



REMEMBERING JOHN MURRA: LETTERS FROM A COLLABORATION

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In this reminiscence I want to bring to mind the autograph manuscript letters of the well-known seventeenth-century Andean chronicler, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, and the scholar who did so much to bring Guaman Poma to the world, John V. Murra. As most readers of these remarks will know, John and I collaborated in editing and publishing Guaman Poma's *El Primer Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* (Copenhagen, Royal Library, GkS 2232, 4°).

The collaboration that John Murra and I undertook to edit Guaman Poma's *El Primer Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* stretches back to the mid-1970s. We worked together on the project for three intense years and, on at least two multi-week occasions, Jorge Urioste joined us to carry out his analysis and translation of the Quechua portions of the manuscript. Our three-volume Siglo XXI edition appeared in Mexico City in early 1980. We prepared a slightly updated edition, also in three volumes, in the mid-1980s, and it was published in Madrid by Historia 16 in 1987. (During this same period, our mutual friend and John's longtime colleague Franklin Pease also edited and published Guaman Poma's work, for Biblioteca Ayacucho in Caracas in 1980 and, in 1993, with Jan Szemiński, for the Fondo de Cultura Económica in Lima.) By 1987, John and I considered that we had accomplished our goal: publication in Latin America and Spain of this unique, early colonial source of information on the Andes. John had been bearing such a project in mind for as long as I knew him, since 1972, and, without a doubt, for much longer. Yet when time ushered in the digital age, we were offered a new editorial challenge.

In 2000, the Royal Library of Denmark in Copenhagen digitized the complete, autograph Guaman Poma manuscript, which had been in the Danish royal collections for centuries; the documentary evidence places it there by 1729, and the

circumstantial evidence, by the 1660s (This was Raúl Porras Barrenechea's longtime hunch, and investigations at the Royal Library have borne it out). Ivan Boserup, the head of the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books, contacted me in August, 2000, as the project was underway. And I contacted John, seeking his opinion about including in the soon- to-be-launched searchable online document the three indices that we had published in our Siglo XXI and Historia 16 editions.

Each of these documents had its own story. The information for the onomastic and toponymic index was gathered by me as I sat at my Smith-Corona electric typewriter, transcribing Guaman Poma's prose and reading it aloud, following its cadences to be able to identify, to the degree possible, its syntactic divisions. John and I then worked over my provisional listing of Guaman Poma's identifications of peoples, persons, and places for months and months, because the Quechua terms for Andean locations, ethnic groups, and languages often overlapped. Jorge Urioste's Quechua glossary provided its own special challenge. It involved setting forth Andean concepts and terms and creating their alphabetical ordering in accordance with Jorge's rephonologized version of Guaman Poma's simpler Quechua orthography.

Memories of the three of us sitting side by side at my dining room table in Syracuse to get this job done are indelible. The greatest of the three indices, however, was John's alone. Decades earlier he had created an ethnological index as a private guide to his own reading of the *Nueva corónica*. Passing it along to me, we turned these carefully prepared pages, typed by John on his manual typewriter, into the index upon which Andeanist readers subsequently have relied for nearly three decades. John and Jorge were enthusiastic about the prospect of putting on the Internet these aids to the reader, provided that Siglo XXI give approval. Reminding us that we

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held the rights (*derechos de autoría*) to our 1980 edition, Siglo XXI gladly assented to the indices' inclusion.

The next phase of the Royal Library's digital project was to place online the Murra-Adorno transcription of the Spanish text and the Urioste transcription of the Quechua text. John and Jorge readily agreed that this, too, should be done. It was accomplished by August, 2004, thanks to the dedication of Ivan Boserup. He corrected our 1970s transcription against the original manuscript and supervised its complicated uploading on the Internet. In my visits to John at his West Buffalo Street apartment in 2003 and early 2004, he was bemused by this latest transformation of our printed work, and he smiled as I recalled the days, in the early 1970s, when the large, leased Xerox machine that occupied his dining room had been the latest word in technological advancement regarding the reproduction of the printed word and the graphic image.

