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## **Rediscovering the Americas: the making of Latin American archaeological collections in Spanish national museums**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the gradual making and display of Latin American archaeological collections in Spanish national museums, and sets out to understand this process in the framework of the elaboration of national master narratives in Spain about the conquest and colonisation of the Americas. Two institutions in particular will be considered in this analysis: the National Archaeological Museum (*Museo Arqueológico Nacional*), established in 1867 and the Museum of the Americas (*Museo de América*), inaugurated in 1965 as an offspring of the former, both located in Madrid. By studying diachronically these museums in their political and intellectual context, I aim to reflect critically on the changing meaning and the growing significance endowed upon Latin American collections in Spain throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. As this paper sets out to demonstrate, the way these collections were displayed reflects directly the interpretations developed by historians and thinkers on Spain's former role on the American continent, as well as its aspirations in contemporary international relations.

## Introduction

The establishment and development of national museums can be explained as the consequence of two social processes: on the one hand the construction of particular areas of knowledge, which is at the same time a cause and a consequence of the formation of scientific and/or artistic collections; and on the other, the political decisions to promote (or eventually suppress) some particular field of knowledge due to its significance for different political projects. The history of the formation and display of Latin American archaeological collections in Spanish national museums, and their redistribution, is marked precisely by those two vectors of action: science and politics. Therefore, this process evinces not only the creation of knowledge on those areas of the world, but also contemporary readings on Spain's history, as well as political and diplomatic projects.

This paper reconstructs the history of Latin American collections in Spain through different stages. Latin American archaeological/ethnological artefacts were part of the Royal Cabinet of Natural History created in Madrid in the eighteenth century where they were displayed as scientific objects. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century, that these collections were gradually conceptualised as the material evidence of a historical process, the colonisation of the Americas, which was increasingly interpreted as a crucial chapter in Spanish "national history". In the context of the 1892 American Historical Exhibition (*Exposición Histórico-Americana*), which celebrated the Fourth Centenary of the "Discovery", those collections gained particular relevance within the National Archaeological Museum (*Museo Arqueológico Nacional*, Madrid). Finally, the ideological reconsideration of Spain's imperial past in the first decades of the twentieth century and their subsequent appropriation by the Franco regime, inspired the establishment of a national museum dedicated to housing these collections in 1941, the Museum of the Americas (*Museo de América*).

History of collections and their display is thus to be considered in relation to the ideas developed by historians and thinkers on the past and present of Spain's interaction with the Latin American territories, ideas which in turn inspired the creation or reconfiguration of the discussed museums. It must be remembered that the national museums referred in this study are elements in a wider and more complex cartography of cultural institutions, which includes other national museums, libraries and archives, as well as public monuments, or national and international exhibitions. For this reason, this paper also explores, at least for the chosen case study museums, their architectonic and urban dimensions in as much as these contributed to the imaginary of Madrid as the capital city of the nation and the colonial empire. This is particularly relevant in the case of the Palace of National Library and Museums (*Palacio de Bibliotecas y Museos Nacionales*), where the National Archaeological Museum is located, for the nineteenth century liberal state, and the new venue of Museum of the Americas inaugurated in 1965, within the renewed Madrid that Francoist Spain promoted.

## Latin American collections in the National Archaeological Museum (1867–1892)

The transfer of artefacts from the New to the Old World began with the first voyage of Columbus. In a scene often represented by the nineteenth century Spanish historical painting

school, in 1493 King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella received Columbus in Barcelona upon the completion of his first trip; the Admiral presented them with several objects from the Caribbean islands and was accompanied by six natives. Years later, when the conqueror Hernán Cortés first set foot on the continent, he received as a present from the Aztec emperor Moctezuma a hoard of feather garments, which were subsequently sent to emperor Charles V. Even if no examples of those early modern collections seem to have been preserved in Spain, diplomatic practices of gift exchange explain the presence of some of these artefacts in other European courts; for instance, some Mexican antiquities from the Medici collections are currently on display in the Pitti Palace in Florence, and the feather headdress and some other elements that are believed to have belonged to Moctezuma are today preserved in Vienna.

In the eighteenth century, the process of formation and transfer of collections benefited from the decisive support given by the Hispanic Crown to the scientific exploration of its overseas territories, and it was also inspired by a growing interest for its human “primitive” peoples (Alcina 1995, Cañizares 2006, De Vos 2009). Natural and ethnographic samples sent from the American and Pacific territories of the empire were gathered in Madrid, particularly in the Royal Cabinet of Natural History (*Real Gabinete de Historia Natural*), created by Charles III in 1771 (Cabello 1998). As a display of the magnificence of the Crown, as well as its support for scientific research, King Charles IV (1786–1808) decided to construct a new venue for the Royal Cabinet in Madrid, which years later became the Museo del Prado.

