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SANCTITY AND WAR IN THE MIDDLE AGES: AN INTRODUCTION

Javier Albarrán*

The justification of violence through religion reaches its highest expression when it leads to the sacralization of war.[1] As expected, given the variety of human religious experiences, it is possible to detect multiple notions of a similar phenomenon, or rather, numerous modalities of sacralising a military conflict. The deity can determine the outcome before the battle begins or even fight on behalf of its people. Furthermore, the people can fight on behalf of the deity (or what it symbolises), the ideals of the religion, or against the false ideas of opposing religions or peoples. Similarly, divine authority for war can be established directly through the word of God communicated through speech or writing, or indirectly through a prophet, priest, or religious official who determines the order of the deity, for example, through oracular means. Such a broad spectrum reflects the varied cultural and religious environments in which this process can be found, and the different ways in which it is manifested: military acts directly inspired by divine will, military confrontations led by religious authorities, wars fought in defence of religion or for its expansion, campaigns in which the combatants are spiritually rewarded, etc. Many of these elements can be found in different religious traditions and contexts, such as the Christian or the Islamic.

The concept of the sacralization of war offers a more effective analytical framework than that of holy war for examining the relationship between warfare and religion in the medieval world. This choice is both methodological

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[1] For different approaches to the study of the relationship between religion and warfare, see, for example, the recent volume I. Ploinskaya, A. James and I. Papadogiannakis (eds), *Religion and War from Antiquity to Early Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024)

and historiographical. Rather than starting from the notion of holy war, which has long dominated scholarly discussions, it is more useful to examine the multiple ways in which warfare was endowed with sacred meaning through discourse, ritual, practice, and memory in specific historical contexts. The concept of holy war, although widely used, is fundamentally a modern scholarly construct. Historiography has produced a wide range of definitions – juridical, theological, ideological, or functional – without achieving a stable consensus.[2] This definitional instability has progressively weakened the analytical effectiveness of the term, which often risks imposing doctrinal coherence, intentionality, and normative clarity on medieval societies that did not necessarily conceptualise warfare in such abstract or unified terms. From the perspective of conceptual history, this problem is particularly acute, as medieval Christian and Islamic sources employed diverse and context-dependent vocabularies to articulate the relationship between violence and religion, without operating with an explicit category equivalent to the modern notion of holy war.[3]

By contrast, sacralization of war is understood not as a fixed typology but as a dynamic and historically situated process. Drawing on sociological and anthropological approaches to religion and power, sacralization of war refers to the mechanisms through which warfare was progressively invested with sacred meaning and integrated into religious worldviews. This process unfolded through concrete practices: ritual gestures, liturgical frameworks, narrative constructions, performative acts, and material symbols. Blessings of arms, prayers and vows, processions, fasting, the invocation of saints or martyrs, the display of relics, and providential interpretations of victory and defeat all

[2] Alexander P. Bronisch provides a useful overview of them. A. P. Bronisch, *Reconquista y Guerra Santa. La concepción de la guerra en la España cristiana desde los visigodos hasta comienzos del siglo XII* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2006), 277 ff. See also H. W. Goetz, "'Holy wars'? 'Religious wars'?: The perception of religious motives of warfare against non-Christian enemies in ninth-century chronicles", in *Early medieval militarisation*, eds. Ellora Bennett, Guido M. Berndt, Stefan Esders and Laury Sarti (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 211-228; J. Albarrán, *Ejércitos benditos. Yihad y memoria en al-Andalus (siglos X-XIII)* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2020).

[3] In the Turkish-Ottoman context, for instance, *ghazat*/*ghazwa* is more common than *jihād* in the context of war sacralization, just as *ghāzī* is more common than *mujāhid*: see B. K. Bayrı, *Warriors, martyrs, and dervishes: Moving frontiers, shifting identities in the land of Rome (13th-15th centuries)* (Leiden: Brill, 2020) 178 ff. Likewise, in one of Islam's founding political documents, the so-called "Constitution of Medina," while there is no use of *jihād* we do find the expressions *qitāl fī sabīl Allāh* (fighting in the path of God) and *ḥāraba fī l-dīn* (fight for the religion), both of which denote a link between religion and violence. On the "Constitution of Medina" see, e.g., M. Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muḥammad's first legal document* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2004).

contributed to transforming warfare into a religiously meaningful experience. In this sense, sacrality was produced and negotiated rather than presupposed.

This process-oriented approach allows us to move beyond normative or teleological models that tend to define holy war in relation to ideal types such as crusade or *jihād*. Instead, it highlights variability, gradation, and change over time. Warfare could be intensely sacralised in certain moments or contexts and deliberately de-sacralised in others, depending on political objectives, social actors, audiences, and modes of remembrance. Such flexibility is essential for understanding medieval warfare as a social practice embedded in broader systems of belief and power. Finally, the notion of sacralization provides a productive comparative framework for the study of Christian and Islamic societies. It enables the identification of shared ritual grammars and analogous mechanisms of legitimation across the medieval Mediterranean, while fully respecting doctrinal, institutional, and cultural specificities, offering a transcultural perspective on the religious dimensions of medieval warfare.

In this sense, this volume understands the sacralization of war as a mechanism intended to justify military practices that functions as a discursive tool appealing to religious elements that are accepted and shared by those to whom it is directed, with which a large scheme of legitimization for different actions is constructed and from which great doses of authority are obtained. In this sense, we must understand it not so much as a specific action with well-established limits, but as a flexible framework of action that adapts to different contexts and is used by various actors to justify their activities.

Furthermore, this discursive tool possesses its own language, expressed through symbolism, distinctive features, and performative dimensions: liturgy and ritual, which the German tradition has described as the 'phenomenology of holy war'. In this sense, as Carsten Colpe observed, since most wars resemble one another in their conduct, determining whether a war is holy – or, as we prefer, is sacralised – requires an inquiry into the morphology and function of those phenomena and actions that are unmistakably religious, or at least more clearly so, and thus merit the designation of sacredness.[4] The following list summarizes the most important discursive features when analysing the sacralization of war and its language, which also show their own elements of ritualization, that is, a phenomenology.

[4] C. Colpe, *Der "Heilige Krieg". Benennung und Wirklichkeit, Begründung und Widerstreit* (Bodenheim: Athenäum Hain Hanstein, 1994). For this conceptual approach, see for example, J. Albarrán, "Can we talk about "holy war" in al-Andalus? Ǧihād -and beyond- in 10th century Umayyad Iberia", in *The Medieval Jihad: Texts, Theories and Practices*, eds. Mehdi Berriah and Abbes Zouache (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2025), 109-146.

- The presence of God in the conflict and His aid to His warriors. This can be observed through images such as the appearance of angels and saints in battle, or miracles. A variety of symbols and rituals also demonstrate God's direct involvement in the war, such as blessed banners, military liturgy, the use of relics as a means of connection with the divinity in the military context, etc.
- The missionary nature of the war and the defence of the true religion against adversaries conceptualised as enemies of God. This is displayed, for example, through rituals such as the invitation to conversion, campaign announcements, or the purification of the conquered territory and the destruction of the enemy's religious symbols.
- The meritorious and even salvific nature of the war from a religious point of view. The best discursive evidence of this feature is martyrdom, although there are also others such as the need for warriors to enter battle in a state of purity and right intention.

This volume is dedicated to the first of these discursive features, namely, the presence of God in war and His aid to His faithful. Particularly, the volume focuses on one of the ways in which this image can be expressed: the multifaceted relationship between sanctity and war.[5] From Late Antiquity to the late Middle Ages, from the Atlantic Ocean to Armenia, via Portugal, Castile, Aragon, France, North Africa, the Italian maritime cities or Egypt, this volume aims to study, for the first time in this geographical and chronological framework, the presence of holy men and women in the context of war,[6] from a holistic perspective: not only do we refer to their direct participation on the battlefield, but also to issues such as the processes of sanctification through battle, the use of relics or liturgies in war, the cult of warrior-saints, their hagiographic depictions, their participation in war preaching, or the political use of their memory. This broad approach to the phenomenon allows us to address it from a cross-cultural perspective, considering the realities of different religious traditions such as Islam and Christianity. Likewise, the focus has been

[5] Sanctity in the medieval world can be defined as a socially recognised form of religious authority grounded in perceived proximity to the sacred, arising from charismatic qualities – such as asceticism, moral exemplarity, ritual efficacy, or divinely sanctioned action – and subsequently stabilised through communal validation, institutional mediation, and the regulation of memory. Rather than a purely spiritual attribute, sanctity functioned as a mechanism of social legitimation, capable of conferring prestige, structuring collective identities, and authorising power.

[6] In this sense, by holy men and women we mean all those individuals – and all the cultural manifestations associated with them – with a special link to the divine, channelling supernatural aid.

placed on the Mediterranean as the geographical axis of analysis – although its limits will sometimes be crossed – since, as will be seen in this book, it was a space in which ideas of sanctity, war, holy men and women, and the objects associated with them, circulated and were exchanged throughout the Middle Ages.

I. On Saints and War in the Middle Ages: a multifaceted relationship

A. The Christian Tradition

a. The Warrior-Saint

Holy men and women (or, saints), venerated for their holiness, piety, and moral integrity, are typically associated with values of peace, compassion, and non-violence. Yet throughout history, many saints have been closely connected with war, whether as military figures, defenders of the faith, or symbols of moral guidance in times of conflict.[7] As Peter Brown argues in one of the seminal studies on the functions of the holy man in Late Antiquity, one such role was the protection of an individual or of the community of a city.[8]

Ever since the earliest Christian communities, theologians have agreed that it was unrealistic to imagine societies without war, because societies here on earth can never be without evil, and it is therefore necessary to fight against evil,

[7] See for example H. Delehaye, *Les Légendes Grecques des Saints Militaires* (Paris: Picard, 1909); A. F. C. Webster, "Varieties of Christian Military Saints: From Martyrs under Caesar to Warrior Princes", *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 24 (1980), 3-35; R. Cammilleri, *I Santi militari* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1992); A. M. Orselli, *Santità militare e culto dei santi militari nell' impero dei romani (secoli VI-X)* (Bologna: Lo Scarabeo, 1993); C. Holdsworth, "An 'Airier Aristocracy': The Saints at War," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996): 103-122; C. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); J. MacGregor, "Negotiating Knightly Piety: The Cult of the Warrior-Saints in the West, ca. 1070- ca. 1200," *Church History* 73/2 (2004): 317-345; D. Barthélemy, *Chevaliers et miracles. La violence et le sacré dans la societé féodale* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2006); M-F. Baslez, *Les persécutions dans l'Antiquité. Victimes, héros, martyrs* (Paris: Fayard, 2007); P. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints: Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843-1261)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); M. White, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus, 900-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); E. Dehoux, *Saints guerriers. Georges, Guillaume, Maurice et Michel dans la France médiévale* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014). J. France, "Holy War and Holy Men: Erdmann and the Lives of the Saints", in *The Experience of Crusading: Vol. 1: The Western Approaches*, eds. Marcus G. Bull and Norman J. Housley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 193–208.

[8] P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971).

both spiritually and physically.[9] Saints participated in warfare as intercessors and symbols, and in this capacity they became closely integrated into both the preparations for war and the conduct of battle itself.

