

Michał Mochocki

[University of Gdańsk, Poland]

Yaroslau I. Kot

[University of Warsaw, Poland; European Humanities University, Lithuania]

Editorial:

EHGS and Ukrainian Games of War

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *European Historical Game Studies* (EHGS), an open-access, peer-reviewed journal published by the Faculty of History at the University of Gdańsk. Our mission is to publish high-quality empirical and theoretical research on games across all platforms, digital and nondigital, insofar as they engage with European histories and heritages. In particular, we aim to provide a scholarly platform for historical game research emerging from regions and countries in Europe that remain under-represented in international Game Studies discourse.

European Historical Game Studies is interested in research on games that represent historical settings or processes, reflect their contemporary historical moment, explore alternate or counterfactual histories, or draw on European cultural heritage, including legends and mythologies. The journal is interdisciplinary by design and welcomes contributions from history, art history, heritage studies, historical fiction studies, historical education, narratology, media studies, postcolonial and gender studies, ethnography, cultural studies, political science, and related fields. At the same time, EHGS is explicitly situated within Historical Game Studies, and we expect authors to engage critically with state-of-the-art scholarship in both Historical Game Studies and broader Game Studies.

The mission of *European Historical Game Studies* begins with a thematic issue linked to the annual conference “Games of War,” held at the Faculty of History of the University of Gdańsk since 2024. Focused on a very recent history that extends into the present and beyond, this publication appears at a moment when the relationship between games, history, and lived experience can no longer be treated as an abstract scholarly problem. War has returned to Europe not as a distant memory or a simulation, but as an ongoing reality. This special issue, devoted to Ukrainian games of war, emerges directly from that context.

Historical Game Studies has long examined how games represent the past, how they model conflict, and how players engage with historical systems of violence, power, and agency. Yet the Russian invasion of Ukraine confronts scholars, designers, and players alike with a more urgent question: what does it mean to design, play, analyse, or theorise games of war while war is being fought in real time, by real people, on European soil? The articles collected in this issue approach this question from complementary but distinct perspectives. Together, they demonstrate that Ukrainian games of war are not merely cultural reactions to violence, but complex historical practices that register shifting beliefs, construct meanings, mobilise communities, and preserve testimony.

Aliaksandr Razhkov’s analysis of religious symbols in Ukrainian war games examines how representations of religious institutions and iconography reflect broader changes in public sentiment, particularly in relation to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. By situating game content within wider patterns of trust and disillusionment, this study shows how games can act as sensitive indicators of ideological and institutional transformation during wartime.

A related but spatially grounded perspective is offered by Jagoda Kościelniak’s semiotic analysis of wartime Kharkiv in Ukrainian video games. Drawing on urban semiotics, her article explores how cities under attack are reconstituted through signs, language, sound, and narrative fragments. Kharkiv emerges as a layered system of meanings shaped by memory, destruction, endurance, and everyday survival. Here, games function as semiotic maps of lived urban experience under bombardment.

Emilia Mazur and Kacper Karwacki examine parody and absurdity in independent video games responding to the invasion, demonstrating how humour, exaggeration, and satire operate across mechanics, aesthetics, and narrative. Their analysis situates such games within a broader ecology of transmedial activism, showing how play can transform anger, fear, and outrage into participatory, globally legible forms of critique and solidarity.

The issue expands its analytical scope beyond Ukraine by examining how these games are received and discussed internationally. Anna Sroka and Igor Kwasigroch analyse Chinese-speaking Steam community responses to *Ukraine War Stories*, focusing on language use, emotional expression, and dominant narratives in player comments. Their study demonstrates how Ukrainian games of war circulate within global platforms and encounter diverse interpretative frameworks.

While many of the games discussed in this issue are created under precarious conditions and with limited resources, they nonetheless raise pressing questions about cultural heritage and historical responsibility. Michał Palmąka's contribution addresses these questions directly by proposing a framework for preserving war-related video games as digital testimony. Drawing on archival science and records management, his article shifts the focus from interpretation to infrastructure, asking how such games can be selected, described, stored, and made accessible for future research. In doing so, it positions Ukrainian war games not only as objects of study, but as fragile historical sources at risk of disappearance.

The scale and diversity of this emerging corpus are made visible in Yaroslau I. Kot's work: the first stage of a multi-year research initiative analysing over two hundred games created in response to Russia's full-scale invasion. By mapping Ukrainian-developed games between 2022 and 2025 in a comprehensive open-access database, this contribution establishes an empirical foundation for the field.

Taken together, these articles show that Ukrainian games of war cannot be reduced to a single function or genre. They operate simultaneously as historical arguments, cultural artefacts, political interventions, and forms of testimony. They raise ethical questions about representation and play, but also practical questions about preservation, accessibility, and scholarly

responsibility. Importantly, they remind us that games are not only about history after the fact, but also about history in the making.

Publishing this thematic issue as the first volume of *European Historical Game Studies* is a deliberate editorial decision. It signals that the journal understands Historical Game Studies not as a purely retrospective discipline, but as one that must remain responsive to contemporary history and to the conditions under which historical games are produced, circulated, and interpreted.

We are acutely aware that no scholarly publication can do justice to the human cost of war. This issue does not attempt to speak for those who fight, suffer, or mourn. Instead, it offers carefully situated analyses of games as one of many cultural forms through which war is experienced, contested, and remembered. If this issue succeeds, it will do so not by providing definitive answers, but by opening a space for responsible, critical, and historically informed discussion.