

Mario Santoro (1905-1998): A pioneer of Italian nipiology

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Abstract. *Background and aim:* After his death in 1998, the biography of Mario Santoro was the subject of studies published with the aim of reconstructing the biography and bibliography of his scientific production. These studies, generally rather celebratory, do not allow to deduce the substantial contributions that Santoro has made in medicine in areas such as paediatrics and, more specifically, nipiology. *Methods:* The sources to reconstruct the original contributions of the scientific work of Santoro are the documents kept in the historical archive of Studio Firmano. An analysis was carried out on documentation on the years of Santoro's medical training at the Universities of Rome and Padua, as well as from 1939 to 1952, in which his interest in nipiology developed. Correspondence with the main scholars of reference for nipiology represents a useful scientific tool in documenting the importance assumed in the national and regional context of the activities carried out by Santoro. *Results:* It is remarkable the discover of the unpublished letter from Ernesto Cacace, the founder of Nipiology (Naples, 11 September 1945) that takes on the importance of a scientific manifesto, illustrating in detail the pioneering nipiological work carried out in Fermo. *Conclusions:* Santoro founded the first Italian school of nipiological assistants, started in an Italian brephotrophy and supported, with a series of initiatives, the scientific development of the Marche regional section of the Italian Society of Nipiology, becoming a pioneer of the diffusion in Italy of the nipiology as a new experimental science.

Key words: Mario Santoro, Ernesto Cacace, nipiology, infant health history, nurse training school history, paediatrics history

Introduction

Mario Santoro is certainly better known for his contribution to historical-medical studies with the creation in 1955 of the Marche centre for the history of medical studies (later called Studio Firmano and still active today), rather than for his original scientific contributions to paediatrics and in particular to nipiology. After his death in Fermo on April 2nd, 1998, studies were published in his honour (1), with the aim of reconstructing his biography and bibliography. However, these publications generally focus on his historical-medical activity carried out under the aegis of his teacher Adalberto Pazzini of the University of Rome (2), while little space is devoted to his profession of doctor, paediatrician and Director of the

Brephotrophy of Fermo, beginning 1939. Santoro's interest in nipiology matures during the first formative phase of his life in which paediatrics, and in particular the care and assistance of newborns are at the centre of his medical studies and found more concreteness in his first professional assignment as director of the orphanage in Fermo.

Early career: The Brefotrofo orphanage and the care of illegitimate children

After obtaining a degree in medicine at the University of Rome on July 24th, 1933, Mario Santoro achieved in the same year the qualification to practice the profession of doctor-surgeon at the University of Padua. He returned to Rome and began

his specialisation in pediatrics at the University of Rome, which he completed on December 21st, 1935. From January 1934 to January 1936 he worked as a volunteer assistant the pediatric clinic of the Poli-clinico Umberto I directed by Luigi Spolverini (3). Shortly thereafter, he arrived in Fermo, the capital city of the territory of the ancient Marca Fermana, located in central Italy, with a significant historical tradition in assisting the needy. The Opera Pia Brephotrophy of the city of Fermo, where Mario Santoro was called to manage as Health Director following the appointment of February 18th, 1939, is an institution with a long-standing tradition. This orphanage is the legacy of the ancient Hospital of Santa Maria della Carità, of medieval origin. The young Santoro, in his first professional assignment, perceived the importance of the institution entrusted to him. After 1955, the year of the foundation in Fermo of the Marche centre for the history of medical studies, the history of the Hospital of Santa Maria della Carità would also become one of the main objects of study of his publications of historical-medical interest. He was interested also in the history of childbirth and the training of the midwives in the Marca Fermana (4).

Santoro marks an innovative turning point in the management of the Institute, starting from the internal division of the spaces. Upon his arrival in 1939, he immediately requested the establishment of a room for premature babies, often with a high rate in unwanted children, which would be carried out in a limited manner in 1942. He also asked for the division of the nursing room from the nursing ward, which he obtained in 1950 (5). The war had dramatically increased the cases of illegitimate and unwanted births due to displacement, poverty and the increase in cases of abandonment. This led to a significant rise in the number of guests of the Institute to which, however, an expansion of the spaces had not been allocated, resulting in problems regarding hygiene and health. With the division of the spaces, Santoro solved the problem in a pragmatic way, obtaining as incredible results. Within a few years, there was a sharp decrease in infant mortality and morbidity.

