

Civilization 36

Chapter 36 A Day in Xiulote

The breeze scattered through the mountains, caressing the fresh buds on the treetops and bringing with it moist vapor, in what was the budding month of April. The siege had already lasted half a year; the dry season on the highlands had passed, and the new rainy season had not yet arrived.

After returning to the main encampment of the siege, Xiulote initially rested in his hut for a few days, then his father, Xiuxoke, came to visit him and they exchanged information about the campaign.

The northern city of Pamus had almost been burned to the ground, and many nomadic Chichimec had moved south. After Guamare and the City-State of Pamus were devastated, the attacks by the Otomi on the army rapidly weakened, and the number of militia significantly decreased.

Although the guerrilla tactics of the Otomi were still ongoing, their intensity had diminished from flies to mosquitoes. The casualties among Mexica warriors dropped to just over a hundred each month. The warriors of the City-State remained somewhat discontented, but it was still within the limits of endurance. The supply of food had caught up with consumption, and the stockpiles in the camp began to increase.

The days of the siege seemed somewhat leisurely. Having been on campaign for several months, Xiuxoke had higher expectations for his son. He had a lengthy private discussion with the senior warrior, Bertade, and then resumed Xiulote's family military training.

Every day at dawn, Xiulote had to rise, accompanied by the nascent sunrise, to begin his warrior training, with Bertade as his instructor.

The Aztec City-State Alliance was a typical classical militaristic society, where every young man within each Mexica City-State was mandatorily required to undergo military training. Family training usually started by the age of twelve, influenced by the family's financial ability.

Xiulote's training had started at the age of ten, his father provided him with abundant food supply, such as fine cornmeal cakes and scarce meats, and then had Olosh instruct him in martial arts.

Initially, Xiulote, possessing the memories of an adult, was resistant to the training. He used various methods of hiding to test Olosh's intelligence in finding people, thus delaying the start of the training.

To increase the young boy's interest in practicing martial arts, the Jaguar warriors, under the protection of the samurai, showed him an "ultimate technique": one man with one club dueling a jaguar. It was unimaginable how a human could agilely dodge the pounce of a large feline, then fiercely strike with both hands wielding an obsidian club, stunning the tiger with one blow and killing it with ten!

Since then, the shocked Xiulote obediently met Olosh's training demands, which eventually shaped the muscles beneath his light clothing.

When the City-State youths reached fifteen years of age, they would enter the strict community military school of Telpochcalli to receive practical skills and military instruction. The instructors at the military school were all Fourth-Level veteran warriors, looking after the youths like a Jaguar caring for a litter of kittens, definitely providing each youth with a memorable "pleasant" experience.

These "pleasant" memories would last five years, until graduation from the military school. Outstanding youths would earn the status of junior samurai, becoming part of the prospective ruling class. Afterwards, they would start the promotion process of capturing prisoners and climbing ranks, advancing from the young to the middle-aged, bravely moving forward until reaching the civilian ceiling

of "Fourth Level senior warriors," with the qualifications to join the Jaguar and Eagle Warrior Battalions, and become part of the military nobility.

Youths who failed would henceforth be estranged from the ruling class. They would become craftsmen, merchants, or the lowest class of farmers. Top craftsmen could participate in the construction of pyramid temples, excellent merchants might be absorbed as intelligence scouts for the Pochtecatl, and they too belonged to the fringes of the ruling class.

A minority of nobility and priest descendants would enter the Calmecac, the City-State's higher academy directly. There, military instruction was secondary, the main curriculum being noble literature and politics, astronomy and theology, ultimately achieving a higher "starting point," as junior noble warriors or assistant priests.

The young noble warriors and priests still had to level up by capturing prisoners. Fourth-Level senior noble warriors usually joined the Jaguar or Eagle Warrior Battalions more easily, becoming First-Level military nobles. First-Level military nobles belonged to the small nobility class, moving upward to becoming a Second-Level hereditary noble, Third-Level honor noble, and finally reaching the Royal Family and King of the Descendants of the Sun God. The honor nobles already had the qualifications to rule the City-State as City Lords.

The pinnacle of priests' promotions through capturing prisoners was the Fifth Level Coyote Priest, with the subsequent City-State Elder Priest, the Chief Priest of Teotihuacan, and the Chief Priest of Tenochtitlan all belonging to the holes filled by individuals at the top of the ruling hierarchy.

