# Table of Contents

**Chapter 17: San Cristóbal Totonicapán**

17.1. Introduction ................................................................. 2
   17.1.1. Setting .............................................................. 2
   17.1.2. Feria Schedule .................................................... 4
   17.1.3. The Conquista Dance Team .................................. 4
   17.1.4. My Engagement with the Dance Team ..................... 6

17.2. Preliminaries and Participation in Public Rituals and Events .............. 7
   17.2.1. Preparation ...................................................... 7
   17.2.2. Rehearsals ........................................................ 7
   17.2.3. Arranging the Dance Ground ................................ 7
   17.2.4. Costumbre on Kanchavox and La Velada de los Trajes .......... 8
   17.2.5. Ceremonial acts on days of public performance ............ 20

17.3. Conventions ............................................................... 22
   17.3.1. Costume and Masks ............................................ 22
   17.3.2. Text .............................................................. 25
   17.3.3. Staging .......................................................... 25
   17.3.4. Dance Steps and Choreography ............................. 27
   17.3.5. Music ........................................................... 29

17.4. Dance Performance Sequence .......................................... 29
   17.4.1. Procession to the Dance Ground ............................ 30
   17.4.2. Morning Entrance: Opening Dance ......................... 30
   17.4.3. Prologue ......................................................... 34
   17.4.4 Azteca ........................................................... 35
   17.4.5. Part I ............................................................ 37
   17.4.6. Part II ............................................................ 44
   17.4.7. Part III ........................................................... 58
   17.4.8. Part IV ........................................................... 62
   17.4.9. Closing Dance .................................................. 74

17.5. Discussion ...................................................................... 75
Chapter 17: San Cristóbal Totonicapán

17.1. Introduction

17.1.1. Setting

The name for the community of San Cristóbal Totonicapán before Spanish invasion and colonization, is debated, variously listed as Pahulá (Frisón 1975), Puhilá, and Puxilá.¹ The first of these is understood to mean “waterfall” and derives from features in the river that runs along and through the city.² San Cristóbal is located at the northeastern end of the large and impressive Samalá River valley, the southwestern end of which is dominated by the city of Quetzaltenango, also known as Xela or Xelajú, the second largest city in Guatemala. Overlooking the present city of Quetzaltenango are the perfect cone of the Santa María volcano and the lower, broken silhouette of Cerro Quemado, a peak at the

¹ Diccionario Geográfico de Guatemala: http://www.guatepymes.com/geo_list.php?pageNum_q1=2&totalRows_q1=36&munid=0802&deptoid=08
² Juan Oswaldo Hernández Chanax, personal communication, 2015.
edge of a large caldera that encloses the community of Cantel among others. Cerro Quemado is believed to have been called Lajuj Noj (Ten Incense). The name Xela is the shortened form of Xe Lajuj Noj (Under Ten Incense), due to its location at the base of this mountain.

To the west of San Cristóbal, past San Andrés Xecul, is the municipio of Olintepeque, traversed by the Río Xequiquel, where Tekum is most likely to have died in the first of the two massacres of the K'iche' army by invading forces under Pedro de Alvarado. To the south of San Cristóbal are the flats of Urbina where Alvarado's forces enacted the final massacre of K'iche' fighters in February, 1524. The municipio of Salcajá, which adjoins San Cristóbal on the east, is the original Quetzaltenango, the secondary capital to which Tekum, as heir to the throne, was posted as military leader, and which Alvarado occupied when the K'iche' fled after the Xequiquel massacre in which Tekum died.

Cuatro Caminos, the busiest intersection on the Pan-American Highway in the Maya-dominated western highlands, is also within the municipio of San Cristóbal Totonicapán. Of this four-way intersection, the northern arm leads to Huehuetenango and on to the Mexican border; the southern arm leads to Guatemala City; the western arm leads to Quetzaltenango and on to San Marcos, and the eastern arm leads to Totonicapán and on to Santa Cruz del Quiché. Rising over the southeast corner of this intersection is the sacred hill of Kanchavox on which take place costumbres for the Conquest Dance team at San Cristóbal.
17.1.2. Feria Schedule

San Cristóbal’s *feria* lasts only three days, July 24–26, and the Conquista is performed on each of those days. Previously, it lasted six days.\(^3\) Often the *Conquista* is the only festival dance performed during the *feria*, but on two of the years I have attended (2010, 2013), the *Convite Típico* was also presented on July 25. While July 25 is the day of San Cristóbal, known here as San Cristóbal Martir, it is also the feast day of Santiago, the patron saint of the Spanish conquest and of the long-lived colonial capital now known as Antigua. In some respects, the community of San Cristóbal has embraced Santiago Apóstol with much more devotion than San Cristóbal. The affluent *cofradía* Santiago is particularly active in the community, headed for many years by Antonieta Tistoj Huitz de Barrios who also owns the largest *morería* in the city. Thus the *cofradía* of Santiago does not rotate at San Cristóbal, but instead remains within the Tistoj mansion. A 2004 certificate displayed in one of the mansion’s salons honours Doña Antonieta’s contribution as *autora* of the *cofradía*: “*Por su entrega y dedicación a la preservación de las costumbres y tradiciones de nuestro querido pueblo.*” (For her commitment and dedication to the preservation of the customs and traditions of our beloved community.)

17.1.3. The Conquista Dance Team

The group that performs the *Conquista* each year in San Cristóbal has been in continuous existence since 1915, and celebrated its centennial in June of 2015. This is the only example I have encountered of a formally constituted dance team able to reproduce itself without interruption. Now referred to as a *Grupo Folklórico*, it consists of twenty-three members with an annually-elected directive committee. The head of the group since 1986 is Francisco Rodolfo Hernández Juárez, known locally as Don Pancho. He serves as the sponsor or *autor* of the dance group, responsible for organizing materials and fostering enthusiasm and harmony among the participants. Don Pancho also serves as the instructor (*maestro*) as he owns the text and is the most knowledgeable member. Don Pancho has also danced the role of Ajitz since 1973, and he serves as the group’s priest or *chuchkajaw*, officiating at ceremonies. Thus Don Pancho has thus regularly taken on the four most important roles for the San Cristóbal group.

\(^3\) Juan Oswaldo Hernández Chanax, personal communication, 2015.
According to Don Pancho, the *Conquista* group was formed when performers from Cantel ceased coming to offer the dance in the annual San Cristóbal *feria*. As part of the group's longevity and historicity, Don Pancho is often moved to recite the names of some former *autores* as the group's genealogy. For the group’s centennial, a complete list of *autores* was provided along with approximate dates for their service in this role:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autor</th>
<th>Years of Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tomás Sabaj</td>
<td>1915–1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José Mejía</td>
<td>1921–1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramón Peñalonzo</td>
<td>1926–1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedro Pastor Choz</td>
<td>1931–1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martín Navarro</td>
<td>1936–1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilio Sosa</td>
<td>1941–1944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego Castro</td>
<td>1945–1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofía Cuc</td>
<td>1951–1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan Sabaj</td>
<td>1967–1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocael Chuc y José María Cuc</td>
<td>1979–1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Rodolfo Hernández</td>
<td>1986– present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Baile de la Conquista Folkloric Group of San Cristóbal Totonicapán, 2014. Don Pancho, standing at left, holds the text.
As is typical for most dance teams, in San Cristóbal the tradition of dancing in the Conquista tends to cluster in families. Thus Don Pancho’s sons and daughters have all participated. At present, two of his sons, Juan and Frank, and a nephew Alfredo, still perform annually. Pablo Julio Hernández Hernández who performs Rey K’iche’, also brings his two sons who until 2012 have danced as the Princes. José Gregorio Elías Chay (Don Chepe) who dances Tekum, comes with his son Pedro Aparicio Elías Mantanico who is the alternate Alvarado. In 2013 Pedro’s son danced as a Prince. From 2008–2013, the same two sisters performed the role of the Malinches.

For many years, Florentín Elías Silverio has served the group as chirimiista, accompanied by tamboristas. Santiago Tamayec Rodriguez was, until his death in 2009, the long-serving tamborista for the group, and is still annually memorialized in the ceremony on Kanchavox. Don Florentín has since been accompanied by various tamboristas, including his grandson. In 2013, Don Florentín was too ill to perform so two musicians were called in from Cantel: Esteban Chojolan played chirimía and Gregorio Sacalxoc played tambor. In 2014, Don Florentín again played chirimía while Juan Rosales played tambor, though they sometimes switched instruments.

17.1.4. My Engagement with the Dance Team

I began a relationship with the San Cristóbal dance team in 2008 when I made a donation to the group in return for being allowed to videotape the entire performance as research for a class lecture. When I returned in 2009, I was committed to researching the Dance of the Conquest. When I gave the group copies of the 2008 video, the response of Don Pancho and other dancers was to question why I had videotaped the whole performance from a single vantage point. Taking this criticism to heart, I made a larger contribution in 2009 and moved freely throughout the dance ground to get a much more detailed view, also enhanced by having brought an up-to-date camera, thanks to the equipment fund at my university. I also took many photographs and brought copies of these and the new videotape with me the next year, along with another donation, and so on through 2014.

In addition to attending and photographing performances, I have also been welcomed at rehearsals, and most importantly at the hilltop shrine ceremony to welcome the trajes and the subsequent late night ceremony of the final rehearsal, the Velada de los Trajes. As an example of the friendship offered me by Don Pancho and the rest of the group, on one of these climbs to the summit of Kanchavox, Don Pancho had noticed that I was limping slightly. During the ceremony, he offered to assist me, as he was doing with others, by using the ceremonial fire and prayer. Don Pancho has also let me study two copies of the text for the dance that are in his possession, a privilege that is tightly controlled and requires a good deal of trust.

As detailed further in the final section of this chapter, I have been asked to reciprocate not only with contributions and copies of photographs and video, but also with assistance. As requested, I provided
a certificate of appreciation for the cultural efforts of the group in behalf of my university department, and I designed and mounted a bilingual website explaining the dance and its context in San Cristóbal.

17.2. Preliminaries and Participation in Public Rituals and Events

17.2.1. Preparation

According to Don Pancho, the ceremony of commitment to perform the Conquista in the following year is held in September in his house, as he is autor. Then in December when the performers have been selected they are invited to dinner at Don Pancho’s house. Text parts for the different dancers will be distributed at the first rehearsal in June.

17.2.2. Rehearsals

After the costumes are ordered, rehearsals begin. These rehearsals take place in the patio of the Hernández home on weekends in June and the beginning of July. The steps and choreography of the dance are given equal emphasis to the text. Dancers have all received copies of their parts and studied them, though the leading dancers have been performing the same parts for many years and already know their lines well. For the newer and younger dancers, Don Francisco carries his copy of the text and he or one of the boys performing the Princes reminds them of their lines at the proper place in the action. Rehearsal occasions are also used for meetings involving the whole group where any important logistics or needs for contribution are discussed.

17.2.3. Arranging the Dance Ground

Usually on a morning shortly before the dance begins, as many members of the group as are available meet to construct the platforms for Tekum’s palace and Ajitz’s shrine, as well as a fence that will separate the audience from the dance ground. No construction is needed for Rey K’iche’s palace as there is a permanent stage structure with dressing rooms at the back used for this purpose. Participants begin loading lumber by 6 am and by 6:30 have left for the dance ground, which must be swept clean of the previous day’s garbage before they begin construction.
The whole dance area is paved with Guatemala’s standardized concrete paving stones, of an elongated and cusped but basically cruciform shape. Each year the same tiles are dug up for the fence posts and the columns of the two elevated platforms. Where they are removed, deep holes are dug: nearly a meter deep for the columns. Platforms are constructed first. Once the columns are in place and stabilized with packed earth, cross beams are attached. No nails are used: the crossbeams are first bound with wire and then with ropes. Then the flat planks are laid, secured to the crossbeams with rope and wire together. After a breakfast break some finish the two platforms by adding crossbeams on the backs and ends of the two platforms to enclose them on three sides, while others set the fence posts, many fashioned from tree branches. After lunch, pine branches will be cut to decorate the three walls of the platforms and ropes will be strung between the fence posts, leaving a passageway at the far end opposite the stage platform for Rey K’iche’s palace.

17.2.4. Costumbre on Kanchavox and La Velada de los Trajes

The number of costumbres or ceremonies for the Baile de la Conquista in San Cristóbal Totonicapán has diminished over time. Juan Oswaldo Hernández Chanax, son of the current autor, informs me that six ceremonies were once traditional: three during the rehearsal period that begins in May, one at the velada de los trajes before the opening of the feria, another during the feria, and the last at its conclusion. In 1957, Barbara Bode (1961: 233) was informed of three costumbres for the Conquista dance team on Mount Kanchavox, of which only the latter, a Welcoming called the velada de los trajes, is still performed. The description which follows is based on my participation in the ceremony in five years of the seven covered by this project.

Those dancers who are available come as a group to pick up the trajes from the Morería Tistoj Mazariegos in San Cristóbal. I was present at this activity only once, in 2014. The dancers were brought into a grand salon in the Tistoj mansion, just across a small patio from the morería workshop, and just before the office. This salon also serves as part of the Cofradía Santiago. Trajes were already

---

4 Juan Oswaldo Hernández Chanax, personal communication, 2015.
laid out on woven mats on the floor in two rows of nine *trajes* each. In back were the six *Caciques* and the male members of the Court. In front were the seven Spaniards plus Ajitz and Chiquito. In each set the clothing was on the bottom, then attributes such as the *plato* and *flecha*, with the headdress or helmet on top. In addition, the *plato* and sceptre used by the Malinches was set near the *traje* for the Rey K’iche’, as Malinches in San Cristóbal use a finer version of current local *traje* rather than a special costume. The masks were laid out on a table against the wall, opposite the entrance. The distinctive costume for Azteca, a character reintroduced in 2014 after a decade lapse, was placed on the table next to the masks.

When the dancers entered the salon, they went first to the left end of the room to kneel and pray to statues of the Virgin and Santiago. They then lined up along the mats with the costumes, near the wall that contains the entrance. The *morera*, Doña Antonieta Tistoj Mazariegos, faced them from across the mats, her back against the tables that line the opposite wall and on which the masks were placed. Don Pancho then began a formal speech in which he talked about the joy and importance of performing the *Baile de la Conquista* as a sacred offering, a contribution to the San Cristóbal feria, and in fulfillment of the patterns established by the ancestors. He then thanked Doña Antonieta for her customary donation, as she waives the costume rental fees for the San Cristóbal dance team as an offering to Santiago and to the community.

Don Chepe then began a series of prayers. He first extemporized a prayer in which he asked God for blessings on the Tistoj house, the deceased founders and dancers of the San Cristóbal *Conquista*, and the current dancers. He then led the group in recitation of the “Padre Nuestro” prayer, followed by another extemporized prayer in which he recited the lineage of Tistoj *moreros*. Finally he led the group in a series of prayers involving both unison recitation and call-and-response.

Formalities over, Doña Antonieta pointed out the Azteca costume to Don Pancho and showed him how it is worn. The *trajes* were then packed up for transport to Don Pancho’s house, headquarters for the *Conquista* dance team. Clothing and masks were placed in bundles while headdresses were kept apart, temporarily placed on chairs. All was then packed into the back of Don Pancho’s truck, taken to his house, and placed in the altar room, but not immediately arranged.

The time for collecting the costumes from the *morería* is determined partly by the advantage of having the *Velada de los Trajes* (Vigil of the Costumes) ceremony on a weekend preceding the three days of dancing, provided that it is a propitious day in the Maya 260 day calendar. This ceremony, a welcoming of the *trajes*, consists of an afternoon hilltop *costumbre* and an evening ceremony that incorporates the final rehearsal.

