

Not a Matter of Love But Marriages Abound

When our honorable editor in chief assigns the review jobs, he proves his particular tactfulness time and again. This time, he makes a father-in-law-to-be write about a game in which enterprising families get rid of marry off their daughters and sons so that the children-in-law enter into the family enterprise and see to its expansion. These are not really bonds of love.

The players take on the roles of marriage brokers; everybody is driven by economic interests alone. They enter the game with a small amount of pocket money only; and before they can begin to play at all, plenty of work is waiting for them. Camels – 120 of them – need to be set up, 50 relationship tiles sorted and piled up, and 33 resource tiles distributed on the gameboard. And in addition, they have to put out the sons and daughters of the merchant families.

Ten families inhabit an area that reaches from Constantinople to Western India. The respective domain is marked on the gameboard, and the family assets are piled up at the edge of the playing area. Initially, the assets consist of camels only, and you'll search in vain for money. Only a marriage can fill the family fund. Each family has two children who can take on, at their discretion and to their

for a victim to marry. Nothing is happening here without a marriage.

I The location determines the price of the bride

The family we are going to marry into has to pay a more or less high price for the marriage. The charge doesn't depend on the beauty of the people involved, but on the place of residence: if somebody is located in the center of the gameboard, he'll charge more. As a wedding gift, we get options on resources. We are offered three; how many we keep is left to us. However, we have to accept at least one in order not to be considered impolite.

Let's explain it in more detail. The options come in the form of cards, and they correlate to the resource tiles that were distributed on the gameboard in the beginning. In case of a marriage, you draw three cards from the stack and then decide which one(s) you'll keep. It must be at least one, but it may be all three. If, during the game, you reach a resource on the board for which you have the corresponding card in your hand, this will give you victory points for sure.

When you have married into a family, you may take out their camels from then on (is this what you dreamt of regarding marriage?). This gets us to the second possibility of action that the instructions provide. Either you get married or you take out camels; but only camels from

a family to whom you are bound by a family tie.

But fortunately, there doesn't have to be only one! Here we can indulge in polygamy! O tempora, o mores!

"Taking out camels" means we take a camel from a family we are married to and place it on a space next to the domain. We can also place another camel on the next space; that costs money, though – money that the family has to pay from the assets that they acquired through the marriage. This way, caravan routes are gradually developing through the desert. If they weren't camels, one might think that we were building railroad tracks ...

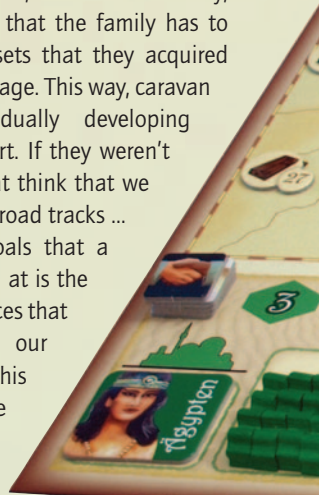
One of the goals that a caravan is aiming at is the amount of resources that we're holding in our hands as cards. This makes sense since that's what gives us the victory points

mentioned above. Initially, we received two cards to take along – and, with this, also guidance on our decision as to what family we should marry into: one whose domain is located near these resource sites. We get further cards with every wedding. Chance alone determines which resources fall into our hands. However, it is not advisable to keep all cards in your hand in the hope of making use of them sometime later, because there is a limit of hand cards. If you reach this limit, you may no longer take cards at a wedding. And if you may not take any



taste, the male or female gender: The tiles are printed on both sides, one side showing a son and the other a daughter.

After having placed everything on the board, we can finally become active. The game instructions promise that we can choose between two possibilities of action. In fact, however, this doesn't apply to the first turn. First of all, it's time for everybody to look





new cards, you may not discard any cards either – including older cards.

I Camel seeking for relationships

But finding resources is not the only goal; we also like to establish relationships with other caravans. Not because we'd like to court their daughters or sons, but for reasons much more mundane: first, it puts cash in our pockets

(with which we could buy more brides). And second, each *dinar* – that's the name of the currency in the game – is worth one victory point, provided we don't spend it.

