

Expectations Regarding Female Head Covering in Greek, Roman, and Jewish Cultures of the First Century

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The wealthy and ancient city of Corinth was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC. It survived in a much-diminished form, with people essentially living among the ruins, until it was re-founded by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony in 44 BC.¹ The new city quickly became prosperous and attracted many people. The Romans officially dominated the city with their laws, culture, and religion, but not surprisingly, in the first century AD there was a heavy influence of Greek culture.² There was also a substantial Jewish presence in the city.³

In 1986 New Testament scholar David Lowery wrote: "It cannot be unequivocally asserted, but the preponderance of evidence points toward the public head covering of women as a universal custom in the first century in both Jewish culture and Greco-Roman culture. The nature of the covering varied considerably, but it was commonly a portion of the outer garment (ἱμάτιον) drawn up over the head like a hood."⁴ Though many dispute Lowery's assessment, a significant amount of subsequent scholarship supports it.

Many scholars acknowledge that women in Greek culture habitually wore something on their heads when in public. For example:

- Douglas Cairns states, "That women in Greek societies veil, both as a regular public demeanor and as a response to particular events and circumstances, is demonstrated by a wealth of visual evidence and confirmed in literature."⁵
- Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones states in his "masterful study,"⁶ "I suggest that women of varying social strata in the ancient Greek world were habitually veiled, especially for public appearances or before unrelated men"⁷ and "I maintain that in public situations or in the presence of unfamiliar men, a woman was expected to be veiled."⁸ He further states:

¹ Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 144-146.

² Johannes Wessels, *Paul's Approach to the Cultural Conflict in Corinth: A socio-historical study* (Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2017), 43; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 3:2692-2695; Timothy A. Brookins, *Corinthian Wisdom, Stoic Philosophy, and the Ancient Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 131; Robert S. Dutch, *The Educated Elite in 1 Corinthians* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 56.

³ See, e.g., Keener (2014), 3:2694-2695.

⁴ David K. Lowery, "The Head Covering and the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:2-34," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (1986), 157.

⁵ Douglas L. Cairns, "The Meaning of the Veil in Ancient Greek Culture" in Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, ed., *Women's Dress in the Ancient Greek World* (Swansea, Wales: The Classical Press of Wales, 2001), 75.

⁶ The work is so described by classical scholar Kelly Olson in *Dress and the Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 125 (n. 85).

⁷ Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2003), 3.

⁸ Llewellyn-Jones (2003), 11.

In Greek culture from the archaic era through to the Roman period, the veiling of women was routine. An ideology of veiling which was imposed and endorsed by men was probably adhered to by most women in Greek society as a matter of daily practice, at least when they appeared out of doors or at home in the company of strange men. Because of its habitual nature, veiling tends to be underplayed in the ancient androcentric sources. . . .

I have attempted to demonstrate that veiling was a habitual female practice in the Greek world. This is reflected in the artistic sources, which display an impressive variety of veil-styles worn over a wide geographical area and a correspondingly broad period.⁹

- Liza Cleland, Glenys Davies, and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones state, "Greek women routinely veiled their heads and sometimes faces – even Spartan women veiled – as part of an ideology requiring female social invisibility; by placing themselves beneath veils, women effected a symbolic separation."¹⁰
- Elizabeth Carney states, "Macedonian women, like women elsewhere in Greece, wore veils of varying degrees of coverage, in effect functioning as substitute houses that enabled a woman to move in public but stay private."¹¹
- Benjamin Edsall states, "Greek practice of female head covering was remarkably static from pre-classical antiquity through the Roman period."¹²
- Edwin Yamauchi and Marvin Wilson state, "In going outdoors [Greek] women wore the draped himation, which they could draw over their heads."¹³
- Elif Hilal Karaman states, "In Greek culture a woman's *himation* generally served as a veil. The *himation* was an outer garment worn on top of the inner clothing (*chiton*), and it functioned as a veil by being pulled forward and onto the head."¹⁴

Many scholars likewise acknowledge that women in Roman culture routinely wore something on their heads when in public. For example:

- Plutarch was a Greek philosopher and historian (c. AD 46 – AD 119/120). He became a Roman citizen, and public duties took him to Rome on several occasions. He was a

⁹ Llewellyn-Jones (2003), 315.

