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Making Roman Theatrical Masks: An Aspect of Ancient Performance Culture

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Abstract: Research centered on Roman theatrical masks over the last several decades has primarily focused on informing the performance aspects associated with the on-stage device of the mask; rather than on the device of the mask itself (materials) or on who made them and how (processes). The craftsmen of Roman antiquity, and the activities they engaged in, fall into the many gaps left in the ancient historical record. Analysis of the daily existence of Roman craftsmen presents a challenge that can be addressed partly through traditional primary and secondary source analysis and partly through direct experimentation with materials and processes. Roman theatrical mask-making acts as an informative case study by which to examine broader cultural and social phenomena among the working classes of Roman society.

Theatrical masks were a standard element of stage production in ancient Mediterranean societies.¹ Much of the research conducted for most of the 20th c. on ancient performance culture focused on what was Greek, 5th c., and tragic; but the explosion of performance studies over the last 25 years have prompted Classicists to move beyond old prejudices and the anxiety of influence that once overshadowed the study of Roman performance traditions. Performance culture in the ancient world has come to extend well beyond the established textual traditions, back into the theatre and beyond.² The actual and symbolic importances of masks, as they relate to stage production and the acting style of the actor in ancient Mediterranean societies, are attested in modern scholarship³, but those who made Roman theatrical masks, and the diverse range of possibilities concerning materials and processes, have been less illuminated through interdisciplinary historical interpretation.

The Roman craftsmen of antiquity, and by extension their processes, fall through the cracks and gaps in the historical and archaeological records.⁴ As Goetsch states in her 1994 review of Teele's article, "No/Kyogen Masks and Performance":

¹ Overview of scholarship: C. W. Marshall, *The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy (SPORC)*. (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 126, n. 1.

² Duncan (review); Easterling and Hall (eds.). *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

³ For a relatively comprehensive summary of modern scholarship on ancient theatrical masks, see: A. Varakis, "Research on the the Ancient Mask." *Didaskalia*. Vol. 6, No. 1 (2004), www.didaskalia.net/issues/vol6no1/varakis.html (20/01/06). Mask-makers focused on Greek Theatrical Masks: Vervain: <http://www.chrisvervain.btinternet.co.uk>; Vovolis: <http://free-books.us/Others/429022/The-acoustical-mask-of-Greek-Tragedy-by-Thanos-Vovolis-and-Giorgos-Zamboulakis>; Chase; Williams and Knight <http://www.scottishmaskandpuppetcentre.co.uk/>.

⁴ Burford, *Craftsmen in Greek and Roman Society*. (Thames and Hudson, 1972).

We have no evidence of who these mask-makers were [in ancient Greek and Roman traditions], but that lack should not be taken as an indication of unimportance. Whether or not there were fifth-century equivalents of modern costume designers, the production of a tragedy, comedy, or satyr-play required quantities of highly specialized products. The undeniable existence of these products necessitates the existence of producers, artisans and tradesmen and merchants whose business was theatre.¹

Just because individual craftsmen can rarely be isolated from the extant archaeological and textual record doesn't mean that potentialities concerning the materials and processes utilized cannot. From these, potential realities concerning economic and social networks and restraints of nameless craftsmen can be surmised.

The methodology used here is simple: identify materials and processes related to Roman theatrical mask-making by considering as many textual, epigraphic, monumental, theatrical, visual, secondary, and archaeological sources as possible; then, engage with the materials and processes identified to gain the desired product. Many scholars who have engaged in various types of experimental archaeology note that the processes taught them a tremendous amount about the possibilities and limitations of the technologies being considered, thus lending insight for interpretation of the historical contextual questions by way of establishing useful analogies². Engaging in the processes themselves can serve to eliminate possibilities, show possible answers, and indicate probability, but it cannot prove something specific beyond the shadow of a doubt³.

Roman theatrical mask-making has proven an illustrative case-study by which to potentially examine a number of specific types of craftsmanship. The primary intent of this experiment is to assess a range of possibilities concerning the diversity of materials and processes individual craftsmen may have utilized for the production of Roman theatrical masks and how these potentialities may have affected the social and economic realities of their day-to-day business realities.

