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The Beginnings of the Development of Ophthalmology in Slovakia Region Bratislava

Początki rozwoju okulistyki na Słowacji w rejonie Bratysławy

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ABSTRACT

The first hospital was founded in Bratislava in the territory of today's Slovakia, but probably also in the whole of Hungary, already in 1307. One of the very serious disease states, threatening the eyes with blindness, was an infectious eye disease – trachoma. According to preserved historical sources, the large spread of trachoma in the territory of Slovakia occurred during the Turkish wars. A fundamental and extremely important moment for ophthalmology was the construction and opening of the new landscape “State” Hospital in Bratislava in the years 1857-1864 (still within Austria-Hungary). The landscape “State” Hospital was built and equipped very modernly for the given period. The fact that among its first “founding” departments: internal, skin-genital, surgical-obstetrical, psychiatric was also ophthalmic department is extremely important, because this made Bratislava one of the first cities in Europe to have a separate inpatient unit for the treatment of eye diseases. Dr. Kanka in 1882-1892 was also the director of the landscape “State” Hospital, as a royal councilor in Bratislava, he also served as regional ophthalmologist and was awarded the 3rd degree of the Iron Crown. Scientifically he dealt with the problems of accommodation of the eye, operating instruments and eye operations, the effect of poisonous substances on the eyes, but also general problems of health care in Bratislava and in some counties of Hungary. Dr. Kanka was among the doctors who were also very active in publishing. The landscape “State” Hospital in Bratislava, which at the time of its foundation was the largest not only in Upper Hungary, but in Hungary as a whole, became, together with the

ABSTRAKT

Pierwszy szpital w Bratysławie powstał na terenie dzisiejszej Słowacji, ale prawdopodobnie także całych Węgier, już w 1307 r. Jednym z bardzo poważnych stanów chorobowych, grożących ślepotą, była zakaźna choroba oczu – jaglica. Według zachowanych źródeł historycznych duże rozprzestrzenienie się jaglicy na terenie Słowacji miało miejsce podczas wojen tureckich. Zasadniczym i niezwykle ważnym momentem dla okulistyki była budowa i otwarcie nowego Szpitala Krajińskiego („Państwowego”) w Bratysławie w latach 1857-1864 (jeszcze w granicach Austro-Węgier). Szpital Wojewódzki („Państwowy”) został zbudowany i wyposażony bardzo nowoczesnie jak na ten okres. Fakt, że wśród jej pierwszych założycielskich oddziałów: wewnętrznego, skórno-płciowego, chirurgiczno-położniczego i psychiatrycznego, był także oddział okulistyczny, jest niezwykle ważny, gdyż uczyniło to Bratysławę jednym z pierwszych miast w Europie, które posiadało odrębny oddział szpitalny do leczenia chorób oczu. W latach 1882-1892 dr Kanka był dyrektorem Szpitala Krajińskiego, jako radny królewski w Bratysławie, pełnił również funkcję okulisty okręgowego i został odznaczony Żelazną Koroną III stopnia. Naukowo zajmował się problematyką akomodacji oka, operacją narzędzi i operacją oka, działaniem substancji trujących na oczy, ale także ogólnymi problemami służby zdrowia w Bratysławie i w niektórych powiatach Węgier. Doktor Kanka był jednym z lekarzy, którzy również bardzo aktywnie działali na polu wydawniczym. Szpital Regionalny w Bratysławie, który w momencie powstania był największym nie tylko na Górnych Węgrzech, ale na całych Węgrzech, stał się

activities of the “Medical and Natural Science Society” in Bratislava, a center of intensive medical-professional and scientific life.

Keywords: ophthalmology, Bratislava, Slovakia region

wraz z działalnością Towarzystwa Lekarskiego i Przyrodniczego w Bratysławie ośrodkiem intensywnego życia medycycko-zawodowego oraz naukowego.

Słowa kluczowe: okulistyka, Bratysława, region Słowacji

INTRODUCTION

Bratislava (in Hungary it was called Posonium, Pozsony, Presspork) belongs to the cities with a relatively old medical and university tradition. According to literature, the first hospital was founded in Bratislava in the territory of today's Slovakia, but probably also in the whole of Hungary. Already in 1307, a hospital in front of the Laurin Gate in Bratislava, is mentioned. It was founded during the lifetime of King Ladislav, who, as the commander of the troops of the first crusade (religious war), gathered Christian troops in Bratislava and needed an asylum for sick members of the crusade. It was a medical facility in the sense of a medieval hospital (“lazaret”). Hospitals – infirmaries were mostly shelters for elderly and poor citizens. So they served as nursing homes, popularly called infirmaries. The exception was only the social health facilities of the healing orders (Milosrdní bratia, Alžbetinky), where medical care was also provided under the supervision of city doctors [1,2,3].