Of course, these realities assumed very different forms in medieval societies. The mention of one or more saints at the head of an army introduced a crucial element of legitimation: it strengthened the position of the leader who launched the expedition, affirmed that the cause he defended enjoyed God's support, and at the same time helped to define the *bellator*'s position and role within society.[10]

The most prominent figures in this context are saints remembered for their military service or their association with battle. St. George, among the most widely venerated military saints, and the first to receive imperial favour as early as the fifth century, is often portrayed as a knight slaying a dragon, a symbol of the triumph of good over evil.[11] His image was embraced by Christian soldiers, particularly in the crusading era, as a powerful emblem of divine protection and righteous warfare.

In this sense, starting in the eleventh century, an image of the saint spread, appearing miraculously during battle on a white horse and killing the infidel enemy, a reference of clear biblical origin (2 Maccabees, 11:8-10).[12] The Byzantine

[9] See for example P. Brock, *The Military Question in the Early Church: A Selected Bibliography of a Century's Scholarship* (Toronto: privately printed, 1988). See also J. F. Shean, *Soldiering for God: Christianity and the Roman Army* (Leiden and Boston MA: Brill, 2010).

[10] E. Dehoux, "*Adest noster exercitus previis apostolis cum Mauricio et Carpophoro*. Des saints sur le champ de bataille (XIe-XIIe siècles)," in *Le miracle de guerre dans la chrétienté occidentale*, ed. Philippe Desmette and Philippe Martin (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2018), 55-64.

[11] C. Walter, "The Origins of the Cult of St. George," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 53 (1995): 295-326; H. A. Badamo, *Saint George between Empires: Image and Encounter in the Medieval East* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2023).

[12] The dual model of militant resistance and self-sacrificial piety embodied by the Maccabees became a powerful paradigm in medieval Christian thought, particularly from the eleventh century onward, when crusading ideology sought scriptural validation for religious violence. The Maccabees were thus invoked both as *milites Dei* (God's warriors) and as martyrs, legitimizing armed struggle in defence of the faith and presenting death in battle as spiritually meritorious. Scholars have argued that the emulation of the Maccabees preceded and prepared the ground for the formulation of crusading ideology, especially in Carolingian and Ottonian discourse, where references to Old Testament warfare were already being used to frame contemporary campaigns as divinely ordained. In this sense, the Maccabees functioned as both historical and symbolic antecedents for Christian conceptions of *bellum sacrum* and redemptive suffering. See, for example, D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). On the figure of the saint as a helper in battle, see F. Graus, "Der Heilige als Schlachtenhelfer - Zur Nationalisierung einer Wundererzählung in der mittelalterlichen Chronistik," in *Festschrift für Helmut Beumann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Kurt-Ulrich Jäschke

military aristocracy established in the provinces of Anatolia and Asia Minor adopted him as their patron, and he became a favourite of the Macedonian dynasty. Along with Theodore and Demetrius,[13] he also became the co-patron of the Comnenian dynasty. General and Emperor John Tzimiskes, for example, dedicated his triumphs in battle to him.[14] In this same context, the Crusaders exploited the legend of the martyr soldier who suffered for his Christian faith in the same places they traversed on their way to Jerusalem, eventually establishing him as the patron of the fight against the Muslims. Thus, the imagery carried by the Crusaders to Western Europe reproduced the archetype of the military saint who has defeated the dragon, which is directly linked to the processes of conquest and the foundation of cities.[15] The *sanctus bellator* resembles the warrior of the time, appearing at the heart of the battle, armed and fully acquainted with the concrete realities of warfare.

The cult of warrior saints thus first emerged in Western Europe on the eve of the First Crusade. Prior to this, individual warrior saints had achieved varying degrees of prominence at the local level, yet there is no evidence that Western knights or clerics had recognized a universal group of saints specifically

and Reinhard Wenskus (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1977), 330-348; C. Holdsworth, "'An Airier Aristocracy': The Saints at War," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996): 103-122; K. Schreiner, *Märtyrer, Schlachtenhelfer, Friedenstifter: Krieg und Frieden im Spiegel mittelalterlicher und frühneuzeitlicher Heiligenverehrung* (Opladen: Springer, 2000); S. Rüther, "Heilige im Krieg – Zur Sakralisierung von Kriegsschauplätzen im Mittelalter," in *Heilige, Liturgie, Raum*, ed. Dieter R. Bauer et al. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 2010), 247-268; L. Berezhnaya (ed.), *Die Militarisierung der Heiligen in Vormoderne und Moderne* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2020).

[13] In Byzantium, St. Theodore was one of the favourite martyrs, since he combined the distinctive features of the original warrior-saint, who confronted paganism, with the added function of defender of the Christian faith against the Muslim enemy. Likewise, he also had another feature specific to the warrior-saint: the exercise of divine protection for the urban communities, being the patron saint of Eucacita (today Beyözü, Turkey), located in the frontier territory between Byzantium and the East. In this context, Theodore became a symbol of the Christian struggle against the infidel throughout the empire. C. Walter, "Theodore, archetype of the warrior saint," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 57 (1999): 163-210; J-C. Cheynet, "Le culte de Saint Théodore chez les officiers de l'armée d'Orient," in *Le société byzantine. L'apport des sceaux*, ed. Jean Claude Cheynet (Paris: Association des Amis du centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2008), 307-321. On St. Demetrius see E. Russell, *Demetrius of Thessalonica. Cult and Devotion on the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010); J-M. Spieser, "Le culte de Saint Démétrios à Thessalonique," in *Des dieux civiques aux saints patrons (Vie-VIIe siècle)*, ed. Jean Pierre Caillet et al. (Paris: Picard, 2016), 275-291.

[14] M. Casas Olea, "La *passio* de San Jorge," in *Héroes santos: textos hagiográficos y religión popular en el cristianismo oriental*, ed. Matilde Casas Olea (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2019), 147-232.

[15] See J. MacGregor, "Negotiating Knightly Piety," 317-345.

associated with military life. In this sense, it is possible to identify two distinct sets of clerical attitudes towards these saints and their perceived role in influencing knightly piety: one that regarded the warrior-saints primarily as pious exemplars, the other that regarded them as potent intercessors.

The phenomenon of military saints served as both warriors and symbols of divine intervention in times of war. These saints represent a synthesis of religious devotion and military service, which became particularly significant in medieval and early modern Christianity. In contrast to other stereotypes of anchorite or civilian saints who distance themselves from their previous life, the warrior-saint does not renounce his military career, but reaffirms himself in it by becoming part of the heavenly army as a "soldier of Christ" in the *postmortem* miracles.

These functions were fulfilled not only by warrior-saints, but also by other figures such as the Virgin Mary, who progressively became a kind of goddess of war. Not only did the veneration of the Virgin become even more widespread during the twelfth century than before, but it also became deeper and more emotional.[16] Because of her all-absorbing maternal love, Mary could also be all-absorbing in her wrath and anger against those who fought against her Son. This may explain why during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, she also became perhaps the most popular saint for warriors fighting against infidels: Mary was used as a unifying symbol during battle, depicted on icons carried in front of the troops, or more often on banners, as can be seen in one of the sources analysed in Alexander Korte's chapter, *Cantigas de Santa María*.

b. Sanctification Through War

The role of the warrior-saint in Christian tradition often suggests the possibility of sanctification through war, particularly in certain historical contexts such as the Crusades, where warfare was framed as a holy endeavour and a means of spiritual purification. Soldiers who participated in these wars were promised spiritual rewards, including the remission of sins, as a form of sanctification.[17] On many occasions, this process of sanctification was linked to rulers. A

[16] E. A. Johnson, "Marian Devotion in the Western Church" in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation,* ed. Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), 394-414; J. Montoya Martínez, *Las colecciones de Milagros de la Virgen en la Edad Media: El milagro literario* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1981); M. Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); A. G. Remensneyder, *La Conquistadora: The Virgin Mary at War and Peace in the Old and New Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[17] See, for example, A. L. Bysted, *The Crusade Indulgence. Spiritual Rewards and the Theology of the Crusades, c. 1095-1216* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

paradigmatic example is that of Louis IX of France, who participated in two Crusades and ultimately died of an epidemic while besieging Tunis in 1270: he is a prime example of a medieval ruler who combined saintly virtue with military leadership. His early canonization in 1297 was a direct result of his reputation as a pious king who fought in the service of Christianity. His participation in battle and his saintly status blurred the lines between the warrior and the saint, making him a model of sanctity through military service.[18]

Another well-known saint of this Crusader context is the Danish duke Canute Lavard, who was killed in 1131. Soon after his murder, a cult began to develop around his grave in Ringsted. In 1146, Canute's son and his nephew attempted to have him canonized, immediately before a crusade against the pagan Wends. Twenty-five years later, Canute Lavard was canonized by papal authorization. In the official liturgy used during the translation of his body, Canute is presented as a warrior who, while alive, fought to defend and expand Christianity, and who therefore became a martyr and died for the faith. He thus fits in with several kings who were canonized during the twelfth century, in a context immediately preceding the crusade, or directly related to it.[19]

However, there are also examples of this type of sanctification before the Crusader context and the changes it brought to the Christian conception of holy war. One example is that of the Norwegian King Olaf, who sought to Christianize Scandinavia.[20] Olaf fell at the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030, and miracles were soon recorded from around his grave. After his death, he continued to participate in wars against infidels. For example, in 1043, he appeared in a vision to his son Magnus the evening before the great battle at Lyrskov Heath in southern Denmark against the pagan Wends. When fighting began the next day, the air was filled with the sound of the great church bell in far-away Trondheim, and Magnus swung his father's big battle-axe, named Hel, and killed Wends in great numbers. His influence extended even to the Mediterranean East through the Crusader connection, and in the twelfth century the story spread that Olaf had not died, but had moved to Syria and was now

[18] See, for example, C. M. Gaposchkin, *The Making of Saint Louis: Kingship, Sanctity, and Crusade in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

[19] K. Villads Jensen, "Creating a Crusader Saint. Canute Lavard and others of that Ilk," in *Of Chronicles and Kings: National Saints and the Emergence of Nation States in the High Middle Ages*, eds. John Bergsagel, Thomas Riis, and Erland Kolding Nielsen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2015), 51-72.

[20] See S. Bagge, "Warrior, King, and Saint: The Medieval Histories about St. Óláfr Haraldsson," *Journal of English and German Philology* 109 (2010): 281-321; K. Villads Jensen, "Saints at War in the Baltic Region," in *Saints and Sainthood around the Baltic Sea: Identity, Literacy and Communication in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carsten Selch Jensen et al. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2018), 251-272.

riding his horse and leading the Christian troops against Muslims, a *topos* appearing also, as we will see in this volume, in the case of Islamic rulers sanctified by their military activity.

