



**Figure 8.1:** *Schmidt Telescope (Askania, Berlin), Mérida Observatory, CIDA, Venezuela (Photo in the Archive of the Deutsches Technikmuseum Berlin, 2007): Gudrun Wolfschmidt, Askania-Warte 18 (1961), Heft 57)*

## 8. The Truncated Modernization (1950–1959): Eduardo Röhl and the Observatories of Cagigal and Hamburg

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At the end of the Second World War a large group of scientists returned to their labs; Astronomy was no exception. Newer and increasingly larger instruments were distinguishable on the horizon. New research programs were dedicated to seek a solution to specific problems and particular subjects and areas. International relations among the observatories of the world would set the stage for what the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be.

In Venezuela, the Director of the Observatory Cagigal at Caracas (1888), Dr. Eduardo Röhl (1891–1953) proposed the modernization of the observatory to the President of the Republic, Gen. Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1914–2001), to thus place it at level with other scientific institutions in Europe and the United States. His proposal consisted in obtaining a series of pieces of equipment with modest dimensions. However, he did not specify the scientific programmes or personnel that would work in the observatory.

Taking advantage of his skill for speaking English and German perfectly, Dr. Röhl started contacts with several observatories: Otto Heckmann (1901–1983) (Hamburg), Chester Burleigh Watts (1889–1971) (USA), André Danjon (1890–1967) (Paris); his attention was particularly focused on the Observatory of Hamburg-Bergedorf. There, he realized the advances in technology being implemented.

Similarly, the opportunity Venezuela represented to install the biggest and best technology and the advice offered by Otto Heckmann was not wasted. The contracts for the Modern Cagigal Observatory were signed in 1953.

The architects were from Hamburg; the Refractor, the Schmidt Telescope, the Reflector, the Astrograph and the Meridian Circle Telescope were built by Zeiss (Jena, Oberkochen) and Askania Werke of Berlin respectively.

With the conclusion of the Military Government in



**Figure 8.2:** Mérida Observatory, CIDA, Venezuela (1975)

Venezuela (1958), the sudden death of Röhl (1959), the radical change in the Directive of the Cagigal Observatory to the hands of the Marines; the modernization project suffered a serious blow. The equipment was stored away, the headquarters of the Observatory was transformed, the tools and equipment scattered and almost forgotten.

Finally the Mérida Observatory, CIDA, Venezuela, was opened in 1975 where Jürgen Stock (1923–2004) acted as director from 1973 until 1983.

### Bibliography

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