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## Introduction

### RECOVERING THE NAHUATL PASSION PLAY

This book tells the story of, and the story told by, six Passion play manuscripts from colonial Mexico. Scripted in the Nahuatl language, a lingua franca of both the Aztec Empire and the viceroyalty of New Spain, the plays enact events in Jesus Christ's life leading up to Easter, though no play stages his resurrection. Instead, they track his movements, and those of his friends and enemies, from Palm Sunday through to his death on the cross. They close either while the actor still hangs on the cross or once he is taken down and carried away. Five plays are complete; of the sixth, about two-fifths of the original text survives.

The story of Jesus's self-sacrifice and his triumph over death is Christianity's core mythos, but people of different times and places construe it in different ways. The formal evangelization program that transferred this story to Mexico began in 1524, only three years after the twin island cities Tlatelolco and Tenochtitlan fell to the Indigenous-Spanish alliance that ended Mexica imperial rule. Indigenous people, whether allies or enemies of the Spaniards, soon faced the political necessity of conforming—at least to a minimal and publicly observable extent—to an alien faith entrenched in Western European society and culture of the later medieval and early Renaissance eras. In this faith, Jesus's bodily suffering had become a focus for fervent devotion, and this fixation formed part of what Indigenous Mexicans encountered as they learned about Christianity.

Nahuas and other Indigenous people confronted these new stories with the baggage not of European religious trends and disputes but of their own long history, as they simultaneously made the social, political, and economic accommodations necessitated by colonial rule. Indigenous Passion performances arose as one outcome of these confrontations and accommodations and would turn out to be a particularly fraught one in the eighteenth century. Church leaders, who never deigned to find Indigenous Christian practice fully acceptable, cast their opprobrium first on Passion plays performed in Nahuatl and then, as well, on Spanish plays that mimicked them but lacked even the justification that had kept Nahuatl Christian theater alive until then: the notion that the ever-benighted Indigenous population needed such visible models to ensure even minimal compliance with the Church. These Spanish plays drew the attention of the Mexican Inquisition's office in Chalco, southeast of Mexico City. Inquisitors investigated. The four Spanish scripts they collected and the reports they wrote, all housed in the Inquisition branch (volume 1072, file 10) at the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City, have assisted in my own exploration here.

Pressured to Christianize, Indigenous people acquired new practices and beliefs, replaced some, and altered or retained others, hiding them when necessary;<sup>1</sup> colonial religion cannot be parceled into Christian and pre-Columbian components. The story of Jesus Christ was Indigenized throughout Mesoamerica, assimilated especially to the powerful and life-giving role of the sun in Indigenous mythos and to calendrical rituals of world or seasonal renewal. Today, many communities, whether they still speak Indigenous languages or have shifted to Spanish at some point in their history, act out or otherwise commemorate Passion-related events during the Lenten and Holy Week seasons. A Jesus identity has been claimed, at times, not just by actors but by leaders of Indigenous resistance movements.<sup>2</sup> While I include occasional examples, to attempt to survey such practices and appropriations either historically or ethnographically is beyond the scope of this book. However, by detailing what members of one major language group were doing with this story during the eighteenth, and likely the seventeenth, centuries, near the heart of Spain's empire, I provide both a portrait of one of the more elaborate Indigenous Passion adaptations and a basis for comparison across space and time.

I have been working with Nahuatl Christian texts since 1982 and never cease to find in them beautiful, creative expressions of their subject material, accommodated to Nahuatl language and often to Nahua cultural conventions and colonial circumstances. At the same time, these texts are artifacts of colonialism, of the process by which Christian evangelizers colonized the Nahuatl language itself, obliging its words to take on meanings and associations they did not previously have and inventing new words as necessary. Even though this process had limited

success, Christianized usages percolated through the language and became part of everyday speech. William F. Hanks (2010), describing the impact of evangelization on the Yucatec Maya language, labels this a process of *reducción*, analogous to the way Indigenous communities were “reduced”: that is, obliged to consolidate their dispersed members and relocate to places that would facilitate colonial oversight. Doctrinal formulas, internalized through rote memorization and repetition, spread beyond church-related usage. For example, petitions to colonial officials used terms that echoed the Passion of Christ or a penitent sinner’s appeal for mercy (114, 316).

Nahuas learned to speak and write in the “reduced” Nahuatl that emerged from the unequal and complicated relationship between evangelizing friars and their Indigenous students and coauthors.<sup>3</sup> But mastery of this language contributed not only to mere survival under colonial rulers who insisted upon the acceptance of Christianity. Literature that Nahuas authored or coauthored, circulated, and recopied for their own uses supported their *survivance*—their active, engaged commitment to maintaining communal identity in the face of European domination.<sup>4</sup> For them, survivance strategies included making Christian stories and festivals their own, selecting and altering them, and even projecting them into their past. Theater became a means, in Jonathan Truitt’s (2018, 109–110) words, to “own the tools” that connected Nahuas most closely and personally with the Catholic sacred as they conceived it. The fact that their most inventive techniques for the transculturation of Christianity met regularly with censorship and denigration is one of the many tragedies of colonial rule.

