VIDEOGAMES AND THE MIDDLE AGES

JUAN FRANCISCO JIMÉNEZ ALCÁZAR
UNIVERSIDAD DE MURCIA
SPAIN

For Juanfri, who at the age of 10
enjoys these games as much as I do at 42

ABSTRACT

The advances in technology and its application to the world of leisure have generated a new model of cultural expression: the videogame. Among the scripts chosen for these, there are those of a historical nature, or simulation of this past, but with special emphasis on the medieval period. This article presents the reality of this phenomenon applied to the knowledge and divulgation that these games offer about the Middle Ages.

KEY WORDS

Videogame, Middle Ages, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Cultural leisure, European Union.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Iudus per uisum, Medium Aevum, Artes ad disquisitionem et communicationem, Otium doctrinae deditum, Europea communitas.

1. Start: Programmes

This expressive way is the start for what I intend to be a first approach to the complex and complete world of videogames by professionals and aficionados in medieval history. In many cases the contents will be known to some (I suppose the younger among the readers) but others (certainly many) will encounter for the first time a series of names and denominations that belong to the specific semantic field of videogames, constituting almost a slang. If you understand nothing in the following sentence, you belong to this second group: MTW II, from the TW saga, is a *TBS* videogame, although the combats are RTS, that requires a minimum of a 1,800 MHz chipset, 512 Mb RAM, a graphic card with 128 Mb, DirectX 9 and Windows 2000/XP OS (although the truth is that you need a more powerful unit). This sentence includes the abbreviated name of a very well-known game of management, strategy and tactics set in the high and late Middle Ages (Medieval Total War II, that is, the second version), the abbreviations of *Turn Based Strategy*, developed by the player, where you also manage material resources that allow your faction to advance and thus generate sufficient military machinery to enable you to win the game (where previously you win purely tactical medieval battles). The acronym of *Real Time Strategy*, and the rest of the contents expressed are linked to the hardware the game requires. This work is aimed fundamentally at those who have had no close contact with this world, or those who see it through eyes prejudiced by mere disdain for the unknown, as a result of one's own insecurity. But it is also destined for those who have certain notions, so that my reflections can offer another point of view or generate new ways for application and reflection.

I am not trying to offer an encyclopaedic presentation of the vast world of the videogame, nor the importance that it has for leisure in our civilisation (although I mention it in passing). Nor do I even present a list of all the videogames linked to, or inspired by, the medieval period or the Middle Ages, in its widest sense. Accordingly, someone may feel some titles are missing. My aim is to present a specific reality, that is the presence and roots of the *videogame* phenomenon in modern society (and specifically among adolescents and post-adolescents, extending to individuals between thirty and forty, approximately[1] (but does not extend to the portable videogame consoles for the adult public and third age),[2] and its impact

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1. The report on "Habits and initiation to videogames in the over 35s", carried out in December 2008 by a team from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid under Antonio García Martínez is very expressive. Universidad Complutense de Madrid. "Hábitos e iniciación a los videojuegos en mayores de 35 años". *Asociación Española de distribuidores y editores de Software de entretenimiento*. December 2008. 3rd May 2009 <http://www.adese.es/pdf/vjadultosestudio.pdf>.

2. The commission that approved the inclusion of the videogame industry as a cultural industry, stated the following "In its extraordinary diversity, the videogame is used by both children and young people as well as adults, so it also represents a good opportunity to experiment with new pedagogic formulas in educational development and the formation of civic values (File number 161/000774/0000)". "Proposición no de ley presentada por el Grupo Parlamentario Socialista, relativa a la promoción y el respaldo a la industria cultural del videojuego". *Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales. Congreso de los Diputados*, D/ 148, 17 February 2009: 40.

on the divulgation of the concept of *medieval*. This is from the point of view of the perception we receive through this informative channel (which is really leisure) and specifically in the field of the professionals in medieval history, both at the level of secondary education and the university.

This is precisely one of the first steps that need establishing to begin our route. Why do we play at *Medievo*? What is it that attracts us to that epoch that induces us to play as if we were living in the past? My final conclusion will be that, in the end, it is a question of just that, of playing, with all the advantages that leisure infers for learning and the educational act in itself, always from the viewpoint of a medievalist and medieval history. I am not a pedagogue, so nobody should expect a treatise about the educational value of videogames, which, it must be mentioned, has appeared in other forums, with varied results. I do not, however, rule out an incursion into this terrain from the perspective of university teaching.

All these precautions that I present are related to the heterodox fact that an article about videogames and the Middle Ages can appear *a priori*, as with one on cinema and the medieval period, as would have been, in its time, one about medieval literature and history, and the wide field that supposes the application of multiple disciplines[3] to a specific subject of study. For some people, the world of the videogame is as distant as it is close and day-to-day for others. Thus, the idea is to present the neophytes with a precise and specific reality that represents a fundamental part of leisure. We know that in 2005, the videogames business in Spain overtook the cinema (both at the box office and in video) and music industries.[4] In fact, the 2008 figure for Spain was a turnover of 1,432[5] million euros, the fourth European country and the sixth in the world in consumption of interactive entertainment software. In this sense, something that the creators themselves assume consciously must be clear, which is that it is not only a question of leisure. The developer M. Frasca expressly mentioned in an interview that "*los juegos pueden ir mucho más allá que el simple entretenimiento. Lo mismo sucede con el cine, la televisión, la música. Los videojuegos no tienen por qué ser una excepción*".[6] However, referring to what "explaining something"

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3. The reflections about the by no means new concept of interdisciplinarity are very interesting in this respect, in Castillo, Juan José. "La paradigma perdido de la interdisciplinariedad: volver a los clásicos". *Política y Sociedad*, 26 (1997): 143-155.

4. Benito García, José María. "El mercado del videojuego: unas cifras". *Icono 14. Revista científica semestral de comunicación audiovisual y nuevas tecnologías*. June 2006. Asociación científica de las NNTT de la Educación. 3rd May 2009 <http://www.icono14.net/revista/num7/articulos/Jose%20Maria%20Benito.pdf>.

5. Figure offered by *Hobby Consolas*, 212 (2009): 28. The document that contains the above-mentioned initiative in the Congreso de the Diputados specified a turnover of 700 million, but these are changing figures and permanently growing and that at this moment is already obsolete given its ongoing development. However, this figure corresponds to the data in the ISFE report for 2007, where it must be taken into account that the data refers to sales of software, not to the sum total of the videogame business, such as the sales of consoles. "Key Facts. The profile of the European Videogamer". *Interactive Software Federation of Europe*. 2007. Interactive Software Federation of Europe. 3rd May 2009. <http://www.isfe.eu/index.php?PHPSESSID=JF4PQ8432EH6RK3F8BJ92VVQD6&oidit=T001:662b1653638 8a7260921599321365911>.

6. "The games can go far beyond simple entertainment. The same happens with the cinema, television or music. There is no reason why videogames should be an exception". Esnaola Horacek, Graciela

to distract or entertain means, the videogame goes way beyond the cinema, for example. The cinematographic medium is finite, limited and specific: the script and definition of the product with a time limit show this. The videogame is not like that. The new non-lineal forms of script mean that they diverge considerably from the traditional development of a film. Peter Molyneux (developer of the game *Fable* and known as the "King of *Hype*") mentioned the separation between videogame and cinema based on this concept.[7] The Spanish parliament approved an initiative so that, given that the "*industria del videogameo constituye uno de los sectores más dinámicos y pujantes de nuestra cultura*", it should be recognised as an "*industria cultural de primer orden*". The same document considered the authors as "*creativos culturales*" and their staff made up of "*guionistas, dibujantes, modeladores and directors de artes, a la que se unen profesionales de las nuevas tecnologías*", as integral parts of this authorship, in a potential "*internacionalización de su actividad, en los mismos términos que el cine, la música, el libro o las artes plásticas*".[8] It is thus a tangible reality. So let us see what the approach to the Middle Ages from the perspective of the virtual game means for the quality and quantity of this information. The different views that arise will simply be the product of the multiple possibilities that the human being can see (and give) to these technologies.

One final premise: the literature on this subject is as scarce as it is recent (for obvious reasons).[9] The great majority of contributions are limited to the field of the network, with electronic publications where immediacy supplants obsolescence into which these themes usually fall from the moment they are written. These studies are mainly carried out by psychologists or pedagogues, although some will be useful for setting and placing games that belong to different typologies, all being on medieval subjects. There are abundant references to these studies on the Internet, so it should not surprise if in many cases the date of the last visit coincides, as this was to check that they are still at the same URL.

Alicia; Levis Czernik, Diego Levis. "La narrativa en los videojuegos: un espacio cultural de aprendizaje socioemocional". Teoría de la Educación, 9/3 (2008): 53; Sánchez Peris, Francesc J, coord. "Videojuegos: una herramienta educativa del 'homo digitalis'". *Revista Electrónica Teoría de la Educación: Educación y Cultura en la Sociedad de la Información*, 9/3. November 2008. Universidad de Salamanca. 21ª April 2009. <http://www.usal.es/teoriaeducacion/rev_numero_09_03/n9_03_esnaola_levis.pdf.

7. Interview with Peter Molyneux. *Marcaplayer*, 8 (2009): 69.

8. "the videogame industry constitutes one of the most dynamic and fast-growing sectors of our culture" (...) "first order cultural industry" (...) "cultural creators" (...) "scriptwriters, draughtsmen, modellers and art directors, who are joined by professionals in the new technologies" (...) "internationalisation of their activity, in the same terms as the cinema, music, books or plastic arts". See note 3.

9. In the Spanish case, just a few references have been griten by: Rodríguez, José María. "¿Historia o ficción: la visión de la Edad Media en los juegos de ordenador". *Clío: revista de Historia*, 37 (2004): 52-27; "El uso de Internet y los videojuegos en la didáctica de la Historia medieval", *La historia medieval en la Enseñanza Secundaria Obligatoria: un balance*, Ana Echevarría, coord. Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 2008: 177-216.

2. Tutorial. What is a videogame?

According to the definition in the RAE, a videogame is an *"electronic device that allows one, by means of the appropriate controls, to simulate games on the screen of a television or computer"*. Apart from the fact that this definition is already obsolete, basically due to the appearance of new platforms that have nothing to do with a computer or a television (or what we understand as either of these devices), a videogame is somewhat more complex. This is not a "device" as such, the question of controls is vague (a gamepad, a keyboard, a mouse, a joystick; there are also touch screens, like with the new multi-touch technology, applied to Apple's iPhone for example, where the games are handled from the machine's own screen, here a device), and where in reality they do not "simulate games", but rather verify games. In a word, one plays, one does not simulate playing: one simulates being a knight, a general, a trader, a strategist, a super-soldier, etc. Without it becoming a precedent, I find the definition in the oh so dangerous Wikipedia closer to the mark, *"A videogame is a computational programme, created for entertainment, based on the interaction between one or more people and an electronic device (either a computer, an arcade system, a video console, a handheld device or nowadays a cellular phone), which executes said videogame. In many cases, these recreate virtual worlds in which the players can control one or more characters (or any other element in that environment), to reach one or more objectives through a set of rules"*.[10]

It is clear that this is a virtual element that uses a cybernetic device to generate leisure activity. At the same time a physical platform appears, and it is worth very briefly running through the history of the videogame to help us to understand the reality and deep roots in our society, the same that untiringly demands contents inspired in the medieval period, under any excuse and in any format (that of the videogames included). The reason is that the videogame can only be played through a machine (described simply and almost simplistically), so that we can only access the game if we have the possibility at a specific moment to acquire, or use, one device or another. This fact is also important, as technological progress has allowed the virtual *re-creations* of the Middle Ages to become progressively more spectacular, thus adding to the intrinsic attraction of the game.

For some sociologists[11] the videogame is the gateway for children and young people to approach the information and communication technologies (the famous TICs). The most normal is that for us to find students in university classrooms whose deepest approach to History, not only Spanish but also European, has been through one (or various) videogames. That is why we should not consider the question inane, given the enormous impact it is having on our society, and despite this only being an impression among those of us who have approached the subject.[12]

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10. "Videojuego". *Wikipedia*. 21st April 2009 < http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/videojuego>.

11. Belli, Simone; López Raventós, Cristian. "Breve historia de los videojuegos". *Athenea Digital*, 14 (2008): 160.

12. These same authors mention this fact in the above article, showing that it "is a phenomenon that has still not been studied in depth by social researchers". Belli, Simone; López Raventós, Cristian. "Breve

The first videogames were the direct result of technological advances. The application of the new media to board games (including *wargames*) was *a posteriori*. Now is the moment to present where the game is played, and we will see that the platform is fundamental. On a board, there sufficed a flat surface, the physical game and two or more players (except if one "engineers" it as solitaire). A videogame is, however, much more complex given the simple fact that the platform chosen is the determining factor.

2.1. *The machine that serves for playing*

Nowadays, and for certain titles, the system we have chosen or opted to play on is determinate. The game is not a free element, so the media is often an end in itself. The marketing of the machine we play on appears as a handicap, a decisive factor, which allows us to execute the chosen game. A computer (PC or Mac, Windows environment in its various versions, Linux...), an Xbox 360 console, a Playstation (versions One, 2, 3 and Portable), Nintendo DS (plus all the earlier ones from this company, such as Game Cube or Game Boy), Wii (also from the Japanese giant), iPhone, N-Gage or various models of mobile phone terminals.[13] We are talking here about the field of hardware, the physical platform where the game is executed, that is the product of an increasingly fast evolution since the mid 20th century.

Since the appearance of what is considered the first console in 1972, the Magnavox Odyssey[14], the panorama of the platforms destined exclusively for games has undergone one technological revolution after another. The first of these great moments arrived with the launch of the Atari VCS/2600 at the end of the 1970s. This allowed games to be changed, each loaded onto an exchangeable cartridge. Shortly afterwards, an apparatus appeared on the market that could be used to programme games, all very simple with sober lineal interfaces in muted colours. This was the

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historia...": 160.

13. Om this theme, see Moreno Herrero, Isidro; García Serrano, José Antonio. "Las nuevas pantallas, un reto educativo". *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 17/1 (2006): 135-149.

14. The stories of the videogame platforms and the games themselves are destined to be done progressively, as they quickly become antiquated and obsolete. For the periods set, that is the origins, development, beginnings of the hardware and software companies, etc., it is possible to find high quality and fairly complete texts. There are brief histories of videogames in the electronic format that we can find on internet (*Fabienspain*. 6th december 2008. 21st April 2009 <http://fabiensapin.centerblog.net>; "Historia de los Videojuegos". *Wikipedia*. 21st April 2009 <http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historia_de_los_videojuegos>; or various pages in "Prehistoria de los Videojuegos". 2050 D.C. *Microhistoria de los Videojuegos*. 21st April 2009 <http://sapiens.ya.com/fredworried/html/Microhistoria-ep1.htm> forwards, altering the digit), and on paper in *Guinness World Records. Especial videojuegos 2008*. Barcelona: Planeta, 2008: 24, and the following, Demaria, Rusel; Wilson, John L. *High score! La Historia ilustrada de los videojuegos*. Madrid: Osborne McGraw-Hill, 2002. Some concentrate on the early stages, trying to define specific elements of the phenomenon, such as the arcade game. López Nieto, Daniel. "Análisis del contexto histórico y tecnológico del origen de los videojuegos". *Icono 14. Revista científica semestral de comunicación audiovisual y nuevas tecnologías*. January 2006. Asociación científica de las NNTT de la Educación. 26th April 2009. <http://www.icono14.net/revista/num8/articulos/05.pdf>.

