

# THE ISLAMIC REACTION TO THE CHRISTIAN CONQUESTS IN IBERIA: THE IDEAL OF TERRITORIAL RECOVERY (ELEVENTH-TWELFTH CENTURIES)

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## ABSTRACT

Heavily biased by ideological prejudices, traditional Spanish scholarship claimed the existence of sharply divergent approaches between Iberian Christians and Muslims about the perception of the land and the feelings that got them bound to it. Gathered around a shared national project, the Christians would have held highly stable emotional bonds to the land they lived in. Propelled by a strong sense of attachment to their territories, they would have fought tirelessly over eight centuries to recover the lands previously seized by the Muslims. Lacking a similar sense of belonging to the land, the Muslims, bound by agnatic and religious ties, would have considered themselves just temporary dwellers. However, a careful reading of the Arabic sources suggests the existence of parallels regarding the recovery of lost lands. This article seeks to provide compelling textual evidence about the idea of land recovery among the Muslims across the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

## KEYWORDS

Spanish nationalism, Al-Andalus, *Reconquista*, Recovery, *Istirjā'*.

## CAPITALIA VERBA

Nationalismus Hispanicus, Iberia Arabica, Restauratio Hispanica, Restauratio, *Istirjā'*.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The complex issue of the Islamic reactions to the territorial expansion of the Christians in medieval Iberia has been addressed by different authors from different perspectives. Although the existence of a project aimed at recovering the lands previously seized by the Muslims enjoys broad historiographical consensus, current scholarship no longer considers the said project as uniform or unambiguous<sup>2</sup>. Besides, far from being uniform, up to four different versions can be singled out: Leonese (Neo-Gothic), Carolingian, Hispanic (Crown of Aragon) and pontifical.<sup>3</sup> Narrowly associated with Spanish nationalist scholarship, the use of the name *Reconquista* to describe the medieval idea of land recovery became first called into question in 1978 and has been ever since the subject of ongoing and controversial debates between historians.<sup>4</sup>

Drawing from a critical reconsideration of the most traditional scholarship, this article seeks to provide compelling textual evidence about the existence among the Muslims of a project of land recovery between the 11th and 12th centuries.

## 2. *Reconquista* and Islamic reaction: the historiographical debate

A good number of places and territories changed hands at different moments across the medieval period. The best-documented cases correspond to middle and large-size cities, including Barbastro (taken by the Christians in 1064-retaken by the Muslims in 1065), Valencia (1094-1102), Santarem (1093-1111), Almería (1147-1157), Silves (1189-1191) and Algeciras (1344-1369), among others. In addition to these, there were many other Islamic unsuccessful attempts of retaking cities and places seized by the Christians. Despite their definitive 1492 failure, the Muslims strove to regain their lost lands at different moments. Overlooking this apparently obvious and simple historical evidence, the most traditional scholarship proved reluctant to admit the existence of an Islamic notion of land recovery. Following the typically chauvinistic approach of Spanish nationalism, “the” *Reconquista* would

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2. Alvira Cabrer, Martín. “Conquista y reconquista en la Corona de Aragón (1162-1276)”, *La Reconquista: ideología y justificación de la guerra santa peninsular*, Carlos de Ayala, Isabel Cristina Ferreira Fernandes, José Santiago Palacios Ontalva, eds. Madrid: La Ergástula, 2019: 187-231.

3. De Ayala, Carlos. “¿Reconquista o reconquistas? La legitimación de la guerra santa peninsular”, *Revista del Centro de Estudios Históricos de Granada y su Reino*, 32 (2020): 3-20.

4. García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. “Rejecting al-Andalus, exalting the *Reconquista* historical memory in contemporary Spain”, *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 10/1 (2018): 127-145; García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. “Weaponizing Historical Knowledge: the Notion of *Reconquista* in Spanish Nationalism”, *Imago temporis. Medium Aevum* 14 (2020): 133-162.



have been an exclusive feat of the Iberian Christians with no parallels whatsoever in other historical contexts.<sup>5</sup>

Heavily biased by nationalist and colonialist prejudices, 19th-century scholarship pointed at the existence of radical differences between Muslims and Christians with regard to collective feelings of identity. M. Lafuente (1806-1866), the most influential liberal historian, claimed that, while the notion of nation did not exist among the Muslims ("it was a congregation of slaves"), the Christians represented "the triple enthusiasm of religion, the homeland, and civil liberty. Accordingly, even as they fought for the faith, they also did so to rescue their nationality", in such a way that this three-fold enthusiasm gave them "more vigor in the fight."<sup>6</sup>

Heirs, to a large extent, to the 19th-century academic tradition, 20th-century historians kept unflinchingly clung to the traditional *Reconquista* paradigm, according to which Spain "shaped against Islam". Firmly convinced that medieval Christian Spain was a nation,<sup>7</sup> R. Menéndez Pidal (1869-1968) argued the Muslims put up little resistance to the Christian expansion simply because they did not have "a national and religious spirit," and hence, once the Christians prevailed, "they were easily inclined to submit."<sup>8</sup>

In his classic 1954 study of the medieval idea of Spain, J.A. Maravall (1911-1986) revisited this approach and advanced ideas that became almost axiomatic, re-emphasizing the differences between Christians and Muslims regarding their emotional bonds to the land: "for the Christians, Spain was a political historical concept which did entail obligations, while, for the Arabs, it was merely a geographical name involving no liabilities."<sup>9</sup>

Drawing on Menéndez Pidal and Maravall, R. Barkai claimed the idea of homeland, frequent in Latin texts, "has no parallel" in the accounts of the Arabic sources, pointing out that this absence represents "one of the reasons why they were unable to keep up with the dynamic Christian society, strongly propelled by national feelings."<sup>10</sup> Although he branded Maravall's work "an excellent study on the development of Spanish self-awareness," Barkai took issue with the idea that the Islamic approach to the land entailed "no liabilities", claiming they actually had their own notion of land recovery. First surfaced over the 13th century, the notion

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5. García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. "¿Eppur si muove? Consideraciones críticas sobre la noción de *Reconquista*", *Una nueva mirada a la formación de al-Andalus. La arabización y la islamización desde la interdisciplinariedad*, Eneko López Martínez de Marigorta, ed. Vitoria: Universidad del País Vasco, 2022: 225-246.

6. Lafuente, Modesto. *Historia general de España*. Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de Mellado, 1850: I: 78-79.

7. Menéndez Pidal, Ramón; Pérez de Urbel, Justo; Del Arco Garay, Ramón. *España Cristiana. Comienzo de la Reconquista (711-1038)*. *Historia de España Menéndez Pidal VI*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1971: xxv.

8. Menéndez Pidal, Ramón. *La España del Cid*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1967: 70-71. This paragraph is worded differently in the original edition of the work: Madrid: Editorial Plutarco, 1929: I, 85.

9. Maravall, José Antonio. *El concepto de España en la Edad Media*. Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 1981: 197; Among those quoting him see, for instance: Fanjul, Serafín. *La quimera de al-Andalus*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2004: 199.

10. Barkai, Ron. *Cristianos y musulmanes en la España medieval (el enemigo en el espejo)*. Madrid: Rialp, 1984: 296-297.



of *istirjāʿ*, he argued, would have been an “Arabic word equivalent to the concept of Reconquista”.<sup>11</sup>

Apparently ignoring Barkai, Spanish Arabist J. Vallvé (1929-2011) took later on the same approach and pointed at the same notion: the Muslims never gave up on the idea of recovering their lost territories, expressing their feeling of *istirjāʿ* “through expressions or formulas conveying the hope of retaking them.” While Vallvé just provided poetic textual evidence of this idea, he did not consider said Islamic “feeling of reconquest” to be merely longing<sup>12</sup>.

