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DEVOTIO IBERICA AND THE MANIPULATION
OF ANCIENT HISTORY TO SUIT SPAIN'S
MYTHIC NATIONALIST PAST

By FIONA GREENLAND

In the middle of the fourth century BC, Publius Decius Mus, a celebrated general in the Roman army, sacrificed himself against enemy lines in return for the gods' protection of his soldiers and city.¹ Two hundred and seventy years later, the eques Quintus Sertorius was rescued from the battlefield by his Iberian followers, who hoisted him onto their shoulders and passed him safely over a city wall, out of the range of fire.² What Decius did was called a *devotio* by ancient writers; modern scholars cite Sertorius' rescue as an example of *devotio Iberica*. In both cases, a cognate of the verb *devoveo* is used. This paper explores the confusion between two related but nevertheless distinct uses of the term, and argues that *devotio Iberica*, although possibly referring to an actual phenomenon, should be understood primarily as an ancient practice invented by modern historians to further an idealized image of ancient Spain under the Francoist dictatorship.

Along with *damnatio memoriae* and *Romanitas*, *devotio Iberica* is not a phrase attested in ancient literature, but is often used as if it were. Like those expressions, *devotio Iberica* takes on a variety of meanings depending on the author and context in which it is used. Whilst the invention of Latinate phrases can provide a convenient tool with which to refer to historically rooted practices or beliefs for which we do not have the ancient terminology, such invention can also lead to problems: modern scholarship has turned one form of 'vowing oneself' into another (as can be done in English with the term 'self-sacrifice').

Undoubtedly, *devoveo* and its cluster of cognates legitimately served a number of purposes, as a cursory glance through the relevant entry in the *OLD* illustrates. My primary concern here, however, is not with the etymological and semantic roots of the myriad uses for *devoveo*. What needs probing is how *devotio* came to describe an ancient Iberian 'custom,' and whether the literary and material evidence can

¹ Livy 8.9.5–10.

² Plutarch, *Sert.* 14.5; Sallust, *Hist.* 1.112; 1.125.

support this supposed custom. I argue that the phrase *devotio Iberica* was invented at a time when archaeologists and historians in Spain sought evidence of their country's national, imperialist past. It is no coincidence that, just when it was politically fashionable to characterize the people of Spain as loyal nationalists, *devotio Iberica* was unearthed as a model of early nationalism. Greek and Roman authors used instances of *devotiones* to transmit fantasies of a bygone Republican era. *Devotio Iberica*, though differing from the Roman *devotio* in several respects, is related to it, one defining the other as an emblem of nationalism and loyalty to the state.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section examines the historiography of *devotio Iberica* and its use (and misuse) in twentieth-century scholarship. The second section discusses Greek and Latin passages that recount episodes of battlefield leader protection among soldiers from the Iberian Peninsula.³ The third section considers the social and cultural import of battlefield self-sacrifice, and its role in the Roman value system. Finally, the fourth section concludes the paper by asking whether, notwithstanding the criticisms, there is evidence for an actual ancient practice similar to *devotio Iberica*.

'Devotio Iberica' – leader protection pacts among Iberians

References to *devotio Iberica* and its variant, *fides Iberica*, are frequent and diverse in modern scholarship.⁴ *Devotio Iberica* has an impressive pedigree, used variously to characterize Spanish peoples as fiercely loyal and stubborn in battle (to the point of self-destruction); to account for the founding of the imperial cult in Roman Spain; and, to refer to a religious or military cult.

³ The Gallic and German examples are included not from any *a priori* assumption that a unified 'Celtic spirit' linked these events, but because they provide important comparisons and place the Iberian incidents in a wider cultural framework.

⁴ Exacerbating the problem of definition and use is the propensity to interchange *devotio Iberica* and *fides Iberica*. L. A. Curchin, for example, refers to 'the institution of *devotio* or *fides Iberica*, whereby the clients of a Spanish leader would accompany him into battle and forfeit their own lives if he died' (L. A. Curchin, 'Cult and Celt: indigenous participation in emperor worship in central Spain', in A. Small [ed.], *Subject and Ruler. The Cult of the Ruling Power in Classical Antiquity*, JRA Supplementary Series No. 17, [Ann Arbor, 1996], 143ff.). Elsewhere, he defines *fides Iberica* as 'Spanish devotion to their leaders without regard for their own lives' (L. A. Curchin, *Roman Spain* [London, 1991], 43). The same author uses the term to describe an indigenous way of thinking: 'The year 72 was spent subduing Clunia, Uxama, Calagurris and other towns which still resisted out of *fides Iberica* to the memory of Sertorius (sometimes to the point of cannibalism) until Pompey was master of all Citerior' (Curchin [1991], 46).