Some of the naturalists expeditions sent from Spain to the Americas in this period collected “antiquities”, and the monarchy also promoted studies and expeditions, such as for example the one directed by the military engineer Antonio del Río (1745–1789) at the Maya site of Palenque (Cabello 1992). However, it is important to bear in mind that “American antiquities” were not considered strictly as “archaeological” collections; in the time of Winklemann and the pursuing of the ideal of Classical beauty, archaeology was mainly concerned with Mediterranean Classical civilisations. For this reason, those objects brought from the site of Palenque (for instance some Maya epigraphic stelae) were included in the Royal Cabinet of Natural sciences. It was only through a series of intellectual re-conceptions of these collections that they could become endowed with new meanings – these were brought about by the development of a new and more general concept of archaeology linked to anthropology and to universal human history and also by the transformation of the Royal Cabinet into a “national museum”.

The creation of the first national museums ensues from the emergence of the “nation” as an ideology and political programme. Whilst in Spanish historiography the start of the Napoleonic occupation of the peninsula (1808–1814) marks the end (albeit not the definitive one) of the *Ancien Régime*, 1812 has been considered the founding moment of Spanish nationalism. In that year, the representatives of the self-organised Spanish resistance met in Cadiz, the main colonial port in the Peninsula, and proclaimed the “Spanish nation”, which they defined as the “reunion of all Spaniards from both hemispheres”, referring to the citizens of both the metropolis and the overseas empire. However, this first liberal experience in Spain was hampered by the war against the occupying army, the imposed king Joseph Bonaparte (1808–1813) and his programme of reforms. One of the initiatives of the French king was precisely to create the first public national museums in Spain, among which a natural sciences museum, but the on-going war delayed those plans.

When the Bourbons regained the throne in 1814, the political structures of the *Ancien Régime* were restored. Nonetheless, the Crown was weakened, not just by the war's destruction but also by the process of independence of most of its American territories, which culminated in the 1820s. Cultural policy and particularly the promotion of arts and sciences was one of the means left to the monarchy to affirm its role in the definition of the national community: drawing on previous initiatives, King Ferdinand VII (1814–1833) created the Royal Museum of Natural History (*Real Museo de Historia Natural*) in 1815 (Barreiro 1992) and the Royal Museum of Paintings (*Museo Real de Pinturas*) in 1819.

One of the aims, imposed after 1833 by the new liberal state, was precisely to appropriate both materially and symbolically the legacies of the *Ancien Régime*. As a consequence of the policy of nationalisation of the properties of the religious orders, the liberal government decreed in 1835 the establishment of the National Museum of Paintings (*Museo Nacional de Pinturas*) in Madrid. This museum, gathering works of art from suppressed convents, was the first “national museum” created in Spain. Just a few years later, in 1838, the Museum of Natural History became a “national” institution as well (Bolaños 2008). American collections preserved in this institution were displayed in the top floor of the building that this museum shared with the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Compared to the growing relevance of the Royal Museum in Madrid (which was installed in the venue originally built for the Royal Cabinet), the Museum of Natural Sciences was in the first half of the nineteenth century a modest institution in both its capacity to promote scientific research and its displaying means, which affected its Latin American collections (Cabello 2007).

This might indicate that the study of these collections was as relevant as the study of “vernacular antiquities” for the definition of the nation. This new kind of archaeology was promoted by the liberal state and by the new social classes, in order to create a national culture, which could sustain the construction of civic nationalism. As a consequence, in March 1867 the National Archaeological Museum was established in Madrid (Marcos 1993); its collections extended from the origins of humanity to the Renaissance, and it was divided into four departments: Primitive and Ancient Times, Middle Ages, Numismatics and Ethnography. Through this display, the museum sought to place the history of Spain within a universal timeline of human progress, from primitivism to civilisation. For this reason, the first section of collected object from beyond Spanish borders, such as European prehistoric collections from France and Scandinavia and Near Eastern and Classical antiquities (Barril 1993).

In turn, medieval collections were predominantly of “national” origin; they were chosen from the different regions of the country in order to stress the medieval origins of the Spanish nation in the *Reconquista*, defined as the process of Christian “re-conquest” of the territory from the Muslim “occupiers”. As the foundational decree affirmed, “the monumental history of that brilliant period of constant struggle, which began with Pelayo and ended with Isabella the Catholic, should occupy the main space in our museum”<sup>1</sup>. These ideas were rooted in the interpretation of Spanish history that liberal historiography was promoting; in his *Historia General de España*, Modesto Lafuente (1810–1866), dated the birth of Spanish national identity back to medieval times. According to him, it was this time of conflict that had created the Spanish national soul, under the leadership of the Crown and the ideological guidance of the Church.