Until 1672, the hospital of St. Ladislav is the only hospital facility in Bratislava. The second hospital (but not yet in today's sense) with a capacity of 62 beds was a facility built in 1672 by Cardinal Primate Szelepcsényi for the Merciful Brothers. In 1738, Cardinal Imrich Eszterházy founded a hospital for the women's order of St. Elizabeth with 22 beds for women. Both mentioned hospitals also owned a pharmacy. They also had a monastery for the accommodation of nursing staff and a church with an auxiliary pastoral mission. Other churches – apart from the Catholic one – later built their own medical facilities in the city. The Chevra Kadiž Jewish Brotherhood established a hospital for Jewish citizens. In 1799, the evangelicals also founded their hospital with the original number of 22 beds and a charitable space for orphans [3,4,5].

Documentation can support the existence and activity of doctors in the city since the 15th century. King Matej Korvín with the consent of Pope Paul II. founded and opened the university on 28 July 1467 under the name “Academia Istropolitana.” This period includes e.g. also the stay and activity of Th. B. von Hohenheim Paracelsus in Bratislava. His presence and activities in Bratislava are also documented on a memorial plaque on the wall of the Primate's Palace. Until 1672 was the

hospital of St. Ladislav is the only hospital facility in the city. The second “hospital” (but not yet in today's sense) with a capacity of 62 beds was given by 1672 to build for the Brothers of Mercy Cardinal Primate Szelepcsényi. After the dissolution of the Academia Istropolitana in 1490 was not until the eighties of the 18th century on the territory of Slovakia (and actually in Hungary in general) an institution that would provide those interested in this region with quality medical education [3,6].

One of the very serious disease states, threatening the eyes with blindness, was an infectious eye disease – trachoma. According to preserved historical sources, the large spread of trachoma in the territory of Slovakia occurred during the Turkish wars. It was especially common at the end of the 18th century, when it came to us from the southern counties of Hungary through seasonal agricultural workers. Trachoma mainly affected poor sections of the population from the north-west of today's Slovakia (where most of the seasonal workers came from). Another period of considerable spread of trachoma in the territory of Slovakia was the time of the Napoleonic Wars. The issue of trachoma as well as other eye diseases, especially infectious ones, demanded attention already in the Austro-Hungarian period. Already at this time, the registration of trachoma diseases was mandatory and was based on legal article No. 14/1876. This procedure testifies to the high level of legislation in the fight against trachoma already in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy [4,5,6].

An important prerequisite for the further fight against infectious eye diseases (especially trachoma) and a serious step against eye diseases in general was the establishment of the “State Institute of Ophthalmology” in Bratislava in the then city poorhouse, in the so-called “Lazaret” (at Dunajská street no. 43) in 1856. The institute was founded by Karol Kanka, M.D., the first Slovak ophthalmologist. This made possible the first, emergency hospitalization options for patients with eye diseases, where patients with trachoma were mainly treated. A fundamental and extremely important moment for ophthalmology was the construction and opening of the new landscape “State” Hospital in Bratislava in the years 1857-1864 (still within Austria-Hungary). The new hospital was built on land that was a gift from the city, with an area of 18,573 m² in the district of the city, in the so-called “Flower Valley” (Blumenthal).

The builder was the Bratislava designer and builder Ignác Feigler Jr. The state authorities entrusted the supervision of its construction to Dr. Karol Kanka [6,7,8,9].

The landscape “State” Hospital (Fig. 1) was built and equipped very modernly for the given period. It started its activity by accepting patients on October 26, 1864. Already the original capacity – 250 beds – was large by Hungarian standards. In the first year of its existence, it provided care to about 2,000 patients. During the next two years, the number of beds was increased to 382). The fact that among its first 5 (“founding”) departments: internal, skin-genital, surgical-obstetrical, psychiatric was also ophthalmic is extremely important for our issue. This made Bratislava one of the first cities in Europe to have a separate inpatient unit for the treatment of eye diseases.



