

MEDIEVAL MOTIFS IN THE POKÉMON FRANCHISE: A SURVEY

ELEMENTI MEDIEVALI NELLA SERIE POKÉMON: UN SONDAGGIO

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the incorporation of medieval motifs into pop culture through a case-study focusing on one of the most successful videogame franchises in history: Pokémon. This study considers the ways in which these motifs may have been developed from the perspective of medieval history and popular medievalism. Each successive generation of the videogame franchise has incorporated more elements drawn from the European Middle Ages, from its architecture, knights, tournaments, berserkers, and runestones. These elements are a source of lively discussion among the game's online fanbase, stimulating interest in the historical period while showing a mutual exchange between history and its rewritings. Studying the way medieval motifs impact the creation of pop-culture products and the way these affect the perception of history is an important yet critically neglected endeavor, which this article seeks to redress.

Keywords: Pokémon, Medievalism, Norse mythology, Norse literature

Riassunto: Questo studio intende focalizzarsi su come alcuni elementi medievali siano assimilati nella cultura pop attraverso l'analisi di un caso di studio peculiare: Pokémon, uno dei marchi videoludici di maggior successo al mondo. Questo sondaggio considera inoltre le diverse modalità attraverso le quali questi elementi si siano sviluppati a partire da modelli riconducibili sia alla storia medievale sia al medievalismo a livello popolare. In maniera graduale, ogni nuova generazione di giochi Pokémon ha infatti fatto proprio un numero sempre maggiore di elementi attribuibili al Medioevo europeo – come le architetture, tornei, i berserker e le pietre runiche – i quali costituiscono per un largo numero di fan la base di vivaci discussioni. Essi stimolano, in aggiunta, un sincero interesse per il periodo medievale e danno vita a uno scambio reciproco tra la storia e le sue riscritture e/o derivazioni. Spesso si sottostima il notevole impatto di questi elementi medievali sulla creazione di prodotti della cultura pop e come essi influenzano considerevolmente la percezione della storia; questo studio, pertanto, si propone di gettare le fondamenta per future analisi della correlazione tra cultura pop e storia.

Parole chiave: Pokémon, medievalismo, mitologia norrena, letteratura norrena

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Introduction

Recent studies have brought to light numerous motifs being used in pop culture, with conspicuous attention being dedicated to entertainment media, in particular videogames, set in universes that attempt to recreate, to varying degrees, the world of medieval Europe³. The blockbuster videogame series *Dark Souls*, for example, includes the impressive Anor Londo cathedral as a tribute to the cathedral in Milan, while the Undead Burg (*Dark Souls 1*) and the Undead Settlement (*Dark Souls 3*) are characterized by their half-timbered buildings and fortified walls⁴. However, medieval motifs are not restricted to videogames that locate their action in a time and space explicitly grounded in a simulacrum of historical reality.

The current surge of (pseudo)medieval motifs in contemporary artistic and creative production has not failed to affect the highest grossing franchises in history⁵: Pokémon, which is manifestly set in a world separate from our own. Little or no attention, outside of the online world of fan speculation, has so far been given to the inclusion of motifs that draw from the pool of ideas surrounding the European Middle Ages in the Pokémon universe, and the objective of this paper is to present a first assessment and evaluation of such motifs.

The name Pokémon is a portmanteau of *pocket* and *monster*, the main objective of the games in this series being to catch monsters with the help of advanced mechanical spheres, pokéballs, which can contain them and can be comfortably kept in one's pocket. These monsters are trained, bred, and used by the player to fight against other in-game characters or other players, and can be traded between players to grow their collections. The player is offered one starter Pokémon by a Pokémon professor who also asks the courtesy of helping them collect data for a Pokémon encyclopedia they are working on. These creatures are categorized according to one or more types (such as water, fire, grass, electric, dragon, ground), each with particular strengths and weaknesses against other types. The player walks through a world map by solving puzzles, helping people or Pokémon in distress, fighting

³ See as examples Romera, Ojeda, Velasco (2016), Lima (2020) and Lorber and Zimmermann (2020).

⁴ Other videogames developed by FromSoftware contain references to the Middle Ages, too: as example, in the equally acclaimed *Bloodborne* the Astral Clocktower looks very similar to the Astronomical Clock in Prague.

⁵ See Peters (2018) and Hoffer (2021).

trainers (and evil teams), earning medals, and eventually becoming champion of the regional Pokémon League.

Pokémon may change their shape through a process called *evolution*, which causes them also to improve their statistics such as health points, attack, speed etc. This can be achieved in a number of different ways; for example, by levelling up, with the use of elemental stones, by holding certain objects, through trading with other players, or through the fulfillment of particular conditions.

Pokémon's success story began on February 27, 1996, when Nintendo released a set of two games, *Pokémon Green* and *Pokémon Red*, for their Game Boy console, designed by the (at that time) small video game developer Game Freak. The green version was replaced by *Pokémon Blue* in the North American, Australian, New Zealand (1998) and European (1999) markets; however, in 2004 it was remade together with the red version, and the new games were named *Pokémon FireRed* and *Pokémon LeafGreen*. Each version included a sample of Pokémon not available in the other, so that, in order to complete the game and collect all the monsters, players were required to trade Pokémon with other players by means of a connecting cable between their *Game Boy* systems. This added social component of the video gaming experience has proven to be one of the key factors in ensuring the extraordinary and lasting success of the concept.

The franchise is centered upon the release of different generations of videogames, released with an expanded roster of available monsters, whose action is localized in a story-world loosely based on our own in a number of aesthetic and cultural details. In this world, humans live side-by-side with Pokémon, creatures who have different powers, abilities, and characteristics. The human inhabitants of this world live in towns and cities, use trains and ferries, and have mythologies concerning the origin and creation of the world that are centered around the Pokémon.

Just as the in-game world draws inspiration from our own, its architecture, for example, mirroring the traditional styles of places such as Japan, France, England, and Hawaii, so too are this world's Pokémon inhabitants modelled on animals (both real and imaginary), supernatural entities, and objects. Among these references scattered throughout the Pokémon

franchise, there are elements that are inspired by, or borrowed from, the medieval (Norse) world. It would be too much, of course, to expect exact correspondences or overlaps between the Pokémon story-world (or any other) and our own reality. World-building in works of fantasy, novels, and videogames alike, results in a universe controlled by different natural and physics laws, and the Pokémon franchise is no exception, and while some superficial similarities and some points of contact exist between the fictional and primary worlds, it does not claim to be in any way any kind of representation of it. It is thus best analyzed as a syncretic creation with its own laws (cf. Ryan and Thon, 2014).

