

# Maria

# Skłodowska-Curie



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Muzeum  
Marii Skłodowskiej-Curie  
w Warszawie

# From the love for science



Maria Skłodowska-Curie is the most outstanding Polish woman, a pioneer in the world of science dominated by men, the first and so far the only woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize twice, a tireless guardian of scientific truth. “Dear Me”, as her daughters called her, was a quiet, modest woman with large, grey eyes, full of passion and genius. Following the path of science, she was ahead of her time. She retained her pre-eminence even after her death, when she was the first woman to be buried in the Paris Pantheon among the most outstanding Frenchmen. Her life story motivated generations and continues to inspire dreamers hungry for scientific challenges and courageous seekers of their own path.

← Maria Skłodowska-Curie after defending her doctorate, 1903.

The scientist was also a social activist and a fervent patriot. She cared about the fate of her homeland and emphasized that she was Polish. At the same time, she was devoted to serving France, where she spent her adult life.

📄 Public domain

↓ Signature of Maria Skłodowska-Curie from the family archive.

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*M. Skłodowska-Curie*

# Mania

Maria Salomea Skłodowska was born on 7 November 1867 in Warsaw, into a family of teachers. She was the youngest of five children of Bronisława, née Boguska, and Władysław Skłodowski. She had an excellent memory, and easily acquired knowledge during educational games at home and at school. In 1883, she graduated from the 3rd State Gymnasium for Girls in Warsaw. The greatest tragedy of Maria's childhood was the death of her mother, who was ill with tuberculosis, when the girl was eleven years old.

↓ Bronisława née Boguska and Władysław Skłodowski, Warsaw, ca. 1870. Her parents were a great authority for Maria. Her father instilled in her a love of learning and patriotic values, her mother was an intelligent woman with a strong character and a loving heart.  Public domain



↑ Maria Salomea Skłodowska, 1882. At the age of four, Mania could count and read. She mastered foreign languages very quickly. She was also interested in literature and poetry. However, she was most fascinated by the exact sciences.  Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw

## **Mania, Manusia, my little Anciupecio! (...)**

***This is what they say to her precisely in moments of greatest congeniality, because this is the name that was once given to her in the cradle as the youngest sprout in the house.***

E. Curie, *Maria Curie*, Warszawa 1983, 16th ed., p.12.



← The Skłodowski siblings. From the left: Zofia, Helena, Maria, Józef and Bronisława, Warsaw 1872.  Chrząstowski family collection



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# Hunger for knowledge

Lack of funds and the fact that women were not allowed to study at higher education institutions in the Russian partition made it impossible for Maria, who was hungry for intellectual challenges, to continue her education in Poland. She was a student at the Flying University in Warsaw, then she took up a position as a governess near Ciechanów. After returning to Warsaw in 1889, her days were filled with teaching and studying, with the hope of starting studies in Paris.

→ Sisters Maria and Bronisława Skłodowska, Warsaw 1885 or 1886. Thanks to her work as a governess, Maria financially supported Bronisława, who was studying in Paris, and who later helped Mania to study there.  
📍 Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw



← The house in Szczuki where Skłodowska taught the daughters of the Żórawski family in the years 1886-1889. During this time, she also secretly taught the village children.  
📍 Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw

→ Thanks to the help of her cousin Józef Bogucki, Maria was able to develop scientifically and gain experience in the chemical laboratory at the Museum of Industry and Agriculture in Warsaw, 1905.  
📍 National Museum in Warsaw



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# Fulfilling dreams

In November 1891, Maria began her education at the Sorbonne in Paris. She studied physics and mathematics, devoting all her time to her studies. In 1893, she received a bachelor's degree in physics, taking first place on the list, and a year later in mathematics. In 1894, she met the French physicist Pierre Curie, in whom she found a life and scientific partner. This acquaintance quickly turned into love and completely changed Maria's life.

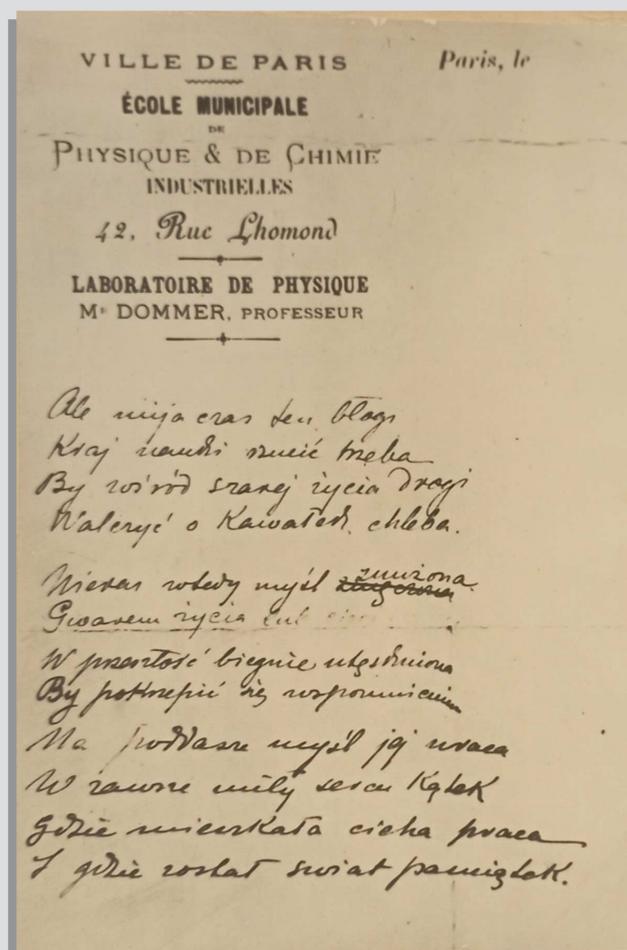
→ Maria Skłodowska during her studies in Paris, 1894.

