

OF IRON AND THORNS

BONONIA



On the origins of Bononia and the current situation at the Dawn of the Anno Lacrimarum



In the day that Emperor AUGUSTUS, MARCUS AEMILIUS LEPIDUS, and MARCUS ANTONIUS gathered around the stele of the Triumvirate the skies were leaden and the thunder made the earth tremble. An eagle alighted on the Emperor's tent, its rostrum damp with the blood of two ravens. Its black eyes were burning of the black light of foreshadowing.

The Triumvirate decided that in the land at the intersection of the military route used for the campaign in Gaul, the Via Aemilia, and the Via Flaminia, which led south, a military center was to be established with a specific task: that of defending the population of three thousand Romans from the attacks of the Celts and their wild monstrosities

that haunted the mountains, and from the residual influence of the mysterious Etruscans who had survived in the mountain valleys where their very powerful king, Bianore, once presided.

Between the courses of the Reno and Savena rivers, the three thousand Romans built a great basilica, a stone longhouse in the central square where the activities of the center were carried out. The remains of the Etruscan settlement of King Bianore's people were efficiently replaced by wide cardinal and decuman roads defining a core town surrounded by ten gates. A long aqueduct was built to bring the waters of the Setta stream to the center of the small town, then watered only by a small river, the Aposa.

It was through this aqueduct that King Bianore's Etruscans attacked the center, summoning the spirits



of flame to burn the buildings and palisades from the very heart of the town. Bianore's haruspices had read of the terrible fate reserved for their people if the Romans actually built their own center over the ruins of what was once called **FELSINA**. Bianore met one of the dragons of the North, a fiery worm with ashen wings, and confronted him so that he would intervene in the carnage that took place that day. Bianore kept his promise and left the town Pianoro to found Mantua and Cremona in the North. The dragons remained until Charlemagne's paladins began a ruthless hunt forcing the ancient creatures to migrate north. In those days the winged figures of ancient dragons began to ply the skies bound for the lands of **HOUSE VISCONTI** of Mediolanum, where they still serve the household today by a very ancient pact reconfirmed in those very years.

Years of famine and flooding followed. The fall of the Roman Empire made these marshy and wild lands a place of difficult control for Roman-Barbarian peoples. The war between Goth barbarians

and Bizantine Romans ravaged the land. In those dark years, winters lasted for over six months and leather-clad barbarians fought for the gold and for the land with muscle and cold steel against hellish shapeless mutations that the monks of that era were unable to describe such amorphous and frightening was their form.

In these early centuries since the birth of Christ, the Roman settlement then known as **BONONIA**, little more than a footnote among the writings of Paolo Diacono, was reduced to little more than rubble, protected by four crosses blessed by St. Ambrose of Mediolanum and placed around a selenite wall to protect ancient and evil secrets kept within those walls. The ten outermost gates, erected by the Romans, however, were still intact, and the town was repopulated by Theodoric's Byzantines. At the behest of the powerful Bishop Zama, Bononia's first bishop, the Benedictine monasteries sent resources and religious manpower so that the city would become a center for gathering information and studying the Lord's enemy fauna and chimeras scattered throughout the Italic peninsula. Bononia would be tasked with cataloging, understanding, and guarding any abnormal and monstrous life that might be found thanks in part to companies of adventurers who gathered in the city, which grew in fame and prestige year after year. Bononia passed into the hands of Liutprand's Lombards, who in turn handed the city over to the Church.

Bononia had become a place of learning and faith. Its internal roads and factories lived upon an intricate system of canals and machinery connected to water propulsion. It became a place famous for extremely fine silks and great craftsmanship, a feature that recently led to the formation of powerful guilds.

When Charlemagne's Franks descended on Bononia, it was decided that the use of the water powered force of the Aposa River and the various other canals within the city could be channeled to fuel an ambitious project: monstrous creatures, the possessed and the infected, the cursed relics and objects of unclean power that were collected over the centuries would be taken underground in an immense network of dungeons, portcullises and

locking mechanisms that would be dug into the very depths of Earth.

The system of conduits and dungeon cells would be run by an order of Benedictine monks and a chivalric Order of pontifical right adhering to the rule of St. Benedict, dedicated to the discovery and hunting of the unclean. The Holy Order of The Black Cross was born, its members took a vow of silence and swore an oath to guard the secrets of Bononia's dungeons.

This order, which inherited the experience and testimony of the hunters and adventurers of centuries past, recently became a direct organ of the Holy Inquisition.

The monks built a complex of monasteries, churches, prisons and scriptorium aboveground creating the immense complex that stretched three dimensions, deep underground. Here they could classify and study the anatomy of monstrosities by compiling the first great **BESTIARIES**.

Bononia became a land of adventurers and despite the encastellation of the surrounding lands remained independent, albeit forced into papal vicariate. In contrast to Modena, described in the previous tome, in Bologna despite the large number of families, that deliberate partitioning of lordly domains did not take place as it did for its imperial adversary to the west.

The city's new governmental system included the figures of the **PODESTÀ** (mayor) and the **CAPITANO DEL POPOLO** (military leader), who directed the militia and mercenary troops on behalf of the city. The two governors usually from **HOUSE GEREMEI** or **HOUSE LAMBERTAZZI**, are bestowed with full powers by the very powerful bishop **ST. PETRONIUS**, who is centuries old and and blessed with Charisma, a sacred form that is also said to be expressed by the scents of roses and wildflowers surrounding his undead body. St. Petronius is the voice of **ST. PETER** and **GOD**, and he directs the spiritual life of Bononia from his cathedral in the **CATHEDRAL OF NEW JERUSALEM**.

Petronius wanted the monastery to be integrated

1 See volume II on the Lands of Modena



into the new student body complex, creating a hub of culture and study the likes of which the world had never seen before.

All city offices are supervised and granted by the Church, as also seen for Borgo Franco¹.

With the birth of the Antichrist in Anno Lacrimarum I and in the aftermath of the Scream of St. Peter that blew out the stained glass windows of all the cathedrals, St. Ambrose emerged from his torpor to put on his golden armor once again. The **HOUSE VISCONTI** sent an ambassador from Mediolanum to enforce St. Ambrose's contribution to the protection of the city.

The Lambertazzi, loyal to the Emperor, are fighting not to be exiled from the city, while **HOUSE PEPOLI** is taking advantage of the power vacuum to overrule the Geremei in the saint's service. Sent by the Holy Father himself, the **HOUSE ORSINI** from Rome are now present in the city with the powerful Matteo Orsini and his corps of papal militia.