

# Varna

November 10th, 1444  
The Last Crusade

## 14th century

A small country in Asia Minor, Turkey, by means of conquest transforms into the powerful Ottoman Empire (named after its founder, Osman I). The Ottoman Turks eventually enter the Balkan Peninsula, further occupying countries in south-eastern Europe.

## 1396

Defeat of an army of European knights in a battle with Turkish forces at Nikopolis. The Turkish expansion then heads towards the borders of the Hungarian Kingdom.

## 1437-1442

Turkish raids on the Kingdom of Hungary. After the death of the King of Bohemia and Hungary, Albrecht II Habsburg (1397-1439), the Hungarians count on Polish help in their fight against the Ottoman invasion.

## 1440

The Polish king Władysław III Jagiellończyk (1424-1444) takes the Hungarian throne.

## 1442

The Hungarians repel another Ottoman invasion and during their counter-offensive occupy some parts of present-day Bulgarian and Serbian lands, threatening the then capital of the Ottoman Empire, Adrianople (Edirne).

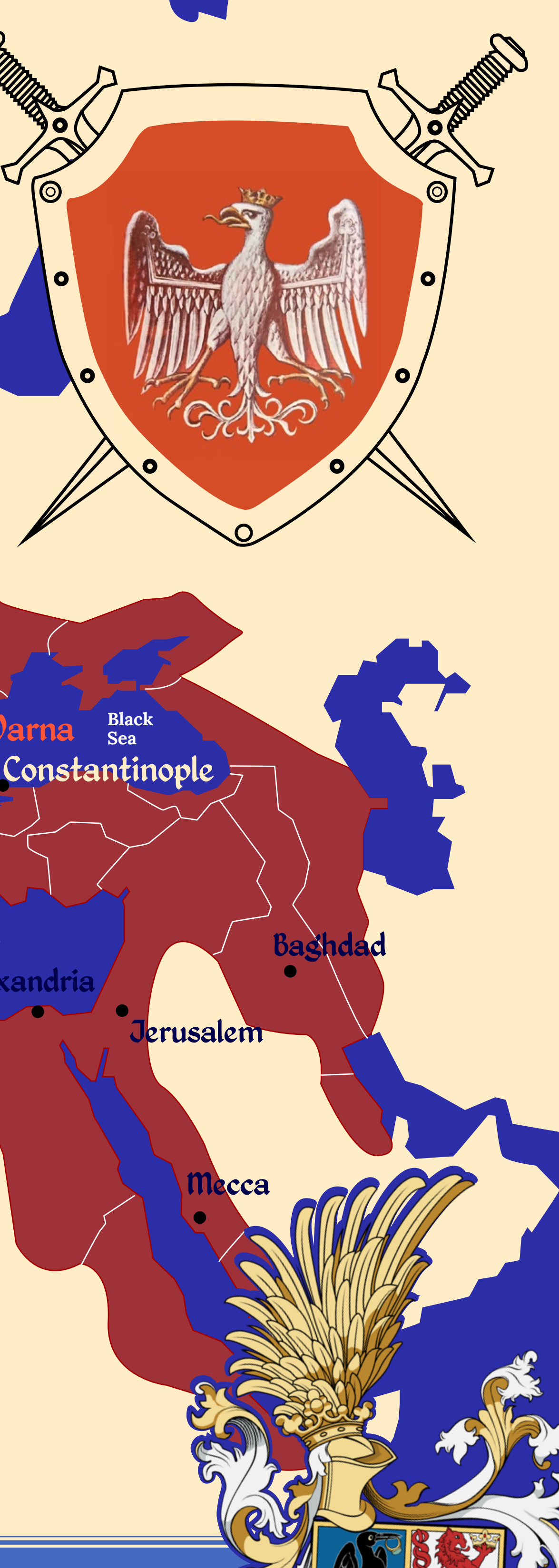
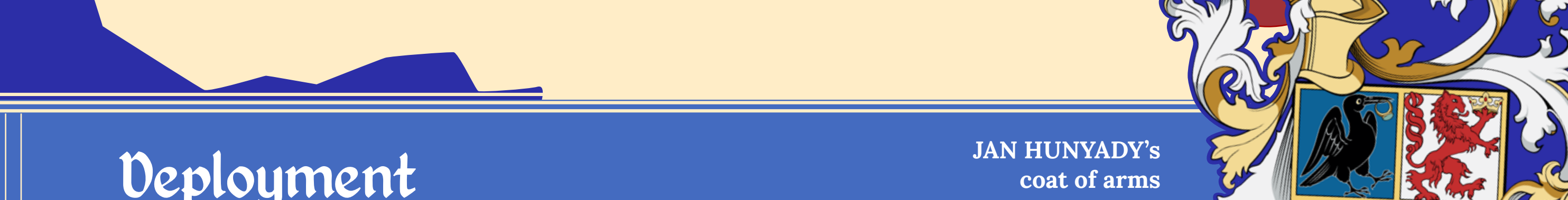
## August 1, 1444

The Turkish Sultan Murad II concludes a ten-year truce with the Kingdom of Hungary (peace in Szegedynia).

## August 4, 1444

Urged by the papal legate, King Władysław Jagiellończyk breaks the truce, gathers an army, and moves against the Turks.

