THE LARGE MASK

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Abstract
This text presents an over life-sized marble mask situated above the arch in the west wall of the Lancellotti palace courtyard. The mask consists of two larger fragments of which the upper one was re-worked in post-Antique times. The re-working caused volume-reduction of the upper part, stylistic discrepancy, and technical differences. In spite of its lack of quality, its position in the palace’s courtyard indicates a high estimation. This brings forth the value of ancient masks in Renaissance palace and villa decoration.

Investigations of the mask conclude that its original position was of even greater importance. The mask corresponds in form, type, style and dimensions to eight known masks from the frieze on the Temple of Venus and Rome at the Roman Forum, built at the time of Emperor Hadrian (AD 118-136).*

Figs. 1a, 1b. The mask in the Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard. Photos: M. Prusac.

Description
The Lancellotti mask is heavily restored. It consists of two large fragments irregularly joined at the root of the nose and below the eyes. There are stylistic discrepancies and technical differences between the upper and lower parts of the face (figs. 1a-d).1 The veins in the marble indicate that the two parts originally were one. The back of the mask cannot be investigated. It is attached to the wall with cement in an oval niche. There is a fracture at the mask’s left side, and a small marble piece is attached under the left eye and in the joint to the right. The lower lip is attached as a separate piece, the nose is lost, the surface of the chin and the upper lip is damaged, and there is a cut in the right temple.

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1 SAR no. 36. For catalogue information and technical description, see Agneta Freccero’s contribution in this publication.
Style and provenance
Judging from stylistic discrepancies and technical differences, the mask was renovated in post-Antique times to such an extent that it can no longer be regarded as ancient. The lower part has a strong, rounded chin representing an idealised head. The mouth is quite large, and the lips are parted. The opening of the mouth is rather deep and wide. Below the chin, fragmented remains indicate a wide continuation downward corresponding to the snakes below the Medusa masks from the Temple of Venus and Rome. The expression is severe or awe-inspiring, which is also the case with the masks from the Temple of Venus and Rome at the Roman Forum, representing Medusa immediately after her decapitation by Perseus.

The hair is moulded in large strands parted in the centre, and has no parallels in ancient sculpture. In some places, in particular on the left side, there are traces of a hollow chisel, and there are several traces of a running drill. These are not very deep, and might be remains of the original styling which must have had a larger volume than the present. The hairline along the forehead might also be ascribed to the original head. The forehead is wide but short. It is limited downwards by the eyebrows which seem to grow together by the base of the nose. The eyes are asymmetric and were compressed when the fragments were reassembled. The fracture was probably irregular making it difficult to rejoin the fragments. The artist thus removed a couple of centimetres and shortened the area under the eyes. Because of the volume-reduction, the upper part of the head had to be adjusted by being tilted slightly forward, in order to align with the lower part of the face.

It could be suggested that the eyes had been reduced to make a more natural impression from below or from the gallery. To obtain this, however, the eyes should rather have been enlarged. The mask’s right eye is wider and more in harmony with the face than the left, which is slanted and compressed, measuring only 6.2 cm. The right eye measures 8.5 cm and is almond-shaped and in deep profile. A drill has been used to mark out the inner corner of the eyes as well as the line below the eyelids. The irises are defined by incised circles; the right one in shallow profile and the left one so deep that the iris protrudes. The pupil of the right eye is formed like a sickle, whereas the left pupil has the form of a horseshoe, with deep drill holes in both ends. It took much effort to re-work this mask into an acceptable form. The mask’s prominent position in spite of its lack of quality suggests a high estimation. Masks were popular ingredients in Renaissance gardens and courtyards, and irrespective of the provenance of the mask, it is obvious that it was regarded as an object of ornamental value or perhaps as a curiosity.
Ancient masks in Renaissance palaces

