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Chapter 11. Cunén

11.1. Introduction

11.1.1. Setting

Cunén is the westernmost of a string of municipios located in a deep valley on the north side of which rises the Cuchumatanes massif. The next municipio to the east is Uspantán, famous since 1992 as the birthplace of Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Maya-K’iche’ winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for her revelation of the ongoing oppression as well as the outrageous cruelty inflicted on Maya peoples during the civil war that ended with the Peace Accords of 1996. Though they share an equally beautiful landscape setting, Cunén and Uspantán are quite different. In contrast to bustling and thriving Uspantán, Cunén is small, quiet, and it seemed to me
economically depressed. The community invests a great deal of energy and emotion maintaining a traditional religious life, but economic conditions make this a particularly difficult struggle.

11.1.2. The Fiesta Patronal

The patron saint of Santa María Cunén is the Virgen de Candelaria, whose feast day is February 2. The feria in Cunén is of the 15–day (two octavo) type with some additional preliminaries that extend the time of dancing and other festivities to a total of 19 days, running from January 23 to February 10. The market and amusement sections of the Cunén feria are small in scale compared to the other three communities investigated, but religious and other public events are spectacular.

In my experience, the profound and symbiotic ritual interconnection between cofradías and dance teams is nowhere better illustrated than in the feria at Cunén, which involves an 18–day stretch of dances, processions and other religious activities in which dance teams like the Conquista are essential participants. Furthermore, it is only in Cunén that I have seen the different dance teams integrated with each other to the extent of performing several important joint dances. Also unique among the four municipios studied, all four poza chapels are in use at Cunén and figure importantly in processional circuits during the feria.

11.1.3. The Conquista Dance Team

As elsewhere, the core of the Conquista dance team draws on a few families who see this dance as a responsibility not only to the community but also to the ancestors who were dancers. During the feria of 2010, one performance of the Conquista took place in the home of a regular dancer, as a memorial to his uncle who had been a leading member of the team. Likewise, the uncle of the current Ajitz danced the same part before him. Two other dancers are brothers, whose daughters in their time also danced Malinche. Serapio Pérez, who dances Tekum, noted that his father and grandfather had been Conquista dancers and autores. Where Cunén differs is in the particular strength of its cofradía system, which results in the fact that some leading members of the Conquista team also hold important offices in cofradías. José Camajá (Don Chepe), who was the autor during the two years I attended the Cunén feria, and who also dances Rey K'iche', in 2010 was the head of the highest ranking cofradía, that of the Virgen del Rosario. Don Serapio not only dances Tekum and serves at times as maestro, but is also a high–ranking officer in the cofradía of Cunén's patron saint, the Virgen de Candelaria.

Pedro Jerónimo is maestro for the group. The duties of autor were shared among different people in 2010. Don Chepe is the primary autor, but the brothers Juan and Ambrosio Chilisná often functioned as co–autores. Another co–autor is Jaime Gennaro, a Ladino merchant who has taken interest in the
group and has a copy of the text. Don Jaime explained to me that there had Ladino’s have participated in the dance team for the *Conquista* and that his father had danced Alvarado. Don Jaime worries that it has become more and more difficult for the Maya community in Cunén to mount the dance, and expressed an interest in forming a *Ladino* dance team if necessary to preserve Cunén’s *Conquista*. He noted that one of the problems with organizing the team is that so few persons wish to dance in the traditional forms: youths are tired of the traditional music and dance forms, he argued, and prefer to participate in the *Disfraces* dance with its contemporary imagery and music. Another problem Don Jaime mentioned, and my observations confirmed, is that the indulgence in alcohol during the fair, considered an obligation to the saints and ancestors, is acute in impoverished Cunén. This makes it difficult even for dancers committed to the *Conquista* to actually perform.

### 11.1.4. Involvement With Dance Team

As the timing of the Cunén *feria* conflicts with my teaching schedule, I was only able to attend on two occasions in the two sequent years that I took one-term sabbaticals. In 2009 I spent only a few days in Cunén near the end of the *feria*, as I had made prior arrangements to see the *Rabinal Achi* in Rabinal. But in that time I was able to make connections with some of the dancers and the various *autores*. I agreed with Don Jaime that I would make a large contribution toward the 2010 *feria*, sufficient to pay for the *traje* rental and the musicians, and in return he would report to me on preliminary activities prior to my return the following January. In fact, Don Jaime sent me a report of the preliminary announcement of commitment to dance, and I wired him my contribution. In 2010 then, I spent the entire *feria* in Cunén. As is customary, Don Jaime did not reveal my contribution, though I found it necessary at times to refer to it, since many of the dancers wondered what right I had to hang around and photograph their performance. The brothers Ambrosio and Juan Chilisná, who served as *co-autores*, befriended me and invited me to their homes.

### 11.2. Preliminaries and Participation in Other Public Events

#### 11.2.1. Preparation and Rehearsals

Of the four communities investigated, Cunén stands out for the public interest in the contribution of its dance teams to the *feria*. Thus the announcement of intent to dance in the following *feria* is both public and ritualized. According to Don Jaime’s letter, the public announcement of commitment to dance in the 2010 *feria* took place on September 16, 2009. Two days previous a fee of Q15.00 was paid to the auditor to receive permission for a *costumbre* or ritual offering of candles, incense and alcohol, which was undertaken by the team leaders on September 16 in the Cunén cemetery. While this ceremony was being performed, the leaders’ wives were preparing a special dinner including a red soup and a type of *tamalito* (steamed maize) with layers of ground frijoles (beans) that are elsewhere
called *tallullos* but for such ritual occasions in Cunén are called “*tamalitos de siete camisas*” (*tamalitos* of seven shirts). The musicians who play the *chirimía* and *tambor* were also invited to this dinner. The dinner took place at the home of the main *autor*, José Camajá, which would function as the *posada* or headquarters where dancers would change into and out of their dance costumes during the *feria*.

According to Don Jaime’s letter, after dinner, about 8 pm, participants prayed to the Cunén *municipio* patron, the Virgen de Candelaria, asking her to permit them to perform the dance in her honour, and asking for conditions that would permit them success. Later, about 9 pm, the musicians played while participants, holding candles, walked in procession through the streets to the church. At the church they set the lit candles (on the atrium I presume, as the church was likely closed) and repeated their prayers for successful completion of the dance as an offering to Candelaria. Then they set off a *bomba*, an areal firecracker launched from a metal tube or mortar to produce a loud bang that would signal to other residents as well as local spiritual entities their intention to dance in the coming *feria*.

With musicians playing, the group walked in procession back to the *posada*. When they arrived, they set off another *bomba* to begin the first rehearsal, finishing about 1 am. Don Jaime’s letter continued by noting that further rehearsals had to be planned around the men’s schedule for going to cut sugar cane in plantations along Guatemala’s Pacific coast, needed in part to raise funds for their participation in the *feria*. Though Don Jaime did not provide me with dates or details, I am aware that within a short time of this announcement the team would have had to advise the *morero* or costume shop keeper in Chichicastenango what costumes and masks they would be needing, and the day by which they must be ready. There are two *morerías* in Chichicastenango—the older, more established and more affluent Ignacio *morería*, and the offshoot Buchan *morería*. Cunén dancers normally use the Buchan *morería*, which is less costly, and they would have made arrangements through Don Jaime with the *morero*, Miguel Buchan.

Juan Chilisná, a leading *Conquista* dancer who frequently serves as co-*autor*, provided further information on *costumbres* for the dance. He differs from Don Jaime’s account of events that transpired in September 2009 by arguing for an announcement and first rehearsal on Holy Saturday (*Sabado de Gloria*) of Easter Week (*Semana Santa*). He added that the group hires a frequent *Conquista* dancer, Don Estanislao Zárate, to perform the *costumbres*. These offerings, an expense totaling about Q200 for each event, must be undertaken at four locations. According to Don Juan these are:

1. The cemetery, where permission to dance is asked of deceased *Conquista* dancers
2. The *posada* or headquarters, in recent times the home of Don José Camajá, head *autor*
3. A *cumbre* or summit of a mountain peak such as El Chorro
4. The Cunén church.
11.2.2. Welcoming the masks

Members of the Cunén *Conquista* team come to the Buchan *morería* a few days before their first events of the annual *feria*. In 2010, they had arranged to pick up the *trajes* on January 20. I stopped into the *morería* on the previous day to find Miguel Buchan repainting the masks. He said he would attach the eyes on the following morning. His sons were also putting finishing touches on the costumes.

The next day, January 20, I arrived at the *morería* at 8:30 am, and within 10 minutes the Cunén delegates, led by Juan Chilisná, arrived. Miguel Buchan and one of his sons were still finishing the sewing of *Conquista* costumes. Eyes were also being put into the masks, using some wax melted with matches. But the *trajes* were brought out and the delegate dancers examined each piece. It was noted that some of the Spanish jackets did not have their bells and epaulettes attached so Don Miguel saw to that. The K’iche’ crowns needed reinforcement and some lacked tassels, so these deficiencies were also rectified. As they went through the costumes, a pile was made for the costume and mask of each character. For Cunén, this includes:

- All five members of the K’iche’ court
- Five *Caciques*
- Five Spaniards
- Ajitz Grande and Ajitz Chiquito
- Two Monkey dancers

The K’iche’ *flechas* were not yet painted so it was arranged that these would be brought on the following Saturday along with the Spanish swords and royal sceptres. *Platos* were not necessary as Don Jaime had already purchased these.

When the *trajes* were assembled, they were carefully stuffed into large boxes and netted bags for the journey to Cunén. The first leg of the journey required a *tuk-tuk* ride to the bus stop and then a half-hour bus ride to Santa Cruz del Quiché. The first bus passing in that direction refused to take the bulky packages, but the *ayudante* of the second bus agreed to tie them on top of the vehicle for a surcharge of Q 10. In the Quiché bus terminal we transferred the packages to a microbus for about a 2-hour trip to Cunén. The microbus continued on to Uspantán, so we were able to ride it right to Don Chepe’s house, on the
main highway, east of the town centre. As we arrived, two bombas were launched to honour the sacred spirits or primeros that the costumes embody and to announce their arrival to the community.

We entered the altar room, which since October had also been the cofradía of the Virgen del Rosario. Along the back wall were three glass-fronted cases holding the main icon of Rosario, flanked by a smaller Rosario icon and one for Santa Ana. To the left, not in a glass case, was an icon of the Black Christ of Esquipulas. For the next 2 ½ weeks, this room would serve not only as the cofradía Rosario but also as the altar room for the Conquista dance team. Corresponding to the second capacity, Don Chepe immediately spread a petate or plaited mat on the floor in front of the central Rosario icon and arranged the trajes in piles on top of this mat. As elsewhere, the trajes are divided by group. The court members and Caciques were placed on the left, the Spaniards on the right, Ajitz Grande and Chiquito in the middle, and the two Monkeys behind. A few hours later, dinner was served to the Conquista team in the altar room, and this concluded the events for welcoming the trajes. Some of the dancers took their headdresses home to sew on the feathers, and, for Tekum, the quetzal effigy as well.

11.2.3. Last rehearsal

The non–ritual opening to the feria is the luncheon hosted by the cofradía of Cunén’s patron, the Virgen de Candelaria, on January 23. Community members pay for the soup and the tamales de siete camisas, a means of helping to support the large expenses this cofradía must endure for the duration of the feria.

The ritual opening takes place on the evening of the same day, a little after 8 pm. This is the ceremonial last rehearsal not only for the Conquista dance team but also for the teams of Venado (Deer) and Torito (Bull) dancers. This evening’s rehearsal, without traje or masks, rotates between the cofradías of Rosario and Candelaria, taking place in their patios. Bombas announce the dance in both locations. Accommodating three dance groups in two cofradía patios meant that at times there would be two groups dancing in the same patio. When I was with the Conquista group in 2010, they first danced through a shortened version of the drama in the patio of Rosario cofradía, which is also their posada headquarters. In this shortened version, both Part III and the Battle were eliminated. One of the other teams—without
costumes I could not distinguish which—shared the patio with them but left earlier for Candelaria cofradía. When the Conquista group finished their rehearsal at Rosario cofradía, they then danced in procession with music to the Candelaria cofradía. There they waited and prayed in the cofradía room as the Venado and Torito groups were both still dancing in the Candelaria patio. When one of those groups finished, Conquista went through its rehearsal there. Following the rehearsal came another sequence of prayers in the cofradía room, much of it lead by Don Chepe as autor, and finishing shortly after midnight.

