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Video Games as Mythology Museums? Mythographical Story Collections in Games

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Abstract

The growing field of historical game studies (which studies the intersection of history and video games) has often described video games with historical settings as virtual museums, based on their potential to allow players to move through a historical game space and/or interact with historical artefacts. The present article investigates how these insights may be applied to mythological video games (i.e. those that represent and simulate a storyworld known from or inspired by mythological traditions). Specifically, this article argues (1) that through the collection, combination, and presentation of different myths, mythological video games often exhibit characteristics similar to ancient and modern mythography, (2) that on the basis of these mythographical qualities, they may be considered as interactive mythology museums, and (3) that the incorporation of these features has potential for applications in education. As case studies, this article considers the popular games *Age of Mythology*, *Smite*, *Immortals Fenyx Rising*, *God of War* (and its sequel, *God of War: Ragnarök*), *Apotheon*, and *Hades* in light of their mythographical and museal properties. Finally, several future directions to further improve upon the educational potential of these games for both formal and informal learning are suggested.

In the twenty-first century, people increasingly encounter the ancient world through video games. In academia, there is the currently thriving field of historical game

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studies (HGS), examining not only how video games represent and simulate history and historical processes, but also how audiences experience history through games, and how such games are produced.[1] Classical reception studies has similarly grown progressively enthusiastic about games: the 2020s have already seen the publication of two edited volumes and one dedicated monograph.[2] As games become increasingly important in not only entertainment, but also education and art,[3] it is 'incumbent upon classicists to take video games seriously',[4] and it is to this growing field that the present article seeks to contribute.

One metaphor often used in HGS is the description of historical video games as virtual museums. For example, Politopoulos et al. describe the *Discovery Tour* for *Assassin's Creed Origins* (2017, Ubisoft Montreal)—a non-violent version of the game's quasi-photorealistic recreation of Ptolemaic Egypt, where players walk through historical sites while hearing scholarly commentary—as 'a mostly noninteractive museum visit'.[5] These tours, writes Navarrete, 'display a series of museum pieces'.[6] Similarly, Hess wrote that *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* (2003, EA Los Angeles), a shooting game set during World War II, 'becomes a type of digital museum allowing visiting gamers to select the items they wish to learn about'.[7] The game serves as 'an ideologically structured museum of the Pacific theater' by including documentary footage and interviews with WWII veterans, and allows players to walk around historical environments and observe historical artefacts.[8] Finally, in a discussion on *Valiant Hearts: The Great War* (2014, Ubisoft Montpellier), which simulates World War I, Anderson uses the term 'interactive museum' to describe how the game employs 'world building through lore—such as through item text descriptions—as well as affective game design aesthetics to create a learning experience closer in similarity to touring a museum than reading a textbook'.[9]

[1] On HGS, see A. Chapman, *Digital Games as History. How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice*, New York, 2016 and A. Chapman, A. Foka, and J. Westin, 'Introduction: what is historical game studies?', *Rethinking History*, 21 (3), 2017, pp. 358–71.

[2] The edited volumes are *Classical Antiquity in Video Games. Playing with the Ancient World*, ed. C. Rollinger, New York and London, 2020 and *Women in Classical Video Games*, ed. J. Draycott and K. Cook, New York, London and Dublin, 2022. For the monograph, see R. Clare, *Ancient Greece and Rome in Video Games: Representation, Play, Transmedia,* New York, London and Dublin, 2021.

[3] See, for example, M. Caracciolo, 'Remediating Video Games in Contemporary Fiction: Literary Form and Intermedial Transfer', *Games and Culture*, advance online publication, 2022, 1–20 on how video games shape contemporary literature.

[4] P. Christesen and D. Machado, 'Video Games and Classical Antiquity', *Classical World*, 104 (1), 2010, pp. 107–10 (107).

[5] A. Politopoulos, A. A. A. Mol, K. H. J. Boom and C. E. Ariese, '"History is our playground": Action and authenticity in Assassin's Creed Odyssey'*, Advances in Archaeological Practice*, 7 (3), 2019, pp. 317–23 (322).

[6] T. Navarrete, 'Digital heritage tourism: innovations in museums', *World Leisure Journal*, 61 (3), 2019, pp. 200–14 (208).

[7] A. Hess, ''You Don't Play, You Volunteer': Narrative Public Memory Construction in *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 24 (4), 2007, pp. 339–56 (346).

[8] Ibid., p. 352.

[9] S. L. Anderson, 'The interactive museum: Video games as history lessons through lore and affective design', *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 16 (3), 2019, pp. 177–95 (178).

As a consequence of their museal qualities, such games have also started to become included in actual museums: reconstructions from the aforementioned *Assassin's Creed Origins* were, for example, included in the exhibition *Alexander the Great: The Making of a Myth* (2022–2023) at The British Library in London.[10] This article examines how these insights can be applied to the context of *mythological* video games, or those which present mythological storyworlds known from (or inspired by) ancient texts. I have recently argued that while there is a breadth of literature on historical video games, an equivalent 'mythological game studies' is still in its infancy.[11]

At their core, and generally speaking at least, museums are collections of historical and archaeological artefacts or documents, which are presented and described for an audience.[12] However, a collection of, in our case, Greco-Roman myths—understood here as the combined canon of mythological stories left to us from Greco-Roman antiquity—cannot produce similar kinds of artefacts due to the fictional nature of mythology: with a few exceptions of historical artefacts with mythologized descriptions (e.g. the Nestor cup, Agamemnon's mask; popularly claimed to 'be' the objects of myth), it is impossible to open an exhibition with 'actual' mythical artefacts such as Poseidon's trident or Apollo's lyre. A collection of myths must, therefore, be a collection of mythic stories. The child-oriented exhibition *Gods of Olympus* (*Θεοί του Ολύμπου*) which opened in Athens on 23 September 2022 is surely able to present reconstructions of the mythological artefacts such as the ones just named, but its main focus lies with collecting and recounting mythic episodes, both by the museum guides (who act as the Greek gods) and its informational plaques, which present the Greek myths. Importantly, the collection and recounting of myths is the precise topic of a literary genre known in both antiquity and the contemporary age as mythography. Mythographical texts have the main purpose of, in Hansen's words, transforming the 'huge and slippery mass fantasy' of Greek mythology into 'a manageable corpus of unchanging stories, the Greek mythology of the handbooks'.[13] In what follows, the literary genre of mythography will be used as the basis for presenting the museum-like potential of mythological video games.

This article argues (1) that mythological video games often exhibit mythographical characteristics, (2) that such games can be considered as mythology museums, and (3) that the incorporation of such mythographical elements in games has educational potential, effectively opening avenues for 'game-based learning' or 'serious gaming' (see below) in non-serious games. First, this article will briefly survey both ancient and modern mythographical texts in order to illustrate the genre and some

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[10] See Y. Maguid, 'Assassin's Creed Partners with British Library for Alexander the Great Exhibition', *Ubisoft*, 2022, https://news.ubisoft.com/en-us/article/4NXZclyvIlERbp0rw1CCDL/assassins-creed-partners-with-british-library-for-alexander-the-great-exhibition.

[11] A. Vandewalle, 'Towards a Mythological Game Studies?', presented at the Antiquity in Media Studies (AIMS) Annual Meeting, 2022, 10 December.

[12] For further definition, see F. Mairesse, 'The Definition of the Museum: History and Issues', *Museum International*, 71 (1–2), 2019, pp. 151–9.

