



# UNIVERSITY LIFE

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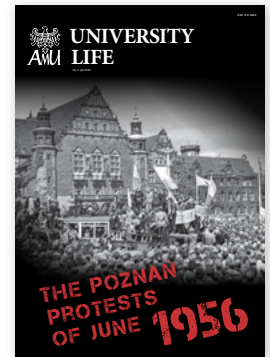
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# CELEBRATING AMU EXCELLENCE



**Prof. Michał Bogdziewicz** from the Faculty of Biology has once again been named the Frontiers Planet Prize National Champion! His winning paper, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS), is titled “Growth decline in European beech associated with temperature-driven increase in reproductive allocation.” “This is great honor for me, and it’s an important signal that research on forests in the context of climate change is relevant not only to ecologists but also, more broadly, to understanding the future of ecosystems,” said Prof. Bogdziewicz.



**AMU Prof. Patryk Borowiak**, Director of the Institute of Slavic Studies, has been appointed chair of the newly established Slavic Studies Forum, a national body that brings together researchers specializing in South and West Slavic languages, literatures, and cultures.



**Prof. Leszek Skrzypczak** from the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science won the Nicolaus Copernicus Polish-German Research Award, also known as the Copernicus Award. The German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP) present this award to individuals most active in Polish-German scientific cooperation who have achieved exceptional research results through that collaboration. Prof. Skrzypczak shared the award with Prof. Dorothee Haroske of Friedrich Schiller University Jena for their nearly twenty years of collaborative research in mathematical analysis and partial differential equations.



## **The Poznań Literary Award for Dorota Masłowska and Justyna Kulikowska**

The annual Poznań Literary Award is presented in two categories: for outstanding contributions to Polish literature and culture (the Adam Mickiewicz Prize) and for significant, innovative achievements in literature, the humanities, and the promotion of literary culture (the Stanisław Barańczak Scholarship). AMU Rector Prof. Bogumiła Kaniewska announced the award committee's decision during a press conference at Collegium Minus.

This year, Dorota Masłowska received the Adam Mickiewicz Prize for her novel *Magiczna rana*, published by Karakter Publishing House, as well as for her entire body of work. The Stanisław Barańczak Scholarship was awarded to poet Justyna Kulikowska for the collection *Wnyki dla światła*, which is part of the book *Wiersze zebrane (2018–2025)* published by the Provincial Public Library and Cultural Animation Center in Poznań.

## **The Physics of Frozen and Science Communication**

The AMU Faculty of Physics and Astronomy project, "The Physics of Frozen," received an award in the Science Communication category at the 2026 competition by the Association for Public Relations and Promotion of Polish Universities (Stowarzyszenie PRom).

The project showed that science can be presented in an engaging and captivating way that is close to a child's imagination. During the December presentations, participants were transported to a winter world inspired by the *Frozen* franchise, where characters performed impressive experiments and showed how knowledge of physics helps us overcome everyday challenges. The project was made possible thanks to support provided by the Poznań Science and Technology Park of the AMU Foundation as part of the FUND\_AKCJA competition.



## **Ultrasound Tongue Imaging System**

The AMU Faculty of English has acquired a portable ultrasound machine that allows linguists to visualize and measure the movement and shape of the tongue during speech.

Ultrasound tongue imaging is a state-of-the-art, non-invasive method adapted from medical practice that provides real-time insights into the kinematics of speech articulation. In this method, a probe placed under the speaker's chin emits ultrasound waves that travel through soft tissue and bounce back as returning echoes. These echoes are then used to generate an image of the oral cavity, which reveals the position and contour of the tongue during articulation. The method has vast research potential in experimental phonetics and phonology. It enables the investigation of linguistic phenomena such as coarticulation, assimilation, and speech timing.



## ***AMU Paves the Way for a Triple European Degree***

**Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań has signed an agreement in Strasbourg with the University of Strasbourg and the University of Southern Denmark to launch a triple master's degree program.**

The EPICUR Master's in European Geopolitics, International Security and Law is a new program that enables students to earn three degrees while studying in Poznań, Odense and Strasbourg. The agreement marks an important step in strengthening international academic cooperation and developing innovative European educational pathways.



## ***Run, Ride & Roll***

**Participants in this year's AMU Spring Warm-Up ran, cycled, and rollerbladed over 64,000 kilometers. Both AMU students and staff attended the event.**

They were tasked with covering the greatest distance over the course of the entire month (April 4 to May 4, 2026), and their efforts were credited to their respective AMU faculty. The Faculty of Physics and Astronomy took first place in the rankings, with its representatives covering a total of 12,036.92 kilometers. The Faculty of Sociology took second place with 9,245.33 kilometers, and the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science took third place with 7,414.25 kilometers.

# JUNE 1956: THE PRICE OF HUMAN DIGNITY

How much must a person sacrifice to preserve their dignity? The residents of Poznań learned the answer in June 1956. Before World War II, Poznań was one of the wealthiest cities in Poland. However, its prosperity was not solely measured by income levels, the number of apartments with plumbing, lit streets, shops, or workshops. The city's wealth also stemmed from decades of focusing on the development of society in the spirit of organic work, resulting in spiritual, mental, and cultural wealth. This helped Poznań survive the aggressive policies of the German authorities at the turn of the 20th century, which sought to eradicate Polish identity.

The first months of the Nazi occupation in 1939 brought widespread and bloody terror to Poznań's Polish residents. Deportations, property confiscations, arrests, and the physical extermination of the population contributed to the collapse of the city's social structure. The destruction of the city center in the winter of 1945 left many families who had survived the occupation without their remaining belongings. Like the rest of the country, Poznań became significantly poorer in every respect.

Before WWII, the communists were not a political force to be reckoned with in Poznań, and residents associated them with the murder of Father Stanisław Streich in a Luboń church in February 1938. After the war, the communists seized power by force. While Poznań's Old Town was successfully rebuilt, the attempt to establish a new order based on exploitation and violence certainly failed. Rhetoric about social equality stood in stark contrast to the ruling party's persecution of various social groups. Slogans about the importance of workers and their role in the country's development were not reflected in the decisions of the party and state authorities. The ever-widening gap between the realities of daily life and the empty rhetoric of the ideals proclaimed by the communists gave rise to increasingly visible tensions.

The young generation of workers had no experience organizing collective protests. Accounts of strikes in April 1920 and October 1923 were of little help. Workers at Poznań factories, particularly at the Joseph Stalin Metal Works (formerly the Hipolit Cegielski Metal Works), were forced to work excessive hours for no additional pay. Supporting a family was



**AMU PROF. RAFAŁ WITKOWSKI**  
Vice-Rector for International Cooperation

nearly impossible, and widespread impoverishment became the norm. Appeals for negotiations were rejected, and when negotiations did take place, government representatives did not intend to keep their promises. Feeling deceived and lied to, and exhausted from overwork, the workers took to the streets of Poznań on June 28, 1956, in a peaceful demonstration. Soon, others joined the marching protesters. Nearly one hundred thousand people gathered in the square near the former Imperial Castle. The workers and demonstrators did not convey a political agenda; they focused on issues that mattered to them: "We want bread!" and "We want a normal life!"

How did the representatives of the ruling party, whose name included the word "Workers" and proclaimed that workers were the nation's leading force, respond? The local Citizens' Militia and troops from the Poznań garrison were immediately mobilized, and the first shots were fired around 10:40 a.m. near the Public Security Office building. The peaceful demonstration then turned into an unequal battle in the city streets between trained troops and demonstrators who had seized weapons. The pacification of the rebellious city lasted until the morning of June 30 and was made possible by deploying nearly 10,000 soldiers and 400 tanks to Poznań. Against such forces, the demonstrators stood no chance.

Romek Strzałkowski, a thirteen-year-old boy, remains a symbol of the victims to this day. While not all of the circumstances surrounding his death have been clarified, it is known that he was killed by a bullet fired by a Public Security officer while he was picking up a white-and-red flag from the ground.

According to communist propaganda, the events in Poznań were instigated by "imperialist agents" and the "reactionary underground." Many protesters were convicted in trials, and the communist regime erased the memory of those tragic moments. However, these actions had the opposite effect. The residents of Poznań have remembered, and continue to remember, those who stood up for human dignity. No dictatorship or evil force can take that away. The Poznań June 1956 Monument reminds us that defending human dignity sometimes comes at the highest price so future generations will not live in bondage. ■



## WHEN WORKERS TOOK TO THE STREETS

Ewa Konarzewska-Michalak interviews **Prof. Stanisław Jankowiak**  
from the AMU Faculty of History.

### Why did the 1956 protests break out in Poznań?

That is a very good question. The documents from the authorities at the time make it clear that they expected protests in Łódź or Silesia, where huge concentrations of workers were located. However, they did not expect protests in law-abiding Poznań.

Why Poznań? To understand this, one must look back to the period of the Partitions, when the cult of work emerged as a model initially linked to defending Polish identity. Even then, however, an evolutionary path toward improving one's livelihood was taking shape, focused on achieving the overarching goal of securing one's rights at minimal cost so there would be no casualties. This attitude persisted throughout the interwar period and after World War II.

It is no coincidence that the workers of Poznań's largest factories—the Cegielski Metal Works and the Railway Rolling Stock Repair Works—were described as a working-class aristocracy who worked hard and were fairly compensated. This attitude did not immediately clash with the communist chaos because the initial period following a major upheaval is usually easy to manage. Displaced inhabitants of Greater Poland returned home after World War II. The first thing they cared about was having a place to live and work. They renovated apartments and

helped factories get up and running again. They saw the end of the Nazi occupation as liberation.

However, the situation began to change when the authorities decided to be straightforward — it was time to build socialism. After the political opposition was crushed and Prime Minister Stanisław Mikołajczyk fled Poland, the implementation of the Soviet Union's policy began, and this meant the nationalization of everything, including small craft workshops. People lost their jobs and moved to larger cities. However, there was no investment in transportation or housing, and even the water and sewer systems malfunctioned. State-run stores did not replace the closed private ones, and the ones that did operate were poorly stocked. The farther away from the war, the more stability society expected, but it never came.

People became impatient and discouraged, especially regarding the system of work organization in factories, which was not rational. Workers were forced into hard and sometimes senseless labor. They were lured by the prospect of receiving bonuses if they exceeded their quotas, which would allow them to live better. From 1949 onward, this combination of factors created fertile ground for protests to explode among workers at the Cegielski Metal Works in Poznań.

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It was no coincidence that the protests occurred there; it was the largest industrial plant in Greater Poland and a key facility that was systematically expanded and produced weapons. Some said that the Cegielski Works was the conscience of Greater Poland. Whatever the Cegielski workers did, workers at other plants followed suit. They set the course of action.

## What was the immediate cause of the protests?

I disagree with the theory that a single spark caused the explosion because the events leading up to the strike took time.

After Joseph Stalin's death and a certain thaw, the system was still strong, so no one dared to protest openly, but the workers were not talking about things during their lunch breaks. This was the first sign that something strange was happening. Then, they approached the trade unions and the factory committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. Admittedly, this did not yield results, but discussions about the new five-year plan emerged as an impetus. The previous six-year plan was coming to an end. According to predictions, it was supposed to increase the standard of living by 60 percent. However, with very low wages ranging from 500 to 1,200 zlotys and high prices, workers could not afford much.

The discussions took place amid a changing atmosphere as de-Stalinization had begun in the Soviet Union. Following Polish Ministry of Public Security Colonel Józef Światło's defection to the West and the "Behind the Scenes of the Secret Police and the Party" series on Radio Free Europe, based on Światło's revelations, the Polish United Workers' Party condemned the errors and distortions. A psychological breakthrough occurred, the significance of which cannot be overstated. At the Cegielski Works, nearly 5,000 amendments to the five-year plan were submitted. Until recently, no one would have dared to do so. The authorities listened, of course, but had no intention of implementing the amendments. However, the fact that people were becoming active was a result of the fear barrier breaking down.

When it became clear that the party could not act, discontent began to organize within Cegielski. The culmination was the sending of a 30-person delegation to Warsaw. There, the situation looked completely different because the Minister of Machine Industry, Roman Fidelski, suddenly agreed to cooperate. The workers were most angered by the fact that their payroll taxes had been calculated incorrectly, resulting in a loss of 11 million zlotys. The minister said that some of this money would be refunded to them. However, the next day, June 27, at factory meetings at the Cegielski Works, the minister told a different story. The First Secretary of the Voivodship Committee, Leon Stasiak, pulled him aside and said, "Comrade Minister, we won't achieve anything here with propaganda alone. What can we give the workers?" "Nothing," he heard in response.

## Why did the strike take place in June?

At that time, the Poznań International Fair was held once a year for a month. Foreign guests, exhibitors, journalists,

and—let's give the authorities their due—spies and agents came to Poznań to find out what the situation in the country was like, not to incite a revolt. This particular moment was significant for the workers because they believed the authorities would have to reckon with the fact that visitors from the West would spread news of what happened in Poznań across the globe.

To this day, I wonder why no attempt was made to calm the situation. In my opinion, it was because a power struggle had broken out between factions within the Polish United Workers' Party. Minister Fidelski could have promised the workers anything, but he did not. Instead, the workers were told to go back to work, which was an obvious invitation to protest. That's the kind of decision workers would make. On June 28, at 6:30 a.m., the factory siren sounded at the gate—a signal to the city that the Cegielski workers were taking to the streets. It was comical to see First Secretary Leon Stasiak try to stop the 10,000-person march, which was impossible to halt. En route, the workers encouraged workers from other factories to join the protest.

This was a turning point because, until then, the workers had been afraid of their own shadows. At the same time, their determination grew because they knew they had broken all the rules, and if they failed to resolve the issues, they would face serious consequences. According to the Polish Small Penal Code of 1946, each of their offenses carried a sentence ranging from five years in prison to the death penalty.

The protesters went to the building of the Voivodship Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. Next door was the seat of the Municipal National Council in the Imperial Castle, and the Collegium Iuridicum nearby housed the Voivodship Citizens'



Militia Headquarters, the actual center of power. While the workers did not want to start an uprising or overthrow the system, they did want their demands to be met. They were now demanding talks with Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz or First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party Edward Ochab.

### Could bloodshed have been prevented at that stage?

Yes, if the authorities had been committed to resolving the issue. However, they were not. Let's review the timeline. Small groups of workers began gathering in Adam Mickiewicz Square at 9:30 a.m. However, an alarm sounded at the Biedrusko military base as early as 8:00 a.m., and a meeting of the Politburo was convened in Warsaw at 10:00 a.m. Earlier, Konstantin Rokossovsky, the Minister of National Defense at the time, approached Edward Ochab. He laid it out bluntly, saying: "Give me free rein, and I'll take care of the Poznań situation." At that moment, the decision to pacify the city was made, even though nothing had happened yet.

In Poznań, speeches began, and the surrounding streets were full of people. Clearly, this would not pass quietly. At the party's Voivodship Committee, Wincenty Kraśko, in charge of propaganda, tried to speak with the people, but he was unable to persuade them. No one responded as he had hoped. Why? I don't want to speculate about conspiracy theories. I think it was simply chaos. They couldn't fathom that something like this could happen. There were no established procedures for such a situation.

When word spread that the workers' delegation that had been to Warsaw and back had been arrested, the crowd responded with one voice: "We're going to free our brothers!" They headed for the prison on Młyńska Street. Head Warden Stanisław Lewandowski made a phone call and asked what he should do. No one made a decision. The second attempt ended with the crowd scaling the fence and freeing the prisoners. The delegation was not among them, as they had not been arrested—a fact that no one knew. The crowd then headed to Kochanowskiego Street, where the Voivodship Office of the Ministry of Public Security was located.

A turning point occurred when a shot rang out. To this day, the question of who fired the shot remains unanswered. Many believe that someone from the Ministry of Public Security fired it. We will likely never know the truth. The shots on Kochanowskiego Street led to clashes. Several hundred people remained in the area, while the rest had dispersed to their workplaces and homes.

### What were the consequences of the Poznań June for the Polish authorities?

First, the Poznań uprising was brutally suppressed. The scale of the casualties was unimaginable. The prevailing view today is that 58 people died, but public security officers named 53 victims in their reports. There are a number of lines of evidence suggesting that the death toll could have been as high as 100. This is not to say that a higher number would elevate the significance of the event. Even one victim is too many. However, I am trying to find the truth.

In 2006, I organized a conference and a large exhibition at the Imperial Castle in Poznań. Several people approached me at the time. One of them was a man who had served in the military in 1970. He found a clearing on the Biedrusko military training ground by chance, where there were rows of graves marked with the names and military ranks of those who died in 1956. We located that place. Unfortunately, the prosecutor from the Institute of National Remembrance did not pursue this lead, despite reports of people being shot at Ławica.

There was also a rumor that a French journalist had been killed. A ministry representative and an International Poznań Fair spokesperson searched for him in the city morgues. They counted 113 bodies, but not everyone was involved in the uprising. We must also remember that hospitals falsified medical records to protect the wounded. Visitors may have been injured as well, but they did not seek help for fear of getting into trouble. We will never know the exact number of victims.

The brutal suppression of the Poznań protests in June 1956 might seem to have had a calming effect on the entire country. However, Polish society reacted differently. Workers began demanding improvements to their situation. According to party documents, the workers threatened to stage "a second Poznań." The authorities agreed, knowing they could not afford a repeat.

### Did this help in the power struggle at the party's top levels?

Yes and no. Those demanding democratization said: "Listen, if we don't loosen up, we'll have plenty more hotspots like this one." The hardliners, on the other hand, said, "We've barely loosened up, and they've already walked all over us." The memory of June 1956 in Poznań lingers in Polish society, clashing with attempts to explain what happened.

The state authorities' approach also changed — it started with "hooligans" and "imperialist agents." By summer, other explanations had emerged; it was a just protest by workers exploited by the dregs of society. Then, in October, Władysław Gomułka said that the working class had taught us a painful lesson in Poznań, shouting with one thunderous voice, "Enough! Turn back from the wrong path." He dismissed the theory about imperialist agents—he must have realized that, since Poznań had decided to take a stand, the rest of the country might react the same way. He exploited this brilliantly. At the time, he was the most popular politician in Poland.

What happened in Poznań certainly catalyzed Poland's democratic transition. Of course, it soon became clear that things had returned to the old ways, though never an exact replica of the previous system.

I would also mention the spontaneous rally of 300,000 people in Warsaw, which must have terrified Gomułka. He suddenly saw that the working class could exert massive influence on the government. He told the people, "Enough with the rallies. It's time to get back to our daily work." The Poznań June protests and the spontaneous October crowd reaction were two factors that undoubtedly influenced Poland's changes after 1956. ■



## THE 1956 POZNAŃ UPRISING IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

**T**he Poznań uprising of 1956 was one of the first open rebellions against the Stalinist system in the Eastern Bloc. These events signaled the changes taking place and elicited varied reactions from communist authorities and a broad international response.

### CONTEXT

After World War II, communism was forced upon all of Central and Eastern Europe as a result of the Yalta Agreements. The communists came to power on their own in Albania and Yugoslavia, while in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, Romania, and Hungary, communism was imposed with the help of Red Army troops. Soon, all “people’s democracies” experienced the totalitarianization of social life.

Developments that had occurred in the Soviet Union in the 1930s began to unfold in the newly established communist systems. After subjugating society, the spiral of terror engulfed senior party officials, who were accused by the political police of “right-wing nationalist deviation” or conspiring with the “lapdog of imperialism,” Josip Broz Tito. Political show trials took place in Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Romania.



**PROF. KRZYSZTOF BRZECHCZYN**  
AMU Faculty of Philosophy

Although such trials did not occur in Poland, Władysław Gomułka was stripped of his party and state functions and placed under house arrest from 1951 to 1954.

Thus, the de-Stalinization of communist systems took place both from the bottom up and from the top down. The basis of the bottom-up movements toward the end of totalitarianism was rebuilding bonds of social solidarity. This led to open rebellions demanding improved living conditions and political freedom. Top-down de-Stalinization was based on condemning the cult of personality, rehabilitating wrongfully convicted members of the ruling apparatus,

and introducing reforms to prevent distortions without undermining the system’s foundations.

The first uprisings broke out in Soviet labor camps before the cult of Joseph Stalin was officially condemned. The most famous of these uprisings, described by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago*, occurred in labor camps in Ekibastuz (January 1952), Vorkuta (May–June 1953), and Kengir (May–June 1954).

Joseph Stalin’s death on March 5, 1953, triggered top-down de-Stalinization. At the 20th Congress of the Communist Party

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of the Soviet Union on February 25, 1956, First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev condemned the cult of personality in his Secret Speech, placing all blame for the purges of the Communist Party and the collectivization of agriculture on Stalin. The intended secret speech was read aloud at party meetings and unofficially copied and distributed in Poland.

Top-down de-Stalinization fueled grassroots social protests. The demonstrations and workers' strikes that erupted on June 1, 1953, in Plzeň and other cities across Czechoslovakia were among the first. From June 16 to 17, 1953, demonstrations took place in East Berlin, spreading to several hundred localities in the GDR. In both cases, the protests were rooted in economic issues, but the demonstrators also put forth political demands.

Poznań was the third city in the Eastern Bloc to rise up in revolt. A conflict over the incorrect calculation of payroll taxes had been simmering at its largest industrial plant since late 1955. After unsuccessful negotiations, the workers organized a demonstration for Thursday, June 28, 1956. This coincided with the final days of the 25th Poznań International Fair, which ran from June 17 to July 1 and featured 1,246 Polish and 554 foreign exhibitors. Over 425,000 people visited the fair, including many journalists, businesspeople, and diplomats from the West. Thanks to their presence, it was difficult to hide the Poznań protests from international public opinion.

### IN THE EYES OF THE EAST

During the 7th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party on July 18, First Secretary Edward Ochab put forward the thesis that the Poznań protests had two strands. The first consisted of "the machinations of provocateurs and agents of imperialism," while the second was the party's insufficient efforts "to raise the standard of living" and "bureaucratic errors."

This interpretive framework was replicated in the mass media of individual communist countries. Where supporters

of the status quo held sway, there was talk of imperialist provocation or the Poznań protests were ignored entirely. However, where supporters of de-Stalinization were gaining influence, the objective causes of discontent were acknowledged.

In the USSR, the prevailing interpretation was that of an "imperialist provocation." The June 30 issue of *Pravda* carried an article with the telling title: "Enemy Provocation by Imperialist Agents in Poznań." The position of the Communist Party and the state authorities of the People's Republic of China was more nuanced. Although the Xinhua News Agency and the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party, *Rénmín Ribào* (*The People's Daily*), immediately echoed the thesis of imperialist provocation after the suppression of the Poznań protests, the objective causes of the protests were recognized relatively quickly.

In East Germany, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany met on the afternoon of June 28 and noted similarities to the events of 1953 in Berlin. The party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* reported on an imperialist provocation suppressed by the authorities and workers. The central organ of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, *Rudé Právo*, and the entire Czechoslovak press described the Poznań uprising in a similar manner. Fearing that the Poznań protests might be emulated, Bulgaria imposed a media blackout. For example, access to Polish newspapers subscribed to by university libraries was restricted. In the summer, the Bulgarian communist youth organization refused to host 200 students from Poland. The situation in Poland was also the subject of an extraordinary meeting of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Working People's Party. During this meeting, reform supporters were warned against succumbing to the "schemes of the imperialists."

### IN THE EYES OF THE WEST

The Poznań uprising caused a stir in western Europe and North America. News reports and press articles cited statements from

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tourists, businesspeople, diplomats, and journalists who were visiting Poznań at the time. They quoted anonymous protesters and published smuggled photographs. Radio Free Europe played a significant role in informing the Western public and the Polish public about the course of the protests in Poznań and the West's reaction to them. Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, head of the RFE Polish section, recalled that journalists from eighteen of the station's bureaus waited at airports to record eyewitness accounts. This allowed them to reconstruct the sequence of events and provide real-time updates on the protests.

On Friday, the BBC reported on the Poznań protests in its morning news broadcast. Throughout the day, information was updated through interviews with exhibitors and traders returning from the Poznań International Fair. Until mid-July, events in Poznań were a constant feature in the British press. Brief reports, features, and editorial commentaries appeared in the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *The Times*, *Daily Herald*, *News Chronicle*, and *The Manchester Guardian*.

In West Germany, reports appeared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, *Die Welt*, and *Rheinischer Merkur*. Commentaries drew natural comparisons to the East Berlin protests. In the United States, press coverage appeared in the *Chicago Daily News*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Time*. Noteworthy is David Lawrence's July 4, 1956 article in the *New York Herald Tribune*, in which he called on labor unions, social organizations, and churches to organize a global wave of protests. Media interest persisted until mid-July 1956.

