

Civilization 521

Chapter 521 - Heritage Slab, Faith Remolded_2

In this painting, the first Predecessor Monarch Tariacuri is depicted as the offspring of the union of the Nava and Urixu people, and even more so, the Divine Descendant chosen by the Chief Divine of the sun! He possessed innate authority and divinity to rule over all the citizens of the lake region. During this period, the Chief Divine of the sun also ascended from the Heavenly Divine of the migrating tribes to become the Protective Divinity of all the citizens of the lake region!"

Hearing this, Xiulote nodded in agreement, positively remarking,

"Similar to the Alliance. The elevation of the Chief Divine, the deification of the former King... These are signs of the Kingdom's will congealing."

"Wise King!"

Upon these words, Jatili's wrinkles trembled, and he chuckled deeply, his smile bearing the weight of time.

He then pointed to the third group painting. In the painting, a prominent sun shone in the sky, casting light upon a towering pyramid below. At the center of the frame stood a King with a Divine Eagle helmet. He connected the sun with the pyramid, as if bridging heaven and earth, divinity and humanity, the Divine Kingdom and the mortal world!

"The third painting, drawn during the reign of the third Predecessor Monarch, depicts the scene of the new King ascending to the very top of the pyramid and offering sacrifices to the Heavenly Divines.

During this period, after the efforts of the second-generation Predecessor Monarch, the Divine Eagle Family had gained divinity in the hearts of the people. The Patzcuaro Lake region became, in myths, the source that maintains the world's rotation; and the pyramid of Qinchongcan City is the true center of the universe!

The King's power is endowed and safeguarded by the Heavenly Divines, and the royal power is destined to be passed down through the sacred bloodline of the Divine Descendants, through holy rituals. And with the sacrificial rites at the pyramids, each King establishes a sacred connection with the Heavenly Divines, beyond the comprehension of the people!"

"Offering sacrifices to heaven and earth, the divinity bestows royal power."

Xiulote mused to himself, many images from his memory flashing before his eyes. After a while, the young King nodded first, then let out a gentle sigh.

He looked toward the last, expansive painting. In the frame was still the King of the Divine Eagle. The King had ascended, transformed into the Divine King of the tribes. He stood between heaven and earth, radiating a godly glow. His feet were apart, one on the land, the other on water. Around the Divine King were countless people prostrating in worship. And below in the painting, there were lines of mysterious glyphs and inscriptions, as if the conclusion of the mythological epic.

"Elder, is this the epic of the gods?"

The young King traced the inscriptions with his finger and looked towards the knowledgeable elder in front of him.

Jatili nodded. He cleared his throat and with an ancient and distant intonation, he recited the last of the Kingdom Epic.

"The sun shines over heaven and earth, ancestors rule in all directions! Praise you, Tariacuri, you are the Divine Descendant of the sun, the incarnation of the Divine Eagle, you are destined to rule the sky, the land, and the lakes!

Oh, citizens from all directions, we also worship the ancestral Divine King. One of His feet stands on land, and the other on water. He has supreme might, with divine hands, creating the newly born people of Prepetcha...

And we are the descendants of the Divine King! We are the holy people of Prepetcha, destined to become a great tribe! We gestate and grow in the lands of the lake, multiply and perish... and the great Tarasco Kingdom, under the rule of the exalted Divine Eagle Royal Family, shall persist generation after generation, standing for thousands of autumns and tens of thousands of years!..."

The deep chanting echoed in the ancient Stone Hall, as if with some strange Magic Power, stirring the King's emotions. It swept away the dust of history, unveiled sealed memories, and once more sang of the bygone epics, turning them into a final resonating song. And the sunset at the horizon finally sunk completely into the earth, leaving behind only the profound night, and the flickering candlelight in the Stone Hall.

The candlelight flickered, casting elongated shadows. Xiulote gazed at the Heritage Slabs in the shadows, now indistinguishable. At this moment, his thoughts fluctuated, and he was deep in contemplation.

From these silent slabs, he heard the myths of four Eras converging into a unified story; he witnessed the fall of the old Kingdom, and the rise of the newborn Kingdom; he contemplated the intermarriage of merging tribes, and also looked forward to the fiefs with a heart wide as the world...

And in the newborn fiefdoms, it was necessary to reconstruct the Third Level framework, and to deal with different strata; to strengthen the centralization of power, and to manage the finances of the fiefs; and also, over the long passage of time, to nurture a completely renewed pantheon of divinities, and evolve an ever-strengthening set of beliefs!

Countless sparks of thought twinkled in the King's mind and then gathered into a fierce flame in his chest. The Stone Hall was silent, with everyone quietly waiting as if in a historical freeze-frame. Only when a gentle smile appeared on the King's face did time once again flow within the hall.

"Today, having the Sage recount the epic has truly been extremely beneficial to me, sparing me a decade's worth of toil."

Xiulote smiled as he clasped Jatili's hands.

"Chief, you are the wings that enable me to soar through the skies. The future governance of the Kingdom cannot do without wise men like you; our newly built officialdom in the fief also needs more skilled birds that can fly. If you know of any talented individuals, please do not hesitate to recommend them! I will appoint them based on their virtues and abilities, without regard to race or kinship," he said.

Upon hearing this, a flash of joy crossed the learned Elder's face. He bowed solemnly and repeated a phrase he had said before.

"Your Majesty, the turtles in the river, the fish in the lake, and the waterbirds are all willing to serve a true eagle!" he said.

Xiulote laughed heartily at this and nodded with satisfaction. He looked around, and after one last glance at the spacious stone hall, was about to leave. Suddenly, in the corner of the chamber, a dull gray dagger caught the light, drawing the attention of the king.

"A dull gray dagger?"

The young king paused. He took several steps forward, picked up the dagger, and examined it closely. Then, he ran his hand over the razor-sharp and smooth edge, feeling the distinct solid touch of the metal, which was not the familiar obsidian.

"Dull gray metal... this is... an iron dagger!"

Surprise spread across Xiulote's face. He turned eagerly to Jatili and asked,

"Chief, where did this weapon come from?"

The Elder glanced at the uniquely shaped dagger and smiled knowingly.

"Your Majesty, this is an ancient weapon confiscated by the Kingdom during an expedition against the Tekos Tribe in the Colima region, southwest of here, many years ago. There are several more daggers like this one, all stored in a nearby trophy hut. These weapons are exceptionally sharp, slightly less so than the sharpness of obsidian but far more durable, even stronger than the latest bronze!

The Royal Family once sent people to search carefully in the complex Colima Mountain Region for the gray metal that could be forged into these daggers, but they found nothing. In the end, as the Elder of the Tekos Tribe said, they classified them as weapons gifted by the gods. The Divine Eagle Family, calling themselves the Descendants of the Divine, also chose the sturdiest dagger and placed it in this Heritage Stone Hall," he explained.

"Colima Mountain Region... I see," Xiulote said, nodding slightly in disappointment. He remembered the stories Ezpan had told him, and with a heavy heart, he could only sigh deeply. Then, the young king's expression grew solemn. He pondered for a while before turning to the Head Warrior he trusted most.

"Bertade, has the extraction of the southern copper mines resumed? How is the craftsman camp faring? What is the production rate of the longbows? Have the production of the bronze agricultural tools I commanded begun? And what about the small copper cannons I've emphasized, what are the latest developments?" he asked.

"Your Highness, I have already gathered a thousand miners to preliminarily resume the extraction in the southern copper mines. The Priests have settled in the craftsman camp and have instructed the craftsmen. Over two thousand craftsmen have been fully organized and have started to take on their previous functions. If we have sufficient wood, we can maintain a production of over one hundred longbows a day. The losses of the longbow regiments have already been replenished...

The expensive production of bronze agricultural tools poses no difficulty in manufacturing and has already been completed on a trial basis. However, although the bronze tools make farming easier, the costs are too high. Their production is limited by the copper sourced from the southern mines of our fiefs, and we also need to import more tin ore from the south of the Alliance. As for the copper cannons you requested..."