The purpose of the hilltop *costumbre* is to secure final permission for the dance from Costumbrista (Christian and Maya) supernaturals and also to secure their aid in ensuring a successful outcome.
without injuries or other mishaps. Narratives of this costumbre from Bode (1961), Sexton (1992), and Peck (1971) indicate that the leading personages of the Conquest Dance who have become encantos (Rey K’iche’, Tekum, Ajitz, and sometimes Alvarado) are invoked in these prayers, asked for permission to participate, and asked for protection. Though Bode did not witness such a costumbre, some of her information came from Feliciano Charchalac and Paulino Mutz of San Cristóbal Totonicapán (Bode 1961: 233). They listed three midnight costumbres carried out on Cerro Kanchavox, the hill that overlooks San Cristóbal: the first to recite the Maya days and choose a propitious day for the second Costumbre; the second, two weeks before the dance, in which others dance around Ajitz; and the third a week before the dance, after collecting the trajes. In this third Costumbre, according to Bodes’ informants, dancers climb Cerro Kanchavox wearing their masks but carrying their costumes in a bundle. The group dances and Ajitz preforms an incense ceremony.

In my years of engagement with the San Cristóbal dance group, under the direction of Francisco Rodolfo Hernández (Don Pancho), they have only carried out the third of these costumbres, and it is planned for late afternoon rather than midnight. Having witnessed it five times, it is evident to me that there is no “script” for the ceremony. The general process is the repeated but many details differ. In some cases outside forces intervene: in 2013, a threatening storm led Don Pancho to curtail the ceremony a bit. Also, the costumbre on Cerro Kanchavox is one of two ceremonial events that take place on this day in strict succession, the other being the Velada de los Trajes (Vigil for the Costumes).

For the first portion of the ceremony that takes place in late afternoon on Cerro Kanchavox, many participants assemble at Don Pancho’s house. The first to arrive at Don Pancho’s in the afternoon on the appointed day are the musicians who then play intermittently as the others assemble. Then Don Pancho assembles materials for the ceremony, including large quantities of incense and candles, as well as soft drinks for refreshment. The largest sack is generally carried in relay by Don Chepe and his son Pedro.

Participants leave the house between 3:00 and 3:30 pm with Don Pancho at the front carrying a lit censer with copal spread on the hot coals, followed by the musicians who play to accompany the procession, and then the other dancers. The procession traverses almost the entire length of San Cristóbal, including a crossing of the Pan American Highway, to arrive at the base of Cerro Kanchavox where there is a thermal spring and large public bath used also for clothes washing. As the ascent
begins, a few members who live in that area join the procession, including wives of some of the dancers who have brought food and flowers for the altar.

After less than fifteen minutes of climbing the procession reaches a meadow where all relax and have a soft drink. On some occasions some of the ladies preceded the rest of the participants for the final stage of the climb, in order to have the flowers arranged on the altar and candles lit before the dancers arrive. After fifteen minutes of rest the climb resumes, steeper now, taking over twenty minutes and thus reaching the absolute summit of the hill a little over an hour after leaving the house. The musicians have ceased playing for the steeper parts of the climb but as the procession nears the summit they go on ahead and begin playing so that the dancers might enter accompanied by music.

At the summit, surrounded by a few stately trees, is an altar on the east side of the clearing composed of a cross atop a series of stone walls that extend to the front to form three alcoves, symbolic caves used for candle offerings. The cross and walls of the alcoves are decorated with flowers while pine needles have been spread on the ground. As people assemble and find a place to stand or sit, I have time to enjoy the spectacular view, particularly looking towards the imposing volcanoes, the conical Santa María and the broken outline of Cerro Quemado (Lajuj Noj), that overlook Xela (Quetzaltenango). Directly below us are the still sparsely occupied flats of Urbina where in February 1524 the K'iche' army suffered its second defeat and massacre, six days after the death of Tekum.

As musicians play, the dancers enter by groups, following their usual formations and steps despite the restricted space, and as each group finishes the members kneel for a short prayer before the altar. In some years however this entrance is delayed until after Don Pancho’s introduction (see below). *Cohetes* (strips of firecrackers) may also be set off to mark the start of the ceremony and create a link with the supernaturals who are being addressed in its process.

When the gear has been set down, Don Pancho arranges some materials then wraps a *tzute* (square hand-woven cloth) over his head, since he is acting as a Maya priest or *chuchkajaw*. Don Pancho each year gives a short speech at this point. Addressing the group, he welcomes all participants and supporters and asks all to clear negative thoughts from their minds so that their hearts will be at peace during the ceremony. He reminds those present to leave their problems outside, as this is a sacred
ground and the dance is a spiritual act of devotion to Patrón San Cristóbal and Santiago Apóstol. For several years he also chose this time to remember the recently deceased tamborista, Santiago Samayoc Rodriguez. Don Pancho then kneels and prays before the altar, setting candles in the cavity, while his assistant unwraps the incense, candles, and ocote (pitch pine). Don Pancho then uses some of these to prepare his bundles of candles, incense, and flowers for the blessing.

On several occasions, Don Chepe, who dances Tekum, has brought large conch shells trumpets to sound to the four directions, marking the beginning of the ritual proper. In 2013, he and a younger dancer each blew the trumpets, standing back to back, positioned behind the cross. Don Chepe was in the lead, facing the usual sequence of directions (East, West, North, South) for each sounding of the trumpet.

The first segment of the ritual at the summit consists of a cleansing and blessing of the participants. As typical for such a Costumbre ritual, as chuchkajaw, Don Pancho uses a bundle in which are wrapped flowers, large candles, and rolls of incense balls. The blessing now begins. Don Pancho calls the dancers to kneel before the altar by group. The precise organization of the blessing differs from year to year. In 2010, the three main groups were called together, with Rey K'iche' and his Court in a line in the central offering space, Caciques lined up in the space to the right when seen from the side away from the cross altar), and the Spaniards lined up in the space to the left. In 2011, each group was called up individually. In 2013 and 2014, the Court was blessed separately, kneeling in their standard lateral line formation, with blessings moving outward from the central position occupied by Don Pablo as Rey K’iche’. Then Don Pancho called the Caciques and Españoles to make two parallel lines, side by side, in the precise hierarchic order of the dance. He blessed them alternately, moving from Tekum to Alvarado to Tzunun to Carrillo, etc. As the blessing finished for each dancer, he rose and moved to the rear of the cleared area while the remaining kneeling dancers in that line each moved up a position. When Azteca was introduced in 2014, he was called to the altar and blessed separately, as he does not belong to any group. The blessing for Ajitz Chiquito then follows, the dancer for Ajitz Grande being Don Pancho who is performing the blessings.
In these blessings and cleansings for the dancer, Don Pancho says aloud to the encantos the name of the personage and the name of the person who will dance that character, thus invoking a unification of primero and living person to form a “danced primero.” Don Pancho touches and or swipes the bundle at various key points of the dancer’s body, thus cleansing him and invoking protection against injury during the dance. Don Pancho then makes the sign of the cross on the dancer’s body by touching the bundle to the four points, and finally places the bundle in front of the dancer’s face in order for him or her to kiss the bundle. During this procedure, Don Pancho is praying in K’iche’ to Maya supernaturals and ancestors, including the encantos or spirits who inhabit locations relevant to their community, and he prays in Spanish to the Christian supernaturals—God, Jesus, Mary. When all dancers have been blessed, musicians and supporting members of the group, including myself, are granted the same blessing. Finally Don Pancho kneels before the altar and prays that this offering be accepted.

The next segment of the ritual involves a fire. Musicians begin to play, and large lit candles may be placed in each of the three cave-like alcoves in front of the cross. Don Pancho then prepares the offering fire in the central space before the altar. Pine needles are cleared from a circular space about 80 cm across. Sugar is then poured in lines from his hand to make a ritual design. In 2009 the design was a quartered circle. In 2010, the design was a chalice with three crosses decorating the cup area. I could not interpret the design used in 2011. In 2013 again a quartered circle with smaller circles in each quadrant and the centre forming a quincunx. I was mystified by the design in 2014. I could tell there were three crosses but the rest escaped me, so I questioned Don Pancho. He explained that the design changes every year because it must relate to the day in the Maya calendar. On this occasion in 2014 the day was tz’ikin which he interpreted as bird, and therefore drew a quetzal with the three crosses. I did not ask, but suggest that the three crosses which commonly appear in these sugar drawings as the base of the fire mark it as a sacred spot for communication with the supernaturals, similar to shrines of three crosses or a cross and three cavities.

On top of the sugar design are arranged balls of black incense, cakes of brown incense, strips of resinous pine wood (ocote) many colours of candles, and sprigs of sage, all in large quantities. While the fire is in preparation, two small white candles are distributed to all present for offering to the fire at a later point. The fire is then lit, and the conch shell trumpets may again be sounded to the four directions. It is generally around 5 pm at this point.
Then Don Pancho may give a short speech encouraging participants to make offerings through the fire. Don Pancho then prays before the fire. In his K'iche' prayers in 2014 I noted the names of creator deities in the Popol Vuh. He also appealed to Christian supernaturals including the Christ, the Virgin, San Vicente, San Antonio, and Cristo de Capetagua. More prayer in K'iche' followed. Don Pancho then invoked all of the personages from the *Baile de la Conquista*, beginning with Tekum, Príncipe Guerrero (Tekum Warrior Prince), then Alvarado, and so on alternating *Cacique* and Spaniard down the line to Quirijol and Azteca. He then recited the name of Rey K'iche' as well as the Princes and Malinches, and finally Ajitz Grande and Chiquito. Don Pancho then knelt and prayed in Spanish including an Ave María and crossed himself. He then stood and continued praying in Spanish and K'iche', counting out days in the Maya calendar and referring to the four cardinal directions while dropping nodules of incense into the fire. He again invoked some of the *Conquista encantos*, asking that the offerings be accepted and the dancers protected. He then prayed with mentions of the four cardinal directions, Mother Earth, Centre of Earth, and Centre of Sky. At this point he encouraged those who wanted to make confession to do so.

With the fire well and duly sanctified, each group is called up to the altar to kneel and then dance two circuits around the fire to their most characteristic *son*. In 2014, the order was first the members of the court, then the *Caciques*, *Azteca*, the Ajitz pair, and finally the Spaniards. The court and *Cacique* groups and Azteca danced two counter-clockwise circuits. When the *Cacique* group finished their rounds, they knelt and bowed with arms spread. As the Azteca dancer is new, Don Pancho worked more on teaching him the step, then he too knelt and bowed. Ajitz Grande (Don Pancho) and Chiquito knelt and bowed after their two circuits but then danced a third circuit. Finally the Spaniards danced a clockwise round and then a round with diagonals, as they would on the dance ground. They also finished by kneeling and bowing.
It is time for refreshments, beginning with local guaro, a clear cane liquor, some of which is offered to the fire, poured at its outer edge in the four directions, causing it to flare up. There is a lot of coca cola, and sometimes special offerings such as fruit juice and paches (soft maize mixture with sauce filling steamed in banana leaves). Don Pancho continues praying for part of this time, pouring an offering of guaro at the four cardinal direction positions of the fire, then offering some guaro to the cross and the three cave-like bays, dedicating the latter to deceased ancestors, particularly those of the Conquista group.

The final two segments may be enacted in either order. They involve a second blessing sequence, this time before the fire, and dances presented more-or-less in the order of the narrative. For this second blessing, each group of dancers is called up separately. The court group arranges itself in a lateral line while the Caciques and Spaniards are lined up single file, and Azteca and Chiquito are called separately. All dancers kneel for the blessing. The musicians are then called up and this time their instruments also receive a blessing/cleansing by passing over the fire. Collaborators are then called up as before. As each person receives a blessing, he or she can throw the candles in the fire.

When all have been blessed the second time a series of about ten dances are performed, usually in the order that they appear in a full presentation. This sequence was completely eliminated in 2013 due to the approaching storm. In 2014, Don Pancho began with the dance of Tzunun for his embassy in part III, but as he began this before the second blessing, and people were busy eating, he discontinued the sequence. Instead he offered more guaro to the fire and recited the names of previous autores.

I recorded the order of dances in 2010, which was as follows:

1. Opening dance: Ajitz entered first, then the Court group as usual in a lateral line, then Caciques entering single file, and finishing as usual with Tekum dancing alone.
2. “Vendón”: Tekum dancing back from the palace with the flag, accompanied by the Caciques. Again Tekum solos at the end.
4. Spanish balonia dance.
5. Tzunun embassy to Rey K’iche’.
6. Return of Tzunun embassy.
7. Ambassadors to Tekum.
8. Ambassadors return to Spanish.
10. Court, then Caciques and Chiquito with Tekum solo (Don Pancho, the Ajitz, is praying and making offerings to the fire).
Note that this sequence did not follow the performance precisely, as Tzunun’s dances of Part III were called for before the Ambassadors’ dances of Part II. The reason may be the greater status of Tzunun than the Ambassadors.

It is now around 6 pm and Don Pancho announces that this part of the ceremony is over and the next part will take place at the *encanto* altar partway down the hill. If *cohetes* have been brought they will be set off again as the group descends by a different path for about twenty minutes. This shrine is dedicated in part to Tekum as *encanto*. The shrine is hidden in dense vegetation and in some years there has been a good deal of searching in the increasing darkness to find the entrance to the path. Musicians then play as the group climbs a slope to a cleared area with three crosses, the centre cross featuring a large cavity in its base, and with a flat altar stone on the ground in front that can be used for fire offerings.

While he prays, Don Pancho places several lit candles in the cavity under the central cross then kneels and prays. He rises and incenses all three crosses including making a circuit around the ground level altar in front. Don Pancho then kneels and prays at the cavity under the central cross, offering *guaro* to the symbolic cave and on the other crosses as well as on the altar. In 2014 the musicians played again and Don Pancho called the court group up to dance on and around the altar stone.

Then with more *cohetes* the group descends the slope to the path and descends the hill to traverse the pueblo of San Cristóbal. About a block before Don Pancho’s house the musicians begin playing so that the procession can make a proper entrance. This will be about 7:30 to 8 pm.

At the house, the first order of business is supper. The musicians may continue playing as participants and supporters gather in the salon of Don Pancho’s house, wash their hands in a bowl of warm water provided, and after a series of Christian prayers all partake of a supper prepared by the Hernández family.

After supper, around 8:30, begins *La Velada de los Trajes*. As with the final portion of the ceremony on the summit of Cerro Kanchavox, this ritual involves blessings and then dances presented roughly in the order of performance.
For the blessing portion, participants are called to a room set aside for the purpose of laying out *trajes* (costumes, masks and headdresses). If the *trajes* had not been laid out before the departure for Cerro Kanchavox, this is done as supper is ending. At the head of the room, opposite the door, is a temporary altar. In 2014 this altar consisted of a cloth covered base with a framed photograph on top as the centre of attention. The photo was of a painting of Santiago Matamoros (Santiago killer of Moors), showing the bearded saint on his rearing white horse with vanquished Moors sprawled beneath. The *trajes* are laid out according to the position the dancers will occupy on the dance ground. Directly in front of the altar are the costumes of the court group, with that of Rey K’iche’ in the centre. Then in a line on the left (as one faces the altar) are the costumes of the Spaniards beginning with Alvarado and ending with Quirijol. On the right are the costumes of the *Caciques*, beginning with Tekum and ending with Azteca. This is the same organization the dancers occupied for blessings on the summit of Cerro Kanchavox. The costumes of Ajitz Grande and Chiquito were placed to the right of the altar. This is the position the tower of Ajitz occupies relative to the palace platform of Rey K’iche’ at Momostenango and may recall such a placement as an older tradition. When the *trajes* have been arranged, the dancers are called in to the room one at a time to kneel for another blessing with a bundle of incense and candles. As usual the order is: court group, *Caciques*, Azteca, Spaniards, Chiquito. Then musicians are called and finally supporters.

The second portion of the evening ceremony, involving dance, is a final rehearsal in the form of a *cruzada*. Thus while the blessings were taking place, helpers began arranging five fires in an X pattern, using the same materials (sugar drawing, incense, candles, *ocote*...
wood) as on Cerro Kanchavox. The dancers after their blessing put on parts of their costume, primarily cape or jacket and headdress.

