The Early Modern period was a time of unusual revolutionary activity in many areas, and especially in the Mediterranean basin. Whereas a great deal of attention has been paid to the Renaissance and Reformation roots of the rights revolutions and modern political change, less attention has been paid to equally revolutionary developments in art, art history and archaeology. In this course, we will examine an emerging culture of encyclopedic display as it developed in modern archaeology and the public art museums created to house treasures newly excavated and/or looted. What we see is, first, that the gunpowder empires rapidly took their rivalry in a new aesthetic direction, vying with one another for the best art collections, and second, that national and imperial museums created a new way of seeing such art objects, as common heritage and public treasure. Both archaeology and museums were put in the service of displaying the nation, and in the case of the last great empire of Islam, the empire itself. In each case, museums tell a politically and culturally meaningful story, often through a profound re-creation of the past.

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