The Conquest All Over Again

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The Destruction of Jerusalem as Colonial Nahuatl Historical Drama
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"Ma tiqixmanacan ma ticxixititzaca macatl tetli ypan mocahua" ("Let us level it. Let us destroy it. Let no stone remain in it"). With these words the Roman emperor Vespasian decrees the destruction of Jerusalem in a Nahuatl drama from Tlaxcala, dating most likely to the early eighteenth century.¹ For Nahuas, Rome’s brutal conquest of Jerusalem in AD 70 wreaked urban death and devastation unparalleled in their own historical experience except for the conquest of Mexico Tenochtitlan in 1521 — a conquest that depended heavily on the Tlaxcalan forces who had banded with Hernando Cortés. This Nahuatl Vespasian’s words echo, with a parallel verb construction typical of Nahuatl, those of the sixteenth-century Spanish narrative on which the play is based: “es mi [ar[jecer q[ue] la allanasemos por terra: & no q[ue]de piedra sobre piedra” (it is my opinion that we should level it to the ground, and that there not remain stone upon stone).² In this version of Roman imperial history, thickly encrusted with Christian legend, Vespasian’s command fulfills Jesus’s prophecy about Jerusalem: “Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2; see also Mark 13:2, Luke 19:44).

The play from Tlaxcala, along with a one-leaf fragment of a similar play dated 1745,³ shows that colonial Nahuaplays replayed urban siege and conquest, over and over again for at least two centuries, as religious theater. Guy Rozat Duyeroy has argued that, for Franciscan-educated, Christianized native writers, the fall of Jerusalem provided an obvious model and parallel for that of Mexico Tenochtitlan. The destruction of the Mexica capital posed “una ruptura tan fabulosa y tan simbólicamente importante para los indios como la caída de Jersalén para los judíos” (“a rupture as fabled and as symbolically important for the Indians as the fall of Jerusalem for the Jews”).⁴ The catalogs of omens that soon attached themselves to accounts of the conquest were modeled, Rozat Duyeroy suggests, in part on the omens that were said to presage the conquest of Jerusalem; in both cases the stubborn residents of the doomed cities refused to read these divine warnings correctly.⁵ A Nahuatl drama about Jerusalem’s fall might, thus, reflect and evoke memories of that local devastation. In this chapter I compare the Nahuatl texts to their Spanish source in order to explore the historical consciousness exhibited by this dramatic tradition. Omissions and alterations reveal much about how the text was molded to fit Nahua preferences and performance practices. First, though, I provide some background on the Nahuatl texts, their Spanish source, and the origins of the story they tell.

The Nahuatl play was first published by Francisco del Paso y Troncoso in 1907, under the title Destrucción de Jerusalén.⁶ In 1970 Marilyn Ekdahl Ravicz published an English translation of Paso y Troncoso’s Spanish version of the play.⁷ Fernando Horcasitas republished the text in 1974.⁸ Unable to locate the original manuscript, Horcasitas adapted Paso y Troncoso’s idiosyncratic orthography into his own standardized style. The manuscript, once owned by the Mexican bibliophile Federico Gómez de Orozco, since 1965 has resided in Mexico’s Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Fifteen folios of a rough but legible native hand, it is bound together with a Nahuatl drama on the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which also probably dates to around 1700.⁹ The one-folio fragment, submitted to the Mexican Inquisition from an unstated location in response to a 1757 archiepiscopal crackdown on certain genres of indigenous religious performance, found its way to the Tulane University Latin American Library. My transcriptions and English translations of both texts, based on the original manuscripts and prepared with assistance from Barry D. Sell, appear in Volume Four of Nahuatl Theater.¹⁰ We there retain the established title for the drama, “The Destruction of Jerusalem.” The actual manuscript opens with the statement “Nican motecPana in inemilistzin yn Señor Santiago Apostol yn quenin oquimocihuiyi ypan in huey altepetl Jerusalem in quipopolon in Judaismo yhuan in pilatos” (“Here is put in order the life of Lord Saint James the Apostle, what he did in the great altepetl of Jerusalem. He destroyed the Jews, along with Pilate”). The one-leaf fragment bears as a heading only the invocation “M[ar]ña Ś[](š)fantsijma” and the date 1745.

The Nahuatl play was adapted from a Spanish prose narrative called “La destrucción de Jerusalem.” It is a translation into Castilian, by one Juan de Molina, of an anonymous Catalan text that dates to the fifteenth century, if not earlier.¹¹ The Catalan and Castilian versions formed part of a compilation of devotional texts apocryphally attributed to Gamaliel, a first-century Pharisee whom Christian legend imagined an early convert.
Molina’s full title for this part of the larger work, as given in the 1536 Seville edition, folio 34v, is:

Libro. i. del p[re]sente tractado escríue la destrucción de Jerusale[m]: & como Vespasiano & Titus su fijo la tomaron por la rebelio[n] que los judios fizieron de nega[n]do el tributo q[ue] a los Romanos deuia[n]; assi mismo por ve[n]gar la muerte de jesus xpo. A esto fue movido por vn milagro q[ue] n[uest]ro sehor obro en la persona del Emperador Vespasiano sanandole subitamente de vna grauissima lepra mediante la Veronica segun adelante veryes.

(Book Two of the present treatise writes the destruction of Jerusalem, and how Vespasian and Titus his son took it because of the rebellion that the Jews made, denying the tribute they owed to the Romans, likewise to avenge the death of Jesus Christ. To this they were moved by a miracle that our lord worked on the person of the emperor Vespasian, curing him suddenly of a very grave leprosy through the Veronica, as you will see ahead.)

This edition of the story is 2.5 folios long, and is divided into the same 25 chapters as the Catalan source. It features thirteen woodcuts. The Jerusalem story told here is cognate with and may derive from a French narrative and dramatic tradition known as “La Vengeance de Nostre-Seigneur,” which flourished especially during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.13

The basic story goes back to the eighth-century Latin text Vindicta Salvatoris, or “Vengeance of the Savior,” itself a creative composite of various early Christian apocrypha.13 Rome’s suppression of the first-century Jewish revolt — a politically-motivated anti-colonial revolt followed by a politically-motivated campaign of suppression and punishment — was described firsthand, with some embellishments, by the Jewish commander-turned-historian Flavius Josephus. Much like Malintzin and the native Mexican leaders who aligned themselves with Cortés, Josephus, having decided that Jewish resistance was futile, joined the Romans as an advisor and interpreter.14 Over time, Christian writers refashioned the events into a tale of vengeance against Pontius Pilate and the Jews for the torture and death of Jesus.