Sinclair Spectrum ZX, launched in 1982. There were already some machines in public places that gradually replaced the classic pinball, among which there were the three *eternal* games: *Pac-Man*, *Space Invaders* (in its multiple variants, including *Asteroids*) and *Tetris*. However, in this epoch, and with the application of a novel technology (*laserdisc*[15]), a game which *sounded medieval* could be played in amusement arcades or bars, a game that has lasted since then, with multiple editions in absolutely all the platforms (recently even in UMD for PSP). I refer to *Dragon's Lair*, which was a transfer of the sword strokes from a cartoon with costumes identified with the medieval period and that was controlled by the player.
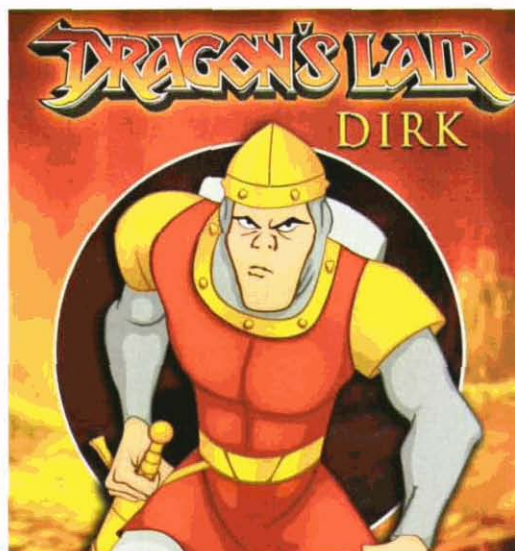

ILLUSTRATION 1. DRAGON'S LAIR.

Dirk, the leading character (another question not dealt with in this article is the personality that these fictional or non-fictional characters take on), is clearly described in the user's manual for the PC game, "Help Dirk, a daring medieval knight, to rescue the princess Daphne, held prisoner in the dragon's lair". It was a great success, and it consisted of 800 decision points where a player who made no mistakes took less than ten minutes to complete the game. Was it the graphics, or the spectacular feeling of brandishing a sword? Nowadays it is still a cult, complete with marketing and graphic adaptations of the characters (we can find Daphne on the net represented as a pure sex symbol). But let us leave this kind of game aside. I also differentiate between the games that use improbable, fantasy and magic

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15. At that time and with this technology, *Mach 3*, the first really spectacular flight simulator for amusement arcades was produced, where the player flew a combat aircraft. This game can be seen in a sequence of the film *Terminator 2*.

phenomena and elements (typical of the generalised stereotype of the medieval), and those that remain more or less true to the historical record. I will return to this point, as it is one of the pillars of this study.

This stage of development coincided with the change between the "golden" and the "driving" epochs, in Huertero's classification.[16] In the first, the videogame became established as an element of home entertainment (the epoch of the above-mentioned "space invaders"), and in the second, between 1983 and 1994, the technological limits for the creation of videogames diminished. This was when the franchises of this product were generated. The above-mentioned *Dragon's Lair* game thus had a springboard to bring dream and fantasy worlds closer, that for which the universe of *the medieval* has attracted our western civilisation (the potential player) since the Renaissance (which was when the concept was generated). The Romanticism and fantasy literature of Tolkien or Lewis were the perfect complement (and I emphasise, complement) for its development.

The application of technology led to an exponential multiplication of the diversity of games. The expansion of the PC and the outbreak of the war of the consoles in the 1990s meant that the developers (those who created the game) offered the consumers the opportunity to play anything, where the visual culture of the age of the computer became progressively cinematographic in its appearance, digital in its material and computerised in its logic.[17] Thus we are talking about an increasingly attractive appearance that gradually absorbs the players.

The appearance of strategy games in those years also revolutionised the possibilities of developing products that transferred the audience from the tables to the screens. There was then no need for another person to compete against in strategic or tactical games: the historical substrate was there simply to be used.

Substantial improvements in the various components of personal computers, through the application of *antialiasing* technology (explained simply, that which stops the graphics from appearing excessively pixelated, blurring the outlines) with the growth in size of the memory of the graphic cards, and the ongoing perfecting of information processing (a good card already has DDR5 memory, although a DDR3 is more than sufficient for all the PC games on the market), have been accompanied by the well-known war of the consoles between large companies in this type of leisure activities, that has generated the rise and splendour of some consoles, like versions

16. Huertero Valle, Guillermo Alexis. "Videojuegos políticos: una forma diferente de entender la política". *Razón y palabra*. 2007. Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey. 25th April 2009 <http://www.cem.itesm.mx/dacs/publicaciones/logos/actual/ghuertero.pdf.> The same article appeared in Huertero Valle, Guillermo Alexis. "Videojuegos políticos: una forma diferente de entender la política". *Cibersociedad*. 18th december 2007. Observatorio para la Cibersociedad. 25th April 2009 <http://www.cibersociedad.net/textos/articulo.php?art=141>. He distinguishes between *pioneer* (1971-1978), *golden* (1978-1983), *driving* (1983-1994), and *technological* (1994-2004) phases, where the videogame industry took positions of power, with the definitive expansion of the PC and the beginning of the war of the consoles, and *flash* (from 2004 until now), when the application of certain tools (Macromedia Flash and Java by Sun) made production easy for independent creators, accompanied by the definitive expansion of the internet, that facilitated their spread.

17. Manovich, Lev. *El lenguaje de los nuevos medios de comunicación: la imagen en la era digital.* Barcelona: Paidós, 2005: 241.

One and Two of the Sony Playstation, the Microsoft Xbox (that has held the interest of players with the *Age of Empires* saga, now extended with *Halo Wars*, a strategy game by the same team of developers, Ensemble Studios), or Nintendo, that after the frustrating Game Cube has seen a huge increase in the sales of the portable Nintendo Ds (now rejuvenated with the Nintendo DSi) and the revolutionary Wii. Each game requires a specific application, so the degree of commercial penetration is decisive when commenting on which games inspired in the medieval period the player has access to. A RTS (real time strategy) game that seemed limited to the PC media until recently, has filled a space in the consoles (Xbox) through the videogame I have mentioned above (*Halo Wars*). However, even the most widespread medieval game, *Age of Empires II* (the basic series, *The Age of Kings*, without the expansions) that had been generated for the PC and Mac platforms, has been applied to the PS2, the Nintendo DS (here with a typology as a TBS (turn based strategy) game), and mobile phone terminals.

I insist that this is not a conditioning factor, but rather a question that undoubtedly determines the use and enjoyment of a particular game. The companies, large multinationals in the case of the consoles, direct the implantation of these games through their marketing. The personal computers present other conditioning factors, which is where the software distributors have more say.

2.2. The software. The business world, distribution and the historical subjects

At this point, it is worth briefly mentioning that these same limits apply to the games themselves. If the implantation of a system of consoles makes it easy to understand whether or not we can play a game in a specific area, in this case the European Union, it is to no lesser degree the distributor's commercial interest to sell a product in a determined sector. For example, bearing in mind that there are very few Spanish development studies, with the honourable exceptions of Pyro Studios, FX Interactive (Hispano-Italian) or Alcachofa Soft, the language also ends up being a limit in itself, representing as it does an obstacle to easy playing for a public with a limited knowledge of English (not to mention other languages). In this sense, there is an excellent game called *Europa 1400*, from *The Guild* saga, that was not a great success in countries like Spain for the mere reason of being in English. It has now been re-released with expansions and the second part (under the title *Pirates of the European Seas*, in 2008), with all the texts translated into Spanish, although not the voices. The law obliges this type of information to be available for the consumer when acquiring the product, so that it is quite common to find a label to attract potential buyers with "Totalmente en castellano" ("All in Spanish") (or "Totalmente en español") or specifying simply "Juego en castellano" (Game in Spanish). It may also indicate the linguistic limitation stating "Textos de pantalla en inglés" (Screen texts in English) (as in *Great Invasions. The Dark Ages. 350-1066 AD*), or a have minuscule box indicating what is or is not translated into Spanish (for example, the case of *Knights of Honor*, one such box merely specifies that the manual

is in Castilian, but that the voices and texts on the screen are in English, with the proverbial national identifying flags). This is habitual, given that the manuals assure that the buyer has enough of a guide to be able to play the game. In the case of the above-mentioned *Europa 1400. The Guild*, the Castilian manual is in pdf format on the support CD, but the second version has a full guide.

All these suppositions, from the linguistic issue to the offer of the product reducing costs, lead us to the starting point for this epigraph. The commercial interests of the large distributors (who, in the end, do or do not translate the games) excessively condition the hold of certain videogames among the public. The marketing strategies, accompanied by the regulatory dynamic of supply and demand, in most cases decide the destiny of these products. Promotion, distribution, specific interest of the intermediaries (franchises or large commercial enterprises), etc., end up to a great extent directing the implantation of a videogame.

The economic situation seriously conditions the release or withdrawal of any title, as generally happens. I am not referring to the current situation, but to that of the company (in fact, the videogame sector is experiencing unprecedented growth in the leisure world, given the low cost when compared with the investment-hours of enjoyment). The drop in consoles (like the Atari in the 80s), support for specific platforms (Microsoft with Xbox) or the use of the machines for other activities (such as the PS3 with the Blu-Ray player, PSP as a GPS navigator, or the PC or Mac as working tools), are factors of such great importance that the player suffers these movements passively. The only response left is to buy the products or not to buy them. This is where the *taste* for certain themes comes in.

Now is the moment to mention the phenomenon not only of the sagas but also the expansions. The success of some titles ensures that two parallel forces have been generated that pull in the same direction. On one hand there is the business interest that, wishing to repeat the profits, will insist on a new improved version of the game. It is the *saga* applied to the field of videogames. These are the cases of the second, third, fourth, or more parts, where together with the identification number, (*Caesar, Caesar II, Caesar III*, and now *Caesar IV*) the interface is normally changed, notably improving the graphics and the gameplay (sometimes even the full game). *Stronghold* and *Medieval Total War* are the most outstanding examples of games set in the Middle Ages. A different element is the *expansion* for PC or Mac. In first place, the original game must already be installed to enable play to begin (a factor that the distributors are obliged to announce on the boxes, in various formulas, but all warning about this requirement), and are extensions of that first game. From the commercial perspective, it is very interesting, as it requires a potential public that wishes to continue with the game, for various reasons. In the field of science fiction the possibilities are infinite (the only limit is the imagination of the scriptwriters), in the videogames with a historical background, there are various historically specific ways. Although this is reiterated later, I must mention the expansions of *MTW*, for both the first game in the saga and the second. For the first, we had the *Viking Invasion* expansion, setting the scenario in the British Isles during the high medieval period; for the second there were multiple expansions, given that *Medieval Total War*

II: Kingdoms included four micro-expansions, stand-alone games but with the same playability system: *Britannia, Teutonic, Crusades* and *Americas* (concentrating on the early phases of the American conquest of the Caribbean and Central America). The product could be acquired in a collectors' pack, apart from the *gold* editions (that includes the original game and the expansions), a tactic used to sell the same games but with some specific incentives (a map, a figure, post cards, etc.). It has been used by the same companies and for the new game in the saga, *Empire Total War*, where the box is changed, a large map is included and four specific units are given away after registering the game on-line.

There is no need to emphasise that the videogame inspired or set in the Middle Ages, or simulating it, is one of the great favourites, whether the game has a high degree of verisimilitude or if it presents an unreal, fantasy world, linked to the prototype image of the medieval period. The demand for these games among players, whether occasional or habitual, has grown, and it is not surprising that the medieval background for games that have appeared on the market over the last twenty years take this period as the historical framework for adventure, challenge or enjoyment of the game in itself (*playing for playing's sake*). The dynamic has been continuous, with milestones like *Zelda*, the medieval *Total War* (including the expansion of *Rome Total War: Barbarian Invasion*, set in the late Ancient world), *Age of Empire II* and its expansion *The Conquerors*, all the versions of *Tzar*, *Assassin's Creed* (its star, Altaïr, has generated his own fan club), *Stronghold* (the full saga), all the fantasy universe of the *The Lord of the Rings*, *Narnia*, *World of Warcraft*, *The Guild*, the *Patrician* saga or the recent *Mount & Blade*, to mention just some. On many occasions, these have arisen with the backing of releases outside the videogame world, but which have been reflected in it through some application to increase the income from merchandising, taking advantage of the virtual attraction of living and starring in the film. In the same way that the producer of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy has released all kinds of contraption, or as with the premiere of *Beowulf* by Zemeckis and the homonymous novel by Kiernan (both in 2007),[18] the videogames[19] have started to form part of this panoply of the exploitation of a consumer product (and the videogame is just that).

18. Conde Silvestre, Juan Camilo. "Estrategias and recursos para la reelaboración de un poema heroico medieval en el siglo XXI: los Beowulfs de Robert Zemeckis y Caitlín R. Kiernan". *Miscelánea Medieval Murciana*, XXXIII (2009), forthcoming.

19. For the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, there are *The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar* (a MMORPG, very similar to WoW), *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* and *The Lord of the Rings: The third age* (all for PS2, although belonging to different typologies of playing, as while the first two were action, "beat'em up", the third is an RPG in the style of *Final Fantasy*), as well as *The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle Earth* (strategy for PC) and *The Lord of the Rings: The Conquest* (multiplatform: PC, X360, PS3 and Nintendo DS). For *Beowulf* with the game of the same name for PC, Xbox, PSP and PS3, developed by the Franco-Canadian Ubisoft. And *King Arthur* for PS2 and Xbox. This marketing strategy is habitual for these products, there being all kinds of cases that have "leapt" from the big screen to the monitor (*Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley*; all the children's films have their corresponding videogames in almost all the platforms) and even from the small screen (series that have their own videogame, such as *Perdidos, CSI, Mujeres Desesperadas, etc.*). The interesting cases are those that have gone the other way, that is, a videogame that has generated a film, such as *Tomb Raider* or *Blade*, and with such "complex" cases as *Alien vs Predator*. These are notes for an endless list.

Thus, I conclude that the videogame is another element that appears in the showcase to be consumed; the market demands *medieval* products, so the companies respond accordingly, moving towards these same tastes. The extension of historical, or pseudo-historical subject matter, is something that the same firms insist on in search of the same type of player but who leans towards other historical periods that attract more than the medieval, such as the numerous games about classical Rome (from the *Great Battles of Caesar*, via *Pax Romana*, *Age of Empires. Gold Edition*, *Rome Total War*, *Roma*, *Praetorians*, *Pompeii: the Legend of Vesuvius*, the extensive *Imperivm* saga, the *Caesar*, *Civcity Roma*, *Great Battles of Rome*, *Europa Universalis: Rome* and its expansion *Vae Victis*, *Legión Arena*, *Glory of the Roman Empire*, *Imperium Romanum Gold Edition*, *Artyrian*, the online game, or the very recent *Horrible Histories: Ruthless Romans*, for Wii, PC and DS, from the "Horrible Histories" series of history books for children), Greece (*the Sparta saga*, *Zeus: Master of Olympus*, *Rise of the Argonauts*, *Alexander:* expansion of *RTW*, *Great Battles of Alexander*, *Alexander*, about the campaigns of Alexander the Great, the *Alexander* derived from Oliver Stone's film), the many about ancient civilisations (*Rise and Fall: Civilizations at War*, *Strength & Honour: Empire Building in the Ancient World (260 BC-100 AD)*, *Chariots of War*); some from the modern epoch (the *Cossacks* saga and its corresponding expansions, *Imperial Glory*, *Europa Universalis III* (although starting from the late medieval period), *Age of Empires III* and the expansions in the Far West and the American West, *Empire Total War*, the *Anno* saga (*Anno 1602*, *Anno 1503* and *Anno 1701*), all those related to the world of Caribbean corsairs (the *Port Royale* saga, *Black Buccaneer*, *Sea Dogs*, the legendary *Monkey Island*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*), *American Conquest*, the expansion of *Civilization IV: Colonization*) and the ancient Egyptian period (*Pharaoh* and the expansion *Cleopatra*, *Queen of the Nile*, *The Children of the Nile*, *Egypt 1156 BC: the Tomb of the Pharaoh*, *Egypt II: the Prophesy of Heliopolis* and *Egypt III: the destiny of Rameses*, *Ankh: an Egyptian adventure*).

