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ANOTHER LOOK AT ΚΕΦΑΛΗ
IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11. 3

The 1 Corinthians passage, in which Paul insists that a woman praying or prophesying in the Christian assembly should have her head covered (11. 2–16), has been said to be ‘in its present form hardly one of Paul’s happier compositions. The logic is obscure at best and contradictory at worst. The word choice is peculiar; the tone peevish.’¹ On an earlier occasion I addressed myself to the interpretation of one of the difficult phrases in this passage,² and I now turn to another one in v. 3 because some recent discussion of this verse may be obscuring its basic thrust and because some evidence relevant to its meaning has not been considered. It has to do with the sense in which Paul uses κεφαλή in this verse, which reads:

θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι
παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλὴ ὁ Χριστός ἐστιν,
κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ,
κεφαλὴ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός.

But I want you to understand that
the head of every man is Christ,
the head of a woman is her husband,
and the head of Christ is God. (RSV)

From this statement Paul goes on to construct an argument about the need for a head-covering when a woman prays or prophesies in the public Christian assembly. Part of the problem is that Paul uses κεφαλή in the literal sense of the physical, anatomical ‘head’ in vv. 4, 5, 7, 10, but in v. 3 (and according to some commentators in the second instance of v. 4) he uses it in a metaphorical sense. But the problem is, in what metaphorical sense is it used in v. 3?

¹ R. Scroggs, ‘Paul and the Eschatological Woman’, *JAAR* 40 (1972) 283–303, esp. 297.

² ‘A Feature of Qumran Angelology and the Angels of I Cor. xi. 10’, *NTS* 4 (1957–8) 48–58; reprinted with a postscript in J. Murphy-O’Connor (ed.), *Paul and Qumran* (London: Chapman, 1968) 31–47; and in *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (London: Chapman, 1971; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1974) 187–204.

RECENT DISCUSSION

Apparently J. Weiss was the first to toy with the idea that v. 3 might be a gloss on vv. 4–5, but even he had to recognize that v. 7 later played on the sense of v. 3.¹ More recently, W. O. Walker, Jr. has considered not only this verse, but all of vv. 2–16 to be an interpolation – indeed, an interpolation of three originally separate and distinct pericopae of non-Pauline composition (A: vv. 3, 8–9, 11–12; B: vv. 4–7, 10, 13, 16; C: vv. 14–15).² One of Walker's reasons for distinguishing v. 3 from what follows in vv. 4, 5, 7, 10 is precisely the metaphorical use of κεφαλή in v. 3 and its literal sense in the following verses. Thus Paul is spared a charge of unhappy composition. Though G. W. Trompf subsequently insisted on the unity of vv. 3–16, he too recognized 'that the whole passage sits ill at ease in the context of 1 Cor 10:1–11:34' and argued strongly for its interpolation into the original text (even though he remained undecided whether the excursus on head-covering came 'from Paul or not').³ Still later, L. Cope argued for the Pauline composition of v. 2 and limited the interpolation to vv. 3–16: the best argument for their interpolated character was that they were 'suspect in any context in a Pauline letter' (his emphasis).⁴

In a number of articles, J. Murphy-O'Connor has not only insisted – rightly, in my opinion – on the unity of vv. 3–16, but also on their Pauline authorship.⁵ He has done much to present a coherent interpretation of this difficult Pauline passage, but one aspect of his interpretation still creates a problem, the meaning of κεφαλή in v. 3 (and possibly the second occurrence of it in v. 4). Murphy-O'Connor has been influenced mainly by R. Scroggs, who has translated v. 3 as follows:

¹ *Der erste Korintherbrief* (MeyerK 5; 9th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910) 271.

² '1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and Paul's Views Regarding Women', *JBL* 94 (1975) 94–110, esp. 101–8.

³ 'On Attitudes toward Women in Paul and Paulist Literature: 1 Corinthians 11:3–16 and Its Context', *CBQ* 42 (1980) 196–215.

