

The Spanish Armada in Lisbon: preparing to invade England

The story of the Spanish Armada's attempt to overthrow Queen Elizabeth I in 1588 is well known. Less discussed is the fact that the fleet assembled in Lisbon before heading north to the English Channel and its fateful meeting with the English navy. This article considers the lengthy preparations carried out in Lisbon before the Armada sailed, including the disruptions caused to those preparations by Sir Francis Drake.

By Andrew Shepherd^{1,2}

Introduction

When Spain conquered Portugal in 1580, Philip II of Spain (Philip I of Portugal) significantly expanded his sphere of power, gaining control of the port of Lisbon and a small but strong Portuguese fleet. The Spanish fleet was commanded by Captain-General Don Alvaro de Bazan, Marquis of Santa Cruz, who supported the Duke of Alba's infantry in the conquest of Lisbon. Over the following two years, Santa Cruz developed Lisbon as a secure base. The narrow and difficult approach at the mouth of the Tagus was already defended by several forts and Santa Cruz upgraded their artillery, thereby providing a sheltered and well-defended port for a potentially large fleet. No other Atlantic port in Iberia could offer this combination of almost unlimited capacity with almost total security from both enemies and the weather. If ever required, it made a perfect base from which to mount an invasion.³



Lisbon in 1572

The only significant resistance to the Spanish was provided by the Azores, in support of the Pretender, the Prior of Crato. In 1582 the French sent a fleet under the command of Filippo Strozzi to help defend the islands. Similar to Sir Francis Drake, and many other naval captains of the time, Strozzi was both in the employ of a government and also a mercenary or privateer – in effect little more than a pirate. The French action resulted in the Spanish sending their own fleet to the Azores, under the command of

¹ My interest in this topic was inspired by reading Ken Follet's *A Column of Fire*, a well-researched novel about Europe during the time of Elizabeth I. Many thanks to my wife, Luiza, for having given me this as a 2020 Christmas present.

² Thanks are due to Curtis Stewart and Mark Crathorne for their assistance.

³ Martin, Colin John Mackenzie, 1984. *The Equipment and Fighting Potential of the Spanish Armada*. PhD Thesis. <http://hdl.handle.net/10023/10991>

Santa Cruz, the country's most experienced naval commander. The two fleets met 18 miles south of São Miguel Island, on 26 July. Despite Strozzi having 40 ships at his disposal, including nine English, compared with the 21 available to Santa Cruz, the battle resulted in a comprehensive victory for the Spaniards, although their fleet suffered considerable damage and had to limp back to Lisbon for repairs. In 1583, the Spaniards also captured the Portuguese base at Terceira. It was immediately after this victory that Santa Cruz wrote to Philip II making the first definite suggestion of the Spanish Armada, as he was convinced that it would be possible to defeat the English.^{4,5}

Although no English ships had been captured in 1582, Philip agreed that the victory at São Miguel showed that an English fleet could indeed be defeated, leading him to contemplate an invasion of the British Isles. Tension between Protestant England and Catholic Spain had been growing during the reign of Elizabeth I. English privateers, such as Sir Francis Drake, had been attacking Spanish ships, while the English had been supporting the Dutch Protestants in their revolt against Spanish rule. If Spain decided to invade England the threat presented would be considerable, as Spain was supported by the German Habsburgs and the Italian princes. Above all, Philip II regarded the invasion of England as a Crusade, a belief that was shared by Pope Sixtus V, who granted papal clemencies to those who participated, and permitted Philip to levy so-called 'Crusade taxes' to help finance the invasion.⁶