This premise must be made, since for any number of elements in the story-world of the games which justify a comparison with some real-world ones, there exists a myriad other for which the two worlds diverge. These should not be interpreted as an invalidation of the proposition that a particular element of the games appears to derive from something belonging to our own world; an idea or initial stimulus originating in our world may undergo a series of changes which are part and parcel of the creative process, and which at times result in radical transformations of the concept or object that was its starting point.

Identifying motifs under layers of creativity can, at times, be a speculative endeavor, and it is not unheard of for commentators to identify connections between a creative product and reality (or other creative products) that were not envisioned by its creators. Such occurrences, however, do not undermine the validity of such an analysis: creativity does not operate in a cultural vacuum, and authors may sometimes be unaware of the cultural stimuli under which they are operating, and which may surface to their conscience without them remembering where they came from and when. Furthermore, once a creative work has reached the public domain, the responses of its audience can detect influences and connections that were unintended by the creators, adding further complexity to the cultural significance of the product.

In recent years, popular TV series, such as *Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom*, or videogames like *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*, heavily impacted the popular image of the late Scandinavian Iron Age, initiating a mutual exchange between them and the representation of historical reality; in other words, those who consume such cultural works may base, to some extent, their

understanding of history on the content of these products. Thus, scholars should be mindful of these ongoing media developments, to avoid creating a gap in the understanding of history which may eventually be largely filled with unhistorical concepts. This article is a preliminary survey on medievalism in Pokémon, its different shapes, and its sources: the second section introduces the first five generations, which are heavily based on elements of Japanese culture and provide a limited, but not entirely absent, number of European medievalisms. The third and the fourth sections, on the other hand, focus on the sixth and the eighth generations respectively, which are set in two European-like regions and reveal an increased interest in medieval motifs.

Medieval Motifs in the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Pokémon Generations

On July 16, 2005, at the turn of the third and the fourth generation, the eighth official Pokémon animated film, *Lucario and the Mystery of Mew*, was released in Japan by the OLM, Inc. studio. This version was followed by three Japanese manga adaptations: a longer one by Shigekatsu Ihara – long-time partner of the franchise – and two shorter, the first one by Emiko Yoshino and Hidenori Kusaka, and a second by Miho Asada. The film was later followed by the English version in 2006, and by the Italian premiere in 2007 during the *Pokémon Day*.

The film introduces four new fourth-generation monsters, including Lucario, one of the protagonists, and is independent of the timeline of the anime series, its action taking place in the nearby town of Rota. An important location is the castle of Cameran Palace, since it houses the annual tournament in honor of Sir Aaron (a so-called “aura knight” of Queen Rin, lady of Cameran) and his noble deeds. In its opening scenes, a mother reads the legend of Sir Aaron to her daughter⁶, telling of how, hundreds of years ago, Cameran was menaced by two incredibly large and fierce armies, composed of both humans and Pokémon. In order to avoid the conflict and save the kingdom, Aaron made a heroic decision, leaving his fellow Lucario to sacrifice himself at the legendary Tree of Beginning, a gigantic tree-shaped rock formation and home of the mythical Pokémon Mew.

⁶ The mother and the daughter, whose first appearance is exactly in *Lucario and the Mystery of Mew*, are a well-known cameo in Pokémon films, including the latest one, *Secrets of the Jungle*, released in 2020 in Japan and (presumably) in 2021 worldwide.

The tournament at Cameran, in which many trainers, some clad in pseudo-medieval armor, take part, is won by the main protagonist of the anime series, the young Pokémon trainer named Ash, who had meanwhile disguised himself like Aaron for the occasion, in itself a very popular trope in medieval romance, which we find (among many others) in the anonymous 15th century Icelandic prose *Viktors saga og Blávus*, the 13th century German *Tristan* by Gottfried of Strassburg, and the 14th century Anglosaxon *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*⁷. Mistaking Ash for its long-departed comrade, Lucario awakens from its centuries-long sleep, as the anime's recurring co-antagonist James, a member of the villainous Team Rocket, exclaims that Lucario, and his famous legend, are more than 1000 years old (minute 35:06). The relationship between myth and reality is the main pillar of the film, as Lucario seeks to reconstruct the motives for Aaron's betrayal of his companion and his queen. At the denouement, Lucario realizes that his master's goal was to save his kingdom and decides to sacrifice itself, too, in order to rescue Ash and its new friends. In the end, Lucario and Aaron are finally seen happy and together, giving a positive conclusion to the film.

In *Lucario and the Mystery of Mew* there are two main examples of European medievalism, the first being the location of Cameran Palace. The structure of the castle is clearly based on the famous Neuschwanstein Castle, a masterpiece of 19th-century historicism. The presence of a *Castrum Swangowe* was first attested in 1090 on the pre-Alpine elevations south of the Bavarian town of Schwangau (Baumgartner, 1987, p. 158). This *castrum* was indeed composed by two fortifications, Vorder- and Hinterschwangau (literally the anterior and the posterior Schwangau castle) and in time it was home to important members of the Guelph faction, like Hiltbolt von Schwangau, a *Minnesänger* active during the 13th century (Juethé, 1977). Hiltbolt's textual corpus consists of 23 compositions in 49 strophes and the main witness is the *Große Heidelberger Liederhandschrift*, or *Codex Manesse*, (Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Pal. germ. 848)⁸, which preserves all the known strophes and also a representation of the poet (f. 146r) with a black swan on a red field as coat of arms.

⁷ Cf. Sweringer Baur (1917), Feistner (1996), and Moore (2017).

⁸ Digitalization of the manuscript at <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg848/0287>.

A second important witness is the *Weingartner Liederhandschrift* (Stuttgart, Landesbibliothek, Cod. HB XIII 1)⁹, preserving only 14 strophes, but since three *folia* are missing, the number of texts may originally have been greater. After the medieval and pre-modern age, the double fortification went to ruin, and it was only in the 19th century that, thanks to the interest of the Bavarian king Ludwig II (1845-1886), it was torn from the grip of nature. Following the 19th century fashion of (re-)building castles in picturesque locations (other masterpieces include Hohenzollern Castle in modern Baden-Württemberg, or Drachenburg Castle along the Rhine, south of Bonn), and fascinated by the romantic vision of the Middle Ages, as well by his friendship with Richard Wagner, in 1868 Ludwig II ordered the medieval ruins to be razed and a magnificent new castle to be erected in the same place.

