lack of evidence makes it difficult to discern Paul’s meaning.

5 The significance of this misreading is highlighted by the fact that Massey’s work has already been quoted as demonstrating, along with others, that veils not hair are under consideration in the passage. Mark Finney, "Honour, Head-Coverings and Headship: 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 in Its Social Context," JSNT 33 (2010): 31.
6 Online: http://www.tlg.uci.edu/ [accessed June 23, 2012]. This database catalogs most extant literary texts written in Greek from Homer to the fall of Byzantium in A.D. 1453.
7 Online: http://papyri.info/ [accessed June 23, 2012]. This site allows users to search simultaneously the Advanced Papyrological Information System (APIS), the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri (DDbDP) and the Heidelberger Gesamtverzeichnis der griechischen Papyrusurkunden Ägyptens (HGV).
8 Specifically, the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων without an explicit direct object for ἔχων occurs in no (electronically available) extant Greek literature from the 8th c. B.C. to the 3rd c. A.D., unless in church fathers who are quoting this passage. This is true regardless of whether κεφαλῆς is anarthrous or not. A search of the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri at Papyri.Info yielded only three instances of κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς, all of which were dated after A.D. 200. Further, in none of these cases did the phrase refer to covering the head but to the head as the location of a blow or wound. In Les Papyrus Fouad I 129.11, (A.D. 224), a father complains of his son’s head being wounded by someone throwing a stone (βίσαντος ἐξ αὐτῶν τινος λίθον, τραυματίας ὁ νεῦς μου, ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἔστρικας, ἐγένετο κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς). P.Oxy. 33.2672dupl (A.D. 218), lines 15-18, also registers a complaint regarding someone being struck on the head with a stone (καὶ λίθῳ με ἐνετιναξὲν κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς). P.Oxy 16.1885 (c. A.D. 509), line 8 speaks of someone being struck repeatedly on the head and receiving a mortal wound (κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς κόψας ἀφειδῶς καὶ βανατηφόρον ἐπενεγκών).
In 1995 Ben Witherington stated in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, “the discussions by Murphy-O’Connor, Hurley, Padgett, and others of hair and hairstyles are quite beside the point. The issue is headcoverings. … Plutarch uses the same phrase that Paul does, kατά κεφαλής, to refer to something resting on the head, not hair and much less long, flowing hair (Regum 200F; Aitia Romana 267C; Vitae Decem Oratorae 842B; Pyrrhus 399B; Pompeius 640C; Caesar 739D).”

The extended list of citations Witherington offers from Plutarch gives the impression of a substantial array of evidence for the material-covering position. There are, however, several problems with this evidence.

The first problem is that two of the cited sources are irrelevant: Vitae Decem Oratorae 842B and Pyrrhus 399B. In both of these texts the phrase κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς occurs in the context of someone being struck on the head, in the first with a staff and the second with a sword. Neither have anything to do with something resting on the head.

Second, although the rest of the texts cited from Plutarch do provide partial parallels to Paul’s construction, each of them has one significant difference.

(1) Plutarch’s Moralia, “Sayings of Romans” 200F, provides the closest parallel to 1 Cor 11:4. Recounting Scipio the Younger’s arrival in Alexandria to inspect it for the Roman Senate, Plutarch says, “after disembarking, he was walking with his toga covering his head.” Although this statement has been often cited as confirmation that Paul was referring to a material head covering, most commentators ignore the fact that Plutarch supplies an explicit object ἱμάτιον (“toga”) for ἔχων (“covering”), whereas Paul does not. In other words, Plutarch explicitly states that a garment was covering Scipio’s head.

(2) In his Lives, Pompeius 640C, Plutarch describes Demetrius as: “that fellow would be already reclining at table in great state, having the hood of his toga drawn down behind his

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9 Ben Witherington III, Conflict & Community, 233. As the following discussion will demonstrate, Witherington is certainly correct that κατὰ κεφαλής by itself does not refer to hair or long, flowing hair.

10 Plutarch (c. A.D. 46-120), a contemporary of the Apostle Paul and Josephus, was among other things a Greek historian and biographer, best known for his works Parallel Lives and Customs (Moria).  

11 Vitae Decem Oratorum 842B: ἀπαντήσας ῥάβδῳ τῇ κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τοῦ τελώνος κατήνεγκε; “he struck the officer on the head with his staff.” Plutarch’s Morals (trans. W. W. Goodwin; Little, Brown, and Co., 1874), 5.39; Pyrrhus 24.3: καὶ φθάσας τὸν βάρβαρον ἔπληξε κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τῷ ἔξιφι πληγήν; “and before the Barbarian could strike, struck him such a blow on the head with his sword.” Plutarch’s Lives (LCL; trans. B. Perrin; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 9.426-27.


ears.\textsuperscript{14} Again, in contrast with Paul’s language, the verbal ἔχων ("having") has τὸ ἱμάτιον ("toga") as its explicit direct object.

(3) In his Lives, Caesar 739D, Plutarch describes Caesar’s reaction when he realized Brutus was against him: “but when he saw Brutus with his sword drawn in his hand, then he pulled his garment over his head, and made no more resistance.”\textsuperscript{15} In this instance, the verb ἔφειλκύσατο (“pulled”) has τὸ ἱμάτιον (“garment”) as its explicit direct object.

