Naomi Rebis, "Entry on: Age of Mythology by ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/214. Entry version as of November 06, 2026.

Age of Mythology

United States (2002)

TAGS: Athena Chiron / Cheiron Cronus / Kronos Egyptian Mythology Norse Mythology Olympus Penelope Poseidon Troy





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Age of Mythology
Studio/Production Company	Microsoft Game Studios
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2002
First Edition Details	United States: released October 2002; EU: released November 2002.
Platform	Windows
Official Website	ageofempires.com (accessed: August 20, 2018
Available Onllne	Trailer: youtube.com (accessed: August 20, 2018)
Genre	Action and adventure video games*, RTS (Real Time Strategy)*, Strategy*
Author of the Entry	Naomi Rebis, University College London, n.rebis.17@ucl.ac.uk
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

***Age of Mythology: The Titans* (2003)** – this expansion added a fourth civilization (the Atlanteans) to the game, as well as a second campaign and the ability to create Titans.

***Age of Empires: Mythologies* (2008-9)** – a spin-off game for Nintendo DS, this version focuses on turn-based strategy rather than real-time like the PC game. It has the three main civilizations of the original game, but is less faithful to the mythology. For example, Hades, despite being God of the Underworld, cannot attain the Underworld Passage god power.

***Age of Mythology: Extended Edition* (2014)** – this version was developed by SkyBox Labs, and contains both the original game and *The Titans* expansion. It was released via the gaming platform Steam, and will consequently work on platforms that the original disc will not, such as Windows 10.

***Age of Mythology: Tale of the Dragon* (2016)** – this new expansion was developed by SkyBox Labs and Forgotten Empires, and also released via Steam. It adds Ancient China as a playable civilization, with its own campaign.

Summary

In *Age of Mythology* users play as one of three ancient civilizations (Greek, Egyptian or Norse), and guide their people from the paucity of the Archaic Age to the cultural and military brilliance of the Mythic Age. Starting with a small settlement, players collect resources – Food, Wood, Gold and divine Favour – that enable them to erect buildings, train soldiers, and research new technologies to strengthen their civilization. The overall aim is to defeat rival players by either destroying their armies and cities; claiming every settlement on the map; or building, and defending, a Wonder.

As well as those Random Map games (where players select the map they wish to play on, the number of opponents they want, their civilization, etc.), *Age of Mythology* has a Campaign called 'Fall of the Trident'. This comprises 31 scenarios, spanning all three civilizations, and follows the story of the fictional hero Arkantos.

Initially sent to help the Greeks at Troy, Arkantos soon finds himself

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caught up in a race to stop the Titan Kronos from breaking out of Tartarus. This challenge takes him all over the mythical world, from Circe's island to the Well of Urd, meaning the player learns much about the three civilizations' folklore without even realising. Each Campaign scenario has different objectives, and while some mirror the traditional 'base-building' of the Random Map games, there are variations where users play only as the hero characters (sneaking through Troy to open the gates for Agamemnon's army), or against a time limit (mending Thor's hammer), which keeps the game fresh and exciting.

The video-game's mythical aspects are largely bound up with the gods, since it is through them that players gain legendary creatures for their army, or cosmic powers such as earthquakes. At the start of each scenario users select a Major god – Zeus, Poseidon or Hades for the Greeks; Ra, Isis or Set for the Egyptians; and Odin, Thor or Loki for the Norse – who then grants specific bonuses for the duration of that particular game.

Most importantly, the Major god fixes the tree of Minor gods players can choose from when advancing in Age. For example, selecting Zeus as a Major god, would give a choice between Athena and Hermes when advancing from the Archaic Age to the Classical Age. In comparison, selecting Hades as the Major god offers a choice between Athena and Ares. Since each Minor god grants different myth units, god powers, and technologies, according to their specialties, the choices players make shape their later strategies. Each civilization has a vast array of legendary creatures to summon; centaurs, manticores, jackals, sphinxes, frost giants, trolls, and many more!