⁴ '1 Cor 11:2–16: One Step Further', *JBL* 97 (1978) 435–6.

⁵ 'The Non-Pauline Character of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16?' *JBL* 96 (1976) 615–21; 'Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16', *CBQ* 42 (1980) 482–500; 'Interpolations in 1 Corinthians', *CBQ* 48 (1986) 81–94. On the question of the unity and authorship of vv. 3–16, see further A. C. Thiselton, 'Realized Eschatology at Corinth', *NTS* 24 (1977–8) 510–26, esp. 520–1; J. P. Meier, 'On the Veiling of Hermeneutics (1 Cor 11:2–16)', *CBQ* 40 (1978) 212–22.

I want you to know that
 every man's source is Christ,
 the source of woman is man,
 the source of Christ is God.¹

Scroggs recognised that 'in normal Greek usage κεφαλή does not mean lordship, and while the word is sometimes used in the LXX to translate רֹדֵף [*sic*] when the Hebrew word carries the connotation of chief or leader, the more common word for that meaning is ἄρχων or ἀρχηγός.'² Scroggs later returned to a discussion of the meaning of κεφαλή, asserting that the article in *TWNT* on it does not suggest that 'the word ever had such a metaphorical meaning in Greek literature' and that Liddell-Scott-Jones 'does not even give it as a sub-category within the metaphorical usages'.³ Scroggs labels the LXX translator who rendered Hebrew רֹדֵף in the sense of 'leader' as 'wooden-headed or sleepy . . . ; this is not the usual procedure'.⁴ According to him, in the LXX of Numbers κεφαλή occurs as a translation of Hebrew רֹדֵף nine times, of which eight have the literal meaning 'head' (of a person or animal), and once (5. 7 [read 6. 7!]) it is used metaphorically to mean 'self'. But ἄρχων translates רֹדֵף, 'leader, ruler', seven times, and ἀρχηγός, four times.

Murphy-O'Connor has pressed beyond Scroggs, again maintaining that κεφαλή connoting 'supremacy' or 'authority' is not attested in profane Greek.⁵ He admits that κεφαλή appears 281 times in the LXX as the translation of Hebrew רֹדֵף. This Hebrew word occurs twenty-five times in Exodus, and the LXX renders it regularly by κεφαλή when used in the literal sense, but not in the three texts where רֹדֵף means 'ruler'. Similarly, in 1 Samuel κεφαλή occurs in the literal sense thirteen times (out of twenty-two), but in the one instance where רֹדֵף means 'ruler', it is translated ἡγούμενος. Murphy-O'Connor grants that ms. A of LXX Judg 10. 18; 11. 8, 9, 11 uses κεφαλή for רֹדֵף, 'leader, ruler', but notes that ms. B has ἄρχων for Judg 10. 18; 11. 8, 9, whereas it uses κεφαλή in 11. 11.

¹ 'Paul and the Eschatological Woman' (n. 1, p. 503 above) 298. Scroggs (n. 41) ascribes the meaning 'source' to S. Bedale ('The Meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles', *JTS* ns 5 [1954] 211–15). Scroggs also attributes this meaning to H. Schlier (*TDNT* 3. 678), but Schlier's article does not use the word 'source': 'Κεφαλή implies one who stands over another in the sense of being the ground of his being.'

² 'Paul and the Eschatological Woman' (n. 1, p. 503 above) 298–9 n. 41.

³ 'Paul and the Eschatological Woman: Revisited', *JAAR* 42 (1974) 532–7, esp. 534–5 n. 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ 'Sex and Logic' (n. 5, p. 504 above) 491. He recalls that J. Weiss (*Der erste Korintherbrief* [n. 1, p. 504 above] 269), H. Schlier (*TDNT* 3. 674), and H. Conzelmann (1 Corinthians [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 183 n. 21) had already noted this earlier.

