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The Almohads and the “Qur’anization” of War Narrative and Ritual

Javier Albarrán ^{1,2} 

- ¹ Ancient and Medieval History Department, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Ciudad Universitaria de Cantoblanco, 28049 Madrid, Spain; javier.albarran@uam.es
- ² RomanIslam—Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies, Universität Hamburg, 20146 Hamburg, Germany

Abstract: The Almohad movement (12th–13th centuries, Islamic West) had in the return to the direct study of the primary sources of Islam—the Qur’an and the Sunna—and in *jihād*, two of its most important pillars of legitimation and action. In this sense, it is an ideal period to study how both realities—Qur’an and *jihād*—were linked in a given historical context. During the Almohad period, the use of Qur’anic verses in accounts related to war episodes became widespread. We thus witness a “Qur’anization” of the war narrative, a resource adding greater religiosity and spirituality to the context of *jihād*, to its elaboration and discursive representation, and to its memory and remembrance through written testimonies. In this paper I study, through the main narrative and documentary sources of the period, how the Qur’an was inserted into and adapted to the Almohad war discourse. Likewise, this approach allows me to explore how the Qur’an came to life within the framework of the Almohad *jihād*, how it served for its justification and legitimation, and how it formed part of the ceremony and the war protocol of the Maghrebi caliphate, thus linking itself with other discursive and propaganda mechanisms such as architecture or military parades.



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1. Introduction. Almohad Jihād Parades

The army of the Almohad caliphate (1130–1269) set course for the holy war¹ through a ritualized military parade in which its vanguard, known as *sāqa*, maintained a specific formation (Ghouirgate 2014, p. 314ff; Albarrán 2020a, p. 302ff). Among other things, in front of the ruler, two Qur’ans were displayed. The first of these was known as the Qur’an of ‘Uthmān, which was carried on a camel in a red canopy (*qubba hamrā*) protecting it (Bennison 2007, pp. 131–54; Buresi 2008, pp. 297–309; Buresi 2010, pp. 7–29; Ghouirgate 2014, p. 337ff). According to Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt, it was decorated with all kinds of precious stones, one of which was shaped similarly to a horseshoe and would have belonged to Ibn Ṭūlūn, lord of Egypt. Similarly, the four corners of the ark containing the *rāshidūn* caliph’s volume were adorned with four small flags held on spears that, in turn, had a golden apple on top that shone with the brilliance of light. This Qur’an would have belonged to the Umayyads of al-Andalus, and was allegedly recovered in Cordoba by the Almohad caliph ‘Abd al-Mu’min (d. 1163).² According to some traditions, it was the codex carried to battle by the Umayyad ‘Abd al-Rahmān III (d. 961), specifically to Simancas (939).³ In addition, the jewels adorning it would have been offered by Andalusī dynasties, such as the Banū Hūd, to the Almoravids, so the object was presented not only as a link to the early days of Islam, which the Almohad movement wanted to recover, but also as a deposit of the rights over the government of al-Andalus, which the Almohads now possessed (Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt 1964, pp. 349–50; Ibn Idhārī 2009, vol. 4, p. 229; Ibn Simāk 1979, p. 152; ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī 2005, p. 179). The second of the manuscripts, preceding the caliph in the *sāqa*, was the Qur’an of the *mahdī* Ibn Tūmart (d. 1130), carried on a mule and

adorned with gilt silver (Ibn Idhārī 2009, vol. 1, p. 229; ‘Abd al-Wāhid al-Marrākushī 2005, p. 179; Ghouirgate 2014, p. 346ff).

The presence of these sacred objects, of these “relics”, in this military ceremony is a measure of the enormous ritualization of the holy war that took place in the Almohad period, as well as of the spirit of military religiosity that was lived. The *translatio* of these two Qur’ans gave the Mu’minid caliphs a legitimacy based on their direct link, in the context of *jihād*, with the early times of Islam, with the power over al-Andalus, with the Cordoban Umayyad Caliphate era, and with the foundation of the unitary movement. Travis Zadeh, following Ibn Marzūq, states that in these objects they found charismatic authority, as well as projection of divine grace, *baraka* (Zadeh 2008, pp. 321–46). This idea must be related to the fact that the catafalque keeping the copy of ‘Uthmān was called *tābūt*, a term used in the Qur’an to designate the Ark of the Covenant (Ghouirgate 2014, p. 337ff).⁴ That is to say, this codex could function as such, thus representing the presence of God and his assistance in the realization of holy war. Behind the two relics rode the *ghāzī*-caliph, the depository of the inheritances that both manuscripts represented.

This example clearly illustrates what I aim to show in this article, which is the following: how the Qur’an became a central element—including, as in this case, its physical presence—of the Almohad *jihād*’s discourse, including its ritual side. That is to say, how the war narrative was “Qur’anized”. This phenomenon gave great legitimacy to the military actions of the Mu’minids, and linked them directly to one of the aims of the Almohad reform, which is as follows: a return to the early days of Islam.

2. The Almohad Movement: Qur’an and *Jihād*

The Almohad movement (Bennison 2016), founded at the beginning of the 12th century by Muḥammad b. Tūmart, was considered to be the restorer of the original purity of Islam. Ibn Tūmart and his followers, the true believers, were identified with strangers, *ghurabā’*, in a world of religious decadence (Fierro 2005, vol. 2, pp. 895–935).⁵ The fight against that supposed period of corruption would be one of the aims of the Almohads.

To this end, Ibn Tūmart rose like a savior *mahdī* and an *imām ma’ṣūm*, impeccable and infallible in his religious knowledge (Fierro 1999, pp. 159–75; Fierro 2001, pp. 107–24), who wanted to break with the immediate past and come closer to the first moments of Muḥammad’s community by returning to a model of moral puritanism and military activism (Fierro 2001, pp. 107–24; Bombrun 2011, 93–108). Ibn Tūmart’s own history was narrated with a rhetorical construction that linked his vital experience with the Prophet’s (Fierro 2016, pp. 73–97). In this sense, the return to the direct study of the revealed sources, the Qur’an and the *Sunna*, was undoubtedly one of the main objectives of the Almohads from a doctrinal point of view (Fierro 2000b, pp. 131–65); for example, there was an increasing preference for the study of the sources of law (*ḥadīth* and Qur’an) and a decline in interest in the study of Mālikī legal doctrine (Hernández 2017, pp. 74–102). This is why the Qur’an became visible in numerous contexts of the Almohad movement; for example, the Almohad numismatic discourse had a privileged palimpsest in the Qur’an, as an absolute source (Feria et al. 2002). Similarly, the Mu’minid caliphs presented their rule on Earth as equal to God’s order, through the Qur’anic concept of *al-amr* (Fricaud 2002, pp. 93–122). Moreover, a massive presence of Qur’anic quotations is attested in all types of epigraphic inscriptions, not only in those located in religious buildings (Martínez Núñez 2014, pp. 139–58).

On the other hand, along with this alleged return to the early days of Islam, *jihād* was another of the axis of legitimation of the Almohad movement. *Jihād* was proclaimed from the very beginning against the Almoravids (Lévi-Provençal 1928, p. 3), denying their condition of true believers (Serrano 2005, vol. 2, pp. 815–52; García Sanjuán 2019, pp. 89–113; Albarrán 2020a, p. 290ff). Therefore, the Almohads used the doctrine of *takfīr* (Adang et al. 2016), classifying believers as infidels (Albarrán 2020a, p. 290ff). *Jihād* had to be conducted against all those denying their vision of Islam, the only true one. That battle was a holy war against a government, that of the Almoravids, which was considered unjust

and illicit. In this sense, *jihād* was intertwined with *ḥisba*, the notion of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” (Cook 2000, pp. 390, 478, 496, 511; García-Arenal 2006, pp. 157–92; García Sanjuán 2019, pp. 89–113; Albarrán 2020a, p. 290ff).

