

= Age of Empires (video game) =

Age of Empires (AoE) is a history @-@ based real @-@ time strategy video game developed by Ensemble Studios and published by Microsoft . The game uses the Genie , a 2D sprite @-@ based game engine . The game allows the user to act as the leader of an ancient civilization by advancing it through four ages (the Stone , Tool , Bronze , and Iron Ages) , gaining access to new and improved units with each advance . It was later ported to Pocket PCs with Windows , resulting in a version very similar to the PC game .

Originally touted as Civilization meets Warcraft , some reviewers felt that the game failed to live up to these expectations when it was released . Despite this , it received generally good reviews , and an expansion pack , titled The Rise of Rome , was released in 1998 . Both the original Age of Empires and the expansion pack were later released as " The Gold Edition " . A sequel , Age of Empires II , was released in 1999 .

= = Gameplay = =

Age of Empires requires the player to develop a civilization from a handful of hunter @-@ gatherers to an expansive Iron Age Empire . To assure victory , the player must gather resources in order to pay for new units , buildings and more advanced technology . Resources must also be preserved , as no new resources become available as the game progresses , for example , trees that are cut down will not grow back .

Twelve civilizations are available . Each with individual sets of attributes , including a varying number of available technologies and units . Each civilization has technologies unique to them , so that no civilization possesses all the technologies possible within the game .

A major component of the game is the advancement through four ages . These are the Stone Age (Mesolithic / Nomad / Paleolithic) , the Tool Age (Neolithic / Chalcolithic) , the Bronze Age and the Iron Age . Advancement between ages is researched at the Town Center , and each advancement brings the player new technologies , weapons , and units .

= = = Modes = = =

The game features four single @-@ player campaigns in which the player is required to complete specific objectives . Campaigns are a collection of scenarios which are completed in a linear fashion . The campaigns follow the history of the Egyptian , Greek , Babylonian and Yamato civilizations ; there 's also a complete campaign specially made for the demo version that takes place in the Hittite Empire . Aside from the campaigns , there is a game mode called " random map " , in which a different map is generated for each new game . Variations of random map , such as the resource @-@ heavy " death match " , are also available .

Age of Empires also facilitated online and network play with up to 8 people simultaneously . Because the network play is less sophisticated than that of modern games , lag and disconnections often occur . Until June 19 , 2006 , multiplayer gameplay was supported by Microsoft Gaming Zone . At that point , the Zone abandoned support of most CD @-@ ROM games , including Age of Empires and Age of Empires II : The Age of Kings .

The creation of user @-@ made scenarios or series of scenarios (campaigns) for the game was made possible using the Scenario Builder . This tool is simpler and easier to learn than comparable editors used in more modern games , but it has fewer capabilities as a result . Ensemble Studios used the Scenario Builder to make the single @-@ player campaigns which shipped with the retail game . Various unofficial sites exist where custom scenarios can be submitted and downloaded . In late 2005 , it was discovered that by modifying various data files , units present in the beta versions of the game could be made available in the editor . Some obscure units include a spaceship and a hero that changes ownership when units move near it . Through data editing , the rules of unit placement can also be modified . This allows units to be placed on any terrain and on top of other units , which creates new possibilities for design . Other significant discoveries include new terrain

templates , a mode to triple each unit 's hitpoints and a tool to edit map sizes .

== Civilizations ==

Players choose to play as one of 12 civilizations . The civilizations are sorted into four distinct architectural styles , based on East Asian , Mesopotamian , Egyptian and Greek architecture , which determine their in @-@ game appearance .

== Technology ==

Technology is researched at specific buildings , to which they are generally related ; for example , religious research is done in temples and improved armor is researched in the storage pit . Technological advances come in many categories , such as military upgrades (better arms and armor for units) , economic upgrades (increasing the efficiency of resource gathering) , religious upgrades (faster conversion rates and more abilities for priests) and infrastructure upgrades (stronger fortifications and more resilient buildings) . As basic technology research is completed , more advanced technologies may become available . Some technologies are not available to certain civilizations .

Technology plays a very important role in the strategy of the game . As a civilization progresses through the ages , technology becomes more and more expensive , which makes collecting the necessary resources to research them difficult . As a consequence , balancing the workforce of villagers across the various resources can make the difference between victory and defeat .

== Units ==

Players control a variety of Civilian and Military units . Most units can be upgraded through research (e.g. faster gathering for villagers , stronger armor for military units , and longer range for archers) .

Land @-@ based units are the most prevalent in gameplay . Villagers are the most basic units in Age of Empires . Their primary function is to collect resources , cutting down trees for wood , mining for stone and gold , and hunting , foraging , farming , or fishing to acquire food . Villagers can also construct buildings and repair both buildings and naval vessels , and are capable of engaging in hand @-@ to @-@ hand combat when necessary . Priests are non @-@ combat units which can heal allied units or " convert " enemy units (in which case the target unit changes allegiance) . Infantry units , such as clubmen , swordsmen , and hoplites use melee combat to attack at short range . Mounted units include chariots , cavalry , and war elephants . Archers , mounted or on foot , attack at range . Siege units are of two types : catapults and ballista . Catapults hurl stones which generate blast damage , affecting all units in a small area , and are especially effective against buildings and groups of units . The ballista is less damaging against buildings and units , but it fires faster and is cheaper than the catapult .

