

The History of the Crusades Podcast presents
Reconquista: The Rise of Al-Andalus and the Reconquest of Spain
Episode 71
The Kingdom of Portugal and the Second Crusade, Part 3

Hello again. Last time we discussed the lead up to the siege of Lisbon. After some debate, the Crusaders who had arrived in Lisbon all agreed to join King Alfonso I of Portugal in his mission to conquer the city, on quite generous terms. Once the city had been taken, King Alfonso and his forces would stand back and leave the Crusaders free to plunder and loot the city, which would then be handed over to Portugal. Any Crusaders who wished to remain in Lisbon after it had been conquered would be given land on the condition that they recognised King Alfonso as their overlord. In addition, all Crusaders who took part in the battle, and their descendants, would be exempt from having to pay merchant tolls anywhere inside the Kingdom of Portugal. At the end of the last episode we saw that an effort to convince the Muslims to surrender the city had failed, so the stage was set for the siege to commence.

Now, before we start the siege, we are going to zoom out a little and take a look at the city of Lisbon as it was in the year 1147. Lisbon is actually a very old city. In fact, according to Wikipedia, it's the second oldest city in Europe, after Athens. The city in the year 1147 centred around the citadel of St George or in Portuguese the "Castello de Sao Jorge", which was a fortification which had been built on top of a hill. The original citadel had expanded over the years, and by the year 1147 a set of extremely impressive city walls surrounded the base of the hill upon which the citadel stood, and ran down all the way to the water's edge. However, as we mentioned in the last episode, the population of Lisbon during the 1100's had spilled out beyond its walls, so there were a series of densely packed suburbs located outside the walls.

Recent archaeological excavations around the citadel have indicated that the Phoenicians likely settled the site as far back as 1200 BC, and it's not hard to see why the Phoenicians decided to set up camp there. The Phoenicians were a seafaring people, and really it's difficult to think of a better location for a port city than Lisbon. Being on the western coast of the Iberian peninsula, Lisbon provides a handy and safe anchorage for ships sailing out of the Mediterranean around to the northern parts of France, the British Isles, and the northern parts of continental Europe. The fact that the city is located at the mouth of the Tagus River means that it is protected from the worst of the weather coming in from the Atlantic Ocean, while the river also provides safe anchorage for ships as well as abundant fishing. The land in the region is fertile, and the fact that Lisbon was located on the top of a hill next to the estuary made it easy to defend. All in all, it's an absolutely perfect spot, and it wasn't just the Phoenicians who thought so.

The citadel of St George still exists today but it is absolutely dwarfed by the current city of Lisbon, which has grown to levels likely completely beyond the imagination of the people who were hanging around Lisbon in July of 1147 waiting for the siege to start. Today around 3 million people call Lisbon home, and the city has spread over to the other side of the estuary along both banks of the Tagus River and all the way across to the Atlantic Ocean coast. It's huge. It wasn't of course as huge back in 1147, but it was a massively important town. It was a thriving, busy commercial port which had served Al-Andalus well during the centuries in which it had been under Muslim control, and King Alfonso understandably wanted to annex it to the Kingdom of Portugal.

The combined Crusader and Portuguese attack on Lisbon commenced on the 1st of July 1147. The first objective was to capture the suburbs outside the city walls. Archers and small catapult machines were directed to fire into the suburbs, and towards the end of the first day the Muslim defenders had begun to retreat from one suburb, although the other districts were all being strongly defended. Commanders from the various Crusader groups met with King Alfonso and suggested that everyone withdraw from all of the suburbs for the night, then make a combined assault on the districts the following day.

However, according to Jonathan Phillips in his book "The Second Crusade", one of the Anglo-Norman commanders from the crusading forces, a man called Saher of Archelle decided that too many of his men were already heavily involved in hand to hand fighting in the suburb from which the Muslims had been retreating and would likely suffer heavy casualties if ordered to withdraw. So he ordered his own men and other Crusaders to join in the attack instead of retreating. The men were quickly blessed by the Bishop of Porto, then Saher led them into the suburb. After some heavy fighting the Crusaders began to gain the upper hand. Saher met with his fighters in a cemetery inside the suburb to regroup, then the fighting recommenced, with the Muslims being pushed all the way back to the city gates by the Crusader archers and knights. The suburb was then declared to be under Crusader control.

