

Mia Thoresen

Gaming the Past

The Impact of Colonialism on the Depiction of
Archaeology in Video Games

Bachelor's project in Archaeology

Supervisor: Martin Callanan

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

A man sits in the shade, sheltering from the unrelenting heat from the sun, watching as the local people, his hired workforce, dig through the sand. He might have done all the planning. Certainly, all the financings. Maybe he even helps with the digging. Either way, this man is the sole reason they are all here. He has paid for the rights to excavate here, this country being just another of the many under occupation of his own country. Whatever finds might be done, thanks to his money and the hard work of the ones he has hired, will be his to do with as he wishes. A private museum at home, maybe? After all, it is not unheard of in these times, during the 19th century and partway into the 20th. This nameless man is far from the only aristocrat with a private collection at home. Undoubtedly the most famous of this type of people is the 5th Earl of Carnarvon, the man who funded the dig who led to the discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb and all treasures within. Most, if not all of these went back to England with him, and for years were stored in Highclere Castle, the family estate. For centuries, this was a common practice.

Today it would be heavily frowned upon because we know better. But did they do it simply because they did not know better? Or were there other reasons behind their choices? The colonial process has been going on since the sixteenth century, and unfortunately it still is today, with countries like England and France holding on to territories they claimed centuries ago.

In this paper I will look at the effects of colonialism on the portrayal of how archaeologists operate in popular media. This portrayal does not fit with how practitioners of the discipline behave today, but it is heavily influenced by the acts of people during the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century. Additionally, I will also look at postcolonial theory.

2.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this paper I will look at and answer the following questions:
What evidence of colonialism can be found in video games with archaeology? And how does this affect the portrayal of archaeology in those games?

3.0 DATA AND METHODS

I have chosen the Tomb Raider and Uncharted series for various reasons. One of them is that they are games I am familiar with as I have played them myself. The other is that the newer Tomb Raider games and the Uncharted series both are set in the present-day, ranging from 2007 until 2018 in terms of both publishing and setting. Another is that these are some of, if not the most popular games when one thinks of games including archaeology, as well as being overall successful.

As of December 2017 the total number of games sold for the whole franchise was 41.7 million copies, which includes five games for the PS3 and PS4, as well as one for the PS Vita. (Comicbook Staff, 2017)

For Tomb Raider, the total number is 81 million per early November 2020, although this number also includes the older games, not just the rebooted trilogy. (TombRaiderChronicles, 2020) In total, there are 17 Tomb Raider games.

For Tomb Raider, I have limited the games to the newest trilogy; Tomb Raider (2013), Rise of the Tomb Raider (2016) and Shadow of the Tomb Raider (2018). Otherwise, there are simply too many games in the series to narrow it down, and the Lara Croft from the original series is different in a number of ways to the Croft of the rebooted series.

For Uncharted, I have limited them to the main series; Uncharted: Drake's Fortune (2007), Uncharted 2: Among Thieves (2009), Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception (2011) and Uncharted 4: A Thief's End (2016), as these are the games where you play as Nathan Drake and they were not released for other platforms¹.

I will shorten the names of the games in the text; thus TR is the first Tomb Raider game, RotTR is Rise of the Tomb Raider, and SotTR is Shadow of the Tomb Raider.

4.0 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

4.1 (POST)STRUCTURALISM, POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES AND THEORY

Just as archaeology is tied to anthropology, so is colonialism and postcolonialism tied to structuralism and post-structuralism. The process of creating images and theories of us as well as others, has been a process of both disciplines since the 1850's, and it took more than a century for it to start breaking down (Gosden, p.161).

Structuralism was used in both disciplines to create an order, or structure to not only objects but to societies as well. In doing so, they chose to use the evolution of Western countries as the standard, thus the divide between 'Us' vs 'Others' was born. Every other country, especially African, South American and some Asian countries, their peoples, their belief system, and culture were then looked at through that lens, compared to countries such as England, France, and Germany.

Such a divide is harmful to everyone involved, as it furthers stereotypes and a belief that if you are from a Western country, you're better than those who are not. Theories and views like these have become so fused with not only archaeology and anthropology, but with people at a far more personal level, that truly dismantling it takes a long time. It's especially important that people working in these fields strive to change their views of others, but also of themselves, especially when they come from a Western country and work in non-Western parts of the world.

In the 1960's, structuralism started to unravel, as many viewed it as "[...] the last grand theory that tried to explain all human life through the universal structuring powers of the human mind [...]", since it was used to not only create divides but to take pleasure in the created tension. (Gosden, p. 165)

¹ i.e., PlayStation Vita or mobile phones

As Chris Gosden points out in the book *A Companion to Social Archaeology*, working with and respecting the local peoples, especially when it comes to those who are indigenous, is today not viewed as weak intellect, but rather strong intellect. It's a way of learning about the peoples directly from the source, rather than through outdated tales told by colonists with a biased view. In order to understand the differences, it's crucial to exhibit constructive self-criticism, especially in cases like this, but in general as well.