11.2.4. Participation in Public Events

Due to the close integration of cofradías and dance teams in the Cunén feria, participation in processionals leading to and from the church is more extensive than in the other communities I studied. The structure of these processionals also determines the rotation of dance teams among venues at the Church and at the cofradías, so these will be discussed in a separate section following the description of the dance sequence. For now I note that, as elsewhere, dance teams participate in the school parade or desfile that has become an important part of the patron saint festival tradition in Guatemala.

In Cunén, the desfile takes place on the morning of January 31. As elsewhere, a processional route is devised that will end in the public athletic field, accompanied by various speeches of municipio officials. As the community is smaller at Cunén than in Joyabaj or Momostenango, where I have also joined the Conquista team for the desfile, it was possible for me to take in the event as a whole and think about some of its ramifications. As usual, each classroom marched and/or danced as a unit, exhibiting a particular theme. Mostly these themes were derived from globalized understandings of North American and Latin American popular culture, with lots of adolescent women in ball gowns or with bare midriffs. I only saw one class in which the girls wore Maya traje. Many of the classes formed bands, using contemporary instruments and especially the ubiquitous public school metallic zither. It seemed to me at the time that the schools were presenting themselves as instruments of acculturation or ladinization. But on subsequent reflection it became more interesting to observe how this community enthusiastically and simultaneously celebrates what outsiders might call its traditionalism and its modernity, but which for participants is more accurately the diversity of their society in the contemporary world.

11.3. Conventions

11.3.1. Costumes and Masks

Tekum death mask.
In addition to the distinctive stylistic elements noted for Chichicastenango _morerías_ in the chapter on Conquest Dance conventions, some particular choices affect the appearance of Cunén’s _Conquista_ dancers. Most noticeable is the absence of dark coloured masks indicating racial, ethnic, or religious difference. Instead, masks of both K'iche' and Spanish personages are flesh coloured. The only exceptions to the flesh coloured masks are the traditional red-coloured masks of Ajitz Grande and Chiquito. I was shown a very fine death mask for Tekum, but this mask was not used in any performance that year.\(^1\) Wigs are of tightly braided cord rather than curled maguey fibers. All performers wear golden-haired wigs, in line with the light-skinned masks. As in San Cristóbal, dancers wear a combination of ostrich and clustered chicken feathers. Most dancers also wear a bright scarf knotted around their neck.

Rey K'iche's _traje_ is dramatically distinguished from those of other K'iche' personages by its restriction to silver coloured ornaments, whether mirrors, braids, tassels, tin leaves, sequins or trim. This all–silver ornamentation contrasts richly with the deep red velvet ground to which they are attached. The only exception to this monochrome effect is the lower, striped panel of the cape, which is decorated like those of other K'iche' personages.

Malinches at Cunén are danced by young girls whose faces are disguised not by a mask (as at Nebaj) or a lace veil (as at Joyabaj) but simply by the cloth wrappings that dancers normally wear to protect their faces from masks. Malinches wear a rounded hat with a very broad brim from which hangs the usual Chichicastenango–style long silver–coloured

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\(^1\) The mask belongs to a set of costumes and masks purchased for Cunén with government funds, still stored but no longer used in performance.
fringe. They wear a velvet skirt with horizontal trim band decorations and a long fringe halfway down its length. Both Princes and Malinches wear a pechero similar to that of other personages except that the chest panel takes the form of an eight-pointed star with a pendant crescent.

Spaniards at Cunén wear the same short and highly decorated pantalones as do the K’iche’ characters, a preference also followed at San Cristóbal. However, they wear the cocked or admiralty hat also worn in Joyabaj and Momostenango, in contrast to the helmet worn by Spaniards in San Cristóbal. Monkey dancers dress in black military uniform with a shako cap like that worn by Ajitz.

11.3.2. Text

I was able to copy a transcript of the text from Don Jaime, which is dated 2008. Later, the autor in Nebaj offered to sell me a text that his group found unusable because it lacked sufficient speeches for Tekum. This text turned out to be from Cunén and contained the date 1927, a date consistent with the elegant penmanship as also found on late 19th century texts. These two versions, over eighty years apart, are identical except for some isolated and inadvertent word changes that normally creep into the texts through copying. The basic format of the two Cunén texts is conservative, nearly identical to that collected in Cobán in 1872, the earliest surviving text for the Conquista. Even instructions concerning the dances that intervene between speeches are virtually identical. And in some spots, the Cunén texts appear to preserve original wordings that were already corrupted in the 1872 version from Cobán. Most of the word changes involve: 1) misunderstandings; 2) filling out the terse poetic text into lines closer to everyday conversation; and 3) changing the outmoded second person plural verb forms to the more current third person plural. Most dramatic is the absence from the Cunén texts of Tekum’s profound monologue “Hecho un mar de confusiones se halla mi espíritu amigos” (Friends, I find that my spirit has been made into a sea of confusions) that begins Part IV, as well as the Caciques’ responses to it. Most of Ajitz’s speech in sending off the Ambassadors is also eliminated.

Yet the Cunén text also clearly has some post–1870 additions. These are of two types. One involves added or substitute speeches. The short speech that Ajitz gives on Tekum’s death, beginning “Adiós Tekum querido” (Farewell dear Tekum) is different from the Cobán version and was, perhaps at a later time, incorporated into the distinctive Momostenango text. An addition includes a short dialogue between the two Ambassadors before they hear the song of the Malinches in Part II. The Cunén text also ends differently than the text from Cobán, and these two texts represent the two alternatives that have developed, probably in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Cobán type ends with an extended dedication to a patron saint in which all characters (except the deceased Tekum) contribute in an alternation of K’iche’ and Spanish personages. The Cunén text ends with extended speeches by the two gracejos: Quirijol as usual talks about his need for women and food, while Ajitz repudiates his religion in favor of conversion to Catholicism.
The second type of intentional change in the Cunén text involves the addition of one or a pair of lines of fairly general meaning to established speeches or songs. Many of these involve changing the serial responses of Caciques or Spaniards from two to four lines (i.e. from half of a redondilla abrazada to a complete redondilla cruzada). Others involve the addition of the paired lines to longer texts. For example, to the aforementioned song of the Malinches, in which they entreat the volcano to vomit fire and engulf the Spaniards, the two added lines are "Que nos dejen estar en paz. Que no creemos en su fe" (May they leave us alone, since we don’t believe in their faith). More telling is an addition to a short chorus of Caciques before the battle: “Vivan los liberales que arman la guerra” (Hooray for the Liberals who prepare for war). Similarly, just before the climax of the battle with Tekum’s fatal wounding, the Spanish chorus chants praise to the Cunén patron saint, while the Cacique chorus cries “Viva la montaña de los Altos, Y que vivan los liberales” (Hooray for the mountains of Los Altos and Hooray for the Liberals). This is political rhetoric associated with the mid 19th century history of the K'iche' and associated regions attempting to create a separate Los Altos nation, and to the successful struggle of the Los Altos liberals to overthrow the conservative government and implant their own politics and ideology on the nation in 1870–71. That this liberal ideology had become immediately pervasive is evident from a reference to “la patria” (the fatherland) even in the Cobán 1872 text. But the sentiment is expanded in the Cunén texts with an added couplet for Tekum’s death speech that reads: “Adiós patria, Adiós Ciudad, Jamás volveré a sufrir” (Farewell fatherland, farewell city; I will never again suffer).

As discussed elsewhere, it is likely that texts for La Conquista were confined to the western K'iche' area before the 1871 liberal takeover, so it is likely as well that the major changes to the Cunén text were originally made at some community in or around Quetzaltenango. This would also explain why some similar elements appear in a text collected at the Finca Las Ilusiones, near the Pacific, south of Antigua.

Though little of the text is declaimed at Cunén, some leading dancers know and can recite significant portions of the text, especially the monologues. In some cases they recite, as elsewhere, with a pronounced accent on the penultimate syllable of a line, then dropping the pitch and volume for the final syllable. At other times, dancers will recite the text as fast as possible, rather than introducing drama into the narration, and in fact making it very difficult for spectators to understand the words. However, there tend to be relatively few spectators at Cunén, and as the dance is delivered primarily for the patron saint and the other cofradia saints, this would be sufficient. For those community members who do watch the dance, they are likely well versed in the story and its sequence of events, so that the text becomes unnecessary for dramatic purposes.

11.3.3. Staging
In Cunén as in Joyabaj, no stationary structure is used for the court of the Rey K’iche’, allowing the Conquista team to dance in the church atrio or forecourt, in patios of cofradías and private homes, and in the street in front of either. The place of the musicians is established first, often with their backs toward the cofradía or church, and thus marking the most honoured direction. From this starting point, the court of the Rey K’iche’ is arranged opposite the musicians, the Caciques are placed on the right side and the Spaniards are on the left. The priest–diviners, Ajitz Grande and Chiquito, are placed at the far end of the Cacique line but also move freely through the central space. This is the same basic arrangement followed elsewhere, and as in other communities it is maintained in procession, whether moving to and from a dance venue or participating in a religious processional or school parade (desfile), with the usual difference that the Spanish and Cacique groups are reversed in procession so that leaders adjoin the court dancers. And as at San Cristóbal, the same configuration is maintained when trajes are arranged in before an altar for the welcoming ritual.

Of the four communities studied, only Cunén includes two monkey dancers in its Conquista lineup. The monkey dancers have no formal role or text within the dance. Their job is to entertain and to take care of mundane tasks such as carrying seats for the musicians. However, they end up doing much more. The two years that I viewed the Conquista in Cunén, there was a drastic shortage of dancers each day, though different dancers would be absent on each occasion for different reasons and there would be constant shifting of the role each dancer took up. But in addition, the Monkey dancers would need to step in and fulfill a scripted role almost daily. As the feria wore on through more than two weeks, often the Monkey dancers themselves would fail to appear and some drastic substitutions would have to be made. The small child performing Ajitz Chiquito on occasion had to be coaxed to fulfill the demanding role of Ajitz Grande. While it is possible in these circumstances for a child to fill in for an adult’s role, and I have seen a Prince fill in for Tzunun, requiring a Malinche to fill in for the Prince, I found that it was not possible for an adult to fill in for the child’s role of Prince.

11.3.4. Steps and Choreography

As noted, apart from the major characters, few dancers have learned the texts at Cunén. Much less is recited at Momostenango, but there pantomime has expanded greatly and, with the addition of jokes extemporized in K’iche’, it has become the focus. In Cunén, pantomime is more limited, so the emphasis rests much more squarely on dance. Fortunately, the choreography at Cunén is elaborate and varied, sustaining interest.
One example of this choreographic complexity concerns a short dance sequence that appears in different contexts, including at the beginning and end of a *Conquista* performance, but it is also shared by the other Cunén dance teams, the *Venado* and *Torito*. This dance sequence is regularly used to honour some entity, whether a character in the dance or a saint. The dancers form a lateral line facing the entity being honoured or building to be entered. In performance, they are also facing the musicians. The line dances forwards, backwards, and forwards, ending in front of the musicians, then turns around. Now facing away from the musicians as well as the building or saints, the line dances again forwards, backwards, and forwards, ending at the court side, and then turns around a second time. Now again facing towards the musicians as well as the building or saint, they dance forwards, backwards, and forwards, ending just in front of the musicians or saint. At this point they bow and do a small genuflect with each knee. In this position, at the end of the dance, they recite in unison a short dedication to the Virgen de Candelaria as patron of Cunén. This sequence appears many times and will be referred to as the honouring sequence. As will be noted in the description of the dance sequence of the *Conquista* at Cunén, at certain points in the dance an abbreviated honouring sequence forms part of the choreography.

Another repeated choreographic sequence concerns dances that involve a whole group, whether Spaniards or *Caciques*, in which case they are led by Alvarado or Tekum, respectively. In such dances there is normally one regular circuit, then a second circuit involving diagonals in a figure-eight sequence. This brings the group to their appropriate side, but they do two U-turns in order to repeat their progress up the final side. Then most of the dancers stay in place while the leader performs a *vuelta* with the next personage in line and also shakes hands with him, after which the leader continues with a solo dance circuit. He finishes in the centre with a *vuelta* and a signal to the musicians to terminate the *son*.

