SOURCES AND METHODS
FOR THE STUDY OF POSTCONQUEST MESOAMERICAN ETHNOHISTORY

PROVISIONAL VERSION

edited by

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**Preliminary Remarks**

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In the last thirty years indigenous-language sources have come into their own in the field of postconquest Mesoamerican ethnohistory. Susan Kellogg once called the phenomenon a remarkable outpouring of research. Most of the basic writings are already available to the public in a series of books and sometimes articles, as well as dissertations on their way to being books. But it is not easy for a reader to get a sense of the whole corpus, scattered as it is and often without much crossreference. Perhaps it is even harder to find out how one would go about doing such work oneself. To achieve their results the participants in this movement have used a large variety of new and uniquely constituted sources and have devised methods specifically adapted to them, even evolving whole new genres of research and writing. But their books, naturally enough, tend to concentrate on the substantive results, leaving little time for that systematic discussion of sources and methods so much needed by anyone entering the field.

In the fall of 2002 a conference was held on the UCLA campus, organized by Kevin Terraciano, Lisa Sousa, John Kicza, and others, precisely to discuss sources and methods in the postconquest philological ethnohistory of Mesoamerica. The majority of the main practitioners in the field attended. Included were some who did not employ indigenous languages; philological methods are not restricted to any particular language, indigenous-language material is not always available for any given ethnohistorical topic, and what is called the New Philology in Mesoamerican ethnohistory began in and continues to be tied to social history based on Spanish sources.

The conference inevitably led to plans for a volume based on the papers presented. The presentations were many, varied, and substantial, and we looked forward to a monumental research tool and reference work. Lisa Sousa and Jim Lockhart were the first candidates to be editors of the volume, and later Stephanie Wood came on board. Revised contributions were requested from everyone, and also from some important figures who did not participate in the event itself.

Each article was to describe a source the author had worked with, assessing its potential and particularly explaining the methods the author had evolved to extract ideas and insights from it. A certain autobiographical element was hoped for and even solicited, for through it lines of intellectual influence and reaction are often most effectively conveyed, and in that way others can often best grasp how a given work came to be. A combination of the personal and the technical within a relaxed atmosphere was the aim.

A great many contributions of this kind in fact came in and were gradually edited and revised to suit the volume’s purposes and to be compatible with one another, as far as that seemed feasible and desirable. In due course more than enough of them reached a polished form to be the makings of a splendid and

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useful volume. But other important contributions have not come in. And it must be admitted that some that did long lay unedited, a situation that has now been rectified.

Before proceeding to publication arrangements it seems well worth it to wait for the greater comprehensiveness that will flow from the development of the remaining contributions. Yet meanwhile over twenty significant articles by figures active in the field have languished in a computer unseen, unread, unused. With much editing now having been done, the time seems ripe for this compromise step, putting on the web that portion of the volume which is in virtually final form so that it can in some way reach those who need it, and the writers of these important pieces can receive at least a fraction of the credit due them.

A partly topical, partly chronological scheme of organization is planned for the completed published volume. Meanwhile the items included here are arranged as separate files in alphabetic order according to author. For now each one is copyrighted by the respective author. The published edition is to have a unified bibliography, but for the present each piece has its own.

It was envisioned that Lockhart would provide an introductory piece for the whole, and with the collection so far advanced, he has now done so, although there may be further revision and expansion at a later date.

Included here as of January 2007 are all the contributions presently on hand, having been through a back-and-forth process of editing and having nearly all attained a relatively complete form. Other contributions will be added as they arrive, with the goal of a regular book publication when all are assembled in similar form. It would perhaps be of interest to list the expected remaining contributors and their topics, but aside from uncertainties, it could be invidious and hence is not done here. When it comes to our careers, all of us are at the mercy of fate, health, and multiple commitments.

In view of the somewhat provisional nature of the enterprise, a very few bibliographic entries are left incomplete. Individual contributions may be revised at various times.

NOTE, January 2010. The collection in its present form has been in effect functioning as a published book. A few contributions have been somewhat revised, and a major one has been added. Here in the introductory part an article by Rebecca Horn and Jim Lockhart, a general guide to mundane Nahuatl documents, has been included until such time as it is published as part of a supplementary volume of the Handbook of Middle American Indians.
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