

Herald 271

Chapter 271 Land Shortage (Part-2)

Cambyes was over the moon that such a golden opportunity had presented itself.

Usually, Alexander was very astute and methodical with his maths, but today it seemed he was having one of those days where nothing seems to go right for oneself.

Days where people have huge lapses in concentration, leading to mistakes that would normally never happen.

And this fortunate occurrence had happened by coincidence on her orientation day, presenting Cambyes with a silver bullet by which she could cement her mark on the council.

'Hahaha, the heavens have truly blessed me today,' Cambyes laughed out in her heart, ecstatic that she could increase her reputation and not least bother that she would have to do it by stepping a bit on Alexander's reputation and proving him wrong.

Noticing that all the men were expectantly looking at her for her explanation, she decided to longer keep them waiting.

Tapping her index finger on the table, Cambyes began, "The first reason the twelve hundred square kilometers (1,200 sq km) answer is wrong is because it does not take into account the three crop rotation into account."

"From what I'm told, in this farming method, one-third ($\frac{1}{3}$) of the land is left fallow, meaning only two-thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the total available land is used. So. we will actually need one thousand sixteen hundred square kilometers (1,600 sq. km) of land, and not twelve hundred square kilometers (1,200 sq km)."

Then without losing any steam, she placed her long finger on the table and continued, "Secondly, the lord's math assumes that the entirety of the obtained land will be good arable land. That is clearly wishful thinking, as only a tiny fraction of the total owned land is actually farmland. "

Cambyes then waved her palmed and said, "For instance, let's take the land surrounding Zanzan city itself. Yes. we might control one thousand square kilometers (1,000 sq. km) on the map, but the majority of it is the hilly, barren area in the Cisrian hills, full of rocky thin soil, totally unsuitable for cultivation."

"So we must find out how much of Zanzan's land is actually suitable for farming." Cambyes proposed.

Then she continued, "We know that even in good, fertile provinces, the amount of arable land would not exceed a third (33%) of the total land available. But for a barren place like the Zanzan province, even half that amount might be optimistic. A more likely figure will be one-tenth (10%). And that puts the required land at sixteen thousand square kilometers (16,000 sq. km)."

"But" Cambyes reminded, "Since we will be planting crops twice a year, this drops of eight square kilometers (8,000 sq. km)."

Cambyes here paused a bit to savor the faces of the men around her which ranged from pleasantly surprised to flabbergasted, and one particular one who was very flushed and embarrassed.

'Hmmm, Italy also only had a pre-industrial arable land of just 10%,' Alexander thought of a tidbit of information as he tried to distract himself from the huge embarrassment he was suffering at Cambyes's hands.

Cambyes, after a bit of basking in her own glory, then succinctly finished the third and ultimate point, "And last of all, in the first calculation, there is no consideration of slack. According to the previous calculation, we will only be able to produce the bare minimum, whereas, in reality, we must produce some excess to store for times of emergency."

"So the total required land area should be at least ten thousand square kilometers (10,000 sq km)."

As Cambyes finished showing her workings and sent a 'Praise me!' look at Alexander, the men around the table simply commented, 'Another monster'.

They were aware that Cambyes ran the medical camp before and all of them were very impressed by how she had managed to stymie the spread of the plague by following Alexander's orders.

But giving instructions to a few slaves and doctors was in no way comparable to making state-level decisions.

Thus they had assumed her to be just another pretty face that Alexander had bought here to bolster his own faction.

But it seems they were wrong in that assessment.

Very wrong.

The young girl seemed perfectly capable of holding her own against them and even Theocles, who was Cambyses's former boss was caught surprised by this display.

But instead of feeling down or even jealous, Theocles only piously thought, 'As expected of the lord's consort. How can we mortals compare to a vessel chosen by the gods?'

While these men were having their thoughts and musings, Alexander was himself thinking and evaluating the whole occurrence.

For many this instance might seem like a simple math calculation gone astray, after all, Alexander was actively engaging in a conversation while he multitasked the solution inside his head.

But still, it was not like it was just an innocent little misplacement of a zero or a decimal point or the error margin was small and within a rounding error.

That could have been forgiven.

But the numbers were orders of magnitudes off.

Almost by a factor of ten, a one thousand percent (1000%) discrepancy.

This was never going to be acceptable to Alexander or anyone else for the matter, and so he repeatedly chastised himself for not being careful enough which led to this huge error percentage.

He had missed not one, not two, but three crucial points.

'Slack! Oh god, I can't believe I forgot about slack!' Missing the third point particularly stung Alexander and he lampooned for making such a basic error.

Slack was the accommodation one made in the mathematical calculations to correct for any assumption error and usually, it involved multiplying the value with a factor greater than one.

For example, the most famous of slack would be the safety factor which was 2.5 times the calculated value, and every engineer who has ever made anything structural, i.e- designed to support weight, would use this value.

And thus this practice became pretty basic knowledge for every engineering major which made Alexander's lapse all the more egregious.

It was gross negligence on his part no doubt.

'I've been getting too cocky,' He self-reflects as he recalled that he had experienced the same feeling in Adhan with Pasha Farzah.

And so he repeatedly berated himself for making the same mistake twice.

On the other hand, Alexander did not doubt Cambyses's mathematical result.

In fact, he found them to be very accurate.

Though Cambyses had seemingly assumed and rounded off many things, the answer of ten thousand square kilometers (10,000 sq km) land for two hundred thousand (200,000) people was surprisingly spot on.

In fact, it was scarily spot.

And the reason was because the province of Zanzan's total land area was around three hundred thousand thirty to three hundred thousand fifty square kilometers (330,000 - 350,000 sq km).

And it was said that it had a population of around six and a half to seven million people (6,500,000 - 7,000,000).

This gave a population density of 20 per square kilometer (20 men per sq km), just like in Cambyses's calculation.

As a matter of fact, this could be extrapolated to all of Adhania, which had a total area of around four million square kilometers (4,000,000 sq km) and a population of around seventy to eighty million (70,000,000 - 80,000,000), which gave the same rough population density of 20 men per sq km.

And this was not even the most remarkable part.

The most astounding part was that this value of 20 men per sq km was even followed in Alexander's previous life, as evidenced by the Roman empire.

At its peak, the Roman empire was around four million square kilometers (4,000,000 sq km) in area and had a population of seventy to seventy-five million (70,000,000 - 75,000,000), which, as you guessed, produced the magic population density of around 20 men per sq km.

So from this example, it could be seen that the average land really could only feed up to twenty people per square kilometer, or one man per five hectares.

Some places might have excess food, like the good arable farmlands around the banks of rivers and deltas, which can then grow into cities, as evidenced by most large, ancient cities situated by the banks of rivers and near the coasts.

And some places might have no agricultural value, like hills, mountains deserts, swamps, and marshes and the population around it would be mostly small and tribal.

But on average, one man per five hectares was the food-producing capacity of the land, even when 'advanced techniques' such as the three-crop rotation, horse collar, and natural manure were used.

And the only way to increase that capacity would be to industrialize and use heavy machinery to quickly cultivate vast swaths of land, while at the same time using copious amounts of various synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides to boost the yield.

Or, if such high-tech solutions were not possible, the only low-tech option available would be to introduce potatoes.

These little buggers had insane yields, and historically, after they were introduced to Europe, the population density went from 20 men per square kilometer to 100 hundred per square kilometer and in some places to even 120 men per square kilometer.

And knowing this Alexander in the past years had searched high and low for these little globules of goodness, searching desperately for even the tiniest sniff of the thing.

But alas! It was to avail.

No traveler, no merchant, and certainly no one he knew that ever seen or heard of the famed potato.

Chapter 272 Manpower Distribution

As Alexander swam inside his own mind bubble, almost playing 3D chess with himself using the various math calculations, everyone else decided to it was to get their lord back to earth.

"Ahem," Cambyses took it upon herself to break Alexander out of the trance-like state and then asked, "Does the pasha find anything wrong with my workings?"

Alexander almost could not keep a straight face when he looked at Cambyses's almost cat-like smug expression, her eyes twinkling with delight.

'How does it feel to get beaten by a girl?' It seemed to say, which seemed to produce a wry, shy smile.

'Ahhh, embarrassed Alex is so cute,' She chuckled at the contorting face.

But Alexander moments later recovered and decided to turn the tables around.

He was no greenhorn to being corrected after all.

It might be a novelty for him in his life, but in his previous life there had been numerous times when he was corrected and he corrected other.

And along the way, he had picked on a myriad of ways on how to both admit being wrong without actually admitting being wrong and also not admitting being wrong while actually being wrong.

And now, he decided to use one of the techniques belonging to the latter category.

So he cleverly retorted, "Haha, excellent, excellent. It's said that a lord's ability can be judged by the ability of his retinue. Hahaha, good job. Immaculate calculations."

Alexander tried to make it look like this was all his credit because it was he who bought Cambyses here.

Cambyses was unimpressed by this showing to say the least.

'What a sore loser,' She swore, feeling that she had learned a new level of level of shamelessness about her husband.

Alexander knew this was a low blow to use and so tried to quickly move the meeting forward.

"As my lords can see, Cambyses has perfectly pointed out why this campaign needs to happen. Though we are not in critical need of grain as we have some stock that we bought from Adhan and Pasha Farzah will be providing us with more, we still need to acquire the land if we want to be self-sufficient."

Then he raised his fist into the air and gently slammed the table with a dull thud, he declared, "And now is the time optimum time to strike. Because as soon as spring comes, the total men at our disposal with vanish like the morning dew vanishes under the radiant rays of the sun."

The men and one woman raised a look of inquiry at his incongruous statement, as Alexander was just saying that he did not have enough land to feed so much people and now he was saying he won't have enough men?

What did it mean?

So Alexander elucidated, "As a farmer can take care of two to three hectares of land by himself, the two thousand square kilometers or two hundred thousand hectares of farmland will need to be plowed by seventy to eighty thousand (70,000 - 80,000) men."

"And to support these farmers, to cook for them, to do their household chores, to sew clothes for them, and to do a hundred different miscellaneous things, there needs to be a woman, i.e- his wife." He pointed out.

"That brings the people just producing food, from grain to vegetable to meat and fish to rearing various animals to around hundred and fifty thousand (150,000)." Alexander calculated.

