

Amerigo Filia (1873-1925) and the first School of Pediatrics in the island of Sardinia

Maria Grazia Clemente^{1,2,3}, Patrizia Cincinnati³, Luigi Cataldi³, Roberto Antonucci¹

¹Pediatric Clinic, Department of Medical, Surgical and Experimental Sciences, University of Sassari, Sassari, Italy

²Pediatric Hospital A. Cao, A.R.N.A.S. Brotzu, Cagliari, Italy

³Italian Society of Pediatrics – Pediatric History Study Group, Rome, Italy

Abstract

Amerigo Filia was born on July 18, 1873, in Sassari, Sardinia, Italy. After attaining his Medicine degree at the University of Turin in 1900, he went to Rome to study Pediatrics at the School of Pediatrics directed by Professor Luigi Concetti. His academic career began in Sassari when he was appointed as teacher of Pediatrics in 1911, becoming Full Professor in 1917, Dean of the School of Medicine and Surgery in 1918 and, finally, Rector of the University in 1919. He distinguished himself as the founder of the Pediatric Clinic and the School of Pediatrics in Sassari, both being the first ones in Sardinia, and as the promoter of the restoration of the front of the main building of the University of Sassari (“*Palazzo dell’Università*”), as well as of new buildings to host Scientific Institutes and Clinics. Moreover, in 1923, he succeeded in preventing the suppression of Sassari University as a consequence of the “Gentile” reform. As documented by his scientific publications, Filia’s research activity included both experimental and clinical studies focusing on the renal excretion of high dose of arsenic, the effects of *Lactobacilli* in infantile enteritis, as well as on renal tuberculosis and pulmonary echinococcosis in children. Amerigo Filia died suddenly on December 21, 1925, in Rome, where he was participating in a university competition as a committee member.

Keywords

History of Pediatrics, School of Pediatrics, Dean of the School of Medicine and Surgery, Rector of the University, Sassari University.

Corresponding author

Maria Grazia Clemente, Pediatric Clinic, Department of Medical, Surgical and Experimental Sciences, University of Sassari, Sassari, Italy, and Pediatric Hospital A. Cao, A.R.N.A.S. Brotzu, Cagliari, Italy, and Italian Society of Pediatrics – Pediatric History Study Group, Rome, Italy; email: mgclemente@uniss.it.

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Amerigo Filia and the School of Pediatrics

Amerigo Filia has been the first Italian pediatrician to take up the high academic position of University Rector, being appointed as the Rector of Sassari University in 1919 [1], just a century ago.

Fig. 1 shows the milestones of Filia's life and academic carrier. Born in Sassari on July 18, 1873, Filia attended the University of Turin, Italy, where he graduated in Medicine and Surgery in 1900. The Italian Society of Pediatrics had been founded in 1898, during the third National Meeting of Pediatrics held in Turin, following a proposal by Professor Luigi Concetti, at that time Director of the "Bambino Gesù" Hospital in Rome. It is not known whether, on that occasion, Filia met Professor Concetti in Turin and was inspired by his proposal. As a matter of fact, after attaining his Medical Degree, Filia moved to Rome for a Pediatric Residency, thereafter becoming Assistant to Professor Concetti [2].

Amerigo Filia remained in Rome until 1911, when, at the age of 38, he decided to return to his native city, accepting the teaching position of Pediatrics at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Sassari.

The historical context of the following years was marked by the drama of World War I and the difficult social and economic post-war period [3].

Filia's academic career in Sassari was fast: he became Full Professor of Pediatrics in 1917, Dean

of the School of Medicine and Surgery in 1918 and, finally, Rector of the University in 1919. Unfortunately, both his academic career and his life were short [1]. On December 21, 1925, Filia died suddenly, at the age of 52, of a heart attack while participating in an academic competition as a committee member in Rome. Reportedly, though suffering from palpitations, he did not cancel his trip to Rome due to a profound sense of duty [2, 4]. After a solemn funeral ceremony in Rome, Filia's body was transferred to Sardinia on a steamship, accompanied by relatives, his friend Mr. Lentini, as well as Professor Macciotta and Doctor Sirca from the Pediatric Clinic of Sassari. After a further solemn ceremony, his body was buried in the monumental cemetery of Sassari, where it still rests.

