

2026-01-05

The Final Months of Lionel Kieseritzky



— Lionel Kieseritzky, 1806-1853

by Jean Olivier Leconte - <https://lecafedelaregence.blogspot.com/>

The end of Lionel Kieseritzky's life long remained unclear to me, until I discovered several documents that shed light on his final months. What follows is the result of my investigation.

In 1851, Kieseritzky travelled to London for the first major international chess tournament, held during the Great Exhibition. He went there as the leading French player of the time. The event was not a great success for him, but his name would remain forever in the annals of chess thanks to the so-called "Immortal Game" played against Anderssen on the sidelines of the tournament.

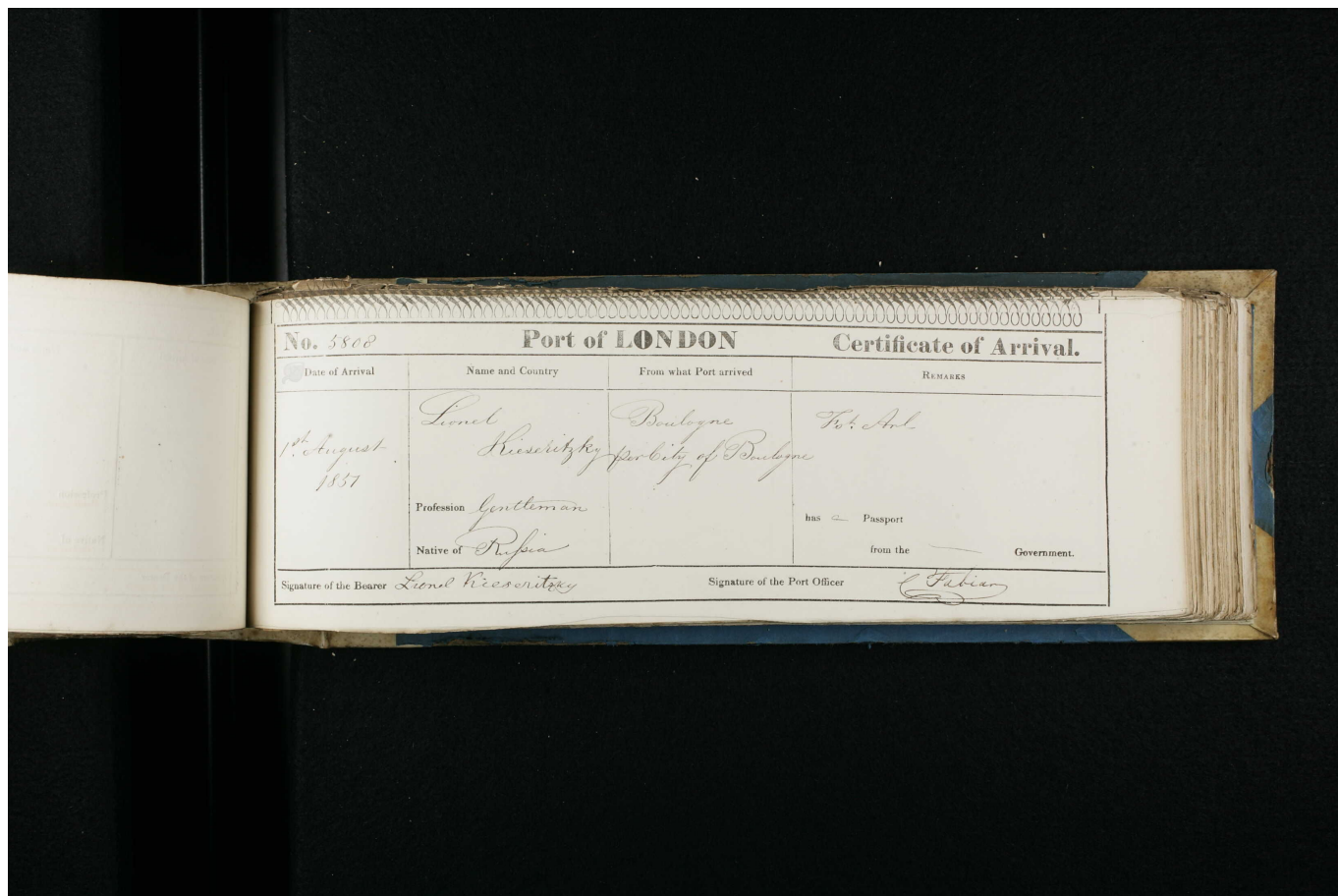
No. 1167		Port of Folkestone		Certificate of Arrival.	
Day and Place of Landing	Name and Country	From what Country last arrived	REMARKS		
1851 24 May	Mr Lionel Kieseritzky Russia	France	has a Passport from the French Government.		
Signature of the Bearer L. Kieseritzky		Signature of the Port Officer M. Muller Inspector			

3 Rms.—Feb. 1849. United Kingdom—No. 94.—Aliens' Certificate of Arrival. 10—15.

Certificate of arrival in England

Kieseritzky arrived in Folkestone on 24 May 1851. His nationality is recorded as Russian, but he was in possession of a passport issued by the French government.

