



Kijacy

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Even in the 1830s, in his work entitled *Lud i jego zwyczaje (Common People and Their Customs)*, Łukasz Gołębiowski stated that one can meet in Kraków people dressed in ... navy blue homespun coat with crimson edging accompanied by a green belt and shapely hat hemmed with sheep's skin.... Their most important attribute was a strong stick, often decorated with wood carvings and fitted with flint stones.

The stick was often finished with an ox's horn which could cover a small dagger for protection. These people were called *Kijacy* (literally: stick holders). The stick was their weapon and a kind of identification. Every owner fitted this tool with a individual feature, and thus it performed the function of *gmerek*, a property mark of the old craftsmen. *Kijacy* lived in the villages near Kraków at the right bank of the Vistula river, but they were frequent visitors to Kraków, Kazimierz and Wawel court. Their history includes all legends and traditions that disappeared only after the Second World War. Where did they come from? What did they do? Who were they?

Let's start from the beginning.

From the early Middle Ages oxen had been one of the main goods in Kraków's trade. Next to copper, salt, lead, fabric and oriental roots, they determined the commercial strength of the Kraków merchants. As the effective methods of meat preservation were unknown, the live oxen were driven usually from the areas of today's Moldova, west Ukraine and east Slovakia. These droves frequently passed by Kraków and, circumventing the city from the south along the roads through Bochnia, Barycz, Kosocice, Piaski Wielkie and Skawina, headed for Silesia or further to the German and Czech lands. But thousands of oxen completed their journey in Kraków to finish their lives there. No wonder that Kraków particularly developed such crafts as butchery, tanning, shoemaking, furriery and many other related crafts (saddlers, glovers, belt makers, vesicles, etc). The guilds of these occupational specializations were one of the strongest in the city, and their members sometimes gained top status, which was not easy in a Kraków dominated by rich merchant families. One needs to remember that Kraków and its vicinity has been a hugely populous agglomeration since the Middle Ages. Kraków, Kazimierz and Kleparz, three adjoining towns, were surrounded by a belt of about 200 villages and hamlets. Their population needed sufficient amounts of food that also had to be provided for the numerous Wawel court, many monasteries and finally visitors who came to Kraków, particularly during fairs. The meat demand probably accounted for the development of strong butchery centres competing with the Kraków butchers' guild at the route where the oxen were driven in such villages as Piaski Wielkie, Jugowice, Łagiewniki, Płaszów and Rajsko. They were a very strong competition for the city butchers, as they brought to Kraków meat at lower prices because they did not make any contributions for the guild and the city. These butchers were called *Kijacy*. What was particularly famous was the *kijacka* sausage, produced from various kinds of meat of the finest quality, chopped and ground with heavy broad swords. The set of herbs used to season and corn the meat mass, and the wood used to smoke the sausage, were kept in strict confidence. Hams or pork fat were preserved and processed in a similar way. Kraków butchers consistently fought with the competition of *Kijacy* not because of malice or pettiness, but because that was the letter of the city law in the medieval Europe. A craftsman that was not a member of the guild was called a *disturber* or *parter* (because they produced meat *on the side* from the Latin *pars* = side), and was subject to severe punishment. Bu in the case of *Kijacy* it



was not easy, because they played too important a part in view of the huge demand for meat. That is probably the reason why law started to be bent to fit life. According to tradition, already King **Casimir the Great** loosened the strict regulations and issued a document which gave *Kijacy* of Piaski the right to sell their goods in Kraków. Unfortunately, the parchment has not been preserved till the present times, so it is difficult to decide whether this tradition is true. It is likely that this law did not refer to all *Kijacy* but to one of them. In such cases he would be the so-called *servitor*, the craftsman who is exempted from guild affinity because he is in service to the King. In the 15th and 16th centuries the dispute between Kraków and near-Kraków butchers continued. The Kraków City Council and the Kazimierz Council stood up for the local butchers, but the prohibitions issued by them (1576, 1583) indicated that *Kijacy* still operated. Since they could not deal with the opposition of Kraków butchers, *Kijacy* more often appeared in Kazimierz where a legal compromise settled with time. This regulation **allowed** *Kijacy* to officially sell meat at the Kazimierz market on every Saturday from *St. Bartholomew's Day* (**24th of August**) to the *Epiphany* (**6th of January**). Hence the Kazimierz market became a **wolnica** (meaning: free trade area). The second success was the **privilege** granted by **Stefan Batory** and later repeated by **Sigismund III Vasa** that turned *Kijacy* into the official providers of meat to court. Despite the fact that the royal court left Kraków in 1609, the *Kijacy's* position in the city did not deteriorate. On the contrary, in the 18th century the demand for cheaper meat rose due to the many wars and natural disasters Kraków suffered from. The legal situation of Podgórze butchers changed with the *industrial law* of **1859** which abolished the obligatory membership in guilds. From this moment on they could open their shops and run commercial activity in Kraków. **Chachlowscy, Grzybczykowie, Świątkowie, Laszczykowie**, *Kijacy's* names known for a long time, appeared on shop signs. The time had come for rapid development of the village of Piaski Wielkie where construction works covered a modern slaughter-house, neo-Gothic church, power plant and school. During the Second World War the centuries-old occupation of *Kijacy* gained special rank. They became the feeders of the war-stricken society. Only the restrictions of the Stalinist times and the economic absurdity of socialism destroyed the *Kijacy's* craft of the Podgórze villages. Even today in Piaski Wielkie, incorporated into Kraków in 1941, one can see the butchers' and cold meat makers' house built from the common funds of the local butchers.

That's history. What about the legend?

Legend has it that ages ago, during the reign of Casimir the Great, the areas between Kraków and Bochnia were covered by a thick forest known as the *Black Forest*. It was there that the royal troop went hunting, often headed by the King himself. The game was supposedly to be flayed by a *Lascyk*, an inhabitant of the settlement spread on the clearing situated at the top of the *Czajna* hill. Soon he became the favourite of the court's equerry who enjoyed the perfectly prepared meat.

Unfortunately, one time *Lascyk* took his meat products to Kraków hoping to sell them on the market. The city guards stopped him at the gates, and – since he was not a member of the butchers' guild – took away his meat and threw him away. This saddened the equerry who did not intend to resign from supplying the court with *Lascyk's* cold meats. He sent the latter a message to come up with a way to provide the goods to Wawel. *Lascyk* thought, then thought some more ... and came up with an idea. He cut out long sticks, hollowed them out and ... stuck with sausages. Then he reached Wawel uninterrupted. When he took out his goods out of the sticks, he was noticed by the king himself who appreciated the butcher's wit and granted all



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Kraków**

inhabitants of Piaski with the right to bring meat to Kraków. That is why these butchers were called *Kijacy*.

In fact, the name *Kijak* originated from the fact that they hanged the parts of meat and pork fat on sticks. That is why the housekeepers who went to buy meat from *Kijacy* used to say that they go for *sochaczki* (from the Polish word 'socha' meaning 'club,' 'stick'). As stated before, in the 19th century the *Kijak*'s stick became an inseparable element of attire. It is said that when a *Kijak* took oxen from the breeder on credit, he pawned his stick. Then, no-one doubted that he would settle his debt, because a stick was to a *Kijak* like a sabre to a nobleman.

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