

Civilization 199

Chapter 199 Mexica Folk Industry: Jade Carvers, Goldsmiths, Stonemasons, and Potters_3

The youth thought for a moment. The stone mason leader's skills were indeed remarkable, and he could be recruited into his own technical team. Therefore, he took out a jade token and gave it to the stone mason leader with a dignified expression.

The stone mason leader held the jade talisman and scrutinized it for a moment, his expression puzzled. Then he weighed the jade talisman and directly expressed his dissatisfaction.

"Priest sir, this jade has already been engraved with strange square patterns; it has no value for further processing. The weight is also too light; even if sold to the nobility, it would only be worth half a bag of gold dust!"

Xiulote's face darkened, the engraving on the jade talisman was, of course, his name. He felt somewhat unwavering, watching the stone mason leader with authority.

The stone mason leader shrank slightly, looked at the youth's delicate face, and guessed the level of the young priest. Then he boldly straightened up and puffed out his chest, stared wide-eyed and bravely locked gazes with the youth.

"Priest sir, you can't take all four items. I, Losano, am the best stone mason in this area; my creations are also the best here! Well, the earplugs are worthless; I can give those to you. For the rest, the stone mirror, the cup, or lens, your jade talisman can only trade for one!"

Xiulote's face remained dark, and he did not speak.

Bertade smiled. He stepped forward, and under the vigilant eyes of the stone mason leader, suddenly moved swiftly and easily subdued the other's resistance. Then, before the stone mason leader could cry out loudly for help, the Head Warrior whispered something to him.

The stone mason leader's expression solidified, his gaze incredulous as he looked at Bertade; the Head Warrior nodded gently. Then, he looked back at Xiulote, who was expressionless.

"You... don't think you can deceive me! I, Losano, am the best stone mason in this area; I have seen much and know broad! How could the esteemed royalty come to this craftsmen's district?"

Bertade shook his head. He pinched his lower lip, emitting an eagle's cry. Soon, from the door of the workshop, more than a dozen elite warriors surged in. The warriors wore Leather Armor, holding shields in one hand and Bronze Axes in the other, their expressions as solemn as stone statues, exuding an awe-inspiring aura.

Faced with the stern warriors, the craftsmen in the workshop all prostrated on the ground, trembling. Losano's expression went blank. He opened his mouth wide, looking at the noble family crests on the warriors' Leather Armors. It took a long while before the best stone mason finally knelt down with a thud, his forehead touching the ground, producing a loud bang. Then, sweating profusely, he was unable to speak.

Xiulote sighed. This melodramatic situation was not what he had hoped to encounter. He pondered for a moment, and still spoke authoritatively.

"Losano, you have been recruited by the Royal Family. Take the token, go to the High Priest's Mansion tomorrow, and do not delay!"

After speaking, the youth turned and walked away. After taking a few steps, he remembered something and turned back to add.

"I took the items. Two bags of gold dust, and you can collect them at the High Priest's Mansion tomorrow."

Just as Losano had just raised his big head to sneak a peek, he locked eyes with the youth who had suddenly turned back. Frightened, the stone mason leader bowed his head again with a loud bang.

Watching this scene, Xiulote's forehead throbbed faintly. He shook his head and smiled, then walked out of the workshop.

It took a while before Losano cautiously raised his head and looked around. Then, he heaved a long sigh of relief, stood up with a clatter from the ground, and loudly scolded the apprentices around him.

"Get back to work! Today I, Losano, really hit bad luck!... What rubbish royalty, not attending to proper matters, roaming around the craftsmen's district..."

The burly stone mason leader lowered his voice and murmured the last sentence, also shaking his head.

The sun dipped slightly in the west, and the group finally arrived at the pottery area. Under the bright sunlight, the colorful glaze of the pottery shone like gold, the vivid patterns outlining the lively flowers, birds, fish, and insects, seemingly pulsating with life.

Xiulote didn't enter the workshop again. He just slowly walked down the street, carefully watching the pottery makers on both sides. The potters were predominantly women, a tradition stemming from the early tribal era.