The Poznań uprising was also covered in Argentine, Brazilian, and Mexican newspapers. The Argentine Socialist Party issued a statement expressing solidarity with the Poznań workers. According to Jan Nowak Jeziorański, the Poznań protests were also reported on by the Indian (*Hindustan Standard*), Iraqi (*Al-Zaman*), and Burmese press.

The governments' reactions, which are somewhat understandable, were more restrained. The U.S. State Department issued two statements, one on June 29 and one on July 2, 1956. The first statement condemned the suppression of the protests by force, and the second statement denied any American involvement. The U.S. House of Representatives urged President Dwight D. Eisenhower to raise the issue of the Poznań protests at the United Nations and take measures to prevent repression against the protesters. On July 22, Americans boycotted a reception organized by the embassy of the Polish People's Republic. The United Kingdom's Foreign Office issued a statement about the protests, and West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer spoke repeatedly about them.

In Canada, John Diefenbaker, the leader of the parliamentary opposition at the time, repeatedly called on the Canadian government to strongly condemn the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland. Although reluctant to intervene, the Canadian government forwarded the transcripts of the proceedings to the Polish Embassy in Ottawa at Diefenbaker's request, prompting a protest from the Polish diplomatic service.

On July 12, the French Socialist Party organized a rally in Paris in solidarity with the Poznań workers. At the event, Nobel Prize-winning author Albert Camus highlighted the violations of civil and labor rights under communist regimes. This sentiment was echoed in the protesters' slogans demanding bread and freedom. Camus declared: "As far as I am concerned, I shall always avoid, even in the slightest degree, encouraging struggle and revolt among people whose actions I cannot support. But now that these people, after enduring extreme humiliation, have rebelled and been killed, I would despise myself if I showed the least restraint in condemning this massacre or in expressing my respect for and solidarity with the victims of repression."

## THE INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1956 POZNAŃ PROTESTS

In the fall of 1956, three trials were held involving individuals carefully selected for their involvement in the "Poznań events." The final trial began on October 5 and ended on October 18. The verdict was scheduled to be announced on October 22. However, on October 19, during the 8th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, Władysław Gomułka was elected First Secretary. Due to the new political situation, the verdict was not handed down; the Voivodship Court had summoned new witnesses to testify on November 6. Before this could happen, however, the court returned the case files to the Voivodship Prosecutor's Office to complete the investigation. By the end of the Polish People's Republic in 1989, the prosecutor's office had not carried out this order.

The charismatic Poznań attorney Stanisław Hejmwski played a pivotal role in the trials. His speeches were discussed in the press and broadcast by Radio Poznań. Journalists from *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, and *The Times*, as well as correspondents from the United Press International, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse, were in Poznań at that time. The information they gathered and used in Radio Free Europe broadcasts influenced domestic public opinion during the 1956 Polish October thaw. One could argue that the Poznań protests taught the three sides of the conflict—society, the party and government authorities, and the Soviet leadership—to exercise self-restraint. The Soviet leadership had been considering intervention for some time.

The Poznań uprising also indirectly influenced the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, which began with a solidarity rally for Poland at the Józef Bem Monument in Budapest. Demonstrators demanded free elections, which then led to Soviet intervention. The Hungarian Revolution served as a warning to communist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe against maintaining the unaltered Stalinist system of governance and shook the post-Yalta international order. However, it is important to note that while the Hungarian Revolution was directly influenced by the October changes in Poland, the events in Poznań in June 1956 had directly and indirectly influenced what was happening all over the country at that time. ■



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## CRACKDOWN ON A DEFIANT CITY: REPRESSION AND JUSTICE AFTER THE 1956 POZNAŃ PROTESTS

**O**n June 29, 1956, the then Prime Minister of the Polish People's Republic, Józef Cyrankiewicz, spoke words that foreshadowed the repression that the citizens of defiant Poznań could expect from the "people's government." He stated, "Any provocateur or lunatic who raises his hand against the people's government may be sure that this hand will be chopped off." That same day, at the funeral of Ministry of Public Security officers and soldiers, Edward Gierek—the future First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party—also threatened severe punishments.

The first arrests were made while the protests were still being suppressed by soldiers from the military units pacifying Poznań. Then, on the night of June 28–29, officers from the Ministry of Public Security and the Citizens' Militia (the national police organization of the Polish People's Republic) carried out a massive operation aimed at rounding up the most active participants in the protests. Sometimes they operated under the cover of the military. These operations continued for several weeks after the fighting ended. According to a report by the Committee for Public Security, 746 people had been detained by August 8 in connection with the events in Poznań. According to an investigation by public prosecutors of the Institute of National Remembrance, the total number was slightly higher: 1,113. Of those detained, 323 were placed in custody, and investigations were initiated. The remaining detainees

were released after being interrogated at the screening center at Ławica Airport, which operated from June 28 to July 5.

Many of those detained were subjected to brutal treatment by Citizens' Militia officers and interrogators. They were subjected to physical and psychological violence, including death threats. Representatives of several international organizations appealed to the Polish authorities, urging them to end such practices and ensure fair trials for those arrested. The initial refusal to allow Western observers to attend the trials was indicative of the overall situation in Poland. The White House expressed its concern in strong terms. In a statement dated September 26, just before the first trials, it was hoped that all defendants would be allowed a genuine and fair defense in an open hearing, without fear of deportation to the East. This would be tangible proof that certain so-called Stalinist methods had been rejected in both practice and theory.

Amid the shifting political landscape, the mounting pressure bore fruit, prompting the Polish authorities to permit Western journalists, government representatives [including personnel from the French and U.S. embassies], and various international organizations to attend the trials.

The start of the trials, originally scheduled for late July, was gradually postponed. One reason was the protracted investigations. Another reason was concern about the impact that seeing defendants with visible signs of beatings might have. Therefore, the authorities first wanted to ensure that all traces of "violations

# THE POZNAŃ PROTESTS OF JUNE 1956

of the socialist rule of law” disappeared from the defendants’ bodies. One detainee was even offered surgery for a broken nose. Over time, the defendants were fed better, and their clothing was changed daily.

The communist authorities wanted to use the upcoming trials to prove to the public the previously accepted argument that, on June 28, a peaceful, partially justified workers’ protest took place on the one hand, and a riot fueled by hooligan violence—sometimes involving the use of weapons—against the “people’s government” took place on the other hand. It was precisely the participants in the latter who were to be brought to trial.

Along with the postponement of trial dates, the projected number of defendants changed as well. Initially, investigators prepared 51 trials for 135 defendants. In some particularly important cases, as many as two or three versions of the indictments were drafted. Ultimately, only three trials took place, in which the guilt of the defendants was deemed easy to prove. Many of them were further incriminated by their prior run-ins with the law. This was a deliberate move by the ruling authorities, who sought to portray the most active participants in the June protests as common hooligans or thugs. This move was also intended to indirectly cast a shadow over the entire workers’ protest.

The first of these trials, known as the “Trial of the Three,” began on September 27, 1956, at the Voivodship Court building in Poznań, located at the intersection of Marcinkowskiego and Solna Streets. The defendants were Józef Foltynowicz, Kazimierz Żurek, and Jerzy Sroka. They were charged with complicity in the assault of public security officer Corporal Zygmunt Izdebný, who died from his injuries. Additionally, Kazimierz Żurek was charged with destroying official documents from the Voivodship Prosecutor’s Office and County Court, and Sroka was charged with destroying prison equipment that had been taken over by demonstrators.

On September 27, the “Trial of the Nine” also began in the same building. The defendants were Zenon Urbanek, Józef Pocztowy, Stanisław Jaworek, Ludwik Wierzbicki, Łukasz Piotrowski, Stanisław Kaufmann, Leon Olejniczak, Janusz Biegański, and Jan Suwart. The first four were accused of committing a violent attack on public security officers stationed in the Office of the Ministry of Public Security “together with other unidentified perpetrators,” while the others were charged with aiding and abetting the attack by supplying weapons and ammunition. The indictment also included the murder of Romek Strzałkowski and two other boys, although the evidence gathered during the investigation did not support bringing charges against the defendants.

The last of the scheduled trials, known as the “Trial of the Ten,” began on October 5. The defendants were Janusz Kulas, Mikołaj Pac-Pomarnacki, Roman Bulczyński, Władysław Kaczkowski, Hieronim Zielonacki, Marian Joachimiak, Antoni Klimecki, Jan Łuczak, Zygmunt Majcher, and Zbigniew Błaszczyk. They were charged with a series of offenses committed while fighting soldiers of the Polish People’s Army, public security officers, and Citizens’ Militia posts.

The defendants in all three trials faced severe sentences, especially since they were tried under the Small Penal Code

of 1946. This code imposed penalties ranging from five years in prison to life imprisonment or the death penalty for the crimes of which the defendants were accused. Aware of the implications of “Stalinist justice,” the residents of Poznań were deeply concerned about the defendants’ fate. Some attempted to pressure the judicial authorities by sending threatening, anonymous letters to prosecutors and judges or by distributing leaflets. The people of Poznań were not alone in this effort. Both before and during the trials, numerous voices from abroad called for fair trials and clemency for the defendants.

The proceedings of the “Trial of the Three,” as well as the subsequent “Trial of the Nine” and “Trial of the Ten,” took observers by surprise. During these trials, the judges rejected statements made by the defendants during the investigation when they were under the influence of beatings or the threat of beatings. The judges also allowed the defendants’ attorneys to present extensive explanations and call expert witnesses. The experts emphasized the psychological factors underlying the defendants’ actions, pointing to their emotional instability due to their young age and the diminished mental capacity of individuals under the influence of an agitated crowd.

The Poznań Bar Association representatives deserved the highest praise. The most notable defense attorneys were Stanisław Hejmowski, Gerard Kujanek, and Michał Grzegorzewicz. They firmly opposed the prosecutors’ attempts to separate the defendants’ actions from the context of the workers’ protests. They emphasized the working-class background of most of the defendants and pointed out gaps in the investigators’ evidence. In short, contrary to the prosecutors’ efforts, they sought to portray the ongoing trials in a socio-political context. This tactic was effective, and by September and October of 1956, impending political changes were already in the air.

Consequently, the sentences handed down in both the “Trial of the Three” and the “Trial of the Nine” were significantly lower than expected. In the “Trial of the Three,” Józef Foltynowicz and Jerzy Sroka received 4 years and 6 months in prison, and Kazimierz Żurek received 4 years. In the “Trial of the Nine,” Zenon Urbanek, Stanisław Jaworek, and Ludwik Wierzbicki received 6 years in prison; Józef Pocztowy received 3 years; Janusz Biegański received 2.5 years; Łukasz Piotrowski received 1.5 years; and Stanisław Kauffman received 2 years, suspended for 5 years. Furthermore, the court acquitted Jan Suwart and Leon Olejniczak. Notably, in the “Trial of the Ten,” the judge first resumed the trial to question new witnesses, then adjourned it, and finally dismissed the case, instead of announcing the verdict as scheduled on October 22. This decision was undoubtedly influenced by a statement made by Władysław Gomułka, the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party. At the 7th Plenum of the PUPW Central Committee, he stated: “The causes of the Poznań tragedy and the deep dissatisfaction of the entire working class lie within us, in the party leadership and the government.” Gomułka’s statement effectively put an end to the possibility of continued repression. ■



## REBELS IN UNIFORM: SOLDIERS WHO STOOD WITH POZNAŃ IN JUNE 1956

The events of June 28, 1956, are undoubtedly among the most significant in Poznań's history. They were an act of desperation intended to preserve the dignity of the city's residents and the Polish people. Seventy years later, we know a great deal about the origins, course, and consequences of the Poznań uprising. However, we know very little about the soldiers who were manipulated by the communist system, forced to follow orders and shoot at protesters. Some of these soldiers refused to carry out orders and were arrested by the Ministry of Public Security.

KRZYSZTOF SMURA

# THE POZNAŃ PROTESTS OF JUNE 1956



**A**lmost from the very beginning of the protests, a special task force of the Main Directorate of Information of the Polish Army was active on the streets of Poznań. The agents observed the behavior of the soldiers and compiled reports on any “deviations from the norm.” Colonel Radzienczak, the deputy head of the Main Directorate of Information, led the unit. A special report was prepared for him and the military authorities and printed in three copies. One of the copies was placed in file 1812/92/90 at the Central Military Archives in Rembertów.

The report, titled “Results of the Work of the Operational Group of the Main Directorate of Information in Poznań Aimed at Identifying the Perpetrators of Provocative Incidents,” was prepared by military security agents. The list of those who were “at fault” is long. Five soldiers and two civilians were arrested, and an investigation was launched against eight military personnel “who displayed an attitude either approving of the provocation or otherwise expressing solidarity with it.” The descriptions are extensive. The names of informants also appear. Below are a few cases from the long list.

## HE FIRED AT THE BUILDING

According to military investigators, Cadet Stanisław Niekłan from the Officer Training School in Poznań

## THE ARCHIVAL FILES ALSO INCLUDED REPORTS REGARDING:

### → WIRETAPS:

On June 29, 1956, Captain Sikorzak, head of the Mobile Communications Unit of the 17th Signal Battalion, and five privates listened to Western radio broadcasts to verify reports published in the press.

### → FINDINGS:

On June 28 at 12:00 p.m., Private Gegel discovered an anti-state leaflet in Polish and Russian on a sports field. The leaflet was issued by the General Staff of the National Alliance of Russian Solidarists. Despite the rain, the leaflet looked freshly printed. Perhaps it was dropped from a balloon or was planted there.

### → GRAFFITI:

While on guard duty, Private Osieński, of the radio communications company, wrote on the wall of the building he was guarding: “We soldiers want a free Poland! Death to red thugs!” He was also writing in the stairwell, “We do not want pre-1939 Poland, but...” At this point, he was interrupted. The private was arrested.

### → COMMENDATIONS:

Private Marian Jeziorski of the 2nd Tank Regiment deserves praise. After the combat alert was declared, he was left at the firing range to guard the ammunition. During operations in Poznań, the command forgot about him. He was not relieved until three days later, during which time he had no food or water.

### → MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE:

“I would like to report that one of the soldiers serving in the Kołobrzeg unit pulled a bottle containing a message written in a foreign language out of the sea. After a preliminary analysis, we determined that the text was in Danish. We propose appointing a certified translator to this matter, as there is suspicion that the text is hostile towards our state and may lead to the exposure of espionage activities in Poznań. M.” The note was handed over to law enforcement authorities.

Twenty years ago, then Minister of National Defense Bronisław Komorowski made the decision to declassify military files related to the 1956 Poznań protests. These files are a treasure trove of information that researchers of our history will continue to draw upon for years to come.



actively participated in firing at the Ministry of Public Security office building in Poznań. He was also charged with shooting at one of the tanks and surrendering his submachine gun to the protesting Poznań residents.

### A COLLEAGUE REPORTED HIM

Sergeant Zdzisław Przybycień was denounced by Captain K. from the Ministry of Public Security's Poznań office. This occurred shortly after the arrest of a civilian. M., who was inside the building, stated unequivocally that Przybycień was among the Poznań residents who took part in the fighting. Additional evidence against Przybycień consisted of photographs taken by Ministry of Public Security employees. The wounded sergeant was found in a Poznań hospital.

### HE SPOKE TOO LOUDLY

In 1956, Bogusław Kruszona was stationed in an army unit in Ustka. During the unrest, he was on a 14-day leave in Poznań. According to witnesses, he was on Dąbrowskiego Street on June 28. Seeing soldiers occupying the street, he reportedly said, "They're standing there watching people like bandits." Those words were enough to get him arrested. Three cadets filed a report of the incident. Their names are listed in the report.

### A RELATIVE OF A TRAITOR

The denunciation of Captain Jarecki from the Poznań unit is clearly a provocation. According to the files, he was related to another Polish Air Force officer who turned out to be a traitor. Colleagues from his unit denounced the captain, claiming he uttered anti-state slogans and asserted that the events unfolding

on the streets were a consequence of poverty rather than imperialist actions. He allegedly claimed that the security officers opened fire first: "A woman was shooting at children..." Further information indicates that the captain had been under surveillance for quite some time.

### HE INCITED OTHERS TO DO WRONG

According to witness reports, Corporal Jerzy Boguś from the armored unit in Biedrusko actively participated in the demonstration by joining the crowds on Mickiewicza Street. He also urged soldiers from the Officer School to lay down their arms and fight alongside the Poznań residents. Boguś also reportedly tried to disarm a cadet and later took part in the fighting for the Ministry of Public Security building.

### HE WAS IN UNIFORM

Second Lieutenant Rajmund Kuźnicki from the Krzesiny unit was reportedly present near the Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party building during the events. According to an informant, Kuźnicki shouted that he regretted being in uniform because he would have shown everyone what to do with the communists. Furthermore, he praised the actions of the "provocateurs."

A wave of quiet protests and denunciations swept across Poland. Rumor was the main driving force at the time, often greatly exaggerated, but thanks to it, the notebooks of the military secret police were bursting at the seams. Throughout July, the head of the Main Political Directorate of the Polish Army, General Kazimierz Witaszewski, received plenty of reports to read.

He must have had a terrible headache just from reading that a certain Captain Wiesław Suliński had said aloud, "Let them give the workers prosperity, not just empty promises. In my opinion, they could have gone on strike instead of taking to the streets," or that Sergeant Jan Czajka had said, "It's hard to blame a worker who earns 500 zlotys." Lieutenant Wolny must also have caused him concern. During a meeting with an informant, he reportedly said, "Before I open fire on the workers, I'll shoot myself in the head first." Lieutenant Zdanowski agreed, saying, "With a clear conscience, I would line up those responsible for the unrest against a wall and deal with them. They say the people are devoted to the party, but if war broke out and mobilization came, they'd all flee to the woods." Captain Bronisław Mysak, on the other hand, said, "This strike was predictable. The workers are being exploited. They were outraged at the government because government officials were buying foreign goods while the workers got nothing." ■

## THE 1956 POZNAŃ PROTESTS: A SOCIOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON MEMORY AND GENERATIONS

Just as the perceptions of successive generations of Poznań residents vary, the contemporary reception of the 1956 Poznań uprising is not unambiguous.

Each generation likely views the events of June 1956 somewhat differently. The immediacy of the experience fades as successive cohorts born during the Nazi occupation of Poland and earlier pass away. However, this does not mean that the story of the Poznań protests has been completely written, nor does it mean that the story has been completely viewed. One example of this is the 1996 film *Poznań '56*, which is available on YouTube. Those who were children in 1956 and are now over 80 have firsthand memories, which are likely the images passed down through family stories. In my family, the story is associated with my uncle, who disappeared for the entire day on June 28, 1956, while his terrified sister (my mother) listened to the sounds of gunfire and rifle bullets striking the ceramic roofs of the now-defunct row of tenement houses on Św. Marcin Street and Kantaka Street. My uncle, Henryk, a teenager at the time, returned that evening alive, dragging with him parts of radio jamming equipment that had been thrown into the street. As attorney Michał Grzegorzewicz recalled in a 2017 publication: Anyone who saw that demonstration will likely never forget it for the rest of their life. As they marched in orderly ranks, they walked with discipline, pride, and dignity. But let us not forget that this was not a crowd of strollers, onlookers, or sports fans [...] It was a seething, boiling crowd—an angry crowd. As the crowd grew denser and the sound of footsteps grew louder, the intensity of emotions rose as well. Such a mood is like dynamite. Every spark becomes dangerous.

The fighting and events took place in Poznań's Jeżyce district and the city center. As we know today, the vast majority of the June 1956 fatalities were caused by indiscriminate gunfire. My memory is connected to the People's Republic of Poland and another anniversary of the Poznań protests from the second half of the 1980s. From the window of the Imperial Castle, I watched the pacification of Poznań



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residents attempting to lay flowers at the June 1956 Monument. This monument had become a symbol and sacred site for all acts of defiance against the communist authorities.

The memory of my generation and the vast majority of today's Poznań residents (many of whom are newcomers) is shaped by "secondhand" accounts and our interest in history. According to data from the Centre for Public Opinion Research, the events of June 1956 in Poznań are hardly mentioned in public opinion polls, which is likely due to the frugality, reserve, and modesty typical of Poznań residents. The responsibility of commemorating the 70th anniversary rests with resi-

dent communities, local politicians, artists, activists, and tour guides. The celebration is therefore less widespread, being more of an occasional event. Still, it is fairly visible in the Dębiec neighborhood, likely around Kochanowskiego, Dąbrowskiego, and Św. Marcin streets, or at the Poznań International Fair. Its momentum will likely depend on social media and how local Facebook influencers draw attention to this milestone anniversary.

There will also be recurring events, such as the presentation of the Stukot'56 Award. This award honors individuals and organizations "who fight for dignity and solidarity not only with words, but also through concrete action." It is organized by the Poznań June 1956 Uprising Museum. Another event is the upcoming 6th Inter-School Conference, "Youth Debate on June '56." A clear picture emerges of the "grassroots work" regarding the memory of the Poznań June events, which primarily influences the younger generation. Though the message is institutionally mediated, it takes on an individualized character through stories about specific people and the broader context of the struggle for justice and freedom. Here, the workers' uprising is presented as a unique, "Poznań-specific," second collective piece in the puzzle of Central European democratization, following the East German uprising of 1953. ■



DR. PIOTR GRZELCZAK

## FORBIDDEN MEMORY, RECLAIMED MEMORY: REMEMBERING THE POZNAŃ PROTESTS OF JUNE 1956

The Poznań protests of June 1956 are undoubtedly one of the most significant events in Poland's recent history. This obvious, textbook-style assertion should be countered by another. The great, and crucially grassroots, uprising of the people of Poznań cost the lives of several dozen victims. It was marginalized for decades. It was officially condemned. It was pushed into the realm of social oblivion. This is paradoxically contradictory to its great historical significance.

**T**his counterintuitive juxtaposition is no coincidence. After all, the path that led the 1956 Poznań protests to be granted their rightful place in the national pantheon of memory was exceptionally long and bumpy. It is especially important to remember in today's free Poland, as we usually only commemorate "the first public uprising in the People's Republic of Poland" on its anniversary.

From the beginning, the Polish communist authorities had a fundamental problem with the Poznań June, which is understandable. The protests' bottom-up, anti-system, and, above all, working-class character permanently shattered the propaganda

mirror in which the Polish United Workers' Party loved to see itself. The Poznań protests not only heralded one of the greatest crises in the history of the political system built in Poland under the misnomer of the worker-peasant alliance, people's government, and historical justice, but they also spectacularly undermined the essence of the imposed order in which a workers' revolt against the workers' government representing workers' interests was impossible. However, since the revolt did occur, the natural conclusion was that the authorities did not represent those interests, that their historical mandate was a grand bluff, and that they thereby lost any mandate to govern on behalf

# THE POZNAŃ PROTESTS OF JUNE 1956

of the so-called working class. For this reason, much effort and energy were poured into the brutal suppression of the June 1956 protests in Poznań and, shortly thereafter, into a propaganda campaign aimed at explaining the “foreign” nature of the protests to the society of the People’s Republic of Poland.

In the early summer of 1956, the Poznań workers’ uprising, which defied any ideological framework, was labeled a provocation, a counterrevolutionary riot, a diversion, and a conspiracy. The broadly defined “enemy” was held fully responsible for these events. This widely contested assessment of the Poznań protests of June 1956, further reinforced by Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz’s famous radio address in which he thundered about chopping off the hand raised against the “people’s government,” was temporarily called into question in October 1956 by Władysław Gomułka, who was returning to power and was adept at reading the public’s mood. Gomułka redefined the June protests, suggesting that they were caused by Stalinist errors that distorted the essence of the ideal socialist doctrine. He claimed that the protests themselves were of a working-class nature and justified. However, this interpretation harbored a significant danger because it legitimized the institution of the workers’ strike, which was unacceptable within the existing political system. For this reason, as early as 1956, a decision was made to stifle the developing discussion surrounding June 1956 with Gomułka’s “Silence over the coffin” [editor’s note: a well-known phrase in Polish public discourse used as an appeal for restraint and respect in the aftermath of a death or national tragedy]. The problem generated by “the Poznań June,” its memory, and its legacy must have been significant, since, on the eve of its first anniversary, Władysław Gomułka himself visited the Cegielski Metal Works—the epicenter of the June events—to appeal to the Poznań workers to draw a “mourning veil of silence.” The veil was swiftly drawn with the help of high-ranking party secretaries, subservient trade unions, exceptionally harsh preventive censorship, and the secret political police’s extraordinary activity.