"And then there are the infants and infirm, the lame and the physically disabled. Let's say all combined is ten thousand (10,000)."

This number might seem too low because each farmer alone could have five-six, and even ten kids.

But one should look closely to see that Alexander used the word infant, not children.

This is because in this time period, children were seen as just small men and women and expected to perform their part of the duties.

Young boys, aged as small as five or six, would accompany their fathers to the field at the crack of dawn and perform back-breaking work alongside their parent, while young girls of similar age would help with household chores, cooking, cleaning, cleaning, and mending.

There were only three stages of life- babies, children, and adults, with no concept of the word teenager, which was a very modern concept.

In fact, some even thought that there were only two stages- babies and adults because children worked just as hard as the adults, ie- close to their physical limits.

Life was crude and hard, and every member of the family who could walk and talk was required to chip in just to survive.

"That leaves us with just forty thousand (40,000) people," Alexander loudly said the number.

"From there ten to fifteen thousand (10,000 - 15,000) will have to work in the mines to feed our massive need for stone, iron, and limestone, all needed to make various products and fuel the infrastructure projects we are launching."

"And then we are keeping a standing army of six thousand (6,000) infantrymen, five hundred (500) cavalrymen with five hundred (500) servants, another five hundred (500) cavalrymen which I have a secret use for, and one thousand (1,000) city guards, which gives us the number - eight thousand five hundred (8,500).

"Let's say another five hundred (500) more are noblemen and women, city administrators, doctors, judges, teachers and priests, and priestesses."

"That leaves only us with a mere sixteen thousand (16,000) people that are the real city dwellers. It would be only these sixteen thousand (16,000) people, that would form all the entire different kinds of occupations unique to a city."

"Most will become artisans like blacksmiths, potters, bakers, tanners, tailors, carpenters, and the list could go on, some will become merchants and shopkeepers, and a few will even become mercenaries, thugs, and criminals, with a scant number even becoming prostitutes and beggars."

After Alexander finished, the men could easily figure out why Alexander said now was the time to strike.

Because now, only a fraction of the men were engaged in farming, living off the food stocks that Alexander bought and so many hands that would not otherwise be available were open to them currently.

Meanwhile, Alexander was saying to himself, 'God, I hate eating,' as he could scarcely believe that the two hundred thousand people had magically transformed into just sixteen thousand (16,000) urban people, a more than ninety percent decrease.

All because people needed to eat.

And this also illustrated perfectly why no one kept a large standing army.

Not because they were stupid, but because they were smart.

Like in the case of Alexander, if he disbanded the army, the urban people's population would go up by a third, to almost twenty-four thousand (24,000).

Of course, the total number of city dwellers would not be really as low as twenty-four thousand (24,000) as Alexander calculated.

Because though some farmers with farmlands too far away from the city will leave in villages and around small manors ruled by Shordars (Barons), everyone within a fifteen-kilometer radius usually tended to live in the city.

It was this particular number because it took a man around three hours to travel this distance.

And thus such a journey of walking for three hours, working the whole day till late noon, and then being back by dusk using the same three-hour-long trek was hellish but certainly doable.

But why did people go through so much trouble just to live in a city?

Because a city had a certain allure to the people.

For peasants, it provided the allure of nightlife like bars, gambling dens, and brothels, a better range of food, a more varied social life, and most of all, security.

The security of the city's tall walls.

Alexander would calculate that since Zanzan was a port city, the land portion of the city formed a semicircle, and with the soil east and north of here being fully fertile, once taken over, around twenty thousand (20,000) peasants including their family members could live in the city.

Another ten thousand (10,000) fishermen would also call the city home, setting out to the Mad Sea to catch their living, thus bringing the expected inhabitants number to around sixty thousand (60,000).

This was not a shabby number, as the city had a pre-drought and pre-war population of one hundred thousand (100,000).

And in Alexander's previous life, London in the 1500s had a population of around fifty thousand (50,000).

But it was still a far cry from the original two hundred thousand (200,000) and it made Alexander bleed.

But Alexander knew he could not mope, everyone was in the same boat as him, some much worse, and so he mightily said, "As we have the numbers now, it is the perfect time to attack east. Though we can't conquer the entire ten thousand square kilometers right away, we will aim to take over at least a third of it, around three thousand square kilometers."

Chapter 273 Eastern March

Alexander breaking down the situation for them set many of the military leaders' hearts ablaze.

They understood that abiding by the treaty will result in their slow death and knew attacking was the only option.

"Do we simply charge and kill the ruling nobles?" Menes wanted to know Alexander's strategy.

"No, not that," Came the reply.

But hearing this answer made some people almost jump in fright.

Not because of its contents.

But because of the owner of its utterance.

For this was not said by Alexander but by Cambyses!

'The brat needs a good spanking tonight.' Alexander getting his thunder stolen could barely keep the gentle smiling facade.

He had been worried that due to Cambyses being a woman she would be underestimated or shunned by her fellow council members.

But it seems he should have been worried about Cambyses making him feel irrelevant.

Cambyses did not pay attention to Alexander's wounded heart, and instead, after snatching the figurative microphone from Alexander, quickly said, "We have basically two options."

Then raising her thumb listed:

"One- We dress up the soldiers as civilians and portray the take over as a popular rebellion to join us"

"Or two" With her index finger up, she said, "We take some of the refugees with us and have them take the lead, thus installing a puppet."

'...Aren't you too good at this,' Alexander felt like he was seeing Cambyses grow wings as she took charge of the planning and policy-making.

And the initial acridness, he was beginning to like this.

Having a competent underling to wipe your butt was a blessing to have.

If it was anyone else, Alexander might have been a little fearful that the person could try and usurp him.

But with Cambyses, his wife and student, he only felt impressed,...and relieved.

Yes, relieved because it meant that he would be able to dump a large amount of the work on her.

"Haha, well you heard the lady," Alexander chuckled, "So which one?"

Alexander's question generated a mixed response.

"I believe we should use the first option. Civilians will only get in the way," Menes presented himself as a staunch supporter of only using the military.

"I agree," And he was supported by Grahtos, who nodded and added, "The legion formation is already a very new tactic. To use civilians would only complicate the matter."

But they were opposed by Menicus, "I like the second option better. I believe we should try to preserve the treaty as much as possible, or at least the illusion of it."

Melodias too preferred the old man's approach, "I too want the civilians in this deployment. It's good to have scapegoats to help take the blame if anything goes wrong."

Melodias, the ever cautious, had a much darker reason.

"No, we should make the people see the army as reliable. So no civilians," Menes argued.

And was countered by Menicus, "The civilians should help the army achieve its goal."

The two groups had two very different philosophies regarding this matter.

And thus this fencing of words went on for some time, with both sides presenting good, robust points.

And then at last, understanding they were unlikely to reach a consensus within themselves, turned to Alexander to adjudicate.

But Alexander instead of picking and choosing a side, decided to do things differently.

"Hehe, well let's have a vote then," Alexander suggested with a light smile.

He did this because he did not want to show open support for either Menes or Menicus at the cost of the other and thus draw a wedge between the two.

So he chose the diplomatic route of letting the people decide.

"Vote?" Melodias asked raising an eyebrow.

The studious man had read quite extensively about Adhania's court culture while in Adhan and this suggestion was certainly an abnormality.

Usually, a lord would command and his retinues would obey.

"Yes. vote," Alexander repeated.

Then he turned to look at both his military and civilian leaders and said, "Well gentlemen, you have all heard what both sides have to say. Now vote for the group who think made more sense."

He then laid down the rules, "The voting will be unanimous, meaning you will just write your answer on a piece of papyrus and nothing else. No names or anything like that."

"After everyone is done writing in, you will drop the piece of papyrus on this bowl," Alexander showed a bowl that once contained some fruits as refreshment.

"And that you are done, I will tally the results and declare the winner."

Alexander then finished by saying, "As I'm the judge, I will not vote."

The instructions were quite easy and clear, and so after Menicus and Menes both agreed to it by saying, "We have no problem," the voting process began.

Alexander cut a few pieces of papyrus with a fruit cutter and all the people drew one or two lines, according to their answer.

And after a while, Alexander finished counting the ballots, and announced,

"The results are in! And the winner is...." He then paused for dramatic effect, "....Menes!"

The results were close, with Menes winning by just two votes, but it seemed that more people trusted the military to get the job than getting the civilians mixed up in all this.

Menicus was, of course, a bit deflated at losing, but he was gracious enough to have no intention of challenging the results.

Instead, he was more fearful of the consequences that option one might bring.

And he tried to make Alexander share theses as he asked, "My lord, will it be alright? If the treaty is...." He trailed off.

So Alexander soothed the old man's nerves, "My lord Menicus, I do understand your concern. You fear this rash military incursion so soon after signing the treaty will make all our efforts turn to water."

"*Nod*," Menicus felt exactly that way.

"But don't worry, that won't happen," Alexander very confidently stated.

And finding Menicus give him an inquisitive look, he explained, "Because I'm afraid you are looking at it all wrong."

He then posited, "You fear that the recentness of the treaty is what makes it so fragile. According to you, we should wait a while and let the treaty mature a bit, so as to make the other party less wary of whether we will keep our promise or not."

Until now, everything was as Alexander said.

Menicus felt exactly this way.

So Alexander attempted to show the place where he thought Menicus was wrong, "I believe in the opposite. I believe that the treaty is the strongest right one and will become more fragile as time goes by."

"Now why do I say this?" Alexander asked a rhetorical question.

"Because the demands Amenheraft made during the negotiations pointed to such." Alexander clenched his strong fist as he said it.

"He has demanded from His Majesty Ptolomy huge war reparations in the name of loan and various other goods."

"Why? Because he cannot afford it financially. His purse strings are too tight now."

"And that means that once he gets it, once he is sufficiently solvent enough, the former king will have no reason to keep his promise. And the annulment of the treaty will then only be a matter of time" Alexander warned.

So he again emphasized, "And that's why we must strike soon, The sooner the better. The sooner we attack, the more they will be unwilling to break the truce."

Alexander made his grand statement very forcefully and was quickly joined by Theocles,

"My lords, please remember that it was they that struck first. This was they who killed our priests!"

