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ARCHAEOLOGY

TRACES OF THE GOD DIONYSUS IN THE SOUTH NECROPOLIS OF TRALLEIS: A TERRACOTTA MASK

Abstract: The Southern Necropolis of Tralleis is an important city of antiquity and lies beneath the modern city center of Aydın. Numerous salvage excavations have been conducted by the Aydın Archaeology Museum in response to construction activities and illegal excavations that have uncovered graves throughout the urban area. This study focuses on a terracotta mask recovered during a rescue excavation at Grave No. 1 in Parcel 28, Block 419, within the boundaries of the Tralleis Ancient City's Third-Degree Archaeological Site, located in the Köprülü Neighborhood of the Efeler District. The artifact, produced using a mold, was analyzed typologically and dated to the late first century AD through comparison with similar examples.

Keywords: *Mask, Tralleis, Ancient Theater, Terracotta Figurine, Dionysus.*

Zerrin AYDIN TAVUKÇU

Atatürk University, Erzurum, Turkey
ztavukcu@atauni.edu.tr

Sinem COŞKUN

Ardahan University, Ardahan, Turkey
sinemcoskun@ardahan.edu.tr

INTRODUCTION

Tralleis was founded on a high plateau on the southern slopes of the Messogis (Kestane) Mountains, to the north of the modern city center of Aydın, within the boundaries of today's Aegean Region (**Fig. 1**)¹. Situated on the border between Lydia to the north and Caria to the south, the city held strategic importance and experienced significant development due to its location along ancient trade routes².

The name of the city is first mentioned in the works of Xenophon, the renowned philosopher, writer, soldier, and historian of the Classical Period, particularly in *Anabasis*³ and *Hellenica*⁴. These texts indicate that Tralleis served as an important base during the campaign led by Cyrus the Younger, the brother of the Persian King Artaxerxes II, to claim the throne in 401 to 400 BC⁵. Strabo, who provides more detailed information about the city, offers the following observations regarding the condition of its inhabitants.

*"It is as well inhabited by rich people as any other city in Asia; some of its people have always held the chief offices in the province and have become Asiarchs"*⁶.

¹ STRABON, XIV, I, 42; TEXIER 1862, 279; RAYET/THOMAS 1877, 45.

² STRABON, XIV, I, 42; CHANDLER 1825, 260; TEXIER 1862, 279; RAYET/THOMAS 1877, 45; RAMSAY 1960, 44-45; MAGIE 2015, 20.

³ XENOPHON, I, IV, 8.

⁴ XENOPHON, III, II, 19.

⁵ XENOPHON, I, IV, 8.

⁶ STRABON, XIV, I, 42.