In late spring of 1957, the implementation of the longest strategy adopted by the “people’s government” regarding the Poznań events of June 1956 began. This strategy was one of consistent silence and spanned over twenty years. Its effectiveness in the public sphere was ensured by repressing all those who sought to break the silence surrounding the events. However, this did not mean that the experience of Poznań June vanished overnight. Its clear echoes could be found on the streets during subsequent crises in the Polish People’s Republic and in the offices of the ruling party. A telling testament to this is the account of Kazimierz Barcikowski, the First Secretary of the Voivodship Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party. Recalling the Poznań chapter of the December 1970 protests in Poland, he wrote explicitly: “One desire dominated all our work during those days—to prevent a repeat of the events of 1956 in Poznań.” Characteristically, the successive crises that periodically afflicted the People’s Republic of Poland reinforced the forbidden memory of the Poznań uprising. Over time, this

memory came to be understood as part of a broader sequence of chronologically spread events illustrating the fundamental conflict between the communist authorities and society.

From 1976 to 1980, an organized opposition emerged in the People’s Republic of Poland that drew upon the tradition of the 1956 Poznań protests. This opposition sought to commemorate the protests in a manner commensurate with its modest capabilities. During this period, the perception of June 1956 changed in the Polish public sphere. However, the real breakthrough did not occur until the rise of the Solidarity movement in 1980, when it unequivocally recognized June 1956 as one of the most important building blocks of its nascent identity. It was then that a distinct, conceptualized interpretation of the Poznań protests emerged, revealing a tradition of resistance and exposing the hypocrisy of communist ideology and practice. This narrative was strengthened by the subsequent December 1970 and June 1976 protests in Poland. These events culminated in the unveiling of the Poznań June 1956 Monument in Adam Mickiewicz Square in Poznań on June 28, 1981, and the publication of *Poznański Czerwiec 1956* (Poznań June 1956) by **Jarosław Maciejewski** and **Prof. Zofia Trojanowiczowa** (Poznań, 1981). This demand to reclaim June 1956 reflected a deeply suppressed social need to commemorate the protests and served as definitive proof that the historical policy pursued toward the protests for nearly a quarter-century had failed spectacularly. At that time, the communist authorities found themselves on the defensive. They could only respond after December 13, 1981, when martial law was imposed in Poland. They developed strategies to neutralize Solidarity’s discourse on the Poznań protests of 1956 and to appropriate and politically domesticate their legacy, which had been rejected for years. However, these actions were belated and ineffective despite massive political and propaganda support. Up until the late 1980s, the party authorities organizing successive official anniversaries of June 1956 faced formidable opponents in the struggle over its memory: underground opposition structures.

In 1989, the complex process of reclaiming a memory first banned and then manipulated came to a successful conclusion. Today, the place of the Poznań protests of June 1956 in Polish public discourse is unquestionable. However, with the inevitable passing of the direct participants in the protests, who were the natural custodians of the memory of the uprising in free Poland, we must ask ourselves a fundamental question: What do we actually remember about June 1956, and how do we understand it today? This is not merely about listing the names of heroes of the uprising, which have been present in the city’s toponymy for some time, or explaining the symbolism of the crosses of the Poznań June 1956 Monument. After seventy years, it seems that we are facing a far more serious task: creating a new framework for remembering June 1956 and its significant historical message. This is necessary so that June 1956 becomes not only an integral part of Poznań’s or Greater Poland’s identity and pride but also a nationwide and universal symbol of dissent and resistance against those in power who are unjust. ■

## THE 1956 POZNAŃ PROTESTS ON STAGE

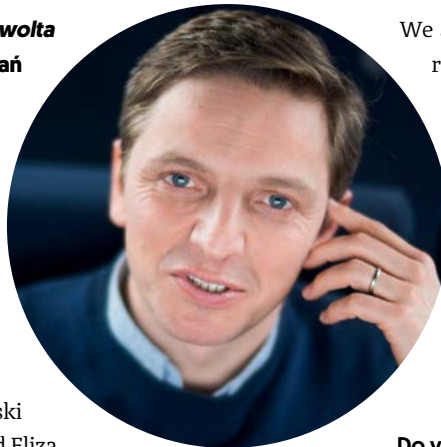
An interview with **Dr. Przemysław Kieliszewski**, a graduate of the AMU Faculty of Law and Administration and director of the Music Theatre in Poznań,

by Krzysztof Smura

THEME OF THE ISSUE:

**Another premiere at the Music Theatre, *Rewolta* (Revolt), which focuses on the 1956 Poznań protests, is now behind us. History—and, consequently, memory—often takes center stage at the Poznań Music Theatre.**

I was fortunate to have excellent history teachers at my schools. Dariusz Młodzianowski, an underground activist, spoke to us confidentially about the 1984 assassination of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, the chaplain of the Solidarity trade union movement. Michał Sobański discussed the Katyn massacre with us, and Eliza Liberkowska demonstrated throughout our high school years that Cicero's "Historia magistra vitae est" is true. Marek Tym and I still discuss history while hiking in the mountains today. I still remember the topic of my final exam at Ignacy Jan Paderewski High School: the Jagiellonian Era. However, theater also serves educational functions, and history is the foundation of our identity. This explains the stage production of *Virtuoso*, a musical about Ignacy Jan Paderewski, one of the most important figures in uniting the people of Wielkopolska around the idea of regaining independence. We also staged a production about the vibrant 1920s and 1930s before the rise of Nazism. This subject is explored in the musical *Cabaret*, which was staged at the beginning of this season. We consistently tell the story of the 20th century through productions such as those about Irena Sendler and the oppression of individuals by totalitarian systems in Wojciech Kościelniak's *Kombinat*, which features songs by Grzegorz Ciechowski and the legendary Polish rock band Republika. With our latest production about the 1956 Poznań protests, we are doing more than just recalling history.



We are discovering how important it was and remains to the identity of Poznań's residents. Just as Poznań had been the cradle of Polish statehood and won its independence through the victorious Greater Poland Uprising (1918–1919) and suffered immensely during World War II—a fact often forgotten—in 1956, on the basis of this very identity, it was also the first to rise up en masse against the crude, inefficient, and inhumane communist system.

**Do you have any personal memories connected with the Poznań protest?**

Personally? Not really, considering my date of birth (laughing). However, after watching *Rewolta*, my father, Tadeusz, added a chapter to the memoirs he was writing. When he was ten years old, he was returning with his grandmother from a store on Poznańska Street when he saw the crowd marching noisily toward the Ministry of Public Security building on Kochanowskiego Street. They were wearing wooden-soled clogs, which made a lot of noise. Later, he spent almost the entire afternoon of June 28 sitting by the window of a tenement house on the corner of Krasieńskiego and Roosevelta Streets, watching the events unfold. Fortunately, he had stepped out into the kitchen for a moment when a shard of glass flew through the window. A thick decorative pane from the upper part of the window lodged in the windowsill where he had been sitting. He also wrote about his mother, Helena, and his sister, Majka, who spent the night of June 28–29 at the clinic on Słowackiego Street. They were detained under curfew there. There was only one telephone in the tenement house, so it was

# THE POZNAŃ PROTESTS OF JUNE 1956



unknown for a long while what had happened to them. There were 100,000 people on the streets at the time. Almost every family in Poznań therefore has difficult memories.

I remember the publication of the book *Poznański Czerwiec 1956* (Poznań June 1956) by **Jarosław Maciejewski** and **Prof. Zofia Trojanowiczowa**, which sold in massive numbers at the time. It became a sensation six months before the imposition of martial law in Poland on December 13, 1981. Previously, it had been forbidden to speak of the tragic events of Poznań in 1956, in which nearly 60 people were killed and many more were injured or forced to leave the city as a disciplinary measure. Many of those people were barred from working, including the father of the famous Polish singer Krzysztof Krawczyk.

**The selection of songs by the Polish rock band Maanam for the musical about the 1956 Poznań protests was no coincidence. What inspired you?**

The three of us sat down with my notes, which served as an outline for the script. The script was written by Przemysław Piłarski and the production was beautifully staged and directed by Jerzy Jan Połoński. He drew our attention to the music of Marek Jackowski and the lyrics of Kora from Maanam. We listened to the songs one by one and took notes. Almost all of them struck us as extraordinary, poetic commentaries on the difficult past.

**Personally, I was enchanted by the second half of *Rewolta*, especially the scene with the elephants. Who is responsible for this performance?**

The scenes accompanied by Maanam songs, such as “Parada słoni,” “Kreon,” and “Stoję, stoję,” make indeed a powerful impression. On our small stage, we see and hear tanks moving.

This is all thanks to the creative team. This includes the brilliant musical arrangements by Łukasz Damrych based on the music of Marek Jackowski and the choreography by Basia Olech, who is known for her work on the musical *1989*. The set designer, lighting director, and visual designers all contributed. However, Jerzy Jan Połoński’s vision and talent as a director deserve special praise.

**Have you ever considered staging *Rewolta* outdoors to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Poznań protests? I remember how enthusiastically *Carmen* was received when it was staged on the roof of the Stary Browar Shopping, Arts, and Business Center in Poznań. What about staging it at H. Cegielski – Poznań, the industrial plant where the protests began?**

On the day of the commemoration, we are performing *Rewolta* twice at the theater. We are also organizing a concert at the June 1956 Monument in Adam Mickiewicz Square, featuring songs from *Kombinat* and *Rewolta*. We can’t do everything. However, we are in talks with TVP about recording the performance and airing it on the day of the commemoration. The significance of the Poznań June for the subsequent dismantling of the communist system deserves to be remembered as widely as possible.

**Is it difficult to obtain a license for this type of project today? I ask because talks about a musical featuring Anna Jantar’s songs recently concluded successfully.**

Negotiations with heirs are never easy. However, transparency is key. Sometimes, however, expectations can be excessive, and as a public theater, we are unable to meet them. However, the quality of our productions and our commitment to paying royalties encourage cooperation, which we have returned to after years of discussions. This is the case with the production about the famous Poznań singer, Anna Jantar, who became a pop culture icon in Poland during the 1970s and 1980s. The premiere is scheduled for September 11, 2027, and will be the last major production on the theater’s old stage on Niezłomnych Street.

**Finally, a question about the future. We are experiencing an influx of new productions. First, *Rewolta*, followed by *Pani Doubtfire*, and then *Dracula*. Do we know which show will open the new stage?**

Yes. First and foremost, we are an entertainment theater. Since we are building a new theater, we have planned the entire repertoire through the end of 2028. Now, we are planning what will happen at Poland’s largest venue for musicals. I am heading to London to discuss this and test the latest sound systems. Please do not expect us to announce anything before the licensing agreements are finalized. We are also in talks with Polish artists. Deciding on the first production is very difficult, but it will be an event that will go down in history. We will certainly announce presales for this eagerly awaited event once we are certain that the new theater will open on schedule in early 2029. The event is anticipated by all residents of Poznań and Wielkopolska, as well as musical fans from all over Poland. ■

# AT THE SOURCE OF DISEASE: RNA RESEARCH AT THE THRESHOLD OF NEW THERAPIES



An Interview with **Prof. Krzysztof Sobczak**,  
Head of the Gene Therapy Development Center,  
by Krzysztof Smura

**You have been elected a member of the Polish Academy of Sciences and have received prestigious grants. Are such distinctions more of a reward for your past achievements or a commitment to the future?**

Membership in the Academy is, on the one hand, an honor and, on the other hand, a commitment to working for the scientific community—not just locally, but across the country. As for projects, I always say that they are, by their very nature, only the beginning. They are primarily a commitment, not a reward. They are merely tools, instruments, and opportunities. I consider the products of individual projects to be successes.

**When we spoke in 2020, you said that scientists from Poznań wanted to give hope to patients with genetic diseases. After several years of intensive research, are you closer to achieving that goal?**

Absolutely. Our work focuses on rare diseases. There are well over 5,000 of them globally, and we are studying just three, including myotonic dystrophy. Progress in medical biotechnology in recent years has been incredible in terms of the tools we are developing. This hope grows with every year, every publication, and every clinical trial result.

**What are these tools?**

They are small therapeutic nucleic acids that can now be effectively delivered into a patient's body. This was a major obstacle just a decade ago because these molecules cannot penetrate cells on their own. They require specific carriers. Scientists around the world have quite effectively optimized their delivery.

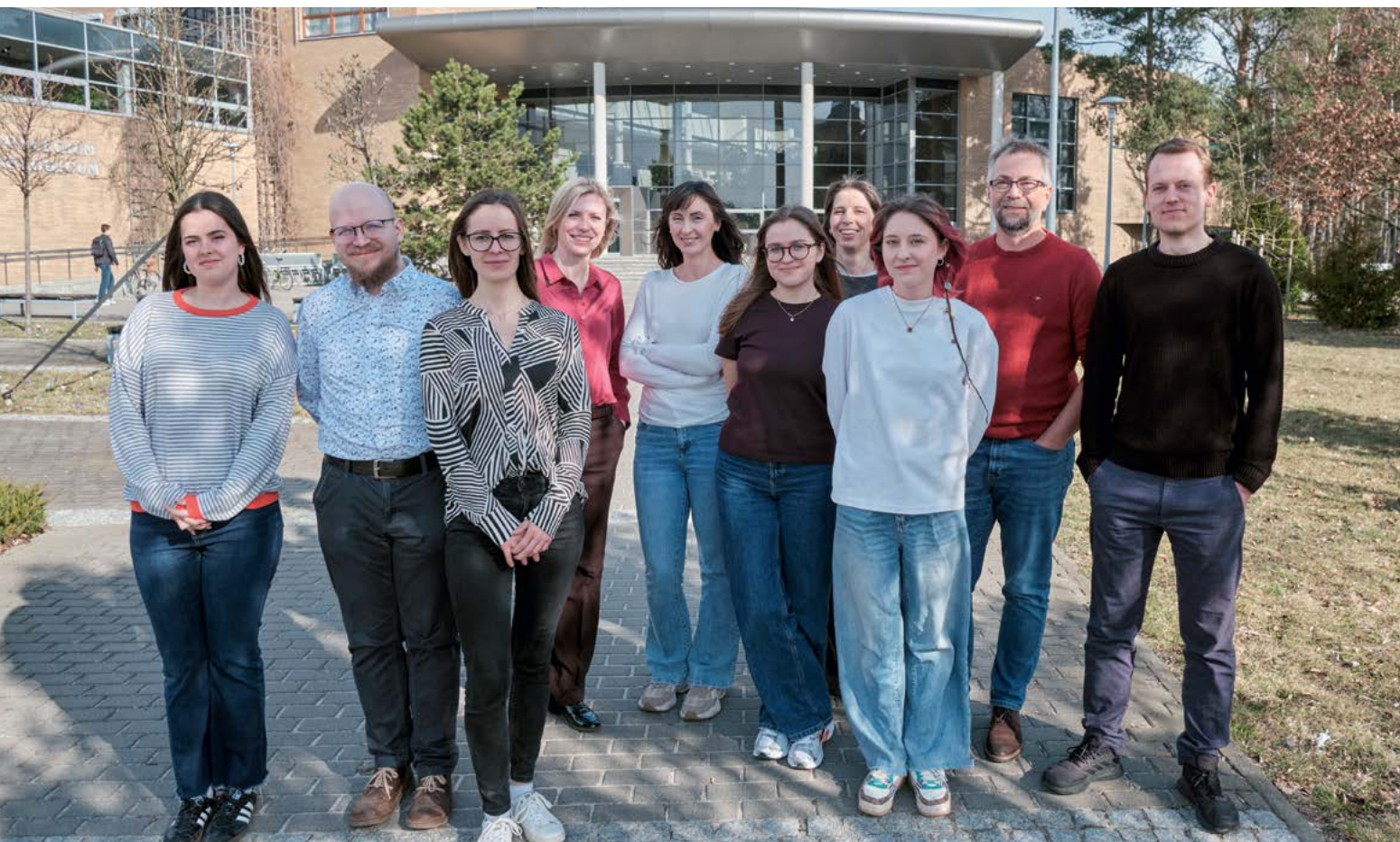
These carriers have greatly accelerated clinical research on delivering these active therapeutic nucleic acid molecules. For six years, there have been eight or nine clinical trials testing potential drugs in patients with myotonic dystrophy, including two based on molecules we developed years ago. These molecules are now in Phase III, meaning they are being studied by many clinical centers in hundreds of patients.

**Is one of these carriers erythromycin?**

Yes. It is not the nucleic acid we have discussed so far, but rather a small molecule that many of us took a couple decades ago. It turns out that this antibiotic effectively fights bacteria and also perfectly binds to the RNA molecule that causes myotonic dystrophy, the most common form of muscular dystrophy in adults.

Years ago, erythromycin was clinically tested and thoroughly studied for potential side effects in thousands of patients during research into its antibacterial properties. Therefore, reexamining the use of this drug to target mutated RNA is relatively straightforward. The results of our preclinical research, conducted in collaboration with a team from the University of Osaka, were published over a decade ago. The first clinical trials were designed based on this work. Today, the compound is being tested in

# FEATURE INTERVIEW



Prof. Krzysztof Sobczak's team establishing the Center for Gene Therapy Development.

a slightly modified form at several Japanese clinics as part of Phase III trials in patients with the aforementioned dystrophy.

In just a few years, it seems that therapeutic options based on nucleic acids or low-molecular-weight compounds, such as erythromycin, may significantly delay or halt the progression of the disease. This is currently the main goal of our research, since a cure may not be possible. The last five or six years have brought significant changes. This is a fantastic development and, as we said, a source of hope.

### **Why did you focus on rare diseases?**

Because they are generally poorly understood, and the rarer the disease, the less is known about it. The diseases we study are progressive, meaning the severity of symptoms increases with age. Usually, within a decade or two of the initial diagnosis, patients become completely dependent on their caregivers. These are severe diseases for which there is currently no specific treatment.

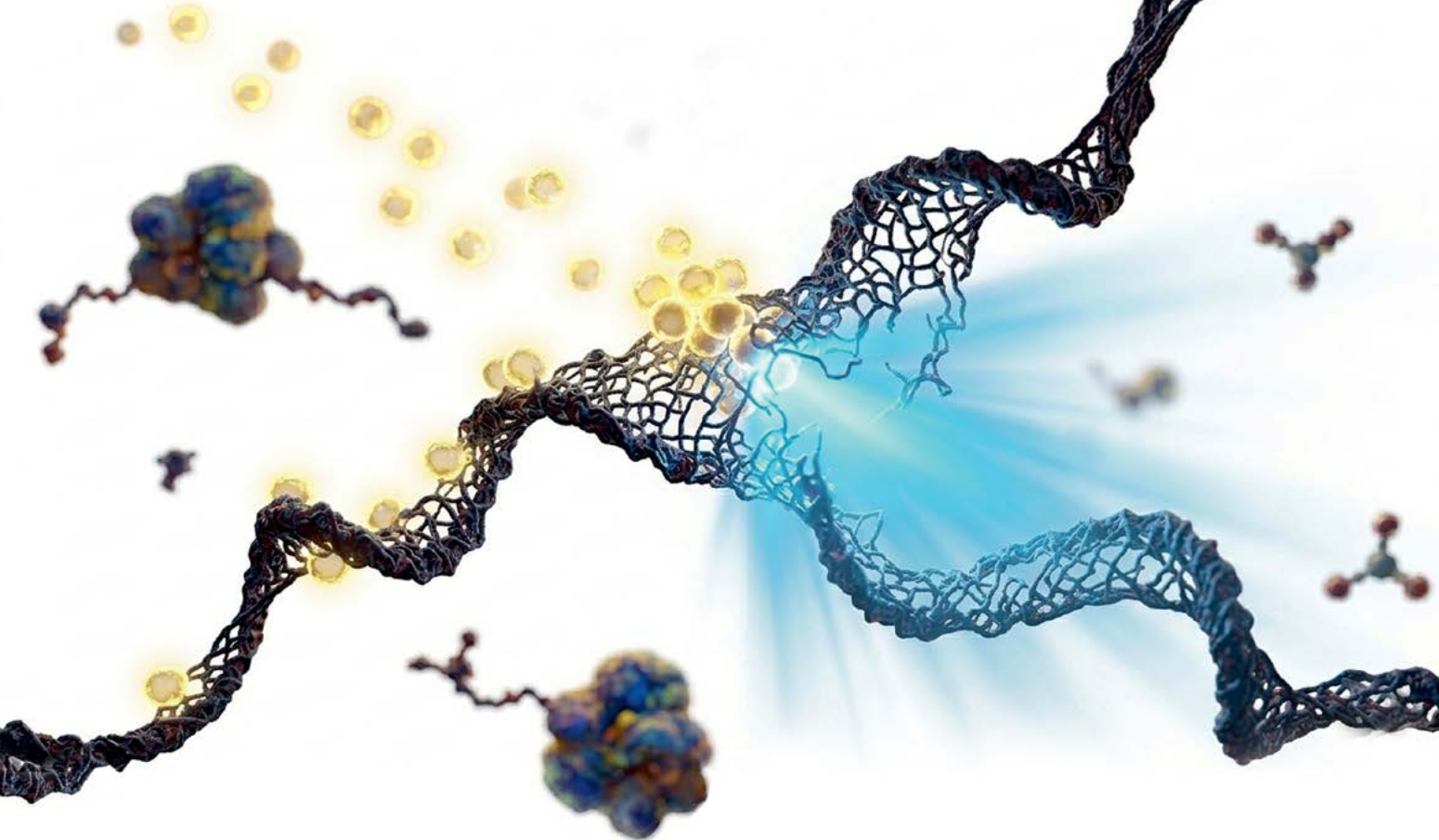
### **Much of your research focuses on diseases caused by nucleotide repeat expansions. Why are these diseases such an important scientific challenge for you?**

Usually, our decisions are influenced by the people we meet along our scientific journeys. These diseases are not particularly

different from other rare diseases, but they stem from a single genetic mechanism: trinucleotide repeat expansions. I began my research career in the laboratory of Prof. Włodzimierz Krzyżosiak at the Institute of Bioorganic Chemistry of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Over 20 years ago, we began researching this area there. Later, I went on a fellowship to the University of Rochester in New York, where my research advisor was Prof. Charles Thornton. He is a clinician and molecular biologist who has been treating patients with myotonic dystrophy for several decades. It was then that I realized the best motivation for working in this field is direct contact with patients and their families.

### **How has our understanding of the underlying mechanisms of diseases such as myotonic dystrophy changed over the past six years?**

Today, I believe we have a deep enough understanding of the molecular mechanisms of the disease to design therapeutic tools that will provide the best possible outcome for patients. The necessary critical mass is finally being reached, enabling us to design new therapeutic molecules effectively. However, I would like to emphasize that basic research, which enables an understanding of these molecular mechanisms, is undervalued in Poland. I am quite skeptical of an excessive shift toward



applied research. Without solid basic research, moving on to the next level is impossible. Basic and applied research must be developed to the same extent. There must be a proper balance between the two. It is important to remember that inventions stem from scientific curiosity, which leads to basic research. Only this line of thinking provides the foundation for developing something that will benefit society.

#### **What about experimental therapies?**

They are not used for the diseases we target. Such treatments are usually reserved for rarer diseases when no other options are available and the patient's condition is critical. In such cases, standard clinical trials are bypassed. It is crucial to remember, however, that the established method for introducing new drugs to the market is clinical trials. Unfortunately, they are time-consuming and costly, but they guarantee that the compound introduced to the market will be safe and well-characterized in terms of its benefits to patients and potential side effects. Experimental treatment, on the other hand, is not always grounded in solid research results and is often overused in medical procedures. This occurs worldwide when someone wants to "fast-track" a product to market. Unfortunately, this shortcut always raises ethical concerns and sometimes leads to abuse.

#### **Your team has published significant research on the relationship between myotonic dystrophy and symptoms of the autism spectrum. What implications does this have for future research on this disease?**

Myotonic dystrophy is a multisystem disease. While it primarily affects skeletal and heart muscles, it actually involves abnor-

malities in many other organs, including the central nervous system. Autism, or more specifically autism spectrum disorder, is typically associated with neurodevelopmental disorders. This means that during human development, there are disruptions in the formation of neural networks in the brain. Our research has shown that ASD may be linked to rare genetic diseases, such as myotonic dystrophy. This disease involves symptoms affecting not only skeletal and cardiac muscles but also deficits, including social deficits, which are characteristic of autism. We have found that these deficits stem from the well-understood molecular pathomechanism of this genetic disorder. Therefore, we understand what occurs in the neuronal cells of patients with myotonic dystrophy, which leads to their dysfunction and, consequently, impaired social functioning. We learned that toxic RNA, which we previously identified as the main culprit behind the skeletal muscle phenotype, also causes molecular changes that lead to autism spectrum disorder.