Queen Elizabeth ordered Drake to lead an expedition to attack the Spanish New World in 1585. In the early months of 1586 the fleet sacked Santo Domingo, Cartagena and St. Augustine in Florida. Drake returned to England in July as a national hero. In Spain, however, the news strengthened the case for a Spanish invasion and Philip II gave detailed orders and instructions to Santa Cruz, setting out every aspect of the operation. Recognising that Santa Cruz was probably the only man capable of organising and leading such an undertaking, Philip appointed him to an unprecedented Captain-Generalcy of all the oceans on 23 June, 1584. The Armada was to assemble at Lisbon, where the necessary ammunition and stores were to be loaded onto the ships. Anticipating the difficulties involved, Santa Cruz reacted cautiously, requesting an enormous navy to carry out the undertaking. As the Armada that Philip had at his disposition was inadequate to carry sufficient troops for an invasion, the plan was to meet up with the Duke of Parma, the Governor-General of the Low Countries, at Dunkirk, and escort 30,000 troops across the Channel in flat-bottomed boats that were to be constructed on Dunkirk beach.⁷

Marquis of Santa Cruz

Don Alvaro de Bazan, Marquis of Santa Cruz, was born in Granada in 1526. His early career was spent in the Mediterranean, fighting the French during the Fourth Hapsburg-Valois War, and also against the Ottoman Turks, and Algerian pirates, who were presenting a major threat to shipping in the Mediterranean. He was rewarded by being appointed Governor of Gibraltar in 1562, Captain of the Galleys of Naples in 1568, and Marquis of Santa Cruz in 1569. In 1571 he commanded the reserve fleet at the Battle of Lepanto, which was the last great battle fought between fleets of galleys, making a major contribution to the victory of the Holy League over the Ottomans. He was never defeated in a sea battle.⁸



The Marquis of Santa Cruz

⁴ Portuguese Armada Fleet 1588. <https://weaponsandwarfare.com/2016/05/21/portuguese-armada-fleet-1588-i/>

⁵ Silveira, Maria Cristina and Carlos Silveira, 1968. *A alimentação na "Armada Invencível"*.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322609260_A_alimentacao_na_Armada_Invencivel

⁶ Spanish Armada sets sail from Lisbon. Information Britain. <https://www.information-britain.co.uk/famdates.php?id=533>

⁷ Silveira, op cit

⁸ Rickard, J, *Alvaro de Bazan, Marquis of Santa Cruz, 1526-1588*,

http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/people_santa_cruz_alvaro.html

Development of the fleet

Early in 1586, Philip II instructed Santa Cruz to submit plans for an invasion of England. Santa Cruz submitted his proposals at the end of March. These were not presented as a strategic plan, but rather as a detailed breakdown of the resources that would be required. Nevertheless, his intentions were clear. The Armada was to be developed in Lisbon and launched from there as a single task force. The objective was to land a strong army in the Thames estuary, together with all the support services required. Santa Cruz envisaged landing 55,000 troops, and believed that he would need 150 ships to achieve this and defend the Armada. The whole force, including sailors, oarsmen, and gentlemen-adventurers, would amount to 94,222 men, which needed to be provided with enormous supplies of food, horse fodder, drinking water and wine, as well as ammunition and other items such as tents, packs, shoes and water canteens – all of which were to be supplied from Seville. Santa Cruz was of the opinion that a further 40 large vessels would be needed to transport all these supplies, as well as tenders to ferry items from the supply ships to the main Armada. It was clear that the cost of all of these ships and support services was way beyond King Philip's financial capacity. In his analysis of the proposals made by Santa Cruz, Martin (1984) states that it was likely that Santa Cruz was deliberately overestimating his requirements, as both a form of negotiation and as a potential excuse were the venture to fail, in which case he could argue that he had not been given the necessary resources for the venture.⁹

Santa Cruz was empowered to requisition whatever shipping, be it Spanish or foreign, that he considered necessary. The bulk of the ships comprising the Armada were not purpose-built fighting ships, for although it was recognised that a naval battle would be inevitable, the main purpose of the Armada was to transport troops to invade England. In reality, the "Armada" was made up of several smaller armadas under separate command. In addition to the Portuguese galleons captured in 1580, the proposed Armada included an group of *Galeaças* from Naples, 14 Basque ships, and a Castilian fleet of 14 medium-sized galleons, which were routinely used for transport between Spain and the Americas.

