Editorial

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This year two important anniversaries fall, which we cannot omit pointing out to the reader of this journal.

One hundred and thirty years ago, on March 2, 1884, Gian Battista Guccia, a young mathematician (who was born in Palermo in 1855), founded the Circolo Matematico di Palermo. The first issue of the *Rendiconti* came to light 3 years later, in 1887. Guccia at the time was not yet a professor (he will get a permanent job at the university of Palermo only in 1889). He had been a student of Luigi Cremona (1830–1903) in Rome, where he moved, attracted by the great master and initiator of the so-called Italian school of algebraic geometry. The brilliant intuition of founding the Circolo, to which he devoted all of his efforts, strength and passion for 30 years, provided the international mathematical community of that time with the only really international, democratic and highly prestigious and influential arena for scientific discussions. The *Rendiconti* quite soon became one of the most important mathematical journals of the time. But Guccia's venture goes well beyond mathematics: it has been the (at the time successful) attempt of a scientific, cultural and social raise of a newly formed nation, Italy, and of an underdeveloped region, Sicily, which were trying hard to fill up centennial gaps which separated them from France, Germany, Great Britain, etc. It is not the case to review here Circolo's history, which has been delightfully written in the book by Brigaglia and Masotto [1] (see [3, Chapter 4], for a shorter account). The social and political importance of the Circolo is witnessed by the attention devoted to it by sociologists, as in [2].

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Guccia wrote about 50 papers (see the web site [4]), most of them in the spirit of Cremona's approach to the geometry of curves in the complex projective plane. His most important result has been the classification, up to Cremona transformations, of linear systems of plane curves of low genera. For this he applied an argument due to M. Noether (1844–1921), which was affected by a mistake. Guccia's classification was however fixed after him by various authors, and turned out to be correct, despite the gap in Noether's argument. These results still play an important role in the birational geometry of surfaces. The strenuous work made by Guccia for the Circolo certainly required to him most of his efforts, to the point that he had to slow down his scientific activity. The competition and comparison with algebraic geometers of his generation like Eugenio Bertini (1846–1933), Corrado Segre (1863–1924), Giuseppe Veronese (1854–1917) and of the next one, Guido Castelnuovo (1865–1952), Federico Enriques (1871–1946), Francesco Severi (1879–1961), positioned him in a secondary role, leaving him with the attribute of a “gentleman and great organizer”. However we think that also as a scientist he should deserve more attention and recognition. In any event a history of Guccia as a mathematician has not been written yet, and we will certainly not attempt to do it now.

Guccia passed away just one century ago, on October 29, 1914. We feel we owed him this short tribute.

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