

FIRST AND SECOND DYNASTY

GIZA**BUILD THE GREAT PYRAMID**

When we go back 5.000 years or more to the great Kingdoms of the Egyptian age I am always fascinated whatever the medium: book, film or game. I like reading of Egyptian history and I have many books discussing life, politics and warfare of that time, but as an Engineer I am mainly interested in the building capacities of our ancestors.

Egyptians did not know the "arc" but they were able to erect magnificent constructions and all their buildings were based on strong foundations, while their stability was assured by well disposed "weights": pyramids were no exception and their "geometrical form" was really necessary in order to build and "keep" such huge giants. Of course the ancient engineers and architects knew very well how to prepare strong foundations, and therefore they usually selected sandy terrains where construction was easier and the terrain more stable. Initially everything was not too complicated: huge stone blocks came from the Northern region (directly cut in the sides of the mountains); then they were loaded on ship and brought to the Delta of Nile; finally they were transported on the construction site and lifted to their place with wooden cranes.

But when the pyramid started to increase in height it was necessary to prepare large climbing slopes to rise the stone blocks, using oxen and special sliders. Then each block was moved on its final place with a wooden crane. Thousands of workers were used for this task: some of them were slaves, but most of them were employed with a salary: a sort of "cooperatives" were created to handle this job and to distribute salaries.

GIZA THE GREAT PYRAMID is a game that depicts the construction of one of those giants, the most famous of them and the bigger: when Dagmar brought it to Modena, during PLAY 2013, I was very interested in testing it immediately and so we ... started, but at the end of the first game we were quite deceived as rules were not so clear and we were obliged to often go back to them and search for an answer. Finally we realized that we made all sort of mistakes, mainly because we were unable to easily understand the rules !!! Before classifying it as a "lost investment" I took the "task" of reading again and again those rules until

I discovered all the subtleties of this game and we were able to play GIZA many more times (in Modena and at my club) with higher satisfaction.

In effect the game is interesting and very interactive and thus was it worth the time spent to clarify all the rules. It lasts 10 turns divided in two rounds (Eras) called First Dynasty and Second Dynasty. The player with most VP at the end of the 10th turn will be the winner, even if the Giza pyramid is not completed (this may happens if players are not so keen to cooperate and but more oriented in attacking the others, thus slowing down the complete process).

Opening the box we find a very "particular" board, designed in old Egyptian style, with a lot of hieroglyphics on the score track (all around the board) and drawings with "side shown" workers driving oxen, building objects, moving blocks, etc. A very nice graphic touch! In the middle of the board are depicted four tracks, each one composed of 4 cases (a quarry and 3 moving spaces), then on one side we have an area called "support camp" (divided in three zones: farm, temple and artist study), and on the other side we see the pyramid site, a lift slope (divided in two cases: middle lift and capstone lift); a turn order track (the "motor" of the game) completes the board.

The other components are not so beautiful: 64 "ugly" wooden blocks (WORKERS) in the players four colors (blue, red, brown and natural); 56 cardboard FOOD round tokens (value 1 and 5); 28 cardboard ART round tokens (value 1 and 5); 4 square cardboard SLEDS (to transport the components of the pyramid); 4 player SCREENS (to hide the tokens) and 9 plastic PYRAMID blocks (4 base-ments, 4 intermediate and 1 capstone). A cardboard rectangular tile, used to modify the turn order track on Era 2, completes the components.

Players should cooperate to transport the 9 blocks to the construction site and then to build the pyramid but ... attention, this is not a cooperative game as each player always try to help the others just to get more victory points, as we will see shortly thereafter. The game is much more interesting if played with four "architects" so I will describe only this option, with some notes for

the 3 player game if necessary.

At the start one pyramid "basement" block is placed on each of the four quarry cases, just on top of the sled: each player then takes 3 Art and 8 Food tokens (that they will hide behind the screens) and 8 workers (10 when playing the 3 players game) that he keeps in front of him. Five extra workers per player are set aside and will be used on the turn track. Finally one worker is placed on the case "0" of the Victory Points (VP) track.

