

Preface

Astronomy is a scientific discipline that has developed a rapid and impressive growth in Spain. Thirty years ago, Spain occupied a purely anecdotal presence in the international context, but today it occupies the eighth position in the world in publication of astronomical articles, and, among other successes, owns and operates ninety per cent of the world's largest optical telescope GTC (*Gran Telescopio Canarias*).

The Eighth Scientific Meeting of the Spanish Astronomical Society (*Sociedad Española de Astronomía*, SEA), held in Santander in July 7–11 2008, whose proceedings are in your hands, clearly shows the enthusiasm, motivation and quality of the present Spanish astronomical community. The event brought together 322 participants, who represent almost 50% of Spanish professional astronomers. This percentage, together with the continuously increasing, with respect to previous SEA meetings, number of oral presentations and poster contributions (179 and 127 respectively), confirms that the SEA conferences have become a point of reference to assess the interests and achievements of astrophysical research in Spain.

The most important and current topics of modern Astrophysics were taken into account at the preliminary meeting, as well as the number and quality of participants and their contributions, to select the invited speakers and oral contributors. We took a week to enjoy the high quality contributions submitted by Spanish astronomers to the Scientific Organizing Committee. The selection was difficult. We wish to acknowledge the gentle advice and commitment of the SOC members.

The contents of these Proceedings reflect the broad interests of the Spanish astronomical community, but we want to emphasize two important aspects. In the first place, although only 15 years ago our community played a passive role using the observing facilities provided by other countries, in the last few years we have witnessed a spectacular increase in the active participation of the community in handling instruments and in the creation of groups in our research centers, mainly propelled by the GTC enterprise and other international projects. For example, in the first volume of *Highlights of Spanish Astrophysics* of only ten years ago, 15% of the contributions were about instruments. In this volume, the contributions in the Observatories (real and virtual) and Instrumentation category constitute 30% of the total number. Secondly, in this meeting, for the first time, parallel sessions devoted to *Teaching and Outreach of Astronomy* were organized. The success of

these sessions, with a high number of participants, reflects the involvement of our community in the celebration of the International Year of Astronomy 2009 and our commitment to return to the society the knowledge that we are gathering.

Welcoming friends at home is always a pleasure. But welcoming about half of the Spanish astronomical community in Santander was, in addition, a challenge. Preparations for this big event, the largest ever organized in Astronomy by the community at the Instituto de Física de Cantabria (CSIC-UC) and at the University of Cantabria, took about a year and a half. For the Local Organizing Committee, the event was a success, and we believe that it was also perceived as such by the Spanish astronomers who visited Santander. A number of activities were organized in connection with the meeting, devoted mostly to enhance the link of Astronomy with society. That included public talks, school contests, industry displays and articles and interviews in newspapers, among other activities. We also believe this extra component of the meeting, not recorded in this book, was worth the effort that we invested in it. Publishing the proceedings of the meeting is the last part of the activities of the LOC, so this formally closes their contribution to this series. We are now eagerly waiting to help our colleagues in and around Madrid to organize the next one in 2010.

This meeting was possible thanks to the financial support of governmental institutions, universities, research centers and private Spanish companies. The Society is indebted to the host institutions (the Instituto de Física de Cantabria and the University of Cantabria), and to the wonderful and friendly city of Santander, and its city council, for making us feel at home. It was a wonderful experience.

José Miguel Rodríguez Espinosa - SEA President
Emilio J. Alfaro - Chairman of the SOC
Xavier Barcons - Chairman of the LOC

José M. Diego
Luis J. Goicoechea
José Ignacio González Serrano
Javier Gorgas
Editors



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Diego, J.M.; Goicoechea, L.; González-Serrano, J.I.;

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