By devoting a book to these six Passion play manuscripts, I aim to place the beautifully written and creatively staged Nahuatl Passion play in front of many audiences that did not witness these performances in their own time and place. In the ongoing, 900-year history of Passion plays, the way Indigenous Mexicans adapted and enacted the story—working from the violent, patriarchal, and anti-Jewish material that was fed to them—merits attention from historical, anthropological, and artistic perspectives. Indeed, coming as it does from a colonized people, passed along and performed by Native Americans in their own language, this devotional practice carries a historical and global relevance beyond that of any single European tradition. It recontextualizes the Gospel accounts, and the accretions medieval Europeans layered upon them, within the religious practice of Indigenous Mexicans living, precariously, under Spanish rule.

Nahuas chose to enact this play; it was not forced on them. With it they transformed their communities into temporary Jerusalems, their townspeople not just into Christ, Mary, and other saintly figures but into the villains of the piece: Jews and Romans who commit violence and leave death in their wake. While the show demonstrated compliance with the evangelization project Spain deployed to justify

its destructive imperial enterprise—declaring, in effect, “look what good Christians we are”—it also blew an emotional whirlwind across its actors and audience, a dis-equilibrating ordeal of physical abuse and gory suffering, vicious hatred and transcendent love, incompetent leadership and unfaithful friends, heavenly visitations and vile mockeries, laid out across a Palm Sunday afternoon. Actors layered foreign identities onto their bodies in a manner not alien to the way, in pre-Columbian rituals, people were turned into localized embodiments of gods by being dressed in their regalia and then sometimes dispatched through ritualized killing.<sup>5</sup> Jesus dies in the play—but the actor went home alive, albeit bruised and bloodied. Nevertheless, the play was a cathartic experience, perhaps, for audience and actors and a ritual of chaotic destruction and cleansing renewal, set at the dawn of spring. The plays lay a strong Indigenous claim to Christianity’s core narrative. Once they met attempts at suppression, they shifted even more from an expression of compliance into an assertion of ownership.

While this volume is aimed at readers of English interested in Indigenous or colonial Mexico, the history and anthropology of Christianity, comparative religion, Native American literature, or the history of theater, a companion website, *Passion Plays of Eighteenth-Century Mexico* ([passionplaysofeighteenthcenturymexico.omeka.net](http://passionplaysofeighteenthcenturymexico.omeka.net)), presents the six texts in paleographic and standardized Nahuatl transcriptions as well as English translations. The four Passion plays in Spanish collected by the Mexican Inquisition are presented on the website, translated into English by my colleague Daniel O. Mosquera. I cite these plays using their folio number in the Inquisition file; readers who wish to explore these plays further can consult Mosquera’s editions directly. In addition, we are posting the reports and other documents from the Inquisition case and some related documents on the suppression of Indigenous popular theater, which have never been published in English.<sup>6</sup> Nadia Marín-Guadarrama has assisted with this transcription and translation work. Rebecca Dufendach designed and maintains the website. This digital project provides a textual archive that complements this book, and I encourage readers to also explore the original sources housed there. We continue to add to and update this website.

The digital project is also directed in part to contemporary speakers of Nahuatl, through standardized transcriptions and also accompanying essays composed in Huastecan Nahuatl by Nahua anthropologist and language teacher Abelardo de la Cruz de la Cruz. We aim to make the texts accessible to contemporary Nahuatl speakers who may wish to read the work of their forebears. To that end, my standardized transcriptions on the website employ the “enriched traditional” or “ACK” (after the eminent Nahuatl linguists J. Richard Andrews, R. Joe Campbell, and Frances Karttunen) orthography promoted by John Sullivan, Justyna Olko, and their Nahua collaborators through publications of the Zacatecas Institute for

Education and Ethnographic Research (IDIEZ) at the University of Zacatecas, Mexico, and the Revitalizing Endangered Languages Project at the University of Warsaw (see Olko and Sullivan 2014).

This transcription system works within the conventions of colonial written Nahuatl—in the interest of making the vast corpus of colonial documents more accessible to contemporary Nahuas—but regularizes spelling and also shows glottal stops (as the letter “h”), which most colonial writers did not include in their work. I use the standardized orthography in this book when I include excerpts from the Passion plays and from other Nahuatl texts (unless otherwise stated), regularizing the colonial writers’ variable manners of inscription. I also add a glottal stop to Spanish loanwords that end in a vowel to reflect how they were adapted into Nahuatl—for example, *mesah* for *mesa* ‘table’ and *coronah* for *corona* ‘crown.’ Anyone interested in orthographic or dialectal variation among the plays can consult the paleographic transcriptions on the website.

