



Review Paper

**Henryk Jordan – polish doctor,
friend of children and youth**

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: November 18, 2024

Accepted: January 13, 2025

Available online: June 9, 2025

Keywords

physical education

Henryk Jordan

Jordan park

Doi

<https://doi.org/10.29089/paom/200042>

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Physical education ensures proper education for children and adolescents, as well as their personality, cultural, and social development. The pioneer of such a holistic approach to youth education in Poland was Dr. Henryk Jordan.

Aim: The aim of this study is to examine the biography of Henryk Jordan.

Material and methods: A literature review was conducted using the Google Scholar database with selected keywords.

Results and discussion: Henryk Jordan (1842–1907) after numerous internships abroad, he assumed the role of Head of the Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics at the Jagiellonian University. Jordan's second life mission was to promote health-oriented behaviors among children and adolescents. Henryk Jordan park featured numerous sports fields, workshops, and provided continuous medical care. Patriotic education for youth was also emphasized. Furthermore, in 1887, he initiated the Association for Feeding Poor Children with Warm Meals, and in 1892, he assumed the leadership of the Association for Assisting Poor Students of Public Schools. For 26 years, he served as a Kraków councilor, primarily engaging in the sanitary commission.

Conclusions: Henryk Jordan made an invaluable contribution to the development of physical education in Poland. He fostered the advancement of hygiene and patriotic values among the youngest citizens of the city. He was also committed to alleviating poverty among his compatriots.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 18th century, education in Polish territories underwent significant changes. In 1773, the Commission of National Education was established. Among its recommendations was the need for reforming physical education, aligning with the progressive ideas of Enlightenment pedagogy.¹

The first modern Olympic Games held in Athens in 1896 marked an emblematic moment in the history of physical education.² In Poland, favorable conditions for the development of this field emerged after 1815 with the establishment of the Free City of Kraków. At that time, schools introduced sports activities for children, though these were generally unattractive to students. In 1817, the Jagiellonian University (UJ) offered classes in horseback riding, dancing, and fencing, though they did not gain popularity. After 1849, sports activities were no longer held in secondary schools. They were instead conducted by private instructors, mainly graduates of the JU Faculty of Medicine.³

Physical education provides children and adolescents with proper education and fosters their personal, cultural, and social development. Henryk Jordan was a pioneer of this holistic approach to youth development in Poland.⁴ He critically examined the state of physical culture and education system in this area, and subsequently introduced changes in this regard.⁵

2. AIM

The aim of this study was to examine the biography of Dr. Henryk Jordan, from his youth and studies to his work on behalf of children and adolescents. The study also includes a description of his medical career and his role in shaping positive social attitudes.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The Google Scholar database was searched using the keyword ‘Henryk Jordan.’ Both Polish and English texts were analyzed, with no time restrictions applied in excluding studies. Priority was given to peer-reviewed articles and authoritative sources.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Early years of Henryk Jordan

Henryk Jordan was born on July 23, 1842, in Przemyśl. He completed lower secondary school in Tarnopol and attended upper secondary school in Tarnów.^{6–9} He came from a poor, landowning family⁷ and was raised by his mother, Samuela née Wędrychowska, who ran a boarding school for girls. His father, Bonifacy, was a private teacher and passed away while Henryk was still young^{1,8,10}. Henryk, as a high school student, was supporting himself by tutoring.^{1,10} In his youth, Henryk

participated in patriotic demonstrations. He left school of his own accord and in 1862 moved to Trieste to continue his studies^{4,7,8,10}, despite initially not knowing Italian. In 1862⁸ or 1863^{4,9,10} he completed his secondary education.^{4,8–10}

Henryk went to Vienna to begin medical studies, which he later continued in Kraków. However, financial and health difficulties forced him to leave Poland again for work. He moved to Berlin, and then to New York, where he earned money by playing the piano in local restaurants. In New York, he was introduced to professional physical education^{4,7,10} and began practicing sports such as football, boxing, running, jumping, and sailing.⁹

In 1870, he married Maria née Gebhardt⁷, who passed away in 1900.⁸ They had one son, who died at the age of six.^{7,8} After this profound loss, Henryk Jordan began his social work. His second wife was Helena (née Kleczkowska), who died in 1913.⁸

