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Article

'Requiescat in Pace'. Initiation and Assassination Rituals in the Assassin's Creed Game Series

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Abstract: The Assassin's Creed game series (Ubisoft 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2015, 2017) revolves around an alternative interpretation of human history as an ongoing battle between two rival factions: the Assassin Brotherhood (modelled on the historical Nizar Isma'ilis) and the Templar Order (inspired by the historical Order of the Knights Templar). Both factions compete over the possession of mythical artefacts, called the 'Apples of Eden', which once belonged to a now extinct proto-human race. The possession of these artefacts gives the owner incredible knowledge and the ability to manipulate large numbers of people. The Templars strive for world domination, while the Assassins want to prevent this; their aim is to develop human consciousness and individual freedom. Considering games as 'playable texts', I make an inventory of three in-game rituals, two of the Assassin Brotherhood and one of the Templar Order. Both initiation and assassination rituals are quite elaborate given the context of the games in which they are displayed. Progression and regression can be observed in terms of ritual practices within the primary series of the game series, which stretches from ancient Egypt to modernity. This article describes the three ritual practices mentioned within the Assassin's Creed series, and links them to the larger metanarrative of the series.

Keywords: ritual; rituality; ritualism; digital games; assassination; initiation; nizarism; Templar Order

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One upon a time, we had a ceremony on such occasions. But I don't think either of us are really the type for that. You have your tools and training, your targets and goals. And now you have your title. Welcome to the Brotherhood, Connor. (AC3)

The event described is rather minimalistic, at least materially, but for the young Native American Connor (birth name Ratonhnhaké:ton) it constitutes his formal initiation into the Assassin Brotherhood, a secret organization dedicated since the dawn of time to the protection of human freedom. After being trained by an Assassin mentor called Achilles Davenport, Connor is given the task to find and slay seven targets, all members of the American Rite of the Templar Order, while simultaneously conducting his own personal quest to find those responsible for the destruction of his native village. To mark his readiness for such a severe task, his mentor gives him the traditional clothing of the Assassins, strikes him on the shoulder, and utters the strange little speech quoted above.

It is only one of several scenes with ritual overtones in the *Assassin's Creed* series (2007–2017) produced by Ubisoft. Ubisoft re-images world history as an ongoing confrontation between the Assassin Brotherhood and the Templar Order over the possession and use of certain powerful artefacts, the 'Apples of Eden', left behind by a now extinct superhuman race. Both secret organizations are responsible for many historical revolutions, discoveries, and disasters, and they have their own initiation rituals, while the Brotherhood also has its own assassination ritual.

In this article, I will investigate the various forms in which the three fictional rituals (two initiation rituals and one assassination ritual) are depicted by Ubisoft in its *Assassin's Creed* series, including the changes that they undergo during the series. I take 'initiation' to mean a particular rite of

passage (Van Gennep 1909), defined by Eliade (1975, p. X) as 'a body of rites and oral teachings, whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status' of the initiate. The initiate's 'existential condition' changes; once he has undergone the ritual 'he has become another'. In the *Assassin's Creed* series, both Templar and Assassin 'pupils' are ritually initiated into their respective fraternities.

The assassination ritual of the Brotherhood will be discussed in terms of human sacrifice, 'a practice that once was near universal, but nowadays increasingly abandoned' (Bremmer 2007, p. 1). It has returned to our present collective consciousness in the context of Islamic inspired terrorism, paradoxically applied to (or claimed for) both perpetrators and victims alike. Sacrifice, both human and animal, is community-oriented, ritual in performance, and constitutive of a collective or individual identity (Duyndam et al. 2017, p. 5). In the *Assassin's Creed* series, ritual assassination is re-imagined in a context that is both political and religious.

As we will discover, not all instances of the in-game rituals can be characterized as the elaborate, stylized, more or less 'classical' rituals we know from institutionalized religion; the minimalistic and/or abbreviated forms of the two rituals are also very informative about the nature of the rituals. 'The possibility of making mistakes and of failure is a constitutive feature of rituals,' as Hüsken (2007) has already observed. And precisely the possibility of failure adds to the importance of the ritual: if nothing is at stake, why bother at all? This is also the reason why I will construct an 'ideal form' of both rituals, not to correct or differentiate between 'successful' and 'failed' forms of the rituals through the series, but to show what is at stake in both cases.

In order to be able to carry out my investigation properly, I will start with a description of the metanarrative of the *Assassin's Creed* universe (Section 1), including a short overview of the Assassin Brotherhood and the Templar Order, their historical inspiration (the Nizari Isma'ilis and the Templar Knights) and a short characterization of the way in which Ubisoft has—rather critically—incorporated the concept of religion into its series. Before turning to the actual rituals itself, I will briefly describe the complex narratological structure of the game series to enable me to make my subsequent claim that the player of the series is her- or himself also initiated into the Brotherhood or the Order (Section 2).

In Section 3, I will describe four different forms in which Ubisoft presents initiation into the Brotherhood, and then the forms of initiation into the Order (Section 4). After some initial reflections on both initiation rituals, I will discuss the assassination ritual that is performed by almost all playable Assassins within the series (Section 5). After some short reflections on the assassination ritual, I will argue that the gamer her- or himself is—virtually—initiated into the Brotherhood (or the Order) by using the complex narratological structure of the series described earlier (Section 6). I will end with my conclusions (Section 7).

A word on methodology: I consider games to be 'digital (interactive), playable (narrative) texts' (Bosman 2016a). As a text, a video game can be an object of interpretation. As a narrative, it can be conceived as communicating meaning. As a game, it is playable. And as a digital medium, it is interactive. Treating these video games as playable texts and using a gamer-immanent approach in this article, I will use close reading of the primary sources of my research, the actual video games themselves, as well as secondary sources, i.e., material provided by critics and scholars discussing the game in question (Heidbrink et al. 2015). Close reading of the video game series is performed by playing the games themselves (multiple times), including all possible (side) missions.

While the *Assassin's Creed* franchise consists of primary and secondary games for multiple devices, together with novels, comics, and (animated) films, I will concentrate exclusively on the main video games (see Table 1). All games were played in their PC versions.

Table 1. Primary games. Overview of primary games within the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, including in-game time frame, dramatic period, main protagonists, and release dates. The games are listed in the order of the game-internal time frame.

GAMES (Main)	Ab.	Period	Title	Protagonist	Release
Ptolemaic Egypt	ACO	49–43 BC	Assassin's Creed: Origins	Bayek & Aya	2017
Third Crusade	AC1	1191	Assassin's Creed I	Altaïr ibn La'Ahad	2007
Renaissance	AC2	1476–1499	Assassin's Creed II	Ezio Auditore da Firenze	2009
	ACB	1499–1507	Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood	Ezio Auditore da Firenze	2010
	ACRe	1511–1512	Assassin's Creed: Revelations	Ezio/Altaïr	2011
Colonial Era	AC3	1754–1783	Assassin's Creed 3	Haytham Kenway/Connor	2012
	AC4	1715–1722	Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag	Edward Kenway	2013
	ACRo	1752–1776	Assassin's Creed: Rogue	Shay Cormac	2014
French Revolution	ACU	1776–1808	Assassin's Creed: Unity	Arno Dorian	2014
Victorian Age	ACS	1868	Assassin's Creed: Syndicate	Evie & Jacob Frye	2015

1. Those Who Came Before. The Metanarrative of the Assassin's Creed Series

The metanarrative of the *Assassin's Creed* series is a multi-leveled allohistorical complex, ranging up to four narratological levels.