Nautical units often play a secondary role , but can be essential to victory . Fishing boats are similar to villagers in that they can gather fish . Merchant ships trade resources from the stockpile and exchange it for gold at another player 's dock , with the amount of gold earned being relative to the distance between both docks . Transport ships carry land units from one area of land to another . As well as attacking enemy ships , warships can be very effective in attacking land @-@ based units close to the shoreline (because melee units cannot fight back) . Warships come either as galleys which fire arrows or triremes which launch bolts or boulders (very effective against buildings near the shoreline) .

Unit types are identical , regardless of civilization (though certain civilizations may have improved variations of these units) . So , for example , a Korean Choson broad swordsman is identical to a Persian or Phoenician one , as are bowmen , axemen , short swordsmen , cavalry , and so forth . Some armors and clothes are historically inaccurate , with the long swordsman bearing more resemblance to a Roman praetorian . Some units were also available in the game to civilizations

that never , historically , had them ; hoplites can be trained by every civilization except Persia , and some middle @-@ Asian civilizations can train Legions and Centurions , while Japanese Yamato can build triremes .

= = = Buildings = = =

The Town Center is one of the most important buildings in the game . Here villagers are created , and age advancement is researched . Most scenarios have each player begin with a single Town Center ; the ability to build multiple Town Centers is unlocked by the construction of the Government Center during the Bronze Age . The Town Center provides population support for four units . In order to build more units , houses must be constructed . Each house supports four units , and although any number of houses can be built (a concept which was not maintained in later games like Age of Mythology) , they can only support a maximum of fifty units .

Military units are produced at specific buildings relevant to their area . All sea units are created at the docks . Walls and towers are defensive fortifications (Age of Empires was one of the first real @-@ time strategy games to include walls strong enough to form a feasible means of defense) . Farms are used to produce food . Granaries , storage pits , and the Town Center are used to store resources deposited by the villagers .

Wonders are enormous monuments representing the architectural achievements of the time , such as the Egyptian Pyramids . They require huge amounts of resources to build and are constructed very slowly . Wonders can neither produce units nor conduct research . In scenarios with Standard Victory conditions , a player can win by constructing a wonder and keeping it from being destroyed for 2 @, @ 000 years (about 10 minutes in the real world) . Building a wonder also greatly increases a player 's score , which is beneficial in " score " games . Players typically make it their top priority to destroy enemy wonders , especially under Standard Victory conditions . For this reason and because a wonder is relatively easy to destroy , a wonder must be well @-@ guarded at all times .

= = Development = =

Age of Empires (under the working title Dawn of Man) was the first game developed by Ensemble Studios . Its historical setting was chosen to be more plausible and accessible , particularly to casual gamers , than existing games . At the time , other real @-@ time strategy games had science fiction and fantasy settings , so the historical setting of Age of Empires enabled it to stand out . The designers received much of their inspiration from the game Civilization , with its proven historical setting ; this was noted among reviewers as something positive . Age of Empires was designed by Bruce Shelley , Tony Goodman (in charge of the game 's artwork) , and Dave Pottinger (in charge of the game 's artificial intelligence) . Stephen Rippy was the music director (a role he kept through the series) , with occasional help from his brother , David Rippy , as well as Kevin McMullan . He created the original music in Age of Empires using sounds from actual instruments from the periods in the game , as well as their digital samples . The tunes were the result of extensive research on the cultures , styles , and instruments used .

= = Reception = =

Although not as acclaimed as the later games in the series , the first Age of Empires was generally well received by critics , and scored highly on review aggregator websites including an 8 @. @ 3 out of 10 on Metacritic , an 87 % on Game Rankings , an 85 out of 100 on MobyGames .

Game Informer ranked it the 81st best game ever made in its 100th issue in 2001 . They called it a cross between Warcraft and SimCity and praised its multi @-@ player and its popularity among gamers . Game Revolution categorized the game as " a cross between Civilization II and Warcraft II : Tides of Darkness " , while GameSpot lamented that it was " a simple combat game rather than a glorious empire @-@ builder " , describing it as " Warcraft with a hint of Civilization . " While

Computer Gaming World 's Elliott Chin compared the game extensively to WarCraft II , he said that it has " great depth , and when compared to its real @-@ time brethren , it has to be the most sophisticated of the bunch " . GameVortex wanted less of a combat @-@ oriented gameplay , but praised the modes of play , commenting that " the random map generation [...] really keeps the game spiced up . " GameSpot decried the level of micromanagement necessary to control the game (which was due to absence of production queues and low AI of the player 's units) calling it " a poor idea " , which " seriously diminishes AOE 's enjoyability . " GameVortex echoed this criticism , while PC Gameworld pointed out the subsequently released patches improving some of the faulty AI programming . Elliott Chin criticized the game 's population limit , which he thought to be its " most serious grievance " .

While noting the similarities with Warcraft II , PC Gameworld praised the uniqueness of each playable civilization , and noted that the " graphics are extremely detailed and have a hand @-@ painted feel to them . It 's rare to see a game this beautiful with such detailed unit movements . " Game Revolution was impressed by the amount of different units of the game , and noted that the developers " obviously did [their] research here , and the result is a well rounded , historically accurate product (at least for a game) " . The soundscape of the game was also criticized , with GameVortex stating that " the oral clues just aren 't enough to let you differentiate just what 's going on . " With a view to the future of the game , Game @-@ Revolution emphasized the scenario editor , which " allows you total control in the design of scenarios and campaigns " , a " tool at your disposal to create a scenario exactly to your liking . "

The game won numerous awards , including Gamecenter 's 1997 Game of the Year and the 1998 AIAS Computer Strategy Game of the Year award .