

The 1999 International Meteor Conference

Frasso Sabino, Italy, September 23–26, 1999

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The *IMC* started on September 23, as usual on a Thursday evening. That day during the late afternoon, after having arrived from Rome where I spent a couple of days with some friends, I was drinking a beer in front of Hotel Persi and enjoying the wonderfully warm evening sun, casting its golden glow over a rolling landscape amidst the Sabine Mountains, while familiar faces started to arrive—and a few new ones, too. Enthusiasm and disappointment alternated when the list of participants, and absentees, started to get more concrete. I felt the mixed expectation of familiarity and new confrontations, a feeling that is known and appreciated by seasoned *IMC* participants.

Frasso Sabino is a village in the Sabine Mountains, which are part of the Apennines, a mountain chain running north-south over almost the entire length of the Italian peninsula. The town is located about 50 km from Rome, in the Province of Rieti, near the Via Salaria, an originally Roman road which cuts from west to east through the Apennines and links the Capital to the Adriatic Sea. Hotel Persi is situated right on the Via Salaria.

At 7 p.m., we were brought to the lecture room, which was at about one kilometer from the hotel. The lecture room was part of a building called "Grotta dei Massacci." This partly renovated structure used to be a 17th-century country palace built on top of the ruins of a Roman tomb of the 2nd century BC. From the lecture rooms, the colossal stones of these ruins were clearly visible through glass panels in the floor and doors. This, and two other Roman tombs within a few hundred meters from the conference location, made us impressively aware of the rich history of the region. At the "Grotta dei Massacci," we were welcomed by the organizing team, and the *IMC* was officially opened by Marc Gyssens on behalf of the *IMO* Council. Several Council members who usually attend *IMCs*, among them President Jürgen Rendtel, could not make it to the *IMC* this time. The opening was followed by the evening meal back at the hotel, and of course some drinking and chatting in the bar, as would be the case every night.

As always, the meals and the bar were the best places to socialize. This was especially true for the meals this year, with excellent food and wine à volonté. Concerning the bar, this *IMC* saw a new phenomenon: closure at 1 o'clock due to the setting of the hotel alarm. While this looked very unpleasant at first—nobody likes to break off interesting and pleasant conversations with people you cannot meet often, it brought more people to the morning lectures, and few people have turned into "zombies" during the conference.

On Friday, the first morning session saw a series of shower analysis presentations: preliminary results of the 1999 Perseids by Rainer Arlt, two lectures on possible new showers, and two on the Taurids.

The next session had another presentation on a candidate minor shower, but essentially addressed more technical means of observing meteors: meteor spectroscopy and video observations. A highlight here was certainly the lecture by Sirko Molau, in which he presented a fully automated video system that yields lists of observed and processed meteors as output! I can remember how, only 6 years ago, at the *IMC* in Puimichel, France, in 1993, he proudly showed us the first meteors he had been able to capture on video tape...

In the afternoon, professional meteor worker Vladimir Smirnov from Odessa, Ukraine, spoke about peculiarities of meteor radiation, which seemed to shed some light on why meteors are recorded so well by red-sensitive video cameras. Before and into the coffee break, there was a poster session which initiated a flourishing pool of avid discussions. I mainly talked to Juan Martin Semegone from Buenos Aires, Argentina, who is heavily involved in the building of a radio meteor receiver, a subject I am especially interested in.

It was no surprise to see a series of lectures dedicated to the Leonids, which filled the remaining part of the afternoon. Of course, the results of last year's expeditions in China and Mongolia were presented, with funny and sometimes really impressive videotapes. However, the real highlight of this "Leonid special," and, I dare say, of the whole *IMC*, was a lecture by David Asher of Armagh Observatory, in Northern Ireland, in which he presented results from simulations of the Leonid stream, which apparently permit a prediction of Leonid activity peaks with an accuracy of up to a few minutes! Also the fireball outburst of last year was explained to be the result of a resonance phenomenon in the meteoroid orbits. Please, read the article co-authored by David in *WGN* 27:2 if you did not already do so, it is worth it! After this presentation, one could not help wondering if meteor astronomy might be on its way to become a predictable science after all. Let us first use this year's Leonids as a test case, however...

In the evening, we visited the near-by observatory of the organizing *Associazione Romana Astrofili*, situated in an old mill. The observatory's telescope is a self-made 0.37-m *f*/12 Cassegrain, and the renovated structure also contains a charming small planetarium. As could be expected, the evening was closed in the bar, with serious and less serious exchanges. Unlike at other *IMCs*, this exchange was again followed by a full 8 hours of sleep!

Some participants arrived late due to visa problems. At some point, we had almost abandoned hope that the small Yugoslav delegation would still make it to the *IMC*. It was therefore a pleasant surprise Saturday morning to see that at least some of the Yugoslavians had finally made it. Their lectures were rescheduled.

