

Hamurabi

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Hamurabi is a text-based game of land and resource management and is one of the earliest computer games. Its name is a shortening of Hammurabi, reduced to fit an eight-character limit.

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History

Doug Dymont wrote *The Sumer Game* in 1968 as a demonstration program for the FOCAL programming language, programming it on a DEC PDP-8. The game has often been inaccurately attributed to Richard Merrill, the designer of FOCAL. Once a version of BASIC was released for the PDP-8, David H. Ahl ported it to BASIC. The game spread beyond mainframes when Ahl published an expanded version of it in *BASIC Computer Games*, the first best-selling computer book.^[1] The expanded version was renamed *Hamurabi* [*sic*] and added an end-of-game performance appraisal.^[2] This version was then ported to many different microcomputers.

Gameplay

Like many BASIC games of the time, Hamurabi was mainly a game of numeric input. As the ruler, the player could buy and sell land, purchase grain and decide how much grain to release to his kingdom.

Scott Rosenberg, in *Dreaming in Code*, wrote of his encounter with the game:^[3]

I was fifteen years old and in love with a game called *Sumer*, which put me in charge of an ancient city-state in the Fertile Crescent. Today's computer gamers might snicker at its crudity: its progress consisted of all-capital type pecked out line by line on a paper scroll. You'd make decisions, allocating bushels of grain for feeding and planting, and then the program would tell you how your city was doing year by year. "Hamurabi," it would announce, like an obsequious prime minister who feared beheading, "I beg to report..."

Within a couple of days of play I'd exhausted the game's possibilities. But unlike most of the games that captivate teenagers today, *Sumer* invited tinkering. Anyone could inspect its insides: the game was a set of simple instructions to the computer, stored on a paper tape coded with little rows of

eight holes.

The end-game appraisal compared the player to historical rulers (e.g., "Your heavy-handed performance smacks of Nero and Ivan IV.")^[4], a tradition carried on by many contemporary strategy games.

Influence

As a simulation, *Hamurabi* influenced later games such as Sid Meier's *Civilization* and inspired a number of similar resource-management simulators:

- *Kingdom* (1974)^[5] by Lee Schneider and Todd Voros.
- *Dukedom*^{[6][7]} (1976), an expanded version of *Hamurabi*.
- *King*^[5] (1978) by James A. Storer, set in modern times and printed in Ahl's *More Basic Computer Games*.
- *Santa Paravia en Fiumaccio* (1978) by George Blank which takes place in Renaissance Italy.
- *Dynasty*, a somewhat expanded version of *Hamurabi* set in feudal China.
- *Manor* (1986), a derivative of *Dukedom*.

References

1. ^ Ahl, David. "David H. Ahl biography from Who's Who in America" (<http://www.swapmeetdave.com/Ahl/DHAbio.htm>) . <http://www.swapmeetdave.com/Ahl/DHAbio.htm>. Retrieved 2009-11-23.
2. ^ "BASIC Computer Games: Hammurabi" (<http://atariarchives.org/basicgames/showpage.php?page=78>) . AtariArchives.org. <http://atariarchives.org/basicgames/showpage.php?page=78>. Retrieved 2009-11-23.
3. ^ Rosenberg, Scott. "Dreaming in Code" (<http://www.dreamingincode.com/book-excerpt/>) . <http://www.dreamingincode.com/book-excerpt/>. Retrieved 2009-11-23.
4. ^ HMRABI code listing (<http://www.dunnington.u-net.com/public/basicgames/HMRABI>)
5. ^ *a b* "BASIC Computer Games: King" (<http://atariarchives.org/basicgames/showpage.php?page=96>) . AtariArchives.org. <http://atariarchives.org/basicgames/showpage.php?page=96>. Retrieved 2009-11-23.
6. ^ "Big Computer Games: Dukedom" (<http://www.atariarchives.org/bigcomputergames/showpage.php?page=11>) . AtariArchives.org. <http://www.atariarchives.org/bigcomputergames/showpage.php?page=11>. Retrieved 2009-11-23.
7. ^ Ferguson, Derek. "What I Did on My Holiday Vacation" (<http://dotnet.sys-con.com/read/43654.htm>) . .NET Developers Journal. <http://dotnet.sys-con.com/read/43654.htm>. Retrieved 2009-11-23.

External links

- July 1973 DECUS Catalog listing for FOCAL8-5 The Sumer Game - pdf (http://pdp-8.org/scans/highgate/decus/decus_lib_73a.pdf)
- David Ahl's BASIC program listing — scan (<http://atariarchives.org/basicgames/showpage.php?page=79>)
- David Ahl's BASIC program listing — text (<http://www.moorecad.com/classicbasic/basic/creative/hamurabi.bas>)
- JavaScript port (<http://www.hammurabigame.com/>) at HammurabiGame.com
- JavaScript port (<http://www.apollowebworks.com/russell/samples/hamurabi.html>) by Russell Glasser

- C99 port (<http://github.com/blt/hamurabi>) by Brian L. Troutwine
- Dylan port (<http://www.opendylan.org/downloads/contributions/>)
- Back to BASICS (<http://peyre.byethost8.com/GWBASIC/index.htm>) , a site hosting old GW-BASIC games and other programs, including Manor

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