Another chapter is generated by the range of videogames with historical back-drop that develop a true human story, some starting from Prehistory, and that reach a futurist epoch (now set in science fiction), and where the player, according to his or her skills and achievements, reaches stages marked by technological consecutions that lead through classical, medieval, modern and contemporary civilizations. This way, it is not unusual to be able to face a host with a tank division, an authentic aberration for the historical purists but very entertaining for those who only want to play. This is *Empire Earth* and its corresponding expansions, *Empires. Dawn of the Modern World* (in this case beginning in the late Middle Ages) or the well-known *Civilization* saga, by the developer Sid Meier.

Another separate theme is the very wide catalogue of videogames centred on the Second World War. It must be born in mind that not only have *shooter* games multiplied (the player moves forward by shooting at almost anything that moves), such as the *Medal of Honor* saga, or *Call of Duty* or *Brothers in Arms*, but also those of strategy have usurped the role of the old board *wargames*, especially the simulators of all kinds and almost all scenarios: combat aircraft (either fighters or bombers), warships, submarines, tanks, etc. Bear in mind that these simulators have been encouraged by the military industry, with the resulting investment leading in the short term to higher quality in

the products that quickly jump to the general market. We have continuations of this type of game with applications in the Vietnam War or the recent Gulf conflicts. There are even some set in the Cold War, like the recent *Codename Panzers: Cold War*. I insist that there are very numerous videogames related to the great world conflict, with a constant stream of innovations for absolutely all platforms.

I have not tried to offer a complete list of the videogames set in any historical period (and I have not done so with this intention), but rather that at this point of the study we must note the fundamental importance that History, with a capital letter, has for the industry and the phenomenon of the videogame as a whole. To think otherwise would be to deny the evidence.

However, two questions relativise or alter this process. In first place, there is the development of online games on Internet, and secondly, downloads in electronic format. In the latter case, there are occasions when this is not a good option for the player, as they may find that some expansions are unplayable without a legally acquired copy, as with *Medieval Total War II. Kingdoms.*

Another different subject is the private initiative that has shown itself to be independent and wants to turn itself into a competitor (given its free nature) "with the large companies in the videogame sector" (as the creators of *Buccaneer Quest*, a free game, state).[20] Internet is like the countryside, without gates (with the exception of the limits that public powers want to impose). In this sense, the question of piracy must be mentioned. I own no illegal game, firstly because I can afford the hobby, secondly because I originally approached this world through the simulators and needed the necessary complex instructions, so I saw the advantages of the original copies, and thirdly, because the manuals represent a bibliography in themselves; sometimes one is disappointed by the little investment the companies make in these, although one can understand that this is to decrease costs. What I cannot understand is that some still cost a real fortune for an adolescent from an average family and do not even include a miserable explanatory leaflet.

2.3. Internet and the multiplayer

Naturally, the growth of videogames on the net has not stopped. Here, one registers by offering only simple details, such as an alias and an e-mail, and this has the great advantage that the support is the internet itself. Sometimes there is a charge, but the result is the same. These are known as MMORPGs *Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games.* After the phenomenon of *World of Warcraft* (WoW),[21] with eleven million players around the world, and its move to a commercial CD format, the extension of this type of games (of all kinds) is growing at a spectacular rate. This media is generating specific forums linked to a specific

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20. SourceForge. *Buccaneer quest.* 25th April 2009 <http://buccaneerquest.sourceforge.net/index.html>.

21. Official page: Blizard Entertaiment. *World of Warcraft.* 25th April 2009 <http://www.wow-europe.com/es/index.xml>, developed by Blizzard Entertainment for Windows and Mac OS X platforms, through the designers Rob Pardo, Jeff Kaplan and Ton Chilton.

game, deriving for obvious reasons from the context that inspired it. If this is a videogame set in the medieval past, the contents of the forum will be inextricably linked to our discipline. Leaving aside the abovementioned videogame of medieval fantasy inspiration, there are five games (although there will be others), the first two of role and the rest of strategy, that are worth mentioning: *Holy-War*[22], *Battle Knight*,[23] *Kings Age*,[24] *Guerras Tribales*[25] and *Medievol*.[26]

ILLUSTRATION 2. HOLY WAR.

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22. GameArt Studio. *Holy War*. 25th April 2009 <http://www.Holy-War.net>. "Holy War is a complex on-line role game that you can play for free. Submerge yourself into the exciting era of Holy war. Choose the role of a crusader, a Saracen or a pagan, and conquer or defend the Holy Land." is the definition of the game that appears on the start page. The possible languages are German, English, Spanish, French, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian and Turkish.

23. Gameforge. *Battleknight*. 25th April 2009 <http://battleknight.es/index.php?loc=start>.

24. Gameforge. *KingsAge*. 25th April 2009 <http://www.kingsage.es>.

25. InnoGames. *Guerras tribales*. 25th April 2009 <http://www.guerrastribales.es>; Travian Games. *Bienvenido a Travian*. 25th April 2009 <www.travian.net>. In Travian the gaming system is similar, with hamlets to increase and defend, and with attacks on the others. Leaving aside some other simple arcade pastime (more than simple), titled *Castle Siege*, the object of which is to defend a fortified post and which requires no more attention (Panaworld. "Castle Siege". *Macrojuegos.com*. 25th April 2009 <ttp://www.macrojuegos.com/juegos/castle-siege-3020.php/>, although it can also be found at Producciones lo nunca visto. "Castle Siege". *Juegosagogo.com*. 25th April 2009 <http://www.juegosagogo.com/arcade/juego/2368-castle-siege>, and at Soluciones Telemáticas. "Castle Siege". Juegos10.com. 25th April 2009 <http://www.juegos10.com/juegos/castle-siege_2928.php>.

26. Integra media digital. *Medievol*. 25th April 2009 <http://www.medievol.es>.

Take on the personality of a "Christian, Saracen or pagan" (HW) defending or attacking the Holy Land, or obtaining resources through combat and management, although what most encourages playing with these is the direct and permanent communication between users. The interfaces of the first and third are much better, but this is not a decisive factor in this media, rather the playability and immediacy of response and action. *Tribal Wars* and *Kings Age* have the substrate that continuous "frontier" type attacks are the basis of the growth of one's own position: the more you "rob" from the neighbour, the more powerful your village becomes. This requires spending a very long time connected, so that, as some users say, these are games where the winners are administrators who spend infinitely long hours sitting in front of the screen.

The popularisation of these "multiplayer" games has altered the reality of the solo game, the man-machine fight. They have their origin in the MUD (role games), that have existed since *Arpanet* (the network that Internet was built on around the end of the 70s), and was based on the use of written text,[27] a system that lasted; in 1984 a game was launched with this system, *The Saga of Erik the Viking*, a game that brings a smile to our faces when compared with even the simplest online games nowadays. However, among the keys to success in the future, as well as such factors as the development of graphics and AI (the artificial intelligence of the enemy), is the application of the multiplayer modes, either through Internet or local connections.[28]

A very different question is marketing through the network, as this opens an exceptional possibility for an independent to prosper with no more means than Internet. This is the case of *Mount & Blade*, by the Turkish Taleworlds Entertainment studio, that was recently released by the firm Paradox, considering the great success of downloads between players.

I am currently unaware of the success of the new *OnLive* system,[29] presented in the San Francisco *Games Developers Conference*, which reproduces games remotely through the Internet, without the need for a specific console. However, a terminal will always be necessary, and in the last step, a machine (TV, PC or Mac). However, it does give a good measure of how fundamental the network will be in the near future.

3. Games and players

It was necessary to present the complex framework of supports and working (in very broad traits) of the videogame phenomenon in order to understand the success that games set in the Middle Ages have had, and still have, among the users.

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27. Esnaola Horacek, Graciela Alicia; Levis Czernik, Diego Sebastián. "La narrativa en los videojuegos...": 64-65.

28. Carrasco Polaino, Rafael. "Propuesta de tipología básica de the videojuegos de PC and consola". *Icono 14*. 2006. Asociación científica de las NNTT de la Educación. 25th April 2009 < www.icono14.net/revista/num7/articulos/rafael%20carrasco.pdf>.

29. *Onlive*. 21st April 2009 <http://www.onlive.com>.

The enumeration of all these useful parameters for observing the universe of the videogame to the right degree has led to the appearance of two basic factors: who plays and what is played. The typology of these is basic, as not all players expect the same from a game nor do all the games have the same structure, although they share a common objective: to play.

Another comment before continuing is that since 2003, there has been a rating code for videogames, depending on their contents referring to violence, the appearance of drugs, discrimination, situations of terror, inappropriate and rude language, or more or less explicit sexual content. This is the PEGI (*Pan European Game Information*, similar to the American ESRB or Japanese CERO), and that replaced the national classifications in Europe with a common system.

ILLUSTRATION 3. CLASIFICATION PEGI.

The use of a videogame classified for the over 18s by adolescent players is more common than expected, as it means "joining the group" and even "being more respected".[30] I mention this because in the end, and until the player has purchasing power, it is the adult who buys the game, and this rating is designed to guide them. In the intention to purchase, apart from the evident interest by the one who asks for a present, we must bear in mind the parameter of tastes (or responsibility, unilateral on many occasions) of the purchaser. It is very common for adults to be led by the salesperson (or the friend "who knows about this"), without taking aspects of the script of the videogame into consideration, and whether the contents will be to the consumer's taste. This usually turns out right, however, owing precisely to the market being generalised and structured. One must understand that it is not recommendable to give a seven-year-old a game of real-time strategy on a medieval subject just because we have seen how good the graphics look and that we like the Middle Ages, in the same way that a videogame where handling a sword ends up splashing the TV or computer screen with virtual blood is not recommendable for the same child. The adolescent will soon appear who will find a way to get his hands on that bloodthirsty and illegal game.

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30. There is a study by Petra Mª Pérez Alonso-Geta that mentions that the application of the PEGI does not guarantee the protection of minors: Pérez Alonso-Geta, Petra Mª. "Protección de la infancia y nuevas tecnología de la comunicación: el código PEGI de regulación de los videojuegos and juegos on-line". *Teoría de la Educación*, 9/3 (2008): 29-47.

3.1. The "Medievalist" player

The "videoplayer" is the person who uses and plays a videogame. This is a simple way to define this, but it corresponds to an average reality. From this premise, players can be differentiated into categories depending on their implication in the game. I fail to see the difference that is proposed between the concepts *play* and *game* clearly, where the former is limited to enjoyment of the game through the mere fact of playing it, and the latter to the use by adults, with rules and objectives.[31] People play for many reasons, but nobody plays to loose, but rather to reach an objective, either in the game or outside it. The average age of players in Spain, according to the ISFE report for 2007,[32] is 26. The occasional player is the one who sporadically enters a videogame, with the intention of what is commonly called "killing time".[33] The bad public image of the player and the act of playing a videogame (the former seen as real drug addicts, living in the Avernus or the pale of Satan) has generated a debate between pedagogues and psychologists about the benefits or the harm of using videogames, while the initiative passed by the Spanish parliament mentions these games as "a good opportunity to experience new pedagogical formulas in educational development and the forming of civic values".[34] As this obstinacy continues, I simply state that one should know the phenomenon before expressing an opinion, and generate criteria from the contributions that some videogames make to knowledge about the medieval period. These occasional players approach with curiosity, almost surprise, when they see the avalanche of information that they receive about the time period when playing a good part of these games. On many occasions the response is to say "It's very complicated" for games that are in fact complex, like those of strategy, and normally take refuge in the *arcade*, adventure or role games that *a priori* need no more than a superficial tutorial to begin to enjoy the game. The more complicated ones to control are tackled with the development of the player. However, this is an a priori impression that sometimes means surprises, as in certain circumstances the control of the situations requires prior knowledge of the realities of the game. For example, when seen for the first time, *XIII Century. Death or Glory* is spectacular, but controlling the game is really complex for a non-expert.

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31. Esnaola Horacek, Graciela Alicia and Levis Czernik, Diego Sebastián. "La narrativa en los video-juegos...": 64-65.

32. "Key Facts. The profile of the European Videogamer"... See note 6.

33. The article by Aurelio del Portillo about the meaning of wasting time, using time, losing the notion of time playing, etc, is very interesting: Portillo, Aurelio del. "Enajenación de la experiencia del tiempo ante la pantalla del videojuego". *Icono 14*. 2004. Asociación científica de las NNTT de la Educación. 26th April 2009 <http://www.icono14.net/revista/num4/index.html>.

34. See note 2.

ILLUSTRATION 4. XIII CENTURY: DEATH OR GLORY. LAS NAVAS DE TOLOSA.

However, after having done our own biography, the simple tutorial in *Mount & Blade* has us instantly clouting right, left and centre in the rooms of a castle or using the bow on horseback as practice.
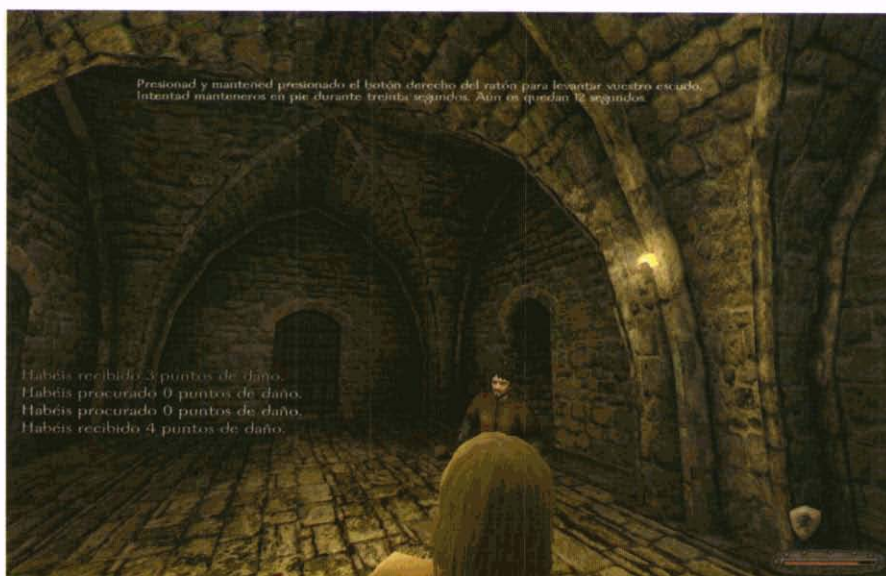

ILLUSTRATION 5. MOUNT-BLADE. TUTORIAL.