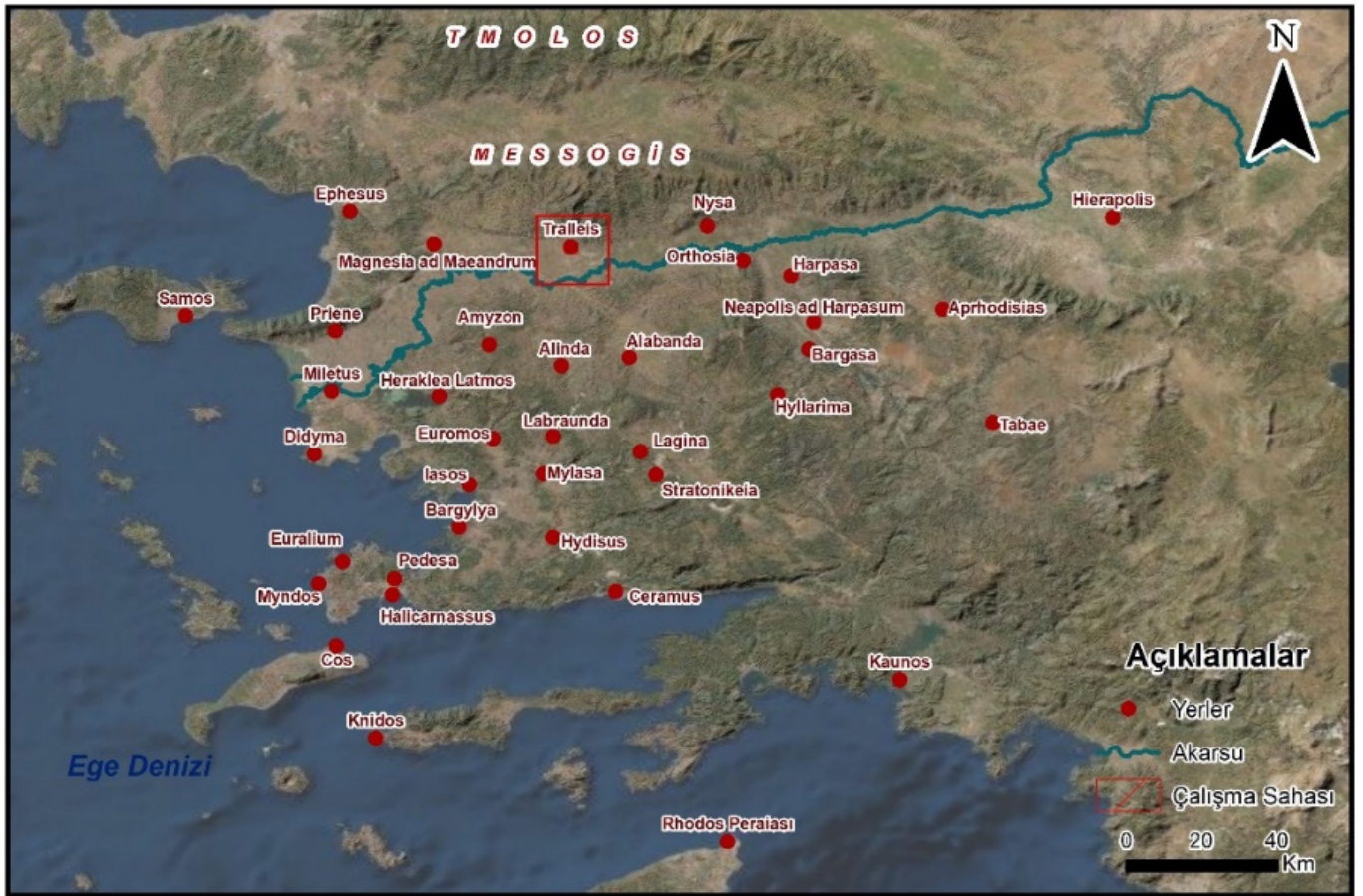


Fig. 1. Location of the Ancient City of Tralleis.

According to Strabo, Pythodoros, a native of Nysa and a friend of the prominent Roman general Pompey, chose to settle in Tralleis due to the city's reputation at the time. Menedoros, the priest of Zeus Larasios, who was highly regarded for his education in Tralleis, as well as the renowned orators Dionysocles and Damasos Skombros, were also born in the city⁷. This information suggests that Tralleis was a major urban center inhabited by wealthy and cultured individuals. The fine craftsmanship and high quality of the artworks and architectural remains uncovered during excavations in and beneath the modern city center of Aydın further support this characterization.

This study examines a terracotta mask recovered during rescue excavations conducted by specialists from the Aydın Archaeology Museum Directorate in the Köprülü Neighborhood of the Efeler District, Aydın Province, within the boundaries of the Third-Degree Archaeological Site. In 2016, a rectangular tomb featuring a central dromos and a barrel-vaulted ceiling was uncovered in an area affected by illegal diggings within the Southern Necropolis of Tralleis (**Fig. 2-3**). Access to the tomb chamber is through an arched doorway. The tomb is designed with cist-type klinai aligned along the north, south, and east walls. Due to destruction on the eastern side, the upper cover of the tomb was damaged, and displaced soil accumulated inside the chamber. This

disturbance compromised the original in-situ arrangement of the artifacts and led to a loss of archaeological context.

