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Hair and Hat Ritual Shaming Punishments in Nineteenth-Century Iran

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Abstract

This article considers three temporary and reversible penal shaming acts in nineteenth-century Iran: the shaving or cutting of hair, irrespective of gender; the shaving or cutting of men's facial hair; and the forcible removal of headgear or the coerced wearing of silly headgear. Drawing on anthropological, historical, and sociological studies of hair, this study argues that hair and hat punishments embodied elements of ritual, sexuality, social control, and marginalization. In order to understand the meaning of these penal acts, the article looks at general taboos around hair and head exposure alongside licit and voluntary forms of cutting or shaving hair. Illicit sex, heresy, and alcohol consumption were recurring moral crimes most often associated with such forms of humiliating punishment. Since restoration of honor was not the sole prerogative of the government, these punishments were often carried out by those acting on behalf of a religious authority or individually and collectively by ordinary subjects outraged by a moral violation.

Keywords: Punishment; Crime; Hair; Hat; Ritual; Honor; Qajar

In nineteenth-century Iran, criminals were often subjected to highly ritualized punishments in which they were paraded, often on foot or by pack animal, before a town or city's general population. Known in Islamic jurisprudence as a publicizing punishment (*tashhīr*) and being paraded around town (*shahr gardāndan*) in Persian government sources, these punishments foregrounded humiliation, shame, and loss of honor. Unlike talionic punishments that operated on an eye-for-eye or life-for-life logic, such punitive parades did not reduce punishment to a logic of equivalences. Nor was their main objective the infliction of pain, as was the case with many other forms of corporal punishment. Strangely, punitive parades frequently involved the criminal being forced to parade bareheaded, with a shaved head or facial hair, or wearing a ridiculous hat. The purpose of this article is to understand the cultural meanings associated with shaved or shortened hair, the exposed head, and headgear in order to explain their use in punishments. At a semiotic level, the meanings of these punishments were both at odds but connected with the licit ritual meaning of the same act, especially those involving hair. Hair and hat punishments were, respectively, temporary forms of bodily mutilation akin to more permanent ones such as chopping ears, the nose, fingers, toes, hands, feet, and distortions of the body's public self-presentation, such as

through branding.¹ Temporary and permanent punishments were communicative acts, signifying exposure, shame, and even bestialization.

This article draws on an array of primary sources, ranging from diaries, travelogues, police, consular, and government reports, and official newspapers to works of Islamic jurisprudence, reformist texts, local and official chronicles, petitions, and telegraphic reports and responses. It begins by examining the penal uses of shaving men's hair, especially in the case of beardless youths (*amrads*) and Jews, as a punishment for crimes associated with a host of licit activities around illicit sex, illegal entertainment music, and alcohol production. It then turns to the striking case of the penal shaving of women's hair, almost always done in cases involving illicit sex, whether adultery, prostitution, or procurement. Shaving women's hair was a way of removing a core element of their sexuality. If a woman's head hair was a marker of her femininity, a man's facial hair similarly signified his manhood. The forcible removal of men's facial hair therefore became a culturally extreme form of punitive exposure. Finally, the article ends by concentrating on the ubiquitous removal of headgear during punishments for major crimes and the less common, but no less shameful, forcible wearing of a silly hat. Since headgear embodied social status, punishments of this nature erased or debased the criminal's previous social personhood.

Reading Penal History through Hair and Headgear Studies

While most scholarship on hair and headgear in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has focused on the onset of modernity and changes in sartorial regimes, the question of veiling, gender and sexuality, and other cultural meanings associated with hair and the head in penal contexts have largely been ignored.² By contrast, recent scholarship on early and medieval Islamic history delves into the complex ritual and penal meanings associated with hair punishments.³ Importantly, anthropological and sociological studies on hair have guided my thinking about ritual, the sacred, and social control, all three of which are at the heart of many nineteenth-century Iranian penal practices.⁴ Edmund Leach's seminal essay, "Magical Hair," draws on ethnographic accounts to make three broad generalizations about the relationship between hair and sexuality: long, uncut hair was a marker of unrestrained sexuality; cut or bound hair had to do with restricted sexuality; and a shaved

¹ I explore parallel themes in my recent study of branding. Farzin Vejdani, "Branded Bodies: Judicial Torture, Punishment, and Infamy in Nineteenth-Century Iran," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 65, no. 2 (April, 2023): 321–45.

² H. E. Chehabi, "The Banning of the Veil and Its Consequences," in *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah 1921-1941*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 203–21; Houchang Chehabi, "Staging the Emperor's New Clothes: Dress Codes and Nation-Building under Reza Shah," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 3/4 (1993): 209–29; Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Avner Wishnitzer, "Beneath the Mustache: A Well-Trimmed History of Facial Hair in the Late Ottoman Era," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61, no. 3 (April 11, 2018): 289–326; Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

³ Christina Thérèse (Tineke) Rooijackers, "The Luscious Locks of Lust: Hair and the Construction of Gender in Egypt from Clement to the Fāṭimids," *Al-Masāq* 30, no. 1 (January, 2018): 26–55; Petra Sijpesteijn, "Shaving Hair and Beards in Early Islamic Egypt: An Arab Innovation?," *Al-Masāq* 30, no. 1 (January, 2018): 9–25; Christian Robert Lange, "Beards of Paradise: Hair in the Muslim Eschaton," in *Barbe et Barbis: Symboliques, Rites et Pratiques Du Port de La Barbe Dans Le Proche-Orient Ancien et Moderne*, ed. Youri Volokhine, Bruce Fudge, and Christoph Herzog (Bern: Peter Lang, 2019), 119–29.

⁴ Ingrid Pflüger-Schindlbeck, "On the Symbolism of Hair in Islamic Societies: An Analysis of Approaches," *Anthropology of the Middle East* 1, no. 2 (December, 2006): 72–88; Shahla Haeri, "In the Garden of the Sexes: Of Men, Women, Gaze, and Hair," in *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Middle East*, ed. Soraya Altorki (London: Blackwell, 2015), 151–71.

head meant celibacy.⁵ Moving away from a purely sexual focus, C. R. Hallpike argues that cutting off hair had much to do with social control.⁶ As a result, those with long hair were considered social outcasts, such as witches, recluses, or women, whereas those with short or cut hair were associated with obedience and discipline, such as soldiers, monks, and convicts.⁷ Employing binary constructions, sociologist Anthony Synnott views hair in terms of opposites: opposite ideologies have opposite hair, just as opposite sexes have opposite hair.⁸

In light of this scholarship, I argue that hair and hat punishments in nineteenth-century Iran embodied elements of ritual, sexuality, social control, and marginalization (i.e., the opposite of being normal). Recipients of such punishments were usually paraded ritualistically through the streets; the shearing of the beautiful locks of a beardless youth, a woman, or a man's beard or head hair all had sexual components having to do with shame and honor; as visible markers of shame, hair and hat punishments likewise were meant to assert control, governmental or religious, over the condemned, which sometimes dovetailed with enforced differentiation between communities such as Jews and Muslims; and finally, the cutting of hair, being bareheaded, or the forcible wearing of silly headgear all signaled social abnormality, marginalization, and even bestialization.

Shaving Men's Hair

Hair was considered sacred in many societies, in the sense of being both holy and taboo. As such, prohibitions and regulations governing its growth, length, and cutting have historically existed. Mary Douglas stressed hair's dangerous, or "left sacred," dimensions, as it is at the margins of the body.⁹ Émile Durkheim emphasizes the sacred, ritualistic dimensions of hair cutting, including prohibitions on coming into contact with it.¹⁰ E. P. Thompson highlights the ritualistic and punitive dimensions of hair punishments in parades, describing the mid-nineteenth-century Rebecca gangs in rural England who blackened the houses of men and women who breached morality laws and beat, paraded, flogged, and cut their hair off.¹¹

In Muslim societies, shaving one's hair was an act laden with ritual significance.¹² For instance, as part of a religious rite known as the *'aqīqah*, a child's forelock was shaved and its weight offered as alms.¹³ The Quran prescribes that male pilgrims shave their heads upon concluding the Muslim pilgrimage (*hajj*).¹⁴ In many other contexts, however, men were expected to have head hair, albeit of a certain length, just as they were expected to have facial hair.¹⁵ This mode of thinking is reflected in the book of laws of the nineteenth-century Iranian prophet Mīrzā Ḥusayn Nurī Bahā'ullāh (Baha'u'llah). In it, he prohibited

⁵ E. R. Leach, "Magical Hair," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 88, no. 2 (1958): 147–64.

⁶ C. R. Hallpike, "Social Hair," *Man* 4, no. 2 (1969): 256–64.

⁷ Pfluger-Schindlbeck, "On the Symbolism of Hair," 74.

⁸ Anthony Synnott, "Shame and Glory: A Sociology of Hair," *The British Journal of Sociology* 38, no. 3 (1987): 381–413; Pfluger-Schindlbeck, "On the Symbolism of Hair," 75.

⁹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 150.

¹⁰ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, ed. Mark S. Cladis, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 106, 225.

¹¹ E. P. Thompson, "Rough Music," in *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1993), 523.

¹² For a concise yet thorough survey of Islamic hadith on hair as a form of "temporary body modification," see Irvin Cemil Schick, "Some Islamic Determinants of Dress and Personal Appearance in Southwest Asia," *Khil'ā* 3 (2009): 26–30.

¹³ Pfluger-Schindlbeck, "On the Symbolism of Hair," 81.