Bertade hesitated to continue. After a moment's thought, he cautiously replied,

"The craftsmen have just tried to manufacture one, but there have been some problems, and it cannot be used yet... I request that you inspect it personally."

Hearing this, Xiulote contemplated for a moment before issuing a command.

"Very well! You go and make preparations. Once I'm done with the state affairs at hand, and August is almost over, we'll set the time for the visit before the September harvest. I will bring the trusted aides I've been grooming to inspect the craftsman camp first, then oversee the mining operations in the southern Ivachi!" he commanded.

Chapter 522 - Autumn of 1484 - Conversations among Navigators

August 1484, Capital of the Kingdom of Portugal, the ancient yet newly splendid City of Seven Hills, Lisbon.

In this era, Lisbon was an undeniable European metropolis. It was the capital of a kingdom with fifteen hundred thousand subjects, housing over seventy thousand permanent residents and thousands of foreign merchants and travelers. The ancient Sintra Palace was situated upon the Sintra Mountains to the north of the city; it was the true power center of the kingdom, home to an ambitious and vigorous king.

To the south of the capital, a tranquil long river gently flowed. This was the mother river of the Kingdom of Portugal, the Tagus River. Originating from the central mountains of the Iberian Peninsula, it coursed west, passed through forests blanketing the highlands, meandered around woodlands enclosing pastures and crossed the borders of two kingdoms. It irrigated the seaside plains dense with farmlands, nourished the capital's suburbs adorned with orchards, and finally arrived at this prosperous and splendid seaside city to meet the Atlantic Ocean.

At the rivermouth where the Tagus flowed into the sea, there thrived a bustling seaside port. Merchant ships, warships, exploration vessels—hundreds of sails were docked here, waiting; nobles, merchants, commoners bustled through, trading. Looking closer, one could see hundreds of stout slaves with dark skin, submissively bowing their heads, drenched in sweat, unloading the large quantities of incoming goods.

Under the scorching sun, Bruno strutted toward the port in a newly tailored, elegant attire, accompanied by a few robust sailors armed with daggers and walking briskly.

Noting his noble garb, merchants of diverse nationalities and local fishermen along the way made room for him to pass. Only a few inebriated sailors in short tunics staggered forward. The drunkards, mumbling foul language, reached out their grubby hands towards the well-dressed young noble.

Bruno's brow furrowed. He lifted his right foot and kicked hard, sending the lead drunkard tumbling to the ground. The robust sailors following him cursed aloud, surged forward, and with daggers inverted, used the blunt ends to ferociously pummel the shoulders and backs of the drunkards, knocking them to the ground with "bang bang" sounds. Soon enough, the cursing turned into screams, and the screams into groans.

"Boss, these blind fools must've come from some merchant ship, bumping around like masterless stray dogs! Judging by their accents, they're definitely not from Lisbon. There were too many deaths among the lower-deck sailors on the trip back from the demon's land to the south, and we can't replace them quickly enough. The fleet has to set sail southward soon... Shall we grab these idiots and put them to work as deckhands on our ship?"

A brutish, middle-aged sailor stepped forward and asked in a cold, low voice.

Hearing this, Bruno hesitated for a moment, then shook his head.

"Forget it. Under the Holy Mother's watch, I've just married the woman I love... Besides, Sir Dias, the royal supervisor, is also with the fleet. He's going to lead several scholars and missionaries with us to the south. I haven't figured out Sir Dias's temper yet... Let's just spare them this time!"

The middle-aged sailor nodded obediently at these words.

Hurrying back from the distant town of Faro in the south by carriage, Paulo, the former chief sailor's widowed sister, became Bruno's bride, making him one of their own among the sailors. Moreover, as the noble's son ventured into the native kingdoms and obtained intelligence on the Kingdom of John, he was awarded the lowest rank of knight by the royal family. The crew thus held some respect for him and acknowledged him as their leader.

"Ptui! Your luck saved you; you've escaped with your lives!"

The middle-aged sailor kicked a drunkard on the ground hard and spit contemptuously. In that era, being captured as a deckhand for the lowest ranks on a ship heading to the horrifying Black Africa was akin to being handed a death sentence.

Another burly sailor moved closer and cautiously asked,

"Boss, this Sir Dias, the royal supervisor, what's his deal?"

"Ah, what's his deal? He comes from true nobility, as esteemed as a royal knight and captain!"

Bruno's laugh was tinged with self-mockery. Such genuine nobles were not something he, an illegitimate child born of a nobleman, could compare with.

"Sir Dias's father and grandfather were nobles, veterans who followed Prince Enrique as navigators. He himself is highly trusted by the king, not only a noble royal knight but also the overseer of the royal warehouse, and a current captain."

"Hey, boss, if he's a captain, why should he care about the lives of a few common sailors!"

The middle-aged sailor laughed grimly, turning his head to coldly glance at the still groaning drunkards on the ground, then turning back to ask,

"Fodesse! A noble like that is going south with us to lands infested with demons?"

"Sir Dias won't venture deep into the demon's lands. He's been part of the conquest of the Gold Coast before. This time he's heading south to support the newly built Elmina Castle since gold is abundant there."

As Bruno said this, his eyes filled with a mix of fear and longing.

On his last voyage, he had narrowly escaped death from the demon's lands and had even witnessed the demon's Angel Envoy on earth, which haunted his dreams for a month. Yet, the rewards of such adventures were generous and astounding. The gemstones, gold, and ivory he brought back sold for a

handsome price in the Lisbon market. Not only was the money enough to throw a respectable noble wedding, but it also allowed him to buy a noble manor on the outskirts of the capital, complete with its own orchard.

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Had he followed the path of an ordinary commoner, his entire life's savings wouldn't have amounted to such a fortune. Not to mention, he had been knighted for his achievements, finally shedding his status as a bastard and becoming a true member of the nobility!

"Fodesse! Glittering gold, you are my most beloved little treasure!... This time sailing south, I must make another two such profits, no matter what!"

"Hmm, of course!... With such a long voyage, there will always be opportunities."

The group excitedly and quietly discussed among themselves as they walked toward the southern part of the harbor, and they soon arrived at an excellent deep-water berth. More than a dozen caravels were lined up with the kingdom's cross flags flying high on their masts.

Bruno boarded a small boat and rowed his way to the forefront, where the flagship was positioned. As he climbed aboard, he saw several well-dressed dignitaries gathered, conversing in low and serious tones. At the center of the crowd stood two distinguished royal knight captains.

Bruno carefully approached, bowing his head from afar in greeting.

"Honorable captains, Sir Bartolomeu Dias! I, Noble Knight Bruno Cao, extend my greetings to the respected royal knights!"

Upon hearing the greeting, Captain Diogo Cao turned around, revealing a solemn and resolute face. Then the solemnity in his eyes dispersed slightly, replaced by a gentle smile, and he nodded slowly.

After spending two years at sea, Diogo returned to Lisbon this April and reported his maritime experiences to Sintra Palace. The establishment of Elmina Castle had pleased the court, the discovery of the Kingdom of Congo had surprised the nobility, and the concrete intel on the Elder's Kingdom had shaken the entire kingdom!

King Joao II immediately summoned Captain Diogo Cao and inquired in detail about everything he had witnessed on his voyage. Next was the influential Archbishop of Lisbon, Jorge da Costa. Within a mere fortnight, Diogo was bestowed with the title of Royal Knight, awarded an annuity, and granted a family crest!

"Bruno, come here."

Diogo Cao beckoned and then smiled towards the other royal knight.

"Dias, this is my kinsman, Bruno Cao. He ventured into the lands of the Demon, met the Congo Chieftain longing for the Almighty, and bravely seized the Coptic Cross from the clutches of the Demon's Angel Envoy!"

"Oh? Such bravery! Ha, a true son of Aviz indeed!"

Dias laughed heartily, voicing his admiration. In his early thirties and in the prime of his life, he possessed an inherently stern countenance. However, his years in the Lisbon court had softened his edges and made his smile more approachable. He reached out and affectionately patted Bruno on the shoulder.

