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From Academia

With A Little Help From Our Friends

In each issue of Academia magazine, we highlight the accomplishments of Polish researchers. This time, as well, we are proud to showcase truly impressive successes of Polish science, in fields including medicine, physics, archeology, and astronomy.

Obviously, achieving any success requires funding. Other important factors are solid background knowledge, coming up with an original idea, fostering the traits of talent, passion, and commitment, cooperation between team members, and also ensuring the right institutional support. Like business endeavors, research projects demand a certain readiness to take risks. They also require skill at filling out grant applications, and sometimes one also simply needs a stroke of luck: happening upon an up-and-coming research topic at just the right time (or even slightly earlier). The list of requirements is long, and every researcher can add something to it. As editors of Academia magazine, we can add one more ourselves: for research findings to make an impact, they need to be promoted.

Every researcher strives for success, everyone dreams of outpacing the "competition." But a fascinating result, leaving other researchers far behind, can get relegated to relative oblivion if it only gets published in a niche journal. Then, once a similar result appears in a higher-profile publication, the claim "I wrote about that first!" will not make a good impression on anyone, instead only being seen as a sign of frustration, an inability to sufficiently ensure one's own interests.

One gets the impression that we in Poland are unable to boast of our own achievements, the way the French, Americans, and British do. When reporting on a breakthrough operation that gave a patient with a severed spine a chance to walk again (p. 4), the BBC wrote: "Behind those few steps lay the extraordinary efforts of a group of scientists, surgeons and fundraisers in Britain and Poland." In reality, the operation was performed by a Polish team led by Dr. Tabakow, and a crucial contribution was made by Polish researchers from the PAS Institute of Immunology and Experimental Therapy.

It is not true that interesting results always make a big splash. For true scientific success to become a reality, it always takes the proverbial "little help from our friends": the media in the broadest sense, coverage in well-read news portals, and especially articles in English, including in both popular publications and highly prestigious, specialized journals. Sometimes just a good picture of research work can help attract worldwide attention. Polish scientists are learning the importance of good marketing, but there is much work still to be done, and the competition is, as always, fierce.

One might respond: "But is this really so important? Science is an international endeavor, after all." Agreed. But Nobel Prizes and major grants still get awarded to specific researchers from specific countries.

ACADEMIA staff



"The magnificent discovery of the frescos in Faras would have enjoyed less fame if had not included the beautiful portrait of St. Anne, which became world-famous," writes Prof. Zawadzki on p. 50. This wonderful work of art is on display at the newly opened Faras Gallery at the National Museum in Warsaw.