ALTAÏR IBN-LA'AHAD

In 2007, Ubisoft launched ASSASSIN'S CREED, a game set in the Near East during the Third Crusade. The protagonist, Altaïr, is an Assassin of Arab origin. He is depicted as an Arab man, blending in naturally with the rich oriental surroundings. However, when he speaks we hear an American accent. This raises the question if he really is different or if he is just another American game hero.

Arab Assassin or all-American game hero?

Connie Veugen

From a historical and cultural point of view the launch of this game at that particular moment in time is, to say the least, interesting. Not only because it is set in a time of religious war between the Near East and the West, but also because it deliberately grounds the story in reality to increase its credibility. In 2007, America was still very much involved in the War on Terror, while in other Western countries, recent anti-Muslim sentiments made headlines. In 2005, *Newsweek* reported the alleged defilement of a Qur'an by interrogators at Guantánamo Bay. One year later, the Danish newspaper *Jyllads-Posten* published a set of debated Muhammad cartoons, while Pope Benedict XVI referred to the Islam as evil and inhuman. In 2007 in the Netherlands, controversial politician Geert Wilders[1] called for a ban on the Qur'an prior to the launch of his film FITNA planned later that year.[1] In light of these sentiments, it should not come as a surprise that after 9-11 the opponent in games and other popular media dealing with contemporary wars, terrorism, or espionage was a Muslim fanatic bent on bringing down the Western Christian world. Alternatively, he could also be a Western opportunist who uses the Muslim threat for personal gain, as in the UK TV-series STRIKE BACK (2010). In computer games, we find this enemy predominately in the genre of the first-person shooter (FPS).[2] Prior to 9-11, the military FPS games mostly involved historic battlegrounds. Since the attacks, however, recent military conflicts became common, such as Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in *DELTA FORCE: TASK FORCE DAGGER* (2002), and Operation Iraqi Freedom in *NAVY SEALS: WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION* (2003) and *CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE* (2007).[3] These games did not only popularize the new enemy, they also gave the players a means to virtually participate in America's retaliatory actions, albeit after the actual missions took place. At least that is what such games as *KUMA\WAR* (2004-2012) promised:

> Kuma\War missions allow subscribers to experience first-hand some of the
> toughest fighting in the global war on terror because each mission is based
> on real-world events. Missions are developed and delivered to your
> computer with unpreced(ented speed so you can experience these critical
> current events soon after they happen.[4]

One could argue that the number of gamers who actually played these games is limited in comparison to the consumers of other media. Still, as professor of Media and Cultural Studies Jonathan Gray convincingly argues in his book *Show Sold Separately* (2010), most of our media consumption is 'second hand'. Consequently, the media texts surrounding games can influence even non-players.[5] Another aspect that has to be taken into account is hat computer game players are a very perceptive audience, so when a game deals with an actual (historic) event or environment, such as ASSASSIN'S CREED, they will be extra critical. Furthermore, players love the immersive experience games bring. Consequently, anything that disrupts this experience, including any inaccuracies, decreases their enjoyment. Both these aspects must be considered when discussing the game and the portrayal of its protagonist Altaïr Ibn-La'Ahad.

A nuanced view or a modern game protagonist?

Today, everyone who has ever played one of the major ASSASSIN'S CREED games has heard of Altaïr Ibn-La'Ahad, the famous mentor and reformer of the Assassin's order. He is the protagonist in three ASSASSIN'S CREED games and features in two more. He is also the subject of the graphic novel *Assassin's Creed* (2007), and of Oliver Bowden's book: *Assassin's Creed: The Secret Crusade* (2011). Because of the game's disclaimer which reads: 'Inspired by historical events and characters. This work of fiction was designed, developed and produced by a multicultural team of various religious faiths and beliefs', Altaïr promised to be a representative of a more nuanced and enlightened view on the Muslim world. That is, until someone pointed out that he is just a modern American game protagonist.

