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The Capture of Almeria and Tortosa

By Caffaro

This account of the Genoese expedition to Spain during the Second Crusade was written very soon after the events in question. The author, Caffaro di Rustico (1080-c.1164), was one of the leading men of Genoa, who served as one of the consuls of the city six times between 1122 and 1149, and who as consul commanded a naval expedition to Minorca in 1146. He also acted as the city's ambassador on a number of occasions, notably to the First Lateran Council of 1123 and to Frederick Barbarossa's Diet of Roncaglia in 1158, where he refused the emperor's demand for hostages and tribute from the city. He was a prolific historian, the author of the Genoese annals from 1099 up to 1163, and of 'The Liberation of the Cities of the East', a manifesto recounting the Genoese contribution to the conquest of the Holy Land which was submitted to Pope Adrian IV in 1155. His 'Annals', formally presented to the consuls and the commune in 1152, became the basis for the official history of the city, continued by a number of other authors until 1294.

Of the two cities captured by this expedition, the Genoese sold their share of Tortosa to the Count of Barcelona in 1153, and the town was subsequently incorporated within the kingdom of Aragon. However, Almeria was an isolated enclave within Muslim territory, too far to the south to be defensible when Spain was invaded by the Almohads, members of a fundamentalist Berber movement from North Africa, and the city was recovered by the Muslims in 1157. Furthermore this expedition and the cost of defending Almeria seriously strained Genoese finances, to such an extent that there was something of a social and political crisis in the city during the early 1150s.

*For the author and his work, see Richard Face, 'Secular history in twelfth-century Italy: Caffaro of Genoa', *Journal of Medieval History*, vi (1980), 169-84. There is also, however, an incomplete verse account of the capture of Almeria from the Spanish point of view, that lays far less stress on the Genoese contribution, and which forms a postscript to the 'Chronicle of the Emperor Alfonso', a contemporary history that may have been written by Bishop Arnaldo of Astorga (1144-52). This is*

translated in Simon Barton & Richard Fletcher, The World of El Cid. Chronicles of the Reconquest (Manchester 2000), pp. 250-63. For the long-term significance of Almeria, see B. Gari, 'Why Almeria? An Islamic port in the compass of Genoa', Journal of Medieval History, xviii (1992), 211-31.

This text has been translated from Annali Genovesi di Caffaro e de'suoi continuatori, i, ed. L.T. Belgrano (Fonti per la storia d'Italia, Rome 1890), 79-89, by G.A. Loud © (2007).

Here begins the History of the Capture of Almeria and Tortosa which were taken in the year of Our Lord 1147.

It is known to almost the whole world how formerly and for a long time Christians were captured by the Saracens of Almeria, far and wide, by land and sea, and through many regions. Some were killed, and many were placed in prison and afflicted with various torments and punishments, as a result of which many for fear of suffering abandoned the law of God and called upon the diabolical name of Mahomet. As a result, however, God did not fail to exact revenge for the effusion of so much blood.¹ For the Genoese were advised and summoned by God, through the Apostolic See, and they made an oath [to send] an army against the Saracens of Almeria, and they held a parliament in which six consuls were elected from among the better sort for the commune and four more for the pleas of the city, through whose wisdom and leadership the city and the army would be ruled at this time. So impressive were the character, behaviour and eloquence of these men the entire motherland was guided by their sense and leadership. Their names were Oberto Torre, Filippo di Platealonga, Balduino and Ansaldo Doria. These four, and two of the consuls of the pleas, Ingo and Ansaldo Pizo, went to lead the host. Oglerio di Guidone and Guglielmo Picamilio, along with Oberto the chancellor and Ugo, judge of the pleas, remained to rule the city. Immediately after their election the aforesaid consuls held a parliament in which they ordered everyone who was in dispute to swear [to observe] peace. At