At the inauguration of the 1925-26 academic year, the commemorative speech in memory of the late Rector Filia was delivered by Professor Leonardo Dominici [2], Director of the Surgical Clinic of the University of Sassari, awarded with several medals for military valor in World War I [5]. As a medical student, Professor Dominici had met Professor Filia when the latter was Assistant of Professor Concetti at Rome University [2].

Professor Filia distinguished himself for his determination, commitment and sacrifice. Before World War I, he founded the Pediatric Clinic and the School of Pediatrics of Sassari University, both being the first ones in Sardinia. Later, as a Rector of the University, Filia promoted the realization of important works for the University and the city of Sassari, including the restoration of the front of the main building of the University of Sassari ("*Palazzo dell'Università*") and the construction of the buildings housing Scientific Institutes and University Hospitals.

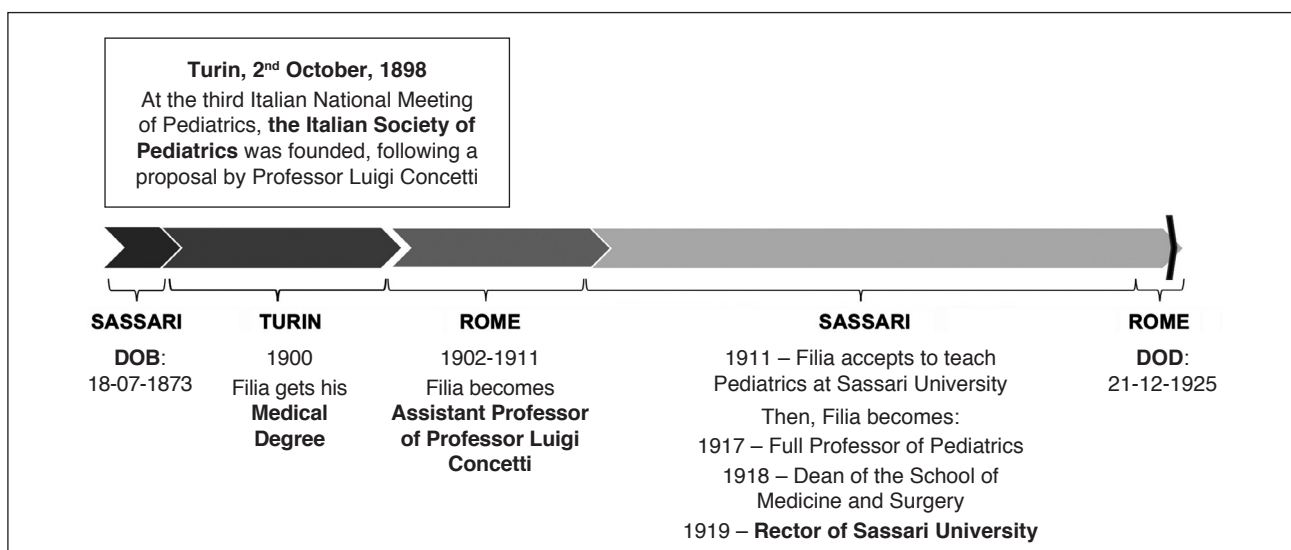


Figure 1. Milestones of Amerigo Filia's life and academic carrier (1873-1925).

