THE LIMNER COMPANY



FRENCH SCHOOL (19th century)

Portrait miniature of a chef d'escadron of the Polish Light Horse Guard, possibly Seweryn Fredero (b.1785), wearing uniform with grosses epaulettes, and holding a light cavalry sabre

Circa: circa 1810-11

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Watercolour on ivory (licence 71UV9VY9)

Oval, 71mm (2 ¾ in) high

Following his entry to Warsaw in 1807, Napoleon Bonaparte, functioning at the height of his power, ordered that a regiment of light horse guards be established. The Polish Light Horse Guard would go on to leave Poland in 1808, and their campaigns would take them to Spain, France, and Germany. The gentleman in this portrait miniature wears the uniform of the regiment and can be dated to between 1810 and 1811, when the Napoleonic Empire was relatively peaceful. For this reason, he is wearing elements of the uniform only used during parades.

Perhaps because of its size, any viewer of this portrait is drawn immediately to the large plume on the hat that the officer wears. The drama of this plume and the elaborate epaulettes on his coat and hat would have played an important role during parades, which would in some cases be attended by Emperor Napoleon himself. The sword on which the sitter rests his left hand is, in fact, a dress sword and was not intended for use in battle. The mark of the emperor is also visible on his uniform, taking the form of the letter 'N' surmounted by a crown.

An examination of the names of officers of the correct rank to have been depicted in the specific uniform shown here has led to the suggestion that this gentleman could be Seweryn Fredero. There is only one other extant portrait of Fredero (b.1785), from much later in his life, but a facial comparison reveals remarkably similar eyes, which are emphasised in both depictions. If this is Fredero, then the

portrait must have been painted before he received the Order of Virtuti Militari, on 10 November 1810, as the deep blue and black ribbon of the order is not visible in this portrait. Fredero was most famous for being the brother of Aleksander Fredero, a playwright and poet, known for his movement against the romantic forms of the period. Whether or not this is the identity of the officer, the level of extravagance and detail in the uniform in this portrait demonstrates a level of pride in his role, and provides an interesting historical record of the regiment.

We are grateful to Yves Martin for his assistance in the research of the uniform in this miniature.