¹ Almeria is on the southern coast of Spain, about 180 km. E of Malaga. The piratical ravages of the people of Almeria were also stressed by 'The Chronicle of the Emperor Alfonso', *The World of El Cid*, p. 248, but there were in addition commercial imperatives which Caffaro does not mention. Almeria was the principal port for Cordoba, the traditional capital of Islamic Spain, and its possession would give the Genoese a base for penetrating the markets of Al-Andalus, Gari, 'Why Almeria?', pp. 221-2.

the prompting of the Holy Spirit all those who were at war promptly made peace as the consuls and archbishop wished, and kissed each other. As a result both men and women greatly rejoiced, so that they agreed unanimously to the consuls receiving funding for the army. After hearing the precept of God and ascertaining the will of the people, the consuls ordered all the men of the *contado* of Genoa, under oath, speedily to provide for themselves everything that was necessary for the expedition: abundant food to avoid want, many weapons and fine tents, beautiful and impressive banners and everything else that would be needed for such a project, as well as towers (*castella*), machines and all sorts of devices for the capture of the city. Once the warriors of the city had heard the consuls' instructions, they furnished themselves with arms, tents and everything that was needed, so that no army as great, fine and well equipped had been seen or heard of in the last thousand years. Then, after everything had been made ready as we have described, they started their journey with sixty-three galleys and one hundred and sixty-three other vessels. Everything had been prepared and the journey was begun within five months.

After they had come at Porto Maone, the consul Balduino then went ahead to Almeria with fifteen galleys as an advance guard until the fleet should arrive as a body. The Genoese arrived at Cape de Gata but not finding the 'emperor' ² they waited there for a month in a state of great fear, since they were outside the port. They sent Ottone di Bonovillano as an envoy to the 'emperor', who was at Baeza. The latter had given his army permission to depart, and had with him no more than four hundred knights and a thousand infantry. ³ When he heard that the Genoese fleet had arrived, he was sorry that he had given his knights license [to go home]. He told them to come [once more] but he made a delay. Meanwhile the Saracens of Almeria rejoiced, and sortied from the city with fifteen galleys seeking battle. The consul Balduino, who was on guard with his galleys, then ordered his companions, namely Oberto Torre and Filippo and Ansaldo Doria, to come and make war against

² King Alfonso VII of Castile (1126-57), who claimed to be Emperor of all Spain., had concluded an alliance with Genoa in September 1146, to the effect that they would jointly besiege Almeria in the following May, and contributing 10,000 *marobotini* towards the costs of outfitting the Genoese fleet, *Codice diplomatico della repubblica di Genova dal dcclviii al mclxiii*, ed. C. Imperiale di Sant'Angelo (Fonti per la storia d'Italia, Rome 1936), 204-9 nos. 146-7. In fact the attack took place in August 1147, and Almeria was captured on 17th October.

³ The troops sent home may well have been those of the urban militias, whose term of service had expired after the capture of Baeza.

Almeria. These companions were unhappy about [doing] this, until some troops should arrive. Meanwhile the Count of Barcelona came with a great ship, bringing soldiers with him, including fifty-three mounted knights.⁴ They sent a message to Balduino that he should arrive at the mosque with his galleys at daybreak and make a demonstration of wishing to do battle, so that the Saracens should leave the city for this, for the count and his knights would be at the river at dawn, on land. The fifteen galleys would be outside the Lena [River] and one galley would be stationed at the mouth of the Lena. After the Saracens came out to fight, that galley would give the signal to the knights and the fifteen [other] galleys. And so it was done.

