

The Physicality of the Other

Edited by
ANGELIKA BERLEJUNG
and JUDITH E. FILITZ

*Orientalische Religionen
in der Antike*

27

Mohr Siebeck

Orientalische Religionen in der Antike

Ägypten, Israel, Alter Orient

Oriental Religions in Antiquity

Egypt, Israel, Ancient Near East

(ORA)

Herausgegeben von / Edited by

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Masks from the Ancient Near East and
the Eastern Mediterranean

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ISBN 978-3-16-155513-8 / eISBN 978-3-16-160605-2 unveränderte eBook-Ausgabe 2021
ISSN 1869-0513 (Orientalische Religionen in der Antike)

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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The book was printed by Gulde Druck in Tübingen on non-aging paper and bound by Buchbinderei Spinner in Ottersweier.

Printed in Germany.

Preface

From antiquity until today, masks are part of ritual and theatre, religion and art. They can be attached to nearly any object or can be worn by the living or the dead. Although they appear in very different contexts, times, spaces, and cultures and seem to be an element of the human condition, in historical sciences they do not get the attention that they deserve. They are only rarely treated in a monograph and are often considered to be a marginal phenomenon. This is especially the case for masks from the ancient Near East and the Levant, while the Greek theatre masks and the Egyptian mummy masks have received some attention. Nearly all museums in the world have some masks of Antiquity in their stock and therefore present them in an encyclopaedic way in exhibition catalogues. However, the masks of the ancient Near Eastern cultures have not been systematically treated, compared, and analyzed with reference to their possible functions, styles, or meanings, and the possible intercultural transfer, metamorphosis and local interpretations have not yet been studied. However, masks are (and hint at) *a mysterium tremendum et fascinans* par excellence. And they are an important topic for interdisciplinary research from different academic points of view, including archaeological, iconographical, anthropological, cultural, biblical, historical, and theological perspectives or in the contexts of theatre and art. Each of these approaches adds a different look at a particular facet of the complex phenomenon of masks.

The multi-faceted topic can only be treated in interdisciplinary cooperation and dialogue. Based on the assumption that masks embody the physicality of the other and belong to a communication system, the present volume brings together different disciplines in order to shed some light on the masks of the ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean from the third to the first millennium BCE. We are aware of the fact that we have only made a preliminary step in the direction of a systematic treatment of masks in Antiquity and that some further research has to be done. Fortunately, during the three-day symposium *The Physicality of the Other – Masks as a Means of Encounter*, organized by the Institute of Old Testament Studies at Leipzig University in November 2015 and funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, we brought together fourteen scholars who presented their research on masks and enriched the discussion panels with their skills and knowledge. Most of the collected essays in this volume were presented during this meeting, with some being added later as the outcome of the ongoing research. Following the program of the conference-sessions, the present book is organized in an introductory part followed by sections focusing on the different geographical areas: Egypt, Southern Levant, Syria, and Mesopotamia. From the Eastern Mediterranean, the road is taken to Europe in order to sketch the cultural exchange between Orient

and Occident. Despite changes, developments, and local interpretations, there are many aspects that reveal masks in Europe as part of an ancient and cross-cultural phenomenon.

We want to thank all speakers who took part in the stimulating conference, presented their current research in Leipzig, and contributed to these conference proceedings. Likewise, we are indebted to the authors who joined our project after the conference and supported this volume with their articles.

A book on masks needs images. Therefore we want to express our gratitude to all those who hold the rights of reproduction over the many drawings, images, and photographs presented in the articles and the catalogue and who permitted the various authors and us to use them in the present publication. Here, our special thank goes to the Israel Antiquities Authority, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Eran Arie and Nili Luria; Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem, Noga Zeevi; Direction Générale des Antiquités, Beirut, Sarkis Khoury and Anne-Marie Afeiche; David Ben-Shlomo; Ayelet Gilboa; Othmar Keel; Oren Tal; Ephraim Stern; Ilan Sharon; Peter Fischer; Aren Maeir; Amit Dagan; Yifat Thareani; Gunnar Lehmann; Israel Finkelstein; Raz Kletter; Eliezer Oren; Zeev Herzog; Liat Naeh; Nimrod Getzov; Jean-Baptiste Humbert; Assaf Kleiman; Shlomo Bunimovitz; Stefan Münger; Katri Saarelainen; Rona Avissar Lewis and Martin Peilstöcker. We also thank the editors for the inclusion in the series ORA and the publisher Mohr Siebeck for all the help and advice. Moreover, we are indebted to Sandy Rogers and Stephen Germany who assisted in questions of translations as well as to Takayoshi Oshima and Svetlana Matskevich for their support during the process of editing. Last but not least, we want to thank our staff in Leipzig for their untiring, reliable, and enthusiastic help in realizing this volume: Sebastian Dallmann, Josephine Haas, Susanne Kohlhaas, Anna Kühleis, Hannes Neitzke, Lisa Pacholleck, Juliane Stein, Christian Swistek, and Jan Philipp Turck.