¹⁴ Lloyd Ridgeon, "Shaggy or Shaved? The Symbolism of Hair among Persian Qalandar Sufis," *Iran and the Caucasus* 14, no. 2 (January, 2010): 235; Pfluger-Schindlbeck, "On the Symbolism of Hair," 81–82.

¹⁵ James Grehan, *Everyday Life & Consumer Culture in 18th-Century Damascus* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 197.

believers from shaving their head hair or allowing men's hair to grow longer than their earlobes.¹⁶ Still, in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Iran, it was common practice for men to voluntarily shave all or part of their scalps as an act of piety. Others, including some ruffians (*lūtīs*), villagers, soldiers, and courtiers, also shaved parts of their scalp but allowed hair to grow from the sides and/or the back into locks of hair.¹⁷ Outside the domestic sphere, however, men typically wore headgear that only allowed the side or back of their head to be visible, keeping the shaved scalp covered.

In many Muslim societies, historically, hairstyle was also a means of community differentiation; for non-Muslims, on the other hand, hairstyle could signify subordination. In certain prophetic sayings (*ḥadīth*), Muslims are advised to differentiate their hairstyles from those of Jews and Christians.¹⁸ Drawing on early Arabic texts, Petra Sijpesteijn suggests that the forcible cutting of the forelock “symbolized submission to a disciplinary regime, social control, and obedience.”¹⁹ The Quran, for instance, mentions grabbing or shearing the forelock as a humiliating practice.²⁰ The shearing of a forelock also signified the vanquishing of an enemy whose life was spared or that someone had a debt to repay.²¹ Shades of these meanings are apparent in the regulations of non-Muslim (*dhimmī*) hairstyles. The Pact of ‘Umar, which included regulations regarding the appearance of non-Muslims, stipulated that these communities were forbidden from parting their hair in the manner of Muslims and were required to shear their forelocks.²² In his *dhimmī* regulations, the jurist Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) argued that non-Muslims had to shave the top fourth of their head hair, not just trim their locks. This more robust form of shaving would unambiguously communicate their status as *dhimmī*.²³ Similar rationales for shaving the front of the head of *dhimmī* populations are found in Shi‘i works of jurisprudence, including those from the nineteenth century.²⁴

The penal uses of shaving men's hair also appear in Islamic jurisprudence and public regulation (*ḥisbah*) manuals. Early Sunni hadith, works of jurisprudence, and *ḥisbah* manuals mention shaving the hair of someone who provides false witness testimony or engages in perjury (*shahādat al-zūr*) as a discretionary (*ta‘zīr*) punishment.²⁵ Shi‘i jurists, on the other hand, considered this the appropriate punishment for three categories of crime: the unmarried male fornicator; the male pimp; and the male Jew making a false accusation of fornication (*zinā*) against a Muslim.²⁶ While the first two categories related to violations of sexual

¹⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Pub. Trust, 1994), 35.

¹⁷ Sivan Balslev, *Iranian Masculinities: Gender and Sexuality in Late Qajar and Early Pahlavi Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 216–17.

¹⁸ M. J. Kister, “Do Not Assimilate Yourselves ...”: *Lā Tashabbahū*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 12 (1989): 321–71; Rooijackers, “The Luscious Locks of Lust,” 44.

¹⁹ Sijpesteijn, “Shaving Hair and Beards in Early Islamic Egypt,” 22.

²⁰ Q 96:15 and Q 55:41. See Sijpesteijn, 22; Ridgeon, “Shaggy or Shaved?,” 236.

²¹ Sijpesteijn, “Shaving Hair and Beards in Early Islamic Egypt,” 22.

²² Albrecht Noth, “Problems of Differentiation between Muslims and Non-Muslims: Re-Reading the ‘Ordinances of ‘Umar’ (Al-Shurūṭ al-‘Umariyya),” in *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, ed. Robert G. Hoyland (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 103–24; Rooijackers, “The Luscious Locks of Lust,” 44.

²³ Marion Holmes Katz, “The ‘Shearing of Forelocks’ as a Penitential Rite,” in *The Heritage of Arabo-Islamic Learning*, ed. Maurice A. Pomerantz and Aram Shahin (Boston: Brill, 2016), 198. For more on al-Jawziyya and hair regulations, see Antonia Bosanquet, *Minding Their Place: Space and Religious Hierarchy in Ibn al-Qayyim's Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma* (Boston: Brill, 2020), 73.

²⁴ Daniel Tsadik, *Between Foreigners and Shi'is: Nineteenth-Century Iran and Its Jewish Minority* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 28. For the texts of these *dhimmī* regulations, see Muḥammad Ḥasan Najafī, *Jawāhir al-Kalām* (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1981), 21: 247–8, 271–76.

²⁵ Christian Lange, *Justice, Punishment and the Medieval Muslim Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 81; Everett Rowson, “Reveal or Conceal Public Humiliation and Banishment as Punishments in Early Islamic Times,” in *Public Violence in Islamic Societies: Power, Discipline, and the Construction of the Public Sphere, 7th–19th Centuries C.E.*, ed. Christian Lange and Maribel Fierro (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 123–24.

²⁶ For the unmarried male fornicator, male pimps, and a *dhimmī* making a false accusation of *zinā* against a Muslim, see Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Ḥudūd va Qisās wa Diyāt*, ed. ‘Alī Fāzil (Qum: Nashr-i Āsār-i Islāmī, 198[?]), 16, 24, 64.

norms, the latter involved violating the sanctity of Islam through a speech act involving illicit sex, resembling the punishment for false witness testimony. Implied in these punishments is an understanding that temporarily disfiguring one's appearance was a suitable response to one's violation of sexual norms.

On rare occasions, a man who cut another man's locks may have done so as an act of heroic retribution. Sayyid Asadullāh, a shrine servant with a history of conflict with Naṣrullāh Khān, the former Assistant Governor (Nā'ib al-Ḥukūmah) of Kashan, decided to beat Naṣrullāh Khān up when he came to Qum and cut off his locks (*zulfash ra miburad*). This and other misdeeds were reported by Qum's government to the shrine guardian (Mutivallibāshī), who only levied a minor punishment for the crime.²⁷

As with so many other penal practices, however, known cases—even carried out by Shi'i *mujtahids*—often deviated from the letter of jurisprudence. Two categories of men seem to have recurrently been the object of hair cutting: Jewish musicians and beardless youth (*amrads*). In the former case, Shi'i *mujtahids* and their followers carried out this punishment, which was sometimes referred to as a shari'ah and/or mandatory fixed punishment (*ḥadd*), despite no mention of either in works of jurisprudence. Given the significance of hair as a marker of community distinction, it is possible the punishment was meant to reinforce both the difference and subjugation of Jewish subjects seen to have contravened Islamic public moral norms by performing for Muslims at underground parties. In the case of beardless youth, however, the shaving of locks appears to have had an altogether different function, one that more closely paralleled its use for women: it was meant not only to shame the condemned but also to remove a marker of their beauty and seductive potency.

Amrads and Sexual Criminals

Amrads often shaved their beards intentionally, once past a certain age, in order to retain a particular aesthetic deemed pleasing to men. While the *amrad* may have willingly shaved his facial hair in contravention of societal norms, he usually still had tresses (*zulf*), markers of beauty. It was, therefore, not uncommon for Qajar authorities to cut *amrads*' tresses as punishment. In the spring of 1887, a male prostitute *amrad* was engaging in "evil deeds and disorder" (*sharārat va harziqī*) among the shop owners of Shiraz. The local government had already punished the young man several times, but he continued his illicit actions. The government thus ruled (*ḥukm*) that he should be beaten with a stick, have the locks of his hair shaved off, and be banished and exiled (*nafy va ikhrāj*) from the city.²⁸ In Hamadan, an *amrad* was caught drunk, yelling (*arbadah*) in the streets, and sentenced by the prince-governor to his locks being shaved and being entrusted to the master baker (*ustād khabbāz*) with the goal of rehabilitating him through learning a licit trade.²⁹

In other cases, men's hair was cut for attempted sexual assault, suggesting a connection to sexual immorality but not necessarily one to reducing male beauty. Although Islamic jurisprudence called for shaving men's hair for male pimping and fornication, the punishment was rarely enforced. The use of it for sexual assault, however, was the closest practice came to theory. In Qum, a woman at the bazaar to buy bread found herself surrounded by ruffians (*alvāt*), who whisked her away against her will to a local ruin (*kharābah*). She started screaming and managed to free herself from their grip. The main culprit, Ṣādiq, was a repeat offender. The local Assistant Governor had his locks cut off (*zulf-i ū rā tarāshidah*) and made

²⁷ Parvīz Badī'ī, ed., *Guzārishhā-yi awzā'ī Sīyāsī Ijtimā'ī Vilāyāt-i 'Aṣr-i Nāṣirī 1307 Hijrī Qamarī* (Tih-rān: Sāzmān-i Asnād-i Milli-i Irān, 1994), 43. [1 Ṣafar, 1307 H./26 September, 1884].

²⁸ *Farhang*, n. 449 (1 Sha'bān 1304 H./25 April 1887).

