

Collector Coins



face value	20 zł
metal	925/1000 Ag and paints: white and red
finish	proof
diameter	38.61 mm
weight	28.28 g
mintage	74 000 pcs

Obverse: Centrally, an image of the Eagle established as the state Emblem of the Republic of Poland. Around the eagle, a harvest wreath with bread, vegetables and fruit, interlaced with a white and red ribbon. On the left-hand side and on the right hand-side a semicircular inscription, RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA. An inscription, 20 Zł, below. To the left of the inscription, a semicircular notation of the year of issue, 2004. The Mint's mark, $\frac{m}{w}$, under the Eagle's left leg.

Reverse: A procession in folk costumes bearing crops. Above, a semicircular inscription, DOŻYNKI (Harvest Festival).

Designer of the coin: Roussanka Nowakowska



face value	2 zł
metal	CuAl5Zn5Sn1 alloy
finish	standard
diameter	27.00 mm
weight	8.15 g
mintage	850 000 pcs

Obverse: An image of the Eagle established as the state Emblem of the Republic of Poland; on either side of the Eagle, the notation of the year of issue, 20-04. An inscription, Zł 2 Zł, below the Eagle; on the rim a circumscription, RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA, preceded and followed by six pearls. The Mint's mark, $\frac{m}{w}$, under the Eagle's left leg.

Reverse: A procession in folk costumes bearing crops. On the right-hand side of the procession, an inscription, DOŻYNKI (Harvest Festival).

On the edge: The inscription, NBP, repeated eight times, every second one inverted 180°, separated by stars.

Obverse Designer: Ewa Tyc-Karpińska

Reverse Designer: Roussanka Nowakowska



Coins struck by the State Mint in Warsaw.

Printed by NBP Printing Office

Design: DECORUM

Harvest Festival
– The Polish Calendar of Traditional
Customs and Rituals –

On September 10, 2004, the National Bank of Poland is putting into circulation "Harvest Festival" (Dożynki) collector coins with the following face values:

- 20 zł – struck in proof finish, in silver,
- 2 zł – struck in standard finish, in CuAl5Zn5Sn1 alloy, i.e. Nordic Gold.

Harvest Festival – the crop feast

The Harvest Festival has many names in the Polish folklore, referring to the custom of walking around the fields after harvest or making a harvest wreath, which was the most important attribute of the festival, from ears of grain and other fruits of the earth. It was the most important farming festival during the year, held after the harvest was over. Originally organised by landowners for farm hands and all reapers working in the fields, it later turned into a festival held by affluent farmers and rural local government bodies.

The harvest and the crop it yielded were – and still are – a matter of great importance, crowning a year's worth of farmers' toil upon which human livelihood depended. Thus it was an occasion for a festive and well-deserved celebration.

The harvest festival was usually held at the beginning of September, sometimes earlier. When the weather was good and the grain was speedily collected from the fields, it took place as early as on August 15 – on the Assumption of Mary (Our Lady's Herb Day), according to the proverb "When the Assumption has come, the harvest is completed."

However, these were usually two separate festivals.

Some 18th- and 19th-century Polish scholars and folklore enthusiasts, including writers and poets (e.g. Oskar Kolberg, Zygmunt Gloger, Ignacy Kraszewski) attempted to prove that harvest festivals were a continuation of pagan fertility and crop festivals, which included great feasts and crop offerings to harvest gods. However, not enough sources exist that could support such hypotheses.

The harvest festival probably originated much later and was connected with the institutions of landed estate and manor economy. Therefore, it was not held until the 16th century. However, certain customs (e.g. concerning the last ears of grain) that accompanied the festivals certainly date back to the relics of archaic vegetation and farming rituals.

The harvest festival, which was held throughout Poland, had many local varieties, but three fundamental stages could always be distinguished:

1. The ritual cutting of last ears of grain. Throughout Poland, a special significance was attached to the last handful or

clump of uncut grain, which was left in the empty field for some time. There was a widespread belief that these last ears (which had many folk names) harboured extraordinary, magic forces that held the key to the continuity of plant vegetation and abundant crops. Thus these ears were cut with reverence by the squire himself, the farmer or the best reaper. In all regions of Poland the last ears cut during this ritual were woven into the harvest wreath.

2. The weaving of the harvest wreath (called the "crop") and a procession taking the wreath to the festival host (the squire, the best farmer in the village, priest, village administrator, district or province governor or even the president of Poland). This was the most distinctive, solemn and spectacular part of the harvest festival.

The weaving of the wreath (which symbolised crops) was always the job of the best women reapers and constituted one of the most important parts of the harvest festival. Apart from the last ears of grain, streaks consisting of various kinds of unthreshed grain (wheat, rye, barley and oat), rowanberries, vegetables, apples, field and garden flowers as well as crêpe flowers and colourful ribbons were woven into the wreath. The Polish harvest wreaths were of various shapes. They could have the form of decorative sheaves, bouquets or large, colourful wheels. Most often, however, a harvest wreath was shaped as a crown and worn by the leading woman reaper. If it was larger in size, boys who were the leading reapers carried it on poles.

When the wreath was ready, a procession of reapers dressed in their best outfits would form, carrying scythes and sickles decorated with bouquets of flowers on their shoulders. Leading reapers with the "crop" wreath, quarts of nuts and always with a huge loaf of bread baked from the flour from the new harvest, led the procession.

People in the procession sang songs. With time, harvest festival songs became a village chronicle of sorts, telling about various local events. Old and contemporary, these songs have always been of interest and a source of research to folklorists, ethnographers and linguists.

The singing procession first went to church in order to bless the wreath and thank God for the crop, and then proceeded to the festival host. The host received the wreath from the leading woman reaper, kissed the bread with reverence and partook of it. The wreath was carefully stored in a hall or barn until the next spring and the grains that were shelled from it were always added to bags with seed grain.

3. Feast and dance. These concluded the traditional harvest festivals, the reapers' well-earned reward for their work. The host, after being presented with the wreath, thanked the

reapers and showed them to the arranged beforehand tables, abundant in food and drink. He himself served them the festive dishes: meat simmered in broth, borsch with cream, sausage, wheat dumplings, cucumbers and cucumber sour, fresh bread, beer and vodka. Then he invited them to dance, asking the leading woman reaper to the first dance. Then everyone indulged in the music, dance and food until early morning hours.

The harvest festival – albeit in a slightly altered form – has survived to the present day as a great crop feast and the holiday of all farmers.

As early as in the interwar period parish, municipal and district harvest festivals were organised under the patronage of the Church, rural activists as well as various local business and social institutions and associations, foremost the local Peasants' Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe) organisations.

After the Second World War rural residents (or, strictly speaking, their representatives) also took part in official harvest festivals at various – from municipal to national – levels. In recent years, harvest festivals have also been organised under the auspices of the President of Poland, with many accompanying events: exhibitions, fairs, art performances, harvest wreath contests etc. After 1980, the custom of peasant pilgrimages to places of religious worship after the harvest – which had already been organised in the interwar period – was revived. The prime pilgrimage destination has been the largest Polish sanctuary at Jasna Góra (Bright Hill) in Częstochowa, where the Primate of Poland celebrates the religious part of the harvest festival.

Contemporary harvest festivals have preserved many old traditions, customs, rituals and accessories. The most important of which are farmers' processions, with participants often dressed in regional costumes, bearing bread and wreaths – not only in the traditional shape of a crown, but also in the shape of hearts, globes, maps of Poland, coats of arms of different cities, church silhouettes and various national and religious emblems composed of ears of grain. Songs and orations are improvised during such processions.

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