

Civilization 56

Chapter 56 Water Battle

Aweit stood solemnly on the hilltop on the north coast, overlooking the enemy with focused attention. By his side were dozens of drummers, conch shell players, and flag bearers, awaiting the commander's orders.

This was the narrow crossing of the Lerma River, where, even during the rainy season when the waters rose, the widest part was only five or six hundred meters across, and the narrowest less than three hundred meters.

The Tarasco people launched a river crossing operation over a range of more than ten miles. Hundreds of canoes, loaded with warriors wielding two-handed pikes, approached from the south like a fleet of arrows, almost instantly upon them.

At the commander's order, a deep drum sound filled the great river. The Mexica canoes also surged forward. The paddlers accelerated to their maximum, and within moments, the fleets clashed fiercely.

Xiulote felt the world pause for a split second, then thunderous chaos erupted.

He saw two large boats collide head-on, halting their forward momentum with a thunderous impact. The boats shook violently, spinning in place, and then slammed against each other again. The sailors and militia on both sides did not wait for the boats to steady; they roared as they brandished their weapons, leaping onto the enemy vessel, entangling in fierce combat.

A Mexica militiaman raised his shield diagonally with his left hand, deflecting an incoming stone spear, then immediately thrust an obsidian dagger with his right hand into the enemy's abdomen in front and stirred it clockwise with force. The Tarasco paddler screamed and fell backward into the water, turning the water red where he sank. The militiaman had just started to smile when he felt a sudden chill followed by intense pain in his chest, and his strength left him instantaneously. When he looked down, all he could see was a spear that had penetrated a full span into his flesh.

The opposing Tarasco spearman then howled ferociously, drawing attention from nearby. He tried to pull out his spear, but it wouldn't budge. The thrust had been too powerful and too deep, getting stuck on the ribs. As he attempted again, a stone axe already came from behind and viciously struck his neck.

The spearman's scream was cut in half as the axe fell again. Then, a sturdy barefoot kicked his twisted corpse into the churning river, swiftly erasing all traces of his existence.

Between the large boats, they grappled with one another. And when a large boat faced a small one, it was a complete overpowering.

The young man saw that when a dozen paddlers on a Mexica large boat put their force together, the boat lunged forward like a hunting cheetah, heading straight for several small boats on the opposite side. One small boat couldn't maneuver away in time and was struck directly on the side by the large vessel. The small boat was tilted and lifted forcefully until it capsized, dumping the people on board into the water, where they did not have time to swim before several stone spears pierced their heads like carving into a melon.

Another small boat hastily turned away, narrowly avoiding a collision, and then spun to join alongside the large boat. Immediately, a dozen warriors on the large boat roared as they pounced forward, with their weapons outnumbering and skewering the few on the small boat into a bloody mess.

The continued collisions eventually slowed the large boat, briefly floating on the water. Dozens of small boats spotted their chance and swarmed like wolves, surrounding the large vessel. Militiamen surged from all directions, spears thrusting repeatedly, with sounds of flesh being penetrated, and blood quickly drenched the deck.

Battle on water was exceptionally cruel. The warriors were entangled with one another; weapons attacked from all directions while footing was constantly unsteady and slippery. Falling into the water often spelled death.

Xiulote, while distracted by the intense naval battle, quickly completed the blessing ceremony of the War God. After praying to the Guardian God Huitzilopochtli, the Mexica warriors finally found the courage to fight against the "Evil Spirit cultists" of the strange gods.

Only then could the young man take a close look at the boats on the Great River. Here, whether Mexica or Tarasco, there were only paddle-driven, sailless canoes.

The so-called canoe was made from a single tree trunk for the entire keel, with the trunk being hollowed out to form the body of the boat, and the ends, edges, and gunwales shaped accordingly. In this era, Central American shipbuilding techniques were limited; there was no method of iron nail reinforcement or keel splicing. Only when a giant tree was used could there be no risk of leaking or disintegration.

Therefore, the length and width of a canoe were strictly limited by the size of the trunk. Large, broad trees such as birch and cedar were often the preferred choices for canoes. Fortuitously, the forests of Central America were dense, and centuries-old trees were common, providing ample material for canoes.

The canoes on the battlefield were divided into large and small types. The large canoe was the nucleus of naval battles, requiring entire trees and a complicated construction process. It was at least fifteen

meters long and three to four meters wide, allowing for four people to sit side by side. With a large trunk as the keel, the structure of the boat was stable, and it could be additionally widened on both sides, such as attaching broad rafts, to obtain greater transport capacity. Of course, the canoe rested close to the water's surface and was not particularly tall, so flagships often had a high platform built for the commander to observe the situation. Around the gunwales, many round shields were secured with ropes to protect the paddlers and warriors and to defend against stones and arrows.

To effectively drive a large canoe, at least ten paddlers were needed. Besides the paddlers, a large boat could typically carry thirty warriors while maintaining enough space for them to wield their weapons. Large canoes were also used to transport bulky items. The ritual plates of Xilotepec City were transported back to Mexico's capital on large boats.

