



## The academic career of Max Clara in Padova

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the following investigation was to explore Max Clara's (1899–1966) early academic activity in Italy at the University of Padua.

While Clara's career during the National-Socialist Party dictatorship was extensively studied in literature, little to no information is available regarding Clara's early academic years, with particular regard to his role at the University of Padua during his time in Italy. The scientific and didactic activities held by Clara during this timespan could shed a light on his appointment as Professor of Anatomy at the University of Leipzig, clarifying the academic motives and political pretences behind it. To this end, systematic research has been conducted at the Historical Archives of the University of Padua, where our findings have revealed detailed records of Clara's teaching and research activity from 1929 to 1935.

Our findings confirm that Clara held a paid position as free lecturer at the University of Padua, and was likely under the tutelage of Prof. Tullio Terni, who directed the Institute of Histology and General Embryology until 1933. Max Clara's didactic activity focused mainly on the teaching of microscopical anatomy, which was distinct from histology and considered within the field of anatomy. Even though Clara had a minimal amount of lectures assigned, our records suggest that he conducted part of his research in the laboratories of the University of Padua whilst also working independently in his private medical practice in Blumau (South Tyrol). It is therefore possible to speculate that the teaching of Microscopical Anatomy, rather than Histology, could have represented the pretext for appointing Clara as Professor of Anatomy, justifying his new, politically-driven role at Leipzig.

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### 1. Introduction

Max Clara (1899–1966) was Professor of Anatomy at the Universities of Leipzig and Munich (Germany) during the “Third Reich”. Due to his strict ties with the National-Socialist Party (NSDAP), Clara's academic activity during the NSDAP dictatorship was extensively studied by numerous authors (Aumüller and Grundmann, 2002; Hildebrandt, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, Hildebrandt, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Winkelmann and Noack, 2010; Woywodt et al., 2010; Redies and Hildebrandt, 2012; Winkelmann, 2012, 2015, 2017; Schütz et al., 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017). However, not much is known about his early academic career, in particular about Clara's time at the Histological Institute in Innsbruck (1920–1923) and the University of Padua (1929–1935). While Brenner et al., 2021 has investigated Max Clara's early biography and sociopolitical background, with particular regard to his connections with the Histological Institute of the University of Innsbruck where Clara's academic career began, we aimed to explore Max Clara's

academic activity at the University of Padua starting from 1929. To this end, systematic research has been conducted at the Historical Archives of the University of Padua, where our findings have revealed detailed records of Clara's teaching and research activity from 1929 to 1935.

Max Clara was born in 1899 in Völs am Schlern (Italian: Fiè allo Sciliar), a small village in South Tyrol (then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) (Brenner et al., 2021). After participating in World War I, Clara studied Medicine at the University of Innsbruck from 1918 to 1923, where his academic career began working as a demonstrator (tutor; 1920–1922) and assistant (1923) at the Institute of Histology and Embryology.

In December 1923, Clara abruptly interrupted his work at the University of Innsbruck in order to move to Blumau (South Tyrol; Italian: Prato all'Isarco) to take over his father's medical practice, after the father had suddenly passed away the same month. Almost no information is available regarding Clara's time in Italy from 1923 to 1928.

In January 1929, Clara was appointed free lecturer (*Libero Docente*) for Histology and General Embryology by ministerial Decree (D.M. January 15th, 1929) of the Italian Ministry of Education.

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In 1929, when Max Clara became a freelance lecturer in Italy, this career-step, which is quite similar to the habilitation or teaching license (*venia docendi*) in other countries, was regulated by the Italian royal Decree of April 6th, 1924, n°647. Only graduates could become freelance lecturers; therefore, graduation was the primary requisite. According to paragraph V of the Decree, the candidates had to send a written request to the Ministry of Public Education, including the following documents:

- Birth certificate
- Certificate of Italian citizenship
- General certification (criminal record?), issued by the juridical authorities
- Certificate of good conduct, issued by the mayor of the town of residence
- Five copies of the list of publications and didactical activities performed by the candidate
- Other documents, publications, or patents that the candidate wishes to present to the habilitation committee.