The history of Cameran Palace shares several points in common with that of the castle that inspired it. In some frames of the opening scenes, it is possible to observe the antique appearance of Cameran Palace: the castle consisted of a central keep, surrounded by a perimeter wall and some towers. It is also possible to identify many arrow slits and a drawbridge, and, as a whole, the castle was clearly austere, imposing, and dull-colored. The 'modern' castle is much larger, it includes new wings, and the highest tower has a clock. The slits have been scaled or deleted, and the main access now consists of a ramp. This evident architectural change may highlight the long temporal distance between legend and reality, while retaining an air of exceptionality and marvel. The wide range of costumes (from full armor to elaborate clothes, inspired by 18th-century fashion) increases the detachment from modern time, catapulting the tournament into a timeless and dreamlike atmosphere in a way not so different from what historical re-enactments do in our world. A major difference with Neuschwanstein is in the castle's situation: Cameran Palace is situated on a high prominence surrounded by lake connected to land by two long bridges. The decision to show the castle in this way may be explained by comparing this setting with that in the following film, *The Rise of Darkrai* (2007), which is set in Alamos Town, loosely inspired by Barcelona, and whose main landmark, the Space-Time Towers, is evocative of the *Sagrada Familia* church. Alamos is also connected to the rest of the world by an impressive Roman-like bridge, a maneuver that

⁹ Digitalization of the manuscript at http://digital.wlb-stuttgart.de/sammlungen/sammlungsliste/werksansicht/?no_cache=1&tx_dlf%5Bid%5D=3919&tx_dlf%5Bpage%5D=129&tx_dlf%5Bdouble%5D=0&cHash=bc1195386d0c31467622106962be8fc0.

contains the narrative action within a single area, thus not affecting the events of the region where the main animated series takes place. A similar line of reasoning may explain the island setting of Cameran.

The second example is Sir Aaron himself, a clear reference to the (stereotypical) ideal of the brave knight¹⁰, ready to sacrifice even his own life for the triumph of justice, a concept that is often linked (even negatively) to Japanese culture, too¹¹. According to his legend, Aaron does not hesitate to save the kingdom at the cost of his own life, and his resoluteness and integrity are honored every year with a great event, which, centuries later, has almost entirely lost its roots in historic reality and to become a popular attraction. Unaware of the legend tied to his master and upset by the enormous temporal and cultural change, once awakened from his centuries-long sleep, Lucario feels lost and believes that Aaron has selfishly abandoned it. Lucario's final conscious sacrifice is the fulfillment of its journey in the film, consistent with that of his master centuries before. Since the franchise and its associated media cater mostly towards a younger audience, Lucario's death is softened by the final scene, but does lose its relevance to its knightly narrative. The whole Aaron and Lucario plot and their final reunion may be linked to another relevant medieval topic: the lion knight.

The core of this *topos* is built around a knight and his familiar: together, they resolve quests, and, once the human is dead, the familiar mourns him on his grave. The example of this motif *par excellence* is the lion knight, which we find in *Chrétien de Troyes's* 12th century poem *Yoain ou le Chevalier au lion*, or in *Dietrich*¹², and even in artefacts from the furthest outposts of medieval Europe: the door of the church of Valþjófsstaður, now at the National Museum of Iceland, believed to have been carved around 1200, and displaying a knight mounting a horse, accompanied by a lion¹³. The door predates the composition of a number of sagas which contain the motif of the lion knight, such as *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, *Ectors saga*, *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*, *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs*, and *Sigurðar saga þögla* (Harris, 1971, 129-141). Modern

¹⁰ On the reception and mythization of medieval knights, see Stevenson and Gribling (2016).

¹¹ On this much discussed and sensitive topic, see Fusé (1980) and Pierre (2015).

¹² Cf. Benati (2006).

¹³ Cf. Kedwards (2021).

rewritings of the *topos* include the figure of the family in many (video)games, such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Skyrim*, and *World of Warcraft*.

Pseudo-medieval elements are also part of the narrative system of the fifth generation of Pokémon, which lasted from 2010 (Japan)/2011 (rest of the world) to 2013. Even though it is set in the region of Unova, the setting modelled geographically on the area of New York City, the main focus of this generation is the relationship between philosophical opposites, (such as the Yin-Yang of ancient Chinese philosophy, whose influence is found in the four main games, *Pokémon Black*, *White*, *Black 2* and *White 2*), the relationship between ideals and truth, and other binaries in the contemporary world (nature vs. mankind or progress vs. tradition). The traditional presence of a villainous team, which serves as main antagonist during the gameplay, is here fulfilled by Team Plasma, whose ostensible aim is a radical separation of Pokémon from the chains of the human society and the creation of a de facto black and white world, without any possibility of dialogue between the two parties.

In the videogames, Team Plasma is first seen in the prologue before the opening screen; in the imposing castle-headquarters of the team, the anti-villain of the games, N (full name Natura Harmonia Gropius), is crowned king of the Team by his adoptive father, Ghetsis Harmonia Gropius, the most powerful of the Seven Sages (a sort of king council) and real leader and mastermind of the Team. While N's robe in the prologue is white (the color attributed to purity and holiness in Japanese culture, as well as a reference to N's innocence and initial absence of autonomous personality, a puppet in his adoptive father's hands), Ghetsis's robe is much more elaborate, the upper part adorned with a border that recalls the medieval Guelph battlements, with a flat cornice. During the exploration of the Abyssal Ruins, an ancient sunken temple in the north-eastern part of Unova which is described as "An ancient tomb that is said to be the resting place of an ancient king"¹⁴, the player discovers that, thousands of years before the game's present, the Harmonia dynasty was the royal family of Unova; and though they had lost the throne, they kept their immense wealth, perceivable from the rare relics which can be found in the Abyssal Ruins. If one considers this historical premise,

¹⁴ All the in-game descriptions are directly quoted from the English version of the corresponding Pokémon games.

Ghetsis's restoration of the monarchy (and of an ancient and forgotten past) may be seen as legitimate.

