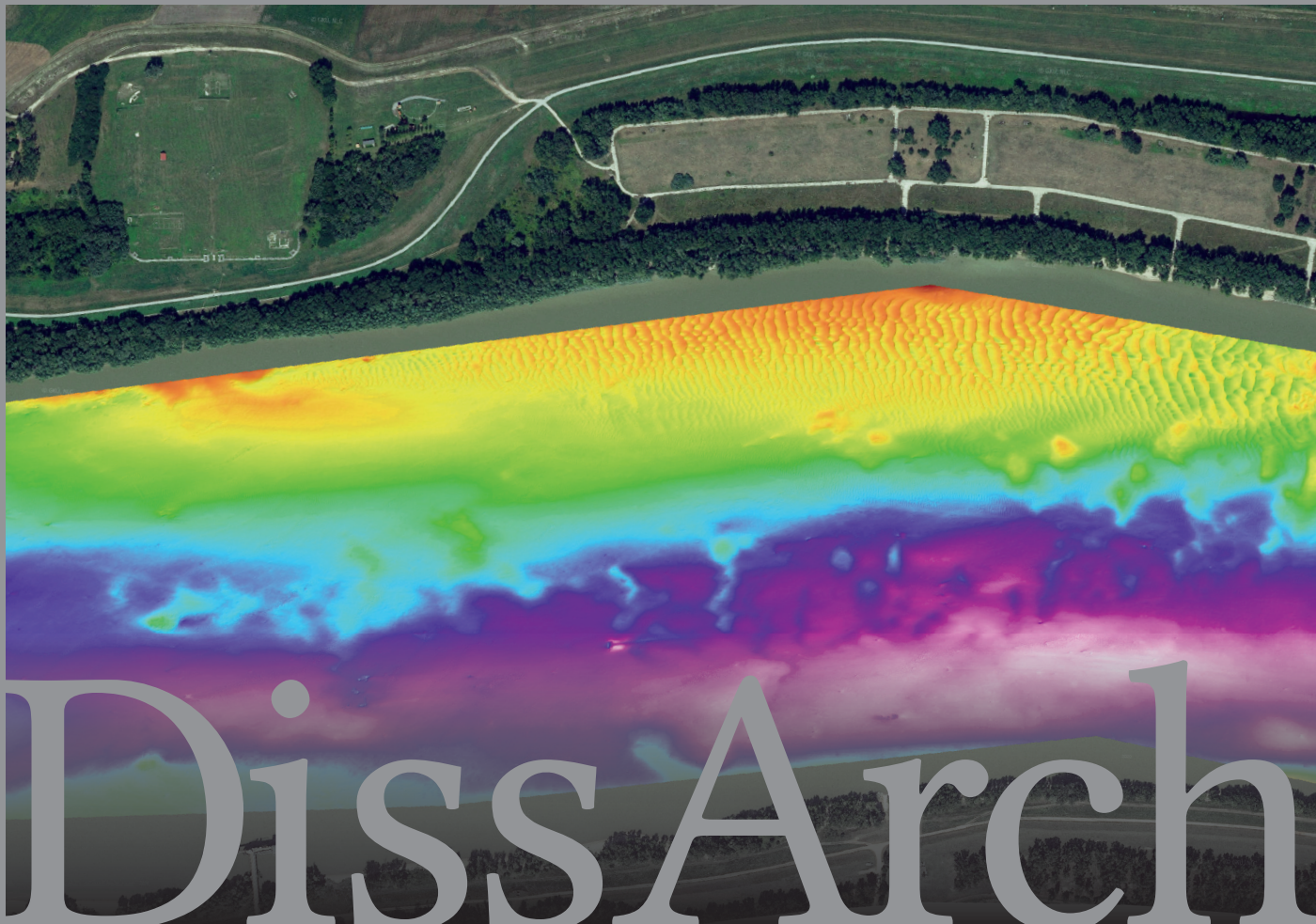


# DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

ex Instituto Archaeologico

Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



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# Not all Gorgons are Greek

## A red-figure kylix fragment in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest\*

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**Abstract:** The collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, holds an unpublished kylix fragment (Inv.no. 51.100) with an unusual depiction of the head of a Gorgon in its *tondo*. According to the museum's records, the kylix was originally part of the painter Antal Haan's collection. However, a thorough study of the published and unpublished revision records of the collection showed that the kylix cannot be identified with any of the described objects; thus, it may not have originally been part of said collection. Through careful examination of the fragment, it was possible to identify the traces of post-antique alteration on its surface, revealing that the uncommon Gorgoneion was most probably added to the original Attic black glazed vase in the 19th century. The lack of information does not allow for drawing a definitive conclusion regarding the precise place and time of alteration, but the necessary skills and the possibilities of the Békés County Museum in the decades preceding WW II, as well as the similarities with another altered piece in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, suggest that the Gorgoneion was added in Italy.