And, of course, this phenomenon of sanctification through the exercise of war is also observed in the case of the Eastern Christian tradition. An example of similar chronology is that of the prince-martyrs Boris and Gleb of Kyivan Rus (d. 1015), who began to be venerated as saints after their death and officially canonized in 1072. According to their *passio*, they had excelled, for example, in leading armies against the Pechenegs.[21] But undoubtedly, the most well-known case is that of Aleksandr Nevsky, who had distinguished himself through his military feats against the Swedes and Teutons. After the death of the Rusian ruler in 1263, his body was moved to Vladimir, where he was prince (in addition to Novgorod and Kiev), and buried in the cathedral of the Nativity of the Virgin Monastery. Since then, a local cult began around his figure, although his official canonization by the Rusian church did not occur until 1547. Shortly after his death, the *Life of Aleksandr Nevsky* was written, a military narrative with some religious and sanctifying episodes that aimed to give the text Christian features to justify the local cult held in his honour in Vladimir. For example, in the account of the Battle of the Neva River (1240), where he defeated the Swedes, Aleksandr not only constantly asks God for help, but there is also a premonitory vision before the fight: a guard named Pelugio had a vision induced by God, where the saints Boris and Gleb appeared before him on a boat. Pelugio heard Boris suggesting to his brother to help Aleksandr in the battle and ensure victory. Moreover, in 1380, just before the Battle of Kulikovo between the Russian troops and the armies of the Golden Horde, a miraculous event occurred in which Aleksandr, already considered a saint at least unofficially, would help achieve victory. The sacristan of Vladimir's cathedral had a miraculous vision while praying near the prince's tomb, asking for help against the Mongols. The candles lit up, and two men emerged from the tomb, starting to pray for divine aid. Aleksandr himself joined them after rising from his grave.[22]

[21] E. Santos Marinas, "Los príncipes mártires Borís y Gleb," in *Héroes santos: textos hagiográficos y religión popular en el cristianismo oriental*, ed. Matilde Casas Olea (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2019), 649-779; M. White, "Byzantine Saints in Rus' and the Cult of Boris and Gleb," in *Saints and their Lives on the Periphery: Veneration of Saints in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe (c. 1000-1200)*, eds. Ildar H. Garipzanov and Haki Antonsson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 95-114.

[22] M. Peña Escudero, "Aleksandr Nevskj," in *Héroes santos: textos hagiográficos y religión popular en el cristianismo oriental*, ed. Matilde Casas Olea (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2019) 781-834; D. Ostrowski, "An Ideal Prince for the Times: Alexander Nevskii in Rus' Literature,"

c. Miraculous Interventions in Battle

All these warrior-saints became part of a broader narrative which depicted holy figures as intervening in earthly battles, to ensure victory and safeguard the faith. The sanctification of warriors also bears witness to clerics' sensitivity to the situation of *bellatores* and the place they occupied within society. For them, it was a question of proposing examples adapted to the realities of the time and to the expectations, social, political and spiritual, of the lay aristocracy.[23]

At the heart of the belief in the miraculous intervention of saints in battle was the theological idea that saints acted as intercessors between God and humanity. Saints, due to their proximity to God in heaven, had the power to intercede on behalf of the living. This belief extended to the realm of warfare, where saints were thought to possess the ability to influence the outcomes of battles through divine power.

For medieval Christians – and likewise for Muslims – divine favour in battle did not depend solely on military prowess but rather on the moral righteousness of the cause and the faithfulness of the combatants. The fact that God permitted the defeat of His own could only be understood as punishment for their sins: this is the notion expressed by the formula *peccatis exigentibus*, that is, "by the demand of sins."[24] Saints played an essential role in sanctifying the battle, ensuring that those who fought for Christian ideals were protected and guided by divine power.

Numerous battles throughout the Middle Ages are steeped in accounts of miraculous intervention by saints. The saints' miracles in these contexts were typically seen as signs of God's favour, ensuring that Christian forces would triumph over their enemies. As early as the seventh century, in the work of John

Palaeoslavica 16/2 (2008): 259-271; M. Isoaho, *The Image of Aleksandr Nevskiy in Medieval Russia: Warrior and Saint* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

[23] See, for example, T. R. Sands, "The Cult of Eric, King and Martyr, in Medieval Sweden," in *Sanctity in the North. Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Thomas A. Dubois (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 203–238; E. Dehoux, "À l'épreuve de l'an mil. Grandeur et déclin du culte de saint Julien de Brioude (IX^{e}-XI^{e} siècle)," in *Brioude aux temps carolingiens*, eds. Alain Dubreucq, Christian Lauranson-Rosaz and Bernard Sanial (Le Puy-en-Velay: Almanach de Brioude, 2010), 279-304; E. Dehoux, "*Bien vos connois au cors et au visage, as poinz quarrez et as leës espaules*: autour des enseignes de pèlerinage à l'effigie de Guilhem, guerrier saint de Gellone," *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 54 (2019): 239-256 and the chapter by Esther Dehoux in this volume.

[24] C. de Ayala, "Religiosidad Militar y Cancillería Regia: El discurso sobre la Guerra Santa en el Reinado de Alfonso VII (1135-1157)," in *Cister e a Ordens Militares na Idade Média. Guerra, Igreja e Vida Religiosa*, eds. José Alburquerque and Carlos de Ayala, (Tomar: Studium Cistercium et Militarium Ordinum, 2015), 47-72; M. Alvira, *Las Navas de Tolosa 1212. Idea, liturgia y memoria de la batalla* (Madrid: Sílex, 2012), 129.

of Thessalonica, it is recounted that St. Demetrius appeared in the guise of an infantryman upon the city wall during the siege of Thessalonica by the Avars and Slavs in 597, repelling the assailants and even leaving drops of his blood on the battlements to mark the spot of his manifestation. This scene finds a striking parallel in the miraculous story of St. Thecla, discussed by Eduard Juncosa in this volume, in which the saint protects the city of Seleucia during a siege by appearing upon the wall, rousing the inhabitants, and directing the troops against the enemy.[25] Within the Byzantine tradition one also finds striking examples, such as that of St. Theodore who, according to the chronicle by John Skylitzes, appeared mounted on a white horse, breaking the enemy lines during John Tzimiskes' victory over the Russians in 971.[26]

St. George is undeniably one of the most iconic saints associated with miraculous intervention in battle. For example, during the Battle of Antioch (1098), crusaders attributed their unexpected victory to the intervention of the saint, who was believed to have appeared in the sky to guide them to victory – along with others such as Demetrius or Mercurius, depending on the source.[27] In Iberia, St. George became the patron saint of several cities in connection with the patronage he exercised among the kings of the Crown of Aragon during the successive conquests of Huesca, Valencia, and Majorca.[28] He is said, for instance, to have aided Pedro I at the battle of Alcoraz in 1096, and to have intervened

[25] Á. Narro, "Tópicos retóricos en las primeras colecciones bizantinas de milagros," *Eclás* 151 (2017): 93-122; Á. Narro, "Versiones del Martirio de San Demetrio de Tesalónica," in *Héroes santos: textos hagiográficos y religión popular en el cristianismo oriental*, ed. Matilde Casas Olea (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2019), 473-509.

[26] J-C. Cheynet, "Le culte de Saint Théodore," 307-321.

[27] See J. MacGregor, "Negotiating Knightly Piety," 317-345; C. Gaposchkin, *Invisible Weapons: Liturgy and the Making of Crusade Ideology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017); E. Lapina, *Warfare and the Miraculous in the Chronicles of the First Crusade* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015).

[28] The Islamic-Christian frontier in Iberia gave rise to the appearance of many warrior-saints. Another example is St. Demetrius, whose image was used by King Sancho Ramírez of Aragón at the end of the eleventh century. M. Poza, "Byzantine echoes at the end of the eleventh century in the kingdom of Aragon. Sancho Ramírez and the relics of Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki, fact or historiographic fiction?", in *Romanesque saints, shrines and pilgrimage*, eds. John McNeill and Richard Plant (New York: Routledge, 2020), 173-185. Likewise, the kingdom of Pamplona used, from the tenth to the twelfth century, the image of St. Michael as protector of the monarchy, especially in the confrontation against the Muslims. F. Miranda, "Ascenso, auge y caída de san Miguel como protector de la monarquía pamplonesa (ss. X-XII)," in *Mundos medievales: espacios, sociedades y poder. Homenaje al Prof. José Ángel García de Cortázar* (Santander: Universidad de Cantabria, 2013), vol. I, 759-768. On the cult of St. Michael see J. C. Arnold, *The Footprints of Michael the Archangel: The Formation and Diffusion of a Saintly Cult, c. 300–c. 800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

again during the conquest of Majorca.[29] The saint also appears in other Mediterranean contexts on the eve of the Crusades, as in Sicily, where Geoffrey of Malaterra recounts that St. George came to the aid of a Norman army at the battle of Cerami as early as 1063.[30]

In this sense, the appearance in battle of these saints was also acquiring an important "national" meaning.[31] For example, a slightly later and more French-speaking text, the *Chanson de Jerusalem*, mentions, in the context of the battle of Ramla, the help of a host formed by Sts. George, Barbarus, Demetrius, Maurice and Denis. Although St. Denis, the martyred apostle of the Franks, was not traditionally seen as a warrior-saint, it is probably his association with the kingdom of France that best explains his transformation into an armed combatant in the fight to liberate Jerusalem. The *Chanson de Jerusalem* was a poem composed in French for a French-speaking knightly audience to praise the heroic deeds of the Franks in the Holy Land.[32] It was not unprecedented since other non-warrior-saints, most notably St. James in Iberia, also found themselves transformed into warrior-saints within the context of armed conflict with Muslims.[33] The *Chanson of Jerusalem* shows that the ranks of the warrior-saints

[29] James I of Aragon, *The Book of Deeds of James I of Aragon. A Translation of the Medieval Catalan Llibre dels Fets*, trans. Damian J. Smith and Helena Buffery (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), ch. 84.

[30] Geoffroy Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris ejus*, ed. Ernesto Pontieri (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1924), 43-44.

[31] See, for exemple, F. Graus, "Der Heilige als Schlachtenhelfer", 330-348; A. T. Thacker, "'Pecularius patronus noster': The Saint as Patron of the State in the Early Middle Ages," in *The Medieval State: Essays Presented to James Campbell*, ed. John R. Maddicott and D. M. Palliser (London, Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 2000), 1-24.

[32] G. M. Spiegel, "The Cult of St Denis and Capetian Kingship," *Journal of Medieval History* 1 (1975), 43-69.

[33] The origins of the cult of St. James in the Iberian Peninsula can be traced to the late eighth century, notably in the hymn *O Dei Verbum* attributed to Beatus of Liébana, where it is connected with the establishment of Islamic rule in al-Andalus. It is not until the late ninth century, however, that St. James first appears in association with a military context, and only by the thirteenth century does he emerge as a warrior figure on the battlefield – most prominently in the tradition recounting Ramiro I of Asturias' victory over the Muslims at the battle of Clavijo (844). Finally, in the fourteenth century St. James was associated with the Castilian monarchy. See K. Herbers, *Der Jakobscult des 12. Jahrunderts und Der « Liber Sancti Jacobi ». Studien über das Verhältnis zwischen Religion und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Steiner: 1984), 108-163; L. Fernández Gallardo, "Santiago Matamoros en la historiografía medieval: origen y desarrollo de un mito nacional", *Medievalismo: Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Medievales*, 15 (2005): 139-174; K. Herbers, "Santiago Matamoros. Mito o realidad de la Reconquista?," in *El mundo de los conquistadores*, ed. Martín Ríos Saloma (Ciudad de México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015), 307-320; Th. Deswarte, "St. James in Galicia (c. 500-1300): Rivalries in Heaven and on Earth," in *Culture*

were open and could be adjusted depending upon a variety of factors including the geographical location of the battlefield and/or the geographical origins of the combatants.