Finally, the Ethnographic section received the American collections previously kept at in the Museum of Natural History. These materials were used to contextualise the Spanish / European collections, in the same way that the ethnographic collections were displayed in the French *Musée des Antiquités Nationales* in Saint-Germain-en-Laye or the *Museo Preistorico-etnografico* created by Luigi Pigorini in Rome. Unfortunately no visual sources seem to have been preserved of the display of these collections in the first venue of the National Archaeological Museum. Only some engravings in *Museo Español de Arqueología*, the scientific journal published by the museum provide some images of the pieces.



**Figure 1: Peruvian antiquities present in the National Archaeological Museum collections in the nineteenth century. Plate published in Janer, F. (1872). "Vasos peruanos del Museo Arqueológico Nacional." Museo Español de Antigüedades 1: 211-218.**

The role of the National Archaeological Museum in the creation of national imaginary was highlighted by the project to locate it in the premises of the new Palace of National Library and Museums (*Palacio de Biblioteca y Museos Nacionales*) in Madrid. This was an ambitious project that aimed to gather in the same building all the main repositories of sources of national history, along

with the National Library and the National Historical Archive. Intended as a landmark of the liberal capital in construction, the Palace was located in the *Paseo de Recoletos*, on the same urban axis as the *Paseo del Prado*, in-between Old Madrid and the newly planned bourgeois extension. Similar in its general outline and distribution of spaces to the British museum and Library, this building was designed by Francisco Jareño (1818–1892) in the 1860s, and Queen Elisabeth II laid the first stone in 1866. Nevertheless, the works stopped and were resumed several times, and it was only completed in 1892 on the occasion of the celebration of the Fourth Centenary of the Discovery of America (Layuno 2004).

### **The Fourth Centenary of the Discovery and the Colonial ‘Disaster’ (1892–1898)**

In the last third of the nineteenth century, European industrialised nations competed to extend their economic influence to other areas of the world and to create overseas empires. In a time when colonial power was considered a proof of the vitality of the nation, Spain was not in the best situation; after the independence of most of its American territories in the 1820s, only Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean, and the Philippines and three archipelagos in the Pacific, were all that remained of the former empire. In 1868 the first War of Independence broke out in Cuba; it finished ten years later, in 1878, but the demands of the Cuban patriots were not satisfied. Moreover, the USA challenged the Spanish hold on the Antilleans and a new colonial power, Germany, ambioned Spanish possessions in the Pacific.

As a consequence of this international colonial context of competition, geographical societies were created in Madrid and in several port cities such as Barcelona, in order to foster the exploitation of the existing colonies, and new colonial endeavours were undertaken in Africa (Fradera 2005). In 1887 the Exhibition on the Philippines (*Exposición de las Islas Filipinas*) not only presented the economic potential of the colonial enterprise but also celebrated the civilising role of the metropolis in the Far East. On the occasion, some “native peoples” were displayed in Madrid for the entertainment of visitors, and one of the initiatives born of the Exhibition, the Museum-Library of the Overseas (*Museo-Biblioteca de Ultramar*) was turned into a permanent institution. Attached to the ministry of Overseas Affairs (*Ministerio de Ultramar*), it gathered information on Spain’s historical role in the discovery and colonisation of extra-European territories and was intended to encourage commercial ventures (Sánchez Gómez 2003).

In addition to these initiatives, late nineteenth century Spain’s official discourse, especially under the conservative driven Restoration (*Restauración*) period (1875-1903) drew mainly on a nostalgic reading of the bygone Spanish Empire for the purpose of fostering national pride. In this context, the Fourth centenary of the “discovery” of the New World was celebrated in 1892 with different events; for instance, that year the 12<sup>th</sup> of October was celebrated for the first time as a national day. Some of the celebrations took place in the province of Huelva (Andalusia), from which Columbus had departed in 1492; it was in the same city that the Ninth International Congress of Americanists was organized (López-Ocón 2005).

Meanwhile, in the capital of the kingdom, a double historical exhibition was programmed. In 1888, when the events were first announced in an official decree, the government proposed the celebration of an “American Historical Exhibition” (*Exposición Histórico-Americana*), intended to illustrate “the diverse degrees of culture that the natives had when the Spanish and the

Portuguese arrived there, as well as the remains of those ancient civilisations that were extinct at that moment”<sup>2</sup>. The organisers hoped that in so doing, the exhibition would show the current state of progress of Latin America by comparison, underlining “the glory of those who planted there the European civilisation and the peoples who stem from it and who make them blossom”<sup>3</sup>. It was decided that both exhibitions were to be hosted in the Palace of National Library and Museums, a decision that hastened its completion (Bernabéu 1987).



