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Chapter 15. Momostenango

15.1. Introduction

15.1.1. Setting

A good road, parts of it recently paved, leads from the Pan-American Highway through San Francisco el Alto and across a pine forest to Santiago Momostenango. But Momostenango is not on a major through-route, and so most traffic is local. This communication pattern is only one of the many reasons Momostenango has been able to maintain a strong sense of tradition that has made it a Mecca for anthropological studies, including those of Garrett Cook, Thomas Offit, Barbara Tedlock, and Dennis Tedlock. Outstanding among these are Cook’s study of Momostenango’s cofradías and festival dance teams and Barbara Tedlock’s study of divination: together the three major components of the
Costumbrista religion. More consistent with the methodology of this study is Carmack’s (1983: 139–40) methodology of “ethnohistory” as an historical study of an Indigenous group, which he has applied to Momostenango’s history in several major publications.

Carmack (1995: 40–56) details the early history of Momostenango. Before the Spanish invasion, the place now called Momostenango was inhabited by Mam Maya, conquered and re-settled by K’iche’ in the 15th century. The K’iche’ settlement was known as Chwa Tz’ak, meaning “Place Above the Walls”. Local leadership, subordinate to K’iche’ kings in Q’umarcaaj, was under the authority of the Nehaib family who during the 16th century documented their social position in multiple títulos (Carmack 1973: 32–37). In 1540 Franciscans begin the progress of congregación, transforming Chwa Tz’ak into Pueblo Viejo. There, Ixquin Nehaib was baptized as the Cacique Francisco Vicente, granted privileges by the Spanish crown including rights to use the title “Don,” to appear in Spanish dress, to wear a sword, to own and ride horses, and exemption from tribute. There also, under Spanish authority and witnessed by the K’iche’ kings of Q’umarcaaj, Francisco Vicente was elevated to the rank of king (ajpop), installed on a throne and given a crown and bone sceptre. By 1587, when population recovery was sufficient to found a cabecera—the town centre was moved to its present location and renamed Momostenango (from Mumus Tenanco, the Nahuatl translation of Chwa Tz’ak) and a Franciscan convent was established. The patron chosen was Santiago. The municipality was divided into four wards or barrios (parcialidades), each with its own patron saint. According to Cook and Offit (2013: 10–11), construction of the first church in the new cabecera was subsidized by Diego Vicente, then head of the Vicente cacique family. This construction took place around 1600, roughly contemporary with the writing and first production of the Baile de la Conquista.

As elsewhere in the northwestern highlands of Guatemala, the population of Momostenango municipio remains overwhelmingly Indigenous, settled both in the cabecera, which they share with a Ladino population, and in the smaller surrounding communities. Wool blankets and rugs are a specialty artisanal product in Momostenango, arising from early colonial introduction of sheep. Although traditionalist in many respects, women’s dress in Momostenango has not retained the uniformity of traje seen in many other municipios. The corte is still common, usually of Salcajá or San Cristóbal manufacture, and this may be combined with huipiles in various styles, including the Momostecan
huipil. Much more common however is the industrially manufactured blusa of white satiny material with floral embroidery, the latter added industrially or locally by hand, on the sleeves and around the neck.

The style of civil-religious hierarchy integrating cofradías and the Indigenous governing body now called the auxiliatura (because it is auxiliary to the mayor and council) has remained prominent in Momostenango. In public ceremonial events one notes participation by leaders of both groups. Leaders of the Indigenous-membership cofradías hold wood staffs with elaborate silver emblems at the top identifying the particular cofradía. The Alcaldes Comunitarios (community mayors) who represent the various barrios of the cabecera as well as the cantones and parajes, and who form the Auxiliatura, wear suits and hold staffs with a simple silver cap.

In his studies of Costumbre at Momostenango, Garrett Cook has paid particular attention to the Conquest Dance in that municipio. His earlier book (Cook 2000) is based on fieldwork in the 1970s. His later volume, co-authored with Thomas Offit (2013), investigates contrasts between the Conquista he investigated in the 1970s with its revival in 2008–11. In this section I will mostly report on my own investigations of the Conquista at Momostenango during the 2008–11 period but will refer whenever possible to Cook’s observations and interpretations of performances he witnessed three decades previous.

15.1.2. Fiesta Patronal

Each year Momostenango holds a feria for its patron saint, Santiago, lasting the 15 days (two octavos) from July 21 to August 4. As elsewhere, itinerant vendors and amusement ride operators flock to Momostenango for these days. Amusement rides and booths are set up several blocks from the town centre. Marketing extends down several streets, through the park in front of the municipal building, and into part of the church plaza where recently four dance teams perform. Vendors of riscos (a hard sweetbread) along the street and textile vendors occupy much of the municipal park. Vendors of prepared foods concentrate along the two sides of the municipal building, facing both the park and the church plaza. Local, very small-scale produce and plastics vendors along with pirated DVD and CD booths tend to occupy whatever bit of ground they can find amid the larger-scale enterprises. Cook and Offit (2013: 19) noted that as marketing for the fair has grown since Cook began his Momostenango research in the 1970s, local traditional wares have tended to be moved into the
margins of the marketing space while globalized international products (shoes, plastics, electronics) have taken over the most central vending locations. This change actually animates a pantomimed sequence of the Conquista performance, as will be seen.

Sharing the space of the church plaza with this expanded marketing are traditional festival dances and traveling musical bands. Among the traditional dances, normally the Conquista, Mexicanos, and Convite Típico dance each year, while the Monos y Tigres, a combined Deer and Monkey dance involving acrobatics on a high rope, takes place in alternate (even) years. Cook and Offit (2013: 15) recall that in the 1970s, the Baile de Moros y Cristianos was regularly performed in this plaza as well, but has ceased to be performed at Momostenango. At present, the four dance teams are largely limited to the west half of the elongated church plaza. The eastern half includes market booths as well as two bandstands, closest to the door of the church, with tall stacks of enormous speakers. Overlooking these activities in its stately classicism is the church, rebuilt in this “liberal” style shortly after 1900 under the leadership of Teodoro Cifuentes, head of the most powerful Ladino family in the Momostenango municipio. Don Teodoro was elected mayor in 1895 and rose to be the comandante local in Momostenango and soon thereafter the jefe político of Totonicapán department (Carmack 1979: 279–82).1

Though July 25 is the saint’s day for Santiago, this is not the primary day of Momostenango’s feria. One reason may be that July 25 is the primary day for the feria in nearby San Cristóbal Totonicapán, dedicated to both San Cristóbal and Santiago Apostol. Instead at Momostenango the primary day is moved forward one octavo to August 1. The two flanking days, July 31 and August 2 have become nearly as important, so Momostenango’s feria is characterized by a three-day climax. On each of these three major days, a different team of Disfraces dancers performs in the street adjoining the municipal park, in front of “El Portal”, the arcaded commercial building. The third of these Disfraces groups is a women’s team. The Momostenango Disfraces has been the subject of study by art historian Rhonda Taube (2009, 2012, 2013). The lead-up to this three-day climax includes school parades on July 28

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1 Carmack follows the anthropological procedure of inventing pseudonyms for Indigenous subjects, so he refers to Cifuentes as “Cienfuegos.”
and 29, in which school groups with their bands are joined by dance groups as well as the alcaldes comunitarios.

The Momostenango church houses two icons of Patrón Santiago. Santiago Mayor dominates the retablo behind the altar and is the focus of Catholic worship, especially the procession that includes a large float on the primary fair day, August 1. Santiago de los Caballeros is the smaller mounted figure kept in a glass case at the left or north side, adjoining the apse. Sharing his case is San Felipe, considered Santiago’s “secretary” as he holds a book. These smaller icons are the focus of Costumbrista worship at Momostenango.

Santiago de los Caballeros is understood to be a warrior and thus as a saint he is “delicado” (potentially dangerous). Festival dancers make a vow to Santiago to dance for nine years in his honour and many fulfill that contract because to fail would incur his severe punishment.

Cook and Offit (2013: 16–17, 135–44) detail activities during the feria of the Santiago cofradía as well as how these activities have changed over the period of their investigation since the 1970s. The statues of Santiago and San Felipe were formerly brought out of the church in procession to the cofradía, then in Santa Isabel barrio, on July 23 for an all-night vigil involving the transfer of office to the cofrades for the coming year, who are formerly inducted the next morning in the church. The cofradía is presently located in barrio Santa Caterina and the current alcalde has instituted an additional festival on July 22. On that day the procession brings the saints to the cofradía for celebrations and vigil, while now on July 23 they are brought to a chapel in Santa Isabel. The saints process through town again on Santiago’s feast day, July 25.

According to Cook and Offit (2013: 16) on July 30 the saints are brought to the cofradía for a renewal of their clothing that signals the start of a new year for the cofradía and saints. Then, early on July 31 the icons are brought to the calvario, the cemetery chapel to be placed on another anda in preparation for the most important procession to the church on that day. However, I have seen the saints brought directly to the calvario on July 30 to await the following day’s procession to the church. On August 1,
the climax of the Momostenango feria, the icons are carried in procession around town and return to the church in the evening, to end their public participation in the fiesta patronal. Spectators and participants in these last processions have been reduced since the introduction of Disfraces dances on July 31, August 1 and 2, all of which command enormous crowds of spectators. These processions are discussed in more detail below in terms of the participation of the Conquista dance team.

This fiesta patronal is not universally appreciated in Momostenango. Evangelical Protestantism and more recently the Mormons (Church of Latter Day Saints) have won many converts in the municipio. Here Evangelical Protestantism decries both Catholicism and Costumbre as pagan religions. As Evangelical Protestantism tends to represent the religious model for capitalism in Latin America, moralizing the accumulation of wealth, Costumbre is a particular target. The Costumbre religion at Momostenango and elsewhere has thrived under a kind of big-man system of wealth redistribution through status-raising largesse, articulated through the enormous expenses of both cofradía activities and traditional fiesta dances. Evangelical Protestants teach that such cofradía and dance team expenses are both immoral and wasteful. Many who lack the funds for such monetary outlays find the Evangelical religion a convenient alternative.

15.1.3. The Conquista Dance Team

The first time I saw the Baile de la Conquista in Momostenango, and indeed the first time I saw the dance at all, was in 2008. Guided on my first visit to Momostenango by Matthew Krystal, I lucked out, as the dance had not been performed in Momostenango for four years (Cook and Offit 2013: 21–22). The autor who brought it back in that year was Juan Eulogio Vicente (born 1939), perhaps a descendent of the Nehaib Caciques of Momostenango who took the name Vicente. Don Eulogio resides in the paraje of Pa Mumus in the aldea of Santa Ana and has enlisted several other dancers from that community. One of these, Santiago Itzep Vicente, who dances the role of a Spaniard, usually Quirijol, became my first contact and friend among the Conquista group, introducing me to Don Eulogio.

As autor, Don Eulogio hosts rehearsals at his home, converting one of the rooms into an altar room with a framed photograph of the paired icons of Santiago and San Felipe on a table and pine needles spread over the floor. Pa Mumus is outside of urban Momostenango, so for the feria Don Eulogio rents a room in town, in the Barrio Santa Isabel, to serve as the posada for changing into and out of costumes. This posada is at a convenient distance from the church plaza so that it is possible to move between the two locations in formal procession with musical accompaniment.

\[\text{Footnote 2} \text{ For several years I noted the labours of the pairs of young Mormon men one regularly sees walking the streets, identified by their short hair, short-sleeved white shirts with dark pants and ties. But in 2013 I noticed that the pairs of Evangelical missionary youths now tend to be made up of one North American and one Latin American, presumably a Guatemalan.} \]
Don Eulogio was also the autor for the ferias of 2009–2011, but has not been able to bring out the dance since then (as of this writing, 2014). In 2009, Ernesto Ixcayauh acted as co-autor and hosted one of the rehearsals at his own house in paraje Chonimá of the Barrio Santa Catalina on the east side of town. Don Ernesto also dances Ajitz. He is also well educated, articulate, extremely competent, very good at interpersonal relations, and an entrepreneur with a playera (T-shirt) shop in the tourist centre of Antigua. Don Ernesto was born in 1961 and as of 2011 had 13 children and 6 grandchildren. He noted that he started dancing the Conquista when he was in his forties, beginning with Alvarado then switching to Ajitz. Don Ernesto’s sons and daughters have taken their turns as the Princes and Malinches.

I have had several interviews with Don Ernesto because he responds most easily to the kinds of questions I want to ask, and because he has considered carefully the importance and intent of some of the improvisations he adds to the pantomimes that are the dominant feature of the Momostenango Conquista. In contrast, I have not been able to pursue interviews with Don Eulogio as his Spanish is halting and difficult for me to understand, while my K’iche’ is nonexistent. Unfortunately, Don Eulogio does not get along with Don Ernesto, and since 2010 has excluded him from either dancing or sharing the responsibilities of autor.

From 2008 to 2010, Don Ernesto’s father, Anselmo Ixcayauh Ajxup (born 1941) served as maestro and also danced Tekum. After Don Anselmo’s death, Julio Xiloj Ajanel replaced him as maestro. In 2010, Don Eulogio prepared a list of the maestros dating from the time of Napoleón Zárate in the 1940s. I did not see this list but instead heard it being announced to the crowd at the desfile of that year and caught only a few names. Francisco García Peruch, who danced Alvarado for nine years in the 1960s, mentioned that at times maestros have had to be brought from the nearby municipio of Santa María Chiquimula. According to Don Ernesto (August, 2011) Don Julio’s, father Juan Xiloj Coyuch, had been a revered maestro for about three decades. He died around 2005, which may have led to the lapse in the Conquista until 2008.

In 2009, Don Ernesto trained Oscar Caguox Vicente to share the role of Ajitz, and Oscar has continued to dance this role along with others. Both men have had their sons dance with them as Ajitz Chiquito. Since 2008, I have seen Antonio (Don Toño) Velásquez dance Ajitz as well. Don Ernesto (2011) noted that Don Toño’s father Sebastián Velásquez had been autor before Juan Xiloj. Don Toño’s children have also participated as Conquista dancers.

I was told that Don Eulogio gathers dancers in the customary way, bringing a small bottle of quetzalteca (sugar cane liquor) to a prospective dancer’s house and asking him to contribute. As with other festival dances at Momostenango, it has been customary for dancers to pledge to participate for nine years. The pledge is made to the Patrón Santiago in return for health and prosperity. Because the Conquista is performed on all 15 days of the feria, from July 21 through August 4, it is necessary to
enlist two dancers for each role whenever possible, allowing them to alternate days. This also shares the burden of the cost for renting the traje.

Each year I have seen the Conquista in Momostenango, the chirimiista has been Cristóbal Pantuj Zanik. Don Cristóbal had learned from his father Dionysio Pantuj Vicente, who played chirimía for the Conquista before him. Glen Horspool interviewed musicians in Momostenango in 1977–78 as research for his musicological dissertation (1982). He noted that Dionysio Pantuj had been playing chirimía since he was 30 and that he had learned from Manuel Zárate. Horspool also records José Antonio Pérez likewise played chirimía at the time of his fieldwork. Don Cristóbal had been the tamborista for his father, and after he took over the chirimía he hoped his own son would take over the tambor. His son soon gave it up, however, Don Cristóbal linked with the tamborista Juan Pérez who I saw play in 2008, 2009, and 2010. However, half way through the feria in 2010 Juan Pérez suffered a bad fall and was hospitalized. Since then, Alejandro Hernández Pérez has played tambor for the Conquista.

The Baile de la Conquista still commands high prestige in Momostenango, and many persons, old and young, carry a great deal of knowledge on former autores, maestros and leading dancers. I have not sought specifically to gather and fully compile this genealogical information, leaving this project to future investigators.