When it comes to the history of archaeology, the practice of the discipline in colonized places was promoted with an idealized image for most of the 20th century. Political implications were omitted, and, when it came to appropriating material culture in those colonized places, used to justify these actions. (Moro-Abadía, 2006, p.4)

The birth of postcolonial theory happened largely in the 1980's and -90's, showing a growing criticism of the way archaeology had been practiced in the past centuries, even before archaeology became its own discipline and earned its name.

It's worth noting that while the whole dissatisfaction and criticism was worldwide at this point, for the peoples of those areas it must have already been so since the practice of excavating in colonised lands became a thing. Watching their culture get stolen and not being able to do anything about it cannot have been easy back then, and maybe even less so now when their requests of repatriation are denied.

4.2 ARCHAEOGAMING

Andrew Reinhar is the author of the book *Archaeogaming. An Introduction to Archaeology in and of Video Games*, as well as the blog archaeogaming.com, in addition to being the person who came up with the term 'archaeogaming' in 2013. Reinhard claims that there are five ways to define what this term means. As not all are of use in this paper, I have chosen to focus on the three that are but explain them all.

The first is the physical aspect of the games, as in the cartridges or disks, the case they come in and the manual that follows. This also includes digital games and the metadata involved. The most known example of this is the Atari excavation that took place in New Mexico in 2014, where approximately 800 000 game cartridges had been dumped in 1983.

The second is to study the archaeology in videogames, and how the discipline is portrayed. What do the developers think when they create the game, and how does that affect the way they choose to portray this discipline? What do the players have in mind before, during and after having played them, and will their opinion change? Playing games like *Tomb Raider* and *Uncharted* can help with understand the tropes the developers have chosen to incorporate and why the popular version of archaeology still remains, as well as how they affect the way we play these games.

The third theme is examining how one can use methods normally applied in archaeology to look at the synthetic space that exists in the game worlds. Typologies, context and how we understand it, looting or collecting artefacts, maybe even photography from other points of view are all part of this.

The fourth is how we begin to understand how the way players view and interact with the game world stems from the choices made when it comes to the chosen designs of the game. This can include which areas the game allows players to access and items that are placed in ways that they will draw attention and create an invitation to explore further.

The fifth is about how the mechanics and codes of the games interact with the players, as well as the deeper meanings behind the way archaeologists interested in gaming can glean from them.

In summary, these themes can be put into two overarching themes: material (the games themselves including any packaging and manuals) and immaterial (the game worlds).

When talking on the portrayal of archaeology in a recent interview, Reinhard expressed the following:

For historical based games I think the narrative comes first, you know, they wanna make a good story, the company wanna have interesting characters doing interesting things, they wanna have plenty of conflict, plenty of places to go and interact. (Alabama Archaeological Society, 2021, 20:06-20:20)

While indie games have become more and more popular these last few years², most of the games sold are still AAA-games. In general, indie games offer a more relaxed style of games, whereas AAA-games focus on action and excitement.

A team at Leiden University, consisting of Angus Mol, Csilla Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke, Krijn Boom, Aris Politopoulos, and Vincent Vandemeulebroucke, created a research group by the name of VALUE: Video Games and Archaeology at Leiden University in early 2015. (2016, p. 11). The same year, they conducted a study, asking 123 students doing their BA or ME, as well as 46 staff members to complete a survey on gaming, the second half of the it being focused on gaming and archaeology.

On the question of whether or not they enjoyed the archaeology in games, just over half³ said they do find it 'extremely' or 'a lot, but when it comes to the importance of it, they viewed it as average or neutral. When VALUE asked about how the archaeology of games represents archaeology itself, the feedback was mostly negative, noting how it was not so much about collecting artefacts, but more on hunting for treasures and calling it "[...] more looting than actual archaeology." (Mol et al. 2016, p. 13). Further on, the participants responded that for most people, 'real' archaeology is neither popular nor exiting enough for the medium of videogames.

A game that features elements of archaeology is the MMORPG The Elder Scrolls Online, which features the ability to excavate antiquities after joining the Antiquarian's Circle. Here, the player will scry to determine the location of an object and will be given a search area. Before one can scry however, the player must purchase maps. Once in the area, the player will locate a mound of dirt and begin the excavation. A marked off square will appear, and there are three tools available; one which will be used to narrow

² Like the farming game Stardew Valley, which sold over 10 million copies over the course of four years

³ 51%

down the exact location of the antiquity, as well as a brush and trowel to remove the dirt, much like in real life. It is important to take care during the excavation, as using the trowel with too few layers of dirt between the tool and antiquity will result in damaging it. Once uncovered, the antiquity will be sent off to be studied overnight, and the player receives correspondence the next morning with information about the antiquity.

