

The Legend of the Aztec Origin

The Mexica/ Aztec people's place of origin is known as the land of Aztlan; a mythical place in the north meaning *Land of the White Heron*. Huitzilopochtli commanded their senior priest Tenoch, the leader for the people of Aztlan, to go on a journey to find their promised land. Huitzilopochtli would give him a sign as an eagle perched on top of a cactus devouring a serpent as the exact location where they should build their new capital. From this city they would found a mighty nation and as long as they kept their covenant with him, and would be allowed to conquer and rule the entire world.

The Mexica/ Aztecs were a poor, ragged people who surviving on vermin, snakes, and stolen food. They were hated and rejected by all the surrounding inhabitants of the Valley of Mexico, for their barbarous and uncultured habits. They were a small, nomadic, tribal peoples living on the margins of civilized Mesoamerica.

In the 12th century they embarked on a period of wandering for 165 years (a pilgrimage to the south in search of the promised land according to the myth) and eventually settled in the central basin of México.

According to the myth, when Tenoch saw an island in the Lake Texcoco, they saw an eagle perched on a cactus full of its fruits (*nochtli*). Tenoch announced that this was the place given to them by Huitzilopochtli, and it became known as Tenochtitlan, meaning "The Place of the Prickly Pear Cactus" and "The City of Tenoch".

The basin was a very inhospitable, unstable place because it was in the middle of a lake, surrounded by inhospitable swamps and infested with snakes and grasshoppers. But it became their capital city and in the center was built the Templo Mayor; a shrine for both the god of the sun Huitzilopochtli and the god of the rain Tlaloc. Here captive warriors were sacrificed so that their blood would nourish the sun, and enable it to prevail in its daily struggle to banish the forces of darkness and night. During sacrifices, prisoners and captives were thrown from the temple's summit down the stairs to the bottom where there's a , re-enacting the victory of Huitzilopochtli over Coyoxauhqui.