[13] W. Hansen, 'Packaging Greek Mythology', in *Writing Down the Myth*, ed. J. F. Nagy, Turnhout, 2013, 19–43 (19).

of its characteristics, which are later discussed in the context of games. Second, we will investigate a series of high-profile mythological video games—*Age of Mythology* (2002, Ensemble Studios), *Smite* (2014–present, Titan Forge Games), *Immortals Fenyx Rising* (2020, Ubisoft Quebec), *God of War* (2018, Santa Monica Studio) and its sequel *God of War: Ragnarök* (2022, Santa Monica Studio), *Apotheon* (2015, Alientrap), and *Hades* (2020, Supergiant Games)—and discuss how they incorporate museum-like mythography. Our focus will primarily be with Greco-Roman mythology, although other mythological traditions (Norse, Chinese) contained within these games are also discussed. Finally, we will discuss some of the limitations of current mythographies in games, and conceptualize several potential future directions. By applying HGS concepts to mythological games, this article not only contributes to the ongoing study of video games and history/antiquity—embedded in both the aforementioned HGS and the larger field of classical reception studies[14]—but also to the investigation of how video games can be used and/or applied within contexts of both formal and informal learning. Furthermore, the following discussion may also be relevant to game designers who wish to incorporate mythology in their games, whether their intentions are explicitly educational or not.

Ancient and Modern Mythography

Scholars date the earliest practices of Greco-Roman mythography around the sixth century BCE.[15] Smith and Trzaskoma broadly distinguish between two kinds of mythography: one that paraphrases (systematic mythography), and one that also interprets (interpretative mythography).[16] Of the former kind, arguably the two most well-known authors are Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca*) and Hyginus (*Fabulae*), both active during the Roman period. The second, interpretive style, includes texts such as Palaephatus's *On Unbelievable Tales* or Euhemerus's lost *Sacred History*.[17] A characteristic of mythographical texts is their 'unadorned'[18] and 'simple'[19] style:

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[14] A. Chapman, '*Quo Vadis* Historical Game Studies and Classical Reception? Moving Two Fields Forward Together', in *Classical Antiquity in Video Games. Playing with the Ancient World*, ed. C. Rollinger, New York and London, 2020, pp. 233–52.

[15] R. L. Fowler, 'Greek Mythography' in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. V. Zajko and H. Hoyle, Hoboken, 2017, pp. 15–27 (17).

[16] *Apollodorus' Library and Hyginus' Fabulae. Two Handbooks of Greek Mythology*, ed. and trans. R. S. Smith and S. M. Trzaskoma, Indianapolis and Cambridge, 2007, pp. xiv–xv; R. S. Smith and S. M. Trzaskoma, 'Mythography and Education', in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Mythography*, ed. R. S. Smith and S. M. Trzaskoma, Oxford, 2022, pp. 409–27 (411).

[17] Fowler, 'Greek Mythography' (n. 15 above), p. 17.

[18] V. Zajko, 'Scholarly Mythopoesis: Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths*', *Robert Graves & The Classical Tradition*, ed. A. G. G. Gibson, Oxford, 2015, 181–200 (198); S. M. Trzaskoma, 'Apollodorus the Mythographer, *Bibliotheca*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Mythography*, ed. R. S. Smith and S. M. Trzaskoma, Oxford, 2022, pp. 151–62 (155).

[19] Fowler, 'Greek Mythography' (n. 15 above), p. 16; Trzaskoma, 'Apollodorus the Mythographer' (n. 18 above), p. 152.

while highly literary collections of myth also exist (most notably, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), mythography generally does not have large literary aspirations.

The genre of mythography continues to be present in modern times. Well-known modern mythographies include Thomas Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable* (1855), Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* (1942), or Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths* (1955).[20] More contemporary examples are Stephen Fry's *Mythos* (2017), *Heroes* (2018), and *Troy* (2020), or Liv Albert's *Greek Mythology* (2021).[21] These retellings often prove incredibly popular:[22] Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable*, for instance, 'became one of the most popular books ever published in the United States and the standard work on classical mythology for nearly a century'.[23]

An important topic within mythography is the extent to which the author opens the work for the expression of their own voice. Apollodorus and Hyginus largely present the ancient myths in a seemingly neutral way, without commentary or a substantial authorial presence. Of course, real neutrality is impossible: through the very acts of selection, collection, and phrasing, the author is engaged in an authorial process that creates and shapes a specific narrative.[24] Moreover, Trzaskoma has investigated how Apollodorus includes brief moments of first-person narration when guiding the reader to a different part in the text, thereby constructing a specific version of the mythological narrative through which the reader is directed—yet Trzaskoma also notes the rarity of such instances.[25]

The situation is different in modern myth collections and, as we will see later, in games. All aforementioned modern authors include prefaces, notes, introductions, and/or appendices where they clarify their choices, purpose, or more. In Bulfinch's preface, for instance, the author explains that his collection is made to amuse, inform, and make mythology accessible to a wider audience.[26] Furthermore, modern mythographers sometimes intervene more drastically in the mythographical

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[20] Versions used: T. Bulfinch, *The Age of Fable or Beauties of Mythology*, Philadelphia, 1898 (published by David McKay); E. Hamilton, *Mythology. Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*, New York, 2017 (published by Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers); R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 2 vols, London, 1996 (published by The Folio Society).

[21] S. Fry, *Mythos*, London, 2017; S. Fry, *Heroes*, London, 2018; S. Fry, *Troy*, London, 2020; L. Albert, *Greek Mythology. The Gods, Goddesses, and Heroes Handbook*, Stoughton, 2021.

[22] *Apollodorus'* Library *and Hyginus'* Fabulae, ed. and trans. R. S. Smith & S. M. Trzaskoma (n. 16 above), p. xvi; J. Talbot, 'Bulfinch and Graves: Modern Mythography as Literary Reception', in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. V. Zajko and H. Hoyle, Hoboken, 2017, pp. 75–86 (75).

[23] C. J. Richard, *The Golden Age of the Classics in America. Greece, Rome, and the Antebellum United States*, Cambridge and London, 2009, p. 33.

[24] See *Apollodorus'* Library *and Hyginus'* Fabulae, ed. and trans. R. S. Smith & S. M. Trzaskoma (n. 16 above), p. xiv; S. M. Trzaskoma, 'Citation, Organization and Authorial Presence in Ps.-Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*', in *Writing Myth: Mythography in the Ancient World*, ed. S. M. Trzaskoma and R. S. Smith, Leuven, 2013, pp. 75–94 (83–4); Zajko, 'Scholarly Mythopoesis' (n. 18 above), p. 199; Fowler, 'Greek Mythography' (n. 15 above), p. 16.

[25] Trzaskoma, 'Citation' (n. 24 above), pp. 78–9. Likewise, see K. F. B. Fletcher, 'Hyginus' *Fabulae*: Toward a Roman Mythography', in *Writing Myth: Mythography in the Ancient World*, ed. S. M. Trzaskoma and R. S. Smith, Leuven, 2013, pp. 133–64 (138) on first-person narration in Hyginus.