The range of processes engaged in from conception to completion of theatrical masks can be roughly divided into three sections: mold construction, mask construction, and mask finishing. Each of these three broad processes will be considered in turn before moving to analysis and results.

There are three major considerations with respect to mold construction – size, materials, and features. A theatrical mask certainly needs to “fit” the actor who wears it, which suggests a degree of personalization, keeping in mind that there is only about 6” of total variance in head circumference in human populations. In the case of constructing a mold for theatrical mask-making, the finished product must be relative to the dimensions of an actual human head, therefore, working from a live model is reasonable, especially considering that we all have a head to use as a reference⁴. To

¹ *Didaskalia*. Vol. 1, No. 4, www.didaskalia.net/issues/vol1no4/goetschre.html (20/01/06).

² Meyer Mathieu, “Reconceptualizing Experimental Archaeology: Assessing the Process of Experimentation,” *Experimental Archaeology: Replicating past objects, behaviors, and processes*. J. R. Mathieu ed. Bar International Series, 2002. p. 76.

³ Mathieu, “Intro,” 8.

⁴ Kleiner, 4-5; cf. Cutler, “The Right Hands Cunning.” *Speculum*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (1997), 979-81.

account for size variance, the construction of a bust-type mold modelled after a generic, oversize human head is the most reasonable option. The mold could then reasonably be re-used to construct multiple masks from an original structure¹.

A hypothesis in the initial experimentation conducted c. 2006 was to assess whether a “mass-production” aspect was reasonable to consider in conjunction with mold re-use. Not only was this hypothesis confirmed by the experiment itself, since four masks were created from a single mold, but also by a recent rediscovery. In 2009, M. Borriello rediscovered 15 Roman theatrical masks and molds originally discovered at excavations in Pompeii in 1749, that had been deposited in the Royal Palace of Portici. A discovery of this magnitude related to Roman theatrical masks is an untold boon to multiple fields. Prior to this rediscovery, the material evidence relating to Roman theatrical masks was discrepant at best, pieced together through textual and visual analysis of a huge range of textual and material sources spanning over hundreds of years². Lost to the light for the last 250 years, and left to us without proper contextual paperwork (which was standard practice for the “archaeologists” of the 18th c.), analysis by Borriello posits for the re-use of molds in Roman theatrical mask production³.

Constructing the mold was relatively straightforward.⁴ Water-based clay from the Middle East was readily available and used to desired effect. As it turns out, once again, based on conclusions drawn from the subsequent rediscovery of the Pompeii Masks/Molds, a type of plaster composite was a more likely medium to utilize for mold construction. The Romans were masters of manipulating composite media, like concrete and plaster. Plaster is not only a versatile choice, but it also eliminates the need for firing as the air dries it hard⁵.

The aesthetic aspects of feature construction were the most complex aspect of mold construction to realize. Experts in the fields of classics, performance theory, and theatrical practice generally agree that the attention of the audience is guided by through theatrical masks, because they act like a spotlight on the stage.⁶ Concerning features, André claims that, “ancient historians and biographers as well as mimes and mask-makers used truisms of physiognomies to describe and represent their

¹ Wiles Vervaine, “The Masks of Greek Tragedy as a Point of Departure for Modern Performance.” *New Theatre Quarterly*. 67 (2001), 254-272. As seen through Vervain and Wiles work on the acoustic properties of Greek theatrical masks, Chase’s method of having a personalized device attached has been explored to great effect concerning 5th c. Greek Tragedy masks.

² There are too many sources to list them in their entirety, including: cornices, graffiti, pottery, mosaics, frescoes, inscriptions, plays, treatises, figurines, buildings, and secondary sources.

³ M. R. Boriello, *Historionica: teatri, maschere e spettacoli nel mondo antico*. (Milano, Skira, 2010).

⁴ B. Lucchesi, M. Malstrom, *Modeling the Head in Clay*. (New York, Watson-Guption Publications, 1996); J. C. Rich, *The Materials and Methods of Sculpture*. (New York, Dover Publications Inc., 1974).

⁵ Humphrey, Oleson, Sherwood, *Greek and Roman Technology: A Sourcebook*. New York, Routledge, 1998. 242-245.

