

Civilization 40

Chapter 40: Life

Spring plowing had just begun, and April in Mexico was the season for sowing.

Xiulote sat at the edge of the field, watching the busy village farmers. Most of them were shirtless, wearing only loincloths, their feet bare and calloused, backs bent and hunched as they swung simple digging sticks, sweating over the freshly burnt fields.

Fortunately, Mexico was not lacking in salt. The long coastline, scattered City-State rule, extensive trade, and widespread salt mines meant that the lower classes did not have to suffer from painful salt-deficiency edema. Xiulote remembered that near the capital, there were huge salt mines, which were also one of the trade goods of the City in the Lake.

Strictly speaking, life in Mexico before the arrival of the colonizers was not too bad, Xiulote thought.

City-State governance over its subsidiary villages was lax, without the high taxes imposed on the farmers of Eurasia during this era. Food was abundant, and salt was inexpensive. Even in the barren mountain fields, an Otomi person only needed to cultivate three to five acres to survive without fearing the dreadful spring famine. If sweet potatoes, which were highly productive, were planted in the mountains, it could even support an extra child.

"Aside from the densely populated Mexican Valley, the lands in other regions are far from reaching their cultivation limit. With enough iron agricultural tools, a new great development could be ushered in, similar to the development of Jiangnan during Jin Dynasty," the young man's thoughts wandered off to Huaxia, a country also developed through history, thousands of miles away.

Then, Xiulote grabbed a handful of soil from the field and carefully identified its type: it was a sandy loam commonly found in the Mexican Plateau area, between water-repellent sandy soil and water-affectionate loam. This soil, with good water and nutrient retention, did not require much alteration and was excellent for agriculture.

"If only a canal could be built from the south by the Lerma River, the entire dry fields of the Otapan region could be transformed into irrigated fields," Xiulote yearned as he looked southward, "The yield of the land could undergo a breakthrough, moving from 'lower fields' to 'middle fields' and even 'upper fields'."

"And to really achieve high yields, fertilizers must be applied. River mud, manure, and the recent natural fertilizer, guano," Xiulote recalled.

America is famous for its guano deposits, with the nearest abundance being on the islands along the coast of Lower California to the west, a sacred resting place for flocks of birds. Further away, was the most famous Chilean guano. He remembered that Bolivia, Peru, and Chile had fought the renowned "Guano War."

Xiulote watched the fields in contemplation. Warriors were scattered nearby, vigilant yet resting. In the controlled village area, everyone was relatively relaxed, with their weapons tied to their backs with hemp ropes, and only shields in hand.

A young warrior took out a flask but before drinking, walked over to Xiulote and sincerely offered it to the young man: "Priest, this is the last bag of wine brewed by my wife, please drink."

Xiulote smiled and reached out to take it. Seeing this, his trusted aide Bertade took it relaxingly first. He unscrewed it, smelled it, and then drank a gulp.

"Not bad, this Tequila," Bertade smiled at the young warrior, "I was a bit thirsty, let me drink some first."

"Need some salt?" the young warrior asked with a smile.

"No need, I like this bittersweet and joyful taste. It reminds me of the old days," Bertade said with slight sentiment. After speaking, he took two more sips before passing it to Xiulote.

The young warrior, named Kusora, had followed Xiulote since the funeral last July, and nine months had already passed in the blink of an eye.

Xiulote knew that he came from a City-State civilian family, had a wife, and a newborn son. A few months ago under the city of Guamare, Xiulote had watched him bury his son's umbilical cord there and make a warrior's vow.

Taking the flask, Xiulote did not hurry to drink, but first took out a small pottery jar, poured a little salt on his hand back, quickly licked it, and then took a gulp of Tequila. First came the saltiness, then the bitterness, followed by a gentle kick.

"Without distillation technology, this light alcohol doesn't taste too bad," Xiulote thought.

Then he looked at the flask in his hand, feeling its softness and light weight, a unique touch, and good sealing properties, making it a great marching water flask.

"Did you make this yourself?" Xiulote curiously looked at Kusora.

"Yes," Kusora nodded vigorously and began to explain enthusiastically, "This is made from a deer's stomach. I cut the appropriate part of the stomach, then sew one end tight, and make the other end adjustable with a closure. Afterwards, I bake pine branches, extract pine tar, and apply it on the stomach. Then I lightly roast the stomach with fire to let the pine tar seep into it and shape it, making a water flask that can be used for a long time."

"You have skilled hands," Xiulote admired.

Kusora was very happy: "My father is a craftsman; he taught me a lot. I often make small obsidian ornaments for my wife. When I go back, my son will probably be two years old, just the right time to make him a wooden toy."

"Why did you think of becoming a warrior?" Xiulote smiled at Kusora's calloused hands. "You could have been a very good craftsman."

Kusora scratched his head, laughed again: "By becoming a City-State Warrior, I gained a piece of land outside the city, and my wife could reduce her workload from weaving. If I capture some prisoners in this war, I could get promoted and rewarded. When my son grows up, I could provide better food for his warrior training. Later, he would have the chance to become a strong Jaguar warrior, or even own a Chinampa."