

Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy

Why did Greek actors in the age of Sophocles always wear masks? David Wiles provides the first book-length study of this question. He surveys the evidence of vases and other monuments, arguing that they portray masks as part of a process of transformation, and that masks were never seen in the fifth century as autonomous objects. Wiles goes on to examine experiments with the mask in twentieth-century theatre, tracing a tension between the use of masks for possession and for alienation, and he identifies a preference among modern classical scholars for alienation. Wiles declines to distinguish the political aims of Greek tragedy from its religious aims, and concludes that an understanding of the mask allows us to see how Greek acting was simultaneously text-centred and body-centred. This book challenges orthodox views about how theatre relates to ritual, and provides insight into the creative work of the actor.

DAVID WILES is Professor of Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London. He has published widely on the topic of Greek theatre and his books include *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (2003), *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction* (2000), *Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning* (1997) and *The Masks of Menander: Sign and Meaning in Greek and Roman Performance* (1991), all published by Cambridge University Press.

Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy

From Ancient Festival to
Modern Experimentation

DAVID WILES



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Contents

Acknowledgements [page vii]

List of illustrations [ix]

- 1 Introduction [1]
 - 2 The evidence of vases [15]
 - 3 The sculptural art of the mask-maker [44]
 - 4 Mask and modernism [71]
 - 5 Physical theatre and mask in the twentieth century [102]
 - 6 Mask and text: the case of Hall's *Oresteia* [125]
 - 7 The mask as musical instrument [153]
 - 8 Masks and polytheism [180]
 - 9 The mask of Dionysos [205]
 - 10 Sacred viewing: 'theorizing' the ancient mask [237]
 - 11 Mask and self [261]
- Epilogue: to the performer [286]
- Bibliography* [291]
Index [315]

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Illustrations

Drawings

- 2.1 Men with horse heads + satyrs on the reverse. Athenian neck amphora. Berlin Staatlich Museen. 1697. [page 17]
- 2.2 Mask. Detail of Plate 2.2. [21]
- 2.3 Dancers on an Athenian calyx-krater. Vatican: Astarita 42. [27]
- 2.4 Maenad mask. Detail of Plate 2.5. [29]
- 2.5 Silenus on the 'Pronomos' vase. Detail of Plate 2.6. [32]
- 2.6 Side view of the 'Pronomos' vase. [34]
- 2.7 Fragment of an Athenian volute-krater. Martin Von Wagner Museum, Würzburg. H4781. [35]
- 2.8 Fragment of an Athenian volute-krater, Archaeological Museum of Samothrace 65.1041. [36]
- 2.9 Parody of *Antigone*. Apulian bell-krater. Museo Diocesano, Sant' Agata dei Goti. [40]
- 3.1 Actors and Dionysos. Stone relief from Peiraeus. Athens National Archaeological Museum 1500. [45]
- 3.2 Tympanum as mirror. Apulian bell-krater. Zurich. 3585. [48]
- 3.3 Actor and mask. Stone grave relief from Salamis. Peiraeus Museum. [49]
- 3.4 Oedipus and Antigone. Wall-painting from Delos. [51]
- 3.5 Terracotta mask from Naples. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. [56]
- 3.6 Centaur. Temple of Zeus at Olympia: west pediment. [63]
- 4.1 Antigone with Picasso's chorus of masks. Cocteau's *Antigone*, 1922. From a photo in *Le Théâtre-Comoedia*, January 1923. [83]
- 9.1 Running hoplite on an eye-cup. Ella Riegel Museum, Bryn Mawr. P2155. [208]
- 9.2 Satyr arming Dionysos. Athenian pelike from Vulci. Paris Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles 391. [209]
- 9.3 Satyr with eye-motif on his briefs. Dinos from Athens. Athens National Archaeological Museum 13027. [211]
- 9.4 Men dancing round mask-idol of Dionysos. Lekythos from Athens. Brussels A262. [215]

- 9.5 Libation for mask of Dionysos. Athenian stamnos, now destroyed. Berlin 1930. [217]
- 9.6 Prometheus before a mask of Dionysos. Chous from Athens. Collection of the 3rd Ephorate. [218]
- 9.7 Mask and krater. Etrurian bell-krater. Metropolitan Museum, New York. L.63.21.5. [229]
- 9.8 Actor with Dionysos and masks. Athenian bell-krater from Spina. Museo Archeologico Ferrara. T161C. [230]
- 10.1 Late sixth-century death-mask from Sindos, grave no. 115. Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki. [248]