15.1.4. My Engagement with the Dance Team

As noted above, my first contact with the dance team, acting on information provided by Garrett Cook, was Santiago Itzep, a young and energetic man who had taken a great interest in the group and served as co-autor in 2008 when I first saw the dance. Santiago was already familiar with Cook, who had helped him out in a previous year when one of his children was sick. When I met Santiago in January, 2009, his fifth child had just been born. I became friends with Santiago and his wife Candelaria, both at the time committed Costumbristas, and his son Oscar often tagged along with me in town. In 2009, I paid for Santiago's costume rental for performing Quirijol, which he shares with his brother, Hector. I also paid for the traje rental of his friend, José Barrera Pélico, who Santiago said could not afford to dance otherwise. Santiago also called on me for health emergencies that befell both him and Candelaria, though at separate times, and for assistance in paying for Oscar's school tuition.
Santiago often walked me the few kilometers from his house on the bus route in Pa Mumus to the home of Don Eulogio, an off-the-beaten-track route that is dangerous for a foreigner to traverse alone. The first time he introduced me to Don Eulogio, in January 2009, was particularly memorable. Garrett Cook had warned me that there would be a *costumbre* or ceremonial offering to clear the path for me to collaborate with the group, and on the way, Santiago told me that Don Eulogio, who is also a *chuchkajaw*, had already done this and I owed Q200. When we arrived, I was ushered into the altar room where Don Eulogio was sitting at his divination table. Don Eulogio questioned me on my interest in the *Conquista* and then asked me to contribute to his costs for hosting the rehearsals, at the same time giving me a list of the past and proposed rehearsal dates. He stated that each *ensayo* costs him Q2500 so I gave him Q1500 for the *ensayos* I would be attending a few weeks later. Don Eulogio then asked me to write down my name, the names of my children, and the cities I would be visiting, then explained to me that this would require him to do six *costumbres* for me at cost of Q3000–4000. I did not understand what was happening at the time but on a later occasion found it necessary to explain to Don Eulogio that I was happy to contribute funds for things that benefitted the whole group but did not want to be paying for him to do any more *costumbres* for me. I then asked about the *costumbres* that must be accomplished on mountains associated with the four directions, and Don Eulogio recited a list for me of these, as will be discussed below. Business finished, Don Eulogio used three candles to “bless” me, touching them to various parts of my body then making the sign of the cross, after which he lit the candles and placed them on the altar table.

I did attend rehearsals on January 27 and 28 of that year, though the second was almost immediately suspended, and on my next trip also came to the last rehearsal on June 7. This was held at the house of Don Ernesto, who had become the co-*autor*. By this time I had decided that my contribution to the dance team would be paying for the musicians for the 15 days of the *feria*, amounting to Q3000, and explained this to Don Ernesto. In return, he welcomed my collaboration and gave me permission to videotape the entire *ensayo*. Over the next few years, I continued this practice of supporting the musician fees and was welcomed to videotape or photograph at will. I was also welcomed to sit on the platform occupied by the court and the musicians along with some of their family members.

### 15.2. Preliminaries and Participation in Other Public Rituals and Events

#### 15.2.1. Preparation

I am not aware of any formal procedure to announce to the community that the *Conquista* will take place at the *feria*. However, one year Don Eulogio announced his plan to have the icon of Santiago brought in procession to his house. Others claimed this would never happen, and they were apparently right. In the past, Cook (2000: 53) reports that a commitment to bring out the *Conquista* would be announced in November of the previous year by playing the *chirimía* in front of the church.
15.2.2. Rehearsals and Cruzada

Don Eulogio stated that he planned rehearsals for several weekends, dancing both days, coordinating dancers’ availability with propitious days in the Maya divinatory calendar. The dates he gave me showed that they occurred about one weekend a month, beginning in December and ending in June.

As elsewhere, rehearsals are held in the houses of autores who provide a meal and hire the musicians. For the three rehearsals I attended in Momostenango, the maestro was Don Anselmo, who also danced Tekum. Don Anselmo would read out phrases from his booklet with the text, expecting the dancer to repeat the phrase. This did not aid significantly in memorization for two reasons. First, Don Anselmo did not apportion his phrases according to either meaning or the rhymed poetic line, which would be two methods to assist a dancer in memorizing the text. Second, many dancers repeated only the last word that Don Anselmo read for each phrase portion. Some dancers were well-prepared already: Don Anselmo knew portions of his text, while Don Ernesto knew the Ajitz text well, and Alberto Pêlico Xiloj knew the part of Alvarado well. For the other performers, they were mainly interested in the dances and the pantomimes, depending on the part. K’iche’ personages have little pantomime to accomplish, so their interest is more in the dance, and especially so with Victoriano Rojas Velásquez who dances Rey K’iche’ to perfection but does not recite any text in performance. In contrast, the Spaniards engage in constant and boisterous pantomime with Ajitz, which becomes their focus. They participate and improvise in these pantomimes with energy and a kind of adolescent humour.

For the first rehearsal I attended, on January 27, 2009, it was necessary for me to leave while it was ongoing, due to the scarcity of buses passing through Pa Mumus and the need for me to return before dark. Santiago later explained to me that I had missed a ceremonial conclusion involving a cruzada, in which candles are laid out in the dance area in the form of an X. Fortunately, I saw this in the final full rehearsal at Don Ernesto’s house on June 7. When the closing speeches and dedication to Patrón Santiago are rehearsed, 13 plates holding fires of candles, sugar and incense are set in the X pattern of crossing diagonals (3 for each arm and one for centre). Firing of cohetes then signaled the start to the cruzada.

The choreography of this ceremonial dance is much the same as the despedida elaboration of the closing dance as will be described later in this chapter. The K’iche’ and Spaniards lined up on the two sides of the dance ground and began to dance two circuits, single file, with Spaniards moving clockwise and K’iche’ moving counter-clockwise, passing each other on the two ends. The two groups joined into a single line on the court side and danced forward to the opposite side, backwards to the court side, and forward again, all the while taking care not to step on the plates with candles. At the front, the line again separated into two groups, but with Spaniards now dancing counter-clockwise and K’iche’ dancing clockwise.
At the end of this circuit, the K’iche’ remained in a line at the court end and the Spaniards at the opposite end. The two leaders, Alvarado and Tzunun,\(^3\) danced diagonally through the centre, passing each other and dancing around the plates. They then moved back to the centre and embraced, then passed each other again in dancing to the opposite end. The next pair in line then joined them and repeated the sequence, so that Alvarado paired with Chavez and Tzunun with Carrillo. At each completion another pair joined and this continued until all were dancing and everyone from one side had embraced everyone from the other side. The procedure still continued as the sequence was danced in reverse, with pairs departing one by one until only the leaders were left. At this point the dancers were lined up on the side opposite from where they started. So the whole dance was repeated until they have returned to their original side.

At the conclusion of the embracing sequence, the two groups again danced circuits in opposite directions, then joined into a single line, dancing forward and backward. This time they terminated at the far side, away from the court, where they were met by Don Eulogio who censed them with copal.

The line danced backwards to the court end where they divided into two lines dancing circuits in opposite directions again. By this time the fires in the plates had gone out, and the dancers joined for a last time into a single line at the far end of the dance ground. All dancers knelt and repeated the dedication to Patrón Santiago as Don Eulogio began to bless each in turn with a bundle of candles. This ended the *cruzada* ceremony for the final rehearsal on June 7, 2009.

15.2.3. Costumbres

In preparation for the public dance and during the period of rehearsals, *costumbres* are undertaken on four sacred mountains surrounding Momostenango territory and associated with the four cardinal directions. These four mountains are Quilaja in the east, Sokop in the west, Tamancu in the south, and Pipil in the North. They were listed for me both by Don Eulogio and Francisco García. They are also referenced in Barbara Tedlock’s *Time and the Highland Maya* (1992: 101), as these mountaintop

\(^3\) Rey K’iche’ would be the leader of the K’iche’ group in public performance.
costumbres serve many purposes. For the Conquista dance team, these mountain costumbres are normally undertaken only by the autor and a chuchkajaw. In Momostenango, Don Eulogio is a chuchkajaw as well as autor so he performs the costumo with the co-autor. Some of these mountains are quite distant, requiring a hired car or public transportation, then climbing a few hours to the altar, carrying the necessary candles, incense balls, liquor and ocote wood. The fifth costumo then takes place at the centre of Momostenango ritual space, at the Paclom hill-shrine that occupies the centre of the urban development. Don Ernesto also referred to the central shrine as Guacal Santiago (the Calabash of Santiago). All of these costumbres are accomplished on specific days of the Maya divination calendar. Despite my best efforts, scheduling has prevented my attendance at any of these costumbres for the Conquista team.

Part of the ritual preparation for the festival dancing involves celibacy. Don Ernesto noted specifically that he remains celibate to not only to ensure general success but also to ensure that no accident will befall him when he climbs the high platform representing his mountain shrine. By comparison, Cook and Offit (2013: 92, 150) document the same need for celibacy among those who perform acrobatics in the Monos y Tigres dance.

15.2.4. Arranging the Dance Ground

At Momostenango, the church plaza that runs along the front of the church and the monastery serves as an overflow market place. But for the feria, many of these stalls give way to special installations. On the eastern half, closest to the church, bandstands are constructed among the market stalls. The west half is given over to dance teams. On even years, four dance teams participate, always in the same location. From north to south, the arrangement of dance teams is Monos y Tigres, Convite Típico, Conquista, and Mexicanos. An alley between the Convite and Conquista dance grounds provides direct access to the church entrance. Also, Monos y Tigres requires more space for its acrobatics, so it takes up the full width of the northern end of the church plaza. For all four dances, a stand is constructed for musicians, occupying the western margin of the plaza.

Shortly before the opening of the feria on July 21, members of the Conquista team meet to construct the platform for the court of Rey K’iche’ and the two
musicians with an adjoining platform representing a high mountain shrine for Ajitz. Some of the wood has been saved from the previous year, and some must be bought new, at the expense of the autor. Transportation of the wood will also require hiring a truck. Six post-holes are dug in the plaza to the depth of a machete blade, using the same spots each year, for the supporting wood columns of the two adjoining structures. Intermediary columns were supported directly on the plaza pavement. Crossbeams are then fastened to the posts and floor planks are laid. This platform for the court of Rey K'iche' and the musicians is then decorated, as at San Cristóbal, with pine branches. The high shrine platform is more difficult to construct. The crossbeams were carefully lashed to four tall posts before the floor boards were laid. A long ladder then provides access. However, in my experience the platform was only used by Don Ernesto and otherwise remains symbolic.

15.2.5. The Posada

About four blocks from the church plaza, the posada for Conquista dancers consists of two rented rooms in a family home that happens to be across the street from the ermita (chapel) of Santiago in barrio Santa Isabel. Each morning dancers come there to dress as the musicians play, and each afternoon they return to change back into their regular clothing. Movement between the posada and the church plaza is traversed in formal processional arrangements to the accompaniment of the musicians. One point about the posada that will resonate with information to be provided in the narrative of the dance sequence, is that K'iche' and Spanish personages dress in different rooms. I have not seen this division in any of the other Conquista dance teams investigated.

15.2.6. Welcoming the Masks

As elsewhere, the transformation of a mask and costume from morería merchandise to sacred presence requires a ritual act of embodiment. In Momostenango this ritual act is undertaken differently, however. The trajes are picked up individually from the morería so there is no communal ritual act. Instead, this ritual of embodiment is a private family event.

I was invited to attend two such ceremonies in 2009. Santiago Itzep invited me in part as thanks for funding his traje rental, and Oscar Caguox, who shared the role of Ajitz with Don Ernesto, invited me as thanks for paying for half of his son’s rental of the Ajitz Chiquito traje. Both were held on July 20, the day before the feria opened and the first performance of the Conquista took place. Both events will be briefly described to point out similarities.

Oscar Caguox lives within the cabecera of Momostenango, in a large, middle-class extended family compound. A feast was prepared and the Conquista musicians were engaged for the day. When I arrived, the musicians were sitting in an altar room, playing Conquista and related sones. Masks and
costumes for Ajitz Grande and Chiquito were set up on the altar. A man who appeared to be a family friend but was also qualified as a chuchkajaw performed the blessing while Oscar and his son knelt before the altar. Then while both performers dressed in the costumes the masks were anointed with liquor and given liquor to drink before they were put on. At this point, the proceedings moved into a large paved patio. While the musicians played and Oscar’s family looked on with pride as witnesses, Oscar and his son danced. They first danced circuits with the usual vueltas at the corners. Then they mimed some of the scenes that in performance would involve interaction with the Ambassadors. The divination table and chairs were set up on the patio, so that Ajitz and Chiquito could perform the divination. Then, portraying part of what will be explained as the re-sanctification of the divination table, Oscar jumped over the table then stood on it and danced there. Oscar then performed more dance circuits, spiced with jokes in K’iche’, many of which centered around my presence. When the dancing was over, Oscar thanked people individually for their support. Both his parents were teary-eyed when special thanks for their support was voiced. Then the lunch feast was served.

Later in the same day, the parallel ceremonial occasion was held in Santiago Itzep’s residence in Pa Mumus. Santiago’s family is poor, so there were no resources to hire musicians and the feast was less sumptuous, but no less heartfelt. Also, Santiago had invited Garrett Cook and the Baylor University students Garrett had brought for a field school at Momostenango, making the occasion more festive and also raising Santiago’s currency in the eyes of his family. Santiago’s 93–year old grandfather served as Chuchkajaw. Santiago’s house consists of an earthen patio with a kitchen on one side and the living area on the other, the latter serving Santiago, Candelaria, and their five children for daily activities as well as sleeping. But on this day, that living space was converted into a ceremonial space with pine needles carpeting the floor and an altar table at one side, opposite the door. At the altar, Santiago’s grandfather prayed while he swung a censer filled with copal. When he finished his prayer, each person attending was called individually to the altar to kneel, be blessed with prayers, and to kiss the mask of Quirijol that Santiago would be wearing in performance. Santiago, wearing his costume, also knelt for his blessing, then put on the mask. We then
went into the patio and Santiago danced two circuits without music. Drawing an X on the ground with his sword, Santiago prayed to the four directions. The dinner feast was then served.

Although family circumstances and procedural details differed, both ceremonies for welcoming the trajes served to bind the traje and dancer into a supernatural embodiment through the combination of prayer and dance. In both, the mask was a focus of embodiment, made animate in part through treating it as animate, whether giving it a drink or kissing it. As was discussed in relation to the interaction of cofradías and dance teams at Cunén, this strategy of animating an icon is referred to by Alfred Gell as an externalist strategy, involving insertion of the icon into a web of social relations. But while the masks become animate through these acts, it remains for the dancer to meld with the mask and costume as an embodied primero, an act accomplished through dance as a manifestation of the sacred.

In contrast to group ceremonies for dancers taking on their trajes at Joyabaj and San Cristóbal, the family oriented event at Momostenango provides an occasion for which social relations can also be foregrounded. In part, family members function as witnesses to the evidence that the dancer is an appropriate practitioner of Costumbre who, through his sacrifice or offering of dance to the patron saint, is assuring the family of benefits in terms of health and prosperity. The dancer is thus confirmed as one who has taken on the Costumbrista role of actively honouring his ancestors and working for the good of his family and community rather than only looking out for himself. On the other hand, family members are also participants, having sacrificed to ensure funding for the dancer, who must rent his traje and miss work for more than two weeks.

15.2.7. Ceremonial Last Rehearsal

The final preparatory ceremony is a dress rehearsal that takes place at dawn on the morning of July 21, just before the first performance. The ceremony is held at Don Eulogio’s house in Pa Mumus and is attended largely or perhaps exclusively by dancers who live in that community. In my experience, those who live in the cabecera of Momostenango usually do not attend. When I sought someone to accompany me to Pa Mumus, since it would be dangerous for me to travel alone before dawn, none of the dancers with whom I spoke were willing to go either, and largely for the same reason. So I have not seen the ceremony. However I have been told it is a cruzada like the one held at the end of the rehearsal on June 7 of 2009 and described above, using the same plates with fire offerings in an X pattern, except that dancers are in costume rather than street clothes. Following the ceremony, a hired truck brings the musicians and dancers, still in costume, to the rented posada space in the town centre. They arrive around 9:00 –9:30 am. While others finish dressing, the musicians play in the courtyard.
Ceremonial events for the beginning of the *Conquista* participation in the *feria* did not end with the ceremonial dress rehearsal, but instead continued with further episodes.