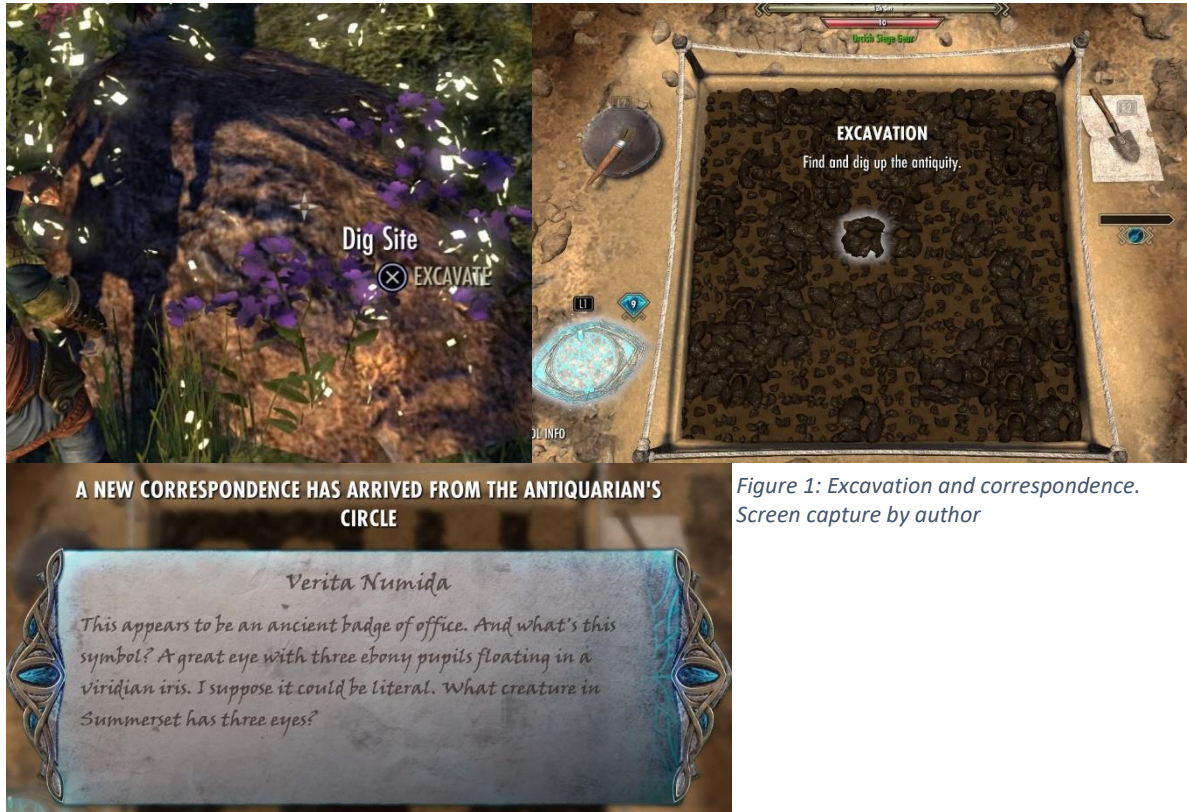


Figure 1: Excavation and correspondence.
Screen capture by author

If one ignores the part of scrying in order to learn where to search, it is a rather realistic portrayal of the excavation part of archaeology, and it is clear that there is knowledge behind the way it works.

4.3 WHAT IS LOOTING?

Now that we know what archaeogaming is, we'll take a look at looting, both in real life and in games, to see how the fictional worlds are affected by the real one.

The basis of many of today's museums stem from people like Lord Carnarvon; private collections that were later on gifted to museums or institutions with the message that they were only gifted to create public displays. Several museums would not exist without such collections.

Recent years have seen an increase in the awareness of the problematic origins of museums such as The British Museum. The act of repatriation has been high on the list of wishes, and in some cases demands, from the peoples and countries the artefacts were looted from. Or, in other words, stolen.

The term itself stems from the 1800's, from when the British Empire were taking control over India, with the actual word being the anglicised version of the Hindu word 'lut' which means 'stolen property', which again has roots in the Sanskrit 'lo(p)tram', which means to 'plunder'. (Zimmer, 2020) (Ghiring, 2020)

Robert Phillimore, an influential English judge, claimed in 1854 that "the acquisitions of war belong to the state" (Ghiring, 2020), and that all the states that at the time were considered civilised would agree to this. Really, this is just a roundabout way of stating that the too-familiar saying 'finder's keepers' is legal in these cases.

