

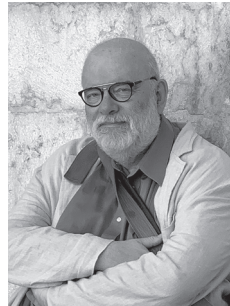
## IN MEMORIAM

## PAWEŁ PIOTR LIBERSKI

BEATA SIKORSKA, RADZISŁAW KORDEK

On 19 August 2025, Professor Paweł Piotr Liberski passed away – and far too soon – at his home in Lodz, in the presence of his wife, Professor Maria Respondek-Liberska. He was among the most dynamic and distinguished figures in Polish medical science: a brilliant scientist and an outstanding neuropathologist. Those fortunate enough known him will remember a man of exceptional intellect, wearing brightly coloured braces and always ready with a quotation from Shakespeare, Bulgakov, or Tolkien.

Paweł Liberski was an eminent scholar, neuropathologist, and neurologist whose work profoundly influenced the understanding of prion diseases. His research combined rigorous scientific inquiry with an exceptional sense of curiosity and imagination, leading to internationally recognised contributions in the fields of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. Internationally, he is best known for his work on the ultrastructural features of prion diseases. Particularly well known are his studies on tubulovesicular structures in these disorders, as well as his research on the ultrastructural features of neurodegenerative and viral diseases of the central nervous system. Paweł Liberski was born into an artistic family of well-known painters, Benon Liberski and Krystyna Liberska. There is no doubt that growing up surrounded by his parents' paintings and their lively artistic world helped shape his wide-ranging, Renaissance-like interests. He was an art connoisseur, particularly devoted to painting; he adored the works of Picasso and Bruegel. At international conferences, everyone knew that if he was not in the lecture hall, he was most likely in a museum. He was also passionate about Japan and about the art of the indigenous peoples of Africa and Oceania; he collected Japanese woodcuts, masks, and small animal figurines, especially elephants. The Department's rooms are filled with prints, paintings, masks, and figurines, and they were in the Professor's office was filled with they were in every corner of the Professor's office. He was a true Renaissance man, interested in almost everything. He could



in Vienna – he had already stood out as an unusual student, fascinated by a rare group of disorders: transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, later known as prion diseases. That is how he was remembered by Professor Herbert Budka, then still a young neuropathologist. Professor Małgorzata Wągrowska-Danilewicz, who had been his teaching assistant in pathology classes, remembers him as an exceptionally gifted and brilliant student – though somewhat unruly, interested exclusively in the nervous system, and studying only what truly fascinated him. After graduating from the Medical Academy, he completed specialist training first in neurology and later in neuropathology. The age of thirty-nine he was awarded the title of Professor by President Lech Wałęsa in 1993; this was an exceptional distinction at that time. He served for many years as the Head of the Department of Molecular Pathology and Neuropathology at the Medical University of Lodz. From 2002 to 2008, he held the position of the Vice-Rector for Research, and he also founded the National Reference Centre for Prion Diseases in Poland.

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In the 1980s, he was a Fogarty Visiting Fellow in the laboratory of Nobel laureate D. Carleton Gajdusek, with whom he later worked together and maintained a long-standing friendship for many years. And although he did not approve of what was later revealed about Gajdusek's past, he remained loyal to him until the end – as did many other co-workers at the NIH. He also became acquainted with another Nobel laureate, Stanley Prusiner, with whom he often discussed – and often argued about – the nature of the infectious agent.



Professor Liberski authored more than 400 scientific papers and over 40 books; his works have been cited approximately 20,000 times, and his h-index reached 47. Yet in an era in which we strive to quantify every-

thing, to translate research into profitability, and to reduce a scholar's stature to numerical indices, it is not these – impressive as they are – that truly attest to the greatness of an individual. In our view, the stature of a man and a scholar is reflected in his international recognisability, in the response to his passing, in the immediate invitation to deliver a lecture about him at the world's largest prion conference, and in the fact that a world-renowned neuropathologist, Professor Budka, travelled to accompany him on his final journey. Among the Professor's other remarkable traits, one could mention his generosity and his willingness to share everything he possessed – his knowledge, his contacts abroad, and even his food, although the latter somewhat less willingly. It is hardly surprising that he shaped so many careers; many of his former students now occupy senior posts in science and medicine.

I believe that many of us, his disciples – just as the authors of this text – heard his favourite line from *The Matrix*. at some point in our careers.: [...] *I can only show you the door. You're the one who has to walk through it.* Most of us did indeed walk through that door.

Thank you, Paweł, for opening that door for us.