

Report on the outcomes of a Short-Term Scientific Mission¹

Action number: CA22145

Grantee name: Oksana Ruchynska

Details of the STSM

Title: Board Games in Chersonesos Taurica from the Roman to the Late Antique Periods

Start and end date: 20/4/2026-11/5/2026

Description of the work carried out during the STSM

(max. 500 words)

The STSM, conducted by Dr Oksana Ruchynska at the University of Reading, involved a research visit during which the applicant met with Dr Tim Penn to discuss tall bone gaming pieces from Chersonesos Taurica. During the STSM, the applicant carried out a series of knowledge-exchange activities, largely in accordance with the original work plan.

The applicant delivered a presentation entitled “Tall Gaming Counters from Late Antique Chersonesos Taurica” at the seminar “Ludic evidence hour” for the Ancient Games Study Group at the University of Reading. The Reading team showed particular interest in this material, as it is both comparable to and significantly different from Western datasets.

Significant progress was made in compiling a catalogue of “tall gaming pieces.” These have not previously been gathered together, let alone analysed in detail. A new typology of these objects was developed based on both published and unpublished data. This represents the first substantial scholarly study of these artefacts, which are widely distributed across the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea regions but have so far only been mentioned in reports and never systematically analysed.

The catalogue and typology will form the foundation for future research on these objects. Their association with other gaming materials in the Northern Black Sea / Ukrainian context suggests that they did indeed serve a gaming function, although no complete “set” has yet been identified. These objects are primarily found in elite contexts of the 4th–7th centuries CE, although some examples date to later periods. It is important to distinguish them from later chess pieces. They can likely be linked to elite gaming practices within contexts of social interaction and hospitality. Written sources from the 5th and 6th centuries indicate that games increasingly became a shared activity among members of Late Antique

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.

elite society, particularly in the context of hosting guests. This work will be submitted to the Oxford Journal of Archaeology and represents an important milestone in the study of these artefacts.

Research was also carried out on collections of gaming artefacts and relevant publications on Roman and Late Antique board games at the Bodleian Art, Archaeology and Ancient World Library (Oxford), the National Library of Wales (Aberystwyth), and the major private collection of Pontic region publications assembled by Prof. Gocha Tsetskhladze in Llandrindod Wells. This enabled the collection of a substantial dataset on Roman and Late Antique board games, as well as significant progress on the completion of a book chapter on board games in Chersonesos Taurica for the applicant's monograph *Play and Games in the Northern Black Sea Poleis: Public and Private Aspects*. It also unexpectedly allowed progress on the applicant's chapter for W. Crist and A. de Voogt (eds.), *Moving Along: Game Pieces in Material Culture*.

During the STSM at the University of Reading, the applicant established academic contacts with Prof. Emma Aston, Prof. Amy Smith, Dr. Andreas Gavrielatos, Dr. Edward Ross, Dr. Thomas Daniaux, as well as with the Secretary of the International Congress on Black Sea Antiquities, Dr. James Hargrave.

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

(max. 500 words)

The STSM successfully achieved its primary objectives. The main achievements of this STSM were:

1. The creation of a catalogue of "tall gaming pieces," accompanied by a detailed analysis of the chronology and terminology of these bone gaming artefacts used both in the Northern Black Sea region / Ukraine and across the wider Mediterranean. This represents a cutting-edge scholarly study that will form the basis for further research in this field. The material analysed will initially be submitted as a co-authored article with Dr Tim Penn to the Oxford Journal of Archaeology. A draft of this article has already been initiated and is expected to be submitted by the end of September. This study, published in English, is crucial for reassessing the role of the gaming heritage of the Greek poleis of the Northern Black Sea region (southern Ukraine), which has previously received insufficient scholarly attention and integrating this material into a wider framework across the ancient world.
2. Completion of the chapter on board games in Chersonesos Taurica for the applicant's forthcoming monograph *Play and Games in the Northern Black Sea Poleis: Public and Private Aspects* – an innovative study of games in the Northern Black Sea region across the Classical, Roman, Late Antique, and Medieval periods. The discussion of the materials presented in this chapter at the research seminar of the Ancient Games Study Group at the University of Reading was recognised as a fundamental study that will constitute a landmark contribution both to the study of board games in the Greek cities of the Northern Black Sea region and to the broader field of research on gaming culture in the ancient and post-antique world.
3. This academic exchange strengthened the applicant's ongoing research on game pieces from Chersonesos Taurica and contributed significantly to progress on the applicant's chapter for W. Crist and A. de Voogt (eds.), *Moving Along: Game Pieces in Material Culture*.
4. Additional collaborative work with colleagues at the University of Reading included the analysis and discussion of collections of counters with graffiti, stick dice, and flattened rectangular dice, as well as the planning of future articles and publications.

5. The applicant will present “Game Boards and the Cultural Context of Play in Chersonesos Taurica” at the 8th International Congress on Black Sea Antiquities, which will take place on 14–18 September in Warsaw.
6. A finalised dataset of gaming artefacts from Chersonesos Taurica is planned to be uploaded to the Ludii database, making it accessible to European researchers and contributing to the wider dissemination of these materials to a broader audience.