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Chapter 126 The Empire's Past

In the history of the Aztec Empire, if one were to choose the most significant figure, it would neither be the "Obsidian Serpent", the creator of the Empire and the first leader, the fourth Mexica predecessor monarch Itzcoatl, nor the "King with the Wrathful Frown", the second leader of the Empire who expanded its territory, Montezuma I. The true historical shaper of the Aztec Empire was the immortal Sun, the Empire's chief architect, Trakel Er.

In the process of following in his ancestors' footsteps, Xiulote habitually brought these great figures of the Empire into the familiar context of Huaxia history. In an era similar in economics and politics, he looked for the future of Mexica history within Huaxia's past.

If one were to compare Itzcoatl, who rose from a vassal city-state to establish the Triple Alliance of the Aztec and overthrow the dominion of the Tepanec Kingdom, to King Wen of Zhou who raised arms against the tyrant Zhou of Shang,

Then Montezuma I, who inherited the Alliance throne, solidified its relationships, subdued remaining Tepanec forces, and expanded the Alliance's territories, would be like King Wu of Zhou who ruled all under heaven.

And Trakel Er, the brother of Montezuma I, who served through the reigns of six Mexica monarchs, from the second predecessor monarch Huitzilíhuitl, to Chimalpopoca, Itzcoatl, Montezuma I, Asayacatl, Tizoc, and four leaders of the Empire, was like Duke Zhou, the founder of the Western Zhou dynasty.

In Xiulote's mind, most great figures in the world shared one common trait: they lived long enough to have sufficient life to achieve their grand goals. And in a Central America where the average life expectancy was only in the twenties, the eighty-five years old Trakel Er clearly had the most important foundation of a great man—immortal time.

Trakel Er was the son of the second predecessor monarch Huitzilíhuitl, born in 1397, an era when everything had not yet happened; the lord of the Mexican Valley was still the Tepanec Kingdom, headquartered on the western shores of Lake Texcoco, and the Aztec were but a nomadic tribe that had settled on a small island in the lake.

The rule of the world was passed from the Teotihuacan civilization of the 1st century BC to the 5th century, to the Toltec civilization from the 6th century to the 12th century, and then to the hands of the Toltec-Tepanec in the 13th century, just like the transition from the Xia to the Shang.

The improved chinampa farming technology of the Aztec became the basis of the burgeoning Empire. The astounding agricultural yields led to significant population growth, and the lake city-states gradually became increasingly pivotal. The thirty years following the birth of Trakel Er were a time of quiet toiling by the Aztec, accumulating strength, engaging in marital diplomacy, and dutifully submitting to the Tepanec.

At that time, the Tepanec Kingdom, ruled by the powerful monarch Texosoxomoc, conquered in the east and subdued uprisings in the west, stabilizing the world. In 1418, he launched a major attack on the eastern part of Lake Texcoco, subdued the rising City of Texcoco, and thus unified the Valley. The various city-states could do nothing but silently endure, dutifully paying tribute to the Tepanec Kingdom on schedule.

When Texosoxomoc finally died in the 12th Rabbit year of the Maya calendar, 1426, the long-waiting Mexica-Tenochtitlan quickly formed an alliance with the unwilling City of Texcoco, followed by the accession of Tlacopan from the western shores of the lake.

In 1428, the Triple Alliance of the Aztec was established, and that same year, they laid siege to and captured the capital of the Tepanec Kingdom, Azcapotzalco. Subsequently, after several years of

warfare, they inherited the hegemony of the Tepanec. The Triple Alliance unified the Mexican Valley, becoming the Aztec Empire.

In this era, Trakel Er was an outstanding general of the Alliance and, alongside his brother Montezuma I and the Poet King of Texcoco, Nezahualcoyotl, was known as one of the three Tlacohtcalatl, or Marshals, of the Alliance.

In Xiulote's eyes, although Trakel Er's military achievements were outstanding, they were not yet great. His true great endeavor was establishing the civil order of the Empire.

With the advent of peace, Trakel Er stepped down from his position as Marshal to take on the role of the Empire's chief architect, that is, Chief Advisor. Under the direction of the chief architect, the entire Lake Region underwent complete transformation. Vital canals were constructed; the high-yield chinampas were expanded to their peaks; numerous bridges across the lake were built, and the magnificent stony capital city gradually took form. Without a doubt, such large-scale construction during the Stone Age required the fuel of laborers' lives.

Trakel Er's will was strong and resolute. He exchanged the piled bones of countless Tepanec slaves for the agricultural core of the imperial enterprise, a Texcoco Lake Region capable of sustaining one and a half million people. With the flourishing and prosperous Mexican Valley, the Aztec Empire had truly established the economic foundation of its hegemony.

To Xiulote, this was akin to Duke Zhou expanding and perfecting the well-field system. "Zhou enacted the laws; farming households were granted a hundred mu of land and likewise levied a tithe tax," laying the economic foundation of the Western Zhou hegemony.

Beneath the achievements of agricultural construction, Trakel Er had enough prestige to pursue deeper religious and cultural reforms, thereby unifying and strengthening the ideological consciousness of the Aztec.

The first thing he did was to dethrone gods! He elevated the War God, the guardian god of the Mexica, Huitzilopochtli, to the status of the chief Sun God, and deposed the original Sun God, Tezcatlipoca. He solidified the Mexica's divine status as a nation with the blessing of the gods.

The second thing he did was to rewrite history! With his amendments, the Aztec were no longer the semi-nomadic canine descendants from Aztlán in the northwest, but the inheritors of the ancient Teotihuacan civilization, the successors of the glorious Toltec civilization, a divinely favored tribe with a noble history!