(4) In his Roman Questions 267C, Plutarch recounts the supposed reasons why the first three divorces in Roman history took place: “the second was Sulpicius Gallus, because he saw his wife pull her cloak over her head.”\textsuperscript{16} As in the previous example, τὸ ἱμάτιον ("cloak") is the explicit direct object of ἐφελκυσαμένην ("pull").

In each of the four examples above, the construction κατὰ κεφαλῆς is not used by itself to indicate something resting on the head as was claimed.\textsuperscript{17} Rather it is used to indicate where the person’s ἱμάτιον was being worn. In every case the verbs ἔχω ("to have") and ἐφέλκω ("to draw") have ἱμάτιον ("toga, garment") as their explicit direct object which identified what was being worn or drawn over the head (κατὰ κεφαλῆς).

Third, Witherington does not inform his reader that the phrase κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς by itself has a wide range of syntagmatic usages, many of them having nothing to do with material head coverings or even “something resting on the head.”\textsuperscript{18} For example, it may mean “at the head” as in—“he killed his brother in a match by throwing a discus at his head.”\textsuperscript{19} It may mean “headlong, head first” as in—“[Gaius] might be cast down headlong.”\textsuperscript{20} Or, it may mean “on the head” as in—“I would take pickle sauce and go [and] pour it on his head.”\textsuperscript{21} The fact that κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς is used in a broad variety of contexts is significant because it undermines the claim that this phrase transparently refers to a material head-covering.

\textsuperscript{14} Pompeius 640C: ἐκεῖνος ἦν κατίκειτο σοβαρός, ἔχων δὲ ὅτων κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον. Translation adapted from Pompey 40.4.6-7 in Plutarch’s Lives (LCL; trans. B. Perrin; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 5.218-19.


\textsuperscript{17} Witherington, Conflict & Community, 233.

\textsuperscript{18} Conflict & Community, 233. Witherington’s assertion, “the discussions by Murpy-O’Connor, Hurley, Padgett, and others of hair and hairstyles are quite beside the point. The issue is headcoverings,” appears to reflect his personal certainty more than it does the nature of the available evidence.


\textsuperscript{20} Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, 19.71: διαφυσιουτάντα ὦσι κατὰ κεφαλῆς.

\textsuperscript{21} Epictetus, Discourse, 2.20.29: ἐβαλὼν ἐν γάριον καὶ ἀπελθὼν κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦς κατέχεον. For other uses of this phrase, see Josephus who uses phrase κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς three times to refer to something happening to someone’s head and none of them have anything to do with veils or hair (Antiquities, 1.50.4; 2.252.2; 13.117.5).
Finally, it is particularly noteworthy that when Plutarch discusses why Romans cover their heads when worshipping\(^{22}\) and why Roman sons cover their heads but daughter go with uncovered heads when escorting their dead parents to the grave,\(^{23}\) the phrase κατὰ κεφαλὴς with or without ἔχων (“having”) is entirely absent.\(^{24}\) In these contexts, to denote a covered head, Plutarch uses terms for being covered or veiled: συγκεκαλυμμέναι (“veil completely”), ἐπικαλύπτεσθαι (“cover over, shroud”), ἐγκεκαλυμμέναις (“veil, wrap up”), or the expression “pulling the toga up to the ears” (ἀξρι τῶν ὠτῶν ἄνελάμβανον τὸ ἱμάτιον). To denote an uncovered head he uses the following terms: γυμναῖς (“naked”), ἀκαλύπτοις, ἀπαρακαλύπτῳ (“uncovered”), or ἀποκαλύπτονται (“to uncover”). Strikingly, none of this specific vocabulary occurs in 1 Cor 11. In other words, in the very context in which it would be most natural for Plutarch to use κατὰ κεφαλὴς if it normally referred to a head covered with something material, he does not use the phrase.

**Data Advanced by Preston Massey**

In his 2007 article, under the section “The Meaning of κατὰ κεφαλὴς ἔχων,” Preston Massey asserts that κατὰ κεφαλὴς ἔχων “though generally used with an object (but understood without the object), always implies some kind of garment or cloth coming down from the head.”\(^{25}\) He then footnotes (n. 71) the following statement:

Besides the references already cited, κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον (a covering down from the head) may be found in the following texts: Dionysius of Halicarnassus *The Roman Antiquities* III.71, VI.3.3, XI.26.4, XII.16.4, XV.9.7, XIX.8.3; Plutarch *Pompey* XL.4; *Caesar* LXVI.12 The Sayings of the Romans 200F; The Roman Questions 266C and 267C; Fortune of the Romans 319C (which has the similar ἀφεῖλεν ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον; and Josephus, *Ant.* III.270.26

Contrary to Massey’s claim, the phrase κατὰ κεφαλὴς ἔχων does not occur in the extant literature unless it has an explicit direct object. It is, therefore, illegitimate to claim that it is “understood without the object” to always imply “some kind of garment or cloth coming down from the head.” Nonetheless, Massey’s footnote appears to be an impressive list of citations supporting his conclusion that κατὰ κεφαλὴς ἔχων refers to a material covering.