²⁹ Muḥammad Taqī Pīshkhidmat, "Safarnāmah-i Hamadān," in *Safarnāmahhā-yi Khaṭṭī-i Fārsī*, ed. Hārūn Vahūman, vol. 2 (Tih-rān: Nashr-i Akhtarān, 2009), 658. The travelogue was undated, but internal evidence suggests it was written just after 1855/6 (1272 H.). See Pīshkhidmat, 639.

him write a note promising to never again engage in such illegal actions. The other two ruffians, however, managed to escape.³⁰

Jews

The shaving of Jewish men's hair, a common occurrence in Shiraz, carried multiple meanings within hair regulations and punishments. At one level, such shaving did connote a subordination and differentiation, as seen in certain hadith and promoted by later jurists. On another level, Shi'i jurists also cited shaving as a punishment for a Jew who falsely accuses a Muslim of *zinā*. In practice, however, many of the Jews punished in this manner were either musicians or involved in facilitating the consumption of alcohol by Muslims. Since both alcohol and music were associated with underground parties frequented by prostitutes, there may have been also a partly sexual rationale for this punishment. In Shiraz, unlike almost all other instances in which government authorities meted out this punishment, the *mujtahid* Sayyid 'Alī Akbar Fālasīrī and his followers were at the forefront, often enacting the punishment against the wishes of local and central governments.

In the summer of 1881, Sayyid 'Alī Akbar Fālasīrī encountered a Jewish man carrying a pitcher (*ẓarf*) of liquor (*'araq*) to the house of a Muslim on a side street; as an act of summary punishment, he broke the man's pitcher and cut off his locks of hair (*zulfhā*). In response, Jews taped a broadsheet (*kāghaz*) to the *mujtahid's* house with the following message: "Why do you forbid us from selling wine? Ban your own mullahs who buy our alcohol. If you want to do such things in the future, we will kill you." This message, dotted with several unmentioned curse words, sent Fālasīrī into a rage, leading him to call--from his pulpit at the Masjid-i Vakīl--for Jews to be killed after the month of Ramaẓān. Ḥājjī Amīr, the Amīr-i Dīvānkhānah (head of the central government judiciary) in Shiraz, went to speak to Fālasīrī: "What kind of ruling is this you have made? Is the killing of Jews in your hands? This is a government issue (*in kār-i dawlatī ast*). Do you want to throw Fars and the country of Iran into disarray?" Ḥājjī Amīr's position was that only the Qajar government had the right to direct violence towards its subjects, not the 'ulamā. Fālasīrī fell momentarily silent, but then spelled out his logic: "Selling wine and playing music (*muṭribī*) must stop. They [the Jews] must shave their heads and refrain from wearing fine clothing (*libās-i fākhīr*). If they do not do so, I will do what I must do."³¹

This episode is striking for a number of reasons. First, much like the hair-cutting punishment for prostitutes and *amrads*, it suggests a shaming function. Second, it is also indicative of a method to further visually differentiate Jewish men from Muslim men; a method made clear in Fālasīrī's later pronouncement that all Jews--not just those guilty of a particular crime--voluntarily shave their locks and not wear elegant clothing. Finally, the fact that this punishment was otherwise primarily associated with women or beardless youth suggests it was a form of emasculation.

All other known cases of Jewish men's hair being shaved related to musicians and dancers, unsurprising given the close association between alcohol, music, dance, and moral crimes. In June 1889, four Jewish musicians (*muṭribis*) played at someone's house at night. Fālasīrī sent a group (*jami'atī*) to raid the party and destroy all the musical instruments. The crowd detained the Jewish musicians and took them to Fālasīrī's home, where they were kept until morning and then "thoroughly punished" (*tanbīh-i kāmil*) and their locks

³⁰ Telegram from Mustawfī al-Mamālik to Nā'ib al-Ḥukūmah, 16 Sha'bān 1301 H./10 June, 1884; Telegram from Nā'ib al-Ḥukūmah to Mustawfī al-Mamālik, 19 Sha'bān 1301 H./13 June, 1884, *Majmū'ah-i Tiligrāfhā-yi Irsālī az Ṭīhrān bih Qum Kāshān Kirmān Shīrāz va Būshīhr 1301-2 H.*, Sāzmān-i Asnād va Kitābkhānah-i Millī [Hereafter SAKM], no. 295/7411, folio 11.

³¹ 'Alī Akbar Sa'īdī Sīrjānī, ed., *Vaqāyī-i Ittifaqīyah: Majmū'ah-i guzārishhā-yi khufiyah nivīsān-i Inglīs dar Vilāyāt-i Junūbī-i Īrān az sāl-i 1291 tā 1322 h.q.* (Tīhrān: Nashr-i Naw, 1982), 139. [5 Ramaẓān-20 Ramaẓān 1298 H./1 August-16 August 1881].

shaved off.³² In another similar event a year later, Fālasīrī had Jewish musicians brought to him and imprisoned, inflicting a *ḥadd* punishment and cutting their locks off in the morning. In response, the government sent a messenger to tell Fālasīrī that, without government involvement, such actions were not correct; he replied with a declaration to sacrifice himself on the path of shari‘ah.³³ Several years later, Fālasīrī was still continuing to raid private parties. In 1892, for example, Fālasīrī sent several seminarians and a sayyid to a residence where Jewish musicians were performing. After the musicians were caught and brought to the *mujtahid*, they were punished extensively with both lashings and shaving their locks. The Bīglarbīgī (police magistrate) was informed of the situation, but instead of being upset with Fālasīrī for encroaching on police work, he had the neighborhood’s day guard (*pākār*) bastinadoed and imprisoned for not informing him of the events.³⁴

The Bīglarbīgī’s same hesitance to punish Fālasīrī and his supporters was also apparent in a case involving a Jewish musician and his dancing boy. Mullā Āqā was a famous Shirazi Jewish musician who employed a Jewish dancing boy of fourteen or fifteen years old. A shoe weaver (*urusidūz*) invited the two to his house on two or three occasions, but they did not attend. One night, the shoe weaver spent quite a bit of money on a party and invited ten to twenty guests. Mullā Āqā attended but did not bring the dancing boy with him, which annoyed the shoe weaver. At a later date, the shoe weaver harassed Mullā Āqā and the dancing boy at another residence. When the two were on their way home eight hours into the night, the shoe weaver gathered fifteen people, all armed with clubs (*yarāq*), to attack them, attempting to abduct the dancing boy. Mullā Āqā fended them off temporarily, but suffered injuries to his head and forehead, and the crowd managed to abduct the dancing boy. Mullā Āqā informed the Bīglarbīgī that same night, and the latter dispatched his head attendant and several agents to investigate, but the investigation led nowhere. The next day, the dancing boy turned up at Fālasīrī’s house. As Fālasīrī’s son intended to shave the boy’s locks, Mullā Āqā offered the son a present (*ta‘āruf*) in exchange for the boy. This indicates that Mullā Āqā was mainly concerned by the punishment’s removal of the boy’s beauty and the associated financial consequences for his entertainment troupe. Meanwhile, the Bīglarbīgī intended to punish (*tanbīh*) the crowd that abducted the boy in the first place, but they responded that they had merely been carrying out the orders of Fālasīrī’s son, who wanted the dancing boy’s locks shaved. As in the previous case, the Bīglarbīgī did not want to take on Fālasīrī’s network and let the matter slide.³⁵

The punitive cutting of men’s hair involved shaming by emasculation, reinforcing subordination in the case of the Jews, and/or reducing male beauty in the case of *amrads*. When carried out in an extralegal fashion, these actions could also signify retribution and dominance. The use of the hair-cutting punishment in the case of male sexual assault on a woman came closest to that found in Islamic jurisprudence for fornication.

Shaving Women’s Hair: Adultery, Prostitution, and Procurement

Men who voluntarily shaved their heads or beards have been written about quite extensively in Islamic history. This is less the case for women who cut their own hair, even though they are no less key to contextualizing the penal (and therefore forced) equivalent. Historically, women voluntary cutting their own hair held associations with mourning, although by the nineteenth century such actions had also taken on other meanings. ‘Alī Aṣghar Fīrūznā argued that women in Persian poetry and prose cut their hair as an act of mourning.³⁶ In the *Shāhnāmāh*, Farangīs, the wife of the slain warrior Siyāvush, cuts her own hair to

³² Sa‘īdī Sīrjānī, 338. [28 Zī Qa‘dah 1306 H./27 July 1889].

³³ Sa‘īdī Sīrjānī, 37–38. [17 Zī Qa‘dah 1307 H./5 July 1890].

³⁴ Sa‘īdī Sīrjānī, 409. [29 Zī Hījāh 1309 H./25 July 1892].

³⁵ Sa‘īdī Sīrjānī, 558. [11 Rajab 1317 H./16 November 1899].

³⁶ ‘Alī Aṣghar Fīrūznā, “Dirakht-i Gisū, Dirakht-i Murād: Bāztāb-i Yikī az Sunan-i ‘Azādārī dar Shī‘r va Naṣr-i Fārsī,” *Arshad-i Āmūzish-i Zabān-i Fārsī* 31, no. 3 (Bahār Shamsī 1397 Sh./Spring 2018): 76–79.

mourn the event.³⁷ In Persian mystic Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tazkirat al-Awliyā* (Memorial of the Saints), a mother mourns her son’s murder by cutting her hair in grief.³⁸ Surprisingly perhaps, female voluntary hair cutting did not have a sexual significance akin to cross-dressing. For instance, there are photos of Qajar-era prostitutes dressed like men, but whose long tresses were still visible even when their hairstyle was distinctly male.³⁹

By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, women cutting their hair short took on new meanings, including entry into battle and (later) championing women’s rights. During the 1850 Zanzibar Babi rebellion, Zaynab, a woman from a peasant background, cut her hair and dressed as a man to join the men in battle. She took on the name Rustam ‘Alī as part of her male persona.⁴⁰ Read through Hallpike’s insights, this episode suggests women’s hair-cutting signified being subject to military discipline. It was also, ostensibly, a way of erasing gender boundaries or at least blurring them in much the same way that shaving a beard was for men, although to allow women to occupy male martial spaces in this case. In the early twentieth century, Ṭayīrah, a female Baha’i poet and champion of women’s rights, had a portrait taken with short hair.⁴¹ Her intention in cutting her hair short is unknown, but it was possibly an assertion of her role as a female intellectual whose worth was not tied to her hair.

