
The Voyage of Saint Amaro: A Spanish Legend in Nahuatl Literature*

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Indigenous-language versions of Spanish and Latin religious literature are significant for the insight they offer into native constructions of Christianity and native culture under Spanish rule. Europeans represented native American cultures to other Europeans by inscribing the literature of conquest, exploration, and evangelization. Native-language texts on Christian religion reveal another side of colonial discourse: the transmission of European culture to native people. And just as European writings present a distorted image of the "Indian," filtered through European categories and subjected to hegemonic priorities, so too were Old World texts altered as they passed into an indigenous discursive universe.

A large corpus of Christian religious literature in the Nahuatl language survives from early colonial Mexico. These culturally ambivalent writings are characterized by what Hanks (1986, 739) calls "hybrid discourses": indigenous and European modes of expression are fused, often inextricably, into new styles of speaking and writing. In translating Christian narratives, native writers often disrupted the plot structures, ignoring connections between episodes and omitting elements that European writers would consider essential to the unfolding of the story. At the same time, they introduced Nahuatl oratorical discourse, based on couplets or larger strings of parallel phrases, into narrative contexts and paid special attention to motifs that corresponded to Nahuatl poetic imagery.

This paper examines the transfer of one Spanish-Christian narrative into colonial Nahuatl literature. Two late-sixteenth-century Nahuatl-language manuscripts from central Mexico, compilations of Christian devotional texts transcribed by native writers, contain versions of the

life of a minor Spanish saint named Amaro. This saint does not appear in the conventional collections of saints' lives printed in sixteenth-century Spain, nor was his festival included in the Church calendar as observed in Spain and New Spain.¹ No native towns took Saint Amaro for their patron saint. The Catholic world is populated by many minor saints who receive little attention beyond a local cult, but such figures do not ordinarily find their way into Nahuatl texts. In these texts, hagiographic narrative tends to focus on the Church's major actors: the Holy Family, the Apostles, the early martyrs, the Church Fathers, the founders of religious orders. It is curious, therefore, that Amaro's legend should appear in these Nahuatl documents.

Who is Saint Amaro, and why would Nahuas be interested in him? After commenting briefly on Saint Amaro's Spanish cult, I will explore his representation in Nahuatl literature. I include a composite English translation of the two Nahuatl versions of his life, and offer some suggestions regarding the possible significance, to Nahuas, of the story's content. The circulation of this non-canonical and somewhat garbled text among literate Nahuas also indicates that native people's engagement with Christian narratives was not strictly controlled by their priests or limited to the standard contexts of Church preaching and ritual.

Pilgrim Saint and Mystic Navigator

Saint Amaro is a late-medieval pilgrim saint associated with the city of Burgos in northern Spain, on the pilgrimage route to the shrine of Saint James at Compostela in Galicia. The saint's presumed remains lie in the thirteenth-century Hospital del Rey in Burgos (*Novena* 1966).

As recorded by the eighteenth-century Augustinian chronicler Enrique Flórez, Amaro's legend tells of a pilgrim, possibly a Frenchman, who, on his way to Compostela, stopped in Burgos and found shelter at the Hospital del Rey, a charitable institution founded by King Alfonso VIII. Amaro was so impressed with the work of this hospital that, after his visit to Compostela, he returned to Burgos and remained there, devoting himself to the service of the hospital's poor and infirm residents and pilgrim guests. His piety, charity, and humility, plus the spiritual advisement he gave his patients, earned him a reputation for saintliness that was affirmed after his death by various miraculous cures and interventions (Flórez 1772; *Novena* 1966).

Not mentioned in Flórez's version, however, is Saint Amaro's most interesting pilgrimage: his magical ocean voyage to paradise. As with Ireland's Saint Brendan, legend ascribed to Amaro pre-Columbian ocean voyages to unknown and enchanted isles. Since these adventures bear no direct relation to the story of Burgos's pious hospital attendant, it is likely that an originally independent story or stories became attached

to Saint Amaro's name. A substantial body of medieval lore telling of otherworldly visions and miraculous journeys, including trips to paradise, existed as a foundation for the emergence of this particular legend.² The linkage to Saint Amaro served to relate the story to Spain and to ascribe saintly status to the protagonist.

This connection must have been established in or before 1552, when the story of the seafaring saint was published in Burgos. Although this imprint never actually places its Amaro in Burgos and its hospital, it can be no accident that the tale was propagated in the city that claimed a saint of this name.

According to the legend, as told in the 1552 Burgos imprint (*Vida* 1552),³ Amaro came from an Asian city now destroyed. His name, an allusion to bitterness (*amargura*), was revealed to his parents by a voice they heard nine days before Amaro's birth. A rich but pious and charitable man, Amaro is beset by a longing to see terrestrial paradise (the Garden of Eden). Directed by a mysterious voice, he sets sail with some companions. After spending six months on an island inhabited by cruel men and beautiful women, they cross the Red Sea and visit other uncharted territories. At one point, when their ship is stuck in a curdled or coagulated (*cuajada*) sea and they watch as sea monsters gobble down the passengers of other stranded ships, they are saved through the intervention of the Virgin Mary. She appears to Amaro and advises him to empty the skins of wine and vinegar with which the ship is provisioned, inflate them, attach them to ropes, and throw them overboard. The monsters attack the skins and drag them away, pulling the ship to safety in flowing waters.

Finally, at a convent inhabited by women of high status, Amaro encounters a saintly hermit woman named Baralides, to whom God has already granted a vision of paradise. This character, along with her niece Brigida,⁴ acts as Amaro's Beatrice, assisting him in his quest for paradise. She guides him up a high mountain to a river that flows forth from paradise, bearing with it many fruits and flowers. She then returns to the port where Amaro's companions have remained and conveys his instructions that they divide up his possessions and build a settlement. Meanwhile, Amaro proceeds upriver to the site of a shimmering, jewel-encrusted castle surrounded by walls made of various precious substances. He is forbidden entry to the castle but is allowed to peer into the adjoining garden, which is the garden of paradise. He sees the tree from which Adam ate the apple, as well as many other trees and flowers. He watches a great number of virgins and other female saints singing and dancing in the garden, with the Virgin Mary in their midst. Though it seems to Amaro that he stands there looking for but a brief time, the porter who guards the gate tells him that he has been there for 266 years, even though he has not eaten or drunk and his clothes are

cleaner than when he arrived. The porter allows Amaro to take away some dirt from the garden.

When Amaro returns to seek his companions, he finds that they are long dead, the settlement they founded having grown into a large city. The inhabitants treat him with great honor. He has a new monastery built next to the convent where he met Baralides, and where she and Brigida are now buried. He lives out a saintly life there, and God works many miracles upon his death. He is then buried there beside the two women.

Motifs this narrative shares with other legends of journeys to paradise include paradise's location on an island in the far east; the river bearing forth the produce of the garden; the high mountain; the castle and walls of precious materials; the guardian at the door (a cherub in some tales, after the cherub guardians of Genesis 3:24); the delightful flowers, trees, and birds; and the distorted passage of time, which makes the voyager return home a stranger.⁵

This legend made popular reading in sixteenth-century Spain: when the stock of Toledo bookseller Juan de Ayala was inventoried in 1567, it contained 869 printed pamphlets of Amaro's story (Blanco Sánchez 1987, 216, 227, 233, 238). The Portuguese had a very similar version of the story, known as the *Conto de Amaro* (Lida de Malkiel 1956, 377-79). Spain's imperial expansion into the Americas, like that of the Portuguese into Africa and Asia, was accompanied by tales of magical islands, monstrous beasts, and strange peoples. It is not surprising that legends of previous overseas explorations, however fanciful, would appeal to the Iberian imagination at this time.

Late-medieval Europeans believed that the Garden of Eden existed on an island somewhere in the far east. Most medieval maps of the world depicted paradise at the easternmost edge of the terrestrial orb (Watt 1985, 77-78). Although separated from the rest of the earth by water, its great height, and/or a wall of fire, it was part of earth and could be visited. To do so, however, required supernatural assistance (Patch 1956, 156-61).