The mask, which is the subject of our study, was taken out of the eastern kline, on which rubble and filled soil were piled up. According to the conclusions drawn from the doctoral thesis conducted by the expert archaeologists assigned by the museum who carried out initial excavations in the tomb and the subsequent doctoral thesis, it was determined that the chamber tomb was used intensively between the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD⁸. Along with the mask, 6 Oil Lamps (early 1st century AD - early 2nd century AD), 2 Unguentarium (mid-1st century AD), 1 Game Stone (1st century AD) and 1 Coin (unidentified) were recovered from the eastern kline. An inscribed marble altar fixed to the wall was unearthed in the northwest corner of the chamber tomb. The inscription on the altar, which has a cylindrical body measuring 110 cm in height and 68 cm in diameter and has a bucranium garland belt around it, was translated by Prof. Dr. Hasan Malay. The inscription, which consists of a total of 10 lines, reads as follows:

"The tomb monument and altar of Bakhylos, Son of Isidoros the People and the Assembly and the International Athletes Crowned with the Sacred Wreath and the Artists Under the Patronage of the God Dionysus honored the good man, Bakhylos,

⁷ STRABON, XIV, I, 42.

⁸ AKKAN/COŞKUN/AKKAN/DEDE 2017, 389; COŞKUN 2022, 175.