After the lectures on Saturday morning, which included a second talk by Dr. Smirnov—this time about the coefficient of meteor plasma radiation, the annual meeting of the General Assembly of the *IMC* took place. There were of course the financial reports and the activity reports of the Council Members and Commission Directors present, but what we were really looking forward to was the announcement of the Council of their decision as to where the next *IMC* would take place. We already knew Romania and Slovenia were in the running, and that both candidates had a strong proposal, so choosing would have been hard. In a Salomon's judgment, the Council members present at the *IMC* (after proper consultation of the other Council members via email and telephone) attributed the 2000 *IMC* to the Romanians, who had submitted their candidacy for the third consecutive time, but also assured the Slovenians that they would seriously reconsider their proposal next year.



Figure 1 – Group photo at Farfa Abbey.

The annual excursion took us to Farfa Abbey, a picturesque monastery lost in the mountains, and surrounded by a small village. Farfa Abbey dates back to Carolingian times, although little of that period remains. It used to be a very influential place in the region, both religiously and politically. After a guided tour through the premises, including the abbey church, we got some free time, during which we could reflect on the rich history of this place. When it was about time to leave, we witnessed the beginning of a marriage ceremony in the abbey church—apparently a very posh one. On the short way back to the hotel, we made a stop at the center of Frasso Sabino, which most of us had not yet seen, then! The old town is centered around the Sforza Cesarini Castle, located on a sharp hill top. After the castle had lost its strategic importance, houses have been erected on top of it, and even the top floor of the tower is an apartment, which became apparent when an Italian “mama” looked through the window to see what was going on below. We walked inside the fortification, which afforded us spectacular views over the surrounding area, with the Farfa River meandering deep below us, but also made us discover cosy corners with small houses decorated with flowers, which added to the medieval character of the village center. Our Italian friends pointed our attention to several particularities which would otherwise have gone by unnoticed, such as a piece of petrified wood amidst the stones that have been used to construct a gate.

Back at the hotel, anticipation grew. At the last two *IMCs*, our Romanian friends had presented a program of astropoetry and some astro-plays. For most of us, these had been fascinating but somewhat strange performances, with an unclear goal. This year, we were already more accustomed to the idea, and we had been explained that, in Romania, this is one of the few ways to attract people to sciences in general and astronomy in particular. Apparently, Romania has a strong tradition of performing arts. After dinner, the *moment suprême* had come, and we returned to the “Grotta” for this year's edition. We were not disappointed! A combination of astro-poetry, astro-music, and astro-play helped us, on the one hand, to better understand the Romanian soul, but, on the other hand, was great fun, too! In one instance, Andrei Georgehe, acting as the Earth in one of the plays, surprised everybody by walsing over the stage as one of the ballet-dancing hippos in tutu in Walt Disney's *Fantasia*—I still cannot figure out how he did it! Anyway, we are looking forward to more of this next year in Romania!



Figure 2 – Mihaela Triglav and Rainer Arlt working hard on figuring out the best way to analyze Taurid activity.

After the performance, our Japanese friend and faithful *IMC* participant Nagatoshi Nogami treated us on very interesting sweets from his country typical for the Moon Festival. Yes, we closed Saturday evening in the bar ...

On Sunday, we got two striking examples of people working on astronomy in circumstances very unlike those in Western Europe: we learned about the astronomy popularization work in Romania, and about an effort to build a reliable radio meteor receiver in Argentina. With an event as spectacular as a total solar eclipse in Europe, on August 11, 1999, an exception was made to the "meteor-related presentations only" rule, and a few groups presented their eclipse activities and observations, illustrated by captivating video records.

Before the closure of the *IMC*, we saw promising presentations of the Romanian (2000) and Slovenian (2001) *IMC* locations, and Rainer Arlt advised us about where to go in order to have the best view on the 1999 Leonids. Once again, this *IMC* was a very unique event, totally unlike any other *IMC*—as usual, one could say.

After the *IMC*, I spent one more day in Rome, but this time with David Asher, Nagatoshi Nogami, and our Romanian friends. The city was a whole new experience with this international company. I could not think of a better way to close this *IMC*!

The 2000 International Meteor Conference

Pucioasa, Romania, September 21–24, 2000

communicated by Marc Gyssens

It was decided at the 1999 *IMC* to have the 2000 *International Meteor Conference* in Pucioasa, Romania, from September 21 (Thursday evening) to September 24 (Sunday noon). It will be organized by the *Romanian Society for Meteors and Astronomy (SARM)*. Pucioasa is a spa town, located at an altitude of 400 m, about 100 km to the northwest of Bucharest, and only 23 km to the northwest of Târgoviște. There are direct trains and buses from the Bucharest airport/train station to Pucioasa, but the organizers plan to offer an additional shuttle service.

Accommodation will be provided in double rooms, and all meals will be served at the hotel restaurant, at 150 m from the conference site. The conference is organized in cooperation with the Town Authorities. The full conference fee will be 170 DEM (86.92 EUR). (Reductions for Eastern European participants are possible.)

More information and a registration form will be provided in the next issue of *WGN*. Alternatively, you may also consult the *IMO* Web pages at <http://www.imo.net>.