In its most famous scholarly guise, *devotio Iberica* is a key factor in the establishment of the Roman imperial cult in Spain, an argument set forth by Robert Étienne. Étienne suggested that fidelity, personal and impersonal, was innate to the ‘mentalité des indigènes’ of the Iberian Peninsula. Further, he considered *devotio Iberica* to have proceeded ‘directly from wartime mentality and relations with military clientele.’⁵ He differentiated *devotio Iberica* from *devotio Romana* – the military-religious act in which a magistrate *cum imperio* consecrates his life to the infernal gods in exchange for the destruction of the enemy.⁶ In contrast with *devotio Romana*, according to Étienne, *devotio Iberica* entails the consecration of the lives of warriors for the divine protection of their chief or general. A major part of Étienne’s analysis centres round the supposition that Iberian soldiers consecrated themselves willingly, out of personal loyalty to the chief or general, in an effort to bolster his hypothesis that the ‘mentalité ibérique’ made Spain fertile ground for the imperial cult to flourish.

Étienne’s theory on the link between *devotio Iberica* and the imperial cult has found widespread acceptance.⁷ A variation on this theory has it that *devotio Iberica* smoothed the way for the implementation of Roman-style patronage systems. For example, in assessing the role of patronage in pre-Roman, and then in Roman, Spain, Leonard Curchin writes: ‘Patronage was a conspicuous and essential mechanism in both Celtic and Roman societies, a partial mitigation of the inequalities of the class hierarchy. [...] In Celtic Britain the clients would fight and die in defence of the nobles (Martial 2.18; Tacitus, *Agr.* 12.1). In Spain we find the same principle under the name of *devotio Iberica*. The transition to Roman rule merely substituted Roman for Iberian patrons.’ To account for the appearance of the imperial cult in Roman Spain, Curchin uses Étienne’s argument:

The cult of the leader was an established phenomenon in pre-Roman Spain, where *devotio Iberica* entailed not only respecting, but worshipping and, if necessary, dying for him. [...] Once the indigenous tribes had accepted Roman leadership, it was natural for them to treat an outstanding general like Scipio Africanus or Sertorius as god. [...] Under the Empire, Spaniards worshipped the Roman emperors as they had worshipped previous leaders.⁸

⁵ R. Étienne, *Le culte impérial dans la péninsule ibérique* (Paris, 1958), 75.

⁶ Étienne (n. 5), 77.

⁷ Curchin (n. 4, 1996); D. Fishwick, ‘Four temples at Tarraco’, in A. Small (ed.), *Subject and Ruler: The Cult of the Ruling Power in Classical Antiquity*, JRA Supplementary Series No. 17, (Ann Arbor, 1996), 165ff; M. Salinas de Frías, *Conquista y romanización de Celtiberia* (Salamanca, 1986), 196f.

⁸ Curchin (n. 4, 1991), 162.

Curchin is even more specific on what he sees as the link between *devotio Iberica* and the imperial cult in a 1996 article in which he concludes, 'Although the imperial cult in central Spain by no means supplanted pre-Roman cults, the Celtic custom of *devotio* with its emphasis on the cult of the leader must have considerably facilitated the transition to emperor worship in this provincial hinterland.'⁹ Curchin makes a solid case for the growth of the imperial cult having been strengthened by pre-existing forms of leader veneration, but is misleading when he refers to a 'Celtic custom of *devotio*' since it is not at all clear to what extent this 'custom' was diachronic, widespread, or Celtic-influenced.

Duncan Fishwick takes Étienne's theory a step further in his study of changes in the urban topography of Roman Spain after the introduction of the imperial cult. Fishwick uses the phrase *devotio Iberica* to mean loyalty to a leader or regime. For example, he characterizes the monumental landscape of the city of Tarraco as 'a political statement, a declaration of loyalty to Rome by imitation of her monuments, an avowal of solidarity and sympathy with the ruling power. What it all amounts to is a tremendous outpouring of *devotio Iberica* which R. Étienne first identified some thirty-five years ago.'¹⁰ In essence, Fishwick suggests that *devotio Iberica* was a mentality or a behavioural trait, rather than a religious act.

In speaking primarily in terms of political sagacity and loyalty to the ruling body, Curchin and Fishwick diminish the religiosity of leader protection pacts and the imperial cult. As Simon Price's work on the imperial cult demonstrates, it was not the main point of the cult to promote loyalty or prevent revolts and rebellions.¹¹ This is not to say that the cult was not tied to the dominant political apparatus; indeed, its success was ensured by the willingness of local leaders all over the Empire to implement and oversee the rituals of the cult. However, 'indigenous loyalty pacts + new governing regime = Roman imperial cult' is too crude an equation to explain the relationship between old and new leader veneration practices. It is worth thinking about why Curchin's and Fishwick's theories differ from Price's. Price is an historian with a strong interest in ancient religion and how rites and rituals worked within their cultural contexts. Curchin and Fishwick are historians dealing primarily with questions of historical

⁹ Curchin (n. 4, 1996), 152.

¹⁰ Fishwick (n. 7), 184.

¹¹ S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power. The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge, 1984), 239ff.

processes and development. For Price, vowing/sacrificing oneself can be located in a religious framework and does not necessarily impinge on wider social processes. For Curchin and Fishwick, *devotio* can be understood as a religious act but is more of interest as evidence of social behaviours and ethnic characteristics.

Thus, *devotio Iberica* plays a prominent role in the development of the imperial cult in Spain, and explains Iberians' supposed leader loyalty in various scholars' works. These theories are fraught with ideological tensions, and it is salutary to look at the origins of *devotio Iberica*.