Though Murphy-O'Connor admits that his survey is 'incomplete', he believes that it is

sufficiently based to show that the metaphorical meanings of *rōš* and *kephalē* did not overlap completely, and that *kephalē* was inappropriate to render *rōš* when this term connoted 'authority'. *Kephalē* does appear for *rōš* = 'ruler' in 2 Sam 22:44, but this single exception (even Homer nods!) does not change the picture. There is simply no basis for the assumption that a Hellenized Jew would instinctively give *kephalē* the meaning 'one having authority over someone'.¹

Thus has Murphy-O'Connor stated the case, and he too prefers to translate κεφαλή in 1 Cor 11. 3 as 'source'.²

Whether it be a case of Homer nodding or of a wooden-headed or sleepy translator, is it correct to speak of a 'single exception', when one is dealing with the use of κεφαλή in the LXX or in other Greek literature? (After all, Murphy-O'Connor has admitted that κεφαλή, 'ruler, leader', is also found in Judg 10. 18; 11. 8, 9, 11, at least in ms. A.) But there is more to be said on this subject.

FURTHER EVIDENCE BEARING ON THE USE OF ΚΕΦΑΛΗ IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11

Let us leave aside for the moment the question whether κεφαλή ever connotes 'supremacy' or 'authority, leadership' elsewhere in Greek literature. In general, in the Old Testament the Hebrew word *rōš* means (1) 'head' in the literal, anatomical sense (Gen 40. 16-17 [of a man]; 3. 15 [of an animal]); (2) 'top' (Gen 8. 5 [of a mountain]); (3) 'head = chief' (Judg 10. 18; 11. 8, 9, 11); (4) 'beginning, source' (Gen 2. 10 [of rivers]; Judg 7. 19 [of watches of the night]); (5) 'sum' (Exod 30. 12 [in a census]); and (6) 'division, company' (Judg 7. 16 [of an army]). It is no surprise that the LXX renders the first two of these meanings by κεφαλή, either 'head' or

¹ 'Sex and Logic' (n. 5, p. 504 above) 492.

² In his commentary on 1 Corinthians in the forthcoming *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, and R. E. Murphy; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990) art. 49, #53, Murphy-O'Connor goes so far as to write: 'Gk *kephalē* never connotes authority or superiority (*pace* S. Bedale, *JTS* 5 [1954] 211-15).' See further his article, '1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again', *CBQ* 50 (1988) 265-74, esp. 269-70. Cf. J. Delobel, '1 Cor 11:2-16: Toward a Coherent Explanation', *L'Apôtre Paul: Personnalité, style et conception du ministère* (BETL 73; ed. A. Vanhoye; Louvain: Leuven University/Peeters, 1986) 369-89.

Other commentators who have used 'source' as the meaning of κεφαλή in 1 Cor 11. 3 are C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 248; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (NCBC; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971) 103.

'top'. Nor is it a surprise that *rōš* in the sense of 'beginning, source' is usually rendered by ἀρχή (or some cognate of it).¹ The problem is whether a 'Hellenistic Jew' would rightly give κεφαλή the meaning 'one having authority over someone else'.

Apart from the LXX passages already mentioned by Scroggs or Murphy-O'Connor where κεφαλή does occur in this sense (Judg 10. 18; 11. 8, 9, 11 [at least in ms. A]; 2 Sam 22. 44), we may consider the following passages:

(1) In Isaiah 7 the prophet counsels Ahaz, the King of Judah, about the war plotted against him by Aram and Ephraim. Part of Isaiah's words to Ahaz (vv. 8–9) runs as follows:

... כִּי רֹאשׁ אֲרָם דְּמִשְׁק וְרֹאשׁ דְּמִשְׁק רִצִּין.^{8a}
וְרֹאשׁ אֲפַרַּיִם שְׁמַרְוֹן וְרֹאשׁ שְׁמַרְוֹן בֶּן רֵמַלְיָהוּ⁹

In the RSV these lines are translated:

For the head of Syria is Damascus,
and the head of Damascus is Rezin . . .
And the head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

These verses, however, are rendered in the LXX as follows:

ἀλλ' ἡ κεφαλή Ἀράμ Δαμασκός . . .
καὶ ἡ κεφαλή Ἐφραὶμ Σομορών, καὶ ἡ κεφαλή Σομορών υἱὸς τοῦ Ῥομελίου.