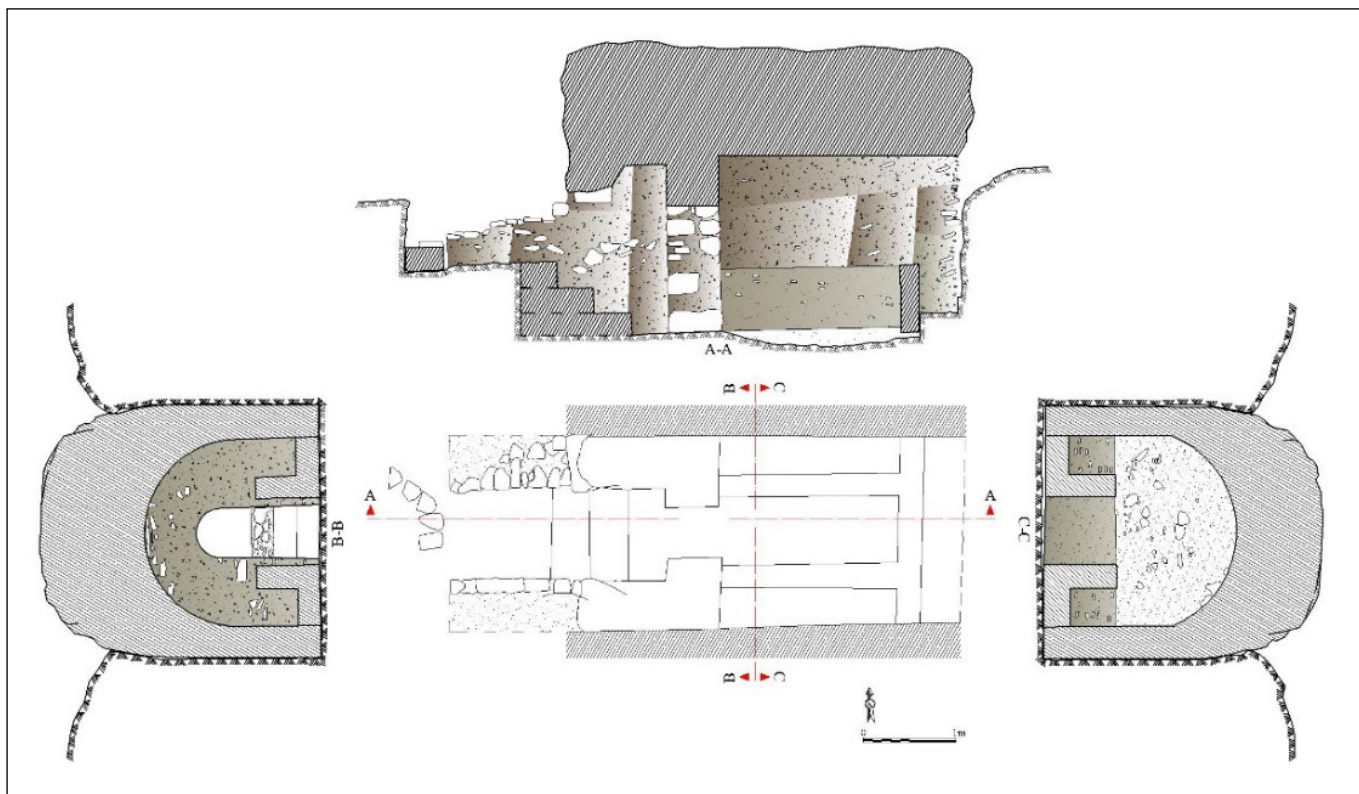


Fig. 2. Plan and Section of the Tomb No. 1 in Köprülü Neighborhood, Block 419, Parcel 28.



Fig. 3. Photographs of the Tomb No. 1 in Köprülü Neighborhood, Block 419, Parcel 28.

Son of Isidoros, who served as the commander of the city and also lawfully and justly administered the night security command and impartially presided over the festivities held in honor of the God Zeus and the Emperors. (These institutions) also honored his sons, Isidoros and Bakhlos.⁹

Based on Malay's writing style, it is understood that Bakhlyos, who is mentioned in the altar that he dates to the 2nd century AD, served in the sports and artists' unions mentioned above, in addition to his duties as a commander and administrator. As Akkan also stated, the city must have been one of the important centers of athletics and the arts

during this period¹⁰. The Artists' Union under the patronage of the god Dionysus took the form of an association to which local artists registered, gaining branch characteristics during the Roman Period¹¹. According to the inscription, the fair management he showed in the organized festivals ensured that Bakhlyos and his sons were honored. It is not surprising that a tragedy mask was found in the grave of a family that valued sports and art.

ORIGIN AND USE OF THE MASK

The use of masks, which are a type of headgear that can be in the form of a human, animal or mythological creature's

⁹ AKKAN/COŞKUN/AKKAN/DEDE 2017, 381-382, 394, Pic. 8.

¹⁰ AKKAN/COŞKUN/AKKAN/DEDE 2017, 382.

¹¹ ANEZİRİ 2009, 217.

face and worn on the face or head for various purposes such as not being recognized, for protection or to look beautiful, is almost as old as human history¹². The first known example was discovered at the entrance of La Roche-Cotard Cave on the banks of the Loire River in France¹³. Although some archaeologists question whether the “La Roche-Cotard Mask”, which was found in a layer containing a characteristic Middle Paleolithic stone industry and made of flint and bone, represents a human face, it has been accepted as an example of artistic expression in the Paleolithic Period. The artifact called the “Mousterian Protofigurine” was dated between 75,000-58,000 as a result of the examination of bone remains found in the cave using radiocarbon (C 14) and quartz optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) methods. The first anthropomorphic masks, known as the “Judean Masks” from the Southern Levant Region, dating back 9,000 years, are examples of Pre-Pottery Neolithic B Period (PPNB) limestone¹⁴. The practice of modeling facial features on the skull, encountered in the first village settlements in the Levant Region during the same period, is encountered in settlements such as Çatalhöyük, Köşk Höyük, Tepecik-Çiftlik in Anatolia during the Late Neolithic Period¹⁵. Plastered skulls, which originated from efforts to immortalize the human face by plastering it with clay/plaster, must have been produced for ritual performances. Although funeral masks consisting of independent sections made of wood and cardboard¹⁶ were used to cover the faces of the dead from the Old Kingdom Period in Egypt, this practice was later abandoned. Because over time, more holistic masks made of durable materials such as gold and precious stones, where the face was processed into a mummy case, as in Tutankhamun’s mask, were used for the funerals of the royal family or nobles¹⁷. The silver goblet found in the Tsintskaro Kurgan in the Trialeti region of Georgia and dated to the first half of the 2nd millennium BC is an example of the use of masks in religious ceremonies in the Bronze Age¹⁸. The ceremonial procession on the goblet exhibited in the Georgian National Museum features men wearing wolf masks and carrying goblets to be offered to the altar. The gold burial masks unearthed in shaft graves in Mycenae, where an aristocratic royal dynasty ruled in the Late Bronze Age, also indicate the use of masks in funeral ceremonies and tombs. The mask, which probably represents an early attempt at a real portrait and is known in archaeological literature as the “Mask of Agamemnon” and dates back to 1550-1500 BC¹⁹, is among the other examples²⁰ found in burial chambers A and B,

