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# Origins: From the Protosun to the First Steps of Life

*Edited by*

Bruce G. Elmegreen

L. Viktor Tóth

Manuel Güdel

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ORIGINS:  
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*COVER ILLUSTRATION:*

View of the Earth and Moon from the Galileo spacecraft, 6.2 million kilometers away, on its way to Jupiter in 1992 (credit: NASA). The Earth, filled with water, air, and abundant life, shines brilliantly in stark contrast to its nearest neighbor.

Carl Sagan and collaborators used measurements from this spacecraft as it flew by the Earth to see if they could detect evidence for intelligent life.

(C. Sagan, W. R. Thompson, R. Carlson, D. Gurnett, and C. Hord 1993, “A search for life on Earth from the Galileo spacecraft,” *Nature*, Volume 365, Issue 6448, pp. 715-721)

“There are countless suns and countless earths all rotating round their suns in exactly the same way as the seven planets of our system. We see only the suns because they are the largest bodies and are luminous, but their planets remain invisible to us because they are smaller and non-luminous. The countless worlds in the universe are no worse and no less inhabited than our earth. For it is utterly unreasonable to suppose that those teeming worlds which are as magnificent as our own, perhaps more so, and which enjoy the fructifying rays of a sun just as we do, should be uninhabited and should not bear similar or even more perfect inhabitants than our earth. The unnumbered worlds in the universe are all similar in form and rank and subject to the same forces and the same laws.” - Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), as quoted in *The Discovery of Nature* (1965), by Albert W. Bettex, London, Thames and Hudson Publishers.

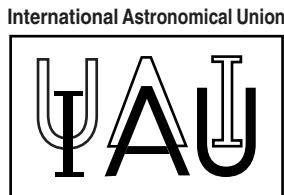
One of the questions addressed in this symposium is whether the “countless earths” envisioned by Giordano Bruno have any “inhabitants” at all. This question seems much more complex than anyone could have imagined.

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*Chief Editor*  
PIERO BENVENUTI, IAU General Secretary  
*IAU-UAI Secretariat*  
*98-bis Blvd Arago*  
*F-75014 Paris*  
*France*  
*[iau-general.secretary@iap.fr](mailto:iau-general.secretary@iap.fr)*

*Editor*  
MARIA TERESA LAGO, IAU Assistant General Secretary  
*Universidade do Porto*  
*Centro de Astrofísica*  
*Rua das Estrelas*  
*4150-762 Porto*  
*Portugal*  
*[mtlago@astro.up.pt](mailto:mtlago@astro.up.pt)*

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# ORIGINS: FROM THE PROTOSUN TO THE FIRST STEPS OF LIFE

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Edited by

**BRUCE G. ELMEGREEN**  
*IBM T.J. Watson Research Center, USA*

**L. VIKTOR TÓTH**  
*Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, Hungary*

and

**MANUEL GÜDEL**  
*University of Vienna, Austria*



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## Preface

Understanding the origin of the Sun, the Earth and how life began on Earth are some of the most challenging and interesting problems facing the science community today. With the goal of addressing many of the complex processes involved, the Scientific Organizing Committee put together this Symposium 345 at the General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union in Vienna, Austria. The meeting, held on 20-24 August 2018, had 10 invited talks, 37 contributed talks, and 151 posters, with 190 registered attendants from 34 countries. The General Assembly also included a Plenary talk on this topic by one of us (MG) and a summary of highlights from the Symposium by a second (LVT) at Division H Days.

The symposium spanned many disciplines in astronomy, planetary science, and astrobiology, following the chain of events that could have been involved in the formation of the Earth and the earliest life forms. Many steps in this process have been inferred from detailed observations and computer models. Stars form in dense interstellar clouds and are usually clustered together. The environment of the early Sun should have been affected by that clustering, as suggested by the isotopic composition of meteorites. Protoplanetary disks that may form Earth-size planets have been studied at high resolution in infrared and radio wavelengths. These observations reveal the chemistry and dust content of the disks, and possible interactions with the growing planets.

While there are no direct observations yet of Earth-size protoplanets, there is evidence for fully-formed Earth-size planets around other stars, and there are clues to the formation process of the Earth itself from within our Solar System. New models, complemented by observations of exoplanets and solar-system planets, have revealed an important role for the host star's energy output for processing and eroding planetary atmospheres. The conditions for habitability are more difficult to observe and model. How these conditions arose and the nature of the first organisms are topics of intense study.

An accompanying summer school, “Basics of Astrobiology,” was held at the University of Vienna on the two days prior to the General Assembly, 17-18 August 2018. There were approximately 100 attendees and 11 speakers. The talks are on [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com).

