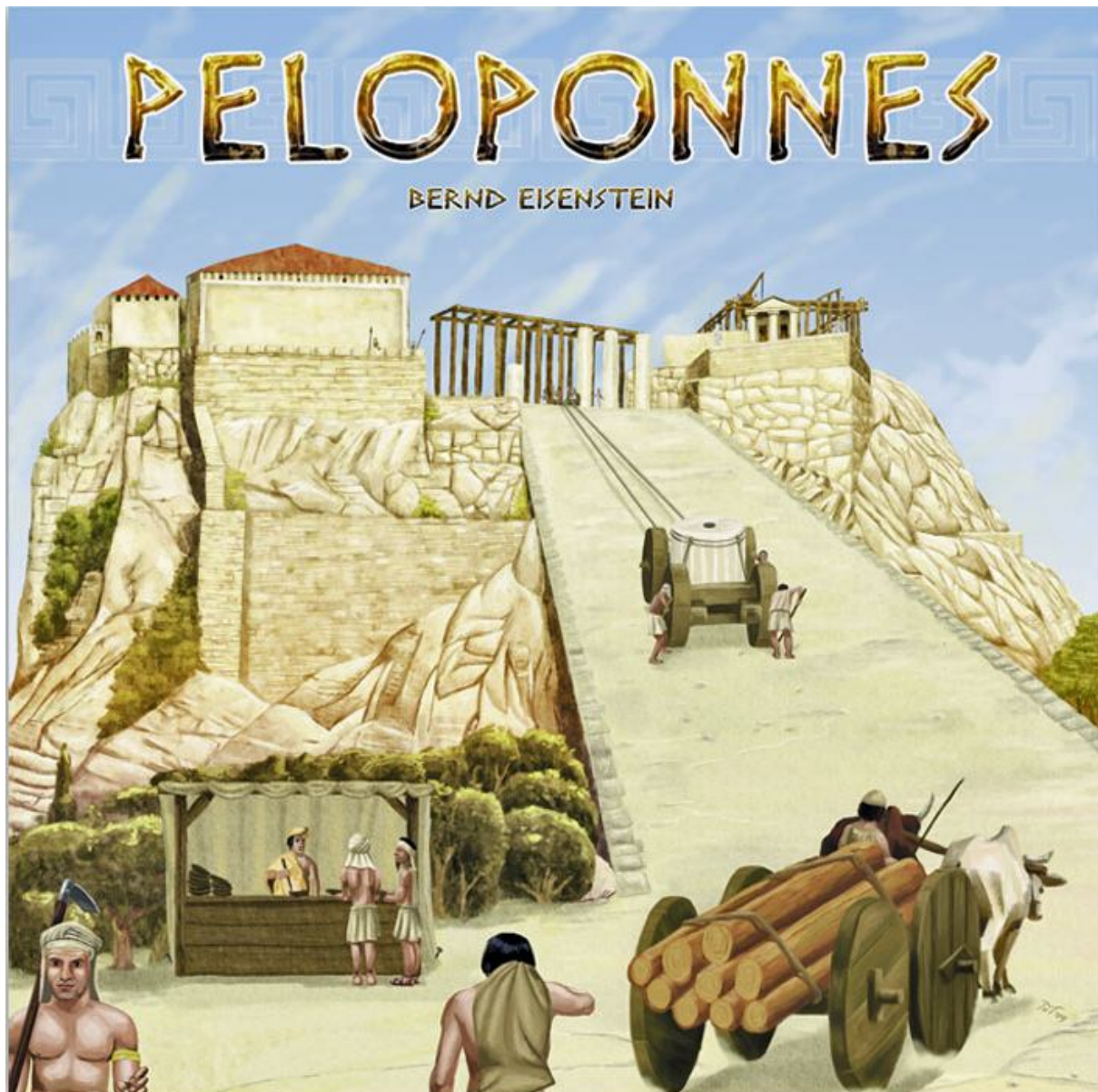


Building a Civilization

Pevans's quick review of *Peloponnes*

Peloponnes was launched at last year's Spiel games fair, but I didn't notice it there. Perhaps because it comes from a new publisher, Iron Games, set up by Bernd Eisenstein to produce his own games (though he already has several titles with major publishers to his credit). Now that I have got my hands on a copy, I have been enjoying playing it. It has been quite a favourite at the Swiggers games club in recent months as well.

