CALL FOR PAPERS for the international conference at the Finnish institute at Athens, on 22–23 October 2026:

'So(cially) ancient! Representing Ancient and Early Medieval Social, Ethnic and Religious Realities in Video Games'

Video games have become a significant and influential part of mainstream culture. Consequently, historical game studies have rapidly evolved into a new field of study over the last two decades. Monographs have been published which explore the topics of historical video games as a form of history (Chapman 2016), as well as the representation of Classical Antiquity (Clare 2021) and the Middle Ages (Houghton 2024) in video games. Furthermore, a number of recent studies have focused on various specific aspects of historical video games, including authenticity, world building, music, women, and pedagogical applications (see bibliography).

The objective of this conference is twofold: firstly, to direct attention towards the representations of social, ethnic and religious aspects of past worlds in video games that have received comparatively little scholarly attention; and secondly, to explore a chronological frame that has not seen much attention. Indeed, despite the flourishing academic interest in diverse forms of classical reception in video games, films and music videos, the reception of the late antique and early medieval periods (however defined) in video games and transmedia has so far been a rarely explored topic.

Furthermore, even though the ancient Mediterranean region was home to a multitude of cultures and ethnicities, the focus of video games – and consequently of scholarly studies dealing with them – has been fairly Eurocentric. In fact, the SWANA region (South-West Asia and North Africa) and the Eastern Mediterranean have received comparatively little attention in reception studies. For example, the reception of the Eastern Roman ('Byzantine') Empire in popular culture is a subject that is rarely discussed, despite its significant historical importance during Late Antiquity and beyond (a recent example is Kulhánková & Marciniak 2023, which includes one chapter on video games). With this conference, we also wish to explore such non-Eurocentric points of view.

In order to encourage discussion between different academic disciplines and to bridge the gap between classical and medieval reception studies, we welcome case studies and comparative studies on the reception - in any game genre - of social, ethnic and religious realities from Classical Antiquity until the Crusades. Thematically, we invite the papers to focus on one or more of the following, often overlapping aspects in representing past societies in games:

- **Social.** How are social or professional groups represented? How do different types of games (like city-builders, grand strategy, and narrative-based games) strike a balance between

realism, relatability, and being entertaining? How do social dynamics influence gameplay, narrative or character creation – including such things as *clientela* system, slavery, different languages, citizen/non-citizen status, disabilities, the position of women in different societies/eras, and the range of ancient sexualities?

- **Ethnic.** What visual or technical solutions are used to distinguish ethnic groups from each other? Can we observe any kind of nationalist discourse reflecting the present day in the ways ethnic groups are portrayed? Are the Hellenistic or Late Roman worlds – to give just two examples – portrayed as multiethnic, or can we detect (unconscious or conscious) 'whitewashing' or homogenisation? How are cultures on the margins of the Mediterranean world and between the major, 'recognisable' blocks represented? Are 'barbarians' represented in ways that perpetuate ancient stereotypes and primitivist narratives? Does the *topos* of the 'migration period' influence depictions of late antiquity?

- **Religious**. How do different types of historical games engage with the religious traditions and cultures of the ancient and early medieval worlds? Are representations of characteristics such as credos, rituals, vestments, or religious architecture equally granular, or do certain aspects receive more attention than others? To what extent is religion used in historical games as a tool to make the game world seem more immersive? Are religious characters and groups presented in a clearly positive or negative light? Are certain religious topics avoided due to contemporary tensions?

The two keynote speakers who have confirmed their participation are:

Jane Draycott ([link](#) and [link](#))

Dr Jane Draycott is a senior lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Glasgow and co-director of the University of Glasgow's Games and Gaming Lab. She investigates science, technology, and medicine in the ancient world, and is particularly interested in the history and archaeology of medicine; impairment, disability, and prostheses; and botany and horticulture. Recently, she has begun exploring the use (and abuse) of history and archaeology in video games, particularly those set in classical antiquity. She has also long had a special interest in Graeco-Roman Egypt and the Roman client kingdom of Mauretania.

Robert Houghton ([link](#))

Dr Robert Houghton is a senior lecturer in Early Medieval European History at the University of Winchester. He currently studies the relationship networks and socio-political structures in Northern Italy c.950—c.1122. He is also interested in the ways in which modern games can be used to represent, explore, and debate the Middle Ages. His current project engages with the presentation of the Middle Ages within computer games and considers the interaction between ludic and medievalist tropes to create a particular vision of the period. Outside the University he has worked as a researcher for *Mouseion Ltd* and with *Paradox Interactive* and as an editor for *The Public Medievalist*. He also organises the annual *Middle Ages in Modern Games Asynchronous* conference and associated events and proceedings.

We warmly invite scholars from any discipline to submit an abstract, whether they are PhD students or more experienced academics. Please submit your abstracts and a short bio in English (max. 300 words for the abstract and 50 words for the bio) to Antti Lampinen at ajlamp@utu.fi by **31 March 2026.** The results will be communicated in April.

