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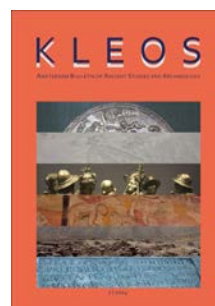
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Carthago Prosperanda Est: Representation of Carthaginians in Video Games

Corine Gerritsen

ABSTRACT

Roma Aeterna! Words corroborated by the continuous popularity of the Romans in the ever-growing video game industry. Games and movies, along with their respective fields of study, often favour the Roman Empire as the star of the show.¹ Instead, this paper analyses one of their greatest adversaries in video games: the Carthaginians. The article explores the representation of the Carthaginians in the digital ludic realm and the sources used to form these representations. Furthermore, the study analyses how game designers manage gaps in the historical record. The absence of Carthaginian literary texts means the creators turn to other sources or adopt alternative approaches. How can lacunas in sources turn into a depiction of a complex culture and society? The paper analyses two popular video games: *Imperator: Rome* and *Old World*.² The focus lies on the influence of ancient and historiographic sources in shaping digital representation, as evident from in-game texts and game files. This analysis requires a multidisciplinary methodology and perspective, combining historical research and game studies. The study demonstrates the great influence that Roman and Greek sources have on the representation of Carthage in video games. Additionally, I discuss developers' approaches to gaps in knowledge, and what other sources they employ to create a complete and layered representation.

INTRODUCTION

Digital Romans made their first appearance in 1982 in the game *Legionnaire*; it would only take five more years for one of their most potent enemies, the Carthaginians, to step into the digital playspace as well. *Annals of Rome* established the Carthaginians as

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¹ Bembeneck 2013; Lozano 2020; Machado 2020; McCall 2020.

² Paradox Interactive, *Imperator: Rome* 2019; Mohawk Games, *Old World* 2021.

a powerful force in the ancient world, and from here on out, they continued to appear.³ Even though surviving Carthaginian sources are scarce, the representation of this culture does not suffer from a lack of content in video games. These two elements seem contradictory and give rise to the questions: What are the key elements of digital Carthaginians, and what sources and game design approaches shape this representation?

This paper employs an interdisciplinary scope to analyse both the portrayal and processes at play in constructing ancient Carthaginians in the digital realm. Moreover, the study uses methodologies and sources from both history and game studies. The corpus of digital sources includes gameplay, in-game texts, and game files. With the game sources as a starting point, certain quotations, mentions of authors and specific events pointed to the inclusion of ancient sources, such as the writings of Polybius, Cicero, Horace, and Livy. The case study focuses on the recent games *Imperator: Rome*, a grand-strategy game, and *Old World*, a turn-based strategy game, as they are comparable in scope.⁴ These games allow us to address another important question: how are the absences of ancient sources translated into seemingly complete representations onscreen?

These two questions steer away from the issue: 'Is this game historically accurate?', since the answer is always 'no'.⁵ History, after all, is a construct. Moreover, the creators of 'historical' video games are not historians.⁶ Occasionally, the game studios are able to consult historians. More often, in smaller teams or when the budget is insufficient, team members do the research themselves, using online sources, academic works, and books.⁷ In both scenarios, developers encounter constraints, particularly regarding time and financial resources. Additionally, genre expectations push developers to adhere to successfully proven concepts.⁸ These elements highlight the difference in objectives between game creators and historians. Despite the challenges developers face in creating playable pasts, the games demonstrate a commitment to including a wide array of historical elements.

METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK

This study falls within the domain of historical game studies and uses methods from both the discipline of history and game

3 Avalon Hill Company 1982, *Legionnaire*; Data Design Interactive et al 1987, *Annals of Rome*.

4 Paradox Interactive 2019, *Imperator: Rome*; Mohawk Games 2021, *Old World*.

5 Montfort 2003, 2-3.

6 Maguid 2019.

7 Grufstedt 2022, 97.

8 Arsenault 2009, 149-156.

studies. The representations of the past in video games proves a fruitful object of study: some approaches, demonstrated by Y. Grufstedt and A. Chapman, focus on the modes of representation, others on a specific period, exemplified by R. Houghton and C. Rollinger, and finally, some on the representation of a specific game, illustrated by A. Flegler and D. Dow.⁹ This article contains a similar representation angle but foregrounds an understudied object, digital Carthaginians.

The method consists of close-playing, as employed by S. Lammes, both *Imperator: Rome* and *Old World*.¹⁰ While playing, I took notes and captured the gameplay using Open Broadcast Software.¹¹ Due to the nature of these extensive games and in-game player decisions, it is virtually impossible to encounter all potential scenarios and content. However, all textual content, visible or invisible within a game session, is stored in game files.¹² The descriptive language elements in these files contain information on game elements such as cultures, names, events, and mechanics. By close-reading the texts that refer to the digital Carthaginians, certain quotes, authors, and other references to ancient sources emerge. All Carthaginian text files have been analysed, but for brevity's sake, the examples in this paper are limited.

Unfortunately, there is no extensive documentation of the full process of historical research by these specific game creators. Interviews attest to the consultation of texts by Roman authors, but do not list specific texts or how the sources were used.¹³ For other games by the same developers, the historical research included the reading and interpreting of Wikipedia, online academic databases, secondary literature, and primary sources.¹⁴ Developers likely used this standard approach for the creation of *Imperator: Rome* and *Old World*. By close-playing and close-reading the game files, texts by authors such as Polybius, Cicero, Horace and Livy can be found. Even though digital databases such as Perseus Digital Library and LOEB classical libraries allow for extensive searches through quick queries, in addition to previous familiarity with these sources, it is possible that not all ancient

⁹ Chapman 2016; Dow 2014; Flegler 2021; Grufstedt 2022; Houghton 2021; Rollinger 2021.

¹⁰ Lammes 2003.

¹¹ OBS Studio, <https://obsproject.com/>, accessed on 02/04/2021.

¹² The files for *Imperator: Rome* can be accessed through:

Steam>Steamapps>common>ImperatorRome>game>common; the files for *Old World* can be accessed through Epic Games>OldWorld>Reference>XML>infos.

¹³ <https://www.vice.com/en/article/gk8gb3/finding-the-paradox-game-within-roman-history-for-imperator-rome>, accessed on 04/09/2023.

¹⁴ Grufstedt 2022, 97.

authors are included.¹⁵ Rather than providing an all-encompassing list, this study aims to display what types of sources are used for these games and to demonstrate how the sources shape the portrayal of the digital Carthaginians.

THE LEGACY OF CARTHAGE

In *Imperator: Rome*, players assume the role of a leader governing a historical city-state, tribe, kingdom, or empire. Players interact with and make decisions on various aspects, including religious, political, military, economic, and diplomatic affairs. The game entices players to complete missions to receive bonuses. The first three Carthaginian missions all aim to make Carthage the most influential trade power in the game. For example, one mission is titled “An end to Sicilian warfare”, which urges the player to “finally annex the island for once and for all” for their trade to prosper.¹⁶ Furthermore, every political entity has a “heritage” containing a description of the historical context. For Carthage, this states that “her heritage is one of a strong naval and mercantile power.” Even when a player has no previous knowledge of historical Carthage, these elements convey wealth and trade as key characteristics of Carthage.

In *Old World*, the emphasis on wealth is also evident. The game scenario “riches and influence” states, “[...] the time has come for Carthage to become the [...] richest Phoenician civilization.” Furthermore, Carthage is the only entity in the game that receives bonus gold through coastal cities and through two of their gods. The description reinforces the idea that Carthage should be wealthy, and the mechanics result in Carthage generating more income than any other culture, affording the player to quick riches.