and is now among the collections of the National Museum of Athens. A similar face mask made of gold sheet (repoussé) discovered by Schliemann in 1876 was found in Central Anatolia²¹. This mask probably covered the face of a dead king or prince. All of these were certainly measures taken to give the royal dead an incorruptible face and to postpone the inevitable decay as much as possible²². In addition to the Mycenaean masks, a rectangular curved gold plate was found on the facial bones of a warrior in Tholos Tomb B, dated to the Late Minoan III C period at Mesa Mouliana in Crete. The Mouliana Mask²³, with rounded corners and a gap for the nose, was made in the same technique, is simpler and cruder than the Mycenaean Masks, and although it does not reflect the face of the deceased, it was made for a similar purpose. Clay masks have been found in Tharros in Sardinia in the 7th/6th centuries BC, and bronze examples in Chiusi in Tuscany and in the Steyr region of Austria²⁴. Masks used in funerary ceremonies can also be seen in the Archaic tombs²⁵ at Trebenishte, Petilep and Sindos. In fact, funeral masks made of gold were found in tombs dating to the same period in Archontiko, near Giannitsa in the Pella region of Greece²⁶.

As can be understood from the examples mentioned, masks used for different purposes such as fertility, rain, harvest time, healing diseases, and keeping society under control, in addition to burial, are known to have different meanings and functions depending on the context, and even the materials used reflect social status²⁷. Masks, which correspond to the Greek²⁸ words προσωπεῖον, κεφαλή περίθετος, πρόσωπον, and the Latin²⁹ words persona and larva, and whose primary use is much older than theater structures, are generally divided into three groups as ritual, portrait and stage masks³⁰. Ritual masks are masks generally used in religious ceremonies and even symbolize gods and goddesses³¹. Portrait masks symbolize famous people, while stage masks are works used by actors in theaters.

Stage masks, which began to be seen in Athens in the 6th and 5th centuries BC, allowed actors to quickly assume multiple roles in theater plays³². It is accepted that masks, which were previously known to be made of wood, cork or leather, were first made of baked clay in the late 5th century BC³³. Since masks were used in ancient Greece in Dionysus festivals, they were associated with this god, and since they have been accepted as a symbol of theater since Greek tragedy, they have been defined as theater masks³⁴. This

¹² SALTUK 1993, 116; KAPTAN 2001, 56.

¹³ MARQUET/LORBLANCHET/OBERLİN 2016, p. 253-263.

¹⁴ HERSHMAN 2014, 31.

¹⁵ ÖZBEK 2009, 147; BÜYÜKKARAKAYA/CAVALLİ/ÇAKAN/CANOL/FALAY/ORMANCI 2024, 1, Fig. 1.

¹⁶ It is a type of paper pulp-like material produced by hardening linen and papyrus fibers with plaster, and used to wrap the bodies of dead people and animals. See ATEŞ/ÖREN 2023, 2593, Dn. 10.

¹⁷ DESPINI/SCHÜRMAN/GISLER 2009, 27, Dn. 62.

¹⁸ ODIHSELI 2019, 399, Dn. 76.