The only characters in the Spanish narrative who were real people alive at the time of the revolt are Vespasian, the general whom Emperor Nero dispatched in AD 66 to lead the Roman forces; his son and successor, Titus, who oversaw the AD 70 siege and destruction of Jerusalem after his father was recalled to Rome to become emperor; and Clement, the fourth bishop of Rome, later canonized (died circa 100).15 The Christian story, though, makes Clement into one of Jesus’s own disciples and lets him convert Vespasian and Titus to Christianity, as they all foster a spirit of baptisms and church-building throughout the Roman Empire. Pilate and the Jewish king Archelaus, who in the story co-rule rebellious Jerusalem, were real but are anachronisms in this narrative: the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate was removed from office in AD 36; Herod Archelaus, a son of Herod the Great, ruled Judea under Caesar Augustus only from 4 BC to AD 6. Apocryphal and anti-Semitic, brimming with violence and vengeance, the tale appealed to Christians in Western Europe, gaining new popularity in the wake of the Crusades and, in Spain, after the completion of the Reconquista.16

Two versions of the story circulated in Spain. The first one to be published there bore variations of the title “Ystoria del noble Vespesiano”; its first printing occurred in Toledo circa 1492; it was in January of that year that Ferdinand and Isabella gained Granada. The second, Molina’s “Destrucción” text, was published at least five times between 1522 and 1536. A 1529 inventory for the printer Jácobo Cromberger of Seville lists 671 copies of the work. The only known early Spanish play on the subject was also based on Molina’s “Destrucción,” but independently of the NahuaI dramas.17

One of the publishers of the “Destrucción,” Jácobo Cromberger’s son Juan, exported to New Spain the colony’s first printing press.18 Given not only the Cromberger connection but the generally lively book trade between Spain and Mexico City, it is not surprising that copies of this imprint would have found their way across the Atlantic.19 One was read by Cortés’s companion Bernal Díaz del Castillo. He was not the only Spaniard whose writings compared Mexico Tenochtitlan’s destruction to that of Jerusalem, but he was the only one to specifically reference this version of the story. In his 1568 memoir, recalling the heaps of stinking corpses that choked the fallen city he commented, “Yo e leído la Destrucción de Jerusalén; mas si fue más mortandad qu’esta, no lo sé cierto” (“I have read the Destruction of Jerusalem, but whether that was greater mortality than this, I do not know for certain”).20

Another copy supplied the model for the NahuaI play. It is possible that a lost Spanish dramatization of the story was translated into NahuaI. It is also possible that the Spanish text languished in New Spain for a long time before it was adapted into NahuaI, such that the original dramatization was not far removed in date from the surviving texts. However, the simplest and what seems to me the most likely scenario is that the imported Spanish text was dramatized directly into NahuaI sometime during the decades immediately following the conquest, when that imprint was in general circulation and the fall of Mexico Tenochtitlan remained in living memory. It then, like other plays, survived in Nahua hands, occasionally recopied, until the existing texts were redacted.

The decades following the fall of Granada were a fertile time for the Jerusalem story, for it resonated with the millennial hopes of the age and the real threat that the Ottoman Empire posed on the edges of Christian
Europe. Spaniards and other European Catholics longed to take the Holy Land from the Ottoman Empire. Christopher Columbus, drawing on the visions of the Angel of Fire and other medieval prophetic traditions, as interpreted by Spanish apocalyptic writers, had sought in his voyages an alternate route to alleviate the Holy Land and the gold with which to finance such a campaign, which was to be led by a Spanish monarch. The Roman Church’s losses to Protestantism would be made good by Indian converts, who would swell the ranks of the Catholic armies as they confronted the Turks.

Charles, grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella, gained the Spanish throne in 1517. Two years later the young king was elected to succeed his grandfather Maximilian as Holy Roman Emperor. Various eschatological thinkers began to pin their aspirations on him: he would be the Second Charlemagne, the Last World Emperor, who was to unite the world, conquer Jerusalem, rebuild the Temple, and then hand his crown over to the returning Christ. The Ottoman Turks, meanwhile, under Suleiman the Magnificent, expanded their territories, conquering Belgrade in 1521, the island of Rhodes in 1522, and most of Hungary in 1526. In 1527 Charles’s armies sacked Rome, an event the apocalyptically-minded read in prophetic terms as a necessary chastisement of the Church. In 1529 the Ottomans were turned back after laying siege to Vienna, but Suleiman’s Berber ally Khair ad-Din took Algiers in 1529 and Tunis in 1534, expanding Muslim control of the southern Mediterranean. Charles in 1535 vanquished Khair ad-Din’s fleet and recaptured Tunis, lending credence to his prophetic role as conqueror of Jerusalem. However, further advances were interrupted by Charles’s conflicts with Francis I of France. In 1538 Pope Paul III, anxious to see the anti-Muslim campaign advanced, engineered a ten-year truce between Charles and Francis. The Truce of Nice allowed Charles to return his attention to Christian Europe’s confrontation with Islam — though with little success, as his attempt to take Algiers in 1541 failed miserably. Millennial prophecies continued to circulate about Charles as late as 1547.

Nahuas celebrated the 1538 truce with two elaborate mock battle performances, documented by Spanish observers, which imagined future victories over the Turks. The first was a “Conquest of Rhodes” staged in Mexico City in February, 1539, in which Spanish leaders and local Africans, as well as Nahuas, took part. There followed a much more indigenous “Conquest of Jerusalem” in Tlaxcala that June, when it formed part of the town’s Corpus Christi theatricals. Rhodes was needed as a staging area for the Christian fleets that would invade Judea; Jerusalem was, of course, the ultimate goal.

Both performances referenced the conquest of Mexico Tenochtitlan. Cortés (perhaps in person, or played by an actor) led the Christian forces in the Rhodes production. The Tlaxcalans, who in the late 1530s had a flourishing theatrical life, purposefully outdid their Mexica rivals’ performance. They even parodied it by having an actor pretending to be Cortés lead not the Christians but the Turks; Sultan Cortés does, however, vindicate himself by peaceably surrendering Jerusalem, in the wake of saintly and angelic interventions, to Emperor Charles V, played by a Tlaxcalan lord (and referred to as the Roman emperor). The intervening saints are Saint James, Spain’s patron, and Saint Hippolytus, on whose August 13 feast day Mexico Tenochtitlan fell to Cortés and his allies. In the performance Saint Hippolytus leads the Tlaxcalan forces against Jerusalem, while Saint James leads the Spanish forces (impersonated by Tlaxcalans).

If Tlaxcalans, who for centuries would milk their alliance with Cortés for every advantage they could claim, avidly prepared this massive production and imagined themselves invading Jerusalem, it is not surprising that they — as well as the millenarian Franciscan friars, such as Motolinía, who oversaw their public religious life—might take an interest in the story of the Roman campaign. “The Destruction of Jerusalem,” as Spanish narrative and Nahuatl drama, depicts a historical, not a future and millennial, battle. But its story provided an obvious precedent and parallel for the dreamed-of victory over Jerusalem that the Tlaxcalans staged so extravagantly in 1539.

As noted above, one of the legendary accretions to the story is Roman emperor Vespasian’s conversion to Christianity — set almost three centuries before Constantine became the first emperor to be baptized. Told this way, such that Jerusalem’s fall is coeval with Rome’s conversion, the story creates a more dramatic transition from Old Testament and pagan times into the historical Christian era. This motif also makes Vespasian a more comfortable prototype for Charles, the Holy Roman Emperor who was to retake the city and initiate the Christian millennium, than if he remained his pagan self.