1.1. On the First Level

Assassin's Creed draws inspiration from the pseudoscientific 'Ancient Astronauts Hypothesis' (Feder 2002), popularized for instance in Von Däniken (1969) bestseller *Chariots of the Gods?*. Some 100,000 years ago, humankind was genetically engineered by a super-advanced, Earth-born race, known in-game as the Isu, 'Those Who Came Before' or 'the Precursors'. Originally designed as a cheap and docile labor force for and by the Isu, humankind eventually rebelled against its creators, at the instigation of two human-Isu hybrids Adam and Eve, who were unaffected by the Isu's mind-controlling apparatus, called 'Apples of Eden' or 'Pieces of Eden' in the game. The Isu-human war ended with the victory of the far more primitive, but more resilient *homo sapiens* when a cosmic disaster changed the Earth's magnetic fields, known in-game as the 'Toba Catastrophe'. Humankind thrived, but the few remaining Isu could not hold out. They vanished into history, gradually 'remembered' as the gods and godheads of human civilization.

1.2. On the Second Level

Ubisoft re-imagines human history as a struggle between two secret factions, the Assassin Brotherhood and the Templar Order, over the possession of the artefacts left by the Isu after their extinction. Both factions, which have existed from the time of the Isu-human hybrids Adam and Eve, have the same ideal: the ending of all conflict, the undisturbed development of humankind, and everlasting world peace. The means they use are different, however: the Order wants to use the Apples of Eden to force humankind into obedience, order, and discipline, while the Assassins want to guard human freedom by keeping these artefacts out of their adversaries' hands. All major conflicts in world history are orchestrated by, or are a consequence of, the manipulations of one of these two factions, including—for example—the rise and fall of Julius Caesar, the French Revolution, and the moon landing.

The in-game Assassin Brotherhood is inspired by the historical Shi'ite sect of the Nizari Isma'ilis (Bosman 2016b; Daftary 1998, 1994; Bartlett 2011; Mirza 1997). Before and after the Third Crusade, the Nizaris occupied numerous mountain fortresses in Syria and Persia, of which Alamut and Masyaf were the most famous. Political assassination was one of their main military tactics, used to preserve their precariously independent position between a Sunni majority and the Christian crusaders. The Assassin leader of Masyaf in AC1, Al-Mualim (Arabic for 'mentor') is a reference to the historical Nizari leader Rashid ad-Din Sinan (1162–1192/3).

The Templar Order is based on the historical *Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon*, also known as the 'Order of Solomon's Temple', the 'Knights Templar' or simply as 'Templars' (Haag 2009). Founded by Huguess de Payens (1070–1136) and King Baldwin II of Jerusalem (reign 1118–1131) the Templar Order developed from a military group dedicated to the protection of pilgrims in occupied Jerusalem and the surrounding area into a powerful international organization with branches across Europe that possessed vast amounts of property and gold.

The sudden and spectacular end of this influential Order in 1307 has kindled several enduring conspiracy theories and inspired many novels and films, the best known of which are the pseudoscientific *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (Baigent et al. 1982) and the fictional *The Da Vinci Code* (Brown 2003).

While both the Assassin Brotherhood and the Templar Order are thus inspired by historical organizations with very clear religious identities, Muslim and Christian respectively, the *Assassin's Creed* series addresses the topic of religion very critically (Bosman 2016c). The miracle stories from Old and New Testament are re-interpreted as tricks by the (possessors of the) Apples of Eden: Cain and Abel, Joseph, Moses and ultimately Jesus of Nazareth.

The initiation and assassination rituals of the Brotherhood and the Order therefore have little or nothing to do with the historical rituals of the Nizaris and the Templar Knights. The Assassin's Creed—'Nothing is true, everything is permitted'—is not religious nor ideological, but represents a radical, phenomenological approach to reality: all human knowledge is relative and contextual (Bosman 2018). And the Templar's ritual uttering—'May the Father of Understanding guide us'—is vaguely connected with the French deism of Maximilien de Robespierre (1758–1794), a Templar in the *Assassin's Creed* universe (Scurr 2014). I am not suggesting, however, that the in-game rituals are not religious in nature, but only that they cannot be attributed to the two historical religious organizations.

1.3. On the Third Level

Every instalment tells the story of one (sometimes two) historical Assassins (and in two cases a Templar), ranging from Ptolemaic Egypt to Victorian London.

1.4. On the Fourth Level

Every instalment also features a modern-day Assassin (in one case a Templar), who interacts with her or his historical counterpart, in a rather complex narratological structure that I will discuss in Section 4.

2. Playing the Animus. The Narratological Structure of the Assassin's Creed Series

The vast metanarrative of the *Assassin's Creed* universe gives scope to rather complex naratological structures. In modern times, Abstergo Industries, the above-ground 'face' of the Templar Order, has discovered the existence of 'genetic memory' within human DNA: the collection of memories of one's ancestors that are passed down to subsequent generations embedded in their DNA. With the help of the Animus (Latin for 'life'), a machine used to decode this genetic memory, it has become possible for people to actively relive the memories of their genetic forefathers.

The Animus presents these memories in a kind of virtual environment in which the subject who uses the Animus is able to control the movements of her or his ancestors. When the subject who uses the Animus fails to 'imitate' the movements and other acts of her or his ancestors sufficiently closely, the subject will be regarded as 'out of synchronization' and will be pulled out of the specific memory, enabling them to try another time.

While this idea of 'controlling an ancestor' is a bit odd from a narratological perspective (reliving memories suggests a passive spectator), ludologically it produces a very sound game mechanic (activating the player to take action). Later on in the game series, the Assassins have developed their own version of the Animus, which achieves precisely the same function as the Templar device. In the second part of the series (from AC4 onwards), access to the memories of a specific historical figure is also available to people who do not share their DNA.

Both the Order and the Brotherhood try to access the parental DNA of historical Templars and Assassins to discover clues to the hidden locations of the Apples of Eden. Some Isu artefacts have not yet been found, others were lost by accident or were hidden on purpose by men and women (predominantly Assassins) to prevent misuse.

Three types of narratological structure can be found in the *Assassin's Creed* game series: triple layered, double layered, and merged layers (see Table 2).

Table 2. Narratological structures. Overview of the different narratological layers in the primary games of the *Assassin's Creed* series. They are listed in the order of narratological complexity (primary) and game-internal time frame (secondary).

Ab.	Actual Situation		In-Game Situation				
	Actual player	*Actual device*	*Contemporary Assassin*	*Primary in-game device*	*Primary historical Assassin*	*Secondary in-game device*	*Secondary historical Assassin*
A. Triple layered (PC, Animus, Masyaf Keys)							
ACRe	Player	(PC)	Desmond	(Animus)	Ezio	(Masyaf Keys)	Altaïr
B. Double layered (PC, Animus)							
AC1	Player	(PC)	Desmond	(Animus)	Altaïr		
AC2	Player	(PC)	Desmond	(Animus)	Ezio		
ACB	Player	(PC)	Desmond	(Animus)	Ezio		
AC3	Player	(PC)	Desmond	(Animus)	Connor/Haytham		
AC4	Player	(PC)	Employee 1	(Animus Omega)	Edward		
ACRo	Player	(PC)	Employee 2	(Animus Omega)	Shay		
ACO	Player	(PC)	Layla	(Animus HR-8)	Bayek/Aya		
C. Merged layers (PC = Helix/Animus)							
ACU	Player	(PC)	=	(Helix/Animus)	Arno		
ACS	Player	(PC)	=	(Helix/Animus)	Evie/Jacob/Lydia		

2.1. Double Layered

In AC1, AC2, ACB, and AC3, the story revolves around a present-day Assassin, Desmond Miles, who is controlled by the player. Desmond is sent into the Animus (in AC1 of Templar origin) to relive the memories of his genetic ancestors Altaïr ibn La'Ahad during the Third Crusade (AC1), Ezio Auditore da Firenze in Renaissance Italy (AC2 and ACB), and Connor and Hatham Kenway (a Templar) in colonial North America (AC3). Thus the player controls Desmond through his gaming console; Desmond (and through him the player) controls his (mainly) Assassin and Templar forefathers through the Animus. This is the double layered narrative structure.

