

Civilization 54

Chapter 54: Tarasco Legion

The drizzle had ceased, but the wind persisted. The feathered helmets of the warriors shook like the trees in the forest, ominously pointing towards the sky.

Aweit carefully identified the flags on the opposite bank of the river, then suddenly smiled, "It's my old friend. The new Cazonci of Tarasca, Su'angua, who ascended to the throne two years ago."

"Su'angua?" Xiulote curiously looked at the enemy commander surrounded by axe-wielding warriors. "Is he formidable?"

"He's a decent commander, very tenacious in battle, and adept at motivating his troops," Aweit reflected.

"He had just ascended the throne two years ago. My elder brother, the former King Asayacatl, thought it a good opportunity to subjugate Tarasca, so he mobilized thirty thousand samurai and seventy thousand militia, invading the Xitaqualo regions of the Tarascans from the southern states of the Alliance."

"His health was already failing at the time, so he handed over the command of the hundred thousand troops to me. As the new Cazonci, Su'angua also mobilized a hundred thousand, personally leading them to battle. Two hundred thousand troops were squeezed into the narrow area south of Toluca Mountain and north of the Balsas River. We fought fiercely for half a year, and the undulating highland terrain was everywhere bloodied."

"The Mexica legion once gained an advantage. But the Tarascans relied on the mountains and rivers, stubbornly defending the fortresses of Cutzamala and Tlalchapa. Months later, as our vigor gradually waned and the samurai grew tired, Su'angua found his opportunity in a major battle, leading three thousand Copper-axe Guards to strike at our two thousand Eagle Warrior Battalion and several thousand surrounding samurai, defeating our tactical core."

"I was defeated in that battle," Aweit said wistfully, "The army retreated hastily, losing four hundred Eagle Nobility, over three thousand samurai, and nearly twenty thousand militia along the way."

"That battle cost us three Xiquipilli legions. Of course, the Tarascans also lost a thousand Copper-axe Guards and eight thousand militia as cannon fodder. It was a Pyrrhic victory for them."

Upon returning to the capital, I handed over the command of the army and took over the Alliance's intelligence and security tasks. A few months later, my elder brother Asayacatl died, and my brother who loved theology, Tizoc, succeeded him as the new Tratuani."

Aweit looked towards the Copper-axe Guards on the opposite bank, his eyes filled with reminiscence, contemplation, and a hint of regret usually deeply hidden.

Xiulote watched the Copper Axe Warriors with interest. They were robust, wearing bronze pointed helmets and heavy bronze shoulder guards, clad in yellow leather armor, each holding a man-high bronze battle axe. The design of these two-handed battle axes could effectively breach heavy wooden shields. Clearly, they were meant to counter the elite shield-bearing units of the Aztec, especially the heavily shielded Eagle Warriors.

The elite force comprised about two thousand warriors. They stood firm and solemn, their expressions steadfast, exuding a powerful beauty and the sharpness of metal.

The young man observed carefully, sensing that the Tarascan forces already bore some characteristics of Ancient Greek legions. Bronze was used to manufacture helmets and weapons, although they evidently had not yet developed the technology for bronze armor.

"Battle Axe Imperial Guards, elite, Two-Handed Battle-axe Soldiers, bronze helmets, leather armor, Medium Armor, high morale, average discipline, armor-piercing weapons, enhanced against Shield Soldiers. Excellent shock infantry."

Xiulote nodded, "This unit poses a significant threat to the Jaguar and Eagle Warrior Battalions."

Aweit laughed, "The Tarascans lack a military system for extensively training seasoned warriors; they can only organize such a Copper Axe strike force to counter our elite battalions."

Of course, we don't want our Nobility battalions to exhaust themselves against these metal warriors. It takes at least twenty years to train a well-rounded Jaguar or Eagle Warrior. But these metal warriors only need a few years of battle axe training to be ready."

Xiulote strongly agreed, the Jaguar or Eagle Warriors were like the Spartans of Ancient Greece. Their martial arts and physique needed to be honed from a young age and then tempered in war, with a training cycle close to twenty years."

In the history of Huaxia, they would be likened to the Jurchen wearing white armor, high in both offense and defense, but difficult to replenish, only deployable on crucial battlefields. It wasn't that they couldn't defeat the high-attack Battle Axe Imperial Guards, but rather, they couldn't afford the exhaustion.

The young man pondered for a moment, then smiled confidently, "Facing such unshielded infantry, our newly formed Longbow Guards can perfectly counter them!"

The commanders on both sides of the river confirmed each others' identities and then stared silently at each other for a long time before each returning to their camp.

The next day was an unusually sunny day, with morning light streaming through gaps in the clouds. Early in the morning, the Tarascan camp on the opposite bank was bustling, and eighty thousand troops marched out from the camp, forming a massive formation on the southern bank of the Lerma River.

Aweit also ordered ten thousand personal samurai to his side, relying on the stronghold behind them, unfolding on the hills of the Lerma River's northern bank. A thousand Jaguar warriors with beast helmets lined up neatly, exuding a formidable wild power.

However, Xiulote knew well that neither army on the riverbanks was the real protagonist of the war. The true forces shaping the course of this confrontation were the naval forces on both sides of the great river, consisting of thousands of canoes.

The main characters remained unseen, while the supporting actors took the spotlight first.

