

## HISTORY OF THE MEDICINE

**The life of Mor Kaposi in Bratislava (1853–1856)**

Szep Z

Department of Pediatric Dermatovenereology, Children University Hospital, Faculty of Medicine, Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia. [bl@fmed.uniba.sk](mailto:bl@fmed.uniba.sk)

**Abstract**

**Mor Kaposi is one of the most important personalities of the 19th century dermatology. This article discloses so far unknown data from his life, concerning the years he spent at the grammar school in Bratislava in 1853–1856. The author describes the history of the Catholic Secondary Grammar School in Bratislava, its curriculum, the staff of teachers as well as the results of Kaposi's school-leaving examination. (Tab. 1, Ref. LF.)**

**Key words:** Mor Kaposi, grammar school, Bratislava.

Mor Kaposi and Hebra are the most outstanding personalities of dermatology of the 19th century, Mor Kaposi is one of the founders of the Viennese School of Dermatology. The recently published book titled "Famous Hungarian Physicians – Hires magyar orvosok" ranks him among the best Hungarian physicians who have ever been in the Hungarian history. His personality and the influence of the dermatological school founded by him have determined the entire central European region's development of dermatology.

The details of his life and work, either known or newly discovered, are even nowadays the topics of several lectures and articles. We would like to contribute to this effort by setting up the complex of Kaposi's life and work mosaic to by adding the information on the years of his life spent in Bratislava. Up to now no details of this period of Kaposi's life have been published.

**Previous events**

It is 1853. Mor Kaposi, whose original name is Moric Kohn, comes to Bratislava from Kaposvar to continue with his secondary grammar school education. It is known that he finished his elementary school studies as well as four years of grammar school education in Kaposvar. It is difficult to say why he came to Bratislava. However, it is a fact that the last four years of secondary grammar school (V.–VIII.) Mor Kaposi spends at Royal Roman Catholic Main Secondary Grammar School in Bratislava where he graduates with excellent results. From here he goes to Vienna where he decides to study medicine.

At those days, the Secondary grammar school in Bratislava was a German school. Only four years have passed since the Hungarian revolution in 1848–1849 and the defeat of the fight for liberty. In the years of Haynau's and Bach's regime the Austrian influence was felt every where, including the education. Thanks to school reforms of Thun, the level of education rose but at the same time the German influence was strengthened.

**The history of the Catholic Secondary Grammar School in Bratislava**

*The Grammar school* where Mor Kaposi studied had been located in the building of *Clare nuns' monastery*. The monastery together with its church are situated in the historical centre of Bratislava, in the Clare nuns' Street. The histories of the building and of the Grammar school had run side by side in the past and in 1786 they joined.

---

Department of Pediatric Dermatovenereology, Children University Hospital, Faculty of Medicine, Comenius University, Bratislava

**Address for correspondence:** Z. Szep, MD, Dept of Pediatric Dermatology, Limbova 1, SK-833 40 Bratislava 37, Slovakia.  
Phone: +421.2.59371261

**Acknowledgement:** I would like to express my gratitude to the directress of Archives of the city of Bratislava, A. Buzinkayova, PhD, who enabled me to research the archives, as well as to E. Ostranska, PhD, who has helped me with the English translation of this paper.

This work reviews the recently found out details of Prof. Kaposi's life that were presented to dermatologists by the author at an international conference "Mor Kaposi Centennial Conference", on 12 Apr 2002 in Budapest, in Hungary.

The Catholic Grammar school was founded by Peter Pazmany and the Jesuits. Pazmany laid the foundation stone in 1628. The original building stands even now next to the Dome of St. Martin. The Jesuitical order was dissolved in 1773, and then the monks of the Benedictical order started to direct the Grammar school. In 1786 the Grammar school moved from its previous building to the original Clare nuns' monastery that had been dissolved. This was the residence of the Grammar school in the years when Mor Kaposi studied in Bratislava.

