

A ROMAN HEAD IN THE AMERICAN SCHOOL OF CLASSICAL STUDIES AT ATHENS

(PLATES 34–36)

THE FRAGMENTARY RELIEF PLAQUE presented in this paper is kept in the antiquities collection of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens under the inventory number ASS 13.¹ It is sculpted in high relief and shows the lower half of the head of a youth; the neck appears never to have been sculpted (Pls. 34, 35). The iconography, which is unusual for a human head, attracted our attention and led to our efforts to identify the type of monument to which this piece belonged, as well as to detect the identity of the mysterious head. There is unfortunately no record of the provenience or history of acquisition of ASS 13.

DESCRIPTION

The plaque on which the head is carved has been broken on all sides. Its flat front surface is preserved to the right of the head and in a small portion under the chin.² The face itself is preserved from the area just below the eyes down to the bottom of the chin and is approximately life-size.³ The piece is, for the most part, broken off at the back, but at a slightly higher level there is a quadrilateral surface. At the upper right-hand corner of this surface, an oblong patch is preserved bearing the tool marks of a point (Pl. 35:c).⁴

The marble is white and fine-grained, containing many calcite crystals. Testing has shown that it is Pentelic; this identification is supported by comparison with the information compiled on Classical Greek and Roman marble bases.⁵ The surface of the sculpture is rough, indicating that the final smoothing had not taken place. On the surface of the broken slab and also above the inner corner of the right ear are remains of mortar, perhaps indicating that the piece was once built into a modern wall. Two drill holes mark the corners of the mouth, and there is a hole just above the lobe of each ear. There is a break and a chip on the right part of the chin. The nose is mostly chipped and worn, except for the nostrils.

The lower face is roughly triangular in shape, broadening in the area of the cheeks. It is a youthful, chubby face with protruding cheekbones. The chin is small, with a marked horizontal

¹ The authors would like to thank Professor Evelyn Harrison, for her valuable suggestions, and Professor Olga Palagia, for her helpful comments while reading this article in manuscript. The authors are also grateful to the KT Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities in Herakleion for permission to study and photograph the marble sarcophagus in the Archaeological Museum in Herakleion (inv. no. 387). Finally, we owe thanks to the anonymous referees of this article, who contributed significantly to its improvement. The photographs of ASS 13 were taken and developed by Craig and Marie Mauzy; the antiquities collection of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens is under the direction of the School's archivist, Dr. Natalia Vogeikoff.

² To the right of the head the plaque is preserved to a width of 0.05 m. The total width of the plaque under the chin is 0.105 m, and its height here is ca. 0.04 m.

³ The height of the face is 0.10 m; the height of the entire piece is 0.14 m. The upper surface of the plaque (Pl. 34:b) has a width of 0.215 m and a depth (from top to bottom in the photograph) of 0.20 m. The relief of the face (Pl. 35:a, b) protrudes 0.075 m, and the plaque has a thickness of 0.125 m.

⁴ Similar marks can be observed on the back surface of a relief slab in the National Museum of Athens (N.M. 1425); see note 15 below.

⁵ Stable isotopic ratio analysis of oxygen and carbon in a sample taken from the head was carried out by Professor Norman Herz while he was Senior Visiting Fellow at the Wiener Laboratory of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. For the Classical Greek and Roman marble bases, see Herz 1987.

impression under the lower lip. The mouth is also small and animated by a smile. The overall impression is that of a young male, reinforced by the short hair, a curl of which is preserved above the right ear.⁶ The ears are summarily rendered and lie flat against the relief plane; the left ear is set slightly higher. The face has other asymmetries: the right half is somewhat flattened but shows finer surface modeling in comparison to the left side. The possibility of a neck rendered in paint must be excluded owing to the absence of any known parallels.⁷ The lack of a neck and, in general, the partial preservation of the face make the identification of the figure and of the type of monument to which it belonged all the more difficult.