When Abstergo manages to improve the Animus technology so that it is no longer necessary for the present-day user and the historical figure to share the same DNA, the games follow other modern-day persons who use the Animus Omega, and who unwittingly assist either the Assassins or Templars. In most cases the persons in question are two nameless Abstergo employees (AC4, ACRo), and on one occasion an obstinate Abstergo scientist called Layla Hassan (ACO). The double layered narrative structure is maintained, however: the player controls Abstergo employees through his gaming console; the employees (and through them the player) controls historical Assassins/Templars through the Animus Omega.

2.2. Triple Layered

In ACRe, Ezio—an old man by then—acquires a certain object called 'Masyaf Keys', which allows him to relive particular memories of his ancestor Altaïr, who used these 'keys' to send messages to his unknown Assassin successors. The player, however, can control Desmond, Ezio, and Altaïr, and desynchronization can occur even when he controls Altaïr. Thus the player controls Desmond through his gaming console; Desmond (and through him the player) controls his forefather Ezio through the Animus; Ezio relives Altaïr's life, and the player and Desmond control Altaïr's life through Ezio). This is the triple layered narrative structure.

2.3. Merged Layers

When genetic memory technology no longer requires that users be descendants of historical Assassins/Templars, Abstergo commercializes the Animus, producing a gaming console (still called 'Animus') that uses a cloud service (known as 'Helix' after the DNA structure with the same name). In ACU, and ACS the suggestion is that the player is actually playing on the Animus/Helix instead of their own gaming device. The player directly controls the historical Assassins Arno Dorian (ACU), and Jacob, Evie, and Lydia Frye (ACS), thus merging the layers of the real-world and in-game gaming devices. This is the merged layers narrative structure.

This suggestion of merging and emerging is enhanced by 'hacks' into the game carried out by a mysterious group known as Erudito, which is allied with the Assassins, and which invites the player (addressed as 'Initiate') to join the Brotherhood's efforts to locate the Isu artefacts.

3. Nothing Is True. The Brotherhood's Initiation Ritual

The Assassins' initiation ritual does not appear in all instalments, but only in AC2, ACB, AC3, and ACU, and then in rather varied forms and variations. I will differentiate between a 'typical form', found twice (AC2 and ACB), a 'minimalistic form' (only found in AC3), and the 'new form' of the French branch (ACU). I will conclude with the construction of a hypothetical full-fledged ritual.

3.1. Typical Form: Ezio and Claudia

In 1488, Ezio Auditore, the protagonist in AC2, ACB, and ACRe, is formally initiated into the Brotherhood during a nocturnal ceremony at the top of a tower somewhere in Venice (AC2). In attendance are seven of the highest-ranking Assassins of the Italian branch: Paola (leader of the Florentine courtesans), Teodora Contanto (leader of the Venetian courtesans), Antonio de Magianis (leader of Florence's guild of thieves), Bartolomeo d'Alviano, Nicollo Machiavelli, Mario Auditore, and Gilberto (known as *La Volpe*, 'the fox' in Italian).

All attendees are standing in a classical position of reverence: holding their folded hands before the lower abdomen. All stand in a circle, while Ezio stands inside the circle, his hands beside his body. Mario Auditore, Ezio's Assassin mentor and uncle, presides over the ceremony, making the sacerdotal *orans* gesture with his hands as he faces a big fire lit in one of the corners of the tower. He says:

> Laa shay'a waqi'un moutlaq bale kouloun. These are the words spoken by our ancestors that lay at the heart of our creed.

Mario is referring to the master Assassin Altaïr ibn La- Ahad (AC1), and the Arabic text of the Assassin's Creed: 'Nothing is true, everything is permitted'. The Italian branch of the Brotherhood was founded in 1269, by the famous Venetian travelers Niccolo and Maffeo Polo (the explorer Marco Polo's father and uncle, respectively) who had been initiated into the Brotherhood by the same Altaïr (ACRe).

The creed is broken down into a simple exchange of questions and answers between the initiate and Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1627), the famous Italian diplomat and author. At the end, all attendees repeat the creed collectively.

> **Machiavelli:** Where other men blindly follow the truth, remember . . .
>
> **Altaïr:** Nothing is true.
>
> **Maciavelli:** Where other men are limited, by morality or law, remember . . .
>
> **Altaïr:** Everything is permitted.
>
> **Machiavelli:** We work in the dark, to serve the light. We are Assassins.
>
> **All:** Nothing is true, everything is permitted.

After this exchange, Ezio is branded with a mark on his left ring finger by Antonio. Mario refers to the older form of the same ritual in which the finger was entirely amputated, both as a

token of dedication to the Brotherhood's cause and as a practical measure, to be able to handle the typical Assassin hidden blade. But this form was discarded by Altaïr as 'a false promise of paradise' (AC2), a reference to the Christian legends about the Nizaris that included stories about young men being enticed into obedience to their leader by being drugged and brought into paradise-like gardens (Bosman 2016c; Daftary 1994).

> **Machiavelli:** It is time, Ezio.
>
> **Mario:** In this modern age, we are not so literal as our ancestors. But our seal is no less permanent. Are you ready to join us?
>
> **Altaïr:** I am.

Antonio takes two long iron pincers and burns the mark onto Ezio's finger. Although the older form of amputation became obsolete after Altaïr's takeover of the Order, Ubisoft traces its origin to the proto-Assassin Bayek, who accidentally cut off his finger with his own hidden blade, and then cauterized his mutilated finger on purpose to stop the bleeding, leaving him without his left ring finger (ACO). Back to Ezio's initiation, where Machiavelli continues:

> **Machiavelli:** Welcome, Ezio. You are one of us now. Come! We have much to do!

All attendees, including Ezio, preform a 'leap of faith', a characteristic feature of the Assassins in the *Assassin's Creed* series. It enables the Assassin to jump from very tall buildings onto a haystack that is frequently and helpfully found under such buildings. This leap is a further reference to a Christian myth about the Nizaris: the death-defying obedience of the Nizaris to their leader was such that they would fling themselves from the palisade of their mountain fortress into the depths below on his command, just to impress the advancing armies. While the jump was more or less trickery, both historically and in-game, the effect on the Nizaris' enemies was understandably great (Bosman 2016c; Daftary 1994).

Another initiation ceremony is found in ACB, the direct sequel to AC2. In 1503, Ezio is appointed 'mentor' (effective ruler) of the Italian branch of the Brotherhood during the initiation ceremony of Claudia Auditore, Ezio's sister, in their Roman hideout. The ceremony is attended by Bartolomeo d'Alviano, Niccolo Machiavelli, Gilberto, Claudia, Ezio, and seven nameless assassins, whom Ezio has inducted into the Brotherhood earlier in the game. Claudia, Ezio, and Machiavelli are standing on a little platform like those found in Christian churches, all facing the rest of the room where the other attendees are gathered, themselves facing the platform. All attendees have their arms beside their body, except Machiavelli who speaks the first words *in orans* as he takes over Mario's job after his assassination by the Templar Order. Ezio takes over Machiavelli's place in the ritual.

