

Civilization 203

Chapter 203: The Salt Mine and Salt Workers

The largest salt mine of the Alliance was not far south of the Capital City, and smaller salt mines could be found everywhere. The eastern section of Lake Texcoco was divided by a dike, where there were hypersaline lakes, and many high-quality salt springs were distributed around the mountains and deep valleys, also a product of volcanic activity.

The Mexica Alliance was never short on salt. Salt was an important trade good for the Mexica people and brought in enormous revenues. From the eastern to the southern shores of the lake region, there were many villages engaged in salt production. The large salt mine had also developed from these salt-producing villages. It was closest to the bustling Lake Capital City, which made transportation extremely convenient, so the population gathered, and the production capacity was the highest, able to supply the demand for salt of hundreds of thousands of people.

After traveling southward for a short while, they reached the large salt mine. Piles of white salt sparkled under the sunlight, weathered by the wind and sun and mixed with earth, taking on a light shade of grey. Hundreds or even thousands of salt workers labored here. There were only forty or fifty samurai supervising them. From time to time, cloaked merchants came with slaves to load up their goods in a hurry and left hastily.

Looking around, between the mountains and woods, was a vast expanse of white. When a breeze blew, whisking up fine grains of salt, a salty wind met the face as if one were standing by the boundless seaside.

Xiulote stopped in his tracks, beholding this magnificent scene, and couldn't help feeling impressed: Salt, truly was the real wealth of the medieval era!

"Kuode, how many salt workers are there? How much salt is produced every day?" The young man's eyes were bright.

Hearing His Highness's question, Kuode sighed inwardly, feeling a headache coming on. His Highness was good in every respect, except that he always asked for specific numbers. When there were so few people below who truly knew numbers, how could he give an accurate answer.

After pondering for a moment, the craftsman supervisor cautiously responded.

"There are nearly a thousand salt workers here. According to the most recent standards of measurement in the market, each person produces at least a few liters of salt per day. Altogether, it would be several thousand liters of salt. This salt all belongs to the Alliance."

Then, he thought further and whispered.

"Of course, the actual production is probably far more than that. Salt is a necessity; even the tribal people in the forests need it. Salt workers and supervisors often sell it privately, and merchants also make secret deals, secretly taking away some of the output."

Xiulote was slightly shocked.

"For such an important product as salt, why doesn't the Alliance strictly control it and levy tribute?"

After pondering for a while, Kuode continued the conversation in a low voice.

"The Alliance produces lake salt and rock salt in abundance. If we were to strictly control it here, the merchants would naturally gather in other villages that produce salt. Rather than let them move to the fiefs of the Great Nobility, it is better to trade in the Royal Family's territory here. Moreover, the substantial profits from the private trades all flow into the hands of the Nobility at various levels."

Xiulote frowned slightly. He thought for a long while and finally nodded slowly, suppressing his dissatisfaction.

As they talked, a supervisor samurai in charge of management hurried over from a distance, his round face full of smiles.

An escort had already stepped forward to identify themselves, and the supervisor samurai knelt down respectfully, loudly hailing Xiulote.

"The revered presence of His Highness is a blessing from the Guardian God! I am willing to give my life for the great His Highness!"

The salute echoed far and wide, and other supervisor samurai came upon hearing it. The supervisors knelt down and paid their respects in disarray; Xiulote looked at them expressionlessly. When the supervisors' performance ended, the young man looked towards the salt fields again. Cloaked merchants had already disappeared without a trace.

Xiulote lowered his eyes slightly, then opened them again and smiled as he accepted the flattery of the supervisors. Then the young man waved his hand, signaling for them to return to their positions.

Afterwards, he strode forward, and surrounded by samurai, he approached the noisy and busy salt workers.

The tools used by the salt workers were very simple: stone shovels for digging, stone hoes for loosening the soil, and stone picks for extracting the salt mineral. They used bags made of jute to carry the salty mud, and large ceramic jars to transport water for washing the salt.

Xiulote just stood quietly beside the salt workers, watching.

The salt workers first dug up salt-rich soil from the lakeshore, underground saline soil, or salt spring soil. They then thoroughly and reasonably mixed these soils. Next, they piled the saline soil into mounds, waiting for filtration, next to these were shallow pits made of sand and limestone.

Subsequently, the salt workers poured the clear water from the ceramic jars slowly from above the salt piles, letting the water flow evenly through the saline soil, dissolving and carrying away the salt content. The saltwater gradually flowed out from the bottom of the piles, down the designed channels, slowly into the pits. This process of dissolving and filtering out the salt was quite slow and required sufficient strength and enduring patience.

Some pits were cone-shaped, large and deep, half a meter deep with a diameter of one meter. The salt workers then scooped out the brine from these pits into ceramic pots to boil, obtaining crystallized salt. Once dry under the sun, this crystallized salt could be sold as table salt.

Another type of pit was a flat, shallow evaporation pond. The brine was evenly spread in the pond, and under the scorching sun of the tropical Highlands, it quickly turned into crystal white powder. The evaporation ponds had coarse and shallow filtration setups; although slightly slower, the quality of the salt was better.

Xiulote stepped forward, picked up some salt grains with his finger, and tasted them. Similar to the table salt they used, the production here was all rough salt. The larger grains hitting the tip of the tongue created a burst of salty taste in the mouth. The young man tasted it again, confirming it was grey salt. It had a tough texture, full of a mineral salty fragrance, and was moist, perfect for roasting meat or cooking beans.