📍 Chrząstowski family collection



↓ A fragment of a piece by Skłodowska. To take a break from learning, the young student performed in an amateur theatre. She also wrote poetry.

📍 Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw



→ During the meetings of Polish students (in the photo), which Maria attended, patriotic topics were eagerly discussed. Paris, 1892.

📍 Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw



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***We got married in the simplest way. (...)***

***From that time on, a new period of life began for me, completely different from the lonely existence of the preceding years. My husband and I were so closely connected by love and common work that we spent almost all our time together.***

M. Skłodowska-Curie, *Marja Skłodowska-Curie o swoim życiu i pracach*, Warszawa 1935, pp. 21-22.

→ Pierre and Maria Curie  
on their wedding day, 1895.  
📄 Public domain



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# Madame Curie

The intimate wedding ceremony of Maria and Pierre Curie took place on 26 July 1895 in Sceaux. Two independent, brilliant minds began a common path focused on intensive scientific work and family. A year after the wedding, Maria passed the exam for the right to teach in a secondary school. In the same year, she began work on her doctoral dissertation and focused on Henri Becquerel's research on uranium salts. On 12 September 1897, the Curies' first daughter, Irène, was born.



↑ The Curies in front of Pierre's parents' house in Sceaux, 1895.

Maria and Pierre Curie shared a common passion for cycling trips out of town. They bought their bikes with money they received as a wedding present.

📷 Public domain

→ In 1900, Madame Curie became the first female lecturer at the Sèvres Higher School for Women. In the photo surrounded by her students, ca. 1903.

📷 Library of Congress, George Grantham Bain Collection



→ Maria with seven-year-old Irène, a future Nobel Prize winner in chemistry, in the garden, 1904.

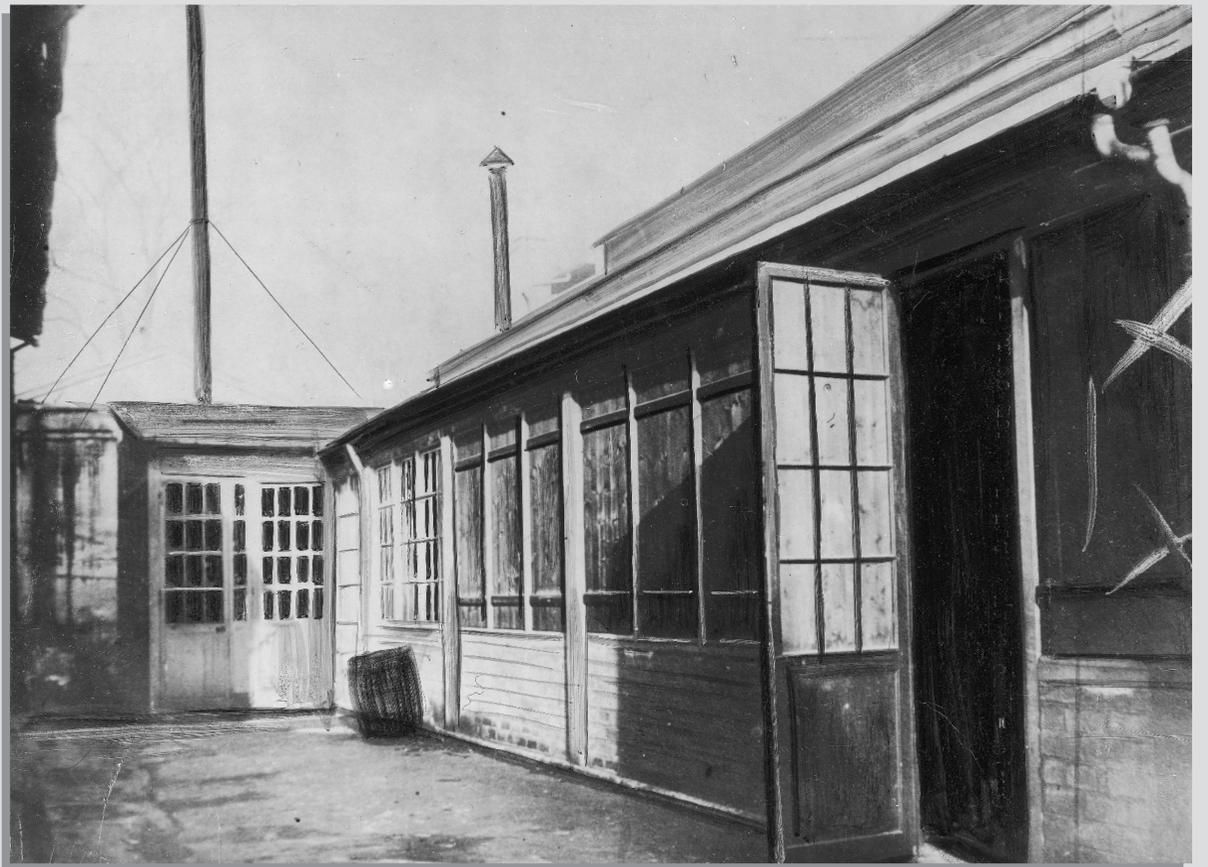
📷 Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw



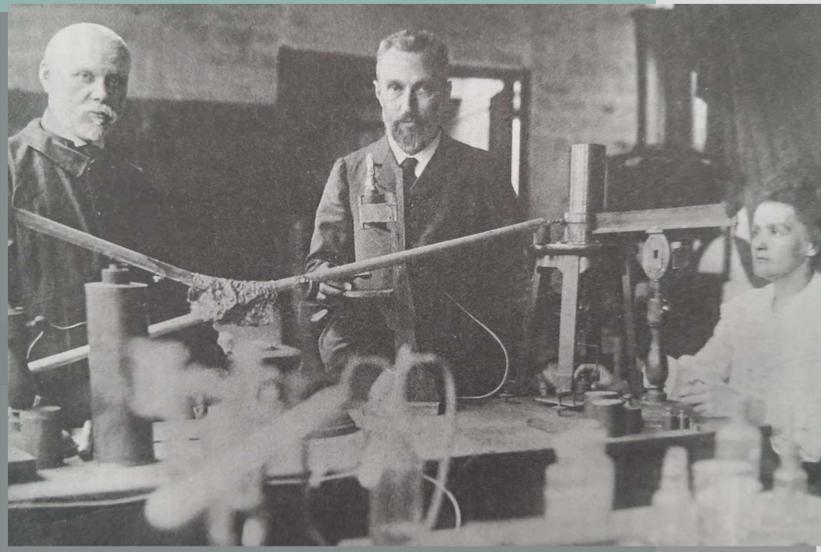
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# Polonium et radium

As a result of laboratory research, Maria and Pierre Curie announced the discovery of two new, highly radioactive elements in 1898: polonium (named after Poland) and radium. In the same year, the scientist introduced the term “radioactivity” to science. She was the first to question the indivisibility of the atom. The culmination of their scientific successes was the Nobel Prize in physics, which the Curies and Henri Becquerel received in 1903. A few months earlier, Maria had defended her doctoral dissertation.



↑ The shed in the courtyard of the School of Physics in Paris, where the Curies discovered radium, 1934. Skłodowska-Curie was the first woman to discover radioactive elements and receive the Nobel Prize in physics.  National Digital Archives



↑ Maria and Pierre Curie with Gustave Bémont, who co-authored the announcement of the discovery of radium. Paris, ca. 1898.

 T. Pospieszny, *Maria Skłodowska-Curie. Zakochana w nauce*, 3rd ed., Warszawa 2024, p. 147.

↓ Diploma for the Nobel Prize in physics for Maria and Pierre Curie, 1903.

The Curies' scientific success was based on hard work and years of experience. They gained international fame and numerous awards, losing the peace they valued in their research work.

 Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw



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# Joys and sorrows

The discovery of radium was a breakthrough in the world of science and the lives of the Curies. Pierre took over the chair of physics at the Sorbonne, and Maria became the head of their laboratory. The orderly and happy life was interrupted by the tragic death of Pierre on 19 April 1906. After the loss of her husband, Skłodowska-Curie continued her scientific work – she took over the chair of physics at the Sorbonne, and at the age of 41 became the first female professor at this university. Her scientific career was at its peak.