#### FROM ONE PLAY TO SIX

This study draws on six Nahuatl scripts, but I have been referring to “the” Nahuatl Passion play. Are there six plays or one? Both. All six derive from one original Nahuatl composition. Whether this was adapted from a Spanish play or first composed in Nahuatl based on one or more narrative sources in Spanish, Latin, or Nahuatl I cannot say for sure, though it seems most likely that some as-yet-unidentified Spanish-language source was the direct or indirect model for the bulk of the text. This could have been a narrative, like the Spanish text on which the Nahuatl play *The Destruction of Jerusalem* was based, or a theatrical piece, like the one that was adapted—rather freely—for the play *Holy Wednesday* (Burkhart 2010, 75–77; Burkhart 1996). No Nahuatl source currently known to me is sufficiently cognate with the plays to be their direct model—with the exception of the farewell scene between Christ and Mary, for which I have identified a sixteenth-century predecessor. As I propose in chapter 3, this non-biblical scene could have been added to the Nahuatl play after its original composition.

This model Passion play could have come from the busy scriptorium at the Indigenous College of Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco, a center of Nahuatl-Christian text production from its founding in 1536 through the first decades of the seventeenth century. In 1606, the Franciscan friar Juan Bautista Viseo (1606, prologue) reported that he and his Tlatelolca colleague Agustín de la Fuente had three volumes of plays prepared for publication. These books never reached the press: ecclesiastical suspicion of the genre kept Nahuatl plays from ever being printed during the colonial era. The friar categorizes these volumes as dealing, respectively, with penitence, the

Articles of the Faith, and parables of the Gospels. There is no obvious place here for a full-scale Passion play, but the prolific drama production is notable nonetheless.

A documentable case of dissemination from Tlatelolco can be seen in an Epiphany play composed there for fray Juan Bautista in the early seventeenth century—or so it appears, from an inscription to that friar on the play manuscript that Francisco del Paso y Troncoso published in 1902; the manuscript's present-day whereabouts are unknown (Paso y Troncoso 1902; Horcasitas 1974, 281–327). In 1724 a Nahua man named Carlos de San Juan was paid to make a new copy of a cognate play, at the behest of local dignitaries, in the town of Metepec, 63 kilometers from Mexico City in what is now the State of México (Sell and Burkhart 2009, 122–123; Burkhart, de la Cruz, and Sullivan 2017, 93). Metepec's play had lost any recorded connection to its metropolitan model—yet over a hundred years later, it retained nearly identical speaking parts, as well as what by 1724 was an archaic register of Nahuatl.

The model Passion play could have followed this pattern, or it may have been written later in the seventeenth century or back in the sixteenth. The variations among the extant scripts suggest that copies had been circulating for some time before these versions were written down. Performance may not have been continuous: the play could have been revived at some point between its original composition and the eighteenth century. Whatever the case, the text moved geographically from a center of Nahua scholarship and education to hinterland communities. And it moved through time to an era when that florescence of scholarship had receded into the past and Indigenous people had, overall, declined even further in status under colonial rule. In the second half of the seventeenth century, Indigenous communities began to recover somewhat from the horrific demographic collapse caused by the first century of Spanish colonialism. However, they had grown increasingly impoverished. By the mid-eighteenth century, an “overwhelming majority” of Indigenous Mexicans subsisted in difficult economic straits (Sousa 2017, 305). Jesus Christ's afflictions, anti-elite messaging, and identification with the poor might have resonated more powerfully with these new audiences than with the educated noblemen who wrote, or co-wrote with a priest, the model play.

Like all colonial Nahuatl plays, the Passion scripts retain the grammar of early colonial Nahuatl (or Stage Two Nahuatl, in Karttunen and James Lockhart's 1976 classification). The most striking feature preserved in this archaic register is that Spanish loanwords are limited and are restricted to nouns: cross, Passion, crown, tunic, saint, and so on. The sole exceptions occur in the stage directions for one of the plays, where a borrowed verb (*pasear*oa, from *pasear* ‘to stroll’) and a borrowed conjunction (*hastah* ‘until’) each appear two times.<sup>7</sup> Stage directions, overall, use more noun loans as well; for example, the apostles are *apóstoles*, rather than Jesus's students (*itlamachtihuan*), only in stage directions. But whether the model

play was recently written, rediscovered, or in continuous transmission, the existing scripts speak to Indigenous practice before and around the mid-eighteenth century and are valuable as records of that era.

The six plays are, in some places, strikingly consistent and thus likely preserve the wording of their original model. Notable examples include two of the longest speeches: Judas's deliberative soliloquy and Christ's address to his students after the Last Supper. This consistency denotes a certain reverence for these extended speeches as worthy of nearly exact reproduction through time and space—even the words of traitorous Judas. But some shorter scenes too are remarkably consistent. Elsewhere, however, many variations in the spoken dialogue, characters, and staging make each of the six manuscripts a unique production. As new copies of the plays were commissioned, their writers clearly felt free to introduce changes. They add scenes and speeches based on other sources, streamline some material, expand on other material, and move scenes from one place to another within the story. They change the names of speakers and add or remove characters. They make different suggestions regarding props, costumes, and sets. They call for different music. They also respond to criticisms of the performance by, for example, removing or minimizing the mimicked consecration of the bread and wine in the Last Supper scene.

