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Assassin's Creed Odyssey. A Review

Leonie Glauner

Abstract

Review of the video game *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*.

Keywords: *Odyssey*, Temples, Statues, Gods, Ancient Greece, Isu, DLC *The Fate of Atlantis*, gameenvironments

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Odyssey (2018) is the latest installment in the Assassin's Creed franchise by Ubisoft. Known to let players experience past times and historic events, *Odyssey* takes place the earliest in the series so far. Two bigger DLCs – split in three episodes each – followed the release. The *Legacy of the First Blade* (2018, 2019) uncovers "new revelations about the origins of the Assassin's Brotherhood" (Ubisoft Entertainment 2018), whereas *The Fate of Atlantis* (2019) explores the Greek afterlife and the city Atlantis itself in Episode 1 *Fields of Elysium*, Episode 2 *Torment of Hades* and Episode 3 *Judgement of Atlantis*. The game offers multiple research possibilities for Religious Studies due to its frequent use of religious language, symbols and NPC interactions.

Story

Set in 431 BCE – at the start of the Peloponnesian War – Kassandraⁱ, granddaughter of King Leonidas of Sparta and wielder of his broken spear, travels the lands of Greece as a mercenary. During those travels, she collides with the Cult of Kosmos, an underground organization with the goal to take control over the entire Greek world.

the Mediterranean Sea, temples in construction or in the middle of the forest, statues of gods on street corners or next to altars embellished with flowers, food and other offerings as well as colossal statues as widely visible landmarks. Beside the seemingly innumerable temples and statues, the idea of the Greek gods manifests itself through the everyday language and worshipping of the NPCs, Quests, and communication-options that the players have. Places are named after the gods, such as "Zeus' Playground" (*Odyssey* 2018) in Messara or the "Bay of Hades" (*Odyssey* 2018) in Messenia, moreover, expressions such as "Gods save me", "By Zeus, thank you" or "You can go straight to Hades" (*Odyssey* 2018) can be heard all over the place.



Figure 2. An NPC inside the Temple of Artemis Diktyнна, Messara, *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* © Ubisoft.

Some of the NPCs are part of a specific following – for example, the Priestesses of Aphrodite or the Daughters of Artemis – while a small group of NPCs even worships the character chosen by the player as a god (Quest *The Image of Faith* 2018). Another NPC – Empedokles – thinks himself a god (Quest *A God Among Men* 2018). In the conversations with those NPCs, one often has the option to choose whether to

present oneself either as a god, a messenger of the gods, or as a simple human, who does not believe in the gods sending anyone to the NPCs as an answer to their prayers. Beth Elderkin (2018) comments on this omnipresent perception in her review "*Assassin's Creed: Odyssey and Living in Myth*":

"In the world of *Odyssey* (...), the gods aren't just figures in tales, they're part of the world. It's one thing to read the stories of Athena, Theseus, and Medusa on the page, it's another to feel them all around you, reflected in the thoughts, actions, and beliefs of everyone you meet. Everywhere you go, you pass by random NPCs hosting epic debates about the nature of Hera's vengeance, sacrificing goats to Zeus on altars, or visiting a spring supposedly blessed by Iris, the goddess of the rainbow, in order to cure their diseases. And don't get me started on the island devoted to Dionysus. Those folks *love* to party."

Upon learning of the Isu, Cassandra discovers that the gods worshiped by the NPCs are in fact the Isu. Alethia's archive tells Cassandra that her fellow precursors loved to be treated like gods and created the mythical beings – Medusa, the Minotaur and the Sphinx – as pets worthy of that reputation. They called this the "Olympos Project" (*Odyssey* 2018). Not only does this confer depth to the game, it also adds questions: Are the Isu gods or not? Would this even be important to the NPCs if they knew this? What even makes a god? Does *Assassin's Creed* convey religious criticism? Especially the third Episode *Judgment of Atlantis* (2019) offers a deeper insight, since the Isu and humans both live side by side in the simulation of Atlantis and Cassandra is tasked with making the decision, whether or not the ruling system of the Isu over the humans is working or not.

Although the questions about the Isu are interesting, *Odyssey* offers more aspects to analyze. The NPCs language and offerings to the gods in hope of assistance is a general aspect of the game to look into. Both questlines *A God Among Men* (2017)

and *The Image of Faith* (2018) provide a deeper insight into this subject. They offer a better understanding of how the gods and offerings are perceived by the NPCs.

