

THE OTHER POSSIBLE PAST: SIMULATION OF THE MIDDLE AGES IN VIDEOGAMES

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SUMMARY

The videogame phenomenon is marking our current and future the perception of the medieval past. The simulated setting, the contents this requires and the possibility of manipulating the past are the elements needed to generate entertainment set in the Middle Ages. What is important is that among future generations, this will condition the image of these centuries and their cultural background, both as the origin of most European nationalities and the polarised values of barbarity and refinement¹.

KEY WORDS

Videogames, virtual simulation, Medievo, manipulation.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Ludus per visum, Simulationes, Medium Aevum, Confectio.

1. This work has been carried out as part of the research project "Historia y videojuegos: el impacto de los nuevos medios de ocio sobre el conocimiento del pasado medieval" (HAR2011-25548) funded by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness of the Government of Spain.

In a recent work,² I reviewed videogames related to what we nowadays understand as the Middle Ages: the phenomenon as a leisure activity, its development, the conditioning factors, the elements that make it up, its market and the evolution of the games to date. However, a further step was needed into what the world of the videogame really means for to the perception of the Middle Ages and, especially, what it represents, as it allows two basic responses: control of the past and simulation of what this medieval past could, or might have been. If we add the possibilities of the contents offered by the game script, apart from the historical sequence itself, an enormous balcony opens up for the medievalist to look down from (or to throw oneself off, depending on the *a priori* attitude to this new medium) to obtain a view of the Medioevo.

The title of this study is based on one of the most interesting characteristics videogames can generate. Not only a possible past, that can be altered virtually, but even the *divine and omnipotent* position from which the player (including all categories of videoplayer) has the opportunity (the power) to do anything in this virtual setting: from managing worlds to planning the life and the death of the characters.³ In fact, the common denominator is manipulating (in the literal sense of handling) something until now impossible, namely time and events that have already happened, taken as events with a beginning and an end. For example, the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa took place in 1212 in the Iberian Peninsula and was won by the Christians.⁴ Up to here, fine. The videogame gives us the possibility to alter this *fact*, with the Almohad sultan managing to win the battle. This is one of the battles that can be played in *XIII Century: Death or Glory*. This is the novelty. One plays at supposing, as we have always

2. Jiménez, Juan Francisco. "Videojuego y Edad Media". *Imago Temporis*, 3 (2009): 548-585.

3. There is a role game titled *Hard to be a God*, developed by Akella and Burut Entertainment and based on the novel of the same name by the brothers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (*Qué difícil es ser Dios*, published by Acervo, Barcelona, 1975, and that can be consulted in PDF format on this link, 25 January 2010 <www.librosgratisweb.com/html/strugatski/que-dificil-es-ser-dios/index.htm>, clearly inspired by an indisputably medieval iconography. In fact, it is set in an imaginary kingdom, Arkanar, whose inhabitants "are now in the Middle Ages, and are closely watched by much more technologically advanced entities, but who are prohibited from intervening in their history", until the protagonist does so (Sañudo Díaz, José Antonio. "Delirios de grandeza". *Meristation*. 4 February 2008. 25 January 2010 <www.meristation.com/v3/todosobre.php?pic=PC&idj=cw41af9b1645cdf>. It takes place in the decades after the Russian science fiction novel (Soviet to be more precise). It is very interesting that credits of the game (instruction manual) thank the brothers for their collaboration. They also mention the names of those who wrote the script of the videogame. It is becoming ever more common to mention these collaborators who are so important for the development of these titles. This game is one of the best examples of the fusion between literature and the videogame, as it breaks down the barrier of prose and its dialogues in benefit of what we would do in a similar situation. Another title also linked to a literary work, is *The Abbey* (a graphic adventure developed by Alcachofa Soft, 2008), whose reference is clearly *The Name of the Rose*, by Umberto Eco. And of course, there are others inspired in the epic literature (*Beowulf*, by Ubisoft, 2007) or those literally guided by a specific medieval work, like *The Divine Comedy (Dante's Inferno)*, EA and Visceral Games, 2010).

4. The work by García Fitz, Francisco. *Las Navas de Tolosa*. Barcelona: Ariel, 2005 is the basic text about this battle. It is also highly recommendable for anyone interested in tactical battle videogames.



done. However, what this medium proposes is the contingency not to suppose anything, but rather to *see* and *provoke it*. What we have done is to change the event intrinsically. We play at being gods.⁵



ILLUSTRATION 1. *HARD TO BE A GOD*. COVER OF THE USER MANUAL.

The simulation, re-creation and recreation, and the desire to execute these actions is the basis of this research, to which I would add the enormous contribution of these contents to a simulator effect with the greatest guarantees and credibility, and in last place, present the reasons that lead a player to want

5. A well-known strategy game, *Spore*, by Will Wright, the developer of *The Sims* (the simulation game *par excellence*), is based on the (literal) creation of a world, with the process of evolution included, which goes from the single-cell stage to the space age, passing through the various possible civilisations (Creature, Tribal —the most *medieval*—, Civilization and Spatial). A greater degree of godliness as a player is hard to imagine.



to play *at the Middle Ages*, their aims and what they hope to achieve, with all the ingredients referred to.

Three timely warnings. The first is that all the illustrations are from screen captures, the covers of user manuals or the games themselves. The second is that all the URLs were checked at the end of this study, but these may change. The third is that with to compliment the many and varied themes that arose, I have seen fit to add footnotes with the state of the subjects, such as the time factor in the Middle Ages, women, theories about feudalism, and many more, which the reader will find as he or she reads on. This work has been designed as an exercise to present what the videogame universe means for historical science and the medievalist in particular, an authentic challenge marked by a future that is already present.

1. The contents of Medieval History: credibility, veracity and information

We are in a new field, with no defined horizons or solid ground. It is not a question of everything still to do, but rather a lack of specific academic rules. What has already been done and what we will have to see in the near future will set guidelines about what historians (and philologists, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, etc, in short, all the disciplines of knowledge) will do, some as educators, others simply as members of a cultural community that accepts the videogame as another leisure medium with importance for forming and expressing individual and collective culture. The limits in the short term are only set by the technology, tastes and trends, and even the general tendency towards rescuing the medieval past (or learning about it). Thus, it is essential to start from the basic idea that the videogame is a manifestation of cultural leisure in full growth, as shown in the latest report by the Asociación Española de Distribuidores y Editores de Software de Entretenimiento, published in November 2009.⁶ As well as machines aimed directly at the videogame, such as the consoles by the likes of Sony and Nintendo, the development and spread of the home *computer* is the key to this growth, a process that is far from reaching its peak.

Having a PC at home implies owning a machine that lets us play. Most of the games with historical contents are strategy, either in real time (RTS) or by turns (TBS), and despite their intrinsic relations with other types of game, such role, action or simulation games, these have become more widely used for PC than for consoles. In recent times, this market has evolved, as the majority of titles are now designed expressly for this format and simply cannot be played on any

6. *Usos y hábitos de los videojugadores españoles 2009*. November 2009. Asociación Española de Distribuidores y Editores de Software de Entretenimiento. 15 January 2010 <www.adese.es/pdf/PPThabitoshabitos122009.pdf>.



other platform. They have failed to find a slot among the players, and examples like *Civilization Revolution* (for PS3, Xbox 360 and a tactile version for iPhone), have remained on the shelves. This is important when someone wants to play something, first they seek the means to do so and, in second place, worry about how to do it. Another factor is different when in different age groups.

The preferences for the subject of a game are certainly random and highly influentiable for various reasons. These include the distribution channel, the machine the game can be played on (type of console, PC and its requirements, etc.), the graphics, but especially, a preference for certain types of content and game. The above-mentioned *aDeSe* report indicates that the most important factor when choosing a game is the history and the story, more than the price or speed of play. This is very significant, because this was in second place in the 2006 report, while it did not appear in 2004.

The reasons why someone decides for a game set or inspired in the Medioevo is equally diverse, but of enormous importance. They include sociability (a well-known game), particular sensitivity (taste for Middle Age iconography) or interest in history. Many factors can influence players when choosing a title that will take them, through the screen, to the streets of Acre at the end of the 12th century (*Assassin's Creed*), or to stand in for Alexander Nevski on the battlefield (and commanding the hosts) in the frozen settings of Lake Peipus (*XIII Century: Death or glory*), but all come together in the period the game is set in. It is not a passive context, but rather a highly active one that the player expressly seeks.



ILLUSTRATION 2. ALTAÏR AT THE GATES OF DAMASCUS. *ASSASSIN'S CREED*.





ILLUSTRATION 3. CHARGE OF THE TEUTONIC CAVALRY AGAINST THE VANGUARD OF ALEXANDER NEVSKI. BATTLE OF LAKE PEIPUS. *XIII CENTURY: DEATH OR GLORY*.

We can decide to play at building medieval towns instead of Roman ones with *Medieval Lords* or *Anno 1404*, although it is possible that our taste for the merely historical turns us into consumers of a very common game widely used for both its spectacular graphics (a basic element when dealing with videogames) and its simple distribution, such as *Imperium Civitas III*, with its continuation in the on-line version. The difficulty in this example will be to discern the reason for this preference.



ILLUSTRATION 4. VIEW OF A PORT CITY. *ANNO 1404*.



Without going into the choice between Rome or the Medievo, I consider that the decision to opt for a game that has either the plausibility or fantasy as the basic script is more important. These are the two aspects that support strategy games. Leaving the analysis and study of games in magical universes clearly inspired by a medieval interface (or what we identify as such: knights, large swords, catapults, castles, etc.), for a future occasion, the principal aim of this study is to link the plausibility and veracity of the game to the most successful virtual simulation.

2. The setting

There is no period that generates as much collective imagination as medieval times. Even the Roman past is anchored by very rational directives and marked by the classicism of our cultural roots, sieved by the contribution of the Renaissance and the 18th century. The Medievo always represents the intangible and the most irrational human beliefs and behaviour. Witchcraft, magic, brutality, chivalrous love (the knight and the lady), the fantasy of architecture either imaginary (castles in ruins completed in the minds of 19th-century people and, thus, in ours, men and women of the 21st) or not (splendid fortresses that dominated the European landscape), arms as signs of dignity (long swords), heraldry and genealogy as an attraction *per se*; the perception of social category and behaviour (a *feudal lord* nowadays has a very clearly defined collective image, regardless of reality, as does a *vassal*). Even the gastronomy has a place in this universe (a *medieval supper* is associated with unbridled gluttony). All this contributes to the videogame being one of the clearest ways of bringing all these concepts together; and this is where the plausibility or fantasies of the games set in the Medievo come into play. The danger is undoubtedly that without any other criterion than one's own opinion, and lacking any other guidance, false images or events end up becoming true in each player's mind (the ucronic slip-ups). That is why the contribution of specific contents to each videogame is so important, as the clarifying these can help to a gloss over the anachronic additions (in the least bad cases) that the developer or scriptwriter adds to increase playability, understanding this neologism (widely used in the videogame universe from the 1980s onwards, now understood as a technical term) as the possibilities of enjoying the quality of the game and the versatility of its rules with the aim of leisure.

