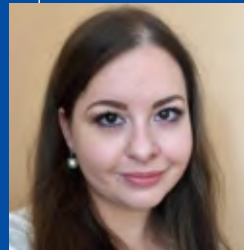


Portraying Historical Landmarks and Events in the Digital Game Series *Assassin's Creed*

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ABSTRACT:

Most young people living in the world of today do not express much interest in history and historical landmarks. It is therefore quite surprising that specific digital games portraying various historical periods or their alternative, partly fictitious versions might at least raise their players' awareness of real historical facts and sites. Some of these games have been able to achieve global popularity. The author uses the digital game series *Assassin's Creed* (2007 – present day) as an example of a digital gaming environment which features historical fiction merged with real historical events and figures. The aim of the study is to better understand the ways *Assassin's Creed* portrays historical landmarks all over the world and bring them closer to the players. The basic assumption is that at least some of the players, here seen as potential "gamers-tourists", may be interested in finding out more about the depicted historical sites and their true counterparts. Given the aforementioned assumption, our ambition is to discuss the digital game series *Assassin's Creed* and its tendency to offer visually attractive virtual re-creations of real historical sites, reflecting on the series' presumed ability to depict historical landmarks, figures and events in mostly fictitious, but still interesting and eye-catching ways.

KEY WORDS:

Assassin's Creed series, gamer-tourist, gaming environments, historical accuracy of digital games, historical landmarks, hyper-realistic game renditions.

Introduction

At present, it is very difficult to raise teenagers and young adults' (generally low) awareness of historical events and landmarks. Although these events or sites have been parts of human spiritual and material riches for centuries, some of them even for millennia, young people's disinterest in historical facts and monuments is still quite obvious. We therefore have to seek 'alternative' or rather late-modern methods of displaying their remarkable features and stressing their importance. It is worth noting that various digital games have proven to be quite effective and useful tools of this much needed popularisation. While discussing new trends in marketing communication related to digital games, Z. Mago remarks that the mobile digital game *Pokémon GO* offers various opportunities for tourism and destination marketing. The ways the game utilises location-based services have even inspired its fans to create several travel itineraries and sightseeing tours linked to Pokémon hunting. As the author further remarks, these fans have made many sites with Pokémon location maps and also mobile applications (e.g. *Poké Radar*, *Gochat*). Moreover, 'official' organisations (such as travel agencies) do not underestimate the potential of *Pokémon GO* for tourism development either; some of them have started to offer 'Pokémon tours' (e.g. *Junior Travel* in Spain).¹

One of the most popular digital game products that possesses the potential to increase young people's awareness of history (as well as their knowledge on architec- tonic styles used in various countries or historical eras, on their transformations and

¹ MAGO, Z.: New Trends of Marketing Communication Based on Digital Games. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2017, Vol. 13, No. 5, p. 178.

differences) is the digital game series *Assassin's Creed*. In the *Assassin's Creed* digital game series, players are given a chance to explore many different heritage environments, e.g. the Holy Land during the Third Crusade, Renaissance Italy, the Ottoman Empire, America during the War of Independence and Seven Years War, the Golden Age of Piracy in the Caribbean, Paris during the French Revolution, Victorian Era London² and, most recently, Ancient Egypt near the end of the Ptolemaic period. Developed by the French digital game publisher *Ubisoft*, *Assassin's Creed* can be characterised as a multiplatform game franchise consisting of ten major digital games which are loosely based on the Slovenian novel *Alamut* by Vladimir Bartol, the history of the Knights Templar and older digital games featuring the Prince of Persia. Different games in the series are set in different locations and historical periods.³ The historical framework of the given digital game series is also acknowledged by its producers and creators. One of them, Michael Beadle, underlines this fact repeatedly: "*History is a core component of the Assassin's Creed franchise,*" he says, "*and one that we know has taught millions of players over the years about key characters and historical events by experiencing pivotal moments in history*".⁴ The *Assassin's Creed* series has therefore become more explicit in its claims to historical accuracy. And yet, as E. Herbst Buzay and E. Buzay state, the very basic history presented in the games is false, not only in terms of the physicality of the locations but also in relation to the biographies of real historical figures included in the games.⁵ Nevertheless, ordinary players – especially younger ones – are mostly unaware of the numerous differences between real historical events and the events of the game; at least they might not spot these differences immediately. Of course, this fact may increase the games' 'realistic' aspirations, but it also poses various uncertainties and potential problems associated with perceiving fictitious historical events as real.