[26] Bulfinch, *The Age of Fable* (n. 20 above), pp. v–vi.

narrative. Consider, for instance, how Albert recounts Theseus's abandonment of Ariadne:

> Once Theseus had killed the Minotaur, Ariadne further helped him escape the island itself, and together they landed on the island of Naxos. There, while Ariadne was sleeping, Theseus abandoned her (he did so, so many awful things!). Ariadne awoke on a strange island, having helped a strange man kill her half brother and defy her kingdom, having left her entire family behind for this man... suddenly *alone*.[27]

Here, the author gives access to their own personal voice: Albert's retelling of the myth places the work within a contemporary movement of feminist mythology revisionism, which rewrites the traditional (hegemonically male) stories of antiquity from the female perspective.[28] As such, Talbot has argued that modern mythography should be seen as classical reception itself: more than 'neutral' retellings of myth, they are narrative works of literature shaped by authorial intentions and specific aims.[29] Following Talbot, we should investigate such mythographies within their modern context as their own expressive mode of engaging with the past. Furthermore, modern mythographies (or classical receptions in general) are not only *impacted by* contemporary cultural contexts (e.g. feminist revisionism) but are simultaneously *constructive of* the public memory of these myths—not unlike museums[30]—making it all the more important to investigate how such practices exist in video games, often cited as the 'biggest' entertainment sector, economically more successful than the film or television industries.[31]

Game Analyses

We will now discuss several mythological video games with regard to how they contain mythographical characteristics. Specifically, we will identify two frequent modes of mythography in video games. The first is *environmental mythography*, which blends collections of myths with the concept of environmental storytelling in game studies. Jenkins uses 'environmental storytelling' to describe how game developers carefully arrange narrative information and story beats across video game

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[27] Albert, *Greek Mythology* (n. 21 above), p. 141 (original emphasis).

[28] L. Doherty, 'Revisionism', in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. V. Zajko and H. Hoyle, Hoboken, 2017, pp. 153–64; C. Guest, 'Feminist literary revisionism and the #MeToo movement', *TEXT: Journal of writing and writing courses*, 26 (1), 2022, pp. 1–20.

[29] Talbot, 'Bulfinch and Graves' (n. 22 above); see also Zajko, 'Scholarly Mythopoesis' (n. 18 above); Fletcher, 'Hyginus' (n. 25 above), p. 135, 164 for similar observations on Roman mythography; or H. Weisinger, '"A Very Curious and Painstaking Person" Robert Graves as Mythographer', *Midwest Folklore*, 6 (4), 1956, pp. 235–44 for a contemporary review of Graves' *The Greek Myths*. For an example, see Hansen, 'Packaging Greek Mythology' (n. 13 above), pp. 24–33 on how modern mythographers individually treat the myth of Pandora.

[30] G. Black, 'Museums, Memory and History', *Cultural and Social History*, 8 (3), 2011, pp. 415–27 (415).

[31] See E. Hayot, 'Video Games & the Novel', *Daedalus*, 150 (1), 2021, pp. 178–87 (183).

spaces—which he conceptualizes as a designed and explorable 'narrative architecture'—ranging from a singular level to a fully navigable world. While exploring this world, players encounter the narrative depending on how they traverse it, thus actualizing the story of the game.[32] Environmental mythography is efficient in building the museum-like qualities of these games, as it provides a way of arranging mythological narratives within the game space, which players traverse at their own pace and leisure. The second mode is *actorial mythography*, in which mythographical content is narrated by one of the mythological characters themselves. While the voice of the author was relatively absent in ancient mythography and increasingly present in modern collections, the games investigated below thus radically increase the presence of a narrator in the text. As we will see, this has consequences for the characterization of these narrators: the way in which the mythic characters retell the stories, and/or voice their own evaluations of them, has an impact on how the characters themselves are presented in the work.[33]

In accordance with the encyclopedic nature of ancient mythography, this analysis will primarily investigate games that combine various mythological narratives within the same storyworld. Similar to how Uricchio, writing on *historical* video games, distinguishes between (a) games representing a single historical event (e.g. a specific battle in World War II) and (b) games representing broader historical systems or processes (e.g. the *Civilization* series (1991–present), in which players maintain a historical empire themselves),[34] we could distinguish between (a) games representing a relatively isolated mythic narrative, such as *Persephone* (2018, Momo-pi) or *Theseus* (2021, Sisi Jiang), and (b) games, akin to the mythographies described above, collecting various myths. These latter games often exhibit mythological equivalents to the process of 'mashup' as discussed by Cole in the context of historical video games: Cole argues that games like *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* (2018, Ubisoft Quebec), which is set during the Peloponnesian War, effectively 'mashup' historical content from different time periods with elements from mythology, references to contemporary cinema, popular memes, and more.[35] In these mythological games, we likewise find various mythological stories mixed together, resulting in game simulations of what Johnston called the 'Greek mythic storyworld' or the

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[32] H. Jenkins, 'Game Design as Narrative Architecture', in *First Person. New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, ed. N. Wardrip-Fruin and P. Harrigan, Cambridge and London, 2004, pp. 118–30 (121–9).

[33] K. De Temmerman and E. van Emde Boas, 'Character and Characterization in Ancient Greek Literature: An Introduction', in *Characterization in Ancient Greek Literature*, ed. K. De Temmerman and E. van Emde Boas, Leiden, 2018, pp. 1–23 (23); J. Eder, F. Jannidis and R. Schneider, 'Characters in Fictional Worlds. An Introduction', in *Characters in Fictional Worlds. Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*, ed. J. Eder, F. Jannidis and R. Schneider, Berlin and New York, 2010, pp. 3–64 (32).

[34] W. Uricchio, 'Simulation, History, and Computer Games', in *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, ed. J. Raessens and J. Goldstein, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 327–38 (328).

[35] R. Cole, 'Mashing Up History and Heritage in Assassin's Creed Odyssey', *Games and Culture*, 17 (6), 2022, pp. 915–28. On mashup and classical reception, see also I. Willis, 'Contemporary Mythography. In the Time of Ancient Gods, Warlords, and Kings', in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. V. Zajko and H. Hoyle, Hoboken, 2017, pp. 105–20 (105).

resulting, more or less coherent, narrative universe constructed through the inter-twined storytelling of Greek myth.[36] As these 'mashup games' present more elabo-rate collections of myths than the isolated games confined to a single narrative, we will concentrate on the former (type 'b' above).

The below games are all important case studies within video game mythology reception. As some cases are more extensive than others (e.g. longer duration, differ-ent mythographical characteristics), their analyses vary somewhat in length.

Age of Mythology

The first game under analysis consists of several scenarios in which players, playing as the Atlantean hero Arkantos, fight the evil Gargarensis who has stolen Poseidon's trident from Atlantis. Gameplay is set not only in worlds inspired by Greek mythol-ogy (Troy, Erebus), but also in Egyptian and Norse mythological storyworlds.

The game collects, combines, and mashes up several mythological stories into one: for example, the player may at once choose to enlist 'packs' of Cyclopes, Hydras, Chimeras, or Minotaurs in their army.[37] Most important for our purposes is that the game provides mythological characters with dedicated entries in an in-game encyclopedia. The entry for the game's Pegasus 'Myth unit', for example, goes as follows:

> Pegasus was born from the severed neck of the slain gorgon Medusa. Bellero-phon slew the mighty Chimera from the back of Pegasus after taming him with the help of Athena and the Golden Bridle. Pegasus later flew to Olympus when Zeus made him into a constellation.

As with Apollodorus and Hyginus, the text is short, to the point, and unembellished. Similar encyclopedias or codices exist in historical video games (e.g. the Civilope-dia in *Civilization*), but scholars have also shown that such historical encyclopedias sometimes contain inaccuracies. Bierstedt, for example, shows how the accuracy of the codex in *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* (2020, Ubisoft Montreal), set in Viking Age England, 'is highly variable, particularly regarding pre-Christian Norse religions'.[38] Nevertheless, the potential for such encyclopedias to convey, in this case, mytho-logical information is clear.

Smite

A similar approach is taken by *Smite*, an online multiplayer game in which teams of players fight other real-world players in sports-like matches. Each player plays as a

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[36] S. I. Johnston, *The Story of Myth*, Cambridge and London, 2018, pp. 121–46.

[37] See L. Gloyn, *Tracking Classical Monsters in Popular Culture*, New York and London, 2020, p. 36 on 'packs of minotaurs'.