They carefully added the well-prepared clay into molds, shaping it into different forms, then smoothed the surface with scrapers and polished it with specialized stones. Next, they placed the shaped pottery into bonfires or simple kilns to fire, hardening the clay into pottery. Finally, they applied various colors, painting bright patterns that reflected more of everyday life, significantly reducing the depiction of deities.

With the aid of molds and kilns, various everyday pottery pieces took shape one after the other. Mushroom-shaped molds were particularly suitable for shaping bases of plates, bowls, and cups. Concave molds were used for pots of different sizes, with the bottoms seamlessly connecting at right angles, the thickness precisely controlled.

Xiulote watched with interest. In front of a larger pottery workshop, he even saw pottery made from molds of flowers, solo canoes, small warrior figurines, and Mayan toy carts. These crafts were intended for noble families and thus were exquisitely made, all glazed.

Afterward, the young man picked up a colorful pottery bowl and studied it carefully. The bowl was painted with lifelike animals and plants. The bottom was a neat grid of crosses, each grid no larger than half a fingernail. He looked at Bertade with some confusion.

The Head Warrior nodded slightly.

"Your Highness, this is a bowl used by commoners to grind chili peppers, and can also be used to grind small amounts of corn and beans. The grid pattern is used to crush the plants. Lesser nobility also use this type of bowl to grind spices and herbs, while the Great Nobility would use bowls of gold or silver."

Xiulote nodded. He turned to a pottery-making girl who approached. She had the sparkling eyes of an artist, and a delicate and gentle appearance.

"How much for this bowl?"

The pottery girl blushed slightly. She looked at the young man's face hesitantly for a moment, then decisively shook her head, choosing to raise the price.

"One large handful, no, two large handfuls of cocoa beans!"

Xiulote did the math in his mind. Two large handfuls of cocoa beans were less than a hundred beans, worth probably about twenty to thirty corn cakes, or a tiny fraction of a bag of gold dust. Ordinary pottery was indeed inexpensive, an essential part of every commoner's life. Pottery technology in Central America had fully matured and spread, and high-quality clay was readily available everywhere. Many commoner families made their own pottery.

Xiulote nodded, and the escort warriors behind him took out a small tube of gold dust, handing it to the exceedingly surprised pottery girl. Long-term contact with high-quality white kaolin clay was like continually using high-end cosmetics, making the girl's hands fair and translucent, as smooth and finely crafted as porcelain.

The young man watched the porcelain-like hands, increasingly attracted. He instinctively reached out and held them softly, gently rubbing, feeling the familiar softness, delicacy, and smoothness. His thoughts drifted far away, until they reached the distant shores of a vast ocean, recalling and longing for what lay beyond.

"The autumn wind and dew herald the opening of the Yue kilns, capturing the emerald hues of a thousand peaks."

On the Mexican Plateau, there was no shortage of high-quality raw clay. What was lacking was the technology to fire porcelain. If large kilns were constructed and high-temperature charcoal prepared, consistently experimenting would eventually yield experience in porcelain making.

However, such luxuries were of little help to the Mexica amidst their Warring States conflicts. Simple pottery was already sufficient for daily life. Better to wait until they unified the land and then produce exquisite porcelain to harvest the wealth of the nobility.

Thinking this, Xiulote smiled wistfully. He held the porcelain bowl in his hands again, feeling its soft warmth, but was startled by a suppressed moan. Looking up, he saw a girl with her head bowed like a swan, her neck flush with embarrassment. Her breathing was faint and rapid, seemingly without the strength to resist.

Xiulote paused. Then, shaking his head with a smile, he released her hands, glanced again, and turned away without looking back. Moments later, the youth was far gone.

Bertade waved his hand, signaling the warriors to quickly follow and escort. He picked up the colorful bowl the young man had hurriedly left behind and forgotten to take, and smiled lightly. Then, he looked

at the pottery girl. She stood on tiptoes, gazing wistfully into the distance. Unbeknownst to her, the gold dust had already slipped from her hands onto the ground, creating ripples in the pottery tube.

The Head Warrior shook his head. He memorized the shop's location and the girl's appearance and briskly left as well.