On the other hand, we have to mention one of *Assassin's Creed's* important in-game features – the on-screen 'guides' of historical places. These guides, as M. Salmond and J. Salmond observe, are written much like a tourist guide book would be. The specific log entries typically include information on important characters from the virtual world of the game (some of them are real historical personas, e.g. Leonardo da Vinci or George Washington) and their personal history. What is more important to us, however, is that many entries related to the historical context and true backstory for historical landmarks or buildings situated within the game are also available. In other words, when players encounter a location of historical importance, the built-in game mechanics allows them to see textual information on the landmark's history and cultural significance. The game thus performs the role of a tour guide, providing the "gamer-tourist" with additional historical and contextual information. This feature seems to enrich the gaming experience and the players' understanding of a specific location. As the main focus of the game series is action, the players might decide to completely ignore these 'tourist guides'. However, they are also free to explore the city or landscape further; they can wander around like gamers-tourists. The characters populating this in-game 'world' are, for the most part, accurately dressed and the cities carefully mapped from original plans, sketches and

2 CHAPMAN, A.: *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice*. New York : Routledge, 2016, p. 179.

3 KERR, A.: *Global Games: Production, Circulation and Policy in the Networked Era*. New York : Routledge, 2017, p. 142-143.

4 STARKEY, D.: *Department of Education Believes Video Games Are the Future of Learning*. Released on 15th April 2015. [online]. [2018-02-11]. Available at: <<https://www.gamespot.com/articles/department-of-education-believes-video-games-are-t/1100-6426600/>>.

5 For more information, see: HERBST BUZAY, E., BUZAY, E.: Neomedievalism and the Epic in *Assassin's Creed*. In YOUNG, H. (ed.): *The Middle Ages in Popular Culture: Medievalism and Genre – Student Edition*. New York: Cambria Press, 2015, p. 113-129.

historical records.⁶ Other authors express similar opinions – according to C. Veugen, the *Assassin's Creed* series uses hyper-realistic renditions of locations to 're-create' historical sites on the basis of archaeological evidence, aiming to create visually compelling architectural escape routes for the games' main characters.⁷

The narrative format of *Assassin's Creed* is also interesting. As noted by D. N. Dow, the story encourages its players to interact with the game's environments in an imaginative and interpretive way. Structured as 'a game within a game', the events taking place during the game are, in fact, a virtual reality constructed in the mind of a man named Desmond who lives in present-day America. This virtual reality is based on the memories of Desmond's long dead ancestors⁸ living in different historical periods and all over the world.

Goals and Methods of the Analysis

The article's main objective is to reflect on the digital game series *Assassin's Creed* and its ability to offer visually attractive virtual re-creations of real historical landmarks and sites. We work with the basic assumption that such spectacular computer-generated imagery may raise or strengthen the players' interest in (and awareness of) real historical events and buildings of great historical significance.

The previous theoretical overview on the topic aimed to point out that most young people are (generally) not interested in history and historical buildings or architectural styles; unless they experience them in an original and visually compelling way. We also wanted to offer a complex set of theoretical outlines on the digital game series *Assassin's Creed* and note that it may function as a 'tourist guide'; it involves many landmarks and buildings of huge historical importance which the players can see and explore; they can get to know them better.

The following chapter allows us to use logical methods of thinking (analysis, synthesis, comparison and specification) to analyse the ways individual games of the *Assassin's Creed* series portray historical landmarks within their narratives. Its ambition is to reflect on the development of the *Assassin's Creed* series in terms of re-creating significant historical buildings and landmarks to make the in-game environments more interesting and visually rich. As we are interested in uncovering the ways the games in question portray historical sites, events or figures, we employ the basic principles of qualitative content analysis; more specifically, elements of narrative and discourse analysis are applied in order to find out more about how the individual instalments belonging to the given game series depict and utilise the spectacular in-game renditions of historical sites.

