

# AQUILONIA

## The Proudest Kingdom of the World

*'The proudest kingdom of the world was Aquilonia, reigning supreme in the dreaming west.'*

*The Nemedian Chronicles*

**AQUILONIA IS THE** most advanced and powerful of the Hyborian kingdoms, with a proud, relatively wealthy populace. Its politics are rife with intrigue, murder and horror, with countless plots and intrigues amidst the barons and counts who maintain ancient feuds from generation to generation. With frontiers that are often tested by Picts, Cimmerians, Nemedians and Ophireans there is opportunity within its borders for warrior and courtier alike.

Nearly twenty five million people live in the various counties, baronies, villages, towns and cities of Aquilonia. Two of the great Hyborian metropolises can be found in Aquilonia: Tarantia and Shamar. King Conan's census following his great victory in the Year of the Dragon revealed fifty other large towns and cities, nearly three hundred smaller towns and over thirty thousand villages, with almost a half million residents living in innumerable hamlets, thorps or individual farms and homesteads.

Aquilonia represents the pinnacle of Hyborian age society – a realm of enlightenment and prosperity. Even so, its forms of government and its treatment of the various economic classes of people fall back on ancient Hyborian traditions instead of a more efficient form of government. Aquilonia has a feudal government, being ruled by a king, who divides up the land and the responsibilities of the kingdom among various barons and counts, who then subdivide up their properties and responsibilities further. The reigning monarch of Aquilonia is King Conan who took, and has defended, his crown by force of arms.

Aquilonia is an impressively large kingdom, larger even than its king can effectively rule. Without a surfeit of troops enough to enforce his will everywhere, Aquilonia is left with a fragmented government of local powers, counts and barons, who perform civil and military functions in the name of the king for an equally fragmented kingdom subdivided into numerous fiefs and sub-fiefs.

Aquilonia is broken up into provinces, many of which are further subdivided into smaller fiefs or civil territories. Many of these boundaries are poorly defined or in dispute, with the lands near the country's borders further confused. This is extremely evident in the west, where the Westermarck, which considers itself to be part of Aquilonia, is separated by Gunderland, which does not despite an agreement to the contrary. The divisions tend to undermine the sovereignty of the king and lead to inefficient government by the counts, barons and those subordinate to the upper nobility.

The counts and barons of Aquilonia hold noble titles and fiefs from the king granting them official power. The granting of these fiefs is done by a patent, or contract, wherein the noble swears fealty to the king and the king grants the noble all rights pertaining to the land proffered as fief, including an accompanying title of nobility. These noble titles are inherited through the male line, although the king may remove a title at his pleasure. The eldest son or the husband of an eldest daughter almost always inherits the noble title. The actual property of the fief, however, can be divided among the lord's heirs as may see fit. If a dispute over inheritance occurs, especially in a case where a nobleman produced no heir, the king may intercede and name an heir.

Unfortunately, the political and military structure of Aquilonia tends to maintain only the illusion of unity beneath the king. The counts and barons frequently can and do ignore the edicts and commands of the king. Although the king rules all of Aquilonia in theory, the true practice of power shows that the king rules Tarantia and its surrounding manors only. Many times in Aquilonia's history

*'I found Aquilonia in the grip of a pig like you - one who traced his genealogy for a thousand years. The land was torn with the wars of the barons, and the people cried out under suppression and taxation. Today no Aquilonian noble dares maltreat the humblest of my subjects, and the taxes of the people are lighter than anywhere else in the world.'*

*R. E. Howard. The Scarlet Citadel*



provinces rebelled and had to be 'reacquired' by the king's force of arms. Aquilonia's borders swelled and shrank depending on the relative strength of the various kings. King Conan is a strong king, yet even he has had problems with the various provinces, nobles, peoples and manors across his great kingdom. The wars between the nobles, which once were many, are now few. King Conan intercedes as much as he can with barbaric ferocity.

The manor is the economic unit of life in Aquilonia. A manor consists of a manor house and one or more associated villages and acres of land numbering in the thousands. Fully a third of the land is devoted to supporting the noble fief-holder and his retinue. The serfs and peasants who work the land are usually required to spend half their time working the portions set aside for the nobility, but have the rest of the time to work their own lands or to work on special projects, such as building bridges or roads, as required by the local lord.

These local lords maintain their own military, and can nominally be ordered by the king to fight. These military men, knights and chevaliers, have become, over time, their own social class. Many of these quasi-independent units have taken up colourful and well-known names – the imperial troops are the Black Legion and the king's personal protective knights are known as the Black Dragons. The soldiers of Aquilonia include both powerful cavalry and impressive infantry. Aquilonia appears to be unique in the world in its recognition of the importance of a trained infantry. Most of the infantry are Gundermen, who excel at the spear and poleaxe, and

Bossonian archers, who are without equal in the Hyborian age for bowmanship. In time of national war, King Conan can command hosts in excess of 50,000 troops. Troops in Aquilonia are often signalled via the oliphant, an ornate ivory instrument that a skilled performer can use to imitate everything from the roar of a lion or elephant to the gentle sound of a breeze.