¹⁰ Liza Cleland, Glenys Davies, and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *Greek and Roman Dress From A to Z* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 205.

¹¹ Elizabeth Carney, "Macedonian Women" in Joseph Roisman and Ian Worthington, eds., *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 412.

¹² Benjamin A. Edsall, "Greco-Roman Costume and Paul's Fraught Argument in 1 Corinthians 11.2-16," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 9 (2013), 143.

¹³ Edwin M. Yamauchi and Marvin R. Wilson, *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity, Volume I* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014), 329.

¹⁴ Elif Hilal Karaman, *Ephesian Women in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Perspective* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 132.

prolific writer and traveled widely, visiting central Greece, Sparta, Corinth, Patrae (Patras), Sardis, and Alexandria.¹⁵ He wrote *Moralia* around AD 100. It is a set of essays on various subjects, including his answers to various questions about Roman and Greek practices. In Question 14 of "Roman Questions" (*Mor.* 267a-c) he ponders the question: "Why do sons cover their heads when they escort their parents to the grave, while daughters go with uncovered heads and hair unbound?" He writes:

Is it because fathers should be honoured as gods by their male offspring, but mourned as dead by their daughters, that custom has assigned to each sex its proper part and has produced a fitting result from both?

Or is it that the unusual is proper in mourning, and it is more usual for women to go forth in public with their heads covered and men with their heads uncovered?¹⁶

As noted by J. L. Hilton and L. L. V. Matthews:

Plutarch assumes that Roman women regularly wore the veil in public. Most modern scholars, quite possibly mistakenly (the issue of veiling is complex in most societies and Roman society is unlikely to be any different in this respect), believe that this was not generally the case, at any rate in the late Republic or Augustan period, and that Roman women were unlike their Greek sisters in this regard. However, Plutarch must have known how Roman women usually dressed in public and indeed the assumption that women normally wore the veil in his day (a fact that must have been common knowledge at the time) explains his subsequent question concerning the hypothetical general prohibition of female veiling in early Roman society.¹⁷

- Judith Sebesta states, "The costume of the matron signified her modesty and chastity, her *pudicitia*. It consisted of her distinctive dress, the woolen stola, which was worn over a tunic; the protective woolen bands, which dressed her hair; and the woolen palla or mantle, which was used to veil her head when she went out in public."¹⁸
- Norma Goldman states:

The palla was a long rectangular piece of cloth used by Roman women as a covering when they left the house. Like women in the Near East today, women in ancient Rome did not go outdoors without being modestly covered by a mantle. The woman outdoors covered her body, and probably her head

¹⁵ Frank W. Walbank, "Plutarch" in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (accessed on 4/1/24).

¹⁶ [Roman Questions by Plutarch](#), Loeb Classical Library Edition, Vol. 4 (accessed on 4/1/24).

¹⁷ J. L. Hilton and L. L. V. Matthews in "Veiled or Unveiled? (Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 267B-C)," *The Classical Quarterly* (April 18, 2008), 341.

¹⁸ Judith Sebesta, "Symbolism in the Costume of the Roman Woman" in Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante, eds., *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 48.

as well, with the *palla*, both to protect herself against the cold or improper display and against any evil eye or improper advance.¹⁹

- Joyce Salisbury states: "Figure 19 shows a Roman woman with her *stola*, draped modestly and graciously in her *palla*. The *palla* also served to veil a woman's head while she was in public. . . . When a Roman woman became a widow, she replaced the *palla* with another covering for her head. This was a square covering made of dark wool, called the *ricinium*."²⁰
- Craig S. Keener states, citing Croom, "In public, even well-to-do Roman women probably pulled a mantle over their heads."²¹
- Kelly Olson states: "A married woman's rank, status, and morality were also supposed to be indicated by her dress: long tunic, *stola*, and *palla* or mantle, drawn over her head when the woman was out of doors, and hair bound with fillets. This description is offered by several modern scholars as that of the everyday clothing of the Roman *matrona*."²² She further states:

According to literary evidence, married women also wore the *palla* or mantle, a rectangular piece of cloth. . . . 'In later times, there was a tendency to merge the name with *pallium* [a Greek cloak], the two words having the same derivation and meaning' (Wilson 1938: 149). . . .