[38] A. Bierstedt, 'Livestreaming History: The Streamer-Historian and Historical Games Outreach', *Games and Culture*, 17 (6), 2022, pp. 871–84 (877).

Fig. 1 *Mercury's 'Lore' description in* Smite. *Used with permission from Hi-Rez Studios.*

specific 'god' from currently sixteen playable pantheons.[39] Well-known mythological characters like Apollo, Zeus, Anubis, or Thor are mashed up with characters who are not traditionally divine or religious, such as Arachne, King Arthur, or Mulan. *Smite* does not present a detailed narrative, but contextualizes the meeting of these gods as the result of a large, worldwide Ragnarök event.

Most importantly, each of *Smite*'s currently 126 playable characters is presented with an in-game 'Lore' text, which briefly describes the god in question and their background.[40] Figure 1 shows the Lore text for Mercury, describing the god's speed, messenger role, and, more specifically, the myths where he constructed the first lyre, stole the cattle of Apollo, and killed Argus. Like *Age of Mythology*, the text acts as an entry within the encyclopedia of the game, albeit with larger narrative aspirations.

We also see that, in addition to recounting the ancient myths, *Smite* moulds the mythography to suits its own narrative needs: similar to other Lore texts in *Smite*, the last paragraph connects the mythological background to the current narrative of Ragnarök.[41] This is indicated by the word 'now', which complements the (in

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[39] Arthurian, Babylonian, Celtic, Chinese, Egyptian, Great Old Ones, Greek, Hindu, Japanese, Maya, Norse, Polynesian, Roman, Slavic, Voodoo, and Yoruba.

[40] See K. Beydler, 'Reception and Representation of Graeco-Roman Goddesses in *Smite: Battleground of the Gods*', in *Women in Classical Video Games*, ed. J. Draycott and K. Cook, New York, London and Dublin, 2022, 116–27 (118).

[41] This is not uncommon in contemporary narrative universes. On blending 'canonical' mythology with new narratives in codex texts, see J. Paul, 'The Half-Blood Hero: Percy Jackson and Mythmaking in the Twenty-First Century', in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. V. Zajko and H. Hoyle, Hoboken, 2017, pp. 231–42 (238) on the same process in the *Percy Jackson* universe.

Hansen's words cited above) 'manageable corpus of unchanging stories' with the present game narrative.[42]

Immortals Fenyx Rising

In our next game, players play as the 'new' Greek hero Fenyx and help the Olympians defeat Typhon, who has returned after his original defeat by Zeus. The game's entire story, while played in real time, is narrated from the perspective of Prometheus and Zeus: in order to secure the release from his eternal punishment, Prometheus tries to convince Zeus that mortals may help him in the fight against Typhon by telling the story of Fenyx. Through personal testimonies of the Greek gods, the story effectively leads to Zeus's realization that he has failed as a father and ruler of the gods. The game is noteworthy for the humour with which its dialogues and characters are infused.

The game's explorable world, the 'Golden Isle', comprises seven regions, each dedicated to a character of Greek mythology (Hermes, Aphrodite, Athena, Hephaestus, Ares, Zeus, and Typhon), and containing a variety of references to mythical episodes related to their specific deity. For example, the region of Aphrodite contains references to (among others) the birth of the goddess, the Paris judgement, Adonis, Eros and Psyche, or the Lemnian women, while Athena's realm includes the myths of Arachne, Medusa, the trial of Orestes, or her quarrel with Poseidon over the patronage of Athens. These are often represented in the game environment through puzzles ('Myth Challenges'): for example, the game includes so-called 'Fresco Challenges' where players must move tiles into a correct order, the result of which leads to a (potentially recognizable) image of a mythic episode and a brief description of the myth by Prometheus and Zeus. For example, Ares's region contains a Fresco Challenge depicting the scene from Homer (*Iliad* 5.855–63), where Athena helps Diomedes wound Ares. Arriving at the puzzle, players hear Prometheus and Zeus discuss the story:

> PROMETHEUS: You'll remember this scene well.
> ZEUS: Is that Diomedes? Bit of a phenom, that kid. Wounding gods in the Trojan War? Unheard of.
> PROMETHEUS: Not just gods, but Ares.

Players must then move the blocks around until they complete the fresco of the myth. Upon completion, players collect their reward ('Coins of Charon', used to upgrade Fenyx's abilities), and both narrators further elaborate on the myth:

> PROMETHEUS: Thanks to Athena, Diomedes had the perfect opportunity to wound Ares in battle.
> ZEUS: I'll never forget Ares's belly-aching. Literally. He was hit in the stomach, but he also couldn't shut up about it.

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[42] Hansen, 'Packaging Greek Mythology' (n. 13 above), p. 19.

Zeus's 'belly-aching' recalls Ares roaring as loud as 'nine or ten thousand warriors' (*Iliad* 5.860). In total, the game contains 80 Myth Challenges (excluding further references), allowing us to speak of a mythographical collection of mythic narratives in the game. As these puzzles are spread throughout the world (differently from *Age of Mythology* and *Smite*, where the references were contained in menus), we can consider this an environmental form of mythography: this environmental mythography is the result of collecting/encountering mythical stories carefully arranged throughout the 'narrative architecture'—or designed, explorable storyworld—of the game.[43]

Different from *Age of Mythology* and *Smite*, the stories are told here by mythological characters themselves (Zeus and Prometheus). This is an example of actorial mythography, as the mythography is narrated by the characters from the myths. The mythic story is thus not merely a narrative object from a distant past, but also a personal story told by a narrative agent with first-hand involvement in the storyworld in which the narrative is set. As such, these interludes have a dual function within the diegesis: first, they relate (past) mythological background to the player audience; second, they continue the (presently) ongoing narrative of the game, by revealing character traits of the embedded narrators (Zeus, Prometheus) through their myth retellings. Potentially, they may even indicate character development through changes in how the stories are told. Towards the end of the game, when the gods have made clear that the self-serving and demeaning ways in which Zeus treats them are the source of their dysfunctional family, Zeus's mythographies change. After retelling the story of how Kronos ate his children, Zeus says:

> ZEUS: There we go, it's fixed. Unlike my life.
> PROMETHEUS: Hey now. If he'd eaten you, Demeter, Hestia, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon would all be in his stomach right now. You saved them.
> ZEUS: Correction: I doomed them to eternal life with me. Which is worse?

In this scene, Zeus is a sad or depressed character who tells the story in similarly sad or depressing ways. As such, the embedded, actorial recounting of myths becomes a flexible, colourful, and efficient meta-vehicle for storytelling and characterization.

It is also worthwhile to discuss *Immortals Fenyx Rising*'s expansions (the so-called 'downloadable content', or DLC), which require additional purchase and offer new settings and storylines. In the first DLC, *A New God*, Fenyx travels to Olympus to be inducted into the pantheon as the Greek god of unity. Fenyx must prove their worth by completing the 'Trials of the Gods': large, difficult tests/puzzles constructed by the gods. Hermes mentions that he misplaced several mythological artefacts (called 'relics') throughout all 24 Trials, and asks Fenyx to collect and display them in the centre of Olympus. With a nod to the *Indiana Jones* film series (1981–2023), this side-quest bears the revealing name *It Belongs in a Museum... err... Pantheon!*, once again employing the museum metaphor, but this time in a decidedly mythological context. Indeed, at the end of the storyline, players will have constructed a virtual mythology 'museum', consisting of the 24 relics and brief in-game descriptions, not unlike museum plaques. The relics and their references

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[43] Jenkins, 'Game Design as Narrative Architecture' (n. 32 above).

range from well known (e.g. 'Arrow of Artemis') to obscure (e.g. 'Healing Salve of Panakeia'). For example, the description for Demeter's 'Sheaf of Grain' reads:

> A relic representing Demeter. Goddess of agriculture, Demeter's mastery of growth and harvest are vital to the people of the world.