While some Crusaders began looting and some houses were set alight, Saher and his leadership team set up camp in the cemetery, deciding to spend the night there so they would be in position for the Muslim counterattack which they expected would take place the following morning. The following morning the Muslims did attack, but their attack was quelled with the assistance of royal Portuguese troops, and the Muslims eventually withdrew from the suburb. This first suburb taken by the Crusaders was seen as a victory for the Anglo-Normans, so this provided extra incentive for the Flemish and German Crusaders battling in adjacent suburbs to score their own victories. They did make inroads into the Muslim defences, and eventually most suburbs to the east and west of the city walls came under Crusader control.

It was while the Crusaders were in the process of looting the suburbs that they made a discovery which greatly enhanced their chances of succeeding in their overall campaign to take Lisbon. As we've previously stated, the population of Lisbon had spilled over its walls and space was at a premium inside the walled city. As a consequence, the city's large storehouses had been relocated into the suburbs, with the result that large quantities of wheat, barley, millet, and dried beans were now in Crusader hands, ensuring that they would not go hungry if the siege of the city dragged on.

While this was good news for the Crusaders, it was of course terrible news for the people of Lisbon. The population of the city was actually larger than usual. It seems that not many residents had heeded the Archbishop of Braga's warning to leave the city prior to the commencement of the siege, and the city's population had recently swelled due to an influx of refugees from Santarem, who had fled southwards to the safety of Lisbon when King Alfonso had attacked their town. People who had lived in the suburbs outside the walls had also by now made their way into the city, adding to the refugee population. And now the residents and refugees inside Lisbon were trapped inside the city without access to their supplies of grain.

The siege of Lisbon now began in earnest. The Crusader and Portuguese forces set up camp around the city and made sure that the residents were locked in tight. As the Crusaders began working on the construction of siege engines, groups of Muslim

attackers would occasionally burst out of one of the city's gates and engage the Crusaders in hand-to-hand fighting before being forced back inside the walls. A chronicler who was present at the siege reported that Muslims from the city would frequently shout insults down at the Crusaders, and attempt to divert them from their tasks by telling them that they should return back to their homelands as their wives were probably being unfaithful to them, while also mocking aspects of the Christian religion.

But the ploy didn't work. As the months passed, the besiegers toiled away, constructing some pretty impressive siege equipment. Four bridges were built, which could be lashed onto seven ships, meaning that the sea walls could be accessed by the Crusaders. The Anglo-Normans teamed up to build a siege tower which was an astonishing 95 feet high, while the Flemish Crusaders and the Rhinelanders made a giant ram, a small mobile tower, and some catapult machines. Unfortunately for the Flemish and Rhineland Crusaders though, when they brought their ram and catapults up next to the wall the Muslims set fire to various items and dropped them down upon the machines, managing to successfully burn every single one of them.

In early August, the giant Anglo-Norman siege tower was carefully manoeuvred close to the wall, only to become stuck in some sandy soil near the base of the wall. The Muslim defenders hurled their fiery items at the siege tower and bombarded it with stones using a catapult machine they had constructed high on the walls. With the Crusaders unable to pull the siege tower away from the wall and out of danger due to the fact that it had been bogged down in sand, after four days of concerted attacks it too burned to the ground, leaving the Crusaders to start building their siege equipment again from scratch.

Six weeks into the siege the food supplies inside Lisbon began to run low. Some residents began resorting to eating cats and dogs while others decided to surrender, leaving the city and pledging to convert to Christianity in return for their lives. While some converts were treated well by the Crusaders others weren't, with a chronicler reporting that some Crusaders refused to allow the residents to convert and instead cut off both their hands and sent them back inside the city.