It is generally agreed that the final decision to proceed with the Armada's voyage was taken in 1586, when the Portuguese galleons were ready after having been refitted.¹⁰ According to most historians, the main reason for Philip II's confidence in the outcome of the campaign was the presence of the Portuguese ships. However, in effect, only the nine Portuguese galleons, and, to a lesser extent, those of Castile, together with four galleys manned by convict oarsmen and four galleasses¹¹ from Naples, could really be described as fighting ships. Furthermore, the Genoese galleys and many of the private vessels in the Armada were built for Mediterranean conditions and thus proved unsuitable for the Atlantic, apart from having little space to carry troops.¹² In the Mediterranean, these merchant ships used to sail before the wind, dealing with adverse winds by simply anchoring and waiting for the wind to shift. They were thus at a great disadvantage when it came to sailing north from Lisbon against the wind. Galleys, propelled by oars, also proved to be unsuitable for the rougher seas of the Atlantic.

In general terms, the majority of the warships in the Armada, be they galleons or armed merchant vessels, were mostly carracks, built with a high rounded stern, with a large aftcastle, forecastle and bowsprit. Some of these ships were built in the ports of the Hanseatic League in the Baltic, and their structure made them less manoeuvrable and responsive in combat than the English navy vessels and many of the English privateer craft.¹³ The English possessed an additional advantage, which was to prove decisive off Calais. Spanish guns were mounted on two-wheeled gun carriages, which were usually tied to the side of the ship to absorb recoil. This made them difficult to reload, with the gunners often having to reload by straddling the barrel, being exposed to enemy fire. Merchant ships were often armed with cannons, which in many cases originated from fortresses, resulting in a slow rate of fire, often no greater than one shot per gun per hour, whereas English guns, mounted on four-wheeled

⁹ Martin, op cit

¹⁰ *A Derrota Da Invencível Armada*. <https://docplayer.com.br/80799954-A-derrota-da-invencivel-armada.html>

¹¹ A vessel that combined the features of an oar-propelled galley with some of the sails and the artillery of a galleon.

¹² *Winds of Change: Defeat of the Spanish Armada, 1588*. Landsat Science, NASA.

<https://landsat.gsfc.nasa.gov/article/winds-change-defeat-spanish-armada-1588>

¹³ *The Spanish Armada*. <https://www.britishbattles.com/the-spanish-war/the-spanish-armada/>

carriages, were able to be drawn inboard for reloading and could fire three or four shots per hour.¹⁴ Most of the sailors were Portuguese, despite being commanded by Spaniards, which generated dissatisfaction, as the Portuguese, still unaccustomed to the consequences of the enforced union with Spain, did not feel comfortable fighting on ships of their country under the command of Spaniards.¹⁵



The Armada in Lisbon

The final Armada had 132 vessels, more than 20,000 troops, 8,000 sailors, and 2,500 guns. This was significantly less than the original proposal of Santa Cruz, as he had reluctantly agreed with the plan to meet up with the Duke of Parma and his troops around Dunkirk. According to Martin, there were two persuasive arguments for this: first, it would have been almost impossible to find sufficient troops to join the Armada in Lisbon without weakening other defences and, second, the fighting force that had been developed by the Duke of Parma in Flanders was second to none. Offsetting this decision, however, was the difficulty of coordinating a meeting of the two forces and the real dangers of transporting soldiers in flat-bottomed boats across the English Channel, unless it was calm.¹⁶

Intelligence from English spies

The task of Elizabeth I's 'spymaster', Sir Francis Walsingham, was to protect the Queen, not only from plots inside England, but also from the danger of invasion. Captured privateers were one source of information about the Armada's preparations and Walsingham also ran a network of spies throughout Europe. One of these, Antony Standen, made friends with the Tuscan ambassador to Madrid and reported that the four Genoese galleys had already been sent to Spain. Standen then recruited a Flemish spy to travel to Lisbon, probably in 1586, and he sent regular reports about the gradual expansion of the Armada. As a consequence, a list of all the ships, men and supplies available to Spain was in

¹⁴ *Portuguese Armada Fleet 1588*, op cit

¹⁵ *A Derrota da Armada do Imperio Espanhol*. Marinha de Guerra Portuguesa.