> **Machiavelli:** Laa shay'a waqi'un moutlaq bale kouloun moumkine. The wisdom of our Creed is revealed through these words. We work in the dark, to serve the light. We are Assassins.
>
> **Ezio:** Claudia. We here dedicate our lives to protecting the freedom of humanity. Mario, our father and our brother, once stood around this fire, fighting off the darkness. Now, I offer the choice to you. Join us.

Claudia does not speak, as Ezio certainly did at his own initiation ceremony. Her left ring finger is branded by Machiavelli. The question and answer sequence does occur, but this time in the context of Ezio's elevation to the rank of mentor, which takes places directly after Claudia's branding.

> **Machiavelli:** Ezio Auditore da Firenze. You will now be known as il Mentore, the guardian of our order and our secrets.
>
> **Ezio:** Where other men blindly follow the truth, remember . . .
>
> **All:** Nothing is true.
>
> **Ezio:** Where other men are limited, by morality or law, remember . . .
>
> **All:** Everything is permitted.

Again, a leap of faith is performed, but this time we only see Claudia jump off a high building. Machiavelli and Ezio witness Claudia, but only Ezio follows her after a short discussion with Machiavelli.

3.2. Minimalistic Form: Connor

It AC3, another initiation ritual finally appears in an *Assassin's Creed* series. In an unknown year after 1770, Ratonhnhaké:ton (also known as Connor) is initiated into the Brotherhood by mentor Achilles Davenport. Connor is the illicit child of Kaniehtí:io, a Native American woman, and the English Templar Haytham Kenway. Intriguingly enough (and it is illustrative of the high narratological complexity of the *Assassin's Creed* series), it was this same Kenway who crippled Davenport in 1760 (ACRo).

Together with an Assassin-turned-Templar, Shay Cormac, Haytham succeeds in eliminating the Brotherhood presence in the New World, with the exception of Achilles, who is left to live with the knowledge of his ultimate failure. Achilles becomes depressed and cynical after his crippling, until Connor more or less forces him to train him as an Assassin. Connor's initiation heralds the rise of a new generation of Assassins.

After Connor has finished his training, and has returned from a naval expedition, Achilles takes his apprentice to the basement of his Davenport Manor, near Rockport (Massachusetts). There, he simply hands over the classical Assassin outfit to Connor, asking him to put it on. When Connor does this, Achilles speaks a few simple words to him.

> Once upon a time, we had a ceremony on such occasions. But I don't think either of us are really the type for that. You have your tools and training. Your targets and goals. And now you have your title. Welcome to the Brotherhood, Connor.

After this somewhat minimalistic initiation, Achilles pats Connor on the shoulder in encouragement, leaving the new brother to his own thoughts.

3.3. New Form: Arno

At the end of ACRo, in 1776, the rogue Assassin Shay Cormac performs a last assassination, of the French Assassin Charles Dorian. Charles's son, Arno, is left an orphan and, in a bizarre twist of plot, he is raised by François de la Serre, the Grand Master of the Parisian Rite of the Templar Order. When De la Serre is murdered by another Templar, Arno is framed for the deed and is sent to the Bastille in Paris. In 1789, he escapes during the historical storming of the Bastille that marked the beginning of the French Revolution. Arno reports to the Assassin Council in the Sainte-Chapelle, where he is formally initiated into the Brotherhood.

This initiation is the most formal one. The Assassin Council stands on a balcony, towering over Arno who stands in the large space between two staircases leading up. An unknown number of silent and masked Assassins lurk in the shadows, ready to obey the council's every word. Arno is still wearing his simple prison clothes, while the council members are dressed in beautiful uniforms and large, gray, hooded cloaks. The Council consists of Honoré Gabriel Riqueti (Comte de Mirabeau), Pierre Bellec, Sophie Trenet, Hervé Quemar, and Guillaume Beylier.

Mentor Gabriel starts the inquiry, and Arno answers sarcastically.

> **Gabriel:** Very well. Out of the dark, you have come to the light. From the light, you will return to the dark. Are you prepared to travel the eagle's path?
>
> **Arno:** If that is a fancy way of asking 'do I want your help', yes.
>
> **Gabriel:** Then drink.

Arno drinks from a golden chalice, engraved with the Latin word for 'brotherhood', *Fraternitas*. The potion instantly induces psychedelic effects, and fractured dreams of Arno's own past, including the death of his biological and adoptive fathers. While this liquid in ACU primarily seems to produce

an introspective state of mind in which the initiate is forced to 'face' the demons of his past, the potion is also another reference to the Nizari drug legend from medieval times (Bosman 2016c; Daftary 1994).

After the effects of the potion have worn off, Gabriel continues with the ceremony, now starting a variation of the question and answer sequence.

> **Gabriel:** These are the words spoken by our ancestors. The words that lay at the heart of our creed.
>
> **Guillaume:** Stay your blade from the flesh of the innocent.
>
> **Sophie:** Hide in plain sight.
>
> **Hervé:** Never compromise the Brotherhood.
>
> **Gabriel:** Let these tenets be branded upon your mind. Let these be branded upon your mind. Follow them, and be uplifted. Break them at your peril. Rise, Assassin.

Gabriel obliquely refers to the ritual of the branding of the left ring finger—absent here—by using the phrase 'let these tenets be *branded* upon your mind'. It is also the first time that the so-called 'three tenets' of the Brotherhood are used in the initiation ritual. While the tenets were already discussed in AC1, they were never part of the initiation ceremony before. Afterwards, Arno is greeted by the council members and his assassin's clothes are presented to him. Although the leap of faith is still an integral mechanic throughout the game in ACU (especially for Arno), it is not part of the initiation itself.

3.4. Theoretical Structure

After the description of four of the Assassin Brotherhood's initiation rituals, it is possible to construct an 'idealized' form and identify its main constitutive elements as they appear in all instalments of the series that have been mentioned.

(1) The initiate is presented to a 'council' of elder, experienced Assassin masters, in the presence of other assassins of lower rank (if these are available). The atmosphere is solemn, resembling a traditional religious (Christian) ceremony. Sometimes the attendees have their hands folded in reverence, while the 'minister' recites the creed 'Nothing is true, everything is permitted' *in orans*. Sometimes another ritual utterance is used, evoking the three tenets of the Assassin's Creed. The minister, usually the highest-ranking Assassin, the initiate, and the attendees perform a simple question and answer ritual, which is also based on the creed or its tenets.

(2) The recitation of the creed is followed by a branding ceremony, which is physical and mental in nature. The ring finger of the initiate's left hand is branded by another high-ranking Assassin as a symbol of their commitment to the Brotherhood and its creed. In later times, the branding of the finger is replaced by a ceremonial draught from a chalice which induces visions that are 'branded' onto the initiate's mind.

(3) After the recitation and the branding (in either form), there seem to be two possibilities. If the initiate is already working with the Brotherhood (like Ezio and Claudia), they already wear their distinct uniforms. In this case the initiate and/or the other attendees perform a leap of faith, as a visible token of their acceptance and—again—of their dedication to the Brotherhood. (It takes nerves of steel to 'trust' that the fall will not be deadly.) If the initiate is not already working for the Brotherhood (like Arno), the leap of faith is replaced by the handing over of the Assassin's uniform. In Connor's case, the handing over is the only part of the ritual that Achilles uses.

4. The Father of Understanding. The Order's Initiation Ritual

The Templar Order's initiation ritual is simpler and receives much less attention in the game series, both qualitatively and quantitatively, mainly because the Brotherhood perspective is dominant in the franchise (with the exception of ACRo and the first part of AC3). The Templar Order's initiation ritual comprises three elements: (1) the swearing of an oath, not unlike the ritual question and answer sequence of the Brotherhood initiation; (2) the handing over of a ring; and (3) the ritual utterance.

