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Editorial

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The way the hair is worn, by whom it is cut and in what context, either voluntarily or under compulsion – as a ritual necessity, as punishment or in retribution – carries, needless to say, important symbolic charges. The exact force of these charges, however, is notoriously hard to identify. The visual prominence and plasticity of (head) hair imbue it with unusual decorative potential, and ensure for it a typically critical place in the formation of an individual's persona and the organisation of his or her self-representation. Yet hair's mutability, the impermanence of its stylings, its resistance to structure and its dispensability, despite its intrinsicality, make its status oddly ambiguous and its meanings fluid and unstable – and hence continuously open to contestation.

On the one hand, hair "interventions" – whether self-selected or imposed – evoke potent associations of (or the violation of) intimacy, privacy, agency, individuality and wholeness, especially in the case of head and facial hair which generally is visible and plays an important role in social interactions. On the other, hair's winning ability to grow back necessarily limits the duration of these effects, at least to the extent that they are inscribed on the body. This also allows for or necessitates a continuous sequence of (different) interventions in (head) hair styles, allowing for different (temporary) associations and identifications. Of course the stress-invoking trauma of the (forced) imposition of hair styles can have an effect that long outlives any visible signs. Hence, hairstyles are powerful ideological and social signifiers of inclusion and exclusion, group identity and othering, but also subject to the typically meaning-defying vagaries of fashion, adding a dimension of "symbolic noise" that further complicates interpretation.

Hair's being part of the body, and its close connection to the head, allows hair, attached or cut loose from the body, to represent the body as a whole, especially in magical and sacrificial rituals and transitional rites. These kinds of ambiguous and multiple significations in the mediaeval West[1] and the Byzantine East[2] have been stimulatingly scrutinised in a variety of recent studies that approach the subject from a sociological or anthropological angle. Islam, however, has gone largely unexamined.[3]

In sheer complexity and "loadedness", however, the situation in the Muslim world can more than hold its own against either of these two contemporary cultures across the Mediterranean.[4]

[1]Robert Bartlett, "Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4 (1994): 43–60.
[2]Marie-France Auzépy, "Prolégomènes à une histoire du poil", *Travaux et Mémoires* 14 [special issue : *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron*] (2002): 1–12.
[3]But notice the current interest with a collected volume on the being prepared under the editorialship of Bruce Fudge of the University of Geneva, based on the workshop Barbe et barbus *Symboliques, rites et pratiques du port de la barbe dans le Proche-Orient ancien et moderne*.
[4]For some recent overview studies, see Ingrid Pfluger-Schindlbeck, "On the Symbolism of Hair in Islamic Societies: An Analysis of Approaches", *Anthropology of the Middle East* 1/2 (2006): 72–88; Christian Bromberger, "Hair: From the West to the Middle East through the Mediterranean", *The Journal of American Folklore* 121/482 (2008): 379–99; for an overview of the treatment of shaving and cutting hair in the Qurʾān, Ḥadīth and *sīra*, see Lloyd Ridgeon, "Shaggy or Shaved? The Symbolism of Hair among Persian Qalandar Sufis", *Iran and the Caucasus* 14/2 (2010): 233–63.

The social meaning of hair in the Islamic sphere is often discussed in relation to gender, more especially in the context of the veil and the custom of women covering their hair.[5] As in other cultures, cutting hair or letting it grow defines the individual's relationship with society, whether in a positive or negative sense, covering religious, social and ethnic identities. The question is how the treatment and meaning of hair in the Muslim world sets people apart, taking into account both the shared elements of the Mediterranean and Near Eastern value system, and the distinctive, historically specific features of enforced or self-selected hairstyles.[6]

