

# Spoon rack



- Author highlander Maciej Goncorz (Gonciok) Hodok
- Date of production mid-19th century
- Place of creation Międzyzcerwienne, Poland
- Dimensions length: base: 49.5 cm, facing wall: 50 cm, hanger: 19.5 cm, width: base: 6 cm, facing wall: 8cm, hanger: 7 cm
- ID no. E/382/MT
- Museum [The Dr. Tytus Chałubiński Tatra Museum in Zakopane](#)
- Subjects [daily life](#), [rural areas](#), [sculpted](#), [mountain](#)
- Technique [sculpture](#), [engraving](#)
- Material [sycamore wood](#)
- Collector Józef Lesiecki
- Acquired date 1920
- Object copyright The Dr. Tytus Chałubiński Tatra Museum in Zakopane
- Digital images copyright public domain
- Digitalisation RDW MIC, Małopolska's Virtual Museums project
- Tags [rzeźba](#), [techniki zdobnicze](#), [życie codzienne](#), [3D](#), [łyżki](#), [rzemiosło](#), [3D plus](#)

Spoon rack — a small narrow wooden shelf with holes for spoons, covered in the front with a decoratively carved board, used for storing spoons; hung on the wall of the room. It comes from Józef Lesiecki's collection created in Zakopane in the years 1912–1914, and was transferred to the collections of the Tatra Museum in 1920.

Józef Lesiecki (1886–1914), carpenter and wood carver, graduate from the School of Wood Industry in Zakopane, excellent mountaineer and skier, Tatra rescuer. He earned his living in Zakopane by making wooden souvenirs. In the years 1912–1914, he collected heritage items related to the Podhale folk art which he later donated in his will to the Tatra Museum. Together with several other collectors from Zakopane he was an active member of the Folklore Section of the Tatra Society founded in 1911 by Bronisław Piłsudski, which cooperated with the Tatra Museum. During field expeditions the members of the Section acquired exhibits mostly for their own collections, but also they also made purchases for the museum collection with the money received by the Museum Board from Alfonsyna Dzieduszycka of Lviv (600 crowns) for the expansion of the ethnographic collections, even before the establishment of the Section. Folklore Section. All private collections of that period, as well as collections created in Zakopane at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century included spoon racks (Polish: *łyżnik*), but Józef Lesiecki showed particular interest in them and collected the great number of 54 spoon racks. During World War I, Lesiecki fought in the Polish Legions and died in the battle of Łowczówek near Tarnów. His collection of 183 exhibits was taken over by the Museum in 1920.

In this collection we present an old Podhale spoon rack made by highlander Maciej Goncorz (or Gonciok) Hodok and bought by Józef Lesiecki from Jan Godzek in the village of Międzyzyczewienne.

The collection of 589 spoon racks is one of the largest and most valuable features in the collections at the Tatra Museum, and is comparable in numbers only with the collections of Podhale outfits, historical and modern glass paintings and ceramics. It includes priceless specimens collected in Podhale by private collectors from the 1880s to World War I, and subsequently donated to the Museum in Zakopane or purchased by the Museum. From private ethnographic collections the Museum received carefully selected, impressive nineteenth-century spoon racks of great beauty, originality and rich ornaments that probably hang in the white rooms of highlanders' cottages. Let us have a look at one of them.

