The idea of writing a history of the Italian pharmacy and its pharmacists was first mooted by G. Battista Capello, a Venetian herbalist and author of the Lessico Farmaceutico (the Pharmaceutical Lexicon) a book of prescriptions, printed in numerous editions, that made its debut in 1729. The Venetian edition of 1759 contained a preface telling the well-documented story of the Venetian pharmacy, from its origins in that city to the triumph of its ‘theriac’, a universal panacea popularly known as Venice Treacle, that was exported throughout the known world.

However, the true founder of the discipline was the physician Alfonso Corradi, whose major contribution was to write, in 1887, the principal chapters of the Statuti degli Speziali, a comprehensive rule-book for herbalists, and the official pharmacopoeia, starting from the Florentine prescription book of 1498. Other medical practitioners following in his wake were, most notably, Alberico Benedicenti (1924) and Pietro Mascherpa who, with pharmacist Carlo Pedrazzini, instigated the teaching of pharmacy as a scientific discipline in the University of Pavia in 1942.

After the Second World War, the pharmacists themselves took over the baton, in the person of the eminent scholar Giulio Conci, whose Pagine di Storia della Farmacia (Pages in the History of the Pharmacy) is the most complete text on the evolution of our profession. Conci’s work has been continued by his disciples Antonio Vitolo and Cristoforo Masino who, in 1983, founded the magazine Atti e Memorie A.I.S.F. which relates the doings of the Academy and which is celebrating its 30th birthday this year.