

The Meaning of “Komao” or “Have Long Hair”



In 1 Corinthians 11:14-15

*“Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man **have long hair**, [“komao”] it is a shame unto him? But if a woman **have long hair**, [“komao”] it is a glory to her: for her **hair** [“kome”] is given her for a covering.”*

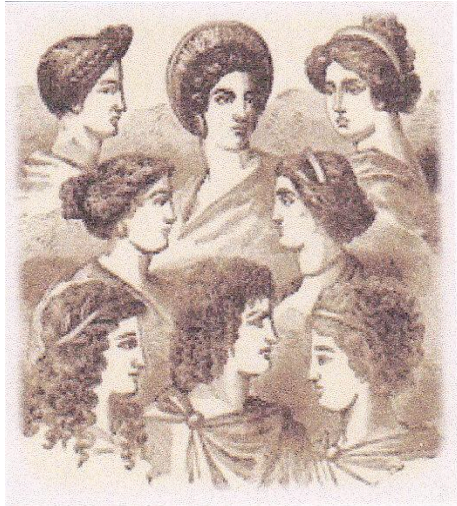
“Have long hair” in vv 14-15 is translated from the Greek verb, *komao*, that comes from the noun, *kome*, translated “hair” in v15. *Strong’s Complete Dictionary of Bible Words* defines *komao*, #2863, as, “to wear **tresses** of hair:--have long hair.” *Strong’s Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*, which is the most complete, accurate, and up-to-date Greek dictionary available, and is cross-referenced to the leading lexical works: *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker*, *Thayer’s*, and more, defines *komao* the same and further states, “*Komao* signifies “to let the hair grow long, to wear long hair,” a glory to a woman, a dishonor to a man (as taught by nature), 1 Cor. 11:14, 15.”

American Heritage Dictionary defines “tress” as 1. “A long lock or ringlet of hair. 2. *Archaic* A plait or braid of hair.” “Locks” is translated from the OT Hebrew word, *machlaphah*, and is defined in *Strong’s Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*, #4253, as, “ringlet or braid of hair.” Thayer and Smith, *The NT Greek Lexicon*, IDENTIFIES *komao* as *Strong’s*, #2863, and defines *komao* as, “to let the hair grow, have long hair.”

The noun, *kome*, #2864 in *Strong’s Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*, means, “the hair of the head (*locks*, as *ornamental*...)” A synonym, *thrix*, #2359, is the anatomical or physical

term for hair; whereas *kome* designates the hair as an ornament, the notion of length being only secondary and suggested.”

Both *komao* and *kome* come from the root word, *komeo*, which means in *Strong's* “to tend, i.e. take care of.” *Komao* is nothing more than a verb-form of *kome*, akin to the verb, *komeo*—“care for.”



Ancient Greek and Roman women spent much time and effort on their tresses. Roman ladies kept slaves esp. for the purpose of dressing their hair. Although shampoo was unknown, Greek women would wash their hair in clear water and then use olive oil as a deep conditioner. The use of heated irons to curl the hair was adopted very early among the Romans. The instrument (*calamistrum*) was heated in wood ashes (*cinis*), and the person who performed the office of heating it was called the *ciniflo*.¹

The UPCI bases their doctrine against women cutting their hair (any length) on their preferred definition of “let the hair grow” found in Thayer and Smith, but, *komao* has **more than one meaning**, depending upon the context. *Komao* was the general term for having “long” hair, indicating a measurement of length.

“Komao” vs Having “Uncut” Hair

-According to Greek Language Experts-

Q. Is there anything in the meaning of *komao* that would define “long” hair as “uncut” hair?

1. The Assistant Greek Professor at the University of North Carolina says, “It just means to have long hair, not to have hair that has **never been cut**. In Homer (the earliest attestation of the word) the Greek soldiers (all men) are known by the formula *komoontes Achaioi* where *komoontes* is just the participial form of *komao*. [A Greek participial is an adjective formed from a verb.] This is translated as “the long-haired Achaeans.” Although they had “long