The specific relation that this established iconography (consolidated by the historical novel and the cinema) has with videogames "is linked to the symbolic and the imaginary", as it shows a corpus built from images shown as symbols, "and that moreover, can represent something else that is denominated the radical imaginary, which is what constitutes the subject in its singularity and is the part that aims to gratify unconsciously". This process is due to each society generating a profile of the world it inhabits, applying it to the objects and beings that interest or affect



collective life, influenced by the media and the ambience.⁷ The true challenge is to know the impact this cultural phenomenon will have on this collective imagination. To date, and in certain cases, the emphasis is on what already existed, gestated in turn in Hollywood studios, such as the example of Robin Hood. The still of Errol Flynn from *The Adventures of Robin Hood* 1938,⁸ no longer appears on the covers of videogames, but is updated with other models, such as Kevin Costner in *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves* for the game *Robin Hood. Defender of the Crown* (for PS2, by Cinemaware, 2003), or the curious case (the videogame having appeared before the film) of Russell Crow in *Robin Hood*, with an interesting similarity to the cover of the recent homonymous title by FX Interactive (2009).

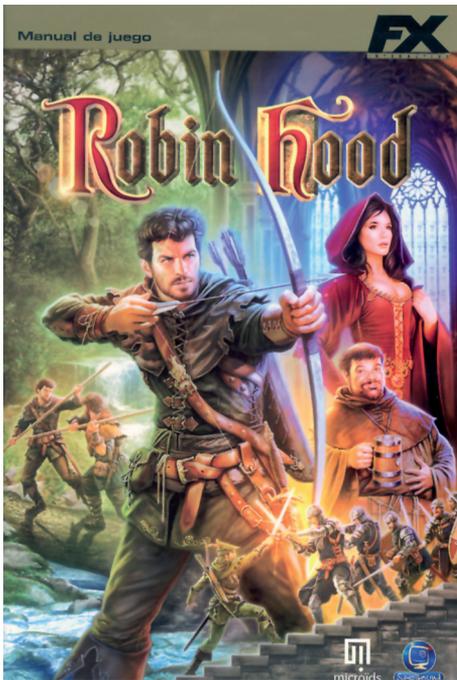


ILLUSTRATION 5. COVER OF THE GAME *ROBIN HOOD*, BY FX.

7. Huertero Guillermo A. "Videojuegos políticos: una forma diferente de entender la política". *Razón y palabra*, 58 (2007). 19 January 2010 <www.cem.itesm.mx/dacs/publicaciones/logos/actual/ghuertero.pdf>.

We can also see it in *Textos de la CiberSociety*, 12 (2008). 19 January 2010 <www.cibersociety.net/textos/articulo.php?art=141>.

8. A very interesting study into North American cinema set in the Middle Ages by Barrio, José Antonio. "The Middle Ages in USA cinema". *Imago Temporis*, 2 (2008): 229-260.



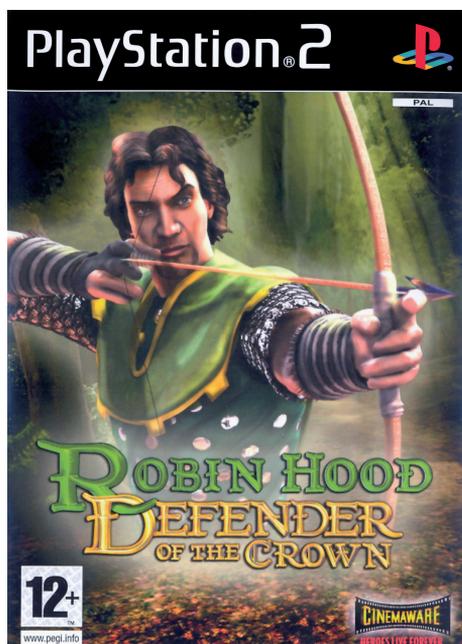


ILLUSTRATION 6. COVER OF THE GAME *ROBIN HOOD. DEFENDER OF THE CROWN*.

Others, in contrast, are truly new, despite being rooted in a historical analysis designed to generate plausibility. These are the characters Altaïr and Ezio (to mention some with a media impact beyond the universe of the videogame, in *Assassin's Creed* and *Assassin's Creed II* respectively).

Parallel to the image of the game, this interface, what we see and hear (fundamental in both cases as basic elements of the system of interactive communication between the machine, game and player), the contents of the period we want to immerse (or develop) ourselves in are inherent to a specific game. In other words, the more players know about the circumstances and context, and the factors and elements that gave the medieval period its character, the easier it will be to enjoy their time in front of the screen. Moreover, even when they are not in front of the screen, their experiences serve as elements of sociability. The fact that the relations between players (and there are more and more) can even refer to passages or deeds by their characters (for example the above mentioned Altaïr or Ezio), means that the game is going beyond the player's physical presence at the controls of the console or PC. One of the first comments that any player would make about these two games would undoubtedly be the exceptional ambience achieved, with high-definition graphics that do not take you to an urban landscape of any specific medieval century, but that "show" it to you cinematographically. In this sense, there is no need to imagine anything,



given that you are seeing it. The al-Aqsa mosque or the cathedral de Santa María del Fiore are active postcards, not mere references.



ILLUSTRATION 7. ALTAÏR NEAR THE DOME OF THE ROCK IN JERUSALEM. *ASSASSIN'S CREED*.



ILLUSTRATION 8. EZIO AND THE DOME OF SANTA MARÍA DEL FIORE. FLORENCE. *ASSASSIN'S CREED II*.

There are two clear variables for the atmosphere. On one hand, the communication system used, where the technological resources (and their power) allow the player to be an active and defining element, and on the other, greater visualization of the spatial framework and, with greater precision and graphic perfection, increasing integration between game and player. This is what they seek and what is intended. We are far from those times when moving a pair of pixels excited anyone. Technological progress has simultaneously generated the development of the videogame as cultural patrimony.⁹ The consumer-player seeks and aims for two things: to have fun (playability, which we will study below) and quality. This degree of identification is to a great extent achieved through the scenarios, and the more realistic, the better (as I write this, 3D playing is starting to spread). But it is not only the image that is fundamental, but also that the sound effects and music go hand in hand with what appears on the screen. The metallic synthesizer effect to simulate any sound in the game is also a thing of the past. Now, the highest quality titles include real effects, as does any cinematographic production (in fact, they are taken from this source). A clash of swords, a horse's gallop or a timely shout often generate more atmosphere than what the image alone portrays. Another equally important contribution is the voices that help to introduce the scene or scenario that is about to be generated. This is the case of the moments prior to the tactical battles in *Medieval Total War II*, where the leaders address the troops with rousing speeches that sometimes border on the politically incorrect. But obviously we cannot expect a flat discourse just before the hordes charge the enemy. Thus, over the roar of the troops, we can here a captain of the faction of the Kingdom of Jerusalem exhorting them to fight with the following words,

*Let's hope the enemy have brought beautiful women this time and not the old witches they usually bring! Go for the ladies!*¹⁰

It is clear that this is a game with a PEGI age limit of 16 (under the new 2009 classification)¹¹, with all the implications of gender violence and other barbarities that are implicit in the harangue, coincide perfectly with what this meant on a medieval battlefield, where part of the booty was the enemy's women (if they were found).

Another example of voices and sounds is the frequent use of famous people to dub certain characters in animated cinema. Mark Hamill's career (*Luke Skywalker* in *Star Wars*) has mainly focussed on dubbing videogames, as have those other well-known Hollywood actors (Sean Connery, Bill Murray, Charlize Theron, Samuel

9. Esposito, Nicolás. "Emulation et conservation du patrimoine culturel lie aux jeux video". *Digital Culture & Heritage*. Berlin: 2004: 8. 16 January 2010 <www.utc.fr/~nesposit/publications/esposito2004emulation.pdf>.

10. *Medieval Total War II. Kingdoms*. Crusade campaign.

11. Report about the new Pan European Game Information (PEGI). 15th January 2010 <www.adese.es/pdf/PEGI%20Annual_Report09-2.pdf>.



L. Jackson, etc.).¹² The actors from the Robert Zemeckis' film of *Beowulf* (Anthony Hopkins, Ray Winstone...) lent their voices to the characters in the game of the same name. In the Spanish case, the lead character in *The Abbey*, Leonardo de Toledo, was dubbed by Ramón Langa, very famous in the Spanish film market,¹³ or there is the more recent case of the actor Juan Diego Botto lending his voice to Leonardo Da Vinci in *Assassin's Creed II*. However, this is increasingly habitual on the screens in all games, and the economic power of the videogame market means that this phenomenon will continue to grow.¹⁴ As well as this commercial aspect, a closer relation is also achieved between the game and the player, with "familiar" voices from a more recognisable and comfortable setting. It is a great contribution to the efforts of the simulation.

It is easier to accept the use of music to create this atmosphere. Needless to say, anything like Celtic folk, monastic chants, or even rhythms that "sound" medieval. The latter includes modern soundtracks that use no old instruments (such as those by Jeff van Dyck for the *Medieval Total War* saga, including the *Viking* expansion of the first title, the contents of the collector's edition of *Anno 1404*, or the Black and White Editions *Assassin's Creed II*), manage to capture the spectator (here the player behaves like a passive agent). It is unquestionable that this helps to generate an evocative atmosphere for the purpose of the game,¹⁵ which is indisputably self-satisfaction.

An inherent part of this setting is also in the position that game gives the user. This is not only about a communicative act, but is also offered as the best reference for the sensorial localization of the player. Let us say that it is like a talking mirror that the player listens to or reads. We can observe this in the forms of address that seem nowadays archaic but that are precisely what we collectively imagine from the medieval past. To illustrate this I include an example from a Spanish language game. At the beginning of the tutorial in *Europa Universalis III*, there is a paragraph

12. Aparicio, Daniel. "Esta voz me suena: personajes famosos metidos al doblaje de videogames". 26th October 2009. *20 minutos.es. Section videogames*. 20th January 2010 <www.20minutos.es/noticia/544797/0/doblaje/famosos/videogames/>.

13. *The Abbey*. User's manual: 24.