Fig. 1. Contemporary photograph of the facade of the newly built landscape “State” Hospital in Bratislava (Pozsony)

A separate eye department in the mid-19th century was among European rarities, and on the basis of 91 beds, it was actually created thanks to the care of Dr. Karol Kanka, a native of Modra. In the years 1857-1864, he contributed to the construction of the landscape “State” Hospital in Prešpork (today’s Bratislava), the largest in Upper Hungary, and after its opening he became the first head of its newly opened eye department. In the capacity of head, he led the Ophthalmic Department of the landscape “State” Hospital for over 40 years and created the foundations for the provision of professional ophthalmology services in Bratislava. At the same time, he used his professional knowledge acquired at the University of Vienna. Under his leadership, the Ophthalmic Department of landscape “State” Hospital became the leading workplace in Hungary at the time. He was among the Slovak doctors, thanks to whom our modern ophthalmology was born [6,9,10].

Dr. Karol Kanka (Fig. 2) was born on October 27, 1817 in Modra, in the family of an evangelical teacher. He completed his high school studies in Banská Štiavnica. After a two-year study at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Vienna, he continued his studies at its Faculty of Medicine, where he obtained in 1842

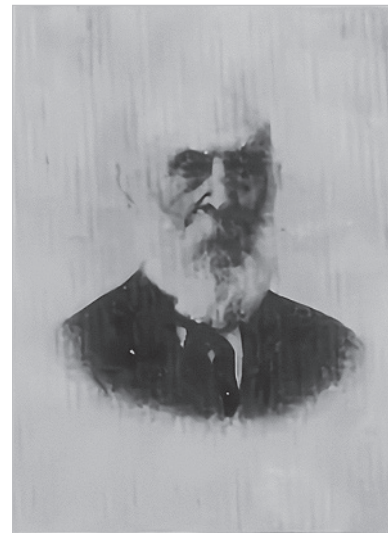


Fig. 2. Dr. Karol Kanka, first head of the Ophthalmic Department in the years 1865-1908

doctorate. After skipping his studies at the Faculty of Medicine, for 6 years he held the position of assistant at the Eye Clinic of the famous ophthalmologist, professor of the University of Vienna, under prof. Dr. Anton Rózsás. He devoted his doctoral thesis “Instrumenta scholae oftalmicae Vindobonensis” to a description of the problem of instruments used in the treatment of eye diseases. He later expanded and published it. Together with Prof. Rózsás, he edited the medical journal *Medizinische Jahrbücher* in Vienna. During the revolutionary years 1848-1849, he worked as Gögey’s military doctor regiment in the Szeged and later in the Arad military hospital. After completing his military service, he was appointed as a temporary provincial doctor in Nagyvárád in Transylvania in 1850. In this capacity, he traveled through almost all of Hungary’s capitals, which enabled him to gain an overview of the health of the population and what was particularly he also gained a significant insight into the spread of eye diseases. This fact is confirmed by as many as 14 published studies focusing on the issue of eye diseases published in the *Zeitschrift für Natur- und Heilkunde* between 1850 and 1856. He was not deterred from working in the field of ophthalmology even by unfavorable field conditions for research don’t even comply conditions for the provision of medical assistance. On the contrary. Through his activities, he won the trust of patients and also showed a high humane approach when he treated the poor for free. His health-educational side of visits to Hungarian capitals was also irreplaceable [6,10].

An important landmark in the nomadic life of Dr. Kanka is represented by the year 1856, when the Minister of the Interior of Hungary entrusts him with the

function of head of the eye department in the future landscape "State" Hospital in Bratislava. And so for the next 52 years, Dr. Kanka combines his professional and private life with this city. The available documents confirm that, in addition to over 40 years of continuous management of the 87-bed Ophthalmology Department, in 1882-1892 he was also the director of the landscape "State" Hospital. As a royal councilor in Bratislava, he also served as regional ophthalmologist and was awarded the 3rd degree of the Iron Crown [6,7].

Scientifically, Dr. Kanka dealt with the problems of accommodation of the eye, operating instruments and eye operations, the effect of poisonous substances on the eyes, but also general problems of health care in Bratislava and in some counties of Hungary. Dr. Kanka was among the doctors who were also very active in publishing. In addition to the already mentioned works, his articles have appeared in magazines such as *Verhandlungen für Naturkunde*, *Orvosi hetilap*, *Korespondenz für Naturkunde*, *Magyar orvosok és nasztórvizsgálók munkalatai*, *Kórházi szemle* and *Orvosi szemle*. A lot of health and educational work was carried out by Dr. Kanka in the Medical and Natural Sciences Association in Bratislava. He joined the activity together immediately after arriving in Bratislava. He gave several lectures not only on the issue of ophthalmology, but also on a broader medical concept. He was also the secretary for sixteen years and from 1882 until his death as the chairman of the Association. His contemporary, doctor Gábor Pávai-Vajna, evaluates the contribution of Dr. Kanka as a significant revival of the Association. He was the soul of the Association. During the work of Dr. Kanka's medical section became so active that the Bratislava "Prírodovedný-lekársky spolok" was renamed to the Bratislava "Medical-Scientific." This seemingly minor change reflects the great activity of the medical section of Dr. Kanka. In 1898 Dr. Kanka, who is 80 years old, is retiring from the post of head of the Ophthalmology Department due to his old age. Dr. Karol Kanka lived in the period when ophthalmology in Hungary became independent as a special medical field, and he is rightfully considered not only the founder of the eye department in Bratislava landscape "State" Hospital, but also the founder of ophthalmology in Slovakia. He built and developed the foundations of Slovak ophthalmology, on this basis the city of Bratislava could later demand the creation of a clinical-teaching workplace of ophthalmology (the foundations of today's Ophthalmology Clinic of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Warsaw and the UN Eye Clinic in Bratislava) [6,7].