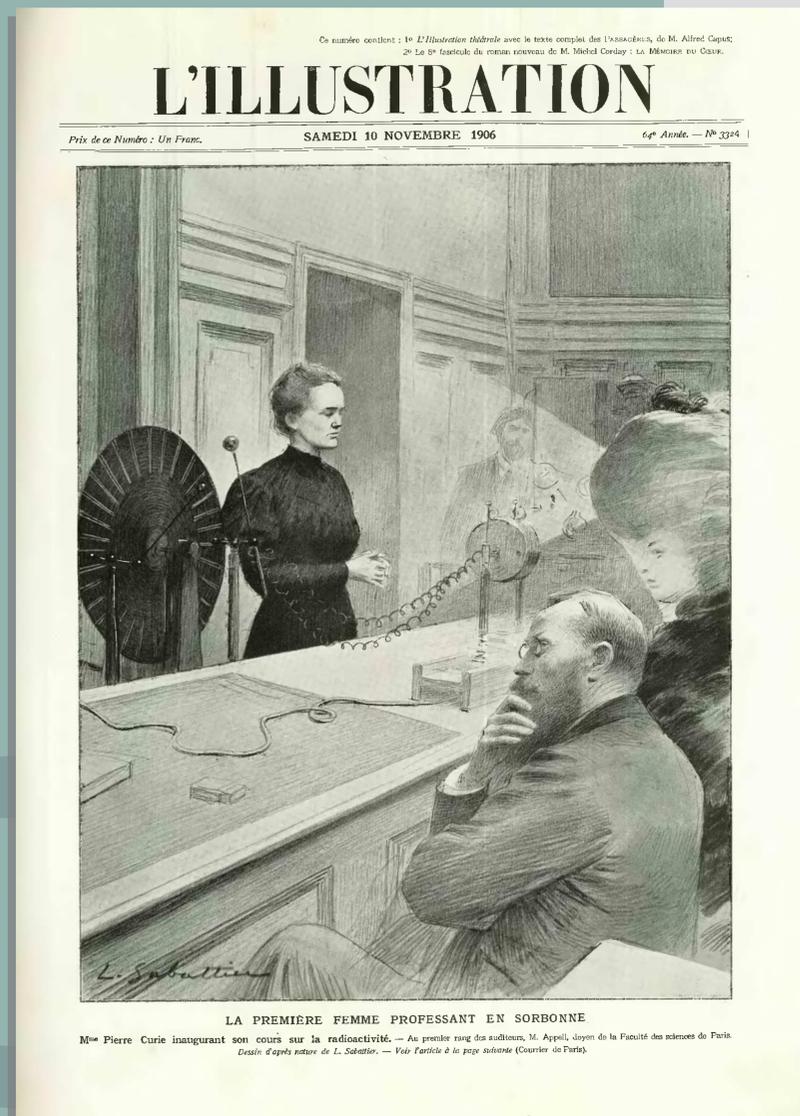
→ The scientist with Irène and Ève in the garden of the house in Sceaux, 1905. Ève Denise, the younger daughter of Maria and Pierre Curie and her mother's future biographer, was born on 6 December 1904.

📍 Chrzęstowski family collection



↓ Maria Skłodowska-Curie in the laboratory, Paris 1911. Skłodowska-Curie suffered greatly after the death of her husband, and fell into depression. Work was her solace. For a year she kept a mourning diary, in which she described her feelings and sadness after the loss of her beloved, as well as the moments they had shared together.

📍 Chrzęstowski family collection



↑ Cover of the weekly "L'illustration" from 10 November 1906 with a drawing of the outstanding scientist during her debut speech on 5 November 1906. Maria Skłodowska-Curie was the first woman to give a lecture at the Sorbonne in Paris.

📍 Municipal Public Library in Dąbrowa Górnicza



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# Successes and failures

The year 1911 began with the rejection of Madame Curie's candidacy for the French Academy of Sciences. In December, in turn, the scientist was recognized by the Swedish Academy of Sciences. She became the first woman to receive the Nobel Prize in chemistry. She was also the first person in history to be awarded the Nobel Prize twice. In the autumn of 1911, she participated in the First Solvay Conference in Brussels. She initiated the construction of the Radium Institute in Paris, completed in 1914. In November 1913, she participated in the official opening of the Mirosław Kernbaum Radiological Laboratory in Warsaw.

→ Maria with Ève in the Tatra Mountains, 1911. Polish lessons, meetings with Polish relatives, and holidays in their mother's homeland were not the only efforts of the Nobel Prize winner to instill the Polish spirit in Irène and Ève. 



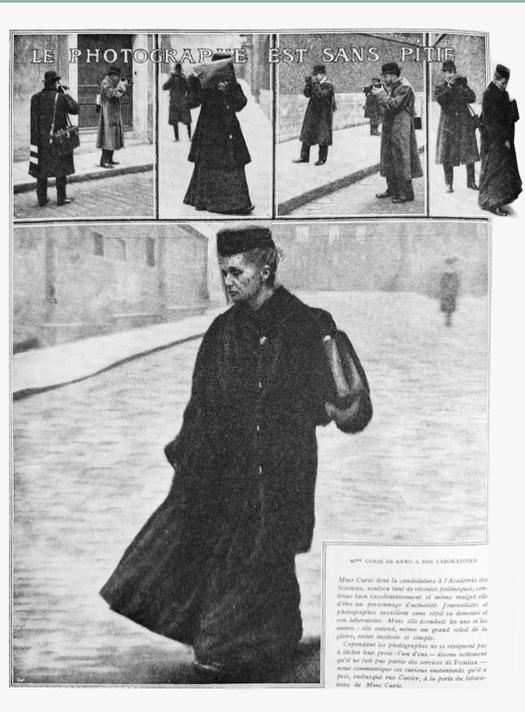
↓ The first Solvay conference brought together many distinguished scientists, including the young Albert Einstein (standing second from the right). Symposia continued in subsequent years. Until 1933, Madame Curie was the only woman in this distinguished group. Brussels, 1911. 