[Literary sources include] explicit references to the *palla's* function as a veil. An anecdote in Valerius Maximus recounts that Gaius Sulpicius Gallus (cos. 166 BC) divorced his wife for leaving the house with her head uncovered, thereby exposing to view what he alone should see (Val. Max. 6.3.10). The elder Seneca [55 BC – AD 39] wrote that veiling the face and head was a way for women to avoid the public gaze and the ensuing solicitations by men (*Con.* 2.7.6). Thus, like the rest of her costume, the *palla* was supposed to announce the social and moral status of the woman, and was a mark of honor, dignity, and sexual modesty.

Modern authors have stated that the covered head was part of the everyday costume of the Roman *matrona*.²³

- Mireille Lee states: "The Roman woman's *palla* was similar in concept and function to the Greek himation. It was employed by Roman women as a veil."²⁴

¹⁹ Norma Goldman, "Reconstructing Roman Clothing" in Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante, eds., *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 228.

²⁰ Joyce E. Salisbury states in *Encyclopedia of Women in the Ancient World* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2001), 65.

²¹ Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, NCBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 92.

²² Olson (2008), 25.

²³ Olson (2008), 33-34.

²⁴ Mireille M. Lee, "Clothing" in Michael Gagarin, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1:231.

- Alexandra Croom states, "Modest women were supposed to keep their heads covered when out of doors, but this generally took the form of draping their mantle over their head rather than wearing a hat, since the elaborate hairstyles frequently made hats impossible."²⁵
- Benjamin Edsall states, "While the young freeborn Roman girl tended to wear her hair in simple braids, those who were married and widowed wore the *palla* (*himation*) or *ricinium*, which was pushed up over the hair – or part of the hair for those with more elaborate hairstyles – when in public or around men other than one's husband."²⁶ He adds, "Roman literary sources are unanimous in their expectation that women be covered in public."²⁷
- Yamauchi and Wilson state, "In public [Roman] women would wear the *palla*, a large rectangular shawl, which could cover their heads. Widows and women in mourning wore the *ricinium*, a double folded veil."²⁸
- Lena Larsson Lovén states, "Married Roman women of practically all social classes would cover their heads in public as a sign both the married state and of modesty, but there is no visual evidence that their faces were covered in public."²⁹
- Elif Hilal Karaman states: "In Roman society, a veil was also used to cover the head, but it had various names according to size and purpose (a *palla*, a *ricinium* or a *rica* – simply a rectangular shawl). . . . [The *palla/himation*] was considered a sign of chastity and modesty, and, therefore, was worn by the devoted wife."³⁰

It is widely recognized that women in Jewish culture habitually wore something on their heads when in public. For example:

- Hans Conzelmann states, "The Jewish custom, to be sure, can be unequivocally ascertained, and corresponds to Paul's regulation: a Jewess may appear in public only with her head covered."³¹
- Randall Chesnutt states, "The Talmud seeks to minimize and carefully regulate women's appearances in public (Babylonian Talmud *Yebamot* 76b-77a; *Berakot* 3a-b; *Gittin* 12a;

²⁵ Alexandra Croom, *Roman Clothing and Fashion* (The Hill, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2012), 169 [Kindle location 1978 of 3018].

²⁶ Edsall (2013), 139.

²⁷ Edsall (2013), 143.

²⁸ Yamauchi and Wilson state (2014), 330.

²⁹ Lena Larsson Lovén, "Visual Representations" in Mary Harlow, ed., *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in Antiquity* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 149.

³⁰ Karaman (2018), 132.

