

## *Oware*

Oware is the oldest board game that is still widely played in the world today. It belongs to the pit and pebbles classification of games, which has been in existence for seven thousand years. Quoting John B Haggerty 'the game has persisted for seven thousand years in widely separated areas all over the globe.' Its exact origin has been lost to history, but what we can say is that Africa has always been considered its traditional home.

Time magazine (June 14 1963) tells us of the ancient origin of these games and how widespread it was. 'Carved on a vast block of rock in the ancient Syrian city of Aleppo are two facing ranks of six shallow pits with larger hollows scooped out at each end. The same design is carved on columns of the temple at Karnak in Egypt, and it appears in the early tomb paintings in the valley of the Nile. It is carved in the Theseum in Athens, and in rock ledges along caravan routes of the ancient world. Today the same pits and hollows are to be found all over Asia and Africa, scratched in the bare earth, carved in rare woods or ivory inlaid with gold.'

There is a legend in Twi, the language of the Asante people of Ghana that Oware began when a man and a woman played the game on end. To always be together and someday end the various games, they married. Hence the name Oware or Wari means he/she marries.

## *Game Rules*

The game requires an Oware board and 48 seeds.

A typical Oware board has two straight rows of six pits, called "houses", and optionally one large house at either end. Each player controls the six houses on their side of the board, and the score house on their right. The game begins with four seeds in each of the twelve smaller houses.

Boards may be elaborately carved or simple and functional; they may include a pedestal, or be hinged to fold lengthwise or crosswise and latch for portability and storage with the seeds inside. While most commonly located at either end, scoring houses may be placed elsewhere, and the rows need not be straight. When a board has a hinged cover like a diptych, the scoring houses may be carved into the two halves of the cover, and so be in front of the players during play. The ground may also be used as a board; players simply scoop two rows of pits out of the earth.



### **Object**

The object of the game is to capture more seeds than one's opponent. Since the game has only 48 seeds, capturing 25 is sufficient to accomplish this. Since there is an even number of seeds, it is possible for the game to end in a draw, where each player has captured 24.

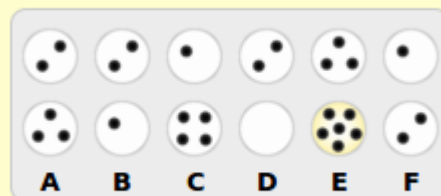


## Sowing

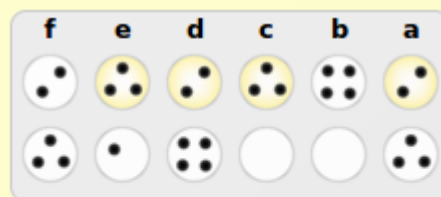
Players take turns moving the seeds. On a turn, a player chooses one of the six houses under his or her control. The player removes all seeds from that house, and distributes them, dropping one in each house counter-clockwise from this house, in a process called sowing. Seeds are not distributed into the end scoring houses, nor into the house drawn from. That is, the starting house is left empty; if it contained 12 seeds, it is skipped, and the twelfth seed is placed in the next house. The diagram shows the result of sowing from house E.

Knowing the number of seeds in each house is, of course, important to gameplay. When there are many seeds in a house, sometimes enough to make a full lap of the board or more, they cannot easily be counted by eye, and their number is often guarded by the player who controls that house. This may be done by repeatedly moving the seeds in the house. A player may count the seeds when contemplating a move; in such cases the last few are usually counted in the hand to avoid revealing their number.

### Example turn:



The lower player prepares to sow from E.



After sowing, c, d, and e are captured but not a.

## Capturing

After a turn, if the last seed was placed into an opponent's house that brought its total to two or three, all the seeds in that house are captured and placed in the player's scoring house (or set aside if the board has no scoring houses). If the previous-to-last seed also brought an opponent's house to two or three, these are captured as well, and so on. However, if a move would capture all an opponent's seeds, the capture is forfeited, and the seeds are instead left on the board, since this would prevent the opponent from continuing the game. In the above diagram, the lower player would capture all the seeds in houses c, d, and e but not a, since it is not contiguous to the other captured houses.

## Let the opponent Play

The proscription against capturing all an opponent's seeds is related to a more general idea, that one ought to make a move that allows the opponent to continue playing. If an opponent's houses are all empty, the current player must make a move that gives the opponent seeds. If no such move is possible, the current player captures all seeds in his/her own territory, ending the game.

## Winning

The game is over when one player has captured 25 or more seeds, or each player has taken 24 seeds (draw). If both players agree that the game has been reduced to an endless cycle, each player captures the seeds on their side of the board.

