Report on the outcomes of a Short-Term Scientific Mission[1]

Action number: **CA22145**

Grantee name: **Francesca Berti**

Details of the STSM

Title: **Games as Living Heritage: Inside Stewart Culin's Collections**

Description of the work carried out during the STSM

Description of the activities carried out during the STSM. Any deviations from the initial working plan shall also be described in this section.

The STSM *Games as Living Heritage: Inside Stewart Culin's Collections* aimed to analyse Stewart Culin's archival collection. Culin was the founder and first curator of the Department of Ethnology at the Brooklyn Museum (1903–1929). The research adopted an approach grounded in Play Studies, through which these materials were explored, probably for the first time, in relation to contemporary studies of play. Stewart Culin (1858–1929) was a pioneering figure in the comparative study of games as cultural expressions. His major publications, including *Korean Games, with Notes on the Corresponding Games of China and Japan* (1895), *Chess and Playing-Cards* (1898), and *Games of the North American Indians* (1907), demonstrate his interest in the diversity of play practices and in the connections between play, culture, and society.

The research was carried out over four days, devoted to exploring the collections displayed in permanent and temporary exhibitions and consulting archival materials.

The consultation of the *Stewart Culin Archival Collection* constituted the core of the STSM and yielded findings of particular interest in relation to the research objectives. Four archival boxes, comprising approximately 60 folders, and five scrapbooks containing newspaper articles written by Culin or cut out and collected by him were examined. Particular attention was paid to the following subseries:

Subseries 7.1 – North American Indian (1895–1914): This subseries mainly comprises correspondence relating to the research and publication of *Games of the North American Indians*. It includes correspondence with other ethnologists and museum institutions, index cards, manuscripts, typescripts, lists of games and play equipment, drawings, and reviews of the publication. These documents make it possible to reconstruct the scholarly networks through which Culin collected and verified information about the games of specific populations and regions.

[1] This report is submitted by the grantee to the Action MC for approval and for claiming payment of the awarded grant. The Grant Awarding Coordinator coordinates the evaluation of this report on behalf of the Action MC and instructs the Grant Holder Manager to verify the grant documents compliance and proceed with the payment.

Subseries 7.2 – Categories (1871–1927): Organised according to types of games and toys, this subseries includes correspondence, manuscripts, typescripts, articles, pamphlets, newspaper clippings, and illustrations. Particularly noteworthy are drawings of playing cards, dice, dolls, and game boards from different parts of the world, as well as a notebook containing notes on Chinese games, dominoes, and other forms of play. The documentation also includes information on marbles, street games played by children in Philadelphia and Brooklyn, and the rhymes associated with these games.

Subseries 7.3 – International (1889–1923): This subseries documents Culin's studies of African and Asian games through correspondence, notes, manuscripts, and typescripts. The materials include documents on mancala, Egyptian games, mahjong, and Japanese toys, as well as correspondence with Franz Boas and Frank Hamilton Cushing relating to the article *Mancala: The National Game of Africa* (1894).

In addition to documentation relating to his publications, the collection contains several unpublished typescripts, including contributions intended for local newspapers and texts of lectures. These materials are a particularly promising source for further exploring Culin's approach to play beyond his published works. While the latter are predominantly cataloguing and taxonomic in nature, the articles and lectures are more descriptive and allow the author's sensibility and the passion that animated his research to emerge more directly.

Description of the STSM main achievements and planned follow-up activities

Description and assessment of whether the STSM achieved its planned goals and expected outcomes, including specific contribution to Action objective and deliverables, or publications resulting from the STSM. Agreed plans for future follow-up collaborations shall also be described in this section.

The STSM made it possible to begin analysing Stewart Culin's archival legacy from an original perspective focused on Play Studies. The research led to the identification of unpublished materials relating to games and toys from different geographical areas, including correspondence with scholars and institutions, notes, drawings, and documentation on specific play practices, such as mancala, children's street games, and Asian toys.

In particular, the *lectures* and newspaper articles appear to offer further opportunities to explore his approach to interpreting play. On an initial reading, these texts adopt a more discursive register than the predominantly compilatory style of his monographs, which are characterised by a systematic description of objects and play practices. A more in-depth examination of these materials could contribute to a better understanding of Culin's contribution to the origins and development of Play Studies, as well as on his conception of play both as a universal dimension of human experience and as an expression of cultural diversity, in line with the comparative approach he explicitly stated in the introduction to *Korean Games, with Notes on the Corresponding Games of China and Japan* (1895): "This work is intended not only as a survey of the games of Korea, but as a practical introduction to the study of the games of the world."

Unfortunately, the survey of the museum's exhibition collections did not make it possible to observe the play materials held at the Brooklyn Museum, with the exception of an exhibition dedicated to Hopi kachina dolls, which includes approximately 40 examples acquired during Culin's tenure as curator (https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/it-IT/exhibitions/hopi-kachina-dolls). The section dedicated to Native North American cultures is currently undergoing renovation. This has limited the possibility of directly examining materials relevant to Culin's monograph *Games of the North American Indians*, published in 1907 and still considered a fundamental reference for the study of games played by Indigenous North American peoples. However, it was possible to view some photographs of objects featured in the exhibition catalogue *Objects of Myth and Memory: American Indian Art at the Brooklyn Museum* (1991), curated by Diana Fane. The Asian section currently has no games on display. The need therefore emerged to investigate further the location and accessibility of these materials. To this end, contact was initiated with the museum's management to explore the presence of play materials relating to these regions; however, a response is still awaited.

The planned follow-up activities include:

1. The preparation of three scientific publications, beginning with an in-depth examination of the unpublished *lectures* identified during the research.
2. The continuation of collaboration with the Brooklyn Museum archivists to explore the possibility of consulting additional materials held in other sections of the collection in digital format.

3. Renewed contact with the museum's management and the curators of the different sections to assess the feasibility of an exhibition proposal dedicated to play, spanning the different geographical and cultural areas currently represented in the museum.

The publications aim to bring together Cultural Heritage Studies and Intercultural Education, bringing Culin's legacy and his contribution to Play Studies to light. They also seek to explore how his work and collections can contribute to contemporary understandings of play as living cultural heritage and as a means of investigating cultural similarities and differences.

Overall, the STSM constituted an initial exploratory phase that made it possible to identify unpublished materials and outline possible avenues for further research into Culin, a pioneering figure in the emergence of modern Play Studies and therefore a valuable primary source for the GameTable COST Action. His work can be situated within the historical context of the great explorations and the emergence of anthropology as a scientific discipline.