

The Veiling of Women in Judaism, Christianity and Islam
A Guide to the Exhibition
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University of Hartford with help from the students who attended our 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 Summer Study programs



As part of our Greenberg Center Study Abroad program in Archaeology and Arabic Language and Culture in Israel, students have written research papers on the status of women, often accompanied by a photo-journal and a power point presentation. In Summer 2009, 2010, and then again in Summer, 2011, Lena Stein, a professional award winning local photographer, was invited to photograph a selection of women from all over Israel now featured in the exhibition: "Veiled Women." Stein accompanied students on our study abroad program in Israel and spent two weeks meeting, interacting and photographing the women highlighted in this exhibition, which attempts to understand how the women of Israel, Jews, Christians and Muslims, both female tourists and natives, experience the act of head-covering or veiling. This short exhibition and catalogue is intended to give students, staff, faculty and community members an opportunity to contemplate the meaning of this act and to consider its meaning in the context of history and modern society. Thanks to the **Maximilian E. and Marion O. Hoffmann Foundation and the Minnie Goldenberg Photography Exhibition Fund** at the University of Hartford's Greenberg Center for sponsoring the exhibition. DreAnna Hadash curated the exhibition; Professor Avinoam Patt, the Philip D. Feltman Professor of Modern Jewish History is the Museum Director and the Museum's administrator is Susan Gottlieb.

Greenberg Center Summer, 2012

Our next summer abroad program will leave Hartford on June 24 and return on July 20 and this is a part of our summer school offerings that include:

Undergraduate

ARA 110 Elementary Arabic I (on campus) May 21-June 5, 2012

ARA 110 Elementary Arabic I (in Israel) June 24-July 20, 2012

HBR 227 Elementary Hebrew I (in Israel) June 24-July 20, 2012

JS 205 Israel: History and Society (on campus) May 21-June 5, 2012

JS 306 Archaeology of the Land of Israel (in Israel) June 24-July 20, 2012 (HIS 306/POL 376/SOC 306)

JS 307 Archaeological Field Methods and Material Culture (in Israel) June 24-July 20, 2012 (HIS 307/POL 377/SOC 307)

JS 318 Maimonides in Historical Context (on campus) HIS 318/PHI 318/REL 318 July 6-August 11, 2012

Graduate JS 500 Bible and Archaeology (in Israel) June 24-July 20, 2012

A History of Veiled Women from the Bible, Historical Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Veiling of Women in Historical Judaism:

While the Hebrew Bible may not be clear about the veiling of women and the reasoning behind it, Rabbinic literature presents it as a question of modesty. Modesty became an important rabbinic virtue in the early Roman period, perhaps as a reaction to Greco-Roman life (and later in Babylonian society and may have been a way to differentiate Jewish women from non-Jewish women. In the Babylonian Talmud Berachot 24a, a discussion about what constitutes modesty: "Rav Hisda said: [the sight of] a woman's leg is *ervah*, (immodest to be seen and it is related concerning general dress) "your *ervah* [immodesty] shall be uncovered and your shame shall be exposed." This selection has been recently invoked in the debate over modern Jewish women and appropriate dress. The Babylonian 3rd century CE scholar, Samuel states: *kol b'ishah ervah*, a woman's voice is *ervah*, [immodest] as it is written (Song of Songs 2:14) "for your voice is sweet and your appearance is comely." The Babylonian source Rav Sheshet (who was blind) said: [seeing] the hair of a woman is *ervah*, [immodest] as it is written (*ibid.* 4:1) "your hair is like a flock of goats." There are some murals and images that one could invoke to show that the hair of Jewish women was covered or veiled in the Roman period, (the 3rd century CE Dura