Figure 2: Palace of National Library and Museums (*Palacio de la Biblioteca y Museos Nacionales*), Madrid (© Ignacio Vleming)

Later on, the project evolved and a second event was added, the “European Historical Exhibition” (*Exposición Histórico-Europea*). This event was to be devoted to the display of the “examples of Iberian work” in a chronological span that went back to the formation of the different kingdoms in the Peninsula to the time “in which they searched and found across the sea vast territories in which to expand”<sup>4</sup>, that is from the beginning to the end of the Middle Ages. For the organisers by comparing both exhibitions “the respective degree of culture that had been reached, at the moment of the meeting, the conquered and the conquerors” should thus be evident<sup>5</sup>. The Jesuit Epigraphist Fidel Fita (1835–1918), member of the Royal Academy of History curated the European Historical Exhibition. It was installed on the second floor of the Palace, and it displayed mostly artworks coming from Catholic churches and cathedrals. The display confirmed the liberal historiographical model that recognised medieval times as the origins of national history, but it added the discovery (and evangelisation) of the Americas to affirm Spanish cultural leading role among other European nations, and its contribution to universal civilisation.



In turn, the display of the American Historical Exhibition was the result of the sum of the exhibitions organised by the participating countries, coordinated by a committee led by Juan de Dios de la Rada y Delgado (1827–1901), director of the National Archaeological Museum. The rooms of the first floor of the palace were distributed into “national pavilions” assigned to the independent states of the American continent. However, the invitation to participate was extended to European (colonial) nations; an invitation that was turned down by France and Great Britain, but it was accepted by Denmark, which sent a collection of materials from Greenland, and by Sweden with ethnographic materials from the university of Uppsala. Portugal played a particularly relevant role and its King presided the opening ceremonies, along with the Spanish Regent Queen.

The 1892 celebrations were used as part of a renovated effort by the Spanish government to reaffirm its hold on its Caribbean colonies and to reformulate its foreign policy with the Latin American republics. By the time the invitation was sent, the USA had organised the First International Conference of American States in 1890. From Spain, the growth of *Panamericanism* was seen as a competition, only to be aggravated by the decision to organise the Columbian Exhibition of Chicago (1893). If the exhibitions in Madrid aimed to root Spanish identity in historical deeds, Chicago’s event focused on technology and tried to show the world the rising power of the North American Union (Bolotin & Laing 2002). For the Latin American republics, the decision to participate in Madrid’s or in Chicago’s exhibition, or in both, became a matter of politics and diplomacy, and provoked large internal debates.

Latin American societies were torn along political lines, between progressive and conservatives programmes, and between an admiration for the values of the North American Union and the fear of its colonial ambitions. Similarly, the rapprochement to Spain was dictated by current politics and particular issues, as evinced by the case of the Quimbayas Hoard. When the president of Colombia, Carlos Holguín (1832–1894), received the invitation to participate in Madrid’s exhibition, he used public funds to acquire a hoard of pre-Columbian gold artefacts that had been looted and divided between different Colombian collectors. After being exposed as one set in both Madrid and Chicago, in 1893, the hoard was dismantled again: 74 gold artefacts remained in Chicago as a gift, whereas 122 pieces were donated to the Spanish government. This was justified at the time as a reward for Spanish support in a dispute over borders with Venezuela, settled in 1891 with the mediation of the Spanish Regent Queen. Moreover, the gift had symbolic value: it was only in 1886 that the Colombian Republic had established full diplomatic relationships with its former metropolis (Gamboa 2002).

Indeed, the 1892 celebrations inaugurated a period of improved diplomatic relations between Spain and the former territories, and confirmed the double international projection of Spain: both towards Europe and the American territories. In this context, the history of the conquest was rewritten in nationalist key; in 1892 the national history book series promoted under the auspices of the Royal Academy of History by its president, the statesman Antonio Cánovas del Castillo (1828–1897), leader of the conservative party, started to be published (Peiró 1995, Boyd 1997). This work responded to the ideological orientation of a political system, the *Restauración*, which favoured the ideological matching of Catholic faith and Spanish nationalism. In this context, Spanish imperial history was cultivated and celebrated in order to boost national pride,

and to disperse the phantoms of the present, such as the social unrest provoked by the workers movement.

After the closure of those exhibitions, the Palace was finally set up to host the institutions it was created for: the National Library and the National Archaeological Museum. Under the supervision of Rada y Delgado, the materials were installed in its new premises, which were inaugurated in 1895. Latin American collections were displayed as a subsection within the Ethnographic department, in five rooms, in which the collections were set according to geographical criterion. The rooms decorated with Pre-Columbian American motives, which included some of the elements present in the national pavilions of the Exhibition, such as plaster casts of Central American sculptures and friezes sent by the Mexican delegation (Ramírez Losada 2009). As opposed to this focus on the greater archaeological cultures of Latin America, the colonial period was not given much attention.