14. In the Spanish case, Santiago Segura dubbed his famous character Torrente for the PS2 version, and will do so again for Eddie Riggs in the Spanish edition of *Brutal Legend* (Jack Black does this in the North American version). 26th October 2009. *20 minutos.es. Section videogames*. 20th January 2010 <www.20minutos.es/noticia/544651/0/brutal/legend/segura/>. Casting is even being done among users specifically to find a dubber for the third episode of *Runaway*, a graphic adventure that is set in the modern world. 10th January 2010. *Diario Crítico*. 20th January 2010 <www.diariocritico.com/ocio/2010/Enero/videogames/190136/run-away-busca-doblador-tiendas-marzo.html>. Finally it will be Conchi López (Rachel Weisz in *Ágora*) and Eduardo del Hoyo (Michael in the series *Lost*) who will lend their voices to the characters in the game by Péndulo Studios.

15. We have parallel cases of the same game for other epochs, like the one of XVI Japanese in *Shogun Total War*, of the XVIII illustrated (with chamber pieces of identified in *Empire Total War*). Even clearer is the case of *Rome Total War* (also by Jeff van Dyck), as well as other more recent examples, like the one set in the Vietnam War (*Battlefield Vietnam*, where there is the possibility of including music specifically from that time. We can include anything by the *Doors*, Jimi Hendrix or the *Rollings Stones*, like it was the soundtrack for *Good morning, Vietnam!*, *Platoon* or *Full Metal Jacket*).



with the following text, “And what will your role in all this be? You will be the “power behind the throne” and manage everything, from national politics and the diplomacy to appointing people and constructing the specific buildings in the provinces. Such is your relevance, that the game almost always addresses you as “vos” as if you were truly the monarch”. The comment is from Saturday 30th May 1453, the starting date for the game and highly significant for being the supposed end for an idea of the Middle Ages, which I do not share. In reality, this was a concept among by Spanish speakers in the Iberian Peninsula, with the use of the formal “vos”, which we identify with medieval epochs and the Golden Age (this owes a great deal to classic 16th and 17th century Spanish theatre), but does not concord with reality, although it makes it plausible. In the 15th century, practically everyone used “vos”, with “tú” only being used to talk to children. Thus, “vos” was almost the only form, like “you” in English. These were nominal elements that made the difference. Thus, “vos, amigo, sois...” were the forms that could be used by the superior to address the inferior, and viceversa, “vos, señor, sois...” were the terms the inferior used to address his superior. The difference is in “amigo” and “señor”. The king could be addressed as “vos”, but always together with “señor”: “Vos señor, sabéis que...” Thus, it was used as in the game, but with nominal reinforcements. This led to such forms as “vuestra merced”, “vuestra alteza” and “vuestra majestad”, that were used when addressing the monarch during that century.¹⁶ We can see that this is used to create an atmosphere closer to the player’s prior perception than to reality, but that has positive effects on the user’s belief in the game’s presumed historical precision (falsified).

In second place, after the audiovisual aspect, what is indispensable for generating a correct setting is *the content of the material itself*, that is, adequate information, and the fuller the better. This is a way of identifying with the greatest possible number of people, and that infers an acceptance of the specific subject.¹⁷ However, this is a game, not a monographic on medieval history, so these contents must maintain a balance that should channel the curious towards acquiring deeper knowledge. I will focus on this aspect, namely the recompilation, use and development of statements, texts and information about the Middle Ages. In many cases, this has a strong influence on the player’s perception of the period or what the medievalist player wishes to find in this activity.

16. Sometimes they are used with the verbs in third person: “vuestra majestad tiene, sabe, etc...”, but on other occasions with the verb in second person plural: “[Álvaro de Luna to King John II] Ca dirán les gentes que por algund grande error o deserbiço que yo fize e cometi contra Vuestra Alteza, me desterrays de vuestra presencia”. Note that “Vuestra Alteza” concurs with the second person plural of the verb (corresponding to “vos”) and the possessive “vosotros”. Eberenz, Rolf. *El español en el otoño de la Edad Media. Sobre el artículo y los pronombres*. Madrid: Gredos, 2000: 102-108.

17. “The creative works are generally developed in scenarios which a large number of people can identify with. This is why there are so many books, films and games set in the Second World War and other events that affected the lives of millions of people”. Vicent Pontbriand, associate producer of *Assassin’s Creed II*. In *La guía oficial. Assassin’s Creed II*. Spanish version. 2009: 196. This statement may be very radical, but not without reason.



Without wishing to go into how positive the concentration of these contents can be for the educational aspect, adding elements and factors to the game (to “play better” and sometimes to know how to play),¹⁸ it is beyond doubt that there are enormous possibilities for recompiling and displaying a huge amount of information about the medieval period or any of its aspects. The geometric growth of the physical memory of the hardware used (I would rather say the infinite succession of the possible terms) has allowed these guides to be included, sometimes being necessary for the game. In early games, the scarcity of kilobytes prohibited certain excesses, but this now belongs to digital prehistory. Nowadays, there are authentic encyclopaedias inside certain videogames, such as the *Civilopedia* in *Civilization V*.

3. The contents of Medieval History

It is very strange that the data itself to appear in a videogame, firstly because this is a criterion of situation, so a geographic and temporal setting is needed, which means the contextualisation of this narrative element. The use of a certain year as the beginning for campaigns is quite common (*Medieval Total War II. Kingdoms*), and even for the whole game (*Stronghold*, in 1066), but it is generally accompanied by texts that vary in length depending on the game.

The intervention of the person who develops a specific title, such as *Mount & Blade* (a role set in the 13th century) is conditioned by the “requirements of the script”, an argument that *may* follow a plot imagined in a historically true setting. Or not. This is where the raw material of the possible contents appears. The greater the plausibility or known certainty of the facts of the game’s setting, the greater the need for information that allows this historical situation to be controlled. Its use for teaching is evident, generating “attitudes of curiosity and the need to extend knowledge”.¹⁹ But in the entertainment process, the use of elements that supply “historical context” does not necessarily require the use of and reference to specific events that took place. In the aforementioned game, whose starting date is the 23rd of March 1257 in an imaginary territory (*Calradia*), it only requires the anachronisms not to be excessive. It will return to this example later.

It is true that the first we choose is what to play, and secondly, how to play it.²⁰ This is where the type of game comes into play, depending if we want to brandish a sword or a catapult (on occasions virtually through the consoles with movement,

18. This is not set in the Middle Ages, but is used here as an example. In *Task Command. 2nd Manassas* (Paradox, 2006), either you know the regimental system of the Union and the Confederacy during the American Civil War, or you will not be able to play the fluidly. In fact, its historical accuracy is valued by the users. Forum of reanalysis in *Meristation.com* of the mentioned title. 16th January 2010 <zonaforo.meristation.com/foros/viewtopic.php?t=626573>.

19. Gálvez, María del Carmen. “Aplicaciones de the videogames de content histórico en the aula”. *Icono 14*, 7 (2006). 25 January 2010 <www.icono14.net/revista/num7/articulos/carmen%20galvez.pdf>.

20. STM. “Juegos de estrategia. La diversión invade tu PC”, *Micromanía*, 177 (2009): 70-75.



like the Wii or PS3 Move), control an immense board with innumerable variables (*Europa Universalis III* or *Great Invasions*), or command the English *rovers* on Saint Crispin's day and be blood brothers together with Henry V (*Medieval Total War II*).



ILLUSTRATION 9. ENGLISH ARCHERS IN THE PROLEGOMENA OF AGINCOURT. *MEDIEVAL TOTAL WAR II*.

It is a very different question to want to play a game more closely linked to history itself, normally of strategy in one of its two facets, either real or by turns. If the script is governed by the historical condition, with the technology, economic, military, social or institutional situation, and has a starting point (when the game begins), this approach falls apart when the progression of events enters the fray, when the player becomes an active agent. The plot displays the historical development itself (it is a different situation if we wish to simulate another experience, the role cited above) and here the paths of the known historical sequence (that written in history books) and that of historical re-creation part ways. This is the point where the dream worlds that give the player the power to create narrative also begin (*Fable* and *Dante's Inferno*).

In my previous study,²¹ I referred to the wide range of players who place themselves at any of the points between the occasional user with wide knowledge of the Medioevo and the habitual user without this base. Personally, I include myself among those who do not wish to see what I call *the curse of the spell* in the games, where the attacks by dragons, magicians, anachronisms difficult to explain and the events not covered by

21. See note 1.



the general laws of Nature, are an inherent part of the game and its playability (I fully understand those who do not think alike: “Un jeu vidéo, c’est avant tout un jeu”).²²

However, until now everything has obviously been about the player who seeks historical precision. There are also players who go the opposite way, and who miss an element of fantasy in sober historically accurate games, in benefit of some very specific potentialities of playing. The penultimate in the *Stronghold* saga, with the subtitle *Legend*, welcomes this type of player. There is also the *King Arthur* (by NeoCore, distributed by FX Interactive, 2010), a game that brings to mind another by the same developers, *Crusaders. Thy Kingdom come*, but closer to the system of playing in *Medieval Total War II*, although with logical magic elements in a mythical setting like Camelot. However, the *mods* give greater scope to these possibilities, like that of *Third Age* for *Medieval Total War II*, where we can conquer the “Middle Earth” with one of the twelve factions created by Tolkien.²³

The contribution of a range of information is one of the characteristics of videogames inspired in historical themes or that use them as a basic factor. Firstly, I will present different examples and types of these contents, which will help us to place ourselves in the fact in itself and analyse the consequences that derive from this.

The first thing to mention is that the contents are generally very wide in a large proportion of the videogames dealing with the Medioevo. The introduction to the manual tends to be very interesting, as this immediately situates the videogame chronologically and sets out its aims. The back cover usually also has attractive comments, also written to hook the buyer. These are normally direct and evocative references, often using the imperative as a publicity strategy, although sometimes too aggressively. In *Crusader Kings* it literally states, “Have you got what it takes to be a Crusader King?”.

But without being so provocative (but still bellicose while dealing with war games, which is logical and obvious), there are elements that draw our attention. At the start of the manual for *Age of Empire II: The Age of Kings* it states, “This is a combat game where you can create your own empire in the Middle Ages”. Nothing more, as the generic information one has about the Medioevo is taken for granted.

