Backgammon board - backgammon and chess

Furniture Collection

Accession Nr.:	77.190.1
Date of production:	ca. 1590
Place of production:	Southern Germany (presumably)
Materials:	plum
Techniques:	ivory inlay; painted in indian ink
Dimensions:	height: 5,3 cm length: 34,5 cm width: 34,5 cm

One side of the folding board can be used for chess or draughts the other side for three-men's morris the inside for backgammon. The upper side is decorated with crossed leaves on the light, and circle motifs on the dark fields the underside has a star-shaped ornament. There are pairs of deer, horses, camels and unicorns along the middle lines. The two outer boards are framed by hunter and animal figures - a boar, a unicorn, a goat, a camel, a horse and a deer - in oval fields. The corners are decorated with sitting lions: two are missing on the draughts board and all four are missing on the other side. When opened, the field of the backgammon board consists of alternate long, spear-shaped leaves and rolling flowers. The ribbon motifs of the border hide small animal figures. To the left is a lady, to the right is a lord, pointing to the lady both are in oval medallions. The boards have iron hinges the lock is covered by a blue iron key-hole escutcheon. The animal figures which appear on the board are symbols of the virtues required of successful players: the deer represents Prudence, the horse symbolizes speed, the camel represents temperance, and the unicorn is the symbol of thoughtfulness.

Chess or draughts can be played on the back of one of the panels of this folding tables board, and three men’s morris on the other. The white squares of the chessboard are decorated with cruciform leaves, the black ones with a circular motif. The ornamentation of the three men’s morris side is arranged in accordance with the game, along the medians and diagonals of the square. There is a pair of deer, horses, camels and unicorns, respectively, along each median, facing each other. The pattern on the decorative border of the back of the tables is punctuated by the images of hunters and animals—a boar, a unicorn, a goat, a camel, a horse, a deer—in oval frames. The corners were accentuated by lions in circular fields: only two have survived on the three men’s morris side, and all four are missing on the chessboard side. The twenty-four points of the tables board are made up of a succession of long spear-shaped leaves and floral scrolls. Hidden in the running scroll decorating the border are small figures of animals, while there is a noble lady in the oval medallion on the left, and a gentleman pointing towards her in the one on the right. The tables turn on an iron hinge, and the lock is covered by an iron escutcheon with blue decoration. The animal figures on the board represent qualities needed for the game. The deer, as an attribute of Prudentia, represents foresight, the horse symbolizes speed, the camel moderation, the unicorn circumspection.

In 1941, this tables board was in the possession of Mrs Margit Radvány (née Fechtig, 1874–?), an art collector in Budapest, who believed her great-grandfather had obtained it from a palace in Carinthia. In all likelihood, this was the same game board that was on view at the 1896 Millennial Exhibition in Budapest, and was cited as the property of Baroness Adél Fechtig (1877–1939), the sister of Mrs Margit Radvány, who later must have inherited it from her. The marked pieces that belong to the board and are dated to 1592, are also in the collection of the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest (inv. no. 77.191).

The game board must have been a treasured part of the collection of the Fechtigs, who had their origins in Baden-Württemberg, and who passed it down from one generation to the next. The family had been living in Hungary since the early 19th century: Ferdinand Fechtig (1756–1837), a lawyer, moved to Vienna from his native Baden in 1779, where he was the legal representative of the estates of Further Austria. In 1793 he was made a nobleman, then in 1813 a baron, was granted Carinthian indigeneity, and took the title ‘von Fechtenberg.’ Around 1820, he acquired estates in Hungary, near Lengyeltóti, and was granted Hungarian indigeneity by Act XLI of 1827. His son, Károly Fechtig (1816–1886) married Sarolta Luby, a landowner in Tiszaug, and Margit and Adél Fechtig were their

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granddaughters.

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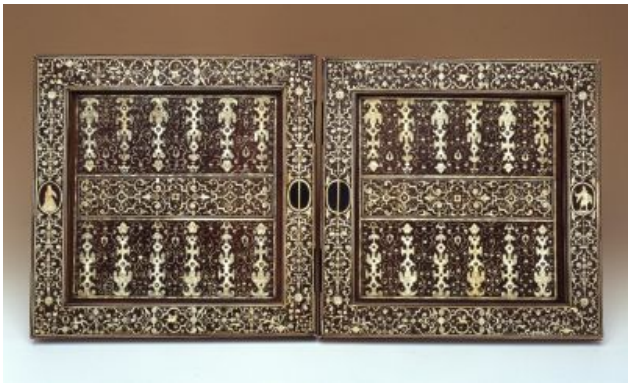

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