Santoro also created a laboratory for scientific investigations provided with modern devices for ordinary research, for the diagnosis of infectious diseases – in

particular syphilis – and a lactuarius or milk room in which to provide for the rational conservation and pasteurisation of milk, the cleaning of baby food and distribution containers (6).

Santoro maximized breastfeeding as a tool in order to combat infant mortality – even attempting to find the natural mother with the support of local institutions and pushing her to breastfeed the baby – and makes it the subject of studies and research. The centrality of breastfeeding in the growth and future state of health of the child had been the subject of important studies in those years such as those of the paediatrician Virginia Angiola Borrino (7-9), professor of paediatric clinic at the University of Perugia. In the context of the Nipiology congresses, Borrino's studies had highlighted how the growth of the child was governed in early age essentially by the processes of nutrition. Alterations of this process would have negative consequences on somatic and psychic development, thus preventing normal physiological development.

For the purpose of an internal reorganization of the institute, Santoro also collaborated in the drafting of a new statute of the orphanage. His management greatly improved rates of morbidity and mortality in the Institute, which were initially high due to diseases of the digestive system and nutrition, reduced to acceptable levels between 1939 and 1952 (10).

Santoro's goal from the beginning of his career was to develop the orphanage as an institution dedicated not only to the care and reception of at-risk children, but also to the teaching, research and training of personnel educated in the care of infants.

The particular complexity of the care of newborns in the very first years of life was crystal clear to Santoro, not only from a medical point of view, but also from that of pedagogy. The lack of preparation for this task was widespread and existed on the part of mothers as well as those working in domestic support. The latter were often called upon to perform a hygienic and educational roles in a completely empirical manner, an aspect that would have required precise skills in terms of training. Hence the brilliant intuition of giving life at the Brephotrophy to a Nipiogenic Institute and a school of nipiological assistants. This was the first of its kind in Italy. The project that started at the beginning

of 1942, however it was interrupted by the call to arms on July 10th of the same year.

During the fourteen months of his military service, he developed this project and also dedicated himself to the drafting of scientific works, the result of those first years of health management of the Institute. These were studies intended, according to Santoro's intentions, for publication, but which would be lost with the destruction of the Forlì Military Hospital in which he was in service. However, the list of these works is known, as preserved in a typewritten copy in the archival documentation (11): With the end of the War after September 8th, 1943, he returned to service as director of the Institute and resumed working hard on the project of founding a school for nipiological assistants.

Methods

The years between 1939 and 1952 were therefore the interval of strategic importance that would be analysed and reconstructed historically through the documentation kept in the historical archive of Studio Firmano. The archival documentation on the organization and internal management of the brephotrophy by M. Santoro as health director represents also a relevant source for an accurate reconstruction of the institution from the medical and clinical point of view. Furthermore, Santoro's correspondence documents the scientific network in which he became a fervent supporter of nipiological science during the years interval examined. The analysis of the unpublished letter of Ernesto Cacace the founder of Italian Nipiology sent to Santoro from Naples on 11 September 1945 offers new historical perspective to contextualize at a national level the genesis of Santoro's project of the first Italian school of nipiological assistants in an orphanage.

Nipiology and the beginning of a new modern care of children

In 1905, Ernesto Cacace, the father of nipiology, founded the first Nipiogenic Institute in Capua, in Naples, which was built in 1915, with a broader organization including a nursery, modelled after institutions in other European countries and America. While

in France, the science of childcare dominated, as the focus was entirely on the child's rearing, in Italy the scientific focus on the newborn was broader and more original turned to their care and health, with points of contact with German paediatrics, including education and safeguarding and protection of maternity (12). Cacace introduced a new concept of the infant, focusing on the training of personnel in charge of child services, defining nipiology as the autonomous science of the first stage of life.

The First National Congress of Nipiology under the Presidency of Ernesto Cacace was held on October 21st- 23rd, 1928 (13), in Ancona, where a regional section of the Society of Nipiology was established. Santoro would be a prominent member, as a founding member, also joining in 1932 the editorial staff of the magazine "La Nipiologia" founded and directed by Cacace from 1915 to 1948. The Marche region was obviously particularly sensitive to the new science and Fermo would represent a national outpost.

