

Coins

The Piast Horseman – History of the Polish Cavalry –



Below the eagle, on the right, an inscription: 10 ZŁ, on the left, images of two spearheads on poles. Under the Eagle's left leg, the mint's mark $\frac{m}{w}$.

Reverse: In the centre, a stylised image of an armoured mounted sergeant with a bared sword. In the background, the shadow of an armoured mounted sergeant holding a spear. On the top right, a diagonal inscription: JEZDZIEC PIASTOWSKI (the Piast Horseman).

face value	200 zł
metal	900/1000Au
finish	proof
diameter	27.00 mm
weight	15.50 g
mintage	10,000 pcs

Obverse: On the left, an image of the Eagle established as the state Emblem of the Republic of Poland. On the right, an image of Szczerbiec (lit. notched sword), the sword that was traditionally used in the coronation ceremony of Polish kings. In the background, a motive from the sword's hilt. On the right, the notation of the year of issue: 2006. On the top right, a semicircular inscription: RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA (the Republic of Poland). At the bottom, an inscription: 200 ZŁ. Under the Eagle's left leg, the mint's mark: $\frac{m}{w}$.

Reverse: In the centre, a stylised image of an armoured mounted sergeant with a bared sword. In the background, the sergeant's shadow. On the left, a semicircular inscription: JEZDZIEC PIASTOWSKI (the Piast Horseman).



face value	2 zł
metal	CuAl5Zn5Sn1 alloy
finish	standard
diameter	27.00 mm
weight	8.15 g
mintage	1,000,000 pcs

Obverse: An image of the Eagle established as the state Emblem of the Republic of Poland, at the sides of the Eagle, the notation of the year of issue: 20-06, below the eagle, an inscription: ZŁ 2 ZŁ, a circumscription: RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA (the Republic of Poland), preceded and followed by six pearls. Under the Eagle's left leg, the mint's mark: $\frac{m}{w}$.

Reverse: In the centre, a stylised image of an armoured mounted sergeant armed with a spear, a sword and a shield. A circumscription: JEZDZIEC PIASTOWSKI (the Piast Horseman).

On the edge: An inscription: NBP, eight times repeated, every second one inverted by 180 degrees, separated by stars.



face value	10 zł
metal	925/1000 Ag
finish	proof
diameter	length: 22.00 mm; width: 32.00 mm
weight	14.14 g
mintage	62,000 pcs

Obverse: An image of the Eagle established as the state Emblem of the Republic of Poland. Above the eagle, on the right, a semicircular inscription: RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA (the Republic of Poland) and the notation of the year of issue: 2006.

Coins Designer: *Ewa Tyc-Karpińska*

Coins struck by the Mint of Poland plc. in Warsaw.

Printed by NBP Printing Office



On 22 November 2006, the National Bank of Poland puts into circulation collector coins representing the Piast horseman from the new "History of the Polish Cavalry" series, with face value amounting to:

- 200 zł – struck in proof finish in gold,
- 10 zł – struck in proof finish in silver,
- 2 zł – struck in standard finish in Nordic Gold alloy.

It is hard to determine the exact date when cavalry was first used in the Polish army. Already in the early days of Poland as a state mounted warriors were a significant part of its armed forces. An army of such warriors was indispensable for ruling on vast, forested territories. The horsemen of Polish rulers were famous even in distant lands: Ibrahim ibn Jacob, a Jewish merchant from the Arabic Spain, travelling throughout Europe at the beginning of the second half of the 10th century, already wrote with respect and admiration about the army of "the Northern king", referring to the Polish duke, Mieszko I. According to him, the duke of the Piast dynasty could rely on 3 thousand armoured warriors, of whom one hundred means as much as ten hundred other warriors. A part of them constituted ducal guard, while the remaining troops were located in the main strongholds. Mieszko's successor, his son Bolesław the Brave, had an even larger army of 4,300 people. He offered three hundred warriors to Emperor Otto III during the Congress of Gniezno in 1000.