<http://marinhadeguerraportuguesa.blogspot.com/2014/09/conflitos-da-renascenca-seculo-xvi-i.html?m=1>

¹⁶ Martin, op cit

Walsingham's hands sometime in 1587. This spy's information also made it clear that the Armada would not be ready to sail in 1587, which enabled England to spend more time on building up its fleet.¹⁷

It was impossible to keep secret the recruitment of troops and the enormous quantity of supplies that were being gathered in Lisbon. In early 1587, other intelligence reached London regarding the extent of Spain's preparations. The first report came from a merchant from Danzig, who had counted 300 ships in Portugal and southern Spain. He reported that "*they have taken up all the victuals in every ship that comes out of Holland or the [Baltic], both bacon and beef, butter and cheese and whatsoever else*". The second was sent by a Portuguese citizen in France, who knew a fellow countryman who was provisioning the Spanish fleet. The report spoke of 400 ships and 50 galleys docked in and around Lisbon. He estimated the quantities of biscuit, bacon, wine, beef, and hard cheese that had been purchased by the Spaniards.¹⁸

"Singeing the King of Spain's beard"

Learning of such reports, Sir Francis Drake argued for urgent action, believing that a pre-emptive strike on the Spanish fleet was vital to buy time for the English defences to be strengthened. It was suggested to the Queen that Drake should be sent to Spain, on the face of it to support the Prior of Crato, but, in reality, to destroy as much enemy shipping as he could or, at worst, to disrupt the invasion plans. After some wavering, Queen Elizabeth agreed to Drake's mission on 25 March 1587, ordering Drake "*to prevent or withstand any enterprise as might be attempted against her Highnesses dominions*". Exactly how this was to be achieved was not stated. However, it was clear that the objective was to prevent the various parts of the Armada from coming together in Lisbon. Queen Elizabeth agreed to contribute four of her own warships, with the rest of the fleet being supplied by London merchants in the hope that the voyage would be a profitable one. However, even with these clear instructions, the fleet came close to not setting sail, as more cautious counsel in London apparently persuaded the Queen to tone down her instructions after Drake had left for Plymouth to make preparations. Suspecting that this might happen, Drake rushed to set sail and his fleet had left Plymouth by the time the new instructions reached there.¹⁹

Instead of striking at heavily defended Lisbon, Drake bypassed the Portuguese capital and headed for Cadiz. En route to Lisbon he had intercepted two Dutch merchant ships, and these had reported a large concentration of ships getting ready to provision the Armada in Cadiz. Although Lisbon was to be the base from which the Armada would ultimately sail, activity at first centred on Cadiz, which possessed extensive facilities that were routinely used to fit out and supply fleets headed for South America. Supplies could easily be brought down from Seville on the Guadalquivir River. Even though the port was less secure than Lisbon, it was well defended with forts and artillery, and also by a squadron of galleys. On Drake's arrival, around 60 vessels were in the harbour.²⁰

¹⁷ Antony Standen, *alias Pompeo Pellegrini*. Secrets and Spies.

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/spies/spies/standen/default.htm>

¹⁸ *Drake's Attack on Cadiz*. Weapons and War. <https://weaponsandwarfare.com/2018/04/17/drakes-attack-on-cadiz-1587/>

¹⁹ Corbett, Julian S. *The Spanish War, 1585-1587*. Navy Records Society, 1898.

<https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/bitstream/handle/1774.2/34291/31151027490477.pdf>

²⁰ Martin, *op cit*.

