

# The history of Laurania until 1900

## Pre-history

Recent archaeological finds indicate that the first inhabitants of Laurania were hunter-gatherers who lived in caves in the lower slopes of the mountains. Little is known of these people save that they recorded their daily lives and struggles on the walls of the caves where they lived, and several fine examples of this primitive wall art can still be found in the area around Minas Roman.

## Roman Laurania

The first records of Laurania date from the time of the Roman conquest. The little known *Commentaries on the war against the Lauranii* by Gaius Septimus Crassus outline – at great length – the difficulties his legions had in defeating the warlike Lauranii, especially in the country's mountainous terrain. Despite these problems his troops finally prevailed, and the area was incorporated into the Roman Empire as the Province of Laurania.

The local tribes' people were soon assimilated into Roman culture, and this is reflected in the fact that much of the vocabulary of the modern Lauranian language is Latin in origin. Laurania became a source of iron ore as well as being a major supplier of cereals for Rome and many young Lauranii men served in the ranks of infantry *Auxillia* units.

## The collapse of the Roman Empire and the Visigoth invasion

The collapse of the Western Roman Empire left Laurania open to invasion by Visigoths from the north. The Governor of Laurania – Flavius Maximus Molarius – sought the protection of the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, but the Emperor had neither the inclination nor the resources to aid the beleaguered province.

When the invasion came the Lauranians were pushed back, and at the site that is now known as Matanza – the Massacre – a large part of the Lauranian army was destroyed. Flavius Maximus assembled what remained of the Lauranian army – two cohorts of trained *Auxillia* and the equivalent of a further four cohorts of veterans and young men – some kilometres south of the site of the recent defeat. There is no contemporary written record of the battle, although a translation of what is thought to be the first written version of the story<sup>1</sup> was included in William Proctor's *History of the Barbarian Wars* (1840):

*Flavius Maximus perceived that his enemies were mighty and inclined to be impetuous and ill disciplined in battle. He resolved to use this to his advantage. Finding a suitable site between two wooded hills, Flavius Maximus ordered his troops to dig a large number of deep pits between the hills. Each pit was to be at least as deep as a man is tall and twice as wide as they were deep. These pits were then filled with sharpened wooden stakes cut from the nearby trees. The pits were then covered with foliage so as to obscure them from the sight of the advancing Visigoths. He further ordered that the pits should not extend the full width between the hills, but that gaps were to be left at the right and left large enough to allow a cohort to pass through in column.*

*Flavius Maximus stationed his cohorts of veterans and young men behind these pits, and exhorted them to stand firm in the face of their enemies. He also told them that if they held, they would have an opportunity to avenge the massacre of their countrymen. Flavius Maximus then placed his two cohorts of trained men behind the line of veterans and young men so that the Visigoths could not see them.*

*On the day of battle, the Visigoths, seeing none but old men and youths in their path, made many great and threatening noises. This unsettled many of the young soldiers, but the veterans steadied them with tales of previous glories and promises of rewards if they held firm.*

*The Visigoths, having exhorted each other with boasts of the number of enemies they would each slaughter and the booty they would plunder, charged forward precipitously. As the first of*

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<sup>1</sup> Recent research indicates that Gulio Montebanca, a travelling friar who visited Laurania during the early 13th century, first wrote down the story in Latin in his diary. William Proctor found it in a box of old manuscripts held in the Bodleian Library, translated it, and then incorporated it into his book.

*the horde reached the pits, the covering gave way and they fell in, impaling themselves upon the stakes therein. Such was the denseness of the Visigoth horde that those following behind pushed forward unaware of the fate of the leading ranks, and also fell into the pits.*

*Very soon the pits were full of dead and dying Visigoths, but such was their numbers that many remained to advance over the bodies of their fallen kinsmen. They fell upon the veterans and young men, and a mighty slaughter began on both sides.*

*At this moment Flavius Maximus ordered each of his trained cohorts to the flanks of the fighting. The sudden arrival of these unexpected reinforcements for their enemies caused great consternation amongst the Visigoths, who saw that they were in danger of becoming trapped. Many tried to flee, but turning their backs on the Lauranians proved fatal, and a large number were killed without mercy. A few managed to escape, taking with them tales of their great heroism in the face of a mighty and implacable enemy. The fame of the Lauranians grew with each re-telling of the tale around the campfires of the Visigoths, whose leaders resolved to find easier territories wherein to exercise their military prowess. Thus were the Lauranians able to preserve themselves from the further deprecations of the Visigoths, and Flavius Maximus Molarius was made *Principa* (Prince) of Laurania by the leading nobles of that land.*

## The Dark Ages

In the centuries that followed Lauranians held to the Roman ways as best they could, and the curators of the Prince's library preserved much of the knowledge and wisdom that the philosophers of the Roman Empire had gathered over many generations. Contemporary commentators compared this library, which was situated within the walls of the Prince's Palace in Laurania City, with the great library in Alexandria.

During the European Dark Ages Laurania was threatened many times by stronger neighbours, but the reputation of its warriors, its terrain, and the willingness of the people to fight for their independence whenever they were threatened enabled the Princes of Laurania to maintain their principality's integrity.

As befitted a bastion of European culture, Lauranian knights and foot soldiers took part in the Crusades, where they gained a reputation as fierce warriors who were willing to fight to the death should the need arise. As a result they were feared and respected by friend and foe alike.