As will be seen, choreography is complex at Cunén, whether in the opening and closing dances as elsewhere, or in the intricate battle scene and *despedida*. In contrast, the steps are conspicuously
uncomplicated. Most steps are formed in a three step rotation that allows the leading foot to alternate. As usual, Ajitz and Chiquito add a bit more energy to the step, lifting their feet higher and more deliberately. In terms of posture, K’iche’ figures hold out their plato and either sceptre or flecha, Spaniards hold out their swords, usually in a vertical position, while Ajitz and Chiquito dance with their hands on their hips.

11.3.5. Music

The chirimiista during my time at Cunén was Manuel Camajá Bach. In 2010, Don Manuel mentioned that he has been playing chirimía for about fifteen years. His accompanying tamborista is Diego Martín Canto. Both also play for the Nebaj feria August 8–15. The musicians know and use a large complement of sones during the performance. Their knowledge of the choreography matches that of a maestro.

11.4. Dance Sequence

11.4.1. Introduction:

The following narrative of the Conquista sequence at Cunén was gleaned from more than a dozen performances but these tended to be inconsistent due to inexperienced dancers and perpetual shortage of participants. Furthermore, dances were often abbreviated in different ways depending on the available time and the energy of dancers and musicians. This narrative then represents my best reconstruction of an ideal that exists in the knowledge of many experienced participants (especially maestros and músicos) but that is rarely approximated in performance.

Depending on the venue and time available, since the Conquista group may be dancing in more than one cofradía during a day or night occasion, the performance may be shortened in various ways. Parts of the opening dance may be cut. All of Part III and the Battle sequence of Part IV may also be cut, thus eliminating Tekum’s death and allowing him to participate in the closing dance. Some of these abbreviations will be mentioned in the following narrative of the Cunén dance sequence for the Baile de la Conquista.

\[2\] For dances of Spaniards, the leading foot steps forward, brushing the ground and kicking upwards, the other foot comes up to meet it just behind, and the leading foot steps forward again, completing the three steps. The other foot now steps forward, brushing the ground and kicking upwards, to become the leading foot, and so on. I suspect that K’iche’ dancers are meant to use the same step, but in my experience it is done more casually, closer to walking.
Due to the absence of many dancers during the rehearsal period, as they are cutting sugar cane on the coast to support their feria expenses, few performers have memorized any of the lines. The major figures (Rey K’iche’, Tekum, Alvarado, Ajitz) often know how their speeches begin, but little more. When Don Serapio dances Tekum, he is considerably better prepared as he owns a copy of the text. But in 2010, his cofradía duties only allowed him a few performances.

11.4.2. Opening dance

11.4.2.1. The Court

When all groups are in position on the sides of the dance ground, including the Spaniards who will not participate until the second part, the opening dance begins. Rey K’iche’ carries the Guatemalan flag as a sign of his royal authority and K’iche’ sovereignty.

The five members of the Court form into a lateral line and begin by performing an honouring sequence, dancing forwards toward the musicians, backwards and forwards again to the musicians. They turn around and dance forwards, backwards, and forwards again, arriving back at the court side. They turn around once more and dance forward toward the music side and backwards to the court side, circling together in a vuelta to take the proper place for their line. The court line may end this section here or may continue into a longer version. In the latter case, the court group then dances single file two counter-clockwise circuits, with vueltas at the corners, while the Cacique group dances in place. Coming down the central axis from the music side to the court side, the court group again forms a lateral line, dancing together to the music side and back to the court side. They then dance backwards toward the music side and forwards again to the court side, performing another vuelta to re-enter their line.

The Princes and Malinches then remain in the court position while the Rey K’iche’ dances 1 ½ more counter-clockwise circuits, ending up at the centre of the music side where he begins dancing backwards along the central axis toward the court. As Rey K’iche’ dances backwards, the Princes and Malinches dance forward to meet him. The court line, newly re-formed continues to the music side. The line then turns around and dances forward to the court side then backwards to the music side and forward again towards the court side, again a segment of the honouring sequence. At this station they turn around again and occupy the court position. These last two sections are skipped in the abbreviated form.

11.4.2.2. Waxing Phase Gatherings
Rey K'iche' now leaves the court position to dance alone in a counter-clockwise circuit. After 1½ circuits he reaches Tekum’s position and Tekum comes out of the Cacique line to join him. Rey K'iche' and Tekum continue to dance counter-clockwise and on their second circuit together, as they pass the court position, the First Prince joins their line. Continuing in the same direction, when they reach the Tekum corner, Tzunun comes out to join the line. In the next three circuits the remaining three members of the court joint the dance line. Then one of the Caciques joins the line in each of the next continuing circuits. Finally, Ajitz and Chiquito join the end of the line as a pair. They continue for another counter-clockwise round to the centre of the music side.

11.4.2.3. Central pivot

As the complete line pauses on the second circuit at the middle of the music side, Rey K'iche' shakes hands with Tekum and backs up slightly so that the rest of the line can continue to dance a circuit around him. Ajitz and Chiquito, who will be the first to leave, move from the end of the line to the centre to join Rey K'iche' and all three continue dancing in place.

11.4.2.4. Waning Phase Departures

When Tekum reaches the centre of the court side, he leads the line up the central axis, where Rey K'iche' can resume his position as head, but with Ajitz and Chiquito now leading him as they will be the first to depart. Ajitz and Chiquito lead the line counter-clockwise to the Alvarado corner, where they perform a U-turn, changing the direction to clockwise. Ajitz and Chiquito continue to lead the line clockwise to the Tekum corner, where they shake hands with the Rey K'iche' and leave the line. At the same time, Rey K'iche' reverses the line direction to counter-clockwise. As the line continues its counter-clockwise circuit, the next dancer to leave (which may be the last Cacique or the Second Malinche) stays at the Quirijol corner while the rest of the line continues on to the Alvarado Corner. There they reverse direction to clockwise and as they pass the Quirijol corner, pick up the dancer who has stayed but now positioned at the head of the line. This dancer leads the line until passing the point where they should depart for their assigned position. Thus if it is a Cacique, the dancer leads the line to the Tekum corner, shakes hands with Rey K'iche' and leaves the dance line as it turns counter-clockwise to deposit the next dancer at the Quirijol corner. If it is a court youth leading, they continue dancing after the reverse to counter-clockwise at the Tekum corner and leave the line when they reach
the court position. This process continues through Tzunun, the last Cacique to leave, and then First Prince as the last court youth to leave.

Now only Rey K'iche' and Tekum remain dancing, and they continue with two more counter-clockwise circuits, dancing side by side rather than single file. When they reach the Tekum corner after the two circuits, Tekum shakes hands with Rey K'iche' and stays in his position.

11.4.2.5. Corte

Rey K'iche' remains on the music side, positioning himself in the centre of that side for the court youths to dance up to meet him in a lateral line and perform a version of the honouring sequence. All together the five court members dance backwards to the court side and forward again to the music side where they turn around. Then they dance forward to the court side, backwards to the music side, and forwards to the court side, where they turn around again. Finally they dance forward to the music side, and backwards to the court side. There Rey K'iche' does vueltas with the Princes and Malinches as they reform their proper line and the music stops.

The complete opening dance takes about an hour, so there are also a number of standard ways in which it may be abbreviated if time is short due to the schedule of dances at cofradías or suspension of dances for processions. For example, most of the first part with the court youths might be cut, or in the second part the Caciques might all join at once and might also all leave at once. For the departure portion it is also possible to eliminate the period of waiting at the Quirijol corner and instead have the next dancer to leave moved to the head of the line when it reverses at the Tekum corner.

11.4.3. Part I.

11.4.3.1. Scene 1: Q'umarcaaj

Rey K'iche' steps out from the court line for his opening monologue that begins: “Valerme, dioses, Valerme” (Help me, Gods, Help me) in which he announces that imminent Spanish invasion and speculates on methods of reacting to it. As he talks he dances in place and shakes the plato or shield-rattle. Due to the youth and inexperience of the Princes and Malinches, their dialogue with Rey K'iche' is eliminated, as is Rey K'iche's second monologue “Hijas mías levantad” (Rise my daughters). Thus when Rey K'iche' finishes the monologue, the music starts immediately for the Princes' dance to Quetzaltenango to bring back Tekum. As they take their leave, the Princes do a vuelta with Rey K'iche', shake hands with him, and leave immediately for Tekum’s palace in Quetzaltenango.
11.4.3.2. Scene 2: Quetzaltenango

The Princes dance to Quetzaltenango side-by-side, facing forwards, in two counter-clockwise circuits. When the Princes arrive, they find Tekum asleep. They shake Tekum three times to wake him up, each time separated by a pause. When he is awake, the Princes articulate the danger and Tekum responds, first incredulous then decisive. He interchanges with the Caciques, all of whom offer their military support in a report series. Tekum listens to the fears of Ajitz who suggests instead that they go to a mountain shrine to seek the advice of the gods. Tekum refuses, saying that he is not afraid of death and will confront Alvarado in battle.

11.4.3.3. Scene 3: Q’umarcaaj

The Princes lead Tekum and the Caciques in counter-clockwise circuits, turning at the centre of the music side to approach Rey K’iche’s palace down the central axis. Tekum leads the caciques in kneeling, single file, before Rey K’iche’. However Ajitz and Chiquito face backwards, resting on the back of the last Cacique, acting as lookouts.

Rey K’iche’ asks Tekum and the Caciques to rise, and Tekum and the other Caciques offer their allegiance to him in serial reports. As the other Caciques step to the side, Tekum and the Rey K’iche’ converse and Tekum tries to allay Rey K’iche’s fears. Officially charging Tekum with military command, Rey K’iche’ hands Tekum the Guatemalan flag that signifies K’iche’ royal authority and sovereignty. Tekum promises to tinge the river with enemy blood. Tekum and the Rey K’iche’ perform a vuelta and shake hands, after which Tekum leads his followers back to Quetzaltenango.

11.4.3.4. Scene 4: Quetzaltenango
The dance back to Tekum’s palace in Quetzaltenango normally begins with a clockwise circuit. On the second circuit, Tekum leads the *Caciques* in diagonal crossings of the dance field, from the Tekum to the Quirijol corner, up the Spanish side, from the Alvarado to the Ajitz corner, and up the *Cacique* side. Rather than ending at this point, the line does a U-turn to the Ajitz corner and then another U-turn back up the *Cacique* side to the Tekum corner, thereby repeating the last leg of the circuit. However in many cases Tekum led his *Caciques* in a counter-clockwise direction, requiring a reversal in front of the court side on the second circuit. When he has deposited the *Caciques* in their proper place, Tekum shakes hands with Tzunun, the second in line. Tekum then continues for another circuit, after which he moves to the center, faces the musicians and signals them to finish the son.

When he has finished his solo dance, Tekum remains in the centre to deliver a speech that begins “*Ya mis Caciques aliados*” (Now my allied Caciques), and in which Tekum explains his defense strategy. At the end of his speech, Tekum returns to the line, doing a vuelta with Tzunun as he enters his position. For the subsequent exchange of words of committed alliance with Tekum, each of the *Caciques* is granted a dance. Tzunun begins this process by moving to a position in front of Tekum and taking the flag, then dances alone a counter-clockwise round to confront Tekum and take part in the exchange. Before he leaves it is time for the next *Cacique*, who is Chávez, to step out, do a vuelta with Tzunun and take the flag to prepare for his turn. As Tzunun then returns to his position with a clockwise circuit, Chávez dances counter-clockwise to confront Tekum. The two dancers thus pass each other roughly ½ of the way around, which would be near the Quirijol corner. As they meet they do a vuelta and shake hands, then continue on their way. In some performances however, the flag was exchanged at the point at which they passed, which is the rule at Joyabaj. After the final *Cacique* has reported it is time for Ajitz and Chiquito do dance their counter-clockwise round to dialogue with Tekum, but they do not take the flag. Instead the last *Cacique* returns the flag to Tekum. Ajitz has the most pointed dialogue in this process, ending Part I with a promise to use his magical powers to harass and harm the Spaniards. Ajitz Grande and Chiquito then return in a clockwise dance.