The Aquilonian army favours a standard formation for Hyborian hosts. The centre, heavily armoured knights, is the strongest section. The wings are composed of lesser cavalry units that are supported by pikemen and Bossonian archers. The wings move in advance of the centre. The archers unleash their stinging death and the pikemen and swordsmen move in afterward. The archers lift their aim to fire at the back ranks of the foe so as to avoid killing their own soldiers. The cavalry units move in next, followed by the knights on their immense horses.

The wealthy in Aquilonia dress well. Silken jupons, close-fitting jackets with gilt-braided skirts and jagged sleeves are typical outfits worn in the courts. Hair is usually curled and scented, bound with cloth-of-silver or cloth-of-gold bands. Most nobles wear a sword, though many of them are merely ceremonial weapons. Others wear simple tunics with hose and soft leather boots.

Far below the status of the nobility and the military, beneath even the station



of the commoners, the slaves of Aquilonia toil. Thoth-Amon, the greatest sorcerer in the world, lived as a slave in Aquilonia until he freed himself. The cult of Asura in Aquilonia is known to treat its slaves well, though they're often put to unpleasant uses, such as piloting the boats of the dead down the Khorotas river. The people of Gunderland, however, keep no slaves and find even the mere idea of slavery to be distasteful. This is one of the causes of dispute between the two countries.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF AQUILONIA

Aquilonia is a beautiful temperate land, slowly conquered by Hyborian civilisation since the fall of Acheron some 3,000 years ago. The combination of a pleasant climate with rich and fertile land has promoted agriculture for centuries. Agriculture has transformed much of the arable land into precious fields of wheat, barley and other vegetables. Forests also abound, although most of the eastern woodlands are reserved for the nobility and are protected by wardens, who keep out rogues and dangerous animals. The vast western forests are still wild, filled with panthers, apes, bears, wolves and, if

one goes far enough west, Picts. The most notable geographic features are the rivers.

**Alimane River** – The Alimane is a river marking the border between Aquilonia and Zingara, rarely used much for river traffic, being too shallow in places to allow boats up its length as it features many fords and crossing points. A caravan trail follows along the banks of the Alimane before crossing over the Khorotas at the village of Pedassa. The Ford of Nogara is a common route for trade from the Saxula Pass to cross the Alimane. A road passes from here to Culario, the capital of Poitain.

**Bitaxa River** – The Bitaxa is a turbulent tributary of the Alimane, flowing over the Imirian Escarpment into the Brocellian Forest below.

**Black River** – This river is the frontier border of Aquilonia and the site of many battles with the savage Picts. The river has a swift current, yet is quite deep and rather wide, carrying a large volume of water. The river's source is somewhere in the mountains of northern Pictland, flowing southward along the border of the Bossonian Marches, then along the frontier border of Westermarck, eventually curving to the West as it flows into Zingara on its course to the open sea. The Zingaran capital of Kordava sits at its mouth.

**Brocellian Forest** – The Brocellian forest lies between the southern Poitain cities and the Imirian Escarpment. Peasant superstitions, encouraged by nobles wishing to keep their hunting preserves, has it that unnatural beings haunt the trees and prey upon the unwary. A road runs through the forest toward the Imirian Escarpment where the Bitaxa River carves out the Giant's Notch, a large gorge through the escarpment that the road follows. It takes a day to cross the width of the forest from the edge to the escarpment. Satyrs are rumoured to live in this dark forest but Trocero and his barons have never encountered them while hunting in the forest.

**Fury River** – This river, flowing southwest past Sicas, eventually joins the Khorotas River.

**Golamira, Mount** – This is the Mount of Eternal Time, called 'black-hearted' in Aquilonia. The legendary prophet Epimetreus' body was laid to rest here 1,500 years ago in a magically protected tomb. Legend has it that his spirit ventures forth in dreams when Aquilonia is in dire need.

**Goralian Hills** – These hills are in northwestern Aquilonia above the Shirki River. These hills had served as the last stand of several Aquilonian kings. Amid the crags and tortuous peaks of these hills hides the Valley of Lions, a fan-shaped valley with steep hills on either side that cannot be easily climbed. It was here that Valerius was betrayed and killed during the events of *The Hour of the Dragon*.

**Imirian Escarpment** – This escarpment lies in Poitain. It is passable through the Giant's Notch, where the Bitaxa River cuts through it. The Imirian Plateau is above it.

