

Introduction

The scientific meeting for which the Proceedings are published in this volume 28 of Bocconea was not organized by mere chance. It was designed as an appropriate way to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Professor Werner Greuter, tireless protagonist of OPTIMA and key figure in Mediterranean, European and, by certain of his skills, indeed world botany. The suitable opportunity of organizing the meeting, some months later than the actual date of the birthday (intervened on 27 February 2018), came about in Palermo, at OPTIMA's operational headquarters, seat of its Presidency and Secretariat. It is generally known that Professor Greuter, at the end of his long scientific activity and demanding administrative leadership in prestigious European research institutions in Geneva, Athens and Berlin, even before his academic commitment in Germany came to an end, elected Palermo in Sicily as his permanent residence, considering it as the capital city of Mediterranean botany. He indeed transferred to Sicily his whole, sizeable scientific heritage, formed of his books and plant collections, with a view to help implementing the OPTIMA-sponsored project of a large international herbarium, to be built in the Sicilian capital and devoted to the botanical study of the Mediterranean countries. During seven terms of mandate as secretary or president of OPTIMA, he remained in the lead of this organization, that he himself had founded in 1974 together with Vernon H. Heywood (Reading), Hans Rhunemark (Lund), and Guido Moggi (Florence), for the initial four decades of its existence, spending his best energies to give the scientific community interested in the phytotaxonomic investigation of the Mediterranean area the much-needed common platform for communication and the basic cognitive tools. Strong also of his previous experience of research on the flora of Crete, and of Greece in general, he always had a predilection for the flora of the Mediterranean biogeographic region and devoted to it much of his greatest commitment, summarized in the substantial and complex work "Med-Checklist", to the conclusion of which only the two final volumes are missing.

It seemed therefore dutiful to us to seize the fortunate opportunity of his anniversary to assemble the scientific community connected with OPTIMA around the charismatic figure of Werner Greuter. For that event we chose the archaeological site of Selinunte, the ancient Selinus, one of the most extensive Hellenistic monuments extant in Sicily; and, most appropriate for that scenery and the event itself, we chose for its general theme: "Botany at the intersection of Nature, Culture, Art and Science".

The idea of organizing a symposium dedicated to exploring the connecting links between nature, culture, art and science – meaning, botany – around the Mediterranean could find no better stage than the spectacular, mythical archaeological area of Selinunte.

Enrico Caruso, Director of the Selinunte and Cave di Cusa Archaeological Park, readily declared himself available as supporter of the idea. We were privileged to receive the moral and financial support of the esteemed Regional Councilor, professor Sebastiano Tusa, whose premature, tragic death we sadly deplore and who remains present in our memory for his great competence, culture and uncommon generosity.

The two-day Symposium was also sponsored by the Section of Botany and Plant Ecology of the STEBICEF Department of the University of Palermo and received substantial support from the Selinunte and Cave di Cusa Archaeological Park, the International Foundation Pro Herbario Mediterraneo, and the Foundation Herbarium Greuter. The scientific programme comprised four sessions with invited speakers, plus a poster session. About one hundred scholars from many countries, young and old, were in attendance, including the authors of reports, lectures, and posters.

Some of the papers assembled in this proceedings volume have been published in advance in *Flora Mediterranea*, volumes 28 (2018) and 29 (2019). Also included here are texts contributed, as a testimony of esteem, by some of professor Greuter's friends who were unable to be present at the meeting.

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President of OPTIMA