

AoEIII

TAD guide 3.0

The meta of 2014

Table of contents

Introduction.....	4
Note on map balance.....	5
Part 1: The theory behind AoE3.....	6
The ever evolving metagame.....	7
Rushing and why it's losing popularity.....	7
Meta shift #1.....	8
Meta shift #2.....	9
Timings.....	11
Colonial timings.....	12
Fortress timings.....	13
Civ scaling.....	14
Hitting them where it hurts.....	15
Army compositions.....	16
Musketeers.....	16
Common colonial compositions and how to counter them.....	17
Fortress compositions and how to counter them.....	18
List of civs and their favourite fortress compositions.....	19
Micro.....	22
Planning a battle.....	22
Fighting a battle.....	23
Scouting.....	25
When to scout.....	25
What to scout for.....	25
Civ balance.....	28
Match ups.....	31
Outscaling them.....	31
Killing them early.....	32
Civ counter table.....	33
Hotkeys.....	34
Part 2: Civ guides.....	35
Introduction.....	36
Aztecs.....	37
The rush 10%.....	38
The 8 minute timing 30%.....	38
The late game plan 60%.....	39
British.....	40
The 3v build 20%.....	42
The VC build 80%.....	43
China.....	44
The naked FF 70%.....	45
The colonial start 30%.....	46
Dutch.....	47
France.....	50
The FF (5%).....	51
The rush/timing 10%.....	52
The long term plan 85%.....	52
Germans.....	54
The FF 20%.....	55
The rush/timing 10%.....	56

The long term plan 70%.....	57
India.....	58
The rush (10/10 Agra) 20%.....	60
The defensive Agra 40%.....	61
The Karni Mata build 40%.....	62
Iroquois.....	63
The fast age build 70%.....	64
The wise woman build 30%.....	65
Japan.....	67
Against a rush.....	69
Against a long term colonial start.....	70
Against a fortress build.....	70
Ottomans.....	71
The early colonial plan 5%.....	72
The fortress plan 40%.....	73
The long term plan 55%.....	73
Portuguese.....	74
The long term plan 60%.....	75
The aggressive start 10%.....	76
The FF 30%.....	76
Russia.....	77
The 700w build 50%.....	79
The 700g build 20%.....	79
The long term plan 30%.....	80
Spain.....	81
The FF 30%.....	82
The aggressive start 40%.....	83
The long term plan 30%.....	83
Glossary.....	85

Introduction

For those of you who don't know me, my main account is Goodspeed and I've been playing this game from 2007, actively from 2009. I've been active in the competitive community ever since then, playing mainly Spain on vanilla then Dutch on TWC and Japan on TAD. I've always been a relatively casual player though, and never really participated in tournaments.

As I played this game and saw the metagame evolve throughout the years, I've started to treat AoE3 as a science rather than a game. All of the games I currently play (which due to lack of time isn't many) are experiments, testing builds or match ups to gather more information. After all, coming up with new builds and new ways to play a civ and seeing it work in real games is, to me, the most rewarding feeling one can get out of AoE3.

Over the years I've gotten more than my share of questions about strategy in AoE3. Most of those were "Civ X vs Civ Y, what build is best?"

Understandable of course, as this is the big question before starting a game. But should it be? Is there a definite right build in every match up?

There's a right build in every specific situation, but a match up can go a number of ways meaning it can end up in number of different situations. To name an example, is it wise for Japan to assume colonial play from Otto rather than an FF? Is there a "right build" for Japan in this match up that stops both?

No, they should scout and adapt. Against colonial play they need to set up a good eco and mass units while against an FF they need to neglect their boom somewhat and age up asap. As Japan if you make the wrong choice here, it doesn't matter how good your execution is; you've already lost the game.

AoE3 has 105 match ups and a whole bunch of different viable cards. This is unique in the RTS genre and creates an incredible amount of variety which makes the possibilities to innovate endless. It's not about knowing a build, it's about understanding the civs and applying that knowledge to your build. This wide variety of variations makes AoE3 such an original game, and it's what makes it so incredibly rewarding to see a build come together.

This guide is not going to tell you what Civ X should do against Civ Y. It's going to tell you something much more valuable: why you should do it. It's going to focus on the civs' strengths and weaknesses, and how they interact within a match up. It's going to tell you how to plan ahead, to play with a clock. It's going to leave you with a build, but also with the tools to create your own. It will dig into the underlying strategy principles and how they apply to AoE3 and my hope is that it will help shed light on this game as not a collection of build orders but the strategically challenging, complex RTS that we all love so much.

This guide will be using many abbreviations and other AoE-specific words and phrases. For that, refer to the glossary.

DISCLAIMER: *I am just one player. Even though I've played the game for many hours throughout the years, my judgement is not flawless and not all of the information in this guide will be correct. They are opinions and often speculative. Even so, if you find yourself disagreeing with something, instead of classifying it as misinformation immediately, reflect on what your own opinion is based on. While some of the information here is wrong, the vast majority of it is correct.*

Note on map balance

This game has some issues with balance, obviously. If you ask me though, civ balance is not the worst of them. The maps, and by that I mean the RE patch standard maps, are for the most part highly unbalanced.

This game, by design, has builds that have the ability to take map control early game. It also has civs that are good at early game. Most standard maps force you to pick such a civ and/or such a build. It forces players into doing a build that gets the most possible units out asap in order to take the map before their resources run out. This is exaggerated, you'll still see some variation, but it removes choices and the less choices you have in a game, the more it's based on luck. Also it just so happens that early game aggressive civs were already strong to begin with and civs with good booms or semi-FF builds could use a buff, which is an important argument for playing resource-rich maps. Anyway on most standard maps you're not playing against your opponent, you're playing against the map. And let's not forget that it can screw you, big time. Map screws are a much bigger deal and much more frequent when a map is low on resources to begin with. Games on these maps are decided by luck too often, lowering the skill cap. A big luck factor isn't welcome in a competitive RTS, right?

Let's not forget water, either. Even though water can be fun (I had a water phase myself a long time ago), it doesn't stay fun. At least, it didn't for me. Water is exceptionally poorly balanced and poorly designed in AoE3. It's a classic case of "were you even trying, ES?". The war ships fire randomly making them impossible to micro, plus they are too large and don't use formations. Fishing boats are way, way, way too cheap with schooners. 40w? Are you serious? Recall AoE2, where fishing boats are 75w and vills 50f. And of course fishing boats should be more expensive than vills. After all, they are supposed to be a way to expand your economy slightly, not to replace your land economy entirely. As it turns out, neglecting land and going almost purely for water is possible in AoE3. These magical fishing boats even gather gold... It shouldn't be possible from a game design perspective. ES made a mistake. Let's all not abuse this too much, for all our sakes.

Moral of the story is that most maps have major balance flaws which prevent skill-rewarding competitive play. Sometimes it can feel like throwing dice, and who wants to waste their time on that?

This game is most balanced on resource-rich maps, and players seem to finally be catching on to this fact recently. Of course, back on FP, many maps were improved and even though the patch went inactive, FP's Great plains is still the most popular obs map. And for good reason. The map is balanced in its resources, doesn't have water, isn't too big or too small and map screws are rare. It even features above average TPs which allows for even better economy-focused builds. Of course, there's still a time where you run out of resources in your base, and map control becomes important. But by the time it does, most civs in most match ups will have had at least one opportunity to push out of their base in an attempt to force map control. This makes it a map where adaptive play is rewarded, greatly improving the skill cap. The game is not completely decided by the civs or the map spawn, and a good player can usually force out a win even in bad match ups.

I realise most of you play rated games on standard maps and want to know how to play on them. Though don't despair, like I already mentioned this guide will not simply tell you what to do on FP maps (although it is largely based on FP GP) it will list most of your options (which work on other maps as well), and it will teach you how to play with timings to push for map control or contain your opponent, which you can apply according to the map's resource balance. Anyway, on to the fun stuff.

The ever evolving metagame

Metagame (noun): In simple terms it's the general understanding at any given moment about how the game should be played. In yet simpler terms: What's currently popular.
So what is currently popular?

Rushing and why it's losing popularity

A rush is a build that plays for an early attack (in AoE3 terms: in early colonial) and invests (next to) nothing in economy. Another way to look at it is an all in. In RTS terms, it's the sort of attack that, from a balance perspective, should only be able to win if you surprised your opponent with it. After all, if it won despite proper preparation against it, the civ in question would simply abuse it every game and win every game, making it undeniably too strong *cough* Iro *cough*.

Rushing has always been popular in AoE3. Many maps promote it due to lack of resources, and aggressive play is simply a lot easier than defending against it. Rushing gives control, it's something that your opponent needs to respond to, it gives initiative. That's why it will always seem stronger than it really is until you meet a player who knows how to play against it. A simple Otto jan rush is only viable up to a certain level, for example, because a solid defense is hard to set up but beats it easily.

Then why is rushing not as popular any more?

What's left of the competitive community seems to have realised that most of AoE3's standard maps are broken. Most of the standard maps promote aggressive play because they have small hunts or poor mines and map screws are all too common. On FP, many maps were fixed, and after having such a great map pool we can't really go back to games being decided by luck. On the more balanced maps which are being played more frequently now, due to refined defensive builds and the predictability of a rush, early aggression has lost popularity. Way back, people used to skull knight rush in 90% of the games as Azzzy, now it's clear that this is one of their worst options. For all civs, economic investment and timing-based play has become more popular.

Because scouting in this game is easy (unlike in for example SC2 where you can catch people off guard with early rushes), you're generally not going to surprise your opponent with a rush in AoE3. On balanced maps, this means that rushing simply isn't viable. How are you going to rush a Brit with longbows behind a wall, a Dutch with skirms behind a wall, an Indian with gurkha behind a wall, etcetera. The answer is you aren't, hence why rushing is inherently weak in AoE3 and finally losing popularity now that the bad maps are being filtered out and defensive builds refined.

So what gets more popular now that people are catching on about this?

Early game eco investments.

And what is an eco investment that almost every civ can afford before colonial?

Meta shift #1 Trading posts

The evolution of TP builds has been going on for a while, pretty much from the end of the fan patch era back in 2010 when we first started using TPs frequently as France and Germans (of course for some civs like Otto and Iro it was already common to build TPs). A number of strong eco builds popped up for France with 1 or 2 TPs while the German 9 uhlan 1 TP semi-FF became widespread as opposed to the much slower uhlan semi that people were using before. Note how this is on the fan patch, where a TP costs 250w.

On the current patch they cost 200w. Soon enough, to many players a TP was no longer something you built if you had 200w laying around, but it was something you relied on in your game plan. Now, builds are being created revolving around an early TP, and yet even now people aren't using them that much or at all when they should. TPs are surprisingly *still* underrated.

Try sending 300w first as Russia, China or Ports and get a TP up.

Try building one on your way to colonial with France, Germany, Otto, India, Russia, Ports, Spain, Iro or Azzy.

Try getting a TP from the starting wood (if extra wood crate) and chopping for a house as France, Germany, Spain, Brits, Ports, China, India or even Dutch, effectively getting almost an entire extra shipment early on.

In all of these cases you'll find yourself in a much more comfortable position from 8 minutes and on, and in the current meta it's rare for games to be decided before then. Yes, not all of these are advisable in every situation but if you refine your build and make sure you're well prepared for any early rushes (which is possible in all of these cases) it will be worth it most of the time. And in the following cases it's even just completely wrong not to go for at least one TP every single game: France, Germany, Iro, Ports, China, India, Russia and Otto.

It's possible that you as a player have never seen some of these civs build a TP early. It's not you, it's the fact that even a large part of the competitive community has not made this transition yet. Are people building that early TP as China? Sometimes. Are people building a TP during transition with Germany or France? Often, but not always. And with India, are people even building a TP at all? Nope.

A TP gathers at different speeds per map, but on average about 1.25 XP per second (for reference: on great plains it's 1.35 XP/s). Your first 5 shipments take an average of about 450 XP to get, so you're getting one extra shipment by $450/1.25 = 360$ seconds = 6 minutes after you built the TP. However this is not taking into account the timing you build the TP, obviously it's stronger if you finish it right before the cart arrives. Taking that into account let's take 30 seconds off and say you're getting an extra shipment by 5:30 after you built the TP. Now, say you got it during your transition to colonial which would be around 4:30, this means it netted you a full extra shipment by 10 minutes.

How about comparing it to buying villas for wood at 4:30?

That extra shipment by 10 minutes equals around 1200 vill seconds if it's a colonial shipment. How many villas would you need at 4:30 to get 1200 VS at 10 minutes? $1200/330 = 3.6$ so at 10 min the TP would be worth about the same as 3.6 villas at 4:30. If it's a fortress shipment, being around 1700 VS, it would be worth $1700/330 = 5.1$ villas at 4:30.

All of your shipments after the first and second one are faster than they would usually be as well, meaning your build quite literally speeds up. For example a German 3 SW 700g semi-FF which without a TP would age around 9 minutes, suddenly finds itself in fortress at 7.40 with

a shipment ready. Of course, 5 vill at 4:30 would speed up your build as well, but the earlier 700g does a better job at it. After all, even with the 5v, you'd have to wait for 700g to age up.

The TP speeds up your build and the 200w investment doesn't slow your build down, it only hurts your early colonial military mass a tiny bit (about 1 or 2 less units at 6 min) which is okay because rushing isn't really viable anyway, as explained before. In practice, I would rate a TP at 4 minutes about as strong as buying 3-4 vill for 200w at 4 minutes. Also consider how shipments are worth more for some civs like Germans (+2/3 uhlans per shipment) and India (+1v per shipment). Are you thinking it's madness not to use this? Because you should be.

Speaking of TPs, what about upgrading the trade route? This is something you can do if you have spare resources and it's mostly worth it in longer games, however keep in mind that the XP income is actually better than having them gather resources for most of the early game (for most civs, that is). As you need more and more XP for each next shipment, the resource income does overtake the XP income in value later in the game. This is around 9-12 minutes depending on what age you're in, someone did the math on this once but it wasn't me.

Meta shift #2

Resource shipments

In a game where early aggression is losing popularity and builds are getting more and more refined, you're looking at different ways to invest in your economy. Building an early TP is one of them, another important one is not sending a military shipment in early colonial, since these shipments are meant for the short term. You're going to want to send an eco card (think 4cdb (5v) as France, 3SW (6v) as Germans, 5v as Iro, 300e as India, etcetera) or a resource shipment. This choice depends on the match up and the build your opponent chose, but sending resource shipments early on is almost never wrong because their value is so good. They pay off almost as fast as unit shipments and can be spent on economy (market or other) too. For example starting 700w 600w 700g or 700w 700g 600g as any euro civ is quite strong, and currently still very underrated. In fact, a lot of players don't even have 600g in their decks. Please note, though, that 700f and 600f are bad shipments. Food gathers more quickly than other resources and the market upgrades are cheaper, making food the resource you would usually want to be gathering with villagers while sending wood and/or gold. Anyway, what about 5v vs 700w in early colonial?

700w = 1400 vill seconds.

5 vill take 280 seconds = 4:40 to gather 700w. In theory that would mean that 4:40 after you sent your shipment, 5v will surpass 700w in value. In reality though, this happens later. After all, the 700w pays off immediately while 5v pays off gradually. The 700w can be used immediately to get market upgrades or a better mass to defend early harassment or pressure or even a TP, while 5v cannot. In practice it will take your 5v about 7 to 8 minutes to catch up with the 700w in value. Before that time, something will often have happened that made the 700w superior to the 5v even if you reach the 7-8 minutes after the shipment. After all, 5v first gets you a bunch less units in early colonial than 700w, and as a result you may have lost some buildings, part of your army or even the game.

A perfect example of the battle between resource shipments and villager shipments is Japan mirrors. While testing during the 600w 4v 4v meta, there was the insight that 600w 600g 600g (In the future: triple 600) would be able to age to fortress for free while still nearly matching the unit count of their opponent, meaning a solid advantage. Suddenly there were game winning timings in early fortress for the triple 600 player to beat 600w 4v 4v, or even

eco builds with 7v in fortress, or simply taking map control in early fortress and never letting go of it again.

Why? Simply because 4v takes long to pay off, and double 4v even longer. Middle ground is found with 600w 4v 600g, which can age up slightly later with the same amount of units as triple 600 but does get the 4v, and suddenly it's up to the triple 600 player to do some damage early on and he can't seem to. But, 600w 4v 4v will hold any timing that 600w 4v 600g can throw at them and ages up not that much later. Hence the rock-paper-scissors build triangle of Japan mirrors, triple 600 > 600 4v 4v > 600 4v 600. Untested: 4v 600g 600g.

This demonstrates the never-ending war between resource shipments and economic shipments and it proves how well AoE3 has managed to balance them. Yes, crate shipments are often better because most current-meta timing attacks are from 8 to 12 minutes which is too early for vill shipments to have paid off, but there is still a place for economic shipments in early colonial.

There's an interesting pattern to be observed throughout the recent history of the metagame, in the very first shipment players tend to send in colonial:

Past (early game focus)	Present (mid game focus)	Future? (late game focus)
9/8 xbows	700w	3 SW
10 maces	700w	3 WP
5 ashi or daimyo	600w	4v
5 sepoy	600w	300e
8 ckn	700w (investing in units)	700w (investing in eco)
5 cossacks	700w or 700g	Spice trade
Etc	Etc	Etc

The shift towards late game focus is not one likely to happen for every civ because some civs simply scale better into the late game and you can't camp in your base for longer than 10 minutes on any map unless you're Dutch or India (they don't use as much food). This means that it's likely that resource shipments will always stay as popular as they are now. Something that will happen relatively soon though, is people starting to use more crate shipments in early fortress. 1000w is already quite popular and soon enough 1000g will be too.

Timings

Timing attack (noun): An attack that is designed to hit at a specific time when your military is relatively strong and/or your opponent's military is relatively weak.

With a timing-based metagame, we need to be playing with a clock. We don't age asap and make units asap, we calculate ahead and think of ways to invest in a mid- or lategame plan. Often, you're going to want to attack eventually. Now why would you want this? 2 possible reasons:

- Because you're the civ who gets outscaled, meaning you lose if you leave the enemy alone for too long (for example if their economy grows faster than yours), or
- Because you need to take map control in order to gather more resources.

In both these cases you're going to have to leave your cozy base and attack at some point. The next question is when to attack?

In AoE3, like in every other RTS, answering this question is among the most important things a player needs to be able to do in order to win. This part of the guide will focus on the "when", and how to tailor your build to fit the timing.

There are 2 types of aggression: There's constant pressure, and there's timings. Of course, there's also raiding and obviously raiding is always good if you have the unit composition to do so, but raiding is different from actual aggression in that raiding is meant to gain small advantages by damaging the enemy's economy while aggression is more large scale, and meant to take the map or win the game outright.

Sometimes, constant pressure is the way to play. This is something Otto for example are very good at. An Otto with jan+abus in colonial will keep hitting your army with abus again and again while his army is growing steadily. Slowly but surely he gains enough of a military advantage to break you. This style is the opposite of a timing, and rarely used. The way most civs attempt to win a game is not by constant pressure, but by designing their build order to get the most possible units out at a certain time in the game, and then suddenly becoming aggressive around that time. This is called a timing attack, and using this concept well is one of the biggest differences between a good player and a great one.

Example. Let's take a simple timing that most of you will know, the French xbow+pike start. Note that this is not purely a timing, it's already strong in early colonial and can maintain constant pressure. However, there is a certain time when this build comes together, when its unit mass is almost unparalleled by any other civ. This is not after the 700w, not after the 600w, but after the 8 xbow shipment. At this time, most other civs' rushes will have run out of steam, most boom civs' economies will not yet have paid off in unit mass and FFs or semi-FFs won't have an army yet. This is when this build wins games. A good player will therefore not commit to the enemy's base until this time because he knows this is when the difference in unit mass will be biggest. A somewhat lesser player may think he sees an opening earlier, and may just lose to a well-executed defense because he eagerly moved in and overextended. Another frequently made, timing-related mistake with this particular build is going eco (4v) after 600w. This is viable when you can't do damage with the timing (because he has lb behind a wall, for example), but neglecting the timing and going for economic development instead is not playing to the strength of the build and is a sign that maybe you shouldn't have chosen the build in the first place.

The other type of timing is not meant to end the game but to break out of your base and take map control. This kind of timing is most often used by boom builds or FF builds, which will

move out when their eco and/or tech starts paying off. For example as Brits versus France in a somewhat prolonged colonial war where France is attempting to contain you to your base and you know your hunts are going to run out at some point, you're going to have to choose a time to move out and take the map. Since your eco is superior you want to do this as late as possible, preferably just before your hunts run out. Your build can then be tailored to have the most possible mass at this time, and not necessarily before. The trick is to go as much eco as you can while holding him off and going for the most efficient mass around 10 minutes (or whenever hunts run out). Following this logic, you can quickly see that a card like 5 vills is not worth it before you take the map. The reason is simple: it takes too much time to pay off. After the (almost forced) 700w first, another resource card (like 600w) at 6 minutes is better than 5v, and after that 700g at 7.30 is better than 5v simply because 5 vills won't gather even close to 700 gold in 2:30 minutes. The 600w part is closer because it arrives earlier which means your 5 vills have 4 minutes to gather, but the math doesn't lie: 5v gathers 2.5 wood per second. This means it takes 240 seconds = 4 minutes to gather 600 wood. If your 600w arrives at 6 minutes, this would mean the cards are technically equal in value if you're aiming for the 10 minute push. However, the earlier you have this 600w the better. At 6 minutes it can already be used for manors (=XP and vills) and market upgrades which means that by 10 min it will still be worth a lot more than the 5v. But, if you were going for a 12+ minute (possibly fortress) timing and you don't need the extra units early on, 5v may be worth it over 600w. Keeping this in mind it follows that if you're planning to send 5v at some point, it's always better to do it as early as possible since the card takes a while to pay off. In most cases this is not worth it, but that's another discussion.

Moral of the story is that if you plan ahead correctly and know at which point in the game your civ has the best unit selection and/or mass compared to the opposing civ, you can tailor your build to work most efficiently for this particular time. Look at it as if it's treaty X, and you're deciding what X is based on the civs and map and you're building the best possible army at X minutes. Now obviously in supremacy a lot can happen in X minutes so you need to be adapting at all times, but still in the back of your mind should be the timing at which you know you can overpower them, and before that time all you're doing is surviving, raiding and scouting to possibly adapt your plan into some other, later or earlier timing attack based on their build. Adapting like this, planning timings and tailoring your build on the fly is an underrated skill that can really give you an edge in this game. Obviously though, you have to understand your and the opponent's civ very well in order to be effective at this.

Colonial timings

Early colonial timings

There are some fast rushes like the Indian sepoy rush or the Iro rush that hit before 6 or even before 5 minutes, but most colonial game-winning timing attacks hit around 7 to 8 minutes, mostly after 3 colonial shipments. The civs you would usually use this against would be boom civs or FF civs since in both cases they outscale your early-to-midgame focused colonial play. Almost all non-boom civs have builds that hit a timing around this time. Usually they're meant to punish a potential age up and force a prolonged colonial war. The civs that use this frequently are Iro, Otto, Aztec, France and Russia, but as mentioned most civs have the option. Boom civs like Brit or Japan are also capable of hitting this early, although they will not be able to punish an age up as effectively because they'll have less units.

And about punishing a boom rather than an age up, note that against a civ like Brit or Dutch who is slowly growing their mass behind a wall, an early timing like this is often not good enough to break them. Players will therefore opt for yet another different kind of timing which is designed to starve out your opponent. The gist of it is that if you know when the Brit is

going to move out of his base to secure more resources, that is the time you need your army the most and that is the time you should tailor your build to. Think of it as a defensive timing rather than an offensive one. Because of this, if you plan a colonial war against a Brit it's often better to start eco heavy, raid and aim for the biggest possible mass around 9-10 minutes (think 4v 700w 600w 700g) rather than doing a 7.30-8 minute timing.

Mid colonial timings

These are timings generally used by eco civs who prefer to stay colonial and wish to prevent the enemy from ageing up unharmed and gaining a tech advantage. In this context it's designed to catch their early fortress army (which will still be small) off guard and getting a contain on them. Under this same category are the timings that boom civs use to secure more resources. They hit from 9 to 12 minutes and generally have a strong economy to back them up. Civs that frequently use this are Brits, Japan, Ports and India, sometimes Aztec and Russia if they went for eco. These are all civs that scale very well into late colonial and would therefore often prefer to stay in colonial. If they didn't choose to age and their opponent did, they have a good chance of doing damage around this time and will therefore often attempt to. And of course, this is the time when hunts or mines start to run out (or in Japan's case all their shrines are dying) and eco civs like these are forced to make some kind of move to take control of the game. Since this is the time their eco starts translating to a better unit mass, this is the time when these civs become active.