The phrase was coined by José-María Ramos y Loscertales in 1924, in an article appearing in a Spanish law journal. In his article, he writes:

Among the Iberians [...] there existed a social institution, not founded in blood so much as in a personal relationship freely contracted out of fidelity and reciprocal services, created preferably for war. [...] In the *devotio* ibérica one observes [...] two integral elements: the one purely social, which puts one in intimate contact with the military clientela, the other rooted in religious consciousness.¹²

Ramos y Loscertales stresses that although the Iberian practice was not identical to the Roman *devotio*, the single name (*devotio*) can legitimately be applied to both because of close analogies between the two practices. Nevertheless, he argues that the idea of a Roman aspect to the Spanish leader protection pacts should not influence too much our understanding of them. At the heart of the Roman *devotio* is the aim of annihilating the enemies, but on the Iberian Peninsula, 'there was nothing similar; for this reason it is not possible to confuse the two.'¹³ In light of the differences between the self-sacrifice of a Roman general, and the pledge of Spanish soldiers to protect their leader, it is interesting that Ramos y Loscertales chose to use *devotio* at all to refer to the Spanish practice. His motives for doing so become clear when it is remembered that he worked during an 'upsurge' of Spanish nationalism that influenced ancient history and archaeology.¹⁴ *Devotio* represented precisely what Ramos y Loscertales and his coevals hoped to draw from the Spanish past.

¹² J. M. Ramos y Loscertales, 'La "*devotio*" ibérica', *Anuario de historia del derecho español* 1 (1924), 7ff. My translation.

¹³ Ramos y Loscertales (n. 12), 15.

¹⁴ M. Díaz-Andreu, 'Archaeology and nationalism in Spain', in P. L. Kohl and C. Fawcett (eds.), *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology*, (Cambridge, 1995), 39ff.

In September 1923, Miguel Primo de Rivera led a coup d'état that resulted in the establishment of a military dictatorship, the suspension of the constitution and the Cortes (Spanish parliament), and the imposition of martial law and strict censorship. Ramos y Loscertales was a young scholar at the time (he would reach his publishing peak in the 1940s and 1950s), and discovered that the best way to win an academic post was to produce work sympathetic with the new political mood. After Spain's civil war, he made his name as an expert in the legal codes of Spain in the early medieval period. Throughout his publications there runs a distinct philosophical thread: peoples can be unified under laws.¹⁵ Like many of the Spanish historians of his time, Ramos y Loscertales sought to prove that Spain was at her most glorious when the Iberian Peninsula was united, whether under the Romans, the Visigoths, or the Catholic monarchs.¹⁶

Alongside his research into medieval Spain, Ramos y Loscertales kept up his interest in the Peninsula's Roman period. His *devotio Iberica* article focused on the mechanisms by which ancient Iberians made and kept vows, which functioned (he argues) as quasi-religious legal ties. Ramos y Loscertales had professional and political incentive to make the case that the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula had a natural tendency to unite under the banner of one ruler or regime – a tendency traceable back to the pre-Roman period¹⁷ and, by implication, active still in the Francoist era.

That Franco's nationalism affected archaeological theory and ancient history in Spain has been soundly illustrated by Margarita Díaz-Andreu. In particular, she has argued that Francoist Spain pushed a monolithic ethnic agenda that encouraged historians and archaeologists to see 'Iberians' as a cohesive ethnic group whose purported similarities amounted to a form of early nationalism.¹⁸ Elsewhere, Gonzalo Ruiz-Zapatero and Jesús Álvarez-Sanchis have discussed schoolbooks' portrayal of Spanish pre-history as a 'uniform, timeless, "remote past"' which reinforced Spanish nationalism and studied the past only insofar as the past 'can be used to reinforce and

¹⁵ Ramos y Loscertales, 'El derecho de los francos de Logroño en 1095', *Berceo* 2 (1947); *El Reino de Aragón bajo la dinastía pamplonesa* (Salamanca, 1961); *La tenencia de año y día en el derecho aragonés (1063–1247)* (Salamanca, 1951).

¹⁶ Díaz-Andreu (n. 14), 46.

¹⁷ Ramos y Loscertales, 'Hospicio y clientela en la España céltica', *Emerita* 10 (1948), 308ff. Although he viewed the Roman domination of Spain as helpful to the development of the Peninsula, Ramos y Loscertales differentiated native, Celtiberian *hospitium* from Roman *hospitium*. In essence, loyalty was a characteristic innate to Iberians, not a foreign import.

¹⁸ Díaz-Andreu (n. 14).

illustrate the values of the present.¹⁹ The invention and promotion of *devotio Iberica* was part of the same sustained intellectual campaign designed to reconfigure ancient Iberia as an ethnically homogeneous Peninsula, strongly influenced by Celtic culture yet comprising its own ‘big men’ and big events.

