

Editor's Preface

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The John Carter Brown Library (JCB) in Providence, Rhode Island, has long been a mecca for ethnohistorians in search of its rare books, maps, and manuscripts. Sooner or later, most scholars of Mesoamerican culture, history, and language end up gingerly turning ancient pages in the JCB Reading Room; many start as students and return again and again, for decades. It is thus highly appropriate and long overdue that we offer this special issue of *Ethnohistory*—“Colonial Mesoamerican Literacy: Method, Form, and Consequence”—both to present articles that originated as papers given at the JCB and to be sponsored by the library. A generous subvention provided courtesy of the library’s new director, Neil Safier (himself a long-time scholar-devotee of the JCB’s gems), has made possible the color plates included in this special issue (see “Color Image Gallery”). Those plates mark not just a rarity in the journal’s sixty-year history, this being one of only a very few issues to feature color images; they also mark the first time two issues in the same volume have included color. They are mentioned in Vail’s, Terraciano’s, and Maxwell’s articles, where they are called out by “gallery” rather than “figure” number.

It is unusual for a single journal issue to stretch to ten articles. The ten authors are to be thanked for their efforts at meeting word limits, with the lion’s share of credit and gratitude going to Kathryn E. Sampeck in her role as a tireless and unflappable guest editor. This issue is fat in every way—overstuffed with expertise and insight, corpulent with many lifetimes of immersion in indigenous languages and cultural traditions. Yet these articles represent merely a part of the range of work that was on display at the JCB during the 2012 International Workshop on Indigenous Literacy in Meso-

america and the Colonial World; they are a fraction of the scholarship that these ten scholars have published on Mesoamerican topics; and they are just the tip of a growing iceberg of study into the lives and practices of the people who lived during the colonial centuries in what is now Mexico and Central America.

The scholars here range from eminent luminaries to rising stars, representing the disciplines of history, anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, literature, and art history. Not all of them would necessarily self-identify as New Philologists, but philologist-ethnohistorians they are, and the issue makes a major contribution to the New Philology. Although the temporal focus is mostly the colonial period, the discussion spans some eight centuries, from the Late Postclassic to today. The Maya of the Yucatán peninsula get attention in most of the essays, but geographically, two Nahuatl zones—those of Central Mexico and of Pipil speakers—effectively book-end the other language areas covered here: those of Mixtec, Yucatec Maya, K'iche', Kaqchikel, and Q'eqchi'. Whatever the specific interest that drew you to one or two of the articles in this issue, I would encourage you to browse among them all and to savor fully the interplay between the diversity of method and topic and the commonality of concern.