

MASTER EZENEKIER'S PUPPETS.  
CONTRIBUTION TO THE ORIGINS OF NATIVITY SCENE (SZOPKA)  
TRADITION IN KRAKÓW

The nativity scene (szopka) tradition in Kraków was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2018. The fairy-tale architecture of contemporary Kraków nativity scenes, shimmering with colours and delighting with detailed workmanship, often overshadows the little crib with Infant Jesus and the Holy Family. The narrative, most often expressed through figurines depicting the folklore and legends of Kraków, as well as contemporary events, is also of secondary importance. The Kraków nativity scene (szopka), unlike any other nativity scenes (also known as Christmas cribs or crèches), originated from church and home nativity scenes with figurines, as well as from the Christmas puppet theatre removed from churches – puppet crib used by carollers. This is the form of Michał Ezenekier's oldest Kraków szopka, preserved in the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków. There is also a collection of crib puppets (about

750 items), most of which do not bear any information about their origin, as they appeared in the museum inventory only in 1954.

In this article, nineteen puppets were subjected to formal analysis and comparative studies aimed at proving that they come from the szopka made by Michał Ezenekier. This selection was possible thanks to the book by Jan Krupski (owned by Stanisław and Tadeusz Estreicher) *Szopka krakowska* (Kraków nativity scene), where photographs of six puppets were included, and the remaining ones were ascribed to this ensemble on the basis of detailed comparisons of the materials used, the manner of execution, as well as texts delivered by the characters played by the puppets.

This oldest surviving Kraków szopka should be treated as a whole, since not only the szopka construction has been preserved, but also the text of the performance and part of the original set of master Ezenekier's puppets.