

The birth of Mexico

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Where did the founders of *Tenochtitlan* come from? Over what hills and dales did they wander and for how long before building their amazing city? After many centuries we still don't know. Fables and myths prevail over history. But a cherished lie that survives long enough ends up being considered true. Thus the mythology of *Tenochtitlan* has become its history,

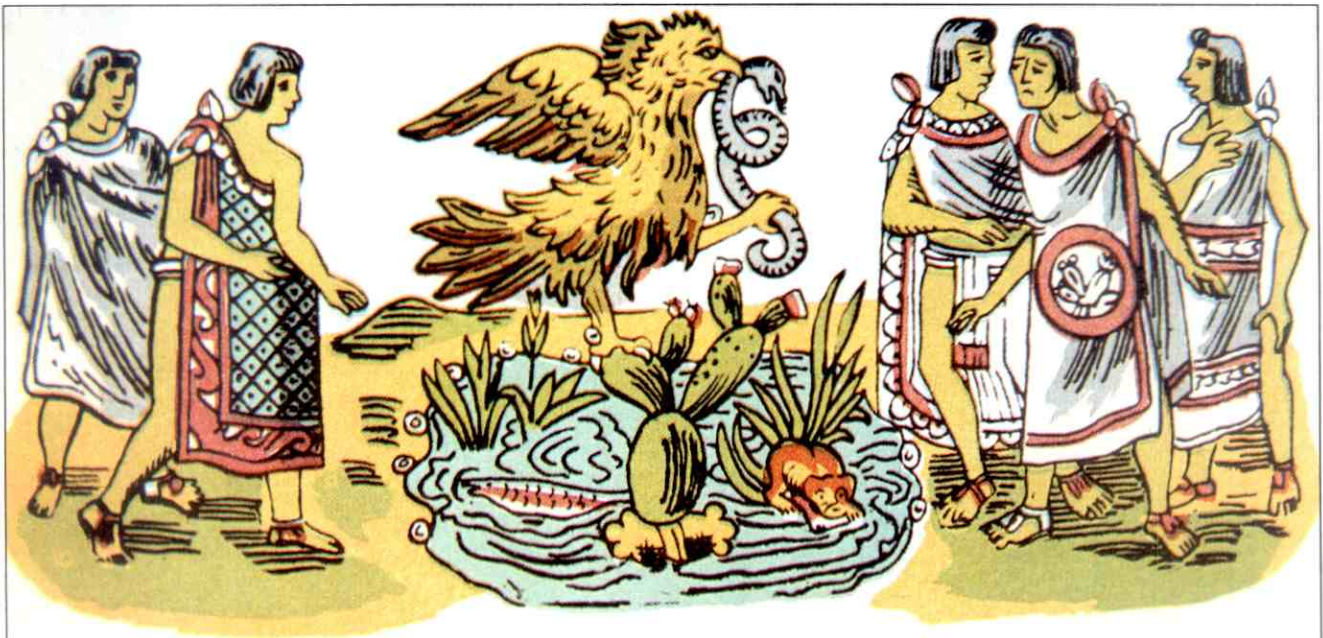
and the one is as beautiful as the other.

They came, so the story says, from *Aztlán*, the land of herons. But where is that, exactly? A thousand or ten thousand kilometers from the spot the numens chose for the people of Tenoch, their leader? How long had they been wandering? A hundred, two hundred years? No one can know. The only certainty is that they arrived. They never lost their direction. They