↓ Press article attacking the Nobel Prize winner, 1911. Skłodowska-Curie became involved in a moral scandal due to her affair with the scientist and friend Paul Langevin, who had a wife and children. The publication of this fact by the Parisian press and the attacks on the scientist exhausted Maria, who was struggling with health problems.

 Material from the collection of Tomasz Pospieszny in: T. Pospieszny, *Maria Skłodowska-Curie. Zakochana w nauce*, 3rd ed., Warszawa 2024, p. 270.



← Diploma for the Nobel Prize in chemistry for Maria Skłodowska-Curie, 1911. The fact that she received the Nobel Prize in a field she never studied attests to genius of the scientist. 



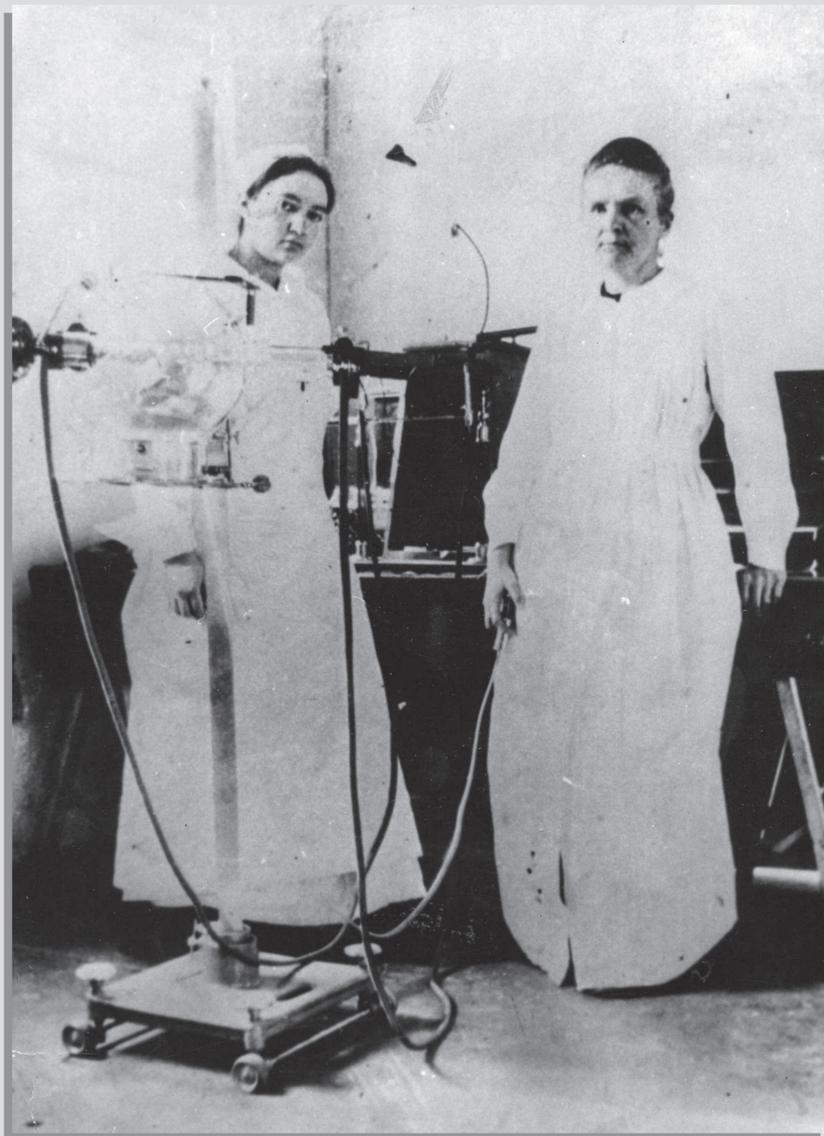
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# The Great War

During World War I, the Nobel Prize winner was involved in the mission of saving the lives and health of wounded soldiers. She organized radiological services in French military hospitals. She created new, stationary X-ray points and mobile radiological stations, "little Curies". She often drove ambulances equipped with X-ray machines. She trained radiological nurses. At that time, she also financially supported activities for the Polish cause. After the war, she devoted herself to work at the Radium Institute in Paris.

→ Maria and Irène Curie in a radiology laboratory in Belgium, 1915. Over time, Irène also joined the medical service. Like her mother, she drove to the front lines, created new radiology points and trained staff to operate them.

📍 Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw



↑ Madame Curie in a radiology clinic among female students during the war, 1915. Her work in the sanitary service in the years 1914–1918, including contact with radioactive rays, significantly damaged the scientist's health.

