

# Facing the Gorgon in Pharos: A Glimpse into Central Adriatic Glocality?

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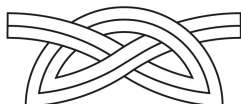
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## FACING THE GORGON IN PHAROS: A GLIMPSE INTO CENTRAL ADRIATIC GLOCALITY?

Original scientific paper

Among the numerous pottery artefacts unearthed in archaeological excavations in Stari Grad on Hvar Island (modern Dalmatia, Croatia), preserving the material testimonies of Pharos, an ancient Greek polis in the central-eastern Adriatic, one particular fragment of a vessel, probably a fish plate, stands out as a remarkable and captivating artefact. This fragment features a subsequently incised image within the depression in the middle of its floor, identified as a graffito depicting a Gorgoneion, an image of the Gorgon's head. As such, it represents not only a unique advanced artistic expression from the 4<sup>th</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE in a region where imagery is rare, but also evidence that a well-known Greek cultural tradition was practised in the central Adriatic, embedded into the facets of insular cultural identity and possibly a religious/spiritual sphere.

**KEY WORDS: PHAROS, GREEKS IN THE ADRIATIC, BLACK GLOSS POTTERY, GRAFFITO, GORGONEION, CULTURAL IDENTITY**

### INTRODUCTION

For centuries, Stari Grad on Hvar Island (central Dalmatia, eastern Adriatic), today a UNESCO protected cultural heritage, has been in the focus of generations of different types of scholars. This comes as no surprise, since it stands on the material remains of Pharos, an ancient Greek polis and one of the oldest cities of the central Adriatic region founded by Cycladic Parians in 385/384 BCE (Diod. Sicul. 15, 13, 4). Consequently, Pharos was one of the last Greek colonies established in the central and western Mediterranean (Fig. 1). Since the 1980s, the town of Stari Grad and its island context have been the focus of archaeological investigation that has intensified in the last few years. These ongoing research activities have recognized Pharos as an influential contributor to

swifter development of regional protohistory and emergence of early history, with its political and economic heyday in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, and cast light on aspects of its cultural, social, and economic traits and policies (Gaffney, Stančić 1992; Forenbaher et al. 1994; Jeličić-Radonić 1995; Gaffney et al. 1997; Gaffney et al. 2002; Kirigin 2004; Kirigin 2006; Popović 2010; Jeličić Radonić, Katić 2015; Jeličić Radonić, Göricke Lukić 2018; Popović, Devlahović 2018; Kavur, Blečić Kavur, Kirigin 2019; Barnett, Ugarković 2020; Popović 2020; Visković, Ugarković 2021; Miše et al. 2022; Ugarković et al. 2022; Zojčeski, Buća 2022; Ugarković et al. 2023). Nonetheless, most of our knowledge of Pharos, including the precise perimeter of the ancient city, and what preceded it (the extent and other elements of the earlier local settlement), is still very limited.





**Fig. 1** – Map of the part of the Mediterranean (base map: NASA World Wind (retouched), modified by: Eric Gaba (Sting); close-up base map: Geoportal DGU; made by: M. Ugarković)

In an attempt to unravel some of the unknown facets of Pharian agencies that actively shaped (g)local central Dalmatian cultural practices, which are partly reflected in the preserved material evidence, this paper will focus on the study of a unique ceramic artefact that stands out among hundreds of thousands of recovered Greek pottery fragments, due to its graffito with the depiction of a Gorgoneion.

## CONTEXT

The so-called Remete site, house and garden (*Remete kuća, Remete vrt*), situated at the south-eastern edge of the modern urban core of Stari Grad, is one of the most researched micro-regional areas today, also presented as an archaeo-

logical site for a wider audience. In the course of several decades, rescue and research excavations conducted by several institutions have provided important insights into different phases of urban planning and architecture, as well as numerous ceramic and other finds from the time of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman Pharos (Jeličić Radonić, Katić 2015; Popović 2010; Popović, Devlahović 2018; Kirigin, Barbarić 2019).<sup>1</sup>

