FOREWORD

Star clusters and young stellar associations provide ideal samples to study the evolution of rotation, magnetic activity, circumstellar matter, and elemental abundances during the lifetime of stars, and hence to study physical processes such as accretion disks, convection, dynamo action, mass loss and winds. By studying both open clusters and star forming regions, one can follow the evolution of stars from the early phases of star formation, to pre-main-sequence contraction, and to the evolution of stars on the main sequence. There is a growing interest all over the world for studies of magnetic activity and age dependent phenomena in clusters and associations. This interest is expected to become even larger in the next few years with the many opportunities offered by new optical, IR, X-ray and radio facilities, including the ESO Very Large Telescope and the ESA and NASA X-ray observatories XMM and AXAF.

With this motivations in mind, and with the specific purpose of promoting fruitful collaborations between the various groups active in the field, we held a small workshop on "Star Clusters and Associations: Magnetic Activity and Age Indicators" in Palermo on May 20-23, 1997. The Workshop, hosted by the Osservatorio Astronomico di Palermo "Giuseppe S. Vaiana" and by the Institute of Astronomy of the University of Palermo, was attended by about sixty researchers coming from Europe, the US and Japan. This was the first scientific meeting after many decades to take place in the historical building, on top of the Norman tower of Palazzo dei Normanni, where Giuseppe Piazzi first established the Palermo Observatory in 1790 and where he carried out his researches in positional astronomy leading to the discovery of the first asteroid, Ceres, in the night of January 1st, 1801.

The Scientific Committee, co-chaired by Roberto Pallavicini and Salvatore Sciortino, included K. Koyama (Japan), T. Montmerle (France), J. Pye (UK), R. Rebolo (Spain), J. Schmitt (Germany), D. Soderblom (USA), J. Stauffer (USA) and R. Stern (USA). The Local Organizing Committee was chaired by Giusi Micela and included F. Damiani, G. Foderà Serio, A. Maggio, G. Peres and D. Randazzo. We are grateful to the members of the SOC for setting up an exciting scientific program and for suggesting topics and invited speakers. We are grateful to the members of the LOC for taking care of all organizational details and providing a pleasent and enjoyable atmosphere throughtout the meeting. We thank the Director of the Observatory and of the Institute of Astronomy (Prof. Salvatore Serio) for supporting the Workshop both financially and with personnel and facilities. We cannot mention all the people in the Observatory staff who contributed to the smooth running of the meeting, but we would like to mention at least Roberto Candia, Giuseppe Inzerillo, Giovanni Liggio, Filippo Mirabello and Giuseppe Vitale.

Financial support came from a number of sources, in addition to the registration fees. The primary supporting organization was the Palermo Astronomical Observatory, with additional support from Luxel Corporation, Assemblea Regionale Siciliana, Presidenza della Regione Sicilia and Università degli Studi di Palermo. The social program included a visit to the ruins of the Phoenician town of Mozia on a small island just outside the western coast of Sicily, guided by the archeologyst Prof. Sebastiano Tusa, and a lively closing dinner in an old mill, in the salt marshes of Trapani.

An important outcome of the Palermo Workshop was the decision to organize over the years 1998-2000, a series of three Euroconferences, sponsored by the European Union and coordinated by the Osservatorio Astronomico di Palermo. The three conferences (that we dubbed "The Three-Islands Euroconference") will be devoted to "Galactic Open Clusters and Young Stellar Associations: Formation, Evolution, and Magnetic Activity in Low-mass Stars". They will take place in La Palma (1998), Palermo (1999) and Corse (2000) under the scientific responsibility of, respectively, Rafael Rebolo, Roberto Pallavicini and Thierry Montmerle.

We look forward to meeting many attendees of the Palermo Workshop at one, and possibly all, of these coming Euroconferences on low-mass stars in clusters.

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