Jihād was soon extended to Christians (Buresi 2003, pp. 229–41; Fierro 2014, pp. 53–77; Albarrán 2020a, p. 271ff), especially after the campaign in Ifriqiya, carried out by ‘Abd al-Mu‘min in the year 1158, when the caliph directly confronted a Christian power, that of the Normands, taking Mahdiyya. Two years later, in 1160, ‘Abd al-Mu‘min crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, announcing the next *jihād* against the Christians, during the festival of sacrifice (Fierro 2014, pp. 53–77). Thus, the figure of the “*ghāzī*-caliph” appeared, a feature pretty much developed by the Almohad state; for example, letters were sent in the name of caliphs to the capitals of the empire, announcing the victories over the infidels (*kutub al-fath*), and they were publicly read in the more important mosques (Cherif 2014, pp. 53–68).⁶ Works on *jihād* were also composed on the express request of the Almohad authorities, as is the case of Ibn al-Munāṣif’s (d. 1223), *qāḍī* of Valencia, and Murcia. In the introduction to this work, commissioned by the governor of Valencia—the youngest son of the Caliph ‘Abd al-Mu‘min—the author explained the reason why he composed it, which is as follows: so as to fulfill the noblest of duties and as the best way to subordinate to God, namely, *jihād* against Allāh’s enemies (Cherif 2014, pp. 53–68). The caliphs, as Pascal Buresi has stated, were at the center of the performance of *jihād* (Buresi 2003, pp. 229–41; Bennison 2016, p. 86ff), and this was not a mere rhetorical instrument, but several caliphs died conducting holy war; for example, ‘Abū Ya‘qūb died fighting the Christians in Santarem in the year 1184 (Albarrán 2020a, p. 271ff).

It is not difficult to find examples in the Almohad context that connect the *jihād* phenomenon to the idea of the restoration of the purity of the early times of Islam. The constantly repeated return to the direct study of the primary sources of Islam is evidenced in the war context, with episodes such as the one where the caliph Abū Ya‘qūb, while preparing an expedition against the Christians in 1179, ordered the ‘*ulamā*’ to dictate the available traditions on *jihād* to the Almohads, so that they copied them on wooden tables and learned them by heart. The spirit of war-like religiousness described by the chronicler was such that one of these scholars, Abū l-Qamar, ordered that his tables must be kept and that he wanted to be buried with them (‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī 2005, p. 208). The use, in the battlefield, of the copy of ‘Uthmān’s Qur’an that has already been pointed out must be added to this idea of restoration and connection with the early times of Islam, and its relationship with *jihād* in the Almohad context.

Similarly, those places serving as a framework for the rituals of *jihād* were decorated with Qur’anic inscriptions relating to the sacredness of war and the fight against the infidel (Albarrán 2020a, p. 320ff). The Qur’an was thus visually present in these war rituals; for example, in the *miḥrāb* of the Kutubiyya, the great mosque of Marrakesh, where, therefore, the most important *khutbas* and prayers took place, including many of those that were performed before a campaign, the following Qur’anic verses are inscribed for the exhortation to holy war: “Oh you who have believed, bow and prostrate and worship your Lord and do good—that you may succeed. And strive for Allāh with the striving due to Him (*jahidū fi Allāh ḥaqq jihādi-hi*)”.⁷ These same verses also decorate the *miḥrāb* of the Qaṣba mosque in Marrakesh—built in 1188—the residence of the Almohad caliphs and the place where many of the war parades started (Ibn Ṣāḥib Al-Ṣalāt 1964, p. 218; Villalba Sola 2015, p. 168ff). In this palace area is also the great ceremonial gate of Bāb Agnāw—also known as Bāb al-Qaṣr or Bāb al-Kuhl—⁸ which is a symbol of the Mu‘minid dynasty. Significantly, it is entirely framed by an epigraphic *alfiz*—an architectonic adornment that encloses the outward side of an arch—in which the verses Q. 15: 46–48 are reproduced (Villalba Sola 2015, p. 111ff), which convey a message relating to paradise that could indicate the reward awaiting the *jihād* fighters. In this way, the architecture and its decoration were part of the ritualization of *jihād*, and of the restoration of the early times of Islam through the emphasis on the Qur’an. Similarly, these constructions and their inscriptions became active tools of the holy war exhortation, thus helping to create the atmosphere of warfare spirituality that

reigned in the Almohad military ceremonies, which undoubtedly must have had a great impact on the population.

3. The “Qur’anization” of War Narrative: Contexts

The Qur’an not only began to appear in a systematic way in Almohad epigraphy and numismatics, in their doctrinal and legal discourse, or in their parades, but its presence and trace also became extensive in the texts and reports linked to war episodes.⁹ Therefore, a “Qur’anization” of the narrative discourse of holy war was observed, a resource that adds greater religiosity and spirituality to the context of *jihād*, to its elaboration and discursive representation, and to its memory and remembrance through written testimonies.¹⁰

The Qur’anic references appear to be inserted into narrative contexts that are central for the Almohad *jihād*’s speech and its ritualization. An example is that of the letters of exhortation to war.¹¹ The Almohad holy war ritual began with the announcement of the preparation of the expedition against the enemies of God (Albarrán 2020a, p. 302ff). The most common method of making this announcement of *jihād* was by sending missives. Sources collect numerous cases of this practice;¹² for example, Ibn Abī Zar’ recounts how, after the loss of Silves, Beja, and Évora in the years 1190–1191, the Caliph al-Manṣūr ordered his *qa’ids* to prepare for war by means of a letter (Ibn Abī Zar’ 1972, p. 219). Similarly, Ibn ‘Idhārī describes how al-Nāṣir, before the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212), sent letters to al-Andalus to incite the Muslims to holy war (*bi-taḥrīd al-muslimīn ‘alā al-jihād*), and to organize and prepare it (Ibn ‘Idhārī 2009, vol. 4, p. 330). Moreover, ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī explains how ‘Abd al-Mu’min wrote a letter to the defeated Arab tribes in Ifriqiya, calling for a campaign in al-Andalus (*fa-kataba ilay-him risāla yastanfiru-hum ilā al-ghazw bi-jazirat al-Andalus*) (‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī 2005, p. 158).

These calls were infused with discursive elements typical of the holy war; for example, in the poem included in the aforementioned letter from ‘Abd al-Mu’min, transmitted by ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī, the importance of the intention of performing *jihād* is emphasized. This idea of the value of *niyya* also appears in a letter sent to the Arab tribes, in which Ibn Ṭufayl contributed with a poem (García Gómez 1953, pp. 21–28), reminding them of their decided intention for holy war (*niyyata-hu al-‘āzima ‘alā al-jihād*). This epistle, which also included other verses by Ibn ‘Ayyāsh, urging the tribes to move, talks about the defense of religion, the subjugation of the hypocrites, and the domination of the infidels (Ibn Ṣāḥib Al-Ṣalāt 1964, p. 324). Reading this text and the poetry it contained enlightened the Arabs with its eloquence—according to Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt—and incited them to partake holy war, with God purifying their hearts and illuminating their souls.

The Qur’an played an important role in highlighting—and justifying—those elements of the holy war discourse in these letters; for example, the spiritual benefits of *jihād* were recalled,¹³ it was stated that those who resisted the enemy, as the prophets had done, would be rewarded,¹⁴ the fight against those Muslims who deviated from the path of God was legitimized,¹⁵ and the possibility of fleeing from the battlefield was denied,¹⁶ or preparation for holy war was encouraged.¹⁷

These features of the holy war discourse also appear, through Qur’anic references, in another of the most important narrative contexts, and of the implementation of *jihād* and its ritualization in the Almohad period, which includes the exhortations prior to the expedition, prior to the battle, and those carried out directly in the middle of the fight.¹⁸

Immediately before the departure for holy war took place, the Almohad war ritualization included exhortations to *jihād*.¹⁹ With the army already assembled in Rabat, ready to leave, in order to break the siege used by Ibn Hamushk to suffocate the Almohads in the citadel of Granada, the caliph reminded his soldiers of the prize guaranteed by God to his combatants, and they promised the sovereign the extermination of the rebels and infidels (Ibn Ṣāḥib Al-Ṣalāt 1964, p. 130). In these speeches, with the aim of seeking the commitment of the troops that were about to go into the fight, the ruler and his preachers encouraged them to fight the Christians and reminded them of the duty of holy war im-

posed by God (*wa-ya'rifuhum bi-mā awjaba Allāh 'alay-him min al-jihād*). An example is that of the *shaykh* Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wāhid b. 'Umar, who exhorted the Almohad troops in July 1172, in the context of Huete's campaign, asserting that they had an obligation towards God and their caliph, and once committed to it, in the event of not fulfilling it, they would not be more than traitors. This is outlined by the following:

“And he told them, speaking in Berber: ‘when you were in Marrakesh you said: if we come to fight with the Christians, we will wage holy war for God (*li-jāhadnā Allāh*), and we will make an effort in it (*ijtāhadnā*); but when you have met them, you have failed, you have gone mad, you have betrayed God, you have retreated and you have not been sincere. You are not believers or Almohads, when you hear the bells tolling and you see the infidels, and you do not reject what is forbidden. The *amīr al-mu'minīn* cannot see you, because of your neglect for the cause of God in the holy war, despite your great numbers’. Then he exhorted them to repent and they said: ‘We repent’”. (Ibn Ṣāhib Al-Ṣalāt 1964, p. 411)

Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalāt specifies that the speech was made in Arabic and Berber, which indicates that it was intended to be transmitted to the entire population of the Almohad empire—similarly to the unitary project itself—and thus be able to spread the image of Mu'minid power as a guarantor of the realization of *jihād* and the defense of Islam. On the other hand, with their “repentance”, it seems that, through holy war, the warriors wanted to seek redemption for their misconduct.