It is a spoon rack made of sycamore maple wood. It consists of three parts: base, facing wall and hanging fixture. The base has the form of a horizontal, rectangular plank with thirteen round holes for spoons placed in one row. The facing wall, also in the form of a rectangular plank, is fitted to the base at a straight angle in the middle of its height with three sycamore maple pegs whose heads are visible at the front of the spoon rack (the connection was later reinforced with two nails). The face is adorned with deep-seated geometrical carvings from the bottom to more or less three quarters of its height, with open-work cuts along the top edge. The carving decoration comprises parallel, horizontal and vertical straight and broken lines made of tiny indents that divide the surface into eight nearly square fields. These fields are filled with six-pointed stars embedded in a circle, known as rosettes. The open-work ornament consists of cut-through, intersecting semicircles, and tiny two-indent protrusions stemming from the contact points of semicircles and sticking above the top edge of the facing wall. In the middle of the edge at the back of the base of the spoon rack is a trapezoid opening where the hanging fixture is placed vertically and then attached with two pegs. Decorated with wood carvings, the entire hanging fixture is cut out from a single plank and has quite a complex form. Its bottom with the opening used to hang the spoon rack is cut into a triangle whose apex features an open-work rosette, a six-point star in a circular rim. In the rosette there are two fully symmetrical circles, each crowned with a bird profile figure; the birds are turned to each other with their beaks. The rosette circle and two small circles have a geometrical ornament emphasising the form of these elements; in the star rim it is a constant broken line made of indents, and on the circle surface there are indents placed in one line along their edge and a dot in the middle of the circle.

This spoon rack was found in the field by the above-mentioned Józef Lesiecki, who supported himself with souvenir production since 1904. When making them, he used the old Podhale patterns drawn upon his collections. He frequently copied highlanders' home equipment, mainly spoon racks. "When he could not buy the coveted spoon rack because the highlander owner did not want to part with this memorial heritage item or when the collector lacked money, 'Lesik' borrowed the spoon rack from gazda and, outside of his regular working hours and frequently at night, he copied the old specimen and traded the copy for the original or, in exchange for the authentic item, offered his own spoon rack which preserved

the old highlander carving and ornamentation tradition. He marked the copies and his own products in the invisible places with small letters of his name and the date so as to protect collectors from buying the allegedly folk products,” wrote Juliusz Zborowski many years later – an associate of the Tatra Museum since 1918 – in his article on *Z dziejów ludoznawstwa i muzealnictwa na Podhalu: Sekcja ludoznawcza Towarzystwa Tatrzańskiego (From the History of Folk and Museum Studies in Podhale: Folklore Section of the Tatra Society)* (1911–1919).” In his memoirs, Wojciech Brzega also noted that Lesiecki exchanged the spoon racks found in the Podhale cottages for copies made by himself that were later often sold by housekeepers as old spoon racks to other collectors.

In the end, let me remind you that Stanisław Witkiewicz assigned a spoon rack with a symbolical role in the birth of the Zakopane style created by him. In 1906 he wrote that “a happy hand that brought the first spoon rack from the darkness of the cottage to the light of the sun and the thought kindled the spark from which a great fire started to burn to reach its flames to the remotest corners of Poland.” He believed that spoon racks concentrated the entire wealth of highlander ornaments and they were the most abundant source of the highlander decorative style. The form and rich carving ornamentation of the Podhale spoon rack were introduced by Stanisław Witkiewicz as a decorative element to the Zakopane-style villas (e.g., banisters of verandas and balconies), and furniture and interior decoration elements (curtain rods) completed according to his design. Decorations inspired by spoon racks may also be observed in the altar of Our Lady of Rosary in the Church of the Holy Family in Zakopane.

Elaborated by Zofia Rak (The Dr. Tytus Chałubiński Tatra Museum in Zakopane), © all rights reserved

See also [spoons from Cecylia Chrzanowska’s collection](#) from the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków in the collection from Małopolska’s Virtual Museums.

## **What was the spoon rack for and what were the favourite patterns of Podhale wood carvers?**

The spoon rack was one of the elements of the traditional furnishing of a Podhale cottage. It usually hung between the entrance door from the hall and the dish shelf in the black room, which was called thus because of the colour of the smoked walls. This room catered to the everyday life of a highlanders' family; it served as a bedroom, kitchen, workshop and storage for all kinds of farm equipment and tools. A spoon rack, or several spoon racks in wealthier households, was also hung in the white room, which served as a place for meetings and family celebrations. Therefore, in the black room there was usually one spoon rack for everyday use, and in the white room there were several spoon racks with new spoons so that there would always be a sufficient number of spoons for the more numerous guest groups like wedding guests, and so that there would be no need to borrow spoons from the neighbours.

