

THE SET OF OBJECTS USED
IN THE PARLOUR GAMES IN WILANÓW

By discussing the preserved set of parlour games this article aims to enrich our knowledge about that part of life of Wilanów owners which they devoted to entertainment.

"The Memoirs from the Times of John Sobieski" written by Kazimierz Sarnecki introduce us to the atmosphere of the royal court where the parlour games and plays were treated as the most noble entertainment serving both, physical and spiritual rest and they played an important part in the cultural and diplomatic life. An inventory made after king John III's death which describes only the fragment of the heritage contains the descriptions of very valuable chess cases being king's favourites and of equally valuable draughts cases. Quite often a case with "draughts" contained the boards for three games: the draught-board, the whirl-board and the tric-trac board and also pawns used in all those games. That gave one common name to all those games, as in the case of the preserved "John III's chess-board" (Fig. 66-68).

An equally nice entertainment, especially in queen's rooms, were the card games, mostly of the French type. The most popular were piquet, "pasz" and "two cards" games. In Sarnecki's memoirs we also read about lottery and "goose" game. The mentioning of the second game is one of the earliest in Europe. We are intrigued by the names of the games which are quite unknown nowadays, such as "bassade" brought to Wilanów in February 1694 by count Denhoff or "mathematic caskets" with "mathematic tricks" inside.

There were special tables for the games in the royal rooms, e. g. the one mentioned in the inventory from the year 1696 - a silver table with a chess-board on top. They represented furniture which appeared in all European residences in the end of 17th century, namely, the special types of tables for games with tops covered with decorative plates, often of a complicated construction

as in the case of such games as "bille", "biliards" or "trou-madame". The tops of the card tables were usually covered with green woollen cloth or leather.

After August the Second arrived in Poland the character of the royal court changed and the elements of Saxon and French culture became visible.

The programmes of entertainments suggested by the king were connected with the participation of the whole court in its full splendour and the entertainments sometimes lasted for more than ten days. The representatives of aristocracy and nobility took part in everyday performances, balls and card games: pharao, "tryszak", "ćwik", macao or outdoor games.

The change of customs required architectural changes. Palaces were equipped with theatre halls, salons for chamber games and there also appeared some new park buildings. Changes of that kind happened also in Wilanów. The daring programme of rebuilding the palace for August the Second resulted only in the Big Dining Room, called the White Room and, probably, the biliards room. Both, Zofia Denhoff and August the Second equipped palace rooms with English and Saxon sets of games tables, such as "table de tri", "table de quadrille" or "table de brelon". Some of them have been preserved in Wilanów collection. Izabella Lubomirska's inventory from the year 1793 mentioned, among others, "trou madame" and "biliards" which had their separate rooms.

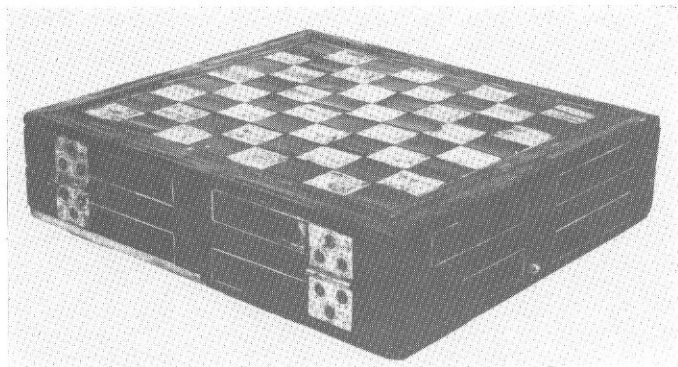
Intellectual games, especially chess also had their fans. The inventories give the description of a richly inlaid casket with the pawns decorated with obverses and reverses of occasional medals and valuable prints of original coin stamps.

The successive owners of Wilanów gradually enriched the equipment of the palace with objects of French and English origin and also with specimen of Eastern art or its imitations. One of the interesting objects here is a folded table with a three-part top from the second half of 18th century. It was used for piquet and the French version of "damier" (Fig. 69).

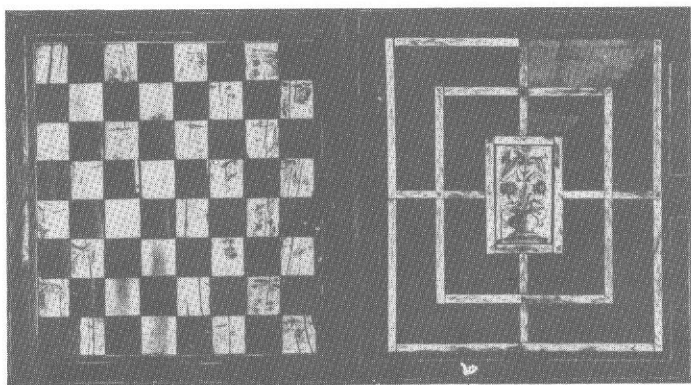
Another interesting example is a Japanese casket for "tric-trac" decorated with inlays and brocade lacquer and finely engraved counters made of pearl substance.

The latest of the preserved objects is 19th century unidentified set of three boards with painted miniatures of symbolical me-

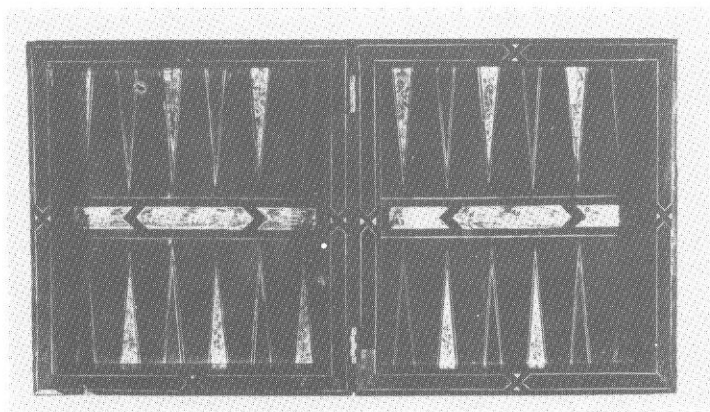
aning which was probably one of the versions of fabulised games on historical subjects, which were very popular during the partitions of Poland.



66. Chess-board belonging to John III Sobieski



67. Sobieski's 'chess-board' in unfold position: the lid and the bottom side contain another board for playing 'młynek'



68. Inner side of unfolded 'chess-board' containing board for playing 'tric-trac'



69. Unfolded top of a table for "damier" game