When all members of the *Conquista* team are dressed on the morning of July 21, they arrange themselves into processional formation in the street outside the *posada*. They do not wear their masks, but instead turn the skull cap around so that the maguey-fiber hair disguises their faces. Only Ajitz and Chiquito actually wear their masks, a relation that also proves characteristic of later processions. At the rear of the procession are the musicians, and at the head are Don Eulogio carrying the sacred bundle of candles, flowers and incense, while another dancer walks beside him carrying the framed photograph of the Patrón Santiago and San Felipe icons. The procession is initially directed to the municipal government building, climbing the stairs to the office of the Mayor who awaits the team with his council members. After the *Conquista* group shakes hands with the Mayor and council, Don Eulogio speaks and presents flowers to the mayor. Don Eulogio leads the assembled group in prayers, and the mayor responds with a speech wishing the team success and reciting rules that the team must obey. The mayor then asks the dancers and musicians to perform for him. As noted, the Mayor is Evangelical, so it may be that he perceives the *Conquista* as a religious outsider, understanding it more as folklore than a sacred offering. In this dance, only the K’iche’ characters take part, so that it reflects the opening dance of the performance. After another general shaking of hands, the *Conquista* team departs the mayor’s office.4

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4 Cook and Offit (2013: 75–76) report a similar visit to the Mayor’s office by the *Monos y Tigres* group before their first performance.
The next stop is the Indigenous governing body or Auxiliatura, the office of which is on the lower floor of the same municipal building. There the Alcaldes Comunitarios are arranged in front of their desks to await the team, who circulate through them shaking hands. The leader of the Auxiliatura is the Síndico Segundo, to whom Don Eulogio also presents flowers and who also gives a short speech. Some of the other Alcaldes Comunitarios also give short speeches. On one such occasion (2011), the Conquista team also danced for the Auxiliatura, though I did not see this in the two previous years.

Another general hand-shaking ends the encounter.

Emerging from the Auxiliatura, the Conquista continues in procession, making a counter-clockwise circuit around the park that fronts the municipal building, then proceeding into the adjoining church plaza. A partial circuit of the periphery of the church plaza brings the team to the main axis of the church, on which the Conquista team enters. The Conquista group walks to the church altar and kneels as the autores lead prayers. They then move slightly to the left (north) to kneel before the case containing the Costumbrista statues of Santiago and San Felipe. More prayers are said before dancers and as many supporters as are

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5 This was the order of events in 2009. In 2010, the circuit of the park was suspended due to congestion, and in 2011 this circuit took place before entering the municipal building.
present are individually blessed with the sacred bundles. Don Eulogio then leaves the framed photograph and the blessing bundle next to the case with the icons. In 2009, the group moved back to the centre of the church front and Don Ernesto summoned the priest to sprinkle them with holy water.

Prayers concluded, Ajitz and Chiquito may stay behind for a bit and pray at the ‘navel’ hole in the floor of the church, on its central axis, where some lit offering candles already rest. Other dancers put on their masks and proceed out to the plaza. As they exit the church, cohetes are set off on the Conquista dance ground to consecrate it and advise supernaturals that the dance in their honour is about to begin. Chairs are set up for Caciques and Spaniards, musicians mount the platform, and the opening dance begins. The Spaniards return to the posada to relax until they are needed for Part II.

That Ajitz and Chiquito tarry in the church to pray further and leave lit candle offerings while the other dancers and the autores have gone out is due to their unusual function as dancers embodying primeros who are Maya priests or chuchkajaw. This connection, unmatched in any other festival dance, calls on Ajitz to serve as priest for the Conquista dance and dance team, whether or not he has this training and capacity in his everyday life. This special distinction also requires that in processions, Ajitz and Chiquito wear their masks although the other dancers usually do not.

The actions I saw Ajitz and Chiquito undertake in the church after the blessing are generally repeated by at least Ajitz before every performance of the Conquista. According to Don Ernesto, who is committed to fulfilling the priestly role as the embodiment of Ajitz, these prayers in the church are designed to protect Conquista dancers and to help the dance go well. After leaving the church Ajitz will enter the centre of the dance ground, whether or not the performance is underway, in order to pray to the four directions. As is typical of Indigenous aspects of Costumbre, which tend to be improvisational, prayer styles differ. Don Ernesto usually kneels and crosses himself facing each of the four directions, while Don Toño will often also prostrate himself to kiss the ground in all four directions or at least to the east, the direction of the church and the icon of Patrón Santiago. These actions of worship are performed twice: at the start of the morning segment and at the start of the afternoon segment.
Alternately, on these two occasions Don Ernesto will climb the tall platform representing Ajitz’s mountain shrine. Reaching the platform floor, he first dances to the four directions, in the order east, west, north, south that is standard for Maya rituals. In this dance, he is not only both Don Ernesto and Ajitz but he is also the K’ak’ K’oxol (Red Lightning), an important *encanto* or nature spirit inhabiting the local mountains with whom Ajitz has become blended through the centuries. This is partly because as a lightning spirit, K’ak’ K’oxol is associated with the pre-Hispanic K’iche’ storm deity Tohil, who wields the axe that causes lightning. The character of Ajitz also wields an axe as well as manipulating a doll-like effigy of Tohil. In this ritual dance, Ajitz is on a platform representing a mountain shrine, which puts him in the area of mountain *encantos* like K’ak’ K’oxol and, according to Don Ernesto, through his dance he not only embodies but also activates the *encantos*. On one occasion he also caused the platform to shake violently to awaken the *encantos* of the mountains. I questioned whether this shaking does not put him in danger, considering the height of the platform and its minimal construction, but Don Ernesto argued that his safety has been assured through the *costumbres* performed on the four sacred mountains in anticipation of the *feria*, and due to his strict observation of celibacy for 15 days.

After dancing to the four directions, and remaining on the high platform, Don Ernesto as Ajitz kneels and prays to the four directions in the same order. He makes a hand gesture first in front of his body then raising it above his head, which he explains as saying to God that “my soul is in your hands.” Don Ernesto noted that in earlier times he would take a lit candle up to the high platform for these prayers. Then, reverting to autochthonous Maya practice, Don Ernesto takes out a rock crystal and uses it to determine the direction from which danger might approach, here specifically referencing Ajitz attempting to divine the location of the Spaniards, thereby moving into the past events that are relived in the present through dance.

15.2.9. Participation in Public Ceremonial Acts

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As elsewhere, the *Conquista* dance team participates in several of the religious and secular processions that form part of standard *feria* proceedings. And as elsewhere, they maintain the proper spatial configuration, with musicians at the back, the court group in front of the musicians, the Spaniards and *Caciques* on either side, with leaders closest to the court, and with Ajitz and Chiquito in the front centre.

In religious processions, the main function of the *Conquista* and other dance teams is to accompany the *Costumbrista* icons of Patrón Santiago and San Felipe as they travel on their highly-decorated *anda*. The icons are securely fastened to the base of the *anda* with ropes that are hidden by a carpet of distinctive Momostenango woven rugs. The saints wear several scarves and woven shawls along with velvet capes decorated with reflective ornaments like the costumes of dancers. Santiago also wears a *morral*, the woven shoulder bag used by most Maya men as well as some women. The *anda* is further decorated with both real and plastic flowers and chains of coloured papers.

Usually these patron icons have their own brass band while each of the dance teams is accompanied by their appropriate instruments. The *son* called “*Alegría*” played for processions by the *Conquista* musicians is intended for such occasions, rather than for performance of the dance drama. While the Spaniards walk, suggesting their marching movement, the K’iche' personages dance.
Also accompanying the anda are the cofrades of Momostenango’s cofradías and the Alcaldes Comunitarios of the Auxiliatura. At various stores and homes along the route of a particular processional, decorations facing the street and an adjoining bed of pine needles will signal the anda to stop so that Santiago can provide blessings for the responsible parties. When the anda stops for such a purpose, often accompanied by bombas and cohetes, the dancers turn around and face it, whether they are standing or dancing.

The first procession in which the Conquista team participates takes place on July 22, the second day of the feria. The Costumbrista icons of Santiago and San Felipe are taken on a highly decorated anda from the Church to the cofradia Santiago which for several years has been located along the road connecting Momostenango with San Francisco el Alto, in paraje Chonimá of barrio Santa Catalina. While the Conquista performance is taking place in the church plaza, musicians watch for the emergence of Santiago’s anda from the church with its brass band following. As soon as the anda appears, the Conquista performance is suspended and the whole team moves to take their place in front of the anda. The Mexicanos and Monos y Tigres teams also join. The Convite Típico team, who also share the church plaza, do not begin their participation until a later date.

As the procession moves through the densest areas of the town centre, ropes holding several market stall tents have to be removed to let the anda pass through. Once out of the downtown, the procession continues along the inter-community road, stopping at an important intersection for a snack. Continuing on, the procession reaches the cofradia, where various groups take turns dancing the anda through the patio and setting it down before the altar room. Many people come up to the anda to pay devotion to the saints. Then the saints are taken inside and installed on the altar, taking their place beside images of San Simon. San Simon is dressed as a wealthy ladino, and it is customary to make monetary offerings to him, which then become donations to the cofradia Santiago, which is necessary because any donations to Santiago must go to the church (Cook and Offit 2013: 146–147). The altar room of cofradia Santiago is one of the

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7 According to Ernesto Ixckayauh (personal communication 2014), complaints have led to the removal of the San Simon icons, and donations to Santiago made at the cofradia can now be retained by the it.
most beautifully decorated that I have seen; flowers are positioned around the room; walls decorated with paintings and posters; and the ceiling hung with myriad brightly coloured paper chains (see Cook and Offit 2013: figure 2.1).

Meanwhile the Conquista and other dance teams enter rooms prepared for them to shed their masks and headdresses and enjoy a meal. Spaniard and K’iche’ characters notably sit on opposite sides of the room, repeating the segregation noted in the posada dressing rooms. After luncheon, all dance teams proceed to the altar room where each member is blessed individually by the alcalde of cofradía Santiago. Dance teams then assemble in different areas of the cofradía patio and perform some dances. For the Conquista, only the K’iche’ personages dance—not the Spaniards—just as in the Mayor’s office the previous day. After dancing, team members catch minibuses back to the town centre and continue the performance, often beginning with the Part IV battle in the street that fronts the municipal government building.

A similar procession takes place on the following day, July 23, this time to accompany the saints back into town, for the vigil in the ermita (chapel) in Santa Isabel across from the posada. The team assembles at the cofradía, and again partakes of lunch and individual blessings before dancing in the patio. The saints are then fastened to the anda with ropes and the procession moves back to the town centre by the same route, again stopping at houses and stores for private blessings. In 2009, the anda was brought to the Santiago ermita (chapel), the floor of which was covered not only with pine needles but also with rose blossoms. There Santiago and San Felipe were placed on the altar table for more prayers. Cook and Offit (2013: 16) discuss this vigil in greater detail.

On July 25, the feast day of Santiago, the anda with the saints makes a circuit through the downtown. Again, the Conquista and other dance performances are suspended when the anda emerges through the church door. As it turns north, the dance teams move in front of it. The procession then turns west, down the hill into Santa Isabel barrio, turns south for two blocks, then eastwards, climbing up the hill into the town centre along the main street. After moving up the main street for several blocks, stopping for blessings at several establishments, it comes to a fork in the road and makes a sharp left turn that takes it back west again through the market and into the park in front of the municipal building. After circumambulating the park counter-clockwise, the procession moves through the church plaza to enter the church as the dancers melt away from the procession.

The procession to the Calvario chapel on July 30 begins with the same route from the church taken on July 25, downhill to the west and then uphill to the east, but it continues on past the fork intersection a few more blocks to the cemetery. Two andas are used in this procession, as the saints will need to be transferred to a different anda in the Calvario. Although the Mexicanos dance team participates in the procession, as well as the group devoted to offering of fireworks, the Conquista usually does not join in on this day.
July 31 features the more widely attended procession from the Calvario chapel in the cemetery to the Church. Before the procession starts, and inside the Calvario, cofrades transfer Santiago and San Felipe to the larger and more sumptuous anda, with its carved decorations and abundant plastic flowers. In 2009 I noticed that Santiago was sporting some new clothing including a new sequined cape as well as a shawl draped over his right arm. According to Cook and Offit (2013: 16), his clothing had been ritually renewed the previous midnight. People come up to worship the saints, touching Santiago’s clothing and San Felipe’s clothing and book. Candles and rolls of cohetes are touched to the saints for blessings as well.

When the saints are firmly bound into the anda, the cofrades enter and kneel before the anda. As finishing touches are put on the anda, adding real flowers for example, it is also perfumed with the standard aerosol deodorant, a widespread practice in Guatemalan Costumbre. As the bearers for the anda come to kneel and prey before it, the Alcaldes Comunitarios circumambulate the anda counterclockwise, with each also touching their upright staff to the front of the anda. The Catholic priest, dressed entirely in red vestments, offers a short speech and prayers. It is shortly after 10 am by this time and the Conquista team is already dancing in the plaza in front of the Calvario chapel. It is time for the saints to emerge, and cohetes are set off in the plaza, away from the dancers.

When the anda emerges carrying the saints, the dance teams form up into a procession, each with their musicians at the back of their group. On even years that see the full complement of four dance teams, the Monos y Tigres dancers come first with their marimba sencilla and pito players, as well as helpers who carry the marimba. Next comes the Convite Típico with their marimba orchestra dressed in matching shirts. Then come the Mexicanos with their marimba sencilla and saxophone players. The team closest to the anda then is the Conquista with chirimía and tambor. Next comes the group with the bamboo-stabilized noise rockets with their marimba orchestra, and finally the saints’ anda with its brass band.

The procession continues in the usual manner down the main street, then enters the park in front of the municipal hall. The congestion there is enormous because a Disfraces dance is taking place in that park, on the street fronting the building of shops called El Portal. The Disfraces clear a path for the procession to pass through but the crowd presses closely in. The procession continues to circumambulate the park counter-clockwise and then enters the church plaza, making a half-circuit clockwise in order to enter the church.

The procession on August 1, the final day of the triad of climax days for the Momostenango feria is Catholic so none of the Costumbrista dance teams take part. The church interior is now decorated for the event with red and white hanging draperies, with hundreds of lit candles at both the front and the back. The side chapel is also open, with a cluster of lit candles inside there as well. This is the day for
taking out the Catholic icon of Santiago that normally occupies the retablo behind the altar, and which is known as Santiago Mayor or Santiago Apostol, in contrast to the Costumbrista image that shows Santiago on his horse, and is called Santiago de los Caballeros. This Catholic procession involves a much larger anda with sculptured narrative scenes. The year I noted this, 2010, looking down from the Conquista platform as the anda was brought into the church, one scene showed a woman presenting wheat stalks to Christ with the text “Of the wheat, you are the flower.” The other showed an angel in front of a cottony cloud with the text “Pan Sacramentado.”

In addition to processions attending Momostenango’s patron saints, dance teams also participate in the school parade or desfile. Normally the desfile takes place on two sequent days, but the Conquista team participates only in the desfile of July 28. The Alcaldes Comunitarios lead the parade with the Conquista team coming next, then the other dance teams, all preceding the school groups. As elsewhere, the Conquista team maintains its processional spatial arrangement for the desfile as well.

The parade traverses the downtown to end in the large athletic field where the announcer, among his other duties, introduces the Conquista group. In 2010, the announcer listed all of the personages in the Conquista dance and gave a great deal of information about Don Eulogio. Although Anselmo Ixcayauh still served as maestro, the announcer was given information to promote Julio Xiloj, including tracing the genealogy of apparently “official” maestros through his father and grandfather back to Napoleón Zárate without mentioning Don Anselmo. This was my first indication of some of the current political rivalries among families loyal to the Conquista. And with Don Anselmo’s subsequent death, Julio Xiloj did take over the function of Conquista maestro in 2011, at the same time that Don Anselmo’s son, Don Ernesto, was excluded from participation.