Upon inspection, however, two major problems appear. First, of the six references to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, three do not contain the phrase κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον as was claimed. In fact, they have nothing to do with head coverings. Specifically, in *Roman Antiquities*, 6.3.3, Dionysius refers to Postumius “setting up camp high above” (lit. on the head of; κατὰ κεφαλὴς) his enemies; *Roman Antiquities*, 11.26.4, line 6, describes how Siccius’ enemies got

\(^{22}\) *Moralia* 266C-E.
\(^{23}\) *Moralia* 267A-B.
\(^{24}\) As noted before, the phrase does occur in *Moralia* 267C in his parenthetical remark about divorce, but that has no direct bearing on why Roman sons escort their parents to their grave bare headed.
above him (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) and rolled stones on him, killing him; and Roman Antiquities, 19.8.3, line 6, describes Meton being thrown out of the theater head first (κατὰ κεφαλῆς). 27

The second problem is that citing texts that contain terms such as ἵματιον (“toga”) or περιβολὴν (“garment, mantle”) does nothing to prove that the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων, which does not contain such terms, refers to a material covering. That is similar to saying that since the phrase “with a hat on his head” occurs frequently in English literature, the blank in the phrase “with _______ on his head” must refer to a hat.

Less significant, but still noteworthy, the other texts Massey cites do not contain the exact phrase κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον but use language similar to that found in the Plutarch examples previously discussed. 28

(5) In Roman Antiquities 3.71.5, Dionysius of Halicarnassus describes a statue as: “This statue … was shorter than a man of average stature, having a mantle over the head.” 29 Here “mantle” (περιβολὴν), a cognate of the term “covering” used in 1 Cor 11:15 (περιβόλαιον), is used rather than “toga” (ἱμάτιον). Note that Dionysius supplied an explicit direct object for “having” (ἔχονσα), indicating what was on the head of the statue.

(6) In Roman Antiquities 12.16.4, Dionysius describes Camillos preparing to depart after praying: “Camillos ... since he had prayed and had drawn his garment over his head, desired to turn ….” 30 Here the verb “had drawn” (ἐἵλκυσε) has “garment” (ἱμάτιον) as its explicit direct object and “over the head” (κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς) indicates where Camillos drew his garment.

(7) In Roman Antiquities 15.9.7, Dionysius describes a Roman praying: “When he was about to depart, he both drew his garment over his head and held up his hands to the sky, as the custom is, and made prayer to the gods.” 31 Once again the direct object “garment” (περιβολὴν) of the verb “drew” (ἐἵλκυσε) is explicit.

From all the foregoing evidence, it should be clear that κατὰ κεφαλῆς is the natural phrase that would be used to describe where a person would wear a veil or mantle—“on the head.” On the other hand, where else but κατὰ κεφαλῆς (“on the head”) would one wear hair?

27 This is not simply a case of citing the wrong references in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, since a TLG search of Dionysius’ works turns up no other instances of this phrase.
28 Plutarch’s The Roman Questions 266C reads “having a toga on their head” (ἐπὶ [not κατὰ] τῆς κεφαλῆς ἔχοντες τὸ ἱμάτιον), a similar phrase but one in which, as has been noted in all the previous examples, the direct object of ἔχοντες is explicit unlike the situation in 1 Cor 11:4.
30 ὁ Κάμιλλος ... ἐπειδὴ τὴν εὐχὴν ἐποίησατο καὶ κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς εἶλκυσε τὸ ἱμάτιον, ἐβούλετο μὲν στραφῆναι ... The Roman Antiquities of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, (LCL; trans. E. Cary; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 7.236-37.
The fact that Hellenistic writers regularly make use of this phrase in non-veiling contexts, without any qualification to indicate that a material covering is not in view, provides solid evidence that κατὰ κεφαλῆς does not normally denote or connote a condition of having the head covered with anything. Massey’s assertion that κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων “always implies some kind of garment or cloth coming down from the head” is incorrect.

Κατὰ κεφαλῆς in the LXX

There is one occurrence of the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς as a description of a covered head in the Septuagint. In Esther 6:12, Haman is described as hurrying home mourning, with his head covered. The LXX translates the Hebrew phrase רֹאשׁ וַחֲפוּי “head being covered” with κατὰ κεφαλῆς.

Several items are noteworthy here. First, the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς was not used with the verb ἔχω as in 1 Cor 11:4. Second, the fact that Sinaiticus has a scribal correction which corrects κατὰ κεφαλῆς to κατακεκαλύμμενος κεφαλήν (“having an covered head”) suggests that at least one Greek scribe felt that κατὰ κεφαλῆς was too ambiguous a rendering and changed it to a more explicit construction. In other words, Esth. 6:12 suggests that κατὰ κεφαλῆς may be used to refer to “a covered head.” However, in light of all the preceding evidence, “a covered head” is neither the necessary meaning nor the normal usage of this phrase. Further, it is illegitimate to isolate the investigation of κατὰ κεφαλῆς from its syntagmic relationship to the verb ἔχω.

Conclusion regarding κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων

What should we conclude from the foregoing analysis? First, it is clear that the precise phrase Paul used is unusual. Second, as Esther 6:12 shows, the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς without the verb ἔχω could be used to refer to a covered head. However, since Paul does not use this phrase by itself, the parallel while suggestive is not conclusive. Third, in regard to the examples found in Plutarch and Dionysius, in each case where ἔχω, ἔλκω, or ἐφέλκω occur with κατὰ κεφαλῆς, they invariably have an explicit object. Paul, on the other hand, does not supply an explicit object for ἔχων.

Κόμη as the Direct Object of ἔχω

In both Classical and Hellenistic Greek the verb ἔχω takes κόμην (“hair, long hair”) as a direct object to describe a person who has let their hair grow long. For example, in his play Birds Aristophanes writes: “Since then you are a slave, [how is that] you have long hair (κόμην

32 Dionysius, Roman Antiquities, VI.3.3; XI.26.4, line 6; XIX.8.3, line 6; Plutarch, Vitae Decem Oratorae 842B; Pyrrhus 399B; Les Papyrus Fouad I 29.11; P.Oxy. 33.2672dupl, lines 15-18; Josephus, Ant., 1.50.4; 2.252.2; 13.117.5.