In 1536 Charles abdicated; the Spanish throne passed to his son Philip and Charles’s brother Ferdinand was elected to succeed him as Holy Roman Emperor. If the Nahuatl play was not written during Charles’s reign, slightly later inspirations could have been the defense of Malta against the Turks in 1565 or the dramatic naval victory over the Turks at Lepanto in 1571. At Lepanto John of Austria, Charles’s illegitimate son, led the Christian fleet. Spain under Philip and his successors turned more toward internal and colonial problems and away from anti-Ottoman campaigns, although as late as the 1590s the Franciscan chronicler Gerónimo de Mendíeta, writing in New Spain, clung to hopes that a future Spanish monarch would yet fulfill the old millennial dreams.

The “Destructión” text ceased to be reprinted in Spain after 1536 and by 1559 had been added to the index of banned books. The “Ystoria del noble Vespesiano” variant may have been published once in the sixteenth
century, and there is a handwritten copy dated to the seventeenth century, but it too faded from circulation. Similar versions of the story dropped from use in other European countries as well after the sixteenth century.

For all the reasons just detailed I am inclined to see the years immediately following 1538 as the most likely era for the original adaptation of Molina's narrative into Nahauatl drama, and consider it unlikely that the first version postdates the sixteenth century. I am also inclined to see Tlaxcala as a likely venue, given its burgeoning early theater, the fact that the complete extant script of the play comes from there, and its stake in keeping alive memories of the victory over Mexico Tenochtitlan even when other Nahau communities found it expedient to downplay the violence of the conquest. "The Destruction of Jerusalem" can carry the same message that Viviana Díaz Balsera sees in the Tlaxcalan "Conquest of Jerusalem": a criticism of the Mexica for stubbornly resisting Cortés and Christianity and for allowing their city to be destroyed. My attributions are admittedly speculative. But regardless of original composition date, the surviving Nahauatl manuscripts represent an odd and fascinating perpetuation of medieval European legend in late-colonial New Spain.

The one-leaf fragment at Tlalnepantla is so different from the complete drama as to suggest there were at least two separate textual and performance traditions in Nahauatl. However, the fact that the action begins at exactly the same point in both, a point that is not the beginning of the Spanish source text, suggests that both derive from the same original Nahauatl adaptation, diverging at some later time as they were recopied and possibly passed from one community to another. The one represented by the Tlalnepantla fragment diverged more from the Spanish original, adding some characters and changing the sequence of action somewhat. Among other changes, in the Tlalnepantla piece Vespasian has been replaced by Saint James in the opening dialogue, while in the Tlaxcalan script James is mentioned by name only in the heading.

I turn now to the story as told in the Spanish and Nahauatl texts. I will review the action from beginning to end, commenting on the relationships among the texts and suggesting interpretations for the adaptations made in the Nahauatl. For convenience I will refer to the Spanish source by the name of its translator from the Catalan, Molina.

In Molina's first chapter (34v–36v), Vespasian is the rich and powerful emperor of Rome, forty years after Christ's death. Because he is an idola
ter, God sends "cancer y lepra" ("cancer and leprosy"), which leaves Vespasian bedridden and eats his face away down to the bones. Doctors can do nothing. Meanwhile, Clement, one of Jesus's disciples, has come to Rome. Vespasian's trusted seneschal, named Cain (occasionally Gay, as in the Catalan; sometimes Gain in the Nahauatl), hears Clement preach and confides to his master that the pagan gods probably cannot help him. However, he has heard of a great prophet who cured lepers in Jerusalem in the time of Caesar Augustus. The jealous Jews condemned this man to death, and a disciple of his named Judas sold him for thirty denarii. After three days he arose from death. Cain believes that an object that had touched that prophet's body might have the power to cure the emperor. Vespasian dispatches Cain himself to seek such a relic, promising that if it works he will avenge the prophet by selling Jews at thirty for a denarius. Cain should also inform Vespasian's procurator (provisor) Pilate that the emperor is angry because Pilate paid the tribute owed to Rome for only the first three of the past nine years. Cain, with ten knights, travels to Jerusalem and lodges with a wise Jew named Jacob, whom he takes into his confidence.

In the next chapter (36v–37r), Jacob tells Cain about Veronica of Galilee, in this version a leper who lent Mary a towel with which to wipe Jesus's face as he hung on the cross. Mary then returned the towel, on which Jesus's face had appeared, and told Veronica to wipe her own face with it. This cured her of her leprosy. Jacob sends for Veronica and she agrees to travel with Cain to Rome and attempt to heal the emperor. In Chapter 3 (37r–37v) Jacob escorts Cain to Pilate, and the seneschal requests the back tribute, presenting Pilate a letter from the emperor. Pilate reacts rudely and accepts the letter only at the urging of King Archelaus and other nobles. Tlaxcalans performed a similar sending of letters among the Christian leaders, including Charles V, and the Sultan and ruler of Jerusalem in the 1539 "Conquest of Jerusalem."

The Nahauatl script reduces all of the above to a single statement by the emperor: "Ca ie yeixihuitl yi ipan ticate in Roma onictlaCuilhui yn Pilato" ("It's now three years that we've been here in Rome. I have written to Pilate"; 20r). Stage directions then send Cain immediately to Pilate. He is to give the letter to Archelaus, who gives it to Pilate, who looks at it. The emperor's words place the opening scene in Rome, but the "three years" is a cryptically incomplete explication of the tribute dispute. This abrupt opening is one of the more striking examples of how the Nahauatl play strips from the story much material that one might expect Christian preachers to want to highlight: punishment for paganism, the ineffectiveness of pagan gods, the story of Jesus. Instead, the play skips ahead to highlight not Vespasian's story but that of the threatened, colonized city.

Molina's fourth chapter (37v–39r) gives the words of Vespasian's letter, which is not in the Nahauatl, but then the texts report similar dialogue. Pilate asks Archelaus and his other close advisers how to respond; they urge defiance. Archelaus asserts that the emperor would be unable to capture the city because his army could not endure the lack of water, and that Pilate should refuse to pay the tribute. The Nahua Archelaus uses terms that make Jerusalem's population seem Nahua: he refers to Pilate's subjects as "y mocuitlapil y matlapal" ("your tails, your wings"), a formulaic metaphor for commoners or vassals, and notes that all the
"eagles" (quauhtli) are assembled (20r). "Eagles" and "jaguars" were elite Mexica warrior grades. Pilate tells Cain to report to the emperor that Pilate will keep Jerusalem and Vespasian can keep Rome. In Molina Pilate looks angrily into Cain’s face; stage directions in the Nahuaatl embellish this scene by instructing Pilate to grab Cain by the cravat (20v).

