

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: 28 (History)		
Title of case study: Deepening Public Engagement in Medieval History Via New Design Strategies for Tabletop Games		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010 - 2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Gianluca Raccagni	Senior Lecturer in Medieval History	2010 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact <p>During the past five years, Raccagni has used the growing popularity of miniature tabletop wargames as a means of sharing his research on medieval Italian city republics and the crusades with new audiences. His work has inspired and shaped the creation of three new game products, which have been recognised by the industry as new directions in the relationship between gaming, historical accuracy and historical research. Raccagni's work has also influenced the administrators of the Italian town of Gradara in their approach to engaging the public in history.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Raccagni's research has brought together, for the first time, the separate fields of crusader studies and Italian medieval studies. He has explored the evolution of the Italian city republics and their relationship with the Holy Roman Emperor across the late 12th and 13th centuries, focusing on the impact of the crusades on politics and society in northern Italy, and vice versa.</p> <p>Many historians consider the 1183 Peace of Constance, between the papal-supported Lombard League of northern Italian cities and Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, to be the formal foundation of the Italian city republics and a landmark moment in medieval European History. It put an end to a very long conflict and for the first time the emperor officially granted the Italian cities control of public assets and civil and criminal jurisdiction, alongside the freedom to elect their own leaders. In a 2016 peer-reviewed article [3.1], Raccagni argued that a pervasive view amongst historians of the settlement as a capitulation by the empire grossly underestimates the role that emperors continued to play in northern Italy between 1183 and 1250. He showed that emperors retained the power, for example, to bestow certain important rights on the cities. Differing interpretations of the Peace of Constance ended up underpinning conflict from 1226 through to 1250 between the empire and the League, with long-lasting consequences for Europe. Examining unedited manuscripts of Bolognese jurist Odofredus' analysis of the Peace of Constance, Raccagni argued that Odofredus played a little-known but hugely influential role in the evolution of European legal thought regarding popular sovereignty.</p> <p>Extending his analysis of the influence of the Peace of Constance upon European affairs, Raccagni argued in a second peer-reviewed article [3.2] that the Peace allowed the Italian cities and the emperors to collaborate in supporting crusades to the Holy Land. These crusading activities played a crucial role in helping northern Italy to cohere, easing its endemic – and often crippling – factional strife. In 1226, however, Emperor Frederick II tried to circumvent some of the provisions of the Peace of Constance by arguing that it hindered preparation for crusades. Raccagni found that the emperor even sought to portray his political opponents as heretics, who should themselves be made the target of crusades. A subsequent escalation of crusading activity within northern Italy itself extended by 1240 to the launch of a crusade against Frederick II and his</p>		

Italian supporters. Raccagni argued that scholars have underestimated the significance of the crusade against Frederick II, and the critical role it played in reversing the previous pacifying effect of the crusades on northern Italy – not least by fuelling the rise of factional strife both between and within cities. This conflict, he concluded, ultimately brought about the decline of the republican model in Medieval Italy.

3. References to the research

3.1. G. Raccagni (2016). When the emperor submitted to his rebellious subjects: A neglected and innovative legal account of the 1183-Peace of Constance. *English Historical Review* 131, 519-39. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/cew173>

3.2. G. Raccagni (2016). The crusade against Frederick II: A neglected piece of evidence. *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 67, 721-740. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002204691600066X>

4. Details of the impact

Introduction

The board games market is predicted to grow from USD 7.16 billion to USD 12 billion between 2017 and 2023 [5.1], playing an increasingly significant role in shaping public understanding of history. And yet significant barriers exist to the creation of historically accurate games: a perception of an inevitable trade-off between accuracy and playability, a shortage of relevant academic research and a lack of familiarity amongst developers with research where it is available. Raccagni has addressed this situation by collaborating with game designers in producing games inspired by his own research. He chose to focus on tabletop games because this sector is made up of relatively small firms, capable of great agility in their response to changing market conditions and amenable to interventions such as Raccagni's. The resulting products have been well received by users across the world and have proven commercially successful. Industry commentators have lauded their striking of a distinctive balance between historical accuracy and playability, regarding this as a new direction in game design.