(The URL of the Royal Library's Guaman Poma website is: <<http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/info/en/frontpage.htm>>.)

All these events serve as background for the remembrance that I would like to put forth here. When asked to participate in this special volume in John's honor, I declined the invitation, feeling (as I did after the death of my father) that here was a person, and a relationship, too richly complicated and with too great an impact on me, to share in a public forum. Even in the moments when I thought favorably about this invitation, I could recall the anecdotes, but I could not find the words. Then, providentially, I happened across some of the last letters that John, ever the exemplary correspondent, even as his handwriting failed, had written to me. So here is John in his own words.

He wrote the first of the letters I transcribe here after the inauguration on May 15, 2001, of the *Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* on the Royal Library website. I had sent him the small, bilingual English-Spanish book that I had written to accompany and announce that historic event (Rolena Adorno, *Guaman Poma and His Illustrated Chronicle from Colonial Peru*, Copenhagen, 2001). Upon receipt of the small volume and my account of the May 15, 2001, proceedings in Copenhagen, John wrote to me from Ithaca on May 29, 2001, recalling his 1994 visit to the Royal Library. (In this letter and those that follow, I have placed square brackets around

information that I have supplied. Note also that John always refers to Guaman Poma by the rephonologized Quechua spelling, Waman Puma):

Dear Rolena,

Many thanks for the copy of your book about the Danish care given our friend W.P. [Waman Puma]. I had seen the manuscript a decade or so ago when [Ramiro] Matos and I were invited by the Danes to an anthropological gathering [June 29-July 1, 1994]. They let us see and even handle the manuscript book and it was an unexpected thrill. I guess I did not expect they would let us handle it.

Your book reminded me of our collaboration and the relations with our Mexican colleagues – Palerm and most of those of that generation are gone now, but Teresa Rojas and her chums are very active— Have you seen her UNESCO volume [Teresa Rojas Rabiela et al., *Vidas y bienes olvidados: testamentos indígenas novohispanos*, México, 1991- 2002]?

I'm breaking up my Andean library –most of it goes to IEP [Instituto de Estudios Peruanos] in Lima but most of the archaeology went to Arica, in Chile.

Regards to David,

Suyo, John

"Thrill" is not a word I heard often from John Murra's lips, and his use of it in the letter above is a measure of his response to having the Guaman Poma manuscript close enough to touch. At that point in time, we recall, John had studied the *Nueva corónica*, thanks to the 1936 Paris facsimile edition directed by Paul Rivet, for nearly four decades.

John's next letter on these topics was written on July 12, 2003. Together with Ivan Boserup, I had published a long study that took up afresh the history and codicological examination of the Guaman Poma manuscript (Rolena Adorno and Ivan Boserup, *New Studies of the Autograph Manuscript of Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno*, Copenhagen, 2003). In early 2003 I had also recently lost my mathematician husband of thirty-six years, David Adorno, who had been very ill in the preceding years and whom John knew well and admired for his devotion to our Guaman Poma work. Against the backdrop of these two events John wrote the following letter:

Dear Rolena,

I have your letter and the new book, a most learned tome, and it made me think of our collaboration.

I was sorry to hear news of David's leaving us.

As you can see, I have trouble writing legibly. I am far away from the Department of Anthropology; they no longer forward my mail and I rarely go to campus.

I am glad we connected and that I see your continued interest in Waman Puma.

I intend to send you a copy of a large volume published by the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos [John V. Murra, *El mundo andino: población, medio ambiente y economía*, Lima, 2002], unless I have sent you one already. Too long, I think, too heavy to hold and read, but a record of what I have ever published in Spanish and in English.

An observation on WP: At some point in recent years, I read a paper in Ithaca, which I have since lost. In it there is a Spanish priest, living in Cuzco but originally from near Seville, who tried repeatedly to become the bishop of C-o. He had money and ambition and may offer an explanation for WP's ambitions and opportunities.