The ceramic artefact that is the subject of this paper was found during the 2013 excavation campaign, conducted by the Museum of Stari Grad. It was discovered in trench L in the Remete garden, which was situated between the discovered segment of the southern fortification wall of the ancient Greek city and the stone structure used as a cistern (Popović, Devlahović 2018: 388-390; Kirigin 2018: 397). This elaborate stone-walled

<sup>1</sup> — The excavations on the Remete site and its immediate vicinity have been conducted by the Conservation Department in Split (1994-2004), the Museum of Stari Grad (2009-2013, 2017-2018), the Institute of Archaeology, and the Museum of Stari Grad (2022-2023) and a public institution, the Agency for the Management of the *Stari Grad Plain* (2022-2023).

structure, used for pulling spring water out of it, was one of the earliest Greek architectural structures in this area. As the stratigraphy suggests, it was built earlier than the nearby rampart segment and repaired when the rampart segment was erected (Popović, Devlahović 2018, 389, 391; Kirigin 2018: 401; Kirigin, Barbarić 2019: 223). Although an in-depth study of the ceramic assemblages has not yet been conducted, the finds include pottery, preliminarily roughly dated to the middle and late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE (black gloss and plain painted tableware, amphorae...), five coins, also from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE (three minted in Heraclea and two in Pharos), and a fragment of a vessel with an incised figural motif in a thick layer of crushed shells, defined as stratigraphic unit 451 (Popović, Devlahović 2018: 390; Kirigin 2018; for examples of Corinth type B amphorae from SU 451 see nos. 4 and 6 and 7). This layer has been considered in the context of deliberate fills serving to level the area around the cistern and interpreted as a drainage used for the preparation of new buildings, such as the erection of the new city wall and the repairs of the cistern (Popović, Devlahović 2018: 389, 390, fig. 17; Kirigin, Barbarić 2019: 227, 228, fig. 14 B). Therefore, in line with the date proposed for the erection of new elements and the reparation of old elements of the Pharos urban tissue – from the (advanced/late) 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to the (early) 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE (Popović, Devlahović 2018: 390, 391; Kirigin 2018: 397) – the context in which the remaining part of the vessel was found seems to suggest its earlier chronology, possibly in connection with other documented finds, preliminarily dated to the middle and the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, although an earlier 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE date cannot be excluded.

### THE CERAMIC ARTEFACT: A LOOK AT ITS TYPO-CHRONOLOGY, FUNCTION, AND POSSIBLE PROVENANCE<sup>2</sup>

The discovered ceramic artefact could be classified as black gloss ware (Fig. 2). Only the lower part of the vessel with its base has been preserved. The vessel was made from fine levigated clay, red-yellow in colour (Munsell 7.5 YR

7/3), with visible yet uncommon small orange and white inclusions. Most of its surfaces are covered with black gloss, with the exception of the underside of the base, where five black concentric bands are suggested on the otherwise reserved area. The gloss is dull and smooth, partially flaked off. A thickened and distinct edge divides the central flat depression of the floor from the rest of the vessel wall, which breaks off after the edge, while the ring-shaped base has a concave underside. At some point, but clearly after firing, the inner side of the bottom was adorned with graffiti, in this case a figural mark. It was made with the use of the incision technique, depicting a figural motif, a face that covered the whole depression area. The visible distinct features of the face include eyes, eyebrows, mouth, and hair (curls), while the nose is missing due to the state of preservation. The most elaborate features are the wide, almond shaped eyes, emphasised by eyebrows, and the clearly visible curls fall down the right cheek (Fig. 3).

Notwithstanding the lack of many morphological elements, the preserved traits of the artefact point to its being an open shape. The only known ceramic shapes with a central depression inside the lower part of the vessel are fish plates, a common element of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE ceramic assemblages, that continued to be produced and used in later periods of the last centuries BCE (Rotroff 1997: 15, 146–149). The edge of the central depression on fish plates is typically separated from the rest of the bottom with a groove, a feature that might have existed on the Pharian example, but the breakage of the vessel wall at this particular point prevents us from confirming or rejecting this assumption.

