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Chapter 3: A Brief Historical Sketch of Maya Public Ritual Dance and its Institutionalizations

If you were to walk into the central plaza of a Guatemalan city that is predominantly Maya, the *cabecera* or head town of a *municipio* (county), you would see several groups of dancers performing different dances in different costumes with different dance movements and instrumental accompaniments, increasing the pleasure of the patron saint and the likelihood of reciprocation of benefits to the community. Historically, the dances one sees within a single day in the present were created and adopted into the ceremonial repertoire of a *municipio* at very different times, even reaching into the pre-Hispanic past. Since their adoption, these dances have evolved, both independently and in tandem. Present performances thus encompass layers of history that can be "excavated" -using Garrett Cook's term¹—to help us learn something about the history of dance in these communities. Excavating the present to learn about the past is an important methodology in this study of the *Baile de la Conquista* and will be applied most intensively in the study of texts for the this dance in order to make some reasonable speculations on its origin and how it may have evolved over the last four centuries.

The Guatemalan *Baile de la Conquista* was most likely created the late 16th or early 17th century in the region of Quetzaltenango, a time and place that saw dramatic changes and innovations in Maya dances designed for public ritual occasions. Transcultural interchange between colonists, especially the regular orders of friars and the Indigenous population, did likely see the extinction of many dance dramas and other forms of ritual dance, but the new circumstances also spurred exceptional collaborative creativity in the modification of old dance forms and composition of new ones. Further waves of transcultural interchange have led to other episodes of creativity in the origination of public festival dances that continue into the present. This chapter provides a few signposts to an overview of the history of Maya public ritual dance in order to provisionally situate the *Baile de la Conquista* within that history.

3.1. Introduction to Pre-Hispanic Maya Ritual Dance

Archaeologists have divided the millennia of pre-Hispanic occupation and history in the Maya region into distinct periods. The first period to be distinguished and described in detail was called the classic period, due to the opinion that it represented the apex of Maya civilization, and particularly based on the elegant and human-centred style of visual representation and the presence of hieroglyphic texts on stone monuments. Though distinct methods were suggested for correlating dates inscribed on these monuments with the European calendar, a growing consensus has dated the classic period to approximately 300-900 c.e. Previous development was then labeled Preclassic, and subsequent development became Postclassic. Though elegantly simple, this chronology of Preclassic, Classic and

¹ Personal communication 2010.

Postclassic is also clearly biased in its determination of what should be considered most important, leading Maya society of other periods, including that following the conquest, to be considered inferior. One reason for taking up a historical survey of Maya public ritual dance is to undermine the notion that contemporary Maya society should be considered inferior to its Classic period antecedents.

The most abundant information on pre-Hispanic Maya ritual dance arises from the Classic period, in the rain forests of the southern lowlands. The information consists of visual images, texts, those musical instruments made of clay (flutes, ocarinas, drums) and some non-perishable components of dance regalia such as jade and shell. One clay and fiber mask has also been partially preserved (Inomata 2006). Concerning imagery, recent scholarship has shown that dance may be the most commonly represented activity in this era. Although the standard depiction of Maya rulers on stela sculptures, as well as some lintels and door jambs, represent their feet firmly planted, these figures are nevertheless shown to be involved in ritual dance by their regalia and often as well by the inscriptions that accompany such images. Matthew Looper (2009: 45–46) explains that:

The typical image of dance focuses on the body and costume of the principal performer, at the expense of details for spatial setting, additional props, and especially the audience. The actions chosen for depiction are likewise highly stereotyped, focusing either on the adornment of the dancer or on the moment of high drama when the performer's body is on stage, fully displayed.

These images on stelae commemorate the ruler's performance of a "period-ending" ritual in which he participates as the main actor in the saga of the destruction and recreation of the cosmos that is equated with the death and regeneration of the Maize. The ruler's dance is one method in which he embodies the regenerated Maize, since in many sculptural and painted images the reborn and remergent Maize deity is shown dancing.² From this and other information it is clear that for the Classic Maya dance involved embodiment of supernaturals in order to enact transformation. As Looper indicates, dance regalia provided a medium not only to enact embodiment and transformation but also to display ritual knowledge, wealth and status (i.e. cultural, economic and social capital).

Dance images are also abundant in other media surviving from Classic Maya times. Many if not most clay figurines of standing men and women from cities like Jaina and Jonuta are likely dancing. Again even when feet are not shown in motion, regalia such as the fan carried by many females provides important evidence. Further, many of these figurines are two-stop ocarinas. These musical instruments would have accompanied such dances, especially those in which women participated, since men are never depicted using them. Both single and group dances appear frequently in late classic ceramic and

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² Examples of classic Maya Maize deities from the Southern Lowlands shown dancing as they emerge from a mountain cave include figures from the façade of Structure 22 on the Copán Acropolis, the image of Pakal as the reborn maize from the sarcophagus at Palenque, and a common motif on painted ceramics of the region of Naranjo first identified with Holmul.

mural painting, particularly in the Petén or "heartland" region of the lowlands. Some of these will be discussed in more detail below in terms of possible relations to dances described in the Colonial period.

The virtual absence of stone inscriptions and shift in visual imagery to supernatural rather than human figures has left little visual or textual evidence of dance for the Postclassic Maya (900–1524), though copper bells designed for dance costume are abundant and ubiquitous. Comparisons are made to dances of the Aztec and Mixtec societies of Central Mexico and Oaxaca, respectively, that were contemporary with the late Postclassic Maya, in an attempt to recover information on Maya public dance for this period. The Mixtec Codex Becker in particular (pages 8–9) illustrates dancers with an accompanying musical ensemble consisting of slit gong, standing drum, flutes and rattles.

The most important source for information on dance and dance-drama during the Postclassic period in the Maya region is Franciscan Fray Diego de Landa's *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, compiled from noble informants in the mid 16th century. In his survey of the ceremonies for each *winal* or 20-day period, commonly called a 'month', and for the transition to a new solar year, Landa mentions or sometimes describes a great quantity of dances, including those for hunters, fishermen, and soldiers. Pisote and opossom disguises were especially noted for clowning acts in comic dances that were still an important part of these annual festivals. Similarly, one the songs of Dzitbalché from Yucatán in the period of Landa's writing (Curl 2005: 95-97), lists popular entertainers at festival dances such as "clowns, dancers, contortionists, jugglers, hunchbacks."