Then there are some console games that only require you to insert the disc and start pressing buttons, such as *Assassin's Creed* (versions PS3, Xbox and PSP, or the prequel[35] for Nintendo DS with the subtitle *Altaïr's Chronicles*, and that has just appeared for the iPhone). It must be emphasised that this is the player who plays from time to time, not to be confused with the one who sits in front of a screen once every three, four or five months.

After the occasional player, we have the *gamer*, a player who knows the industry (to a greater or lesser extent) and the videogame market in depth, and is usually up to date with the new products. This is possibly the best model for analysis as a medievalist player, as he dedicates precise (and sometimes precious) time to finding a game, calibrating it and, if it is worth it, playing and controlling it. This type of player is very interesting as he normally has a prior condition that draws him towards the game set in the Middle Ages, independently of whether it is arcade or strategy. It then depends on one's tastes or the possibilities and the playability of the product. *Lords III: the Realm* is truly fantastic for understanding the feudal-vassalistic system, but this option makes it complicated to play for a non-expert (either in the game or in medieval issues).

The next case is known in the jargon as *programmer*, who is dedicated to running on-line championships and taking part in the betas (trial versions) of the programmes (in this case, videogames), very often detecting errors that, once eradicated, improve the product. The credits on some instruction manuals reflect specific cases of this type of collaboration on the final version (the one put on sale), as in *XIII Century. Death or Glory*, *Stronghold 2* or almost the entire *TW* saga (especially the latest). At this point, mention must be made of the "patch" phenomenon in the PC platform, so well known to the habitual users of the new technologies. It is very possible that a version has some problem of playability or management of the game, or one that generates some problems with the equipment. Then either the firm itself or a user writes a small programme that completes or corrects the error.

The *hardcore gamer* would be the real professional, as the highest step of the players. There are subdivisions among these with specific denominations (such as *gosu*, who is a *gamer* who has a special ability for certain videogames).[36]

Although this classification attends to the implication of the player with the product, in reality there are two extreme types related to the Middle Ages, which set the limits for a wide range of intermediate possibilities. I am referring to the player who is very keen on this medium but who has no more knowledge of what that historical period meant than the prototype of the medieval that anyone can have, generated by the avalanche of stereotyped images that floods over us from an

35. This is a neologism for a work generated after the original, but whose script is set at an earlier time. This is an interesting way of supplying information to complete the story of the first instalment. In the cinema there are several examples, the best-known being the three recent *Star Wars* prequels, set chronologically before the original from the 70s.

36. The data in the report Universidad Complutense de Madrid. "Hábitos e iniciación a los...", section 7.1 is very revealing. See note 2.

early age (Middle Ages equal darkness, backwardness, knights, castles, a princess); and on the other extreme, the professional medievalist, who seeks the background of veracity (even plausibility) in the game. Between these two, there are a vast number of possible degrees.

The first that we have to respond to is the anxiety with which the user begins any videogame. Huertero[37] states that players attempt to comply with two very different plans: for pure satisfaction, that is the mere fact of playing-competing-winning-sharing,[38] and to satisfy the group. Here is where we count the videogame as an element of sociability: not having a videogame or not playing it is not to participate in the *tribe*. The approximation of a professional historian to this type of medium can be understood, but the fact that draws the attention of a good part of non-lovers of historical knowledge is more complex (some of these young people even reject the discipline they receive in their centres of study). It can be argued that they are playing, not studying. But, at the end of the day, in some of these videogames, control of events, conditions, factors and elements of that culture set between the 5th and 16th centuries is necessary to be able to enjoy the game. What is spectacular is that players end up assuming a terminology of "combat units" more normal in a specialist, and that they would not otherwise have known about. For example, a very useful unit in *Age of Empires II* is the *catafracta*, the heavy cavalry in the Byzantine faction. I very much doubt that access to and use of this terminology would have come about with what we could call a general education. The act of choosing the game and participating in it with *equals* (colleagues, friends...) has no greater sense than to feel part of and be recognized in the group. There is an even more interesting case, which responds to the specific fashion of some games. Two years ago (in November 2007), and coinciding with the launch of one of the most popular consoles, the PS3, *Assassin's Creed* came out to exploit the high definition of the Blu-Ray player in the Sony machine.

Having played this adventure game, set in the Middle Ages and Ultramar (Holy Land), with the possibility to stroll through the streets of Damascus, Acre, Masyaf, Arsuf and Jerusalem itself at the end of the 12th century, meant prestige for the individual within the group.

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37. Huertero Valle, Guillermo Alexis. "Videojuegos políticos...".

38. The results of the report Universidad Complutense de Madrid. "Hábitos e iniciación a los..." seems to confirm this, with very high percentages of players (approximately half), who say they play for entertainment/distraction. The oldest did so to share something with the family, which leads us to Huertero's second proposal to indicate the reasons to approach a videogame, that is no other than integration, in this case more for a wish not to become separated from the group than to assimilate to it, as they already belong to it.
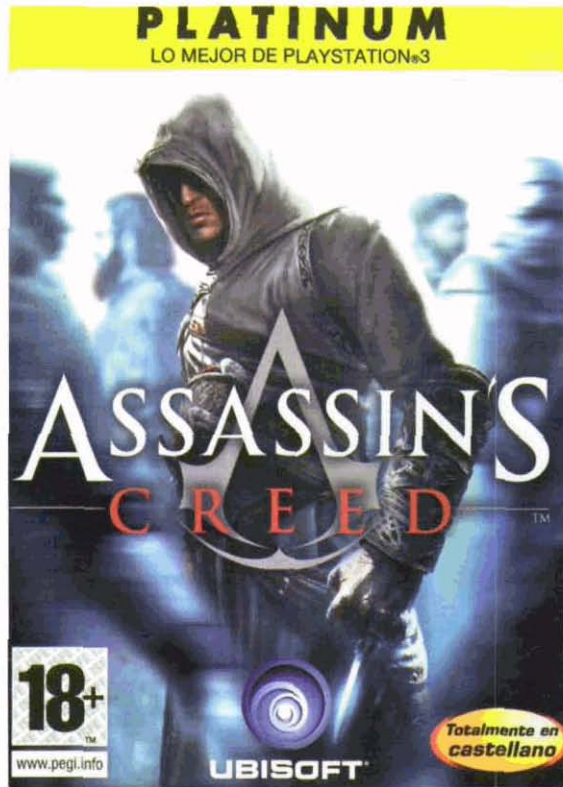
ILLUSTRATION 6. COVER OF THE EDITION PLATINUM ABOUT
ASSASIN'S CREED.

However, this led to an "accidental" approach to the *medieval* game. It was
the novelty, moreover, of the new graphic device (developed in *Scimitar*, like the
one used for *Prince of Persia*), which allowed the images to be seen on HD Ready
screens, at 720p, which was a spectacular advance over the resolution in previous
televisions. The most important aspect of this is that it generated a sizeable group
of followers, who secured not only the development of marketing (as mentioned
above), but a whole social phenomenon within the videogame.[39] This was despite
having a PEGI +18. Even in this case, we must take this into account, as it leads the
player in neophyte medieval history to know who the sect of the *assassin* were,[40]
and even the historical characters who appear, not to mention the cities, and the
specific historical context of the Third Crusade.

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39. Ubisoft Entertainment. *Assasin's Creed 2*. 21ˢᵗ April 2009 <http://assassinscreed.es.ubi.com/assassins-
creed-2/teaser>.

40. W. B. Bartlett's essay about this phenomenon is very interesting: Bartlett, Wayne Baker. *Los asesinos*.
Barcelona: Crítica, 2006.

The professional historian does not necessarily coincide with the professional player of medieval history. The history teacher who plays the videogames will have his particular inclination towards one theme or another, and even for some specific kind of game. We do not think that all professional historians are unconditional followers of strategy games, which are considered to be those which can offer us the greatest historical content. An interesting point is to know the attitude of a player who was trained as a medievalist, independently of whether this was through History, Literature, Art, Philosophy or Philology.

It is unquestionable that the implication of the player is of enormous importance for what will develop into a game. Without going any further, it is worth mentioning the phenomenon of the *mods*. A *mod* is an extension or perfection (or profiling) of a game by some followers who are experts in it and have technical knowledge, and which are normally posted on the net for other users to use and enjoy. There are various sites where you can find this type of file, which must be installed after the original game, but I will mention a URL that has a long list of possibilities, as well as all kinds of games: strategyinformer.com.[41] The options for *Rome: Total War* are very varied, from the application of the conquest of Iberia, and thus the formalisation of Hispania (*Iberia: Total War*[42]), to various applications from Antiquity (Rome itself or a beta of the Persian invasion), to the Napoleonic campaigns or, what might interest us most, the barbarian invasions with considerable levels of historicity (*Europa Barbarorum*[43]), and which appears as *Rome Medieval* in the *mod*.[44] There is even *Star Wars*. The interesting point is that the community of players of the full TW saga is so big that, sensibly, a specific forum, *Total War Center*, was generated,[45] which is the place for players to find the *mods* that they want, to the point that norms for the working and use of these had to be published.

The concepts "veracity", "plausibility", "historical concretion" or "adaptation to the contents of History" are inherent in the position taken first by the *medievalists* (here meaning not only the teacher, but also the researcher and the aficionado in things medieval). They will choose one videogame or another, according to their learning criteria and even the visibility of a reality that can only be imagined in books, and that they now have the chance to recreate. They can even live it virtually through certain games, such as *Mount & Blade, The Guild* saga or *Assassin's Creed*. This is where the great schism between players must be made: between those who seek this veracity, and those who do not mind that license is taken in place of the game desired by the author (with the appearance of magicians, dragons, magic beings, etc.). I am unaware whether the 20% of players among those who had

41. *Strategyinformer*. 21st April 2009 <http://www.strategyinformer.com/all/mods.html>.

42. *Iberia Total War*. 21st April 2009 <http://itw.celtiberos.net>, which redirects to "Rome: Total War Mod.". *Strategyinformer*. 21st April 2009 <www.strategyinformer.com/pc/rometotalwar/mod/23491.html>.

43. *Europa Barbarorum. Modification for Rome: Total War*. 21st April 2009 <http://www.europabarbaro-rum.com/>.

44. There is a list of possible downloads on "Rome: Total War Mod: Downloads". *Strategyinformer*. 21st April 2009 <http://www.strategyinformer.com/pc/rometotalwar/mod/23772.html>.

45. Twcenter.net. *Total War Center*. 21st April 2009 <http://www.twcenter.net>.

higher education in 2007, lean towards one side or the other. The player's age has a lot to do with it in this case, since we know that about 43% of the under 30s are considered habitual players, dropping to 16% in those between 30 and 49 (ISFE 2007 report). Thus, prior education is implicit in the use and perspective that the researcher might have of the image of the *medieval* projected by these videogames. It is possible that several years will have to pass in order for us to calibrate the impact accurately, when the reality is fully understood by teachers (who will have played thee games and will have knowledge of this, at the same level as their students). We can substantiate this when we note that interest in the strategy game falls abruptly after the age of 45, as does interest in the adventure game.[46] But these are data from today; the report on the web of the Asociación Española de Distribuidores and Editores de Software de Entretenimiento (*aDeSe*) about videogames in Spanish homes, with figures and results from 2000, urgently needs revising.

3.2. Videogames and the notion and image of the medieval

I will now move on to refer specifically to those videogames set in the medieval period. We must remember something that I have been referring to from the beginning of this study. I accept the division offered by R. Carrasco Polaino, who specifies that the game can be arcade, adventure and role, simulation, strategy, sports or puzzles and questions.[47] Under arcade, adventure and role, and strategy we can find games set in or inspired by the Medievo. Several years ago, one was sold by Diáspora, under the title *Trivial Templarios 15.000*, that consisted of a videogame with questions, with the aim of getting hold of the Order's treasure, but whose interest is simply anecdotal. Then, as the next step, a division must be made between the videogames that have the Middle Ages as the graphic excuse and those that link their script and subject to the medieval period. In one word: the fantasy or the ones that stay close to a history more or less inspired in the past reality. This phenomenon does not happen with any other historical stage with the range of videogames that I mentioned related to other moments in History. The games linked to the classical Roman past have no magicians wandering around (except certain licenses in some titles with "heroes", like *Rise and Fall. The Fall of the Empires*, or one of the *Imperivm* saga), because there is a specific real-time strategy game referring to the mythological world (*Age of Mythology*, developed by Ensemble Studios and published by Microsoft in 2002). Apart from that, and referring to the Second World War, there is a *shooter* set in a gothic castle inhabited by monstrous Nazis soldiers (Wolfenstein 3D, by id Software, and distributed by Apogee Software), and some virtual histories in the purest "what would have happened if ..." style, like the *Enigma* simulator, turning Point or some graphic adventures.

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46. Report Universidad Complutense de Madrid. "Hábitos e iniciación a los...", It also has an interesting data in collation with what I state about the "normalization" of the age with the passing of time, as almost half of those interviewed between the 35 and 44 in this report said that they had played in their youth.
47. Carrasco Polaino, Rafael. "Propuesta de tipología básica...".

3.2.1. The fantasy videogame

I will now refer briefly to this section, linking the interest in the image of *the medieval* in the West to the 19th century rediscovery of the Romantic. Taking the Arthurian cycle[48] as the indisputable starting point for the whole question (in fact, together with Germanic and Nordic epics, it is the base for all these "worlds"), it really belongs to a parallel impulse, as it is also the result of the tradition promoted by the works of Lewis and Tolkien (both friends in the literary circle of the *Inklings*). All the European epics must be taken into account, especially those from the North (including France, with the *Song of Roland* or the *Chanson de Guillaume*), where the "marvellous" forms an indivisible part of Western culture; the importance of *The Ring of the Nibelungs* or *Beowulf* is thus evident. In the Iberian Peninsula, this tradition is marked by the legends from the medieval epoch found in most places and districts (a Moorish princess, a knight, etc.) but all imbued with the most purely Hispanic substrate of romance, that derives from the Hispanic epic, closer to the real and historical world than in the rest of Europe, as shown by Menéndez Pidal. However, fantasy forms an indivisible part of this tradition generated in the Middle Ages, which was transformed and adapted to modernity through the sagas by the above-mentioned authors (among others).

However, the *fundamental* role played by the genre of the *books of knightly endeavours* in sustaining these illusory worlds, where the impossible was real and fantasy was habitual, is always ignored. The roots of this cultural base seem to have been lost as a reference point, when in reality the videogames in question take ideas from this literature, nuanced by the massive influence of Tolkien. However, what is not usually known is Tolkien's deep knowledge of the Germanic epic (both Nordic and German). His family roots were from Lower Saxony, and he was a great expert on *Beowulf*. In fact, he may have been interested in generating a new English epic through his works. His friend Lewis shared his interest in the Nordic epic, as I have mentioned in the context of their literary gatherings in *The Eagle and Child* pub. Thus, there is no visible cultural discontinuity between these epics and the ones generated by videoplayers in their own adventure.

