

We are deeply saddened to announce the death of Vittorio Castellani, who passed away in the night of May 19 and 20, 2006. Vittorio was born in Palermo (Sicily) on March 13, 1937 and spent the first years of his life between Sicily and Liguria (near Genova, in the northwestern coastal area of Italy). The family moved to Rome when he was about 12. From then on, Vittorio spent most of his life in Rome. Despite the relocation of his Chair of Stellar Physics from the Roma La Sapienza University to the University of Pisa and the award of the directorship of the Teramo Observatory, Vittorio remained deeply attached to Rome.

Vittorio's scientific career in astrophysics began after he met Prof. Livio Gratton, who was just returning to Italy from Argentina. At that time, Vittorio had already taken his degree in physics working in particle physics at the INFN Laboratories in Frascati, where Prof. Gratton had established a "scientific coterie". Many young scientists from all over Italy and also from abroad visited Frascati for short or long periods to learn and work in modern astrophysics.

During those years, Vittorio met a number of colleagues with whom he would eventually venture into new research activities. Among the early collaborations, those with Alvio Renzini and Pietro Giannone were probably the strongest and longest lasting. This period marked the beginning of the Roman school of theoretical stellar evolution. Evolutionary time scales of various phases were about to be measured and compared with stellar counts in the same phases. Semiconvection during the horizontal branch evolutionary phase was detected and included in the computations. The result was that the He abundance in globular clusters turned out to be much closer to 0.20 than to the previously assumed number of 0.30. The lower value has now been confirmed to be correct. Other unresolved puzzles, such as stellar pulsation or mass loss in convective envelopes, received Vittorio's attention as well. Vittorio and his future collaborators subsequently addressed these issues in their later work. Over time, new challenges appeared for Vittorio, such as his directorship of the CNR Laboratorio di Astrofisica in Frascati in 1971.

The duty of heading institutions in Rome, Teramo and Pisa lasted until 1996. Fortunately, Vittorio's research activity in the field of stellar physics remained unbroken. His publications reveal the impact of his work all across the HR diagram. Among Vittorio's most cited publications are those on the evolutionary properties of very low, low, and intermediate-mass stars from the pre-main sequence to their final fate as white dwarfs. Vittorio's work emphasized the tight connection of stellar astrophysics with particle physics (solar standard models and solar neutrinos), with macrophysics (gravitational settling, stellar abundances), and with Galactic and extragalactic astronomy (UV upturn, synthetic colors of open and globular clusters' distance scale). He pursued these activities with both theoreticians and experimentalists within several national and international collaborations. Vittorio always provided new insights and an independent point of view.

Vittorio's life extended beyond astrophysics. In the seventies, Franco Pacini used to name Vittorio as a person with seven intellectual lives living all seven every day. Vittorio made substantial contributions in areas such as spelaeology, the search and exploration of subterranean Roman or medieval aqueducts, or the search and excavation of prehistoric

settlements in the Mediterranean area. The resulting scientific reports are considered professional-level in the archaeological academic community.

Above all, Vittorio will be most remembered for his teaching qualities. Like few or no one, Vittorio was able to speak to the students and to attract and fascinate them. His lectures were always packed with students, many coming from non-astronomical disciplines. Attendance always increased over the academic year. Many students became so fascinated with the subject that they pursued their own careers in astrophysical research.

Teaching, keeping directorships, mountain trekking, caves and Roman underground aqueducts, excavating archaic settlements, and many other activities never distracted Vittorio from pure astrophysical research. His main interests remained understanding the age and the chemical composition of Population II stars in the Galaxy, the intrinsic properties of evolving stars, and the properties of RR-Lyrae stars. The challenges were the “problem of the second parameter” in Galactic globular clusters, the alpha/iron abundance in Galactic halo stars, and the precision of the distance scale at low redshift. Vittorio authored some 200 refereed papers on these subjects from 1968 to 2006.

The loss of Vittorio left a deep vacuum in all of us. Vittorio will be missed not only by his friends and immediate colleagues but also by his many former students who often moved on to work in very different fields. Vittorio’s legacy, however, will live on: scientists from his school are carrying his torch all over Italy (mainly in Teramo, Pisa, Naples and, of course, in Rome) and in many other places around the world.