

# A TARTAR ON HORSEBACK

*The Lajkonik – a rider on a wooden horse, carrying a mace and wearing a crescent-topped pointed hat – is among the most popular symbols of Kraków.*



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JAN GRACZYŃSKI / EAST NEWS

This figure is a reference both to historical events (the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Tartar invasions) and half-legendary stories about the city being saved by rafters from Zwierzyniec. In times past, the Lajkonik would participate in each Corpus Christi procession, walking alongside members of the rafters' guild. When, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, figures in "weird" and "risible" outfits were forbidden from participating in this Catholic celebration, the Lajkonik Festival was moved to the day closing the octave of Corpus Christi (i.e. the Thursday of the week after the feast). Today, the prancing Lajkonik stops traffic in the streets of Kraków, and

being touched by his mace is said to bring good luck and prosperity. Since 2014, the Lajkonik Festival in Kraków has been included in the national list of intangible cultural heritage.

# THE WAWEL DRAGON

*The oldest Kraków legends written down at the beginning 13th century by the Bishop of Kraków and historian of Poland, Wincenty Kadłubek, tell of a ferocious man-eating dragon which lived in a cave under Wawel Hill in the early days of the city and terrorized the local inhabitants.*



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It is said that the monster was defeated by trickery, when instead of a real animal it was fed calf skin stuffed with sulphur. Today, people come to Kraków every year to see the Dragon Parade, while soft-toy dragons and miniature copies of the Wawel Dragon Monument (erected on riverside in 1972) are sold in the stalls near the Castle and on the Market Square. Until a few decades ago, however, the most

popular toys were wooden dragons with a wriggling lizard-like body. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these wooden dragons were made to a design developed several decades earlier by the Kraków Workshops. At that time, in 1918, the prototype of the dragon-lizard was designed by the painter Zofia Stryjeńska, and is currently held in the collections of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków.

## ROSES OF A SAINT

*Until recently, few people in Kraków had ever heard of St Rita of Cascia (1381-1457).*



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FOT. ANNA NIEDŹWIEDŹ

Today, her cult is rapidly developing, centred on the Church of St Catherine. St Rita is the patroness of impossible and hopeless causes and her cult has been promoted especially vigorously by the Augustinian orders. She became an Augustine nun as a mature woman, widow, and mother. Perhaps it is her biography, in which stories of a normal, but also difficult, family life are fused with typical

hagiographical elements such as stigmata, miracles (including roses blooming in winter), and mystical experiences that attracts so many among the faithful? Every month, rose sellers throng the streets around the church. Worshippers lay flowers at the foot of St Rita's statue, which was designed by the pre-war architect Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz. After the service, bouquets of roses are taken home and given to friends who are experiencing hardship in their lives. In June 2017, after the monthly celebrations, someone adorned a parking meter close to the church with roses and images of St Rita.

## GOD OF FOUR FACES

*One of the many souvenirs from Kraków is a Światowid figurine. These figurines are miniature copies of a stone statue with four faces (the so-called Zbruch Idol) that was discovered in the 19th century in the Zbruch River (now in Ukraine).*



The original statue is on display in Kraków's Archaeological Museum. It attracts not only aficionados of Slavic history, but also modern pagans, who sometimes pray and meditate in the exhibition space.

In 1968, a life-size copy of the Zbruch Idol was erected at the foot of Wawel Hill. This statue is also part of the cycle of ancient Slavic holidays and neo-pagan worship, as evidenced by the herbs, candles, and garlands made for the Slavic deity Kupala which people leave at the foot of the statue. On the other hand, during national holidays, it sometimes acquires a red-and-white sash or patriotic rosette, reflecting the incorporation of Slavic heritage into the vision of national community.

In its original context, this figure, which dates back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, was a sacred symbol connected with the pre-Christian religions of the Slavs. The intriguing form of the obelisk, comprising four figures facing the four corners of the world, evokes associations with the *axis mundi* – the celestial axis connecting heaven and earth, which indicates directions like a compass.