For those days in which the Conquista dance team participates in the desfile and processions with Santiago, it is not possible to present the entire dance-drama. For midday processions, the most common, the performance is suspended somewhere during Part II and then picked up again at the battle scene of Part IV.
15.3. Conventions

15.3.1. Traje: Masks and Costumes

Mask choices at Momostenango are fairly conventional but with an important exception. While Tekum and Tzunun have their standard dark-skinned masks with bird designs (quetzal and hummingbird), the other Caciques all wear light-skinned masks. These masks lack the beard associated with the Spaniards but they have the mustache denoting male gender. They are also of a generalized type that may be used for male dancers in many different dances, such as the Vaqueros in the Torito or the Zagales in the Venado. I asked Don Ernesto why a mask of Ajitz used at Momostenango has a quetzal carved on the forehead rather than the axe symbol, and he suggested that the quetzal, understood as Tekum’s nawal, gives Ajitz his knowledge, and that when Tekum died, the quetzal remained imprinted on Ajitz’s forehead. Finally, a death mask is regularly used for Tekum at Momostenango, though it has tended to fall out of use in many other municipios.

I had the opportunity to see one important mask worn by two very different dancers. For nearly all performances I have seen at Momostenango over four years, the men performing Tekum have been elderly, but on one occasion I saw a young performer take that role. What surprised me is how body language influences the way the mask is read. On the older and feebler Tekums, the mask seemed woebegone and enervated. On the younger Tekum, the mask instead appeared to exude energy and courage.
As the costumes are rented from the same Tistoj morería as those used in San Cristóbal, there are only a few significant differences that may be mentioned. First, the stick pasted with chicken feathers used as headdress decorations in San Cristóbal does not appear in Momostenango, where only ostrich feathers are used. Second, Spaniards wear the usual cocked or admiralty hat (rather than the helmet worn in San Cristóbal) and they wear plain long pants. Two colours of long pants are rented: red pants are worn for most days but white pants are worn for the principal days of the feria, July 31, August 1 and August 2. Spaniards also tend to wear a white silk scarf tied around their necks and white gloves. Third, there is a tendency for Rey K'iche’ to wear a cape with more orange fabric in it that on other capes, and some dancers in this role wear orange socks to complement it. Many dancers keep a handkerchief in their cuff to wipe off the sweat from under their mask. Finally, as in San Cristóbal, Malinches dress in the women’s traje style specific to their municipio, though in the case of Momostenango, the Conquista is one of the few contexts in which the traditional Momostenango huipil can still be seen.

In one conversation (August 4, 2011) Don Ernesto offered an interpretation of colours of feathers chosen for Ajitz’s cap. He asserted that: red feathers refer to force, valour, energy and blood; yellow feathers refer to well-being, drink, and especially atole de maíz (maize drink); and blue feathers refer to the sky and the earth. However, the colours chosen for the Ajitz headdress differ each year.

15.3.2. Text

As discussed more extensively in an earlier section, the text currently used in Momostenango and formerly also in neighbouring Santa María Chiquimula (Cook and Offit 2013: 21) is a modification of the Dioses Inmortales variant likely composed in the 1890s in the octosyllabic redondilla cruzada rhyme format (ABAB). Very few Dioses Inmortales scripts have been localized: through Carroll Mace, Bode collected one from Rabinal and referred to another from Momostenango, while Montoya (1970) published one from San Andrés Xecul. When comparing it with the Rabinal version, it is clear that the Momostenango script also incorporates some text from the Valedme type as well as some new textual material. One prominent example is the interruption by Tekum in the first scene of Part I, a device found in Cantel-derived Valedme texts as at San Cristóbal. The Momostenango version of this scene is clearly a later addition to the Dioses Inmortales variant as it departs from the standard poetic form. It differs as well from the San Cristóbal version of Tekum’s speech by following the more recent trend of announcing future events.

Bode’s (1961: 249) information on the Momostenango text arose from an interview with Napoleón Zárate on September 11, 1957. She identifies Don Napoleón as a maestro and barber, born 1909.
At the time of her interview, the Momostenango text was being used by a relative of Don Napoleón to coach the Conquista in another municipio. In 1976 Don Napoleón informed Garrett Cook that he had obtained this text in the neighbouring municipio of Santa María Chiquimula (Cook and Offit 2013: 21). Though Bode could not see the text, Don Napoleón provided her with important information. With help from his brother, Don Napoleón recited some lengthy portions from memory, which Bode transcribed, allowing her to determine correctly that it was the Dioses Inmortales variant but with some portions from the Valedme variant. Don Napoleón also provided information on the history of this text in Momostenango. He said that it had been composed elsewhere, possibly in the vicinity of Santa Cruz del Quiché, and had been revised by his father, Juan Zárate (1877–1916), who introduced it to Momostenango. He also claimed that his copy of the text was written by Juan Zárate and is dated 1894. Don Napoleón further mentioned that the Valedme variant was performed in Momostenango in 1944 but was rejected by the community in favour of the Dioses Inmortales variant. He also noted that the Dioses Inmortales variant was performed by the Momostenango team in 1933 in the capital. This performance was announced in the newspaper Diario de Centro América (August 12, 1933), as being one of the attractions of the National Summer Fair organized annually by President Ubico.

At the time of my research in Momostenango, two copies of the text were in use: one owned by Anselmo Ixcayauh who served as maestro from 2008 until his death, and the other by Julio Xiloj who replaced him. Neither copy obeys the poetic line. Instead, speeches are written as paragraphs. Loss of the poetic line in recent recopying is a trend that was also noted by Bode half a century earlier. This change makes it more difficult to memorize the text, and may have contributed to the loss of interest in its recitation at Momostenango. Francisco García argues that this disinterest is recent, and proves his point by his ability to recite parts of the text though he has not danced in four decades. This shift may also account for the choice of Malinches who are far too young to learn or deliver any lines or sing any of their songs, and are actually unable to dance, instead walking their circuits.

For those bits of text that are recited, the usual cadence is used involving emphasis and higher pitch on the last accented syllable of the line, followed by lowered tone and pitch for the final syllable. Whereas at the other municipios studied, leaders deliver their texts while pacing in front of the line of their followers, in Momostenango they walk to the central axis of the dance ground to recite. The choice of this position for speaking may be due in part to protocol, as this is the axis of hierarchy focused on Rey K’iche’. Speakers first silently walk or dance up and down the central axis two times, then on the third time begin reciting their lines. Of K’iche’ personages, only Tekum recites from this position, as the Rey K’iche’ would recite from his position on the court platform. Tekum’s approach is to dance a step and gesture with his sceptre or flag while shaking his plato between each line of text delivered—usually about 4 lines for each speech. Of the Spaniards, both Alvarado and Quirijol deliver speeches from the central axis. With sword out, they raise both hands between each phrase, and they

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8 Bode also later collected a notebook with the part of Alvarado which had been signed by Zárate.
9 Personal communication, 2009.
The platform for the court of Rey K’iche’ with the adjoining mountain shrine of Ajitz is constructed at the west side of the church plaza, facing the church and convent. As noted, musicians also occupy the platform, thus coordinating with the platforms for musicians for the other three dances lined up with La Conquista on the west side of the Church plaza: the Monos y Tigres, Convite Típico, and Mexicanos. In contrast, Cook’s (2000: 85) diagram of the arrangement of dances in 1976 shows the west side of the plaza occupied by two groups of Mexicanos, along with Vaqueros (Cowboys, a dance of the Torito genre), and Moros y Cristianos. The Conquista instead occupies a privileged position on the east side of the plaza directly on axis with the church entrance. Don Ernesto referred to the court platform as the tarima (platform) but he referred to the platform for Ajitz’s mountain shrine as the volcán. To the right and left of the dance ground, a line of plastic chairs creates the illusion of Tekum’s palace and the Spanish field camp while also giving the dancers a chance to relax during long periods of inactivity.

Though not marked physically, the central east–west axis is also significant as both sacred and hierarchically superior, as it is in other municipios, because it connects the palace of Rey K’iche’ with the conceptual location of the sacred. In Momostenango the significance of this axis is visually enhanced by the fact that it connects the court platform with the church. As noted, most speeches are delivered by walking back and forth along the central axis. In dance, the court of the Rey K’iche’ must be approached along this central axis. When Ajitz sits at the divination table, it is placed along this axis and he only sits on axis (the east and west sides). Further, when he vaults the table, it is from east to west and west to east. Like the court platform, the table must be approached along the central axis from the centre of the church side. And during the opening and closing dances, lateral dance lines are formed that move back and forth along this axis.

The central point of the dance ground is the most sacred and thus most associated with Ajitz, who prays from this position at the start of the morning and afternoon segments of the performance. In Part II, the divination table is appropriately placed at the central point. One means for the Spaniards to harass Ajitz is to move the table away from the central point, requiring Ajitz to move it back before he can continue whatever he is doing at the time. In general, the central space is the place for pantomimed interactions, primarily those between Ajitz and the two Ambassadors, in contrast to the

Turn around with a sweep of the sword. For the conference in which Alvarado explains their mission to the Ambassadors, all three walk back and forth together along this central axis. The central axis is not used for the reports, the formal interchanges between subordinate characters and their leaders, which as elsewhere are instead accomplished with the subordinate advancing to the leader’s position and facing him. Of the subordinates, usually only Ajitz is able to recite text, and he does so with his typically energetic dance step, brandishing his axe to emphasize each line.
four edges and central axis used for dance circuits, the four corners at which dancers perform *vueltas*, and the central point used for divination.

For the battle scene, the *Conquista* staging expands into the adjoining park plaza, taking place in the street in front of the municipal hall. At the appropriate point in the performance, musicians and dancers file through the dense outdoor marketing areas to this street, which is daily cleared of market stalls for this purpose. As in other municipios, the two factions in the battle regularly exchange sides of the battlefield, and the strike that mortally wounds Tekum always takes place in the same spot. Following the wounding, the Spaniards, preceded by the musicians, march back to the church plaza while the K'iche' personages remain for Tekum's death scene. At its conclusion, these dancers accompany and help carry Tekum in his coffin to the dance ground.

Garrett Cook's description of the *Conquista* staging he viewed at Momostenango in 1976 (Cook 2000: 121–24) shows that even this two-plaza approach is a contraction of earlier staging practices. These concern the Spaniards and their interaction with Ajitz. As elsewhere in these years and earlier, Spaniards entered on horseback. In Momostenango, according to Cook, this *entrada* actually began at a shrine called *Ventana Mundo* (World Window) on a hillside west of the town center. Ajitz is able to see their advance from his tower adjoining the palace platform, and he rushes to meet the advancing battalion with chili-laced incense. He encounters the Spaniards a few blocks before they reach the centre of town. Despite his harassment, the mounted Spanish march into town and situate their camp at a main intersection between the town-centre shrine of Paclom and the church plaza. Ajitz set up his divination table at the west side of the park, midway between the Spanish camp and the K'iche' locations of Q'umarcaaj and Quetzaltenango in the church plaza. The battle was fought between this position and the Spanish camp. This is the same location in which the battle was fought in 2008–11, and from there the staging is similar, except that in 1976 Tekum's coffin was taken into the convent adjoining the church rather than into the municipal hall as it has been done recently.

Finally, I include in the category of staging the activities of assistants. Most important is Ajitz's assistant, usually the alternate Ajitz dancer, who helps manage his many props, including the table and chairs, idol, chain and axe.

15.3.4. Dance Steps and Choreography

The basic step for all Maya characters is a side–to–side step, often turning around after each two repetitions so that dancers face alternately inwards and outwards, and of course circling at the corners for a *vueltas* accompanied by a speeded–up drum roll. Forward movement is gained primarily on the
step a dancer takes when he turns around.\textsuperscript{10} The back-and-forth sidestepping motion is used without alternating the direction faced when the K'iche' dance in place. When speaking along the central axis, Tekum also uses a simpler version of this step, alternating the leading foot and facing diagonally in the direction of the other foot. Dancers who are too young to accomplish the step, including the Malinches and sometimes the Princes, tend to just walk forwards. As elsewhere, Ajitz uses a more energetic step with more exaggerated and coordinated arm and leg movements, the arms gesturing with the axe in the right hand and the chain in the left, also tilting the head and torso.\textsuperscript{11} Also a widespread trait, Ajitz has a special step when he goes with Chiquito to inform Tekum of the Ambassadors' arrival. In Cunén and Joyabaj, this is a rapid hopping step, but in Momostenango the step is contrastingly slow and sombre.\textsuperscript{12} When I asked Don Ernesto the meaning of this dance, he interpreted it as one of sadness, the raised arm and hand showing that Ajitz has to shield his tearing eyes.

While K'iche' personages dance by alternating sideways-facing directions, and Ajitz dances with alternate angles of his torso, Spaniards generally move straight forward, whether marching or dancing. I did not ask about this contrast, but it seemed that it could be interpreted as the contrast of K'iche' people occupying their own lands versus Spaniards pushing forward as an invasion force.

The Spanish march involves carrying the sword with the right hand, and resting it against the right shoulder. While this arm is stationary, the left arm swings back and forth: swinging forward when the right foot takes a step, and back when the left foot steps. The marching step simply involves raising the moving foot high before stepping down. At the corners, instead of performing a vuelta the dancer

\textsuperscript{10} Victoriano Rojas Velázquez, a highly accomplished dancer, performs the step in this fashion. Facing perpendicular to the direction in which he must advance, the leading foot which is toward that direction takes a large step to the side, and the other foot catches up. The leading foot then takes another large step to the side in the direction of advance, but this time the other foot raises up high and moves back slightly in the opposite direction. The leading foot then moves back next to the other foot, and the other foot takes a very small step. Now it is time for the turn. The leading foot is raised up high and takes a big step but the foot is rotated so that it points to the direction of advance, and the other foot steps up next to it. The leading foot takes another big step but turns the foot farther so that it is perpendicular to the direction of advance and the dancer's body is now facing in the opposite direction. The other foot then takes a big step in the direction of advance to take over as the leading foot.

\textsuperscript{11} The leading foot is raised high with a hop and a complementary raising and gesturing of the arm on that side, also tilting the head and torso slightly to that side, while the other foot catches up but is still behind. The leading foot then moves slightly forward and to the side, so that the other foot can take over as the main foot, reaching high with a hop and stepping forward as the arm on that side is now raised and gesturing and the head and torso tilt to the new side.

\textsuperscript{12} When the leading foot steps high, hops and moves forward with the arm on that side raised and the body tilted in that direction, the dancer pauses, holding the position. Then he rocks back on the other foot, and steps slightly forward with the leading foot. As the other foot takes over with its high step, hop, complementary raised arm and tilted torso, again the dancer pauses and maintains the pose. Ajitz and Chiquito proceed in this fashion except that when they do a vuelta at the corners, it is in the normal faster speed.
makes a quick ninety degree turn with his body, for some dancers accompanied by a small bend of the knees, and continues on. The Spanish dance is more lyrical in its motions. Although facing forward, the body shifts slightly to right and left, and moves up or down with each step as the knees are either straightened or bent.

Choreography at Momostenango closely matches the most common conventions elsewhere, in the use of two circuits for most dances, the choice of clockwise or counter-clockwise direction, the use of vueltas at the corners, K’iche’ personages dancing in place, etc. One small difference is that although dancers approach the court platform along the central axis, they do not use the axis when they leave it to dance to another location. Some elements common at the other three municipios studied are absent at Momostenango. Elsewhere it is common for both K’iche’ and Spaniards to traverse the dance ground diagonally in the second circuit, and for the leader to end the dance with a solo, but these conventions are not, or at least no longer, in use at Momostenango. Likewise the diagonal cruzadas in the battle scene do not appear. Also there are no individual circuits that introduce the Caciques and the Spaniards when they come to speak to Tekum and Alvarado, respectively. However, when Ajitz comes to speak to Tekum in these formal exchanges, he runs counter-clockwise for ¾ circuit to reach Tekum, and then hops three times before speaking. Don Ernesto explained this running convention by saying that Ajitz is in a hurry to give Tekum important news about the Spaniards’ approach.

