

*"The great obstacle to progress is not ignorance, but the illusion of knowledge."*  
D. Boorstein, as quoted by Y. Terzian during this symposium.

## PREFACE

Planetary Nebulae constitute a field in astronomical research that deals with one of the last stages in the existence of stars of intermediate and low mass, stars that do not develop into supernovae. The study of planetary nebulae has proven to be essential for our increasing knowledge of the late stages in the life of a star. Its importance for obtaining insight in the history of older stellar populations in other galaxies is becoming more and more clear. In words of Lawrence Aller: "Planetary nebulae, once regarded only as useful objects for visitor nights and for testing physical theories of atomic processes, have emerged as windows for the study of the last days of ordinary stars, as probes for nucleosynthesis processes, and as yardsticks for measuring the nearby universe."

The spectacular advances in recent years makes it very worthwhile to maintain the tradition of international meetings every five years to discuss these fascinating objects. The invitation of the University of Groningen to hold the 1996 symposium there gave us an excellent opportunity to honour Stuart R. Pottasch, Professor at the University of Groningen, for his passion for and his achievements in the study of planetary nebulae over the last twenty years.

The symposium was organized by the International Astronomical Union, through commission 34 (Interstellar Matter), 35 (Stellar Constitution) and 36 (Theory of Stellar Atmospheres). It is a pleasure to acknowledge the support of the Executive Committee of the IAU for the realization of this meeting; in particular the support by the Assistant General Secretary, Johannes Andersen. We also acknowledge the enthusiastic endorsement provided by the presidents of IAU Commissions 34, 35, and 36: D.R. Flower, C.S. Chiosi and L.E. Cram. The conference would not have been possible without the generous support of the Kapteyn Astronomical Institute, and of other sponsors: the Royal Academy of Sciences (KNAW), the Foundation for Space Research in the Netherlands (SRON), the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics Sciences of the University of Groningen, the Board of the University, and Kluwer Publishers. We thank our local volunteers, the secretariat of the Kapteyn Laboratorium, Jacky Zwegers and Gineke Alberts. Olaf Kolkman designed the conference logo.

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M. Peimbert, P. Wesselius, H.J.Habing, H.J.G.M.L. Lamers  
Mexico City, Groningen, Leiden, Utrecht