The one-leaf fragment from Tulane begins with Saint James, in place of Vespasian, calling his messenger Cain (also spelled Cayn) to him. Cain, addressing his master as "titelpochtli Santiago cavallero" ("you young man, Saint James the knight"), asks him for his orders. Immediately Cain is at "Puerta Savario," demanding entry from and directions to Jerusalem from Capitan Savario. This character derives from the source text’s Jafel, who does not appear until Chapter 7 in the Spanish (see below).33 Jafel there is lord of Jafa, or Haifa; this "puerta Savario" could be read as the port of Haifa. However, in the text it seems to be a gate of Jerusalem, as Savario calls for the "yaocapitan" ("war captain") Archelaus. A centurion summons him and another captain, whose incoherent name (Escru or Escriu) may be a garbling of Archelaus. The latter captain summons Pilate, and Cain explains his mission: "Ca niconotemolihuitzuy huin teuamichtiani Xipto Nasarenno, yhua[n] yca yn itlacaquiluztin yn Sisar Augusto" ("I come in search of the great teacher, Christ the Nazarene, and the tribute of Caesar Augustus"; 1v). Pilate defies him, Cain warns that Saint James will attack, and Pilate orders the nobles and people of Jerusalem to seize and wound Cain. This is all that survives of that script.

In the Aztec empire, for a subject polity to default on its assigned tribute was considered a rebellion and cause for violent retribution.34 Archelaus and Pilate’s defiance thus fits into precontact Nahua patterns of warfare. Colonial Nahuaus paid tribute to their imperial overlords, so on one level the play is a warning as to what could happen to a community that flouted these demands. If Jerusalem is read as symbolizing Mexico Tenochtitlan, the defiance of Jerusalem’s leaders echoes the Mexica’s refusal to recognize the authority of Charles V, even while other Nahua polities, Tlaxcala among them, were alloying themselves with Cortés and offering their fealty to his king. In Spanish eyes, of course, all of Mesoamerica was legitimately theirs, ever since Pope Alexander VI had granted America (excluding Brazil) to Spain in the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas. Any resistance could be viewed as rebellion.

In Molina and the complete Nahuaatl play, Cain now returns to Rome, bringing Veronica. His speech to Vespasian shows the often very close relationship between the Nahuaatl and Spanish sources. In Molina, Cain intentionally avoids telling his sick lord the bad news about the tribute, and greets him as follows (38v):

señor Emperador alegraos con mucha razon: ca verdaderamente yo vos traygo vna muger que sin duda ninguna ella os sanara: porque ella trae vna tuxtapa en que esta la faz de aquel santo profeta Jesus de Nazareth & con esta ha sanado muchas & grauissimas enfermidades. Por tanto señor vos tened fe + creencia en lo que aquella Buena muger os dira: que sin falta ella os dara sano sin alguna dilacion.

(Lord Emperor, rejoice with good reason for truly I bring to you a woman who without any doubt will cure you, because she brings a towel on which is the face of that holy prophet Jesus of Nazareth and with this she has cured many very grave illnesses. Therefore, lord, have faith and believe in what that good woman will say to you, for without fail she will make you well with no delay.)

The corresponding Nahuaatl reads (21r):

tlatlauhian ca onihuia yn opa tincemihualicco ahu ma ximopalpaquiltitie ca oniqualico yn sihuatzintzi ytoca Veranica Ca nelli ca mitzmpatiliz ca quipia quihuahluca centetli ntepoxopohualoni yn oca in icuiluicca yn Sanco proFeta ahu ca cenca miecann ynic ontepati yeica tlatlauhian huel xicmoneloquilti yn tlen mitzmolhuililis ca itla xicmochluhi ca ceh nelli ca mitzpatiz.

(O ruler, I went where you sent me. And be joyful, for I have brought a dear woman named Veronica. She will truly cure you, for she has in her keeping, she is bringing with her a face-cleaner where the holy prophet is painted. And she has cured people with it many times. Therefore, O ruler, believe well in what she will say to you. If you do it, she will truly cure you.)

The Nahuaatl gives Veronica’s name, a necessary identification since she has not yet been mentioned outside of the stage directions. This speech is also the first place the Nahuaatl reports that Vespasian is ill. Cain leaves his lord, resolved to bring Veronica to him the following day, a decision he verbalizes in the Nahuaatl: “tlatlauhian ca mostla ticmotonitzinos” ("O ruler, you will see her tomorrow"; 21r).

Although she has no scripted lines in the play, Veronica is an important link between the early and later scenes: she provides the sought-for relic and cures the emperor, so that he must fulfill his pledge to avenge Jesus’s death. For Nahua audiences, Veronica also provides a link between this story and the more common performance genre of Passion plays. In Nahuaatl Passion plays Veronica performs the more familiar action of wiping Christ’s face herself as he carries his cross toward Calvary, then displaying the imprint of his face to the audience.35 From this context Nahuaus would recognize her character and her cloth. Pontius Pilate too was a familiar presence from Passion plays, in which he tries to pass the buck regarding Jesus’s fate but eventually accedes to the Jews’ demands that he be crucified. Also familiar were actors impersonating Jews and Roman soldiers; one can imagine various Passion play costumes dressing the actors in this play as well. The death of Jesus, which Vespasian vows to avenge, was enacted in Passion plays quite elaborately, with feigned
violence and fake blood, such that Nahuas could graphically imagine the deeds for which Jerusalem is being punished. 38

In Molina’s Chapter 5 (39r–39v) Veronica, who has retired to pray for the night, hears Clement’s voice telling her that she will meet him the next day. The Nahuatl text removes the mystery and simply has Cain tell her that she and Clement will work together to cure the emperor (21r). The two meet and Cain presents them to Vespasian as experts on the “holy prophet.” Clement gives a speech, the Nahuatl fairly close to the Spanish, explaining how the prophet is the sole true god. He died willingly but his killers are nevertheless guilty because of how badly they treated him. Clement approaches the emperor in order to apply the cloth, but Vespasian delays him (21v–22r).

The next chapter (39v–40v) is also closely cognate with the Nahuatl (22r–23r), though more elaborate in the Spanish. Vespasian has his imperial sword and crown brought in. He kneels and declares that he will avenge the death of the holy prophet. His regalia are removed, and he asks Clement to apply the cloth. In the Spanish, Vespasian, Clement, and Veronica all pray before Clement touches the emperor with the cloth; in the Nahuatl he and Veronica simply wipe the cloth over Vespasian’s face. In both Vespasian kisses the cloth, though the Nahuatl could be read as him kissing Veronica herself (rather than “the” Veronica, the veil).

The Nahuatl does not explain what happens to Vespasian, just as it does not explain why he needs a cure. In Molina the delighted emperor is immediately and fully healed. In both texts he offers his healers any reward they want, though only the Nahuatl includes chalchihuitl, jade or precious green stones, as one of the options. They decline earthly rewards and encourage him to be baptized and to oblige his subjects to desire the same. Vespasian agrees to let them baptize his subjects.