In contrast to voluntary acts, the forced cutting of hair was another matter altogether, as the emphasis was on humiliation and shame. According to the majority opinion in Islamic jurisprudence, a woman’s hair was part of her nakedness (*‘awrah*), with legal implications beyond mere veiling.⁴² If an individual cut or shaved a woman’s hair, it constituted an injury for which compensation equivalent to that of either a bride price or an intentional murder (*diyāh*) was due: a full bride’s price if the hair grew back and equivalent to an intentional murder if it did not, indicating that a woman’s hair was a core component of her sanctity. Indeed, Shi’i *fiqh* manuals explicitly forbid shaving an adulterous woman’s hair while, at the same time, prescribing it for men.⁴³ The point of this punishment was exposure, and exposing a woman’s bare head to the gaze of unrelated men undermined the potential intended goal of restoring community morality. Despite the lack of this punishment in Islamic jurisprudence for a female fornicator (and, by extension, a female prostitute or pimp), governments did use hair punishments for these crimes, primarily in cases of sexual deviance and immorality. Indeed, female prostitutes, pimps, and adulterers had their hair shaved, usually before being paraded on a pack animal backwards through the city or town. While there was clearly an element of publicness in the ritualistic exposure of shaved women’s heads, there were rare instances of husbands carrying out such acts against their wives as a domestic disciplinary measure. A woman with cut locks (*gisū buridah*) was synonymous with shamelessness.⁴⁴ In “Sang-i Šabūr,” the folk story collected by Šadiq Hidāyat, a king punishes

³⁷ Abū al-Qāsim Firdawsī, *Šāhnāmāh* (Tihārān: Sahāmī, 1990), 2: 206 cited in Fīrūznīā, 77.

³⁸ Farid al-Din ‘Attar, *The Tadhkiratu ‘l-Awliya*, ed. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson and Muhammad Qazwini (London: Luzac & Co., 1905), 2: 210.

³⁹ See, for instance, “Two women dressed as men along with a man,” *Women’s Worlds in Qajar Iran*, <http://www.qajarrowomen.org/en/items/1261A109.html>.

⁴⁰ Nabil Zarandi, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Baha’i Revelation*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá’í Pub. Trust, 1999), 550. For a biographical sketch of Zaynab, see John Walbridge, “Zaynab,” in *Amazons to Fighter Pilots, a Biographical Dictionary of Military Women*, ed. Reina Pennington (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 503–4.

⁴¹ “Ṭayīrah Khanum,” *Women’s Worlds in Qajar Iran*, <http://www.qajarrowomen.org/en/items/14133B15.html>. For more on her place among other early twentieth-century Iranian poets, see Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, “Women Poets,” in *Literature of the Early Twentieth Century: From the Constitutional Period to Reza Shah, A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, vol. XI (London: Tauris, 2015), 240–310.

⁴² Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Search for Beauty in Islam: A Conference of the Books* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 193.

⁴³ Najafī, *Jawāhir al-Kalām*, 41: 328–9, 400–401; Haider Ala Hamoudi, “Sex and the Shari’a: Defining Gender Norms and Sexual Deviancy in Shi’i Islam,” *Fordham International Law Journal* 39, no. 1 (2015): 56.

⁴⁴ s.v. “gisū-burida,” Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*; s.v. “gisū buridah,” ‘Alī Akbar Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāmāh* (Tihārān: Majlis, 1947).



Image 1. Women punished by having their hair tied to the tail of a donkey in a scene from *Chihil Ṭūti*, dated 1851 (1268 H.). Source: Ulrich Marzolph and Roxana Zenhari, *Mirzā ‘Ali-Qoli Kho‘i: The Master Illustrator of Persian Lithographed Books in the Qajar Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 2: 278.

one of his faithless and treacherous wives by having her hair tied to the tail of a donkey who rides off into the desert.⁴⁵ A very similar scene was depicted in the nineteenth-century Persian lithograph *Chihil Ṭūti*, where a king’s two “lecherous” wives are executed in the same manner [see Image 1].⁴⁶ While these fictional narratives did not include shaving per se, they did associate the punishment for female illicit acts with hair. Within the domicile, husbands sometimes carried out retributive acts that mirrored the penal act of shaving a woman’s hair. For instance, ‘Alī Akbar, the previous water carrier (*ābdār*) of ‘Alā al-Dawlah, became drunk, returned home, and fought with his wife in the ‘Udlājān neighborhood of Tehran. During their altercation, he pulled out his knife, cut her tresses (*gīsū-yi ū rā burīdah*), and injured her hand.⁴⁷

Women’s moral crimes, particularly prostitution and adultery, were occasionally punished by shaving their hair. This was in stark contrast to the early modern Ottoman context, where similar crimes were typically punished by fines, corporal punishment, or banishment.⁴⁸ In his 1861 German-language account, Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh’s Austrian physician, Jakob Eduard Polak, provided a broad picture of how prostitutes were punished for moral

⁴⁵ Ṣādiq Hidāyat, *Majmū‘ah-i Nivishtahhā-yi Parākandah-i Ṣādiq Hidāyat*, ed. Ḥasan Qā’imiyān, 2nd ed. (Tih-rān: Amīr Kabīr, 1965), 138.

⁴⁶ For the reproduction of this image of the false bride being punished in the story, *Chihil Ṭūti*, see Ulrich Marzolph and Roxana Zenhari, *Mirzā ‘Ali-Qoli Kho‘i: The Master Illustrator of Persian Lithographed Books in the Qajar Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 2: 278. For a discussion of the story, see Ulrich Marzolph and Roxana Zenhari, *Mirzā ‘Ali-Qoli Kho‘i: The Master Illustrator of Persian Lithographed Books in the Qajar Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 1: 82.

⁴⁷ “Report from the ‘Udlājān neighborhood dated 5 June, 1867/1 Ṣafar 1284 H.,” *Vaqāyī‘-i Maḥallāt-i Ṭih-rān Shāmil-i Sirqat Fahshā Nizā‘-i afrād Sharb-i Musakkarāt va Ahkām-i Ijrā shudah dar Mawrid-i Muttahimīn*, SAKM, no. 295/3499, folio 3.

⁴⁸ For three excellent studies of sex crimes and punishments in the early modern Ottoman context, see Elyse Semerdjian, “Off the Straight Path”: *Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008); Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul: 1700–1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Dror Ze’evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

crimes. According to Polak, this punishment was usually “at the instigation of the ‘ulamā” but carried out by government authorities. Prostitutes were rounded up, had their heads shaved, and were paraded around the city on donkeys before being banished.⁴⁹ Missing from this account, however, were the specificities of particular cases, as he claimed this punishment was used universally in Tabriz, Qazvin, Hamadan, and Qum. The account of Charles Wills, an English physician residing in Iran between 1866 and 1881, seems to corroborate Polak’s general claims, although Wills addressed the case of an adulterous woman rather than a prostitute. Relaying the account of a Shirazi informant, Wills reported a woman being paraded bareheaded throughout town, her hair shaved off, sitting backwards on a donkey and accompanied by buffoons singing and dancing, with Jewish musicians forced to play the accompanying tunes. Unlike the prostitutes in Polak’s case, she was not banished; instead, she was executed by being thrown down a well.⁵⁰

Persian sources often provide more concrete details than the schematic picture drawn by European observers. A summary report from early 1860s Shiraz described an instance in which a female pimp (*jākish*) hindered (*zajr*) a female guest from leaving her house where ten to fifteen people were present, presumably including unrelated men. This seems to have been a case of entrapment and procurement of the female guest. The city’s chief attendant (Farrāshbāshī) caught the madam in question, had her tresses (*gīs*) shaved off, put her in a bridle, placed her on a pack animal, and paraded her around the bazaar so that others “would hold themselves accountable” (*hisāb-i khūd rā bidānand*). The spectacle had elements of bestialization (the bridle, the pack animal) and shaming (shaving hair and the parade) central to Qajar-era publicizing punishments.⁵¹

Soldiers were often among those caught frequenting prostitutes or women deemed sexually immoral in nineteenth-century Iran. Women caught with soldiers in morally compromised positions seem to have been particularly singled out for punishment, possibly due to their threat to army discipline. In one instance in Shiraz, cavalrymen had a party at night in their barracks (*sarbāzkhānah*), brought “several immoral women” (*chand zan-i kharāb*), and drank and partied through the night. The governor ordered his attendants (*farrāshān*) to detain and imprison the women while keeping the cavalry in their barracks until morning. Instead, however, the cavalrymen beat up the attendants. When the governor learned of this, he sent attendants backed by soldiers to punish and beat the guilty cavalrymen as well as detain and imprison the women. In the morning, the governor ruled that the women’s hair would be shaved and they would be released.⁵² In another instance, an official of Fars Governor Farhād Mīrzā Muṭamid al-Dawlah observed two women speaking with a soldier in the street and chastised and admonished (*naṣīhat*) them. Instead of listening, however, the soldier injured the official, who then reported the case to the governor. The governor ruled that the two women be detained, have their hair shaved, and be paraded around in the streets.⁵³ On another occasion, several gunners hosted a woman at their house. The governor, Qavām al-Mulk, in addition to punishing the gunners, summoned the woman, had her hair shaved off, and paraded her around the streets and bazaar.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Eduard Polak [1861] 1982, “Prostitution in Persien,” in *Jahrbuch 1982 des Verbandes Iranischer Akademiker in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Berlin-West* (Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1982), 2: 40 reproduced and translated in Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 66.