DATE

Comparisons with sculptures from the theater at Leptis Magna, dated to the Hadrianic period, reveal affinities with our head, especially in the treatment of the mouth and the area around it.⁸ A fragmentary statuette of Dionysos⁹ has a face similar in structure, particularly in the outline of the chin and in the plump cheeks. The subtle modeling of ASS 13, however, which gives a strong sense of plasticity to the individual volumes of the face but does not exaggerate its form,¹⁰ is closer to Attic sculptures of the second half of the 2nd century A.C., such as, for example, the gorgoneia that decorate the interiors of the garland loops on one of the long sides of a marble sarcophagus from Mallia on Crete, now in the Herakleion museum (Pl. 36:a, b).¹¹ The face of a youth on a fragment of a grave relief once in Piraeus and dated to the middle Antonine period is also similar.¹² Parallels for the drilling at the corners of the mouth are provided by marble figures from Attic table supports of the second half of the 2nd century A.C.¹³ The latter comparisons suggest a date in the third quarter of the 2nd century for ASS 13.

IDENTIFICATION

The Pentelic marble of ASS 13 suggests that the monument to which it originally belonged was Attic. The type of monument it came from can be narrowed down as well. It is unlikely that the plaque was part of a larger architectural monument, such as a frieze, or even of a funerary or

⁶ The face has been incorrectly registered as female in the files of the antiquities collection of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

⁷ On an Italian round altar with relief decoration of two female neckless heads, now in Potsdam (Klein Glienicke Schloß 325), the neck is suggested by a necklace carved under the head: Goethert 1972, p. 16, no. 86, pl. 37. This is, however, an isolated example that possibly follows the iconographical conventions of a specific group of monuments; see note 35 below.

⁸ Cf. a female head in the Leptis Magna Museum (inv. no. 242): Caputo and Traversari 1976, p. 40, no. 18, pl. 10; also a head of Hermes (inv. no. 16): p. 33, no. 12, pls. 11, 12.

⁹ Leptis Magna Museum, inv. no. 42: Caputo and Traversari 1976, p. 42, no. 21, pls. 18, 19.

¹⁰ Contrast this with the face of the youth on the Early Imperial relief in the National Museum of Athens (N.M. 2794): Conze 1911–1922, no. 2054, pl. CCCCL; Goette 1989, p. 211, no. 6.

¹¹ Inv. no. 387: van Effenterre 1976; Koch and Sichtermann 1982, p. 439, no. 14; Rogge 1993, p. 112, note 29, pls. 46:1, 47:2.

¹² Conze 1911–1922, p. 59 (with fig.), no. 1970; Walters 1988, p. 37, note 34, p. 80, fig. 32:b.

¹³ E.g., Stefanidou-Tiveriou 1993, p. 247, no. 45, pl. 19 (Athens, N.M. 3494), and p. 280, no. 129, pl. 67 (Athens, N.M. 3857).

dedicatory altar¹⁴ or revetment, since such pieces exhibit greater depth.¹⁵ Moreover, friezes or other slabs decorated with isolated heads, such as those that occur in East Greece during Roman times, are rather unusual in mainland Greece, especially in Attika.¹⁶ Our slab is surely not a fragment of a votive relief, not so much because of its depth, which accords well with that of votive reliefs,¹⁷ but because of the dimensions of the head, which is life-size.

The possibility remains that we should consider our plaque to be a fragment of a marble garland sarcophagus decorated with neckless heads inside the loops of the garlands. Isolated relief heads of Medusa,¹⁸ heads of maenads and satyrs, and also theater masks appear on the garland sarcophagi of Roman Imperial times.¹⁹ Well known are the Alexandrian examples,²⁰ those produced in the workshops of Aphrodisias in Caria,²¹ and those from Attika. An excellent parallel for ASS 13 is provided by the Attic sarcophagus from Mallia, mentioned above.²² The depth of the relief of the Medusa heads that decorate the loops of the garlands (Pl. 36:a, b) is 0.09 m at the forehead and 0.08–0.085 m at the nose. The Medusa heads are also of approximately the