This is the point where we must indicate that these contents appear in the videogame in two possible forms: indirect or direct. The former is what is logically behind the title, with texts to clarify or define specific aspects, and does so separately from the development of the game; thus *indirect*. In the above-mentioned *Age of Empires II*, the reality is that when you reach the game interface, there is a possibility, expressly marked as “History”, which leads to a number of varied definitions about the period, such as the High and Late Middle Ages, Feudalism, Medieval War, etc. (and that curiously are not essential to play it). What is interesting is that videoplayer is given the opportunity to complete the information or simply to consult it. In this case, an explanatory text

22. Esposito, Nicolás. “Emulation et conservation...”

23. 16 January 2010 <www.twcenter.net/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=654>. The *Kingdoms* expansion must be installed to run the mod.



about the various factions is also included, to help to understand the reasons for their historical importance. The quality of some of these contents deserves mention,²⁴ and in some cases they help to maintain the distance between historical science and the game itself. In a game of battles and real time strategy (RTS), like this one, we can read the following about medieval war, which is very informative for those uninitiated in the Medievo, “on the rare occasions when armies met in the field, the knights could be devastating”, and later ends up stating that “the wars in the Middle Ages fundamentally consisted of sieges of some kind”.

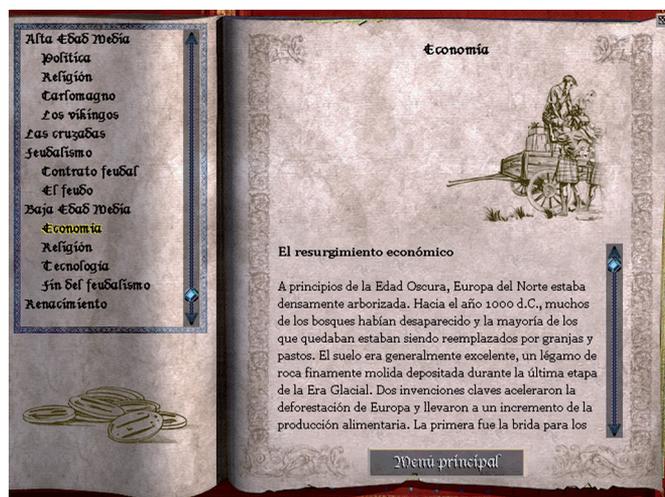


ILLUSTRATION 10. HISTORICAL CONTENTS IN *AGE OF EMPIRES II*.

Or they break with the globalised idea of the medieval period held during the enlightenment (pejorative, dark, lugubrious, backward, barbarous...): “At the end of the Middle Ages, science in Europe had not only reached the level of Antiquity, but had even exceeded it”. But here to, we have access to one of the statements of greatest interest for us as medievalist observers. Referring to the globality of the concept “Middle Ages”, the text that clarifies the essence of this period states that, “In Asia and the Middle East, this historical period does not easily enter into the European concept of Middle Ages”. I insist; let us not forget that it is a game for wide

24. The game specifically defines Feudalism as follows, “The predominant political and economic structure in the Middle Ages was feudalism. This system was developed as a response to the disintegration of central authority and social chaos that arose after the end of the Roman mandate. A hierarchy of powerful men, governed by the new system of vassalage and division of the territory in feuds replaced the old Roman system of emperor, senate, province, city and village”. And it spread much more with the “feudal contract”.



audiences that is still being sold, and is over ten years old (it is an enormous success for videogame not to have been discontinued after two or three years).

The second system for displaying contents is more direct; specific information that the game presents to you as you play. For example, during the crusade in *Medieval Total War II. Kingdoms*, it is usual for windows to appear on the screen with events that happened at the chronological moment you are playing. Around 1348, windows start to appear about a certain disease coming from the Black Sea. The players must pay attention to these contents, as it is normal for some of the cities they rule to be affected by this (with all that means for the stability of the territory you rule, and as a result, a plus for achieving victory). Or in the same campaign in the same game, in 1204, where the reference to the IV Crusade means that the Venetian faction appears in the geography of the videogame (centred on the Mediterranean to the coasts of the Middle East, reaching as far as Mesopotamia).



ILLUSTRATION 11. ALLUSION TO THE SACK OF ZARA BY THE CRUSADERS ON THE IV CRUSADE. *MEDIEVAL TOTAL WAR II. KINGDOMS*. CRUSADE CAMPAIGNS.

In this same sense, the Mongols appear and there are mentions of the Children's Crusade, etc.

Thus, those who still thought that this type of game (or videogames in general) could not contribute specific and specialised information about the Middle Ages will see that this is completely untrue, and the best of it all are the possibilities of taking part in a sensible and productive way as medievalists.



4. An image of the Middle Ages: rigour

This factor is very complex and extensive to analyse,²⁵ as the number of games and the multiple aspects they contain make it almost impossible to control the veracity and anachronisms in them. I will mention some significant cases, but I am aware that it would be very interesting to analyse most of them in detail to take into consideration the utility of these games for teaching or even, to see, depending on their diffusion, this image that they present of the Medievo.

There are titles (and companies) that have maintained a line with almost religious faith. An example is Paradox, whose policy is to publish historically accurate games (making this almost into their identifying trait), although they make incursions into science fiction or fantasy, with products like *Elven Legacy*.²⁶ This clearly shows that there is commercial interest for such products, or in other words, there is a demand to which they pay close attention for obvious commercial reasons.

It has been made clear that one of the resources for the setting is the content. But a crucial factor must be emphasised: not everyone has anything like a clear idea of what the medieval period was and what it represented, and this is where the importance of precision in the game must be placed. There is this prototypical idea, generally associated with the pejorative nuance, together with that of the highest values, and it is in this universe, an uncontrolled and uncontrollable world, where the videogame tends to place the player. The manual for *The Two Thrones* has a succinct description of what the Middle Ages was generically, "The great deeds, the acts of chivalry, as well as villainy and treason were on the order of the day". On the cover of *Crusaders Kings*, there is a definition of what we will find, "Game of medieval strategy", together with references to El Cid, Richard the Lionheart, Saladin and the Hundred Year's War, and "Diplomacy —War— Intrigue in the dark Middle Ages". In this case, the darkness is considered an attraction. But more interesting is the manual, which states, "The feudal hierarchy was a rigid and

25. About the image of the Middle Ages nowadays, and among the bibliography about the subject, mention must be made of the works by Heers, Jacques. *La invención de la Edad Media*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1995; and the reflections by Le Goff, Jacques. *Una larga Edad Media*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2008, specifically the interview with the leading French historian that appears at the beginning of the book under the title "La Edad Media de J. Le Goff": 23-36. The traditional *Semana de Estudios Medievales de Estella*, specifically in 2008 corresponding to the XXXV edition, concentrated on *The History Medieval today: academic perception and social perception* (Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, 2009), various contributions observed the phenomenon from many points of view, even with contributions about the connection between the historical novel and Medievo (Ruiz-Doménech, José Enrique. "El poder de la ficción. La Edad Media vista por la novela histórica", *The History Medieval Today...*: 247-261), or the vision of secondary school students about the Middle Ages in the classrooms (Frieria, Florencia. "Percepción de la Historia Medieval en la Enseñanza Secundaria": 63-108) as well as other more academic ones strictly linked to the university field or great institutions (de Manuel González Jiménez, Miguel Angel Ladero Quesada, José Manuel Ruiz Asencio...). It is very interesting that no mention is made of the videogame intruding into this perception; only at one moment in the above-mentioned work by Florencia Frieria does she mention the idea "that secondary students have about the Middle Ages, as well as the influence of teachers and curriculum, is affected by such important factors as the cine, literature, the TV, *the increasingly powerful computer media*, and, in the best of cases, some publications of History". The italics are mine.

26. STM. "Juegos de estrategia. La diversión invade tu PC": 76.



conservative institution. Despite the brutality of the epoch, starting wars without prior provocation was frowned upon". The latter aspect will have no *a priori* impact on a player who wants "things to happen" in the game. However, in reality, this title is based on a historical accuracy that allows all possible variables to influence its development. In this case, this is the definition of the dynasties (in fact, it is a game about these), where one must "make demands on the provinces to be able to declare war on their ruler". There are options to obtain territory through marriage, papal or imperial decrees, etc., but usurpation might entail unpopularity. Its specific historical context is defined. "*Crusader Kings* is a game of strategy set in the feudal epoch of medieval Europe and with the aim of recovering the Holy Land through the Crusaders". We can see that this is not exactly the final aim of the game, as earlier and later processes have been introduced that have little to do with the Crusade. There are three options for starting the game, one being in 1187, with the Third Crusade, but the others are set in 1066, the year of the Battle of Hastings, and 1337, as the agreed date for the start of the Hundred Years' War. However, the best of this kind of game is the many factors that must be kept in mind to be able to play fluently, not to mention that this is the only way to reach your objectives. In this case, the user manual states literally, "To understand *Crusader Kings*, you must understand the medieval feudal system and its associated hierarchy". And then it adds that, "Although it was an archaic system compared with the current one, it was nevertheless solid and became consolidated".²⁷ These lines are undoubtedly addressed at someone who *does not know*, who has no prior knowledge about feudalism. The manual continues with information about the character of each of the possible personalities in the game (their character traits -arbitrary, indulgent, a liar, etc; possible illnesses suffered -schizophrenia, cleft palate, leprosy, etc; education -courtesan, ecclesiastical or martial, as well as wasteful, negotiator, schemer...), and the progress in military technology (more common in this type of game), legislation (salic and semisallic primogeniture, royal prerogative real, uses and customs...), culture (from chronicles to heraldry, passing through the popular -carnivals, jugglers, clothing fashion...), religious rigour (celibacy, formalised liturgy, apostolic poverty, jubilee...), education and thought (monastic schools, universities, Aristotelian logic...), economic and trade practices (guilds, local chambers of commerce, local and international fairs, bills of exchange, double-entry bookkeeping), advances in farming techniques (rakes, crop and fallow rotation, soil enrichment...), artisans (salt and sugar refining, paper-making, textile, glass...), and others (bubonic and pneumonic plague, smallpox, pillage, revolt, heresy, etc.).²⁸ All these, plus others not

27. *Crusader Kings*. User manual, p. 25.

28. An example. *Semisallic consanguinity*: "All the titles go to the most powerful son or, if he is dead, to his oldest brother and so on. If none of the sons can become heir, it will be the most powerful grandson who inherits and thus successively. Bear in mind that this allows the hereditary line to pass to a woman who, as such, can never inherit, but can allow a male descendant to become heir. Power depends on the military attribute, the prestige and possession of provinces". And the same with the rest of the concepts. User's manual, p. 40.



included here for questions of space, are defined with a greater or lesser precision. So, in point of fact, you need to study to be able to play.

It must be understood that the player must understand the reasons for the conflict in these strategy games, thus the interest in the political information. In the case of *XIII Century: Death or Glory* (although this is about tactical battles, like the recent *History: Great Battles Medieval*, developed by Slitherine Software and Koch Media, or the *Total War* series), there is an introductory video with voiceover (subtitled), that contains precise information about the causes of the battle, but not its result (logically, so the player has the chance to relive the uncertainty of the outcome).



ILLUSTRATION 12. *HISTORY: GREAT BATTLES MEDIEVAL*.