Once the Saracens saw the men from the fifteen galleys going ashore, apparently intent on doing battle, they were afraid that there were others hiding in secret. Thus they sent two soldiers, one white and one black, to climb up onto a hillock and reconnoitre the surrounding area. They did not spot the soldiers who were in hiding, and so they made a signal with flags for the Saracens to sortie from the city and come to do battle. Forty thousand armed men promptly emerged and began to fight with the men from the fifteen galleys. The Genoese then boarded the galleys and remained there, with eight of their men being killed. Meanwhile the consul Ansaldo Doria, on the one galley that was on watch, made the signal, even though it was not at the proper time. Twenty-five galleys and the knights all set off as one, and these galleys came across others, took them along with them and acted in unison. The consuls Oberto Torre and Philipppo, who were off Capo de Gata, set sail with the whole fleet. They sailed forwards with twelve galleys as a vanguard, while on land the knights [marched off]. These twelve galleys made contact with the others which were at the mosque, and they moved forwards to the coast. The knights then encountered the Saracens who had left the city, and fortified by Divine assistance, they manfully attacked them. For fear of the galleys the Saracens wished to turn back, and they started to retreat towards the city, with the knights following them. Among the latter was a certain Genoese knight, called Guglielmo Pellis, who charged ahead of the others without the count's permission. First of all he killed a Saracen who was in the front rank with his lance; and then like a lion tearing with his claws at the bodies of lesser beasts he slew many others, severing the Saracens' heads all along

⁴ Ramón Berenguer IV (1131-62).

the coast by Almeria. The aforesaid consuls promptly went ashore with the men from one galley to fight the Saracens, and the men who manned the galleys near the mosque also landed. They and the knights killed more than five thousand Saracens and left them laying dead along the shore. The galleys that were out to sea also joined the battle and they killed the Saracens fleeing to seaward. After accomplishing this, the consuls ordered both the galley crews and the soldiers to go to the Porta Lena, which they did, pitching their tents there. A meeting (*parlamentum*) was held and they rendered thanks to God for giving [them] such a great victory.

After some discussion, the consuls decided that the galleys should be beached on the shore at Almeria, and after this had been done they gave instructions for the preparation of siege engines, towers and ‘cats’. ⁵ As this work was begun, the Saracens made a sortie towards the galleys, in three parties, but they were beaten, some of them were killed and [the rest] fled back to the city. While these mangonels, towers and ‘cats’ were being constructed, the emperor arrived with four hundred knights and a thousand infantry. We immediately brought a ‘castle’ and some mangonels up to appropriate and suitable places next to the city. The Saracens made an attack from a number of directions but were defeated, [but] they fought back against our towers by day and night, with mangonels, fire and other weapons. ⁶ However, the Genoese remained on guard, resisted the Saracens, and they invariably drove them back into the city, inflicting heavy casualties upon them. The ‘castles’ of the Genoese captured two towers and destroyed eighteen yards of the wall. This terrified the Saracens, who had secret discussions with the emperor’s envoys, namely the Count of Urgel and King Garcia. They offered to give them a hundred thousand *marabotini*, ⁷ and also to give hostages, if the emperor would retire from there and abandon the Genoese. When the consuls of the Genoese were informed of this, they discussed the matter and decided to attack and storm the town at dawn on the next day. When dawn arrived on the vigil of St. Lucia they held a speedy meeting [*parlamentum*], and arranged themselves in twelve companies, each with its own banner and with a thousand armed men in every company. The consuls ordered them

⁵ Protective screens or coverings, usually made of wood and leather, and mounted on wheels, which were used to approach the walls of besieged places.

⁶ Mangonels were stone-throwing catapults.

⁷ *Marabotini* or *maravedi* were alternative Spanish names for dinars, the gold coin which was the principal unit of Islamic currency in the Middle Ages. Garcia Ramirez IV, King of Navarre, had married an illegitimate daughter of King Alfonso in 1144.

to advance. The consuls also sent a number of messages to the emperor and to the Count of Barcelona, begging them to have their men arm themselves and join in the battle so as to capture the city. Hearing this, the emperor soon arrived and found the armed companies of the Genoese [already] in the field. The consuls had instructed their warriors that when they heard the signal from the trumpets they should enter the city ready to fight, but in silence and without shouting. And so it was done. The knights followed after them, and within three hours, with the help and favour of God, and with much Saracen blood shed by the swords of the Genoese, the whole city was captured apart from the citadel. Twenty thousand Saracens were killed that day; and from one part of the city ten thousand were captured, and in the citadel twenty thousand, and then thousand women and children were brought to Genoa. Within four days the Saracens surrendered the citadel and themselves, and gave thirty thousand *marobotini* to ransom themselves.