Ramos y Loscertales’ political sympathies affected his use and interpretation of the literary evidence at his disposal. Relying on Greek and Latin texts, he pieced together written fragments to create the image of a widespread wartime phenomenon among the Iberians. He was aware that numerous names were attached to the pre-Roman tribes of the Iberian Peninsula, but chose to downplay their significance as discrete peoples or nations. Instead, he classified these peoples as one national entity, often referring to the collective ‘Iberian people,’ perhaps partly out of ignorance (he was not trained in Iberian prehistory), but in part, certainly, to create the image of a single, culturally related Spanish population.²⁰

Textual evidence

What is the literary evidence that Ramos y Loscertales used to formulate *devotio Iberica*? Sallust, Strabo and Plutarch recount episodes of mass self-sacrifice in battle among Iberian soldiers, while Valerius Maximus and Cassius Dio provide tertiary discussions of this ‘custom’.

It can probably go without saying that Greek and Roman authors did not have a clear grasp of tribal and ethnic groupings of the Iberian Peninsula. Indeed, scholars continue to debate whether and how to divide and label the inhabitants of prehistoric Iberia.²¹ The term

¹⁹ G. Ruiz-Zapatero and J. R. Alvarez-Sanchís, ‘Prehistory, story-telling, and illustrations: The Spanish past in school textbooks (1880–1994)’, *Journal of European Archaeology* 3.1 (1995), 213ff.

²⁰ For general discussions on diversity in Iberian ethnicity: M. Almagro Gorbea and G. Ruiz Zapatero (eds.), *La Palaeoetnología de la Península Ibérica* (Madrid, 1993); M. Díaz-Andreu, ‘Ethnicity and Iberians’, *European Journal of Archaeology* 1.2 (1998), 199ff. On Cantabrians: B. García Fernández-Albalat, *Guerra y religión en la Gallaecia y la Lusitania antiguas* (La Coruña, 1990); I. Sastre, ‘Forms of social inequality in the Castro Culture of north-west Iberia’, *European Journal of Archaeology* 5.2 (2002), 213ff. On Iberians: A. Ruiz Rodríguez, ‘The Iron Age Iberian peoples of the Upper Guadalquivir Valley’, in M. Díaz-Andreu and S. Keay (eds.), *The Archaeology of Iberia. The dynamics of change*, (London, 1997), 175ff. On Celtiberians: A. Lorrio, *Celtiberos* (Alicante, 1997); F. Burillo Mozota, *Los celtiberos. Etnias y estados* (Zaragoza, 1998).

²¹ Nor did the ancient authors understand tribal divisions among the people they broadly call ‘Celts’ and ‘Germans’. As the passages concerning Gaul and Germany are included only for comparing the classical writers’ reports on leader protection pacts, the ethnic groupings of Celts and Germans will not be explored in this paper. Useful overviews of the issue of ethnic diversity

‘Iberian’ was used by Plutarch, Cassius Dio and Strabo even where the peoples concerned were not Iberian in the archaeologically diagnostic sense of the word (people originating from the south or east coast, largely urbanised, and speaking any of the dialects of the Iberian language, a non-Celtic tongue). Some writers were more specific. Valerius Maximus singled out the Celtiberians for praise. Plutarch and Sallust wrote about Lusitanians. Strabo’s passage on the *kataspendein* (avowal) of soldiers to their leader comes just after commentary on Cantabrians’ customs, and just before those of Celtiberians. His switch from ‘Cantabrian’ to ‘Iberian’ suggests that he was aware of differences among peoples.

Two passages from Sallust’s *Histories* mention leader protection and devotion among soldiers of the Iberian Peninsula (the first of these is repeated by Plutarch at *Sert.* 14.5). Reporting on the vicissitudes of Sertorius’ military fortunes in Lusitania, at *Hist.* 1.112 Sallust writes:

While the gates were causing the people to crowd together, and, as usual in such terrified confusion, no distinction was being made regarding birth or rank, Sertorius was raised about half-way up the wall on the shoulders of his servants [*calones*] and then hoisted over the wall by the hands of soldiers positioned on the top of the wall.²²

A second fragment from Sallust (*Hist.* 1.125) mentions part of the Lusitanian soldiers deciding to ‘face up to and die with the enemy’ – also in the context of soldiers fighting under Sertorius.

The third pertinent passage comes from Strabo’s *Geography*. At the end of a discourse on customs ascribed to Iberians, Strabo (3.4.18) writes:

It is a practice among the Iberians for them to devote their lives [*kataspendein*] to whomever they attach themselves, to the point of dying for them.

Strabo’s information on the inhabitants of the Peninsula came primarily from Greeks and Romans who visited the Hispaniae as soldiers, merchants, or explorers. His *Geography* was intended to explain the behaviours and geographical settings of foreign peoples to a central Mediterranean audience.

among Celtic speakers are K. Kristiansen and J. Jensen (eds.), *Europe in the First Millennium B.C.* (Sheffield, 1994) and A. Gilman, ‘Prehistoric European chiefdoms. Rethinking “Germanic societies”’, in T. Douglas and G. M. Feinman (eds.), *Foundations of Social Inequality*, (London, 1995), 235ff.

²² Translation: P. McGushin, *Sallust. The Histories* (Oxford, 1992).