## The Ottoman Empire 1300-1683

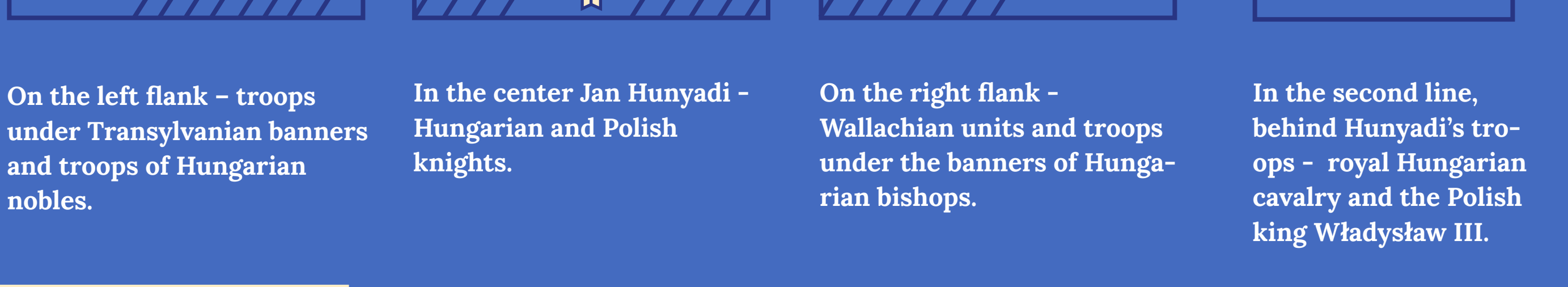


## Members of the Christian Coalition

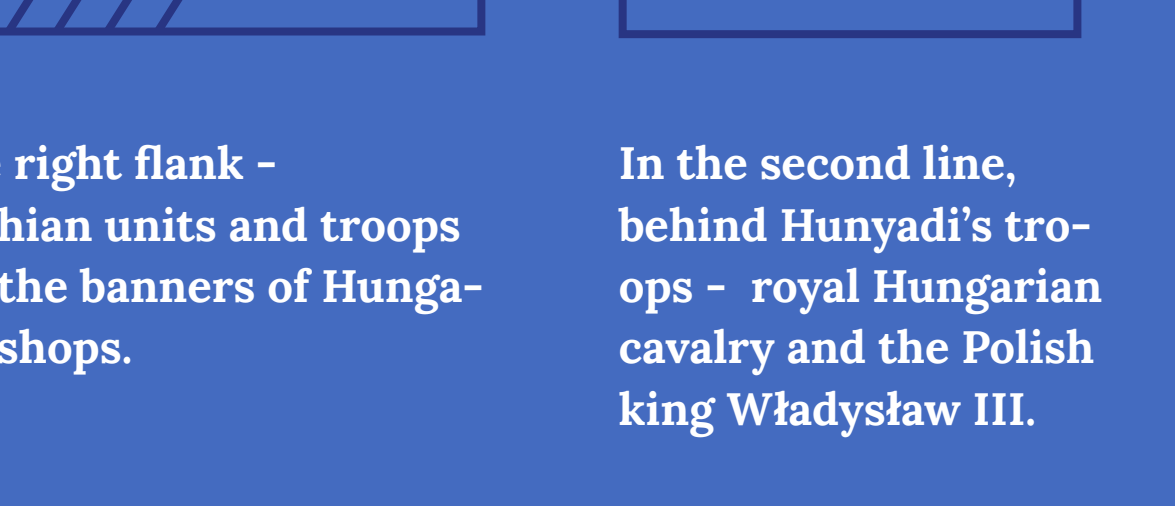
The Polish-Hungarian expedition sets off in mid-September. Marching along the river Danube, the Christian troops reach a plain outside Varna. There, the advance of the allies is blocked by Turkish forces.

Despite being outnumbered three times by the Turks, the Christians decide to launch a major attack.