All these events celebrating the colonial past, present and future of the Spanish nation were promoted by the state in a period of instability marked by crisis in the colonies. In 1895 a new uprising in Cuba claimed independence, followed by a rebellion the next year in the Philippines. The USA entered into the war between the Cuban revolts and the Spanish monarchy in 1898 after three years of conflict, which had in Spain provoked inflamed nationalist discourses in the Parliament and in the press, and a bitter feeling among the popular classes whose sons made up the majority of the soldiers. In a quick battle, the US navy defeated the old Spanish ships in Santiago de Cuba, and in December the Peace Treaty was signed in Paris, in which Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines as the remains of the Spanish empire were sold off. Finally, in 1899 the Spanish government sold the last remaining territories of the overseas empire in the Pacific, the Marianas, Carolinas and Palaos archipelago to the German Empire (Fusi & Niño 1996; Balfour 1997; Pan-Mantojo & Álvarez-Junco 1998). As an immediate consequence, the Ministry of Overseas was suppressed (and with it the Museum of Overseas) enacting symbolically the end of a colonial enterprise (Carrero & Blanco 1999).

### **“Hispanidad”, Re-conquering the Americas for the Spanish national project (1900–1936)**

The colonial crisis of 1898 was perceived as a blow to Spanish national identity. The idea of the decadence of the national body obsessed a generation of patriotic intellectuals in the first third of the twentieth century, who proposed scientific improvement to regenerate the political, social and economic structures of the country. They regretted what for them was a long chain of historical wrongdoings, which had separated Spain from the path of European civilised nations. As a remedy they proposed the “Europeanisation” of Spain. These ideas informed a process of development of the country’s cultural and scientific structures in the first three decades of the century, which has been named the “Silver Age of Spanish culture” (Varela 1999; Gómez-Ferrer Morant, G. & R. Sánchez 2007).

This early twentieth-century Spanish nationalism continued to consider the country’s history as a process of centralisation and homogenisation of its different territories, in which the Castilian language and tradition constituted the backbone of national identity. Nevertheless, in the last third of the nineteenth century, cultural nationalist movements had begun to develop in several areas of the country, to be transformed into political parties in the first decades of the

twentieth century in the Basque Provinces and in Catalonia. It was in this context that the memory of the empire and the links with the Spanish-speaking world were stressed in order to reaffirm internally a unitary national identity. As the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955) argued, Spain had united precisely to conquer its position in the world; the American empire became the justification of the nation, just when its identity was shaken as a result of the loss of the colonies and the rising of alternative nationalist projects (Forcadell 1998, Taibo 2007).

These ideas combined with a renovated interest in the people as a depositary of national essences. For this reason the history of the Hispanic Empire was redefined as the evolution of a civilisation based on language and traditions, particularly in the work of the historian Rafael Altamira (1866–1951), who developed the school of *Hispanoamericanismo*. If *Hispanismo* was the study of the Spanish civilisation, a term coined by French scholars in the last third of the nineteenth century, which implied a symbolic appropriation of Spanish past, and *americanismo* was the scientific study of the Americas, *Hispanoamericanismo* implied the spiritual “re-conquest” of those territories and was based on the assertion of a shared “civilisation” on both sides of the Atlantic (Valero 2003). Nonetheless, as Sepúlveda has studied, twentieth century *Hispanoamericanismo* was divided in tendencies along political lines: on the one hand, progressive *Hispanoamericanismo*, and on the other *Hispanidad*, developed by conservative thinkers (Sepúlveda 1999 & 2005).

As Carlos Serrano has studied from the point of view of the public monuments, the conversion of the colonial past into a key element of national identity was developed in exactly those two decades that followed the 1898 defeat. In just a few years, the memory of the bloodshed of the colonial war in Cuba was transformed by the desire to reconstruct the ties with the American territories. The vitality of the nation and the race, symbolized by the young King Alphonse XIII (1902–1931) had to be fostered by remembering the deeds of the past. This rapprochement was to compensate for the marginal position of Spain in the 1919 peace treaties signed at the end of the First World War, which had confirmed the pre-eminence of colonial empires, France and Great Britain, the beginning of USA’s international power, whilst also fostering the dissolution of multi-national monarchies in Central Europe (Serrano 1999).

However, the rapprochement with Spain was partly seconded and partly contested by Latin Americans. In 1913, the celebrations of the 12<sup>th</sup> of October were launched in both Spain and the Latin American Republics as “Day of Race” (*Día de la Raza*) and in 1918 it was declared Spain’s national day (Barrachina 2000). Whereas conservative politicians and Catholic hierarchies supported the celebration of the 12th of October, others, such as the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969) denounced Spain’s attempt of *Reconquista espiritual* of the Americas (in clear reference to Altamira’s formulation) as a form of neo-colonialism, and affirmed that what for Spain meant *europización* was for Cuba *americanización*, meaning learning from the USA and imitating its technological development (Ortiz 1911).

During Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship (1923–1930), conservative thinkers shaped the concept *Hispanidad*, highlighting the role of Spain not just in the conquest of the New World but also in its conversion to the Catholic Faith. The Hispanic-American Exhibition (*Exposición Hispano-Americana*), organised in Seville in 1929, sought to stress the alleged fraternity with the former colonies, in the city that had monopolised the trade with the Americas in early modern times.

Though the celebration of the American past was not the reserve of the right wing, the Republican authorities that ruled the country after 1931 fully supported it.

In 1935, a collection of Peruvian antiquities amassed by Juan de Larrea (1895-1980), a Spanish poet and man of fortune of Basque origins, was exhibited in Madrid. He travelled in 1930 to Perú and in a few months gathered a rich collection, which he managed to ship to Paris. The collection was exhibited in the *Musée d'ethnonographie du Trocadéro* (nowadays *Musée de l'Homme*) in 1933, before being taken to Madrid. The 1935 exhibition triggered the interest of the Spanish government, and that year, it signed an agreement with Larrea, so that the whole collection was loaned to the National Archaeological Museum. Finally, in the midst of the Civil War, Larrea, a supporter of the Republican government, donated his collection to the “Spanish Republican People” on the significant date of the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, 1937. In September of the same year, the Republican authorities decided to create a *Museo-Biblioteca de Indias*. However, the war context impeded the realization of the project (Gutiérrez 1995).

### **The Museum of the Americas (1941–2011)**

In summer 1936, a coup by a group of generals supported by the high ranks of the Catholic Church and the industrial and banking sectors, aimed to overthrow the Republican government. The subsequent Civil War (1936–1939) was an important period for the reframing of the old liberal Spanish national master narrative, which interpreted the history of the country as the fight for independence from foreign domination. Whereas the Francoist claimed that they fought a “crusade” against the enemies of religion and the fatherland, the Republicans denounced the support that Franco obtained from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Nevertheless, what both sides had in common was the idea of the American empire as a crucial element of national identity; this was so well established that in 1937, both warring sides tried to enforce the creation of a Museum of the Americas (González & Limón 1988).

It was finally General Franco, who officially created the *Museo de América* in 1941; in a country socially and economically devastated and diplomatically isolated, the imperial myth was exalted as the central element of the fascist ideology that characterised the first years of Franco’s dictatorship. The holdings of the museum and even its location had been already determined in the 1937 Republican decree; however, the dictatorship used it in its own benefit. The inaugural decree favoured “the heroic deed of the Discovery”, and it set out to promote the knowledge of Spain’s civilising mission. The new museum was firstly located within the premises of the National Archaeological Museum; it was not until 1962 that it was transferred to a purposed-built museum in the university campus of Madrid (*Ciudad Universitaria*), on the North West exit of the city. The *Ciudad Universitaria*, constructed in the 1920s, had been totally destroyed during the siege of Madrid in the Civil War. After 1939, reconstruction began, and in 1956 the dictator erected a gigantic arch of triumph (*Arco de la Victoria*) in commemoration of his victory (Chías 1986; Diéguez 1992).



Figure 3: Museum of the Americas, Madrid (© Ignacio Vleming)

The new museum was inaugurated by General Franco on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1965. Situated right next to the Victory arch, the *Museo de América* was part of the urban propagandistic programme of a regime, which defined itself as *nacional-católico*. Not surprisingly, the purpose-built museum designed by Luis Moya Blanco (1904–1990) and Luis Martínez-Feduchi Ruiz (1901–1975), was inspired by sixteenth century Spanish monastic architecture, stressing thus the role of Spain in the extension of Catholicism to the New World. The museum received the archaeological / anthropological collections from the National Archaeological Museum and the Museum of Anthropology (*Museo de Antropología*), but also a large number of artworks and handcrafts dating to the colonial period, which came from different public institutions. Finally, the research library of the museum also received the library collections that had belonged to the *Museo-Biblioteca de Ultramar*.

The new Museum of the Americas paid particular attention to the colonial period, leaving a much smaller display area for the archaeological collections; it included several historical rooms devoted to Christopher Columbus or to Isabella the Catholic, to the Institutions created by the Spaniards or the Laws that were implemented to rule those territories. The aim was to celebrate the conquest, colonisation and evangelisation as another step in the diffusion of Western civilisation to the rest of the world (Fernández 1965).

