



## ***Exhibit of the Month***

### **CHESS**

*Museologist Simona Gustaitytė*

- Chess figures made of bread paste;
- the figures painted with white and black paint and varnish to help retain moisture and solidity;
- the height of the figures is from 2.5 cm to 5.2 cm; the diameter is from 1.6 cm to 3 cm;
- technique - molding;
- author of the chess - political prisoner Leonas Juškevičius;
- manufactured at the Dneprovsky Labour Camp, Magadan Oblast, the USSR, 1954.

Currently, chess is a well-known game and an intellectual sport that develops logical thinking, memory and creativity. The history of the game dates back hundreds of years, and its earliest version is thought to have originated in the 6th century in India and spread rapidly. Of course, the first prototypes of chess developed in Asia differed from the principles of the modern game, and the figures looked different.

Chess reached Europe in different ways. They spread to the southern part of the continent after the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula and to the east

through trade relations with Islamic lands. In Europe, this game became popular in approximately the 12th century, and in Lithuania it has been known since the beginning of the 15th century. By adopting chess to different cultures, the names and forms of the figures were adapted to local symbolism, traditions and religion. Therefore, in European countries, the figures acquired new forms, names and meanings. The initial depiction of chess as a reduced battlefield became an allusion to a feudal order with its own hierarchy. For example, in many European countries, the figure of an elephant was changed to a bishop, an adviser to a king - to a queen and an infantry - to a peasant. The abstract oriental and realistic figurines that arrived to the mainland from the far corners of the world became more and more detailed. Still, the modern style of chess, which is familiar to us, was developed much later, in the middle of the 19th century.

These days chess is usually made of high-quality wood, metals and plastics, but historically the variety of materials used was clay, glass, ivory or even precious stones. It should be noted that the range of options was not always wide: in prisons with strict supervision and limited access to materials, ingenuity was often required to create chess. The convicts made them out of what was available in their environment. Soviet camps were dominated by figures made of bread pulp (they were coloured black and white with soot and tooth powder, and later with paint) or carved from wood. Prisoners having artistic talent often produced works that were noteworthy under the simplest conditions. It should be noted that playing chess was by no means a rare activity in the USSR camps; they provided the imprisoned people with the opportunity to get away from the dull daily life and engage in intellectual activities. A nice set of chess made for talented prisoners could also save lives. This is exactly what happened to the author of the exhibit in the photo, Leonas Juškevičius. His drawings and creations from bread repeatedly protected him from exhaustion and starvation as they earned him the sympathy of prisoners and the camp doctors.





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