15.3.5. Music

The repertoire of sones is similar to those used in Conquista performances elsewhere. Don Cristóbal said that although they no longer play the individual sones for each of the Caciques and Spaniards, he does know them. I had actually contracted with him and Juan Pérez to record all the sones but Sr. Pérez’s devastating accident made this impossible. In 2014 Don Cristóbal and his new tamborista, Don Alejandro, recorded for me the sones in common use but not those of individual dancers that have gone out of use. See the chapter on General Conquista Conventions for the names of sones collected at Momostenango by Glen Horspool in 1977–78 and by myself in 2014. Though lacking in musical training, I was able to recognize that the funeral march used in Momostenango is a sombre and slow variant of the Rey K’iche’ theme.

15.3.6. Pantomime

Unscripted narratives enacted through pantomime are more prominent in contemporary Momostenango than in the other three communities studied. These pantomimes always involve Ajitz,

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13 With bent knees the leading foot steps forward, then the other foot crosses behind it to step just behind the leading foot. As the other foot is put down, the knees bend again and simultaneously the leading foot steps forward again and slightly to the side. Straightening up, the other foot moves farther forward to become the leading foot, bending the knees as it is put down.
whether parodying Alvarado’s march, dance, or speeches, or interacting more directly with the Ambassadors and other Spaniards. Although by definition pantomimes construct narratives that are not found in the Spanish text, they are not entirely improvised but instead follow a structure of set routines passed on through demonstration and verbal instruction. Through these and other expanded pantomimes, the Momostenango Conquista becomes focused far more on Ajitz than on Tekum or the other leaders. But besides this expansion, pantomime in the Momostenango Conquista takes on some very distinct practices. In Momostenango, pantomime is not silent, even though the narrative is presented entirely through gesture. Silence is broken by a constant banter from Ajitz in K’iche’, generally involving insults directed towards the Spaniards with largely scatological and sexual content. Also, Ajitz actively brings the audience into the action in the two most extended pantomime sequences: the ransom of Ajitz Chiquito in Part II and the death of Tekum in Part IV. While only Ajitz hurls insults in K’iche’ in complete sentences, both Ajitz and the Spaniards can exchange meaningful gestures, sometimes accompanied by a single word. Most prominent among these are addressing the opponent as a ‘burro’ and the gesture for “screw you.’

Other characteristics involve Ajitz’s general relation to the Spaniards, especially Alvarado, the Ambassadors, and the gracejo Quirijol. On the one hand, Ajitz constantly parodies the movements and speech of the Spaniards, interrupting them whenever possible. On the other hand, the Spaniards constantly test Ajitz’s powers, not only in desecrating his table and hiding his divination seeds in Part II, but also attempting to dishonour Tekum’s coffin in Part IV. The thorough blending of identity between Ajitz and the dancer who embodies him is forcefully enacted through these tests, simultaneously a test of the spiritual powers of Ajitz within the context of Indigenous religious practice and belief, and a test of the fortitude and charisma of the dancer. The Spaniards respect a forceful, confident and commanding Ajitz, but they are merciless towards one who is personally weak or unsure of himself. As Don Ernesto explains this situation, a strong Ajitz becomes identified with the encanto K’ak’ K’oxol, to the extent that he has had women from the audience become “enchanted” and proposition him. But a weak Ajitz cannot be fully identified with the encanto.

With this expanded pantomime, it is clearer at Momostenango than anywhere else how the Conquista as performed currently is the interweaving of a siglo de oro tragedy (through Spanish text) and an ever–contemporary farce (through pantomime spiced with K’iche’ insults). As noted earlier, these two modes also involve different relationships to staging. The Spanish script requires individuals to move between locations in order to dialogue with different persons or groups, and these must be danced, maintaining the illusion that the different sides of the dance ground represent distant locations. However in pantomime, performers walk freely to different locations and interact with persons that in the logic of the scripted drama could not be in contact. For example, during his confrontation with the Ambassadors, Ajitz freely walks to Tekum’s corner to seek support and to Alvarado’s corner to hurl insults or to affect the ransom of Chiquito.
15.4. Dance Performance Sequence

The following description represents the dance as it was performed in Momostenango in four sequent ferias from 2008 to 2011. It cannot be presumed to stand for performances that came before or will come after, as the dance is always evolving.

15.4.1. Opening Dance

The opening dance at Momostenango follows the broad characteristics shared by other communities and outlined in chapter 10. As elsewhere it takes an hour if there is a full complement of dancers, and it is constructed symmetrically with gathering and distribution phases around a pivotal circular dance. The first three personages to join Rey K'iche' are Tekum, First Prince and Tzunun, with more variable order among the remaining court youths and Caciques until the process ends with Ajitz Grande and Chiquito joining as a pair. As elsewhere, they depart the dance line in reverse order. Also standard are the direction reversals in the distribution phase and the line dances used for the court at the beginning and end. More detail follows.

At the beginning of the opening dance, court members line up in front of the Palace platform, and the Caciques line up on their side, with Ajitz and Chiquito at the end of the Cacique line. Rey K'iche' begins the dance by circling around First Prince and First Malinche to the north and then Second Prince and Second Malinche to the south. Rey K'iche' then dances counter-clockwise 1½ circuits. Then, as he reaches the Tekum corner, Tekum steps out to meet him and they do a vuelta together, while the rest of the Cacique line moves up one position. Tekum and Rey K'iche' continue dancing counter-clockwise for two more rounds.

The gathering phase of the dance now starts. At Momostenango, reversal of dance direction occurs in both the gathering and the distribution halves of the opening dance. The choreography pattern for this half will be to reverse direction each time the Tekum corner is reached. Although this is a corner, the reversal of direction does not require a vuelta from the dancing line, the U–turn serving this purpose. Each personage will do a vuelta with the next in the stationary line before joining the dancing line. Such joining occurs on clockwise rounds. The fact that dancers enter from both the court and Cacique
stationary lines requires slight variation in this pattern. Also, for the *Cacique* line, each time the dancer at the head of the line enters, the others move up a position, so that *Cacique* line dancers always enter from the Tekum corner.

Thus, to continue where Rey K’iche’ and Tekum had danced two counter-clockwise rounds, reaching the Tekum corner the third time they reverse direction and dance clockwise. When they reach the court line, First Prince dances a *vuelta* with First Malinche and then joins the line, which continues clockwise. Arriving at the Tekum corner, the line reverses direction to counter-clockwise. Arriving the next time at the Tekum corner, Tzunun does a *vuelta* with the next *Cacique* (Chávez) then steps out and joins the dancing line as it reverses direction to clockwise. Arriving again at the Tekum corner, Chávez dances a *vuelta* with Tepe and joins the line. This sequence would continue through the joining of Tepe, Ixcot, and finally Saquimux, but in my experience the Saquimux position has not been filled. When royal youths enter from the court line, they each join half way through a clockwise round rather than at its start. Finally, Ajitz Grande and Ajitz Chiquito dance a *vuelta* with each other and then enter as a pair. However, when they enter the line does not reverse to clockwise. Instead, the whole contingent of dancers continues for nearly two counter-clockwise rounds.

When Rey K’iche’ at the head of the line has reached the middle of the east or church end of the dance ground, just before what would have been the completion of two rounds at the Tekum corner, the line stops. Rey K’iche’ dances a *vuelta* with Tekum and then dances backwards along the central east–west axis of the dance ground. While he is dancing backwards, Tekum leads the rest
of the line, continuing counter-clockwise but now running in a circle around Rey K'iche'. When Tekum reaches the centre of the church side after one round, the line reverses direction. Now Ajitz and Chiquito lead the run around Rey K'iche' clockwise as he dances forward to meet the line. When, at the end of the line, Tekum again reaches the church-centre position. Rey K'iche' again takes over the lead, continuing counter-clockwise, past the Tekum corner and continuing.

The departure or distribution half now begins, and the choreographic pattern becomes more complex. Before each dancer leaves, he or she is first deposited from the end of the line on a counter-clockwise round at the Quirijol corner. The line continues to the Tekum corner where it reverses to clockwise. When Rey K'iche' reaches the Quirijol corner that dancer does a vuelta with Rey K'iche' and then steps in front of him to now lead the line back to the position where that dancer will be deposited, either in the court line or at the head of the Cacique line. As each leaves, they dance another vuelta with Rey K'iche'. If they are from the Cacique line, they leave at the Tekum corner as the line reverses to counter-clockwise. If they are from the court line, they lead the reversal and continue on counter-clockwise to the court for their departure.

Thus after rejoining the head of the line following the circular run, and continuing counter-clockwise for 1 ½ rounds, Ajitz and Chiquito are deposited at the Quirijol corner. The line continues to the Tekum corner and reverses clockwise. Upon reaching the Quirijol corner, Ajitz and Chiquito dance a vuelta with Rey K'iche' and take the lead of the line and continue dancing to the Tekum corner. There they dance a vuelta with Rey K'iche' and remain at the Tekum corner. At the same time, the line reverses to counter-clockwise and continues to the Quirijol corner where Second Malinche is deposited. The line continues to the Tekum corner where it reverses to clockwise. As the line reaches the Quirijol corner, Second Malinche steps out to dance a vuelta with Rey K'iche' and then leads the line continuing clockwise to the Tekum corner. There she also leads its reversal to counter-clockwise and continues leading until she reaches the court line, where she dances a vuelta with Rey K'iche' and then stays in the court line. The line continues a short distance to the Quirijol corner where Second Prince is deposited. The dancing line continues to the Tekum corner where it reverses to clockwise. Reaching the Quirijol corner, Second Prince dances a vuelta with Rey K'iche' and takes the lead, and so on until all the Princes, Malinches, and Caciques have left the line. The last to leave is First Prince, and the line continues with just Rey K'iche' and Tekum to the Tekum corner.
The final segments of the opening dance begin as Rey K’iche’ and Tekum pass the Tekum corner but do not reverse. Instead they continue dancing counter-clockwise for two more circuits. Then, arriving at the Tekum corner, Tekum and Rey K’iche’ shake hands. Tekum dances a vuelta with Tzunun and stays in place. Rey K’iche’, now alone, reverses to clockwise and continues dancing for two rounds.

When Rey K’iche’ reaches the centre of the church side, he begins dancing backwards. At the same time, the Princes and Malinches begin dancing forwards to meet him at the middle. All five then continue dancing in a lateral line forward to the church end, backward again to the court end, forward again to the church end, and finally backward to the court end. There Rey K’iche’ dances a vuelta around the First Prince and First Malinche on the north, and around Second Prince and Second Malinche on the south. The opening dance is now over and Rey K’iche’ leads the Princes and Malinches up the steps to the palace. Reaching the central position, Rey K’iche’ dances in place until all the youths have taken their places.

When I first saw the Conquista performance at Momostenango, I was impressed with the length of the opening dance, and the next year, as I began my research, I questioned several people about why this should be so. Most people I questioned responded with the incredulity that many of my questions elicited: for them the way anything is done can be explained simply by the fact that it is always done this way. As usual, however, Don Ernesto was willing to assuage my curiosity. While the dance is generally recognized as showing how the K’iche’ lived in peace and order before the Spanish invaded, Don Ernesto argued that it also shows that the ancestors are present in spirit. Don Ernesto’s comment, though seemingly obvious and direct, may be considered to encompass deeper levels of meaning when related to a central theoretical position on the nature of rituals that re-enact a foundational event, whether it is understood to have occurred centuries or millennia earlier. Through the ritual technology of embodiment and the armature of dance on which it frequently rests, past and present conflate and the ancient ones become present, not re-enacting but actually enacting the transformation that serves to make the world as it is.

In some performances, Don Ernesto took advantage of the fact that Ajitz is not needed in the opening dance until the end of the gathering phase, around 20–25 minutes into the dance, and climbed the tower platform representing Ajitz’s mountain shrine. As described above, he first dances to the four
directions, in the order east, west, north, south that is standard for Costumbrista rituals, a dance that animates his incarnation of the mountain encanto known as K’ak’ K’oxol. He then kneels and prays to the four directions in the same order. He raises his hand above his head to ask for God’s protection. Then, he uses the rock crystal to divine the direction from which danger might approach.

15.4.2. Part I

15.4.2.1. Scene 1: Q’umarcaaj (and Quetzaltenango)

The first dramatic scene involves Rey K’iche’s monologue “Venid Dioses inmortales” about the letter informing him of the Aztec conquest. As the Rey K’iche’ at Momostenango knows none of the lines, he spends about a minute dancing in place and shaking his plato as if he were reciting. The Princes and Malinches do not pretend to recite their lines.

Interrupting the action at Q’umarcaaj is a vignette that takes place among Tekum and the Caciques in their headquarters at Quetzaltenango. As the vignette consists almost entirely of a speech by Tekum, in which he pledges to resist Alvarado’s invasion, it is necessary to precede it with a dance introducing Tekum and his Cacique followers. Tekum dances a vuelta with Tzunun and then leads the Caciques in two clockwise rounds, standard for his position. Tekum then goes to the centre of the church side, pacing forward to the court side, turning around to return to the church side, and repeating the sequence. After these two silent traverses of the central axis, he continues pacing in both directions while reciting the beginning of his monologue, often about eight lines. With each line he dances forward and shakes his rattle for emphasis. Tekum then returns to his corner and the Caciques begin their separate addresses to him in hierarchical order. Each walks up to Tekum and faces him, pretends to deliver lines, then returns to their position. It appears that they are merely assuming a standard practice of individual conversations, as there are no individual texts for the Caciques at this point—only a unison response, since this Tekum intervention mini-scene is a post-1870 addition.

When Ajitz reports to Tekum, he runs the circuit of the dance ground counter-clockwise. On reaching Tekum and facing him, Ajitz jumps three times. Don Ernesto explains the
running and jumping movement as representing Ajitz’s urgency in warning Tekum about the Spanish, though the text that Tekum has just delivered, as is typical of post–1870 modifications, indicates that he already knew. Ajitz then speaks a few lines or pretends to, performing his usual dance in place. Although it will not be consistently mentioned, Ajitz always dances in place when speaking.

Tekum again steps to the centre of the church side, paces up and down silently two times, and then declaims some of his remaining speech. In this text he asks Ajitz to bring him a seat as he wishes to rest in order to quiet his spirit and prepare to mount the defense. Tekum then sits in his usual chair, rests his head against his right hand, and covers the left side of his head with his plato, miming that he is sleeping.

The remainder of the court scene, involving another monologue by Rey K’iche’ and a dialogue with the Princes and Malinches, is completely skipped. So the Princes descend immediately for their mission to bring Tekum to the court.

15.4.2.2. Scene 2: Quetzaltenango

The Princes dance nearly two counter-clockwise circuits to reach Tekum. Upon finding him asleep, they shake him awake, sometimes calling his name. Tekum rubs his eyes as he wakes and then stands to face the Princes. The Princes pretend to speak their part of the ensuing dialogue, in which Tekum is summoned to the court, and Tekum may speak some of his part. As the Princes stand slightly to the side, each of the Caciques again takes a turn walking up to face Tekum and pledge support to him and the Princes. This time there are lines for each Cacique but they only pretend to speak. Lastly Ajitz again runs a counter-clockwise circuit to face Tekum. In their dialogue, the text has Ajitz encourage a visit to his mountain shrine (“Vamos todos al volcán”) to make sacrifices so that the gods will provide visions. Tekum’s text is a rebuke of Ajitz’s apparent fear and cowardice, suggesting instead that Ajitz approach Alvarado to spy on his movements, for which reason Ajitz turns around and Tekum shoves him away.
Tekum then goes to the centre of the church side to deliver what he remembers of the text that announces to the Caciques that they will now go to fulfill the Rey K’iche’s orders.

15.4.2.3. Scene 3: Q’unmarcaaj

The Princes now lead Tekum two rounds clockwise, turning at the middle of the church side to approach the palace along its central axis. All climb up and the Caciques kneel in a straight line in front of Rey K’iche’, with Tekum in front directly facing Rey K’iche’. Ajitz and Chiquito are at the back but as they are responsible for protecting Tekum and the king by warning of approaching danger, they face outwards towards the dance ground.