After Ajitz and Chiquito return, on some occasions there is group dance of *Caciques*, counter-clockwise. But more commonly, Ajitz and Chiquito refrain from entering their place in line, but instead
remain in the centre to perform as both diviners and lookout in anticipation of the Spanish arrival at the beginning of Part II. The red–painted table and chair are brought out for this purpose and placed in the precise centre of the dance ground. Ajitz sits on the court side of the table, facing the musicians, while Chiquito is not given a chair.

11.4.4. Part II

11.4.4.1. Scene 1: The Spanish Entrada

Before the Spanish can enter, Ajitz uses his axe to draw a circle on the ground around the table as a trap for the Spanish to fowl their horses. Even when the table is used and a cloth pañuelo is spread over it, Ajitz rarely uses seeds to demonstrate divination any more, but instead uses suggestive hand gestures and then puts away the cloth before the Spanish march has finished. Ajitz also manipulates the doll–like idol as a form of pantomime, sometimes in parody of the Spanish marching posture.

The Entrada begins with a march in which the musical accompaniment is the usual chirimía doing its best to sound like a bugle while the tamborista uses the other end of his drumsticks for a sharper sound more akin to a snare drum. This is a standard time for a regular bit of horseplay involving the gracejo of one side placing his hand on the lower drumhead to dampen the sound, while the gracejo of the other side seeks to stop him and chase him away. In this case, since the Spaniards are marching, it is Chiquito who tries dampen the drum to irritate the Spaniards, Quirijol who breaks from the line of marching to come and chase him away.

The Spaniards begin their march by leaving their position and marching counter–clockwise to the music side. As they reach the Tekum corner, they march in place for several measures to only drum
accompaniment. They then continue onto the Cacique side and march in place when reaching the Ajitz corner. Two circuits are completed in this fashion, though interrupted in part by Spanish harassment of Ajitz and his retaliation. When they complete these rounds, the Spaniards are on their usual side and perform vueltas in pairs to take up their proper positions.

11.4.4.2. Scene 2: Spanish Camp

Immediately the Spaniards begin their dance, to a lilting tune known as the Balonia after Bologna, Italy, holding their swords out vertically in front. They dance a complete round counter-clockwise and then incorporate diagonals in the second round, dancing from the Alvarado to Ajitz corners, up the Cacique side, from the Tekum to Quirijol corners, and up the Spanish side. When they reach their usual position, Alvarado leads them back down the Spanish side and then forward again to their proper positions. Alvarado may then perform a solo circuit to finish the dance.

Alvarado then steps into the central space in front of the musicians and gives his speech beginning “Caballeros y señores, leales hijos de España” (Knights and gentlemen, loyal sons of Spain), promising his followers success in their mission to bring the K'iche' under the authority of the Spanish crown and Catholic church. When Alvarado says the line “mandad tocar los tambores” (have the drums sound), the drum plays and Chiquito tries to dampen it while Quirijol defends. When Alvarado says “suene el clarín de la fama” (let the bugle of fame resound), he marches forward, marches in place, then marches back to continue his speech. This march is inspired by what is actually a Cunén transposition of the text in the following line, substituting “marcha redoblada” (redoubled march) for “parche redoblante” (snare drum head), itself a modification of “caja redoblante” (snare drum). The intent of the original lines was to allude to the pair of military instruments: bugle and snare drum.

Alvarado’s speech is followed by short dialogues that introduce each Spaniard in turn, descending the ranks. As occurred with the Caciques in the previous scene with Tekum, each Spaniard will precede and follow his dialogue with an individual dance. The process begins with Carrillo first shaking hands with Cardona and then dancing clockwise to confront and dialogue with Alvarado, then dancing back counter-clockwise as Cardona dances clockwise for his turn. When the advancing and returning Spaniards pass, near the Ajitz corner, they shake hands. The same process continues, ending with Quirijol.
When Quirijol has returned, another group movement ensues. This is called the “marcha pareada” or paired march. Alvarado leads this counter-clockwise dance flanked by Carrillo and Cardona, with remaining Spaniards in a row behind them. In some performances, dancers held out their swords horizontally rather than vertically. They dance a counter-clockwise circuit with another special treatment of each corner. As they reach the corner and the drum solos for them to march in place, they slowly rotate the 90 degrees necessary to approach the next side of the dance ground. On the second round and continuing the special corner treatment, they incorporate diagonals, so that they cross from the Alvarado corner to the Ajitz corner, come up the Cacique side, then cross from the Tekum to the Quirijol corner and come up the Spanish side to end the dance. The dance ends with a fast drum roll, when the Spaniards do a vuelta and reform their line, another temptation for Ajitz or Chiquito to dampen the drum.

When the other Spaniards have returned to their line Alvarado steps out to announce the embassy to Tekum. Carrillo steps forward and volunteers, then Alvarado asks Cardona to accompany Carrillo. Alvarado paces along the side with Carrillo and Cardona in a private conference in which he explains the terms to be delivered to Tekum: that he must convert to Christianity and submit to the authority of the Spanish king. Alvarado then returns to his place in line while the two Ambassadors stand in front of him to take their leave.

11.4.4.3. Scene 3: Q'umarcaaj

The Ambassadors dance two circuits counter-clockwise then at the centre of the music side traverse the central axis for the proper entrance into Rey K’iche’s palace. They dance forward to the court side, backwards to the music side, and forwards again to the court, thus performing a segment of the honouring dance likely to demonstrate deference to the K’iche’ king. As noted in the explanation of the Conquista dance sequence in general, the original author probably intended the meeting with Princes and Malinches to take place in the forest enroute to Quetzaltenango, but the meeting is today universally interpreted as taking place in the royal court at Q’umarcaaj perhaps to fulfill the requirement of proper protocol. As the Princes and Malinches are very young and unable to recite their lines, the Ambassadors instead pretend to carry on a conversation with Rey K’iche’. This pretend dialogue ends with the Ambassadors shaking hands with Rey K’iche’ before they depart.
11.4.4. Scene 4: Quetzaltenango

The Ambassadors resume their counter-clockwise circuit and then enter the central axis from the music side to come upon Ajitz at his divining table. As they reach the table, the Ambassadors again back up and go forward—another gesture of deference. Ajitz immediately begins jumping over the table and continues to jump, as the text suggests, until Carrillo orders him to stop and may even block his path.

The Ambassadors and Ajitz now confront each other in what will remain the standard position for such confrontations, with Ajitz on the court side of the table and the Ambassadors on the music side. From these positions, Carrillo orders Ajitz to seek their admission to speak with Tekum and Ajitz agrees to seek Tekum’s permission.
Ajitz and Chiquito dance counter-clockwise around the table and then diagonally to the Tekum corner where they begin two counter-clockwise circuits to Tekum’s position. A special step is used in which the two dancers hop on the left foot the entire length of each side, swinging the suspended right foot back and forth as they hop, and using both feet only when they perform a vuelta with each other at the corners. During this dance, Quirijol often dampens the drum. When the priest–diviners arrive, Ajitz shakes hands with Tekum, and explains the Ambassadors’ request. Tekum responds that the Ambassadors may enter but only if blindfolded.

Ajitz and Chiquito then dance back clockwise but with their usual step. Coming to the centre from the Tekum corner side they dance counter-clockwise around the table. As the dance ends they face the Ambassadors across the table and Ajitz announces Tekum’s requirement that they must be blindfolded. As elsewhere, Ajitz goes far beyond this prescription. Before binding the Ambassadors’ eyes he also disarms them and binds their hands.

In this process, Ajitz must first disarm the Spaniards’ and he begins with Carrillo. Ajitz first needs to find out exactly where the sword is and how it might be accessed. He squats slightly and shades his eyes with one hand in the “reconnoiter” gesture of surveying a distant view. Once assured, Ajitz runs up to Carrillo, feels around his body to find the sword which he then tries to grab, but Carrillo resists. Ajitz then runs back and may again “reconnoiter.” He rushes Carrillo a second time and fails again. After these two unsuccessful attempts, Ajitz may call upon his idol, pointing it to the four directions to summon its magical powers. Then on the third try he is successful in wrestling the sword from Carrillo’s grasp.
When the sword is in his hands, Ajitz looks down the shaft and with surprise makes gestures with his hands that show it to be bent and in need of straightening. He grabs the sword at both ends and applies pressure with his knee, hopping as he does so. This is only partially successful, so he braces the point against the ground and hammers at the central portion with his axe. Then he looks down the shaft and gestures that it is now properly straight.

But then Ajitz notices that the sword is dull; it wouldn’t cut anything. He sharpens the sword by drawing it back and forth between Chiquito’s legs, using Chiquito’s crotch and butt crack for a sharpening device. He may then sharpen the sword in the same way on his own body. Then he tests the sharpness of the sword with his finger, drawing it back rapidly when he feels the cut, and wiping the blood on his scarf (all of this mimed). Now satisfied that the sword is a proper weapon, he places it diagonally on the table and goes through this entire procedure of stealing, straightening and sharpening with Cardona’s sword.

Ajitz now pulls from his *morral* or shoulder bag a *pañuelo* to bind Carillo’s eyes. But he adds insult to injury by first wiping the cloth in his crotch, then in his armpits. He smells it and shows that it reeks, but not sufficiently. He wipes the armpits and crotches of Chiquito and in some performances also of other characters such as Rey K’iche’. He smells it again and stifles vomiting from the repulsive stench. Now it is ready to put over Carrillo’s face. Carrillo may hide but he is found and the blindfold applied with a short statement. Ajitz then carries out the same procedure on Cardona.

Now it is time to bind the Ambassadors. While Ajitz binds their arms, Chiquito binds their legs, each using a rope stored in their *morral*. Ajitz then draws the Ambassadors toward him across the table and, seeing they are entirely in his power and waving his axe for emphasis,
he joyfully calls for music of the *pito* to triumphantly accompany their dance in to see Tekum. Ajitz in front and Chiquito behind dance as they lead the Spaniards into Tekum’s palace, though the Spaniards only walk. They first dance counter-clockwise around the table then diagonally to the Tekum corner where they begin a counter-clockwise circuit.

Upon reaching Tekum, Ajitz hands Tekum the ends of the ropes that bind the Ambassadors. In the long dialogue that should follow, Ambassadors rarely know any lines, but it is sufficient if Tekum can articulate his refusal of the terms of surrender and commitment to do battle.

Ajitz and Chiquito lead the Ambassadors back in clockwise circuits then enter diagonally from the Tekum corner to the table in the centre and dance counter-clockwise around the table. Ajitz and Chiquito then release the Spaniards from their ropes and blindfolds. Ajitz ceremoniously holds up their swords together, positioned horizontally with their handles pointing in opposite directions to provide an easy access to them for their recipients, and he signals to the Ambassadors that they should each take their own sword.

### 11.4.4.5. Scene 5: Spanish Camp

However Ajitz does not yet leave the Ambassadors. Instead he accompanies them partway back to the Spanish camp. Ajitz, Chiquito and the Ambassadors all dance counter-clockwise around the table then diagonally to the Tekum corner where they begin a counter-clockwise circuit. Stopping at the centre of the court side, they do a *vuelta* and part after shaking hands. While Ajitz and Chiquito continue dancing counter-clockwise to return to the *Cacique* side, the Ambassadors shift to a clockwise circuit which will take them to Alvarado. They stop in front of Alvarado and report to him on the result of their interview with Tekum. In some performances the three Spaniards will step out and pace in a private conference as they did when receiving instructions from Alvarado preceding the interview.

Alvarado then leads the Spaniards in a counter-clockwise dance circuit, then in the second round traversing the field diagonally from the Alvarado to the Ajitz corner, up the *Cacique* side, diagonally from the Tekum to Quirijol corner and up the Spanish side, adding an extra leg to the circuit with a U-turn at this point down to the Quirijol corner and another U-turn back to the Alvarado corner. For this dance, the Spaniards sheath their swords and hold their hands on their hips. When the dance has
finished, Alvarado steps out of the line and, while pacing in front of the musicians, speaks to his captains about the strategy for the battle.

11.4.5. Part III

11.4.5.1. Scene 1. Quetzaltenango

Part III begins with a dance of all Caciques, moving counter-clockwise in the first circuit, then on the second circuit traversing the field diagonally from the Tekum to the Quirijol corners, up the Spanish side, diagonally from the Alvarado to the Ajitz corners and up the Cacique side, concluding with a U-turn back to the Ajitz corner and another U-turn to return to the Tekum corner, thus repeating the last leg of the circuit. Tekum then shakes hands with Tzunun continues with a solo counter-clockwise dance that continues until he does a vuelta in the centre and signals the musicians to stop.