The context of affirmation of the new science explains the particular fervor with which it is welcomed by Ernesto Cacace – President of the Italian Society of Nipiology – in 1945 the proposal of Mario Santoro to found in Fermo a Nipiogenic Institute at the Brefotrofio and in particular, an annexed school for nipiological assistants.

Santoro had actually begun to develop the idea, shortly after his arrival in Fermo, as director of the Brefotrofio Institute in 1939, as documented in a letter of September 19th of the same year, sent to the Board of Directors of the Brefotrofio of Fermo, in which he outlined his scientific program(14). The Nipiogenic Institute had to aim at the complete solution of the problem of hygienic protection of the early childhood and had to be the leader of a series of related institutions with different functions: educational such as hygiene schools for the first age, schools for mothers; scientific laboratories for the examination of milk and for the hygienic study of the child; welfare and assistance for mothers and children.

There were to be two courses. The first was aimed at young people assisted by the Institute, both internally and externally, and second dedicated to mothers and educated unmarried women – teachers, health assistants – with the aim of spreading, in different

classes of the population, the common rules on assistance and early childhood upbringing, whose mortality in the first two years of life was still too high. Santoro, after the Foundation of the Nipioigienic Institute, managed to give real form to the school for nipiological assistants that began to operate with his first year of course from November 10th, 1944 to July 1st, 1945. The diploma conferred by the course was formally recognized immediately by the Italian Society of Nipiology and in 1945 also by the Educational Boards of Ascoli Piceno, which appointed its own member to the final examination committee of the course.

Results

The school for nipiological assistants in Fermo was the first to be built in an Italian Brephotrophy, as Ernesto Cacace commented in the discovered letter sent from Naples on September 11th, 1945, to Mario Santoro, who had informed him about his work(15). This unpublished document sheds light on the development of nipiology at national and international level, as well as on the genesis of the project in Fermo. It had been Cacace who, since 1942, had encouraged Santoro to activate a school for nipiological assistants in Fermo, a project that materialized two years later in 1944. Cacace's attention to the training of early childhood care staff had always been at the centre of the new science, so much so that at the First General Congress on Infancy held in Geneva in 1925 he had presented a report on the training of newborn care staff starting with the nipiologist.

Cacace does not hide the bitterness in seeing that Nipiology had found greater scientific favour in international contexts, in particular in the Spanish-American area rather than in Italy, and for the disadvantages it had encountered in the professional and university fields, precisely for having given life to the new science (16), seen in competition with paediatrics on an academic level. Cacace also requested detailed documentation on the organisation of the school – programs, lessons, teachers, number of students, members of the examining committee – accompanied also by photographic material, for a report to be sent to the Ministry of Education as President of the Italian

Society of Nipiology. The vast amount of advice that Cacace sent to Santoro on how to manage and articulate the school in Fermo represent a sort of programmatic manifesto of the development of nipiology in the mainland. Starting from the program of the topics to be treated in the lessons that Cacace defined with precision, and that, in fact, reflects the main contents of the nipiological science: Italian legislation on the protection of the legitimate and illegitimate infant and on the protection of the maternity of workers; organization of the National Work Maternity and Childhood and its action for the protection of the infant; the institutions for the protection of the infant with special regard to the brephotrophy, the nipiogenic institute, the institute and the centre of nipiology, the school and the wandering chair of nipiology; current knowledge of the psychology of the infant; education of the infant, education of mothers for the education of the infant; notes of history of the infant with special regard to hygiene, care and art; notes of ethnography of the infant (17).

