

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 70
The Kingdom of Portugal and the Second Crusade, Part 2

Hello again. Last time, we saw 164 ships carrying around 13,000 English, German, Flemish, and Norman Crusaders, who were heading to the Holy Land to join the Second Crusade, drop anchor at Porto in Portugal, where they were encouraged by a lengthy and passionate speech given by the Bishop of Porto to sail to Lisbon to assist King Alfonso I of Portugal in an attack on Muslim Lisbon. By the end of the last episode, the Crusaders had decided to sail to Lisbon and meet personally with King Alfonso to see exactly what was being proposed and what was on offer.

The entire fleet then headed southwards, arriving at the mouth of the River Tagus in late June or early July of 1147. A chronicler who was on board one of the ships reported that when the fleet arrived at the Tagus River a miraculous sign appeared. A storm had caused white clouds coming in from the ocean to collide with black clouds which were hovering over the land. The black and white clouds came together and appeared to battle, before the black clouds retreated, with the white clouds emerging victorious. The Crusaders took this as a positive sign, reportedly yelling, and I quote "Behold, our cloud has conquered! Behold, God is with us! The power of our enemies is destroyed. They are confounded, for the Lord has put them to flight" end quote.

While being uplifted by victorious clouds, the Crusaders were also heartened by the city of Lisbon itself and its environs. The fortified city was located on top of a series of hills eight miles from the sea down the estuary of the River Tagus, with the city walls running all the way down to the banks of the river. Densely populated suburbs were located outside the walls, with Jonathan Phillips describing them in his book "The Second Crusade" as being tightly packed, with some buildings even being cut into the rocks of the hills. The grounds around the city were fertile, with vines, pomegranates, and figs being grown in abundance. As the Crusaders had arrived during the summer, some of the figs were ripe, so many of them in fact that the chronicler observed that, and I quote "we could hardly eat a fraction of them" end quote. If the Crusaders grew tired of eating figs, they could always fish in the abundant waters of the estuary, which also provided plenty of shellfish. So the early signs were favourable. The Crusaders must have been heartened by the abundance of food on offer, which would see them through even a lengthy siege of Lisbon without too much hardship.

On the flip side, though, it was clear that the city was heavily fortified and that the Muslims would be formidable opponents. Almost as soon as the Crusaders had landed they came under attack by a group of Muslims who had ventured out from the city. The attackers were quickly overpowered by a larger group of Crusaders, who chased them back up the hill towards the suburbs of the city. Fortunately, one of the military commanders from the Crusading fleet raced after the Crusaders and called them back before they were lured into the narrow, winding streets of the suburbs where they could have been easily trapped.

With the first military skirmish of the campaign behind them, the Crusaders set up camp not far from the city walls and prepared to meet with King Alfonso. Now, this meeting was necessary so that both sides could clarify what exactly would be required from the Crusaders by King Alfonso and what exactly the Crusaders were to be given in return for their assistance. With the failed attack on Lisbon which had taken place six years earlier

having involved allegations of a breach of the agreement between the Crusaders and King Alfonso, it was important for both sides that the negotiations be thorough and result in a water-tight agreement being reached between the parties. A roadblock in the way of this being achieved was the fact that there was no overall leader of the Crusading fleet. Each regional group came with its own military commander and none of those commanders held sway over the others. Consequently, instead of negotiating with a single man who represented the entire Crusading fleet, King Alfonso found himself addressing a group of commanders with each commander representing a ship or group of ships from a particular region. This didn't seem to faze King Alfonso, who, similar to the actions of the Bishop of Porto, launched into a lengthy speech detailing all the reasons why the Crusaders should assist him in his attack on Lisbon. In contrast to the speech given by the Bishop though, King Alfonso emphasised the spiritual rewards who would await those who assisted him in his attack on the Muslims, rather than the material ones stating, and I quote "we feel certain that your piety will invite you to the labour and exertion of so great an enterprise more than the promise of our money will incite you to the recompense of booty" end quote. Of course, it was in the King's interest to convince the Crusaders that they should be satisfied with as little material reward as possible. He was, though, a realist, and he did promise the Crusaders the spoils of Lisbon if the city was defeated in battle.

There was one big problem though with the outcome of the negotiations. You might remember from the last episode that the leader of the earlier proposal for the Crusaders to attack Lisbon, the one six years ago which resulted in failure, bad feelings, and recriminations against King Alfonso, was a man called William Viel. Well, unfortunately for King Alfonso, one of the leaders of this current Crusade, one of the men he is addressing outside Lisbon, is that man William Viel, who has returned with his men. Not only is William Viel completely uninterested in signing on to the attack on Lisbon, he is actively telling anyone who will listen that King Alfonso is not a man who can be trusted and that everyone should just get back onto their ships and head to Jerusalem, leaving King Alfonso to attack Lisbon by himself. In fact, said William Viel, the attack on Lisbon will likely fail, and our time would be much better spent exploring the options offered by merchant vessels sailing further south. This was in fact a proposal to resort to piracy, which, luckily for King Alfonso, was largely frowned upon by the other Crusaders.