It is also the example of the historical battles in the *The Conquerors* expansion of *Age of Empires II*, although with a different reflex for the type of game; Hastings, Manzikert (you play with the Turks), Poitiers (under the name of Tours, in 732) or Agincourt are generated as a succession of achievements, more than the tactical battle itself, which does not allow this encounter to be *recreated* at the same level of accuracy as the pattern cited above.

One of the keys to many of the strategy and management games (and not only, but especially, those with medieval settings) is the index of popularity or satisfaction of the population. A revolt means losing territory, income, the ability to recruit armies



or improve infrastructure, and ends up leading to disaster in the game (how exciting it is when you have a good part of your territory on a war footing and with enemy forces *ad portas!*). From that *Castles II: Siege & Conquest*, where an internal uprising was a key part of the game (together with relations with the Pope, who had to accept you as king for you to win the war), to the rebellions of the *Medieval Total War* saga (where even complete armies that cut the trade routes were free), the degree of complacency of your vassals or subjects (depending on the game) is crucial for the structure of government. For example, even with the same substrate, *Stronghold* has effects from abandonment or reception of settlers in the castle and town, very similar to the behaviour of the peasantry in *Anno 1404*. What interests us as medievalists are the factors that make this popularity rise or fall. It not only depends on essential supplies, but also on the entertainment available (beer or festivities), passing through the equally basic tax burden. On occasions, this accuracy is lost in benefit of what an average player expects, and one who has no need for great precision and does not want to be surprised. I still fail to understand, as an inhabitant of the Peninsula, why there is a bullring to improve public order for the Spanish and Portuguese factions in *Medieval Total War II* (other inaccuracies possibly caused by the same reason). We know that places for this leisure activity were not built until the 18th and 19th centuries.

In *Civilization V*, we find the above-mentioned *Civilopedia*, which makes it easy to consult certain elements essential for the game. There is a more direct element in *Stronghold* when referring to knowledge, as there is the chance and almost the obligation to look at what each building is used for and what is needed to develop at the start of each mission-objective: a granary for storing processed victuals or those that do not require it (apples for example); a mill to grind the grain that a peasant has brought from the fields, and that a baker will take from this store when it has been made into flour. And also with the arms: a cattle farm that produces cheese but also leather for the outer defensive clothing, or the wood and iron needed for the master archer, etc. If we do not control all these "rules" taken from the information supplied by the game, we will not reach our target. In other words, we will lose and possibly without knowing why.

There is a question worth asking here and without a possible answer. The contents displayed before beginning the game are supposedly presented as the basis for the development of the game for a neophyte in historical science. However, those who approach this type of game usually have prior knowledge. Is this information thus useful? It never hurts, and it should be seen from the opposite point of view from the specialist, that is, the player who is not an expert (or initiated) in medieval history.

5. Crusades, Hundred Year's War, barbarian invasions...

Here we should analyse the specific moments that tend to appear in the videogames, basically because they tell us about the player's preference not for the Middle Ages, but for a specific period within this Medioevo. This specialisation very clearly expresses the image that one can have of *the medieval*, as it is such world-worn epochs as the Crusades



that end up defining this individual and group iconography. In such a widely used game as *Assassin's Creed*, the fact that the Crusader movement represented is highly conditioned by our contemporary contextualisation (21st century), where we take a member of the Muslim sect of the assassins to murder (although virtually) vile templar knights (here they are *the evil ones*, as in Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven*), to prevent greater evils. More can be interpreted about the current situation in this than past events.

The use of the chronology is fundamental, as it generates the temporal context (let us not forget that we are always referring to a specific past that is more or less defined). Thus, the development of the game will always be linked to a historical event: barbarian invasions, Norman presence in England after Hastings, the convulsive 13th century, or the above mentioned tactical combat in the Hundred Year's War. Let us briefly review all of these.

There are two great themes from the *Late-imperial and High-modern* periods (making it clear that we put aside Danish mythology, like *Beowulf*, or the Arthurian cycle, like *Tzar. Excalibur*, as these games are more closely linked to the world of fantasy). On one hand, we find that they concentrate on the presence of barbarian peoples in the heart of the Western Roman Empire, as in the expansion of *Rome Total War: Barbarian Invasion*, where the western and eastern Christians appear, and especially, *Great Invasions*, a game of high strategy.



ILLUSTRATION 13. VISIGOTH INFANTRY AS ROME'S ALLIES AGAINST THE HUNS OF ATTLA DURING THE BATTLE OF THE CATALAUNIAN PLAINS. *ROME TOTAL WAR: BARBARIAN INVASION*.



We can include the expansion of the first *Medieval Total War*, called *Viking Invasion*, in this same group. We can play with Picts, Scots, Mercians, Northumbrians, Saxons, Welsh, Irish and the Vikings themselves. And this game leads to those focused almost exclusively on the Viking world, like the platform game *Viking* (not strictly historical, closer to the recreation of Norman mythology similar to the videogame *Beowulf*) or the campaigns in *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings* (including a battle in its expansion called *Vindlandsaga*, to play the Vikings' North American adventure).

The second main group is the one centred on William I's victory at Hastings.



ILLUSTRATION 14. SAXON INFANTRY AT HASTINGS. *MEDIEVAL TOTAL WAR II*.

It is not only one of the most “playable” battles, as we can see it in many titles (from *Age of Empires II* to *Medieval Total War II*,²⁹ *Lords of the Realm III*³⁰ or *Crusader Kings*), but it is also the starting point for some titles, like *Stronghold*. In fact, the

29. For the historical battle, there is a long explanation with a good summary of the event. In the case of the English campaign, it is situated in 1080 A.D. with the following introduction: “After recently having seized control of England from the Saxons, the majority would expect the Norman conquerors to be somewhat exhausted and weakened. However, the new sovereigns of England have taken little time to change and improve the tax system to replenish their coffers as quickly as possible. And, what is more important, William the Conqueror came with the Pope’s backing, as well as with mixed forces of heavy cavalry, archers and well-trained infantry. The new lords of England have a more modern view of the art of war, and the desire to make the most of the country’s wealth of resources”. The only thing missing is the colophon to indicate the existence of the *Doomsday Book*. In have reproduced the text that appears on the screen to give an idea of what the player is provided with.

30. The battle of Stamford Bridge can also be played in this game.



beginning of this game is the placing of the Norman donjon in 1066, and it is the end of others, as in *Great Invasions*.

The other preferred period is undoubtedly the Crusades, which almost makes up its own subgenre.³¹ It is true that the above-mentioned *Assassin's Creed* was a milestone for the videogame set in the time of the crusades, but also that this is a simplification, as the game focuses specifically on the 3rd Crusade. The generic Middle Ages titles usually have a section (of varying size) about the crusades. One of the campaigns in *Medieval Total War II. Kingdoms* is about the crusaders in general, enabling one to lead the Principality of Antioch (specific Hospitaller units), the kingdom of Jerusalem (Templar cavalry), or the Turks, among others. There is a different monographic introduction to each of the factions, which is welcome for the details about each one. There are monographic games on this subject, with mixed results, such as *Crusades. Quest for Power*, that contributes nothing, *Crusader Kings*, which we have seen does, *Crusaders. Thy Kingdom come*, an excellent game of tactical battles, or *Stronghold. Crusaders*, which follows the specific development of the 1st Crusade. I do not go into the possibilities of specific battles, campaigns or aspects of many other games, as in *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings* (with Saladin's campaign, or those of Frederick I Barbarossa), as these can link to any other historical period.



ILLUSTRATION 15. *CRUSADER KINGS. THY KINGDOM COME*. COVER OF THE USER MANUAL.

31. I touched on this question in Jiménez, Juan Francisco. *Anales de la Universidad de Alicante. Historia medieval*, 17 (2011): 367-408.



Another of the key periods for the game set in the Medioevo is the great century of the medieval revolution, *the 13th century*. Apart from a monographic game under this name (which I have referred to on more than one occasion, *XIII Century: Death or Glory*), this was the time of some of the best-known battles in the West (and Orient), and the changes generated through the expansion of the previous centuries.



ILLUSTRATION 16. BATTLES IN THE FRENCH CAMPAIGN. *XIII CENTURY: DEATH OR GLORY*. FROM TAILLEBOURG TO BOUVINES, PASSING THROUGH MURET, ARE ATTRACTIVE CHALLENGES FOR THE PLAYER.

In *Medieval Total War II. Kingdoms*, the *Britannia* campaign begins in 1258, presenting the Welsh situation, with the self-proclaimed Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, in Ireland, with Brian O'Connor elected by the local clans, the peculiar Scottish juncture of the marriage of King Alexander to Margaret, daughter of Edward III of England, and the latter's own problem with the barons, with "the traitor Simon de Monfort" (as the introduction to the battle in the game states literally). In *Lords of the Realm III* one can also play the battles of Muret, Bouvines, Stirling Bridge, Falkirk or Courtrai (now in 1302).

However, as the period most typically identified with the medieval, it is the one that has lent itself best to simulation and role games. This is the case of the previously mentioned *Mount & Blade*, whose action takes place in mid century.

The next period the videogames have focussed on is the *Hundred Years' War*. One only needs to think about another of the great periods of well-known battles, the time of Joan of Arc and a good part of Shakespeare's historical works (*Henry V*, to



name but one). Again, we have two monographic games (with all that entails). One is a recent real time strategy game of tactical battles (the mentioned *History: Great Battles Medieval*), and another, *Bladestorm. The Hundred Years' War*, has been on the market since 2008 for PS3, and unlike the former, it can also be played on PC and Xbox 360. *Bladestorm* is a game of literal action, with a great deal borrowed from *manga* aesthetics. The figure of the Maid of Orleans has also awoken the interest of companies and players, with titles like *Wars and Warriors: Joan of Arc*, or *Joan of Arc* for PSP. *The Guild* also concentrates on these years. However, it is the possibilities of playing at the best-known battle for the Anglo-Saxon world, Agincourt (25th October 1415, possibly for the harangue about the “*Band of brothers*” on San Crispin’s day by Henry V from Shakespeare’s pen), which has truly expanded this theme in the videogames. In most of these and in different forms, one can head Henry V’s hungry soldiers after the disaster of Harfleur and into the muddy field of Agincourt.