4.1. Typical Form

In AC3 and ACRo, we find two initiation ceremonies which are quite similar in structure and phrasing. In AC3, Charles Lee (1732–1782) is sworn into the Order by Grand Master Haytham Kenway (the father of the Assassin Connor, discussed above) in 1755. In ACRo, the Assassin-turned-Templar Shay Cormac (1731–?) is sworn in by, again, Grand Master Haytham, in 1757. Both initiations are witnessed by numerous Templars, and in the case of Shay also by Lee. In both cases the Templars are gathered at a large table, lit by candles. The grand master presides over the meeting at the head of the table. All Templars have folded their hands in reference to the severity of the situation, just like the Assassins in their ceremony. All the Templars have their eyes fixed on the initiate. In both scenarios the questioning is as follows:

> **Kenway:** Do you [Lee or Cormac] swear to uphold the principle of our order and all that for which we stand?
>
> **Lee/Cormac**: I do.
>
> **Kenway:** And never to share our secrets nor divulge the true nature of our work?
>
> **Lee/Cormac**: I do.
>
> **Kenway:** And to do so from now until death, whatever the cost?
>
> **Lee/Cormac**: I do.
>
> **Kenway:** Then we welcome you into our fold, brother.
>
> In AC3, Kenway adds to Lee:
>
> Together we will usher in the dawn of a New World. One defined by purpose and order. Give me your hand. Give me your hand. You are a Templar.
>
> In ACRo, Kenway adds to Cormac:
>
> You are a Templar now, a harbinger of the New World.

In both AC3 and ACRo, Kenway presents the initiate with the ceremonial Templar ring, to be worn on the ring finger of the right hand (unlike the branding of the *left* ring finger performed by the Assassins). The initiate puts the ring on his finger, and then Kenway utters the traditional formula 'May the Father of Understanding guide us', and all attendees respond with the same phrase.

The ring presented to the initiates is from a deceased Templar, thus suggesting a kind of spiritual-hereditary succession between different Templar generations. The ring presented to Lee, by Kenway (AC3), had been taken by the same Kenway from his rogue fellow Templar Edward Braddock (1695–1755) in 1755 (without killing him). The ring presented to Cormac, also by Kenway (ACRo), had been given to Cormac by the Templar George Monro (1700–1757), after Cormac rescued him from a burning house (in vain though, because Monro died directly after the rescue).

4.2. Atypical Forms

There are two further references to the ceremonial rings of the Templar Order: in AC4 and in ACRo. In AC4, the grand master of the Caribbean Rite of the Templars, Laureano de Torres y Ayala (1645–1722), calls together a meeting of several important Templars to plot their next operations. In attendance are, in addition to Laureano, Julien du Casse (1682–1715), Woodes Rogers (1679–1732), and Edward Kenway (posing as the Templar Robert Walpole, whom Kenway had killed earlier). Before the meeting starts, Laureano presents the attendees with a Templar ring. The presentation lacks any other aspect of the initiation rite as described above. Laureano speaks:

> Please, hold out your hands. Mark and remember our purpose. To guide all wayward souls 'till they reach a quiet road. To guide all wayward desire until impassioned hearts are cooled. To guide all wayward minds to safe and sober thought. By the Father of understanding's light, let our work now begin.

The last 'ring ceremony' can be found in ACRo, at the end of the game, when the nameless Abstergo employee (with whom the player has relived Cormac's past) receives the offer to join the Order. Abstergo officials Melanie Lemay, Violet da Costa, and Juhani Otso Berg stand before the player/the nameless employee, when Melanie offers him/her the ring, saying:

> Join us, and a bright future will be all yours. Refuse . . .

The consequences of refusal are not spelled out, but no leaps of imagination are required to know what it would be: death. The choice which the nameless Abstergo employee makes is not shown in the game, thus also relieving the player of responsibility to choose. I will return to this situation in Section 6 when discussing the initiation of the player.

The ritual utterance 'May the Father of Understanding guide us' sounds rather religious, but its true meaning remains vague during the series. It is normally used in the Order's initiation ritual described, but also as a secret password (AC3), as a ritual saying for the opening of a secret meeting (AC2), or more casually in letters and conversations (ACRo, ACU, and ACS). In ACU, which is set in revolutionary France, the Assassin Elise Dorian comments on Robbespierre's historical cult of the Supreme Being as 'a popularized version' of the Order's true doctrine (Bosman 2018).

The cult of the Supreme Being was a historical cult established by Robespierre during the French Revolution, a form of classic deism intended to replace Roman Catholicism (and its competitor, the Cult of Reason) as the state religion. Robespierre's religion included belief in a Supreme Being, an eternal human soul, and a life dedicated to 'civil virtues' (Scurr 2014). It lost its momentum with the execution of Robespierre in 1794, and was abolished by Napoleon Bonaparte, an ally to the Brotherhood according to Ubisoft, in 1802.

4.3. Theoretical Structure

After examining these four examples of the Order's initiation ritual (two in its typical, and two in its atypical form), we can distinguish three constitutive elements: (a) the swearing of an oath in which the initiate is asked to uphold the Order's principles and to guard its secrets until death; (b) the handing over of the Templar's ring, often one that previously belonged to a now deceased Templar, to be worn on the initiate's right ring finger; and (c) the ritual utterance of the words about the Father of Understanding, to be repeated by all present.

5. Requiescat In Pace. The Brotherhood's Assassination Ritual

The second ritual frequently shown in the *Assassin's Creed* series is the assassination ritual. Although the presentation does cloud the ritual form somewhat, when all the primary games of the series are examined, a definite ritual pattern can be distinguished, with diverse forms and constitutive elements (see Table A1: Assassinations, in the Appendix A). I will start with the theoretical structure and then differentiate between the different instalments and scenes (instead of the other way around, as I did with the initiation rituals).

In every instalment of the *Assassin's Creed* series, the protagonist is given the task of assassinating certain high-profile targets, usually high-ranking Templars or their accomplices. When the protagonist is about to attack (by striking with a hidden blade or sword, by firing a pistol, or by some other means), the assassin and his target enter the so-called 'memory corridor'. The memory corridor is a special feature of the Animus (which the modern-day Assassin, and through him the player, uses to control the historical protagonist) which slows time and intensifies contact between the assassin and his target. The corridor shows blue and white lights and patterns in the background, leaving only the assassin and the target in the scene.

Sometimes a high-profile target does not trigger the memory corridor, but certain ritual traits similar to those which do trigger the corridor still occur. They have been included in this study. For all other exceptions and anomalies, see Table A1: Assassinations (Appendix A).

5.1. Theoretical Structure

In all instalments, assassinations include certain ritual characteristics, all with their in-game origin and purpose: (1) the Assassin holds the head of his target in his arms, as the target lies on the ground; (2) the Assassin and his target exchange last words, usually in the form of a confession by the latter; (3) the Assassin closes the eyes of the dead person; (4) the Assassin collects a sample of the victim's blood; and (5) the Assassin ritually utters a final short prayer, usually 'rest in peace' or a variation thereof.

The entire ritual evinces piety and respect for the victim, making the act less about personal motives or vendettas and more about 'something that has to be done' for the greater good of the Brotherhood's long-term goals. This is shown particularly well in AC2, when the young (but uninitiated) Ezio kills Vieri de'Pazzi, one of the murderers of his brothers and father. Ezio burns with the desire to avenge their deaths, and he not only kills Vieri, but also shakes his dead body while shouting angrily:

> [In Italian] Piece of shit! I only wish you'd suffered more! You met the fate you deserved! I hope you . . .