¹⁴ The group of predominantly East Greek altars of rectangular or cylindrical shape decorated with relief masks and masklike heads appears mostly in Late Hellenistic times. See, e.g., a funerary altar with a Helios head in Rhodes (1st century B.C.): Fraser 1977, p. 19, note 82, figs. 43:c, d, 44:b. A dedicatory altar of Hellenistic or Early Roman date from Salamis on Cyprus in the Archaeological Museum in Nicosia is decorated with heads of maenads, a silen, and Pan: Karageorghis 1963, p. 588, fig. 53; Fraser 1977, p. 113, note 148 (vi), fig. 76:d, where it is incorrectly stated that the altar is decorated with lion heads. See also the altar with silen masks in the Theater of Dionysos in Athens: Fraser 1977, p. 113, note 148 (v), fig. 75:a. For the continuation of this tradition in Attika in Roman Imperial times, see note 30 below. See also, in general, Berges 1996.

¹⁵ The depth of an architrave block decorated with relief masks from a Roman mausoleum at Suhut-Synnada in Asia Minor (Buckler, Calder, and Guthrie 1933, p. 25, no. 80A, fig. 10, pl. 22) is 0.42 m. The slab Athens, N.M. 1425 (4th century B.C.; *LIMC* II, 1984, no. 90, pl. 642, s.v. *Asklepios* [B. Holtzmann]), allegedly from the revetment of an altar in the Asklepieion of Epidauros, has a depth of 0.185 m. Other similar slabs (N.M. 1451, 1452) are said to come from the precinct of the temenos of Aphrodite and Eros on the North Slope of the Akropolis (2nd century B.C.; *LIMC* III, 1986, no. 447, pl. 632, s.v. *Eros* [A. Hermayr]); these measure 0.19 m in depth.

¹⁶ The decoration of architectural friezes with relief masks and masklike heads begins in Late Hellenistic Asia Minor; see Moretti 1993, pp. 209, 214. Among the earliest examples is an inscribed lintel with masklike heads of satyrs and silens from the theater of Pergamon, dated to the late 2nd or early 1st century B.C.: Chaisemartin and Theodorescu 1991, p. 52, note 57; Moretti 1993, p. 209, note 10. See also the frieze of a mausoleum, the so-called Octagon in Ephesos, where a relief Medusa head occurs on a rosette (third quarter of the 1st century B.C.): Strocka 1978, p. 886, note 18, p. 905. Furthermore, Aphrodisias in Caria presents a famous example of masklike heads on the friezes from the porches of the Agora of Tiberius (dated to ca. A.D. 20, the 2nd century A.C., and the 5th century A.C.), which can now be seen in the Izmir Archaeological Museum: Jacopi 1939; also Erim 1982, pp. 162–163; Chaisemartin 1987, esp. pp. 142–143; 1990; Moretti 1993, pp. 216–217. Another instance is provided by the male and female heads, Dionysiac and other types, on the slabs serving as the bases of relief panels at the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias, dating to the 1st century A.C.: Outschar 1987, p. 108, figs. 2, 11; Moretti 1993, pp. 215–216. See also the parapet slabs decorated with garlands and female heads from the monumental altar of the Temple of Zeus in Aizanoi, dated to the 2nd century A.C.: Naumann 1979, pp. 39, 52, fig. 17, pl. 68. There is also a marble relief frieze decorated with theatrical masks that was found in Athens; see note 29 below.

¹⁷ Usually Classical votive reliefs from Attika and elsewhere on mainland Greece have an average depth of between ca. 0.12 and 0.15 m, e.g., the 4th-century B.C. reliefs in Athens, N.M. 1424 and 1332: *LIMC* II, 1984, nos. 6 and 313, pls. 631, 660, s.v. *Asklepios* (B. Holtzmann); measurements taken by the authors.

¹⁸ This tradition is first exemplified by a Lycian sarcophagus of the early second century B.C. from Trysa, now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, decorated on its cover with gorgoneia: Işık 1993, p. 9, note 9, pl. 1.