The saintly military interventions of Aleksandr Nevsky as a saint must be understood in the same "national" sense. Aleksandr's miracles are found accompanying the writing of the extensive *Vita* elaborated in 1591 by Iona Dumin. In the collection there are three miracles that portray the warrior-saint as a helper of princes and tsars in battles crucial to the history of the constitution of the Rusian state and its defence against the infidel: that of the battle of Kulikovo (1380) already mentioned, and two in the time of Tsar Ivan IV, the subjugation of the Kazan khanate in 1552 and the Rusian victory over the Crimean khanate in 1572. In the latter, Aleksandr appeared escorted by a choir of holy princes on white horses to a clergyman who marched armed to help the tsar.[34]

d. Relics at War

The participation of saints in battles was not only performed through a miraculous intervention, but could also take place through the presence of their relics in the context of war and its liturgy.[35] Relics were considered to be imbued with sacred power, and their veneration was a key part of medieval religiosity.[36] The relics of saints – such as bones, clothing, or objects associated with their lives – were thought to possess the ability to heal, protect, and intercede on behalf of those who invoked them. The presence of a relic was believed to bring divine favour, making it a powerful tool in the religious and military culture of the time. Relics were often housed in churches, monasteries, and shrines, where pilgrims would come to venerate them. However, they also played a crucial role in military settings, particularly when armies faced the threat of war. Relics were used as focal points for civic identity, to subdue enemies, and even as hostages.

and Society in Medieval Galicia: A Cultural Crossroads at the Edge of Europe, ed. James D'Emilio (Leiden and Boston MA: Brill, 2015), 477-511; A. García Sanjuán, "Santiago Matamoros, pasado y presente de un mito medieval peninsular," in *Almanzor y Carlomagno: el Camino de Santiago ante el islam en la época medieval*, ed. Inés Monteira Arias (Oviedo: Trea, 2023), 185-207.

[34] M. Peña Escudero, "Aleksandr Nevskj," 781-834.

[35] See, for example, R. Kotecki, J. Maciejewski, and G. Leighton (eds.), *Religious Rites of War beyond the Medieval West,* (Leiden: Brill, 2023).

[36] N. Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques des saints. Formation coutumière d'un droit* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1975); J-L. Deuffic (ed.), *Reliques et sainteté dans l'espace médiéval* (Saint Denis: Pecia, 2005).

The capture of relics, *furta sacra*, was seen as a sign of divine favour.[37] They were considered war trophies, symbols of victory, and a means of asserting political superiority. There was a blending of relics, war trophies, and *spolia*, particularly in religious buildings. They were symbols of supremacy and reminders of past conflicts. Nevertheless, the use of holy relics in warfare appears to have been limited during the Middle Ages, with most evidence pertaining to the remains of the True Cross.[38] Their use in battle is attested in contexts such as the Byzantine Empire, the Carolingian world or the Visigothic kingdom following Reccared's conversion to Catholicism,[39] as well as in the later Crusader context.

[37] P. J. Geary, *Furta Sacra. Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 1978). As Simone Lombardo shows in his chapter, most relics were transferred from the East to Italian cities, which were seen as repositories of Christian treasures. Venice, for example, had a strong religious connection with the Levant before the crusades, acquiring relics from the 9th and 10th centuries. The narratives of these translations emphasized the idea that the Christian East had failed to guard the relics. See also F. Cardini, "Crociata e religione civica nell'Italia medievale," in *La religion civique à l'époque médiévale et moderne (Chrétienté et Islam)*, *Actes du colloque (Nanterre, 21-23 juin 1993)*, ed. André Vauchez (Roma: École française de Rome, 1995), 155-164; J. Durand, "Reliquie e reliquiari depredati in Oriente e a Bisanzio al tempo delle crociate," in *Le crociate. L'oriente e l'occidente da Urbano II a San Luigi 1096-1270*, ed. Monique Rey-Delqué (Milano: Electa, 1997), 378-389; H. A. Klein, "Eastern objects and western desires: relics and reliquaries between Byzantium and the west," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 283-314; A. Musarra, *In partibus Ultramaris. I Genovesi, la Crociata e la Terrasanta (secc. XII-XIII)* (Rome: Isime, 2017); A. E. Lester, "Translation and Appropriation: Greek Relics in the Latin West in the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade", *Studies in Church History* 53 (2017): 88-117; K. R. Mathews, *Conflict, Commerce, and an Aesthetic of Appropriation in the Italian Maritime Cities, 1000-1150* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); M. Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis. I furti di reliquie nell'Italia medieval* (Firenze: Firenze University Press 2019); M. Papasidero, *Thefts of Relics in Italy. From Late Antiquity to the Central Middle Ages (300-1150)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025).

[38] A. Frolow, *La relique de la Vraie Croix. Recherches sur le développement d'un culte* (Paris: Institute Français d'Études byzantines, 1961).

[39] M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 357-358; E. J. Goldberg, "'More Devoted to the Equipment of Battle than the Splendor of Banquets': Frontier Kingship, Military Ritual, and Early Knighthood at the Court of Louis the German," *Viator* 30 (1999): 41–78; H. A. Klein, "Sacred Relics and Imperial Ceremonies at the Great Palace of Constantinople," in *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft. Frühmittelalterliche Residenzen, Gestalt und Zeremoniell*, ed. Franz A. Bauer (Istanbul, 2006), 79-100; J. Á. Castillo Lozano, *La sacralización de la guerra en el mundo visigodo. Ceremonias, ritos y símbolos* (Madrid: La Ergástula, 2024), 117 ff. It is also evidenced in the Kyivan Rus: R. Kotecki, "Pious Rulers, Princely Clerics, and Angels of Light: Imperial Holy War Imagery in Twelfth-Century Poland and Rus'," in *Christianity and War in Medieval East Central Europe and Scandinavia*, ed. Radosław Kotecki, Carsten S. Jensen and Stephen Bennett (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2021), 159-188.

[40] The Crusades are among the most well-documented examples of the use of relics in battle as tangible symbols of that divine support. For example, the relic of the True Cross was carried by the Crusaders during the battle of Hattin in 1187, where Saladin captured it. The relic was believed to ensure the success of the Crusader forces and was a potent symbol of Christ's presence on the battlefield.

Beyond the crusades, relics were also used in other warfare contexts. For example, Constantius II took the body of St. Mercurius of Caesarea from Cappadocia to serve as protection and a sign of faith to his soldiers during the military campaign he launched in 661 against the Longobards in southern Italy. According to the hagiographer of the *Historia translationis*, it was an alleged military custom that involved the presence of the remains of protective saints during the battle.[41] The emperor intended to take the remains to Benevento, but by the inspiration of the saint himself through some monks, they were abandoned in Quintodecimo. Almost a century later and in the context of his fight against the Franks, Arequis II (d. 787), duke of Benevento, undertook the search for the remains and the transfer of the relics to the basilica of Saint Sophia in Benevento, founded or completed by the *princeps* in the second half of the eighth century.[42] As will be seen in the chapter by Carlos de Ayala Martínez, relics took on a more belligerent emphasis in Iberia, from the eleventh century onwards, becoming a guarantee of victory in the theatre of war.

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[40] G. Ligato, "The Political Meanings of the Relic of the Holy Cross among the crusaders and in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem: An Example of 1185," in *Autour de la première croisade. Actes du colloque de la Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East (Clermont-Ferrand, 22-25 juin 1995*), ed. Michel Balard (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), 315-330; M. Tsurtsumia, "The True Cross in the Armies of Georgia and the Frankish East," *Crusades* 12/1 (2013): 91-102; A. V. Murray, "'Mighty against the enemies of Christ': the relic of the True Cross in the armies of the kingdom of Jerusalem," in *The Franks in Outremer. Studies in the Latin Principalities of Palestine and Syria, 1099-1187*, ed. Alan V. Murray, (Farnham: Ashgate 2015), 217-238; C. Gaposchkin, "Louis IX and the Triumphal Cross of Constantine," *French Historical Studies* 46 (2023): 3-35. See also E. L. Bowerman, "The Spanish Emperors and the True Cross: The Variable Uses of the Lignum Crucis of Sahagún in Early Twelfth-Century Iberia," *Comitatus* 55/1 (2024): 29-61.

[41] S. Mergiali-Sahas, "Byzantine Emperors and Holy Relics," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 51 (2001): 41-60; A. Kaldellis, "The Military Use of the Icon of the Theotokos and its Moral Logic in the Historians of the Ninth-Twelfth Centuries", *Revista de Estudios Bizantinos* 1 (2013): 56-75.

[42] Á. Ibáñez Chacón, "San Mercurio de Cesarea (Capadocia)," in *Héroes santos: textos hagiográficos y religión popular en el cristianismo oriental*, ed. Matilde Casas Olea (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2019), 331-410.

e. The Military Orders

Relics also performed several important roles for the military orders, institutions closely linked to Holy War and crusade. Above all, they served as a crucial means of promoting military activity to the wider public, emphasizing the orders' geographical and spiritual connections with events in the East. They were likely a persuasive recruitment tool, especially so during periods of military reversal, and the very presence of relics demonstrated God's approval of their enterprise. In this sense, there is also evidence of its use in battle. For example, it has been suggested that a mid-twelfth century reliquary from the Hospitaller conventual church in Jerusalem was carried with the campaigning army, and this is probably also true of small reliquary altars, such as a late 14th century triptych decorated with the images of St. Catherine and St. George, which is known to have belonged to the Teutonic order.[43]

The rise of military orders in the Middle Ages further solidified the relationship between sainthood and warfare. These orders, which combined religious life with military service, promoted the idea that spiritual perfection and warfare were not mutually exclusive but could be combined in the service of God.[44] In this sense, the military orders encouraged devotion to martyr-saints.[45] For example, the Templars may have translated relics of the supposed early fourth-century military martyr St. Varus from Jezreel in Palestine to northern Italy, suggesting that they saw him as a possible role model for members of the order.[46] Likewise, St. George's relics could be found at the Templar grand priory of Auvergne in 1292, while his arm and iron from his lance were recorded at the Hospitaller site at Moures on Cyprus between 1418 and

[43] T. Borowski and C. Gerrard, "Constructing Identity in the Middle Ages: Relics, Religiosity, and the Military Orders," *Speculum* 92/4 (2017): 1086–87.

[44] See, for example, A. J. Forey, *The Military Orders: From the Twelfth to the Early Fourteenth Centuries* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1992); A. Demurger, *Chevaliers du Christ. Les ordres religieux-militaires au Moyen Âge (XIe-XVIe siècle)* (Paris, Ed. du Seuil, 2002).