4.2. Gynecology and obstetrics

During his stay in New York, Henryk began practicing gynecology and obstetrics. He established a midwifery school and continued his training in the United States, Berlin, and England. In 1870, he returned to Kraków, where he passed his diploma examination.^{7,9,10} He went back to Vienna for a six-month internship.¹⁰ He was often summoned to deliveries at the imperial court in Vienna and served as a physician for Maria Isabella of Habsburg (1834–1901).⁹ After completing his internship, he took a position as an assistant at the Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics at the UJ.^{4,10} He also earned a doctorate in medical sciences. In 1874, he left this position to establish his own medical practice,^{4,7} which allowed him to achieve a comfortable lifestyle.⁷ The year 1881 was a turning point for him – not only did he earn the title of docent, but he also gained a position on the Kraków City Council.^{7,8} In 1884, he became president of the Gynecological Society. The following year he returned to the department, this time as its head.^{9,10} From numerous internships abroad, he was familiar with the standards of gynecological and obstetric clinics in Europe and the United States. He attempted to introduce these standards in Kraków, but financial limitations prevented hospital modernization. He invested his own funds, installing a hot water pipeline in the delivery and operating rooms. He published a work titled *How to Prevent Puerperal Fever*, which he distributed among poor families. He advocated for the construction of county hospitals with infectious disease, gynecology, and obstetrics wards, due to inadequate healthcare and high mortality rates. ‘legislators must understand that for both the country and the state, the highest capital is human life—of course, healthy human life.’⁹ Jordan was appointed professor in 1890 and later became the dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the UJ.⁷ Many obstetricians trained under his guidance,⁹ for example Zofia Garlicka (1874–1942).¹¹

4.3. Physical education and children’s health

Henryk, beyond his medical practice, he had another mission: promoting health-conscious behaviors among children and adolescents. On March 26, 1888,^{1,8} or March 28, 1888,^{5,7}

he submitted a request to the Kraków City Council for the lease of the Kraków Błonia grounds.^{1,3,5,7,8} Perhaps due to his title as Councilor of the Habsburg Court in Vienna,⁹ his request was approved. On June 21, 1889, at a special session of the Kraków City Council, a document was signed for Dr. Jordan's donation to the city of Kraków of eight marble busts of distinguished Poles.⁵ The park officially opened in the spring of 1889.⁹ This indicates that between 1888 and 1889, Henryk Jordan organized and funded the construction of the Henryk Jordan Municipal Park.^{4,10}

Visitors entered the park via a wooden bridge, greeted by a gate with the inscription 'Dr. Jordan's Municipal Park.'⁷ The park was exceptionally modern. It included 12 sports fields.^{1,10} It was enriched with gymnastics equipment purchased abroad,² and in winter, it even had an ice rink.^{3,5} The park's modernity was also evidenced by its facilities, which included showers^{1,7} and a teachers' changing room.⁵ In its early years, around half a thousand children regularly attended sports activities there. By 1891, this number had grown to 13,000, and by 1901, to 32,000.^{1,10} Outdoor activities in groups of 35 students³ took place in the afternoons from May to October, and during the colder months, they were held in special pavilions. Military exercises were held on Saturdays.² During the 90-minute classes, students rotated between fields and sang patriotic songs while marching.⁹ Participants could enjoy the park's amenities for free, while parents voluntarily made donations to support improvements.¹² Sunday sports games and activities were preceded by personal hygiene lessons, aimed at developing healthy habits.⁹ An innovative feature of the park was the permanent medical supervision ensuring the children's safety.⁴

The earliest mentions in the press about Jordan's Park are found in a lengthy article titled: On Children's Play-

grounds and Henryk Jordan's Park in Kraków. It was published in the Vienna monthly *Humanität* on May 3, 1890. The German-language press pointing out that it was the only initiative of its kind in Europe. At the same time, there were articles aimed at warning Germans about the risks of trips by Poles from Upper Silesia to Kraków, where, according to the article's author, Poles were inspired toward propagandist activities.¹³