In a rather implicit way, that is, without specifically addressing the matter, scholarly references to an Islamic notion of land recovery are to be found in translations of Arabic sources published before 1984, when Barkai’s book came out. For instance, E. Lévi-Provençal rendered as *reprendre* (retake) the Arabic word *akhdh* used by al-Ḥimyarī to describe the 1065 conquest of Barbastro by al-Muqtadir ibn Hūd<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, J. Vallvé interpreted *fath*,<sup>14</sup> mentioned by Ibn Ghālib when referring to the same city, as “reconquest,”<sup>15</sup> just like F. Maíllo later did in his version of Ibn ʿIdhārī.<sup>16</sup>

While neither *akhdh* nor *fath* conveys the idea of “recovery”, these words describe the seizing of a previously lost Islamic city. Whether rendering them as “reconquest” could be considered as overtranslation remains, however, a moot question. Perhaps looking at the parallel notion of *Reconquista* may offer a good case: hardly mentioned in medieval sources<sup>17</sup> but extensively and consistently used as a valid academic notion. At any rate, Islamic recoveries of places and cities from the hands of the Christians have been sometimes featured as “reconquista”. For the sake of brevity, however, let us remember here just the much-studied case of Barbastro, starting with the works of J. Bosch Vilá and Afif Turk in the 1970s down to the most recent contributions on the topic.<sup>18</sup>

11. Barkai, Ron. *Cristianos y musulmanes...: 272-273*.

12. Vallvé, Joaquín. “El tiempo de los moros”, *Tópicos y realidades de la Edad Media*, Eloy Benito Ruano, coord. Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2002: 79-80.

13. Al-Ḥimyarī. *Kitāb al-rawḍ al miʿtār fī khabar al-aqtār*, ed. and trans. Évariste Lévi-Provençal. Leiden: Brill, 1938: 41 (in Arabic) and 52 (trans.).

14. García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. “La noción de *fath* en las fuentes árabes andalusíes y magrebíes, siglos VIII al XIII”, *Orígenes y desarrollo de la guerra santa en la Península Ibérica. Palabras e imágenes para una legitimación (ss. X-XIV)*, Carlos de Ayala, Patrick Henriot, José Santiago Palacios Ontalva, eds. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2016: 31-50.

15. The text of Ibn Ghālib, *Farḥat al-anfus*, is edited in: ʿAbd al-Badī, Lutfi. “Naṣṣ andalusī jadīd qitʿa min Kitāb farḥat al-anfus li-Ibn Gālib”. *Majallat Maʿhad al-Makhtūṭāt al-ʿArabiyya: magalla taqafiya – Revue de l’Institut des Manuscrits Arabes*, 1/2 (1955): 286; Vallvé, Joaquín, trans. “Una descripción de España de Ibn Galib”. *Anuario de Filología*, 1 (1975): 376. As mentioned below, he does the same with respect to the case of Almería.

16. Ibn ʿIdhārī. *Al-Bayān al-mughrib*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1983: III: 228; ed. Bashār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf. Tunisia: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2013: II, 461; Maíllo, Felipe. *La caída del califato de Córdoba y los reyes de Taifas*. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1993: 190.

17. De Ayala, Carlos. “La Reconquista: ¿ficción o realidad historiográfica?”, *La Edad Media peninsular. Aproximaciones y problemas*, Ángel Gordo, Diego Melo, eds. Gijón: Ediciones Trea, 2017: 127-142.

18. Bosch Vilá, Jacinto. “De nuevo sobre Barbastro, 1064-1065. Nuevos aspectos y precisiones sobre la conquista cristiana y la reconquista musulmana”. *Biblos*, 46 (1970): 225-233; Turk, Afif. *El Reino de*



The cases of P. Chalmeta and M. J. Viguera,<sup>19</sup> however, suggest that Spanish scholarship has been largely reluctant to admit an Islamic notion of “reconquista”. More recently and within the framework of what remains the most comprehensive and insightful survey of the end of al-Andalus, F. Maíllo updated the traditional approach with fresh ideas. Drawing on Maravall’s ideas (without mentioning him by name), Maíllo feeds on the stereotype of the sharp differences between the Islamic and the Christian approaches to the land, so that the well-worn and misleading idea that limits al-Andalus “to the land under Muslim control” leads him to claim that an Islamic idea of reconquest would have been just simply impossible.<sup>20</sup>

Claiming their social cohesion drew on tribal ties and religion rather than the land, Maíllo calls into question or downplays the Muslim’s territorial feelings of belonging. The beduins, he argues, “do not cling to the land, but rather to their lineages”, in such a way that the land hardly represents anything else than a passing-over zone, never felt as a true homeland.<sup>21</sup> Emphasizing the agnatic and patrilineal kinship of the Arabs, Maíllo points out that, in their communities, men were more important than land, and similarly power draws on lineage, not land. In short, their perception of the land “rendered a sense of national identity impossible” and, rather than al-Andalus, their “true homeland” was actually “the great Islamic community” (*umma*).<sup>22</sup>

Beyond betraying a rather poor, biased, and shallow understanding of the Arabic sources, the traditional approach cannot be rightly understood outside the general framework of the traditional *Reconquista* narrative which, as pointed out by A. K. Bennison, “implicitly denied the existence of a substantial indigenous Arabic speaking Muslim community in al-Andalus, and implied that the Arabs were a small conquering elite which was ultimately expelled, their temporary presence being no more than an Oriental aberration in Spanish Christian history”<sup>23</sup>. Their extensive reconsideration over the last few years notwithstanding,<sup>24</sup> the most traditional prejudices (among them, the name al-Andalus as lacking any geographical stability or the Muslims as mere interlopers), remain active in the most conservative

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*Zaragoza en el siglo XI de Cristo (V de la Hégira)*. Madrid: Instituto Egipcio de Estudios Islámicos (Egyptian Institute of Islamic Studies), 1978: 96-99; Marín, Manuela. “El ejército, in Viguera Molins”, *Los reinos de taifas. Al-Andalus en el siglo XI. Historia de España Menéndez Pidal VIII-1*, María Jesús Viguera, ed. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1994: 202, 219.

19. Chalmeta, Pedro. *Invasión e islamización. La sumisión de Hispania y la formación de al-Andalus*. Madrid: Mapfre, 1994: 23-24; Viguera, María Jesús. “Prólogo”, *Los reinos de taifas. Al-Andalus en el siglo XI. Historia de España Menéndez Pidal VIII-1*, María Jesús Viguera, ed. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1994: xvii.

20. Maíllo, Felipe. *De la desaparición de al-Andalus*. Madrid: Abada, 2011: 30, 33.

21. Maíllo, Felipe. *De la desaparición...: 29-30*.

22. Maíllo, Felipe. *De la desaparición...: 102-103*.

23. Bennison, Amira K. “The peoples of the north in the eyes of the Muslims of Umayyad al-Andalus (711-1031)”, *Journal of Global History*, 2/2 (2007): 159.

24. García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. “El significado geográfico del topónimo al-Andalus en las fuentes árabes”, *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 33/1 (2003): 3-36; García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. “Territorio y formas de identidad colectiva en al-Andalus (siglos VIII-XV)”, *Minervae Baeticae. Boletín de la Real Academia Sevillana de Buenas Letras*, 43 (2015): 123-144.



scholarship,<sup>25</sup> largely reluctant to admit new approaches that may challenge their rancid and worn-out narrative.

Although both the historical evidence and the vocabulary of the Arabic sources offer compelling evidence to spark debate, the Islamic concept of land recovery in al-Andalus remained largely unnoticed until 1984, and 35 more years were gone until it was first approached in earnest<sup>26</sup>. The unhurried pace of this slow evolution points, once more, to the abiding and pervasive influence of hard-to-overcome prejudices and stereotypes.

Drawing on Barkai and Albarrán's previous contributions, this article seeks to explore new textual evidence enhancing and refining our understanding of the Islamic notion of land recovery, frequently expressed in Arabic through the so-called tenth form, which conveys the meaning of seeking an action. Such is the case, in particular, of *istarja*<sup>ʿa</sup>/*istirjā*<sup>ʿ</sup>, the most common in the sources, as well as other including *istaradda*/*istirdād* and *istakhlāṣa*/*istikhlāṣ*.