## **FOLK AND NATIONAL COSTUME**

*Kraków folk costume is simply the festive garb worn by peasants in the Kraków region. It later gained fame as the archetypical Polish national costume.*





MUZEUM ETNOGRAFICZNE KRAKÓW

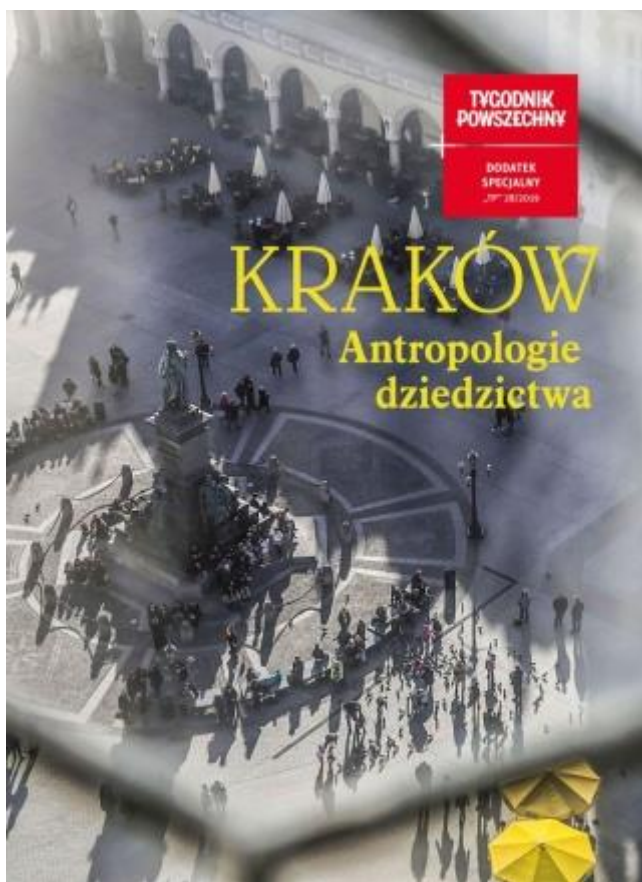
Its popularity and the stereotypical canon of what Cracovian men and women wear owes much to the Kosciuszko legend, the fascinations of the modernist Young Poland era, and Stanisław Wyspiański's famous play, *Wesele*, about a wedding between a poet and a peasant girl. The costume is still worn today during festivities in the city and in the surrounding villages. Dolls dressed in Kraków costume are popular souvenirs, as are the characteristic elements of this costume. The most popular among these is the four-cornered *krakuska* hat, which, adorned with peacock feathers, was once worn by the best man at weddings. Equally fashionable were black hats – *celendry*, resembling the top hats worn by city folk, and in winter the knitted woollen *magierka* caps.

## Krakow. Anthropologies of Heritage [ENGLISH] (special supplement of "Tygodnik Powszechny" nr 28/2019)

These interludes appeared in the Special Supplement of "Tygodnik Powszechny" 28/2019. This publication came about thanks to cooperation with the Polish team of the international HERILIGION consortium within the framework of HERA's Uses of the Past programme. The project is financed by the HERA network, NCN, AHRC, FCT, DASTI, NOW, and the European Union under the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme on the basis of grant agreement no. 649307. The Polish part of the project is carried out at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of History. The Tygodnik Powszechny Foundation is a partner of the project. [www.heranet.info](http://www.heranet.info)



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 649307



### Krakow. Anthropologies of Heritage [ENGLISH]

Supplement to Tygodnik Powszechny 28/2019

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COVER: view of the Market Square from the tower of St Mary's Church | PHOTO: Beata Zawrzel / Reporter

**Krakow. Anthropologies of Heritage [ENGLISH]**  
(special supplement of "Tygodnik Powszechny" nr 28/2019)

Kraków 2019, ISBN 978-83-65811-05-9

This special supplement of "Tygodnik Powszechny" was distributed in the Polish version between July 10 and July 16, 2019 together with printed as well as on-line versions ("Tygodnik Powszechny" nr 28/2019). Content is available via open-access websites:

Polish:

<https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/krakow-antropologie-dziedzictwa-20201>

English:

<https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/krakow-anthropologies-of-heritage-english-20340>

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