#### **Your team won the International Research Agendas Program grant from the Foundation for Polish Science. What new opportunities does a grant worth nearly 30 million PLN open up for genetic disease research?**

Large pharmaceutical companies often overlook rare diseases. This is why research on these diseases must be funded by public sources, such as the aforementioned grant. This project aims to establish a Gene Therapy Development Center that will bring together several research groups with complementary expertise. Initially, the project plans to establish four such groups. We are currently recruiting young scientists for the first group and will be based at the AMU Center for Advanced Technologies. In the future, with additional funding, we will

# FEATURE INTERVIEW

be able to build new research groups focused on the same scientific goal.

## **The same goal?**

In research, each of us usually focuses on a narrow area of interest, resulting in fragmented efforts. Each of us works on something slightly different, or even something very different. The Center offers the advantage that several dozen people will work toward the same shared goal.

Our goal is to develop tools based on therapeutic RNA molecules that target the mutated gene products of three genetic diseases: myotonic dystrophies, fragile X-associated disorders, and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). We will develop small therapeutic RNA molecules to target different molecular pathways that lead to disease progression, both directly at the mutated gene and at its products, which are RNA molecules and proteins, to eliminate or reduce their toxic effects.

## **As a member of the International Alzheimer's Disease Research Portfolio, you are involved in this research.**

### **How does the blood transcriptomics approach fit into this research?**

Blood transcriptomics aims to understand the mechanism of drug action by analyzing all RNA molecules present in cells. This allows for the simultaneous analysis of the activity of all genes expressed in the tissue being studied. That is precisely what we are doing in this consortium. We are focusing on understanding the activity of several small-molecule compounds that work perfectly in animal models of Alzheimer's disease for reasons that are as yet unknown. However, we have absolutely no idea what their target is or what mechanism they act upon.

## **I must admit that I find this somewhat difficult to follow.**

Let me explain. Typically, drugs act on a specific protein by binding to it in a particular manner. In the case of the low-molecular-weight compounds investigated in this project, however, their molecular targets remain unknown. Nonetheless, these compounds have been shown to reduce the formation of amyloid plaques in the brains of mouse models of Alzheimer's disease, leading to a decrease in neuronal loss. Our research aims to identify this altered metabolic pathway resulting from delivering the tested compound to the brain so that we can ultimately identify the fundamental target whose activity, whether increased or decreased, causes the deposition of amyloid plaques to be greatly reduced.

While "blood transcriptomics" may sound intimidating, it actually aims to uncover the mechanism behind the action of active compounds. Based on this research, it will be possible to develop safer and more effective drugs in the future.

## **You lead a large team of young scientists. Is it easy to convince young biologists these days that pursuing a career in science in Poland is worthwhile—or that returning to Poland after internships abroad is worthwhile?**


Every scientist who goes abroad for a research internship gains a broader perspective and enhances their skills, not only from learning new research methods but also from gaining a deeper understanding of the essence of scientific research. With more research strategies at one's disposal, it becomes easier to plan future research. Today, gaining experience is possible not only abroad because we also have many research teams here conducting

work at the highest global level. However, fewer and fewer young people are choosing this career path. There are many reasons for this. Most often, family, settling down, mortgages, etc.

Unfortunately, I also notice that interest in pursuing an academic career is waning because young people perceive it as difficult and risky. And it probably is. Few of those who embark on this path can ultimately succeed. We have many doctoral students, fewer assistant professors, and even fewer full professors. However, this is partly due to a flawed perception of the risks involved in pursuing an academic career. After all, during our doctoral studies and postdoctoral fellowships, we acquire an extremely broad range of skills that allow us to work in sectors unrelated to academia.

## **One final question: If you had to point to the most exciting aspect of current research on RNA and genetic diseases, what would it be?**

The source. Despite studying myotonic dystrophy and its underlying mechanisms for a long time, many questions remain unanswered. One of the biggest and most challenging questions is what the primary mechanism is that initiates the disease. We know what happens later. We understand the consequences, but the earliest stage of disease development remains poorly understood. How can just a few mutated RNA molecules, present in a single cell, trigger such devastating effects? What is the source of the downstream cascade of pathological changes? ■



*One of the biggest and most challenging questions is what the primary mechanism is that initiates the disease.*

# AN AMU STATION ON THE ISLAND OF VIKINGS



The Natural Environment Monitoring Station in Biała Góra is an AMU research station and laboratory. It is an interdisciplinary facility and a place of relaxation.

Krzysztof Smura speaks with **AMU Prof. Jacek Tylkowski** about the university's station on the island of Wolin.

**This April marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Natural Environment Monitoring Station in Biała Góra on Wolin. Prof. Andrzej Kostrzewski initiated the history of the site and its research activities. You later took over the station. How did the early years differ from the present?**

Natural science research on Wolin was pioneered at our university after World War II, partly due to the efforts of Profs. Bogumił Krygowski and Adam Wodziczko. The research focused mainly on geographical and biological issues.

In the following decades, especially from the 1970s to the 1990s, research on Wolin continued, particularly regarding the geological structure and morphodynamics of the cliff coast, thanks to Prof. Andrzej Kostrzewski and his team. The intensifi-

cation of research activities revealed the need for a permanent research field station. In 1996, Prof. Kostrzewski established a field station in Grodno. Initially, the station's facilities were limited to three small rooms provided by the Wolin National Park. The station had no permanent staff, and the lack of adequate lodging and facilities prevented groups of students from conducting regular fieldwork. Research activities were mainly carried out as part of monthly site visits. The Geography Research Student Club organized field exercises and camps in Wolin National Park pavilions.

A turning point in the station's operations occurred in 2004 when Prof. Andrzej Kostrzewski, with the approval of **AMU Rector Prof. Stanisław Lorenc** and Wolin National

← The cliff coastline in the area of Biała Góra and Grodno. Researchers from Adam Mickiewicz University have observed the shoreline here receding by an average of 20–30 cm per year. These erosion measurements are crucial for predicting changes brought about by rising Baltic Sea water levels.

Park Director Dr. Ireneusz Lewicki, relocated the station to Biała Góra. This new location significantly improved living conditions and modernized research, measurement, and laboratory infrastructure.

Currently, the station has excellent facilities and 60 beds, allowing for the organization of research camps, field activities, workshops, and seminars. It also conducts ongoing environmental research, including that of the Integrated Monitoring of the Natural Environment program. The station's key strengths include its unique coastal location within Wolin National Park, good transportation access, permanent staff, and year-round operation.

### **The station is a university research laboratory. What are its objectives?**

Since 2010, it has been part of the national Integrated Monitoring of the Natural Environment (IMNE) network. IMNE constitutes the scientific component of the Polish State Environmental Monitoring system and is coordinated by the AMU Center for Environmental Monitoring. The station is one of twelve base stations investigating changes in Poland's geoecosystems and is the only one located in the Baltic coastal zone. Empirical data collected at the station are used to evaluate environmental conditions and identify changes based on long-term measurement and observation series. These series form the basis for modeling future environmental changes related to climate, water resources, and coastal erosion. Additionally, the station conducts research projects and supports academic work related to pursuing academic degrees.

### **Students from different AMU faculties also visit Biała Góra. What role do they play in the station's operations? Is the station interdisciplinary?**

Although the station is part of the AMU Faculty of Geographical and Geological Sciences, its research facilities are also used by students from other AMU faculties, such as the Faculty of Biology and the Faculty of Chemistry. Students and researchers from other academic institutions also visit the station, including those from Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, the University of Gdańsk, and Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, as well as the University of the Arts in Poznań. Therefore, the station's activities are not limited solely to serving its home faculty. It is used intensively for research and teaching, with approximately 1,500 overnight stays logged annually.

### **You finished your research projects in November. What were they about?**

Last year, as part of an agreement between AMU and Wolin National Park, two projects were conducted: one examining the impact of climate change on biomass and forest community

health using satellite remote sensing data, and another investigating changes in water resources in the context of climate change and the construction of new groundwater intakes on Wolin, which exerts anthropogenic pressure.

The results of the studies showed that climate change significantly impacts the phenological advance and lengthens the growing season while reducing biomass growth. There was also a decline in surface and groundwater resources, and the volume of groundwater abstraction at planned intake sites that is safe for the environment was determined.

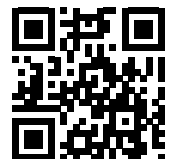
### **Is the Baltic Sea dying? Or is it coming back to life by swallowing more and more land? You recently addressed this question at the Wolin National Park Museum. What is the truth?**

The Baltic Sea is particularly sensitive to climate change and the influx of pollutants, particularly nutrients. It is characterized by limited water exchange with the global ocean. Due to climate change, the waters of the Baltic Sea are becoming warmer, less oxygenated, and less saline. Combined with increasing eutrophication, these changes lead to a decline in biodiversity. Periodic improvements in water quality are driven by the inflow of cold, oxygen-rich, saline water from the North Sea. However, this phenomenon occurs nearly three times less frequently in the 21st century than in the 20th century, averaging about once every ten years. Decreased major inflow frequency contributes to intensified eutrophication and the formation of anoxic bottom waters, ultimately resulting in reduced biodiversity and lower marine biomass.

Another significant effect of contemporary climate change is sea-level rise, estimated at 3–4 mm per year. Our measurements of cliff erosion on the island of Wolin, which have been conducted for over 40 years, indicate that the shoreline is retreating at a rate of 0.2–0.3 m per year. While no clear acceleration of this process has been observed, land loss is continuous and the sea gradually expands its reach.

### **I can't help but ask: Is the Biała Góra station also a popular destination for AMU staff? What do visitors to Biała Góra appreciate most?**

In addition to conducting research and offering educational programs, the station is an ideal place for relaxation and creative work. Visitors highly appreciate its unique location on the edge of a cliff, surrounded by the beech forests of Wolin National Park. Its location provides convenient access to Międzyzdroje's tourist attractions. Of particular interest is the Lubiń viewpoint, which offers a unique panorama of the Świna River's reverse delta and the Szczecin Lagoon. History enthusiasts should visit Wolin, a town dating back over a thousand years that is often identified with the legendary Viking stronghold of Jomsborg or the Slavic Vineta.



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# COLLAGEN WITH MATCHA? HERE YOU GO!

Prof. Jakub D. Rybka, Dr. Adam Mieloch, and Dr. Filip Porzucek discuss an innovative product now available: collagen developed by SpinBionic, the first AMU spin-off.

AN INTERVIEW BY KRZYSZTOF SMURA

**Your biotechnology spin-off was established on October 5, 2023. Two years later, we are seeing results. The synergy between science and business has become a reality. What scientific reasons led to the decision to develop your own collagen supplement at AMU?**



**Jakub Rybka:** We've been operating for nearly two and a half years now, which in itself can be considered a significant success in the small biotech company sector. This is most likely the result of our complementary capabilities. From the beginning, SpinBionic has fo-

cused on developing regenerative medicine technologies. In our research, we use an extracellular matrix derived from animal tissues. We primarily use it as an advanced biomaterial, such as in bioprinting.

However, we are fully aware that the path to the direct commercialization of regenerative medicine solutions—from research to the final product reaching the patient or end user—is very long, demanding, and costly. This was one of the key reasons we developed an alternative way to commercialize our expertise and research results. These results were generated within projects funded by the National Science Center, the National Center for Research and Development, and the Excellence Initiative – Research University.

The next logical step was to create a dietary supplement based on collagen, the main component of the extracellular matrix with which we work daily. During our research, we repeatedly observed and confirmed the beneficial effects of collagen on human cells. This provided a solid scientific basis for developing a product based on collagen.

**Where did the idea to combine fish collagen with Japanese matcha originate? Which matcha properties were considered key when combining it with collagen?**



**Adam Mieloch:** My niece, Ola, was the inspiration. She brought a Japanese teaware set to a family gathering and made me a matcha latte. At the time, we were looking for natural flavors that would effectively mask the fishy aftertaste of the collagen while providing

complementary biological properties. Matcha's intense flavor and well-known health benefits turned out to be exactly what we were looking for.

Matcha is a finely ground powder of green tea that has been an important part of East Asian cultures for hundreds of years. In addition to its distinctive taste and aroma, matcha is rich in bioactive compounds that can have beneficial effects on the human body. Its health-promoting properties have been confirmed in numerous studies and described in many scientific publications.

Matcha is a rich source of powerful antioxidants, vitamin C, and other polyphenols whose properties complement collagen peptides' effects. Antioxidants protect collagen from degradation and reduce inflammation. Vitamin C supports the enzymatic synthesis of new collagen. Matcha also inhibits glycation-related aging, which causes collagen fibers to lose their elasticity.

Our unique formula combines collagen and matcha to provide structural support and protect and support the body's natural renewal processes.

**What research challenges did you face when developing the formula?**



**Filip Porzucek:** One of the key challenges was determining the optimal proportions of the various collagen fractions and matcha. Our primary goal was to create a product with proven biological activity—in other words, a product that actually works.

Sensory qualities such as taste, smell, color, and texture were also important to us. We wanted the product to be nutritionally sound and enjoyable to use every day. During the research and development phase, we tested many natural, plant-based additives that exhibit beneficial biological properties in ad-



dition to their sensory qualities. Our first product, collagen with matcha, is the result of this work, but it certainly isn't our final product.

**How is the collagen produced by the Laboratory of Applied Biotechnology at the AMU NanoBioMedical Center different from similar products? What sets it apart?**

**J.R.:** A pivotal component of our solution is the amalgamation of high-molecular-weight collagen with a low-molecular-weight fraction. The technology used to produce high-molecular-weight collagen is the result of several years of intensive research.

Many collagen products on the market are not subject to advanced purification processes. The high-molecular-weight collagen used in SpinBionic products undergoes multi-stage purification using modern biotechnology techniques. In this regard, we work closely with CoFactor.

As a result, we obtain a raw material that is highly pure and safe, and cost-optimized to the extent that it can be used as a dietary supplement. This combination of biomedical quality and consumer accessibility distinguishes our product.

**What roles do high-molecular-weight marine collagen and the hydrolyzed form play? Why is combining the two so beneficial in your product?**

**A.M.:** Low-molecular-weight (hydrolyzed) collagen is highly absorbable. Short peptides enter the bloodstream quickly and are efficiently distribut-



ed to the body's tissues. This provides the body with a rapid "boost" of amino acids and collagen peptides.

In contrast, high-molecular-weight collagen undergoes gradual hydrolysis in the gastrointestinal tract, which releases peptides more slowly and over a longer period of time. This extended digestion profile may promote the longer availability of bioactive collagen fragments rather than a short-lived, rapid spike in their concentration.

Additionally, recently published studies indicate that digestion products of high-molecular-weight collagen reach the distal sections of the intestines, where they have beneficial prebiotic effects on the microbiome. We find this aspect to be an interesting research direction, and we plan to verify it through our own research.

Combining both forms of collagen allows for a faster and more sustained supply of collagen peptides. We consider this a more comprehensive solution than using only one fraction.

### **What about product safety? How did you ensure it, especially given the ongoing concerns about heavy metals?**

**J.R.:** Heavy metal contamination is a serious issue today, which is why monitoring health-supporting products is an absolute priority for us. We regularly test every batch to ensure that the levels of heavy metals in our products do not exceed applicable standards.

The high-molecular-weight collagen used in our products is derived from salmon skin. We know fish can be a source of heavy metals, so safety begins at the raw material selection stage. We work exclusively with trusted suppliers, and the material used meets rigorous quality standards.

However, the technological process itself is of utmost importance. Multi-stage purification methods based on biotechnology solutions make it possible to remove trace amounts

of contaminants, including heavy metals. This advanced purification process sets our technology apart from standard collagen products on the market.

Additionally, each batch of our product undergoes microbiological purity testing, and the entire manufacturing process takes place under controlled sanitary conditions in accordance with applicable food quality and safety standards.

### **Who will benefit most from using your collagen?**

**F.P.:** It is generally accepted that the body's natural collagen production peaks around the age of 20-25, after which it gradually declines. Under ideal conditions, this decline is gradual, but in reality, we are exposed to many factors that further accelerate collagen degradation, such as stress, environmental pollution, UV radiation, and poor diet.

For this reason, we believe that even young, healthy individuals who wish to support the body's natural regenerative processes can benefit from incorporating SpinBionic/AMU collagen supplementation. Conversely, people recovering from injuries, those with musculoskeletal issues, and those undergoing intensive tissue regeneration may experience positive effects at a younger age. Collagen can support the regeneration of bone fractures, cartilage, tendons, and ligaments, as well as aid in the treatment of gum and periodontal diseases. It can also promote muscle hypertrophy and accelerate wound healing.

Another group of consumers consists of people interested in improving skin hydration, reducing wrinkles, and enhancing the condition of their hair and nails.

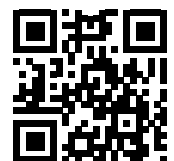
It should be emphasized that the idea that one type of collagen "works on the skin" and another "on the joints" is a myth. With oral supplementation, collagen peptides are not targeted to a single site. They circulate throughout the body via the bloodstream and support natural processes related to connective tissue in joints and skin structure.

### **Clearly, the fact that your product originates from the research community adds to its quality. Do you have plans for more innovative supplements?**

**J.R.:** Yes, we are constantly conducting research and development. We plan to introduce more collagen-based dietary supplements with different flavor profiles and compositions of active ingredients.

In the long term, we also plan to introduce collagen-based cosmetics. A growing body of research suggests that a complementary approach combining oral and topical delivery of ingredients can be especially beneficial for skincare.

We hope to present new products very soon. Together with the special-purpose entity AMU Innovation and the CoFactor company, we plan to conduct research to confirm the effectiveness and uniqueness of our solutions.



**MORE AT**  
[uniwersyteckie.pl](https://uniwersyteckie.pl)

# INSIDE PAOLO SARPI'S CONSPIRACY NETWORK



An interview with **Prof. Robert A. Maryks** from the AMU Institute of Classical Philology, author of the project “Wars of the Quill: The Anti-Papal, Anti-Habsburg, and Anti-Jesuit Conspiracy Network in Early Modern Europe”,

BY DARIUSZ NOWACZYK

## Who was Paolo Sarpi, and what was his network?

Paolo Sarpi is an intriguing figure because his personality and works reveal fascinating paradoxes. For example, he was a Roman Catholic priest and a Servite friar, yet he also served as a counselor to the Doge of Venice, which meant he held a government position. Venice, at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, was both a republic and an empire. Sarpi identified more as a citizen of this city-state than as a member of the Roman Catholic Church. The conflict between Venice and the papacy revealed his greater allegiance to republican ideals than to the papacy. The dispute led the pope to issue an interdict, a ban on performing liturgical rites in Venice, and the Jesuits played a significant role in it. In response, Venice expelled the Jesuits in 1606. This is the crux of the conflict between Sarpi and the papacy, Sarpi and the Jesuits, and Sarpi and the Habsburgs. Sarpi saw the Jesuit-Habsburg alliance as the greatest threat to Venice's interests and those of Europe as a whole. He demonstrated that *raison d'état* is more important than religious affiliations.

## Where did Paolo Sarpi's strength come from?

Sarpi was a theologian and writer who authored *The History of the Council of Trent*, a work that criticized the Catholic Church and the Jesuit order. The book was later translated from Italian into Latin in Jacobean Protestant London. This explains Sarpi's connection to London and his friendship with the English ambassador to Venice, Sir Henry Wotton. Sarpi founded a group

within the Venetian Senate known as the *Giovani* (“the Young”), which sought to reduce papal and Habsburg-Jesuit influence.

## Was this group the core of the network that involved Europe's most important states?

In my opinion, that is exactly what happened. However, as far as spies are concerned, it relied more on the network built by the three-time English ambassador to Venice, which could intercept correspondence sent from places like Rome to Venice. Sarpi's network, on the other hand, relied on Wotton's contacts in England and other centers, such as France where Gallican tendencies prevailed—that is, independence from the papacy and opposition to the Jesuits—and was more intellectual in nature.

## How was Sarpi's intellectual network formed?

It was built on extensive correspondence. Its main purpose was to exchange insights on events happening not only in Venice, but also throughout Europe, as Sarpi's interests were pan-European. He was interested in more than just Venice's conflicts with the papacy and the Habsburgs; he was interested in all of Europe. Sarpi gathered information on the influence of the Jesuits in various European countries. With the help of young senators, Sarpi expelled the Jesuits from Venice. However, he was obsessively afraid that they would return. He collected anti-Jesuit texts, which can now be viewed at the Marciana Library in Venice. Sarpi also wrote anti-Jesuit texts with the help of his associates. For example, a series of letters forged by Sarpi's associates and



The writings of Paolo Sarpi – a theologian who prioritized the interests of the state over loyalty to Rome. This multi-volume collection illustrates the scale of early modern conspiracy, the mechanisms of which are studied today by researchers with the support of artificial intelligence.



*Tandem hominem inveni cuius Sapientia Coelo lapsa oculos aperit Regibus et Populis.*

purporting to be between a Jesuit rector and a wealthy Venetian widow who was manipulated into leaving her fortune to the order is very interesting. This is how the myth that the Jesuits exploited wealthy widows to obtain money took root. Intellectual networks and activities such as gathering information and writing texts were a reaction to the Jesuits' influence and were intended to prevent their return.

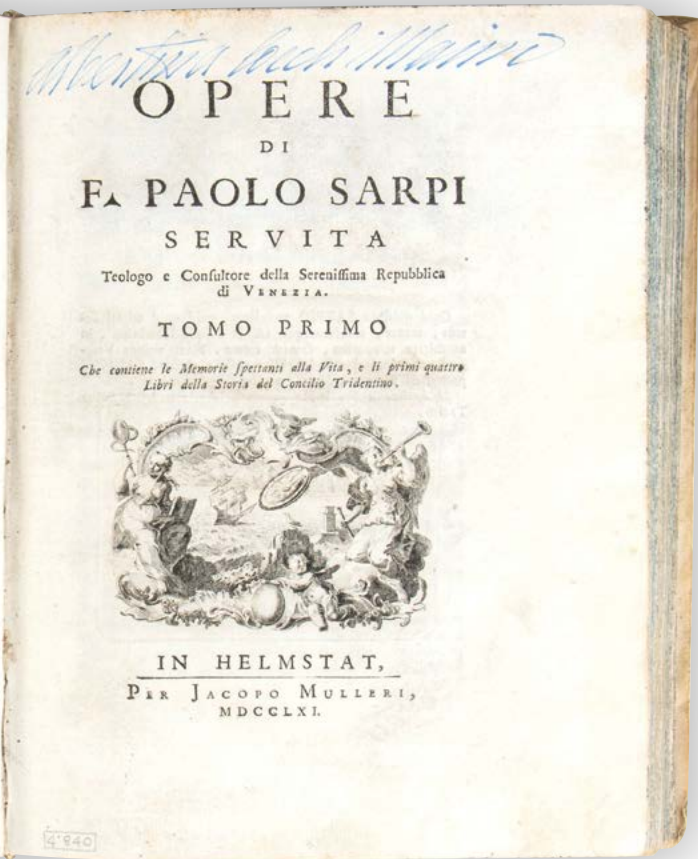
**As I understand it, these were propaganda, literary, and journalistic texts with the potential to spread throughout Europe.**

These texts included literary works, historiographical texts, political satires, and theological treatises that refuted the political theories of the papacy or the Jesuits. The goal was to prevent the Jesuits from returning to Venice. Sarpi tried to gather information from places where such returns were taking place. For example, the Jesuits were expelled from France at the end of the 16th century but had returned by the beginning of the 17th century. They returned with great influence over the king and quickly became the main political force in the state. After their return, the Jesuits served as confessors and advisors to kings until the end of the monarchy. They are perceived as a conspiracy group whose members, being so close to monarchs in most Catholic European countries, created a network of influence over political and dynastic decisions. Let us not forget that one of the main features of modern European politics is precisely dynastic politics. A great example is the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, Sigismund III Vasa. He was elected king

after defeating the Habsburg candidate; however, his two wives, Anne and Constance, were of Habsburg lineage. They had Jesuit confessors. Sarpi notes that, despite Sigismund's earlier opposition to the Habsburgs, they subsequently influenced politics in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The subsequent kings were Sigismund's sons and thus had Habsburg blood. The Zebrzydowski Rebellion in Poland from 1606 to 1609 was a revolt against the king and the Jesuits. One of the rebels' demands was to limit the Jesuits' influence, and some even called for their expulsion. References to Venice, which set an example of how to handle the Jesuits, appear in the literature on the Zebrzydowski Rebellion.