Europos Synagogue and the coffins paintings of Jewish men and women from Egypt, for example) but as we shall see it may be a cultural marker of the Roman women, rather than Jewish religious standards. The general idea is expressed in the word: *Tzniut* (Hebrew word for modesty or privacy) in rabbinic Judaism for women and their hair covering. Maimonides, a 13th century Rabbinic scholar states in his book, the *Mishneh Torah*, (Laws of Women): it is a "direct biblical command for married women to keep their hair from becoming exposed in public, and a *custom* of Jewish married women to increase that standard in the interest of modesty and maintain an intact covering on their heads at all times." A few styles of hair covering or veiling are found in historical Judaism. They are scarves, a hat, a net, a wig, and a beret like covering—especially among European (Ashkenazic) women in the past two centuries. They are common among married Orthodox women today and they are sometimes just called, a net, snood, *sheitel*, or hat. Jewish law from the Middle Ages onward is very clear about the provision to cover the hair of women. According to the Babylonian Talmud, it is a biblical requirement but that is very difficult to clearly ascertain if the use of a hair covering was normative in Ancient Israel.

A Jewish veiling custom is connected with one of the photos in the exhibition. It was an event in the biblical book of Genesis, chapter 29, which inspired a religious injunction about checking underneath the veil to insure the right bride will be married (“*badeken*” in Yiddish means “covering”) and is followed to this day at Jewish weddings. According to the interpretation of the Genesis story, Leah the elder (and unmarried) daughter of Laban is replaced for Rachel (the younger daughter) and because the groom (Jacob) did not check, he married Leah instead of her sister Rachel! Although it is not explicit in the text, the veiling of a bride became the norm and the groom checking under the veil of the bride a part of the Jewish wedding ceremony chronicled in Lena’s exhibition. .



There are allusions to certain coverings of women’s hair in the Bible. In The Song of Songs, 4.1 we see that the poetry alludes to a woman looking out from “behind her veil” and in Genesis 24.65 it is mentioned regarding Rebecca that “...she took her veil and covered herself.” Was she doing this as a custom of welcome, respect, as an appealing allure, it is just not clear. The famous Tamar enticed Judah in a scene in Genesis 38 that suggests that veils for women were for allure and not necessarily connected with modesty: “When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face.” In Deuteronomy we hear that a captive woman’s hair is cut apparently as a sign of servitude and in the book of Numbers the suspected wife has her hair loosened in front of a public group but little is said about a formal head covering for women in the biblical period. In the book of Isaiah, (the latter part is from the sixth century BCE), the reference to a woman removing her veil is a sign of shame. *Come down and sit in the dust, virgin daughter Babylon! --Sit on the ground without a throne, daughter Chaldea! --For you shall no more be called tender and delicate. Take the millstones and grind meal, **remove your veil, strip***

off your robe, uncover your legs, pass through the rivers, Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your shame shall be seen.” It is clear that since there is not many explicitly Israelite renderings of women in the classical biblical period (Iron Age, 1200-586 BCE), nor is there any clear textual information or archaeological artifacts that can confirm the veiling of Israelite and Judean women in the pre-Exilic and pre-Persian period. It is interesting to note that many of the female figurines found in Israelite homes that are perhaps indicators of how the Israelites felt women should/ought to be depicted have a head covering (as do the many pagan figurines from Asherahs, Istartes, Hathor, Isis, etc.) The idea of Jewish married women wearing a wig (or detached-artificial or natural hair) is debated among Jewish sources and may actually be seen as an import from outside of Jewish practices. The idea of men and women wearing wigs (documented in the medieval and early modern illuminated manuscripts such as the Passover Haggadah below) affected the debate as well. Some rabbis argued against wigs because non-Jews were wearing them (in that period) while other rabbis insisted on a head-covering for women of some kind.



Passover Haggadah

Some women in the modern period have multiple head-coverings, including a wig, (*sheitel* in Yiddish), hair extenders or partial covers, a scarf (*tichel* in Yiddish) and a hat or beret to insure that the hair is totally covered and only seen by the husband (and or very close family members). The use of the head covering in the modern period among married Jewish women (and sometimes even unmarried women) has changed in the post-WWII period.



