

Report on the outcomes of a Short-Term Scientific Mission¹

Action number: CA22145

Grantee name: Tim Penn

Details of the STSM

Title: Boardgames at Aphrodisias from the Roman to Ottoman periods: documentation to establish standardised recording protocols

Start and end date: 2/8/2025-23/8/2025

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)

During the STSM at Aphrodisias, the applicant undertook a series of on-site recording and knowledge-exchange activities, largely in line with the original working plan. The applicant recorded 155 graffiti gameboards in the Stadium and approximately 20 in a secondary street in the House of Kybele neighbourhood. Additional survey work included checking draft documentation of other areas of the site, such as the Theatre (final total 93 gameboards). Most of these can be dated to the Roman period. This survey led to the identification of important gameboards, including a purpose-made game table—equipped with a drain for cleaning—possibly associated with an elite house, which requires further archival study. These data will underpin the applicant's forthcoming monograph on gameboards through space and time at Aphrodisias, a chapter on the Stadium for a monograph on the structure, and a contribution to an edited volume on graffiti at the site (the latter two products of on-site discussions with Aphrodisias team members and remote discussions with other GameTable members, primarily Summer Courts and Walter Crist, while still on site).

Collaboratively, the applicant and Dr Fatih Parlak examined gameboards in multiple areas including the Ottoman Hammam, Tetrastoon, Theatre Baths, Theatre, Place of Palms, and the Stadium. Discussions focused on structured recording techniques, challenges in documenting scratched versus carved boards, lighting considerations, and the identification of later-period (Turkish/Ottoman) boards, mostly for mancala or nine men's morris, through typological or contextual considerations (see further below). A key activity was the trial of a digital recording system via AppSheet on Dr Parlak's phone, designed by

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 GH for payment of the Grant.

Summer Courts as part of ongoing collaborations within the GameTable COST action, to geolocate and document boards efficiently. Feedback from this trial will inform further refinements in the autumn and enable the system to be used in other projects, including Dr Parlak's survey of Ottoman-period games in mosques and a proposed project in Jerash by Courts and Penn (2026). We may then be able to make this open access in future.

Additional collaborative work included reviewing Fatih's collection of gameboards from Bursa, Iznik, Istanbul, and Konya, discussing Early Modern Ottoman gaming terms, and exploring future article and publication outputs. Field observations identified possible Ottoman-era mancala boards in the Stadium and House of Kybele neighbourhood, contributing to new methods for distinguishing later-period games in earlier contexts, based on typology, location, and evidence of reuse. Overall, we were able to combine rigorous field recording, methodological testing, and knowledge exchange, with minor deviations from the original plan including the greater-than-expected focus on Ottoman-period boards, which emerged organically through discussions with Dr Parlak. This was particularly valuable as games of this period are poorly understood in comparison with ancient games.

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 successfully achieved its primary objectives, advancing both research coordination and capacity-building goals. Key achievements include:

Comprehensive gameboard dataset: Approximately 268 boards were recorded in detail, including graffiti in the Stadium and House of Kybele, theatre boards, and a purpose-built game table; these can be combined with c. 700 from other parts of the site. These data will support a monograph on Aphrodisias' games, a chapter on the Stadium, and contributions to volumes on graffiti, while providing the foundation for eventual upload to the Ludii database and integration with computational visualisation projects.

Knowledge exchange: Discussions with Dr Parlak generated new insights on Ottoman-period games, Early Modern gaming terminology, and identification of later-period boards in earlier contexts (e.g. possible Seljuk or Ottoman boards carved into Roman floor surfaces). This exchange has strengthened Dr Parlak's important ongoing research on games in pre-Republic mosques.

Trial of digital recording system: The AppSheet-based system was successfully tested, allowing geolocated photographs, structured notes, and typological data to be captured efficiently. This system provides a template for standardised, shareable documentation across multiple sites and is a transferable output for future projects. It became apparent that further testing with larger sets and multiple concurrent recordings is necessary before this will

Identification of later-period boards: The STSM produced preliminary criteria for identifying Turkish/Ottoman boards, considering typology, location, and evidence of modification or reuse. Case studies include probable mancala boards in the Stadium and House of Kybele (as well as examples in other parts of the Mediterranean)

Planned follow-up activities include:

1. refining the AppSheet recording system based on Dr Parlak's feedback,
2. completing the Aphrodisias gameboards monograph and associated chapters,
3. co-authoring an article on identifying later-period games in earlier contexts for the *Journal of Boardgames Studies*, and exploring collaborative surveys of games in other Anatolian cities (e.g., Iznik).

The STSM has demonstrably advanced the Action's objectives by expanding datasets, developing transferable methodologies, and building international collaborative capacity for the study of material evidence for historical games.