[45] H. Nicholson, "Saints venerated in the Military Orders," in *Selbstbild und Selbstverständnis der geistlichen Ritterorden*, eds. Roman Czaja and Jürgen Sarnowsky, (Toruń: Ordines Militares Colloquia Torunensia Historica XIII, 2005) 91–113; H. Nicholson, "'Martyrum collegio sociandus haberet': Depictions of the Military Orders' Martyrs in the Holy Land, 1187–1291", in *Crusading and Warfare in the Middle Ages: Realities and Representations. Essays in Honour of John France*, eds. Simon John and Nicholas Morton (London: Routledge, 2014), 101-118.

[46] D. Woods, "Varus of Egypt: A Fictitious Military Martyr," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996): 175-200.

1420.[47] Other military saints were also represented: St. Maurice, together with St. Mary, was depicted on the banner of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic order.

These classical warrior-saints were not the only saints with whom the military orders, and therefore their warrior activity, had a relationship. Figures such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux, contemporary to the crusades, played an important role not only in the consolidation of the sacralization of war, but also in the very creation of these institutions.[48] Kyle Lincoln's chapter will delve into this kind of relationship between sanctity and war, in which the religious activity and preaching of holy men will be one more tool in the fight against the infidel.

B. The Islamic Tradition

a. Jihād and the Awliyā' Allāh

Sacralised violence was one of the most powerful discursive and legitimizing tools, and Islam was no exception.[49] From very early on, a series of religious and salvific merits were associated with *jihād*, shaping it as one of the most important means of sanctification. The connection between sainthood, saints and warfare in the context of medieval Islam is a complex and multifaceted topic.[50] Following the Islamic tradition, and being aware that the term "saint" does not belong to it, I equate this concept to that of *wālī Allāh* (pl. *awliyā' Allāh*), i.e., "friend of God," one who is close to God, who can perform miracles (*karāmāt*), and who possessed *baraka*, a kind of divine grace that flows through the nature of people, which can be accumulated, transmitted and lost, and which believers seek in contact with the saints, in visits and pilgrimages to their tombs. In the saint's relationship with the community, he occupies a place of mediation because of

[47] T. Borowski and C. Gerrard, "Constructing Identity," 1056-1100.

[48] H. Nicholson, *The Knights Templar* (Amsterdam: University Press, 2021); See also B. M. Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade in Occitania, 1145–1229: Preaching in the Lord's Vineyard* (Woodbridge: York University Press, 2001).

[49] See R. Bonney, *Jihad. From Qur'an to bin Laden* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); P. Heck, "Jihad revisited," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 32/1 (2004): 95-128; D. Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2005); M. Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History. Doctrines and Practices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); A. García Sanjuán, *Yihad. La regulación de la guerra en el islam clásico* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2020).

[50] See, for example, G. Cecere, "Jihad and Sanctity in Damietta: in the Footsteps of Šayḫ Šaṭā" (d. 21AH/642AD?)," in *The Medieval Jihad. Texts, Theories, and Practices*, eds. Mehdi Berriah and Abbès Zouache (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2025), 67-108.

his relationship with God.[51] Their elevated spiritual status often led them to be regarded as intercessors between the divine and the earthly realm. Their prayers and blessings were seen as capable of securing divine favour and victory for those fighting on behalf of Islam. This sense of divine support through sainthood was especially important in times of conflict, as Muslim warriors often believed that the intercession of saints would lead to military success or divine protection. Likewise, the idea of spiritual warfare, in which the inner battle against sin and temptation parallels the outer battle against enemies of Islam, provided a framework for understanding the role of saints in both personal and military conflict.

Therefore, among the many motifs encountered in stories of God's friends is that of the *wālī Allāh* as warrior for the faith. Anecdotes of saints fighting the enemies of Islam or rendering miraculous assistance to Muslim armies are common throughout the Sufi hagiographical tradition.[52] As Harry Neale points out, "scholarship in European languages has often overlooked the militant component of Sufism, preferring instead the study of Sufism's mystical and aesthetic aspects instead." [53] Both perspectives are valid, and they are not mutually exclusive.

God's friends often assisted in waging war against the unbelievers, either by sending aid from afar or by taking part in battle as a *mujāhid* or *ghāzī*. For example, the saint Abū Isḥāq al-Kāzarūnī (d. c. 1035) – his military activity caused him to be called *Shaykh-e Ghāzī* – appeared as a great warrior on horseback and routed the Byzantines, all while remaining in Kazarun. Sometime after his death, his spiritual successor called upon him to aid the Muslims of Kazarun in their campaign against a Christian city, which they had besieged. Abū Isḥāq's spirit tells his successor what the Muslims must do to defeat the Christians, which leads to the fall of the Christian city and victory for the Muslim host.[54]

God's friends also played a significant role in the Islamization of some regions, particularly the Indian subcontinent, where they contributed to the

[51] See J. Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment and Servanthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); V. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint. Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); C. Mayeur-Jaouen, *Le culte des saints musulmans: des débuts de l'islam à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 2024).

[52] See A. Knysh, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press); H. S. Neale, *Jihad in premodern Sufi Writings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 57-73; H. S. Neale, *Sufi Warrior Saints: Stories of Sufi Jihad from Muslim Hagiography* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022); J. Eden, *Warrior Saints of the Silk Road: Legends of the Qarakhanids* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[53] H. Neale, *Sufi Warrior Saints*, 5.

[54] H. Neale, *Sufi Warrior Saints*, 52 ff.

spread of Islam through both proselytising activities and participation in military *jihād* to expand Islam. In this sense, the tradition of *ghāzī* friends of God has remained an important component of popular Sufi shrine worship in Muslim India.[55]

b. Asceticism and War

The model from which these *ghāzī*-saints originated is that of the warrior-scholars who began to stand out in the last decades of the eighth century, particularly along the Byzantine-Arabic border. I refer to figures such as Abū Isḥāq al-Fazārī (d. 802),[56] author of the *Kitāb al-siyar*, a work on conduct in war, and his friend the Iranian scholar and ascetic ʻAbd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 797),[57] author of *Kitāb al-jihād*, one of the first treatises on the topic that has survived and which consists of a collection of 206 prophetic traditions. Both represent, better than anyone, the authority of the frontier scholars derived from the imitation of the Prophet and his companions in military action. These figures were credited for their war activities but were also known for their intellectual deeds, especially the transmission of hadith, and for their asceticism.[58]

This concern with *jihād* was closely linked to asceticism in the thought of Ibn al-Mubārak and others like him.[59] There was no contradiction between being an ascetic and a warrior or, in other words, war was a form of asceticism and

[55] See R. M. Eaton, *The Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); R. M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

[56] M. Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War. Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1996), 113 ff.

[57] See M. Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*, 122 ff. R. Bonney, *Jihad*, 62-63; M. Bonner, *Jihad*, 99-100; R. Denaro, "From Marw to the *Ṭuġūr*. Ibn al-Mubārak and the Shaping of a Biographical Tradition", *Eurasian Studies* VII/1-2 (2009): 125-144; C. Melchert, "Ibn al-Mubārak's Kitāb al-Jihād and Early Renunciant Literature," in *Violence in Islamic Thought from the Qur'ān to the Mongols*, eds. Robert Gleave and István Kristo-Nagy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 49-69; F. Salem, *The Emergence of Early Sufi Piety and Sunnī Scholasticism. ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak and the Formation of Sunnī Identity in the Second Islamic Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 77 ff.

[58] Al-Dhahabī (d. 1348) described Ibn al-Mubārak as "the pride of the *mujāhidīn*", and al-Fazārī was known as "master of the *sunna* and the *ghazwa*". Salem, *The Emergence of Early Sufi*, 33-34; Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*, 113 ff.

[59] Ibn al-Mubārak also composed a *Kitāb al-zuhd*, "Book of Asceticism". Ibn al-Mubarāk, *Kitāb al-zuhd wa al-raqā'iq*, ed. al-Raḥmān al-ʻAẓamī (Beirut: Malegaon, 1998). See F. Salem, *The Emergence of Early Sufi*, 36 ff; A. Sinno, "Le *Kitāb al-zuhd wa-l-raqā'iq* de ʻAbd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (m. 181/797)," in *La littérature aux Marges du 'Adab. Regards croisés sur la prose arabe classique*, ed. Iyas Hassan (Beirut: Diacritiques Éditions-Presses de l'Ifpo, 2017), 32-60.

renunciation of the world, another characteristic of this group (*al-zuhd fī al-dunyā*).[60] This is clearly seen in the famous hadith transmitted in his work: "Every community has a form of asceticism (*rahbāniyya*, a term also understood as 'monasticism'), and the asceticism of my community is *jihād* in the path of God".[61] Thus, the struggle became a spiritual activity, both internal and external, an issue that undoubtedly continued religious trends from Late Antiquity, as Thomas Sizgorich studied.[62] Moreover, performing pious acts guaranteed military success: "Perform good deeds before the battle, for you fight through them".[63] A good example is that of Abū Mu'āwiya al-Aswad, an ascetic who lived in the border city of Tarsus throughout the eighth century.[64] His displays of piety and asceticism combined continuous lamentation or constant night prayers with participation in expeditions against the Byzantines or border surveillance activities.[65]

c. Sanctification through War

Another significant theme is the notion of sanctification through warfare in Islam, a subject explored in chapters 8 and 9 of this volume. The idea of sanctification through war in medieval Islam is a nuanced and complex concept that intertwines the spiritual, social, and political dimensions of warfare. It tends to focus on the notion of *jihād* and the spiritual rewards or purification associated with fighting in the name of Islam. *Jihād* was not only seen as a military duty but

[60] C. Melchert, "Ibn al-Mubārak's Kitāb," 49-69. Another of their features, according to Deborah Tor, was their adherence to the *ahl al-ḥadīth* and their struggle against what they considered heretical through the precept of *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf*, especially against Kharijism. D. Tor, *Violent Order: Religious Warfare, Chivalry, and the 'Ayyār Phenomenon in the Medieval Islamic World* (Istanbul-Wurzburg: Orient-Institut-Ergon Verlag, 2007). On the precept of "commanding good and forbidding evil" see M. Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Tor, in fact, goes further and sees in this group of warrior-scholars one of the reasons for the consolidation of traditionalism, especially Hanbalism.

[61] Ibn al-Mubarāk, *Kitāb al-jihād*, ed. Hammād (Beirut: Dār al-Nūr, 1971), 36. In his *Kitāb al-zuhd* he quotes similar hadiths. For example: Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, nº 845. On this tradition see C. Sahner, "'The Monasticism of My Community is Jihad': A Debate on Asceticism, Sex, and Warfare in Early Islam," *Arabica* 64/2 (2017): 149-183.

[62] T. Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity. Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

[63] Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-jihād*, 30.

[64] On the city of Tarsus as the epicentre of the activity of *jihād* volunteers see C. E. Bosworth, "The City of Tarsus and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier in Early and Middle Abbasid Times," *Oriens* 33 (1992): 268-286.

