

## Civilization 220

### Chapter 220 Heavenly Fire Island and Divine Revelation Place

As January neared its end, a cold wind blew over Lake Texcoco, bringing ice-cold sharpness and solemnity.

In recent days, on the southeast side of Lake Texcoco, two Heavenly Fire Islands had been tightly secured. Nearly a hundred Samurai were stationed on the first Heavenly Fire Island, and those wishing to land must have approval from the King and the prince. The boatmen of the Naval Forces patrolled the nearby waters, using the idle second Heavenly Fire Island as their base to inspect passing trade ships and suppress smuggling.

Thus, this place had become a patrol army outpost that civilians would avoid. There were also rumors that the Priesthood was secretly conducting sacrificial rites to pray for power from evil spirits.

On the southern shore of Lake Texcoco, hundreds of salt workers continuously transported saltpeter and wood ash, which were then sent to the first Heavenly Fire Island by the vessels of the Naval Forces. The salt foreman, Moreno, boarded the island along with the boats and saltpeter.

The fierce salt foreman stood bewildered beside the newly built port. He looked around and everywhere he saw reeds as tall as a person, along with sporadic wooden and straw huts. The formidable Samurai, equipped with Leather Armor, War Clubs, and Longbows, completely blockaded the island's surroundings with their numerous dugout war canoes—it really was a natural prison.

By the lakeshore, a crocodile had just submerged, not yet having a chance to open its maw, when it was excitedly discovered by a sailor. The Samurai immediately swarmed over and used Long Spears to flip the four-meter-long great crocodile, exposing its soft underbelly. Then, with agile precision, they trapped the crocodile's jaws and struck with huge Stone Hammers in rapid succession. Within just a few seconds, the crocodile trembled, spitting blood in death, utterly powerless to resist.

The Samurai erupted in cheers. Following that, they boisterously shouted, skinned and stripped the meat from the crocodile right by the lake, and kindled a bonfire for barbecuing. Soon, the aroma of roasting meat wafted through the air.

Seeing this scene, smelling the grilled meat, the fierce Moreno couldn't help but swallow his saliva. He carefully concealed the expression on his face, and with a smile, sought guidance from the island's steward, a middle-aged Samurai with a weather-worn face.

"Respected Samurai, how long are we to stay on this island? Actually, it is not far from the villages on the southern shore. We could come early every day and leave when it gets dark..."

Esko gave Moreno a deep look, with an odd smile.

"So you're Moreno? His Highness has specifically ordered that from now on, you and your salt workers must produce burning salt around the clock and also research more efficient processes. Every improvement must be recorded, and there will be rewards in wealth. Food will be supplied to you thrice daily, according to the standard for Samurai. Without His Highness's personal approval, no one is allowed to leave. Otherwise..."

Esko nodded toward the barbecuing crocodile, smiling oddly again.

Moreno felt a chill all over. He and his loyal brothers exchanged glances, their eyes brimming with tears. Staying on a deserted island making salt—this kind of life... Grand dreams burned in the heart of the salt overlord. The Gold River to the south kept calling out to him. Moreno once again revealed a fierce expression, and the salt workers began to grow rowdy.

"Get to work! You haven't even started today's workload! Someone will come to inspect and test tonight!"

Esko scolded harshly. With a light wave of his hand, over a dozen Samurai approached, their War Clubs slanted, surrounding dozens of salt workers.

"This is a mission emphasized by His Highness, the most important mission, and a hard-earned opportunity!"

Thinking this, Esko's eyes flashed fiercely across each clamorous salt worker. The education of the Samurai taught him that blood was the best way to deter the masses... Without hesitation, he drew his sharp War Club and advanced with large strides.

Moreno, with a fierce expression, looked towards the Samurai. Then, his gaze met that of the middle-aged Samurai, and the murderous aura from battlefields faced him head-on, sending a sudden chill through his heart, and he quickly calmed down from his furious rage. The salt foreman bowed decisively, slapped his brothers beside him, and scolded loudly.