Small canoes were the most numerous and easy to manufacture. They were generally no more than eight meters long and one and a half meters wide, enough for two people side by side. Effectively driving a small boat required only two paddlers, and sometimes even one person could manage. It could accommodate six warriors or an equivalent volume of cargo. This was also the most common vessel among fishermen and merchants.

Xiulote knew that farther east, the Nava and Maya peoples possessed a type of "great ship" that sailed along the coast. These 'great ships' required certain skills and rare giant trees to construct. They were thirty meters long and three to four meters wide. The width of canoes was strictly limited by the girth of the trees.

These huge vessels capable of navigating the seas were both oar and sail powered, with a mast set in the center and a great rectangular sail. The sails were made of animal hides, cotton, or even hemp mats. With sails for propulsion, the ship required a minimum of only sixteen paddlers.

The Nava and the Maya sailed these great ships across the boundless Great Lake, trading precious spices, gemstones, feathers, and sacred incense. The Maya had even sailed to the distant great islands to trade tobacco and cotton with the tribes of the Taino people. Those were the primitive yet densely populated islands of the Caribbean Sea.

Xiulote shook his head, ceasing further thought. He silently estimated the number of Tarasco ships.

Aweit had told him that this time the Mexica naval force had mobilized on a large scale, bringing in two hundred large ships and six hundred smaller ones from Lake Texcoco. However, the ships were not loaded with a full complement of naval forces, but rather half the space was used to carry provisions, so the naval force totaled around eight thousand men.

The opposing Tarasco had roughly over a hundred large ships and eight hundred smaller ones, all fully loaded. The total came to about eleven thousand men, including five thousand militiamen armed with Long Spears. Although the Tarasco were people of the lake, their core area around Lake Patzcuaro was not connected to the Lerma River, hence they could not assemble enough large ships.

In river warfare, big ships had the advantage over small ones, and more ships triumphed over fewer, especially when bows, catapults, and cannons were absent. The young man had contemplated the classic tactic of fire attack, and Aweit was momentarily tempted. However, after searching around, the two regrettably discovered that it was not possible to procure much oil on the spot. This was because animal fats were scarce, vegetable oils expensive, and high-oil-yielding crops had not yet been introduced to America.

"When will we be able to go to Texas or Venezuela to drill for oil? Greek fire is a powerful weapon in naval warfare, although the exact formula is still unclear," Xiulote yearned, yet with a touch of self-mockery.

"It seems that California also has plenty of oil, and the climate is warm and suitable, better than the frost-ridden north or the miasmic rainforests of the south. If shipbuilding technology allows, colonizing California would be a good choice."

Besides fire attacks and long-range combat, the era of oar-and-sail ships also allowed for the installation of rams at the prow. The fierce charge of a large ship could easily rip through a smaller one. However, the Mexica lacked sufficient metal, and the Tarasco probably hadn't thought of it.

Consequently, the river battle became a brutal boarding melee. Warriors on both sides fought desperately to the death, with militiamen screaming as they fell into the water, quickly causing the river to turn a spreading pale red.

It only took a quarter of an hour till both sides had suffered a thousand casualties each. On land, the militiamen would likely have already collapsed, but the chaotic and vicious nature of naval engagements increased their endurance. Either an entire ship perished, or all aboard survived, leaving the vessel with sufficient morale.

"The situation seems dire," the young man quickly calculated the casualty rate of the two sides, knowing the numbers wouldn't lie.

Aweit frowned. Leveraging the advantages of large ships, the Mexica navy had initially gained some advantage in the collisions. But once they entered large-scale boarding combat, the disparity in numbers became apparent.

"The Tarasco's Long Spears killed quite a few of our militiamen; we will lose if this continues," the Commander swiftly confirmed the situation.

"Shall we let the Samurai or militiamen board the ships?" suggested the young man.

"There's no need to wear ourselves out against them on the water. The loss ratio is too disadvantageous. Let their Long Spears board first, then we can devour them in one gulp," responded Aweit.

Saying so, Aweit confidently clenched his fist as if he had the enemies on the river in his grasp.

He immediately gave the order, and the sharp sound of conch shells echoed along both riverbanks. The Mexica ships began to retreat, slowly disengaging. The ten thousand Samurai directly under the Commander's command also arranged their weapons, ready to fight at any moment.

The Tarasco fleet did not pursue, as crossing the river was still their priority. The paddlers sped up their advance, swiftly unloading large numbers of Long Spears militiamen on the river banks, then quickly returned to the south coast to transport another regiment.

About five thousand Long Spears formed into small teams, creating several round formations. They were prepared to trade their lives for time, awaiting the arrival of the next wave of reinforcements.

Meanwhile, not far on the nearby hills, the Mexica Samurai were already excitedly gripping shields and clubs, ready for a thoroughly satisfying melee.