Hence, while we lack the original, model play, we have a set of individual versions that add up to a much larger whole. While we might consider the author(s) of the model play the Nahuatl Passion's actual *playwright(s)*, distinguishing them from later redactors whom I will refer to as *scriptwriters*, the latter group includes creative adaptors who were not mere copyists or who dictated their innovations to copyists. We can see hundreds of decisions meant to improve upon the material handed down by earlier redactors. Plays that are similar in some scenes can be quite distinct in others, but we can, to a limited extent, trace subgroups within the small corpus. Innovations made in one version may appear in others—sometimes so similar as to indicate the copying of a written text, sometimes an approximation that may have been inspired by attendance at another community's performance. In one case, a redactor combined into one play two separate versions circulating in his local district while adding additional scenes and his own touches. Although we cannot precisely reconstruct the model play, we can get a pretty good idea of its content and compare the different changes made to it.

Undoubtedly, many other versions of the play once circulated in the literary underground of Nahuatl literacy, kept and treasured, borrowed and copied, pawned and stolen,<sup>8</sup> bought and sold,<sup>9</sup> lost to time and wear. From the Inquisition case we know that now-lost Nahuatl Passions were performed in Xochitlán and Tepoztlán, now in the state of Morelos; in Huejotzingo, Puebla; and in Amecameca, in the State of México.<sup>10</sup> Some plays remain guarded in local archives and are not,



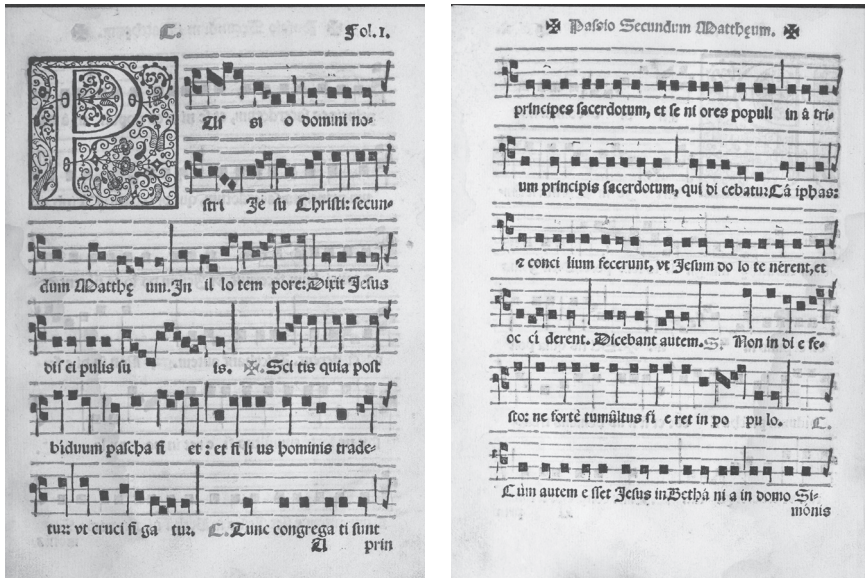
or not yet, available to academics; I know of one such case in the State of México.<sup>11</sup> Given the history of suppression and confiscation, one can hardly blame their keepers for their reticence. But these six provide ample fodder for the present study, which can then provide context for any additional Nahuatl Passions that reach a wider audience.

One of the six scripts was revealed in the course of the Tlaxcalan anthropologist Luis Reyes García's explorations of local archives in his home state. This is the incomplete play, from San Simón Tlatlahquitepec, Tlaxcala, published by Reyes García's student Raul Macuil Martínez in 2010 and, with Macuil Martínez's collaboration, by Barry D. Sell and me in 2009. The play is held in the Archivo de la Fiscalía, which allowed photographs to be made of the manuscript; however, it is not currently accessible to outside scholars. Its twelve surviving folios preserve the action of the play from a short time after Jesus's arrival in Jerusalem to just after his flagellation. The document hunt also turned up two small Passion fragments, one leaf of a play and two leaves of Christ's speeches, from another Tlaxcala community, Atlihuetzia, which Macuil Martínez published in 2016.<sup>12</sup> As small as these are, they provide more evidence of the original play's spread and variations.

The other five Passion play manuscripts, all complete, bear witness to processes of suppression and loss that moved Nahuatl texts from communities to outsiders and eventually, in some cases, to public collections. One was acquired by Daniel Garrison Brinton (1837–1899), an American surgeon who dabbled in the literatures of Native America. The script ended up, with his other papers, at the University of Pennsylvania; I will refer to it, for convenience, as the Penn Passion play (or simply “Penn” or “the Penn play”).

