

obituaries

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Giuseppe Franco Bassani

Giuseppe Franco Bassani, a cofounder of the modern Italian school of condensed-matter theory, died in Pisa on 25 September 2008 after a long and tenacious fight against cancer.

Born on 29 October 1929 in Milan, Franco studied at the University of Pavia, with Piero Caldirola and Fausto Fumi as his thesis advisers. After finishing his *laurea* thesis, "The energy levels of the F-center," in 1952, Franco went to the US to work at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he collaborated with Frederick Seitz and considered himself Seitz's student.

Franco returned to Italy in 1956 to take a position as an assistant professor, first at the University of Palermo and then at Pavia University. In 1960 he moved to Chicago to work at Argonne National Laboratory as a research associate. His research during that time was instrumental in the formulation of the modern electronic theory of solids based on pseudopotentials and in the analysis of the connections between electronic structure and optical properties, particularly of semiconductors. That work was described by David Brust, James Phillips, and Franco in a 1962 article published in *Physical Review Letters* (volume 9, page 94). His book *Electronic States and Optical Transitions in Solids* (Pergamon Press, 1975), written with his student Giuseppe Pastori Parravicini, inspired at least two generations of theorists worldwide who were working in that field. (A Russian translation was published in the Soviet Union without any royalties paid to the authors!) The book made extensive use of group theory, a subject that Franco mastered, beginning with an advanced course he took in 1955 under Seitz at Illinois.

In 1963 Franco returned to Italy and took a job as a professor of theoretical physics at the University of Messina. He moved to the University of Pisa in 1966 and then went to the University of Rome, where he held the chair of solid-state physics from 1969 to 1980. But the vagaries of student politics in Italy's capital were too much for Franco's con-



Giuseppe Franco Bassani

servative spirit. After spending 1979 as a visiting scholar at the University of Illinois, Franco returned to Pisa in 1980, where he had been offered the chair of solid-state physics at the prestigious Scuola Normale Superiore. He later served as the director of the Scuola Normale from 1995 to 1999.

In addition to teaching students and encouraging them to engage in vigorous research, Franco carried out his own studies and organized lively condensed-matter physics groups. He extended his research interests to the theory of excitons, the theory of nonlinear optical properties, and the electronic structure and optical properties of layered compounds, including organic-inorganic heterojunctions. In studying the electron-lattice interactions at F-centers, he revisited the subject of his 1952 thesis.

Franco steadfastly supported Italian and European physics in all its manifestations. He was a member of Italy's Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, and he served as chairman of the European Physical Society's condensed-matter division from 1986 to 1992 and as president of the Italian Physical Society from 1999 to 2007. Franco received numerous recognitions and awards, including the 1979 Somaini Prize of the Italian Physical Society, the 1996 Italgas Prize for

technology and science of materials, and the Italian Presidential Gold Medal for Science and Culture for 2000.

Besides his contributions to science, Franco was a cultivated man with a love for history that rivaled that of professional historians. One morning while driving along the Muro Torto, part of Rome's Aurelian Walls, he realized that a small statue, usually encased in the wall, was missing and called the superintendent to the monuments of Rome. After a lengthy and in-depth discussion with the superintendent, who at first thought he was talking to the well-known writer Giorgio Bassani, Franco learned that the statue had been removed for restoration.

Many of Franco's friends remember him stopping his car in the middle of traffic to point out some antiquities and explain their history. Other drivers would furiously blow their horns, but their reactions did not seem to deter him from his mission.

Franco also was well regarded for his expertise and appreciation of wine. With his brother Giancarlo, he produced excellent wines from a vineyard on his family estate. Once Franco acted as the "defender of red wine" in a fictitious trial in which he brilliantly illustrated the wine's almost miraculous and therapeutic virtues.

An exceedingly warm and gentle human being, Franco was beloved by his many students and was well respected as a teacher, mentor, and colleague. He was a man of exceptional vigor and principles. His personality, humor, and many interests are reflected in numerous other enjoyable anecdotes that make the rounds among his friends, colleagues, and students. They and the physics community will dearly miss him.

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Ronald Harry Ottewill

Ronald Harry Ottewill, who died from cancer on 4 June 2008 in Wickham, UK, was a colloid scientist with unusually broad vision and great energy. He played an important role in the development of soft condensed matter as a