Some religious women have taken to wearing head bands, berets, and other types of head coverings only in ritual settings and synagogues. Some religious women and especially women rabbis cover their hair as indicators of their own piety and the types of coverings are similar to those worn by religious men and head coverings worn by male rabbis. The head coverings include hats, yarmulkes (*Kippah* in Hebrew) that are knitted (as male yarmulkes), but just as often these yarmulkes worn by women have been specially knitted to distinguish the male head covering from the female head covering to insure that they do not violate a biblical prohibition on cross-dressing. Yemenite, unmarried Jewish women covered their heads in Yemen in the pre-World War II period, similar to Muslim women of that period. When the Yemenite Jews came to Israel this custom stopped among Jewish unmarried women. This Jewish custom of unmarried women covering their hair is not found among Ashkenazic (European) Jewish women (nor is it found among other Jewish women in the rest of the Middle East). The custom of unmarried Yemenite Jewish women covering their hair did not continue in modern Israel but the topic is a very important issue in modern Israel. In modern Israel, even the different types of coverings that women choose to cover their hair with has taken on new and unexpected political, cultural, ethnic and religious implications. While modern orthodox Jewish women had tended in the post-WWII era to prefer to wear stylish hats to wigs or scarves, today combinations of scarfs, wigs, and hats (sometimes at the same time) have become parts of some communities both in Israel and the Diaspora.

Veiling of Women in Historical Christianity:

While one might have thought that historical views of the veiling of women in Christianity emerged from Judaism, in fact it appears that Christian views are a reaction to pagan practices of the Greco-Roman period. The most famous citation in early Christianity is from Paul's letter to the Corinthians about what is appropriate for the male and female followers to do in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 11:4-16: "4. Every man who prays or prophesies, having his head covered, dishonors his head. 5. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if she were shaven. 6. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. 7. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, inasmuch as he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man."



Women in the Tabgha Church of the Multiplication of Loaves on the Sea of Galilee

To this day, men in churches remove their head covering while women often cover their hair. At Christian holy sites, women will veil even if they are not fully modestly dressed as a vestige of the original practice. Men will **uncover** their heads and women **will cover** both the head and sometimes the shoulders and head often depending on the denomination of the holy site in Israel. This was part of Lena's work, to track women of different denominations and show how they reflected this. Lay people (non-clergy) often cover their heads in Roman Catholic settings. Lace head coverings are used in many churches and sometimes different women will not wear the head-covering in the same holy site and even in the most holy settings (for example in The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the holiest site in Christendom). Some of the most famous veiling ceremonies of modern Christianity which were noted by our students are in the "coming of age" ceremony of "Communion" which, in many denominations, happens at puberty and the wedding ceremony where the veiled bride walks down the aisle and is presented to the groom veiled and the groom will help the bride pull the veil back to reveal her face during the ceremony. ,



Veiled Mary-4th century



The origins of this view in Christianity may have to do more with the influence of Roman (non-Christian) women than from an inherent Jewish practice. The Vestal virgins wore a special head-covering and on the Roman coins in our archaeology section you will be able to see the women of Roman depicted wearing a veil. In our small statuette from Bethsaida you will notice that veil of Livia-Julia (wife of the Augustus Caesar) wearing a veil with what looks like a very stylized hair style. One of the ways of personifying Rome itself was *pudicitia*, “modesty” and she is presented as a goddess wearing her head covered with a *pallium* or veil.



Livia Julia, the wife of the Caesar Augustus (1st century CE)