Fish plates appear in two pottery classes: red-figure plates with depiction of fish and other marine life (McPhee, Trendall 1987; 1990), and plain black glazed/gloss (Morel 1981, série 1121), both of which have been found in central Dalmatia. The shape seems to have been invented in Attic workshops, and is therefore considered Greek in origin, though it is known to have been manufactured in different ceramic workshops in the Mediterranean and beyond, including the Adriatic (e.g. Sparkes, Talcott 1970: 147, 148; Morel 1981, série 1121; Rotroff 1997: 15, 146–149; Vreka 1998; Ugarković 2013, and therein cited bibliography). Regionally, one red-figure example of possible local manufacture is known from Issa (Ugarković

2 — The artefact in question is currently misplaced, and could not be at the time of writing of this article analyzed in person by the author.



**Fig. 2** – Ceramic fragment from Pharos, with the graffito depicting the Gorgoneion (drawing and photo: P. Kukoč)

**Fig. 3** – Ceramic fragment from Pharos, with the face (photo: B. Kirigin)



2013; 2019a: 66, 67; 2019b: 41, 66.1), while several black glazed/gloss fish plates (and their fragments) come from different sites, including Pharos (Forenbaher et al. 1994: 25, fig. 7, 2; Jeličić Radonić 1995: 110, br. 4; 111; Ugarković 2013: 87, 88; 2019a: 96), where more examples of this pottery type, currently unpublished, have been discovered during recent excavations.

Even though fish plates were primarily used on an everyday basis for serving food, some of their specimens no doubt played symbolic and other roles in different cultural activities (Ugarković 2013, with bibliography). This is in line with central Dalmatian evidence, where most fish plates have been found in settlements (for Issa: Čargo et al. 2018: 79, nos. 118; Pharos: Forenbaher et al. 1994: 25, fig. 7, 2; Jeličić Radonić 1995: 110, 111; Tragurion: Kovačić 2002: 384, fig. 17; Epetion: Faber 1983: T III, 6, along with many unpublished examples from recent excavations), with some in graves as well (the Martvilo necropolis of Issa: Čargo et al. 2018: 79, nos. 116, 117; Jovanović 2023: 186, 491, 492, no. 9.2; 813, no. 40.9; 851, 852, no. 46.3; for the Vlaška Njiva necropolis of Issa: Ugarković 2013; 2019a: 66, 67, 96; 2019b: 41, 66.1).

Since only part of the vessel has been preserved, it is impossible to attempt to make detailed comparative analogies with regards to specific morphological traits, and their development in different productions, and consequently offer more argued provenance and precise

chronology. However, some observations can be made. When compared to possible Greek models, our shape is rather peculiar, as it has a flat-bottomed depression formed with the addition of a ridge, as opposed to a deeper, rounded shape of the depression, as well as a raised base instead of a ring foot. Some general analogies, with an almost flat bottomed depression, though not exactly of this shape, and with a raised base of a somewhat different morphology, could be found in the example of a 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE fish plate from Apollonia or Budva (only the flat bottomed depression) in the very south of the eastern Adriatic (Vreka 1988: 124, Tab. VI, 54; Ugarković 2013: 88, 89, 7b). For a short time in the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, in Attic production, the underside was reserved and decorated with bands of glaze with a central dot (Sparkes, Talcott 1970: 148, 353, e.g. nos. 1065-1068), similarly to the Pharian example, where the existence of a central dot can only be speculated about since the middle part of the bottom is missing. For the ridge around the depression, it is generally easier to find parallels in Hellenistic fish plates rather than Classical ones, suggesting its date, based on typology, should be rather in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, and not earlier.

When proposing provenance, an additional problem can be recognized in the insufficient knowledge of the local and regional production of this shape, as such studies have not been conducted yet. Moreover, the general study of