## The Ottoman invasion

The growth of the Ottoman Empire during the middle of the fifteenth century threatened Laurania. Prince Flavius XVIII, the ruler of Laurania, was a weak and ineffective man, who, despite many warnings from his military advisers, failed to maintain the fortifications that protected the country's borders. In addition he allowed the annual military census to lapse<sup>2</sup>. As a result, when the Ottoman army marched across the southern borders in 1468, the country was unprepared. In the ensuing panic the Prince and his court fled abroad, leaving his cousin, Roberto Molar, Lord of Torracastra, to lead the Lauranian Army against the invaders.

The hastily raised army that Molar led was unable to hold back the Ottoman invaders, and after defeats at the Battles of Medacasa and Torra Diegra he withdrew his army into the mountains. From Santa da Montas Molar's troops harried the occupying Ottoman forces.

Mehmet Ali, the leader of the Ottoman occupiers, countered the Lauranian guerrilla campaign by massacring all Lauranians who lived in areas where attacks had taken place. This was counter-productive, and after a year of occupation the Ottomans controlled less than a quarter of the country, and even within this area no Turk was safe from assassination.

After one of his senior lieutenants was killed by a Lauranian ambush near Lisba, Mehmet Ali decided to attack Molar's fortified camp at Santa da Montas. He gathered his army at Badragosa, and advanced up the valley towards the mountain pass that led to Santa da Montas. At Punta da Montas a small force of

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<sup>2</sup> Since the time when Flavius Maximus Molarius was appointed *Principa* it had been the custom – on each Midsummer Day – for every able-bodied man over the age of eighteen to demonstrate his prowess at arms to a representative of the Prince. The representative – usually a local landholder or military commander – would record the name and age of each man who was fit for duty. This military census enabled the Prince to know exactly how strong an army he could raise should the need arise.

Lauranians held back the Ottomans for several days, and this gave Molara time to withdraw his army to Xalla, leaving Santa da Montas to be defended by a small group of experienced troops.

After several hastily organised attacks failed to capture Santa da Montas, the Ottoman army laid siege to the fortified camp. Molara's troops harried the Turks at every opportunity and this continual skirmishing reduced both the numbers of besiegers and – more importantly – their morale. As winter approached Mehmet Ali was forced to decide whether to lift the siege or mount a final, all-out attack on Santa da Montas. He ordered several hundred of his troops – led by a loyal and trusted subordinate, Azeem Kadir – to attack Molara's camp at Xalla in order to divert the Lauranian leader's attention away from Santa da Montas.

The diversion worked. Three days after leaving Santa da Montas the Turks were ambushed by a much larger force led by Molara, and Azeem Kadir and most of his men were killed. However on the day after Azeem Kadir's force had left Santa da Montas the rest of the Ottoman army had attacked the fortified Lauranian camp and overwhelmed the defenders.

When the news of the loss of Santa da Montas reached Molara, he ordered his army to attack the Ottoman army at Santa da Montas. Within two days the Lauranian army had reached Santa da Montas, but the Ottoman army had already withdrawn towards Badragosa. Molara pursued the Turks all the way to Lisba, and with winter now upon them the Lauranians returned to Xalla.

For the next ten years Mehmet Ali tried to subdue the Lauranians whilst Molara attempted to defeat the Ottoman army piecemeal. Neither strategy achieved its purpose. The Ottoman Governor accepted that the best he could achieve was to contain the Lauranian army within the Lauranian Mountains.

Whilst Molara kept the idea of Lauranian independence alive, Prince Flavius XVIII travelled around the royal courts of Europe seeking aid for his cause. His efforts were fruitless and he finally settled in Rome, from whence he sent a series of letters to his cousin Roberto<sup>3</sup>.

Mehmet Ali was eventually replaced as Ottoman Governor of Laurania in 1479 by Yousuf Tariq, who had experience of fighting in mountainous areas and whom had recruited a special corps of Moslem Albanians to fight the Lauranians. Yousuf Tariq's troops soon began mounting patrols from their newly fortified camp at Badragosa. Molara responded by sending troops to ambush them, but after some initial successes, the Lauranians began to suffer more casualties than they inflicted. Molara decided that the only course of action he could follow was to attack the Albanian's camp in order to wipe them out. He gathered his army together, and advanced on Badragosa, which was attacked at dawn on St. George's Day<sup>4</sup>. The Lauranian attack was ferocious and by midday Badragosa was captured and the Albanians were retreating down the valley. However during the assault Molara was killed and in the aftermath of the victory the morale of the Lauranian army collapsed. Many of the soldiers had had enough of fighting, and only a few returned to Xalla. The remainder returned to their homes. The death of Molara, and the absence of Prince Flavius, left the Lauranians without a leader, and for the next three hundred and eighteen years the county remained under Ottoman rule.

### Three centuries of Ottoman rule

Whilst Yousuf Tariq remained as Governor of Laurania, the Lauranians were treated quite well. Although conversion to Islam was encouraged, it was not imposed upon the population as a whole. Likewise, the Governor ensured that his tax collectors only collected what was due, and did not line their own pockets too much. However his replacement introduced a far more repressive regime and this sparked the first of many minor revolts. These were generally very localised and uncoordinated, and usually resulted in massacres and the enslavement of anyone who was assumed to have supported the rebels.