Analysis

Quite apart from being a pleasure to play, 'Age of Mythology' has much to offer in terms of educating children about ancient legends and culture. Right-clicking on any mythical creature, hero unit, or soldier, pauses the game and brings up a fact-file about them for players to read at their leisure. The descriptions are surprisingly detailed, and because they cover both bestial and human characters they offer information on topics ranging from ancient military tactics to myth. The Sphinx's entry, for example, not only tells the story of Oedipus and the Sphinx's riddle, but also notes the creature's use in Egyptian iconography and building.

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I can personally vouch for these fact-files' efficacy in introducing children to mythology, since I not only have many fond memories of reading them, but also know how often I drew upon that knowledge in my high school studies. In most cases, these files were my first introduction to ancient myths and creatures, meaning I approached my later learning with sheer enthusiasm for the subject of Classics. My love of the multi-faceted Olympian gods, nurtured early-on by the game's depiction of them, has continued to this day.

Age of Mythology is also particularly valuable in counteracting the impression perpetuated by schools that Greece and Rome are antiquity's only important civilizations. The Egyptian and Norse civilizations are given equal status with Greece, while also being marked out as distinct societies with their own culture. For example, in the game, the Greeks gain Favour by worshipping at temples, but the Egyptians do so by building monuments, and the Norse do so through combat.

Even something as seemingly insignificant as Relics (which grant benefits when garrisoned in a player's temple) can inspire children to learn more about mythology, because they are often named after more obscure items, such as the Canopic Jar of Imsety, or the Ship of Fingernails, which relate to Egyptian and Norse ideas of the afterlife.

The game's 'Fall of the Trident' Campaign has a special role to play in the reception and re-telling of mythology. Not only is its over-arching story based on the Titanomachy (as players work to thwart Kronos' attempts to escape his Underworld prison) but the segments devoted to each civilisation focus on a specific legend too. The Greek section details the Fall of Troy (players even have to gather wood to make the Trojan Horse!); the Egyptian one focuses on Osiris' murder by Set (players strive to reunite all the pieces of Osiris' body so he can help their cause); and, in the Norse one, the aim is to prevent Ragnarok by defeating Loki.

Athena is the story's narrator, so although Arkantos himself has no mythical template, she acts as an omniscient presence who can explain background aspects, like the Olympians' war with Kronos. Many legendary heroes appear as secondary characters in the Campaign, such as Chiron the Centaur, and the dwarven smiths Brokk and Eitri. Sometimes the comparisons are not completely accurate (for example, the character of Setna is actually based on the Egyptian prince Khaemweset), but they still serve to give depth and diversity to

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	the campaign.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Athena Chiron / Cheiron Cronus / Kronos Egyptian Mythology Norse Mythology Olympus Penelope Poseidon Troy
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Sacrifice Self Society Tricksters
Further Reading	Ashinoff, B. K., *The potential of videogames as a pedagogical tool*, available at Frontiers in Psychology, 2014 (accessed: February 6, 2018). Perry, D. C., *The influence of literature and myth in videogames*, 2006, available at ign.com (accessed: February 5, 2018). Spring, D. (2015) "Gaming history: Computer and video games as historical scholarship", *Rethinking History, the Journal of Theory and Practice* 19.2 (2015): 207–221. (accessed: February 7, 2018).
Addenda	*Age of Mythology* was developed by Ensemble Studios, an independent video-game developer established in 1995. It was acquired by Microsoft in 2001 but later disbanded in 2009, by which time it had sold 20 million copies (see here, accessed: August 20, 2018). Microsoft Game Studios produced the game. Commercial Success: Since its release, the game has been widely acclaimed and enjoyed, earning an average of 88.67% on GameRankings.com (accessed:

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August 20, 2018).

In 2003, *Age of Mythology* was shortlisted for both 'Computer Game of the Year' and 'Computer Strategy Game of the Year' at the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences' *Interactive Achievement Awards* (see here, accessed: August 20, 2018).

In August 2006, it was rated as the United States' 10th best-selling computer game by Next Generation, having sold an estimated 870,000 units since its release (see here, accessed: August 20, 2018).

Genre: Mythology-based, real-time computer strategy game.

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