6 SALMOND, M., SALMOND, J.: The Gamer as a Tourist. In LONG, P., MORPETH, N. D. (eds.): *Tourism and the Creative Industries: Theories, Policies and Practice*. Abingdon : Routledge, 2016, p. 158.

7 VEUGEN, C.: Computer Games as a Comparative Medium: A Few Cautionary Remarks. In FROMME, J., UNGER, A. (eds.): *Computer Games and New Media Cultures: A Handbook of Digital Games Studies*. Dordrecht : Springer, 2012, p. 53.

8 DOW, D. N.: Historical Veneers: Anachronism, Simulation, and Art History in *Assassin's Creed II*. In KAPPELL, M. W., ELLIOTT, A. B. R. (eds.): *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*. New York : Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 227.

Portrayals of Historical Landmarks in the Assassin's Creed Series

Following the previous parts of the text, let us focus on the most significant and interesting historical sites, landscapes and buildings featured in the digital game series *Assassin's Creed*. Careful readers will note that numerous smaller expansions and downloadable contents are not included – we mention only the ten major digital games from the series. The original *Assassin's Creed*⁹ takes place during the Third Crusade and thus features a lot of religious landmarks; most of them are situated in the sacred city of Jerusalem. We would like to mention, for example, the Temple Mount and the Dome of the Rock, a gold-topped mosque and major landmark in Jerusalem (for the Dome's in-game portrayal, see Picture 1). The Temple Mount is the third holiest site in the world for Muslims (after Mecca and Medina). In Muslim tradition, this is where Prophet Mohammed made his 'Night Journey' to the throne of God. The Dome of the Rock was built upon it in the seventh century, when Muslims conquered Jerusalem. Moreover, parts of the four walls surrounding the Temple Mount and the Dome of the Rock are the holiest site for Jewish believers and the landmark is very important for Christians, too.¹⁰ The game's creators seemed to quickly understand that the symbolic or rather virtual exploration of historical sites was one of the most compelling features of the given game. In this particular case, some of the portrayed historical landmarks are hard, dangerous or even impossible to visit in real life – mostly due to unstable political and religious situation in today's Israel.



Picture 1: In-game footage of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, *Assassin's Creed* (2007)

Source: *Dome of the Rock*. [online]. [2018-02-22]. Available at: <http://assassinscreed.wikia.com/wiki/Dome_of_the_Rock>.

*Assassin's Creed II*¹¹ and *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*,¹² the second and third major games in the *Assassin's Creed* series, are set in Renaissance Italy. The amount of visualised historical landmarks is quite overwhelming, much higher than in case of the first game.

9 UBISOFT ENTERTAINMENT: *Assassin's Creed + Assassin's Creed 2. Special Collection*. [digital game]. Montreuil Suis Bois : Ubisoft Entertainment, 2010.

10 *Visiting the Temple Mount and Dome of the Rock*. [online]. [2018-02-11]. Available at: <<https://www.touristisrael.com/temple-mount/15944/>>.

11 UBISOFT ENTERTAINMENT: *Assassin's Creed + Assassin's Creed 2. Special Collection*. [digital game]. Montreuil Suis Bois : Ubisoft Entertainment, 2010.

12 UBISOFT ENTERTAINMENT: *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. [digital game]. Montreuil Suis Bois : Ubisoft Entertainment, 2011.

It is also believed that this feature, among others, strengthens the enormous popularity of these particular games, which is unmatched by any of the newer and visually superior sequels. One of the most interesting historical landmarks included in the games in question is the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Flower, the main church in Florence, Italy (see Picture 2 for its in-game visualisation). Dominating the Florence skyline, the Cathedral's magnificent dome is considered to be one of the most important architectural achievements of the Italian Renaissance. Inside the Cathedral, there are stained-glass windows and frescoes painted by Italian masters, and one of the oldest examples of a 'hora italica' clock in the world.¹³ The players are able to explore the site quite thoroughly, solving various riddles and puzzles.