This play, forty-five leaves in length, lacks any date or indication of its place of origin. Its copyist gave it this title in Spanish and Latin, foreshadowing some of the early events in the play: “The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ from when his majesty bade farewell to his most holy mother together with his apostles. As soon as he bade farewell, he left, bringing his disciples, for the city of Jerusalem, where they received him and they sang to him the *Hosanna son of David, blessed, who comes in the name of the lord, Hosanna in the highest*” (italicized text in Latin).<sup>13</sup> A list of dramatis personae follows, with a Spanish heading: “Those who go out [on stage] in the Passion are these.”<sup>14</sup> This is the only such list a copyist included in his script.

Then, after Christ and Mary each take one turn at speech, the writer copied in the opening lines of a published set of chants derived from the Gospel of Matthew. The source is the Franciscan friar Juan Navarro's *Liber in quo quatuor passiones Christi Domini continentur*, printed at the order's Tlatelolco establishment in 1604 and thus easily available to the friars and the Native scholars (Carreño n.d.). Navarro presents a plainsong Passion account, with Latin text and musical notation, using



**Figure 0.1.** The beginning of the Passion According to Saint Matthew, in Juan Navarro, *Liber in quo quatuor passiones Christi Domini continentur* (Mexico City, 1604), folios 1r and 1v. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, Providence, RI.

excerpts from, in turn, each of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).<sup>15</sup> The excerpt here in the Penn play corresponds to Matthew 26:1–5. The scriptwriter reproduces Navarro’s words just as they appear in his book—apart from some misspellings of the Latin and one dropped phrase—and including the abbreviations “s” and “c” in red ink, indicating solo and chorus parts (Navarro 1604, 1r–1v; Penn Passion 1v–2r; see figures 0.1 and 0.2).

Having paused for this Latin interruption, the scriptwriter then restarts the Nahuatl play, replacing the initial two speeches with more expanded versions and continuing through Jesus’s farewell to his mother, as prefaced by the initial title. It is not until the fourth leaf of the script that the passage from Matthew is reflected in the play. The “Hosanna” scene invoked in the title, from Matthew 21:9 and not part of Navarro’s text, comes up a little later. The Spanish and Latin material frames and legitimates the play for observers who could not, or would not bother to, read the Nahuatl content.

Another play found its way to Princeton University, and I will call it the Princeton Passion play. The man who wrote out its fifty leaves gave it a similarly detailed heading, but in Nahuatl and Latin: “Here begins the precious and revered Passion of our lord Jesus Christ, the way he died for our sake, us sinners, as he came to save us. Here



He considers the graveyard settings appropriate because they are not as profane (*profanos*) as the public plazas or as respectable (*respectables*) as the church buildings.<sup>18</sup> This middle ground between the profane and the sacred was home to the actors' deceased relations, silent spectators at a show that itself ended in the deaths of Jesus and the two thieves.

Cemeteries witnessed other events as well. Until Archbishop Francisco Antonio Lorenzana banned these practices in 1769, religious confraternities conducted many of their meetings and ceremonies, often performed in memory of deceased members, in cemeteries (Larkin 2010, 151). Nahuas avidly joined these voluntary sodalities after the Franciscans introduced them, using them to organize both devotional and charitable acts (Webster 1997a, 1998; Richie 2011; Truitt 2018, chapter 4; Dierksmeier 2020). Many of these groups had Holy Week affiliations.

Someone other than the copyist of the script added a list of *dramatis personae* inside the front and back of the Princeton text's vellum cover. Other notes in what appears to be the same hand give us the names of one Señor don Bartolomé and one Gregorio Eusebio, the latter identified as the choirmaster (*m[aest]ro de capilla*), plus the date 1750. Given his religious leadership office, Gregorio Eusebio may have had charge of the performance, at least for that year. His name, consisting of two Spanish first names and no preceding "don," suggests he was of non-noble rank, though he could potentially have become a "don" if he continued to occupy high-profile public roles.<sup>19</sup> As for don Bartolomé, he was probably a local Nahua dignitary involved with the production, perhaps a leader of a religious confraternity or a member of the community's governing board. Below his name is written "dimas" in smaller letters. Dimas (also spelled Dismas) is the name assigned to the good thief crucified alongside Jesus (James 1924, 103–104). This character is simply *boen ladro* (for *buen ladrón* 'good thief') in the play itself, but this later annotator knew the name Dimas. Its association with don Bartolomé might indicate that this gentleman took the good thief's role himself. It was a small role but an arduous one, as don Bartolomé would have had to undergo a feigned crucifixion, leg breaking, and death.