¹ “Greek Fashion” <http://www.malahanas.de/Greeks/Fashion3.htm>

- hair,” they would **CUT OFF SOME OF IT** and leave it at tombs in honor of the dead (like most Greeks did throughout antiquity, including at the time of Christ.)”
2. A graduate student, who has worked with NT material and studied *Koine*, says, “*Komao* basically means “to wear long hair” or “to let one’s hair grow long.” It is etymologically related to ‘kome’ (“hair of a person’s head; (long) hair of a woman”). There is absolutely nothing in the nuances of ‘komao’ itself...to indicate that “long hair” is either “uncut hair” or “untrimmed hair.” In fact, there is nothing inherent in the word that gives any specific indication of length (other than the indication that one’s hair is “long”...), whether shoulder or waist-length or whatever. Therefore, **it is possible for one to cut or trim hair to at least some extent while still remaining within the implied boundaries of the word.** Obviously, this would not include a cutting that would fall under the basic senses of ‘keiro’ or ‘xurao’, since both of those words imply a final state that is the antithesis of “long hair.” ...the word ‘komao’ does not carry an implication of specific length (other than the sense that “long” hair is being indicated). Neither does it carry an implication that “cut” or “trimmed” hair cannot be included.”
 3. Dr. Leitaο, Greek professor at the University of San Francisco says, “...‘komao’ does not mean one has **never cut** his (her) hair, though **in some contexts** [such as a **vow**] it could. [*Pagan people, similar to Hebrew Nazarites, vowed their hair, as it was common for Greek women to offer their hair as a sacrifice to a goddess in exchange for favors, such as the safe return of a husband fighting in the military.*² *The story of Berenice’s Hair (“Coma Berenices”), by Callimachus, is an example of this practice.*³] Spartan warriors wore it long (‘komao’), but probably trimmed it frequently... **‘Komao’ i.e., is not an absolute word, but a relative word.** [Both Greek and Latin are **inflective** languages; word meanings change with context.]
 4. Professor Griffith says, “I don’t think this necessarily means that someone of whom the word is used has **NEVER** cut his/her hair. There is a word in Greek for hair that has **NEVER** been cut, viz. **akersikomes**, which is an epithet of Apollo...”
 5. The Greek professor of Ohio State University says, “Just going from the Liddell-Scott lexicon and my sense of usage, ‘komao’ generally indicates hair that is noticeably long. That doesn’t mean a specific length or **COMPLETELY UNCUT** ever (split ends etc.)”
 6. Dr. Edmonds says, “...there is no reason to believe that it would necessarily signify hair that had **never been cut**...”
 7. Professor Kilpatrick says, “Greek women could, I am sure, trim off, and of course braid or bun their long hair.”
 8. Dr. Richard Hunter, member of a team of experts who are writing a Greek-English dictionary that will be available online, says, “*Komao* means to have hair of a length which makes it noticeable by its length, i.e. there is a sense of a social norm.”
 9. A lady studying for a doctorate degree in Latin literature involving hair says, “From the examples in Liddel & Scott (revised by Johnson) Lexicon, *komao* seems to refer to general “long” length, not necessarily to never having been cut.”

The general consensus among Greek professors is that the meaning of *komao* is NOT that of having **TOTALLY UNCUT** hair, also, that the meaning of *komao* indicated a measurement of length.

The hair of Greek and Roman boys, up to the age of puberty, was suffered to grow long then was cut and dedicated to a deity. The ceremony was termed *Koureotis*. The boys’ hair was cut short. An epithet of Phoebus (Homer, Iliad 20.39) is translated “not shearing the hair”

² “Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History,” by Victoria Sherrow

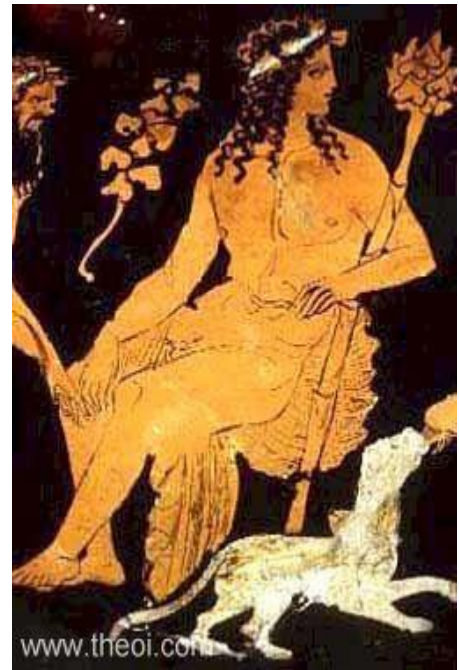
³ <http://www.constellationsofwords.com/Constellations/ComaBerenices.html>

in reference to the boy's hair. *Koureion* means "barber-shop" to this day in Greece. Hair that has NEVER been cut is **akersikomes**. The words *keiro* and *kome* can clearly be seen in these terms, and the "a" means "not."