Similarly, in the hours prior to the battle, the sources report how exhortations and harangues were also carried out, which, similarly to liturgies—many times, they were displayed after one of the prayers—reminded the combatants of the notions of holy war, so that they had them alive during the fight. Obviously, the reward of salvation that the *mujāhidūn* would receive was one of the preferred topics (Qutbuddin 2019, p. 292ff); for example, in July 1162, the day before an attack on Ibn Hamushk, the Almohad *shaykh* Abū Ya'qūb stated the following:

“repeated his exhortations about the prize they would have in front of God in the holy war against the infidels (*jihād al-kufra*), their enemies, and the expedition against them, and on the Paradise guaranteed for them by God (*al-janna al-maḍmūna la-hum 'inda Allāh*), if they were sincere and kept what they had proclaimed and promised”. (Ibn Ṣāhib Al-Ṣalāt 1964, p. 133)

After this, the troops revitalized their purpose and renewed their intention to perform *jihād* (*jadādū fī l-jihād al-niyya*), so that when they entered combat they would be in a state of spiritual purity, and be capable of ensuring victory in the holy war. Thus, at the end of the evening prayer, they took their weapons, mounted their horses, and marched to the battlefield, where, the next day, they were victorious.

Before Alarcos, there was also a similar situation that underscores the importance of these battle liturgies, at least on a symbolic and discursive level. The caliph requested that the Muslim combatants apologize to each other, seeking, perhaps, that they would meet their death in peace, and be repentant of their mistakes and sins, and ordered them to pacify their souls and purify their intentions towards God (*ṭayyabū nufūsa-kum wa-akhlaṣū li-llāh niyyāta-kum*). Then, *qādī* Abū 'Alī b. Ḥajjāj arose and delivered an eloquent speech inciting holy war and its merits, words that, according to Ibn 'Idhārī, strengthened the consciences of the Almohads, and redoubled their bravery and courage (Ibn 'Idhārī 2009, vol. 4, pp. 289–90). This phenomenon follows the Old Testament models related, for example, to the need to maintain, in the context of Yahweh's wars, the camp as purified—in the biblical case, from a more material perspective—so that God supports those who are faithful to Him.²⁰ Thus, an image of the ideal warrior king is represented, watching over the moral rectitude of his army, in order to obtain divine aid and victory. Additionally, in this context of repentance prior to the battle of Alarcos, the Almohad preachers reminded their soldiers, through the Qur'an, that they should not be sad or worried, even in the most adverse situations, as happened in the battle of Uḥud, since God knows everything.²¹

Finally, the harangues proclaimed in the middle of the battle are exhortations that, as a discursive element, try to show the degree of military spiritual commitment reached by the Almohad troops at the most dramatic moment of war (Albarrán 2020b, pp. 33–55). One of the recurring themes appearing in these speeches that were proclaimed during combat is the need for straining the hearts of the warriors, at the very moment in which the ordeal is taking place, in order to have a good predisposition towards holy war and the defense of Islam; this pure intention is what will make God help them and grant them victory. For example, after a Christian bid at the battle of Alarcos, the caliph al-Manṣūr highlighted this idea among those around him, stating the following: “Renew your intentions and present your hearts (*jaddadū niyyāta-kum wa-aḥḍarū qulūba-kum*)” (Ibn Idhārī 2009, vol. 4, p. 290). Thus, the sources showed how the Almohads, even in a moment of tension similar to that, did not forget that they were not fighting for their lives, but for something much greater—for God and the safeguarding of his religion. These harangues, therefore, served to represent them as the perfect *mujāhidūn*. Moreover, once again, the Qur’an played a central role; for example, the Arab emir Jarmūn b. Riyāḥ ran through the ranks of his troops at Alarcos, straining the hearts of the warriors (*qulūb al-mujāhidīn*) and reciting various Qur’anic verses regarding divine aid in battle.²²

4. The “Qur’anization” of War Narrative: The Sacralization of the Fight

This “Qur’anization” of the war narrative served the following very clear aim: its use as a means of justifying and sacralizing war.²³ There is no better way—in an Islamic milieu—to legitimize a contest, and to make it sacred, than through the Qur’an itself. That is to say, it is the sacred text itself that justifies war, and it is God who guides and sanctions the military activity of the Almohads. Against infidels, the sacralization of the war is simple, so this phenomenon is accentuated in the case of the fight against other Muslims, particularly against the Almoravids, in the Almohad case. In this sense, it is intimately linked to the notion of *ḥisba*, to its development in *takfīr*, and, finally, in *jihād*.

In the Almohad discourse, there is a continuous idea, within all its “reformist” policies and its fight against the corruption of its time, to correct the behavior of other Muslims, an issue eventually leading to open armed struggle. This phenomenon can be observed in the sources, since the beginning of the activity of Ibn Tūmart, through the notion of *ḥisba* (Huici Miranda 1957, vol. 1, p. 37ff; García Sanjuán 2019, pp. 89–113). Ibn al-Kardabūs is clear in this sense; in times when corruption (*fasād*) had spread in the Maghreb, because of the Almoravids and their wrong path, God sent Ibn Tūmart to make the signs of religion evident, renew it, and disseminate its rules through the exercise of *ḥisba* (Ibn al-Kardabūs 1971, pp. 124–25). Thus, the importance of the precept of *ḥisba* was maintained throughout the Almohad period. This was in the moments of the maximum splendor of this movement, in which it is documented, for example, in the epigraphic inscriptions of the gate of Bāb al-Ruwāḥ in Rabat, through the Qur’anic verse Q. 3: 110.²⁴ It was also maintained after the crisis caused by Las Navas, where it is recorded, for example, in a letter written by the Caliph al-Mustansīr, in which “commanding right and forbidding wrong” appears as one of the maxims of the power action of the Mu’minids (‘Azzāwī 1995, vol. 1, pp. 348–49).

Similarly, it is not strange that the practice of *ḥisba* against those who did not follow the teachings of the *mahdī*, and the consequent application of *takfīr* if they did not change their attitude, resulted in a direct fight against all those who did not adhere to the Almohad movement, a confrontation that was considered sacred.²⁵

Moreover, one of the means to sacralize this fight will be, as has been said, to insert Qur’anic references in the war narrative. This phenomenon can be clearly observed in the letters allegedly sent by the *mahdī* to the Almohad community about the war against the Almoravids. An example is the mention of verse Q. 8: 60, a verse that, in this context, must be interpreted as an exhortation to holy war.²⁶ Another paradigmatic case is that of the mention, in another of these letters, of verse Q. 4: 89, which refers to taking prisoner or killing those who depart from *tawḥīd* and *hijra*, that is, applying *takfīr* to, in this case, the Almoravids.²⁷ Similarly, in another letter from Ibn Tūmart, although, in this case, it was

supposedly sent to his enemies, he proceed to demonize the Almoravids—and, therefore, to sanctify the fight against them—through Q. 89: 11–12.²⁸ These verses refer to the tribe of ‘Ād, who did not listen to the warnings of the prophet Hūd; to the people of Tamūd, who did not follow the advice of the prophet Šālih; to the Pharaoh. These are three of the enemies of the believers in the sacred history of Islam.

