

PREFACE

The first ideas for the symposium were generated at exquisite outdoor lunches on Bali during the Wolf-Rayet IAU Symposium No. 143. At the time it was felt that in a subsequent IAU symposium on WR stars, binary aspects should receive more attention, notably after the growing recognition that many observations of spectral and photometric variability at all accessible wavelengths have something to do with colliding winds or other forms of wind interaction.

Tradition prescribes that IAU symposia on hot massive stars take place in high luminosity beach resorts, and after Buenos Aires, Qualicum Beach, Cozumel, Porto Heli and Bali, Elba sounded like a reasonable place. Therefore we were only too pleased with the suggestion of Francesca Matteucci and the invitation of Federico Ferrini, of the Elba International Physics Center and the University of Pisa, to host the symposium in La Biodola (Elba), Italy. This meeting is part of an extended programme of events marking the 650th anniversary of the University of Pisa.

A candidate Scientific Organizing Committee was invited in late 1991, and following approval by the IAU Executive Committee in May 1993, quorums of the SOC met at various occasions, lately during the Brussels colloquium on Evolution of Massive Stars, August 1993. Such gatherings and extensive e-mail communication subsequently established the program for the symposium. The basic structure agreed upon was: basic parameters and general properties of WR stars; state of the art model atmospheres for WR stars; anisotropic mass loss and disk formation of WR stars; properties of WR binaries; influence of stellar winds on mass transfer in hot massive binary evolution; dust formation near WC stars and other circumstellar phenomena; and hydrodynamics and high-energy physics of colliding winds in WR+O binaries and of WR winds interacting with compact objects. In the spirit of IAU Symposia, we sought to leaven the hot massive star community with expertise from other fields, such as novae and dust chemistry, and feature results from the latest missions, such as *ROSAT* and *ASCA*. Within this framework 20 invited reviews, 38 invited oral contributions, and 76 poster papers were presented at the symposium, entertaining 111 astronomers from 24 countries.

The Local Organizing Committee under the expert guidance of Federico Ferrini and Antonella Sapere did an excellent job, not only in hosting us at an extremely efficient and pleasant venue, but also in distributing the financial support from the IAU, the ISF, and some local sponsors.

Thanks to the cooperation of the authors, most manuscripts arrived in time and in reasonable shape, thus alleviating the task of the editors. The discussion administration was in the able hands of Daniella Villani of Pisa

University. Decipherment of discussion forms was skilfully performed by Dorothy Skedd of the Royal Observatories, Edinburgh.

Four years ago we departed from Bali, and have been wandering about on the high seas of thought in the ship of science to make landfall on Elba, to refuel and for fresh supplies, or in other words, for a week of exchange and stimulation. And while the waves of the Mediterranean Sea were crashing constantly on the beach of La Biodola Bay, waves of information from new observations and refined theories came crashing continuously onto the participants. Did we get it all straight? Perhaps not the tower of Pisa, but many directions for future research have been straightened out to various degrees, and we all will have found motivation and incentives to carry on.

Certainly, some years from now we shall land on another fertile beach, to discuss Wolf-Rayet stars from new aspect angles. A possible topic with broad interest could be 'Massive stars in starbursts' but Wolf-Rayet stars impinge on so many areas of astronomy that other topics will compete. But how can we live up to the expectations of the Executive Committee of the IAU? Where to convene after Elba? Waterloo has no beach and St. Helena limited gastronomic resources. Still, we have years and lots of work ahead to find our bearings. May these proceedings be a compass to guide us in the ocean of research on massive stars in general and on Wolf-Rayet stars in particular, till the next Wolf-Rayet symposium looms at the horizon.

Karel A. van der Hucht & Peredur M. Williams