A group of participants at the Claymore game convention in August 2018 play 'The War of the Lombard' scenario using the Byblos castle kit co-designed by Raccagni (see below).

Inspiring new game products

Raccagni's initial collaboration was with Supreme Littlestness Designs (hereafter SLD), a company that produces scenery kits for tabletop games. Together, they created the prototype of a terrain kit modelled on the Castle of Byblos. Owned by one of the ruling families of Genoa, the castle exemplified the sorts of connections between the Italian cities and the crusades revealed by

Raccagni in his research [3.2]. The prototype kit – the first historically accurate kit representing any part of the Mediterranean region – was developed with the help of a GBP 5,000 Innovation Voucher from the Scottish Funding Council [5.2a]. It was showcased in a participative game at Scotland's leading wargames convention, Claymore, in August 2018. The game involved a scenario entitled 'The War of the Lombards', based on medieval sources deployed and discussed in Raccagni's research [3.2]. Claymore's judges awarded the scenario third place among 32 entries in the 'best display' category [5.2a, 5.2b].

This successful showcase led, in September 2019, to world-leading wargame terrain kit producer 4ground agreeing to licence SLD's models, including Byblos Castle, for international distribution. SLD's owner says that 'Raccagni's research on the Italian city republics and the crusades, and his suggestions regarding the relationship between historical accuracy and playability in wargames, struck a chord': where a lack of relevant academic research, together with concerns about playability, had so far prevented designers from trying to produce historically accurate kits representing the Mediterranean region, Raccagni was 'disrupt[ing] those perceptions by working with game designers to gamify episodes that he found in his sources' [5.2a]. Mass production of the Byblos kit was delayed by COVID-19, but is now scheduled for 2021 [5.2a].

The scenario played at Claymore also led game designer Daniel Mersey (winner of the UK Games Expo Award in 2019) to ask for Raccagni's help in developing a new expansion for *Lion Rampant*, one of the most popular sets of gaming rules in this sector of the games industry. Mersey says that 'Raccagni's research on the interaction between Italian city republics and the crusades [3.1] changed my view on both of those' and that the way Raccagni 'translated his historical research into game design...is also very innovative' [5.3]. Through a series of face-to-face and online meetings, along with exchanges of draft material, Raccagni helped to create a game book that consists of a sizeable introductory chapter providing general historical context (around 6,000 words), additional rules for *Lion Rampant*, and twelve game scenarios that show players how to apply those rules to historical episodes mentioned in medieval sources. Each new rule and scenario is accompanied by historical analysis drawn from Raccagni's research findings, the rationale for their inclusion in the game, and goblets chosen from Raccagni's medieval primary sources [3.1, 3.2]. Output 3.2, for example, makes reference to a letter written by Emperor Frederick II in which he mentions that a crusader army was led and supported by papal legates and Franciscans clad in armour, offering indulgences and blessings to the soldiers. On the basis of this letter the new game, called *Lion Rampant: The Crusader States* (hereafter LRCS), features for the first time the ability to include religious figures as part of the gameplay. Where tabletop wargames tend to shy away from the supernatural (perhaps because of the risk of confusion with the fantasy genre), religious figures can now be deployed to help allies and to act against enemies. LRCS runs to 153 pages, more than two-thirds of which is historical context – analysis and source material – provided by Raccagni on the basis of his research.

Launched in October 2020, a pilot print run of 470 copies of LRCS sold out within a fortnight, prompting a second print run in November and then a third in December [5.4a, 5.4b]. The distributor of the printed version comments that 'customers found the item quite expensive when compared to other historical gaming rulebooks. However, customers said that it was worth its price given the quality of its content, and especially how it reflected real historical research and the use of historical sources' [5.4a]. In its electronic format, the game reached the top three on the bestseller list of Wargames Vault, the leading online selling platform in this sector [5.4c].

