Supplemental Materials

Group Activity: Assessing Djoser’s Complex in *Assassin’s Creed: Origins*

Summary:

The purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to think critically about the representation of archaeology and the ancient world in digital games, and how it compares with scholarly representations. Exploring these topics can help you make decisions about how to communicate your data in the future, whether you continue in archaeology or move on into a different profession. You will work in a group of 3-4 to answer a selection of discussion questions, and then share your answers with the class.

Instructions:

**1.** Ensure you have read the following readings:

Nielsen, Holly

2017 Assassin’s Creed Origins: How Ubisoft Painstakingly Recreated Ancient Egypt. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/05/assassins-creed-origins-recreated-ancient-egypt-ubisoft>, accessed October 2, 2020.

Uricchio, William

2005 Simulation, History, and Computer Games. In *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, edited by Joost Raessens and Jeffrey Goldstein, pp. 328-338. The MIT Press, Cambridge.

And the discussion of Djoser’s Step Pyramid Complex on pages 140-145 from:

Bard, Kathryn

2015 *An Introduction to the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*. Wiley Blackwell, Malden.

**2.** Watch the video walkthrough tour of Djoser’s Saqqara complex from *Assassin’s Creed: Origins*. A link can be found on the course website.

**3.** Work with your group to discuss the answers to the following discussion questions, comparing the *Assassin’s Creed* version of the Step Pyramid Complex with the descriptions and diagrams in your textbook. You may wish to work together on a Google Docs file. It is perfectly acceptable to note differing opinions. To explore the game version yourselves, you and your group are encouraged to sign up on the course website for a time to come in and play the game in the department.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the major similarities and differences in the main structure of the complex and pyramid represented in *Assassin’s Creed*, and that portrayed in your textbook through descriptions and 2D images?
2. What are some of the different minor elements, or *lexia*, the game developers have added to the digital reconstruction that are missing from the scholarly version? (like flora, fauna, additional baskets of objects, etc.)
3. What (if anything) do you learn about this structure by moving through the complex and the pyramid as an avatar that you did not understand from the textbook reconstructions?
4. Consider your overall impression of the monument as created by the scholarly descriptions and diagrams, and that by the version in *Assassin’s Creed*. Discuss the different intended audiences, and how this would have affected the choices made for each reconstruction. What does each contribute to your understanding of how ancient peoples interacted with these monuments?
5. If you were asked to design a reconstruction for a mixed audience (both scholarly and public), what elements would you include or leave out, which media would you use, and why?

**4.** You and your group will then submit your answers, which will be shared and discussed with the class.

Term Paper Topic:

Assessing the Representation of Ancient Egypt in Digital Games

Research Question:

How does the representation of ancient Egypt in digital games compare with scholarly reconstructions? Consider the merits and drawbacks of both approaches for helping people understand and appreciate the past.

Learning Outcomes:

Through this assignment, the student should be able to demonstrate that they:

1. are able to find and asses a variety of resources.
2. are able to critically consider academic and popular archaeological reconstructions.
3. are able to complete a well-structured research paper.

Note – while these skills are particularly helpful in your career as a student, being able to critically consider the merits and drawbacks of digital media is a skill that can also help you in many professions, and in your personal life as well.

Assignment Summary:

For this paper, select an archaeological site or monument that we studied this term, which is presented in a digital game. Compare the popular reconstruction to scholarly reconstructions in drawings, models, or written descriptions, published in scholarly sources. How do both types of reconstructions compare with the physical evidence? Suggest whether, or in which ways, the digital game reconstruction enhances our understanding of the past.

Considerations:

You may want to consider the following questions while working on your paper:

* What *lexia* have been added to the reconstruction in the game? Do these add to the “authenticity” of the ancient environment?
* How does the player engage with the reconstruction during gameplay? How might this affect the player’s view of the reconstruction, or the past in general?
* In which contexts, or for which audience, would you use one version over the other?

Formatting:

The essay should be 2000-2500 words long, double-spaced with 12” font, in Times New Roman. In-text citations in SAA format should be used, followed by a References Cited section that includes at least eight sources. The in-text citations are part of the word count, the references cited is not. You are encouraged to include images and additional media. If you choose to include significant original media, such as a video walkthrough, you may discuss a lower word count for the accompanying written essay with the instructor.

\*Note – while you are permitted to use any video game for this assignment, be aware that some games include violent or sexual content. If you would prefer to avoid these elements, I would recommend selecting a site that is represented in the “Discovery Tour”of *Assassin’s Creed: Origins*, from which these aspects have been removed. If you do not have access to this game at home, you can make an appointment with the instructor to work through them in the department.