

The Quran and its Message

The articles on this website may be reproduced freely as long as the following source reference is provided:

Joseph A Islam www.quransmessage.com

سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE WORD 'KHIMAR'

Joseph A Islam

Copyright © 2009 Joseph A Islam: Article last modified 9th February 2014

Verse 24:31 is usually cited as Quranic support for the use of head coverings or the 'hijab'. Let us note the relevant part of the verse:

024:031 (Part)

"And to draw (walyadribna) their coverings (Bi'khumurihinna) over (ala) their chests (Jayubihin)"

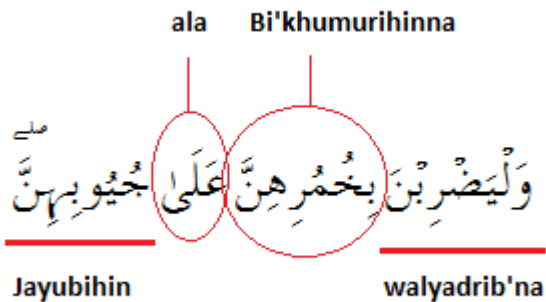


Illustration - Joseph Islam

What most non-Arabic speakers incline to do is to ask the common Arabic speaking person what a Quranic word may mean today. Of course, a modern day Arabic speaker will most likely give a response based on the 21st century popular rendering of the term if the term is known to them. This is also the case with popular translations which often incorporate popular uses of Arabic terms.

For academics and students of the Quran who study classical languages, this is of little use. For a student of the Quran, one needs to understand what is meant by a word in its classical / Quranic usage to obtain the best meaning given the context. Words often develop in languages and the best meaning of a word needs to be understood in the context that is being studied. Conversely, it is also

futile to obtain a classical rendering of a term to understand what a word means in its modern usage.

The Arabic word 'Khumur' does **not** simply imply a head-covering for women as commonly understood in its modern day usage.

It is formed from the root word 'Kha-Miim-Ra' which primarily means to '**conceal or to cover**'. A veil is an example of such a covering but it is **not restricted to it**.

خَمِرٌ

1. *خَمِرٌ*, aor. ٤, (TA,) inf. n. *خَمِيرٌ*, (K,) *He veiled, covered, or concealed, a thing; (K,* TA;) as also خَمِيرٌ, inf. n. تَخْمِيرٌ, (Mgh, Mṣb,) which also signifies he covered over a thing; (S, Mṣb,*

(S, K,) inf. n. خَمِرٌ, (S,) He became concealed, or hidden; or he concealed, or hid, himself; (S, K;) خَمِرٌ from me; (S;) as also خَامِرٌ, (S, K,) inf. n. مَخَامِرَةٌ; (K;) and اخْمِرُ: (K:) or this last signifies he concealed, or hid, himself in a خَمِيرٌ [or covert of trees or the like]. (TA.) One says also, خَمِرٌ عَنِّي الْخَبْرُ † The news, or story, became concealed from me. (S.) And one says

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

The same root word Kha-Miim-Ra also forms words such as 'Khamr' which means something which intoxicates (e.g. wine) as it clouds, obscures, covers and conceals the intellect. Again, the core meaning is derived from the understanding 'to conceal'

005:090

"O you who believe! Strong drink / wine (**Arabic: Khamru**) and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are only an abomination of Satan's handiwork. Leave it aside in order that you may succeed"

(S, Mṣb,) and خَمَرُهَا, (A, Mgh,) and خَمْرُهَا, (TA,) † He concealed his testimony. (S, A, Mgh, Mṣb, TA.) And الْخَمْرُ تَخْمِرُ الْعَقْلَ † Wine veils [or obscures] the intellect; (K;) and so تَخْمِرُهُ, lit. covers it : (Mṣb :) or the latter signifies † in-

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [2]

Even though the 'Khimar' has now become more commonly known in its restrictive sense as a 'head covering' for women the original meaning of a 'Khimar' (plural: Khumur) is **anything by which a thing is veiled or covered**. This is **not** restricted to a head covering or a covering of the hair. For a man's turban is also known as a 'Khumur' as it 'covers' a man's head.

خَمْرٌ : (Th, K:) and any covering of a thing;
anything by which a thing is veiled, or covered :
 (K:) pl. [of pauc.] أَخْمِرَةٌ (K) and [of mult.]
خُمُرٌ (Mṣb, K) and خَمْرٌ (K.) — Also A man's
turban; because a man covers his head with it
 in like manner as a woman covers her head with
 her خِمَارٌ :

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [3]

خَمَرَ aor. i. and o. To cover over, ferment. خَمْرٌ
 fem. Wine. خُمُرٌ plur. of خِمَارٌ A covering,
and especially a woman's head and face veil.

Source: A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran by John Penrice [4]

Please note the primary rendering of the word 'Khimar' in John Penrice's 1873 dictionary as 'a **covering**'. The lexicographer is also correct to note the most popular usage of the word as a veil of the head and face. However this is **not** the '**primary**' meaning.

Information regarding what women wore at the time of Jahliyya (Period of Ignorance) or what their Khimar's consisted of, are only known to us by traditions and folklore often centuries removed from source and not the Quran. Many of these narratives are well known to be aggressive interpretations against women. The Quran is and undoubtedly remains the primary source of any interpretation of Quranic words. The word 'Khimar' or 'Khumur' comes from the root 'Kh-Mim'Ra' which means something which veils or conceals.

The last point to note is the Arabic word: '**yadribna**' which is formed from the root word 'Da-Ra-Ba' which in this context means to draw or draw over (as in to cover). This term does not necessarily or exclusively imply that it is to be drawn from a particular location such as the head.

Therefore, a better rendering of the specific part of the verse in question is as follows:

"...And to draw their coverings over their chests" (24:31)

The focus is simply on the chest. If one is to remain true to the classical Arabic and the Quran itself, there is also no implication of 'hair covering' by virtue of the word 'bi'khumurihinna' which simply means 'a covering' in its primary sense. The 'head-covering' is just one example which has also become a popular example and often used to interpret the Quran.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This article explores the term 'khimar' in a little more depth and argues it to mean '**anything by which a thing is veiled or covered**'. This can be a head veil or a similar item, but is not restricted to it.

In the article regarding 'Hijab' below [1], and in the particular matter of 'hair covering' it was also argued that the term 'hijaab' was never used by the Quran to imply 'head covering' either. However, it was admitted that one could argue that **bedecking the hair** in public (beautifying oneself to an extent which can become a cause of attraction) needs to be carefully considered under the broad Arabic term '**zeenat**', a term which the article briefly explored. Many may feel that such bedecking would fall under the scope of 'zeenat'. If so, the directive is **not** to display **this** beauty and adornment to those other than the people listed in verse 24:31.

Related Articles:

- (1) [Hijaab](#)
- (2) [Thobe & Jilbab](#)

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 2, Page 807-808

[2] Ibid., Page 808

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[3] Ibid., Page 809

[4] PENRICE, J, A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran 1873; Reprint 1991 Adam Publishers & Distributors, Delhi, Page 45

[Joseph Islam](#)

© 2010 Quransmessage.com All Rights Reserved