**Keywords:** attic vase painting, forgery, Gorgoneion, Antal Haan's collection

### Introduction

The collection of the Department of Antiquities of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest (hereafter MFAB) holds a seemingly uninteresting, unpublished Athenian red-figure kylix fragment dated ca. 500 BC (Figs 1–2, Fig. 3.a–e).<sup>1</sup> The kylix, alongside other Greek, Etruscan, and Roman artefacts, was originally part of Hungarian painter Antal Haan's collection, which was deposited in MFAB after World War II.

According to the records, the cup was purchased in Italy from the antiquities market together with other artefacts of the Haan collection; after Haan's return to Hungary, these artefacts played an important role in the establishment of the Békés County Museum (henceforth: BCM). Three surveys are known to have been conducted in the museum between 1873 and 1950, but neither mentions the kylix in focus.

The figural decoration on the preserved part of the *tondo* was done using the red-figure technique. Due to damage to the vessel, only part of a mouth, a nose, and two eyes are recognisable. Despite

\* A version of this paper was presented at the I. Régészhallgatók Országos Konferenciája [I. National Conference of Students of Archaeology] in 2022.

1 The fragment has never been the subject of any study, but the basic information and a black and white photo are accessible in the registry of the MFAB <https://hyperion.szepmuveszeti.hu/hu/hyperion/targy/5059?sid=32734> (last accessed: 1 September 2025).



Fig. 1. Attic black glazed kylix fragment with modern decoration Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, inv. no. 51.100 (photo by the author).

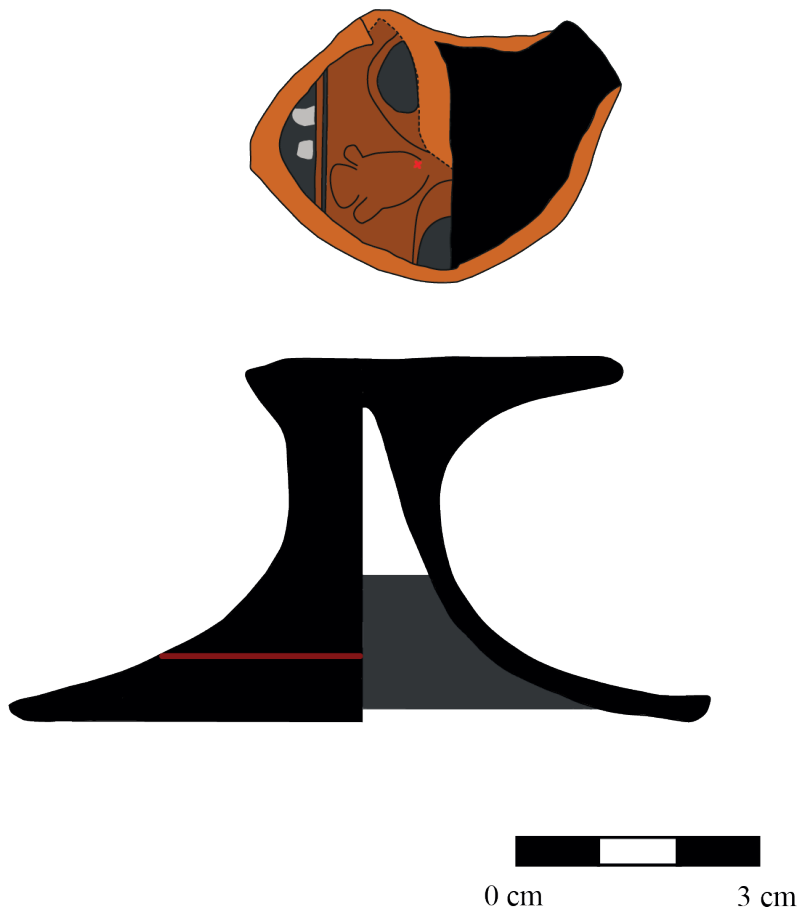


Fig. 2. Drawing of Attic black glazed kylix fragment with modern decoration Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, inv. no. 51.100 (work of the author).

