

Obituary

## Professor Antonio Graniti, 1926-2019



Professor Antonio Graniti died in Rome, on 11 September 2019.

Antonio Graniti was born in Florence on 9 October 1926. In 1950 he graduated in Agricultural Sciences from the University of Florence, and in 1956 he obtained the Libera Docenza of Plant Pathology, allowing him to teach this discipline in the University. From 1951 to 1966 he worked as Assistente Incaricato of Plant Pathology at the Universities of Sassari and Catania, and then at the University of Bari. In 1967, at the age of 41, he became Chair Professor in Plant Pathology at the University of Bari.

Antonio Graniti was initially trained in mycology and plant pathology, focusing on plant disease problems in agricultural crops in the southern and island regions of Italy. In 1956 he studied in Zurich, Switzerland, with Prof. Ernst Gäumann, who was a leader in development of the toxigenic theory of plant diseases. This began Prof. Graniti's interest in phytotoxins. Under the guidance of his mentor Prof. Antonio Ciccarone, he began

to make significant contributions to the knowledge of diseases of olive, grapevine, citrus, almond, cereals and cypress, crops and plants that important in Mediterranean environments.

Prof. Graniti was a leader in the foundation of the Mediterranean Phytopathological Union (MPU) and the MPU journal *Phytopathologia Mediterranea*. He strongly supported the principles that established the MPU, and worked diligently to organize meetings and promote *Phytopathologia Mediterranea*. His work assisted in the establishment/success of the journal and personal interactive knowledge exchange for plant pathology in Mediterranean countries. From 1960 to 1981 he was on the Editorial Board of *Phytopathologia Mediterranea*, and from 1982 to 1992 he served as Co-Editor of the journal with Prof. Antonio Canova. For over 30 years, Prof. Graniti was, therefore, primarily responsible for production of *Phytopathologia Mediterranea*.

Prof. Graniti has held key roles in the University of Bari. He was Director of the Institute of Agricul-

tural Microbiology, the Institute of Plant Pathology, and the Department of Biology and Plant Pathology, and he became Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture. He was appointed to several academies, including the National Academy of Agriculture of Bologna, the Academy of Georgofili of Florence, the Academy of Physiocrats of Siena, the National Academy of Sciences (Academy of the XL) and the Lincei National Academy, the most prestigious Italian Academy. He was a member of the Advisory Committee for Agricultural Sciences of the National Research Council, Rome; a member of the Council of the International Society for Plant Pathology (ISPP), and the ISPP Task Force on Global Food Security. He served as Director of the Experimental Institute for Plant Pathology for the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, Rome. He was President and Past-President (1992-2002) of the MPU, and he helped with organization of numerous scientific conferences, in Italy and elsewhere. He was the Organizer and Scientific Director of two "Advanced Study Institute" events and an "Advanced Research Workshop" of the NATO's Scientific Division. Prof. Graniti visited many laboratories overseas, and developed an extensive international network of collaborators, colleagues and friends.

During the latter part of Prof. Graniti's career, his research contributions were on physiological aspects of plant diseases. His studies of phytotoxin production, chemistry, roles and mechanism of action were of international renown. His research on fusicoccin from *Fusicoccum amygdali* and on toxins from *Seiridium cardinale* (the cypress bark canker pathogen) were particularly important.

Prof. Graniti made a very significant organizational contribution during the 1960s, when he established the interdisciplinary and inter-institute research initiative on phytotoxins. This included plant pathologists in Bari, biochemists in Rome, organic chemists in Naples and plant physiologists in Milan. This group concentrated first on fusicoccin, and later on many other phytotoxins. This model of research collaboration has since been widely adopted in Italy and elsewhere.

Following retirement Prof. Graniti was appointed Emeritus Professor of Plant Pathology at the University of Bari, and he continued to follow the research of his former students and collaborators. As an Academician of the Lincei, he also returned to his initial passion of mycology. In the last years of his life, he undertook valuable historical investigations that have resulted in key publications. These include *Federico Cesi - a naturalist prince*, a tribute to the founder of the Lincei National Academy, and a book on Giuseppe de Notaris, one of the greatest Italian botanists of the nineteenth century.

Antonio Graniti was a reserved person, who fully respected the prerogatives of his colleagues and friends. He was never a dominating personality, but always present for every need of his students and collaborators. He was a highly cultured person, elegant in manner, witty with strong intellect, and ability to focus on the future of phytopathology. Faithful to the guidance of Antonio Ciccarone, who approached old age with dignity and a lively mind, Prof. Antonio Graniti pursued the nurturing and advancement of knowledge until his death. His leadership and contributions to plant pathology leave a profound legacy.

Giuseppe Surico