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Nuclear encounters: Italian and German physicists during WWII

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This contribution aims at giving a special perspective on the relationships between Italian and German nuclear scientists during WWII. It considers and analyzes for the first time two significant gatherings organized in Rome by the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institut für Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte: a lecture by Otto Hahn on nuclear fission, in March 1941, and one by Max Planck on the meaning and limits of the exact sciences, in April 1942. Both lectures were held at Palazzo Zuccari, formerly the seat of the prestigious Bibliotheca Hertziana, which had been recently renamed and restructured by the Hitler regime. A varied assortment of guests participated in these events: alongside Nazi political figures and authorities, and high exponents of the cultural life of the institute, Italian and German physicists such as Edoardo Amaldi, Gian Carlo Wick, Arnold Sommerfeld. Hitherto unpublished documents and letters allow to add meaningful pieces to the story of the interactions between Italian and German nuclear scientists during the world conflict, and to follow the evolution of these relationships in the post-war period, precluding to the role that physicists like Amaldi would play in the reorganization of science in Europe.

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