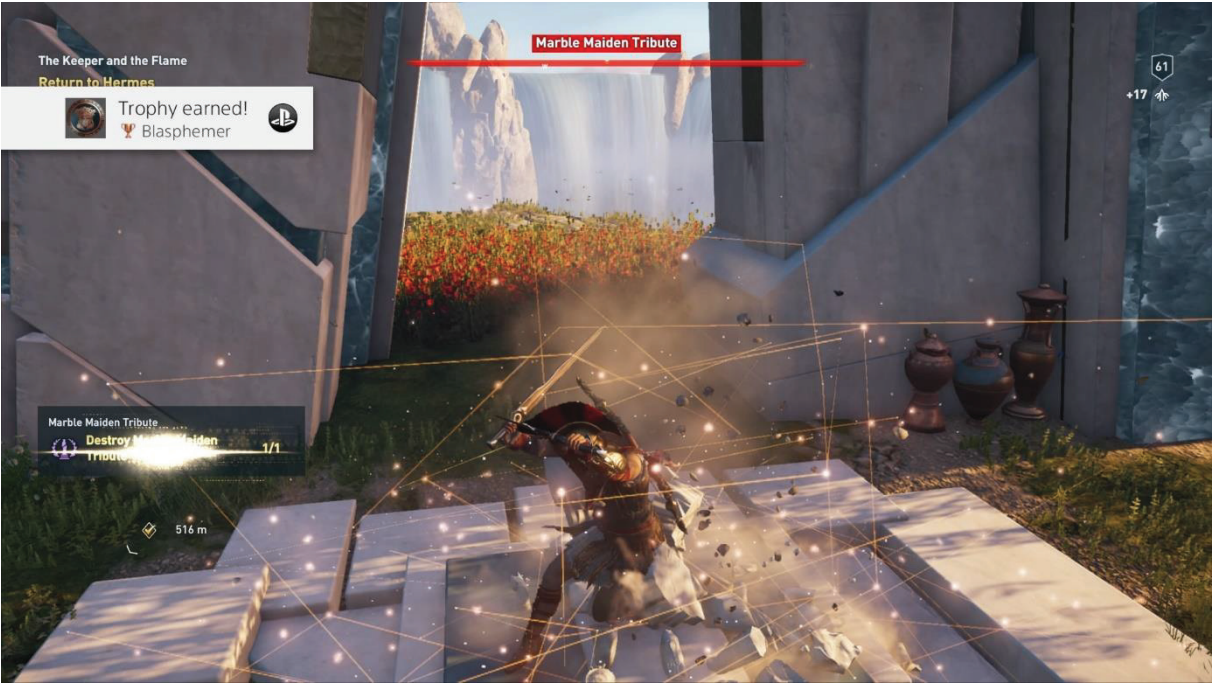


Figure 3. Trophy "Blasphemer" earned, after destroying all 18 marble statues of Persephone in Elysium, *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* © Ubisoft.

Furthermore, the issue of death and postmortality should be examined by taking a closer look at the first and second part of the DLC *The Fate of Atlantis*. Even though some NPCs close to Cassandra or her friends die in the main story, traveling to Elysium and the Underworld – and meeting characters such as Charon, Hades himself and former friends of Cassandra – offers a great opportunity to study the portrayal of death and postmortality of ancient Greece. Leading up to the afterlife one could also examine the funeral in *A Night to Remember* (2018) and *Honoring the Dead* (2018) as well as the graveyards all over the map, in order to start a discussion about the different usage of death in this game, *Death* as a game mechanic, as a narrative plot device or the morality of killing NPCs (Quest *The Sokratic Method* 2018). Combining

the portrayal of postmortality, funerals and discussions about death within the game could push discourses about the transformation of burial culture in videogames and digital media in general.



Figure 4. Tribute to Persephone in Hades’s Palace in the Underworld, *Assassin’s Creed Odyssey* © Ubisoft.

Game Design

Besides the story and setting, the mechanics of the game are also linked to the gods. Since *Odyssey* is, more than its predecessors are, an RPG based game, the choices made leveling one’s character are more relevant. Most of the abilities one can learn are divided into the categories of hunter, warrior and assassin. The hunter abilities are somewhat inspired by Artemis – such as *Might of Artemis* (2018) – whereas the warrior abilities are often associated with Ares – such as *Ares Madness* (2018). As a warrior one can even “conjure the fire of Hephaistos” (*Odyssey* 2018) to inflict fire damage and as an assassin, one may slow down time with “Kronos Time Warp”

feel more real since they often hold different world views and beliefs especially about the gods and religion and in which way they influence their everyday life. As interesting as the religious language pattern of the NPCs may be for Religious Studies, it should also be asked, whether the developers felt a need to make this language so omnipresent – and why.

Finally, there seems to be an increase in the portrayal of religion and mythology ever since the series started to further explore settings and contexts where Christianity is less prominent – such as ancient Egypt in *Origins* (2017) and ancient Greece in *Odyssey*. Their upcoming title *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* will take players back in time to the Viking days, bringing yet another new setting to the table: Northern Europe and Norse mythology. Looking at this from a Religious Studies perspective, several questions come up, for example: Where does this increase in the portrayal of religion and mythology in videogames come from and how does it compare to other media?

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ⁱ Depending on the character you choose – Cassandra or Alexios – the other becomes the antagonist in your story. Other than that, none of your in game options changes. Since I played as Cassandra, she will be the example for this review as well.