
In 1961 Ziehm began the long labor of clarifying and explicating the San Pedro Nahua texts, which had been collected in 1906-1907 by her former teacher Konrad Theodor Preuß. The project provided the occasion for repeated trips to the Western Sierra Madre of Mexico, to the little village of San Pedro Jicora — a northern outpost of Nahua, or latter-day Aztec, tradition in the state of Durango — where Preuß had amassed what would come to be recognized as the largest compilation of Nahuatl myth, song, and prayer since the sixteenth-century work of the great Franciscan, Bernardino de Sahagún.

Born March 23, 1911, to non-Jewish parents, as Elsa Harmening, the future editor of the Nahua-Texte was adopted by a family of Jewish background and given the family’s surname, Wertheim. In 1934, during her third year at the University of Berlin, encountering aggressive anti-semitism in the linguistic department (where, as she recalled, the study of Sanskrit had come to be regarded as an “Aryan science”), she switched her major and went on to take her doctorate in ethnomusicology. Accordingly,

* Photograph taken August 1992