In Molina, Vespasian promises to be baptized as soon as he returns from Jerusalem. The Nahuatl omits this. As noted above, the whole opening section about Vespasian’s paganism and sickness was omitted from the Nahuatl. Idolatry and Roman gods are never mentioned, while in Molina Vespasian comments, for example, that he is emperor “por voluntad de los dioses” (“by the will of the gods”; 37v). The Nahuatl does not leave out that Vespasian is not yet a Christian, nor that he is ill, but these facts seem to be downplayed. Stage directions say nothing of his bedridden state or diseased appearance, or how the actor is supposed to demonstrate that he is healed. In the Spanish play on the subject, “se le cae la lepra” (“the leprosy falls from him”). 39 Further on, the elaborate and climactic scene of Vespasian’s baptism is almost omitted from the Nahuatl (see below). Not only is the Nahuatl play focusing on Jerusalem more than Rome, on action more than piety. It seems to be presenting a more consistent image of Vespasian as simply a powerful imperial ruler, not a man miraculously transformed from incapacitated idolater to neophyte Christian. Such a transformation could give a persuasive pro-Christian message — like at the end of the 1539 “Conquest of Jerusalem” when the conquered “Turks” accepted Christianity and some Indians actually did receive the sacrament of baptism. Those Turks, however, were the defeated enemy, not the glorious victors. Even so, Vespasian’s conversion is mentioned, and audiences could find in this figure a prototype for the Nahuatl leaders who accepted Christianity. Similar models appear in other Nahuatl dramas: the three Magi in Epiphany plays; Emperor Constantine in a dramatization of his conversion. 40 But to the extent that redactors of the script, whether Catholic priests or Nahuas expressing loyalty to the Spanish crown, intended Emperor Vespasian to symbolize Emperor Charles V, or Spanish-Christian imperial might more generally, they may have preferred not to put their emphasis on his paganism.

In addition to the political crime of flouting tribute debts and denying imperial authority, Jerusalem is to be punished for a religious crime: the torture of Jesus. Spaniards, including mendicant chroniclers such as Motolinia, Durán, and Torquemada, often justified the violence inflicted upon Mexico as a punishment for religious crimes: devil-worship and human sacrifice. 41 Christian Nahuas to some extent accepted this judgment, labeling their own previous deities as devils (tlatlactecol), even while retaining a respectful view of their ancestors. Many colonial Nahuas communities exaggerated the ease and speed with which their conquerors leaders had accepted Christianity. Tlaxcalans claimed to be the first to adopt the new religion, fomenting the fiction that their leaders accepted baptism at the time of their alliance with Cortés, before the joint march on Mexico Tenochtitlan. 42 This quick conversion, fictional as it was, in retrospect left the Mexica, as they held out against Spanish authority, uniquely guilty of denying Christ’s authority as well. Hence they resemble Pilate and his Jewish subjects in both of their crimes. The text’s downplaying of Vespasian’s paganism is consistent with this reading: Rome is supposed to represent the Spanish and Christian side, Jerusalem the anti-Spanish, anti-Christian holdout that, like Mexico Tenochtitlan, must be conquered by sheer force.

Vespasian now, in both texts, hears from Cain about Pilate’s refusal to recognize the emperor’s authority and his rough treatment of Cain himself (40v; 23r–23v). In Molina’s Chapter 7 (40v–41v) the Romans prepare their troops and fleets for the invasion, sail to Acre and kill all rebellious Jews there, and sail on to Jafa (Haifa), conquering its well-defended castle. The Nahuatl skips to where Jafel, the lord of Jafa, begs Vespasian for mercy and offers to help him defeat Jerusalem. Vespasian accepts his offer and they proceed to the entrance to Jerusalem (23r–24r). The stage set could be something like the walled, five-towered, and flower-bedecked “Jerusalem” the Tlaxcalans erected in 1539 around and on top of their
own town government buildings. Stage directions call for some kind of wall on which Pilate can look out at the Roman forces (24v). However, scenes occurring inside Jerusalem would have had to be visible and audible to the audience.

The character of Jafel resembles Josephus, the Jewish commander and historian who documented his own shift of fealty to the Romans. In Mexico, Jafel's role parallels that of the various native leaders who, after offering some initial resistance to Cortés, deemed it in their best interest to ally themselves with him. Jafel would remind Tlaxcalans of the famous Xicotencatl and Maxixcatzin. Judging by later-colonial Nahua historical documents, especially the so-called "primordial titles," Nahua ethnic groups, except the Mexica, typically retained foundational legends of the prescient conquest-era rulers who befriended the Spanish invaders and accepted their god.

Archelaus in both texts again counsels Pilate that Vespasian will not be able to hold out for long (51r; 24r). In Molina one of the emperor's knights tells him that the man with the staff is Pilate (41v); by the time the extant Nahuař script was written this had reversed itself, such that a Jew informs Pilate that Vespasian is the man with the staff (24r). Vespasian demands Pilate's submission, and Pilate defies him. Pilate also speaks in a manner Nahuař would hear as very rude. Not only does he address Vespasian by name without the polite vocative suffix -e. He closes his speech with "Ca i nehuatl y ni Pilatos y notlatolmachio ynic nicuepili [sic] in emPeraDor in Verbasiano" ("I, Pilate, reply to the emperor Vespasian with my fancy words"; 24v). This use of Vespasian's and his own names, and his bragging, violate Nahuař codes of polite speech, much like Herod does in a Nahuař Epiphany play. Both these leaders of Jerusalem mark themselves as angry, failed rulers in the mode of Motecuhzoma's postcontact persona.

The Nahuař Pilate uses the traditional diplphrse "the seat, the mat" (yn icPali in Petlatli; 24v) to refer to his rulership of Jerusalem. Like Archelaus's earlier use of "tails, wings" and "eagle" warriors, this makes Jerusalem seem Nahuař. Also, although Archelaus twice receives the Spanish designation "king" (Rei, 20r and 25v) in the stage directions, only once does a speaker refer to him with that title: Vespasian, on 30v, in phrasing translated directly from the Spanish (48r). Conversely, in the Spanish text the name Archelaus (Archelao) is preceded by rey in all but a few instances. In the Nahuař, Archelaus generally and Pilate always are referred to by Nahuař terms used for precontact rulers, such as tlatoani (speaker, ruler), tecuhltli (lord), and pilli (noble). Pilate is not given the Spanish title provisor that he bears in the Spanish, nor does he receive the title presidento that he has in Nahuař Passion plays. Meanwhile, characters in the Nahuař frequently address and refer to Vespasian with the Spanish word emperador, familiar in early colonial Mexico in reference to Charles V.