## Deployment of Polish-Hungarian forces

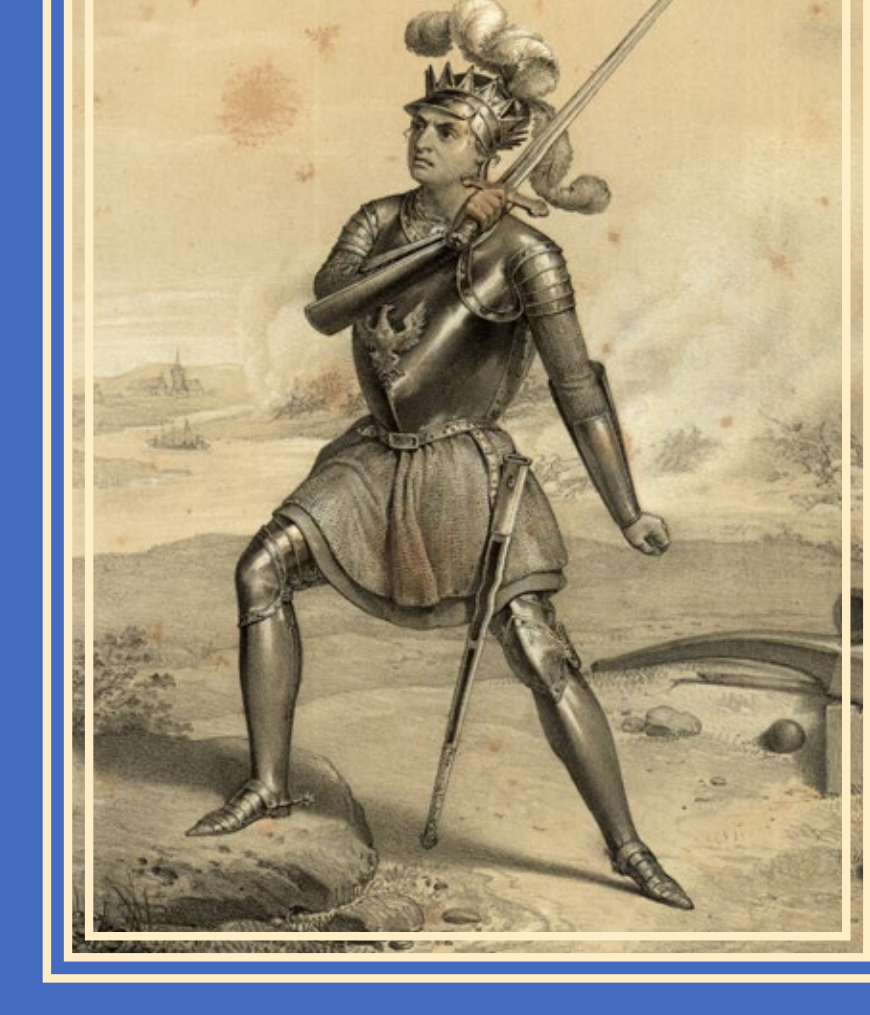


JAN HUNYADY'S coat of arms



## Władysław III (1424-1444)

King of the Jagiellonian dynasty. In 1434, after the death of his father, Władysław Jagiełło, he took the Polish throne as a 10-year-old commoner. In 1440 he became the king of Hungary as I. Ulászló - Władysław I.