It is believed that dr. Jordan introduced football to Polish lands. In 1990, Ryszard Wasztyl wrote: 'in late 1890, football appeared for the first time on Polish soil in Dr. Jordan's Park [...]. On Sunday afternoon, August 30, 1891, the first official football demonstration with an audience took place in Dr. Jordan's Park in Kraków.'¹⁴ In 1905, a football match with a large audience was held, featuring two teams: youth from Kraków and the then-victorious team from Lwów.¹⁵ Football gained great popularity, leading to the founding in 1906 of two sports clubs, the oldest still existing in Poland today: Wisła Kraków and Cracovia.⁶

In the park were 44 busts of distinguished Poles.^{4,10} In their presence, dr. Jordan delivered lessons and brief lectures on history.^{1,4,7,9,10} Among the youth, traits such as chivalry, integrity, heroism, helpfulness, and camaraderie were instilled.¹ Over time, dr. Jordan initiated the establishment of additional parks,¹⁰ for example in Nowy Sącz⁶, Nowy Targ, Lwów, Tarnopol, Warsaw,¹⁰ and Toruń.¹⁶ Dr. Jordan frequently advocated for the popularization of activities for children through the Gymnastic Society 'Sokół',⁷⁴ which was founded in 1867 in Lwów.^{1,17} The society's main objective was the spiritual and physical regeneration of the Polish nation.^{3,15}

Dr. Jordan also worked to gain social recognition and respect for gym teachers, encouraging them to further their education through a course organized by the UJ, beginning

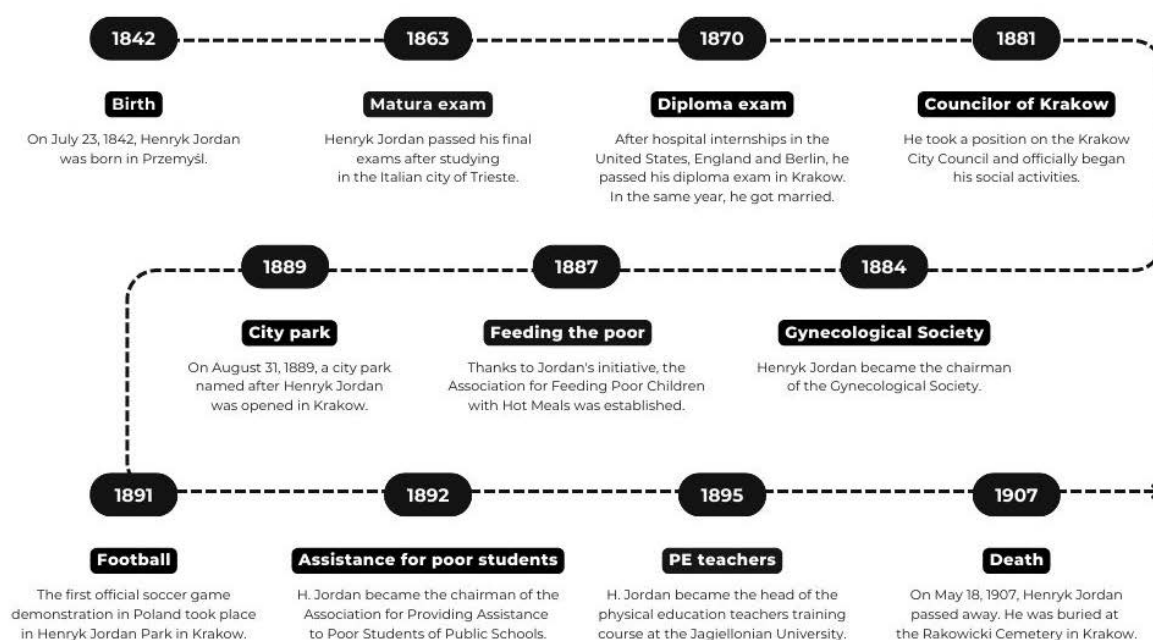


Figure 1. A timeline showing the most important events in Henryk Jordan's life.

in 1895 at his initiative.^{4,7} On February 16, 1893, a consilium (on the establishment of physical education courses) was held, chaired by Prof. Dr. Franciszek Schwarzenberg-Czerny (1847–1917). It was decided to establish a two-year course under the supervision of Prof. Jordan.³ The first scientific course in gymnastics for prospective physical education teachers began on October 20, 1895. Over the next 19 years, nine two-year courses were conducted, with the last one interrupted by the outbreak of World War I. In Galicia, the UJ was the only institution training physical education teachers, with Henryk Jordan directing the course until his death.¹⁵ Figure 1 presents the dates of the most significant events in Henryk Jordan's life.