This portrayal echoes the primary sources written by Roman and Greek observers, which predominantly include an admiring mention of Carthage’s wealth, often paired with a comment on the success of trade that provided these riches. For example, in the early 5th century BC, Thucydides wrote that “they have the most silver”.¹⁷ Over 250 years later, Polybius refers to Carthage as “the wealthiest city in the world”.¹⁸ Trade is attributed as the reason for this wealth, as Cicero expresses Carthaginians are “craving for mercantile voyages and commercial profit”.¹⁹

¹⁵ Perseus Digital Library, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>, accessed on 3/09/2024; LOEB Classical Library, <https://www.loebclassics.com/>, accessed on 3/09/2024.

¹⁶ The quotes from the games were present in *Imperator: Rome* [1.5.3] and *Old World* [0.1.51079] and can be found in the game files.

¹⁷ Thucydides 6.34.

¹⁸ Polybius 18.35.

¹⁹ Cicero, *De Republica* 2.7.

In both games, the Carthaginians are constructed around elements of wealth and trade, and both grant Carthage bonuses related to trading abilities and wealth accumulation. Therefore, even when a player has agency to play as the realm, there is an enormous chance of creating Carthage with the same over-emphasised characteristics as those in the primary sources. The words of Thucydides, Livy, Cicero, and Polybius consistently appreciate Carthage's wealth and subsequent historiography, and easily accessible sources, such as Wikipedia, use the ancient words to emphasise this element. Developers thus shape mechanics and game design elements that recreate the curated conventional image of the past painted by specific ancient sources.

POWER AND INDIVIDUALS

Another core element is the importance placed on the power Carthage owes to well-known individuals and their families. Starting *Old World* as Carthage, the player is immediately introduced to Queen Dido, whose role they assume (figure 1). Although her historicity remains debated, this founder is given the leadership role in the game because of the near-mythical status ancient texts give her. Moreover, her introductory text strongly resembles the words of Virgil.

"I am a Phoenician princess, carrying the name Elissa, who fled my home in Tyre. Having escaped my brother Pygmalion, who murdered my beloved husband Acerbar, a priest of Hercules, I arrived in North Africa. With my husband's riches, I bargained [...]." ²⁰

These are the first few lines in which Dido presents herself to the player. While the story of Dido is well known, this particular text remains strikingly close to the Aeneid.

"Dido rules this empire, having set out from Tyre, fleeing her brother. [...] Acerbar was her husband, wealthiest, in land, of Phoenicians[...] and loved with a great love by the wretched girl. But her brother Pygmalion[...] killed the unwary Sychaeus. But the ghost of her unburied husband came to her in dream [...] and revealed an ancient treasure." ²¹

The most important elements, such as Tyre, her flight from her brother, her love for her husband, the murder, the names, and the

²⁰ Mohawk Games, *Old World* 2021.

²¹ Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.494. Kline (translation) 2002.



Figure 1.
Dido as the leader of the Carthaginians. Mohawk Games, *Old World* 2021, screenshot by author.

riches of her late husband, are concisely reproduced. In the last sentence of her game introduction, she tells the player, “I am ready to become [...] Queen of Carthage, goddess of my people”. The choice of the term “goddess” further underlines the direct influence of Virgil’s text, as he refers to Dido with this exact word.²² Dido’s story has been reimagined and altered throughout centuries, but the specific wording suggests distinct efforts to incorporate primary textual sources instead.

Another essential game mechanic in *Old World* is “Important Families”, who can grant bonuses or create problems. All the Carthaginian family names are derived from important and often-mentioned individuals or their families. The most famous individual is Hannibal, featuring in an abundance of ancient texts such as those by Cicero, Livy, Horace, and Polybius; the Barcid family thus makes an unsurprising appearance in the game as one of the important families.²³ Diodorus, in turn, extensively writes about the Magonids, the historical family preceding the Barconids in influence, and in *Old World* they appear side by side.²⁴ The other two are simply named after important Carthaginian individuals: Hannonid after Hanno the navigator and Didonian after Queen Dido (figure 2). The developers thus place the same importance on these great individuals and families as the primary sources do. Rather than favouring the chronological realities of the figures,

²² Ibid., 370, 405.