The English fleet arrived at Cadiz on the afternoon of 29 April, 1587. Against opposition from some of his captains, Drake ordered the fleet to immediately enter the harbour in order to maintain the necessary element of surprise. Quickly sinking a Genoese merchant vessel and two galleys, Drake's forces then began to attack the ships at anchor, which were unable to react as most of their crews were ashore. The English continued their attacks the next day, despite the Spanish use of onshore artillery and fireships.²¹ Although the pickings were disappointing for a privateer such as Drake, the English succeeded in destroying large quantities of barrel staves, which was to prove crucial as the Armada left Lisbon with too few barrels of food and drink, with some of the barrels being made from unsuitable wood. Around 30 Spanish ships were destroyed, including a galleon belonging to Santa Cruz, for the loss of one English ship. Drake was to refer to the event as the "*Singeing of the King of Spain's beard*". After this attack, he proceeded to raid several ports along the Portuguese Coast. On 5 May he plundered Sagres and destroyed most of the fortress, playing a leading role in the fighting himself. He then occupied Cape St. Vincent, near Sagres, the most south-westerly point of Portugal. This enabled him both to rest his sailors and also to disrupt coastal shipping between Cadiz and Lisbon. He also destroyed the Algarve's tuna fishing vessels, on which the Armada mainly depended for its supply of salted fish.^{22,23}



Sir Francis Drake

Drake on the Tagus

After "*singeing the King of Spain's beard*" and pillaging the Algarve coast, Drake next appeared at the entrance to Lisbon. The purpose of this seems unclear, although it enabled him to obtain an intimate knowledge of the Tagus bar and the defences of the port, on which he would justify his refusal to attack the city when he was to return to Portugal with his own Armada in 1589.²⁴ By 1587, Lisbon was probably the most powerfully defended port in the world. In the apology for his conduct of the 1589 campaign, which Drake had written for him by Petruccio Ubaldino, the Florentine historian, he presented a detailed account of the entrances to Lisbon as they then were. There was a good anchorage outside the Tagus but it was overlooked by the Citadel of Cascais. Some seven miles to the east, and immediately opposite the northern end of the Tagus sand bar, lay St. Julian's fort, with the main channel to enter the Tagus passing right next to it. Indeed, the full name of the fort is *São Julião da Barra*. The Tagus bar was dangerous, and thus ships usually took special pilots to navigate each section of it. The only way to avoid St Julian's was to enter by the southern channel, but this was even more dangerous than the northern one, and was also defended, by the *Torre Viejo* fort. If ships were successful in passing through one of these two channels, they then came across the *Torre de Belém* fort, which at the time was situated on a rocky island. Beyond this, where the river opened out into the port of Lisbon, were situated the batteries of the city itself. In addition to these and the guns of the ships already waiting to sail in the Armada, several galleys attached to the port of Lisbon were in operation.²⁵

When Drake anchored in Cascais Bay on 10 May 1587, Santa Cruz was in St. Julian's fort, commanding in person, with seven galleys at his disposition. The wind dropped completely, giving the Spanish the

²¹ Old ships set alight and pointed in the direction of the enemy.

²² https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortaleza_de_Sagres

²³ Mason, A.E.W., *The Life of Francis Drake*. Hodder and Stoughton. London, 1941.

²⁴ Vaz, João and Luis Falcão da Fonseca. *Sir Francis Drake and the Poor King D. António: The Portugal Voyage of 1589*. British Historical Society of Portugal Annual Report 23. 1996. <https://www.bhsportugal.org/library/articles/sir-francis-drake-and-the-poor-king-d-antonio-the-portugal-voyage-of-1589>

²⁵ Corbett, op cit

opportunity to attack the English. However, Santa Cruz gave no orders, apparently on the instructions of Philip II. Perhaps the Cadiz experience was still fresh in his mind? Drake's own vessels hunted down every small commercial ship they could find, but according to Drake's account, Santa Cruz did not even fire one cannon shot. As Santa Cruz refrained from sending out his vessels to fight, and as Drake could not sail in, Drake attempted to arrange an exchange of prisoners, at the same time demanding to know whether Philip II intended to wage war against England that same year. Santa Cruz replied that he held no English prisoners, and that the King was not planning for war that year. The English believed both statements to be false, even though the second was certainly true – as Santa Cruz had no intention of setting sail before he was ready, whatever the King may have ordered. Drake spent the next day attacking more commercial shipping in the estuary, still without any response from Santa Cruz. In the evening a northerly wind began to blow, and being certain that he lacked the vessels to attack Lisbon, and knowing that his crews were crippled by disease, Drake left and headed south, back to Cape St. Vincent, where the crews were able to briefly recuperate and where he was well-positioned to prevent ships from the Mediterranean joining up with the Armada. One consequence of this was that Philip II instructed the troops earmarked for the Armada to march to Lisbon, rather than go by ship.^{26,27,28}