### 3. The Taifa period (11<sup>th</sup> Century)

The name al-Andalus first surfaced on the bilingual dinars struck in 98/716-717 by Emir al-Ḥurr as the Arabic equivalent of the Latin name Spania. The land of al-Andalus is often described in the Arabic sources as a Peninsula (*jazīrat al-Andalus*), and the Iberian Muslims built their sense of collective belonging out of that name, calling themselves "the people of al-Andalus" (*ahl al-Andalus*). On the other hand, al-Andalus being the only minting place mentioned in the Umayyad coinage suggests it represents the dynasty's space of sovereignty. However, the emirs of Córdoba not only never got hold of the entire Iberia/al-Andalus but, as pointed out time ago<sup>27</sup>, they hardly attempted to do so, even at the peak of their political and military power over the Caliphate period. If the Umayyad project seems to have envisioned a shared Iberia between Muslims and Christians under the political supremacy of the emirs of Córdoba, the Asturian and Leonese Kings, dreamt of a much more exclusive control over all of Hispania.

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25. Álvarez Palenzuela, Vicente A. "Hispania: pérdida y recuperación", *Hispania, al-Ándalus y España: identidad y nacionalismo en la historia peninsular*, Maribel Fierro, Alejandro García-Sanjuán, eds. Madrid: Marcial Pons - Casa Árabe, 2020: 175; Besga, Armando. "La España que dejó de ser España", *Hispania, al-Ándalus y España: identidad y nacionalismo en la historia peninsular*, Maribel Fierro, Alejandro García-Sanjuán, eds. Madrid: Marcial Pons-Casa Árabe, 2020: 185-195.

26. Albarrán, Javier, "Una reconquista de la reconquista: la reacción ideológica islámica al avance cristiano (ss. XI-XIII)", *La Reconquista: ideología y justificación de la guerra santa peninsular*, Carlos de Ayala, Isabel Cristina Ferreira Fernandes, J. Santiago Palacios Ontalva, eds. Madrid: La Ergástula, 2019: 233-258; Buresi, Pascal. *La frontière entre chrétienté et Islam dans la péninsule Ibérique: du Tage à la Sierra Morena, fin XIe-milieu XIIIe siècle*. Paris: Publibook, 2004: 296-299.

27. García Gómez, Emilio. "La trayectoria omeya y la civilización de Córdoba", *España musulmana hasta la caída del califato. Historia de España dirigida por Ramón Menéndez Pidal*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1957: IV, 21.



The unambiguous geographical meaning of the name al-Andalus stands in sharp contrast with the lack of a project to hold sway of all of Iberia, which might suggest the Muslims suffered some sort of “territorial short-circuit”. More so, over the Caliphate period, the Muslims uncritically assumed the narrative featuring Pelayo as the forerunner of the Christian conquering expansion: the finest Umayyad chronicler, ʿIṣā ibn Aḥmad al-Rāzī (d. 379/989), claimed Pelayo’s descendants “seized what the Muslims had taken from *their* country” (*akhadhū mā kāna akhadhū-hu al-muslimūn min bilādi-him*).<sup>28</sup> The question is raised whether this would-be territorial short-circuit and a gullible buy-in of the enemy’s narrative might contribute to refining our understanding of the Muslim collapse or, in other words, whether the ultimate Islamic failure did not actually begin with an ideological defeat.

The Islamic notion of land recovery did not play out the same way across the different historical stages, neither was the only reaction in al-Andalus to the Christian conquests.<sup>29</sup> In light of what happened later, dismissing control of the Northern Iberian lands might be considered reckless. Furthermore, the Umayyads failed to take successful action in response to the first blows they suffered with the Carolingian seizing of Narbonne (759), Gerona (785), and Barcelona (801). As mentioned earlier, the Taifa period marks a tipping point in this regard, with the 1064 falling Barbastro setting a benchmark: this event rocked the people of al-Andalus to the point that, for the first time, fear looks to have changed sides.

With devastating and eloquent pessimism, Ibn Ḥayyān voiced the massive impact the fall of Barbastro made when the bad news reached Córdoba, bitterly moaning about the apparent lack of reaction among the people of Córdoba and their indifference to the tragic fate of their fellow Muslims, to the point that he claims that “it is as if they were not ours.”<sup>30</sup> However, the truth is that the Muslims not only did not remain passive, but they reacted successfully. Two poetic compositions written by contemporary authors are faithful expressions of a deep sense of concern in the face of the catastrophe: in the framework of a moving call to jihad Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071)<sup>31</sup> and Ibn al-ʿAssāl (d. 487/1094)<sup>32</sup> urge their brothers to take

28. Al-Maqqarī, Ahmad. *Nafh al-fīb min ghuṣn al-Andalus al-raṭīb*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968: IV, 350-351. See: Lapedra, Eva. “Reconquista cristiana y pérdida de al-Andalus en las fuentes árabes: dos discursos complementarios”. *eHumanista/IVITRA*, 13 (2018): 296-314. The most recent approach to the Arabic texts on Pelayo is to be found in: García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. “El origen del reino de Asturias en las fuentes árabes”, *Nuevas visiones del Reino de Asturias*, Javier Rodríguez Muñoz, ed. Oviedo: Real Instituto de Estudios Asturianos, 2020: 101-121.

29. Suñé, Josep. *Guerra, ejército y fiscalidad...*: 58-59, 126, 129, describes the military activity of the Muslims as hardly keen on long sieges.

30. Ibn Bassām. *Al-Dhakhīra fī maḥāsīn ahl al-jazīra*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2000, III, 137-145; Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Bayān...*: II, 480-481; III, 254,255; trans. Maíllo, *La caída...*: 211-213; al-Maqqarī, *Nafh...*: IV, 449-454.

31. Ibn Bassām, *Al-Dhakhīra...*: III, pp. 132-137; trans. Garulo Muñoz, Teresa. *La literatura árabe de Al-Andalus durante el siglo XI*. Madrid: Hiperión, 1998: 142-145.

32. Al-Ḥimyarī, *Rawḍ...*: 40-41 (Arabic) and 51-52 (trans.); trans. López y López, Ángel C. “Ibn al-ʿAssāl”, *Biblioteca de al-Andalus II. De Ibn Adḥa a Ibn Buṣṣā*, Jorge Lirola, dir. Almería: Fundación Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 399.



the fight to the enemy's territory before the enemy can fight the Muslims in their lands.

The actual influence of these poetic compositions is hard to gauge, but an Islamic reaction took place eventually and ended up successfully thanks to al-Muqtadir billāh, ruler of Saragossa. While no explicit mentions of the idea of recovery are to be found in these poems<sup>33</sup>, the first known references are related to this event. Al-Bakrī, one of the most outstanding contemporary Arabic sources, resorts to *fath*,<sup>34</sup> while the later Ibn Ghālib and al-Ḥimyarī do not use terms related to the notion of recovery, as previously mentioned.<sup>35</sup>

Ibn Ḥayyān, instead, draws on different forms from the same root as *istirjāʿ* (*rafʿ/rujūʿ/irtijāʿ*) and conveying the same meaning ("return", "restitution"),<sup>36</sup> a vocabulary interpreted in recent studies as "reconquista."<sup>37</sup> The idea of recovery is likewise to be found in later sources, among them Ibn al-Kardabūs (*istaraddū Barbashtar*),<sup>38</sup> and Ibn al-Abbār, describing al-Muqtadir Aḥmad ibn Sulaymān ibn Hūd as "he who recovered the city of Barbastro" (*istarjaʿa madīnat Barbashtar*).<sup>39</sup> It also appears in Nasrid authors, including Ibn al-Khaṭīb, who claims al-Muqtadir Aḥmad ibn Sulaymān ibn Hūd "hastened to recover it" (*shammara ilā istirjāʿi-hā*);<sup>40</sup> and Ibn Simāk, using the same vocabulary (*istarjaʿa-hā min ayḏ-him*).<sup>41</sup>

Both because of the ideological context behind the campaign and the decisive contribution of warriors from beyond the Pyrenees, the taking of Barbastro has been traditionally considered a direct precedent of the first Crusade, 35 years ahead of the 1099 taking of Jerusalem. In 1970, A. Ubieto (1923-1990) featured Barbastro as the beginning of the real *Reconquista*.<sup>42</sup> The fact that the Islamic idea of "recovery" first surfaced in this context makes Barbastro likewise a special case from the Islamic perspective.

