



# *A tale about* AlmaLusa

**By Miguel Baiena**

**A**lmaLusa Baixa/Chiado is located in a building whose history is tangled with the city's history itself. This building, which in the past housed the Lisbon's arsenal, had a major role in the history of Portugal. Still today, there are remnants of a glorious past which may be found in the different floors of the building. The blocks of stone were witness to the visits of Kings, renowned sailors, cartographers and commanders.

Let us dive into the history of Lisbon and Portugal to better comprehend the importance of this building that now houses AlmaLusa Baixa/Chiado.

## **A special context**

Lisbon has always been seen as a privileged site. Its proximity to the sea and the Tagus, provided an array of food sources, an undeniable benefit for the first to inhabit this region. It is also both the sea and river, which later on, working as communication routes, allowed Lisbon to perform a powerful role in the contact with other civilizations.

The city was born in a hill, where the Castle of S. Jorge can be found, having developed fast towards the river. Lisbon's urban area is then born, always maintaining its ties to the riverside, the ports, commerce, industry and crafts.

Formerly known as Olisipo, Lisbon was dominated by various people, from Carthaginian to Romans, Suevians and Visigoths. Lisbon was a densely populated, rich and strong city. Founded on the riverside, it was the port that served as a pit stop between the Mediterranean and European East side, where a great number of travelers and merchants met.

The area nowadays known as the Município Square, Terreiro do Paço, Rua do Ouro, Augusta e da Prata, were, at the time, covered in water which went all the way up to Rossio, Mouraria until the Arco do Marquês de Alegrete. The city and most of its infrastructure were towards the left side of this wake. This was the view Afonso Henriques first had when he surrounded Lisbon in 1147.

### **The discovery of India**



With the Treaty of Tordesillas, which divided the world between Portugal and Spain, the king João II guaranteed the exclusive right for the Portuguese crown to navigate the oriental sea. Preparations began for an expedition towards India. Even though João II died, his successor, King Manuel kept the plan and chose Vasco da Gama, a member of the nobility, to be the commander.

Having arrived in India, the Portuguese were confronted with mostly Moorish tradespeople. Although the Moorish tried hard to keep the Portuguese trade from taking place, they were defeated at the end by the Portuguese superiority in terms of fleet and artillery. At this moment, the small Portuguese country was transformed in one of the biggest naval and commercial powers in Europe.



### **And so, Terreiro do Paço is born...**

King Manuel orders the construction of a new Palace Yard by the river. The court increases rapidly and new buildings show, integrated in an architectural complex that brings together a series of values: residential aulic, naval, military, commercial, administrative and politic

The Portuguese royal family, whose residence in Lisbon was the Paço da Alcáçova, moved to the new Paço, where the most important banquets and festivities of the Portuguese crown began to take place.

In the center of Terreiro do Paço, a fountain is built, where most of the public ceremonies of praise of Portuguese sovereigns start to take place.

### **The Lisbon Arsenal**

The Arsenal occupied a prominent place within the Terreiro do Paço buildings. To be able to load the fleet with the most advanced technology and artillery, there was the need of a unique structure: therefore, the building had huge dimensions. The best masters and craftsman worked in the Lisbon Arsenal. This was where all the war material was stored but also all kinds of objects brought back from the East. The Lisbon Arsenal also worked as a university for research, testing and production of all sorts of war objects.



The AlmaLusa Hotel occupies the west wing of what once was the Lisbon Arsenal. King Manuel walked frequently through the stone slabs that can be found nowadays at the hotel, together with Vasco da Gama, Pedro Álvares Cabral, Duarte Pacheco Pereira and so many others from that time.

### **The Beginning of the End**

In 1580, straight after the battle of Alcácer Quibir, the Duque of Alba entered Lisbon and took over all the armor that existed in the Lisbon Arsenal. Eight years later, the Marquis of Santa Cruz decided that the little that was left of the Lisbon Arsenal would serve to equip the 'Invincible Fleet'. Two and a half centuries later, Maria I ordered that the remaining armors were to be melted so that the iron could be repurposed in the Basílica da Estrela and that the chain mail would be cut and sold to housewives to clean copper pots.

*This was how  
the Lisbon  
Arsenal  
disappeared...*

*But there are  
still remains  
and memories  
in a hotel built  
on top of its  
ruins: the  
AlmaLusa.*

