

# A KOUROS HEAD IN KANSAS CITY

(PLATES 96-100)

SINCE my first published article on Greek sculpture, written forty years ago, dealt largely with Archaic material, and since that article was written at the request of Oscar Broneer, it seems appropriate to present him with this new foray in the field of Archaic sculpture in honor of his eightieth birthday.

An excellent marble head of the Kouros type in the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art in Kansas City has thus far eluded the notice to which it is entitled<sup>2</sup> (Pls. 96-99). Of island marble, it measures seven and one-half inches in height and is in remarkably good condition despite losses to the chin, the tip of the nose, and a section of the hair above the right forehead.

In determining the development of later Archaic sculpture, three features are of particular importance: the hair, the eyes and the mouth. The Kansas City head defines each of these in an unusual way and combines them in a manner that is quite unique.

The hair over the forehead is represented in two rows of tight formal curls, carefully chiseled, but still retaining traces of the square outlines from which they were formed. The curls briefly feed back to a narrow fillet, either in a single ridge from each spiral in the lower row or in paired ridges from each of the upper (Pl. 98, a).

On top of the head, and behind the fillet, these ridges are patterned uniquely. They begin with a small loop over the center of the forehead and, in concentric arcs, extend across the crown from side to side, winding up over the base of the skull in a broadly oval line (Pls. 97, 98, b). The rough surfaces of the ridges faintly suggest a crinkly texture that is never defined as such.

Over the nape of the neck the long locks are looped up and stuffed back under the fillet to emerge as a broad flat band. The ridges are represented as horizontal in the loop itself, but emerge on the outer surface in fully developed zigzag crinkles, comparable in technique to the usage of the last of the Archaic and early Severe styles.

No precise parallel for this combination of formulae for the rendering of the hair is known to me. The double row of tight snail-shell curls over the forehead is a common late Archaic formula that continues with somewhat less formality well into the Severe style. In almost every example of this type the hair on top of the head

<sup>1</sup> "The Terracotta Figurines from the North Slope of the Acropolis," *Hesperia*, IV, 1935, pp. 189-213.

<sup>2</sup> Inv. no. 38-7. It has been published in *The William Rockhill Nelson Collection*, 3rd ed., p. 18; also in Gisela M. A. Richter's *The Sculpture and Sculptors of the Greeks*, New Haven, 1929, pp. 73-74, fig. 149.

is rendered in sharp zigzag locks radiating outward from the crown. The only variants I know, except for the Kansas City head, are a kouros head in Boston<sup>3</sup> where the surface is merely roughened with a claw chisel; and a head in the Acropolis Museum.<sup>4</sup> Here the locks are arranged in narrow ridges concentric to the crown. This later mannerism finds good parallels in most of the heads of the athletes on the base with scenes from the palaistra found in the Themistoklean circuit wall of Athens.

The loop of long hair over the nape of the neck represents a type of coiffure that seems to have existed without standardization in the late Archaic-early Severe periods. Its first appearances are to be found in the Theseus and the Bull metope and the Herakles and the Stag metope from the Treasury of the Athenians at Delphi, and on a coin of Poseidonia dated after 510. Later variations appear on the small bronze head from the Acropolis and, of course, the Olympia Apollo. The zigzag surface of the Kansas City head's version finds one parallel, again in the Acropolis head no. 663, where similar parallel locks appear over the nape of the neck.

The eyes of the Kansas City head are unique in monumental sculpture. They are conceived as large lumps protruding from their sockets in oval-shaped masses. The upper plane of each is flat and projects outward and slightly downward from under the eyebrow. The eyeball mass is rounded, and faceted downward and inward toward the bottom of the socket. There is virtually no indication of the inner edges of the eyelids.

This curious, massive treatment of the eye is not a part of the Archaic tradition. In bulk it relates closely to the prominent, heavy-lidded eyes of the Severe style. Within the framework of the late Archaic it can claim kinship with two monuments in marble, both of Athenian origin. The first of these is the palaistra base from the Themistoklean wall; the second is with three of the metopes from the Athenian Treasury at Delphi: Theseus and the Bull, Theseus and the Amazon, and Herakles and Kyknos. The parallel with the Theseus of the Amazon metope is remarkably close (Pl. 100, a). It should be noted that in the Theseus and the Bull metope the lids are beginning to be defined by the sculptor (Pl. 100, b).