The continuous references to the European Middle Ages and their modern reception are also clearly identifiable in the uniforms of the Team Plasma grunts in *Pokémon Black* and *White*, since they are modeled on hauberks, a type of chain mail also covering arms and legs, integrated with a mail coif. These protections were quite effective against many bladed weapons, but quite ineffective against arrows, crossbows, clubs, and (at the end of the Middle Ages) firearms. Nevertheless, in the contemporary imaginary, chain mail is, together with the suit of armor, a vivid reference to the knightly period of the Late Middle Ages, and an ideal model for the new (on foot) knights of a team apparently driven by noble ideals. The ideal of a modern-knight team is also emphasized by their square-shaped coat of arms, well in sight on the grunts' chests.

Appearances are deceiving, however, and during the gameplay of *Pokémon Black* and *White* it turns out that Ghetsis's real aim is to become the only person in the world to possess Pokémon, being able to command them entirely at his own will. During the exploration of N's Castle, the player discovers from a defeated grunt that the castle has been built in time thanks to the forced work of the "liberated" Pokémon, but Team Plasma's plan was so perfect that nobody had ever noticed the imposing construction site hidden under the Unova Pokémon League, the final destination for budding Pokémon masters. In the sequels, after being unmasked, Ghetsis's devotees abandon the old knight-like uniform and wear a black commando-like new one, a clear reference to the conflict between ideals and truth permeating the whole fifth generation.

Besides the story, the fifth generation of Pokémon includes two further references to the Middle Ages, the monsters Shelmet and Escavalier. Although they are not part of the same evolutionary line, they share one of the most peculiar evolution methods of the whole Pokémon franchise, since Shelmet evolves into Accelgor (a sort of combination between a ninja and a pupa) when traded for a Karrablast (based on a beetle, the *Carabus smaragdinus*), which becomes Escavalier. Shelmet, combining the body of a snail with a sort of late medieval helmet, recalls those snails which may be found as marginalia in 13th-14th century gothic manuscripts,

fighting against knights, soldiers, and other animals, too; sometimes snail shells are also combined with human or animal heads (Randall, 1962 and Camille, 1992, 31-36)¹⁵. In Pokémon videogames, once traded, Karrablast literally steals Shelmet's shell (as confirmed by Ken Sugimori, art director of the Pokémon franchise, in an interview on the Japanese magazine Nintendo Dream, volume 201, January 2011¹⁶) and evolves into Escavalier. This monster combines physical aspects of snails and of the *Nautilus pompilius* with the snail-hunting habits of the *Drilus* beetles, probably maintaining the Bug Pokémon type the latter feature: as reported in Shelmet Pokédex entry, an in-game encyclopedia of Pokémon lore, in *Pokémon Sword*, Karrablast is the only living being able to bypass Shelmet's shell protection.

Escavalier's name is certainly a portmanteau combining *escargot* (*snail* in French) and *chevalier* (*knight* in French), since Escavalier's head is protected by a steel element resembling a red-plumed jousting helmet and its arms are replaced by two jousting spears. Tournaments and jousts are without a doubt one of the first places where a modern person would link a knight to: even if it is impossible to identify when was the first tournament held, the 11th century saw the introduction of a new tactic in war, that is to say "the use of the couched lance by a group of horsemen who mounted a closely coordinated charge as a single unit" (Barber and Barker, 2000², p. 14).

From northern France, tournaments and jousts found great success among nobles during the 12th century, but the Church immediately opposed this show because it was considered too dangerous, an event where it was easy to kill someone – even unintentionally – and where the display of someone's skills could lead to pride. Only in the 14th century did pope John XXII remove all the bans on the sport with the bull *Quia in futurorum* (1316), and the Church admitted that its former position was unsuccessful (Barber and Barker, 2000², p. 139-145). In the 14th and 15th centuries, tournaments and jousts became so expensive and elaborate that only the wealthiest of nobles could afford them; they also became a show for the whole city and/or land, and a staple part of great events like royal welcomes, coronations, and diplomatic affairs (Barber and Barker, 2000², p. 107-108).

¹⁵ For a case study on rewritings of the snail *topos* in music, see Pinon (1980).

¹⁶ The article has been translated into English in Dr Lava (2019).

Sometimes, lower-rank noblemen and knights also entertained the public during jousts by playing trumpets and drums (Schwob and Schwob, 2014a; Schwob and Schwob, 2014b, p. 218), but they were background actors in a wider show, where heavily armored knights were the center of attention.

Escavalier's Pokédex entries resemble the description of a typical joust charge: they move at high speed and bravely, striking with their pointed spears at the ready (*Pokémon Black and Shield*) and with steel armor protecting their whole body (*Pokémon White, Y and Alpha Sapphire*). As for Sir Aaron in the film, the most important features of a medieval (or medieval-like) knight for the Pokémon franchise are once again fearlessness, determination, and self-confidence. While this entry praises Escavalier's "high speed", however, its speed stat (the in-game quotient assigned to its speed in competitive play), is among the slowest of any Pokémon; this apparent contradiction could be explained by the fact that a jousting knight in full armor could reach such an exceptional weight that speed in the joust was severely limited.

Traces of Norse Mythology in a French-Based Region

The European Middle Ages gained a major interest during the sixth generation (2013-2016), whose main videogames are *Pokémon X* and *Y*, the main themes of which are genetics, beauty, fashion, and harmony and balance between life and destruction. The new region, Kàlos (a reference to *καλός*, *beautiful* and *good* in both Ancient and Modern Greek), is geographically based on metropolitan France. Many sixth-generation cities have French medieval equivalents, like the lower part of Avignon Town and the homonymous former seat of the popes during the Avignon papacy (1309-1376) and of antipopes during the Great Western Schism (1378-1417).

However, there is a correspondence found by fans which might be questioned: *Bulbapedia*, probably the most important Wiki on Pokémon, reports that the Kalos Pokémon League seat "may be based on the eastern face of the Notre-Dame cathedral [in Paris] and includes elements from other Gothic cathedrals"¹⁷. The link to Notre-Dame is only applicable

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See https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Pok%C3%A9mon_world_in_relation_to_the_real_world#Kalos.

to the lower section of the Pokémon League, since the upper section, consisting in two lateral four-sided towers and a higher central octagonal one reminds Romanesque churches, in particular the modern westwork of the Speyer Imperial Cathedral (in the German *Land* Rhineland-Palatinate), even though the actual westwork was built from the 1854 to the 1858 following the historicist architect Heinrich Hübsch's design.