The articles collected in this volume arise from papers presented at a small workshop at Leiden University that explored the multiple social meanings of hair in the mediaeval Muslim world. Representing different disciplinary approaches and geographical regions, we did not aim to provide complete or systematic coverage of the many different meanings inherent in the cutting and shaving, growing and braiding, displaying and concealing of hair in different socio-historical contexts. The case studies from seemingly unrelated cultural domains served mainly to offer jumping-off points for exploring the complicated and multi-layered meanings of hair in the historical Muslim world in light of research in other fields, especially the ancient and mediaeval societies around the Mediterranean. Three presentations at the workshop offered a comparative perspective from such better-researched areas, namely the Byzantine East and the mediaeval West – the latter of which was reworked into an article which is published here as well.[7] Consistent with the outcome of this and other research, the articles presented here do not aim to offer a blanket explanation of how hair was perceived in the Muslim Middle Ages. Instead, following from the observations that the "symbolism of hair was very inconsistent and highly contextual",[8] and "hair's physical and metaphorical potency rests in the plenitude of what it can be made to say",[9] case studies look at the specific historical circumstances that gave rise to certain attitudes towards hair and the consequences these had for how hair was shaped, exhibited and used to regulate behaviour and assert membership of or exclusion from certain social, religious or ethnic groups. With a focus on the social function of hair in medieval Muslim societies, the articles combine normative discussions and evidence from practice, phenomenological and metaphorical references, and texts and material remains in all their diversity. Some issues that the articles raise might nevertheless be usefully discussed here.

The first concerns sources and how our use of legal, theological and other normative treatises, literary texts, documents such as papyri, and material culture influences how we approach and explain the past. Islamic legal texts discuss *ḥadd* punishments extensively, but in practice – as evidenced by documents and anecdotal evidence in chronicles and other literary texts – these penalties seem to have been only rarely applied. Similarly, literary texts produced in the Muslim world abound in descriptions of public shaming ceremonies of high-profile offenders, which often included shaving or plucking the beard, parading, covering in soot and feathers, and whipping.[10] Prohibitions against excessive adornment

[5]Simonetta Calderini, "Two Radical Hair-Cuts in Medieval Egypt: Gendering Politics in Times of Trouble", *Al-Masāq* 20/1 (2008): 17–28; Pfluger-Schindlbeck, "Symbolism", 76–9.

[6]For the importance of considering culture and region-specific factors in the symbolisation of hair, see Pfluger-Schindlbeck, "Symbolism", 73; Bromberger, "Hair", 380; Christopher R. Hallpike, "Social Hair", *Man: New Series* 4/2 (1969): 256–64, p. 259; Marion H. Katz, "The 'Shearing of Forelocks' as a Penitential Rite", in *The Heritage of Arabo-Islamic Learning: Studies Presented to Wadad Kadi,* ed. Maurice Pomerantz and Aram A. Shahin (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 191–206.

[7]Jan J. van Ginkel "Long as God can grow it". The attitude to hair in Syriac Christian Literature ; Marie-France Auzépy The meaning of hair in the Byzantine world; Ian Wood The meaning of hair in medieval western Europe.

[8]Nn. 11 and 12 in Wood below.

[9]Below, Bashir.

[10]Christian Lange, "On That Day When Faces will be Black", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127/4 (2007): pp. 429–46 and n. 8 in Sijpesteijn, below.

of the hair were addressed to the highest social classes, opening up the question of who actually wore those hairstyles and how widespread these styles were.[11] Classical authors might have emphasised beards as an ethnic marker of barbarians, but most people would have been informed of the proper attitudes towards hair in a Christian religious context, where different associations played a role.[12] Conversely, what is the significance of specific literary or material treatments of hair (or the absence of them) in one culture vis-à-vis another? The extensive production of poems on beards, both praising and dismissing them, in Arabic and Persian literature in contrast to the almost complete lack of this genre in medieval Western literature cannot only be explained by the literary hyperactivity of the Muslim world generally.[13] The appearance of hair and beards in the literary texts, associated with script and deciphering hidden messages, as well as the creative act of writing poetry, might at first sight seem to fall into a very different category. But with its dynamic and mediating characteristics, it is very well compared to the treatment of hair in religious and legal texts.[14] The association of dishevelled and unkempt hair with divine or artistic inspiration applies in literary as well as other domains.[15] Indeed, there is no lack of allegorical discussion of hair in Western religious literature. Biblical commentary, Qurʾānic exegesis and Ḥadīth literature are all major repositories of discussions on how hair and beards should be treated. The exemplary status of the beard of Jesus for priests and other Christian religious authorities, and of Muḥammad for Muslims, gave rise to a rich stock of imagery, depictions and descriptions.[16]