Now, it is time to lift the curtain for the masks from the ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean and to get in touch with *the Other*.

Angelika Berlejung
Judith E. Filitz
Leipzig, Dezember 2017

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Abbreviations

All abbreviations used in the articles as well as in the catalogue follow “The SBL Handbook of Style” (1999); concerning Ancient Near Eastern studies, see the list of abbreviations of the “Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie” (2015); for abbreviations in Egyptology, see “Lexikon der Ägyptologie” (1975–1992).

I. Introductory Considerations

Of Masks and Men

Thoughts on Masks from Different Perspectives

Judith E. Filitz

Although European society has left only little space for material masks and, in most of the cases, has reduced their usage to special times like Carnival, the term *mask* as a metaphor has achieved an inherent part of everyday language.¹ By looking up the German word for *mask* (“Maske”) in the well-known German dictionary *Duden*, one can find a not inconsiderable number of explanations: starting with masks as an object and continuing through protective masks such as may be used in the workplace, from made up faces to the entry field of search engines like Google. Following the definitions, and this is more revealing, there is a list of different synonyms for the German word *Maske*. This list of synonyms begins with *Gesicht* (“face”) and *Larve*. The last is an archaic word for mask, which is related to the German word *entlarven* which means “to expose someone” or, better, “to unmask someone” and which also calls to mind the English word *larva*. These entries are not spectacular, but the second part of this list of synonyms is more interesting and shows what ideas and emotions are associated with masks in the German language. Here, one finds suggested synonyms such as falsehood, pretence, jugglery, duplicity, and hypocrisy, all concepts that have a negative connotation. The terms describe moments of dishonesty and insincerity, which are condemned by society. These are also associated with the above mentioned verb *entlarven* or the idiom *die Maske fallen lassen* (“someone’s mask slips”). As can easily be seen, the English language offers similar ideas. The Oxford English Dictionary lists some definitions of *mask*, including: “[a] facial expression assumed deliberately to conceal an emotion or give a false impression; an outward appearance which belies a person’s true nature.”² Furthermore, there are many ways of understanding the term in the con-

¹ According to this, there are many approaches concerning masks from different perspectives including ethnology (e.g., LÉVI-STRAUSS, Way), ritual studies (e.g., GRIMES, Masking, 508–516), cultural history (e.g., WEIHE, Paradoxie), comprehensive cultural anthropology (e.g., EDSON, Masks), philosophy (e.g., OLSCHANSKI, Maske), pictorial science (e.g., BELTING, Bild-Anthropologie, 34–38), theatre studies (e.g., MÜNZ, Aldilà, 275–279), and many more. All of these approaches, which understand the term in different ways, have a claim to and shed light on one or more specific moments of masks. It is necessary to keep in mind that masks are a manifold phenomenon and that none of the named perspectives can give a complete examination and understanding. This little spotlight on masks cannot and shall not answer this claim, but tries to shed some light on different aspects of masks to encourage further research.

² OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, Mask n.³; see also the entries to the verb: cf. OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, Mask v.⁴.

text of hiding, pretending, and deceiving. *Mask* as a metaphor is thus connected with the realm of falsehood in opposition to the truth. It is something that has to be dropped off and removed in order to see the true individual, the real and undisguised person. A human wearing a mask wants to hide something, wants to deceive and delude. The dialectic of the mask concerning both *hiding* and *showing*, which will be described below, is reduced to the moment of hiding. What the mask shows, is seen as something false and insignificant.³ In the context of the search for the truth and authenticity of the individual, the mask has to be thrown off.⁴