In ancient times both men and women wore long hair. The Romans of the Augustan age designated their ancestors **intonsi** ["uncut"] and **capillati** ["longhaired"]. These are two different Latin terms; one meant "uncut," "unshaven," "unshorn," the other meant "having long hair."⁴ The Greek god, Apollo, when his hair is not tied upon the top of his head, is always long and hanging over the neck and shoulders. Hence, he is called *intonsus* [Latin for "uncut"] and *akersekomes* [Greek for "uncut"] because he is always imagined as being just on the threshold of maturity. The Greek for the Latin, *capillati* ["long-haired"], is *kome*, the noun form of the verb, *komaō*.



Apollo



Dionysus

The Greek god, Dionysus, also wears his hair **unshorn**; for he, as well as Apollo, is typical of perpetual youth.⁵

Homer, writing about the "long-haired Achaeans," used the correct grammatical form of *komaō*, but in speaking of Apollo in the *Iliad*, Book 20, Line 30, he used the word **akersikomes**, "Phoebus, of the unshorn locks."⁶ Phoebus was another name for Apollo, the god of bachelorhood and partially of beautiful male youths, and an adolescent boy was called an *epeheus*.⁷

⁴ "LacusCurtius" Greek and Roman Hairstyles (Smith's Dictionary, 1875) ; William Whitaker's Words

⁵ "Coma" <http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/LX/Coma.html>

⁶ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0134%3Aboo...>

⁷ "The Ancient Greek Festival of Apaturia"

Paul had been raised in a Hellenistic (Greek thought, influence and customs) society in Tarsus, home of an ancient “ivy league” university. In the book of Acts, chapter 21, we find that Paul spoke fluent Greek to the Roman military captain, Lysias. Historian and exegete William Barclay states the following: “The captain was amazed to hear the accents of cultured Greek coming from the man (Paul) whom the crowds were out to lynch.” Paul was fluent in *Koine* Greek as well as being fluent in Classical Greek, which indicated that he had been exposed to Greek learning at the university level. George T. Montague had the following to say concerning Paul’s use of “Classical” Greek and his possible exposure to the university or philosophical schools in his training: “His mastery of the Greek literary technique of the diatribe and his occasional citation of Greek authors (Aratus in Acts 17:18; Menander in 1 Cor. 15:23; Epimenides in Titus 1:1) are considered by some as evidence that he frequented the Hellenistic schools of rhetoric.”⁸

Paul was aware of Greek words that meant “uncut” hair. Being educated in Greco-Roman culture likely he knew of the ceremony of *Koureotes* and that the gods, Apollo and Dionysus, had “uncut” hair, but the Apostle did not use the word for TOTALLY UNCUT hair in vv14-15; he used a MUCH MORE FLEXIBLE word, *komaō*.

Mourning

It was a well-known ancient Greek (and Roman) practice of men and women to cut off locks of their hair to honor the dead, and many references to it are found in Greek literature. Many of them deal with Electra/Orestes. A famous passage involving Electra’s locks is found in Aeschylus’, *Libation Bearers*, where Electra spots locks upon her father’s tomb that look like hers, but they belong to her brother, Orestes. Hercules left some of his own hair on his son’s tomb.⁹ *The Lock of Hair*, by Alexanna Speight, “It was the custom for the Greeks...the mourners not infrequently tore, cut off or shaved their own hair which they laid upon the corpse...”¹⁰

Hair offerings are found in Homer’s, *Iliad*, “they gave a share of their locks,” i.e. cut off their locks and laid them on the corpse.”¹¹ In Book 23, Line 135, “...the Achaeans...as with a garment they wholly covered the corpse with their hair that they shore off and cast thereon...Chrysothemis is told to lay locks of her own hair and her sister’s on Agamemnon’s tomb – the significance of the act being marked by the prayer which is to follow the gift...” In its primitive symbolism the severed hair meant that the person from whose head it was cut devoted himself to the dead, and (as it were) escorted him to the shades; the gift of hair being a substitute for self-immolation at the grave.¹²

Electra refers to this practice in Euripides’, *Orestes*, in reference to Helen of Troy, who should have shorn or shaved her head to mourn the death of her sister, Clytemnestra. Helen was famed to be the most beautiful woman on earth. Lovely hair characterized women, esp

⁸ “The Early Life and Background of Paul the Apostle,” The American Journal of Biblical Theology; <http://www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/WallaceQ01.html>

⁹ “Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History,” by Victoria Sherrow

