

“Hans Frank” Chess Set

by Israel Raphaelli

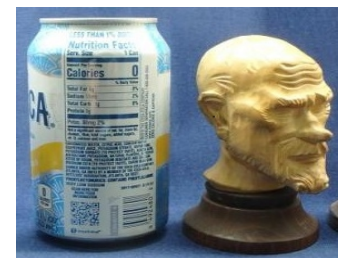
The hunt: In April of 2019, I was contacted by a person who asked me if I was interested in buying a unique Chess set from 1945. He told me that he had received it from a woman who fled from Poland shortly after WWII and brought it with her to the USA. Following, I received a couple of photos of a few small wooden pieces, showing carved heads and busts mounted on large pedestal bases. I have the Dolfi farmers set and have seen several similar German sets and others but these were interesting enough to trigger my curiosity (and anyway, I never say “no” to a new Chess set). The negotiation process was not successful and after a few weeks we both gave up on this exchange.



The purchase: A few months later I received a message from the seller that he was ready to complete the sale. He also attached a new photo showing the set inside the original wooden box. We agreed on a meeting place and that evening, I got in the car for a long ride to meet the seller at a pizza shop about an hour away from my home, in the darkest part of a city with a somewhat spooky reputation. Oh well, a chess collector on a hunt is willing to take chances!



When he pulled the chess box out of his car I got my first surprise. What looked in the photos like a standard little chess box is actually a very large wooden box, the size used to sell wine bottles by the dozen. What looked like standard small size chess pieces turned out to be almost the size of a common can of soda. I was really NOT ready for this. Moreover, upon further inspection I got many more surprises...



The facts: The chess pieces are stored in a custom box, size approx. 18.5" x 10.25" x 10.5". The box is built like “log house”, with interwoven, extended wooden dove-tail construct . The box has two levels, the bottom one hidden and can be opened only after one of the side bars is removed, giving access to a shelf that then slides out to reveal the hidden compartment.





The cover of the box is engraved with the name **Hans Frank**, the city **Burghausen** (in Germany) and the city's coat of arms is carved into it (colorful image thanks to Wikipedia). Wow, this is getting seriously interesting. Hans Frank was executed in 1946 following being convicted in the Nuremberg trials. More on this later...



The chess pieces are hand carved in two-tone wood. Most represent the head or bust of people mounted on custom bases of a contrasting color. The wood is likely Red Birch, which can be found only in Europe. The King, Queen, Bishops and Pawns are beautiful and detailed carved heads, not clear whether imaginary or modeled. The Knights are represented by Horse-Heads and the Rooks seem to be castles. The pieces are approx. 4.5" tall with base diameter of over 2.5". Note that the kings and queens are significantly smaller compared with the other pieces while the Pawns are significantly much larger .



The chess pieces on the light side are stamped with ink:



<i>(stamp)</i>	<i>(translated)</i>
<i>Hans Frank</i>	Hans Frank
<i>Bildhauer</i>	Sculptor
<i>Burghausen Obb.</i>	Burghausen Upper Bayern
<i>Hittorfstrasse 4*</i>	4 Hittorf street
<i>BAYERN</i>	BAYERN
<i>20. Juli 1945</i>	Jul 20, 1945

*According to current maps, this address is still valid and assumed at the same physical location.

The Research: Searching the web for “Hans Frank” yields over 230,000,000 results, according to Google.

1. Most of references are to *Hans Michael Frank*. He was Adolf Hitler's personal legal adviser who, in 1939 was appointed Governor-General of the occupied Polish territories. During his tenure, he instituted a reign of terror against the civilian population and became directly involved in the mass murder of Jews. After the war, he was found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity at the Nuremberg trials, was sentenced to death and executed in 1946.

Hans Frank was the most prominent Nazi leader to be strongly interested in **chess**. He patronized the General Government chess tournaments (1940–1944), which started in the context of a chess congress held in Kraków in 1940. Hans Frank seems to have been a strong chess player, supporter of the game and acquaintance of many of the leading chess champions of the period including Dr. Aljechin, Dr. Euwe, Sämisch, Bogoljubow and many others. An excellent report, including documents and photographs, can be found at the following link - <http://www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/frank.html>.

2. Persisting with the research, you will find only a handful of references to *Hans Adler Frank*. Twin brothers Hans Frank and Leo Frank were born in Vienna on 13 May 1884. They were both students at the School of Applied Arts in Vienna and at the Vienna Academy. Hans Frank became a painter and print-maker, working in both aquatint and color woodcut. He exhibited in Vienna and traveled extensively through southern France, Italy, and Austria. He was awarded numerous prizes and recognition world wide. His favorite motifs were birds and forest animals depicted in their natural habitats. There were no references found of his involvement with chess nor creation of a chess set. However, he is the most likely the artist to have carved this magnificent set. He died in 1948.

Additional closeups of the set:





In conclusion, a rare find of a unique chess set and piece of art but I'm in search for information. Please write to me at chess@ogdir.com. Please visit my collection at www.eosef.com/gsc (no log-in required) where you can also find more photos of this (item #332) and many other sets.

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