While kneeling, Tekum speaks a few lines to Rey K’iche’, who mimes a response as he raises Tekum up. The Caciques then individually approach the king and pretend to address him, ending with Ajitz. Rey K’iche’ and Tekum then give a pretense of continuing their dialogue, after which Rey K’iche’ hands Tekum the flag. Tekum in turn hands his sceptre to Rey K’iche’. Tekum speaks a few hopeful lines to Rey K’iche’. When he finishes, Tekum leads the Caciques back down the steps. Ajitz and Chiquito are at the rear of the line, and they may stamp on the palace platform floorboards as they move towards the steps.

15.4.2.4. Scene 4: Quetzaltenango

Dancing counter-clockwise, Tekum leads the Caciques only to the Quirijol corner, then reverses direction to dance clockwise for 1 ½ rounds to their place in the Cacique line. Tekum then goes to the central axis to speak a few lines of the text in which he organizes the kingdom’s defenses. The speech begins “Vamos a abrir la campaña contra el furor Español” (We are going to open the campaign against Spanish fury). When noting at the end of the second quatrain that Spanish victory would mean bitter defeat for the K’iche’, he points his flag downward. When Tekum returns to his position, the Caciques again take turns walking up to face him as if to deliver their texts
that pledge courageous support and await his response. Ajitz again runs the counter-clockwise circuit to report to Tekum, dancing in place for the text in which he pledges to harass the Spaniards. These individual reports are sometimes skipped, in which case Part I ends with Tekum’s speech.

15.4.3. Part II

15.4.3.1. Scene 1: Spanish Entrada

As recorded by Cook (2000: 121–23) based on a performance in 1976, in earlier times the Spanish entrada was spectacular. In Cook’s account, it begins with the Spaniards mounted on horseback, gathering at the Ventana Mundo shrine on a hillside west of the town centre. At this time Ajitz climbs the tower representing his mountain shrine and recognizes that the Spanish are gathering for an invasion. A bomba announces the Spaniards mounted march towards the town centre, accompanied by their own bugle and snare drum (Cook and Offit 2013: 20). Ajitz grabs his censer and spikes it with chili peppers, to meet the Spaniards just before they enter the town centre and harass the horses with the acrid smoke. Alvarado stays behind at this meeting point, a bridge just at the west edge of the town centre, while the other Spaniards ride farther into town and establish their camp at what Cook calls the Paclom corner. This is a major intersection from which one ascends southwards to the Paclom shrine at the heart of the community, and descends northward to the municipal hall fronting the park, and farther on to the church and church plaza. Cook reports that a single Spaniard, likely Portocarrero as Cook (2000: 121) mentions that he holds a flag, is stationed to hold the camp while the others continue down to the municipal hall. These Spaniards ride around the park four times, all the while harassed by Ajitz running before them and attempting to turn back the horses with the chili smoke. The Spaniards then request permission from the alcalde, head council member, and priest for Alvarado to enter the town. Alvarado then rides up to the Spanish camp and the other Spaniards return to it. At this point Alvarado begins his monologue.

Cook’s description of Ajitz’s activity on the tower representing his mountain shrine corresponds well to Don Ernesto’s use of the tower platform at the beginning of Part II. As noted above, after dancing to the four directions, then kneeling and praying to the four directions, Don Ernesto uses the rock crystal to divine the nature of the Spanish threat. At this point in the drama, he can use it specifically to know from what direction the Spanish will advance, and from his vantage on the tower, Ajitz would be able to see the mounted Spaniards in the past advancing from Ventana Mundo.
In 2008–2011, the years I witnessed the *Conquista* in Momostenango, as was explained in the section on staging, the Spanish camp is one side of the dance ground, as in other communities. Also the Spaniards now march on foot, without horses. Usually the Spaniards do not plan to be present during Part I, so they time their departure from the *posada* in terms of when they expect Part I to finish. They may arrive early, in which case they sit in their chairs and wait for the proper time and Ajitz will need to begin harassing them ahead of schedule, or they may arrive late, in which case the musicians watch for their appearance down the street to begin the march music. To imitate a proper European–style military march, the *chirimia* works to make his instrument sound as much like a bugle as possible, and the *tamborista* to make his instrument sound like a snare drum. To do this, the *tamborista* ties a string tightly across the drumhead, and uses the stick ends of the mallets rather than the rubber–tipped ends.

The Spaniards enter at the Quirijol corner and march counter–clockwise using the step described above. Though this might be seen as ominous, it is spiced with satirical humour both because this marching step seems out of place in relation to the dances that have preceded it, and because Alvarado makes an exaggerated dip by bending his knees as he pivots each corner.

Ajitz is very busy during this march. When the Spaniards are coming up a side, he often goes in front with a wildly exaggerated parody of the marching movement which, as I have just suggested, already seems a parody in itself. But as Alvarado nears a corner, Ajitz spreads his chain along the path, setting a trap that will cause the imagined horses to stumble and fall. Each time Alvarado nears the corner with the trap set, he challenges Ajitz who hastily
withdraws the chain and moves on ahead to renew his parody and plant another trap at the next corner.

As the Spaniards near the Tekum corner on the first circuit, the line of **Caciques** steps forward and turns around facing outward. They remain in this position until they have watched the Spaniards march past, then resume their place in the usual line. This motion of the **Caciques** clearly shows that the Spaniards' movements are being noted by the K'iche'. Don Ernesto provides a further interpretation of this movement that is typical of his constant interest in parallels between ancient and contemporary forms of oppression. He asserts that the K'iche' first welcomed these foreigners to their lands, not understanding that behind their promises lay deceit, robbery, oppression, and death.

The Spanish March involves two rounds, both counter-clockwise, not incorporating the diagonals that are common in the second round in other communities. When they reach their proper position, each of the Spaniards in rank order walks to the head of the line to face Alvarado, where he salutes and then returns by walking behind the Spanish line. No text is exchanged, and unlike other communities there is no special dance or march to bring these captains to their leader.

After all of his followers have saluted him, Alvarado moves to the central axis of the dance ground, walks up and down twice silently, then begins delivering his first speech with the line “**Españoles esforzados, vamos a entrar en campaña**” (Valliant Spaniards, we are going to begin the campaign). After each line, and sometimes during the line, Ajitz parodies him, sometimes using a few of the words in a different fashion than Alvarado intended. In response, Alvarado breaks from the arms-uplifted pose that goes with each line to challenge Ajitz with his sword.
At two points in his speech, Alvarado calls for the bugle to sound and the musicians comply with *chirimía* and *tambor*. Each time they do, Ajitz becomes furious at their duplicity with the enemy. He runs up to the court platform, reaches up and angrily taps on the floorboards with his axe to get them to stop. If for some reason he finds himself too far from the platform to accomplish this maneuver in time, he will instead brandish his axe threateningly at the musicians. This pantomime, like others in the *Baile de la Conquista*, does not obey theatrical divisions of time or space. Instead, time and space collapse into a dramatic event that becomes multi-layered in signification.

When Alvarado has finished his speech, he returns to his place in line and his followers again come up singly, in rank order, to report to him. At this point Quirijol has a long speech. He delivers what he remembers of this speech from the central axis. Much of the comedy of the original speech is diluted in the *Dioses Inmortales* rewriting, and what remains is unrecognizable as comedy in its delivery.

15.4.3.2. Scene 2: Spanish Camp

This scene begins with a Spanish dance to a bright *son* often referred to as the Balonia. The dance is correspondingly lyrical. Challenging this sense of assurance is Tekum, who in some performances steps out of his line and waves his flag of authority. After two counter-clockwise rounds, the Spaniards return to their position.
Alvarado returns to the central axis for a short text recitation, then returns to his position. He calls Carrillo and Cardona to him and they traverse the central axis, up and down, as Alvarado explains the Ambassadors’ mission. All the while, Ajitz is harassing the trio, and usually one of the Spaniards will be spending his time fending off Ajitz with his sword rather than walking beside Alvarado. At the conclusion of this conference, Alvarado returns to his place in line and the two Ambassadors face him and salute before departing.

15.4.3.3. Scene 3: Q’umarcaaj and Quetzaltenango

Whereas in 1976 the Ambassadors would have danced down from the Paclom corner to the position of Ajitz’s divination in front of the Municipal Hall, now the Ambassadors dance to the palace of Rey K’iche’. The two Ambassadors dance side-by-side two counter-clockwise rounds, turning inward at the centre of the east side to advance up the central axis to the court. They climb the steps and tramp heavily on the floor boards as they approach Rey K’iche’. As they are not aware that this scene calls for a dialogue with the Princes and Malinches, they pretend a dialogue with Rey K’iche’, who responds by dancing and shaking his plato as if he is speaking with them. In this way, they use pantomime to make sense of a scene that betrays the logic of the narrative. As the Ambassadors finish they move towards the platform stairs, they stamp as hard as possible on the floorboards.

While the Ambassadors are dancing and visiting the royal court, the divination table and chairs are set up for Ajitz. Cook (2000: 122–23) reports that in 1976, Ajitz set up his divination table along the road that leads from the Paclom corner to the Church plaza, positioning him in front the municipal hall. Ajitz seats himself facing the Spaniards, likely so he can keep watch on them, and Chiquito sits opposite him. Cook notes that the crowd was particularly interested in his divination with a rock crystal and the tz’ite seeds.
In the current format, the table and chairs are set up in the precise centre of the dance ground in the church plaza. Ajitz sits on the east side of the table, facing across it toward the court, which he must protect since this is where the Ambassadors are headed. Chiquito sits on the opposite side. Ajitz takes the red tz’ite seeds (red frijoles are a common substitute) from their bag and piles them on the table. He rubs his hands in a circular motion over the beans as if to “shuffle” them. Some Ajitz dancers do no more than this shuffle to pantomime a divination ceremony, but a more knowledgeable and skillful Ajitz will take further steps. He takes a handful and divides these into small piles arranged in rows for the twenty named days of the Maya calendar, counting and naming them. He then points to various limbs to show where his blood is “jumping”, which gives him information on the Spanish threat.

**15.4.3.4. Scene 4: Quetzaltenango**

The Ambassadors descend the platform and begin their counter-clockwise circuits to reach Quetzaltenango. At this point, Ajitz and Chiquito exchange seats so that Ajitz can now protect Tekum. In their circuits, the Ambassadors as well as Quirijol will try to harass Ajitz, who watches their actions carefully. Often one of these Spaniards will overturn the table, sending the seeds flying, so that helpers (dancers from alternate days, and sometimes Don Eulogio, the autor) will come to clean them up and reset the table.

After two circuits the Ambassadors end their dance at the centre of the east or church end of the dance ground. While Cardona remains in that place, Carillo walks to the four corners of the dance ground. The order is not invariable, but it is often the Tekum, Quirijol, Ajitz, and Alvarado corners. At each corner he stoops slightly and shields his eyes from the sunlight to peer into the distance (the reconnoiter or reconnaissance gesture) and then

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14 On some occasions I have seen Tekum dance forward and then backward into line several times while the Ambassadors are dancing and other K’iche’ dance in place.
gestures that he has seen nothing.

Carrillo then rejoins Cardona and both go to the centre where they find Ajitz. As Carrillo lunges at Ajitz to chase him, Ajitz kicks away his chair and sets off running round the table with Carrillo in pursuit. Ajitz gains control and calls the Ambassadors to the table, where they are supposed to inform him of their mission to speak with Tekum. Dancing, Ajitz indicates that he will ask Tekum for permission for them to enter.

Whereas in 1976, Ajitz and Chiquito would be dancing from the Municipal Hall to the church plaza and back, now they dance entirely within the dance ground on this plaza. The same is true for their return to the divination table, and for the later round trip also with the Ambassadors in tow, so this previous spatial accommodation will not be mentioned again.

Currently then, Ajitz and Chiquito dance around the table and begin two counter-clockwise circuits to encounter Tekum. Their step is the slow variant described above, and they each hold an end of Ajitz’s chain. While Ajitz and Chiquito are dancing to Tekum and then interacting with him, the Ambassadors’ attention is drawn to the divination table. They clean up the tz’ite seeds and put them in the bag. Then they use the bag to shine each other’s shoes and wipe each other’s asses. While Carrillo stacks the two chairs on the table to complete its desecration and the annulment of its powers, Cardona may go to the Spaniards’ line and shine the shoes of Alvarado, Quirijol, and/or Portocarrero. One of the ambassadors will also hide the vara or divination seed bag, often handing it to one of the seated Spaniards. The Ambassadors then station themselves at the Ajitz and Quirijol corners as sentries, each walking to the other corner and passing at the center of the court.
side. An attendant then takes the two chairs away, leaving the divination table in the centre of the dance ground.

Arriving at Tekum’s corner and facing Tekum, Ajitz dances in mimed-conversation and also demonstrates through clear pantomime that he is furious with the Ambassadors because they have beaten him. Ajitz turns around and Tekum endeavours to cure him by miming the action of spitting on the palm of his hand and then rubbing it on Ajitz’s back. As this exchange takes place, Alvarado or another Spaniard may come and harass Ajitz, so that Ajitz must break from the exchange and chase the Spaniard away.

Ajitz and Chiquito then dance back to meet the Ambassadors, dancing clockwise with their normal step. Usually Chiquito takes a rest and alone Ajitz advances to the table along the central axis from the centre of the church side. Ajitz sees that the table has been desecrated and its powers annulled, so he must resanctify it. Although this activity is pantomime, the musicians play throughout this pivotal sequence. Though Ajitz has several procedures to enact, the Ambassadors and other Spaniards frequently harass and test him, often just by moving the table a bit from the centre, requiring him to move it back before he continues.

Ajitz uses his axe to rap on the four corners of the table, as if remaking it but perhaps also, due to the cosmological symbolism of the table through its four sides and corners, to revive its powers. He then kneels on the table and prays, after which he stands on the table and dances. As noted in the discussion of Ajitz’s activities on the high shrine platform, the kneeling prayer constitutes Catholic worship while dancing both honours and animates Maya *encantos* including the K’ak’ K’oxol (Red Lightning) with
whom Ajitz has blended over the centuries. Ajitz then dances east along the central axis towards the church side and runs to the table, jumping over it from east to west. He then dances to the centre of the court side and again runs at the table to hop over it from west to east, thus perhaps signifying a complete solar cycle composed of diurnal and nocturnal journeys. When these jumps are completed, the table having been fully renewed, the music stops.

Ajitz remains on the church side of the table and calls the Ambassadors to advance to the opposite side, facing him. Ajitz dances to deliver the information about Tekum’s insistence that they be blindfolded. Ajitz must then disarm the Ambassadors. Some Ajitz dancers expect that the Ambassadors will follow the usual rule that they surrender the sword on the third try, so the first two tries may be feints. However at Momostenango where antagonism between the Spaniards and Ajitz is the central story line, Ambassadors often hold out as long as they are able.

When Ajitz has successfully taken Carrillo’s sword, he wants to test its sharpness. He walks over to Tekum and attempts to shave him with it, but the sword proves too dull. So Ajitz sharpens the sword on the table. He then returns to Tekum and cleans his boots. He may also mime shaving/cleaning Tekum’s crotch area. He then walks toward Alvarado, making a gesture of wiping the unclean material off the sword, enhanced by picking up garbage from the dance ground, and throwing it at Alvarado. In this manner, as Cook (2000: 123)
pointed out, he desecrates the sword in response to the Ambassadors’ desecration of his table. Ajitz then repeats the same procedure with Cardona and his sword.

The next step is to blindfold the Ambassadors. Ajitz calls them to the table again and gives each Ambassador an end of his chain, signifying that they are now bound. Ajitz loops the chain over the edge of the table so the Ambassadors will stay in place, but they often drag the table over. At this point, sometimes before or after, the Ambassadors and other Spaniards may provoke Ajitz much farther, throwing the chairs and table or taking the table to Alvarado to use as a foot stool. I have seen performances in which, recognizing that Ajitz was becoming frustrated with this harassment, they would smash the table to bits. One time they also smashed a chair, and Ajitz, in frustration, smashed the other chair himself.

