INFORMAL INTRODUCTION

When I came as a B.Sc. thesis student to the Instituto Nacional de Astrofísica, Óptica y Electrónica (INAOE) in Tonantzintla in the State of Puebla in 1987, Guillermo Haro, the founder of INAOE, had been gone for 3 years. However, his influence pervaded conversations and his presence in the development of Mexican Astronomy was still strong. Even at that time, every action or decision that was taken had a reference to his way of doing things. In the halls of the building that hosted the Schmidt camera plate collection, there were copies of old issues of Boletín de los Observatorios de Tonantzitla y Tacubaya (hereafter I will refer to it as BOTT). I was impressed by such publication. Its pages were written in Spanish and English, they had lots of finding charts of blue objects; photographic reproductions of stellar spectra and long lists objects, which I found strange at the time; lists of flare stars in the Orion region; while some other pages had theoretical calculations and tables. Although, most of the articles were written by Mexican Astronomers such as Haro, E. Chavira, B. Iriarte, L. Rivera-Terrazas, E. E. Mendoza V., Guillermina and Graciela González; also some American astronomers were among the authors: W. J. Luyten, W. W. Morgan, H. L. Johnson, R. I. Mitchell, and A. G. D. Philip. Later on, I'd learn that BOTT was one of the first scientific journals in Latin America.

Haro founded BOTT in 1952 and remained as its main editor for the next 20 years, that is, its entire publication lifetime. The quality of the publication was rather austere in comparison with the major astronomical journals (e.g., ApJ, AJ, PASP, MNRAS). Some papers were published in Spanish accompanied by a summary in English. Everyone referred to it as the "Boletín", and had always very high and positive reactions about its contents. BOTT came into existence in a rather odd time. It was the practice during the XIX century and the first part of the XX century for the major observatories to report their observations in their own publications (e.g., Annals of the Harvard Observatory). Nevertheless, by 1952 most of those publications had given way to major journals. The modern way of publishing scientific contributions is based on a peer review process. Most journals had adopted this fashion by 1952. But the publications in the BOTT were unrefereed. Haro as Director of the Observatorio Astrofísico Nacional de Tonantzintla and of Observatorio Astronómico Nacional (now Instituto de Astronomía) of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (IA-UNAM) would request to everyone to publish in the BOTT.

In 1968, Haro stepped down from the directorship of the IA-UNAM and in 1971 founded INAOE. BOTT saw its last issue in 1972 and for some time a new journal named Boletín del Instituto de Tonantzintla was published at INAOE. Meanwhile, at UNAM, Eugenio Mendoza, Paris Pismis and Silvia Torres-Peimbert founded the Revista Mexicana de Astronomía y Astrofísica (RMxAA).

In 1987 the panorama was very much changed for Mexican Astronomy. The younger generations had little appreciation for the BOTT and ignored the importance of its role in the development of modern Mexican Astronomy. During my trips for graduate studies and research visits, I have been impressed and delighted to find the BOTT in the main collections of the libraries of the Vatican Observatory, the David Dunlap Observatory, the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, Caltech's Astronomy Deparment, and the Carnegie Observatories, among others.

It was during my tenure of a Fulbright Scholarship at Carnegie Observatories in 2002 that I came across the Centennial Volume of the Astrophysical Journal. It is an impressive publication that contains the most influential papers in the ApJ after its first Century of being published. The editor was Helmut Abt. He invited some of the most important astronomers to comment on the selected papers. I recall, finding the comments of Manuel Peimbert and Silvia Torres-Peimbert on the paper by Peebles, 1966, ApJ, 146, 542, "Primordial Helium Abundance and the Primordial Fireball. II"; this paper indeed made a very strong mark in Cosmology. The

Centennial Volume was by itself monumental and made a deep impression on myself. I enjoyed reading the review of Jerry Ostriker on Zwicky's 1933 most influential paper. Here, with a single stroke Fritz Zwicky gave us dark matter and clusters of galaxies as gravitational lenses. Ostriker provided very revealing details, which someone with less experience could have easily overlooked, at the same time, providing historical facts hardly mentioned anywhere else, for example, that Zwicky introduced, in a rather obscure Swiss publication, the term *dunkle calde materie* which means cold dark matter or the stuff that we know as CDM – I was overwhelmed. Was Zwicky a prophet or the wackiest astronomer with the most exaggeratedly unbound imagination that ever walked on the face of Earth? I was convinced after having read Ostriker's review that Zwicky had an imagination sparkled with moments of genius. No doubt.

In 2009, all astronomers and astrophysics celebrated the International Year of Astronomy. I saw this as a great opportunity to pay tribute to the initial phases of modern Mexican astronomy. I thought, about repeating the experience of the Astrophysical Journal Centennial Volume but this time for the BOTT. I spoke with José Guichard, the General Director at INAOE and with José Franco, the Director of Instituto de Astronomía-UNAM; both were very positive and offered funding for the organization of a symposium where the selected papers would be reviewed and for publication of the resulting proceedings. I looked for someone who had experience in the publication and editing of scientific astronomical journals. The choice was simple. I contacted one of the founders of RMAA. It didn't take me long to convince Silvia Torres-Peimbert, at IA-UNAM, and got her commitment to dedicate time to the venture. Together, we organized the Symposium Highlights of the Boletín de los Observatorios de Tonantzintla y Tacubaya during November 5–7, 2009 in Tonantzintla. Both of us selected the papers to be commented upon and invited the reviewers. Our selection was guided, mainly, by the number of citations; however, we also included some papers that have been very important in the development of Mexican astronomy. Our main idea was to generate a publication that had scientific and historical value.

In this volume we have reviewed 25 papers, some authors couldn't be present at the symposium but sent their comments to be read at the meeting. We also invited Helmut Abt, a long time friend of some Mexican astronomers. He offered to review the series of papers published by the González sisters and by W. W. Morgan. Abt also contributed with the symposium summary. We asked some authors to review their own articles. We asked them to provide firsthand accounts about the motivations and conditions that led them to write the papers in question.

The symposium was well attended by INAOE's graduate students and faculty who for two days listened to the presentations in awe and showed great enthusiasm. I believe that during the symposium it became very clear that we should be proud of the origins of modern Mexican astronomy. As we are looking into a brighter future with the advent of large telescopes, such as the Gran Telescopio Milimétrico (GTM/LMT), the Gran Telescopio Canarias (GTC), and the Synoptic All-Sky Infrared Survey, SASIR; we paused for two days to build strength from the stories and feats of the pioneers of modern Astronomy in Mexico.

I am grateful to all the contributors to this special volume of the RMxAA Serie Conferencias. Special thanks are due to John Lester, John Percy, Nolan Walborn, David Crawford and Juan Manuel Alcalá for contributing to this volume despite not being able to attend the symposium. I want to express my deepest gratitude to Silvia Torres-Peimbert for her enthusiasm and endurance during this enterprise, it has been an honor and a great privilege to collaborate with her. During all this time, we have received guidance, generous advice, and encouragement from Manuel Peimbert; his boundless influence is seen in many pages of this publication. I am also grateful to Arcadio Poveda, the dean of Mexican Astronomy, for his interest and advice during this project. I am thankful to José Guichard and José Franco for their support and encouragement. I thank my colleagues at INAOE who served at the SOC and LOC for helping directly on the symposium and for constant support along the years. To finish this long acknowledgment list, I should mention the support and love of Azie, Emiliano, and Allan.

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