

FRANÇOISE FRONTISI-DUCROUX, *Du masque au visage. Aspects de l'identité en Grèce ancienne (Idées et Recherches)*. Paris, Flammarion, 1995. 192 pp., ill. Pr. Fr. 180.

In *Du masque au visage* Frontisi-Ducroux sets out to do two closely related things: first, to study the *Wortfeld*, semantic domain, subset or whatever you choose to call it, of the word *prosopon* and a number of related words; and secondly, to study the iconography of mask and face, especially the frontal face. In themselves these two parts will not, and are not intended to, revolutionize our ideas: on the basis of this book, there is no need for a complete revision of the lemma s.v. *prosopon* in *LSJ* (at most a rearrangement), nor has a

work like Y. Korshak, *Frontal faces in Attic vase painting of the archaic period*, Chicago 1987, been superseded. The originality of the whole enterprise lies in the combination of the one and the other. This is also a very well-argued book, closely argued too, sometimes a bit too closely for my taste: “certaines de nos observations sembleront banales”, as F. says herself (21). In the end, however, I think she is right: even the banal should be made explicit, because especially the banal is in danger of being overlooked, and not only does this contribute to the persuasiveness of the complete text, but also the banalities are transformed by their inclusion into this meaningful whole.

F. first offers an overview of masks and ‘mascarons’, except funerary ones. With the important proviso that all that we have in the archaeological record are only simulacra of masks. We have to reason from images of masks, whether these are images in the usual sense (depicted on painted pottery, and so on) or votive copies of masks. A functional typology will not do, because the function is so often in doubt. One can only work with a formal typology. This is a very sensible approach, but F. chooses for an ‘emic’ apparatus: “s’il faut classer, que ce soit avec des notions grecques” (10). I disagree, if only because of *gorgoneion*, *mormolukeion*, *prosopon* and *prosopeion*, only *gorgoneion* can be linked to a definite class of objects. The Greek concepts are no good for our scholarly classifications: there, in the nature of things, we will have to come up with our own, etic, concepts. But this does not mean that the Greek concepts are not an interesting object of enquiry, and F. has much that is worthwhile to say on them. The word *prosopon* is the mainstay of her argument: *prosopon* is mask and face, it is both what one sees opposite oneself, and what one sees with.

The face is a “medium privilégié”: the *prosopon* is the locus of speaking and seeing, as reciprocal activities: one’s face is also being spoken to and being seen. The dead have no *prosopon*, just as the Gorgoneion is never called a *prosopon*. The face is where the individual shows his thoughts, feelings, character, emotions. F. contrasts this with the modern conception of the face, which is supposed to be a façade behind which the real person can hide. In ancient Greece, dissimulation is only to be understood with the word *prosopeion* in late usage: Lucian, Christian authors. In archaic, classical or hellenistic texts, to which F. restricts herself, there is nothing comparable; the usage of *prosopeion* as a deceptive façade is related to a late antique re-evaluation of the individual. This is all fairly persuasive, but maybe somewhat too schematic. Thus I doubt

whether the face as an inscrutable façade is nowadays a general conviction; it seems to me that in Holland at least, expressions like 'the face is the mirror of the soul' are still taken seriously. In order to know a person's real thoughts or intentions one does not listen to his words, but one scrutinizes his face, the eyes in particular. This immediately reminds me of F.'s analysis of Homeric epic, where lies and deceptions are always false *words*. The Greek ideas might be not so different as the author wants them to be.

Still, there is an undeniable semantic development leading up to *prosopon* as 'person', reached by way of earlier, then auxiliary, meanings, which we can see developing from Polybius onwards: personage, role, an individual, and person (linguistically). The influence of the Latin *persona* will have played its part. F.'s analysis is to the point, but, as any such attempts to unravel the usage of some vocabulary, it is sometimes in danger of succumbing to wishful thinking in interpreting particular instances; as she herself notices when discussing *prosopon* in the sense of 'role' as used by Plutarch: "Mais la langue grecque n'a pas à choisir et Plutarch peut jouer entre le concret et l'abstrait" (58). This says it all. F. could have put the words 'la langue grecque n'a pas à choisir' as a motto above all of her discussion of *prosopon*.

As the face is there to see and be seen, in the same way a *prosopon*, mask, is not a cover that hides the face: it is a new face that brings with it a new identity (the identity of the bearer of the mask is not gone, but in abeyance). Masks are not there to hide, just as faces do not hide anything. The expression *hupo to prosopon* is not found. Thus masks are portrayed in painting (and with the simulacra of masks found as votives it usually is the same) with eyes that have irises and pupils—still, the author admits we have one scene on an Attic red-figured krater (Ferrara 20.299) in which the mask is shown as eyeless, that is, as a mask in our sense, instead of a *prosopon*. This one instance is left as an oddity and not explained away—which is by far the best solution. Only, we have got this one krater, and there might very well have been more scenes like it, and the theory does not accommodate for these. F. speaks of masks as 'a new face'; on the other hand, she calls masks rigid and emotionless—the text that was spoken by those wearing the masks is supposed to have made the audience see what was not actually there to see. This primacy of the text might be doubted; for instance, Japanese No-masks are in fact capable of several expressions: the way the head is held and the way the light strikes the mask makes one think its expression is subtly changing. Western audiences also testify to this

effect, while they can hardly have been prompted by a text which even most Japanese find hard to understand. As said, we have not a single Greek mask left, only copies in other materials. I think it is rather easy to underrate a mask's potential.