When the fires are lit, about 9 or 9:30 pm, the musicians play and the dancers come out. Under Don Pancho’s direction, many of the dances of the actual presentation are performed, and in roughly the same order, moving carefully around the fire. Don Pancho mentioned to me during this process that it was in part a test of the dancer’s commitment and concentration. To demonstrate the flexibility of this procedure in both number and order of dances, it is useful to compare the sequences of in 2011, 2013, and 2014:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>Entrada</em> with Court in lateral line, <em>Caciques</em> single file, and the Ajitz pair moving around the fires more freely.</td>
<td>1. <em>Entrada</em> with Court in lateral line, <em>Caciques</em> single file, and the Ajitz pair moving around the fires more freely.</td>
<td>1. <em>Entrada</em> with Court in lateral line, <em>Caciques</em> single file, and the Ajitz pair moving around the fires more freely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Princes lead Tekum and <em>Caciques</em> to Rey K’iche’</td>
<td>4. <em>Tzunun</em> embassy with Ajitz to Rey K’iche’</td>
<td>4. Opening dance with court and youths (no meeting of Rey K’iche’ and Tekum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. “Vendon”: Tekum returns with flag</td>
<td>5. Return of the Tzunun embassy</td>
<td>5. Spanish March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Spanish Dance</td>
<td>7. Spanish Balonia dance</td>
<td>7. <em>Tzunun</em> Embassy to Rey K'iche' (called for but skipped as the Tzunun dancer had left)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Ambassadors dance to Tekum</td>
<td>10. Ambassadors returning.</td>
<td>10. Princes dance to Quirijol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Ambassadors return</td>
<td>11. Princes dance to Quirijol</td>
<td>11. Quirijol leads Princes to Alvarado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Tzunun dances to Rey K’iche’</td>
<td>12. Quirijol leads Princes to Alvarado</td>
<td>12. <em>Princes</em> dance to Quirijol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Quirijol leads Princes to Alvarado</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The version of 2011 followed the performance sequence precisely, while in 2013, as on Kanchavox, Tzunun’s dances were moved forward, in this case even preceding the Spanish dances that begin Part II. In 2014 again Tzunun’s dance was moved up but in this year also the Ambassadors’ dances were eliminated.

In 2009, the dance by Ajitz (Don Pancho) and Chiquito involved an intricate choreography around the five fires: dancing around a corner fire, then around the central fire, then diagonally to the opposite corner, then counterclockwise along the side to the next corner back to the centre and opposite fires, counterclockwise to another side, and so on to the starting point, ultimately circling each of the corner fires four times.

The closing dance ends as it does in public performance, with dancers in a double column marching out of the dance area, in this case towards the dressing room where they change out of their partial costumes.

Dancing ends about 10 pm. Don Pancho tends the dying fires and prays before them with musicians playing as dancers remove their costumes.

The final event of the evening is a group meeting. Don Pancho begins by thanking those present for their participation. Part of the agenda involves finances, and this provides an opportunity for me to publicly present my Q 1000 donation to the group. Others are reminded of their small (Q 15) donation for the day’s ritual provisions and refreshments. While members are offered a snack (meat-filled tamales and coffee), Don Pancho continues with his announcements. He requests help to build the platforms on the day before the first dance. And he asks that dancers come on time to dress for the dance for the three days of performance. Three volunteers are requested to provide lunch for the musicians for those three days. In 2014 Don Pancho also mentioned that two days before the first dance he would be receiving coconut palm leaves from the coast to use for ornamenting the platforms. The meeting is then adjourned.

---

5 This is much less than I contribute in the other three communities but the dancers in San Cristóbal are financially better off and do not have to pay for their traje rental.
The following morning Don Pancho carefully cleans up the ashes left from the five fires so that they may be deposited on Kanchavox.

### 17.2.5. Ceremonial acts on days of public performance

The *feria* in San Cristóbal is held for three days: July 24–26. On July 24, the icon of the patron Santiago Apóstol is brought in procession to the church for the annual renewal. As this is a *Costumbrista* event, the *Conquista* group has an important role in it, especially since the Conquest Dance is the only regularly performed festival dance of the San Cristóbal *feria*. In contrast, the *Conquista* group rarely takes part in the Catholic–oriented and community wide procession and parade on July 25 or the procession on July 26.

The halt in the Conquest Dance performance for ceremonial participation on July 24 usually comes around 3pm, during or directly after the scene with Ajitz and the Ambassadors. With musicians playing, and remaining in full costume, dancers proceed through the fairgrounds and market to the Cofradía Santiago within the Tistoj mansion that also houses the *morería*. The *cofradía* icon of Santiago on his horse is displayed on its *anda* just inside the entrance, or else it is accompanied by the larger Santiago icon from the church. Unlike the *cofradía* Santiago icon at Momostenango, which is covered in scarves and a cape decorated like those of dancers, the San Cristóbal Santiago has no Indigenous-style accoutrements. Attending Santiago is the beating of the large “town drum.” The dancers each individually kneel and pay their respects to Santiago as they enter.

*Conquista* dancers then pass through a salon into the large tiled patio. As they enter, the brass band that has been playing finishes and takes a break. The *Conquista* dancers then organize themselves in proper spatial relation and, as the musicians play, they present a few dances. In 2013, the order was:

1. *Entada*, in two segments: first Ajitz danced with the Court group and then Ajitz danced with the *Caciques*, ending with a Tekum solo.
2. Spanish Balonia dance

![Spanish dance in the patio of the Cofradía Santiago, located in the Tistoj mansion. 2012.](image)
3. Spanish dance  
4. Princes’ dance  
5. Spanish march

Those present clapped for each of these dances. After this presentation, dancers were served a guaro and coca cola and the brass band began to play again.

If the icon has not already been displayed on its anda, then while the Conquista dancers perform, cofradía members will situate Santiago on the anda for procession, so when refreshments are finished, it is time to move outside and organize the participating groups. This point is signalled by bombas in the street and then cohetes. The Conquista musicians move outside first in order to head the procession, followed by the Court group, with the files of Spaniards and Caciques arranged on the two sides, Ajitz in the middle, as usual. Behind the Conquista group comes the Santiago cofradía group, beginning with the cofradía chirimía and the large “town drum”. They are followed by the cofrades with their staffs topped with silver emblems on one side and their women counterparts on the other side. Then comes the anda, followed by town officials and the brass band.

Shortly after the anda of the Santiago cofradía begins moving and turns the corner, the adult Conquista
dancers take over carrying it, with Spanish arranged on one side and *Caciques* on the other. At the Samalá river bridge that begins the downtown core, the dancers change sides, perhaps to relieve shoulder strain. They may or may not continue carrying the *anda* as far as the church plaza and, in 2011, even carried it up to the church steps. When the *anda* carried by the *Conquista* dancers reaches the church plaza, the band announcer acknowledges the *Conquista* group and the *morera*, Doña Antonieta Tistoj, as the *autora* of the *Cofradía* Santiago.⁶ When the dancers are relieved at or before the church, they head back through the *feria* market to resume the *Conquista* dance where they had left off.

The performance on the final *feria* day, July 26, is also interrupted, but this time for a speech by Don Pancho honouring the group and directed to the audience as a kind of *despedida* or send-off. Don Pancho times this interruption to come previous to the scene in which the battle will take place, aware that audience members will stick around to see the battle. Don Pancho changes out of his costume for this speech. He thanks the group’s collaborators: myself (for my monetary contributions and website), and the *morera*, Doña Antonieta, who does not charge the group rental for the *trajes*. Don Pancho then introduces each member in rank order of their characters, giving the name of the character and the dancer, and including the musicians. In addition, in 2013 Don Pancho began the speech with a special announcement that in two years they will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the group. In 2014, Don Pancho also asked me to take a group photo of the participants.

### 17.3. Conventions

#### 17.3.1. Costume and Masks

Costumes at San Cristóbal differ in a few respects from the general Conquest Dance conventions. The costumes are particularly close to those used at Momostenango, as both draw on the *morería* Tistoj in San Cristóbal, the largest *morería* in San Cristóbal and likely the largest in Guatemala. However, the San Cristóbal group has a closer connection with this *morería*, in part because it is located in the same

---

⁶ According to Don Pancho, Doña Antonieta has been *autora* of the Santiago *cofradía* for over thirty years.
community, and in part because, as noted, the morera, Doña Antonieta Tistoj, is also the autora of the cofradía Santiago to whose rituals the Conquista group contributes on July 24 each year.

K’iche’ personages in San Cristóbal are dressed much like those in Momostenango but the masks differ. In Momostenango, Tekum and Tzunun wear dark-skinned masks while the other Caciques wear masks with light skin like those of the Court group and Spaniards. In San Cristóbal, all the Cacique masks are dark. With the exception of Tekum, all the masks are coloured a brownish grey with a rosy blush on the cheeks. Tekum’s mask at San Cristóbal is not borrowed from the morería but is instead owned by Don Pancho, likely older, and is coloured a deep, dark brown.

K’iche’ characters also wear sandals rather than street shoes in San Cristóbal in order to provide more authenticity. K’iche’ capes are standard, including the tendency to associate Rey K’iche with the colour orange. Rey K’iche’s cape is also more elaborately decorated. The crowns of Rey K’iche’ and the Princes feature a cross on top, adopted from the depiction of Christians in the Moros y Cristianos dances. Headdresses of the Caciques are of the multi-

Don Chepe as Tekum, with his loincloth worn over pants. 2010.

Royal Court group. 2011,

Tzunun costume, with the macana or bladed club. 2010.
level type with a plain disk on top, except that Tekum’s quetzal is set atop the disk of his headdress. As Tekum, Don Chepe often wears black gloves. He also wears a loincloth over his pantalones that he made and decorated with coins and two ceramic medallions with quetzal birds. As noted in the section on conventions, Ajitz’s military jacket often features a rayed heart design on the front of the chest, though in 2013 the design was a flower composed in silver sequins. Finally, the plato is provided without the noise-making element, so dancers provide strings of coins. The Azteca, also known as Jicaque or Lacandón, wears a breastplate, loincloth, armbands, and wristbands along with a shallow headdress. He holds a bow and arrow and wears a quiver full of arrows on his back.

Unlike Momostenango, Spaniards at San Cristóbal wear the same short pants as K’iche’ personages. Spaniards also have scabbards with their swords, which encourages more active treatment of swords than in other locations. Spaniards wear brass-coloured openwork tin helmets suggestive of 16th century combat dress, rather than the cocked hat typical of the other communities. At the front of the helmet is a mirror assemblage on velvet with reinforced backing. The military jacket is composite in some cases, with the early modern style ruffed sleeve, also used on the K’iche’ pecheros, combined with an 18–19th century military jacket.

All dancers may wear a fabric belt with very large tassels at the ends. Feathers of both K’iche’ and Spanish personages tend to be arranged with ostrich feathers at the centre of the headdress or helmet and with the clusters of dyed chicken feathers attached to a stick flanking these on

7 These medallions are souvenirs, featuring the quetzal against the background of a shell and with the word “Guatemala” inscribed at the side.
either side, or vice versa, with ostrich feathers flanking chicken feather sticks. K'iche' attributes, the Plato, flecha for Caciques, and sceptre for royals, are silver coloured except that Tekum may carry a gold coloured sceptre. A spiked club representing the Aztec macana (macahuitl) is painted in multicoloured bands. This attribute is used only by Tzunun and only for his embassy to Rey K’iche’ in Part III.

17.3.2. Text

Francisco Rodolfo Hernández Juárez (Don Pancho), the autor and maestro of the San Cristóbal dance group, possesses at least two copies of the dance text. One of these is was written out by Don Pancho himself, apparently in 1994, and the other is the manuscript from which he copied, dated probably to the 1970s but possibly as early as 1947. The earlier text is missing the four last pages, comprising the scenes of the Princes in dialogue with Alvarado and of Alvarado’s subsequent dialogue with Rey K’iche’. Don Pancho’s copy therefore lacks this text as well, and its absence is no longer noted. In performance, the proper sequence of dances and encounters for this missing section is preserved, but without the text of the conversations and monologues.

As noted earlier, the text used in San Cristóbal shares with that of Joyabaj a derivation from Cantel texts, though of a different branch of the Cantel lineage. Thus the San Cristóbal Conquista includes the prologue involving a dialogue between Tekum and Ajitz, and it includes a short scene for the Azteca or Lacandon/Jicaque, but it does not have four entrada texts for Alvarado, designed for one to be delivered on each of the four sides of the dance ground. As in Joyabaj, texts are provided for the interludes between each battle skirmish, but in San Cristóbal texts delivered by Tekum and Alvarado alternate skirmishes rather than occurring together in each break.

17.3.3. Staging

San Cristóbal uses a more elaborate physical setting for the Conquest Dance than other communities. The large concrete stage platform of a permanent building is used as the platform for the Court and musicians. Previously, according to Don Pancho, a tall platform was constructed for Rey K’iche’s palace. Such a platform is evident in a photograph taken by Barbara Bode in 1957. On this new structure, rooms at back provide areas for dancers to rest and take refreshment. A row of five stones dug from the dance ground paving in preparation of the platforms is commonly used as seats for the Rey K’iche’ and his Court, but in 2012 small wooden chairs were provided instead. On the left side, looking out
from the stage platform, is the raised wooden platform constructed as a palace for Tekum and the Caciques. A third construction at the far end of the left side is a detached high but smaller platform for the mountain shrine of Ajitz, to which I will sometimes refer as his temple. The dance ground is also both an elongated rectangle and quite large, which affects the length of each dance.

The arrangement of the Spaniards and Caciques differs in San Cristóbal from other locations. Although as usual the Spaniards are on Rey K’iche’s right and Caciques on his left, the leaders, Tekum and Alvarado, are positioned at the end closest to the Court rather than away from them. It is thus necessary to remember a different system for the four named corners cited in the narrative of dance movements. Another shift from the usual vocabulary needs to be made. Since the dance ground is not located in the church plaza, and since the musicians occupy the Court platform, there is nothing to distinguish the opposing side. I will refer to this side opposite the Court as the “far side.”

Tekum and the Caciques are not normally lined up on the dance ground: they do so for the battle and for dances. At other times, the Caciques occupy the platform representing Tekum’s palace. On this platform, they arrange themselves in imitation of the Rey K’iche’s Court, with Tekum in the centre, flanked by his “vassals.” Several scenes involve exchanges between Tekum and the vassals, including Tekum’s priest, Ajitz. However on some occasions Ajitz does not join Tekum and the Caciques on the palace platform; he instead speaks from his elevated shrine or temple platform.

This procedure complicates the meaning of the temple platform in relation to the staging of the dance. Ajitz’s shrine and lookout is considered to be on a volcano, at some distance from Tekum’s palace in Tekum’s palace is at left and Ajitz’s temple at the back. 2013.

![MUSIY\NERS](image)

Staging particular to San Cristóbal.
the Samalá Valley bottom lands. Thus when Ajitz needs to talk to Tekum, he must dance from the shrine to the palace, and he also returns dancing. This occurs in the prologue and in the scene with the Ambassadors. Likewise, when Alvarado occupies Tekum’s palace, and Quirijol takes Ajitz’s place as lookout, Quirijol must dance with the Princes to present them to Alvarado. In contrast, when Ajitz disputes with Tzunun over the embassy to Rey K’iche’ in Part III, Ajitz speaks from the shrine platform while Tzunun speaks from Tekum’s palace platform, denying the distance between the architectural forms these platforms represent. What these different approaches to staging have in common, and what likely generates this duplicity, is that the shrine platform is simply the proper location for Ajitz. This is not true everywhere, however, and on one occasion in Momostenango, Tzunun danced from Tekum’s position to that of Ajitz in order to speak with him.

