

Civilization 212

Chapter 212: Promises and Governance

Outside the window, it was already afternoon. The slanting sunlight streamed through the window, illuminating the dignitaries inside the room. Faced with things beyond their cognition, a range of true emotions finally emerged on their profound faces: there was surprise, contemplation, confusion, concern, and even fear. Xiulote, with his back to the sun's glare, looked like an angel envoy stepping out of a myth.

As they gazed at the mysterious smoke and the boy under the sunlight, everyone was momentarily stunned.

After a while, King Aweit was the first to speak, his interest piqued.

"Xiulote, this burning saltpeter, the soil's... saltpeter, it resembles the Tarasco's Stone of the Dead. How is it used?"

The young man smiled confidently.

"The burning mixture of saltpeter and sulfur from the Stone of the Dead, along with powdered charcoal, can create a revolutionary... um... fire potion that can easily ignite ships on water. With the Tarasco campaign impending, it can help us gain an advantage on water!"

Xiulote paused midway through his explanation. He was still unsure about the explosive power of the original gunpowder and needed time to experiment with the right formula, so he simply outlined the enhancing effects of the gunpowder.

"A fire potion that can burn on water? Xiulote, is it really so?"

Listening to this, King Aweit's expression became serious and his gaze intense as he looked at the young man.

With the new year beginning, the Council of Politics had already been discussing the invasion routes after the autumn harvest. The Alliance was about to mobilize tens of thousands of Samurai and Militia to march west against Tarasco and initiate a genuine divine war.

The failure of last year's Otomi war was still vividly remembered; the enormous army required an astonishing amount of food supplies and had to establish a stable and efficient logistics transport line. In this era, convenient water transport was the only choice.

Unlike the Otomi, the Tarasco people had taken over the land of the fishermen of Miquechquatl. They possessed an equally formidable fleet that had always been deeply feared by the Mexica Alliance. Without securing sufficient naval superiority to suppress the enemy's attack boats, there was no hope for the water supply line.

King Aweit's gaze grew deeper as he recalled the terrain of Miquechquatl, between the north and south rivers, with the Great Lake in the middle, the fertile core being the flat lakeside valley, and the solid outskirts being the undulating mountain hills.

Years ago, during his first western campaign along the Balsas River, his forces had encountered the Tarasco fleet not long after setting off. The Mexica fleet and the enemy engaged repeatedly, with Samurai and Militia falling like rain, yet neither side could achieve a real advantage.

The army was forced to abandon the waterway and land, only to attack the Tarasco's eastern line of fortresses through complex and narrow mountain terrain. It was a protracted bloodbath, with difficult logistics and treacherous terrain, recalling it was like a nightmare.

Feeling the pressure in King Aweit's gaze, Xiulote nodded cautiously and explained earnestly.

"Gunpowder can burn in water. Its combustion does not require air. It produces a large amount of gas and high temperatures when it burns, and the high-temperature expanding air can push away the water, providing space for continuous combustion..."

King Aweit's look of confusion lasted only a moment. Fortunately, he was exceptionally intelligent and often chatted idly with the young man; he was vaguely able to understand.

On the other hand, the three Samurai ministers looked at each other bewildered. Doubting yet believing, they could only attribute it to the Priest's divine arts.

The Intelligence Officer, unnoticed, had returned to the corner. His perspective different from others, he focused his attention on each person's face. With just a brief observation, he was certain that Xiulote was confident and not lying. Then, he silently continued to watch each person's expression, guessing their psychology and memorizing their characteristics.

After a long moment, King Aweit, slightly pleased, commanded gravely.

"Xiulote, my student, the gunpowder you speak of is crucial for the war against Tarasco. If you truly can develop a flame that burns in water, it will be the greatest achievement of this western campaign! What do you need? The Alliance will support you fully!"

Finally hearing this promise, Xiulote smiled slightly and bowed earnestly.

"King, I need the Capital City's southern great salt mine until March to collect ingredients for making saltpeter. Additionally, I need a spacious research center, preferably far from the city because it involves combustion. I also have many other ideas to try and need to establish a new craftsmen center specifically for researching useful new technologies."

"What! The great salt mine? That is..."

Hearing the key word, Royal Family's Nobility, Iskali, finally snapped out of his daze. He hurriedly spoke out, glaring at Xiulote.

King Aweit's gaze swept over coldly, carrying a chilling pressure and an uncompromising authority. Iskali instantly fell silent. He bowed his head, seething inside.

Xiulote didn't notice. The young man was mentally calculating in his mind; he had many enlightening thoughts recently in the craftsmen district, and the planned scientific research projects were indeed numerous.

The jade craftsmen's block printing and the stonemason's glass firing needed to be experimented with urgently; the goldsmith's clay molding and the potter's porcelain were to be temporarily shelved; efforts must be focused on collecting saltpeter from saline soil, improving the craftsmanship of saltpeter

production, and trying to extract from urine. Primitive gunpowder was to be developed with charcoal, sulfur, and saltpeter, and a stronger formula was to be explored.