The consuls retained some of the captured money, namely sixty thousand *marobotini*, for the benefit of the commune, and they paid the debt that the commune owed, namely seventeen thousand pounds. They had the rest of the money divided up among the galleys and other ships. They left Ottone de Bonovillano with a thousand men to guard the city, and after holding a *parlamentum* they instructed everyone [else] to leave the city with their galleys and other ships, and this was done.⁸ They arrived unharmed, gloriously and triumphantly, at Barcelona; there they beached the galleys and ships and appointed a new consulate. With the agreement and permission of their fellows, two of the consuls, Oberto Torre and Ansaldo Doria, went with two galleys to Genoa, and with the money that they had brought they paid the commune's debt, and they made a new consulate at Genoa.

Since the deeds which were done at the capture of Almeria have been recounted by Caffaro in this present document for the memory of those in the future, truth requires that it should also be used to recount the victories at Tortosa, lest they fade away into oblivion in future times, and so Caffaro di Caschifellone will now try to speak about them.

⁸ Three weeks after the capture of Almeria, on 5th November 1147 the consuls granted the Genoese share of the city to Ottone for some thirty years, in return for a token payment for fifteen years and a half-share in its revenues for another fifteen, while he promised to provide a permanent garrison of 300 soldiers, *Codice diplomatico della repubblica di Genova*, 228-30 nos. 182-3.

The truth is as follows. After the Genoese had left Almeria, they came with their whole fleet to Barcelona, and beached their galleys and ships. Even though they had been absent from their wives, children and homes for a year, they still stayed here over the winter, for the honour of God and of the city of Genoa, so that when the summer came they could more safely go with all the supplies they needed to capture the city of Tortosa.⁹ And so they brought wood for their towers and machines from forests far from the city, and by the [next] summer they had everything that they needed prepared in that place. Furthermore, to increase the number of warriors, they immediately sent envoys home to Genoa [to urge] that men should hasten to them with ships and arms. Once everything was prepared, they set off for Tortosa on the feast of the Blessed Peter,¹⁰ and on 1st July they and their whole fleet entered the river of Tortosa. They stopped when they were about two miles away from the city, and they held a meeting [*parlamentum*] with the count and his knights, where they chose the men who should carry the banners of the Genoese. They immediately went with the count and a party of his knights to reconnoitre the situation of the city, and to decide together where and how they would position their warriors. After they had inspected the city, they decided to station half the Genoese soldiers, with part of the count's knights below the city next to the river, while the rest pitched their tents above it on Monte Bagnara, along with the count and William of Montpellier. In addition, the English, along with the knights of the Temple and many other foreigners stationed themselves in the vicinity of a mill near the river. Meanwhile a group of the warlike men of Genoa, without the permission of the consuls and the others, marched on the city, armed and ready to give battle. The Genoese did this so that they might find out how well the Saracens fought. The latter gave battle to the Genoese and fought with them to the third hour, and there were many dead and wounded on each side. On being told of the rashness of their men, the Genoese consuls immediately held a meeting, and in it they ordered all those under their jurisdiction to make an oath that no one would henceforth make an attack without general agreement and the permission of the consuls. They also ordered that the [siege] towers and machines should be finished as quickly as possible and brought up to the city, and so indeed it

⁹ Tortosa is some 20 km. from the mouth of the River Ebro, about 150 km. south of Barcelona. The Genoese had in fact already promised Alfonso VII to take part in an attack on Tortosa once Almeria had been captured, *Codice diplomatico della repubblica di Genova*, 210-17 nos. 168-9.