The months passed, with various teams of Crusaders attempting to undermine the walls, without success, and others building siege engines which were destroyed by the defenders. Occasionally groups of bored Crusaders would go on raiding missions to nearby Muslim towns and fortresses, with some of these campaigns yielding large amounts of booty.

In October a couple of breakthroughs occurred. Over on the eastern side of the city walls, near the Flemish and German Crusader camps, the Flemish and Rhineland Crusaders completed work on an extensive and elaborate mine.

For those of you who haven't listened to the History of the Crusades podcast, or who need a refresher on the operation of mines in siege warfare, mines were tunnels dug underneath a defensive wall. The walls of the tunnels were held up by a timber framework. Once the mine was completed, the attackers would withdraw and set it on fire, causing the timber framework to burn and the tunnels to collapse, bringing down the wall above. As you might have guessed, mine digging was a dangerous and very strenuous occupation, but if it was executed successfully, undermining could breach a wall which had proven impervious to catapults and scaling.

Anyway, the mine dug by the Flemish and Rhinelander Crusaders was extremely impressive. It was described by Jonathan Phillips in his book "The Second Crusade" as a masterpiece. It had five separate entrances and had taken a month to build. At dawn on the 16th of October the tunnels inside the mine were set on fire, and the mine worked exactly as planned, with 200 feet of Lisbon's wall collapsing. The Muslim defenders of the town scrambled to shore up the defences, piling heavy beams across the gaps and filling it in with rubble from the wall. Unfortunately for the Crusaders, the area around this part of the wall was steep and difficult to access. The Anglo-Normans, whose camp was located on the western side of the city, raced over to join the attack but were told that they weren't allowed. This was a Flemish and German operation and only Flemish and German Crusaders were allowed to take part. In the end, it was all to no avail, with the Muslims successfully managing to repair the breach.

A few days later, the Anglo-Normans launched their major attack. While the Flemish and German Crusaders had been working on their mine, the Anglo-Normans had been working on another huge siege tower, financed by King Alfonso. This time, the Crusaders had come prepared for the Muslim defensive tactics. They had draped the tower with heavy matting and animal hides to protect it from bombardment, and had soaked the hides in water to prevent them from being burned. They also had a cunning plan in store. The plan was to roll the massive 83 foot tower over to one of the corner towers down near the water line. They would pretend to head towards the wall on the western side of the tower, then at the last minute they planned to swing the massive structure around the tower towards the sea section of the wall, where there happened to be a doorway in the tower which overlooked the western wall. The Muslim attackers massed on the western wall wouldn't have time to make it around to the doorway before the Crusaders emerged from their siege tower. Well, that was the plan, anyway.

On the 19th of October, the siege tower was manoeuvred over to the western side of the corner tower. The Muslim attackers saw what was taking place and put themselves into position along the western part of the wall, setting up catapult machines and preparing flammable projectiles to throw at the tower when it moved close enough. The following day, the Crusaders did start to move the tower up to the wall. The Muslims had begun their attack when the Crusaders performed their surprise manoeuvre, successfully swinging the giant tower over to the other side of the corner tower of the wall. As the Muslims scrambled to change position they were within range of the archers stationed on the upper levels of the siege tower. The archers managed to force the Muslims away from the wall, enabling the siege tower to be brought quite close to the wall.

By this time night was falling and it was decided to leave a contingent of guards around the siege tower, then resume the attack the next morning. However, there was one crucial piece of planning which the Crusaders had neglected. The giant siege tower was now stationed next to the sea wall of the city of Lisbon, and unfortunately the tide was coming in.

Join me next time for our final episode on the siege of Lisbon, as we see what takes place when the sea surrounds the Crusaders' siege tower. Until next time, bye for now.

This podcast is powered by Patreon. If you can spare \$1 per month and would like to support this podcast, go to patreon.com and search for "History of the Crusades", or go to our website, crusadespod.com, and click on the Patreon link. Your \$1 contribution will mean you get access to an extra episode every fortnight on topics related to the Crusades,

and it means that you are powering the History of the Crusades podcast. Thank you to all who have signed up so far.

End