Archaeological Evidence of the Early Christians in Catacombs

There is evidence on the murals and drawings in the catacombs of Rome that early Christian women were covering their heads. In the ancient illustrations and sculptures that do show Greek women with covered heads, the head covering is usually just the *himation* (a scarf) pulled over the top and back of the head. Sometimes it is shown over the head and wrapped around the neck, without covering the face. There is also women who apparently covered the lower part of the face with a scarf in much the same way that Islamic women cover the lower part of the face showing the eyes. We have the traditions of Plutarch who comments that respectable Roman women would appear in public with head covering as evidence that this may be a cultural rather than religious practice. Plutarch writes concerning the Spartans, "When someone inquired why they took their girls into public places unveiled, but their married women veiled, he said, 'Because the girls have to find husbands, and the married women have to keep to those who have them!'" This may imply that the veiling was after marriage similar to the Jewish veiling practices. In about 200 CE, Tertullian in Carthage (a Roman colony, like Corinth) wrote, "some, with their turbans and woolen bands, do not veil their head, but bind it up; protected, indeed, in front, but, where the head properly lies, bare. Others are to a certain extent covered over the region of the brain with linen coifs of small dimensions ...and not reaching quite to the ears" (*On the Veiling of Virgins*, chap. 17). Tertullian's *On the Pallium* indicates that there were a number of different customs of dress associated with different cults to which the early Christians had belonged. There are a number of independent sources which pretty clearly indicate that pagan Roman women did not always cover their heads in public. The "veiling of the bride" spoken of in ancient Roman sources pertains only to the wedding ceremony, not to a change of ordinary clothing. For a nun, the "habit" symbolizes a new sanctified lifestyle which is a form of marriage to Christ, with the nun as the "bride of Christ." When asking women (tourists and locals) in the churches that the students visited in Israel why the women were veiling, most pointed to modesty reasons (even when they were wearing immodest clothing). Some pointed to

the fact that the nuns ministering in many of the churches were veiled and knew that the Roman Catholic nuns in the churches we visited were “married to Christ.” The veiling may be reminiscent of the pagan veiling ceremony of Rome or the veiling of Jewish women after marriage. It is hard to know which came first (or what was more influential), although the students came to the conclusion that the Roman custom seems to have been very culturally influential and affected both the Jewish and the early Christian practice.



(Nuns and Novices at the Mount of the Beatitudes, Galilee)

The Veiling of Women in Historical Islam

Most Muslims that were asked about veiling quote the Quran as the source of the tradition in Islam of veiling. Modesty and privacy is the general term used in Arabic or *Hijab*. There are Arabic words for headscarf (*Chimar* or *Jilbab*, *Jalbab-or Jalabib*), but generally in that Arabic speaking world, one finds that *Niqab* (is seen as the word for the face covering), and *Abaya* for the robes. There are other ideas as well. The Quran states: “O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters, and the women of the faithful, to draw their wraps (*Jalabib*) over them. They will thus be recognized and no harm will come to them. God is all forgiving and most merciful.” (Sura 33, verse 59). But earlier in the chapter, this is related specifically to the wives of Muhammad. Sura 33:53: “*If you have to ask his wives (the prophet’s wives) for something, ask them from behind a barrier (Hijab). This is purer for your hearts and their hearts.*” Although it is directed to the wives of the Prophet and daughters, it is by inference understood to be directed to all Muslim women. It has been directed to all girls of any age, not just married women. The problem is that the citation and the other citation used to describe the practice does not give a direct prohibition or commandment concerning a head covering but is a general idea about modesty. In the Quran, Sura 24.31 it is said: “And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their *Chimar* (*scarf*) over their breasts and not display their beauty except to [their husbands].” The other major source for the custom seems to come from early Islamic custom which is mentioned in the Hadith traditions of the *Sahih Al Bukhari*.

(Note: Hadith: Narrations by Al Bukhari regarding the Quranic verses of the Hijab are usually what is by Shia and Sunni traditions. Al Bukhari was a Persian Muslim Scholar, Muhammad ibn Ismail **al-Bukhari**, (9th century) and according to Islam he collected from oral traditions that went all the way back to the time of Muhammad.) One tradition, states: *“Prophet of Allah!, you receive all kinds of people at your home – good and bad; it would be better if you ask your wives to observe Hijab.”* The second narration that is quoted: *“The advantage in observing Hijab is that these women are recognized as pious and respectable. Thus, the evil doers would not be after them and the women would not have to face unpleasantness. Nobody will dare follow and make advances to a woman who has completely concealed herself as opposed to the one who has come out nicely decorated without Hijab; the malicious and evil-minded folks will associate great hopes with such women.* This is, of course, not in the presence of all men. The category of close family is distinguished from the general population. Examples of close family are: father, brother, uncle, husband etc. The other question is when this veiling should start. While for Jews, the marriage marks a change of status and therefore married women will cover their hair, the “covering” of women’s hair in prayer situations among Jews at “Bat Mitzvah” age or puberty seems to mark a difference. The veiling of little girls (ages five and above) during their early childhood we found was seen as a way to teach the child for future reference.