33. See the recent analysis of this text by Albarrán, Javier. "Una reconquista de la reconquista" ...: 245-249.

34. Al-Bakrī. *Al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, eds. Adrian P. Van Leeuwen, André Ferré. Tunisia: Al-Dār al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Kitāb, 1992: II, 910 (No. 1526).

35. See footnotes 13-14.

36. Ibn Bassām, *Dhakhīra*...: II, 137 and 144; al-Maqqarī, *Nafh*...: IV, 454.

37. Sénac, Philippe; Laliena, Carlos. *1064, Barbastro. Guerra Santa y Yihad en la España medieval*, Madrid: Alianza, 2020: 101.

38. Ibn al-Kardabūs, *Al-Iktifāʿ fī akhbār al-khulafāʿ*, ed. Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghāmīdī. Medina: Al-Jāmiʿa al-Islāmiyya, 2008: 1225; trans. Maíllo, Felipe. *Historia de al-Andalus (kitab al-iktifaʿ)*. Madrid: Akal, 1986: 94.

39. Ibn al-Abbār. *Al-Ḥulla al-siyarāʿ*, ed. Ḥusayn Muʿnis. El Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1985: II, 247.

40. Ibn al-Jaṭīb. *Kitāb Aʿmāl al-Aʿlām*, ed. E. Lévi-Provençal. Beirut: Dār al-Makšūf, 1956, 171. See the translation in: De Castro, Víctor. *Ibn al-Jaṭīb: símbolo de la cultura andalusí del Reino Nazarí de Granada. Análisis y traducción al castellano del Kitāb Aʿmāl al-Aʿlām*. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca (PhD Dissertation), 2015: 133.

41. Ibn Simāk. *Al-Ḥulal al-mawshīyya*, eds. Suhayl Zakkār, ʿAbd al-Qādir Zamāma. Casablanca: Dār al-Rashād al-Ḥadītha, 1979: 76; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Al-Ḥulal Al Mawshīyya: crónica árabe de las dinastías almorávide, almohade y benimerín*. Tétouan: Editora Marroquí, 1951: 89.

42. Ubieto, Antonio. "Valoración de la reconquista peninsular", *Príncipe de Viana* 31/120-121 (1970): 213-220.



The 1085 fall of Toledo, a much more important city, and, what was worse for the Muslims, a permanent Christian conquest, overshadowed the retaking of Barbastro. In his closing remark upon his quote of Ibn Ḥayyān's text on the latter, the great Maghribi compiler al-Maqqarī wails Toledo could not have been recovered in the same way (*layta Ṭulayṭula al-bā'isa usturjī'at ka-hādhihi*) and regrets the ultimate victory of the enemy.<sup>43</sup> The loss of Toledo triggered some of the most eloquent expressions of what M. Fierro branded the “feeling of precariousness”, which first surfaced early after the Islamic conquest of Iberia.<sup>44</sup> This notion helps us understand the diversity of Muslim reactions to the Christian expansion, made up of mixed feelings so that an “optimistic” desire for recovery coexisted alongside a pessimistic outlook narrowly associated with said “feeling of precariousness”<sup>45</sup>.

#### 4. The Almoravid period (1086-1145)

The 1086 arrival of the Almoravids marks the beginning of the Berber dynasties' cycle, a lengthy period of more than two and a half centuries (1086-1340) that ushered a new phase in the conflict between Muslims and Christians. The growing weakness of the Taifa rulers, culminating in the fall of Toledo, tipped the balance of power between Christians and Muslims. In the context of a sharp ideological escalation of the conflict (crusade and jihad), the Muslim's efforts of recovery peaked over the 12th century.

Recent scholarship about the Almoravids is extensive, but their campaigns against the Christians remain largely ill-studied, making it hard to figure out what role the notion of “recovery” could have played in their project. An exhaustive revision of these campaigns is beyond my grasp here, so I would rather focus on those having effective results in the form of territorial recoveries from the hands of the Christians, with special attention to the explicit references to this notion in the sources.

Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn (456-500/1065-1106) and his son and successor 'Alī ibn Yūsuf (500-537/1106-1143) intensified jihad campaigns in al-Andalus, temporarily thwarting the Christian expansion and recovering some of the territories previously lost. The notion of recovery appears in the sources early after the Almoravid's arrival in al-Andalus. In the wake of the great 479/1086 Islamic victory of Sagraja, an anonymous source claims: “Thanks to this battle God saved those who were in the Peninsula, as it had been about to perish. God will, by His grace, make it a territory

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43. Al-Maqqarī, *Nafh...*: IV, 454.

44. Fierro, Maribel. “Mahdisme et eschatologie dans al-Andalus”, *Mahdisme. Crise et changement dans l'histoire de Maroc. Actes de la table ronde organisée à Marrakech para la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Rabat du 11 au 14 Février 1993*, Abdelmajid Khaddouri, ed. Rabat: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 1994: 46-69.

45. However, according to Felipe Maíllo: “the people of al-Andalus were never fully conscious of the disaster awaiting them”: Maíllo, Felipe. *De la desaparición...*: 99.



of the faithful again.”<sup>46</sup>. It is worth mentioning that the idea of recovery appears here in connection with a global notion of the Iberian territory.

The Almoravid project about Toledo, the most substantial Islamic loss over the Taifa period, has been the subject of some scholarly debate. Apparently, Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn aimed at retaking the city upon his third coming to al-Andalus in 483/1090,<sup>47</sup> although some scholars remain skeptical about the reach of this military operation.<sup>48</sup> Despite the fact that Ibn Abī Zar<sup>6</sup> explicitly mentions the city was put under siege (*ḥāṣara-hā*), J. Suñé argues none of the ten Islamic attacks between 1090 and 1171 “can be compared to a long siege”, an approach that matches Guichard’s previous remarks about the Almoravids’ true intentions.<sup>49</sup> Others, however, believe the said raid was actually aimed at retaking the city and claim the existence of an Almoravid project to recover it.<sup>50</sup> The striking lack of references to the language of recovery with respect to the old Visigoth capital city suggests this idea only appears in narratives of success. It holds true, however, that at least a poetic composition urged the Almoravid emir to achieve that goal (“Islam will be grateful to your sword”).<sup>51</sup>

Standing around 75 km East of Toledo, the city of Talavera was taken by ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf in 503/1109. Without making any explicit references to the vocabulary of “recovery,” Ibn al-Qaṭṭān provides the most accurate description of this Almoravid *fath*.<sup>52</sup> A comeback to Islam, however, is mentioned in other sources: “The mosque was purified and returned to the Muslim way; her sacredness was renewed, prayers were implanted, and God erased infidelity from it.”<sup>53</sup>

46. *Fath al-Andalus*, ed. Luis Molina. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1994: 120; trans. Penelas, Mayte. *La conquista de al-Andalus*, Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2002: 108.

47. Ibn Abī Zar<sup>6</sup>. *Rawd al-qirṭās*. Rabat: Dār al-Manṣūr, 1972: 153; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn Abī Zar<sup>6</sup>. Rawd al-Qirtas*. Valencia: Anúbar, 1964: I, 297-298.

48. Bosch, Jacinto. *Los almorávides*. Tetuán: Editora Marroquí, 1956: 146-147; Lagardère, Vincent. *Les almorávides jusqu’au règne de Yūsuf b. Tāshfīn (1039-1106)*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1989: 127.

49. Suñé, Josep. *Guerra, ejército y fiscalidad en al-Andalus*: 127; Guichard, Pierre. *Esplendor y fragilidad de al-Andalus*. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2015: 206, claims that the Almoravids never managed to take Toledo “nor did they seek to, apparently”.