[The London tournament](#) took place from 27 May 1851 to 15 June 1851.



Certificate of arrival in England

On 1 August 1851, Kieseritzky returned to London, arriving from Boulogne.

It is amusing to note that his occupation is listed as gentleman.

The journal La Régence, of which he was the editor, ceased publication in December 1851.

LA RÉGENCE

JOURNAL DES ÉCHECS

Rédigé par une Société d'Amateurs.



Troisième Année.

PARIS.

AU CAFÉ DE LA RÉGENCE, PLACE DU PALAIS-ROYAL.

1851

= Paris, N. 5. 57

La Régence

The very unusual system of chess notation that he had devised was one of the reasons for the closure of the journal, which proved to be financially unviable.

I then find his name again in an English newspaper, the Western Courier and West of England Conservative, dated 26 May 1852. Still energetic, Kieseritzky was attempting to organise a correspondence match between London and Paris, nearly twenty years after the famous encounter of 1834–1836 initiated by La Bourdonnais.

Our Chess Corner.

THE CONTEST BETWEEN FRANCE AND ENGLAND BY CORRESPONDENCE, AND THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF THE ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH.

In a short time, a contest in Chess will take place between the Club of Paris and the St. George's Club, of London, the match to consist of two games by the Electric Telegraph, and two games by correspondence in the usual way.

Mr. Staunton has addressed himself to Mr. Kieseritzky, and proposes that himself, Mr. Wyvill, and Captain Kennedy shall conduct the match on the part of the St. George's Club, and wishes Mr. K., to arrange with Mr. Laroche and the other French amateurs; the prize of the contest to be fifty guineas, the surplus remaining of the subscription for the Grand Tournament.

Deprived of the co-operation of Mr. Laroche, through his private affairs at Bayonne, and believing the contest would prove highly interesting, Mr. Kieseritzky proposed it to the Cercle of *La Régence*, which has accepted the proposal, and named a Committee of the following gentlemen:—Messrs. Devink (President), Crampell (Secretary), Chamouillet, Delannoy, Garcin, Journauz, Kieseritzky and Seguin, to settle the conditions of the match.

The Cercle, having arranged with the Electric Telegraph Company, proposes to the English players that two games shall be played through that medium, so that each party may have the first move, and at the same time offers an additional prize of 1,250 francs to the winners.

British Newspaper Archive.

Western Courier West of England Conservative newspaper of 26 May 1852

transcription of the article

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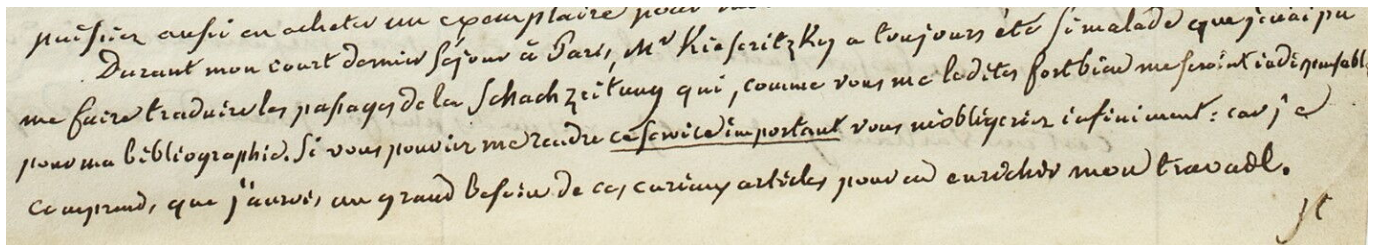
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that two games shall be played through that medium, so that each party may have the first move, and at the same time offers an additional prize of 1,250 francs to the winners.

However, I have not found any further information relating to this match.
I doubt that it actually took place.

Did Kieseritzky experience health problems around June 1852?
This is quite possible.

A letter dated a few months later, from the collector Camille Théodore Frédéric Alliey to Tassilo von Heydebrand und der Lasa, indicates that ...



puissiez aussi en acheter un exemplaire pour vous.
Durant mon court dernier séjour à Paris, M^r Kieseritzky a toujours été si malade que j'ai pu
me faire traduire les passages de la Schachzeitung qui, comme vous me le dites, sont bien indispensables
pour ma bibliographie. Si vous pouvez me rendre ce service important vous m'obligerez infiniment: car j'ai
compris, que j'aurai, un grand besoin de ces curieux articles pour en enrichir mon travail.