In turn each player places 2 workers on the board in any case he wishes (support camp, transport road and/or lift road) but at the game start it is not suggested to place blocks on the Temple or on the lift cases as they will not be used in the first turns. Then

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An interesting Worker Placement game with a different taste and high interaction

all place again 2 workers, and so on until all the 8 workers are on the board.

Typically the workers are initially placed on the sleds to push them towards the Pyramid site: but each sled may host a maximum of FOUR blocks per case (regardless of the color) so it is important to understand from the beginning that each pyramid block may move only when is "pushed" by at least THREE workers and that when it arrives to the construction site it gives VP only to the players whose workers are on the sled. If a block has workers of one player only he receives an interesting bonus (extra VP) so it is very important to cooperate, not only to share the VP, but also to negate those bonuses to a competitor.

Ok, all is ready now and we may start to give ORDERS to our workers so let's focus our attention to the TURN ORDER TRACK. It is divided in 5 columns (one per turn) and 8 rows (4 Moves actions, 3 Production actions and one "no action" row) that may give a bonus to the players who select each of them. Unfortunately during each Era you cannot select the same row twice, so it is very important to understand what you need and when: then you will plan your moves accordingly in order to be sure to get the right row in the right turn. Of course the other players will try their best to get the same good cases and therefore competition and interaction are very high.

The first player select one row, places his worker on the case corresponding to the first column and takes the bonus (if available): no one else may use the same case. The other players do the same until we have

all the four blocks on the turn track. Then the turn is played, starting with the first block from the top of the column. The following turn order will be chosen in reverse order, starting with the first block from the bottom of the column.

It is very important to understand the difference between "turn moves" and "row bonuses". In your turn you may select any one action that you wish (see below) but during the turn order placement you must use the bonus of the selected row immediately after your placement or you lose this possibility: if, for example, you selected row "6" (Quarry Bonus) you may immediately move 1 of your workers between quarry tracks and camp; if you selected the Farm x2 Action you may perform TWICE this action (but you cannot perform the Fishing action); etc.

Row 5 (Lifter Move) is special: its bonus allows you to move a worker into the lift

slope: as the only other way to move workers on the lift slope is after a successful transport of pyramid blocks, this bonus is very important especially on the final turns of the game. For that reason on Era 2 one of the two Quarry move rows is cancelled by a second Lift move

The player's turn is divided in three steps:

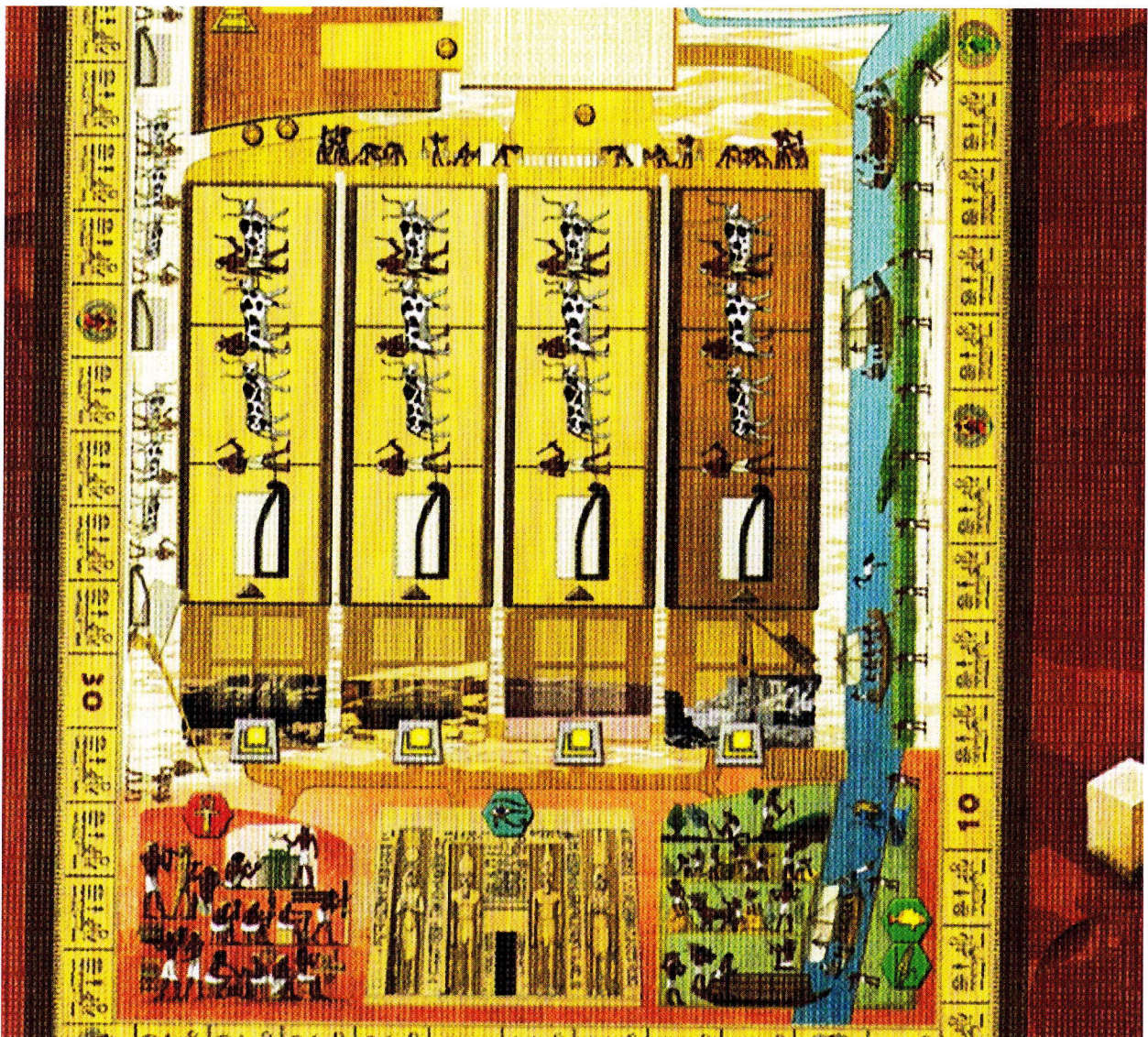
STEP 1: you may perform THREE actions per turn, but only once each, selecting between the following:

- Support Move: you may move one of your workers already in the support camp from one zone to another (Farm, Temple, Artist).
- Quarry Move: you may move 1 of your workers between the support camp zones and the quarry spaces.
- Quarry Track Advance: you may move one of your workers from one case of the transport to the following one in the direction of the pyramid site (you typically use this move

to try to climb on a sled already advanced).

- Farm for Food: you take as many food tokens as you have workers in the Farm case of the camp (but if you selected row 7 you may perform this action twice)
- Fish for Food: you take HALF as many food tokens as you have workers in the Farm case of the camp (but if you selected row 1 you may perform this action twice)
- Make Art: you may take as many Art tokens as you have workers on the Artist case of the camp, but you must pay 1 food for each token

STEP 2: you must now nominate a pyramid block to be pushed (if it is in one of the four the transport tracks) or lifted (if it is on the two lift slope). Remember that each block can be nominated only if it has already 3 workers: if you do not have workers on any block you are obliged to select a block controlled by your opponents. Also note that on the transport tracks you may have a maximum of 4 workers per case, while



on the lifting slope there is no limit to the number of workers that may coexist on the same case.

- To PUSH a block you need first to ... feed the workers: all players may BID a certain amount of food for the nominated block. Of course if you do not have workers on that case you will bet "0" food, but if you have at least one worker you must consider all the options before bidding, as this is the real "heart" of the game. If the total amount of bid food is 3 or less the push fails and the workers starve (see below). With 4-5 food the sled is moved one case, with 6-7 two cases and with 8 or more three cases.

- To LIFT a block you use a similar bidding system: with 3 or less you fail and the workers starve, while with 4 or more the lift is successful. You may lift the intermediate blocks only if there are already some basement blocks in the pyramid site. You may lift the capstone on the Pyramid only if you first lifted it to the higher case of the slope and, second, if all the others blocks have already been mounted.