³¹ Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia, trans. by James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 185. This preceded Lowery's article, but I include it because of its clarity and definiteness.

90a-b; see also *Genesis Rabbah* 8:12; 18:1). . . . When a woman did go out in public, she was expected to have her head covered."³²

- Tal Ilan states:

Several other sources, in addition to the ones we have already cited, specify that when a [Jewish] woman does go out in public, her head should be covered. For example: "The house of R. Ishmael: a warning to the daughters of Israel, that they not go out with their heads uncovered (lit. unbound). (*bKet.* 72a); and in *Sifre* we find the following interpretation of the passage "and he shall let loose the hair on the woman's head" (*Num.* 5.18): "of the daughters of Israel, that they cover their heads" (*Sifre Num.* 11, p. 17 ed. Horovitz). And in fact, we find in the *aggadah* examples of truly modest women who cover their heads even indoors. Thus Qimhit, when asked by the sages how it happened that seven of her sons served in the high priesthood, gave the following answer: "The beams in my house never saw the hair on my head" (*yHor.* 3.5, 47d; *bYoma* 47a; ARNA 35, p. 105 ed. Schechter).

Unbound hair on a woman is depicted as compromising her modesty.³³

- Lucille Roussin states, "The importance of a woman's head covering is stated unequivocally in the Babylonian Talmud. A woman may be divorced without payment of her marriage contract if she goes out with her hair fully or partially uncovered."³⁴
- Charles Talbert states, "Jewish women appeared in public only with their heads covered (Sus 32; 3 Mac 4:6; Midrash Rabbah 1.139, so R. Joshua, c. AD 90; b Nedarim 30b; Tertullian *De Corona* 4; *De Oratione* 22)."³⁵
- Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones states, "In Jewish tradition, respectable women were routinely expected to be veiled, especially for religious rites, as uncovered hair could be perceived as the sign of an adulteress (*Num.* 5.18)."³⁶

Whereas each of the above statements addressed female head covering in a single culture (Greek or Roman or Jewish), the following refer to head covering by women in two (Greek and Roman) or three cultures (Greek, Roman, and Jewish).

³² Randall D. Chesnutt, "Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman Era" in Carroll D. Osburn, ed., *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity Volume One* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing, 1996), 111.

³³ Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 129-130.

³⁴ Lucille A. Roussin, "Costume in Roman Palestine: Archaeological Remains and the Evidence from the Mishnah" in Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante, eds., *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 186.

³⁵ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, rev. ed. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2002), 87.

³⁶ Llewellyn-Jones (2003), 280 (n. 105).

- Aline Rouselle states, "In Rome and the East, on the rare occasions when women left the home, they wore veils or hoods."³⁷
- Craig Keener states in a section titled "Head Coverings in the Greek and Roman World": "The customs of women covering their heads were quite ancient in the Mediterranean. . . . Head coverings for women became a common practice. . . . The evidence that this practice continued in Asia Minor and in Greece includes both literary sources and funerary reliefs . . . and the practice was probably not limited to the East."³⁸
- Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones states, "So whatever the make-up of the women of the Christian assembly at Corinth – Greek, Roman, or even Jewish – their uncovered heads would have broken with a number of social conventions and appeared as anathema to Paul."³⁹
- Mireille Lee states, "In contrast [to Greek and Roman men], women regularly covered their heads with veils (such as the himation or *palla*)."⁴⁰
- Benjamin Edsall states, "Importantly, recent scholarship on both Greek and Roman costume has concluded that women *did* wear veils, even if it was not a custom entirely without exception."⁴¹ He adds, "In fact, as I suggested above, the practice of a woman covering her head in public is widely attested in Greco-Roman and Jewish antiquity"⁴² and "female head-coverings were the norm in Greek and Roman society."⁴³
- Victor Matthews states, "The issue of women being required to cover their long hair with a veil is raised in 1 Corinthians 11:4-7. It is unlikely that Paul is instructing the Corinthian church to adopt a Jewish tradition (see 3 Macc. 4:6; *Ant.* 3.11.270 for this custom); Greek and Roman women also regularly covered their head with a veil (Tertullian, *Cor.* 4; Plutarch, *Quaest. rom.* 267a)."⁴⁴

³⁷ Aline Rouselle, "Body Politics in Ancient Rome" in Pauline Schmitt Pantel, *A History of Women in the West: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 315.