¹⁹ On the development of the decoration of garland sarcophagi in Asia Minor, see Strocka 1978. Işık (1993) argues against some of the views presented by Strocka. On the garland sarcophagi from Roman, Attic, and Asia Minor workshops, see in general Koch and Sichtermann 1982, pp. 223–235, 435–441, and 499–500, respectively. Cf. Koch 1993, pp. 88–89, 108, 113–115, 147–191. On the Roman garland sarcophagi, see also Herdejürge 1966.

²⁰ Most examples date from the late 2nd to the early 3rd century A.C. See Adriani 1961, pp. 19–32, nos. 1–37, pls. 1–31; Koch and Sichtermann 1982, pp. 576–578.

²¹ See Strocka 1978, pp. 905–913, note 88, pls. CCX, CCXI. For a more general view, see Işık 1984, pp. 256–267.

²² See note 11 above.

same size as our head, measuring 0.09–0.10 m from the chin to the area just under the eyes. The depth of our plaque, too, accords well with that of the Mallia sarcophagus;²³ in addition, like our slab, the Mallia sarcophagus has its inside surfaces worked with a point.²⁴

The possibility that ASS 13 might once have belonged to a garland sarcophagus narrows considerably the candidates for the identification of the head. The masklike heads that decorate sarcophagi in low or high relief are of a restricted typology and are not merely decorative but also symbolic, their meaning connected to the fact of death (Medusa heads) and the ideal of afterlife (Dionysiac heads).²⁵

The male heads that decorate the loops of garland sarcophagi are usually silens or satyrs. Youthful satyrs, however, have animal ears and a strong facial distortion, characteristics that the head on ASS 13 lacks.²⁶ Yet our head is remarkably close to the masklike head of a youth on the covers of two identical Alexandrian porphyry relief sarcophagi dated to the 4th century A.C. and located in the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria and the Vatican Museums, respectively.²⁷ The faces on these sarcophagi (see Plate 36:c for the one in Alexandria) have broad proportions, protruding cheekbones, short hair, and smiles. They have been identified as satyrs, although lacking animal ears, or as young participants in the Dionysiac Mysteries, that is, bacchants. The faces adorn the covers of the two sarcophagi, where they are accompanied by three other faces: one aged male and two females of different ages, possibly all belonging to the same retinue. The four faces could represent the different ages and sexes of Dionysiac devotees, whose mythological archetypes would be satyrs, silens, and maenads.²⁸

Could the head of ASS 13, therefore, be that of a young bacchant? If so, it would be the earliest known example of an iconographical type that is presently known only from Late Roman monuments. As a prototype of the Alexandrian heads, it could be traced back to an Attic workshop at least as early as the 2nd century A.C. Although we lack an exact parallel of that date from Attika, the tradition of marble monuments decorated with relief masks or masklike heads is present in Imperial Athens. Apart from a unique example of an architectural frieze with theatrical masks found in the Theater of Dionysos and now in the National Museum of Athens,²⁹ we possess some garland sarcophagi decorated with the heads of satyrs or maenads³⁰ and an example of

²³ The depth of the wall of the Mallia sarcophagus without the protrusion of the relief on its external side is ca. 0.13 m; see van Effenterre 1976, p. 527, fig. 2.

²⁴ van Effenterre 1976, p. 531.

²⁵ See Strocka 1978, pp. 912–913.

²⁶ For examples of satyr heads, see Adriani 1961, no. 16, pl. 14, fig. 42. Cf. also the Classical Praxitelean satyrs in Rizzo 1932, pls. XLVIII–LI, LIII–LV; Bartman 1992, figs. 28, 41, 45, 47. See, too, the head of a young satyr on a terracotta model of a comedy mask in the Glasgow Museum: Bernabò-Brea 1981, p. 130, H7, fig. 217. For a satyr head with short hair, see Goethert 1972, p. 5, no. 28, pl. 15.

