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Academy of Medical Sciences of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Corresponding author: Professor Izet Masic, MD, PhD, FWAAS, FIAHSI, FEFMI, FACMI. Academy of Medical Sciences of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. E-mail: izetmasic@gmail.com. ORCID ID: <https://www.orcid.org/0000-0002-9880-5456>.

The Most Influential Physicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Stanko Sielski (1891-1958)

Izet Masic

In the book "Korijeni medicine i zdravstva u Bosni i Hercegovini / The roots of medicine and Health-care protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) has printed copy of the scan picture of student's index of former President of Academy of Sciences and Arts of B&H, Academician Seid Huković, with the name of Stanko Sielski. as teacher (1). Stanko Sielski was professor and first Dean of the Faculty of medicine in Sarajevo opened in the year of 1944, during wartime, and very few people new that fact (Figure 1). When the book was printed out only two students of the first generation of the faculty were still alive - academicians Seid Huković and Aleksandar Nikulin. Details are described in the mentioned book and also in the book "History of medicine in Bosnia and Herzegovina", written by Academician Izet Mašić. Also, dr. Vladimir Dugački in his text "Prvi medicinski fakultet u Sarajevu (1944-1945)/The first Medical faculty in Sarajevo (1944-1945" (2) described that "The initiative to open the Faculty of Medicine in Sarajevo was given by professor Eduard Miloslavčić. He also suggested to open the Faculty of Oriental studies in Sarajevo, and the Shariatic theological faculty. The University of Zagreb helped during the NDH period (WW2) the Sarajevo faculty of medicine with 15 tons of professional equipment necessary for teaching, and books. Due to war operations in Bosnia going on in 1944/1945 it was not possible to transport further equipment for the faculty. When WW2 ended, academician Ante Serčer was sentenced by Yugoslav communists to one year of forced work, and his property was confiscated. He was found guilty among others for having supported the NDH regime to build the faculty in Sarajevo (while the faculty continued its activity after 1945 only due to initial efforts of Croatia during NDH



Figure 1. Stanko Sielski (1891-1958)

period). And during the ustasha regime in Sarajevo the faculty had 8 professors, among them two Serbs (Žarko Praštalo and Milutin Gligić), and one Muslim (Muhamed Kantardžić). Out of 180 students, about 35% Muslim, 35% Croats, 25% Serbs, and 5% the rest, including Jews" (2).

About Dr. Stanko Sielski had written Ismail Hadžiahmetović and Samuel Elazar, who mentioned his name as one of famous physicians who worked in Gračanica (besides both of them), like: Dr. Justin Karlinski, Dr. Oskar Hildes, Dr. Franjo Galzinski, Dr. Josip Katz, Dr. Drago Plenčaj, Dr. Egon Zahradka (later Chief of Department for Mental illness of "Landesspital" in Sarajevo) in the period before, during and after 1st WW (1, 3, 5).

But Academician Husref Tahirović was scientist who "opened" the story about Dr. Stanko Sielski and with grand-doughter of Dr. Sielski, Maja Juras, who is living in Zagreb (4) "discovered" the facts which was not written in any medical historical book - the picture about Stanko Sielski as "the physician, humanist and scientist, who is worthy of our interest, not only in the field of medicine, but also in the fields of ethnology, ethnography, archaeology and sociology" (4). He was a man, led by his

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Figure 2. The building of the Institute for endemic syphilis eradication in Banja Luka, where Dr. Stanko Sielski was Director during WW2

feelings, who helped people in various ways, regardless of their social status, ethnic and religious affiliation, and sometimes even regardless of the current moral values of the environment he was working in (4).

The majority of the working life of Dr. Stanko Sielski was marked by the social and economic consequences of the First and Second World Wars (4-14). At that time in B&H the living conditions were very bad, the level of education of the people poor, the hygiene of the population, especially in the villages, was at a low level. Infectious diseases frequently took on the characteristics of epidemics, and the resulting mortality of the population, especially children, was high (1, 4 14-16). The life of so-



Figure 3. News in the journal “Novi behar” from July 1st, 1944 about founding of the Medical Faculty in Sarajevo in 1944



Figure 4. The letter of Professor Stanko Sielski to Professor Ante Sercer with greetings, regarding opening Medical faculty in Sarajevo, November 22nd, 1944

ciety, in many aspects, was based on “customs”, which were deemed to be the best and only way to behave, and quackery (traditional/folk medicine) was deeply rooted. "Dr. Stanko Sielski was a physician, who made a significant contribution to improving public health in B&H in his time, a humanist and a fruitful cultural and scientific worker, no one has yet undertaken a thorough analysis, to research his life and work systematically, and present it to the wider cultural public of B&H, but also the public of the wider environment" (4). As a result his broad and varied opus, of great importance for his own country, has mainly remained unknown, or is only mentioned in fragments.