📍 Public domain



↑ Maria in a radiological van during the war, 1915.

📍 Public domain



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# The American gift

Thanks to the initiative of the American journalist Marie Maloney, in the spring of 1921 the Nobel Prize winner travelled to the United States. The purpose of the visit was to give her a gram of radium. During her over-six-week stay in the US, the scientist took part in numerous meetings, lectures and receptions. She was honoured with decorations and medals, and received honorary doctorates from universities including Yale and Northwestern.

→ On her journey overseas, Maria was accompanied by her daughters, who actively supported her. The first meetings with journalists were organized on board the liner *Olympic*, on which they arrived in New York on 11 May 1921. From the left: Marie Maloney, Irène Curie, Maria Skłodowska-Curie and Ève Curie.

📍 Library of Congress, George Grantham Bain Collection Warsaw



↑ The Nobel Prize winner during her visit to St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, 26 October 1929.

Skłodowska-Curie once again received financial support for the purchase of radium for the Radium Institute in Warsaw, which was being established at that time. For this reason, she returned to America in 1929.

📍 Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw

→ The precious gram of radium that Madame Curie received from the hands of the US President Warren Harding on 20 May 1921 was purchased with funds donated by the Polish community and wealthy Americans to the Radium Fund in her name.

📍 Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw

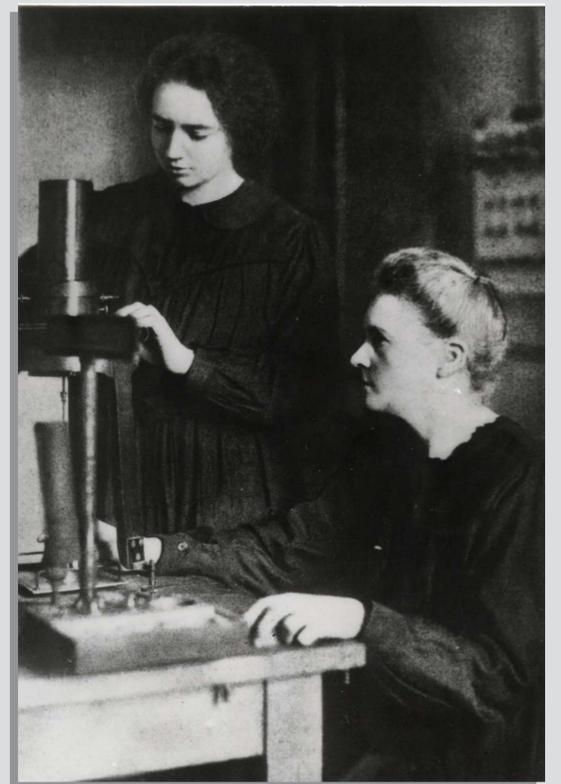


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# Recognition and travel

In 1922, Madame Curie became the first woman admitted to the Paris Academy of Medicine and a member of the International Commission for Intellectual Cooperation at the League of Nations. In 1925, she took part in the ceremony of consecrating the cornerstone of the Radium Institute in Warsaw, visited Czechoslovakia, and the following year Brazil. She participated in subsequent Solvay Congresses, supported Irène's scientific career, and devoted time to her family. However, her health problems were becoming more severe, and her body was becoming weaker.

→ Maria Skłodowska-Curie in the 1920s.  
📍 Chrząstowski family collection



↓ Maria and Irène in the Radium Institute laboratory, Paris 1922.  
📍 Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw

***There is not a single corner left in the world where she is not known. Even in China, in one of the old cities, Tai Youan Fou, there is her portrait in the “temple of Confucius”, in a row of images of the “benefactors of humanity”: Buddha, Descartes, Newton and the great Chinese emperors...***

E. Curie, *Maria Curie. Biografia*, Warszawa 1983, p. 379.



↑ Maria and Irène with members of the Brazilian Federation for the Advancement of Women in Rio de Janeiro, 21 August 1926.  
📍 National Archives of Brazil



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***I am one of those who believe that Science is a very beautiful thing.  
A scientist in his laboratory is not only a technician, but also a child,  
gazing at natural phenomena, moving like a fairy tale.***

M. Skłodowska-Curie in: E. Curie, *Maria Curie. Biografia*, Warszawa 1983, pp. 381-382.



← Maria Skłodowska-Curie in the laboratory on Cuvier Street in Paris, 1911.  
📷 Photo: Henri Manuel, Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw



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# Last years

Maria Skłodowska-Curie remained professionally active until the end of her life. She lectured at the university and conducted research in the laboratory. Her dream of establishing a Radium Institute in independent Poland came true. She increasingly suffered from fatigue, rheumatism and vision problems. Ill, under Ève's care, she left for the Sancellemoz sanatorium in the Alps, where she died on 4 July 1934 from pernicious anaemia, the result of many years of contact with radioactive materials. Condolences poured in from all over the world.