Ancient masks are often to be found as decoration in Renaissance palaces, as are ancient sculptures and copies of them in general. The giardino all’antico, typical of villa complexes of the period, is reflected in the city palaces like in the Palazzo Lancellotti. One of the first to enjoy a courtyard in the giardino all’antico style was Pope Julius II (1503-1515). This was Cortile del Belvedere, designed by Bramante and decorated with some of the most famous ancient sculptures of the time. The collection in this courtyard contained several ancient theatre-masks. Ancient masks seem to have been most popular in the late Renaissance when ancient originals were difficult to get hold of and copies and imitations were abounding. The discovery of Nero’s Golden House at the end of the 15th century is regarded as a source of inspiration for the many Renaissance gardens with grotesques, which can be compared to the masks. A little later than the Palazzo Lancellotti, at the time of the establishment of the garden of Villa d’Este in Tivoli, ancient sculpture had been coveted for a long time, and copies and imitations substituted the original ancient sculpture. Pirro Ligorio, who designed the garden of Villa d’Este, was interested in ancient theatres and circuses in particular. This is clear in one of the other estates he designed: Pius IV’s Casino in the Vatican at the beginning of the second half of the 16th century where the references to the ancient theatre were many and evident. The popularity of masks as decoration in the Renaissance is evident in the many examples preserved, and any distinction between theatre-masks and masks from other ancient buildings seems to have been absent. For the Renaissance collector, one ancient mask was probably just as good as another one, and large masks like the one in the Palazzo Lancellotti must have been highly appreciated. In this period, numerous monumental Medusa masks were enlisted in the registers of antiquity collections in Rome.

The masks from the Temple of Venus and Rome

The Temple of Venus and Rome, from where the eight Medusa masks that form the closest parallel to the Lancellotti mask derive, was erected by Emperor Hadrian (AD 118-136) between AD 121 and 136/137. After a fire which destroyed the temple, Emperor Maxentius (AD 306-312) had it rebuilt in AD 307. In archive notes from the excavation of the temple in 1813, when it was believed to be the Temple of Pax connected to Maxentius’ basilica, six fragmented gorgon masks were mentioned of which the Vatican Museum acquired the three best preserved. They are now in the Braccio Nuovo (figs. 2-4). It has been suggested that the three other masks could be identified with a group that appeared in an antiquarians shop some years after the excavations. One of these is now in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne (fig. 5). One is in Villa San Michele at Capri (fig. 6), and one is in the Antiquarium at the Roman Forum (fig. 7). There are furthermore two examples in Villa Albani (Figs. 8-9). The masks are made of Proconnesian marble, and they were probably attached to the 316 meter long temple-frieze. The original number of masks is unknown.

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4 Mac Dougall 1994, 25; Brummer 1970, 33-42. For ancient theatre masks in general, see Webster 1995; for more specific examples, see Ciancio Rossetto 1990, 1-6; Fuchs 1987, 13-14 pl. 1.
5 Mac Dougall 1994, 25. For example in Palazzo Te; see Verheyen 1997.
6 Dacos 1969, 5-41.
9 The majority of ancient masks made for architectural ornamentation are different from the masks from the Temple of Venus and Rome, see Hülsem 1917, 53; Gasparri 1998, 639-640. For the decoration of the Temple of Venus and Rome in general, see Baratto 1977, 133-148.
12 Amelung 1903, 41-42 no. 27, 59-60 no. 40, 109 no. 93, pl. 6.
14 Noelke 1993, 133; Düntzer 1885, 3-4 no. 1.
15 Andrén 1965, 129-130 no. 14 pl. 9; 1980, 177-178. Andrén 1957, 378 tells that Axel Munthe found the head in the water outside Tiberius’ baths. This has later been disputed by Freccero 2003, 131-133.
18 Gasparri 1998, 640, also for the Medusa motive’s political and symbolic meaning during Hadrian’s reign.
Fig. 2-4. Above: The masks from the Temple of Venus and Rome in the Vatican Museum, Braccio Nuovo. Photos: M. Prusac.
Fig. 5. Below: The mask from the Temple of Venus and Rome in Cologne. From Buschor 1958 pl. 43.
The lower part of the mask from the Palazzo Lancellotti is executed in the same style as the masks from the Temple of Venus and Rome. It has the same chin and mouth; even the size of the chin, c. 9 cm, and the mouth, c. 13.5x6.5 cm. is the same. The distance between the corners of the mouth and inner eye-corners is c. 17 cm, as well as the length of the nose, c. 13.5 cm, and width of the nose, 10 cm, of the nose. This corresponds with the measurements of the masks from the Temple of Venus and Rome in the Vatican Museum.