"Ha, I've seen you! Four months ago, you went to Braganza Palace and submitted new plant specimens to the scholars, and received a handsome reward."

Bruno, slightly embarrassed and then pleasantly surprised by the captains' praises, bowed his head and quickly repeated his gesture of courtesy.

Dias maintained his smile and casually praised him a couple more times before turning serious.

"The venerable Archbishop meticulously examined the returned Coptic Cross and, overwhelmed with joy, sent an Envoy to the most high Pope Sixtus IV to report. The court's messenger of good tidings has also taken the King's letter to the Holy See in Rome. The good news has traveled ahead, and the papal decree will arrive shortly. The subsequent exploration is imminent!"

"Diogo, the King's hasty command for your southern exploration signifies his great hope in you and also pressure from the Holy See! The iris at the Cape gazes towards the very end of the ocean, please do not disappoint the heavy trust placed in you by the King!"

Upon hearing this, Diogo Cao bowed his head resolutely and bent in reverence toward the northeast, in the direction of Braganza Palace.

"The Almighty as my witness, I, Diogo Cao, swear upon my life! This voyage south, I am determined to explore the edge of the ocean, trace the river's source, search for signs of the Elder's Kingdom, until the very end of my days!"

The solemn oath echoed between heaven and sea, and the flagship fell silent for a moment. Then, the priest aboard led everyone in a brief prayer, after which the dignitaries resumed their conversation.

"Dias, I've only just returned home and heard the powerful Ottomans are embroiled in internal strife, having halted their advance into the Balkan Peninsula... Is the mission to find the Elder's Kingdom still so urgent?"

"Holy Mother bless us! Diogo, although the fearsome Sultan Mehmed II has passed away under the punishment of the Almighty, his attempt to send armies to invade the Italian Peninsula four years ago has plunged the whole Holy See into prolonged shock and unease."

Before he died, Sultan Mehmed II left behind a barbaric law of fratricide for succession. The current turmoil in the Ottoman Empire is merely a limited struggle between two heirs; the majority of the influential Pashas have not participated. And Sultan Bayezid has already gained an absolute advantage—the internal chaos will soon end, and the Ottomans' advance to the west will continue..."

"The kind Catholic World is perilously endangered under the threat of the Ottomans, urgently requiring our Eastern brethren who believe in the Almighty to lead their armies in support!"

Upon hearing this, Diogo's face grew solemn. He slowly nodded, as if carrying the entire burden of the Catholic World on his shoulders.

"However, the Ottomans in the East of the Mediterranean are, after all, distant. The invasion of the Ottomans is also of great concern to Pope Sixtus in Rome and Emperor Frederick of Shenluo. Dias, my old friend, mankind should only worry about what they can handle."

Dias looked at his old friend for a moment, then advised him with a smile.

"The great Prince Henry once told my grandfather: 'Our future as Portuguese lies on the sea, we only need to consider three things!'"

Upon hearing the name of Prince Henry, the deck fell silent again, as everyone turned their attention expectantly.

"Situated at the westernmost edge of the Catholic World, we are descendants of the iris by the sea. Our first task is maritime exploration! To continue delving into the ocean, venturing into an unknown world, seeking unclaimed lands!

Our land is narrow, our people numbered; we must avoid conflicts on land at all costs. Our second task is the expansion at sea! To seize control of the islands within the seas, to occupy coastal lands, to expand our Kingdom."

At this point, Dias paused. His expression became very serious, his voice more resonant.

"The Castilians have blocked our eastern space, and they have always been greedy towards us. The last task is to be wary of Castilians! The Portuguese must preserve their independence. The mountain people of Avis, the fishermen, and the farmers must unite and always be vigilant against the Castilians!"

Upon hearing this, the Portuguese sailors aboard began to loudly agree, cursing the Castilians from one end to the other. The nobility also quietly assented.

"Dias, my friend. As an admirer of Prince Henry, I couldn't agree more with your words. However, I still have some perplexities in my heart."

Diogo nodded profoundly. He approached Dias, speaking in a cautious voice audible only to the two of them.

"You are the steward of the royal warehouses, deeply trusted by the king... How does the king regard the Kingdom of Castile, or rather, today's Kingdom of Spain? The idea of a Spanish-Portuguese union is nothing but a Castilian's vain fantasy, but it seems in the Kingdom's court, there is no shortage of voices in favor..."

At these words, Dias's gaze flickered. He took a few steps towards the bow, with Diogo closely behind, while the others tactfully did not follow.

"Diogo, as we all know, many from the kingdom's Great Nobility do not share the intense resentment towards the Castilians like the common folk do. They collude with the Spanish court, caring not for the future of the Portuguese but only for their own positions of power.

Luckily, by the Holy Mother's blessing! Our respected King Joao possesses a foresight akin to a black kite, a lion's ambitious courage, as well as the will and capability to match it! His Majesty has never wished to be subordinate to others. On the contrary, concerning the Kingdom of Spain, he harbors even greater ambitions.

His Majesty's only legitimate heir, Prince Afonso, has been betrothed since childhood to Isabel, the eldest daughter of the Catholic Monarchs of Spain, in a sacred marriage..."

Dias paused, then fell silent. Diogo's expression changed, and he slowly nodded in understanding. He changed the subject, continuing.

"I hope everything will unfold as His Majesty has planned. The Moors in the south of the Peninsula are now reduced to the capital of Granada, and the Spaniards are about to achieve their final victory in the Reconquista. When that time comes, if there are no other significant distractions for the Spaniards, the court in Madrid will surely turn its greedy eyes toward us.

At that time, who can support us on land? The English? The French? Or perhaps the Moors across the Strait?"

Chapter 524 - Autumn of 1484 - Catholic World, Europe Before the Second Voyage

The northeast trade winds caressed the coast, bringing the fresh scent of inland flora and propelling the sails towards distant shores. Here, the North Atlantic current forked to the south, forming the vast and gentle Canary Cold Stream. With the wind at our sails and the current in our favor, the journey from the Kingdom of Portugal to the Southern Continent was made ever so convenient, setting the hearts of navigators ablaze with anticipation.

Dias raised his head, gazing toward the sky to the south. Enormous flamingos soared through the sea breeze, their red wings flickering like flames, igniting the hearts of those who watched from afar. The flamingo symbolized freedom and fantasy, and was also the solar bird of Ancient Egyptian mythology. The royal steward mused for a long while before speaking with a wry smile.

"Diogo, we Portuguese can only rely on ourselves. The "Treaty of Windsor" has lasted a hundred years, and although the Kingdom of England is our steadfast ally, they are unable to provide much effective support on land. King Henry and King Richard are both amassing their armies, bracing for the final battle.

This protracted war for the throne has been raging for nearly thirty years! The nobility of England has suffered tremendous losses, with at least 50 distinguished families extinguished and over a thousand nobles fallen in battle. The English people are already weary of war! No matter which king prevails in the end, they won't have the capacity to respond to us in the potential war with Spain in the short term."

Diogo nodded heavily, his expression grave. In the brutal English Civil War, thousands of nobles and knights had perished, and countless fiefs had lost their lords. This had greatly weakened the strength of our allies and left the future direction of the Kingdom of England uncertain.

"Dias, what about the neighbors—the French? Given the increasingly powerful United Kingdom of Spain, they must be wary, right? When I returned, I heard of the Spider King's death, and the new King Charles ascended the throne at just fifteen years old. The true power of the Valois dynasty now lies in the hands of the regent, 'Madame la Grand'—Anne, the Dauphin of France, who is 'the least foolish woman' in all of France!"

"Diogo, your information is still astute. The Kingdom of France harbors hostility towards its powerful neighbor, the nascent Kingdom of Spain, but the French Royal Family is in the midst of divisive confrontation. The regent 'Madame la Grand' is currently suppressing the challenges of Prince Louis of Orléans. After annexing Burgundy, Anjou, Maine, and Provence, the French Royal Family has grown too powerful. Now only three to four lords still have substantial fiefs, and they all submit to the king's taxes and conscription."

As he said this, Dias's eyes held yearning, and his words carried a touch of wistfulness.