⁵⁰ Charles James Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and Sun, or Modern Persia: Being Experiences of Life in Persia from 1866 to 1881* (London: Ward, Lock, 1891), 275–76.

⁵¹ “Guzārīsh az Dār al-‘Ilm-i Shirāz,” in Khānbābā Bayānī, *Panjāh Sāl Tārīkh-i Īrān dar Dawrah-i Nāṣirī: Mustanad bih Asnād-i Tārīkhī va Ārshivī*, vol. 4–6 (Tihārān: Nashr-i ‘Ilm, 1996), 367. The undated document is from the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive. Internal evidence suggests the case occurred in the early 1860s.

⁵² Sa‘īdī Sīrjānī, *Vaqāyī-i Ittīfāqīyah*, 82. [From 20 Muḥarram to 17 Šafar 1295 H./From 24 January 1878 to 20 February 1878].

⁵³ Sa‘īdī Sīrjānī, 104. [From 26 Zī Hījāh 1295 until 26 Muḥarram 1296 H./From 21 December 1878 to 19 January 1879].

⁵⁴ Sa‘īdī Sīrjānī, 191. [From 23 Sha‘bān 1300/29 June 1883].

Despite this, not all shaving sentences seem to have been carried out, due to either popular objection to shaving and publicly parading women or because a fine was paid instead. In the summer of 1877, Muṭamid al-Dawlah attended a case in which three women were proven to be prostitutes. In the government garden (*bāgh-i ḥukūmatī*) before a “public crowd” (*dar malāʿi ʿamm*), he ruled that the chief executioner, Mīr Ghazab, shave the three women’s heads and parade them around the bazaar without hijab. But public reaction to this ruling was unfavorable; people in the bazaar were upset and intended to “cause a disturbance” (*khiyāl-i ghawghāʾi dāshtand*). They asked, “What kind of action is this that is occurring in a Muslim land in punishing (*tanbīh*) women.” Before the punishment could be carried out, Qavam al-Mulk, the Kalāntar (police magistrate), stopped it.⁵⁵ This remarkable account suggests that people objected to the shaving punishment for women because it contravened shariʿah, an objection consistent with the rules laid out in Islamic jurisprudence.

Finally, in a petition and report from the town of Khāf in Khurasan province dated December 23, 1886 (27 Rabīʿ al-Avval 1304 H.), the daughter of Mīr Ḥusayn was caught by her husband in the middle of “vile sex acts” (*mubāshirat-i shanaʿātī*) with a man named Aḥmad. The husband made the matter public (*maṣalah rā ʿumūmī kard*) by petitioning (*taẓallum*) the local government. While the adulterous man was put in a bridle, had his ear cut off, and was paraded through the side streets and bazaars, the daughter was kept in the house of the local headman (*kadkhudā*) waiting for her hair to be shaved before her punitive parade. Before her punishment was implemented, however, her father interceded, arranged for a forty tumān fine (*taʿāruf*), and pleaded for her to be forgiven. According to the note on the ensuing investigation in the presence of the judge and deputy (*khalīfah*), Mīr Darvish Khān—a local official—accepted the forty tumāns in the presence of a council.⁵⁶

Women’s hair punishments were distinctly sexual in nature; government officials not only punished women for their crimes, but also exposed and humiliated them by removing markers of their beauty and sexuality. Despite the gender difference, this paralleled the shaving of the lock punishment inflicted on *amrads*. Women’s exposure for violating sexual norms flew in the face of Islamic jurisprudence, sometimes leading to popular objections to its violation of the shariʿah.

Removing Men’s Facial Hair

The removal of a man’s facial hair, including a beard or mustache, was a form of emasculation: a mature beardless man was, in a sense, naked and exposed.⁵⁷ Facial hair was one of the visible markers of manhood; its voluntary removal was, therefore, socially stigmatized.⁵⁸ Those who purposely shaved their own facial hair were known as *amradnumā*, or those who made themselves appear as beardless youth.⁵⁹ According to Ahmad Karamustafa, within the spiritual coordinates or certain forms of mysticism, such as the *qalandariyah*, the intentional removal of facial hair was meant to court social disapproval and blame, as “loss of hair

⁵⁵ Saʿīdī Sirjānī, 73. [7 Jumādī al-Ṣani-13 Rajab 1294 H./19–24 July 1877].

⁵⁶ “Petitions and Responses from Khāf dated 27 Rabīʿ al-Avval 1304 H./December 23, 1886,” *Rūznāmah-i Umūrāt-i Ittifāqiyah-i Vilāyat-i Sulsah*, SAKM, no. 295/7688, folio 31.

⁵⁷ For a short but useful overview of the meaning of beards in a variety of geographic and historical contexts, see Marion Dowd, “Beards: An Archaeological and Historical Overview,” in *A Glorious Gallimaufry: A Collection of Interesting Things in Honour of Nick Maxwell*, ed. Gabriel Cooney, K. M. Davies, and Una MacConville (Dublin: Wordwell, 2010), 38–42.

⁵⁸ For studies of the beard’s shifting meanings in contemporary Iran and other Muslim societies, see Faegheh Shirazi, “Manly Matters in Iran: From Beards to Turbans,” in *Critical Encounters, Essays on Persian Literature and Culture in Honor of Peter J. Chelkowski*, ed. Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami and M. R. Ghanoonparvar (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2007), 145–66; Faegheh Shirazi, “Men’s Facial Hair in Islam: A Matter of Interpretation,” in *Hair: Styling, Culture and Fashion*, ed. Geraldine Biddle-Perry and Sarah Cheang (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), 111–22.

⁵⁹ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 16.

symbolized loss of honor and social status.”⁶⁰ The Qalandar shaving of the hair, beard, mustache, and eyebrows was known as the “four blows” (*chāhār zarb*), which contravened the Prophetic tradition of long mustaches and beards.⁶¹ Qalandars also viewed gazing upon the face of a beardless youth as a reminder of God’s beauty, as the face was unobstructed by hair.⁶² As a forcible act, the removal of facial hair could also be an extralegal form of retribution. In the romance narrative of Husayn Kurd Shabistārī popular during the Qajar era, the protagonist rips the mustaches off the faces of his foes as an individual act of retribution expressed through dishonoring and emasculating the enemy.⁶³

Men voluntarily shaving their beards, intending to look like beardless youth, was itself a crime in many Muslim societies. In eighteenth-century Ottoman Damascus, for example, a governor forbade Muslims from shaving their beards and threatened to cut off the hands of any barber who aided them.⁶⁴ Safavid-era (1501–1722) *farmāns* also banned shaving beards. Shāh Ṭahmāsb prohibited beard shaving in a pietistic *farmān* dated September 16, 1534.⁶⁵ Later, Shāh Ṣafī banned the shaving of the beard in a *farmān* also regulating other illicit activities.⁶⁶ Safavid-era ‘ulamā supported such measures in their own legal responsa (*fatvās*). For instance, the jurist Āqā Khānsārī issued *fatvās* prohibiting voluntary beard shaving despite his own private proclivity for beardless youth.⁶⁷

These formal prohibitions and rationales continued to be relevant well into the Qajar period. Zayn al-‘Ābidīn Khān Kirmānī, for instance, argued that shaving the beard was an act committed by the people of Lot.⁶⁸ Muḥammad Shafī‘ Qazvīnī believed that had there been such beautiful *amrads* at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, there would be a Quranic verse requiring them to veil. He proposed that Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh issue a regulation (*qarārdād*) banning any man from shaving his beard. If the authorities caught a man doing so, they should be imprisoned for a few days, until the facial hair grew back. The purpose of this was to avoid them appearing barefaced (*sādah*) in public, as Qazvīnī believed that male beardlessness was akin to nudity.⁶⁹ The ‘ulamā of the Qajar period continued to issue bans similar to their Safavid predecessors: I‘timād al-Salṭānah noted that the ‘ulamā of Tehran prohibited men from shaving their beards and women from wearing a particular type of footwear, possibly a form of high heels, known as *pāshnah nakhāb*.⁷⁰

In the late Qajar period, the shaving of beards was often closely associated with the culture of the bathhouse (*ḥammām*). Indeed, the Shaykhī jurist Muḥammad Karīm Khān

⁶⁰ Ahmet Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Middle Period 1200–1550* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 19.

⁶¹ Karamustafa, 19, 39, 43, 66. As Shahzad Bashir has demonstrated, in certain forms of Sufi initiation, the cutting of hair could also signify “socio-religious cohesion” rather than its restriction or elimination. Shahzad Bashir, “The Mediation of Hair: Sūfi, Hurūfī, and Poetic Usages in Persian Texts,” *Al-Masāq* 30, no. 1 (January, 2018): 97.

⁶² Lange, “Beards of Paradise,” 120.

⁶³ Ulrich Marzolph, “A Treasury of Formulaic Narrative: The Persian Popular Romance Hosein-e Kord,” *Oral Tradition* 14, no. 2 (1999): 292.

⁶⁴ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 198.

⁶⁵ This *farmān* is preserved in the Mīr ‘Imād Mosque in Kāshān, see Saīd Amir Arjomand, *Sociology of Shi‘ite Islam* (Boston: Brill, 2018), 154, 159.