Landa also speaks of the dancers. In his description of the ceremonies for the "month" *Xul*, Landa notes that the dance troop first assembled in the lord's house, then went to the temple of Kukulkan to make offerings and prayers. Then for five days they went to various houses to perform, in each of which they received gifts that were later shared with lords and priests (Landa 1941: 158).



Platform of the Eagles and Jaguars, Chichén Itzá. Ca. 10th century.

Landa also mentions "farces" and he writes about "comedians" who went among the principal houses performing and collecting offerings in return (Landa 1941: 158). In Landa's work, many dances are called farces and comedies but this may not have had the same connotations in the past as today. In the 16th century, the term "comedia" was common for full length stage plays that we might today differentiate between tragedy and comedy. Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar (2003: 97), identifies the subject matter of these dramatic performances as "farsantes, que representan fábulas, e historias antiguas" (farces that represent legends and ancient

stories). These "comedies" may then be closer to what we now call dance-dramas or simply "bailes." Tedlock (2003: 163) argues that in such pre-Hispanic dance-dramas the text would be sung rather than spoken, a practice that Spanish colonial authorities later prohibited. _The importance of such theatrical works in Pre-Hispanic times may be gauged from Landa's assertion, obtained from informants, that the two large four-stair platforms in the main plaza of Chichén Itzá were designed for the presentation of such "comedies" (Landa 1941: 179).

For missionaries and secular clergy in the Maya region, performing histories and making offerings to ancestors were considered acts of idolatry and therefore subject to extirpation, and indeed many of the books that Landa burned were likely historical in content. Writing in Yucatan in 1613, Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar, dean of the cathedral in Mérida, remarks on the performance of legends and ancient histories, arguing that these should be replaced by stories with Christian content (Gubler 2005: 49). Sánchez de Aguilar himself wrote *cantares* in Yucatec. In paraphrasing Sánchez's comments on these performances, Diego López de Cogolludo, writing in 1688 in Yucatán, adds that such performers were similar to those of Maya priests, so he feared that their continued use would be a way of recalling their idolatrous religion (López de Cogolludo 2005: 186–87).

The K'iche' Maya text known as the *Popol Vuj* is a third important source of information on Postclassic Maya dance. Though compiled from various sources and transposed into text in the mid-1550s, several parts represent historical narration stimulated by representations in pre-Hispanic painted books that are likely to have been similar in approach to that of the Mixtec codices. However the central and best known section of the *Popol Vuj* appears instead to be the transcription of a Postclassic dance. This dance dramatized the widespread and ancient saga of the cyclic regeneration of the cosmos based on the transformation of twin deities who are defeated and sacrificed by the underworld lords, but are later reborn and in turn defeat their enemies to inaugurate a new era with its first sunrise.3 Central to the action of this dance in the Popol Vui is the ball game played by the so-called Hero Twins with the Underworld Lords. The *Popol Vuj* appears to have been transcribed at the K'iche' capital Q'umarcaaj shortly before its abandonment. Though the site has been largely destroyed through various colonial period episodes, likely facilities for performing this dance are still evident. These include the ball court, the adjoining central plaza, and the tunnel that terminates below the plaza. Furthermore, within this dance transcription various dances of animal impersonation and evidences of dance stagecraft are mentioned that may in this context have been diverting danceswithin-a-dance:

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³ For decades it has been understood that a similar dance-drama of the Hero Twins' triumph was presented at San Juan Chamelco, Alta Verapaz, in 1543, but as Carroll Mace points out (personal communication, 2009), Estrada Monroy likely fabricated his narrative of this dance. Estrada's purported documentation was never produced. And indeed, much of the description makes little sense, for example the change to devil masks.

And on the very next day, they appeared again as two poor orphans. They wore rags in front and rags on their backs. Rags were thus all they had to cover themselves. But they did not act according to their appearance when they were seen by the Xibalbans. For they did the Dance of the Whippoorwill and the Dance of the Weasel. They danced the Armadillo and the Centipede. They danced the Injury, for many marvels they did then. They set fire to a house as if it were truly burning, then immediately recreated it again as the Xibalbans watched with admiration (Anonymous 2007: 169).

3.2. Continuities between Pre-Hispanic and Colonial Ritual Dance

Many of the dance forms depicted in Classic Maya imagery find parallels in records of the Colonial period, which suggests continuity through the Postclassic. Though, as Looper emphasizes, the subject of continuity must be approached with caution, it nevertheless provides a convenient entry in a survey of those pre-Hispanic public dance forms for which evidence has been recovered. Six types of dance provide what appears to be the best evidence for such continuity across the colonization boundary.

3.2.1. Tocontin

The first type to be mentioned is characterized by participation of high-ranking males, either including or presented to the ruler, and emphasizing display of valuable and symbolic dance regalia such as jade and quetzal feathers. The murals of rooms 1 and 3 of the late eighth century painted palace at



Dance scene painted on ceramic cacao beaker, likely from Moul de San José, 8th century. Kerr archive number 3464. Photograph by Justin Kerr.

Bonampak provide important examples, as do many of the contemporary painted cacao beakers from Motul de San Jose (The "Ik" site) on the northern shore of Lake Petén Itzá. In Bonampak room 3 for example, 10 nobles dance holding a fan and a ceremonial axe, lavishly attired in valuable quetzal feather headdresses, jade beaded ornaments, and elegantly patterned

textiles. Their dance appears to be a stately unison step from side to side. This dance does not require impersonation through masks, though these are presented in some examples, particularly those ceramic paintings from Motul de San José.

