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[Home](#) > Taxonomy term

- **[Muslims Behead Men Over Haircut – But Why?](#)** [1]

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Source Item:

[Muslims Behead Men Over Haircut – But Why?](#) [3]

Summary:

The case of Islam's 'rules of engagement' is fancied by Muslim apologists as the example of restraint and equity in warfare which was revealed during the seventh century, when Abu Bakr, the successor to Muhammad, was about to conquer Syria, that he gave his troops a set of precepts to uphold, such as not to burn down trees, kill women and children, and other moral prohibitions to even sparing monks and hermits:

You will meet people who have set themselves apart in hermitages; leave them to accomplish the purpose for which they have done this. (1)

No one was to be killed, except for one, men with the dreaded hairstyle—the tonsure:

"You will meet people who have shaved the crowns of their heads, leaving a band of hair around it. Strike them with the sword." (2)

What symbolism can a hairstyle have that would provoke a religion to specifically punish anyone who exhibits it by death?

During my search, I came across one of the oldest documents ever written on the tonsure; it was a letter from the year 710 AD, written by an abbot named Ceolfrid, to Nechtan, the king of the Picts in England, in which he explained the tradition and significance of the tonsure:

But we are not shaven in the form of a crown solely because Peter was shorn in this way, but because Peter was shorn in this way in memory of our Lord's Passion. Therefore we who desire to be saved by Christ's Passion like Peter wear this sign of the Passion on the crown of the head, which is the highest part of the body. ... Similarly, those who have taken monastic vows or are in Holy Orders should bind themselves to stricter self-discipline for our Lord's sake, and wear their heads tonsured in the form of the crown of thorns which Christ wore on His head in His Passion, so that He might bear the thorns and briars of our sins and thus bear them away from us. In this way their own appearance will be a reminder to them

to be willing and ready to suffer ridicule and disgrace for His sake, and a sign that they are always hoping to receive 'the crown of everlasting life which the Lord hath promised to those that love Him', and in order to win this crown regard both adversity and prosperity as of equal insignificance. (3)

So, the tonsure represented the crown of thorns placed on Christ's head, and this would have been, to the Muslim spirit, a thing worthy of death since Islam teaches that Christ did not suffer.

Source URL (retrieved on 29/01/2020): <https://shariawatch.org.uk/?q=tags/warfare>

Links

[1] <https://shariawatch.org.uk/?q=content/muslims-behead-men-over-haircut-why>

[2] <https://shariawatch.org.uk/?q=authors/theodore-shoebat>

[3] <http://shoebat.com/2013/10/18/muslims-kill-men-haircut/>