The archpriest had an indignant tone to his voice.

"That's right, that's right." Menes nodded heavily, "This is just retaliation."

And he was soon joined by many others, all playing along despite knowing the real story.

'Well, we did steal the nobles' houses when we entered Zanzan. And the soldiers will be wearing civilian clothes. So I guess we won't be tearing the facade too blatantly,' Menicus tried to reason with himself.

And given most were in support of option one, he nodded and consented, "The pasha is wise."

"Mmm, good," Alexander lightly smiled at having resolved the disagreement.

And then turned to Grahtos, "Captain Graptos, you are to arrange and send fifty covert scout riders to the east and fifty to the north of Zanzan respectively."

"I want to know the terrain and defense around there. Who rules what piece of land there, and most importantly if there are any hidden roads we can use to launch a sneak attack" He instructed.

"At once my lord," Grahtos had no problem with this practiced act.

"Mmmm, you will have one month," Alexander set a time frame.

And then turning to Menes, he said, "After Grahtos gets the information, you are to use that to plan an offensive plan. And submit it to me for evaluation before mid-December."

"And by the first week of January, we will march east." Alexander declared.

"Yes, my lord." Menes nodded.

And so the revised military campaign was set.

Chapter 274 Latest Heist Earnings

Alexander then spent the rest of the meeting talking about general miscellaneous things.

For example, he asked Menicus to plan setting up more food stations to accommodate the coming refugees.

He asked Harun to start making more bronze blades for the new plows they would need come March.

And Diaogosis was instructed to start making the wooden plows.

"Speaking of plows, we will need enough daft animals to pull them. Eighty thousand (80,000) of them to be exact." Alexander spoke out aloud.

Then turning to Heliptos ordered, "I'm putting you in charge of acquiring more. We only have twenty thousand (20,000) in total so you are to acquire an additional eighty thousand (80,000)."

Hearing this mammoth task, Heliptos turned deathly pale and struggled to keep his frightful scream from emanating outward.

"My lord...that...ummm..." He squirmed and bent his head and neck as his sycophantic instincts and his realistic instinct fought on how to try and explain to Alexander the impossibility of acquiring such huge quantities of animals within March, which was just five months away.

"You don't have to do it this year. You have till spring of next year." Alexander was not a tyrant and this timeline bought some water back to the economic minister's heart.

Though it was a lot a ton of time, it was still generous.

"I will try my hardest," Heliptos dutifully nodded.

"Mmmm, seek out any large merchants and guilds as you wish. Even foreign ones will do." Alexander gave the permission.

And with this, he finally noticed that it was well past noon already, almost approaching late afternoon, with the meeting lasting almost eight hours.

So finally, much to the other's relief decided to end the meeting, "Well gentlemen, I think that's it for today."

"Sorry for taking up so much time today, and thank you for bearing it with me." He finished.

"No, no, it was our pleasure." The men naturally politely replied.

"Mmm, then that's it for today," Alexander repeated.

"And tomorrow I will be coming on a tour of the city with all my civilian ministers. That includes you Harun, Krishok, Diagnosis- the whole lot of you." Alexander listed.

"It will be our greatest honor," Harun as the representative quickly said.

"And so there will be no council meeting," He announced, which to the men felt like the teacher was saying there will be no school tomorrow.

Joy!

Utter joy!

"Then we will see you the day after tomorrow."

"Please take care, my lord,"

These saying were quickly uttered by everyone and after giving Alexander a bow, they showed themselves out.

Except for Theocles, which by this point had become a normality.

But by now Alexander was in no mood to listen to his archpriest's report on the temple's state. His head was feeling jammed and his stomach was very angry.

This was because though he had eaten a hearty breakfast of large slices of freshly baked bread, cheese, and eggs with an assortment of various fruits right at the crack of dawn, nothing had entered his stomach afterward to replace them till now, close to a whole twelve hours.

And all while, he had been constantly at work or going to and fro from his work, from the morning speech in front of the temple to entertaining the guests at the temple, to the long council meeting that just finished.

And so instead of continuing the conversation, Alexander with a cordial smile invited Theocles, "I know it's very late, but join us for lunch."

By 'us' here Alexander was of course referring to him and Cambyses.

"It would be my honor, Your Holiness." The offer was quickly and graciously accepted by Theocles, as evidenced by using the words Your Holiness.

He would always address Alexander as such whenever they were alone, away from prying eyes and ears.

With this invitation accepted, the trio quickly exited the second-floor hall room and was escorted downstairs to a guest dining room where delicacies such as roast chicken, succulent trout, boiled eggs, and a bevy of both cooked and raw winter vegetables such as broccoli, beans, and lettuce slices were at once presented to them.

"So how much did we get from the temple?" Alexander greedily asked as he formed a makeshift sandwich containing shredded chicken, small slices of egg, and a variety of vegetables.

"Not much I'm afraid Your Grace," Theocles had a regretful tone to his voice, "Only around thirty million ropals."

"Oh? That is quite low." This was said by Cambyses, who in a surprised tone asked, "I thought we would get more. Wasn't Zanzan suppose to be the provincial capital and Pasha Muazz's city?"

It seemed like her husband, Cambyses too had gotten a taste for banditry.

"Yes, we were surprised by it too," Theocles admitted, saying, "Though we never expected the haul to be even close to Adhan's ten billion, Adhan's grand temple's status is in a league of its own after all, but it's still too low. A billion would have been a more appropriate amount, or at least five hundred million."

Theocles seemed very puzzled by this amount and worse, it was not like he could ask the temple priests or priestesses about it on the account of them being dead.

And even if he had the supernatural ability to talk to the deceased, he doubted the clergymen would have looked too kindly seeing their money being stolen.

"Hmmm, I guess we have to thank Muazz's goons and all the people who left the city to thank for that." Alexander hypothesized where all the money went, regret filling his voice.

Then he thought, 'I should arrange an auction for those damn paintings of Muazz and his ancestor to recoup some of my losses,' though he knew hosting such an event and attracting the required personnel with sufficient heavy pockets would take at least a few years.

This was because a minimum of that amount of time would be needed to transform the current tattered city of Zanzan into something respectable enough to hold such a grand occasion.

"I believe that Your Holiness is most likely right," Theocles too shared Alexander's thoughts and expressed his support with repeated nods.

"Well I guess some money is better than none," Cambyses tried to look at the bright side of things and this drew wry smiles from both the men.

Afterward, Alexander asked about general things regarding his religion to Theocles, ranging from the temple renovation to the progress of writing the religious scriptures, to policies regarding attracting new believers.

"Do not compete with the Ramuh faith regarding followers," Alexander instructed Theocles to keep his religious zeal in check for the time being, saying, "For now, concentrate on forming a small but very loyal

and pious group of followers. They will be the seeds we will use to spread out religion in the future and so emphasize quality over quantity."

"As you wish my lord," Theocles took heed and replied affirmatively.

"Umm, but also this does not mean we should not try to spread our faith." Alexander clarified, saying, "We will of course try to gain new followers by providing perks and rewards to new converts."

"For example, the thirty million ropals we got will be given to the refugees as a merciful grant from the goddess. That will get us some new followers," Alexander cunning planned.

Hearing such huge financial support was on the way, Theocles was naturally enthusiastic and so smiled and replied, "Your Grace is wise and the goddess is boundless in her mercy."

"Umm," Alexander gave a short hum at the expected answer and then promised, "I will personally open the temple on the first day of next month, and hold my wedding with Cambyes there on the first of January."

"....." The large news was shocking enough to make Theocles lose his words for a moment, causing Cambyes to comment, 'There is his bad habit again, saying hugely important things like he is simply breathing air.'

"Hahaha congratulations! Congratulations! Congratulations my lord!" Recovering himself just a little bit later, Theocles quickly and very animatedly applauded Alexander, saying the word congratulations repeatedly to emphasize the point.

Although Alexander and Cambyes were considered a couple, and everyone knew about it, they themselves never explicitly declared it, and so hearing the confirmation of it filled Theocles with joy.

A wide grin forced on his face at this announcement, as he was happy not only that the humble building he chose would be the place that his lord would be making his marriage venue, but also over the fact that marriages were usually followed by children.

The mere thought of seeing a god's offspring, the thrill of being soon able to look after and take care of a god's descendant, and the thought that his god's bloodline on earth would soon be secure was a feeling Theocles could confidently say he had not experienced ever before.

And then, quickly thinking about the person who will actually be giving birth to them, Theocles said the same thing to Cambyses, "Congratulations my lady. Congratulations, for the gods have answered my lady's prayers."

As Cambyses's former boss, Theocles certainly knew of the girl's desires towards Alexander and thus knew that this was dream come true for her.

"Thank you, my lord. Please keep us in your prayers," Cambyses replied with a gentle smile.

And in this way, amidst this warm atmosphere, the luncheon ended, with Theocles bidding his goodbye, saying, "Well my lord. Please let me excuse myself."

"And once again congratulations on your engagement. I'll make sure the marriage ceremony is a perfect success."

Chapter 275 Gelene (Part1) (R18)

After the very late lunch was finished, the couple finally alone, decided to laze in one of the many secluded gardens.

"So how did I do today?" Cambyses sent a charming smile to Alexander as she bit into a thick, juicy grape, its juices staining her pale, thin lips.

"Mnnn, better than I expected," Alexander kept a straight face as he said so, taking a large gulp of wine to hide any facial expression.

This little trick was immediately detected by Cambyses, who laughed, "Hahaha, you mean I kicked your ass."

After hearing which Alexander could not help but burst into a chuckle, "Haha, well I beat your ass every night."

"Shameless," Cambyses flushed at the crude joke and playfully elbowed Alexander's arms.

"Whaaat? I do, don't I, hahaha?" Alexander laughed even harder, as Cambyses elbowed him even harder.

"In all seriousness, your ability leaves me at ease," Alexander said after the little teasing, feeling confident about leaving Cambyses in charge during his campaigns.

"Mmmm, I will try hard," Cambyses seriously nodded, promising to guard her house fiercely when Alexander is away.

"In addition to working, you should also keep up your swordsmanship. Exercise is important," Alexander stressed another point.

In addition to not wanting his girls to lose their shape, in this period of almost nonexistent healthcare, one's fitness was his or her greatest asset against sickness and disease.