¹⁹ According to Schliemann, the mask depicts King Agamemnon, one of the heroes of the Trojan War. According to Schliemann’s theory, the mask is known in archaeological literature as the “Mask of Agamemnon.” However, modern research suggests that the mask predates the legendary Trojan War by 300-400 years. MARINATOS/HIRMER 1973, 184-189; HIGGINS 1997, 152-153.

²⁰ MARINATOS/HIRMER 1973, 184-189; DESPINI/SCHÜRMAN/GISLER 2009, p. 20-65.

²¹ ALP 1965, 15-18.

²² RIETH 1973, 29.

²³ XANTHOUDIDES 1904, “Εκ Κρήτης. Β. Οι Τάφοι των Μουλιανών.” Αρχαιολογική Εφημερίς, 49, Pic. 12.

²⁴ RIETH 1973, 30; DESPINI/SCHÜRMAN/GISLER 2009, 28.

²⁵ RIETH 1973, 29-31; DESPINI/SCHÜRMAN/GISLER 2009, 23; CHULEV 2014, 1-25.

²⁶ DESPINI/SCHÜRMAN/GISLER 2009, 23.

²⁷ KAPTAN 2001, 58; SÖĞÜT/YILMAZ 2012, 3, Fn. 15; ÖZER/TÜRKAN/ERDİNÇ 2022, 87.

²⁸ LIDDELL/SCOTT 1940.

²⁹ LEWIS/SHORT 1879.

³⁰ SÖĞÜT/YILMAZ 2012, 3.

³¹ SÖĞÜT/YILMAZ 2012, 3, Fn. 12.

³² ÖZBAY 2019, 88.

³³ SCHWARZMAIER 2010, 42; ÇEKILMEZ 2014, 104.

³⁴ BIEBER 1961, Fig. 31-33; ÖZER/TÜRKAN/ERDİNÇ 2022, 87. It is thought that the mask was first used on the theater stage by Thespis in the

religious aspect of masks, which were used as a cult image and were associated with gods, also led to them being hung on walls as protective-frightening amulets for “apotropaic” purposes³⁵. For example, all stages of ceramic production are depicted on a black-figured hydria dated 550 BC³⁶. In the depiction, a mask is hung as a protector over the potter’s kiln, which was the most dangerous part of the workshop and therefore where accidents could occur. Burford states that these masks are particularly grotesque³⁷. Perhaps it could have been placed in a tomb for the same purpose, as in the Tralleis example. Because Dionysus, known as the God closest to humans, was not only the god of the living but also the god of the dead. This chthonic character of Dionysus is also encountered in his Anthesteria Festivals. The mask has an eschatological importance in tombs and sarcophagi and refers to the Dionysian mysteries³⁸. After the Archaic Period, the tradition of golden masks in tombs re-emerges in the Syria-Palestine Region in the Late Hellenistic and Roman Periods³⁹. In the Roman Republican Period, the most important area of use of the mask was the imago (ancestral mask) cult. When someone from a noble family died, a wax mold was taken from their face and sometimes a professional actor put the mask on their face to ensure that they attended the funeral in this way⁴⁰.

The holes seen on the masks, which were crafted as a decorative structural element⁴¹ and even hung on the walls of the architectural structure and were thought to protect the space “apotropaically” in this way⁴², must have been opened for the purpose of use. It has been observed that these types of masks, whose eyes and mouth parts were empty, had small holes in the forehead and chin sections, as in the Stratonikeia example⁴³. Such holes are accepted as holes for the ropes surrounding the actors’ faces. However, when a human face is considered, it is striking that some mask examples are more massive and heavier. Therefore, it is quite difficult for the actor to perform on stage under such a weight. In this case, it is thought that the mask was hung on the wall of a house rather than worn on the face, or placed as a burial offering near the grave⁴⁴.

