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Italian Influence on Venezuelan Science and Physics

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Although the Italian presence in the history of Venezuela can be traced back at its very beginning, with figures like Cristoforo Colombo (1451-1506), who discovered the country in 1498, followed by Amerigo Vespucci (1454-1512), who in 1499 provided its name as “Little Venice” when he saw the Indian palafittes on the Guajira Peninsula, the arrival of Italians in Venezuela became particularly important in numbers by the second half of the 19th century and even more during the first half of the 20th century. In this way, they became as an immigrant community, one of biggest of the country, with a very solid cultural heritage and it was combined, in an unusual way, with a very broad openness in the approach of problems in their new home. Certainly, this fact contributed to their fast social integration but, at the same time, it also had an impact on their synergy with other immigrant communities in Venezuela. Of Italian descent or first-generation immigrants and along the Venezuelan history, we found independence leaders, constitution writers, presidents, legislators, academics, scientists, business entrepreneurs, journalists, athletes and artists. In this work we are going to examine the role of academics and scientists like Francisco De Venanzi (1917-1987) as a promoter of modern science in the second half of the 20th century, how his interest in scientific research led him to the creation of the Venezuelan Association for the Advancement of Science (ASOVAC) in 1950, the Cancer Research Center of the Anticancer Society of Venezuela, also in the same year, and as rector-president of the Central University of Venezuela, the creation of the Faculty of Science in 1958, which was a cornerstone in the development of science and physics in the country. In the same way, we are going to take a closer look to the impact of the contributions in science and particularly in physics made by other actors like, among others, Mario Vecchi, who co-authored the original work on simulated annealing with Scott Kirkpatrick and Daniel Gelatt in 1983, as well as the efforts made in the development of research and development schools and infrastructure in applied physics and related areas.

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