"I will start practicing for an hour every day from Sunday," Cambyses knew from Alexander the importance of a healthy body and lately she had started noticing some thin flaps on her belly.

This was unacceptable to her.

The couple then talked about various other miscellaneous things and in the blink of an eye, the sun disappeared and dusk greeted them.

Dinner was served a while later, which was various fish stews, a few vegetable sides, and a whole roast chicken, with bread as the staple carbohydrate as usual, after finishing which the girls were eager to get the card game going.

But not Alexander.

"I've got a few things to do, so you go ahead," Alexander told Cambyses as he decided to skip tonight's games night.

He had built up a backlog of a whole host of things that needed to be done and we wanted to catch up on some of that.

These ranged from designing a few concept arts of bras and panties for Gelene, to designing the priestess uniforms for Ophenia, to designing a wedding suit for himself and a wedding dress for Cambyses, to writing a spy manual for Camius, to writing various policies,...the list was endless.

"Mmm, okay, then. Bye," This was a regular occurrence and so Cambyses hummed a nonchalant farewell and quickly left to play some cards, finding the game very addictive.

Thus Alexander was left to spend the next few hours alone in his study, finishing some of the work.

And it was only close to midnight when he decided to return to his room, finishing an almost sixteen-hour work day.

And once inside he was surprised to find it devoid of any inhabitants empty, for Cambyses was nowhere to be found.

This was strange as usually, the sexy bunny would be already half-naked and crawling up all over his body by now.

And just as he was wondering if he should order Hemicus to ask around for Cambyses,

Knock! Knock! Knock!

A gentle, but crisp tap was posted outside the door, along with the mellifluous sound, "Master it's me."

The voice was soft and deferential but contrarily not pure and innocent.

It was sultry and tempting, thick with anticipation, and almost had an animalistic hunger to it.

'Oh, I forgot. It's her turn today,' The mystery of Cambyses's disappearance was quickly solved inside Alexander's head as the girl usually preferred to avoid Alexander's partner for tonight.

"Come in," Alexander gave the permission and at once the door was pushed open, letting in a girl Alexander had quite ambivalent feelings towards.

She was tall, graceful, and frontally very well endowed, possessing long, raven braided hair and shiny ebony skin that glistened under the light.

She wore a turquoise-colored traditional peplos extended all the way up to her ankle, the one-piece linen cloth hanging off her neck with a circular knot in a v- shape and showing her beautiful shoulder.

Her neck was decorated by a beautiful emerald studded necklace that matched her dress and bangles, and every time she walked, the payal jiggled and chimed, heralding her arrival.

She was Gelene,

The black beauty entered the large room swaying her hips like it was being blown around in a storm, letting Alexander very much appreciate the willow waist and its magnificent curves, making his anticipation rise at the expected night ahead.

But what attracted Alexander most was the huge milk jugs that swayed precariously within the one-piece, threatening to tear out of it and greet Alexander.

They looked firm, soft, and mighty juicy.

'Horny bitch! How many guards sprouted a tent seeing your outfit,' Alexander could clearly see the large nipple protrusions along the thin fabric and felt his lower body waking up.

Gelene approached Alexander with her back held high and when close enough, gave a full noble's bow, making sure to give Alexander a perfect view of the deep, fleshy ravine as she greeted, "Greetings my lord. Slave Gelene is here to serve."

"Mmmm, you are looking more beautiful day by day, Gelene" Alexander tried to give a cool reply, hiding his lust.

He had always held a complicated feeling towards the woman and did not want to appear too smitten.

"All by the grace of My lord pumping me full of his seed every day," Gelene flashed a sultry smile accompanying the lewd reply, turning Alexander's innocent praise into a lewd innuendo.

"Haha," But Alexander only laughed the answer off, instead pivoting and asking, "Is anyone else gonna join us? Tayin or Cam?"

Usually, these nightly visits would be done in pairs, one because the girls would get more time with Alexander in this way and two, which was the more important reason, because Alexander preferred it.

"No," Gelene shook her head, her heart very happy that she had managed to snatch such an opportune moment with Alexander, saying, "Sister Tayin said she has a slight cold and wants to sleep in early today. And mistress seems to want to enjoy the night with Sister Mean today," 'Well that's Cam for you,' Alexander understood that since Cambyses's first lover was technically not available today, she had decided to play with her second one.

'Ahhh, I would love to peep at what those two get up to,' Alexander lustfully imagined.

Though he could enjoy them together anytime, anywhere, there was certainly something very hot about seeing two girls get it on, especially if it was all natural and not something they were doing to put on a show for Alexander.

But he soon put those fantasies aside and concentrated on the beautiful woman looking hungrily at him.

And then without further ado, he decided to start the night.

"*Squeeze*, your's are the biggest among all my women you know Gelene," Alexander's wolfish claws sank into the youthful lumps of perky goodness, the soft, resilient fat setting his heart flying.

"Ahhh, yes, master. These are only yours. Only you can enjoy them," Gelene lovingly moaned as Alexander started to pinch her engrossed cherries through her clothes, squeezing them repeating as the pleasant, youthful tautness bounced and filled his hand with pleasure.

'Gelene's boobs are even better than Ophenia's or even Mikaya's.' Alexander thought to himself as the boobs sank back further under his squeeze, inviting him to fondle the pillowy cushions again and again.

"Ahhh, so strong," Gelene shuddered and moan in delight at having her breasts kneaded, feeling like Alexander was going to crush them.

Fueled by Gelene's lusty calls and because of Alexander's own need for pleasure, he then unhooked the small pin that held Gelene's peplos together and let the humongous titties grace Alexander's eyes once more.

They were like huge smooth chocolate globules, with two large pink cherries on top, which stood proud and erect, eager to be tormented by their master.

Grope, grope, grope.

The buxom flesh spilled out from between Alexander's fingers as he handed the boobs with abandon, drawing large, red finger marks on them and making Gelenes twist her body in pain and pleasure.

'Ahhhh, these breasts are my weak spots and he's always rough with them,' Gelene felt the pleasure assault her under Alexander's fondling and could only passively take the onslaught, letting out a deluge of mewls and moans as her master shortly after started to encroach upon her nipples.

"Kyaahhh, master..please... don't stretch my boobies...ahhh," Gelene moaned as she felt an orgasm coming.

"Hahaha, and why not?" But Alexander only yanked the beautiful tits further, pinching them by the nipples and pulling them apart, turning the perfect semi-circles to eclipses as he did so, and making Gelene go from moaning to howling.

"Nooo...too rough...ahhhh," Gelene could feel her breasts being pulled to the point it felt like they might tear apart.

"Hehehe, your melons are so naughty, slut," Alexander sneered as he twisted and spun the boobs around, whispering, "Say it! Say you love this rough play of having your nipples toyed with this."

"Yes, master. I do master. So turn my nipples into your slut hooks," Gelene screamed and nodded her head fiercely, her lower cave gushing in pleasure.

"Good! And here is your reward," Alexander then with one strong pinch stretched the pink, hard cherries into dirty oblong shapes, rubbing them between his fingers and causing Gelene to scream, "Ahhh...coming."

Twitch....twitch....twitch

Her body spasmed after achieving orgasm.

But Alexander did not stop the teasing with just that.

On the contrary, he started a new offensive, this time taking one of them into his mouth while pulling, twisting, rubbing, and kneading the other tiny, sensitive beautiful protrusion.

"Master please, I'm still sensitive, hyakk," Gelene was yet to recover from her previous release, but was already having one of her cherries sucked and kissed.

"Chupp...chup...chup," Gelene had larger than average-sized nipples, and Alexander found them very comfortable to suck, loving the salty, fruity, and almost milky smell of it.

"Ahhh...master, don't suck so much...ohh...now you are biting," Gelene could feel Alexander's teeth grind against the springy cartilage, leaving small bite marks all around the pink areola as Alexander made wet, lewd sucking sounds.

And a while later, he began to bite on the large, lovely cherries and then pull his head back, deforming the boobs and making Gelene shudder as she experienced her second release.

"Hahaha, mas...master," Gelene was a bit glass-eyed from this much stronger than usual release.

Having her nipples bitten and pinched at the same time was really a great turn-on for her.

"Hehe, then have some more," Alexander loved to see his girls be pushed past pleasure and become haggard from excess orgasms, and he was intent on doing the same to Gelene.

And so he started again, pooling the boobs together and putting both the protrusions inside his mouth together.

"Ahhh, master...no milk is gonna come no matter how hard you suck, arghhh," Gelene grunted as Alexander strongly bit on the cherries and tugged them, turning the fatty globules into oblongs, and making Gelene orgasm again.

This went on for some time, as Alexander at some point switched to not just biting her nipple, but her entire breasts, leaving little hickeys and bite marks on the entire sack of flesh.

"Ma...mas...master, mercy, no more...ahhh, too much." By the end

Gelene went from being a confident woman who seemed in control, to begging Alexander.

The ebony beauty could barely keep standing, and her smooth, rich legs shaking like a newborn fawn as she

had who knows how many orgasms.

She could only keep upright because Alexander was supporting her.

Seeing Gelene fully tamed for the time being, Alexander decided now he wanted her to pleasure him.

Chapter 276 Gelene (Part-2) (R-18)

While Alexander pleased the black busty beauty, his pitched tent had formed a spear that was poking against her lewd cave.

But with the trousers caging it within, it was stuck inside, making Alexander feel very uncomfortable.

"Ma...master...I'm sorry. Here let me help," Feeling the hardness hit her, Gelene understood Alexander's predicament and quickly kneeled down and in one swift pull, freed the imprisoned organ, causing the long spear to immediately point upward.

This was the most desirable part of Alexander in her eyes- the thick, hard, curved sword adorned with two heavy balls, and the strong scent it emitted made her lower cave drool.

"*Chuuu*, Nice to meet you again young master," Gelene greeted Alexander's cock as she always did, and the turgid rod responded with a mighty twitch.

"Hehehe, I'm happy to see you too, *chuu*," Gelene landed another sloppy kiss, and then used just one roll of her skilled tongue to pull back the foreskin to reveal Alexander's engorged glans.