The phenomenon of demonization of the Almoravids through Qur’anic verses is also observed in other Almohad war narratives; for example, in those referring to the first and third expeditions of the *mahdī* against the Almoravids. In this report, verse Q. 33: 25 is used to point out their infidelity, as well as to emphasize that the Almohads obtained God’s help.²⁹ This idea is closely linked to another notion omnipresent in the Mu’minid discourse, which is the following: the Almohads were the people of God, and he is with them in battle and offers his help. This was a thought that must have surely comforted the warriors and made them fight more fiercely in a struggle conceptualized as a divine judgment; for example, one of the Almohad *shaykhs* walked through the Mu’minid ranks in Alarcos while saying the following:

“Servants of God! You are the party of God (*ḥizb Allāh*); resist in combat against the enemies of God, because you will be victorious and triumphant (*hum al-mansūrūn wa-hum al-ghālibūn*)”. (Ibn Abī Zar’ 1972, p. 226)

In this sense, the Almohad troops are called, over and over again, the “blessed army (*al-‘askar al-mubārak*)” (Ibn Šāḥib Al-Šalāt 1964, pp. 231, 314, 319, 371),³⁰ which is an idea that shows God’s preference for the Almohad soldiers, as well as the fact that his *baraka* accompanied them and manifested through them in the divine help in the war context. A good example of this is al-Baydhaq’s account of the *mahdī*’s fifth expedition against the Almoravids, in which Ibn Tūmart harangued his troops, shouting the following: “We go against them, with the blessing of Allāh (*‘alā barakat Allāh*)!” Moreover, indeed, God supposedly helped the Mu’minid soldiers and gave them victory (Al-Baydhaq 2004, p. 37).

This aiding presence of God at the battlefield is one of the unequivocal discursive features of the sacralization of war. There is no image more powerful of this idea than the one of the divinity itself obtaining the military triumphs. In the battle of Aghmat against the Almoravids, for example, the fighting lasted for eight days until God gave victory to the Almohads (*manaḥa Allāh al-muwahḥidīn al-naṣr*) (Ibn Abī Zar’ 1972, p. 179). Similarly, it was also God who conquered al-Mahdiyya (*fataḥa Allāh*) from the Normans (Ibn Šāḥib Al-Šalāt 1964, p. 70). In addition, according to this narrative, the image of God not only granted victory, but directly fought alongside the Almohads; for example, in a battle between the Mu’minid troops of Seville and some Christian hordes, “God drew his sword against them (*fasala Allāh ‘alay-him sayfa-hu*) and discharged their terror and fear” (Ibn Idhārī 2009, vol. 4, p. 199).

Moreover, of course, this is a recurrent theme in the process of “Qur’anization” of the war narrative.³¹ It appears, for example, in the narration of the fourth expedition of Ibn Tūmart against the Almoravids, this time through verse Q. 2: 249,³² which, according to the exegetes, refers to the fight between David and Goliath, being a very appropriate verse for an exhortation to war; if God is on your side, a small army will be able to defeat a larger one, as in the case of the Almohad–Almoravid conflict. It also appears in the harangue addressed by the emir Jarmūn b. Riyāḥ in Alarcos,³³ where, through verses Q. 3: 200 and Q. 47: 7, it asserts that those who believe will be helped by God. It is also addressed in an Almohad victory letter, where it is emphasized that it is God who fights, in this case, the one who shoots the arrows, through verse Q. 8: 17, which refers to the help of the angel Gabriel in Badr.³⁴ This issue even appears in the defeats, as in the battle of ‘Umra in the year 1187, where the Almohads who survived ran away.³⁵ In the account of this episode, and through verse Q. 9: 25, the example of the prophetic battle of Ḥunayn is remembered, as well as all the help God granted to the believers on the battlefield.

Divine help is given to believers, to those who have faith and keep it, even in the most difficult moments. This is another of the recurring images in the “Qur’anization” of the Almohad war narrative.³⁶ A clear example is verse Q. 3: 146, which is used in one of the letters sent by the *mahdī* to the assembly of the Almohads, talking about the holy war against the Almoravids.³⁷ This verse, which talks about how neither the prophets nor their followers were disheartened in the bitterest moments, supposedly descended when the Muslims left the Prophet for dead at the battle of Uḥud, as a credit to those companions who stood by his side. Thus, victory and salvation would be for those who stood by Ibn Tūmart.

However, if there is one feature of the sacralization of war par excellence, it is martyrdom. Undoubtedly, it is the symbol that represents how the struggle acquires a meritorious and salvific nature, and, therefore, is sacred (Cook 2007; Albarrán 2020a, pp. 124, 340–42). This sign of the holy war was present in the Almohad movement from its beginning, from the fight against the Almoravids; for instance, after the defeat of al-Buḥayra (1130), outside Marrakesh, the *mahdī* assured his followers that their dead were *shuhadā’* because they fought for the religion of God, defending the *sunna*.³⁸ This increased the conviction of their cause and the zeal to meet their enemies (‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī 2005, p. 136), which led to numerous expeditions against the emirs of Marrakesh, led by Ibn Tūmart himself (Ibn Simāk 1979, pp. 115–16). Similarly, martyrdom also appears as one of the favorite topics in exhortations to *jihād* and in harangues delivered on the battlefield; for example, at Alarcos, the preachers of Abū Yaḥyā b. Abī Ḥafṣ reminded the Muslim soldiers that they either achieved martyrdom and paradise, or merit and booty (*amā al-shahāda wa-l-janna, wa-amā al-ajar wa-l-ghanīma*) (Ibn Abī Zar’ 1972, p. 226).

Martyrdom also played a prominent role in the “Qur’anization” of the war narrative;³⁹ for example, when writing to the Almohad community about the fight against the Almoravids, Ibn Tūmart reminded them that whoever died defending his faith would be a martyr (*man qutila dūn dīni-hi fa-huwa shahīd*). He argued this idea through verses Q. 3: 169–170 and Q. 2: 154⁴⁰, as well as quoting the authority of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (Lévi-Provençal 1928, 3; ‘Azzāwī 1995, pp. 44–49). This letter also includes verse Q. 9: 111⁴¹, a verse containing the salvific covenant between God and the believers defining the nature of *jihād*; he who fights in God’s path will win paradise (Rubin 1984, pp. 113–32; Cook 2005, pp. 9–11).

Another Almohad tool to sanctify war was the use of the memory of Islamic history, often considered sacred. In this sense, memory is understood as the dynamic process where narratives from the past are recovered and recontextualized in a given present to serve future goals (Assmann 2011, p. 62ff).⁴² Consequently, collective ‘memorialization’ is not neutral, since it is always linked to questions of identity and power. This is to say that the relationship between the construction of memory and power or, as Jan Assmann calls it, the alliance between power and memory (Assmann 2011, p. 53ff) must be taken into account. Memory control is, therefore, a power mechanism that serves to legitimize numerous acts, such as, among others, war, and, in the case dealt here, the sacralization of the fight of the Almohads against their enemies, both Muslims and infidels (Albarrán 2018, pp. 113–50; Albarrán 2020a, pp. 42ff, 357ff).

The Mu’minid movement was presented, as I have said, as the rebirth of a previous golden age, so the commemoration of past events will be one of its main discursive axes; for example, as already noted, the biography of Ibn Tūmart was built parallel to that of the Prophet (García-Arenal 2006, p. 162ff; Fierro 2016, pp. 73–97). Not only was his genealogy linked to Muḥammad’s (Ibn Simāk 1979, p. 103; Ibn Abī Zar’ 1972, p. 172; Ibn al-Qaṭṭān 1990, p. 38; Lévi-Provençal 1928, p. 30; ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī 2005, p. 132), but the Almohad sources use his memory again and again to legitimize the actions of the *mahdī*. Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, for instance, reports that “his ethic was like that of the Prophet” (Ibn al-Qaṭṭān 1990, p. 76). In this sense, the march to Tinmal was considered as a new Hijra, being the locality of the Moroccan Atlas; therefore, it was considered as a renewed Medina (García-Arenal 2006, p. 162ff; Bennison 2016, p. 67).

