

## A MAPUCHE EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI LEGEND



Through their oral history, the indigenous Mapuche people of Chile passed down stories and legends that describe their cosmology, encompassing social, moral and spiritual beliefs and teachings about the natural world. The great battle between Xeg-Xeg filu (also called Trengteng or Ten Ten vilu) and Kai-Kai filu (also called Caicai or Caycay vilu), the warring serpents of land and sea, explains how the Chilean archipelago was formed.

Xeg-Xeg controls the domains of earth and volcanoes, and is responsible for earthquakes. Xeg-Xeg, friendlier to humans, helped the people move to high ground to escape the tsunami caused by Kaykay, who rules the ocean as a marine serpent, half fish, half snake. The legend says that Kaykay yelled “Kai-kai” and in that moment, the ocean rose, taking all living beings in its path. Xeg-Xeg raised the mountains and the people fled to high ground. Some were drowned, and these turned into marine life, while others survived to pass on the legend. Last names with marine roots trace genealogies back to this time.

In 1674, Diego de Rosales, a Spanish Jesuit missionary and historian, documented the legend and noted that there are many different sacred mountains called Tenten by the Mapuche. “And they are on watch,” he wrote, “ready should there be another flood, to withdraw there to escape the danger.”



Mapuche Machis, the wisdom-bearers, spiritual advisors or protectors, or shaman, photographed January 1, 1903 by Carlos Brandt. [wiki commons](#)

The tops of the Tenten mountains or hills, according to machi, or shamans, were flattened by the heavy weight of the large number of people and animals living on them to escape the legendary flood, or tsunami. Platforms and mounds were built there for ritual purpose. ■

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## **References**

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