The possibilities opened up by the new computer art of the videogame are infinite, and the applications arising from it were the fruit of this current, where the medieval interface covered, protected and even legitimated (and still does) any script set in dream or fantasy worlds. Huge swords and enormous axes, ineffable creatures, with impossible shapes, purposefully mannerist breastplates and helmets, fantasy events, unreal processes, phenomena from far-off worlds... paraphernalia from the purest tradition of King Arthur and that also absorbs part of the books of chivalrous adventures as I have mentioned. Morgana, Lancelot, Merlin, Amadis of Gaul, Tirant lo Blanc, Perceval, etc., are on the same level as Sartharion, Malygos,

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48. Which naturally has the relevant videogames, both those derived from the film directed by Fuqua in 2004 (*King Arthur*, Krome Studios, 2005), and the earlier *Tzar. Excalibur and the King Arthur* (FX Interactive, 2002) and Legion: The legend of Excalibur (Midway, 2002) or the recent *Sonic and the Black Knight* (Sega, 2009).

Sir Anduin Lothar or King Llane (all the latter present in *World of Warcraft*). Monsters and extraordinary beings that live beside humans (or humanoids) exposed to both the fulminating bolt of a wizard and the rapid bolt from a timely crossbow. If we add a carefully weighted contribution from Japanese *manga* culture to this, the result is that we even see a transfer of some aspects in the opposite direction, confusing real characters with others dressed like the heroes of any Japanese comic. The best example is the stars of *Bladestorm. The Hundred Years' War*, where the Black Prince is a knight from any scene from a *seinen manga* (*manga* aimed at young men and adults) developed as *jidaimono* (a *manga* set in feudal Japan).

ILLUSTRATION 7. BLADESTORM. THE BLACK PRINCE.

Not to mention Queen Phillipa, portrayed as extraordinarily attractive, and identified as an English general: because girls also play, a reality far from the prejudices that these inventions are only for boys.

In the context of this approach, we find such a wide range of possibilities in the world of videogames that a specific study would be necessary about how these medieval images are absorbed and projected into these games. Reality is not of interest, nor is there any urge to find a plausible script. It is fantasy and does not pretend to be anything else. Neither does the player seek this veracity, but enters into this private world (generated in the imagination through reading *The Lord of the Rings*, or in a visually passive way after seeing one of the films in the trilogy by the director Peter Jackson, or, and this is what interests us, taking an active part through handling the videogame). It am not sure if it is appropriate to link a flight

from a reality "that is hostile, full of demands and requirements that the common people have problems dealing with",[49] to the use of this type of videogame, as this can equally be achieved with any other on any other theme, even with the aforementioned historical scripts.

In reality, with this type of game, the players are also seeking to involve themselves in these worlds. Ultimately, they go into these scripts (making them their own, participating in them to generate certain possibilities), and that opens a different perspective from the technological progression in graphic effects that we consider the main attraction for the future videoplayer. With the growth in the number of users and also the increase in knowledge in the global sense, sales are being linked to the offer of a pre-designed history, "that involves the players and lets them enjoy themselves without any need to show their skill with the joystick".[50] This type of videogame *à la medieval* allows the generation of an *emerging* script, that is, one that develops as it emerges, rather than following a specific path, created by the author. In the end, it is the same player who creates the history of the videogame, albeit indirectly as the game progresses. The possibilities for those closer to a historical reality are different, as we now enter the field of *re-created* History.

This type of videogame is interesting because a player without specific knowledge of Western European medieval history will not worry about fighting against Prince Yaroslav (Grand Prince of Novgorod and Kiev) or Prince Caspian (fruit of Lewis' imagination in *The Chronicles of Narnia* saga), or that the *hobbit* from *The Lord of the Rings* is comparable to a lancer from the Vistula, or that Aragorn (whose face will always be immortalised by Viggo Mortensen) shares a showcase with Premysl II Otakar of Bohemia (Yaroslav, the lancer of the Vistula and the *King of Iron and Gold* appear in *XIII Century. Death or Glory*). The player wants to play without going any deeper, although what is really interesting is that he (or she) ends up as an expert on these worlds, with a deep knowledge about the population, fauna, flora, geography and even the institutions of these universes. This is important because the approach to these "universes" appears at first so similar that for those players with no profound idea about medieval societies it might be an approximation to 13th-century monarchies.

There are so many and such varied games in this genre: arcade, strategy, adventure and role (a huge number of the latter type), that it would be incongruous to stop at this point. We need only mention such popular titles as the aforementioned *World of Warcraft*, the saga of the *Lord of the Rings, Drakensang, Beowulf, Cultures* (in-

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49. Esnaola Horacek, Graciela Alicia; Levis Czernik, Diego Sebastián. "La narrativa en los video-juegos...": 53.

50. "Nowadays the necessary hardware fits in the palm of the hand and its possibilities of connection make the technology that saw the birth of the first videogames seem ridiculous. But, despite all this power, it could be said that we have spent 30 years playing the same things. The race to squeeze the most out of the latest generation of graphic processors is beginning to tire the consumer, and after years of long waits and dedication to games without narrative content, the users are hoping that the developers leave more space and allow the stories of the videogames to have a bigger role". Peinado, Federico; Santorum, Michael. "Juego emergente: ¿nuevas formas de contar historias en videojuegos?". *Icono 14.* 2004. Asociación científica de las NNTT de la Educación. 24th April 2009 <www.icono14.net/revista/num4/index.html>.

cluding *Northland*), those linked to *Dungeons & Dragons* (and which, as the first role playing board game, has had an enormous influence), *Warrior Kings. Battles, Ladnok* (an MMORPG),[51] the better known *Lineage* (another MMORPG, from the late 1990s, with over 43 million copies sold around the world), all the games derived from the marketing of the Harry Potter phenomenon (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*), the *Might and Magic* saga, *Warhammer* and *Gothic, Ascension to the Throne, Oblivion, Valhalla Chronicles*, and many more. The setting of *Prince of Persia* (a widely extended game since its appearance in 1989 for Apple II) links the game to the medieval period through the mere fact of its platform being developed in the context of an Islamic medina. We can even see the puppet Sonic recently starring in a title under the denomination *Sonic and the Black Knight* (Nintendo for Wii) in a full Arthurian court.

3.2.2. Medieval historical videogames

This section is the real subject of this analysis. I have mentioned that there have been videogames on the medieval period on the market for two decades, and that these have surprised us on account of both their quantity and their quality. I will not mention the multiplayer options of the various videogames that appear below, because this has no influence on the proposed aims of this study.

Computer graphics have been shown to be the ideal tool for showing the scenarios of the past, such as a castle (*Castillo*, by Zeta Multimedia, marketed in 1996, for PC and Mac). This is not about the appearance of educational or cultural products from the different public administrations (*Castillos de España*, by Logograph Multimedia; or those aimed at children, like *La Máquina del Tiempo del Pequeño Aventurero*, by Zeta Multimedia, or the more recent Pipo series linked to mathematics for the last course of primary school, to mention a few). I refer to games that were assumed from the outset to represent the leap from the board game to the screen of the PC (or Mac).

In the mid 80s, there were various games added to what, from our perspective, can be considered the pioneers of the graphic systems that attracted a public, at that time limited but expectant. Examples from this period are *Defender of the Crown*, with spectacular graphics for the time (for various platforms, although at first only for the Commodore Amiga platform, later extended to more modern consoles like the Game Boy). It appeared in 1986, and the player could control any of the five factions in the game. It is impressive that Cinemaware redistributed an updated version in 2007, with the subtitle of *Heroes Live Forever*. It was inevitable. We must remember that when it appeared, the strategy genre was not very widespread in Spain, but it signified a very important starting point. In fact, a million copies were sold around the world.[52] However, the game evolved over the years,

51. *Ladnok*. 24th April 2009 <http://www.ladnok.es/pages/geschichte>.

52. As Alberto de Vega Luna mentions in his comments about the game in *Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown* for PC in the forum of *Meristation*: Vega de Luna, Alberto. "Avances: Robin Hood: Defender of

and also diversified towards adventure, and can be found for PS2 and even Xbox as *Robin Hood. Defender of the Crown*, where one can handle the character in various situations.

1989 saw the first title of what would over time become one of the most interesting sagas of commercial simulation, in the mercantile setting of the 13th-century Hanseatic League: *The Patrician*. Here the player took on the role of a merchant, and the objective was to progress economically in order to win power in the city of origin by climbing through a series of ranks: from merchant as the basic level, up to the level of governor. I will refer to the titles in this saga later.

The broad perspectives that opened up after applying this strategy game scheme to the computer screen through a game like *Castles II. Siege & Conquest* (by Interplay Entertainment, in 1992, and that generated the saga opened by *Castles*, launched the previous year) gave Medieval History buffs an opportunity they could identify with.

ILLUSTRATION 8. CASTLES II.

Set in the early 14th century, a fight to the death between various factions (Valois, Albion, Anjou, Aragon and Burgundy) conditioned the choice of the king of Brittany through the prior recognition by the Papacy (the video introduction begins

the Crown". *Meristation*. 4th May 2009 <www.meristation.com/v3/des_avances.php?id=4236&idj =2420&pic=GEN>.

with the news of the death of the Breton king, Charles). The game was about obtaining resources (the usual food, gold, iron and timber) to support growth in the home territory, conquests, espionage and diplomacy, the building of castles and to sustain a sizeable armed host, both for attack and defence.

As can be seen, this was a game where the historical motive was the excuse. However, the script had no bearing on the historical reality (Brittany was a duchy, for example, nor was there ever a king Charles). However, what was interesting was that you could play "at the Middle Ages" on your computer screen, including the complex relations that had to be maintained with the Papacy. The latter is a factor that has never disappeared from the later games, such as *Medieval Total War*, thus defining how important it was then to keep on good terms with the Pope. This was also the time when colour screens started to become common, so the qualitative leap was remarkable. The graphics, with the exception of the building of castles, were rather simple, but this is merely an impression which we have nowadays: in its time the game was unrivalled. This strategy videogame also included one of the greatest elements for playability, namely that of maintaining various territories in peace and prosperity. An uprising could emancipate a rebellious region and thus mean a loss of power for the player: the presence of a castle mitigated these attempts to rebel. These are elements that have since that time appeared in one way or another in later games on the same subject, such as the importance of the climate and the weather for war (in winter the troops moved with greater difficulty). I consider it risky to talk about antecedents, but the truth is that these aspects would become standard elements in medieval strategy games down to the present.

Two years later, *Lords of the Realm*, by Impressions Games (the same as *Pharaoh* and *Caesar*) appeared on the market. This game gave the player the power to manoeuvre through the strategy in real-time to take over the English throne. The second in the saga appeared in 1996, also for PC and Mac. The third came out in 2004, with much improved graphics, continuing with the same philosophy as the first two: closely linked to historical truth, without magic units and, in contrast to other strategy games, with no technological tree. The battles are fairly simple to handle, and there are some fifteen historical encounters to choose from (Hastings, Legnano, Crécy, Poitiers, Courtrai, Stirling, Bouvines, Stanford Bridge, etc, with an explanation of each). However, the game's strategic system is rather complicated, with an involvement in the feudal-vassalistic structure when controlling territory (with the seigniorialisation of villages and key points in the area included), which makes it very attractive to see, but cumbersome to play without a favourable predisposition.

ILLUSTRATION 9. LORDS OF THE RALM III.

This has been one of the strongest criticisms from some users in the specialised forums, complaining that once a vassal had been nominated, the player loses direct control of what happens in this fiefdom. One cannot personally choose the units or take any specific action, as the AI is in charge of executing and managing it (that is, the virtual fact was that the vassal had in turn become a lord of vassals and had freedom to act supported by the designation of the lord, in this case, the player). Thus we have an approximation to what the private relation between lord and vassal was like. A medievalist videoplayer will always regard this type of parameter positively, although it reduces the playability.

The perfecting of graphic systems led to the generation of a new type of adventure game that took advantage of this interface to "hook" the consumer. *Crusader. Conspiracy in the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (by Pointsoft, 1997), is an example of this type, which uses the resort to adventure to introduce the player to a series of aspects relating to the entire medieval period, from the technology of the time to the historical maps of the Crusades. In reality this was emphasising the educational value of these new technologies, making it less attractive for someone who is looking for the pleasure of the game through merely playing it.

3.2.2.1. From Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings...

Two years later, in 1999, the first great keystone for videogames inspired by the medieval period appeared. I am referring to *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings*.

ILLUSTRATION 10. AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE AGE OF KINGS.

This Microsoft game, developed by Ensemble Studios, continued the saga generated a year earlier with *Age of Empires*, initially limited to prehistoric civilisation, and extended with an expansion into the Roman epoch (*The Rise of Rome*). The videogame, an RTS in the subgenre of *Build and Battle* (B&B), represented a violent change in what it meant to sit in front of the computer screen and "see the Middle Ages". While Mercedes Molina, dean of the Faculty of Geography and History at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid, stated in 2004 that the game *Imperivm III. Great Battles of Rome* had generated "enthusiasts of History",[53] we could say the same about this game, where the Middle Ages acquired a series of unconditional fans, who have stood up to the passing of time with the same game.

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53. EFE. "Mercedes Molina, decana de Historia de la UCM. 'Imperium III' crea 'entusiastas de la Historia'". Elmundo.es. 10th January 2005. 4th May 2009 <http://www.elmundo.es/navegante/2004/12/16/juegos/1103212223.html>.

Among the various options in the game was an icon named "History", which provided the player with a little encyclopaedia with detailed information about the factions and various explanations about the Middle Ages, such as the concept itself, war and the different military units, politics and religion in the high and late Middle Ages, feudalism, the Crusades, etc.

Microsoft introduced the game progressively in the United States, Europe and finally Australia, but not in Japan. I mention this in order to show the importance that marketing has on the impact of any game, as I mentioned above. In the same way, the systems chosen in the first place, PC and Mac, were extended with the application of the game for PS2, Nintendo DS, and finally mobile phone terminals. This was the case with *Civilization* by Sid Meier. The first version, from 1991, did not reach Spain, while the second and third did (in 1996 and 2002 respectively).

The graphic engine of *Age of Empires II, Genie Engine* allowed one of the most dynamic games to date to be managed. The interface was also spectacular for those times, with the buildings neatly recreated and the units conforming to the archetypes suggested by the image of the different civilisations that could be played (a total of thirteen: English, Celts, Francs, Goths, Teutons, Vikings, Chinese, Japanese, Mongols, Byzantines, Persians, Saracens and Turks). Like its predecessor in the saga, the game consisted of accumulating resources, building infrastructures and fighting to attack or defend, progressing in technological phases that went from the high Middle Ages to the Imperial Age, via the Feudal Age and the Age of Castles. The improvements that were achieved in each of these gave the player a clear advantage over the other players, whether this was a multiplayer system or whether playing against the machine's AI. One of the best characteristics of the game is that each civilisation has its strong and weak points, with military units generated in the castles that are specific to the faction (such as the English archers with longbows), creating closer identification with the game. A full tree for the development of military units, buildings and technologies guides the progression of the game, where it is necessary to complete certain projects successfully in order to move on to the following phase. Obtaining resources (gold, stone, timber and food) through the peasants (who became miners, foresters or labourers, as they were ordered) is the basis for administrating the game.

