

Coins

Heavy Armoured 15th Century Horseman – History of the Polish Cavalry –



face value	200 zł
metal	900/1000Au
finish	proof
diameter	27.00 mm
weight	15.50 g
mintage	9,900 pcs

Obverse: On the right-hand side, image of the Eagle established as the State Emblem of the Republic of Poland. Below the Eagle, an inscription, 2007. On the left-hand side of the Eagle, above, the notation of the year of issue, 2007. Below, the stylized images of: helmet, two swords, lance, glove and a pennant. At the bottom a semicircular inscription, RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA. The Mint's mark under the Eagle's left leg, $\frac{m}{w}$.

Reverse: A stylised image of a heavy armoured mounted horseman with the bared sword. On the left-hand side a stylised image of urban edifices. At the bottom and on the right hand side a semicircular inscription, RYCERZ CIĘŻKOZBROJNY (heavy armoured mounted horseman) – XV w.

Coin designer: *Roussanka Nowakowska*



face value	10 zł
metal	925/1000 Ag
finish	proof
dimensions	length: 22.00 mm width: 32.00 mm
weight	14.14 g
mintage	61,000 pcs

Obverse: An image of the Eagle established as the State Emblem of the Republic of Poland. Above the Eagle, a chivalric helmet and a floral ornament around the Eagle and helmet. Below the Eagle on the right-hand side an inscription, 10/ZŁ, on the left-hand side oblique image of the sword. Below the sword the notation of the year of

issue, 2007. On the left-hand side a vertical inscription, RZECZPOSPOLITA, at the bottom an inscription, POLSKA. The Mint's mark under the Eagle's left leg, $\frac{m}{w}$.

Reverse: Stylised images of: a heavy armoured mounted horseman with the lance, and an outline of a mounted knight with the bare sword in the background. At the top, on the right-hand side, the outline of urban edifices. At the bottom, below a broken line, an inscription, RYCERZ/CIĘŻKOZBROJNY (heavy armoured mounted horseman), above the line on the right-hand side an inscription, XV w.

Coin designer: *Roussanka Nowakowska*



face value	2 zł
metal	CuAl5Zn5Sn1 alloy
finish	standard
diameter	27.00 mm
weight	8.15 g
mintage	990,000 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, 20-07. Below the Eagle an inscription, ZŁ 2 ZŁ, an inscription on the rim, RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA, preceded and followed by six pearls. The Mint's mark under the Eagle's left leg, $\frac{m}{w}$.

Reverse: Stylised image of a heavy armoured mounted horseman with a lance. At the bottom on the sash, a semi-circular inscription, RYCERZ CIĘŻKOZBROJNY (heavy armoured mounted horseman) – XV w.

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

Obverse designer: *Ewa Tyc-Karpińska*

Reverse designer: *Roussanka Nowakowska*

Information on the purchase of coins is provided at:
www.nbp.pl

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

Printed by NBP Printing Office

Design: DECORUM



On 24 October 2007, the National Bank of Poland is putting into circulation coins of the series "History of Polish cavalry" depicting a heavy armoured Polish horseman of the 15th century, of the following face values:

- * 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.

In the 15th century, weaponry, garments and martial tactics used in Poland were the same as those applied in that part of Europe where Romance culture prevailed. The quality and components of typical weaponry and equipment of Polish warriors corresponded to those used in Germany, Czechs or Switzerland at that time.

Following the centuries of experiments, in the 15th century the process of building an armour made of steel plates covering the entire body was finite. In appreciation of the superb quality of armours, knights in Europe adopted a new way of wearing armour. They no longer covered it with robes. Shields went into disuse in combat and remained solely as a tournament element and heraldic emblem. The introduction of plate armour implied the need to adequately protect a charger. Consequently, war horses received the so-called barding - horse armour, matching the armour of their riders. Those armours were made both of chain mail, and metal plates. Expensive and not very useful in battles fought by Polish knights, they were, however, not common in Poland.

The saddle was also improved, so that its high pommel, covered with sheet metal, protected the knight both against the enemy's weapon and against being unhorsed, i.e. knocked off from the saddle

Heavier weight of the armed warrior called for an adequately strong charger. Such a tough breed was developed in northern Europe. Chargers were used only for combat or for tournament. Given the weight of the rider, these mounts could only walk, never trot. In attack, they could break into a gallop at a short distance. Three breeds of chargers were developed, the most valuable of them being the so-called grand horse, which cost fortunes.

From the beginning the most important weapon of the knights was the sword – which functioned both as a weapon and as a symbol of chivalry. In the 15th century, parallel to the improvements in armour, which became more resistant to blows, the sword was enlarged by adding a two-handed hilt often also sharp-pointed. The dagger, to strike the blows between the plates of the armour in direct combat was carried on the right side.

