

31

Comic Mask

300-200 BC

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Object Details

Catalogue Number	31
Inventory Number	96.AD.247
Typology	Mask
Location	Taranto region
Dimensions	H: 9 cm; W: 8.4 cm

Fabric

Beige in color (Munsell 7.5 yr 8/3-8/4), very hard and compact, with many small reflective inclusions; extensive traces of polychromy over a layer of white slip; brownish red (hair), pink (complexion).

Condition

Incrustations, white in color and calcareous, especially on the right side of the back section. The internal surface of the two holes on either side of the head is abraded, probably due to the original presence of metal elements.

Provenance

Thomas Virzì, Italian, 1881-1974 (Munich, Germany)¹; by 1994-1996, Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman (New York, New York), donated to the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1996.

1. On the Virzì Collection, see description section for cat. 4-23, n.1.

Bibliography

PASSION FOR ANTIQUITIES 1994, p. 354, no. 222; *ACQUISITIONS* 1996–1998, p. 67.

Description

The mask presents a rounded skullcap and two holes for hanging in the upper section of the head. The general characteristics suggest that it is associated with the New Comedy character *Colax*, an adulator (vain flatterer), described by Pollux and also documented in the corpus of theatrical masks of Lipari in five separate examples. This character has a malevolent, ambiguous smile, an oval face with puffy cheeks, a strong jaw, and a long, thin nose. The convex forehead features a cleft in the central area and a frontal eminence above that. The eyes are half closed with the upper eyelids partially lowered; the eyebrows are raised in an arching curve; the mouth is broad and wide open, with fleshy lips; the chin is full, with a dimple. The hair, painted red, forms a crown of radial striations around the forehead, with a raised section in the middle. The *Colax* masks from Lipari, found in stratigraphic contexts associated with vases in the style of Gnathia and of the Lipari Painter, can be dated to the first half of the third century BC.¹ Hypothetically, the *Colax* mask might be attributable to the Apulian area and, though there is no direct comparison with other Tarentine masks, it can be placed in the larger repertory of theatrical terracottas that characterize the local production and the funerary votive deposits of the third century BC.²

Notes

1. On theater masks of New Comedy described in the catalogue of Julius Pollux, see BERNABÒ BREA 1981, pp. 133–42; for the mask of the adulator in particular, see pp. 189–91; WEBSTER 1995, vol. 1, pp. 22–23; see also BERNABÒ BREA 1971–74, pp. 167–80.
2. For the masks in the Tarentine funerary deposits, see GRAEPLER 1997, pp. 231–34.