"Get moving and work! Each and every one of you fools wants to die, don't you!"

Immediately after, Moreno bowed to the approaching middle-aged Samurai and then turned to head toward the central straw hut on the island. The stubborn salt workers hesitated only a moment before the merciless strikes of the Samurai's clubs drove them toward the huts. There, saltpeter was piled up like mountains.

Under Esko's management, the first Heavenly Fire Island operated with maximum efficiency. Two days later, Esko came personally, respectfully reporting the specific production situation to Xiulote.

Xiulote nodded in approval satisfactorily but sighed slightly in his heart.

"The day-long labor of fifty to sixty salt workers results in only twenty to thirty catties of saltpeter per day, while the consumption of brown saltpeter nearly reaches a thousand catties. The extraction process still needs to be improved..."

Of course, the youth was unaware that the nitrate content of normal saltpeter was around 70g-140g/kg, approximately one-tenth. Yet, the craftsmen's extraction efficiency was already at about one-thirtieth to two-thirtieths. In the Middle Ages, this efficiency was actually normal. They had already implemented numerous separation processes and crystallization experiences from later ages. As the craftsmen became more adept, the efficiency of saltpeter production would further increase, perhaps even surpassing their European contemporaries of this era.

Then, Xiulote fixed his gaze on Esko, his eyes showing appreciation, and he issued a stern order.

"Esko, well done! I'm giving you another hundred Samurai and authorizing you to press-gang civilians from the villages on the southern shore, expanding the collection of saltpeter. You must fully commit to this task for these two months! I want the daily production of saltpeter to reach a hundred catties in a month, no matter the cost!"

Upon hearing this, Esko respectfully knelt to accept the order, his heart filled with wild joy and excitement.

He had been promoted by His Highness just a few days ago, and already he had command over two hundred samurai, managing thousands of laborers and salt workers. After a mundane thirty-year career, faithfully following his group leader for fifteen years, he was finally stepping onto the broad path ahead. For His Highness's trust and a higher future, he was determined to spare no effort.

Xiulote pondered for a moment and then continued with his instructions.

"The extracted saltpeter should be sealed in pottery jars and kept separately underground. Be sure not to come into contact with flames! Stay away from the saltpeter to prevent any accidents.

I will send two assistant priests to you to record the specific production steps and participate in the improvement process of making saltpeter. Soon, specialized craftsmen will also be sent to produce the fire potion, and you must prepare an open work space just for them."

Although Esko did not fully understand everything His Highness said, he respectfully nodded, committing every word to memory.

Xiulote gave an encouraging pat on the middle-aged warrior's shoulder before waving his hand to dismiss the excited man.

The young man let out a soft sigh. Both saltpeter and gunpowder were highly flammable chemicals that could cause severe accidents if not handled with care, leading to death or injury. By assigning the newly promoted Esko to this task, he harbored a private motive. Otherwise, for an assignment of this importance, it should have fallen to Bertade, Begire, or "Monkey" to handle.

Speaking of "Monkey", Kuluka had already gone with the Mayan merchants Tikalo toward the mountainous city-states south of Tarasco to smuggle copper ore to local tribe leaders. If all went well, the first batch of copper ore should be brought back by the fleets in two weeks. They had another dangerous mission: to ascertain the geography and military distribution of the southern city-states, gathering intelligence for possible conquests after the autumn harvest.

Xiulote stood up and began to pace thoughtfully.

All the copper ore on hand was being made into bronze tools and given to the old carpenters to make longbows. The assembly of miners and the conscription of tribal civilians would probably wait until after the New Year's sacrificial rites. The production of three-meter-long bronze spears was not urgent either. For now, they could take out the two-meter copper spears seized from the people of Tarasco for the elite militia's drills, using the leather armor large shields from the armory.