⁶ C. W. Marshall, “Quis Hic Loquitur?: Plautine Delivery and the Double Aside.” *Syllecta Classica*, Vol. 10 (1999), 105-106.

characters.”¹ Categorization and physiognomy serve to place an individual quickly within a broader group-oriented society, which “may seem shallow and unreliable to the modern spectator, but was a standard manner of perceiving and describing persons in antiquity.”² The stereotypes and archetypes reinforced through physiognomic norms in the ancient world acted across all strata of Roman society, making them effective tropes to make use of and manipulate on stage, before both so-called “low” and “high” audiences, to desired comic effect.³ 20th and 21st c. scholarship suggests that archetypes and conventions for visual representation are commonplace and recognizable as such in many past and present visual art forms.⁴

Pollux’s *Onomasticon* (4.143-154)⁵ is the primary text to consider in that it contains 44 descriptions of specific Roman theatrical masks. Interpretations and categorizations of Pollux’s List are several and appear in *Monuments Illustrating New Comedy*,⁶ as well as the work of Poe, Wiles, Marshall, and many other scholars who focus research on the role the mask played on the ancient stage.⁷ Marshall’s Hellenistic Mask Typology is a useful tool for our purposes because his broad typology is far from rigid and is further reinforced when one accounts for pervasive ancient conventions concerning categorization, polarization, and physiognomy. Marshall divides Pollux’s list into five broad categories: Masks 1-9: old men (male and elderly, typically with white hair), Masks 10-20: young men (male and young, typically with dark hair), Masks 21-27: male slaves (male and of varying age, with hair of variable colour), Masks 28-30: old women (female and elderly, typically with white hair), Masks 31-44: young women (female and young, with variable hair colour). Marshall’s typology suggests that a range of possibility centred within the broader categories of biological sex and relative age, are further reinforced and differentiated through hair colour and

¹ J. André, *Anonyme Latin, Traite de Physiognomie*. (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1981). p. 19-20. cf. Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars* where each biographical sketch ends with a summary of physical and character traits.

² Neyrey Malina, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1996). 48; 61; 101.

³ For example, Atelline farce made use of standard stock characters to hilarious effect because the audience already had a sense of who the actor’s costume, mask, and movement were to represent, such as in the genre of *Commedia dell’ arte* (Marshall, *SPORC*, 132-9). It has become generally accepted that the Roman penchant for comedy and other ‘low’ forms of entertainment crossed all strata of society, suggesting that audience were comprised of elite and non-elite persons.

⁴ A. Artaud, “The Theatre of Cruelty (First Manifesto)” *The Theatre and Its Double* (trans. M. C. Richards, Grove Press Inc., New York, 1958), 89-100; 91; Chase: *NTQ*, 259. Roman Theatre and Masks as ‘grotesque’: Vovolis, “The Voice and the Mask in Ancient Greek Tragedy,” *Soundscape: the School of Sound Lectures 1998-2002*, 74); Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality*, 103; Vervaine, “Performing Ancient Drama in Mask: the Case of Greek New Comedy.” *NTQ* 20:3 (August 2004) 248.

⁵ Julius Pollux (2nd c. CE grammarian).

⁶ *Monuments Illustrating New Comedy* (BICSS Supp. 50, 1995).

⁷ Poe, “The Supposed Conventional Meaning of Dramatic Masks: A Re-Examination of Pollux 4.133-54.” *Philologus* 140 (1996) 2; Marshall, *SPORC*. 126-158; 129 n. 17.

ornamentation. These established conventions communicated by the masks help the audience easily distinguish between the various characters on stage.

Two of the four masks created over the course of this experiment will be considered here. These are based loosely on Demipho and Lysimachus, the two leading “old men” (*senex*, pl. *senes*) we meet in Titus Maccius Plautus’ play, *Mercator* (*The Merchant*). Plautus describes Demipho as, “a gray-haired, knock-kneed, potbellied, big mouthed, stubby fellow, with blackish eyes, lantern jaws and feet a bit splayed,”¹ which corresponds to Pollux’s description of Mask 3, “The leading old man has a wreath of hair round his head; he is hook-nosed, broad-faced, and has his right eyebrow raised.”² To get a clearer sense of appropriate feature representation, specific descriptions can be further examined in conjunction with relevant treatises, such as Pseudo-Aristotle’s *Physiognomics*³ and Quintilian (II. 3. 74):

In comedy...the father who has the principle role has one eyebrow raised and the other not, because he is sometimes angry and sometimes calm, and the actors regularly turn towards the audience that side of the mask which suits the particular part they are playing⁴ (trans. Russel, 2001).