To understand the portrayal of Altaïr it is necessary to understand the premise of the first series of ASSASSIN'S CREED games, the so-called Desmond Saga, which all contain two plotlines. The contemporary plotline centres around Desmond Miles, a 25-year-old barkeeper who is kidnapped by a company called Abstergo, a modern day front for the ancient order of the Knights Templar. Abstergo has developed a machine, the Animus, that lets subjects relive the memories of their ancestors. Abstergo is looking for certain artefacts that are scattered through history, so called pieces of Eden. They need these for a mysterious project that will come to fruition on or just before 21 December 2012. Desmond was chosen, because more than one of his ancestors possessed a piece of Eden, therefore his memories might give information about their location. The first of these ancestors is Altaïr (the second plotline). The Altaïr part of the game (90% of the gameplay) takes place during the Third Crusade in 1191. Thus, even though it is set in a historic past, it is set in a similar conflict as the one that emerged after 9-11, a conflict between the Christian West (the 'Occident') and the Muslim Near East (the 'Orient').[6] The game's main locations are the Assassin stronghold Masyaf, which is located in the Orontes Valley in Western Syria (factually at that time the main headquarter of the Hashashin), and the cities Jerusalem, Damascus, and Acre. Ubisoft tried to

recreate the setting, the world of the Third Crusade, as faithfully as possible, according to one of the producers:

> From the start we worked with one historian, who dug up all this very hard to find reference material, like plans of all the cities, the layout of the land at the time, how people dressed, types of weapons that were available, as much info we could find about the actual assassins as possible.[7]

When you play the game, especially when you are in Jerusalem and Damascus, you are immersed in an Arab world, full of typical buildings[8] and populated by a believable set of non-player characters. Apart from the different colour schemes that the three cities use (depending on their location), they can also be distinguished by their occupying force. Jerusalem and Damascus are under Saladin's control, so the people speak either Arabic or with an Arabic accent. The guards in these cities wear turbans and an oriental style of armour. The scholars that wander in the streets are Muslim ascetics. Acre, on the other hand, has recently been recaptured by Richard the Lionheart. Consequently, the player hears British accents, and the guards wear uniforms with the Crusader's cross. Here the scholars are Christian priests.[9] For someone who has not grown up in the Orient, it is a very convincing depiction of the settings including town criers and Mosques. In fact, it is so credible that in 2013 the Danish news channel TV2 used the *ASSASSIN'S CREED* version of Damascus in a report about the present-day conflict in Syria (image 1).

image 1

In their article 'Assassin's Creed a Multicultural Read', Seif El-Nasr et al. present an extensive analysis of the depiction of the Arab world in *ASSASSIN'S CREED*, especially the three cities. In their analysis, they emphasize the Arab building style, which often includes elements that are directly influenced or even prescribed by the Qur'an and/or Muslim beliefs. Seif El-Nasr et al. conclude that *ASSASSIN'S CREED* convincingly recreates this building style.[10] To some of the researchers the environmental narrative of the game even evoked feelings of nostalgia:

The environment depicted in Assassins' Creed is undeniably beautiful. Great time and effort was spent on detail and layout. For both Magy and Maha the game-play experience was a transportation to their homeland. Every corner, every shadow, every detail in the environment carried with it many nostalgic feelings.[11]

The three cities form the major backdrop of the game, as Altaïr has to visit each city at least three times. They are also vital to the gameplay as the game's producer Jade Raymond explained: 'What better setting for interesting crowd game-play than narrow medieval streets filled with merchants, nights, public hangings, and all of the street life from this gruesome time.' [12] Climbing the high minarets and running across the rooftops are also major gameplay elements in ASSASSIN'S CREED.

image 2   image 3

His hood conceals his features

This then is the world of Altaïr, whom the player first meets in the ASSASSIN'S CREED official launch trailer.[13] What immediately strikes you is that Altaïr's looks are deliberately hidden. In the first images (image 2 and 3) of the trailer, we only see a restricted view of his face his hood hides the rest. Even in the promotional material (image 6) Altaïr's face is always partially concealed. In the game itself, we mostly see Altaïr from behind. On the rare occasions we see him face-on, usually his hood again conceals (part of) his features, as in the trailer. As he is an Assassin, who has to rely on his ability to blend in and not draw attention to himself, it is only natural to keep his face hidden (in the game this is one of the explicit rules of the Assassins' order).[14] It is also a specific game design choice. On the one hand, it does away with the need to show a lively face full of emotion, a tricky feat in a detailed game world that has to be rendered in real-time.[15] On the other hand, it gives the player a 'blank canvas' which makes it easier to identify with the character (images 4, 5 and 6).
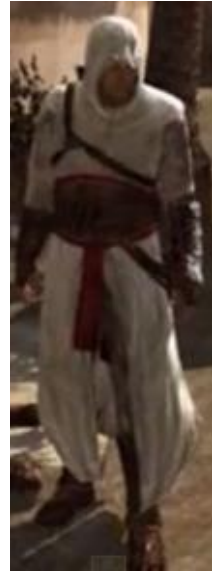
image 4　　　　　　image 5　　　　　image 6