Drake next headed for the Azores, acting on intelligence about the return from the East Indies, via Mozambique, of the *San Felipe*, “*the greatest ship in all Portugal, richly laden, to our happy joy and great gladness*”. The ship was captured with little difficulty, and was found to contain hundreds of tons of spices and precious gums, chests of china, bales of silks and velvets, and also bullion and jewels. When Drake arrived home on 26 June, 1587, less than three months after setting out, the contents were valued at close to £100,000.²⁹ In addition, he discovered documents on board about the long-kept secrets of Portugal's East India trade. Meanwhile, back in Lisbon, Santa Cruz, unaware of Drake's return home, headed to the Azores to protect the homecoming of a fleet of vessels returning from South America laden with gold, which was essential for Philip II to pay his debts to Lombardy's bankers.³⁰

Drake's decision to return to England was probably dictated by his wish to enjoy the spoils of war, but also by the sickness among his sailors. This decision did, however, permit Santa Cruz to finalise the Armada in Lisbon by bringing together in safety a fleet of 70 vessels that had been waiting in Mediterranean ports and in Seville. These arrived on 4 August, 1587. The assembled Armada was now close to its final strength.

Delayed departure

Although the Armada was planned to leave in 1587, Drake's activities in Cadiz and Cape St. Vincent delayed its preparations. Furthermore, strong winds damaged several vessels and an outbreak of the plague spread through the ships anchored in Lisbon, with the exception of the Portuguese galleons, which had kept their crews ashore. Further delays were caused by the inability of Philip II to make decisions, and his many political and financial problems, which meant that Santa Cruz was unable to fully fit out his fleet after Cadiz. The voyage by Santa Cruz to the Azores also delayed matters. By the time the Armada was more or less ready to sail, as winter approached, Santa Cruz was unwilling to leave Lisbon, proposing to the King that the departure be delayed until the middle of February, 1588. The independence shown by Santa Cruz eventually offended the king, who held him responsible for the delays.

The death of Santa Cruz and the appointment of Medina Sidonia

On 9 February, 1588, the sudden death of Santa Cruz left the Armada rudderless. His death is said to have been accelerated by the unjustified criticism by the King. Five days later, Philip II named Don Alonso Perez de Guzman el Bueno, 7th Duke of Medina Sidonia, to take his place. For many, including

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ *Invincible Armada (Portugal) 1588*. World of Warships. <https://forum.worldofwarships.eu/topic/2463-Invincible-Armada-Portugal-1588/>

²⁸ Mason, *op cit*

²⁹ <https://archive.org/details/sirfrancisdrakes00lengrich/page/50/mode/2up>

³⁰ Corbett, *op cit*

Medina Sidonia himself, the choice was mystifying and he begged the king to be excused.³¹ Historians continue to discuss why he was selected. Lacking in military experience, it appears that he may have been chosen because he was not too proud to take the advice of the admirals and was prepared to play second fiddle to the Duke of Parma. Rivalries between the army and the navy meant that the new commander had to be selected from outside the armed forces. The Armada had also attracted a large number of illustrious and titled Spaniards and it was necessary for the leader of the fleet to outrank them all. Medina Sidonia was Spain's premier Duke. Other historians suspect that Philip II did not have a particularly high regard for Medina Sidonia, with at least one suggesting that he got the job because the king once had a relationship with his mother-in-law.³² Whatever the reason, Medina Sidonia found himself hurrying to Lisbon in the middle of February.³³