More specifically, the *Reconquest* is observed from the international vantage point as a particular Hispanic question (as it was for its characteristics, although isolated from Western Europe). In the introductory video to the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in *XIII Century: Death or glory*, the voice over states, “The war had lasted five centuries. The Arabs, or Moors as the Spaniards called them, had conquered Spain. Then they began to retreat under the attacks of the Christians returning Spain to its old inhabitants. This was called the Reconquest”. Something similar can be read in the explanatory text for *Age of Empires II: The Conquerors*, where the Spanish side is introduced as a novelty. However, it was a Bulgarian developer, distributed by the Hispano-Italian FX Interactive, which most successfully adapted its generic game, *Tzar*, to the Hispanic scenario under the title of *El Cid and the Reconquest*. From the skirmish at Covadonga to the siege of Granada, passing through the siege of Valencia, we participate in the dialogues in a game of real time strategy, where the most interesting (apart from the playability) is our identification with the geography of the events. It is somewhat similar to the siege of Setenil in *Medieval Total War II*, whose prior indirect contents could be greatly improved.

Finally, linked with the above and given the Spanish monarchy’s own importance in the twilight of the medieval, the beginnings of the conquest of America is another landmark reference. The expansion of *Age of Empires II: The Conquerors* introduces the Spanish to intervene in Central America (where it is interesting that the emblematic figure in the faction is the *conquistador*, a horseman armed with an arquebus). In fact, the title says it all. In this sense, we can also include the American campaign in *Medieval Total War II: Kingdoms*, with Otumba included, *American Conquest* or *Civilization Colonization*.

There are, in a more specific way, others that seek other more specific aspects, such as *Patrician IV* (the Hanseatic trade system), *Anno 1404*, more focussed on trade with the Orient (including its expansion *Venice*) or *Paris 1313*, an adventure on the eve of the death of Jacques de Molay, Phillip IV of France and Pope Clement V.





ILLUSTRATION 17. ANNO 1404. EXPANSION VENICE.

Linked to the latter, the *Templar* subgenre is included, straddling those of the Crusades and fantasy, almost like what we could do with a historical novel and those about the sciences of the occult (to give them a name). We must also include the contribution of *Assassin's Creed II*, set at the end of the Italian *Quattrocento*, where Florence, the Medicis (Pazzi included), and Leonardo himself wander through the game.



ILLUSTRATION 18. LEONARDO DA VINCI IN THE BOOK ART OF ASSASSIN'S CREED II. BLACK EDITION.



As a partial conclusion, reference must be made to the general outline we have seen, that the information offered concentrates on the strategy games, and specifically at the beginnings of battles or with an explanatory text about the faction. Here is where we find the limits between fact, interpretation and value judgements. The latter factor is very important, because in the end it is what will steer us more towards what we are going to play than how we will do so.

The quality of the contents derives from the beta versions that the companies distribute for this purpose. It is not normal for the credits to include contributions from recognised specialists. Is it the companies that do not approach us, or is it that we ourselves, elated by the purity of our science, refuse to participate in the new, or rather, are scared by the unknown? This panorama will undoubtedly change in the future.

It is the means to offer the society guarantees of quality and not misrepresentations of a specific and instructive past. This is not a trivial question, as this industry is growing. The 2008 report of the Entertainment Software Association for the USA (*Essential facts about the computer and video game industry*), mentions *Assassins Creed* as one of the ten best-selling games in 2007.³² The anachronisms of this title are justified by the “fluidity of the history”, understood as the development of the preestablished script, as the “mission of the game is to entertain and recruit adepts, rather than give classes of history, science or initiate a debate”.³³ It is somewhat similar to what the second part of this game proposes, where only is the graphic system that lets you walk about 15th-century Italy spectacular, but also Leonardo Da Vinci appears in person, beginning with a street fight between patronage gangs (in the future will we have the chance to participate in a struggle between oligarchic families in some Castilian or Aragonese city?). But this must not lead us towards an unproductive purism, as this is precisely where our corrections and guidance can contribute. An exercise in mental agility awaits us, where the historian is faced with the pre-established historical script, and the possibility of changing it. There is already a contradiction between the real process and the plausible. Then this script is altered, converting it into virtual history, but always within limits that give a certain quality to playing at reliving, recreating, re-creating or simulating the past, in this case the medieval.

6. Simulate the Middle Ages: the other possible past and the present reality

In Spanish, *simular* is to represent something, pretending or imitating what it is not (according to the definition in the RAE), and corresponds to the nuance in the English verb *to simulate*, linked to the imitation of an effect or a sound. In Huertero's words, “Simulation is understood as the modelling of a dynamic system by means

32. ESA report, 2008. 15 January 2010 <www.adese.es/pdf/ESA_EF_2008.pdf>.

33. Rubio, Juan. Guide to the game in *Meristation.com*. 16 January 2010 <www.meristation.com/v3/des_trucos_guias.php?id=cw474d2bad8205a&idj=cw4457d2a59b0ae&pic=GEN&tipo=G>.



of another system".³⁴ In reality, the process begins with the setting, the ambience that I have presented above, and leads to very diverse results, which are the next steps in this work.

Needless to say, it is impossible to relive what has been lived, both from the perspective and the external conditions. Another different question is whether you fancy simulating another life besides our one in this world, as this belongs to the most intimate personal realm.

However, no doubt, playing at history, at the events in themselves is innately human. The contribution of digital technology to our civilization allows us to do so, not by supposition but directly by sight and sound, as shown above. It is then a question of generating a safe virtual ambience, where someone is allowed to fight and die one day and another. And if he wins, the enjoyment is complete. On occasions it will be the player's dominion of the world that is complete and absolute.³⁵ On others, it will be the experience of "strolling" along a medieval street, known or recognised, or negotiating, talking, fighting... in scenarios or with characters (generated for this) from, for example the 15th century (*Assassin's Creed II*).

But one thing is *changing* History and something very different is *living it*. Changing it implies inconformity, of taking sides, this value judgement, this idea that another future would have been possible. It is more virtual and has an infinite emotional charge. Living it, simulating it, has another very different hue, as in this case it is a sensation, not an emotion. It is taking part in the events. The only link between the two would be that of intervening, participating, having the possibility of changing, and thus building the events with one's own first hand feelings.

We are not talking about sober issues or scientific aspects. I am referring to a feeling, a sensation. The videogame integrates this factor; that is why it is a game, a leisure element. And the historian is a person who writes history, contemplates it, knows its reach, what it implies, its benefits and risks. The weak frontier that separates professionalism and active leisure, in a job which those of us lucky enough to dedicate ourselves to mainly feel passionate about, becomes a specific point for our attention.

There are not many professions that simulate their subject of study. We like it so much that we let ourselves go with the simulation. Or not? Do we do exercises about what would have happened if the infantry had made a frontal attack at Agincourt instead of the cavalry, or if the wall of Saxon *theigns* at Hastings had not collapsed?³⁶ It is a game, but we cannot forget that it is an approximate simulation, where we have to count all the pieces, the board. But we must be careful, not all the factors made one thing possible but not something else. If anything, the best of this entire affair would be to live it from a cinematographic perspective or simply observe the elements of the moment, from the knight to the war machinery, if not the scenario,

34. Huertero, Guillermo A. "Videojuegos políticos...".

35. See note 2.

36. Reference must be made to the essays in the work. See: *Historia virtual: ¿qué hubiera pasado si...?* Ferguson, Niall, dir. Madrid: Taurus, 1998.



neatly recreated thanks to the spectacular advances in computer imagery. This is fundamental, as it leads the player through this recreation by the hand.

The videogame as a cultural element is crossing the line between a simple game and something more important with deeper implications. A painting, song, film or book starts off as a human manifestation, often playful, but sometimes takes on a much more important role for various reasons (on purpose or not), and starts to signify something intrinsic with explicit consequences. Choosing a faction we feel more closely identified with (Castile instead of Aragon or vice versa, England or France, Teutonic Order or Poland, Lithuania, Russia, etc.) would be the clearest example, but the start screen for *Assassin's Creed* (I and II, and which curiously does not appear in the iPhone version) is more clarifying, and specifically states that the development team belongs to a multicultural group seeking a politically correct discourse that has a positive effect on the commercial possibilities of the product, although it implies that the company makes no value judgement.³⁷

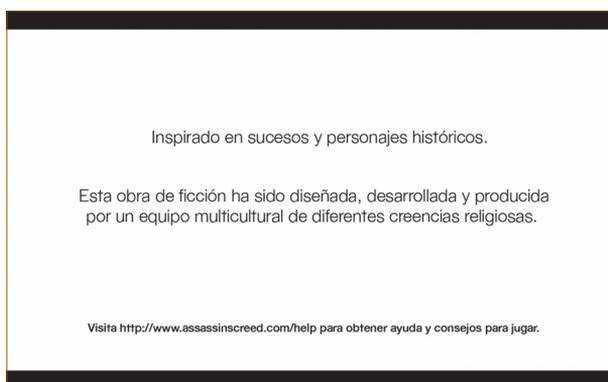


ILLUSTRATION 19. START SCREEN FOR *ASSASSIN'S CREED*.

Thus, this whole process understood as the link between the player and his or her own culture responds to the construction of an identity by the player.³⁸ This base, in whose surroundings the player has generated and developed, leads us to propose the formative attitude of some of these games, while according to the canons of modern society, *a priori* they are violent videogames (the Middle Ages understood as a violent society, in a very commonly held collective imaginary), but also located in the ocean of what are called "gender relations". Without wishing to go further into

37. The words of Gaelec Simard, head of design for the missions in *Assassin's Creed II*. *La guía oficial...*: 197.

38. Revuelta, Francisco I.; Sánchez, M^a Cruz and Esnaola, Graciela A. "Investigando videogames: recursos online para el inicio de una investigación cualitativa sobre la narrativa de/sobre los videojuegos". 25th January 2010 <www.uv.es/jopeicha/MaterialesTE/Esnaola4.pdf>.



this point here and now, it is true that the possibilities offered by videogames are opening up in all imaginable directions. In recent years, the number of players³⁹ has been rising continuously, as has the number of manageable females, such as Queen Phillipa in *Bladestorm*, or the better-known Joan of Arc. This point would make us think that we tend towards a generalised policy of equality and the politically correct in a world, the medieval, where this new phenomenon was almost anti-natural. But then we have a game for children, *The Fortress of the Dragon. Laura, Alex and the knights*, with the characteristic iconography of the *Playmobil* figures (by Micronet and Playmobil Interactive, 2009), where as well as sending the characters, two boy dolls in this case, back to the “time of the knights” (as the protagonist Alex says), the girl (Laura) says that she wants to be a princess. In the introductory video (it is later a very entertaining game of tests for children, played with the virtual figures from the well-known Danish brand), there is a conversation between the two while they ride through a dangerous place. She snaps at him,

-You're afraid, aren't you?

-I'm not afraid, Alex answers.

-You are afraid ... and I'll say something else. That's why you're still a page. You haven't got guts! If you were a bit braver you would have stopped being a page a long time ago and you'd be a knight (sic).