50. “Yúçuf brought an ambitious plan to recover Toledo, to satisfy a great popular aspiration”: Menéndez Pidal, Ramón. *La España del Cid...: I*, 420; “the conquest of the city probably constituted the first phase of a plan calling for the subjugation and unification of the whole of al-Andalus”: Mínguez, José María. *Alfonso VI. Poder, expansión y reorganización interior*. Hondarribia: Nerea, 2000: 155-156; Reilly, Bernard. *El Reino de León y Castilla bajo el rey Alfonso VI (1065-1109)*. Toledo: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1989: 243-245, does not cast doubts about this attack on Toledo either.

51. Ibn Aṣmā al-Tuṭlī. *Dīwān*, ed. Muḥyī-l-Dīn Dīb. Tripoli, 2014: 219 (verse n° 43). Quoted by Buresi, Pascal. “La réaction idéologique almoravide et almohade à l’expansion occidentale dans la péninsule Ibérique (fin XIe-mi XIIIe siècles)”, *Actes des congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l’enseignement supérieur public*. 33e congrès. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne: 235-236.

52. Ibn Qaṭṭān. *Nuẓum al-jumān*, ed. Maḥmūd ʿAlī Makkī. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990: 69-70. This conquest is also mentioned by Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Aṣmāl...: 247*; trans. De Castro, Víctor, *Ibn al-Jaṭīb...: 283 (fataḥa madīnat Ṭalabīra)*; Ibn al-Khaṭīb. *Al-Iḥāṭa fī akhbār Gharnāṭa*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh ʿInān. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1977: IV, 59, seems to date it in 505/1111-1112.

53. Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Al-Bayān...: III*, 43; *IV*, 52; trans. Huici, Ambrosio. *Ibn ʿIdari: al-Bayan al-Mugrib. Nuevos fragmentos almorávides y almohades*. Valencia: Anúbar, 1963: 122-124.



The Leonese takeover in Western Iberia over the second half of the 11th century explains why the emirs of Marrakesh likewise targeted this territory. In addition to the 1064 taking of Coimbra by King Fernando I, al-Mutawakkil of Badajoz gave Alfonso VI the cities of Santarem, Lisbon, and Sintra in exchange for protection after the 1092 fall of Seville to the Almoravids, who eventually managed to regain control of these cities, first Lisbon (1094) and later, Santarem.<sup>54</sup> The emir's nephew, Sīr ibn Abī Bakr ibn Tāshfīn, took the latter, and his secretary, Ibn al-Qaṣīra, wrote a long victory letter in which he made no reference to the notion of "recovery."<sup>55</sup> The case of Coimbra, however, remains uncertain: taken (*iftataha*) by ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf in 511/1117-1118, following some sources,<sup>56</sup> but only besieged, without positive results, according to others.<sup>57</sup> The idea that it was taken and then abandoned a few weeks later has been raised but without further explanation of the specific circumstances leading to this apparently striking decision.<sup>58</sup>

Writing from his exile in Agmat, the emir ʿAbd Allāh considered the recovery of Valencia only a "distant hope" (*amal baʿīd*),<sup>59</sup> but the Almoravids eventually got the job done. Taken by El Cid in 487/1094, the city, however, returned to Islamic rule eight years later (495/1102) thanks to the campaign carried out by the Almoravid commander Mazdalī. Several Arabic sources feature the Almoravid taking of Valencia as a recovery, *istaradda*<sup>60</sup> and *istakhlaṣa*<sup>61</sup>, although, as it is often the case, others draw on *fath*, the most frequent Arabic name for an Islamic victory.<sup>62</sup> The idea of return to Islam likewise appears in some sources in terms similar to those

54. Mínguez, José María. *Alfonso VI...*: 160, 168, mentions the 'reconquest' of Lisbon by the Almoravids.

55. ʿAbd al-Wāhid al-Marrākushī, *Kitāb al-muʿjib fī talkhīṣ akhbār al-Maghrib*, ed. Reinhart P.A. Dozy. Leiden: Brill, 1847: 116-119; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Lo admirable en el resumen de las noticias del Magrib*. Tétouan: Editora Marroquí, 1955: 120-124; *Chronicon Lusitanum*, online ed. and trans. Micheline Sz wajcjer (<<http://remacle.org/bloodwolf/historiens/chroniques/lusitanie.htm>>).

56. Ibn Simāk. *Al-Ḥulal...*: 86; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Al-Ḥulal...*: 103.

57. Ibn ʿIdhārī. *Al-Bayān...*: III, 52; IV, 64; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn ʿIdari...*: 151; Ibn al-Khaṭīb. *Iḥāta...*: IV, 59; Sz wajcjer, Marc. *Chronique de Lusitanie*, ed. Online: <<http://remacle.org/bloodwolf/historiens/chroniques/lusitanie.htm>>; Ibn al-Khaṭīb. *Aʿmāl...*: 247; trans. De Castro, Víctor. *Ibn al-Jaṭīb...*: 283.

58. Bosch, Jacinto. *Los almorávides...*: 193; Guichard, Pierre. *Esplendor...*: 206.

59. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Buluggīn, *Kitāb al-tibyān*, ed. Amīn Tawfīq al-Ṭībī, Rabat: Dār al-ʿUkāz, 1995: 175; trans. Tibi, Amin T. *The tibyān. Memoirs of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Buluggīn, last Zirid Amīr of Granada*, Leiden: Brill, 1986: 172.

60. *Fath...*: 118; trans. Penelas, Mayte. *La conquista...*: 106; Yāqūt. *Muʿjam al-buldān*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977: I, 490; Abd al-Karim, Gamal. "La España musulmana en la obra de Yāqūt (s. XII-XIII)", *Cuadernos de Historia del Islam*, 6 (1974): 127.

61. Ibn ʿIdhārī. *Bayān...*: III, 306; Mañllo, Felipe. *Crónica anónima de los reyes de taifa*. Madrid: Akal, 1991: 53; Ibn Khaldūn. *Kitāb al-ʿibar*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003: VI, 221; De Slane, McGuckin. *Histoire des Berbères*. Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1999: II, 79. The forms *istakhlaṣa/istikhlās* are likewise used to describe Christian conquests; for instance, with regard to the 1248 taking of Seville by Fernando III, as pointed out by Ibn al-Khaṭīb. *Kitāb Aʿmāl...*: 332; trans. De Castro, Víctor. *Ibn al-Jaṭīb...*: 443: "He passed away after recovering Seville" (*halaka baʿda istikhlaṣ Ishbiliya*).

62. Ibn Bassām. *Dhakhīra...*: III, 78; al-Maqqarī. *Nafh...*: IV, 456, quoting Ibn al-Abbār; De Gayangos, Pascual. *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*. London: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain, Ireland and London, 1843: II, 334, translates it as "retake".



expressed regarding Talavera: “God took Valencia out of the hands of polytheism and the power of the Christians; he cleansed it and returned it to the light of Islam and the religion of Muḥammad.”<sup>63</sup>

Ibn al-Abbār deserves special attention, for he is the Arabic author who most frequently mentions the recovery of Valencia: born in Onda, a small town 80 km North of Valencia, he had a deep knowledge of the Islamic history of his land. In his well-known biographical dictionary, the Valencian polymath brands twice the Almoravid conquest of the city as *istirjā*<sup>64</sup> and he likewise combines said notion with *fath*,<sup>65</sup> which he uses alone once more elsewhere.<sup>66</sup>

The recoveries of Talavera and Valencia, and the rather unclear attempts to retake other cities, such as Toledo and Coimbra, let us wonder whether the Almoravids actually aimed at reinstating the Islamic rule in al-Andalus as it existed before 1085. Following the Islamic success in Valencia, Ibn al-Kardabūs claims the Almoravids aimed at subduing the entire Peninsula of al-Andalus (*jamī<sup>c</sup> jazīrat al-Andalus*); furthermore, he emphasized the global nature of their authority, encompassing all of al-Andalus, except Saragossa.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī argues Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn’s fighters did not cease to travel the kingdoms of the taifa “until the entire Peninsula was subdued” (*ilā an dānat la-hum al-jazīra bi-ajma<sup>i</sup>-hā*), so that the emir “seized the peninsula of al-Andalus and all of it obeyed him” (*malaka jazīrat al-Andalus wa-aṭā<sup>a</sup> at-hu bi-asri-hā*).

