

Pancerny – Polish Medium to Heavy Cavalry, Late 17th Century

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Pancerni as seen in "Przednia straż" (The Vanguard), a painting by Polish artist Wladislaw Szerner (1836-1915)

When it comes to 17th Century Polish cavalry, most collectors seem to be familiar with just the Polish "winged" hussars (*huszar*) but there was a different arm, the *pancerny* or *pancerni* that should also be of note. The *pancerni* cavalryman, actually "*towarzysz pancerny* [tɔ'vazʃɨ pan'tsɛrɲi], plural: *towarzysze pancerni*), meaning "armored companion" was a medium to heavy cavalryman in 16th to 18th century Poland, named after their chainmail armor. The *pancerni* units were the second-most-important (and successful) cavalry in the Polish-Lithuanian army, after the hussars, and were from the lesser nobility. They are often referred to as light cavalry but the Polish army actually had light cavalry, the "*kwarciany*" who were not armored and had different utilizations. The *kwarciany* light cavalry, consisting of the poor Polish gentry and foreigners, wore little armor and brandished short lances, sabers, and the occasional pistol.

The name *pancerni* derives from the Polish word for 'armor' (*pancerz*, in turn from German *Panzer*) referring to their chain mail coats. From the 1640s onwards, this type of armored cavalry dominated in the standing armies of both Poland and Lithuania. At the review held before the 1683 Battle of Vienna, 8,874 *pancerni* were said to have ridden past under 84 flags; this was more than half of Poland's total cavalry at the time.

The *pancerni*'s protective clothing included a chainmail shirt, a *misiurka* which is a steel cap with a long neck of mail and a light.¹ They also wore vambraces (*karawaze*) sometimes with gauntlets. Additional protection was provided by a small round *kalkan* shield which originated

¹ <http://lajt.mobi/muzeumwp/armament-of-the-medium-cavalry-of-the-2nd-half-of-the-17th-century>

in Asia and was generally made of rattan that was wound into a spiral coil centered by a metal boss.



Armor and equipment of a Polish *towarzysz pancerny*, in the late 17th century in the Muzeum Wojska Polskiego (Polish Army Museum), Warsaw

The *pancerni* were armed with reflex bow and arrows but also could carried firearms. They included “*bandolets*”, light muskets named after the bandoliers used to hold their ammunition, as well as pistols that were carried in saddle holsters. They also used swords (the *koncerz*), war hammers, horseman’s picks or maces, and in the era of Jan Sobieski, short spears (about 2.5 meters or 8¼ feet). The horseman’s pick and mace often also served as a symbol of the soldiers’ rank and function.² Earlier companies would sometimes be equipped with a horseman's pick, a short spear, or a lance. During the rule of king John III Sobieski, polearms became compulsory.



“On Reconnaissance”



“Safe Passage”



“Towarzysz pancerny”

Paintings of *pancerni* by Wladislaw Szerner (1836-1915)
Source for some was Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski.

² <http://lajt.mobi/muzeumwp/armament-of-the-medium-cavalry-of-the-2nd-half-of-the-17th-century>

Most *pancerni* were recruited from the Polish (or Lithuanian) nobility's middle or lower classes, not able to afford the expensive equipment of the winged hussars. The *pancerni* were organized into companies, with each company (Polish: *chorągiew* or *rota*) consisting of 60 to 200 horsemen. Generally they formed up in two ranks. Each unit was normally led by a captain (*rotmistrz*) and his deputy (*poruznik*). Additionally, each unit had a *chorągiew* flag, quartered in red and white, etc. The *pancernis* normally formed the second rank, in a checker-board pattern, just behind the winged hussars or positioned on the flanks and had the mission to charge into the melee and then pursue retreating foes. The *pancerni* were also used in the vanguard and for other missions.

