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FROM THE VICTORY AT ORSHA TO THE BATTLE OF OBERTYN

Changes in Hussars' Weaponry in the First Half of the Sixteenth Century

Abstract

The need to transform heavy formations of lance-armed knights supported by mounted shooters and shooters' banners or companions (Polish: *chorągiew*) was becoming evident already in the early sixteenth century. The Hungarians and *Racs* (Polish: *Racowie*, from Hungarian *Rac* = Serb) coming to Poland to serve as mercenaries gave rise to a new universal formation which in time changed from the light cavalry to medium cavalry.

This conversion of lightly-armed *Racs* and first Hungarian hussars (dressed only in chain mails) into the medium armoured cavalry resulted in the creation of universal Polish hussar troops with various operational and tactical capabilities; they showed their excellent performance in fights against Tatars, Moscow, Moldova, and the Teutonic Order. The emergence of the medium armoured hussars made it possible to introduce further reforms in cavalry formations – in 1551 the first light Cossacks banners were created in consequence of the replacement in the shooters' banners of lancers with hussars. A light crossbow was replaced with a reflex bow which, with its much better rate of fire and greater manoeuvrability, better suited to tactical tasks of the banner in which hussars served.

Although the process of armament transformation of hussars, modelled on the *Racs*, into the medium armoured Polish units took over twenty years, it produced very good results in the form of operationally and tactically universal medium armoured cavalry.