STEP 3: If a pyramid block arrived on the site (the four basements) or on the slope (the four intermediate blocks and the capstone) or if it was successfully lifted you may score VP:

- 6 VP for the player with most workers
 - 3 VP for the player with the second most workers
 - 1 VP for the player with the third most workers
 - 4 extra VP are added to the player's score if he moved a block with only his own workers.
- Tied players divide the VP of the related positions (if, for example, two players tied for second position they get $3+1 = 4 : 2$ that is two VP each).

If the capstone is lifted on the pyramid the players who did bid for this lift get points as follows: 10-6-3-1

If a move was unsuccessful the player who bided less food lose 1 worker (he starved and therefore he is placed on the Farm case of the camp).

Note that bids are "open" (you must show the food points that you bid) and are made in turn order, starting from the player to the left of the active one. The latter has always the opportunity to see what the other players do and decide accordingly: sometimes players are tempted to bid "0" food in order to oblige the active player to spend those precious food tokens, but this can be dangerous because the active player may de-

cide to offer just "1" food in order to lose the bid and to eliminate (starved) one worker of the opponent and have the opportunity, on the following turn, to get extra VP. The more you know the game, the more this may happens ... life was hard and competitive for the architects of the Egyptian age!!

EXTRA VP are assigned when a pyramid section (two adjacent blocks) is built:

- DECORATING THE BLOCKS: all players (not only the ones that made the move) may secretly bid "Art" tokens. The winner, as usual, will get 6 VP, the second 3 and the third 1 (nothing is due to the fourth player)
- DECORATING THE CAPSTONE: as before, but all players may get VP (10-6-3-1).

EXTRA VP are also assigned three times during the game: when the four basement blocks are built, then the four intermediate blocks and finally the capstone:

- PRAYING AT THE TEMPLE: when a tier is completed players should count the number of workers that they have in the Temple zone of the camp. The winner gets 6 VP, the others 3 and 1, as usual.

Each time that a sled unloads its block all the players who pushed it have to decide where they wish to move their workers. Then the sled is placed again on the Quarry starting case and loaded with a new pyramid block. All workers eventually waiting on those cases (with a maximum of 4, as usual) are automatically assigned to the new load (now you know why you should select the Quarry action sometimes).

The game immediately ends after having placed and scored the Capstone OR at the end of the 10th turn. The winner is the player with most VP. In case of tie the winner is the player with most Food and Art tokens behind his screen.

As you understand from those notes the game is not too difficult to learn, once you passed the problem of the "not-so-easy-to-understand" rules. But you have to think well before starting your turn, as interaction is very high and you should consider all the alternatives: otherwise your "perfect plan" may be easily crashed by one of your friends.

The First Dynasty turns are mainly used to move the blocks to the pyramid site in order to get as many VP as possible, without thinking too much about the lifting (even if I prefer to place a worker or two there by the end of turn 5th).

It is during the five turns of the Second Dynasty that play becomes harder: you need

food to push or lift and you must collect it in time, but you also need workers on the lift slopes if you want to score VP. You also need to have some workers in the temple just in time to finish a tier of the Pyramid (and thus to score some extra VP) but special attention should be paid to the Capstone: its lift and decoration may assign 20 VP to the player who has most workers and most Artist ... so by turn 7 you have to understand if the capstone will arrive in time to be lifted on top of the pyramid (this happens 60% of the games) or not. The answer to this question will guide you on the last two turns to move workers and to buy art tokens.

GIZA cannot be considered a "family game" in large sense, as younger players will not be able to make all the considerations about the placement on the turn order track and on the collection of tokens, therefore I think that this game should be suggested to players 14 years old or more.

But if have to test the game with some friends in regular gaming sessions I will suggest to try GIZA at least a few times as it could become a "nasty" but interesting game ...

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INFORMATION

Designer: David Heberer

Artist: David Cochard

Price: ca. 30 Euro

Publisher: Mayfair Games 2012

www.mayfairgames.com

PLAYERS:
3-4

AGE:
12+

TIME:
90+

EVALUATION

Worker Placement
Users: With friends
Version: en
Rules: en
In-game text: no

Comments:

Rules not easy to understand * Once understood they result in an interesting and challenging game * Recommended for players of ages 14+

Compares to:

Cairo and other games with a pyramid building topic

Other editions:

Currently none