Molina's eighth chapter (41v–43r) gives Vespasian's reply to Pilate's defiance: "por esta imple[er]al corona que traemos: Sc por esta espada q[ue] en la mano traemos se juramos q[ue] jamas en ningun[al] tien[mo] de tu persona & vida aura merced ni piedad ninguna" ("By this imperial crown that we bring, and by this sword that we bring in our hand, we swear to you that at no time will there be mercy on your person and life, nor any pity"); 41v–42r). His Nahuař counterpart echoes him with "Ca nican ca y no emperaDorcorona auh ca nomac ca en emPeraDoresPata yehca ipalitzino caocac mitztlacoilis auh cayac moPa tlaocoyas" ("Here is my imperial crown, and the imperial sword is in my hand. Therefore, by their authority, no longer will anyone have pity on you, and no one will feel compassion for you"); 24v). Molina then spends two pages detailing the two ensuing days of pitched battle, during which the Romans lose 47,000 of their 100,000 men and Jerusalem loses 41,000 (42r–43r). The Nahuař stage directions state simply "niman miquani" ("then there is fighting"); 24v). Nahuařs performing the play could here enact a mock battle of whatever scale and duration they chose.

In the next chapter (43r–43v), and its corresponding Nahuař (24v–25r), Jafel proposes an ingenious plan to supply water to the Roman troops by lining the Valley of Jehosaphat with animal skins and filling it with water. They can then subsist comfortably while laying siege to the city. Jerusalem's arid setting is the opposite of Mexico Tenoctitlan's island one, but both cities were slowly starved into submission via lengthy sieges: Jerusalem over six months, Mexico Tenoctitlan over three. Both cities saw their supplies of food and fresh water cut off (the lake waters around the Mexico capital were brackish; Cortés had the city's aqueduct cut).

The Nahuař play now omits a motif, found in Molina's tenth chapter (43v–44r), that is standard in European versions of the story and derives from Josephus's account: women whose hunger drives them to consume their own dead children. Nahuařs, sensitive to their ancestors' reputation for cannibalism, perhaps could not stomach staging such an atrocity, even imputed to "enemy" people. The besieged Mexica by their own account ate worms, mice, marsh grass, and adobe, but no one accused them of eating their children. The Nahuař skips directly to Pilate's reaction to the women's act, which is to send Archelaus to negotiate terms. Vespasian insists on unconditional surrender (25v–26r).

Chapter 11 (44r–44v) recounts Archelaus's suicide. Nahuař stage directions explain how the actor is to lie down on his sword, and Pilate to weep when he sees his dead comrade (26r). Pilate realizes the city is lost, but before casting himself on Vespasian's mercy he orders all the city's treasure — gold, pearls, and precious stones in the Spanish; gold, jade...
(chalchihuitli), emeralds, and pearls in the Nahuatl — ground up and swallowed by the people so that it will not fall into the Romans’ hands (44v; 26v).

In Chapter 12 (44v–45r) and its parallel Nahuatl (26v), the Jews turn on Pilate, blaming him for their distress. The delays, confusion, and despair could recall Mexico Tenochtitlan’s final weeks, when brigantines surrounded the city, firing cannon and preventing imports of food, as the invaders gradually leveled buildings and filled in canals. Inga Clendinnen has suggested that the battle for Mexico Tenochtitlan dragged on for months, as the city was destroyed and people starved, in part because this form of war was so alien to the Mexica that they did not know how to negotiate their own surrender.49 Siege tactics were known in Mesoamerican warfare, and cities that refused to surrender were sometimes sacked,50 but nothing on this scale could have been imagined. The Mexica held on in silent, stubborn resistance, even as tens of thousands were massacred.51

Molina’s next three chapters (45r–47r) and their corresponding Nahuatl (27r–29r) recount how Pilate admits his wrongdoing to the Jewish nobles, then appeals to Titus to intercede with his father to spare the procurator’s life. Titus, moved to compassion, tries to do so but Vespasian rebuffs him. Pilate laments to the Jewish leaders that “nuestros Dioses” (“our gods”) have brought us to a bad end (46v); in Nahuatl he says “temac otechcahuque ynteotehuan” (“our gods have betrayed us”; 29r). A polytheistic Roman among monotheistic Jews, Pilate here voices a sentiment appropriate also to the defeated Mexica. The reference is more notable given how, as mentioned above, the Nahuatl avoids direct references to Vespasian’s polytheism.

In Chapter 16 (47r–47v) Pilate goes to the Roman camp to submit to Vespasian, handing his sword—the loanword espada—is used for Pilate’s weapon as well as Vespasian’s—to the emperor. His submission speech in the Nahuatl (29r–30v) once again includes traditional diphrases: Pilate deserves “in tetti ynhuahuitli” (“the stone, the stick,” meaning punishment); he usurped “in petlatli ynicPali” (“the mat, the seat,” rulership) that he held by the authority of an earlier emperor (29v). In Chapter 17 (47v–49r) Vespasian berates Pilate at length for his various offenses. The parallel text is by far the longest speech in the Nahuatl play, filling two pages of the script (30r–31r). Vespasian deploys the diphrase “ycahpalp yepatlapa” (“in his mat, in his seat”) in respect to Caesar Augustus’s authority over Jerusalem; this is the only instance in the play when Vespasian uses one of these diphrases.

The Spanish text speaks often of the pomp and the numbers of soldiers and attendants that surround the Roman emperor. Nahuatl performers could dress up their show as lavishly as they chose, but the stage directions demand minimal elaboration. Occasionally they call for a visual direct-ness that the Spanish lacks, as above when Pilate seizes Cain’s cravat. At this point, the Spanish Vespasian orders twenty of his most faithful knights to take Pilate into custody (48v), while in the Nahuatl Vespasian himself takes a chain and ties Pilate up with it (31r).52

For Mexico Tenochtitlan too the end came with the captivity of a ruler. Cuauhtemoc and other high nobles were captured while departing the city by canoe. Díaz del Castillo claimed that they intended to go into hiding on the mainland; according to the Nahuatl version in the Florentine Codex, people said Cuauhtemoc was en route to submit to the Spaniards. Cortés himself does not give a motive for their sailing, but he imputes to Cuauhtemoc a somewhat ceremonial act of submission: through an interpreter Cuauhtemoc says that he has done all he could to defend his people, then puts his hand on Cortés’s dagger and asks for death. The Nahuatl account refers only to how Cortés stared at Cuauhtemoc and stroked his hair — the same sort of disrespectful treatment the Spaniard gave Motecuhzoma at their first meeting.53

In both texts the emperor now orders the surviving Jews sold into slavery (48v; 31r), although the Nahuatl omits the pricing at thirty for a denarius that runs through the European sources. Cain’s erstwhile host, Jacob, is spared, along with his family. No one is left inside the city; all are dead except for the survivors who have accompanied Pilate. It is at this point — Molina’s Chapter 18 — that the emperor orders the complete dismantling of the fallen city (49r–49v; 31v).