In the exhibition we feature some of the youngest and some of the oldest:



If the average non-Muslim were asked to name one thing about Islam, it could well be that women are required by Islamic Law (*Shariah*) to wear a veil and cover their faces in public. In fact, that is not easily legislated in most Muslim countries and in a country such as Israel or France, the veiling serves to give ethnic, cultural as well as religious identity.

Muslims are usually referring to these sources of the Quran and Hadith when they say that “Islam” enjoins both men and women to dress modestly. Historical Islam has a series of different views concerning appropriate dress for men and women as they are presented in historically important texts such as the Quran and Hadith although many of these citations show little attempt to systematize dress for men and women. Islamic law developed a code where women were expected to cover their bodies from the ankles to the neck and the arms above the elbow and this legislation is usually what is invoked (and not the Quran or Hadith). According to one interpretation given by women in the photographs of the exhibitions, *Jalbab* is actually the outer sheet or coverlet which a woman wraps around on top of her garments to cover herself from head to toe. It hides her body completely. The root word *Jalbab* means to completely cover something. Some Islamic sources hold the *Jalbab* is that sheet of cloth, which is worn on top of the scarf.



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There are different ways to wear the Hijab presently seen in Israel, some were in the exhibition and others were observed by students on the streets. Hijab is: the sheet should be wrapped from the top covering the forehead, then bringing one side of the sheet to cover the face below the eyes so that most of the face and the upper body is covered. This will leave both the eyes uncovered and of, course, the top covering without any face covering.

But the veil itself, particularly a veil which covers the entire face including the eyes, is controversial both in Muslim countries and in non-Muslim countries, beyond the issues of safety and community identity. There are many words used to describe the veiling. *Abaya*, *Bourka*, *Niqab*, *Jalbab*, *Hijab* and *Chador*. *Chador* is a Persian word for a full-body-length semicircle of fabric that is split open down the front, with a head-hole in the top. It is easy to put on and fulfills the *hijab* (modesty) covering.

Among Muslim women, Lena Stein, the photographer found three versions of coverings. Stylish, colorful, long robes are substituted in the cities with long suits and *hijab*, the more traditional full black *bourka* without full face covering (*niqab*) is sometimes found in small cities and villages.

Traditional dress codes in fact vary sharply in different Muslim countries and among different types of Muslims. In Iran, the black *chador* is traditional among wide sectors of society but among the Bedouin of the Arabian peninsula, women wear scarves that cover their hair but leave their faces open - just like most of the men in the area-the scarf may be different, but the purposes are similar. The same is also true in Muslim areas of south-east Asia. As political Islam in areas formerly influenced primarily by European culture, the veil has become a part of an ideological statement by women, their families and often as a sign of resistance and not always for piety. But it is important to recognize that Islam's classical texts may "originally" only prescribe modesty for women rather than actually mandating the wearing of a particular garment. The garment chosen: "veil" may be a carry-over from the different influences of early period Islam: Judaism, Christianity, early desert groups. Some suggest, for example, that as the "original" concept of modesty can be interpreted in the modern period as not drawing

unnecessary attention to oneself, a woman wearing baggy jeans, a jumper and an unobtrusive (often colorful or stylish) scarf in a Western country could be more in accordance with the spirit of Islamic law than another woman who wore the full *bourka* which drew more attention to her. In 2010, one of our students, Katie Child, a Judaic Studies major and a Music Major at the Hartt did a whole project on the “veiling practices” and came to the conclusion in Israel that the head covering served a number of different purposes. She wrote: “Muslim women who would wear head covering would sometimes wear it all of the time or just some of the time. Some social status issues were clear. Village people in Galilee, for example, in very non-Muslim settings (swimming at the Sea of Galilee) were sometimes more meticulous with their head coverings than in exclusively Muslim settings.”

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