This is brought up in the movie Black Panther (Marvel Studio, 2018), where the protagonist Eric, also known as Killmonger, visits what the movie calls 'Museum of Great Britain', a clear nod to the British Museum. He tells the expert of the African artefacts that he'll take the items off her hands, and when she says the items aren't for sale, he responds "How do you think your ancestors got these? You think they paid a fair price? Or did they take it, like they took everything else?" (TNT, 2020, 1:09-1:15)

When translating colonial looting in real life to the looting portrayed in these games, the similarities aren't so striking or obvious.

In video games, there is no definition of looting, as 'loot' is everything from what you take from a chest deep in a forgotten cave, to what you take from the enemy you just killed or a random corpse on the roadside. Loot is also generally randomly generated, unless for a specific quest; killing the exact same enemy twice or looting the same chest multiple times over multiple playthroughs of the game will not generate the exact same items you gain.

This paper will focus on the portrayal of looting we see in real life; that of tombs, sites, and artefacts.

Here there are similarities, mostly in the way of the complete disregard the PC and real-world colonizers have when it comes to the artefacts they take. Croft or Drake picking up an item they come across, taking it home with them is no different from any person going into another country and taking what they want because they believe they have a right to it.

Kratos, the player character in the God of War series, remarks upon how the dead person has no need for the hacksilver they were buried with, upon looting a coffin in God of War (2018); "He can no longer use it. We can." (TagBackTV, 2021,19:05-19:13) This seems to be a general consensus when it comes to the history of looting and graverobbing throughout history, whether it be because the person(s) doing the looting needs the objects in order to sell them for money they need, or a rich person 'needs' them to display them in a private museum.

But is it different if the looting is done with good deeds in mind, say for instance there is war in the area and the objects needs to be removed in order to protect them, if it is done without permission from the government of the country the objects are located? Wars tend to cause destruction of lives and property, and in several cases bombings will, intentionally or not, permanently eradicate items and sites that exist nowhere else.

The first item Croft loots in *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* is a dagger. This is to keep the leader of the local Trinity faction from taking it for himself, and by doing so, Croft sets in motion events that literary shakes the local community. Here, again, do we see the classical example of the 'heroic archaeologist' who takes it upon themselves to stop the 'bad guys' from gaining access to something that can be used to change the world.

"Why do you want it? To steal it? To sell it?" Unuratu asks Croft, to which she replies "No. I just can't let Trinity-- the Cult-- get to it first. They're too dangerous."
(RabidRetrospectGames, 2018, 2:52:28-2:52:38)

Drake and his friends too are not only out there to find treasures and get rich, but to stop others from attempting to get a hold of the very same objects. And Drake, much like Croft, turns to looting first.

Of course, it does not work like that in real life; there are no supernatural artefacts that can allow the user to re-make the world or gain immortality, but one can argue that the way it's portrayed reflects artefacts and cultural heritage sites around the world. And there are, undoubtedly, artefacts of great religious importance to all peoples, items viewed as signs of their creation and that they are meant to rule. Supernatural elements and believes have always existed in one form or another.

5.0 ANALYSIS

With the knowledge of both archaeogaming and looting in hand, we will now analyse how these factors are incorporated in *Tomb Raider* and *Uncharted*.

In doing the research for this paper, I played through parts of the three *Tomb Raider* games, all of *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*, and watched playthroughs of the first three games of the *Uncharted* series. I have played through all these games previously, but I needed a refresher in some cases as there is not only a lot going on in the games but writing this paper and doing research on colonialism offers a new lens through which I view the representations of archaeology the games offer.

Playing through, I paid more attention than I have done previously to what was being said and done, both by Croft and Drake, but also their companions as well as comments by other characters in the various settings of the games. Doing so, I noted down several instances in which what was said and done by both the protagonists and antagonists as well as their companions, and it quickly became apparent that the issues were too many to note down. What follows is some of those instances.

5.1 ANALYSIS OF LOOTING IN *TOMB RAIDER* AND *UNCHARTED*

The way archaeology in most games is portrayed is vastly different to how we as students, or those with a degree and experience in it, view it and know it to be like. With

each lecture and book, and with experience both on the field and outside it, we learn what it's truly like. But games and other popular media like films usually tend to portray it in ways that will catch the viewer's or gamer's attention.

Games and movies like Tomb Raider, Indiana Jones and Uncharted, while including archaeology, places the discipline to the side, focusing instead on the action. There is shooting, running, climbing, trying to reach the site(s) before the 'bad guys'. There is almost always something supernatural involved, and the looting and destruction of heritage and archaeological sites are passed off as 'well, it comes with the job'. The same with murder, and not just a person here or there, but uncountable groups, that serve as a barrier between the character and the goal. Only the people in charge, are the face of the enemy - the rest have no names and will in several cases wear helmets or something obscuring their faces. They're collateral damage, same as the ruins.