Some young men did try to resist the Ottomans by emigrating so that they could serve in the armies of their enemies, and regiments of Lauranian troops could be found in the Austrian and Russian armies during the eighteenth century. They were universally regarded as hardy soldiers who were ideally suited to fighting in mountainous areas, and they were always keen to fight the Ottoman Turks.

Not all Lauranians fought against the Ottomans and several joined the Ottoman Army where they rose to high rank. One – Ahmed Riza (formerly Anton Riva) – commanded Ottoman troops near Balta<sup>5</sup> during the

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<sup>3</sup> Copies of these letters are held in the National Archives of Laurania.

<sup>4</sup> St. George is the patron saint on Laurania.

<sup>5</sup> Balta was an Ottoman town near the border. It was the scene of the alleged massacre of locals by

Russo-Turkish War (1768 – 1774). In general, however, the Ottomans did not trust the Lauranians and the Lauranians always sought ways by which they could regain their independence. This took over three hundred years, during which the Lauranians did all they could to keep their language, customs, and traditions alive.

## Independence

In 1797, during the Revolutionary Wars, Laurania was invaded by French troops, who were welcomed as liberators. The French recruited numerous Lauranians, and the Lauranian Legion<sup>6</sup> served with distinction in Italy and Spain. When Napoleon abdicated in 1814 and was exiled to Elba, the Lauranians were not willing to give up their newfound liberty. During the Peace of Paris the Lauranians were offered independence as a principality ruled by a minor Austrian prince<sup>7</sup>, and the majority of the population willingly accepted this.

The new ruler of Laurania did little to endear himself to his people, and proved to be as weak and dissolute as his predecessor. He failed to learn the language, and surrounded himself with Austrian courtiers. Many Lauranians had welcomed their new Prince but within a few years small republican secret societies began to form in Laurania. They wanted a return to the freedoms they had enjoyed under the French Republic and Empire. The Lauranian Secret Police (*Policia Secreta*) – who were mainly recruited in Austria – arrested and tortured any members of these secret societies they could identify.

In 1832 Flavius XIX died suddenly<sup>8</sup>, and was succeeded by his 18-year old son, Flavius XX. The new Prince proved to be even less effective than his father. He was an infrequent visitor to Laurania, preferring to spend his time in Vienna and Paris. During his long absences an Austrian – Count Schwarzenberg – ruled the principality. The Count hated all things Lauranian, often referring to Lauranian nobles as ‘rustics in fine clothes’ and the general populace as ‘boorish peasants whose idea of wealth is to own a field of turnips’. He raised taxes to a level that was almost unsustainable in order to finance the Prince’s extravagant life-style and to pay for a larger and larger Secret Police, whose sole role seemed to be to suppress the native Lauranians.

## The 1848 Revolution

By 1848 the repressive Flavian regime was hated throughout Laurania, and its excesses were even commented on in *The Times*. Matters came to a head when Flavius XX returned from a visit to Vienna. Count Schwarzenberg ordered the population of the City of Laurania to line the streets to welcome the Prince. They did so reluctantly, and when some of the crowd started to boo, members of the Secret Police opened fire indiscriminately. Almost instantly the crowd changed into a mob, and several Secret Policemen were killed. The Prince’s cavalry escort<sup>9</sup> literally cut a path through the mob and managed to get Flavius and Count Schwarzenberg – who was travelling in the same coach as the Prince – into the palace just ahead of the pursuing Lauranians. The gates of the palace were secured, and the Prince, Count Schwarzenberg, the Guard Cavalry Regiment, and the Palace Guard<sup>10</sup> prepared for a siege.

When news of the rising reached the Austrian Emperor, Ferdinand I, the Austrians were already dealing with

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Russian Cossacks – a fact denied by the Russians – that precipitated the declaration of war by Sultan Mustafa III.

<sup>6</sup> The Lauranian Legion (*Legiona da Laurania*) consisted of:

- Three battalions of line infantry (*1<sup>o</sup> - 3<sup>o</sup> Batalionas Infantaria* [1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalions])
- One battalion of light infantry (*1<sup>o</sup> Bataliona Infantaria Levisa* [1<sup>st</sup> Light Infantry Battalion])
- Two squadrons of light cavalry; (*1<sup>o</sup> - 2<sup>o</sup> Squadra Cavalria Levisa* [1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Cavalry Squadrons])
- One battery of foot artillery (*1<sup>o</sup> Batteria Artilleria da Pedia*)

This later became the basis of the post-1814 *Arma da Laurania* (Lauranian Army).

<sup>7</sup> The Austrian prince was a distant relative of Prince Flavius XVIII, who had married a minor Austrian princess whilst he was in exile in Rome. This fact made the new prince – who called himself Flavius XIX – acceptable to the majority of Lauranians.

<sup>8</sup> The Prince’s demise was due to food poisoning as a result of eating oysters out of season, but the Lauranian Secret Police used his sudden death as an excuse to arrest large numbers of ‘suspects’, many of whom did not survive ‘questioning’.

<sup>9</sup> The cavalry escort was drawn from the Guard Cavalry Regiment, which was exclusively recruited in Austria.

<sup>10</sup> The Palace Guard, like the Guard Cavalry Regiment, was an exclusively Austrian unit. It was organised as an infantry regiment with an attached artillery battery.

risings in Italy and Hungary as well as a revolt in Vienna. They were unable to send any immediate assistance to Flavius, and urged him to follow Ferdinand's lead in promising constitutional reforms as well as the abolition of the Secret Police. Flavius dithered, fearing that without the support of Austria and the Secret Police he would be unable to rule Laurania. Despite the urgings of Count Schwarzenberg to stand firm, and the assurances of the commanders of the Palace Guard and the Guard Cavalry that they could hold the Palace against any attack<sup>11</sup>, Flavius announced his abdication on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1848.