The fourth relevant passage is Plutarch's *Life of Sertorius* (14.5), compiled after AD 96. This is the longest written report of Iberian soldiers dedicating their lives to a leader. Plutarch used several sources of information, some of them written during Sertorius' life or shortly thereafter, but he probably relied primarily on Sallust's *Histories*.²³

It was the custom among the Iberians for those who were stationed close to their leader to die with him if he fell, and the barbarians in those parts call this 'to pour a libation' (*kataspeisin*). Now, the other commanders had few such shield-bearers and companions, but Sertorius was attended by many thousands of men who had thus consecrated themselves to death. And we are told that when his army had been defeated at a certain city and the enemy were pressing upon them, the Iberians, careless of themselves, rescued Sertorius, and taking him on their shoulders one after another, carried him to the walls, and only when their leader was in safety, did they flee, each man for himself. (Loeb translation)

Episodes of leader loyalty are also reported of Gallic and Germanic peoples at Polybius 2.17.12, Caesar, *B Gall.* 6.12.2 and 3.22.1–3, and Tacitus, *Germ.* 13 and 14. None of these makes reference to the *devotiones* of Iberian peoples, but they are part of the wider stereotyping of the European 'Other' as staunchly and unquestioningly loyal to their chieftains (see below).

The point of reference for Sallust, Strabo, Plutarch and Ramos y Loscertales, consciously or unconsciously, is Livy's recounting of the *devotiones ducis* of Publius Decius Mus and his son, Decius, in 340 BC and 295 BC, respectively (8.9.5–10; 10.28.12–18). These *devotiones* are fully studied in H. S. Versnel's 1976 article.²⁴ Briefly, these acts entailed the devotion of the general in the heat of battle and with the support and supervision of the pontifex. The religious nature of the *devotiones* of the Decii is underscored by the consistent use of the word *piaculum* – a divine offering.

Sallust, Strabo and Plutarch in the aforementioned passages deal with a group or individual committed to defend and, if necessary, die for the safety of a leader. The leader in question is mortal, and the dedicatees are soldiers. If civilians also dedicated themselves to a leader, this is not clear to us from the passages. Valerius Maximus and Strabo claim that Celtiberian soldiers devote themselves to their leaders, to the point of dying for them, whilst Plutarch and Sallust give examples of such devotion among Lusitanians. These last two

²³ C. Konrad, *Plutarch's Sertorius: A Historical Commentary* (London, 1994), liii.

²⁴ H. S. Versnel, 'Two types of Roman *devotio*', *Mnemosyne* 29 (1976), 365ff.

portray Lusitanian soldiers putting themselves in danger in order to remove Sertorius from harm's way. Sallust's passage suggests an organized system of protection, such that Sertorius's devotees on the city wall are prepared to receive their general from the shoulders of another group of devoted soldiers on the ground. It is interesting to note that after this rescue the soldiers flee to safety. Having seen the futility of their situation, they fulfil their pledge to protect Sertorius but do not engage in a battle they cannot win. Heroism stops short of suicide. Cassius Dio, meanwhile, describes Sextus Pacuvius' proclamation of loyalty and self-consecration to Augustus as fashioned after a Spanish custom.

The handling of battlefield devotion to leaders in the Greek and Latin texts suggests that the authors are describing something foreign to them, and something uncommon to Roman military practice. We are dealing with an assortment of ethnographic, historical, and moralizing texts. The purpose of the ethnographies is to recount behaviours and practices of non-Greeks and non-Romans to a Greek and Roman readership, and it follows that the authors chose examples that were strange, exotic, and/or emblematic of the peoples about whom they wrote.²⁵ Valerius Maximus' praise for the loyal Celtiberian soldiers, and Caesar's frequent comments on the Gallic soldiers' stubborn willingness to die for their leader, suggest that both men see these devotional practices as unusual; in other words, as behaviour uncommon among Roman soldiers.

The thrust of leader protection pacts was that soldiers were to die in defence of their chief – not in place of their chief – such that the chief be the last man standing, dying only if none of his devoted soldiers remained standing. The implication from the literary sources is that the soldiers involved in a leader protection pact were fighting to defend the honour and life of the chief; in other words, that many were to die for one. Central to the *devotiones* of the Decii, on the other hand, is the idea that one person dies for many.

The permanence of the Spanish leader protection pacts and the temporary nature of the Roman *devotio* provide another point of contrast. The Roman *devotio* was a spur-of-the-moment pledge undertaken to avert defeat.²⁶ A general may have suspected his fate before

²⁵ C. Nicolet, *Space, Geography and Politics in the Early Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor, 1991).

²⁶ As Livy presents the *devotio Decii*, the acts were decided upon and performed on the spot, with seemingly little warning. However, Livy's inclusion of the *haruspex*'s prophetic interpretation of the sacrifice at 8.9.1, and his emphasis on the presence and preparedness of the *pontifices maximi*, suggest that there was a degree of forethought to the acts.

the battle, but the decision to devote oneself was apparently taken during battle, when the vicissitudes of military fortune were made clear. If the devoted general was not killed in battle, he ended his commitment to the vow by burying a seven-foot statue of himself as substitution for the life that he had promised the gods.²⁷ The leader protection pacts, on the other hand, entailed lifelong loyalty and the willingness to die for the chief in battle after battle: once a soldier swore his life to the protection of his chief, he was (apparently) so sworn permanently.²⁸

In purpose, function, and execution, *devotio Iberica* and the *devotiones* of the Decii differ significantly. When one considers the broader political motives behind the promotion of both *devotiones*, however, it becomes clear why *devotio Iberica* and *devotio ducis* were initially linked.