Right, once the first batch of copper ore from the southern part of Tarasco was delivered by Mayan merchants, they were to make copper spears and train spear-wielding soldiers. They could also use bronze plates to make simple yet effective cloth armor. Now, a reliable source of high-quality spearmen had not yet been secured, considering the thousands of miners...

Thinking of this, Xiulote opened his mouth to speak, wanting to ask King Aweit for the gold and stone miners.

The King just turned his head, his chilling aura not yet withdrawn. A chill went through the youth's heart, his intuition telling him that it was not the time to speak. So he calmly waited.

King Aweit pondered for a moment, his expression calming down. Then, he smiled slightly and made a promise to the young man.

"Xiulote, I entrust the great salt mines to you. If you lack funds or manpower, come directly to me. Should you have any new creation or invention, come report to me anytime. The eastern Prince's Mansion in Texcoco has been seized by the Royal Family and has been idle until now. The place is spacious, with many houses; I'll hand it over to you as a new crafting center. You can also use the old crafting center's site, since you often go to see Kuode..."

Xiulote nodded in agreement, then slightly hesitated. Aweit seemed to know his whereabouts well.

"There are two saline islands outside the southeastern embankment, unsuitable for planting Chinampas, but they can serve as your testing grounds for burning trials. I will have the boat brigade assist you. Remember, the focus of your research should be the flames burning on water; you must develop a usable weapon!"

At this, King Aweit took two steps forward, obscuring Xiulote's figure, blocking the view of the Cabinet Ministers. He gently touched the youth's head and whispered.

"After the autumn harvest, the western campaign will be my coronation war. Stand with me, and do not let me repeat Tizoc's mistakes!"

Xiulote looked up in surprise, gazing into Aweit's eyes, tasting the genuine emotions of the moment.

Their eyes met, and memories of the past surged in their minds; Aweit remembered the youth's rescue at the decisive battle, and Xiulote recalled the exuberant victory feast... They remained silent for a moment, exchanging knowing smiles, as if returning to old times.

"Aweit, I will always stand by your side," the youth promised, in the name of his ancestors.

King Aweit smiled warmly. When he turned around to face the crowd, he was once again the majestic King.

The ensuing meeting was somewhat uneventful, mostly involving the administrative affairs of the Capital City, negotiations with tribes and city-states, and collecting tribute for the new year.

The Cabinet Ministers took turns reporting on military and political matters, occasionally summoning nobles from outside. The King made decisions quickly and decisively. Aweit had become familiar with the work of a king; complex administrative affairs were handled smoothly as clouds and flowing water in his hands. Sometimes, Gillim would offer detailed suggestions and additions.

The elder had already handed over the affairs of the Alliance; now, these were the responsibilities of the king.

After the New Year sacrificial rites, the elder would once again retire from involvement in the operations of the Capital City, only quietly pushing forward religious reforms from behind the scenes. His body could no longer support intense labor; he was now striving to live a few more years, suppressing the entire Alliance before the king established sufficient authority.

This year's New Year sacrificial rites were also much delayed; the priests were discussing new regulations and had prepared many changes.

Xiulote sat by Aweit's side, quietly observing the bustling center of power. He was continually learning, considering the principles and perspectives with which people handled problems, remembering the values from the tribal era, and analyzing decision cases that convinced everyone.

This was a whole new field. One day, the young man would also have to face the same difficulties and challenges. No one is born a king; kings must navigate a long path of growth. Fortunately, under the guidance of his elders, the doors of kingship had already opened to him.

As the sun set and the twilight filled the king's palace, the nobles in the outer palace gradually dispersed, forming groups to attend banquets. Iskali and Tepopolo also bowed to the king before leaving side by side from the council hall.

King Aweit continued busying himself, weighing priorities. The king's power did not fall from the sky but came from each decision in state affairs.

Xiulote watched the retreating figures of Iskali and Tepopolo together. He felt a hint of unease. After pondering for a long time, he finally identified the source of his discomfort. Then, he suddenly realized.

"The royal nobility is the strength of the royal family, but they are not detached from the great nobility; they are closely connected! Different classes are never clearly separated but are dynamically intertwined. The great nobility are not united as one; they are divided into different wholes. Therefore, reforms targeted at the great nobility should not be overly aggressive; instead, they should strike down a batch of noble enemies, ally with a batch of partners, and neutralize a batch of onlookers."

Having understood this, Xiulote smiled widely, ancient philosophers' words coming to his mind:

"Governing is about how to make our enemies fewer and our friends more... Managing a large country is like cooking a small fish; unhurried and deliberate, just right."

From a distance, Gillim silently observed, analyzing the changes in the youth's expression. This time, he frowned slightly, silently puzzled.