



MUSEUM OF THE BATTLE OF LEGNICA

Branch of the Museum of Copper in Legnica

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MUSEUM OF COPPER IN LEGNICA

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chronicler Jan Długosz provided a detailed account of the battle but he was writing almost two hundred years after the battle and it is impossible to determine how accurate he is in describing the actual events of 1241. In any case, Długosz's dramatic account of the Battle in Legnica has in itself become an important cultural heritage. Over the centuries, it has continued to appeal to imagination and helped cultivate the battle's tradition. It has also inspired numerous artistic visions of the battle and its participants.

Locus – The Site

The small village of Legnickie Pole has a significant place in the history of the Battle of Legnica. According to local tradition it was founded on the site of the battle and it is here that Henry the Pious was killed. Allegedly, the extant Gothic Church of the Holy Trinity and the Blessed Virgin Mary was built on the site the duke's head-



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less body had been found. Initially the church was entrusted to the Benedictines. During the Reformation period, it was taken over by the Protestants who continued to use it until the end of World War II. In 1961, the historic church was converted into the Museum of the Battle of Legnica.

Dux – The Duke

Over the centuries, Duke Henry II the Pious has been perceived as the principal hero of the Battle of Legnica, an ideal Christian knight, the defender of Silesia and Europe. His story was related in chronicles, works of art and literature. His memory was cultivated by the Silesian branch of the Piast dynasty, the Catholic Church and local Protestants. For centuries, the example of the fallen duke and his knights united the people of Silesia against current threats. The memory of the heroes of the Battle of Legnica has uplifted the spirits of two nations as both Poles and Germans have regarded the story of the Battle of Legnica as part of their national history.



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6. M. Merian, *Great defeat of Christian forces by the Tatars*, copperplate engraving, 1674

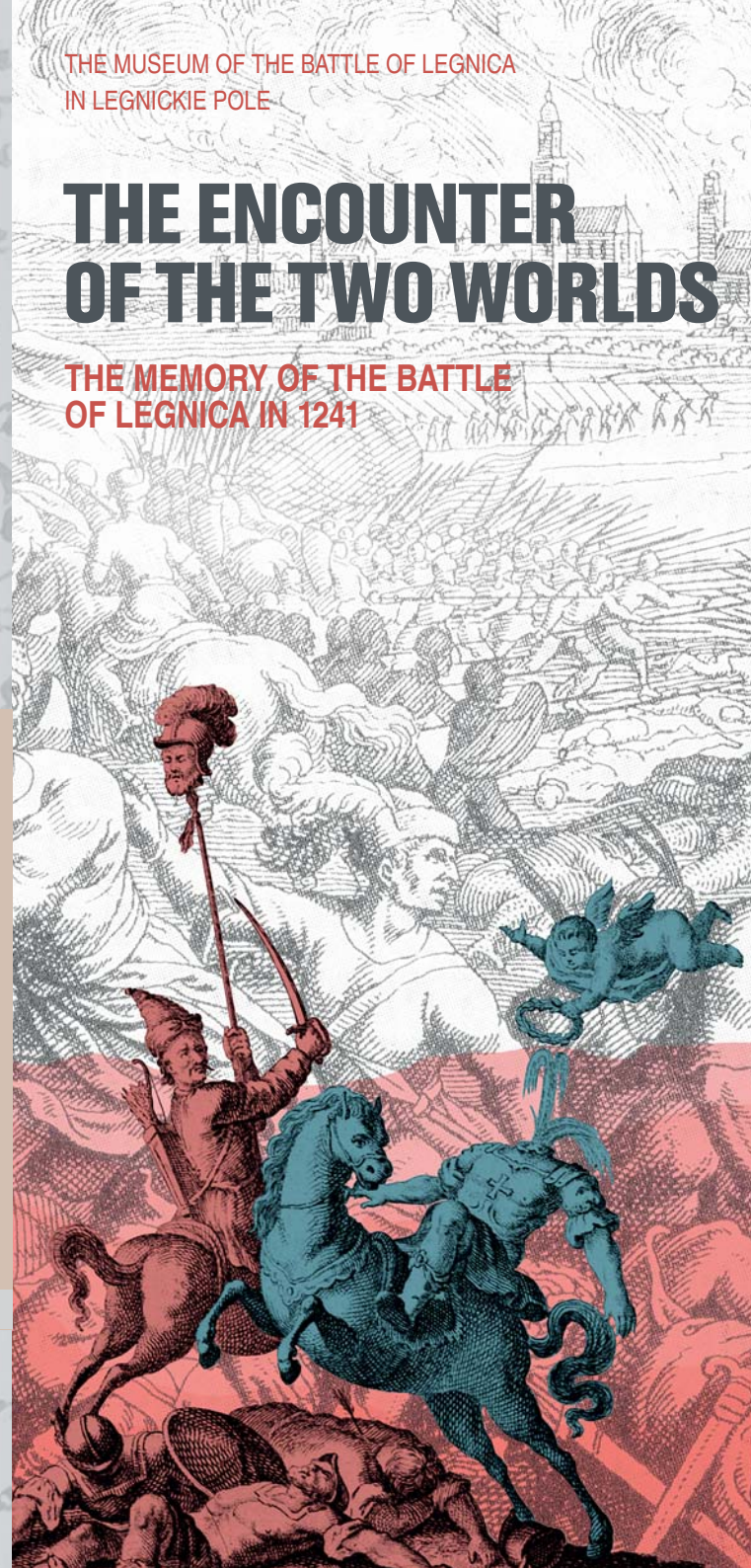
7. D. C. Asam, *Finding the body of Duke Henry the Pious*, fresco in Church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross and St Hedwig at Legnickie Pole, 1733