The LXX does not translate the second part of v. 8a, but it clearly renders Hebrew *rōš* 'head, chief',² in the other three instances by κεφαλή. Now this Old Testament passage is not an *exact* parallel to Paul's words in 1 Cor 11. 3, but no one can fail to miss the similarity in the use of κεφαλή in both passages or the bearing that this LXX text has on the meaning of the Pauline verse.

(2) In Jeremiah 31 the prophet tells of the homecoming of the remnant of Israel. In v. 7 he says:

רִנּוּ לַיַּעֲקֹב שִׂמְחָה וְצַהֲלוּ בְּרֹאשׁ הַגּוֹיִם

As the RSV puts it:

Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations.

¹ See further S. Bedale, 'The Meaning' (n. 1, p. 505 above) 212.

² See F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* . . . (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952) 911. Cf. H. Wildberger, *Jesaja* (BKAT 10; 2nd ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-V., 1980) 264, 266, 282–4: 'Haupt.' O. Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kapitel 1–12* (ATD 17; Göttingen; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970) 74.

This is rendered in the LXX as follows (38:7):

Εὐφράνθητε καὶ χρεμετίσατε ἐπὶ κεφαλῆν ἔθνῶν.

In this case it is not a question of the 'head' of persons, but of nations; yet the notion of supremacy or authority is surely present, and expressed by κεφαλή.

(3) In 1 Kgs 21. 12 the Hebrew text reads:

וַיִּשְׂבוּ אֶת נָבוֹת בְּרֹאשׁ הָעָם

This may be translated:

And they set up Naboth as head of the people.

The LXX renders the sentence thus (20. 12):

καὶ ἐκάθισαν τὸν Ναβουθαὶ ἐν κεφαλῇ τοῦ λαοῦ.¹

Here both *rōš* and κεφαλή have the nuance of prominence of place or position.

(4) We have already mentioned 2 Sam 22. 44 above, as Murphy-O'Connor's 'single exception', but one should also note the half verse that follows the part quoted by him. In the Hebrew, 22. 44 runs as follows:

וַיִּשְׁמְרֵנִי כְּרֹאשׁ הָעַמִּים עַם אֲלֹהֵי יַעֲבֹדֵנִי

You preserve me as the head of the nations; people that I do not know will serve me.

This is rendered by the LXX thus:

φυλάξεις με εἰς κεφαλῆν ἔθνῶν, λαός, ὃν οὐκ ἔγνω, ἐδούλευσάν μοι.

Though the LXX alters the tense of the verbs, the last half of the verse makes it clear that κεφαλή is here used with the connotation of 'authority' or 'supremacy'.

(5) The same connotation is present when persons are referred to as the 'head' (*rōš*) and the 'tail' (*zānāb*); see Deut 28. 13, 44; Isa 9. 13–14 (in this instance the LXX uses κεφαλή in v. 13 and explains it as ἀρχή in v. 14); 19. 15 (here the LXX has κεφαλῆν καὶ οὐράν for Hebrew *rōš wəzānāb*, whereas the following phrase *kippāh wəʿagmōn*, 'palm branch or reed', becomes in the Greek ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος).

Now these examples from the LXX show that κεφαλή has been

¹ This is the reading of ms. A; but ms. R uses ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦ λαοῦ, which also appears in 20. 9.

used in a good number of instances to connote 'authority' or 'supremacy'. I do not deny that *רֹבֵץ*, when used in the sense of 'leader, ruler', is often rendered in the LXX by either ἄρχων or ἀρχηγός, but the evidence adduced above shows that a Hellenistic Jew could instinctively use κεφαλή as a proper expression for such authority.