Fortress timings

Early fortress timings

This is something you do if you (fast semi-)FF'd and need to do damage quickly because they either (semi-)FF'd with a better eco than you or their boom is so strong that you have to hit them before it starts kicking in. This is a timing that hits around 8 to 10 minutes and can be used by a wide variety of civs, mainly Otto, Iro, Spain, France, Germans and China. The most common goal with this timing is to punish an eco-heavy semi-FF like the Japanese, Indian, Dutch or British one. Another common way this timing is used is to prevent your opponent from going up to fortress safely after you, meaning that if he went for colonial play and was surprised by your age up, in a lot of cases he'll try to follow you up in which case this timing is likely going to be your only chance to break him.

Mid fortress timings

Mid fortress timings hit from 12 to 15 minutes. Civs that would go for such timings are civs that have decent early fortress potential but don't scale into the late game as well as their opponents. In the end it's simply a matter of asking yourself the question "which civ would be stronger at 20+ minutes, mine or my opponent's?". Whichever is the weakest civ at 20+ minutes needs to do a timing before then. Obviously there are a lot of factors weighing into this like economy, unit scaling, resource usage etc, and also more often than not some damage has already been done in the first 15 minutes. But assuming equal starts, in every match up there is 1 civ that simply does better the longer the game goes. Strong examples are India and Japan which both scale very well due to strong units with great upgrades and a solid boom, you need to break or cripple them before 15 minutes. On the other side of the spectrum there's Brits who around 12 minutes are often in a position where their resources are drying up but their mass is strong which is a good time to push. And there's Dutch, whose units and eco are not up to par late game. These civs will often try to reach fortress with a good eco and then finish the game while their eco is still ahead because their eco is really all they have when it comes to late game scaling. Usually, mid game timings like these are aimed at forcing map control and making sure they can't gather, simply to starve the opponent out and outlast them.

Civ scaling

Aztecs:	Colo 6+ minutes.	Fort 11+ minutes.
British:	Colo 9-12 minutes.	Fort 12-18 minutes.
China:	Colo 8-10 minutes.	Fort 10+ minutes.
Dutch:	Colo 7-9 minutes.	Fort 10-15 minutes.
France:	Colo 6-13 minutes.	Fort 8-15 minutes.
Germans:	Colo 6-9 minutes.	Fort 8-15 minutes.
India:	Colo 8+ minutes.	Fort 13+ minutes.
Iroquois:	Colo 4+ minutes.	Fort 7-15 minutes.
Japan:	Colo 9+ minutes.	Fort 12+ minutes.
Ottomans:	Colo 7+ minutes.	Fort 8-16 minutes.
Portuguese:	Colo 10-15 minutes.	Fort 12-18 minutes.
Russia:	Colo 8+ minutes.	Fort 12+ minutes.
Spain:	Colo 7-11 minutes.	Fort 8-13 minutes.

This is a list of estimated times per age where civs are strongest. The remaining times for each civ are where the civ is at its weakest, and where you can attempt to do your damage or take advantage of their lower mass by booming.

Note that in each of these, I'm assuming colonial vs colonial wars and fortress vs fortress wars.

For example it says Aztecs are strong in colonial from 6 minutes and on, but this doesn't mean they are strong against fortress based armies while in colonial. As a general rule, in fortress vs colonial wars, the colonial civ will try to keep map control and starve the fortress civ while they will try to break free around 10-12 minutes. Hopefully, which civs can do this and which civs can't will be made somewhat more clear in the civ guides (part 2 of this guide).

Another general rule (with the necessary exceptions) is that when a civ is strong at X+ minutes and another civ is strong in the same age at >X+ minutes, the latter will win in the long term war. This does not mean that the civ is definitely better as there may be a window of opportunity in the gap between the 2 times, or 1 civ may be able to take map control and the other will be starved before their time comes.

Example #1: China (10+) vs India (13+) where India is better in long term fortress.

Example #2: Germans (6-9) vs France (6-13) where France is better in long term colonial.

Example #3: It follows that India is the strongest late fortress civ (13+) while Japan is the strongest late colonial civ (9+).

The fact that there are very little exceptions to this rule is a sign of balance. Japan and India are weakest early, but strongest late, which balances them out somewhat. Exceptions to this rule like Iro, which despite hitting their strong point very early still do very well late colonial due to strong unit upgrades and map control which they will never let go of, are signs of unbalance.

Hitting them where it hurts

So, we know when to hit them. The next question, and just as important, is where. The short answer: Where it hurts.

Does it hurt to lose a market? Not really. Does it hurt to lose 10 villagers? I cringe just thinking about it.

But you can't always kill villagers. What, then, is the best way to attack in any given situation? Your priorities are generally as follows:

1. Army
2. Economy
3. Military buildings
4. Houses
5. TC

In other words, by the time you're attacking his TC, you should already have won the game. In fact it's rare for games between strong players to ever reach a point where either of them is attacking the other's TC because one will generally have resigned by then. And yet, this still is one of the most common and one of the most painful mistakes newer players make in AoE3, they neglect to attack the opponent's economy and go straight for the TC which really isn't all that important in the short term, has high HP, and makes the attacker vulnerable to minutemen. Many games have been lost this way.

The first priority is his army. Of course if his army is worse than yours he will try not to fight, and chasing him into his base is only a good idea if you have a large military advantage. So if his army is hiding in his base, your next target is his economy. Depending on how far along the game is, he may have villagers gathering resources outside of his base. You can check this by scouting hunts that he may be using. Note that you can see dead animals even if you don't have vision there, so you should always know if he's hunting outside of his base. His gold miners are harder to scout but you should try to stay on top of scouting the mines especially if you have map control. You don't want him to be gathering on your map, after all.

If all his villas are still gathering in his base, or if he retreated all his villas to his base already, your next target is military buildings. He may have hidden them somewhere in the back of his base which makes it hard to attack them, in which case houses are a better target. Note that if you forced a lot of villagers into his base by pushing him off resources outside of his base, it's often worth it to simply contain him. In other words, keep the pressure on so that his villas can't gather, but don't overextend into his base as this will give him chances to break out using his defender's advantage. Consider that ranged-focused compositions work better if you want to keep pressure on his villagers inside his base because that way he can't trade shots and has to stay back with his army.

Army compositions

AoE3 has a hard counter system. This is somewhat uncommon in RTS, and it means that getting a decent army comp is extra important. After all if your opponent has a bunch of huss and you have no anticav, you're going to lose that fight. If he has mostly skirms and you have no cav, you're also losing that fight. Constantly scouting and adapting to your opponent's composition is important, as well as always maintaining a balanced comp and not focusing on 1 unit too much, unless that unit is overpowered.

Note that 3-unit-compositions are ALWAYS superior to 2-unit-compositions. Skirm/pike/hussar beats every combination of 2 you can make out of it (skirm+hussar, skirm+pike, pike+hussar). And it doesn't just beat those compositions, it crushes them.

Musketeers

First, let's talk about the unit that effectively ruins AoE3's colonial age counter system: musks. Musketeer-type units are extremely strong in colonial due to their amazing flexibility and convenient cost. In colonial, a musk+cavalry composition is already almost unbeatable using anything except a mirror of the composition. Sadly, even 3-unit-compositions have trouble beating it, which is a core balance flaw in AoE3 that prevents people from going for 3-unit-compositions in colonial since often enough musk+cav is plenty. This is what I mean when I say musks ruin AoE3's colonial age counter system. But why are musks so strong?

- Musks are very flexible. They counter cavalry which encourages players to make an immobile composition to counter the musks, which is a big deal because it means the musk player can always run away from fights and can raid much more effectively. The problem here is that this immobile composition that the other player is forced to make, doesn't even counter musk+cav. A RI+HI combo should, in theory, counter HI+cav, but in practice it's the other way around when musks are involved.
- Musks are great damage dealers. Behind a wall of tanks (and by tanks I mean heavy cavalry) musks are hard to focus down without big overkill and their damage is high. The fact that musks die quickly to focused RI fire, which is really their only weakness, becomes less relevant this way.

Because musks aren't really heavy infantry and quite unique in their flexibility, in the future I will treat them as their own unit type. After all when choosing your unit composition, you can't treat musks as heavy infantry. You have to see them as a mixture between HI and RI, which works well in entirely different situations than HI would.

So, what if your opponent has access to a musk-type unit and you don't? You have to either age up or outmass him. In fact, lack of musks is the reason why colonial play as Germans is awkward, which is why you'll see Germans almost always going for a fortress age build. Aztecs also don't have musks, but they generally do okay since their colonial composition works so well together. China is hurt by the lack of musks but they also have no heavy cav to write home about, so they have even more reasons to play for fortress.

What it comes down to is a musk composition is beatable with fast rushes where you outmass them significantly, but if your armies are equal in cost a musk composition will almost always come out on top. The exception is when you have a ranged inf+ranged cav composition which can hit and run musk+cav pretty well, but only India has this option *cough*.

Common colonial compositions and how to counter them

Note on single unit compositions

Full cav, full musk and full RI can be viable in colonial but these compositions are easily countered and they would only be used as a start which will then transition in either a fortress build or an adapted unit composition based the opposing unit composition or build.

Also note that for example an xbow+pike build can choose not to make pikes if you're not throwing cav at him, but this still counts as an xbow+pike composition because it has the option to mix pikes when necessary and is therefore not really countered by full cav.

Note on ranged cavalry in colonial

This is a bonus that basically gives India a fortress composition in colonial. Because it only applies to India *cough* I will only list its counters in short:

RI+RC+cav counters every other colonial composition although it has trouble against melee-based comps like Azzy's mace+coy+puma.

RI+RC counters most other colonial compositions but is soft countered by RI+cav and breaks even with musk+cav.

RC+cav counters RI+cav and is countered by RI+musks or by RI+HI.

From this point on, for convenience, I will assume there's no such thing as ranged cavalry in colonial and I will assume you can decide by yourself how to counter single unit compositions.

Remember, musks do not count as HI in this next part.

3-unit-composition (example: xbow+pike+hussar)

Use: Used by all civs with no access to musks.

Pros: Can't be hard countered.

Cons: Needs 2+ military buildings, and the cost of the units usually differs so you need to gather all 3 resources which means you will need to invest more in market upgrades.

Counters: All 2-unit-compositions except musk+cav.

Countered by: Soft countered by 3-unit-compositions with musks.

3-unit-composition with musks (example: xbow+musk+hussar)

Use: Used by all civs with access to musks.

Pros: Can't be countered.

Cons: Needs 2+ military buildings, and the costs of the units usually differ so you need to gather all 3 resources which means you will need to invest more in market upgrades.

Counters: Everything else (soft counters 3-unit-compositions without musks).

Countered by: -

RI+HI (example: xbow+pike)

Use: A common composition from 2 rax rushes and non-musk civs.

Pros: Cost. These units are cheap and cost wood (exception: Dutch) so you can easily mass them while shipping 700w/600w which circumvents the fact that wood gathers slowly, making these units more cost effective than their cost would imply.

Cons: Immobile and easy to counter.

Counters: HI+cav

Countered by: RI+cav, musk+cav

RI+cav (example: skirm+hussar)

Use: A composition used mostly defensively by boom civs to counter infantry rushes, and by all civs against Otto's infamous jan+abus combo.

Pros: Good at holding rushes, even small amounts of cav can still be dealt with using minutemen and your cav still allow you to raid and keep the pressure on.

Cons: It's hard to move out of your base with this because your opponent could be doing a secret cav switch which would destroy your army.

Counters: RI+HI, RI+musk

Countered by: HI+cav, musk+cav

HI+cav (example: dopp+uhlan)

Use: Rarely used by any civs other than Germans.

Pros: Very dangerous in close combat, hard to micro against.

Cons: Is not very cost effective against musks. (this would really only work long term against China or Aztec).

Counters: RI+cav

Countered by: RI+musk, RI+HI (not in case of dopp+uhlan)

RI+musk (example: yumi+ashig)

Use: Used by all civs with access to musks if their RI-based composition runs into cavalry, and often used by Otto in the form of jan+abus.

Pros: Solid ranged composition with good kiting potential, and out of the 2-unit-compositions its only real counter (RI+cav) can't really go for a head on fight outside of their base due to the possibility of you having cav.

Cons: Immobile.

Counters: HI+cav, soft counters musk+cav with good kiting.

Countered by: RI+cav

Musk+cav (example: musk+hussar)

Use: The most used 2-unit-composition in colonial, used by all civs with access to musks.

Pros: Mobile, can move around the map relatively easily and retreat if the enemy army is superior. Is supported by a food+gold eco which is efficient and sets you up nicely for a potential age up.

Cons: Not really a con, but it's not a 3-unit-composition.

Counters: RI+cav, RI+HI

Countered by: Soft countered by RI+musk if they kite well.

Fortress compositions and how to counter them

In fortress, there are a lot of unique compositions based on the strengths of the civ in question. France for example will often aim for a cav-heavy composition because cuirs are strong while a civ like Japan will focus on infantry to get the most out of their pavilion wonder, Brits will try and mass longbows, etcetera. Of course, this also means that certain compositions work better against some civs than against others, for example you'd want a lot of cav against China while against France you'd want a lot of anti-cav. Obviously, constant scouting and adapting to the opponent's composition is vital but often enough they are quite predictable. Otto will often attempt mass jans and wait for mamelukes then push for the kill, Spain will probably try to overwhelm you with mainly rod+lancer, Germans may hit you with a large mass of uhlands, etcetera. Playing into the strengths of your own civ and adapting to the strengths of the opposing civ becomes very important here.

The most important difference between fortress and colonial is the addition of ranged cavalry. Now, musks no longer dominate the game and the best composition becomes the ranged-focused RI+RC+cav. The cav in this composition are mostly meant to tank damage and they are indeed an important addition to the composition, as RI+RC loses to RI+RC+cav. Anyway, knowing how to counter 2-unit-compositions in fortress is less of a big deal than in colonial because in fortress, most civs will have both their military buildings up (most of them have to in order to get RC) and in almost all cases both civs will have a 3-unit-composition. Fights are then decided by micro, and by which unit each player focused on. If one player got a lot of RI out and the other a lot of RC, it's not rocket science to decide who has the best composition. It's all about knowing how much RC you need to stop the opposing cav dead in its tracks and always trying to have more RI than your opponent to force them to initiate the engagement, which is not what they want in a fight where their cav have to walk all the way across to your army only to get picked off by RC before they even arrive at your infantry. And if your civ has some kind of bonus that makes one of their unit types stronger, by all means focus on that unit.

List of civs and their favourite fortress compositions

Aztecs

Azzy has some choice in the matter. Most sensible is usually mace+ERK+coyote, but sometimes an Azzy will mix in some jaguars to counter heavy inf. A jaguar+coyote based composition is very hard to counter efficiently, but it's expensive and because you will have the range advantage you can usually outmicro it. Pure RI+RC is advisable against Azzy, you really don't want to be making too much cav against ERK.

British

Brits will probably go for a longbow-heavy composition with some goons and some huss. Longbows are tough to deal with, especially considering how many of them Brits can crank out. You can't kite them and they're relatively strong against single targets which makes tanking their hits with cav less effective. Still, a cav-heavy composition would often be best against Brits because it at least discourages them from massing crazy amounts of longbows, although they do often upgrade their musks so in the end you're going to have to adapt.

China

China has somewhat of a weakness against cav. You're going to want to focus on that, but don't overdo it. They can get Manchu out and suddenly your cav force is a whole lot less scary. Either way China's fortress army is a pain to deal with and you're simply going to have to out-eco them. They're comparable to India in the sense that the later in the game you get, the better their army starts working together.

Dutch

The Dutch army is really nothing special in fortress. They may try something gimmicky like ruyter falc to force some kind of gold-heavy artillery fight but usually this isn't worth it. What they'll mostly end up with is the skirm+ruyter+huss composition which is awkward because none of those units are particularly strong and they have to upgrade the huss. Most compositions will beat the Dutch army cost-effectively but be careful, their eco does allow them to gather quite a decent army in mid fortress.

France

France will almost always go for mostly RI+cav with a couple of goons. A cav-heavy (that means a lot of RC and a lot of cav) composition will generally work best against them because it discourages cuirs and we all know French love their cuirs.

Germans

Against this civ you're going to want to prepare for a lot of cav. Germans will often age with a stable already up, sometimes with only a stable up, and their shipment bonus means they will never run short of uhlans. Some HI are often good against Germans because even if you have a bunch of RC, uhlans will get a lot of damage in before they all die and having some units to scare them off and/or tank melee hits can be game changing.

India

Having the best fortress age unit selection, India will aim for mid fortress. They'll have some mahouts and their monks to tank, optional sowars to kill ranged infantry, urumi to chew through basically everything whilst tanking hits and zamburak/sepoy/gurkha to back it all up. Their individual units are cost effective, but the way their army works together is unmatched. You're going to have to outmass them significantly with a 3 unit combo to stand a chance.

Iroquois

Iro don't have much to write home about in fortress except great cav shipments. Kanya forest prowler + the 5 cuirs will often be the way to go for them, with some musk riders or tomas mixed in for anticav. Their early fortress mass is something to be scared of, but their unit selection really isn't. In that way, they are the opposite of India and will need to push in early fortress to gain a lasting advantage.

Japan

Japan banks on their golden pavilion to gain an advantage in fortress. Their units have great upgrades and they have access to 4 flaming arrows which is a big deal. Often, Japan will go for ashi+yumi+flaming arrow with possibly some nagi to force you to make anticav, and their upgraded ball of infantry with 4 more big damage dealers behind it is really quite scary. Anyway, because Japan loves infantry so much, RI+cav is the way to go against them.

Otto

Otto has 2 timings that they can hit with entirely different compositions. First is the early fortress jan+falc push. It's scary but mostly holdable if you're quick and precise in your defense. The next timing is the real problem: Mamelukes are too strong and such an excellent addition to the Ottoman army that it will usually break their opponent. Otto can also choose to ignore the early fortress timing and go straight for mams while setting up a solid abus+jan or even abus+CA composition. So what can you do against this? Honestly, not much except outmass them hard which is a challenge considering their speed and TP eco.

Russia

There's hardly anything in fortress for Russia. All they get is a falc shipment and CA. They don't get a new skirm and no new cav unit so they have to upgrade everything, often including musks because they still had some from colonial. It's not uncommon for Russia to actually stick with strelet+musk+cossack even in fortress age. Sure, the falcs help but most civs get those. In the end Russia really wants to stick with colonial, but as it turns out their eco takes some time and shipments to really get going and more often than not their opponent can semi-FF well enough that Russia has no choice but to follow them up.

Portuguese

Ports have mams, which is great. They can set up a strong RI+RC composition while waiting for mams and then take control when they arrive. In most cases this is what Ports will do, and your best bet against it is to pull off some kind of timing before mams arrive, taking advantage of their lack of heavy cavalry. But this is risky since it's hard to scout when the mams are being shipped, and to counter pure RI+RC you would want to make pure RI+cav. If you're in the middle of your timing push with RI+cav and mams pop out you're pretty much doomed, so it's usually best to mix in some anticav which is awkward because they do nothing until (and if) mams pop out. (This is one of the reasons mams are so strong).

Spain

Having a fast FF with a relative lack of eco, Spain tends to try early fortress timings.

Lancer+pike+rod+skirms+falcs can be scary because it's hard to match their mass, and you can find yourself overwhelmed. Focus on ranged units backed up with building walls, they are especially important against Spain because it hinders their melee-based army.

In mid to late fortress Spain will usually revert back to the standard skirm+lancer+goon with possibly some rods mixed in, or full rod+lancer depending on your civ (this can be strong if you don't have access to musks). Something to note is that Spain is a civ against which musks in fortress can be advisable. It's hard to counter rod+lancer effectively without them.

Micro

Knowing which unit composition to go for and how to counter your opponent's composition is one thing, using your army as efficiently as possible is something else. It's one of the most important skills to have as a good AoE3 player, and is generally called "micro".

Note that micro is not just army control, it's also using your villagers in the most efficient way possible. However that's something that will eventually come natural to any player and this chapter will only focus on army control.

In the end, army control is nothing more than the correct and properly timed use of a collection of standard tactics, plus positioning. The things a good player automatically does and doesn't do when microing his army are important, but there's not really a lot of theory behind it and the list would be endless. For this reason I will mostly focus on larger-scale micro like positioning and how to plan a fight. I will look into most standard compositions and how they work together in a battle, and most importantly I'll talk about how to make sure your units are fighting their counter (for example you want pikes to fight cav, not skirms). For starters, there are a couple of basic things everyone should be doing:

- Using control groups. It's simply more efficient, and it will train your mechanics. This is probably the single most important advice anyone could give for AoE3.
- Using attack move. This is a time-saving way of preventing overkill and pathing issues. It's especially important with melee units, you will lose won games if you don't use it.
- Kiting with ranged units (shoot and run, shoot and run, repeat). If you have map control and your composition is more ranged-focused, you should be doing this non-stop (keep hitting his army no matter where it is). And in fights, if your composition is more ranged-focused and you're on the defensive you should also be doing this non-stop. It's a simple tactic that can decide games easily.
- Putting non-musk heavy infantry (like pikes) in cover mode to tank ranged damage. This makes it much harder for your opponent to pick them off effectively and can give your ranged infantry in the back enough time to deal their damage. For example abus take 4 hits to kill a pike in cover mode where they would otherwise take 2.
- Putting musks in melee mode when you need them to kill cav, or moving them into the cav so that all of them are in melee range of at least one cav unit and then attack moving them. This isn't always a good idea but it does 1 of 2 things: kills their cav, or keeps his cav away for a while longer.

Planning a battle

After you made sure that either you want to fight his army or you are forced to, the next part is planning the battle. Of course this is often something you have to do quickly (especially if you're on the defensive which is one of the reasons defensive play is so much harder), and doing this quickly and correctly can be challenging. As you play more games and fight more battles though, your planning speed will improve on its own as you learn which parts to focus on. For now here are the 3 things you need to think about before engaging:

1. **Decide who would win the ranged fight.**

This is important because whoever wins the ranged fight is happy just sticking with that. Whoever would lose that fight is forced to initiate a melee war which means he would first have to take the initiative of moving his cavalry and HI towards the opponent's army.

If you're the one who would lose a ranged fight, make sure you have a (slightly) better army than him. Taking the initiative with equal units will lose a fight if both micro equally well, because your opponent gets more hits off your heavy cav, more time to pick off heavy infantry or ranged cavalry and his ranged inf can end up tanking HI melee hits which you don't want.

2. Decide if you need minutemen.

Are you on the defensive and is your opponent pushing aggressively into your base? That's when you always call minutemen, 100% of the time, even if you don't necessarily need them to win the fight. MM are also viable in pretty much all cases where you're committing to a fight somewhat near your base and even if you're fighting in the middle of the map, if it's going to be a long fight, trying to delay it a little while calling mm can be worth it.

3. If you are the better ranged composition, decide where to kite to.

As your opponent tries to get his melee units to your army in order to snare it (combat this by removing units from your group after they're hit or when they're about to be hit by a melee attack), you'll be kiting as much as you can to delay the melee war and pick off as many of his units as possible before he catches up. But where to go? Often, your own base will be close and it's best to kite to that, but in all other cases if you see trees or a natural chokepoint nearby, those are some solid options as well. Trees and chokepoints are a true pain for a melee army against a ranged army due to the way pathing works in this game (poorly), and the advantage you get from the lack of surface area shouldn't be underestimated.

Fighting a battle

At this point, one of the players has decided to move his melee army into the enemy's army and stuff starts dying. Let's throw in some common examples, one for colonial and one for fortress. Note that in each of these examples I'm assuming a balanced mix of units where the armies are relatively equal. This doesn't necessarily mean equal in cost, it means the fight would be (almost) even if both players microed to the best of human ability.

Xbow+pike (A) against musk+hussar (B)

Obviously, player A has the range advantage and will try kiting. Important here is that he doesn't let his xbows get snared, which player B wants to achieve by hitting them with his hussars. Attempting to prevent this, player A will move his pikes in front of his xbows to catch the hussars before they reach the xbows, while trying to target the musks with his xbows and minimizing overkill by drag microing. This is a very challenging situation for player A and good mouse control can really make a difference for him especially.