Dr. Kanka was extremely active and active until the last days of his life. A few days before his death, he treated patients in his clinic. As often happens to people who have dedicated their whole lives to a noble cause,

Dr. Karol Kanka dies at the age of 91 in complete poverty on January 27, 1908. The grateful public erected a monument on his grave (Fig. 3), which still stands today in the cemetery in Bratislava [7].

Continued by Dr. Kanka was the head of the Ophthalmic Department of the landscape "State" Hospital from 1898 graduate of Budapest University and pupil of Professor Schulek from the Eye Clinic in Budapest Dr. Alexander LIPPAY. He was born in 1865 in Miskolc. Although during his tenure the Ophthalmology Department of the landscape "State" Hospital in Bratislava had only one secondary doctor, it showed remarkable results (with a fund of 87 beds). For example in 1904, 771 patients were admitted, 440 operations were performed, and 2121 commuters were treated. Dr. Lippay focused his research on the issue of eye and orbit injuries and on some problems of conservative therapy. He is the co-author of the publication published in 1899: "Ungarische Beiträge zur Augenheilkunde." He held his position until the establishment of the University Eye Clinic of Elizabeth University in 1918 [6].



Fig. 3. The epitaph of Dr. Karol Kanka in the cemetery near the Goat's Gate on Šulekova street in Bratislava

INPATIENT EYE DEPARTMENT OF THE LANDSCAPE “STATE” HOSPITAL – THE BASE FOR THE FUTURE CLINICAL BASE OF TEACHING OPHTHALMOLOGY IN BRATISLAVA

The landscape “State” Hospital in Bratislava, which at the time of its foundation was the largest not only in Upper Hungary, but in Hungary as a whole, became, together with the activities of the “Medical and Natural Science Society” in Bratislava, a center of intensive medical-professional and scientific life. At the same time, during the entire 19th century, the region of Upper Hungary (today’s territory of the Slovak Republic) did not have a college of a university nature. Overall, however, the scientific and professional activity of the institutions in Bratislava was so extensive and significant that, in addition to medical activity, it created prerequisites and professional conditions for the establishment of higher medical education and ophthalmology teaching at the future Faculty of Medicine [6,9].

In the 19th century on the territory of Hungary, the role of educating medical personnel was performed primarily by the Orvostudományi Egyetem in Budapest. However, everyday life made it difficult to establish another university, which would mainly cover the needs of the population of Northern Hungary. At the end of the 19th century, scientific and various professional activities took on such dimensions and professional workers showed such active activity that the prerequisites for the establishment of a university were created. Based on this, the city of Bratislava (then Pozsony) could expect to develop into a university city. In Bratislava at that time, in addition to the natural sciences, legal sciences were also developing rapidly. Many different professional articles were published in professional magazines published in Bratislava (Pozsony). It was also important for ophthalmology that the long-term chairman of the Medical and Natural Sciences Association was the aforementioned Dr. Kanka. It had an impact both on professional – publication and educational activities within Bratislava [7,11].