Xiulote looked toward the distant Tarasca military formations, where the cold light of bronze flickered under the sunlight.

At the core position was Su'angua, the King and Supreme Commander of Tarasca, surrounded by two thousand Copper-axe Guards. On the outer perimeter were thirty thousand Tarasca warriors, of whom it was estimated twenty thousand were directly under the king.

Most of these warriors wore wooden helmets adorned with feathers, and a few wore quaint bronze helmets. They were clad in yellow or green leather armor, and many wore a string of gilded small stones around their necks, shining and shifting dazzlingly under the sunlight.

Xiulote examined them closely and determined these were by-products from mining variegated copper ore, though he wondered what their purpose could be. Perhaps they were meant to dazzle an opponent's eyes?

The Tarascan warriors mostly carried robust wooden shields in one hand, and in the other, they held copper spears about one and a half meters long. The warrior formations were somewhat clamorous and not very orderly. Many nobility warriors were waving bronze weapons at the Mexica legion on the north coast and banging on their expensive bronze shields, shouting threats.

Based on the number of bronze shields, the young man concluded that Tarasca's bronze mining output was still limited.

"The Tarasca warrior battalion, elite, spear soldiers, leather-medium armor, high morale, poor discipline. Mainly close combat infantry. Apart from the copper spears in their hands, these Tarasca warriors indeed fall behind the year-round fighting, well-trained Mexica warriors in discipline."

On the perimeter of the thirty thousand warriors, Xiulote also spotted two interesting new units.

The unit on the left was dressed in simple cloth garments, with circular cloth caps on their heads, holding approximately two and a half meters long copper spears with both hands. This battalion of long spear soldiers, around five thousand in number, stayed silent without much noise. They roughly formed a square formation, even more orderly than the Tarasca warriors.

"What is this unit?" the young man asked curiously. On the face of it, these spear soldiers resembled somewhat the formations of Ancient Greek phalanxes, but upon closer observation of their simple equipment, they appeared more like the Japanese Ashigaru with Yari spears.

Aweit smiled after a glance at the formation, "This is a new unit concocted by Tarasca, composed of miners from the copper mines, using long spears in formation for combat. When they cluster together, they indeed have some use; they can defeat militia and even small groups of warriors. But if a large group of warriors charges from behind or the side, they quickly can't hold up and scatter. Once dispersed, they are much easier to deal with, as simple as reaping cornstalks in the fields."

Xiulote nodded, acknowledging the unit's weak equipment and insufficient martial skills and morale. If equipped with shields, armored, and strictly trained to form spear formations, they actually held significant potential.

"Tarasca Long Spear Battalion, average, spear soldiers, cloth-unarmored, average morale, average discipline, basic long spear formation. A good militia for maintaining battle lines."

Being able to organize structured miner soldiers proved Tarasca's mining industry had developed to a certain extent. The city's economy had developed enough, and among the nobility and peasants, a certain number of citizens and craftsmen had emerged. Similar to self-sustaining farmers, this class would provide the country with elite militia, or what might be called foot soldiers.

"Look at the other side," Aweit pointed to the right side, indicating another interesting new unit.

This unit also consisted of about five thousand members, but their weapons were very disorderly, including stone hammers, stone axes, copper spears, wooden shields, and even short bows. Their equipment varied in layers, mostly dressed in cloth garments, a few in leather armor, some even wearing wooden helmets with feathers. These disorganized fighters were currently shouting towards the north coast, appearing to have fairly good morale.

"These are Tarasca's foreign mercenaries, with complex origins, harbored by the people of Tarasca for use on the battlefield. They include the untamed Chichimec people, the displaced Otomi people, Toltec defectors with deep grievances against the Alliance, and even some warriors who lost their lands. This unit is morale-rich expendable forces."

Xiulote then understood that mercenaries were indeed destined to be cannon fodder.

"Foreign mercenaries, average, miscellaneous soldiers, cloth-unarmored, high morale, poor discipline. Excellent cannon fodder for the front lines."

Beyond the Tarasca military formation stretched the hillside, already familiar to Xiulote, filled with militia. These militia were still primarily armed with stone spears, a few with shields. They wore cloth garments or were simply bare-chested, with low morale and no formation to speak of. About one-eighth were slingers, barely qualifying as a ranged unit.

The militia numbered a total of forty thousand. In any Alliance, they were the multifunctional expendable forces that could carry supplies, dig pits, build fortifications, and fill the battle lines to exhaust the opposing warriors' strength.

This was the composition of the Tarasca legion: two thousand Copper-axe Guards as the core, thirty thousand warriors as the main force, and the remaining five thousand long spear soldiers and five thousand foreign mercenaries as quality cannon fodder, with the largest number being forty thousand ordinary cannon fodder.

The two armies faced each other across the river. The Mexica warriors sat quietly on the hill, conserving their strength and observing the bustling opposite bank.

The Tarascan army initially spread out into a semi-circle, with the guards and warriors sitting down to rest. Then, hundreds of militia walked to the front of the formation, where under the command of a dozen elder priests adorned with feather crowns, they constructed three large round platforms, several meters high and about ten meters in diameter.

Finally, when the sun had risen to the middle of the sky, over a hundred priests draped with long feathers, wearing gourd necklaces, arrived. Carrying various implements, they ascended the platforms and under the gaze of a hundred thousand soldiers on both banks, began a captivating performance.