Because of Altaïr's Arabic name that loosely translates to 'flying eagle' or 'the flying one, son of no one' his hood has a pointed end (image 3), which resembles the beak of a bird of prey. When he jumps from a height, the tails of his robes bilge out, making his shadow resemble the eagle he is named after (image 7).

image 7

Identification with the avatar is also easy because at the launch of *ASSASSIN'S CREED*, very little information about Altaïr and his background was revealed. In one interview, Jade Raymond talks about him having an Arab father and an English mother, but in the game itself, his history and background are not given. Even in the development dairies and other material included in some of the more luxury boxed editions of the game, it is omitted.[16] It should also be noted that Raymond invariably stresses this role of Altaïr as avatar rather than Altaïr as character. Notice, for instance the use of you in the following interview excerpt (emphasis not in the original):

> **'Your** goal here (in the footage shown) is to track down an assassin named William the Montferrat. William is an actual historical figure that died in the year 1191, not necessarily by assassins but we don't know that, and we want to play with that. Basically, he is talking to Richard at the beginning and **you** get the whole setup of who he is and why **you** want to assassinate him. Basically, he is trying to take over the city while Richard the Lionheart is out of town kind of doing his business. And he is a corrupt leader and so that justifies why **you** are trying to assassinate him.' [17]

What little we know of Altaïr we gather from playing the game itself, especially the first scene, the one showing him before his fall from grace. Here we see him as a very successful master Assassin. He is also arrogant, proud, and reckless, traits that could both apply to young men from the West as well as from the Near East.

image 8

image 9

Interestingly, in the second *ASSASSIN'S CREED* game, published two years later in 2009, Ubisoft did away with the deliberately concealed face. In the announcement trailer, which did not use game footage, we see the new Assassin Ezio with his face still partially concealed by his hood (image 8). In the launch trailer and the game itself, however, we see Ezio fully, even when he is wearing his Assassin's robes (image 9).[18] There are three reasons why Ezio does not have to be 'concealed'. The first two link to the storyline. Unlike Altaïr, Ezio does not know that he is the descendant in a line of Assassins. He has a normal life until fate forces him to assume his father's role as an assassin and even then, he does so very reluctantly. Secondly, Ezio is not an enigma as Altaïr is. In the Altaïr game, there is much more room for the gamer to become the Assassin. As we know very little about Altaïr, he more easily becomes just a vehicle, the avatar for gameplay. Ezio, however, is not a pawn in the hands of the player. He is a character in his own right. We are not the Assassin, we are Ezio, and we live his life, literally from the day he is born. As Ubisoft wants us to identify with Ezio, before the launch of the game he and his

family were purposefully introduced in the short film ASSASSIN'S CREED: LINEAGE, as lead writer Cory May explains:

> Since our story does focus a great deal on the concept of vengeance, it became apparent to us very early on that for this to work, you know, the player much like Ezio has to grow attached to his family. And I think that is when the idea of doing something like the films became very appealing to us, with another way to further expand Ezio's back-story, you know, in a different medium, in a way where we didn't have to concern ourselves as much with gameplay, we could focus entirely on character and story and universe building.[18]

Thirdly, when the second game was released two years had passed. Consequently, rendering techniques and 3D modelling had advanced to a point where the gamer character is more visually pronounced. This in turn also helps to identify with the character itself, which is necessary for Ezio's story to work.

The dilemma of choosing the accent

As to the Arab nature of Altaïr, from his surroundings and his appearance we immediately assume that he is Syrian like the other Assassins. His Assassin's garb is distinctly oriental, even looking like the robes of the ascetics. Of course, this is not a good point of departure, as Altaïr must be able to blend in to confuse the guards. What does distinguish him, however, is his looks. What you see is not the face of a typical American game hero. In fact, when Ubisoft was looking for a model they specifically looked for a face with Mediterranean features as Francisco Randez, the singer and model who lend his face to Desmond, Ezio and Altaïr, attested (images 10a and 10b).[20] For the voice acting, Ubisoft employed the actor Philip Shabaz. Shabaz is American but from Arab-Iranian decent. Initially, Altaïr was going to have a Middle Eastern accent. In the voice rehearsal, Shabaz was first asked to use a very thick accent. Then they asked him to tone it down to a thinner one and again to an even thinner one. Finally, he was asked to drop the accent altogether, allegedly because the voice director was so impressed by Shabaz's voice that he left it as is. It was also suggested that the American accent would make it easier for the player to identify with the character (reinforcing Ubisoft's emphasis on Altaïr as avatar as opposed to Altaïr as character).