A review of LRCS in *Wargames Illustrated* (a major magazine in the sector, with a monthly circulation of 10,500 copies) described it as 'a great mix of games that have been woven through a fabric of historical accuracy', and as 'an intriguing new direction for rule development'. The reviewer called for more products to follow Raccagni and Mersey's lead [5.5a, 5.5b]. The editor of the Dutch, English-language magazine *Wargames Soldiers and Strategy* (circulation: 13,500 copies per month) commented in a podcast in November 2020 that whereas the original *Lion Rampant* had been 'a Hollywood-style history rule set', with LRCS 'it really came of age' thanks to 'a supplement which includes a good chunk of history and then tweaks the rules to make it into a proper historical rule set... that is what Gianluca has done, and it is very impressive ... it has really

taken Lion Rampant forward, I sincerely hope there is more like this' [5.5c, 5.5d, 5.5e]. A review in the French magazine *VaeVictis, le magazine des jeux d'histoire* (3,150 followers on Facebook) described it as a 'real success' and 'an excellent synthesis of two worlds' [academia and the games industry] [5.5f, 5.5g]. A review in the Italian magazine *Dadi e Piombo* (1,688 followers on Facebook), which was submitted for publication on December 2020, described LRCS as 'Gaming in the service of history, and history in the service of gaming', and declared its historical content to be 'unquestionably superior' to the usual 'potted history' of historical wargames [5.5h, 5.5i].

Gamers, too, were impressed. A Czech blogger wrote that 'the rules and history are tied together and the result will bring[sic] more narrative detail and depth to your wargaming experience. And I like that. That is how I want to play my games' [5.6a]. A contributor to a Spanish forum noted that 'each scene, apart from a detailed explanation of the historical context, is introduced by one or more fragments of medieval chroniclers. The level of immersion these pearls provide is incredible ...Do I recommend your purchase? Definitely!' [5.6b]. In December 2020, an anonymous survey was distributed amongst Gaming the Crusades Facebook followers, to which seventy-five gamers from fifteen countries responded. One third of the respondents were from outside Europe, including the United States, Australia and New Zealand. 94.5% of respondents found LRCS more historically informative than other historical wargames, and 98% found that appealing; 98.6% hoped for more such products in the future. In the final general feedback question, an Australian respondent described LRCS as 'a definite breath of fresh air' in the industry; an American one stated that LRCS 'has really kickstarted my interests in this period'; two British respondents suggested that the rule-book be used to teach history in schools – 'a lot of children could be inspired', they wrote, 'by exploring history in this way' [5.6c].

Momentum is now building in the UK and abroad behind Raccagni's approach to game design. The Spanish company HT Publishers is planning a Spanish edition of LRCS [5.7a]. Osprey Publishing, one of the most important companies in this sector in terms of sales and income, has expressed interest in turning LRCS into the first in a new series adopting Raccagni's distinctive design style: historically accurate scenarios, introduced using snippets of medieval sources alongside commentary drawn from Raccagni's research [5.7b]. And the leading Italian game design studio Cobblepot Games was persuaded by Raccagni's research and track record in historically accurate game design to broaden the period in which their 2020 game, *Ventura: Captain & Company*, is set. In doing so, they sought Raccagni's help as a consultant. Cobblepot Games team principal, Giacomo Santopietro, recalls that they originally intended to set the game during the Italian Renaissance but 'Raccagni's publications on 13th century Italy convinced us to include that century in [the game] too.' He was particularly struck by 'what Raccagni showed about the effects of crusading against other Christians on the evolution of the Italian cities. That is not how the history of the Italian cities is traditionally told... the crusader features of conflicts between Italian cities have not been taken seriously, and have been overlooked. Raccagni's research... changed our view' [5.7c].