Letter preserved at the Kórník Library in Poland, dated 4 February 1853

During my short recent stay in Paris, Mr. Kieseritzky was always so ill that I was unable to have the passages from the Schachzeitung translated for me which, as you quite rightly say, would be indispensable for my bibliography.

And it is here that we enter the final months of Lionel Kieseritzky's life.

The archives of the [AP-HP](#) (Assistance Publique – Hôpitaux de Paris) make it possible, with a little patience (and the consultation of dozens of pages), to uncover essential information.

I eventually came across a register mentioning Lionel Kieseritzky at the [Hôpital de la Charité](#) in Paris, a hospital that no longer exists today.

filles fins et vivaces Pierre Vincent S.	Pierre	13. avril	9.
Garçon	hémiplegie Michel 14.	19. mai	15
in a Garçon	ad. f. typ. M. 14.	19. mai	32 2 enfant malade

— on the right

The page on the right provides much more information. The mention “Garçon” indicates that he was unmarried. We then learn that he was suffering from hemiplegia (paralysis of one side of the body) and that he occupied bed no. 14 in the (Saint) Michel ward. One must imagine a large ward with around forty beds and very little privacy.

Continuing to the right in this grim record, one can read “softening of the brain” and the date of death, 19 May (1853), after 45 days spent at the Hôpital de la Charité, which places his admission on 4 April 1853.

DÉCÈS.	
ANNÉE	Arrondis ^t ancien.
1853	10
Noms <i>Kieseritz Ki</i>	
Prénoms <i>Lionel</i>	
Date du décès <i>19 mai 1853</i>	
<i>2/41</i>	

— death certificate

The fact that he remained there for 45 days means that:

- he was bedridden (hemiplegia),
- he had no one to care for him at home,
- he became a chronic case and then a terminal one.

Hemiplegia, together with the contemporary medical term “softening of the brain,” clearly indicates the pathology from which Lionel Kieseritzky suffered: most probably an ischaemic stroke.

A grim detail: in most cases, if the patient was not claimed, an autopsy was carried out. This was very probably the case for Lionel Kieseritzky.

The Archives of Paris make it possible to locate the reconstructed death certificate.

It is difficult to find information about his death in French newspapers of the period. So far, I have not found any mention of his death on Retronews. However, I did find a reference to it in a British newspaper.

their wearing apparel, &c.

DEATH OF KIESERITZKY, THE GREAT CHESS-PLAYER.
—With profound regret we have to record the death of the celebrated Herr Kieseritzki, so long the ornament and pet of the Paris Chess Club, and one of the most brilliant players of the day. From various distressing causes he had for many months previously been obliged to abandon all attendance at the club, his intellect having become affected, till at length his friends deemed it advisable to place him in that receptacle of the afflicted, the Hotel de Dieu, in which he breathed his last on the 18th ult.

A clerk in one of the Lisbon shops has been stabbed,

[British Newspaper Archive](#)

11 June 1853 - Farmer's Friend and Freeman's Journal

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The article contains two errors (the Hôtel-Dieu instead of the Hôpital de la Charité, and 18 May instead of 19 May). However, it tells us that he had abandoned all activity for many months — probably since the proposal of the correspondence match in May 1852.

One possible scenario would therefore be a first stroke in June 1852, followed by a deterioration (a second stroke?) at the beginning of 1853.

The question of the place of his burial still remained. Once again, it required somewhat painstaking online research. But in the end, it was possible to reach a conclusion thanks to the increasingly extensive digitisation of historical documents. This time, it was the cemetery registers of Paris that enabled me to discover his place of burial.