“Blindfolds” are put on the Ambassadors without much resistance. Ajitz then uses his axe to grab the chain that “binds” them, but the Ambassadors may evade this for a while. When he succeeds in hooking the chain, Ajitz takes it in his hand, and dances to deliver the lines where he calls for the _pito_ to accompany his dance.

Ajitz leads the ambassadors by the chain first around the table and then in a counter-clockwise circuit while Chiquito harasses them from behind. Usually on the second round a Spaniard, often Quirijol but sometimes an Ambassador if Quirijol is too slow, abducts Chiquito, picking him up and placing him on Alvarado’s lap. Ajitz continues his circuit and presents the Ambassadors to Tekum. Ajitz again takes the opportunity to pantomime his complaints about the Ambassadors’ treatment of him. Tekum then recites some of his lines. The Ambassadors do not know their lines, in which they should first ask for a seat and then
deliver the terms of surrender, but the import of this dialogue becomes evident when Tekum gives them an angry shove.

Ajitz then hands Tekum the chain to have him guard the Ambassadors while he seeks to rescue Chiquito from captivity. Ajitz walks over to Alvarado and makes gestures of begging for Chiquito’s release, an issue made more poignant at Momostenango by the understanding that Ajitz Chiquito is Ajitz Grande’s brother or son. When Alvarado refuses mercy, Ajitz tries unsuccessfully to seize Chiquito. Realizing that ransom is necessary, Ajitz walks into the adjoining area of market stalls and comes back with some product to exchange with Alvarado. Alvarado refuses and Ajitz tries several more times to interest him in such an exchange. Here a good Ajitz can be most entertaining, as he shows the foreigner what can be done with the products he has selected. On one occasion, Ajitz brought a plastic wash basin from the market and showed the notoriously filthy Spaniards how to use it to bathe.

Alvarado finally makes it clear that he is not interested in local products but only in money, so Ajitz must go around the audience and beg for donations. He may use a container from the market or borrow a cap from an audience member. A charismatic Ajitz will have no trouble immediately collecting donations but for a weaker dancer this becomes difficult and humiliatingly prolonged. When
funds have been collected they are presented to Alvarado who accepts them but indicates that it is not enough. More is necessary, and Ajitz must solicit donations a second time.

When Alvarado receives the second payment he relinquishes Chiquito. As Ajitz grabs the child away from Alvarado he is inundated with mixed emotions. Relieved to have rescued his child he picks up Chiquito and dances for joy. Then remembering that Chiquito should have been more careful about avoiding abduction, he puts the child down and kicks him in the behind. Finally his anger at Alvarado surfaces and he mimes the gesture of wiping shit from his and Chiquito’s asses and throwing it at Alvarado.

Ajitz and Chiquito then walk over to Tekum to collect the prisoners. They dance the prisoners back clockwise, advancing to the table from the church side along the central axis, and circumambulating the table counterclockwise. At this point the normal situation is for a Spaniard to abduct Chiquito again. This requires Ajitz to walk the Ambassadors back to Tekum so that he can guard them while Ajitz undertakes the same ransom procedure all over again! When he has again successfully retrieved Chiquito a second time, Ajitz returns to Tekum and dances the Ambassadors back to the table again, once more circumambulating it.
Ajitz takes off the Ambassadors’ blindfolds, beginning with Carrillo’s. He sees that the cloth has been infested with lice, ticks and fleas from the unwashed Spanish bodies. Laying part of the pañuelo on the ground he attempts to kill the insects by stamping on them. He does this near Alvarado, showing by gesture that he blames Alvarado for this infestation, to which Alvarado responds with angry and challenging gestures. Ajitz may also show that some of the bugs have gotten on him, itching at the fleas under his jacket or pulling up a pant leg to remove a tick.

When Ajitz has removed both blindfolds and mimed their insect infestation, he must find the bag of divination seeds, referred to as the vara, that the Spaniards have hidden. As he can only search one Ambassador at a time, there is opportunity for the seated Spaniard who has kept it to slip it to the other. The two Ambassadors take such opportunities to hand it back and forth, keeping it out of Ajitz’s sight, then eventually hiding it in a cuff or in their cocked hat. During this frustrating hunt, Ajitz will often go to Tekum for consolation from his “father,” even sitting in his lap. The search for the vara is another test of Ajitz’s personal and spiritual power, and a weaker Ajitz will be defeated by the game and have to give up his search for the vara. Whether or not he finds the vara, Ajitz will then give the Ambassadors back their swords and send them off.

15.4.3.5. Scene 5: Spanish Camp

The Ambassadors dance clockwise two circuits back to the Spanish camp, with Ajitz parodying their movements and harassing them. Reaching Alvarado, they salute and report on the results of their mission. They may remain in Alvarado’s corner for this report or again pace up and down the central axis. The other Spaniards then report to Alvarado with a salute, and Quirijol gives a speech along the central axis, harassed by Ajitz.

The Spaniards dance another Balonia two circuits counter-clockwise, as Ajitz again dances ahead to parody and harass them. At the conclusion of the dance, Alvarado moves to the central axis to deliver a few lines of his speech announcing the onset of war, after which the dance team breaks for lunch.
15.4.4. Part III

15.4.4.1. Scene 1: Quetzaltenango

The scene begins with a dance for Tekum, the Caciques and the Ajitz pair to introduce a monologue by Tekum. Tekum begins by doing a vuelta with Tzunun and then leads the others in two circuits clockwise. At the conclusion of this dance, Tekum moves to the central axis to deliver a few lines of his speech.

Tekum returns to his corner and calls Tzunun to face him to explain his desire for an embassy to Rey K’iche’, the purpose of which is informing the monarch that there will be war. Tekum hands Tzunun the flag to carry on this mission. Tzunun does a vuelta with Tekum and steps out. Because Tekum has told Tzunun that Ajitz will accompany him, Tzunun then dances clockwise two circuits to Ajitz’s corner, since Ajitz is understood to be at his mountain shrine. There Tzunun argues with Ajitz about his participation in the embassy. As elsewhere, Ajitz and Chiquito accompany Tzunun in contradiction to the Spanish text.

15.4.4.2. Scene 2: Q’umarcaaj

Ajitz and Chiquito in fact lead the dance, with Tzunun following on two clockwise circuits, approaching the court along the central axis. Climbing the court platform, Tzunun kneels before Rey K’iche’. Ajitz and Chiquito follow behind, often stamping on the floorboards, and then kneel facing outwards to watch for danger. Rey K’iche’ raises Tzunun up and the two pace together in front of the court youths as a pantomime for their conversation, since neither knows the lines. Tzunun, Ajitz and Chiquito then move to the stairs to descend the platform, with Ajitz and Chiquito again stamping.
15.4.4.3 Scene 3: Quetzaltenango

Tzunun now leads Ajitz and Chiquito back to the Ajitz corner, dancing two circuits clockwise with the flag. While Ajitz and Chiquito remain at their corner, Tzunun continues dancing to Tekum. Tekum then steps out to do a vuelta with Tzunun. Tzunun then is to report the results of his embassy to Tekum. He may do this in Tekum’s corner or they may both walk to the central axis for this conversation. Returning to Tekum’s corner, Tekum takes the flag back. To signify Tekum’s naming Tzunun second-in-command, they embrace. The other Caciques now walk individually to report to Tekum, with Ajitz finishing by running the four corners and jumping in front of Tekum before dancing his lines.

15.4.5 Part IV

15.4.5.1 Scene 1: Quetzaltenango to El Pinal Battlefield

This scene begins with a despedida in which the members of the court see the Caciques off to the battlefield. As the music starts, all five members of the court descend and line up in front of their platform. Rey K’iche’ then leads the court dancing counter-clockwise. Just as Rey K’iche’ reaches the Alvarado corner and does the vuelta with First Prince, Tekum does a vuelta with Tzunun and begins leading the Caciques and the Ajitz pair in a clockwise circuit, so that the two groups are moving in opposite directions. The two files of dancers pass each other on the church end and continue dancing up the two sides. They pass each other on the court end and dance back down the two sides. When the two groups meet again at the church end, Rey K’iche’ and Tekum embrace or shake hands. The files of dancers then continue passing each other and again dance up the two sides, passing again on the court end. At this point the court group stops dancing and climbs up their palace platform, while the Caciques continue dancing down their side to their usual places. On one occasion, Ajitz and Chiquito performed the slow version of their dance in this final segment.
Tekum now goes to the centre to deliver a short speech. After this, the text calls for a unison response by the Caciques but usually they repeat the sequence of each coming individually to Tekum, ending with Ajitz running a counter-clockwise circuit and jumping before Tekum, then dancing in place for his speech.

15.4.5.2. Scene 2: Spanish Camp to El Pinal Battlefield

The Spanish soldiers begin this scene by dancing two circuits counter-clockwise. When the dance is finished, Alvarado goes to the central axis to deliver a few lines. The text calls for each Spaniard to report to Alvarado but this is often skipped. Alvarado speaks once more along the central axis.

15.4.5.3. Scene 3: Battlefield

In 1976, Cook saw the K'iche' march from the church plaza to the battle ground to the accompaniment of chirimía and tambor, while the Spaniards march to the battle from the Paclom intersection to the accompaniment of their bugle and snare drum. (Cook 2000: 123). Currently, led by the musicians, both groups move together from the dance ground in the church plaza through the market stalls to the usual battlefield in the street that fronts the municipal hall. Only the five court members stay behind. The musicians station themselves on the west side of the street, directly in front of the municipal hall. In the starting positions for the two teams, the K'iche' line up downhill in the north towards the church and the Spaniards uphill in the south towards the Paclom corner. Their two lines are organized with the leaders at the east end, farthest from the municipal hall, and in the same orientation as on the usual dance ground. Ajitz and Chiquito fight in this battle so they are positioned at the end of the K'iche' line. After each skirmish, the two groups change sides and the lines change their orientations. Thus the alternate position is for the K'iche' to be uphill in the south, the Spaniards downhill in the north, and the two leaders at the west ends of their lines, toward the municipal hall.

Cruzadas are not used in the battle at Momostenango, so the fighting consists entirely of minimally-choreographed skirmishes between all members of both groups, broken briefly by recitations from Tekum and Alvarado. For each skirmish, those on the lower or north side advance towards those on the upper or south side. When they reach the opposing group, that group advances and the battle lines move back.
downhill. This forward and backward motion continues five or six times, all the while with Ajitz hurling insults in K'iche' at the Spaniards and some of the Spaniards returning the insult. As elsewhere, the battle is accompanied by martial music on *chirimía* and *tambor*.

After the first four skirmishes, Tekum moves to the central axis, traverses it twice, then dancing up and down the axis he speaks the lines in Spanish beginning “*Bastantes gentes he perdido*” (I have lost so many men). Few notice or hear his lines because Ajitz is carrying on a loud and boisterous verbal interchange in K'iche' with Alvarado at the same time. Four more skirmishes then take place and this time Alvarado steps to the centre. As Ajitz harasses and parodies him, Alvarado proclaims “*Sin caballo me ha dejado ese feroz animal*” (This ferocious animal has left me without a horse). Four more skirmishes take place until Tekum again moves to the centre to call up the furies of hell (“*Venid furia infernal*”) to aid the K'iche'. Then after the final set of four skirmishes, Alvarado walks to stand in front of Portocarrero and exchange his sword for the Spanish flag. Alvarado carries the flag to the central axis to deliver the last battlefield speech.

For the remaining skirmishes, Ajitz aids and supports Tekum in battle. There are two normal skirmishes followed by a last extended skirmish that continues until Alvarado stabs Tekum. As elsewhere, the fatal blow is always delivered in the same spot. In Momostenango, that spot is on the lower half and the east edge, since this final skirmish sees the K'iche' advancing uphill from the north with leaders on the east side. Also note that on some occasions, there were only two skirmishes in each of the three times between speeches, so that the fatal wound occurred on the thirteenth skirmish, which may have cosmological significance.

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15.4.5.4. Scene 4: Battlefield, Q’umarcaaj, and Burial Place
As soon as Tekum is wounded, the Spanish march is played and the Spaniards march two clockwise circuits around the battlefield before continuing through the market to the dance ground, followed by the musicians. Entering the dance ground, the Spaniards march two clockwise circuits, then from the middle of the church side move up the central axis to the court platform. They climb up the ladder, dance through the palace and descend. Again this gesture makes no sense geographically, but it follows protocol as before to advise the royal court before continuing on to Quetzaltenango. The Spaniards then dance two more clockwise circuits, ending on the Cacique side. Sitting in the chairs formerly occupied by the Caciques, the Spaniards have now occupied Tekum’s palace and the city of Quetzaltenango.

While the Spanish march to occupy Quetzaltenango, the K’iche’ remain in the battlefield to tend to the wounded Tekum. As soon as Tekum is wounded, two Caciques rush to aid him, supporting him on either side. They lead him in two clockwise walking circuits closer to the center of the field, so that the Spaniards can march their circuits at the outer edge. As Tekum is led, he delivers a few lines of his death speech, asking Tzunun to bear his body to the king, bidding farewell to his “patria”, and surrendering his flag, crown, and sceptre.

By the time the sad procession has ended, a cloth has been laid in the centre of the battlefield. Tekum sits on the cloth and is helped to remove his crown and cape. Part of the cloth is used to cover Tekum while he exchanges his normal mask for a death mask. When the cloth is lifted, Tekum reclines, holding the death mask to his face. The flag and crown are handed to Tzunun, who dances around the body to refer to a text that explains his choice to submit and convert. A coffin is brought out from the municipal hall and laid on the east side of Tekum’s body.
At this point, Ajitz takes over and stages an elaborate scene that includes his lines in Spanish, beginning “Adios Tecún querido” (Farewell, dear Tekum), but that is primarily improvised in K'iche'. Leavening tragedy with humour, Ajitz checks Tekum’s head, heart, and genitals for signs of life. He may mount the body and rub up against it, attempting to stimulate it sexually, or he may coach Chiquito to perform this pantomime. If Tekum does not respond to sexual stimulation, he is surely dead. Ajitz then seeks donations to assuage the costs of the velorio (wake) and burial for Tekum. When spectators show little interest in contributing, Ajitz wonders why they are not as stricken with grief as he is, seeing the loss of the defending hero. Responding to the humorous side of Ajitz’s banter, audience members may hand him odd things like a soda can and it is up to Ajitz to make further comedy out of such gestures. This scene will continue as long as the audience maintains interest and especially if they participate in the humour. On days when there are not enough helpers (usually the alternate dancers) to carry the coffin, Ajitz’s priestly powers revive Tekum who then gets up and takes his crown into the municipal hall, an incongruous act that is made more acceptable by the humour Ajitz makes of it.

Tekum is then placed in the coffin, the lid is closed, and his cape is spread on top. Preceded by the Caciques, the coffin is carried through the market stalls and into the dance ground, where it is placed in the centre. Cook (1976: 136) reports that previously Ajitz’s small idol was also placed on the coffin. The Caciques then dance counter-clockwise, with Tzunun in the lead carrying the flag and crown (Tekum’s headdress). The Caciques climb the court platform and Tzunun presents the crown and flag to Rey K’iche’. During these dances and interchanges, the Spaniards try to defile Tekum’s coffin by flicking his cape off the top with their swords or placing garbage on it. Ajitz must resist these attempts and defend the coffin, so this becomes another test of his spiritual powers as revealed by his agility, fortitude, and charisma.
On Rey K'iche's instructions, Tzunun leaves the palace with the flag and crown and leads the Caciques to conduct Tekum’s coffin to his burial place. In reality, Tzunun and the other Caciques wait just outside the dance ground while helpers carry the coffin back through the market stalls and into the municipal building, where Tekum leaves the coffin and goes to the posada to change. Back at the dance ground, Tzunun re-enters leading the Caciques, dancing two counter-clockwise rounds then approaching the court platform along the central axis. The Caciques climb the platform and Tzunun kneels before Rey K'iche' to return the flag. The Caciques then line up beside Rey K'iche'.

