



Figure 1. Alfonso in Spain, Summer 2007 (photograph courtesy of Laura Lacadena).

In Memoriam: Alfonso Lacadena García-Gallo¹

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Mesoamericanists everywhere are saddened by the passing earlier this year of Alfonso Lacadena García-Gallo (Zaragoza, August 21, 1964 – Madrid, February 9, 2018). A treasured friend and a brilliant colleague, Alfonso was taken from all of us much too soon after a year's battle with cancer. He is survived by his parents, his loving wife Laura, and their two sons Alejo and Ignacio.

Alfonso spoke frequently of his early childhood fascination with the indigenous peoples of the New World, and of his longing to see the places where the ancient Precolumbian cities of Tenochtitlan (Mexico City), Itzamkanac (Campeche), and Ichcaantiho (Merida) once stood. To paraphrase the words of Alfonso's favorite American country song, which he loved to sing with colleagues and friends in Mexican and European bars: "life seemed old there, older than the trees." He received a broad education at the Colegio de Nuestra Señora del Recuerdo de Madrid (*los jesuitas*), but occasionally admitted that he sometimes ignored his assigned work in favor of poring over the histories of the Aztec emperors in Fray Juan de Torquemada's *Monarquía indiana* and Fray Diego Durán's *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España*. As a young man, just beginning his formal education in Mesoamerican studies, he reached out to various American, Mexican, and European scholars engaged in the study of Mesoamerican languages and hieroglyphic writing, forging lifelong correspondences and friendships with Victoria R. Bricker, Joaquín Galarza, Stephen

D. Houston, Otto Schumann Gálvez, and many others. In future years, he would always remember the generous responses of these and other senior colleagues, and therefore strove to be equally responsive to junior colleagues throughout his long and distinguished career. I will never forget Alfonso's response to my first email to him, in the mid-1990s. Realizing that we would be in Mérida (Yucatan) at the same time, he invited me to visit him at his apartment near the UADY and "talk glyphs." I ended up staying with him for three days, and we talked about much more than glyphs! His enthusiasm for Mesoamerican studies was contagious, and he was generous with his learning.

Alfonso was a Mesoamericanist in the truest sense of the word, equally at home among the snow-capped mountains of Highland Mexico, the hills and plains of the Yucatan peninsula, and the humid neotropical rainforest of the Peten, Guatemala, as well as in the respective languages, writing systems, and indigenous literatures of these regions. Archaeological, epigraphic,

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and linguistic fieldwork took him to Río Bec, in Campeche; to Ek Balam and Oxkintok, in Yucatan; to La Blanca, Machaquila, and Naachtun in the Peten; and to Jocotan in Chiquimula. And very few archives, libraries, and museums with Mesoamerican collections escaped his attention.

In some thirty years of work, between 1987 and his most recent publications and academic presentations in 2017, Alfonso's accomplishments and contributions to Mesoamerican studies defy brief summary, ranging over such traditionally separated domains as anthropology, archaeology, epigraphy, grammatology, history, linguistics, and literature, as well as the all-too-often dissociated regions of Central Mexico and the Maya area. Alfonso produced scores of insightful articles on decipherment, orthography, and morphology throughout his distinguished career, including the decipherment of several previously-unreadable logographs (e.g., T158/1G4 **WI'**, T164/XE2 **HA'AL**, T275/ZUJ **YAX/yi**, T327/AC3 **LOK'**, etc.), the initial recognition of several important grammatical morphemes and constructions in Classic Maya glyphic texts (e.g., passive and antipassive constructions, verbalized nouns, the adverbial use of adjectives, etc.), and perceptive analyses of the types of consonants that were often omitted in Maya writing.