This idea, however, backfired. When the first footage of the game was released, many gamers complained about the fact that Altaïr had an American accent. As there was also footage of Altaïr speaking Arabic, it was speculated that the early footage was to show the graphic capabilities of the game and that in the final game he would speak Arabic or at least have an Arabic accent. Regrettably, the footage turned out to be the real deal. In an interview in 2008 Jade Raymond explained the American accent as a deliberate choice because of the double layer of the Animus, i.e. we see Altaïr but in reality it is Desmond reliving Altaïr's life using his own experience.[21] Still, there are moments in the game when Altaïr uses Arabic names, words, and even whole sentences. Because Ubisoft used Shabaz, these are spoken in fluent Arabic, which not only makes Altaïr more believable as an Arab; it also gives the player a deeper sense of immersion.[22]

image 10a   image 10b

In the other games in which he features, Altaïr has an Arabic accent. In BLOODLINES (2009), this is easily explained, firstly because a different company made the game and secondly because the gamer plays Altaïr directly, not 'through the Animus'. In ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS (2011), there is a more specific reason. Certainly, Desmond uses a newer, technically more advanced version of the Animus, making it possible to hear Altaïr 'directly'. However, as already noted, starting with ASSASSIN'S CREED II Ubisoft changed the avatar/character dichotomy. Hence, in REVELATIONS, we are no longer the 'hidden' Altaïr: the avatar for gameplay. On the contrary, we are explicitly asked to identify with Altaïr as a character (image 11 and 12). This is now possible because his background story is revealed in the book *Assassin's Creed: The Secret Crusade* (2011). From the book, it becomes clear that even though his mother was English, she died in childbirth. Consequently, he is raised by his father at the Assassin's stronghold in Masyaf. Also by this time, his legend has risen through the other games and media texts. Thus, his Arab background has not only become acceptable; it has become an integral part of his character. By the end of the game, he even turns into a personification of the ancient wisdom of the Arab world. This shift is perhaps also the reason why Altaïr is voiced by a different actor in this game, Canadian born Cas Anvar, whose parents are both Iranian.[25]

image 11   image 12

More subtle differences

However, his accent is not the only aspect that fans criticised at the time. His gestural patterns are also not consistent with those of a person of Arab descent. Admittedly, this difference is a lot more subtle and will most likely not be noticed by gamers from outside the Arab world. Yet, to those in the know it is clear that Altaïr's mannerism and motions are not consistent with his alleged background. In contrast, one of the other Assassins, Malik, does use gestural movements we recognize from these regions, such as hand gestures while making a point. The reason Altaïr's motions differ from those of other Arab characters in the game is easily explained. Whereas other characters have been completely motion captured, Altaïr is made up of individual motions so he can interact with every possible object and surface in the game in a convincing way. He also has to respond differently to diverse input actions by the player. Consequently, the game's designers created over 12,000 animations for his model so that his movements could be rendered on the fly while also being able to have body parts react differently in response to the user's input.

So even in what seem to be cut-scenes we are shown Altaïr in exactly the same way as he is shown in the rest of the game, simply because he is still the player character, literally the moving avatar. Malik, on the other hand, is always shown in pre-rendered animations. As a result, the motions captured from his Lebanon born actor-double Haaz Sleiman, in contrast, make Altaïr's non-Arab motions stand out more. However, is this really a problem in a game where Altaïr is an avatar and not a character? I remember admiring Altaïr's beautiful fluid motions in the game. At that time, it was really state-of-the-art CGI to have a character move and climb so lithely. Moreover, his motions were, in my view, catlike and sinuous, in keeping with those of an Assassin or the bird of prey he had been modelled on. However, I also remember my mother emphatically stating that his movements were too feminine. Still, his attractiveness for the female gamer was obvious, especially as you usually would only see his back. It should also be noted that Altaïr moves in line with the other protagonist, Desmond. Their motions and gestures are the same, reinforcing the idea of Altaïr as avatar for both Desmond as well as the gamer.

