

ISLE OF LEWIS CHESS SET



- Considered by many scholars to be the most famous chess set in the world, found on the Isle of Lewis in far western Scotland in 1831 by a shepherd; the pieces were buried in a chamber of dry-built stone
- Some scholars now believe the pieces were created (around 1200 or so) by Icelandic master carver **Margaret the Adroit**; today they are considered masterpieces of Romanesque art
- Modern theory is that Margaret was hired by Bishop Pall Jonsson (Bishop and 'ruler' of Iceland) to carve gifts for his colleagues in Denmark, Norway, Scotland, and Greenland, a gift giving custom of the time
- A total of 93 pieces were found; 78 chessmen, 14 table men, and a buckle. Made from walrus ivory & whale teeth, 82 pieces are in the British Museum, 11 pieces are in the National Scottish Museum; consists of pieces from 4 different chess sets (a modern chessboard has 16 pieces on each side, a total of 32)
- Several pieces were studied to explain the dress, military uniforms, and weapons of the age. As example, the rook is likely a projection of a Viking 'Berserker' warrior, even though Bersekers no longer existed by the early 1200s. The Knight sits on a pony, not a warhorse of the age (introduced by Normans?)
- Ponies were ridden in Iceland, Scotland & Europe for long distances due to their smooth gait as well as 'riding to battle', then dismount to fight. Warhorses (destriers) were found on mainland Europe. Warhorses generally weren't suitable for riding long distances. As example, in *The Canterbury Tales*, everyone is riding a pony or a donkey

Rook



Sources:



Icelandic/
Highland
Pony
(13-14
hands)



Friesian
War Horse
(15-17 Hands)

Knight



<https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/stories/scottish-history-and-archaeology/lewis-chess-pieces/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margret_the_Adroit

<https://www.girlmuseum.org/the-lewis-chessman/>

<https://www.medievalists.net/2015/09/telling-the-story-of-the-ivory-vikings/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Ivory-Vikings-Mystery-Famous-Chessmen/dp/1250108594>

Where you can buy Isle of Lewis chess and Hnefatafl games online (besides Amazon, who also sells them):

https://sonsofvikings.com/collections/viking-decor/games?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI7YUJ-Kev9AIVmrjICh3bDQp1EAMYASAAEgKZ9vD_BwE

The nobleman's skills: riding, swimming, archery, boxing, hawking, chess, and verse-writing (poetry)