"Princess Anne has seized royal power and just convened the Estates-General in Tours. I heard that the delegates had initially agreed unanimously to limit royal authority, but once at the assembly, not one dared to speak out. In the end, the Estates-General became a one-woman show for 'Madame la Grand,' a display of royal authority and a tool to suppress Prince Louis of Orléans!"

"Diogo, when royal power becomes this strong, the obsolete Estates-General becomes all the more dispensable... This is likely the last influential Estates-General."

Hearing this, Diogo nodded, his expression similarly wistful. When royal power is sufficient, there is no need to compromise with feudal lords and religious representatives, no concessions to exchange for support from all classes. In the eyes of Europe's elites of this era, only absolute monarchies symbolize strength and progress.

"Dias, Prince Louis is no match for 'Madame la Grand.' His unique status simply means that the royal family won't truly deal with him. Nonetheless, the French still possess enough force to balance the Spaniards on land."

"Diogo, that's true, but the Kingdom of France's interests are more concentrated on the rich Italian city-states. They'd rather go to Naples to drink wine than travel to the Pyrenees to play with goats alongside the uncouth Spaniards."

Dias blinked and made a crude joke, then continued.

"Don't forget, King Charles's grandmother was Duchess Marie of Anjou; he still nominally holds claim to the thrones of Naples and Sicily."

Diogo didn't laugh. With a serious face, he replied.

"May the Holy Mother bless us! Only true fools would overlook the threat of the Kingdom of Spain and rashly enter into the quagmire of the Italian Peninsula! It is a direct challenge to the Pope of Rome and the Austrian Emperor, bound to dilute the Catholic World's resistance. Do the French wish to betray the Catholic World and join hands with the nefarious Ottomans?!"

Dias shrugged, his words laden with meaning.

"My old friend, if you could suppress the Spaniards, would you be willing to ally with the Moors across the Strait?"

At these words, Diogo's expression shifted, and he did not respond for a long time. Finally, he asked in a low voice.

"Across the Strait, the Moorish Kingdom... any good news? Have they just watched their kin on the North Coast be conquered by the people from Castile?"

"Unfortunately, it seems so."

Dias shook his head regretfully.

"The Braganza Palace discreetly sent envoys to the south... Ever since the fall of the Marinid dynasty, Granada has lost the support from across the Strait. The nascent Wattasid dynasty merely controls Northern Morocco and is internally decayed to the core. The returning court envoys reported that they have neither the desire nor the ability to challenge the Spaniards; instead, they are an easy target for conquest.

Chapter 525 - Autumn of 1484 - Catholic World, Europe Before the Second Voyage_2

The Kingdom had never found a reliable ally, and now all it could do was place its hopes in the King's plans. Of course, if the opportunity arose to embroil the Spaniards across the Strait, or in some other quagmire they couldn't extricate themselves from, the Kingdom would gladly interfere in secret, wishing that our dangerous and greedy neighbors to the East would encounter even more trouble...

Having listened to this, Diogo slowly exhaled. He devoutly looked towards the East and with his thumb, traced small crosses on his forehead, lips, and chest, praying fervently in Latin.

"Per signum Sanctae Crucis, de inimicis nostris, libera nos, Domine Deus noster... Dias, it seems that currently, the only one willing and able to help us face the Spanish threat is..."

"The Holy See."

Dias nodded affirmatively.

"The esteemed Pope Sixtus has always been friendly towards the Kingdom. Four years ago, the Pope signed a decree, approving the 'Treaty of Alcaswash', which clarified the Kingdom's dominion over the seas, and also allowed us to end the Spanish War of Succession with some dignity. However, since this year, Pope Sixtus's health has not been good, and I fear that he will soon... This is also why the Archbishop of Portugal reported the news of Elder John's Kingdom to the Holy See immediately, sending the Coptic Cross."

Upon hearing this, Diogo nodded in understanding. He clenched his fist to his chest, his emotions fluctuating, as he summarized each word.

"Once the Pope is called by the Almighty, how the attitude of the new Pope towards the Kingdom will change is unpredictable... Only by finding traces of Elder John's Kingdom and mastering the routes of contact with our Eastern brethren can the Kingdom truly have lasting influence in the Holy See!

And only by occupying the unclaimed lands by the sea and establishing key coastal strongholds to control the trade routes of the East can we, the Portuguese, have a future of strength and prosperity!

Holy Mother bless! On this voyage, I will not stop, I will explore straight unto death!"

Dias looked at his resolute friend, hesitating to speak. A faint premonition of ill fortune crossed his mind. After a while, he took out an ancient silver crucifix and carefully handed it over, saying softly,

"Diogo, in the southern lands of the Demon, there are many irresistible evils! They enter our bodies unnoticed, stealing the lives of the Lord's Citizens. This is the Holy Relic left by my grandfather, take it with you. I hope it will grant you the Almighty's blessing on your journey into the heart of evil!"

Diogo nodded gratefully, accepted the crucifix, and solemnly put it away. After thinking for a moment, he said in a serious tone.

"Dias, during the last voyage, I wrote a journal, which detailed the course and landmarks after heading south from the Gold Coast. At the Equator, there's a difficult calm belt that requires ample paddlers and

provisions. And in the deep sea far from the coast, the wind often changes; we need a new design for triangular sails... when I head down to the captain's quarters later, I'll give you the journal. If I don't return this time, the exploration beyond will be up to you!"

Dias looked at his friend for a moment and then nodded slowly.

"Fine! Diogo, on this voyage, the King has especially sent a new court advisor, a noble scholar and skilled cartographer from Nuremberg, Martin Behaim. He will accompany you to calculate latitudes with Jacob's staff and record the detailed southern route. If you are unfortunate... I will continue the exploration and search for the route to the East!"

The sea breeze blew silently, carrying the moist air. Both men were heavy with thoughts, and for a while, neither spoke. After a bit, Dias spoke with a smile.

"Diogo, the benevolent Almighty always protects us Portuguese. King Joao is wise and insightful, and the future of the Kingdom is always bright! During the two years of your last exploration, His Majesty has revealed the stature of a great King. Apart from valuing navigation and restarting the exploration plans, the King has promoted talents, appointed advisors, and made great efforts to revitalize the Kingdom, indeed accomplishing two major feats!"

Upon hearing this, Diogo pondered briefly and asked in a low voice,

"Two major feats? Dias, you are the King's confidant... When I returned, I heard that last year His Majesty executed Duke Ferdinand of Braganza and confiscated his lands..."

Dias glanced around the deck and saw that people were chatting away at a distance before saying affirmatively,

"Yes. The Duke of Braganza was dissatisfied with His Majesty's interference in noble succession rights and had secret correspondence with Queen Isabella. He was the most powerful noble in the Kingdom, and his fief was the largest... Centralizing the royal authority is the foundation of the Kingdom's strength. We cannot emulate the way of the Wall of Christ; it's probably also unsustainable.

His Majesty is determined to centralize the royal family's power like the Kingdom of France. Next, there are still many real power nobles to handle in His Majesty's plan... Of course, navigating families like ours are most trusted by the King and need not worry about this."

Upon hearing this, Diogo fell silent, his heart chilled. He pondered for a moment, then asked again,

"During my audience with His Majesty, he inquired in detail about the gold production around Elmina Castle and the Gold Tribes nearby. He also asked about the military capabilities of the Songhai Kingdom and the Congo Kingdom, whether they are rich in Gold... is this second major act about minting coins?"

"Diogo, my old friend, you do have the keen intuition of a Navigator!"

Chapter 526 - Autumn of 1484 - Catholic World, Europe Before the Second Voyage_3

Dias smiled and exclaimed.

"Relying on the gold obtained from the Gold Coast, His Majesty has restarted King Afonso's coin minting program. A new batch of Crusado 'Crusade' gold coins is being minted!"

