Moritz Kaposi (1837–1902), born Moricz Kohn in Hungary, graduated in medicine from the University of Vienna in 1861. He became assistant to Ferdinand von Hebra (1816–1880), professor and founder of the histological school of dermatology. Kaposi married Hebra’s daughter, completed Hebra’s textbook, and inherited the chair of dermatology in 1881, a post he retained until his death.

Kaposi was an undisputed master of Viennese dermatology and a superb teacher. His minute clinical descriptions include many to which his name was eponymically attached or to which he added the Latin suffix "mihi," meaning "belonging to me," as in "xeroderma pigmentosum mihi." [cf. Rothman, S. In: L. V. Ackerman, and J. F. Murray (eds.), Symposium on Kaposi’s Sarcoma. New York: Hafner Press, 1963.]

In 1872, Kaposi described and named "idiopathic multiple pigmented sarcoma of the skin" (Arch. Derm. Syph., 4: 265–273, 1872), for which S. M. Bluefarb (Kaposi’s Sarcoma: Multiple Idiopathic Hemorrhagic Sarcoma. Springfield, Ill.: Charles C Thomas, 1957) lists over 30 synonyms. The eponymous name has prevailed for the entity, in view of its obscure nature and unknown etiology.

Kaposi’s sarcoma presents clinically as multiple soft bluish nodules of the skin with hemorrhages, symmetrically involving the extremities. Kaposi’s sarcoma predominates in adult males. It occurs sporadically in many countries. A. Quenum and R. Camain (Ann. Anat. Pathol., 3: 337–368, 1958) pointed out its high frequency among the Bantu, and further studies confirmed its concentration in equatorial and South Africa. The map, taken from A. Oettle’s article in Symposium on Kaposi’s Sarcoma, shows the ratio of Kaposi’s sarcoma to all cancers in Negroes in Africa.

The histopathology of Kaposi’s sarcoma has been studied extensively (cf. Bluefarb, Ackerman, and Murray), and there is a general consensus that the entity is a cutaneous neoplasm of connective tissue origin, which may involve internal organs. The spindle cell is an integral part of the lesion, but the exact nature of the cell of origin is unestablished; it may be the pericyte, the Schwann cell, or the reticuloendothelial cell.

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M. B. S.