Columbus, on his voyages to what he assumed was the far east, thus had good reason to believe that he was approaching paradise. When, on his third voyage, he came into fresh water off the coast of Venezuela, he convinced himself that this water flowed not from a continental land mass but from the fountain in paradise (O'Gorman 1961, 94-99). At first he conjectured that he would be able actually to enter paradise. Elsewhere he wrote that it was impossible to go there, but he described the surrounding terrains as sharing in the character of paradise (Milhou 1983, 252-53). The connection between the New World and paradise, taken sometimes literally, sometimes metaphorically, became established in the European imagination.

Amaro's story had a practical application as well. Here, the story of his magical voyage seems to have merged with that of his more mundane existence as a healer of Burgos's sick. Folk healers invoked Saint Amaro to help them cure their patients. For example, a man named Pedro de Pazos, a laborer from the town of Vilella in Galicia, was investigated by the Spanish Inquisition in 1602. He admitted to curing the sick by applying a poultice to their shoulders and uttering an incantation, which included the words "Señor Santo Amaro, he passed through the coagulated sea" (Barreiro 1973, 105). This alludes to the episode in Amaro's adventures when the Virgin Mary rescued him from the coagulated sea full of monsters. Pazos also indicated that Saint Amaro had appeared to him two or three times, instructing him to cure in this manner (Barreiro 1973, 105).

Saint Amaro in New Spain: The Nahuatl Manuscripts

Stories of the lives and miraculous deeds of saints are found in a number of sixteenth-century Nahuatl books and manuscripts. For the Catholic priests who ministered to native congregations, these materials served a homiletic function: the saints' biographies provided models of morally superior lifestyles and their miracles supplied a stock of *exempla*, exemplary anecdotes inserted into sermons to reinforce points of doctrine.

In a Spanish prologue to his Nahuatl *sanctoral*, the most complete published account of saints' lives in Nahuatl, the Augustinian friar Juan de la Anunciación explains why native people should be taught about the lives of the saints (1577, 130r):

It is obvious, religious reader, that it is not only a pious thing but one of much spiritual benefit for the Christian people to write the lives of the saints and tell of their deeds and examples, since in this way devotion is awakened in the faithful, and charity is kindled, and the souls of men are moved to follow in their footsteps . . .

The Nahuas themselves may have been less interested in the saints as moral models than as holy tutelary beings linking human life to the realm of the divine and serving as community patrons. Their stories were sacred narratives that validated the Nahuas' adoption of Christianity while also telling of shamanistic dreams and visions, otherworldly encounters, and alliances with God.

A comparison of Anunciación's hagiographic writing with the *Psalmódia christiana* (Sahagún 1583; 1993), a compilation of Nahuatl songs for Church festivals, makes evident this difference in attitude. Four Nahua scholars collaborated with the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún to compose the *Psalmódia*. Their native perspective is evident

in a less moralistic, more celebratory and invocatory tone adopted toward the stories of the saints as well as their usage of poetic imagery. Connections between the Christian divine and the Nahua community are asserted via invocations of saintly and divine presences and descriptions of local settings in visionary terms (see Burkhart 1992a; 1992b).

Some sixteenth-century imprint bearing Saint Amaro's story found its way to New Spain. It is likely that the imported work was intended for the consumption of Spanish colonists, but someone chose to adapt it into Nahuatl. It is possible that the basis for this adaptation was the 1552 Burgos edition or a reprint of it: although by no means identical to the Nahuatl versions, it does correspond to them in many details. A priest may have supervised or assisted with the initial translation; if so, he was probably motivated, like Anunciación, to provide his Nahua charges with models of pious Christian life. However, the nature of some of the changes and additions indicates a primary role for one or more Nahua interpreters not perfectly literate in Spanish nor particularly erudite in matters of doctrine.

The two extant Nahuatl versions are cognate texts, both of which must ultimately derive from the same original adaptation from Spanish. This is indicated by the fact that both versions contain similar alterations of proper names and are, though not identical, very close in their wording. Each contains phrases not in the other version but which may have been included in a common model. Both are found in anonymous, unprovenanced, and undated manuscripts. Compared to early published books in Nahuatl and the canonical Classical Nahuatl manuscripts such as the *Florentine Codex*, both of these texts are in a rustic, unpolished Nahuatl transcribed with a particularly freewheeling orthography.

The more complete version occupies pages 67 through 80 of a manuscript in the Biblioteca Nacional de México (*Sermones en mexicano* n.d.; contents are indexed in Moreno 1966, 95-100). It is a collection of sermons, Gospel readings, hagiography, and miscellaneous Christian texts. The scribes, whose handwriting is typical of Nahuas from the later sixteenth century, had considerable difficulty with the spelling of Spanish and Latin terms. The last 122 of the manuscript's 470 pages are copied from fray Juan de la Anunciación's 1577 *sanctoral*, indicating that the document postdates that imprint.

The Saint Amaro legend follows entries on divine judgment and punishment, heavenly reward, and penitence. The latter text comments on the fall of Adam and Eve and the role of Mary and Christ in rescuing people from its results. After Saint Amaro's tale, the manuscript continues with a text for Advent and a long sequence on creation, the fall of Lucifer, Adam and Eve, Mary's birth and character, and the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ. Amaro's story fits in this context

because it discusses paradise, with allusions to the story of Adam and Eve and to the nature of heaven.

The second version is missing its beginning, probably its first folio. It is a more summary treatment than the first, as if a scribe taking dictation misheard some words, elided various words and phrases, changed the wording of other passages (often with no significant change in meaning), and omitted some entire episodes. The result is, in places, incoherent. This text occupies folios 116r to 123r of a manuscript in the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University (*Doctrina* n.d.). Like the first manuscript, this one is written by native scribes who have not mastered Spanish and Latin spelling. The volume houses a variety of religious texts, many of them relating to the cult of Mary.

One of the entries is a hand-written copy of an otherwise unknown Nahuatl imprint listing the papal indulgences granted to the religious confraternity of the Rosary and the ritual obligations of confraternity members. According to this copy, the text had been translated into Nahuatl by the Franciscan lexicographer Alonso de Molina and published at Pedro Ocharte's Mexico City press in 1572. The inclusion of this item in the manuscript suggests that the volume may have belonged to Nahua members of a Rosary confraternity. Introduced to Nahuas by Dominican friars, this confraternity was, like other Catholic sodalities, very popular among the native people (Dávila Padilla 1955, 354-60). The Saint Amaro legend is the next text in the volume; it may be assumed that it was transcribed there in or after 1572.

Within this manuscript, the Saint Amaro story is most closely related to several narratives about miracles performed by the Virgin for the benefit of her worshippers. In one of these narratives, Mary takes a pious abbess on a tour of hell, where the abbess sees her dead niece undergoing eternal torment due to one unconfessed mortal sin (*Doctrina* n.d., 23r-24r). Another tells of a Franciscan friar's vision of purgatory, in which the souls are crying out to Mary (75r-75v). Also included is a widely used *exemplum* in which pilgrims sailing to Jerusalem suffer a shipwreck. One of the men, who is thought drowned, is found alive on shore; he reports that he appealed to Mary and she carried him to safety wrapped in her mantle (72v-73v; c.f. Herolt 1928; Pez 1925). The Saint Amaro story resembles these narratives in that it includes two apparitions of the Virgin and a miraculous intervention at sea, as well as an otherworldly journey. The manuscript also tells of the heavenly visions of the prophet Ezekiel (63v-64r, corresponding to Ezekiel 1:10-14) and of Saint John (77r-78r, corresponding to Revelation 7:2-12).

The Nahuatl Life of Saint Amalo

Both Nahuatl versions of Amaro's story render the saint's name as Amalo, never as Amaro. Nahuatl lacks the phoneme /r/; native speakers tended to substitute /l/ when pronouncing Spanish or Latin loanwords. Nahua scribes sometimes made the corresponding orthographic switch. The consistency with which Amaro is called *amalo* (with the variants *amalon*, *amallo*) in these two texts suggests that the earlier version(s) had given his name in this way and the scribes did not see it spelled with an *r*. In contrast, they retain the letter *r* in *maria*, *padre*, *parayso terrenal*, and other Spanish words.