"Mmmmm, nice," Alexander loved the sensation of the wet, slimy organ dancing on his sensitive part and the way the experienced woman used it was something to marvel at.

Gelene then in a playful way called, "Ohhh, look here master! What do we have?" in a voice not that one of alarm, but of immense joy.

"Dickcheese! Yummy, yummy dickcheese!" She pointed to the thin black ring around the base of the pulled foreskin, her eyes sparkling with joy at this supposed delicacy.

There was a prevalent myth in Thesos, most probably perpetuated by men, that this thin crust of oils, skin cells, and moisture was the essence of a man's superiority and women eating it might be able to acquire some of their power.

And so the ambitious Gelene loved it.

It was certainly an acquired taste, and though she at first hated it, after being forced to eat much stronger iterations of it at the brothel for days, she came to love the musky, salty taste of it.

But unfortunately for her, Alexander was very health conscious about keeping his penis clean, and so to much of Gelene's chagrin, she had never got to taste any of his.

Thus to accidentally stumble upon this treasure today filled Gelene with rapturous joy.

'Ohhh, today is really my day! Not only do I get to enjoy him for myself, but I also get to taste the elusive heaven's curd.' Gelene rejoiced, thinking eating it will bestow upon her some of Alexander's powers.

Meanwhile, Alexander flushed at being pointed this out.

He had taken a shower in the morning, but because today was particularly hectic, he skipped the nightly bath, leading to this embarrassing hygiene situation.

But before he could utter a single word of resistance, Gelene had already taken the meat lollipop inside her mouth, eager to clean out the day's accumulated stress.

"Here, master, let this slave clean you all up," Gelene sultrily breathed on the hard cock, before,

Chuuu, suuuck, ummmm.

She gobbled up the entire organ and started repeatedly rolling her tongue around the frenulum where all the goodness was.

And then she began to audibly chew the delicacy, finding it to have a mild, salty musky taste.

"Mmmm, so good...so manly," Gelene loudly praised as she ate, after finishing which she let out the shining, sparkling dick with a plop.

"Here master, arggg, see..all eaten up, hehehe." She lasciviously grinned while opening her mouth to show Alexander her work.

This lewd show lit a lustful fire inside Alexander and so fiercely grabbed Gelene by the hips and growled, "Sexy bitch, come here."

"Kyahhh," Gelene yelped as Alexander then threw her onto the bed and got up on it himself, sitting imperiously on her chest and sandwiching his spear between the warm inviting valleys, ready to hump it.

"Hahahaha...does master like by boobpussy?" Gelene only giggled at this play, and even squeezed the boobs together with her arms to form a tighter seal.

'Fuck...the boobs are so soft and Gelene has such a sultry look that I almost came,' Alexnader only clenched his teeth in reply, finding it hard to take the lead as he glanced at Gelene's angelic face with a devil's countenance.

'Hehe, you are gonna have to do better than that, boy,' Gelene could easily see Alexnader struggling and feel the hot rod give that characteristic twitch one gives just before cumming.

She had done far more demanding and demeaning plays than this, and so if this was Alexander's of asserting dominance, this was too small too tame.

But Alexander had to try anyway.

And so started to quickly thrust between the creamy mountains, finding their valleys warm, soft, and lush.

And every time he came out of the flesh tunnel, his little brother was greeted with a hot, moist reception as Gelene stretched out her tongue like a red carpet to greet the incoming VIP, lovingly kissing, sucking, and licking him as a way of showing her hospitality.

"Mmm, more master. Squeeze my boobs more. Pound my mouth harder. Turn my entire body into your exclusive pussy," Gelene roared in joy as Alexander humped her, to which Alexander respond by starting to pull her nipples up as hard as he could, twisting the breast into obscene shapes and making Gelene howls roar louder.

"Your boobs are so thick and fleshy. It feels like my dick is plowing through jelly. Ahhh...so nice," Alexander commented as he then pulled the breasts up by the nipples, and then crisscrossed them, his release edging closer.

"Ohhh...not by nipples...ahhh...my boobies are feeling weird! Hyeh! Cumming," Having her weak cheery buds bullied, Gelene soon announced another release.

"Me too. Take it on your face, slave," Alexander grunted, and then quickly, and simultaneously both achieved their peak.

Squirt, squirt, squirt.

While Gelene's body shudder and shook, Alexander painted the ebony beauty's face and breasts pure white- thick, ropy cum staining the black canvas.

"Ahhh, master essence. As thick as always! And the smell is so manly..mmmnnn" Gelene gave a lewd, blissful smile, loving her hot new facial.

She had always believed that the sperm of young men would help retain her youth and thus loved drinking and pasting the turbid fluid on her skin.

And so to make sure she got everything, she even squeezed the boobs together using her hands, enclosing the sensitive stick inside her warm flesh pocket and letting large amounts of leftover cream flow out.

"Ahhh, your whole body is like a pussy," Alexander moaned as he relished in the afterglow.

Then after recovering a while later, Alexander instructed Gelene to take his favorite position.

"Now get on all fours like the bitch you are," He lewdly commanded, which the woman did with much alacrity.

"Hehe, here master," Gelene giggled as she raised her ass up high and shook it invitingly, lewdly tempting, "Master, take any hole you want and pound them to hell and back."

While in the meantime, Alexander soaked in the magnificent view that was presented to him.

The drooling closed cave was hidden by a patch of sparse bush, giving off a lascivious fruity smell, while the dirty hole above was expanding and contracting like it was breathing, beckoning him to taste its smooth, silky walls of pleasure.

"*Smack*, you sexy whore. I will destroy both," Alexander fiercely spanked the huge black butt, letting it jiggle and wobble magnificently as he was put in a dilemma over which hole to pound first.

But finally, he decided to fill Gelene's baby room first.

And so bringing his huge organ in contact with the puffy lips, he hungrily growled, "Take it!"

He then immediately penetrated Gelene all the way in one thrust, going balls deep till his head hit the cervix, and soaking in the heavenly sensation.

"Arghhhh. yes....master...ohhh," Gelene let out an ear-splitting howl of pleasure at this sensation, swaying her bubble butt in happiness as she soon began to rhythmically move her hips to match Alexander's thrusting.

"As usual your pussy is first class Gelene. So hot, soft, and cozy," Alexander thrustured rapidly to pleasure himself using his lewd cave of pleasure, while Gelene was being sent to the high heavens with each strike again her walls

"Yes! Master's penis feels good too. So long and hard. Ahhhhh, it even scrapes by my clit, ohhh soooo good!" Gelene raised her butt even higher to let Alexander have a better angle of attack, while moaning at the top of her voice, her boobs swinging wildly under her like divine fruits hanging from the heavens.

Seeing such juicy fruits, Alexander naturally could not control himself and began a third round of fondling, growling,

"Your cow udders are really something else."

"Ahh...master that's so meannn," Gelene playfully pouted at being called names, but that was soon replaced by a higher-pitched prolonged wail as Alexander strongly pinched the already bruised nipples, bringing a fresh new round of pleasurable torment.

"Ahh...no, my nipples are gonna get destroyed, My boobs are gonna get destroyed. My pussy is gonna get destroyed." Gelene ecstatically shouted, her walls rapidly contracting and spasming in joy.

She had another light orgasm

Squeeze. Pinch. Knead.

Alexander continued to manhandle the boobs, stretching them like one milks a cow, while his hips hit Gelene's plump ass fiercely, producing a loud, wet, nasty sound and leaving a deep print on the flesh, turning the beautiful rump red like pepper.

His large, balls swung and hit Gelene on her revealed red bean constantly and soon Alexander was close.

"Ahhh..coming," Alexander warned, to which Gelene responded by having her mature walls envelop Alexander even more and coaxing him to release quickly.

"Yes, master, cum! Cum inside this slave pussy. Mark her as yours" Gelene urged by rocking her hip, making Alexander thrust faster and kneaded her breast rougher.

"Here, hmmp, take it," Then with a grand thrust against Gelene's butt, Alexander struck the girl's cervix, and directly deposited the baby batter into the baby room.

"Yes...ohhhh, make me pregnant master. Make me you breeding bitch, my lord," Gelene arched her head back and wailed and howled until she became hoarse, her lewd proclamations even reaching Cambyses two rooms away.

'Slutty whore,' Alexander's main wife commented as she sat with her legs wide open, having Mean diligently lap up her juices like a cat, licking, sucking, and biting her little sister until Cambyses got a release.

Back to Alexander and Gelene, after filling up the demanding woman up, still not satisfied with just two releases, Alexander picked her up, made her sit on his lap, and then *Bam*.

He skewered her bum in one go.

"Ahh...master is particularly fierce today, hehe. Go on then, pound my asshole till it can't close anymore," Gelene did not find his action the least bit uncomfortable, only infinitely pleasurable as she started to jump up and down along with Alexander, matching his rhythm.

While Alexander moved his hands to her red bean and started directly pinching it, treating it like it was her third nipple and causing Gelene's pleasure to again soar to cloud nine.

"Hyak! Master really loves pinching me, don't you?" Gelene rapidly shook her ass, finding the hot, thick rod molding her ass while her clit was being turned inside out very desirable.

"Gelene, you lewd cow. I could pinch you to death," Alexander growled his hands caressed all over the black, mature beauty's body like roving bandits, pinching, kneading, and pulling at all kinds of different places- from the usual erogenous zones like nipples and clits, to some esoteric options like her armpits, nose and the slight flabs on her otherwise smooth tummy.

"Yes, master! Pinch me! Pinch this slutty cow as much as you wish," Gelene moved her ass faster.

"Argghm cumming,.. *splurt*, *splurt*," Alexander soon deposited another still thick and creamy turbid fluid into the fat ass, the amount so much that some of it leaked out and dyed the pink puckered hole white and muddy.

And in this way, the carnal mayhem continued for close to another two hours, until finally the man and woman were exhausted enough to go to sleep, with Gelene laying sprawled on top of Alexander, his rod still plugging her lewd cave, while her pink hole leaked a nasty but beautiful white sauce.

Chapter 277 Mikaya And Seelima's Talks

On the other side of things, the girls had finished another of their exciting game nights and as they retired to their chambers, Mikaya and Queen mother Seelima were having a little alone talk in the latter's room.

"So, what do you about Azira and Azura becoming priestesses again?" The Queen mother asked in a casual, off-tone voice.