Then his uncle Mario intervenes, asking his nephew to show some 'respect' for the dead. When Ezio responds that Vieri would not have shown either of them 'such kindness', Mario replies:

> [to Ezio in English] You are not Vieri. Do not become him. [to Vieri in Italian] May death provide the peace you sought. Requiescat in pace [Rest in peace].

Like all mentors, Mario teaches Ezio that their victims should not be killed out of emotion alone, but through minuscule planning and deliberation.

5.2. Holding the Target

Approximately half of the assassination victims that trigger the memory corridor are first held in their Assassin's arms. Altaïr (AC), the younger Ezio (AC2, ACB), and Jacob Frye (ACS) often provide some comfort to their victims in the last seconds of their lives by doing this, while the older Ezio (ACRe), Connor (AC3), Edward (AC4), Shay (ACRo), Arno (ACU), and Bayek (ACO) do not hold their victims, or only on rare occasions. There seems to be a connection between the emotional involvement of the Assassin and his willingness to hold his victims. Altaïr, Ezio, and Jacob are rather calculated in their manner, while Ezio very quickly learns to overcome his hunger for vengeance. Connor, Edward, Shay, and Bayek are very much involved personally in the deaths of their targets, as they hold them responsible for the deaths of loved ones (tribe, friends, or family), with the exception of Shay (the Assassin-turned-Templar) who wants to prevent his former brothers from possessing the Apples of Eden.

5.3. Confession

In the majority of the assassinations that trigger the memory corridor, a discussion between the Assassin and his target takes place, and/or a confession in which the victim either pleads innocence, ignorance, or steadfast belief in the Templar's goals. In the cases of Altaïr (AC), Ezio (AC2, ACB, ACRe), and the Frye twins (ACU), the discussion/confession is calm and 'reasonable': the Assassin and his target exchange motives for their own choices and behavior, sometimes causing the Assassin to doubt his own actions (AC1) or the victim to come to terms with his.

In the cases of Connor (AC4), Edward (AC4), Shay (ACRo), and Bayek (ACO), the exchanges are often far more violent: the Assassin and his target(s) argue bitterly, shouting to each other, disagree with each other, and constantly belittle each other. In the case of ACU, the memory corridor set-up is slightly different than in the other instalments. When Arno assassinates a target, flashbacks from the target's life are shown, which allow both Arno and the player to understand the target's motives, and to obtain insight into the true nature of past events.

5.4. Closing the Eyes

The closing of a dead person's eyes is an old ritual known in many parts of the world as part of wider ceremonies of death and dying. It is also used in the *Assassin's Creed* series, especially as a token of respect to the deceased (as Mario explains to Ezio). In a minority of the assassinations, the killer does not close the eyes of his victims. Even Ezio hesitates, even though Mario explicitly instructs him to do so. There are eight victims whose eyes are closed by their assassins throughout the primary instalments of the series: Vieri (by Mario, AC2); four out of seven assassinations in ACB (by Ezio); Leandros (by Ezio, ACRe); John Pitcairn (by Connor, AC3); and El Tiburón (by Edward, AC4). In three instances, the protagonist is seen closing the eyes of fallen comrades: Bartolomeo's mercenary (by Ezio, AC2); Yusuf Tazim (by Ezio, ACRe); and George Monroe (by Shay, ACRo).

5.5. Collecting of Blood

The collecting of blood occurs in AC (9 out of 10 assassinations), ACS (11 out of 12 assassinations) and—partially—in ACO (7 out of 12 assassinations). Altaïr (AC1) collects the blood of his fallen victim by sweeping a white feather over their cut throat, and then putting it into his pocket. The same act does not occur again until the penultimate instalment of the series, ACS. Evie and Jacob Frye take the blood of their slain victims by wiping a white handkerchief over the victim's open throat, and putting this into their suits too.

Before the release of ACO in 2017, the use of a feather (AC1) is a reference to the name of the main fortress of the Nizaris in Persia, called Alamut, which possibly means 'eagle's nest'. Other in-game references are 'eagle vision', the ability of certain Assassins to 'scan' the environment, and 'eagle points', the tops of tall buildings, mountains, and trees where the Assassins scout the perimeters of designated areas.

In ACO, it becomes clear that the feather 'originally' stems from the Egyptian idea of the weighing of the soul before entering the afterlife. The feather of the Egyptian god Ma'at is used as a counterweight to determine the moral value of the individual soul (Allen 2004, pp. 115–16). The Assassin touches his or her own head before touching the body of the target, which dissolves into a cloud of black dots. The rationale behind this ritual is probably that the Assassin asks Ma'at not to 'weigh' the soul of his victims against him when it is his own turn to enter the underworld.

5.6. The Ritual Prayer

The closing part of the assassination ritual is the utterance of a short religious phrase. In the case of Altaïr, three victims are said to 'be at peace (now)' or to 'rest now'. In Ezio's case, he mostly uses the Latin phrase *Requiescat in pace*, 'Rest in peace', although Ezio is not as consistent in using this phrase later in his life (ACRe). Arno uses 'Rest in peace' once (ACU), while Evie Frye jokingly says 'Rest in peace' as she throws her unwanted ball gown into the water (ACS).

In ACO, *Requiescat in pace* is heard again only after the last assassination (by Aya), of Julius Caesar himself. Other 'prayers' also appear in ACO, all connected to Egyptian mythology. Bayek uses 'May the Hidden One Greet you; the Lord of the Duat awaits' twice, and 'Apap, devour your fetid heart' once. The 'Hidden One' and 'the Lord of the Duat' are both references to Osiris, the lord of the underworld in Egyptian mythology. Again, as was the case with the feather, the Assassin pleads to the gods to judge his victim for his crimes, but not his executioner.

Sometimes, especially in AC1, AC2, ACB, and AC3, the short prayer is preceded by a longer quote, in Ezio's case in Italian, the content of which is usually closely connected to the victim's life, and to the reasons why he had to die. For example: 'Your schemes are at an end' (Altaïr, AC1); 'Meglio essere felici in questa vita che aspirare a esserlo nella prossima [Better to be content in this life, than aspire to it in the next]' (Ezio, AC2); 'Che tu sia pari nella morte. [May you be equal in death]' (Ezio, ACB) and 'Your words may have been sincere, but that does not make them true' (Connor, AC3).

6. Welcome, Initiate. The Gamer as Initiate

Usually, it is the game's protagonist, an Assassin (sometimes a Templar), who is initiated into the Brotherhood (or the Order). In two cases however, the initiation is transferred from an in-game ritual to a ritual on the level of the player himself. Once, the player is given the opportunity to join the Order (ACRo), and on another occasion to join the Brotherhood (ACU/ACS). This is made possible by the complex narratological structures Ubisoft uses in the series (see: Table 2).

In ACRo, the narratological structure provides the following sequence: the player, through his game device, controls a nameless Abstergo employee, who—in turn—controls the historical Assassin Shay Cormac through the in-game Helix Animus. (The same structure can also be found in AC4). At the end of ACRo, the nameless employee is asked to join the Order Melanie offers him the ring, asking:

Join us, and a bright future will be all yours. Refuse . . .

While the outcome of the choice is not shown (the end credits are screened), acceptance is the most likely outcome, since a refusal would probably result in the employee's swift death. But because of the complex narratological structure of ACRo, it is not only 'numbskull' who is asked to join the Order, but the player, too, is offered this choice. Since it is the player who makes the actual choices in the game, it is the gamer who ultimately has to decide whether or not to 'join' the Order.