A similar, but still different approach is taken by the game's second expansion, *Myths of the Eastern Realm.* This DLC moves to a storyworld inspired by Chinese mythology, and has players play as the hero Ku, who collaborates with the gods Nuwa and Gong Gong to restore balance to Heaven and Earth. *Myths of the Eastern Realm* also consists of Myth Challenges recounting mythic stories, but additionally includes collectible scrolls ('World Logs') which players find on their journey. The contents of these scrolls cover different events and elements from Chinese myth, and are presented on-screen for fifteen seconds, after which they move to the game's tutorial menu.

As with Zeus and Prometheus in the main game, some of these scrolls are written by mythic characters. One entry by Nuwa, called 'On the Gods', reads:

> The houses of Huang and Yan were locked in constant struggle even before I crafted my first squirrel. When others ask why I chose to settle in these mortal lands, I just tell them 'it's quiet here.'
> Lord Gong Gong and his people, exiled from Heaven, seemed to settle in Bu Zhou quite well, too. At the end of the day, we just want a place to call our own.

The text introduces the player to two legendary clans of Chinese emperors: the descendants of the Fire Emperor Yan Di, and those of the Yellow Emperor Huang Di, who were feuding brothers.[44] At the same time, the scroll identifies Nuwa as a goddess of creation with a special affinity towards humans, whom, in her role as Chinese mother goddess, she created out of clay. As another instance of actorial mythography, the text characterizes Nuwa as someone who appreciates tranquillity, is well-disposed towards Gong Gong, and does not seem eager to perpetuate the feud between the two clans. If Nuwa's text was a further call to arms between the two houses, it would have characterized her differently.

Finally, *Immortals Fenyx Rising* is noteworthy because the game was extended in 2022 with a lore book called *A Traveler's Guide to the Golden Isle* ('*TG*'), authored by Rick Barba.[45] In the *TG*, Zeus presents the various regions of the Golden Isle and the mythical narratives found within them. It also includes an extensive roster of 'Gods and Lesser Beings', comprising over 130 entries on mythological characters including, for example, Achilles, Daphne, Iolaus, the Nereids, and Steropes. Here, the game studio has taken efforts to produce an actual written mythographical account of the stories found in *Immortals Fenyx Rising*, although they are presented through a specific perspective and with clear comedic, entertaining undertones.

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[44] L. Yang, A. Deming, and J. A. Turner. *Handbook of Chinese Mythology*. Santa Barbara, 2005, p. 138.

[45] R. Barba, *Immortals Fenyx Rising. A Traveler's Guide to the Golden Isle*, Milwaukie, 2022.

God of War (2018) and *God of War: Ragnarök*

The *God of War* series (2005–present, Santa Monica Studio) revolves around the Spartan general Kratos who, after serving Ares (and eventually killing him), becomes the Greek god of war. The two most recent entries in the saga have transported the protagonist to a Norse mythological context, where he lives with his son, Atreus. In *God of War* (2018)—not to be confused with the 2005 game of the same name, which inaugurated the series—Kratos and Atreus travel to the highest peak in all the realms to scatter the ashes of Kratos's departed wife, Faye. At the end of the game, Atreus is revealed to be Loki, and Kratos is prophesied to die. These revelations drive the narrative in the 2022 sequel, *God of War: Ragnarök*, which sees Kratos and Atreus attacked by Odin and Thor for their transgressions against the pantheon, and travelling through the realms once again. The game's main focus, however, is the father–son relationship between Kratos and Atreus.[46]

Kratos and Atreus meet many characters of Norse myth (including Baldur, Freya, Jörmungandr, Mimir, Ratatoskr, Angrboda, Freyr, and more), and travel to all nine realms of Norse mythology. All receive in-game descriptions during exploration: for example, upon arrival in Asgard, explanations are given about Heimdall's Gjallar-horn, the Valkyries, Thor's children, etc. The game thus presents an environmental mythography, in which mythological references are collected and represented throughout a pre-programmed narrative architecture.

Notably, both games also include in-game 'Codex' entries. In the first game, these are written by Atreus, while those from the sequel are also completed by Kratos or Mimir. As actorial mythographies, the in-game codex works similarly to Zeus and Prometheus's voice-over narratives in *Immortals Fenyx Rising*, or the scrolls by Nuwa and Gong Gong in *Myths of the Eastern Realm*: players not only receive information about the mythical content, but are also privileged with access to Kratos and Atreus's thoughts. See, for example, Atreus's entry on Angrboda in *God of War: Ragnarök*:

> There's a girl here in Ironwood.
> Her name is Angrboda and she's the same age as me. A Giant too. She's really funny, and she paints, and is friends with the wolves here. She's unlike anyone I've ever met in so many different ways. She says she has been waiting her whole life to see me, which sounds so crazy.
> It's actually a lot of pressure to try to meet whatever expectations she has of me. I just need to stay calm and get a better feel for everything that's going on here but wow… so much is happening so fast.

The text simultaneously informs us of Angrboda's Giant (jötunn) heritage and association with wolves (in Norse mythology, Angrboda and Loki are the parents of the wolf Fenrir). Her location in Ironwood recalls passages from the *Völuspá* (40) and

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Snorri's *Gylfaginning* (12) in which a giantess—presumed to be Angrboda[47]—raises a breed of wolves in Járnviðr/Ironwood.[48] At the same time, the passage also reveals Atreus/Loki's incipient feelings towards her, anticipating their communion in Norse myth. In this respect, games like these may have found an answer to Aarseth's assertion that games are 'awful' in conveying the inner lives of their characters—although it is telling that they resort to a form of in-game literature to do so.[49] Similar texts have been investigated by Banfi in the context of the game *The Last of Us Part II* (2020, Naughty Dog), who likewise examines the in-game diary as a para-narrative in which players gain access to the character's thoughts.[50]

Like *Immortals Fenyx Rising*, *God of War* (2018) received a lore book expansion in 2020, called *God of War: Lore & Legends* ('*L&L*'), also written by the *TG* author Rick Barba.[51] *L&L* is considerably more expansive than the brief in-game Codex, and takes the form of a diary-like notebook focalized from the perspective of Atreus. Its fourth chapter, 'Norse Lore', is most relevant here, as it collects information on mythological topics and characters including 'Magni and Modi', 'Týr, God of War', or 'Surtr the Brave'. Atreus even clarifies his sources:

> And so I've gathered what I've heard from all these different people and written it all down in this journal section. I figure if I pull together all the bits and pieces of everyone's stories—from Mother, Mimir, Brok, and Sindri—I can cover a lot of our land's lore. I also added notes from some of the scrolls and markers we found on our journey.[52]

Similar to ancient mythographers—see Trzaskoma on the methods of Apollodorus[53]—Barba/Atreus used various sources, added their own input, and collected this information into a coherent whole.

Apotheon

The following game revolves around another new Greek hero, Nikandreos, who is recruited by Hera to topple Olympus and, ultimately, the power of Zeus. *Apotheon* is known for its employment of mythology consultant Dr Maciej Paprocki, who advised on the game's mythological content, wrote dialogues, and helped with

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[47] See J. Lindow, *Handbook of Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*, Oxford, 2001, p. 204.

[48] *Vǫluspá*, ed. S. Nordal, trans. B. S. Benedikz and J. McKinnell, Durham, 1978 and *The Uppsala Edda*, ed. H. Pálsson, trans. A. Faulkes, London, 2012 were used for *Vǫluspá* and *Gylfaginning*, respectively.