Specifically, the topics relating to the education, psychology, history and ethnography of the infant are considered essential “*to make [people] understand the integral conception of Nipiology and to avoid that the school of nipiology should be considered as a school of paediatrics or childcare*” (18). Cacace proposed the articulation of the school in three courses. In addition to that for nipiological assistants and for mothers and young singles women, also that for working mothers in analogy with that which he had carried out in 1943 at the Nipiological Centre of the National Opera Maternity and Childhood of Capua. Furthermore, the school should also be paired with a Nipiology clinic and possibly a mobile teaching role for Nipiology in Fermo. The clinic should have been divided into two sections: a nipiology clinic for the care of the sick infant, a nipio-organic-psychological clinic for the psychological examination and the hygiene of the healthy infant. Adding to the school of nipiology, the nipiological office and the mobile teaching role of Nipiology would have been created according to Cacace at the Nipiological Centre of Fermo as “*second in Italy and the first in the Marche and in Central and Northern Italy*” (19). An ambitious project motivated by the fervour of Cacace in seeing Nipiology finally

given renewed attention on Italian soil and the possibility of creating a centre equivalent to the one he had founded in Capua. However, Cacace was fully aware of an essential aspect for the success of the project: it was a fundamental premise for all this to make the establishment of the school for nipiological assistants long-term, in order to avoid having to request each year for authorisation from the Department of Studies and the Ministry. It is precisely this aspect of precariousness that would eventually undermine their survival.

The start of the second course for nipiological assistants with the extension of Santoro at the opening of the celebrations scheduled for the 40th Anniversary of the Foundation of Nipiology had a strong impact in the media, as well as in regional and local newspapers, which clearly understood the modernity of Santoro's project (20). It aimed to create a technical and professional mentality in Italy through a school for nurses inspired by the country's most at the forefront in the field, such as Anglo-American countries.

Santoro, with an extraordinarily modern outlook, gave an international feel to the courses. He established contacts with similar European schools, so that his students could confront each other in broader contexts. Santoro joined the educational roles with the foundation of the school with a social one. Moreover, he offered qualified employment to the young guests of the brephotrophy on which to rely after turning eighteen, the age when they should have left the institute. Once graduated, they could be employed in private families or public institutions. Santoro's attention was not only directed to the patients and guests of the Institute, but also to children in general. For these reasons, the school was also open to mothers so that they could be educated in the care of their newborns and to young unmarried women eager to undertake a qualified professional path. It was a question of modernising a social fabric, mostly of a rural nature, which was rather backward in terms of childcare. With the school for nipiological assistants, Santoro intended to spread a complete culture on the infant not only in medical-clinical manner, filling a gap of hygienic, pedagogical, legal and social character that, thanks to nipiology, integrated the knowledge of paediatrics and childcare.

Santoro's school of nipiological assistants soon became a model and a point of reference for similar experiences that would later follow in Italy. At the First National Congress of Brephotrophic Directors held in Padua on April 26th, 1951, Santoro brought the model of Fermo, proposing to extend the training experience at the national level. The technical instruction of personnel assigned to the care and supervision of infants was to be managed and cared for directly by the Brephotrophic Directors – including this obligation among the articles of the Regulations – with the creation of a school of Nipiology in each Institute.

In 1951, Salvatore Rapisardi, Director of the Provincial Brephotrofio of Catania, in order to receive advice on the start of a similar school for nipiological assistants, turned to Santoro as a pioneer in the field (21), who promptly responded by illustrating the salient features of the course he had organized in Fermo.

The didactic and teaching orientation that Santoro gave to the school is eminently practical. The program was modulated differently each year, adapting it to the cultural level of the students, while ample space was given to practical exercises at the Institute in the infant department and at external clinics.

The courses were also differentiated with regard to subjects if oriented to the training of mothers – the school for mothers – or professional nipiological assistants – the school for child governesses/caretakers. In order to make the theoretical lessons more usable and updated, Santoro invited various specialists in the field to intervene. On a theoretical level, the program of the course for nipiological assistants included elements from different disciplines with the aim of providing comprehensive training on infant care: anatomy and physiology, dedicated in particular to the functioning of the digestive system of the infant; breastfeeding and weaning of the infant; personal hygiene of the infant, hygiene of the room, outdoor life, games and climatology; assistance of the sick child, measurement of the wrist, breathing and temperature, paediatric first aid, elementary notions of nutrition diseases, infectious diseases, rickets, lily, childhood anaemia, adenoidism; care prophylaxis, climate therapy, artificial hydrotherapy.