local Pharian pottery production is still in its infancy. While preliminary observations should be taken with caution, the existing indirect and direct production evidence (e.g. kiln remains, ceramic discards of overfired and deformed vessel fragments, moulds and small kiln supporters), as well as the preliminary stylistic and morphological characteristics and archaeometric traits, have been used to argue for a plausible Pharian production of fineware during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE, with the hypothesis of a workshop or workshops situated possibly in the south-eastern part of the residential city area (Migotti 1989: 20, T: 7, 1; Katić 2000; Kirigin et al. 2002; Kirigin 2004: 70, 165; Miše 2005; Popović 2010: 139–141, fig. 5; Jeličić Radonić and Katić 2015: 140–145; Popović, Devahović 2018; Kirigin, Barbarić 2019: 227; Miše et al. 2022; Ugarković et al. 2022). It has been further suggested that Pharian fineware included black gloss tableware characterised by yellowish clay and quality gloss (Kirigin 2004: 165, 173; Miše 2005: 31), whose local production in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE is supported by the result of the compositional and microstructural analysis of selected samples (Miše et al. 2020). On the other hand, the Pharian community also imported pottery, especially fineware and amphorae, though a preliminary review by B. Kirigin suggests a small quantity of imports (Kirigin 2004: 137). Among these, the Attic, south Italian, central Mediterranean Agrinion group and the western north/central Adriatic red-figure, south-Italian gnathia, and black gloss pottery imports of different provenances have been recognized (Kirigin 2004: 154–162; Miše et al. 2020; Ugarković 2020; Ugarković et al. 2022). Even though the studies have not advanced so far as to discuss the characteristics and dynamic of imports and local products, it is clear that black gloss pottery is the commonest pottery class of fine tableware in the layers of Pharos from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE (e.g. Ugarković et al. 2022). Aside from fineware, it has been suggested that the presumed local Pharian production included other classes, such as plainware and different types of coarseware, along with coarseware made without the potter's wheel as a continuation of the local Iron Age indigenous tradition that persists in Greek layers as well. Was our plate fragment also a product of a local ceramic workshop? Based on the current state of research, it is not possible to either confirm or reject the Pharian production of the ceramic artefact, at least on the simple basis of a macroscopic inspection. While this fact will remain sealed in many respects by the fragmentary nature of the artefact, it is, however,

tempting and in many ways logical, considering e.g. some of the peculiar morphological traits and the hypothesized Pharian black gloss production, to follow that line of argument. However, an even more interesting question is when the graffito was applied, that is, if the vessel was initially used as common tableware and, after a partial or full de-functionalization of its original purpose at a later stage of this object's biography, repurposed and recontextualised via the application of meaningful "decoration"? While it is difficult to make definite conclusions with regards to the provenance of the vessel, considering at least the manufacture of the graffito, its local Pharian origin is more than likely. Furthermore, the somewhat sketchy drawing, its nature and quality, as well as the nature of the incised line cut through fired clay instead of soft clay, allow us to suggest that the graffito was probably not a part of the original production of the vessel, but a later intervention. Moreover, it looks as if the wall of the plate might have been deliberately removed to leave just the central "emblem", as the edges look chipped. This would imply that the effort put into remaking this object included more than just adding a graffito. Therefore, it seems more than probable that we have to make a sharp distinction between the production of the vessel, associated with a potter and a ceramic workshop, and its later (re)use as the medium for the application of a figural graffito. These should be looked at as separate events in this object's biography, which could but need not be closely connected.

## THE PHAROS GORGONEION AND ITS CULTURAL IMPLICATION IN THE (G)LOCAL COSMOS

Already at the very first glance at the figural graffito, the distinct facial morphology incised on the vessel floor, with its deep gaze and some of the hair falling down the right cheek, reminiscent of snakes, recalls the image of the Gorgon's/Medusa's head. The history and meaning of Medusa, an infamous figure of ancient Greek mythology, and its imagery, which was widespread in the Greek world from the Archaic to the Roman times, is more than clear. As one of the three sisters known as the Gorgons (Γοργόνες), humanoid female monsters (Stheno, the Mighty or Strong, Eurylea, the Far Springer, and Medusa, the Queen), she was born to Ceto and Phorcys, primordial sea gods (Spyropoulos 2018: 34–38). Medusa,

the only mortal among them. Her fateful encounter with the Greek hero Perseus is the most notable of the many stories about the Gorgons and one of the oldest and most detailed myths (e.g. Hes. Theog. 287). Medusa is best known for her snakelike hair and her ability to turn whomever she looked at into stone, while her decapitated head became known as the Gorgon mask (γοργόνειο προσωπίο) or Gorgoneion/Gorgoneio (γοργόνειο) (Lazarou, Liritzis 2022: 47).