TRALLEIS SOUTH NECROPOLIS TOMB CHAMBER MASK

The mask⁴⁵ (**Fig. 4**) found in the east kline of the grave room no. 1 in the Köprülü Neighborhood, block 419, parcel

6th century BC and that these masks were generally made of colorless linen. HORST-BLUME 1999, 976. Although the mask is the symbol of Dionysus, it was also used in the cults of Artemis and Demeter. Pausanias, speaking of the cult of Demeter of Kidaria in Arcadia, states that the priestess wore the goddess’s mask in the goddess’s rituals. PAUSANIAS, VIII,15,1-3; OTTO 1965, 87. INDIRKAŞ 2012, 61.

³⁵ BURFORD 1972, 122; SÖĞÜT/YILMAZ 2012, 3, Fn. 11.

³⁶ BURFORD 1972, Fig.17, 55.

³⁷ BURFORD 1972, 122.

³⁸ HORST/BLUME 1999, 975.

³⁹ RIETH 1973, 32; DESPINI/SCHÜRMMANN/GISLER 2009, 24.

⁴⁰ SMITH/WAYTE/MARINDIN 1890; ÖZER/TÜRKAN/ERDİNÇ 2022, 88.

⁴¹ MORETTI 1993, 207-223; DURMUŞ 2016, 28.

⁴² BURFORD 1972, 122, Pl. 17, 32; HORST/BLUME 1999, 979, Fn. 20-22.

⁴³ SÖĞÜT/YILMAZ 2012, 3-4, Fn. 20.

⁴⁴ ÖZER/TÜRKAN/ERDİNÇ 2022, 88.

⁴⁵ The dimensions of the Tralleis Mask with inventory number 2017/88 are



Fig. 4. Tralleis Mask.

28, has missing parts in the hair on the left side and the hair on the back of the head. The work, which was shaped from reddish yellow paste with mica additives, was covered with the same color slip⁴⁶. In the details, very little white slip and red paint residues are observed between the hair curls on the lower right. Three rows of laurel leaves are depicted on the hair curls that taper towards the middle in the form of a triangular crown on the narrow forehead and also serve as a very high onkos⁴⁷. The hair is in the form of round curls around the face. The pupils are carved in the form of small holes in the middle of the thick almond-shaped eyelids. There is a surface crack at the tip of the long nose, and full lips are open at the bottom. The full face is finished with a round chin. The right side of the head is preserved and the left side is missing, and a central area surrounding the facial area where the face can sit is left in the middle on the back of the head (**Fig. 5**). The hair was indicated by superficial scratches on the terracotta plate, which was left plain without decoration compared to the highly decorated front face and was later restored, and was given a curved shape on the right back side of the head.

The female masks recovered from ancient centers are fewer in number than the male masks. Among the many mask groups recovered from Amisos, female tragedy masks were found, as in the Tralleis example⁴⁸. Among the masks examined by Töpperwein in Pergamon, there is an artifact⁴⁹ with an onkos section consisting of superimposed curls. When we look at a female comedy mask⁵⁰ among the masks recovered from Myrina, it is seen that it is similar to our example preserved in the Aydın Archaeology Museum in

as follows: Height 13.4 cm, Width 9.5 cm, Face Width 5.7 cm, Face Length 6.7 cm.

⁴⁶ According to the Munsell Color Catalogue of Tralleis Mask, Paste Color: 7.5 YR 7/6 reddish yellow, Slip Color: 7.5 YR 7/6 reddish yellow.

⁴⁷ A type of protruding headdress, resembling hair, worn by actors in ancient theaters, designed to elongate the performers’ height and conceal the bulk of the mask. This voluminous hairstyle would eventually become an essential element of the tragedy mask. Thus, a more effective and superior appearance was achieved with the onkos, and the high hairstyle was thought to reflect a distinguished character. WILES 1991, 2; HORST-BLUME 1999, 976; SALTUK 1993, 128; CAMPBELL 2000, 26; DURMUŞ 2016, 27.

⁴⁸ SUMERER 1999, Tafel 29, M III 2.

⁴⁹ TÖPPERWEIN 1972, 124-124, Taf. 76, 524.