When the dance has finished, Tekum announces his decision to send Tzunun and Ajitz to Q'umarcaaj to inform Rey K'iche' that there will be war. He steps back into the line and Tzunun comes forward, circles with Tekum, and again shakes hands. Tzunun takes the flag from Tekum and dances two counter-clockwise rounds to reach Ajitz. After they argue about Ajitz's refusal to go, they set off with Tzunun in the lead.

11.4.5.2. Scene 2. Q'umarcaaj.

Tzunun leaves with Ajitz and Chiquito, dancing two counter-clockwise rounds and after a vuelta at the centre of the music side, traversing the central axis to reach the royal court. Tzunun kneels to Rey K'iche' while Ajitz and Chiquito face outward as lookouts. The dialogue that should follow, a crucial pivot in the original text, was not recited in my experience. After miming a bit of interchange, Rey K'iche' steps out of the court line and dances a vuelta with Tzunun, then shakes his hand as the three emissaries leave.

11.4.5.3. Scene 3: Quetzaltenango

The three emissaries dance back to Quetzaltenango counter-clockwise. As they reach Tekum, they do a vuelta and Tzunun remains standing in front of Tekum to report to him, after which Tekum does a vuelta with Tzunun as he invites the emissaries to rest. Textually the other Caciques would offer their allegiance and Ajitz offers to plague the Spaniards with small pox, but these lines are not memorized.
11.4.6. Part IV

11.4.6.1. Scene 1: From Quetzaltenango to El Pinar

As noted in the general dance sequence, Part IV opens with parallel scenes for the K'iche' and Spanish, each of which has two parts, the second taking place in their battlefield station. However, in the K'iche' scene at Cunén the two parts are condensed into one. As Tekum's dream speech has been omitted from the Cunén text, the opening Cacique dance serves also to indicate movement to the battlefield.

In this dance, after Tekum and Tzunun perform a vuelta, the Caciques dance one circuit counter-clockwise and the second circuit with diagonals, traversing the field diagonally from the Tekum to the Quirijol corners, up the Spanish side, diagonally from the Alvarado to the Ajitz corners and up the Cacique side, concluding with a U-turn back to the Ajitz corner and another U-turn to return to the Tekum corner, thus repeating the last leg of the circuit. Tekum then shakes hands with Tzunun and moves into the centre for a solo dance that continues until he signals the musicians to stop. Remaining in the centre, Tekum then delivers his battlefield statement.

11.4.6.2. Scene 2: From Spanish Camp to El Pinar

The Spanish scene is also condensed, but here it is the second rather than the first part that is largely eliminated. The Spaniards dance counter-clockwise with their swords held horizontally. They dance the first circuit counter-clockwise, then on the second circuit traverse the field diagonally from the Alvarado to the Ajitz corner, come up the Cacique side, traverse diagonally from the Tekum to the Quirijol corner and come up the Spanish side, finishing by returning to the Quirijol corner and then back to the Alvarado corner in a repeat of the last leg of the circuit. Alvarado then steps out in front of the musicians and addresses his captains, then returns to the line with a vuelta, after which the other Spaniards are supposed to contribute individually. Then without an additional dance or march, Alvarado delivers his battlefield statement.

11.4.6.3. Scene 3: The battlefield at El Pinar

The battle now begins, and it is a lengthy and completely choreographed sequence divided into two parts. In the first part, Alvarado will be wounded but recover. In the second part, Tekum will be mortally wounded. Each of these two parts involves an initial aggression and response, cruzadas, a general battle, and then a duel before the wounding takes place. Repetition within these parts allows K'iche' and Spaniard to alternate aggressor roles. This is the most complicated dance choreography of the four municipios studied.
11.4.6.3.1. Battle Part I: K'iche' Aggressors

The first half of the battle begins with the K'iche' as aggressors. Tekum seems to sneak up for an attack, weaving and slowly advancing. He spies Alvarado and thrusts at him in a feint, then quickly moves down the Spanish line and instead attacks Quirijol. Tekum advances and withdraws three times. With each advance, he attacks Quirijol who parries each thrust. On the third advance, Quirijol emerges from his line and pursues Tekum in combat. Quirijol moves three steps forward while Tekum retreats three steps. Then Tekum advances three steps and Quirijol retreats. Both combatants use an active and energetic step, whether moving forwards or backwards, maintaining the same leading foot.\(^3\)

The two combatants circle around and exchange sides, then repeat the advances and retreats, circling again to regain their original sides, finally reentering their lines with vueltas.

Tekum and Quirijol emerge from their lines again to engage in choreographed cruzadas. They cross weapons twice then jump and turn so that they end up on the opposite side where they taunt their enemies with their weapons. Tekum and Quirijol do a second cruzada, again crossing their weapons twice then the third time jumping and turning. The second cruzada returns them to their original side so that they can reenter their line doing a vuelta with their neighbour.

Tekum now advances directly toward Alvarado. He moves forward three times and each time Alvarado parries his thrust. On the third advance, Alvarado steps out of his line to pursue Tekum. They then battle, advancing and retreating, then circling to end up on the opposite side, advancing and retreating, and then circling again to return. They perform the paired cruzadas, crossing weapons twice then leaping and turning to enemy lines where they taunt their opponents, then crossing weapons twice again, leaping and turning to return to their own line.

Now all the Caciques advance on the Spanish, again advancing and withdrawing three times, with the Spanish pursuing the Caciques as they retreat for the third time. Attacking Tekum, Alvarado leads a

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\(^3\) The leading foot moves forward in a long step, while the other foot comes up just behind to join it. The leading foot then takes another big step, and so on.
quick chase that brings all members of both sides into a spiral movement, ending up on opposite sides from their normal positions.

Now begins the duel portion. Alvarado and Tekum, now on opposite sides, advance toward each other twice and then on the third time leap and turn to perform a cruzada. Again this lands them near the enemy so they taunt their opponents. Tekum now moves to the Quirijol corner to do a cruzada diagonally with Alvarado. They advance twice and on the third time jump and turn as they attack, landing them back on their own side, where they do a vuelta and reenter their respective line.

**11.4.6.3.2. Battle Part I: Spaniard Aggressors**

The whole sequence is then repeated with the Spaniards as aggressors. This time Alvarado advances towards Tekum but it is a feint as his target is Ajitz. He advances three times and each time his thrust is parried by Ajitz’s hacha. On the third advance, Ajitz is drawn out to pursue Alvarado. Together they advance and retreat three times, circle to their opponents side, advance and retreat three times more, circle to return to their own side, do a vuelta and reenter their lines.

Alvarado and Ajitz then step out from their lines, advancing towards each other twice to cross weapons and the third time to jump and turn in a cruzada, landing them near the enemy line where they taunt their opponents. Again they advance, cross weapons twice then leap and turn in a cruzada, returning them to their own side where they do a vuelta and reenter their respective lines.

Now Alvarado advances directly toward Tekum. After two parries on the third advance Tekum is drawn out of his line and pursues Alvarado. Together they advance and retreat three times, then circle to end up on the enemy side. Again they advance and retreat three times and circle to return to their own side, where they do a vuelta and reenter their respective lines.

Alvarado and Tekum step out of their lines again and advance towards each other crossing weapons two times before leaping and turning in a cruzada that lands them on the opposite side where they taunt the enemy. Alvarado and Tekum again cross weapons twice, leap and turn in a cruzada to return to their own side, where they do a vuelta and reenter their respective lines.

Tekum chases Alvarado. 2010.
Now the whole Spanish line advances towards the K’iche’, and on the third advance the K’iche’ pursue the Spaniards. Both sides advance and retreat three times until Tekum chases Alvarado in a spiral that draws in all members of both armies. They stop when they have returned to their usual lines.

11.4.6.3.3. Battle Part I: Wounding of Alvarado

The second duel of the first half then begins, and it is in this section that Alvarado will suffer a wound. This duel begins with rotating cruzadas. Alvarado steps out from his position, while Tekum moves down the line to the Ajitz position so that the two leaders are in diagonal opposition. From there the two leaders perform the cruzada, running to each other to leap and turn as they attack, ending up at their opponent’s position. From these spots each walks ¼ round, which is one side, in a counter-clockwise direction. Thus Alvarado has ended up in the Ajitz position and walks counter-clockwise to the Quirijol position, while Tekum has ended up in the Alvarado position and walks counter-clockwise back to his own position. From these new positions they do another cruzada, ending up on the opposite sides, from which they will again rotate counter-clockwise ¼ circuit to a new cruzada position. The norm appears to be six cruzadas in this manner though I have seen less.

Less choreographed cruzadas then ensue, beginning with Tekum at his own position and Alvarado at the Quirijol position, leaping and turning to land on the opposite side, then doing another cruzada to return to their own side and, with a vuelta, to reenter their line. With Tekum at the Ajitz position and Alvarado at his own position the two leaders again perform a diagonal cruzada, but this time Tekum continues to pursue Alvarado, who may hide among his troops. Tekum continues his pursuit around the field but at one point near the Spanish side he will manage to spear Alvarado with his flag. Alvarado then staggers into the arms of his troops.

Two Spaniards support Alvarado and move him to a position in front of the musicians. While his attendants march Alvarado, staggering, around two counter-clockwise circuits with vueltas, the Caciques perform a victory dance, moving counter-clockwise for the first circuit, then traversing the field in two diagonals, then repeating the last leg of the second circuit, and finally with Tekum dancing...
solo. By the time the victory dance has ended, Alvarado shakes out his leg to show that it is healed and he is ready to resume the battle.

11.4.6.3.4. Dialogue.

Both leaders step forward to lament at their losses so far during the battle. Normally Tekum bemoans at the number of his fighters who have been killed, while Alvarado remarks angrily that Tekum has left him without a horse. However, the text used in Cunén is slightly altered, and in line with his previous wounding, Alvarado complains instead that Tekum has left him weak (“sin fuerza”) rather than without a horse (“sin caballo”). As usual, Alvarado also requests the loan of a lance from Portocarrero, and this dancer hands him the Spanish flag.

11.4.6.3.5. Battle Part II: Repetition of K’iche’ and Spanish aggression, duel, and wounding of Tekum

Almost all of the battle performed so far is repeated exactly, with the major difference being that Alvarado now uses a flag as his weapon rather than a sword. To summarize only briefly, in the first section, Tekum feints an attack on Alvarado but engages Quirijol first, then Alvarado, and then all the Caciques engage all the Spaniards and Alvarado chases Tekum in a circle. After Tekum and Alvarado participate in dueling cruzadas the Spanish become the aggressors. Alvarado feints an attack on Tekum but Ajitz is his intended target. After his cruzadas with Ajitz, Alvarado does attack Tekum, then all Spaniards attack all Caciques, and then Tekum chases Alvarado in a circle. The extended duel follows in which this time Tekum will be wounded. Alvarado and Tekum battle in rotating cruzadas, then in less choreographed cruzadas after which Alvarado flushes Tekum out of hiding and pursues him continuously. Tekum is fatally wounded near the Cacique side, and two of his followers rush to support him.
Tekum staggers, supported by Ajitz and Tzunun, while the Spaniards march to occupy Tekum’s palace at Quetzaltenango, 2010.

Staggering, Tekum relies on the support of these Caciques as he moves toward the centre and begins a slow march, with two counter-clockwise circuits and vueltas at the corners. At the same time, the Spanish dance a counter-clockwise circuit with the second round involving diagonals and the repeat of the last leg. The Spanish may then occupy Quetzaltenango, represented by the Cacique side, though in most performances they instead returned to their original side.

Tekum’s attendants now help him indoors, whether into a cofradía altar room or the church. Inside, Tekum removes his headdress and announces to Tzunun that he is dying. Taking the headdress and the flag, Tzunun announces that he will submit to the Spanish conditions and end the war. In the text, Ajitz bids farewell to his master while Tzunun announces that he will take Tekum’s body to Rey K’iche’. But in Cunén a coffin or stretcher is no longer used due to insufficient manpower, so Tekum remains indoors.