The Ministry would then forward each request to the Superior Council for Education, which proceeded to nominate a steering committee for each discipline. Each of these committees was formed by three members, who met in Rome once a year (generally in March, April or May) to judge which candidates could be admitted to the examination, basing on the received documentation. The candidates were then examined by the steering committee and had to perform a public lecture. The specific theme of the public lecture was announced 24 h before the beginning of the lecture itself. If the candidate succeeded, the nation-wide valid teaching license for the discipline was granted for five years.

On May 26th of the same year, Prof. Tullio Terni demands Clara's employment as a voluntary assistant of the Institute of Histology and General Embryology of the University of Padua, and, immediately after being nominated voluntary assistant by the Rector of the University of Padua Prof. Giannino Ferrari Dalle Spade, Clara began his career as a paid lecturer including the duty to teach at least one course a year.

## 2. Historical background

### 2.1. The Institute of Histology in the early '30es

The Institute of Histology and General Embryology in Padova was founded in 1924 when Prof. T. Terni became Chair of Histology, which was the very first chair of Histology in Italy. In the early '30es, with particular regard to the year 1930, the Institute was constituted by the following personnel and was part of the Faculty of Medicine:

- Prof. Tullio Terni, Director of the Institute since 1924.
- Dr. Achille Francescon, assistant. Joined the Institute in 1926 as a voluntary assistant and became assistant to the Chair of Histology in 1929 by ministerial Decree.

- Dr. Max Clara, a voluntary assistant, joined in 1929 as a free lecturer.
- Mr. Raffaele Campos, orderly.

**Tullio Terni** (1888–1946), whose role and influence was crucial for Clara's academic career in Italy, was a brilliant anatomist in the School of Medicine of Padova who gave fundamental and pioneering contributions in various fields of Medicine, including cytology, human and comparative morphogenesis, neuroanatomy, embryology and teratology (Macchi et al., 2013). Terni worked as an assistant to famous anatomist Giuseppe Levi at Turin until 1924 when he was appointed as the Chair of Histology and Embryology at the University of Padua. In 1933, during Clara's time in Padua, Terni became Professor of Anatomy and Director of the Institute of Human Anatomy; he retained that position until 1938, when the University officially dismissed him due to his Jewish background, as a consequence of the introduction of the "racial laws" in Italy (Capristo, 2002). Terni embodied the ideal of free science without geographic boundaries by using cutting-edge tools and always favouring international exchange between his laboratory and other institutions, such as the Rockefeller Foundation, which likely led to the first contact with Max Clara.

**Achille Francescon** is a lesser-known figure of Patavine Medicine, but of great historical interest. Born on December 10th, 1899 in Padova, Francescon obtained his degree in Medicine and Surgery in the early 20es and became voluntary assistant to the Chair of Histology in 1926. In 1929, Francescon won a national competition indicted by the Italian Ministry of Education and became regular assistant to the chair of histology until 1935, when he resigned from the position to pursue his career in psychiatry. From 1935 to 1941, Francescon held an optional course in Histological Techniques as a free lecturer but had his main occupation as director of the Psychiatric Hospital of Vicenza, a town close to Padova. Even though Francescon worked for the University of Padova during the fascist regime, several records of the historical archives of the partisan associations of Vicenza (1944) describe him as a member of several antifascist organizations; furthermore, he was known to have hidden several allied soldiers, hundreds of jews and fugitives in his psychiatric hospital during the liberation from the fascist regime (Dossi Busoi, 2018). In an article from 1934 (Clara, 1934), Clara thanks Francescon for making several paraffin inclusions used by the author for both research and didactics; thus, it is likely that the two figures worked closely together during Clara's lecturership in Padova.

### 2.2. The Faculty of Medicine in Padova in the early '30es

The Faculty of Medicine was directed, during Clara's time in Padova, by Prof. Gian Maria Fasiani from 1929 to 1932, followed by Prof. Alessandro Bertino (1932–1933) and Prof. Mario Truffi (1933–1939). The degree in Medicine and Surgery, supervised by the Faculty as mentioned above, had a duration of 6 years and counted 1053 total students for the academic year 1930/1931 (demographic data from the year 1930, when Clara held his first lectures); the following table reports the students of the degree in Medicine and Surgery:

Course year	Italians		Foreigners		Total Male Students	Total Female Students	Total students
	Males	Females	Males	Females			
1st	153	8	46	3	109	11	210
2nd	156	7	65	5	221	12	233
3rd	137	4	48	4	185	8	193
4th	119	4	26	2	145	6	151
5th	100	1	9	3	109	4	113
6th	94	3	30	4	124	7	131
Supplementary year students*	16	–	6	–	22	–	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>775</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1005</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>1053</b>

\* "Studenti fuori corso", i.e. students which did not pass all the exams of their current year.