Pancerni Formation

R = Captain (*Rotmistrz*)
 D = Deputy (*poruznik*)
 S = Standard
 K = Kettledrummer
 T = Trumpeter
 X = Pancerni trooper (1:5 ratio)

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                R S
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
                K      D
                TTTT
  
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Pancerni - detail from Gathering Intelligence by Wladislaw Szerner



Apparent derivative trumpeter by Kieler Zinnfiguren (Ep 41b)

Turning to figures of *pancerni*, there is a significant variety of 30mm “flats” still in production and most are very artistically drawn and engraved. It appears that a number of the *pancerni* flats were derived from paintings by Wladislaw Szerner (1836-1915).

More than 50 years ago, the Kieler Zinnfiguren company issued fifteen different *pancerni* figures including two officers, a “nobleman” from Jan Sobiesky’s staff, a standard bearer, a trumpeter and ten troopers armed with swords and some combination of bows and arrows and

and/or muskets, with holstered pistols. The figures were engraved by Sixtus Maier the Younger (1907-1968) and are still available from Kieler Zinnfiguren. Its website (<http://www.kieler-zinnfiguren.de/Listen-e/1700-e.html>) has images of the figures and options for ordering.



Pancerni cadre figures & nobleman in Sobiesky's staff, halted (Ep 40b, far left) by Kieler Zinnfiguren, painting & photo: R. Sanders

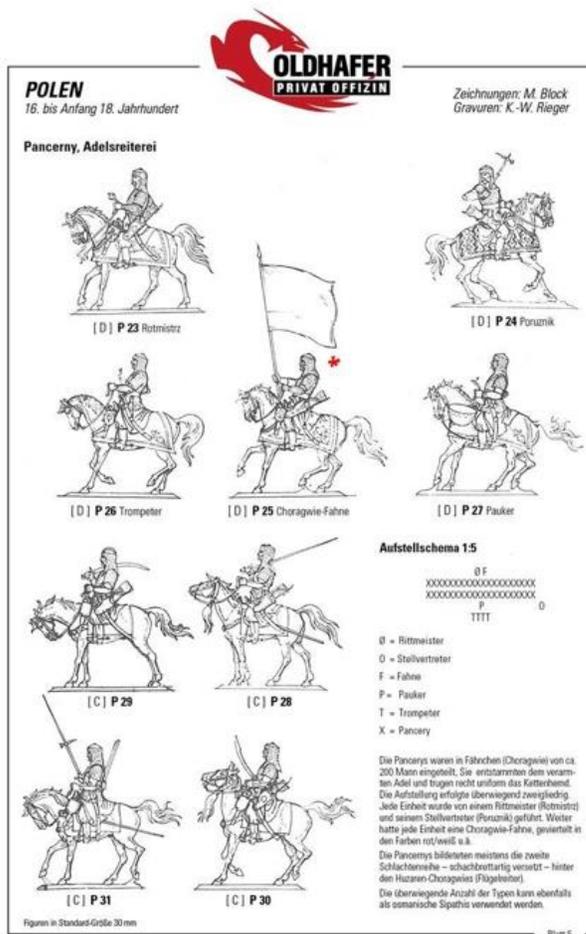


Pancerni by Kieler Zinnfiguren, painting & photo: R. Sanders (Ep40b, 41a, 41b, 42a & Ep42b, and 316a & b to 320a and b)