*History of the Monastery* (the future Grammar school) building is as follows: the Clare nuns' monastery and the church were built on ruins of the late monastery of the Cistercian order. Their monastery stood there since the first half of the 13th century. The Clare nuns order came to Bratislava in 1297 when invited by Andrew III. In 1297 the foundations of the monastery were laid, enlarging the previous monastery of the Cistercians. The building was damaged several times, mainly during the raids of Turks. Its renovation was done thanks to Peter Pazmany who engaged a famous Italian builder Jacob Rava. The renovation was performed from 1637 to 1640. The Clare nuns order was dismissed in 1782 and since then the building has served secular purposes. In 1783–1784 the Academy of Law moved in from Trnava, later in 1786 the Catholic Secondary Grammar School was situated there. It stayed in the building until 1908. Since 1914 the building has become Bratislava town's property. To the same year dates back the beginning of construction of the Bratislava Elisabethan Library dates back.

### The teaching staff and the curriculum

During Kaposi's studies at the Grammar School, the teaching staff kept changing almost annually. Some teachers left and others came. In 1853 the permanent teaching staff consisted of thirteen members. In 1854 twelve, in 1855 eleven, and finally in the year of his school leaving examination in 1856 it had twelve members. The numbers include only the teachers whose names could be found in the school year-books. However, it is possible that there were also some external teachers participating in the educational process. According to the data gained from the archives, Kaposi studied also Hungarian and French as well as music. But these subjects were not included into the curriculum recorded in the year-books. The data on teachers of the previously mentioned subjects are missing as well. There are some

other unclear facts is the method and person of the theology teacher. In the view of the fact that Mor Kaposi was Jewish, theology should have been taught by persons of the Jewish church. The names of these teachers are also missing in the year-books. The following list gives the names of the teachers who taught Kaposi and reviews the changes in the teaching staff between years 1853–1856. In 1853, Mor Kaposi was a student of the fifth form. The staff in 1853 consisted of the following teachers:

1. Anton Theodor Wolf, headmaster,
2. Alois Soltesz, teacher of Catholic theology. Considering the fact that Kaposi was Jewish, there must have been a Jewish teacher of this subject. We have failed to find any data about this fact, but a minute – book reviewing the school leaving examination mentions *Nathan Wolf Liber* – theology teacher who stated that Kaposi deserved an “excellent” mark on theology,
3. Joseph Kroth, priest, theology teacher,
4. Anton Schmidt, Phil. doctor, teacher of mathematics, physics, and philosophy,
5. *Ignac Honig*, teacher of *geography*, and *history*,
6. Franz Hohegger, Phil. doctor, teacher of Latin and German,
7. *Gregor Tuschar*, Phil. doctor, Kaposi's teacher of *Latin* and *German*. In 1853 and in 1854 he was Kaposi's *class teacher*,
8. *Karl Schiller* (supply teacher) Kaposi's teacher of *Greek* in 1853,
9. Franz Stanek, teacher of Latin and Greek,
10. Friedrich Povetz supply teacher of history, Latin and German,
11. Joseph Ludwig Christ supply teacher of Latin, German, geography and mathematics,
12. *Gustav Lorinser*, Med. doctor, Kaposi's teacher of *biology* in 1853,
13. *Anton Wilhelm Schopf* supply teacher of German and mathematics teacher, who taught Kaposi *mathematics* and *philosophy* in 1853.

In 1854 four teachers left the school, among them the headmaster Anton Theodor Wolf, F. Hohegger, K. Schiller, and F. Povetz. They were replaced by Wenzel Svoboda (Vencel Svoboda) theology teacher, Adolf Lang, and Antonin Alt. Antonin Alt, Phil. doctor, was a priest, and became the headmaster. At that time, Kaposi was a student of the sixth form.

In 1855 the teaching staff did not change significantly. The archives do not contain records of J. Kroth and A. Lang, but

**Tab. 1. Survey of the teaching staff and taught subjects according to forms in between years 1853 and 1856.**

Subject/form	V. (1853)	VI. (1854)	VII. (1855)	VIII. (1856)
Latin	G.Tuschar	F.Staněk	W.Svoboda	F.Pauly
Greek	K.Schiller	<i>G.Tuschar</i>	G.Tuschar	W.Svoboda
German	<i>G.Tuschar</i>	A.Lang	<i>A.W.Schopf</i>	F.Pauly
Geography&History	I.Honig	I.Honig	I.Honig	I.Honig
Maths&Philosophy	A.W.Schopf	A.W.Schopf	A.W.Schopf	<i>A.Schmid</i>
Biology	G.Lorinser	G.Lorinser	-	G.Lorinser?
Physics	-	-	A.Schmid	A.Schmid

there is a new name Wenzel (Vencel) Hovorka, Latin, and German teacher. The eleven member of the teaching staff were headed by Antonin Alt. At that time Kaposi was in the seventh form.

