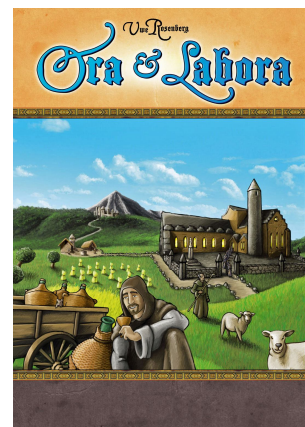


## First Impressions (1)

### Pevans tries out *Ora & Labora*

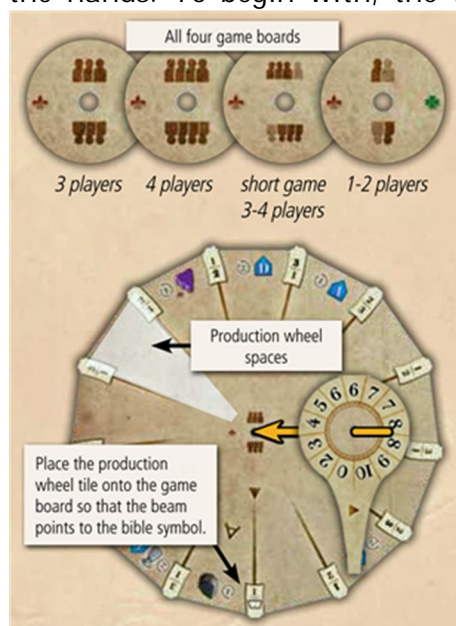
There was one game that was both much talked about in Essen last year and something of a disappointment. This is the new board game from Uwe Rosenberg, *Ora & Labora*. It was much talked about because it is the new game from Uwe Rosenberg – incorporating, I was told, all the best features from *Agricola* and *Le Havre*. It was something of a disappointment because production problems meant the English language version wasn't ready in time for Spiel. However, it wasn't long in coming out and is now readily available. I finally got a chance to play it a couple of weeks ago, so here are my first impressions.



The Latin title (which loosely translates as Prayer and Work) reflects the game's theme of a medieval monastery. Each player is developing their monastery and building up the trades needed to support it. At the end of the game, they will get points for the buildings in and around their monastery and for the goods they have accumulated. Unlike *Agricola* and *Le Havre*, though, there is no requirement to produce enough food for your workforce – a major consideration when playing those two games.

My immediate thought on seeing the components of the game was a worry that it was over-produced. Did it really need these large dials with a variety of 'hands' to go on them? This turns out to be a clever mechanism for managing the resources available to the players and the timing of the game. The combinations of different dials and hands provide several different ways of playing the game.

The dials are divided into segments, which are reflected in the circular central portion of the hands. To begin with, the wooden pieces representing the various resources are



How the rules introduce the 'dial'

tucked up against the right-hand side of the hand, making sure they are all in one segment of the dial. Each turn, the hand is moved anti-clockwise, leaving the pieces behind. The section at the base of the hand shows how many of each resource are available in each section – until someone takes them, when the appropriate piece is moved back against the hand. This device is both brilliantly simple and brilliantly clever. Icons on the outside of the dial indicate what else happens that turn – on the first, second or even third circuit of the dial, depending how long a game you're playing.

Players each start with a small board, divided by a rectangular grid onto which cards are placed. This board shows the starting buildings and initially holds cards for forest and moorland. I'm quite used to games where having forest means you get wood. However, in this game, you clear the forest to get

your wood, leaving land on which you can build – but won't produce any more wood. Clearing land like this is one of the actions available to you each turn.

The next action in a quite obvious progression is to build something on cleared land. The buildings are represented by cards, with some available for players to buy – different sets are laid out as the game progresses. Some buildings expand your monastery, others represent trades and settlements growing up around the monastery. There is a cost to build each one, so players need to accumulate the right resources for the buildings they want.

What's more, each building card must be played on the correct terrain, so players must also expand the land available around their monastery by buying more boards, selecting the terrain they want. This is what I think of as a *Tetris* element to the game as players need to fit their terrain and buildings together. Particularly as some of the buildings score points according to what's adjacent to them. Hence you need to look ahead and leave spaces for the buildings you plan to buy later. Of course, this could easily go pear-shaped if you don't get the buildings you want.

The third action in a turn is, of course, to use a building to produce stuff. You do this with one of your clergyman pieces – you don't get these back until you've used all of them and you can't place one on a building that's already occupied. An interesting twist is that you can pay another player to use one of their buildings. Not only does this give you access to build-ings you didn't build, it also uses up one of the other player's clergymen!

As you'd expect, there's an awful lot going on in his game. Clearly, the aim of the game is to add buildings to produce the resources that you need to get more buildings and score enough points to win. Just how you do this depends on which buildings you get (and what other players have) and a bit of experience is needed to understand which combinations make sense. It's also a question of which version of the game you play: France or Ireland. There's not a huge difference, but the French produce wine (using grapes, which are not grown in Ireland), while the Irish make whiskey (of course!).

On my first playing, I was very taken with *Ora & Labora* and give it a preliminary 9/10 on my highly subjective scale. I can see where mechanisms have been taken from Uwe Rosenberg's other recent games, *Le Havre* in particular. However, *Ora & Labora* stands on its own, providing a significantly different challenge from the other games. I look forward to playing it a lot more.

*Ora & Labora* was designed by Uwe Rosenberg and published by lookout Games (in German) with Z-Man Games doing the English language version. It is a strategy board game for 1-4 players, aged 10+, and takes about 120 minutes to play.

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