¹⁰ “The History of Hair: Fashion and Fantasy Down the Ages,” by Robin Bryer

¹¹ George W. Mooney, Commentary on Apollonius: Argonautica, Summary, Line 1533

¹² Sir Richard C. Jebb, Commentary on Sophoclesw: Ajax, commLine 1173

when their subordinate or captive status is being emphasized. When thundering Zeus, whom Agamemnon resembles, is described as Hera's lord, she too is figured as having lovely hair. Helen was lovely-haired and was Clytemnestra.¹³ Evidently, her sister was not worth her hair, so she simply **cut her hair off on the ends** like a modern day "trim" and sent these "tresses" to the gravesite by her daughter and attendants. In Line 128 Electra says, "Did ye mark how she CUT OFF (**apeqrisen**—**not keiro**) her hair only **at the ends** careful to preserve its beauty? She is the same woman as of old."¹⁴

Helen did not employ *keiro*. She "cut" her hair but still had "long" hair or *komaos*. The Greek verb, **apeqrisen**, is translated as, "to cut off" and is also used of objects.¹⁵ The Greek verb, *keiro*, is closely related to *xurao* ("shave"), but *apeqrisen* is totally unrelated to *keiro* or *xurao*.

From examples in Greek literature and the word definitions, we can conclude that *keiro*, when referring to a single "lock" of hair being "shorn," meant to cut a section of hair short or at or near the root. When hair was cut from the ends like a "trim" it was an entirely different Greek word. There are many examples in Greek literature and history of women and men cutting their hair, but the hair was still "long," although, "trimming" ends as we of it today is a modern concept.

According to historical sources, ALL women of the Roman Empire had long hair. PAGAN WOMEN had *kome*! There were only a few reasons why a woman would have short cut hair, such as: 1. **Slavery**. FREE women grew long hair. 2. **Mourning** the dead. 3. **Pagan worship** that involved transvestitism. 4. **Judaism**. According to the *Talmud* a woman's punishment for adultery was to have her hair "shorn" or "shaven."¹⁶ 5. **To end a vow**.

Pre-Marital Offerings

As a rite of passage before marriage adolescent girls cut and dedicated a lock of hair in a ritual. Generically, Artemis (Roman Diana) received the maiden locks of girls prior to marriage. Girls cut off a lock of hair and wound it around a spindle and laid it on the memorial which was inside the Artemision, the sanctuary of Artemis. But, instead of Artemis, heroised virgins, who had not married because they had died, received an offering of hair in some parts of Greece.

At Megara girls before marriage brought pitchers, presumably for pouring libations, to the memorial of Iphinoe, who had died a virgin, and placed a lock of their hair on it.

A lock of hair could be dedicated to the virgin goddess, Athena, in gratitude for finding a husband, or to Hera when a girl married. Hippolytos, Armetis' male votary and male virgin who renounced Aphrodite and marriage, was also the recipient of hair offerings; as he is dying, through Aphrodite's wrath, Artemis promises him that unmarried girls prior to marriage will cut their hair for him.¹⁷

¹³ "Greek Prostitutes in the Ancient Mediterranean," by Allison Glazebrook & Madeleine M. Henry; p221

¹⁴ "Euripides, Orestes E.P. Coleridge, Ed.", Persius website

¹⁵ "Greek Word Study Tool"

¹⁶ "Sketches of Jewish Social Life", by Alfred Edersheim p142

¹⁷ "Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion," by Matthew Dillon; p215

The Spartans

Not far from Corinth was the city of Sparta. The Spartan soldiers, who fought in the Persian Wars, were known for their long hair, which they favored at shoulder-length.¹⁸ They tied it up for battle.¹⁹ Long hair on the warriors was an ordinance of Lycurgus, their legendary law giver. The Greek professor of the University of San Francisco is of the opinion that the Spartan warriors probably trimmed their hair frequently, even though they had *komao*. So, we could say “long” hair began at the shoulders.

“Bangs”

Both men and women in the Roman Empire sometimes wore bangs, as did people in ancient Greece.²⁰ Locks which fell over the forehead were termed *capronae*, the modern “bang” or “fringe.” *Capronae* are seen in the figure of the god Cupid. During the time of Julia, sister of Emperor Augustus (reign 27 BC-14 CE), elaborate forehead curls were popular.²¹ There is an abundance of ancient art work on vases of Greek women pictured with a thick “fringe” of hair across the forehead and tufts of hair in front of the ears (*antiae*), yet their hair is still referred to as “long.”