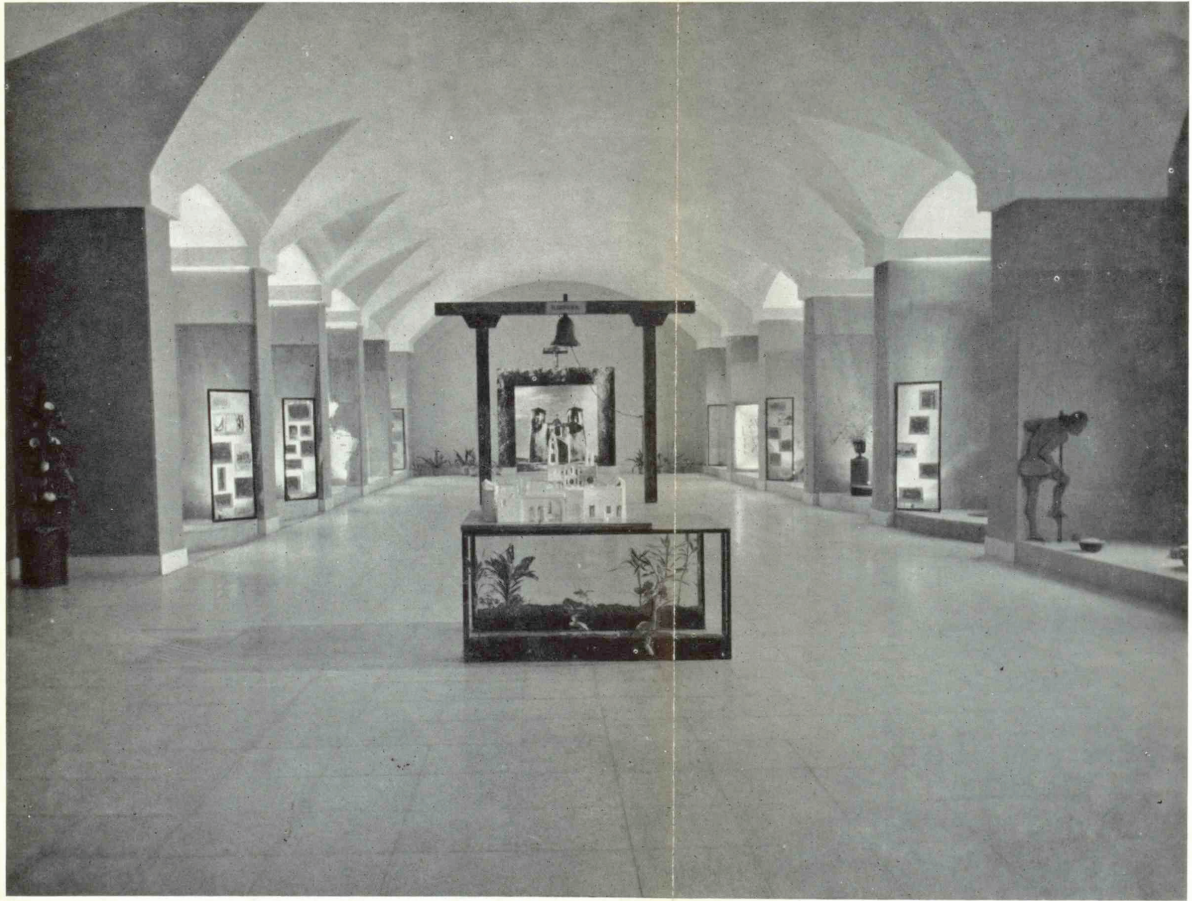


Figure 4: Museum of the Americas, Madrid. View of Room XI: “Room on Institutions”. Taken from Fernández Vega, P. (1965). *Guía del Museo de América*, Madrid, Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Dirección General de Bellas Artes.



Figure 5: Museum of the Americas, Madrid. Two of the dioramas in Room XI: “Institutions”. Translation of the texts: First diorama “España brought wheat to the Americas”. Second diorama “Maize was brought from the Americas”. Taken from Fernández Vega, P. (1965). *Guía del Museo de América*, Madrid, Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Dirección General de Bellas Artes.

In 1981, six years after Franco's death, the museum closed its doors to the public in order to undergo the renovation of its premises. The idea was to complete the renovation for the Fifth Centenary of Colon's arrival to America in 1992, which was celebrated with a World Exhibition in Seville that served as a showcase for Spanish modernity, but also for its international projection. In 1988, the Social-Democrat cabinet had confirmed the 12<sup>th</sup> of October as the national day, consolidating a name that for many had too much of a Francoist connotation: *Día de la Hispanidad* (Barrachina 2000). Democratic Spain also sought to construct diplomatic ties with Latin America, and in 1991 the Mexican city of Guadalajara hosted the first Ibero-American summit, which gathers together every year the representatives of the countries of Spanish and Portuguese official language. In this context, the Museum of the Americas is one of the pieces, albeit not the central one, of a larger strategy of cultural diplomacy oriented towards Latin America, which includes the *Casa de América* established in the very centre of Madrid in 1990; different cooperation programmes directed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs complete this trend of cultural policy.