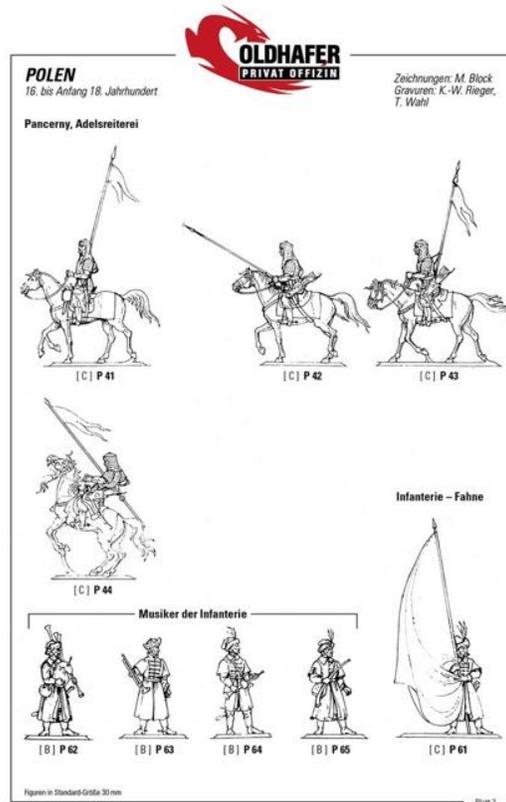
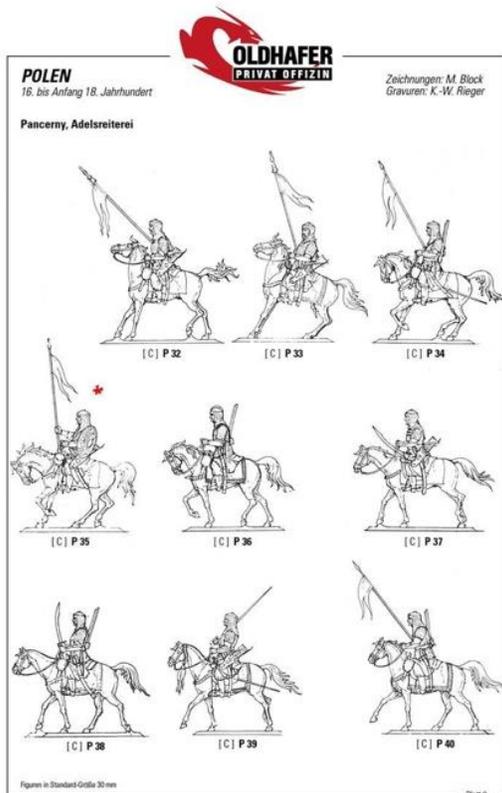
The other extensive line of 30mm *pancerni* figures were produced by Zinnfiguren Oldhafer.



Pancerni 30mm flats by Oldhafer (photo: Berliner Zinnfiguren)



Twenty-two different 30mm flat figures were originally edited by Hans-Dieter Oldhafer and designed by Martin Block and engraved by Karl-Werner Rieger. They are now available from the Oldhafer Privat Offizin, a private producer, by contacting Matthias Tritschler, Weserstraße 81, 27572 Bremerhaven (Tel.: +49 (0)471 9265787), Email: zinnfiguren-tritschler@t-online.de. All the Polish figures can be view at the "Oldhafer" website (<http://www.zinnfiguren-oldhafer.de>) which has an English option and ordering options.



Oldhafer Zinnfiguren Catalogue pages 5-7



Pancerni - 30mm flats by Alexander Wilken, figures 1627, 1628a and 1628b

Furthermore, Alexander Wilken offers three *pancerni* figures shown here. The standard bearer is not wearing chainmail. Those figures were initially edited by August Kühn and then by Martin Sauter who transferred them to Mr. Wilken. They were engraved by R. Grünwald after drawings by Werner Zimmerer. In Mr. Wilken's website's "Shop", they can be found and

ordered under "Flachfiguren Einzelfiguren" > "Barock" > "Polen" under the numbers 1627, 1628a, 1628b.

