

# Players' perceptions of Andalusian cultural heritage representations in the digital game *Blasphemous*

**Teresa de la Hera**

Erasmus University Rotterdam  
Burg. Oudlaan 50, Rotterdam, The Netherlands  
[delahera@eshcc.eur.nl](mailto:delahera@eshcc.eur.nl)

**Deborah Castro**

University of Groningen  
Broerstraat 5  
9712 CP Groningen, The Netherlands  
[d.castro.marino@rug.nl](mailto:d.castro.marino@rug.nl)

**Salvador Gómez-García**

Complutense University of Madrid  
Avda. de Séneca, 2 Ciudad Universitaria  
28040 Madrid, Spain  
[salvgome@ucm.es](mailto:salvgome@ucm.es)

## ABSTRACT

This study explores how representations of Andalusian cultural heritage in the Spanish digital game *Blasphemous* (The Game Kitchen, 2019) are perceived and interpreted by its players. Anthropology has categorized cultural heritage into two main aspects: tangible and intangible. The intangible facet encompasses social customs, ethical values, beliefs, traditions, myths, and folklore. On the other hand, the tangible aspect comprises music, dance, works of art, artifacts, language, festivities, poetry, ceremonies, as well as knowledge and skills (Balela & Mundy, 2011). Representations of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage are common in commercial digital games (Chapman, 2016). The virtual and interactive nature of digital games turns them into unique environments for the representation of cultural heritage. The game, as the context in which cultural heritage is included and represented, however, plays an important role in the way these representations are experienced and interpreted by players (Luigini et al., 2019). According to Copplestone (2017) there is a tension that exists between achieving historical accuracy when representing characters, places, or narratives of cultural heritage in games. This had led to some players reporting concerns about how particular nations and cultures are represented in games. Furthermore, due to the interactive nature of games, players actions in the game tend to have an impact in the context in which these representations are embedded (Musichina, 2021). It is therefore relevant to gain understanding of how players interact with, experience and interpret representations of cultural heritage in games.

In this study we look into *Blasphemous* (The Game Kitchen, 2019), an Spanish action-adventure game in the Metroidvania genre, set in the fictional region of Cvstodia. This game is characterised by introducing references to intangible cultural

Proceedings of DiGRA 2023

© 2023 Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA. Personal and educational classroom use of this paper is allowed, commercial use requires specific permission from the author.

heritage such as religious traditions and symbols of Andalusian culture (e.g., Sevillian pasos) and representations of tangible cultural heritage such as architecture and monuments (e.g., Puente de Triana, Reales Alcázares). The game has been a great success, reaching more than one million players in early 2021 (Devore, 2021). Previous researchers have explored the content of the game (Venegas & Gutiérrez, 2021) and analysed its crowdfunding strategy (Arjona & Ruiz del Olmo, 2020). Nevertheless, the perceptions of the representations of Andalusian cultural heritage in *Blasphemous* remains unexplored. This study delves into how Andalusians perceive the use of cultural heritage in the aesthetic and narrative aspects of *Blasphemous*.

Within the field of game studies, historical accuracy has been framed as “the relationship between games and cultural-heritage” (Chapman et al, 2017, p.366). Drawing on Copplestone’s (2017) discussion on how different backgrounds of players affect cultural heritage’s understanding and enactment (Copplestone, 2017), we take in account a constructionist approach (which focuses on the idea that history is constructed through the perspectives of those who interpret it and this includes interpretation of cultural heritage) and a deconstructionist approach (which considers that historical accuracy is challenging considering that cultural heritage is constructed and deconstructed as it is constantly negotiated by different people and generations). By analysing Andalusians' interpretations of the representation of Andalusian cultural heritage in *Blasphemous*, this study seeks to conceptually illuminate the understanding of the term historical accuracy in relation to the representation of cultural heritage in games.