²³ Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*; Cicero, *De Senectute De Amicitia De Divinatione*;

Horace, *Carmina* 2.12.2; Horace, *Carmina* 4.4.49; Livy 21.2; Polybius 1.24-44, 1.60-87, 2.13.

²⁴ Diodorus 13.43.5-6, 13.80.1-2, 14.50, 14.90.2-4, 15.54-70.



Figure 2.
Didonian family. Mohawk Games, Old World 2021, screenshot by author.

the developers prioritise incorporating families and figures that are widely recognised in sources.

The important families have power within Carthage, yet Carthage's geopolitical role within the games holds equal importance in its representation. In *Imperator: Rome*, the AI (artificial intelligence) determines the behaviour of the political entities surrounding the player. "Observer" mode offers the possibility to study the AI without player interference. Players are always faced with political instability, but the AI mode proves that Carthage hardly ever disintegrates in this game, as the Carthaginians effectively manage almost all rebellions. Furthermore, Carthage demonstrates rapid expansion, often outpacing its historical trajectory, demonstrated by the AI's early conquest of Hispania, decades before Hamilcar Barca's expansion (around 236 BC).²⁵ Most importantly, Carthage is the most powerful entity at the beginning of the game in the Western Mediterranean world. While Rome has the potential to expand quickly, Carthage is already a force to be reckoned with, often spreading influence through Hispania into Gaul.²⁶ This means that Carthage is programmed to be the biggest and most powerful enemy of the Romans. It echoes the sentiment of Roman writers who emphasise the greatness of their foe, as can be read in words

²⁵ Freeman 2022, 29-34.

²⁶ VALUE, <https://youtu.be/fROsZzaBQJ4>, accessed on 18/06/2021, 7:51-12:05.

such as Livy's "Carthaginians, destined to be such formidable enemies".²⁷ In the games, Carthage is coded to balance Rome mechanically.

However, the appearance of Carthage as the main challenge to Roman expansion does not spring solely from a game design need. The idea that Carthage wielded great influence and power, possibly posing the greatest threat to Rome's rise to power, is articulated in primary sources and historiography.²⁸ Admiration of specific individuals and their military genius often accompanied this notion. From the first moment, Hannibal and the Romans step onto the field of battle, the general's name becomes a synonym for fear: "Dread Hannibal", "Treacherous Hannibal", and "Hannibal at the gates".²⁹ He captures Rome's imagination and receives enduring popularity well into our day and age.³⁰ While Hannibal's military victories earned him and Carthage praise and awe from Roman writers, it is also common for Roman authors to represent their enemies with inflated greatness making any victory over them seem more significant. The mythic attraction of these characters remained persistent in history and in popular culture. Video games draw from referential codes for popular classical reception, and cinema and television pose unavoidable cultural references, as D. Lozano states.³¹ Indeed opera, movies and TV series have made characters, such as Dido and Hannibal, inescapable as cultural reference. A game featuring Carthage can thus not simply ignore the existence of these figures, and developers incorporate references to them in abundance.

FROM PRIMARY SOURCE TO KEY ELEMENT

The primary historical accounts, often characterised by a positive tone, shape the core pillars upon which Carthage in games is constructed. However, it is important to acknowledge another layer of complexity within these ancient Roman texts and their stance towards the Carthaginians. The statements of Carthaginian wealth often show up together with the warning that this wealth leads to greed, arrogance, and corruption.³² These views stem from earlier opinions on the Phoenicians and their cities, including Carthage, who were targets of the same negative sentiments.³³ The Carthaginians, in particular, are portrayed as untrustworthy

²⁷ Livy 5.29.

