Sommario. È recentemente scomparso l’ing. Gianni Tofani, una figura di primo piano dell’Osservatorio Astrofisico di Arcetri, che ha dato un apporto fondamentale allo sviluppo della radioastronomia italiana. In questo contributo ne ripercorriamo brevemente l’esperienza professionale, senza dimenticare la sua profonda umanità.

Parole chiave. Gianni Tofani, Radioastronomia

Lo scorso febbraio è improvvisamente scomparso Gianni Tofani, una delle persone che più hanno contribuito allo sviluppo dell’Osservatorio Astrofisico di Arcetri. Difatti la sua vita professionale è stata indissolubilmente legata all’astronomia, nonostante la formazione come ingegnere elettronico. Fin dal suo primo contatto con l’Osservatorio all’inizio degli anni ’60, è risultato chiaro l’interesse di Gianni per la nascente radioastronomia solare in cui l’Osservatorio muoveva i primi passi; una materia questa nella quale le sue conoscenze di tipo tecnico trovavano un’applicazione al tempo stesso naturale ed intellettualmente stimolante. Entrato prima ad Arcetri come assistente universitario, poi nel CNR come ricercatore e nel Dipartimento di Astronomia dell’Università di Firenze come professore associato, ha infine concluso la sua carriera come astronomo ordinario presso l’Osservatorio.

Abstract. Prof. Gianni Tofani, a leading figure at the Arcetri Astrophysical Observatory, passed away a few months ago. Prof. Tofani played a fundamental role in the development of radioastronomy both in Florence and in Italy as a whole. This short essay seeks to highlight his main professional achievements.

Keywords. Gianni Tofani, radio astronomy

Gianni Tofani, one of the people who contributed most to the development of the Arcetri Astrophysical Observatory, passed away suddenly last February. Indeed, despite his education as an electronic engineer, Gianni’s professional life was inextricably bound up with astronomy. From his very first contact with the Arcetri Observatory at the beginning of the ’60s, he immediately displayed his interest in the emerging field of solar radio astronomy which the Observatory was just beginning to explore. It was a subject in which his technical knowledge
could be applied in a way that was at once natural and intellectually stimulating. Having first joined Arcetri as a university assistant, he went on to become a researcher in the CNR and then joined the Department of Astronomy of the University of Florence as an Associate Professor. Finally, he concluded his career as Senior Astronomer at the Observatory.

Over the years Gianni held positions of great responsibility, such as Director of the CAISMI (the body in charge of the management of the Italian infrared telescope, TIRGO) and, most recently, Director of the Institute of Radio Astronomy (Bologna). It would nevertheless be misleading to mention only the contribution made by Gianni to the management of astronomical activities, without mentioning his production of both a technological and scientific nature. This started with the development of the pioneering radio telescopes for the observation of solar activity, in the '60s, through his fundamental contribution to the creation of the VLBI antennae of the of Medicina and Noto and, more recently, of the Sardinia Radio Telescope (SRT). Gianni himself then used these instruments in his studies of spectroscopy in the radio wavelengths, and in particular to observe water maser emission. His numerous visits to radio observatories abroad should also be mentioned, such as the time spent at the Stanford Radio Telescope in California. Last but not least, we should recall his work as a lecturer on the radio astronomy course at the University of Florence.

In the scientific field his publications range from solar radio astronomy to the study of star formation in our galaxy, through both radio and infrared observations, with a special interest in the regions of ionised hydrogen associated with stars of types O and B. Gianni also con-

In campo scientifico le sue pubblicazioni spaziano dalla radioastronomia solare allo studio della formazione stellare nella nostra galassia, sia con osservazioni radio sia infrarosse, con un particolare interesse per le regioni di idrogeno ioniz-
Riccardo Cesaroni, Marcello Felli

tributed to opening up new strands of research, such as the study of maser emission in the star-forming regions of the galaxy, mentioned above, carried out through observations with both single-dish telescopes and interferometers. In addition to his personal research, Gianni also deserves the credit for having set up a research group working in the star formation field. Indeed a substantial part of the current research activity of the Arcetri Observatory has its roots in the work he performed over the course of his life.

However what we like most to remember about Gianni is his wonderful openness and affability, his ability to talk calmly to everybody with that deep voice and measured tone of his. Nor should we forget his profound culture, which was humanistic as well as scientific. Those who had the pleasure of knowing him will recall him as an assiduous professional and a true gentleman, whom it was a delight to spend time with even beyond professional commitments.

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Marcello Felli. Has been Ordinary Astronomer at the Astrophysical Observatory of Arcetri. Together with Gianni Tofani he has been active in the development of the Radioastronomy. He has studied the interstellar medium with particular reference to the molecular clouds and to the regions of ionized hydrogen, through the observation both in the in continuum and in the stellar lines.