To become free from these unilateral and mostly negative associations with the metaphorical mask as described above and also from the narrow and unreflected acceptance of an absolute understanding of what is meant by *theatre* or *ritual*, an inquiry about typical and characteristic elements of masks as an artifact is needed. Therefore, a look at the terminology is necessary and will lead to implied information about how to understand a mask and its usage. A concrete and final definition is waived, because masks are a cross-border phenomenon, located between cult and art as well as life,⁵ while appearing in so many different cultures.⁶ Hence, it is not appropriate to create universal statements, especially because masks are always part of their own cultural context.⁷ Nevertheless, some heuristic differentiations and demarcations are helpful as well as some ideas on masks from other disciplines.⁸ In the context of this volume, therefore, the emphasis is on masks of the eastern Mediterranean and the Ancient Near East from (but not necessarily restricted to) the 3rd millennium BCE to the early 1st millennium CE. However, the area of interest has to be limited, although this restriction is a provisional one. As a result, the focus will be on objects, as artifacts or shown in iconography, presenting aspects of human or animal bodies, which, in most cases, are just the head and the face, due to the condition of preservation. If iconographic material is involved, painted faces and bodies must also be taken into account.

³ For the meaning of mask in German see also WEIHE, *Paradoxie*, 25; for the negative perception see BAUMBACH, *Maske*, 105–107; FERINO-PAGDEN, *Geleit*, 12.

⁴ Cf. BAUMBACH, *Maske*, 105–107; SCHÄFER, *Maske*, 81f.

⁵ Even if they originate in cultic practices, masks can become objects of art, e.g., by transferring them to museum contexts.

⁶ However, especially in the cases of the Neolithic objects, it will be helpful to refer to results of anthropology, comparative religion, ethnology, etc. A collection of some aspects associated with masks in different cultures is presented by WEISS, *Universum*, 39–43. Concerning the problem of definition, see GRIMES, *Masking*, 508. For the following aspects of characterizing masks, results of other interdisciplinary research projects are necessary, though this will be done with reservations.

⁷ Concerning this aspect, see, e.g., the analysis of the Inuit masks of Northwest America by Lévi-Strauss. He worked out the interconnectedness of the masks and argued that masks must not be treated as isolated phenomena but must always be analyzed in the light of their neighbouring masks (cf. LÉVI-STRAUSS, *Way*, 144–148). For the masks of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East of Antiquity, this will not be possible in all cases. However, according to this, masks (and their appearance) should also be seen as a part of a concrete cultural region, among others including their mythical, religious, political, and social beliefs as well as their ideas of ‘aesthetics’ (see further EDSON, *Masks*, 56).

⁸ This will be done in the following description of masks, their functions and their meanings.

Nevertheless, one must always keep in mind the idea of whole body masks,⁹ as is seen, for example, on two Neo-Assyrian stone slabs in the form of lion-masks. As long as masks were made of textiles, it is unlikely to find more than just the head or face. These objects, especially when they present faces, can, and mostly do, fit human faces, but, as it is also possible that smaller objects were part of a whole body mask, this is not a requirement. It is of more importance that they do not form a sculpture or bust but an artifact that is mobile and can be worn in different ways by human beings or other objects such as divine images, cultic poles, or sarcophagi. In many cases, this can result in open eyes and/or an open mouth. Furthermore, a look at the function is helpful. If these objects allow or seem to allow a (cultic) presence of the figure associated with it and, thus, imply some form of transformation, then one can speak of a mask. These transformations can occur in different ways, including a total assimilation of the figure or the wearer as well as a partial, more or less embracing conjunction of them. Moreover, the transformation does not only have to touch the wearer (and the figure) but also can include other participants. At least, at the end of the event there is also a re-transformation. Here, the context of the mask-wearing is primarily ritual practices and can be paired with special movements such as dancing, which also belong to the event of the mask.¹⁰ Although ancient masks are in many cases shown and viewed in isolation, for example in a museum, it is important to notice that they were part of a larger context. However, the object of the mask itself appears as a medium of communication and as a memorial of the transformational event.¹¹ If a wearer can be identified, for example by the iconographic material, this also refers to a mask, as there is no need for an identification of the wearer and the figure. There are some cases, as is seen in Egypt, in which the wearer can be identified as a priest. Nevertheless, there are many grey areas and open borders to other phenomena, such as amulets, protomes, divine images as the body of a god, plastered skulls, or tattoos,¹² so that each case has to be proven individually.

