

Re-rating the empires

By Greg Pinder

Rating the empires in 7 Ages is not an easy task. The value of an empire depends on the circumstances in which it's played and they are infinitely variable. Faced with such a complex task, many players quite naturally just assume that the card values accurately reflect the relative worth of the empires and rely on them to guide their choices. That was, indeed, precisely Harry's intention.

Harry used a simple rating system based on a combination of the maximum glory that an empire could earn per turn and the age range over which the empire could be started. This is a reasonable system but it isn't the only one. I have developed another system that relies on a combination of my subjective rating of the empire's likely average glory points per turn, the maximum glory that it could earn in each age and the chances of it being around in that age to earn glory.

The results of my rating system broadly reflect Harry's ratings but there are some significant discrepancies and a few less significant ones. I'll run you through the significant ones here and my reasons for why the cards under- or over-rate those empires.

Underrated empires

The most significantly underrated empire on my analysis is the Ukrainians on card no. 91. Harry rates it as worth a 2; I would make it a 7. The main reason for this discrepancy I think is that Harry has over-discounted the glory that the Ukrainians can earn for you. By my reckoning, they could be pulling in 11 glory a turn in ages 5, 6 and 7, when the wheat in NW Europe comes on line. Each wheat area brings in a glory point and there are plenty within striking range of the Ukraine. I rate the Ukrainians as being worth an average of just over 4 glory points a turn in those ages. Despite seldom being around in the earlier ages, that's still enough points to put them onto one of the 7 point cards under my rating system.

The other significantly underrated empire for me is the Sudanese on card no. 80. Harry has it on a 3 card; I would put it on a 6. My main reason for this is that, although the Sudanese can only earn a maximum of 5 glory points a turn, I think they have a good chance of averaging a fair slice of that every turn. I think they can average 2 glory a turn in age 2, and 3.5 or so in each later age. This is mostly because their isolation in Africa makes them very hard to attack, guaranteeing them the sort of peace they need to build an empire into the largest in the world. Coupled with the longevity of their empire, the Sudanese earn a position high among the second rank empires.

The other empires I think are underrated (although to a lesser extent) are: the Shang (no. 4), the Hittites (no. 8), the Mongols (no. 41), the Zimbabweans (no. 42), the Etruscans (no. 52), Teotihuacan and Olmec (no. 57), the Chavin and Mochica (no. 60), the Melanesians (no. 79), Kanem and Bornu (no. 83), the Chams (no. 85), the Papal States (no. 89), the Chou (no. 108) and the Assassins (no. 109).

Overrated empires

I think 5 of the empires are significantly overrated. The first of these is the Macedonians on card no. 15. They look good – they were historically highly successful, they have one of the game's best leaders in Alexander, they get several unit bonuses and they start with 2 free manoeuvres. But they never seem to achieve what you expect from them. On analysis, the reason for that is quite obvious: they start small in a crowded part of the map and never get the chance to grow big enough to realise their potential. They could earn up to 5 glory points a turn but I have never seen them get anywhere near that. I rate them as likely to average only about 2. Marry that with their low chance of being around for long and I can only put them on a 2 card, not the 5 they have at the moment.

The next overrated empire is the Slavs on card no. 26. Harry gives them a 3; I couldn't justify more than a 0. The Slavs' maximum glory is 4 a turn but I think they will average less than 1. The reasons are much the same as for the Macedonians – they pop up in a highly competitive part of the world with hardly any money (usually either 7 or 14). That's just not enough to be really viable, so I could almost never think of a good reason to start these guys.

The next card for the 'think twice' basket is (oh no!) the Australians on card no. 78. I know for a fact that Harry gave these chaps their ridiculous 4 value rating for patriotic reasons but you shouldn't make the same mistake – this empire is a dog and you should stay well clear. Why? Look at the card and you can see that they can earn up to 5 glory points a turn. But 2 of those points are from cities and the Aussies can't build any cities until ages 6 and 7. I suppose they could conquer other empires' cities but I wouldn't bet on it. I rate them as bringing in between 1 and 1.5 glory points a turn and that's being generous. They're on a 4 card but I can only give them a 1.

Next is the Ancient Iranians on card no. 86. They could earn you up to 4 points a turn but seriously, they aren't going to average much more than 1. Again, the reasons are pretty obvious – a small start (only 10 money) and a big need to fight their way into the congested European heartland just isn't a basis for a solid empire. With a slim chance of being around for more than an age or two, I would put this empire onto a 0 card, a big drop from the 3 the game gives them.

My final significantly overrated empire is the Seljuks on card no. 93. The historical opponents of Richard the Lionheart must be great, right? Wrong. They can earn up to 5 glory points but they are never going to get it, trust me. The 2 points for Africa and the 2 points for Asia are contradictory objectives and you just aren't going to get them both. You are, in fact, unlikely to get either of them. I think this empire could average about 1 point a turn, maybe a bit more when Saladin is in play. Combine that with a low chance of long term survival, and I see this empire as belonging on a 0 card instead of its printed 3.

For the record, the empires that I think are slightly less seriously overrated are the Egyptians (no. 1), the Toltecs and Aztecs (no. 10), the Saxons (no. 23), the Modern Chinese (no. 29), the Russians (no. 34), the Italians (no. 44), the Byzantines (no. 54), the Cimmerians (no. 59), the Moors (no. 69), the Magyars (no. 72), the Pirate State (no. 98), the Ming (no. 104), the Modern State (no. 105) and the Latin Americans (no. 110).

Conclusion

There are plenty of things you could look for in an empire. Maybe you only want them for a turn or two – I have used the Huns like a battering ram to clear the way for another empire I wanted to play and I have started the Germans so that, when my Hapsburgs appeared, they would start by converting a big stack of German units. Maybe you want the empire to work alongside another empire of yours (we dream of the Romans and Carthaginians working in tandem). Maybe you want an empire whose objectives won't conflict with your other empires. Or maybe you play the technology optional rule and just want an empire that can take destiny actions to give you a 6-card hand.

Whatever reason you have for playing a particular empire, a static rating system, like the one Harry used in the game or the one I have used here, isn't going to capture the full range of possible circumstances. You have to make those judgments for yourself.

But if you are looking to maximise the glory your empires pull in each turn, such static rating systems are a reasonable starting point. If that's what you're looking to do, I suggest you think carefully about the empires I think are overrated and look again at those I suggest might just be hidden diamonds.

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