By this time the population of Laurania knew the leaders of the secret societies who wished to set up a republic. They included Hector Godoy (a young lawyer), Luca Ramira (a *Tenanta-Colonela* in the Lauranian Army), Horatio Casamonta (a prominent doctor), Rueben Matanza (a banker), and Stefan Molaro (a distant relative of Flavius XX and a descendant of Roberto Molaro, Lord of Torracastra, who had led the resistance to the Ottoman invasion and occupation). On the abdication of Flavius XX these five men became the Supreme Council of Laurania (*Consilia Suprema da Laurania*). Horatio Casamonta was the chairman of the Council and ran the country with the active support of the other members. All the members of the Supreme Council took on specific governmental roles<sup>12</sup>.

One of the first acts of the Supreme Council was the setting up of a special committee to write a constitution for the new republic. The committee produced a draft constitution within six months, and this was accepted and signed by all the members of the Supreme Council. A census of the population was made, and those who were eligible to vote were identified. Elections followed, and on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1849 the Republic of Laurania was declared by its new President – *Presidenta* Rueben Matanza – from the balcony of the newly refurbished Palace of the Republic (*Palacia da Republica*, formerly the Prince's Palace). He appointed the former members of the Supreme Council to important positions within the Presidential cabinet and set about modernising the country.

## The First Republic

The first task facing the new republic was the threat from Austria. Stefan Molaro made numerous visits to foreign capitals – particularly London, Paris, and St Petersburg – where he made a favourable impression on every Head of State and government minister he met. He was able to secure the support of the British, French, and Russian governments, all of whom recognised the new republic. At the same time Luca Ramira reorganised the Lauranian Army (*Arma da Laurania*)<sup>13</sup> and Lauranian Navy (*Armada da Laurania*)<sup>14</sup>, and sent purchasing commissions to buy up-to-date weapons with which to arm its units. Rueben Matanza had few problems raising the taxes necessary for the restructuring and re-equipping of the Army, as many Lauranians saw it as their national duty to support and pay for their independence. So much money was

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<sup>11</sup> After an initial attempt to storm the Palace was repulsed the Lauranian besiegers surrounded the building, keeping well out of rifle range. The siege was not rigorously enforced, and messengers were allowed in and out without let or hindrance, although food and other supplies were not allowed to pass through the cordon. This policy was followed in the hope that further loss of Lauranian blood could be avoided.

<sup>12</sup> These roles were:

- Horatio Casamonta – Chairman of the Supreme Council and Minister without Portfolio
- Hector Godoy – Minister of Justice and Head of the Lauranian Police
- Luca Ramira – Minister of War
- Rueben Matanza – Minister of Finance and Public Works
- Stefan Molaro – Minister for Foreign Affairs

<sup>13</sup> The *Arma da Laurania* (Lauranian Army) consisted of:

- A regiment of Guard cavalry (*Lanca da Guarda* [The Lancers of the Guard])
- Three regiments Guard infantry – 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiments of Infantry of the Guard (1<sup>o</sup> - 3<sup>o</sup> *Regimentas Infantaria da Guarda*)
- Four regiments of line cavalry – 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiments (1<sup>o</sup> - 4<sup>o</sup> *Regimentas Cavalria*)
- Twenty regiments of line infantry – 1<sup>st</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments (1<sup>o</sup> - 20<sup>o</sup> *Regimentas Infantaria*)
- Six batteries of field artillery – 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Batteries) (1<sup>o</sup> - 6<sup>o</sup> *Batterias Artilleria da Campa*)

<sup>14</sup> The Lauranian Navy (*Armada da Laurania*) initially consisted of three coastal gunboats (*Guardacosta*) converted from steam tugs. These were:

- *Laurania*
- *Molaro*
- *Victoria*

raised that Matanza was able to help finance the building of the first railway in Laurania<sup>15</sup> as well as embarking on a programme of road building and renovation of defensive fortifications.

Under Emperor Franz Joseph, Austria realised that a strong, independent Laurania was preferable to a weak, dependant satellite, and in 1852 the Lauranian Republic – *Republica Laurania* – was formally recognised by the Austrians. By 1857, when *Presidenta* Matanza's second four-year term came to an end, Laurania was well protected from any potential enemies and becoming industrialised. Herein, however, lay problems for the incoming *Presidenta* Lorenzo Marka.

Lorenzo Marka had served under *Presidenta* Matanza as Minister of Public Works, and was a supporter of the moves to industrialise Laurania. In order to achieve this as quickly as possible, both Matanza and Marka had encouraged foreign investment and the immigration of skilled foreign workers. This policy was not popular with Lauranians who lived in the traditionally agricultural areas along the main river valleys or in the mountainous areas where livelihoods depended upon forestry and goat herding. These more traditionally minded Lauranians supported the 'Laurania for the Lauranians' policy espoused by *Generala* Luca Ramira<sup>16</sup> and Stefan Molara, who had formed the Traditionalist Party (*Partia Traditionalista*) in 1854.