The imitation of the action of the first Muslims was not limited exclusively to the *mahdī*, but was also carried out by the Mu'minid rulers. Al-Manṣūr, for example, "wanted, at the beginning of his reign, to follow the rules of the first caliphs and, therefore, he was personally *imām* in the five prayers" ('Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī 2005, pp. 202–3). Furthermore, some of the life episodes of the Almohad caliphs were created and narrated to resemble events from the life of the Prophet and the *rāshidūn*. A paradigmatic example is the alleged assassination attempt on 'Abd al-Mu'min by relatives of Ibn Tūmart. One of the *mahdī*'s companions, named Ismā'īl, heard of this assassination plan, and told the Mu'minid ruler to let him sleep in his tent that night. Thus, when the assassins entered, they killed Ismā'īl—who is characterized as a martyr—instead of 'Abd al-Mu'min ('Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī 2005, p. 164; Ibn Abī Zar' 1972, pp. 199–200). Undoubtedly, this account is a recontextualization of the one in the *Sīra*, reporting how 'Alī took Muḥammad's position in his bed to avoid the death of the Messenger of God before the Hijra; although, in this case, the Prophet's son-in-law also managed to bypass the grim reaper (Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Hishām 1955, p. 221ff).

Linking this idea again with holy war—and, in this case, its ritualization—after Alarcos al-Manṣūr "ordered his secretary Abū al-Faḍl b. Abī al-Ṭāhir to be brief in the official letter of this victory and to imitate in it the letters of the companions of the Prophet (*kutub al-ṣaḥāba*), may God be pleased with all of them" (Ibn Simāk 1979, pp. 159–60). Thus, the use, by the Almohads, of the commemoration of the first battles of Islam as a tool to legitimize and sanctify the war is introduced; for instance, in the victory epistle written on the occasion of the triumph of the *sayyid* Abū Ḥafṣ against the troops of Ibn Mardaniš in Murcia (1165) (Ibn Ṣāḥib Al-Ṣalāt 1964, pp. 201–8), this episode is compared with that of Dhū al-Kār, a famous battle of the *ayyām al-'arab* that took place near Kufa between a victorious coalition of Arab tribes and another allied with the Persians. Although the victorious tribes were still pagan, the Prophet, according to a tradition transmitted by Abū 'Ubayda, said that it was the first time the Arabs had triumphed over the Persians because God had helped (*nuṣiru*) them through him (the Prophet) (Veccia Vaglieri 2012). The Almohads were, therefore, those tribes assisted by Allāh and Muḥammad, while Ibn Mardaniš represented those who had allied with the infidel Sassanids. Similarly, al-Baydhaq's way of narrating Ibn Tūmart's expeditions, that is, one after another in a specific section of his work, is a clear parallel to the way in which *maghāzī*'s texts report the battles of the Prophet (Al-Baydhaq 2004, p. 35ff). Additionally, it is, as the *mahdī* himself said to his community in one of his letters, the Almohads fight for the religion of Allāh, just as Muḥammad fought for it along with his companions (Lévi-Provençal 1928, p. 4). In another of his missives, this time addressed to the Almoravid emir 'Alī b. Yūsuf, the *mahdī* stated that "the Almohads are armed to put an end to your attacks, as happened with the people of Badr" (Lévi-Provençal 1928, pp. 19–20).

The "Qur'anization" of the war narrative participated in this commemoration of the first battles of Islam.⁴³ Al-Jarāwī, for example, compares, in one of his poems, the battle of Alarcos with Badr through the verse Q. 44: 16,⁴⁴ referring, according to the exegetes, both to that battle of the Prophet and to the victory against the Pharaoh, viewed as the worst of the tyrants and enemies of the people of God. The *jihād* of the Almohads, in their most representative victory, was thus equated with Muḥammad's struggle and his most commemorated battle.⁴⁵ The Almohads became the new *ahl Badr*—as was the case in the letter sent by Ibn Tūmart to 'Alī b. Yūsuf—that is, the most excellent among the Muslims after the *rāshidūn* and ten of the companions of the Prophet, having guaranteed entry to paradise (Afsaruddin 2008, p. 57ff).⁴⁶ Similarly, the use of this verse meant that the triumph of the Mu'minids was equivalent to the victory of the believers against the Pharaoh, a success representing a renewal of the absolute defeat of infidelity throughout all of sacred history.

Moreover, the Almohads were also similar to the *anṣār*, an image projected through the use of verse Q. 42: 38 in the context, once again, of the battle of Alarcos.⁴⁷ The Caliph al-Manṣūr, following the example of the Prophet and his companions, sought advice from his *qa'ids* on how to proceed in battle. In fact, the first followers of Ibn Tūmart were called *aṣḥāb* and *anṣār* (Lévi-Provençal 1928, p. 55; Ibn Simāk 1979, p. 108). On the other hand, if the followers of Ibn Tūmart were equivalent to the companions of the Prophet, the *aṣḥāb* of the Andalusī enemies of the Almohads were Christians. Thus, next to the appellation of “companions” to designate the Christian allies of leaders such as Ibn Mardaniš, that of “hypocrites” also usually appears to refer to the rebel king and his men, or also to the Almoravids (Jones 2008, pp. 793–829; Albarrán 2020a, p. 290ff). That is, the Mu'minids were fighting the same enemies fought by the Prophet, which were the infidels and *munāfiqūn*.

The last example I will refer to is that of the concept of *fath qarīb*, which refers to an Almohad naval victory in the context of the siege of al-Mahdiyya.⁴⁸ This notion of the “imminent conquest” appears in verses Q. 48: 18 and Q. 48: 27, and refers, depending on the interpretations, to the victory in the battle of Khaybar, or to the conquest of Mecca. Moreover, they are two verses in which divine aid in battle is patent. In fact, the first one states that God sent his *sakīna* (Fahd 2012), the tranquility granted by the divine presence, to those who remained faithful to Islam. The Almohads, therefore, would enjoy this prerogative. Similarly, verse Q. 48: 18 also mentions the Pledge of Ridwān, where Muslims exhibited their support for the Prophet under a tree. Interestingly, the pact of loyalty that Ibn Tūmart's companions swore to the *mahdī* was also made under a tree, specifically a carob tree, similarly to Muḥammad's (Ibn Simāk 1979, p. 108). Furthermore, 'Abd al-Wāhid al-Marrākushī reports that, in carrying out the pact, Ibn Tūmart told his followers the following: “your recognition/oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) is like that of the companions (*aṣḥāb*) of the Messenger of God” ('Abd al-Wāhid al-Marrākushī 2005, p. 132). In this event, supposedly taking place at a dramatic moment, since the Prophet thought the people of Mecca had murdered 'Uthmān and that the battle against the polytheists was imminent, the followers of Muḥammad renewed their pact of fidelity towards him and vowed to fight to death against the infidels. After that, God rewarded them with a victory at Khaybar (Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Hishām 1955, pp. 503–4, p. 510ff; Al-Wāqidī 2011, pp. 297, 311ff; Ma'mar ibn Rāshid 2014, p. 90).⁴⁹

On the other hand, these verses were part of the *sūrat al-Fath*, a chapter of the Qur'an (48) that, according to exegetes, refers to the Ḥudaybiyya treaty and the subsequent conquest of Mecca (Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Hishām 1955, pp. 499ff, 540ff; Al-Wāqidī 2011, pp. 281ff, 384ff). It is full of references to holy war, such as God's help in war (through the *sakīna*, once again) and his image as the leader of armies (Q. 48: 4), or the idea of martyrdom (Q. 48: 5). Furthermore, according to Q. 2: 248, the *sakīna* was kept in the Ark of Covenant, the *tābūt* (*tābūt fi-hi sakīna min rabbikum*), which is the same term used to name, as has already been said, the catafalque keeping the Qur'an of 'Uthmān used in the Almohad military parades.

5. Conclusions

'Abd al-Wāhid al-Marrākushī reports that, in the course of a discussion between the Caliph al-Manṣūr and the Mālikī jurist Abū Bakr b. al-Jadd (m. 1190) over the reasons for the existence of diversity of opinion (*ikhtilāf*), the caliph said that, on the one hand, there was only the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition, specifically Abū Dāwud's *Sunan*, and, on the other, the sword, *jihād* ('Abd al-Wāhid al-Marrākushī 2005, pp. 198–99); that is to say, the Qur'an and *Sunna*, and holy war.