Meanwhile player B will try to get rid of the pikes with his musks which is why it helps him to bait the pikes by parading his cav in front of the enemy xbows. This little back and forth mechanic will continue until one of 2 things happens: all the pikes are dead, or all the hussars are dead. Usually, if all the pikes die with still a decent number of huss remaining, player B will win the fight unless their musk numbers have been significantly hurt. If the huss die first, player B will probably end up losing the fight. Cover mode pikes with xbows behind them can be a pain to deal with if all you have is musks, but then again he has the advantage of being able to retreat at any time.

Skirm+goon+cuir (A) vs skirm+goon+cuir (B) where player B has more skirms and player A has more cuirs

In this scenario player A will have to engage his melee units first, in this case the cuirs. He will simply run them up to player B's army and attack move. After that the cuirs don't really require much attention and most of player A's attention will go to focus firing player B's dragoons and player B's attention will go to focus firing player A's dragoons. Killing cuirs with goons is important too of course, but since the cuirs are in front this will happen automatically (with some overkill, if you have time to spare it's always good to drag micro your goons). Your skirms on the other hand will need more attention as they will start shooting cuirs if you don't micro them, which is a waste.

You'd think that, because cuir > skirm, player A would have the advantage in this fight. After all he has more cuirs while player B has more skirms. However because player A has to be the one to initiate the fight, player B will get more hits off with his goons and will have an easier time focus firing the goons with his skirms, which evens out the advantage player B might have had.

In the end, player B would've been most happy with some extra goons instead of extra skirms. That way player A would still lose the (prolonged) ranged war and would have to engage, AND extra goons > extra cuirs. This is again a sort of rock-paper-scissors kind of skirmish where both players try to have a clear idea of their opponent's army comp and attempt to counter it.

Scouting

Considering how important it is to know what your opponent is up to and adapt properly, knowing how to scout is a big deal. It can make the difference between choosing the losing play and the winning one, between choosing a build that happens to be countered by what your opponent is doing, and choosing a build that counters theirs.

Good scouting is a big reason why rushing isn't viable in this game. Fast rushes are always scoutable, and easily adapted to. Walls stop most rushes dead in their tracks, and most civs can adapt into defensive play focusing on military rather than economy with plenty of time to spare. That is, if they scout in time.

When to scout

In most cases, you want your explorer in their base around the time they hit colonial to see what politician they aged up with and military buildings they're building, if any. Stick around to see their first shipment, then leave so you don't lose your explorer. Losing your explorer early can be a big deal, it's actually a great tank in fights (don't underestimate this!).

After you scouted their initial build, scouting for their composition becomes important. Don't use your explorer for this unless you're India (can get away), but simply send out single units, preferably cheap ones of course. If he's on top of his army he can still prevent you from seeing everything, but in practice you will get enough information most of the time. It's also important to keep track of how many units they're building, just so you'll know in time if they try to age up. Of course, you can also know this simply by how aggressive they're being.

What to scout for

This differs per civ, and it also changes often due to an evolving metagame. For example, keeping track of how many trading posts some civs are building can be very valuable in the future, while it's not as important yet (a France without trading posts isn't necessarily rushing you, he may just be doing a suboptimal semi-FF or musk+huss start).

Aztecs

Scout their war hut and when they build it. Are they building it forward? If so, expect early pressure. Keep track of it to see if they sent a unit shipment first. Scout their first shipment. If 3 WP it's an eco build, if 700w it can still be anything. After that it becomes guesswork, try to scout later whether they sent 3 WP in early colonial. If they did that means they won't be attacking early, but they may still be doing a sub-10 min timing.

British

Scout during transition. If you see them building a lot of manors that means they went for virginia company. This means they will boom fast and you will either need to age up to fortress quickly or pressure them in early colonial. Next, it's useful to scout if they have a stable. If so they're likely going musk+huss, otherwise lb+pike.

China

Scout their first shipment in colonial. If 700g, they're FFing, if 700w they're staying colonial. You can also scout an FF during transition, if they have villas on gold that means FF.

Dutch

Scout how many banks they're building in early colonial, and which military buildings. If their first shipment is 700w that means they went with a boomy build (still scout their military buildings), if bank wagon they went for quick cav (or quick skirms, in which case they probably want to pressure you early).

France

Scout for buildings in early colonial. If only a stable, it's probably a cav semi-FF but they also could be mixing the raxes later. See if their first shipment is 4v (semi-FF) or 700w (raxes) in this case.

If they start 2 rax it's probably xbow+pike (but verify this, it could still be 2 rax musk as well). If 1 rax it's a musk semi-FF. If no buildings, it's a straight FF.

Germans

Same as France, except a 2 rax from them always means bow+pike. Not that Germans should ever be starting 2 rax anyway. Also if they start 1 rax, scout their first shipment. If 8 xbow, they're obviously rushing.

India

Scout the speed of their age up and their age up wonder. With 10/10 Karni they could still be aggressive but they will likely go for a boom build, with 10/10 Agra (forward?) they will usually try to put on early pressure.

With a slow age up, they will have gone Agra but they likely will not rush.

Iroquois

Slow age up means FF or semi-FF (scout first shipment (600g?) to verify which one). Fast age can mean a number of things, but usually you're going to want to wall off and sit in your base for a while. If they get 2 TPs up in the near future it's likely that they're going for some kind of longer-term build involving an early stable.

Japan

It's not very important to scout Japan since you are basically the one dictating their play from the start and it's more important to be chasing their monks all over the map, but if it's a bad Japan player he still may do something gimmicky. Scout if he's doing a late double rax or rax+stable after 600w or building his military building in early colonial.

Ottomans

A good Otto won't straight FF, and if he does he won't age with the tower. But, in reality, most Otto players are so bad that they will age up with the tower and FF quite frequently. So scout for this. If you scout 400w age up and 700w first, they're going for a colonial build. Scout their buildings to see which combo, usually this will be jan+abus.

Russia

14v age up or 17v age up (with this they will likely go heavy on eco)? Also scout their first shipment, if it's 5 coss they're going to be rushing you and if it's anything else they're playing for the long term. If they send 700g first they are likely setting themselves up for a quick musk+coss push.

Portuguese

Scout their military building(s) in early colonial. If they don't have any they're FFing, otherwise it's likely a semi-FF. If you scout 2 raxes, they're doing something suboptimal and

it's probably a 2 rax bow+pike rush. Confirming their age up is hard because they're likely going to have 2 raxes + stable up either way.

Spain

Scout during transition. If they aren't chopping a lot of wood (after the potential TP) that means FF. If they are chopping wood, it's either a semi-FF or a colonial build but in Spain's case this is very hard to verify. In either case they will be sending 700w and 5v in early colonial, and often enough 700g after that (no matter if they want to age or not). The best way to scout whether Spain is ageing up is their mass, and whether they have 2 raxes or not.

Civ balance

As we all know, the balance isn't great in AoE3. Some civs are simply too strong early on while others are too strong in their late game scaling. A big issue here is that, dealing with differences such as early game/late game scaling between civs, when you have 105 match ups it's going to mean that a lot of match ups are going to be imbalanced. Why? Because 1 civ will scale better into the late game, and the other will either be able to kill them before that, or won't be. Therefore, there are very little truly balanced match ups and making a patch that balances all of them is simply impossible.

Note that when ranking the civs I'm not taking water into account. The rank list is really only reliable on the FP Great plains, which most of this guide is based on anyway, but it should hold up on most other balanced (FP) maps.

The reason I'm only counting FP maps is that balance is very different on the rest of them. Every civ has some preferences when it comes to the maps, after all, and some of them are a lot stronger on one map than they are on the next. I've found FP Great plains to be generally the most balanced map, given the extra hunts and balanced mines and trees. This may be a controversial opinion, as many players consider the abundance of hunts a weak point of the map. However, the reality of it is that an abundance of hunts is the only way to play a balanced game in AoE3. Lack of hunts is simply too advantageous for certain civs, and doesn't allow most of them to even complete their build. Yes, abundance of hunts promotes defensive play and makes eco civs stronger, but as it turns out this actually improves balance in the end. Brits for example are unplayable on most maps because they run out of hunts too early, and most of the builds that are too strong on this patch are early-game focused and lose some of their strength on a resource-rich map. Iro don't really care, though.

Tier 1

Iroquois

Still, Iro are unmatched. Not played as often any more because everyone realises by now how broken they are, it's a civ that can rush you and hurt your early economy with constant relentless pressure while happily sending 5 vills at home and/or getting a 2 TP eco up. And you can't even blindly prepare for this due to their strong FF builds.

A free early TP, a 4 minute age up with a free war hut, an insane war chief, strong military shipments (especially cavalry), and strong unit upgrades. Truly, this civ has all the possible tools to turn the early game into a game-winning advantage.

Ottomans

A close second, Otto wins most match ups easily by abusing one of 2 things, along with their fast age up times and TP eco. Those 2 things are mamelukes and abus guns.

5 mams is possibly the best shipment in the game, and Otto has an easy time holding out until they arrive. Ask yourself, should it be possible for a civ with a very low eco to predictably sit in their base for 13-15 minutes and then suddenly pushing with an unstoppable army?

Then there's abus, the strongest colonial unit in the game. The infamous jan+abus build is a pain to deal with, and Otto can even choose to abuse both abus and mams and go for abus+mam+CA, the type of composition that can kill an army without even losing anything.

Tier 2

Aztecs

Azzy is comparable to Iro in that they have an immediate edge in the early game with a fast age up and solid early XP income. However they are missing the things that make Iro truly OP, like the free war hut and the war chief. Still Azzy's boom is better and their units are better, and they scale very well into late colonial. Most of their strength comes from this, as they combine this with strong mid colonial timings to prevent other civs from ageing. Their colonial army composition shouldn't be underestimated, even considering the lack of musks. The units are all cost effective, especially with the war dance, and work together nicely.

India

India has some very solid defensive options and scales insanely well into the late game, making them scary to be up against because you know you're going to have to push them eventually and they are not easy to break. Their boom is somewhat slow though, and they are often forced to play completely passively in the early game to get it going allowing their opponents to boom fully or tech quickly, making India somewhat vulnerable to mid game timing attacks. But most civs will still end up on the receiving end after India gets going, their fortress army is such a bargain considering how strong it is.

Brits

On balanced maps, Brits are very hard to break. A rush doesn't beat them, their boom can be extremely fast and FF builds don't really work against them because they will boom fully and overwhelm you with units in early to mid fortress. They can do this because longbows stand up against skirms quite well, and they have some solid upgrades for their musks and hussars in colonial. However they do run out of resources quickly, and starving them out will sometimes work.

Tier 3

Japan

Japan is a slower booming Brit with better units and they don't have the issue of running out of resources at 10 minutes. They are a lot slower though, and this makes them vulnerable to timings much like India. Like India, Japan also doesn't really have the option of being aggressive while booming, making their passive play easy to abuse. Also, Japan has the issue of their shrines being easy to "raid", which can really hurt them early on. Still, their scaling is amazing. In fortress, armies melt like ice cream in the sun to their heavily upgraded mass of infantry.

France

France is a sort of average. They can do most things decently, but nothing exceptionally. They are versatile, well designed, and balanced. They have a good rush, a good semi-FF, solid long term colonial options and decent scaling, but they lack that edge that the top civs have. Very comparable to Germans in play style, France likes to get a TP or two up and age to fortress quickly. Unlike Germans though, they have musks in colonial and have the option for a strong prolonged colonial play with musk+huss.

Germans

Germans are a fan of fortress age builds, which makes sense because they don't have musks and ageing up gets them an extra uhlan with every shipment. Their shipments are great because of the extra uhlands and they get a decent eco going with the TP and a 6 vill shipment, making their semi-FF a force to be reckoned with. However their weakness to musk type units in colonial means that against some civs they will have to age up somewhat uncomfortably. Also, their units in fortress are really nothing special and they don't have the 2 falc shipment, which is somewhat of a big deal.

Spain

Spain is not bad. Their fast no eco FF allows them to punish even fast booms, and their fortress army is pretty strong. Yes, their age up politicians are terrible and their eco isn't much to write home about, but the shipment bonus still allows for very versatile, almost France-like play. Spain is weaker than France at almost everything, yes, but I feel like with the meta shift into resource shipments, a Spanish (and I'm just speculating here) 5v 700w 700g 600g 1000w semi-FF build could become somewhat of a pain to deal with, as they will be pumping out a ton of units and hit a very scary mid fortress timing.

Tier 4

China

China lacks options. They have a decent FF, but it's really all they have and it's awkward because other civs can counter it with a semi-FF. China doesn't have a good semi-FF because they have little ways of investing in economy, making their FF very predictable which makes it easy to prepare for and easy to counter. Boom civs will simply boom fully and age up afterwards, civs like France and Germans are quite comfortable starving China out until mid fortress, and civs with fast rushes or strong mid colonial timings won't let China age up unharmed. Still though, China's army is very cost effective and a pain to deal with in mid fortress, so left alone for too long they are still scary.

Portuguese

Ports are a solid defensive civ, but their economy grows slowly and they use a whole lot of food. This means they are forced to take map control early, and most civs can take advantage of that by simply massing a bunch of units and preventing the Port from moving out of his base too far. The Port semi-FF is strong but it doesn't get a lot of units out, and until mams they have very little ways of pushing. Mams are the light at the end of the tunnel, but they don't win games by themselves.

Dutch

The Dutch eco gets ahead early on, but it doesn't really stay ahead. Dutch really need to age up since their only anti-cav in colonial is pikes. This makes it easy for their opponent to either boom fully in response and age up too, or do a colonial timing. Most timings are holdable for Dutch with skirm+pike behind a wall, but if he sees that your position can't be broken your opponent is simply going to age and your 3 or 4 banks really aren't as impressive as you may have thought. As soon as gold or hunts run out in the Dutch's base, he'll usually be in trouble.

Russia

To a lot of players it may seem counter-intuitive to put Russia as the bottom civ on this patch. This is because on most maps, their hard-to-break forward position gives a decent advantage. On FP maps though, most civs can semi-FF without running out of resources and Russia has a hard time punishing that. This forces them to age up too, which is simply awkward because fortress age really doesn't get them much. Another awkward thing about Russia (comparable to Ports) is the fact that they have to send cards like wood trickle in discovery and spice trade in colonial as eco cards, where other civs have the superior 3v and 5v. Still their late colonial is extremely scary and forward base hard to break, so they are definitely playable in many match ups, they simply have a hard time coming out on top.

Match ups

As previously stated, there are 105 match ups in AoE3 and all of them are completely unique in how they should theoretically play out. Of course, every civ likes to play for a certain time and a certain unit composition, and finding a civ that matches up well against those 2 factors is key. You want strong musks against rod+lancer and strong anticav against cuirs, but you also want a civ with a strong semi-FF against India and a civ with a good 10 minute mass against Brit. Of course, most civs also have certain builds that they like and you may want to counter. A general rule to go by when it comes to counter builds, which has a crazy amount of exceptions so don't take it for granted, is:

Rush > (semi-)FF > Full boom > Half boom > Rush >....

Civ countering is an important skill to have in a tournament setting, and not so important in quick search or unrated games. However, apart from it being an important skill, knowing how it works also helps to develop a good understanding of each civ's strengths and weaknesses and how to use timings to your advantage. There are usually 2 ways you can take it, from a defensive point of view (outscaling them) or an aggressive one (killing them early), the right choice depending on what you're comfortable with as a player. I will describe the general considerations when choosing a match up with an example.

We are trying to counter China:

Outscaling them

- Find civs that scale better into the late game (15+ minutes) than them.
China has some decent scaling, but better are Japan, India, Portuguese and Brits.
- Out of these civs, which ones are comfortable against their favourite timing attack?
China's timing will come around 12 to 15 minutes in fortress age. Japan, India, and Brits are comfortable holding it where Brits can even push China around that time due to their strong mass.
- Out of those civs, which ones are most comfortable against their unit composition?
China will have a balanced composition with a bunch of melee units in it. Japan and India would be most comfortable against it, Japan with their strong ball of infantry backed up with FA and India with a solid all round army including urumi. British longbows on the other hand are somewhat awkward against China's melee-heavy composition, although Brits are still a solid choice in the match up due to their strong eco advantage.

So if you want to beat China by outscaling them, choose Japan, Brits or India.

Killing them early

- Find civs that scale worse into the late game (15+ minutes) than them.
All civs except Japan, India, Ports and Brits.
- Out of these civs, which ones have potential game-winning timing attacks against them?
China likes fortress but is somewhat weak early (before manchu and before they can get a solid mass of cavalry out). France, Dutch and Germans have a strong timing in early to mid fortress while Azzy, Otto and Iro have solid timings in colonial or during China's transition to fortress at which point China doesn't have an army.
- Out of those civs, which ones are most comfortable against their unit composition?
*(This isn't relevant for the civs that hit China during their transition).
None of the above civs are exceptionally comfortable against it, although France and Germans have strong cav which plays into China's weakness and forces them to make units they wouldn't really want to make.*

So if you want to beat China by killing them early, choose France, Germans, Azzy, Otto or Iro.

Civ counter table

Note: This is an estimation. I'm not particularly experienced in every single one of these match ups and therefore have not figured all of them out. The recent meta shifts have also changed many match ups drastically and in most cases this is still untested by me personally so more often than not I'm going on theory alone.

Green = The match up is favourable for the left civ

Red = The match up is favourable for the top civ

Blue = The match up is close. Note that no match up can ever be totally even.

	Azz	Brit	Chn	Dtch	Fre	Ger	India	Iroq	Japs	Otto	Port	Rus	Spa	Ratio
Aztecs		Blue	Green	Green	Green	Blue	Blue	Red	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	+5
British	Blue		Green	Green	Green	Green	Blue	Red	Blue	Red	Green	Green	Green	+5
China	Red	Red		Blue	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Blue	Green	Blue	-7
Dutch	Red	Red	Blue		Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Blue	Blue	Red	-9
France	Red	Red	Green	Green		Blue	Red	Red	Blue	Red	Blue	Green	Green	-1
Germans	Blue	Red	Green	Green	Blue		Red	Red	Blue	Red	Blue	Green	Blue	-1
India	Blue	Blue	Green	Green	Green	Green		Red	Blue	Red	Green	Green	Green	+5
Iroquois	Green		Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	+12						
Japan	Red	Blue	Green	Green	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red		Red	Green	Green	Blue	+1
Ottomans	Green	Red	Green		Green	Green	Green	+10						
Portuguese	Red	Red	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	Red		Blue	Red	-7
Russia	Red	Red	Red	Blue	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Blue		Red	-10
Spain	Red	Red	Blue	Green	Red	Blue	Red	Red	Blue	Red	Green	Green		-3

Hotkeys

If you're not using hotkeys yet, this is when you start. Important are control groups, as previously stated, for many reasons. They save time. They allow you to micro much more efficiently. And, something else that using control groups will do for you that people seem to be overlooking, is teach you how to use hotkeys. It will get you comfortable using your non-mouse hand which will help you get the hang of other hotkeys as well, improving your game significantly.

I put some thought into my hotkey setup a long time ago and came up with the following set. I don't personally use hotkeys to build units, I just click them (which is not efficient, but I never saw the necessity to hotkey them). Using hotkeys to build units is an option even with this set, for example you can still use R, T, W, and A for unit production.

Ctrl group 1 = ranged infantry
Ctrl group 2 = anti-cav
Ctrl group 3 = cav
Ctrl group 4 = spare/artillery
Ctrl group 5 = spare

Q = Find explorer
E = Find TC
S = Find stable
D = Find barracks
F = Find all rax type buildings
C = Find art foundry/consulate
V = Find market
Space = Find idle villager
G = Find all idle military

W = build villager or use explorer's special ability
A = build house or eject villagers
ctrl-E = build TC
ctrl-S = build stable
ctrl-D = build barracks
ctrl-C = build art foundry/consulate
ctrl-V = build market
ctrl-W = build wall

R = Stagger mode
T = Cover mode
Alt = Attack move

Introduction

This chapter focuses on each civ specifically. For each civ I will describe most viable build variations, but this will not be very detailed and unlike my previous guides most of the focus will be on how to play the civ. By that I mean what your mindset should be when playing a certain civ. What timings to play for, what unit compositions, and ways to play a civ that are largely unexplored in the current meta. You may notice that I like resource shipments, this is simply because they are the best shipments. I personally believe that as the meta evolves more (which it will do slowly due to the lack of competitive players), 600w, 600g, 1000w and 1000g are shipments we will start seeing more often now. I will include them often in this guide even though I have not had the chance to test them with all civs yet.

For convenience and simply because this guide is not meant for absolute beginners, I will assume you know how to allocate your vills. If you don't, it's something you get used to after using a build multiple times. As mentioned in my last guide, figuring out how to do this on your own is very valuable as it allows you to adapt if necessary, instead of following a build blindly. Figuring out the little things on your own will also help you develop an understanding of why I'm making certain choices in a build. And in the end, this guide would simply be too long if I went into that much detail.

Quick note: shipments will be marked like so:

→ (2) 700w

Where (2) means it's the second shipment you're sending.

Quick note #2: After every specific build I will mention a percentage, which is a rough estimation of how often I play the build when playing that civ. For example, 90% would mean that I play that build 9 out of 10 games when playing the civ in question.

Aztecs

Azzy is the least played civ in the game, which is undeserved. The reasons are because of how misunderstood they are, their unique style and possibly their strength. They are one of the top civs after all. They are also a TWC civ which means their villagers have that time-wasting, awkward animation when firing at hunts. This is one of those things that can make you dislike a civ without realising it.

Being a native civ, Azzy also lack market upgrades. The wood upgrade is decent but expensive, and not having steel traps is a huge deal. Really, don't underestimate how big of a deal this is. With 16 vills on food which is actually pretty common in mid colonial, steel traps would be worth 4 vills and it only costs 250 resources.

Pumas are cost effective units but they cost 50f/50g. They are the only Aztec unit in colonial that costs gold, and it's hard to plan how many pikes you need. Usually you'd want the option to simply mix them in on the fly, but it doesn't quite work that way with Azzy. This can make managing your early economy somewhat awkward, but it's something you get used to.

Azzy's early game is complex. There are a lot of choices concerning TPs, and a lot of different shipment orders as Azzy gets an insane amount of shipments early on. They have the option to rush, and this can be viable in some match ups, but the end result according to Azzy's game plan is always a prolonged colonial war as that is where the civ excels.

They ultimately play for the late colonial. They scale extremely well in colonial due to their strong composition (have you tried to micro against mace+puma+coyote?), the war dance, and the excellent coyote upgrade card. However, their boom is limited and some civs can end up outmassing them and can break through their (forward) position in mid colonial, or possibly even age up. In most cases though, Azzy will hold onto map control or hit a strong timing against (semi-)FF builds.

It needs to be mentioned that 3 WP is one of the best colonial shipments in the game. It equals about 2.5 TPs in XP income (3 XP/s), and you can switch to war dance for extra stats at any time (which is a pretty big deal) or even spawn more WP if you're planning for the long term. This is a very strong shipment to send in early colonial because it speeds up all your next shipments by a lot, and gives you the option to buff your units significantly in fights. But is it a better eco shipment than 5 vills?

Yes. Yes it absolutely is. Not even close.

The Aztec build

Immediately check the amount of wood crates you started with. If 3, you're going to want to build a TP immediately (unless you're rushing, then go for market). Get the fire pit up too, and chop 100w for a house. On GP where you can take the middle TP, you'll need 4 vills on wood to get this on time, as your first shipment will be ready at 1 minute and you'll be on 12/10 pop. This will slow your age up slightly and you may even have some idle TC time early, but it's absolutely worth it. If you started with 200w, simply go for the house+fire pit.

Fire pit goes on XP dance until you get your first shipment, then baby dance until you start ageing up. This allows you to make an extra vill but not age up that much later.

→ (1) 3v

Azzy's politicians are pretty terrible. Thank god for the fast age, which is the best politician in the game and should generally (with all civs) be used whenever possible, unless you're saving

it for fortress in case of an Iro semi-FF. Azzy can semi-FF, but they don't care as much about saving the fast age because they don't mind building colonial units on their way to fortress, something Iro is not a fan of. Anyway, why is fast age so strong?

The minute faster age up gets you +3 vills due to less idle TC time, and since Azzy has 2 or even 3 shipments ready as they hit colonial, ageing up slowly would be extra painful because your first 3 colonial shipments will be a minute later than usual.

When you start ageing up, leave 4-5 vills on food for a steady vill production and put the rest on wood. A choice you have to make here is whether to chop for a TP first, or go for the WH immediately. This depends on your game plan, if you go for a TP first you may have trouble holding off rushes and you won't be able to put on early aggression other than small coyote raids, but it is the fastest boom you have so if you're playing for the long term, this is worth it. Azzy is a civ that is very good at playing for the long term, and this plays into that.