²⁸ Hoyos 2010, 2-4.

²⁹ Horace, *Carmina* 2.12.2; Horace, *Carmina* 4.4.49; Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum* 4.22.

³⁰ Bazalgette 2006, *Hannibal*; Bragaglia/Ulmer 1959, *Annibale*; Fleming 2001, *Hannibal: the Man who hated Rome*; Gallone 1937, *Scipione l'Africano*; Hufnail 2005, *The True Story of Hannibal*.

³¹ Lozano 2021, 47-48.

³² Cicero, *De Lege Agraria* 2.95.5

³³ Isaac 2004, 326.

and lacking in respect for the gods.³⁴ The ancient stereotype of Carthaginians thus portrays them as wealthy, and militarily powerful, but also corruptible, faithless, and oath-breaking. This stereotype functions as a cultural foil to the Romans and was directly opposed to some of the most vital Roman virtues: a life without extravagance, respect for the gods, and the keeping of oaths.

A distinctly negative Carthaginian stereotype thus existed in antiquity, rooted in Orientalist views. Popular culture, including video games, still struggles with this type of portrayal, as is the case with multiple Eastern cultures in Sid Meier's *Civilization* series.³⁵ The negative aspects of Carthaginians are notably absent in the presented case studies. One potential explanation is that the games are relatively recent, and the awareness of Western bias and Orientalist interpretations receive more attention in society.

In *Old World* and *Imperator: Rome*, only the main positive aspects of Carthage are magnified. These elements have been perpetuated by historical books and popular media, allowing the perception of the representation as authentic or accurate by the player. Because of previous conventions, the mythological image of Carthage becomes the authentic one, and this discursive authenticity is continued and legitimised in these game elements.³⁶ As Rome, players face the greatest challenge when confronting Carthage, reflecting the historical rivalry and the struggle for dominance between these ancient powers. While alternate game narratives could have explored other facets of Carthage's history, the focus on trade, wealth, and powerful leaders reinforces the significance of these elements and underscores the formidable nature of Carthage as the ultimate adversary. The contemporary games present the same narrow portrayal of Carthage as the ancient sources did. By focusing heavily on the key attributes, these are overemphasised, ensuring a Carthaginian legacy as a captivating and challenging force in gaming realms.

WHEN THE SOURCES REMAIN QUIET

In *Imperator: Rome*, there is one framework for all governments, modelled after the Roman Empire. Governments consist of eight offices, named differently for each political entity. While there is substantial information about the Roman government, this is not the case for Carthage.³⁷ Livy provides us with terms for the leaders, incorporated in the game as Suffete and Co-Suffete, but

³⁴ Ibid., 328.

³⁵ Mol/Politopoulos 2021, 44-51.

³⁶ Pfister 2020, 62-63.

³⁷ Hoyos 2020, 50-57.



other titles of political offices remain unknown.³⁸

Figure 3 shows the titles of all offices, and none is left blank. The developers' approach to this gap in knowledge demonstrates a distinct pattern: words such as Augur and Magistrate are Roman and indicate similar offices in Carthage. Other titles such as Shephat, Mefahked, Kahen, and Rophet are Hebrew words. The word "Rophet", רֹפֵא in Hebrew, means doctor. The description of this government function states, "this office is the most senior doctor".³⁹ Kahen, or כהן, simply means priest, and the in-game function is that of a high priest.⁴⁰ Mefahked, or מִפְחָד, which translates to commander, is an office for military leadership.⁴¹

The inclusion of Hebrew words points to historical considerations. Both the Punic and Phoenician languages have been handed down sparingly.⁴² This is not the case with the Hebrew language, which has preserved written traditions. Hebrew is linguistically closely related to Phoenician, and thus, by proxy, Punic.⁴³ The decision to use a linguistic relative of Punic and incorporate Hebrew words in *Imperator: Rome* to fill in the gaps in knowledge demonstrates the intention to come as close as possible to the original language.

