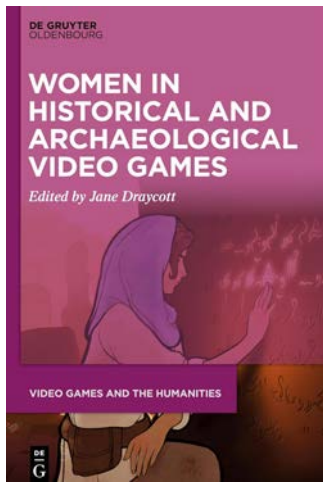# Book Review

Women in Historical and Archaeological Video Games *(Video Games and the Humanities, Volume 9)*

Draycott (J.) (ed.) Pp. vi + 370, colour ills. Berlin and Boston: Walter De Gruyter, 2023. Paper, £27.50 (Cased, £86). ISBN: 978111356624.

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Women in Historical and Archaeological Video Games is a collection of articles exploring the role of women in video games, the games studios creating those games, and the culture surrounding them at the time of release and earlier. On the whole, it achieves its goal of examining the many factors around releasing games with female protagonists, and the results and reaction of the wider game-playing public. The book would be a useful text in school departments such as Sociology, Graphic Design, History and Classics. There would also be a place for it in any Business Studies department as the video games business is worldwide and has significant economic heft, being the largest entertainment industry in the world, expecting to gross $282 billion dollars by 2026 according to current predictions.

Each chapter, written by different authors, covers a separate specific part of a video game, covering the character design, writing, or general historical accuracy of women portrayed in specific games, as well as games grouped together by theme, or historical period depicted. Cultural backlash to women appearing in the games themselves is covered as well, with frequent mention of 'Gamergate' appearing in many chapters. Not a great amount of detail is shared about it, but considering the size, spontaneity, aggression, and contradictory information surrounding that movement, it would take a whole book itself to explain the movement, and this text does a reasonable job of including the criticisms from 'gamergaters' of various video games and an equally admirable job of responding to them. As a sociological text it tells us a lot about attitudes within the gaming community and the way that historical accuracy can take second place to economics, as seen by at least one company having to rework a storyline to allow their work to be sold in one particular country. More importantly, this book explains the actual historical context of the games and weighs up the accuracy of the games compared to history. The book does jump between periods, and is by no means comprehensive, but covers much of the most well-known games and the historical context of women portrayed in an interesting and informative way and is a good way for both the informed and relatively uninitiated to find out more. In terms of historical accuracy of games such as *Assassin's Creed*, it is almost the norm now to find this game playing in museums in discovery mode to give a tour around ancient Greece, Egypt, and Anglo-Saxon Britain, and it is pretty accurate. Playing as a woman perhaps used to mean that there were more pitfalls, and your character may have had fewer choices, but in the more recent versions of games this seems to have been largely rectified and, whilst there is a discussion about historical accuracy, there were cultures where women were more likely to be visible and indeed warriors!

In terms of wider sociological aspects, the text is also an interesting explanation of modern attitudes towards women and people from the LGBT community from within the games industry and its general reluctance to feature women as protagonists, due to claims that they aren't financially viable. Several chapters push back on this, referencing the split of 41% of gamers identifying as female, and 59% as male. Where there are female protagonists, they are often designed for the male gaze, whereas male protagonists are power fantasies to be emulated, thereby ignoring 41% of the market and significant financial opportunities, the context of female contributions in history, and opportunities for modern female role models.

We would recommend wider reading around specific subjects covered within the book, particularly with regard to historical accuracy, not because the articles are necessarily incorrect, but they come from a specific viewpoint which may not be appropriate for wider historical learning or indeed video games; however, this is a very good starting point.