ESTABLISHMENT OF ELIZABETH UNIVERSITY AND ITS FACULTY OF MEDICINE IN BRATISLAVA

To take advantage of the possibilities of establishing a new university, the city of Bratislava (Pozsony) already in 1876 created a preparatory commission. The ambitions of the people of Bratislava to establish a university were most convincingly justified at the end of the 19th century. Bratislava doctor Dr. Gabriel Pápai-Vajna. Taking advantage of the favorable atmosphere, he started a major campaign to establish a new university and, within it, the Faculty of Medicine for the region

of Northern Hungary, based in Bratislava (Pozsony). Therefore, he turned to the members of the Hungarian National Assembly in Budapest, arguing that the city of Bratislava (Pozsony) has all the prerequisites for this request. He proved that, in addition to the work of the landscape “State” Hospital, this requirement is supported by the activity of the children’s hospital, the military hospital and other medical facilities in the city. After many negotiations in 1912, the Hungarian parliament approved the establishment of a new university under the name Elizabeth University. Teaching at the Faculty of Medicine of the new Elizabeth University was to begin in the fall of 1916. Since the originally planned new construction did not start in 1917, the management of the city of Pozsony decided to proceed with the expansion of the existing premises in the grounds of the landscape “State” Hospital. In an effort to meet the conditions of teaching medicine, a new extension was created as part of the landscape “State” Hospital, with spaces for lectures and laboratories. After the completion of this extension, the Faculty of Medicine was not founded until 14 April 1918. Lectures, including ophthalmology, were then held in the newly built lecture and laboratory complex in the area of the landscape “State” Hospital, which still exists today, on what is now Mickiewiczova Street 13. The Ophthalmology Clinic of the Faculty of Medicine of Elizabeth University also got a place here. Teaching was carried out in the same premises by the Department of Ophthalmology of the Faculty of Medicine, Charles University, for almost 100 years. Only at the beginning of the 21st century she was transferred to the premises of the University Hospital in Ružinov, where she still works today [6].

The Ophthalmic Department of the landscape “State” Hospital has kept since its opening in 1864 thanks to its superiors (Dr. Kanka and Dr. Lippay) the constantly high level of its work. The professional level of the department created the necessary basis and starting point for starting the work of the new Eye Clinic of the Faculty of Medicine of Elizabeth University. For the development of ophthalmology in Pozsony at the time (and later, as part of further development, also in Bratislava), it was significant that on April 3, 1918, professor of ophthalmology Dr. Jozef IMRE, Jr. (Fig. 4).

After the official opening of the Faculty of Medicine of Elizabeth University in Bratislava on April 14, 1918, teaching began only from the winter semester of the 1918/1919 school year in the higher (3rd, 4th and 5th) grades. Prof. Imre, Jr. as the head of the newly established Ophthalmology Clinic of the Faculty of Medicine of the Elizabeth University, he continued the surgical tradition of the Ophthalmology Department that had existed until then. In addition to the clinical and pedagogical work of prof. Imre, Jr. at the same time, he also



Fig. 4. Prof. Dr. J. Imre, Jr.



Fig. 5. Facsimile of the diploma of one of the first graduates of the Elizabeth University Faculty of Arts

held the position of secretary of the Faculty of Medicine of Elizabeth University. This is evidenced by a facsimile of the preserved diploma of one of the first graduates, including his signature (Fig. 5). In his clinical work, he attached considerable importance to laboratory findings and the interrelationship of disease processes of the eye with disease processes in the body. He also led his team in this direction (Fig. 6) [6].

Thanks to prof. Imre, Jr. is that he expanded and further developed the clinical and scientific program of the workplace with the issue of plastic surgery. He was mainly devoted to the field of eyelashes surgery, and the "arch" plastic surgery procedures he developed and introduced became world-famous. Lectures on ophthalmology, delivered by prof. Imre had a high level. Thanks to his excellent organizational and professional skills during his work, the number of patients treated in the ophthalmology department increased fivefold. The work of the Elizabeth University and its Faculty of



Fig. 6. Collective of doctors of the Ophthalmic Clinic of the Faculty of Medicine of Elizabeth University. Prof. Dr. J. Imre Jr. third from the left

Medicine was not yet fully underway when, after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, Act No. 375 of June 27, 1919 was dissolved and by the same law the National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic simultaneously established the Czechoslovak State University in Bratislava. The basic work of the Eye Clinic of the Faculty of Medicine of Elizabeth University was extremely valuable and was followed up and developed after 1919 within the newly established Eye Clinic of the Faculty of Medicine of the Comenius University. The traditions and experiences of medical-clinical and pedagogical work were taken over by the newly established Faculty of Medicine of the Comenius University and, in its union, the Department of Ophthalmology of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Bratislava in Bratislava. Clinical base of the newly established university began to be built in Bratislava on the results of the 55-year work of the Eye Department of the landscape "State" Hospital and the short activity of the Eye Clinic of Elizabeth University. However, it was a spiritual rather than a material legacy. The positives of the Vienna and Budapest medical schools were concentrated here, as well as domestic tradition and their activities were an important starting point for the further development of medical education already in the new conditions in the Czechoslovak Republic [6].

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