Logistical considerations also lead to multiplicity in the function of the permanent platform for the K’iche’ Court. First, while it is the palace of the Rey K’iche’ in Q’umarcaaj, it also functions as a sheltered area for the musicians to sit. Also, because the coffin for Tekum can be brought out of and into one of the back rooms, the stage becomes the place of Tekum’s burial.

17.3.4. Dance Steps and Choreography

In San Cristóbal the long-standing dance group has invested considerable effort in developing many distinct steps, not only to differentiate groups of dancers with basic distinctive steps, but also to differentiate particular narrative contexts of some dances with more elaborate steps. San Cristóbal dance steps are thus more complex and varied than I have seen elsewhere. Many involve a process in which the left and right feet take turns leading. This requires elements within a repeated sequence to consist of an odd number of components, so that the sequence begins again on the alternate foot. In contrast to other locations, Spaniards as well as Caciques alternate facing inward and facing outward as they progress through a dance circuit.

Some regularities link these different dance steps. When the Caciques dance as a group, they alternately face outward towards the audience and inward towards the dance ground centre. All K’iche’ personages except Ajitz, Chiquito and Azteca carry the plato, the combined shield and rattle. In such a dance, the plato is shaken only when the Caciques are facing outward. The Rey K’iche’ and the four youths, comprising the court, dance in a lateral line, and they shake the plato only when the left foot is leading.

In contrast to the dance steps, the choreography, which involves the pattern of movement through the dance field, is the least complex that I have seen. The opening and closing dances that elsewhere require much time and intricate choreography are at San Cristóbal both short and uncomplicated. What differentiates San Cristóbal’s choreography is the distinction in dance formation as well as dance steps. The five members of the Court only dance in a lateral line, facing forward, while Caciques and
Spaniards dance single file, alternately facing inward and outward in relation to the dance ground. A pair of dancers, whether Princes or Spaniards, will often dance alternating back-to-back and front-to-front en route to a new location, and side by side with arms linked on the return journey.

As elsewhere, two circuits of the dance ground are the norm for dances of travel and introduction, but the Spaniards at San Cristóbal, whether marching or dancing, always incorporate diagonals into the second round. That is, after completing one round and returning to the Alvarado corner, they dance diagonally from the Alvarado to Ajitz corners, then up the Cacique side to the Tekum corner, diagonally again from the Tekum to the Quirijol corners, and finish by coming up the Spanish side to the Alvarado corner.

Caciques do not normally incorporate the diagonal, but on two occasions they do. These are the return of Tekum with the flag at the end of part I, and the introduction to Part III.

The multiplication of structures for the San Cristóbal Conquista also results in a multiplication of axes of approach. As elsewhere approach to the Rey K’iche’s palace, situated at the head of the dance ground, requires advancing along the central axis. But at San Cristóbal Tekum’s palace also has an axis of approach, perpendicular to that of the Rey K’iche’s palace. I refer to the axis of Tekum’s palace as the lateral axis since it crosses the narrower width of the dance ground. Furthermore, Ajitz’s shrine platform at the far corner of the dance ground is subject to a diagonal axis of approach leading from the Alvarado corner. Only the Spaniards lack an axis of approach.

Caciques also have a common choreographic pattern though less frequent than the Spanish standard. Caciques normally leave the palace of Tekum along the lateral axis but they enter the palace by coming up the Cacique side from the Ajitz corner. As the Caciques climb the ladder to their platform, representing Tekum’s palace in Quetzaltenango, Tekum remains below dancing solo. He stops the
music when all other Caciques have ascended. Then he climbs the ladder and all the Caciques greet him with the standard half-kneeling bow with arms extended. Tekum then takes his seat in the centre of the Palace's back wall and the other Caciques arrange themselves on either side.

Another stark distinction in the choreography from other communities is that only Ajitz and Chiquito consistently perform vueltas at the corners. When others dance with Ajitz and Chiquito, they must take part in Ajitz’s vueltas. This applies to the Ambassadors in part II and Tzunun in part III. Apart from this priest-diviner pair, in some dances the members of the court, arranged in a lateral line, dance vueltas in the corners as well.

17.3.5. Music

Many of the sones played for dances are distinctively different than those in other locations, though they fulfill similar functions within the dance. About 20 different musical pieces are now in use. See chapter 9 on General Conquista Conventions for a comparison of names for these pieces.

17.4. Dance Performance Sequence

As noted in the explanation of the Conquista dance sequence in general, dances that do not fulfill the narrative function of demonstrating travel from one location to another instead fulfill the function of introducing the main divisions of the dance-drama that I have called the parts, and that would correspond to acts in a play. The introductory dance to each part features the group most associated with the leading individual who will begin the textual declamation with a monologue immediately following the introductory dance. In San Cristóbal, this structure is amplified in two ways. First, to the four parts, the San Cristóbal performance adds a prologue that therefore also includes an introductory dance. Second, entrance and exit dances are also used to begin and end the morning and afternoon divisions of the performance. Some dances do double duty. The entrance dance in the morning is the opening dance, and the entrance dance in the afternoon is also the introduction to Part II. The exit dance in the afternoon is also the closing dance. The only dance that is introduced with a single new function then is the exit dance for the morning division.
### Dances not for travel at San Cristóbal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating Groups</th>
<th>Function(s)</th>
<th>Monologue Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Court, Caciques, Priest-Diviners</strong></td>
<td>Opening Dance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morning Entrance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Priest-Diviners</td>
<td>Intro to Prologue</td>
<td>Ajitz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Court, Caciques</td>
<td>Intro to Part I</td>
<td>Rey K’iche’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Priest-Diviners</td>
<td>Morning Exit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Spanish</td>
<td>Afternoon Entrance</td>
<td>Alvarado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intro to Part II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <strong>Caciques</strong></td>
<td>Intro to Part III</td>
<td>Tekum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. <strong>Caciques</strong></td>
<td>Intro to Part IV</td>
<td>Tekum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Court, Caciques, Spanish, Priest-Diviners</td>
<td>Closing Dance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Afternoon Exit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 17.4.1. Procession to the Dance Ground

Because the San Cristóbal performance starts relatively late in the morning, the lunch break comes between the first and second parts, so that the Spaniards do not enter until after lunch. Thus the morning procession to the dance ground from the headquarters involves only the playing musicians and the three groups of K’iche’ personages. As Ajitz, Don Pancho leads the group, carrying a smoking *incensario*, with Chiquito close by. Behind them is the Court in its usual lateral line then the *Caciques* in single file followed by Azteca. All bow as they enter the dance ground, which is surrounded by fair amusements including rides and skill-testing booths.

#### 17.4.2. Morning Entrance: Opening Dance

As the musicians head for the main platform where they will be seated, the three groups of dancers assemble at the entrance to the dance ground but enter separately, each with a distinctive configuration and step, a differentiation unique among the dance groups studied. As the first to enter, Ajitz and Chiquito bow down on one knee and stretch out their arms in a gesture of respect that by its difference from contemporary protocol is intended to be read as pre–Hispanic. Ajitz and Chiquito then
perform a *vuelta* and begin dancing a counter-clockwise circuit. This priest–diviner pair dances single file, looking forward, with a *vuelta* at each corner. As typical for these priest–diviner characters in any community, their step involves a hop and a deliberate raising of arms in unison with the legs, imparting a sense of greater energy.\(^8\) Unlike other personages in the San Cristóbal *Conquista*, this step never varies (though it does in other *municipios*) irrespective of the narrative context or other figures with whom they dance. In this opening dance, Ajitz may continue to carry the *incensario*. Otherwise he will display a chain with his *hacha* (axe) and possibly his idol.

As Ajitz and Chiquito move down the dance ground, the Court group enters and follows in the same counter-clockwise direction. Court members dance in their usual lateral line, facing forward, maintaining that line as they turn corners. All members use the same step, shaking their *platos* only

\(^8\) At San Cristóbal, for the Ajitz pair’s step, the right foot moves forward and extended to land on the heel with a hop as the right hand is extended up and forward. The right foot then retracts slightly to be planted fully. A step is taken with the left foot and then another with the right. Now the left foot leads with the extension and heel tap, also extending the left hand. The left foot then retracts slightly to be planted fully. A step is taken with the right foot and then another with the left, then changing again to the right foot leading.
when the left foot goes forward and touches the ground. Although the four youths will use different steps when they dance without him, Rey K'iche' will not vary his step until the closing dance.

When the Court group has danced away from the entrance, the Caciques begin their dance in the same direction, single file. The Caciques dance instead facing to the side, and shifting at regular intervals between facing inward toward the dance ground and outward away from it, which is also toward the audience. The Cacique's dance step is enhanced as dancers flex their knees and rise up slightly on their toes before taking the leading step. The plato is shaken with each foot movement but only while the left foot leads and the dancer faces outwards. While this may be considered the basic Cacique step for the San Cristóbal Conquista, many of the other dances in which they take part involve significant variations.

As the dance step of Ajitz and Chiquito is more energetic, the pair of priest–diviners gets ahead of the other two groups. These other groups are given time to catch up by two methods. One is using a wide space to perform the vuelta, thus covering much more ground so that the movement takes more time. The other is to break from the circuit and dance about the centre of the field, a practice only permitted to the priest–diviners.

---

9 In the dance of the Court members, the right foot goes forward hitting only the heel, then partly to the right side coming down on the whole foot. The left foot then comes forward and towards the right side in a normal step. The right and left foot repeat in the same fashion a second time. The third time, after the right foot has gone forward with the heel the change occurs. The right foot is brought back leftwards and put down. Then the left foot takes the lead, landing forward on the heel and partly to the left side on the whole foot. Thus each foot performs the heel–touching three times in sequence before changing the leading foot. Also, as a group the lateral line of Court personages is moving not only forward but rightward when the right foot leads and leftward when the left foot leads.

10 When the Caciques are dancing counter–clockwise, progress in the circuit is rightwards with the right foot leading when they face inward, and leftwards with the left foot leading when they face outward. The leading foot is picked up and moved in the direction of progress. With a shake of the plato and a pause, the heel of the foot is tapped in front of the dancer then moved very slightly to the side in the direction of progress, but also slightly back. The other foot then arcs behind the leading foot, carrying the dancer farther back but also catching up with the progress made by the leading foot. The leading foot is then again picked up and moved in the direction of progress and the heel is tapped down, and so on. This process of leading foot tap and other foot arc takes place usually three times, then on the fourth a turn is made. After the leading foot taps down, the other foot, instead of arcing behind, turns slightly in the direction of progress. The leading foot then turns farther, causing the body to turn around. The other foot then becomes the leading foot, moving in the direction of progress and out in front to tap the heel. Overall an elegant rhythm is produced by the combination of a pause and plato shake when the heel taps down, and flexing the knees for all other steps.
The Court group completes two rounds, then beginning from the centre of the far side they dance along the central longitudinal axis to mount the stair used for accessing the Court platform. They continue dancing in place in front of their seats until the music stops.

After 1½ rounds, reaching the Court side, Ajitz and Chiquito perform a vuelta and dance diagonally from the Alvarado to the Ajitz corner, ending at the base of their high shrine platform. They remain at the base of the elevated platform in preparation for their solo dance which will follow shortly. The Caciques continue dancing up the Cacique side to the platform that represents Tekum’s palace. As the Caciques climb their ladder, a fairly slow operation made difficult by limited visibility through the eye holes of their masks, Tekum continues dancing solo near the ladder and the centre of the dance ground. When all Caciques have reached the top, Tekum stops dancing and signals with his plato for the musicians to stop, and then mounts himself. As he reaches the top, the Caciques bow to him, going down on one knee and spreading their arms low and wide in the usual gesture of respect. Tekum then takes his position at the centre of the back wall of his platform and the Caciques arrange themselves flanking him. If there is a bench at the back of this platform, the Caciques will be seated. This is the standard procedure for the Caciques to finish a dance and mount their platform so that it need not be explained in detail for later repetitions.

This opening dance is noteworthy for its stark difference from opening dances in the other communities studied. In those other three communities, the opening dance takes up to an hour rather than five minutes, as it involves a symmetrical organization in which each personage is first drawn into line by the Rey K'iche' and then, in reverse order, deposited in their proper position, thereby organizing dancers into distinctive groups at distinctive locations. In San Cristóbal, by contrast, the three groups always remain distinct: there is no interaction of other groups with the Rey K'iche', and they never join

11 The Court group may only complete only one round before moving to the central axis, which will also shorten the dances of the Ajitz group and Caciques.
into a single line until the last few seconds of the whole performance. The three groups not only remain spatially distinct throughout the dance but they also use very different dance steps and formations.

17.4.3. Prologue

Typically a distinct part or section of the *Conquista* begins with a dance and monologue by the most important character of its initial scene. Such dances thus represent introductions to a scene and its characters rather than travel between locations. As the Prologue will begin with a monologue by Ajitz, he and Chiquito first dance to introduce the scene. With their usual step and formation, they dance counter-clockwise 1 ½ circuits in order to again approach their temple platform on a diagonal axis. As the music stops, members of the Court sit, while both Ajitz and Chiquito then mount their temple platform, leaving the *incensario* on the ground.

A table is usually placed on the high temple platform floor and Ajitz, either sitting on a chair or squatting, lays out his divination equipment: the doll-like idol, the red *tz’ite* beans, and a large rock
crystal. He counts the beans into piles, each pile representing one of the 20 days in the Maya divinatory calendar, and then gazes into the rock crystal. He shows signs of distress then stands to open his monologue with "Mis trabajos se me empañan," (My labours have clouded [my eyes] ). Through divination, Ajitz has foreseen that his religion and his service to it will soon end. He returns to divine a second time then again stands and proclaims even worse prognostications. He foresees the coming of a strange army, the massacre of his people, their lands overrun. Ajitz divines a third time and now in greatest agitation, stands again and reveals that the K’iche’ nation will fall and its people will be enslaved.

Needing to communicate this vision to Tekum, Ajitz and Chiquito then descend from their platform and dance counter-clockwise to the son that is their “signature tune.” They dance a little more than 1 ½ rounds until they reach the centre of the Spanish side, where they do a vuelta and approach Tekum’s palace on its lateral axis. Ajitz and Chiquito climb the ladder to enter the palace platform, where they bow to Tekum with the usual gesture of respect. Ajitz then explains to Tekum the information he has received from the gods through his divination, announcing a foreign invasion and destruction of the kingdom.

Tekum is both incredulous at the prophecy and angered that Ajitz could conceive of the kingdom’s defeat. He orders Ajitz to speak with the gods again. As he takes his leave, Ajitz agrees to do as commanded, but repeats the prophecy that war and destruction are imminent.

Ajitz and Chiquito then bow, descend the ladder, and dance back to the mountain shrine represented by their temple platform. Dancing to a different son, Ajitz and Chiquito may or may not leave on the lateral axis of Tekum’s palace, then turn for a clockwise circuit, opposite to the direction of circulation they used in coming to Tekum. Again they dance to the Alvarado corner and then down the long diagonal to their platform on the corner of the far side.

17.4.4 Azteca
At this point the script used in San Cristóbal begins the Aztec scene. However in performance in 2014, the first time in over a decade that Azteca has been danced at San Cristóbal, Don Pancho decided to have the Azteca scene performed before the Ajitz prologue. This, he said, gave him more time as Ajitz to perform the divination that he interprets in the prologue.

Azteca arrives with the K'iche' dancers for the morning performance but does not take part in the opening dance. When it is finished, in this new ordering, he begins his dance to reach Rey K'iche' in his palace. From the far side of the dance ground, Azteca dances two counter-clockwise rounds, periodically stopping to look around quizzically, then enters the Rey K'iche's palace on the central axis. On July 25 he also demonstrated his confusion by overstepping the palace entrance, retreating too far in the direction he had come, and then finally finding the stairway onto the platform. In the text for this scene, Azteca has come as an emissary of the Aztec emperor Motecuhzoma. He brings a letter and asks Rey K'iche' for permission to enter his service.