It is also at this point that Vespasian learns the whereabouts of the city’s treasure: the Jews are excreting gold, silver, and precious stones (just teocuittli, gold or silver, in the Nahuatl). European versions of the story, including the Spanish “Ystoria del noble Vespasiano,” typically describe the Romans murdering and dismembering captive Jews to recover the swallowed gold.54 The Nahuatl Vespasian now declares, “ma tictoculitonti ym inaxcán” (“Let’s go enrich ourselves with their goods”; 31v).55 There is no model for this in the 1536 edition of Molina, but other editions may have included a passage on which this Nahuatl statement is based: the Catalan original tells of some who disinterred and disembowelled the dead to recover gold, silver, and jewels.56 The scene evokes Spanish greed for Mexico gold. When Mexico Tenochtitlan fell, Cortés’s first act was to demand more gold, accusing Cuauhtemoc and other leaders of hiding it from him. Meanwhile, other Spaniards searched the starving survivors for concealed gold and picked out the ones they wanted to rape or enslave.57

Molina’s Chapter 19, three pages long (49v–51r), shrinks in the Nahuatl to two brief speeches, totaling eight lines of dialogue: Clement urges Vespasian to be baptized and order everyone else to do the same; Vespasian agrees (32r). The Romans’ triumphant return to Rome could be enacted by the Nahuatl actors simply moving across the performance space,
but, other than one later speech referring to Rome, there is no indication that they even leave the part of the set that represents Jerusalem. The bulk of the Spanish chapter is filled by the baptism of Vespasian, Titus, and other Roman lords, followed by a mass conversion, in response to which Vespasian arranges for Clement to preach to the gathered throngs. Molina devotes a page and a half to listing all the topics about which Clement preaches. The entire scene is omitted in the Nahuañl, whether to deflect attention from the Romans’ paganism or to avoid a long digression from the play’s drama of military defeat, negotiations, and punishment.

The remainder of both plays—six chapters in the Spanish, five pages in the Nahuañl—centers on Pilate’s punishment and death. Representatives from Vienne (Viana in the Spanish), in Gaul (France), request custody of Pilate, citing privileges granted their community for executing imperial traitors (51r–51v; 32r–32v). This motif parallels the French narrative tradition and Vienne folklore, and derives ultimately from Josephus, who states that Augustus exiled Archelaus to Vienne. In the Nahuañl the two spokesmen for the “elders” of Vienne speak very respectfully and deploy idiosyncratic Nahuañl speech; Nahuañl audiences would likely read them as indigenous despite their unfamiliar homeland (sometimes rendered “Píñar” or “Píñan” by the Nahuañ writer). Vespasian at first doubts, but after conferring with his advisors is persuaded to consent (51v–52r; 32v–33r).

Rather than tracking Pilate’s further trials in the Spanish text, I will mention only the two brief parts that Nahuañl redactors found interesting enough to include, or retain over time. First, Pilate, who must have been placed into a stage-set prison, asks a guard whose dog it is that he hears barking outside every day. The soldier replies that it is Pilate’s own dog, who has followed his scent all this way. Pilate asks that the dog be allowed to come inside. The soldier refuses, and Pilate laments, for the dog’s cries sadden him (52r–53v; 32r–33v). Second, a slave explains why Pilate does not die (despite the privations visited upon him in prison, which the Nahuañl does not detail). This man, one of the enslaved Jerusalemites, witnessed the crucifixion and knows that the mantle (tliamatzintli; in the Spanish a generic vestidura, “garment”) Jesus was wearing ended up in Pilate’s possession (53v–54r; 33v–34r). This alludes to the clothing stripped from Jesus in the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion; Nahuañl Passion plays included the removal of a garment from Jesus. According to the slave, Pilate might be wearing this mantle now. The elders of Vienne go and look at the mantle Pilate is wearing, and remove it from him. He cries out and falls down. In the Nahuañl the elders run away and then return to see if he is dead. The play ends abruptly with the (apparent) death of the captured ruler. Vespasian’s vengeance is achieved in full.

One loose end is Saint James’s usurpation of Vespasian’s role in the fragmentary text at Tulane and in the opening description of the full-length play. Given how the play focuses on warfare and the negotiations among and between victors and vanquished, and features a mock battle, it is not surprising that colonial Nahuañ might over time intrude Saint James into the text. The Apostle James is Spain’s patron saint, believed buried at the pilgrimage site of Compostela, in Galicia. In his persona as Santiago Matamoros (“Saint James Moor-slayer”), James was, according to Spanish tradition, seen fighting on the Christian side in battles of the Reconquista; Spaniards extended this tradition to conquests in the Americas. Actors impersonating the saint, with his white horse, danced in many native Mexican festivals in the “Moors and Christians” dances introduced from Spain. Adopted by indigenous communities, the figure ceased to represent Spanish military power and acquired indigenous meanings as a community protector. Above I mentioned that the Tlaxcalans cast one of their actors as Saint James in the 1539 Tlaxcala “Conquest of Jerusalem” production. Saint James may have become so closely associated with mock battles that he seemed to just go with them as a matter of course.

The Tulane fragment survives only because native “Danzas de los Santiaguitos” (“Dances of the Little Saint Jameses”) during the mid-eighteenth century were viewed with disfavor by churchmen who found them too wild and pagan—an ironic turn for a genre that originally celebrated Christian victories over infidels. The folio was sent to the Mexican Inquisition in response to a decree ordering that all papers relating to Passion plays and Santiaguitos dances be turned in. The play from which it comes was apparently classified under the second category because it features Santiago, at least on that first leaf; the Nahuañs from whose community it came may have themselves considered it the script for this genre of dance.

The complete play, and probably the fragmentary one as well, are more fully scripted than a typical mock battle or Moors and Christians dance. They fit into a scripted, theatrical variety of the tradition, which, according to Arturo Warman, is under-represented in Mexico compared to Spain. Warman himself classifies the full-length “Destruction of Jerusalem,” as published by Paso y Troncoso, as a Moors and Christians play despite its pagan and Jewish historical setting. Notably, Pontius Pilate serves as (anachronistic) villain in some Moors and Christians productions. After Holy Roman Emperor Charles’s hoped-for replay of the Roman victory failed to materialize, and after millennialist Franciscans lost their influence over Nahuañ religious life, the Roman emperor Vespasian may have become a less compelling figure. Thus, it is not surprising that, long after the conquest and the original redaction of Molina’s narrative into Nahuañl play, Nahuañs had started replacing that now-obsolete Roman with the more familiar Christian victor and defender against evil, Santiago.
The play, unmoored from its specific historical reference points and passed along among generations of Nahua performers, could be staged as a generic drama of conquest, victors and vanquished representing whomever the directors, performers, or observers wished to identify with or against. There is no single possible reading; parallels to the conquest of Mexico Tenochtitlan and the Mexico, some of which I have highlighted above, offer only one. It is, though, the most obvious one for colonial Mexico, especially for the Mexicas’ longtime enemies the Tlaxcalans, and could coexist with other readings. Colonial Nahua communities viewed their ancestors’ alliances with the Spanish and acceptance of Christianity as foundational acts by which community identities, rights, and boundaries were established. However fictionalized, the conquest retained a status in native history as a world-transforming event, much as the events of first-century Judea had for Christian Europe. At the same time, colonial Nahua actively protested specific colonial abuses such as excessive tribute demands, forced labor, and acts of violence; the Mexico were not the only Nahua who might see in Pilate and the Jews — overtly the villains of the piece — reflections of their own brutalization. Though the millennial and anti-Ottoman sentiments of the early postcontact decades may have motivated the initial staging of a Nahual “ Destruction of Jerusalem,” later generations continued to find reasons to revisit history through this play.