The Uncharted games are, at least, honest about Drake not being an archaeologist but a treasure hunter and seeker of fame, unlike Croft, who has at least a Master's degree and at the time of RoTR is a PhD candidate. Croft's first expedition in the rebooted series, starts out as an archaeological expedition, albeit one that will be made into a documentary as the leading archaeologist on the team is out for glory and fame and in need of money. Croft herself wants to know the truth, there because her best friend is a descendant of the ruler of the fabled island Yamatai. Much like Atlantis, it is believed the island is simply a myth, but as it is stated in the game, myths have roots in reality.

TOMB RAIDER REBOOT:

There's no wonder Lara Croft has such little qualms taking items from whatever 'exotic' location she ventures to; in a flashback to her childhood in Shadow of the Tomb Raider, we see the Croft Manor houses a private museum of artefacts collected by her late father. Growing up with this, with her family's wealth and a father who was too often away on expeditions, has clearly affected her as a person.

In fact, some of Croft's expeditions are connected to her father and his work, specifically the setting in the second game, Rise of the Tomb Raider. Additionally, bonus content for the game allows you to explore parts of the dilapidated Croft Manor, where Croft seeks to find clues about the circumstances surrounding her mother's death and the subsequent obsession of her father to 'find a cure for death' which later ended in his murder-apparent-suicide.

The first item you find in TR is an Hannya Mask placed in a box in an underground chamber that is currently used as a butchery by at least one person living on the island after having survived being stranded, seen in FIG 2. There is no context behind this mask so conveniently placed in a metal box on a table. Bringing items out of their context in the ways the games does leads to many questions. Why is it there? Why bring it there? Why is it in a box? Where did they find it originally? Did the person(s) chopping up meat bring it there? Or was it someone before that, as the room appears, based on construction and material, to be dated to WW2⁴?

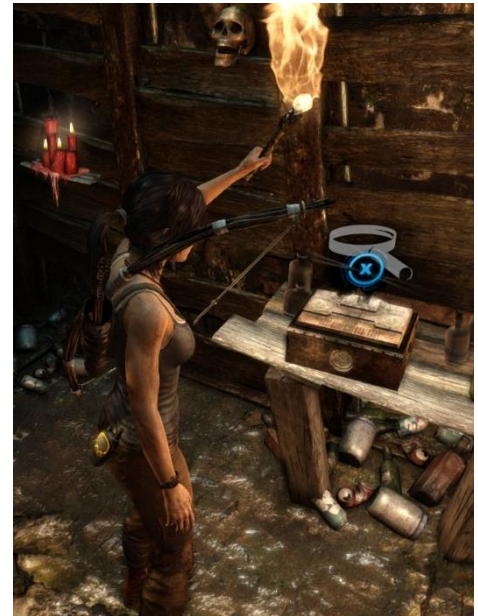


Figure 2: A box containing the first relic Croft comes across, a Hannya mask. Screen capture by author

Non-archaeologists might not think of such questions, might not wonder why these choices were made. Was this a deliberate choice to make the items easier to find, to save the player from having to manually locate and dig up the items? Maybe it was to make the players interested in continuing to locate these artefacts, because they're easy to find this way. After all, one might claim that not everyone would be interested in doing it 'the actual way' and the developers would prefer to have every player examine these artefacts and not ignore them. They all tell stories of the worlds they've built in the games, so it makes sense they want us as players to find the information. This goes for the documents in the game as well – together, they create immersion.

As someone who studies or has an education in and experience with archaeology, it makes you question how regular players of the game view these choices, and how those views can differ from ours.