[49] E. Aarseth, 'Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation', in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, ed. N. Wardrip-Fruin and P. Harrigan, Cambridge and London, 2004, pp. 45–55 (50).

[50] R. Banfi, 'Ellie's Journal: Para-Narratives in *The Last of Us Part II*', *Game Studies*, 22 (3), 2022.

[51] R. Barba, *God of War: Lore & Legends*, Milwaukie, 2020.

[52] Ibid., p. 45.

[53] Trzaskoma, 'Apollodorus the Mythographer' (n. 18 above), pp. 157–8.

Fig. 2 *A stele depicting* Homeric Hymn *28 in* Apotheon. *Used with permission from Alientrap.*

character design.[54] The game consists of specific levels that reference mythic stories: for example, Nikandreos is transformed into a deer during his fight with Artemis, similar to the mythic Actaeon in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.194–205.

Likely as a result of Paprocki's consultancy,[55] *Apotheon* includes a plenitude of *stelai* displaying Greek texts upon interaction. They present translations from, for example, Homer, Hesiod, or Greek drama (see Fig. 2 for a stele depicting the first lines of a Homeric Hymn to Athena; *HH.* 28. 1–7a.). The text is a quotation: it is not presented by a mythic character, nor is it a retelling of the myth. Instead, it serves to provide background information on the game's characters, and to create an 'authentic' atmosphere of Greek mythology.[56] Different from the previous codices, these *stelai* connect players with the actual ancient sources. Again, this is an example of environmental mythography, as these fragments are strategically placed throughout the game world. However, as we will further discuss below, the texts are not integrated into the narrative and receive no further elaboration or explanation: in Figure 2, the text does not explain the meaning of 'Tritogeneia'. While it contributes to the mythological atmosphere described above, its meaning will most likely remain inaccessible for most players.

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[54] C. Rollinger, 'Battling the Gods: An Interview with the Creators of "Apotheon" (2015)', *thersites*, 7, 2018, pp. 11–29 (14); M. Paprocki, 'Mortal Immortals: Deicide of Greek Gods in *Apotheon* and Its Role in the Greek Mythic Storyworld', in *Classical Antiquity in Video Games. Playing with the Ancient World*, ed. C. Rollinger, New York and London, 2020, pp. 193–204; M. Paprocki, 'By the Power of Zeus: Apotheon, Divine Power-Ups and their Classical Inspirations', *Paizomen*, 2021, https://paizomen.com/2021/10/19/by-the-power-of-zeus-apotheon-divine-power-ups-and-their-classical-inspirations-by-maciej-paprocki/.

[55] Clare, *Ancient Greece and Rome in Videogames* (n. 2 above), p. 61.
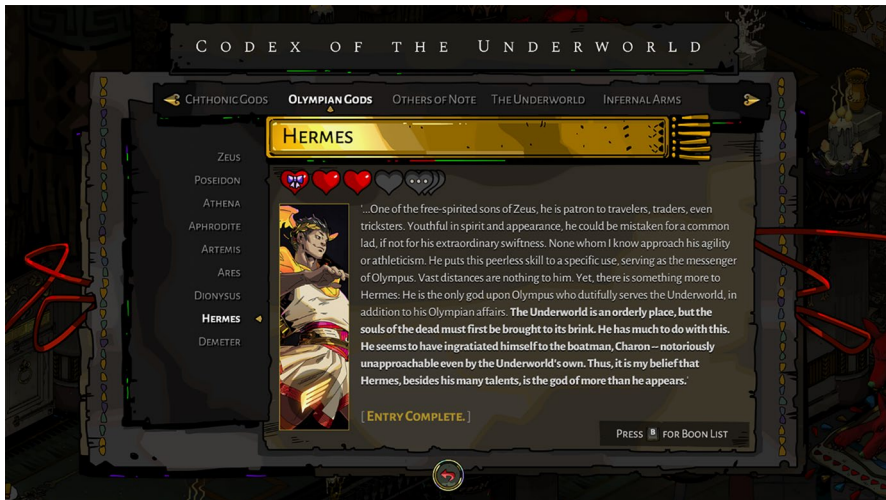
[56] Ibid., pp. 58–65.

Fig. 3 *Achilles's entry on Hermes in the Codex of* Hades. *Used with permission from Supergiant Games.*
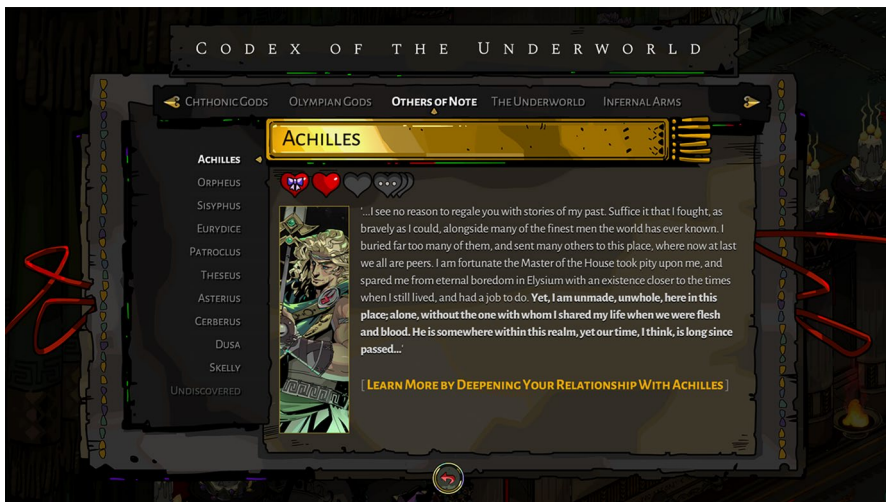

Fig. 4 *Achilles's own entry in the Codex of* Hades. *Used with permission from Supergiant Games.*

Hades

In our last case, players repeatedly attempt to escape the Underworld as Zagreus, the son of Hades, in search of Persephone, Zagreus's mother. The game features a wide cast of mythological characters who converse with Zagreus, simultaneously

referencing a wide variety of myths. Scholar-reviewers of the game were perhaps most surprised to find references to Orphism in the game.[57]

Hades features a 'Codex of the Underworld', containing 'mythological background' on Chthonic Gods, Olympian Gods, Others of Note, The Underworld, Infernal Arms, Perilous Foes, Artefacts, River Denizens, and Fables.[58] The Codex is given to Zagreus by Achilles, who initially started writing it and now entrusts Zagreus with its knowledge. Handing him the Codex, Achilles says 'I want your love of history to grow, not just your love of warfare', addressing the player as much as Zagreus, as the studio exposes the possibility for players to learn about mythology while fighting through the game. The Codex entries are initially incomplete: through repeated encounters with the game's characters, Zagreus accesses increasingly deep information. Figure 3 shows the entry for Hermes, describing his provenance, domain, and character. Achilles also voices his own opinion of Hermes, calling his skill 'peerless', and hinting that he is the 'god of more than he appears'. Upon completion of the codex, Achilles calls it a 'chronicle' of the Underworld, almost explicitly describing the codex as a mythographical collection of organized narratives.