"I could barely stop myself from slapping my forehead at those idiots. Seriously! Did my nieces grow up eating grass?" Mikaya answered in an exasperated tone, in disbelief that the twins had not been able to see through this simple plan.

But she was still not done as she grumbled, "They even went and made up that ridiculous story about the so-called ruinous powers! When did we have ruinous powers?"

"Hahaha, maybe it's also because they wanted to believe Alexander's excuse. They miss the temple very much after all," The Queen mother simply chuckled seeing Mikya's fuming reaction, taking a large bite out of an apple in the process.

"..." Mikaya only pursed her lips, finding Alexander playing her nieces like a fiddle displeasing.

And every time she met the twins yesterday, she had the urge to shout, 'You idiots, he is the mastermind, the culprit you are looking for. He killed the priests and then used their deaths to purge the gangs, both factions which were not loyal to him. And now he is using you to take control of the temple.'

But the one thought that stopped her was this- 'Am I so different?'

Mikaya was well aware of why Alexander was offering her the chance to do the things he promised.

But like a drawn to the flames, she accepted nonetheless, much like his niece.

While the Queen mother did not speak against Alexander because there was no point.

She had no proof and it was simply her words against Alexander's.

And though this act was an open secret, saying such a thing out loud would be a serious breach of noble etiquette.

"Well, Alexander is unlikely to harm the twins outright, so there should not be too big a problem," Seeing the silent, pouting Mikaya. the Queen tried to console the silver-haired beauty, herself not too concerned about the twin's safety.

"Hmmm, I guess," Mikaya seemed to agree with a small nod.

Then the Queen mother suddenly changed the topic, "So, what do you think of Alexander? You seemed to like his speech," Seelima probed Mikaya.

It had to be known that though the two women were personal friends, some friction did exist between their houses.

Particularly, each viewed Alexander's presence differently.

Mikaya and particularly her father saw him as a vital component to becoming the top dog of Adhania.

While Seelima saw him as a dangerous, unpredictable element, and a potential threat to the royal family.

In Seelima's eyes, the royal family and Matrak were two equal forces who could balance each other and keep stability.

But Alexander, he was the wild card that could make whichever force he threw his weight under triumph.

And Seelima was sure that Alexander would never support Ptolomy.

"Hmmm, he is not half bad," Mikaya hid any sign of praise, only nonchalantly saying, "His Azhak has improved quite a lot."

She knew the angle the Queen mother was attacking from and so only pretended to show that she was mildly impressed by Alexander's linguistic skills.

"Yes, for a boy he has skills." The Queen mother did not seem to notice Mikaya's little trick and like her younger friend, hid her real thoughts behind a thick facade of nonchalance.

Though in reality, she certainly was very impressed by how Alexander had conducted the crowd, even if she would never admit it aloud.

Seeing Alexander on the stage, Seelima felt like she was witnessing an expert musician perform a grand opera, each of his words masterfully pronounced like a heavenly note, to which the crowd cheered with the exact emotion Alexander demanded.

She was mesmerized by how Alexander played the crowd like a fiddle, hitting all the strings exactly at the correct time, and making the crowd experience dance, sing, and howl to his tune.

The people expressed joy when he wanted them to, sorrow at some points, and anger when the situation demanded it.

For an ambitious woman like Seelima, who had always pursued control and dominance over others, seeing someone else enthrall so many people so effortlessly made her both amazed and jealous.

And with the latter emotion trumping the former, she thus sulkily added, "But looting temples and killing priests is becoming a habit of his,"

"Not His Majesty's temples. But Amenheraft's," Mikaya in a soft voice reminded, knowing a bit about her father's plan regarding religion.

"For now," The Queen mother curtly replied, the two words containing vast inferences.

Seelima feared that if Alexander could kill one type of priest, he might see killing all priests as fair play.

"Haha, the Queen mother is being too paranoid," But Mikaya brushed these concerns off with a laugh, adding, "We are allies. Matrak will hold the north, Adhan the center, and Alexander the south. And remember, Alexander also has Tibias to contend with, He isn't going to be a threat to us,"

"Hmmm, then what do you think about what he said about god Ramuh and Gaia," This was the real stickler of a point for the woman.

Seelima had scolded Ptolomy for letting Alexander have religious freedom and though Ptolomy had no choice in the matter, he certainly could have done more to curb Alexander's demands.

But Ptolomy had confidently replied. 'The faith of Ramuh is eternal. We have resisted Thesian influence for thousands of years and one brat is not going to change that.'

"I think he just said that to erode Amenheraft's influence. If he really wanted to bolster his religion, he would have claimed that only Gaia could save them." Mikaya downplayed the act, both because she truly saw it like that and because of her family's interests.

And then quickly added, "And besides with Azira and Azura as the priestesses, things will not get any easy for him."

"You of all people should know how zealous those two are of their faith."

The Queen mother too knew of the twins infamous intolerance and thus felt that she was being overly cautious.

And another further reason was that even if Alexander wanted to plot against the royal family and usurp Ptolomy, Pasha Farzah would never allow that.

And she could not presage any scenario in the nearby future where such a scenario was possible.

"So, how you liking Zanzan?" The Queen mother then decided to change to a much lighter topic.

"Hmmp, boring," Mikaya snorted, though the contempt in them seemed to be much lesser than before.

And then feeling the Queen mother's teasing look, she sulkily added, "Well, maybe the card game isn't too bad."

'And that whorehouse,' Mikaya added in her heart, very much anticipating that establishment's grand opening.

"Haha, so what do you say we spice things up a bit?" Suddenly the queen mother's voice turned husky and she sent Mikaya a sultry look.

"Ohhh?" Mikaya flashed a grin in glee.

This was not the first time they had engaged in a girl-on-girl little tussle.

"Did you bring it?" Mikaya very excitedly asked about one of the Queen mother's most famous pieces of equipment.

"Check my trunk! See for yourself!" The Queen mother invited, gesturing with her hands to a large, inconspicuous, wooden storage box in the furthest corner of the room.

And so Mikiya, like an excited little girl, trotted over and very eagerly opened the treasure chest, and found the object that lay in front of her every bit as beautiful as she had remembered.

It was a leather strapon, with a huge curved bronze phallus, studded with tiny, baby-smooth gems.

This was something the previous queen had made, reportedly using the king's organ as a blueprint, and used to regularly use on the harem girls, especially on Seelima.

This tool would many times be used to train new harem girls too, before they presented to the king, and so the wooded phallus had literally tasted the dew and juices of hundreds of women.

And even some men, as the former queen, sometimes would peg the guards and slaves.

And after her death, this became Seelima's spoils of victory.

"The thing always impresses me," Mikaya's eyes seemed to be sparkling as she lovingly caressed the incredible upward curve.

"Well, then put it on me," The Queen mother had stood up by now, and was looking down imperiously at the white beauty.

"*Smirk*, but I'm not sure only one will be enough," Mikaya did not feel any pressure from the penetrative gaze sent by Seelima, but instead made further demands.

She was more concerned about acquiring a minimum of two as anything less would just leave her frustrated.

"I got three," The Queen mother returned the smirk as she held up her three fingers, causing Mikaya to beam in glee.

"I'll get Nafia and Tajia," Mikaya's feet barely touched the carpet as she skipped out, the anticipation in her voice thick and voluminous.

And soon, the room echoed with the sounds of flesh hitting flesh.

If one were to peer inside, they would have found Mikaya on all fours, with three metal phalluses inside her three holes.

The rear end was being fiercely gorged out by the queen mother, and her wet cave was being heavily pounded by Nafiam, while above, her mouth was being violated by Tajia, who strongly held her mistress's head and humped her with abandon, constantly hitting her mistress's throat and making her moan.

The queen mother was showing herself to be especially skilled, rotating and gyrating her hips to hit Mikaya's various known sensitive spots as their hips repeatedly slammed against one another, while Nafia strongly uppercuted from below, trying to hit her mistress's womb with as much force as possible.

'Noooo, this isn't it. It's not enough,' But Mikaya only moaned in frustration at the trio's attempt, while moving her hips faster to try and get a more intense feeling.

The lifeless, cold metallic objects could never replicate the hot, raw feeling of the real thing, and the smooth, slick surface just could not scratch the same itch as a throbbing, veiny cock.

'Ohhh, when will that damned pasha open his business,' Mikaya cursed as she herself furiously strummed her little reddened pearl even amidst the pounding to try and help douse that flame of lust, but ultimately found no relief.

And thus like that the session ended, with Mikaya having experienced a few orgasms, but still left ultimately unsatisfied and frustrated, with a prickling itch down there remaining nonetheless.

And it took a long time for her to let herself be finally carried off to the dreamlands.

Chapter 278 Cement Kiln Operation(Part-1)

The next two months for Zanzan were a hectic one.

In just those two months, the city had experienced arguably more changes than it had in the past two hundred years, possibly in more than two thousand since its inception as a small fishing hamlet.

And Alexander was there to document all these changes firsthand.

The first change was the initiation of the first-ever cement kiln, located to the south of the city, near the port.

Alexander was there to personally light the first kindling that lit the furnace for the kiln and as he laid eyes upon the tall, conical structure, Alexander remembered feeling a huge surge of pride.

'This is mine! I designed it! And it works!' Alexander shouted with joy in his heart.

This feeling of invention and discovery was quite the novelty for him, for though he had introduced many new things to this world, things which all the people rightfully named him as the inventor of, deep down Alexander knew that none of those were his.

He did not feel guilty for taking credit, but he also did not feel a sense of achievement, for there was no sense of discovery for him in those.

These things had been made and tested before and so if he were to copy them properly, naturally they would perform the same way.

But not this kiln.

It was nothing like the rotary kiln usually used in the previous world and other than the core principle of mixing the ingredients and heating them, there was nothing common between the two kilns.

And the reason why the rotary kiln was not used was because not Alexander did not want to use it, but because it could not be used.

That particular kiln was basically a slanted horizontal tube through which the cement slurry flowed while being heated from the outside.

This tube had to be rotated to slow down the descent of the slurry and give it enough time to properly cook the mixture and because there was no way Alexander would manufacture or spin this huge metal tube without the use of a steam engine, he opted for the new kind of kiln.