the lacunas, the features of the face resemble a Gorgon's head, a popular decorative motif in the *tondi* of cups during the archaic and early classical periods. It should be underlined, however, that the depiction is an atypical one, since it seems as if the upper half of the head was cut off and covered with black glaze.

The problems regarding the fragment's origin and iconography gave rise to doubts regarding its authenticity. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is twofold: to publish the fragment in detail for the first time, tackling the question of authenticity, and to reconstruct the possible path of the kylix from Athens to Budapest through a careful study of museum records.

### The fragment inv. no. 51.100

The fragment is 4 cm high, the diameter of its foot is 9.3 cm, and the diameter of the widest preserved part of the *tondo* is 3.9 cm. The vase was finely potted: the foot joins the body without any break, giving it an uninterrupted profile (Fig. 3.a–e). The overall condition of the fragment is very poor: only the base, the stem, and a small part of the *tondo* are preserved. Numerous small damages can be observed on the surface, especially the bottom of the body. Fracture surfaces reveal reddish-orange pottery, characteristic of Athenian vases. The stem, the upper part of the base, and part of the foot's underside are covered in shiny black glaze. A thin red line was painted around the stem above the base.

The upper side of the preserved *tondo* fragment is covered in the same shiny black glaze as other parts of the vase. The 'lower' part, i.e. the actual image field, features a black dot surrounded by a half-circle from below on both the left and the right side; on the right the shiny black glaze seems to cut into the figural decoration. Between these pairs of circles a nose appears, marked by two long, curved lines starting from the edges of the half circles and a trefoil motif at their lower end. A black line above a half circle with superimposed, elongated white dots fill the lowermost part of the image field fragment. The described features, especially the trefoil nose and the mouth with the teeth in white, recall the Gorgon's head motif, often appearing in the *tondi* of kylixes.

The uninterrupted profile and the foot are both characteristics of Type B *kylikes*. This type was primarily made in red-figure and black glazed variations, the latter representing only a small part compared to the former.<sup>2</sup> The closest parallel of the vase's profile can be found in Hansjörg Bloesch's monograph in Type 18/1, attributed to the potter Pamphaios.<sup>3</sup> Based on the similarities with the Pamphaios cup, the fragment in focus can be dated around the turn of the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.

### The problems of the origin

The vessel was part of the collection of Antal Haan (1827 Békéscsaba–1888 Capri), a Hungarian painter from Békéscsaba, who worked in Italy and briefly returned to Hungary before settling in Capri. János György Szilágyi studied in detail the history of the collection and the painter's importance as an art collector.<sup>4</sup> Haan acquired his collection of mostly Greek, Etruscan, and Roman antiquities during his stay in Rome between 1850 and 1860.<sup>5</sup> In 1862, he travelled to Hungary, only to return to Italy a decade later. His collection was sold to the BCM in 1873 and became the core of the newly founded museum's collection.<sup>6</sup> János Mogyoróssy created the first inventory of this

2 SPARKES – TALCOTT 1972, 92.

3 BLOESCH 1940, 65; Taf. 18.1a–b.

4 SZILÁGYI 2016.

5 SZILÁGYI 2016.

6 SZILÁGYI 2016, 79.



Fig. 3. a – fragment of an Attic black-figure stemless cup The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 2011.604.3.1985, b – fragment of an Attic black-figure kylix The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 2011.604.3.1990, c – fragment of an Attic black-figure kylix The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 2011.604.3.1991, d – fragment of an Attic black-figure kylix The Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. no. 2011.604.3.2019, e – fragment of an Attic black-figure kylix The Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. no. 2011.604.3.2020.