The principal, compulsory, courses offered by the degree in Medicine and Surgery can be appreciated below; furthermore, students could enrol in optional courses held by free lecturers such as Max Clara, which were approved each year by the council of the Faculty of Medicine.

1st Year	
Zoology and comparative anatomy, with practical activities	Prof. P. Enriques
Experimental physics	Prof. A. Levi
Botany	Prof. G. Gola
Organic and inorganic chemistry	Prof. A. Roncato
Human Anatomy, with practical activities	Prof. D. Bertelli
Histology and embryology, with practical activities	Prof. T. Terni
2nd Year	
Human physiology, with practical activities	Prof. V. Ducceschi
Human anatomy, with practical activities	Prof. D. Bertelli
General pathology	Prof. G. Guerrini
Biological chemistry (biochemistry)	Prof. G. Dolfin
History of Medicine	Prof. A. Castiglioni
3rd Year	
General pathology, with practical activities	Prof. G. Guerrini
Human physiology, with practical activities	Prof. V. Ducceschi
Pathological anatomy, with practical activities	Prof. G. Cagnetto
Pharmacology, with practical activities	Prof. G. Simon
4th Year	
Clinical Medicine	Prof. A. Gasbarrini
Medical Semiotics	Prof. V. Scimone
Clinical surgery	Prof. G.M. Fasiani
Pathological anatomy, with practical activities	Prof. G. Cagnetto
Surgical anatomy and surgical operations, with practical activities	Prof. G. Oselladore
Otorhinolaryngology and diagnostics	Prof. F. Brunetti
Orthopaedics	Prof. F. Delitala
Special medical pathology, with practical activities	Prof. G. Pari
Special surgical pathology, with practical activities	Prof. L. Torraca
Clinical Ophthalmology, with practical activities	Prof. G. Lo Cascio
5th Year	
Clinical Medicine	Prof. G. Frugoni
Clinical surgery	Prof. G.M. Fasiani
Clinical dermosiphilopathy, with practical activities	Prof. M. Truffi
Hygiene	Prof. O. Casagrandi
Legal Medicine, with practical activities	Prof. R. Pellegrini
Clinical pathology of nervous and mental afflictions, with practical activities	Prof. G. Riquier
Clinical paediatrics, with practical activities	Prof. G. Frontali
6th Year	
Clinical Medicine	Prof. G. Frugoni
Clinical surgery	Prof. G.M. Fasiani
Obstetrics and gynaecology	Prof. A. Bertino
Odontology	Prof. C. Cavina

### 2.3. Clara's academic and scientific activity in Padova

On December 3rd 1929, Clara presented the program for his first free course, titled "Special histology with references to organogenesis" (Translated by the authors, original title in Italian: "Istologia speciale con cenni di organogenesi"). This free course could be chosen by the students among other alternative options (e.g. other free courses on other subjects) and was considered complementary to the compulsory course of Histology taught by Prof. Tullio Terni.

A series of 14 one-hour long lectures were held during the academic year 1929/1930. The following table shows the program of the course, as approved by the Faculty:

I. Tegument: Structure of the skin; hair, nails and glands of the skin.	IV. Respiratory system; Organogenesis; Structure of the larynx; structure of the trachea; structure of the bronchi; structure of the lungs.
II. Structure of the serous and mucous membranes.	V. Reproductive system; Organogenesis; Male genital organs; structure of the testicle; structure of the sperm pathway; structure of the penis; structure of the male glands (prostate; Cowper's gland, etc.).
III. Digestive system; Organogenesis; Structure of the oral cavity; teeth; structure of the tongue; structure of the salivary glands; Structure of the pharyngeal cavity; structure of the oesophagus; structure of the stomach; structure of the intestine; structure of the liver; structure of the pancreas;	

Female genital organs: structure of the ovaries; structure of the oviduct; structure of the uterus; structure of the vagina; structure of the clitoris; structure of the labia; structure of the vulval vestibule.