³⁸ Craig S. Keener, "Head Coverings" in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 445.

³⁹ Llewellyn-Jones (2003), 280 (n. 105).

⁴⁰ Lee (2010), 1:231.

⁴¹ Edsall (2013), 137.

⁴² Edsall (2013), 139, citing Léon Heuzey, *Histoire du costume antique* (Paris: Librairie ancienne honoré Champion, 1922), 168-74, 191-96; Georges Losfeld, *Essai sur le costume grec* (Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1991), 275-78; Lucille A. Roussin, 'Costume in Roman Palestine: Archaeological Remains and the Evidence from the Mishnah,' in Sebesta and Bonfante, eds., *World of Roman Costume*, 182-90; Ursula Scharf, *Straßenkleidung der römischen Frau* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, 3.585; New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 96-103; Sebesta, 'Symbolism,' 48-50; Fantham, 'Covering'; Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite's Tortoise*.

⁴³ Edsall (2013), 141.

⁴⁴ Victor H. Matthews, *The Cultural World of the Bible: An Illustrated Guide to Manners and Customs*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 244.

As indicated above, the garment that commonly served as a head covering for Greek women was called a *himation*. It was a cloak or wrap that could be pulled onto or over the head.⁴⁵ Here is a statue that illustrates the usage.⁴⁶



Woman in Blue, Tanagra terracotta figurine, c. 300 BC, via Musée du Louvre, Paris

In first-century Roman society, the equivalent of the *himation* was called a *pallium*. As the classical scholar Jan Radicke explains in his recent major study:

When the Roman Empire expanded towards Greece in the second century BCE, the above-mentioned terms were already established 'Latin' words. Romans used them to translate Greek terms of new dress items they adopted or came to know more closely. They thereby extended the terms' traditional meaning. The term *tunica* (tunic) hence came to comprise the Greek *chiton* as well; the term *pallium* (cloak) included the Greek *himation* . . . In some cases, this causes difficulties for us because the Latin and the Greek garments were not completely equal, but our knowledge of them is too limited to note the small differences. We can see that the

⁴⁵ Sue Blundell notes in *Women in Classical Athens* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1998), 36: "In Athens veils were of two main types. A woman could either drape her cloak or *himation* over her head to form a veil or she used a separate piece of material, like a large scarf, which again was worn loosely over the head" (quoted in Llewellyn-Jones [2003], 7-8).

⁴⁶ Image from Stella Polyzoidou, [Women's Fashion: What Did Women Wear In Ancient Greece?](#). She writes: "This statue depicts a woman wearing a himation as a veil. Her body is revealed under the folds of the himation thrown around the shoulders covering the head. The veil makes a woman socially invisible allowing her to enjoy privacy while being in public."

chiton slightly differed from the Roman *tunic* . . . In the case of the *himation* and the *pallium*, we find no difference at all . . .⁴⁷

In earlier Roman history, the term *palla* was used for a valuable version of this wrap, but by the first century *palla* had been displaced or subsumed by the term *pallium*.⁴⁸ Olson quotes Wilson to that effect above: "In later times, there was a tendency to merge the name [*palla*] with *pallium* [a Greek cloak], the two words having the same derivation and meaning." Radicke states, "In the first century BCE at the latest, we see that the ordinary coat of Roman women was called a *pallium* and that the term *palla* was reserved for very precious cloaks. In Imperial times [meaning after 27 BC],⁴⁹ there is no evidence of any Roman women wearing a *palla*."⁵⁰

