

TO THE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH
OF MORIZ KAPOSI
(1837–1902)

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Moriz Kaposi, the professor and head of the Clinic of Dermatology of the University of Vienna died a hundred years ago, on March 6, 1902. He was the first to describe several dermatoses – known and used to this day [idiopathic multiplex pigment sarcoma of the epidermis (1872), lupus erythematosus (systemicus) (1869, 1872), xeroderma pigmentosum, folliculitis nuchae sclerotisans, pustulosis varicelliformis (1880) etc.] [1]. His activity – together with his father-in-law, Ferdinand

Hebra – determined the development of dermatology in the second half/last third of the 19th century not only in Europe but relating to the civilized world of the age as well.

Moriz Kaposi was named ‘Móric Kohn’ when he was born on October 23, 1837 in Kaposvár into a poor but educated orthodox Jewish family. He went to the primary school of his hometown and followed his studies in the local grammar school. After completing the first four years, he went on to the German grammar school of Pozsony (Bratislava) and had his “Matura” exams there. Then he was doing his studies at the best European Medical University of the time in Vienna. He was conferred a title on the Doctor of Medicine in December 1861, later he was appointed to doctor of surgery and master of obstetrics in 1866.

Preceding his membership at the dermatology department (led by Prof. Hebra) in 1866, he had been working at several places between 1861 and 1866 at the Surgery of the Allgemeines Krankenhaus III, at the Löw Sanatorium and for two years at the Department for Curing Syphilis led by Prof. Sigmund.

His dissertation was based on his work he was doing in that department and it led to his being nominated professor in 1866 (“Die Syphilis der Schleimhaut der Mund-, Rachen, Nasen und Kehlkopfhöhle”).

Hebra founded the science of dermatology in Vienna and he played a determinant role in the Second Vienna Medical School together with Skoda and Rokitansky. First Hebra worked as assistant to Skoda and part of his work here included the classification of skin diseases and the study of their treatment. Rokitansky’s way of thinking had a great influence on him as well. His book on skin diseases “Versuch einer auf pathologische Anatomie gegründete Einteilung der Hautkrankheiten” (published in 1845) received significant attention internationally. Hebra was a trained clinician, a skilled observer and excellent in diagnosis but he was not experienced in histopathology – that started to develop gradually at this time –; Moriz Kaposi, on the other hand, had this skill and the two of them were complementary to each other’s work. The republishing of Hebra’s masterpiece in 1860, its survey and complementation kept them busy in Hebra’s home several nights. This was how Móric Kohn was acquainted with and finally got married to Hebra’s daughter, Marta [2]. The fact that Hebra’s family was Roman Catholic meant an obstacle to the marriage but for the sake of his future wife, Móric Kohn received baptism [3, 4, 5]. Later he also changed his name from Kohn to Kaposi. He signed his first article on lupus erythematosus (systemicus) as ‘Moriz Kohn’ in 1869; but his specified work concerning disease entity therapy was published under the name ‘Moriz Kaposi’. The reason of changing his family name was probably that he wanted to be distinguished from all the other doctors named ‘Kohn’ since there were five of them working at the Vienna University, one called Moric Kohn and another Moriz Gohn.

Naturally he could be the only competent person to explain the reason of changing his name – yet he only gave a reason for leaving the name ‘Kohn’, not explaining the choice of ‘Kaposi’. We could in fact see a devotion to his motherland in this “Magyarization” of his surname. This is also indicated by the fact that he preserved good relations not only with his relatives who stayed in Kaposvár, but he also welcomed his Hungarian colleagues at his clinic and had been keeping in touch with them for his lifetime.

Hebra died on August 5, 1880, and Moriz Kaposi preceded his father-in-law at the department first as a temporary lecturer; then he was confirmed in 1881. Moriz Kaposi gave his inaugural lecture in October 1881, when he was 44. In his lecture, he spoke in praise about Hebra’s work in dermatology.

The years spent at the Clinic of Dermatology in Vienna on the side of Hebra were fruitful for Moriz Kaposi and this was followed by the accomplishment of his activity as the head of the Clinic (Fig. 1). During his lifetime, he wrote 156 articles. The majority of which were published in ‘Archiv für Dermatologie und Syphilis’. His work ‘Pathologie und Therapie der Hautkrankheiten’ was published in 1880; in this, he summarized the pathological and therapeutical attitudes of the Vienna Dermatology School. This work evoked considerable international reaction and it was issued several times. It was republished last in 1902 and it was translated into numerous languages. His work appeared in French in the translations of Professors Besnier and Doyon, with the remarks of the translators.

Thus, the principle, experiences and attitudes of the two dermatological schools – the Vienna and the Parisian ones – were merged. Then in 1898–1900, Moriz Kaposi’s ‘Handatlas’ Volume (I–III) was issued and it proved to be a great success [6].

