

Civilization 38

Chapter 38 Agriculture and the Empire_2

After marching through the forest for two days, they had not seen any of the attacking Otomi Warriors. Instead, they encountered Otomi villagers coming out of the forest to surrender. Now, the nearby villages were all under the control of the Mexica warriors, and the spring planting was about to begin. Without spring planting, there would be no harvest for the year and certain death thereafter. The villagers had no choice but to abandon hiding and come down from the mountains.

As for the villages that could be controlled, the legion treated them as their possession, showing enough mercy.

When Xiulote arrived at the nearest Otomi mountain village, extinguished blue smoke lay before his eyes. A stretch of forest outside the village had been completely burned down, and the peasants were taking out stone ploughs, a simple digging stick, from between the thatched cottages and mud walls along with corn seeds, getting ready to begin spring planting.

Upon seeing the large troop of Mexica warriors led by the Coyote Priest, the Otomi villagers immediately prostrated themselves, deeply burying their heads, hiding the fear and fire in their eyes. This was starkly different from the passion of peasants in the Mexican Valley. The commander of the stationed Mexica militia hurriedly came forward and paid respects to Xiulote.

Xiulote observed everything: the empire's rule here was fragile, maintained only through military force. He did not say much but merely informed the militia commander that the squad's purpose was to perform the "spring planting sacrificial rite." Upon hearing this, the prostrate Otomi people also raised their heads, finally showing an expression of reverence and joy.

The Priest's divine authority was potent. Its strength lay in its deep roots within people's hearts, encompassing every aspect of life, sustained through various rites.

Xiulote came to the center of the village and set up a small altar. He first placed a circular stone, sprinkling soil on top to symbolize the earth. Then he scattered corn, beans, pumpkins, cocoa, and chili peppers on the soil—all divine sustenance—symbolizing the upcoming planting. He then placed green grass around to signify growth, and finally green branches on the outer perimeter, symbolizing the eventual harvest.

This was a ritual to pray for a bountiful harvest, very basic and people-friendly, widely spread through the villages of Central America.

Next, the Young Priest ascended the altar, and immediately everything below hushed into silence. As the crowd waited prostrate, the Priest danced and sang:

"I slept beneath the Earth,

Dreaming of seven serpents encircling around.

They feasted on my flesh of olden days,

Hissing loudly, calling me home.

It was Tonakaxiwatel,

Goddess of fertility and harvests."

"The Goddess chose me in her blooming garden,

Sunflowers and corn were my naive childhood,

Beans and pumpkins were my comfort of youth,

Cocoa was my bitter middle-age,

Red chili peppers were my ripe old age.

Then the flowers bloomed, tearing my throat,

Then the fruits grew plump, coagulating my flesh."

"The Goddess dyed the fruit that was me,

She dressed me in olden skin,

Life then departed from my body,

Quickly come, consume the sacrifice of my flesh.

I will once again take root in the midst of the Earth,

Planted deeply,

Into a long slumber."

"I am the Goddess's grain,

The seed buried in the soil.

After planting, it sprouts,

After sprouting, it grows,

After growing, it matures,

After maturing, it sacrifices,

After sacrificing, it returns,

Turning again into a seed."

"This is the endless circle,

I will always emerge for the Goddess.

She guards me with the Sun,

She kisses me with raindrops,

Bringing the Earth its harvest,

And I am never alone.

This mighty Goddess,

Tonakaxiwatel!"

Consequently, the warriors solemnly performed their rites, chanting the divine name "Tonakaxiwatel" in unison, while the villagers lay flat on the ground, kissing the Earth beneath them.

In Xiulote's view, this sacrificial poem was quite straightforward, treating crops as people, which sounded very odd at first.

But after listening a few times, he realized it was actually an easily understandable agricultural poem, indeed meant to guide agricultural production.

The first verse was nonsense.

The second verse, the planting sequence of crops over time is sunflowers, corn, beans, pumpkins, cocoa, and red chili peppers.

The third and fourth verses, the growth sequence of crops is: after planting the seed, wait for a while for it to sprout; after it sprouts, it will grow and then flower; after flowering, it will bear fruit, which must be eaten quickly; after eating, remember to plant again.

The final verse, the conditions for crop growth are sunshine and water.

After the ritual, the Otomi people's attitude toward Xiulote visibly changed. The youth, now utterly beloved, was surrounded by hundreds of villagers, with every corner of his priestly garment passionately kissed until his trusted aide Bertade rescued him from the crowd.

After completing the ritual, it was time to sow. Xiulote followed closely to observe.

The villagers dug finger-deep holes in the land cleared by burning, placed a few corn kernels therein, gathered ash and wood debris as fertilizer around the holes, and covered them. The gaps between the planting pits were about half a meter both horizontally and vertically, and the soil could not be densely planted as in modern agriculture, mainly due to insufficient soil fertility.

This is the big sister of America's staple food, the Three Sisters: corn.

The subsequent planting was coached by the village Elder, who explained and demonstrated while Xiulote listened and asked questions.

A few weeks later, when the corn had grown to several inches, it was time to plant beans. These were the second of the Three Sisters. Beans must be planted surrounding the corn, several beans around one corn.

Then a week later, it was time to plant pumpkins, the youngest sister. Approximately two to three meters was planted per pumpkin since pumpkins spread across the ground.