The founding of Traditionalist Party marked a watershed in Lauranian politics, and led to the formation of several other political groupings, the most important of which was *Presidenta* Lorenzo Marka's National Party (*Partia Nationala*)<sup>17</sup>. From then on the united front that had created the republic was split and Lauranian politics became bedevilled by political intrigue and infighting. Each new *Presidenta* had to appoint Ministers drawn from a number of different political parties, as no single party was ever able to secure a majority in the Chamber of Deputies<sup>18</sup>.

In 1876 *Generala* Luca Ramira retired from the Army and returned to active politics. He stood as the Traditionalist Party's presidential candidate in the 1877 and was elected by a narrow majority. Almost immediately he introduced legislation that was intended to deprive all non-Lauranians of the right to vote in future elections. This was not well received by the Chamber of Deputies, who amended the Bill so that non-Lauranians would be able to vote once they had lived in the country for ten years. *Presidenta* Ramira then tried to fill the Chamber of Senators with people who would support his legislation, but such unconstitutional behaviour was intolerable even to his allies, and he was forced to withdraw the Bill.

Ramira then sought to divert attention from his political plight by encouraging the Colonial Movement (*Movementa Coloniala*) – supported by the Lauranian Army and Navy – to found a Lauranian colony in Africa. This proved to be very successful, and in 1880 the Lauranian flag was raised for the first time in the capital of Laurania's new African colony, Nuva Xalla.

The 1881 elections proved to be a close run thing, with no political party gaining a majority in the Chamber of Deputies. The National Party candidate – Hugo Recta – was elected *Presidenta*, but he proved to be a poor choice. The political crisis about voting rights that had begun under *Presidenta* Ramira had continued to simmer under the surface of Lauranian political life. Matters came to a head in 1883 when *Presidenta* Recta ordered *Generala* Antonio Molara<sup>19</sup> – the commander of the Army garrison in Torracastra – to use force to disperse a crowd of Traditionalist Party supporters who had gathered in the town's main square to protest because non-Lauranians had been allowed to vote in the local mayoral election. When Molara politely declined to obey this order he was summarily removed from his post and 'retired' from the Army.

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<sup>15</sup> The first line of the state-owned Laurania Railway (*Viaferra da Laurania*) ran from the City of Laurania to Villablanca via Villamolara.

<sup>16</sup> After serving a term as Minister of War, Luca Ramira had returned to active duty and been promoted to the rank of General (*Generala*).

<sup>17</sup> The other political parties included:

- The Democratic Party (*Partia Democratica*)
- The Popular Party (*Partia Populara*)
- The Radical Party (*Partia Radicala*)
- The Reform Party (*Partia Reforma*)

<sup>18</sup> The Lauranian parliament consisted of two chambers. The lower chamber – the Chamber of Deputies – was made up of Deputies elected by each county and large town on a 'first past the post' basis whereas the upper chamber – the Chamber of Senators – was made up of important men appointed by the *Presidenta* from each political party in proportion to the total votes the parties polled during the national elections. The elections for the two Chambers – along with that for the *Presidenta* – were held every four years.

<sup>19</sup> Antonio Molara was the son of Stefan Molara, co-founder of the Traditionalist Party.

## The 1883 Civil War

Within days of Molara's removal many Army officers began to refuse to obey orders signed by the President, and Army units that were recruited from areas where Traditionalist Party support was strong began moving towards the capital, handing stocks of weapons over to party supporters as they went. *Presidenta Recta* responded by mobilising the Republican Militia<sup>20</sup> (*Militia Republicana*) in those areas that were not controlled by the Traditionalist Party.

Over the next two weeks sporadic fighting took place between the two sides, with full-scale battles taking place at Torra Diegra, Teruella, and Castellantiqua. The superior training of the Army units that supported Molara and the Traditionalist Party more than made up for their inferior numbers, and they easily pushed aside the larger but poorly trained units of Republican Militia that faced them. By now *Presidenta Recta* was becoming desperate, and he ordered the few remaining loyal units of the Lauranian Army to march on Laurania City to prevent its capture.

At the same time he ordered the battleships and cruisers of the Lauranian Navy to sail from their base at Portaferra to Laurania City so that they could reinforce the capital's defences. Unbeknown to *Presidenta Recta* two torpedo boats based in the southern port of Pelaya had joined the Molara's 'rebels', and were already patrolling the coast off Cape Cheronta (*Capa Cheronta*) to prevent such a move. When the main Lauranian battle fleet came into sight, the commander of the leading 'rebel' torpedo boat – *Commandanta da Nava Saldanho* – signalled the admiral commanding the Lauranian battle fleet – *Amirala Burga* – to heave to and join the 'rebels'. *Amirala Burga*, who was well known for his dislike of the Molara family in general and of Antonio Molara in particular, answered by ordering his gunnery officer to open fire on the two torpedo boats. Moments later the torpedo boats were obscured from view by numerous shell splashes.

*Commandanta da Nava Saldanho* turned his torpedo boat towards *Amirala Burga's* flagship – *Republica* – and fired both his ship's torpedoes at short range. Almost as soon as this had happened *Commandanta da Nava Saldanho's* torpedo boat was hit by a heavy calibre shell fired by *Republica* and sank with the loss of all aboard. The two torpedoes could not fail to hit their target and exploded against *Republica's* port side, just abreast of the bridge and near to the stern. The *Republica* immediately lurched to a halt, and began taking on water. *Amirala Burga* was thrown off his feet by the explosion of the first torpedo, and hit his head on the flagship's binnacle. He was taken below, and despite receiving the best medical treatment available, he died several hours later as a result of a brain haemorrhage.