Religious, philosophical and cosmological meanings play a role in the significance of hair at one level, while beard and hairstyles as group identifiers, including of religious denominations as well as "orthodox" versus "heretical" groups, were important for day-to-day interaction.[17] But while religious arguments are used in the discussion of how hair should be treated – for example, in anti-adornment discourses or the initiation rites of religious groups such as Ṣūfīs and monks – and developments in this debate can be connected to theological changes, religion is not the defining explanation. In other words, the veiling of women's hair might have increased in Islamic Egypt, but when this happened, in the tenth century, it did so amongst Muslim, Christian and Jewish women.[18] And although the cutting of some of the hair of Ṣūfī disciples or newly tonsured monks might show their "commitment to a common religious path" and their withdrawal to a life of chastity, it is the "explicit commitment to social cohesion in a group" that offers the best explanation of why this ritual worked so well in this context.[19] Islamic writers might not have opposed the adornment and dying of hair as pagan and Christian writers did, but they surely did not approve of physical vanity and might have had other motives for going easy on the practice of hair dying.[20] Beards and hair were, through their connection to the head, associated with the quality and

[11]Below Rooijakkers n. 27.
[12]Below Wood.
[13]For poems in praise of the beginning beards of adolescents, see van Gelder n. 32 and Rooijakkers nn. 81–2 below. Van Gelder's article treats poems mocking (ugly) beards. For Persian poetry mentioning hair, see below Bashir n. 7.
[14]Below Bashir, n. 8, van Gelder and Ouyang.
[15]Below Ouyang.
[16]Christiane Gruber, "Between Logos (*kalima*) and Light (*nūr*): Representations of the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Painting", *Muqarnas* 26 (2009): 229–62, p. 234. And below, Bashir n. 20.
[17]For the significance of the way the hair is cut amongst Ṣūfīs or priests, indicating sub-groups through specific styles, see below Bashir and Wood respectively.
[18]See below, Rooijakkers nn. 77–9.
[19]Quotes from below Bashir nn. 22ff. For cutting the hair of novice monks, see below, Wood.
[20]As argued by Ahmad al-Shamsy in his paper, "The Curious Case of Early Muslim Hair Dyeing: A Reconsideration", presented at a conference in Leiden. On hair dying, see below, Rooijakkers nn. 66ff. and G.H.A. Juynboll, "Dyeing the Hair and Beard in Early Islam: A Ḥadīth-Analytical Study", *Arabica* 33/1 (1986): 49–75.

state of the mind.[21] Indeed, the poems mocking long beards as sucking the intellect from the head can be compared to the arguments that support the disapproval in Christian texts of the over-the-top big hairdos sported by well-to-do women in Late Antique Egypt.[22]

Moreover, it may be that it was cultural standards in Arabia and Persia, where men typically wore their hair long, that influenced Islamic attitudes towards gender-distinctive hairstyles rather than theologically based attitudes towards the body.[23] Similarly, while hair, once cut, might grow back, it is only possible to perform the first haircut once and its emblematic meaning cannot be replaced by the physical. The appearance of a boy's first beard and the cutting thereof had a ritual meaning as a (legal) passage into adulthood, while its natural course can only be postponed temporarily by removing these signs of manliness through plucking or shaving.[24] This does not mean that significance can be isolated to one domain or interpretation – in fact (seemingly) opposing attributes and connotations could exist simultaneously – but rather that a particular feature or meaning associated with hair would dominate in a certain context, leading to a particular treatment at a specific time and place.

Another important point to be borne in mind is that ideas about and preferences for certain hairstyles could, of course, change – subject to gradual reinterpretation or a sudden reconfiguration due to régime change. Such was the case after the fall of the Merovingians, whose long hair, once a sign of royalty, was the focus of mockery when the new régime of Charlemagne preferred a clean-shaven look with moustache.[25] Similarly, the categorical disapproval of hair care in Late Antique Egypt eased under Islam, while hair care was obviously central to post-Roman populations in the West as well.[26] The emphatic rejection of long hairstyles for men by classical and Christian authors seems to have had little bearing on the preferences of post-Roman people in the East and West.[27]

