

All Polish collector coins feature:

- face value
- image of the Eagle established as the state emblem of the Republic of Poland
- inscription: Rzeczpospolita Polska
- year of issue



Issuing collector items is an occasion to commemorate important historic figures and anniversaries, as well as to develop the interest of the public in Polish culture, science and tradition.

Information on the issue schedule can be found at the www.nbp.pl/monety website.

Should you have any questions, please contact our consultants at the following phone numbers: +48 22 185 91 59 and +48 22 185 13 03.

Collector coins issued by NBP are sold at NBP regional branches and in the NBP online shop.

On 6 August 2020, Narodowy Bank Polski will be putting into circulation a silver coin “40th Anniversary of the ‘Solidarity’ Trade Union”, with a face value of 10 złoty.

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Narodowy Bank Polski

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Narodowy Bank Polski

The Polish Thermopylae

Węgrów



Collector coins

The Polish Thermopylae – Węgrów

On 23 July 2020, Narodowy Bank Polski is putting into circulation a silver coin of the series “The Polish Thermopylae” – Węgrów, with a face value of 20 zloty.

When the uprising broke out in 1863, Węgrów was participating in the nationwide rebellion already on the night of 22/23 January, and it managed to liberate itself on its own. Also, patriotic citizens quickly flocked to Węgrów from the neighbouring areas in Podlasie, from both manor houses and villages. In just a few days were two powerful fighting units, some 2,000 men strong each, formed. One of the groups was commanded by Jan “Sokół” (Falcon) Matliński, the other by Władysław Jabłonowski.

The Russian authorities, particularly in the military, instantly reacted to the uprising in Węgrów with a ferocity that contrasted their initial powerlessness. By the order of the Tsar’s brother, Grand Duke Konstantin, they decided to attack with all their forces at once.

The troop led by General Georgij Pappaanasopulo marched from Siedlce in the south and it was the first to arrive near Węgrów. The second troop set off from Warsaw by St. Petersburg-Warsaw railway and approached from the west. The third one approached – also by train – from the north: from Łochów and Małkinia.

The Polish commanders, having received intelligence from point men, took the decision to anticipate the enemy’s move and prevent the encirclement from closing. Over ten days of the Polish control of Węgrów, the troops were reorganised into companies and battalions and armed with “whatever came in handy”, mostly scythes and pikes. They counted and distributed rifles, including “government” hunting rifles and decent Polish double-barrelled shotguns, totalling 700 pieces.

A plan was developed to rescue the encircled troops. The commanders were also concerned about Węgrów itself as it was threatened by burning and pillaging. Hence they decided to evacuate the Polish troops to the east as early as during the night of 2 February. The insurgents were separated from a vast forest by a hill, nowadays called the Independence Hill. The carts and troops, prepared for retreat beforehand, were preceded by a 400-strong unit led by Jan Matliński, known as the “Maltese Falcon”. At



Face value: 20 zł

Metal: Ag 925/1000

Finish: proof

Diameter: 38.61 mm

Weight: 28.28 g

Edge (side): plain

Mintage: up to 10,000 pcs



Obverse designer: Urszula Walerzak

Reverse designer: Grzegorz Pfeifer

Issuer: NBP

The coins, commissioned by NBP, were struck by Mennica Polska S.A.

first light, they successfully attacked the drowsing sentries of the Tsarist troops. However, the Russians managed to fire six cannons gathered on the hill. They could have disrupted the entire retreat and destroyed the insurgent army, so the Maltese Falcon took one of his bravest and most opportune decisions. Like Tadeusz Kościuszko in the battle of Raclawice, he threw scythes against cannons. Four hundred peasants from Podlasie charged towards the cannons under the personal commandment of Władysław Jabłonowski, and captured them after the first shot was fired. More than three hundred Tsarist soldiers and about one hundred Polish scythemen died in hand-to-hand fighting.

In anticipation for reinforcements, Pappaanasopulo’s troops retreated from Węgrów. The insurgents, taking advantage of the surprise and lack of response of the Tsarist commandment, efficiently led the troops and carts with the insurgents’ property out of the town. The Polish units safely backed out to Siemiatycze, where another battle, less fortunate for Poles, took place already on 7 February 1863.

At the same time, the Poles realised that considering the brutal warfare of the Russians, the latter would make a point of ravishing Węgrów. And unfortunately they did so. The

Tsarist General Pappaanasopulo ordered to capture and pillage the town, up to the point of burning it. The inhabitants were looted and arrested for supporting the uprising. While the bloody fighting went on, a white-and-red flag was proudly flying on top of the town hall tower. The Tsarist revenge on Węgrów was terrible indeed. The fallen were undressed, looted and transported to the main market square, where they were stacked in a huge pile. Any wounded found in town were killed. After the enemy left, the corpses were counted and 156 people were buried in a mass grave.

A stone was erected at the site of the famous scythemen’s charge to commemorate the date and place of the battle which soon earned the name of the “insurgents’ Thermopylae”.

The reverse of the coin depicts a fragment of the lithograph “The Battle of Węgrów”.

The obverse of all the coins of the series “The Polish Thermopylae” features Athena, the goddess of just war and wisdom.

Krzysztof Jablonka