The new Museum of the Americas was finally inaugurated on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1994, and since then it has not undergone major reforms. Since then, the museum's discourse is structured in five main sections; the first one, "The knowledge on the America" (*El conocimiento de América*) gives a historiographical overview on the formation of collections, and on the historical sources of the "discovery". In this way it provides a dialogue between image and text and guides the visitor's gaze towards the appreciation of the creation of knowledge. The next section, "Geography and Landscapes" deals with the natural setting in which human societies developed. The third section, "Society" is the longest, and it is structured following the classification of human societies provided by anthropology –Bands, Tribes, Chiefdoms and States–, in which it considers both the history of the pre-Columbian peoples and the colonial times. The last two sections, "Religious forms", and "Communication" focus on the cultural expressions. In this way the museum reflects a historical materialist view in which the study of the infrastructure (the environment) is followed by the economic and social structures and finally by the ideological constructions, such as the languages and religious beliefs (Jiménez 1995).

The display is classically object-orientated, and in so doing the museum does not render any historical master narratives explicitly but camouflages it in scientific theory, anthropology in particular, without reflecting critically on it. The museum stresses the creative mixing of peoples and cultures and the legacy of Spanish civilisation to the New World, while avoiding any discussion on the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise. It thus seemingly reflects the motto that dominated the 1992 celebrations: "The Meeting of Two Worlds" (*El encuentro de dos mundos*). In the last fifteen years, Spanish society has undergone major changes in its composition due to the arrival of waves of immigrants from Latin America and other parts of the world. As a consequence, the Museum of the Americas tries to fulfil a role in contemporary society by the organisation of activities that address Latin American immigrants in it.

Other initiatives have contributed to the historiographical re-addressing of the colonial period, such as, for instance, the exhibition organised by the Museo del Prado and the *Patrimonio Nacional* in October 2010-January 2011, "Pintura de los reinos. Identidades compartidas en el mundo hispánico" (Painting from the kingdoms. Shared identities in the Hispanic world"). It attempted "to bring the European public closer to an area of 16th- and 17th-century painting that has

generally been excluded from the art historical literature on painting, while demonstrating to what degree the Spanish monarchy was a motor for artistic and intellectual stimulus” (<http://www.museodelprado.es/en/exhibitions/exhibitions/at-the-museum/pintura-de-los-reinos/la-exposicion/>).

## Conclusions

*Descubrimiento, Hispanoamericanismo, Hispanidad, Encuentro*, those ideological constructs have characterised the evolution of the relationship between Spain and the Latin American territories in the last two hundred years, as well as determining the creation and display of Latin American collections in Spain’s national museums. By following the arrival and display of those collections, it is possible to analyse the changing relationship between Spain and those territories. When the first collections arrived in Early Modern Times, they were considered scientific objects or curiosities, clearly different from European artworks. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that American collections started to become relevant artefacts for the writing of Spanish national narrative. The 1892 “Discovery” celebrations inaugurated new relations between Spain and the former colonies, but also a reconsideration of its material and cultural legacy. The creation of the Museum of the Americas in 1941, although charged ideologically by the dictatorship, followed the trends marked by liberal historiography since the early twentieth century. In this long process, Latin American collections became the material evidence of a historical process, the conquest and colonisation of a continent, whose control determined the evolution of the Iberian societies in the last five hundred years, and still nowadays guides their international geostrategic position.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> “la historia monumental de aquel brillante y dilatado período de perenne lucha, que comienza en Pelayo y termina en Isabel la Católica, debe ocupar el principal compartimiento de nuestro Museo arqueológico”. Royal Decree of 20 March 1867, creating the National Archaeological Museum, published in *Gazeta de Madrid*, issue 80, on 21 March. See Marcos Pous 1993.
- <sup>2</sup> “los diversos grados de cultura que tenían los indígenas cuando españoles y portugueses llegaron allí por vez primera, así como los restos y vestigios de antiguas y ya entonces extinguidas civilizaciones”. Original document quoted in Bernabéu 1987: 153. Documental Appendix. Document 1: “Preámbulos y reales decretos creando la comisión de 1888”.
- <sup>3</sup> “aparecerá representado el estado actual de la América neolatina”, “para Gloria de los que trasplantaron allí la civilización europea y de los pueblos que de ella proceden y que la han hecho florecer”. Original document quoted in Bernabéu 1987: 153-54. Documental Appendix. Document 1: “Preámbulos y reales decretos creando la comisión de 1888”.
- <sup>4</sup> From the moment in which “se empezaron a formar las nuevas naciones de la península” to the time “en que buscaron y hallaron territorios inmensos por donde extenderse a través de los mares”. Original document quoted in Bernabéu 1987: 157. Documental Appendix. Document 2: “Preámbulo al real decreto de la junta directiva de 1891”.
- <sup>5</sup> “el respectivo estado de cultura que, en el punto de encontrarse, conquistados y conquistadores alcanzaban”. Original document quoted in: Bernabéu 1987: 157. Documental Appendix. Document 2: “Preámbulo al real decreto de la junta directiva de 1891”.



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