

PEAK OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

TRAJAN

SENATORS, MILITARY AND SHIPS

In 110 AD the Roman Empire is at his height under Trajan and the Patricians try to gain more power.

The "black" box of TRAJAN is not so inviting with its "dark" fashion, but as usually it is not the box that makes a good game (even if it can make it more "appealing!"), let's go on and have a look at the components, as there is a lot to handle.

The board again is not so ... appealing (but after QUEBEC you may expect more and more of this kind of "special" works); hopefully after the first game or two you understand the artist's idea and you feel that in effect it is not so bad: in the foreground you have a picture of the Senatus Romanus; then if you ideally walk a little to the background you find the Trajan's Triumph Arc; a few extra steps and you may enter the Forum Romanum; if you keep walking downhill you enter Roma (Urbis Aeterna) and her busy streets where the artisans work hard to produce goods; rent a coach and you may travel as far as to Ostia's Port where you find three big ships ready to load and leave for commerce in far Countries; behind Roma, in the background, there is a small strip of green land that represent Italy's territory and you will surely need a horse to travel

until the Padus plain, where a military camp wait for you and your soldiers. Finally the picture shows the North of Italy, the Alps, and other nine Great Provinces of Europe conquered by the Romans, from Raetia and Noricum (more or less where Dagmar and Ferdinand's Austrian museum (Austrian Games Museum) is located today) to Gallia and Britannia.

Each player takes a personal board that will be used to plan his Actions and to host the different tiles that he will gain during play. The heart of the action process is represented by a roundel printed on the personal board, with six "plates" (numbered from "I" to "VI") that you will randomly fill with 12 colored pawns (2 pawns per plate): this roundel immediately remind us the African game MANCALA (also named AWELE, or WARI, etc.) and in effect the system is the same. You pick up the pawns from one plate and you distribute them one by one (clockwise) in the following plates. The position of the last placed pawn determines the ACTION that you will do (as we will see).

You take one Leader, 15 workers/soldiers and two discs: then you place the Leader and 1 soldier in the Camp, 1 worker in Roma, one disc in the Senatus and the other one

on the Victory Point (VP) track. Keep everything else in your reserve.

The triumph Arc must be filled with 54 TRAJAN tiles (in six piles, one per "type" of tile); the Forum will get 3 "yellow" ACTION tiles and up to 12 "green" ACTION tiles (the exact number depends on the numbers of players that may vary from 2 to 4); three SHIPS will be placed at the Port; 20 WORKSHOP tiles in Roma; and other 10 ACTION tiles in the Provinces (one per province). The number of players also determines which "time track" will be use (there are 3 tracks, for 2, 3 and 4 players) and a TIME marker is placed on its starting case. Finally a deck with 12 people's REQUESTS (round markers with icons) is placed near the time track.

Before starting every player will receive ONE BONUS tile (from a set of 12) and THREE GOODS CARDS from a deck of 60 (12 different goods reproduced 5 times each). The remaining cards are placed in a deck near the board with two cards face up on its side. Two extra BONUS tiles are randomly placed in the Senatus and will be the "prize" for the best Senators.

You decide who will go first and this player, followed by the others, should select 3 TRAJAN tiles from the arc (max one per type) and place them on the roundel on his personal board. Each tile offers some VP and/or special actions and can be activated if, during the roundel phase, you place the "last" pawn in the plate just in face of a tile and you have inside this plate the two colored pawns printed on the tile (each tile of each type has a different combination of colors). Sound complicated? No, it easier to play then to explain it, but it is true that you should plan in advance how to move your pawns in order to be able to bring the right colors to the right plate at the right moment!!! (Remember: when you distribute your pawns you must place ONLY ONE of them per plate). For example, if you want to use 3 pawns that are in the ARC plate you put the first one in the Roma (workers), the second in the Port (ships) and the third in the Forum: then you will perform the FORUM action. You cannot stop at the Port or in Roma and perform their actions.

OK, so now everything is in place and we may start the game. The first player takes the pawns from one plate and clearly tells their number to the other players: the TIME marked is immediately moved clockwise the same number of cases. Then the player "seeds" his pawns (one per plate) and performs the selected action (where the last pawn is placed):

- FORUM: the player takes ONE ACTION tile (yellow or green) from the available ones



and put it on his board. Those tiles may give you extra bonus to proceed faster on the Senatus track, repeat an action twice, use the tile as a joker, etc.

- MILITARY: the player may move his Leader from the camp (or the Province where he previously moved) to a Province and pick up the action tile standing there, if still available; or he may move ONE Soldier from the Camp to the Province where his Leader stands (marking the related number of VP); or he may move ONE workers from his reserve to the Camp (he becomes a Soldier)

- TRAJAN ARC: the player may select ONE of the visible special tiles and put it on his board (near to one of his "plates"). Then you move a special "wooden" Arc from plate "I" (where it was placed at the start of the game) to the first free plate. If all plates are

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A pure optimization game if I ever saw one, you should never lose sight of any aspects of the game at any time! A real challenge for experts!

already filled you place the arc in the middle of the roundel and you cannot select this Action gain until you free one space with tile activation.