Picture 2: Visualisation of the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Flowers in Florence, *Assassin's Creed II* (2009)

Source: *Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore*. [online]. [2018-02-22]. Available at: <http://assassinscreed.wikia.com/wiki/Basilica_di_Santa_Maria_del_Fiore?file=Basilica_di_Santa_Maria_del_Fiore_Panorama.png>.

*Assassin's Creed Revelations*¹⁴ rediscovers both previous protagonists: Altaïr Ibn-La'Ahad in 12th and 13th century Masyaf and Ezio Auditore da Firenze in 16th century Constantinople. The in-game environment is therefore considerably different. The players are offered a chance to encounter various historical landmarks of the Ottoman Empire, which are, once again, quite exotic and relatively unknown, at least in relation to younger members of the Western digital games audiences. Probably the most important of them is the Hagia Sophia (see Picture 3 for the building's in-game re-creation), otherwise known as the Church of Holy Wisdom, the former Eastern-Orthodox Christian basilica located in Constantinople. Being one of the most significant monuments not only in Turkey but on Earth, the Hagia Sophia church had been the centre of Orthodox Christianity until 1453 when the city was conquered by Ottomans. It quickly became a jewel for the Muslim world and the grand mosque of the sultans. It is now the national museum of Turkey.¹⁵ The romantic landmark also plays an important role in relation to one of the *Assassin's Creed*'s most popular and rather untraditional love stories – the aging Assassin Ezio Auditore looks for a florist to obtain white tulips, a gift meant for Sofia Sartor, a much younger, sophisticated Venetian bookstore owner who will eventually become his wife. The quest ends up with Ezio finding the flowers in Hagia Sophia's courtyard and him and Sophia enjoying a picnic in the shadow of the great mosque.

13 *Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore (Duomo)*. [online]. [2018-02-11]. Available at: <<https://www.expedia.com/Cathedral-Of-Saint-Mary-Of-The-Flower-Duomo.d501046.Vacation-Attraction>>.

14 UBISOFT ENTERTAINMENT: *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*. [digital game]. Montreuil Suis Bois : Ubisoft Entertainment, 2011.

15 *Hagia Sophia Info*. [online]. [2018-02-11]. Available at: <<http://www.hagiasophia.com/listingview.php?listingID=18>>.



Picture 3: Comparison of the real Hagia Sophia and its representation in *Assassin's Creed Revelations* (2011)

Source: *Hagia Sophia*. [online]. [2018-02-22]. Available at: <http://assassinscreed.wikia.com/wiki/Hagia_Sophia?file=800px-Hagia_Sophia.png>.

*Assassin's Creed III*¹⁶ was the developers' attempt to popularise the franchise amongst North American gaming audiences. That is why the story is set at the time of the American Revolutionary War. However, the number of historical landmarks is notably lower than in the previous games. One of the historical sites worth mentioning is St. Paul's Chapel, the Episcopal church located in Lower Manhattan, the longest serving public building in New York (more than 250 years of continuous service). It is still home to an active worshipping community, hosts a wide variety of events and welcomes more than one million visitors every year. It first opened in 1766; a decade later, the Great Fire of 1776 destroyed the first Trinity Church nearby, but St. Paul's survived, thanks to a bucket brigade dousing the building with water. Many, including the first American President George Washington, made St. Paul's their religious home until the second Trinity Church was rebuilt.¹⁷ The site is therefore an important part of American history (as well as the portrayed era as a whole). However, the game's obvious fixation on the life of Native Americans and huge open spaces of the (then almost untouched) North American wilderness excludes the possibility of thoroughly exploring urban landmarks and interesting sites built by European immigrants.

Portraying the Golden Era of Piracy in the Caribbean, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*¹⁸ includes various areas of the Caribbean, including Jamaica and Cuba. The most significant landmark the game involves is the Cathedral of Havana, i.e. the Cathedral of the Virgin Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Cuba. The Cathedral of Havana was built on the site of an earlier smaller church; construction began in 1748 and was finished many years later, in 1777. The Cathedral was built in a Baroque style, featuring many curves and double curves. The building's obvious asymmetry and curious construction material – coral taken from the ocean – make it one of the most unique houses of worship in the world. Fossils of marine flora and fauna can still be seen in the stone of the Cathedral.¹⁹ Despite the fact that the site would not have existed during the events of *Assassin's Creed IV*, the building is featured in the game due to its status of an easily recognisable local landmark (see Picture 4). As substantial parts of the narrative take place at sea, aboard a pirate ship or on one of many Caribbean islands, the developers have once again decided to prefer action over site exploration.

