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Foreword

The XVI Annual Meeting of the Italian Astronomical Society took place in Padova from April 10 to 13, 2002. It was devoted to an examination of the main projects carried out in the framework of the National funding by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR), in the period from 1999 to 2001. These projects were proposed by large consortia of Italian researchers, often with important international collaborations, and the selection procedure involved a lengthy and severe scrutiny by a number of referees.

Therefore the Scientific Committee of the Meeting felt that a fairly complete overview of the Italian Astronomy and of its role in the international scenario could be achieved. In retrospect, this goal has been amply reached, as shown by the present book, which contains a good fraction of what was actually presented.

A second aim was to give visibility to the younger researchers, granting them some time for oral presentation in front of the community. This novel structure of the presentation, namely a short introduction by the Principal investigator, followed by several sections assigned to PhD students or young collaborators, was both very lively and entertaining. For sure, the older professionals had the rare occasion to listen to a number of enthusiast young astronomers-to-be, quite often of excellent quality, and all motivated to research.

The oral presentations were accompanied by a high number of poster papers containing details of the larger programs, or suggestions for future projects.

The scientific sessions were opened by an invited talk of Prof. F. Paresce, who illustrated the status of the ESO VLTI ambitious program; certainly a timely conference, given the still scarce contribution of the Italian researchers, that from Paresces presentation were certainly stimulated to take a more active role in it.

Italy is living a time of profound reforms of the University and of the Research structure; to underline these changes, that will affect also Astronomy, two round tables were organized. The first one discussed the content of the changes of the traditional 4 year 'laurea' in a structure of 3 + 2 years, and of its interaction with the reform of the high school system. From the Ministry side, contributions were brought by Drs. S. Perugini Cigni and B. Dibilio, from the University of Padova by the Dean of the Faculty of Sciences Prof. F. Sassi, from the National Council for University by Prof. V. DeZanche, and by the two chairmen of the present Courses in Astronomy in Padova and in Bologna, Profs. B. Marano and G. Barbaro. The second one, presided by Prof. G. Setti, discussed the role and functions of the new Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica (INAF), which has absorbed the previous individual Astronomical Observatory in a unique structure.

The meeting took place the first day in the Aula Magna of the University. The following sessions took place in the Sala Barbarigo of the Archdiocese of Padova. I wish to thank the Rector of the University, Prof. G. Marchesini, for his hospitality and generous contribution toward the good success of the conference, and the Bishop Mons. A. Mattiazzo for the rare privilege of entering the Sala Barbarigo and the adjacent Museum. Im sure that all participants were delighted to admire the beauties of those places.

The public lecture of the conference was given Prof. F. Bertola. The fascinating subject, namely the impact of the Milky Way on different cultures over the centuries, was vividly illustrated with drawings, engraving, paintings coming from an exhaustive search carried out by Prof. Bertola on many original documents. In particular, the discovery on the series of astrological frescoes on the walls of the Palazzo della Ragione in Padova of a still unknown idealisation of the Galaxy struck the numerous audience[1]

A warm expression of thanks to the Directors of the Department of Astronomy Prof. P. Rafanelli and of the Astronomical Observatory Prof. M. Calvani, and to the Chairman of the Local Organizing Committee Prof. G. Galletta.

The Proceedings of the Conference would have never been completed if not for the endurance of Dr. E.M. Corsini, who chased many of the contributors.

C. Barbieri

Padova, February 2003

[1] Recently, this lecture has been published as a paper in the Giornale di Astronomia of the Italian Astronomical Society (2002, vol. 28, n. 4, p. 3 and 2003, vol. 29, n. 1, p. 7).