As evidenced by the reported program of the course, Clara's teaching activity was focused more on microscopic anatomy than general histology. It must be noted that while histology represents the field of science investigating the components of biological tissues (e.g. cells, extracellular components, etc.) and their different forms of organization (e.g. muscular tissue, connective tissue, nervous tissue), microscopic anatomy can be defined as the field of anatomical sciences which studies the structure and ultrastructure of the different organs, investigating their morphological characteristics through the aid of microscopic techniques, including both histological and cytological aspects. Starting from the academic year 1930/1931, Clara's course was renamed "Some chapters of human microscopic anatomy" and included practical activities through the aid of microscopic preparations, and was given during two weeks in May 1931.

The course maintained its general asset from 1930 to 1935, with the addition of specific lectures on the microscopic anatomy of the excretory system (microscopic anatomy of the kidneys and urethra) and the endocrine system. During the academic year 1932/1933, Clara could not perform lectures due to a fracture at the level of the right thumb, as testified by an official letter dating back to July 8th, 1932. The last course held by Clara at the University of Padua was within the academic year 1933/1934 and was titled "Some chapters on human microscopic anatomy (with demonstrations)" (Translated by the authors).

On January 16th 1935, Prof. Tullio Terni informed the faculty council that Max Clara had been appointed as Professor of Anatomy at the University of Leipzig. On February 8th 1935, Clara informed the Rector of the University of Padua, Prof. Carlo Anti, of the newly gained role of Professor and asked for his contract as a free lecturer at the University of Padua to be terminated.

As for Clara's scientific activity during his time as a lecturer in Padua, we have found little evidence for the convergence of Terni and Clara's research lines. From 1922 to 1929, both Clara and Terni published several articles on the anatomy of birds (Terni, 1923a, 1923b; 1924a; 1924b; 1924c; 1924d; 1927; Clara, 1923; 1924; 1925; 1926a; 1926b; 1926c; 1926d; 1926e; 1926f; 1927a; 1927b; 1928; 1929a; 1929b), with the former focusing mainly on the gastrointestinal system and the latter on the autonomous nervous system. Since several of Clara's publications revolved around the anatomy and physiology of secretory glands in different types of birds, it could be possible that Terni's research on the autonomous nervous system attracted Clara's attention, or vice versa, leading to the first contact between the two scientists. During Clara's lectureship in Padua (1929–1935), the author published several papers on the regeneration of tissue (Clara, 1931; 1935) and the gastrointestinal system of Sauropsida and Amphibians (Clara, 1933; 1935), while also continuing his research on mammals and avians. On the other hand, during the same period, Terni published several pieces of research on the regeneration of tissues in Amniotes and Amphibians, on the autonomous nervous system and the innervation of secretory glands in tritons and other sauropsids (Terni, 1929b, 1931a, 1931b, 1932a, 1932b; 1935). Hence, even though the two authors had different research lines, it is likely that both conducted at least some of their studies on animals held in the Institute of Histology and General Embryology and in the Institute of Human Anatomy, which were known to host several aquariums and laboratories specialized on amphibians and reptiles (Terni, 1929a, 1929b; 1933). For a list of Clara's publication, refer to Brenner et al., 2021.



### 3. Conclusions

Our findings confirm that Clara held a paid position as free lecturer at the University of Padua, and was likely under the tutelage of Prof. Tullio Terni, who directed the Institute of Histology and General Embryology until 1933 when he also became director of the Institute of Human Anatomy. Even though Clara had a minimal amount of lectures assigned, i.e. one lecture per week for a total of 14 lectures every academic year, it is likely that he conducted part of his research in the laboratories of the University of Padua, as testified by some of his publications, whilst also working independently on other research lines in his private medical practice in Blumau (South Tyrol).

However, what appears of particular interest concerning Clara's career as a future Anatomist is the content of his lectures, which focused mainly on microscopic anatomy rather than histology. This was common in Italy, as macroscopic anatomy was preferentially taught by full professors and was rarely assigned to assistants. It is therefore possible to speculate that the teaching of Microscopical Anatomy, rather than Histology, could have represented the pretext for appointing Clara as Professor of Anatomy, justifying his new, politically-driven role at Leipzig.

### Conflict of interests

Dr. Emmi has nothing to disclose.

Dr. Macchi has nothing to disclose.

Dr. Porzionato has nothing to disclose.

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Dr. De Caro has nothing to disclose.

### Ethical statement

Not applicable.

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### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:[doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aanat.2021.151697](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aanat.2021.151697).

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