The kingdom's gold coins prevailed among the Mediterranean countries and were even accepted by Arab merchants. For every 3.55 gram Crusado gold coin minted, the kingdom gained at least an 8% minting tax and attracted even more foreign merchants. In the commercial city-states of the Italian Peninsula, the influence of the kingdom was constantly rising. With a sufficient source of gold, the stability of kingdom coins even surpassed the Venetians' Ducat. Ah, the cunning Venetian merchants begrudged us to the point of itchy teeth, yet they were still helpless!

Diogo, you also know that on the Southern Continent, among the ignorant nations, there was a different gold, silver, and copper exchange ratio from that of the Catholic World. Besides direct plundering and occupation, our merchant ships could continuously obtain gold from the Southern Continent through different precious metal exchange disparities! The profit from this, the royal financial advisors had already calculated in detail, was enough to make monarchs from various nations green with envy and crazed!"

A smile finally appeared on Diogo's face. He stretched out his hand and vigorously patted his old friend's shoulder.

"Excellent! Dias, the kingdom's hope lies in the vast and fertile Southern Continent, on the route to wealth in the East! May the Almighty bless us! Let us set sail again toward the unknown south, in search of the holy kingdoms, to obtain the wealth promised by the Lord..."

Hearing these familiar prayers, Dias also pressed his friend's shoulder and recited loudly together.

"Under the guidance of the Almighty, we will forge ahead bravely, spreading His glory and mercy throughout the ignorant nations along the way!...amen"

The two exchanged smiles, looking together towards the south. That gaze was warm and bright, the world of the Lord; that gaze was cold and stern, the light of judgment.

"...Set sail!"

The signal flags waved, and a dozen or so Caravel ships raised their half-sails, forming a neat line, slowly sailing out of the harbor. The northeasterly trade winds never ceased, and the kingdom's fleet moved forward, quickly raising full sails, disappearing into the horizon.

"Vaffanculo! Che minchione! Damn mathematician, damn court advisor! Braganza Palace is filled with fools with eyes on their asses!"

On the shore of the port, a man in his thirties, tall and sturdy, with a hawk nose and a long face, high cheekbones, a pair of blue eyes, and reddish-brown hair, stared angrily at the direction where the ships had disappeared, incessantly muttering curses. He was dressed in a washed-out black robe of a commoner and wore a tattered but intact sailor's flat cap; the only valuable thing was his shiny pig-fat-polished calfskin pointed boots.

Although his clothes were worn, the middle-aged man stood upright, his eyes filled with the stubbornness of a wild boar. He furiously roared until the last exploratory sailboat was out of sight, then suddenly crouched down, clutching his head and cursing softly.

"Diamine! Cazzo! The great merchant Marco Polo once said, as did the astrologer Toscanelli! The world is round, China is where India begins, right across from Iberia and Ireland!"

...A bunch of fools... Only we city-staters can see the true nature of the world! I will become the Fleet Commander, become nobility, become the Governor beyond the sea! I will lead the fleet from the west side of the ocean to the rich East!..."

The middle-aged man was muttering to himself, but suddenly felt a weight on his shoulder. He looked up angrily and saw two towering Slav men, each with a large axe at their waist, pinning him between them. A skinny Jewish merchant, wearing a small round hat and sporting a long beard, casually walked up to him.

"Columbus, this time the Portuguese exploration voyage doesn't include you! The Kingdom's court advisors have already refuted your calculated sailing route, and the last fleet found traces of Elder John's country... Your plan seems hopeless. And now it's time to settle the debt you owe me."

With that, the Jewish merchant pulled a paper document from his bosom and began to read it slowly.

"Six years ago, you borrowed 20 Ducat Gold Coins from me to cover the costs of lobbying various countries. At an annual interest rate of 48%, with the interest compounded into the principal, today you should owe me... hmm, 210 Ducat Gold Coins, plus 3 Grosso Silver Coins, and 16.5 Denarius Copper Coins. Hmm, considering our long acquaintance, I'll waive the 0.5 Denarius Copper Coin..."

Hearing this, Columbus stood up abruptly. He swung his arms vigorously and roared angrily.

"Vaffanculo! Merda! Eliyahu, you heretic from the Hell of Fire, you greedy dwarf snake, don't let these barbarians touch me! You only gave me 15 Ducats, and you want me to pay back 210?!..."

"It's 210 Ducat Gold Coins, 3 Grosso Silver Coins, and 16.5 Denarius Copper Coins. As for the 25% advance deduction, it's an industry standard."

The Jewish merchant remained unfazed and waved his hand with a cold laugh.

"Columbus, my patience is running thin! Are you going to pay up nicely now, or would you prefer to be tied to a stone and sunk to the bottom of the sea?"

Upon seeing the signal, the two Slav men growled together and used their strength simultaneously. They forcibly dragged Columbus a few steps and hoisted him up on the pier, letting his head hang down over the deep sea.

Fear finally appeared in Columbus's eyes. While struggling violently, he shouted loudly.

"Eliyahu, give me a little more time! I will continue to lobby the monarchs of various countries, I will surely succeed! I've long spent all the Gold Coins I had; even if you kill me now, you won't get anything! But, but! If you have just a little patience to wait, as soon as my voyage succeeds, you'll get 210 Ducats!..."

Upon hearing this, Eliyahu narrowed his eyes and scrutinized Columbus's desperate expression. After a long while, he slowly nodded his head.

"All right! Columbus, for the sake of our long acquaintance, I'll give you a bit more time. But..."

Eliyahu reached into his bosom and pulled out a commercial contract he had prepared earlier.

"You need to sign this!"

Chapter 527 - Craftsman Camp, Compound Bow and Mass-produced Bamboo Bow

History is as vast and deep as the ocean, filled with unpredictable possibilities. At times it is calm and tranquil, at other times, waves sweep over it. Countless warm currents surge beneath the sea, flowing toward a perhaps predestined faraway place. The civilizations of various ethnic groups move forward in the lightless deep sea. They follow the currents, waiting for encounters they know nothing of.

Only a fish that has traversed through time, falls from the distant sky into the water. It sees the path of the future clearly, struggles forward with all its might, desperately squeezes to the front of the school, and finally becomes a young leader. It searches for new directions, explores new possibilities, and leads the school behind it towards a brand new uncharted path!

North of the Equator, the summer monsoon bridges the sea and land. It carries the exploration ships from Portugal to the Southern Continent, and it sends the moisture from the Caribbean Sea toward the western Lake Region. Amid the warm and abundant rainfall, the Lake Region's farmlands are lush and brimming with vitality. August thus passed in the rain, and September arrived with the wind.

The weather in September was extremely hot, and layers of relaxed clouds enveloped Qinchongcan City. Xiulote looked up, observed the recently ceased cloud and rain, as well as the clear sky after the rain. He turned to the Head Warrior and laughed.

"Haha, the heavy rain these past few days was really strong! It's as if the Great Lake in the sky had sprung a leak, who knows if it might have dropped any fish down?"

"Your Highness, during the rainy season, the Valley in the Lake Region is actually still fine, at most there is just a lot of rainwater. If it were the low-lying lands by the sea where the Vastec people live, almost every one or two years, the Wind God would become enraged. When that happens, roaring wind beasts would sweep across the sky, destroying villages and farmlands they encounter, and truly drop countless leftover sea fish! Therefore, along the coastal regions, the faith in the Wind God is often second only to the Feathered Serpent Divine," Bertade explained with a calm expression. Behind him, two hundred Personal Guard Warriors clad in armor, holding their weapons, closely protected the traveling King.

Xiulote was taken aback upon hearing this. After a moment of thought, he nodded his head.

The Gulf of Mexico region is hot and rainy, often hit by typhoons during the rainy season, and typically these are disastrous hurricanes that even modern times find difficult to deal with. Once these hurricanes make landfall, they tend to deal a destructive blow to the agricultural society of this era. Therefore, the two groups Vastec and Totonac along the eastern coast, despite having fertile land, have never been populous. And their coastal lands cannot serve as a lasting foundation for operation.

"Your Highness, I inquired with the old farmers of the Lake Region. Although this year's precipitation is high, it is still within normal levels. Lake Patzcuaro has risen only slightly, so it won't affect the farmlands along the lake too much. The substantial rainfall in August is actually good for the growth of maize, which will increase the harvest in October!"