The development of certain maps and specific campaigns links the game to the real past, with general or specific historical episodes featuring in campaigns to be run (such as Joan of Arc, Genghis Khan or Frederick I.
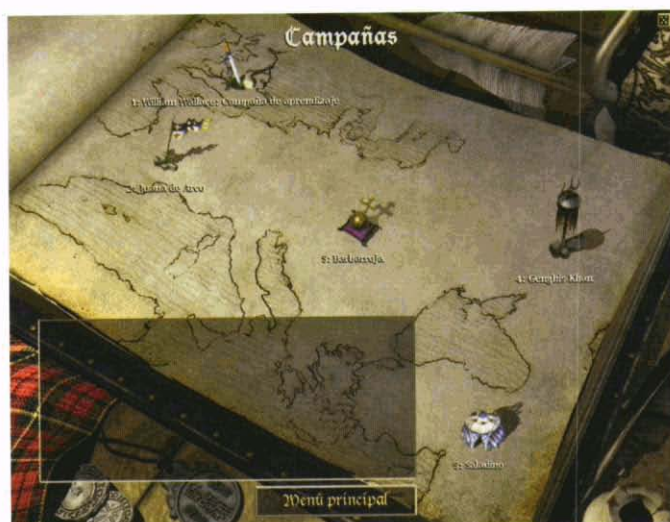
ILLUSTRATION 11. AGE OF EMPIRES II. CAMPAIGNS.

In fact, the tutorial (the interactive medium that "shows" you how to play) shows William Wallace's campaign, and its release coincided with the launch of the film *Braveheart*, starring Mel Gibson, which helped to know the real historical figure. At the beginning of each campaign, a narrator introduces the story, which progresses as the game goes on. However, it is also possible to confront any faction, given the possibility to generate one's own game.
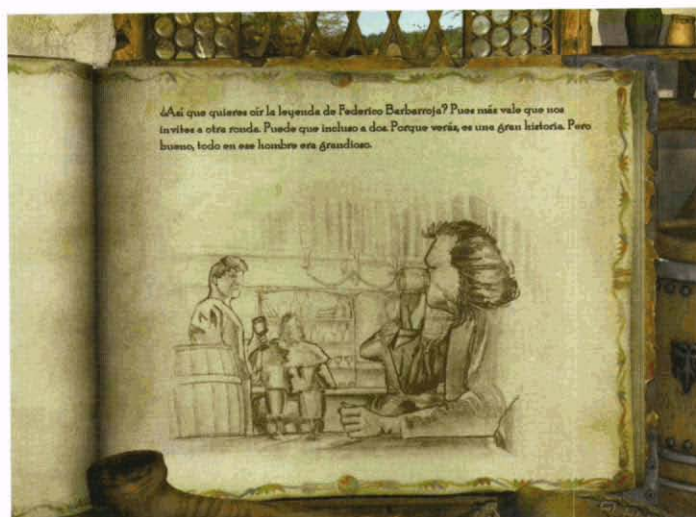

ILLUSTRATION 12. AGE OF EMPIRES II. INTRODUCTION TO THE CAMPAIGN OF FREDERICK I BARBAROSSA.

    What is interesting is "to be able to play at the medieval". There are various systems
of victory, but in the end all boil down to surviving and destroying the enemy (al-
though it is not necessary to exterminate them in any specific way to be able to win).

    The expansion of this videogame, which was released in the following year with
the subtitle of *The Conquerors*, added five more civilisations (two pre-Colombian
ones, the Aztecs and Mayas, and three from the known world, the Spanish, Huns
and Koreans), where they were involved in the medieval decline, and that has
also ended being a formula in the other great game about the Middle Ages, MTW
II, as we shall see below. But in our case of the Spanish context, this expansion
included El Cid's campaign, with his exile, the Almoravid landing and the conquest
of Valencia. Another important innovation was to be able to command historical
battles: Agincourt, Hastings or Tours allowed us to manage the battle as Henry V,
William the Conqueror or Charles Martel. There were also others from the modern
era, such as Lepanto (1571), Kyoto (1582) and Noryang (1598). Under the name
of "Vindlandsaga" one could play the adventure of Erik the Red in lands beyond
Greenland.

    When *Empires: Dawn of the Modern World* was released in 2002 (another RTS game
developed by the team at Stainless Steel Studios, directed by Rick Goodman, the
same as *Empire Earth*), its different factions started in the late medieval period, which
was no surprise, unlike their progress to the contemporary epoch (2nd World War).
The preface of the manual also mentions this. The shadow of *Age of Empires II* was
too long and its success worthy of being reproduced in similar products. However, it
is really linked to the above-mentioned *Empire Earth*, with the significant difference
that the latter begins in the prehistoric period and continues, with the use of science
fiction, into the future. This videogame with its expansions was launched in 2001.
The English faction took much of the lead in the medieval phases, although of
the three that interest us (The Dark Ages, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance),
the first had hardly any appreciable technological progression, the second opened
up many possibilities for the military units and the third, as well as seeing the
disappearance of the phenomenon of *feudalism*, introduced gunpowder. *Empire
Earth I* featured William of Normandy's campaign, and *Empire Earth II* featured the
German campaigns. Apart from this, it had no greater innovations than the specified
ones of global and futurist chronology.

    The contributions of medieval history to *Civilization* are scarce, although, natu-
rally, they do exist, given its character of historical development. This is the most
widespread turn-taking strategy game, with a version for the latest generation of
consoles (*Civilization Revolution*, 2008). It deals with the evolution of humanity from
its origins to the Space Age.

    Highland Warriors (DataBecker, 2002) is in the same style, set in medieval Scot-
land, and has the same style of management, with the collection and construction of
buildings and generation of combat units. As the user's manual states, "The control
of the units in *Highland Warriors* is practically identical to the majority of real-time
strategy games". Nothing new, except the scenario. The game develops over the
four hundred years from the first Scottish monarch, Kenneth MacAlpin, to the early

years of the 14th century with Edward I and Robert the Bruce. This videogame takes a certain licence that is not to the liking of the purists of the historical game, as certain units have magical powers. This is the same defect (or not, depending on what we expect from the game) that we find in another product also by DataBecker, called *Castle Strike*, which was released in 2003. In this and the rest, more of the same.

Prior to these games, although likewise in the real-time strategy genre, a videogame from FX Interactive appeared on the Spanish market that was to have a long life. This was *Tzar* (2000). With a series of games linked to the first one (*Tzar. The Burden of the Crown*), the Bulgarian company Haemimont Games was established to make this product. Its great success was due to its ease of use, handling of the resources and the versatility of the battles. The magic units appeared, but they did so in aspects of the game that allowed the possibility of plausibility and fantasy, thus not interfering excessively with the game if we did not want dragons or wizards loose on the screen. The release of *La Reconquista* (only in Spain and Italy) was an authentic revolution in videogames not only of medieval history, but of the entire history of the Iberian Peninsula, as it meant that for the first time there existed a specific interest in being able to involve oneself in this past. The game had a clear inclination towards the Castilian-Leonese origins, with the development of the Astur nucleus, the conquest of Valencia by El Cid, or the siege of Granada by the Catholic Monarchs, and it became a reference point for those who wanted to play in the Middle Ages south of the Pyrenees. Another three versions of the main game came out subsequently, under the titles of *Excalibur and King Arthur* (where spells have a specific purpose in the game), *Gold edition* (a recompilation, to which the Mongol campaign is added), and *The Dominions of the Magic* (2003), where the fantasy aspect is of greater importance. However, *Age of Empires II* is still the benchmark that leaves all the other games far behind in any comparison.

1998, the year before *Age of Empires II*, saw the release of *Knights and Merchants: The Peasants' Rebellion* (by Joymania Entertainment). This was another real-time strategy game, of administering resources and battles, but had neither the graphic impact nor the players, despite being a good videogame. Its complexity may have been the reason. A version for Linux appeared in 2007.

The saga of *Patrician*, initiated in 1989 as mentioned above, made a recovery with the second game by the same company (Ascaron), to which the subtitle *Power, fortune and victory* was added. Appearing in 2000, it required a large proportion of the resources of those PCs. It continued to simulate the Hanseatic merchant in search of a rise in rank through success in business. When *Patrician III* was launched (in 2003), it was the same game, but much lighter, so that machines handled its execution and development much better. With a user's manual that was unlike the habitual (printed in colour and very informative in Spanish), the videogame contained a brief historical review of the chronological situation in the 13th century and the geographic location in the North and Baltic Seas.

Illustration 13. Hanseatic map of Patrician III. A faldout is included in the box.

The fluctuation in commodity prices, the running of the city, loans, donations, etc., made it a very attractive game (with very interesting graphics) for the medievalist, but also for anyone seeking in this typology a means to control a maritime empire economically. For those who wanted to transfer the system to another similar setting, the company developed *Port Royale* (also in 2003) and *Port Royale 2: Empire and Pirates* (which appeared two years later), set in the Caribbean. They are known in the forums as the "Caribbean cousins" of the original saga, which is very significant and which requires no further comments.

In 2001, the leap of *Europa Universalis* from the tables to the computers through the firm Paradox generated a series that is on its third instalment, and that always starts in the 15th century as a basis for the development of the modern era, which is the real subject of these videogames. For this, the company dreamed up two games more closely centred on the medieval stage. In 2003, *Two Thrones. From Joan of Arc to Richard III* was launched (with the same motor as *Europa Universalis*). This game is set in western Europe, with suggested management and battles (that cannot be personally led), and that fails to impress, having played other games. *Crown of the North* is the same game, but applied to the Nordic monarchies (Paradox is Swedish), and also appeared in the same year. Remaining with the same kind of game and the same development company, we have *Crusader Kings* (2004, with an expansion subtitled *Deus Vult*), which takes on the management and war system (where the latter is not necessarily productive, even if one wins), and which we can see projected in *Europa Universalis III*. The

presence of historical medieval elements is very high, from the territories to the personalities who appear, a fact that is emphasized on both the cover and the back of the inlay.

ILLUSTRATION 14. DETAIL OF THE COVER OF CRUSADER KINGS.

The game stretches from 1066 to 1453, and the innovation compared with previous ones is that the player takes over a dynasty and not a country. It can be started in 1066, 1187 or 1337, three different historical moments, but which end in the year of the fall of Constantinople. An interesting aspect is that the game can be transported and continued in *Europa Universalis II* and prolonged to 1820. This system of game is the most interesting, both for the historical background and its playability. With an interface very similar to *Europa Universalis*, another strategy game that was equally ambitious in its historically accurate approach appeared in 2005. In fact, the back cover specifies the "absolute historical rigor" as one of the strong points offered to the potential consumer. I am referring to *Great Invasions. The Dark Ages. 350-1066 AD* by Indie Games Productions.

ILLUSTRATION 15. GREAT INVASIONS. THE DARK AGES 350-1066 AD. CAMPAIGN OF JUSTINIAN.

The truth is that this is a game that, like *Crusader Kings*, covers a specific time period. The user manual states that "it is a decisive historical age in History that has never before been simulated in a videogame, probably because of its complexity and heterogeneity". These words were written by Philippe Thibaut, the creator of the game, *Pax Romana* and also EU, who always insists on this accuracy. The *engine* is from the above mentioned Roman themed videogame, and in reality there is a great deal of coincidence between all these games, with their format, playability and interface so similar that they can appear to be continuations of *Europa Universalis* and other medieval games mentioned above (*Two Thrones, Crown of the North* and *Crusader Kings*), although it surpasses these in both major and minor historical detail. It is not produed by Paradox, like the former, but this will be of little importance to the non-professional player (that is, the vast majority). The game is very complex to control and play because of the multiplicity of elements and factors, which satisfies the medievalist but can confuse the casual buyer, as it has a PEGI for players older than 3. The most noteworthy for the objectives of this article is the specific interest of the game's creator[54] not to develop a purely entertaining product, but rather one that serves to enrich the player's general culture ("*I am a great fan of strategy games, but also a History addict (see below). I always found that a game should bring you not only fun but also something else to enrich your "culture générale"*

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54. King, Brian. " Europa Universalis: Philipee Thibaut – Interview". *Armchair general.* 13th March 2006. 4th May 2009 <www.armchairgeneral.com/interview-philippe-thibaut.htm>.

as we say in France). So for us, any game that can provide some cultural content in addition to good gameplay is worth a try"). In the case of *Great invasions...*, Philippe Thibaut argued that he was interested in this period as the origin of the world we live in, which leads us to congratulate ourselves as medievalists for the particular interest of these creators which takes formal shape in such notable products as this.

Let us go back four years. In 2001, the same year that *Europa Universalis* appeared, the shelves of the specialized shops were awash with a real-time strategy videogame that contained procedures that already existed in others, such as the obligation to ensure prior elements to obtain resources (for example, have cereal fields and a mill to obtain bread), as in *Knights and Merchants*. It was also to be a landmark, and thus *Stronghold* became one of the best ways of "controlling" the Western Christian Middle Ages on the computer screen. There was a strategy game of the same name from 1993, basically centred on running cities, which had real and fantasy units. From the Firefly studios, what was an authentic "simulator of castles" hit the market from the same team that was also behind the *Caesar* and *Lords of the Realm* games. With an invented story but limited to a plausible level, the player moves through phases corresponding to targets. The most attractive aspect of this game is procuring the productive infrastructure that will allow attack and defence, with a very interesting graphic level. The assaults on the castles are reproduced with gameplay possibilities that are more than acceptable. The second instalment of the saga improves the game (that came out in 2005), with better graphics and more options for entertainment, without ever separating from a plausibility close to what the game calls the "the definitive medieval simulator".

ILLUSTRATION 16. STRONGHOLD 2. OFFICE OF TREASURER.

The truth is that the hopes for a new step in quality were frustrated in the third instalment, as historicity was exchanged for fantasy, a fact that the game's name announced: *Stronghold 3. Legend*. However, a game that appeared in 2002, which took advantage of the momentum of the first part of the saga, came to justify the interest of the medievalist in this title. This was *Stronghold. Crusader*, with the castle simulator now set in the Holy Land. There is another version, with the subtitle *Extreme*, that goes deeper into the possibilities of this Crusader *Stronghold*. The game begins in 1066, where, as a first step, the player must establish the Norman keep that becomes the centre of the castle. Then there is the store (that has to be kept fully stocked, as it is emptied periodically through the consumption by the inhabitants), various kinds of productive places (places for hunting, for woodcutting, plantations with crops ranging from apples to cereals and hops), artisanal industries for both civil and military products (mills, bakeries, taverns, breweries, a bow maker (who is lame), a smith, a tanner...), metal mines, quarries, transport places (one of these is needed, with two oxen that draw carts, taking the stone from the quarry to the store for building walls), houses... These buildings function like units. The interesting thing is that the virtual medieval Europe which it portrays originates from the north, as it is linked to the "Norman" area after William the Conqueror, through Norman towers or beer making, elements far from the wine culture of Mediterranean Europe, until the decline of the medieval period. For the medievalist, it is also a benchmark.

The marketing of *Europa 1400. The Guild* in 2002 made available the first simulator set in the Middle Ages, in other words, it gave the player the possibility of taking on the life of a character who lived in those times at the beginning of the 15th century. With spectacular graphics and novel development of the game, this release culminated in the sequel, *The Guild 2* (2008). This videogame was a melting pot of role, strategy, management and social interaction, whose language problem for non-English speakers was overcome with subtitles. I mention this game in this section instead of in the next to continue the system of mentioning full sagas, although it really belongs to the latest generation of games.

