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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 – Kassandra, 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.
Through this encounter, Kassandra learns the whereabouts of her mother and begins her own Odyssey to restore her fractured family and to destroy the Cult of Kosmos. Throughout her journey, she also learns that she is a descendant of the Isu, an ancient highly advanced and intelligent humanoid species that created mankind as well as some powerful artefacts to control it. One of those artefacts is the Staff of Hermes Trismegistus. In the DLC *The Fate of Atlantis* the Isu Aletheia creates simulations for Kassandra to learn how to control the Staff. These simulations take Kassandra first to Elysium, to the Underworld and finally to Atlantis. In those simulations, Kassandra meets other Isu – and supposed gods – such as Persephone, Hermes, Hekate, Hades and Poseidon.

![Hedone in Quest](image)

Figure 1. Hedone in Quest – "The Hedonistic Method", *Assassin’s Creed Odyssey* © Ubisoft.

**Gods and Living Faith. Religion in Odyssey**

The breathtaking open-world of *Assassin’s Creed Odyssey* is filled with beliefs in and worship of the ancient gods. It includes long lost temples sunken to the bottom of
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 Diktynna, 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, Kassandra discovers that the gods worshiped by the NPCs
are in fact the Isu. Alethia’s archive tells Kassandra 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 Kassandra 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.

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 Kassandra 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 Kassandra – 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”
(Odyssey 2018). Depending on the choice of armor and weapons, the damage dealt by the different abilities can also be increased. The legendary set of Artemis increases damage to all hunter abilities and equipping Poseidon’s Trident allows one to breathe underwater.

Figure 5. Ability “Ares Madness” summons “the full power of Leonidas’s unbroken Spear. For 10 seconds, all attacks deal 35% Assassin damage, all enemy attacks are non-lethal, and other Abilities are unavailable.” Assassin’s Creed Odyssey © Ubisoft.

**Conclusion**

I enjoyed playing Odyssey immensely. The stunning love for details is everywhere, some so small, that one does not even notice them at first, e.g., the tiny colorful decorations in the temples and historic buildings. The game feels somewhat immersive due to the choices one can make in action and dialog, even though the story is already predetermined. The choices thus decide mainly whether a person dies or not, without altering the main quest to much, often just causing slightly different sentences during a dialog. But the dialogs with the individual NPCs make the world
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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\[1\] Depending on the character you choose – Kassandra or Alexios – the other becomes the antagonist in your story. Other than that, none of your in game options changes. Since I played as Kassandra, she will be the example for this review as well.