

Civilization 132

Chapter 132 Papermaking, Cotton Armor, and Gifts_2

Xiulote examined the corn stalks, uncertain whether this abundant material could be used for papermaking. The outer skin of corn stalks felt hard and had many nodes, which did not seem to be ideal for making paper. Later, he could have the craftsmen give it a try.

Thinking of cotton and maguey, Xiulote was reminded of the Mexica armor. Due to the lack of domesticated large animals, sturdy leather armor was often only owned by senior warriors, while cotton armor was the most widely used equipment among the warriors.

Armor was a symbol of distinction between warriors and militia. The standard gear for warriors was the Ichcahuipilli, "cotton upper garment", a type of light cotton-maguey war armor. Its shape resembled a thick vest, each layer woven from a mix of cotton and sisal, then pressed into form in multiple layers. Cotton provided cutting protection, while sisal offered cooling and sweat-absorbing effects. This cotton armor could effectively increase the warriors' defense against obsidian clubs and stone arrowheads.

As warriors rose in rank, starting from the second level Vastec hunters, they began to equip the Tlahuiztli, "war clothes", a full-body light war armor. War clothes were usually worn over the Ichcahuipilli, also made by weaving together cotton and maguey fibers. As warriors continued to climb in rank, their war clothes would be painted with various patterns, becoming increasingly splendid and majestic.

Fourth level veteran warriors began to wear various feathers and sew various beast skins, illustrating eagles and jaguars on their war clothes. When reaching the ranks of Eagle and Jaguar nobility battle groups, the war clothes would upgrade to leather armor draped with feathers.

For head protection, low-ranking warriors wore various cotton-maguey or leather caps, while high-ranking warriors and commanders wore helmets fashioned after different beasts. The beast helmet, Cacalotl, was a symbol of honor, actually made of wood rather than bone.

The beast helmet Xiulote often wore looked extremely majestic, a brightly colored and realistic tiger head, but in reality, it was exceedingly heavy and lacked ventilation. This meant he always gave orders with a stern and cool demeanor, while sweat streamed down his face.

He intended, once he acquired the copper mines of Tarasco, to first craft bronze helmets, as wooden beast helmets were lacking in both defense and comfort. Bronze armor was somewhat heavy, so initially he planned to imitate the design of half-body Ancient Greek armor, adding skirt armor and greaves. Only after the development of the shallow iron mines of Colima could he consider more advanced scale armor, stab armor, chain mail, and as for the highest-grade plate armor technology, it still seemed far off in the future.

Under Xiulote's command and the craftsmen's operation, the first papermaking experiment tentatively began.

The preparation of soaking the materials was already completed; next came cooking the materials. The craftsmen built a wooden stove with a hearth and boiled the bark in lime water for a day. Xiulote squeezed the bark with his hand and found the fibers had not completely separated. After considering for a while, he had the craftsmen use a stronger alkali, wood ash, for another boil. After another day, the bark finally turned into suitable pulp.

Next came washing the materials, to remove the lime residue and some solubles from the pulp. Since labor was plentiful, Xiulote only needed to observe until he was satisfied that the pulp was clean enough.

Not knowing about the whitening process, after washing, they went straight to beating the materials. Dozens of workers used thick wooden pestles to repeatedly beat the pulp in stone mortars, at the same time, picking out impurities and coarse materials. After several hours, the pulp was finally beaten into a paste. Looking at it, Xiulote felt it was not much different from the pulp he remembered, just slightly yellowish.

Then came the technical part of papermaking, dissolving the pulp in water troughs, then evenly spreading it on hemp mats to form thin sheets of wet paper. Although Xiulote was strict, the thickness of the wet paper was still uneven. The accumulated wet paper should have been gently pressed once more to remove water, but this step was also forgotten, so they moved directly on to drying the paper.

Xiulote first tried drying the paper with a bonfire, saw the paper curl and deform, and then realized the drying temperature needed to be uniform and not too high. He had the craftsmen build a clay furnace for drying, where the wet paper was placed on the outer walls to dry slowly. Of course, he was still unaware of the polishing process.

Over several days, the processes were repeatedly modified and repeated. When Xiulote finally held a piece of bark paper that was rough, tough, slightly thick, yellowish and grayish, a flood of emotions overcame him.

"This is a small step for me, but a giant leap for Indian civilization!" the young man thought proudly, momentarily ignoring the uneven thickness and impurities of the paper.

Papermaking technology was introduced to the Arab world in the eighth century and Europe in the twelfth century. Europe at that time was still using parchment and paper equally. On this point, America still had plenty of opportunity to catch up with Europe.

Xiulote instructed the craftsmen to continue making paper without stopping; he needed a sufficient number of papers to demonstrate the superiority of the new technology. Then, he carefully copied the most commonly used one thousand Han characters onto the paper with a writing brush.

During this time, he visited little Aviloztli several times. Upon seeing him, the little golden eagle would chirp enthusiastically and flap its wings. Immediately, Aweit touched the head of the little golden eagle with a smile, and little Aviloztli fell silent and obediently listened.

Xiulote smiled with satisfaction; it seemed that Aweit and the little golden eagle were getting along well. The youth then turned and walked away, ignoring little Aviloztli's "deep" longing and desire. Aweit stood at the wooden hut's door with a smile, while the little golden eagle was overshadowed by his figure.

After ten days, Xiulote looked at the gifts before him with satisfaction: an exquisitely decorated longbow, a small model of a trebuchet, a set of wooden planks illustrating the "Oracle Bone Script/Pictograph" and their corresponding Han characters, a roll of the Thousand Character Text that didn't match from front to back, and a whole three loads of paper.

In that time, Aweit also bestowed rewards and disbanded the City-State Warriors of the Seven States. Each state's leader and commanders of various levels bid Aweit respectful farewells before leading the warriors on the long-awaited journey home.

Olosh, leading the Teotihuacan Battle Group, also said goodbye to Xiulote and departed, Xiuxoke gave his son a gentle hug, then weakly boarded a small boat and left.

Two days later, Gillim finally arrived from the Capital City. Covered in dust, he paid great homage upon seeing Aweit.

"Your Majesty, the immortal sun Trakel Er summons you to the Capital, requesting you to leave at least twenty thousand Mexica warriors to continue the siege of Xilotepec City until it falls," Gillim said.

"What did the old ancestor say?" Aweit asked, his expression serious and his gaze piercing.

"Congratulations to Your Majesty! The elder has agreed for you to inherit the throne, but he wants to meet with you once. It should be to finalize the verdict on Tizoc's death and to protect the dignity of the Royal Family. It may also be to resolve the conflict between you and the Chief Priest Quetzal," Gillim replied.

Gillim paid his respects once more.

"Good, no time should be wasted! Gather ten thousand warriors; the army will head south by water, setting out as soon as possible!" Aweit said, smiling confidently, for everything was as he had anticipated, and he was the only suitable successor.

Gillim took his leave with a bow. He tilted his head slightly, looking at Xiulote's delighted smile, and sighed inwardly.

"Your Highness, for the sake of the king, I can only apologize to you!" he murmured.

The next day, two thousand nobility Battle Groups and eight thousand personal warriors boarded the broad fleet of hundreds of ships, sailing upstream toward the majestic Lake Capital City.