**Were the activities of Paolo Sarpi and his network evident in the policies of European rulers?**

Over the years, Sarpi's thinking becomes increasingly paranoid. He saw that his ideals were losing ground. According to some historians, European countries were undergoing a process of re-Catholicization in which the Jesuits played a leading role. This was happening in Poland, Lithuania, France, and the Holy Roman Empire. Thanks to the Jesuits, monarchs favored Roman Catholicism and persecuted religious minorities. In Poland, for example, the Polish Brethren (Minor Reformed Church of Poland) were ultimately expelled in 1658 following the Swedish invasion. The Jesuits' actions are apparent in much of the literature written against them. For instance, the fabrication of false information claiming that the Polish Brethren aided the Swedish invaders led to the conclusion that, since they were not patriots, they should



be expelled. In France, the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685, which strengthened Jesuit Catholicism and curtailed the Gallican and Jansenist movements.

**The project involves analyzing a large quantity of texts, for which you intend to use AI.**

Yes, we will collect, review, and analyze these texts with AI, with the help of Dr. Cezary Rosiński from the Poznań branch of the Digital Humanities Center at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. We have already developed an AI tool, the Grammar of Conspiracy Matrix Analysis, which reads texts and flags passages with conspiratorial undertones. We spent several months working on the prompt to define how this tool should function. We identified types of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and sometimes punctuation that suggest a text may contain conspiratorial undertones. It turned out that GPT 5.1 is the most effective. We examined 64 letters from Henry Wotton mentioning the Jesuits and found conspiratorial tones in each, suggesting that early modern diplomacy and the perception of reality were largely conspiratorial. These letters were written to the Secretary of State of England. The Secretary of State was the most important person in the government; he reported on the situation in Europe to King James I, thereby influencing his decisions. From this perspective, I believe this project is important because we can see how certain decisions were the result of conspiratorial thinking. The question remains: Will we find the same

conspiratorial way of thinking about politics in Europe when we analyze all of Paolo Sarpi's letters in this way?

**Is what you said about the conspiracy network in the first half of the seventeenth century applicable to the present day?**

Yes, definitely. Many people think that conspiracy theories are a modern phenomenon, but our analyses show that they have a long history. Conspiracy theories are not only expressed in letters, but also through texts that aim to convince readers to fight against an opposing group or minority. The Jesuits' reality was shaped in the king's mind by the secretary of state, who was influenced by Henry Wotton's letters written in collusion with Sarpi. These decisions shaped the reality of post-Reformation Europe.

**What is the intended outcome of this project?**

The project will reconstruct and study Paolo Sarpi's European correspondence network, which exemplifies covert rhetorical political struggle in the 17th century. It will produce an open digital corpus of sources, a hybrid knowledge map illustrating personal relationship dynamics and information flow, and an innovative analytical tool: the Grammar of Conspiracy Matrix Analysis. This tool is designed to identify conspiratorial rhetoric in historical texts. These results will be disseminated through peer-reviewed scholarly publications, a monograph that summarizes the project's findings, and a sustainable digital infrastructure that can be applied to the study of conspiracy networks in different geographical and chronological contexts of the "wars of the quill." ■

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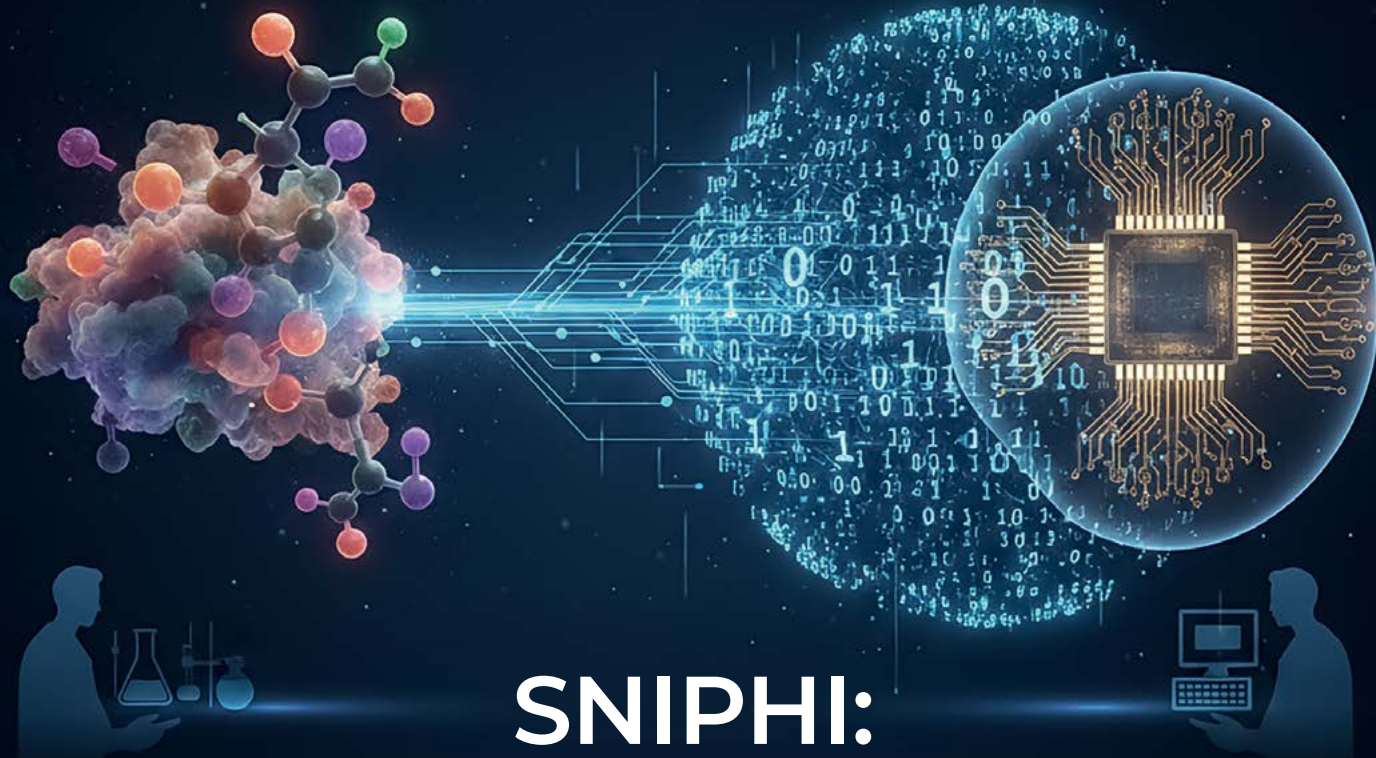
**f FROM FACEBOOK:**

This is going to be an incredibly interesting project! Prof. Robert A. Maryks from the AMU Institute of Classical Philology leading his team to explore the topic, "Wars of the Quill: The Anti-Papal, Anti-Habsburg, and Anti-Jesuit Conspiracy Network in Early Modern Europe," makes it all the more compelling. The title alone is fascinating.

The project has received funding from the National Science Center and aims to examine how conspiracy theories, diplomacy, and espionage shaped politics and religion in early modern Europe.

Prof. Maryks and his team will analyze thousands of historical documents, including letters, diplomatic reports, and polemical texts written in English, Italian, and Latin. Their research will be based on traditional historical methods and supported by modern digital tools that will help them identify hidden linguistic patterns and communication networks.

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# SNIPHI: THE DIGITAL NOSE OF THE FUTURE

**Oliwia Staryszak**, a student at the AMU Faculty of Chemistry, and **Szymon Obst**, a graduate of the AMU Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science, are contributing to the success of Sniphi, a technology startup founded by Antdata which is developing digital scent recognition technology.

EWA KONARZEWSKA-MICHALAK

The Digital Nose system combines advanced chemical sensors with artificial intelligence algorithms. The sensors record data on unique gas patterns and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which the system's AI-powered digital brain then analyzes. The device uses a machine learning module and a cloud-based data infrastructure.

The Digital Nose is based on sensors that use metal oxides. The sensor's electrical resistance changes

depending on the type of molecules that adhere to its surface. Additionally, a specific temperature profile is used to enable controlled regulation of the sensor surface temperature. This allows for characteristic signal responses to be obtained for different substances," says Oliwia Staryszak.

Oliwia is responsible for designing the experimental procedure, conducting the experiments, and testing the completed model. Szymon Obst, on the



The jury of the Young Inventor competition, organized by the daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*, recognized its capabilities. The Sniphi – Digital Nose project, in which AMU students and graduates actively participated, was awarded in the AgroTech & Food Technology category.

Additionally, in collaboration with researchers from the University of Silesia in Katowice, a joint project was conducted to identify pests in grain. Using the digital nose, the team could distinguish between clean and infested grain, opening up a wide range of industrial applications.

This new technology can be implemented in many sectors of the economy, including food quality control (e.g., detecting spoilage and odor deviations), agriculture and grain monitoring (e.g., detecting the presence of pests in grain to prevent significant product losses), medicine and cosmetology (e.g., odor analysis for early diagnosis or product quality assessment), and environmental protection (e.g., air quality monitoring or detecting undesirable substances). Sniphi has commercial potential—it has already been officially presented in Silicon Valley.

Oliwia and Szymon emphasize that the project is constantly evolving and still requires work. “More research is necessary to validate the entire procedure and check parameters that may affect the results. In fact, there are still many issues that need further investigation,” says Oliwia.

Oliwia is working on her master’s thesis in chemical analysis, examining how freeze-drying and freezing fruit affect their composition. She is interning at Antdata on the Sniphi team. Szymon, who graduated from the Poznań University of Economics and Business with degrees in computer science and econometrics and from Adam Mickiewicz University with a degree in data analysis, also works at Antdata on other IT solutions for businesses.

Interestingly, the Sniphi team includes other AMU graduates: Bartosz Tomczak, who earned a master’s degree in Internet of Things Applications from the Faculty of Physics and Astronomy; Adam Hącia, who earned a bachelor’s degree in mathematics and an engineering degree in computer science at the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science; and postgraduate students: Daniel Kucięba (data processing – big data, Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science) and Konrad Kołaczek (applications of the internet of things, Faculty of Physics and Astronomy). Clearly, graduating from our university opens the door to an exciting professional career. ■

other hand, works on the IT team. “We receive experimental results from Oliwia—that is, records of how the sensors respond over time. Each record corresponds to a specific scent and is repeated multiple times. Based on this data, we train the scent recognition system. In the future, when a scent appears, the system can classify it and indicate the level of certainty that it is a given substance,” Szymon explains.

Much like the human nose, the system can distinguish between scents and gas profiles—and even better, as it demonstrates greater precision. Thanks to AI, the system can detect deviations from the norm in enclosed spaces, such as warehouses, without opening packaging.



## *The Sniphi team employs six AMU graduates.*

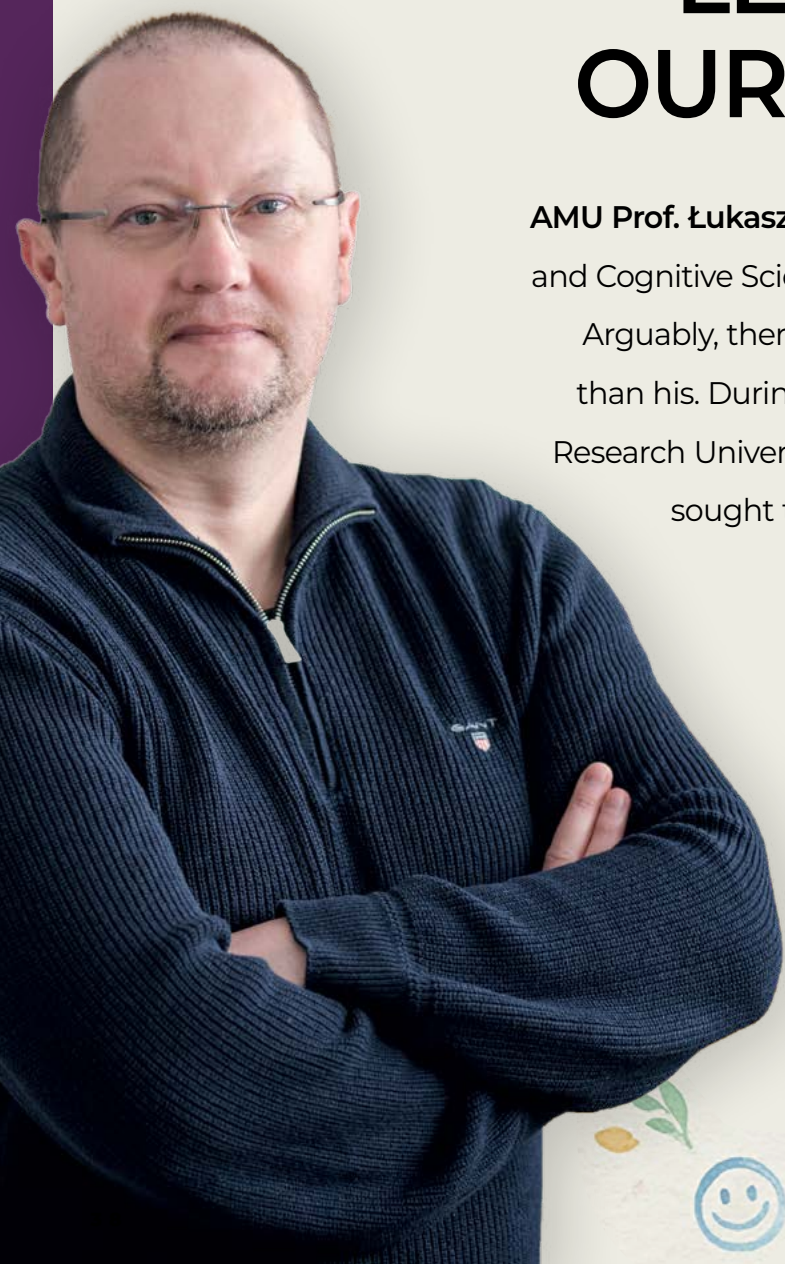


# LET'S BOOST OUR HAPPINESS!

**AMU Prof. Łukasz Kaczmarek** from the Faculty of Psychology and Cognitive Science has been studying happiness for years.

Arguably, there is no more enjoyable or motivating job than his. During the recent IDUB (Excellence Initiative – Research University) Days, he was one of the lecturers who sought to convince others that promoting happiness is worthwhile.

INTERVIEW BY KRZYSZTOF SMURA



# WISDOM BEGINS IN WONDER

## **Do you think our understanding of happiness is different today than it was 25 years ago?**

Yes! I'm already worried about what will happen in the next 25 years. The ultimate "currency" doesn't change. People have always wanted to feel satisfied with life, have a sense of purpose, and experience positive emotions. However, what we accumulate and ultimately exchange for happiness has changed over the years. This has evolved over the centuries. In Homer's time, happiness was considered a stroke of luck. People hoped that their lives would change for the better in an almost magical way, thanks to the favor of the gods. During the time of the Classical Greek philosophers, happiness meant shaping one's own character, or deriving satisfaction from one's virtue. A happy person was an exemplary citizen. During the cold, disease- and famine-ridden dark times of the Middle Ages, happiness was defined as a life that brought one closer to heaven. People hoped that their good deeds would be exchanged for happiness after death. During the Age of Enlightenment, happiness was equated with pleasure. The goal was to have as much happiness as possible for as many people as possible. This attitude seems to persist to this day. I am under the impression that Poland has retraced this entire path in a very short time. Immediately after the fall of communism—which was also supposed to be a system that made people happy—we experienced a period of good fortune. Overnight, great fortunes appeared. Then came times of hard work and earning a living. There were also crises and deep poverty, meaning that sometimes, all we could do was turn our eyes toward heaven. Now, it seems we are experiencing an explosion in the pursuit of pleasure and well-being. Jim Holt, an American journalist and essayist, described our time as an era in which the "warm puppy" has become a symbol of happiness. It may be a bit sarcastic, but there's something to it. Happiness is comfort.

## **Your field is positive psychology. Why not negative psychology? Wouldn't delving into the dark corners of the soul be easier?**

I try to focus on psychology as a whole. I'm interested in positive psychology because happiness is a neglected area of scientific research. There's simply more to discover here. The field of psychopathology has already been thoroughly explored.

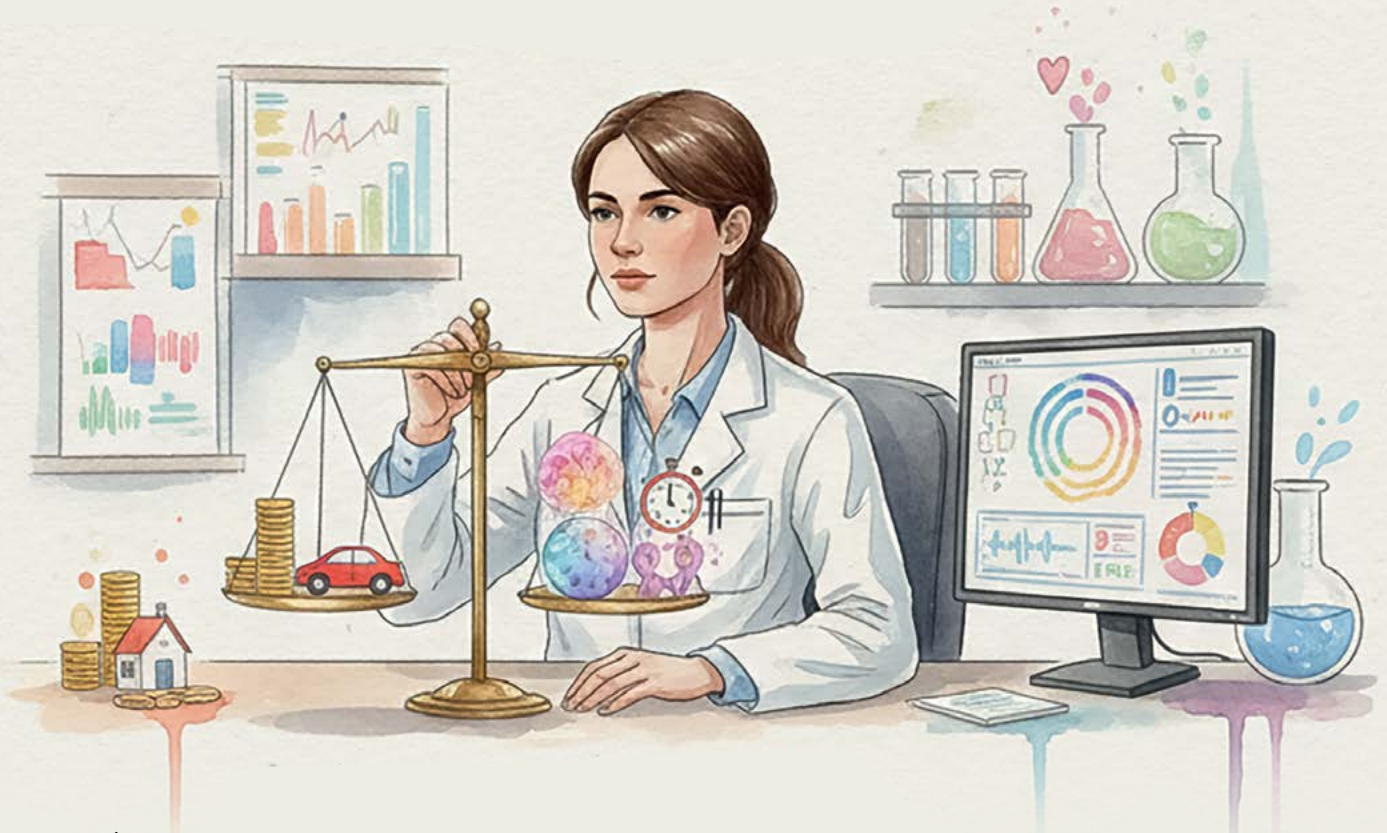
## **What is the shortest definition of happiness that you can think of?**

I understand that you're asking for the most concise definition, not the best one. Of the definitions I've heard, "chocolate" is the best. But, from a scientific

perspective, happiness is the ultimate currency. This is a teleological approach, one based on ends, purposes, or goals. Everything we do, we do for a reason. However, there are certain states of affairs and states of mind that no longer require justification because they serve no further purpose. They are an end in themselves. For example, we do many things to derive satisfaction from life. But why do we need satisfaction? There is no answer. To many people, this question may seem absurd. States of mind such as life satisfaction, a sense of meaningfulness, and the experience of positive emotions are the ultimate goals in life. That is why these ultimate notions fall within the concept of happiness.

## **Which emotions have a positive impact on our well-being, and how can we experience more of them?**

A large body of research shows that experiencing positive emotions daily is important for physical and mental health and for developing good relationships with others. The range of positive emotions is complex. Some positive emotions are associated with achieving goals, such as joy and pride. There are also positive emotions associated with the process of striving toward a goal, such as curiosity and enthusiasm. Then, there are positive emotions associated with stepping away from goals, such as peace, relief, and calm. There are also positive social emotions, such as gratitude, tenderness, and love. Research on happiness shows that the main problem with positive emotions is that, once we find them, we try to draw them constantly from the same source. Today, my six-year-old son asked me to tell him a joke that had made him laugh so much the day before. He was surprised that the joke made him laugh less each time! But it's the same joke! It should be just as funny every time! Of course, we all know that's not the case. People quickly habituate to stimuli, and their perceived value decreases. This is both our blessing and our curse, as well as the driving force behind our development. By constantly repeating the same situations, we devalue them. It's a bit like trying to simply print more money in the hope that it will retain its value. Once again, we return to a sort of "economics" of happiness. To break this hedonistic cycle, we must seek different sources of the same positive emotions. For example, if we particularly enjoy the emotion of pride, we can't derive it effectively over the long term by playing guitar for our friends. We need to think about where else we can experience this emotion. How about volunteering? Or joining a discussion group where we can proudly share our ability to lead engaging conversations? Second, we need to draw on various positive emotions. I've already listed quite a few. In a healthy emotional



diet, it's important to experience a variety of emotions. Lastly, it's difficult to experience positive emotions without negative ones. Often, the strongest positive emotions require a certain amount of negative tension. It's just like in games—we're happiest when a win is preceded by high tension and a high probability of losing. In a sense, positive emotions steal that arousal and explode. We start jumping and shouting with joy, unaware that this is a reward for the negative emotions we experienced just moments before. Here, too, positive and "negative" psychology converge, and one is difficult to understand without the other.

### How are instant happiness and long-term well-being different?

Happiness is both a short-lived state and a personal trait. It's similar to body weight. People have a baseline. For some, it is higher, while for others, unfortunately, it is lower. There are periodic fluctuations around this baseline. Research shows that a person's level of happiness depends on this baseline roughly half the time and on variable factors the other half of the time. It's much like health—some people are more prone to illness, while bacteria and viruses seem to avoid others. However, both groups experience ups and downs in life. Identical twins tend to be equally happy, even if they are raised separately. Genes undoubtedly play a role in this, as they regulate the hormonal and neurotransmitter processes important for forming mental states. The second group of factors consists of life circumstances. Interestingly, many people believe that a change in circumstances will lead to long-term happiness, but this is not the case. Many people imagine that if they had a bigger house, a more luxurious car, more money in the bank, more academic degrees, a bigger TV, a more expensive smartphone, and a spouse with more virtues and fewer flaws, their happiness would improve permanently.

However, we know that this effect is not as lasting as people think. First, there is the ceiling effect, meaning subsequent changes are unable to add much if one significant positive change occurs. Second, adaptation sets in quickly, and new problems emerge. After a year or two, we find ourselves thinking not that life is much better than before but that, while the house may be twice as big, the commute to work has become a daily nightmare. The car may be luxurious, but it's difficult to park in the city, and we miss the manual transmission. There's supposedly more money in the bank, but we invested our savings, which we didn't have before, and it was a total flop. The TV is twice as big, but the only benefit is that it's clearer that there's nothing interesting on it. That's why we must make a daily effort to do something for our own happiness, to raise its level. It's just like how we should take care of our bodies every day, even if it's just with a short workout.

