



of the volcano, so the belief in Itzel Binak goes back to preconquest times. Atitecos refer to a preconquest eruption (story 14), and MCBRYDE (1933: 67) mentions that he found a source (XIMÉNEZ) stating that there was such an eruption sometime during the 15th century. It was around this time that the ancient Tzutujil capital was built, but the archaeology of the area around Lake Atitlán has not yet given any indication that the people moved there due to a volcanic eruption (see LOTHROP 1933).

The Midwest Highland region is composed of high, fertile valleys interspersed with pine and oak-covered plateaus. To the south lie subtropical foothills covered with cypress which comprise an intermediate piedmont area between the highland and flat tropical coastal plain. Lake Atitlán, a large oval shaped body of water with an average diameter of 15 miles, dominates the Midwest Highland area. It is generally accepted that this lake was formed as a result of the collapse of a volcanic crater (MCBRYDE 1933: 66-67). The caldera formed and filled up with water. Folk history, however, attributes the origin of the lake to an inexhaustible jug (story 16) and to the piercing of a sealed basin (story 15).

MCBRYDE reports that in recent years the level of Lake Atitlán has fluctuated, and that it was much lower in earlier times (1947: 132). Archaeological pieces from Chutinamit have also been recovered from land now submerged so just before the Conquest, when the ancient capital was occupied,