Thanks to his important social relations and friendships woven while he was in Turin and in Rome, Professor Filia was able to avoid the suppression of Sassari University as a consequence of the “Gentile” reform of 1923, which was designed to streamline the Italian university system to only one University per each political region [2-4]. His patient, active and prudent tenacity not only avoided the threat of the closure of Sassari University in 1923, but also achieved the objective of making it truly worthy of the city of Sassari [6]. Moreover, Filia took care of the restoration of the the main building of the University of Sassari (“Palazzo dell’Università”). The front of the former College of Jesuits (Sassari University was founded by the Jesuits in the XVI century) was demolished and rebuilt in a more elegant form [7, 8], reason of pride for both the University and the city of Sassari.

Rector Filia was the mastermind behind the plan to build the new Scientific Institutes and the Clinics. At the time, the laboratories of the Scientific Institutes were located in rented apartments, which were not only inadequate, but also quite expensive [6]. These building projects, led by Rector Filia, started in 1922. The Scientific Institutes were inaugurated shortly after Filia’s death, as reported by his successor Professor Giuseppe Castiglia [4], who was Professor of History of Roman Law at the School of Law of

Sassari University from 1899 to 1930, and Rector of the University soon after Filia, from 1926 to 1930 [1]. During his last trip to Rome, Filia had been able to obtain a remarkable increase of the funding necessary for the construction of the Clinics at the University of Sassari from 6 to 11 million of Italian Lire [1].

Initially, the Pediatric Clinic directed by professor Filia included one small outpatient clinic, one waiting room and one laboratory, but in a short period of time it expanded with the addition of three inpatient wards housing a total of 20 beds [9].

Two years after his death, in 1927, his Assistant and successor, Professor Giuseppe Macciotta (1892-1985) [10], had the honor of presiding over the new Clinics opening ceremony [1, 9]. Today, the building is the new headquarters of the School of Political Sciences of Sassari University. At that time, it was the headquarters of the Pediatric Clinic, ENT Clinic and Dental Clinic [7, 9].

As documented by his scientific publications, the intense research activity of Professor Filia includes both experimental and clinical studies, focusing on the renal excretion of high dose of arsenic, the effects of *Lactobacilli* in infantile enteritis, and renal tuberculosis and pulmonary echinococcosis in children. A partial list of Filia’s scientific publications is reported in **Tab. 1**.