### Can positive emotions be trained like muscles at the gym?

Making an effort to cultivate happiness can become a daily habit. Each day, we should try to do something that brings us satisfaction, a sense of purpose, or an increase in positive emotions. Happiness doesn't come without effort. It requires overcoming bad habits and developing new ones. The good news is that, once established, it's easier to maintain a habit than to break it—and this applies to good habits as well. You can easily test this theory. For example, try not brushing your teeth before bed tonight. Many people are unable to resist doing so. I often demonstrate this in my lectures by asking students to try the experiment. Habit is second nature to humans and is something over which we have considerable control. I wrote a book on this topic called *Pozytywne interwencje psychologiczne – Zachowania intencjonalne a dobrostan* (Positive Psychological

# WISDOM BEGINS IN WONDER

Interventions: Well-Being and Intentional Activity). I encourage you to read it to learn more about the topic.

## **Some say alcohol and stimulants bring happiness in the face of misfortune. Is that a prescription for the desperate?**

It's not. Prescriptions are written by doctors, and no doctor will prescribe alcohol or stimulants. The chemicals in these products generally affect dopamine levels. Dopamine is the hormone associated with excitement in anticipation of a reward. But there's no reward here! These products trick the brain into thinking that something genuinely positive has happened in our lives. Alcohol also numbs emotions, temporarily drowning out negative feelings like shame or shyness. Alcohol may have some minor, short-term benefits. After all, many people turn to such substances for some reason. However, jokes aside, I have never heard of a recipe for happiness like this one. Any minor benefits quickly fade, and addiction, coercion, and a loss of autonomy take their place. Currently, a fairly trendy area of research in psychiatry and clinical psychology involves psychedelic substances, which may benefit some people. However, we are talking about taking them under psychiatric supervision, not for recreational purposes. This is a controversial trend, but it shows that, for people for whom other methods fail, this path toward achieving a beneficial change may be possible.

## **In your opinion, which areas of positive psychology are under-researched?**

Without a doubt, cultural differences. The psychology we know today is still based on information from Western cultures. In contrast, information from Eastern cultures often paints a completely different picture of the factors that determine happiness. For instance, many psychological interventions used in the West are ineffective in the East. Western interventions often focus heavily on the individual. In some cultures, this orientation is not widely accepted. This phenomenon is interesting and casts a bit of a shadow on science. We often think the United States and Europe represent the whole world, yet we are a clear minority in terms of numbers. Many people in the West are surprised to learn that 80% of the world's population has a completely different background. In the past, European cartographers would write on maps that beyond Africa there were only lions and dragons. Today, we know just as little about happiness in Muslim countries, Africa, or Asia, which make up the majority of the world.

The second area is hard science, including genetic, epigenetic, biological, and psychophysiological research. There is still a lot of ground to cover in happiness research. In my lab, we're trying to address this by looking for concrete indicators of happiness, such as positive emotions measured psychophysiologically. This area lacks research methods and funding. If we want to know more than just what people think, we must purchase and maintain expensive equipment to measure these things. For example, we observe subtle changes in heart function, and

these tools are not cheap. As Adam Mickiewicz, the patron of our university, once said, "Have heart and look into your heart," and that is what we are trying to do.

## **Imagine that you are the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Happiness Studies* and Moses. You stand before a crowd and present ten commandments for happiness. I'm in the crowd, listening and taking notes.**

1. Treat happiness as a serious part of your life.
2. Accept that you are responsible for some of it.
3. While you can't will yourself into happiness, you can do things that make it more likely.
4. Happiness takes work, especially at first, before it becomes a habit.
5. While not everyone can achieve perfect happiness, everyone can be a little happier. Over a lifetime, that makes a big difference.
6. Stick to the golden mean—obsessing over happiness can lead to unhappiness.
7. You won't be happy all the time, and you don't need to be. A happy person is someone who is happy sometimes. The lows make the highs possible.
8. Happiness requires change; you can't stay happy in the same way forever.
9. Avoid substances; they're shortcuts through a swamp. It's better to take the longer road.
10. Remember, many of the strongest sources of happiness are simple: good relationships, physical activity, parenthood, meaningful work, and helping others.

## **How do you take care of your well-being?**

I consider myself lucky to have a fairly high baseline for well-being. I'm generally happy with my life and experience many positive emotions. Of course, that doesn't mean I don't have worries, difficult moments, sleepless nights, or moments of doubt. But I bounce back from them fairly quickly. Sometimes I wonder why I feel like things aren't so bad when they actually are. My well-being primarily comes from my commitment to my family and work. Some people regret not devoting enough attention to their children. They regret that their children are no longer children and that they didn't really have time to get to know them well at that age. I know I'll never say that. I have flexible working hours. I can work in the evenings and at night, when everyone is asleep. Over the past 15 years, I've spent a great deal of time with my kids, especially since they're prone to illness and spend a lot of time at home. I don't know where I'd get oxytocin, the social bonding hormone, if I didn't have that kind of contact. The second thing is work. For many years, I tried to make it so that I could do the things that fascinate me the most. I feel like I succeeded a few years ago. We conduct a lot of research and have great results. Every day, I learn that another paper has been published citing the results of our research. All of this gives me a sense of purpose and satisfaction. ■

# THE CHEMISTRY OF UNHAPPINESS

Cannabis has made a spectacular return to medicine, and psilocybin is following suit. This highlights the importance of scientific freedom over bureaucratic restrictions.

EWA KONARZEWSKA-MICHALAK



**A** **MU Prof. Karol Kacprzak** from the Faculty of Chemistry delivered a popular science lecture for young people titled “The Chemistry of Unhappiness: Molecular Foundations and Treatment of Stress, Anxiety, and Depression.” The scientist discussed how the human body responds to chronic stress and how chemistry can help treat mental disorders.

“What is unhappiness?” Prof. Kacprzak began by defining the problem. “In the context of mental well-being, it is the sum of stress, anxiety, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and depressive episodes or depression.” According to a study conducted in 27 European Union member states, mental health has the greatest impact on a person’s experience of unhappiness, exceeding the impact of poverty and unemployment.

Prof. Kacprzak argued that all our feelings, emotions, and even our consciousness are triggered by chemical compounds produced in the body. “If we know what these compounds are and where they act, we will be able to influence our states of consciousness. Incidentally, this has been practiced since the dawn of human civilization—i.e., drugs—and for just the past 100 years, psychiatric medication,” he said.

Unhappiness starts with stress, which has gotten a bad rap lately but is always present in the physiology of every living organism. Eustress, or short-term stress of moderate intensity, motivates action, increases alertness, helps one adapt to new situations, and builds resilience. At the molecular level, eustress triggers numerous biochemical processes, including autophagy and oxidative stress reduction. It also stimulates repair and protective processes in brain neurons and other cells. Distress, on the other hand, is usually a “by-product” of modern civilization that overwhelms the body’s adaptive capacity. If chronic, it can lead to various diseases.

The hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis regulates stress in the body. The hypothalamus responds to stress by releasing corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH), which stimulates the pituitary gland to secrete adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH). ACTH then stimulates the adrenal glands to produce corticosteroids, such as cortisol and catecholamines.

“When this system functions properly, a feedback mechanism ensures that everything returns to normal after the stress subsides. Unfortunately, stress often does not go away in today’s reality. The feedback loop does not fully activate, which leads to chronically elevated cortisol levels. This condition, known as a dysregulated HPA axis, is associated with various mental and physical disorders and is well-documented in medical literature,” explained Prof. Kacprzak. This is when anxiety responses and depressive moods begin. Reactive oxygen species appear in cells, reducing their vitality and stimulating the release of inflammatory mediators — molecular stressors — which ultimately lead to weakened neurons in the brain and associated dysfunctions.

Adaptogens, chemical substances found in certain plants, can help manage harmful stress at the molecular level. They were discovered and defined by Soviet toxicologist Nikolai Lazarev, who, as early as the 1940s, observed that people living in the harsh Siberian climate were able to maintain good health thanks to these substances.

Adaptogens help cells function better and become more resilient. Importantly, these compounds lower cortisol levels. Their effects are non-specific, activating various cellular mechanisms (as defined by the FDA, for example). Adaptogens can be found in popular plants such as ginseng, ashwagandha, maca, schisandra, *Rhodiola rosea*, Asiatic pennywort, and shiitake mushrooms. Including them in your diet is beneficial,

## TRENDING TOPIC

but keep in mind that hormetic stressors, such as intense training, ice swimming, saunas, fasting, and mental exertion, strengthen the body when administered in controlled doses. Adaptogens and hormesis will both help you stay in shape and cope with chronic stress, which is often beyond our control.

Another source of unhappiness can be anxiety. It is associated with social phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic attacks, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The amygdalae, a small, paired nuclear complex located in the temporal lobes that serves as an emotion regulator within the limbic system, are responsible for anxiety. Reducing the excessive activity of this structure, which constantly analyzes potential threats, can help alleviate chronic anxiety, which may lead to depressive episodes. Anti-anxiety drugs quite selectively reduce amygdala activity by increasing gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) inhibitors and targeting catecholamines. However, there are also many natural products and compounds that can help.

“They’re flavonoids,” said Prof. Kacprzak. “We find them in fruits and vegetables. For example, apigenin is found in parsley, celery, artichokes, thyme, lavender, mint, and onions; hesperidin is found in citrus fruits; and epigallocatechin gallate is found in green tea.” Modern medicine has been more successful in treating anxiety than depression. Unfortunately, as many as 300 million people (4.4% of the world’s population) suffer from a severe form of this condition. At the same time, pharmaceutical therapy is becoming an increasingly lucrative business—the market value in wealthy countries is already \$17 billion. Despite this, there are not many substances that effectively treat patients with treatment-resistant depression, who account for 30–50% of those affected. The available medications, mainly selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), act slowly and are associated with troublesome side effects. These include an increased risk of suicide among young people, emotional numbness, and sexual dysfunction. Upon discontinuation, patients experience a prolonged and often troublesome withdrawal syndrome.



Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) – the hidden power of red berries



Schisandra (*Schisandra chinensis*) – the fruit with five flavors



Shitake mushrooms (*Lentinula edodes*) – the elixir of life from the depths of the forest



Asian pennywort (*Centella asiatica*) – the legendary ‘tiger’s claw’

“Two years ago, it was revealed that all the claims that pharmaceutical companies had made for years about depression being caused by low serotonin levels were essentially invalid. The hypothesis that depression results from reduced serotonin activity or levels has not been confirmed. In fact, there is data suggesting that long-term use of antidepressants may lower these levels even further. In fact, we know very little. We have a massive pharmaceutical market with drugs whose mechanisms of action we do not understand. Researchers at King’s College London raised this topic and were immediately attacked by Big Pharma and part of the medical community,” emphasized Prof. Kacprzak.

Currently, few fast-acting antidepressants are available, such as esketamine (brand name Spravato). However, scientists are pinning their greatest hopes on psilocybin, a hallucinogen found in mushrooms of the *Psilocybe* genus that was once popular among hippies. Psilocybin has proven to be an effective, fast-acting antidepressant with few side effects. “At the beginning of the 20th century, officials removed psilocybin and cannabis from medicine because these compounds were being abused, just like many other ‘problematic’ alkaloids that are classified as drugs,” the lecturer explained. “Today, we are witnessing the spectacular return of cannabis to medicine. It has dozens of registered uses and is a fully recognized medication. Psilocybin is also making a comeback. This shows that the freedom of scientific research should take precedence over bureaucratic bans, which have severely hindered progress for decades. For 70 years, there were no cannabis- or psilocybin-based medicines because researching them was either impossible or required heroic determination and a grueling journey through administrative red tape,” he said.

In conclusion, Prof. Kacprzak reminded the audience that drugs are not everything. “We have a superbly developed, functioning, inborn system based on dopamine, endorphins, oxytocin, and serotonin that gives us pleasure and enjoyment in life. We should look after these systems and neurotransmitters so that we experience as much happiness and joy as possible, balancing it with unhappiness.” ■

# STRENGTH IN COLLABORATION: BUILDING A UNIQUE NEUROBIOLOGY PROGRAM



### **Prof. Paweł Marciniak**

from the AMU Department of Animal Physiology and Developmental Biology, head of the neurobiology study program,

IS INTERVIEWED BY KRZYSZTOF SMURA.

**The neurobiology program is 10 years old. Today, it is an unparalleled study program. It stands out on the academic map of our country.**

In 2015, Prof. Jan Celichowski from the Poznań University of Physical Education (PUPE) initiated discussions with the Poznań University of Life Sciences (PULS) and our university, specifically with Prof. Grzegorz Rosiński, who was then the head of the Department of Animal Physiology and Developmental Biology. They decided to create a joint master's program in Poznań with teams specializing in neurobiology. This program is unique, as neurobiology is only offered in Poznań and at Jagiellonian University in Krakow. In 2018, the Poznań University of Medical Sciences (PUMS) joined the consortium, and courses have since been offered at four faculties: the AMU Faculty of Biology, the PUPE Faculty of Health Sciences, the PULS Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science, and the PUMS Faculty of Medical Sciences.

**What is the admissions process like? It can't be easy, can it?**

Initially, the four universities conducted admissions for the neurobiology master's program independently. Each recruited its own pool of candidates. In 2018, changes to the program's structure were mandated by the Polish Law on Higher Education and Science.

A lead institution had to be selected, and AMU was assigned that role. While all universities participate in teaching the courses, AMU represents the program. Formally, the students are enrolled in our faculty. The admissions process, which consists of an interview, is conducted by an admissions committee composed of faculty representatives from all universities.

**What about the diploma?**

AMU issues the diploma, which bears the full names of all four universities. This was formalized through an agreement signed by the rectors of PUPE, AMU, PULS, and PUMS.

**What was the rationale behind creating the neurobiology program?**

The motivation was that each university had strong research groups in this field. These teams were highly ac-

tive in research related to various aspects of neurobiology. However, they were highly dispersed. Prof. Celichowski proposed consolidating all the groups and creating a program that would train highly specialized graduates who would, in the future, constitute potential research staff and pursue doctoral studies.

**Based on what you said, each university had its own academically strong team. What research areas did AMU focus on, and which ones were strongly represented by the other universities?**

Our faculty primarily focuses on neurobiology and neuroendocrinology using invertebrate models. My team studies the physiological functions of neuropeptides. The faculty has a very strong team, led by **Prof. Krzysztof Sobczak**, that studies the molecular basis of neurodegenerative diseases. **Prof. Patryk Konieczny's** group at AMU deals with similar aspects, though involving different diseases. **Prof. Tomasz Hanć**, meanwhile, investigates the cognitive and behavioral aspects of nervous system function. **Dr. Savani Anbalagan**, in turn, conducts research on the pituitary gland using a fish model.

The Poznań University of Life Sciences primarily conducts research using vertebrate animal models to study the mechanisms of addiction within the nervous system, for example. The Poznań University of Physical Education, on the other hand, focuses on neuroplasticity and neuromotor function, or the functioning of the nervous system resulting from physical activity. The most recently joined institution, the Poznań University of Medical Sciences, focuses primarily on research related to the human nervous system, dysfunctions, and neuropathologies. This includes neuroimaging, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging. In short, PUMS is mainly concerned with human neurobiology. I should also mention that courses on neural networks and neuroimaging are conducted in collaboration with the AMU NanoBioMedical Center.

**These initiatives are truly collaborative. They give us the sense that it is possible, after all.**

Indeed, this is a unique phenomenon on a national scale. Only Jagiellonian University offers a similar program, but there, neurobiology is concentrated at a single institution. Here, the program brings together four units. Of course, it's not easy. Organizational challenges arise, but if you really want to...

**Do the classes at the four universities require a fair amount of mobility?**

Classes are organized so that they are held on different days of the week at different universities. Students don't have to travel from one part of Poznań to another on the same day. For instance, classes are held at AMU on Monday, at PUMS on Tuesday,



## *Neurobiology is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on various aspects of how the nervous system functions.*

at PULS on Wednesday, and at PUPE on Thursday. Friday is free for students to spend as they wish.

Within the program, we have shared courses, which work very well. One such course is neurogenetics, which is taught by three different faculties. I coordinate another course, the methodology of neurobiological sciences. As part of this course, classes are held at all four faculties, and the grade is shared.

The fact that AMU has become the lead institution made organizing the classes easier because all information, including grades and course completion, is centralized in one place.

**What does neurobiology offer us?**

It is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on various aspects of how the nervous system functions. When choosing a thesis topic, there are two types of seminars to consider. The first type is experimental and focuses on the molecular, cellular, and organismal levels. The second type focuses on the cognitive and behavioral levels. Given the challenges of neurobiology and neuroscience, it is crucial for students to explore the mechanisms of brain function. Therapies are also important because neurodegenerative diseases are a societal challenge, and new experimental therapies are still being developed. Developing nervous system imaging technologies is crucial because it directly links to our understanding of how the brain or spinal cord functions. Understanding these mechanisms requires seeking out new disease models—simple experimental systems that help us comprehend more complex systems, such as a specific neural network in the brain. Additionally, it is worth emphasizing that, throughout their studies, students conduct practical laboratory work and work with animal models. Students assist us in carrying out research projects funded by the National Science Center, gaining valuable experience in the process. Students also take the initiative, as evidenced by subsequent projects in the Study@research competition, which is funded by the Excellence Initiative – Research University program. Students have the opportunity to obtain a certificate allowing them to participate in procedures involving vertebrate animal models later on.

**What direction do you want to take? What is needed for neurobiology?**

We want to develop a course on functional magnetic resonance imaging led by PUMS. Unfortunately, we do not have access to the type of MRI scanner typically used for student classes in Poznań. It would be very useful. Therefore, we are focusing on neuroimaging. We would also like to increase the number of English-language courses. Additionally, we are considering offering courses on artificial intelligence. ■



# SINGING THE LANGUAGE OF COMMUNITY

“It’s not just about the names of sounds or musical theory; it’s about experiencing music with your whole body. Gesture, movement, and voice support an intuitive understanding of the relationships between sounds,” Professor Nicholas Bannan told his students. The world-renowned musicologist, conductor, and educator from the University of Western Australia in Perth visited the AMU Faculty of Art Studies where he gave a lecture and led a Harmony Signing workshop.

MAGDA ZIÓLEK

Prof. Bannan’s research focuses on the evolutionary foundations of music, the relationship between singing and language, social communication, and modern methods of music education. In his publications, Prof. Bannan emphasizes that music is a universal ele-

ment of the human experience that plays a key role in building social bonds.

He began his musical career as a chorister at Canterbury Cathedral and studied music at the University of Cambridge. He then worked for many years as a conductor and educator in the United Kingdom,

including at Eton College and the Yehudi Menuhin School. He led the Esterhazy Singers, a London-based chamber choir, for 12 years.

Prof. Bannan is renowned in the scholarly world as the creator of the Harmony Signing method, a proprietary sign language that enables collective vocal improvisation and fosters group creativity.

“Harmony Signing is a system of simple hand signs derived from the music education systems of John Curwen and Zoltán Kodály, as well as traditional conducting,” explained **Dr. Ewa Schreiber**, Deputy Dean for Academic Affairs of the Faculty of the Arts and coordinator of Prof. Bannan’s visit to Poznań, shortly before the meeting.

“It is based on a systematized manual language that is relatively easy to master. Participants learn to be open to one another, improvise, and compose. They can also take on the role of ensemble leader. This method is particularly effective in engaging participants in collaborative music-making and promotes rapid improvement in musical ear training and group work,” she explained.

“Professor Bannan has tested his method in various countries, including Canada, Germany, the United States, Brazil, and China, as well as at the University of Western Australia, where he has been a faculty member for a long time,” said Dr. Schreiber. “That is why we were very pleased with the idea of holding the singing workshops here in Poznań.” The Poznań City Office supported this event as part of the Academic Poznań program. An additional impetus for the researcher’s visit to the AMU was his collaboration with Poznań-based AMU musicologist **Prof. Piotr Podlipniak**.

The workshop for AMU musicology students began without a word being spoken. Later in the session, Prof. Nicholas Bannan explained that this approach was intended to demonstrate that the foundation of making music together lies in the interaction of voices and attentive listening. He emphasized that the ability to sing has deep evolutionary roots and is common to all people, regardless of culture or language. Changes in the voice during puberty are a universal element of human biology.

Prof. Bannan’s research also highlights the therapeutic properties of singing. He notes that the ability to sing is sometimes preserved in people with aphasia, a speech impairment caused by brain damage. Numerous clinical observations show that patients with speech impairments can sing words, making singing an important tool for supporting neurological rehabilitation, communication, and emotional well-being.

During the sessions, participants gradually learned and practiced basic musical principles, such as the parallel and contrary motion of voices, the relationship between consonance and dissonance, and the interplay of tension and release. However, improvisation and shared responsibility for the ensemble’s sound were key elements of the workshop.

Prof. Bannan stressed that hand signs are not an end in themselves but rather a way of showing our understanding of our

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## COMMENTS FROM WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

### **Stanisław Antoni Godek**

For me, the subject matter and scope of Prof. Bannan’s research are living proof that musicology is a broad, interdisciplinary field that is constantly evolving. This bodes well not only for my generation of musicologists, but also for future ones. I am also very proud and happy about the many positive developments at the AMU Institute of Musicology. As a passionate student, I must say that such lectures, events, and initiatives reinforce my belief that I am in the right place—one to which I can dedicate myself.

### **Emilia Wójcik**

After listening to Prof. Bannan’s lecture, I decided that I had to experience his methods firsthand. Having worked with an amateur choir for several years, I was interested in new methods of teaching music to people who cannot read sheet music. I was familiar with the Kodály method, so the workshop made a huge impression on me. I was able to explore the professor’s own method, which really resonated with me. His approach to learning and his encouragement to sing by simultaneously singing notes and demonstrating their pitch with hand signs is a truly promising method. Even with only a modest understanding of the method, I began researching it online and tried applying its principles during my choir’s rehearsal. The choir members, mostly people who don’t read music, responded very well to this approach, confirming the effectiveness of Prof. Bannan’s method. I will carry the knowledge I gained from the professor’s workshop with me for a long time and apply it in my work.

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relationships with others. Because of this, even people without formal musical training could quickly engage in the creative process and contribute to a polyphonic structure. Prof. Bannan also highlighted the universal nature of music, emphasizing that not all cultures use harmony in the European sense. Therefore, the Harmony Signing method remains flexible and open. It allows for work with functional harmony and other ways of organizing sound adapted to cultural and educational contexts.

As Prof. Bannan noted, the goal of his proposed practice is to illustrate relationships between sounds in the simplest and most intuitive way possible. According to Prof. Bannan, harmonic relationships can be both heard and “memorized with the body,” which makes music an understandable and living language rather than an abstract theory.



We had the opportunity to ask **Prof. Nicholas Bannan**  
a few questions just before the workshop.

**How did the Harmony Signing method come about, and how did your work with a children's choir contribute to its development?**

The method began with observing children's instinctive reactions to music. The impetus for developing the practice of "harmonic gesture," however, came from my work with a children's choir that I founded at the University of Reading. The choir consisted of children aged seven to eleven. I specifically wanted this age group because in England, children attend primary school until age 11, and then they move on to secondary school. This is a very special developmental stage.

Rather than rehearsing a repertoire to perform at concerts, as most choirs do, we gave some concerts, of course, but I also wanted to see what would happen if half of the music we performed was created by the children themselves. Most children of this age cannot read or write music yet. Therefore, when we worked on the composition, they could write down individual words or use fragments of familiar songs. The most important thing, however, was for them to create the pieces themselves—and it worked wonderfully.

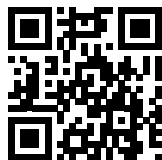
As we used Kodály's hand signs to illustrate the relationships between sounds in his system, the children learned to sing in parts. For the experiment, we separated the choir into small groups of about eight and let them decide which song to work on. I also wanted to see if the child who created a piece could lead a performance without a piano, so different songs could be combined.

**From an evolutionary perspective, why does singing, which predates language, play such an important role in human development, bonding, and therapy?**

This is also significant from an evolutionary perspective. Charles Darwin and subsequent neurologists and linguists noted that, compared to our closest relatives, such as chimpanzees, orangutans, and gorillas, changes in body posture during the evolutionary process affected the position of the larynx, breathing patterns, and sound production. Unlike chimpanzees, we can breathe and sing for long periods without stopping. They lack the necessary mechanisms for this, even neurologically.