As you enter colonial age, you should have almost enough wood for either the TP or the WH. I'll leave it up to your judgement when to build the market, the most greedy eco play is to delay the WH until 700w and chop for a TP+market, but the order at which you build these buildings is up to you and depends entirely on the situation.

→ (2) 700w (exception: no eco rush)

The rush 10%

Azzy have a no eco rush where they chop for a WH with all their vills (meaning idle TC time in early colonial), get it up asap and forward and send a unit shipment first in colonial (so no 700w) which will arrive at that WH. This can be strong sometimes, after all having 10 maces in your base at 4.30 is really quite annoying, but minutemen shut it down and it sacrifices Azzy's own eco as well which ultimately makes it not worth it. It can be a decent meta choice against civs that are unlikely to have the resources for minutemen, though.

The more well-rounded and more popular rush build plays for strong pressure around 6 to 8 minutes and does send the 700w first. Note that if you were planning to rush, you shouldn't have went for either of the early TPs as they will slow you down a bit which in case of a rush is a big deal. If you don't have a market yet, build it from the 700w. It's an option to build a TP from the 700w. This will result in a slightly weaker rush but obviously a better eco, and is often worth it if your rush is just meant to force them to stay colonial, which is about the only situation in which you should be doing this rush.

→ (3) 10 maces

Note that it's better to mine for the pumas than to send them. Push with mace+puma or mace+coyote depending on what you made from WH, and decide whether to continue the pressure. As long as you're continuing the aggression, keep sending military shipments (9 mace and 6 puma, and even 5 coyote (which is a bad shipment) if you really need the units asap). As soon as you think it's not worth it to continue (his defense is too strong), or you've accomplished your goal in that he was forced to stay colonial where he would otherwise have aged, it's time to set yourself up for the long term and send 3 WP. Sometimes 600w first is necessary to keep up at least some military production, depending on if you need that or not.

The 8 minute timing 30%

Meant to punish semi-FFs but also viable to punish heavy eco play, this is a timing that hits hard. It damages the enemy's economy and sets Azzy up for a prolonged colonial (often vs fortress) war where Azzy's primary goal is keeping map control.

When going for this timing, the second early TP is somewhat awkward. It means your mass at 8 min will be slightly weaker, however it will get you the 9 mace shipment earlier which means you can hit your timing slightly earlier. More often than not, you should build it from the 700w. Remember it's also very beneficial when it comes to the follow up, you will need a strong eco in the end. Generally you'll have 3 more shipments after the 700w before you push:

- (3) 600w
- (4) 10 maces
- (5) 9 maces

Note that you don't need that second WH just yet, you will be able to spend your resources just fine without it.

Sometimes it's worth it to keep up pressure with 6 puma, but in most cases after the timing you'll want to invest in economy. 3 WP is the most common follow up, allowing you to crank out 5v and the coyote upgrade quickly, still having 600g for situations where you need a lot of puma. Civs who went for a semi-FF and faced this timing will have a lot of trouble breaking your position, even with falcs.

The late game plan 60%

This is the style that Azzy secretly wants to go for every single game, because it sets them up for a solid mid to late game where they are stronger than most civs. But they run into the issue that if they boom, their opponent may age up and even though Azzy can fight fortress armies in colonial and can even sometimes age up themselves, allowing the opponent to comfortably age up does create chances for them. In such cases, think France for example, Azzy can still start eco-heavy but may adapt into a somewhat weakened 8 min timing with a stronger eco behind it, if they scout a semi-FF from France.

The most greedy start Azzy can do is delaying the WH until 700w, chopping for a market and TP, and sending the following shipments:

- (3) 3 WP
- (4) 5v
- (5) 600w (second WH) or 600g (age up)

Needless to say this will get you a really strong economy with either 1 or 2 TPs, and your dual WH mass will soon overwhelm your opponent. However, some civs will abuse your early passive play and age up or possibly even push in colonial, in which case you can opt out of 5v and send military shipments. Against (semi-)FF builds you can also choose to age up after them with 600g instead of 600w. Note that 5v is not important, it's just stronger long term and if you find yourself needing units for a timing or to hold a timing in (relatively) early colonial, skip 5v and send maces.

Against early colonial rushes, this build is vulnerable so make sure you scout your opponent and make sure he isn't pulling any of that stuff. If you scout a fast rush simply send 10 mace instead of 3 WP and delay your boom a bit. You should still hold any rush that way.

If you ever find yourself in fortress (age up with the nobles hut politician), keep going mace+coyote but add ERK instead of pikes. ERK are an extremely strong dragoon-type unit and will demolish any cav he throws at you while still providing some decent damage against infantry too. Against falcs, make some arrow knights. These are good for sieging a base from far away as well.

British

Counter-intuitively, Brits have the most options out of any civ. They can choose to invest in economy at any random point in the game, but also have solid aggressive options as well as a balanced unit composition. Having so many (eco-focused) options, Brits are one of those challenging civs where you have to scout and adapt. Their early to midgame economy is the best in the game, but it takes a big investment and opens you up to early game timings. Walls as Brit can be a huge help against such timings, but an even better help is to scout and see them coming, and adapt into the right card order and right unit composition to stop the army that you know will be coming at X minutes. Brits are a civ that is very focused on getting just enough mass out to hold early game timings, because too little obviously loses and too much would mean they could have invested more in their economy, which they will need to win the game with later. Greedily cutting corners will win games with Brit.

Then there's longbows which are the best ranged infantry in colonial (not counting abus), and their range makes them work very well behind walls which gives Brit some excellent defensive options. This means Brit can often get away with a fast boom even against rushes, and it makes them generally not worth rushing. This is painful when up against Brits because you know they're booming, and they are a civ that can outgather you by 2k within 8 minutes.

All well and good, but there is an issue that Brit faces.

Brits would be the top civ if they had infinite resources in their base. However this is not the case, and at some point Brit will have to move out. This is where the problem lies, as Brit's boom will only barely have paid off by the time they run out of hunts in their base which means they'll have about the same amount if not less units than their opponent (depending on their civ). The trick here, and this is something NaturePhoenix did intelligently which is one of the reasons he was such a scary Brit player, is using walls. Walls can help you push out across the map, since longbows work so extremely well behind them. Any defensive position with a wall in front of a mass of longbows is pretty much impossible to push into, which makes securing extra resources sometimes a tedious task, but doable.

Mostly a Brit's opponent will end up with some sort of a fast (semi-)FF build. Brit can mass a whole bunch of units by 8 min, don't get that wrong, but it's not going to be a game winning timing against for example a French musk semi-FF. Brit can choose to fight in colonial which is risky, or follow up to fortress. You'd think Brit's FF builds are awkward because they don't generally build a TP, don't have a fast age politician and quick teching interferes with their boom. They also have to upgrade RI and cav in fortress. Seemingly plenty of reasons not to go fortress, but in the end it's just simply something Brits can afford to do against opposing FF builds, and fighting fortress in colonial can be tough. So following them up is a great choice in this case, but it can be too late.

If you scout their age up by reading "X's colony has just reached the fortress age", your only option is now playing it out in colonial. After all, Brits don't have that fast age politician and you'll likely be killed just as you hit fortress.

If you scout their age up by seeing them send 700g early and stopping unit production but your 5v just arrived, you're also too late. Waiting for 700g is not an option, and gathering the entire 2200 resources will usually take too long.

But you can't scout it earlier than that, can you?

No you can't. The solution? send 700g.

Simply send 700g early no matter what (after 700w 600w, or even immediately after 700w) and then choose to use it either for units or for the age up. 700g doesn't only function as a gateway to fortress, it's also a great card which will grow your mass quite a bit if you simply use it for musk huss (or just huss). Then, if you scout his (semi-)FF you won't be in a situation where an awkward 5v shipment just popped out, you'll have 700g lying around and can follow him up comfortably (*note: this trick applies for many other civs as well*). Strategic tricks like these that enable a Brit to be as greedy as possible while keeping an eye on their opponent and keeping their options open is how Brit gets an edge over most civs, and also what makes it such a hard and rewarding civ to play.

The British build

Check your starting crates. Your start is very different for all 3 possibilities:

With 200w and no gold crate, simply build a manor.

With 300w, build a TP and chop 35w for the manor.

With 200w and 100g, Mine 75 gold (usually get most of this from treasures), build a market first and trade gold for wood, then get a manor + hunting dogs.

As players start relying on timings and FF builds to beat Brit rather than fast rushes, booming fast and early with them becomes stronger. Virginia company suddenly finds itself competing with 3v as the first card to send, and actually winning in most cases. If a lot of early military presence is not necessary, VC becomes worth it, after all you're saving almost 50 wood per house and assuming you'll make about 15 during transition and early colonial you'll have saved a total of 750 wood AND generated a bunch of XP, which is huge for an age1 card. The card actually does about the same as port consulate+heavenly kami does for Japan, and Japan goes for that every single game. Go figure.

→ (1) 3v

Or

→ (1) Virginia company

If you had an early TP from a 300w start, always send both (3 villis first). For convenience I will still refer to 700w as your second shipment even if you've already sent 3v and VC.

Remember, with 3 villis first will have more units in early colonial but VC first will have a stronger mass later on. It has strong timings after 7 min but is somewhat vulnerable to fast rushes. Because the style is largely unexplored, I'm unsure myself as to which rushes actually beat it and which don't. Walling always helps, and note that Brits are often quick at ageing (~4:10) so they can usually afford to boom and wait for 700w before building raxes.

→ (2) 700w

700w second is a no-brainer with Brits. Even if you'd only use it for manors it would still be a superior eco card compared to 5v due to the XP you get from building the manors and the 50 extra pop. But of course you're not only using it for manors, you're using it to get (additional) military buildings up, market upgrades, lb or pike, and manors.

Your age up politician is almost always 500f, the tower is unnecessary. However against civs like Iro which can garrison your villis early making the 500f somewhat less useful, tower+200c is viable as well. You are essentially buying a tower for 250f though, since you're missing the 500f, and in theory with proper walling you should never need the tower. If you need it later for map control, delaying it until then is better than getting it early. After all the earlier you get it, the more time it will spend just sitting there doing nothing. Useless investments are something you want to shy away from, especially early on.

Something I like to do as Brits is mine 150g no matter what, and then decide based on their build whether to spend it on minutemen or steel traps in early colonial. This is a mindset you'll have to get into as Brits: setting yourself up for multiple options then choosing one at the latest possible moment so that you have time to scout your opponent and adapt properly.

If you are likely to semi-FF (you can hardly ever know this for sure before scouting your opponent's colonial start), note that building a TP during transition to colonial is worth it.

The 3v build 20%

If you sent 3v first and don't have a TP, that means you're not planning to boom fully. Either you have to defend against early aggression, or you want to be the aggressor. There are 3 ways of playing from here, in each case you'll want to have gathered 200w at the time of age up for your first military building (but don't skip market):

- Cav start. This is a good choice against rushes that are holdable with 5 cav + minutemen. You can turn it into colonial play with any composition involving huss, but it can also be turned into a strong semi-FF (think against China).

Get a second military building from the 700w. In situations where you need a lot of infantry fast you might even get 2 raxes from it to land on a total of 2 rax+1 stable. Sometimes it's better to wait for the 600w and boom fully from 700w.

→ (3) 700g or (3) 600w

You can choose to age up immediately from the 700g, in that case send nothing afterwards until fortress unless you got a TP up during age up (which in hindsight you should have).

→ (4) 700g or (4) 600g

You can choose on the fly whether to age up with it or not. 600w is also good if you still have it, but note that you won't have the option to age.

- Musk start. Better against fast HI+cav based rushes than cav, and also less vulnerable to timings if you decide to follow up with a semi-FF. A musk start can also put on some solid pressure where cav are more of a raiding force. The follow up is identical to the cav start.
- Lb/pike start. Strong if you want to turtle behind a wall (a rush or an 8 min timing will never break you that way), or if you want to 2 rax rush them. This isn't as strong as the French 2 rax but it still puts on some decent pressure and can take initiative where Brits would otherwise lack it.
 - (3) 600w. Build a stable from this unless you want to do a full inf rush or you're 100% sure you want to age up.
 - (4) 700g (Mix cav or age up) or (4) 6 lb (continued rush or lb/pike timing).

The recommended card order is very similar for all 3 of these options, but they're also not very clear cut. Brits are a civ that should be adapting to their opponent from the moment they hit colonial, and they have many options since they can choose how gradually they want to boom and their colonial unit comp is very balanced. The question mark after the first 3 colonial shipments means that at that point, there are too many variations. There are too many different situations you could find yourself in after 3 colonial shipments, and the next card to send depends entirely on that situation. Instead of mentioning your options and which one to use in which situation, here's the gist of it:

- A resource shipment (the last one) is best if you want to move out soon or have to defend a timing soon (in the next 1 to 4 minutes).
- 5v is best if you're sure you're going to be left alone for the next 4 min and have already sent both of your wood shipments. If you still have 600w, that is still better than 5v.
- A unit shipment (lb or musk) is best if you need units now (<1 minute).

The VC build 80%

Also known as the greedy build, this will get you a vill count of about 35 at 6.30 which is a big deal. However, obviously you're throwing most of your early income into your boom, which means you'll have less units. Use this at your own risk, it takes a solid understanding of the match up and some good adaptation to be comfortable with it. And yet, it may be one of the strongest builds on the current patch.

The main strength of this build is that it, while designed to boom as quickly as possible, also has the option of turning into a relatively normal defensive build. It doesn't actually force you to boom, you can still choose to simply gather 200w for your military building and build it. Relative to 3v, it will have less of an economy in early colonial, but it will likely still hold the rush and end up winning later because rushing just isn't great against a Brit with a decent hunt. This makes it often worth it to make the early investment and send VC, allowing you to choose later whether it's worth it to boom fully or to simply make some units. After all, it booms better than the 3v build and will still beat (most) rushes. This again comes back to that typical Brit mindset of cutting corners, keeping their options open and making choices at the latest possible moment.

During transition, it's recommended to get the market up first and gather just 100f, then put all villas on wood. Get gang saw, don't bother with 100f for a vill. You will age up with 500f, and the small idle TC time is not worth wasting wood over.

Mass manors.

The TP is still worth it, so if you're planning to semi-FF get that up. As you hit colonial, don't stop chopping wood. Mine gold after hunting dogs for either mm or steel traps and just keep massing manors until 700w. The arrival of 700w is when you decide what to build, usually it'll be 2 raxes for lb+pike. Cav is also fine, or even musk huss from 2rax+stable immediately.

→ (3) 600w

Even if you went cav or musk(+huss) this is worth it for market upgrades and more manors. If you really need more units for some reason, 700g is also fine, but this would be a rare exception.

→ (4) 700g

Age with this or mix hussars, decide as it arrives. At this point you can switch to musk huss comfortably.

The same principles apply to this build as the 3v build, but this has some stronger timings from 8-10 min. 700w 600w 6 lb is pretty strong, and 700g after that for a cav switch can really throw them off. Sending 5 villas with this build isn't viable early, as you're always looking to push out of your base as your hunts run out around 8-10 min and 5 villas won't have paid off yet at that point.

China

If China had any realistic means of booming, they would be an interesting civ. As they are now though, they're a slow civ without musks with no means of booming and no means of punishing economic play either. It doesn't take a genius to say that this is a recipe for failure. China's eco is weak, their semi-FF is slow, and prolonged colonial wars would be great for them if they had cav worth a damn which, sadly, they do not. They do have one thing going for them though:

China's fortress scaling is truly amazing. Even with a relatively shitty economy, their units' crazy cost-efficiency and strong shipments make for a very scary mass. A naked China FF that goes untouched is a scary build to face because of that. Generally a naked FF (think Spain) would run into eco trouble and have to push you in early fortress, but China is happy sitting back and massing, eventually reaching critical mass and pushing out with an amount of units that makes you think their eco is better than you thought it was.

But, semi-FF > FF, this isn't any less true against China. A cav semi against them forces them to send 9 pikes or face awkward amounts of idle villager time while you're both ageing up. A musk semi forces them to send 8 ckn or face the same problems, and a musk+huss semi will truly give them a headache. Most players don't know how to abuse the big window of opportunity China gives them when they FF, and therefore their FF will seem a lot stronger than it really is. China is slow and they dislike colonial age, so harassing them early is a no brainer.

Normally, to counter strong semi-FF play as China, you'd want to semi-FF yourself in order to have a strong defense but still reach that age that you love so much (fortress). The problem here is that China's semi-FF isn't very good. Why? Multiple reasons:

- There's only 1 way for them to boom and it's very inefficient. A semi-FF without at least some economic investment besides the market is weak.
- They have to send unit shipments to have any half decent army composition. A semi-FF generally doesn't get a lot of units out so it wants to focus on getting the exact right units out. China doesn't really have that option, except with a unit shipment to balance their composition. This is awkward because a unit shipment is about the last thing you want to be sending when semi-FFing.
- Their semi-FF is quite slow for a non-boom civ. A civ like Brit for example can semi-FF and reach fortress around the same time as China with a much, much better economy.

Don't underestimate China's colonial potential (that's not to say they're strong in colonial, but they aren't totally hopeless). Even without strong cav, after 2 of their unit shipments they have a decent mass, and their shipments arrive fast with the 2 TPs up. China has a choice after they've sent 2 of their military shipments. Their mass by that time is usually strong enough that it can be used for some kind of colonial timing, or they can use it to defend and age up. Often, the latter is the correct choice as reaching fortress unharmed as China is very tempting indeed. This would potentially be strong against musk+huss semi-FFs. Against faster semi-FFs (pure cav or pure musk) it will often be too slow. Also note that against civs who like to stick with colonial, you need to make sure that you can even afford to age up. Something to remember as China is if you're in colonial age you're not looking to kill them, you're looking for ways to reach fortress unharmed, much like Dutch.

China's one way to boom other than the market is a build that's really not played in the current meta at all, and there's a good reason for that. It's slow and inefficient, relies on strong

TPs, but it does get you a solid eco with the option to age. This doesn't sound amazing, but it is a way to boom which would make it worth it if only you ever got the time to pull it off. It involves a late northern refugees (age1 vill card) and 2 TPs early in order to support your desperate need for shipments. It's a style that relies on good scouting and good adaptation, for example a decision you'll have to make in early colonial is whether you can even afford to send your 6-8 vill card before you age up or are forced into no-eco fortress play.

Sadly though, naked FF with a unit shipment for defense remains China's only option in most match ups. There quite simply is nothing better in most cases.

The Chinese build

Always get an early TP up from the starting wood.

There's a trick that you can do on GP. If you take the middle TP and don't miss the first cart, since your first shipment will be 300w, you can actually wait for it before building the village. This will net you about 10 seconds idle TC time but it also means you don't have to gather 100w in early colonial and it will make you age up slightly faster than you would've otherwise. In that case,

→ (1) 300w

From this, build another TP and a village (build that village with multiple vills to reduce idle TC time).

In all other cases,

→ (1) Northern refugees.

Note that this removes the possibility to send it later as a 5-8v card. You can still go for 300w if you definitely want to send a big vill card later, but this will make you age up later (5:10+) because without the above trick you do have to chop the extra 100w in early colonial, or find yourself housed at 10/10.

Putting 4 vills on the summer palace you will reach colonial around 4:50-5:00. If you don't have 2 TPs yet, chop for one during transition. Exception: when FFing against a potential rush.

During transition you already need to have made the decision to FF or not. A naked FF should not gather any wood (optionally for the second TP) but rather should go for the 1200-300. If you gather wood for a market as well as the TP you're going to run into food trouble as your 700g arrives.

Considering some civs can counter your predictable FF by rushing (the French bow+pike rush comes to mind) you need to scout actively and turn your build into a colonial start if you scout a rush that you can't hold with 1 shipment and mm. You should be able to switch most of your vills to wood on time and get a rax up while sending 8ckn 700w.

The naked FF 70%

→ (2) 700g (age up with confucian academy)

→ (3) Unit card to defend against their cav or musk (or both) semi-FF. In case of musk send 8 ckn, in case of cav send 9 pike, in case of musk+huss send 9 pike. Why 9 pike against musk+huss? Because that way you'll at least have protection for the 8 arqs that will pop out when you hit fortress.

→ (4) 700w

→ (5+) Fortress shipments. Note that 1000w and 1000g are desirable if you can afford to send them without dying to pressure (China is often under pressure in early fortress).

Mostly you can afford to build a market and get the food/gold upgrades from 700w. If you're under a lot of pressure, skip this and use the wood only for rax, house and consulate. Consulate allies with Brits (possibly France first for 500w) allowing for that 9 musk shipment as well as 10% HP on your units. Keep chopping wood with a decent number of vills, China's units aren't very pop effective.

Your fortress composition is quite strong, so you can win even against civs with better economies than you. Don't feel pressured to kill France or Germans early (which isn't possible anyway), they have better ecos but you still outscale them somewhat in the long run. In match ups like those, simply try to keep your half of the map. They will run out of resources first and will have to be the one to get aggressive. But don't get me wrong, I'm not saying China wins these match ups if they reach fortress. It's still an uphill battle due to the difference in eco.

The colonial start 30%

China's colonial start gives them a decent number of options due to the amount of shipments they get. The problem is, still, that they don't really have any means to boom. Of course they have the market which you can use to buff your eco about 20%, but this takes an investment and you can't always afford it in early colonial. If you can, definitely make sure you get all of the food and wood upgrades and the 50/50/50 one. Delay the gold ups until you age up. Still this isn't really a boom. Most civs have market upgrades plus a vill shipment, which makes the market ups stronger as well. China is slow to colonial and their best way of booming is a market. This means they have to either age up relatively quickly, or do something game-winning in colonial.

Or they can go for mass villages + northern refugees. Viable? Possibly, but I have a hard time imagining a match up that would allow for such slow play.

Turns out none of those 3 options is ideal, and this is the reason why naked FF is often China's only option.

You're going to want a market early. You can do this in transition at the cost of a later rax, or do it after the rax so that you can start a batch as soon as the 700w arrives. Which is the right choice depends on whether you need units early or not.

- (2) 700w
- (3) 600w or (3) a unit shipment. Often a unit shipment is better in order to balance your composition, but 600w is better if you're not being pressured.
- (4+) Unit shipments until you want to age up (then 700g, confucian academy).

Note that China's 1 rax mass + 2-3 unit shipments is not bad. It can break forward bases if your opponent invested in an early rush, and is hard to pressure. You can use this as a gateway to fortress, as explained before.

As for northern refugees if you went for the 300w start, it's a decent vill card if you have 4+ villages, but in reality this won't happen until later in the game unless you mass villages for the sake of the card which I don't think is worth it. Therefore, it can be a strong card to send in prolonged colonial games, but in case of a semi-FF you'd usually want to send eco cards in early colonial which, in this case, is not an option. This means the card will rarely (if ever) be worth it in colonial, but it is a way to prepare for the long term if you find yourself in a situation where that is necessary.

Dutch

Dutch suffer from a mild case of close but no cigar. They are a boom civ, and they can get a good economy fairly quickly, but (there's always a "but" with this civ) it requires a massive investment of 1500w and 1500f for +16 villas. Compared to other boom civs, for example Japan which gets +20 villas by spending 1500 wood, this isn't great. In fact, due to banks not scaling with market upgrades (if only they did Dutch might've been balanced), Dutch's 4 bank eco is barely better than France's early colonial eco after 4v and steel traps. And let's not forget that Dutch's villas are more expensive than other civs' villas. Their boom is ok, but not quite good enough. Close, but no cigar.

Dutch have decent colonial potential with skirms and a quick age up, but they don't have musks and pikes awkwardly cost wood, which means you really don't want to be making too many of them. This makes musk+huss a devastating comp to face as Dutch. In other words their colonial is ok, but not quite good enough. Close, but no cigar.

And then there's fortress age, which Dutch generally aim for. Note that they don't aim for fortress because their fortress is so great, but because they generally can't win in colonial. As for their fortress, they have a decent eco by now, a fast age politician and ranged cavalry. But they don't have a 2 falc shipment and their units are nothing special (they even have to upgrade the huss) whereas most civs get something new and game changing in fortress (think cuirs, lancers, urumi, etc). Dutch even has to admit at this point that their eco is barely better than their opponent's, because they don't scale very well with market ups. Close, but no cigar.