'Once I design the steam engine, I will replace it with the rotary kiln.' Alexander had said to himself during the design of the kiln.

He said so because the rotary kiln was much better with more capacity and ease of use than his custom-made kiln.

And the only reason he had not invented the steam engine is because, one- he did not know its design for not being a mechanical engineer, and two- because the material, i.e- the steel needed to make the thing was not there.

To be more specific, the forging techniques needed to shape a block of steel into the complex shapes need to make a steam engine was not there.

Otherwise, even if Alexander did not know the specifics of how a steam engine worked or know all the detailed inner workings, he was confident he could have jerry-rigged something.

After all, even a child knew the basics of a steam engine- that is, using the compressed, pressurized steam to drive a piston up and down, which can then be connected to a flywheel, thus providing mechanical energy.

But Alexander knew he was getting ahead of himself.

For to even think that a basically bronze-era civilization could leap into the industrial revolution within a few years or two was a pipe dream among pipe dreams.

'Welp, I guess a few decades will be needed,' Alexander conservatively estimated.

Because obtaining the ability to shape and install air-tight steel pieces that smoothly and seamlessly slid past each other was no easy ask.

For these blacksmiths would could not even make a flat piece of steel just a meter long, this would be a monumental leap that would require at least an entire generation's effort to study and experiment to obtain and master.

'Put thy foolish ambitions to rest.' Thus Alexander could only helplessly say this to himself, as he then shelved these thoughts into deep storage for the time being, deciding to revisit them at a much, much later date.

Instead, he decided to focus on the cement kiln right in front of him.

It looked very similar to what he had in his mind, except for a few small structural additives.

First was that there was a type of cowl at the top, very similar to what a chimney had, and it served the same purpose as that- to keep out the rain, hail, and snow.

The only difference here was the size, which, due to being made of wood, made it seem almost like a small shed.

Its roof was dome-shaped to deflect any unwanted debris falling directly on it, while its walls were solid with only many little inch-like slits carved out of them to allow the smoke and soot to leave.

Thus gases would easily escape but the entry for moisture such as rain, hail, and snow, or such debris as fallen leaves and small rocks and stones would be severely restricted.

This shed was very well built and had only one small opening on one of the sides to allow the workers to dump the raw slurry in through the open chimney.

And that bought Alexander to the next innovation- the thing that would allow the workers to get to the top to input the cement slurry.

Jazum had ordered the construction of supporting scaffolding and inclined stairs that surrounded the kiln in a semi-circular shape and went all the way up to the top, providing access to the workers to input the raw materials into the chimney.

The scale of this wooden structure was huge and Alexander was informed that it took a worker only two minutes to complete a full cycle- i.e- from starting off the base of the stairs with his wooden plate full of the wet mixture to climbing the twelve meters high stairs to depositing the load into the furnace to then returning back the stairs where he would be issued a new batch.

To make this process as efficient as possible, management had ordered the workers at the base to not only mix the sand, limestone, and clay in the appropriate amount and then fill the large wooden plates that the worker would ferry up, but they would also place it on the heads of the workers so that the latter would not have to waste time and energy bending over.

This made it so that the transport workers would be able to catch a brief respite as they awaited their refill and did not have to strain their back muscles, thus making them less fatigued.

Alexander was very impressed to see how pragmatic these workers were as they all wore a kind of makeshift flat turban on their heads, made from any large, loose piece of cloth that these people could get their hands on, ranging from towels to even rags, which was used to cushion the effect of carrying such a heavy load on their head for so long.

And the last innovation added to the kiln, or more specifically dug around the kiln were two large ditches which were dug around the back and front of the kiln and connected to ramps that led upward.

These two ditches were just below the exit portals of the kiln through which the product fell and to collect them, on the ditches were two awaiting horse carts.

Once filled, these horse carts would be driven out of the ditch using the ramp while two new empty ones would take their place.

These semi-completed products would then be taken to a nearby warehouse, where they would be ground to a fine powder using massive hammers, and then be mixed with 4% crushed gypsum thus making portland cement.

"Umm, you did well Jazum and Krishok," Alexander had praised the two men, getting a synchronized, "Thank you, my lord," from the men.

Alexander then asked, "Who designed the nice way for workers to take the slurry up? It's very efficient."

"That was me, my lord," Jazum claimed, a humble but pleased smile pasted on his face.

Alexander nodded with a slight smile and then turned to Krishok, "And how did you like the design of the double-acting bellows?"

"My lord, it's amazing!" The bald man replied, who then used his arm to point to the four huge, almost two-meter-long bellows connected to the two sides, each being operated by a small team of extremely buff slaves,

"I have designed many bellows in my life, but none has ever blown so much air so easily," The tanner plus carpenter exclaimed.

This was natural as this blower was basically two blowers stuck together and was designed in such a way that it would blow air during both phases, once during the pulling phase when the lever was pulled down, and again during the pushing phase, when the lever was pushed up.

And this action was in full display in front of Alexander who focused his attention on the men working the blowers just a bit ahead.

They were on a slightly elevated two-storied flat scaffolding and were working in teams of two on each blower.

The one on the lower floor would yank down on the bellow using ropes, which would cause a large amount of air to be blasted into the furnace, after which the one at the top would yank another rope up to pull the blowers up, thus completing the cycle.

And thus the fire would be fed and the cement produced.

Chapter 279 Cement Kiln Operations (Part-2)

Alexander stood for a while, watching the men furiously work the bellow, perspiration running down their large, strong bodies like small streams.

Though it was the middle of winter, these men's upper bodies were bare, evidence of the heat being generated by the hard work.

In fact, it was such strenuous work that these workers would regularly switch places with others in their team who were waiting to take over the helm, while these exhausted men would drink some water from their waterskins and sit down a while to rest their aching arm muscles.

Clearly 'as easy as blowing air' was not always the case, especially when blowing such large amounts of air.

"I assume Jazum, you did the scaffoldings?" Alexander then remembered to ask about the 'grand architecture' surrounding the kiln, something he had forgotten about.

"We both did my lord." The stonemason chirped up while gesturing to his colleague, and saying, "I drew the designs, while Krishok made them. He is a great carpenter, you know, my lord."

The stonemason's frank praise caused the latter to blush.

"Oh? That's good. I will call you for some more projects then," Alexander said with a light smile, not finding the twin mastery of tanning and carpentry too surprising.

There was a reason artisans were called artisans and usually not specifically blacksmiths, stonemasons, carpenters, etc.

Because though most would specialize in just one job, they would often have a decent grasp of a second or even third art.

This was because usually most products could not be made using just one skill, necessitating familiarity with a few adjacent ones.

Alexander then at last asked about the real issue.

"So how much are we making per day?"

He knew that a rough estimate was one cubic meter volume of capacity produced one tonne of cement per day.

For example, the very early kilns in his previous life were 1.5m in diameter and 15m in length and could make around 20 tonnes per day.

Thus Alexander calculated that the twelve-meter conical kiln with an internal radius of two meters could make around fifty tonnes a day.

And this was easily possible as it would mean a feeding rate of only around 35 kg of slurry per minute.

Something the workers that were climbing up and down the stairs in rows and rows, each carrying a twenty kg load, almost like ants, would be easily able to achieve.

"A lot any lord! A lot!" Jazum gleefully cheered, "Almost twenty-five tonnes a day!"

'So small!'

Contrary to Jazum's ecstatic reply, Alexander's feeling was much gloomier and he could help but lampooned, finding the only fifty percent efficiency damning.

And this too gave him another concrete proof that rotary kilns were explicitly better than his jerry-rigged one.

But why was Alexander so peeved about such a large amount?

Because though twenty-five tonnes a day might sound like a lot, it was a drop in the bucket when compared to Alexander's insatiable demand.

To give a context of how little this was, a room made of five walls, each 4m long, 4m high, and 15cm thick would need close to one and a half tons of cement, along with around four and a half tons of sand.

So, using a whole day's worth of production, Alexander would be able to produce, just around thirty rooms of 35 square meters in area.

Now, twenty-five tonnes was not bad in any way.

For example, this amount of cement could be used to lay about one hundred thousand (100,000) bricks.

And though this might sound like a lot, this amount of bricks could only be used to make just only 2 four-walled perimeter walls and two roofs of the buildings Alexander designed for the residence.

Nowhere near enough to satisfy his current demand.

But it seemed the other two artisans were, rightfully too engrossed celebrating to notice Alexander's tiny scowl.

"It's true my lord. I have never seen so much of something being produced so quickly." Krishok said with much alacrity, his face flushed with pride and excitement.

But his more attentive partner soon did notice Alexander's slightly sour mood and asked in a fearful, almost 'going to the slaughter-house lamb' voice, "Is something the matter, my lord?"

'Damn. I shouldn't be disappointed. These guys did an amazing job,' This sound instantly made Alexander remove his slight scowl and he then immediately turned to give a big grin to the two men, "Hahaha, no, no, you did a great job, great job. Well done, well done."

This made the two men breathe a sigh of relief, wiping the sweat off their brows as they were reassured to find that Alexander was not looking to pit-pick at them.

"Is the kiln working also through the night?" Alexander wanted to confirm.

"Yes, lord." Jazum nodded, while Krishok delineated, "As you ordered my lord, we have formed two teams, working alternatively, thus making the cement 24/7."

He then pointed to one of the many large braisers and said, "And we light those during the night! And when all of them are lit, it almost becomes as bright as day."

"Mmm, that's good then." Alexander flatly commented as he already knew about it and only wanted to confirm it, and then asked, "So, what are the challenges you faced when making the kiln?"

"My lords, other the blowers, everything else was not too hard. It's all because of the cement!" Jazum claimed, quickly adding, "With this magical glue, we can make anything we want as long as we have enough stones."

This was followed by Krishok's statement.

"The blowers were not too hard either. We had a little bit of trouble designing the thing because it was all new to us," He admitted, "But once we figured that out, the problem was just getting the leather tanned large enough and making the metal hinges strong enough to hold the wood planks together.

"Haha, I see," Alexander gently chuckled, and then in a mysterious tone asked, "I remember that this kiln needed around two weeks to build, am I right?"

"Yes, my lord," Jazum nodded, though his heart uncharacteristically skipped a beat hearing Alexander's tone.