This made me wonder whether sounds themselves—what we hear—have a huge impact on what we remember from birth. After all, our first cries and sounds are much closer to singing than language. We learn language later. In education, I have the impression that we often learn language and gradually forget music.

However, if we maintain both music and language, and sing together, developing these skills in parallel, then we can say that music is a form of therapy and a mechanism for building bonds and preparing people for later stages of life. A project carried out among Alzheimer's patients in England in the mid-2000s showed that singing can restore language abilities in people who can no longer speak. All of this demonstrates the many reasons we have to recognize the true value of music and use our voices throughout our lives.



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# INTERPRETING PREHISTORIC ROCK ART: INSIGHTS FROM DAVID LEWIS-WILLIAMS

While in Johannesburg, we had the opportunity to meet with **Professor David Lewis-Williams**, a world-renowned expert in rock art and one of the most prominent researchers in the field. We discussed African cave paintings, ethnography, decolonizing knowledge, and international scientific collaboration.

AMU PROF. IWONA SOBKOWIAK-TABAKA, PROF. ANDRZEJ ROZWADOWSKI



A detail from a painting in the Lascaux Cave, which Prof. David Lewis-Williams interprets as part of a complex system of beliefs and shamanic visions held by ancient humans.

Who isn't impressed by the prehistoric cave paintings at Lascaux or Altamira? Upon visiting Lascaux, Pablo Picasso reportedly said that nothing had been invented in fifteen thousand years.

Photo: Wikipedia, Public Domain

In addition to those preserved in European caves, there is a vast array of rock paintings and engravings in other regions of the world. One such region is South Africa. Though these sites are on the other side of the globe, they are of particular significance to international rock art studies, a field in which the AMU



Meeting a legend. Researchers from the AMU Faculty of Archaeology visited Prof. David Lewis-Williams, the creator of groundbreaking methods for interpreting cave art. From left: Prof. Iwona Sobkowiak-Tabaka, Prof. Andrzej Rozwadowski, Prof. David Lewis-Williams, and Dr. Jeremy Hollmann. This photo was taken in August during a meeting in South Africa.

Faculty of Archaeology is involved. In the 1970s, David Lewis-Williams, a novice at the time and now one of the most distinguished researchers, began to transform our understanding of the rock art there.

Lewis-Williams is a remarkable figure. In 1983, he founded the world's first Rock Art Research Institute (RARI) at the University of the Witwatersrand. He studied not only African art, but also European cave art, ultimately formulating an innovative theory of the origins of art. His interpretive methodology has inspired many researchers around the world. Our faculty has cooperated with the RARI for many years thanks to Prof. Andrzej Rozwadowski, whose ties to the institute have lasted 25 years. Due to this collaboration, two years ago, we hosted Dr. Jeremy Hollmann, another RARI staff member. According to Dr. Hollmann, David Lewis-Williams is like a beacon for us, illuminating our research paths.

David Lewis-Williams's achievements remain relatively unknown in Poland. This is why, in August 2025, we traveled to Johannesburg to interview him. Dr. Hollmann was waiting for us there. David invited the three of us to his home on the day of his 91st (!)

birthday. Before sharing excerpts from our two-day interview, here is a brief introduction to Prof. Lewis-Williams's research.

David Lewis-Williams rediscovered the potential of ethnographic data for archaeology. This data was collected by the German linguist Wilhelm Bleek, who came to southern Africa in the 19th century to study the language of the Bantu peoples. He ultimately focused on the San people because he realized they were on the brink of extinction and felt a duty to preserve their language and beliefs. His collection comprises 12,000 pages of records gathered directly from San people. Much of this information turned out to be key to understanding rock art. However, these are not direct descriptions of the art. Lewis-Williams's contribution was to demonstrate that rock art cannot be interpreted through ethnography alone by assuming ethnographic sources will describe what we see on the rocks. This data must also be interpreted; only the "connections" between the two elements bring us closer to understanding the content of the rock images. It is an intricate journey into the realm of myths and beliefs and

the decoding of the symbols contained within them. Ultimately, one could say that David Lewis-Williams decolonized African rock art. He restored its African identity because, until then, even its San authorship had been denied.

## **David, how did your interest in rock art begin?**

At first, it was the Bushmen themselves—as the San were called back then—who caught my attention. My dad would take me to a museum in Cape Town where I could see models of them. Later, when I began studying at the University of Cape Town, I enrolled in a social anthropology course taught by Monica Wilson, a renowned anthropologist who had studied in London. While there, she attended lectures by Bronisław Malinowski at University College London. In her classes, she often referred to him.

## **Bronisław Malinowski—so there's a bit of a connection to Poland.**

Not just a bit—a significant and important one! Malinowski's research was a huge inspiration to me. Consider his work with the Trobriand people. Their boat-building isn't just about gathering planks and joining them together. The entire process is steeped in symbolism tied to local beliefs and myths. I thought rock art must have been similar—that it wasn't simply illustrations of everyday life, as was believed at the time.

I worked as an English teacher in East London for five years. There, I became friends with Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, the director of the local museum. Together, we visited various sites with rock art. Almost everyone had rock art on their farm.

## **And how did you get into professional research?**

It was the 1960s. I moved to the province of Natal, near Pietermaritzburg and close to the Drakensberg. There, I began studying the local rock art sites and published my first articles. At the time, the University of Natal held occasional lectures on various topics. I was asked to lead one of these lecture series first in Pietermaritzburg and then in Durban at the university's second campus. After one of the lectures, I was invited to lunch. There, John Argyle, a professor of African Studies in the Department of Social Anthropology, asked me why I wasn't pursuing an academic degree based on my work. I replied, "Well, actually, why not?" So, I started working on my master's thesis. It took a few years. One day, John

called me. Over the phone, I heard: "You know, we can't keep dragging this out." I thought, "Oh my God! My master's thesis is done for." But then I heard him say, "I spoke with the degree committee, and we've decided it needs to be a Ph.D. dissertation. We want it completed by the end of next year."

"I defended my dissertation in 1977, and it was published in 1981 as *Believing and Seeing: Symbolic Meanings in Southern San Rock Paintings*." To this day, it remains a seminal work for any student of rock art, and a new edition is underway. It will be an excellent read for our students. The fact that Prof. Rozwadowski was invited to contribute a foreword to this edition further strengthens our collaboration with Prof. Lewis-Williams and the University of the Witwatersrand Institute.

David Lewis-Williams has written over 210 articles and 21 books. Another is currently in press. One

of them, *The Shamans of Prehistory: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves*, which he co-authored with Jean Clottes, has been translated into Polish. Professor Iwona Sobkowiak-Tabaka had a copy with her in Johannesburg. David was unaware of the Polish edition. As he said: "I've lost track of which of my books have been published and in what languages. It's all beyond my control now."

We were moved by the fact that David does not profit from his books. He informed us that

one of his books, *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art*, sold 28,000 copies quite some time ago. "I donate all the profits from my books to a foundation that supports the San community," Prof. Lewis-Williams explained. "You're not just a professor, but a true gentleman," Jeremy Hollmann concluded during our conversation in Johannesburg.

**David Lewis-Williams** has been awarded two honorary doctorates, one from the University of Cape Town and one from the University of the Witwatersrand. In 2015, President Jacob Zuma awarded Lewis-Williams the title of Supreme Counsellor of the Order of the Baobab, South Africa's highest state honor. This honor recognizes his contribution to creating a multicultural, post-apartheid South Africa. We hope the full interview with this distinguished researcher will soon be published as a book, serving as a lasting testament to the collaboration between the AMU Faculty of Archaeology and the Rock Art Research Institute in Johannesburg. ■



## *David Lewis-Williams decolonized African rock art.*



# EVERYDAY NARRATIVES OF IDENTITY

He is once again a Fulbright scholar and is back at the AMU Faculty of English. An interview with **Prof. Michael Bamberg** of Clark University (USA)

BY KRZYSZTOF SMURA

**What does the fellowship of Fulbright Distinguished Scholar in Humanities and Social Sciences—awarded in collaboration with the AMU Faculty of English—mean to you, and what drew you to our academic community?**

Although becoming a Fulbright Scholar may not be unique, it is certainly prestigious. I am happy and proud. However, receiving the Fulbright Distinguished Scholar fellowship in Humanities and Social Sciences at the AMU Faculty of English this semester came as quite a surprise, since I had already received this honor six years ago and didn't expect to receive it again. I applied to the Fulbright program because I wanted to finish a few projects and start new ones. Now that I'm here, I'm doing everything I can to not let down those who have placed their trust in me and my contributions to working with students and to the faculty's activities. One of my personal goals during my time at the Faculty of English is to plan and co-organize the international Positioning Theory Research Conference, which will take place in late May and early June in Poznań. The conference will be attended by colleagues from around the world. Through this conference, I hope to thank my hosts and strengthen the international ties between AMU and researchers from other institutions.

**Your research focuses on language, narrative, and identity. Why are narratives important for understanding who we are as individuals and as a community?**

Indeed, "narrative is meaningful"—and this is also the theme of a series of biannual conferences in which I am a proud participant. However, despite this, my contribution to the field of narrative research is critical and challenges established assumptions to some extent. While the traditional "narrative turn" consisted mainly of biographical research based on individualism rooted in Eurocentric and colonial ways of thinking, some of my colleagues and I have begun suggesting that individuals, collectives, institutions, and brands are more than "wandering narratives" capable of revealing their "story" through deep reflection. We propose that people's (or institutions') identity is not fixed in their big narratives, awaiting discovery by an astute narrator. Rather, our sense of self emerges from what

we call "small stories"; these are the stories that often go unnoticed because they are told in local, situational interactions. This study shifts attention from grand life stories, constructed for important occasions such as biographical interviews, to everyday narrative practices in vivo and in situ. This suggests the need to rethink the methods employed in "narrative studies" and shift the focus to interpersonal interactions as the primary subject of analysis.



*This suggests the need to rethink the methods employed in "narrative studies" and shift the focus to interpersonal interactions as the primary subject of analysis.*

**In today's interdisciplinary research environment, what factors make qualitative and narrative methods particularly useful?**

One might ask, "Why do we grant storytelling a privileged status in qualitative research?" The answer is complex and would require more space than is available here. In short, however, when we make claims about a person's or a brand's identity, we are usually referring to how we differ from or are similar to other brands. We can also claim to be responsible and trustworthy. All of this can be achieved using language in its descriptive or argumentative genres, that is, non-narrative. However, to reveal that we are the same or have changed, we must resort to a different genre: narrative. Through storytelling, we make claims essential to shaping our identity over time. This is what makes narratives (understood as narrative practices) an extremely valuable resource in qualitative research. They allow us to delve into the phenomena underlying the formation of identity.

**What will students and early-career researchers at AMU gain from your lectures and seminars this semester?**

During the course I am currently teaching at the Faculty of English, as well as in the newly formed research group led by the dean of the faculty, **AMU Prof. Joanna Pawelczyk**, I hope to continue sharing the experiences I gained as a student over 12 years and as a university professor over nearly 40 years. I would be very happy (and proud) if my time at the Faculty of English helped fulfill the promise I made to my AMU colleagues and students. I hope this semester is not the end of our collaboration and that there will be many more opportunities to continue working together in the future. ■



## A TRULY GLOBAL MASTER'S PROGRAM IN MATERIALS SCIENCE

Every year, approximately 900 candidates from around the world apply to the prestigious two-year Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Program in Materials Science, MaMaSELF2 (Master in Materials Science Powered by Large Scale Facilities), which is co-funded by the European Union. Only 30 students are accepted to study at renowned European universities, some of whom come to Poznań to study at the AMU Faculty of Physics and Astronomy.

Magda Ziółek speaks with **Prof. Jacek Kubicki**, the program coordinator at AMU.

**The first defining feature of the MaMaSELF2 program that comes to mind is its global reach. Do students from countries as far away as the Philippines or Pakistan come to Poznań?**

Yes, absolutely. This year, we are hosting nine people, including students from Bhutan, Mexico, and Ethiopia. Throughout the program's history, participants have come from nearly

every region of the world, including Ecuador, Vietnam, the Philippines, China, India, and Japan. These students are from dozens of countries on every continent except Australia. This demonstrates that MaMaSELF<sup>2</sup> truly has a global reach.

We receive a very large number of applications every year—approximately 900. Most come from Pakistan—as many as

# VENI, VIDI, VICI

300 annually—though only a few students from that country ultimately enroll, mainly due to visa difficulties. Only about 30 students enroll in the program each year.

## **What is the key to MaMaSELF<sup>2</sup>'s success? What makes it so appealing to students from around the world?**

There are several key factors. First, MaMaSELF<sup>2</sup> is part of the Erasmus Mundus program, which is based on close international cooperation. The minimum requirement is participation of at least three universities from three different countries.

The MaMaSELF<sup>2</sup> consortium consists of six renowned universities: the University of Rennes (France), the project coordinator; University of Montpellier (France); Technical University of Munich (Germany); Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (Germany); University of Turin (Italy); and Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań. This is a strong draw for applicants. Furthermore, the grant-implementing consortium includes research institutions from Japan, India, the U.S., and Europe as Associated Partners.

MaMaSELF<sup>2</sup>'s guiding principle is clearly defined, making it unique. The program trains master's students and places a strong emphasis on using Large Scale Facilities for research, as reflected in the program's name. Students have access to state-of-the-art research infrastructure, including the European X-ray Free Electron Laser in Hamburg, one of the world's most advanced facilities, and synchrotrons. Another factor that attracts applicants is the scholarships offered through the Erasmus Mundus program. Approximately one-third of participants receive scholarships of about 34,000 euros each for two years of study.

Additionally, for students from outside the European Union, participation in MaMaSELF<sup>2</sup> provides a valuable opportunity to study at renowned European universities and pursue an academic or professional career in Europe in the long term.

## **If I understand correctly, only nine students are enrolled in this program at AMU this year. That's not very many, is it?**

However, considering that we have six partner universities and recruit 30 students for the program annually, these numbers are entirely satisfactory. This year, we are hosting nine MaMaSELF<sup>2</sup> students in Poznań. Last year, there were eight, and next year, we are expecting seven.

It's important to note that this program attracts exceptional individuals—not only those with excellent academic performance, but also those who are active, participate in conferences, and conduct research projects during their undergraduate studies. This contributes to their outstanding academic performance.

Some of these program graduates pursue academic careers by enrolling in doctoral programs, including at the Faculty

of Physics and Astronomy. MaMaSELF<sup>2</sup> prepares specialists capable of conducting advanced experimental research in physics, chemistry, or materials science. The interdisciplinary nature of the program is reinforced by the consortium's structure: students develop their skills at universities with diverse profiles, choosing centers best suited to their prior education.

The research component remains a key element of the education. Students learn to plan experiments, prepare samples, and make effective use of limited measurement time on unique research infrastructure.

They also gain experience analyzing and interpreting research results. This ensures they are fully prepared for scientific work.

Many of our graduates find employment in the private sector, working in advanced research companies in Switzerland on new methods of wound treatment in the face of growing bacterial resistance to antibiotics.

From an employer's perspective, their mobility is of immense value.

Students who leave Mexico, Bhutan, or India to spend two years in Europe demonstrate their ability to adapt to a new cultural environment, a skill that is highly valued in international research teams and global companies.

## **Are there orientation activities included in the study program? As you mentioned, some of these students come from countries with very different cultures.**

Students participate in a two-week integration program at the University of Rennes. I am not directly involved, but I know the program includes activities such as river rafting and broomball. This intensive initial period is designed to help students get to know each other and build relationships before heading to their partner universities. After the orientation in Rennes, the first-year students meet the second-year students in Montpellier, who are attending a summer school there at that time. Then, they go their separate ways to begin their first year of studies at one of the partner universities. They begin their second year with a joint, two-week intensive summer school in Montpellier dedicated to team-building activities. This is the only time when all students in the program take the same classes.

## **How do these students adjust to life in Poznań?**

They arrive at AMU after their first year of studies, so they are already somewhat acclimated to Europe. From what I know, the beginning of their studies is the hardest part. For example, one student was surprised by how late the sun rises and how early it sets in winter in France. She came from a region closer



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Hi! I'm **Xavier Lewis** from Southbury, Connecticut, in the United States. Many Americans have stereotypical ideas about Poland, viewing it as a post-Soviet country with limited infrastructure that is still developing. However, after spending nearly six months in

Poznań, I can say that my perspective has completely changed.

Life here is excellent, comparable to, and at times even better than, my student life in the U.S. What's more, Poland offers advanced services such as the BLIK payment system and parcel lockers.

I'm studying physics at AMU. The classes I take are very practical, covering topics such as solar cells and nanotechnology. Having earned a bachelor's degree in materials engineering, I particularly value the opportunity to learn the theoretical foundations of physics and its real-world applications that benefit society.



My name is **Raquel Cota**. I'm from Mexico and have been studying at the AMU Faculty of Physics and Astronomy for several months. Before coming to a country whose language I didn't know, I was nervous because I knew nothing about the education system or daily

life here. However, I was convinced that many new and interesting experiences awaited me.

Today, I can say that coming here was one of the best decisions I've ever made. Although my hometown is very different from Poznań, I quickly found many delightful things here: the beauty of the Old Town, excellent Polish cuisine (especially pierogi), and numerous places to explore with friends.

The university provided tremendous support to us international students, helping us overcome the difficulties we often face.



My name is **Henock Tadele Demissie**, and I am from Ethiopia. Thanks to the MaMaSELF2 program, I had the opportunity to study in France and Poland. Going abroad was a big challenge for me because everything was new, from the culture to the language.

I am currently studying at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, a city that I find to be unique. As an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian, I was particularly moved by the important role that remembrance of the city's patron saints and traditions plays here. Participating in the All Saints' Day and St. Martin's Day celebrations made a big impression on me.

Thanks to the MaMaSELF2 program's support, I was also able to take a study trip with other students to the SOLARIS National Synchrotron Radiation Center and tour the Wieliczka Salt Mine in Kraków. The AMU Meteor Student Hall provides comfortable living conditions, and the classes—including lectures, labs, and seminars—help us develop our research competencies and presentation skills.

Although Polish winters are very cold for me, I hope to return during the warmer months to get to know Poland and its culture better.

to the equator where the length of the day and night changes minimally throughout the year. There are also other minor misunderstandings resulting from unfamiliarity with local regulations rather than ill will. These are not intentional actions but rather the result of differences in regulations that the students had not encountered before.

## As the coordinator of the MaMaSELF2 program with ten years of experience, what challenges do you face most often?

The administrative side has been the biggest challenge for years. On average, I spend about two days a week on MaMaSELF2-related matters, though this is just an average. There are quieter periods, but also exceptionally intense moments, such as when preparing grant applications. For the most recent grant application, for example, I worked day in and day out for over three months as part of a large team from all the participating universities. The result was securing an Erasmus Mundus grant of approximately 5.38 million euros for the years 2022–2028. In addition, there are regular meetings of the grant implementation team, including frequent online meetings, as well as hundreds of emails from program students regarding various matters.

The most serious operational challenge is legalizing the stay of students from non-EU countries in Poland. Under the current legal framework, this is a labor-intensive process. While not particularly complicated in substance, it requires fulfilling numerous formalities, such as compiling a large number of documents, having them translated into Polish by certified translators, and notarizing their authenticity. The university can only register non-EU students after completing these procedures.

As the program coordinator, I am responsible for ensuring that deadlines and procedures are met, and that the program runs smoothly. However, I would like to emphasize that MaMaSELF2 is a team effort. Many people are working toward its success. I would like to mention AMU Vice-Rector for Student Affairs and Teaching **Prof. Joanna Wójcik**, the faculty administration, the Main Office, the Student Office, Student Relations, and our team of lecturers.

All of this translates into an ever-improving range of courses taught in English for international students at our faculty. When we compare the achievements of students who come to Poznań from France, Germany, or Italy—including students who are French, German, or Italian nationals—we can clearly see that the level of education at the AMU Faculty of Physics and Astronomy is fully comparable to that of other leading academic centers in Europe. ■

For more details about the project, visit the project website at [www.mamself.eu](http://www.mamself.eu).



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# ARCHAEOLOGY IS MY PASSION

**Prof. Hanna Kóčka-Krenz**, a distinguished archaeologist from Poznań, talks to Magda Ziółek about her family home, the scholarly passions passed down from generation to generation—especially archaeology—and her belief that everything in life has a purpose.



**The Collegium Historicum recently hosted an exhibition in commemoration of Prof. Wojciech Kóčka, an exceptional anthropologist and archaeologist who co-founded the Biskupin Archaeological Expedition. He was also your father. What was it like growing up as the daughter of an archaeologist?**

I firmly believe that the values our parents instill in us are immensely important for the choices we make later in life. I was fortunate that my father was an archaeologist because I naturally followed in his footsteps.

He conducted research in many places, including Ostrów Tumski (Cathedral Island) in Poznań and Wrocław. However, his work on the Biskupin Bronze Age settlement, carried out jointly with Prof. Józef Kostrzewski, was particularly significant. This research has left a lasting mark on the history of archaeology, especially thanks to the excellent photographic documentation, including aerial photographs of the gord remnants taken from a tethered balloon. Photography was his great passion, so he gradually took on both the research and its documentation himself.

I had been in constant contact with archaeology since childhood. During the summer holidays, my father would usually visit archaeological sites in Greater Poland and Pomerania, which he oversaw due to his professional duties. He would take the family to the seaside and visit all the sites along the way, providing expert guidance rather than inspecting them. I have vivid memories from that time of excavations at key locations of the Piast state.

For example, I remember the postwar excavations on Ostrów Tumski in Poznań and Wrocław and on the Vegetable Market near the Ducal Castle in Szczecin perfectly. Additionally, there were sites where the Chair of Archaeology conducted research. It couldn't have been any other

way. As the only daughter—I have three brothers—and the one who always accompanied my father, I had to follow in his footsteps. Archaeology is my passion.

**In one of your interviews, you mentioned that Professor Kóčka was not pleased when you decided to study archaeology.**

My father was part of a generation of pre-war scholars who believed archaeology was a profession for men only. Indeed, in his day, very few women chose to study it. Later, when the major became known as material culture studies and combined archaeology with ethnography and art history, more women enrolled, though men still dominated. As far as I remember, in my senior year, there were four female students for every six male students, so the ratio was evening out.

Returning to my father, the prevailing belief at the time was that archaeology was a difficult profession requiring good physical condition. After all, research is conducted under very different conditions: in the rain, in the heat, and sometimes even in the snow. Sometimes, you also have to pick up a shovel. As a strong woman, I really enjoyed digging and often took great pleasure in it. On top of that, archaeologists often work away from home, which can be difficult for women.

After graduating from high school, I chose art history instead of archaeology when it turned out there would be no admissions for archaeology that year. I haven't regretted it for a moment because that knowledge proved useful in my later research. I'm convinced that everything happens for a reason. I've always been drawn to the Middle Ages. For my master's thesis, I examined temporal pendants—early medieval adornments worn by women on their temples—from artistic and cultural

perspectives, including who wore them, where they were worn, and what they symbolized.

My doctoral dissertation, on the other hand, focused on decorative arts based on Scandinavian goldsmithing. My supervisor, Prof. Jan Żak, was very interested in early medieval Scandinavia. He was the author of many works on the subject and had even conceived the idea of establishing a separate specialization at our university. However, this did not happen, so I shifted the focus of my research to West Slavic jewelry.

Such is the way of fate. I was interested in goldsmithing, and perhaps that's exactly why I discovered a goldsmith's workshop at the Poznań gord. Everything has its own strange, unpredictable consequences.

### **Do you remember the day you discovered Mieszko I's palatium?**

I remember it perfectly! While preparing my research on Ostrów Tumski, I thoroughly studied the written sources. Fortunately, research had already been conducted at this site, so I was in an ideal situation. I knew the extent of the stronghold and its fortifications. I knew it consisted of multiple parts and that the cathedral formed its central core. However, I did not know the function of each part of the settlement.

The sources contain a late medieval record describing an event that took place “in castro Ostrov prope, ubi nunc est Pozenania,” that is, at the Ostrów hillfort near modern-day Poznań. Since “Ostrów” was mainly associated with Ostrów Lednicki (a fortified settlement on Lake Lednica between Gniezno and Poznań) at that time, it was believed that this reference concerned the palatium at Ostrów Lednicki. This was justified by the fact that the remains of the palatium have survived on the island to this day.

However, I was convinced that the reference pertained to Ostrów Tumski in Poznań. Today, it is well connected

to the surrounding area. In the time of Mieszko I (10th century CE), it was a sandbar in the floodplains of the Warta River—in other words, simply an “ostrów”—an island.