15.4.5.5. Scene 5: Quetzaltenango

The action shifts briefly to Quetzaltenango where Alvarado, occupying Tekum’s palace, appoints Quirijol as sentry or lookout. Alvarado calls Carrillo and Cardona to his corner (previously the Tekum corner) and gives this order. Quirijol is then called up to Alvarado’s position to receive the order. Carrillo and Cardona accompany Quirijol in dance, clockwise, to deposit Quirijol at the Ajitz corner where he will be stationed in the lookout position formerly manned by Ajitz. Note in this sequence that the position at the Ajitz corner occupied by Quirijol signifies different locales before and after his dance. Before the dance, he is with Alvarado in Tekum’s palace and thus can walk directly to Alvarado. But through the dance that returns him in a circuit to the same physical position, he is now stationed at a lookout, outside the palace and/or city. Thus, after depositing Quirijol in this position, Carrillo and Cardona dance back counter-clockwise to report to Alvarado (in Tekum’s palace) before re-entering the Spanish line.

Back in the royal court at Q’umarcaaj, it is understood that the Princes must now invite the victorious Spaniards to the capital. The Princes descend the court platform and dance clockwise to the Ajitz
corner where they encounter Quirijol. It is understood that they have asked to speak with Alvarado, so Quirijol leaves the Princes at his lookout station and dances counter-clockwise to Alvarado’s position at the Tekum corner. There he speaks with Alvarado, Carrillo, and Cardona. Receiving permission, Quirijol dances back clockwise to his station where the Princes await his response. This information relayed, Quirijol leads the Princes in a counter-clockwise circuit to Alvarado’s position. As usual, this dance requires special hand gestures from Quirijol. Here he holds the sword in front of his body, supporting both ends of the sword with his two hands. His hands then rise and fall alternately, constantly shifting the orientation of the sword between two diagonals. This alternate raising of hands to manipulate the sword may well derive from the more common gesture in this dance of raising hands alternately to the head in the reconnoiter or reconnaissance gesture.

Although they have arrived at the former Tekum corner where Alvarado is standing, according to the text they are not yet admitted to see Alvarado. Permission must first be asked of Moreno to enter Alvarado’s quarters. Thus after arriving at Alvarado’s position, Quirijol remains while the Princes dance alone, one circuit counter-clockwise that returns them to Alvarado’s position. This means they are now inside Alvarado’s quarters, where they may hold their conversation. Following this, Alvarado proceeds to the central axis to speak his lines, beginning “Tan grande honor he recibido” (I have received such a great honour). After Alvarado returns to his position the Princes lead the Spaniards in two counter-clockwise circuits, approaching the royal court platform along the central axis.

15.4.5.6. Scene 6: Q’umarcaaj

The Princes and Spaniards ascend the court platform where Alvarado and Rey K’iche’ mime an interchange and shake hands. While the others have climbed the court platform, Ajitz and Quirijol have remained below in the dance ground. Quirijol is in the (former) Ajitz corner, and Ajitz
moves to the (former) Alvarado corner, diagonally opposite. From these positions both walk toward each other. At their meeting, Ajitz throws down his axe. This illustrates the text in which Ajitz says “Haré tirar mi Lucifer” (I will discard my Lucifer). Quirijol picks up the axe as both continue to their opposite corners. Again they set out towards each other, traversing the dance ground diagonally, but this time Quirijol throws down the axe and Ajitz picks it up. This may match Quirijol’s text, where he remarks that “Estoy muy contento por haber triunfado Alvarado y que no ganó el Ajitz brujo” (I’m very pleased that Alvarado has triumphed and the wizard Ajitz did not win). Ajitz and Quirijol remain below as the rest of the dancers descend for the closing dance.

15.4.6. Closing Dance

The closing dance is choreographed in two parallel halves. The first half begins with Alvarado leading the Spaniards and K’iche’ down the platform ladder into the dance ground. Alvarado leads the Spaniards in a clockwise circuit down what had been the Cacique side while Rey K’iche’ leads the K’iche’ in a counter-clockwise circuit down what had been the Spanish side. Both leaders are carrying flags. Both groups continue onto the church end where they pass each other, with the Spaniards toward the outside of the dance ground and the K’iche’ toward the inside. Both groups continue up the two sides and then pass on the court end, again with the Spaniards on the outside. The two groups continue down the two sides and pass again along the church end. Again they proceed up the sides toward the court end but this time they line up at the sides with the two leaders closest to the court: Alvarado in the (former) Quirijol corner and Rey K’iche’ in the (former) Ajitz corner. The other dancers remain in position while Alvarado and Rey K’iche’ dance backwards past each other along the court end. They
then turn and dance backwards again to their starting position. Again they dance backwards along the court end but this time they circle each other, waving their flags. Then they dance backwards to their starting position and do a *vuelta* with the next in line. Rey K’iche’ and Alvarado then lead their followers towards each other to form a single line of dancers in front of the court platform. This joint line advances straight to the church end, then backs up to the court end, and again advances to the church end where Rey K’iche’ and Alvarado cross their flags as the music pauses.

The musicians resume playing as the second half of the closing dance begins. From their stopping position at the church end, the line dances backwards to the court end and forward to the church end, then Rey K’iche’ and Alvarado lead their followers past each other in opposite directions. But now the K’iche’ are dancing clockwise and the Spaniards are dancing counterclockwise, thus providing balance to the first half.\(^{15}\) Moving in opposite directions, the two groups dance two circuits, returning along the sides just up to the church end, so that the K’iche’ are lined up on what began as the Spanish side and the Spanish are lined up on what began as the *Cacique* side. At this point, however, the two dance lines make U-turns and continue back down the same sides they now occupy. This brings them along those sides with the two leaders close to the court: Alvarado again at the Quirijol corner and Rey K’iche’ again at the Ajitz corner. As in the first half, the two leaders again back up past each other, turn and back up to the starting point. They back up towards each other again

\(^{15}\) This reversal of direction was facilitated by the single line moving straight along the centre axis from the court side to the church side. As they had originally formed a single line on the court side, but break the line on the church side, this puts them in a position to reverse directions when they split into the two factions.
and this time circle, waving their flags, then back up to their starting point and do a *vuelta* with the next in line. And as before Alvarado and Rey K’iche’ lead their followers to form a single line along the court end. The line advances to the church end, backs up to the court end, and advances again to the church end where Rey K’iche’ and Alvarado cross their flags. In this position Rey K’iche’ and Alvarado recite the dedication to Santiago to finish the performance.\(^{16}\)

**15.4.7. Gran Despedida**

On August 4, the final day of the Momostenango *feria*, the performance concludes with a closing *despedida*. The alternates who are not dancing on August 4 and are thus in street clothes also join their respective groups so that all dancers are celebrated as the *primeros* are bid farewell for another year. The *despedida* portion begins after the two-part closing described above, and it follows the general pattern for *despedidas* described in the section on the *Conquista* general dance sequence. However, this typical *despedida* is inserted within a repetition of the first half of the closing dance.

From the final position of the usual closing dance, the joint line dances backwards to the court end and forwards to the church end as before. Again the line splits so that Alvarado leads the Spaniards counter-clockwise and Rey K’iche’ leads the K’iche’ clockwise in two circuits, passing on the church and court ends. This time however, when they finish the circuits and are approaching the church end, one of the two groups dances a U turn, reversing its orientation along its side. This positions the two leaders, Rey K’iche’ and Alvarado, diagonally opposite each other.\(^{17}\) This sets the two groups up for the diagonal interchanges or *cruzadas* characteristic of a closing *despedida*.

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\(^{16}\) On some occasions the second half is repeated, making three units of the closing dance rather than two.

\(^{17}\) Unexpectedly, I have seen this done both ways. If the K’iche’ make a U-turn, then Rey K’iche’ occupies the Ajitz corner and Alvarado occupies the Alvarado corner. If the Spaniards make a U-turn, then Rey K’iche’ occupies the Tekum corner and Alvarado occupies the Quirijol Corner.
Rey K’iche’ and Alvarado now dance backwards along the diagonal axis, past each other to the opposite corner, then turn and dance backwards to their starting corners. They then dance to the centre again but this time they meet in the centre to embrace and return to their starting corner. For the next repeat, the next dancer in each group joins, so that Rey K’iche’ dances with the second Spaniard (Carrillo) and Alvarado dances with the First Prince. As usual, each repetition brings another pair into the sequence of dancing diagonally and embracing until all members have taken part. The action then reverses and a pair is subtracted with each repetition, remaining on the opposite side, until only Rey K’iche’ and Alvarado remain. As the two lines are now on the opposite side from which they started, the whole cruzada pattern of adding and subtracting pairs is then repeated, leaving dancers back on their original sides.

Cruzadas now complete, the closing dance pattern resumes. Whichever group is positioned with the leader at the Church end now dances a U-turn so that both leaders are positioned at the court end. From this point they begin the circuits in opposite directions, with the Spaniards dancing clockwise and the K’iche’ dancing counter-clockwise. As in the first part of the closing dance, the groups dance two opposed circuits, after which Rey K’iche’ and Alvarado dance backwards along the court side, first passing each other and then circling each other. Again this is followed by forming a joint line that dances forward to the church end, backwards to the court end, forwards to the church end and terminates with the leaders crossing flags.

The performance is now over so the musicians descend from the platform and play for the procession of dancers into the church. Again the Conquista team prays at the main altar and at the Costumbrista icons of Santiago and San Felipe. As they leave the church, cohetes are set off in the dance ground. The musicians continue to play as the dancers descend to the posada to change clothing and depart, each responsible for returning their trajes to the morería and paying for any damage. Through the process of the despedida as well as the return to the church and firing of cohetes, traje and dancer are again separated and returned to everyday life.

15. 5. Discussion

One of the most interesting aspects arising from investigating the Baile de la Conquista in Momostenango is the ability to compare performances three decades apart, thanks to the description Cook published of a performance in 1976. Three differences of the 1976 performance stand out most prominently: the entrance of the Spaniards on horseback; the expansive staging; and the greater dependence on the text.

As noted previously, it was customary for Conquista performances in several municipios before the civil war, and perhaps as late as the mid 1990s, for Spaniards to enter on horseback. As Dorothy Reynolds
(1945:30) described a performance of the *Baile de la Conquista* that she witnessed in Momostenango in or before 1945, the Spaniards came to the place of battle on horseback. The *Caciques* twice forced them up the hill (towards the Paclom corner) but on the third attack the Spaniards dismounted and engaged their opponents. A slightly later article by the same author, Reynolds (1956) pictures mounted Spaniards in San Cristóbal Totonicapán. This practice may date back at least to the beginning of the 20th century; the evidence is equivocal. A postcard from that time labeled “*Sololá: Paseo del Baile de la Conquista*” shows figures on horseback. However another postcard from the same time labeled “*Sololá– Baile de la Conquista*” is not of the Conquest Dance but of the composite dance combining elements of the Deer and Bull dances. Also, Celso Narciso Teletor describes two versions of the conquest story that he witnessed in Rabinal around 1900 (Montoya 1970: 38–40). The first performance was of the spectacle genre. Hence a large construction representing a hill was erected in the plaza and heavily used during the performance. As usual for this genre, performers did not wear masks. Teletor makes note that some of the Spaniards in this performance were mounted on horseback. The second performance was the *Baile de la Conquista* and Teletor noted that masks were worn, that there were in this case two *brujos* (Ajitz Grande and Ajitz Chiquito), but he makes no mention of horses. Thus without assuming that horses had always been part of the *Conquista* performance, we might also follow a line of questioning to ascertain why it might have become possible in the 20th century. Further, we might ask how the current lack of horses affects the messages spectators might take away from the performance. For example, lack of horses better expresses the current reality of *Costumbristas*, both because they rarely use horses nowadays and because the current invaders, neoliberal developers, choose other modes of transportation.

Cook and Offit (2013: 15) also note that on important dance days, Alvarado entered on a white horse. The white colour of the horse would function as a sign of particular status and authority, which is an important component of Conquest dance productions. Another example of this emphasis on status and authority is the generalization of Alvarado’s blond hair and beard to all the Spaniards and even to Rey K’iche’. The bearded soldier on a white horse also forcefully recalls the image of Santiago Matamoros, the saint with whom Spanish conquerors specifically identified in their defeat and conversion of non-Christians, though Santiago is not shown blond. The emblem of Santiago, a conflation of cross and sword, was one of the most common banners the Spaniards carried into battles in the Americas, and they were said to invoke Santiago as they met the enemy. The *Costumbrista* icon of Santiago in Momostenango is of the Matamoros type, mounted on a white (though greying) horse. I therefore suspect that one of the messages audience members may take away from the Spanish entrada is an identification of Alvarado with Santiago. This is also because the script portrays Alvarado as promising rewards for compliance and conversion versus punishment for resistance, a parallel to Patrón Santiago’s actions of rewarding those who honour and make offerings to him and punishing those who fail in their ritual responsibilities.

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18 The postcard was advertised on ebay in April, 2013. The image is no longer available online.
19 This postcard was advertised on Delcampe, viewed September 2014.
In contrast, there is less information on the pattern of expanded staging seen in the earlier Momostenango performances of *La Conquista*. Apart from this *municipio*, I have only heard such staging mentioned for Olintepeque, with Spanish and K’iche’ on different sides of a bridge near the town centre and the battle taking place on the bridge.\(^{20}\) Unlike the presence or absence of horses, expanded staging requires major differences in dance choreography at many points in the performance. It also requires breaking from the pattern of two parallel ranks that the *Conquista* genre shares with the *Moros y Cristianos*. Further, the addition of the Tepe scene in the Tecpán lineage texts suggests that before 1900 it had already become common for the Spanish Ambassadors to visit the palace of Rey K’iche’ in Q’umarcaaj before going on to encounter Ajitz as lookout for Tekum in Quetzaltenango, a practice strictly maintained in all the communities investigated. The staging described and drawn by Cook for the 1976 performance would make it unusually difficult for the Ambassadors to dance from the Pacholm corner all the way to the church plaza and then back to Ajitz’s divination table in front of the Municipal hall, and Cook’s description (2000: 123) suggests that they did not do so. Additionally, Francisco García’s drawing of the arrangement of the dance ground in the 1960s shows the same arrangement as that in use currently, with Spaniards and K’iche’ in lines on the two sides of the dance ground and the palace of Rey K’iche’ at the head of the dance ground between them. And finally, Cook (2000: 86) received information that in the early 20\(^{th}\) century the *Conquista* was danced in the cemetery plaza, an ample but fully enclosed space.

I therefore suspect that the expanded staging noted for Momostenango and Olintepeque for the late 20\(^{th}\) century may arise from a particular innovation around that time. One explanation for such an interest might be the cult of Tekum as a national hero promoted by the military government in the early 1960s that led to a national holiday in his honour, the required singing by school children of a newly composed hymn to Tekum, and statues of Tekum by Roberto González Goyri in Guatemala City and by Rodolfo Galeotti Torres in Quetzaltenango and Santa Cruz del Quiché. Such an intensity of interest might have led to incorporating more dramatic and realistic effects into *Conquista* performances.

Evidence that the text was much more prominent in performances of the *Baile de la Conquista* in Momostenango in earlier times than it is today comes from the testimony of Francisco García, who danced Alvarado nine times in the 1960s and was still able to recite parts of the text in 2009. Currently, almost none of the text is recited in performance at Momostenango, in contrast to the considerable time given to it in rehearsal. Elsewhere, the use of pantomime has made it possible to subvert or at least re-position the text in many ways, but in Momostenango pantomime virtually replaces the text and thus takes on much greater importance and elaboration. This shift from text to pantomime as carrier of the story line has freed the narrative to focus more intensely on the issue of resistance, strongly conveying the sense that the struggle that the dance narrates is absolutely current.

\(^{20}\) Damian Mazariegos, personal communication, 2009.
As will be discussed in the following chapter, resistance is focused on the personage of Ajitz, and in the hands of a skilled dancer parallels between past and present resistance to invasion and oppression are further developed.