8. F. G. Endler, *Benedictine monk from Legnickie Pole*, copperplate engraving, 1811

THE MUSEUM OF THE BATTLE OF LEGNICA
IN LEGNICKIE POLE

THE ENCOUNTER OF THE TWO WORLDS

THE MEMORY OF THE BATTLE
OF LEGNICA IN 1241





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On April 1241, in a battle fought near Legnica, two worlds collided. On the one side, the Mongols, in Europe called Tatars, arriving from the depth of the Asian steppe. Marked with numerous victories, their seemingly unstoppable advance into Europe had led them into Poland, already weakened by its feudal fragmentation and political divisions, the kingdom disunited, split up between several Piasts princes. On the opposite side, in defense of their land against the invaders, stood Silesian knights led by Duke Henry II the Pious. Europe did not understand the aims and ambitions of the Mongols. It saw the invaders as the fearsome “Tartars”, the envoys of hell or Tartaros (from Greek mythology), with an insatiable appetite for bounty and human blood. The Mongolian forces won the battle. From their perspective, it was but an insignificant episode happening somewhere in a very distant world. In contrast, to the people in Silesia, Poland, and Europe, the defeat of the Christian army and the death of its commander, Duke Henry II the Pious, was a terrifying and memorable event.

The new permanent exhibition at the Museum of the Battle of Legnica at Legnickie Pole is a journey tracing the tradition which has been for centuries an important historic heritage and a building bloc of the local identity for the people living in Silesia, whether Polish or German. The exhibition focuses on the phenomenon of the 13th-century battle which changed not only the history of Silesia but also the cultural horizon of its people. In its four sections, the exhibition traces the genesis of the battle and the period sources relating the

Mongol invasion of Poland. It also presents the battle's local tradition and the significance of its principal hero, Duke Henry II of Legnica called “the Pious” by later generations.

Mundi – The Worlds

The Mongol empire was founded in the early 13th century by Genghis Khan who succeeded in uniting the nomadic tribes of the Asian steppe into the Far East's mightiest military power. Led by Genghis Khan and then his successors, the Mongol armies conquered China and the vast expanses of Central Asia. Their armies also reached Christian Europe. In 1241, the main thrust of the Mongol invasion was directed against Hungary but their armies also ventured into Poland. The Battle of Legnica was the last accord of the campaign in Poland. After the Mongols had withdrawn from Central Europe and returned to their Asian hub, Western envoys were sent to the Far East. One of the important results of these journeys were completely new reports regarding Asia and its inhabitants.

Narrationes – The Narratives

Contemporary 13th- and 14th-century sources only briefly relate the battle fought near Legnica. In the 15th century, the famous Polish

1. *Mongol warriors pursuing the enemy*, Persian miniature, ca. 1300-1325
2. *The Battle of Legnica*, miniatures from the so-called Lubin Codex, 1353
3. K. Sichulski, *Battle of Legnica*, oil painting, 1936
4. G. Boettger Sr., *The heroic death of Duke Henry II*, copperplate engraving, 1808
5. S. Wyspiański, *Duke Henry II the Pious*, design for a stained glass window, 1900, National Museum in Kraków



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