My translation is based on both Nahuatl versions. It tends to follow the more complete and more coherent Biblioteca Nacional de México manuscript (BNM), but with occasional reference to the John Carter Brown Library manuscript (JCB) where the latter includes text that is not present in the other or seems to make more sense. The style of the text, with its many parallel phrasings, frequent use of dialogue, and repetitive "ands," "thens," and "thereupons," accords with Nahua conventions of oral performance; I prefer to preserve these features rather than to impose conventions of English written prose.

In some places I have inserted names or other explanatory text to clarify who is being referred to or who is speaking to whom. Other ambiguities and inconsistencies reflect the fact that the Nahua translator did not fully comprehend his Spanish source and omitted much of its content. The paragraph divisions are based on textual divisions in the BNM text. I interrupt the narrative at several points to comment on the ongoing action and to make some comparisons with the 1552 Spanish edition.

[BNM 67] The Life of Saint Amalo

Listen to the life of Saint Amalo. His mother was always very merciful to the poor. It is quite evident that through compassion is begun good living, pure living. And then on a cliff they heard words from heaven, which uttered forth, "He who will be your child, he who will be your offspring, his name will be Amalo, which means 'very bitter.' He will go very far away. His sufferings will be very many. Sufferings will befall him, will happen to him. It will be as if they are bitter: they will embitter his heart, his life."

And after Saint Amalo was born, while he was living, he used to teach people very well, he used to live very well. He was not a *padre*,⁶ but he was like some Spaniards who are very great teachers. And people would listen very well to what he said. He would explain everything to people, what God was like, and heaven, and the angels who live there. And when they heard how very straightforward his teaching was, how well he explained all of God's words, then some people asked him what terrestrial paradise⁷ was like. Then he said to them, "I do not know, oh my children, what terrestrial paradise is like."

The Nahuatl Amalo does not come from Asia. Rather, a Spanish identity is suggested through the comparison to Spanish teachers. The Nahua redactor(s) may have elaborated on the prophecy connected with the saint's birth, since in the Burgos edition the voice merely informs Amaro's parents of what their son's name shall be. Such prophecies, though a feature of many saints' legends, would be interesting to Nahuas, who traditionally consulted diviners regarding the fate of their newborn children. An unfavorable prognosis could sometimes be counteracted through a rigorous and penitential lifestyle—such as that followed by Amalo, whose tribulations do finally end in contentment. Here and elsewhere, Amalo's suffering and fatigue are described in the same terminology used in Nahuatl to refer to the Passion of Christ.

And Saint Amalo then began a very long suffering, a penitence. Thus, he was praying to God to reveal to him where terrestrial paradise was. He would say, as he was praying, "perhaps it will be with my own eyes, or perhaps it will just be by wondrous means. I cannot know. If he wants me to see it, he is all-powerful."

And then one time when he was sleeping, he saw in his sleep how an angel spoke to him. Then when he looked forth, he no longer saw anyone. In his sleep he heard what the angel said: "God has listened to your prayer. [BNM 68] Take courage! Prepare yourself! You will see that for which you have prayed to God. In a great boat you will be conveyed. A great many things will come to you, will befall you, will happen to you, sufferings, afflictions." Then Saint Amalo was very grateful. And then he gave all his possessions, his goods to the poor, and to his servants he gave all the possessions he had. They were very happy, they were very contented. Thereupon he went to the shore, along with all his servants. They brought along a great many things that they would need in the water: wine, vinegar.⁸ Then they made a very large boat. Thereupon they departed. It is not known how they went. Just by the will of God, the boat followed the way. Then someplace in the middle of the water he saw a great city. Those who dwelt there were very wicked, very fierce, and very black,⁹ but the women were rather beautiful. Then they remained there for six months. Then an angel appeared to him there and said: "You must not live here. God does not want you to live among wicked people whom God despises. Travel on to where you are going." Thereupon he set forth.

Where the Spanish and Portuguese versions speak of a disembodied voice, the Nahuatl introduces an angel, who is visible to the saint. This makes the source of the orders unambiguous: it cannot be a demon, or one of the native deities now classified as demons. Angelic apparitions were familiar to the Nahuas from other Christian narratives, such as those of the Annunciation and the Nativity, and angels were popular subjects in Indo-Christian painting and sculpture.

Although the Burgos edition does not include this motif, boats that magically follow their course without guidance are a feature of other saints' legends. It is in this manner that Saint James reached Spain

and Saints Martha, Magdalene, Lazarus and their companions arrived in France (*Leyenda de los Sanctos* 1568, 113r, 129r; Sahagún 1583, 127r-27v).

In the Burgos edition the travelers cross the Red Sea (*el mar Rubio*) and the narrator speaks of Moses and the Israelites' escape from Pharaoh. The Nahuatl versions include the allusion to Moses, but also speak of the Jews' rejection of Christ. They begin by echoing sermons for Passion Sunday, which took as their topic the Jews' purported envy of Christ.¹⁰ The idea that the sack of Jerusalem by Rome in A.D. 70 was God's way of punishing the Jews for Christ's death was common in Christian Europe. However, the text here conflates the destruction of Jerusalem with the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, confusing the Roman Emperor with Pharaoh and placing Moses in Jerusalem. This suggests that a Nahua interpreter who does not have all of the stories straight is taking a free hand with the text.

The merging of these two stories is especially curious, given the tendency for Nahuatl texts to speak of Jews either as the (good) "children of Israel" of the Old Testament—prophets and patriarchs, including Moses, who were subtly conflated with the Nahuas' own revered ancestors—or as the (wicked) Jews (*Judiosmeh*) who lived at the time of Christ. However, despite the temporal conflation, the author of this passage maintains the moral distinction between Christ's tormentors and "God's precious ones," who were living "among the others" in Jerusalem.

In the colonial Mexican context, the destruction of Jerusalem could be interpreted as a precedent or metaphor for the Spaniards' destruction of the great Nahua city Tenochtitlan, which some Spanish commentators justified on the basis of what they considered the Nahuas' religious sins. It is possible that the Nahua interpreter here had such a parallel in mind, which could have motivated him to draw the moral distinction noted above: the inhabitants of the old city included good proto-Christians as well as the misguided people who merited God's punishment.¹¹ Colonial Nahuas commonly projected Christian motifs and values into their own past, dissociating themselves from the idolatries maligned by Spanish priests and emphasizing their willingness to accept Christianity (see, for example, Burkhart 1992a; Lockhart 1982; Wood 1991; Klor de Alva 1992).

The reference to Moses's difficulty in speaking is a chronologically misplaced episode from the Book of Exodus. After God first speaks to Moses from the burning bush, Moses protests that he is not eloquent but of a slow tongue. God promises to tell him what to say, and arranges that Moses's brother Aaron shall act as his spokesman before the people (Exodus 4:10-16).

And then in another place he went across red water. It was like blood, it is said to be the blood of the Jews. A very long time ago, the people of Jerusalem knew how our lord would descend hither. And they knew it very well, they saw it in a book. [JCB 116r] But when he came to appear on earth, they did not want to recognize him and they no longer wanted to listen to all of his teachings. They were so envious of our lord that they tormented him. You already know what his sufferings were like, all the things that they did to him. They stretched him by the arms upon a cross. Thus he died; thus they killed him.

[BNM 69] But when he was born, in a certain city there was a sovereign called an Emperor.¹² He was governing everywhere. Jerusalem was subject to him. When he heard how the Jews had done this, then by the order of God, because they had committed the misdeed of tormenting our lord God, therefore they turned them into slaves. The sovereign tormented them greatly. But God's precious ones, who were living there among the others in Jerusalem, they were rescued. By the order of God, far away through the water they went away, they fled. It seemed like dry land as they went. And God's very great precious one, Moses, God said to him, "Oh Moses, today you are captain of all my precious ones. You will lead them." But Moses, he was unable to speak, he was really unable to speak, his chest was closed up. Then he said to God, "Oh my lord, let it not be me, for I am unable to speak." Then once again God said, "I do not require that. I only want [JCB 116v] you to go so that you all will be rescued, by my orders, in the water."