Upon hearing this, the young ruler showed a smile. His gaze passed over the busy camp of craftsmen and looked towards the horizon beyond the city.

"This year's planting was late, and the villages were all a bit rushed. I do not ask for a large harvest in the Lake Region, just a decent yield, so that the hearts of the people of Prepetcha and the soldiers stationed in the fields can settle down! Then I can also free up my hands to deal with the nobility in the south..."

As they were talking and laughing, Black Wolf Torc had already walked out of the camp of craftsmen with his chest puffed out and his head held high. He bowed his head to the King.

"Your Highness, the inspection of the craft camp has been completed, and the Personal Guard Warriors have been positioned! The craftsmen of Prepetcha are all prepared and await Your Highness's inspection!"

"Good!"

Xiulote nodded and led the way into the craft camp. The Head Warrior and Black Wolf followed closely, along with a large group of guards.

The army had only conquered Qinchongcan City a few months ago, and the craft camp now contained more than two thousand craftsmen who had been incorporated. When entering the camp for inspection, one must always remain extra vigilant. Once craftsmen from Tenochtitlan of Mexica relocate to the Capital City, the Divine Revelation Place near the palace area will officially start operating. At that time, the craftsmen in the camp will be further classified into ranks, organized into groups, and allocated to different places.

Soon, the young King entered the craft camp and looked around. The entire camp was enclosed by sturdy bronze stone walls, occupying a vast amount of land. The warehouses in the camp stored large amounts of wood, stones, cotton, and leather. According to the current functions of the craftsmen, they could be roughly divided into four main areas, with two for civilian use and two for military production.

Xiulote continued walking without stopping, first passing through the center for production of nobility goods. Previously exclusive to the Tarasco Royal Family, producing exquisite and luxurious palace wares, it was now used to make expensive trade goods.

The young ruler's gaze lingered briefly on various exquisite palace colored pottery, nobility clothing, and gold and silver ornaments, then he walked away without a second glance. The Head Warrior followed close behind, equally undistracted. Black Wolf, a step behind, looked around curiously at the noble utensils along the way.

Next, they came to the bustling center for the production of farming tools and wheelbarrows. The young King stopped, surveyed briefly. The managing warriors shouted loudly, and the busy craftsmen all bowed down, awaiting the King's inspection.

Whether in the military or civilian settlements of the Lake Region, strict farming practices were enforced, and the per capita cultivated land area had to be significantly larger than before. Commonly used stone tools wore down easily, hence they needed constant repair and replacement. The production of wheelbarrows, crucial for transportation and challenging to make because the wheels had to be reinforced with metal, also easily broke. To improve efficiency, Xiulote had allocated a large number of craftsmen and sufficient bronze tools, specially to provide logistical support for the military and civilians in the fields.

Chapter 528 - Craftsman Camp, Compound Bow and Mass-produced Bamboo Bow_2

The young King watched for a while, then personally pushed a single-wheel cart to try it out.

The manufacture of wood-rimmed wheels with nails was a technical task that not only required specific wood but also demanded skilled craftsmanship. With the current level of production for single-wheel carts, they could only be used on the flat fields surrounding the lake region. As soon as the terrain became slightly undulating, or the area became thick with tree roots, the carts would quickly fall apart.

After trying it for a moment, Xiulote nodded slightly, indicating that the quality was acceptable. He looked at the Head Warrior.

"Bertade, reward the craftsmen who made the single-wheel carts and encourage them to further research reinforcement... Moreover, where are the bronze agricultural tools that I requested?"

"At your command! Your Highness, the bronze agricultural tools are not here, but in the final manufacturing center."

Xiulote hummed in acknowledgment and continued forward. Following closely behind him was the center for manufacturing military equipment.

This was a military stronghold guarded by hundreds of Samurai, with over a thousand craftsmen busy at work. Divided into different groups, they were making Longbows, War Clubs, Copper Spears, shields, Cotton Armor, and Wooden Helmets. The military equipment center once supplied tens of thousands of soldiers from the Tarasco Royal Legion and had the largest number of craftsmen, concentrating the most talented master craftsmen.

After walking for a while, Xiulote's gaze sharpened, and he stopped in his tracks in front of the largest workbench.

He picked up a newly made Longbow lying before him and caressed it. The bow was smooth, made of cedar wood, and simply varnished. Noteworthy, though, was that with the string removed, the two ends of the Longbow curved significantly inward, forming an obvious arc. The main body of the bow bent away from the archer, resembling a long-used carrying pole.

Xiulote lowered his eyes slightly, and a flurry of fleeting memories surged in his heart, accompanied by flashes of war scenes. Then, he stood the Longbow upright to measure it, and the linear length of the bow was just one meter sixty-seven, more suited for combat on the battlefield. The young monarch pondered for a moment and, when he looked again at the elderly craftsman before him, his demeanor had turned authoritative.

"Recurved end on a Short Bow... Did you make this Longbow, and why design it this way?"

"Yes, this is crafted by my own hands, having modified it based on the Mexica Longbow."

The craftsman before him was in his early fifties, with an antiquated appearance. He wore a flat leather cap denoting his status, with more than ten apprentices standing with folded hands behind him, clearly a master craftsman. Upon hearing the King's inquiry, the master craftsman respectfully bowed his head and explained in detail.

"Your Majesty, I have experimented with bow limbs of various lengths and stiffness, as well as studied the characteristics of Longbows made from different materials. This kind of small-tipped recurved Long Wooden Bow is capable of maintaining range and power while effectively shortening the length of the bow. Its shaping is slightly complex, but it does not increase difficulty, nor does it require high-quality materials.

In fact, I also have a small-tipped bow made of bamboo here. Its range is about seventy percent that of a cedar bow, and it uses slightly shorter Arrows. The bamboo bow has a bit less power, only able to damage Leather Armor within 60 steps, and injure clothed Militia within 90 steps. However, it's very cheap to produce, allowing for rapid mass deployment, which was initially prepared for the previous... conflicts. Similarly, this type of bamboo bow is not demanding on arrows, significantly reducing arrow manufacturing costs."

The master craftsman watched the King's expression cautiously, and carefully took out a recurved bamboo bow. Xiulote took the bow and tried it, his expression shifting immediately.

"The draw weight is about 60 pounds, even ordinary Militia can use it... Low-cost mass production, the bamboo bow, feather-light..."

The young monarch pondered thoughtfully, murmuring to himself. After a moment, he looked at the standing master craftsman before him and smiled with satisfaction.

"A very nice improvement, very useful research! Tell me your name."

"Your Majesty, I am a 'Bowyer' from Prepetcha, Kundili."

...

Kundili straightened up and proudly announced his title. This was a hereditary title, meaning "the person who makes bows in the tribe." It also signified the highest level among bowyers.

Hearing this, Xiulote nodded in understanding. The people of Prepetcha had a vast group of craftsmen skilled in craftsmanship, who were the first in the entire world to discover and use bronze weapons. The fact that their master craftsmen were able to study and improve longbows was not beyond the king's expectations.

The young king pondered for a moment before making a decisive choice. He looked solemn as he spoke aloud.

"Kundili, you have improved the longbow well! From today on, you are a noble of military merit in the kingdom, conferred with a fief just like the samurai! I appoint you as the head of longbow production in the capital city and entrust you with two tasks!"

At these words, Kundili's mouth fell open in disbelief.

Under the traditional three-level system of the Tarasco Kingdom, he would have been a craftsman for life with no chance of becoming nobility. The air around them grew still, and the other craftsmen were also full of shock. It wasn't until the apprentice behind him quietly kicked him in the rear that he finally knelt down to worship the king of the fief.

"Your Majesty, thank you for your conferment, I will serve you unto death!"

"Serving unto death is unnecessary. You must keep yourself useful, using your wisdom and experience to further refine the longbow!"

Xiulote gave a faint smile. By now, he was accustomed to people willing to die for him, and such declarations hardly stirred him anymore.