33 For a similar, independent evaluation of Massey’s NTS article, see the unpublished critique by Philip Payne which he references in his Man and Woman: One in Christ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 167 n. 104: http://www.pbpayne.com/wp-admin/Massey_critique.pdf [accessed June 23, 2012].

34 For an explanation of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships of words or phrases within the context of a sentence, see Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989), 155-61, 188-89.

35 For a similar conclusion, see Blattenberger, Rethinking 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, 36.
In another play by Aristophanes, *Clouds*, a father laments that he is being ruined by his son who “has long hair (κόμην ἔχων) [and] races horses and chariots.” In “Proverbs which Alexandreus Used,” Plutarch includes the following description: “Concerning the long-haired one in Samos: A certain Samian was a boxer, who being mocked as weak by his opponents since he had long hair (κόμας εἶχεν), having entered the competition, overcame them.” A commentator on Aristotle from the 1-2 c. B.C. describes a group of people whose men had long hair (κόμην ἔχουσι) down to their knees and below. These examples demonstrate that it is not impossible or even unlikely that ἔχων (“having”) in the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων (“having on his head”) could be understood as having κόμην (“long hair”) as its unstated object, especially in light of Paul’s use of this term in vv. 14-15. The previous examples lead us to consider two early church interpreters who understood the covering Paul was forbidding to men to include or to be long hair.

**John Chrysostom on 1 Corinthians 11:4**

John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) was an elder at the church in Antioch where he earned a reputation as a “golden-mouthed” preacher. He was later appointed, against his will, archbishop of Constantinople. During his time in Antioch he preached a series of expository sermons through 1 Corinthians and devoted an entire sermon to 1 Cor 11:2-16. In reference to verse four, Chrysostom understood Paul to be addressing men who were wearing long hair and were covering their heads with a material covering when praying: “the men went so far as to wear long hair as having spent their time in philosophy, and covered their heads when praying and prophesying, each of which was a Grecian custom.”

Chrysostom argues that Paul is forbidding men from wearing anything on their heads, including long hair:

Now regarding the man, it is no longer about a covering but about wearing long hair, that [Paul] forms his discourse. To be covered then [Paul] only forbids, when a man is praying; but wearing long hair he discourages at all times. … For this reason also [Paul] said at the beginning, “Every man praying or prophesying, having any thing on his head, dishonoreth his head.” He did not say,
“covered,” but “having any thing on his head;” signifying that even if a man should pray with a bare head, yet if he have long hair, he is like one who is covered [with a material covering]. “For the hair,” says [Paul], “is given for a covering.”

Three aspects of Chrysostom’s explanation of verse four are particularly noteworthy. First, he contrasts the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων with κεκαλυμμένος (“being covered”)—a verb that he uses repeatedly in the sermon to refer to being veiled—and he explicitly denies that κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων means κεκαλυμμένος (“being covered” [with a material veil]).

Second, he affirms that Paul used the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων in order to show that even if a man prays with a bare head, but has long hair, it is the same as if his head were covered. In other words, Chrysostom understands Paul to mean something like “a man may not pray or prophesy with anything on his head,” excluding both long hair and a material covering.

Third, Chrysostom uses the phrase κόμην ἔχει (“may have long hair”), implying that he regards κόμην (“long hair”) as a legitimate implicit object of ἔχων (“having”) in the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων in verse four.

Epiphanius of Salamis on 1 Corinthians 11:7

Epiphanius (c. A.D. 315-403), Bishop of Salamis and Metropolitan of the Church of Cyprus, stands out from other ancient Christian writers because he understood the covering forbidden to men to be wearing long hair. He cites 1 Cor 11:7 in five different contexts in his polemical work Panarion. In each case, he cites the verse as: “A man ought not to wear long hair [κομὴν] because he is the image and glory of God.”

For example, he cites 1 Cor 11:7 in addressing Manicheanism’s misunderstanding of the value of the body:

And once more, the same apostle says in another passage, “A man ought not to have long hair forasmuch as he is the glory and image of God.” And you see how he called hair the glory of God, though it is grown on the body and not in the soul.

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42 Chrysostom uses forms of καλύπτω at least 15 times throughout his sermon to refer to a veiled head.

43 ἄνηρ, γὰρ φησιν, οὐκ ὀφείλει κομὴν, εἰκὼν καὶ δέξα θεοῦ υπάρχων. Karl Holl, Epiphanius, Ancoratus und Panarion in Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922, 1933), 2.122, 167; 3.91, 236, 492. Epiphanius also quotes this verse in the same way in his letter to John of Jerusalem. However, the Greek text of Epiphanius’s letter is fragmentary and does not contain this excerpt. P. Maas, “Die ikonoklastische Episode in dem Brief des Epiphanius an Johannes,” ByzZ 30 (1929-1930): 281-83. Fortunately, Epiphanius asked Jerome to translate the letter into Latin, and we have a copy of the entire letter through Jerome. “Letter LI. From Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, in Cyprus, to John, Bishop of Jerusalem” (NPNF³ 6:88).

There is no NT manuscript or versio nal evidence for the rendering of verse seven cited by Epiphanius. It seems most likely, therefore, that it reflects Epiphanius’s understanding that κατακαλύπτεσθαι (“to be covered”) refers to “having long hair” (κομας). This relatively early interpretation is noteworthy because it calls into question the argument advanced by Massey that “a study of the verb κατακαλύπτω will permit a translation only of textile head coverings.”