Then they set forth into the water. Then God's precious ones were going away, just by wondrous means. And when the sovereign realized that all his precious ones,¹³ his vassals were getting away, then he said to his servants, "Our slaves are fleeing." Then he commanded his servants to go and capture them. But God's precious one, Moses, when he blessed the water, then it was as if the great ocean stood up. It became like dry land. Thus they got away.

And there where it was like blood, like bloody water, that Amalo was going across, it was all bloody water, the blood of the Jews. By this means will be remembered how very great a misdeed it was. And then Saint Amalo traveled on. Then he saw a city in the middle of the water. Life there was very good, very fine, and a great many riches were made there, and people did not die until they were very old because life was very good.

[BNM 70] And then a noblewoman said to him, "You must not reside here. May it be that you travel on to where you are going. If your servants remain here, perhaps they will desire the riches that are here. [JCB 117r] Then you will leave them and travel all by yourself. You shall set off this very day." And Saint Amalo then set off, taking his servants. They traveled very far. They did not know where they were traveling. They were weeping very much, they were sad, the servants of Saint Amalo. They were greatly fatigued in the water. They prayed fervently to God, they were very grateful to him. Then somewhere in the distance Saint Amalo saw seven boats. Thereupon his servants were consoled. Then he said to his servants, "Perhaps a city will appear now, since there are seven boats going about, which are very large." Then they were looking at them. And it was as if the water became like liquid metal. It was very condensed. The boats could no longer move. Then they

just turned around there; they could not go forward. Then he saw that fierce beasts like horses were killing and eating the people on the other boats. Then they were very sad. They said:

"Oh how wretched we are! Perhaps they will also eat us in this manner. Then we will die!" But Saint Amalo looked upwards. He prayed to Saint Mary. He said, "Oh heavenly noblewoman, you who are the mother of the rescuer, Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, I beseech you, [JCB 117v] help us! Speak for us, you most high one, you noblewoman." In a great many ways he praised her. It cannot be said how he was crying out to her, everything that he was saying to her, "*corona de las virgines*." It cannot be said, it cannot be seen in our words, how greatly he praised her. He was saying to her, "*ruego te señora por la tu sancta virginidad*." Then he was saying, "*Ave maris stella*," "*O gloriosa domina*." Thus he was giving himself utterly to our precious mother. He was saying to her, "Oh our precious advocate, have mercy on me. We children of Eve the woman, we go about weeping, we go about saddened, here in the place of weeping," as it is done today in our time. And when Saint Amalo's prayer was over, his servants were sleepy. But Saint Amalo was not sleepy. He just went on praying to the noblewoman, Saint Mary.

The Nahua translator seems to have despaired of conveying in "our words"—that is, in Nahuatl—the litany of praises, some of them rather esoteric (e.g. "noble bridal bower of the chambers of the heavens") that the saint utters in the Spanish text. He begins by loosely following the Spanish, which is given in the Burgos imprint (*Vida* 1552, 3r) as: "Ay, glorious virgin, mother of my lord Jesus Christ the Nazarene, queen of the high heavens." He then gives up on translation, inserts editorial comments on the difficulty of the text, and copies two phrases directly from the Spanish: "crown of the virgins," and "I beg you, lady, by your holy virginity." The spelling of the Spanish phrases is garbled in the extant texts.¹⁴

The translator then incorporates the opening words of two Latin hymns to the Virgin, "*Ave maris stella*" and "*O gloriosa domina*" (Nebrija 1549, 23v-25r).¹⁵ The 1552 Spanish text contains Spanish phrases that resemble these hymn titles: "*estrella de la mar*" and "*gloriosa virgen*." Passages from both hymns are translated into Nahuatl in the *Psalmodia christiana*'s songs for the Assumption of Mary (Sahagún 1583, 155r-55v).

After this, he has Amalo quote from the *Salve Regina*, a prayer to Mary included in the basic catechism. Fray Pedro de Gante's 1553 Nahuatl *Doctrina* glosses the relevant lines of the *Salve* as follows (Gante 1981, 22r):

We cry out to you, we children of Eve, the first woman, from whom we are descended. We who were exiled hither, we sigh to you, we go about sad, we go about weeping, here on the plain, in the place of weeping. Oh our advocate, may you have pity on us.

The comment “as it is done today in our time” refers to this ongoing use of these words. Here, the translator appears to be responding to a line in the Spanish, “advocate of the miserable and wretched children of Eve,” which itself echoes the *Salve Regina*.

Amalo’s marathon prayer is answered by an apparition of the Virgin. The text’s attention to the shimmering quality of the Virgin’s appearance is typical of Nahuatl devotional literature. An association of the sacred with light, warmth, and iridescence was a feature of Nahua ritual discourse easily adapted to Christian contexts, where it serves an almost emblematic function in marking sacred experience.

[BNM 71] And then on the wind he saw the noblewoman, Saint Mary. She was resplendent. The way she was shining, she surpassed all illumination. Then Saint Amalo swooned. His precious ones thought the world quaked. Then Saint Mary consoled him, encouraged him. [JCB 118r] She said to him, “May you not be afraid, Amalo. I have come to rescue you because you prayed to me so fervently. And you will be rescued if you do what I command. Now throw into the water the whole quantity of wine and vinegar that you have. Thereupon, you will blow up the skin sacks. You will fill them with your breath. And you will throw them into the water, you will tie them to the boat.” And then he awoke his servants. He said to them, “Take courage! Throw all the wine into the water.” Then his servants did so. Then they put it in the water. And Saint Amalo blew into the skin sacks. He filled them with his breath. Then he tied their necks and hung them from the boat. And then the fierce beasts came, which had killed the people of the seven boats. Then they ate the skin baskets. And when they had eaten them, thereupon they dragged the boat wondrously through the sea. They bore it, such that Amalo and his servants would be able to get away from there. Then they gave thanks to our lord, the sole divinity, God, and his precious mother, Saint Mary, for the wondrous thing that had happened to them, how the fierce beasts bore them through the sea. They marveled very much at this. Then they traveled on very far. They saw another city, which was all destroyed. It is said in the words, it is said that on the land there were hermits.¹⁶ And then Saint Amalo went there. He left his servants on the water. There he saw a very great church building. And then he entered there. [JCB 118v] And when they saw him, [BNM 72] they said, “Who are you? What do you want?” Then he said, “We have traveled very far seeking a city. We have seen no one. And we are about to die of thirst. May it be that you might have mercy on us.” Then they said to him, “A very long time ago the people here perished and no fruit has grown. But now may you come, may you sleep right here. You will eat right here. Then at night you will go. But not much farther on you will see¹⁷ a city, a very good place, and there you will find everything that you need. Along the way, you will just go straight toward where the sun rises.” Then they set forth. They saw another city. Then he said to his servants, “Stop your boat here where the city can be seen. Let us descend. We will eat. Wait for me.” Then he went off.

The Spanish text (*Vida* 1552, 4v-5r) explains that Leonatis, the lonely hermit priest whom Amaro now encounters, had experienced a vision

informing him about Amaro's journey in search of paradise. It also tells of the friendly lions who share Leonatis's island, occasionally coming to him to be blessed and then returning to their forest homes. Amaro spends a forty-day period doing penance here with Leonatis, after which he receives communion from the saintly friar. The Nahua translator identifies this forty-day period (*quarentena*) as Lent (*quaresma*), culminating in Easter.

Then he met a padre, a very old man, whose name was Leonatis.¹⁸ He said to our lord, "You have been good to me, oh my divinity, oh God. Now I am like this, now I am an old man. I have spent all my time going about in search of a certain person. Today it is your desire [JCB 199r] that I see him." And afterwards he said to Amalo, "Come, you precious one of God's, you must be exhausted. May you bless me." And Saint Amalo said, "It cannot be. I am not a padre. May it be you who blesses me, for it is your job. You are the representative of God." And the old man, Leonatis, then blessed Amalo first. Afterwards, Amalo blessed the other. They blessed each other.