11.4.6.4. Scene 4: Q’umarcaaj

Tzunun then returns to the patio, joining Tekum’s followers and leading them in a funeral march counter-clockwise, then traversing the central axis to the court. Ajitz and Chiquito are clearly grief-stricken. Arriving at Q’umarcaaj, Tzunun hands the headdress to Rey K’iche’ who takes it and laments Tekum’s passing. Tzunun then takes back the headdress and flag and leads the Caciques in another funeral procession back into the cofradía so that the “crown” may be buried with Tekum.
Leaving the headdress with Tekum for his burial, Tzunun emerges again with only the flag, and leads the Caciques in another dance to the court. There Rey K’iche’ retakes the flag and resumes his authority over the kingdom. He decides to submit to the Spaniards’ conditions and orders the two Princes to take an invitation to the Spaniards to come to Q’umarcaaj.

11.4.6.5. Scene 5: Spanish Camp

The Princes dance side by side two counter-clockwise rounds to meet Quirijol, who acts as a sentry for the Spaniards. In most communities, the Spaniards have occupied Tekum’s palace and thus the opposite side of the dance field, but in Cunén they often remain on their original side, formerly the Spanish camp. After conveying their need to see Alvarado, Quirijol leads them in a clockwise dance to Alvarado’s position, or to Tekum’s position if Alvarado is occupying Tekum’s palace. Quirijol uses a different step for this dance as well as a distinctive hand gesture, alternately raising each hand to shade his eyes in the “reconnoiter” gesture, appropriate for his function as a sentry. The Princes convey the invitation to Alvarado who accepts it.

Quirijol leads the Princes to Alvarado. 2010.

Alvarado kneels to greet Rey K’iche’. 2010.

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4 For this step, the leading foot takes a big step forward. Then the other foot comes up behind and to the side of the leading foot. The leading foot then takes another big step forwards. Then the other foot also takes a large step forward to become the leading foot. Thus there are the usual three steps to the module, the odd number resulting in the alternation of the leading foot. Further, when the new leading foot steps forward, the hand on that side of the body is raised toward the brow in the “reconnoiter” gesture.
11.4.6. Scene 6: Q'umarcaaj

The Princes lead the Spaniards in a counter-clockwise circuit and then approach the court along the central axis. The Spaniards (sometimes just Alvarado) kneel before the Rey K'iche' who then shakes Alvarado's hand, raises him up and embraces him with words of welcome. At this point, Rey K'iche' is supposed to recount a dream in which the Holy Spirit convinced him to convert, ending with a request for baptism that the other K'iche' second.

Alvarado and another Spaniard (the choice varied) now dance as a pair, their swords held out, in counter-clockwise circuits returning to the court along the central axis. As they do so, they perform an honouring sequence presumably to respect the Rey K'iche's authority. They dance forwards towards the court, backwards, forwards again and turn around. Then they dance forwards towards the musicians, backwards, and forwards again and turn around. Once more they dance forward towards the court, backwards and forwards again. At this point they do a vuelta and shake hands.

Alvarado and Rey K'iche' now bow to each other and do a vuelta before dancing together in two clockwise circuits. They too enter on the central axis with the complete honouring sequence, followed by a vuelta, shaking hands, end entering the court line. This dance may perhaps derive from the text in which Alvarado invites Rey K'iche' to come with him to the church for baptism.

11.4.7. Closing Dance

The Spaniards and K'iche' form a single line. After each pair of dancers does a vuelta, they form into two opposing lines, with the First Prince leading the Spanish line and Rey K'iche' leading the K'iche' line. While the Spanish line begins a clockwise circuit, the K'iche' line begins a counter-clockwise
circuit. As they set off, the two lines pass each other along the court side, then progress up the Cacique and Spanish sides to pass each other again on the music side. Coming down the two lateral sides they rejoin into a single line on the court side.

The two lines reform but this time dance together up the central axis side by side, diverging only when they reach the music side. At the music side the Spanish line moves leftward and the K’iche’ side rightward, moving to the corners then down the lateral sides again. And again they join into a single line on the court side, move together up the central axis. And again they diverge at the music side, moving in opposite directions, down the two sides, and rejoining into a single line at the court side. Rey K’iche’ speaks then of his joy at the prospect of conversion and peace.

At this point the second portion of the closing dance begins, again with a single line along the court side, diverging into two lines that pass on this side, then move up the lateral sides, pass on the music side, and return along the opposite lateral sides to join again on the court side. Again they come up the central axis in a column composed of two lines side by side, diverge at the music side, come back along the lateral sides and join into a single line at the court side.

The whole line together now performs the honouring sequence, dancing forwards towards the music side, backwards to the court side, and forward again. Turning around at the music side they dance forwards toward the court side, backwards, and forwards again. Turning again at the court side they dance forwards toward the music side, backwards and forwards again. Reaching the music side this time they bow and make a small genuflect on each knee, then speak in unison a dedication to the community patron, Nuestra Señora de Candelaria.

11.4.8. Abbreviated Version of the Baile de la Conquista at Cunén

A standard abbreviation, useful especially if more than one performance is scheduled for the same day or night, includes the first two parts as usual but Part III is omitted and Part IV is both altered and drastically curtailed. As there is no battle, Tekum leads the Caciques in a dance to the court, where he hands the

Ending of abbreviated performance in which Part III and battle are eliminated, so Tekum takes part in the closing dance. 2010.
flag back to Rey K’iche’ and lines up with the other Caciques at Rey K’iche’s left side. Without the intervention of the Princes’ journey, the Spaniards now dance to the court as well and after they kneel to Rey K’iche’ they line up on his right side. The dance of Alvarado and another Spaniard may be eliminated, but the dance of Alvarado and Rey K’iche’ is performed, after which they enter the line and move directly into the concluding honouring sequence and dedication.

While the absence of the Tzunun embassy is understandable since the rest of the drama is understandable without it, the elimination of the battle scene and Tekum’s death is striking, not only because it can be exciting to the audience but also because, as the play was originally conceived, it constituted the climax leading to the more peaceful denouement. Absence of the battle places more emphasis on the supposed achievement of convivencia or peaceful coexistence attendant on conversion of the K’iche’ to Catholicism. But, as will be discussed in more detail, especially in chapter 17, it more importantly allows Costumbrista participates to focus on celebrating the foundation of their society and religion.

11.4.9. Despedida Sequences

For the final night of the feria, a more drastically abbreviated version of the Conquista is danced at a succession of cofradías, as will be explained later. The narrative is condensed into about half an hour, focusing on the beginning and ending. This shortening is necessary to provide time for the despedida sequence that is particularly complex at Cunén. This despedida, which contains two main stages, is inserted into the closing dance sequence of the Baile de la Conquista.

This usual closing dance of the Conquista involves the Spanish and K’iche’ characters dancing in opposing lines that circle the field in opposing directions, passing each other along the music and court sides, then joined together on the court side into a single line. This process is interrupted for the despedida at the point where dancers re-form into the usual two lines of K’iche’ versus Spanish. At this point, the two culminating leaders, the Rey K’iche’ and Alvarado, dance counter-clockwise circuits, positioned one half circuit apart from each other. They then take up positions diagonally opposite each other. They bow to each other, then advance along the diagonal to the centre and bow again, then back up to their starting positions. Each then takes up a new position by moving one side (one quarter circuit) counter-clockwise. Then they
repeat the bowing sequence along the new diagonal. The five times I saw this movement on this night, the number of rotations varied from two to six.

The two leaders then begin a new step. Still diagonally opposed, they back towards each other and past, each reaching the position from which the other started. Then they turn and dance backwards past each other to their starting points. This movement is then repeated. Then the two leaders dance towards each other, link arms or hands, and spin each other in a circle, after which they return to their starting point. This sequence is also performed twice, first linking the left hands and then the right.

The two leaders then each take a new partner one step down the line, so that four persons are dancing. Each pair performs the same sequences, backing past each other twice and linking hands and spinning twice. When they finish these movements the two leaders each take another partner down the line, while their previous partners in second position dance with each other, so that six performers are now in motion. In the fourth set, the leaders pair with next two personages in descending rank, while the others also change partners in downward rank motion, so that there are four pairs or eight personages dancing. And so on. In this way, each dancer from one side will have danced with each from the other side, moving down the line in rank.

When they have gone all the way down and danced with all members of the opposing side, the sequence moves back up the line in selecting their partners. But this time, on the second link-and-spin, they turn 1 ½ times to end up on the opposing side. When all have danced this procedure, they are now all on the opposite side from where they started. So it is time to repeat the whole process completely, starting with the bowing dance of the principles and continuing on to the link-and-spin for all, moving down the ranks and then back up, until all dancers are back on their original sides.

When this section finished, the closing dance is reintroduced, with the two lines dancing in circuits in opposite directions, passing each other on the music and court sides. Again they form a single line across the back of the dance area, with the leaders at the centre of the line and the others arranged in descending order of rank, concluding with the K’oy (Monkeys). The honouring sequence is performed with the usual music-side recitation of the dedication to the community patron.

11.4.10. Final Despedida

This despedida sequence was performed on one occasion early on in the feria, in the church atrium. But on the final night in which the dance rotates among the four most important cofradías and ends at the church, a further section is added. A pair of cajawxel or cofradía principales takes part. One of these is the principal of the cofradía in which the dance is taking place. The two cajawxel move to the front of the dance area, facing away from the cofradía altar room, holding their silver-topped cofradía staffs in front of them. To begin the procedure, the leaders, Alvarado and Rey K’iche’ break from the
line and perform a modified honouring sequence, dancing forwards, backwards, turning, and dancing forwards and backwards again, circling and advancing to the cajawxels. They bow to the cajawxel followed by the usual small genuflect motion with each knee. Then each of the two dancers embraces the cajawxel in front of him and each huddled pair spends much time exchanging solemn words. I was told that the main issue here is that the cajawxel is thanking the dancer for his participation and encouraging him to participate again in the coming year. Though this may sound like a lightweight exchange, from the expressions on their faces it seemed clear that both cajawxel and dancers were treating this conversation with utmost seriousness, since their participation in the dance constitutes a sacred obligation and a sacred offering on which the health and prosperity of themselves, their families, and their community might depend.

When the first pair finishes their conversation, the two dancers break from the huddle, dance backwards, circle, this time exchanging places, dancing forwards, backwards and forwards to each confront the other cajawxel and repeat the verbal exchanges. While they are thus engaged in the second huddle, the next K'iche' and Spaniard pair begins the forwards and backwards dance honouring motion to prepare for when they will take their place huddled with the cajawxel. When the first pair finishes, they dance backwards, forwards, backwards, then circle, shake hands, and rejoin the line. The sequence of honouring dances and huddled private conversations with the cajawxel then continues down the ranks, ending with the K’oy (Monkey dancers).

After this second stage of the despedida, the closing style dance is taken up again, concluding with the honouring sequence, and the usual culminating recitation of the dedication to the community patron. But this time the pair of cajawxel respond to the dedication with a few words.

11.5. Interaction with Cofradías and Other Dance Groups
In my experience, the profound and symbiotic ritual interconnection between cofradías and dance teams is nowhere better illustrated than in the feria at Cunén, which involves an 18 day stretch of dances, processions and other religious activities in which the three dance teams are essential participants. While I present my recollection of ritual events during this long period, in January-February of 2010, as the most complex example of this interconnection, this narrative should only be taken at face value as the current state in the evolution of the cofradía and dance system in this particular location. Furthermore, this narrative is represents a standard to which cofradía officers and dancers both aspire, but which is not necessarily achieved.

January 23, evening.

In 2010, three traditional dance teams participated in the Cunén feria, performing the Conquista (Dance of the Conquest), Torito (Dance of the Bull), and Venado (Dance of the Deer). In contrast to the accompaniment of the chirimía and tambor for the Conquista, the Torito and Venado are accompanied by large three–man marimbas. On the evening of January 23, all three teams with their musicians participated in a “final rehearsal” dance that circulated between the two most important cofradías, Rosario and Candelaria. Although the trajes had arrived, they were not worn for this ceremonial final rehearsal at Cunén, as they are in other communities; street clothes were used instead. Also, with three
teams performing in two cofradías, it means that at times two teams performed simultaneously in the same patio. The team leaders, maestros and autores, provided direction where needed. The Conquista group began at Rosario cofradía. Then, after less than 2 hours to dance the abbreviated version of the Conquista, musicians and dancers moved to Candelaria cofradía and presented it again.