This generation includes a trio of legendary Pokémon which, upon close inspection, present some similarities with creatures from Norse mythology. These creatures are called Xerneas, Yveltal and Zygarde. Respectively, the first is presented as a force which cedes energy to the universe, while the second takes energy away from it. The third has a balancing role, maintaining a kind of equilibrium between the two. In the games, these creatures are presented by the Kalos Pokémon Professor Sycamore as "incarnations of nature that take care of the land".

Sources on Norse mythology are scarce and mostly late, dating from at least a couple of centuries after the conversion. The most important are the so-called *Poetic Edda*, an anthology of poetry preserved mostly in a codex from around 1275, GKS 2365 4to, and the *Prose Edda*, which is attributed to the chieftain Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), and consists of a handbook for court poets, incorporating a vast number of explanations of the mythology, which was widely referenced in the creation of metaphors called *kenningar*. It is in these two texts that we may find some elements which may have inspired the creation of certain Pokémon, such as the trio under consideration here.

Xerneas is a deer-like creature, with colorful and very voluminous intertwining antlers. A Pokédex entry for this creature states that "when the horns on its head shine in seven different colors, it is said to be sharing everlasting life." (*Pokémon Y*), which may be an indirect reference to *Bifröst*, though this latter is said to be composed of three colours (*Gylfaginning* 13). In both the *Prose Edda* 16 (see Faulkes, 1982, 18) and the *Poetic Edda* (*Grímnismál* 33, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, 2014, 375) four stags, Dáinn¹⁸, Dvalinn, Duneyr, and

¹⁸ Modern Icelandic spelling was chosen as opposed to the reconstructed classical standard of the 13th century.

Duraþrór are mentioned; their mythological role is unclear, but they appear to be biting the foliage of the cosmic tree which holds together the universe according to Norse mythology.

It has been suggested (cf. Finnur Jónsson, 1913, 22) that they may have been derived from an original single creature, mentioned in *Gríminsmál* 26 with the name *Eikþyrnir*, while stanza 35 indicates one single stag, biting at the tree. *Eikþyrnir*, apparently meaning “Oak-thorny” is described in the text as a stag from whose antlers abundant water flows, creating rivers. His name is explained by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014, 373) as a reference to the fact that his antlers are intersecting as branches of a tree or a horn, while Liberman (2016, 341), finds the reference to two trees strange, and prefers a connection to the word *Heiðþyrnir*, a name for one of the heavens of the mythology. Though most of this is not replicated in the lore surrounding Xerneas, its appearance is reminiscent of the mythological *Eykþyrnir*, though instead of exuding water, its horns project light, and the similarity appears more compelling in association with the other two Pokémon of this trio, who also show some parallel with other creatures from the Norse mythology.

Yveltal has the appearance of a bird, with dragon-like elements. In the Norse cosmology, on top of the cosmic tree, there appears to be an eagle sitting (cf. Faulkes 1982, 18), with no name, and whose role is not defined, but only speculated about by scholars. This eagle is said to be knowledgeable, “*margs vitandi*” in Old Norse, “knowing (of) much”, and between its eyes there sits a hawk named *Veðurfölnir*. The role of this hawk was speculated by John Lindow (2001, 312) to be that of a carrier of information and knowledge. The character of this eagle does not seem to have much to do with that of *Yveltal*, which appears to be a more negative force in the Pokémon universe, but there exist another eagle-shaped creature, in Norse mythology: *Hræsvelgur*, the “carcass-swallower”, an eagle of the race of the *jötnar* (often somewhat imprecisely translated as “giants”¹⁹), which is found in the end of heaven and whose wing-flapping is the source of the winds (cf. *Vafþrúðnismál* 37, ed. Jónas kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, 2014, 362). Indeed, *Yveltal* displays an array of moves that are a direct

¹⁹ *jötnar* (sing. *jötun*) are entities of the Norse mythology that are opposed to the gods. They are a separate race from the gods, but they interact and intermingle with them. They are not characterized by an extremely large size, as the word “giant” would imply (cf. Lindow, 2001, 2).

reference to wind power: “air slash”, “oblivion wind” and “hurricane”, among others. An unequivocal inspiration for the creation of any given Pokémon needs not be postulated.

A squirrel named Ratatoskur, runs up and down the tree spreading gossip between the unnamed eagle mentioned earlier and another creature which lives at the opposite end, gnawing on the roots: the serpent Níðhöggr. There seem to be a small resemblance between this creature and one of the three forms of the Pokémon Zygarde, which can be obtained by collecting “cells” of this creature in the main map of the game and uniting them to the “core”: the so-called 50% form, consists of a *wyrm* with some kind of plumage. More interesting, however, is looking at the two additional forms, which have been introduced during the seventh generation: the 10% form looks like a Doberman with a torn leash waving away from its neck, while the 100% form is a humanoid creature with head-protrusions forming a kind of crown, and four serpentine wind-like protrusion departing from its shoulders.

As had already happened with the 50% form, many aficionados have sought relationships between these two forms and Norse mythology; what seems to be the prevailing conjecture²⁰ sees a juxtaposition of this new trio with the three children born by the giantess Angurboða (Sorrow-carrier) and the mischievous god Loki: the wolf Fenrir, the serpent Jörmungandur and Hel, a feminine entity presiding over the underworld. All these three creatures are variously mentioned in both the *Prose Edda* (particularly ch. 35) and in the *Poetic Edda*. It is interesting to notice how their role in Norse mythology tends to be negative: they were predicted to spell catastrophe for the gods, so that the serpent was cast in the deep sea, where it grew to encircle the entire earth. The serpent would be eventually killed by the god Þór (Thor) during Ragnarök, but only after having mortally poisoned him with a bite. Hel was cast into Niflheimr, the world of shadows, to preside over the souls of those who died of sickness or old age. The wolf would be eventually tied with an unbreakable leash forged by the dwarfs. This bond will break, along with all others, at the time of Ragnarök, when Fenrir will spread destruction before devouring the god Óðinn, only to be avenged by his son Víðar, who will rip apart his jaw.

²⁰ This hypothesis has been analyzed in detail by the Italian content creator Cydonia (Francesco Cilurzo): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEjxroIJAdY>.