In short, in Xiulote's view, the Aztec's class system was similar to the Qin State in the East, "title by military service," or Prussia in the West, "a state's army."

Training at the camp always began facing the sunrise. Xiulote first took a half-hour cold water bath, wearing only a pair of shorts in the chilly morning breeze, honing his willpower. Then, the morning involved two to three hours of endurance training, including running, mountain climbing, moving stones, lifting shields, and loaded marching.

After a brief rest, he continued to learn shield and war club techniques with Bertade, starting with shield raising for blocking, followed by war club chopping, hammering, and slapping, mastering the differences between killing and capturing, and finally moving on to one-on-one combat.

During these times, Bertade always demonstrated what it meant to handle weight as if it were light, and what it meant to be indefensible. Xiulote often felt his shield was just for show, while Bertade patiently emphasized that the shield was a Samurai's life. This was especially true in large-scale battles, where one could replace a lost war club with a spare dagger, but losing a shield often meant not surviving more than three minutes.

Training ended with a hearty lunch, as rigorous training required ample nutritional support, which was the biggest constraint encountered in the training of common warriors.

Lunch began with a cup of hot cocoa. Xiulote had a hard time adjusting to the traditional cold cocoa mixed with spices and chilies and instead opted for honeyed hot cocoa. The taste was still bitter, but it felt comforting after drinking it.

Central America was an excellent region for sugarcane cultivation, but sugarcane had not yet been introduced. If one wanted a taste of sweetness, it could only be obtained from expensive, rare wild honey, bland agave nectar, and seasonally limited maple syrup. It was said that the Maya possessed the secret technique of beekeeping, giving Xiulote one more reason to attack Yucatan.

The main dish was corn tortillas filled with black bean paste and green beans, replenishing the basic carbohydrates and protein. The warriors really liked adding chilies, avocados, and cherry tomatoes. Avocados and tomatoes were usually more expensive, but in Mexico, chilies were abundant.

Next was Xiulote's most satisfying supplementary meal, grilled venison seasoned with salt and herbs. In meat-scarce Central America, this was definitely food for the Great Nobility. Because venison was rare, often one had to settle for dry turkey meat instead.

It was said the Maya had invented dishes like grilled lizards, conches, sea turtles, and lobsters. Xiulote politely declined, not daring to try these dangerous foods. Even delicious lobsters, once consumed with parasites, led to lifelong problems in this era, almost without a cure.

Finally, lunch ended with an agave drink. Bertade would have a small cup of tequila, while Xiulote preferred the slightly sweet agave juice. Agave was almost one of the most important plants in the lives of the Mexica, with agave stems that could be roasted and eaten, agave leaves used to feed turkeys, agave juice that could be drunk or fermented, and leaf fibers that could be used to make rope. Xiulote thought it could probably also be used for papermaking.

After lunch came the time Xiulote enjoyed: learning. Every afternoon, he would organize the Chinese characters he used daily, draw instructional diagrams, and sometimes Aweit would come to help and talk about the latest military intelligence.

Then, as the sun set, he would joyfully gather his followers, watching the majestic warriors face the sunset with bafflement as they studied the written word. This was also a time when the eternally solemn Bertade would rarely show a pained expression.

After nightfall, without candles made from fat or the presence of women, the warriors had little to do. They could only gather around the campfire to chat, boast, sing, fight, and drink. Of course, the scarce alcohol was generally only available on important sacrificial days.

At this time, Xiulote would chat with his followers about family matters, listen to tales of urban life, distant rumors, and the desires of warriors.

When the night deepened, he would return to his hut under the moonlight, lie on his grass bed, and gaze at the hazy starlight outside the cloth window. His thoughts would drift far away, crossing time and space, before he finally drifted off to sleep.

Bertade, on the other hand, would lie awake in the corner of the hut, quietly guarding memories of the past and a future full of anticipation. And outside in the forest surrounding the camp, the conflicts and battles between the Mexica warriors and the Otomi people would thus be isolated, as if in another world.

Such was Xiulote's day: rising with the sunrise, resting under the starlight, waiting for the turning point in the war.