The *pallium*, the equivalent of the *himation*, was the regular cloak worn by Roman women. Radicke says it was, next to the *tunica*, "the most common female Roman garment in the period treated in this book (200 BCE–200 CE). It is a very ordinary garment."⁵¹ He says, "The female *pallium* is used by all types of girls and women in the entire period considered in this book"⁵² and "In the time from 200 BCE–200 CE, the *pallium* was worn by all groups of women. It remains in common use in Imperial times."⁵³ He further states:

We may now take a closer look at what kind of women wore a *pallium* and how they used it. Varro's remarks imply that it was the regular cloak of a normal Roman *matrona*. When we look at the rest of our evidence, this picture broadens further. The *pallium* is worn by every kind of woman in the Roman world. It is not restricted to any age and gender role, but comprises all social groups. It is used to cover the body from the head to the legs.⁵⁴

Radicke sums up the social use of the *pallium* this way:

Contrary to the dictionaries, the *pallium* was an everyday garment worn by all groups of women; the word *pallium* was the everyday name for that type of cloak. Our literary sources mention it only rarely because they wrote from a top-down

⁴⁷ Jan Radicke, *Roman Women's Dress: Literary Sources, Terminology, and Historical Development* (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2023), 229.

⁴⁸ Radicke states (2023), 290, "The *palla* differed from a *pallium*, which had the same cut, in that the *palla* was more valuable. The increased value probably derived from better material and more valuable ornaments."

⁴⁹ David E. Aune, "Emperors, Roman" in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 233.

⁵⁰ Radicke (2023), 290.

⁵¹ Radicke (2023), 277.

⁵² Radicke (2023), 278. *Pallium* was the generic term for the cloaks of both genders – being a rectangular piece of cloth, almost like a blanket – but there were male and female versions (see, Radicke [2023], 278). As observed by Olson (2008), 10:

Women's clothing was ideally bound up with notions of honour and ideals of relations between sexes, and then as now played an important part in the cultural construction of sexual categories: gender-specific clothing and adornment formed the normal aesthetic codes for men and women. Although male and female clothing at Rome was similar in basic design, women's appearance was recognizably female: women clearly had a separate normal (and normative) style of clothing from that of men.

⁵³ Radicke (2023), 281.

⁵⁴ Radicke (2023), 281.

perspective, but we may use the term *pallium* without hesitation when describing statues or pictures and when talking about female clothing. The *pallium* is a perfectly normal article of female dress.⁵⁵

Wealthy Roman women in the first century no doubt continued to express their social status by wearing a *pallium* that was especially valuable because of fabric, pattern, coloring, or ornamentation, but the garment was still known as a *pallium*, the everyday garment of all groups of women. Here is a statue dated to around AD 25 that shows a woman wearing a *pallium*.⁵⁶



Pl. 11: Tiberian portrait statue of a woman in stola with straps. (see p. 685 n. 69)

The denial that Greek and Roman women in the first century habitually wore something on their heads when in public is driven largely by the fact ancient visual sources – statues, reliefs, mosaics, and paintings – frequently portray both Greek and Roman women with uncovered heads. This is taken to reflect the social reality, and the literary sources that indicate public head covering was the cultural norm are then reduced to being merely prescriptive rather than descriptive. In other words, the claim is that the writers were expressing how they thought things should be not how they actually were. But that shoe fits as easily on the other foot. That is, the portrayal of women with uncovered heads may reflect a private setting or be a matter of artistic license or convention rather than a representation of reality.

⁵⁵ Radicke (2023), 282.

⁵⁶ Photograph (Plate 11) and explanation are from Joachim Raeder's "The Archaeological Evidence" in Radicke (2023), 684, 698. She is wearing a pleated stola with a V-neck over a tunic with a *pallium* over the stola.