Commenting on the practice of some “esteemed brethren” in the cloisters of Mesopotamia, Epiphanius notes that they:

have been detected in another form [of error], that of deliberately having their hair long like a woman’s and wearing sackcloth openly. … Visible sackcloth is out of place in the catholic church, as is uncut hair, because of the apostle’s injunction, “A man ought not to have long hair, inasmuch as he is the image of God.”

Epiphanius continues his argument by addressing the issue of the Nazirites’ long hair. He argues that “long hair was proper only for Nazirites” and that it is a shame for Christian men to wear long hair, citing 1 Cor 11:14. Since the ascetics were appealing to the OT Nazirite vow,
it is clear that they were allowing their hair to grow uncut. This means Epiphanius’ use of κομᾶν (“to have long hair”) necessarily refers to wearing uncut hair.50

Although there do not appear to be any extant comments by Epiphanius on 1 Cor 11.5-6, precisely the same verb that occurs in verse seven (κατακαλύπτεσθαι) also occurs twice in verse six (κατακαλύπτεται and κατακαλυπτέσθω). If, as appears likely, Epiphanius understood κατακαλύπτεσθαι (“to be covered”) in verse seven to mean κομᾶν (“to wear uncut hair”), then it is most likely that he would have understood the same verb in verse six to have that meaning as well. Given that understanding verse six would read, “If a woman does not have uncut hair, then let her shear the rest off; but since it is a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her allow her hair to grow uncut.”51

The purpose of looking at Chrysostom and Epiphanius is not to appeal to their exegesis as authoritative. Rather, the purpose is to note that two well-educated, native Greek speakers 250 years after Paul did not understand κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων or κατακαλύπτω to be necessarily referring to a material head-covering. Rather, Chrysostom took κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων as a generic phrase meaning “having anything on his head” which primarily had long hair in view, though it included a veil as well. Epiphanius understood the verb κατακαλύπτω in 1 Cor 11:7 to be referring to having relatively long, uncut hair.

**Contextual Reasons to Read κόμη as the Object of ἔχω**

Since the ultimate arbiter of textual meaning is always context, the interpreter of 1 Cor 11:2-16 should seek for the implied object of ἔχω in the context. If nothing in the context argued for a covering other than a garment as the object of ἔχω, this would be a natural inference to draw from the evidence. However, several significant contextual reasons support the conclusion that Paul intends the Corinthians to identify the implicit object of ἔχω as κόμη and not a material covering.

First, as I have argued here before,52 Paul’s argument from man’s created status as the glory of God (11:7) implies that whatever practice dishonors man’s head (Christ) has always dishonored his head. Although the imago dei in man was defaced in the fall (Col 3:10), it was not erased (Gen 9:6; Jam 3:9). In the same way, while man falls short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23), his role as the glory of God was not eliminated.53 Given the persistence of man’s status as the glory of God and the necessity of honoring his head that his status entails, the OT requirements for priests to wear a material head-covering become relevant for determining the nature of the covering.54 It is improbable that God would require OT priests to do something that would

50 Epiphanius, 635. His citation of 1 Cor 11:14 in the context of discussing the Nazirites’ uncut hair demonstrates that κομᾶω could refer to uncut hair, an observation that bears on how he would have understood κόμη.
51 εἰ γὰρ οὐ κατακαλύπτεται [=κομᾶ] γυνή, καὶ κειράσθω· εἰ δὲ αἰσχρὸν γυναικὶ τὸ κείρασθαι ἢ ξυρᾶσθαι, κατακαλυπτέσθω [=κομᾶτω].
52 “Εἰκὼν καὶ Δέξα Θεοῦ: An Interpretive Key to 1 Cor. 11:2-16” presented at the 2003 BFLS.
53 Although it is not the purpose of this essay to explore the relationship of the imago dei in both men and women, I understand Paul to be teaching that while both men and women bear the imago dei, men function as the gloria dei and women function as the glory of men (gloria viri).
54 The divinely specified attire for the High Priest included a linen turban (חטיף; Exod 28:4, 37, 39; 29:6; 39:28, 31; Lev 8:9; 16:4). Regular priests, on the other hand, wore “bonnets” or “caps” (מזבח; Exod 28:40;
dishonor him, i.e., wear a material head-covering when performing their mediatorial office. It is unlikely, therefore, that Paul has wearing material head-coverings in view.

Second, the connections created between Paul’s glory-shame motif and his terminology for being covered/uncovered support the conclusion that the covering he has in mind is κόμη. Specifically with regard to men, a man shames his “head” when he prays or prophesies κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων (v. 4). This phrase refers to the state created when a man covers (κατακαλύπτε-σθαι) his head (v. 7). In verse 14, Paul identifies ‘wearing long/uncut hair’ (κομᾷ) as dishonoring (ἀτιμία). In view of the thematic connection between vv. 4 and 14, it is reasonable to conclude that, since wearing κόμη is a shame to a man (v. 14), it is the implied object of ἔχων in verse four: “when a man prays or prophesies having [long/uncut hair] down from his head, he shames his head.” With regard to woman, the same word (ἀκατακαλύπτω) occurs in vv. 5 and 13 describing the state Paul regards as shameful for a woman when praying. The following discussion of κόμη as a woman’s glory in v. 15 provides conceptual linkage between κόμη and his uncovered=shame / covered=glory theme. Given the use of κατακαλύπτω in verses 6 and 7, if long/uncut hair is indeed the covering forbidden to men (σῶκ ὀφείλει κατακαλύπτεσθαι; v. 7), then it the natural inference would be that it is also the covering women are commanded to have (κατακαλυπτέσθω; v. 6).

