

Events

PNRR Mask

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On 2 and 3 May 2025, the day of studies and public activities took place in Lipari, at the Archaeological Park of the Aeolian Islands and the Luigi Bernabò Brea Regional Archaeological Museum (fig. 1), as part of the project *Restituzione alla teatralità delle miniature di maschere rituali nella necropoli di Lipari*, funded by the PNRR (NextGenerationEU). The initiative was promoted by universities and cultural institutions, with the aim of combining scientific research, technology, theater and cultural inclusiveness. The Archaeological Park of the Aeolian Islands, in line with the new frontiers of enjoyment, inclusiveness and accessibility, therefore equips itself with all those useful expedients to overcome physical, cognitive and sensorial impediments, enhancing the tourist and cultural offer and communication. These aspects were defined as central during the conference *Dal Museo al Teatro. Un progetto di cultura diffusa e inclusiva*, during which numerous interventions by scholars followed one another who highlighted the historical, artistic and communicative value of masks. The program was divided into two days: the first, held at the former church of Santa Caterina, structured in interventions aimed at understanding the finds and the methodologies of valorization, together with the exhibition of

masks and costumes used for the representation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*; the second in a workshop aimed at inaugurating the multisensory rooms financed by the project, and by the performance of *Prometheus Bound* at the theater of the Castle of Lipari. More specifically, during the first day, following the institutional greetings from the local and regional authorities, Rosario Vilardo, director of the Archaeological Park of the Aeolian Islands, presented the PNRR project, followed by interventions aimed at deepening the theme of museum use and the use of terracotta. Maria Clara Martinnelli, an archaeologist at the Aeolian Islands Archaeological Park, explored the sensorial role in museum enjoyment; Elisabetta Matelli, professor at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, illustrated the collection of miniature terracotta masks; Naoum Elpiniki, an archaeologist at the Ephorate of Antiquity in Pella, offered a comparison with the theatrical figurines of Pella in Greece; Natale Spineto, professor at the University of Turin, explored the role and relationship between theatre and the Dionysian rite; Roberto Danese, professor at the University of Urbino Carlo Bo, discussed the 'Casinara' project from Plautus to the masks of Lipari.



Fig. 1. Event brochure.



Fig. 2. Multisensory laboratory.

The morning of the first day finally concluded with a speech by Francesca Fatta, professor at the 'Mediterranea' University of Reggio Calabria, during which the importance of digital humanities in the inclusive valorization of cultural heritage was underlined. In the afternoon, the role of digital technologies in the reproduction and reimagination of masks was discussed: Domenico Mediati, professor at the 'Mediterranea' University of Reggio Calabria, and Andrea Marraffa, architect at the company NaosLab, discussed digitalization at the service of inclusive fruition through storytelling; Francesco Stilo, research fellow at the 'Mediterranea' University of Reggio Calabria, showed the process of acquisition and prototyping of the Lipari masks for theorizing a new wearability on stage; Aretta Sterrantino, research fellow at the Catholic University of the Sacred

Heart of Milan, explored new performative techniques with skullcap masks, towards new perspectives for theatrical performance.

The first day finally concluded with the exhibition curated by Elisabetta Matelli and Stefania Parisini of the masks and costumes for Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, during which the process of selection and artisanal reconstruction of the masks for the representation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* was explained, starting from the digital reading of eight miniatures preserved in the Luigi Bernabò Brea Museum.

The second day saw the inauguration by the director of the Archaeological Park, Rosario Vilardo, of the multisensory laboratory curated by NaosLab, during which users were invited to explore and enjoy the spaces by Lidia La Rocca and Roberta Nisticò (NaosLab) (fig.

2). Finally, the laboratory saw a possible enhancement and development from the project *Digital work. La maschera teatrale: dal Museo al Teatro* curated by Paola Raffa, Sonia Mollica, and Lorella Pizzonia, respectively professor and research fellows at the 'Mediterranea' University of Reggio Calabria.

The event concluded with the performance at the Teatro del Castello di Lipari of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, with masks reconstructed starting from the miniatures of Lipari, obtained from the photogrammetric survey curated by Francesco Stilo and from the artisanal reconstruction of the masks for the life-size stage curated by Andrea Cavarra. The direction of the show was entrusted to Christian Poggioni, with the scientific direction of Elisabetta Matelli. The show, the result of the collaboration with the Kerkís Association, represented the

culmination of the project: an authentic return to theatricality, from archaeology to the stage. The audience was able to dialogue with actors and artisans at the end of the performance.

The event showed how the synergy between archaeology, technology, performance and accessibility can give new life to cultural heritage, making it accessible to a broad, engaging and inclusive audience. The initiative therefore represented a moment of reflection and advanced experimentation around the complex theme of active and performative musealization, restoring the value of use and original function to the clay miniatures of theatrical masks found in the necropolis of Lipari. Through an integrated approach – which saw the collaboration between scholars

of archaeology, classical philology, digital humanities, performing arts and communication design– the event offered an innovative model of transformation of the archaeological find into a performative object.

From a theoretical and methodological point of view, the initiative has underlined the centrality of the concept of widespread and accessible culture, in line with the objectives of the PNRR and European policies for the removal of cognitive, sensorial and physical barriers. The creation of a multisensory laboratory and the use of inclusive theatrical practices have promoted an experiential and participatory use of museum contents, reactivating the interaction between body, gesture, voice and object.

The importance of the event therefore lies in its ability to combine scientific research and restitution to the viewing public, combining the languages of theatrical performance with the most recent developments in digital technology, with a view to intercultural dialogue and expanded accessibility.

This approach opens up new perspectives for the valorization of archaeological heritage, transforming it into a narrative, educational and aesthetic device, capable of generating meaning in contemporaneity. The results of the project can finally be consulted in the volume published by Carocci Editore, in which all the themes addressed during the event are explored in depth.

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