For attacks knights used the lance, a several-meters long type of hafted weapon with a spearhead, held under the arm in many cases supported by the hook attached to the breast plate. To reduce its weight it was made of a hollow wooden pipe. The lance was a disposable weapon – it broke when in a tilt it hit the enemy (which is where the Polish proverb of "crossing the lance over something" – i.e. having a violent and stormy argument over something – comes from).

Knight's armour improved throughout the entire the 15th century, re-designed by armourers aiming to make it as efficient and comfortable protection as possible. Most often Polish knights adopted patterns from neighbouring Germany, wherefrom the armours popular in that century originated. This type of armours is known under the name "Gothic armours" nowadays. They show the characteristic features of Gothic art – slender figures, extended forms (eg. shoe points), sharp contours and decorating the flat surfaces with flutes [canellure]. The armours imitated the fashion of the then worn clothes. Whereas the armourers who worked in Polish towns provided fine quality products, the richest knights also used armours purchased abroad. Had it not been for a time lag in adopting some innovations, Polish cavalry in the 15th century used the same type of armours as the Western European knights.

Design and manufacture of plate armour required both a good concept and advanced craftsmanship. Most work with making an armour was done manually via cold forge, whereas the 15th century saw the introduction of mechanical equipment, i.a. big forging hammers and spinning disks to polish the surface of plates.

It was not easy to put on an armour. A knight could not dispense without assistance of a squire. Specially written instructions were supposed to help put it on, beginning from sabatons and greaves and finishing with the helmet. A full 15th century plate armour would weigh c.25 kilogrammes. This weight was so well spread over the body that a fit man could move freely and remain in battle for long hours.

Rising popularity of firearms in battlefields in the 15th century implied the need to thicken the armour until the limit has been reached – the strength of a rider and its horse wearing those armours. As a result at the end of the 15th century, the troops of knights lost impetus and force of attack decisive for the success of cavalry in the battlefields.

Armours were worn not only in warfare but also at the tournaments, where knights trained before engaging in actual combat. Tournaments provided an opportunity to show arms, horses and the splendour of garments. In the 15th century the tournament tradition reached its full bloom. All stages of games demonstrated rapid evolution, from the gala opening, the review of participants, announcing their programme and joustings until the ceremony of awarding prizes and distinctions to the winners. The refinement of armour craft resulted in the development of a special tournament armour of reinforced metal plates heavier than all the other types combat arms. Those armours were made in a variety of forms for different tournaments. Only the richest – rulers, dukes and kings - could afford them. Although tournaments occasioned competition for awards, fame and graces of ladies, not infrequently they led into serious injuries or even death of participants.

Polish knighthood at that time actively contributed to international developments, sought fame and fortune in foreign military missions in remote lands. They helped neighbouring countries in need and voluntarily conscripted to fight more and

more dangerous Turkish invasion. All this being said, it must be emphasized that at the same time they performed extremely well at the courts ceremonies and tournaments widely abroad.

The most eminent 15th century knight was Zawisza Czarny of Garbów, [Zawisza the Black of Garbów], also known as The Black Knight, Sulima coat of arm, starosta [subprefect] of Spisz, diplomat at the court of Sigismund of Luxembourg, envoy of the Polish king Władysław Jagiełło [Ladislaus Jogailo], glorious winner of a number of tournaments, a man of impeccable candour and renowned for his valour, a hero defending his motherland, e.g. in the battle of Grunwald [I Battle of Tannenberg] in 1410, fallen for Europe in 1428 in fight against Turks near the castle of Golubac on the Danube river, where till the very end he covered the retreat of his brothers in arms defeated by Turks. His fame survived to date in the famous Polish saying „Polegaj jak na Zawiszy” [Count on him like on Zawisza]. This motto also became part of the Polish Scouts oath and tradition.

In the 15th century Polish heavy cavalry on numerous occasions had to confront the enemy. The finest victory in fight with the Teutonic Order was the battle of Grunwald on 15 July 1410.

In the mid-15th century, in 13-year war against the Teutonic Order (1454-66) the defeat of the knighthood-based levée en masse [mass conscription of all landowners, a method employed in the raising of royal Polish armies] gave rise to forming the professional paid military units which became the core element of the Polish military forces. This was the only possible solution in the context of the developing martial art and war technology, and in view of the need for better qualifications of soldiers and higher costs of equipment. While the levée en masse of knights who served gratuitously merely in compensation for landownership continued to be the core element of Polish army, the small highly qualified mercenaries performed the function of elite of all gentry. Thereby, solution were implemented which gave rise to triumphs of the Polish army in the years to come. Paid army cultivated the chivalric principles of patriotism and love to one's motherland. Always in defence readiness condition, they were rapid response units, the school of warcraft and an example for all the system of defence. This group delivered hetmans, voivods [province governors] and starostas [mayors], and in the next centuries even a king of Poland Jan III Sobieski.

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