

Civilization 138

Chapter 138 Lake Capital City, Tenochtitlan! Part Three

Ascending the passage and mounting four steps, one arrived at the summit of the pyramid, a vast platform. The platform measured a hundred meters in length and eighty meters in width, like a throne bearing the essence of divinity. And atop this flat summit stood the temple that dwelled high in the heavens.

The temple soared twenty meters high, with the blue temple of the Maya Rain God on the left, dedicated to the deities of rain, agriculture, and storm—Tlaloc. On the right was the volcanic red War God Hall, housing the War God, Sun God, and Guardian God Huitzilopochtli. The blue of the temple represented the rainy season and summer solstice, while the red symbolized blood and warfare.

These were the two most vital deities in the Mexica belief system: Tlaloc granted abundant harvests to the fields and protected against floods from the lakes, while Huitzilopochtli bestowed victory in war and ushered light into the world. Along with the devotion to these two deities, agriculture and warfare were ingrained in the Mexica's flesh and bones like instincts, guiding the empire's advance.

In front of each temple blazed a massive fire basin, with the sacred fire burning ceaselessly year-round. The fire originated from the conclusion of the previous 52-year cycle, during the end-of-the-world sacrificial ceremony in 1455. On the final day of that year, the Chief Priest ascended to the very peak of Mount Estrella, awaiting the appearance of the Pleiades. There, he ignited the sacred fire in the chest of a divine descendant sacrifice, and it was thereafter escorted by the most elite warriors all the way to the Great Temple's sacred fire for rekindling. This signified that the world would turn once again for another 52 years.

The empire's warriors always had an urgent drive deep within their hearts. They had to constantly wage war to please the celestial deities, to avoid the coming of the apocalypse. Thus, warfare became an integral part of the warriors' lives, as inevitably followed by death.

The entrance of the temple was guarded by hundreds of Temple Warriors. Amongst the warriors, silent as statues, stood the true sculptures of outstanding warriors of generations past. With resolute postures, they held long banners spanning several meters, each banner adorned with the different forms of the two deities. This represented the nobility's and warriors' loyalty and dedication to the deities.

Xiulote examined the banners carefully, finding them lifelike. Tlaloc bore a mask that covered his eyes, a headdress of egret feathers, the fangs of a Jaguar, one hand holding a golden maize staff or a symbolic lightning rod, the other a jug bestowing rain. His backdrop was a sacrificing Jaguar.

Huitzilopochtli wore a blue-green hummingbird helmet, with feathers at his head blossoming like the sun, his face striped with yellow and blue. One hand gripped a serpent-like and mirror-like scepter, which also resembled a javelin, and the other held a shield adorned with eagle feathers, ever ready for battle. His background featured sacrificing bipedal sacrifices.

It was the most distinguished painters, using the most costly pigments, who depicted the Mexica's divine figures with the greatest reverence and trepidation. As for what the true deities looked like—such was ultimately left to immortal beings to decide.

From the temple to the base, the entire Great Temple was covered with thick black stripes and colorful paintings. The serpentine shape was the most common image, followed by the Rain God's favored Jaguars and the War God's beloved eagles. The side oriented toward the Rain God was embellished with simple strokes of maize, beans, pumpkins, and cactuses, while the War God's side was painted with various captured birds and animal prisoners.

The Great Temple, like a divine mountain descending from myth, towered at the center of the Lake Capital City. Legend held that the Rain God Tlaloc emerged from the Divine Mountain, while the War God conquered other gods at Snake Mountain. The mountains were the source of the Great Temple's imagery, and monarchs of generations ceaselessly expanded the mountain's size.

Since its initial completion in 1325, the Great Temple had undergone four expansions, each time encasing the previous structure within a larger layer of massive stones. That is to say, within this pair of twin pyramids, there lay four nested temples. Now, a fifth expansion was underway, this time extending the pyramid's outer walls while keeping the temples unchanged. Each completion of expansion signified a large-scale sacrificial ceremony of unparalleled scale, from the Rain God's favored animals to the War God's requisite sacrifices.

In front of the majestic Great Temple lay a wide canal that branched into several paths, leading to neatly arranged reservoirs. As the setting sun cast its golden light, the apex of the Great Temple transformed into a dazzling vision of heaven, and the temple's reflection shimmered in the canal like the resplendent realm of mortals!

An incomparable solemnity and mystique descended upon the worshippers' hearts. As they faced the setting sun, they humbly prostrated themselves at the feet of the Great Temple, trembling and basking in the glow of the divine. This included even hundreds of family warriors.

Xiulote looked up at the Great Temple before him, and he longed to recite a couplet.

Perhaps, "Imperial red clouds cradle the purple sovereign, clear rivers embrace the tranquil and auspicious."

Or maybe, "Cliffs pierce the cloud-sea, towers reach into the misty skies, unknown which palace it is, gazing eastward it looms lofty and distant." Yet it always felt off.

After some reflection, Xiulote understood the reason. In Huaxia culture, heavenly divines were not worshipped as supreme beings. And the grandeur that enveloped all so-called temples in this world existed solely for the gods, not for the sentiments of mortals.

So, the youth bowed his head slightly, towards the divine temple of the deities. His full heart now voiced an ancient praise:

"Great is to be praised in the city of our God, on His holy mountain!"

From beyond the clouds and mountains. His gaze swept across the ranges.

Meanwhile, not far away, where the setting sun stained the eastern side of the Great Temple red, in the palace of the Chief Minister, there sat a very aged elder. He surveyed the palace gate with a godlike scrutiny, his gaze sliding over the approaching Royal Banner, devoid of any emotion.

By his side was the kindly looking Supreme Priest Quetzal, head crowned with the Obsidian Divine Crown, body garbed in the attire of the highest priest, a gentle smile on his face. Behind him stood the round-faced, slightly plump Elder Priest Uguel, hands clasped and reverently in attendance. Following were a dozen silent elder guards. At the forefront, a warrior with a face like a sculpture cradled a small pottery jar in his arms.

"Esteemed elder, please look," Quetzal bowed his head in respect, pointing towards the center of the procession. There stood a strikingly young and handsome lad, gazing in awe at the temple in the heavens.

The Chief Priest then smiled faintly, "The King's death, it shall be the doing of that child!"