**Khorotas River** – This major river is navigable in its middle reaches and flows within a mile of Tarantia. Once in the Poitainian mountains, the river falls in a series of picturesque falls, cascades and rapids. The Tybor and the Alimane merge with it before it flows

to the Western Ocean at Messantia in Argos. The Road of Kings crosses the Khorotas near its confluence with the Tybor. Fishermen and merchant boats are the usual craft seen on the river, but occasionally a slender, black craft bearing one of the dead of Asura floats down the river. The road crosses the river to the Alimane at the village of Pedassa.

**Ossar River** – This is a swift flowing river that eventually joins with the Fury at the wicked city of Sicas. Its source is somewhere in the hills around Tarantia.

**Shirki River** – The Shirki River is an important waterway through Aquilonia, although it is largely not navigable. It is swift and turbulent from its source in the mountains of Cimmeria all the way past Tanasul, although the rocks at Tanasul are high enough to afford a crossing into Gunderland most of the time. Another crossing exists at Galparan, although it is less certain than the Tanasul crossing. Ferries can cross the lower reaches of the Shirki. Rapids and cascades typify this river through the Tauran.

**Thunder River** - This is another important river for Aquilonia and is a border against Pictland. It was named the Thunder River for the long stretches of white-water rapids in northern Zingara and southern Bossonia.

**Tybor River** – The Tybor river is a placid, much travelled river marking the border between Aquilonia and Ophir. Being both deep and wide, it is in common usage by barges and watermen for transport of passengers and goods alike.

**Valley of Valkia** – This valley, with attendant river, lies in eastern Aquilonia about ten miles from Nemedias border. Bordered by mountains to the west, it is the site of the great battle lost by Conan's army in the Year of the Dragon.

## IMPORTANT AQUILONIA CITIES

**Tarantia** - the capital of Aquilonia, the 'most princely city of the world's West.' This great walled city stands regally on a plain not far from the Khorotas River in south eastern Aquilonia on the Road of Kings. This city is a formidable centre of commerce as well as the home of the King of Aquilonia, Conan. The Imperial troops based here are called the Black Legion, and the king's personal bodyguard are known as the Black Dragons. The gates are guarded by great bronze portals. The wealthy travel about town in chariots. It has a population of 80,256 persons.

† The Citadel: The king's palace with blue and golden towers is surrounded by thick walls and battlements. Gunderland pikemen and Bossonian archers protect the walls. The walls are penetrated via a barbican. Passing through that gatehouse leads one to a drawbridge, then the inner barbican where an iron portcullis and massive double doors defend the outer ward. This outer ward keeps the servant's quarters, stables, wells, forges, groves, fields and other castle support. An interior wall surrounds the keep, where Conan and his family reside. A gate allows access to the inner ward where the more direct castle support can be found, such as the kitchens and bakeries, the private gardens and royal stables. The keep itself is the strongest portion of the entire royal citadel.

*'I have strong reason to suspect that it is now on its way to Sicas, in Aquilonia, if it is not there already... It is not a great city, but it is said to be a wicked one. It lies a few miles off the king's high road between Tarantia and Shamar, at the confluence of two rivers, the Ossar and the Fury. Its wealth comes mainly from its nearby silver mines, and this wealth has attracted persons of a rough sort. The royal officials there are, it is said, of an understanding and forgiving nature.'*

*John Maddox Roberts, Conan the Rogue*

† The Iron Tower: The grim Iron Tower stands apart from the citadel, amid a maze of narrow streets and crowding houses where the meaner structures, appropriating a space from which the more fastidious shrank, had invaded a portion of the city ordinarily alien to them. The Tower was, in reality, a castle; an ancient, formidable pile of heavy stone and black iron, which served as the citadel before the new fortress was built. The infamous Iron Tower is used now to execute Aquilonia's political enemies, although a thousand years ago or more it was the primary castle of the Hyborian king who originally ruled these lands. The interior of the Tower is as forbidding and gloomy as the exterior.

**Culario** – Culario is the capital of Poitain. It is located in the south. The streets are narrow, and the flags of Poitain fly proudly from the battlements. The city holds elections for its mayor. It has a population of over fifteen thousand.

**Galparan** – Galparan is a city on the furious Shirki river, and is the site of a risky crossing. It has a population of over ten thousand.

**Sicas** – This small city between Tarantia and Shamar was once known as the City of Silver before the ore played out. Now it is a rather wicked Aquilonian city lorded over by a King's Reeve. Most of the royal officials stationed there earn their wealthy life-styles by accepting bribes of almost any sort.

**Shamar** – Shamar is an ancient city, possibly older than Atlantis itself. It is a walled city built on the Tybor River's banks and the river itself supplies the water for its moat as two ends of it are connected to the river. The southern walls are against the river. The walls have ballistae mounted on them. A duke governs the city, and its most famous export is its wines. It is a strategic and powerful city, and has been attacked many times. Ophir has laid siege to it at least three times, Nemedias has attempted to capture it twice and Aquilonia even attacked it once during a rebellion. Its duke maintains a large militia force that exceeds 2,500 soldiers, and is said to be recruiting heavily.