Similar to *Myths of the Eastern Realm* and *God of War*, the entries are focalized through the perspective of Achilles, who comments on his (semi-)divine compatriots and other elements in the game. Achilles's own entry, for instance (Fig. 4), paints him as a reflective character who feels isolated and alone in the Underworld. He longs for Patroclus, thereby referring to the deep relationship the two had in the Greek myths, the potential romantic nature of which has kept audiences (and scholars) curious for millennia.[59]

Additionally, players are allowed to shape the Underworld—which the game presents in part as a domestic space—to their liking: the starting point of Zagreus's escapes is called the 'House of Hades', which includes several halls, a lounge, an office, bedrooms for both Zagreus and Hades, and a training ground. Through the House Contractor, players spend resources to customize the environment. Most renovations are generic, such as differently coloured rugs or vases, but several add mythological references, such as portraits of mythological characters (e.g. Dionysus, Cerberus, Aphrodite). As such, the position of the player could be seen as similar to a curator of a mythological museum. These decors receive small descriptions: for example, the item 'Wall-Scroll, Dionysus' is described as 'Bedroom Decor: Features the jubilant and carefree god of wine', not unlike the phrasing on a museum plaque. While the museal potential of this customization feature is limited due to the relatively few mythological artefacts available, the potential of this game mechanic is important to note.

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[57] See Zylla's Athenaeum, 'Orphic Myths | It's Not All Greek to Me', *YouTube*, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8W98yYTu7k for a scholarly review, and K. Jones, 'Good Riddance: Refiguring Eurydice in Supergiant's *Hades*', in *Women in Classical Video Games*, ed. J. Draycott and K. Cook, London, New York and Dublin, 2022, pp. 103–15 for a more in-depth discussion of *Hades*.

[58] Jones, 'Good Riddance' (n. 57 above), p. 107

[59] D. Delbar, 'Achilles and Patroclus Revisited (Again)', in *The Routledge Companion to the Reception of Ancient Greek and Roman Gender and Sexuality*, ed. K. R. Moore, London, 2022, pp. 22–40.

Discussion

The previous analyses have shown that mythological video games collect and combine mythological narratives both similarly to and differently from literary mythography. Like literary mythography, they present collections of stories that shape a coherent narrative storyworld. While these video game mythographies are not as exhaustive or detailed as Apollodorus or Hyginus, the underlying processes of collection, synthesis, and presentation are similar.[60] However, since the medium operates differently from literature, games are also able to represent the collected myths within an explorable narrative architecture, through which players experience the game and its contained myths. Additionally, while the ancient mythographies were constructed as 'work[s] of reference' and 'utility',[61] video game mythographies serve as entertainment.

Based on the aforementioned literature from HGS, these collections may in addition be considered as mythology 'museums', since the collections are actively presented to the audience as a series of artefacts or stories. Players move through the museal game space and, upon their journey, encounter diverse and accumulating retellings or artefacts of mythology which, taken together, create exactly what Anderson called a 'learning experience closer in similarity to touring a museum than reading a textbook'.[62] Moreover, with the increasing popularity of video game livestreaming on platforms such as Twitch and YouTube,[63] players can even act as virtual museum 'guides' for audiences interested in the game and its mythology. Bierstedt discusses a variety of Twitch channels managed by historians or archaeologists (e.g. Streaming the Past, Ludohistory, Save Ancient Studies Alliance) who regularly livestream historical, archaeological or mythological video games (potentially with expert guests) and simultaneously comment upon them.[64] In these cases, the museum is opened to a wide, interested audience, and discussed by a guide who takes that audience on a virtual tour.

Finally, and in conjunction with the previous point, this article argues for the educational potential of these games. Rollinger specifically described the *stelai* of *Apotheon* as having the potential for 'vast amount of learning and information', and in HGS, Anderson described 'item lore' descriptions—such as the ones found in *A New God* or *Hades*—as a way for players to learn about history.[65] We might even consider the above mythographies in light of Ensslin's 'literary gaming',[66] or a hybrid playerly/readerly experience, where the reading of texts is an important part

[60] For a similar example of modern literature, see Paul, 'The Half-Blood Hero' (n. 41 above), p. 238 on *Percy Jackson* author Rick Riordan as mythographer.

[61] Fowler, 'Greek Mythography' (n. 15 above), p. 15 and Fletcher, 'Hyginus' (n. 25 above), p. 134, respectively.

[62] Anderson, 'The interactive museum' (n. 9 above), p. 178.

[63] T. L. Taylor, *Watch Me Play. Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*, Princeton, 2018.

[64] Bierstedt, 'Livestreaming History' (n. 38 above).

[65] Rollinger, 'Battling the Gods' (n. 54 above), p. 14; Anderson, 'The interactive museum' (n. 9 above), p. 192.

[66] A. Ensslin, *Literary Gaming*, Cambridge and London, 2014.

of gameplay: by consulting in-game codices, players are engaged in an experience that is at least partially readerly or even 'bookish'.[67] These games can be used in formal educational situations, but players may already acquire new knowledge when playing informally for their own entertainment. For contemporary players, mythological games may thus function similarly to how mythographical collections in children's literature did for previous generations,[68] although future research should investigate how engagement with mythological games potentially impacts decisions to explore mythology further (or even to study Classics). One of the strengths of the above games is that they effectively apply the potential for 'game-based learning' (i.e. learning through games, or through educational applications of gamification) or 'serious gaming' to decidedly non-serious games. 'Serious games' are games created for more 'serious' purposes than entertainment, including education.[69] Yet, as Reinhard and Anderson write, learning via (historical) games is at its most effective when players are unaware that they are learning, and are simply allowed to play.[70] In a survey, Michael and Chen likewise found that 80% of their respondents considered 'fun' to be an important element of serious games.[71] The above games are all highly popular games constructed outside of any explicit intention of pedagogical application—they are enjoyable first, educational second—meaning that players may acquire new information by simply being immersed within the simulation, rather than by being explicitly asked to learn or study.

Future Directions

However, there are certainly still several obstacles for games with mythographical characteristics in relation to their potential for learning. All aforementioned games present their mythographical collections at least partially as optional: they are very often included in optional puzzles or extra downloadable content (*Immortals Fenyx Rising*), separate 'codex' menus that 'disrupt the diegesis of the fictional [...] world'[72] and may be ignored altogether (*Age of Mythology*, *Smite*, *God of War*, *Hades*), or as objects with which players are not forced to interact (*Apotheon*). For example, statistics of player achievements ('PlayStation Trophies') reveal that, at the time of writing, only 1.9% of PlayStation 5 players and 2.0% of those on PlayStation

[67] S. Domsch, 'Reading player one. Interfaces between video games and literature', in *Media Ecologies of Literature*, ed. S. Bayerlipp, R. Haekel and J. Schlegel, New York and London, 2023, pp. 168–83 (170).

[68] See S. Murnaghan and D. H. Roberts, 'Myth Collections for Children' in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. V. Zajko and H. Hoyle, Hoboken, 2017, pp. 87–103.

[69] See H. Jenkins, B. Camper, A. Chisholm, N. Grigsby, E. Klopfer, S. Osterweil, J. Perry, P. Tan, M. Weise, T. C. Guan, 'From Serious Games to Serious Gaming' in *Serious Games. Mechanisms and Effects*, ed. U. Ritterfeld, M. Cody and P. Vorderer, New York and London, 2009, pp. 448–68.

[70] A. Reinhard, 'Learning Latin via Gaming', in *Greek and Roman Games in the Computer Age*, ed. T. S. Thorsen, Trondheim, 2012, pp. 127–53 (131); Anderson, 'The interactive museum' (n. 9 above), p. 178, 192.

[71] D. Michael and S. Chen, *Serious Games. Games that Educate, Train, and Inform*, Boston, 2006, p. 41.

[72] Chapman, *Digital Games as History* (n. 1 above), p. 176.

4 have actually collected all available relics in *A New God*, whereas the main story was completed by 19.7% and 21.9% of players, respectively.[73] While it is to be assumed that almost all players encounter at least some mythographical content,[74] its minutiae will most likely remain hidden for non-completionist players.

