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"SLEEPING BEAUTIES" IN SCIENCE

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Introduction: A 'Sleeping beauty' is a scientific article that becomes highly cited long after its publication.
Aim: To present this phenomenon, not limited to biomedical research.
Method: Literature search on Google. Keywords: sleeping beauties, scientific discovery, delayed recognition.
Results: The most famous case of 'Sleeping beauty' was that of Gregor Mendel's seminal study on plant genetics that received widespread recognition 31 years after its publication.'Sleeping beauties' led to Nobel prizes (Herman Staudinger, Nobel in Chemistry 1953; Peyton Rous, Nobel in Chemistry 1966). They usually reflect premature discoveries that the scientific community was not ready to recognize when published. Some suppose that this has to do with most scientists' tendency to adhere to their established paradigms. The article's authors may also be young and/or low in the hierarchy of science and their work is initially ignored. Perhaps the paper is not written in the right way for the right journal, il lacks clarity or is not adequately 'promoted' by its authors (e.g. in scientific meetings). Maybe the findings are difficult to be conceptually connected to the existing knowledge by a comprehensible and logical 'bridge'. Sometimes a particular topic could be out of fashion only to see its popularity soar in future. 'Sleeping beauties' are thought to represent 100-1,000 articles out of nearly 1,000,000 papers published annually.
Conclusion: The public access granted to a lot of scientific articles makes difficult for a breakthrough paper to go unnoticed for long. However, just the quantity of today's publications could potentially 'burry' a great article.

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