Seventeenth century accounts of such dances in Guatemala also emphasize the richness of regalia in feathers and precious stones. The most detailed description was provided by Thomas Gage, who proselytized as a Dominican missionary from 1627 to 1637 in various Kaqchikel and Pokomam communities of central highland Guatemala. Gage called this dance the *Tocontin*, a Nahuatl term derived from onomatopoetic syllables identifying drum beats. Gage (1928: 267–69) explains that the dance is of pre-Hispanic origin and that only the chief and principal men of the town dance the *Tocontin*, and he goes on to describe their appearance in detail. In addition to finely embroidered textiles, they wore elaborate feather regalia that bears many similarities in its configuration (headdress, backrack, sandal ornaments) to depictions of dancers in the late classic period lowlands:

On their backs they hang long tufts of feathers of all colours, which with glue are fastened into a little frame made for the purpose and gilded on the outside; this frame with ribbons they tie about their shoulders fast that it fall not, nor slacken with the motion of their bodies. Upon their heads they wear another less tuft of feathers either in their hats, or in some gilded or painted headpiece, or helmet. In their hands also they carry a fan of feathers, and on their feet most will use feathers also bound together like short wings of birds; some wear shoes, some not. And thus from top to toe they are almost covered with curious and coloured feathers (1928: 267–68).

After describing the slit gong rhythm instrument, which he calls the *tepanabaz*, Gage (1928: 268) goes on to describe the movements of the *Tocontin*:

Thus they dance in compass and circle round about that instrument, one following another sometimes straight, sometimes turning about, sometimes turning half way, sometimes bending their bodies and with the feathers in their hands almost touching the ground.... All this dancing is but a kind of walking round, which they will continue two or three whole hours together in one place, and from thence go and perform the same at another house.

While there is no direct evidence to connect the dance to which Gage gave the generic name of *Tocontin* as the descendant of the dance illustrated in the murals of Bonampak and the ceramics of Motul de San José, their similar restriction to participation by titled leaders, lack of narrative, ability to do without masks, reserved motion, and display of elaborate and valuable regalia including jade, feather headdresses and fans, all suggest that these pre-Hispanic and colonial period dances fulfill a similar functional niche. And this niche was not limited to the Maya region: Gage's description also fits early colonial representations of some Aztec dance (Aubin annal).

This form of aristocratic participation in religious ceremonies represented a significant enough institution that it continued past Gage's time at least to the end of the 17th century, when Guatemalan chronicler Fuentes y Guzmán (1969–72: 1, 216–17) described analogous dance regalia:

In the feasts of their pueblos, which are those of the *advocación*, they dance adorned with rich and precious feathers, a variety of coins, mirrors and jades, carrying on themselves an immense and incomparable weight of these ornaments; being in this, as in everything, untiring, because they dance in the cemeteries of the church throughout the day, and beyond this, many times for eight successive days, which is how long the festivals in their towns last.

So little documentation remains on dance in the Colonial period that it was a revelation when, in September 2012, the National Geographic society released a report with photographs of mural fragments found in what was once a large colonial house in the Ixil *cabecera* of Chajul, Department of Quiché (Kaufman 2012). More then one theme is presented in these murals, but here, as with the published accounts, we are concerned with the section that depicts a dance. In what remains of this scene, three seated men in Spanish dress watch a dance in which regalia including a jaguar skin chest-piece and eagle-painted cape suggests Indigenous performers.

After inspecting the mural, archaeologist William Saturno identified the scene as a Conquest Dance, presumably on the basis of both Spanish and Maya figures (Hamaker 2012). Immediately after this interpretation was released, Rosemary Joyce instead identified the mural subject as the *Baile de las Canastas* or Dance of the Baskets (Joyce 2012). Joyce's interpretation was also hasty and based on minimal and ambiguous elements of the mural. For example, Joyce interprets the dancers' capes as the basket construction that gives the dance its name. However, none of the mural elements correspond to the very detailed account by Henrietta Yurchenko from a performance in Chajul in 1945, that she also recorded in audio.⁴ Yurchenko (1978: 4–6) describes the basket element as raised on thirteen poles arranged in a circle, which is nothing like any elements in the mural. Yurchenko also notes that the dance involved masks which do not appear in the mural. Also, only male figures appear in the mural, whereas the Basket Dance involves women, one of whom is a major character. Another major character, who is an elderly man and a hunter, is likewise not seen. Further, nothing in Yurchenko's description of the dance suggests that Spaniards should be present. And finally, the Chajul mural lacks evidence of narrative action in these mural fragments where all but two of the dancers are arrayed similarly and with opulence.

Joyce relates the colonial residence in which these murals are found to *cofradías* and *hermandades*, the religious confraternities that care for saints' images and sponsor their feasts. However the ample

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⁴ The form in which the *Baile de las Canastas* was explained to Yurchenko is heavily influenced by the late 19th and 20th century augmentation of Tekum's importance from the *Baile de la Conquista* as well as the K'iche' *títulos* in which his duel with Pedro de Alvarado is narrated. Thus although the bird appropriate to this dance is the hummingbird, and therefore some versions are called the *Baile del Tzunun*, in Yurchenko's account he has become a quetzal. Further, Yurchenko's explanation includes the detail that people rushed to protect the corpse of the hero from wild animals, which is a detail derived from the K'iche' *títulos* in which Alvarado protects Tekum's corpse from the Spanish dogs.

spaces, hardwood floors, enormous and elaborate wooden doors, and carved stone columns of this residence might suggest instead that it was the home of either a Spaniard or a Maya *cacique* adapting Spanish lifeways for the prestige they carried both within and outside of his own community. This may explain why the three musicians who begin the mural sequence are dressed as Spaniards, since certain Maya *caciques* were granted the right to dress in Spanish clothing. It is not clear what instrument the first player uses, while the second blows a wind instrument, likely a *chirimía*, and the third beats the *tambor*. The other two seated figures are dressed in Maya fashion, and with the images published, it is not evident whether they are also playing musical instruments. They confront each other rather than appear as a series as do the initial figures. Their juxtaposition to a dwarf, combined with the seated posture, may suggest a courtly context, though in classic period representations dwarves were also often associated with dancing figures and may play musical instruments. This adoption of Spanish dress in a Maya dance context, and the potential courtly imagery, likely argue for the original residence as belonging to an Ixil *cacique*.