Similar to other wooden equipment, everyday use spoon racks were made by nearly all men in the Podhale region. Those less talented with wood processing could order them from carpenters and joiners dealing also with wood carvings. The spoon rack was often inherited from ancestors. Sometimes a boy offered a beautifully ornamented spoon rack made by himself to a girl whom he desired to become his wife, which was the expression of his feelings and marriage intentions.

Spoon racks were made mainly of sycamore maple wood, decoratively carved and sometimes painted. The enormous variety and richness of ornaments dominated by geometrical and plant motifs and open-work indents caused that, apart from their basic functional use, the spoon racks were also assigned an aesthetic function in a highlanders' cottage.

A typical Podhale spoon rack consisted of a horizontal plank, known as a base, with cut out holes for spoons and a second plank covering the base from the front and placed at a straight angle to it. Frequently, there was also a hanging fixture attached vertically to the base or the base was extended on the sides to form the so-called lugs where nails were hammered in to attach the spoon rack to a wall. The front and hanging fixtures of Podhale spoon racks were always decorated with geometrical and plant ornaments carved with a knife or chisel (the highlanders called them *cyfrowane*), while the base was not decorated as it performed a utility function.

Most spoon racks were wholly or partly made from sycamore maple wood. The spoon racks made of two or three types of wood featured usually sycamore maple wood for the carved fronts and hanging fixtures, and beech, ash or spruce wood for the bases. The wooden pegs linking the spoon racks' front and base were made of yew-tree, beech, sycamore maple and ash wood.

Podhale spoon racks varied in length (sometimes they even reached 100 cm) and the number of holes for spoons (from several to several dozen). These holes were mostly round, and placed in one, two, or even three rows opposite to one another or alternately. The hanging fixtures of spoon racks had various forms, starting from a simple circle to more original forms like a two-headed eagle, shrine, or heart-shaped ornament known as a *parzenica*.

The geometrical motifs are most commonly used in Podhale ornaments and, therefore, they also dominated the carved ornaments of spoon racks. The geometrical ornament was comprised usually of six-point stars inscribed in a circle, known as rosettes, indents and a heart-shaped motif of a *parzenica*. The spoon racks often featured an open-work decoration, such as cut-through circles, arches and semicircles, hearts, triangles, crosses and windows shaped as rectangles and shrines. The open-work cuts generally appeared along the top edge, and sometimes the bottom edge, of the spoon rack front. Plant ornaments were less common in the decoration of spoon racks. These were dominated by the styled chalice-shaped flower, the so-called *leluja*, while branches with leaves (grooves) or needles (known as *cetyna*, *jedliczka*) were less common, and a corn ear or ground pine appeared quite sporadically. Apart from the geometrical and plant motifs, spoon rack ornaments also featured some symbolical motifs, such as a cross in various forms, a chalice, the Host and the IHS monogram. Individual decorative elements were combined differently on the surface of spoon racks to form various stripe ornaments or a symmetrical central system of decorations. Some zoomorphic motifs appeared only on the hanging fixtures of spoon racks, e.g., horse heads cut at the sides of the hanging fixture, or small bird figures at the end of the hanging fixture. The Podhale wood carvers adorned the spoon racks with a straight sharp-edged clasp knife and then later on with a chisel since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Other tools used for ornamentation were a pair of compasses and a drill. They carved the surface of spoon racks delicately making shallow indents to the wood, which allowed them to achieve such a subtle ornament. It is worth adding that the beautifully decorated spoon racks were hung in highlanders' cottages in the white rooms. The everyday use spoon racks from the black rooms were simpler and less decorative.

Elaborated by Zofia Rak (The Dr. Tytus Chałubiński Tatra Museum in Zakopane), © all rights reserved

See the [spoon rack](#) from the Tatra Museum in the collection from Małopolska's Virtual Museums.

See also [spoons from Cecylia Chrzanowska's collection](#) from the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków in the collection from Małopolska's Virtual Museums.

Tags: [The Dr. Tytus Chałubiński Tatra Museum in Zakopane, tradition, sculpture, The Podhale, cottage, food, Zakopane, everyday life, highlanders, disappearing trades, © all rights reserved](#)