Stanko Sielski was born in Gračanica in 1891, in Polish family moved from Ternopil (Tarnopol was one of the major cities of Western Ukraine and the historical regions of Galicia and Podolia) at the end of the 19th century (4, 11-12). He attended high school in Travnik. After his graduation at Faculty of medicine in Vienna in 1919, he worked as an epidemiologist in Gračanica, Konjic, Prozor, Glamoč and other places in the area of Bosnia, mostly involved in typhoid fever and variola eradication. At the beginning of the Second World War he was in Banja Luka where he was given the duty of director of the Institute of Endemic Syphilis Eradication (Figure 2). Dr. Stanko Sielski was interesting about history of medicine in B&H, and he researched the life and work of doctors from previous generations, the work of medical institutions, old medical manuscripts written in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, folk beliefs about the origins and treatment of a variety of illnesses, and the role of herbal medicine and amulets in treating the sick (1, 4). In addition, he undertook research in the fields of archaeology, ethnology and sociology. Tahirović cited (4) in his article about

Sielski that he has founded facts that Dr. Stanko Sielski published 20 papers: 16 from the realm of medicine, two from archaeology, and one each from the fields of ethnography and sociology (4). All his articles, published in the Bosnian language, are worthy of attention, however, the best insight into his entire work in research is given by the articles "Dr. Justin Karlinski", "Old Turkish and Arabic Medical Manuscripts in Bosnia and Herzegovina", "Amulets", "Archaeological Finds in the Area of Travnik and Žepče" and "Our Village Golubić - a contribution to research into health in the village and life there" (4).

As historian of medicine Dr. Stanko Sielski was one of the most prominent personalities to be credited for realizing project of establishing the Museum of the History of Health Care in Croatia, as the first such museum in the Southeastern part of Europe, together with the head of the Croatian Medical Association in Zagreb Vladimir Čepulić (1891 - 1964) in the year of 1944. Museum is today preserved in the Section of the History of Medicine of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb. On the basis how items were collected for its first exhibition, and of this material it was possible to trace the circumstances of the foundation of the Museum, the role of Stanko Sielski was important in preserving the medical heritage and dissemination of knowledge of the history of medicine to a broader audience (15).

Dr. Stanko Sielski made a significant contribution to treating the sick, preventing various diseases and the health education of the people. In the Second World War, as the Head of the Institute for endemic syphilis eradication he saved the lives of many Jewish doctors and their families from persecution in concentration camps. Dr. Stanko Sielski in 2014 has been nominated posthumously to be declared "Righteous Among the Nations". Reason why? When the Germans entered Zagreb in April 1941, the Ustasha/Ustaša (a Croatian nationalist collaborationist movement) took control, and in July 1941, the roundup of Jews began (5, 6, 13). The first to be targeted were the Jewish intellectuals, lawyers, and doctors. Coincidentally, at around the same time, the head of the health services in Bosnia turned to the authorities and requested that as many doctors as possible be sent to Bosnia in order to treat the spread of contagious diseases, in particular endemic syphilis. "Dr. Miroslav Schlesinger heard about this and saw in it an opportunity to rescue his Jewish colleagues. He turned to his friend Dr. Ante Vuletić, a specialist in contagious diseases and head of the Institute of Hygiene in Zagreb, and asked him to speak to the authorities. Vuletić requested a meeting with Ante Pavelić, the head of the Ustaša puppet state, and told him about the shortage of doctors in Bosnia. Vuletić lobbied for this deficit to be covered by sending the Jewish doctors to Bosnia where they could treat patients. The discussions about the Jewish doctors continued for six months; meanwhile, in October 1941, the deportation of Jews to the camps began. The authorities eventually decided to accept Vuletić's proposal and 68 doctors were chosen to go to Bosnia with their families. In all, this amounted to about 200 Jews being freed. The doctors were sent to Banja Luka, where an Institute

for Eradication of Endemic Syphilis was opened. Vuletić was joined in his efforts by Dr. Stanko Sielski, who issued transfer orders to Jewish doctors, in which he wrote that the transfer had allegedly been ordered by the Ministry of Interior. One of the Jewish doctors, Theodor Grüner, told Yad Vashem that he had benefitted from one of these fake transfer orders issued by Dr. Sielski" (13, 16).

