
Practices of circulation: radioisotopes and cytology in the atomic age

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Abstract

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Invented and manufactured elsewhere – in the U.S. – radioisotopes travelled in the immediate post-WWII better as knowledge than as practice: it was easier to know about their physical-chemistry than to test their effects on living matter –. The effect of radioactivity, that of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was indeed well-known. In the early days of their circulation, from 1948 on, a long journey was needed to get a sample of one of them. The journey was physical and political; it concerned transportation of a sample and diplomacy. As a product obtained under military security measures during WWII, its travels were not permitted – not because of its radiance, but for security reasons, as Angela Creager has shown. Social and biological knowledge travelled attached to every parcel containing a radioisotope in a small and carefully packed bottle, whose genealogy in Spain was the powerful tool that experimental research had become for a culture of learning based on travel. In the parcel within travelled the culture of the atomic age that was putting the basis for medical, human genetics.

This presentation will put travel at the core of a reflection on the circulation of a set of knowledge and practices in biology and medicine during the atomic age in which Spanish research settings participated.

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