Meanwhile, for understanding these ancient masks of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, it is not only necessary to analyze the artifacts and the iconographic evidence, but it is also indispensable to reflect the particular culture's associations with masks. For the European region, as has already been seen, they often have negative connotations. When these connotations are transferred onto ancient masks, whether consciously or unconsciously, ambiguous aspects and striking features of the mask in creating a bridge between this world and beyond are lost.

This article attempts to provide insight into different aspects of masks and their interpretations. Therefore, the article begins with a closer examination of the terminology surrounding masks followed by a description of some of the ambiguities associated with them. The focus then turns to the ancient masks of the Eastern Mediterranean and

⁹ Due to the complicated source situation, this focus is preliminarily on the outer appearances. References to body movements can only be made by iconography with clear evidence as well as by corresponding instructions in ritual texts.

¹⁰ Cf. HERSHMAN, *Image*, 30.

¹¹ Cf. WEIHE, *Paradoxie*, 18.

¹² Cf. EDSON, *Masks*, 13–15.

the Near East and their role in scholarship. The paper then ends with some ideas regarding the treatment of masks and their functions in modern society.

1. What Characterizes a Mask?

Terminology: Persona, Mask, Larva, Mask-Figure, and the Other

That this negative understanding of the modern, metaphorical use of *mask* does not correspond to the phenomenon and event of the mask is already widely known. One can see this easily by looking at the Latin word for mask, which is *persona*, and the developments of this term, which has led to the modern understanding of the idea of *person*.



fig. 1: Dancing (?) Phersu with birds

The origin of the term *persona* was controversially discussed for a long time, and there have been different ideas of its etymology.¹³ It was and is often still said that it derives from a Latin word *personare* which means “to sound through”. However, this is a pseudo-etymology, which was mentioned by the Latin writer Aulus Gellius while citing a grammarian called Gavius Bassus and his work *De origine vocabulorum* (1st century BCE).¹⁴ Bassus considers that the mask covers the whole head of an actor and that the only opening was at the place of the mouth. This opening and the extension of the mask enabled a strengthening of the sound, and this helped the audience to understand the actor’s speech.



fig. 2: Phersu, a dog and a man

¹³ Cf. WEIHE, *Paradoxie*, 27–29; BRASSER, *Rolle*, 53–59; see DELUMEAU, *Development*, 13–18.

¹⁴ Cf. GELLIUS, *Noctes Atticae*, V,7; see also WEIHE, *Paradoxie*, 27f.; BRASSER, *Rolle*, 54.

Nevertheless, there is a more convincing proposal for the term's origin, which comes from the Etruscan culture and a figure, possibly divine or demonic, called Phersu. He is attested by iconography and epigraphy in an Etruscan tomb called *Tomba degli Auguri*, which is located in the Italian Tarquinia, nearly 90 kilometers northwest of Rome, and is dated to 540–530 BCE.¹⁵ A rectangular burial chamber is embellished with wall paintings, and the figure appears here and is identified by an inscription below the paintings as Phersu. The paintings show him in interesting but confusing positions. In one scene, Phersu, surrounded by birds and plants, is just going to jump to the right, while his head is turned to the left; perhaps, he is dancing or imitating a fight (fig. 1).¹⁶ In the centre of another scene, there are two wrestlers with two persons to the left of them, coming to join the event. On the right side of the wrestlers, one can find Phersu holding a leash in his hand (fig. 2). Left to him, there is another person wearing a white bag on his head and a club in his hand. He is getting caught up in Phersu's leash and simultaneously attacked by a dog. This and the other paintings imply that Phersu belongs to funeral games in Etruscan culture.¹⁷ While Phersu's dress differs in the scenes, although it is scanty in both cases,¹⁸ he is always wearing a red face mask with a long goatee; pointed ears, though the normal ears are still visible; and a pointed brimmed cap.¹⁹ It is controversial, if the name Phersu refers to an actor or to a figure, a demon or a god. The latter is uncertain, because there is no clear attestation of Phersu being a part of the Etruscan pantheon.²⁰ Otherwise, according to the context, there is a clear attestation of Phersu belonging to funeral rites and therefore of a connection to the afterworld. Perhaps, the term Phersu names both a figure of the otherworld and the actor wearing its mask.²¹ This is indicated by the pictures, which show a doubled being: Phersu as the figure becoming present and affecting the scene on the one hand and the wearer of the mask on the other hand. It must be noted though that this does not seem to be a concrete individual but rather a functionary such a pro-

¹⁵ Cf. WEBER-LEHMANN, *Etrusker*, 129–135; STEINGRÄBER, *Tarquinia*, 23–28. Different interpretations of the paintings are listed in DOST, *Strukturfigur*, 169–174. For other attestations of Phersu see DOST, *Strukturfigur*, 174f. and his article in this volume.