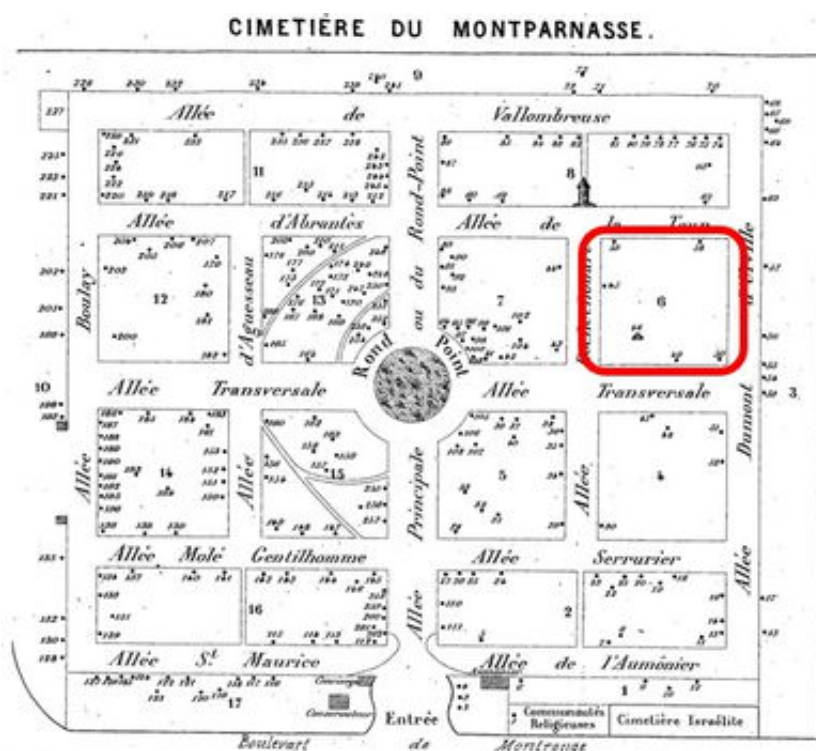
N° 13

NUMÉRO GÉNÉRAL	NUMÉRO D'ORDRE	NUMÉROS des MANUSCRITS de la SÉRIE	DATES de INSCRIPTION	NOMS DES DÉCÉDÉS	PRÉNOMS	ÂGE	SÉPULTURE	ÉTENDUE DES TERRAINS CONCERNÉS		INDICATION DE LA SITUATION LOCALE DES SÉPULTURES		TEMPORAIRE		OBSERVATIONS
								A PARTIR DE	TERMINÉ	LIÈNE	FOUR	LIÈNE	FOUR	
1183	3074	3074	22 Mai 1853	RUBIN	Jean Baptiste	47	12							
1184	3075			ROUSSEAU	Edm d		12							
1185	3076			ROUSSEAU	Emile	38	12							
1186	3077			KIEBUTSKI	Rene	47	10							
1187	3078			JOUAN	Jules	38	10							
1188	3079			SENE	Marie Rachelle	10								

– [Archives of Paris](#), cemetery registers

I was therefore able to locate him at the Montparnasse Cemetery. On the left-hand page, it can be read that he was buried on 22 May 1853, at the age of 47. On the right-hand page, it is stated that he was buried in the common grave of the 6th section of the Montparnasse Cemetery. Once again, this is a marker of his extreme poverty and of the tragic nature of his social condition at the end of his life.

I therefore went to the Montparnasse Cemetery. In 1853, the Montparnasse Cemetery was smaller than it is today. A brief investigation showed that the 6th section of the period corresponds to the present-day 8th section. This can be seen by comparing the current plan with an 1865 plan (Astriè – Guide des cimetières).



– Map 1865



Plan du Cimetière du Montparnasse

Sépultures des personnalités les plus demandées

Riches en œuvres d'art anciennes et modernes, le « cimetière du Sud » accueille, parmi ses 36 000 sépultures, d'illustres défunts du monde des arts et des lettres. C'est un espace vert important (1 200 arbres : sophoras, érables, tilleuls...).

Superficie : 18,72 ha | Création : 1824



— nowadays

However, there is no longer any common grave in the present-day 8th section. Indeed, these gradually disappeared as the available space was taken up by new graves. The contents of the common graves were then transferred to the various ossuaries of the cemetery (galleries located beneath the cemetery; [see here](#) an excellent article in French on the subject).



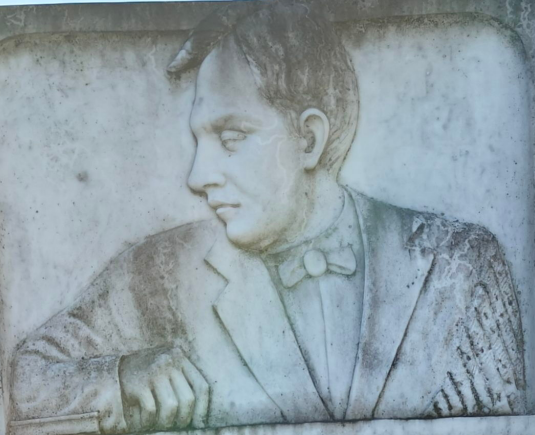
_ Photograph of an ossuary at the Montparnasse Cemetery. Photograph taken from the website Neverends.net

In short, there is no longer any trace of a possible burial site for Lionel Kieseritzky at the Montparnasse Cemetery.



_ 8th section

As a small historical aside, in the 8th section (formerly the 6th section) lies the grave of the World chess champion: Alexander Alekhine.



АЛЕКСАНДР АЛЕХИН
ALEXANDRE ALEKHINE
GÉNIE DES ÉCHECS DE RUSSIE ET DE FRANCE
1^{ER} NOVEMBRE 1892
25 MARS 1946



CHAMPION DU MONDE DES ÉCHECS
DE 1927 À 1935 ET DE 1937 À SA MORT

GRACE ALEKHINE
NÉE WISHAR
1876 - 1956

CE MONUMENT A ÉTÉ ÉRIGÉ LE 25 MARS 1956
FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DES ÉCHECS