Table 1. Some publications by Amerigo Filia.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Filia A. On the elimination of the arsenic administered at high dose in the care of Sydenham’s chorea. [<i>Sull’eliminazione dell’arsenico somministrato ad alte dosi nella cura della Corea del Sydenham</i>]. Gazzetta Internazionale di Medicina Pratica. 1902;V(16). Filia A. On the presence of lactic ferments in the milk of women who breed dyspeptic children. [<i>Sulla presenza dei fermenti nel latte di donne che allevano bambini dispeptici</i>]. Comunicazione alla 1ª Riunione della Sez.ne Napoletana SIP (20 dicembre 1902). Rivista di Clinica Pediatrica. 1903;1:138. Filia A. Contribution to the study of acute nephritides that follow impetigo in children. [<i>Contributo allo studio delle nefriti acute post-impetiginose nei bambini</i>]. Policlinico Suppl. 1902. Also as: Comunicazione alla Adunanza della Sez.ne Toscana SIP (1 febbraio 1903). Rivista di Clinica Pediatrica. 1903;1:207. Filia A. Case report on streptococemia cured using Marmorek serum. [<i>Relazione su alcuni casi di streptococemia curati col siero Marmorek</i>]. Comunicazione alla Sez.ne Romana SIP (1 marzo 1903). Rivista di Clinica Pediatrica. 1903;1:278. Filia A. On the relationship between infantile dyspepsia and presence of some ferments in woman’s milk. [<i>Sui rapporti tra la dispepsia infantile e la presenza di alcuni fermenti nel latte di donna</i>]. Rivista di Clinica Pediatrica. 1903;1:535-49. Filia A. Tetany in children. [<i>Le tétanie chez les Enfants</i>]. Revue d’Hygiène et de Médecine infantiles (Paris). 1903;6. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Filia A. A case of childhood hysteria. [<i>Un caso di isterismo infantile</i>]. Atti V Congresso Pediatrico Italiano (Rome, 1905). Rome: F Centenari & C, 1906. Filia A. On the passage in the milk of proteolytic ferment administered by mouth. [<i>Sul passaggio nel latte del fermento proteolitico somministrato per bocca</i>]. Nota. Rivista di Clinica Pediatrica. 1905;3:12-7. Filia A. A case of cutaneous tuberculosis of hematogeneous origin. [<i>Un caso di tubercolosi della pelle di origine ematogena</i>]. Comunicazione alla Adunanza della Sez.ne Romana SIP (9 aprile 1906). La Pediatría. 1906;14:462-3. Also in: Rivista di Clinica Pediatrica. 1906;4:471-2. Filia A. Two cases of cutaneous tuberculosis of hematogeneous origin. [<i>Due casi di tubercolosi cutanea d’origine ematogena</i>]. Gazzetta Internazionale di Medicina (Naples). 1907. Filia A. The action of <i>Saccharomyces Sardus</i> in the intestinal tract diseases of childhood. [<i>L’azione del Saccharomyces Sardus nelle affezioni del tubo intestinale dell’infanzia</i>]. Rassegna di Bacterio-Opo- e Sieroterapia (Milan). 1908. Filia A. Opsonic power of blood on infantile pneumonia. [<i>Il potere opsonico del sangue nelle polmoniti infantili</i>]. Biochimica e Terapia Sperimentale. 1910;VI. Filia A. Meiotagminic reaction in infantile tuberculosis. [<i>La reazione meiotagminica nella tubercolosi infantile</i>]. Policlinico Sez.ne Pratica. 1910. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Filia A. The action of intestinal anaerobics on the nervous system. [<i>L’azione degli anaerobi dell’intestino sul sistema nervoso</i>]. Giornale della Società d’igiene (Milan). 1910. Filia A. Influence of gastrointestinal diseases on the nervous system of children. [<i>Influenza delle malattie gastro-intestinali sul sistema nervoso dei bambini</i>]. Tesi di Libera Docenza. Rome, 1910. Filia A. The action of intestinal anaerobics on the nervous system. [<i>L’azione degli anaerobi dell’intestino sul sistema nervoso</i>]. Rivista di Clinica Pediatrica. 1911;9:85-92. Filia A. The meiotagminic reaction of tuberculosis on children health. [<i>Die Meiotagminreaktion bei der Tuberkulose im Kindesalter</i>]. Zeitschrift für Chemie und Industrie der Kolloide. 1911,8(1):41. Filia A. On the blood cholesterol content in children. [<i>Sul contenuto in colesterina del sangue di bambini</i>]. Nota I. Rivista di Clinica Pediatrica. 1914;12:339-45. Filia A. On the sacral blue spot in children of Sassari. [<i>Sulla presenza della macchia bleu sacrale nei bambini di Sassari</i>]. La Pediatría. 1916;24:577-94. Filia A. On giant cells formation in the glomeruli during renal tuberculosis. [<i>Intorno alla formazione delle cellule giganti dai glomeruli nella tubercolosi renale</i>]. La Pediatría. 1916;24:705-16. Filia A. Heliotherapy in children can be successfully extended to the private clinical practice. [<i>La elioterapia nei bambini si può estendere con successo nella pratica privata</i>]. Rivista di Clinica Pediatrica. 1916;14:561-83. |
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Fig. 2 shows Rector Amerigo Filia in the early 1920s, with the bow tie, standing in the center, surrounded by his colleagues and residents of the School of Pediatrics. Though not all of them can be identified, his successor, Professor Giuseppe Macciotta (1892-1985), is the one sitting in the central position, just in front of Filia, and Doctor Antonio Sirca (1895-1962), who took the picture using a timer, is the second standing from the right.