Alfonso pioneered the study of Maya paleography with his 1995 dissertation, which was awarded the Premio Extraordinario de Doctorado of the Universidad Complutense, Madrid, and was professionally

published in 2002. In this study, and in several followup articles, Alfonso clearly indicated the importance of paleographic methodology not only in Preclassic, Classic, and Postclassic Maya contexts (particularly in the Codex Madrid), but also for the study of other Mesoamerican writing systems, such as the "Olmec," Isthmian, and Nahuatl systems. These influential publications have since inspired several ongoing studies into the origins and development of Mesoamerican writing.

With his longtime collaborator and close friend, Søren Wichmann, Alfonso also contributed several remarkable studies charting the pronounced linguistic variation present in Classic Maya texts, including the recognition of a distinctive Eastern Yukatekan "school" of hieroglyphic writing at Chichen Itza and Ek Balam, as well as in the much later Madrid and Dresden codices, prefiguring much recent interest in the historical sociolinguistics of Maya writing.

But it was undoubtedly in the domain of Aztec hieroglyphic writing where Alfonso's contributions have had the most dramatic and lasting impact. In several studies published in 2008, Alfonso revealed the fruits of more than two decades of investigation into the systematics of this script, revealing that—although long seen as a pictorial "proto-writing" that had only become partially phonetic under Spanish influence—Aztec writing was in fact a logosyllabic writing system strikingly similar in structure to Anatolian hieroglyphs and (closer to home) Maya writing, that it already had this



Figure 2. Alfonso in the field, sketching Río Bec Stela 5, 2005 (photograph courtesy of Laura Lacadena).



Figure 3. *yu-sa-... u-ki-ti 4-le-ku, yu's(kay) ukit kan lehk (took')*, "This is the trout of Ukit Kan Lehk Took', king of Ek Balam." Alfonso Lacadena's drawing and epigraphic analysis of Ek Balam Miscellaneous Text 5, Tomb 1, Room 49, Structure 1, Acropolis (after Lacadena 2003a).

structure long before the sixteenth century, and that it had not changed radically during the Colonial period, remaining logosyllabic even in its final known examples from the eighteenth century.

Alfonso's nuanced grammatological perspectives on Mesoamerican writing systems in general, and on Nahuatl hieroglyphs in particular, were immediately recognized as breakthroughs, and his cautious step-by-step methodology is now taught in several universities worldwide, where specialist studies building on the perspectives he pioneered continue to appear.

Alfonso was internationally recognized for his contributions to Mesoamerican studies on October 13, 2011, when he was awarded the prestigious Tatiana Proskouriakoff award of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University. A little more than a year ago, on October 9–13, 2017, the Tercer Encuentro Internacional de Gramatología was held in Alfonso's honor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Specialists in the study of writing systems from around the world—including egyptologists, cuneiformists, Linear B specialists, and mesoamericanists—gathered to hear Alfonso's keynote presentation "La escritura jeroglífica náhuatl y el universo colonial español en los siglos XVI–XVII," and to spend a week in amiable and animated conversation about the new perspectives in comparative writing which Alfonso's work has brought to our respective fields. Most recently, a touching *homenaje* was organized for Alfonso on Friday, November 9th, during which the entire community of European Mayanists gathered during the penultimate evening of the 23rd European Maya Conference in Valencia, Spain, to celebrate Alfonso's exceptional life and extraordinary achievements alongside

his parents, his wife, and his children.

At his home university—the Universidad Complutense in Madrid, where he was a professor in the Departamento de Historia de América II (Antropología de América)—he leaves behind several devoted students who will miss his guidance, even as they continue to travel on the roads of investigation he first cleared. Internationally—at the Instituto de Filología del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (Madrid), at the Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (Mexico City), at the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán (Merida), at Tulane University (New Orleans), and among the European Association of Mayanists, of which he was a founding member—he leaves behind close colleagues and former students committed to the continued application of his perspectives to Mesoamerican writing systems, but who will sorely miss his many insights, his unfailingly generous nature, and his never-ending optimism about the future of Mesoamerican studies.

Alfonso Lacadena: A Bibliography

(Note that many of Alfonso's published papers are available online at shsja.academia.edu/AlfonsoLacadena)

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