

Civilization 209

Chapter 209: Salt Fields, Obsidian, and Volcanoes_2

Xiulote, escorted by a squad of guards, advanced forward. He was slightly startled to find that the leader of the Temple Guards was none other than Elvi, a samurai he had known since childhood who guarded the Holy City Butterfly Palace and who loved to flash a fearsome grin.

"Elvi, did grandfather send you here?"

From beneath the wolf's head, Elvi revealed a genial smile.

"Your Highness, I am relieved to see you. After receiving the guard's report, the High Priest was quite concerned. With the promulgation of new laws imminent and the situation in the Capital City unpredictable, the High Priest sent me with a full squad just in case," Elvi replied.

Xiulote nodded, aware that two hundred elite Temple Guards would be enough to protect him from most nobility assaults. After pondering for a moment, he instructed Elvi.

"Leave sixty Temple Guards to take immediate control of the Great Salt Mine. I will return to report to the King and the High Priest about this matter."

Elvi accepted the order without hesitation. Then, he selected three teams of twenty to disperse the grumbling overseers and secure control of the salt field inside and out.

Seeing the actions of the Temple Guards, the chief overseer, Cavali, offered no resistance and cooperated obediently with the work. The salt workers, keeping their distance, watched the situation for a while and then resumed harvesting the brown Saline Soil, prodded on by Cavali's loud scolding.

Observing that everything was on track, Xiulote nodded and set out with his two hundred samurai guards and several dozen salt workers carrying bags of Saltpeter, hurrying towards the Lake Capital City.

On the road, Xiulote pondered carefully.

He had no trust in the corrupt overseers of the Great Salt Mine, and the window for collecting Saltpeter was exceedingly short. After some hesitation, he resolved to take direct control of the Great Salt Mine.

The Great Salt Mine had originally been under the control of the Royal Nobility. The sudden intervention, under the pretext of sacrificial rites, created an actual conflict between religious authority and royal power. He now had to return to report to King Aweit to fulfil the necessary procedures while also facing the dissatisfaction of the stakeholders.

The group traveled northeast, where the saline flats gradually gave way to neatly ordered farmland. Due to frequent volcanic activity, the soil here bore a faint gray hue, rich with fertile Volcanic Ash, hence the crop yield was exceptionally high.

At the edge of the ashen fields stood a vibrant Obsidian mine along a small hill. The soft morning sunlight shimmered across the glossy mineral field, refracting blues, greens, purples, blacks, golds, and silvers, creating a rainbow-like tapestry of extraordinary beauty. Obsidian itself is a form of natural glass.

This mine had already been included in the survey plan. Xiulote entered the mining area, paused to observe. The dozens of guards, startled by the large group of samurai, drew their weapons warily. Soon, Kuode, the overseer of the craftsmen, hastened forward, assuring these familiar guards that the respected prince himself had come for inspection.

Obsidian is one of the Alliance's most critical military supplies. It is a dense volcanic glass formed within rhyolite lava flows, solidified quickly without forming stable crystals because of the rapid cooling of the lava. The volcanic glass has no regular structure and internally fractures into smooth, curved, intersecting patterns. These fracture points create edges sharper than a steel blade, easily capable of slicing through animal hide and flesh.

Thus, the ancestors of Central America fashioned sharp Obsidian arrowheads and war club blades from it, turning them into deadly weapons on the battlefield. In more recent times, these Obsidian blades were also utilized for the razor-sharp edges of surgeons' scalpels.

The Mexica Alliance firmly controlled the most plentiful Obsidian mines in Central America, forming the basis of its strength. The allied states had three major natural Obsidian mines, located to the northeast at Pachuca, to the east at Otumba, and to the south at Chicolloapan. The large Obsidian mine at Pachuca was situated near the Holy City of Teotihuacan and served as the cornerstone for the ancient Teotihuacan civilization's prosperity.

Smaller Obsidian mines were scattered throughout the Alliance territories near the volcanic mountains to the east and west. This particular mine was a small one owned directly by the Royal Family, with their Royal Warriors strictly supervising it.

In the open mine, hundreds of brawny stonecutters worked shirtless, standing before the broken Obsidian veins, extracting the exposed nodules of the raw stone as sweat poured down. They began by swinging picks forcefully to break the surface, then carefully used chisels to extract the raw stones. These stones of varying sizes were then taken to the back, where military craftsmen would sift through them and perform rough processing.

