

Civilization 101

Chapter 101 - The End of the Year 1482 - The Discovery of Congo

In August of the year 1482, in the waters of the Gulf of Guinea, South Atlantic.

When Xiulote had just disembarked south of Xilotepec City, far away in the distant East, the seven caravel ships had just crossed the Equator. Harnessing the power of the southeast trade winds, they sailed southward with determination, against the weak current of the Gulf of Guinea.

The caravels measured approximately twenty to thirty meters in length and six to nine meters in width, with a length to width ratio of about 3.5:1, making them quite small. With this ratio, the ships had high stability, with both their speed and maneuverability being relatively suitable. They had a displacement of about fifty tons, a single deck, and were equipped with two masts carrying the triangular sails commonly seen in the Mediterranean.

Under the gentle monsoon, the caravels' sails were slightly unfurled, pushing the small ships to a moderate speed of 4 knots, traveling 7.4 kilometers per hour. With sufficient wind, the agile caravels could even reach an astonishing 8 to 9 knots.

This type of ship was a potent weapon of the pioneering Kingdom of Portugal, widely used in exploration of coastal waters and the Mediterranean. From the North Atlantic to the South Atlantic, from the Portuguese offshore island of Santa Cruz to Santo Antonio in the Gulf of Guinea, caravels sailed southward, searching for routes to the wealthy East, and for the legendary kingdom of the powerful King John.

The fleet before us was doing the same; it had just crossed Cape Lopez near the Equator and was now continuing southward in search of new lands and seas. Adorning the masthead of the seven caravels was the flag of the Portuguese Royal Family, flying high.

At the center of the flag was a blue cross on a white background. The blue cross was composed of five groups of eleven shields arranged in a shield pattern. These shields, resembling silver coins, symbolized the autonomous currency issuance rights of the initially independent Kingdom of Portugal.

The outer ring of the flag featured the Avis Cross with green patterns and twelve neatly arranged yellow castles. The Avis Cross symbolized the founder of the Avis dynasty, Emperor Joao I, who inherited the kingdom in his capacity as the Grand Master of the Order of Avis. The yellow castles symbolized the common ancestors closely linked between Portugal and the Kingdom of Castile.

Under the Equatorial sun, accompanied by the warm trade wind, the sun shone on the largest caravel. Although early artillery was widely used on the battlefields to expel the Moors, this exploration vessel was not equipped with cannons. The ship was not designed for combat; its tonnage was quite limited, and space had to be left for storing more food and water.

At the ship's bow, a middle-aged white man in luxurious attire stood solemnly, gazing silently at the distant sea and sky. He wore a flat captain's hat, a silver cross necklace of the Holy Mother around his neck, neatly dressed in a red and blue captain's uniform, and a ceremonial sword at his waist. Even in the tropical heat, he kept his collar, cuffs, and trouser legs tightly fastened, his belt accentuating his upright figure, meticulously watching ahead.

Behind the captain was a bustling crew, with sailors climbing the tall masts periodically to observe the distant coastline.

On this two-masted vessel, the mainmast was forward, about 18 meters high, and the mizzenmast was aft, about 15 meters high. On a clear day on deck, an excellent sailor could see more than 30 kilometers, and every two meters climbed on the mast added roughly another kilometer to the view. Therefore, without telescopes, the ship's furthest visible range was about 40 kilometers.

This exploring fleet maintained a safe distance within forty kilometers from the coastline, persistently exploring southward along the edge of the wild jungle on the West African continent.

In the shadow of the mast, a few meters behind the captain, a young nobleman dressed in fine clothes was sweating profusely. He took off his aristocratic hat, loosened his collar, and wiped the sweat from his forehead. Then he quietly took out a flask and took a hearty swig of water mixed with wine.

"Aha! Veteran sailor Bruno Cao, you dare to sneak some wine!" Suddenly behind the young noble, a short-haired sailor emerged. His body was lean and his face sunburned. He was wearing only a sailor's short shirt, with a Moorish scimitar at his waist, and now, his eyes wide, he whispered fiercely.

"Shh, keep it down. Veteran sailor Paulo! Do you want the respected Captain Diogo Cao to find out? This blasted ghost weather." Startled by Paulo, Bruno wiped the sweat from his face again.

"Then let me have a taste too. Quick, let me try it. We've been on this boat for a full two weeks! Fodesse! The sun is nearly cooking me alive; only you nobles still get to drink some wine."

Paulo's eyes were fixed on the flask, his hand reaching out almost involuntarily.

"Alright, have a taste... dammit, that's enough, enough! That's all I have left."

"Ah, Fodesse! Praise the Holy Mother. I've finally tasted wine again." Paulo tipped the flask vigorously, licking the last drops off the rim, relishing the taste.

"Damn it!" Bruno snatched back the empty flask, shook it, and heard no sound of liquid. The melancholy inherent to the Portuguese instantly swept over him, his spirit withering in an instant.

"Tenho saudades! I'm nostalgic! Losing you makes me so forlorn."

Paulo was grinning at his side, laughing heartily. He threw an arm around Bruno's shoulder and gave the young man's body a vigorous shake.

"I say, Brother Bruno, you should take a lesson from the captain. Just look at the captain's demeanor and actions." Speaking, veteran sailor Paulo jerked his chin in the direction of the ship's bow.