Preface

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Over the past few years, the field of star cluster astrophysics has seen a steady rise, and an ever growing number of interested colleagues are contributing their research either in peer-reviewed articles or at conferences. We have also seen (and participated in or even organised) a number of high-level workshops and conferences on both young and old star clusters over the past few years. This shows that the field is vibrant and, considering the oversubscription rates of most of these conferences, there are usually plenty of new results to report on in any given year. Based on our interest in the broad area of star cluster astrophysics, in early 2006 we took the initiative to set up an annual series of workshops (initially to be held alternately in Spain and the UK) addressing science topics relevant to this field.

These proceedings result from the first of these meetings, “Young massive star clusters. Initial conditions and environments”, which was held at the Instituto de Astrofísica de Andalucía (CSIC) in Granada (Spain) from 11 to 14 September 2007. The meeting focussed on young clusters in particular. Topics we aimed to include were, broadly speaking,

- Formation: individual star clusters, how does a cluster turn gas into stars? What is the initial mass function (is it universal)? What clues can we obtain from the initial structure?
- Formation and evolution: environment, cluster mass functions, numbers, properties, etc.
  - how do they vary with environment?
- Star clusters and the interstellar medium: outflows, HII regions, supershells, etc.

- Destruction: infant-mortality rates, early destruction, tidal stripping, etc.

All individual contributions and the discussion sessions (of which there were two each day) were webcast to provide access to a broader audience. This, we thought, would somewhat alleviate the fact that, due to conference-hall capacity limitations, we had to restrict attendance to less than 70 participants. The webcast turned out to be quite successful, with 147 absolute unique visitors from 17 countries. Other colleagues, also in Spain, are now following this example of webcasting to provide wider access to their scientific activities. We also had the conference broadcast in real time to the inner yard of the Institute premises, so that a wider range of facilities were provided for the benefit of all of our colleagues. The slides of the presentations and the video and audio recordings of the sessions can be found on the Conference web page, <http://www.iaa.es/~eperez/cluster/cluster07.html>.

We decided to publish the proceedings of the Conference. This may seem obvious because you are reading this, but nowadays it is ever more common that conferences are not followed by an accompanying publication of proceedings. Although this implies a fair amount of work, we decided that it was well worth the effort to produce a durable version of the conference contributions. All contributions have been refereed and edited for content and style and the result is presented in this special issue of *Astrophysics and Space Science*.

We thank the organising committees for their willingness to support the conference, both from scientific and logistic points of view.

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The editors, Enrique Pérez, Richard de Grijs and Rosa M. González Delgado

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