↓ Maria Skłodowska-Curie shortly before her death, 1934.  
📄 National Digital Archives

↑ The grand opening of the Radium Institute in Warsaw took place on 29 May 1932. The Nobel Prize winner donated to the institution a gram of radium purchased with American contributions. This was Skłodowska-Curie's last visit to her home country.  
📄 National Digital Archives



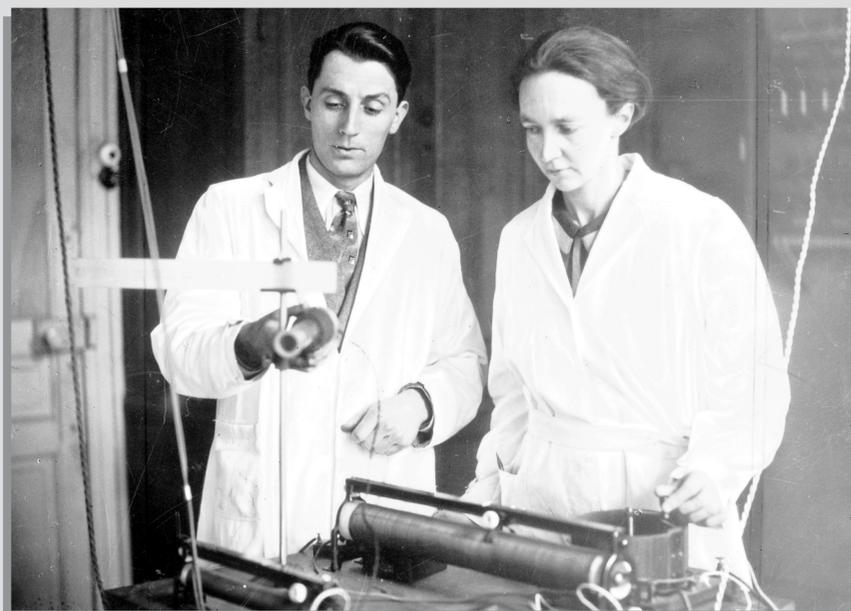
↓ The scientist was buried in a family grave in Sceaux near Paris. The modest funeral ceremony was attended by, among others, her siblings, who placed a handful of soil brought from Poland on their sister's coffin. Sceaux, 1933.  
📄 Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw



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# In the temple of merit

The ashes of Maria and Pierre Curie were placed in the Paris Pantheon on 20 April 1995. The story of the Polish scientist continues to inspire new generations of representatives of science, art, film, and even gardening. She is the patron of institutions, schools, and streets all over the world. The image of the Nobel Prize winner has been used for years in murals, on coins, and in computer games. In 2018, in a poll by the British BBC History Magazine, Maria Skłodowska-Curie was chosen the most influential woman in history.



← The work of Maria and Pierre Curie was continued by Irène and Frédéric Joliot-Curie, who received the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1935. Paris, 1933.  
📷 National Digital Archives



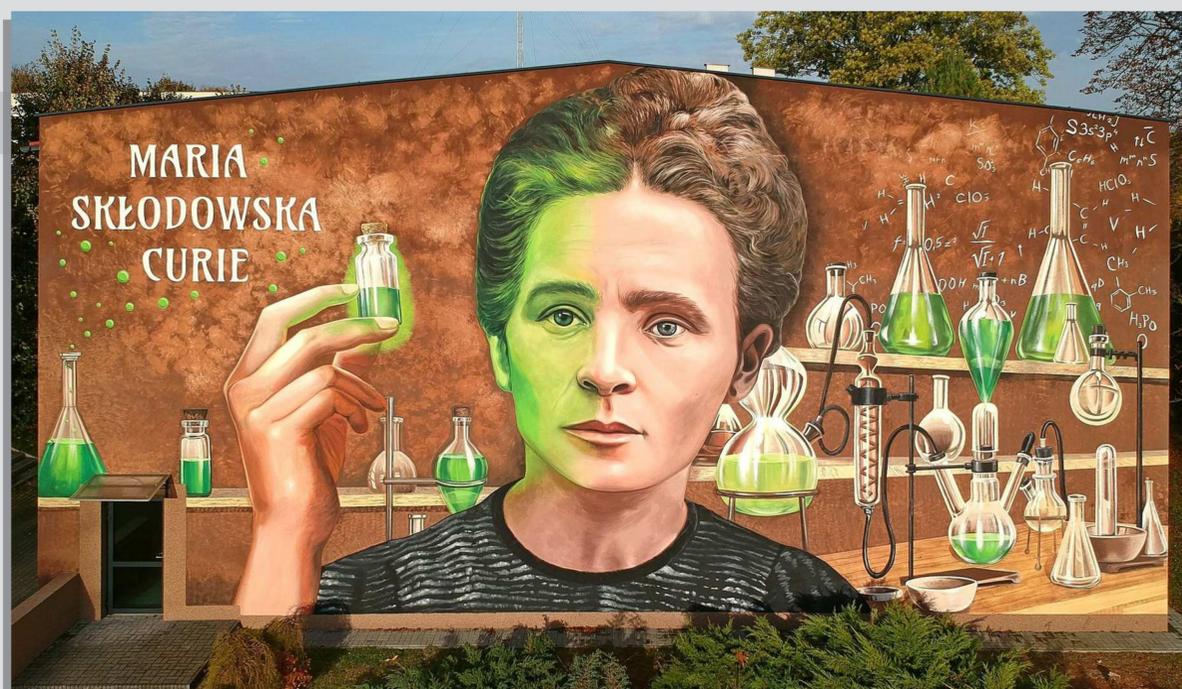
↑ The biographical museum dedicated to Maria Skłodowska-Curie was opened in 1967 at her birthplace, at 16 Freta Street in Warsaw. Ève Curie (first from the right) participated in the event.  
📷 Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw



↑ The sarcophagus of Maria and Pierre Curie in the Pantheon. Paris, 2023. The presidents of France and Poland took part in the ceremony of transferring the ashes of Maria and Pierre Curie to the Parisian mausoleum.  
📷 Photo: Ilona Religa-Gola

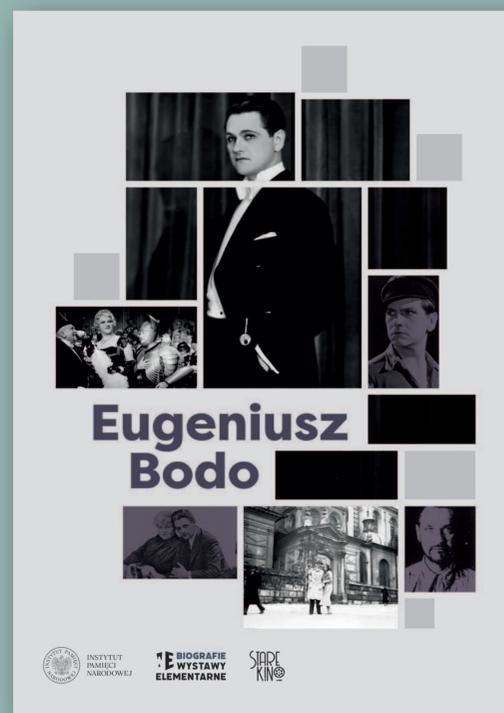
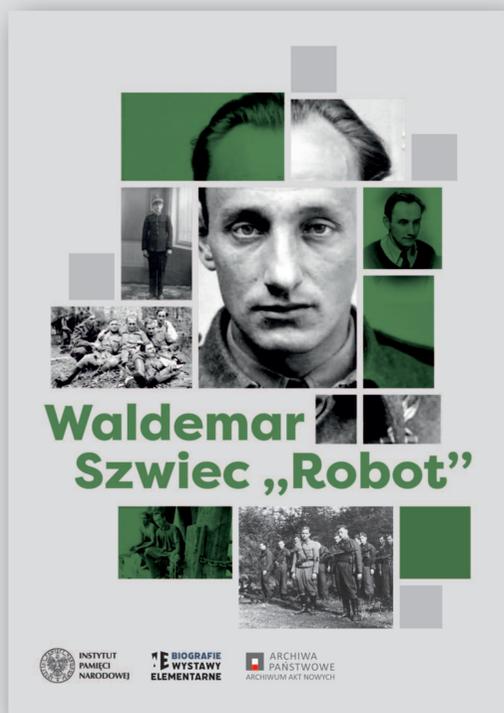
→ Mural on the building of the Educational Complex in Trawniki, unveiled on 9 November 2023.

📷 Photo: Piotr Kołodziejczyk, Maria Skłodowska-Curie Educational Complex in Trawniki

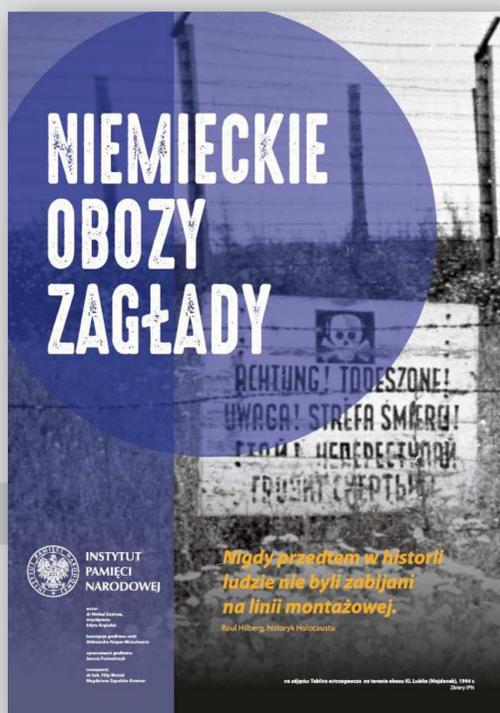


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