collection in 1875, listing only the numbers of different artefacts and classifying classical antique artefacts based on origin as Etruscan and Roman.<sup>7</sup> Ferenc Pulszky made a second revision in 1878, compiling a detailed list of objects in the collection.<sup>8</sup> However, this list mentions only one drinking cup with a *Gorgoneion* in the *tondo*, a red-figure kylix attributed to the Andokides Painter, today in the collection of MFAB.<sup>9</sup> There is a discrepancy between the numbers of objects in the first and second lists, which was already noted by Szilágyi, who believed that Pulszky's 133 objects may be closer to reality than Mogyoróssy's 260.<sup>10</sup>

The last revision of the museum's collection was carried out on the order of József Implom, a freshly appointed museum director, in 1928.<sup>11</sup> Although it was never completed or published, its records are available for study.<sup>12</sup> Most of the Greek artefacts mentioned in it originate from Haan's collection, but the origins of a few remains unknown, including No. 46, a fragmentary red-figure kylix,<sup>13</sup> and No. 47; their description only states that these are "*three non-joining fragments of a kylix*"<sup>14</sup> without any note on decoration. This inventory, just like the previous one, includes only one vase with a Gorgon's head—the Andokides cup.

Under the management of József Implom the collection and the exhibition were moved from its former place into the building of the Boys School (today Implom József School), where they remained until World War II.<sup>15</sup> During the war, the building was transformed into a military hospital, and the collection was deposited in the attic to keep them safe; however, it was looted and badly damaged there. After the war, in 1950, the Haan collection—or rather what was left of it—was packed into wooden boxes and sent to the MFAB,<sup>16</sup> where it was catalogued in 1950–1951.<sup>17</sup>

The problem of matching the records with the kylix—which seems to be missing from all of them—emerges from the history of the Haan collection. Given the cursory character of the documentation and in light of the higher number of objects in Mogyoróssy's list, the kylix might have been part of the group of Etruscan antiquities. The vase was not included, however, in Pulszky's list, although had he seen it, he would most likely have mentioned it and given a description of the figural decoration, as he did for other vases. As for the third list, the provenance of the cup attributed to the

7 MOGYORÓSSY 1875, 178.

8 PULSZKY 1878.

9 PULSZKY 1878, 177. "Kylix. Red figure on black ground. Outside front: naked man (Satyr?) sits. His beard is violet, in his hair taenia. In his hand holds a deep kylix, and he drinks from it. Back. Woman (Maenas?) in her hand vine. She is making a big leap. Next to the handles of the vessel two eyes and vines with grapes. Inside [there is a] Gorgoneion (Head of Medusa as a mask). Archaic" (translation by the author). For the kylix see: PÉCASSE 1990; SZILÁGYI 2016, 74; Hyperión: <https://hyperion.szepmuveszeti.hu/hu/hyperion/targy/52?sid=38345> (last accessed: 1 September 2025).

10 SZILÁGYI 2016, 71.

11 The date of this new inventory is not.

12 I would like to thank János Cseresznyés who provided me with the digitalised list of the Implom survey.

13 The kylix was identified as the cup of the Foundry Painter. Inv. nr.: 51.30 1-7. <https://hyperion.szepmuveszeti.hu/hu/hyperion/targy/5067?sid=38345> (last accessed: 1 September 2025).

14 Translation by the author.

15 LISKA 2017

16 SZILÁGYI 1954, 53; SZILÁGYI 2016, 71.

17 Szilágyi's comment in an interview about the department's situation at the time: "I came to the Museum of Fine Arts and Dobrovits [Aladár Dobrovits (1909–1970) the department's director at the time] collected the classical artefacts from all the museums in the country [Hungary], and we also bought [objects], what we could, and these slowly surrounded me, because there was no storage room, they were all around me in the room the objects, and on the table the vases, the jewellery in the left drawer, and that these should be catalogued." (KOMORÓCZY 2018, 246), (translation by the author).

