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Liquid Crystals

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Obituary



Professor Dr. Dr. h. c. H. Sackmann

Horst Sackmann died suddenly on 2 November 1993 in Halle/S. The liquid crystal community lost one of its most important personalities. Born in Freiburg on 3 February 1921, H. Sackmann earned his Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry at the Martin-Luther-University Halle in 1950. After his habilitation he was promoted to associate professor in 1958 and became a full professor in 1963. From 1963 until his retirement in 1986 he was the head of the Institute of Physical Chemistry.

His early work dealt with the thermodynamics of mixed phases, especially of compounds composed of spherical molecules. In the late 1950s, H. Sackmann extended his interest to compounds of anisotropic (rod-like) shape and in this way he came to the field of liquid crystals which became the main topic of his scientific work.

Based on studies of miscibility, H. Sackmann and his co-workers founded the classification of thermotropic calamatic liquid crystals which later on was confirmed by structural investigations. Apart from some extensions and refinements, his miscibility rule and classification of polymorphic liquid crystalline phases are still employed up to the present. H. Sackmann made the Halle University into a centre of liquid crystal research, continuing the long tradition in this field started by Vorländer's pioneering work since 1900. Based on successful synthetic work in the Institute of Organic Chemistry headed by H. Schubert, H. Sackmann and his co-workers, primarily Professor D. Demus, made important contributions to the relations between molecular structure, phase structure and physical properties, and also their relevance to practical applications. In the late 1970s, H. Sackmann became increasingly interested in biologically relevant systems such as lyotropic liquid crystals or biological membranes.

Sackmann's scientific work was recognized in different ways. Since 1965 he had been a member of the 'German Academy of Natural Science Leopoldina' which played an important role in the scientific exchange between East and West; in 1973, H. Sackmann became the vice-president of this Academy. In the same year he was awarded the National prize for Science and Technique. In 1974, he became a

corresponding member of the Austrian Academy of Science. For his lifework he was honoured with the Bunsen Medal of the Bunsen Society of Physical Chemistry in 1991.

It should be emphasized that H. Sackmann was also an extraordinarily dedicated teacher and a brilliant speaker who was able to inspire and to fascinate students, co-workers or an audience of people. He was a unique, warm-hearted person with a fine sense of humour and with wide intellectual interests, for example, in the arts, literature and history (including the history of science). Discussions with him were always stimulating and enriching.

Horst Sackmann is deeply missed by all who had the privilege of knowing him.

GERHARD PELZL