Over the ages, the image of Medusa and her symbolism attracted the attention of different kinds of writers, artists, and scholars. Numerous ancient sources present a diverse and comprehensive portrayal of this legendary creature, the Greek poets of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Homer and Hesiod) and the 6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE (Pindar) being among the earliest (for an overview of the work on the use of ancient sources see Lazarou, Liritzis 2022: 48, 49 and cited bibliography). Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, modern scholars have been delving into the origins and symbolic significance of the Gorgon/Medusa, and the Gorgoneion, based on the interpretation of the myth from ancient sources and the known iconography (Lazarou, Liritzis 2022: 50-57 and cited bibliography). The origins of the artistic depictions of Medusa, whose sudden appearance and heyday occurred during the Greek Archaic period, with the earliest fully developed images created around the first quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, can be traced back to earlier legends and myths (Tejero 2021: 29). Moreover, the study of its diachronic presence in the Greek world posits a credible theory suggesting its origin in the prehistory, possibly rooted in the Neolithic and the Bronze Age in specific regions of Greece, encompassing both the mainland and the Aegean islands, with likely alterations typical of mythologies, indicating its endurance over successive generations into recorded history and a continuity into Late Antiquity (Lazarou 2019; Nilsson 2020; Lazarou, Liritzis 2022: 48, 56 58).

Be that as it may, the high popularity of Medusa in the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic Greek cultural sphere as an inspiration for various forms of ancient art is clearly evidenced in the material record (e.g. sculpture, ceramic objects, metal utensils etc.), resulting in the Gorgoneion being considered the commonest representation of any Greek mythological creature (Floren 1977; Krauskopf, Dahlinger 1988; Spyropoulos 2018: 38; Tejero 2021). Moreover, a variety of archaeological evidence supports the presence of the Gorgon/Medusa and the Gorgoneion, with the evident enduring prevalence of the latter, in

different activities of the ancient Greek world, subjected to wide social, cultural and ideological considerations (Baumbach 2011).

In that vein, portrayals of Medusa and the Gorgoneion on pottery are a well-documented practice in the Greek cultural sphere in Athens and beyond (Floren 1977; Lazarou, Liritzis 2022: 58). Even though it is also known in early Corinthian art, its earliest fully developed appearances on pottery are usually connected with the repertoire of Attic workshop(s) of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE (Tejero 2021: 29; Lazarou, Liritzis 2022: 52). There are numerous examples of painted or relief-made Gorgoneia on Greek pottery of different shapes, classes, and chronology, from the Archaic period to the Hellenistic period, with the Archaic examples being the most elaborate and commonest (Krauskopf, Dahlinger 1988; Stone 2015: 263-266; Lazarou, Liritzis 2022: 52). Like some other mythological creatures, the image of the Gorgon/Medusa underwent a dramatic artistic evolution over time, a visual transformation from ugly, grotesque, and scary to feminine and beautiful, which is richly illustrated on pottery (Karoglou 2018; Lazarou, Liritzis 2022: 51). In the Archaic period, Medusa was depicted as having a human female body, with snake hair and protruding tusks, often with wings, claws, and scales. Her scary appearance slowly transformed into that of a beautiful woman, which was not uniformly depicted in full-length representations and Gorgoneia. Medusa starts appearing with a more human physical manifestation – that of a beautiful woman – around the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC (Scheffold 1988: 101, 102), while visually appealing portrayals of her beheading become common only in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Serfontein 1991; Wilk 2000; Lazarou, Liritzis 2022: 85). By the end of that century, full-length depictions of Medusa have largely vanished, yet the Gorgon mask persists as a widely recognized symbol throughout the Hellenistic period (Fürtwangler 1886-1890; Lazarou, Liritzis 2022: 54). The emergence of the "beautiful" type of Medusa in ancient Greece is thought to coincide with the advent of the philosophical notions of aesthetics by the pre-Socratics (Lazarou, Liritzis 2022: 58). During this period, artisans began creating representations characterized by harmonious forms, aspiring to establish an idealized and revered standard.