¹⁶ This might be indicated by his clenched fist (cf. WEBER-LEHMANN, *Etrusker*, 132).

¹⁷ Cf. BEVAGNA, *Sport*, 404f.

¹⁸ His dress recalls the Anatolian traditions and is, perhaps, an indication of its origin in the east (cf. WEBER-LEHMANN, *Etrusker*, 131f.).

¹⁹ There are a few other pictures of Phersu showing him in similar scenes with music and athletic contexts (cf. AVRAMIDOU, *Phersu*, 73; WEBER-LEHMANN, *Etrusker*, 132). To understand Phersu as a combination of Fufluns (as a local version of Dionysus) and Orpheus (cf. AVRAMIDOU, *Phersu*, 73–78) reduces Phersu to an actor impersonating the initiator of the Orphic mysteries. By understanding him in this way, the figure loses his own, Etruscan identity and is interpreted only from the outside. For other interpretations in short see BEVAGNA, *Sport*, 399.

²⁰ Many researchers postulate that he is a god or a demon without verifiable arguments, including WEIHE, *Paradoxie*, 28.181.

²¹ Concerning the problem of identifying Phersu and deciding whether the term means a transcendent figure, an actor, a mask, or anything else see DOST, *Strukturfigur*, 176–184.

fessional belonging to a cult and/or a sport.²² According to the connection with funeral rites, both belong to the context of death. In this way, the mask and its wearer seem to create something like the presence of a mythical figure. In fact, if *persona* is derived from this Etruscan phenomenon and can be translated as “something belonging to Phersu”²³, then the term primarily indicates the red face mask as the key feature of the mask-wearer as well as the represented figure and, therefore, of the event of the mask.

However, over time, the term *persona* was used to name the mask as an object and artifact, particularly in contexts of ancient theatre. In the course of philosophical and theological discourse, its meaning changed. Essentially this occurred in the context of the Christian discussion about Trinity, which transformed the term *persona* from a mask as a material object to the three persons of the Trinity: God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As early as the 1st century BCE, the term was understood by Cicero according to behaviour and action; thus there is already a connection to the aspects of acting.²⁴ Ranked as one of the most important pioneers of the Christian interpretation of *persona* is Tertullian, from whom the concise expression used to describe the Trinity originates: *una substantia – tres personae*.²⁵ With these words, he could characterize the paradox of thinking of the unity and the trinity of God at the same time without overemphasizing either of these poles. With this narrow concept of *persona*, it was possible to name the distinctiveness but not independence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within their relational structure. Afterwards, this could be transferred to the description of the human, in which personhood was understood in terms of distinctiveness and relationship regarding God and fellow persons.²⁶ Equally, with the Cappadocian Fathers, especially Basil the Great in the 4th century CE, we find this interpretation formulated as *μία οὐσία τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις*.²⁷ The emphasis on distinctiveness is most important for the further development of this term, and concerning this, Boethius, a Roman scholar of late Antiquity, is very important. He promoted this idea and defined *persona* as “*persona est naturae rationabilis individua substantia*”²⁸. In this way, *persona* became a word to name the individual, and this is how it is still used today, as *person*.²⁹

²² As in many cases of ancient cultures, a clear distinction between sacred and profane and between religion and sport is not indicated here (cf. BEVAGNA, Sport, 405f.). Nevertheless, this differentiation is done because of heuristic reasons.

²³ In the Etruscan language, the ending *-na* indicates a belonging to someone (cf. BRASSER, Rolle, 57f.).

²⁴ Cf. WEIHE, Paradoxie, 183f.330–332.

²⁵ Analogous to the statements in *Adversus Praexan* (e.g., TERTULLIAN, Praxeian, ch. 11,10).

