

# Jan Sajdak (1882–1967)

---

## Summary

*T*his biography of Jan Sajdak, one of the most interesting figures in Polish Byzantine Studies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, attempts to present the scholar's fortunes and at the same time to evaluate his academic output, verified in hindsight against Byzantine Studies through the century as a whole. It is based on archives, most of which were returned to a wider public readership after many years. Private archives might offer hope for the future.

The structure of the book was determined by such facts as Sajdak's education, studies, quest for employment, involvement in PAU research projects, his professorial career and the functions associated with it, as well as administrative tasks, organising primary and secondary education after his ejection from the University in 1933, clandestine teaching under German occupation, and finally, his return to Poznań University in 1945. The events in Jan Sajdak's life took place between Burzyn, where he was born in 1882, Tuchów, Tarnów, Kraków, Lwów and finally, Poznań, where he died in 1967.

Jan Sajdak began his philology studies at the Jagellonian University in 1904. His career coincided with the plan of the Polish Academy of Learning (PAU), which in 1905 established its objective of publishing the Greek writings of the Church Fathers. As a result, Sajdak found himself among Poland's eminent classical philologists, who were later to take over this chair at the university in the reborn Polish state. On defending his doctorate, and subsequently his habilitation thesis, Jan Sajdak applied for the post of secondary school teacher, but did not abandon his dream of a university career. Such an opportunity did present itself and in 1916 he took up a post at the University of Lwów. This was the most intensive period of research that Sajdak conducted, both in terms of the number and importance of the studies he carried out.

With the founding of the Piast University in 1919, Jan Sajdak took up the invitation to join this university in Poznań and set about “organising philology studies”. He climbed the ladder at the University of Poznań, becoming rektor in the 1931/32 academic year. However, in 1933, he was dismissed from his position, along with other professors. This decision taken by the Minister of Education and the President of the Republic of Poland was, of course, an act of political revenge (Sajdak sympathised with people’s parties, and for a short time was a formal member of these structures). He was particularly valued by his fellow professors for his organisational abilities and his attempts to put university property in order. He was tireless in building up and organising the library, and thanks to his contacts in the academic world, managed to acquire significant funds for purchasing books.

Jan Sajdak regarded his peaceful election to the post of rektor as an expression of the scholarly community’s faith in him and as a consequence of his defending the university’s prestige “to the very end”. In his inaugural speech, recalling the economic crisis and the subsequent lack of funds for research or purchasing journals, he posed the question “how to cooperate internationally?”

Opening the 8<sup>th</sup> academic year at the University of Poznań, he gave a lecture on “The Educational Views of St. Gregory of Nazianzus”. In it he set out his world view, his vision for Byzantine Studies, and for the humanities as a whole. He perceived the greatness of Byzantine Studies in its synthesis of traditional culture and the new Christian religion. In its initial phase, individuals from Wielkopolska - Kazimierz Morawski and Ludwik Ćwikliński - played a role in elevating philology studies at Polish universities to the European level. This could not have happened without Leon Sternbach, who Sajdak always treated as his master, and Stanisław Witkowski. He also presented August Cieszkowski from Wierzenica as his great patron. This lecture was addressed to students and profesors alike, and clearly emphasised how “Inner contact must sometimes come between teacher and pupil”. Rektor Jan Sajdak referred to the Greek idea of *paidei*, to sources that he quoted copiously in the original, and demonstrated the relevance of Gregory of Nazianzus’s ideas to his times, in which he was required to fulfil the role of tutor for young people.

During the interwar period, he focused his research more intensively on the Latin Church Fathers. His lectures and studies included ones on Minucius Felix’s “Octavius”, published in Poznań in 1925 as volume 2 of the “Writings of the Church Fathers” series edited by J. Sajdak, and also the lecture on Tertulian’s “Apologeticus” along with a monograph on the author, which were ultimately published in 1947 and 1949 respectively. Forced into retirement for political reasons, Jan Sajdak founded a private school, the Collegium Marianum, which he ran successfully until the outbreak of World War II. During the wartime occupation, he devoted himself to clandestine teaching, performing an invaluable service during this time. After the War, he sought to return to his professorial duties at the University of Poznań, often with difficulty.

He went down in the history of classical philology in Poland as the organiser of philology studies in Poznań and, along with Professor W. Klinger, as the founder of the “Poznań School”. Sajdak participated in the work of academic societies and organisations. He was an untiring proponent of Patristics and Byzantine studies. In these fields, he represented Poland at international congresses in Bucharest, Belgrade, Sofia, Athens, Munich and Oslo. He remained a constant ally to young people, both students and those seeking to join the university community. He organised and then headed the Initial Study Year programme, which later became the University of Poznań Preparatory Studies. This form of education was to enable young people to prepare for studying despite the break in studies imposed by wartime occupation.

On returning to the University, he once again became dean of the Faculty of the Humanities. In 1960, at the age of 78, he went into retirement along with all other professors who had reached the age of 70. He is remembered by all those he taught and also in the form of the school named after him in the village where he was born.

Studying Jan Sajdak’s scholarly output, one can state without any doubt that his work on manuscript tradition of Gregory of Nazianzus and Jan Geometres had a significant influence on present-day editions of their critical work. The huge progress in research on manuscripts since the 1920s has meant that analytical studies and subsequent critical works based on them have ultimately replaced Jan Sajdak’s contribution. Only his treatise on the *lexicon Oxoniensis* remains indispensable.

*Translated by Rob Pagett*