Thus, this study provides an answer to the following research question: *How do Andalusians interpret the representation of Andalusian cultural heritage in the game Blasphemous?* Drawing on a document analysis of the game’s art book and on an interview with one of its creators, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a group of 15 Andalusians who have played the game. Considering the cultural diversity that characterizes Andalucía, we aimed for an heterogeneous group of participants in terms of, for example, Andalusian origin, age and educational background.. The data collected was analysed using *thematic analysis* by following the six-step protocol as proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006) extensively used in media and communication studies. The analysis was done using an abductive approach (Vila-Henninger et al., 2022) in which Copplestone’s discussion of historical accuracy was used for the selection of sensitizing concepts.

The interviewees report on their identification with the representation of Andalusian cultural heritage in the game, and how this compares with their own conception of cultural heritage represented. The analysis of the data shows that Andalusians label the representations of cultural heritage in the game as accurate, rich and complex. It is also discussed how interviewees value these representations, and what, from their perspective, these representations could mean for Andalusian cultural heritage by reaching a global audience. Despite the fact that many of the represented elements are decontextualized, not composing a realistic representation of the traditions they originally belong to, the interviewees still see a real value of these representations for the dissemination and valorisation of Andalusian cultural heritage. Practically, we envisage that this study’s insights will be useful for game developers curious about understanding how gamers interpret the representation of cultural heritage.

## **Keywords**

Blasphemous, cultural heritage, culture in games, players’ interpretations, interviews

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arjona Martín, J. B., & Ruiz del Olmo, F. J. (2020). Análisis descriptivo del desarrollo de videojuegos mediante campañas de crowdfunding en España. *Cuadernos. info*, 47, 237-260.

The Game Kitchen (2019). *Blasphemous* [Online game]

Balela, M.S. & Mundy, D. (2011). Analysing Cultural Heritage and its representation in Video Games. *Proceedings of DiGRA 2011 Conference: Think Design Play*. Retrieved from [http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/92\\_BalelaMundy\\_Analysing-Cultural-Heritage-and-its-Representation-in-Video-Games.pdf](http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/92_BalelaMundy_Analysing-Cultural-Heritage-and-its-Representation-in-Video-Games.pdf)

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Chapman, A. (2016). *Digital games as history: How videogames represent the past and offer access to historical practice*. Routledge

Chapman, A., Foka, A., & Westin, J. (2017). Introduction: What is historical game studies? *Rethinking History*, 21(3), 358–371. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2016.1256638>

Copplestone, T. J. (2017) But that's not accurate: the differing perceptions of accuracy in cultural-heritage videogames between creators, consumers and critics, *Rethinking History*, 21(3), 415-438.

Devore, J. (2021). "Over a million people played Blasphemous". *Destructoid*. Retrieved from <https://www.destructoid.com/over-a-million-people-played-blasphemous/>

Luigini, A., Parricchi, M., Basso, A., & Basso, D. (2019). Immersive and participatory serious games for heritage education, applied to the cultural heritage of South Tyrol. *Interaction Design and Architecture(s) Journal*, 43, 42-67.

Mochocki, M. (2021). Heritage Sites and Video Games: *Questions of Authenticity and Immersion*. *Games and Culture*, 16(8), 951–977. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211005369>

Musichina, M. (2021). *Roleplaying video games: a platform for accessing cultural heritage?* Master Thesis, Uppsala University.

Nájera, A. (2019). *Conoce Blasphemous, el controversial título de Kickstarter*. The Hive Gaming. Accessed via: <https://thehivegaming.rocks/revista/noticias/video-juegos/conoce-blasphemous-el-controversial-titulo-de-kickstarter>

Venegas Ramos, A., & Gutiérrez Manjón, S. (2021). La memoria estética del videojuego: representaciones audiovisuales de Andalucía en Blasphemous. *Miguel Hernández Communication Journal*, 12, 565-586

Vila-Henninger, L., Dupuy, C., Van Ingelgom, V., Caprioli, M., Teuber, F., Pennetreau, D., Bussi, M., & Le Gall, C. (2022). Abductive Coding: Theory Building and Qualitative (Re)Analysis. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00491241211067508>