"Kundili, you have two tasks. The first is to research the new style of greatbow with a compound bow body! It must have a shorter body and greater force. Since you have already crafted longbows from fir and bamboo separately, you surely have a deep understanding of these two materials. Therefore, start with the bamboo-wood composite bow! You can use bamboo and wood laminated together, bonded with cornash paste to make a double-layered bow body... You figure out the specific process! Someone will later give you some brief hints to use as a reference."

Xiulote's expression was serious, not revealing too much. Regarding the production of composite bows, he had only fragmented memories and simply put forth suggestions for these true master craftsmen to refer to.

"The second task is to determine the standard design of this individual bamboo bow, its service life, and the arrows used! Then I will assign a trusted aide to assist you in organizing manpower for mass production. I want this type of bamboo bow to be extensively equipped. The lower the cost, the better, as long as it can threaten a samurai within 60 steps!"

Xiulote extended his hand and tousled the other's hair. Kundili's eyes immediately shone. He bowed to the ground, again respectfully acknowledging the commission. The faces of the craftsmen behind him clearly showed envy.

Seeing this, the young king nodded and looked around before speaking out loud once more.

"By the name of the king, I declare: The Alliance will adopt new policies, different from the old Tarasco system! All craftsmen, regardless of origin, as long as they can focus on their work and produce high-quality equipment consistently and steadily; saving manpower and materials, improving on existing production; or even further, developing more efficient new tools... The Alliance will not stint, rewarding generously with cotton fabric, gold and silver, land, and even nobility!"

The king's voice carried far and wide, echoing throughout the grand camp of craftsmen. They knelt down, letting out a chorus of surprised murmurs. Then, a low buzz of discussion spread through the camp like the humming of bees. Even the samurai responsible for defense revealed a look of perplexity and aspiration on their faces. However, after the western conquest, the king had already acquired ample authority to suppress any dissent, ensuring his will was completely implemented!

Xiulote turned his head and gave a couple of brief orders, and immediately a trusted aide brought paper and pen to write a notice filled with diagrams and text, before pinning it up at the center of the craftsman camp.

The supreme king stretched out his finger, pointing out the direction to his followers. They explored forward, but the king's footsteps did not linger, for he had much more to do.

Xiulote glanced back at Kundili, who was still kneeling, and then proceeded with his trusted aides to the innermost area. There lay the kingdom's secret workshop, the center of bronze production.

Chapter 529 - Bronze Smelting

A group strode briskly, passing through the tall greenstone walls of the inner layer and by the bowing samurai standing guard, arriving at an exceedingly spacious open-air workshop, the center for bronze production.

Xiulote surveyed his surroundings, his eyes gleaming. This was his first time seeing a large-scale metal smelting and casting site.

The vast workshop, like a square in its breadth, had an outdoor working area at the center, surrounded by a ring of sturdy storage stone houses. Heaps of red copper materials, white tin materials, and dark charcoal piled up like mountains in the corners, with rows of copper vessels, copper farm tools, and bronze weapons laid out in arrays, emitting red, yellow, and even blue glows. At the outermost layer of the copper utensils, a bronze cannon, just over a meter long, lay silently on the ground, shimmering with a dark golden hue.

Inside the workshop, near the wall, were rows of more than a dozen clay vertical furnaces for refining copper, along with twice the number of small brick furnaces. Dim red flames burned inside the furnaces while billows of hot air rose up beside the vertical furnaces. The air was filled with the smell of copper green powder, the charred odor of burning wood, and the mixed smell of sweat.

Xiulote took a light sniff, his eyelid twitched, and his eyebrows knitted slightly. Then, his gaze lingered on the bronze cannon for a brief moment before he walked expressionlessly towards the center of the workshop.

In the center, dozens of samurai stood solemnly with spears in hand. Hundreds of coppersmiths, shirtless, kneeled on the ground in unison, their sweat already soaking the muddy earth. At the very front of the craftsmen knelt two craftsman leaders in short garments, each with a copper-trimmed leather cap on their heads.

The two craftsman leaders lay prostrate and breathless, watching a pair of deerskin boots approaching closer and closer before their eyes. Although the boots were plain in style, they walked steadily, step by step, in the center of everyone's attention, until they stopped in front of the two men. Only then did the craftsman leaders simultaneously perform a respectful salute and raised their heads slightly, greeting loudly.

"Master craftsman of Qinchongcan, the person in charge of the Bronze Workshop, master of smelting, Chalape Tiyam (Tilipi Tiyam), pays respects to Your Revered Majesty!"

Xiulote nodded, his expression calm. His mind flashed with many distant memories, as well as the recent narratives of the learned elder.

In the Prepetcha language, "Tiyam" means metal. And the Tiyam family has been the family entrusted with metal matters through the generations. From the recently appointed chief Jatili, Xiulote gained a deep understanding of this family's origins and development.

At the beginning of Tarasco Kingdom, the "Tiyam" Metal Family was still at the third level of the three-tier system. But with the expansion of copper trade over a hundred years and the invention of bronze technology at the beginning of this century, the significance of the Metal Family gradually increased. Eventually, during the reign of the third predecessor monarch, they were promoted to nobility of the second level in the court, directly subordinate to the Royal Family, although without a fief.

Yes, contrary to many people's stereotypes in later generations, it was not until he arrived in this era that Xiulote was astonished to find that the civilization of Central America in the 15th century was already in the early stages of the Bronze Age, boasting a very prosperous copper trade. "Chalape" means red, Chalape Tiyam is red metal, copper in the Prepetcha language. This special name was also passed down by the leaders of the Metal Family, serving generation after generation as the kingdom's Copper Official.

Red copper is the pure copper with a purplish-red color. Throughout the world, the Red Copper Era had lasted for hundreds of years. In the murals of the fourth era, there were scenes of the Urixu Kingdom engaging in copper trade. The Patzcuaro Lake region of the Prepetcha people and the Oaxaca mountains of the Zapotecs are the two main copper production centers in the world. And the Kingdom of the Lake not only produced abundant copper mines but also possessed the most sophisticated bronze casting technology and was the first to establish specialized copper workshops.

Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin, sometimes mixed with a certain proportion of lead to overcome the brittleness of bronze. The world's tin mines are mainly located in the land of Jontal controlled by the Mexica Alliance, along the banks of the Tarsas River, in the Teysiscatlapan state. That place is not far from the land of the lake.

Bronze technology first appeared in the Tarasco Kingdom and was continuously used in weapon forging. At the Qinchongcan site of later generations, a large number of bronze axes and spearheads were found. As the wars continued, bronze technology was gradually spreading to the surrounding nations; recently, the Mexica Alliance has been able to cast bronze weapons. However, the best copper-tin mixing ratio is still considered secret, firmly held in the hands of the Divine Eagle Royal Family.

In the local language, "Tilipi" means gold, Tilipi Tiyam is gold metal, referring to bronze here. This inherited title, which means bronze forger, appeared only a few decades ago and also represents the formal maturity of the Tarasco Kingdom's bronze technology. And the current Tilipi is the third to bear this title.

Thinking this, the King slightly gathered his thoughts and examined the two men before him carefully.

Smelting and casting bronze is a job that requires both physical strength and skill. The two craftsman leaders, brothers to each other, were both in their strong forties. The elder brother Chalape on the left had a smile in his eyes, slightly older. He was adept at smelting, a senior Copper Official often dealing with the Royal Family and the Nobility, making him a technical bureaucrat. At that moment, Chalape's demeanor was respectful yet natural, his face slightly plump, with a smooth smile on his cheeks.

"Chalape, the learned elder has mentioned you to me. I hear that after your conversion, you pray day and night, devoutly believing in the Chief Divine, willing to dedicate the rest of your life to the divine?"

Chapter 530 - Bronze Smelting_2

"Yes, Your Majesty. The Chief Divine commands infinite strength, dominating light and fire! Ever since I devotedly believed in the Chief Divine, I have been filled with strength even when smelting bronze..."