The proceedings of the conference will be published in a collected volume. The conference will be in-person only. Participation is free and sponsored by the Finnish Cultural Foundation and the Finnish institute at Athens. However, the organisers are unable to reimburse participants' travel expenses.

Organisers:

Antti Lampinen (University of Turku, ajlamp@utu.fi) is a Collegium Fellow at the Turku Institute of Advanced Studies and a Docent at the Universities of Turku and Helsinki. Having studied Greek and Roman ethnography and its subsequent reception for a long time, he is currently seeking to link this to the study of historically framed games, which have been a personal hobby for several decades.

Jasmin Lukkari (University of Helsinki, jasmin.lukkari@helsinki.fi) is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki and a visiting scholar at the University of Milan. She specialises in Roman history, historiography and historical narratives and has a passion for historical strategy video games as well as story driven games.

Conference venue:

The Finnish Institute at Athens

Zitrou 16, GR-11742 Athens, Greece

https://finninstitute.gr/en/

Founded in 1984, the Finnish Institute at Athens is an academic institution with a mission to carry out and promote the study of Greek archaeology, history, language and culture from ancient times to the present day.

Important dates:

Call for Papers ends: 31 March 2026.

The selection of accepted papers: During April 2026.

Conference dates: 22–23 October 2026.

Select bibliography:

- Csilla E. Ariese, Krijn H.J. Boom, Bram van den Hout, Angus A.A. Mol & Aris Politopoulos (eds.). 2021. *Return to the Interactive Past: The Interplay of Video Games and Histories*. Leiden: Sidestone Press.
- Bonner, Marc (ed.). 2021. *Game | World | Architectonics: Transdisciplinary Approaches on Structures and Mechanics, Levels and Spaces, Aesthetics and Perception*. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing.
- Chapman, Adam. 2016. *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice*. New York – London: Routledge.
- Clare, Ross. 2021. *Ancient Greece and Rome in Videogames: Representation, Play, Transmedia*. London – New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Draycott, Jane & Kate Cook (eds.). 2022. *Women in Classical Video Games*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

- Draycott, Jane (ed.). 2022. *Women in Historical and Archaeological Video Games*. Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter.
- Houghton, Robert (ed.). 2022. *Teaching the Middle Ages through Modern Games: Using, Modding and Creating Games for Education and Impact*. Basel – Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter.
- Houghton, Robert. 2024. *The Middle Ages in Computer Games: Ludic Approaches to the Medieval and Medievalism*. Cambridge – Boydell & Brewer.
- Kulhánková, Markéta & Przemysław Marciniak (eds.). 2023. *Byzantium in the Popular Imagination: The Modern Reception of the Byzantine Empire*. London – New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Lind, Stephanie. 2023. *Authenticity in the music of video games*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- McCall, Jeremiah B. 2023. *Gaming the past: Using video games to teach secondary history*. New York: Routledge.
- Mol, Angus A. A., Csilla E. Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke, Krijn H. J.Boom & Aris Politopulos (eds.). 2017. *The Interactive Past: Archaeology, Heritage & and Video Games*. Leiden: Sidestone Press.
- Reinhard, Andrew. 2018. *Archaeogaming: An Introduction to Archaeology in and of Video Games*. New York: Berghahn.
- Rollinger, Christian (ed.). 2020. *Classical Antiquity in Video Games: Playing with the Ancient World*. London – New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Ludography:

Here are some popular and/or recent examples of suitable games for the themes of the conference. The paper proposals do not have to be limited to these.

- Age of Empires series (1997-2024, Ensemble Studios, Forgotten Empires/Microsoft).
- Anno 117: Pax Romana (2025, Ubisoft Mainz, Ubisoft).
- Assassin's Creed series (2009-2025, Ubisoft Montréal, Ubisoft).
- Caesar series (1992-2006, Impressions Games/BreakAway Games/Tilted Mill Entertainment/Sierra Entertainment, Sierra Entertainment).
- Civilization series (1991-2025, MicroProse & Firaxis Games, MicroProse/Activision/Infogrames Entertainment/2K Games).
- Crusader Kings III (2020, Paradox Development Studio, Paradox Interactive).
- Expeditions Rome (2022, Logic Artists, THQ Nordic).
- Field of Glory series (2009-2024, Hexwar/Byzantine Games/AGEod, Slitherine Software/Matrix Games).
- Glory of the Roman Empire (2006, Haemimont Games, CDV Software Entertainment/Enlight Interactive).
- God of War series (2005-2024, SCE Santa Monica Studio/Sony Computer Entertainment and Sony Interactive Entertainment).
- Hades (2020, Supergiant Games).
- Humankind (2021, Amplitude Studios, Sega).
- Imperator: Rome (2019, Paradox Development Studio, Paradox Interactive).
- Old World (2020, Mohawk Games, Hooded Horse).
- Ryse: Son of Rome (2013, Crytek).
- Rise of the Tomb Raider (2015, Crystal Dynamics, Microsoft Studios/SquareEnix).
- Total War series (2000-2023, Creative Assembly/Feral Interactive, Electronic Arts/Activision/Sega).