None of this negativity seems to be incorporated in the figure of the Order Pokémon, Zygarde, which is instead, as already mentioned, a figure meant to protect a balance between opposing forces in the universe. This has been taken by the fanbase to be definitive proof against the theory for which these forms of Zygarde may be inspired from the children of Loki, but as it was already specified, it cannot be expected for products of creativity to adhere completely to one single model which may have inspired them. The Pokémon franchise has no pretense to emulate the real world in a coherent way, striving for historical or geographical accuracy. In that sense, looking for the ultimate source of this or that feature of the game is fruitless: what may be of interest is the entanglement of ideas and concepts in an idiosyncratic and original product. Furthermore, through the online commentariat, the imaginative world of Pokémon gets much larger than the one conveyed in the games alone. There is a whole industry of commentary and speculation on matters on the Pokémon's physiology and mythology, which develops and thrives in a way which is not dissimilar to that of the medieval proliferation of tales starting from a pool of themes and motifs, such as the *Matter of Britain* and the *Matter of France*. In this way, a pool of material is taken, increased, manipulated, and expanded by a community with a shared interest, and this is as much the case for medieval literature as it is for contemporary videogames, and cinematic sagas.

The Region of Galar: “British” Setting, “Scandinavian” Cameos

The seventh generation of Pokémon (November 2016 – November 2019) takes place in the newly introduced region of Alola, based on the Hawaii archipelago, and is sparring in its references to the European Middle Ages, excepting some strained links between Zygarde's alternate forms and the progeny of the Norse god Loki, and likewise the remakes of the first-generation games, *Let's Go, Pikachu!* and *Let's Go, Eevee!* (2018), add no new elements in this regard to the originals. The present generation, however, the eighth in the franchise, sees the renewal of The Pokémon Company's interest in Europe. The new region, Galar (whose etymology has not been officially explained²¹) is clearly based on an inverted Great Britain,

²¹ On many websites, Pokémon fans tried (and are still trying) to offer reading keys and/or links to Celtic or Germanic nouns (e.g., Irish *galair*, meaning *sickness*, *infection*, or *misery*) which, however unconvincing from a scholarly perspective, are meaningful insofar as it shows how the fanbase has undertaken interpretation in that area as well.

with snowy mountains in the southern part of the isle, the bagpipe theme of the Wild Area signifying the Scottish Highlands, and the main city and seat of the regional Pokémon League, Wyndon²², in the north.

Galar brings together many aspects for which Great Britain is known around the world: rural areas dedicated to pastoralism, steampunk cities reminiscent of the era of the industrial revolution, ancient archaeological sites, and futuristic buildings. In particular, the Pokémon fandom has found great similarities between the façade and structure of the Hammerlocke Stadium and Warwick Castle, erected by the will of William the Conqueror on an Anglo-Saxon fortified citadel along the bank of the Avon, in central England. An additional cultural link follows the fact that the Hammerlocke Stadium hosts a dragon-type gym, the last one to be faced by players on their paths to the Pokémon League, while, in August, Warwick Castle used to be the scene of a breathtaking show named *The Dragonslayer*. In the end, the whole Hammerlocke perimeter is fortified by a dark purple wall, which mimics the one of the middle English castle; this granted the city its slogan “A city of great history, living and thriving within castle walls that date back to the middle ages [sic]”.

During gameplay, the player meets with the hazy and contorted past of Galar: the foundational myth of the ancient hero who in the legendary past saved Galar from the wrath of the legendary Pokémon Eternatus is a lie, and it is the protagonist’s task to uncover the story of the two brothers who, with the help of the equally legendary Pokémon Zacian and Zamazenta, brought peace to the region. The Hammerlocke Vault and the tapestries preserved therein depict the epic deeds of the two brothers, as well as the hidden chamber in the small village of Stow-on-Side, which has been deliberately walled up to hide from the world the enterprise of the two ancient heroes. The protagonist becomes the new star, shedding light on this ancient mystery and saving Galar from Eternatus once again.

In the eighth generation there are at least two evolutionary lines which draw from medieval Norse culture, reflecting a trend of ever-increasing spread of Norse elements in pop

²² The toponym could be a portmanteau combining *wynd* (Wyndon streets are particularly narrow and crowded), *win* (the city accommodates the Pokémon League), and *London*.

culture²³. The first belongs to Meowth, a monster which debuted in the first generation and in this generation receives a new regional form, a mechanic introduced in the seventh generation set on the Alolan Islands. Galarian Meowth are steel-type Pokémon, as we can read from the Pokédex entry in *Pokémon Sword*: “Living with a savage, seafaring people has toughened this Pokémon's body so much that parts of it have turned to iron”. It seems that in time this adventurous and rough lifestyle transformed Meowth’s characteristic whiskers into tufts resembling the horns of a stereotypical, but historically unfounded, viking helmet, and a long shaggy beard. The coin Meowth bears on its forehead has turned dark: the darker (and harder) the coin, the more respect is garnered among other Galarian Meowth (*Pokémon Shield* Pokédex entry). These traits, recalling those which have been attributed for a few centuries by popular imagination to vikings²⁴, are shared with its unique evolution, Perrserker, a portmanteau of *purr* and *berserker*.

Perrserker’s Pokédex entries reinforce its viking associations: “What appears to be an iron helmet is actually hardened hair. This Pokémon lives for the thrill of battle” (*Pokémon Sword*); “After many battles, it evolved dangerous claws that come together to form daggers when extended” (*Pokémon Shield*). Its aggressive and warlike behavior, coupled with the fact that he continues to be bipedal, makes Perrserker the antithesis of Meowth’s previously known evolution, the form that this Pokémon takes in other regions of the Pokémon world, Persian. On its paw, the extremely long claws join together to form the shape of a sword blade, while it appears to have a horned helmet, and his face is surrounded by a lush beard. Its eyes give the impression of violence or berserker madness, as it can be also inferred from the Pokédex entry stating that this creature lives “for the thrill of battle”, a trait which is usually neared to berserkers.

²³ Many fans have theorized further connections, which, lacking concrete evidence, remain mere suppositions, but still highlight the strong interest in Medieval and Nordic matter of the Pokémon fanbase. See as examples

https://www.reddit.com/r/pokemonconspiracies/comments/axagi7/the_galar_region_is_based_in_norse_and/ and https://www.reddit.com/r/pokemon/comments/k1v60n/kalosgalar_connection/.

²⁴ In this article we shall write *viking* with a small capital (except for title capitalizations), as this word was never an ethnonym historically, and it is preferable not to use it as such. See Driscoll (2019, in particular p. 24).