The above evidence may be sufficient to show that Paul in 1 Cor 11. 3 could use κεφαλή in this Hellenistic Jewish sense to designate preeminence or authority. But there is further evidence from Philo that must be considered. True, in one instance Philo uses κεφαλή in the sense of 'source', when he speaks of Esau 'as the head of the living body, the progenitor of all the members mentioned' (*De cong. erud. causa* 12 #61). But he does use κεφαλή on several occasions in the sense of 'leader' or 'ruler', i.e., in the metaphorical sense of preeminence or authority.

(1) κεφαλὴν μὲν τοίνυν ἀλληγοροῦντές φαμεν εἶναι ψυχῆς τὸν ἡγεμόνα νοῦν,

'Head' we interpret allegorically to mean the ruling part of the soul
(*De somn.* 2. 31 #207).¹

(2) Philo speaks of Ptolemy II Philadelphus as one who was outstanding among the Ptolemies and expresses it thus:

γενόμενος καθάπερ ἐν ζῳῳ τὸ ἡγεμονεῦον κεφαλὴ τὸν τρόπον τινὰ τῶν βασιλείων,

being, as the head is the leading part in a living body, in some sense the head of kings [of the Ptolemaic dynasty].
(*De vita Mosis* 2. 5 #30)

It should be noted in these first two instances that Philo is aware of using κεφαλή in a figurative sense: 'allegorically', 'in some sense'.

(3) In still another instance Philo makes clear what he means by the relation of the head to the body:

... τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἡγεμονίαν ἢ φύσις ἀνήψε κεφαλῆ χαρισαμένη,

Nature conferred the sovereignty of the body on the head.
(*De spec. leg.* 3. 33 #184)

Note how in these three instances some form of ἡγεμών is used.

(4) Lastly, I cite the following:

ἐὰν μὲν οὖν εἷς ἀνὴρ τυγχάνῃ τοιοῦτος ὢν ἐν πόλει, τῆς πόλεως ὑπεράνω φανεῖται, ἐὰν δὲ πόλις, τῆς ἐν κύκλῳ χώρας, ἐὰν δὲ ἔθνος, ἐπιβήσεται πᾶσιν ἔθνεσιν ὡσπερ κεφαλὴ σώματι τοῦ περιφαίνεσθαι χάριν, οὐχ ὑπὲρ εὐδοξίας μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς τῶν ὁρώντων ὠφελείας

So then if one such man be found in a city – will appear superior to the city – or if a city (so appears) to the country roundabout, or if one nation will stand

¹ See further *De vita Mosis* 2. 16 #82; 2. 51 #290.

above all (other) nations, as a head above a body, to be conspicuous all about, (so it will be) not for (its own) glory, but for the benefit of those who behold it.

(*De praem. et poenis* 19 #114)¹

Finally, two occurrences of κεφαλή, 'leader', may be considered. At one point in his *Jewish War* Josephus is speaking about Jerusalem, comparing it with the country (τῆς χώρας) and outlying towns (τῶν ἔξωθεν πόλεων), and he calls it τὴν κεφαλὴν ὅλου τοῦ ἔθνους, 'the head of the whole nation' (4.4.3 #261; cf. 3.3.5 #54). Again, in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, when Hermas requests that the shepherd of punishment depart from his house, he is told that he must suffer because of the great iniquity and sin committed by his family: . . . ἐὰν μὴ σὺ ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ οἴκου θλίβῃς, 'unless you, the head of the household, be afflicted' (*Sim.* 7. 3). To these two instances, which come from fairly contemporary Greek, I may add one from Athanasius, which does not seem to be composed in dependence on some New Testament passage. He refers to some bishops as κεφαλαὶ τοσοῦτων ἐκκλησιῶν, 'heads of such great churches' (*Apol. II contra Arianos* 89 [PG 25. 409A]). The last examples may not be taken from 'profane Greek literature', but none of them seems to be modelled on the use of κεφαλή in Col 2. 10; Eph 1. 22; 4. 15; 5. 23b, where many interpreters would admit that κεφαλή does connote authority or supremacy.