A much later annotation tells us that the play was once in the possession of Father Canuto Flores, a Catholic priest from Tenancingo in the State of México, who had ethnographic and archaeological interests. Among his ecclesiastical postings in his home state were Chapa de Mota, in the north, where he was installed as parish priest in 1900 (Trinidad Basurto 1901, 226); Mexicaltzingo, where he died in 1946;<sup>20</sup> and apparently Tlalnepantla, since on the manuscript's inside back cover he wrote "Property of Presbyter Canuto Flores, Tlalnepantla, State of México."<sup>21</sup> So the play may well be from Tlalnepantla, or Father Flores may have acquired it elsewhere—though most likely within the State of México, given his position of authority in a number of its communities.



We can trace the remaining three plays to the suppression campaign to be discussed in chapter 1. In response to orders from the archbishop's office in 1757, a parish priest in what is now the state of Morelos dutifully collected six Passion plays from communities under his oversight. One of the six, now in the Archivo General de la Nación, bears this note on the first of its fifty-seven leaves: "Year of 1757. Reverend Father Curate [and] Minister fray Miguel de Torres remitted these six notebooks (*cuadernos*), and they are from his jurisdiction of Jonacatepec" (or Xonacatepec, as written in his day).<sup>22</sup> For twenty-five years, this leaf had been a blank cover page. On the second leaf, an Indigenous copyist had filled the top half with Nahuatl script, recording first the date of his writing, "Today, Thursday the 11<sup>th</sup> of September of 1732," and then this précis for the play within: "Here begins the Passion that was done to our lord Jesus Christ as he entered the *altepetl* of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Here everything is shown, all the sufferings that happened to our lord Jesus Christ, by which he saved for us our life forces, our souls, we people of the world."<sup>23</sup> Below this the place name Amacuitlapilco appears twice, first on a pasted-on strip of paper reading "Del Pu[eb]lo D[e] Amacuitlapilco" and, below that, in the phrase "Amacuitlapilco De Xonacatepec," written in fray Miguel's hand. Amacuitlapilco lies just northwest of the town of Jonacatepec.<sup>24</sup>

We can match fray Miguel's handwriting on this play to the inscription "Tepaltzinco De Xonacatepec" added to the beginning of an undated 116-page<sup>25</sup> Passion play, titled simply "It will begin on Passion Sunday of Palms."<sup>26</sup> This community, now called Tepalcingo, lies 10 kilometers from Jonacatepec. This play found its way to Tulane University. It was apparently still there when Arthur E. Gropp (1933, 282) wrote his catalog of manuscripts in the Department of Middle American Research. However, at some point it was removed. The Latin American Library retains a negative photostat of the original, which, fortunately, is very legible. Fernando Horcasitas published this play (1974, 335–419), as did Sell and I (Sell and Burkhart 2009, 160–241); it also appears in English in my book *Aztecs on Stage* (Burkhart 2011, 99–144). Some content in the Tepalcingo play varies enough from the other scripts to indicate use of another narrative or dramatic source, especially in Judas's interactions with the Jewish council and the chief priests' preceding deliberations (38–46 and a brief exchange at 68–69).

A third such note in fray Miguel's hand, "Axochiapan de Xonacatepec," is squeezed in above the Latin title of another play, "Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew. In those days Jesus said to his disciples."<sup>27</sup> The original, with forty-five leaves, resides in the Archivo Histórico of the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City, as manuscript volume 464; a photocopy is housed among the Fernando Horcasitas papers at the Latin American Library at Tulane University. Horcasitas (1974, 421–423) published a brief description of the

text. Axochiapan lies 23 kilometers from Joncatepec and just 16 kilometers from Tepalcingo. This play's Latin title is taken directly from the beginning of Navarro's Saint Matthew Passion (Navarro 1604, 1r), making this the third play to authorize itself by invoking that Latin source. This play also has the date 1732, on its final leaf.

With three of the six confiscated scripts known and intact, at least in facsimile, Joncatepec's plays thus had a high survival rate, in contrast to however many other scripts were submitted to the archbishop's office—if other priests were indeed as cooperative as fray Miguel. However, if this priest had not written down the names of the towns, we would not know them. No Nahua wrote a place name on any of these scripts to claim it for his own locality or recorded his own role as reviser or copyist. The play transcends borders and localities, with scripts passing from place to place, radiating out from wherever the first version was composed and continuing to be passed along multiple lines of transmission. The Joncatepec scripts could have been imported to those communities,<sup>28</sup> and manuscripts still in local archives may have been written elsewhere.

What did “passion” mean in Nahuatl? The title or *précis* inscribed on each of the five complete plays, whether in Nahuatl or Spanish, employs the Spanish loanword *passion* or *pasion*, which comes from the Latin noun *passiō* ‘suffering,’ which, in turn, derives from the verb *pati* ‘to suffer.’ But “passion” had a standard Nahuatl equivalent, seen above where the Amacuitlapilco play promises to reveal “all the sufferings that happened to our lord Jesus Christ” and appearing throughout the scripts themselves. This word, *tlaihiyohuiliztli*, can be translated as suffering or torments or something difficult to endure (in either singular or plural senses). The term is a deverbative noun based on the transitive verb *ihiyohuia* (Andrews 1975, 228). This verb contains the noun *ihiyotl* ‘breath’ plus the transitive suffix *-huia*, which means “to use or apply (the thing denoted by the source noun stem) in relation to s.o. or s.th.” (358). The direct object prefix *tla-* denotes an unspecified thing or things. Hence *tla-ihiyohuia* means “to apply breath to something.” This has the extended sense of becoming fatigued or exhausted, a condition marked by intensified breathing.