16 UBISOFT ENTERTAINMENT: *Assassin's Creed III*. [digital game]. Montreuil Suis Bois: Ubisoft Entertainment, 2012.

17 *Trinity Church Wall Street*. [online]. [2018-02-11]. Available at: <<https://www.trinitywallstreet.org/about/stpaulschapel>>.

18 UBISOFT ENTERTAINMENT: *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag. Skull Edition*. [digital game]. Montreuil Suis Bois: Ubisoft Entertainment, 2013.

19 *Havana Cathedral*. [online]. [2018-02-11]. Available at: <<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/cuba/havana-cathedral>>.



Picture 4: Cathedral of Havana in *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (2013)

Source: *Cathedral of Havana*. [online]. [2018-02-22]. Available at: <http://assassinscreed.wikia.com/wiki/Cathedral_of_Havana?file=Cathedral_of_Havana.jpg>.

*Assassin's Creed Rogue*²⁰ features the Seven Years War era in the mid-18th century. The game's visualisation of famous historical sites is rather modest – however, there are a few, among them Mount Vernon, which is most famous for being the home of the Washington family. George Washington's beloved Mount Vernon began as a one and one-half story house built in 1735 by his father, Augustine, and received its well-known name during the ownership of his half-brother Lawrence. George acquired Mount Vernon in 1754 and personally supervised each renovation, advising on design, construction and decoration – even during the Revolutionary War.²¹ This historical site underlines the importance of George Washington's persona in terms of the *Assassin's Creed* series.

*Assassin's Creed Unity*²² starts on the eve of the French Revolution in 1789 and extends up to the Thermidorian Reaction in 1794. The events therefore take place in revolutionary Paris and its districts, palaces and overcrowded streets. Among the most significant historical sites the player gets to visit is the Palace of Versailles, once the royal residence of the King of France, one of the largest palaces in the world. The Palace is widely considered an architectural and aesthetic masterpiece, one of the greatest achievements in French 17th century art. Louis XIII's old hunting pavilion was transformed and extended by his son, Louis XIV, when he installed the Court and government there in 1682. A succession of kings continued to expand and renovate the Palace up until the French Revolution.²³ The players are able to experience the Palace's beauty and monumentality (the in-game version can be seen in Picture 5) through the eyes of a young boy Arno, the future Assassin, who accompanies his father during a meeting of the Assassins inside the Palace. Much later, Arno, now grown-up, recently exiled from the Assassin Order and rejected by a young woman he loves, returns to Versailles, ends up in a local tavern and engages in a brawl. His precious watch, an important part of his heritage, is stolen right after the fight and he has to explore the Palace once again to find it. Some of the game's most important scenes therefore happen inside the Palace – at first young Arno witnesses his father's murder and later he tries to find the thieves possessing his heritage watch.

20 UBISOFT ENTERTAINMENT: *Assassin's Creed: Rogue*. [digital game]. Montreuil Suis Bois: Ubisoft Entertainment, 2014.

21 *The Mansion of George Washington's Mount Vernon Is One of the Most Iconic 18th-Century Homes in America*. [online]. [2018-02-11]. Available at: <www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/the-mansion/>.

22 UBISOFT ENTERTAINMENT: *Assassin's Creed: Unity. Bastille Edition*. [digital game]. Montreuil Suis Bois: Ubisoft Entertainment, 2014.

23 *The Palace: From the Seat of Power to a Museum of the History of France*. [online]. [2018-02-11]. Available at: <<http://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover/estate/palace>>.