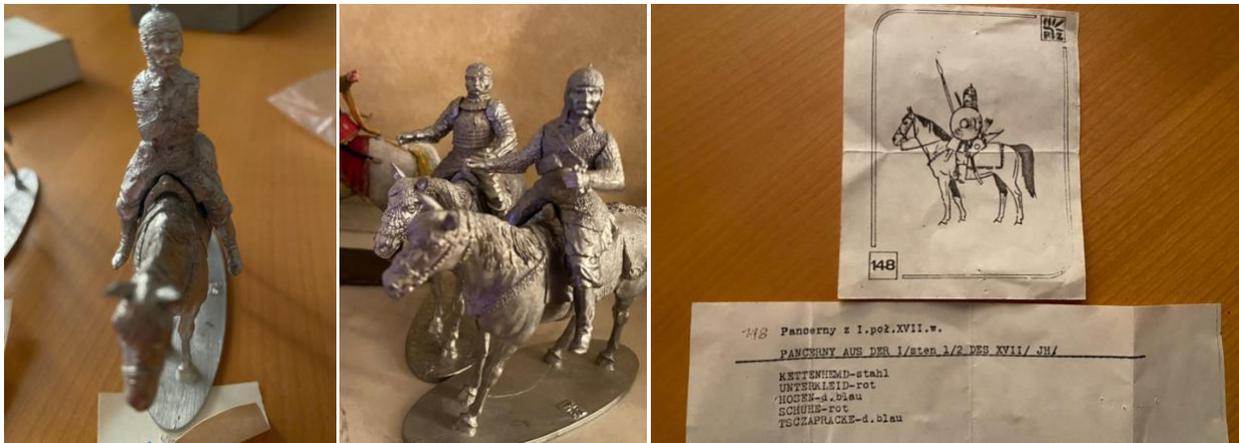
Apparently in France, the Mignot firm produced a 30mm *pancerni* standard-bearer and M. J. Belaubre produced two 20mm *pancerni* figures, but it is unclear who currently has the molds for these flat figures.

On the other hand, the selection of "round", i.e., three-dimensional *pancerni* figures appears to be mostly limited to 15mm and 28mm 'war gaming' figures, both in metal and in plastic. For example, among the 'wargame' figures of *pancerni* for are three 15mm or 28mm by the British firm Essex Miniatures.



28mm rounds by British firm Essex Miniatures

With regard to 54mm full-round figures of *pancerny*, this author's research has revealed only two that were produced in Poland sometime before 1987. The company, which used a logo showing a winged hussar's "wing" between the letters "P" and "Z" (see catalog pages and inset)



Pancerni figures (winged hussar in rear) and pages from the "PZ" catalog. Photos from the collection of Klaus Dulisch, (Gelsenkirchen, Germany)

produced a number of approximately 54mm scale metal kits for winged hussars, *pancerni* and other Polish soldiers, including their mounts. The catalog page, marked "PZ", identifies the figures in Polish and German as depicting '*Pancerny* from the 1st half of the 17th century" and indicates the chainmail shirt was "steel", the coat worn below it was red, the pants dark blue, the shoes (boots) red and the shabraque dark blue. The base of the figure with its arms attached shows the same marking with the "PZ" and hussar wing as in the upper corner of the catalog page. It is unlikely that these figures are still being produced. If anyone can identify the company that made the figures, a note to The Dispatch would be welcome.



"PZ" logo on base



18th century Pancerny Cavalryman by POLART

There is, also an eight-inch tall, 17th century “pancerny cavalryman” available from POLART in Poland. It is made of fired clay, hand-painted, and retails for about \$300.

(<https://polart.com/i/9479/military-figure-poland-xvii-century-pancerny-caval.htm>)

My thanks to my German “*Sammlerfreunde*” (collector friends) Klaus Dulisch, (Gelsenkirchen), Marbod Gerstenhauer (Kieler/KILIA Zinnfiguren), Alexander Wilken and Berliner Zinnfiguren for their photos and assistance with this article.

Sources:

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Armor and equipment of a Polish *towarzysz pancerny*, in the late 17th century in the Muzeum Wojska Polskiego (Polish Army Museum), Warsaw, photo: R Sanders



Pancerni by Kieler Zinnfiguren, painting & photo: R. Sanders