An undeniable part of the popular imagination regarding the Norse Middle Ages, berserkers are described as toughs with superhuman strength, moved by fury and immune to fear and fatigue. Mentions and descriptions of these beast-warriors may be found in numerous literary works, in particular the Icelandic sagas, some relevant examples being *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, *Vatnsdæla saga*, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, *Ynglinga saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, and *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappa hans*²⁵. Cultural references to these characters abound in video games and modern pop culture, and this long history of reception will not be repeated here. Examples, however, include Beorn in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (capable to transform himself into a bear of formidable strength), Miura's manga *Berserk*, the berserker mode in Anno's *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the Space Wolves chapter in *Warhammer 40,000*, the homonymous units and abilities in many videogames (e.g. *Age of Empires II*, *Age of Mythology*, and *The Witcher 3*), and – last but not least – Eivor in *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* are probably the best known examples of their reception in contemporary culture.

The black hair partially covering Perrserker's forelimb seems reminiscent of the dark leather which features prominently in the costumes of TV series like History Channel's *Vikings* and BBC's *The Last Kingdom*, while those rising from the brow recall the stereotypical shape of the "Viking horned helmet"²⁶. Perrserker's color palette is also reminiscent of that of a typical Norwegian forest cat, further showing how multiple sources and ideas can be conflated and reshaped for the creation of a single Pokémon entity.

In other languages, the association with the motif of the viking warrior/berserker is upheld: its French name is *Berserkatt*, from *berserker* and *chat* (cat), while in German it becomes *Mauzinger*, from the noun *Mauzen* "meowing" (derived from the verb *mauzen* "to meow") and *Wikinger* "viking".

²⁵ These and other sources of the berserker *topos*, like the *Haraldskvæði*, have been deeply analyzed by Samson (2011). In particular, ch. 7 focuses on the literary figure and the stereotypes linked to the berserkers in Icelandic sagas.

²⁶ The reception of Vikings has been analyzed from different points of view in Birkett and Dale (2019). Birkett (2019, 2), in particular, considers "the continuing ubiquity of the horned helmet in popular culture" as a major example of those "unhelpful stereotypes or falsehoods" replicated by many re-imaginings of the Vikings.

The second evolutionary line develops in a similar way: a Pokémon, introduced in a previous generation gains a Galarian form, changing its type and gaining a completely new evolution. Galarian Yamask is a ground-ghost-type Pokémon, and it looks similar to its original Unovan form, except that the original funeral mask is replaced by a fragment of rock, decorated with a tail painted in red. When it was introduced in Unova in the fifth generation, the Pokédex entry characterises it as macabre and bound to an ancient burial – “Each of them carries a mask that used to be its face when it was human. Sometimes they look at it and cry” (*Pokémon Black*); “These Pokémon arose from the spirits of people interred in graves in past ages. Each retains memories of its former life” (*Pokémon White*). The Pokédex entries for the Galarian form introduced in generation eight are similar: “A clay slab with cursed engravings took possession of a Yamask. The slab is said to be absorbing the Yamask's dark power” (*Pokémon Sword*); “It's said that this Pokémon was formed when an ancient clay tablet was drawn to a vengeful spirit” (*Pokémon Shield*). However, this nefarious characterization of Yamask's evolutionary line, entailing possession, parasitism, and revenge, reaches its peak with its new evolutionary stage: Runerigus.

Runerigus resembles a large stone slab, which has been shattered into four pieces corresponding to the head, hands, and long tail of the black and amorphous spirit that possesses it. The red-painted tail is now part of a more complex and serpent-shaped decoration; it runs along the whole slab and culminates in a fierce looking head with cartoon-like sharp fangs. In the Pokédex entries, the player discovers that “a powerful curse was woven into an ancient painting. After absorbing the spirit of a Yamask, the painting began to move” (*Pokémon Sword*), and that it is better not to touch “its shadowlike body, or you'll be shown the horrific memories behind the picture carved into it” (*Pokémon Shield*). The shape of the stone slab and its decoration recall those of many runestones; many Pokémon fans have, in particular, speculated links with the Ingvar runestones²⁷. As reported by Gritton (2020, 58), the exact number of these stones is still debated, but the majority of scholars agree that it should range between 23 and 26 finds; all these runestones are united by the fact that they

²⁷ See as example:

https://www.reddit.com/r/SwShLeaks/comments/dsabpq/the_ingvar_runestones_ingvarstenarna_and_the_new/.

commemorate soldiers and deeds of Ingvar's journey to Eastern Europe during the eleventh century, as later narrated in the *Yngvars saga víðförla*²⁸.

It is unlikely, however, that the Ingvar runestones would have been the direct inspiration for the design of Runerigus. *Wikipedia*, which may reasonably be assumed to be the historical source most readily available to the online fandom, describes 26 stones, most likely following the listing in Jesch (2001); the majority of them, such as U 644 and U 654, have been carved in the "Bird's-eye-view"²⁹ style (Gräslund, 2006, 119-120), since the serpent's head is seen from above, with some cases attributable to the Pr2 group. On the contrary, Runerigus shares many characteristics with rune animals in the Pr3 group (Gräslund, 2006, 122): its snake form is firmly rounded; the head is seen in profile and its rear part is low set, rounded and slightly backwards-bent; its mouth is open and low-bent; its tail is rolled up, with a thickened end and a thumb-like protuberance downwards.

One of the best examples of Pr3 style is U 240, one of the eleventh century Lingsberg runestones, dedicated by Holmfríður, and her sons – Danur, Húskarl, and Sveinn – in memory of Halfdan, respectively their husband and father. U 240 is characterized by a rather bizarre peculiarity: its image is the first one to appear on *Wikipedia* page "Runestone" and, consequently, one of the first results on search engines typing "runestone(s)". It cannot be excluded that this coincidence may have made U 240 the source of inspiration (or at least the main one) for Runerigus artwork.

The dreadful Pokédex entries describing Runerigus seem to share many similarities with those of the previous evolution of Yamask, Cofagrigus. Based on an Ancient Egyptian sarcophagus – from which the second part of the monster's name may have taken inspiration – Cofagrigus is said to "teach lessons to grave robbers" (*Pokémon White*) and to "swallow those who get too close and turn them into mummies" (*Pokémon Black*). Cofagrigus's behavior seems to be dictated both by a self-defense mechanism against possible external dangers and by the intrinsic scheme that sees Ghost-type Pokémon as the lovers of jokes and pranks, including those sometimes in bad taste, and linked to paranormal phenomena. It is not unlikely that,

²⁸ See Köster (2014, 217-221) for a detailed analysis of the commemorative lexical element of the inscriptions of the Ingvar runestones.