Picture 5: Young Arno and his father at the Palace of Versailles, *Assassin's Creed Unity* (2014)

Source: *Palace of Versailles*. [online]. [2018-02-22]. Available at: <http://assassinscreed.wikia.com/wiki/Palace_of_Versailles>.

Set in Victorian era London and introducing twins Evie and Jacob Frye as two equally important lead protagonists, *Assassins Creed Syndicate*²⁴ builds upon the general mainstream popularity of the end of the Second Industrial Revolution. It is therefore understandable that the game situates one of the most important missions into Her Majesty's Royal Palace and Fortress, more commonly known as the Tower of London, the world-famous historical castle. The Tower of London was built by William the Conqueror towards the end of 1066 (the White Tower was built later, in 1078). The White Tower lies at the Fortress's centre; it was originally conceived as a residence for royalty, but has served a host of other functions throughout history, most prominently that of a prison. However, over the centuries the Tower of London has been used as a royal residence, an armoury, a treasury, a zoo, the Royal Mint, a records office and to house the Crown Jewels as well.²⁵ Evie Frye infiltrates the Tower to locate the Shroud of Eden, an artefact of ultimate value; however, she finds out that the place has been overtaken by Templars disguised as Royal Guardsmen. The quest involves rescuing the Tower's true warden and killing Lucy Thorne, a prominent Templar. It is therefore one of the most important missions in the game and the players are able to explore even the Tower's hidden places and dark corners. However, in this case they do so not to admire the Tower's particularities, at least not primarily, but rather to experience spectacular action sequences.

*Assassin's Creed Origins*²⁶ focuses on the Ptolemaic Kingdom and the widely popular persona of Queen Cleopatra (undoubtedly she is so popular thanks to being famously portrayed by Elizabeth Taylor in the Hollywood movie from the 1950s). Besides pyramids, the most interesting historical landmark included in the game is the Library of Alexandria, one of the largest and most significant libraries of the ancient world. First built by Ptolemy I and finished under Ptolemy II, it was dedicated to the Muses, the nine goddesses of the arts and daughters of Zeus. Historically, the library was partially destroyed during the Caesar's Siege of Alexandria.²⁷ However, in the game, the Library suffers no damage whatsoever and after the events of the Siege, it remains the same as before. Of course, its digital portrayal is widely based on speculations of the game's developers, as the library's

24 UBISOFT ENTERTAINMENT: *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate. Special Edition*. [digital game]. Montreuil Suis Bois : Ubisoft Entertainment, 2015.

25 CAMPBELL, S.: *Everything You Need to Know about Visiting the Tower of London*. Released on 4th September 2017. [online]. [2018-02-11]. Available at: <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/united-kingdom/england/london/articles/tower-of-london-visitor-guide-prices-tickets-advice/>>.

26 UBISOFT ENTERTAINMENT: *Assassin's Creed: Origins*. [digital game]. Montreuil Suis Bois : Ubisoft Entertainment, 2017.

27 *The Destruction of the Great Library of Alexandria*. Released on 12th May 2014. [online]. [2018-02-11]. Available at: <<http://www.ancient-origins.net/ancient-places-africa-history-important-events/destruction-great-library-alexandria-001644>>.

exact shape, extent and decorations are unknown even to historians. One of the game's most remarkable features is its 'Discovery Tour Mode'. It seems that the series' developers try to 'return to their roots' by offering the players an exploration-based gaming mode that allows them "to explore ancient Egypt without being interrupted by combat or quests. Purely educational, the mode is a 'virtual museum' without threats but instead with guided tours and historical sites to discover".²⁸ In other words, the players who use this mode are – at least at the given time – mostly interested in exploration, not in fulfilling quests or engaging in combat situations. Considering the fact that this game is, quite naturally, visually superior to the previous instalments rich in hyper-realistic renditions of historical landmarks, its gaming environment bound to depictions of historical sites is even more immersive.