Highly propagandistic as they are, these references betray a desire for recovery that was not limited to singular places or cities. This is, in fact, expressed by ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī when following his previous remarks, he goes on quoting Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn own words: “If I lived on enough, I would return to the Muslims the entire country of which the Christians have taken hold throughout this crisis (*fitna*).”<sup>68</sup> As we shall see below, similar expressions of the desire for the total recovery of Iberia are said to have been said by some Almohad Caliphs.

Whether the words attributed to the Almoravid emir could be interpreted as a political project for global restoration remains difficult to ascertain. At any rate, the emirs of Marrakech achieved a major recovery of the Islamic positions, not just in the Western sector of the border, where “the Tagus once again became the dividing line between Christians and Muslims,”<sup>69</sup> but likewise in the East, thanks to the recovery of Valencia. However, the somewhat uncertain case of Toledo and the Almoravid failure regarding other cities cast doubts about the real effectiveness

63. Ibn ‘Idhārī. *Bayān*: III, 34; IV, 42; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn ‘Idari...*: 102.

64. Ibn al-Abbār. *Al-Takmila li-kitāb al-ṣila*, ed. Bashār ‘Awwād Ma’rūf. Tunis: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2011: II, 98 and IV, 121.

65. Ibn al-Abbār. *Takmila...*: III, 111, No. 2194.

66. Ibn al-Abbār. *Takmila...*: I, 305 and II, 152-153.

67. Ibn al-Kardabūs. *Iktifā’...*: 1288; trans. Maíllo, Felipe. *Historia de al-Andalus...*: 136,139.

68. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī. *Mu’jib...*: 114; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Lo admirable...*: 118-119.

69. García Fitz, Francisco. *Relaciones políticas y guerra. La experiencia castellano-leonesa frente al Islam. Siglos XI-XIII*. Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 2002: 78.



of their recovery project. Targeted only once, Huesca is a case in point but, as Suñé recently argued, the most striking case is Saragossa: taken by Alfonso I of Aragon in 1118, it remained completely out of the Almoravid's reach, with no single attempt at recovery<sup>70</sup>.

## 5. The Almohad period (1147-1212)

Unlike the Almoravids, the Almohads did not come to Iberia following a massive call from the local Muslim rulers in the face of Christian advances. The fight against the Christians, however, played no less an important role in the policies of the first Almohad caliphs, who were successful in recovering some territories lost to the Christians. To be sure, the best representative of the Almohad recovery project was the second caliph, Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf ibn ʿAbd al-Mūʿmin, who lost his life in 580/1184 while trying to take back Santarem, seized a few years earlier by the first king of Portugal.

Starting from 539/1144, the Almoravid decline gave way to a new *fitna* in which the Christians could thrive, taking some cities temporarily and others permanently, such as Lisbon and Santarem. According to Ibn Abī Zarʿ, the first Almohad Caliph, ʿAbd al-Muʿmin (524-558/1130-1163), “recovered from the hands of the Christians” (*istarjaʿa min aydī al-rūm*) the cities of Almería, Úbeda, Baeza, and Badajoz.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Ibn al-Athīr points out that in *Jumādā* I, 542 (September 28-October 27, 1147) the Franks seized Almería, as well as Baeza, but the Muslims took them back later (*thumma istaʿāda-hā al-muslimūn baʿda dhālik min-hum*).<sup>72</sup>

A major port city and trade hub, Almería stands as the most important of these cities, and it is certainly one of the best-documented Almohad recoveries. Ibn Ghālib points out that the Christians took it in 542/1147 and remained there for 10 years until ʿUthmān ibn ʿAbd al-Muʿmin *istarjaʿa-hā* in 552/1157, that is to say, “reconquered it”, according to some translators.<sup>73</sup> After mentioning the Frankish taking, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī points to the same chronology and relies on the same vocabulary as Ibn Ghālib.<sup>74</sup> Ibn Abī Zarʿ, on his side, points out that, in the year 546/1151-1152, ʿAbd al-Muʿmin sent an army to attack the Christians and achieve the “liberation” (*istinqādh*) of Almería.<sup>75</sup> As it is often the case, other sources mention

70. Suñé, Josep. *Guerra, ejército y fiscalidad en al-Andalus...*: 128.

71. Ibn Abī Zarʿ. *Rawḍ...*: 204; trans. Huici, Miranda, Ambrosio, *Rawd...*: II, 406.

72. Ibn al-Athīr. *Al-Kāmil fī-l-taʾrīkh*, ed. Carl Jonathan Tornberg. Leiden-Uppsala: Brill, 1851-1876: XI, 80; trans. Fagnan, Edmond. *Ibn El Athir. Annales du Maghreb et de l'Espagne*. Argel: Typographie Adolphe Jourdan, 1898: 562.

73. Ibn Ghālib. *Farḥat al-anfus...*: 284; trans. Vallvé, Joaquín. “Una descripción”...: 373.

74. Yāqūt. *Muʿjam...*: V, 119; trans. Abd al-Karim, Gamal. “La España musulmana”...: 285, does not make reference to the recover. See Lirola, Jorge. *Almería andalusí y su territorio. Textos geográficos*. Almería: Fundación Ibn Tufayl, 2005: 101.

75. Ibn Abī Zarʿ. *Rawḍ...*: 193; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Rawd...*: II, 386.



the taking of the city without using the vocabulary of recovery,<sup>76</sup> including the Almohad chancery's official victory report.<sup>77</sup>

Taken in 557/1162 by Ibn Mardaniš, the local Muslim leader most reluctant to accept the Almohad rule in al-Andalus, the recovery of Granada by 'Abd al-Mu'min (*istakhlaṣa* Gharnāṭa) is likewise mentioned in some sources.<sup>78</sup> This singular case suggests the Almohads made no difference in their land recovery project between their Christian and Muslim rivals.

Beyond these specific cases, the sources likewise frame the Almohad project in a much wider context encompassing the entire al-Andalus. Upon the 555/1160 conquest of al-Mahdiyya from the Normans, Caliph 'Abd al-Mu'min is said to have addressed the Arabs, rallying them to join jihad in al-Andalus and reminding them that the Christians occupied a large part of the lands that had been in the hands of the Muslims, a territory conquered by the Arabs in the early days of Islam.<sup>79</sup> As pointed out by P. Buresi, by framing his intervention within the context of the early Islamic expansion, 'Abd al-Mu'min placed the Almohads' project in a remarkably significant historical narrative,<sup>80</sup> thus giving a new twist to the rhetoric of recovery.

The most peculiar Almohad recovery, in all likelihood, was Badajoz, previously taken by the well-known Portuguese warlord Geraldo Sempavor and later retaken by the Almohads in *rajab* 564/March 1169 with the help of King Ferdinand II of León (1157-1188). While Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā's account initially relies on expressions conveying the idea of defense, "helping the Muslims" (*ghawth al-muslimīn*), the "protection" (*ḥimāya*) of the Almohads besieged in the citadel, he ends up by emphasizing Badajoz's return to Islam (*ṣarafa Baṭalyūs ilā-l-islām aḥsan ṣarf*).<sup>81</sup>

As a faithful servant of the dynasty, the account of Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā's is of substantial relevance for the Almohad period, although unfortunately the preserved portion of his work only covers some 15 years (554-568/1159-1173), spanning the rule of the first two caliphs, 'Abd al-Mu'min and his son and successor Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf (558-580/1163-1184). With the exception of his somewhat inconclusive references to Badajoz, his account does not provide references to an Almohad project of recovery, and his vocabulary points to a rather defensive stance. That is especially the case of the official letters he quotes, a direct expression of the will of the caliph, where mentions are made to the "protection of the country" (*ḥimāyat*

76. Ibn al-Athīr. *Kāmil*...: XI, 147-148; trans. Fagnan, Edmond. *Ibn El Athir*...: 582-584; Ibn Khaldūn. *Ibar*...: VI, 280; De Slane, McGuckin. *Histoire des Berbères*...: II, 192.