This anecdote represents the duality that I have intended to show throughout this article, that is, how the Qur'an became a central element of the Almohad *jihād*'s discourse, including its ritual aspect. Additionally, this “Qur'anization” of the war narrative, as I have called it, was part of the following Almohad project: the return to the early days of Islam. The link between the Qur'an and the discourse of *jihād* is not unique to the Almohad case. It can be observed throughout the history of medieval Islam in general, and of the

Maghreb and al-Andalus in particular (Albarrán 2020a; García Sanjuán 2020). However, in the Almohad period, and unlike what had happened previously in the medieval Islamic West, this link became extensive and systematic, as it was part of the larger religious project of restoration of the early Umma, a phenomenon in which the return to the Qur'an played a central role. Ibn Tūmart, the infallible *mahdī*, and the Almohad *ṭalaba* after him were the only ones capable of recovering and correctly interpreting the meaning of the Qur'anic text, thus renewing the times of the Prophet and the *rāshidūn*. This is the reason why a report similar to that of Caliph al-Manṣūr and the Mālikī jurist Abū Bakr b. al-Jadd, quoted before, is unique to the Almohad *milieu*. The use of the Qur'an in war contexts served to legitimize and sanctify Almohad war activities, and, in turn, to insert them into the revival of a "golden age". In other words, the Almohad *jihād*, through this "Qur'anization", became a fundamental element in the recovery of the first Muslims' *umma*. The Qur'an, in a warfare background, was a link between *jihād* and the restoration of the purity of the early times of Islam.

Moreover, the Qur'an, in turn, was interpreted from that reality. The war narrative in which these verses are included shaped their framework of interpretation, thus carrying out a "warfare exegesis", even of some that, *a priori*, were not understood from that perspective by exegetes such as al-Qurṭubī, Q. 3: 195. In this sense, this "Qur'anization" also led to a "militarization" of the interpretation of the Qur'an.

Similarly, there was also an "Almohadization" of these verses, since, as has been observed, they fit perfectly into the entire Mu'minid discourse employed in the context of the sacralization of war—from the use of *ḥisba* and *takfir* to the self-representation as an army chosen by God, going through the commemoration of the early days of Islam, one of the most characteristic features of the Almohad movement. On the other hand, the Qur'an also served to sacralize the memory and remembrance of the Almohad *jihād* through the written testimonies, placing it into Islamic sacred history.

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Appendix A

	Qur'anic Verse	Exegesis in al-Qurṭubī	War Context
1	Q. 2: 154. "And do not say about those who are killed in the way of Allāh, 'They are dead'. Rather, they are alive, but you do not perceive it".	It refers to the martyrs: they are alive in their tombs and will not realize when they are resurrected, while the rest of the believers will (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 2, p. 461).	Letter sent by the <i>mahdī</i> to the assembly of the Almohads, talking about the holy war against the Almoravids ('Azzāwī 1995, pp. 44–49).
2	Q. 2: 249. "[. . .] But those who were certain that they would meet Allāh said, 'How many times a small company has overcome a large company by permission of Allāh'. And Allāh is with the patient".	It refers to the context of the fight between David and Goliath. In this verse there is an encouragement for people in combat, and a feeling of willingness to be patient and to follow those who give truth to their Lord (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 4, p. 438ff).	Account of the fourth expedition of the <i>mahdī</i> against the Almoravids (Al-Baydhaq 2004, pp. 36–37).
3	Q. 3: 146. "And how many a prophet [fought in battle and] with him fought many devoted men. But they never lost assurance due to what afflicted them in the cause of Allāh, nor did they weaken or submit. And Allāh loves the steadfast".	This verse descends when the Prophet is left for dead in Uḥud, as a merit of those companions who stood firm by his side. The debate on whether a prophet could die in combat is also introduced. (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol 5, p. 349ff).	Letter sent by the <i>mahdī</i> to the assembly of the Almohads, talking about the holy war against the Almoravids ('Azzāwī 1995, pp. 44–49).
4	Q. 3: 153. "[Remember] when you [fled and] climbed [the mountain] without looking aside at anyone while the Messenger was calling you from behind. So Allāh repaid you with distress upon distress so you would not grieve for that which had escaped you [of victory and spoils of war] or [for] that which had befallen you [of injury and death]. And Allāh is [fully] Acquainted with what you do".	It refers to the battle of Uḥud (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 5, p. 365ff).	Preparations on the battlefield of Alarcos (Ibn Abī Zar' 1972, p. 223).
5	C. 3: 169–170. "And never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allāh as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision, Rejoicing in what Allāh has bestowed upon them of His bounty, and they receive good tidings about those [to be martyred] after them who have not yet joined them—that there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve".	What happened in Uḥud was a test from God to distinguish truth from hypocrisy. These verses are about the martyrs of that battle. Al-Qurṭubī develops several issues about the martyrs, for example about whether their bodies are corrupted or not, about how to wash their corpses, etc (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 5, p. 406ff).	Letter sent by the <i>mahdī</i> to the assembly of the Almohads, talking about the holy war against the Almoravids ('Azzāwī 1995, pp. 44–49).
6	Q. 3: 195. "And their Lord responded to them, 'Never will I allow to be lost the work of any of you, whether male or female; you are of one another. So those who emigrated or were evicted from their homes or were harmed in My cause or fought or were killed—I will surely remove from them their misdeeds, and I will surely admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow as reward from Allāh', and Allāh has with Him the best reward".	Al-Qurṭubī does not seem to link it to the holy war (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 5, p. 464ff), although, in the Almohad context, it seems a clear reference to the divine prize awaiting those who joined the Mu'minid movement.	Letter sent by the <i>mahdī</i> to the assembly of the Almohads, talking about the holy war against the Almoravids ('Azzāwī 1995, pp. 44–49).

	Qur'anic Verse	Exegesis in al-Qurṭubī	War Context
7	Q. 3: 200. "Oh you who have believed, persevere and endure and remain stationed and fear Allāh that you may be successful".	Al-Qurṭubī states: "As most of the <i>Umma</i> interpret, be firm and hold your enemies, with the horses, at bay". He links it to Q. 8: 60 and to the action of <i>ribāṭ</i> (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 5, p. 464ff).	Harangue of the emir Jarmūn b. Riyāh in Alarcos (Ibn Abī Zar' 1972, p. 226).
8	Q. 4: 89. "[. . .] But if they turn away, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them and take not from among them any ally or helper".	It refers to taking prisoner or killing those who deviate from <i>tawḥīd</i> and <i>hijra</i> . That is, to apply <i>takfīr</i> (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 6, p. 506ff).	Letter sent by the <i>mahdī</i> to the Almohad community, talking about the holy war against the Almoravids (Lévi-Provençal 1928, p. 8).
9	Q. 8: 16. "And whoever turns his back to them on such a day, unless swerving [as a strategy] for war or joining [another] company, has certainly returned with anger [upon him] from Allāh, and his refuge is Hell—and wretched is the destination".	Allāh has prohibited the believers from fleeing since he made <i>jihād</i> an obligation, even though one is in inferiority. He gives the example of the Battle of Mu'ta, where the Muslim army was much smaller. He also uses, in a very interesting way, the example of the conquest of al-Andalus. He adds that, unlike some scholars, it was reported by Ibn 'Abbās and others that this verse is valid until the day of the Resurrection, maintaining the verdict on the flight of an expedition or the desertion as a fault but not a serious one, since it happened in Uḥud when the people abandoned their positions and Allāh forgave them. He also quotes a <i>ḥadīth</i> : "Stay away from the seven <i>mūbiqāt</i> , and among them is desertion in combat" (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 9, p. 470ff).	Letter sent by the <i>mahdī</i> to the Almohad community, talking about the holy war against the Almoravids (Lévi-Provençal 1928, p. 3).
10	Q. 8: 17. "And you did not kill them, but it was Allāh who killed them. And you did not throw, when you threw, but it was Allāh who threw that He might test the believers with a good test. Indeed, Allāh is Hearing and Knowing".	It refers to Gabriel's help in Badr (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 9, p. 476ff).	Victory letter sent by Ibn Wānūdīn to the Caliph (Ibn 'Idhārī 2009, vol. 4, p. 223).
11	Q. 8: 60. "And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and well-readied horses you can muster (<i>ribāṭ al-jayl</i>) by which you may terrify the enemy of Allāh and your enemy [. . .]".	He talks about the benefits of those who prepare weapons for <i>jihād</i> , of the merits of fighting on horseback, and that learning horsemanship while using weapons is obligatory (<i>farḍ kifāya</i>) (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 10, p. 55ff).	Letter sent by the <i>mahdī</i> to the Almohad community, talking about the holy war against the Almoravids (Lévi-Provençal 1928, p. 4).
12	Q. 9: 25. "Allāh has already given you victory in many regions and [even] on the day of Ḥunayn, when your great number pleased you, but it did not avail you at all, and the earth was confining for you with its vastness; then you turned back, fleeing".	Al-Qurṭubī states that the expression heard by the idolaters, " <i>shāhat al-wuyūh</i> (may the faces be disfigured)!", could come from both the Prophet and the angels, or both, proving that the angels fought on the day of Ḥunayn. At first the Muslims flee, but in the end Allāh helped them and they won. That divine help is described, according to al-Qurṭubī, in verse Q. 8: 26, which speaks of the descent of the <i>sakīna</i> , removing the fear of the Muslims, and of the heavenly troops (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 10, p. 143ff).	Almohad defeat of 'Umra in 1187. The Muslims who survived fled. The source says that in Ḥunayn "there is an example for Muslims (<i>wa-ḥī Ḥunayn aswa li-l-muslimīn</i>)" (Ibn 'Idhārī 2009, vol. 4, p. 259).