"Excellent! The Chief Divine blesses us. His radiance does not discriminate among races, descending upon everyone!"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote smiled and nodded lightly. After becoming the chief, Jatili had fully utilized his influence, recommending many names to him, among which Chalape was one. They were among the first group of Prepetcha people who actively aligned with the Alliance and joined the governance of the Fief.

"Tilipi, I heard that the King Su'angua has a set of bronze armor, highly durable, impenetrable by arrows... Hmm, was it forged by you?"

Tilipi, to his right, pursed his lips, a bit younger. He was a pure master craftsman, possessing the kingdom's most outstanding bronze casting techniques, yet he lacked experience in dealing with the nobility. At this moment, faced with the king's inquiry, he appeared much more restrained, and his face also showed clear nervousness.

"Your... Majesty, the bronze armor was forged by me years ago... At that time, my skills were not yet mature... The armor's parts were not well connected, it was not as highly durable as said... Most importantly, it was too heavy..."

"Forgive me, Your Majesty! Tilipi was ignorant temporarily, serving the false king Su'angua... Now he has devotedly converted to the Chief Divine, willing to dedicate his life to you!..."

Chalape raised his head, looking at the king's expression, cautiously interjected a word. Meanwhile, he stretched out his hand, quietly pulling at his clan brother's short robe.

Xiulote glanced indifferently at Chalape, who immediately bowed his head in awe. He then looked at Tilipi, the master craftsman who now had his mouth shut tight, staring stiffly at the king. The workshop fell silent for a moment, everyone sweating from their foreheads.

"Ha ha! Right, devout belief leads to a bright future."

The king spoke out with a laugh, immediately easing the atmosphere in the room.

"Chalape, you are skilled in smelting bronze, come, tell me about the process of refining bronze!"

Chalape nodded repeatedly. He stood up and led Xiulote to the front of the vertical copper furnace inside.

"Your Majesty, this is the vertical furnace for refining bronze! It is built using the Earth Mother Goddess's clay and possesses the power bestowed by the Chief Divine, capable of divinely reinforcing copper... The entire furnace can roughly be divided into three parts: the furnace base at the bottom, the furnace belly that holds the mineral materials, and the outer furnace body..."

Xiulote stretched out his arm, measuring the specific dimensions of the vertical furnace. The entire furnace was about one person tall, half a person wide, resembling a giant clay jar buried in the soil. From the bottom of the furnace belly to the top of the furnace, it was slightly over 1.2 meters, the material column was just over 1 meter, and the thickness of the furnace walls was between 30-40 centimeters. With a quick estimate, he figured out that the furnace belly's capacity was about one-third of a cubic meter, which was also the maximum volume of bronze that could be smelted in a single operation,

"Your Majesty, the furnace base is below the furnace belly, it has a wind groove connected to the Wind God's power, and there is also a narrow wind vent above the furnace belly. At the lower part of the front wall of the furnace, there is a gold gate for discharging material and a slag hole..."

Xiulote looked at the wind groove and the wind vent, knowing these were channels for oxygen to flow in, yet he saw no dedicated bellows equipment.

"Your Majesty, every time the furnace is built, three or four thousand kilograms of copper material and several hundred to a thousand kilograms of tin material can be loaded inside. Both the copper and tin materials need to be melted once first, passed through a small furnace to remove the slag inside."

Saying that, Chalape pointed with his hand towards the other side, where there was a long-term melting furnace built with green bricks, only half the size of the vertical furnace. Then, he pointed again at the large furnace in front of them.

"Chief Divine bless! Thousands of kilograms of copper and tin materials in the large furnace will be smelted into bronze. Preparing the copper and tin takes a day, building the furnace takes about a day. The furnace needs to heat up until the copper and tin melt, which takes a whole day. Thorough mixing also takes a day. Waiting for it to cool down and extinguishing the fire, then pushing the furnace down and retrieving the bronze, again takes a day..."

At this point, Chalape looked at the king, his face brimming with pride.

"Chief Divine bless! Your Majesty, in total, about five days, each furnace can produce an astonishing over four thousand kilograms of bronze!"

Xiulote's expression was unchanging as he slowly nodded. However, his heart felt somewhat disappointed, as each furnace's daily yield was not even a thousand kilograms, and building and dismantling took two days. Thinking of this, the king furrowed his brow.

"Chalape, this clay furnace of yours, is it a one-time use?"

"Indeed, Your Majesty!"

Chalape nodded affirmatively.

"The furnace must be tightly sealed for the fire to reach sufficient heat. After burning, to retrieve the bronze, the furnace must be dismantled. If there is enough manpower, building and dismantling furnaces is not troublesome. Actually, what's truly lacking here in the workshop is the supply of copper!"

"Not enough fire... low temperature... oxygen supply through bellows..."

Xiulote fell into deep thought. He tried to recall the bellows from the countryside in later generations, but his memory was somewhat unclear. He thought about the principle for a moment and stretched out his hand. The Head Warrior, prepared as always, timely handed over paper and pen. The young King then personally drew a simplified bellows in front of Chalape.

"Chalape, to increase the fire, we need bellows. You should make a batch of large clay pots, bind the mouth with a piece of semi-folded deerhide, and create a functioning inlet valve on the deerhide. Leave a hole in the pot wall, then attach a clay air tube, seal the joint with mud, and lead it into the furnace... this way, when you pull up the deerhide, the folded valve will open to inhale. When you press down the deerhide, the valve on it will close, pushing the air in the pot into the furnace... pulling and pressing, the whole process is like beating a drum. The speed of bellows depends on how fast you pull and press the deerhide!"

Observing His Majesty's drawing and explanation, Chalape showed a look of astonishment. He was just constructing the scenario in his mind when a soft exclamation came from beside him, followed by the voice of his clan brother Tilipi.

"Open the inlet, close it to press air... Hmm, Your Majesty, you are truly ingenious!"

Upon hearing this, Chalape's face darkened. He cautiously looked towards the King but saw that the King was unconcerned, even smiled a bit.

"Chalape, the charcoal kilns and clay brick kilns outside the city are being built. In addition to the bellows, from now on, a batch of high-quality charcoal will be provided to you every month as a priority. You must build a series of vertical furnaces made of green bricks, to prepare for large-scale bronze refining!"

"As for the sources of copper and tin, I will resolve that myself!"

"At Your Majesty's command!"

Upon hearing Xiulote's decree, Chalape quickly pulled his clan brother, and together they bowed to the King. Then, he stood up and continued to guide the King to a row of bronze weapons. Bertade's expression became solemn, and he patted Black Wolf's shoulder. Two Great Generals then stepped forward, hands on their weapons, tightly guarding His Highness on either side.

"With the protection of the Chief Divine, according to the Kingdom's experience over decades, the best copper to tin ratio is..."

Chalape paused, cautiously looking at the King before him.

"Your Majesty, this is a state secret. Your trusted aides behind you..."

"Chalape, speak freely! They are all my trusted aides, there's no need to avoid them. Moreover, I will assign some of them to join you in the production of bronze."

Xiulote shook his head, the current scale of bronze smelting and casting was still too small; production needed to be rapidly expanded. Once production was expanded, more people had to be involved. Spaniards would arrive in America in less than ten years, and these so-called secrets were actually meaningless.

"Ah... Your Majesty... at your command..."

Under the vigilant eyes of the Head Warrior, Chalape reached out his hand towards the bronze weapons in front of him and respectfully said.

"Casting durable bronze articles should use five parts copper to one part tin; casting broad-edged bronze axes, four parts copper to one part tin; casting sharp bronze spearheads, three parts copper to one part tin... generally speaking, the more tin added, the harder the bronze weapons get, but they also become more brittle and prone to breaking..."

"Good! Chalape, you have summarized well!"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote nodded in admiration. His mind was filled with a line of familiar words.

"Five parts of its metal with one part tin, called the equal of axes and mauls; four parts of its metal with one part tin, called the equal of halberds and spears; three parts of its metal with one part tin, called the equal of broad blades... Bronze axes, bronze spears, and bronze swords..."

Thinking of this, the King's expression became solemn as he turned to another Master beside him.

"Tilipi, where is the bronze sword I had you forge?"