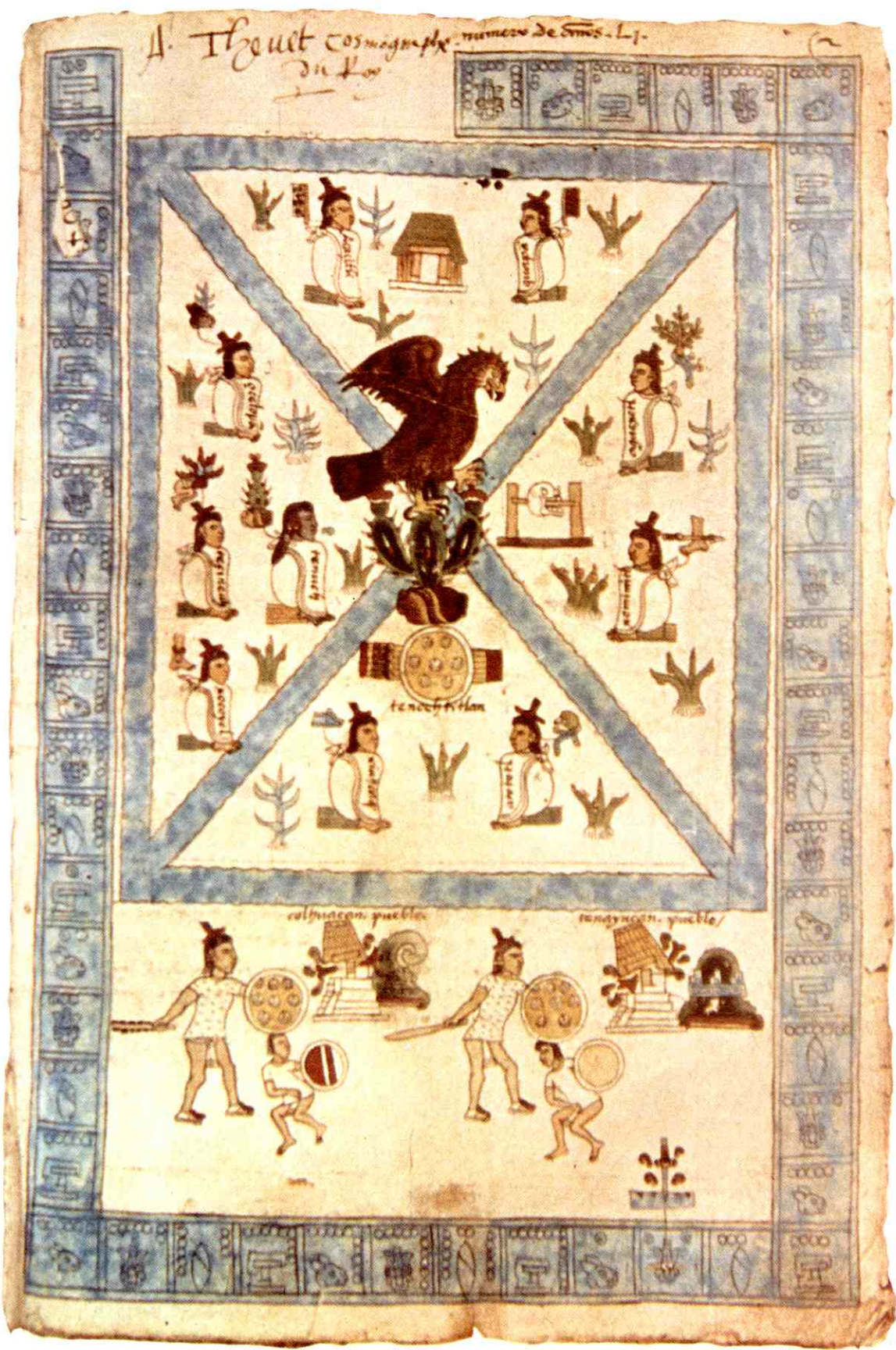
never gave up. And if sometimes they hesitated, despaired of the way they were taking, a small bird told them in its own language: *Tihuí, tihuí*, which they interpreted as meaning: *ahead, ahead*. That's how old the idea and the desire for progress and reform is in the Mexican people.