Continuing with the chronological presentation, a game appeared in 2004 that claimed to have the backing of "The History Channel" (a term that I still fail to understand). This was *Crusades. Quest for Power*, whose only interest for the medievalist player was the title. It could have been set in any other time in history without this being noticed, with the exception of the usual range of units (very simple) and expected scenarios. The worst was the degree of expectation that the manual (brief, and it did not need to be longer as the simplicity of the game required no more space) generated after reading the words of Urban II calling the Crusade and the words that mentioned, "the game *Crusades* puts you in command of the armies of the Western European Crusades or the hordes of Infidels from the East, all with deep religious convictions. You will be the one who commands the troops in their campaign to reconquer the Holy Land and recover the stolen sacred relics". An authentic frustration. The conclusion of this episode is the degree of expectation that the player has when waiting for new titles about the Middle Ages.

In the same year, (a truly productive year for games inspired by the medieval period, as we have seen, also the year of *Lords of Realm III*), *Medieval Lords. Build, defend, expand* joined this interesting range. Developed by the French Montecristo Games, the task is to construct and run a city. This type of strategy really has its own section in the videogame catalogue, the *city-builder*. Since the launch of *SimCity*, in which you could plan and build a city on an empty stretch of land, other games have appeared, set in certain historical periods, with such successful titles as the *Caesar* saga or *Pharaoh* (mentioned above). Now it was the turn of the medieval period with *Medieval Lords*. The battles are "accurate", although it is not precisely a game that we would choose for this motive. It is undoubtedly the graphics that make it attractive, apart from the fact that it is the only one of this type available.

Illustration 17. Medieval Lords.

The medievalist who wants a game of these characteristics has an easy choice, but the player who is simply keen on history, will very possibly see the deficiencies in those from other different periods (looking no further than *Caesar IV*). However, I want to emphasise the excellent perspectives and possibilities of a generic medieval stage, without links to any specific moment in the period (nor any specific territory). The manual assumes that the buyers know what they are going to play (from the evidence of the title and the information on the back cover), but there is no reference to the period until well into a passage in the General Presentation ("But be careful, in the Middle Ages the paths were not safe ..."). I fail to understand the reason for this, this being a game produced for enthusiasts of the genre and the Middle Ages.

As if it were a fever, in the same year 2004, Sunflower brought out *Knights of Honor*. The game is entirely in English, with a decent manual in Spanish. It is announced as "the first simulator of imperial conquest", with the game leading towards the final dominion over all Europe. At no time does it mention imperial dominion according to the medieval concept, but confuses this with absolute political control. The synopsis of the videogame does mention three phases coinciding with the traditional high, central and late Middle Ages, but there are some notable slip ups. For example, among the many explanations in the Spanish version, there is the following paragraph, "Vassalage/independence. The kingdoms can be independent or vassals of another kingdom. (...) Being a vassal means paying 50% of the income to the *chief* as permanent tributes". The italics are mine, but the person responsible for the Spanish version clearly mistook the concept. Despite this, the game is very complete and with full management of the resources and units, although the most outstanding aspect is being able to command historical battles, including Lechfeld, Hastings, Hattin, Lake Peipus, Bannockburn or Nicopolis.

However, this wide range of games in the same category could give the impression of belonging to a closed world, dormant and almost sclerotic in a similar vein. Nothing could be further from the truth. After the appearance of *Age of Empires II* and *Europa Universalis*, it seemed that the last word had been said in the strategy genre, both as RTS and TBS, that no novel aspect could surprise. In reality it did not surprise any more, but in equal measure, so that the medievalist had a greater variety available for playing. Similarly, the videoplayer found greater possibilities to approach the Middle Ages. The 2D had reached its limits, and the *Total War* series broke it with 3D tactical combat. It is very possible that since *Dune 2* (1992, futuristic) came out as a game of strategy, *Shogun Total War* (2000) was the most representative innovation.[55] This title introduced a saga of strategy games, with tactical battles in real time, which had a greater impact and hold among the general public. *Total War* was developed by The Creative Assembly, and the fact that its historical rigor is considerable, it has turned into a references for the videoplayer keen on this kind of strategy game. It allows the player to control numerous units (except when they flee), some of which consist of over a hundred soldiers, so we are talking about taking part in a fight with thousands of troops grouped in detachments on the battlefield, also with spectacular graphics. It is not surprising that it has found a place amongst the undisputed favourites.

Feudal Japan is the scenario for Shogun TW, specifically set in the *Sengoku Jidai* period (the European 16th century, with the appearance of the first two Westerners in the country, who also come out as possible combat units armed with arquebuses). The handling of the camera during the battle, the immediacy of response and the intuitive nature of the gameplay mean the meetings are truly enjoyable. A further

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55. Santiago Lamelo Fagilde used these terms in Meristation: Lamelo Fragilde, Santiago. "Lo que pudo haber sido y no fue. Shogun Total War: Mongol Invasion". *Meristation*. 10th October 2001. 5th May 2009 <www.meristation.com/v3/ des_analisis.php?pic=PC&idj=762&idp=&id=1252&otro=1>.

contribution is the technological development of the different territories. The armies are handled like pieces in a great chess set (or a board of *Risk* type territories[56]), whose boxes are the demarcations of the archipelago. The player takes the role of a *daimio* and fights the others with the aim of becoming the *shogun*.

This might be the most original of the *Total War* games, the purest in its saga, but in truth, for the medievalist it is simply the preparation for what was to come. An expansion of the game, *The Mongol Invasion*, came out two years later. At the same time there also appeared on the market one of the references for the *medieval* game. *Medieval Total War* cleaned up on the shelves, so much so that in the same year it was extended with *Viking Invasion*.
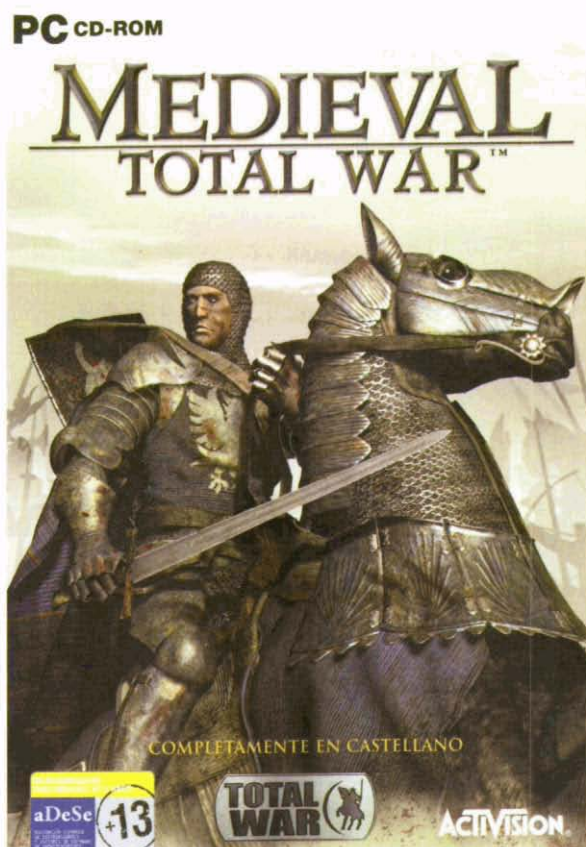

ILLUSTRATION 18. COVER OF *MEDIEVAL TOTAL WAR*.

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56. It has its own homonym videogame for PS2.

MTW took in the medieval world known to the West, including the North African shore of the Mediterranean. It was an enormous qualitative leap over the first of the saga, as the concretion of units and the geography of medieval Japan grew exponentially in MTW to the entire European territory, with which one glimpsed the multitude of units and territories: a medievalist's dream. Christian and Muslim factions strove for control of a series of territories with the same dynamics as the generator of the series. From the 11th to the 15th centuries, you could manage and engage in combat with such historical characters as Joan of Arc or William Wallace. A technological tree perfected the quality of arms, economic progress, generation of tactical combat units, diplomacy, those described as "strategic agents" (emissary, assassin, princess, spy and priests or imams), religion (priests), as well as infrastructure (buildings) that allowed all these advances to strengthen the faction economically and militarily. It must be added that the game does not mislead anyone. It is called *Total War*, and it is a videogame of total war. Fighting is its essence. One could play it without fighting, leaving the AI to resolve the struggle. It would thus become a game of pieces with implications for international politics, where the relations between kingdoms, states or peoples conditioned the development towards the final objective, which was set according to the faction and the conquest of a certain number of territories.

The historical content f the game was very significant, with the definition of specific military units for each faction. Whenever one asked for information about a type of unit, a frame emerged on the right of the interface with all the necessary data. The geographic territorial distribution was narrow, although with generalisations to help playability (as in the division of the Iberian Peninsula). The degree of satisfaction of a territory was very important, as it could lead to rebellion and a loss of control of the area. Of course, good relations with the Papacy were a basic element, an omnipresent factor in any game of medieval strategy worth its salt (as mentioned above for *Castles II*). There were twelve factions, which allowed an impressive variety when playing.

The expansion of *Viking Invasion* concentrated on the British Isles in the late high medieval period and the central Middle Ages, that is, the moment of the Danish invasions. The units were applied to this reality, though which the game was simply a "monograph" of the global videogame.

In 2004, there came a new direction. *Rome: Total War* appeared with a completely new interface and a system of playing that broke with the previous ones. The armies, the units of diplomacy (diplomats or assassins), the economy (merchants), the priests, the ships, etc., moved around the map with total freedom. I mention this videogame because it included an expansion that was set in late Antiquity. This was *Barbarian Invasion* (2005), which came out in DVD format, uniting the expansion and patches to the original game. The units were from the stage where the Christian armies were raising their standards decorated with crosses. The great innovation

was the possibility of fighting at night, when the spectacle of a shower of burning arrows is greatest. There were numerous *mods* for this game, as I mentioned above, with the application of one circumscribed to being an application of a medieval period to the structure of RTW.

But of course, the saga had reached an unparalleled graphic appearance. Battles were a real spectacle, where one could bring the camera so close to the groups fighting that it was possible to see the struggle between individual soldiers, each with his own movement and action in the foreground. However, perspective and distance were needed to control the battle, as in fact, we were the generals, giving orders to detachments, not sword strokes to the enemy.

For this purpose, it was necessary to play the character personally. That means intervening directly, involving oneself in the game. This is the adventure or role-play type. Until now, all the references have been to strategy, either in turns or in real time. It is habitual that all the contents that the medieval videogames can offer are substantiated in the abovementioned strategy, but there is also the possibility of offering a closer perspective, more in line with what the Middle Ages was at a given moment. And this represented an opportunity that was more educational than anything else, with all the leisure content that it could hold.

Paris 1313 (which appeared in 2000) was another landmark amongst the games set in the Middle Ages. In the adventure genre, we find ourselves the year before the death of Phillip IV the Fair involved in a series of adventures arising after the unfortunate accident to the goldsmith, Adam of Douai, a fictional character, but where William of Nogaret, a character who we know was real, also appears. The history is the best aspect of the game, visiting the streets of Paris, with the façade of Notre-Dame painted in bright colours, as it was then (or as we believe it would have been). It has had the assessment of the *Musée National du Moyen Âge* in Paris and is the type of game that is excellent for educational uses.[57]

However, the game-shop shelves already held a game that allowed the player to take on the personality of any of the characters and, thus, that of a historical character, and it had been designed in this way. This was the moment for *Wars & Warriors: Joan of Arc* (by Enlight, in 2004). In the first phases the leading role was for the French heroine, and the possibility of taking over some of her captains, such as Jean de Metz.

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57. Grup F9: Videojocs a l'aula. "Paris 1313. Trasládate a vivir en el siglo XIII". *Videojocs a l'Aula F9*. 179, 2002. Departament d'Educació de la Generalitat de Catalunya. 5th May 2009 <www.xtec.cat/~abernat/propuestas/paris1313.pdf>.

ILLUSTRATION 19. *JOAN OF ARC*. DETAIL.

Then, in the fifth phase, the possibility of playing in strategy mode was left up to the player, although the predominance was for action. This mixture of strategic and adventure game was not as widely accepted as expected, but it was an interesting sideline justified by the appearance of a game on the same subject for PSP, an RPG with graphics more closely linked to the Japanese interface including the pertinent monsters.

3.2.2.2. ...a Medieval Total War II: Kingdoms

The truth is that the new twist imposed by *Rome: Total War* left the doors open for what appeared two years later. The second version of the game in the medieval period signified another landmark. It placed the strategy game on the next level up, as George Fidler, manager of The Creative Assembly studio said.[58] *Medieval Total War II* is, to date, the game that has offered most information about the medieval period. It followed the playability system of RTW, where the armies, strategic units and ships moved on the "screen board" responding to our wishes. Each territory was defined by lineal frontiers that only responded to the capitality of a more or less important city. The investments that the player had to make in each place directly affected the quality of the combat units and the conditions in which the nucleus develops (religious contentment, the economic situation, citizen security, etc.). And the control of expenses and income (through a responsible management of taxes) became a fundamental factor for the progress of a faction.

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58. Declarations on the making of the game, included as a DVD in the Collector's edition of *Medieval Total War II*, marketed by Sega Europa in 2007.

The graphics are impressive so we now have possibilities that impress the non-initiated and amaze the more habitual player.
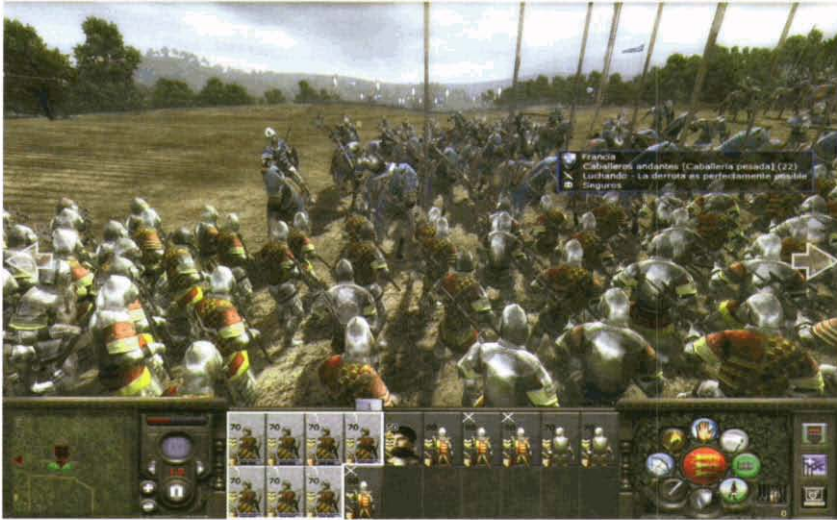

ILLUSTRATION 20. FIRST FRENCH CAVALRY CHARGE IN AZINCOURT. MEDIEVAL TOTAL WAR II. DETAIL.

It is so spectacular that we cannot argue that it is a first order medium for approaching the Middle Ages for anyone, although only to observe the progress of a battle. The complexity of the technological tree is high, although there are certain infrastructures that are taken out of context, which is surprising for a game with a lot of historical accuracy. For example, in the Spanish faction, there is a bullring to award happiness to the inhabitants, when this building really dates from the 18th century. The definition of the factions is also somewhat generalised in this game, as the term "Spanish" includes all the peninsular kingdoms of the actual Kingdom of Spain, which did not occur in the first edition of MTW, where Aragon and Navarre appeared independently. In contrast, Portugal has always appeared separate, as an autonomous faction. The interest to stay as close as possible to the facts has necessitated the use of assessment for the Islamic area (Aksaa Ltd. Management and Training Consultants), a circumstance that is also mentioned in the user's manual. The religious aspect is very important in the game. As for the Christian part, relations with the Papacy define the good state of the diplomacy with the other Catholic factions. In fact, excommunication leads to a generalised worsening of relations with these factions. Instead of being sustained by a lineage like the rest, the Holy See possesses a College of Cardinals that replaces the popes who die. Also each member of this corps is ascribed to a nation, so that the animosity of some pontiff is guaranteed if we control a specific faction and depends on how bad (or good) his relations are with this faction.