The therapy of different skin diseases (mostly of unknown origin) was rather primitive at that time due to the lack of means, methods and experience. Moriz Kaposi’s observations gave an impetus to the development of the therapy. His name is also related to the initiation of chrysarobin, β -naphthol, Vaseline, pyrogalllic acid, liquid soap, lard etc. – into the local treatment [5].

Kaposi was an excellent teacher, a strict principal, who kept abreast of the special literature. His outstanding technical knowledge had a great impact on the development of dermatology and the science of medicine. Besides, having a medical prestige, he was also a polyglot person; he spoke German, English and French (plus Hungarian, of course) at a very high level.

His international fame can be seen by the fact that he was invited to several international congresses. At the First International Dermatological Congress in 1889, Moriz Kaposi was one of the vice-presidents in Paris; and he gave the opening speech

as well. In 1892, Kaposi was the elected president at the Second International Dermatological Congress in Vienna.

It was characteristic of his entries at the meetings of the Congresses and the expert committees that he criticized in a rather harsh manner, thus contributing to the success of the debate. Historians emphasize Kaposi's brilliant logic but at the same time, they attribute the 'Magyarization' of his name to his egocentrism. Besides being member of numerous Austro-Hungarian and international boards he became a court counselor, a 'Hofrath'. He was also an officer in the Legion of Honor and corresponding member of the Medical Academy of Paris [4].

Kaposi was an ambitious, self-confident person. After newly describing an entity like 'xeroderma pigmentosum' he inserted the word 'mihi' demonstrating that he himself was the original author and none else. In his detailed work concerning the treatment of lupus erythematosus (1872), he was the first to write about the systemic features of the disease entity.

Preceding the publication on the idiopathic sarcoma of the skin (1872) Kaposi studied the state of the skin and the course of the disease in six patients (five men above 40 and a boy around 8–10 years). Kaposi described the clinical symptoms of the sarcoma carefully and cautiously; from the very beginning he claimed that the disease was incurable and led to quick death. Tracing the patients showed that two of the patients mentioned above died quickly and another three of them died 12–16 months after the symptoms had appeared. One of the patients underwent a *post mortem* examination. The characteristic symptoms could not only be seen on the limbs, the head and the trunk, but also in the pharynx, larynx, stomach, colon and the small intestines as well. At the same time, several tumors could be diagnosed in the colon and the liver. The liver was enlarged, fasciculated, had a fatty degeneration and a light brown color. Kaposi mentioned that the patient had run a distillery before but he did not add any remarks. No wonder that Kaposi did not refer to the sexual behavior of the adult patients; an entry shows that he rather preferred describing the symptoms of the clinical pattern [6]. As to the clinical pattern Kaposi claimed that the disease was a generalized process rather than a local tumor with later metastasis and a systematic state ('Dyskrasie') (!) in the background. The syndrome was named after Kaposi by the suggestion of Köbner in 1891.

The 'Kaposi syndrome' was regarded as a rare disease and up to 1953 only about 500 cases were diagnosed. Later it turned out that the disease was frequent in the equatorial region of Africa and was responsible e.g. for 9% of malignant tumors in Uganda.

Announcements appeared at the beginning of the 1980's concerning the occurrence of Kaposi syndrome in patients with immune suppression. In line with the

research of the pathogen, the AIDS came to the front. Its symptoms mainly appeared in homo/bisexual male patients and those leading a loose life, then in drug consumers etc. Considering the fact that the symptoms of the 'Kaposi sarcoma' in some of the AIDS patients mostly correspond to those described by Moriz Kaposi, the question arises that probably he was the first to describe the symptoms of AIDS [7]. We now know that the pathogen is the Kaposi Sarcoma-associated Herpes Virus (KSHV) or Human Herpes Virus-8 (HHV-8) [8, 9, 10].

Moriz Kaposi suffered an attack of apoplexy in 1900, having recovered he continued his work. Next year he was attacked by a more serious stroke from which he could not completely recover – yet he continued his work within the bounds of possibility and died on March 6, 1902. A long and laborious career was ended then that gave a tremendous impulse to the science of medicine and the development of dermatology. Two days after his death, Moriz Kaposi was accompanied to his last journey with a great sympathy in Vienna.

The town where he was born made an effort to cultivate Kaposi's memory in various ways. As a part of this effort, the Council of the Somogy County made a resolution that the County Hospital of Somogy should be named after Moriz Kaposi. Next to the memorial of Moriz Kaposi was unveiled in the courtyard of the County Hospital on 23rd of October 1992 (his birthday) – it symbolizes a stylized tree carved in stone with a bronze relief of Moriz Kaposi [11, 12].

All of us pay the tribute of admiration to this world-famous, eminent dermatologist of Hungarian origin on the hundredth anniversary of his death.

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