Reading the Meaning Back into the Context

When the *correct* definition is read back into the passage it will make sense, but when reading the *partial* definition of “let the hair grow” back into the passage we face some serious difficulties. If “long” hair is “uncut” hair, a woman with hair to her knees but trims her ends 1”, would not have “long” hair. Likewise, a man who comes into the church wearing a pony-tail would need only to trim his hair 1”, and he would not have “long” hair either! But, according to UPCI teaching, the definition of “long” hair CHANGES when it pertains to a man. On a woman “long” means “uncut,” but on a man it means a measurement of length.

Komao does not have two, conflicting, contradictory definitions—one for a man and another for a woman. Word definitions cannot CHANGE, but the definition for “long” hair must remain consistent throughout the text.

Hair of a short length, but growing out, was not described as “long,” but this is the idea of the UPCI, who eliminates a measurement in length from the definitions. On p72 of *Hair Length in the Bible* Segraves states, “The definition of long hair in 1 Cor. 11 is uncut hair that is allowed to grow...regardless of the length of a woman’s hair in inches, it is long if it is uncut and allowed to grow.” From examples in Greek literature and from history, hair had to be a “long”

¹⁸ Cf. Lucian, “The Runaways” 27

¹⁹ Herodotus, “History 7” .208-9

²⁰ “Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History,” by Victoria Sherrow

²¹ “Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History,” by Victoria Sherrow

length in measurement for a writer to employ the verb, *komao*, in speaking of that person. The bowl-cut given slaves and young Greek boys was the *kepos*, which was to the cheek or the jaw and considered “short.”²² Down about the shoulders was “long.”

Paul's Vow

If we define “long” hair as hair in a state of continual growth and eliminate the concept of a length in measurement, then the Apostle Paul had “long” hair while at Corinth under a Nazarite vow. Look at the wording of the vow as found in Numbers 6:2-16. Also notice the vow could be taken by a woman as well as a man.

*“...When either man **or woman** shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite...All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head..he...**shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.**”*

The Jews thought Paul taught against the Law of Moses. There is reason to think that it was mainly with a design to convince the Jews that he did not despise their law and was its enemy that a *meaningless* Old Testament vow was used by the Apostle as a decoy—a trick—to get along with the Jews. For how long did the Apostle **allow his hair to grow?** In Acts 18:11 *“...he continued there [Corinth] a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”* In vv12-17 the Jews came against Paul. Then in v18, *“And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria...having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.”* Those who made the vow out of Palestine, and who could not come to the temple when the vow was expired, cut off the hair where they were at the expiration of the vow. Paul delayed to perfect the vow by the proper ceremonies until he reached Jerusalem (Acts 21:23-24).²³

It was during Paul’s extended stay at Corinth that he did not cut his hair. It was not cut until he got to Cenchrea, the eastern seaport of Corinth, where he boarded a ship to continue his missionary journey.²⁴ According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, the usual duration of a Nazarite vow was 30 days. We must conclude Paul’s hair reached a length somewhere between “shorn” and the LENGTH at which it would have been considered a “shame” on a man, or “long” in 1st century Greco-Roman culture.

Noble persons, BOTH men and women, took Nazarite vows. Queen Helena of Adiabene was a Nazarite for 14 or 21 years. King Agrippa’s sister, Berenice, was at Jerusalem on account of a Nazarite vow taken before the outbreak of the great war against the Romans. Miriam of Palmyra is also mentioned as a Nazarite.²⁵

If women were commanded by Moses’ Law to let their hair grow, what significance would there have been in taking a vow to let it grow? If it had been a “sin” for a woman to cut her hair, she would not have been permitted to take a Nazarite vow.

²² “Evolution of Ancient Greek Hairstyles” Ezine Articles

²³ “Bible Hub”; Barnes’ Notes on the Bible

²⁴ “Women’s Adornment,” by Ralph Woodrow; p40

²⁵ “Jewish Encyclopedia”

Conclusion

Apparently, the UPCI has chosen the definitions that fit their belief rather than fitting their belief to the definitions.

I noticed early on in my study that Daniel Segraves has **no degree** in Greek. The doctrine against women cutting their hair (any length) was not formulated by ministers with **degrees** in Greek. It would be impossible to find a Greek language expert who agrees with Segraves on the word definitions imperative to understanding the passage of 1 Cor. 11:2-16. The UPCI has misled multitudes of women by teaching error on the Greek text.

To see how long hair on women and short hair cuts on men came to be the CULTURAL NORM THROUGHOUT THE EMPIRE and not a “holiness standard,” read “1 Cor. 11:2-16 in Light of Culture & Veiling in the Cult of Dionysus.”