²⁶ Cf. HAUDEL, Gotteslehre, 63–66.177f.; DRECOLL, Entwicklungen, 87f.; see also WEIHE, Paradoxie, 190–195.

²⁷ Cf. HAUDEL, Gotteslehre, 73–79.

²⁸ BOETHIUS, Contra Eutychen et Nestorium, III,1–5 (BOETHIUS, Traktate, 74); see also SCHLAP-KOHL, Persona, 20–71; WEIHE, Paradoxie, 195–206; DRECOLL, Entwicklungen, 134f.

²⁹ See also BAUMBACH, Maske, 118f. In law, the term is differentiated between the *natural person* as an individual having legal capacity and the *juridical person* as an entity, to which legal capacity is ascribed by law (cf. GRUBE, Person, 731f.).

With this change from an object to a subject, *persona* lost its semantic range of mask, and, in European languages, the term *mask* became preferred as a name for objects used in the cult or theatre.³⁰ At this point, one can also turn to early studies in psychology. C.G. Jung once again used the term *persona* in his psychological theories. With *persona*, he names that part of the “I” that is responsible for the connection to the outside world and is, therefore, strongly shaped by adaptations to social norms and behaviours. It is a mask, which is worn by the “I”, to communicate with other people. Also, in Jung’s concept, this mask hides and protects something, namely the (alleged) true nature of the individual.³¹ Once again, there seems to be differences between the true and authentic “I” and the mask of pretence which keeps up appearances.

Nevertheless, the most important and best-known term is *mask* itself. It is the typical name in many European languages (*masque, maschera, máscara* etc.) referring mostly to material objects, which can be worn on the face. However, also according to European traditions, one should always include whole body masks, such as Harlequin shows in the *commedia all’improvviso*.³² Although this term is used in everyday language, there is no unquestionable etymological derivation for it. Notwithstanding, there are some ideas, which are quoted in the research literature. The first suggestion deduces *mask* from the Langobardic word *masca*, what meant something like a net, in which a decedent was wrapped. This would prevent the dead from coming back. The term was then used for those actors, who embodied such a demonic revenant. However, this etymological proposal has some linguistic difficulties.³³ Another idea is to derive the term from a non-Indo-European word **mask-* meaning *black* or *sooted* and which refers to a black, demonic being, associated with a mask.³⁴ Although controversial, the last etymological theory often found in the research literature is an assumption of an Arabic root *sh-r* with the prefix *m* to be the origin of *mask*. In this way, it names both an object of mockery and the jester, a buffoon and at the same time a masked person.³⁵ Although there are many possibilities, the origin of the term seems to lead either to a

³⁰ Furthermore, it appears as a description for social behaviour and social role over the centuries, e.g., with the social mask.

³¹ Cf. JUNG, *Beziehungen*, 201, §305; HARK, *Lexikon*, 122–124.

³² Cf. BAUMBACH, *Maske*, 105.

³³ This concerns the etymology of German *Masche* (“mesh”), which is not connected to *mask* (cf. WEIHE, *Paradoxie*, 25–27 by discussing the thesis of MEULI, *Schriften*, 84).

³⁴ This is also associated with a witch (cf. PFEIFER, *Wörterbuch*, 844f. referring to KELLER, *mask-*, 429–441).

³⁵ Cf. GRIMM/GRIMM, *Wörterbuch*, 1702; KLUGE/SEEBOLD, *Wörterbuch*, 604f.; WEIHE, *Paradoxie*, 25–27.52; Baumbach assumes a combination of Arabic, Latin-Langobardic, and Celtic influences (cf. BAUMBACH, *Maske*, 120). Interestingly, there is an Akkadian word that means *skin, hide, and leather* (see CAD M/1, *mašku*, 376–379) among others definitions. In the Gilgamesh Epic, in a passage describing the king’s mourning rites after his friend Enkidu has died reads (VIII, lines 90f.): „After you are gone [my hair will be matted in mourning,] clad in the skin of [a lion I shall wander] the wild“ (GEORGE, *Epic*, 66). Gilgamesh breaks up with the urban society and its conventions and moves to the steppe. Tablet X, line 6 mentions this clothing again. Perhaps the formulation is not meant to be taken literally and instead focuses on his extraordinary amount of body hair. Nevertheless, the wearing of a lion skin seems to be a possible interpretation, so that the term might refer to what is meant by the modern word *mask*.

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