Altaïr interpreted as an all-American hero

Probably the main reason why someone might interpret Altaïr as an all-American hero is his recognisability. This is because his story and character are based on the Hero myth as outlined by Joseph Campbell, a myth which is used abundantly in Western culture, for instance in characters such as King Arthur, Robin Hood, Aragorn, Luke Skywalker, and Batman. Crucial to this myth, however, is the fact that Campbell based it on ancient and more recent hero myths, legends, and stories from all over the world. Roland Barthes also writes about this trans-historical and trans-cultural trait, which explains the universal appeal of the Hero character. It only falls to us to recognize the 'common model' as Barthes calls it. So yes, many of our western myths, stories, and films base on the Hero myth. However, much older heroes such as the Sumerian shepherd Dumuzi whose stories were written down in Iraq around 2500 B.C. or Gilgamesh whose epic stems from around 2000 B.C. base on the same myth. Even more interesting are the central characters of the three world religions, Moses, Jesus, and Buddha, whose stories are also modelled on it. Certainly, our own references to the myth stem from the culture and media closest to us, but this also holds true for the game's players of non-Christian decent.

A different enemy

This brings us to the story. When Altaïr's story begins, he is on a mission for his mentor Al Mualim (Arabic for 'teacher') to recover a valuable artefact hidden in a subterranean room in Jerusalem. Because of his arrogance, Altaïr fails. In retribution, he has to assassinate nine individuals who, according to Al Mualim, stand in the way of peace. It is even alleged that they deliberately lengthen and worsen the war. In the course of what follows, Altaïr discovers that the individuals he has to kill are not all Christian nor are they all typical despots or criminals out to prolong the war. In truth, they are all working towards peace, albeit a very ambiguous one. When Altaïr confronts Al Mualim, he learns that all the victims are Templars who search the artefact, one of the pieces of Eden, because its powers would give them control over the Levant. Therefore, the two factions in the story are not the Christians and the Muslims, but the Templars (both Christian and Muslim) and the Assassins.

Still the game needs and uses the premise of the Third Crusade. Firstly, as we already saw, it lends credibility to the historic depiction of Masyaf, Jerusalem, Damascus, and Acre. Secondly, when the story begins Altaïr and the player are deliberately deceived into believing that the enemy are the Crusaders, especially Robert de Sable. Only the gamers who know more about the Ark of the Covenant, know that the Crusaders Altaïr encounters are Templars. Still, even if they are aware of this, they do not know about the ancient feud between the Templars and the Assassins. Only through the last words of those he assassinates Altaïr becomes aware that Al Mualim's explanations are not completely truthful. When his last victim turns out not to be Robert de Sable, but his lieutenant Maria Thorpe, Altaïr learns that he has been played by Robert. As Altaïr has assassinated both Crusaders and Saracens, Robert now has the means to convince Richard the Lionheart that he should ally himself with Saladin against the Assassins. This will give Robert enough battle strength to bring down the Masyaf fortress and recapture the artefact, the Apple of Eden. Afterwards, he can easily dispense of Richard. Once Altaïr knows about Robert's deceit, he immediately rides to Richard's camp to warn him. Richard is now confronted with two sides of the story, one presented by his fellow Christian Crusader

Robert de Sable, and the other by his enemy: an Arab Assassin. Not wanting to decide, Richard calls for an ordeal by combat. Altaïr defeats Robert, who then tells him that there were not nine but ten Templars who discovered the artefact in Solomon's Temple, the tenth being Al Mualim, who all this time had been conspiring against his fellow Templars to keep the Apple for himself.

A balanced approach

As to the purpose of religion in the game, as has already been discussed the nine people Altaïr has to assassinate are Christian as well as Muslim. The assassination targets do not particularly act the way they do because of their religious background, not even Garnier de Naplouse de Grand Master of the monastic order of the Knights Hospitaller. In fact, most of them use the war as a means to achieve their own goals. The one exception perhaps being Abu'l Nuqoud, who acts out of a sense of personal vengeance because his nature is not in keeping with the beliefs of his subjects and therefore they hate and despise him: 'Look at me! My very nature is an affront to the people I ruled'.

