

Making heritage: The political uses of scientific and technological collections

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Abstract: Collections may serve different purposes and agendas. Shaped by local and global factors, they embrace cultural values and represent beliefs and aspirations about the natural order and the place humans occupy in such characterisations. They are also valuable resources for understanding the construction of traditions and identities. Indeed, communities perceive the nature of heritage in different ways, which is reflected in how objects are selected, preserved, interpreted and displayed. Understanding the process by means of which an object becomes heritage and is used to create a specific narrative proves crucial in order to explore the political uses of heritage. Scientific and technological heritage is not an exception, despite the little attention paid to understand its role in such processes. This talk focuses on the creation of the Spanish National Museum of Science and Technology, established in 1980 during the so-called transition from Franco's dictatorship towards democracy. This case study proves particularly useful to show not only how scientific heritage acquisition policies embed specific political rhetorics, but also the role played by science and technology museums in such practices.