As the name suggests, *Peloponnes* is set in Greece. Ancient Greece to be more accurate. Each player represents one of the Greek city states and develops it in competition with the other players. The game is played over exactly eight turns and



has interesting victory conditions. Each player's score is the lower of two things. First is the points value of the buildings and lands they have added to their city. The other is the points value of their population. Hence there's no point in scoring high in just one: you have to balance the two if you want to win.

Each player has a small board with wooden markers to show their current levels of raw materials (wood and stone), food, population and luxury goods. The last of these being the result of excess production and available for use as a substitute for other things. There are wooden coins for players' money, but at the heart of the game are forty square tiles—lands and buildings—that players add to their starting tile to develop their city-state.

Lands produce raw materials and/or food and are placed on the right side of a player's city. After the first one, lands must produce at least one thing that the preceding land does. This makes it quite tricky for players to diversify, so they tend to specialise in producing one thing. However, this can be a benefit as excess production of one thing provides luxury goods instead. These can then be substituted for things you don't produce. That's a neat touch.

Buildings go to the left of the city. These require wood and/or stone to construct—there's another neat mechanism that allows players temporary use of a building even if they don't have the materials. Sooner or later they will have to find them, though. Both lands and buildings may provide players a bonus when laid, are worth points and produce something. A building may also have a special ability and this can be very useful for later turns.

The turn starts with laying out five tiles for a kind of auction. In order of play, each player places a bid in coins on a tile. If they overbid another player, that player must shift their bid to another tile—provided they have the minimum bid for that tile. Once you've made your bid, you can't add any more coins to it. This provides some interesting decisions as there are several things to take into consideration before committing to your bid. It also means that turn order is important and this is decided by the amount you bid in the previous turn. One nice point about this bidding mechanism is that it's quick—standard auctions can go for quite a while.

Once players have their tile, they place it (assuming they can) and take any bonus. Then everybody gets their income—including money, which depends on the size of their population. At the end of each turn, a couple of counters are turned over to see if a disaster happens. There are five disasters and they will all happen at some point in the game. This tends to be later rather than sooner, which gives players time to build up some protection (some buildings give absolute protection against one or other disaster).

Getting victory points from buildings and lands is clearly constrained by cash and resources, but what limits players' population? Food is the answer. Twice in the game, and again at the end, players must spend food to keep people. This is quite severe: you only keep as much population as you have food (though you can use

luxury goods as a substitute!). The only question is when you'll need to provide the food as this depends on exactly when the tiles that trigger this are drawn.

The tiles provide eight turns, at which point it's time to tot up the points and see who's won. My first game was decided on the second tie-break, so it can be very close. (I've not done that well in any game since, by the way.) It's a tricky game to win as you have to juggle several aspects and your opponents can easily upset things. While there are things to think about, *Peloponnes* is a lighter game than I was expecting. The upside of this is that it's easily playable in the 45-60 minutes given in the box.

Judging by the number of people keen to play it, *Peloponnes* is nicely balanced between complexity and playing time. It provides enough of a challenge to keep people coming back to try again. And it plays quickly enough that several games can be fitted into an evening. I'm quite taken with it, though I've avoided playing it with more than four players. There's also an expansion set, which adds a sixth player, additional tiles and sea pieces for more tactical options. I'll let you know what I think when I've tried it out.

Peloponnes was designed by Bernd Eisenstein and published by Iron Games with rules in German and English. It is a strategic board game for 1-5 players, aged 10+ and takes 45-60 minutes to play. It gets 8/10 on my highly subjective scale. For more (and to buy online) see the publisher's website at www.irongames.de (in German and English).

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