The original height and width of the masks have been altered during renovation, either reduced or increased by stucco modifications. The example in the Antiquarium at Forum Romanum measures c. 63 cm. in height. As this mask has not been renovated, this is probably as near as we can get to the original measure. The mask in Villa San Michele is fragmented at the top of the head, measuring 58 cm in height, whereas the mask in Cologne measures 71 cm in height. Two of the masks in the Vatican Museum

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20 Barattolo 1982, 133.
21 This is probably also as near as we can get some of the details, as for instance that the secondarily incised eye pupils at the Lancellotti mask were not imitations of original pupils. According to Barattolo, 1982, 134 the mask in the Antiquarium at Forum Romanum has none. Although pupils occur at this time, it is normally in portraits and not in idealized heads.
22 Düntzer1885, 3-4. This mask was, however, destroyed during WWII, and not repaired until 1986, see Noelke 1993, 174. Noelke 1993, 62, describes the back side of the mask where a rather wide vertical, rectangular suppression indicates the way in which the mask was attached to the temple frieze; see also Barattolo 1982, 141. According to Barattolo 1982, 142, the masks cannot have been antefixes, as the roof of the Temple of Venus and Rome was made of bronze plates and it would be unlikely to think that the antefixes would have been made of an inferior material.
Braccio Nuovo measure 64 cm in height, and the third 68 cm; the ancient parts of the masks in Villa Albani measure 51 cm and 58 cm in height, while the height of the mask in Palazzo Lancellotti is 52 cm. Because of the alterations to the hair-style in most of the masks, a more important measurement might be the height of the face from the hair line to the chin. This measurement is exactly 42 cm in the three Vatican masks and 41 cm in the Lancellotti mask. This indicates that c. 1 cm was removed when the fragments were rejoined. Based on this, the mask in the Palazzo Lancellotti can very well derive from the Temple of Venus and Rome.

The Medusa masks from the Temple of Venus and Rome belong to the Rondanini type, named after the Gorgon mask in Palazzo Rondanini on Via del Corso in Rome (Fig. 10), which is believed to be a Roman copy of Phidias’ Medusa on the shield of Athena Parthenos from c. 438 B.C. The craftsmanship of the masks from the Temple of Venus and Rome has, however, been attributed to artists from a workshop from Asia Minor active in Rome during the reign of Hadrian. The earliest dated example of use of masks decorating friezes on monumental buildings is also in Asia Minor in the portico of Tiberius and Livia in Aphrodisias from A.D. 14-29. The first examples of large Medusa masks on a monumental building are furthermore at the Temple of Apollo in Didyma, still to be observed outside at the site (Figs. 11-12), and on the Trajaneum in Pergamon, both dated to the late Trajanic and early Hadrianic period. Other examples from Asia Minor are some masks at a relief from a temple in Side, probably dedicated to Apollo, and in the London Museum, similar to the masks of the frieze of the first temple at Side, both dating to the time of Hadrian. Scholars have also found stylistic parallels to the Gorgons from the Temple of Venus and Rome in Ephesos and Pergamon, but as A. Barattolo has demonstrated, the closest parallels are to be found in sculptures from the Aphrodisian school.

More precisely, in Gorgons from Hadrian’s baths in Aphrodisias now in the archaeological museum in Istanbul, Smyrna museum, and in the local magazine in Aphrodisias. The fact that the artists came to Rome from Asia Minor is supported by the fact that the classicizing style in which they are executed was particularly popular in Asia Minor at the time of Hadrian.