Even without costumes, rituals involving dancing in a cofradía were maintained on this evening. Coming to a dance location involves a dancing procession to the music of the usual instruments. On the way to Candelaria cofradía, the dancers maintained the formation in a dancing procession that they use in the dance space: Rey K’iche’ king and his court (Princes and Malinches) danced in a lateral line in front of the musicians, the K’iche’ leaders (Caciques) in single file at the right, the Spaniards in single file at the left, and the priest–diviners Ajitz Grande and Ajitz Chiquito in front. This was also roughly the arrangement of trajes for the Conquista still in place before the Rosario cofradía altar at Don Chepe’s home.

As usual, when the team arrived at Candelaria cofradía, they entered the shrine room to kneel and pray. Normally they would be kneeling before the Virgen de Candelaria in this cofradía but this night her tabernacle was empty as her cofradía statue was in the church, accompanying the larger church icon of the same divinity. Instead, the statue of San José enshrined in a flanking tabernacle presided. Again when they finished the dance presentation, participants entered the shrine room to kneel and pray. Prayers were chanted in Spanish, partly involving a solo call by a leader and unison response. After the prayer, refreshments were served. Typically such refreshments are either atole (maize gruel), coffee, or chocolate. Each dancer is also given a shot of liquor.

January 24.

From this day on, dancers use traje and dance every day, whether in cofradías, in the atrium or front porch of the church, in processions with images of the saints, or in private homes. When they dance or participate in a procession at night they do not wear masks. Because the very limited vision permitted through the holes under the mask’s eyebrows risks injury in the best conditions, decreased visibility in nighttime would make their use far too dangerous. However, they still cover most of their head with the cloths that normally protect the skin from abrasion by the mask, leaving only the eyes and nose uncovered.

On this day in 2010, the Conquista team danced to the church, where they attended a Sunday mass already in progress. When the mass was over, the statue of Candelaria was brought out of the church, attended by the cajawxels or principals of the cofradías, each carrying a staff topped with a distinctive sculptured silver emblem. The male cofrades or cofradía officers were flanked by two files of their women counterparts (normally their wives) all wearing the elaborate nimpot (sobrehuipil or long over-
blouse), with embroidered white shawls over their heads, and carrying large decorated candles. In this procession, as usual, the three dance teams acted as an honour guard to the Virgin. The *Conquista* team led the procession followed by *Venado* and *Torito* teams, after which came the Candelaria image within its highly decorated, pillared and roofed processional “*ança*” carried by male *cofrades*. The saint in her *ança* is also accompanied by ceremonial music produced here on *pito* (the Indigenous cane flute) and the huge “town drum” an oversize version of the *tambor*.

As they headed the procession, the dance teams were the first to arrive at Candelaria *cofradia* and began dancing. But when Candelaria herself arrived, dancing stopped. As *cofrades* surrounded the statue, all present knelt around her and prayed. Candelaria was taken inside to the steady beat of the town drum and the accompaniment of the woman *cofrades*. When Candelaria was installed in her tabernacle in the *cofradia* room, the three dance teams begin to dance in the patio.

For the Conquista team, which has the most complex choreography and narrative of the three groups,
one third of the patio was insufficient, so after about half an hour the Conquista moved to a cleared area next to the previous day’s lunch tables and continued the dance, breaking only for lunch. This was one of the most complete dances performed by the Conquista group during the weeks of the feria. This occasion, the first official dance of the feria at the cofradía of the patron saint, was thus one of the most important. When the dance was finished, the Conquista team entered the cofradía room to pray before the image of Candelaria, and then returned to their headquarters or posada, dancing to musical accompaniment, and in correct formation. Dancers did not enter the cofradía immediately, but instead performed the honouring sequence in the street before its outer entrance.

January 25.
This day saw the first Conquista dance presented at the municipio church. As usual, the Conquista team processed to the church, dancing to the chirimía and tambor, and in proper formation. They entered the church and knelt before the altar to pray, then came outside to the atrium. The dance then ensued, with a lunch break. This was one of the most elaborate versions of the dance performed during the feria. It not only included the full battle but also a despedida. It was explained that since the Conquista would be danced for over a week in cofradías, it was a despedida to the church and its patron saint, Candelaria. As it had to include all present, the monkeys who act as attendants but don’t enter the dance, were included in the despedida. At its conclusion the dance team returned to the church and again knelt at the altar to pray. As usual the group returned to their posada, the Rosario cofradía, dancing in proper formation. As on the day before, they performed the honouring sequence and spoken dedication in the street outside before entering the cofradía and passing through the patio to the changing room.

Thus the beginning of Conquista dance participation in the feria is also a kind high point, with the most complex dances performed at the two most important locations, the cofradía and church both dedicated to Candelaria, the municipio patron.

January 26.
The next sequence of days involves the traditional dance teams in dancing at the cofradías. While the Venado group came to dance at Rosario cofradía on the 26th, the Conquista group went to dance again at Cofradía Candelaria. They performed the honouring sequence and unison dedication before entering...
the cofradía room for the initial prayer. After the prayer the dance began. On this day the dance was interrupted but presumably it would normally conclude with the honouring sequence, cofradía prayer, refreshments and processional dance back to the posada.

**January 27.**
Changing venue according to the proper sequence of cofradías, on this day Conquista performed in the patio of the Rosario cofradía with the usual prayers before and after, but no procession as this cofradía is also their headquarters.

**January 28.**
The Conquista group danced at two cofradías on this day, in proper order of importance. They first danced at the Cofradía San Francisco, preceded as usual by procession and prayer. Following this dance they left for lunch without a procession as the musicians were being treated to lunch at the cofradía. The group gathered again after lunch for a second dance at Cofradía San Juan, after which they returned with procession and honouring sequence to their headquarters at Rosario cofradía.

**January 29.**
Having danced at the four major cofradías, the Conquista group was now free to dance at minor cofradías and at private homes. On this day, they danced in the street outside the San Pedro cofradía, and later danced in a private home with a shrine dedicated to San Bartolo.

**January 30.**
On this day the Conquista again danced in the patio of a private home but on a special occasion. It was the 10th anniversary of the death of a revered dancer and autor of the Conquista, Macario Rodriguez Chilisná. The host, German, one of his grandsons, living still in his house is a member of the Conquista dance team. Some other members are also his grandsons. This special celebratory dance was followed by a memorial meal for the team hosted by the family. The tamalitos for this meal, called tamalitos rojos, were dusted with red chili powder. On returning in procession to the headquarters at Rosario cofradía, the honouring sequence and dedication were performed in the street outside.

**January 31.**
On the morning of January 31 it is conventional to hold the desfile, a town parade featuring primarily secondary school students in which the three dance teams also participate—at the end of the line. The Conquista team in full traje and with chirimía and tambor, took its place at the end of the parade, danced with the other traditional teams to the stadium, and took a place in the bleachers to listen to the speeches and watch a futbol game.

**January 31, night.**
On this evening and far into the night the *Conquista* and the other two dance groups rotate through the four major *cofradías*, performing the dance at each one. In each *cofradía*, the image has been removed from its tabernacle and placed in the patio in front of the *cofradía* room, set in a large alcove created by hanging woven mats, with benches at the sides and candles lit on the ground in front. As the dancers perform, groups of worshippers come, carrying the firecracker rockets that will be lit the next evening as an offering to the patron saint. These groups kneel and pray and light candles before the saint images as the dancers maneuver around them. After each dance and prayer, the dancers are given refreshments, especially coffee or chocolate to help them keep warm and alert through the long and chilly night.

For the *Conquista* group, the formal evening began with the procession from Rosario *cofradía* headquarters at 7:20 pm to San Francisco *cofradía* where they performed the *Conquista* the first time in a version that takes a little over two hours, eliminating the long battle scene and other portions. Shortly after they began dancing, the community saint’s musicians arrived playing the *pito* and town drum. I was told the drum would stay in *Cofradía* San Francisco until the morning.

The team next danced in San Juan *cofradía*, where a large number of worshippers attended and prayed with their rockets. Next was Candelaria *cofradía*, and finally Rosario *cofradía*, where the dance finished at 3:25 am. This night’s dancing and related activities had thus taken eight hours.

*February 1.*

On this day the three traditional dance teams accompanied the saints as each of them were brought separately from their *cofradías* to the church. These include the saint images of the four principal *cofradías* visited the night before, with the addition of San Sebastian from his *cofradía*.

The rituals of this day required a good deal of time so the dances at each *cofradía* were greatly shortened. In fact, the story of the *Conquista* was often left incomplete when the image was brought onto the brightly decorated *anda* for the procession. Leading each procession was a group of worshippers with firecracker rockets accompanied by their own *chirimia* and *tambor*. Then came the *Conquista*, *Torito*, and *Venado* performers, each dancing to their own musicians. Finally came the saint in its *anda*, surrounded by all the *cofrades* and followed by their women partners carrying huge candles and dressed identically in traditional ceremonial garb with a fine corte (skirt), *sobre-*
huipil, and white shawl over their heads. The anda and its attendants and musicians were at the back of the procession.

The statues were brought to the church in separate processions in reverse order of their cofradía’s rank, beginning with San Sebastian, continuing on to San Francisco and San Juan. The last two cofradías, both dedicated to the Virgin Mary as Rosario and Candelaria, are the most important and receive special treatment. Rosario was first brought to Candelaria cofradía and then both Virgins were treated to an offering of dance before they were carried in procession together to the church. As these saints entered the church, each in its anda, the Conquista and the other two traditional dance groups performed their dances on the spacious church porch or atrio.

*February 1, evening.*

Once gathered in the church the saints were treated to special festivities. The traditional dance teams processed to the church and danced in the atrio, waiting for Candelaria and Rosario to be brought out on their paired andas. When they appeared, a little after 8 pm, a procession formed which followed a route counter-clockwise around the church and a block separated from it—a rectangular a route marked by a poza chapel at each of the four corners. These chapels are not open, but the two Virgins’ andas were set down for prayers at each one. Also in the procession were a number of individuals who danced enclosed in, and at the same time carrying, an armature of bamboo or other materials with
various fireworks attached. At the front of each was the effigy of a bull head. These are the toritos de fuego which will feature in the later ritual entertainment. The procession was accompanied by large numbers of people with their rocket firecrackers and these were being set off almost continually during the procession. The procession moved slowly, so the Conquista dancers periodically turned around and danced facing the musicians.

The procession returned to the church a little before 10. There were two hired bands (marimba orchestras) playing near the church with setups of huge speakers and songs alternating with speeches. The two Virgins in their andas were set on the atrio, in front of the church door, facing the open space where they might enjoy the festivities. The traditional dance teams then circumambulated the two andas counter-clockwise. The statues of San Juan and San Francisco were also brought out in their andas and placed flanking the two Virgins, all looking on to the public space. The dance teams only had a little time to dance before the main entertainment began. This is the “burning of the castle”, a three-story high metal construction designed for a spectacular fireworks display that, among other things, reveals a painting of the main Cunén icon of Candelaria. During this time there are also colourful fireworks in the sky overhead, and the individual rocket firecrackers are being set off in a nearby basketball court.

Following the burning of the castle it was time for the lighting of the toritos de fuego. Each in turn danced onto the atrium and up to the andas of the two virgins. The torito bowed three times before each Virgin, while each Virgin’s anda was tipped so that she bowed simultaneously to the torito. With her saintly favour established, each torito descended into the plaza space and the fireworks were lit as
the person supporting it danced and whirled, fostering much joy and excitement among the crowd.

When the *toritos* had all been lit and spent, the three dance teams, still in full costume excepting masks, formed into two lines, creating an alley that led up to the *andas* of the four saints. A dancer from the same point on each line came into the centre space. This pair danced up and down the space as well as across it. Then they danced forward to the saints and backwards in an abbreviated honouring sequence, ending with the usual small genuflect on each knee and adding a kiss on the base of a saint icon. As they must twice kiss the base of each of the four icons, this requires eight separate advances to the *andas*. When this had been accomplished, the dancers went behind the four andas and repeated the complete gesture. Then they went back to the larger front space and again danced forward and backward as well as crosswise before re-entering the line. There was an overlapping of these pairs, so often two pairs were dancing at once in the large space in front of the saints while a third pair was dancing behind them. By midnight, these ritualized festivities had ended.