[65] D. Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 44.

also as a means of spiritual purification. The soldier who participated in it was believed to be engaging in a process of self-purification, where the hardships of battle would lead to divine favour, and therefore his intention (*niyya*) must have been pure. The ultimate goal was the reward of paradise for those who died as martyrs. Thus, martyrdom in war was central to this process of sanctification. Martyrdom was viewed as the highest possible spiritual achievement for a Muslim warrior, and the act of fighting in battle for the defence of Islam was considered an act of deep devotion that could bring the soldier closer to God.[66]

In this sense, those who, for example, fought in battles of the "sacred history" of Islam, such as Badr (624), were honoured and regarded as spiritually elevated, and their participation in the battle was believed to have guaranteed their salvation.[67] The martyrs of Badr were revered not just for their military prowess, but for the spiritual merit they gained through their sacrifice. Their example became a model of sanctification through battle for subsequent generations.

This sanctification would also be transferred to many of the participants in the *futūḥ* or the first conquests of Islam. For example, the tomb of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, a companion of the Prophet who was buried under the walls of Constantinople during the first Islamic siege of the city, became an important pilgrimage centre,[68] known today as the Eyüp Sultan Mosque. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the remains of this companion of the prophet were "rediscovered" at this location. It was at this *locus* of memory of the sacralised war and of the origins of the *umma* that, significantly, the Ottoman sultans received the sword of Osman ('Uthmān Ghāzī, d. 1326), founder of the dynasty, thus representing the ascension to power. This was also the site where they blessed their ceremonial weapons before each military campaign.

[66] D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[67] Badr is without any doubt the most important and most commemorated battle, with the most symbolic capital and prestige in the history of Islam, at least in terms of religiosity and sacredness. The participants of Badr are the most excellent among Muslims after the *rāshidūn* and ten of the Prophet's companions, and they are guaranteed entry into paradise. A. Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims: History and Memory* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 57 ff. See also M. Yazigi, "*Ḥadīth al-'ashara* or the Political Uses of a Tradition," *Studia Islamica*, 86 (1997): 159-167; T. Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad. Narratives of the Prophet in Islam Across the Centuries* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 87 ff.

[68] M. Booner, *Jihad*, 2006: 79; D. Cook, *Martyrdom*, 2007: 23-30; C. Picard, *Sea of the Caliphs: The Mediterranean in the Medieval Islamic World* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 57-58. In the Sind there is also a veneration of a series of tombs belonging to companions of the Prophet who would have participated in its conquest. M. A. Asif, *A Book of Conquest. The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 150 ff.

These burial sites, associated with martyrdom, marked the limits of Islamic expansion during the conquests, thus establishing a sacred frontier: a territory of *jihād* in which the tombs served as milestones along the path of sacralised warfare. The importance of tombs in processes of sanctification will be discussed in Chapter 8. In the eastern case there are very remarkable cases: for example, the poet Abū Dhu'ayb al-Hudhalī took part in an expedition against Byzantium in the time of 'Umar and was mortally wounded on the return from the campaign. He ordered his nephew, who had stayed behind with him in enemy territory, to bury him there. And it used to be said: "the Muslims had penetrated far into the land of the Byzantines. From the tomb of Abū Dhu'ayb onwards there is no longer any known burial place of the people of Islam".[69]

In the Islamic West, we likewise find several instances of the creation of a sacred frontier through martyrdom and burials – a boundary that was, of course, mobile and volatile, continually shifting, and which, with the passage of time and the eventual transfer or disappearance of the frontier itself, was recontextualized, altered in its sacred function, or even effaced altogether. One example is the martyrdom and tomb of Zuhayr b. Qays and his companions near Darna, tombs that are known even today.[70] Or the Mosque of 'Uqba b. Nāfi', a mosque built where 'Uqba b. Nāfi' – conqueror of Ifriqiya and the Maghreb – allegedly died as a martyr and was buried, located in the nowadays and town of Sidi Okba.[71] Likewise, the geographer al-'Udhrī (d. 1085), in his *Niẓām al-murjān fī-l-masālik wa-l-mamālik*, recounts the existence in Saragossa of the tombs of Ḥanash b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ṣan'ānī and 'Alī b. Rabāḥ al-Lakhmī, two *tābiʿūn*, i.e., successors of the Prophet's companions, who would have participated in the conquest of al-Andalus.[72] The text further notes that it was a place of veneration and pilgrimage in search of divine favour, a holy place where miracles took place.[73]

[69] M. Lecker, "On the burial of martyrs in Islam," in *The Concept of Territory in Islamic Law and Thought*, ed. Hiroyuki Yanagihashi (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 37-49.

[70] R. G. Khoury, "Zuhayr b. Kays", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. Volume XI: W–Z* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 559.

[71] J. Albarrán, "*This is your miḥrāb*: sacred spaces and power in Early Islamic North Africa – al-Qayrawān as a Case Study," *Religions* 14/5 (2023): 674.

[72] M. Marín, "Ṣaḥāba et Tābiʿūn dans al-Andalus: Histoire et légende," *Studia Islamica* 54 (1981): 5-49.

[73] Al-ʿUdhrī, *Tarsīʿ al-akhbār wa tanwīʿ al-āthār*, in Fernando de la Granja, "La Marca Superior en la obra de al-ʿUḏrī," *Estudios de Edad Media de la Corona de Aragón* 8 (1966): 447-545.

d. Relics at War

Connected to the issue of *ghāzī*-saints' tombs is the use of sacred objects in military settings.[74] The baraka associated with sacred relics and objects was believed to provide military forces with divine assistance and protection, contributing to their success in battle. This practice can be linked to the larger Islamic tradition of veneration of the Prophet and other holy figures, even if Islamic doctrine tends to distance itself from overtly material forms of sainthood and relic worship, which are common in other religious traditions like Christianity.

For example, the Prophet Muhammad's sword, Dhū al-Fiqār, is one of the most famous relics in Islamic history. It was believed to have belonged to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muḥammad. The sword was highly revered as a symbol of divine justice and courage in battle, and was seen as a spiritual object that could provide victory in warfare. For example, in the context of the confrontation against the rebel Abū Yazīd (d. 947), the Fatimid caliph Ismā'īl (d. 953) appeared on the battlefield bearing the legendary sword. Following his triumph, he proclaimed himself al-Manṣūr, the "victorious one."[75]

Another powerful example – reminiscent of the Christian war liturgy around relics such as the True Cross – is that of the departure on campaign of the Almohads, a dynasty that based its legitimacy, among other things, on *jihād* and the memory of the early days of Islam.[76] In the war parade, two Qur'ans were displayed in front of the caliph. The first of these was the alleged Qur'an of 'Uthmān, third "rightly-guided" caliph, which was carried on a camel on a red canopy (*qubba ḥamrā'*) that protected it.[77] Its covers were decorated with all kinds of precious stones, one of which was in the shape of a horse's hoof said to have belonged to Ibn Ṭūlūn, lord of Egypt and famous leader of the *jihād*. This Qur'an had belonged to the Umayyads of al-Andalus and was recovered in Cordoba itself by 'Abd al-Mu'min. It was the codex that, according to some traditions,

[74] On relics in Islam see, for example, A. Bursi, *Traces of the Prophet: Relics and Sacred Spaces in Early Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

[75] See H. Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi: the Rise of the Fatimids* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 313-320; M. Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids: The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Tenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 176-8, 203-205; M. Brett, *The Fatimid Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 24-5, 57 ff.

[76] On this parade see J. Albarrán, *Ejércitos benditos. Yihad y memoria en al-Andalus (siglos X-XIII)* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2020), 302 ff.

[77] On this Qur'an see, for example, A. Bennison, "The Almohads and the Qur'an of 'Uthman: the legacy of the Umayyads of Cordoba in twelfth century Maghrib," *Al-Masaq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean* 19/2 (2007): 131-154; M. Ghouirgate, *L'Ordre almohade (1120-1269). Une nouvelle lecture anthropologique* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2014), 337 ff.

'Abd al-Raḥmān III had carried into battle, specifically to Simancas (939). Moreover, according to these same traditions, this Qur'anic codex, copied by hand by 'Uthmān himself, was the one with which the third caliph was praying when he was killed, as attested by the blood stains that could be observed on its folios.[78] The second codex preceding the caliph in the parade was the Qur'an of the *mahdī* Ibn Tūmart, founder of the Almohad dynasty, transported on a mule and adorned with gilded silver.[79]

In these objects, the Almohads found charismatic authority as well as the projection of divine grace, *baraka*.[80] This idea should be related to the fact that the catafalque that kept the copy of 'Uthmān was called *tābūt*, a term used in the Qur'an to designate the Ark of the Covenant.[81] The use of this term indicates that this codex could function in the same way, representing God's presence and his help in the conduct of war. In this sense, it is curious to note how in the context of the Crusades the Qur'an of 'Uthmān also appears in a warlike setting, that of the 1148 defence of Damascus. His function was not to preside over the march to battle, but to be the recipient of the supplications and petitions for victory of the Damascene population in the Great Mosque. And, according to Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, it worked.[82]

C. Parallel Features in Christianity and Islam

In summary, and following these introductory pages, it is possible to identify a number of shared features in the construction of warrior-saints and in the relationship between sanctity and warfare in both the Christian and Islamic worlds. In many cases, saints were not merely symbolic figures but were believed to participate directly in warfare: they were said to appear on the

[78] See T. Zadeh, "From Drops of Blood: Charisma and Political Legitimacy in the translatio of the ʿUthmānic Codex of al-Andalus," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 39 (2008): 321-346.

[79] M. Ghouirgate, *L'Ordre almohade*, 346 ff.

[80] T. Zadeh, "From Drops of Blood," 321-346.

[81] M. Ghouirgate, *L'Ordre almohade*, 337 ff. This ark, according to the descriptions previously mentioned, could be similar to the one created by the Ottomans to keep the Prophet's banner. See S. Ağka Diker, *Apartment of the Holy Relics* (Istanbul: Anatolian Cultural Entrepreneurship, 2018). It is worth remembering that in the biblical account the Ark of the Covenant also appears related to the 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 carrying seven ram's horn trumpets before the Ark. On the seventh day, after circling the enclave seven times, blowing the trumpets and shouting a war cry, the walls collapsed. See Joshua 6: 1-16.

[82] See J. Albarrán, "'He was a Muslim knight who fought for religion, not for the world'. War and religiosity in Islam: A comparative study between the Islamic east and west (12th century)," *Al-Masaq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean* 27/3 (2015): 191-206.

battlefield, to manifest themselves to military leaders in visions prior to combat, or to be invoked through prayers during the fighting itself. Alongside this, narratives of saints who suffered martyrdom at the hands of infidels – either in battle or through violent persecution and torture – played a central role. Such stories, already prominent in accounts of Roman persecutions of the early Church and in the formative battles of Islamic sacred history, were frequently retold in frontier societies or to soldiers on campaign, where they could function as exemplary models to be emulated in real warfare.

Within these religious traditions, the figure of the warrior-saint also points to the possibility of sanctification through war, especially in contexts of holy war understood as a path to salvation. This process was often closely associated with rulership, so that participation in battle and saintly status became intertwined, blurring the boundary between warrior and saint and producing an ideal of sanctity achieved through military service. Central to the belief in the saint's intervention on the battlefield was the theological notion of intercession: saints, by virtue of their closeness to God, were thought to act as intermediaries between the divine and the human. This capacity to intercede was extended to warfare, where saints were believed to influence the outcome of battles through divine agency, thereby contributing decisively to the sanctification of combat itself. Finally, the power of the saint was not confined to narrative or belief alone but could also be embodied in material form, particularly in relics, which might be displayed on the battlefield or incorporated into military rituals as tangible vehicles of sacred power.

