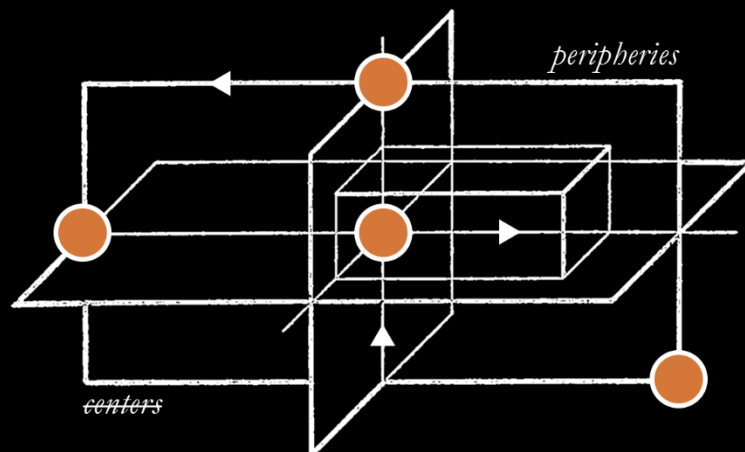


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Peripheries – Title Image. Image by Aska Mayer. CC BY-NC.

Special Issue

Peripheral Religions and Games

edited by

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Houghton uses one of Chapman's important contributions to the field, a division of historical games into *realist simulations* and *conceptual simulations*, as a solid foundation from which to successfully build an updated medievalist model acknowledging the presence of specifically medieval versions blending both types, for example medieval fantasy games and their distinct ludic approach. This argument forms the basis for much of the book's second chapter, but it is followed by many other such useful revisions creating the theoretical groundwork for further studies not of historical games generally, but medievalist games specifically.

One might point out that the book functions rather more like an overview of existing game representations of the Middle Ages than a contribution driving medieval game research significantly forward. This is acknowledged by the author, who does point out that the (conscious) focus on breadth rather than depth causes a loss of detail and nuance in the discussion (Houghton 2024, 29). Nevertheless, it is a particularly valuable contribution as a holistic analysis of medieval computer games, and will serve as a brilliant starting point for future discussion, exactly as intended by Houghton's approach.

These outcomes are very much supported by the book's structure, with a division into thematic chapters, each examining an area of medievalist representation, functioning as a gateway for the reader into particular kinds of medievalism in games. While certain chapters are heavily reliant on specific earlier works for considerable portions of their content, they all serve as orderly and well thought-out walkthroughs of research and representation both. Often, these chapters point out specific pitfalls in medievalist game representation, as in the combat and warfare section, where the author rightly calls out the representation of the Middle Ages as both a dark age of all-encompassing violence, and a heroic age of noble heroes, with romanticized and

grotesque violence often appearing in the same titles – as well as *more* violence appearing in medieval games (Houghton 2024, 81-83, 87-89). Similarly widespread, it is argued, is the idea of developmental stasis as a key characteristic of the medieval, often positioned at the tail end of a more advanced fallen empire, and potentially prior to a more dynamic and advanced modern era (Houghton 2024, 106). These are not new observations, and have been noted by others before, including the book's author, but the book does an admirable job explaining all the historical and literary trends behind these inspirations, from long before the first video game saw the light of day.

The book's ambitions lie in scope rather than in argument, but those ambitions are successfully realised. Houghton's seminal volume will be particularly useful for classes taught on medievalism, and the connections between video games and history, and will no doubt become the primary reference work for any graduate student embarking on a thesis project involving medievalism and the Middle Ages in modern video games. Further, it provides the most thorough summary of what has today become a vibrant field of historical, literary, ludic, and interdisciplinary research. It is difficult to comment on the viability of future research springing from *The Middle Ages in Computer Games*, as the possibilities are almost endless. The breadth of topics and immense variety of examples leaves room for a flourishing of the field across disciplines, themes, and case studies, and finally we have a book weaving the divergent threads of medievalist game studies together.

References

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