Then the padre, the old man said, then he said, "You must not tell me of the sufferings that have befallen you, since before you came here. I already know of them. Then you left to come here, and what happened to you in the water I already know, you will not tell me." [BNM 73] Then the padre, the old man, Leonatis, said to him, "Come, let us go." Then he took him to the church. They were very joyful and they conversed with each other. He was telling him what God was like. And he was telling him all sorts of good things.

Then he said to him, "Here is a little bit of food. Give it to your friends. And you will come. Then you will fast." And then Amalo went off, he went to give the things to his servants. He said to them, "You will continue to wait for me here, my precious children, until Lent is over."

Then he went there, he went to fast while it was Lent, for forty days, during which they were worshipping. And when they had fasted, they spent all their time conversing with each other.

And the old man, [JCB 119v] Leonatis, when it was Easter, then he said to Saint Amalo, "Come. Your servants are waiting for you." Then he taught him about the land where they were to go. He said to him, "When you see another place, a great plain, right away you will leave your servants there. You will go all by yourself. You will leave your servants." Then they set off into the sea.

And when the old man was all alone, when Saint Amalo had left, he was very sad, the padre. He wept very much, he was very sad, because there was no one left to console him. Then because of his sadness he became sick. He was thinking about Saint Amalo. And while he was feeling sad, a woman came upon him, one who was very precious to God, called Babilonia. She was familiar with terrestrial paradise. She carried two staffs, which were very long and thin. They were staffs of great consolation, which she had taken forth from there in terrestrial paradise.

The Spanish text (*Vida* 1552, 5v) explains that this woman, Baralides, was from Mount Sinai and had spent forty years wandering through the desert doing penance. God had rewarded her piety by showing her

terrestrial paradise, whence she had taken these two staffs, one from a tree called the tree of comfort (*árbol de conforte*), the other from the tree of sweet love (*árbol de amor dulce*).¹⁹

According to the Spanish (4v), Leonatis was originally from Babylon (Babylonia). This statement is undoubtedly the source for the original Nahua redactor's rendering of Baralides's name. Since Nahuatl lacks the phonemes /b/, /r/, and /d/, this name would have been difficult to pronounce and might not have seemed very different from the word "Babylonia," which had already appeared in the text. It is an ironic name for a saintly woman, given the personification of Babylon as an abominable harlot in the biblical account of the apocalypse (Revelation 17:5).

Then she said to the old man, Leonatis, "Why are you sad? Why are you weeping?" Then he said to her, "Because of Amalo, my consoler. Now there is no one to console me. That is why I am sad." "Here, grasp this staff. Thus you will be consoled, you will no longer be sad." [BNM 74] Then he grasped it. He was no longer sad. He was never sad ever again. He went about joyfully all the time. And Saint Amalo, when he came to arrive at dry land, he then saw the plain. It was a very good place. Then he said to his servants, "Now, oh my children, I beseech you, may it be that you pardon me for anything that I have done to you. Perhaps I scolded someone, perhaps I did something to someone. Now I am going to leave you. You will just remain here in this very good place, on the plain. And divide all my possessions among yourselves, distribute them among yourselves. Now all by myself I will go. Remain here, I command you, oh my precious children. Now may it be that for my sake you pray to God. May you be strong and may you make yourselves houses. I command you to remain."

Then they said to him, they answered him, "Oh my son, you have been good to us. Your heart has granted it. May it be that you also pardon us for our misdeeds toward you. Perhaps we did not do well as we traveled, perhaps we did not serve you well, perhaps you have become famished." He said to them, "I am going now. May God keep you." Then he went off. It was very far. He did not know where he was going. Then he arrived at a place where he came upon two padres, who were sleeping there. They said to him, "May God keep you. You must be exhausted." And then they kissed his hands and his feet. Then they washed his feet. Thus the padres demonstrated what they do when padres go somewhere. And when they had washed his feet, then the padres went away.

The Nahua redactor here makes a general observation regarding the behavior of friars, who introduced ritual foot-washing to Mexico.

According to the Spanish text, these two men are hermits whose cell Amaro comes upon during the night. He passes the night with them. They console him in his loneliness for his companions, and tell him about Baralides. He then sets off in search of her. In the distance he sees a monastery at the foot of a high mountain. The text then explains

that this monastery is inhabited by saintly women of high status and that Baralides comes there to take communion three times yearly, at Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Returning to the present action, it then recounts Baralides's arrival there in search of Amaro, regarding whom she has had a revelation (*Vida* 1552, 6r-7r).

And then Amalo went on. Then he arrived at another place, in a city. He wept very much, he was very sad. And then one of the padres came. He said to him, "Why are you weeping so much? Why are you sad?" And he said to the padre, "The reason why I weep, why I am sad, is because I left my servants." And then he said to him, "May you not be sad. Here there dwells a woman who is very consoling, who has knowledge of terrestrial paradise." He said to him, "Here nearby to her [BNM 75] do I dwell. We ourselves do not have this knowledge, but the woman does. She is very precious to God. From time to time we see her here, she comes here. And in many places she consoles people and she just devotes herself to the service to God. You should seek her. Perhaps you will see her somewhere. She only comes when it is a great festival, Christmas, when it is Easter, and also when it is Pentecost. She comes to take the body of our lord Jesus Christ." And then Amalo said to them, "May it be that she comes. It is good. Let me yet seek for her. Perhaps I will see her somewhere, where she dwells."

And the woman, Babilonia, our lord God inspired her to seek Amalo. Then the old man, Leonatis, bade her farewell because God was waiting for her to seek Amalo. And Babilonia, thereupon she went to a place where noblewomen were cloistered. There she remained to wait for Amalo. And when she came to enter, everyone would have kissed the hands and feet of the woman, Babilonia. But the woman said to them, "Do not kiss my feet and my hands. I am not very precious to God. You will kiss the feet and hands of one who is very precious to God, who has suffered great fatigue."

She said to them, "Wait for one who is coming here." Then the woman, Babilonia, went off, she went to sit in the church. And when she saw that Saint Amalo was coming, then she gave orders to the noblewomen, she said to them, "Line yourselves up." And when he came, then they greeted him, and they kissed his feet and his hands. He said to them, "No, oh my children, for I am not good, I am not just, I am not precious to God." The woman said, "May you bless these women." And Saint Amalo looked up. He said, "Oh my divinity, [BNM 76] oh my lord, may you bless these women, your creations." Then he blessed them. Then they accompanied him out of the church and arranged for him a place to sleep. Then he spent fifteen days there. Then the woman said to him, "Perhaps there is something you want?" Then he said, "There is nothing. You have been good to me. You have cared for me very well." Then the woman said to him, "May it be that you bless my niece so that she will serve God." Then [JCB 120r] he said, "May it be so." Then he blessed her. And then Saint Amalo went away. The woman said to him, "May it be that you give my niece your mantle, so that she will be able to serve God, he by whom one lives." And then Saint Amalo said to her, "May it be so. It is good."

Baralides's niece, Brígida, is mentioned but never named in the Nahuatl texts. In fact, since the same Nahuatl word refers to both nieces and nephews, this person's sex is never clearly specified, though residence among cloistered noblewomen would imply female identity. The exchange of garments between the saint and the niece also takes place in the Spanish (7r-7v).

The Nahuatl specifies that the garment is a *tilmahtli*, a large rectangular cloth worn as a cape by both men and women. This garment, knotted at the shoulder, served as an ethnic marker in colonial Mexico, since it was indigenous people who wore it. This sartorial detail, like the tamales that Saint Amalo carries with him (see below), in a sense indigenizes the saint, making his ethnic identity ambiguous.

For his visit to paradise, it is appropriate that Amalo be dressed in a clean new garment: Nahuas associated new clothing with a state of ritual purity, achieved through penitential exercises. The keeping of Amalo's worn mantle in remembrance of the saint could have been understood in connection with the veneration of saints' relics, a practice introduced to the Nahuas by the Catholic priests.