²⁷ Alexandria, Greco-Roman Museum 353: Adriani 1961, pp. 92–94, no. 37, pl. 30, figs. 90, 91; Vatican Museums 237: Lippold 1936, p. 165, no. 566, pls. 67, 68:3; Helbig⁴ I, pp. 17–18, no. 21 (A.D. 335–360). Another fragmentary example of the same type of porphyry sarcophagus exists in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum (inv. no. 806). These three sarcophagi were made in an Alexandrian workshop; see Koch and Sichtermann 1982, p. 579; cf. Koch 1993, pp. 202–203.

²⁸ See Adriani 1961, p. 32, pl. 31; Lippold 1936, pl. 68. On the interpretation, see Helbig⁴ I, p. 18. See also Kleiner 1992, p. 457, fig. 419. Cf. the decoration with two maenad masks, one silen mask, and one satyr mask on a garland sarcophagus from a workshop in Rome, today in the Louvre (Ma 451), dating to ca. A.D. 150: Herdejürgen 1966, p. 141, no. 110, pls. 59:3, 60:2, 4.

²⁹ Inv. no. 382. This is a piece of the frieze with the masks arranged in two tiers, and it is connected with the *scaenae frons* of Roman date: Pervanoğlu 1866, p. 170, no. 205; Svoronos 1908, p. 241, no. 22, pl. XLIII; Zoumbaki 1987, p. 45, no. 11, pl. 5:a.

³⁰ Apart from the Mallia sarcophagus (note 11 above), see also the small sarcophagus or possibly *ostotheke* in Athens (N.M. 1191), decorated with silen heads in low relief: Rogge 1993, p. 112, note 26, pl. 47:1. In general, and for other examples of garland sarcophagi from Attic workshops, see Koch and Sichtermann 1982, pp. 435–438, esp. p. 436 for the satyr heads decorating the insides of the garland loops.

a rectangular altar with gorgoneia from the Kerameikos (now in the Epigraphical Museum in Athens) inscribed with a dedication to Dionysos.³¹

CONCLUSION

Neckless heads are generally rare in Greek art, apart from depictions of inhuman creatures such as Medusa, satyrs and maenads, and some celestial deities, such as personifications of the sun,³² the moon,³³ and the moon god Men.³⁴ The depiction of a head without a neck may have been viewed as having something irrational about it, for it was never used for the portrayal of humans or Olympian gods, at least in mainland Greece. It is restricted to demonic beings or persons who have crossed the border of normal human behavior, such as mortals who participate in Dionysiac revelries, and it is normal in funerary art.³⁵ It also occurs with an emblematic or official/symbolic use on Roman *oscilla* or *imagines clipeatae*.³⁶

Neckless relief heads, with the exception of gorgoneia, appear for the first time in Greek art during the 4th century B.C. in northern Greece, where they are found as decorative features of bronze and silver vessels. These, used in aristocratic feasting and in tombs, have a strong connection with the Dionysiac world of revelries or with the afterlife. This northern Greek tradition seems to have been combined, in the Late Hellenistic period, with the Attic practice of using theatrical masks in the cult and festivals of Dionysos, thus leading to the use of theatrical masks and masklike heads in low or high relief for the decoration of stone altars, sarcophagi, and architectural friezes, especially in the theaters and mausoleums of East Greece, where a tradition was established that continued well into Roman Imperial times.³⁷

The main function of neckless heads in Greek art therefore seems to have been Dionysiac; they were used for both life-oriented (festivities and theater) and funerary purposes. An interesting example of the latter is provided by the presence of terracotta theatrical masks and masklike Dionysiac heads in Greek tombs, especially those of Roman date.³⁸ This can be interpreted

³¹ Inv. no. E.M. 8421; the inscription reads Ζώσιμος Ειρηνέου Διονύσω εὐχὴν: Svoronos 1937, p. 672, no. 459 (where the first two words of the inscription are incorrectly written as Σώσιμος Ειρηναίου), pl. CCXXIX (= *IG II²* 4789).

