

THE PAINTED HORSES OF THE POLISH WINGED HUSSARS

„Poland aboundeth with beasts, aswell wild as tame, and yeeldeth excellent horses, not great, but quicke and stirring. Neither doe the Gentlemen more delight in any thing , then in their horses, so as they hang gold chaines and Jewels at their eares, **and paint them halfe over with exquisite colours, but in that uncomely, that they are not naturall for horses, as the Carnation colour,** and their hinder parts they adorne with rich Furres and skinnes of Lions and Leopards and the like, aswell to terrifie their enemies, as to adorne and beautifie their horses.”¹

„The Polonians are a warlike nation, valiant, and actiue, but all their strength consists in their horse, whereof they haue so great number, as some affirme they can bring a hundred thousand horse into the feild, and one Prouince of Lituania, can bring 70 thousand, and king Stephen in the last age had 40. thousand in his Army. Of these horsmen, some are called Hussari, who are armed with long speares, a sheild, a Carbine or short gunn, and two short swords, one by the horsmans syde, the other fastned vnder the left syde of his sadle. The light horsmen called Cosachi are armed with short swords, Jauelin, bowes and arrowes, and a Coat of maile and the whole Country of Poland being playne, this great body of horsmen must needs be a powerfull strength to the kingdome. The horses axe of small stature, but of no lesse agility, then those of the Turkes and singuler in boldnes for any seruice of warr. Yet are they all made Gueldens; And the gentlemen are not prouder of any thing, then of their horses and horsmanshipp professing to weare long garments, as Commodious for horsmen, that they may cast their vpper garment vppon their horses when they are heated with running. And for this Cause many haue their bridles

¹ Moryson, F. *An Itinerary Containing His Ten Yeeres Travell through the Twelve Dominions of Germany, Bohmerland, Sweitzerland, Netherland, Denmarke, Poland, Italy, Turkey, France, England, Scotland & Ireland.* C. Hugher (ed.) (Glasgow, 1908) v. 4, p. 68.

(Which are alwayes snafles by Which the horses are easily turned) sett with studds of gold or siluer, sometymes having gold Chaynes, and like ornaments at the cares of their horses, **and Commonly paynting the mayne and taile yea the whole body, excepting the back of their horses with light Coulors, as Carnation and the like, therein seeming ridiculous, that whereas art imitates nature, these Coulors are such as are most vnnaturall for horses.** They haue guilded stirropps as also spurrs which are some handfull long at the heele. Not only soldiers but Ambassadors and their gentlemen, haue the hinder part of their horse couered with the wings of an Eagle, or skinn of a Tyger, or leopard or some like ornament, either for beauty, or to seeme more terrible, as in generall all haue them couered, some lesse, some more richly.”²

These 2 descriptions of Polish horses, written by the English traveler Fynes Morryson, who visited Poland in 1593, show an interesting custom of Polish knighthood. They painted their horses. They did it for both ceremonies and battles. The Poles said that horses were “w bród farbowone” (ford painted), probably because it looked as if the horses had just come through a red river or dipping tank.

To paint horses the Poles used an extract of Brazilin and alum³. Apart from that a dye for horses was imported from the Ottoman Empire. The cost of a stone (1 stone = almost 13 kg) of a dye was 9 zł (it includes 1 zł of customs duty) in 1688⁴. By comparison, the salary of a winged hussar in that time was 50 zł / 3 months⁵.

2 Moryson, F. *Shakespeare's Europe. Unpublished Chapters of Fynes Moryson's Itinerary, being a survey of the condition of Europe at the end of the 16th century; with an introd. and an account of Fynes Moryson's career by Charles Hughes.* C. Hughes (ed.) (London, 1903) pp. 82 – 3.

3 Gołębiowski, Ł. *Domy i dwory.* (Warszawa, 1830) p. 173.

4 Rolny, W. *Dwie taksy towarów cudzoziemskich z r. 1633.* [in:] „Archiwum komisji prawniczej” 1897, v. 5, p. 570.

5 Sikora, R. *Fenomen husarii.* (Toruń, 2003) p. 166.

Evidences of painting horses to ceremonies

Ceremonial Entry to Kraków of Queen Constantia (in 1605). Hussars from the so called 'Stockholm Roll'



Evidences of painting horses for battles

1. Szymon Boguszowicz, the battle of Kłuszyn 1610



2. The poem of the winged hussar, Samuel Hutor Szymanowski. He described the painted horses of hussars in 2 places in the poem:

- when the Polish army rescued Smoleńsk in September 1633⁶
- during a muster of the Polish army at Kamieniec Podolski in 1634⁷

The latter is the most interesting, because he was there – among those hussars, who mustered.

6 Szymanowski, S. H. *Mars Sauromatski, to jest od szczęśliwej koronacyjnej Najaśniejszego Władysława IV, z łaski Bożej króla polskiego etc. krótkie opisanie różnych ekspedycyj Jaśnie Oświeconemu Książęciu J.M. Jeremiu Michałowi Korybutowi, książęciu na Wiśniowcu Wiśniowieckiemu, Panu swemu Mciwemu, wydany przez Samuela Hutora Szymanowskiego z Kleczan.* (Warszawa, 1642) p. 22.

7 Szymanowski, *Mars*, p. 62.