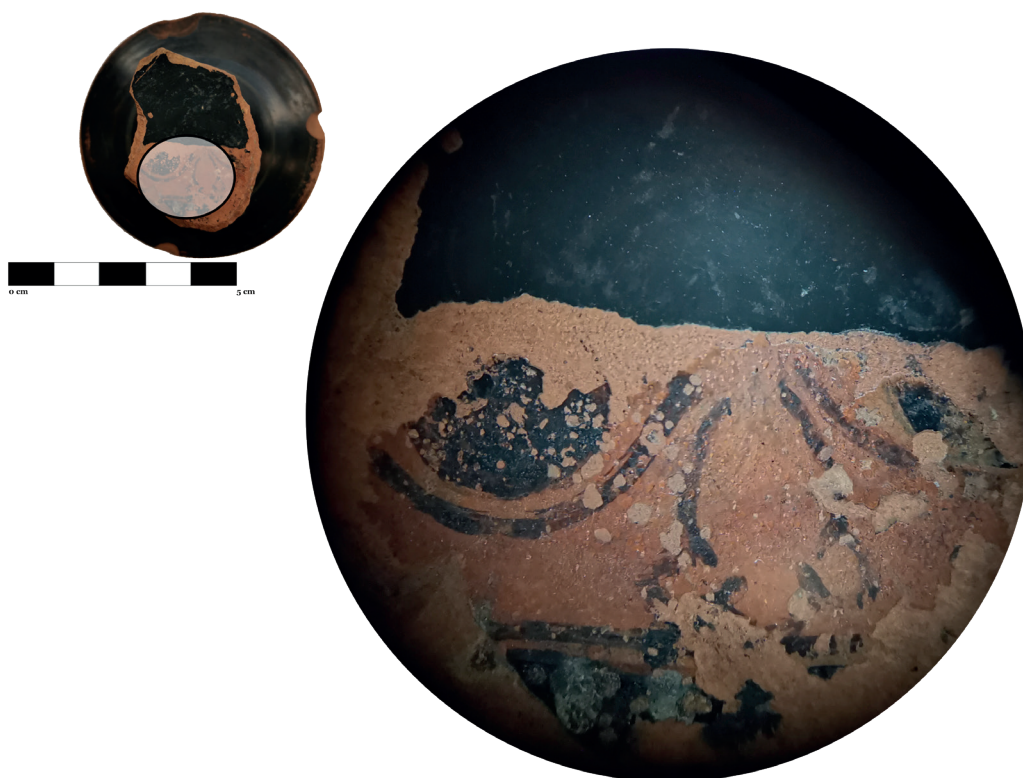


Fig. 4. Attic black glazed kylix fragment with modern decoration (tondo, detail) Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, inv. no. 51.100 (photo by the author).



Fig. 5. Attic black glazed kylix fragment with modern decoration (tondo, detail) Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, inv. no. 51.100 (photo by the author).



Fig. 6. Attic black glazed kylix fragment with modern decoration (underside, detail) Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, inv. no. 51.100 (photo by the author).

Foundry Painter<sup>18</sup> is marked as unknown, but a detailed description is given of its figural decoration. It would be possible to identify the fragment in question with the kylix fragment(s) mentioned in the third list, but given the example of the previous cup, the figural decoration would at least have been mentioned, but the lack of a description leaves this question unresolved.

Its inventory card describes the kylix fragment in focus as belonging to the Haan collection and probably acquired in Italy. However, since it cannot be identified with any artefact in any inventory list, it has possibly never been catalogued or it has perhaps never been part of the Haan collection or the collection of the BCM.

### The problems of the figural decoration

Both the inventory card and MFAB's online database identify the figural decoration as a Gorgon head. The Gorgoneion was a popular decorative motif, often applied to *tondi* of kylixes during the archaic and early classical periods.<sup>19</sup> Gorgoneia have three main types. The oldest is the *Löwentypus* ['lion type'], with animal-like features: a head of a monster with eyes wide open, a mouth with fangs, and an outstretched tongue.<sup>20</sup> The second, *Mittlere Typus* ['intermediate type'], appeared in the late archaic period; in these depictions, the monster-like features are less articulated, and the Gorgon's head is more human-like, while retaining some of the monstrous features of the previous variant. The third type is the *Schöner Typus* ['beautiful type'], where the head is depicted as a beautiful woman bearing no resemblance to the former types.<sup>21</sup>

18 BAPD 275191; ARV1647.55BIS attributed to the Antiphon Painter by Beazley; On the cup see WILLIAMS 2011; Hyperión: <https://hyperion.szepmuveszeti.hu/hu/hyperion/targy/5067?sid=39024> (last accessed: 1 September 2025).