In 1856, Kaposi was in his eighth form. The teaching staff changed during this school year. Alt, Tuschar, Schopf, Hovorka, left the school. New teachers appeared: Johann Zahourek, Jakob Smolej, Karl Schmidt (all the three were Latin, Greek, and German teachers), Franz Pauly (Latin, German), and Martin Csulen (mathematics). At the time of Kaposi's school leaving examination Antonin Alt was still the headmaster, but later he was replaced by Vencel Svoboda.

Table 1 shows a survey of subjects and teachers according to the forms. The names Kaposi's *class teachers* are highlighted.

During Kaposi's studies, the curriculum had the following subjects: theology, Latin, Greek and German, history, geography, mathematics, philosophy, biology, and physics. Physics was not taught in the fifth and the sixth forms; biology was not taught in the seventh form. The other subjects were taught in all forms (V.–VIII.). As we have previously mentioned, neither Hungarian, French, Jewish theology, and music teachers nor their teaching methods were mentioned in the school year-books. We could not find any material to clarify this question.

### Study results and the school leaving examination

Evaluation of study results ranged widely. Owing to the fact that Kaposi was a gifted student, he got largely *excellent* (praecipuos), sometimes *exceedingly excellent* (eximias), or *laudable* (laudabiles) marks.

Let us have a more detailed look at how young Moric Kohn studied. The data are gained from the Secondary grammar school catalogue. According to it, Kaposi's birth place was Kaposvar, Hungary. He was registered as being of Hungarian nationality and of Jewish creed. His father's name was Salomon (Salamon), he was a municipal servant in Kaposvar.

In addition to the taught subjects, the students of the Secondary grammar school were also evaluated according to the compounds of their character as: attention, diligence, and moral behaviour. Kaposi's *behaviour* was "excellent, exemplary". His *attention* was evaluated differently during the four years as "always bright and concentrated", "particularly concentrated", "excellent", or "concentrated, attentive". His *diligence* was "tireless and relentless", "perfect and accurate."

Kaposi was always excellent at *theology*, *German*, *geography*, *history*, *mathematics*, *philosophy*, and *biology*. At *Latin*, he was laudable in the first term of the 5th form, but since then he got only excellent evaluations. At *Greek*, in his first term of the 5th form, he was very laudable, in the first term of the 8th form laudable at writing, but since then excellent. The records of his results at *physics* are completely missing. The records of evaluations of Hungarian, French, and music are also very damaged. His evaluations of *Hungarian* in both terms of the 5th form were excellent but no records could be found of his evaluation from other school years. His evaluation of *French* for the first term of the 5th form was excellent, for the second term it was very laud-

able, and for the second term of the 6th form excellent. There are no records of other subjects. For the first two years there were no data about his *music* results. In the first term of the 7th form it was sufficient, in the second term, it was excellent, and in the first term of the 8th form laudable. Other data are missing. We consider it interesting that at the Grammar school both hand *writing* and the *style* of writing were evaluated. According to the records, Kaposi's handwriting was "excellent", "very remarkable", "very careful", "orderly."

The evaluation at the end of every school year states "*with distinction the first*". It means that Kaposi was the best student of the class. In 1856 there is an abbreviation in the class catalogue under the heading of "future occupation" saying: "*Medic.*" which refers to medicine.

As all students in general, Kaposi did not attend all of his lessons, too. But all his *absences* were justified. In the first term of the 5th form he was absent at 5 lessons, in the first term of the 7th form at 137, in the second at 5, in the first term of the 8th form at 17, and in the second term at 28 lessons. The *number of students* in his class changed every term. In the first term of the 5th form it was 19, in the second 18, in the first term of the 6th form it was 15, in the second term 14, in the first term of the 7th form there were 11 students, in the second term 9 and finally in the 8th form there were 14 students.