Though several similar scenes of seated Spaniards watching Indigenous men dance were painted on the mid 16th-century Lienzo of Quauhquechollan (see Akkeren 2007), the consensus of experts consulted is that these Chajul murals date to the late 17th or early 18th centuries. Yet some differences are also suggestive. Dancers in the Chajul mural are far more elaborately arrayed than those on the Quauhquechollan *lienzo*, where they hold a sword and feather fan. In their configuration as multiple dancers fairly homogeneously dressed, they appear more like the generic dance of nobles or *Tocontin* in Gates' terminology.

However one element in the Chajul dancers' regalia suggests closer connections with ethnographically observed dance festivals. As seen on the best preserved dancer confronting the seated Spaniards, the attributes held in each hand are accompanied by hanging scarves. This attribute is not seen to my knowledge in classic period representations (though on a Tepeu 2 vase a seated dancing lord has scarves hanging from his wristlets),⁵ nor in the Quauhquechollan *lienzo*, nor in the representation of musicians and dancers in the Mixtec Codex Colombino-Becker. Yet it has become standard practice among contemporary dancers, including several of the *Baile de la Conquista* dance groups.

3.2.2. Patzká Dances

We can use the term *Patzká* to refer to a dance genre that persists in Guatemala though it was once much more prevalent and widespread. Examples of this genre are known variously as the *Patzká*, Snake Dance, *Tz'ul* or *Tzulab* dance, and Dance of the *Gracejos* (Buffoons) (Cook 2000: 171-81; Hutcheson 2003: 76-77; Mace 1970; Looper 2009: 201-08). A common element is the manipulation of snakes, often allowed to crawl through the dancers' clothing, or holding of staffs carved with snakes. This

5 http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_hires.php?vase=2573

genre has also been characterized by the wearing of old, tattered clothing and crude masks to suggest an outsider or contrary status, a practice that Hutcheson (2003: 81–82; 2009: 880) relates to the dance performances by the newly reborn Hero Twins in the *Popol Vuj*, as vagabond entertainers dressed in rags. Presently their outsider status is furthered by actions that mock social conventions through transgressive language and sexual play with a single female character.

In the dance-drama section of the *Popol Vuj*, the Hero Twins, in two manifestations, must die and be reborn through the agency of an Underworld or Earth Goddess. Similarly in the *Patzká* complex, whipping or the actions of the single female character cause the death of the men, after which they must be revived, often by the woman (Looper 2009: 202, 206-07). Alternately they are ill with goiter and the woman must ease their pain (Mace 1970: 20-21), Another aspect of the Colonial and contemporary manifestation is the bringing of rain, a pre-Hispanic connection retained through prevalent association with Corpus Christi, a moveable Catholic ceremony that occurs around the time that rains are due (Mace 1970: 24-25).

Also characteristic is the lack, or sometimes minimal use, of text, allowing the dancers freedom to extemporize their ribald joking discourse. As Hutcheson (2009: 885) explains: "The structure of *tzul* performances is grounded in mimetic clowning rather than in narrative per se, and consists of a number of separate competitive, agonistic, and erotic episodes in which the male characters turn somersaults, fight with one another, and attempt to seduce and/or defend the female character."

In general these dancers have been characterized as contraries or tricksters, so it is appropriate that in Momostenango their main function occurs during the days of Holy Week when Jesucristo is dead and underworld forces rule in the form of San Simon (Cook 2000: 143-47). Most authors who have studied this complex assert pre-Hispanic origins, but Cook (2000: 180) adds that it has also adapted elements of the Spanish 16th century *Matachines* clown dance. Thus Hutcheson (2003: 82) notes that while "these entertainments...probably have their true antecedents in the very distant past, yet because they are rooted in spontaneity and invention they are continually open to the generation of new forms."

Potential relations with Classic period dances lead us in two different directions. On the one hand, Claude Baudez (1992) has identified Classic period images at Palenque as a dance in which participants manipulate live snakes. On pier D of House D in the palace the snake is held between a man and a woman. On the Dumbarton Oaks Tablet, the ruler K'inich K'an Joy Chitam II dances with a more naturalistic snake and a vessel in which it might have been kept.

On the other hand, the *Patzká* performers' dangerous, violent, and outsider status may be related to the most common dance imagery on Classic Maya ceramic painting: that of the *wayob*, supernaturals shown in transgressive terms as violent, death-related and often composite creatures. David Stuart (2005) reinterpreted these as demon-like beings who cause disease and misfortune. Many of these

wayob are similar to the underworld lords in the Popol Vuj, whose names are revealed when the biting of an insect causes each of the Underworld Lords to cry out and be questoned by a companion: 1 Death, 7 Death, Flying Scab, Blood Clot, Pus Demon, Jaundice Demon, Bone Staff, Skull Staff; Wing, Packstrap, Bloody Teeth, and Bloody Claws. A contemporaneous relationship between disease and performance appears in Durán's description of ceremonies to honour the wind deity Quetalcoatl-Ehecatl, which included farces representing diseases (Durán 1971: 134-35). The connection between disease and Ehecatl is logical, as dry, hot winds were thought to cause disease, and presumably the deity who caused it can also cure it if properly propitiated.

In my opinion, while the Patzká complex of dances has pre-Hispanic roots as evidenced by the *Popol Vuj*, connections with both the Classic period snake dance and *wayob* dances are tenuous.

3.2.3. Deer Hunting



Painted ceramic beaker, 8th century Petén. Ball game scene. The standing player at right is in dance posture and wears a deer headdess. Kerr archive number 1209. Photograph by Justin Kerr.

Dance narratives of deer hunting constitute another possible connection between the Classic and post-Conquest periods. The theme of the deer hunt appears on Classic period ceramic paintings, as do narratives involving anthropomorphic deities interacting as deer, but not overtly as a dance. However, in ball game scenes on such ceramic paintings, players often wear deer and eagle headdresses, and those players not shown kneeling to strike the ball are in dance postures. Despite lack of evidence, the economic, social, and religious importance of deer hunting, in which the deer is the archetype for human sacrifice likely associated with the setting sun, all make it likely that a deer hunting dance was practiced from earliest times.