ILLUSTRATION 20. FROM THE INTRODUCTORY VIDEO FOR *THE FORTRESS OF THE DRAGON. PLAYMOBIL*.

39. “Mujeres y videojuegos. Hábitos y preferencias de las videoplayeras”. 15th January 2010 <www.adese.es/pdf/EstudioMujeresyvideojuegos.pdf>.

Remember that it is a game for children. Well, that is what there is, what we want to see or not. It is not the other possible past, but rather the real present. Let us go back, but without leaving aside this videogame by Playmobil Interactive. Here it oversteps the imaginary (or rather imaginative) world of the physical toy that places its play models in the medieval period in a prototypical way (castle, knights, princesses, soldiers of all kinds) in the virtual world. It is hard to find anything more here than the game itself, as it is not possible to identify with some figures that are also tangible if you own them physically (that don't bend their joints or gesticulate, the only thing, apart from talking). It should be noted that this game cannot be linked to any kind of simulation, as that would be an almost impossible loop: it would simulate the simulation of a game simulating playing with toys that simulate the Middle Ages. Exhausting.

Whether children or not, the truth is that wanting to recoup sensations and experiences from a past that we presume to know is an exercise in reflection about what we are. Or about what we would have been able to do in a different world (let us suppose the Middle Ages as the case that concerns us here). This example serves well as a comparison. This is not a game set in the medieval age, but is useful for illustrating what I am trying to express. In the comments on simulation games, or the combat *shooters* set in some historically recognised conflict (especially the Second World War), it is very common to see sentences like these aimed at the players: "Combat in Stalingrad with *Red Oschestra 2* [the game]. A brutal battle... and real. O.K, we know you didn't fight in the 2nd World War, but did you fight in *Red Oschestra: Ostfront 41-45*? Well, son, it's more or less the same". And it continues about the novelty of the game: "If you agree [to play], prepare yourself to give your utmost because the realism of the game means there are heroes but no superheroes: a single enemy shot will send you back from the front in a pine box".⁴⁰ But you will be back in it when you tell the computer to start a new game. Referring to the videogames set in the Middle Ages, there are also excellent examples, linked to whether you want to conquer the Holy Land, or as mentioned, if you are ready to deal with a world of kings and battles. The back cover of *Anno 1404* has a *direct* message to the potential player from Al Zahir, Grand Vizier de Califa, offering the possibility of trade with the Orient.⁴¹

40. *Micromanía*, 177 (2009): 14. News about *Red Oschestra 2: Heroes of Stalingrad* (action game by Tripware Interactive, IC Company, 2010).

41. "Salam alaykum, stranger. We have heard a lot about you. They say you are a great builder, a skilled diplomat and a canny merchant from the West. We, the governors of Orient, welcome you and offer our friendship. Trade with us, learn from us and discover the magic of the Orient".





ILLUSTRATION 21. *ANNO 1404*. STILL FROM THE INTRODUCTORY VIDEO.

It is not something distant, but rather *personal*, which delegates the possibility and responsibility for doing a good job to the player. It is a game, but one plays as if it were not. This is the aspect where psychology and sociology exert an influence when it comes to finding benefits in the videogame, as it becomes a practice of social and competence skills. The advantage for historical science comes from the perception of multi-causality grasped at all times by a wide range of consumers of history, of both varied age and cultural level.

Always bearing in mind that the information and veracity do not always coincide, this development (of history) must be perceived as an object of desire in itself. The videogame gives us the chance to mould the historical process and its events explicitly as if it were Plasticine. Even in games that *a priori* have nothing to do with history (a crass error, because they do), and that are about sports, there is the resort to the other possible past. In an advert for a football game (*Fifa 2010*) in a specialised publication (*Marcaplayer*),⁴² a series of footballers appears who are not real (they are the potential *gamers* of the videogame) with one exception, Xavi, a well-known Barcelona FC player. The image I have just referred to would say everything (that the player can become another choice for the manager for the games, in this case virtual), but it is the text that interests us, “We rewrite history before breakfast and raise our glasses before lunch”. This is then controlling this past to reach a distinct reality. It is the culmination of the consumer society: “I am able, I can, I would like to...” It is the weighing of success and achievement. The leaflet included in *Crusaders. Thy Kingdom come* contains the following sentence, “Now, History is in

42. *Marcaplayer*, 13 (2009).

your hands”: it is the other possible past. Not what would have happened under different circumstances, but rather because it will become what the main active agent generates: the player’s wishes. In the case where the game ends with the death (normally violent) of the virtual character, nothing tragic happens. This death is another element of consumption (I die, but no matter, I live again). Here is where it is easier to understand that a videogame is a game, nothing more and nothing less.

Where is the limit? We must think that its setting is in the mind, with an infinite universe. This alternative life we may wish to recreate in the Middle Ages is no more than an effect that gives us pleasure, basically because this experimentation reflects a vital activity, not a game. Thus, it is the script that marks that frontier, and in many cases it will be the historical script itself. The boundaries will be defined by the artificial intelligence in the software. In the *Crusaders Kings* manual, one can read the following, “You govern a medieval feudal dynasty. You can be a Christian emperor, king, duke or count, but there are also dukes, counts and bishops (including the Pope) not controlled by the player”. It is the limit of playability, where this AI is awarded its role in the script/rules that govern the game, according to what its developer has done. This ambiguous, almost schizophrenic, process is what leads us to the following section.

7. Recreate and re-create the historical process

There is a generalised consensus that the kind of game that adapts best to this target is strategy, and its penetration in the console market has been very limited, as mentioned. There are very few titles in this sense, like the version of *Age of Empires II* for PS2 or Nintendo DS, or the above-mentioned *Sid Meier’s Civilization Revolution*. The headline about the latest version of this game for iPhone in the magazine *Marcaplayer* was “Changing History”.⁴³ A clear declaration of intentions, or rather perceptions. And there will be many games that use this claim; we have seen it all before.

This section of the study mixes the basic concepts of historical rigour (for coherence), chronology (for the evident time factor), memory (for the perception of the past), experience (for the particular ability to evaluate situations), willpower (which, in the end, is what impels us to do something), criteria (doing something aware of what we are doing) and, especially, knowledge (the bedrock that the previously acquired contents give us). There is no sense in wanting to recreate something unknown to us. Why would we want to recreate the Battle de Crecy if we do not know what happened? Or better still: why would we want to create it again, that is, re-create it, if there is no specific interest in it, although it is simple entertainment?

43. *Marcaplayer*, 13 (2009): 127.



On the back cover of *Great Invasions*, which is based on historical accuracy, it specifies what may *a priori* seem a contradiction, "It's up to you to rewrite the history of Europe!" The fact that this game focuses on the late Imperial and early medieval period means it concentrates on the Eurocentrist perception then held about the known world. This is clear when we compare it with *Anno 1404*, where the player's role is as a 15th-century manager trying to open trade routes with the Orient and the Spice Route.



ILLUSTRATION 22. *ANNO 1404*. A HARBOR OF ORIENT.

One game has nothing to do with the other, as only the latter's graphic element will make it more attractive for the general public although it lacks the accuracy of the former.

Re-creation supposes that the player takes on the role of god, as he achieves what is even more difficult. Create once again what is already created, that is, control the past, of *what has already passed*. The past cannot be changed, the future can (with the exception of the determinists). The videogame lets us be that god that can do the impossible. The free will behind this omnipotence clashes frontally with the limits set by the script and the AI. Thus, the script becomes something definitive. The framework that sets the limits of the game is the history. The contradiction appears when the player's freedom comes up against the script proposed not only by its author, but also by the historical event itself. Although there are still games based on the *arcade* system, like those first games from the 1980s, which were limited to the player's ability, with endless challenges because they were a progression of



reflexes (like *Medieval Games*, Vir2L Studios, 2009, for Wii), and even the games by phases (the missions of *Age of Empires II*, among many others), the novelty lies in the *emerging* game, “where the worlds in the game are highly credible and let the game develop like a simplified simulation of reality”.⁴⁴ This is the factor that means that every time we approach the game something new happens, there is a different path to follow. And this could be a *Mount & Blade* type role, or business, as in *Patrician III*, or even better known although belonging to the more fantastic genre, *Fable* and its follow ups (with the third about to appear), and *Dante’s Inferno*.

However, it is very important to have a clear idea about the difference between “emerge”, synonym of sprout, and “create”. In the latter case, the effect of generating is voluntary, directed by someone or something; the emergence is generated by itself. *The Sims* is the emerging game *par excellence*, being a social simulator with no specific or predefined targets.⁴⁵

However, this freedom of action⁴⁶ is the characteristic of the new videogame. It is what allows us to generate a result. The fact that the game also allows specific conditions to be generated for this depend on its typology and even the quality of the title (evidently, we must never think that all the videogames are of the same quality). If the application of historical accuracy is an impediment for the development of the game’s arbitrary script, the chronology will be no less so.

For re-creating something that happened, that had its beginning and its end, allowing a dilatation of time is in itself an alteration of history (this “make a history to your liking”). In the case of management games, where certain achievements allow progress to a different era (or stage), as in *Age of Empires II*, and bearing in mind that this title does not respond to specific criteria of accuracy, but rather to a rather addictive entertainment structure, based on the medieval epoch, the temporal space also enters into the orbit of the will (or skill) of the person handling the game. The videogame makers who propose battles to be fought by the player are more permissive with this re-creating process, where the time factor has a lesser impact (or none, because these are events that have to be resolved in a virtual day). In contrast, there are also titles, like *Knights of Honor*, which offer the possibility of recreating situations, with no greater momentaneous achievement than to make progress in technology and political domain through its three “three historical periods” (Early, High and Late Middle Ages), and thus this time lapse is the key. In *Age of Empires II*, also based on the development of *eras* to progress through (High Middle Ages, Feudal Age, Age of the Castles, Imperial Age),⁴⁷ this *tempus* marks the outcome, as it allows you to generate more advanced technologies, both military

44. Peinado, Federico and Santorum, Michael. “Juego emergente: ¿nuevas formas de contar historias en videojuegos?”, *Icono 14*, 4 (2004). 15th January 2010. <www.icono14.net/revista/num4/index.html>.

45. Ibid.

46. Esnaola, Graciela A.; Levis, Diego L. “La narrativa en los videojuegos: un espacio cultural de aprendizaje socioemocional”. *Teoría de la Educación*, 9/3 (2008): 53. Monográfico “Videogames: una herramienta educativa de the ‘homo digitalis’”. 25 January 2010 <www.usal.es/teoriaeducacion/rev_numero_09_03/n9_03_esnaola_levis.pdf>.

47. Explanations of each of these can also be found in the original 1999 instruction manual: 31-32.



and civil, to increase agricultural productivity, the extraction of minerals or basic raw materials, and finally, have more powerful armies.