And then the woman, Babilonia, said to him, "There you will give your mantle to my niece, so that she will remember you by it. Thus you will remove the one in which you suffered fatigue." And then the woman took him to where he would be able to reach terrestrial paradise. And then they ascended a mountain. And at its foot there emerges a very great river, which comes from terrestrial paradise. It is very large, it extends very wide, the way the water goes. And as it goes, it carries everything from there, the plums, the flowers, the fruits, all the other things that grow there, all the precious things. They go forth there submerged in the water that comes from terrestrial paradise. Because the water comes from there, it brings things forth from there submerged in the water, it carries everything. Then the woman, Babilonia, gave him strict orders. She said to him, "You will just go following the bank. In this way you will be able to arrive there, in terrestrial paradise. And you will give my niece your mantle. I told you that you will give her that in which you suffered fatigue." She said to him, "May you go. When my niece leaves you, may our lord God go with you. Here is what my niece made, a white mantle, which you are going to put on. In this way you will go." And Saint Amalo then took off that in which he suffered fatigue, his mantle, and then he put on the white mantle. Babilonia said, "Go forth. I am going to see your friends, your servants. They are very sad."

[BNM 77] Thereupon Saint Amalo went on. Babilonia's niece went with him. And Babilonia, when Amalo had departed while giving his mantle to her niece, thereupon she went there where [JCB 120v] Amalo's servants were. Thus she went to console them. And when she arrived, she said to them, "Why are you weeping so much? Why are you so very sad?" They said to her, "This is why we are sad. We have lost our precious father, Saint Amalo. He went off and left us here. He used to console us very much." Then she said to them, "If you knew how contented he is now, you would be very joyful." Then she

said to them, "Here, grasp this staff. Thus you will be consoled, you will never again be sad. And divide his possessions among yourselves, as Amalo commanded you. Make your fields, and everything else that you need." And after she went to console Saint Amalo's servants, then they were consoled, they were no longer sad. And Saint Amalo, he was following the riverbank. The niece of the woman, Babilonia, bade farewell to him. Then he ascended another mountain. Thereupon he saw terrestrial paradise. He saw how it is enclosed. The mountain is very good, very fine. It cannot be said how very high it is. It is as if it stands entering into heaven, beyond our sight. And on top of the mountain, it is as if there are houses, on the very top. It is a very delightful place. The way it shines, it surpasses the sun. And the mountain is enclosed by not just one but a great many enclosing walls. The first is like gold. The second is like jade. All of them, one after another, are like turquoise, like [JCB 121r] the dawn, like emerald-green jade, like coral, like the lovely cotinga, like quetzal plumes, turquoise jewels, green, red, yellow, like snow, multi-colored. It cannot be said. Then he saw a house. The entrance was like crystal, it was transparent there. Thereupon he entered there, he rested there. Thus he was very joyful, he was very contented. Then he went right to the entrance, the door, to terrestrial paradise. When he was just about to enter, the porter there said to him, "Where are you going?" Then Saint Amalo said, "I want to look in here. Who lives here? It is a very good place. There is no other place like this. In a great many places [BNM 78] I have seen the houses of Emperors, painted with gold, and the houses of God that stand in many places on the earth. I have never seen any place like this." Then the porter said to him, "It is here that our fathers, our mothers, committed their misdeed. This is the place called terrestrial paradise." When he heard this, then he said, "Oh my sovereign, oh God, oh our father, oh all-powerful one, it is true, that which is said, your tenet: 'God the father, the all-powerful, [JCB 121v] made, created, heaven, earth, and all that is visible and invisible.' And this that I now see with my own eyes, I have never seen, and of all the people, no one has seen it, they just believe it, all your creatures on the earth.

Adam and Eve are commonly called "our first fathers" or "our first father, our first mother" in Nahuatl texts; the more inclusive reference here is unusually vague. Amalo quotes the first Article of Faith, part of the catechism Nahuas were expected to memorize. The forbidden fruit that Adam and Eve eat is often labelled, as below, a *xocotl*, a hog plum or, generically, any sour-tasting fruit.

"You have shown me favor. Now I am content. The earth is your creation, the way the heavens are laid out, all your deeds that are not yet visible." Thus he prayed to him fervently. Then he said to the porter, "May it be that I just go in." And then the porter said to himself, "This one is precious to God. If he were not his precious one, would he have come here?" Then he said to Amalo, "God wants you to enter. Let me just open the door for you. Look in." And he saw the plum tree with which our fathers, our mothers committed their misdeed. He was just looking in at the doorway. He saw the fruits and flowers

that were growing there. And in the middle stood that with which Adam and Eve committed their misdeed.

And then the noblewoman Saint Mary descended there, accompanying all the noblewomen. They came very happily. It is truly exceptional, how she came. And as if she were in a garden, she was cutting flowers.

They were entertaining her, they were singing before her. They were saying, "*Pulchra es.*" And then the angels descended there, all God's precious ones. They were singing, [JCB 122r] they were playing flutes, they were playing their harps. It was most delightful, the way they were all entertaining the noblewoman, Saint Mary.

The Spanish text never actually states that Mary is in the garden, but speaks of one especially beautiful lady around whom all the other female saints dance and sing, kneeling when they pass before her. The Nahua translator may have misinterpreted a passage where the ladies sing a liturgical verse beckoning Mary to descend to the garden (*Vida* 1552, 9r). The JCB text has "our lord"—that is, God or Christ—accompany Mary to the garden. This detail is not in the BNM version and there is no basis for this in the Spanish text.

The women's song is given in BNM as *porcla es*; in JCB as *porchra es*. The scribes are quoting the liturgical antiphon *Tota pulchra es, Maria, et macula originalis non est in te*, "You are all fair, Mary, and the stain of original sin is not in you" (*Hours of the Divine Office* 1963, I:1664). This antiphon is based on the Song of Solomon, verse 4:7; the antiphon and the original verse were both applied to the festival of the Conception (e.g. Sahagún 1563, 91v; 1583, 225r). The parallel text in the 1552 Spanish version has the women sing "a verse that the Church sings, and it says, 'Oh how beautiful and pure, oh how beloved you are of God the holy father, Saint Mary'" (*Vida* 1552, 9v).

The Spanish version does not mention angels, although it does have some of the female saints play musical instruments of every kind. In the JCB text, a slight shift in wording allows the angels to play drums, a familiar native instrument, instead of harps.²⁰

And Saint Amalo, it seemed to him that his spirit had left him. He just stayed still, he did not get up, he did not turn his head, he did not eat, he did not need food, he did not look anywhere else. He did not need his tamales, with which they had provisioned him, while he was looking at all the noblewomen. How very delightful [BNM 79] were their flower garlands, and the way they sang! And he felt so content of heart that he did not realize how long he was standing there in the doorway. And then he saw that the plum tree had grown so that it stood entering into heaven. That is why the walls of its enclosure, of its walled enclosure, are so very high. And all the birds that dwell there, it is exceptional how they flew in arcs. They will surpass all, in how pleasingly they sing. It is as if it is very consoling, agreeable, exciting. One who hears it, it is as if his or her heart would go out. And one who hears it finds it exceptionally comforting. No one who lives on earth could say. And no one could say, even

if they actually went to heaven, they would not be able to explain it to us. And the way the writing is on the page, it cannot be said. The glory²¹ in heaven, it is delightful. Then the porter said to him, "You have looked. May you go away." Then Amalo said to him, "May it be that I go inside, for just a little longer. May it be that I go to look at the house." Then the porter said to him, "God does not want this, for it is enough, you have taken a very long time." Saint Amalo said, "It is not yet a long time that I have been looking, perhaps an hour.²² I have not yet eaten [JCB 122v] my provisions." Then the porter said to him, "I know that when you came it was 266 years ago." Then Saint Amalo said, "It was when? I have not eaten. I did not think it was time to eat yet. Look, here are my provisions." Saint Amalo's tamales were on his back, and he showed him. He said to him, "But I never stood up, I never turned my head at all." And then the porter told him, "Come. It is enough, or even greater suffering will befall you, and it will be even worse when you go back there." And then Saint Amalo came back. And when he reached the place where he had left his friends and the boat, it was a most wondrous place. A very great city had been built. He was quite astonished, and he marveled very much. Thereupon the people who lived there saw how he was just going about like a poor orphan, he was just going about feeling sad. Then they said to him, "What do you want? Where is your home?" And Saint Amalo said to them, "Oh my children, it is here. It seems as if it was a place like this. Not long ago I went off and left my friends here. We came in a boat, I came here with them. And now how can it be that [BNM 80] there are all these people living here? Where I have been, I never turned my head, and I never stood up. Nothing happened to my mantle, it did not get worn out." And then they said to him, "What is your name?" He said to them, "My name is Amalo." Then they took out some papers and read them. Then they said to him, "It is 266 years [JCB ends] since this city was founded." Then he said to them, "I do not know, oh my children, how it happened." And then they treated him with great esteem, the people who lived there. Then he wandered around there. He said to them, "May you help me in this way. May you build for me a house of God, so that I may serve him there." Thereupon they founded a house of God there. It was next to the noblewomen, where he had come across the women, where he had seen the one called Babilonia. There he went on serving the sole deity, God. Thus he always went about there devoting himself entirely to him, he went about serving him, he went about devoting himself to him.

