

## Civilization 197

### Chapter 197 Mexica Folk Industries: Jade Carvers, Goldsmiths, Stonemasons, and Potters

A group of people left the heavily guarded center of craftsmanship and entered the bustling craftsmen's district, where life suddenly filled the air. It was as if the solemn and reverent music had transformed into light, cheerful folk tunes, flowing together with the canals between the streets into the lively marketplace.

The sun hadn't reached midday yet, and there were no signs of cooking in the craftsmen's area. The commoners ate only two meals a day, so this was a time of busyness.

The most esteemed craftsmen were the jade artisans. Not far ahead, a middle-aged, experienced jade artisan was using a primitive grinding machine, paired with copper stone grinders, carefully sculpting a jade artifact in his hands with the aid of sand for cutting jade. He slowly and steadily carved an exquisite, ancient god's face into it. As the sand flowed, the crisp and pleasant sound of the jade was like a spring dropping onto the earth.

"A gentleman is like jade. Like cutting, like smoothing, like carving, like polishing."

Xiulote approached silently. He watched with a smile, his thoughts drifting.

Jade was abundant in Central America. From ancient knowledge passed down, jade was known as "the stone of pain," believed to heal or relieve various pains, bringing prosperity, success, and good luck. In sacred rituals, jade symbolized life and purity. The main sources of jade were the southern jungles of Mistec, the Maya Yucatan Peninsula, and Guatemala.

Starting from the 9th century BC, the earliest Olmec people had developed mature jade working techniques. They made blue jade masks, called "Olmec blue." Almost in the same era, the Mayas also began to carve deep green gemstone skulls, known as "the green of the gods."

In Mexica society at the time, jade was considered the most noble of divine objects, similar to the Celestial Empire's Shang and Zhou dynasties. Jade was worshipped in the temples of the gods. Outside the temples, only the Royal Family, High Priests, and true Great Nobility were allowed to use jade ornaments.

This prohibition was strictly enforced, far more than other dress regulations. If a merchant wore jade in public, it was considered a severe offense to the gods and was severely punished. Not long ago, a major merchant from Tarasco named Takulia was arrested and beheaded in North City for this crime, and his head disappeared without a trace.

After a while, the middle-aged jade artisan finally finished his work. He raised his head, revealing an ordinary face with a pair of calm and steady eyes. Then, seeing Xiulote standing by, he recognized him and immediately prostrated himself in respect. Jade artisans were firmly controlled by the Royal Family and the Priesthood, and their raw materials also came from the Royal Family. They often served the distinguished, and one could tell the class of nobility by their attire.

After the greeting, the middle-aged jade artisan remained bowing, presenting a palm-sized jade disc. The youth took it and saw on the square jade surface a perfect carving of the Aztec Sun Stone calendar. Various symbols were meticulously detailed, fine as mosquitoes yet without a single error. Such precision in carving must have taken the artisan a long time of hard work.

Xiulote was astonished. He recognized the patterns and carvings on the jade disc, nodding continuously. This craftsman was an excellent engraver, precisely what was needed for the ongoing engraving experiment.

After pondering for a moment, he asked Bertade to leave a Jade Token as a token for taking the jade artifact and summoning the craftsman. The middle-aged jade artisan looked at the Jade Token with surprise and joy, then prostrated himself on the ground.

"Respected Your Highness, Aquila the jade artisan of Tenochtitlan is willing to serve you. Under the witness of the Guardian God, I offer my loyalty until death!"

Xiulote nodded lightly, noting the jade artisan's name, and spoke authoritatively.

"Aquila, take the token and report to the High Priest's Mansion tomorrow. Don't be late!"

Aquila respectfully accepted the order, his head still pressed to the ground. The youth then smiled faintly and turned to leave.

Leaving the jade artisan's area, he soon reached the workshop of the goldsmiths and silversmiths. They were second-level craftsmen, also serving nobility and under the management of community leaders.

Xiulote walked forward slowly. He gestured to stop the craftsmen's greetings and carefully observed an old goldsmith at work.

The goldsmith's forehead was slightly sweaty, but his hands never stopped, as he was at a critical moment.

He first removed a finely-molded clay model from a high-temperature kiln and meticulously checked its moisture content. The heat from the kiln had hardened the clay layer into a shell. The wax inside the model had melted and was drained through prepared holes. At this point, the model was completely hollow, leaving the shape of the casted item.

Next, the old goldsmith continued to heat the model while melting gold into a liquid. Only when the temperature of the gold and the model were similar to prevent deformation from the temperature difference did he carefully pour the liquid gold into the model through the holes on top. This process was slow and steady until the shell was completely filled without leaving any gaps. Then he cooled the filled model, allowing the liquid gold to solidify into the shape of the casted item.

Finally, the old goldsmith broke the outer shell, and a stunning gold mask appeared in front of Xiulote. The mask was thin as a cicada's wing, with openwork patterns. It shone brightly under the noon sun, its moving light bringing a crystal-clear brilliance, as if naturally formed.

Xiulote was exceedingly impressed. He reached out his hand, and after a slight hesitation, the old goldsmith handed over the gold mask to the young priest. The youth carefully examined the finely crafted mask, looking for any gaps on its surface.

This gold artifact was created using the lost wax process. It involved first using wax to make a model of the item to be cast, then encasing it in a clay model. Afterwards, the model was heated to melt the wax out and metal liquid was poured in, then cooled to form the shape. This casting method sounds simple, but the details are highly intricate. Craftsmen must have superb skills in handling the clay models and good control of the temperature to ensure that the cast does not have gaps or voids.