

SPEAKER'S BIOGRAPHY

Giovanni F. Bignami (Italy)



Giovanni Fabrizio Bignami (born near Milan, 1944) contributed to the planning, design, realization or scientific exploitation of almost all the major space science missions in astronomy and high-energy astrophysics, starting with ESRO's TD-1(1972) after his degree in Beppo Occhialini's group (Milan, 1968) and continuing with ESA'S COS-B (1975).

Covering fields from physics to instrumentation to galactic and extragalactic astronomy, he has authored or co-authored more than three hundred professional papers, pioneering the search for new celestial objects using all astronomical channels, from the ground and from space. He has taken a specially active part in the current XMM/Newton mission, where he was P.I. from 1988 to 1998.

He has frequently concentrated on neutron stars and their physics, most recently proposing them as a celestial laboratory for new physics.

For his discovery of "Geminga" (a gamma-ray emitting neutron star) he was awarded, together with J. Halpern, the 1993 "Bruno Rossi" Prize of the American Astronomical Society.

A full professor of Astronomy at the University of Pavia, GFB is a member of the Accademia dei Lincei and of the Accademia Europaea, and for his scientific merits has been made "Officer de l'Ordre National du Merit" of France. The Royal Society and COSPAR gave to GFB the 2002 Massey Award, with J. Paul, for achievements in space science. In 2004 the Italian Ministry of Culture awarded to GFB its five-yearly Astronomy Prize.

From 1997 to 2002 GFB has served as Director of Science at the Italian Space Agency and has represented Italy at ESA's Science Policy Committee.

Currently, GFB is Director of the Centre d'Etude Spatiale des Rayonnements in Toulouse (France) and serves on CNES science advisory bodies. Since 2004 he chairs ESA's Space Science Advisory Committee.

GFB is a contributor to Nature and Science on a variety of topics, including history of science and scientists, from Galileo to Fermi. A strong believer in presenting science to a wide audience, he also contributes to Italian, French and US magazines and Encyclopaedias, and has participated to TV series (for

RAI and for ESA/Euronews). He has authored two space science documentaries, "Project 242" on the human exploration of Mars, and "Bravo! BeppoSAX" on the Italian Space Agency mission dedicated to his mentor, G. Occhialini. The first biography of this great Italian scientist was written by GFB for the Memoirs of the Royal Society.

His most recent book ("La storia nello spazio", Mursia, 2002) is now in press by O.Jacob, Paris. A keen student of languages, GFB has also published "Against the Donning of the Gown" (Unaluna, Milan, 2000). It is the first translation into English of a 301-line poem by Galileo Galilei, written circa 1590. The poetic version by GFB is written in iambic pentameters, bound in Galileo's original structure of Dantesque tercets.