Fantasies of loyalty and leadership among Romans and Spaniards

What was honourable about dying for a chief, general or nation? Why do such acts earn praise from classical authors? Hallowed customs which united gods and armies, the *devotiones* of the Decii fit neatly into imperial fantasies about republican-era heroism and nationalism. One of the cardinal aims of Livy's project was the preservation of archaic Roman religious practices – especially important at a time when native religion was seen to be threatened by foreign rites.²⁹ His accounts of the *devotiones* of the Decii are given fulsome detail so that their authenticity will not be doubted. Not only the performance of *devotio* but the idea of *devotio* are important to Livy. *Devotio* is a drastic measure, redolent with heroism, magic and, above all, loyalty to the state. The Decii execute their *devotiones* only after taking direction from the pontifex maximus. They consecrate themselves in a public performance designed to win the gods' favour on behalf of the Roman Republic and the army, legion, and auxiliaries of the Roman people. The deaths of the Decii are 'virtual paradigms for Roman patriotism', and Livy's accounts have a didactic function, revealed clearly in the praise each Decius receives from his fellow consul (Livy 8.104; 10.29.19–20).³⁰

²⁷ Livy 8.10.12. M. Beard, J. North and S. Price, *Religions of Rome I* (Cambridge, 1998), 35.

²⁸ Étienne (n. 5), 77–8.

²⁹ A. Feldherr, *Spectacle and Society in Livy's History* (Berkeley, 1998), 87.

³⁰ Feldherr (n. 29), 92.

Livy's interest in the *devotiones* of the Decii extends beyond patriotism. In promoting P. Decius Mus as 'a man larger and more exalted [*augustior*] than of human bearing' (8.6.9–10), he reminds his post-Republic audience that there was an age when men could achieve superhuman status through their deeds on behalf of the state. Livy's contemporaries knew that only one man – the emperor – could be considered truly superhuman; more august than other men. In his concern for the minutiae of ritual, magical omens and subsequent glory surrounding the *devotiones* of the Decii, Livy dreams of a Roman past when individuals so loved the Republic that they devoted their lives to the people and institutions of the state.³¹ This ideal became all the more desirable when it was no longer an available reality.

To the authors of late republican and imperial Rome, the *devotiones* of the Decii represented the ultimate sacrifice to the state. For similar reasons, the Iberian soldiers who died for their chiefs were admired by ancient writers enamoured of the idea of pure-hearted loyalty and honour – virtues thought to be absent from their own corrupt times. From the point of view of the Roman value system, Spanish leader loyalty pacts had several positive aspects: group work rather than individual glory (Plutarch, *Sert.* 14.5); loyalty to the state (Val. Max. 2.6.11); and, putting one's life at risk for another, in the name of *amicitia* or *fides*.³² Chief among Romans' expectations of good wartime conduct was *fides* – good faith and the observation of promises solemnly made.³³

So much for the appeal of self-sacrifice to Roman and Greek writers. What explains the importance of devoting oneself to the state to historians and archaeologists under Franco's regime? The intellectual posture of the Regime during much of Franco's rule emphasized a unique and permanent historical personality characterized by a

³¹ Livy was not alone in using the *devotiones Decii* to promote his fantasies of an idealized Republic. See further: Cicero, *Tusc.* 1.89 and *Fin.* 2.61; Seneca, *Ben.* 6.36.2; Valerius Maximus, 5.6.5–6; St Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 5.18.

³² Importantly, Greek and Roman writers were not always supportive of Iberians' conduct on the battlefield. Valerius Maximus (7.6 ext. 3) was horrified by reports of wartime cannibalism among the Calagurritani, and both Plutarch and Sallust hint at chaos among the ranks of Spanish soldiers – a feature of 'barbaric' warfare that the classical authors disdain. It is not surprising that the Greek and Roman authors saw their Gallic, German, and Iberian literary subjects as innately violent: these authors had access to reports and information about these people precisely because of increased Roman military presence among those populations. Stressing the 'warlike nature' of Gauls, Germans, and Iberians was one way of justifying Rome's attempt to subdue and 'civilize' them. See: J. Webster, 'Ethnographic barbarity: colonial discourse and "Celtic warrior societies"', in J. Webster and N. Cooper (eds.), *Roman Imperialism. Post-Colonial Perspectives* (Leicester, 1996), 111ff.