Time distortion in connection with a sacred journey occurs in at least one indigenous narrative: the story of the ruler Motecuhzoma I's envoys to Coatlicue, the mother of the Mexica patron deity Huitzilopochtli, at the mythical site of Coatepec. The envoys exchange gifts, including mantles, with the people of Coatepec, who have not aged since Huitzilopochtli's departure many generations earlier (Durán 1967, II:215-24).

The JCB manuscript terminates its account upon Amalo's return to the city and the revelation of the time lapse. The BNM text ends by describing Amalo's continuing participation in religious exercises. It is striking that neither Nahuatl account takes the story all the way to

Amalo's death. In European hagiographic writings the saint's death, accompanying miracles, and the disposition of his or her remains were standard inclusions. The Nahua redactors seem to lose interest in their Amalo after he completes his adventures.

Interpreting the Nahuatl "Saint Amalo" Texts

The culturally ambivalent, hybrid texts produced by Nahua translators from Old World sources are difficult to interpret: by their very nature they encode multiple readings, and would have been differentially received by individual Nahuas depending on their social status, their knowledge and acceptance of Christian teachings, their attitude toward Spaniards, and other factors. Many details of the scribes' response to the Spanish story are evident from the Nahuatl translations, with their additions, deletions, misunderstandings, and adjustments to local knowledge. I cannot offer a single, definitive reading of what this text "meant" to late-sixteenth-century Nahuas, but I will suggest possible lines of interpretation.

Certain aspects of the legend resonate with native experience and the Spanish colonial context. The story tells of an otherworldly journey carried out by ship. Nahuas would very likely assume that the destination of Amaro and his companions lay somewhere in their own New World environs, the places that ocean-going foreigners from the Old World visited and settled. But in contrast to the sixteenth-century Spaniards who saw the story as a forerunner of their own explorations, Nahuas might identify themselves with the inhabitants of paradise and its environs, more than with Amaro and his companions.

The connection between the New World and Eden was well established. Some Europeans linked other early Old Testament events to New Spain; for example, the great pyramid at Cholula was compared with and sometimes identified with the Tower of Babel (*Códice Vaticano* 1964, 18-21; Durán 1967, I:14, 166; II:24-25; Motolinia 1979, 51; Mendieta 1980, 86-87). Tlalocan, the verdant home of the Nahua rain deity Tlaloc, seemed to be a native version of terrestrial paradise; this parallel is drawn several times in fray Bernardino de Sahagún's ethnographic writings (1905-08, VI:194; 1905-08, VII:3, 200; 1950-82, VI:35; 1981, I:45; García Icazbalceta 1954, 386). If priests could accept such connections, native people concerned with finding meaning in the new teachings would be even more inclined to foster these associations.

Amaro's companions build a city on the shore, as the first Spanish invaders did at Veracruz. Like Cortés on his march to the island city of Tenochtitlan, Amaro travels uphill and overland to a water-bound site of architectural and horticultural splendors. However, Amaro comes to this paradise not to conquer or evangelize but simply to marvel,

to bear witness to the presence of sacred beings and places. He does not even enter but merely looks in at the door—the guardian of this paradise effectively prevents foreign intrusion. The Nahuatl accounts dress him in an indigenous garment and place tamales on his back, as if in a native-style pack basket. In this way Amaro is himself partially indigenized, adopted into a Mexican cultural world, just as his name is changed to sound like a Nahuatl word. The garden Amaro sees is described in terms of flowers, trees, music, singing, and birds. These are phenomena that were used in Nahuatl poetics and ritual practice to induce and to indicate an encounter with the sacred (Burkhart 1992b). This imagery effectively constructs the garden as a sacred space in Nahua terms. Christian beings are present in this sacred setting, but here Christianity is represented by women saints and bird-like angels. These beings engage in ritual practices that Nahuas recognized and valued and which were common in Nahua-Christian worship: singing, playing musical instruments, gathering flowers, wearing floral garlands. These benevolent superhuman beings with their Nahua-like behaviors contrast with the Spanish males responsible for invading and dominating—and also evangelizing—Mexico. They are welcome in the garden, while the mortal male explorer is excluded; similarly, many Nahuas actively accepted certain aspects of Christian worship while opposing political domination by Spanish colonists. The text achieves a merging of Nahuatl sacred discourse with an appealing and non-threatening representation of the Christian sacred.

But the adaptation of Amaro's story into Nahuatl shows not only that tales of fantastic ocean voyages to garden paradises held some intrinsic appeal for the colonized Nahuas in relation to their own recent history. These variant versions of Amaro's story, both of them in manuscripts that bear no overt evidence of priestly control or editing, also indicate the functioning of some sort of literary underground in late sixteenth-century central Mexico. With or without the collusion of sympathetic priests, Nahuas literate in their own language were passing texts among themselves, copying them, and adapting them for their own use. Christian texts with no connection to the usual round of catechistic lessons and Church holidays were circulated in this way, simply because some people found them interesting.²³ The people involved in this activity were most likely the holders of religious offices, such as the *fiscales* and choirmasters who to a large extent ran the native churches, and the leaders of the confraternities.²⁴

Clearly, these people were neither wallowing in pagan ignorance—despite their occasionally inventive interpretations of Christian teachings—nor were they practicing the minimalized, strictly defined Catholic cultus laid forth in the printed catechisms and doctrinal manuals. Rather, they were seeking to exert control over their own religious life by

locating, among the texts imported from Spain, writings that they could adapt to their aesthetic sensibility, their understanding of the sacred, and their status as colonized and evangelized subjects of Spain.

The effectiveness with which discourses of European origin have supplanted indigenous ones, even in this relatively uncensored domain, is striking. The Spanish priests' view of the hierarchical ordering of languages (Rafael 1992, 69-70) seems to have impressed itself on the consciousness of their native pupils. The Spanish and Latin written word is ascribed tremendous authority, such that interpreters will copy long passages of garbled text in those tongues and comment on the inadequacy of their own words to explain the meaning. They depend heavily on European models and rarely if ever presume to generate texts entirely from scratch.

This whole genre of Nahuatl writing originated as a means of replacing indigenous religious discourse and the old pictorial manuscripts with Catholic texts the contents of which would be subject to control by those friars who were literate in Nahuatl. Its practitioners seem hesitant to violate this directive. Trained to translate and copy materials for use in Church-sanctioned contexts, these native writers consistently frame their interpretations within what Scott (1990) terms the "public transcript": since the texts are potentially accessible to friars or other non-natives who could read Nahuatl—and who would not hesitate to confiscate material they deemed inappropriate—counter-hegemonic assertions are not made openly. To the extent that native writings such as this encode resistance to Spanish rule, it is through subtle processes of selection, emphasis, and double meaning rather than direct challenge.