The remaining 'rebel' torpedo boat made off towards the south – and safety – as fast as it could whilst the rest of the battle fleet heaved to and gave assistance to the *Republica*. After several hours of frantic damage control work they were able to stop the battleship from sinking, and she was slowly towed back to Portaferra to be repaired<sup>21</sup>. This naval action – which was subsequently called the Battle of Cape Cheronta – ensured that the Lauranian Navy was unable to help defend Laurania City from the 'rebels'.

By August 1883 Molara's 'rebels' had reached Tarentum and appeared to be preparing to advance on Laurania City. The commander of *Presidenta Recta's* army of loyal regulars and Republican Militia – *Generala da Corpa Lorenza* – urged Recta to attack the 'rebels' before they were in a position to besiege the capital. On 18<sup>th</sup> August 1883 news that the 'rebels' had moved forward towards Serato confirmed everything that Lorenza had predicted, and the 'loyalist' army – led by *Presidenta Recta* and *Generala Lorenza* – advanced on that town to fight what was to be the last battle of the civil war, the Battle of Serato.

As with so many meeting engagements, the Battle of Serato began when the leading cavalry elements of both armies literally rode into each other early in the morning just outside Serato. After initially skirmishing on horseback both side dismounted and formed firing lines. As other units of infantry and artillery came forward they were fed into the rapidly extending firing lines, and by lunchtime the fighting extended for over a mile on either side of the road between Serato and Laurania City. The fighting was most intense in the centre, but neither side was able to prevail until just before dusk, when members of Molara's bodyguard – led by *Colonela Sorrento*, Molara's aide – cut their way through the leading ranks of the 'loyalist' troops and attacked *Generala Lorenza's* headquarters. In the ensuing fight *Generala Lorenza* was seriously wounded

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<sup>20</sup> The Republican Militia had been set up in 1850 to act as a second-line of defence should war break out with the Austrians. All able-bodied men over the age of eighteen were liable for service in the Militia. When the danger of a war with Austrian passed there were moves to disband the Militia, but this was resisted by many Lauranians – regardless of the political affiliations – who saw service in the Militia as a tradition that went back to the founding of the country.

<sup>21</sup> She was subsequently renamed *Saldanho* in honour of the man who had tried to sink her.

and *Presidenta* Recta was killed.

As news of the President's death spread, fighting gradually died down and 'loyalist' troops began to surrender; first in ones and twos, then in larger groups, and finally in whole units. Those that did not surrender threw down their arms and did their best to escape in the dark.

By dawn the next morning the 'rebel' army had occupied Laurania City and at noon on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1883 *Generala* Antonio Molara was proclaimed President in Constitution Square.

## The Second Republic

Within days of becoming President, Molara declared that the 1852 Constitution was abrogated and that a new Constitution would be introduced in due course. This was followed by a Declaration of the Second Republic, under which *Presidenta* Molara decreed that he would rule by Presidential fiat until the new Constitution was written and approved by a special Council of the Two Chambers<sup>22</sup>.

The special Council approved the new Constitution in early 1884, and in many aspects it was not substantially different from its predecessor. The main difference was that it increased the power of the President. He could suspend any legislation passed by the Lauranian Parliament for up to three years, issue decrees when Parliament was not sitting, and appoint Inspectors of the Census<sup>23</sup> to oversee the registration of voters<sup>24</sup>.

As a result of the work of the Inspectors of the Census, the 1884 elections resulted in a large number of *Presidenta* Molara's supporters becoming Deputies, and this allowed the President to pack the Chamber of Senators with men he knew he could trust. This blatant disregard for the democratic process did not sit well with many Lauranians, including some who had previously supported the President. Furthermore, the Parliament rarely met, and this allowed the President to rule by decree. To all intents and purposes Laurania was no longer a democracy; it had become a dictatorship.

In the months that followed the approval of the new Constitution, several of the old secret societies were revived, and despite the efforts of the Secret Police – ably led by *Colonela* Sorrento – they flourished. Some were dedicated to the use of the democratic process to force the President to restore the 1852 Constitution, whilst others – including 'The League'<sup>25</sup> (*Ligia Anarcista*) – were dedicated to the use of force to achieve their aims. Foremost amongst the opponents of the President was the reformed National Party (*Partia Nationala*), which was led by Stefan Savrola (a writer, political philosopher, and amateur astronomer), Louis Moret (a former newspaper editor and member of the Civic Council of Laurania City), Enrico Renos (a lawyer), and Hector Godoy (formerly a lawyer and member of the 1848 Supreme Council of Laurania, and now Mayor of Laurania City).

During 1886 and 1887 the attention of many Lauranians was diverted from the growing internal unrest by events in Africa. The Lauranian colony in Africa – Nuva Xalla – experienced a serious uprising by members of the Pendi tribe that required the combined efforts of the Lauranian Army and Navy to subdue. It was only after the defeat of the main native army at the Battle of Langi Tal – where a charge by a squadron of the Lancers of the Guard (*Lanca da Guarda*) rode down and destroyed the native leader's bodyguard and pursued them for over five miles – that peace was restored to the colony.