The ducal warriors were a professional army maintained by the ruler, who supplied horses, weapons and food and provided remuneration. Archaeological excavations, scarce written records and iconographic representations allowed for the reconstruction of the possible appearance and equipment of early-Piast horsemen. A mounted sergeant, also called an armoured sergeant, wore a chain mail – armour made of small metal rings that were linked together. They probably also used scale armour – a leather or cloth jacket with iron scales attached to it. Beneath the armour sergeants wore solid clothing – a wool or leather padded jacket (also called "padded leather armour") to absorb the impact from blows to the body. The armour itself took the shape of a jacket or tunic, usually sleeved (with the sleeves protecting the arms reaching to the elbows or hands). The most distinguished warriors also wore chain leggings. The body armour could have a hood for head protection. For additional protection, helmets were worn over the hood. Sometimes the helmet was complemented with a chain coif. A fastened coif protected the neck, throat, shoulders and partially the face of the warrior. Usually various leather or cloth caps were worn beneath the helmet. Between the 10th and the 12th centuries, both eastern and western helmet types were worn by Polish warriors, which reflects the situation of a country on the verge of two cultures. Eastern helmets, of which four items have been found in Wielkopolska (Greater Poland), were most representative. However, the richly ornamented eastern helmets

were not as useful in battle: conical domes were made of four iron plates riveted together and enclosed at the bottom with an ornamental band, which formed a characteristic circlet on the forehead. The dome was topped with a silver-gilt tube to pin a plume or crest. The lower part of the helmet was adjusted to pin the coif. The iron dome was additionally covered with gilt copper plate. They were worn by superior commanders or even by the members of the ducal family.

Another type of helmets that gained popularity in Poland in this period were conical helmets, also called Norman helmets, forged from a single or two iron bars, which proved very well in combat, being able to stop even the heaviest blows. As an added bonus, the nasal guard provided protection for the nose and upper parts of the warrior's face. A coif was also pinned to the rim of those helmets.

Another important element of armour were shields made of wood and leather. Unfortunately, no such shields remained. The warriors probably used both round and triangular shields, the external surface of which was embellished with paintings that later have transformed into coats of arms. The mounted warriors fought mostly with spears and swords. 10th through 12th century swords were relatively short, used rather as slashing than thrusting weapons. They were similar to those commonly used in Europe. The sword quickly became a symbol of knightship, as well as of nobility and justice of monarchs. Swords were kept in leather-covered scabbards worn on the belt. The belt also became a symbol of knightship: from the Polish *pas* (belt), the verb *pasować na rycerza* (to knight somebody) was coined. The spear, a pole-arm ca. 2 meters long with a leaf-shaped tip, was at that time as important as the sword. They could be used in different ways, with blows struck quickly in all directions.

During the reign of the first rulers of the Piast dynasty mounted warriors used common small horses, similar to the tarpans. Such horses were very tough, did not require any special feed, and could easily move in forested areas that constituted the majority of Polish territory at the time. For the purposes of ducal guard, in particular of the greatest armoured sergeants, stronger and larger horses were bred that attained the height and weight of a modern Arabian horse.

The first battle mentioned in historical records that was fought with the participation of armoured sergeants was the victorious battle of Mieszko I against the army of margrave Hodon by the Oder river near Cedynia in 972.

In the times of the first Piasts, the mounted warriors always accompanied the ruler. The warriors were responsible for ensuring security of dukes and kings during the journey and hunts, as well as for representing the state during court trials, meetings with

magnates or with the rulers of neighbouring lands. A large and representative army enhanced the ruler's prestige and allowed him to carry out an active state-strengthening policy. The first Piasts, Mieszko I and his son Bolesław the Brave, would not have enlarged their territory and fought many battles, both defensive and aimed at acquiring new lands, were it not for the large army.

Within the next two centuries, organisation of Polish cavalry changed. Enlarged territory of the country implied higher requirements with respect to efficient governance and defence. During the reign of Bolesław III the Wry-mouthed (1107 - 1138), the ducal sergeants-at-arms turned into knights, who in consideration of land – inherited or assigned by the ruler – served the country. The knights provided their own equipment, horses and food. During the battle, a knight was accompanied by a guard composed of armed servants. With time the equipment of the Polish cavalry improved. The chain mail now covered the entire body, feet to head. Beneath the armour an ankle-long robe was worn, therefore its lower part was visible below the knee-long chain mail. Heads were commonly protected with conical helmets with nasal guards. Large elongated-triangle shaped shields were used for extra protection. Improved equipment implied enlargement of swords, which became heavier and fitter for thrusting, thus more efficient in battle with armoured enemy. Also, the spears have transformed into lances, which were heavier than their predecessors and were held under the right arm during charge in battle. The knights' banners were attached to lances, just below the tip. The impact of lance attack mostly depended on the horse's impetus, not only on the rider's swing, as it used to be earlier. Saddles were adjusted to the new manner of lance-fighting. High saddle-bows were added to the saddles – the pommel protected the knight's stomach and the cantle provided a reliable and comfortable backrest. Improved equipment resulted in higher requirements with respect to knights' horses, which became larger and heavier.

Witold Głębowski
Polish Military Museum in Warsaw

All coins issued by the NBP are legal tender in Poland.