This association between hunting and human sacrifice portrayed in the dance mode was reported by Thomas Gage (1928: 269), a Dominican missionary in Guatemala from approximately 1627-37:

They have another dance much used, which is a kind of hunting out some wild beast (which formerly in time of heathenism was to be sacrificed to their gods) to be offered up unto the saint. This dance hath much variety of tunes, with a small *tepanabaz*⁶, and many shells of tortoises, or instead of them with pots covered with leather, on which they strike as on *tepanabaz*, and with the sound of pipes; in this dance they use much holloaing and noise and calling one unto another, and speaking by way of stage play, some relating one thing, some another concerning the beast they hunt after. These dancers are all clothed like beasts, with painted skins of lions, tigers, wolves, and on their heads such headpieces as may represent the head of such beasts, and others in their hands they have painted staves, bills, swords and axes, wherewith they threaten to kill that beast they hunt after. Others instead of hunting after a beast, hunt after a man, as beasts in a wilderness should hunt a man to kill him. This man that is thus hunted after must be very nimble and agile, as one flying for his life, and striking here and there at the beasts for his defense, whom at last they catch and make a prey of.... this dance doth wholly consist in action, running in a circle round, sometimes out of circle, and leaping and striking with those tools and instruments which they have in their hand.

In Rabinal, where the Dominican's softened approach to spiritual "conquest" resulted in policy of adapting Maya dances to Christian uses rather than exterminating them (Mace 1970), a deer dance with pre-Hispanic character survives. The *Balam Kiej* (Jaguar Deer) Dance is discussed by Mace (1970: 61-62) and in most depth by Hutcheson (2003: 366-498). As Hutcheson narrates this dance (2003: 475-89), human protagonists are the old man called Mam (the name of the Earth Lord) who carries a snake staff, his young wife Tiana, and four hunters. The main animal protagonist is the jaguar who, as the magical guardian of the forest, is an alter ego of the old man. After attempting a seduction of the young wife, the four hunters set out into the forest to hunt. However the jaguar defeats them, paralyzing each with a magic spell. Only the vaginal secretions of the young wife can revive them, and in this strengthened state they are able to defeat the jaguar and hunt the deer. The relation of some of these elements to the Rabinal Patzká dance and other regeneration cycles will be discussed at a later point.

The sexual relationship between an old man and a young woman is a common theme in the Classic period, appearing on painted ceramics, in figurines, and even in the cave painting of Naj Tunich. A narrative theme painted on several ceramics in the "codex" style associated with Nakbe feature an old male deity who appears to be sick or dying, attended by one or more young women and young men (Cohodas 1989). Deer also appear, and in some the young woman seems to escape with the deer.

⁶ This is the slit gong or tunkul which is teponaztli in Nahuatl.

These scenes might be interpreted in relation to a paradigmatic story of solar regeneration found among many Maya groups, in which the old earth lord keeps his young daughter hidden within a cave, but the sun enters and seduces her, after which the couple attempts to escape (Akkeren 2003: 68). However, in these codex style paintings, the old man is not overtly the antagonist of the young man and deer, as both old and young men are shown with deer ears. More will be said about this narrative in the next section, but for the present I consider it likely that a version of this saga was danced in ancient times in relation to deer hunting.

3.2.4. Cosmogenesis and the Regeneration of the Maize

A fourth type of Classic and Postclassic Period dance to be considered is the costumed dance-drama re-telling primordial events. An example from the Classic period appears in room 1 of the Bonampak murals, wherein a troop of masked dancers interrupts the procession of musicians and singers. This group appears to be cosmographically organized, involving four standing dancers outfitted with aquatic symbols surrounding two seated dancers. One of the seated dancers appears from his costume and youthful appearance to impersonate the Maize deity, providing further evidence that the drama presented is the well known saga of the destruction and rejuvenation of the maize that distinguishes the Mesoamerican understanding of (re)creation. Garrett Cook (2000: 214–15) also points out that the Sun-Maize is personified as the solar year and thus the cycle of death and regeneration is based on the change of seasons and its structuring of the sowing, growth, maturation and harvesting of the maize.

In the dance-derived middle section of the *Popol Vuj*, the death and rebirth of the younger Hero Twins in the underworld is marked by the withering and revival of Maize planted in their Grandmother Xmukané's house. Thus it is clear that the adventures of the two sets of Hero Twins, wherein the elder twins die and through the medium of an Earth Goddess are regenerated as the younger twins who defeat the earth lords to emerge again above the earth, dramatize the cycle of death and rebirth of the Maize.⁷ As Cook (2000: 216) explains, the role of the Maize-Sun as both the Earth Goddess's mate and as her child, is spread between the two sets of twins. To present this transformation in a bit more detail, the Underworld lords kill the senior set of twins. The head of one, placed in a gourd tree, causes the tree to fruit. As it becomes a clean skull, it more resembles the gourds. The Underworld Lords try to prevent any contact with this tree, but the Earth Goddess Xquic disobeys and is impregnated when the skull of Jun Junajpu spits in her hand. For this crime, the Earth Lords, including her father, order

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⁷ This interpretation agrees with Cook (2000) but conflicts with current consensus on the *Popol Vuj*, that only Jun Junajpu, one of the senior twins, represents the Maize. The problem with this interpretation is that it ignores significant changes that have developed between the Classic period, as seen primarily on painted ceramics, and the late Post–Classic/ Early Colonial period, as exemplified by the *Popol Vuj*. In the Classic period, the cognates of the younger twins, Jun Ajaw and Yax Balam, are helpers of the Maize–Sun deity in his narrative cycle of regeneration. In the Popol Vuj, they have become the Maize–Sun deity and no helpers are present. In current ritual performance practice, the role of helper continues as San Juan Carajo in Santiago Atitlán (see below).

her to be sacrificed but she escapes and bears the regenerated twins. The young twins also confront the Lords of the Underworld and though they win in the trials and the ball game, they voluntarily undergo a second death, followed by the aforementioned rebirth as vagabond performers. With this renewed strength, they defeat the Lords of the Underworld and rise in to the sky as the Sun and Moon (formerly Sun and Venus).