The start of 1888 saw increased levels of political unrest throughout Laurania. There was considerable pressure from the opposition parties – particularly the National Party – for a date to be set for the next elections, but *Presidenta* Molara seemed in no hurry to do so. After a series of increasingly volatile demonstrations in Laurania City – some of which degenerated into serious riots – *Presidenta* Molara

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<sup>22</sup> The Council was 'selected' by *Presidenta* Molara from amongst his supporters in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Senators.

<sup>23</sup> The Inspectors were mostly retired officers and non-commissioned officers who had served in the 'rebel' army, and who could be trusted to do what was required of them by the new President.

<sup>24</sup> The Inspectors revived the ancient tradition of the military census. On Midsummer Day every able-bodied man over the age of twenty one had to report to a representative of the President – an Inspector of the Census – to show that they were available to bear arms in defence of the republic. In exchange for this promise of service they were given the right to vote. However, the Inspector could reject an applicant if they judged them to be 'unfit'. For example, anyone not born in Laurania could be judged to be 'unfit' as could a factory worker who had supported the former President.

<sup>25</sup> 'The League' was a quasi-anarchist grouping led by Karl Kreutze.



announced that electoral writs would be issued on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1888. In the meantime the Inspectors of the Census set to work to ensure that only those who were regarded as ‘fit’ would be able to vote in the forthcoming elections.

## The 1888 Revolution<sup>26</sup>

Matters came to a head when the Electoral Rolls were published. It soon became apparent that a large number of voters had been declared ‘unfit’, and when Louis Moret addressed the large crowd that had assembled in Constitution Square with the words ...

*‘You are betrayed – a cruel fraud – the hopes we had cherished are dashed to the ground – all has been done in vain – Cheated! Cheated! Cheated! ... The register of citizenship has been mutilated, and the names of more than half the electors have been erased.’*

... the crowd surged forward just as *Presidenta* Molara’s carriage was leaving the Parliament Building which formed one side of the Square. A squadron of Lancers of the Guard then charged the crowd and created a path through the crowd for the President’s carriage. After the carriage and its escort had left the Square, several companies of Infantry of the Guard opened fire on the crowd, which dispersed. Forty people were killed as a result of the cavalry charge and the volleys of rifle fire, and the simmering unrest in the City grew considerably.

In the aftermath of the ‘massacre’ the leadership of the Popular Party – with the exception of Stefan Savrola – assembled in the Mayor of Laurania City’s official residence to discuss what to do. Louis Moret favoured an immediate uprising, but Hector Godoy counselled against such precipitous action. Enrico Renos suggested that they present a legal challenge to the President for the violation of the fundamental principles enshrined in the Declaration of National Right, but he was interrupted by others who wanted to suggest alternative methods of removing the *Presidenta* Molara from power. At this point Savrola arrived, and after calming the situation he proposed that nothing precipitous be done. He also suggested that a deputation be sent to see the President to request that the Inspectors of the Census reinstate the names of those voters who had been removed from the Electoral Roll, and that those responsible for the shooting of unarmed citizens were brought to trial. This was agreed, and the meeting dispersed.

The deputation – whose members included Savrola, Moret, Renos, and Godoy – met the President next day, but he courteously refused their requests, remarking that the current unrest in the country made it impossible for him to comply. He also stated that rising tension with Great Britain over a border dispute affecting Laurania’s colony in Africa meant that international affairs must take precedence for the moment.

At the time of their meeting with the President to the deputation were unaware that the situation in Africa required a military response<sup>27</sup>, and on 8<sup>th</sup> September *Presidenta* Molara ordered *Amirala* De Mello to set sail with the bulk of the Lauranian battle fleet<sup>28</sup> to reinforce the forces already stationed in the colony.

During the uneasy period of peace that followed the despatch of the battle fleet, *Presidenta* Molara attempted to subvert the leadership of the National Party by using his wife – Lucile – to compromise Stefan Savrola. The plot backfired and Lucile Molara, having realised that the opponents to her husband’s rule were totally justified in what they were doing, switched her support to the National Party in general and Stefan Savrola in particular. In the meantime Konrad Strelitz<sup>29</sup> had gathered an army of ‘liberators’<sup>30</sup> in Laurania’s northern neighbour, and against the specific wishes of the leadership of the National Party he invaded Laurania and marched on the town of Turga.

*Presidenta* Molara immediately ordered *Colonela* Brienz to move his brigade<sup>31</sup> by railway to Lorenzo to block any possible advance by the ‘invaders’ on Laurania City. He also ordered *Amirala* De Mello – whose battle

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<sup>26</sup> A fictionalised version of the 1888 Revolution forms the backdrop to Sir Winston Churchill’s only published novel, *Savrola: A Tale of the Revolution in Laurania* (February 1900).

<sup>27</sup> A British battleship – HMS *Aggressor* – had arrived off the coast of the disputed area.

<sup>28</sup> The battle fleet comprised the battleships *Fortuna* (*Amirala* De Mello’s flagship) and *Saldanho*, the cruisers *Petrach* and *Sorato*, and the gunboat *Rienzi*.

<sup>29</sup> Konrad Strelitz was a former professional soldier in the Austrian Army. Although he and his ‘army’ declared allegiance to the National Party, many – including himself – were members of ‘The League’.

<sup>30</sup> The ‘army’ consisted of approximately 2,000 men and several Maxim Machine Guns.

