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

Action number: CA22145

Grantee name: Tim Penn

Details of the STSM

Title: **"Gameboards from the Roman Period in the Carnuntum - ludic finds in context"**

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.

(max. 500 words)

I travelled to Austria and collaborated with Katarína Tökölyová (Römerstadt Carnuntum) to identify and examine gameboards from the UNESCO World Heritage of Carnuntum, a Roman town on the edges of the empire.

During this time, I successfully delivered against the following objectives as proposed in the original working plan:

1. ***Cataloguing and documenting the relevant gaming material, including descriptions of form, manufacture, materials, and measurements:*** *I now have a complete catalogue of a minimum of eight and a maximum of ten Roman gameboards from Carnuntum (there is some uncertainty because of the poor preservation of two examples). Arriving at this point required the elimination of several spurious examples (see below). All the gameboards are grid designs which may have been used for the well-known game Ludus Latrunculorum, though other possibilities must be considered (Crist et al. 2024). Most of them are cut post-firing which suggests pragmatic reuse, rather than specialised manufacturing of gaming materials. I also learned that Carnuntum has excellent collections of dice, counters and production waste relating to gaming materials. It was not possible to examine these during this trip, but I hope to pursue publication of these in future.*
2. ***Obtaining contextual information for spatial and chronological analysis:*** *I have good contextual information for all these objects and am well placed to undertake further research into the spatial and chronological implications. Around half can be given a firm findspot at present,*

[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.

including:the South Street in the ancient urban quarter, a grave (probably reused), and two bathhouses. These appear to suggest a range of different public gaming venues in the city.

3. ***Setting the assemblage in the broader context of gaming material from the region:*** *I can now say that the assemblage is representative of broader trends in the Roman frontier regions (Limes). In particular, the popularity of grid-type boards on bricks and tile is an emerging facet of gaming at the edge of the empire—quickly-made boards on reused ceramics, which thus suggest a casual, pragmatic gaming culture.*

As a fourth subsidiary objective, I also reviewed a series of 'suspicious bricks' bearing pre-firing impressions of Roman coins. Colleagues in the museum initially thought these were a possible type of gameboard, but I was able to establish that this is unlikely. They are, however, important and interesting objects and so may be subject to a separate publication (not least because demonstrating these are probably not gameboards is an important negative result). This work is likely to involve other members of GameTable with appropriate expertise in Roman coins and games studies.

I also delivered a well-attended session on the Archaeology of Roman boardgames to 17 students in the Institute of Archaeology, University of Vienna. This helped to embed boardgames into the curriculum here.

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.

(max. 500 words)

The STSM to Austria has met the goals and expected outcomes, as originally suggested in my proposal and as outlined above. The main result will now be a joint-authored article which will submitted to Carnuntum Jahrbook (target submission date in the first half of 2027). This article will present the material for the first time, and underline that Carnuntum belongs firmly to a broader tradition of gaming along the Limes (Roman frontier). Moreover, I have identified that there is significantly more gaming material still to be studied at Carnuntum and will plan to examine this in future, if at all possible. The proposed second article on the 'suspicious bricks' is also an important step forward because it will help scholars to avoid erroneous identification of similar items as gaming objects (and is thus an important negative result). More broadly, our results will contribute to a synthesis article currently under preparation with other GameTable members about games and gaming in the Roman province of Pannonia. This research visit has therefore allowed me to materially advance our knowledge of Roman-period ludic culture in Central Europe and in doing so contribute to GameTable's central aims to advance the study of games in the past.

Following the success of my session at the Institute of Classical Archaeology, I will now explore an ERASMUS+ bid to teach an intensive (e.g. 2 week) course on Roman boardgames there in 2027. This will expand capacity and raise the profile of boardgames as a serious subfield within archaeology.