Old World has no offices, but the game includes a great number of individual names. The developer approaches are similar to those of *Imperator: Rome*. The game files list all the names that can appear for Carthaginian characters. Some of these, such as Thubabath, Sapanba'al, and Imilce, are known Punic or Phoenician names, but the majority of this list consists of names from other Semitic languages, most often Arabic or Hebrew, such as Famiruz,

Figure 3.

The government offices of Carthage. Paradox Interactive, Imperator: Rome 2019, screenshot by author.

³⁸ Livy 28.37.2, 30.7.5.

³⁹ Brown 2004, 951.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 497.

⁴¹ Ibid., 823-823.

⁴² Adams 2003, 200-201, 205-206.

⁴³ Gras et al. 2006, 82-85.

Nasma, Tabiba, Zohur, and Hannah.

The game creators fill their game with references to Latin texts but mostly use words of linguistically close relatives of the Punic language for names and titles. The average player is most likely unaware that these names and titles are not Punic but are instead Hebrew or, in some cases, Arabic. The games do not communicate the use of a specific language, rather, developers choose closely related alternatives to fit in seamlessly. Despite the limitations in time, finances, and accessibility to sources, developers aim to create a historical close possibility to present the players with a cohesive representation of Carthaginians.

RELIGION

A similar approach emerges from the analysis of Carthaginian religion in *Imperator: Rome*. Some Carthaginian deities appear on epigraphic, numismatic, or other material sources, and several are included in *Imperator: Rome* (Figure 4).⁴⁴ The game mechanics require each political entity to be able to swap their four main gods with at least three different ones per domain. The developers run into another problem here, since there are not enough names of Carthaginian deities that survived.⁴⁵ Once again, they face the challenge of producing alternatives.

In the game, the gods venerated around Phoenicia make up the rest of the selection, such as gods who originated from an earlier Canaan civilisation or the Arabian culture group. According to the founding myth of Carthage, people originally from Tyre created the city as a colony, as both games make explicit to the player. Once again, the choice to bring gods from Phoenicia is grounded in historical reference and possibility.

POLITICAL STRIFE

The historical record often fails to provide specifics about political strife within and beyond Carthage, except for conflicts with the Roman Empire. Archaeological evidence grants some information about events, but it remains a fraction of the complete picture. Moreover, archaeological research is not always accessible to those outside of academia.⁴⁶ The developers of *Imperator: Rome* seek to include political tensions and rebellion for each playable entity. While some conflicts, like the Sicilian Wars, find their roots in historical accounts, many smaller-scale problems and internal

⁴⁴ Tanit, Melquart, Ba'al Qarnaim and Ba'al Hammon are included, for more information see:

Bongiovanni 2014, 2-3, 9-10, 26; Bos 1989, 111-119; Hoyos 2020, 14-17; Lancel 1992, 197.

⁴⁵ Which gods were all venerated is still a topic of academic debate, for a short overview on the topic see: Hoyos 2020, 14-17.

⁴⁶ Hoyos 2020, 53-110.



Figure 4.
Deities of Carthage.
 Paradox Interactive,
Imperator: Rome 2019,
 screenshot by author.

strife lack a solid historical foundation.⁴⁷

The developers devised a system in which important families engage in intense power struggles. Historical sources confirm this type of power dispute, but the families and individuals depicted in *Imperator: Rome* merely represent historical possibilities.⁴⁸ Furthermore, vassals situated at the fringes of Carthage's sphere of influence are more prone to rebellion in this game. An explanation could be rooted in the idea that these distant vassals would be inherently harder to control, making them logical candidates for stirring unrest and challenging Carthage's dominance. While these elements are entirely fictional within the game's narrative, the game features historical possibilities. As Grufstedt points out for two other Paradox games, even when developments during the gameplay are counterfactual in nature, they are still infused with historical references and grounded in historical possibility.⁴⁹ The game elements in *Imperator: Rome* might be similar in historical fabrication but remain within the plausible, and use historical references where possible to

⁴⁷ Hoyos 2010, 181-184.