The same narrative process of regeneration is also performed by Costumbristas annually in Santiago Atitlán for Semana Santa, not as a dance but as a linked series of rituals requiring five days, associated by Christenson with the five wayeb days that end the Indigenous Maya solar year and begin the new one. In this overlaid version, Jesucristo is the Sun-Maize deity, María Andolor is the Earth-Moon deity with whom he mates to renew himself, and Rilaj Mam (Maximon) is the elderly underworld deity who he must overcome. When Jesucristo enters the underworld for his transformation, Rilaj Mam is installed as the temporary ruler for the five days of the ritual performance, associated with a mountain cave symbolized by a vegetal screen in front of the church retablo. The last two days of this sequence represent the climax and illustrate the basic structure. On Thursday night, Jesucristo mates with María Andolor with the help of San Juan Carajo. On Friday Jesucristo as now the child of María is raised on the crucifix, but for Costumbristas this erection represents the rebirth of the Sun-as-Maize and likely the re-establishment of the world axis. Then on Friday night, Rilaj Mam repeatedly confronts Jesucristo, but with the latter's renewed strength from regeneration the Underworld Lord is defeated, flees and is dismantled. Afterwards, Jesucristo proceeds on a circuit of what had been four chapels, related to the cardinal points, to reorder and thereby recreate the quadripartite cosmos. Cook (2000: 214-22) shows that the Momostecan Semana Santa follows the standard paradigm as well, with Jesucristo as the Maize-Sun, and with San Simon as the old Underworld Lord, the Mam, who personifies the juyup (mountain), and who rules in the five days of Jesucristo's absence only to be overthrown when Jesucristo is reborn.

In the *Popol Vuj*, the drama of the Hero Twins forms part of a longer exegesis of Maya views of cosmogenesis, though already (mid 1550s) influenced by Christian theology. Following the creation of the land and animals, and the saga of the two sets of Hero Twins, comes the creation of the first humans who are specifically the K'iche' ancestors. This is followed by a history of the K'iche' kingdom from the viewpoint of the Cavek lineage that ruled at the time of the Spanish invasion. Thus the *Popol Vuj* is an example of the genre of *título*, a telling of family history documenting privileges and rights to land and tribute, a process that was soon encouraged in a royal *cédula* of 1558 (Fuentes y Guzmán 1969–72: III, 291). Many of these *títulos*, also in K'iche', were written in the region in and around the Samalá Valley, encompassing Quetzaltenango, Momostenango and Totonicapán. In contrast to the *Popol Vuj*, those sections dealing with primordial origins, as in the *Título de los señores de Totonicapán*, substitute biblical stories for a Maya creation. A similar substitution occurred in Maya dances of Guatemala, due to the intervention of missionaries, as will be discussed further in relation to the theatre of evangelization.

The underlying theme of the Maya creation saga is the regeneration of the cosmos, the Maize, and humanity through a process of death and rebirth made possible by sexual relations, and this theme can be expressed in dance as well as other media. Today this dance theme is most concentrated in Rabinal, as in the *Patzká* and the *Balam Kiej*. In the *Balam Kiej*, the hunters who take on the role of the Sun-Maize deity are initially killed by the earth-underworld forces identified with the old Mam and his *nawal* the Jaguar, but are revived by the young female earth deity Tiana, after which they can defeat the jaguar and successfully hunt the deer. Thus in the *Balam Kiej*, as in the danced Hero Twins saga in the Popol Vuj, the process of death and renewal through the agency of a female allows the protagonist to gain sufficient magical powers to defeat Earth or Underworld forces.

In several other versions of this cyclic process, more emphasis is placed on the courtship and mating of the Sun-Maize and Moon-Earth deities, and less on the defeat of Underworld Lords. Indeed, the successful insemination itself represents such a defeat, since the underworld Lord is the father of the Earth Goddess. In the Ixil region, this story was danced in the twentieth century as the aforementioned Baile de las Canastas (Dance of the Baskets) also known as the Baile de Tz'unun (Dance of the Hummingbird), a dance that Howell (2004: 43) describes as using a pre-Hispanic-style accompaniment of slit drum, trumpet, and tortoise. In the version of this dance told to Henrietta Yurchenko (1945: 7) by a priest from Nebaj, the Ixil are starving because the maize has not been regenerated. The maiden Mariguita has the seed in her womb but her father, the elderly sorcerer Matagtanic, keeps her sequestered and virginal. The leaders of the starving Ixil enlist the aide of Tz'unun, also known as Oyeb, a Solar-Maize deity who can transform into a hummingbird or sparrow and even a quetzal. In this form he stealthily enters the sorcerer's home and then resumes human form to mate with Mariquita, fertilizing the maize seed in her womb. Though Mariquita is killed and Tz'unun/Oyeb is cursed, their mating has regenerated the maize and the people eat once more. Thus the Nebaj-Ixil version sets in primordial times and with cosmological characters the annual alternation of dry and rainy seasons, the harvesting of maize with ears set aside for seed, verses the planting and maturation of the maize. In its most basic form, the Sun-Maize deity reproduces himself by overcoming the elderly underworld lord and mating with the Earth-Moon deity which thereby renews time, fertility and the cosmos.