Plates

- 2.1 (a) Choral dancers. Athenian column-krater. Antikenmuseum Basel. BS415. (b) Drinking scene on the reverse. [19]
- 2.2 Boy with mask. From a fragment of an Athenian oenochoe. Athens Agora Museum P11810. [20]
- 2.3 (a) Boy with mask and maenad. Athenian bell-krater from Spina. Museo Archeologico Ferrara. Valle Pega 173c. (b) Eos and Tithonos on the reverse. [23]
- 2.4 Dancers with mask. Athenian pelike from Cervetri. Museum of Fine Arts Boston. 98.883. [26]
- 2.5 Maenadic dancers. Fragment of an Athenian bell-krater from Olbia. Academy of Sciences Museum Kiev. [28]
- 2.6 View of the 'Pronomos' vase. Athenian volute-krater from Ruvo. Museo Nazionale Naples 3240. [30]
- 2.7 Actor and satyr, from the 'Pronomos' vase. Photo: François Lissarrague. [31]
- 2.8 Parodic maenad dancers. Athenian bell-krater. Heidelberg Institute of Archaeology. B134. [37]
- 2.9 Maenads and mask-idol. Athenian stamnos from Nuceria. Museo Nazionale Naples 2419. [39]
- 3.1 Miniature terracotta mask from Lipari. Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum Glasgow. 1903.70.dt.1. [53]
- 3.2 Helmet-maker. Cup. Ashmolean Museum Oxford. G267. [58]
- 3.3 Orestes, Apollo and Fury. Athenian column-krater. British Museum, London. 1923.10.16. [60]
- 3.4 Donato Sartori displaying the neutral mask made for Lecoq by his father Amleto. Photo: Renato Villegas. [69]

- 4.1 Mask for Prometheus. From A. Gvozdev, A. Piotrovski, S. Mokulski *et al.*, *Istoria sovetskogo teatra* (Leningrad, 1933). [81]
- 4.2 Io. From *Prometheus Bound*, Delphi 1927. Photo by Nelly Benaki Museum: Photographic Archive. [91]
- 4.3 Prometheus. From *Prometheus Bound*, Delphi 1927. Photo by Nelly (detail). Benaki Museum: Photographic Archive. [92]
- 4.4 The High Priest raises the dead. Sartre *Les Mouches* 1943. Photo: Studio Harcourt. [96]
- 5.1 Jean-Louis Barrault holding the mask of Orestes, with Agamemnon mask in foreground. Photo sent to Amleto Sartori. Museo Internazionale della Maschera Amleto e Donato Sartori, Abano Terme. [114]
- 5.2 Mask of Cassandra. Museo Internazionale della Maschera Amleto e Donato Sartori, Abano Terme. [115]
- 6.1 Drawing of a Fury by Jocelyn Herbert. © Jocelyn Herbert Archive. Drawing no. 3320. [136]
- 6.2 Mask of Orestes. Photo: Sandra Lousada. © Jocelyn Herbert Archive. [137]
- 6.3 Drawing of Orestes by Jocelyn Herbert. © Jocelyn Herbert Archive. Drawing no. 3321. [138]
- 6.4 Greg Hicks, demonstrating use of the body in mask-work. Mask by Tina Pople-Parali from the *Oedipus Plays*. Photo: Renato Villegas. [142]
- 7.1 Masks for the *Oresteia* designed by Donato Sartori. Photo: Renato Villegas. [155]
- 7.2 Michael Chase in his studio. Photo: George Croft. [156]
- 7.3 Actress demonstrating a messenger speech in the Greek theatre at Bradfield: mask by Michael Chase. Photo: George Croft. [159]
- 7.4 Rehearsal mask by Thanos Vovolis. Photo: Renato Villegas. [166]
- 7.5 Rehearsal mask by Thanos Vovolis. Photo: Renato Villegas. [167]
- 7.6 Mask of Messenger in *Oedipus the King*, by Thanos Vovolis. Photo: Thanos Vovolis. [168]
- 7.7 Mask for *Oedipus at Colonus*, by Thanos Vovolis. Photo: Thanos Vovolis. [178]
- 8.1 Nurse whispering to Hippolytus. From *Hippolytus* by Thiasos Theatre Company, 2004, with commissioned Balinese masks. Photo: M. J. Coldiron. [191]

- 8.2 Actor and mask. From a fragment of a bell-krater from Taras. Martin Von Wagner Museum, Würzburg. H4600. [194]
- 8.3 Actor with masks. Apulian bell-krater. Museo Provinciale, Brindisi. Faldetta collection. [196]
- 9.1 Women worshipping an idol of Dionysos. Stamnos from Etruria. Museum of Fine Arts Boston. 90.155. [216]
- 9.2 Mask of Dionysos in a *liknon*. Chous from Athens. National Archaeological Museum Athens: Vlasto collection 318. [217]