"With the support of the entire alliance, everything is much easier. I can finally settle down and focus on farming and scientific research," Xiulote thought, lifting his head with a sentiment in his heart. The noon sunlight poured into the great hall, illuminating the wooden plaque at the top of the hall. The three gilded, neat Chinese characters caught his eye, "Divine Revelation Hall".

This mansion was originally the Texcoco Prince's Mansion, but it had been renamed "Divine Revelation Place". The name Xiulote had originally favored was "Divine Oracle Place" to cherish some distant memories.

However, after pondering for a long time, his grandfather sternly denied this proposal. The term "Divine Oracle" was too sensitive, with strong connotations of authority, which was not suitable for the young man at the time. On the other hand, his reputation as the "Divine Revelator" had already spread among the elder priests, and establishing a new center of craftsmanship in the name of divine revelation would help him build authority more easily.

Now, the great hall where Xiulote stood was the center of the Texcoco Prince's Mansion. The hall was decorated lavishly, spacious, and well-lit. Many areas bore traces of repairs, subtly recording the bloody battle that had taken place not long ago. The Texcoco Royal Family's murals on the four walls had been leveled, and the sacrificial altar stood empty.

The young man was unaware that the severed head of a deity had once been worshiped here, nor did he know of the conversations and schemes between the Chief Priest and the Prince. Aspiration had withered, and the dead would not return; past events had vanished with the wind. But a new chapter was unfolding rapidly with the help of the hero!

In Xiulote's plans, "Divine Revelation Place" would be the alliance's technology research center. Under his direct leadership, gathering the most skilled craftsmen and talent, they would undertake cutting-edge technological advancements. For this, he had specifically asked his grandfather to transfer a group of priests skilled in mathematics to join the promising "Divine Revelation Place".

The High Priest first shook his head with a light laugh, then nodded in agreement. Shifting focus away from the sensitive areas of military, political, and religious affairs and spending time on harmless little trinkets seemed like a good way to keep a low profile.

And so, with dignity, the High Priest allocated mandatory quotas to the various temples during the Council of Elders' meeting. After a spirited discussion, the Council threw out the lowest-ranking civilian assistant priests, letting them join the lowly craftsmen, accompanying the "Divine Revelator" in creating "toys" made of wood and clay.

Before long, Xiulote received forty or fifty dispirited young civilian priests, interspersed with a few sons of noble priests who had defected. He paused for a moment, letting out a soft sigh. This was good; these young, low-ranking priests would be easier to command and more malleable.

"Divine Revelation Place" was now conducting several research projects, with the quartermaster Begire appointed as the specific manager. Hundreds of professional craftsmen had been summoned to form various research groups with the priests, working on military and civilian projects specified by His Highness. They worked diligently to deduce and create the actual products from His Highness's prophetic descriptions, then carefully cataloged the materials and processes used.

Xiulote had set high rewards to motivate the craftsmen's research enthusiasm. Each research breakthrough by the craftsmen earned them handsome rewards of gold, silver, gemstones, cotton cloth, or even land, ensuring years of worry-free living. Recorded merit would also increase their rank and treatment.

The young man restructured the levels of craftsmanship; the "Divine Revelation Place" craftsmen were now divided into four levels: apprentice, ordinary, senior, and master, each split into higher and lower tiers, enjoying different daily treatments. Senior craftsmen were granted the status of ordinary samurai, and the rare master craftsmen were ennobled as military meritorious nobles.

These positions were specifically requested by Xiulote from Aweit. The great nobility were slightly discontented, but since the number of master craftsmen was limited and their positions non-hereditary, they begrudgingly accepted. They had more important concerns now, like the soon-to-be-implemented Noble Law.

The low-ranking priests would accumulate meritorious deeds to elevate their priesthood. In the future, Xiulote intended to create a separate promotion system for "craftsman priests," forming an independent research department.

Under the high rewards and strict supervision, all research was moving forward in an orderly and efficient manner. Thinking of this, Xiulote strode out of the main hall and, under the close escort of the Head Warrior, began to inspect the progress of the various craftsman workgroups.