

# Coding Medieval Worlds 5: Power and Institution

## Schedule and Timings

### FRIDAY 21 FEBRUARY (PRE-EVENT)

Evening 20:00-21:30: What's in a Game? Workflows & Concepts  
*Workshop session with Em Dean and Jafeth van Elten.*

### SATURDAY 22 FEBRUARY (DAY ONE)

Event	Time	Notes
Introductions	13:00	
Panel: Medieval Power and Cultures	14:00	<i>Panel discussion with Fionnuala Fisk and Maria Vrij. Chaired by James Baillie.</i>
Break 1	15:00	
Offers & Responses	15:30	
Break 2	16:30	
Breakout 2	17:00	
Day 1 Plenary	18:15	
Panel: Courts and Power	18:30	<i>Panel discussion with Hirohito Tsuji, Andreas Kjeldsen, Blair Apgar, and François Alliot. Chaired by Madeline Sterns.</i>
Close of Day	20:00	

## SUNDAY 23 FEBRUARY (DAY TWO)

Event	Time	Notes
Reconvene	13:30	
Panel: Power beyond the State	14:00	<i>Panel discussion with William Hepburn and Oana-Alexandra Chirilă. Chaired by Tess Watterson.</i>
Break 3	15:00	
Breakout 3	15:30	
Break 4	17:30	
Keynote: <i>What are the Rules?</i>	18:00	<i>On Medieval Law and Opportunities for Authenticity in Video Games. With Keith Ruiter. Chaired by Kjelda Glimmerveen.</i>
Reports from groups	19:30	
Feedback, Next Steps	20:00	
Close of Day	20:30	

**Evening drinks/chatter session 21:00-23:59.**

## Panel 1: Medieval Cultures and Power

In this panel, we will have specialists giving views on different parts of the medieval world, especially those outside the expected 'norm' of western feudal states. Cultures with imperial concepts of power, or with less sedentary cultural roots, or with less land-focused systems of control, may require different models in games to those treated as precursors to a modern nation state. How people understand these cultures through games, and how we might model them differently, will be the focus of this panel.

The format will be an open roundtable: panelists will give 10-15 min starting remarks and then discussion between the panellists and audience will open for the remainder of the time.

**Maria Vrij** is the coin curator at the Barber Institute, and a specialist on Byzantine coinage. She has a keen interest in how the public relate to Byzantine history, both through active work on and through an interest in games. Her work on game cultures has explored the ways in which Byzantium has received renewed public interest through games such as Crusader Kings III, and how its dual role as Christian empire and Roman state creates complex and sometimes problematic intersections with modern understandings of Christian or European identity.

**Stefan Kamola** is a specialist on later medieval central Asia and the cultures and ideologies of power that the region produced in that time period. Based at the Austrian Academy of Sciences' Institute for Iranian Studies, his work focuses not just on chronicle materials for understanding how Persians came to understand Mongol rule, but also other traditions such as astrological and apocalyptic texts.

**Fionnuala Fisk** is a tabletop roleplaying game GM and the founder of Swan and Raven Studio, an indie art and game studio focused on social good. She is based in Vienna, Austria, where she also runs the GM Supergroup for people running and designing tabletop RPGs. Her current projects include the early development stages of a prehistoric strategy game and a tabletop game project with a setting based on the Mongol Empire. You can find her at [swanandravenstudio.com](http://swanandravenstudio.com).

The panel will be chaired by **James Baillie**. The convenor of Coding Medieval Worlds and current chair of Exilian, James is a historian focusing on digital approaches to the history of the medieval Caucasus and has written and taught on the topic of games in history as well as being an active writer and game developer.

## Panel 2: Medieval Power and Courts

This panel will focus on royal and imperial courts, and their position in game cultures. As a location of power, the court is often key to medievalist settings, but often only as a direct location in which to talk directly to figures of power such as kings and emperors. In this panel we will explore different ways that courts could function in all their social and material complexity, and reflect on the possibilities for games and game design which that might open up.

The format will be an open roundtable: panellists will give short starting remarks and then discussion between the panellists and audience will open for the remainder of the time.

**Hirohito Tsuji** is a specialist on the Imperial family of Japan, currently working at the University of East Anglia. His work covers genealogical aspects of branches of the family, but also the history, historiography, and public reception of Imperial Japanese history more widely. His diverse interests have also included citizen science projects on art history and analysing game representations of late medieval Japan, and he is a licensed Shinto priest and an amateur Enka singer.