Fray Alonso de Molina's 1571 (1992, pt. 2, 36v, 121v) dictionary defines *tla-ihyoiuia* as *padercer trabajos* ‘to suffer or endure labors or hardship’ and *tlaihiouiliztli* as *tormento, fatigo, o pena que se padece* ‘torment, fatigue, or pain that one endures.’ We get from breath to suffering to “passion”—but it is by extension, and it is more active than passive. Jesus applies his breath to things and wears himself out so much, through the hardships he undergoes, that he suffers pain and torment. The whole Passion story and each individual affliction are *tlaihiyohuiliztli*.

Molina's (1992, pt. 1, 93r) Spanish-to-Nahuatl vocabulary links three other nouns to the concept of *passion*: *cocoliztli* ‘sickness,’ *patzmiquiliztli*, and *nentlamatiliztli*. Both of these last two can be translated as “anguish,” but *patzmiquiliztli* suggests

a more graphic sensation of being pressed or squeezed (*patz-*) to death (*miquiliztli*), while *nentlamatiliztli* has more a sense of mental fretting or stewing, thinking useless thoughts, from *nen* ‘in vain’ or ‘uselessly’ and *tlamati* ‘to think’ or ‘to know things.’ Of these four choices, *tlaihiyohuiliztli* best fit the purpose.

Only three of the six plays bear dates: 1732, 1732, 1750. The Axochiapan play of 1732 borrows some of its content either from the extant, undated (but pre-1757) play from nearby Tepalcingo or a different copy of the same. All the plays share not only substantial content but also orthographic patterns, such as the use of the letter *s*, rather than *z* or *ç*, for the phoneme /s/—a displacement that begins in the later seventeenth century and thus serves as a diagnostic tool for dating (Lockhart 1992, 343).<sup>29</sup> As the plays are so similar, it seems best to date the whole corpus, tentatively, to approximately the first half of the eighteenth century, with the understanding that they are modeled on earlier manuscripts.

#### FROM SIX PLAYS TO ONE

For this volume, I have merged the six plays (published individually on the project website mentioned above) and the fragments from Atlihuahuetia into a single, composite English version. This is not an attempt to reconstruct the original, model play, for I include elements that seem to have been added by later editors of the script. Rather, my intent is to pool contributions from the various people who created, passed on, altered, and embellished the play. I take the most extended or elaborate versions of each speech or scene, in order to represent the fullest development of the tradition, while omitting some variants in an effort to avoid redundancy or contradictions. I combine statements from different versions of the same speech if they add something rather than just repeat the same idea. Similarly, I include as many stage and set directions as are provided for any particular passage, opting for the more elaborate ones if a more inclusive composite would send actors in too many directions at once. Readers of this book thus have at hand, apart from these omissions, an expansive representation of the performance tradition without having to read the six different versions.

In this translation, I retain the original texts’ usage of semantic parallelism, where two or more words or phrases with similar meanings are used instead of one. This is a distinctive feature of Nahuatl oratorical style<sup>30</sup> that theatrical speech helped maintain as part of a living oral practice. These pairings and triplings can make sentences seem a bit choppy and repetitive, with lots of commas, but I ask readers to see this as the poetic device that it is. Parallelisms add shades of meaning, highlight verbal acuity, and slow the pacing of a statement—allowing ideas to be delivered and received in a more deliberative fashion. This device was adapted to

the introduction of foreign words, as a Spanish or Latin term could be paired with a Nahuatl term—sometimes a colonial neologism—that gave at least some sense of its meaning. Examples that occur in the play include *profetas* ‘prophets’ paired with the probable neologism *tlaachtōpaihtoanimeh* ‘those who say something first’; *cruz* ‘cross’ paired with the neologism *cuauhnepanolli* ‘wooden crossed-over-itself thing’ or, as I translate it, “crossed-wood device”; and *ánima* ‘soul’ paired with the neologism *teyoliya*. This instrumental form of the verb *yoli* ‘to come to life’ suggests something that enables one to live (Olko and Madajczak 2019); I translate it as “life force.”

The reverential system, which adds honorific suffixes to nouns and additional prefixes and suffixes to verbs, is harder to convey in English. While at times I try to partially suggest this by using more formal language, much of this coding is lost in translation. As a general point, readers may note that reverential forms are used in reference to Jesus in the stage directions and in the speeches by his friends and supporters—and even by Pontius Pilate when persuaded of his innocence. The failure of Christ’s enemies to use such forms coded disrespect into their every utterance. In contrast, the vocative form of address, another distinctive feature of Nahuatl, can be easily represented by an “O,” as in “O my beloved mother.”