A more in-depth comparison between the "Pharian" face and the known Greek tradition of depicting different figural and mythological images on pottery indicates that the interpretation of the depiction as a possible portrayal of a



Gorgoneion is the most plausible hypothesis (although other eye amulets could have also provided a model, e.g. from Kerameikos, Knigge, Tancke 2006: no. 546, pl. 110). This comes as no surprise, as the Gorgon and Gorgoneia certainly stand out as one of the commonest and longest-lasting models in both the artistic and symbolic senses in the ancient Greek world. In general, when speaking of Gorgoneia on ancient Greek vessels, they are often depicted on their floors. While the tradition of this general practice can be traced to the Archaic period, as said above, the presence of such a motif in the interior of the bottom of open vessels (e.g. Attic eye-cups etc.), as on the specimen from Pharos, is also rooted in the same period. However, these archaic examples are painted and made in a manner that clearly differs from our example, with regards to both artistic and compositional traits of the whole image. A closer comparative inspection of the details of the preserved facial morphology reveals that the face from Pharos evidently exhibits characteristics closer to the beautiful Gorgoneion. The somewhat naturalistic rather than stylized eyes and the fangless mouth speak clearly in favour of the latter, which fits into the suggested typological chronology of the late 4<sup>th</sup> or the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. However, incised versions of Gorgoneia, to the best of my knowledge, have been undetected, making this one unique in that sense.

This is also the first occurrence of a Gorgoneion at the site of the ancient polis of Pharos, on Hvar Island, a region where imagery in this period can generally be considered rare.<sup>3</sup> That the image of the Gorgoneion and its use in arts and crafts was apparently no enigma to the Pharians is supported by another piece of recently procured evidence, a ceramic mould for the manufacture of relief appliquéés (unpublished).<sup>4</sup> The mould depicts a female head, interpreted as an image presenting a Gorgoneion, also of the so-called beautiful type (for a comparison with the Hellenistic type of "Medusa" on medallion ware: Stone 2015: 264–266). Even though the knowledge of ceramic production in Pharos is still in its infancy, the above-mentioned mould, whether it was used for the production of medallion ware or/and other purposes, is certainly viewed in the light of local ceramic manufacture.

From the corpus of known graffiti on Greek and chronologically related pottery from Dalmatia (Čače et al. 2022; Radić, Borzić 2023: 11), only 16 short inscriptions and symbols, scratched onto ceramic surfaces, have been identified in Pharos, while several others have been found in the latest excavations (unpublished). These markings not only adorn tableware like skyphoi, bowls, and pitchers, but also the surfaces of various items such as amphorae, loom weights, lamps, supports within ceramic kilns, and pithoi (Migotti 1989: 27, br. 27, T. 4: 3; Jeličić Radonić, Rutar Plančić 1995: 7, 20, 63, 103, 111; Kirigin, Hayes, Leach 2002: 57–8, sl. 2, 61–2, br. 12; 245; 247, T. 4, C1, C5, D; T. VI B1; Kirigin 2006: 123, fig. 79; Čače et al. 2022; Korić, Ugarković 2022; Ugarković, Marohnić, in press). Even though regional textual graffiti are documented on fish plates too (from Issa: Jovanović 2023: 851, 852, 46.3), the only graffito from Dalmatia with figural depiction, besides the Pharian example discussed in this paper, is known from the Kopila necropolis of the local settlement on the nearby island of Korčula (Radić, Borzić 2023). It is a hunt scene engraved on a skyphos, of a possible Issean production, also interpreted as a later addition made by a local agent, with conceivable symbolic connotations (Radić, Borzić 2023).

Graffiti as marks share a common ground in the ultimate symbolic nature enforced by them. Furthermore, every graffito has the power of becoming highly personalized, as it is a reflection of a specific individual act, made with a clear intent in mind, for a purpose obvious to the maker. The one who incised this Gorgoneion was clearly following a model which was familiar to him/her and whose meaning was embedded in his/her consciousness. This model belonged to specifically Greek imagery, connected with the Greek mythology, religion, and culture, known to him from other contemporary sources. Still, what this depiction of the Gorgoneion could have meant to a contemporary viewer, and whether he/she was a Greek or an Adriatic native who lived in the Pharian polis, is hard to say with certainty. However, it is clear that the image must have been inscribed here because of the perceived properties of the Gorgoneion. It has been argued that the Gorgon

<sup>3</sup> — Figural images documented on ceramic objects from Pharos, discovered in the 5 year excavations of the Museum of Stari Grad, were presented during the exhibition *Faces of Pharos* (Popović 2016).