**Blair Apgar** is an art historian focusing on high medieval Italy and especially the courts of Matilda of Canossa. Their work looks at how Matilda's material patronage intersected with issues of authority, agency, and gender, and how it intersects with the wider development of the Investiture Controversy. They currently teach at Elon University, North Carolina, and have worked extensively on ludic receptions of the Middle Ages including as one of the convenors of the *Middle Ages in Modern Games* conference series.

**Andreas Kjeldsen** is an indie game developer currently developing *The Knight And The Maiden: A Modern Medieval Folk Tale*, which mixes visual novel and adventure game mechanics in a story based around the court of the fictional principality of Castamont. In a fairytale beginning, our protagonist dresses as a knight to enter a tourney and save her father from unjust imprisonment, but romance, court politics, and intrigue make things a *little* more complicated after that...

**François Alliot** is a game developer and the design director at Nerial. He is best known for his game *Reigns*, which focuses on simple swipe-decision mechanics to take the player through a variety of medieval courtly decisions and strategically balance different priorities. The Reigns system has also been applied to a range of different courtly settings including *Reigns: Her Majesty*, *Reigns: Game of Thrones*, and *Reigns: Three Kingdoms*.

The panel will be chaired by **Madeline Sterns**. Madeline is an independent scholar and educator in arts and humanities, with this year being her third in attendance at CMW, twice as a chair and once as a panelist for CMW3. She currently integrates game studies into her coursework to inspire students to see connections between history and modern media.

## Panel 3: Medieval Power beyond the State

In this panel, we invite specialists to discuss the ways that medieval power extended beyond and was negotiated outside the formal structures of states, polities, and governments. City leadership, guilds, monasteries, universities and knightly orders among other systems could hold and wield significant power in many people's everyday lives without. This panel will focus on how we represent those systems in games, and how much more there might be to do in exploring these alternative centres of power.

The format will be an open roundtable: panellists will give short starting remarks and then discussion between the panellists and audience will open for the remainder of the time.

**William Hepburn** is currently a Teaching Fellow at the University of Aberdeen, having worked there since 2016 on research (on several projects) and teaching. His work focuses on late medieval history, including both a variety of approaches to studying royal households and, more recently, urban history especially focusing on the use of local records. He was also the lead designer for *Strange Sickness*, a game focused on the response of medieval local governments to plague. The game was based on records from Aberdeen, which has the most complete late medieval record system of any local government body in Scotland.

**Oana-Alexandra Chirilă** is an anthropologist and curator, currently working at the Maramureş County Museum of History and Archaeology in Baia Mare, Romania. Oana is a Fulbright and Erasmus scholar, and her academic interests revolve mainly around Islam and urban culture. She is the author of *Sisyphus Happy. Islam, Drugs, and Hip Hop in American Culture*, first published in Romanian in 2021. Oana is also an avid amateur video game player, a passion that sometimes makes its way into her work, as is the case with "Show this fool knight what it is to have no fear! Freedom and Oppression in Assassin's Creed", a chapter she published in *Playing the Crusades: Engaging the Crusades, vol. V*.

The panel will be chaired by **Tess Watterson**.

## Keynote: Keith Ruiter

### “What are the Rules?”

#### Medieval Law and Opportunities for Authenticity in Video Games

In popular consciousness, the early medieval period is often painted as a dark age, especially in terms of law. Generations of films, television programs, and now games, have vacillated between depictions of this period as possessed of a sort of elemental, quasi-libertarian lawlessness, and a deeply centralised, persecuting society full of anachronistic inquisitorial forces. These may be useful dramatic devices for the writers of these worlds, but neither provides a particularly authentic player experience in a rules-based medium like gaming.

Focusing on the Viking Age and games that engage with it, this talk will explore some attempts to play with law in video games and provide some discussion of early-medieval law, its weirdness, its diversity, and its capacity for compelling storytelling. Comments will be made about missed opportunities for immersiveness and engagement, before finally turning to the games we can look at for inspiration on how to do law better in playable medieval(ist) worlds.

**Keith Ruiter** is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Suffolk, specialising in early medieval laws, norms, and personhood in northern Europe and the Scandinavian diaspora. He takes widely interdisciplinary and culturally comparative approaches to his work, in particular through Indigenous Studies, but also through posthumanist and game studies approaches. His public-facing work has included being a consultant for TV, film, and educational game projects, and the resources on his [History Check](#) YouTube channel.

The session chair will be **Kjelda Glimmerveen**.