Regards,

John

One of John's avocational archival interests was to follow the track back from Guaman Poma to his teachers and sponsors. The trail he mentions above is now cold, to the best of my knowledge, but that does not preclude its becoming "warm" again. In swift response to the letter above, I wrote to John upon returning from Lima, Ayacucho, and Santiago de Chile, which I had participated in the 2003 Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, in which our colleague Jorge Hidalgo, among others, played a high-level planning role. I wrote to John that Mariana Mould de Pease had kindly given me a copy of *El Mundo Andino* when I was in Lima. I also remarked that I would like to visit him before fall term classes started at Yale. John replied to my July 31, 2003, letter by writing a few words on the back of it and redispaching it to me on August 5, 2003. Here is what John wrote in his increasingly unsteady but still legible hand:

Dear Rolena,

I was glad to hear from you and will be delighted to welcome you here. I have sold my home at 515 Dryden Rd and now live downtown, 100 West Buffalo, Apt. 3-A. Phone is the same: 272-7208.

Un abrazo,

John

John had been at the West Buffalo Street apartment for a couple of years, but this would be my first visit to his initial downtown location. When I arrived at John's apartment and walked through the door on August 14, 2003, his first words to me were "Welcome home!" I was moved. On that occasion and successive ones, we had lunch together at John's dining room table. Thanks to Judy Willis's solicitous but unobtrusive care of John, I was able to get for take-out his favorite sandwich at the gourmet deli up the street.

When I visited John a few months later, on December 30, 2003, the cherished greeting "Welcome home!" was repeated and, upon my departure I was asked, "When are you coming back?" These were the two expressions that John used on those occasions between 2003 and 2006 when I visited him, and they established the illusion of a routine of regularly scheduled visits that we both welcomed. But there was another refrain, too, and with it he referred elliptically to his declining health: "¿Cómo será?" What will it be like?

The last time I saw John was on his ninetieth birthday, August 24, 2006, less than two months before he left us, to use his own carefully chosen expression regarding the loss of my husband David. Knowing how much John always appreciated and enjoyed homemade baked goods, I prepared and brought him not one, but two, birthday cakes. His guardian angel Judy Willis also brought him a specially prepared homemade treat. Standing there in John's North Aurora Street home with Judy while we visited with John, I realized, quite suddenly, that we were together, the three of us, on that August day in 2006 just as we had met one another, face to face, for the first time nearly three and a half decades earlier, in September of 1972. On that occasion, when I was a second-year doctoral student in Cornell's Department of Romance Studies, I had appeared, somewhat tentatively, at Professor Murra's office door in McGraw Hall. I will never forget the hot/

cold temperatures that swirled through the room as I was greeted kindly by the reassuring Miss Willis and then glowered at by the fearsome Professor Murra! But that's the beginning of another story, and this one must now come to its end.

As I close this reminiscence and glance from John's handwritten letters to their transcription on my computer screen, I find myself doubting that the regularity and coldness of the transcribed typographic text can convey the vitality, spontaneity, and precision of expression that John's words carry when I look at them as written in his distinctive hand. The handwriting conveys the deeply human quality and intellectual intensity of John's engagement even in his last, difficult years. And the trace of the pen on the page evokes the memory of the warmth of the hand that held it.

As I make this observation about the handwritten text I realize that I am struck by it because it was John Murra who introduced me to that other autograph manuscript letter, Guaman Poma's, of twelve hundred pages and because, thanks to John, I had enjoyed, more than a decade and a half before him, the privilege and, in his words, the "unexpected thrill," of having Guaman Poma's autograph manuscript placed before me. At that lost moment in 1977 I felt the immediacy and preciousness of the holograph document, and, looking now at John's penned words, I feel it on this occasion, too.

With the hope that the residue of the vital pen stroke is recalled if not contained in the printed word, I leave recorded here these few words of John's, in honor of his memory and as a testimony to the legacy that we carry forward.