



Legend of Tenochtitlán

Art of Mexico

Rebecca Hinson

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Dedicated to my friend Luis Cañedo
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The Mexica people founded the city of Tenochtitlán on a small island in Lake Texcoco, where it grew to be the largest and most powerful city of Mesoamerica. The history of the city is linked to legendary gods and goddesses.



At the beginning of time, Coatlicue,
mother of the gods,



gave birth to her firstborn daughter, Coyolxauhqui (above), and 400 brother gods. Coatlicue's children scorned their mother when she became pregnant from a tuft of feathers. They plotted to kill her. Within her womb, her unborn child, Huitzilopochtli, comforted her.



After Coatlicue's children cut off her head, Huitzilopochtli, god of sun and war, sprang from his mother's body. With his lightning spear, the sun god butchered his half-sister, Coyolxauhqui.



He tossed her head up into the sky, where it became the moon. Huitzilopochtli thought his mother's spirit might be comforted to see her eldest daughter every night.



The sun god next butchered his half-brothers. He tossed their heads up into the sky, where they became the stars. Now that Huitzilopochtli had avenged his mother's death, he descended to earth, where mortals sought his help.



Huitzilopochtli answered the cries of seven human tribes, which came from an island paradise called Aztlan. Driven out by the elites of Aztlan, the tribes were homeless. The sun god promised them a new home with abundant sunlight, water, and fertile land for growing corn.



Huitzilopochtli first led the tribes to Chicomoztoc, where he asked his sister Malinalxochitl, goddess of snakes, to give them shelter. The goddess welcomed her brother and his tribes to the seven caves, which she shared with her people.



The god, goddess, and their people all lived together in harmony until lightning struck a tree nearby, splitting it down the middle. Huitzilopochtli took it as a sign that he should choose the good people to go with him and leave the bad behind. After Malinalxochitl fell asleep, he and his chosen people slipped away quietly. When the goddess of snakes awoke abandoned by her brother, she vowed that her next born would avenge Huitzilopochtli's trickery.



Malinalxochitl gave birth to Copil. After Copil grew up, he challenged his uncle to battle. After slaying Copil, Huitzilopochtli hurled his nephew's heart



onto a rock in the middle of Lake Texcoco. To honor Copil, he foretold that the tribes would some day settle at that exact spot.