<sup>4</sup> — The mould was found in the 2023 rescue excavation conducted by the Institute of Archaeology and the Museum of Stari Grad in Vagonj Street.

mask had mostly a ritual use, and was used as an abominable object that exorcises evil (Lazarou, Liritzis 2022: 48, 54). Notwithstanding its destructive nature, the blood of Medusa was considered to be both harmful and healing (Dexter 2010: 29; Spyropoulos 2018: 36). Along with its decorative nature, the Gorgoneion as a symbol appears to possess apotropaic qualities, warding off evil influences, and while its form evolved over time, its fundamental essence, at least within the known cultural context, seems to have remained the same (Baumbach 2011). While the local production of the studied plate with graffito is plausible but not confirmable, except for the hypothesis that the application of the graffito was made and consumed locally, which seems more than logical, this speaks even more of the aspects of local cultural identity. The maker of the graffito and 'user' of the 'new' artefact is conceivably the same individual, from Pharos, who was familiar with the symbolism of the Gorgoneia and made his own adaptation of the image, possibly with apotropaic properties and perhaps of a votive or dedicative nature. The uniqueness of the graffito is a clear reflection of an individual act through which another demonstration of the Gorgoneion was given, reflecting a specific iconographic choice and artisan's characteristics in the way this image was presented, and thereby perhaps becoming a fragment of a Pharian and central Adriatic glocality manifested through different facets of cultural expression and embedded into aspects of the religious/spiritual sphere. Another piece of evidence, at least in the context of the Gorgon, could be used to support this argument. Among the seven personal names that are inscribed in stone monuments in Pharos, a female version of the common male name Γοργίλος, Γοργιλώ, stands out (Bechtel 1902:10; 1917: 111; Marohnić 2012: 152, 153; Marohnić in press). This could be connected to the name Gorgon (Γοργώ and Γοργών). While female name Γοργώ has been recorded in both Doric and Ionian Greek cities, the name Γοργιλώ is unique to Pharos and could be considered as one of the glocal traits of the Pharian community (Marohnić 2010: 152, 153; Marohnić in press). The context of our find does not unfortunately reveal more information on this culturally embedded practice, but it can be used, together with other mentioned evidence, as a tentative argument for the spreading and reinterpretation of the idea of the Gorgon in the central Adriatic

in the advanced 4<sup>th</sup> and the early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE. While its manifestations changed stylistically through centuries and regions, the general core idea behind it seems not to have been lost for good through time and space.

## CONCLUSIONS

The presented fragment of a ceramic artefact with a figural graffito is classified as black gloss fineware, of uncertain shape but possibly from a fish plate, whose stylistic and contextual analysis suggests a date of the advanced/late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE. The graffito, whose motif and method of application do not fit with fish plate decoration or any other standard decorated pottery classes, was incised on the inner bottom of the vessel, while the presented image is interpreted as a Gorgoneion, a depiction of the Gorgon's head. The localized and personalized depiction of this feminine beast/figure is the first occurrence of the Gorgoneion in the polis of Pharos, where imagery is otherwise rare, but also the earliest material evidence connected to the Gorgon in Dalmatia. As such, it stands as a unique find among numerous pottery sherds associated with ancient Pharos, but also beyond, as it represents, to the best of my knowledge, the only known incised Gorgoneion. The distinctiveness of this mythical creature has been presented through many varied mythological accounts and representations within the ancient Greek world of the southeastern Mediterranean and the neighbouring regions, to which we can now, for the first time, add the central eastern Adriatic of the late 4<sup>th</sup> c. and the early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE. While the local manufacture of the vessel is possible but not confirmable, it is more than likely that the application of the graffito, clearly an additional repurposing with symbolic connotations, perhaps connected with apotropaic properties and of a votive/dedicative nature, is connected with Pharian agency. Even though we cannot be certain whether the graffito was made by a Greek or a local, it offers a new, insular manifestation of the Gorgoneion in the artistic sense, with a symbolism hidden behind the visual medium, and forming, with other elements, a fragment of a Pharian and central Adriatic glocality in the regional arena of multifaceted cultural expressions and, in this case, aspects of religious/spiritual beliefs.

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