Notes

1 The manuscript is in the Archivo Histórico, Colección Antigua Vol. 872, Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City. It bears no date; for approximate dating I rely on Barry D. Sell’s evaluation for our coedited volume Nahual Theater Volume 4: Nahua Christianity in Performance (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009). A more literal translation of the Spanish would be “macatle teiti iapan teiti mocaahu” (“let none stone remain on stone”); it is possible that the Nahual here was altered at some point.

2 Juan de Molina, “La destrucción de Jerusalén,” in Camaliel. Nuevamente traducido en lengua Castellana (Seville: Dominico de Robertis, 1536), 49r. I thank the British Library for providing me with a digital scan of this imprint, which is catalogued as C.62.b.11.

3 The page, and accompanying documentation, are in the Rare Book Collection, Latin American Library, Tulane University (497.201 c292). I am grateful to Erika Hosselkus, David Dressing, and Susan Schroeder for providing information about and access to this document.


19 The titles of the Spanish Jerusalem narratives do not appear in the book inventories published by Irving B. Leonard, but these are from later in the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries; Books of the Brave: Being an Account of Books and Men in the Spanish Conquest and Settlement of the Sixteenth–Century New World, intro. by Rolena Adorno (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Romances of Chivalry in the Spanish Indies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1933). A 1583 list from Peru, however, includes twenty copies of a “discreción de Jerusalen,” a title that could conceivably be a distortion of “destrucción”; Books, 357.

20 Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva Españ(a) (manuscrito Guatemala), ed. José Antonio Barbón Rodríguez (México: El Colegio de México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Servicio Alemán de Intercambio Académico, and Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2005), 509. María Rosa Lida de Mirkel notes similar comparisons made in a postscript to Cortés’s second letter and by the chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, in Jerusalen: El tema literario de su cerco y destrucción por los romanos (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1972), 111. Motolinia designates the deaths that occurred during the conquest, especially the conquest of Mexico Tenochtitlan, as the second of ten “plagues” with which God chastised the land. He asserts that the number of dead is said to be higher “than that of those who died in Jerusalem when Titus and Vespasian destroyed it” (Historia de los indios de la Nueva España, ed. Edmundo O’Gorman, México: Editorial Porrúa, 1979, 15).


22 Max Harris, Aztecs, Moors, and Christians: Festivals of Reconquest in Mexico and Spain (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 123.

23 On these millenarian prophetic traditions applied to Charles V see Marjorie Reeves, Joachim of Fiore & The Prophetic Future: A Medieval Study in...
Corrés deflected responsibility for massacres onto his indigenous allies; see his third letter to Charles V; Hernán Cortés, Cartas de relación (México: Editorial Porruía, 1979) and Clendinnen, “Fierce and Unnatural Cruelty,” 91–4.

52 In Nahua Passion plays, Jesus is chained at his arrest; this motif could have suggested the similar treatment of Pilate (see the San Simón Tlatlaahuíquèpec and Tepaltzingo Passion plays in Sell and Burkhardt 2009).

53 Díaz del Castillo, Historia, 505; Lockhart, We People Here, 244–7; Cortés, Cartas, 162.

54 Fouché-Delbosc, “Ystoria,” 617–18; for other examples see Ford, Vengeance, 1984, 175–8; Wright, Vengeance, 156.

55 Grammatically the verb is vetitive but I read it as imperative, given the source and the context; if Yvespian were trying to prevent looting it seems he would make a stronger statement to that effect. Vetitive forms sometimes clearly have imperative intent.

56 Armengol Valenzuela, Obras, 197. The Spanish play based on the “Destructión” text has a soldier disembowel captives and rejoice over the pearls, jewels, and doubloons he finds; Rouanet, Autos, I: 524.

57 Lockhart, We People Here, 248–53, 268–71.


59 In the Tepaltzingo Passion play it is a camisa, “shirt”; Sell and Burkhardt, Nahua Theater Volume 4, p. 112 of the original manuscript. The Gospel references are Matthew 27: 35; Mark 15: 24; Luke 23: 34; John 19: 23–4.


62 Archbishop Manuel Rubio y Salinas’s 1757 pronouncement, which was signed by Francisco Jimenes Caro, Inquisitor of Indians, instructed all priests to notify all indigenous town officials in charge of the Lenten Passion plays “y en las fiestas las dansas de los santiaguitos” (“and on the festivals the dances of the santiaguitos”) that they must turn in all the papers they use to rehearse, which the priests are to submit to the Inquisition, forbidding any further rehearsals or performances while the situation is under review. The document is published in Fortino H. Vera, ed., Colección de documentos eclesiásticos de México, o sea antigua y moderna legislación de la iglesia mexicana, vol. 3 (Ameacameca, México: El Colegio Católico, 1887), 7. Archbishop Francisco Antonio Lorenzana issued another edict regarding these dances in 1769; it is published in Roberto Moreno de los Arcos, “Dos documentos sobre el arzobispo Lorenzana y los indios de la Nueva España,” Historia 10 (1982): 27–38. For more on these campaigns for theatrical
oversight and suppression see my essay in Sell and Burkhart, Nahuatl Theater Volume 4. It is possible that the complete "Destruction" play also was confiscated during one of these eighteenth-century campaigns.

63 Warman, Danza, 101.

64 With only the one extant leaf, it is of course impossible to know whether Santiago replaced Vespasian through the entire production.

References


Chimalpahin Rewrites the Conquest
Yet Another Epic History?

Susan Schroeder

It was recently suggested that a monument be built to honor the seventeenth-century Nahua annalist Chimalpahin (b. 1579), colonial Mesoamerica’s premier historian.1 Chimalpahin is the only known native American author to have written an epic history of Indian Mexico in his own language and signed the work himself. He lived and worked at the little church of San Antonio Abad in Xolocó, located south of today’s zócalo in Mexico City. He also worked part-time as a copyist, diligently transcribing dozens of ancient pictorial manuscripts into Roman alphabetic script. He copied Latin- and Spanish-language books as well and translated them into Nahuatl, or he rewrote them with lavish emendations. In a way, he was a one-man scriptorium, and his oeuvre came to number more than sixteen hundred pages. His purpose, he said, was to record the history of his hometown, Amecameca Chalco, so that generations to come would know of their extraordinary history.2 But Chimalpahin was interested in everything, and although not a member of Mexico Tenochtitlan’s indigenous nobility, he seemed to have access to many of the right people and places in Mexico City. Never having ventured beyond his hometown and the capital, it might be said that Chimalpahin was extremely parochial in terms of his scholarly production. But his knowledge was ecumenical, and he was determined that the grand histories of the peoples of Mexico be regarded as unique and significant in their own right. That he frames them in a literature of conquest and even had to resort to devious means to bring those histories to light only enhances their authenticity and value.3

Chimalpahin arrived in the capital in 1593 at the age of fourteen. He