The full mouth of the Kansas City head retains only a trace of the Archaic smile. This change of expression relaxes the muscles at the corners of the mouth and allows the fulness of the cheeks to subside into broader, smoother masses that round out the prominent chin and jaw and give the outline of the face much of the simple firmness of the Severe style.

The closest parallels for this particular line of the lips are to be found in the heads from the east pediment of the Temple of Aphaia at Aegina. The comparison, however, is limited to this one feature. Other fair examples may be found in a scat-

<sup>3</sup> No. 34.169; illustrated in Miss Richter's *Kouroi*, London, pl. XCIII, fig. 333.

<sup>4</sup> No. 663; *ibid.*, pl. XCII, fig. 328.

tered series of heads belonging to the early Severe period of which the closest is that of the Cyrene Youth.<sup>5</sup>

In summary, the mannerisms of the hair of the Kansas City head are paralleled in late Archaic sculpture; but almost all of them can also be found at the beginning of the Severe style. The only parallels for the eyes date from late Archaic times. The mouth surely must have been carved in the limbo between the two styles.

It is a truism in archaeology that no object can be earlier than the latest feature it incorporates. If this be so, then this head must be dated just before 480 because of the configuration of the lips. What, then, of the very curious treatment of the eyes?

In an earlier article,<sup>6</sup> I suggested that the anatomical experiments exhibited in the palaistra base and the Delphic Treasury metopes could only have been made shortly before the end of the Archaic tradition. Since both of these monuments provide the best parallels for the handling of the eyes of our head, it would seem that they must be of similar date.<sup>7</sup>

On the basis of the evidence presented above, the Kansas City head supplies one more important tessara in the complex mosaic of the immediate origins of the developed Classic style.

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<sup>5</sup> Illustrated in Brunilde S. Ridgway's *The Severe Style in Greek Sculpture*, Princeton, 1970, figs. 80-83. Other interesting comparisons may be made in the same volume with figs. 76-79 and 84-93.

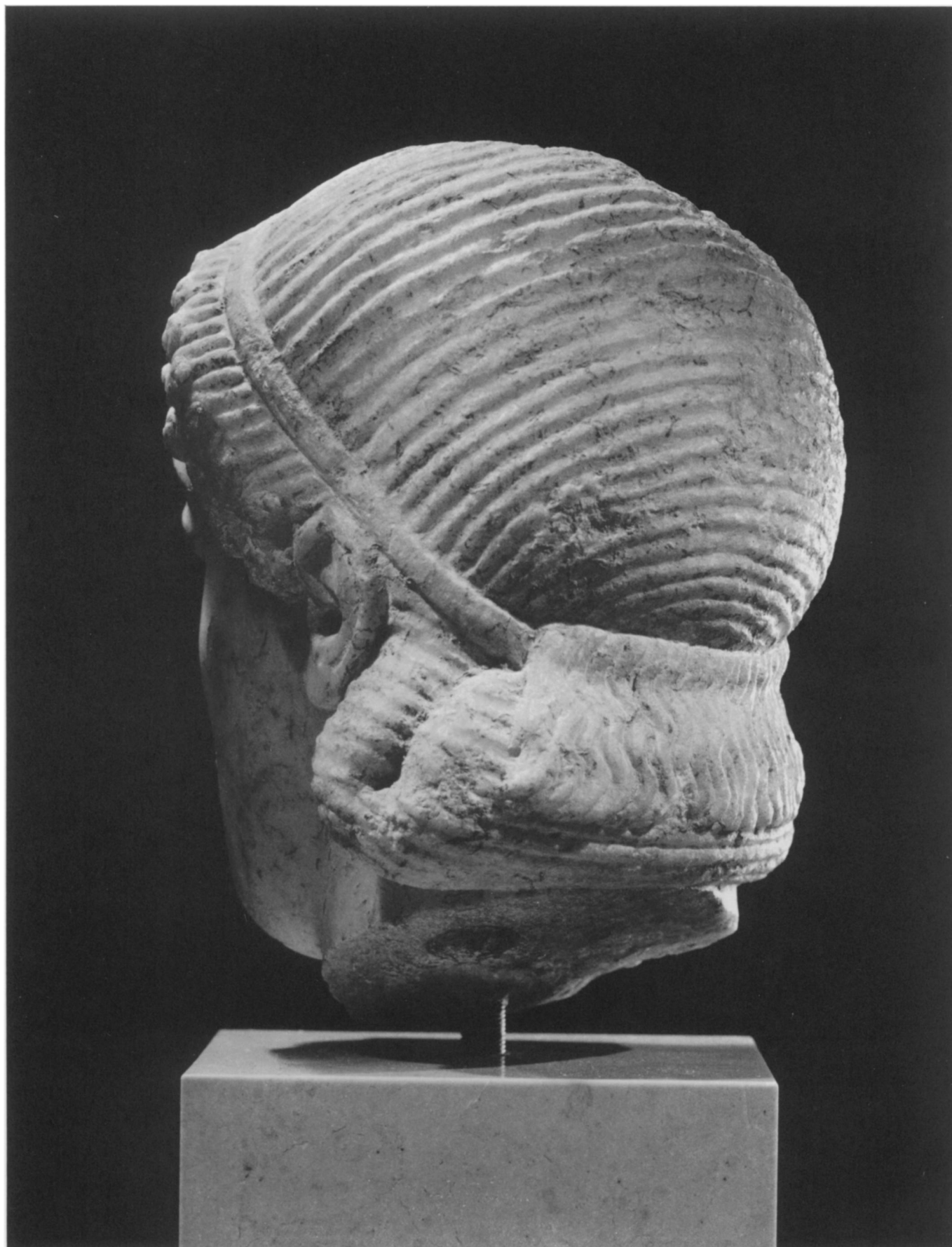
<sup>6</sup> *Hesperia*, XXXVIII, 1969, pp. 205 f.