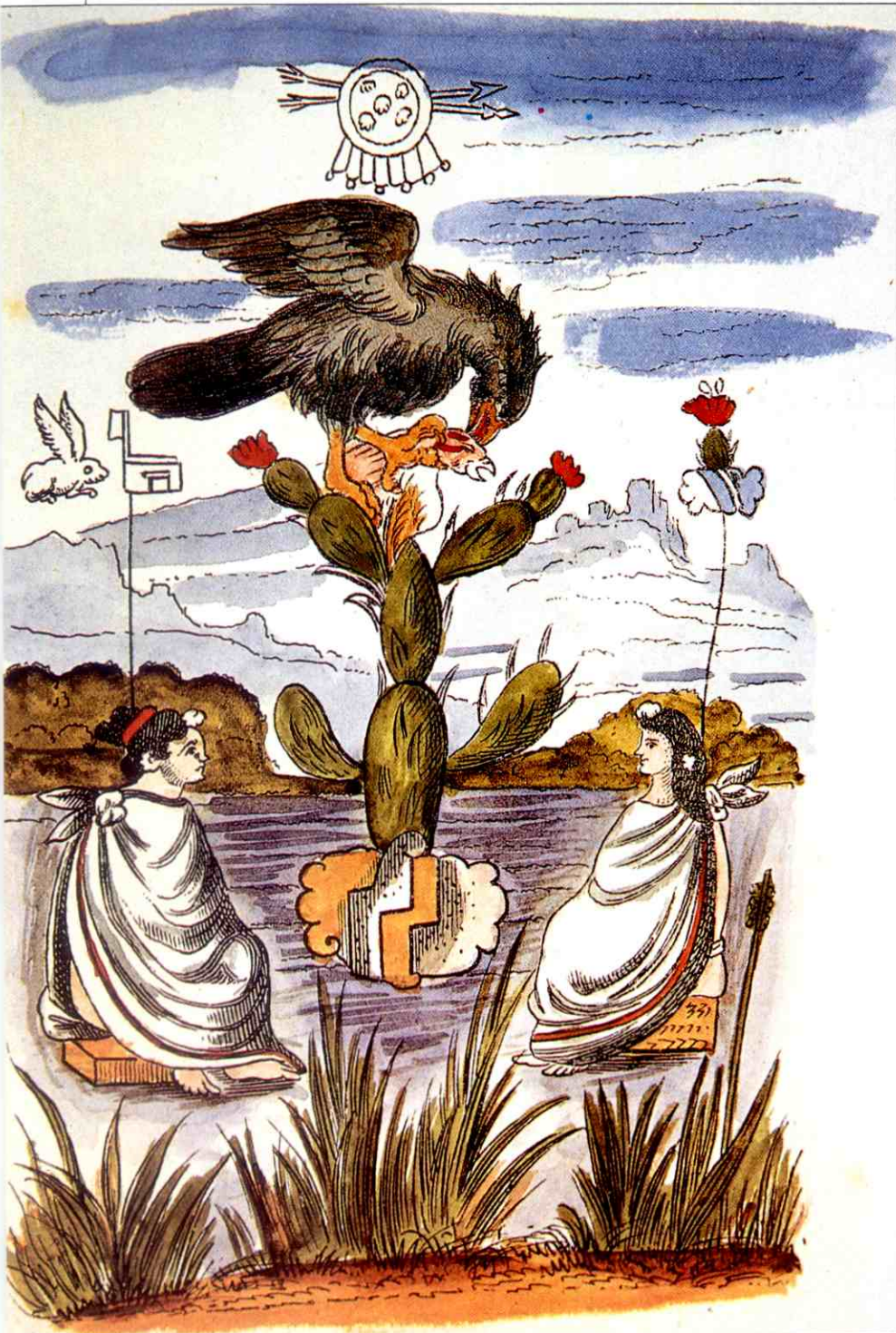
Everything appears mysterious, providential, and marvelous in this story, fable, legend, myth. One says

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They came from *Aztlán*.





A lake, in the lake a rock, a prickly pear,
and an eagle devouring a snake.

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Tenochtitlan, and one immediately sees a people, a world that is more like a vision, a fantasy or illusion, a confusion of all the senses.

The first thing that one asks is why the tribe, the people, chose a land that was as clearly barren and alien to life as the place in which they settled and made their capital.

Cornelio de Paw even threw this in our faces –to have chosen such a site for our dwelling place. How could we have raised a city on the mud and the water, among insects and reptiles. Only to beings who merely appeared to be human could such an absurdity have occurred. A lake, in the lake a rock, on the rock a prickly pear cactus, on the prickly pear an eagle devouring a snake. This is what their gods had said, this was to be the site for *Tenochtitlan*. And until they found this, they were to keep on wandering.

Only people unlike any previously known could have pulled off such an exploit, such an enormous undertaking.

The eagle represents flight, wings, the open sky; the snake represents the earth, the immediate concrete reality they had to overcome. And the eternally alternating concepts of heaven and earth led the Mexica nation to create a striking culture which is still not completely explained or understood. There are still veils hiding the Mexico that we unceasingly seek but do not find.

Not ages ago. Here and now. Did they find here a very small plant which they took home and cherished, lavishing attention on it until it became the corn plant, the grain that was their staff of life and still is? Corn was what the builders of *Tenochtitlan* ate: white corn and yellow corn: so says the *Popol Vuh*.

A mystery. A mythology. That is the history of *Tenochtitlan*, which in time became the capital city of the Valley of Anáhuac 🌽