– Bruce G. Elmegreen, L. Viktor Tóth, Manuel Güdel, co-chairs SOC, March 2019

## Editors

Bruce G. Elmegreen  
 IBM T.J. Watson Research Center, USA

L. Viktor Tóth  
 Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

Manuel Güdel  
 University of Vienna, Austria

## Scientific Organising Committee

### *SOC Co-Chairs*

Bruce G. Elmegreen	(IBM T. J. Watson Research Center, USA)
Manuel Güdel	(University of Vienna, Austria)
L. Viktor Tóth	(Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary)

### **SOC Members**

Yuri Aikawa	(University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan)
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Lucyna Kedziora-Chudczer	(University of New South Wales, Australia)
Susana Lizano	(UNAM Morelia, Mexico)
Morris Podolak	(University of Tel Aviv, Israel)
Monica Rubio	(University of Chile, Santiago, Chile)

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## Participants

Abraham, Peter	Etoh, Yuki
Abrevaya, Ximena C.	Federrath, Christoph
Ackerl, Christine	Fehér, Orsolya
Aikawa, Yuri	Flock, Mario
Airapetian, Vladimir	Fraser, Helen Jane
Akimkin, Vitaly	Freire da Silva, Danielly
Alfaro, Emilio J.	Fujimoto, Yusuke
Alvarado Gomez, Julian David	Garai, Zoltán
Alves, Joao	Gerják, Tímea
Anglada, Guillem	Gregorio-Hetem, Jane
Apai, Daniel	Großschedl, Josefa Elisabeth
Artur de la Villarmois, Elizabeth	Güdel, Manuel
Arulanantham, Nicole	Guenther, Eike
Audard, Marc	Guinan, Edward
Bagrov, Alexander V.	Hacar, Alvaro
Bai, Xuening	Handa, Toshihiro
Berdyugina, Svetlana	Hasenberger, Birgit
Bergin, Edwin	Herbst-Kiss, Gabor
Bertone, Emanuele	Hernández-Reséndiz, Patricia
Bertrang, Gesa H.-M.	Hetem, Annibal
Bisikalo, Dmitry	Higuchi, Aya
Bjerkeli, Per	Hojaev, Alisher S.
Bochkarev, Nikolai	Ipatov, Sergei
Bogner, Rebeka	Iro, Nicolas
Boro Saikia, Sudeshna	Ismayilov, Nariman
Bosman, Arthur	Jatenco-Pereira, Vera
Breuer, Doris	Jensen, Sigurd
Broz, Miroslav	JI, Jianghui
Burger, Christoph	Johnstone, Colin
Calcutt, Hannah	Jorgensen, Jes Kristian
Chaparro, Germán	Juvela, Mika
Chen, Lei	Kadam, Kundan
Chen, Tao	Kalas, Paul
Chouqar, Jamila	Kamp, Inga
Chrenko, Ondrej	Kedziora-Chudczer, Lucyna
Corazza, Lia	Khaibakhmanov, Sergey
Cruz-Saenz de Miera, Fernando	Khodachenko, Maxim
Császár, Anna	Kislyakova, Kristina
Cunningham, Maria	Kley, Wilhelm
Cuntz, Manfred	Koch, Patrick
de Leon, Jerome	Kokubo, Eiichiro
Demidova, Tatiana	Kolomiyets, Svitlana
Dermott, Stanley	Kospal, Agnes
Dionatos, Odysseas	Kouwenhoven, M.B.N. Thijs
Dorfi, Ernst	Kreplin, Alexander
Drake, Jeremy	Kristensen, Lars
Drozdovskaya, Maria	Krizek, Michal
Dudorov, Alexander	Kruijssen, Diederik
Dwarkadas, Vikram	Kuffmeier, Michael
Dwivedi, Navin Kumar	Kumssa, Gemechu
Dzyurkevich, Natalia	Lai, Dong
Ehlerová, Sona	Lammer, Helmut
Elbakyan, Vardan	Larreina, Irati
Elmegreen, Bruce	Leitzinger, Martin
Endo, Izumi	Li, Di

Li, Ji	Rudnitskij, Georgij
Li, Yaping	Salinas, Vachail
Linsky, Jeffrey	Sargent, Benjamin
Longmore, Steven	Sarid, Gal
Lftinger, Theresa	Scherf, Manuel
Makalkin, Andrei	Schlecker, Martin
Malhotra, Satish	Shan, Yutong
Mamajek, Eric	Shematovich, Valery
Manigand, Sébastien	Shevchenko, Ivan
Marov, Mikhail	Skulskyy, Mykhaylo
Maury, Anaëlle	Slyusarev, Ivan
McIntyre, Sarah	Stapelfeldt, Karl
Meingast, Stefan	Starchenko, Sergey
Melnik, Anna	Stephens, Ian
Mikolaitis, Šarunas	Szakats, Robert
Minamoto, Harumi	Tang, Ya-Wen
Molyarova, Tamara	Taubner, Ruth-Sophie
Monfredini, Thiago	Tautvaišiene, Grazina
Moor, Attila	Tomida, Kengo
Mugrauer, Markus	Toth, L. Viktor
Murase, Takeru	Tsinganos, Kanaris
Nandi, Dibyendu	UEDA, Takahiro
Nemec, Nina-Elisabeth	Valio, Adriana
Nguyen-Luong, Quang	van den Ancker, Mario
Nomura, Hideko	Varga, Jozsef
Notsu, Shota	Varga-Verebelyi, Erika
Osorio, Mayra	Vida, Krisztin
Oya, Yoko	Vorobyov, Eduard
Pacheco, Eduardo	Wandel, Amri
Palous, Jan	Wei, Chen-En
Perez, Laura	White, Jacob
Perotti, Giulia	Wolk, Scott
Pignatale, Francesco	Yang, Yao-Lun
Pilat-Lohinger, Elke	Yoshida, Kento
Postel, Andreas	Young, Edward
Pross, Addy	Zahorecz, Sarolta
Pye, John	Zeng, Shaoshan
Rab, Christian	Zhang, Man Ping
Ragulskaya, Mariya	Zinnecker, Hans
Riaz, Basmah	Zsidi, Gabriella
Rice, Thomas	