Dutch are almost always the civ that needs to take the fight into fortress age, because musk+huss simply isn't beatable with skirm+pike. They also have to invest a lot of resources in their economy which means their opponent is generally completely free to do whatever they want. Dutch is on the defensive against even the most eco-heavy musk+huss semi-FFs, and in some cases even has trouble ageing up with 4 banks safely. More often than not, they need walls to even reach fortress safely, and if you look at what they have in fortress and at how big their economy is, they shouldn't have to. Unlike civs like Japs or India, Dutch's fortress is not nearly good enough to warrant how scared they are for timing pressure in colonial, from a balance perspective.

Dutch also don't fit into the TP meta very well. They already have trouble getting both a decent defensive mass and banks up in early colonial, and adding a TP really isn't something they can generally afford. In fact the only time I would build a TP as Dutch is with a 200w start, trying to squeeze one in later is just going to make it even harder for you to reach fortress safely and is most likely going to slow down your bank boom. This means that, because other civs are happily abusing TPs all over the place whereas Dutch aren't, Dutch will be even worse in the TP meta than they already were before.

The only real strength of Dutch is that they're creating resources out of thin air, much like Japan. They don't have to gather all their gold from mines and they don't use much food, which means the resources in their base will generally last them a while longer than their opponents'. Dutch with access to 3 mines will easily outlast French with access to 3 mines, all they have to do is hold until France runs out of gold. This makes Dutch a civ that will generally rely on defender's advantage in early fortress and aim for the mid to late game, despite their units not scaling very well.

Dutch, being a defensive eco civ, require some good adaptation. With this civ, it's very important to scout frequently in order to know if your opponent is ageing up or going for a

timing in colonial. It's therefore hard to describe a build that you can stick to, as you should be changing it based on your opponent's play. For this reason I will focus more on what your long term plan should be and how to cut corners to get as many banks up as possible while not ageing up too late.

Sending 700g to age up isn't very popular with Dutch, but it should be. Sure, banks gather gold pretty quickly but your age up will still be significantly faster if you send gold and put most of your villas on food. This can be game changing, use this shipment wisely! (And no, don't use 700f).

Remember to use walls. A well placed wall with a gate in it can shield your skirms from cav almost indefinitely while you pick off musks. If you want to be really thorough about it, you can even build an entire cage for your skirms to hide in. This is a technique that shouldn't be underestimated, and is possibly necessary in some match ups as Dutch. After all, if you want to hold without walls and still age up, you're going to need a lot of units which will significantly hinder your booming potential. Remember, the Dutch eco takes a big investment, so ageing up and booming means you will have a lot less units than your opponent.

The Dutch build

You're going to want to get a TP up if you started with 200w. Chop another 100w for a house.
→ (1) 3v

Despite chopping 100w you should still always be able to age with 15 villas. If you started with an extra food crate (so no TP) you can even aim for a 14v age up (colonial at 3.40), getting the last 100 gold largely from treasures. With an extra gold crate and food treasures, this is also possible.

If you went for the early TP, consider sending 300w after 3v for a bank during age up. This is largely untested because I don't like to play Dutch much but I do know that you get your first colonial shipment on time if you do this. In theory, it should be worth it.

Your first real choice is immediately an important one. Are you going for a quick bank boom or are you starting 1 bank + military building? The quick boom is generally better if you're not being pressured in early colonial and/or if you aged up with 14v, it obviously gets your economy up quicker but will have units out later. It's also more versatile because it gives you the choice of either going for 2 military buildings quickly or going for 3 banks and 1 military building. For the sake of being thorough, I'll briefly describe the 1 bank start even though it's only viable against the fastest of rushes:

Gather 350-350 during age up and build a bank. If you don't have enough XP for a shipment as you hit colonial, get the bank up asap (build with 4v) to speed up your shipment.

→ (2) Bank wagon

→ (3) 700w (or 8 pike?)

If you need anticav: If you started rax, build pikes from 700w. If stable, send 8 pikes instead of 700w. Mind housing and note that sending 8 pikes is inefficient; you should probably have started rax in this situation.

In the future, I'm assuming you started with a quick bank boom. Keep in mind though that the strategic principles covered in the next part also apply to the bank wagon start.

→ (2) 700w

If you scout a colonial build from your opponent and you're not in a position to age up against it (even with walls), you're going to have to stay colonial a while longer. Your goal is not killing them in colonial although in some match ups you do have strong timings if they decide to age up before you. Ultimately (and this is an advisable mindset to have as Dutch in any situation) your goal is getting enough of an army out to age up safely.

Depending on how many resources you already have when you start ageing you can either choose to gather 350-350 and get the bank up asap or to gather just 300w and wait for the age up wood to make 700. Either way you'll use the 400w from age up for another bank, so you'll have 2 banks early.

From the 700w you can build another bank, a military building and 2 houses (in this case chop 50w if you didn't gather 350-350), or you can build 2 military buildings and 3 houses. Obviously, the first is more eco-heavy while the second allows for a quick huss+skirm combo and doesn't spend another 350f on economy, allowing for a bigger mass. Another variation is building 2 raxes instead of rax+stable and going for dual rax skirm. Your next shipment in that case will be 600w for market/TP and some pikes if necessary, and then 700g to age up. This will beat infantry-based timing pushes but obviously neglects economy somewhat since you'll be ageing up with 2 banks.

If at any point you are thinking you probably need to stay colonial a while longer and can afford to send an eco shipment, send bank wagon. This can enable you to outmass your opponent in colonial in the long run, giving you a chance to age up. Note that squeezing in a TP from 600w is always viable if you don't really need the wood for anything else.

- (3) 600w
- (4) 700g (age up if possible)

Or

- (3) 8 pike
- (4) 700g (age up if possible)

Or even

- (3) 700g (quick age up)
- (4) 8 pike

Note that with good building placement including walls, you can still be relatively safe against most timings.

In early fortress, send 1000w if you can. Build another bank from it if you can. Upgrade your hussars. Skirm ruyter is nice in theory but in practice it gets countered by skirm+cav, and you're going to want something to tank melee hits. Remember, a 3 unit combo is far superior to a 2 unit combo, and is much harder to counter.

If your opponent is somehow still colonial while you're in fortress, going cannons is often viable. After all in colonial, dealing with art is very tough. Using halbs to shield the art can be worth it, and don't overdo it with the anticav. If they have 50 ashi against 3 cannons and 30 ruyters, you're going to lose that fight. It doesn't hurt at all to mix in a couple of skirms.

France

France is versatile, balanced, and not too difficult. This makes them a great civ to start and learn the game with, but also a very strong one in the right hands. After all, they have a gazillion choices when it comes to their build, and choosing the correct one or adapting into the correct one is a challenge. If you do this right though, France cannot be broken. The only way to beat this civ, and this is something many civs are able to do, is to outscale them.

France has the best early game economy in the game. They start with 6.25 villas (5 cdb, each worth 1.25v) and they can always early market, effectively making them start with ~6.9 villas. On top of that they send a 3.75v shipment which is unmatched except by Germany's 4v, and cdb build slightly faster than 1.25x the normal vill build time, meaning France ages up (assuming they went for early market and not early TP, which is even better) with $14 * 1.25 * 1.1 = 19.25$ villas. Compare this to Japan's transition eco of about 14 villas and realise that it makes a lot of sense that Japan would be on the defensive in the early game of this match up. On top of all that, France can easily squeeze in their 5v shipment in early colonial, bringing them to a 30+ vill eco at 5.30 (including steel traps).

France's unmatched early game eco means they will have a lot of resources in early to mid colonial. As a result, they can choose a number of different builds and be successful at each one. Their no eco rush builds (think xbow+pike or musk+huss with 8 xbow early) are especially scary due to "no eco" not really being in France's vocabulary. After all, with steel traps in early colonial they will have a 25v eco in no time and will still be in your face with a decent mass, much like Iro or Azzy. This also makes them very scary on standard (poorly balanced) maps, where they can almost always force map control in the first 8 minutes, fighting with their villas if necessary. Taking map control back from them without any resources in your base can be a challenge.

But, of course, the game doesn't stop there. After their quick boom and solid mass in colonial, France has mediocre scaling. They have strong semi-FFs due to their abundance of resources and they have cuirs, which makes their early to mid fortress quite scary still, but cuirs don't win games by themselves unless it's a 3v3 random, and a lot of civs will have something even better in fortress, or will have boomed and surpassed France in economy making France the forced aggressor. Now, France has some really strong timings both in colonial and early to mid fortress, and they can even play for the long game where they try to keep map control and starve their opponent out, so there are still plenty of options. Indeed, if France had this strong an early game while scaling as well as Japan or India, they would probably be the top civ.

Because of France's extreme versatility, it's very hard to write a build for them that one could follow every game. France can start a number of ways, and they can transition in an even bigger number of ways. For example, they can start with a generic musk huss build and then they still have 3 choices: Do a timing with it, age up, or play for long term colonial. This doesn't only make them a hard civ to master, it also makes them extremely tough to play against. After all you can scout their buildings and first shipment but you still can't really know when to expect them to become aggressive, or even what units they'll be making.

The most important thing to remember when playing as France is that you will generally have the initiative. France is a civ that doesn't really require you to adapt much, meaning you are often the one deciding the way your opponent should play. Attacking France early is kind of a no-go after all (for most civs, that is) and France has a relatively easy time ageing up if they want to. Mind games become strong here, because your opponent will be scouting you and

trying to adapt and if you build 2 raxes in early colonial and then age up, he's caught with his pants down with his yumi behind a wall against 2 falcs, for example. Of course, France can't just do whatever they want. It's not like they can simply choose to do a long term colonial build against a civ like India, they are forced into playing for timings in some match ups. Knowing when you need to push and when you can sit back and relax, is one of the most challenging things about this civ.

The French build

Check starting crates:

With an extra wood crate (200w start), build a TP and chop 100 for the house.

With the gold crate, mine 75 gold and chop 50w, build a market and trade gold for wood. Then get a house + hunting dogs.

With an extra food crate, get the market up first and get hunting dogs (mine 50c). Chop 150 wood then get a house up.

→ (1) 3v

During transition, chop for a(nother) TP (exception: no eco FF).

If you don't have a market yet, chop for that too. Get hunting dogs, placer mines and chop another 125 wood for steel traps. Mine gold for that, too. You can afford all this and still get a decent number of units out in early colonial, because of France's ridiculous transition economy.

ageing up with 400w (500f in case of FF), you can spend this a number of ways. Either 2 raxes for a bow+pike rush or even 2 rax musk, a rax and a stable for a musk+huss start, or a single rax or single stable (+2 houses) for a cav or musk semi-FF. Note that it's also viable to start with a single stable and sending 4v 700w, then mixing 2 raxes in with the 700w. Chop 100w extra for another house with this. This build goes heavy on eco and heavy on cav but chooses to stay in colonial (for now) rather than age up. This can be advisable in match ups where your opponent may do a strong timing to punish your semi-FF which you aren't comfortable against, but you still have the time to invest in economy early on. Think Otto with their jan+abus start.

The FF (5%)

Besides the standard colonial starts that can turn into semi-FFs, there is a fast FF that you can do as well. Note that this is not viable very often, but a decent meta build to mix in every once in a while. Getting a market during transition is optional, it depends which version you're doing: there's an eco version and a no eco version. But the transition TP comes first still, and you shouldn't even build that unless you can afford to delay your fortress time.

Do not do this against civs that are likely to semi-FF unless they're slow at it and can't really punish your lack of units in colonial. What makes this build strong is that it keeps the amount of colonial shipments to a minimum (only 1) which means you will get more value out of your shipments.

The no eco version is also a strong all in FF which can catch some builds off guard, and it's decent against 8 min timings which will arrive too late to punish you.

Note that with this FF, taking the early TP from 100w start is always worth it. Even if you end up ageing with 15 vills, you don't really mind because you aren't relying on a colonial shipment (700g) to get you the resources to age up with.

The no eco version is as follows:

Age up with 500f and mine gold with enough (about 10) vills so that you will have 1200-1000 around the same time.

→ (2) 700w

Use the wood for a military building (yes, only one, usually a stable) and houses, optional: market.

Age up with the fast politician, you will be in fortress around 6.40 with a shipment ready and a military building up, with enough houses to support a decent cuir or goon batch. Send a unit shipment and push immediately.

And the eco variation:

Everything is the same except get the market up during transition and:

→ (2) 4v instead of 700w.

Chop just enough for a rax and a house.

→ (3) 1000w

For a stable, amalgamation and more houses. Obviously, only do this if you have the time to neglect military production for a while.

The rush/timing 10%

As mentioned, the French rush is quite scary due to its unmatched mass around 7 to 8 minutes. They are not as fast as Iro, but their eco is better which makes their rush almost as scary as the Iro one. And while they have strong timings, France also has great constant early pressure builds. Often, the 2 combine into a strong rush as well as a strong timing later on. Note that it's always possible to transition out of this if you run into a wall (be it a literal one or not) that is impossible to push into. In that case, send 4v asap and turn it into a semi-FF or stay colonial if your plan is to starve them out in mid colonial. Assuming you're going through with the rush and the timing:

→ (2) 700w

→ (3) 600w

→ (4) 8 xbow

Always chop for the market during transition and always get steel traps. 2+ vills for 250 resources is simply not something you can pass on.

You're either going 2 rax bow+pike, 2 rax musk or musk+huss in early colonial. Each of these can be built forward and you can pressure from the very first batch, in most match ups.

In case of xbow+pike it's fairly straightforward what you should do with the next shipments.

In case of musk+huss and 2 rax musk, it depends on whether you have housing problems. The 600w usually goes into houses and/or mixing in some xbows, completing the 3 unit composition. The 8 xbow shipment is optional for if you want to do a 7-8 min timing push to punish fast booms or (semi-)FFs. 4v or even 700g for a quick age up are viable as well, if the timing is not likely to do much.

The long term plan 85%

Both 700w first or 4v first can end up here. A common follow up to the first 700w is 4v, and 4v first in colonial is as common. This early vill shipment sets you up for a strong mid game and makes sure your economy is and will stay ahead for another couple of minutes at least.

Obviously, sending 4v early changes the timing you're playing for. You're no longer going for the 8 minute mass or the constant early pressure, you're going for a timing around 10-12

minutes, or, if you outscale your opponent, you're simply sitting back and waiting for them to punish your eco play.

As mentioned, this can easily turn into a semi-FF but can just as easily turn into a solid colonial mass. Note that if you didn't have a second TP yet, it's viable and often a good idea to mix that in with 700w or 600w.

- (2) 700w
- (3) 4v
- (4) 600w or (4) 700g (age up optional)

Or

- (2) 4v
- (3) 700w
- (4) 600w or (4) 700g (age up optional)

Or

- (2) 4v
- (3) 700g (age up)
- (4) Fortress age shipment

After 700w you will almost always have 2 raxes and a stable. If you're definitely going to age up, it's also viable to build just 1 rax, you won't need the second one in fortress (however I would then prefer simply 4v 700g 700w).

600w is for mixing in xbows, houses or amalgamation, whichever of the 3 you need. If you're losing a lot of units you won't need houses, if you're not going for the long term you won't need amalgamation and if you're going to age up you probably won't want xbows.

If you ever find yourself in fortress (always with the fast age up) which you often will as France, try and squeeze in that 1000w. Note that this isn't only a very valuable shipment in itself, it has extra value since you have most of the food/gold market upgrades and none (possibly the first) of the wood upgrades. Also squeeze in the 1000g if you can.

Mixing in a second TC with the 1000w is only worth it if you're losing units and don't need the houses, giving you a lot of spare wood. Note that even though a second TC can end up doing wonders, in most games it's not actually worth spending 600w on in early fortress. Do this only if you need a building to secure your villagers (spending 250w on a tower is viable too in this case) and/or you don't need to be pushing your opponent because you outscale them.

Germans

Germans have a lot in common with France when it comes to their early game economy (they almost match it), their playstyle, their versatility and even their balance. Still, Germans are a completely different civ. They lack musks and add dopps, giving them worse but not that much worse colonial scaling. They have trouble against heavy musk compositions but dopps do quite alright against non-musk civs. And their fortress builds, primarily the semi-FF, are actually stronger than France's due to their better shipments. Uhlans are not to be underestimated, their low health makes overkill an issue against them and they deal a lot of damage very quickly. Also there are *so many* of them, making anticav extremely important against Germans which means Germans' skirm shipments are extra strong. War wagons are considered to be worse than goons and they generally are, but they do have their own strengths. For example they can single handedly shut down musk huss compositions by kiting endlessly and are hard to focus down because they can kill cav from far away. This is something that may seem somewhat irrelevant, but considering how much Germans like to semi-FF they will be up against colonial compositions more often than other civs, and WW help a lot there.

Germans are a civ that evolved greatly over the past 5 years. When I started playing them, starting 1 rax and sending 9 xbow (later nerfed to 8) was still the most common way to play them, second being the 500f 3 SW FF.

As I started semi-FFing with Germans, it quickly became obvious that the 700g is awkwardly timed. Forced to make 10+ uhlans simply because of the long wait for the 700g and ageing up at 9+ minutes didn't feel like the kind of semi-FF that would do very well in a metagame where aggressive builds were common. And yet, this is the only semi-FF that top German players ever did. Needless to say, semi-FFing with Germans wasn't very popular. The next question was how to improve it? How to speed it up?

The (then costing 250w) TP during age up changed everything. A simple, elegant change in the build sped up that 700g shipment and made it possible to age before 8 minutes with a shipment ready and 9 uhlans in colonial. This turned the way people played Germans up on its head. Now their semi-FF is probably their most popular build, and for good reason. And this, I believe, was the change that finally made the competitive community realise how strong TPs are. It's the change in the meta that made everyone experiment with TPs not just with Germans but with every other civ too. While for some civs it was already common to build them, most civs weren't building them at all. Thinking back, this is quite simply suboptimal. France for example can afford that TP, and they should go for it every single game. The same goes for Germans. These kind of revolutionary changes in the metagame are also a reason why old pros coming back to this game may seem like bad players. That's not the case, they are simply dealing with a meta that is ahead of them. But I digress.

Germans are one of those civs that would rather play the game out in fortress age. They're decent in early colonial, sure, but they don't scale very well due to their lack of musks. Their shipments also improve more as they age up, after all they get 3 instead of 2 uhlans with every shipment after ageing to fortress.

This makes them a civ that likes FF builds. They can FF in a number of different ways, similar to France, and they can semi-FF in a number of ways as well. Although I should mention here that their best semi-FFs are cav based. They don't have musks after all, and a dopp semi-FF is awkward because you don't really want to be upgrading them to veteran, and you want that

stable in fortress to upgrade your uhlands. A bow/pike semi-FF is awkward for the same reasons, plus you don't really want these units in fortress.

But, the fact that Germans like their cav semi-FFs is abusable. Some civs will pike or musk rush them and force them to send 8 bows to hold on, but even against that Germans are relatively fine with mm, raids and the bow shipment. They do have a TP, so 8 bow + 700w into a colonial build isn't a very hard transition for them and a colonial pure infantry composition is going to be a sad panda against uhlan+bow.

However, the 7-8 min timings can hurt Germans. The German semi-FF is tight, it can't afford to get distracted and it doesn't have a shipment to spare. Generally they will only have a stable up, and the first ranged inf they'll have is the 8 skirm shipment. Simply mix in some cav to deal with those skirms and suddenly you have yourself a composition that Germans can't really deal with. After all, meanwhile you're wrecking their base with heavy infantry.

Of course it would have to be a strong timing, because Germans will have 9 uhlands and minutemen as well as that first fortress shipment on the way. A bunch of civs can pull this timing off though, and it's against those civs that Germans tend to struggle. This is where a German xbow semi-FF or even a dopp semi-FF becomes decent. Good walling and solid execution will still land you in fortress relatively safely against most timings (notice a similarity with Dutch here), and Germans in fortress are (unlike Dutch) truly tough to deal with.

The German build

Check starting crates:

- With an extra wood crate (200w start), build a TP and chop 100w for a house.
- With an extra coin crate, mine 75g and chop 50w, trade gold for wood in market and then get hunting dogs + a house.
- With an extra food crate, chop 150w and mine 50g and still go early market.

→ (1) 2 SW

During transition, chop for a(nother) TP (exception: no eco FF).

If you don't have a market yet (that should mean you have 2 TPs), whether you should chop for it or not depends on the match up. If you expect to get pushed early or if you're planning to be aggressive in early colonial, skip it for now. If neither of these things are the case chop another 225 wood and get hunting dogs + placer mines. If you want to boom even more, chop for steel traps too. Note that this will slow you down.

If you're doing a 3 SW 700g semi-FF, you'll need to chop 100 extra wood for a house.

The FF 20%

As with France, there are 2 versions of this build. The no eco version and the eco version. Both can be used in a variety of situations. The no eco version is viable in 2 situations: Against a civ that you're not comfortable against in colonial and whose 8 minute timing you cannot hold if you semi-FF, and against civs who like to boom hard in early colonial and then age up after you. This FF may have a game-winning timing against them. Do not do this against civs that are likely to semi-FF unless they're slow at it and can't really punish your lack of units in colonial.

The eco version is viable in situations where you are definitely not getting pushed in the first 8 minutes and have all the time in the world to be greedy. This is, without a doubt, the most

greedy German build you can do. But be aware of the fact that this would only be better than the semi-FF if your extra 5 uhlands would be useless against them (think Japan for example). Note that, same as France, chopping for the early TP if you started with 100w is viable with the FF. You don't mind the later age up because it's not important for your colonial shipment to arrive fast. Don't build another TP during transition with this build unless you can afford to delay your fortress time a bit.

The no eco version is as follows:

Age up with 500f and mine gold with enough (about 10) vills so that you will have 1200-1000 around the same time.

→ (2) 700w

Use that for a stable and houses, optional: market.

Age up with the fast politician, you will be in fortress around 6.40 with a shipment ready and a military building up, with enough houses to support a decent uhlan or WW batch. What to send is up to you, usually a unit shipment to push fast but 1000w is also viable if you want to go for a later timing.

And the eco variation: Everything is the same except chop for the first market upgrades during transition and:

→ (2) 3 SW instead of 700w

Chop just enough for 2 houses and a rax.

→ (3) 1000w

For a stable, uhlan upgrade, potentially second market upgrades and more houses. Again, only do this if you have the time to neglect military production for a while.

The rush/timing 10%

Despite Germans generally favouring FF builds, they have some strong colonial options as well. A forward barracks with 8 xbows first does get a quick 3 unit combo, and this can be a pain to deal with. Meanwhile, much like France, Germans have a decent eco at home and can transition into long term colonial with 3 SW at any point. Don't hesitate to do this if you don't see your timing working. Even so, the German early game economy does allow for a strong mass at 7-8 minutes, and the German colonial timing can therefore still hit pretty hard.

From the 400w that you aged up with you can build either a rax or a stable. Your start doesn't matter much for the timing, it only changes your early colonial pressure. In the end it simply depends on what your opponent is most likely to come up with in early colonial, army wise. I would advise to always start stable if you're going for the timing alone, because in that case you'll at least have the opportunity to raid in early colonial.

→ (2) 8 xbow

→ (3) 700w (build second military building)

→ (4) 700g

For early colonial pressure as well as the (slightly slower) timing.

Or

→ (2) 700w (build second military building)

→ (3) 700g

→ (4) 8 xbow

For only the timing.

This can be a dopp+uhlan+xbow, an xbow+pike+uhlan, or even a pure pike+uhlan or xbow+uhlan timing. Note that it is slower than the French one due to your shipments arriving

less quickly. It speeds up if you had the discovery age TP. It simply depends what you do with the resources, but the shipment order should be the same every game. It is viable to go 2 rax but only if you were going for a full infantry timing, and no early rush. In that case if you're going xbow+pike and not xbow+dopp, send 600w instead of 700g. This is practically the same build as the French 2 rax bow+pike, be it slightly weaker because your shipments arrive slower.

The long term plan 70%

As with France (again), this is the same build as the rush/timing except it squeezes the 3 SW in as soon as possible in order to set you up for a long term game. Where Germans are different from France is their goal: their goal is to reach fortress. Their goal isn't, like it can be with France, to take map control early and not let go. Why not? Because their late colonial composition is simply weaker than France's. Most civs will be able to mass up a decent counter to the German army and push out in time to secure more resources, so what Germans are more likely to do is take map control and put on some pressure while sending 3 SW and ageing up. This is the build that will generally turn into a semi-FF. There are multiple possibilities that all end up in that situation:

- (2) 3 SW
- (3) 700g (age up)
- (4) Fortress age shipment

(The common semi-FF)

Or

- (2) 3 SW
- (3) 700w (build second military building)
- (4) 700g (age up or make units from this)
- (5) 600g (age up) or (5) Fortress age shipment.