As Karaman notes, "There is no way to absolutely distinguish between evidence that portrays an ideal from evidence that presents general reality."⁵⁷ Llewellyn-Jones, for example, who is well aware of the conflict between literary and artistic depictions of head covering, states:

Greek artists were clearly able to depict women veiled, but what is particularly interesting is the realization that for the majority of the time they choose not to. The literary evidence suggests that 'decent' women should always aim to be covered up, but art allows women to appear naked or semi-nude. The artist who fashions the woman unveiled must therefore be working to a different agenda to the creators of literature. He is constructing a different vision of womanhood. Somewhere in the middle of these polar opposites lies the truth of ancient Greek female experience: at home, and in private, a woman might well have worn the kinds of outfits depicted in the artworks (to a degree) and in comic texts, but I maintain that in public situations or in the presence of unfamiliar men, a woman was expected to be veiled.⁵⁸

Edsall similarly cautions:

Finally, Kirk MacGregor has recently argued that because pottery and sculpture in Corinth portray men and women without head-coverings, there was no practice of head covering for men or women in Corinth. However, he fails to account for the fact that this discrepancy between written and visual sources pertains across the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world and that interpretation of visual sources is no less fraught with interpretive difficulty than that of written sources. That is, a bust of an unveiled woman is not a photograph. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that in many cases the veil was implied by the hairstyle, which was styled high in the front but flat at the back where the head-covering would rest. Importantly, recent scholarship on both Greek and Roman costume has concluded that women did wear veils, even if it was not a custom entirely without exception.⁵⁹

As Blundell observed in the quote given above (n. 45), women in ancient Greece had more than one option for covering their heads. They could drape the *himation* over their head or wear a separate piece of material, like a large scarf, loosely over the head. There likewise were options other than the *pallium* that Roman women could use for covering their heads, most notably the *palliolum*.⁶⁰ Radicke explains:

The accessory called *palliolum* suffers from severe neglect in scholarly attention. It is even denied a name of its own in ancient literature and modern dictionaries. The following short chapter seeks to make up for this shortcoming and to honour an article of dress that was worn far more than a *stola*, a *praetexta*, and all the other elegant garments in everyday life. The term *palliolum* ('mini-cloak') is the

⁵⁷ Karaman (2018), 134.

⁵⁸ Llewellyn-Jones (2003), 11.

⁵⁹ Edsall (2013), 137.

⁶⁰ There also was a headscarf called a *mitra*, which in Imperial times was worn above all by elderly Roman wives. See, Radicke (2023), 461-466.

diminutive of *pallium* (cloak) and designates a scarf. Like its larger sister, the *palliolum* is a common garment, and it is therefore rarely mentioned in higher literature. Like the *pallium*, a *palliolum* was usually made of wool and had a rectangular shape. . . . A *palliolum* was usually wrapped around the shoulders and served, like the *pallium*, to cover the head.⁶¹

It is beyond our sources to write a full history of *palliolum*, but one may say that women wore a plain version all the time. . . . By the second part of the first century CE, the *palliolum* started to become a regular part of what was called a 'combination' (synthesis). Martial, who closely mirrors social mores of his time, shows that wearing a *palliolum* was something completely normal for women at the end of the first century CE.⁶²

An expectation in Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures that women in public would wear something on their heads seems obviously relevant to Paul's discussion of female head covering in 1 Cor. 11:2-16. In that light, when Paul urged the women not to pray in the assembly without a head covering, he was, in Donald Guthrie's words, urging them "to respect the social customs of their time, in spite of their new-found freedom."⁶³ I think that is the right track.

Some, however, deny that the evidence of public head covering by women is relevant to early Christian assemblies because, it is claimed, Christians met almost exclusively in homes which were not *public* spaces. I think this claim fails for two reasons. First, it is doubtful that the earliest Christians met "almost exclusively" in homes. As Edward Adams has shown, the evidence for early Christians meeting in homes "is not as extensive and exclusive as is usually thought" and there were many non-house spaces in which Christians plausibly could have met.⁶⁴ Secondly, as Karaman has observed, "even though one's house is a private domain, during Christian gatherings this private domain would be transformed into a public or semi-public space. Choosing whether or not to cover your head at a church gathering, therefore, involved a consideration of how you would be perceived *publicly*."⁶⁵

⁶¹ Radicke (2023), 485.

⁶² Radicke (2023), 486.

⁶³ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 461.

⁶⁴ Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* rev. ed. (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

⁶⁵ Karaman (2018), 128.