And his instinct proved to be correct, for Alexander declared, "Good! Given that you have gained much experience building the kiln, then the next ones should be easy."

'Darn,' Jazum's and Krishok's heart's leaped up to their throats, as Alexander's gentle, but to them, devilish voice entered their ears.

"So, I want ten new kilns within three months!" Alexander dropped the bombshell, proving the two men's instinct right.

"Tha...that..." Jazum was lost for words, while Krishok literally jumped back a bit.

Alexander had directly dropped the average allocated time from around 14 days to 9 days, literally a 35% drop.

But Alexander was unfazed by this subconscious display of unwillingness.

"You two should be aware of the infrastructure projects going on. And you of all people know the best just how much cement is used up just how quickly," Alexander said, reminding, "Remember, this one relatively small kiln took you four tons of cement and twelve tons of sand."

"...We will work hard, my lord," Jazum could barely hold back sighing in front of his lord and breaking etiquette as he replied in a deflated tone.

'Welp, and here I was thinking of celebrating the new year with the kids,' He lampooned.

But he decided to suck it anyway, for Alexander's reminder made him and also Krishok, understand just how much cement would be needed for the close to a thousand huge four-storied buildings, the aqueducts, the sewage, the roads, and the many other kinds of projects waiting to be made.

'We might be making cement kilns for the rest of our lives,' The two men in unison lampooned.

"Mmm, I look forward to it," Alexander legally nodded.

But then hearing how anemic the reply was and knowing that the men were likely saying yes because denying his request was not really an option for the two men. he still decided to sweeten the spartan deal for the two.

"If you can meet the deadline, I will make both of you Shordars (Baron)," Alexander did promise them peerage for great achievements and decided to fulfill them.

This produced the expected excitement and jubilation as the man gave the standard reply of bowing and kneeling and swearing the oath, "We swear to serve you loyalty and wholeheartedly for all eternity."

"Hahaha, work hard," Alexander was always impressed by how fatigue, pain, and unwillingness could be wiped away through the application of enough rewards.

Some might feel that offering land and an inheritable title to be overly generous for what was basically them making something that Alexander designed.

But Alexander had decided to give them it anyway.

This was because these two were already in the council seats and there was little point in haggling over something that was inevitable.

It was not like they would remain civilians for their whole life.

And besides, he will have grander projects in the future, projects which will need its higher-ups to be tight-lipped about them so as not to attract prying eyes, and for that, in addition to competence, loyalty was paramount.

There were many competent people under Alexander.

And there were also many loyal people under him.

But finding a man sharing both qualities was like fishing for one rare shiny pocket monster.

A very hard and elusive search indeed.

So how to search for or in case develop such loyalty among subordinates towards oneself?

Alexander's answer was- To try and buy it of course.

He planned to throw money, land, and benefits at the problem and hopefully ensnare them to his boat.

Chapter 280 Clinker To Cement

Alexander was aware that with his background of being a Thesian, gaining the Adhanian's loyalty would be very hard.

And to promote it Alexander had three basic grand strategies set up.

The first strategy was to make himself a god by promoting his religion.

The second strategy was to be generous with his rewards.

This was the reason Alexander had the reputation of having a loose purse.

Because for a man with the lowly background of a slave, that was the fastest way for him to gain loyalty and respect.

Alexander knew that while in his previous life individual abilities and achievements were looked up to and honored, here, in this time period, bloodline trumped all.

And so his strategy to overcome this handicap was simple, increase the benefits of people following him and thus make it unprofitable for them to jump ship.

And the third and last strategy was tied to the second point, which was to increase his total wealth, thus enabling him to hand out better benefits.

And to do that, Alexander planned to increase trade, introduce new and unique products and establish new trade routes as a means to finance these expenditures.

Or that was the plan way.

For only time would tell of their efficacy.

After bidding farewell to Jazum and Krishok, Alexander then moved to see the warehouse where the product from the kin, called clinkers, were being stored.

The small pebble-like semi-cement would be pulled by twin horses, each carrying two tonnes of the stuff until it was deposited into the warehouse where they would be made into portland cement.

And so Alexander was interested to see its operation.

This was because the process of turning the raw clinkers to cement was something Alexander had the intention of fiercely guarding as, though he knew that he could not keep the manufacturing process of cement a secret for much time, he could easily hide the addition of 4% gypsum.

And though that 4% might sound not like a lot, it was a critical component and the only thing controlling the hardening time of the product when water was added.

Thus a sly smile broke out of Alexander as he looked forward to seeing his opponent toil away to recreate the product, only to find that the 'so called' miracle powder instantly turning to solid after adding water, making the thing pretty useless.

But for this to work, it was imperative that the secrecy regarding the addition of gypsum needed to be kept under the strictest of security.

And that's why Alexander was going there, to judge the security of the complex.

Alexander was greeted by the caretaker of the warehouse right at the gate of the enclosed structure, a short, thin man with two huge buckteeth by the name of Yemin, who was flanked by two large, muscular soldiers.

"Welcome, my lord, welcome." The man wearing a grey, worn-out oat had a wide grin pasted on his face as he bowed to Alexander.

This unassuming man, hand chosen by Camius himself, was among the select few who knew the real recipe, something not even Jazum and Krishok were privy to, and his get-up was thus very intentional, designed not to draw too much attention to himself.

And to ensure that he did not say anything to anyone, by his own permission, all his movements and conversations were strictly monitored and recorded.

The two bodyguards with him were as much his protectors from potential kidnapping as they were his jailors, making sure he kept his tongue in check.

"Yemin, how goes the product sale!" Alexander gave a gentle smile at the loyal man as he patted familiarly on the man's shoulder.

This man was once in the first phalanx and one of Camius's and by extension Alexander's best snitches.

"Haha, by the grace of my lord, well," The man with a wide smile replied, and then invited them in, "Please, Your Grace, please enter."

As Alexander entered the huge enclosed complex, the dull thudding sound from the outside had turned into an ear-splittingly loud boom, constantly and almost rhythmically hitting his ears.

This was because outside the actual huge wooden warehouse. all around the entire premises was the ear-smashing sound of hammering going on.

Alexander spun his head around as he observed the operations for himself while on his way to inspect the warehouse.

He saw workers swarming the recently arrived carts, using small shovels and even their hands to get the clinkers onto small buckets, which then they would dump into various small nearby pits, surrounding which were two to three strong men holding huge bronze sledgehammers.

Once the pit was filled, these men would get to work, lifting their huge, heavy sledgehammers high into the sky and then bringing them down with a mighty smash, progressively turning the small, innocent pebbles to dust under each merciless hit.

"How many people we got working here?" Alexander asked...no, shouted at Yemin.

"About fifteen hundred, my lord," Yemin shouted back, and then gave the breakdown,

"We have a thousand men working the two hundred and fifty pits in two-man teams, both day and night. all day long."

'Hmmm, that's fifty kilograms per shift per team. Not bad,' Alexander gave an approving nod at the speed, understanding this might be close to their maximum limit.

Yemin was still saying, "We have another fifty men crushing the gypsum. But they don't work here, my lord. They work at the mines where the gypsum is mined and we directly bring the crushed product along with our everyday supplies like food and drinks."

"And because the two powders look the same, even the mixers don't know what they are mixing. They think it is the same powder, and are told that to make the cement, the raw powders need to be thoroughly and finely mixed, like kneading a dough," Yemir had a crafty tone to his voice.

"Smart," Alexander had not ordered this and was impressed by the man's cautiousness.

"Thank you, my lord," Yemin bowed with a light smile, and afterward continued,

"And the rest are for doing all the miscellaneous work. They do everything from driving the carts to unloading the carts to filling the pits to mixing the powder to everything you can around you sire." Yemin finished by swinging his right arm wildly to draw the Pasha's attention to his surrounding.

And thus Alexander, urged by his subordinate, once again scanned his surroundings to see all the various hectic activities taking place around him.

Some workers were emptying the pits by scooping up the finely ground powder to then carry it into the warehouse, some were loading the finished Portland cement onto carts to deliver them to various places, well only two places for now, either to Diaogosis to finish his house construction or to Uzak to make his roads, and some were there for miscellaneous tasks like feeding the horses, serving meals for the men and doing other odd jobs like cleaning and various errands.

"Master here," At last at the entrance of the warehouse, Yemin gestured for Alexander to enter before him, though it was largely unnecessary.

For the previously used grain silo's huge door was fully ajar and people flowed in and out of the structure like lines of ants, all either carrying the white powder or carrying the empty bucket that used to carry the white powder.

Surprisingly Alexander's arrival did not cause too much upheaval even at the mouth of the warehouse.

This was because, one- he did not want to cause any and kept his identity secret, and two, which was the more important one- because none of the workers here really knew Alexander.

They of course knew who he was, but only by reputation, i.e- they had heard of him but never seen him.

And with their own boss having armed escorts and many people like Diaogosis coming to him for more cement, who had their own entourages, Alexander's small group of bodyguards did not attract much attention.

Alexander glanced inside the huge two-story high room and found it to have no windows, which was perfectly normal given grain used to be stored there.

But now, this supposedly dark, damp was completely transformed as its doors let in huge amounts of golden sunlight while the insides were too lit by massive torches and brasiers.

And the reason for that was at the center of the room a very curious action was going on.

He could see hundreds, if not thousands of barrels being rolled around on the ground, being kicked and shoved by what Alexander estimated to be around a hundred people.

"Just as you instructed lord Pasha, those barrels are first filled with gypsum of the appropriate amount and then a premeasured amount of the freshly ground clinkers are added. After that the barrels are sealed and rolled by hand...or feet for a few minutes, thus properly mixing the mixture." Yemin explained the entire act.

"Then the barrels are then emptied and the powders are stored there," He finished by then pointing to the huge mountains of cement near the walls of the warehouse, which were constantly being nibbled at by workers carrying large buckets and then loading them into waiting carts.

"Hmmm," Alexander formed a tiny scowl as he observed this highly labor-intensive, but very inefficient process.

Even though it was Alexander himself who had designed this process, on seeing it firsthand, he was beginning to understand that perhaps this was not the best method.

'Isn't there a better way?' He then asked himself, wanting to speed up the mixing process.