This 'capacity' of the player of *Assassin's Creed* is also played out in ACU and ACS, but then with regard to the Brotherhood. The initial double narratological structure is broken by both ACU and ACS in this sense that the player's real-life gaming device and the in-game Helix Animus narratologically merge into a single device. When the player of ACU and ACS starts the game, the Abstergo logo is shown, as well as that of the Helix cloud service. The screen reads: 'Developed by Abstergo; powered by the Animus'. No contemporary Assassin of Templar is shown or used: the player directly controls the historical protagonist. The player is directly using the Helix Animus.

At the beginning of ACU, the player is confronted with a brief narrative about the arrest and death (at the stake) of Jacques de Molay (1244–1314), the historical last grand master of the Templar Order. After the player has finished this little section of the game, which is clearly told from a Templar point of view, an electronic interference appears across the screen of the gaming device (the Helix Animus).

An unknown woman is shown sitting behind a large computer desk communicating with other unseen characters (although these can be identified by hardcore fans of the series as Desmond's fellow Assassins Shaun Hastings and Rebecca Crane). The woman identifies herself by the codename 'Bishop', asking the player to 'join' the Brotherhood by pressing the designated key on the game device/Helix Animus.

Hey there . . . This is probably disorienting, so I'll be brief. I'm Bishop, not my real name obviously, but that's as much as you'll get today. (. . .) These guys [Templars] (. . .) have their fingers in countless corporations, governments, and media outlets, and NGOs, but now they want control over history itself. If that doesn't frighten you, it should. But we're here to stop them. And I need your help. (. . .) This is where you come in. We are confident that you are up to the task. (. . .) Are you willing to take up the fight and join us? (. . .) By pressing "play" you'll be joining the Assassins. If you want to fight the Templar menace, or if you're willing to save civilization from Abstergo's clutches, press "play". [When the "play" button is pressed] Sit back and ready yourself for the truth.

The game does not proceed if the player does not press the 'play' button, and Bishop will wait indefinitely for the player to answer her question. By pressing 'play', the player indicates (at least in the reality of the game) that he is willing to join the Brotherhood in its fight against the Templars. Bishop shows the 'Initiate', as she subsequently calls the player, the truth behind the Abstergo façade. In the rest of the game, the player/Initiate 'works' for the Brotherhood by uncovering the life of the historical Assassin of the French Revolution, Arno.

This narratological frame in which the real-life gamer is 'initiated' into the in-game Brotherhood, is maintained in ACU (but not in ACO, where the old 'double' frame is re-installed). At the start of ACU, the player is welcomed once more by the screen text 'developed by Abstergo; powered by the Animus', again suggesting the merging of the in-game device (Helix Animus) and the real-life game device the player is actually using to play the game. The screen is then blurred by static interference and the logo of the Assassin Brotherhood is shown, with the text 'welcome, Initiate'.

Bishop is seen again talking to the player, and her first words are, 'Hello, Initiate'. The player is then sent to Victorian London, but without being asked by Bishop to pledge his or her alliance (as was the case in ACU), to re-live the lives of the historical Assassins Jacob and Evie Frye. The player does not have to choose, as if Bishop (and the Brotherhood) already know what to think of her or him, narratologically connecting ACU and ACS to each other.

Ultimately, of course it is the player who decides in the game. The assassinations are carried out by means of the player's direct input (pushing the 'assassinate' button), while the (historical) initiations are indirectly triggered by the player (by reaching a certain point within the game's narrative).

7. Conclusions

In this article, I have inventoried the occurrences of three fictional rituals in the *Assassin's Creed* series: the initiation rituals of the Assassin Brotherhood and the Templar Order, and the Brotherhood's assassination rituals. I have constructed a hypothetical and theoretical 'ideal' or 'full-fledged' ritual for each of these three cases, based on the numerous and often varied occurrences within the different instalments of the game series.

The initiation ritual of the Brotherhood proceeds as follows: (1) the initiate is ritually questioned about his knowledge of and loyalty to the Assassin's Creed; (2) the initiate's left ring finger is branded by fire; and (3) the initiate performs a leap of faith. The ceremony is presided over by the branch's mentor in the presence of other high-ranking Assassins and other initiates.

The Templar equivalent proceeds as follows: (1) the initiate is ritually questioned about his knowledge of and loyalty to the Templars' goals; (2) the initiate is offered a Templar ring, which has to be worn on the right ring finger; (3) the 'Father of Understanding' phrase is uttered. The Templar ritual is presided over by the grand master of the rite and witnessed by other high-ranking Templars, but not by other initiates.

The assassinations carried out by the Brotherhood are accompanied by rituals too: (1) the assassin holds his victim; (2) last words are exchanged; (3) the victim's eyes are closed; (4) a sample of the victim's blood is collected; and (5) a short prayer is said, usually a variation of 'rest in peace'.

Whereas the initiation rituals clearly mark the initiate's transition from the outside world to the confined group of the Brotherhood, the Assassins' assassination rituals are more or less safeguards to make sure that the killings are not due to personal dislike or vengeance, but to cold and calculated long-term political plans. It is interesting to note that the Order does not have a comparable ritual, although it carries out almost as many assassinations as the Assassins.

Ubisoft, it appears, uses the three rituals in its *Assassin's Creed* series for four purposes, (1) creatively, to add a sense of suspense and mysticism to both groups, but especially to the Assassins; (2) morally, to imply that the Templars are more prone to assassinating people for personal motives than the Assassins are; (3) socially, to mark the distance between the members of the Brotherhood/Order and the rest of the world, and (4) epistemologically, to mark the difference between those how know the true nature of human existence and evolution (the initiated), and the rest of the 'people', who do not have this knowledge.

Ubisoft makes this even more compelling to the player by merging the narratological layers of the real-life gaming device and the in-game device (Animus), thus successfully involving *and initiating* the player of the series in initiation into Brotherhood or Order. In a certain way, playing the games becomes a ritual practice in itself.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Assassinations. Overview of all assassinations performed in the p rimary games of the *Assassin's Creed* series. The list includes (1) all assassinations that triggered the Animus' memory corridor; (2) high profile assassinations that did not trigger the memory corridor; and (3) allies to whom the same rites are applied.

	Holding of Target	Closing of Eyes	Collecting of Blood	Memory Corridor	Ritual Utterance
AC1 (performed by Altaïr)					
Tamir	y	n	y	y	Be at peace. (a)
Garnier	y	n	y	y	...
Talal	y	n	y	y	...
Abu'l Nuqoud	y	n	y	y	Be at peace now.
William of Montferrat	y	n	y	y	Rest now.
Majd Addin	y	n	y	y	...
Jubair	y	n	y	y	...
Sibrand	y	n	y	y	...
Robert de Sable	y	n	y	y	...
Al Mualim	y	n	n	y	...
(a) The collecting of blood is always done with a feather.					
AC2 (performed by Ezio)					
Uberto Alberti	y	n	n	y	
Vieri de' Pazzi	n	y	n	y	Requiescat in pace. (a)
Francesco de' Pazzi	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Bernardo Baroncelli	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Antonio Maffei	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Francesco Salviati	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Stefano da Bagnone	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Jacopo de' Pazzi	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace. (b)
Emilio Barbarigo	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Carlo Grimaldi	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Marco Barbarigo	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Silvio Barbarigo; Dante Moro	n	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Ludovico Orsi	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Checco Orsi	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
The nobleman	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
The preacher	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
The priest	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
The painter	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
The merchant	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
The farmer	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
The condottiero	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
The guard captain	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
The doctor	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Girolamo Savonarola	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Rodrigo Borgia (1st attempt)	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace, you bastard. (c)
Rodrigo Borgia (2nd attempt)	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace. (d)
(allies)					
Bartolomeo's mercenary	n	y	n	n	Requiescat in pace.
(a) Closing of eyes and prayer performed by Mario.					
(b) Jacopo does not speak during the memory corridor.					
(c) Assassination is interrupted.					
(d) Ezio lets Rodrigo live.					
ACB (performed by Ezio)					
Il Carnefice	y	y	n	y	Requiescat in pace. (a)
Malfatto (by apprentice)	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace. (a)(b)
Silvestro Sabbatini (by apprentice)	y	y	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Juan Borgia the Elder	y	y	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Octavian de Valois	y	y	n	y	Requiescat in pace.
Micheletto Corella	y	n	n	y	... (c)
Cesare Borgia	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace. (d)
(a) Il Carnefice and Malfatto do not speak during the memory corridor.					
(b) Closing of eyes prevented by doctor's mask.					
(c) Micheletto is spared by Ezio.					
(d) Cesare is thrown from wall by Ezio.					