⁶⁶ Rasūl Ja‘fariān, “Amr bih Ma‘rūf va Nahy az Munkar dar Dawrah-i Ṣafavi,” *Kayhān-i Andishah*, no. 82 (1999): 70; Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 300. For further discussion of the Safavid shaving ban, see Kathryn Babayan, *The City as Anthology: Eroticism and Urbanity in Early Modern Isfahan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), 23.

⁶⁷ Babayan, *The City as Anthology*, 89–90.

⁶⁸ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 142.

⁶⁹ Muḥammad Shafī‘ Qazvīnī, *Qānūn-i Qazvīnī: Intiqād-i Awza‘-i Ijtimā‘ī-i Īrān-i Dawrah-i Nāṣiri*, ed. Īraj Afshār (Tīhrān: Ṭalāyah, 1991), 123; Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 144. Qazvīnī’s punishment of the barefaced man sounds oddly like the *fiqh* punishment for a man who shaves a woman’s hair. In such a situation, the man would be imprisoned until such time as the woman’s hair grew back. For the shaving punishment in Shi‘i *fiqh*, see Hamoudi, “Sex and the Shari‘a,” 56.

⁷⁰ Muḥammad Ḥasan Khān I‘timād al-Salṭānah, *Rūznāmah-i Khātirāt-i I‘timād al-Salṭānah*, ed. Īraj Afshār (Tīhrān: Amīr Kabīr, 2000), 830; Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 144.

Kirmānī placed the sin both on the person who wanted their beard shaved and the bath attendant who did the shaving.⁷¹ On April 22, 1841, in Isfahan, a certain Muḥammad Raḥīm Khān went to the door of a public bath in the Mīrābād neighborhood and asked the bath attendant (*dallāk*) to “shave [his] face” (*ṣurat-i marā bitarāsh*). The attendant refused, most likely because doing so was tantamount to being complicit in making the man look like an *amrad*. As a result, the two men exchanged words and came to blows. The police prefect (*dārūghah*) was informed of the situation, but by the time one of his men arrived, several people had already brought about a reconciliation.⁷² Close to half a century later, several mullahs in Isfahan banned the city’s bath attendants from shaving men’s beards. When one *dallāk* broke this rule, a prominent *‘ālim*, Hājji Sayyid Ja’far Bīdābādī, captured him and beat him thoroughly.⁷³

The lines between retribution and government-sanctioned punishment were blurred, however, especially in murder cases. In the medieval Mamluk Empire, a sultan’s governor (*walī*) in Damietta was known for seizing assets, women, and youth. The locals rose up, raided his house, shaved off half his beard and mustache, put him on a camel, paraded him through town, and executed him.⁷⁴ In mid-nineteenth-century Isfahan, when the wife of a murdered man saw her husband’s murderer, she ripped off his mustache with her bare hands and burned the remaining hairs with the flame of her lamp. He was then detained by city authorities.⁷⁵ After assassinating Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh in 1896, Mīrza Rizā Kirmānī was attacked by the crowd who witnessed the murder: one person ripped off his mustache, another tore off his beard, and another bit off his ear while others punched and wailed on him. The prime minister intervened and had him detained.⁷⁶

Within the penal context, medieval Muslim jurists viewed beard shaving as prohibited because it constituted a form of mutilation (*muthlah*).⁷⁷ Despite this, a number of government authorities still employed this specific form of punishment in Muslim societies. In 1696, a court witness who produced “fraudulent documents, had his beard shaved before being paraded through Cairo’s markets on a camel, accompanied by a crier announcing his offenses to the crowds.”⁷⁸ This use of the beard shaving punishment was consistent in spirit, if not in letter, with the aforementioned shaving of head hair punishment for false accusations of *zinā* in Islamic jurisprudence. In early fourteenth-century Delhi, Sultan Muḥammad bin Tughlugh wanted to appoint a renown Sufi shaykh to an official post; when the latter refused, the sultan had his beard hairs plucked out before banishing him from the city.⁷⁹ The founder of the Mughal dynasty, Babur, threatened those within his troops who stood by while other warriors fought opposing Afghans with being “paraded around town with your beards cut so that anyone who lets such an enemy defeat such a warrior and stands by watching on such flat ground without lifting a finger may get his just deserts.”⁸⁰ In early modern Iran, the clipping of the mustache functioned as a way of erasing

⁷¹ Karīm Khān Kirmānī, *Majma’ al-Rasā’il-i Fārsī*, 2:146 cited in Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 144.

⁷² “Vaqāyī’-i Dār al-Salṭanah-i Iṣfahān III,” (1841), Malik Library, No. 1080909. [April 22, 1841/29 Ṣafar, 1257 H.].

⁷³ Badī’ī, *Guzārishhā*, 30 [10 Zī Qa’dah 1307 H./28 June 1890]; Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 144.

⁷⁴ Carl F. Petry, *The Criminal Underworld in a Medieval Islamic Society: Narratives from Cairo and Damascus under the Mamluks* (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2016), 92.

⁷⁵ Haruṭfiwn T^c Tēr Hovhaneants’, *Tārikh-i Julfā-yi Iṣfahān*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Alī Mūsavi Farīdānī, trans. L. G. Minasean (Iṣfahān: Nashr-i Zindah Rūd, 1379), 357.

⁷⁶ Muḥammad ‘Alī Sayyāh Maḥallāti, *Khātirāt-i Hājji Sayyāh, yā, Dawrah-i khawf va vaḥshat*, ed. Ḥamid Sayyāh and Sayfullāh Gulkār (Tīhrān: Amīr Kabīr, 1980), 460.

⁷⁷ Christian Lange and Maribel Fierro, “Spatial, Ritual and Representational Aspects of Public Violence in Islamic Societies (7th-19th Centuries C.E.),” in *Public Violence in Islamic Societies: Power, Discipline, and the Construction of the Public Sphere, 7th-19th Centuries C.E.*, ed. Christian Lange and Maribel Fierro (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 6.

⁷⁸ James E. Baldwin, *Islamic Law and Empire in Ottoman Cairo, Islamic Law and Empire in Ottoman Cairo* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 37.

⁷⁹ Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, ed. Tim Mackintosh-Smith (London: Picador, 2002), 177.

⁸⁰ Babur, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, trans. Wheeler Thackston (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 293.

differences among Muslims. The father of Muşliḥ al-Dīn Lāri was known for patrolling the streets of Lār and clipping the “luxuriant mustaches” that Shi‘is were known to sport prior to the ascendance of the Safavids.⁸¹ Shāh Ṭahmāsb had Amīr Qavām al-Dīn, the leader of the Nūrbakhshīyah Order, interrogated in his presence by a judge (*qāzī*) before deciding that Qavām al-Dīn had acted more like a king than a dervish, especially as he had been amassing arms. After his interrogation, Qavām al-Dīn was imprisoned, had his beard set on fire, and was finally executed.⁸²

Drawing perhaps on this same repertoire, similar punishments were meted out during the Qajar period. Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh had the beard of Ḥājī Hāshim Khān, an upstart rebel in Isfahan, shaved with a dull razor as part of his slow ritualistic execution.⁸³ Based on an ‘ulamā complaint to Governor Ḥusayn Khān Ajūdānbāshī in Shiraz, the early Babi Mullā Şādiq and his companions were arrested for preaching the new message in the Bāqirābād Mosque. The governor had them beaten with sticks, their beards burnt, and bridled and paraded them through the city.⁸⁴ Early in his reign in 1861, Nāşir al-Dīn Shāh punished the police magistrate of Tehran, Maḥmūd Khān Kalāntar, for failing to keep order amidst serious, famine-related bread riots by having his beard shaved off, beaten with sticks, and then strangled to death.⁸⁵ Around the same time, Nāşir al-Dīn Shāh ordered that Qajar princes who recited offensive satirical poetry (*ḥajvīyah*) have their beards shaved.⁸⁶ Later in his reign, however, Nāşir al-Dīn Shāh appears to have accepted such punishments as excessive and unnecessary cruelty; at the very least, he no longer wanted his governors to implement them. Having recently banned torture and excessive punishment, Nāşir al-Dīn Shāh considered beard shaving to be an extralegal example of the same. In Bujnūrd, Governor Saḥām al-Dawlah shaved the beards of criminals and threw them off roofs. The shāh considered these to be illegal actions (*ḥarakāt-i khalāf-i qā’idah*) and asked the official Āşif al-Dawlah to chastise the wayward governor.⁸⁷

Paradoxically, the cutting of facial hair was deemed a crime when done voluntarily but a punishment when done forcibly. Those who challenged government authority or violated prevailing orthodox religious norms were especially singled out for facial hair punishments, as such signified a loss of status, emasculation, or an act of retribution.

Bareheaded and Hat Punishments

In many Muslim societies, social attitudes dictated that men and women both cover their heads. As James Grehan notes, only a Sufi considered extraordinarily pious could appear bareheaded, which was also sometimes understood as a divine form of madness.⁸⁸ Being bareheaded (*sar barahnah*) was a form of exposure for both men and women, although much more consequential for women. Since headgear was one of the most prominent markers of status, its removal constituted a stripping of belonging to a legible status group, whether a tribe, profession, or religious group. In a sense, being bareheaded signified bare life; ejection from a social group meant entering the realm of the bestial. According to Esther Cohen, nudity and the divestiture of clothing were the most common mechanisms

⁸¹ Hamid Algar, “Persian Literature in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 5, no. 2 (1994): 256.