Our leading “old men” express a range of emotions while engaging in all manner of shenanigans throughout *Mercator*; many of which are centred around miscommunications about the concealing and revealing of fair Pasicompsa, who is the object of Demipho’s current desires as well as the acquired property of Demipho’s prodigal son, Charinus. Miscellaneous hijinx are, of course, what the action and plot of the play hinge upon. There are several extended dialogues exchanged by our *senes* where we are made privy to the details of their misguided plans. When they share the stage, the emotions exuded by Demipho and Lysimachus tend to mirror one another – sometimes they are mischievous and at other times woebegone, therefore their masked features could reasonably mirror one another also. The old men are likely to appear to the audience as smiling at each other when Pasicompsa is sneakily purchased by Lysimachus.⁵ Whereas they are just as likely to both come off as listless in lines 283-334, where the Demipho enters and converses with his neighbour about his current love sickness.

The entire process of mold construction is conducted in preparation for the actual mask construction. Mask construction itself is a relatively standard process where the maker greases the mold, then covers it with layers of media coated in a substance that will dry hard, much like papier-mâché. The hard layers are removed from the mold once the mask is dry, and this will be the finished mask. A likely material used for mask construction is suggested by Aulus Gellius, when he asserts in *Attic Nights* that Roman theatrical masks covered the whole head and were constructed of “stiffened

¹ Plautus, *Mercator*, 639-40.

² *MINC*, 9; Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 4. 144. 3-6.

³ Pseudo-Aristotle is a generic cognomen used to refer to authors of works that were Aristotelian in theme or that were attributed to him posthumously, the date of *Physiognomics* is uncertain. Facial features: *Physiognomics*, 811a18 - 814b10.

⁴ Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (1st c. rhetorician).

⁵ Plautus. *Mercator*, 544-587.

linen.”¹ Linen is variable in its versatility and thread count, which make it desirable regardless of whether the stiffening media utilized was glue or plaster.

Although flour and water mixtures dry hard and would have been available to the ancients, a more likely option is types of glues derived from animal hides and milk proteins, which were commonly used well into the 19th c. Hide glues would have been commonly used by Roman craftsmen in many contexts.² If hide glue is the hardening medium of choice, the linen could either be dyed prior to its application to the mold, or it could be painted after the fact. Plaster is another option.³ The use of a wider woven textile coated with plaster, much like modern *gypsona*, seems to be a very likely, versatile, and efficient option for Roman mask construction. The plaster itself could be coloured prior to its application to the linen, but it would have been more likely that it was painted after the fact. Plaster is more water soluble and less durable than hide glue, but these shortcomings could be overcome after the fact through paint choice.

There is little doubt that Roman theatrical masks made use of colour, what is uncertain is whether or not they were naturalistic or monochromatic in tone⁴. This is based not only on the assertion of other scholars studying mask-making in the ancient world, but also on the archaeological evidence suggesting that statuary and inscriptions commonly would have been painted in Roman antiquity.⁵ I have little doubt that colour would have contributed to ease in character differentiation on the stage, especially in instances where multiple players fell into the same broader typological categories – as do Demipho and Lysimachus, our *old men* from *Mercator*.

Recipes for making paint are highly variable, and the materials that could be used as binding media or pigment in the ancient world for these purposes are numerous and only a very few are assessed here.⁶ All pigments used for the paint production and the dyeing process were processed from natural sources which would have been readily accessible to the Romans. By comparing ancient textual sources, edicts, secondary source information and modern geological occurrence, we identified likely and readily available options: “there is no doubt that white of eggs and glue were the favourite binding media [of the Greeks and Romans].”⁷ Animal protein, or “glue”-

¹ Aulus Gellius (2nd c. Latin grammarian). *Attic Nights*, 5.7.

² Application of RHG were multiple in these experiments, not only to bind pigment, but also to stiffen linen and to affix various ornamentation to the finished masks. Others experimenting with ancient mask-making, such as Chase, states that they makes extensive use of RHG in his mask-making processes. Wiles; Vervain, “Departure,” 264.