	Qur'anic Verse	Exegesis in al-Qurṭubī	War Context
13	Q. 9: 111. "Indeed, Allāh has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties [in exchange] for that they will have Paradise. They fight in the cause of Allāh, so they kill and are killed. [It is] a true promise [binding] upon Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur'an. And who is truer to his covenant than Allāh? So rejoice in your transaction which you have contracted. And it is that which is the great attainment".	The servant gives up his soul and his wealth, and Allāh grants him forgiveness. This verse was revealed in the Pledge of al-'Aqaba. According to al-Qurṭubī, the reference to the Torah and the Gospel means that the origin of <i>jihād</i> and resistance to the enemy predates Muḥammad, dating back to the time of Moses (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 10, p. 389ff).	Letter sent by the <i>mahdī</i> to the assembly of the Almohads, talking about the holy war against the Almoravids ('Azzāwī 1995, pp. 44–49).
14	Q. 14: 27. "Allāh keeps firm those who believe, with the firm word, in worldly life and in the Hereafter. And Allāh sends astray the wrongdoers. And Allah does what He wills".	It refers to the punishment in the grave. When the angel comes to see the buried believer, he will recite the <i>shahāda</i> . That is the firm word (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 12, p. 64ff).	Third expedition against the Almoravids. In front of the enemy, the <i>mahdī</i> shouts this verse (Al-Baydhaq 2004, pp. 35–36).
15	Q. 22: 78. "And strive for Allāh with the striving due to Him. He has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty. [It is] the religion of your father, Abraham. Allāh named you Muslims before [in former scriptures] and in this [revelation] that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people. So establish prayer and give <i>zakāt</i> and hold fast to Allāh. He is your protector; and excellent is the protector, and excellent is the helper".	It refers both to the <i>jihād</i> against the infidels and to the rejection of the appetites and whispers of the devil, as well as the injustices of the tyrant. Al-Qurṭubī also quotes a <i>ḥadīth</i> according to which the Prophet would have said that the best <i>jihād</i> is a fair word in front of a tyrant ruler (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 14, p. 450ff).	Poem by al-Jarāwī about an Almohad victory in al-Andalus in 1163 (Al-Jarāwī 1994, p. 160).
16	Q. 27: 37. "Return to them, for we will surely come to them with soldiers that they will be powerless to encounter, and we will surely expel them therefrom in humiliation, and they will be debased".	Solomon rejects some gifts from the king of Yemen and the latter says that he will send his armies. The Yemeni king realizes that he is a prophet and that he will not be able to defeat him (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 16, p. 162ff).	Al-Manṣūr's answer to the alleged challenge of Alfonso VIII that leads to Alarcos (Ibn Abī Zar' 1972, pp. 221–22; Ibn al-Athīr 2009, vol. 2, pp. 2606–7).
17	Q. 33: 25. "And Allāh repelled those who disbelieved, in their rage, not having obtained any good. And sufficient was Allāh for the believers in battle, and ever is Allāh Powerful and Exalted in Might".	God sent winds and armies against their enemies until they are rejected and the Banū Qurayza went back, full of terror, to their fortifications (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 17, p. 115).	Mahdī's first and third expeditions against the Almoravids (Al-Baydhaq 2004, pp. 35–36).
18	Q. 42: 38. "And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves, and from what We have provided them, they spend".	The <i>anṣār</i> asked each other for advice. Also, in the <i>mashūra</i> , the council, there is divine blessing (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 18, p. 486ff).	At Alarcos, the caliph follows the example of the Prophet and asks his <i>qa'ids</i> for advice on how to proceed in battle (Ibn Abī Zar' 1972, p. 223).
19	Q. 44: 16. "The Day We will strike with the greatest assault (<i>al-batsha al-kubrā</i>), indeed, We will take retribution".	It refers to the day of Badr, since in it they (Muslims) will return to destroy the infidels as happened with the Pharaoh, which is the episode narrated in this verse (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 19, p. 110).	A poem by al-Jarāwī about the battle of Alarcos in which it is compared to Badr (Al-Jarāwī 1994, p. 91).

	Qur'anic Verse	Exegesis in al-Qurṭubī	War Context
20	Q. 47: 7. "Oh you who have believed, if you support Allah, He will support you and plant firmly your feet".	Help the religion of Allāh and he will help in the fight against unbelief (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 19, p. 252).	Harangue of emir Jarmūn b. Riyāh in Alarcos (Ibn Abī Zar' 1972, p. 226).
21	Q. 48: 18. "Certainly was Allāh pleased with the believers when they pledged allegiance to you under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquility (<i>sakīna</i>) upon them and rewarded them with an imminent conquest (<i>fath^{am} qarīb^{am}</i>)".	It refers to the Pledge of Riḍwān, and the near victory of Khaybar, although others say that to the conquest of Mecca (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 19, p. 341ff).	A naval victory in the context of the siege of al-Mahdiyya is described as <i>fath^{am} qarīb</i> (Ibn al-Athīr 2009, vol. 2, p. 2437).
22	Q. 48: 20. "Allāh has promised you much booty that you will take [in the future] and has hastened for you this [victory] and withheld the hands of people from you—that it may be a sign for the believers and [that] He may guide you to a straight path".	It refers to the spoil taken at Khaybar, although some say to Ḥudaybiyya (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 19, p. 320).	Distribution of spoils taken from the Almoravids after a victory (Ibn Abī Zar' 1972, p. 178).
23	Q. 48: 27. "Certainly has Allāh showed to His Messenger the vision in truth. You will surely enter <i>al-masjid al-ḥarām</i> , if Allāh wills, in safety, with your heads shaved and [hair] shortened, not fearing [anyone]. He knew what you did not know and has arranged before that an imminent conquest (<i>fath^{am} qarīb^{am}</i>)".	Some scholars say that the imminent victory is Khaybar and others Mecca. There are also those who say that it is Ḥudaybiyya, because thanks to that treaty many pagans converted to Islam in the following two years (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 19, p. 336ff).	A naval victory in the context of the siege of al-Mahdiyya is described as <i>fath^{am} qarīb</i> (Ibn al-Athīr 2009, vol. 2, p. 2437).
24	Q. 61: 14. "[. . .] We supported those who believed against their enemy, and they became dominant".	It refers to those who supported Jesus by confronting those who denied him (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 20, p. 448ff).	Expedition of 'Abd al-Mu'min against the Almoravids (Al-Baydhaq 2004, p. 50).
25	Q. 63: 1. "When the hypocrites come to you, they say, 'We testify that you are the Messenger of Allāh'. And Allāh knows that you are His Messenger, and Allāh testifies that the hypocrites are liars" (it continues until verse Q. 63: 11).	For verses Q. 63: 1–11 al-Qurṭubī interprets that care should be taken with hypocrites, as they are like unbelievers. God will not forgive them (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 20, p. 494ff).	The Caliph al-Manṣūr ordered to read these verses in the Friday prayer. This was done on March 2, 1195, months before the Battle of Alarcos (Ibn Ṣāḥib Al-Ṣalāt 1964, p. 199). During the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mūn, a <i>faqīh</i> recommended to the ruler, quoting these verses, that he should kill the rebels (Ibn 'Idhārī 2009, vol. 4, p. 359).
26	Q. 89: 11–12. "[All of] whom oppressed within the lands, and increased therein the corruption".	It refers to the tribe of 'Ād, who did not listen to the warnings of the prophet Hūd; the people of Ṭamūd, who did not follow the advice of the prophet Ṣāliḥ; and the Pharaoh (Al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 22, p. 256ff).	Letter sent by the <i>mahdī</i> to the Almoravids in which he names them through this verse (Lévi-Provençal 1928, p. 19).