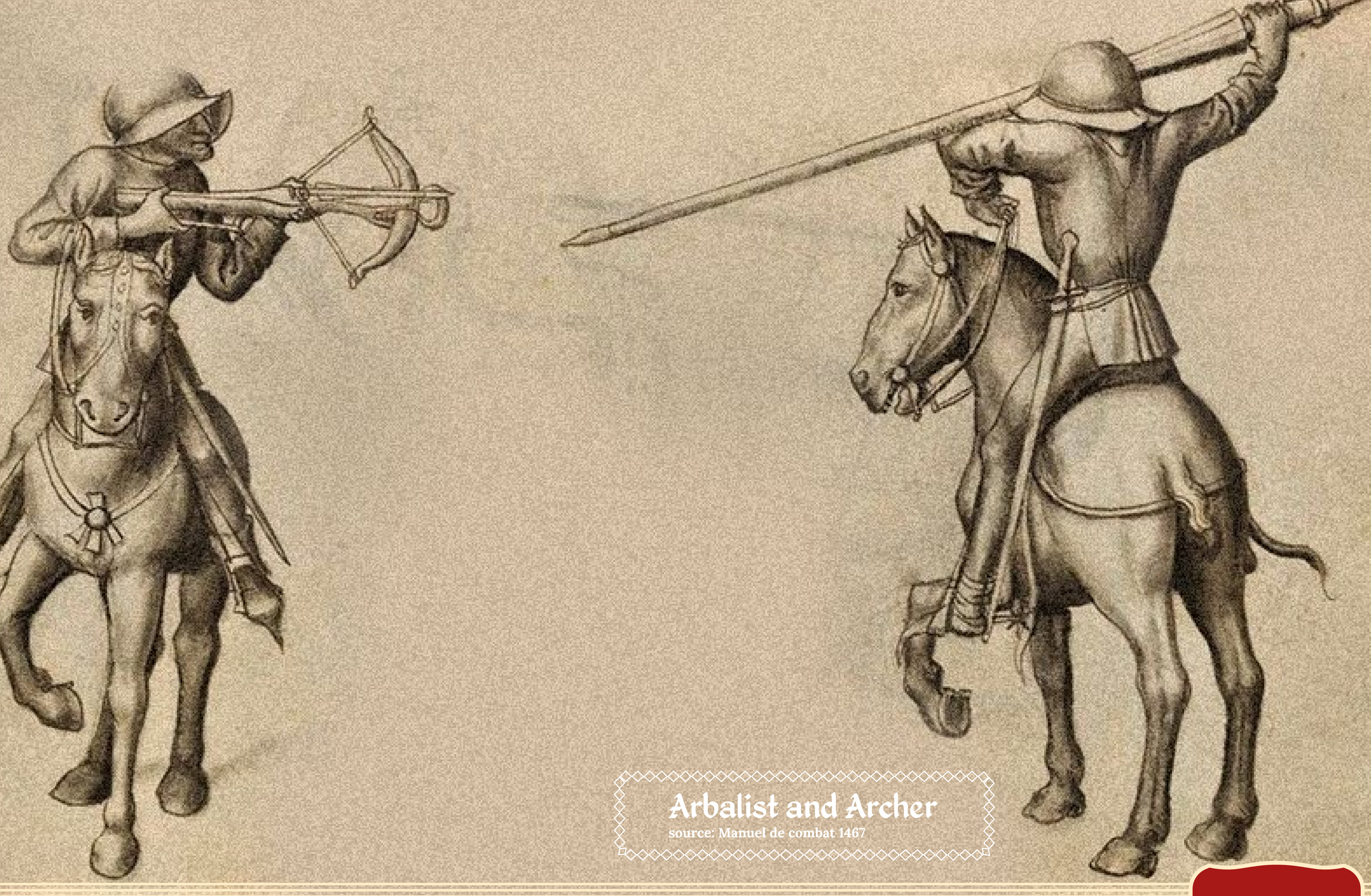


## Jan Hunyady (ok. 1387-1456)

Hungarian nobleman and leader of Transylvania. Commander of the Hungarian army during numerous expeditions against the Ottomans and the real author of the victorious campaigns of 1441-1444 attributed to king Władysław. National hero of Hungary.



Forces of the Christian Coalition approx. 16,000-20,000 people.



## The Turks

## Deployment of Turkish forces:



## Murad II (1404-1451)

Turkish sultan, a talented leader and organizer, known as a cruel ruler, poet and patron of culture.



Turkish forces from 40-50 thousand people.