77. Lévi-Provençal, Évariste. *Trente-sept lettres officielles almohades*. Rabat: Institut des Hautes Études Marocaines, 1941: 71-81, No 16; Lévi-Provençal, Évariste. "Un recueil de lettres officielles almohades. Introduction et étude diplomatique", *Hespéris* 18 (1941): 39-41.

78. Al-Maqqarī. *Nafh*...: I, 443.

79. Ibn al-Athīr. *Kāmil*...: IX, 245-246; trans. Fagnan, Edmond. *Ibn El Athir*...: 590.

80. Buresi, Pascal. "La réaction idéologique"...: 238-239.

81. Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā. *Al-Mann bi-l-imāma*, ed. 'Abd al-Hādī al-Tāzī. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1987: 295 y 297; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā. Al-Mann bil-imāma*. Valencia: Anubar, 1969: 145.



*al-bilād*)<sup>82</sup> and “help” (*ʿawn/nuṣra*)<sup>83</sup>. Similarly Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā draws on the same vocabulary when describing the Almohad’s actions, mentioning “aid” (*ghawth*) for al-Andalus, the “defense” (*ḍifāʿa*) of religion,<sup>84</sup> a “remedy” (*talāfī*) and “assistance” (*naṣr*) for the Peninsula of al-Andalus.<sup>85</sup> Besides, in the run-up to the campaign against Ibn Mardanīsh, he claims the caliph “revitalized al-Andalus and secured it, protecting and populating its interior and its borders”, emphasizing the caliph’s will to “defend and protect religion” (*naṣr al-dīn wa-ḥimāyati-hi*), “repel” (*daḥf*) the infidels, “protection” (*ḥimāya*) and the “defense” (*naṣr*) of al-Andalus.<sup>86</sup>

The language of recovery is likewise missing from his extensive and detailed description of Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf’s failed 567/1172 campaign against Huete<sup>87</sup>, and the same applies to the extremely laconic references to the raids launched against the lands surrounding Talavera and Toledo.<sup>88</sup> Only in the final eulogy of his caliphate does Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā explicitly mention land recovery when he claims the caliph “populated the deserted borders, rebuilt all its walls, and returned them to Islam (*ʿāda-hā li-l-islām*), after their abandonment.”<sup>89</sup> He just resorts once to the notion of *istirjāʿ*, with regard to Badajoz. Oddly enough, however, it does not describe an Islamic recovery, but a Christian attempt “to regain its possession and take it from the hands of the Muslims” (*li-yastarjīʿa milku-hā wa-akhḍhi-hā min aydī-l-muslimīn*).<sup>90</sup>

Alfonso I of Portugal took Santarem in 542/1147 and nearly forty years later (580/1184) Caliph Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf set out to recover it, an event unfortunately not covered in the preserved part of Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā’s account. This failed attempt ended up in a complete fiasco, including the death of the Caliph outside the city walls; from a wound, according to some sources, or illness, according to others. Despite the debacle, the presence of the Almohad ruler at the head of his army points to his personal commitment to an ideal of recovery that the sources describing this event do not mention.<sup>91</sup> As previously pointed out with regard to Toledo and Huete, the language of recovery only appears in narratives of success.

82. Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā. *Mann...*: 273; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā...*: 130.

83. Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā. *Mann...*: 293-294; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā...*: 141-142.

84. Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā. *Mann...*: 290; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā...*: 138.

85. Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā. *Mann...*: 312-313; Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā...*: 154.

86. Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā. *Mann...*: 323-324, 349, 371, 385; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā...*: 163-164, 177, 187, 196.

87. Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā. *Mann...*: 398-413; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā...*: 204-216.

88. Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā. *Mann...*: 426 and 436; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā...*: 226, 233.

89. Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā. *Mann...*: 167; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā...*: 65. Information retrieved by: Ibn ʿIdhārī. *Bayān*), ed. Muḥammad al-Kattānī. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1985: 165; Ibn ʿIdhārī. *Al-Bayān...*: III, 268; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Al-Bayān al-muḡrib fī ijtisār ajbār mulūk al-Andalus wa al-Maḡrib*. Tétouan: Editora Marroquí, 1953: I, 82.

90. Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā. *Mann...*: 314; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā...*: 156.

91. Ibn al-Athīr. *Kāmil...*: XI, 333; trans. Fagnan, Edmond. *Ibn El Athir...*: 602-603; Al-Ḥimyarī. *Rawḍ...*: 114 (Arabic) and 140 (trans.); Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Bayān...*: 159-164; Ibn ʿIdhārī. *Al-Bayān...*: III, 263-265; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Al-Bayān...*: I, 69-79; Ibn Khaldūn. ʿIbar...: VI, 286; trans. De Slane, McGuking. *Histoire des Berbères...*: II, 205.



Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf's failure in Santarem was made up for a few years later by his son and successor in Silves, taken by King Sancho I of Portugal in 585/1189 and recovered two years later (587/1191) by Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr (580-595/1184-1199), which may well be considered the latest Almohad recovery. Although, as is often the case, some of the accounts make no reference to that idea,<sup>92</sup> Silves provides a couple of remarkably interesting references bringing new Arabic vocabulary. In his account of "the expedition in which he set Silves free from the hands of the Christians,"<sup>93</sup> ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī resorts to *istanqadha*, which conveys the idea of "liberation" or "salvation" as much as "recovery." Although unfortunately, Arabic sources are always more limited than Christian ones, the notion of "liberation" represents another common ground shared by Muslims and Christians alike in their respective recovery projects. Similarly, Ibn ʿIdhārī claims that, after being taken by Ibn al-Rink, al-Manṣūr stormed, conquered, and "restored it to Islam, by the sword" (*jabara-hā li-l-islam bi-hadd al-ḥusām*).<sup>94</sup>

As in the case of the Almoravids, some sources point to an Almohad project of global restoration encompassing the whole of al-Andalus. Interestingly enough, one of these references comes from an anonymous 12<sup>th</sup>-century Latin source, known as the *Chronicon Lusitanum*, in which the second Almohad caliph is said to have harbored the project of coming to Hispania and "taking the cities and fortresses that the Saracens previously possessed" (*comprehendere Civitates et Castella quae aliquamdo fuerant a Sarracenis posessa*), among them, Lisbon, Sintra, Santarém, Évora, Alcocer and Coimbra, so that, "after having subjugated all of Portugal until the Duero", he would then proceed to Toledo.<sup>95</sup> If there are good reasons to claim the Muslims had full knowledge of the Christian project of recovery, apparently the same holds true in the opposite case.

If we look at the Arabic sources, the two most significant expressions of this global recovery correspond to Caliph Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr. The first one is framed in the context of his raid against Toledo from *Rajab* of 596/June 1196. In the run-up to the campaign, the Caliph is said to have claimed he was heading North with the aim of "recovering what the wicked had taken from the Islamic territory" (*istirjā mā kāna ghalaba ʿalay-hi al-laʿīn min bilād al-islām*).<sup>96</sup> To be sure, this reference stands as one of the most explicit appeals to the idea of recovery uttered by a Muslim ruler.

92. Ibn al-Athīr. *Kāmil*...: XII, 37; trans. Fagnan, Edmond. *Ibn El Athir*...: 608; Al-Ḥimyarī. *Rawḍ*...: 106-108 (Arabic) and 130-132 (trans.); Ibn ʿIdhārī. *Bayān*...: 210-212; Ibn ʿIdhārī. *Bayān*...: III, 314-316; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Al-Bayān*...: I, 168-172; Ibn Simāk. *Ḥulal*...: 159; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Al-Ḥulal*...: 189; Ibn Khaldūn. *ʿIbar*...: VI, 290; trans. De Slane, MacGukin. *Histoire des Berbères*...: II, 212.

93. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī. *Muʿjib*...: 212; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Lo admirable*...: 243.

94. Ibn ʿIdhārī. *Bayān*...: 201; Ibn ʿIdhārī. *Al-Bayān*...: III, 305; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Al-Bayān*...: I, 150.