Notes

- 1 Holy war is understood as an ideology of war justification that acts as a discursive instrument appealing to sacred elements accepted and shared by those to whom it is directed at, with which a great legitimization scheme is built for different actions and with which large doses of authority are obtained. In this sense, holy war must be understood not as a concrete action with well-established limits, but as a flexible framework of action adapting to different contexts and used by various actors to justify their actions. This broad approach to the analysis of holy war leads me not to limit this notion terminologically in the Arabic–Islamic lexicon. That is, although the term *jihād* will be used as the main synonym for holy war where it is precise and evident following this conceptual proposal, there will be other words, such as *ghazwa*, *qitāl*, *ḥarb* or *fath*, that will also be used in this way. On the other hand, this conceptual proposal also avoids raising legal limits to the concept of *jihād* according to *fiqh* literature. I believe that the discourse of holy war in Islam, and its display in various types of sources, is much broader, complex and multifaceted. On this, as well as for an updated bibliography on *jihād*, see (Albarrán 2020a, pp. 21–42).
- 2 Al-Rāzī places this Qur’an in Umayyad Cordoba. (Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī 1965–1984, vol. 1, p. 158). See (Dessus Lamare 1938, pp. 551–75).
- 3 In addition, according to those traditions, this copy of the Qur’an, copied by hand by ‘Uthmān himself, was the one with which the third caliph was praying when he was assassinated, as witnessed by the blood stains that could be observed on its sheets. See (Zadeh 2008, pp. 321–46).
- 4 The biblical account of the Ark of the Covenant also appears to be related to a war context and to God’s help in battle; for example, during the attack on Jericho, the Israelite army led by Joshua, following divine instructions, marched for six days around the city with seven priests who carried seven ram’s horn trumpets before the Ark. On the seventh day, after circling the settlement seven times, blowing the trumpets and shouting a battle cry, the walls of the city collapsed. See Joshua 6: 1–16.
- 5 For more information about the figure of the *ghurabā’*, see (Fierro 2000a, pp. 230–60; Ghouirgate 2014, p. 231ff).
- 6 For the importance of the concept of *fath* as holy war in the Almohad context, see (García Sanjuán 2016, pp. 31–50, especially 42–50). See also (Donner 2016, pp. 1–14).
- 7 Q. 22: 77–78. This *mihṛāb* was built in 1158. See (Villalba Sola 2015, p. 154).
- 8 On the Almohad gates see (Cressier 2005, pp. 149–87).
- 9 See the table in Appendix A. This table includes the Qur’anic references in an Almohad war context quoted in this article, their interpretation according to the *Tafsīr* of al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), a Qur’anic exegesis from the Almohad period, and a brief description of the war situation in which these references are mentioned in the sources. Legal doctrinal sources, such as Ibn al-Munāṣif’s treatise on *jihād*, are not included. The presence of the Qur’an as a legal source in these texts is obvious and has been extensively studied (García Sanjuán 2019, pp. 89–113). The analysis, therefore, focuses on the historical literary and documentary sources.
- 10 As stated by García Sanjuán, who analyzes and collects the Qur’anic verses used in the letters against the Almoravids written by the Mahdī, the use of the Qur’an maximizes the spiritual and emotional effect caused on the audience (García Sanjuán 2019, pp. 89–113).
- 11 See n. 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13 in Appendix A.
- 12 See, for example, (Lévi-Provençal 1941, n. 26 and 34).
- 13 See n. 1, 5, 6, 13 in Appendix A.
- 14 See n. 3 in Appendix A.
- 15 See n. 8 in Appendix A.
- 16 See n. 9 in Appendix A.
- 17 See n. 11 in Appendix A.
- 18 See n. 4, 7, 14, 20, 25 in Appendix A.
- 19 This is what Miller names as “pre-invasion speech” (Miller 2008, p. 145ff).
- 20 See, for example, Deuteronomy 23: 10–15.
- 21 See n. 4 in Appendix A.
- 22 See n. 7 and 20 in Appendix A.
- 23 See n. 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 17, 22, 24, 25 and 26 in Appendix A.
- 24 “You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allāh”. See, for example, (Penelas 2005, pp. 1051–73).
- 25 On the connection between *ḥisba* and *jihād*, see, for example, (García-Arenal 2006, pp. 157–92).
- 26 See n. 11 in Appendix A.
- 27 See n. 8 in Appendix A.
- 28 See n. 26 in Appendix A.
- 29 See n. 17 in Appendix A.

- 30 Moreover, the Almohad fleet also appears as “blessed”. See, for example, (‘Azzāwī 1995, pp. 83–86).
- 31 See n. 2, 7, 10, 12, 15, 17, 20, 21, 23 and 24 in Appendix A.
- 32 See n. 2 in Appendix A.
- 33 See n. 7 and 20 in Appendix A.
- 34 See n. 10 in Appendix A.
- 35 See n. 12 in Appendix A.
- 36 See n. 3, 7, 15, 21, 23 and 24 in Appendix A.
- 37 See n. 3 in Appendix A.
- 38 . . . *yuqarriru ‘inda-hum ann qutalā’-hum shuhadā’, li-anna-hum dhābbūn ‘an dīn Allāh muzahirūn li-l-sunna.*
- 39 See n. 1, 5, 6, 13 and 14 in Appendix A.
- 40 See n. 1 and 5 in Appendix A.
- 41 See n. 13 in Appendix A.
- 42 For a good state of the art of the developments and perspectives in *Memory Studies*, see (Tamm 2013, pp. 458–73).
- 43 See n. 3, 12, 18, 19, 21 and 23 in Appendix A.
- 44 See n. 19 in Appendix A.
- 45 Badr is, without a doubt, the most important, commemorated, symbolic and prestigious battle in the history of Islam, at least in terms of religiosity and sacredness. Ka’b b. Mālik would have said that it is the most esteemed battle in the eyes of Muslims (Ma’mar ibn Rāshid 2014, p. 130).
- 46 ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 1037), for example, states that the *ahl al-sunna* are those who universally agree that the most excellent of men are Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘Alī; then the rest of the ten (the companions who had paradise guaranteed); then the rest of the people of Badr; then the rest of the people of Uḥud; then the rest of the people of the commitment (*ahl al-bay’a*); then the rest of the companions. See (Yazigi 1997, pp. 159–67; Khalidi 2009, p. 87ff). Already, Mūsā b. ‘Uqba, one of the first authors of a *maghāzī* text circulating widely in al-Andalus, compiled lists of participants in Badr (Schacht 1953, pp. 288–300; Horowitz 2002, pp. 29, 70), something also reproduced in the Islamic West throughout the centuries. This issue has been dealt with by ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Samlālī in his introduction to the edition of *Sayf al-naṣr bi-l-sāda al-kirām ahl Badr* by Ibn Idrīs al-Sanūsī (d. 1886), a text versed on the warriors in Badr and their merits. He describes this battle—and its participants—in the historical imaginary of the Islamic West, as the one that has contributed the most to the defense of Islam, as well as the most important and noble of all expeditions. Similarly, he collects a total of 50 manuscripts of texts on *ahl Badr* preserved in different North African libraries and archives (Al-Sanūsī 2014, pp. 37–46).
- 47 See n. 18 in Appendix A.
- 48 See n. 21 y 23 in Appendix A.
- 49 On Ḥudaybiyya and Khaybar see, for example, (Lecker 1984, pp. 1–11).

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