At the same time, important divergences emerge. In the Islamic tradition, although early sacred history also celebrated figures who died in battle and were remembered as martyrs, the emphasis tended to fall less on posthumous saintly mediation – as in Christianity – and more on exemplary conduct in life and on God's direct support for the fighters. This difference shaped the way narratives of martyrdom circulated: while Christian accounts often highlighted the cult of the saint and the continuing efficacy of his or her presence after death, Islamic sources more commonly presented martyrdom as a culmination of righteous action rewarded immediately by God.

The relationship between warfare and sanctification likewise reveals both convergence and contrast. In Christianity, the idea that participation in war could lead to sanctification was often mediated through the figure of the ruler or knight who embodied both military and spiritual virtues, blurring the boundary between warrior and saint. In Islam, although rulers and commanders could acquire enhanced religious prestige through their participation in *jihād*, sanctity was less frequently personalised in individual holy figures acting as

intercessors and more closely tied to adherence to correct belief, law, and conduct within a divinely sanctioned struggle.

Finally, material culture illustrates another point of divergence. In Christian contexts, the power of the warrior-saint could be physically located in relics, which might be displayed on the battlefield or incorporated into military ceremonies as tangible sources of sacred protection. In Islamic warfare, while objects such as banners, Qur'anic inscriptions, or other symbolic items could carry strong religious meaning, the veneration of bodily relics played a far more limited role, reflecting broader doctrinal reservations about their use. Taken together, these similarities and differences highlight a shared language of sacralised warfare across the medieval Mediterranean, while also revealing distinct theological and ritual logics that shaped Christian and Islamic understandings of sanctity in war.

II. The Present Volume

From Late Antiquity to the late Middle Ages, from the Atlantic Ocean to Armenia, via Portugal, Castile, Aragon, France, North Africa, the Italian maritime cities or Egypt, this volume aims to study, for the first time in this geographical and chronological framework, the presence of holy men and women in the context of war, from a holistic perspective. Following these notions of sanctity and war presented above, this broad approach to the phenomenon allows us to address it from a cross-cultural perspective, taking into account the realities of different religious traditions such as Islam and Christianity. Likewise, the focus has been placed on the Mediterranean as the geographical axis of analysis – although its limits will sometimes be crossed – since, as will be seen in this book, it was a space in which ideas of sanctity, war, holy men and women, and the objects associated with them, circulated and were exchanged throughout the Middle Ages. Moreover, the presence of these holy men and women in a military context is understood in a broad manner: not only do we refer to their direct participation on the battlefield, but also to issues such as the processes of sanctification through battle, the use of relics or liturgies in war, the cult of warrior-saints, their hagiographic depictions, their participation in war preaching, or the political use of their memory.

These topics are organized in three different sections – Sanctifying War: Rituals, Relics and Symbols; Making Saints Through War; Narratives of Saints and War – which highlight the most important features in the link between sanctity and war: how war is sanctified through saints and the cultural manifestations associated with them; how war can help in the process of sanctification of certain individuals; how the participation of holy men and

women in war is narrated. In this sense, the volume addresses, among others, the following issues: involvement of holy men and supernatural aid in the context of warfare (chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12); sanctification through war (e. g. chapters 7, 8 and 9); the cult, worship and/or memory of warrior-saints (e.g. chapters 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 10); relics and war (e. g. chapters 2, 4 and 5); hagiographic literature in war, war in hagiographic literature (e.g. chapters 4, 7, 10, 11 and 12); holy men, liturgy and war (e.g. chapters 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6); holy men and the preaching of war (e.g. chapters by 1 and 11); textual and material depictions of holy men and warfare (e.g. chapters by 3, 5, 7, 9 and 10), and holy women at war (e. g. chapters 3, 6 and 12).

The first section begins with a chapter by Huertas Gómez - "Ecclesiastical Attitudes Towards War in the Visigothic Kingdom" - in which he analyses the relationship between the Visigothic church and war, as well as the mechanisms it implemented in order to sacralise the act of war. The Hispanic clergy during the Visigothic period was far from being clearly enthusiastic about war. Without needing to oppose the various military enterprises of the Visigothic monarchy, there was never an interest in active participation in warfare. This chapter examines the different ideals that existed within the Visigothic Church regarding war, analysing, for example, the views of Saint Isidore of Seville, among others, but also the available casuistry regarding the active participation of the clergy and the supernatural in war, and their attitude towards it.

For the church leaders, the decisive issue was the role of religion in the context of war. It was the king's Catholic faith that allowed divine grace to be mediated through his actions, transforming warfare into a positive force. Consequently, a ruler's military capacity was always subordinated to his function as protector of the Church. In effect, this amounted to the sublimation of the traditional features of Gothic military kingship, redirected to the service of Christianity. In this light, Reccared's conversion to Catholicism marked a pivotal moment, for the new king's Catholic identity enabled God's grace to be bestowed upon the Goths in war as well. In this process, St. Julian of Toledo played a key role in the sacralization of war. He depicted King Wamba as an Old Testament ruler endowed with sanctity, interpreting his struggle against Duke Paul as a *iudicium Dei*, a manifestation of divine justice. It was also during this period that a war liturgy was systematized: one *ordo* to be observed when the king set out on campaign, and another for his return. Among its elements, for instance, were daily masses offered for the health of the king and his army.

Huertas Gómez concludes that the sacralization of war developed from tensions among the Church, the monarchy, and the nobility. Since the ecclesiastical order could not take direct part in warfare because of its moral constraints, the war liturgy and sacralization of martial actions became a means

of its engagement in the military sphere. The emergence of a sacralised discourse on warfare, shaped within the ecclesiastical sphere and disseminated by bishops through liturgical ceremonies associated with campaigns, was thus in some sense a response to the inability to act directly on the battlefield.

The second chapter of this section, "War and Religion: Conquest Narratives in Southern Portuguese Cities", by Luis Filipe Oliveira, remains within the Iberian Peninsula, though in a considerably later period, when the religiously sanctioned warfare was fully established in the Christian West. Based on the conquest narratives of Santarém, Lisbon, Silves and Alcácer, this chapter summarizes the various manifestations of the sacred, from prayers to the presence of ecclesiastics and religious symbols in the armies, to the ritual celebrations that punctuated the progress of the fighting, or the demonstrations of God's support, evident through prodigies and miracles. Among other things, the invocations in battle of the Virgin and St. James, the use of relics such as a fragment of the *Lignum Crucis*, or the appearance of miracles associated with the tombs of martyrs of the siege of Lisbon are analysed.

In the third chapter, "Holy Warriors in Space and Time: Jihād Narratives in Arabic Folk Epics", Oleg Sokolov takes us to the other side of the Mediterranean analysing *jihād* and the portrayal of holy warriors in Medieval Arab Folk narratives, exploring the relationship between religion and ethnicity in these stories. The study draws from popular *sīra* epics such as *Sīrat 'Antara ibn Shaddād*, *Sīrat Dhāt al-Himma*, *Sīrat al-Ẓāhir Baybars*, and tales from *The Thousand and One Nights*, a highly popular genre of folk art widespread in the Middle East during Mamluk and Ottoman eras among the urban and rural population, and one of the sources in which the memory of the crusades has been preserved. These narratives are a valuable source for understanding popular perceptions of the sacralization of war and martyrdom in the medieval Islamic world, reflecting and shaping mass ideas about these concepts. An important feature of these texts is the creation of an image of an eternal war against the Franks by placing confrontations with them in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times, which emphasizes a permanent need for defence from these kinds of invaders. Thus, the folk culture shaped images of idealized holy warriors, both Muslim characters and pre-Islamic monotheists, facing the Franks, which involved the process of re-actualization of the narratives about the Muslim holy warriors of the Abbasid-Byzantine frontier.

The fourth chapter – "Saints at War: Military Use of Relics and Hagiographic Narratives in Castile and Leon (10th-13th Centuries)" – brings us back to the Iberian Peninsula, in this case to deal, guided by Carlos de Ayala, with one of the main resources for the sacralization of war as well as for the linking of holiness and war: the use of relics. In the cases analysed by Ayala, this use of

relics for military purposes did not involve the displacement of these sacred objects to the battlefield, but the association of liturgical ceremonies of special significance with the launching of campaigns against the Muslims. This connection between relics and war played a particularly important role in the legitimizing process that accompanied the change in the balance of power that took place in the mid-eleventh century: faced with the hegemonic predominance of Islam until then, the Christian powers, and in particular the powerful Castilian-Leonese monarchy, took the lead in the conquering offensive. This implied a further step in justifying war. In this process of justification, relics become an indispensable tool in reinforcing the change that has taken place with supernatural elements. For example, one of the analysed episodes is the well-known *translatio* of the body of St. Isidore from Seville to León by Ferdinand I of Leon, and action linked to an anti-Muslim offensive, specifically the attack on the Taifa Kingdom of al-Mu'tamid of Seville in 1063. His successor, King Alfonso VI, added, through relics such as the "Holy Ark", the Jerusalemite factor, typical of the crusader environment in which his reign took place.

Relics continue to be the focus of attention in the fifth chapter – "Relics at Sea and War: The Use of Saintly Remains by Italian Maritime Cities in Late Medieval Military Conflicts". Here, Simone Lombardo turns to Italy, exploring the relationship between war, Italian maritime cities, and the use of holy relics during the 11th to 14th centuries. These sacred remains were considered both tangible signs of the divine and tools with political and social significance, and their use by Italian maritime cities shows the connections between public power, violence, religiosity, and the construction of a civic identity.

Since the very early crusades, the military expeditions to the Levant by Italians coincided with a season of "holy theft" to obtain relics from Eastern deposits. Relics were prey for war and, at the same time, were the sign of the link with the holiness of military exploits, increasing the spiritual prestige of the city. Relics were also stolen from opponents, a practice which intensified during the fourteenth century, when the flow of relics from the East diminished. In 1354, for example, the Genoese admiral Paganino Doria stole some bodies of saints from the Venetians and transferred them to Genoa. Relics were also taken to war against other Christian enemies – for example, the Genoese took a fragment of the True Cross aboard the admiral galley of the fleet headed against the Pisans in 1242 –, in order to invoke God's favour, while depictions of saints, whose bodies were kept at the centre, appeared on banners and military-political *signa*. Relics were, in sum, one of the focal points of the relationship between Italian maritime cities, war and God.