Using sources from Rabinal, Akkeren (2003: 40–41, 68–69) cites the local Q'eq'chi and Rabinaleb story of the Old Earth Lord, Mam, who protects his daughter, Po', within a cave, the usual heart of an Earth Lord's domain. The Sun-Maize deity in this story is B'alan Q'e, a cognate of the *Popol Vuj* younger twin named Xbalankeh.⁸ On his daily deer hunting expeditions, B'alan Q'e passes by and sees Po' weaving

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⁸ When the younger twins are understood to have initially risen as the Sun and Venus, it becomes clear that Junajpu (1 Ajaw) must be Venus, as this calendric date is closely associated with that planet. Xbalankeh, Jaguar-Deer, is then the Sun, and his name actually incorporates two animals that are manifestations of the Sun.

on the cave portico. Desiring her, B'alan Q'e changes into a hummingbird and sucks nectar from tobacco flowers near the cave, thus becoming drugged. To protect the bird, Po' takes the bird into the cave and places it next to her when she retires for the night. The hummingbird resumes his form as a hunter and mates with Po'. As Mam refuses permission for their marriage, the couple escape. He becomes the day sun, Saq Q'e, and she becomes the moon. Shared features of the Rabinal story and the Ixil Baile de Las Canastas/ Baile de Tz'unun, include the Sun-Maize deity who takes the form of a bird, usually a hummingbird, to reach and mate with the sequestered daughter of the Earth Lord. J. Eric S. Thompson (1970) assembled and published several versions of this primordial history, in many of which the mating of the pair is followed by the Earth Lord killing the Sun-Maize deity, the Earth-Moon goddess, or both, often followed by their regeneration. Note also that in some versions the sun becomes associated with the deer or deer hunter, which ties in with the deer hunting version of this paradigmatic narrative, as in the Balam Kiej at Rabinal.

Akkeren also notes that the Rabinal Achí, though a political drama of liberation from domination, yet incorporates elements of this regeneration theme as an overall framework. In the Rabinal Achí; the ruler Hob Toj would have the part of the Old Earth Lord; his daughter, named Mother of Quetzal Feathers, would be the Earth Goddess; and the invading K'iche' Achí would be the Sun-Maize deity. This subtle allusion is primarily developed through three dances that K'iche' Achí performs in his captivity. He first dances after imbibing the intoxicating Quick Hummingbird Drink, then he dances with the Princess's cloth that he returns torn, and finally he dances with the Princess herself. He is then sacrificed but immediately regenerated. Thus Akkeren (2003: 72) asserts that the Rabinal Achí, like the Popol Vuj, becomes a saga of creation and the first sunrise.

3.2.5. Conquest Dances

A fifth type that reveals some continuity between pre-Hispanic and colonial periods involves conquest dances depicting the aftermath of a military success when a leader of the defeated group is captured, tried, and executed. The Rabinal Achí exemplifies this type as it is believed to have been composed in the 15th century, shortly after the events it dramatizes, when an Achí victory established their independence from the K'iche' empire. In this multi-layered narrative, the K'iche' Achí, representing the leader of an attacking force as well as the whole attacking force, disputes and battles with the Rabinal Achí, who may likewise be thought to represent the whole defending force. K'iche' Achí is captured and taken to trial before the ruler Hob Toj. K'iche' Achí is told that he could have been an ally, which would have enabled him to marry the Rabinal Princess and become a brother to the Rabinal Achí. But by attacking instead, making himself an enemy, he has earned execution.

One evidence for such dramatizations of military conquests in the Classic Period is the hieroglyphic stairway at Dos Pilas. According to Stephen Houston (2006: 146-47), the lower four risers were carved

first with a record of victory over Tikal, while the upper riser appears to record a later commemorative dance. Furthermore, noting that many late classic period ceramic paintings of the arraignment and



Rabinal Achí, 2009. Rabinal Achí captures K'iche' Achí.

sacrifice of prisoners also show dancers and musicians, Tedlock (2003: 127-28) speculates that these ancient painted scenes represent not the actual arraignment but, like the Rabinal Achí, its dramatic re-enactment as a dance-drama.

The Rabinal Achí is considered an example of the *Bailes del Tum*⁹, a genre of conquest dances culminating in the sacrifice of a war captive and named for the long wooden trumpets featured in its accompaniment. This genre continued to be widely performed in the Colonial period in Guatemala, with Maya tenacious interest in maintaining this tradition into the 18th century met by even more tenacious government policies to exterminate it (Tedlock 2003: 200–02). Indeed these prohibitions are the best evidence of when and where this dance genre was performed in this period. But descriptions of the dance come from two of the major chroniclers of Guatemalan History. Both Fuentes y Guzmán (1969–72: II, 284) in the late 17th century and Francisco Ximenez

(1929-31: 78) in the early 18th century described dances called *K'iche' Winaq* that involved the capture and sacrifice of a noble enemy fighter despite his display of magical powers. Only the Rabinal Achí has continued intact, again perhaps due to Dominican policy of adapting and re-contextualizing Indigenous dances rather than eliminating them (Mace 1970).

3.2.6. Palo Volador

A final evidence of continuity across the conquest divide concerns the dance known as the *Palo Volador* (Pole of the Flyers). This was a prominent dance among the Aztec and some of those societies with whom they had close relations. It appears to have been brought to Guatemala by the Tlaxcalan or Quauhquechollan soldiers who came with Pedro and Jorge de Alvarado, respectively, and settled in Ciudad Vieja, near the first capital of Guatemala that was replaced by the capital now known as Antigua. Indeed, the *palo volador* dance was first noted in Guatemala at Ciudad Vieja in the 1586 description of

⁹ These dances are also referred to by related terms such as *Loxtum, Oxtum, Uleu Tum and Tum Teleche.*

the dance recorded by Antonio de Ciudad Real, who traveled as secretary with Fray Alonso Ponce in is *visita* of Franciscan monasteries:

They placed in the church courtyard a *volador*, which is a very tall pole, thrust firmly and securely into the ground; on the top of this pole, way up high, they had made a wheel in the style of a spool and attached to it four strong ropes, to which were tied four Indians, each to his own rope, all colorfully dressed, with very large wings and rattles in their hands, and all four

letting themselves fall at the same time, tied at the waist, they descended little by little as if flying, sounding their rattles until they dropped to the ground, which was certainly something to see; then others went up and yet others, and so they celebrated the fiesta (translated by Harris, 1996b).¹⁰

A century later, Fuentes y Guzmán (1969–72: I, 344–46) describes the *palo volador* in the same community as now including a man dressed in monkey costume positioned on the rotating platform at the top of the pole who entertains the crowd with comic movements. The monkey's comic presence may be a specifically Guatemalan Maya contribution. In the *Popol Vuj*, the Hero Twins' older brothers climb a tree that the Twins magically raise too high for them to descend and they are transformed into monkeys. They later dance for their grandmother but her inability to control her laughter at their comic motions dooms them to remain in animal



Palo Volador, Joyabaj, 2008.

form. Currently the *palo volador* is practiced in only a few localities in Guatemala. In Joyabaj, where I have seen it, the dancers are dressed as monkeys and angels, the latter replacing eagles through the Christian association of the sky with heaven.