In the case of the Saint Amaro texts, the Nahua redactors make no explicit reference to the Spanish invasion or Christian evangelization. They stray little from the sequence of episodes in the Spanish legend. But by choosing to include this story among the other entries in their manuscripts, they reveal their own interest in non-canonical, alternative stories about both European exploration and the Christian sacred and provide their fellow Nahuas with access to a narrative they were unlikely to encounter in formal Church contexts. This itself may be seen as an act of resistance, an assertion of native control over the selection and dissemination of Christian discourses.

The content of the Saint Amaro story may also be read as counter-hegemonic in the sense that it contradicts the dominant Spanish colonial discourse, according to which conquering Spanish soldiers brought Christianity to a pagan and demon-ridden land. This story of a benign and essentially powerless visitor to a sacred paradise could be interpreted as a revelation of the intrinsically sacred character of Mexico and its compatibility with those aspects of Christianity that the Nahuas respected and accepted—without necessarily accepting Spanish rule.

Notes

*I am especially grateful to William Christian for providing me with a copy of the Saint Amaro *Novena* and with the Barreiro and Blanco Sánchez references. John Keber was also helpful with sources on the Old World legends. My preliminary research on the Nahuatl documents was supported by the Doherty Foundation and by a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship at the John Carter Brown Library. I thank the staffs of the Biblioteca Nacional de México and the John Carter Brown Library for allowing me to examine and obtain copies of the Saint Amaro documents, and the library of the University of Illinois at Urbana for providing me with a copy of a facsimile of the 1552 Burgos imprint of Amaro's legend. I also thank the reviewers for *Colonial Latin American Review* for their comments.

¹For example, the hagiographic compilations Lilio 1558, *Leyenda de los Santos* 1568; Amaro is also absent from the *Golden Legend* (Voragine 1900), Villegas Selvago (1636), Ribadeneyra (1669). His festival is not celebrated in any of a large number of sixteenth-century missals and breviaries, from Spain and other countries, that I have examined. Mexican imprints with calendrical and/or hagiographic content include Gante (1981), Sahagún (1583), Anunciación (1577), *Missale* (1561); none mention Amaro. Amaro is listed among Spain's *santos y beatos* in the *Enciclopedia de la cultura española* (1963, IV:233), which ascribes him to the fourteenth century. His Burgos shrine is mentioned in Christian (1978, 95).

²This literature is surveyed by Patch (1956). Legendary journeys to paradise go back as early as the Legend of Seth, first recorded in the third or fourth century AD. According to this story, Seth and Eve travel to the garden in search of the "oil of mercy." Seth becomes stupefied upon seeing the splendor of paradise (Patch 1956, 163-64).

³This imprint was reissued in a facsimile edition, probably in Madrid, around 1876. I am using a copy of this facsimile. The *National Union Catalog* lists only one other sixteenth-century imprint of Amaro's story, a 1593 Valladolid version.

⁴This name could have been borrowed from either Saint Brigid of Ireland (5th-6th century) or Saint Bridget of Sweden (14th century). The former may be more likely: the theme of navigating saints has a Celtic flavor, given the popularity during medieval times of the story of Saint Brendan the Navigator, as well as those of other legendary Celtic adventurers such as Bran, Maeldune, and Snedgus (Patch 1956, 39-67).

⁵Several of these narratives are discussed by Patch (1956, 163-77). In three, the voyagers are monks. The travelers often meet Enoch and Elijah, who are absent from the Amaro account. In one story, the *Pantheon* of Godred of Viterbo, monks from Brittany see a statue of the Virgin and Child in paradise, although Mary herself is not encountered (meetings with the Virgin are, however, common in narratives of otherworldly visions). Enoch and Elijah tell them that

one day in paradise equals 100 years in the outside world; when they return home they find that their church is gone and there is a new city, a new king, new laws, and even a new language that they cannot understand. In a 14th-century Italian story, three monks learn that they have been in paradise for 700 years and are told that, when they return to their monastery, they will be identified by the fact that their names are written in the missal on the church altar. The idea that the sweet scent of the fruits of paradise would cause one to lose all desire for food and drink was a typical motif in medieval descriptions of paradise (Patch 1956, 156).

⁶The Spanish loanword is used; it denotes a Catholic priest, specifically a member of a religious order (secular clergy were termed *clerigos*). The word *padre* was in use among literate Nahuas by 1549 (Karttunen and Lockhart 1976, 56).

⁷The Spanish phrase *parayso terrenal* is used throughout the texts.

⁸These are loanwords from Spanish: *vino* and *vinacle* (from *vinagre*).

⁹The Spanish text (*Vida* 1552, 2r) describes the men as ugly and cruel (*feos y crueles*), but not as black. Nahuatl catechistic literature sometimes associated immorality with blackness. The nearness of these people to the Red Sea is consistent with an African identity, to which the Nahuatl may be alluding. It is possible that the Spanish imprint the translator actually used did make this reference. Africans brought to the colony were referred to in Nahuatl as *tliltique*, “black ones” (Lockhart 1992, 509, 510; Cline 1986, 43).

¹⁰Nahuatl examples are in Anunciación 1577; Escalona 1588; Sahagún 1563.

¹¹I thank one of the reviewers for *Colonial Latin American Review* for suggesting that the Jerusalem/Tenochtitlan parallel might be relevant here.

¹²The Spanish word *Emperador* is used. This word was first introduced to Nahuas in reference to Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor who was their first Spanish sovereign.

¹³BNM has *ytlacovan*; “his precious ones” (no parallel word in JCB); this may be an error for *ytlacovan*, “his slaves,” which would make more sense here.

¹⁴The first is written as *corona de las virginis* (BNM) and *Qurna de las virginis* (JCB), the second as *regundere mja p°. da sancta virginidad* (BNM), and *regõtesse mariã porian s.ta virginitat* (JCB), and again as *regofere nira .sta virginidad* (JCB). The correspondence between these copied Spanish phrases and the 1552 Burgos text indicates that the model for the Nahuatl texts, if not this edition itself, resembled it very closely in at least some passages.

¹⁵In the Nahuatl, these are given as *aue maristella. o gloriosa dña excelsam* (BNM) (*excelsa* is the first word of this hymn’s second line) and *aue ma stellã o gloriosa dñe* (JCB).

¹⁶In the Spanish, the building Amaro visits is an abbey populated by hermits (*Vida* 1552, 4r). BNM renders *hermitaños* as *elpitaniame*, a nonsense-word with the structure of a Nahuatl plural noun; JCB lacks a corresponding passage. The redactor’s apparent difficulty with this term may explain his editorial comment

"it is said in the words": i.e., he is doing the best he can to transmit information he does not quite understand.

¹⁷BNM breaks the line here and begins the following line with elaborate lettering of the particle *in*.

¹⁸The Spanish text has Leonatis (*Vida* 1552, 4v). BNM gives the name as leonartis and as leonardis, JCB as leonadis.

¹⁹The motif of a branch brought forth from the trees of paradise goes back to the third- or fourth-century Legend of Seth, in which an angel gives Seth a branch with three leaves from the tree of life (Patch 1956, 163).

²⁰Where BNM has *ynmecahuehueuh quitzontzonaya*, "they were playing their cord drums," or harps, JCB has *miyequintin huehuatl q'tzotzonaya*, "many of them were playing drums."

²¹The Spanish/Laín word *gloria* appears here. The Nahua redactor seems once again to be questioning his ability to translate. In the Spanish text the porter tells Amaro that he will never enter here again, for he will sooner go to the glory of the paradise of the heavens (*mas ayna te yras a la gloria del parayso de los cielos*)—that is, heaven, as opposed to this earthly paradise. This statement is probably the source for the Nahuatl text's "the glory in heaven."

²²JCB here uses the Spanish word *hora* (*ce oran*, "one hour"); BNM has no corresponding phrase.

²³Another example is a collections of orations and meditations organized according to the days of the week. Sahagún claims to have found this manuscript circulating among the Nahuas and determined it to be full of "many faults and incongruities." He and/or his own Nahua assistants rewrote the text and, presumably, returned it to circulation (Sahagún 1574).

²⁴On these officials among the colonial Nahuas, see Lockhart 1992, 210-29. Lockhart notes (p. 218) that the confraternity officers were "[a]lmost a part of the church staff."

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