<sup>7</sup> With the exception of the participants in the cat-and-dog fight on the base, where the youths are appropriately enjoying their sport, the mouths of the other athletes are, with equal propriety, sober.



Kansas City head, full face. William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, Nelson Fund

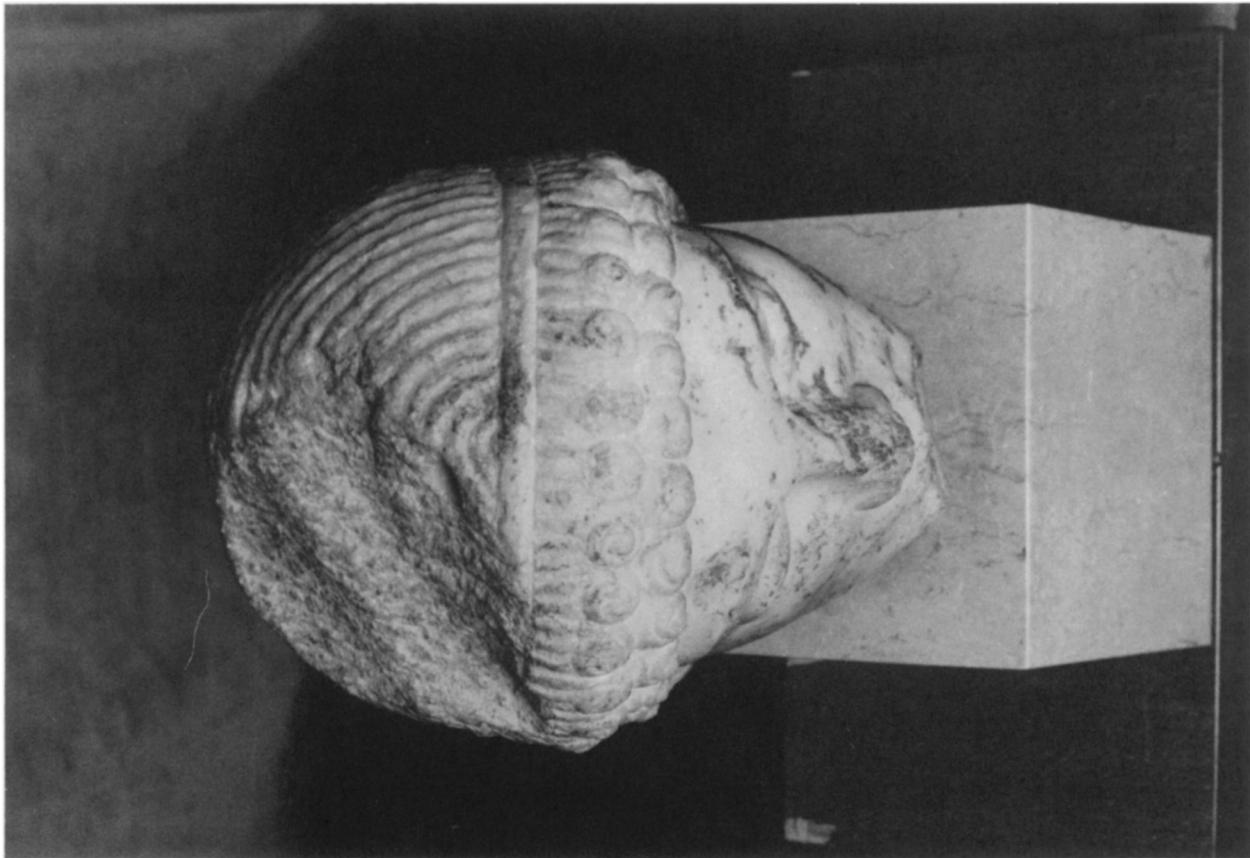
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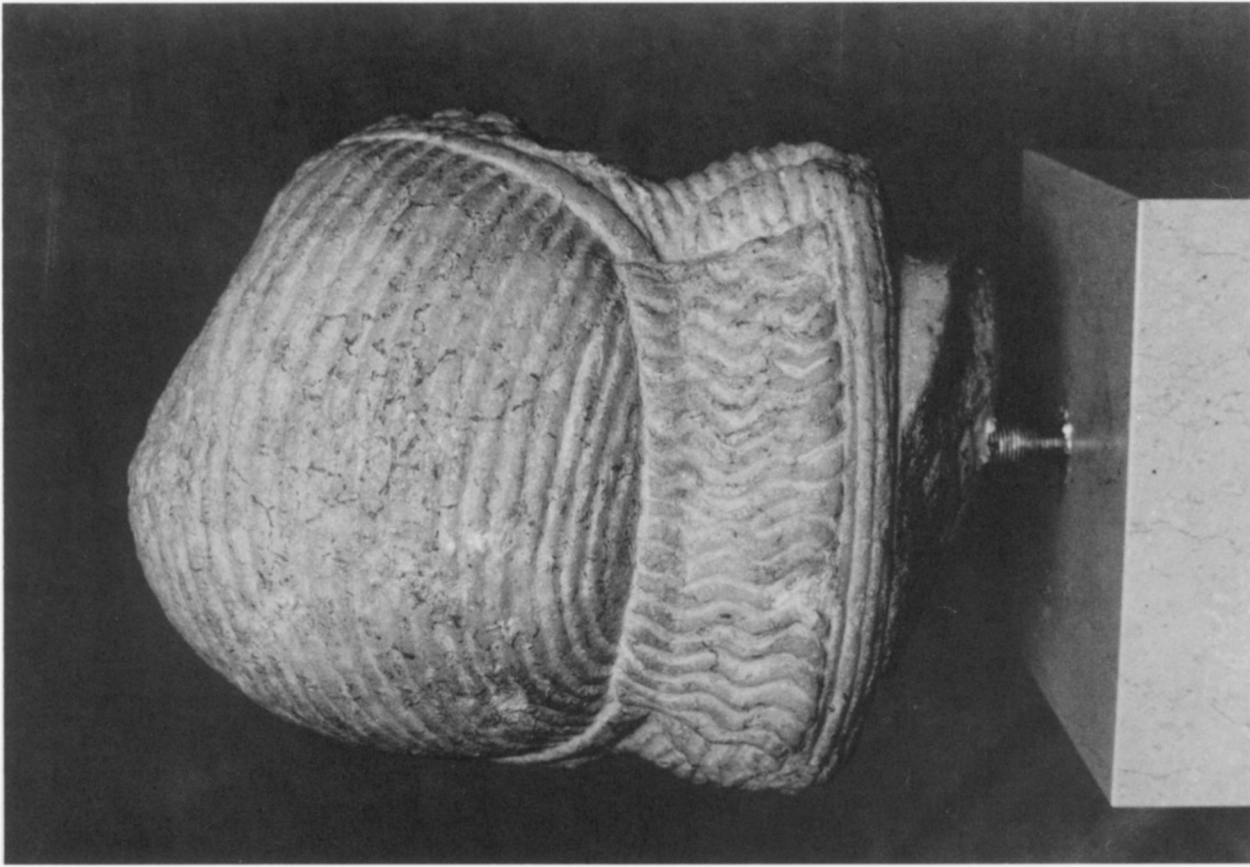
Kansas City head, three-quarter rear view. William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, Nelson Fund