The Flemish Crusaders were the first to nod their heads and sign on to the Lisbon proposal, and they were soon followed by the Rhinelanders, the Boulogniers, the Bretons and the Scots. The Anglo-Normans though were swayed by William Viel's arguments, and they held back. After much debate, eight ships out of the 164 anchored in the estuary ended up holding the William Viel line, and were resolutely shaking their heads. In an effort to preserve the unity of the fleet a man called Hervey of Glanville took it upon himself to attempt to convince William Viel and the captains of the eight renegade ships to join the rest of them in the assault on Lisbon. Hervey ended up making a lengthy and emotional speech, emphasising the importance of unity and the sin, shame, and dishonour of the breaking of oaths and of fearing death at the hands of the Muslims. According to the chronicler who witnessed the speech, it was so impassioned and heartfelt that Hervey actually broke into tears at the end, and offered to kneel down and beg before the renegades. That seemed to do the trick. William Viel told Hervey that there was no need for him to humble himself before them, then the holdouts agreed that, so long as King Alfonso compensated them adequately for their efforts and that they were fed for the duration of the siege without having to draw on their own provisions, well then they would put their misgivings aside and join their fellow Crusaders. There were cheers all around at this outcome, with the chronicler even reporting that some Crusaders wept for joy.

Now that everyone was on board with the mission a formal charter was drawn up, setting out the terms of the campaign. In the words of Jonathan Phillips in his book "The Second Crusade", these were the terms agreed between King Alfonso and the Crusaders, and I quote "the Crusaders were allowed to sack the city of all its possessions and to capture and ransom the populace. Alfonso and his men would take none of these things. But once the city had been thoroughly despoiled it would be handed over to the King. If any of the Franks wished to stay, then he would apportion them lands according to their rank, retaining the position of overlord. All those present at the siege and their heirs were released from merchant tolls throughout his lands." End quote. As Jonathan Phillips notes, this was an extremely generous offer by King Alfonso, and the terms of the agreement served as an indication of just how much the King wanted the assistance of the Crusaders. Both sides to the agreement handed over hostages to the other party, and King Alfonso made a further pledge not to leave Lisbon for the duration of the siege.

With the formalities out of the way, the campaign to take Lisbon was ready to begin. At the urging of the clerics involved in the mission, it was determined that before hostilities commenced the Muslims ought to be given the opportunity to surrender Lisbon to the Christians. To that end, the Archbishop of Braga was chosen to lead a peace delegation into Lisbon. According to the chronicler, the Archbishop's appeal to the Muslims wasn't exactly a master-class in diplomacy. Archbishop John of Braga accused the Muslims of having stolen Lisbon and the surrounding regions 358 years ago, and pointed to the fact that the ruins of a couple of churches still stood inside Lisbon as testament to the truth of this claim. Since the Muslims had stolen Lisbon, the Archbishop declared that the Christians were justified in taking it back by force. The Archbishop then appealed to the ordinary citizens of Lisbon, urging them to leave the city with their possessions prior to the commencement of the siege. The Archbishop did offer though, that if the Muslims of Lisbon wished to remain after the Christians had taken the city, they could do so. While this sounds like a generous concession, Jonathan Phillips points out that it was in fact an economic necessity. Even if all the Crusaders had elected to remain in Lisbon following its conquest, there was simply not enough of them to provide the workforce and manpower needed to run the city. The Archbishop ended his speech with a threat. He pointed out that the Crusaders were greedy men who were keen to make their fortunes in the conquest of the city, and he urged all citizens who valued their lives to leave the city immediately.

Interestingly, much like the rules governing debates in modern times, the Muslims of Lisbon were given an opportunity to respond to the points made by the Christians. A Muslim elder was given this task and he provided a lengthy analysis of the Crusaders motives, describing them as wishing to attack Lisbon due to a combination of greed, pride, and mental instability. The Muslim elder conceded that Lisbon had once been in Christian hands, but stated that it was God's will that the city had passed from Christian ownership into that of the Muslims, and that it was God's will that the city continued to be governed by Muslims, a point evidenced by the fact that the Christians had attempted to take Lisbon on previous occasions without success. In fact, the Muslim elder concluded his speech by stating that it was up to God to decide whether the Christians or Muslims ought to govern the city, therefore, there was no point in debating the matter further. It was better if it was just left up to divine judgement.

The Bishop of Porto took it upon himself to rebut the arguments made by the Muslim elder. He conceded that previous attacks by the Christians had been unsuccessful in taking Lisbon, but that this was just a test of the willpower and motivation of the Christians. If the Crusaders were pure enough in their motives to receive divine favour, then they would succeed in taking Lisbon.

With the parley session having come to an end without surrender by the Muslims, the siege was ready to begin. Join me next time as we examine one of the most important events in the history of Portugal and of the wider Iberian peninsula, the siege of Lisbon. Until next time, bye for now.

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