Table A1. *Cont.*

		Holding of Target	Closing of Eyes	Collecting of Blood	Memory Corridor	Ritual Utterance
ACRe	(performed by Altaïr)					
	Haras	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Abbas	n	n	n	y	. . .
	(performed by Ezio)					
	Leandros	n	y	n	y	Requiescat in pace, bastardo. (a)
	Vali cel Tradat (by apprentice)	y	n	n	y	Peace be with you. (b)
	Tarik Barleti	y	n	n	y	. . . (c)
	Shahkulu	n	n	n	y/n	. . . (d)
	Manuel Palaiologos	n	n	n	y	. . .
	(allies)					
	Yusuf Tazim	n	y	n	n	Requiescat in pace.
	Altaïr	n	n	n	n	Requiescat in pace.

(a) Leandros is thrown back in anger by Ezio.
(b) All rituals are performed by the apprentice.
(c) Holding only commences after Ezio's insight.
(d) Shahkulu's assassination is interrupted.

		Holding of Target	Closing of Eyes	Collecting of Blood	Memory Corridor	Ritual Utterance
AC3	(performed by Haytham)					
	Miko	n	n	n	n	. . .
	Louis Mills	n	n	n	n	. . .
	Cutter	n	n	n	n	. . .
	Edward Braddock	n	n	n	y	. . .
	(performed by Connor)					
	William Johnson	n	n	n	y	. . .
	John Pitcairn	y	y	n	y	. . .
	Thomas Hickey	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Benjamin Church	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Kanen'tó:kon	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Haytham Kenway	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Charles Lee	n	n	n	n	. . .
	(performed by Desmond)					
	Daniel Cross	n	n	n	n	. . . (a)
	Warren Vidic	n	n	n	n	. . . (a) (b)

(a) No memory corridor can be formed because target is not generated by the Animus.
(b) Desmond kills Warren by mind-controlling a guard through the Apple.

		Holding of Target	Closing of Eyes	Collecting of Blood	Memory Corridor	Ritual Utterance
AC4	(performed Edward)					
	Duncan Walpole	n	n	n	n	. . .
	Julien du Casse	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Laurens Prins	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Peter Chamberlain	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Charles Vane	n	n	n	y	. . . (a)
	Josiah Burgess; John Cockram	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Benjamin Hornigold	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Woodes Rogers	n	n	n	y	. . . (b)
	Bartholomew Roberts	n	n	n	y	. . . (c)
	El Tiburón	n	y	n	y	. . . (d)
	Laureano de Torres y Ayala	n	n	n	y	. . .

(a) Charles is spared by Edward.
(b) Woodes is spared by Edward.
(c) Bartholomew's corpse is taken away by Edward.
(d) El Tiburón's eyes are closed by Edward out of respect.

		Holding of Target	Closing of Eyes	Collecting of Blood	Memory Corridor	Ritual Utterance
ACRo	(performed by Shay as an Assassin)					
	Lawrence Washington	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Samuel Smith	n	n	n	y	. . .
	James Wardrop	n	n	n	y	. . .
	(performed by Shay as a Templar)					
	Le Chasseur	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Kesegowaase	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Adéwalé	n	n	n	y	. . . (a)
	Hope Jensen	n	n	n	y	. . .
	Louis-Joseph Gaultier	n	n	n	y	. . . (b)
	Liam O'Brien	n	n	n	y	. . . (c)
	Charles Dorian	n	n	n	y	. . .
	(allies)					
	George Monroe	y	y	n	n	. . .

(a) Haytham joins Shay in the memory corridor.
(b) Shay throws Louis overboard in the memory corridor.
(c) Shay puts Liam's hood in place after he dies.

Table A1. *Cont.*

		Holding of Target	Closing of Eyes	Collecting of Blood	Memory Corridor	Ritual Utterance
ACU	(performed by Arno)					
	Charles Gabriel Sivert	n	n	n	y	… (a)
	Roi des Thunes	n	n	n	y	… (a)
	Chrétien Lafrenière	n	n	n	y	… (a)
	Pierre Bellec	n	y	n	y	Rest in peace.
	Frédéric Rouille	n	n	n	y	… (a)
	Marie Lévesque	n	n	n	y	…
	Louis-Michel le Peletier	n	n	n	y	…
	Aloys la Touche	n	n	n	y	…
	François-Thomas Germain	y	n	n	y	… (b)

(a) The assassinations trigger relived memories from targets within memory corridor instead of a conversation.
(b) François is the only target with whom Arno has a conversation in the memory corridor.

ACS	(performed by Evie)					
	David Brewster	y	n	y	y	… (a)
	Lucy Thorne	y	n	y	y	…
	(the dress)	n	n	n	n	Requescat in pace. (b)
	(performed by Jacob)					
	Rupert Ferris	y	n	y	y	…
	John Elliotson	y	n	y	y	…
	Malcolm Millner	y	n	n	y	…
	Pearl Attaway	y	n	y	y	…
	Philip Twopenny	n	n	y	y	…
	James Brudenell	n	n	y	y	…
	Maxwell Roth	y	n	y	y	… (c)
	(performed by Jacob and Evie)	n	n	y	y	.
	Crawford Starrick	n	n	y	y	… (d)

(a) The collecting of the with ablood is done by handkerchief.
(b) Evie repeats old phrase from Ezio after throwing her dress away.
(c) Maxwell kisses Arno in the memory corridor.
(d) After Crawford's assassination, both Evie and Jacob collect his blood.

ACO	(performed by Bayek)					
	Rudjek	n	n	n	n	…
	Medunamun	n	n	n	y	May the Hidden One greet you. The lord of the Duat awaits.
	Gennadios	n	n	y/n	y	Ditto. (a)
	Eudoros	n	n	y/n	y	Son of Apep, The lord of the Duat awaits.
	Taharqa	n	n	y/n	y	…
	Khaliset	n	n	n	y	…
	Hetepi	n	n	y/n	y	I have my gods, now face yours.
	Berenike	n	n	n	y	…
	Pothinus	n	n	y/n	y	…
	Flavius	n	n	y/n	y	… (b)
	(performed by Aya)					
	Septimius	n	n	y	y	May Apep devour your fetid heart. (c)
	Julius Caesar	y	n	n	y	Requiescat in pace, Caesar. (d)

(a) The target is touched by an eagle's feather (no blood).
(b) Khemu handles the feather.
(c) Aya is the first to collect the blood of her target using a feather.
(d) The feather is used to open Caesar's eyes in the memory corridor.

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