Similarly, where mythographical references exist outside of game codices, they are transient: in *Immortals Fenyx Rising*, once Zeus and Prometheus have discussed a specific myth, it is impossible to replay the dialogue and listen to the mythic content again. Likewise, the mythological exposition in the *God of War* games is lost once it has been narrated by the characters. This limits the educational potential, as players might be distracted during gameplay and miss mythological exposition.

Finally, in cases where the myths were published in book format (*Immortals Fenyx Rising*, *God of War*), it is unclear to which extent they are actually productive in engaging new audiences with mythology: both were released two years after their respective games, meaning that most interested players had likely already played the games and abandoned them. Scholars working on other game genres, such as Mora Cantallops and Sicilia on the incredibly popular *League of Legends* (2009–present, Riot Games), have shown that players are not necessarily motivated to engage with lore paratexts,[75] but we should not assume that players of highly competitive strategy games like *League of Legends* have the same gameplay interests as those that play narrative adventure games, as suggested by Anderson on *Valiant Hearts*.[76] Additionally, it is unclear who the mythology books (*TG*; *L&L*) are actually *for*: due to their gory violence, the *God of War* games received an 18+ age rating, meaning that many younger players may not have been able to play them, or made aware of the book's existence.

In response, this article suggests several future directions for in-game mythographies, taking into account both the games' pedagogical potential and entertainment. It is important to stress that, similar to how Reinhard writes of archaeological video games that 'archaeologists need to reach out to game studios to lobby for the inclusions of various archaeological mechanics without sacrificing the intended entertainment value', the inherent entertainment of games should not be abandoned for the (academic) sake of more elaborately detailed myth retellings in games, as this would defeat its purpose entirely.[77] Echoing Reinhard's call to archaeologists, classicists could be interested in collaborating with game studios as a form of outreach. Examples of this already exist, such as Paprocki and *Apotheon*, or scholarly

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[73] These statistics can be found on PlayStation 4 and 5 systems under 'Trophies' (last accessed 27 April 2023).

[74] See Anderson, 'The interactive museum' (n. 9 above), p. 184.

[75] M. Mora Cantallops and M.-A. Sicilia, 'Motivations to read and learn in videogame lore: the case of *League of Legends*', in *TEEM '16: Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Technological Ecosystems for Enhancing Multiculturality*, 2016, pp. 585–91.

[76] Anderson, 'The interactive museum' (n. 9 above), p. 185

[77] A. Reinhard, *Archaeogaming. An Introduction to Archaeology in and of Video Games*, New York, 2018, p. 17.

involvement in the (historical) *Assassin's Creed Discovery Tours*.[78] Drawing on the museal qualities of these games, museum curators could simultaneously be interested in incorporating games in mythology-inspired exhibitions, similarly to the *Assassin's Creed Origins* example mentioned above.

First, we believe mythological games could learn from how the game *Pentiment* (2022, Obsidian Entertainment) incorporates medieval manuscripts as a fixed element of gameplay. *Pentiment* is set in sixteenth-century Bavaria and revolves around the journeyman artist Andreas Maler, who works as an illustrator in the scriptorium of an abbey. The game is presented as an illustration of a larger manuscript that only the player can see. Whenever historical names, locations, or other terminology are mentioned, explanations appear in the margins of that manuscript, and are stored in the 'glossary' of the player's notebook. Furthermore, at one point in the game, the nun Illuminata asks Andreas to return several books which others had kept beyond their due date. One of these is a manuscript of Virgil's *Aeneid* (which only rarely appears in games),[79] at which point the game presents the manuscript in full screen.[80] While players are unable to parse the manuscript further or actually read the text, the element of 'text' is foregrounded and unmistakably brought to players' attention. The marginal glosses require only a quick click to access, and are brief and to the point. Such mechanics make us wonder about the potential of mythological games that allow players easy access to manuscripts or texts: players could, for example, potentially be required to actively read (translations of) ancient texts and/ or look at different versions of the same myth. On Steam, *Pentiment* has currently garnered 'Overwhelmingly positive' reviews (based on 2,823 player reviews at the time of writing), meaning that such gameplay does not, in Reinhard's words, sacrifice 'the intended entertainment value' for historically oriented mechanics.[81]

Aside from embedding such texts in the main narrative, game mythographies could also become the object of their own quests or reward systems. Such is the case with the relics in *A New God*, but they only exist as a side-narrative within already 'optional' DLC, and their collection does not result in noteworthy rewards: at the end of the quest, players are given a new appearance for Fenyx's companion (the bird Phosphor), and shown a 30-second cutscene depicting a dance party of the gods. Additionally, reaching these relics is not an easy task, as they are hidden within the extensive Trials, and their acquisition requires considerable effort. The methods in which the main game incorporates mythographical interludes through puzzles and voice-over commentary therefore seem more welcome, as the completion of at least some of these puzzles is required to progress through the story.

Alternatively, mythological games could look to include similar 'museum' mechanics as found in other games or game genres. Such was the case with *Hades*,

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[78] For the latter, see P. Poiron, '*Assassin's Creed Origins* Discovery Tour. A Behind the Scenes Experience', *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 84 (1), 2021, pp. 79–85.

[79] D. Lowe, 'Troy in the 21st Century: The Trojan War in Digital Games', presented in the Ure Museum online seminar series, 2021, 20 October, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYDNGAKw6xQ.

[80] Specifically, the game shows lines 168–72 and 662b–7 of *Aeneid* 4.

[81] Reinhard, *Archaeogaming* (n. 76 above), p. 17.

but the game did not include extensive possibilities to construct a museum with mythological artefacts. Various games, such as *Elder Scrolls Online* (2014, ZeniMax Online Studios) or *Assassin's Creed Valhalla*, feature in-game museums with related missions where curators ask players to retrieve objects for them.[82] We can imagine a game with similar missions where players create their own museums of found mythological artefacts, similar to how games like *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (2020, Nintendo EPD) or *RuneScape* (2001, Jagex) allow them to create their own homes and to visit those by other players. As such, constructing the museum and collecting mythical artefacts would form a goal in itself, and allow players to form affectionate relationships with the museums they thus create.

Finally, beyond game design, game publishers could be interested to include mythographical paratexts—such as the lore books described above—in special game bundles or pre-order packages instead of standalone products published years after the game's release. This would considerably increase the audience's engagement with (and awareness of) these texts, and spread the mythographical effort produced by the developers to a wider audience.

Conclusion

As a testament to the enduring popularity of mythology in twenty-first-century entertainment, this article has investigated one avenue within the reception of mythology in video games. Through creative processes of selection and mashup, these mythological games collect mythic narratives in ways similar to literary mythography. In games, these mythological narratives are often dispersed throughout the game world as a form of environmental storytelling, and/or recounted within the game diegesis by one of mythology's own characters. To be sure, this is not to say that such 'actorial mythography' is a narrative mode unique to games, but its recurring presence across high-profile titles is noteworthy. As such, similar to historical video games, mythological games thereby actualize a popular metaphor by which games can be described as museum-like experiences. This ties into the educational aspect of such games, as players are involved in informal learning processes during the act of play. Finally, this article suggested future design avenues that could be implemented in forthcoming mythological games. As was shown, contemporary games provide exciting forays into the world of mythology, and it will be interesting to see how future developments impact the inherent potential of the medium to make mythology more accessible to a wider audience.

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[82] K. Meyers Emery and A. Reinhard, 'Trading Shovels for Controllers: A Brief Exploration of the Portrayal of Archaeology in Video Games', *Public Archaeology*, 14 (2), 2016, 137–49 (142); Reinhard, *Archaeogaming*, (n. 77 above), p. 174.

Declarations

Competing Interests The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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