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Foreword

History of contemporary science, as it is known, has an important place among the our Academy’s present tasks. Our Institution owns a rich historical Archive, dating from 1786 to the present, which thus covers two centuries of lively Italian history and of extraordinary scientific developments, perhaps a unique collection of this kind in Italy (1).

Among the Academy’s endowments there are also remarkable manuscript materials of high historical interest — for example the correspondence of Stanislao Cannizzaro, Augusto Righi and Emanuele Paternò — and besides, one of the two copies of the Archive of the History of Quantum Physics, available at present in Europe. Within the Academy, the Center for the History of Contemporary Science promotes initiatives to encourage research in the field of the history of modern and contemporary science, including the Academy’s history.

The president of the Center, Edoardo Amaldi, is assisted by a Committee composed of Giuseppe Montalenti, Giuseppe Penso, and Emilio Segrè and the undersigned, all from the Academy, and by the Professors Salvo D’Agostino and Michelangelo De Maria from the University of Rome, La Sapienza, acting as Secretaries.

On the occasion of its bicentennial, in 1982, the Academy wished to call attention to some aspects of the Italian history of science, which are somehow related to its past activities. I am pleased to mention among the latter the papers on the development of mathematics, of chemistry in Italy in the last two centuries, which appeared in the special issue of the Memorie in 1982 (2). In the same volume appear also the contributions given to the foundation of the Academy by distinguished scientists as Lorgna, Spallanzani, Felice Fontana, Moscati and Mairone da Ponte.

A complete account of the history of the Academy, by Giuseppe Penso, has been published in 1978, under the title: *Scienziati italiani e Unità d’Italia* (3).

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(3) G. Penso, Scienziati italiani e Unità d’Italia, Scritti e Documenti 1, Accademia Nazionale delle Scienze detta dei XL, Roma 1978.
In this spirit the Academy, considering the activity in the field of history of Science as an important part of its commitments, has sponsored in 1984 the Congresso Nazionale del Gruppo Italiano per la Storia della Fisica of the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche and has hosted a Session of the Congress, and now publishes in its Memorie di Scienze Fisiche e Naturali, the Congress Proceedings, an important contribution to the history of physics.

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