³³ T. Earle, *How Chiefs came to Power. The political economy in prehistory* (Stanford, 1997).

single language, a single culture, and one religion. This monolithic image of the Spanish people was linked to a historical destiny that was meant to legitimize Franco's claim of authority. One of Franco's strategies was to exercise firm government control over key historical and scientific research bodies and academic journals, closely monitoring appointments, funding and publication selection.³⁴ David Herzberger has identified two cardinal aims of Francoist historiography: the assertion of Francoist historians' dominion over time and narration, so that history emerges as myth; and the insistence upon viewing history as truth, such that dissent is disallowed.³⁵

According to such thinking, Spain's essence lay in the unity of its people, with the unifying effects of Catholic religiosity and orthodoxy particularly important. Ramos y Loscertales concentrated his efforts on explaining how laws and the Catholic church contributed to Spain's historical destiny, thus doing his part to accommodate the academic requests of the Regime. He was not alone in casting history as a series of events designed to lead to Franco's Regime. Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo and Rafael Calvo Serer were intellectual icons whose ideas were appropriated into the historiographic enterprise of Franco. These men believed that 'loyalty to one's own history' ensured the sustained health of a nation, and that diversity of historical opinion threatened 'the permanent meaning of [Spanish] history.'³⁶ Under these philosophical circumstances, it becomes clear why *devotio Iberica* should have had resonance within the intellectual culture of Francoist Spain. *Devotio Iberica* showcased those qualities most cherished and extolled by regime historians: unity of the people, bravery in the face of foreign threats, loyalty to the leader and, above all, semblance of nationalism. As Livy promoted the Roman *devotiones* of the Decii as exempla of patriotism and duty, so Ramos y Loscertales formulated *devotio Iberica* as evidence of the timeless tendency of Spaniards to unite under their own flag.

³⁴ G. Pasamar Alzuria, *Historiografía e ideología en la postguerra española. La ruptura de la tradición liberal* (Zaragoza, 1991).

³⁵ D. K. Herzberger, *Narrating the Past. Fiction and historiography in postwar Spain* (London, 1995), 16f.

³⁶ Herzberger (n. 35), 22f.

Devotio Iberica: historical reality?

Is there truth to Ramos y Loscertales's *devotio Iberica*, or should his theory be dismissed on grounds of political manipulation? In fact, there is some evidence from archaeology and literature to suggest that demonstrations of battlefield fidelity and adherence to socio-military codes were valued among Iberians and Celtiberians. To die in defence of, or out of loyalty to, a general or chief was to die nobly. Specifically, four factors made Iberian societies conducive to leader-pact deaths: political organisation, indigenous religious mentality, social collaboration, and contemporary circumstances.

The current thinking on Iberian and Celtiberian tribes is that they featured a hierarchical structure with some measure of chiefly rule. The chief or head ruler commanded the vertical socio-political groupings, possibly with the assistance of a rank of co-chiefs or advisers, and this leader's subordinates were bound to him with a specific bond of fealty.³⁷ Reinforcing the cohesion of these hierarchical groups were cultural mechanisms such as special nomenclature, clothing, and participation in/exclusion from certain public events. The archaeological and textual evidence from Celtiberian (and some Iberian) territories indicate that some of the chief's subordinates had a special military function, travelling with him in a retinue and meeting privately with him. The existence of a centralized power, and of the institutionalisation of authority, reinforced the power of the chief and the legitimacy of his ideology. In this context, rather than in a segmented tribal society with little consolidated power, leader loyalty and protection pacts could thrive.³⁸

The institution of the military and the appearance of military strength were important elements in the creation and reinforcement of complex political institutions, including those of Gaul, Germany, and the Iberian Peninsula at the time of the Roman campaigns. Soldiers bolstered their chief's standing by defeating opposing rulers, dominating enemy populations, and protecting their leaders and territory. War was a critical factor in the success of chiefly power strategies in temperate Europe; all complex chiefdoms in this area relied to some extent on the military to bring people under the ruler's sway.³⁹

³⁷ L. A. García Moreno, 'Organización sociopolítica de los Celtas en la Península Ibérica', in M. Almagro-Gorbea and G. Ruiz Zapatero (eds.), *Los celtas. Hispania y Europa* (Madrid, 1993), 327ff.

³⁸ Burillo Mozota (n. 20), 144f.

³⁹ Earle (n. 33), 104f.

From the chief's (and later the general's) point of view, it was just as important to keep his soldiers wary of his power as it was to keep the enemy wary of his soldiers' strength. To this end, internal structures such as a hierarchy of command sought to ensure discipline and obeisance. Passages by Valerius Maximus, Caesar, and Tacitus report this sort of intra-communal discipline. Each author states that the devoted soldier who survives his chief on the battlefield incurs shame and infamy: *Celtiberi etiam nefas esse ducebant proelio superesse cum is occidisset pro cuius salute spiritum devoverant* (Val. Max. 2.6.11).

The second factor was religion. Formalized religious structures were evidently unnecessary for worship among Iberian peoples: gods were everywhere, particularly in natural features such as springs, trees, lakes, and hills.⁴⁰ What we might call the 'unexplained' played a role in indigenous religious thinking. The story of Sertorius' fawn provides a good example of how miracle working was used by a leader to attract and maintain a following. Plutarch (*Sert.* 11.2–4) recounts the giving of a purely white fawn to Sertorius by a plebeian from the Spanish countryside. The fawn was completely tamed and obeyed Sertorius' calls and commands. Sertorius gradually tried to give the fawn religious importance by telling people that it was a gift from Diana. He pretended to consult the fawn concerning matters of war, and decorated the animal with garlands when he wanted to remind his followers of their good fortune and heavenly favour. The result, Plutarch says, was that Sertorius made the people 'tractable', since they believed that a god, not a mortal, led them.⁴¹

Social encouragement was the third factor that primed Iberian societies for leader protection pacts. The importance of warrior status (or, at least, of warrior appurtenances) is attested by the frequency and wealth of 'warrior graves' – burials containing weapons or complete panoplies. Notable is the appearance of imported weapons that must have had prestige status; whether used in battle or kept as showpieces, such weapons played into a cultural value system in which bravery and military prowess brought honour. Silius Italicus

⁴⁰ Lorrio (n. 20), 333.