Another indication of the balanced approach the development team took are two conversations Altaïr overhears. One takes place in Acre between two Christians where one of them 'quotes' the Bible by saying 'Well, the Bible does say that God helps those that help themselves', upon which the other retorts 'Na, it doesn't actually. That's from one of Aesop's fables.[24] The Bible says quite the opposite in fact.' The other conversation takes place in Damascus between a Muslim and a Christian. It is about goods the Christians smuggle for the Muslims, including wine, a beverage forbidden to Muslims as it is alcoholic. The Muslim says 'It's only wine. Some can be fickle in their faith.' whereupon the Christian answers 'Your Holy Book says something on the subject: 'Leave them that they may eat and enjoy themselves and that hope may beguile them, for they will soon know. And never did We destroy a town but it had a term made known.''. The Muslim does not know what this means, but the Christian does not explain. Consequently, the gamer is as puzzled as the Muslim is, unless she knows the Qur'an. The quote is even more poignant because of the line of verse immediately preceding it, which reads 'Often will those who disbelieve wish that they had been Muslims'. What the Christian is hinting at is that Damascus will fall. With the verse suggesting that this is the will of Allah, because its Muslim population has sinned against their faith. In all this Altaïr remains 'neutral'. As Jade Raymond put it:

> … he does not have any religious beliefs. He is more of a spiritual guy. And I think that is also your role in the game, you are not taking sides. As an Assassin, you are a third party. And the Third Crusade is really this feuding for power with all of these guys on both sides of the fence and you are on the outside trying to stop the Third Crusade.[25]

So even though religion and the Third Crusade have a function in the narrative, they are a means to a different end. Still, even the feud between the Templars and the Assassins is not as pronounced as it is in later ASSASSIN'S CREED games. As Raymond makes it clear, the true opponent is the war itself and those who exploit it. In this Altaïr's role is that of the avatar, as it is the player who ultimately decides how she will act as Assassin, and whether or not she will help the oppressed (on both sides). Altaïr may have an American accent, but this is more a reminder of the fact that he is an avatar. The immersive world of ASSASSIN'S CREED, and Altaïr's apparel and features soon make the player (like myself) forget what he actually sounds like.

And even though his movements do not comply with his Arab background, they do fit his role as an Assassin. In all of this, he is a universal archetypal hero, who, in the aftermath of 9-11, gives us a very recognisable goal irrespective of our own cultural and religious background. Or as Sahar Mesri and her colleagues from the website ORIENTALISM IN MODERN POP CULTURE put it: 'Although the games (plural in the original) takes place within a historical context which draws attention to the 'Occident' versus the 'Orient', the writers of the story circumvent that altogether by making the main character, an extension of the player, stand for something outside of that binary: freedom.' [26]

List of images
- Image 1 Cut-out ASSASSIN'S CREED picture of Damascus used by TV₂ (© Ubisoft Montreal)
- Image 2 First vision of Altaïr's face in the trailer (capture ASSASSIN'S CREED E3 trailer © Ubisoft Montreal)
- Image 3 The only other view of his face in the trailer (capture ASSASSIN'S CREED E3 trailer © Ubisoft Montreal)
- Image 4 During most of the gameplay we only see Altaïr's back. (capture ASSASSIN'S CREED (2007) © Ubisoft Montreal)
- Image 5 Only when the player moves the camera we see him face-on. (capture ASSASSIN'S CREED (2007) © Ubisoft Montreal)
- Image 6 2007 promotional poster. (© Ubisoft Montreal)
- Image 7 capture from the video DEVELOPMENT DIARY: ARTISTIC DIRECTION (© Ubisoft Montreal)
- Image 8 In the first trailer a real actor is used. (capture ASSASSIN'S CREED II E3 trailer © Ubisoft Montreal)
- Image 9 Ezio in the launch trailer. (capture ASSASSIN'S CREED II launch trailer © Ubisoft Montreal)
- Image 10 Francisco Randez, original photo and rendered image. It should be noted that the rendered image was created for the later game ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS (2011) in which Randez returns as Desmond, Ezio and Altaïr. Source: ASSASSIN'S CREED WIKI.
- Image 11 Altair with the Apple of Eden in ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS (2011) (capture ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS © Ubisoft)
- Image 12 As an old man in the same game (capture ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS © Ubisoft)