Third, since Paul grounds his argument in a headship relationship reflective of the economic Trinity (v. 3), in the order and purpose of Creation (v. 8-9), in what the created order (φύσις) suggests is fitting (vv. 13-14), and concludes with an appeal to the universal practice of the early church (v. 16), it is likely that he has in view a covering which is transcultural, not limited by time or place, and thus universally applicable. Κόμη is such a covering.

**Κομάω and κόμη in Hellenistic Literature and the Church Fathers**

In order to answer the question whether Paul’s language supports the conclusion that he intends “uncut hair” as the referent for κόμη, I investigated Hellenistic literature for the use of the two key terms κομάω and κόμη as well as the terminology used for cutting hair. I also considered and the church father’s understanding of κομάω and κόμη in this passage.

29:9; 39:28; Lev 8:13). Cf. Alan D. Ingalls, “Headcoverings in the Old Testament,” Journal of Ministry and Theology 4.2 (2000): 41-52. Although praying was clearly a component of the OT priests’ duties (Num 6:22-24; 2 Chr 30:27), the OT does not expressly state that prophecy was a priestly function. However, Isaiah and Jeremiah both functioned as priests and prophets (Isa 6:1; Jer 1:1). Further, since “prophesy,” in Paul’s language, involves speaking to men for “edification, exhortation, and comfort” (1 Cor 14:3), it seems appropriate to describe the priestly duty of teaching the people the law as “prophesy” (cf. Deut 17:9-11; 33:8-10).

55 The following terms for shame occur in this passage: αἰσχύνω (11:4, 5); αἰσχρός (11:6); and ἀτιμία (11:14). Glory (δόξα) occurs three times: twice in v. 7 and once in v. 15. The distribution of these key terms does not, however, exhaust the development of this motif, since verses 8-9 also contribute to the motif by explaining why woman is the glory of man. Paul’s concern for glory/shame in worship flows naturally from his argument that all things should be done for God’s glory (1 Cor 10:31) and extends into his discussion of the Lord’s Table (1 Cor 11:22). Paul’s concern for God’s glory in these contexts indicates that he is not appealing primarily to 1st c. honor-shame social conventions but to a theological principle that transcends cultural norms. For a helpful discussion of the role honor-shame conventions played in the Greco-Roman world, see Mark Finney,
The verb κομάω “wear/have long hair,” occurs in the NT only in 1 Corinthians 11:13-14. It does not occur in the Septuagint. It occurs only once in Josephus where he is describing the practice of Nazirites who “allow their hair to grow long.” 56 It occurs once in Pseudo-Phocylides: “Long hair is not proper for boys, but for youthful women.” 57 Philo uses κομάω metaphorically with the sense “plume oneself, give oneself airs” 58 and appears to be making something of a play on words since he quotes a phrase from Num. 6:5 in the LXX “nourishes the hair of his head” (τρέφοντα κόμην τρίχα κεφαλῆς) and then interprets it to indicate that “he is holy who promotes the growth in the principal portion of himself of the principal shoots of the doctrines of virtue, and who in a manner prides himself [κομῶντα] and takes delight in these doctrines.” 59

Plutarch uses the verb κομάω to describe the following: 60 the practice of the Spartans who wore their hair and beards long (Sayings of the Spartans 230B 232D); allowing the hair of the beard to grow long enough to be seen by its wearer (232E.463); the practice of Greek men letting their hair grow long when misfortune comes (such as a death), in contrast to the women who cut off their hair in such situations (267B); the customary practice of women to grow long hair as opposed to men who normally have their hair cut (267B); wearing long hair as the special function of a Roman archon (Roman and Greek Questions 274B); the Parthian practice of...
wearing long bushy hair to make themselves appear more formidable (Life of Crassus 24.2);
Caius Marius wearing long hair from the day of his exile until his return at the age of more than
70 years (Life of Caius Marius 41.6); a man having a head of much long curly hair (Life of
Cimon 5.2); male show-offs who wore long hair and talked big (De Stoicorum repugnantii
1038C); of a Greek despot, Lykurgus, who made boys wear long hair and girls cut their hair
and wear boy’s clothes (Virtues of Women 261F); of Greek youths who wore their hair long
because they were not yet men (Virtues of Women 261E); of Greek young men who let their
hair grow long after the age of puberty (Lycurgus 22); of an army of young men who escort
Cicero with their hair let loose as a sign of their distress and desire to entreat mercy (Cicero
31).

Although κομάω can be used with various metaphorical senses (e.g., to have loose,
unkempt hair, or putting on airs), the normal meaning of the word throughout Koine literature is
to allow the hair to grow long by not cutting it, wear long hair.