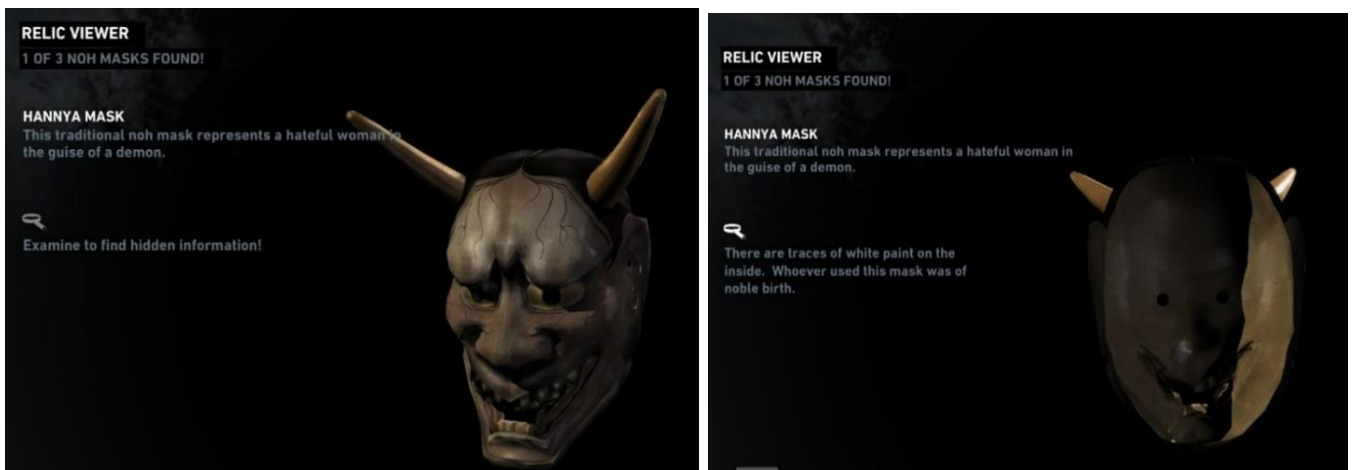


Figure 3: Some relics offer more information upon further inspection. Screen capture by author

The first artefact, or relic as the game calls them, is a Hannya Mask, shown in FIG. 3. The games allow you to use the controllers/mouse to turn the relics around, giving you more information on them. In the instance of this mask, it's paint on the backside. Others might have price tags, showing they are nothing more than mass-produced copies for sale, or a name inscribed on a toy or the date on the back of a photograph.

⁴ based on the presence of Japanese soldiers on the island during that period

All these relics belonged to someone, at some point, whether they were just purchased at a gift shop, or a treasured possession they kept with them at all times.

They may have been looted long before Croft's arrival at the island in TR, or the other locations in the sequels, as proven by the lack of context for these finds, but this does not change the fact that she is participating in looting.

There is a difference here, though, between the first game and the other two; we know that the crew, which includes Croft and a senior archaeologist with two PhD's, have the rights to excavate on the island. There is, in fact, a lot riding on their findings, savings having been poured into financing the expedition with the hopes that their finds will more than cover the costs.

UNCHARTED

Nathan Drake, the protagonist of the four main games of the Uncharted series, had a childhood in great contrast to Croft's. He and his brother were orphans, and Nathan lived in an orphanage for years. Both wanted fame and fortune, and the brothers changed their surname to Drake, claiming to be descendants of Sir Francis Drake.

Already at the very start of the first game of the series, Drake's Fortune, Drake has just brought what was supposedly Francis Drake's coffin from the bottom of the sea, and mere moments later it's revealed he did so without any permits from Panama. The fact that the coffin in this case was void of any remains do not affect the outcome; there are still artefacts, most importantly here a notebook by Sir Drake. Nathan Drake can claim it belongs to him all he wants; the fact of the matter is still that 1: he had no permits to do this expedition, and 2: his claim to be Sir Drake's descendant is born from their mother's theory that Sir Drake had descendants, and no actual proof. Not that being so would change matters either way.

In fact, when it comes to legal vs illegal, it is not until the end of the fourth and last game of the main series, A Thief's End, that Drake and his wife Elena move on to doing it legally.

"But from here on out, we are gonna operate on a strictly legal basis." says Elena. (RabidRetrospectGames, 2016, 7:17:54-7:17:58)

It is worth noting, however, that the fees to pay for the permits are brought from them selling old coins from their latest adventure; coins they brought back illegally, though unknowingly, as they had no permits for exploring the place, much less to bring something back. The fact that they can do everything legally from that point forward stems from previously having done something illegal.

The artefacts are a lot harder to find in this series; whereas the boxes they are stored in in TR makes them easy to spot, and they are marked on the map so you can choose to return to previous areas to pick them up if you missed them, in Uncharted they are simply marked by a small light, as though sunlight reflecting off of a shard of glass on the ground.



Figure 4: The glimmer and the treasure located in an old tower. Screen capture by author

In choosing this way of placing the artefacts, they are left in their original context, unlike with the Tomb Raider series, but it also means they're harder to find and are less tied to the story. The documents are easier; pages placed on a table or in the leather bag next to a skeleton.

Reaching the true beginning of the main story in chapter 3 (The Malaysia Job) shows that Drake has given up on treasure hunting and is now working for a salvage team. The fact that he misses the excitement and rewards are very clear, in that he chooses to stay underwater with mere minutes of air left on his scuba tank, and how disappointed he looks when opening one of the crates to find copper wire.

When asked to do a job in Malaysia, Drake asks his boss if he managed to get the permits, and when learning he didn't but plans to go through with it anyway, Drake replies "No permit means no go." (RabidRestrospectGames, 9.5.2016, 54:48-54:50) Showing he has at least learnt something from his years of treasure hunting, although it's easy enough to see how much he misses that life. When it comes to the artefacts in the Uncharted series, including documents, there is no care taken to protect them. Documents that are 300 years old will be waved around, folded, put in a back pocket or Drake's notebook. There are no protective measures in place to keep these artefacts preserved, to make sure they're not ruined.