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24 Helbig 1963, 323ff no. 418, 421, 439; 446 is a plaster copy. Inventory no. 2239, 2261, 2275.
25 The mask in Palazzo Lancellotti is thus contemporaneous with the colossal portrait of Hadrian (AD 118-136), later re-carved into that of Constantine (AD 305-336). Evers 1991, 785-806, proves the re-carving of the colossalus from a portrait for Hadrian for the first time; Varner 2004, 217-218, demonstrates how the mask first was re-carved into a portrait of Maxentius (AD 306-312). The large dimensions of the mask, as well as the stylistic resemblance of its lower part to that of the portrait-colossus of Constantine, may have been the reason why the author of the Topham Catalogue suggested that the mask represented an emperor.
27 Barattolo 1982, 142.
28 Barattolo 1982, 142, footnote 41-42 for further references to the Medusa masks from the Temple of Apollon in Didyma and the Trajaneum in Pergamon.
29 There is one more fragment of a frieze with this type of masks in the British Museum in London and one in the National Gallery of Oslo, which Barattolo 1982, 144-145 suggests most probably derive from Smyrna, but they are disputable as they are smaller and could also have been fragments of sarcophagi. Siri Sande, who is about to publish a new catalogue of the antiques in the National Gallery in Oslo, has found a parallel to the Oslo fragment on an architectonic element in Crete. Barattolo 1982, 145 also mentions one example in Spain from the Temple of Augusta Emerita, Mérida. The style of the masks on the fragments in London and Oslo, however, are interesting regarding the sublime style and the workmanship, which is comparable with productions by artists from Asia Minor.
31 Erim 1986, 43. See also Barattolo 1982, 147-148. The gorgon masks from Hadrian’s baths in Aphrodisias hung at a height of 8.60 m, and were not to be observed from such a distance below as the masks from the Temple of Venus and Rome. This of course determined a different angle from that in the masks from Rome. The first to suggest that architect and artists came from Asia Minor to work in Rome was D.E. Strong in 1953, 127, who noted the similarity of the architecture and ornamentation of the Temple of Venus and Rome with that of the Temple of Apollon in Didyma.
32 Barattolo 1982, 147, mentions one more example from Sagalassos in Pisidia; 148, one from Celsus’ library in Ephesus; 149, one from the Azianoi in Phrygia. The date of the masks is furthermore supported by Bieber 1911, 222, as a parallel to a youth’s hair style in one of the Hadrianci tonsi at the Arch of Constantine. The carving of the hair and its style also corresponds to Antinous as Dionysis in the Vatican Museum, Sala Rotunda, see Helbig 1963, 28-29, no. 34, for the later.
Fig.10. Medusa Rondanini, Glyptotek, Münich. From Buschor 1958 pl. 1.
From Medusa to man
The lack of records makes it impossible to reconstruct the path the Medusa mask took from the Temple of Venus and Rome at the Roman Forum in the 2nd century to its position in Palazzo Lancellotti on Via Coronari from the 17th century onwards. It also makes it difficult to explain the reason why the craftsman changed it from a damaged Medusa mask into that of a man. The cut through the face indicates only that the craftsman received it in very bad condition and “mended” it as well as best he could. What caused the mask to break is also unknown, but it is not impossible that it broke as it fell from the temple frieze or was broken off by spolia hunters or antiquity dealers.
Irrespective of the lacuna in its record and its bad condition, what is important is that the mask in Palazzo Lancellotti can be traced back to a specific origin. At the time when it was included in the courtyard it might have been known as one of the masks from one of the larger temples of the Roman Forum, later identified with that of Venus and Rome. However damaged, Cardinal Lancellotti might have regarded it as a prestigious acquisition.
Based on the size, style, and craftsmanship of the lower part of the mask, as well as its similarity to the eight known examples, the mask in the Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard may be considered as the ninth mask from the Temple of Venus and Rome, hitherto unknown.

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33Gasparri 1998, 639-640, 666 no. 1108 pl. 352, tells that there is one more mask from the coffee house in Villa Albani, which was probably made after the same model as the Medusa masks from the Temple of Venus and Rome. It was one of a pair in Cardinal Pio da Carpi’s villa at the Quirinal at the beginning of the 17th century, when the collection was split up. At the beginning of the 17th century sculptures from the da Carpi villa were to be found in different places, like Villa Borghese, Villa Montalto, Palazzo Barberini, Villa Giustiniani, and Villa Albani. The sculptures from Villa Carpi were probably acquired contemporaneously in Villa Albani and Villa Giustiniani. It is interesting to note that one of the items in the Galleria Giustiniani was an over life-size Medusa mask, corresponding typologically to those known from the Temple of Venus and Rome. The only recording of this mask is a rendering in a Baroque style, but it is suggested that it is one of the two in Villa Albani. Another possibility could have been that the mask from the Temple of Venus and Rome, via Villa Carpi and Villa Giustiniani, was the one in Palazzo Lancellotti. Several sculptures in Palazzo Lancellotti were previously in the Giustiniani collection. It was proved, however, by A. Freccero, during the conservation of the mask that it was already in its present position in the 17th century, two centuries before the re-distribution of the sculptures from the Giustiniani collection, see Agneta Freccero’s contribution, this volume. This corresponds to the fact that this must be the mask mentioned in the Topham Catalogue from Eton College (1720-1730). There are traces on the mask from the earliest stucco-layer applied in the cortile.
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