³ Theophrastus, *On Stones*, 65-66.

⁴ Vervain Wiles, “Departure”, 266.

⁵ Connelly & Dodge, *The Ancient City*, 70-71; MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, pp. 30-31;156-163; 167. Numerous examples exist from the Wallace-Hadrill excavation at Pompeii also.

⁶ G. O’Hanlon, “Tempera and Emulsion Recipes: Formulas and instructions for making and using tempura and emulsion paints.” <http://www.naturalpigments.com/education/article.asp?PigmentID=&TopicID=&ProductID=&Article=17>. 10/21/05.

⁷ Istry: *Diocletian Edict on Prices*; Pliny; Aelian; &c. 2ndry: R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology: Vol. 3* (Leiden: Brill), 243; &c.

based paints (distemper, casein, tempera, and gesso) are noted for their durability and water resistance. The recipe is simple: gesso is an animal protein-based paint in which the selected pigment is bound in rabbit hide glue with a mortar and pestle, because it must be kept warm. This particular type of paint is best applied in multiple thin layers and dries hard. The highly water resistant nature of gesso would have contributed to its desirability, because plays were performed primarily outdoors in the Republican period.¹ Of course, considerations concerning paint choice may have changed as the construction of permanent theatres increased in the Imperial period.²

It seemed fitting that Demipho, who throughout Mercator is ruled by the strong emotions of love and distress, should be red in the face, whereas his neighbour, Lysimachus, seemed best represented by the colour blue, since he readily made himself available to do just about anything to calm the storms that swirled around Demipho. According to geological occurrences as illuminated by Forbes, Vitruvius, and Pliny, options in red pigment for Roman craftsmen included: ochre, hematite, minium, cinnabar, ferric oxide, and realgar. But the red pigment they utilized was ochre. Ochre is highly variable in tone and remains a common and geologically occurring mineral, and it was known to the Romans as rubrica, sinopsis, syricum, or sil.³ Pliny tells us that the pricing of ochre was variable based on tone and quality, ranging from two denarii to eight ases per pound. The red ochre used in this experiment was obtained from a naturally occurring in the Rocky Mountains of south-eastern British Columbia near Kimberley. Using much the same processing techniques the ancients would have used, the natural iron oxide was pressed into a hockey puck-like slab which once dried, was crushed in a mortar and pestle to make a powdered pigment to suspend in the distemper.⁴

Unlike the Demipho mask, the Lysimachus mask was constructed from pre-dyed linen and rabbit hide glue. The linen was dyed by the chemical isolated from the plants *isatis tinctoria* (woad) and *indigofera tinctoria* (indigo).⁵ Woad could be variably processed and was a popular imported dyestuff in the Classical world which was particularly noted for its intense colour. Woad, like ochre, is a versatile pigment and could be used to make various types of paint, to dye the linen before application in mask construction with RHG, or to colour the plaster used in mask construction. This would largely depend on the specific needs, wants, or whims of the craftsman and/or client.

Ornamentation and hairpieces can be identified as another important characteristic of theatrical masks that Roman audiences used to distinguish one character from another at sight.⁶ There was great potential for diversity with

¹ Goldberg, "Plautus on the Palatine." *JRS*, Vol. 88 (1998), pp. 1-20; Beacham, "Reconstructing Ancient Theatre with the Aid of Computer Simulation." *Syllecta Classica* 10 (1999), pp. 189-214; Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and its Audience* (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1992).

² Beacham, *Spectacle Entertainments of Early Imperial Rome*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

³ Forbes, *Studies: Vol. 3*, 206-7 & 218.

⁴ Pliny, *Natural History*, 35.31-35.

⁵ *Griffin Dyeworks: Natural Dye Basics*, instruction manual, p. 12. <http://griffindyeworks.com/>.