Nor are there asked any questions as to how these artefacts, especially the documents, could have survived for so long. In Chapter 2 of A Thief's End, Drake climbs the ruins of an old Spanish prison, a place where pirates were held captured until hung. Inside, Drake finds a document dated September 18th and 20th of 1696. The survival of this document is not questioned at the moment, but just after, Drake comments on how he's surprised the prison tower itself is still standing, claiming that the Spaniards really knew how to build prisons. It is not until chapter 15 that Drake wonders about how a document could have survived all this time, and it seems odd to only do so after having found numerous documents dating from the late 17th century until the early 19th.

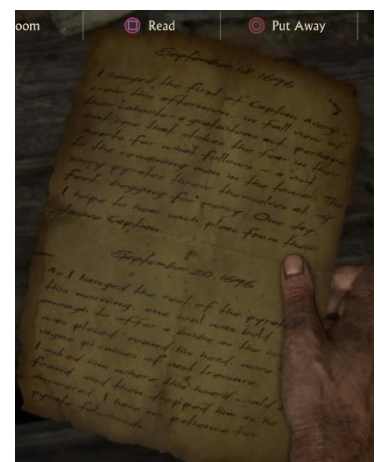


Figure 5: A document dated 1696 found in the same tower as the Navaja knife. Screen capture by author

The disregard to the artefacts is also clear in chapter 7 of the game, where Drake's older brother takes a hammer to a cross dating back to the mid- to late 17th century, belonging to famous pirate Henry Avery,

in order to access the document they suspect is hidden within. Doing so of course ruins it, breaking off the bottom part.

5.2 – THE AFTERMATH

So, what happens next? What happens to all the objects collected on these expeditions? There are simply no mentions of this in either of the games.

During the epilogue of the fourth Uncharted game, Drake's daughter gains access to a cupboard with various artefacts in it, like one of the pirate coins from the same game, and the skull from Among Thieves.

When it comes to Croft's items, it's complete guesswork. This may stem from the fact that the artefacts you as the player collect throughout the games are optional; if you so wish to, you can ignore them completely and focus instead on the stories the games tell. But, as shown when it comes to some of the objects, not all are original, but rather mass-produced copies sold at gift shops, and yet placed in the very same type of containers as the authentic artefacts. One would expect Croft to simply leave these items behind, as they have no archaeological value. And yet, an argument can still be made for the fact that they do. In terms of the first game, these artefacts are brought to the island from the outside world, not made there. They tell the story of the people who perished before or after being stranded. One such item is a toy with the name of a child inscribed on it with a permanent marker. Other such items might be pictures of the wife and/or family of someone who never returned home, as seen in RoTR, where Croft can find such a picture, a remnant from a Soviet soldier.

An argument can be made for these objects being of archaeological importance as well, because just like items from hundreds of years ago, they too belonged to people who stayed in these areas. How long ago, or for how long, does not matter. These material remains still hold value and information.

In Drake's home, all the evidence of his previous life has been packed away in the attic. Walking through the space reveals several artefacts looted during the adventures of the previous games, and Drake will offer up a small comment when picking them up.

6.0 RESULTS

The portrayal of archaeologists seems to sadly be heavily influenced by the history of colonialism.

When choosing how to portray archaeology and looting in games, it is easy to wonder why the developers made the choice to base it so heavily on a past we no longer embrace, but rather look on as faulty and wrong.

It may be because such practices have been so ingrained in the minds of people, especially in the wake of the Indiana Jones movies.

In virtually every case where we see the person we play as – not see through their eyes only – the character is white. With the exception of Croft and not even a handful other women, almost every archaeologist character is a man. Often, we can find them dressed in the classical gear of the stereotypical archaeologist – khakis and a pith helmet, or a fedora. Maybe a whip, like Professor Jones. But never actual archaeological equipment that's in use today.

Much like with their predecessor and inspiration Dr. Jones, both Croft and Drake are portrayed as saviours, the only ones who can stop other people from looting, hinder calamities and make sure the world does not go under.

The problem with this, and this is especially apparent in RoTR and SoTR, is that Croft and Drake are both white people who are saviours of other peoples, and almost always those peoples are people of colour. In SoTR, the villain is part of the group of people Croft helps.

Choosing this portrayal is problematic and reinforces the colonial views that the local populations who are people of colour are incapable of fending for themselves and need someone to rescue them, in some cases from themselves.

Conversations overheard in *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* reinforces the way the locals view archaeologists, negatively; first that the archaeologists “pay us to dig up our own relics, then take the profits” with the second being “tourists bring money; archaeologists just take.” (Winter, 2021, p. 16)

The reason that Croft later introduces herself as a researcher instead of an archaeologist, might just be because she's heard the way archaeologists here are viewed, wanting to keep herself from being looked at in the same way.