Rey K'iche' however sends Azteca on to Tekum. Azteca dances a round counter-clockwise, then another quarter round to enter Tekum's palace on the lateral axis. After considerable trouble figuring out the ladder, Azteca climbs up

---

12 As Don Pancho demonstrated Azteca's step for me, the right foot is raised high with a hop on the left foot, and takes a big step forward to become the leading foot, as the body turns to face left. Then a rocking or back-and-forth motion is created by raising and lowering the left foot, then right, then left, then right, all with the foot raised high and a slight hop on the other foot. At this point the change takes place, as the left foot is raised high and brought forward to become the leading foot, with the body now turned to the right. The rocking motion is accomplished again by alternately raising the right and left feet, each twice, before the right foot again leads. At some points, especially while the right foot is leading, Azteca will stop and timorously look around with jerky motions of the head. The Azteca dancer added additional features to the periods when he stops and looks around, resting the back foot only on the toe and holding his right hand to his ear.
to the platform, bows, and dialogues with Tekum, who accepts Azteca into his service. Azteca then sits on the edge of the platform next to the wall closest to the far end of the dance ground and the temple of Ajitz. In the revised ordering, as soon as Azteca sat down in 2014, Ajitz began the prologue.

17.4.5. Part I

17.4.5.1. Introductory dance

The introduction to Part I involves both the Court and Cacique groups and provides an opportunity for interaction between Tekum and Rey K'iche', thus acting as a prelude to what will follow. As the first scene of Part I focuses on Rey K'iche', with two long monologues, the son to which this introductory dance occurs may be understood as the Rey K'iche' theme. While this introductory dance is taking place, Ajitz and Chiquito climb to their platform and Ajitz begins divining again, obeying Tekum’s orders.13

13 Once in 2012, Ajitz and Chiquito stayed below and joined the dance.
As the dance begins, the four Court youths stand up, face toward Rey K’iche’ and bow to him, then all five descend to dance their usual step in their usual lateral line formation. They dance down the Court’s longitudinal axis and when they reach the far side turn right to begin a clockwise circuit. As the Court group moves up the Spanish side, the Caciques descend from their platform and line up on the Cacique side, arranged with Tekum closest to the Court platform. As the Court reaches the Tekum corner, Rey K’iche’ steps out in front of the Court line and moves toward the Tekum corner as Tekum also comes forward to meet him. The other Court members and Cacique dance in place while Tekum and Rey K’iche’ dance slow vuelta, face to face and circling while holding up and crossing their respective attributes (sceptre and flag). In this pose, they first perform one rotation counter-clockwise and then reverse to perform the second clockwise.14 Rey K’iche’ then rejoins his line, which reverses direction and begins dancing a counter-clockwise circuit. At the same time Tekum rejoins his Cacique line and leads them in the same counter-clockwise circuit behind the Court. Both groups perform the particular steps that they used in the opening or entrance dance.

17.4.5.2. Scene 1: Q’umarcaaj

After 1 ½ rounds the Court reaches the centre of the far side and enters the central longitudinal axis as the approach back into the Court, climbing up when they reach it, and continuing to dance in place until the music stops. The Cacique group continues dancing counter-clockwise, coming up the Cacique side to enter Tekum’s palace with the usual Tekum solo as the others mount, and the usual bow of respect when Tekum reaches the top. If they have not done so before this point, Ajitz and Chiquito mount their shrine platform.

14 I have also seen the reverse: from clockwise to counter-clockwise rotations.
Members of the Court do not take their seats as their conversation dominates this scene. Rey K’iche’ first steps out in front of the youths and delivers his opening monologue “Valedme, Díoses, Valedme” (Help me, Oh Gods, Help Me). He has received a letter from the Aztec emperor informing him of Alvarado’s invasion. Rey K’iche’ envisions a resistance strategy of dissembling by pretending to submit, but he has little hope of success. When Rey K’iche’ has finished, the Princes and Malinches in turn each step in front of Rey K’iche’ and ask him to explain his sadness. He resists, saying they can not possibly help him. All four then bow in front of him to reinforce their entreaty. Rey K’iche’ gently raises them up and responds with his second monologue “Hijas mías Levantad” (Rise up my children)—and San Cristóbal is the only community in which I have seen this monologue recited or even suggested. In this speech, Rey K’iche’ goes into more detail concerning the content of Motecuhzoma’s letter, ending even more despondent than before. When Rey K’iche’ has finished his second monologue, the Malinches come in front of him and sing a song in reaction to the news he has revealed.

At this point a short scene is introduced that interrupts the Q’umarcaaj scene briefly and does not appear in older style texts such as used at Cunén or recorded at Cobán. It was introduced by the maestros of Cantel and thus also appears in the Joyabaj Conquista, and was probably later inserted into the alternate text used at Momostenango. In the Cantel revisions, Tekum is already aware of the coming invasion and its dangers. Speaking from his platform, Tekum voices his preoccupation and announces he will need a short sleep. The reason for this interruption and announcement will become apparent in the next scene with Tekum and the Princes.

Attention then shifts back to Q’umarcaaj where the Princes exclaim to Rey K’iche’ that valourous resistance against the Spanish is needed and announce that they will go to seek the aid of Tekum and his vassal Caciques. In unison the Princes bow to Rey K’iche’ and descend to the dance ground.

17.4.5.2. Scene 3: Quetzaltenango
The musicians begin playing a son distinguished by the Princes’ theme as the two youths dance down the central axis and then turn clockwise when they reach the far end. Their step in this dance may be considered the basic Princes step.\footnote{The Princes dance back to back and front to front, so while one Prince is leading with his left foot the other is leading with his right. Their step is a slight variation on the basic Cacique step, in that when the dancers face each other, the non-leading foot does not arc behind the leading foot. Instead, it moves forward slightly and to the side in the direction of progress. Also, when making the turn, the leading foot after tapping in front turns 90 degrees in the direction of progress, while the alternate foot is brought around the remaining 90 degrees, turning the body, as it is tapped down in front.} They dance alternately back to back and front to front. As they dance to Quetzaltenango, the other members of the Court dance in place, as do the Caciques all except Tekum, who is now sleeping. On the second round, when the Princes reach the centre of the Spanish side, they turn to approach Tekum’s palace on its lateral axis. The music stops as they reach the palace ladder and climb up, bowing to Tekum when they arrive. Immediately they wake Tekum and admonish him for his inattention to the imminent danger, an admonishment in the original text that has been interpreted over the centuries as indicating that Tekum is “asleep on the job.”

Still groggy from being awakened, Tekum asks if he is dreaming, but the Princes insist he immediately take charge of the nation’s defense. Tzunun, the highest ranking of Tekum’s vassal Caciques, seconds the Princes’ advice, insisting that they take up arms immediately to attack the invader. Shaking hands with Tzunun, the First Prince thanks him for his willingness and courage. Chávez, the next ranking Cacique, offers his military skills and the Second Prince shakes hands with him, offering his thanks. Cacique Tepe speaks next of his willingness to contribute and Tekum responds resolutely that
he will win or die in the coming battle, asking his gods for assistance. Tekum responds with short thanks to the following words of the final Caciques, Saquimux and Ixcot,

When the Caciques have finished demonstrating their loyalty it is the turn of Ajitz, who speaks to Tekum from his temple platform. Ajitz suggests that he and Tekum go together up the mountain to hear what the gods will say, as he is more and more terrified at the omens he has read in the appearance of various birds. Tekum again responds to Ajitz's fears with courage, and invites the Caciques to come with him to Q’umarcaaj for an audience with Rey K’iche’, to which, in unison, they assent.

17.4.5.4. Scene 3: Q’umarcaaj

The Princes bow to Tekum and descend his Palace platform, followed by Tekum and the Caciques as well as Azteca, while simultaneously Ajitz and Chiquito also descend from their high platform. All assemble in front of Tekum’s Palace. As the music begins they dance outward along the lateral axis, with the Princes in front, followed by the Caciques and then Azteca, finishing the line with Ajitz and Chiquito, the latter pair carrying the axe in their right hand and chain in the left. When the two groups reach the Spanish side, they turn counter clockwise, dancing 1 ¼ rounds to the centre of the far side and then turning up the longitudinal or central axis to approach the Q’umarcaaj Court. The Princes, Caciques and the Ajitz pair each dance their respective customary steps in their customary formations, including vueltas for Ajitz and Chiquito. Rey K’iche' and the two Malinches are meanwhile dancing in place.

The music stops as the dancing group climbs into the palace. As the Princes bow to Rey K’iche' and return to their places at his sides, the Caciques, Azteca and the Priests line up in front of him, single file, and all kneel and bow in respect. Ajitz and Chiquito do not face outward for protection as they do
in the other *municipios* studied. After Tekum formally greets Rey K’iche’, he and the others are asked to rise and each in turn affirms his loyalty. These end with a speech by Ajitz, proclaiming his magical powers, showing Rey K’iche’ the rock crystal that allows him to see elsewhere or into the future. Ajitz then announces that he will again go to his temple and, offering sacrifices, ask the gods for guidance.

The Malinches then sing of their hopes that the volcano will engulf Alvarado and his men. Tekum speaks at length with Rey K’iche’, offering to lead a resistance to the invaders. The Malinches sing another verse of their song, after which Rey K’iche’ reveals his fears that the Spaniards will crush his nation and kill him. Tekum tells Rey K’iche’ to stop crying like a child, and that his followers will defend the nation valiantly. They may die, he says, but everyone dies and returns to Mother Earth. Tekum tells Rey K’iche’ to guard the capital while he marches to confront the invaders. After the Malinches repeat their previous verse, Tekum and the *Caciques* kneel and Rey K’iche’ hands Tekum the flag as a symbol of his command. As he stands to take the flag, Tekum promises to destroy the invading force. At this point, since all of the performers present are on the stage together, the group often breaks for refreshments. When they are finished, the musicians begin playing as the *Caciques* with Azteca, Ajitz and Chiquito descend for their return to Tekum’s palace in Quetzaltenango.

*17.4.5.5. Scene 4: Quetzaltenango*
For its return dance, the Cacique group departs on the longitudinal Court axis and at the far side turning clockwise. In this stately dance, the leading foot is raised with a small hop, and a dramatic pause is taken before each turn-around. The plato is shaken very softly and less often when the right foot leads, but when the left foot leads it is shaken loudly with each step of either foot. Azteca, Ajitz and Chiquito follow with their usual step, the latter pair again holding the axe in their right hand and chain in the left.

After nearly a full circuit, the Caciques reach the Tekum corner and turn diagonally, dancing to the Quirijol Corner. They continue clockwise up the Spanish side to the Alvarado corner and dance diagonally to the Ajitz corner. They turn up the Cacique side and when reaching its centre climb up the stairway into Tekum's palace with the usual Tekum solo as the others mount and bow as he climbs up. Ajitz and Chiquito meanwhile have stopped at their corner and climb their temple platform. Tekum then paces as he begins a speech with the musical couplet, “Ya mis Caciques aliados, pronto saldremos al Pinal” (Now my allied Caciques, we will soon leave for El Pinal). In this speech Tekum organizes his vassals' participation in the coming battle.

After each of the Caciques speaks in turn to Tekum to demonstrate his loyalty and support, Ajitz has another elaborated speech from his high platform. He again sees a dire future but promises to fly to the Spaniards in the form of a quetzal to harass them. He also promises to use his sacred tz’ite divination seeds to bewitch them. In the traditional texts, Ajitz’s promise to harass the Spaniards ends the scene, but in the Cantel-derived text used in San Cristóbal, another very powerful speech is added for Tekum that begins, “Fuerza, valor” (Force, valour) and ends with the couplet “Cavaré mi sepultura con gloria por el Quetzal” (I will dig my grave to the glory of the Quetzal).

---

The step for this dance involves raising the leading foot very high with a small hop while the other foot pivots on the heel slightly away from the leading foot. The leading foot is then placed down flat and slightly forward in the direction of progress. The other foot then comes forward to the side of the leading foot as both feet pivot slightly on the heel in the direction of the leading foot. This is done seven times before the change. For the change of direction, the dancer makes a distinct pause, takes a small step with what had been his leading foot, and switches the leader to the other foot swinging it around in front of the body, raising the new leading foot with a hop. Thus at the same time that the leading foot is changed, the direction the body faces also changes. When the right is the leading foot, the dancer's body faces diagonally forwards and outwards. When the left is the leading foot, the body faces diagonally forwards and inwards.
As a lunch break is to follow, this part ends with an exit dance. Ajitz has promised to travel to the Spanish so it is he and Chiquito who perform this dance. Ajitz and Chiquito thus descend from their platform and Ajitz takes up the *incensario*. They dance counter-clockwise circuits, while others dance in place. At the conclusion they advance on a diagonal to the exit, then turn and bow. Don Pancho then leaves for his house while other dancers remain and eat on the main palace platform with food provided by some of the dancers’ wives and other collaborators. The musicians may join Don Pancho at his house for lunch or another family may bring lunch for them, depending on who has volunteered to provide their lunch on a particular day.

17.4.6. Part II

17.4.6.1. Scene 1: Entrada

After lunch the Spaniards dress at Don Pancho’s house and when ready, march in single file behind Ajitz to the dance ground. There is no accompaniment when the musicians have remained in the dance ground to eat. Ajitz carries the smoking censer to which chilli peppers are added as he nears the dance ground. During the performance of the second part he will harass the Spaniards with the irritating smoke.

This group of Spaniards will arrive at the dance ground around 2 pm. As noted in the instructions recorded in the dance script, formerly the Spaniards arrived on horseback. The *Caciques* often continue relaxing in the back rooms of the Court platform as they will not be needed for more
than a half hour. From 2012 on, the afternoon section has also been distinguished by two large ceramic vessels holding offering fires of candles, incense and ocote wood, placed symmetrically on either side of the stage platform near the front.

As soon as the musicians see the Spaniards at the entrance to the dance ground, they begin playing a march. The *chirimía* in this piece is designed to sound as much like a clarion trumpet as possible. The *tambor* is made to sound more like a snare drum (*caja* or *caja redoblante*) by stretching a chain across the drumhead and using the bare wood of the butt ends of the drumsticks. However in some years an actual snare drum is used for this march instead. The Spaniards march with their swords held vertically, resting on their shoulder. However, Portocarrero, at the centre of the Spanish line, carries the Spanish flag at his shoulder instead.

The Spaniards march a complete circuit clockwise and then on the second circuit add diagonals. They march up the Spanish side, diagonally down from the Alvarado to the Ajitz corner, up the *Cacique* side, diagonally down from the Tekum to the Quirijol corner, and up the Spanish side. As they march, Ajitz parodies their movement and harasses them with the *chilli* smoke from the censer. Ajitz and Chiquito or, if Azteca is present, Ajitz and Azteca also target Quirijol and Moreno for some slapstick physical confrontation and sword play. Moreno is sometimes danced by a child, so that he is more evenly matched in confrontations with Chiquito. Quirijol, who follows, cannot be danced by a child as he has a much larger role to play, so he is Ajitz’s target.

When the marching has stopped, Alvarado steps out and, pacing in front of his officers, delivers his first speech, “*Caballeros y Señores, Hijos leales de España*” (Knights and Gentlemen, Loyal sons of Spain). For this speech the traditional form appearing in older texts is retained. Alvarado assures his
officers of victory, and when he asks that the drum be sounded, the tamborista on the platform obliges. Likewise when he asks for the “clarin de la fama” (clarion trumpet of fame) the chirimiista responds. After warning his officers against local defensive military strategies, Alvarado dedicates the campaign to the goal of baptizing all of the Indigenous people.