³² Schauburg 1955, pp. 18–19, 30; *LIMC* V, 1990, no. 138, pl. 640, s.v. *Helios* (N. Yalouris).

³³ On the Classical iconography of Selene heads and busts painted in a disk suggestive of the form of the full moon, see Schauburg 1955, pp. 14–15; Brommer 1963; *LIMC* II, 1984, nos. 41–47 and p. 917, s.v. *Astra* (S. Karusu). Cf. also a possible head of Selene on a relief panel with a mythical scene from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias: Smith 1989, fig. on p. 55; 1990, p. 97, fig. 9. The authors are grateful to Evelyn B. Harrison, who drew their attention to the Aphrodisias panel.

³⁴ For the cult and iconography of Men, see Lane 1964; 1971–1978; Salzmänn 1980; van Haepereen-Pourbaix 1983; Lane 1984; 1990; *LIMC* VI, 1992, pp. 462–473, s.v. *Men* (R. Vollkommer).

³⁵ For a similar tradition in the west, see a group of cylindrical funerary altars found in North Italy dating from the 1st century B.C. to the 1st century A.C. These were adorned with neckless heads or, more commonly, with busts of male and female figures that have been interpreted as persons of supernatural character and decorative function; cf. Gabelmann 1968, esp. pp. 92–93 for interpretation.

³⁶ For this type of monument, see in general Corswandt 1982. In addition, Ammon heads appear on a variety of monuments dated to Roman Imperial times: *LIMC* I, 1981, pp. 685–687, e.g., nos. 35, 83, 87, pls. 539, 545, 546, s.v. *Ammon* (J. Leclant and G. Clerc). See especially the Ammon heads and other unidentified male heads on the huge marble shields from the Forum of Augustus in Rome, now in the Antiquario dei Cavalieri di Rodi (Hadrianic restoration): Ganzert and Kockel 1988, pp. 192–194, figs. 84–86; *LIMC* I, 1981, no. 38, s.v. *Ammon* (J. Leclant and G. Clerc).

³⁷ For such heads as attachments on Macedonian metal vessels, see Themelis 1997, pp. 173–182, figs. 46–51. For an account of the origins, the development, and the expansion of architectural members decorated with masks, see Chaisemartin 1987, pp. 140–141; Chaisemartin and Theodorescu 1991, p. 52, with reference to the decoration of relief pottery; also, more recently, Moretti 1993. For this kind of decoration in mausoleums, see the Late Hellenistic mausoleum in Ephesos (note 16 above) and the late-1st- to early-2nd-century A.C. mausoleum at Suhut-Synnada in Asia Minor, where an architrave block is decorated with a frieze of garlands and tragic masks: Buckler, Calder, and Guthrie 1933, p. 25, no. 80A, fig. 18, pl. 22; Waelkens 1982, pl. 30:1.

³⁸ See Davaras 1985, pp. 153–157, notes 49–50, pl. 42.

as denoting a heavenly thiasos into which the deceased is introduced in an act of apotheosis.³⁹ The same interpretation could be applied to the presence of bacchant heads on the Alexandrian sarcophagi and thus to the meaning of the head on ASS 13.

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³⁹ See Davaras 1985, p. 155 and notes 53–55. Cf., in general, Wrede 1981, pp. 182–183, 302.