¹⁰ 29th June [1148].

was done. After two towers had been placed next to the city wall, then the Genoese, the most daring of men and warriors of God, began to break down the walls. They fought their way into the city with the towers, and by bringing one of these towers inside the city they destroyed all the houses and towers right up to the mosque. By bringing the other tower near to the *sueta*, and by fighting with the utmost valour, within a few days they had captured or destroyed forty towers.¹¹

However, when the Genoese realised that they would be unable to capture the *sueta* from that side of the city with these two [siege] towers, they adopted another plan, that they would without delay fill in the ravine on the upper, Bagnara, side, which lay between Bagnara and the *sueta*, with wood, stones and earth. This ravine was 84 cubits in width and 64 cubits deep, and it seemed to many in the army that the task would be most difficult and the outcome uncertain; hence an argument arose among many people in the army as to whether or not they should undertake it. But the consuls had no doubts whatsoever, and ordered the ravine to be filled in and a new [siege] tower to be built. On hearing this order everyone, both knights and foot soldiers, rich and poor, came daily to labour on filling the ravine, and worked together as one. Once two sections of the ravine had been filled, the Genoese immediately set up a tower and a machine at its top, with a crew of three hundred soldiers stationed therein. However, as the Saracens saw the tower coming near they promptly hurled stones weighing some two hundred pounds at it and inflicted some temporary damage to one corner of the tower. But the Genoese soon repaired this, and they placed a great net of ropes next to the walls of the tower, and thereafter had nothing to fear from the impact of the Saracens' stones. Meanwhile, as the Genoese were engaged in fighting the Saracens, the knights from the army of the Count of Barcelona, lacking money for so great an enterprise, retreated, leaving the count with no more than twenty knights. The Genoese were though men of the utmost bravery, and kept in mind their notable victory at Almeria. They held a meeting and swore that they would not abandon Tortosa until it had been defeated and captured; and so they fought the Saracens night and day, even more fiercely than they was their custom. They broke down the walls

¹¹ The Latin text contrasts the *castella*, the movable siege-towers of the Genoese, with the *turres*, the towers and tower-houses of the city. The *sueta* was the citadel; the account later calls it the *Zuda*, the name by which the surviving remains are still known today. This name may have been derived from the Arabic *zuwwāda*, meaning 'provisions', i.e. it was the place where provisions were stored (information from Dr. Alex Metcalfe).

of the *sueta*, the palace and houses with stones from their mangonels, and the Saracens were soon terrified by this deadly peril and sent envoys to the consuls of the Genoese and the Count of Barcelona, offering to surrender the city. They sought however a truce of some forty days, on the following terms: that they might send envoys to the king of the Spaniards ¹² and to all the Spanish [leaders] asking them to come to wage war on the Genoese, and if they could by this battle drive the Genoese away then as victors they would possess the city, but if they did not come within the said time then they promised to surrender the city to the Genoese. To secure this, they handed over into the custody of the Genoese as hostages one hundred Saracens of rank. After the forty-day term had been completed and the Spaniards had not come to help Tortosa, the Saracens of the city immediately fulfilled their promise, placed the banners of the Genoese and of the count on the Zuda, and unconditionally surrendered the city to the Genoese and to the count. This took place in the month of December, on the vigil of St. Silvester in the week after the Lord's Nativity, 1148. ¹³ Once this was accomplished the Genoese had a third, and the count two-thirds [of the city]. Afterwards they gave thanks to God for their victory over these two cities of Almeria and Tortosa, and then the whole force returned to Genoa, arriving there in the year 1149.

* * *

¹² The 'king' of Islamic Spain, Tāshufn ibn 'Ali, had been killed fighting the Almohads in Morocco in 1146. The reference here might however be to Ibn Gāniza, the ruler of Seville, who had for some time been the agent for the Almoravid overlords of Spain, while the latter normally resided in their north African possessions.

¹³ 30th December 1148. Despite what the account here says, the Muslims who wished to remain at Tortosa were granted commercial and property rights, and allowed to retain their own customs and officials, although they were only permitted to live outside the fortified area. Ramon Berenguar IV went on to capture Lerida in October 1149.