⁸² Arjomand, *Sociology of Shi‘ite Islam*, 342.

⁸³ ‘Abd al-Razzāq Maftūn Dunbulī, *Ma‘āsir-i Sulṭāniyah: Tārīkh-i Janghā-yi Īrān va Rūs*, ed. Ghulām Ḥusayn Şadrī Afshār (Tīhrān: Ibn Sīnā, 1972), 388; Tēr Hovhaneants‘, *Tārīkh-i Julfā-yi Īsfahān*, 326.

⁸⁴ Ḥabībullah Afnān, *Tārīkh-i Amrī-i Shīrāz* (n.p., n.d.), 66–67. The same episode is narrated in *The Times*, 1 November 1845, 5 reproduced in Moojan Momen, ed., *The Bābī and Bahā‘ī Religions, 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), 69.

⁸⁵ Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā‘ī Religions, 1844–1944*, 172–73.

⁸⁶ Jakob Eduard Polak, *Safarnāmah-i Pūlak: Īrān va Īrāniān*, trans. Kaykāvūs Jahāndāri (Tīhrān: Shirkat-i Sahāmi-yi Intishārāt-i Khwārazmī, 1989), 228.

⁸⁷ Nāşir al-Dīn Shāh’s imperial order (*dastkhāṭ*) to Āşif al-Dawlah dated 22 Sha‘bān 1302 H./16 May 1887 reproduced in Bayāni, *Panjāh Sāl Tārīkh-i Īrān*, 4–6:140.

⁸⁸ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 192–93.

of status deprivation in medieval France.⁸⁹ Divestiture and nudity were preparatory stages for capital punishment. She argues convincingly that “nudity was thus a symbolic social death.”⁹⁰ The public removal of a man’s headgear by an authority, especially during a ritual penal parade, signified humiliation and punishment during the Qajar era.⁹¹ In Persian, there is a strong association between having one’s hat removed and being made a fool, as illustrated by the expression “having [one’s] hat removed” (*kulāh bardāsh-tan*). In fact, the person who removes the hat (*kulāhbardār*) is a trickster or thief.⁹²

In nineteenth-century Iran, explicit references were made to people being paraded around bareheaded, including prominent religious figures and dissidents considered a threat to the ‘ulamā and/or government authorities. Three striking instances included Babi movement founder Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad (the Bāb), the founder of the Baha’i religion, Baha’u’llah, and the Pan-Islamist Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī, popularly known as al-Afghānī. In the lead-up to his execution in Tabriz’s Sabzakhkānah Kūchak Maydān, the Bāb was paraded around the city with a bare head and bare feet. His turban and sash—markers of his status as a *sayyid*—had been removed. Not only was this intended to shame and expose the Bāb, but also reduce him to bare life before his execution in 1850. As it was generally taboo to shed the blood of a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad (*sayyid*), removing visible markers of such descent was likely symbolically necessary to making such an extraordinary act possible.⁹³ The Bāb and Baha’u’llah, the later founder of the Baha’i Faith, had similar experiences of being paraded without headgear, but to prison rather than an execution site. Baha’u’llah recounted having his feet chained and a man, possibly an attendant or executioner, snatching the hat off his head while parading him bareheaded and barefooted to Siyāh Chāl Prison in Tehran in 1852.⁹⁴ Finally, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, who resided in Tehran for some time and whom the authorities suspected of seditious activities, was forcibly dragged out of the sanctuary of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīm by government attendants in 1891. After the attendants kicked and beat him, al-Afghānī was taken out in the snow bareheaded and barefoot. At one point, even his drawstrings loosened, and his genitals were exposed. Later, when he was about to be exiled from the city and country, he was forced to remove his turban once more, put on a pack horse (*asb-i pālānī*), and had his feet bound by chains from under the animal.⁹⁵

Visual evidence from nineteenth-century Iran, whether photographs or lithographic images, rarely presents a criminal with any sort of headgear on, especially those being taken to the gallows.⁹⁶ In the early 1860s, the official state newspaper included the execution scene of a religious teacher who had raped and later killed his young male student. The lithograph sketch depicts the boy’s uncle as he is about to behead the murderer. Strikingly, the condemned man is bareheaded while all other males in the scene are wearing headgear [See Image 2].⁹⁷ This lends credence to the notion that the removal of social status markers and reduction to bare life were necessary preludes to legal executions. While this example was based on a historical incident, lithographic scenes of captured criminals from fictional works also depict the men as bareheaded. In one scene, for instance, three criminals about to be

⁸⁹ Esther Cohen, *The Crossroads of Justice: Law and Culture in Late Medieval France* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 169.

⁹⁰ Cohen, 170.

⁹¹ Shirazi, “Manly Matters in Iran,” 148. Balslev argues that it also constituted a form of emasculation. Balslev, *Iranian Masculinities*, 235.

⁹² s. v. “kulāhbardārī,” in Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāmah*.

⁹³ Muḥammad Mahdī Khān Za‘īm al-Dawlah, *Miftāḥ Bāb al-Abwāb*, trans. Ḥasan Farīd Gulpāyīgānī (Tih-rān: Shams, 1961), 159. For the Arabic original, see Muḥammad Mahdī Khān Za‘īm al-Dawlah, *Miftāḥ Bāb al-Abwāb* (Egypt: al-Manār, 1903), 238. See also Nabil Zarandī, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 507; Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), 402.

⁹⁴ Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971), 20–21.

⁹⁵ Sayyāḥ Maḥallātī, *Khātirāt-i Hājī Sayyāḥ*, 329.

⁹⁶ Those receiving minor punishments, such as the bastinado, however, were usually depicted with hats on.

⁹⁷ *Rūznāmah-i Dawlat-i ‘Ilīyah-i Īrān*, n.504 (10 Jumādī al-Avval 1278 H./13 November 1861).



Image 2. A murderer-rapist about to be beheaded in Shiraz.

Source: *Rūznāmeh-i Dawlat-i ‘Illyah-i Īrān*, n.504 (10 Jumādī al-Avval 1278 H./13 November 1861).

beheaded are shown bareheaded [See Image 3].⁹⁸ In another execution scene, a veiled woman prepares to execute a bound, bareheaded man [See Image 4].⁹⁹ Photographic evidence of corporal and capital punishment further substantiates that criminals were almost always bareheaded during their punishment. A photo of a man after his beheading at the gallows in Tehran shows no hat or headgear near him [See Image 5].¹⁰⁰ Shaykh Mazkūr Khān ‘Arab, who rebelled against the Qajars and minted coins, was publicly hanged bareheaded in Shiraz for his seditious activities [See Image 6].¹⁰¹ Again in Shiraz, a man about to be blown out of a cannon had his disheveled hair on full display for the camera before his eventual death [See Image 7].¹⁰²

If being bareheaded constituted one form of shaming, being forced to wear a hat not suited to one’s social status was another. For men in the Ottoman Empire, and arguably throughout many Muslim societies, turbans were a marker of social rank.¹⁰³ Islamic primary

⁹⁸ *Akhlāq-i Muhsinī*, 1851 (1268 H.) reproduced in Ulrich Marzolph, *Narrative Illustration in Persian Lithographed Books* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 99.

⁹⁹ *Mukhtār-nāmāh*, 1845 (1261 H.) reproduced in Marzolph, 72.

¹⁰⁰ Antoin Sevruguin, “Criminal Execution Persia, Late 19th Century,” The Nelson Collection of Qajar Photography, <https://www.thenelsoncollection.co.uk/artists/26-antoin-sevruguin/works/9762/>

¹⁰¹ Sa’īdī Sirjānī, *Vaqāyī-i Ittifaqiyah*, recto 201.

¹⁰² Sa’īdī Sirjānī, recto 431.

¹⁰³ Grehan, *Everyday Life*, 193.



Image 3. Three criminals about to be beheaded in a scene from the Persian lithograph *Akhlaq-i Muhsini*, dated 1851 (1268 H.).

Source: Ulrich Marzolph, *Narrative Illustration in Persian Lithographed Books* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 99.

school (*maktab*) teachers in Iran disciplined lazy children by making them stand in front of the class wearing a paper hat and their clothes on backwards, in a manner reminiscent of the dunce cap in England.¹⁰⁴ In an educational setting, this disciplinary action directly mirrored the shaming function of ritualistic hat punishments. Similar to removing a hat, placing a hat on someone's head (*kulāh bar sar-i kasī guzāshān*) connoted tricking or making a fool of them in the Persian language.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Mahdī Partavī Āmuli, *Rishahhā-yi Tārīkhī-i Amṣāl va Hikam* (Tihārān: Sana'i, 1974), 2: 814.

¹⁰⁵ s.v. "kulāh guzāshān," Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāmah*.



Image 4. A veiled woman about to execute a bareheaded man in a scene from the Persian lithograph *Mukhtār-nāmah*, dated 1845 (1261 H.).

Source: Ulrich Marzolph, *Narrative Illustration*, 72.

The elements that made a hat so ridiculous and shameful included the material from which it was made, such as felt or paper, or its fit, which was usually too wide for the person's head and slid down their face. In medieval Islamic *hisbah* manuals, those punished in this manner had to wear hats with special bells on them, bringing to the fore an auditory dimension and perhaps equating the person with a pack animal wearing a bell. Such punishments were also gendered: sources only speak of men being punished in this manner. The Persian term *takhtah kulāh* refers to a wooden hat with bells that is placed on the heads of criminals.¹⁰⁶ In the Safavid era, Jean Chardin noted the use of this punishment on

¹⁰⁶ s. v. "takhtah kulāh," *Dihkhudā*.