⁶ Marshall, *SPORC*, 135.

respect to materials to consider for application as hairpieces on Roman theatrical masks. These included (among other things) animal pelts, hides, natural fibres, and human hair. Animal hides and pelts have been utilized in human society since the inception of hunting to produce clothing, shoes, wall coverings, and military equipment, but these materials could also be used to construct hairpieces for theatrical masks.¹ Consulting Aelian resulted in a long list of readily options depending on geographical availability of the types of animal pelts Roman craftsmen may have had at their disposal. Admittedly, the evidence regarding public use of hides and leather in Roman society is sparse, but the prominence of tanning guilds since the introduction of guilds to Rome by Numa Pompilius (7th c. BCE) suggests that the products related to hide production were widely used in Roman society from an early date.² Other experiments concerning ancient theatrical masks have utilized animal by-products to create hairpieces, including leather thongs affixed to the masks as hairpieces.³ Pelts cut to size would also be a viable option that is both time and cost effective.⁴ The use of feathers should not be ruled out, nor should foliage, especially in a pinch.⁵

Wigs and rugs were hand-produced in antiquity using a “latch-hook” technique. “Latch-hook” technique is used to affix hair or textile threads spun from animal or plant fibres against an appropriately gauged mesh backing to create hairpieces, rugs, or clothing. Roman wig use is well attested to and the use of human hair for the production of hairpieces for theatrical masks is both logical and plausible, although very time intensive.⁶ We know the Romans utilized human hair for wigs in the ancient world, which was considered particularly fashionable in some eras and social sets and would be an easiest way to reflect current trends on the “latch-hook” process it employs. Today, a substantial proportion of wigs are made from synthetic fibres, so why should we assume “real hair” was the only option for hairpieces utilizing a similar “latch-hook” seen on the ancient stage.⁷

¹ Most modern treatises available concerning the production of animal skins in antiquity focus on leather production specifically (rather than pelt preservation) and focus mainly on the use of leather in a military context. (See: R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology: Vol. 5*, 1-77; J. W. Waterer, “Leatherwork” *Roman Crafts*, eds. D. Strong & D. Brown (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 179-193); Dr. C. Epplert, University of Lethbridge, personal communication, Jan 31, 2006.

² Waterer, “Leatherwork,” 187; Forbes, “Leather,” pp. 52, 50; 54.

³ Wiles; Vervaine; Chase. “Departure,” 265.

⁴ Many of these options were explored in areas of the experiment that are not contained in this paper.

⁵ Many cultures have used/use these materials in headdress construction, and the Roman used foliage headpieces to crown their victors.

⁶ Botham, et al., *Manual of Wigmaking* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968; “An Introduction to Wigmaking,” <http://www.makeup-fx.com/perukmakenleng.html> (11/12/05); “Wigmaking,” <http://www.makeup-fx.com/Perukeng.html> (11/12/05); “Ventilation Technique,” <http://www.makeup-fx.com/Perukeng.html> (11/12/05). D. Bis (Wig Maker); C. Butterworth (Wig Maker), Personal Communication, (11/12/05).

⁷ K. Aberle (Roman Archaeologist), Personal Communication, Jan 30, 2006.

Ultimately, the ornamentation for both *senes* was constructed from raw wool, which was the natural choice for use in the construction of the hairpieces because of its off-white colour which would have served to categorize our *senes* as exactly what they were meant to represent: old men – not young men or male slaves, but old men. Wool would have been readily accessible to the Romans and was the textile of choice in Italy well into the Imperial period.¹ The hair and beard pieces of the *senes* were constructed from raw, carded wool, which was spun using a drop spindle. Hand-spinning the wool lets the spinster manipulate the finished product to spec. Maintaining intermittent tension as the wool was spun through the drop spindle resulted in what is known in modern yarn shops as “thick and thin.” The final result once cut, tied, and affixed was a bushy ridge of white hair that circled the edge of the $\frac{3}{4}$ “helmet-style” mask like a wreath, keeping in line with Pollux’s description of Mask 3: the Leading Old Man.² The uneven eyebrows of the *senes* were accentuated using pieces of raw, carded wool cut to specific lengths. All hairpieces for the *senes* were permanently affixed to the masks using Rabbit Hide Glue.

Conclusions

The rediscovery of the Pompeii Masks/Molds (c. 2009) subsequent to the results gained through this experiment (c. 2006) lend support to what was merely informed speculation prior to their rediscovery. They confirm that the re-use of mask-making molds to create multiple masks was common practice for at least one mask-maker in Pompeii c. 79 CE; but what this more broadly suggests is that re-use of mask-making molds is viable to assume as an option for other mask-makers as well.