In comparing the Nahuatl plays to the four Spanish-language plays in the Inquisition file, I find one striking difference to be the more dialogical character of the Nahuatl texts. That is, there is more respectful bowing and scraping as well as insults and informal chit-chat in the Nahuatl ones, more greetings and leave-takings, more expressions of gratitude, more acknowledgment of what other people have just said. Messengers quote the words of the person who dispatched them rather than simply conveying the information. Minor characters talk more, and there are more of them. Like the plays’ frequent use of semantic parallelism and the reverential speech register, this expansive dialogue helps move the Christian story into a Nahua cultural and linguistic milieu. It calls to mind the strikingly oral, conversational mode of expression recorded in some earlier Nahuatl documents, such as the Bancroft Dialogues from approximately the 1570s (Karttunen and Lockhart 1987) or the short text from 1583 that Lockhart (1991, 66–74; 1992, 85–90) called “And Ana Wept.” The pacing of the play allowed time for everyone to speak and for everything to be said. However, I want to note that the composite play has more of these short speeches than does any individual exemplar. Where scriptwriters may have lessened some of the original play’s loquacity or, conversely, furnished their own characters with more turns at speech is difficult to say.

So that I can reference specific parts of the play, I have also imposed a somewhat arbitrary division into acts (indicated by upper-case Roman numerals), scenes (indicated by lower-case Roman numerals), and individual speeches and stage directions



(indicated by Arabic numerals). Hence, II.iv.5 is the fifth speech or stage direction in the fourth scene of Act 2. These annotations run along the left margin of the text.

### OPTIONS AND CHOICES

In chapter 1, I weave together historical developments on both sides of the Atlantic, shuttling back and forth through space and time to give readers a wider perspective on how the Nahuatl Passions came to exist and how they came to be controversial. Without the trend toward affective, contemplative Passion devotion that gripped Europe in the later Middle Ages, no Nahua men would have been put up on crosses. And without the mutual reinforcement of anti-Jewish hatred and Passion violence, Nahua actors would not have taken roles as vicious Jewish henchmen. Passion plays have been around for most of a millennium and have often, and inevitably, posed challenges to religious orthodoxy. The situation in Mexico, distinctive in some ways, fits into this larger historical pattern.

The subsequent chapters look comparatively at the six plays to map the range of available options and explore the choices made by the playwright(s) and the different scriptwriters as they set down their individual visions for the Passion performance. I also discuss the historical background of certain scenes or motifs, considering where they came from and how they may have seemed to Nahuas. As variations at the level of all individual speeches are too many to consider, I select larger issues where the variation either takes us into performance techniques, such as stage sets and music, or into decisions about how vital or controversial aspects of the story are to be told, which characters and episodes are to be included, and how they are meant to be perceived. I assume that variants closer to biblical or other Old World models also hew more closely to the original Nahuatl play, as its author(s) likely possessed a level of Christian education and access to written sources that the later scriptwriters did not.

Chapter 2 tracks the decisions scriptwriters and other show planners made about how to use onstage and offstage spaces, arrange and coordinate sets, and enliven the production with elements that vary across the corpus. These include the writing and reading of documents, the number and placement of angelic messengers, the pacing of certain scenes, the selection and placement of choral and instrumental music, and minor touches that add humor or realism. The chapter also considers the scale of the productions and the community investment they demanded.

Chapter 3 introduces the women of the Passion, exploring the extent and nature of their participation in the staged story and the variations among the scripts. The influence of European Passion literature, in which Mary's role as a fully human co-sufferer with her son helped many devotees relate emotionally to the story, can

be seen in the plays. At the same time, the Nahuatl-speaking women are accorded enhanced respect and strength of character relative to European models, and their compassion and tears may bear different connotations.

Chapter 4 tackles the plays' most controversial scene, the staging of the Last Supper, to see how different playwrights reenacted the origin of the Eucharist and prototype for the Roman Catholic Mass. Some tread with caution, while others assert the right to have a Nahua Christ embodier bless and distribute the tortilla and wine. After-supper speeches by Jesus and Judas offer competing models for Nahuatl oratory. Judas's speech reveals his disordered state of mind but makes him a complex figure, not a cardboard villain.

Chapter 5 completes the discussion of gender by contrasting the women's bulwark of love and stability with the battering ram of male anger and violence that runs through the plays—especially after Jesus is arrested—and leaves a god dead on the cross. Each staging required decisions about how much violence would be acted out and how the characters would talk about it, a pained process as actors had to inflict and undergo these acts of destabilizing aggression. Readers are invited to read the composite play in full at any point in their encounter with this book or to refer to particular scenes and speeches in conjunction with my discussions of them.