The system of faction leaders, where the generals are linked to the royal family, is very interesting, as each character will have personal features that will render them able or unable to undertake certain actions, as well as behaviour that can skirt rebellion (or who revolts, declares himself rebel and raises an army that interrupts the economic dynamics wherever it is, and who has to be defeated in a punitive battle). The machinery of war, which in *Age of Empires II* had its own combat dynamic, in MTW, like in all the series, is spectacular in its dynamic during the struggle by units of footsoldiers. The firing of trebuchets, the use of battering rams, catapults, ribauldequins, mangonels and even the shots from the earliest gunpowder artefacts are a real pleasure for the medievalist videoplayer. The assaults on fortifications are a spectacle of their own, more so if it is the player who has designed the combat tactic: the rupture of walls, a battering ram attacking the gate, boiling oil being poured from the machicolations above it... The buildings are not cloned, but each has its own appearance and together they make up the nucleus. This characteristic is completed by the damage inflicted on these infrastructures by the impact of cannon balls or artillery bombs, which is very tangible and realistic. All this is accompanied by a sound track and effects that give the product a quality that the medievalist will thoroughly enjoy. For those who are not specialists, they will surely want to find out more about the period. You do not need to imagine how the siege engines worked: you see it with what I insist are impressive graphics. There is nothing comparable to observing a heavy cavalry charge with the camera at ground level.

The historical battles are exciting, as you can participate in the assault on Setenil, the clashes at Pavia, Agincourt, Arsuf, Hastings (the battle chosen for the tutorial), Tannenberg and Otumba.

In the various turns, information appears that is well placed, chronologically speaking.

ILLUSTRATION 21. INFORMATION ABOUT THE BLACK DEATH IN MEDIEVAL TOTAL WAR II. KINGDOMS. CRUSADES.

Around 1348, a dialogue box emerges that states that there is an epidemic of a disease devastating Europe, and from then on, there are few moments when some of the cities controlled are not infected (which has to be responded to with a quarantine). This type of information is very common in the expansion of *Kingdoms*, so for example, the *MTW II Crusades* campaign has the Venetian intervention in 1204, the Mongol invasion from the east in the mid 13th century, or the rise of Osman as the leader who formalised the future Ottoman empire.

Once the game had been transferred to a format for mobile phone terminals, the second medieval instalment of *Total War*, with a multiple expansion, was completed in 2007, which is really a single DVD with four monographic games. *Medieval Total II: Kingdoms* is built around a campaign set during the Crusades (starting in 1174, with the Leper King), another in mid-13th century England (beginning in 1258, with Henry III on the throne), a third with the Teutonic Order, concentrated on the northern European sector, and the fourth, which represents the greatest innovation of the edition, incorporating the first European incursions into the Caribbean and continental Central America. The product met the expectations and continued perfectly with the quality of the game-base ("vanilla game" as the *gamers* define it in some forums).

There is an element missing in the game, and that is that the naval battle is not controlled, being resolved by the AI. This factor has been corrected by the creators in the latest instalment of the saga, *Empire Total War*, set in the 18th century. We wait with anticipation for the Australian developers to continue with the medieval saga, and for a third title to appear with the maritime combats situated at the same level as the land battles (or an aspiration to this).

Among this generation of games, centred on MTW II, the latest innovations of a typology of game that is linked to strategy must also be reviewed. One of these is *Crusaders. Thy Kingdom come* (2008) developed by Neocore. It is also a RTS in 3D, and the graphics are excellent. It is basically a series of meetings, with the battle as a basis of the videogame, and the handling of resources is restricted to money. Comparisons are always hateful, but if we are looking for a medieval simulation, this game does not offer many possibilities apart from the combats. This is an aspect that has to be emphasised, as the climatology, the terrain or the tiredness of the units, etc., have a direct impact on the response of the game and its final result. It has the recommendation of *The History Channel*, which, as we have seen, was not an element of sufficient guarantee in the context of *Crusades*, but which ends up being an important catchword for the consumer. It is magnificent to note the importance that the medievalist gives to rigor in these games.

A similar game is *XIII Century. Death or Glory* (that replaced *XIII Century: Sword & Honor*), by the Russian 1C Company (now 1C Avalon) and Unicorn Games, which also appeared in 2008. In this game, the videoplayer has the opportunity to fight in some thirty historical battles by five nations (English, French, imperial German, Russians and Mongols), with a last option of being able to fight in Stirling, Worringen, Campaldino and the Navas de Tolosa. All these are set in

the century that changed Europe and gives the product its title. Among others, there are various well-known battles, such as Evesham, Falkirk, Lewes, Muret, Taillebourg, Bouvines, Marchfeld, Cortenuova or Lake Peipus. These combats are already envisaged by the AI of the programme and leave the tactical question in the player's hands. There is no greater approach. The cover of the game defines it as "historical strategy" as a general qualification, but no game has any greater historical concretion than this. The most interesting is the opening of Slav Medieval History to the western medievalist, with clashes unknown to the vast majority of players (including a good part of the medievalists, more familiar with western medieval history). I mentioned that this distance has an indisputable attraction, and, although some players might not care about fighting in Rakovor or the Middle East, for the medievalist it means an approach to these Middle Ages, so distant, unknown and important for European history through the later formation of the various Slavonic nations. The introductions at the beginning of each clash are good prologues to involve oneself in this history, even more so when the conditions that lead to the battle are adequately presented but the result is nowhere announced.

ILLUSTRATION 22. XIII CENTURY. DEATH OR GLORY. DETAIL OF ALEXANDER OF NOVGOROD CAVALRY. PRELIMINAIRES OF THE BATTLE OF LAKE PEIPUS.

These games of strategy have never hidden other possibilities. Moreover, situated at the same level of diffusion, although not of informative quality for the Middle Ages, *Assassin's Creed* competes on the same level as *Medieval Total War II* among the "back of the wardrobe" of the medievalist player, not to mention the generic aficionado of games with historical settings. The qualitative leap that comes from the spread of the high definition technology (HD) to the world of the consoles has broadened the possibilities of playing in the field of role and adventure.

Ahead of any other videogame is the above-mentioned game, starring one of the fictional characters that has gone from the console and the computer to the world of marketing, with fan clubs and followers on all continents. Altaïr, a member of the Islamic sect of the assassins, has been, since 2007, the principal virtual actor of *Assassin's Creed*.

ILUSTRATION 23. ASSASSIN'S CREED. DETAIL OF THE VIDEO PRESENTATION.

With the players aware of the great contribution that science fiction has made to the script, the developers decided to indicate the beginning of the game with a very visible note on the screen, "based on historical events and characters". This plausibility in games of historical character has always been sought after, but has grown in recent years. In this case, the criticism of the product made in *Meristation.com* is that the degradation of the protagonist produces a reduction of arms and physical powers, as if he had lost agility and mastery for certain actions with the loss of confidence by the sect. This is said about a game that bases its script on mental translation through a machine (*Animus*) to recover the genetic memory of an ancestor of the star who lives today. However, since the script is about an assassin who seeks the lesser evil through crimes that can

mitigate greater killings, the developers use political correctness to fit into the market without creating problems: "This work of fiction has been designed, developed and produced by a multicultural team of different religious beliefs" (introduction screen).

From the same epoch, although launched shortly after, is *Bladestorm. The Hundred Years' War*, by Koei, also mentioned in previous chapters. Integrally designed for the latest generation graphic console (PS3 and Xbox), it is an action and *beat'em up* game where you can handle a series of mercenaries, obviously choosing the English or French sides, but mixed with some strategy and tactics to handle the groups during battle. In combat, it is very similar to *Wars & Warriors: Joan of Arc*, although only for the hand to hand fighting. But the script is different, and is open to the progression of the game, so that it is in the new system of videogames with an emerging narrative (or aspiring to this). The interface chosen is a mixture of purely medieval elements with manga iconography, such as King Edward, the Black Prince, Jean of Metz or Queen Phillipa, as mentioned above.

The last game that I wish to present is *Mount and Blade*. This is an RPG that was launched recently (March 2009) by the firm Paradox for PC. It is simply magnificent at showing a notion of medieval life. If you want to personalise a simulation of the Middle Ages, this is your game. The possibility of creating our own biography is the defining characteristic of this genre. With a wide range of options, such as your father being an impoverished noble, a veteran warrior, a travelling merchant, a hunter, a nomad of the steppe or a thief, or that your childhood was spent as a page in the court of a noble, or as a shop assistant, etc., the personality of the protagonist is configured at the start of the game, the player being able to transform the virtual image of himself with very full physiognomic details.

ILLUSTRATION 24. *MOUNT & BLADE*. RIDDING AROUND ONE VILLAGE.

It continues with the adolescence and presence or absence of education, and it ends with a personal summons that is supposedly the starting point for the development of the game: for personal vengeance, for the loss of a loved one, for an urge to explore, desires for power… to end with a challenging "Take the bit between your teeth; ride towards Calradia". The videogame is a simulator of medieval life, where the vital and temporal context is important (the game begins on the 23rd of March 1257, in the mid-13th century), but not the geographic context. This occurs also on other occasions, but never as obviously as in this case. Calradia is a fictitious territory, but one which might be set in any landscape of the western coasts of France, Britain or Germany. In fact, the cities, the robbers, the buildings… everyone has their own image of those lands in those times. It is an incitement to live the Middle Ages in the first person, through which it achieves enormous playability.

The latter have all been titles which have initiated an unquestionable process, generating the specific interest that the games on medieval themes have among the potential user of this product. We learn immediately that there is a new version of *Assassin's Creed*, as the second game of a saga, which on this occasion puts the leading character, Desmond Miles, in the skin of one of his ancestors, Ezio, in the cities of northern Renaissance Italy. The images that we can enjoy are even more spectacular than those of the first instalment, with those Tuscan streets and squares as the scenario recreated in the style of the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th.[59] In the same way, and also from Ubisoft, another commercial strategy game has been launched to extend the *Anno* saga, corresponding on this occasion to *Anno 1404*, set in the Orient.

4. Conclusions

It is evident that the young player's interest in the Middle Ages is marked by the use of videogames with a historical backdrop, or directly by the clear presentation of the medieval past. In some cases, teaching experiments are already being carried out, backed by some specific pedagogic studies,[60] which aim to exploit the vast educational possibilities of the contents of videogames. This was not one of the targets of this study, but there is no doubt that this can be the research line for the next study. In the same way, and as a more interesting (or important) reflection, I wish to draw together various notes and thoughts drafted during the writing of this article, such as that of the phenomenon of historical simulation and its manipulation, as well as the factor of historical simulation and the importance that this might

59. The game's home page. Ubisoft Entertainment. *Assasin's Creed 2*. 21st April 2009 <http://assassin-screed.es.ubi.com/assassins-creed-2/teaser>.

60. Gálvez de la Cuesta, María del Carmen. "Aplicaciones de los videojuegos de contenido histórico en la aula". *Icono 14*. 2006. Asociación científica de las NNTT de la Educación- 6th May 2009 <http://www.icono14.net/revista/num7/articulos/carmen%20galvez.pdf>.

have for real knowledge of the past, supposing that the concept of ucrony has to be present at all times.

This article has arisen from the record of a snapshot taken in early 2009, with the certainty that in a few years it will have to be updated with new titles and technological applications. We have only been able to glimpse a small number of their possibilities for playing, learning and sociability. The latest generation consoles will stop being thus, and the presumed decline of the PC as a games platform is not so certain when the giant Electronics Arts is firmly betting on this medium.[61]

I have presented the complex reality of the universe of videogames, insisting on the importance of their concept, as well as the developments of the elements that constitute them, including the hardware and software in their different facets (models, technology, markets, companies, distributors, developers, etc.), always linked to the impact of the use of a means (a specific one, for example) and its location in the mercantile space on the possibilities of playing one product or another. Videogames with a historical background have become one of the pillars of this market, especially those inspired in the medieval period, both in terms of the fantasy aspect and in terms of those ruled by more historical realism. The technology used has been a determining factor since the earliest times of the videogame, especially because the spectacular nature of the graphics has increased, and this has heavily influenced the attraction that medieval scenarios have had on potential players. These people, whether or not they have any training or knowledge about the period, or simply have some ideas about the Middle Ages, are classified in a range of categories defined by the objective that a game of these characteristics aims to meet; from the specialist to the amateur in medieval matters, the range of people who enjoy these games is very wide. A reality that is changing is that the videoplayer is young (adolescent), both because the use of these games has extended as a leisure activity among older generations and because with the passing of time, the players will keep playing while they grow older. This will mean that among those young people who created a fabric of medieval contents, which were once forged as aprioristic concepts, some will reach university classrooms with a set of knowledge derived from the videogames they have played. Thus the quantity and quality of the media they have played with and the titles they have had access to will become something definitive. For the specialist who faces this reality in a classroom, it will be a challenge to have students with these characteristics, constituting as they do an ever-larger group.

A journey through the evolution of the videogame inspired in the medieval period completes this study. The development from the first products, simple from our perspective in 2009, to the most recent, has perfected the contents presented to the player. The quality of the game as such has not been the subject of my study, as each person can be drawn by a different aspect, so the valuation I have sometimes

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61. According to declarations by Eric Brown, director of EA: "The PC is becoming the most widely used platform", with the support and open bid for and the production of videogames for computers.
García, Enrique. "Pc se está convirtiendo en la plataforma más extendida". *Meristation: Noticias*. 6th May 2009. 6th May 2009 <www.meristation.com/v3/des_noticia.php?id=cw4a0149d262d9b&pic=GEN>.

included about one title or another (in one sense or another) has had more to do with the perspective of the medievalist, although the medievalist videoplayer. The value judgements that I have inserted at specific moments have had more to do with the defence of a criterion about what I consider interesting, or what can be interesting, than with what the player finds on using a videogame about the Middle Ages, because in the end they will extract an image and a series of concepts. With the premise that a game has to be attractive and entertaining, the quality of the medieval content must be balanced by the leisure aspect, which will help to favour the value of the product and the results the players obtain from using it. In the same way as this imaginarium of the medieval and the number of stereotypes can be a good starting point for a deeper knowledge of this historical period,[62] the videogame is becoming a leading element for this, much better even than the cinematographic resource.

The importance of videogames has never ceased to grow since their invention, with the applications continuously surprising users and observers. I hope that the superficial review of hardware and software has served as an approximate idea of the current reality to frame this universe of the videogame and the Middle Ages. The importance of the titles linked to the medieval past or using its stereotypes as a necessary (even essential) iconography has been the undercurrent of this study, with the hope of having generated among the neophytes an approach to this new world, ever closer through the simple fact that the videogame is occupying spaces in everyday leisure. As university teachers, we must clearly understand that our new students' concept of the medieval period, in the European system of convergence for higher studies, will not be generated by the cinema as it has been until now, but rather by the videogame. The evidence is overwhelming. To deny it is to close one's eyes not only to the future, but rather a very live and dynamic present.

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62. Senatore, Francesco. *Medioevo: istruzioni per l'uso*. Milán: Bruno Mondadori, 2008: 16.