

## Obituary

**Beniamino Segre**

*Professor of Mathematics*

1903–1977



Beniamino Segre

Without doubt, Beniamino Segre was one of the most eminent mathematicians of this century. In a recent autobiography describing his scientific personality, he described himself as a “cultivator of algebraic geometry in the Italian trend.” Certainly the results he achieved in this field are of great importance in the history of modern geometry. In addition to the numerous papers he wrote in the above field, Segre’s eclecticism is shown by the deep results he obtained in many other areas such as algebra, analysis, combinatorics, differential geometry, number theory, and topology; moreover, he made important contributions to applied mathematics.

In the early 1950s Segre started a systematic study of  $k$ -arcs,  $k$ -caps, and  $k$ -sets in finite spaces (calling this new developing branch of mathematics “Galois geometry”). This pioneering work, founded on the interaction of combinatorial, algebraic, and geometric methods, stimulated interest in combinatorics within Italy.

Beniamino Segre was born in Turin (Italy) in 1903 and studied there under Professors G. Fano, G. Fubini, C. Somigliana, and C. Segre. Upon completion of his thesis (written under C. Segre) in 1923, he became assistant in Turin. In 1926, upon being offered simultaneously a teaching position at the University of Zurich and a Rockefeller scholarship, he chose the latter and spent a year in Paris working under E. Cartan. In 1927 he went to Rome as assistant to F. Severi and in 1931 became Professor of Geometry in Bologna, where he continued his very fruitful activity and was honored by various awards and citations. As a consequence of the racial persecution by the fascist government, he was dismissed from his professorship in 1938, but under the auspices of the “Society for the Protection of Science and Learning” he was able to go to England, where he stayed at the Universities of London, Cambridge, and Manchester. At the end of World War II, Segre returned to his chair in Bologna, remaining there until in 1950 he accepted the chair previously occupied by L. Cremona, G. Castelnuovo, and F. Enriques in Rome, where he stayed to the end of his life.

Beniamino Segre was a member of many Academies, was on the editorial boards of numerous journals, and was the recipient of many honors for his exceptional activity. His list of publications<sup>1</sup> includes 266 mathematics papers, 14 books, and over 60 other papers of historical and pedagogical interest (not to mention his numerous reviews); this gives a clear idea of his tremendous activity resulting from his love for science and his firm conviction that scientific progress leads to the improvement of mankind.

Since 1965, Segre was especially active in promoting the development of science in his capacity as President or Vice-President of the “Accademia dei Lincei”; among other things, he organized the “Centro Linceo Interdisciplinare di Scienze Matematiche e loro Applicazioni” which has proved most effective. Although these administrative activities were time consuming, Segre never allowed them to distract him from his own mathematical research or from his family circle.

ADRIANO BARLOTTI

<sup>1</sup> See *Boll. Un. Mat. Ital., Ser. A 15*, No. 5 (1978), 701–714 for a list of his publications.