**February 2.**
The three dance teams today accompanied the two Virgins on a daytime processional circuit following the same rectangular four-chapel route taken the night before, but this time in broad daylight and thus with masks.

**February 3.**
It was time again to perform the *Conquista* in the atrium of the church as an offering to the patron saint on this final official day of the feria. In 2009 this was a complete performance though lacking the special *despedida* of the previous dance in that location. In 2010, the dance was curtailed due to lack of dancers, and two short versions were given, one in front of the municipal building and the other on the atrium of the church.
February 4–8.
For these five days, while the saints remained in the church, the Conquista and the other two traditional dances were performed in another circuit of the main cofradías (Candelaria, Rosario, San Francisco, San Juan). Other cofradías were fit in where possible, as well as private homes when requested. This meant dancing twice on some days. There was also another dance at the church. In 2010 this was on February 7 and was a complete performance with battle. I noted that the only occasions on which the battle scene was included were those performed either at the church dedicated to Maria Candelaria, or the cofradía dedicated to the same saint. This may be in part because Don Serapio, who usually danced Tekum, was a principal of Cofradía Candelaria.

February 8, evening.
The conclusion to the feria, known as the octavo (though called by some in Cunén the ‘octavario’) involves the return of the saints to the cofradías, and thus reverses the order of some of the main celebrations earlier in the period, as shown in the attached diagram. The octavo began on the evening of February 8 with another night procession of the two Virgins around the rectangular, four-chapel circuit that again included rocket firecrackers and toritos de fuego in honour of the saints, as on February 1.

In 2010 the Cofradía Candelaria sponsored two of the three toritos de fuego, so the Conquista and Venado dancers assembled at that cofradía and danced for a while before accompanying them to the church. In this procession, one of the toritos de fuego danced in the middle of each of the two dance teams. When they reached the church, the Torito dance group and the third torito de fuego were already assembled on the atrium.
All three groups danced on the Church atrium until the two Virgins emerged on their andas at about 8 pm. At this point the three traditional dance groups formed in a line preceding the two Virgins: first the Conquista, then the Venado, and then the Torito. In the midst of the three dance teams the three toritos de fuego spun and danced. Among them also, dancers dressed as K’oy (monkeys) cavorted and entertained the crowd, especially the children. Also preceding the andas were the male cofrade leaders or cajawxels with their silver-topped staffs, and their women counterparts with their large decorated candles. Walking behind the anda was a group of worshippers singing hymns. It was interesting to note the succession of different kinds of music as the procession passed, from the chirimía and tambor of the Conquista dancers, to the marimbas of the Venado and Torito, to huge town drum and pito attending the andas of the Virgins, to the a capella hymns sung by those at the back.

The procession proceeded as before, turning southward on the first street and progressing counter-clockwise around the rectangular ceremonial circuit. At each of the four poza chapels that mark the corners of this circuit, the andas were set down with the Virgin statues facing outward from the chapel. The cofrade knelt in a semicircle facing the virgins, while their women counterparts formed another semicircle outside of the men’s, placing their candles on the ground in front of them. To myself as an outsider the sight of these women was particularly impressive, with their uniform, beautiful ceremonial garb softly lit by the candlelight in the dark night.

Indeed this procession was full of delightful attractions: the spectacle of the andas with their cofrade attendants, the excitement of the three dance teams and the toritos de fuego, the joyous fun of the K’oy or monkey dancers, and the noise and brilliance of the fireworks. Two K’oy were part of the Conquista group and others attached to the other dance groups. The K’oy are especially loved. They are performed by energetic teenagers who never speak but entertain through mime. I had found them a bit of a distraction until in this procession one particularly clever K’oy, who I later learned is named Diego Jeremías Pérez, grabbed my notebook and pen and mimed me taking notes on what was happening. He won me over. Now I love the K’oy too.
About 10 pm, the procession completed the circuit and returned to the church. The two Virgins in their candlelit andas were set on the atrium facing outward toward the people. The two male saints, San Francisco and San Juan, were also brought out on their smaller andas and placed flanking the Virgins. The three dance groups and the toritos de fuego circumambulated these saints counter-clockwise. The three toritos de fuego were set to the side and their protective cloth or paper wrappings removed with anticipation of even greater excitement.

As rocket firecrackers were set off continually nearby, the toritos de fuego provided the focus of excitement for perhaps half an hour. The first of the toritos danced up the centre of the atrium, back and forth in the typical honouring gesture of Cunén dance, going up to each Virgin to bow three times. The andas of the Virgin were simultaneously tipped so the saint could bow towards the torito de fuego as it bows toward them. Then the torito’s fireworks were lit and its human carrier danced around the atrium as the construction around him blazed with different kinds and arrangements of fireworks arranged to go off in a particular sequence, and culminating with the unrolling of a poster of the Virgen de Candelaria. When all the fireworks were out, the torito again danced in honour of the Virgins and they again bowed to each other. It was then time for the next torito de fuego to do the same, and following that, the third torito.

When all three toritos de fuego were spent, the three dance teams circled the atrium in opposing directions and then assembled in two opposing lines leaving a central alley leading to the saints. As on
the earlier and parallel occasion, *cofrades* positioned on each side directed a dancer into the centre, and this pair then danced laterally back to back, as well as forward towards the saints, backwards, and forwards again: an honouring sequence that again concluded with the genuflect on each knee and then kissing the feet of a saint. This sequence was repeated for each saint, and after the pair had kissed all from the front, they went around the back of the *andas* to do the same. By the time they returned to the front and repeated the forward–backward and lateral back–to–back movements before returning to their place in line, another pair was already honouring and kissing the saints in front. Thus at most times there was more than one pair dancing, but in different stages of this process. It took about an hour for all the dancers to accomplish this gesture.

When this section of the joint dance ended, another began. The two lines of dancers performed a circuit on the atrium, crossing past each other in opposing directions, then formed up again into two lines facing across the central space leading to the saints. One line danced forwards and backwards toward the other line three times, at which point the other line moved back with it. After going back and forth as two meeting lines, all the dancers knelt along the centre line, with each of the originally moving dancers resting his head on the shoulder of the facing dancer. They then stood facing each other for a while and backed up to their line positions. This process was then repeated completely with the other line dancing forwards first and resting their head on the facing dancer’s shoulder. While this was happening, the male saints were taken inside the church, leaving only the two Virgins in their brilliant, candle–lit *andas*.

In the concluding section, the dancers again performed a circuit in two lines going in opposite directions and crossing past each other. Finally the three dance groups formed into lateral lines and performed the honouring sequence before the two Virgins. At the conclusion of the sequence, the dancers knelt in front of the two *andas* and both Virgins bowed in gracious response to the dancers’ offering.

Then as the dancers rushed around the Virgins, the Virgins in their *andas* were raised up and turned round and round as a pair, increasing the energy and impact of the spectacle. After several counter–clockwise turns with the dancers speeding round in their orbit, the Virgins in their *andas* were carried
swiftly into the church and set down in front of the altar, facing outward. All the dancers followed the Virgins into the church and knelt to pray before the andas, then occupied the front pews for lengthy prayers. This ended about 11:30.

February 9, day.
The parallel event that had taken place eight days previously on February 1 was the gathering of the saints in the church, each accompanied singly in a procession with dancers and cofrades. Now it was time to return the saints to their cofradías with the same processions. Similarly, the order is reversed. Whereas in coming to the church they were taken in rank from the lowest (San Sebastian) to the highest (Candelaria), now the sequence started with Candelaria and ended with San Sebastian.

For each of these five processional events, the cajawxels with their silver staffs would begin by praying at the front of the church while the female cofrades sat on benches at the back with their candles. The other male cofrades then lifted the anda and carried it outside the church, attended by the cajawxels and female cofrades. When it left the church the anda was incorporated into a procession, preceded by the three dance teams, attended by the town drum, and honoured by bombas. For each saint, the dance teams arrived first to the appropriate cofradía and begin dancing as the anda was carried into the patio and set on a bed of pine needles. The music and dancing stopped as the cofrades and dancers knelt around the anda to pray and bombas were set off.

When the prayer was over, the music and dancing would resume while the statue was removed from the anda, taken into the cofradía room, placed in its case, and the altar table moved back in front. The music and dance would stop temporarily as the male and female cofrades enter the cofradía room. Two large petates (reed mats) would be laid out in front of the saints: the front mat for the cajawxels to kneel with their staffs, and the back mat for their women counterparts to kneel with their candles. After prayers, the women would sit back to relax, putting out their candles, while the cajawxels sat with their staffs on benches at the sides. All would then be served drinks, often a chili-spiced atole.

While the prayers and refreshments were taking place in the cofradía room, the dancers and musicians would resume their performance in the patio. They would continue dancing, sometimes with a break for a drink, until the cofrades emerged, at which point they would suddenly stop in order to form the procession to return to the church with the empty anda and transport another saint to his or her cofradía.
As noted, in each of these events when the *cofrades* are praying or served refreshments in the *cofradía* room, dances are taking place in the patio and, if necessary, in the street. The *Conquista* team accommodated the short periods of dance at each of the five *cofradías* by continuing the narrative at each *cofradía* where it had left off at the previous venue upon the emergence of the *cofrades*. As the *cofrades* were not aware of and not concerned with the point in the story that the *Conquista* dancers had reached, it turned out that on this day in 2010 the story was never finished—indeed it was actually stopped in mid-battle.

*February 9, evening.*

Continuing its symmetrical arrangement, the *octavo* concluded with the process of dancing throughout the night at the four main *cofradías*, as on January 31, but in reverse order. In addition, a final dance was held in the atrium of the church before dawn.

For each of the *cofradía* venues, the team danced in procession to the venue, performed the honouring sequence in front of the *cofradía*, then entered the *cofradía* to kneel and pray, before emerging to begin the dance. In each of these *cofradía* dances, the Conquista story was begun afresh, but dramatically shortened to less than half an hour by doing primarily the beginning and ending, in order to make time for the elaborate final *despedida* with *cajawxel* huddles described above. Then as usual in any *cofradía* dance, the dancers entered the *cofradía* room and knelt in front of the saints to pray, after which they were served drinks in the rank order of their characters.⁶

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⁶ Neither the children (Ajitz Chiquito and the *K’oy*) nor the musicians knelt to pray, but all adult dancers did.
This entire procedure was repeated in each of the four principal cofradías, after which the Conquista dancers and musicians danced in procession to the church where they again danced a shortened version of the Conquista and then performed both stages of the despedida, the cajawxels having arrived in time to take part in the huddled conversations of the second stage. The difference was that the church was locked and could not be entered to pray. This process ended a little before dawn in a light drizzle, just as the Torito and Venado teams came to the church atrium to perform their own despedidas. The Conquista team danced in procession back to their headquarters, the Rosario cofradía, pausing in the street to perform the honouring dance sequence and recite the dedication, then entering the cofradía to pray.

February 10, dawn.
When the prayers finished, the cofradía location is celebrated as the Conquista headquarters or posada. The dance team was served breakfast finishing about 6 am. By then it was fully light out, so the dancers went into the patio to begin a final performance of the Conquista. This too was a much shortened version of the Conquista dance, designed in part to thank their posada hosts for their hospitality over the last 18 days. After the final honouring sequence and prayer in the cofradía room, the feria ended for the Conquista dancers.

This lengthy description of the participation of the Conquista dance team in the events of the feria has been introduced to emphasize the profound ritual interconnection of cofradías and dance teams, to a degree that I have not seen elsewhere, though it once may have been more common and widespread. In this participation, dance is central not only to honour the saints but also to make the sacred beings completely present to work the necessary transformations that will renew the saints and the community. The saints themselves do not act: they are carried or watch, or may bow, but the real work of transformation is performed through the prayers of the cofrades and the dances of the three groups or teams. This transformative function of the dance teams is also seen in their performances within private homes. Because of this clear function in Cunén, I suspect that a similar feria structure interrelating dance teams and cofradías was once the rule rather than the exception. It also provides an opportunity for dances to make an offering, at great physical and financial sacrifice, to the patron saint, as usual expecting acts of reciprocity from the patron saint. In other communities, this latter function has come to predominate as the dance teams and cofradías pull apart to various degrees.