

In 1936 in Spain, a military coup started a Civil War which was followed by four decades of dictatorship. The new regime based its legitimacy on its connection to the fifteenth century, during the reign of the Catholic Kings, a time when the remaining focus of Islam in the kingdom of Granada had been erased and America had been discovered. This period, hailed as a “Golden Age”, was represented by the regime as being of long duration, continuing forward into the reign of Charles V and Philip II and tracing its origins back into the Middle Ages and even deeper into the Roman period. In the latter, the Iberian Peninsula had been considered an integral part of the Roman Empire; this was also acclaimed as the time when conversion to Christianity had begun. This perception of imperial glory and budding Christianity as the essence of Rome’s meaning for Spain was far from new, for it had been drafted at the end of the fifteenth century, but in the mid-twentieth century it was reappropriated and re-interpreted from a totalitarian perspective. In the ideological universe of the dictatorship, archaeology did not have a central role, except for the Roman period. Much as was done in Italy, politicians selected images from Rome and integrated them into their political discourse. The Roman Empire was evoked as an essential precedent to the new era in Spanish politics. Roman figures such as Seneca, Trajan and Hadrian were portrayed as national heroes. The fascist-influenced group of La Falange, in particular, employed the image of Caesar and Augustus. As an echo of Mussolini’s *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*, a “*Semana Augústea*” was organised in Zaragoza in 1940. Changes within the regime from the mid-1950s, however, made politicians abandon these types of overt use of the past.

Archaeologists were not unaware of politicians’ use of the Roman past. Some certainly tried to make sure that their allegiance to the regime was well understood by politicians, colleagues and the general public alike. This paper will explore several cases in this framework. First, the return of La Dama de Elche sculpture by the Vichy Government to Spain and the revision of its dating as “Roman” will be discussed. Secondly, the paper will focus on the conversion of international projects such as the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* and the *Tabula Imperii Romani* into nationalist undertakings. Thirdly, the excavation of Ampurias and the contradictions of the Roman image in Catalonia will be examined. Finally, the paper will pay attention to the new interpretations of Roman material in the Spanish protectorate of Morocco.