Sanctity, the sea, and warfare also form the focus of the sixth chapter, "'Ab honor e victòria': The War Activity of the Archbishop of Tarragona Pedro de

Urrea," by Eduard Juncosa. The chapter analyses the role of the archbishop of Tarragona Pedro de Urrea (1445-1489) as captain of the fleet of galleys that joined the crusading fleet organised by Pope Callistus III to cut off the Turks on their march to invade Europe after the fall of Constantinople. The prelate was to advance with his ships to the aid of the Christian islands in the Aegean and Ionian Seas, but the papal project failed due to the disloyalty of King Alfonso the Magnanimous, who used the crusading fleet to devastate the domains of his enemies. The prelate remained at the service of the ruler and was accused of being a traitor and a pirate by the pope until victories at sea led to a subsequent reconciliation between them. The archbishop claimed to have achieved these victories against the infidels "with the help of God and the intercession of the blessed Saint Thecla", patron saint of Tarragona whose image, together with that of St. Peter, appeared on the banners blessed by the pope and carried by the fleet. Thecla's cult became popular in Tarragona especially after the arrival of her relic – one of her arms – in 1321 from Antioch. Despite some former evidence, Thecla's role as a protector in war did not gain significant prominence until this episode studied by Juncosa. In this sense, the *Breviary* of Archbishop Pedro de Urrea, uses language full of military imagery in the prayers and sermons associated with the mass on the patron saint's feast day: "Thecla, soldier of God, make your people good soldiers. Martyr, you are our shield, you are our lance. Victress of sorrows, give us victory over the world."

The second section of the volume, "Making Saints Through War," begins with a chapter – "Defeat as Martyrdom or Family Tradition? The Tension Between Hagiographic and Ethnographic Memory in Mamikonian Dynastic Histories" – through which Kevin Vogelaar explores the development of the legend of Vardan Mamikonean, an Armenian prince who led a rebellion against Sasanian Persia in the year 451 and is considered the first Christian battle-martyr. Examining several key historical texts such as the *Buzandaran*, the *Primary History*, or Ełišē's *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Vogelaar focuses on how claims of Chinese ancestry for the Mamikonean clan were used to enhance Vardan's image and garner support, and how, over time, the narrative shifted toward a more universally Christian understanding of martyrdom, drawing on biblical precedents like the Maccabees. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of considering Armenian sources in the study of the development of Christian sacralization of war, demonstrating that it is more complex than previously recognized.

In the eighth chapter, the second of this section – "Jihād and the Sanctification of the Almohad Caliph Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr" –, we travel across the Mediterranean, from the twelfth to the twentieth century, to analyze the process of sanctification through warfare of the Almohad caliph al-Mansur. The night

before the Battle of Alarcos (1195), in which the Almohad army defeated the Castilian King Alfonso VIII, the Caliph Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr saw in a dream that an angel, depicted as a knight riding a white horse and carrying a green banner, announced to the sultan his imminent victory by the grace of God. The successful participation of al-Manṣūr in *jihād*, one of the legitimizing pillars of the Almohad movement, invested him with a sacred aura that was gradually consolidated after his death. Using chronological, hagiographical and geographical sources, composed between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries and written throughout the Islamic world, the chapter analyses the process of sanctification of this Almohad caliph based on his participation in *jihād*, as well as the memory surrounding this holy warrior. In this regard, one of the most interesting testimonies analysed is a manuscript preserved in the Ibn Yūsuf Library in Marrakech, which contains a protective talisman associated with the memory of this *mujāhid*-sultan, entitled *Ḥijāb Mawlā-nā Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr*, i.e., "the talisman of our lord Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr".

Due to his victories in *jihād*, particularly at Alarcos, his charitable and pious status, and the vicissitudes of his death, several popular traditions emerged that turned al-Manṣūr into a saint. Such an image, in turn, was consolidated due to the Marinid production context, a framework in which the link between sultans and saints was growing and the boundary dividing kingship from sainthood was dissipating. Later on, new popular traditions were introduced in the Maghreb, intensifying the degree of sanctity which had been built up since the thirteenth century. The late nineteenth century accounts reflect a series of popular traditions that have probably been developing for some time before, and which grant al-Manṣūr an undisputed degree of sanctity. The Almohad ruler appears as the builder of the thermal baths of Mulay Ya'qūb, near Fez, where he controlled genies who permanently heated the water, and where people went to receive the *baraka* of the Almohad caliph to be cured. Likewise, he also appears as the black sultan, Sultan al-Akḥal, and as the first disciple of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, eponym of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* Qādiriyya who lived in the mid-twelfth century.

In the last chapter of this section – "Jihād as a Tool for Sanctifying and Constructing the Image of Qutuz as a Mujāhid Sultan" – Mehdi Berriah takes us back to the Mamluk period to explore, through an analysis of Mamluk chronicles, the existence of various narratives that tend to sanctify Quṭuz – victor at ʿAyn Jālūt in 1260 over the Ilkhanid troops – both by his leadership in battle, his allegedly noble origins and the fact that he was chosen by God to fight and defeat the Mongols. Cross-referencing and cross-checking the accounts of the battle of ʿAyn Jālūt told by the Mamluk-era chroniclers fully brings out the intention of some authors to sanctify the character of Quṭuz by giving him a

special religious aura, through certain literary *topoi*, the majority of which are related to the fight against the Mongol threat. The mobilization of *jihād* as a political instrument is a phenomenon that is especially evident during times of external threats, such as the crusades and Mongol invasions. Rulers like Nūr al-Dīn, Saladin, and Baybars were sanctified post-mortem through *jihād*. However, Quṭuz is a unique case, being the only Mamluk sultan whose name was sanctified by *jihād* despite reigning for less than a year and in the context of a single major battle. He is presented as a *mujāhid* par excellence, devoted to the cause of God, and some texts even stipulated that God had ordered that believers should be eternally grateful to the sultan, as if it was a religious obligation, thus trying to establish a kind of worship around his figure.

The third section of the volume, "Narratives of Saints and War," begins with a chapter by Esther Dehoux – "*[…] signiferi et duces esse dicuntur Georgius, Mauricius, Mercurius et Demetrius.* Appearances of Warrior Saints on the Battlefields (tenth-thirteenth centuries)" – analysing various narratives from the tenth-thirteenth centuries, present in sources such as chronicles, hagiographical texts, or songs, recounting the intervention on the battlefield of saints such as George, Maurice, Michael or James. These narratives are set in a particular context, marked by the Gregorian Reform, the political and spiritual demands and expectations of the warriors, but also the military campaigns conducted in the East and on the Iberian Peninsula. These appearances not only served to legitimize military actions but to define the role of warriors within Christian society.

Dehoux demonstrates that the presence of saints like George, Maurice, and Michael in battles was used to signify divine approval of a cause or military campaign, and shows how the specific saint chosen often reflected the nature of the conflict and the desired image of the warrior. However, these apparitions were also part of a larger pastoral effort to integrate the warrior class into Christian society, offering a path to salvation that was not necessarily monastic. The Church presented warrior saints as role models for men-at-arms, encouraging them to imitate the virtues of these figures. A diachronic analysis of these texts in terms of the vocabulary adopted and how the identity of these saints is highlighted enable Dehoux to show how these patron saints were appropriated by men of war and how a distinctive form of piety came to flourish. Over time, the depiction of saints shifted from distant figures to examples of nobility and military valour. This shift led to a decline in the number of battlefield apparition accounts by the thirteenth century as the figures became a natural and expected element of war, with the focus shifting towards martyrdom as well.

In the next chapter – "*Post mortem episcopi Oxomensis cepit crux adversus Albigenses in Francia predicari*: Dominic of Osma, the Early Preachers Movement, and Early Thirteenth Century Crusading" – Kyle Lincoln presents an examination of the crusade-related work of Dominic of Osma, founder of the Order of Preachers, during the period before the Order's formal chartering. It pays specific attention to the ways that crusade and holy war were frequent in the world of Dominic's early work and training. In doing so, it argues both for a reinterpretation of the Dominicans as a kind of tertiary crusader order, supporting the overall goals of the Las Navas de Tolosa, Albigensian, and Fifth Crusades, without overtly engaging in the direct actions of warfighting. In doing so, it also demonstrates that recent crusade historiography's emphasis on the all-encompassing nature of crusading in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century is, while occasionally overstated, not beyond the bounds of possibility as reflected by the early Dominican evidence. In effect, it provides a kind of test case for how frequently and how dynamically crusade motivations influenced the early Order of Preachers and vice versa. Drawing on the hagiographical, cartulary, and chronicle sources, it demonstrates how an originally provincial group of Castilian clerics came to represent the local and urban context of wars first in the Toulousain, and then spread outward to encompass increasingly larger holy wars.

Lincoln shows how the Albigensian Crusade is central to St. Dominic's early work, who was deeply involved in the crusade. In this sense, Dominic's early actions included engaging in debates with heretics, ransoming captives – a common enough practice in military contexts –, and confronting spiritual needs. The language used to describe the mission of the early order was frequently militarized, as were Dominic's miracles, such as the famous debate at Fanjeaux where his book leaped from the flames while the heretics' book burned, emphasizing spiritual combat. Moreover, Pope Honorius III's letters equated the Dominicans to soldiers of Christ. As Lincoln states, in the context of crusading, preaching occupied an important part of the wider "spiritual warfare" arm of the campaign that medieval thinkers understood to be essential to the success of the military project, and the reports about St. Dominic and his involvement in the crusade show another way in which a holy man could participate in war.

In the last chapter of the volume – "Conscripting the Virgin: Holy Mary's Mediterranean Crusade in Alfonso X's Cantigas De Santa María (Ca. 1275)" – Alexander Korte brings us closer to the quintessential holy woman, the Virgin Mary, and how her role as intervener in war and protector of the faith is narrated in the *Cantigas de Santa María* (ca. 1275). The chapter explores fictional retellings of thirteenth-century Castilian military campaigns in the *Cantigas* as a manifestation of imperial anxieties over a new and hostile Mediterranean

seascape, and how Alfonso X of Castile used the *Cantigas* to project an alliance between the authority of the Virgin Mary and his own imperial interests, in the context of the crusades in the Mediterranean during the thirteenth century. Alfonso sought to cultivate a unique relationship with the Virgin Mary, especially in relation to her martial authority, to legitimize his military efforts against his Mediterranean rivals, such as the Marinid empire of Morocco and the Nasrid kingdom of Granada. The *Cantigas* employs crusading rhetoric to present the Virgin as a defender of the faith, referring to campaigns in the Holy Land, as well as local crusading events, such as the conquest of Seville in 1248 and the African crusade of 1260. The figure of the Virgin is highlighted as the patron of martial piety, replacing the traditional Saint James "Matamoros".

In sum, this volume explores the nexus between sanctity and warfare across a wide array of sources, contexts, regions, periods, and analytical methods. The very heterogeneity of these approaches enriches the discussion and allows a coherent picture to emerge. Saints – and, at times, their putative remains – move across an interreligious Mediterranean, while relics, talismans, and other sacra associated with holy figures circulate within martial and protective settings. War liturgies place saints, and sainthood itself, at their centre; battlefields and sieges become spaces where prayers, sermons, and ritual celebrations articulate divine favour through prodigies and miracles. Iconographies of the warrior-saint travel between cultures, not least in the recurrent image of the white horse, and diverse strategies of sacralising warfare take shape. Figures tied to the exercise of war, particularly sacralised war, undergo processes of sanctification; martyrdom offers one pathway, and the cults of warrior-saints expand in tandem with their roles as protectors of cities and communities. Throughout, sanctity, violence, and political legitimacy are tightly interwoven, and the image of the warrior-saint evolves with shifting social and cultural parameters surrounding both war and holiness. Considered together, these trajectories suggest that the relationship between sanctity and warfare in the medieval Mediterranean was, in important respects, transcultural.

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