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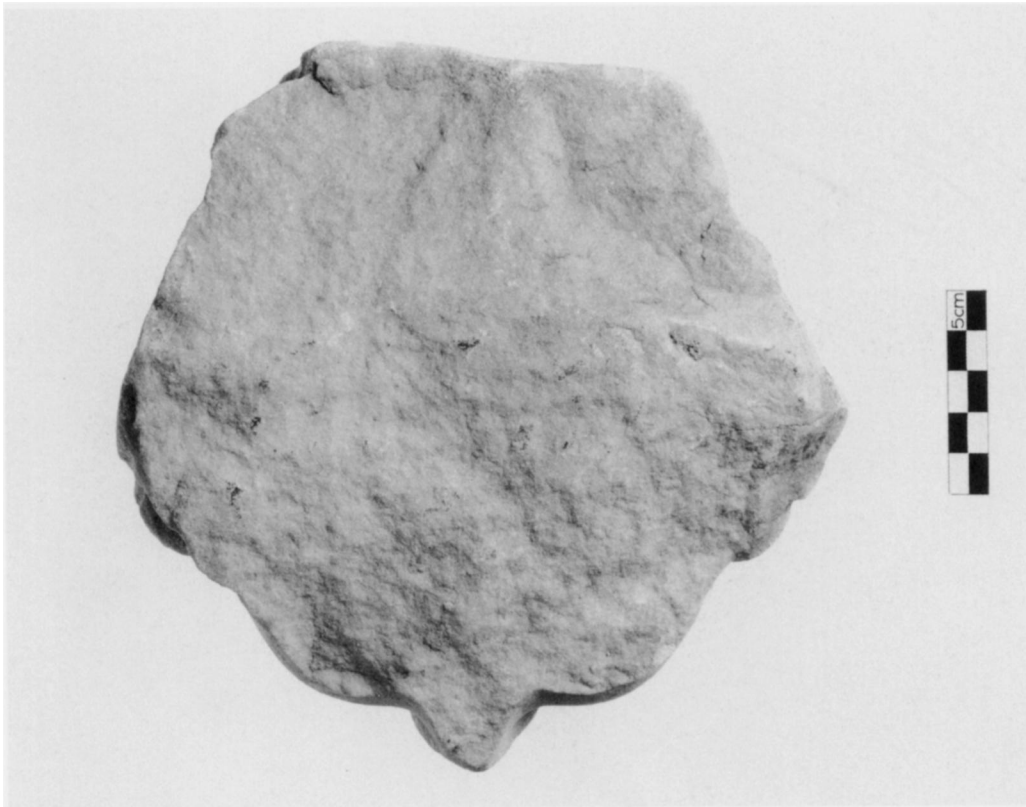
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a. ASS 13, front view



b. ASS 13, top view



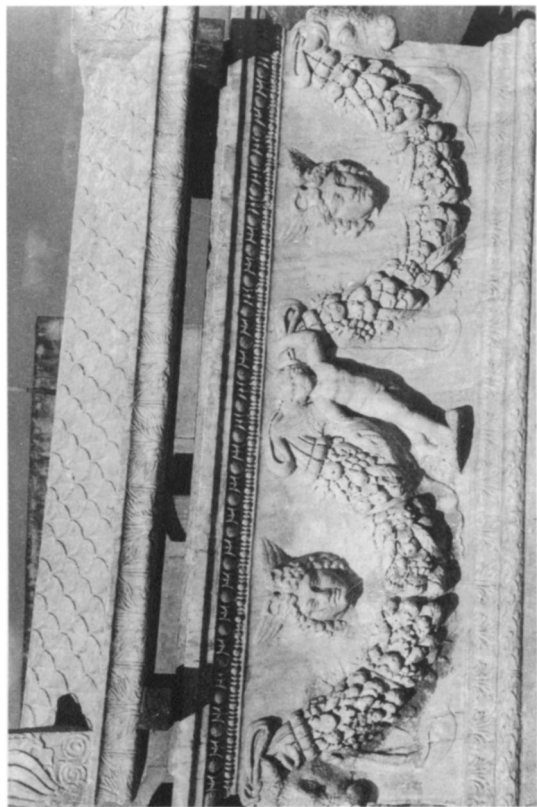
a. ASS 13, right side



b. ASS 13, left side



c. ASS 13, back view, showing marks from pointed tool



b. Sarcophagus from Mallia (Herakleion Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 387). Photo: French School at Athens.



a. Detail of sarcophagus from Mallia: gorgoneion, oblique view.



c. Head of a young bacchant on the sarcophagus in the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, inv. no. 353 (after Adriani 1961, pl. 30, fig. 91).