

Francesco M. Raimondo

Andrea Di Martino (1926-2009)



Fig. 1. Andrea Di Martino (on the right) with Francesco M. Raimondo (on the left).

Last 30th of August, Professor Andrea Di Martino, former Professor of Botany at the Science Faculty of the University of Palermo, died at the age of 83. For many years he had been the Director of the Botanical Garden and then the Director of the newly established Department of Botanical Science. He was always deeply involved in the care both of the Botanical Garden and the Herbarium, our two historical institutions.

Born in Misilmeri (Palermo, Italy) on the 12th of April 1926, he graduated in Natural Science at Palermo University in 1949. Soon afterwards he started his academic career as volunteer at the Botanical Garden in Palermo. In 1951 he

received a scholarship, and only few years later he was appointed permanent Assistant Professor of Botany in 1955. In 1963 he was Professor of Systematic Botany first at the Faculty of Agricultural Studies and then at the Science Faculty in 1975. Hundred of students attending the courses of Natural Science and Biological Science were supervised by him for their final dissertations.

During his long academic years, Di Martino explored the field of phytogeography that thanks to his researches was again part of the scientific tradition after a long period of oblivion. As a botanist, he took part in the project directed by Edoardo Zavattari on the biogeographical study of the Pelagic archipelago. Di Martino looked particularly at the vascular flora of Lampedusa, Linosa and Lampione. Later he pursued similar studies on the Egadi archipelago and on the island of Pantelleria, where he also made some research on the local vegetation.

In the 1970s his interest moved to the Madonie Mountains and he wrote one of the first popular pamphlets describing the most representative plants of that area. In those years, at

Castelbuono he also started to gather the botanical collections of the local naturalist Francesco Mina' Palumbo. This material was studied by one of his first pupils, Pietro Mazzola, now Professor of Applied Botany at the Faculty of Agricultural Studies. Besides the islets, Di Martino explored western Sicily reporting, for the first time, several naturalized species. In the town of Palermo he was involved in the study of arboricolous plants. Worth mentioning are his constructive study on weeds in cultivated wheat fields in Sicily, his pioneer experimental observations – undertaken also at the Botanical Garden – on the sorghum and on its potential grown in Sicily as biofuel, and finally his studies on plant acclimatization on tropical fruit plant species.

Di Martino's commitment was also on the institutional side. He was member of several scientific boards such as the old established Società Botanica Italiana [Italian Botanical Society] and the new born OPTIMA (Organization for the Phytotaxonomic Investigation of the Mediterranean Area). For the former, he organised an unforgivable visit to the Madonie Mountains in 1971, as well as the annual National Congress at Palermo in 1979; while, he realised the annual Meeting between Palermo and the Madonie, for the latter, in 1983. The local growing interest in the field brought him to suggest the opening of a regional branch, of which he was the Director. Andrea Di Martino took part of the re-foundation of the Società Siciliana di Scienze Naturali [Sicilian Society of Natural Science], he became than (1987-1996) President after Professor Marcello Carapezza. He also was among the organisers of a number of Science meetings between scholars and Science school teachers. He remained for them an important reference for a long time.

Facing the growing environmental issues, he was among the first supporters for the creation of the Natural Regional Park of the Madonie Mountains. On the side of academic institutions, he worked for the establishment of the *Herbarium mediterraneum*, of an international foundation and last, but not least, for the enlargement of the Botanical Garden, of which he was again an extremely competent Director from 1996 to 1998.

For his merits on the field, Professor Andrea Di Martino was appointed member of the Regional Board of the Cultural Heritage and later member of the Regional Board for the Preservation of Natural Heritage. His commitment was also spent in politics. In younger days Di Martino was local councillor and vice-mayor at Misilmeri and in the 1980s he was elected at the Palermo district council.

After a long and committed academic career – during which he had relations with many scholars of the field, as well as with several international botanists – one of the most representative man of the botanic community of Palermo is now missing.

Andrea Di Martino died after a life dedicated to his family, to his many friends and students and, above all, to this botanical institution that accepted him from the time of his first degree dissertation under the supervision of Professor Francesco Bruno. He left us while he was in his house at Piano Zucchi, on the Madonie Mountains, that he choose to spend his summer holidays with his family since the 1970s. He died with the image of those mountains in his eyes, mountains that he contributed to explore and made familiar to many generations of students and scholars.

The memories of his academic efforts, of his kindness and of this deep humanity will always survive with us.

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