Changing a heritage body's approach to engaging the public in history

Raccagni's game design activities also attracted the attention of the Municipality of Gradara in central Italy, which invited him to give a lecture on this topic in September 2019 [using 3.1 and 3.2 for illustrative material]. This lecture was given during the Municipality's flagship 'Family Village' event, which attracted more than 3,000 members of the public that year [5.8a]. During the event, Raccagni delivered a workshop showcasing his game design style for more than 20 heritage sector officials and educators from across Italy. He also organised a participative game for the general public.

Attracting more than 500,000 visitors each year, the medieval walled town of Gradara is the largest tourist attraction in the region of Marche [5.8a]. Following the success of the event, in October 2019, the municipality invited Raccagni to join the organising committee for the annual Gradara Ludens event, the leading Italian convention on heritage and gaming [5.8b], in order to add his game design style to the plans. Mayor of Gradara Dr Filippo Gasperi writes that Raccagni's workshop 'had a profound impact' on him, changing his understanding of 'the crusades and Italian medieval history (both crucial to Gradara) by highlighting new connections

that cast new lights [sic] on both episodes'. He says that Raccagni's use of wargames – a first for Gradara – persuaded the Municipality to incorporate them into their portfolio, in order to better engage the public in history [5.8a]. Because of the COVID crisis, Gradara Ludens 2020 was cancelled, but Raccagni is now on the organising committee for the 2021 event.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1. Evidence on the size of the gaming industry:

(11 December 2018). *Board Games Market – Global Outlook and Forecast 2018-2023*. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/board-games-market---global-outlook-and-forecast-2018-2023-300763553.html>

5.2. Castle of Byblos:

- a) Owner. *Supreme Littleness Designs* (testimonial letter, December 2020).
- b) Image: (6 August 2018). *Gaming the Crusades*. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/crusadycastle/posts/2202019270032815>

5.3. D. Mersey. *Lion Rampant* author (testimonial letter, 19 October 2019).

5.4. Evidence from distributors:

- a) Managing Director. *North Star Military Figures Limited*. (testimonial letter, 21 December 2020).
- b) Managing Director. *North Star Military Figures Limited*. (testimonial email, 1 January 2021).
- c) Screenshot of *Lion Rampant* at number 2 in bestselling titles list on Wargame Vault.

5.5. Reviews in games magazines:

- a) Review in *Wargames Illustrated*: <https://www.wargamesillustrated.net/lion-rampant-the-crusader-states/>
- b) *Wargames Illustrated* (testimonial email, 2 February 2021).
- c) Editor. *Wargames Soldiers and Strategy Magazine* (testimonial email, 3 January 2021).
- d) *Wargames Soldiers and Strategy* podcast: <http://thehistorynetwork.org/wss45-if-at-first-you-dont-succeed/> [timestamp: 01.00 – 02.00 minutes]
- e) Editor. *Wargames Soldiers and Strategy Magazine* (testimonial email, 28 January 2021).
- f) Review: *Lion Rampant: The Crusader States*. *VaeVictis* 154, 78.
- g) *VaeVictis*. Facebook. [Screenshots of followers for page, 9 January 2021]
- h) *Dadi e Piombo* review.
- i) *Dadi e Piombo*. Facebook. [Screenshots of followers for page, 9 January 2021]

5.6. Users' comments and reviews:

- a) Czech blogger: <https://wargamingasp.blogspot.com/2020/09/lion-rampant-crusader-states-review.html>
- b) Spanish forum thread: <http://laarmada.net/wargames-historicos/lion-rampant-the-crusader-states/>
- c) Survey results.

5.7. Games Publishers:

- a) Chief Editor. *HT Publishers* (testimonial email, 26 October 2020).
- b) Head of *Osprey Games* (testimonial email, 14 October 2020).
- c) G. Santopietro. Team Principal. *Cobblepot Games* (testimonial letter, 15 October 2019).

5.8. Gradara:

- a) Gradara Mayor (testimonial letter, 23 April 2020).
- b) Co-ordinator. *Gradara Ludens* (testimonial email, 20 October 2019).