Within those four years spent in Bratislava Kaposi *lived* at different places. In the 5th form in 1853 he lived at *Abraham M. Schreiber's* house on 54, Gaissgasse street, in the next year he lived in the same street but changed the number of the house to 53. In 1855 he moved to *Konrad Weinberger's* house on 47, Nonnenbahn street and finally in 1856 he came to live to the same street where his school was, to 139, Clare nuns street, at *Lobel Kurzfimacher's* house.

The *financial situation* of students differed largely. Some students paid tuition fees while the others did not. In best case, the students were scholarship-holders. In 1853 when Kaposi came to the Grammar school, he *paid* for his studies. Then according to the Bratislava school director's 555th decree dated 13th December 1853 *he was waived from paying the tuition fees* until the end at his secondary education.

Kaposi and seven other students sat for the *school leaving examination on 2nd August 1856*. Most of the students came from Hungary, Bratislava, but there were also students from Bohemia, Italy and France.

The *school leaving examination committee* consisted of the following teachers:

*Dr. Jozef Kozacsek* – school adviser,

*Dr. Anton Alt* – headmaster,

*Ignac Honig*,

*Vencel Svoboda*,

*Alojz Soltesz*,

*Dr. Anton Schmid*.

The records convey that prior to the school leaving examination at the end of the school year *evaluated* the students were in each subject, and according to their results, their "improvement" or "progress" of the last year were measured. Next to these data

we can find the *school leaving examination's* marks evaluating separately the written and oral parts of the examinations. Finally, an extra page was of *school leaving examination's minute book* contained detail comments on the results of all the subjects of the school leaving examination.

The following section presents the translation of *the school leaving examination's marks* and the comments found in the minute book.

Kaposi's school leaving examination results are as follows:

*Mores (Mores)*: excellent

*Theology (Doctrina religionis)*: "according to the theology teacher's, *Nathan Wolf Liber's*, testimony, *excellent*"

*Latin (Lingua latina)*: during the school year *excellent*, at the school leaving exam also *excellent*. *Evaluation*: "At the written translation – even at complicated one – his perception is correct, speech is fluent, words are systematic. The grammatical relations and the construction of tenses are correct, expressions are suitable, all aspects of oral performance are fully adequate."

*Greek (Lingua graeca)*: during the whole year as well as at the school leaving exam *excellent*. *Evaluation*: „written translation is accurate, the words are systematic, speech correct. All aspects of oral performance are satisfactory.“

*German (Lingua germanica)*: during the whole year and at the school leaving examination *excellent*. *Evaluation*: "the use of expressions is fully intelligible, systematism logical, performance clear, speech fluent."

*Physics (Physica)*: during the whole year and at the school leaving examination *excellent*. *Evaluation*: "satisfactory in all aspects."

*History and geography (Historia et Geographica)*: during the whole year and at the school leaving examination *excellent*. *Evaluation*: "satisfactory in all aspects."

*Mathematics (Mathematica)*: during the whole year and at the school leaving examination *excellent*. *Evaluation*: "all the written tasks were fully satisfactorily solved. All aspects at the oral examination are fully satisfactory."

*Hungarian (Lingua hungarica)*: during the whole year *exceedingly excellent*, at the school leaving examination *laudable*. *Evaluation*: "the written examination is laudable, the speech is orally abundant."

*The final evaluation of the school leaving examination* can be seen in the last column of the minute book under the heading: "*Num maturus judicetur nec ne*" (Was he acknowledged adult as being (mature) or not?). In case of Mor Kaposi, the result was: "*Mature with distinction*."

We are at the end of the story that took place in Bratislava. After the school leaving examination, Mor Kaposi leaves Bratislava. He goes to Vienna. There, in that town he finds fulfillment in life together with the grand progress in dermatology that makes as proud as both patriots and dermatologists.

## References

The data used in this paper were taken from the Archives of the city of Bratislava, (Archiv mesta Bratislavy) and the University Library in Bratislava (Univerzitna kniznica).