Κόμη — “Long/Uncut hair”

Κόμη occurs in the NT only in 1 Cor. 11:15. It occurs eleven times in the Septuagint. Of
those 11x, it refers to uncut hair twice (nazirite vow—Num. 6:5; regulations for priests’ hair—Eze
44:20). In Lev. 19:27 Israelite men are prohibited from making “a round cutting of the hair” of
their head. Job 1:20 describes Job as rising and shaving “the hair of his head” (ἐκείρατο τὴν
67 “…the rest of the Parthians, still keeping to the Scythian fashion, wore their hair long and bushy to make
themselves more formidable.” τῶν ἄλλων Πάρθων ἔτι Σκυθικῶς ἐπὶ τὸ φοβερὸν τῷ ἀνασίλλῳ κομώντων. See also Plutarch, Sayings of the King 189E.
68 “[Marius] with his hair uncut from the day that he had been an exile, and now above seventy years of
age” κομῶν ἀφ ἧς ἔφυγεν ἡμέρας, ὑπὲρ ἑβδομήκοντα ἔτη
69 “He was not an ill-looking man, as Ion the poet says, but tall, and with a thick curly head of hair.” ἦν δὲ
καὶ τὴν ἱδέαν οὐ μεμπτός, ὡς Ἰων ὁ ποιητής φησιν, ἀλλὰ μέγας, οὔλῃ καὶ πολλῇ τριχὶ κομῶν τὴν κεφαλήν.
70 ψιλουχενεῖ καὶ κομᾶν καὶ μεγαληγορεῖν. See also Plutarch, De Stoicorum repugnantii 1036C.
71 Latin title: Mulierum virtutes. “In fact it is recorded in history that he imposed on the boys the custom of
wearing long hair and golden ornaments, and the girls he compelled to cut their hair and to wear boys’ clothes and
the short undergarment.” ἣστορεῖται γάρ, ὅτι τοὺς μὲν ἄρρενας παῖδας ἤσκει κομᾶν καὶ χρυσοφορέιν, τὰς δὲ θηλείας
ἦναγκαζε περιτρόχαλα κείρεσθαι καὶ φορεῖν ἐφηβικὰς χλαμύδας κατὰ τῶν ἀνακώλων χιτωνίσκων. See also Life of
Lysander 1.1-2.
72 “when he was a mere youth with others of his age who were still wearing their hair long (whom they
called ‘harassers,’ from their long hair presumably)” ὅτε πρὶν ἐστὶν ἀντίπαις, καὶ μειράκιον ἢν παντάπασι μετὰ τῶν
ηλίκων ἐτὶ κομώντων (οὓς κορωνιστὰς ὡς οὖν οὖν ἀπὸ τῆς κόμης ὀνόμαζον)
73 “For this reason, although they all let their hair grow long after the age of puberty” διὸ κομῶντες εὐθὺς ἐκ
tῆς τῶν ἐφηβῶν ἀνακώλου
74 “as many as twenty thousand young men escorted him with their hair untrimmed and joined in his
suppliant entreaties to the people.” καὶ δισμυρίων σὺν ἐλάττους νέων παρχαλούσου κομῶντες καὶ συνικετεύντες
75 In both of these references it translates the word מַעַרַע (HALOT: “loosely hanging and unplaited hair on
the head”). Both these contexts make it explicitly clear that the hair is uncut by prohibiting a razor from touch the
hair (Num. 6:5) or by forbidding the hair to be uncut and requiring it to be cut (Ezek. 44:20).
76 Here the Hebrew reads “do not round off the corner of your head” (לא תקע פס לאפריך).
κόμην τῆς κεφαλῆς. The remaining canonical occurrences are metaphorical uses (Job 16:12; 38:32) or mistranslations (Ezek. 24:23). Four occurrences are found in apocryphal books, two of which refer to men’s hair (Jdt. 13:7; Bel. 1:36) and two to women’s hair (3 Ma. 1:18; 4:6).

Κόμη occurs 19 times in Josephus, 18 times reference to hair, and once in reference to hyssop bunches. Josephus uses κόμη to denote Samson’s hair which was not to be cut as a Nazirite (Ant. 5.278, 311-14). After Samson’s hair was shaved, Josephus notes that “in the process of time Samson’s κόμη grew again (Ant. 5.314). According to Josephus, the prophet Samuel was a Nazirite whose hair was permitted to grow long (κόμη τε οὖν αὐτῶ ἀνείτο; Ant. 5.347). Absalom’s κόμη supposedly grew at such a rapid rate that, according to Josephus, it needed to be cut every 8th day (Ant. 7.189, 239). While David was fleeing Absalom, Mephibosheth didn’t cut his κόμη (Ant. 7.267).

This survey of the uses of κόμη in Koine literature indicates that κόμη does not necessarily denote uncut hair, though it may if the context makes it clear. It may refer to the hair of men or women and is typically used to denote long or feminine-length hair, or hair arranged like a woman’s.

Paul’s Terminology for Cutting Hair

The terms used by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:5-6 for cutting, ξυρόω and κείρω, mean “shave” and “shear, cut short” respectively. Although the verb κείρω may refer to a range of degrees of cutting, it is most commonly used in the context of cutting something short, e.g., shearing sheep, harvesting grain. It appears that the standard term for cutting that did not involve the