Each of Alvarado’s officers must now be introduced and demonstrate their commitment to the campaign. The sequence begins when Carrillo steps out of line and marches counterclockwise a full circuit to reach Alvarado. A drum roll is maintained throughout the march except that it changes to a steady beat when Carrillo turns a corner. Carrillo and Alvarado exchange salutes with their swords. Carrillo then delivers an augmented form of his text and Alvarado responds, then Carrillo delivers an added text to conclude. After Carrillo and Alvarado exchange another sword salute, Carrillo does an about-face and, as the drum roll resumes, he marches back clockwise, this time passing behind the Spanish line to reach his position. As soon as he has returned, Cardona steps out and follows the same procedure, and so on down the line through Quirijol. Ajitz and Chiquito take special pains to harass Moreno and Quirijol as they march. In the older texts, Quirijol gives a comic speech, arguing that his courage is demonstrated by his monstrous appetite, but in the Cantel/San Cristóbal text the comic description of gluttony is altered to merely consist of bragging about his military prowess. When Quirijol has returned, Alvarado briefly steps out and, pacing, sheaths his sword, as do the rest of the Spaniards.

The instructions in the San Cristóbal script say that at this point the Spanish should dismount so that they can begin a dance. As the musicians begin this son, a dance associated with the Spanish soldiers that will be repeated several times, the Spaniards put their hands on their hips and Alvarado leads them in a clockwise circuit. The second circuit incorporates diagonals in their usual pattern. In this dance, the Spaniards follow a widespread trait of K’iche’ dances for the Conquista, facing alternately outward and inward rather than forward. The sequence of steps and taps fits the melody so well that the dancers are able to dance in admirable unison.

---

17 Because they are dancing clockwise at this time, when they face inwards the left foot leads and progress is to the left, then when they face outwards, the right foot leads and progress is to the right. The dance step is characterized by having the leading foot first extended in front of the body with the
When the dance has finished, Alvarado steps out and paces before his followers to deliver a second speech. This speech is a Cantel invention. In other Cantel amplifications, like that used in Joyabaj, there will be four speeches, one for each side of the dance ground, but in San Cristóbal only two are used, and both are given on the Spanish side. Alvarado speaks of defeating the K’iche’ king who he calls an animal, as he asks for his followers’ loyalty. In this addition, there is no mention of the religious motivation. The Spaniards affirm their loyalty in unison.

17.4.6.2. Scene 2: Spanish Camp

This scene begins with a second Spanish dance that is identical to the previous dance in step and choreography. During this dance, Ajitz and Chiquito ready their divination and Azteca moves from a position in front of the platform of Tekum and the Caciques to attend Ajitz. The divination table\(^\text{18}\) is set up on the central axis, but nearer to the far end, indicating that it is an aspect of Ajitz’s shrine. Here also the function of this shrine as an elevated lookout is emphasized, as Ajitz is serving as a sentry for

---

foot and taps again. The leading foot is then brought back behind the body to be placed down. The other foot is brought around behind the leading foot so that it is put down on the progress side. The leading foot then moves in the direction of progress to tap down, etc. Progress is thus made both when the leading foot is first brought forward and tapped, and when the other foot crosses behind it. For the turn, the leading foot makes the first tap as usual, then rotates so it faces in the direction of progress. Then the other foot is brought around to complete the turn and become the leading foot, at the same time that it makes the first heel tap of the repetition. This basic Spanish dance step shares with the basic Cacique dance step both tapping of the leading foot and arching behind of the other foot. The main differences are the faster speed of the Spanish dance step, the double tap rather than single tap and pause, and the turn every second step of the leading foot.

\(^\text{18}\) If a table and chairs were used on the elevated ceremonial platform, they will be lowered by a rope at his point.
When the table and chairs are properly placed, Ajitz sits on the side towards his shrine, across from Chiquito. He spreads a cloth over the table and on it places the quartz crystal and idol. The bag of tz’ite seeds is then opened and emptied, and a handful of seeds are arranged into groups representing the twenty days of the Maya divinatory calendar.

When the Spanish dance ends, Alvarado steps forward and announces that before beginning this war, he will send an embassy to the enemy. Carrillo steps forward to a position in front of Alvarado and offers to undertake this mission. Alvarado thanks him and appoints Cardona to accompany Carrillo. Cardona then steps out next to Carrillo and agrees. Carrillo and Cardona are then referred to as the “Ambassadors” for the rest of Part II.

Alvarado now steps out from the line and passes between Carrillo and Cardona, who then take up positions on either side of him. With swords unsheathed, they pace up and down the dance field as Alvarado explains what his “Ambassadors” are to say. Alvarado explains that he has been sent by Cortés to convert the population and establish Spanish authority in the land. If the K’iche’ refuse either condition there will be war and they will lose everything. When this conference is finished, Alvarado returns to his place in line while the two Ambassadors again stand before him, taking their leave as he wishes them a safe journey. All three salute with their swords and the ambassadors depart.

17.4.6.3. Scene 3: Q’umarcaaj

The Ambassadors sheathe their swords and place their hands on their hips to begin their dance. The step is the same as for the previous joint Spanish dances, however the pair of ambassadors dances alternately face to face and back to back as did the pair of Princes earlier.

When the ambassadors have danced a full clockwise circuit and are at the “front” or Court side near the entrance to the
Court platform, the music stops and the Malinches sing a song, a capella as usual. However, for the song in Spanish used in older texts, San Cristóbal has substituted a song in K'iche' Maya. The song addresses Tekum as Balam (Jaguar) and appears to be a melody of more recent style. Considered a joyful song, it celebrates the arrival of Tekum from Chwi Mek’ena (Totonicapán) and suggests dancing to celebrate. The Spaniards wander down the length of the field, looking around to discover the source of the sweet sound, but drawing their swords in case it portends a threat. By the end of the song, the Spaniards have wandered back to the Court side and are ready to resume the dance.

The Ambassadors sheathe their swords and dance a second clockwise circuit until they reach the centre of the far side, then advance along the central longitudinal axis. As they reach the Court platform, the music stops and they ascend. Thus as in other communities, the ambiguity of the Ambassadors meeting the Princes and Malinches on their way to Tekum’s palace is solved by having them appear at the court of the Rey K’iche’ in Q’umarcaaj which, though geographically impossible, would follow Maya protocol. There is naturally no text for interaction with the Rey K’iche’ so in some communities like Momostenango the Ambassadors and Rey K’iche’ pretend to hold a conversation. No such pretence is affected at San Cristóbal, so the Rey K’iche’ does not engage at all with the Spanish Ambassadors.

When the Ambassadors have entered the palace, the Malinches sing their usual song asking the volcano to destroy the Spaniards. When the Spaniards call out, asking why such beautiful women should say such violent things, the Princes advise the Malinches to be silent. As the Second Prince asks the Spaniards their purpose he also threatens them, and both Princes attack the Spanish Ambassadors, fighting sceptres to swords. Carrillo desists from harming the Princes, considering their youth, but Cardona, enchanted

19 Francisco Rodolfo Hernandez, personal communication, 2014.
with the Malinches' beauty states he would like to stay with them. As he says this, Cardona steps behind one of the Malinches but Carrillo, admonishing Cardona, pulls him away, and both Ambassadors descend.

17.4.6.4. Scene 4: Lookout and Quetzaltenango

The ambassadors again dance counter clockwise, completing a full round, then from the centre of the Court side passing down the longitudinal axis to the far side. Although in reality they have passed Ajitz at his divination table several times so far, story-wise up to this point they have been nowhere near Quetzaltenango where Tekum is stationed. Thus only now can they see Ajitz and they react to what they see as strange appearance and behaviour.
The San Cristóbal text has been altered from the older versions, so instead of telling Ajitz to stop hopping (brincar) they tell him to stop performing witchcraft (brujear). They act out this order by attacking Ajitz and Azteca (or Chiquito) who leave their chairs and use their hand-held attributes to defend themselves, before the situation calms down enough to dialogue. Ajitz’s reply to the Ambassadors’ request for an audience with Tekum is also augmented and includes a statement that he will disarm the Spaniards before he leaves to advise Tekum of their request to speak with him. This disarming process thus occurs at an earlier place in the San Cristóbal dance than it does in other versions of the Conquista, and it means that the Ambassadors cannot act as sentries when Ajitz leaves to speak to Tekum, as they do in other localities.

As Azteca takes Ajitz’s seat at the divination table, Ajitz struggles with Carrillo and manages to steal his sword, leaving Carillo to cringe and cower at Ajitz’s power. Ajitz may insult the Spaniard by using the sword to wipe his behind, before he throws it toward the table. From Carillo Ajitz turns to Cardona, leaving Carrillo free to hassle Chiquito. In 2013 it became standard at this point for Carrillo to spin Chiquito around and then set him down. In his dizziness, the child Chiquito staggers and weaves towards his chair, drawing much laughter from the crowd of spectators. After Ajitz struggles to obtain Cardona’s sword, he may wipe Chiquito’s behind with it and throw it down as well.

Safety assured, Ajitz instructs Azteca very carefully to guard the divination table against the possible depredations of the two Spanish Ambassadors. Ajitz and Chiquito then dance to Tekum. Ajitz first kneels and bows to the sacred divination table, then circumambulates counter-clockwise before leaving on a lateral axis. When they reach the Spanish side, Ajitz and Chiquito turn clockwise to dance two rounds. Then, reaching the centre of the Spanish side, they approach Tekum’s palace on the lateral axis. After mounting the platform and bowing to Tekum, Ajitz explains the purpose of their visit. Tekum agrees to let
While Ajitz and Chiquito speak with Tekum, the Ambassadors desecrate the divination table. 2013.

The Ambassadors get Azteca drunk. 2014.

The Spaniards enter only if blindfolded. When this conversation with Tekum has concluded, Ajitz and Chiquito bow to Tekum and descend to the dance ground.
Meanwhile, in the absence of Ajitz and Chiquito, the Spanish Ambassadors approach the divination table. They distract and befuddle Azteca, then force him to drink strong liquor which puts him to sleep. Thus helpless the Ambassadors drag Azteca out of his seat and onto the ground. They take the rope that had been used to lower the table from the temple, and with it they bind Azteca’s wrists and ankles, placing the bow and arrow back in his hands for fun. Then they begin desecrating the table by taking the idol and the crystal and placing them on Azteca’s chest or abdomen. Then they put the tz’ite seeds in the bag and use it to shine each other’s shoes. Finally they overturn the table, stack the chairs on it, lay the swords over the chairs and the cloth over the top and then add onto it discarded plastic garbage that they find on the dance ground.

Note that in previous years when Azteca has not been danced, a different scenario was enacted. As soon as Ajitz and Chiquito begin mounting the ladder to Tekum’s palace, the Ambassadors go to the table and begin to examine its contents to see where Ajitz’s power lies. They peruse the divination crystal, wondering how it might be used, and put the divination beans back into the bag. Then they decide to hide these sources of Ajitz’s power, finding likely places in or at the edge of the dance ground. In some years they also hide the idol. Returning to the divination table, they overturn and desecrate it as described in the previous paragraph. Finally, they tie Ajitz’s rope to the table and drag it around.

Having finished their dialogue with Tekum, Ajitz and Chiquito descend the platform and dance out the lateral axis then turn clockwise. After completing 1 ¼ rounds they
arrive at the Alvarado corner and dance diagonally along the temple axis to reach the table and Ajitz again bows to honour it. There they find the desecrated table and bound Azteca. Ajitz empties out the garbage, swords, and chairs. Ajitz then unties Azteca, and tries to sit him up. When Azteca cannot stand Ajitz checks his legs to see if they are broken. Finding the legs intact, he raises the loincloth to check for signs of life there, to the audience's hilarity. As Azteca is clearly alive, Ajitz fans him with the cloth used to cover the table. Then he stands Azteca up with Chiquito's help, and pumps his arms up and down to get the oxygen circulating. Semi-revived, Azteca sits in the chair while Ajitz finishes restoring the table, placing it upright with the cloth on top. While the order of actions is fairly structured in this scene, there is much comic improvisation designed to entertain the crowd.

In the years before Azteca danced, the scenario was of course different. After setting up the table, Ajitz realizes that some of his divination equipment is missing. He accuses the Ambassadors who just shrug their shoulders in denial that they had anything to do with the missing items. Ajitz then searches the Ambassadors against great resistance. As this search turns up nothing, Ajitz takes from his morral (shoulder bag) a much smaller rock crystal and gazes into it to determine the whereabouts of the larger crystal. He then knows exactly where to look and immediately fetches the crystal. Then using the large crystal he can also divine the location of the tz’ite bean bag, which he also recovers. Some of the hiding locations I have seen include behind a fence post, on the Court and musician platform, or with one of the Spaniards remaining in line. Once he found the Rey K’iche’ was holding the idol. Carrillo is normally danced by Frank, youngest of Don Pancho’s sons, who reveals the hiding place to his father while he is being searched.20

Ajitz replaces his equipment on the table and then announces to the Ambassadors the condition Tekum has set. The ambassadors see this as an insult by an over-proud pagan but decide it is expedient to agree. Calling Ajitz a wicked Indian they assent to the blindfolding, at least in the text. In performance, they combine aggression with comedy, accompanying their words with slaps and wordless challenges so that Ajitz must chase and capture them, putting on the blindfolds as they cower or fight back and try to escape. Blindfolds in place, Ajitz gloats that the Spaniards are in his power, and pursues this advantage by binding a rope to their arms. As they are still resisting, he binds the other

20 There can be another break for refreshments at this point.
end of the rope around his waist. When both have been thus secured, he calls for music to accompany his dance and begins conducting the ambassadors to their interview. He first circumambulates the divination table and this time bows both on the Cacique and the Spanish sides before setting off.

The ambassadors will not dance and even resist being led, so that Ajitz just drag them from the front while clockwise circuits. At various points Ajitz pauses, turns around, and makes mocking dance gestures at the Ambassadors. These gestures are so clear and effective that my memory puts a smirk on Ajitz’s face though, of course, it is an unchangeable wooden mask.

When they reach the centre of the Spanish side, Ajitz turns in on the lateral axis of Tekum’s palace. At this point the Ambassadors’ resistance becomes intense, and Ajitz must use all his strength to drag them towards Tekum’s palace. When they reach the palace the music stops and Ajitz tries to drag his prisoners up the ladder. This is a point of maximum comedy, as the two Ambassadors, supposedly unable to see, are bound together so they must try to climb at the same time. They variously knock each other off or slip their legs

21 I have also seen this danced counter-clockwise at San Cristóbal.
through the ladder’s spaces, all while Azteca prods them in the buttocks with his pole. Peals of laughter are heard especially from children in the audience.

Once they have mounted the steps, Ajitz bows to Tekum and introduces the Ambassadors to him. When Tekum invites them to deliver their message they first insist on a seat, which Tekum angrily refuses as they are not of sufficient rank to sit in his presence. The ambassadors then deliver Alvarado’s terms which Tekum rejects. He claims his gods are superior to the Christian god and he will defeat the Spanish in battle, affirming also that he would rather die than reject his religion. Before they leave, the Ambassadors threaten that Tekum will receive his punishment in battle.

Ajitz, Chiquito and the Ambassadors then descend the ladder for the return to Ajitz’s sentry post. With Azteca, they dance out the lateral axis and after the usual vuelta they turn again clockwise completing a round and then dancing diagonally from the Alvarado corner to the table, again bowing at the two sides. Ajitz then frees the ambassadors from their rope and blindfolds. In returning their swords, Ajitz briefly challenges each to fight. Finally, while praising Tekum, he sends both Ambassadors off with a mighty shove.
Once Ajitz has finished his dismissal the Ambassadors begin dancing back to the Spanish camp. The Ambassadors leave from the Ajitz corner, dancing counter-clockwise. They now dance side by side with their arms linked and swords held out horizontally in front, facing forward, and using a new step. While they are dancing, Ajitz puts away the divination table and equipment.