According the facts about founding of the Faculty of medicine in Sarajevo in news paper "New behar" from July 1st, 1944 (Figure 3), professor Ante Šercer as Dean of Faculty of medicine in Zagreb proposed to Ministry of education Independent State of Croatia (NDH), based on the expressed needs for more doctors in the Croatia in whose composition was then the B&H, by the statutory provision of 31 march 1944 appointed a commission to implement the organization of the Medical faculty in Sarajevo. Provisions on the establishment of medical faculties in Sarajevo and Split is issued on 27th March 1944 supposed to be implemented by Commission consisted of professor Ante Šercer (1896-1968). (due to his efforts a Faculty of medicine was founded in Sarajevo in 1944), Dean of the Faculty of medicine, Head of the Committee, professor Mile Budak, professor Ljudevit Thaller, professor Ibrahim Ruždić, and professor Ivo Stipčić, Secretary of State ministry for health. in the first half of April, Ante Šercer, Ljudevit Thaller and Ibrahim Ruždić, professors of medicine in Zagreb, visited Sarajevo, where they held several lectures, and founded Medical faculty of Sarajevo as a part of the University of Zagreb (1, 14). It was completely kept secret in the former Yugoslavia and it lay in silence. Commission of the abovementioned composition was conducted by all the preparations for the opening of the Medical faculty in Sarajevo. Committee has drafted rules (Statute), which was first disclosed at July 1944 and for the Dean of the Medical faculty in Sarajevo was appointed professor Stanko Sielski.

Medical faculty in Sarajevo started working on November 22nd (Figure 4), 1944 with inaugural lecture by professor Stanko Sielski. In the text of the distinguished professor Ivo Padovan - "Life and work of Ante Šercer", published in "Globus" in 1997 has been described how opened Medical faculty in Sarajevo on November 22nd 1944 by Inaugural speeches of Professor Ante Šercer (who arrived to Sarajevo in Military craft) and Professor Stanko Sielski (2, 14). The first lecture was presented by Zdenko Križan, professor of Anatomy from Medical faculty in Zagreb in „Konak“ building in Sarajevo (1, 14). Faculty of medicine in Zagreb donated a large pieces of furniture, instruments, microscopes and other necessary educational inventory, and in particular the large number of textbooks and books. The first professors of the Medical faculty in Sarajevo were: professor Stanko Sielski for the subject of History of medicine, professor F. Raguz for the subject of Hygiene and Social medicine, professor Josip Fleger for the subject of Dermatology and venerology, professor Žarko Praštalo for the subject of Otorhinolaryngology, professor Muhamed Kantardžić for the subject Physics for medical students, professor Milutin Gligić for the subject Biology, professor Ibrahim Ruždić for the subject of Chemistry, professor Zdenko Križan for the

subject Anatomy, ass. professor Vjekoslav Duančić for the subject of Histology, and others. The first generation consisted of 160-180 students (2, 14). Faculty facilities of Medical faculty located in bulding of "Konak" - in two buildings: a) in the first building (formerly "Konak") was located Dean's office, the Central medical library, assembly room (aula), Department of history of medicine and Department of social medicine. b) in another building (the former supreme court) was located Department of anatomy, Department of histology, Department of physics and Department of biology. c) the third building (National palace of expectation), which also belonged to the faculty, the army was located, and its exit was planned in this building to accommodate Department of chemistry, Department of physiology and Department of pharmacology.

The program of construction and development of the Medical faculty in Sarajevo, conceptual designs for individual buildings and refurbishment of existing ones, which after the war should be put into operation, were given in the decision of the Ministry of national education of the Republic of Croatia on 10th January 1945. also, special legislation was enthroned the relationship of the State hospital in Sarajevo and the Faculty of certain legal provisions concerning the establishment of the faculty and the provisions on cooperation with the Faculty of medicine of public hospitals. Professor Ivo Padovan selected beautiful words in the mentioned text and has described the great desire and a clear motive for the distinguished academician Ante Šercer during Opening ceremony (on November 22nd, 1944): "Sarajevo is in the need of medicine, which will come in handy for those who will come later, and then all of us, including the blind, it was clear who would come later " (14). But, Professor Stanko Sielski have had important role in described events, and physicians in BiH and abroad need to know facts about it.

Described facts proved that Stanko Sielski, besides as prominent physician, also, was involved in a variety of scientific contributions, research and publication in his academic and scientific work in Bosnia and Herzegovina, till he has passed away in 1958 in Zagreb, Croatia.

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