All members of the families involved benefit from this new relationship. If an Arabian caravan meets an Egyptian one, all daughters and sons of the Egyptians and the Arabs benefit, as well as the players who are married to them. The Arabs get a little more because they brought about the relationship in this example. Since each family has two children but each player may marry into a family only once, this means we are not the only ones who profit from such actions, but we always play into our rivals' pockets as well.

The relationships between the caravans also govern the playing

length. As soon as each caravan has established one relationship, the game ends immediately; alternatively, it is over when a family has linked up to five others. If you play this game for the first time, you'll find that this can



happen surprisingly quickly. But do you really want to finish the game that early?

This makes sense only if you think that you have more victory points than the others. A portion of these points lays out





face up, but a considerable part doesn't arise as a result until you score for the resource cards. Such a card can score up to eight points – or even zero if you weren't attentive.

SAMARKAND is from Harry Wu, this time with a co-author at his side (David V. H. Peters). Harry Wu has already

been responsible for CHICAGO EXPRESS, a railroad game that can be played in only one hour. SAMARKAND, originally, also was a railroad game. This is even more obvious in the American original AGE OF SCHEME, even though the tracks had already been replaced by camels there as well, and players didn't invest in shares from railroad companies but in sons and daughters of merchant families.

I Successful revision

When Queen Games took over the game, changes were required to make it "suitable for families" (see text box). The Winsome Games team needed more than

one year to get this job done, then presenting a game for three to five players. The two-player variant was contributed by Wolfgang Panning (who isn't named in the credits, though). "Suitable for families" obviously means: there must be a bit of luck. It comes in the form of resource cards and fortunately has only moderate effects; chance is not all-powerful or crucial for the game.

If you know the style of Winsome games, you'll be surprised by how the revision was done here. The game doesn't have any charts or the like. Everything you collect turns into victory points. The materials are comprehensive and well thought out, and the game has been constructed smartly. It was fun with any of the number of players indicated, and this explicitly applies also to two-player games that do without the crutch of an additional "ghost player." The box indicates a playing time of 45 minutes, but often you can finish faster. Also pleasant: the fresh theme. *KMW/sbw*

Samarkand vs. Age of Scheme: Routes to Riches

"This is a gamer's game without any auctions or random elements," the instructions of the American original read. Right in the next paragraph, Winsome publisher John Bohrer writes that the game has been licensed to another company and that this company has requested changes: among other things, they require random elements, a shorter playing time and less calculation work.

The most conspicuous difference: the gameboard of AGE OF SCHEME, covering the same region, is divided into hexagons. They stand for six different kinds of terrain, each of them requiring different costs if a camel is placed there. Cities in three different sizes increase the income of a family when their caravan arrives. Instead, resources – the luck element in SAMARKAND – don't exist. Each family (there are only six) has four children to get married and individual features that affect the costs for camels. Another important difference refers to the costs for a marriage. You decide on your own how much you'll pay; there is only a minimum level. If you pay little, you're ill-advised: in this case, the family will run dry of money quickly – money that they need for the caravans. On the other hand, you may not set the price too high either, or, if you do, no other player will marry into this family.

This means that the family won't get a fresh supply of money in their purse.

There are too many differences between the two games to list them all here. This would also be pointless since the AGE OF SCHEME rules can't be transferred to SAMARKAND. This is regrettable, but SAMARKAND has another target group. This is also unfortunate because AGE OF SCHEME was a really excellent game. Only 143 copies are in circulation; a reprint won't happen. And it is highly unlikely that any owner of this game will part with his copy.



Title: Samarkand
 Publisher: Queen Games
 Designer: David Peters, Harry Wu
 Artist: Jo Hartwig
 Players: 2-5 (for two: →)
 Age: about 8 and up
 Duration: about 45 Minuten
 Price: about 33 €

| Reviewer | Playing appeal |
|-------------------|----------------|
| KMW | 8 |
| Udo Bartsch | 5 |
| Christwart Conrad | 8 |
| L. U. Dikus | 7 |
| Matthias Hardel | 7 |
| Wieland Herold | 7 |
| Edwin Ruschitzka | 8 |
| Harald Schrapers* | 7 |

* Unfortunately, the numbered locations make the map unclear – geographical names would be easier to keep in mind.