<sup>31</sup> The brigade comprised the Lancers of the Guard, two regiments of Infantry of the Guard, and two batteries of field artillery.

squadron was just off the entrance to the Suez Canal – to return at once to Laurania. His final response to the invasion was to order a second brigade<sup>32</sup> of less trustworthy troops to prepare to follow *Colonela* Brienzi's Brigade northward. It was this last action that was to precipitate the outbreak of the revolution.

When the 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was paraded in preparation for its move north, it very quickly became apparent that the President no longer enjoyed the Regiment's loyalty. The movement of *Colonela* Rollo's Brigade was immediately postponed, and the troops returned to their barracks. The leadership of the National Party realised that the bulk of the Army no longer supported *Presidenta* Molara, and began organising an uprising in Laurania City. This was to start at midnight, and the signal to seize power was to be the ringing of the City's alarm bells.

When the alarm bells sounded many thousands of ordinary Lauranians joined the members of the National Party on the streets. The mass of people advanced on the Presidential Palace, which they attempted to storm. They were initially unable to do so, and many people of both sides were killed during the intense street fighting that took place in and around the Palace. After several hours of fighting Louis Moret tried to resolve the situation by calling upon the Palace's defenders to surrender. He did so under the protection of a flag of truce, but this did not stop *Colonela* Sorrento from shooting him when Moret tried to persuade the rank-and-file Guardsmen amongst the defenders to put down their weapons.

This blatant disregard for the Rules of War incensed the Palace's besiegers to such an extent that they mounted yet another assault on the Palace. This time they were successful, and *Presidenta* Molara<sup>33</sup> and many of the defenders were killed. In the euphoria that followed, a Committee of Public Safety – chaired by Savrola – took temporary control of the government of Laurania.

The death of *Presidenta* Molara should have marked the end of the revolution, but the arrival of *Amirala* De Mello's battle squadron off the harbour of Laurania City signalled that there were still outstanding matters to be settled. As the squadron came abreast of the fortresses guarding the entrance to the port<sup>34</sup>, the nine-inch coastal defence batteries situated within the fortresses opened fire. The *Fortuna* was hit and badly damaged, but not before she had returned fire and inflicted casualties on the gunners of the coastal defence batteries. *Sorato* passed through the channel without suffering much damage, but the *Petrach* was less fortunate, and when her steering was disabled she ran onto a sandbank. The gunners specially targeted her, and after receiving a considerable battering<sup>35</sup> she blew up at about three o'clock in the afternoon. The *Rienzi* was sheltered from the most severe gunfire by the *Saldanho*, and after a fight lasting approximately forty minutes the squadron had passed into the main harbour where they anchored.

A flag of truce was then run up over the Customs House, and about an hour later a launch carrying two senior officers of the Republican Militia came alongside *Amirala* De Mello flagship. The two officers called upon the Admiral to surrender; he replied that unless the leader of the revolution – Savrola – was handed over to stand trial for murder and rebellion, he would open fire on the city at six o'clock next morning. This ultimatum was conveyed to the Committee of Public Safety, who – after a long and rancorous debate – voted by a small majority to comply with the Admiral's wishes.

That night Stefan Savrola and Lucile Molara left Laurania City and made their way northward to the border, which they crossed later on the following day. True to his word, at six o'clock *Amirala* De Mello ordered the ships of the Lauranian Navy to begin firing at targets in the city. A further flag of truce halted the bombardment, and when the Admiral was made aware that Molara was dead and that Savrola was no longer in Laurania, he surrendered his ships to the Committee of Public Safety. The 1888 Revolution was at an end.

## The Third Republic

In the weeks that followed Hector Godoy was appointed temporary President of Laurania. His first act was to restore the 1852 Constitution, and early in 1889 elections were held. Godoy was confirmed as the new President of the Third Republic, with Enrico Renos as his Vice President and Minister of Justice. The National Party was the majority party in both Chambers and quickly voted through the famous Bill of

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<sup>32</sup> This was *Colonela* Rollo's brigade. It included the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments.

<sup>33</sup> Karl Kreutze shot *Presidenta* Molara in the head after he had been seriously wounded and was no longer able to defend himself. Kreutze was subsequently killed when he tried to attack Stefan Savrola.

<sup>34</sup> The ships were in line astern in the following order: *Fortuna* (*Amirala* De Mello's flagship), *Sorato*, *Petrach*, *Rienzi*, and *Saldanho*.

<sup>35</sup> Some eyewitnesses state that she attempted to raise a white flag, but this was either not seen or ignored by the coastal defence batteries.

Reconciliation. This pardoned all but the most important of Molará's supporters, the latter being offered the opportunity of voluntary exile rather than imprisonment<sup>36</sup>. Despite his age and fragile health, *Presidenta* Godoy made a State Visit to Great Britain in 1890, as a result of which the border dispute between the African colonies of both countries was solved amicably.

Enrico Renos became President after the 1893 elections, and he invited Stefan Savrola – and his new wife, Lucile – to return to Laurania from their self-imposed exile in London. They did so in 1894, but Savrola took no further part in Lauranian politics. Instead he concentrated on his astronomical studies and writing a history of Laurania.

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<sup>36</sup> *Colonela* Sorrento chose exile in Paris, where he set up a rather ineffective Molaran émigré organisation. He died some fifteen years later having never set foot in Laurania again. *Amirala* De Mello's treatment was by the new government was completely different. He was allowed to retire to his house in the country, where he acquired the reputation for growing the best roses in Laurania.