Hints at process as pertaining to Roman craftsmen are hard to come by archaeologically, seldom do the pieces collected result in a whole. This is only exacerbated in this instance by the conditions surrounding the rediscovery of the Pompeii Masks/Molds. The Pompeii Masks/Molds were originally unearthed in the 1740s when archaeology was more of a sport than a discipline; as a result, we are lacking adequate documentation from the field about their original context other than that they were found together, indicating that they may have been in a craftsman’s workshop.³ We have no idea what the context of the molds was – what other materials, tools, or furniture were in the mask’s vicinity. This is particularly disappointing because Pompeii was basically preserved exactly the way it was the day Vesuvius erupted. Excavation of a house in Pompeii conducted in the last ten years revealed a room where a fresco was in the process of being applied to the wall. The craftsman/men’s pots of paint and tools were as he/they left them that day and this is one of the only examples we have from antiquity that represents the active workshop of craftsmen from Roman antiquity. It reflects a reality experienced by many

¹ *Greek and Roman Technology: A Sourcebook*, 366.0

² Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 4. 144. 3-6. Use of ‘helmet’ masks on ancient stage: Vervain, “Performing Ancient Drama in Mask: the Case of Greek New Comedy.” *NTQ* 20:3 (August 2004), 245-264.

³ Lorenzi, “Ancient Theater Masks Rediscovered in Pompeii.” *Discovery News* (July 21, 2009). <http://dsc.discovery.com/news/2009/07/21/pompeii-masks.html> (May 30, 2011).

tradesmen and craftsmen today, which is that the bulk of what they actually do takes place outside the walls of a formal workshop space. Workshops that exist on the move are nearly impossible to detect from the archaeological record. Many workshop spaces should be considered transitory, because even if we could pin-point that a particular craftsman spent all of his time in his workshop, as soon as he's moved we'd be hard pressed to be sure as to what the space was *actually* used for before it was empty.¹

Similar to the workshop discussion above, the rediscovery of the Pompeii Masks/Molds does not tell us much about how the finished product was ornamented, but the range of options for hairpiece construction suggest some things about the economic influences on a craftsman. The materials that would have been considered for hairpieces would have long ago disappeared –leather, fiber, hair. Regardless of whether the ornamentation on a finished theatrical mask was done by a craftsman or by someone else, options with respect to materials and their application to the mask were variable.² Explored briefly above, all options for theatrical hairpieces have clear cost and time implications. For example, full wigs made of human hair for female masks would have been both expensive and time consuming to acquire and/or execute – perhaps a sub-contractor would be considered if this were the instance. On the other hand, scraps of animal pelts would surely have been much cheaper to acquire than a full animal pelt, and this type of material is versatile and easy to work with while keeping within a different client's wants. Production expectations meet with financial realities everyday in a business environment, and the diversity of materials in the instance of hairpieces suggests that ancient craftsmen would have had many ways to navigate among the specific economic considerations of a given project, considering availability and time commitment against the bottom-line.

This particular exercise in comparative historical inquiry is an attempt to gain insight into the working behaviours of the nearly invisible craftsmen who functioned in Roman society and played a role in ancient performance culture. This research demonstrates that the craftsmen engaged in Roman theatrical mask production had choices. It is clear that they certainly had choices concerning materials and processes, which suggests they also had choices when it came to how they acquired their materials and in how the processes were executed. Aspects of patronage, reciprocity, and social networks are intrinsic to the choices that appear to have been available to Roman craftsmen in this instance. There is much more to be said about the function social networking and patronage systems played in the execution of a craftsman's task, but that must be left to a future paper. Actually engaging with the materials and processes that would have been available to Roman craftsmen informs potentialities concerning related behaviours, suggesting that much more work in this area is necessary.

¹ K. Aberle (Roman Archaeologist), Personal Communication, Jan 30, 2006. For example, *atria* often functioned as a weaving room for a portion of the day in an elite domestic context.

² In the case of our *senes* the hairpieces were permanently affixed to the mask, although interchangeable hairpieces affixed non-permanently to a theatrical mask could also be an option.