

Max-Planck-Institut für evolutionäre Anthropologie

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology
Department of Evolutionary Genetics



MAX-PLANCK-GESellschaft

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Re: Dr. Martin M. Hanczyc

Dear colleague,

It is a pleasure for me to write on behalf of Dr. Martin Hanczyc. I know him since 1993 when he was a first year graduate student and approached me with questions at the SMBE meetings. Although we have never worked together formally, we have remained friends and stayed in contact ever since. In 1998, he visited our lab which was then located in Munich and considered a postdoc with us. Unfortunately for us, but surely to his benefit, he instead decided to pursue fundamental aspects of evolution with Dr. Szostak. In spite of this, I have over the years continued to follow Marty's career and to regularly discuss both his work and our own work with him.

Marty is something as unusual as a truly independent, scholarly investigator in a time when most younger scientists work in huge teams where the individual contributions are often hard or impossible to discern. As a graduate student in Yale University, he worked with Dr. Dorit, who had a quite hands-off attitude to the supervision of his collaborators. A less dedicated and able person might have floundered in that situation but Marty was able to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for the success of his project. This was largely due to his great capacity for hard and goal-oriented work and his own scientific judgement. His demonstration that molecular interactions between catalytic RNAs can evolve *in vitro* and that the *in vitro* evolution of at least some catalytic properties of RNAs is repeatable were fundamental new insights that have stood the test of time.

As a postdoctoral fellow he decided to go to Dr. Szostak's laboratory to study *in vitro* models for early stages in the evolution of Life. Although he found himself in an excellent scientific environment, he was again embarking on a project where he could not just build on previous achievements, reagents and know-how of a long-since successful project. Rather, he himself had to establish the experimental systems from first principles. As you will know, he turned

out to be wildly successful. His demonstration of the formation and replication of micelles on clay has broken new ground in our understanding of the origins of Life.

As is evident from the above, Marty is an unusual scientist. Throughout his career, he has identified fundamental questions in biology and then pursued them independently and creatively. This is reflected in his publication record. His publications are of fundamental importance and of the highest quality. Indeed, I expect his Science paper to become a classic in the field of origins of life research. His independence is also demonstrated by the fact that he is the principle investigator on an NIH National Research Service Award.

Let me end by pointing out that his independence does not mean that he is unable to work with others. On the contrary, I know that he has taken an active and much appreciated role in both the formal and informal education of undergraduates and graduate students both at Yale and at Harvard. He is an easy going and well liked person and he takes a keen interest in the work of others. Indeed, I and some people of our department have on several occasions benefited from his advice in our own projects.

In summary, I have no doubt that he is ready to lead his own laboratory and that he will be extremely successful in his future career. He will also be a delightful colleague. I can only envy you the opportunity to recruit him. We would be happy to offer him an independent position at this Max Planck Institute at any time.

Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Svante Pääbo', written in a cursive style.

Svante Pääbo, Ph.D., Drs. *h.c.*
Professor of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology
Director, MPI-EVA