The upshot of this discussion is that a Hellenistic Jewish writer such as Paul of Tarsus could well have intended that κεφαλή in 1 Cor 11. 3 be understood as 'head' in the sense of authority or supremacy over someone else. This would mean that the opinion espoused by such commentators as those mentioned by J. Murphy-O'Connor (J. Weiss, A. Robertson and A. Plummer, H. D. Wendland, B. Allo, J. Héring, H. Lietzmann, W. G. Kümmel, and F. W. Grosheide) is not as unsubstantiated as might be thought in recent discussion of this text. Consequently, I should prefer to translate v. 3 in the following way:

But I want you to understand that
Christ is the head of every man,²

¹ See further *De praem. et poenis* 20 #125: 'For as in a living body the head is the first and best part and the tail the last and meanest . . . so too he means that the virtuous one (τὸν σπουδαῖον), whether a single man or a people, will be the head of the human race (κεφαλὴν . . . τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου γένους) and all the others like parts of a body deriving their life from the powers in the head and at the top.' In this instance, one may debate whether κεφαλή has the sense of 'source'.

² The better reading here is ὁ Χριστός (found in mss. P⁴⁶, K, A, B^c, C, D², Ψ, and the Koine text-tradition). It creates a problem about which is the subject and predicate of the clause; since κεφαλή is anarthrous in the two following clauses, and therefore to be taken as the

man is the head of a woman,
and God is the head of Christ.

The next edition of the *Greek-English-Lexicon* of Liddell-Scott-Jones will have to provide a sub-category within the metaphorical uses of κεφαλή in the sense of 'leader, ruler'.¹ Lastly, it should be clear that the 'head' as the leading part of a living body is not the anachronism that S. Bedale once thought it was.² When Philo calls it the ruling part of the soul, he is not saying something that would be unintelligible to Paul of Tarsus.³

predicate, I prefer to take παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλή as the predicate in this clause too. The meaning of ὁ Χριστός is also problematical and would call for a more developed discussion than is possible here. J. Murphy-O'Connor (*JBL* 95 [1976] 617) maintains that it cannot be the risen Lord, but must be understood as the community of believers, as in 1 Cor 12. 12. It might make some sense to say that Christ in that sense is the κεφαλή of every Christian, but it is baffling how Christ in that sense can be said to be παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλή. The problem is still the same if one says that ὁ Χριστός is to be understood of the risen Lord. My own inclination is to think of the preexistent Christ. See further J. Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (n. 1, p. 504 above), 270. Moreover, the collective sense of ὁ Χριστός seems out of place in the lineup of singulars, ἀνὴρ, γυνή, and θεός.

¹ R. Renehan (*Greek Lexicographical Notes: A Critical Supplement to the Greek-English Lexicon of Liddell-Scott-Jones* [Hypomnemata 45; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975] 120) has additional material for the metaphorical use of κεφαλή, but he does not mention this sub-category or give any of the evidence adduced in this article.

² 'The Meaning' (n. 1, p. 505 above) 212.

³ After I had composed the foregoing article and submitted it to the editor, I learned through the kind cooperation of D. J. Harrington, S.J., editor of *NTA*, that the topic had been discussed by another New Testament interpreter. See W. Grudem, 'Does κεφαλή ("Head"), Mean "Source" or "Authority" in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples', *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985) 38–59. Grudem is in dialogue with other modern writers than those whom I have cited in the body of the article. Though both of us cite some of the same texts, some of my examples are in addition to those that he cites explicitly. He has, however, discovered many others that would supplement my list. Grudem supplies also a telling critique of the arguments of S. Bedale.