Conclusion

Assassin's Creed is one of the few globally popular mainstream digital games series that place prominent emphasis on the exploration of historical landmarks and monuments. The previous analysis shows that the series creatively develops the 'tourist guide book' game mechanics mostly in its earlier instalments. It is worth noting that these games are also the most popular parts of the series, the ones which underline the importance of exploring European and oriental monuments. However, the latest releases are based on much more advanced visual effects and graphic elements – and those set in North America as well – tend to prefer spectacular action over the once careful, aesthetically rich exploration. On the other hand, *Assassin's Creed: Origins* (or rather its Discovery Tour Mode) is, as it seems, an exception. This may even indicate that the game series' developers try to explore new possibilities for utilising the 'tourist guide book' game mechanics. Nevertheless, the ways of presenting specific historical monuments have changed – from the sheer exoticism and mysticism of the ancient religious sites of the Holy Land, through the most beautiful buildings of the Italian Renaissance filled with clues, puzzles and visually compelling escape routes, romanticised portrayals of oriental monuments, some of the most important buildings related to American culture and national identity, to the most popular places to see when one visits European metropolises such as Paris or London.

The positive aspects of including historical landmarks in the games' storylines are related to offering the players visually attractive renditions of (partly fictionalised) history and architecture. At least some of them may start to express more interest in real historical facts and sites or in differences between the buildings, events and people portrayed in the games and their real counterparts. Given the fact that various Italian tourism entrepreneurs offer 'Assassin's Creed tours' of Florence,²⁹ the concept of the "gamer-tourist" certainly exists. It is a relatively new but quite prospective form of cultural tourism. Undoubtedly, the idea is interesting and intriguing enough to inspire a much wider spectrum of scholarly reflections. We may even conclude that many players all over the world who like, own and play this series – especially the younger ones – are able to 'visit' these places only virtually, as travelling around the globe and visiting some of these monuments (such

28 *Discovery Tour Mode of Assassins Creed: Origins*. [online]. [2018-10-05]. Available at: <<https://support.ubi.com/en-GB/Faqs/000031846/Discovery-Tour-Mode-of-Assassin-s-Creed-Origins-ACO>>.

29 Remark by the author: This kind of tourist service is also offered by the prestigious Four Seasons hotel in Florence. It is notable that the service is categorised as a 'family activity'; See, for example: *Family Activities*. [online]. [2018-02-11]. Available at: <https://www.fourseasons.com/florence/services_and_amenities/family_at_four_seasons/family_activities/>.

as the Dome of the Rock) is not only expensive and time-consuming but also potentially problematic due to ongoing political affairs, religious disparities and armed conflicts.

It seems like real historical events may serve as compelling digital game backgrounds and plot structures, particularly if many details included (such as clothing or furniture) do indeed correspond with real historical circumstances. The players are able to encounter – if not strictly realistic, at least approximate – depictions of historical buildings, architectural ‘jewels’, works of art. Those of them who have never expressed any interest in history and architecture may acquire, although unwittingly, a certain body of basic knowledge on them. For example, they may be able to name at least the most famous historical landmarks. Even if the in-game objects are not exactly accurate re-creations of various historical sites, they still preserve the portrayed period’s architectonic style and cultural framework, which is important. The players are therefore able to imagine some material and spiritual components of the given historical era. We may also conclude that, generally speaking, for most young people it is much more interesting to play a digital game with a narrative enriched by intriguing (although partly or fully fictitious) historical plots and monuments than to look at photographs and other materials published in encyclopaedias or read highly factual textbooks related to historical science.

We might presume that the popularity of the analysed digital game series could support cultural tourism, particularly regarding its core fans, whose motivation to visit the real locations portrayed by these games (mostly the monuments of Renaissance Italy, as *Assassin’s Creed II* and *Assassin’s Creed Brotherhood* are still the most popular parts of the series by far) would be probably higher. However, there are several negative consequences, too. The historical events included in the *Assassin’s Creed* series are often fully fictitious, inaccurate, simplified or distorted to comply with the prearranged storytelling. Due to numerous historical inaccuracies and fantastic aspects, real historical elements and fictitious stories merge; less educated or younger players may thus not be able to distinguish between facts and fiction. We also should not forget that portrayals of historically significant places and buildings (or rather their idealised versions) in late modern digital games serve entertainment purposes primarily; their ability to offer universally comprehensible educational entertainment is therefore quite questionable, easy to overlook or even deny.

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