Following the veins, the military craftsmen first shaped the raw Obsidian into cylindrical forms. Placing the black columns between their legs, they then took up fine chisels and exerted force along the edges. With each successful incision along the side, they would shear off glass flakes of different sizes from the column's edge, much like a razor.

The craftsmen then classified the flakes based on size and sharpness. The flakes were either double-sided, single-sided, or shaped into slabs, with most assigned to war club blades and some intended for civilian cutting tools. Only flakes with insufficiently sharp edges or worn edges were used as chiselling parts to replace the stonecutters' quickly worn tools.

And as for the large and beautiful raw stones, the military craftsmen would deliberately select and preserve them. These large raw stones would be sent to the stone crafters' workshops in the Capital City, where they would be exquisitely cut, polished, and carved into various expensive Obsidian Stone utensils. It was from these that the materials of the chief stone craftsman Losano originated.

Xiulote tested the sharpness of the Obsidian flake. He merely grazed the blade lightly, and it sliced through the rabbit skin hanging in the workshop, cutting into the flesh of the dead animal, creating a slender and deep wound.

The young man marveled inwardly. After thousands of years of development, from extraction and usage to processing, the Obsidian crafting skills in Central America had truly reached the pinnacle of perfection. In fact, Obsidian tools had already met the daily needs of Central American civilization, and Obsidian weapons complemented the corresponding warfare situations and the Samurai hierarchy well.

In their early stages, Bronze tools could not offer sufficient advantage over the inexpensive and mass-produced Obsidian tools. To some extent, the advanced Obsidian craft stifled the development of Central America's metallurgical techniques, and the Bronze tools of the Tarasco people were just beginning.

Xiulote observed for a while. His gaze first turned to the well-developed upper body muscles of the stoneworkers, then lingered on their composed expressions. Afterwards, he called a few stoneworkers, measured their discipline again, and nodded satisfactorily.

"How many stoneworkers does the Alliance have?" the young man asked Kuode seriously, his eyes filled with anticipation.

Kuode pondered for a moment, carefully reporting.

"There are nearly a thousand miners in each of the three large Obsidian mines, and ten or so smaller mines vary from a few dozen to several hundred," he said.

Then, the master craftsman hesitated before speaking.

"But Your Highness, stoneworkers and military craftsmen are the foundation of the Alliance's military strength. The consumption of the Samurai's Obsidian flakes is extremely fast, and they may need to be replaced several times in a single battle. The skill of extracting Obsidian also requires a long time to master, and these skilled stoneworkers must serve the Alliance's hundred thousand Samurai; it is simply not possible to draft many," he explained.

Upon hearing this, Xiulote was slightly startled. He pondered for a moment, then asked in a deep voice,

"If we reduce the supply of large stones to the Capital City's stonemason district, how many stoneworkers could we pull together at most?"

The master craftsman was hesitant to speak, but in the end, gave a figure.

"We could perhaps form a regiment of eight hundred men," he replied.

Xiulote nodded, looking at the excellent potential troops with a slight regret. After understanding the information he needed, the young man did not stay long and headed straight for the Capital City.

When the sun reached the zenith in the sky, the Lake Capital City came into distant view. At first glance, the White Stone Capital City shimmered with lustrous splendor, and vibrant bright reds caught the eye dazzlingly. That was the red Volcanic Rock, decorating the tops of palaces and the Great Temple, symbolizing the Heavenly Divine's authority.

Xiulote then looked towards the East of the Capital City. Amongst the stretches of mountains, the towering Popocatepetl Volcano stood.

He recalled the sights along his journey: Lacking Iron ore, abundant Gold and Silver, Salt mines, Obsidian, cultivation of volcanic ash fields, using Volcanic Rocks. Everything in Central American society was influenced by the products of volcanic activity. Geological movements determined the geographic environment, which in turn deeply constrained the local civilization, deciding its initial developmental trajectory.

"Is civilization really determined by geography?"

Xiulote furrowed his brows, pondering this unsolvable question. After a long while, he laughed wryly.

"No, civilization is determined by heroes!"

The young man stood up straight with firm confidence and commanding aura, heading towards the Capital City. Behind him, the Samurai bore solemn expressions, carrying Longbows in hand, while the salt workers bore the burden of Saltpeter, all marching together.