Santoro did not adopt a particular manual but rather more than one. Regarding the psychological

development of the child, he made particular reference to the text of the American paediatrician and psychologist Arnold Gesell (22) for the psychism to which, based on his own statement, he reserved great importance. This bibliographical indication – the only one mentioned in detail by Santoro – was not of secondary importance as it offers a trace on the reference theories on which Santoro inspires in some way his work, particularly attentive to the psychological development of the child, from the very first years of life. According to Gesell, genetic and environmental factors were at the base of the child's development in the first two years of life, a phase of extreme importance to prevent disorders, diseases and deviations that could occur at preschool age. Gesell replaced the historical concept of education with the biological concept of growth and proper development. For this reason, it was necessary to guarantee, in a fair and democratic way, to all children and their parents the possibility of promoting proper growth through a social and educational control of the State – aimed at reducing the gap between the affluent and the less affluent, while correctly supporting growth at home. A key concept of his theories is that of the philosophy of growth that he had elaborated since the 1920s, conceived as a unique and harmonious process capable of removing the differences between mind and body, heritage and environment, disease and health (23).

The program of the course of nipiology for mothers presents some extremely original traits. In addition to an introductory lesson on nipiology and its history, it provided a complete training, including anatomy, physiology, psychology, pathology, demography, hygiene, therapy, mental and physical education of the infant and even the history of the infant about biology, medicine, hygiene, care and even the infant in the history of art, aspect the latter worthy of note. In the years that followed, the history of childcare would be at the centre of Santoro's research and would also be a recurring theme of his contributions to the congresses of the institution in Fermo dedicated to the history of medicine to which he began in 1955. Santoro held the position of the Director of the Public Library of Fermo dal 1960 al 1993. During these years he interested in history of medical bibliography and the pedagogical

use of the historical medical bibliographic collections in teaching medical history (24).

Santoro's goal was to contribute to the spread of nipiology at the national and international level. The new science prevailed specifically in Hispanic-American countries, while the French model of childcare was still dominant in Europe. Santoro fought for the recognition of the new science also through the Italian institutions. In this regard, the procedures for the official recognition of the school of nipiological assistants stopped by the High Commissioner of Health were at a standstill because the government's intention was to define the school as childcare, a definition with which Santoro did not agree in the slightest. In defence of the new nipiological science, he proceeded undaunted in his action, rejecting this inaccurate and rather reductive recognition, in the knowledge that his students enjoyed a much broader preparation than simple paediatric nurses, and that the diploma obtained was appreciated and sought precisely because it guaranteed a new and broader professional qualification. Nipiology was intended to establish itself as a new science that differed from childcare, mainly aimed at the breeding of infants, as well as from paediatrics. Cacace, along with Santoro, fought for the creation of Nipiology Institutes in universities independent of those of the Paediatric Clinic and the operation of creating Nipiogenic Institutes in provincial capitals had not only a hygienic and social function but also a widespread dissemination of the new science.

Conclusion

This historical reconstruction, thanks to archival sources, rightly places Mario Santoro among the national reference figures for nipiology. Alongside the closest collaborators of the founder of nipiology Ernesto Cacace, and other well-known figures are Baudolino Massa in Turin, Gennaro Fiore in Pisa, Luigi Auricchio in Naples and Giovanni De Toni in Genoa, Mario Santoro in Fermo should also be remembered. Despite the fact that Santoro worked in a provincial brephotrophy, the size of his work went well beyond regional boundaries. The scientific value is clear, due to the development of a nipiological

centre to be considered second in Italy only to that of Capua-Naples, and first in the Marche and central Italy, according to the judgment given by Cacace himself. The foundation by Santoro of the first Italian school for nipiological assistants, built in a provincial brephotrophy, but which became a national model, highlights the innovative capacity in management and the broad scientific scope of the training objectives. The struggle for government recognition of the new nipiological science through the accreditation of the course of nipiological assistants and the refusal to assimilate it to a course of childcare, is testimony not only to the fervent nipiological faith of Santoro but also to the awareness of the need for a broader context of scientific reference, such as the nipiology. Importantly, this was a response to the various problems posed by the care and assistance of early childhood in the period following WWII. This highlights the need for a rereading of nipiological science outside the assimilation to fascist demographic policy, especially in the immediate aftermath of the war, in relation to the different medical and social conditions of the problems of early childhood and in particular those of the illegitimate or unwanted children.

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