



Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli. *A capo coperto: Storie di donne e di veli.* Bologna: il Mulino, 2016. 214 pp. EUR 16.00, paper, ISBN 978-88-15-26417-6.

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Recent years have seen controversy in Western Europe over Islamic women wearing veils or other covering. In this book, Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli looks at the West's own history of requiring women to cover their heads, necks, and shoulders. This practice ceased to be normative in Europe and North America during the twentieth century, whether in churches or in public spaces. This change of practice makes the contrast between most Western women's usages and those of Muslim women more striking.

Muzzarelli begins with practices of veiling or covering heads in the ancient world. Greek and Roman practices are covered briefly, while less attention is given to Jewish practices in antiquity. The author gives most attention to early Christianity. The Apostle Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:2-16) set out the idea that a man was his wife's head as Christ was his. This meant, the apostle said, women were not to pray or prophecy without covering her head. Moreover, a woman was to cover her hair in public as a sign of dependence. The patristic writer Tertullian added emphasis to this teaching in his "On Veiling Virgins." The larger Christian tradition reinforced this belief in women veiling or otherwise covering their hair, head, neck, or shoulders.

The author covers much of medieval history quickly before focusing on the late medieval and

early modern periods. The principal geographic focus is Italy, which is treated according to theory and practice. Muzzarelli looks at both laywomen and religious women, also examining the production of cloths, veils, and other coverings and the emergence of fashion as a social phenomenon. In all cases, women were expected to show both modesty and dependence, usually dependence on father or husband. However, they asserted their own wills by using head ornaments and fashionable veils.

The teachings about modesty and sober covering of head and shoulders is illustrated by recourse to the preaching of the Franciscan observants. Bernardino of Siena was especially hard on women who displayed vanity in dress, saying fancy head coverings gave places for demons to lodge. One should note here a gap in coverage. No attention is given to the Dominican observant Antoninus of Florence, whose "On Women's Adornment" made provision for distinction between women's dress by their social status. Friars and other clergy contrasted the Virgin Mary, with her hair covered in much of Christian art, with Eve's failings.

More attention is paid to what women wore and how urban communities tried to regulate dress with sumptuary laws. Laws required head coverings but gave detailed attention to their dec-

orations and the amount of money spent on them. This focus on prices and financial evaluations distinguished lay regulations from clerical denunciations. Clergy might try imposing spiritual censures, but the cities imposed fines for violation of their rules.

Muzzarelli then looks at how women were affected at various stages of life, transitions between which were marked by covering or uncovering the head. Unmarried women might have their heads bare, but married ones were expected to be covered. Some codes permitted a time of wearing fancy head gear after matrimony, but they were to adopt more modest coverings later. Similarly, widows were expected to mark their new status by wearing black and veiling themselves. Nuns were regarded as married to Christ. At their profession, their hair was cut and veils placed on their heads. Prostitutes were required to avoid dressing like “honest” women. The actual styles of these coverings varied by place, and Muzzarelli makes excellent use of the pictures by Cesare Vecellio, published in Venice in 1590. These pictures are reproduced, as are several color plates relevant to the topic. The book also gives attention to the development of the silk industry in Italy, including mechanization of the processing of silk worm cocoons and the production of sheer, transparent veils.

Having covered the later Middle Ages and the early modern period in detail, Muzzarelli treats the passage to modernity in less detail. One notes, among other things, the emergence of printed cloths and the continued distinction between fashions in head coverings by region. Eventually, the moral pressure for women to cover their heads ceased, even for those attending church. (John Paul II lifted the Roman Catholic requirement for head coverings in 1983.) Head scarves occasionally appeared as fashion items, including in the public costume of celebrities like Jacqueline Kennedy. Fashion houses began to issue haute couture versions of the foulard or head scarf. In

fact, some reached out to Muslim women with high-fashion but modest hijabs. This is the opposite of efforts to prevent wearing head scarves. Overall, in the contemporary West, the display of modesty and dependence the Apostle Paul expected of women has been replaced by choice of bare head or covering with coverings designed more for display than for demure public dress.

Muzzarelli has given us a book with much intriguing content. Its strengths are in the medieval and early modern periods, in Italy more than elsewhere. More could have been done with Jewish practices and the impact of the Industrial Revolution. That said, Muzzarelli's book is well worth reading for the history of clothing; the social implications of covering heads; and changes in Western gender mores as reflected by veils, hoods, and hats.

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