Or

- (2) 700w (build second military building)
- (3) 3 SW
- (4) 700g (age up or make units from this) or (4) 600w
- (5) 600g or (5) 700g (age up in either case).

India

It has to be said that India is probably the most well designed civ on TAD. They have multiple options when it comes to their age up wonders which is rare, they have a large number of different units all of which are viable in their own way, a lot of options when it comes to which cards to send, and they even have choices when it comes to their play style: they have strong builds for early aggression and strong builds for late game focus. With this many options, India is also without a doubt the hardest civ to figure out and play correctly each game. After all, the more choices you have the more likely you'll make the wrong one.

It's a shame that India has issues when it comes to balance. They are quite simply too strong. Sepoy are ridiculously cost effective. Seriously, what were they thinking there? They are cheaper than ashigaru and have +20 hp and +1 ranged damage as well as +5 melee damage (+10 against cav). Urumi are too strong (seriously, urumi are ridiculous). Mahouts are too strong. And, last but not least, 300 export is too strong.

Which brings me to the Indian meta. This is another civ that went through a big change over the past couple of years, a much bigger change than Germans in fact. Back on FP they were considered the worst civ, and rarely played. This, combined with their complexity and the strength of their 10/10 rush build on other patches, is probably why they have been played wrong for such a long time.

Near the end of the FP era, sending 300e early started to become the standard. This is no surprise, as this shipment gets you 4 vill from the Otto alliance followed by (admittedly delayed) 500 wood or 500 gold from the French alliance, or the other way around. Basically, it's 4v + 500 resources in 1 shipment, and that's excluding the temporary LOS bonus from Otto and 5% gathering bonus from France. It's only after we stopped playing the 10/10 build, which due to various nerfs wasn't really viable anymore, that we came to this realisation. It's funny, because it seems like such a no-brainer now, which is the case for so many of these innovations.

Note that it is also viable to go for the French consulate first. Stronger if you need units early on or if you want to use 500g to age up with.

And then there's the non-Agra 10/10. Agra is a very strong wonder, but on the more balanced maps the early map control it gives is less game-winning. For the record, people had been playing around with the Tower of victory for a while. As a way for India to be greedy instead of aggressive early, slow age ToV was played pretty often. However, there is such a thing as too slow and slow age ToV is just that. A seemingly logical (at least, now it seems logical) next step was going 10/10 ToV. The reason it took so long for this build to get found is because it's counter intuitive: you're going for an eco wonder but a no eco 10/10 start. As it turns out though, the much faster age up means your eco won't actually be behind that much at all, and the earlier units (compared to slow age ToV) are very important. But actually, ToV isn't even viable...

Because there's Karni Mata. It gives a 10% gathering bonus in a radius large enough that your entire early game eco gets a 10% buff, and it gives 500 resources. Where ToV gives 400w, Karni gives 200w, 200f and 100c. This is equal in value if not better than ToV, considering Indian villas have a 15% wood gathering bonus from the start. And the 10% buff is much stronger than inspiration. So why did people ever play ToV in the first place? I don't really know, it's probably the juicy 400 age up wood which when you think about it is actually not better at all than the 500 res Karni gives, but intuitively seems better.

So at this point in the meta we have 3 solid options: 10/10 Agra, 10/10 Karni and slow age Agra. Something was still missing though and of course, it was the TP.

The transition TP changed everything. Again. India scales very well with TPs because their boom is entirely shipment-based, and much like Germans they can semi-FF quite well with a TP but slowly without it.

Can India afford to build a TP during age up though, even if they 10/10? It seems like they wouldn't be able to gather enough wood, but it turns out that they can, and should. This TP doesn't only speed up any semi-FF or boom you had planned, it also gets you that first colonial shipment immediately upon hitting colonial if you 10/10'd, instead of having to wait for it because you lack XP. Notice how in my last guide I mentioned how much stronger India are on maps with herdables (cows/sheeps/etc) because they generate XP. This early TP does the same thing, except it costs 200w. This is worth it, even if you're going for a sepoy rush.

So what we end up with is basically a completely reworked India. For contrast, notice the difference between the builds for India in this guide and the previous 2, and see for yourself how much of a change they went through. Without a doubt the builds found here are significantly stronger.

Anyway.

India has the best late game scaling in the game. Their eco grows fast and keeps growing steadily, they don't use a lot of food so it's hard to starve them out, and their units are unmatched. They have a skirm in colonial, sepoy are insane, they are the only civ with ranged cavalry in colonial *cough* and their fortress unit composition is simply ridiculous. Mahouts, urumi and stomping monks trash the front and tank a gazillion hits while the Indian high damage infantry is firing from the back. Their units aren't only strong individually, but they work together flawlessly as well. This means that you really don't want to be facing India in a long game.

So can they be killed early? Not really.

They even have a strong rush of their own which can easily transition into an eco build or even an age up, they have a strong FF and although their semi-FF is somewhat slow, it's quite hard to break due to their extremely strong fortress shipments. It's hard to push into their base with the possibility of one of their 2 game changing shipments (urumi or mahouts) popping out any second, especially since you'll want anticav against mahouts but you definitely don't want anticav against urumi.

The best way to go about countering India would be either outbooming them and going for a 10-12 min timing, trying to contain them, or doing an early to mid fortress timing before they get both urumi and mahout out. Some civs succeed at this, but most civs don't.

India's preference is therefore to drag the game out as long as possible. This means investing in economy early on, and not dying to timings. This is achieved by sending 300e early, using 600g to age up and using 600w for a colonial build. Note that the big wood trickle is overrated. It's basically a 4v shipment, which is no good especially as India because you really don't need it. Perhaps against boom civs you'd want to go heavy on eco and send 300e then trickle, but in most cases you're going to want to send resources instead. After all, the trickle takes about 7-8 minutes to catch up with 600w in value (for the math, see chapter "the ever evolving meta") and as India, the important timings all hit you before then. You may be thinking "then why send small trickle over 300w?" and I had the same thought when I first started playing India.

However, as it turns out, 300w is an infinite shipment which means it doesn't give you the +1 villager.

You're going to want walls against most timings. The majority of them are holdable without walls, but why not make it even harder for them to push into you? Also try to make sure you have more skirms than them, it makes them push into your base which anyone with some sense hates to do against India.

As for India's fortress age wonders, this is not a straightforward choice either. The Taj Mahal is great for a nice 800g boost and the ceasefire which is decent against early fortress timings, but the Charminar Gate is great as well due to the age up mahout and mansabdar units allowing you to build a hero gurkha and/or a hero sepoy for a solid buff to your infantry mass and a hero mahout to tank. It's very hard to say which is stronger due to how hard they are to compare, but I personally would prefer the CG in most cases.

Of course, if you didn't use Agra for colonial, there's still the option to use it for fortress to snatch map control at a specific spot or improve your defensive position. Though if map control is not an issue (yet), CG and TM are definitely stronger.

The Indian build

Immediately, you're making one of the most important decisions in the game. 10/10 or slow age Agra? Yes, if you slow age you should always go Agra, there isn't a single match up where it's worth it to go for an eco wonder and a 5 min age up, it's simply too slow.

If you had 400 starting wood, you can slow age agra with a TP from starting wood. This will slow down your age up slightly but is worth it.

Without the early TP your eco won't be that much better than with a 10/10 simply because your later age up slows down your entire build as well. In the vast majority of cases, 10/10 is advisable with 300w start. If you decide to slow age Agra, put 4 vills on the wonder.

→ (1) Distributivism (wood trickle)

Next, that is if you 10/10'd, you're choosing what to age up with. Agra or Karni? This is a tough choice because Agra can be stronger even if you intend to do an eco build: after all, if you go 10/10 Agra they really have no way of knowing whether you're rushing or not, and will have to blindly prepare for a rush. The Agra is also stronger against 7/8 minute timings in colonial (wall off the Agra in that case). With all long term colonial or (semi-)FF plans, go for the Karni. Mindgames are also possible with Karni though, since you can build a stable+rax forward and send 600g first, going for some scary pressure while they are assuming you're playing passively.

Put no vills on the wonder.

No matter what you aged up with, during transition put all of your vills on wood except the herding vill if necessary. If you 10/10'd get the house up first obviously, start vill production and after 2 vills you should have enough for the TP. If 10/10 you should have the TP up by 3:50-4:00 which means you can take the middle one on GP (I haven't tested this on other maps) and catch the cart relatively quickly, getting you that early colonial shipment. If slow age, take the TP in base.

The rush (10/10 Agra) 20%

To rush, your agra doesn't have to be forward but it's obviously better if it is. Whether to build it forward depends on your follow up plan, whether that's keeping map control and starving them out in colonial or ageing up. Without good treasures you won't get a batch of 5 sepoys

out, and definitely not 5 gurkha, but you still can rush by shipping either 5 sepoy or 4 sowar first. This is a scary push and immediately gives you the initiative, making it a solid choice if you don't feel like the adaptive, defensive India style (which is admittedly stronger).

→ (2) Unit shipment (5 sepoy or 4 sowar)

After the initial push, you have a variety of options.

If you decide to age up immediately:

→ (3) 600g (age up)

→ (4) Fortress shipment

This is a kind of surprise age up. Note that this neglects economy and may leave you vulnerable to timings if your opponent scouts it in time. Though if he finds himself surprised by your age up and stuck in colonial he's definitely playing an uphill battle.

If you decide to go for a long term colonial build, you can choose to boom here. Completely halt your military production in that case and get the first 2 tiers of market upgrades except the 150-150-150 one (unless you feel like you can afford even that). Chop 200w for a consulate as well.

→ (3) 300e

→ (4) 600w (build a stable from this, or another rax if you want mass inf which can actually be pretty strong as India)

Or delay your boom in favour of more pressure (or more defense):

→ (3) 600w or (3) Second unit shipment

→ (4) Second unit shipment or (4) 600w

Of course you can send all these cards in any order depending on how many and which units you need, it's pretty much impossible to describe when to do what since India is a civ that likes to scout and adapt rather than go for a predefined build. Possible follow up cards are 600g, cav attack (30%??), desert terror (the camel upgrade) and the big wood trickle.

The defensive Agra 40%

This build works pretty much the same way whether you 10/10'd or not. It's meant to hold early rushes while still investing in economy, and possibly turn into a relatively safe (due to the Agra) (semi-)FF. It's strong because it gives you multiple options while being safe against early pressure. The semi-FF variation is strong if your opponent isn't pressuring you in colonial other than with a cav raid or 2. Note that if you end up semi-FFing with it, it was probably best to have gone for the slow age.

If you want to make it a semi-FF, build some sepoy or gurkha. Squeeze in that market at some point, if you're scared of timings you can delay it until fortress.

→ (2) 300e or (2) 600g for a straight FF

→ (3) 600g (age up) or (3) 600w in case of straight FF

Another possibility is ageing up from 500g from French consulate. However this is only worth it if you want to send either trickle of a unit shipment instead of 600g for extra eco (trickle) or to hold a colonial timing (unit shipment). Usually it's preferable to simply go for the Otto consulate and 4v first and use 600g to age. The trickle for extra eco is only worth it for the very long term, I'd shy away from it in almost all cases.

For a standard colonial start:

- (2) 600w (market and consulate, possibly a stable already)
- (3) 300e
- (4) 600g (age up optional)

The Karni Mata build 40%

If you went for Karni Mata that means you 10/10'd. You'll age up relatively quickly in comparison to other civs so you can usually afford to wait a bit before building a rax. In that case, squeeze in the market during transition and get all the upgrades except the second gold upgrade asap. Build a rax next.

- (2) 600w (consulate, remaining market ups, possibly second military building)
- (3) 300e
- (4) 600g (age up optional)

This is the most boomy viable build you have as India, and it can really jump ahead fast if your opponent doesn't pressure you. With good walling it should still hold any rush. It's vulnerable to early fortress timings though, but in most cases India is up just in time themselves, or can fight their opponent's fortress army in colonial. The latter can be tough, though, so I'd usually avoid this. Alternatively:

If you're up against a likely semi-FF, you can choose to semi-FF a bit faster yourself in order to be somewhat less vulnerable to timings, meaning you skip the 600w. With this build, this means getting a rax up and making some defensive units against their potential cav and sending:

- (2) 300e
- (3) 600g (age up)

Starting 300e can be wise in any case simply because if you scout a semi-FF it's easier for you to adapt into your own semi-FF rather than being stuck in colonial until 600g arrives. If you find yourself in the latter situation anyway, consider using the 300e for 500g from the French consulate and delaying 4v for a quicker age time. This isn't always necessary.

Same as with Agra, FF is also an option although rarely because it leaves you vulnerable to early harassment and it neglects economy. However it can be decent against fast early fortress pushes, which you can effectively hold this way.

- (2) 600g (age up)
- (3) 600w (military building + consulate)

And for early aggression or improved defense (if up against strong rushes), skip the market and consulate until 600w and get 2 military buildings up in early colonial.

- (2) 600g
- (3) 600w (market & consulate)
- (4) 300e

Iroquois

Iro are a fun and versatile low eco civ. Their games are usually won early because they lack the capability to boom as well as other civs, but they possess the ability to sabotage any game plan other civs may have had. Frankly, this is the only civ on TAD that I would call overpowered. Iro don't fuck around. They are so far from balanced it's just not fun playing against them. There isn't a single reason, either. It's not that their units are insane (like India) or their boom is too strong (Brits), it's a combination of overwhelming strengths that make Iro the top civ.

First of all there's the fast age up plus war hut. Whereas other civs have to choose between a 400w age up and a 500f, or choose between a fast age up or a war hut, Iro gets both resources and a fast age. The war hut, considering it builds on its own, is worth about 300 wood. Imagine how insane France would be for example, if they aged up an entire minute earlier with only 100w less. This gives Iro such a significant edge in the early game, it's something many civs can hardly come back from.

Then there's the cav shipments. 4 kanya in colonial is too many. This is worth 400 food and 300 wood, which is about as valuable in villager seconds as a 700 gold shipment. By design, resource shipments should always be worth more than unit shipments, but with Iro's cav shipments this is not the case. I guess it was a tough choice though, since if they had made it a 3 cav shipment (like they did with Germans) it would be too weak. In fortress, they get 6 kanya which is worth 1050 resources, again as good as crate shipments. Oh, and the toma shipment is great too, that one's worth 750 resources.

The War chief. If it only had the 15% (yes, 15%) HP buff and not the crackshot it would already be too strong, but as it is now it's just a matter of "what were you thinking ES?". And it even used to be 20%!

The unit upgrades. They have 2 overpowered upgrade cards in colonial, being 15% hp to all their infantry and 15% attack to all their infantry. This means that combined with the WC aura, with 2 cards you can have your infantry HP upgraded by 30%, and their attack 15%. Add the war dance and you have yourself an army that is so incredibly cost effective not even Russia or India will beat it in late colonial.

However, Iro do have a weakness. They don't have access to artillery in fortress (just not having a 2 falc card is already a pretty big deal) but more importantly they lack any way to counter artillery effectively in fortress. If you ever find yourself in fortress with enough time to spare (which will be rare against Iro), take advantage of this and build yourself some cannons.

Even though Iro lack artillery, Iro have the strongest semi-FF in the game. Because why not? They can do a 7-8 min timing with a pretty scary unit mass while ageing up around 9 minutes, with 2 TPs up and 5 villas sent somewhere in early colonial. What's so good about this is not the speed or the economy, but the timing they hit before ageing up. It will punish most semi-FFs and it will punish FFs, it will even keep a colonial-focused build on its back foot for a while, and meanwhile Iro is ageing up. How can they afford this? It's mostly because of their shipments. They get a whopping 4 shipments in colonial due to their early TPs and their unit shipments are really strong. As it turns out, they don't have to make that many units for this timing, all they have to do is send them. The remaining shipments are eco and gold for the age up, and you have yourself a semi-FF. For about the same reasons, Iro's FF is decent as well.

But despite having great FF builds, Iro still prefer colonial age. With fast pressure giving them free map control, a strong mid colonial mass, an OP explorer and great upgrade cards for late colonial, that is where they are at home. They won't have to deal with artillery because there isn't a single civ who can afford to age up against them and still have any chance, except maybe Otto. They won't lose map control either. Eventually the opposing civ has to face facts and try to push out to secure more resources, and Iro will be happily waiting to smash their army when this happens. Now, it's not always so easy. There are some match ups (for example Brit and India) where Iro actually get in trouble if their opponent has a large amount of resources in their base to work with. After all, Iro's eco is nothing special and despite their numerous strengths, Iro can't really sit back and let Brit or India boom at will. This is where their FF builds become a better option.

The Iroquois build

No matter what you started with crate-wise, always get the early TP up. If you started with an extra wood crate, chop 50 and mine 50 and go early market as well.

→ (1) 3v

Fast age vs slow age (wise woman) can be a tough choice sometimes. Your main consideration in this is whether you want to age up to fortress or not. A planned FF or semi-FF should always age slowly, and sometimes when you think you might want to age up somewhere in mid colonial, you'd still want to save that fast age for fortress. It's very awkward to use fast age to colonial and slow to fortress, because Iro really don't want to be making colonial units on their way to fort. They want forest prowlers and their strong cav shipments asap for a quick early fortress push. Letting their opponent breathe for too long is not something Iro would generally want to do.

The fast age build 70%

If you didn't get the early market up, skip it for now. Chop for a second TP instead, you should get this up somewhere in early colonial. Don't do this if you're planning to rush hard though, because in that case the 2 less units you'll have might actually make a difference.

As for your shipment order, you have a lot of choices. Iro get a bunch of shipments in early colonial, after all.

Note that you're generally going to want to make only aenna from the WH and use the shipments and/or the big button for tomahawks. This is simply the most efficient way to use your resources.

The following is a good, eco heavy way to play if they walled off and you can't really push them until later, or if they are also playing a fast civ and will likely have a defense up by the time you reach their town. This build is eco heavy but due to Iro's insane speed and early abundance of resources it's not vulnerable to rushes at all.

- (2) 5v
- (3) 600w (mix stable)
- (4) 4 kanya or (4) 6 toma

The following is best if you want to go for a 7 min timing:

- (2) 600w
- (3) 4 kanya
- (4) 6 toma

And for a rush:

- (2) 4 kanya
- (3) 6 toma
- (4) 600w or (4) 7 aenna for continued pressure

Another strong and frequently used way to play after a fast age is to quickly harass them with 4 kanya while setting yourself up for a timing. This is also the best way to play Iro mirrors, as it turned out after a significant amount of test games last year. It's strong because the 600w arrives at a very convenient time, meaning you won't have to chop much wood and can focus on a strong food eco.

- (2) 4 kanya
- (3) 600w
- (4) Infantry shipment

Alternatively you can send 5v as your 4th card. In this case you're obviously not doing a timing but transitioning into an eco build.

Follow up cards in mid to late colonial are the infantry upgrades and potentially spice trade if it gets that far. Note that spice trade can be sent before unit upgrades but only if you're losing units and your mass is small, making the unit upgrades a lot less valuable.

And yes, spice trade is better than 4v. Iro generally gather a lot of food, and since you will be late in the game before getting to send your second eco card, spice trade is generally going to be worth more than 4v. If you want to send another eco card early in the game, go for 4v but I question your decision to send 2 eco cards in early colonial. More often than not this will give your opponent chances.

The wise woman build 30%

For all her wisdom, this woman is still quite slow. You have plenty of time during transition to chop for both a second TP and a market if you didn't have that already, and your first unit batches will still easily be 5-5-5. This age up is worse for any colonial focused build, but it does give you the option to age up quickly. This is a big deal and not to be underestimated, especially in MUs where your opponent is likely to wall off his entire town and camp there. Depending on how long your opponent is planning to camp, it's sometimes even good to turn this build into a FI.

The recommended card order in almost all cases is the following. Note how you don't need 600w early because you have a crazy amount of resources in early colonial.

- (2) 4 kanya or (2) 5v if the kanya won't be useful yet
- (3) 5v or (3) 4 kanya
- (4) Infantry shipment
- (5) 600g (age up) or (5) 600w if you want to stick around in colonial.

Do a timing after your 4th shipment to punish them for ageing up or over booming. This is a perfect demonstration of how OP Iro are, the fact that they can do a strong and relatively fast colonial timing and age up only a minute later with 5v already sent. Most civs have to settle for raids while semi-FFing, Iro can do a full blown colonial push.

Sticking around in colonial is quite viable as well. You still have a good unit shipment and you still have 600w, so you can keep massing and age up later. For some civs, your continued pressure after the timing and a delayed age up is a lot scarier than ageing up early.

If you want to turn this into an FI, simply send 1200 res in fortress and don't make any units until industrial. Note how 4 light cannons will force any civ to move out of their base, this can be strong against a camping India.

For the FF:

- (2) 600g
- (3) Fortress shipment

Note that 1200 resources is a very strong fortress shipment.

Of course, this being a slow age up doesn't mean you have to go for an FF build. You can plan for colonial as well, and simply use the age up resources you get from the wise woman for a stronger 8 min timing. In that case:

- (2) 600w (if you want more than 4 cav) or (2) 4 kanya
- (3) Unit shipment
- (4) Unit shipment
- (5) Unit shipment or (5) 600g to age up

Note that the age up is somewhat awkward due to your lack of an economy, but your timing is likely to have crippled your opponent and hopping to fortress because you ran out of strong unit shipments in colonial can be a great way to keep the pressure up. This is definitely not to be underestimated.

Japan

Japan, I have to admit, are somewhat of a favourite of mine. They are a very strong civ but still relatively balanced compared to the actual overpowered civs, and so they have more fun and interesting match ups. They're an adaptive civ that gets very complex and challenging if you want to master them, and they're not map dependent. This especially is a very big deal. The fact that they work on any map makes them, as a boom civ, uniquely playable on the standard maps which explains (or is one of the reasons, at least) why they are so popular on TAD.

They have some great units. Their upgraded colonial army is one of the best in the game and their musks are so fast it makes them an effective raiding unit. The daimyo is a great shipment, the infantry upgrades are decent even after the nerf and yumi are extremely cost effective. What more do you want in your army? A colonial lancer? Sure, you have it. 4 Flaming arrows, which counter falcs? Check. The only thing missing here is an urumi shipment.

Japan's boom is also great. It takes a relatively small investment and can get them a total of about +15 vills in income plus XP from the shrines. 2 downsides though: Shrines, like banks, don't scale with market upgrades, and the fact that they need to occupy hunts makes them very vulnerable. Japan's vills are unraidable, but their economy is all over the map and can easily be harassed. The plus side (for Japan, that is) is that it takes siege to raid their economy instead of cavalry. Siege means heavy infantry which you generally don't want in fights (think pikes), especially against Japan because they like their infantry so much.

But Japan is slow. Lacking a 3v shipment and their orchards giving a slower food income than huntables do, their early game eco is, quite frankly, pathetic. They age up with 13-14 vills (including the shrine) which is very little compared to all other civs, many of which have 16+ vills and a TP. And it's not like Japan's colonial time is fast, either.

This creates a problem. It means that Japan is not going to have a lot of options when it comes to their early colonial start. They have no eco rushes and they have early harassment builds, but none of them are viable because their economy behind it is so bad that they won't have any follow up options. Therefore, Japan's only real option is to shrine boom. This makes them a predictable civ and makes it very hard for them to deal with builds that punish their boom.

Fast rushes do this, fast FFs and even eco semi-FFs can be a pain to deal with. Japan has strong semi-FF builds of their own (always use Golden Pavilion to fortress) but they're slower than other civs' and can more easily get punished by timings. Often, Japan needs to semi-FF with yumis behind a wall to remove this vulnerability, or they have to stay colonial. Of course Japan has no problem staying colonial since they scale extremely well, however they won't have map control and their shrines are vulnerable. Staying colonial against strong (semi-)FFs can be dangerous too, because early fortress pushes become tough to hold. Some civs can even choose to simply take the map and remove most of Japan's shrines, putting Japan in an awkward position since now they're stuck in colonial with a mediocre economy.

Because of Japan's slow start and early investment in economy, they need to be focusing on gathering a large mass from the moment their military buildings are up. This is why eco shipments like 4v are generally a bad idea with this civ. They already have a strong eco, your priority is not getting an even better eco but holding the timings that may kill you. Therefore triple 600 is almost always the correct choice. Like with Brit, 600 gold gives you the choice to age up but you don't have to, you can easily spend it on units as well.

With a wall and yumi behind it, you'd be surprised by the amount of situations where you can sneak in that age up with a 600w 600w 600g card order.