4.4. Work for the poor

In 1887, dr. Jordan initiated the establishment of the Association for Providing Warm Meals to Poor Children. In 1892, he took over the leadership of the Association for Helping Poor Students of Folk Schools. He founded the Society for Affordable Housing for Workers in 1898,⁹ which improved their material conditions as well as their hygiene.^{1,8,10} Dr. Jordan was the president of the Krakow Medical Society and, since 1888, the founder and chairman of the Society for Care and Health,⁸ as well as the founder of the Self-Help Society of Doctors (in 1900)¹⁰ and editor of the Hygiene Guide.⁶ In 1904, he advocated in the Sejm for the construction of a sanatorium for poor patients suffering from tuberculosis and became one of the organizers of the Association for the Fight Against Tuberculosis.⁹ In Dr. Jordan's park, in the so-called milk bar, after finishing their exercises, the youth could have an afternoon snack and drink a glass of milk for free.^{2,5} For 26 years, from 1881 until his death in 1907, Henryk Jordan served as a councilor of Krakow,^{4,7,10} where he was mainly active in the sanitary commission.⁴ He was offered the position of president of Krakow but declined.^{9,10}

4.5. Death and commemoration

Henryk Jordan died on May 18, 1907,^{7,8} as a result of a heart attack due to pneumonia.^{8,10} He was buried in the Rakowicki Cemetery in Krakow,⁷ in section S in the family tomb. Today, the words spoken at Henryk Jordan's grave resonate with emotion and sadness: 'He passed through life with love, rendering immense services to society. He had an active heart, as his feelings did not end in complaints; he cared for daily, gray duties; he was a servant and slave of the institutions he founded.'¹⁴ Twenty-two years after Henryk Jordan's death, Eugeniusz Witold Piasecki (1872–1947) wrote: 'Jordan's merits are so great, his work so original, that his memory has been preserved by naming all such institutions in Poland Jordan Gardens.'¹⁸ These words indicate the multidimensionality of the reform initiated by Henryk Jordan. In the 1950s, the Dr. Henryk Jordan Park Society was established, which still organizes festivals and commemorations of national holidays in the park area.⁸ Figure 2 shows a plaque commemorating Henryk Jordan, located on the wall of the General Secondary School in Szczecin at Wojska Polskiego 119, and Figure 3 depicts the street sign for Henryk Jordan Street in Katowice.

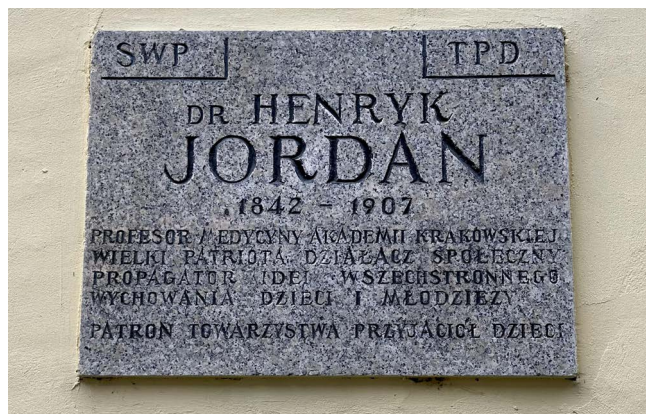


Figure 2. Plaque commemorating Henryk Jordan, located on the wall of the General Secondary School in Szczecin at Wojska Polskiego 119.



Figure 3. The street sign for Henryk Jordan Street in Katowice.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Henryk Jordan popularized physical education in Poland. Through his idealistic and selfless actions, he created a safe space for the development of nationalist values. As a doctor he was aware of the importance of proper nutrition and physical activity in the fresh air for maintaining health. He inspired other cities to build and develop parks as well as sports facilities.

Conflict of interest

None declared.

Funding

None declared.

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