Memory, experience and criteria make up the player's position when he or she faces his or her own notions of the history he or she aims to re-create. But it is the knowledge that I consider fundamental for this process. Without prior contents that orientate us to what we want, we cannot create again, but rather attempt to reproduce something with the animus almost to entertain. It has no importance. It is almost sure that someone from Valencia, to take an example, will prefer to play with the Aragonese rather than the Castilians,⁴⁸ or even with the Byzantine faction rather than the Castilians, for reasons that we imagine but that are irrelevant, only sentiments. That is why the material offered by the game is so important, because at any given moment, it can "position" the player.

8. Control of the medieval past

I have just referred to the time factor for the videogame universe. First of all, a distinction must be made between the perception of *time* generated in the player's surroundings. One question is the time spent playing, an activity which the player decides to do instead of something else,⁴⁹ and another very different one is the projection that the passing of days, months, years or centuries produces in this player's virtual-mental world. These are two fundamental factors, and are not exclusive for understanding the impact the videogame has on the cultural spectrum it generates. On one hand, the number of hours dedicated to the game characterises the typology of videoplayer. A casual player is not the same as a *hardcore gamer*, as the knowledge about the medieval period that they can acquire when they need to progress in the game is proportional to what they could have dedicated *a priori* to this acquiring this knowledge, through reading and other means.⁵⁰ This is not a trivial question, as previously acquired contents can position the player: veracity against fantasy. That is why the simulation begins with this first stage, the mental object of *time*, where the hours spent getting to know the rules of the game are the key for the setting. This path leads us to the next step in the process, and this is the *location of the temporal framework for the simulation*. We have to define the past to prevent our orderly thoughts from becoming confused. That is true if what we want is to simulate the Middle Ages, because if we aim to live in fantastic dream worlds, all we need is the desire to break down barriers and let our imagination

48. During a talk at the University of Córdoba in October 2009, presenting this same question, all those present agreed that they would play first in the seat of Corduba for *Imperivm Civitas*.

49. The comments about this by Aurelio of the Portillo: "Enajenación de la experiencia del tiempo ante la pantalla del videojuego", 16th January 2010 <www.icono14.net/revista/num4/aurelio.doc> are very interesting.

50. I mentioned this typology in: Jiménez, Juan Francisco. "Videogame and Middle Ages"...



fly.⁵¹ This was the route used by many writers to escape the crude realities of their times. To this end, the desire to flee from the everyday reality is not a *sine quae non* condition, but simply incorporating the videogame it into our own everyday lives responds ever more to this need. These are the results of the *aDeSe* report about the use of videogames in Spanish homes (and which we can surely extrapolate to the Western world).⁵²

The division of the past into time fragments for better understanding and to put our thoughts into order (it was not by chance that the concept of the *Medievo* took root in the rational century of Descartes),⁵³ will lead us to want to play in this timeframe, combined with the spatial setting. A very interesting case is a game, *Mount & Blade*, already mentioned more than once in this text, that recreates a period in the 13th century, more precisely, 1257, and specifically the 23rd of March. But the territory is imaginary, although it evokes a model of Atlantic Europe, Calradia. The fact that the towns do not exist is the least. What matters is that while one rides through this countryside, there is the possibility of being attacked by bands of Vikings. This anachronism, as an imprecision, is a historical error, although not one of perception. For the non-specialist, the *Medievo* was a time of violence, of fighting to the death with swords, bows, catapults and maces (you are shown how to handle everything in the tutorial), which means that the appearances of these rural delinquents becomes an element of playability. And it is simpler to use these Norman figures than 14th century mercenaries, whose existence would have to be explained and contextualised. Simplicity is sought in models of the past: the control of this past by other means. And after all, this is also the basis of the commercial success of the products that resemble an idea of the *medieval*.

Here value is placed on the player's prior idea about history in general, and specifically about the *Medievo*. What to expect, what to achieve and what goals to aim at: to win, to play a game, where the simulation does not imply of victory or defeat but simply an experience. It is not only about annihilating a crusader army in the Holy Land in *Crusaders. Thy Kingdom come* or *Medieval Total War II*, but also of being able to stroll through the streets of Acre in 1191 in *Assassin's Creed*. These are not incompatible: this will only depend on the game and what we aim to extract from it as an element of leisure.

51. Chartier, Roger. *La historia o la lectura del tiempo*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 2007: 39-48.

52. See note 5.

53. The book by José Ignacio. Ruiz de la Peña about the concept of Middle Ages: *Introducción al estudio de la Edad Media* is still an excellent reference. Madrid: Taurus, 1984. However, and as a work that must always be kept in mind for these questions, the homonymous work by Santiago Montero Díaz (Murcia: University de Murcia, 1948) is very interesting. The reflections presented about the application of the *Medievo* to civilisations far from Western Europe, like the Japanese, is still very valid (not its approach, but more the reality of this fact), owing especially to the expansion of *manga* interface role playing games, such as the well known saga of *Final Fantasy*.



5. Game over?

With this play on words, I start my conclusions. I understand that a new universe like the videogame generates more suspicion than anything else among those who do not know the phenomenon. I prefer to move freely to present a series of reflections that, as a medievalist, have come to me over the years I have been playing and having fun while combining my hobbies: historical game, the *Medievo*, recreation, the miniatures that come to life on the computer screen. I insist that the future is not yet here, where new generations will find their historical models, and specifically those linked to the medieval period, in what they see and hear in their videogames. The cinema is not active, but passive and isolated. Someone accompanies us in the projection room, but in silence and with a direct unidirectional communication between the producer and spectator. The videogame allows dozens, hundreds or thousands of players, in the case of *World of Warcraft*, to take part in the dynamic of what is happening on screen. This is an attraction in itself, although only as a communicative act.

In an interview in *The Telegraph*, Dan Houser, one of the scriptwriters for *Grand Theft Auto*, a well-known open *sandbox* type videogame, mentioned that he had greater narrative freedom when writing scripts for videogames than for a film or book, due to the novelty of the medium. He associated this with the videogame not having “the same respect” as the other media, as “the sector is not in any academy and is not codified. There is no accepted way of doing things”, and that he would prefer to keep this freedom than be respected.⁵⁴ I suppose this is the style of the pioneer in any field, not paying excessive attention to the difficulties, but it is true that closing the doors to a tangible reality nowadays would not be a good policy to follow. The historical videogame will sink so deeply into our perception of history in the general sense that we will have to intervene in parallel to maintain a certain order. It is a similar process to the one we have had to follow with Internet.

As specialists, among other reflections, we must emphasise that the perception of the historical process is reached through exploring the entrails of history itself from the internal management of its dynamic, of human evolution over time. It is not a matter of managing a discourse, more of reaching a target, that could well be a management objective, military, strategy of dominance or simply the mere fact of coping in a geographic context. I refer to the satisfaction of the consumer of the *History* product, as the well-known documentary channel does, but directly, actively and participatively.

The fundamental is the new concept of *author*, “where the recreation and appropriation by the players of the videogame is linked to social and collective conceptions that can be shared if they offer a scenario where the digital tools

54. “Movies and TV and books have become so structured in the way they have to approach things. Not working in that environment gives us enormous freedom. I’d rather keep the freedom and not have the respect”. 15th January 2010 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/4373632/Dan-Houser-interview-Rockstar-Games-writer-for-GTA-4-and-The-Lost-And-Damned.html>>.



are protagonists".⁵⁵ And what is more important, that there is awareness of this handling. The reason is that the player has to update this content to assimilate it.

We have to unlink the concept of historical "manipulation", understood as the medium that misrepresents historical development and for which we use History, with capital letter, to reach certain objectives (fundamentally political, social or institutional), from the contents seen and enjoyed (or suffered) in the videogames.

All these open processes are very important, as the genesis of the concept of Middle Ages has its resurrection in the *videogame* phenomenon. The adscription to specific geographies of Western Europe ends up redrawing this idea of the Medioevo gestated in the 16th-17th centuries and settled in the 19th. Now we have a window open on the medieval period on our computer screens. These are not controlled images of the many towns and villages in our European territory where we are lucky enough to find some architectural elements from that period (especially castles and fortresses): these are postcards that belong to anyone and everyone who has a computer in front of them.

There is also a growth in the open script (the emerging narrative). However, for the historical case, and thus for games set in the medieval period, this freedom of action clashes head on with the player who seeks to recreate history, with set patterns of authenticity, which is what they value in that case, although they really generate their own history. It is the application of the concept of re-creation, and not recreation.

Possibly this duality between the worst of human feelings and responses and the highest spiritual aims of our species, as configured over the centuries from the 15th down to our times, is what attracts us so irrationally on many occasions. Only the classical culture, and specifically Rome, could compete with the Medioevo as a mental attraction. Nobody (or only few exceptions) wishes to evoke being a soldier in Rocroi, or a 19th century merchant, a scribe in Egypt, or a 16th-century heretic. In contrast, there are some recreations for very specific cases. In the USA, the Mayflower settlers are a reference, more than anything else because they represent the North American "Middle Ages", their oldest origins.

Having reached this point, and looking at the specific contents about old medieval civilisations, we should ask whether people knowledgeable about the Medioevo are at an advantage when playing. In other words, will they be good players? Not necessarily, but they will only enjoy the game more (because they know and understand what they are playing), which is, in the end, the aim.

Beyond Fukuyama's time, and going back to another play on words, should a theory be proposed where the end of history is not *Game Over*, as used to appear in the old arcade games in the 1980s? The truth is that recreating or simulating history

55. "Aprendiendo con los videojuegos comerciales: un puente entre ocio y education". Grupo Imágenes, Palabras e Ideas de la Universidad de Alcalá de Henares y Electronic Arts España. 15th January 2010 <www.adese.es/pdf/informe_UAH.pdf>.



is the present and will be the future. The videogame is the medium, although only as a cultural and patrimonial phenomenon of the culture that gave birth to it.⁵⁶



ILLUSTRATION 23. FINAL SCREEN OF VICTORY IN *MEDIEVAL TOTAL WAR II*.

56. Author's note: by the time this article got to proof stage, the videogame-market had expanded to include new titles which confirm the conclusions drawn here. Lionheart: King's Crusaders, The Cursed Crusade, Crusader Kings II, Assassin's Creed Revelations, El primer templario, Shogun Total War 2 (with its expansion El nacimiento de los Samuráis), among others, or re-editions such as Real Warfare: grandes batallas medievales (de Siglo XIII: muerte o gloria) or Las Cruzadas (de Crusaders)..., though special mention must be made of Los Sims Medieval, a simulation game which provides a new game perspective with is entirely inspired by medieval models.