Notes
[1] Because of several failed attempts, also by the Dutch government, to stop the film from being released, the actual release date was 27 March 2008, followed by the release of a slightly adapted version on 6 April 2008. One of the edits in the 6 April version was the removal of the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons, which Wilders had used without permission of the artist.
[2] A First Person Shooter is a game genre in which the gamer navigates through a virtual 3D game world seeing everything from a first person perspective. Typically, the gamer only sees the hands/arms of the game character wielding a weapon. The aim of the FPS is to survive in a hostile environment, killing as many enemies as possible with a vast array of weapons acquired in the game. FPS' are either played individually (player against the computer) or with other players in a team (also against the computer) or in multi-player mode ((teams of) players against each other).
[3] *CALL OF DUTY 4* is the first game of the popular series not to take place in WWII. The game is set in 2011 when civil war has broken out in Russia. The game starts with a mission against a separatist group lead by a man called Khaled Al-Asad (Arabic for 'The Immortal Lion') who has seized power in a small oil-rich Middle Eastern country. Al-Asad has extreme anti-Western views (in a speech he talks about a noble crusade against the foreign oppressor). When the game start Al-Asad appears to be the main antagonist, but later it turns out that he was aided by the Russian ultranationalist Imran Zakhaev.
[4] Website KUMA\WAR

[5] Cf. the TV-reporter who already in 1991 cautioned viewers watching footage of precision bombing in the Persian Gulf War that they should realize that what they were seeing was real, they were not watching a video game.

[6] The Crusades took place between 1095 and 1291. The First Crusade was proclaimed in November 1095 by Pope Urban II. In his proclamation, he called for the liberation of the Eastern Churches and the reconquest of the Holy Land, particularly the city of Jerusalem. Interestingly, in 1095, Jerusalem had been under Muslim rule for 400 years. According to mediaeval history scholar Thomas Asbridge, the Muslim rulers of Jerusalem were very tolerant of the Jewish and Christian nonbelievers. Urban's position as Pope, however, was under thread, so he proclaimed the Holy War to re-establish Papal power in Europe. The fact that Urban's accusation that 'a people from the kingdom of the Persians, a foreign race, a race absolutely alien to God…has invaded the land of (the) Christians (and) has reduced the people with sword, rapine and fire' (eye-witness account of Urban's sermon) was pure fantasy, did not matter as far as he was concerned. The Third Crusade, when Altaïr's story takes place, is famous because the two main opponents were Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb and Richard the Lionheart. According to Asbridge, the Crusades are the main origin of the enmity between the Christian and the Muslim world. That this enmity is still very much alive can also be witnessed in the reactions to the documentary series Asbridge made about the Crusades for the BBC in 2012. See the comments on the page: http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/tv/posts/the-crusades.

[7] Jade Raymond, producer of ASSASSIN'S CREED, interview Tokyo game show 2007.

8 As Heidi de Mare already pointed out the architecture of an Arab city is very different from that of a Western city. The cities in ASSASSIN'S CREED comply with this principle, especially as their layout is based on original maps. The cities are divided into separate districts for different ethnic groups or occupations. Street patterns are irregular and no two houses are alike. Other typical aspects of the Arab city that can be found in ASSASSIN'S CREED are courtyards, flat rooftops, screened windows, hanging bridges and exposed wooden beams.

[9] These small groups of wandering 'holy men' deep in prayer are a factual aspect of the Third Crusade.

[10] Seif El-Nasr, M., Al-Saati, M., Niedenthal, S. Milam, D. (2008), 'Assassin's Creed: A Multi-Cultural Read', Loading, 2 (3). Retrieved 16 December 2008 from http://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/view/51

[11] Ibid, p. 13.

[12] Ibid.

[13] The trailer can be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UM_fufj8f0. The actual game also begins with the footage of the trailer.

[14] In the game, the player can press a specific button to make Altaïr blend, so that he is less visible to guards. Altaïr can also use the crowd to blend in. However, blending is most effective when he uses the groups of wandering scholars, as shown in the trailer.

[15] Everything that is shown on the screen during gameplay is computed and depicted in real-time. To achieve this, Ubisoft developed a new game engine capable of creating a rich and believable world including a game character who actually can interact with every part in that world.