When the Ambassadors reach Alvarado they salute with swords and the three officers again pace up and down the Spanish side of the dance ground to inform Alvarado of Tekum’s response. Alvarado then returns to his position and the three salute once more before Carrillo and Cardona take their places in the Spanish line. Alvarado then steps out of line and paces in front of the Spaniards as he affirms that Tekum is misguided and that he has planned the strategy for war. The rest of the Spaniards then individually come to Alvarado, salute, and respond to this announcement, beginning with Portocarrero and ending with Quirijol’s speech, bragging about his prowess in war and love. Alvarado then steps out and walks to the centre of the Spanish line and uses his sword to salute with his officers. All return their swords to their scabbards and Alvarado walks back to his post to lead the Spaniards in a dance. This Spanish dance is sometimes performed in exactly the same manner (step and choreography) as the two earlier examples, but in some cases introduces a new son and a new step. Whereas the earlier Spanish dance son is called the “Balonia” (after Bologna, Italy), in other

---

22 The leading foot is raised high with a simultaneous kick and hop then swing to the side and set down. The other foot catches up to the side of the leading foot. The leading foot takes a regular step forward. The other foot now becomes the leading foot raised high with a kick and a hop.

23 The step is danced facing forwards. When the right foot leads, as both feet hop the right foot is raised up and swung out to the right side as the left foot hops to the right. The raised right foot is then put down to the right side but a little behind. Then a normal hopping step is taken with the left foot.
locales, it is this second dance and son that are referred to as Balonia in San Cristóbal. In Momostenango they are called First and Second Balonia. The choreography is the standard one for Spaniards at San Cristóbal, a clockwise circuit for the first round and diagonals for the second round.

After the dance, Alvarado takes out his sword, as do the other Spaniards, and he begins pacing in front of his captains to deliver a speech in which he assigns each officer a particular duty in the upcoming battle. After he returns to the line, Quirijol steps out just in front of his place and turning towards Alvarado delivers a Cantel-invented speech that talks about soldiers stationed in various parts of Northwestern Guatemala under other Spanish officers. When he steps back into line Alvarado paces again and delivers his final speech of this part. Beginning “Espero en Dios de los cielos” (I trust in God in heaven), Alvarado kneels and raises his arms to the sky, then promises to win the land in God’s name. Alvarado resumes pacing and addresses his troops, giving assurance of his confidence in them. The Spaniards then respond in unison. Walking in front again, Alvarado and his troops again salute and sheathe their swords.

17.4.7. Part III

and a larger step with the right foot. Now the left foot takes the lead, raised up with a hop while the right moves to the left, and the left swung out to the left side and back. This alternation is continuous since the dancers always face forwards rather than turning for alternate directions.
59

17.4.7.1. Scene 1: Quetzaltenango

In San Cristóbal there is no break between Parts II and III, nor indeed between Parts III and IV. When Alvarado has finished his speech it is the signal for Tekum and his vassals to descend from their palace to perform the dance that introduces this part as a prelude to Tekum’s opening speech. As the third part does not include Spanish participation, the Spaniards are able to take a half hour break. Azteca, Ajitz and Chiquito may take part in this dance or climb Ajitz’s temple for a rest.

The Caciques move out from the palace along its lateral axis to the Spanish side and then turn counter-clockwise. As in most Cacique dances, they face alternately outwards and inwards. The second round is executed with the two diagonals as in the dance of Tekum’s return with the flag near the end of Part I. The dance concludes along the Cacique side with Caciques climbing into the palace while Tekum dances solo. When all or most Caciques have mounted, Tekum signals the musicians to stop. In 2013 he knelt and bowed before mounting the platform himself, to be greeted by a bow from the Caciques above.

Tekum then paces in front of the Caciques as he delivers a speech in which he announces his intention to send Tzunun and Ajitz to Q’umarcaaj to advise Rey K’iche’ of his decision to go to war to resist the Spaniards. Tzunun responds to Tekum with his willingness to comply and calls on Ajitz to join him. Ajitz, speaking from his ceremonial platform, refuses, confessing fear of the Spaniards. Ajitz’s comic speech of refusal in the older texts, as noted in the Cunén sequence, is replaced in this Cantel-derived version by a softened speech in which Ajitz balances his fear of meeting Spaniards on the way with his desire to stay with and protect Tekum. At this point the Cantel author inserted the only text for Ajitz

24 As the dance is counter-clockwise, when facing outwards progress is made with the left foot, and when facing inwards progress is made with the right foot. The step consists mainly of alternately lifting each leg, flexed at the knee, with a hop and then bringing it back to put down. Considering the leading foot as the one in the direction of progress, when it is put down it is slightly to the side so a slight bit of progress is made. But on the fourth alternation the turn is begun as the leading foot is turned 1/4 rotation as it takes a large step in the direction of progress. Thus if the dancer is facing inwards, when the right foot is lifted the fourth time it is put down to the right in the direction of progress and facing right. The left foot is then raised and swings around to complete the body turn to face outwards. At the same time it becomes the leading foot so the swing ends with the hop and extension that begins a step. When the left foot is put down, it is a step to the left, now the direction of progress. The main progress is thus made by the steps with both feet when the turn is made.
Chiquito who, unafraid, is willing to go. Tzunun descends from Tekum’s palace platform and waits while Ajitz and Chiquito descend from the high temple platform and walk up to join him. Instead of the flecha (joined bow and arrow), Tzunun now carries a representation of the Aztec bladed club (macahuitl) here called a macana.

17.4.7.2. Scene 2: Q’umarcaaj

Arranged in single file with Tzunun leading Ajitz and Chiquito, all three dance away from the palace on its lateral axis. Tzunun performs each vuelta with Ajitz: as Tzunun raises his macana and Ajitz raises his axe, the dancers cross the two implements and rotate in a counter-clockwise circle. Ajitz and Chiquito perform their usual step, facing forward. As a Cacique, Tzunun faces alternately inward and outward. Tzunun’s step in this dance, is the most difficult in the entire performance. After 1 ¼ round the trio reaches the centre of the far side and after a vuelta turns up the longitudinal axis to approach the Court. Another vuelta is performed at the court side and then the music stops as the trio climbs into the royal palace.

25 As the dance is clockwise, but the body is held at a diagonal, progress is made with the right foot when facing diagonally outwards and with the left foot when facing diagonally inwards. With a hop, the leading foot is raised and greatly extended in front, then put down a step in the direction of progress. The other foot then catches up to the leading foot. After three repetitions, the right or leading foot makes a small step and rotation while the other foot is brought around, turning the body inward and taking the lead with the hop and extension.
Tzunun and Ajitz kneel before Rey K’iche’. Tzunun formally greets him, after which Rey K’iche’ responds by asking Tzunun to rise. Tzunun explains the Spanish conditions in detail and announces Tekum’s refusal to comply, choosing armed resistance instead. Rey K’iche’ response is the older form in which he voices his horror and loss of courage, asserting that Tekum is now in charge. However, in essence contradicting this meaning, one word of the first line has been changed in the San Cristóbal script. Where in the early style texts Rey K’iche’ begins “Estoy con tanto pavor” (I am so afraid), in San Cristóbal the line reads “Estoy con tanto favor”. A similar change appears in the Joyabaj text where it reads more forcefully “Estoy con tanto valor”. Apparently for Maya performers it came to be considered inappropriate for the king to boldly state his fear.

Following Rey K’iche’s relinquishment of authority, Tzunun encourages him and the Malinches sing to cheer him up. Both Princes and Malinches voice an emotional response to their father’s despair. But these responses pain him even more deeply and he explains that his major fear is what will happen to his children when the Spanish come. To this response the Cantel author has added lines in which Rey K’iche’ calls upon the gods for assistance and Ajitz assures him of their aid. Tzunun then kneels again and formally bids farewell to the king and the trio descend to the dance ground for the return trip.
17.4.7.3. Scene 3: Quetzaltenango

With Tzunun again in the lead, the trio departs along the Royal Palace’s longitudinal axis and again turns clockwise. *Vueltas* are performed as before with elevated, crossed attributes. Tzunun now dances with the same step as the group *Cacique* dance that opened Part III. After 1 ¼ circuits the group reaches the centre of the Spanish side and turns along the lateral axis to approach Tekum’s palace. While Ajitz and Chiquito return to their temple, Tzunun climbs into the palace and bows to Tekum before reporting on the result of his mission. After Tekum invites Tzunun to rest the other *Caciques* voice their allegiance. Speaking from his temple platform, Ajitz proposes to bewitch the Spaniards.

17.4.8. Part IV

17.4.8.1. Scene 1: From Quetzaltenango to the Battlefield at El Pinal

As Tekum’s monologue opens Part IV, the introductory dance features the *Caciques* led by Tekum, along with Azteca who has rejoined Tekum’s *Cacique* group. The *Caciques* descend and may leave the palace on its lateral axis, then reaching the Spanish side turn counter-clockwise, or they may line up on the *Cacique* side up to the Tekum corner and dance counter-clockwise from there. After 1 ½ circuits of a slow, sombre and dramatic step called *Tres Pasos* 26 *Cacique* dancers reach the centre of the *Cacique* side and while the *Caciques* mount the platform of Tekum’s palace, Tekum dances solo. This *tres pasos* dance can take nearly fifteen minutes and is sometimes rewarded with applause. Tekum then mounts the

---

26 As the dance is counter-clockwise, the left foot leads when facing outwards and the right foot when facing inwards. The leading foot is raised and extended and the heel is tapped down in front before the foot is brought to the side. The other foot is extended forward then swung around to the side with the toe pointing downwards and sometimes tapped, finally crossing behind the other foot. The other foot now swings out and around to cross behind the leading foot. The leading foot does the same, alternating three times with the other foot. To make the turn the leading foot is raised and extended forward with a hop and the heel tapped down with a pause. The leading foot then rotates ¾ turn to face the direction of progress. The other foot is swung around behind, completing the body turn, and becoming the leading foot.
platform and after all the Caciques bow to him, he begins his monologue “Hecho un mar de conjunciones?” in which he explains that his dreams have brought him warnings of death in battle. He hopes to be victorious but, if not, he will die fighting. Each of the Caciques responds to Tekum’s speech with words of valour.

Following protocol, the San Cristóbal performance includes an unscripted despedida or sendoff prior to Tekum leading his troops to the battlefield. The four Court youths rise from their seats, turn in front of Rey K’iche’ and bow to him, then descend the steps to begin travel from the Royal Palace in Q’umarcaaj to Tekum’s palace in Quetzaltenango. The youths dance in the tight lateral line characteristic of the Court group, moving down the longitudinal palace axis and on reaching the far side turning clockwise. The son derives from the song, Balam, Balam, that earlier attracted the attention of the Ambassadors. After 1 ¼ circuits the dancers reach the centre of the Spanish side and proceed on the lateral axis to Tekum’s palace. As the music stops they mount the steps and bow to Tekum. The Malinches then again sing the K’iche’ song, Balam, Balam, the tune of which accompanied their dance. Then all four youths offer verbal encouragement for which Tekum responds with thanks.

The four youths then descend Tekum’s palace platform in order to dance back to the royal palace at Q’umarcaaj. They dance along the lateral line outward from the Palace to the Spanish side and then turn counter-clockwise, dancing the same step they used in coming to Quetzaltenango.

---

27 Originally, this was “Hecho un mar de confusiones,” (Made a sea of confusion) but the post–1871 revisions do not ascribe any hesitation or confusion to Tekum, who remains heroically steadfast throughout.

28 The four youths dance in a line so they always face forwards. Their step is simple but effective when performed in tight unison. The right foot is raised with a hop over to the left front of the left foot, turning the body diagonally to the left. The right foot and body rotate back to forward position and the foot is put down in front with a slight advance. Next the left foot is raised with a hop and the body rotated diagonally to the right. Again the body rotates back to front position and the foot is put down in front with another slight advance. This alternation repeats throughout the dance.
Following the youths, the *Caciques* and Azteca descend Tekum’s palace platform to travel to the battlefield. Ajitz and Chiquito descend from their elevated ceremonial platform to join the *Caciques*. In this dance, Tekum carries the flag as usual, while the *Caciques*, Azteca, Ajitz and Chiquito all carry sticks which they will use to fight the Spaniards. Flag and sticks are held upright against the shoulder for this dance. After 1 ¼ rounds, reaching the centre of the far side, the Court youths turn up the longitudinal axis to approach the Q'umarcaaj Court and climb up when they reach it, then bow to Rey K'iche' and join him in dancing in place. The *Caciques* follow the same route but do not take the central axis, and instead continue to the *Cacique* side, lining up near the Court end. The *Caciques* in this dance use a step similar to that of the four youths.²⁹ Azteca, Ajitz and Chiquito also follow the *Caciques*, using their own accustomed steps, and take their places at the end of the *Cacique* line in preparation for battle. Tekum then steps out in front of the *Cacique* line and while pacing addresses his followers with words of encouragement, to which the *Caciques* respond in unison.

²⁹ The *Cacique* step in this dance involves the same hopping extension with alternating feet as the youth’s dance except that the body does not rotate with each hop and after three alternations on each side dancers change direction between facing inwards and facing outwards. Thus on the turn, the leading foot is raised with the usual hop but rotated ¼ turn in the direction of progress before it is put down. The other foot swings around to complete the body rotation and become the leading foot, hopping with the front extension and then put down at the side.
The Spaniards now likewise proceed to the battlefield at El Pinal (or the Llanos de Pinal, translated as “Pine Flats). Dancing the Balonia (see above) in their usual choreography, clockwise on the first circuit and the usual diagonals on the second they end up in their usual formation and location, but now representing their part of the battlefield.

When the Spaniards are in place, Alvarado steps out and paces to address his officers. In this Cantel-augmented speech, Alvarado plans to surprise the K'iche' in the narrow pass [entering Palajunjnoj] that they have occupied, discharging weapons from the front while Portocarrero leads a squadron around them. The K'iche' will thus be surrounded and massacred. Survivors will pay tribute as punishment for their defiance. As Alvarado steps back into place each of his officers in turn comes to him to show their commitment to the battle plan. Quirijol at first assures Alvarado that his group will secure the defensive wall but gradually reveals his more cowardly and servile nature, preferring to trade in his weapons for shoe polish and a good brush.

17.4.8.2. Scene 2: Battlefield at El Pinal
The Spanish now march to the appropriate music imitating the clarion and snare drum, and in the usual formation with a clockwise circuit and then a second circuit with diagonals, returning to the same position. After the march, a short speech by Alvarado, urging his followers on to victory, begins the battle scene.

The battle is loosely choreographed. Each skirmish begins with both sides shouting “Guerra, guerra” (War, war). As the musicians play a repetitive figure, the two sides come at each other, with each fighter confronting an opponent of equal rank (place in line). This includes Azteca confronting Moreno and Ajitz confronting Quirijol. Their weapons (stick and sword) clash, often three time up high then three times down low. After a few seconds, Tekum and Alvarado stop fighting and run down the field. The other fighters follow in order behind them so that the two lines are now in reversed order. The dancers resume fighting as they continue moving down toward the far end. As each pair reaches that end they begin running or walking back behind the remaining fighters to reform their lines at the side positions and in the usual order.

This choreography for a general skirmish initially repeats five or six times. In the breaks between, alternating leaders offer a speech. While some of these speeches are designed for a leader to animate his troops, others are intended as a challenge to the opposing leader. Two of these speeches are taken
from the older texts. In one, Tekum laments the number of fighters killed and asks Tzunun for advice. In another, Tekum invokes the furies of hell to take the place of the fallen soldiers.

After the fifth or sixth general skirmish Alvarado, pacing in front of his troops, remarks that “Me ha dejado sin caballo, este Tekum animal” (He has left me without a horse, this animal Tekum). Alvarado then asks Portocarrero to lend him a lance. Alvarado returns to his place at the head of the line and Portocarrero comes forward in front of Alvarado to fulfill this request, exchanging the Spanish flag he has been carrying for Alvarado’s sword. Tekum jeers from his side that he doesn’t need anyone to lend him courage. From now on, both Tekum and Alvarado will fight with flags.