And Japan needs walls. In order to cut corners when it comes to economy or a potential age up in the way that Japan wants to, walls are absolutely necessary. After all you have a bad economy early on and you're focusing on booming, so your mass is logically going to be relatively poor. You can play a somewhat less eco-heavy style and in that case you won't need walls, but you're sacrificing economy and for what? It's not like you're going to be pushing out any time soon because your mass will still be worse than theirs in almost every case, and if they're ageing up then staying colonial and doing a timing isn't the right way to play. Following them up is correct, or setting up your economy for a long term colonial vs fortress fight. Either way, neglecting economy for a bigger early colonial mass is opening you up to some nasty mid fortress timings.

Japan is generally going to be late with their military buildings. To stop the fastest of rushes, you're going to want to build the rax immediately as you hit colonial, instead of waiting for the 600w which is standard. Walls are extra important here. Another option is to hide your buildings when the 600w arrives. If they're good, they'll scout for this but even then it's worth it because you've managed to refocus their army to your hidden buildings instead of your base. This means your villas can gather and you can start new buildings elsewhere. Keep him chasing your buildings rather than having all your villas garrisoned. Sometimes you need CM, though (in case of Japan the card is called Enlist irregulars). CM is only worth it if it makes your TC 2 hit units where it would otherwise 3 hit them (jans/sepoy etc), or 1 hit where it would otherwise 2 hit (maces/xbows/pikes etc). If you send CM, boom fully and send military shipments or Daimyo if necessary, otherwise resource shipments and get raxes up, or rax+stable. You're often going to find yourself microing 5 yumi against large armies (walls!) while switching your shrines to food/gold to gather for large batches of minutemen and to keep up vill production (which isn't always worth it).

Japan, much like Dutch, doesn't fit into the TP meta that well. They can get a TP up from 300w starts and send 300w for the consulate and then Heavenly Kami, but this isn't something you do to improve your build. Rather this is something you'd do if you want to steal the middle TP on Great plains from your opponent because it is vital to their build. Even then it's questionable because you will likely lose it in early colonial due to Japan's early mass being too small to defend it, and it won't have paid off by then. This start may only be viable against slower civs, where your TP isn't vulnerable and your later age up won't hurt you.

Japan, being a defensive civ with excellent scaling, are possibly the most adaptive civ in the game. They are weak early, which means they constantly have to cut corners in order to somehow get through the early game and get ahead. This means taking risks, adapting flawlessly to your opponent's decisions and not overcommitting on anything. It also means your defensive abilities need to be on point.

If you do all of this flawlessly, Japan may be the best civ in the game (on standard maps, that is). However, scouting isn't always that easy and always taking the right risks without them backfiring is impossible because then they wouldn't be risks. There is also a certain luck factor in that. But anyway if you're bored of the euro civs (which with enough experience isn't surprising considering a lot of euro civs have barely changed since vanilla), try mastering Japan. You will find challenges you didn't know existed.

The Japanese build

Due to Japan being possibly the most adaptive civ in the game, writing a build for them is nearly impossible. There are a ton of variations and you may even have to transition into suboptimal builds if you scout something unexpected from your opponent. I'll take a slightly different approach in that I won't be listing the builds and saying when they are viable, but listing your reaction to each possible opponent's build. Remember to play this civ with a clock. Always have timings in mind, and know which ones you need to be scared of. Also, "Can I age up without dying?" should be a question that is always on your mind, especially when you reach that time in your build where you're sending 600g.

With 300w, consider the TP mentioned above (in that case chop 25w for shrine and send 300w first for consulate + extra shrine). In the future I will assume you did the standard build:

Start consulate and ally with Ports. Chop either 107 or 7 wood based on how much wood you started with.

→ (1) Heavenly Kami

Age up with the Toshugu Shrine. During transition, leave 6 vill on food for vill production and have the rest on wood. Start spamming shrines all over the map. Their placement can be important in some match ups (build them on the edges of the map if possible against aggressive builds), but usually you're just going to want to plant every single available hunt full of shrines anyway.

Note that you want your shrines on either food or wood. Gold is less effective vill-second wise, and putting the shrines on food means your rice paddies will last longer meaning you won't have to waste a shipment on them as early.

Against a rush

Against early colonial pressure you're going to want to invest in economy a little less. Depending on the speed of the rush, you can still decide to wait for 600w before building military buildings and as mentioned, you can also go for the CM route explained above, which I will not get further into in this part. And wall! Seriously, wall.

There are several options when it comes to your shipments:

- (2) 600w. Use this against the somewhat slower but powerful colonial pressure builds. You still have the choice of building the rax immediately or waiting for 600w.
- (2) Unit shipment (against fast rushes)
- (2) Daimyo. Works against fast rushes as well, it's a decent combat unit as well as a moving military building. Don't lose it.

- (3) 600g (only if you sent 600w first) for ashi+nagi or full ashi.
- (3) 600w for yumi, or to build military buildings if you don't have those yet.
- (3) Unit shipment if you're still in trouble in your base.

- (4) 600g (age up optional). Strong if you want to leave your options open for a while longer while you scout what they're doing.
- (4) Daimyo. Strong in longer term colonial fights, and can act as a stable if you need cav but don't have a stable yet.
- (4) 600w. Obviously you can only send this if you didn't already send it twice. Use for stable, possibly replacing shrines and/or yumi

Against a long term colonial start

Most civs won't want to play a long game against Japan, but sometimes you will run into it. Their plan will usually be to keep you in your base while they kill shrines and mass up, and they will generally plan to age up at some point, even if its after 10 minutes.

Your priority is booming as hard as possible in early colonial. You will likely not run into any trouble even with late double rax (from 600w), and if you think they will try to push your base instead of simply sieging shrines, boom a little less hard. Walls are still advisable, simply because they allow you to boom harder with less units, as well as giving you the option to age up more safely. Important though, is to stop booming immediately after 600w. You're going to want to mass in order to do 1 of 2 things: push them off your shrines, or age up. Sending vills can be viable, but in the vast majority of cases it's a bad idea. This is the point where you need to take control of the game.

- (2) 600w. Build either 2 raxes or rax+stable.
- (3) 600w for yumi or yumi+nag, or (3) 600g for ashi or ashi+nag.
- (4) 600g (age up optional)

Age up with this if he's busy sieging shrines or if his army is not that scary. Sometimes they're sieging fast though and you need to push them off shrines before they hurt your economy too much, in which case staying colonial is better. Note that if you decide to age up and have some ashi, send them to raid. It will keep him busy as well as possibly killing some vills, and the ashi should almost always get out safely due to their speed.

Try to keep scouting for semi-FFs. You don't want to find yourself in a defensive position while they age up for free, likely it'll already be too late for you to follow them up. If you do scout a semi-FF, or simply a lack of units, age up. Staying colonial is fine in most cases, but if you want to be totally safe about it you'll want a fortress army. In colonial, no matter how upgraded your units are, you will still have trouble against artillery. Of course, you won't always have time to age. If you don't have the time, max shrines and possibly even send vills.

Against a fortress build

Many civs will try an early fortress timing against Japan, because it can punish an overbooming Jap while not being vulnerable to harassment due to Japan's slow military start. Against this, Japan has to neglect their boom somewhat and age up themselves. In many cases it's also possible and even straight up winning for Japan to play it out in colonial, but ageing up after them is generally a more solid choice. That is, if you can afford to.

Against fast early fortress timings, use walls to slow them down a bit. Straight FF may be advisable in that case, which means:

- (2) 600w (shrines + market)
- (3) 600g (age up)

Or if you need to be really fast (in which case it may be viable to start TP even with 200w):

- (2) 600g (age up)
- (3) 600w (military building and shrines)

The semi-FF, also described above, is:

- (2) 600w. Build 2 raxes or rax+stable, also viable is just the rax or even just the stable if you know you're ageing up
- (3) 600w or (3) 600g depending on unit composition
- (4) 600g (age up)

Ottomans

Otto, being by far the easiest and also the second strongest civ, are about as lame as you can get. Their eco takes minimal management, their builds are straightforward and aggressive and their army is overpowered. What's not to like?

Not counting units you can only get from shipments, the abus gun is the strongest unit in the game. They are mobile, accessible age2 artillery which even stands up to cav when massed. You could argue that they were designed to be this strong as a civ bonus for Otto and you'd probably be right, but they definitely overdid it in this case. Properly massed abus with cards on them are in no way balanced, and with jans to back them up there are very few civs who have the slightest chance of breaking this composition in colonial. Even Iro has trouble. The negative side though is that Otto will generally focus on jan+abus and will lack cavalry. This means that raiding, and this is very important against jan+abus, becomes your only hope as their mass grows and you can't seem to get a single cost effective engagement. As an Otto's opponent builds up their cav mass, the threat against Otto's villas also grows and as soon as the Otto needs to gather outside of their base, they need jans (a lot of them if you have 10+ cav) to protect their villas. At this point it becomes hard for the Otto to push because his jans can't be with his army as well as protecting his villas, and ageing up against them becomes viable. When trying to age up against jan+abus, it also helps that TCs 2-shot abus, which is a big deal since they're expensive. For this reason Otto will generally shy away from your TC in the early game, giving you chances to age up.

However, it doesn't stop at abus. Otto's FF builds are quite strong as well. Fast, relentless early fortress jan+falc pressure can be hard to deal with already if your start was just a little greedy, and the follow up mameluke push is even scarier. And Otto's 700g 600g semi-FF is scarier still.

Mamelukes. 5 of them tank about as much as 20 fortress age hussars, and while their damage is much lower than that of 20 huss this is not their purpose anyway. Mams are mostly for tanking while your abus do the damage behind them, and tanking just so happens to be their specialty. This makes them fit perfectly into Otto's mid fortress army, and even if they didn't: 12000 ranged HP for 2000 res? I'll take that deal any day of the week.

All in all, Otto has many options for timing pushes as well as strong colonial constant pressure with their amazingly cost effective abus. Their only real weakness, and it's a minor one, is that they can't hard counter ranged cavalry. Abus beat RC cost effectively but it's a close call, and jans barely win too. Considering Otto's bad economy they tend to rely on their extremely cost effective army, and full goon can prevent their army from being that cost effective.

As it turns out though, Otto's eco isn't all that bad. They have a free TP eco from very early on which gives them many resource shipments (think 700w 700g 600g (age) 1000w 1000g), greatly improving their eco which if it was based on their vill count alone would indeed be weak. Their villas are also free, which is a bigger deal than it seems. This means that, even at 12 minutes time, your average civ will not even have a more valuable army than Otto will, and Otto's units are quite simply better. Their mid fortress army with CA+abus+mams cannot be matched except by boom civs who started greedily, and even then it's close.

Speaking of fortress age abus compositions, they are inexplicably never used. Jans are strong, sure, but they really are nothing special and even though Otto can mass a lot of them while sending mams for the winning push and this may seem like a good way to play the civ, it's completely neglecting their best unit. Abus aren't any worse in fortress than they are in colonial, they can even help win falc wars. CA+abus or fortress jan+abus also works extremely

well with mams, because a tank is exactly what the composition needs. This is underused, probably because massing jans and sending shipments is about the extent of your average Otto player's ability. After all, making 2 different units from a whopping 2 different military buildings is extremely difficult for someone who is used to their rax being the only building he or she ever selects.

Otto with their early TP eco basically guaranteeing them 3 shipments in a row in colonial, also have the option to upgrade the TPs early. This doesn't actually affect their shipment income until later in the game, at which point their crate shipments have already been sent, and it gives them a decent eco boost. Not worth it if you have 1 TP or if you will likely lose a TP and questionable if your opponent also has a TP, but even so it's generally a worthwhile investment. Unless you're planning to age up, in which case XP becomes more valuable.

The Ottoman build

With 400w start, build 2 TPs and chop for a house. With 300w, simply build a TP and a house.
→ (1) 3v

Age up with 400w.
During transition, if there is still a TP to take, chop for it.

In all of the next builds if you find yourself in fortress, there are multiple ways to play it. A quick 2 falc shipment + jans from rax to push early, 8 jan 2 falc for a slower but stronger timing, 1000w 1000g for a long term plan, or early spahi for a quick cav push. Generally the artillery push is scarier, but sometimes you're looking to catch their army before they age up, in which case spahi can be a decent choice. Keep in mind that your early fortress timings are not all in, your game winning push comes with the mamelukes which you will send later. So don't overextend.

The early colonial plan 5%

Otto's rush isn't great, but it can punish certain civs for being greedy. This build also works as a solid defense against very fast rushes like the Iro one. If you're rushing with it though, consider going jan huss and not abus. A TC can 2-hit an abus and you don't want that, you'd generally want to stay away from their TC early on which obviously doesn't fit into a rush build very well.

Chop wood during age up. You're starting 700g and building 2 military buildings right away, so you're going to need at least 100 extra wood for housing, usually 200.

- (2) 700g
- (3) 700w or (3) 600g (age up optional).
- (4) 600g (age up optional) or (4) 700w.
- (5) 600w or (5) Unit shipment for a timing.

From 700w build a market, houses and consider upgrading the trade route. Only do this if you intend to stay colonial. If you're planning on going fortress soon, XP is going to be more valuable than the TP resource income for another while.

The best shipment order if you want to turn it into a quick semi-FF is 700g 600g and age up, gathering only food with vills, then 700w during transition. This allows for a quick early game push and a decent fortress age follow up. Slower but more eco-heavy and less lacking in unit

count in colonial is the 700g 700w 600g semi-FF, which is a better long term colonial build if you end up choosing to stay colonial instead of going fortress with the 600g.

The fortress plan 40%

As Otto you have a number of ways to get to fortress. In the end though, it's either FF or semi-FF like most civs. But because Otto are so fast and get so many shipments in early colonial, they have a lot of choices when it comes to how they want to (semi-)FF.

Note that the fast age to fortress is usually stronger than the slow age, but in Otto's case vill production continues anyway and it's not like you're in a hurry to get cav archers or anything. The 4 huss or 4 abus age ups are often better for that reason.

For the straight FF, simply gather 1200-300. Make sure you have enough for minutemen too, if necessary. Still age with 400w, and use this for a military building and houses.

- (2) 700g (age up)
- (3) 700w

For a quick semi-FF with 1 military building, gather only food and enough gold to start your cav or jan batch. Getting a market up during transition to colonial is viable, hunting dogs early is extra valuable since you'll be gathering mostly food for a while. From the 400w, build a rax or a stable and 2 houses.

- (2) 700g
- (3) 600g (age up)
- (4) 700w. Don't forget market.

Alternatively you can semi-FF more slowly but get more units out in colonial. This build is mentioned in the next part because the start is identical to the long term colonial start, except you're deciding to age up from 600g instead of staying colonial.

The long term plan 55%

This is an extremely scary build to face due to its flexibility, its strong early to mid colonial mass and the fact that its composition often contains abus guns. The key to beating it is to use its weaknesses, which are abus getting 2 hit by TCs and the weakness of jan+abus to big raids.

If you know you're staying colonial, you can choose to upgrade the trade route from 400w as well as building a rax or stable from it, then waiting for 700w for houses and market. If you're not upgrading the route because you're either semi-FFing or are not sure yet, build a market from the remaining 200w.

Compositions to choose from in colonial: jan+abus, jan+huss or huss+abus.

- (2) 700w (second military building, houses, market, upgrade route optional)
- (3) 700g
- (4) 600g (age up optional)
- (5) 600w (consider mixing third military building). If you're still colonial and didn't upgrade the route yet, do it now.
- Or (5) Unit shipment for a timing.

Going up from the 600g is often a solid choice because Otto can have trouble breaking an opponent in colonial. However, you could be missing a game winning timing. After all, 8 minute Otto timings can be very devastating if they decided to try and age up, depending on the civ of course.

Portuguese

Ports are playable on the more balanced maps, but they still face issues even then. The lack of vill shipments isn't really the problem, as early TPs and early spice trade are solid alternatives, it's more that Ports' civ bonus is mediocre.

They are designed as a boom civ with the age up TCs, but comparing them to other boom civs quickly shows that they really aren't a boom civ at all. All other boom civs can start their boom during transition, Ports have to wait for the TC. All other boom civs can boom more quickly, Ports only has 1 more TC. Even France, Germans, or basically any other civ with a strong early eco and vill shipments, actually outbooms Ports early on. Where the Port boom starts paying off, is often also the time when they need to be looking to take map control. In that case, the boom was barely even worth it and they may as well have built vills from 1 TC that whole time. Of course, the TCs can also give map control and it's not Ports' only civ bonus (thank god for mamelukes), but as it is now the bonus is simply not very significant until later in the game.

And significant it is, later in the game. The Port boom may be slow, but it doesn't stop. Dutch maxes out at 4 banks, Brit at 20 manors and Japan at 20 shrines. Port just keeps booming. This is Ports strong point, and makes them the ultimate late game civ. They will almost never want to finish a game early, but are much more inclined to camp and slowly take more and more of the map in order to keep gathering resources. This puts the ball in Ports' opponent's court in the end, in almost every case.

Ports use a lot of food. This means they have to push for map control earlier than most civs and won't have the time to really get their boom going while camping safely in their base. This is a situation in which Ports find themselves sending fort. Yes, I mean the thing where they waste an entire shipment on a big building with mediocre damage. Despite all its flaws though, the fort is actually not a bad shipment. It secures 1 place on the map like no other building could, and its damage/HP is stronger than putting 4 towers next to each other for the same purpose. Of course, towers are not meant to secure 1 spot but more for LOS and cheap anti-raid, but that's another story.

Anyway, forgetting towers, Ports are kind of a fan of the fort. It secures resources without the need for a strong army and allows Ports to boom for a while longer, and their opponent's army isn't quite large enough to take on the fort head on. Circumventing it is of course a good idea, but a well placed fort is hard to circumvent without opening yourself up to some very strong counter-raids or your army getting trapped. This is exactly what Ports need in many cases, to get enough time to boom and get mams out.

Being a civ designed for the late game, Ports don't have a lot of aggressive options. Aggressive starts with Ports almost always run into the problem of ending up with a lesser eco than their opponent, even with Ports booming from 2 TCs. As a result, one will rarely see a Port trying something in early colonial. Ports have decent FF builds though, and their long term colonial is potentially strong despite their lack of unit upgrades. In the end, for Ports it's all about map control and finding the most efficient way to secure extra resources. This involves aggressively placing your TCs whenever possible, getting mams out at the correct timing, sending fort, or playing long term colonial against a fortress opponent. Ports don't always mind this, since their production from mid colonial and on is quite impressive.

Usually, games with Ports in them will default to a fortress war where Ports are struggling for resources with a cass+goon+huss composition. The organ guns are awkward because 2 falcs beats the shipment, huss need to be upgraded and cass are nothing special. You'd think Ports'

fortress age is nothing to be scared of and you'd be right, except it becomes a lot scarier with mams added. Still though, most civs will be able to outmass the Port enough for it not to matter, kill them before mams are out, or prepare for mams by making a cav or melee-based army. 2 falcs are still a problem, too. Ports struggle to get an advantage in fortress, and their long term eco becomes their only hope.

The Portuguese build

With a 200w start you can chop 100w for a house and get that early TP up but without treasures this will slow down your age up. Market is often better. With 100w starts, going early market is viable but if you don't early market you can possibly age fast. This is a choice you'll have to make based on the match up. With 100w 100c, early market should be worth it in theory.

→ (1) 300w

Get a TP up from this. If there are no more TPs to build, send eco theory instead.

Age with 400w. During transition you can choose to chop for another TP or a market, or both if your military is not important in early colonial. If you go market, chop 25 extra wood for steel traps. You won't need 2 houses from 400w because you'll have the extra TC for population, and can use the remaining 100w for steel traps.

The long term plan 60%

This build sends an eco card early. Which card? well, there's really only 1 choice.

→ (2) Spice trade

Spice trade would be a good choice even if Ports did have a vill card, because 20% on hunts means not only an increase in gather rate by about 3-4 vill in early colonial, it increases in value as the game goes on. This works especially well with Ports because they're building 2 vill at a time making spice trade twice as effective in the long term, and they tend to have a lot of vill on food from the start of colonial meaning the card will surpass 5v in value relatively quickly.

Sending an eco card first also makes more sense as Ports than with most other civs. This is because they lack resources early on and where other civs would use an early 700w to mix in more military buildings, Ports aren't really in a position to be doing that with their meagre economy. Sure, they can still mass decently by sending a bunch of crate shipments, but their mass is still small compared to most other civs and their economy will take a while to catch up. Ports also like to age up early, and sending an eco card happens to be an important part of any semi-FF. A 3 TC boom while steadily producing units is awkward at best without spice trade, after all you need about 12 vill on food to support a 3 TC vill production alone.

→ (3) 700w. Mix in 1 or 2 raxes from this, and get the last market upgrades.

→ (4) 700g (age up optional)

→ (5) 600g (age up optional) or 600w if you're definitely staying colonial and need houses.

Follow ups are 8 xbows, 600g (age up optional), or fortress shipments (1000w 1000g mams is a good order in fortress). If you end up in fortress, which in most cases you should, it's important to scout if they're building more TCs or not. If they are, you have a strong mameluke timing but can also choose to take them on in a boom war and keep map control with a well

placed fort. If they aren't building TCs, you play defensively and try to hold in early to mid fortress while you boom. Sometimes, if their timing is strong and you can't hold while booming fully, it's worth it to stop vill production for a while.

The aggressive start 10%

Despite Ports being mediocre at massing units in early colonial, their aggressive start shouldn't be underestimated. This can either go for constant pressure from early colonial or a timing around 8-9 minutes, or even both. It obviously neglects to send an eco card, but you still have 2 TCs which means your eco will generally still grow faster than your opponent's. This military-focused start makes it hard for them to punish you for booming as well as giving you the option to push them if they're greedy.

If you decide to start musk+huss:

- (2) 700w. Build 2 more military buildings from this, or just 1 more rax if you started rax and don't need cav.
- (3) 700g
- (4) 600g (age up optional)
- (5) 600w for prolonged colonial,
- (5) 8 xbow for a timing, or
- (5) Fortress shipment if you aged from the 600g.

And if xbow+pike (stronger early pressure but weaker long term):

- (2) 700w
- (3) 600w
- (4) 700g to mix cav or age up, or (4) 8 xbow for a timing.
- (5) 600g, (5) 700g or (5) 8 xbow

The FF 30%

Obviously, a quick FF is extra rewarding for Ports because they get yet another free TC and the option to mix in mams later. However, it also has its downsides:

After a straight FF, Ports age up with such a low eco that they can barely even support the 3 TC boom. So the third TC is nice in theory, but in a lot of cases you won't be able to use it because military production is more important for now.

Ports have to upgrade their huss and 2 falc > 2 organ. Their fortress army is not very scary at all, except for mams.

The choice is whether to age with 500f or 400w. 400w is slower but more efficient, so if you have the time go with that one. Make sure you get steel traps in early colonial, even when FFing. Ports use a lot of food. If you can't afford steel traps because you need to defend against early pressure, you probably shouldn't be doing a naked FF.

Use the 400w for a TP and market upgrades, or possibly for a stable and houses followed by fast age into 1000w while building goons. In the end there are a lot of possibilities in combining the usage of 400w and fast/slow age/1000w/700w, which one to choose depends on the match up.

- (2) 700g

Fast age for 1000w is greedy and better for the long term. Slow age (6 cassa) and 700w is better in the short term.

- (3) 700w or (3) 1000w

Russia

Russia seems to be a straightforward civ on lower levels because their unit shipment no eco rush is extremely popular. However, rushing this way with Russia is literally never the right way to play them. The rush is nothing special except for the unusually strong 5 coss card which isn't quite strong enough to single handedly carry the rush, and Russia's late game scaling is amazing. Boyars are the best upgrade card in the game and their units are already quite cost effective to begin with. Basically, Russia gets a cost-effective fortress composition (missing the ranged cav though) in colonial, simply by sending a card.

Russia's economy also grows significantly faster than most civs', and their villas only cost 90f too. A 270f 3v batch takes 50 seconds to complete while a regular vill takes 25 seconds. This means that with every vill batch, Russia is getting an extra vill for the price of 70f. This may not seem like much, but it adds up and while it doesn't mean their eco will keep up with a Brit or Japanese one, it does mean you want to kill them early. They are similar to Ports in that way too, besides not having any vill cards.

This means that Russia has some of the best late colonial scaling in the game. Killing them in colonial is therefore often hopeless (although not for every civ), and most civs will attempt to age up against them. After all, Russia can fall behind in economy and mass early on and still end up winning through sheer cost efficiency if you fail to age up against them.