19 On the typology of the Gorgoneion in general see FLOREN 1977, on the typology on the Attic black-figure vases: FILOMIA 1994.

20 For a detailed description of the features of this type see FLOREN 1977, 10–15.

21 FLOREN 1977, 188.



Fig. 7. Attic black glazed Nolan amphora with modern decoration. a – Side A, b– Side B. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, inv. no. T.684 (photo by László Mátyus) © Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

Due to surface damage, the facial features on the kylix fragment in question are difficult to discern. The wide-open eyes and the shape of the nose, as well as the open mouth with teeth, suggest that it might belong to the *Löwentypus* or the *Mittlere Typus*. The identification of the type is more difficult because the part above the eyes was painted completely black, which is unusual: the *tondo* of a kylix is a circular image field, and Gorgon depictions are usually composed in a way that the glabella area is positioned at the centre of the well; however, on the Budapest fragment, the glabella area seems to be shifted considerably towards the probable edge of the *tondo*. This black-covered part on similarly damaged cups is where the forehead of the Gorgon appears (Fig. 4). A possible explanation would be that the entire upper part of the head is depicted as covered with hair; but this is rather atypical and unparalleled—even a search through LIMC,<sup>22</sup> the *Beazley Archive Pottery Database*, and other databases yielded no analogy. Even if this Gorgoneion were part of a shield or a scene with other figures, the head would have been depicted the same way as in other representations.

### Microscopic examination

The problems regarding the origin and figural decoration of the artefact in focus gave rise to doubts regarding its time of production. As it was mentioned, based on morphological characteristics, it was dated to the first decades of the 5th century BC; however, the unusual figural decoration

22 LIMC s.v. Gorgon, Gorgones.

does not support that. To verify the authenticity of the fragment, its surface was studied under an analogue microscope in the Department of Antiquities of the MFAB.

Irregularities could be observed on the surface of the *tondo* in the microscope image. The reddish-orange ceramic surface was exposed only *under* the figural decoration (Figs 5–6). A similar layer sequence was observed on the exterior where the body and the stem attach the black slip coating the vase was blistered and chipped there, exposing white and black substances, similar to a Nolan-type amphora (Fig. 7.a–b). in the MFAB collection<sup>23</sup> (Fig. 8). That black glazed amphora is



Fig. 8. Attic black glazed Nolan amphora with modern decoration (Side A, detail) Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, inv. no. T.684 (photo by the author).

genuine, made in 5th-century BC Athens, but it was restored and altered in Naples in the 19th century, probably before it was sold to an art collector. The coating was redone, the background of the scene was scratched off, and the space was filled with reddish-orange slip imitating the colour of Athenian ceramic. Damage of the black glaze in the ‘double slipped’ part of the vessel is similar to that of the Nolan amphora with Herakles depictions.

The atypical representation of the Gorgon’s head and the observations of the microscope image of the layer sequence made it clear that originally, the figural decoration was not part of the vessel but added later, created by scraping off parts of the black glaze (Fig. 9). The quality of the ceramic and the original black slip, together with the elaboration of the vessel suggest that the kylix was actually made in Attica but originally, it was probably a simple, undecorated black glazed cup.

There is no way to tell how the vessel looked when Haan bought it, but given that the Andokides kylix, however fragmentary, was restored and sold to him as a whole vessel, the Gorgoneion cup was likely also a whole kylix at the time and became damaged only later, maybe during the war. If that was the case, the description of the then possibly intact decoration would have been included in the inventory lists of the Haan collection.