### **Was it just a hunch or something more?**

One could argue that it was a hunch supported by historical knowledge. For example, consider the beautiful Gothic Church of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, which stands right here, across from the cathedral entrance. These Marian titles were borne by palace chapels at that time—places of worship directly associated with the ducal court and attached to secular buildings, namely the ducal palaces themselves.

Thus, the church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, which has survived to this day, seems to be the successor, in a new architectural form, to the earlier palace chapel. In the Middle Ages, it was common practice to rebuild and adapt church buildings to new architectural styles without much regard for their historical value. This has been confirmed. During the excavations, we determined that the church's current south wall partially rests on the remains of the palace chapel's north wall. The builders of the Gothic church reused the foundations from the old palace complex. I like to joke that the people of Poznań have always been thrifty, even in the Middle Ages.

During our research, we fully uncovered the remains of the palace chapel, including the collapsed wall and the outline of a window. This discovery particularly excited me because we usually only deal with foundations. It turned out that the palace chapel had suffered some sort of structural collapse. This likely occurred when worship moved to the cathedral and the unrenovated building collapsed.

We also discovered that a wall surrounded the church and that a cemetery for the city's most distinguished citizens was



Glass art installation representing the outline of the palatium of Mieszko I and his wife Dobrawa in Ostrów Tumski in Poznań. Design: ARCHIGLASS Tomasz Urbanowicz.

located along it. In other words, it was an intensively used area. After removing the graves from the excavation profile, I noticed a faint trace of a demolished wall. Fortunately, the wall had not been completely demolished; these were the remains of the palatium's foundation.

**It's difficult for me to imagine how you felt at that moment.**

I had to pause and process what I had discovered. Then, an overwhelming rush of emotions hit me that I can't even begin to describe. I knew then that I had found a piece of the structure I had searched for so long. From there, everything went smoothly. I must say that the palatial and sacral complex in Poznań really surprised me. It is completely different from the ones we knew before. Classic, later Piast layouts were rectangular structures situated along an east-west axis. The chapel was usually located on the eastern side and could be a rotunda, square, or rectangle. In Poznań, however, it was different. The palatium stood on a north-south axis, and a chapel formed a side wing facing east on the eastern side of its entrance. Was this layout accidental? We do not know. Perhaps the Poznań palatial and sacral complex was the oldest in the Piast state, and an established architectural canon had not yet been established.

**What else can be inferred from the excavations?**

I would assume that the builders came from Western Europe. In the Piast state, wooden structures were handled with great skill, as evidenced by the excellent fortifications of the strongholds. Conversely, the ability to work with and join stone was highly developed in the West. Therefore, it is highly likely that Mieszko I brought in architects from the Rhineland, as evidenced by the oldest known churches from that region.

The furnishings of the place of worship also clearly show influences from Kievan Rus. The eastern wall, forming the apse, was decorated with a mosaic. The tradition of creating mosaic images dates back to antiquity. In the early Middle Ages, two centers led the way in this field: Germany and Kievan Rus. It is likely that experts were brought in from these centers.

Mieszko I was evidently familiar with Western culture and had the means to bring the best craftsmen to Poznań. Upon reflection, it becomes clear that our Piasts were not parochial or petty leaders. They were people, as we would say today, of the world, perfectly aware of where to find inspiration. All of this is beautifully revealed in the archaeological record.

**I admire how archaeologists use their imagination to reconstruct aspects of life from such a distant past.**

Their job is to dig in the ground and tell stories from even the tiniest piece of wood. That is exactly what we do. Working in Poznań's Ostrów Tumski has brought me incredible joy and satisfaction. As a result, I earned the title of professor because it's the product of not only the research itself but also the studies, publications, and all the work surrounding them. I owe it all to it.

It was also a deeply personal satisfaction because I felt as if I were following in my father's footsteps. In fact, I am deeply convinced that the bonds connecting us to our loved ones—including those who have passed away—do not disappear, but endure forever. I believe my father was watching over my work on Ostrów Tumski.

**From today's perspective, how would you assess the controversy that erupted in the press following this discovery? Where was Poland's first capital, after all?**

Let's get back to the point. The dispute over which city was the capital back then has no historical basis. None. These were centers of equal standing, and when assessing this issue, one must be guided by reason, not emotion. I understand the residents of Gniezno's frustration—our research has, in a sense, disrupted existing perceptions of those times—but the archaeologists are not to blame for bringing these facts to light. The blame lies with Mieszko I and Bolesław I the Brave. If I may say so, it is they to whom one should hold a grudge.

**We started our conversation with family, so I'd like to end it there. Is it true that your academic career only took off after you raised your children?**

I was fortunate enough to get married quite young and have children soon after. By the time I finished my Ph.D. and post-doctoral degree, my two daughters were old enough to help with household chores, so I was able to devote more time to my academic work.

I like running a household. I'm quite good at being a *cura domestica*. I cook, clean, and do laundry. I think I'm a pretty good cook, and I bake well, though you'd have to ask my family about that. Speaking of family, I inherited these passions from my mom. She was an excellent homemaker and a lecturer at the Institute of Romance Studies. She taught me everything, with a lot of help from her sister. I remember visiting my aunt in Wrocław during the summers. Since she worked at the university, she couldn't always take a long vacation in the summer. Sometimes, while she was still at work, she would call me to tell me how to make dinner.

My older daughter, Agnieszka, majored in Polish and English, and she found her calling in teaching. I think she inherited her talent for teaching from my mom, who was an excellent homemaker and a respected university professor.

My younger daughter, Marta, is a professor of anthropology at our university, so you could say she inherited those interests from my dad. He had a dual degree and devoted part of his work to anthropology. I am very proud of her and enjoy following her academic successes. It brings a mother great joy to see her children find their place in life and fulfill their dreams.

As for my interest in archaeology, I quietly hoped that perhaps my grandchildren would carry it on into the next generation. For now, however, there's no sign of that; they seem to have different, more tech-oriented interests.



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# NO SINGLE STORY, NO SINGLE VILLAGE

**Antonina Tosiek**, winner of the Wisława Szymborska Award and the Warsaw Literary Prize for her poetry collection *Żertwy* (Burnt Offerings), discusses her latest book, *Przepraszam za brzydkie pismo. Pamiętniki wiejskich kobiet* (Sorry for the Messy Handwriting: Memoirs of Rural Women).

INTERVIEW BY MAGDA ZIÓŁEK

**How are you coping with all the commotion caused by the success of your last two books?**

First of all, I'm still surprised and a bit intimidated by the huge amount of interest from readers. The award season for *Żertwy*, my second poetry collection, coincided with the release of my nonfiction book *Przepraszam za brzydkie pismo*, so I doubled my book signings and interviews. Well, maybe not doubled, but almost. Interest in poetry will never match the popularity of nonfiction, after all. I love meeting women readers, though I still find it hard to believe that so many people want to talk to me about my book and spend their free time with me. But I won't lie; the last few months have really taken a toll on me. They were incredibly busy and intense because together with my rural memoirists, I traveled all over Poland—to Sopot, Zakopane, Białystok, and Opole. I've started to miss the peace and quiet of tapping away at my keyboard at my desk.

**Women readers? I understand that it's mainly women who attend the meetings?**

In interviews and critical reviews of other authors' books, I do use the feminine form because women participate most frequently and actively in culture, according to statistics. According to the National Library of Poland's research, sixty percent of people who say they read at least one book a year are women. Why should I ignore that fact? Men also read *Przepraszam za brzydkie pismo*, although they're usually in the minority at book signings. Often, during brief conversations in Q&A sessions or while signing books, men reveal that they decided to read my book because of stories about their mothers or grandmothers, who grew up and worked in rural areas. Sometimes, which moves me deeply, they ask for a dedication for their daughters.

**In one of your interviews, you recounted how you stumbled upon a monograph containing autobiographical writings. Did you see their potential as a book right away?**

During my second year of Polish studies, I found *Pamiętniki chłopów* (Memoirs of Peasants), a collection of peasant memoirs from the 1930s, in a secondhand bookshop in Poznań. I initially mistook it for a stylized novel. I was surprised to find out that textbooks on the history of interwar literature often ignored the phenomenon of competition-style memoir writing. Yet, thanks to Maria Dąbrowska, the editors of the Polish literary weekly *Wiadomości Literackie* (Literary News) named the second volume of *Pamiętniki chłopów* the best book of 1936. In 1936, the men who wrote these memoirs (not a single text by a woman was published) beat out young Czesław Miłosz and Zofia Kossak, among others. Throughout the 20th century, autobiographical writings submitted to memoir competitions remained more of a sociological curiosity than a literary one and certainly not a subject of literary scholarship, despite being written in large numbers.

In 2016, I decided to take this topic seriously. My bachelor's thesis focused on life writings from the 1930s—the same ones I found in the secondhand bookshop. I began buying competition monographs (they cost pennies back then) and compiling memoirs of rural residents from the 1940s, 1960s, and 1970s. For my master's thesis, I examined memoirs written by farmers in the 1990s in direct response to Poland's political transformation that decade.

Four years ago, Joanna Bednarek invited me to start a memoir series for the *Czas Kultury* (Time of Culture) magazine. The first installment, covering memoirs written by men from 1933 to 1995, ran for ten episodes. I neglected the second installment, which was to cover women's memoirs, due to my work on a book, but I hope we'll still be able to return to it. The series was very well-received, and it was precisely because of it that the publisher, Wydawnictwo Czarne, offered me the opportunity to write a book without an assigned topic. I knew right away that it had to be a book about women's memoirs, particularly those from the postwar period.

**The timing was right for this kind of publication. *Przepraszam za brzydkie pismo* fit perfectly into the so-called “peasant turn.”**

It was a difficult time. The publishing market is saturated; periodically, driven more by economic trends and commercial considerations, another “rural” book emerges. The “turn,” which was supposed to be an active strategy to reject the “universal history” paradigm—one that ignores the experiences of people subjected to various forms of violence and systemic erasure—has morphed into yet another problematic form of identity politics. In other words, it's individualism again, a trauma-centered framework, and a fetish for “folk” aesthetics instead of collectivity and discussions about facts and concrete processes. A turn around. I think many men and women readers are tired of this. The problem with my book and many other academic projects is that they cannot compete in the publishing race against commercially commissioned books, which are published in a matter of months. The “trend” toward a peasant turn likely overtook them. When I first became

interested in this subject, the only popular books were by Andrzej Leder and Jan Sowa. Many others were already in progress, regardless of media trends, by authors such as Jan Wasiewicz, Magda Szczeniak, Michał Rauszer, and Małgorzata Fidelis.

Even while I was writing my book, *Chłopki. Opowieść o Naszych Babkach* (Peasant Women: A Story of Our Grandmothers) by Joanna Kuciel-Frydryczak was announced. At the time, no one expected it to achieve spectacular sales success. Unfortunately, I had to postpone my book's deadline several times. I kept returning to the archives and rewriting finished chapters. Finding the right language for an accessible scholarly book proved very difficult. Where does “scholarly” end and “accessible” begin? I was also overwhelmed by the sheer volume of material. I worked with over 800 life writings, some of which were written in dialect or phonetically without periods or capital letters. Reading and transcribing the manuscripts took a long time. That's why, even if this book is a bit late, I know I wouldn't have been able to rush it out under the pressure of other authors' deadlines.

**In your book, you describe memoir competitions as “a literary phenomenon unprecedented in the history of world literature.” According to your data, approximately 1,500 competitions for autobiographical writings were held, resulting in an almost unimaginable number of pages.**

Many original manuscripts have been lost. Few texts written in the 1930s survived the war. However, the greatest catastrophe befell the life-writing archives half a century later, in the 1990s. The Polish Society of Friends of Memoir Writing's building—a manor house in Rudno—was purchased by a private owner. At the beginning of the post-communist transition, no fewer than 900,000 manuscripts were stored there. First, they were moved to the cellars; after a few years, they were thrown into the courtyard. The manuscripts rotted and tore, and the ink disintegrated. Had it not been for the nearly heroic rescue operation by the KARTA Center, the legacy of Polish memoir writing would have been completely lost. We managed to save 10 percent. I'm fortunate that the manuscripts submitted to the competitions that interest me most survived in fairly good condition. Ultimately, I decided not to remove some of them from the archival files, especially those from the 1930s. I was afraid the pages would crumble in my hands. Later memoirs were often written on delicate paper, sometimes torn from notebooks, and other times on wrapping paper. One example is a memoir from the 1960s written on cottage cheese wrappers. The author couldn't afford paper, so she used parchment-like wrappers that had been dried and ironed. These are genuine archival documents that reveal a great deal about the history of writing and the need to tell stories. Simply making the decision to write was challenging in those circumstances.

**It is also a testament to their tremendous determination. What motivated these women to enter the competitions? What sparked their desire to write?**

I suppose we should resort to the cliché: it depends. It depends on the generation and decade when the author decided to write.

But it also depends on the writer's individual character. In most memoirs, however, a common theme emerges: the need to tell one's story on one's own terms. Some authors openly express their surprise that anyone would consider their stories ("ordinary, rural women's stories") worth reading. They wrote because someone finally gave them the opportunity to share their stories and asked how they live and what they think about the world. There are also very intimate memoirs driven by the need for confession, often to voice an experience that could not be shared with even the closest loved ones. This is why many women memoirists said they didn't want to participate in the competition. For them, the stakes of writing were not a potential prize, but rather the relief that comes from "getting things off their chest" through writing. I did not find a single piece of life writing by a man in which the author consciously gave up a possible prize. Among women, this happened often.

Another group consists of memoirs written as a form of intervention. Their authors could be called feminist activists today. At the time, they simply opposed the injustice or harm they observed and/or experienced.

**Do you agree that *Przepraszam za brzydkie pismo* is an attempt to add nuance to the "peasant turn" in Polish literature?**

But what does nuance mean? There is virtually no history of women in the "peasant turn," and when women do appear, they're often in popularized settings full of generalizations and simplifications. However, there is no shortage of "easy reads" that try to emotionally manipulate readers into feeling pity and sympathy for the universal image of the peasant's plight. Even the way the interwar period is portrayed, as if there were a single "village" or a single "peasant woman" whose life story could represent women from every corner of the globe, distorts reality. Women from Polesia and Silesia born in the same year lived in completely different "civilizations"—the only thing they had in common was their identity as "peasant women." The peasant turn has focused on spectacular acts of resistance and rebellion rather than everyday life, even though the struggle for "mundane" survival forms the foundation of the history of subjugated groups experiencing systemic violence. This perspective is imposed from the outside, allowing the "people" to be "used" as a tool for successive historical and political narratives.

The most important thing for me is speaking of the multiplicity and diversity of experiences and not equating class experience with identity. It is also important to lean toward recent history—the decades of the Polish People's Republic and the subsequent years of political transformation. Even the systemic changes of the 1990s did not treat rural residents



*Przepraszam za brzydkie pismo.*  
*Pamiętniki wiejskich kobiet*  
(Sorry for the Messy Handwriting:  
Memoirs of Rural Women)  
Antonina Tosiek  
Wydawnictwo Czarne 2025

equally. Research shows that the effects of the reforms on women were far more brutal.

In the book, I followed in the footsteps of researchers who have challenged the myth of "universal history" for decades. Using specific examples, including data on access to healthcare, I aimed to demonstrate that the history of modernization under the Polish People's Republic has four facets: central and peripheral, as well as male and female. One might call this nuance, or one might call it ideological revisionism. For me, the fundamental issue is the reliability and credibility of research tools.

**You dedicated the book to your mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. Did writing *Przepraszam za brzydkie pismo* change your view of your family?**

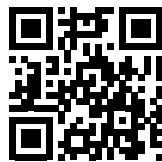
Yes, definitely. I think everyone, including those who come from the countryside but have since left, still faces stereotypical notions about rural origins and a so-called "rural" mentality.

My family, especially the women, is not very representative of the stories in the book. My great-grandmother and grandmother were independent homemakers who managed finances, took care of their appearance, and cared deeply about their children's education. My mother comes from a wealthy farming family, so she was able to finish college and move to the city.

I remember my surprise when my mom showed me a wedding photo of my grandparents from the early 1950s, with my grandmother in a smart blazer and my grandfather in a perfectly tailored suit. No one would have guessed that they came from a small village, let alone from poor farming families. My grandparents placed a high value on their children's education, so a few years after this photo was taken, my grandfather began looking for a home in a town with a school. He rode on the roofs of trains across half of Poland. And he found one.

We often think of rural areas in clichéd ways, mostly aesthetic ones, meaning either "peaceful village, joyful village," or superstition, animal cruelty, and poverty. Since 1989, these clichés have also been overlaid with prejudices tied to political views, albeit time-varying. Consider all these post-election comments and statements: "Poland A, B, C votes for...," "the countryside votes for...," "big cities vote for..."? This book has significantly revised my beliefs about the religiosity and conservatism of rural women.

Most of the protagonists are religious women, yet many of them are anti-clerical. They take offense to the Catholic Church and openly challenge the behavioral models or political choices promoted by priests. The women authors of these memoirs often had left-wing sympathies, not just during the communist era. Since the 1930s, they have written that the state should teach young girls how to protect themselves and provide them with access to contraception.



MORE AT  
[uniwersyteckie.pl](http://uniwersyteckie.pl)

# UPCOMING EVENTS

**JUNE 19–21, 2026**

## **Fantastic AMU at the Pyrkon Multigenre Fan Convention**

AMU is participating in Poland's largest fantasy festival once again. This year's program features unique lectures, workshops, games, RPG sessions, and spectacular science demonstrations where "science and fantasy go hand in hand." Demonstrations at the intersection of physics, astronomy, and biology, workshops inspired by traditional crafts, a student-run RPG zone, a comic book reading room, ancient board games, and lectures on J.R.R. Tolkien, Alice in Wonderland, solar eclipses, Masonic rituals, and witches in pop culture are all included in the program. We invite you to visit the International Poznań Fair.

► [amu.edu.pl/wspolpraca/inicjatywy/fantastyczny/pyrkon](http://amu.edu.pl/wspolpraca/inicjatywy/fantastyczny/pyrkon)

**JUNE 22–26, 2026**

## **The European Conference PHYSICS OF MAGNETISM 2026**

The 2026 European Conference PHYSICS OF MAGNETISM (PM'26) will take place at the AMU Faculty of Physics and Astronomy. For years, this event has brought together physicists, chemists, and materials engineers, particularly those interested in magnetism and magnetic materials. The conference provides a platform for exchanging experiences and presenting the latest scientific achievements. Invited speakers will include distinguished specialists from Poland and abroad, such as Klaus von Klitzing, winner of the 1985 Nobel Prize in Physics. The Institute of Molecular Physics of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the AMU Faculty of Physics and Astronomy are jointly organizing the conference.

► [www.ifmpan.poznan.pl/pm26/](http://www.ifmpan.poznan.pl/pm26/)

**JUNE 29 – JULY 1, 2026**

## **The International Conference on Emerging Adults on the Road to Maturity (EA2026)**

EA2026 is an interdisciplinary forum for presenting and discussing research on emerging adulthood, including its developmental dynamics, cultural determinants, and implications for education, mental health, relationships, and social life. The conference program includes presentations by Prof. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Prof. Lene Arnett Jensen of Clark University (USA), as well as paper and poster sessions that encourage international collaboration. The AMU Faculty of Theology and the Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood are organizing the conference.

**AUGUST 27–30, 2026**

## **The 18th International Conference of the European Association for Japanese Studies (EAJS)**

The EAJS is the world's largest organization of scholars in the humanities and social sciences who study Japan and its relations with other countries. The association unites researchers from Europe, North America, and Asia, including Japan. Since 1973, the EAJS conference has been held every three years in various European cities and, since 2013, in Japan as well. This year's conference will take place in Poznań at the AMU Faculty of Law and Administration. The local organizing committee is comprised of staff from the Department of Japanese Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies and other AMU divisions. The committee is headed by AMU Prof. Beata Bochorodycz.

► [eajs.eu/eajs2026-conference/](http://eajs.eu/eajs2026-conference/)

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We look forward to working with all interested parties.

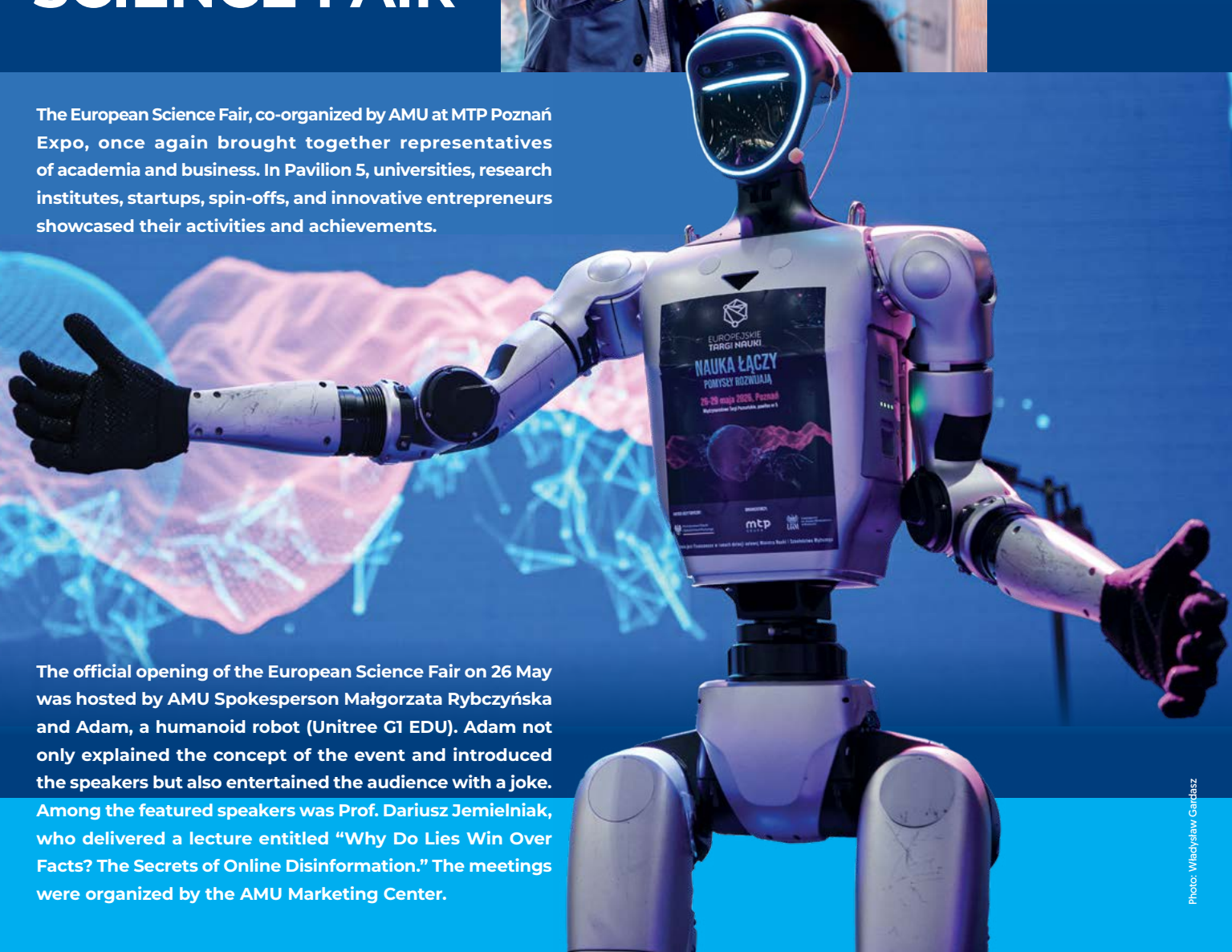
This issue went to press on June 2, 2026.



# EUROPEAN SCIENCE FAIR



The European Science Fair, co-organized by AMU at MTP Poznań Expo, once again brought together representatives of academia and business. In Pavilion 5, universities, research institutes, startups, spin-offs, and innovative entrepreneurs showcased their activities and achievements.



The official opening of the European Science Fair on 26 May was hosted by AMU Spokesperson Małgorzata Rybczyńska and Adam, a humanoid robot (Unitree G1 EDU). Adam not only explained the concept of the event and introduced the speakers but also entertained the audience with a joke. Among the featured speakers was Prof. Dariusz Jemielniak, who delivered a lecture entitled "Why Do Lies Win Over Facts? The Secrets of Online Disinformation." The meetings were organized by the AMU Marketing Center.