This subject is brought up by Matthew Winter in his article 'Beyond Tomb and Relic. Anthropological and Pedagogical Approaches to Archaeogaming' for the March 2021 edition of *Near Eastern Archaeology*. In the article, Winter also brings up how problematic it is that Croft, when examining artefacts, does so with the use of texts written by non-natives who came to the areas much later in order to colonise. These texts are by English explorers and Spanish conquistadors, not by the natives from hundreds of years ago or today. By using newer texts from people who saw the locals as barbaric and inferior, rather than consult the current locals when it comes to the meaning of the old texts and artefacts, the game developers have once again made the choice to push the colonial narrative to the front and centre.

Another thing that they have chosen to do, is to let Croft find, purchase, craft, and wear armours and outfits used by the native people, outfits that holds meaning to them, based on symbolism and colours. Doing so only reinforces how different Croft is from the locals, that she does not belong there and is not a part of them, and it becomes more harmful when the clothing belongs to people of colour. Two of the outfits can be excused in *Shadow*, as they are used to make her blend in and not be discovered by the enemies who are also part of the native populace who inhabit the hidden and long-forgotten city named Paititi. The first of the two is even given to her by the rightful leader, the Rebel Queen Unuratu, with the second being an outfit the guards of Amaru, who calls himself Kukulkan.



Figure 6: Croft in outfits from Paititi. Screen captures by author

Building even further upon this way of portraying Croft as the saviour, she is tasked with locating three ceremonial items for the future king, Unuratu's son Etzli. Originally a task for the father, in this case Etzli's surrogate father Uchu, it is given to Croft because Uchu has more important things to take care of due to the situation with Amaru and the Order of Trinity that Amaru belongs to.

Amaru himself is an archaeologist, with a doctorate, and is one of the archaeologists the local population is speaking of when they talk about how all archaeologists just take things for the profit. He is out to gather two items; a dagger, and a box, that can be used to remake the world. Amaru was taken in and raised by Gualtiero de Luca Dominguez, a Cardinal, after taking an interest in and joined the Order of Kukulcan, which had infiltrated Paititi and manipulated its leaders since the start of the 17th century. Amaru took the name Pedro Dominguez, and then worked to climb the ranks of Trinity as well as studying to gain a doctorate degree in archaeology. All his work was to protect Paititi from the outside world, to keep the city and its people safe. His fear is so great that his dying words towards Croft is asking her to promise to keep the city safe.

7.0 DISCUSSION AND WAYS FORWARD

In playing the games, researching, and writing this paper I have learned to be even more aware of the portrayal of archaeology in video games. This is not to say my enjoyment of them have in any way lessened, but I am more critical of the role these characters play. In playing the games again, I have picked up on conversations between NPC's I had previously missed or not given much thought to, such as the way inhabitants view archaeologists in general, or comments about Croft saving them and how much they owe her.

There are more games than these that contains the same issues seen in Tomb Raider and Uncharted, and, unfortunately, we cannot expect the perfect representation of cultures that differs from the developers and those involved in the planning and creation of video games. Games studios as a general have become better at hiring people with different gender identities, sexual orientations, beliefs, and cultures. This is absolutely a step in the right direction, but there is of course more than this needed, and looking at the history of colonialism and post-colonialism, it sadly seems it will take time.

Yet, it is important as well to not expect perfection while also looking at these games with a critical eye. To be critical of the media we consume is always important, but it does not mean we cannot enjoy it at the same time. But if games are to be representation, it is more important now than ever to have that representation be real, and to get rid of stereotypes, especially the harmful ones, because they only serve to perpetuate the differences build over the last centuries. As consumers, we need to take a stand and let those choosing to perpetuate these representations know that they are harmful and no longer accepted.

Video games are supposed to be fun, but also inclusive, not alienating large masses. If someone from a culture needs to be rescued, let someone from that culture be the saviour, not a generic white person from an entirely different culture, especially when it comes to people like Croft and Drake who are only there for personal gains, be they monetary or for knowledge. Game developers should think more on this subject, hire people who knows what it is like to be misrepresented and always presented as the ones in need of saving, when they are in fact perfectly capable of saving themselves.

Working with not only the local peoples but also historians and archaeologists, especially if these are locals as well, is really important in order to assure that the representation is accurate.

GAMING TERMINOLOGY

AAA-games/triple A-games: Published and/or developed by large game companies, i.e. EA Games or Rockstar. The amount of people included, and size of the budget makes these the Hollywood of games.

Indie games: Few people involved, in most cases 2-10 people. Often crowdfunded, through sites like Kickstarter. Will often deal with subjects not brought up by AAA-games.

PC: player character. This is the character the players themselves will play as, and in some instances have created at the start of the game.

NPC: non-player character, the opposite of a PC.

Antagonist: The "villain" of the game, who is the foil to the protagonist

Protagonist: The main character/PC who is seen as the hero

MMORPG: Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game

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