⁴⁸ Hoyos 2020, 40-42.

⁴⁹ Grufstedt 2022, 4-12.

compensate for the gap in the sources and weave together one cohesive representation.

Imperator: Rome and *Old World* use similar approaches to address silences of sources to create a complete and complex representation of Carthaginian culture. Both games employ names and titles from Semitic languages, linguistically close relatives to Punic, to compensate for our lack of knowledge of the Punic language. Secondly, regarding religion, *Imperator: Rome* includes deities for Carthage that belong to the Phoenician area because of the Carthaginian relation to Tyre. In the case of political strife, game developers opt for choices that make sense in the known historical context. Important individuals, even though they are non-historical, fight over power, and rebellions appear most on the outskirts of the realm, even though these are not actual historical events. The game ventures into ahistorical representations caused by a lack of sources, but developers create a possible historical Carthage, filled with content referencing history.⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

This study examined the key elements comprising the representation of Carthaginians in the video games *Imperator: Rome* and *Old World*. It analysed which historical sources informed the elements and examined the degree of their influence. Moreover, the study discussed developer approaches to the absence of historical information.

The analysis pinpoints three main characteristics of digital Carthaginians in games. There is a clear emphasis on Carthage's wealth as a result of trade, on the individuals most often mentioned by primary sources, and on the geopolitical power and influence of Carthage in antiquity. All three elements are abundantly present in texts by Roman and Greek writers, such as Polybius, Cicero, Horace, and Livy. Although the games might not seem to critically engage with their sources, this study shows that the games are heavily influenced by these texts, sometimes even closely imitating the words of ancient authors. This means that the positive historical opinion present in the written sources shapes the portrayal of Carthage, creating a teleological component. The existing biases are magnified by their constant repetition and perpetuation, perhaps first by the other media and now by video games alike. Within the games, it is almost impossible not to gather wealth and influence, making an argument about the past that Carthage's riches and power were inevitable.

⁵⁰ Grufstedt 2022, 4-12.

The decisions of game designers considering historical unknowns further demonstrate their approach to history. Linguistically, close relatives of the Punic language are used to create the cohesive whole of Carthaginian titles and names. In other instances, game creators make decisions based on what fits within the historical context. This is evident in including Phoenician gods, combined with the core mechanics of digital Carthaginians: generating wealth and geopolitically balancing the Roman Empire. The developers do not rely solely on imagination but make references to history where possible and extrapolate from sources plausible histories lacking in ancient texts.

Finally, to look beyond the two games in this case study, it is important to stress how the representation of the past and the medium of video games itself are shaped by existing conventions: historical conventions, game genre conventions, cultural conventions, and many more. Writing about historical cinema, P. Rosen states that the past must be “recognisable as significantly ‘historical’, that is, signifying a generally accepted minimum of referential pastness”.⁵¹ As Chapman points out, this also means that game developers are incentivised to incorporate elements that are already known to the public and are less likely to take risks and create a diverging alternative. If games present history in a too-unfamiliar way, there is a chance that players will reject the representation. Through games, game developers not only create a dialogue between themselves and players but also between the ancient world and its digital representation. These games thus demonstrate how there are no great diversions of the traditional main elements of the Carthaginians in discursive authenticity. Rather, all the choices of the game creators seem to align with the established conventions of what Carthage is. Alternate game narratives could have explored different facets of Carthage's history, but instead, the representation perpetuates and intensifies the existing one. In any regard, the Carthage of history was a formidable force, and this remains true in the realm of video games. As *Imperator: Rome* boldly proclaims, “Carthage shall endure!”

⁵¹ Rosen 2001, 178.

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