## Tactics

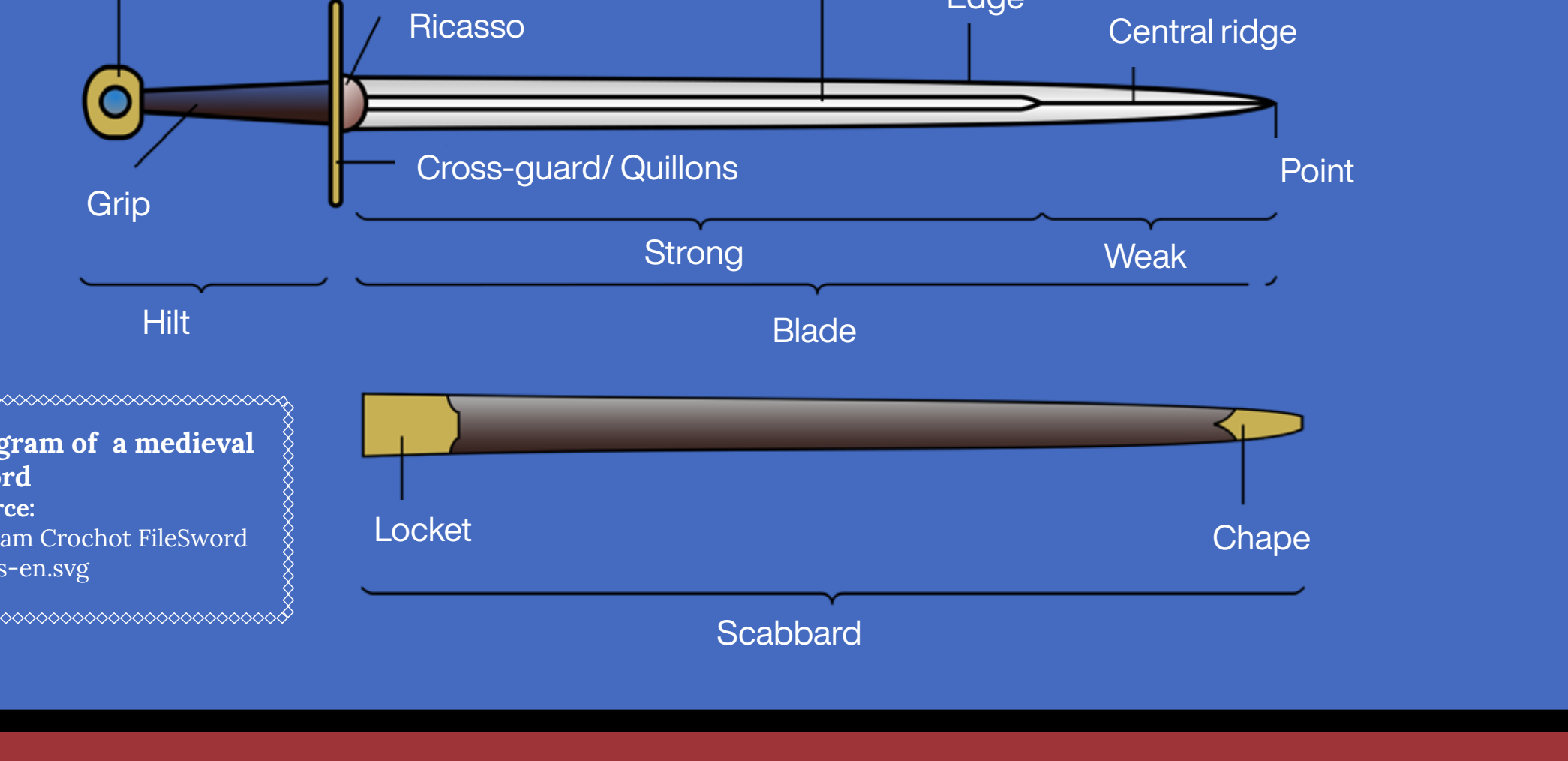
## The battle

### Christian Coalition

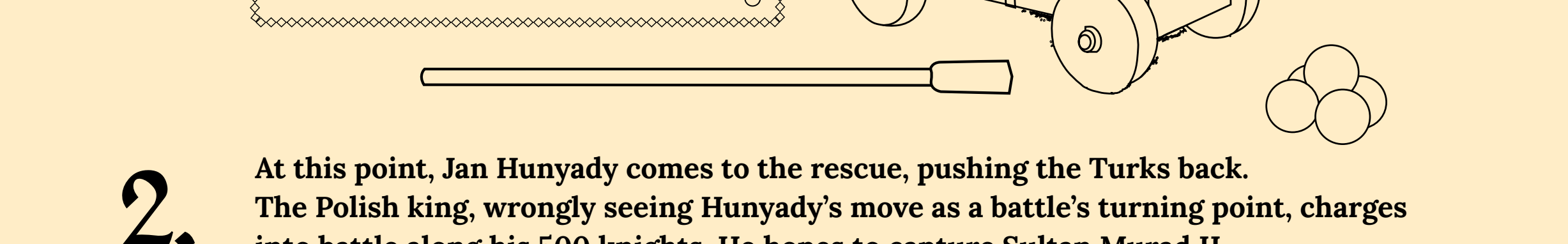
#### Polish cavalry in the 15th century:

lancers - armed with spears and swords  
archers - armed with crossbows and swords

In the front ranks, lancers. The archers attack their opponents using crossbows over the heads of the lancers. The first charge is carried out with lances; after breaking them, the fighting continues with swords, in which archers take equal part.



### 1. The battle begins with a charge of Turkish cavalry towards the left flank of the Christian army. The attack is repelled twice by launching stone projectiles from bombard. The Anatolian cavalry joins the Turkish attack which threatens the Polish-Hungarian force. The Christians attempt to retreat to a small fortress of Galata, but they are further decimated by the Turks.



### 2. At this point, Jan Hunyady comes to the rescue, pushing the Turks back. The Polish king, wrongly seeing Hunyady's move as the battle's turning point, charges into battle along his 500 knights. He hopes to capture Sultan Murad II.

### 3. The Janissaries repel the Polish attack and encircle the king with his knights. The king's horse stumbles, the king is captured and immediately beheaded with a sword by one of the Sultan's warriors.

### 4. The death of the Christian king wreaks havoc among the Polish-Hungarian troops. The Ottoman army finally overcomes the Christian forces.

### 5. Hunyady makes an attempt to retrieve the king's headless corpse, but he is overwhelmed by the Turks and has to retreat.



## The Turks

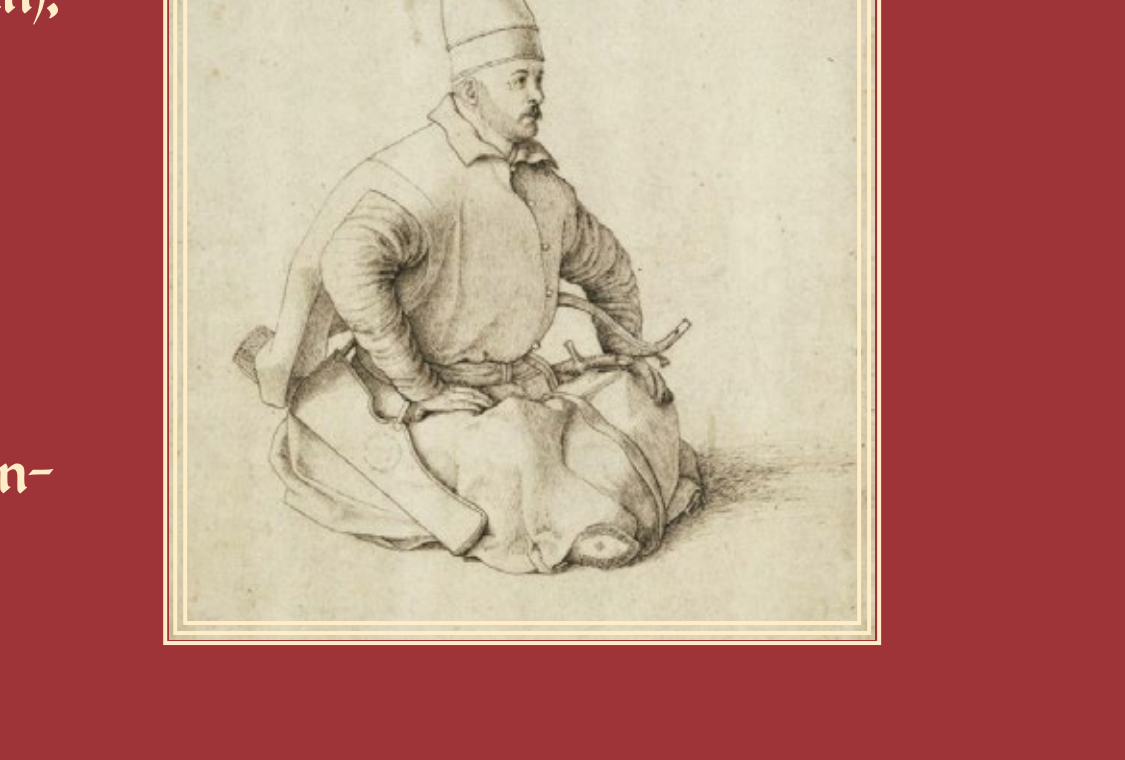
#### Spahisi

Heavy cavalry armed with chainmail jacket, shield, bow, short rooster, saber, rope and a misura.