Contemporary English translation of Medina Sidonia's orders for the Armada. The illustration is of a Portuguese galleon

Food supplies

Long-term stockpiling of provisions for the fleet was crucial. At that time, Europe enjoyed few food surpluses in warehouses that were ready to be purchased. Accordingly, the vast quantities required to supply the Armada would have been difficult to obtain if procurement had been left until the last minute. Balancing this, however, was the fact that the longer foodstuffs were kept in Lisbon, or on board the ships, the more likely they were to rot, which is exactly what happened. Precisely how much food was carried by the Armada when it left Lisbon is known: 110,000 quintals³⁴ of biscuit, 11,117 barrels of wine, about 10,000 barrels of water, 6,000 quintals of bacon, 3,000 quintals of cheese, 6,000 quintals of fish, and 4,000 quintals of rice. Fodder for the large number of horses carried was also required. Documents mention that biscuits were rationed at the rate of half a quintal per person, per month (around 800 gm per person per day) and therefore should have lasted for more than six months. The wine was planned to last for six months, the bacon for five, the cheese for three, the fish for four, and the rice for six months. However, even before the Armada reached Corunna, some of the supplies were being

³¹ *The Spanish Armada*, op cit

³² *The Appointment of the Duke of Medina Sidonia to the Command of the Spanish Armada*. Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/historical-journal/article/abs/i-the-appointment-of-the-duke-of-medina-sidonia-to-the-command-of-the-spanish-armada/57D44DBA1586BBCC60831920BB06F7EF>

³³ Martin, op cit

³⁴ A quintal was 46 kg. Thus, there were 5060 tonnes of bread, 184 tonnes of rice, 276,000 kgs each of bacon and fish, and 138,000 kgs of cheese,

jettisoned as they were already rotten. It appears that the reasons for this were the lengthy delays in Lisbon harbour, together with the damage caused by Drake's Cadiz mission, which resulted in the Armada using casks made from badly cured wood, which was easily permeable. According to Silveira, the official responsible for provisions had warned Medina Sidonia of the poor condition of the food, but he had chosen to believe the sellers, who had assured him there were no problems. A further problem experienced during battle was that Medina Sidonia had ordered foodstuffs to be removed from the main fighting galleons, because they were overloaded. The food was to be carried by supporting caravels, who would, in theory, ferry supplies to the galleons. Thus, if the sailors did not suffer because the food had gone off, they suffered from hunger for lack of supplies.³⁵

Portuguese farmers benefited little from the purchases of the Armada. The biscuits were sourced from Sicily and Naples, as wheat was cheaper there. Over 200 ovens were constructed to make the biscuits. These ovens were supposed to function from November 1587 to March 1588 to complete the order. The wine was purchased in Naples, although it was originally from Greece, as Greek wine was known to not go off as rapidly as Italian wines, as it had a higher alcohol content, which had the added advantage that less was needed to be carried aboard. Bacon came from Malaga, and cheese from Majorca, Sardinia and Naples, which was carried in 20 Hamburg "hulks", rice from Valencia and Salerno, and olive oil from at least four locations. Tuna was supplied by Medina Sidonia, although the contract would have been issued before he took control of the fleet. Other products purchased included broad beans, chickpeas, anchovies, vinegar, and garlic. Nearly all the supplies thus came from the Mediterranean, emphasising the importance of the attack on Cadiz and the presence of Drake's ships at Cape St. Vincent.³⁶



A Hamburg "Hulk" or Urca

Spiritual needs

While the ships of the Armada sat in Lisbon harbour being loaded with munitions and other supplies, and awaiting sailing orders from the King, the sailors and soldiers who were to head to England went in search of "divine protection". The Jesuit priests of São Roque were fully occupied hearing confessions, but even though they remained in the confessionals from "morning until night, they could not satisfy their devotion". To attend to those who could not leave their posts, some priests went aboard the vessels of the Armada. The Society of Jesus in Lisbon also sent five priests (and three brothers) to join the twelve Spanish priests already with the Armada, who were accommodated on dry land by the Jesuits while they were waiting for the Armada to sail. As the ships finally left, the Jesuit Provincial encouraged his priests to keep up with their prayers and flagellations to achieve victory over heresy.³⁷