⁴¹ Something similarly unexplainable features in the story of Olyndicus, a leader of the Celtiberians. The secret of Olyndicus' success was the silver spear he brandished – a spear he claimed to have been sent from heaven. Behaving like a prophet (*vaticinanti similis*), he attracted a loyal following of Celtiberians ready to revolt with him (Florus 1.33.14). A further example of otherworldly miracles in the Celtiberian mindset is excarnation, a practice in which bodies of the war-dead were left on the battlefield so as to be consumed by birds and thus transported to heaven. Excarnation is not traceable archaeologically, but images carved onto tombstones and painted onto pottery, as well as literary reports, provide evidence for the practice (Lorrio [n. 20], 345ff).

(3.340–3) writes that Celtiberians glorified their war dead by allowing their corpses to be consumed by the birds where they fell, but pitied those who died from disease or natural causes, and merely burned their corpses and interred the ashes. At the same time, we must be cautious in not using this archaeological evidence to tar the Iberians with a broad cultural brush. The supposed ferocity and savagery of Iberian peoples features prominently in ancient texts as a topos, and raises the issue of ‘endemic warfare’ among them.⁴²

Finally, contemporary events made fertile ground for intense leader loyalty and national pride. The ancient passages that recount episodes of leader protection in warfare are situated in a period of time in which Rome’s military expansion brought unrest and instability to temperate Europe. At the peak of clashes with Iberians and Celtiberians, Romans observed indigenous soldiers fighting out of loyalty to their chiefs and, by implication, to their tribe or city. Sometimes this fealty was fatal. The sense of group identity promoted by a vow of fidelity was important at the moment when Celtiberians and Iberians felt threatened with extinction. *Hospitium* agreements of the pre-Roman period were treaties designed to make amicable relations between two individuals or peoples, but the leader protection pacts of the early years of Rome’s domination over the Iberian Peninsula were borne out of tribal pride and, above all, concern with preserving autonomy and life as it was before. The collusion of all four of these elements made late-first-century BC Iberian societies ripe for leader veneration and protection pacts that entailed, if necessary, death for the sworn soldiers.

Ramos y Loscertales was not aware of all of this evidence (some of which was uncovered after his death). He knew of the ancient texts, and used them to conceptualize *devotio Iberica* at an opportune moment in Spanish history. But his overly simplistic characterization of this supposed cultural practice – that all Iberian soldiers voluntarily vowed to die in defence of their leader – is not supported by the

⁴² That the indigenous people of the Iberian Peninsula loved war and were perpetually geared for it is a discursive statement rooted in Greco-Roman historiography, and has constrained study of these people. This trope extends from a larger group of stereotypes about ‘Celts’, in which they are held to be united by ‘a common ideal, the same ways of thinking and feeling’, and distinguished by their dynamism, heroism, individualism, and intense spirituality. As Nick Merriman argues, these stereotypes amount to a false homogeneity of culture – one that cannot be sustained by the material record. The popular idea of the ‘Celtic spirit’, he writes, is the result of ‘misunderstanding, manipulation and the imposition on the observer’s preconceptions onto the observed’. N. Merriman, ‘Value and motivation in pre-history: the evidence for “Celtic spirit”’, in I. Hodder (ed.), *The archaeology of contextual meanings* (Cambridge, 1987), 111–16.

evidence as we have it. That chiefs and generals on the Iberian Peninsula enjoyed the protection and battlefield loyalty of picked, consecrated soldiers is attested in Greek and Latin literature. Leader loyalty pacts, however, need to be studied in their native contexts (divorced from Greek and Roman (mis)interpolations) if we are to understand what they meant to the people who participated in them, and how they were upheld by the societies that surrounded them.

In this paper I have argued that *devotio ducis* and *devotio Iberica* differed in purpose, outcome and execution, but were related in functioning as vehicles to promote particular agendas (Livy's Republican fantasies; Francoist historical destiny). The formulation of *devotio Iberica* by José-María Ramos y Loscertales came at a time when Spanish historians actively sought to portray Franco's Regime as destiny, the natural consequence of the tendency of Spanish people to unify for nationalistic purposes. The idea of leader loyalty in ancient Iberia need not be discarded wholesale; indeed, this battlefield practice is amply documented in Greek and Latin sources and deserves to be examined within native contexts and using the latest archaeological evidence. The real problem for historians of Roman Spain is that *devotio Iberica* has been incautiously used by modern scholars to create an indigenous *mentalité* that segued comfortably from loyalty to Iberian chieftains to loyalty to Roman emperors and institutions, thus unwittingly furthering Franco's own historiographic aims.