The *gorgoneion* is the non-*prosopon* par excellence: you cannot look at it, you cannot speak about it directly (it is never described in any detail). It can only be looked at in mirror-image: actually, the mirroring of the Gorgon's head by Athena to enable Perseus to look at it after all, is nothing less than the invention of the image—which also enables us to look at the *gorgoneion*, because the image of the *gorgoneion* only looks like a *gorgoneion*: it is other, but similar. One can compare the beings petrified by the Gorgon's gaze: they are also images. After this interesting excursion into Athenian theorizing about image-making, F. goes on to discuss frontality. The *gorgoneion* is a frontal face. F. puts it in context by looking at frontality in Athenian imagery in general. The real *prosopa* of painted pottery—to which the discussion is restricted—are not the ninety-nine percent profile views, but the faces seen *kata prosopon*, 'face to face', that is: frontal, as faces are meant to be seen. A frontal face is a denial of the objectivity of the image, by addressing a direct appeal to the viewer. (At this point, F. suggests, interestingly, that the painters may have contributed to the semantic development of *prosopon*.) F. next discusses at length (over one third of her text) many instances of frontality: sleepers, the dead or mortally wounded, mourners, drunkards, monsters, amazons, rapt musicians or their audience, the Dionysiac *thiasos*, satyrs in particular, and some instances of ordinary men and women. These are excellent analyses. The only thing I find disconcerting is that *every* image is made to bear a rather heavy burden of meaningfulness. No room is left for artistic experiment or showing off technical skills—every frontal face has to serve some very special purpose.

Alas, there is nothing in the way of a conclusion in which the many different threads are taken up again. In particular the combination of a thorough analysis of the vocabulary of *prosopon* and cognates, and of a discussion of the frontal face in Attic painted pottery, supposed to be the innovative aspect of this study, is thus not made plain enough. For example, F. makes me understand why *prosopon* is never used when speaking of the dead; she also makes me understand why the dead and dying are often depicted frontally. But I would have liked F. to explain more clearly the discrepancy between the one and the other. In its constituent parts the book is clearly written, but its main theses have to be picked up along the

way and we are left with some loose ends: F. obviously has no patience with the hurried reader who wants to flick through, read the conclusion, and use the index. Not only a general conclusion or any kind of summary is lacking, but there is no index either. Those who want to extract the many pearls in this book will have to crack the oyster; indeed the book is oysterish, with its unattractive type-setting (the margins are far too narrow) and with the footnotes at the back, always a nuisance, worse because of the impossibly small print. Redeeming is the liberal supply of very decent illustrations, and the almost complete absence, as far as I could see, of misprints and other infelicities.

If I may be allowed one further point of criticism: the documentation is somewhat insufficient. I will illustrate this from the first two pages of the first chapter only: there are discussed the Lycosoura Despoina drapery, and the Spartan Orthia masks. There is no reference to G. Dickins, *Damophon of Messene, part 2*, ABSA 13 (1906-7), 357-404, or any more recent illustration of the drapery (AK 20 [1977] pl.21.4-5); as to the masks, there is only a reference to R. M. Dawkins (ed.), *The sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta* (London 1929) (actually, G. Dickins again, on pp.163-186), and no reference at all to the articles by J. B. Carter, *The masks at Ortheia*, AJA 91 (1987), 355-383, and *Masks and poetry in early Sparta*, in: R. Hägg, N. Marinatos, and G. C. Nordquist (edd.), *Early Greek cult practice* (Stockholm 1988), 89-98. Further on, it is hardly better (but vases are referred to as they should be, with *ABV*, *ARV*², *ABL* and sometimes *Paralipomena* numbers). I am not suggesting that the author, who has been researching the mask for many years, as documented in several publications since her 1987 Paris thesis, *Prosopon, valeurs grecques du masque et du visage*, has no knowledge of this relevant literature—I am only complaining that the ‘dossier’ in this book will not help those who want to go deeper into some things. F. might of course find for instance Carter’s work on the Orthia-masks irrelevant to her present purposes; but certainly there is nothing wrong with referring readers to some publication which provides pictures of objects discussed by F. but not illustrated in her book.

The above are Dutch grumblings about a quintessentially French book. But all in all, this book is thorough, interesting, provocative, and well-written. Enjoy the sparkling thought and look up the dull details somewhere else.