Due to Russia's weak early economy and their timings not necessarily being the scariest in the game, most civs will have an opportunity to age up against them. This is where Russia's weakness lies, as they are a lot less comfortable in fortress wars. Their semi-FF, like the Portuguese one, can only send an eco card in the form of spice trade and this is not as good as 5v. Sure, they get CA instead of musks and their units are still quite cost effective, but they have to upgrade every unit (often, they even need to up the musks as it's common to semi-FF with musks) and their unit shipments are mediocre at best. However, even in fortress, Russia is a force to be reckoned with. Again, they excel in the later stages of the game and while they don't have game-winning shipments like urumi or an insanely strong composition like Azzy, your average civ won't want to get into a long game with them.

Most civs will therefore attempt to finish Russia early, and by that I don't mean early colonial but early in the game. This is possible for many of them due to stronger semi-FFs and/or strong booms, but depending on how many resources Russia has in their base, some civs can have trouble. Generally though, it's possible to either catch Russia with their pants down with a well-timed age up, or simply push them down with a colonial timing. Russia is fairly predictable after you scout their first card, and have a hard time squeezing in eco cards while keeping map control with a forward blockhouse, which they will often want in order to set up their eventual game-winning contain. Mostly Russia is stuck doing their generic musk coss start into strel+musk+coss colonial no matter what their opponent does, and if Russia can manage to scout an age up on time, they may be able to follow into fortress in some match ups. However, even that will rarely end up in a situation that Russia is comfortable in.

Your first goal as Russia is keeping the fight in colonial if at all possible. You want to get to a point where you can comfortably mass strelets and cossacks without running into population trouble, which is where boyars starts to get all kinds of ridiculous. You don't really mind fortress as Russia, but you'll find it much harder to win there and as mentioned, the road to fortress is somewhat awkward for Russia.

Russia has some decent timings to punish age ups, but they won't win you the game in every match up. There are really only 2 ways of playing this civ: either do a timing on resource

shipments + 5 coss, or send spice trade early and go for long term colonial or a semi-FF, based on your opponent's build. Which one to choose depends on whether or not you are able to punish an age up with a timing. If you're sending 700w 700g 600g 5 coss and you still can't break them if they aged up, that generally means the timing-based play wasn't worth it in the first place and you should've went spice trade into semi-FF or long term colonial vs fortress play. Of course, there are exceptions to this general rule. You can sometimes go for solid pressure from early colonial with crate cards as well as a timing after 5 coss, this can be worth it if spice trade would be too passive; against boom civs or semi-FFs, this may give them incentive to play more greedy (boom harder or age earlier) in which case the threat of your pressure and timing are enough to make it worth it for Russia to pass on the spice trade.

Russia is a civ that is happy with the TP meta. Their shipments in colonial are strong and important, and they don't have 3 vill to send so sending that 300w first is an easy choice to make. As far as chopping for a transition TP goes, Russia is quite comfortable with that as well. They will often have 2 TPs in early colonial and this is a pretty big deal considering the strength of their shipments.

14v vs 17v. Russia is one of the few civs where you have to choose beforehand how many vill you want to age up with. Their vill batches take twice as long to finish, so you can't say "simply age up when you have 800f".

In the vast majority of cases, 14v is preferable. You're building early TPs which means many shipments, and getting your first couple of colonial shipments almost a full minute earlier is a huge deal. The threat of early rushes and/or fast timings is also something your opponent has to prepare for blindly if you went 14v, whereas against a 17v age up most civs are quite comfortable booming or even adapting into a quick semi-FF.

Though sometimes it's better to age with 17. I'd say this is only worth it if you have a 100w start, because in that case you will miss the early market unless you go 17v. Keep in mind though, that planning for a 17v age up will remove the possibility of food treasures speeding up your colonial time. And even with 100w starts, I would only consider 17v if I am up against a civ that has no way of abusing my late age up by booming, and also has no way of adapting into a fast semi-FF. Ports for example.

The Russian build

With 200w starts, go early market and age up with 14 vill unless you messed up badly enough that your TC would be idle for 20+ seconds. In that case simply make another batch. This applies whenever you decide to age with 14v.

With 100w+100c starts, 17v is a viable option. If you do that, still go early market and trade coin for wood first to get your house up in time.

With 100w and the rest food, a 14v age up would be preferable but 17v is possibly still viable in some match ups. In that case, still go early market but build the house first or you will be popped.

In the future I will assume you aged with 14 vill. In the case of 17v, your build changes slightly. Generally you will need to chop for a BH during transition and start building it earlier so that you're not extremely late with your first batch. When it comes to your build order options the rest is pretty much identical, but the way to play most match ups changes as well. I will not go into that any further than I already have for the sake of keeping it relatively simple.

- (1) 300w. Build a TP from this and a market if you didn't have one yet. Don't gather for hunting dogs yet.

Age up with 400w, and chop for another TP as well as hunting dogs and placer mines.

The 700w build 50%

Generally you can stop chopping wood as soon as you queue placer mines and start gathering for your first musk and vill batch. Make sure you have enough gold for steel traps too.

From the 400w, build a BH and get steel traps or a house. This depends on whether you can delay your military batch a bit (steel traps first) or you need it quickly (house first). Delay the other until 700w arrives.

- (2) 700w. Build either a stable or a second BH from this, as well as houses and steel traps if you didn't have that yet. Using this wood for strelets is optional and can be viable, but keep in mind strelets cost 10 pop and cost wood, so this will probably cause pop trouble later. In that case you can choose not to build a second military building from this wood and play for an early infantry-based timing.

Generally:

- (3) 700g (age up optional, although awkward)
- (4) 600g (age up optional) or (4) 600w, depending on your need for houses.
- (5) 5 coss for a timing or the remaining crate shipment (600w or 600g) for a longer-term plan or age up.

Alternatively, in case you went for early strelets:

- (3) 600w. Building a stable optional.
- (4) 5 coss for a timing or (4) 700g for more cav long term or an age up.

Going for fortress with this build is viable of course, but awkward since you're missing that eco card (spice trade) in colonial and you're going to need a good eco to upgrade all your units and still support a decent mass. In some situations though, following them up to fortress is the only possible choice and sometimes you still need those early crate cards to keep up with their mass in colonial while you both age up.

The 700g build 20%

This is a relatively quick musk-based timing to overwhelm your opponent in early colonial. It is the most aggressive viable option Russia has, but don't mistake it for a rush. The strength of this build is its early colonial efficiency: it gathers almost no gold making steel traps even stronger than it already would be, and it gathers just enough wood for houses while not getting too much of it (700w is too much, but worth it for the long term), making its 7 minute mass stronger than that of any other Russian build.

Considering this build goes for an early timing, consider not chopping for the second TP. This will hurt your timing but does help for long term follow ups, so it's a choice you should base on the match up and how much your timing is likely to gain from being slightly stronger in its unit count.

You're getting 2 blockhouses up early. This means 500w for BH's alone, so you're going to have to chop some wood for houses even with the 400w from age up. Note that early steel traps is vital, but you can skip placer mines for now.

- (2) 700g
- (3) 5 coss for the timing.
- (4) 600g to age up or (4) 700w for prolonged colonial play.

Alternatively, if your timing is not likely to do much and you want to transition to a more eco-focused play instead of sending 5 coss:

- (3) 700w
- (4) 600w, (4) 600g (age up optional) or even (4) Spice trade for the long term.

The long term plan 30%

This build is strong but slow. It allows for very strong long term colonial play, and it allows Russia to follow their opponents into fortress without being too far behind in economy. However, Russia's semi-FF is still significantly more awkward than most civs' semi-FFs, and this can open them up to some scary timings or fortress contains. Even so, this is your best option in some match ups where colonial pressure has no real way of preventing your opponent from reaching fortress safely, giving you no option but to follow them up or set yourself up for a colonial vs fortress fight. In the latter case, starting spice trade is also your best option.

Chop for the second TP, market upgrades and the BH similar to the 700w build. However, keep gathering wood for a bit so you don't get housed. Keep in mind though that you will send 700w after ST, so don't overchop wood. A single house will be enough.

- (2) Spice trade
- (3) 700w. Build a stable from this and/or a second BH. You can also send (3) 700g and age up immediately for a quick semi-FF. This means your colonial mass will be negligible.
- (4) 700g (age up optional)
- (5) 600w or (5) 600g (age up optional)

If you find yourself in fortress, full strelet cossack with boyars and manchu (or CA) is a great composition to go for. Don't forget about boyars if you're in fortress, it's still one of your best cards to send as your army starts growing. Remember, 1000w and 1000g are great shipments.

Spain

As a civ that's been overpowered for most of AoE3's history, you could call it justice that Spain got nerfed into the ground. I can't help but disagree with the way they were nerfed though, as nerfing the shipments of a civ whose unique bonus is shipments seems like going against your own design. ES chose to do this anyway, and the result is absolutely abysmal unit shipments in fortress. 3 lancers? That's as valuable as 3 huss in colonial, and that shipment is rarely sent in colonial let alone in fortress. 7 rods? That's 700 resources, most of which food. I wonder who made these decisions...

Rants about design flaws aside, Spain is happy with the evolving crate meta. As it turns out, Spain scales extremely well with crate shipments since those shipments weren't nerfed into the ground and Spain does still get their shipments faster. All nice and dandy, you'd think. However, Spain lacks 1000g which is kind of a huge deal because now, since Spain is already missing RI shipments, 1000w and 2 falc are the only shipments you're excited about sending as you age up to fortress. And the poor unit shipments aren't Spain's only problem: their politicians, both to colonial and to fortress, are no good at all. This is a problem Brits face as well, but Brit doesn't really care whereas Spain relies on their (semi-)FF builds, which are a lot weaker without the fast age option. Especially semi-FFs are hurt by this handicap, which is very significant in match ups where their opponents are likely to semi-FF. After all, Spain can't really deal with that effectively; straight FF is countered by it, and prolonged colonial is hopeless. In semi-FF wars, Spain loses out.

Spain is a lot less happy with the evolving TP meta. They don't really need TPs (more than 1 is already overkill with this civ), and other civs spamming them all over the place kind of negates their civ bonus. They still get shipments faster and they don't have to invest in TPs early on to get this going, but it's still awkward to see your opponent building 2 TPs and knowing your civ bonus is basically irrelevant from there.

But they're not a weak civ. In fact, I'd say Spain has some undiscovered potential especially in an eco-heavy metagame, where their fortress options without unit cards will need to be explored and probably found surprisingly strong.

Spain ages up with a decent eco, comparable to (although admittedly somewhat worse than) the French and German one, and they get shipments faster.

The 500f instead of 400w is somewhat awkward, but manageable. Your quick 3 shipment spam in early colonial gives you a crazy number of options which makes it hard to write a build for Spain, but does make them a versatile civ. As mentioned though, they lack the option to adapt into a quick age up, which limits their options significantly.

Spain is a civ that likes to get at least something out of colonial before going up, or going up immediately. Defensive semi-FFs are not preferable with this civ as you will likely get countered by a faster semi-FF or solid colonial pressure. Spain is better off threatening pressure or even doing a timing to force their opponent to cancel their age up plans. Even though Spain is a good fortress civ with their infamous rod+lancer composition, the lack of a fast age politician makes their semi-FF so awkward that they would rather play a prolonged colonial in most match ups. This is what made them so strong on FP even though they weren't buffed all that much: Prolonged colonial wars were popular there, and Spain thrives at that. Their eco is actually great, and the abundance of shipments even allows them to squeeze in 4v, which no other civ would ever send.

I've personally been playing around with the idea of sending 1 falc in fortress with this civ. After all, to make a falc you'd have to spend 300w on the art foundry and another 500 resources on the falc itself, and generally you won't want more than 3. 3 falcs allows you to win the artillery war against civs with a 2 falc shipment, and falcs are great against colonial compositions as well. Because Spain likes to FF in some match ups, they will often face colonial compositions, making this shipment a viable option.

Yes, 800 resources is not great for a fortress shipment (though 400 of that is wood, which you won't have market upgrades for), but look at all the other shipments that Spain has available to them in fortress. Is there anything better? Besides 1000w and 2 falc, there isn't really. Largely untested, but good in theory. I suggest you put it in your decks and see where it lands you, after all there's plenty of space in Spain's deck because of all the useless unit shipments.

The Spanish build

With 200w, build an early TP and chop for the house.

With 100w+100c, go early market (market first, trade coin for wood).

With just 100w, simply build a house. This is likely to get you a fast age up and the early market may get you a late age up. Not worth the risk in my experience.

→ (1) 3v

At this point you should already know if you're going for the FF or a colonial start, because here is where your build starts to deviate. FF is strong against civs that are not comfortable semi-FFing or have a slow, punishable (by your no eco early fortress push) semi-FF. Obviously it's also important that they don't have the option of simply rushing you to death.

The FF 30%

Spain's is by far the most versatile FF. They have many ways of FFing, all viable in different situations. All the variations can be grouped into 2 styles of play though, being the 5v FF and the 700g FF. There's also the anti-rush tower FF:

The Tower FF:

Age up with the tower and 200c, make sure you gather enough for minutemen as well as the age up (so 1350-1150 instead of 1200-1000) because you're up against a rush (if you're not up against a rush you shouldn't be doing this kind of FF). Chop for a transition TP.

→ (2) 700g

→ (3) 700w or (3) 8 pikes if you desperately need units to hold or want to turn this into an early fortress timing.

Gather food for dogs while you age up, they can help hold.

The 700g FF:

Age up with 500f, chop for a TP. If you already have a market, get placer mines and chop/mine enough for early steel traps. If you don't have a market yet, chopping for it is viable but only if time is not that much of an issue. Your FF will be slightly slower but obviously stronger in the long run. Generally the market is better unless you're going for an early fortress timing.

→ (2) 700g

From here this FF has some options, which makes it able to adapt and therefore a solid choice:

- (3) 700w for a solid early to mid fortress mass. Build a rax from this and get a market going if you didn't have one already.

Or

- (3) 5v for a long term fortress play. Your first card in fortress in this case is always 1000w. If you can't afford to send that because you need units, 5v was a mistake.

Chop wood for a rax/stable and a house or 2 so you can make at least a couple of batches in early fortress while you wait for 1000w. Skip the market until 1000w.

Or

- (3) 8 pike for an early fortress all in push. Your next shipment is generally 2 falc and then for continued pressure any combination of 12 pike, 4 lancer and 8 rod (in order of strength). To transition out of this or take a break from the aggression, ship 1000w.

The 5v FF

Note that this FF is slower, but obviously eco-heavy.

Age up with 500f, chop for a TP. Skip the market for now, unless you already had it in which case you should get placer mines.

Set up your villas to gather the full 1200-1000 without resource shipments.

- (2) 5v
- (3) 700w. Market from this (steel traps and amalgamation), as well as a military building.
- (4) 1000w for houses and a second military building.

The aggressive start 40%

Even though Spain doesn't have a 400w politician, they still have some decent aggressive options in colonial. This involves starting 2 military buildings and sending 700w for houses, much like France or Germans. The difference is that Spain has to chop the 400w, which is a big deal but not game-breaking.

Age up with 500f. Chop wood for a TP. The market (if you didn't have it already) is optional, you can also choose to delay this until 700w for a better mass in early colonial.

Chop 400 (optional: 525 for steel traps) more wood for 2 buildings and move villas to gold/food. Keep in mind you're getting 500f from age up.

Build either 2 raxes or rax+stable as you hit colonial. Note that you have the advantage of not having to gather the 400w before starting the military buildings, but keep in mind you'll be housed if you don't get a house up in time. For this reason you should send 700w asap.

- (2) 700w. Use this for houses and optionally for remaining market upgrades.
- (3) 700g for any combination of musk, huss and rods or (3) 600w for xbow+pike.

Note that (3) 5v is also viable to transition out of military-focused play and go into a long game. Refer to the long term plan for further options.

- (4) 600w or (4) 8 pike for a timing or (4) 600/700g (age up optional).

The long term plan 30%

Spain can also choose to start somewhat more passively and make their build depend on their opponent. Spain has the advantage of getting more shipments, so they can squeeze 5v in with all the crate shipments. If you're going to do this, it's always best to do it asap, but there's still 2 options: 700w first or 5v first.

Age with 500f. Chop for a TP and a market. Make sure you have enough for steel traps and enough for a military building as you hit colonial. You'll also need to keep chopping wood for a house or 2 in early colonial.

Usually you'll build a stable, because that way you'll have the option of raiding. A musk start is also good and preferable in some match ups because it's easier to age up behind.

→ (2) 5v

→ (3) 700w

Doing this the other way around is also viable. This allows you to transition into a somewhat stronger and less cav-dependent (if you started stable, that is) mid colonial mass by mixing in 2 more military buildings from the 700w.

→ (4) 700g (age up optional). (4) 600w is also viable but it's advisable to stick with 700g simply because it gives you the option to age. Spain ages to fortress slowly, so they can't really make the snap decision to age up. You have to keep a potential age up in mind during the early stages of colonial by sending gold shipments and keeping your options open that way.

→ (5) 600w if you decided to age up, (5) 600g if you didn't. 600w may still be better in prolonged colonial, but again you want that option to age up.

Glossary

200w, 300w, 700g, etc.	Crate shipments. 700w = 700 wood, 700g = 700 gold, etcetera.
300e	300 export (Asian shipment)
5v	5 villagers
Abus	Abus gun (Ottoman colonial ranged infantry/artillery).
Ageing (up)	Going to the next age.
Agra	Agra fort (Indian wonder)
Amalgamation	Colonial gold market upgrade
Art foundry	Artillery foundry
Arq	Arquebusier (Chinese fortress ranged infantry).
Ashi	Ashigaru musketeer
Baby dance	Native dance to improve train times.
Boyars	Russian colonial shipment giving both strelets and cossacks (and opirichniks) +15% to both their health and damage.
BH	Blockhouse (Russian barracks)
Big wood trickle	Indian colonial eco shipment giving 2.25 wood per second.
BO/Build/Build order	Strategy of choice
Boom	Focusing on fast economic development (example: British manor boom).
Buff	A balance change that makes something stronger.
CA	Cavalry archer (Ottoman/Russian fortress ranged cavalry)
Cass	Cassadores (Portuguese ranged infantry)
Cav	Cavalry, in this guide solely used to describe heavy cavalry (melee, anti-infantry cavalry).
Cdb	Coureur des bois (French villager)
CG/Charminar Gate	Indian wonder
Civ	Civilisation
Civ counter	Choosing a civ that counters your opponent's.
Ckn	Chu ko nu (Chinese colonial archer)
CM	A shipment that improves your TC in combat and gives you the option to call additional minutemen. For Asian civs this is called Enlist Irregulars.
Confucian Academy	Chinese wonder
Cons	Consulate
Coss	Cossack (Russian heavy cavalry)
Coy(ote)	Coyote runner (Aztec heavy cavalry)
Crackshot	European explorer's special ability, and Iro's War Chief's special ability.
Ctrl group	A group of units grouped under a number key. Ctrl+1 makes the currently selected units group 1. Pressing 1 will select that group. Shift+1 adds the selected units to group 1.
Cuir	Cuirassier (French fortress heavy cavalry)
Daimyo	Japanese shipped unit that boosts all nearby units in combat.
Disc	Disciple (Chinese unit trained by explorer) or Discovery age.
Distributivism	Wood trickle shipment
Dogs	War dogs (Spanish unit trained by explorer)
Dopp	Dopplesoldner (German heavy infantry)
ERK	Eagle runner knight (Aztec fortress ranged cavalry)

ES	Ensemble studios, the developers of AoE3
Euro civ	European civilisation (British, Dutch, France, Germans, Ottomans, Portuguese, Russia and Spain).
FA	Flaming arrow (Japanese artillery)
Falc	Falconet
FF	Fast fortress, meaning going to fortress age quickly without getting any military units out in colonial.
FI	Fast industrial, meaning going to industrial age quickly.
FP/Fan Patch	A user-created patch by a group of high level players (including myself for FP 1.2) to fix the numerous balance issues in AoE3. From around 2009 to 2011, all good players played only FP, but now it is inactive. The map and civ balance were very different there.
Gang saw	Discovery age wood market upgrade
Golden Pavilion	Japanese wonder
Goon	Dragoon
GP	Great plains (Map) or Golden Pavilion.
Halb	Halberdier
Hard counter system	As opposed to a soft counter system, a hard counter system means that units are given multipliers in their damage to counter a specific unit type.
HD/Hunting dogs	Discovery age food market upgrade
HI	Heavy infantry; anti-cavalry infantry
Hotkey	A key used to simplify or speed up certain tasks (for example space bar to find idle villagers).
HP	Hit points, AKA health.
Hunts	Huntables (bison, deer, etc)
Huss	Hussar
Jan rush	Janissary rush; a fast Ottoman rush.
Kami	Heavenly Kami
KM/Karni	Karni Mata (Indian wonder).
Kiting	Also known as hit and run; a popular micro technique where a ranged unit shoots and runs back while reloading, then repeating that process.
Lb	Longbowman (British ranged infantry)
LC	Light cannon (Iroquois industrial artillery)
LOS	Line of sight
Mace	Macehualtin (Aztec ranged infantry)
Mam	Mameluke (High health cavalry mercenary shipped in fortress)
Map control	Control of the map, this is usually decided by which player has the best army.
Mass	Army
Match up	Civ X vs Civ Y, for example France vs British is a match up.
Metagame	The general understanding at any given moment about how the game should be played.
Micro	Small scale unit control.
Mirror	A match up where both players play the same civ (example: Japan vs Japan is a Japan mirror)
MM	Minutemen
Monk	Asian civs' explorer
Musk	Musketeer

Nagi	Naginata rider (Japanese heavy cavalry)
Nerf	A balance change that makes something weaker.
Obs games	Observer games; 2 players play 1v1 and the rest watches. A very common sight on higher levels.
OP/Overpowered	Too strong from a balance perspective.
Outmass	Getting a bigger army than your opponent.
Pathing	The path chosen to any destination by the unit's AI.
Pike	Pikeman
Placer mines	Discovery age gold market upgrade.
Politician	The choices in age up, for example the Quartermaster to colonial (400w).
Puma	Puma pikeman (Aztec heavy infantry)
Raid	A small attack focused purely on killing a player's economy.
Rax	Barracks
RC	Ranged cavalry; anti-cavalry cavalry
RE patch	The current patch that everyone plays on, in other words game version TAD 1.03. Made by Robot Entertainment, the most significant changes being nerfs to Japan and India and the cost of trading posts being reduced to 200 wood from 250.
Res	Resources
RI	Ranged infantry; all infantry with multipliers against heavy infantry.
Rod	Rodelero
Rush	An early colonial, full-scale attack.
Scaling	The degree at which a civ gets better the longer the game goes on.
Semi-FF	Semi-Fast fortress; going to fortress age quickly, but spending some time in colonial to set up an economy.
Skirm	Skirmisher
ST	Steel traps (colonial food market upgrade) or Spice trade (colonial food gathering shipment). Coincidentally they both improve hunt gather rate by 20%.
Starve	Starving a player means containing him until he is out of natural resources.
Steppe	Steppe rider (Chinese heavy cavalry)
Strel	Strelet (Russian ranged infantry)
Summer palace	Chinese wonder
SW	Settler wagon
TAD	The Asian Dynasties expansion
TM/Taj Mahal	Indian wonder
Tank	Soak up damage. A high health unit like for example the Mameluke is great at tanking.
TC	Town center
Timing	An attack that is designed to hit at a specific time when your military is relatively strong and/or your opponent's military is relatively weak.
Toma	Tomahawk (Iroquois musketeer-type infantry)
Toshugu Shrine	Japanese wonder
ToV	Tower of victory (Indian wonder)
TP	Trading post
Transition TP	Building a trading post during transition to colonial age.

Trickle	A constant income from a shipment or building (example distributivism, shrine, factory).
TWC	The War Chiefs expansion
Urumi	Indian mercenary melee infantry with the same properties/counters as ranged infantry.
Vanilla	AoE3 without expansions
VC	Virginia company (British discovery age shipment that reduces the cost of manors).
Vill	Villager
VS/Vill seconds	Villager seconds; the amount of time it takes for a single, unupgraded villager to gather something (for example, 300 wood is 600 VS because a villager gathers wood at 0.5 wood per second).
War dance	A dance at the native fire pit that improves their units in battle.
WC/War Chief	Native civs' explorer
WH	War hut (Native barracks)
Wise woman	Iroquois politician
WP	Warrior priest (Aztec dancing unit)
WW	War wagon (German fortress ranged cavalry)
Xbow	Crossbowman
XP	Experience
XP dance	Native dance to gather XP.
Yumi	Yumi archer