- SENATUS: the player advances his disc one case and marks the indicated number of VP.
- ROMA: the player may take a worker from the workers Recruit Base and place it in one of the 20 workshops, taking the tile and putting it in his board; or he may take a new worker from the reserve placing it in the Recruit Base. The first placement is free: thereafter you must place a new worker adjacent to an existing one of your color. (Those workshop tiles are very interesting if you collect 3 or 4 of identical one: at the game's end you will get, respectively, 10 or 20 VP extra).

- PORT: here you may pick up 2 goods cards from the deck or from the discard; or you may play 1 or 2 cards from your hand (they will give you VP at the game's end if you have the right BONUS tiles); or you may load the ships (discarding one of the cards combinations depicted on the ships) and gain extra VP (example: you get 20 VP for 4 identical goods, 10 VP for a two couples, etc.).

Play goes on in this way until the Time marker reaches again the starting position: a PEOPLE REQUEST disc (bread, games, religion) is then taken from the deck and showed to all: player know that they must have an action tile with the same icon in order to fulfill the request or ... lose VP. When the Time marker reach the starting position for the second time you turn up a second request and a third one after the following turn. When the Time marker reaches the starting position for the fourth time play

stops for a while as a "season" is completed. Players must then discard the right green tile for each request or lose 4-9-15 points unless you already owns some Arc special tiles that will allow you to "save" some VP. Example: if you got 2 bread and 1 religion requests you must discard 2 bread tiles and 1 religion: or use 1 TRAJAN "permanent" bread tile and discard 1 bread tile and 1 religion, etc. Please note that you may use only ONE Trajan tile per type.

Then the Senatus is checked: the most advanced player on this track will select one of the two available BONUS tiles, while the second player will take the remaining one (but overturned, to show a less effective bonus).

All the remaining action tiles are eliminated and a new series is placed on the Forum; empty Provinces also receive new action tiles and the game resumes as before. At the end of the fourth season the game stops and the player with most VP is the winner.

I do not wish to bother you describing all kind of tiles, but I think that it will be enough to say that each one has a specific task:

- Action tiles are used to satisfy the People's requests and to double some actions, when you perform them

- Special Tiles may give you extra workers or soldiers, permanent defense against the People's request, bonus VP, extra cards, etc.

- Workshop tiles will give you some VP immediately and some extra VP if you collect enough of them at the game's end (10 VP for three tiles of the same type or 20 VP with four tiles)

The game runs very well and after a few turns you perfectly understand all the mechanics: then you need to learn how to perfectly use the Roundel/Mancala system. There are special tiles that may grant you 9 VP if you get them; so you need to go to the ARC plate in order to select the special tile that you want, but to do that you have prepare the right number of pawns the right "plate" (i.e. the one where the number of pawns that will grant that the last one will be placed in the Arc).

If you collect THREE identical green tile you will get 10 VP extra at the game's end (20 with all four identical tiles, a situation that may happens even if it is very very difficult) so you need to pay some visits to the workshops in Roma; to do this you need again to select a plate with the right number of pawns. With only TWO identical tiles you may still try to win the extra VP but you must pick up a joker tile.

Moving in the Provinces to conquer them is a good way to make a lot of VP, but you need

to accurately prepare your invasion recruiting soldiers in the Camp, moving the Leader and sending your soldiers, one after the other, to the Provinces (the more they are far from the camp, the more VP they grant); to do that you need to perform many times the MILITARY action, etc.

You surely understand where the HEART of the game is: programming your play is not enough as you have also to "prepare" your pawns inside the roundel, and this will take time and a good vision of the game. Despite that do not try to spend all your time programming the roundel: you will surely lose the game! The first "target" (especially in seasons 1 and 2) is always acquiring something in the field (VP point in the senate, cards to load the ships, new workers, etc.) keeping always an eye to the opportunities in the roundel.

After turn 3 you should already have some interesting TRAJAN tiles in your board (those that will grant 9 VP each, if activated), so now it is time to try to get them with the right pawns combinations and acquire precious VP at the last minute that may grant you the victory in this very interesting game by Stefan Feld. . ☑

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INFORMATION

Designer: Stefan Feld

Artist: Jo Hartwig

Price: ca. 43 Euro

Publisher: Ammonit Spiele 2011

www.huchandfriends.de

PLAYERS:
2-4

AGE:
12+

TIME:
150+

EVALUATION

Optimization game
For experts
Version: en
Rules: de en fr it
In-game text: no

Comments:

Very individual graphics * Lots of components * Easy mechanisms with very challenging implementation * Winner IGA 2012

Compares to:

Macao and other games using a rondel mechanism

Other editions:

Asterion Press, Gigamic