Several renowned Italian academic pediatricians and neonatologists have succeeded over time at Sassari University from 1911 to 1999 (**Tab. 2**). Such rapid turnover of outstanding academics, while somewhat hampering long-term planning of teaching and research, has, however, fostered valuable exchanges of knowledge and experience, as well as the establishment of links and scientific cooperation between various universities [3].

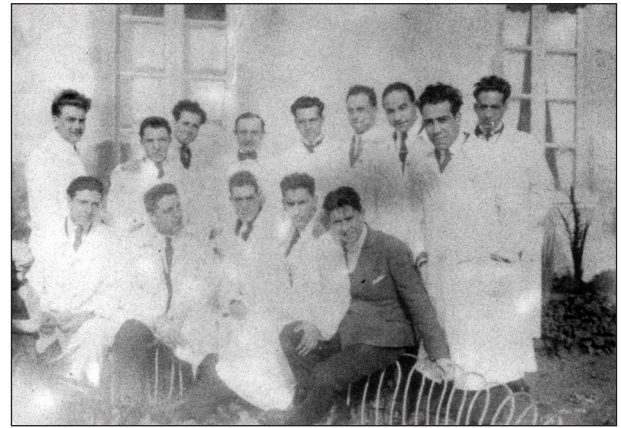


Figure 2. Rector Amerigo Filia in the early 1920s (with the bow tie, standing in the center), surrounded by his colleagues and residents of the School of Pediatrics. Though not all of them can be identified, his successor, Professor Giuseppe Macciotta (1892-1985), is the one sitting in the central position, just in front of Filia, and Doctor Antonio Sirca (1895-1962), who took the picture using a timer, is the second standing from the right.

Table 2. The academic pediatricians and neonatologists at Sassari University from 1911 to 1999.

Period	Name	Note
1911-1925	Filia Amerigo	Deceased in 1925
1925-1928	Macciotta Giuseppe	Transferred to Perugia in 1928
1927-1931	Borrino Virginia Angiola	Transferred to Perugia in 1931
1931-1937	Bentivoglio Gian Carlo	Transferred to Pavia in 1938
1933-1935	Auricchio Luigi	Transferred to Naples in 1935
1937-1938	Cocchi Cesare	Transferred to Parma in 1939
1939-1940	Careddu Giovanni	-
1947-1954	Schwarz Tiene Eugenio	Transferred to Ferrara in 1954
1954-1960	Sartori Ernesto	Transferred to Ferrara in 1961
1960-1961	Panizon Franco	Transferred to Ferrara in 1962
1961-1963	Vecchio Federico	Transferred to Bari in 1964
1962-1966	De Toni Ettore	Transferred to Genoa in 1966
1964-1970	Menghi Giuseppe	Transferred to Ferrara in 1970
1966-1968	Macciotta Aniello	Transferred to Cagliari in 1968
1967-1973	Corda Giovanni	Transferred in 1973
1968-1969	Fois Alberto	Transferred to Siena in 1970
1970-1971	Bucci Giovanni	Transferred in 1971
1970-1975	Cutillo Stefano	Transferred in 1975
1975-1976	Cheli Enrico	Transferred to Modena in 1976
1975-1977	Maggioni Giorgio	Transferred to Ancona in 1977
1976-1986	Meloni Tullio	-
1977-1987	Orzalesi Marcello	Transferred to Rome (La Sapienza University) in 1988
1984-1994	Spano Bruno	Ceased service in 1994
1984-2012	Dore Angelo Fausto	Ceased service in 2012
1988-2010	Gallisai Domenico	Ceased service in 2010
1990-1995	Corchia Carlo Angelo	Transferred to Cosenza in 1995
1992-1993	Ponzone Alberto	Transferred in 1993
1994-1996	Colombo Carla	-
1999-2000	Musumeci Salvatore	Transferred in 2000

Acknowledgments

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Declaration of interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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