On 25 April, 1588, the Cardinal Archduke Albert of Habsburg, the King's nephew, joined Medina Sidonia at Lisbon Cathedral (the Sé) to bless the royal standards for the Armada campaign, following a ceremony similar to that used prior to the successful Battle of Lepanto in 1571. The pair led a procession to the monastery of São Domingos, with "all of the illustrious nobility of all Spain", with the Archbishop

³⁵ Silveira, op cit

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ Brockey, Liam. *Jesuit Pastoral Theater on an Urban Stage: Lisbon, 1588-1593*.

https://www.academia.edu/1531414/Jesuit_Pastoral_Theater_on_an_Urban_Stage_Lisbon_1588_1593

of Lisbon carrying the Dominicans' own relic of the True Cross. As the fleet was about to sail, city-wide processions were organized by both the Dominicans and the Franciscans.³⁸

Departure and problems

The Armada left on 28 May, 1588 but immediately ran into problems, because a storm blew up and headwinds pushed the ships to the western coast of the Algarve. Eventually managing to head in the right direction, the fleet moved northwest, with the first arrivals reaching the port of Corunna on 18 June. Five days later there were still 28 ships out of port at the mercy of yet another violent storm. Learning of these difficulties, an English fleet under Lord Howard left Plymouth on 18 July to attempt to attack the Armada at Corunna. However, this also encountered poor wind conditions. Returning to Plymouth, Howard left several ships at the entrance to the English Channel to warn of the Armada's arrival. On June 10, Medina-Sidonia had already sent a letter to Philip II informing him that there had been a need to jettison a large part of the supplies as they were rotten, having been on board for such a long time, and requesting new supplies to be made available at Corunna. While in Corunna, he wrote again, informing the King that the Armada was not suitable for the intended purpose. His letter was ignored. The Spaniards finally left Corunna on July 23, leaving behind a few ships, including the one that carried doctors and nurses and hospital supplies.



The Armada battling the English in the English Channel

Conclusions

The threat that England faced in 1588 was a very real one. If the original plan proposed by Santa Cruz for a large, self-contained force from Lisbon had been accepted, the Armada would have had a good chance of success. But Philip II's insistence on using the Duke of Parma's army, with a smaller Armada to escort it across the Channel in barges, gave rise to insuperable difficulties. As an armed convoy, the Armada might indeed have proved invincible, but as a battle-fleet it was not well-equipped to succeed.

The decision to use Lisbon as a base for preparing the Armada was a wise one from a tactical point of view. Had somewhere like Corunna been used, the British navy might have been able to destroy the fleet before it had even set off. But the choice of Portugal's capital highlighted the relative poverty of the country in the late 16th century, in that it was totally incapable of meeting the requirements of the

³⁸ *ibid*

fleet in terms of food and other supplies. The need to purchase food from all around the Mediterranean laid Spanish vessels open to attack, such as that by Drake in Cadiz, and also meant that much of the food on board was beyond its shelf life, even before the Armada set off to face its defeat in the Channel.

The use of Lisbon as a base also underlines the historic reason for the ancient Anglo-Portuguese alliance. English rulers recognized that if the Iberian Peninsula was united under a strong and belligerent Spanish regime with access to the port of Lisbon, then England would be threatened. The Alliance prevented such a combination from emerging, by keeping the Peninsula divided and by maintaining Lisbon in friendly hands. The sailing of the Armada from Lisbon would likely have been an important lesson when England and Portugal came to re-establish the Alliance following the restoration of Charles II.



The last of a series of maps by Robert Adams showing the route of the Armada through the English Channel, which appeared in *Expeditionis Hispanorum in Angliam vera descriptio. Anno Do: M D LXXXVIII*. The Armada is grouped to the northeast of the British.³⁹

³⁹ <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g5751sm.grb00001?r=0.142,0.25,0.696,0.416,0>