²⁹ Or "B-e-v". Also see Gräslund (2015, 44-45).

during the creation of new Pokémon and new Galarian forms, The Pokémon Company sought a Northern European element, which may have been comparable to the Coffin Pokémon's obscure behavior. In light of this hypothesis, the idea behind Runerigus – more than the narratives present in the *Grettis Saga* and *Egils Saga*, in which runes are used by antagonists to evil ends³⁰ – recalls certain runestone *formulae*, such as those carved on the Eggja stone (N KJ101)³¹. This stone was discovered in 1917 as a sort of grave cover, and was later dated around the seventh century, the inscription, counting ca. 50 words identified as the longest runic text inscribed in the older runic alphabet (MacLeod and Mees, 2006, 217). When discovered, this stone was lying face down, far from the sight of criminals and ill-intentioned people, and scholars have proposed several interpretations of its inscribed contents, which are in some places illegible and in general of great complexity. The first lines present an alliterative riddle on the exceptional nature of the creation of the stone, not reached by the sun or notched by a blade and whose runes have been sprinkled with *náséu*, a *kenning* indicating human blood. Because of these peculiar characteristics, and thanks to a mythical reference to the magical deeds of a warmongering As god (Óðinn?), the stone will not be profaned at night. The last line is a “dedication” to those who will try to violate the grave. Runerigus's macabre attitude recalls this self-defensive function we see in some of the runic material, since the curse attached to it is only activated once it is disturbed and/or touched.

In French versions of the videogames, Runerigus is named *Tutétékri*, possibly a bizarre pun combining *Tutankhamun* and “tout est écrit” (“all is written”), while the German version of the name, *Oghnatoll*, combines the Celtic alphabet (the *ogham*), *Echnatoll* (*Cofagrigus* in German), and the pun “Och, na toll” (“Oh, great”, maybe an ironic reaction to Runerigus's curse). Thus, both versions move away from the runic motif as far as their names are concerned, though the runic-inspired serpent, of course, remains; and this is possibly a good

³⁰ See MacLeod and Mees (2006, 234):

The Icelandic sagas are often sprinkled with obscure details of amulets, witchcraft and runic sorcery. Yet fascinating as these literary expressions are, there is every reason to be suspicious of the evidence they present. In fact, they cast disappointingly little light on everyday runic practices and we should be wary of reading too much into the details of runic usage they provide. The incidents described so remarkably in these sources rarely include references to the use of runes for practical purposes which was demonstrably prevalent at the time, focusing instead on improbable and usually otherwise unparalleled forms of runic magic.

³¹ See MacLeod and Mees (2006, 216-218) and Düwel (2008⁴, 40-42).

example of syncretism within the Pokémon world, as runic and oghamic are conflated. It is not unheard of, in the world wide web, that people confuse runes with the oghamic script, or assume the existence of “Celtic runes”, and one wonders if this played a role in the creation of the German name of the creature.

Another Pokémon which seems to draw inspiration from medieval motifs is Sirfetch'd, a white duck-like bird holding the lower part of a long leek as a sword, and the upper one as a shield, with its leaves curling out. It is an evolution of Farfetch'd, a brown-white duck-like Pokémon from the very first generation. Aside from the superficial details, there are further similarities with the motif of the medieval knight: its name, incorporating the word “Sir”, is reminiscent of the knights of the round table from the Arthurian cycle, while its Pokédex entry in *Pokémon Sword* recites “Only Farfetch'd that have survived many battles can attain this evolution. When this Pokémon's leek withers, it will retire from combat.” which also seems to echo the motif of the defeated knight with a broken lance at the end of a tournament. As for Perrserker and Runerigus, European localizations of Sirfetch'd reveal a link with medieval motifs: in French, it is called *Palarticho* from *paladin* (“paladin”) and *artichaut* (“artichoke”), in German its name is *Lauchzelot* from *Lauch* (“leek”) and *Lanzelot* (“Launcelot”).

Conclusions

In the course of this analysis, it has been shown that the influence of the Middle Ages on popular culture percolates even into pop-culture products such as the videogames of the Pokémon franchise and their related cinematic releases.

The interest in studying and describing these phenomena of reception, readaptation, and elaboration is justified by the popularity and wide circulation of these new cultural products which play a role in shaping the idea of Middle Ages in the collective mind: not only do they reflect attitudes and ideas about the historical period, but they also contribute to shaping them by propagating clichés and stereotypes. Furthermore, the Pokémon fanbase has demonstrated a pronounced interest in researching and discussing the possible sources of inspiration for various elements of this franchise. This gives rise to a number of theories grounded in some interpretation of medieval history, which are usually discussed in wide communities, in a number of online settings such as Reddit, 4chan, Twitch, or YouTube. These

discussions play a role in the shaping of ideas not only about the franchise, but also about the Middle Ages themselves, as the fans may also take these online discussions as evidence of actual historical understandings and interpretations, taking their lessons in history from the videogames that engage so creatively with it.

In the same way as popular TV series such as *Vikings* or *The Last Kingdom* have heavily impacted the popular image of the late Scandinavian Iron Age, the example of Pokémon attests to a mutual exchange between historical reality and pop-culture rewritings. Considering the role of these products in the shaping of collective ideas about history, it is important for scholars to explore and engage with them, to avoid creating a gap in the understanding of history which pop culture may eagerly, and inexpertly, fill.

The heterogeneity of the examples analysed in this analysis, ranging from architecture to literature, and from the German Alps to the waters around Iceland, demonstrate how complex and manifold the modern public interest concerning the Middle Ages may be. But they also show that medievalisms are not static and are rather subject to a continuous re-elaboration and re-interpretation drawing from multiple sources and conflating them in the creative process to a point at which the sources that inspired their creation become difficult (if not impossible) to identify.

From this study it has emerged that a number of stereotypical motifs from the Middle Ages have made their way in this extremely popular video game series, despite the fact that the Middle Ages are not a paramount focus of The Pokémon Company. The inclusion of medieval motifs – even though not immediately relevant to the theme of the different generations – testifies to their strong presence in the collective imagination. This shows how this historical period is a productive source of ideas for the creation of new cultural products, and still holds an influence on the collective imagination³².

³² Sections 1, 3 and 5 were written by Roberto Luigi Pagani, while sections 2 and 4 were written by Dario Capelli.

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