[16] We must also remember that this was a first release, so only Ubisoft fans who knew about and were interested in the game could have seen the interview and even then only if they used multiple channels to keep up-to-date.

[17] Jade Raymond, producer of ASSASSIN'S CREED, interview Tokyo game show in 2007.

[18] It should be noted that the game contains many (mini) cut-scenes and scripted events, so that showing Ezio face-on is not left up to the player.

[19] In the video THE MAKING OF ASSASSIN'S CREED: LINEAGE (2009).

[20] The article can be found here: http://www.lienmultimedia.com/article.php3?id_article=13885 (retrieved 19 June 2014).
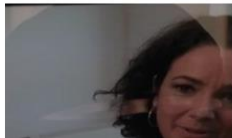
[21] See note 10.

[22] It should be noted that, judging from the game's end-titles, the French, Spanish, Italian, and German localized versions do not use voice actors who were specifically picked for their cultural background.

[23] In 2003, actor Cas Anvar wrote a very poignant piece about identity post 9-11, aptly entitled *Simply Human Nature: Would anybody want to hire us if we were all going to be known only as terrorists?* which can be found here: http://iranian.com/Arts/2003/December/Glass2/index.html (retrieved 19 June 2014). In it, he questions whether or not he has been deliberately hiding his Iranian identity, even before 9-11, because he did not want to be associated with the Persian/Iranian image of the time.

[24] Actually, it is illustrated by two of his fables.

[25] Interview by GAMETRAILERS.COM, Ubidays 2007. Again notice the use of you, speaking indirectly about Altaïr, confirming his status as avatar.

[26] The text can be found at http://modernorientalism.weebly.com/assassins-creed.html (retrieved 19 June 2014).

Stichting **IVMV**
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2 | 2014 – HET BEELD VAN MOSLIMS IN NL
Over moslims in de Nederlandse maatschappelijke verbeelding

INTRO
1. **Heidi de Mare**, 'Een ge(s)laagde beeldformatie? De maatschappelijke verbeelding van moslims in NL' **PDF-1**

KADER
2. **Heidi de Mare**, 'Beeldopvattingen in Nederland (kader 1). Een kleine genealogie van het Europese beeldbegrip' **PDF-2**
3. **Heidi de Mare**, 'Burger en publieke ruimte (kader 2). Cultureel vacuüm of verzadigd domein?' **PDF-3**

COLUMN
4. **Leo van Bergen**, 'Blikvanger. Anthonie van Leeuwenhoek en de moslima' **PDF-4**
5. **Gabriël van den Brink**, 'Beelden als voorbode' **PDF-5**
6. **Heidi de Mare**, 'Politieke comfort zone? Dan kijken we nog maar eens!' **PDF-6**
7. **Joost Pollmann**, 'Steekproef. De Groene Amsterdammer in bange tijden' **PDF-7**

BESPIEGELING
8. **Heidi de Mare**, 'Het *verlangen naar Mekka*. Samenspraak naar aanleiding van een tentoonstelling' **PDF-8**
9. **Abdel El Makhloufi & Harrie Teunissen**, 'De hadj naar Mekka (1). Een reis met een lange geschiedenis' **PDF-9**
10. **Abdel El Makhloufi & Harrie Teunissen**, 'De kern van de hadj (2). Hadj als spirituele ervaring' **PDF-10**
11. **Abdel El Makhloufi & Harrie Teunissen**, 'Arabische cultuur en islam (3). De rol van adellijkheid, stam en status' **PDF-11**

> **Waarschuwing vooraf**
> De voorbereidingen van dit nummer over moslims in de Nederlandse verbeelding gingen ruim een jaar geleden van start. Ons doel was zorgvuldig in kaart te brengen hoe de beeldvorming in deze verloopt. Inmiddels hebben zich in de wereld nieuwe, en soms huiveringwekkende ontwikkelingen voorgedaan, die het beeld van moslims in Nederland en daarbuiten beïnvloeden.
>
> Het leek ons zowel om praktische als om inhoudelijke redenen niet verstandig ook deze ontwikkelingen mee te nemen. Wellicht krijgen ze een plaats in een volgend nummer, gewijd aan geweld in beeld. Vooralsnog is de beeldvorming met betrekking tot gewone moslims al ingewikkeld genoeg.
>
> Voor het **beeldgebruik** in dit nummer, zie de toelichting in de bijdrage 'Vanuit de ooghoek'.