While the symbolism of tonsure, decalvatio, plucking or shaving beards, eyebrows and hair as a punishment or for other reasons might thus differ according to circumstances, questions about what these measures meant in practice and how they were carried out, what instruments were used, where the hair removal took place and how much hair (with or without skin) was removed are very different. Similarly, one can only understand what it meant to cut off beards, braids or hair, when it is known what the norm of hairstyles was. Only if beards or hair on the head were commonly worn and considered to be the norm does it make sense to cut them off as a means of punishment or humiliation. Mockery can only be properly understood when the accepted rule that was being mocked is clear. The significance through (group) association of the (forced) cutting of hair or beards, and the way in which the cutting was executed can only be correctly explained when it is clear what hairstyles distinguished ethnic, religious and social groups and individuals. Finally, the reality of the prescriptions and preferences in hairstyles – how the shaving, cutting and depilation would actually be achieved – can be best appreciated through the examination of material remains.[28] The reconstruction of standard practices in certain periods is hampered by a lack of images, statues, illustrations and pictures on objects, while the chronology and accurate interpretation of material remains also remains a challenge. The underdeveloped state of Islamic archaeology compared with classical and mediaeval excavations is another consideration, as material remains such as combs and other

[21] Below Ouyang.
[22] Below van Gelder and Rooijakkers.
[23] Below Rooijakkers n. 102.
[24] Below Rooijakkers n. 111.
[25] See below, Wood nn. 85–6.
[26] Below Rooijakkers n. 90 and Wood.
[27] Below Wood and Rooijakkers.
[28] For the time invested in certain female hair styles, as well as the removal of female bodily hair, see Rooijakkers below, nn. 26–30 and n. 7.

cosmetic tools contain much information about the status of and attitudes towards hair styling, shaving and the like.[29]

The second issue to be considered is whether hair in all its forms should be treated together. Is hair on the top of one's head the same in its meanings as beards and moustaches, let alone body hair? The shared characteristic between hair on the top of the head and on the face, which is generally visible, at least on men, and thereby functions in social interaction, would argue in favour of a similarity in meaning.[30] On the other hand, the dominant practice for men in the Muslim world to cover their hair under a turban, itself a highly complex signifier, might suggest the opposite.[31] Are attitudes towards the hair of women and of men different? The cutting of beards or hair in coming-of-age and other initiation rituals has obvious connections to gender categories. The erotic aspects of hair, seductive in its absence, as in the case of adolescent men, or in its luxuriant abundance, in the case of women or virile men, are also exploited by our sources.[32] Too large and untamed a beard, however, is mocked as a sure sign of stupidity.[33] Transgressing gender categories by wearing the hair in imitation of the opposite sex, either to hide one's real identity or to play with gender roles, is another dimension.[34]

The endless multiplicity of the meanings of hair in our sources is perhaps best explained by the observation that changes imposed on or made to hair never stand alone. In other words, cutting, removing or otherwise treating hair is always accompanied by other rituals or acts performed on the body and its environment. Only the removal of facial hair by Ṣūfīs who are pure of heart takes away the obstruction between the believer and God.[35] In rituals involving the removal of hair, prayers and other texts are uttered.[36] Prescriptions about hair length and style are often combined with sartorial laws.[37] Penal law codes and legal cases mostly prescribe cutting the hair and beard together with other punishments.[38] The oiling and styling of hair signals a return to normality after a period of madness, but it is combined with other civilising measures such as getting dressed and mounting a horse.[39] Moving beyond general observations concerning hair's universal cultural salience, the case studies presented here nevertheless offer, as I hope to have shown, some interesting comparisons, adding to our understanding if only of the many ways in which this material can be explored.

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[29]For the significance of the omnipresence of combs on mediaeval European archaeological sites, see Wood below, n. 17.
[30]As does Bashir below.
[31]As Rooijakkers argues below. But see the cutting of the hair of a Ṣūfī initiate together with his turban (below Bashir n. 24).
[32]Thomas Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabische Welt des 9. Und 10. Jahrhunderts: Eine literature- und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie des arabischen Ġazal* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1998), pp. 225–80; Bashir below n. 14.
[33]Below, van Gelder and Ouayng nn. 81–4.
[34]See below, Rooijakkers, van Gelder and Bashir.
[35]Below Bashir n. 25.
[36]Below Bashir.
[37]Below Rooijakkers nn. 122–3 and Wood n. 14.
[38]Below Sijpesteijn.
[39]Below Ouyang.