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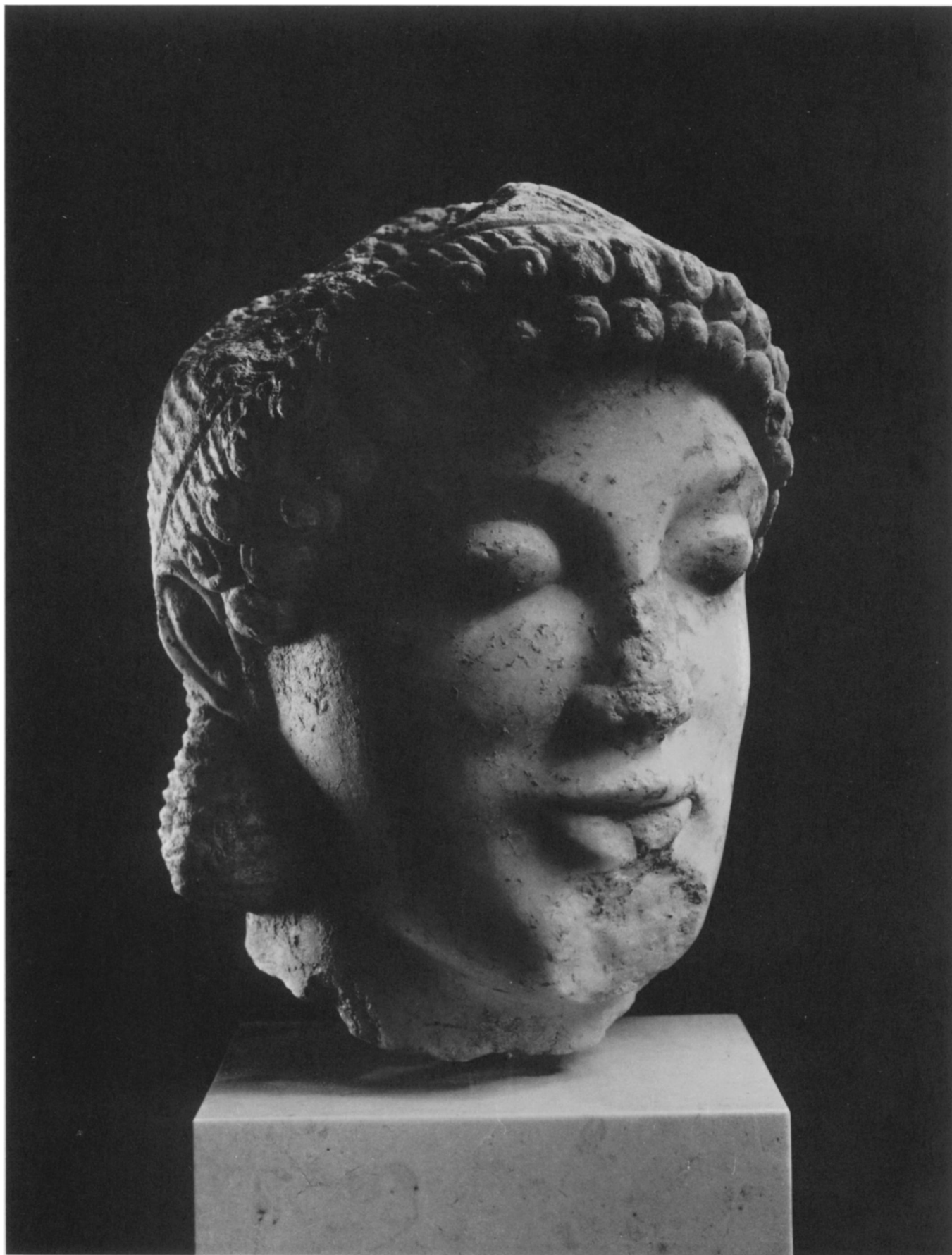
a. Top front view



b. Rear view

Kansas City head, William Rockwell Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, Nelson Fund

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Kansas City head, three-quarter front view. William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, Nelson Fund

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a. Theseus, Amazon metope, Athenian Treasury, Delphi. Photograph, Alison Frantz



b. Theseus, Bull metope, Athenian Treasury, Delphi. (Photograph by Georges de Miré in P. de la Caste-Messelière, *Delphes* by permission)

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