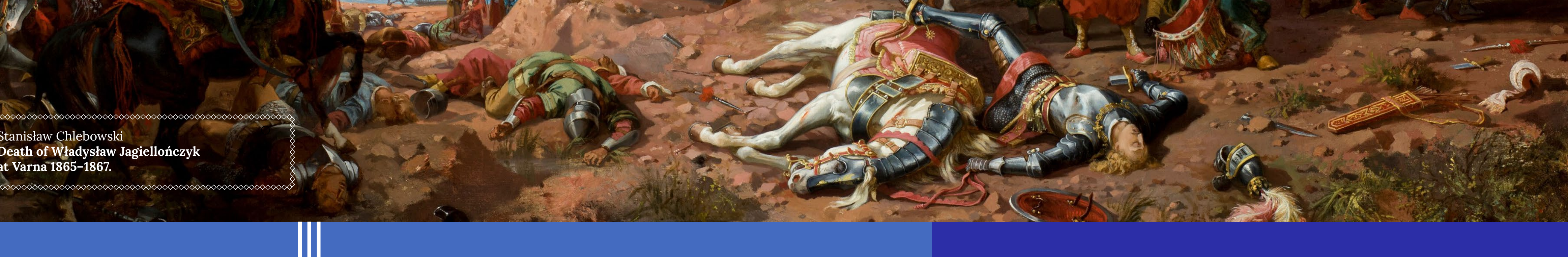
#### Janissaries

Selected infantry, forcibly recruited from among conquered European nations (boys aged 7-14). They were forced to convert to Islam, physically toughened, and taught the art of war. They carried short sabers (yatagan), spears, daggers and initially bows (but later pistols, and then muskets).



#### Akinjays

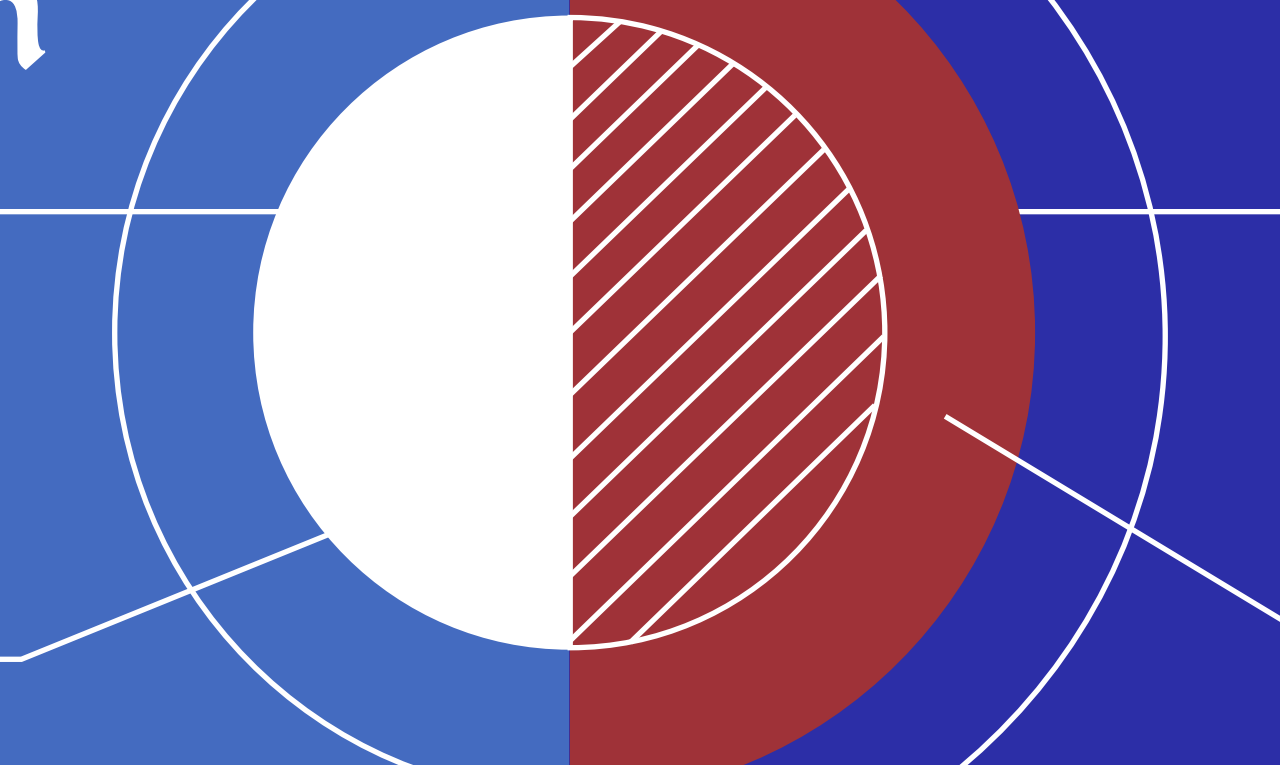
Irregular Ottoman cavalry armed with bows and sabers, used for offensive or reconnaissance operations.