## Ancient with a chance of post-antique

Taking all the above into account, one could ponder, when did the plain black glazed cup become a figural one and why does it not appear in any of the lists? Accepting that the fragment originally belonged to the Haan collection, two possible scenarios emerge from the object’s biography. According to the first, it was found in Italy, where it was most probably restored and altered similarly to the Herakles amphora, including adding the Gorgoneion to raise its value and, thus, price on the antiquities market.<sup>24</sup> Haan purchased the vase and brought with him to Hungary, where it became

23 First published as a black-figure vase in SZILÁGYI 1949, and later as an original amphora with modern alteration: SZILÁGYI 1987. Hyperion: <https://hyperion.szepmuveszeti.hu/en/hyperion/targy/127?sid=39033> (last accessed: 1 September 2025).

24 LOWENTHAL 1990, 22. See also CRADDOCK – BARKER 1990, 161. “The collecting mania created a paradise for dishonest dealers. As each new craze took off a sudden imbalance between supply and demand ►

part of the collection of the BCM. During World War two, the vase was damaged, and after the war, it was sent to the MFAB. During its history, the kylix was simply left out of all inventories and revisions for reasons unknown (Fig. 10).

Alternatively, the vase was a simple black glazed cup when Haan purchased it; it arrived in Gyula without the Gorgoneion in its *tondo* and was altered only later in Hungary. Since it was not included in any of the inventory lists, it either escaped the attention of all scholars and museum staff or was altered after Implom completed the last round of revision of the collection.

As a third option, there is a possibility that the vase was never part of the Haan collection, which cannot be ruled out. It could be obtained for the collection in Gyula from another collector,<sup>25</sup> or, despite all attention and meticulous cataloguing work, it was simply mis-associated with the Haan collection in the overcrowded rooms of the Department of Antiquities and actually came from another source.

Considering the similarities between the glazing of the Herakles amphora and the Gorgon fragment, the first scenario seems the most plausible, especially in light of Cseresznyés' comment, "We can't rule out that the Haan collection has not been restored since the [Békés County] museum acquired it (...) A struggling county museum at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century did not have the opportunity to restore artefacts."<sup>26</sup> Szilágyi mentions a crude restoration in the 1910s,<sup>27</sup> but it is highly unlikely, although not impossible, that the restorers involved back then had the technical knowledge of properly glazing Attic vases. This explanation would solve the problem of the artefact missing from all inventory lists: this restoration only extended to the re-glazing of the vessel and the Gorgon's head was added only after Implom completed the last round of revision. However, technological characteristics suggest that the alteration must have been made in a workshop by professionals mastering the necessary know-how and skills.

## Conclusion

This paper revolves around a red-figure kylix fragment in the collection of the MFAB. After a comprehensive study, it could be concluded that the vase itself was an original Attic kylix, probably made around the 5th century BC, but the figural decoration in the preserved part of the *tondo* was

► created the perfect opportunity for such people to peddle their wares before a pool of expertise had been created. Craftsmen, and some artists, were themselves bemused and sometimes embittered by the fact that the work of their predecessors had so suddenly become many times more valuable than their own. Faking provided not only a living but also an opportunity for revenge on those who showed so unjust a preference for anything old."

25 This possibility is less likely, but there are still unknown private collections containing classical antiquities in Hungary. A recently 'discovered' collection is that of József Porteleki kept at the Jász Museum cp.: Árvai, M. – Balázs, B. – Kiss, A. – Párkányi, B. – Johácz, Sz.: *Görögök a Jászságban? – A Porteleki-gyűjtemény ókori tárgyai*. Poster presented at the XV. Magyar Ókortudományi Konferencia, 23–25 May 2024).

26 János Cseresznyés' comment in a private letter. Translation by the author.

27 SZILÁGYI 2016, 72.

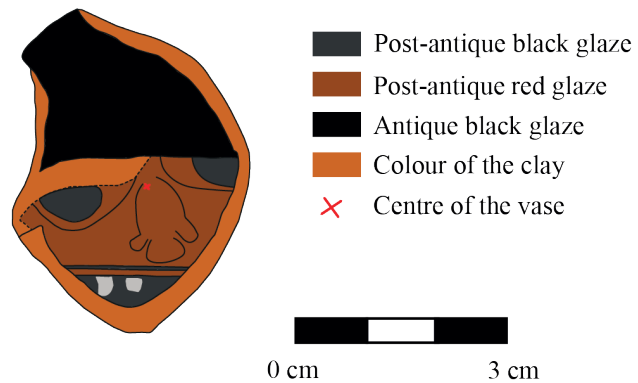


Fig. 9. Colour reconstruction drawing of the Budapest fragment (work of the author).