77 Here the Hebrew reads “and he shaved his head” and does not have a word for “hair” (שָׁנַה לְרֹאשׁוֹ וַיָּגָז).
78 Contrast this to the biblical account in 2 Sam. 14:26 where Absalom cut his hair once a year.
79 My best efforts, which are admittedly limited, to turn up any discussion in Classical or Koine literature in which a distinction is made between cutting and trimming hair have failed. For example, in Musonius Rufus’ essay “On Cutting the Hair,” in which he discusses what legitimates men cutting their hair, no lexical or semantic distinction between cutting and trimming is made. Cora E. Lutz, Musonius Rufus, “The Roman Socrates” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947). My review of all the cognate forms of κείρω in LSJM (απο-, περι-, κατα-, αμφι-, κτλ) found none of them having the sense of cut a small amount of hair, equivalent to our “trim.” The noun κουρά, which refers to “cropping of the hair,” does not denote anything more specific than cutting, without reference to the amount cut. A search from 8th c. BC to 2nd c. AD yielded 11 collocations of τέμνω and κόμη, and nine collocations of κόπτω and κόμη, none of which yielded any insight on this question. This is an area where more research is needed. Specifically, corpus-wide searches for the κόπτω and τέμνω word groups should be conducted to ascertain how they interact with the other Greek vocabulary in the semantic domain of hair. My current conclusion then is that there is no basis to believe that Paul would have distinguished between cutting and trimming as is often done in English.
80 See, for example, Plutarch, Regum 177A; Philo, Contempl. 1:51; T. Jos. 23:9; 24:10.
81 Gen 31:19; 38:12-13; Deut 15:19; 1 Sam 25:2, 4, 7, 11; 2 Sam 13:23-24; Cant 4:2; 6:6; Isa 53:7; Acts 8:32. There are four clear OT instances in which κείρω is used with reference to human hair. In 2 Sam. 14:26 Absalom cuts his hair once a year. Here κείρω translates לַזָּכָה “to shave.” In Job 1:20 it translates תַּחַל, the standard Hebrew term for shearing a sheep. In Micah 1:16 it functions in parallel with ξυρόω (“to shave”) and again translates תַּחַל. It is also used metaphorically in Jer. 7:29 of Jerusalem, as a woman, cutting off her hair in mourning (תַּחַל). In the light of this pattern of usage, when Paul cut his hair in Acts 18:18, it is probable that he shaved or cut his hair rather short.
removal of a large quantity of hair was ἀποκείρω, though κεῖρω could also be used. For example, in Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates strokes the hair (φρίχας) at the back of Phaedo’s neck and says, “Tomorrow, perhaps, Phaedo, you will cut off [ἀποκερή] this beautiful hair.” In Josephus’s account of the Samson narrative, the angel tells his mother “not to cut his hair” (τὰς κόμας αὐτῷ μὴ ἀποκείρειν; *Ant.* 5.278; cf. *Ant.* 5.312). According to Josephus, Absalom’s hair was so thick and fast-growing that his hair (κόμη) had to be cut (ἀποκείρειν) every 8 days! Philo describes young male slaves who “have very long hair, being either completely unshorn (μὴ κειρόμενοι), or else having only the hair on their foreheads evened at the end so as to make them of an equal length all round.”

Paul’s comparison of being “uncovered” (ἀκατακαλύπτῃ τῇ κεφαλῇ) to two degrees of cutting the hair in verse six (τὸ κείρασθαι ἢ ξυρᾶσθαι) supports the conclusion that he has in mind a lesser degree of the same state, i.e., cut hair. Taking ἀκατακαλύπτῃ τῇ κεφαλῇ to refer being uncovered due to having cut hair and κόμη to refer to uncut hair yields a coherent reading of verses 5-6, as the following paraphrase suggests:

5 But every woman praying or prophesying with an uncovered head [due to having cut hair] shames her head, for such a state is one and the same [in terms of its shame] as the woman whose head is shaved. 6 For if a woman is not covered [with uncut hair], then let her cut it off short, but if it is a shame for a woman to have her hair shaved off or cut short, let her be being covered [by letting her hair grow without cutting it].

**The Early Church’s Interpretation of Paul’s use of κόμη and κομάω**

The early church’s interpretation regarding Paul’s use of komáo (κομάω) and kóme (κόμη) is remarkably uniform. In no case are these words taken to refer to hair that is long and yet cut. The consistent understanding that emerges from the extant record is that men are not to have uncut hair and women are to have uncut hair. Examples of this understanding include:

The Synod of Gangra: “If any woman from pretended asceticism shall cut off her hair, which God gave her as the reminder of her subjection, thus annulling as it were the ordinance of subjection, let her be anathema.”

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82 ἀποκείρω does not occur in the NT or the LXX.
Severian of Gabala: And although the men who wore long hair in ancient times cut off part of it, [they still] wore it longer than was necessary; however, it was always forbidden for a woman to shear her hair.”

Augustine, in Of the Work of Monks, who argues that Paul prohibits men from having long hair: “For the same Apostle saith, that long hair is also instead of a veil: by whose authority these men are hard pressed. Seeing he saith openly, “If a man wear long hair, it is a disgrace to him.” “The very disgrace,” say they, “we take upon us, for desert of our sins:” holding out a screen of simulated humility, to the end that under cover of it they may carry on their trade of self-importance.”

Conclusion

Contemporary logic argues, “Paul said it was a shame for a woman to shave or shear her hair. He didn’t say she couldn’t trim it. Since trimming hair is cutting off less hair than shaving or shearing or “cutting,” it is not prohibited by this passage.” This argument stands if (1) it is true that Koine Greek supports a distinction between cutting hair and trimming it, and (2) Paul intended to make this distinction in 1 Cor. 11. Since I can find no such distinction in Koine literature, in the early church’s understanding of this passage, or in Paul, I conclude that the argument is not legitimate. Paul’s expectation was that women would have uncut hair that grows however long nature has determined, and that men would have cut hair that did not “cover” their heads and thus is distinctly masculine.


88 Precisely what constitutes “masculine” hair length seems to be a function of culture. As long as culture makes a distinction, Scripture provides no specific guidelines for masculine hair length other than indicating it should not cover the head.

17