Stanislaw Chlebowski. Death of Władysław Jagiellończyk at Varna 1865-1867.

## Losses

Christian Coalition  
Polish-Hungarian forces  
c.a. 5,000,000 dead



The Turks  
The Sultan's army:  
ca. 7,000 dead

## After the battle



- The military campaign of autumn 1444 and the Battle of Varna are sometimes thought to be the last anti-Turkish crusade of medieval Europe.
- The defeat of the Polish-Hungarian forces resulted in the strengthening of the Turkish position in Europe and the final collapse of the Christian kingdoms and principalities in the Balkans and the remnants of the Byzantine Empire.
- 1453 - Fall of Constantinople to the Turks.
- After the fall of Constantinople, the Hagia Sophia church, with added four minarets, is converted into a mosque.

## Remembrance



For southern Slavs, Władysław III the Jagiellonian became a folk hero, a martyr king for his faith. The Bulgarians recognized King Władysław III as their national hero, giving him the nickname "Varnenezzyk" in the 19th century.

#### 1906

Symbolic tombstone commemorating Władysław III of Varna was unveiled in Wawel Cathedral. It shows the king as a knight in full armor holding the Szezerbic, the national sword of Polish kings, in his hands.

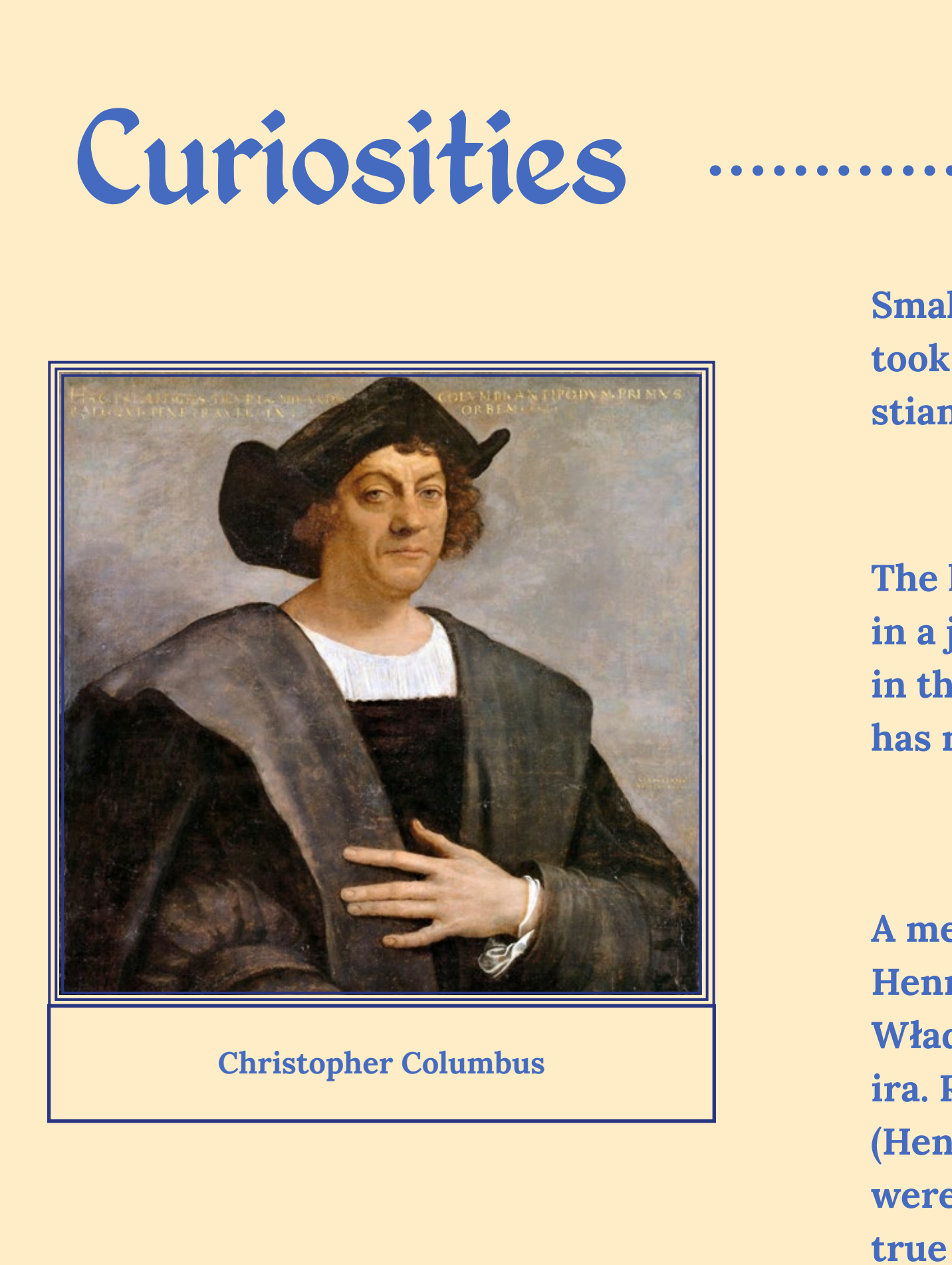
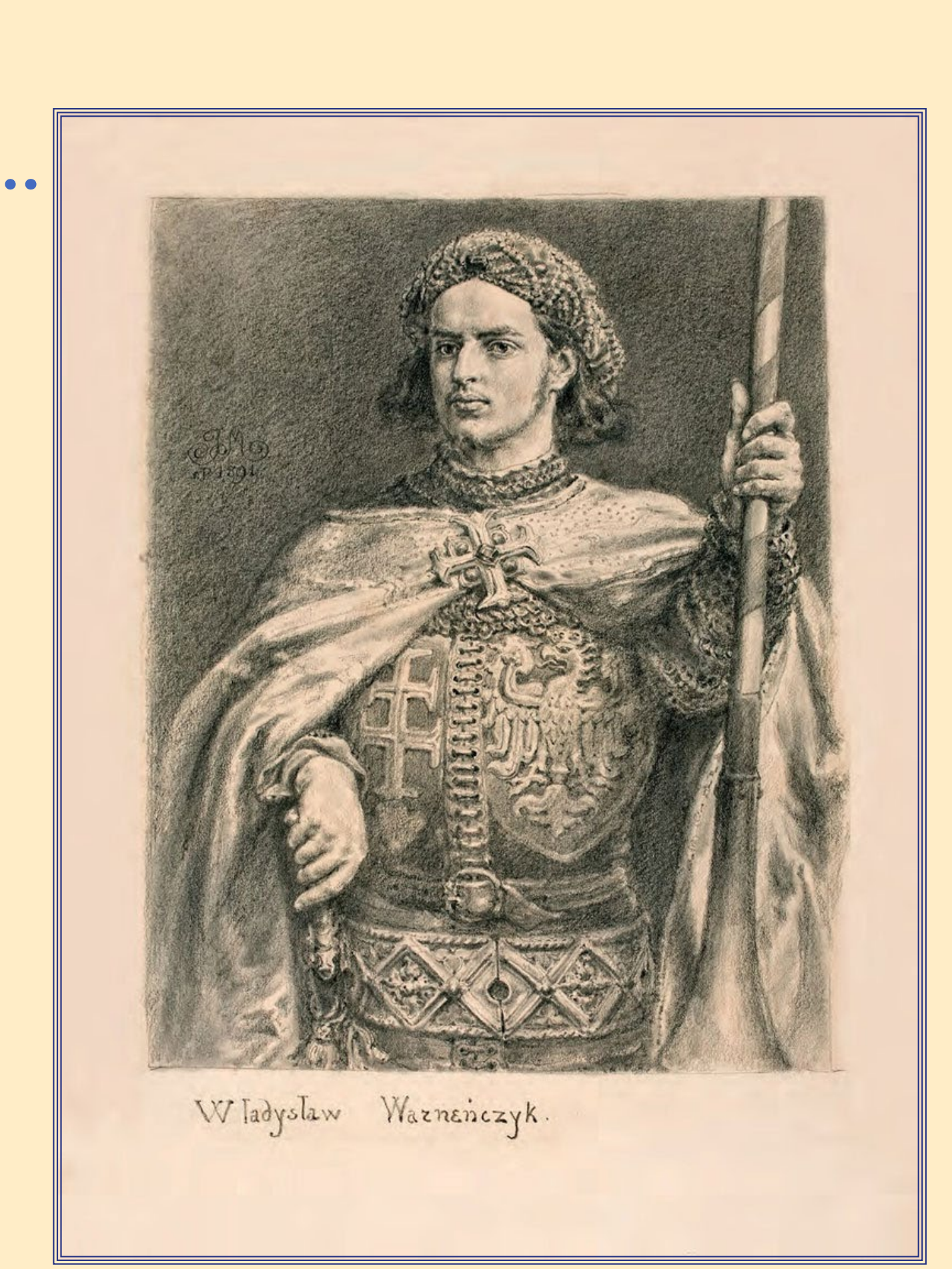
#### 1935

In the presence of about 30,000 people, including the Tsar of Bulgaria Boris III, a monument was unveiled - the mausoleum of the fallen king. The ceremony was attended by a group of about 2,000 guests from Poland, including representatives from state authorities.



04.08.1935 Bulgarian Tsar Boris opens the Mausoleum of Władysław Varnenezzyk in 1935.

## Curiosities



Small numbers of Teutonic Knights and Czech Hussites took part in the Battle of Varna on the side of the Christian forces.

The head of King Władysław was supposedly preserved in a jar of honey and put on display to the public in the Ottoman Empire. The body of King Władysław III has never been found.

A message written in 1722 by the Portuguese historian Henrique Henriques de Noronh suggests that King Władysław survived and went to the island of Madeira. Remembered by the islanders as Henrique Alemeo (Henry the German - as people from across the Rhine were known in Portugal), he was supposed to be the true father of ... Christopher Columbus.