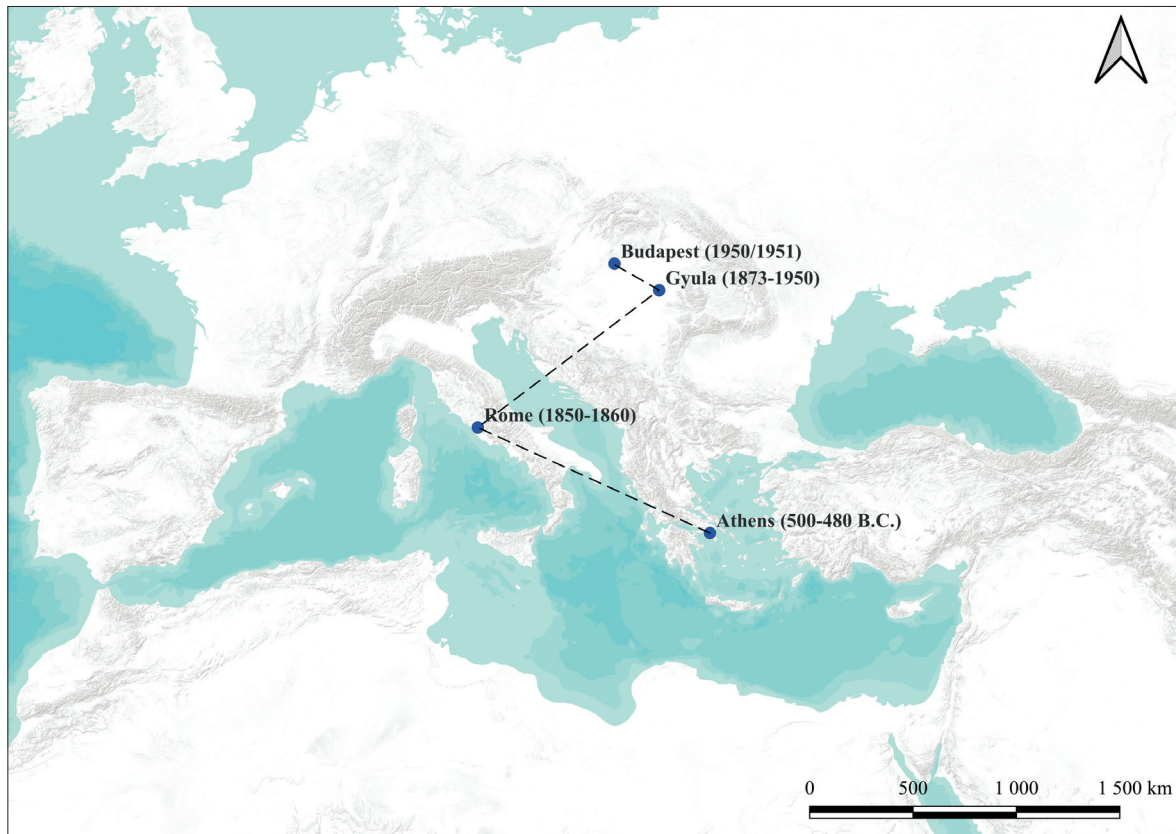


Fig. 10. Known locations and dates of the Budapest fragment (© 2025 Esri [EPSG: 3857]).

a modern alteration, the time of which could not be specified due to problems with the object's biography. Alterations of black glazed vases to increase their value were not uncommon; in light of similarities with an altered Nolan amphora in the collection of MFAB and the possibilities of the BCM at the end of the 19th and early 20th century, the artefact in focus was likely altered in a workshop with craftsmen mastering the skills and know-how necessary for such an intervention.

Further non-destructive analyses may help conclude this question: a comparative analysis of the components of the upper glaze layers of the Herakles amphora and the Gorgon fragment may reveal not only physical but also chemical similarities. The post-antique glazes having a similar chemical composition would mean that the vase in focus was most probably altered and re-glazed in Italy, where Haan purchased it likely in its already altered form, despite the atypical Gorgoneion

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