⁵⁰ BURR 1934, 77, Pl. XLII, 115.



Fig. 5. Mask Views from Different Angles.

terms of a full face with prominent cheekbones. The hair of a female mask⁵¹ recovered from Kalymnos, now in the collections of the British Museum, is parted in the middle above the forehead and reflects a voluminous hairstyle similar to the Tralleis example. Unlike the present mask, however, the hair is decorated with small leaves and fruits. The face of the Kalymnos mask, dated to the late 2nd century BC–early 1st century BC, also displays prominent cheekbones like the Tralleis example, but its eyes are not pierced.

A work with a high onkos, like the Tralleis example, is preserved in the Sadberk Hanım Museum Collection. However, the facial features of the mask, dated to the 3rd century AD, are left very superficial compared to the Tralleis example⁵². This hair type seen in the Tralleis example is more compatible with the hair type of Julia Flavia and Domitia Longina⁵³ from the Flavian Dynasty. This puffy model, which was loved and used by women of the period, facilitated the use of the exaggerated headdress called onkos to make the actors taller. Figurine heads with similar hair types are also seen in the Smyrna figurines⁵⁴ preserved in the British Museum and dated to the late 1st century AD due to their hair style. The old woman mask on a marble frieze found in Pergamon is also depicted with a similar hair type and a high onkos⁵⁵. Onkos, which first began to be seen around 300 BC, were used for a long time and continued to be seen in tragedy masks until the end of the Roman Imperial Period⁵⁶.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Mask making was a challenging craft that comes with several technical difficulties. The mouth area should allow for clear sound without being muffled, and the eye holes need to be appropriately sized to ensure that the actor has adequate vision. This could result in anatomical distortions. Just as the columns of the Parthenon were made curved so that it could appear straight, the proportions had to be adjusted properly

so that the mask could be symmetrical⁵⁷. The proportions of the Tralleis example are seen to be quite regular. However, the holes in the eyes are quite small compared to those seen in masks used in theater plays. When we look at the dimensions of the mask, it is seen that it would be difficult for even a child's face to fit through. Therefore, rather than being a real mask used in plays, it must have been a symbolically sized mask that had a meaning related to the Dionysian cult and was used as an amulet⁵⁸ in the grave. A similar application was seen on a much larger scale in the Necropolis in Lipari⁵⁹. In Lipari, miniature copies of tragedy, satyr and comedy masks made of terracotta, approximately 8-10 cm high, were found. More than 1200 miniature masks found in the graves prove the connection between the Dionysian cult practiced in Lipari and the afterlife⁶⁰. The small size of these terracotta masks, which date from the beginning of the 4th century BC to the middle of the 3rd century BC, and the fact that they were found in the graves suggest that the Tralleis example is a late version of this tradition. The Tralleis example, as understood from the hair type, must date back to the Flavian Period, that is, the end of the 1st century AD. Considering that the inscribed altar found in the grave dates back to the 2nd century AD, it is possible that a terracotta tragedy mask was left as an amulet in a burial belonging to the family of Bacchyllos, or even in the grave of a theater actor or a member of the Dionysian cult within the family.

⁵¹ BURN/HIGGINS 2001, 210, Pl. 103, 2659.

⁵² ÇOKAY KEPÇE/ÖZDEN GERÇEKLER 2011, 213, 126.

⁵³ KLEINER 1992, 179, Fig. 148.

⁵⁴ BURN/HIGGINS 2001, 135, Pl. 60, 2326.

⁵⁵ BIEBER 1961, 85.

⁵⁶ SCHWARZMAIER 2010, 44.

⁵⁷ WILES 2007, 59.

⁵⁸ BURR 1934, 77.

⁵⁹ Lipari is a small island in the northern province of Messina, north of Sicily. The tombs in the necropolis date from the founding of Greek cities, from 580 BC, to the Roman Imperial period.

⁶⁰ BREA/COEN/DESCOEUDRES 1992/1993, 23.

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