This exchange also begins a series of five or six duels in the form of cruzadas, each also separated by a short speech. The cruzadas begin with Tekum in his own corner and Alvarado diagonally opposite Tekum in the Quirijol corner. The two leaders run at each other, clashing weapons in the centre, then continuing to the opposite corner. The two return to their usual corners for the intermediary speech, in the first instance by Alvarado. For the next cruzada, Alvarado stays in his usual corner while Tekum advances to the Ajitz corner. Alternately, the corner shift can be accomplished while speaking. These two diagonally opposed starting positions (Tekum at Tekum corner opposed to Alvarado at Quirijol corner, or Tekum at Ajitz corner opposed to Alvarado at Alvarado corner) will alternate throughout the five or six cruzada duels.

After the cruzadas there are four to seven more general skirmishes separated by speeches alternating Tekum and Alvarado, as before. Alvarado speaks before the last skirmish. He kneels and raises his arms to punctuate the opening words “En el nombre de dios soberano” (In the name of the supreme God). With this invocation the Spanish are granted success through divine assistance. This time the leaders do not reverse the line a second time, so that the two leaders remain at the far end in a protracted combat that ends with Alvarado mortally wounding Tekum.
17.4.8.3. Scene 3: Tekum’s Death and Burial

Immediately when Tekum is wounded the fighting stops and two Caciques rush to support him. At the same time, the Spaniards form up their line at the Quirijol corner, raise their swords to their shoulders and march from the Quirijol corner clockwise to occupy Tekum’s Palace at Quetzaltenango, completing a circuit and then entering along the lateral axis of Tekum’s palace. As uncouth foreigners (from the K’iche’ viewpoint) they sit and lounge in various positions within Tekum’s former abode. Quirijol instead climbs Ajitz’s high temple platform to serve as a sentry or lookout, a position that Ajitz had formerly held.

While Caciques rush to support Tekum, the Spaniards march to occupy Quetzaltenango. 2009.

While the Spaniards are marching, the two Caciques help Tekum stagger to a point a bit on the far side of the dance ground’s centre. They help Tekum remove his headdress and cape, while other Caciques rush to get a reed mat or petate and spread it on the ground for Tekum to lie down. When the Spanish
have ceased marching and the music has stopped, Tekum delivers his death speech, a romantic Cantel augmentation of the very terse original. In the new stanzas, Tekum laments those aspects of his royal life that he will never see again, bidding farewell to his sumptuous palace, sceptre and crown, and beautiful women. He also laments that he could not save his nation from the invader. As Tzunun grasps Tekum’s headdress and flag, Tekum is then helped to recline. Chiquito has lain face down at one end of the mat to serve as Tekum’s pillow. Tekum’s cape is laid over him as a blanket.

Tzunun kneels next to the body and touches Tekum’s chest as he wonders how Tekum was wounded. Tzunun then rises to announce that as he is now in command, he has decided to end the war and become Christian. The other Caciques wish to do the same. After announcing that he must go in person to Q’umarcaaj to bring Rey K’iche’ Tekum’s crown (headdress), Tzunun leads a solemn funeral march. The procession moves away from the centre to the Spanish side, then turns counterclockwise.30 After ½ circuit, the procession reaches the centre of the far side and then progresses along the longitudinal axis to the Court. Ajitz meanwhile has stayed on the battlefield to protect Tekum’s corpse.

---

30 The step for this march is simple. The right foot is brought forward and then the left foot joins it. Then the left is brought forward and the right foot joins it, in continuous alternation.
During this funeral march, the five members of the Court have prepared for Tzunun’s arrival by descending the steps and lining up in front of the platform, just to the Spanish side of the entrance stair. This space now represents the royal palace in Q’umarcaaj. Arriving at the platform, Tzunun bows and hands Rey K’iche’ the flag and crown and announces that he is presenting Tekum’s cadaver.

Tzunun’s announcement of Tekum’s death begins a segment staged very differently from all other communities’ Conquistas that I have studied. In this segment, Rey K’iche’, flanked by the four Court youths, leads the Caciques back to where Tekum sill lies. From the text and other performances it is clear that Tekum’s body is taken to Q’umarcaaj and presented to Rey K’iche’. But at San Cristóbal, Rey K’iche’ instead comes to the body counter-clockwise. Grasping both the headdress and flag in his left hand, Rey K’iche’ kneels to touch Tekum’s chest with his right hand to determine whether a heartbeat remains. When there is none, he delivers the customary farewell speech to Tekum “Amigo al fin vuestro brillo se mira desanimado” (Friend, in the end one sees your brilliance dulled). In this intimate juxtaposition between dead hero and his grieving father, the furrowed brow of Rey K’iche’s mask that had before expressed apprehension now, turned down toward Tekum, seems to project his anguished grief.

Rey K’iche’ then rises and backs up as Ajitz circles the mat. It is now time for this diviner-priest to bid farewell to his master. Despite the great distance between Q’umarcaaj and El Pinal, this movement cannot be considered travel, as no dance is involved. Instead, Court members walk slowly down the centre to the mat on which Tekum lies and circumambulate the body counter-clockwise. Grasping both the headdress and flag in his left hand, Rey K’iche’ kneels to touch Tekum’s chest with his right hand to determine whether a heartbeat remains. When there is none, he delivers the customary farewell speech to Tekum “Amigo al fin vuestro brillo se mira desanimado” (Friend, in the end one sees your
He first gestures as if to speak but without being able to find the words. He then kneels down and himself touches Tekum’s chest, signalling that the heart has stopped. At this point, Ajitz blends comedy with tragedy in his exaggerated wails as he wipes the tears from his eyes and recites his speech. As noted, this Cantel-originated speech refers to the monument to Tekum that was being planned in 1933 and the inception of which was celebrated by a performance of the Cantel group in Xela and the publication of their newly revised text.

During Ajitz’s speech Azteca and the Caciques go up to the Court platform to bring the coffin for Tekum. The coffin is set down laterally on the far side of the mat and Tekum is carefully lifted into it. The cape is taken from over Tekum’s body and draped on the coffin lid as it is closed. The mat is quickly taken away. Led by Tzunun, Azteca, Ajitz and the Caciques then carry the coffin in a second funeral procession to the place of burial, first advancing to the Spanish side, then turning counter-clockwise and after ¼ circuit turning up the longitudinal axis to the Court platform that now represents the mountain where Tekum was buried.31 Again Ajitz blends comedy with tragedy, wailing and shaking his shoulders as if convulsed with grief. The coffin is carried onto the Court platform and set down at the entrance to one of the dressing rooms where Tekum can more privately emerge from its confinement and take refreshment.

After stowing the coffin for Tekum’s burial the Caciques take up their flecha attribute and descend back onto the dance floor with Azteca and form a line for their dance. According to the story the burial has taken place away from Q’umarcaaj, so they must dance back to the Royal Palace. Tzunun leads the Caciques away from the main platform, since at this time it represents the burial place. Nevertheless, he follows the palace protocol by dancing down the central longitudinal axis, turning at the far side into a clockwise circuit. The step is the same as when the Caciques danced to the battlefield, and seems almost joyous after the sombre funeral marches. The Caciques proceed ½ circuit back to the Court side, where Rey K’iche’ and the Court youths await them, still in the dance

31 Tzunun leads with the same step as the previous march, while the pallbearers use a simple right–left alternation step.
ground before the Court platform, which once more represents Q’umarcaaj. Tzunun announces that he has fulfilled the command to bury Tekum with honours. Rey K’iche’ invites Tzunun to rest and sends the two Princes to bring Alvarado and his forces to make peace.

17.4.8.4. Scene 4: Lookout and Quetzaltenango

The Princes dance down the longitudinal axis and when they reach the far side turn clockwise. They dance up the Spanish side and when they reach the Alvarado corner turn onto the diagonal axis that leads to Ajitz’s elevated shrine platform. Their step is the same as when they danced to warn Tekum of the danger in Part I. At the same time Quirijol descends from this lookout position to meet them.

Quirijol agrees to take the Princes in to see Alvarado. He may lead them back along the diagonal axis or directly from this corner on a clockwise circuit. For this dance, the Princes hold their short sceptres behind their backs, while Quirijol puts his sword behind his back, held in place inside his elbows. While it is standard for Quirijol to use a special gesture in this dance when he acts as sentry, the position is unusual, contrasting with the “reconnoitre” gesture common to the other municipios. All three dance
forward using the same Balonia step used by the Spaniards when they came to the battlefield. When they reach the centre of the Spanish side, the trio come up the lateral axis to Tekum’s palace, at the base of which the Spaniards have lined up after descending the ladder.

The Princes then speak directly with Alvarado and deliver part of their message. The San Cristóbal text has a lacuna at this point because the text from which it was copied is missing four pages. The first lines that appear after the lacuna, “Caminemos pues para la iglesia” (Let’s walk to the church then), which are meant to be used at the end of the scene with Rey K’iche’, are instead spoken by Alvarado next to Tekum’s palace in order to initiate the dance to Q’umarcaaj.

17.4.8.5. Scene 5: Q’umarcaaj

The Princes lead this dance, moving out along the lateral axis and at the Spanish side turning counter-clockwise, performing the Balonia step. The Spaniards, using the same step, stay a good distance behind the Princes, since they are supposed to arrive earlier to start preparations for Alvarado’s arrival. After 1 ¼ circuits, the dancers reach the centre of the far side and progress up the longitudinal axis to the Court in Q’umarcaaj.
Members of the Court have remained lined up below the platform with the Caciques to their right. Alvarado thus comes directly up to greet Rey K'iche' while the other Spaniards line up to Rey K'iche's left.

17.4.9. Closing Dance

The final dance of peace is more flexible in its execution. Here follows the most complex version I have seen, but it can be greatly reduced to one or two segments. As the music starts again, Alvarado and Rey K'iche' raise and cross their flag staffs and dance a vuelta together. K'iche' and Spaniards then form a continuous lateral line, dancing forwards about 1/3 of the length of the dance ground and then backwards to the platform in an abbreviated variation of an honouring sequence. Rey K'iche' and Alvarado then link arms and proceed down the centre of the dance ground, followed by other pairs composed of a K'iche' and a Spaniard in descending rank order. They may then dance a full counterclockwise circuit, coming back to the court side, and then dancing down the field and out the exit, or they may go directly out.
17.5. Discussion

One particular feature that distinguishes the staging at San Cristóbal from other municipios is that the Cacique and Spanish lines, when they are positioned at the sides of the dance ground, are both oriented with the highest rank towards the head of the area, occupied by the platform representing Rey K'iche's palace. In other municipios, the highest rank is oriented towards the far end, where in Cunén and Joyabaj one finds the musicians, and where in general the staging suggests the church to which the K'iche' will advance at the conclusion to undergo baptism.

Another aspect of staging, concerns the ways in which added pantomimes negate its spatial logic. However, the use of three platforms at San Cristóbal results in different sorts of negations than in other communities. This contrast is first noted concerning Ajitz's tall temple platform. In the prologue, it is clear that this platform represents a temple, altar, or shrine on a volcano, so Ajitz must travel, through dance, to tell Tekum what he has learned through divination. But in Parts I-IV, the tall platform is treated as an extension of Tekum's palace, so that in Ajitz is able to speak to Tekum directly from his high position.

A more startling disjunction in the logic of staging occurs at Tekum's death, and it two ways. First, though Tekum dies in El Pinal, a great distance from Q'umarcaaj, Rey K'iche' is able to come to the battlefield to grieve. He cannot do this by dancing, which must obey the spatial logic of the staging.
structure, so he and the four youths walk to where Tekum lies dead. This is only part of the change in this portion of the dance-drama, which usually involves two funeral marches, both with coffins, first to bring Tekum to Rey K’iche’ and then to bury him. In San Cristóbal, only the second involves the coffin. Furthermore, the coffin is brought to the main platform, which now represents the burial place, whereas the space below and in front of the platform now represents the royal palace. Thus in the dance from the burial place to Rey K’iche’s palace, Caciques depart from the platform representing the burial place and return to the space in front representing the royal palace. Thus whereas the tall platform of Ajitz both is and is not distant from Tekum’s palace, the main platform both is and is not Rey K’iche’s palace.

I noted earlier that in comparison with the other municipios studied, dance segments for the Baile de la Conquista in San Cristóbal Totonicapán are characterized by generally simpler choreography but more complex and diverse steps. As can be seen from the diagrams punctuating the dance narrative in this chapter, the choreography does achieve some complexity when one considers the three different axes, focused not only on the platform representing Rey K’iche’s palace in Q’umarcaaj but also Tekum’s palace in Quetzaltenango and Ajitz’s altar, temple or shrine on one of the volcanoes overlooking the Samalá River Valley. So to be more precise, it is the drastic shortening and simplifying of the opening and closing dances that most distinguishes the choreography of the Conquista at San Cristóbal from that of other locations.

I believe that this simplification of the longest dance sequences, elsewhere designed to provide a non-narrative mood and setting for the drama, is designed to increase dramatic immediacy in combination with an equally distinctive use of the text. The Conquista at San Cristóbal is distinguished by a break from the usual stylized approach to declamation towards a more natural form of vocal acting. Further, of the four municipios studied, it is only at San Cristóbal that the complete text is given: all dancers, including the royal youths, memorize and recite their lines, and most do so with some degree of dramatic expression. As noted, San Cristóbal is thus the only location in which I have heard Rey K’iche’s “Levantad” monologue performed. So with the simplification of dances that contribute to mood rather than narrative, and emphasis on meaningful interpretation of the full text, San Cristóbal achieves a uniquely taut and dramatic balance of dance and recitation.

This more dramatic approach may be part of the legacy of Cantel. As noted, the Cantel team performed the Conquista at San Cristóbal until 1915, when a local group at San Cristóbal took over, but relations between the two communities’ Conquista remained strong, so that San Cristóbal took advantage of modifications to the text made at Cantel at least through 1933, when the monument reference was added. Cantel texts are designed to give greater weight and emphasis to the heroism of Tekum, through several added monologues as well as the prologue in which the characters of Tekum and Ajitz are more fully drawn through their contrast, as each provides a foil for the other. This has led to the choice of the two best actors for these roles: Don Pancho (Francisco Rodolfo Hernández) for Ajitz and
Don Chepe (José Gregorio Elías Chay) for Tekum. Don Pancho adds a spiritual gravity to the role of Ajitz, performing it in the style of a biblical high priest, while Don Chepe expels his heroic texts with volume and intensity. That this Cantel approach to representation of Tekum’s consistent heroism has been adopted at San Cristóbal is evident from the way in which Don Chepe heroically speaks Tekum’s most indecisive lines, when he seeks out Tzunun in the heat of battle, asking for advice on how to deal with the huge losses his army has sustained. In performance in San Cristóbal, Don Chepe does not seek out Tzunun for some quiet introspection but instead blares out these lines out as a challenge to all of his Cacique leaders. At the same time, as the figure of Ajitz has attained a much greater gravity, the role of a K’iche’ gracejo or buffoon at San Cristóbal has shifted to Azteca, shown to be timorous, easily startled, and generally clueless.

The consistency of these changes may be due in part to the nature of the group that dances the Baile de la Conquista at San Cristóbal. They are proud of a continuous heritage that has lasted for a century. Other charismatic figures have long guided the group as do today Don Pancho and Don Chepe, the autor and segundo autor. Both have involved many family members in the group. In 2014, Don Chepe performed Tekum, his son performed Alvarado, and his grandson was a Prince. All of Don Pancho’s children have participated and his sons Juan and Frank still do. Don Pancho even more than Don Chepe forms the heart and guide for the group as he fulfills four roles: as autor, maestro, chuchkajaw, and Ajitz. His son Juan Hernández hopes one day to inherit his father’s place and carry on this tradition. More of what this guidance has meant will be explored in the following chapter concerning the issue of folklore in San Cristóbal’s Baile de la Conquista.