2005. Les Exécutions Capitales en Perse
Après la pendaison le corps est exposé sur une plate-forme, les indigènes
défilent devant le cadavre
J. H. Déposé

Image 5. Photo of a beheaded man in late nineteenth-century Tehran.

Source: Antoin Sevruguin, "Criminal Execution Persia, Late 19th Century," The Nelson Collection of Qajar Photography, <https://www.thenelsoncollection.co.uk/artists/26-antoin-sevruguin/works/9762/>



Image 6. The hanging of Shaykh Mazkūr Khān ‘Arab in nineteenth-century Shiraz.

Source: ‘Alī Akbar Sa‘īdi Sirjāni, ed., *Vaqāyī-i Ittifaqiyah: Majmū‘ah-i guzārishhā-yi khufiyah nivīsān-i Inglis dar Vilāyāt-i Junūbi-i Īran az sāli 1291 tā 1322 h.q.* (Tih-rān: Nashr-i Naw, 1982), recto 201.

those who used false measures in the bazaar. The criminal was made to wear a wooden board with a bell in front and a long straw cap (*un haut bonnet de paille*) before being paraded around the neighborhood to the jeers of the local rabble.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, Engelbert Kaempfer described the hat as very wide, covering the head and shoulders, and adorned with bells and a single fox tail.¹⁰⁸ The Persian eighteenth-century administrative manual

¹⁰⁷ Jean Chardin, *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin*, 6: 129 reproduced in Vladimir Minorsky, *Tadhkirat Al-Mulūk: A Manual of Safavid Administration (circa 1137–1725)* (London: Luzac, 1943), 149–50.

¹⁰⁸ For the Latin text, see Engelbert Kaempfer, *Amoenitatum exoticarum . . . fasciculi V*, 142 reproduced in Minorsky, 150.



Image 7. A man about to be blown out of a cannon in late nineteenth-century Shiraz.
Source: Sa'idi Sirjani, *Vaqāyi-i Ittifaqiyah*, recto 431.

Tazkirat al-Mulūk made it the *muhtasib's* responsibility to use the *takhtah kulāh* to punish those violating bazaar regulations: "As regards the prices (*tasīrāt*) of the goods sold by the traders (*asnāf*) to the inhabitants of the town, if any of the professional merchants (*ahl-i hirfa*) eludes the *Muhtasib's* regulations (*qarār-dād*), the latter makes him *takhta-kulāh*, that he may serve as an example to others."¹⁰⁹

Hat punishments connoted shame and compromised status. In early modern France, the condemned were sometimes made to wear a paper bonnet—the equivalent of the paper hat (*kulāh kāghazī*) punishment in Iran—as part of their humiliation ritual.¹¹⁰ Those whose hat was replaced with a silly one were almost always from a recognized or honored status group, thus making their shame all the more pronounced. A prominent governor of Khurasan, Mīrzā Muḥammad Qavām al-Dawlah, who was partly responsible for the loss of the Marv to the Turcomans in the 1850s, was among the most well-documented nineteenth-century examples of hat punishment. Upon his shameful return to Tehran, Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh ordered that Qavām al-Dawlah be put on an old, decrepit horse (*yābu*), made to wear a silly hat, and paraded around the city by the chief executioners. Sources disagree on whether this was a felt hat (*kulāh namađī*), a wide hat "pulled down close to his nose," or a paper hat (*kulāh kāghazī*).¹¹¹ 'Abdullāh Mustawfī claims that, in addition to wearing a felt hat, Qavām al-Dawlah was also made to wear a faded, rough cotton (*karbāsi*) cloak, worn-out underwear,

¹⁰⁹ Minorsky, 83.

¹¹⁰ Paul Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done: The Age of Spectacular Capital Punishment in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 95.

¹¹¹ 'Abdullāh Mustawfī, *Sharḥ-i Zindigāni-i Man yā Tārikh-i Ijtimā'i va Idāri-i Dawrah-i Qājāriyah* (Tih-rān: Zuvvār, 2005), 1: 95; Mas'ūd Sālūr 'Ayn al-Salṭanah, *Rūznāmah-i Khāṭirāt-i 'Ayn al-Salṭanah* (Qahramān Mīrzā Sālūr), ed. Iraj Afshar (Tih-rān: Intishārāt-i Asaṭir, 1995), 2: 1769; Partavī Āmulī, *Rīshahhā-yi Tārikhī-i Amṣāl va Hikam*, 2: 815–6. See also "Chigūnagī az dast raftan-i Marv," *Majallah-i Khāndanihā* 32, no. 51 (1972): 23; Ibrāhīm Ṣafā'i, *Asnād-i Barguzidah-i Dawrān-i Qājāriyah* (Tih-rān: Bābak, 1976), 136.

and thick wooden shoes.¹¹² ʿAyn al-Salṭānah, who appears as an eyewitness to the episode, narrated that Qavām al-Dawlah paid the executioners to take him on side streets to lessen his public humiliation.¹¹³

In a case from roughly the same time, a mullah in Isfahan was exposed in this way for providing false testimony (*shahādat-i nā haqq*) in exchange for a bribe (*rishvat*). When the central government’s Court of Justice (Dīvānkhānah-i Mubārakah) received news of this, it ruled he be punished in the following manner: his turban was removed and a hat put on his head (*kulāh bar sarash guzāshtand*), signifying “he was an untrustworthy person and not in the path of the ʿulamā of religion.”¹¹⁴ In this instance, the removal of the turban signaled exclusion from his religious status group: the loss of the turban for a mullah and the wearing of a regular hat was a symbolic expulsion from the ranks of the ʿulamā. That this was done in a case of false testimony is also significant insofar as, in Islamic history, there were precedents for hair shaving functioning in the same way for such legal violations. Thus, it could be said that the hat punishment was functionally equivalent to the hair-shaving punishment.

Conclusion

On September 16, 2022, Mahsā (Zhīnā) Amīnī was brutally murdered by the Iranian morality police after being arrested for improperly wearing her hijab. In the ensuing protests that erupted across Iran and the world, women and sometimes men cut or shaved their hair in solidarity. Turning to history, many commentators sought precedents for this act, particularly in Persian literature, understanding it as signifying intense mourning and/or protest against injustice.¹¹⁵ Notably absent from such commentaries, however, was the historical penal meaning of shaving women’s hair; one meant to inflict shame for her supposed sexual immorality. In light of the arguments made here, women shaving their hair can perhaps be read as a defiant act of inversion, turning cultural logic on its head by making women’s shaved hair a marker of honor rather than disgrace.¹¹⁶

In nineteenth-century Iran, both a person’s hair and headgear were core components of their public persona. There were cultural expectations that one’s hair and head be presented appropriately, the violation of which constituted a form of deviance. Hair, especially, had sacred dimensions governed by prohibitions and regulations regarding its length, shaving in ritual settings, and presentation in public settings. Hair was also tied to one’s sexuality and even beauty. Forced hair cutting, the removal of headgear, or the placement of silly headgear were all effective methods of shaming. These punishments brought together elements of control and subordination with ritualistic punishment.

The shaving of head and facial hair, the removal of the hat, and the forced wearing of a silly hat were all punishments symbolically associated with shaming. Furthermore, such punishments were almost always public in two ways: first, the condemned were usually paraded around the city or town in such a way that others would see them in their humiliated state; and second, the punishment itself was a bodily or sartorial alteration communicating that the condemned had committed a crime. The types of crimes associated with this punishment usually fell into three broad categories. The first and most common had to do with sexual crimes such as fornication, adultery, homosexuality, prostitution, and pimping. The strong connection between hair and nakedness in the case of women, and between hair and manhood in the case of men, seems to have amplified this meaning. Second, those

¹¹² Mustawfī, *Sharḥ-i Zindigānī-i Man*, 1: 95.

¹¹³ ʿAyn al-Salṭānah, *Rūznāmah-i Khātirāt*, 2: 1769.

¹¹⁴ *Vaqāyī-i Ittifāqiyah*, n.31 (7 Zī Qa’dah 1267 H./3 September 1851).

¹¹⁵ Celine Alkhalidi and Nadeen Ebrahim, “Grief, Protest and Power: Why Iranian Women Are Cutting Their Hair,” CNN, September 28, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/28/middleeast/iran-hair-cutting-mime-intl/index.html>.

¹¹⁶ I have explored similar inversion processes in the case of branding. See Vejdani, “Branded Bodies,” 328, 333.

considered to have rebelled against or failed in their duties to the government or religious orthodoxy were also singled out for these punishments. Thus, we see prominent figures deemed to be heretics, leaders of protest movements, and a governor losing territory punished by either appearing bareheaded or forced to wear a silly hat. Finally, Jews—Jewish musicians and sometimes alcohol distributors more specifically—had their locks shaved for supposed moral crimes. In cases involving Jews, a Shi‘i jurist stressed their differentiation from and subordination to Muslims. Conceptually, we can consider how these punishments were carried out by different actors, in ways that were sometimes legal and other times informal. The government or ‘ulamā were usually the agents issuing rulings for such punishments. At the informal level, individuals or collectives used such punishments as forms of retaliation against enemies or those who had somehow wronged them. Within the domicile, husbands forcibly cut their spouses’ hair in domestic disputes. Hair shortening or shaving punishments constituted being subject to a disciplinary regime, one that highlighted subordination. The ritualistic dimension of these punishments was often central to hair and hat punishments, which almost always involved a parade on a pack animal and exposure to jeering crowds.

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