95. *Chronicon Lusitanum*... According to Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Historia política del Imperio almohade*. Tétouan: Editora Marroquí, 1956: I, 29: "Yusuf's military plan did not feature the inordinate proportions attributed to it by the hyperboles".

96. Ibn ʿIdhārī. *Bayān (qism al-muwaḥiddīn)*...: 223; Ibn ʿIdhārī. *Al-Bayān*...: III, 329; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Al-Bayān*...: I, 193; Barkai, Ron. *Cristianos y musulmanes*...: 273, seems to situate the reference



The ultimate outcome of this “famous expedition” seems to have been, however, a far cry from that ideal: after taking Montánchez and Trujillo, “the wind of victory blew through those districts and those regions.” The account emphasizes the return to Islam in these territories, noting that “the invocation of Islam was renewed in these castles, and they changed, in a single week, from the religion of infidelity to the law of Muhammad.” The caliph pursued his work of “extermination and ruin” until he reached Talavera, which was also razed to the ground, finally reaching “the esplanade” of Toledo where he remained for a week before getting back to Seville.<sup>97</sup>

The notion of “recovering what the wicked had taken from the Islamic territory” matches another similar reference according to which, feeling his end near, the caliph gave a series of recommendations to his children and the Almohads, advising them to fear God and take care of “the boy orphans and the girl orphan”. When asked who they were, the caliph replied that “the girl orphan” was al-Andalus, and “the boy orphans” were the people of al-Andalus. Then he went on claiming there was nothing in his soul greater than his concern for them, so that, if God were to prolong his life, he would not stop waging jihad against the infidels “until he made it the abode of Islam again” (*ḥattà nu’īdu-hā dār al-islām*).<sup>98</sup> The idea of recovery is again formulated here through the notion of “return”.

Both references suggest Caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb al-Manṣūr may have harbored a project of global recovery of al-Andalus. In fact, his intention to attack the Christian territory went back to his first 586/1190 Iberian raid, aimed at “ravaging the country of Ibn al-Rink and reaching the Coimbra region”. Similarly, the same source claims elsewhere that, annoyed by the demands of Christian kings’ envoys, the caliph attacked them on their own ground.<sup>99</sup> Although some of the references to Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb al-Manṣūr’s policy towards the Christians are rather defensive, this should not be necessarily incompatible with an ideal of recovery.<sup>100</sup>

One year before the major Almohad 609/1212 defeat in Las Navas de Tolosa, Caliph al-Nāṣir (595-610/1199-1213) could recover the fortress of Salvatierra (Ciudad Real), although the victory letter does not mention this idea<sup>101</sup>, probably because of the limited relevance of the place. That is not the case, however, of

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subsequent to Navas de Tolosa.

97. Ibn ‘Idhārī. *Bayān (qism al-muwaḥiddīn)*...: 223-224; Ibn ‘Idhārī. *Bayān*...: III, 330; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio, *Al-Bayān*...: I, 194-195.

98. Ibn Simāk. *Ḥulal*...: 160; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio. *Al-Ḥulal*...: 189-190. This appeal to “the girl orphan and the boy orphans” as a metaphor for al-Andalus and its people similarly appears in Ibn ‘Idhārī. *Bayān (qism al-muwaḥiddīn)*...: 231-232; Ibn ‘Idhārī. *Bayān*...: III, 339; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio, *Al-Bayān*...: I, 210, but without reference to the ideal of recovery.

99. Ibn ‘Idhārī. *Bayān*...: 206 and 214; Ibn ‘Idhārī. *Bayān*...: III, 310 and 319; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio, *Al-Bayān*...: I, 162 and 176.

100. Ibn ‘Idhārī. *Bayān*...: 201 and 203; Ibn ‘Idhārī. *Bayān*...: III, 304 and 306; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio, *Al-Bayān*...: I, 149 (“rescue the borders”/i‘ānat al-thugūr) and 153 (“repel these evils”/dīfā’a hādhihi-l-adwā’).

101. Al-Ḥimyarī. *Rawḍ*...: 108-111 (in Arabic) and 132-135 (trans.); Ibn ‘Idhārī. *Bayān*...: 260-263; Ibn ‘Idhārī. *Al-Bayān*...: III, 374-377; trans. Huici Miranda, Ambrosio, *Al-Bayān*...: I, 265-269; Ibn Jaldūn. *‘Ibar*...: VI, 295; De Slane, McGukin. *Histoire des Berbères*...: II, 224.



the 613/1216-1217 recovery of the small town of Shurqayra<sup>102</sup> from the hands of the Christians (*istarja'a al-muslimūn min aydī al-naṣārā*)<sup>103</sup>, in all likelihood the last mention of this kind over the Almohad period.

The source material provided above represents much of the information the Arabic sources can provide about the Islamic idea of land recovery. There are more options, however, to expand the topic. Years ago, D. Wasserstein first raised the interest in expressions like "May God give her back!" (*a'āda-hā Allāh*),<sup>104</sup> and other similar ones, typically mentioned by the Arabic sources immediately after the name of places and cities seized by the Christians. Considered merely formulaic language, the study of these expressions has been traditionally neglected and overlooked. To my mind, however, a careful reading of the sources might provide interesting information and, while a first step has been taken in this direction,<sup>105</sup> much work remains yet to be done.

## 6. Final remarks

Although the Umayyads suffered significant territorial losses to the Carolingians over the 8th and 9th centuries, the idea of recovery does not seem to have been associated with the Emirs of Córdoba. The reasons behind it are not clear and should be the subject of more specific analysis.

The Islamic idea of recovery first surfaced in the context of the 1064 fall of Barbastro, Ibn Ḥayyān being its earliest formulator. The taking of this city by a Christian coalition had major repercussions on the evolution of the notions of holy war and territorial recovery on the Christian side. Similarly, it set a benchmark among the Muslims, prompting a new approach to the Christian expansion that joined previously known ones as the feeling of precariousness.

This notion peaked under the Almoravids and Almohads, foreign dynasties whose legitimacy to rule in al-Andalus largely relied on their ability to fight against the Christians. The sources suggest that at least certain rulers from both dynasties (Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn, in the case of the Almoravids, and 'Abd al-Mu'min and Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr, in the case of the Almohads) carried out campaigns aimed at recovering some of the territories previously lost to the Christians. It holds likewise true, however, that the information available is not explicit and abundant enough

102. Jorquera (Albacete), a small town preserving a walled enclosure from the Almohad period. See the undergraduate dissertation by Sánchez Gualda, Isabel. *Estudio histórico y constructivo de las murallas almohades de Jorquera*. Universitat Politècnica de València, 2020. <http://hdl.handle.net/10251/156048>.

103. Ibn al-Abbār. *Takmila...*: IV, 14.

104. Wasserstein, David. *The Rise and Fall of the Party-Kings: Politics and Society in Islamic Spain, 1002-1086*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985: 281.

105. García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. "Los almohades y sus enemigos peninsulares en la crónica de Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā: musulmanes y cristianos", *Escribir la Historia. Crónicas y relato en la Edad Media (XXXI Semana de Estudios Medievales, 2021)*, Esther López Ojeda, ed. Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2022: 107-138.



to ascertain to what extent these campaigns were part of a systematic attempt to restore control of the lands under Islamic control until the caliphate period.

The rhetoric of recovery is well attested in the sources with regard to well-known cities like Valencia and Talavera, in the case of the Almoravids; and Almería and Silves, in that of the Almohads. These examples, together with the references to the wishes of the sovereigns of the two dynasties, are indicative of an idea that would continue into the Nasrid period. It is worth mentioning that the available information is exclusively linked to narratives of success, in such a way that failed attempts, such as those at Toledo, and Santarem, for instance, are never associated with this language.

Beyond the clear limitations of the sources, the existence of an Islamic notion of recovery offers new reasons to call into question some of the most pervasive scholarly prejudices regarding the relationship of the Muslims from al-Andalus with their land. By the same token and taking into account the relevance of this notion, the discussion about the end of al-Andalus should be reconsidered from new perspectives.