3.3 Early Colonial Evangelizing Theatre

The origin of the *Baile de la Conquista* may be situated within the missionary program of evangelizing theatre inaugurated within two decades of the Spanish overthrow of the Aztec Empire. A more detailed

¹⁰ Pusieron en el patio de la iglesia un volador, que es un palo muy alto, hincado en el suelo muy fijo y fuerte, en la punta de este palo, allá en lo alto, tenian hecha una rueda á manera de devanadera, y en ella cogidos indios, á cada cordel el suyo, vestidos todos de color, con unas alas muy grandes y sendas sonajas en las manos, y dejándose caer todos cuatro á un punto atados por medio del cuerpo, bajaron poco á poco como volando, tañendo sus sonajas hasta que cayeron al suelo, que cierto era muy de ver, luego subían otros y luego otros y otros, y así regocijaron la fiesta (Ciudad Real 1873: I, 421–22).

summary of this program will help to better understand the dance's original form and intended functions.

3.3.1. Franciscan Theatre of Conversion

Shortly after the first major Spanish Conquests of Mesoamerica—the defeat of the Mexica Aztec in 1521 and of the K'iche' in 1524—missionaries undertook to convert Indigenous populations, educating them in Christian doctrine and ceremony. Missionary practices of conversion included convincing Indigenous peoples to accept the Christian faith, in part by claiming that the Spanish conquest was God's method of converting them, and reminding the congregation that their Indigenous gods were powerless against the Christian deity. Maintaining the new faith involved administration of the sacraments, undertaking festivals of the Catholic liturgical calendar, and introducing saint icons to replace Indigenous ones. *Cofradías* were also introduced to take on the management of these icons and their festivals. Evangelization also involved campaigns to root out surviving practices of idolatry, identified with non–Christian religious practices being carried on in secrecy. Extirpation of idolatry was complicated by syncretic elements in the form of Christianity adopted by Indigenous Americans. This syncretism was catalyzed in part by the friars' own practices, such as explaining Christian concepts through terms familiar from pre–Hispanic religion, or building churches atop pre–Hispanic temple platforms, thereby helping to identify Christian saints with pre–Hispanic deities (Aracil Varón 1999: 77–78).

Franciscans approached conversion with particular fervor, arguing for baptisms even without instruction in Christian beliefs. As Aracil Varón (1999: 34–43, 430–34) explains, Franciscans adhered to the 13th century prophecy of Joaquín de Fiore, published in 1519, that when all peoples had been converted to Christianity, the millennium would come as a final stage of universal peace and harmony preceding the Last Judgment. Conversion of Amerindians was crucial to this process: Franciscans idealized Amerindians so that they came to be considered not only the last gentiles but indeed pre-Christians, instinctively practicing the virtues taught by Christ. The first generation of Franciscans in the Americas were also optimistic that they could accomplish this global conversion, and thus the end of time, in their own lifetime. To fulfill their goal of global conversion, Franciscans practiced mass baptisms for at least the first 15 years of their mission in New Spain (Aracil Varón 1999: 80).

Ethnographic research by friars in the 16th century has been understood as an aid to this evangelization program, though considering Franciscan idealization of Indigenous Americans, it may also have been designed initially to contrast with, and therefore draw attention to, European corruption, especially in the religious hierarchy of secular priests. In response to European corruption, Franciscans like Motolinia strove to create a terrestrial paradise in New Spain especially for Indigenous peoples, by keeping their communities separate from those of European colonists and free of European contamination. They tried unsuccessfully to influence the Spanish Crown to recognize converted

populations as vassals of the Empire with equal rights to Europeans. They were also disappointed in the ability to train Indigenous men in the rigors of the priesthood. As a result, Franciscans prohibited Indigenous, *mestizo* and *mulatto* men from the priesthood in 1555, a prohibition that lasted until the 17th century (Aracil Varón 1999: 84). The favourable environment for the Franciscan millenarian proselytizing mission under emperor Carlos V almost evaporated under his successor Felipe II (reigned 1556–1598), who preferred to assimilate Indigenous populations into colonial society, attempted to replace missionary friars with secular priests, and banned ethnographic reporting on Indigenous peoples.

Realizing the Indigenous appreciation of the visual, aural, and physical pleasures of song and dance, it was especially Franciscan friars who adapted the current Spanish fashion for various forms religious theatre in festival contexts in order to develop what has been called an evangelizing theatre or theatre of conversion in the Americas. This evangelizing theatre movement was active from the 1530s to the mid 1700s, when Enlightenment thinking disparaged the emotional appeal of these works and many were confiscated (Burkhart 2011: 12, 20).

Aracil Varón (1999: 125) encapsulates the importance of such theatre as a method of instruction:

...dramatic performance, in combining word and image, became the ideal method for transmitting a varied message that touched on persuasive arguments for conversion of the natives like the basic principles of doctrinal and moral teaching and including specific ideological-political notions.¹¹

Congregated towns with a central plaza fronted by the church, adjoining monastery, and *cabildo* (town hall) became the spatial context for festival dance performances (Aracil Varón 1999: 69). In fact, many scholars have argued that the entertainment aspect of religious theatre enacted in these new towns became an important attraction to help keep the congregated populations from deserting and returning to the lands on which their ancestors are buried.

Diana Taylor (2004: 369-70) elaborates on the missionary agenda in producing these evangelizing plays, inculcating a new world view by packaging it within familiar forms:

In order to supplant native performances, the friars introduced missionary theatre shortly after the Conquest to use what they saw as the Amerindians' love of spectacle for evangelization. They hoped to affect indigenous beliefs systems (the what-they-know) by slightly tampering

^{11 ...} la representación dramática , al combinar la palabra y la imagen, se convirtió en un medio idóneo para transmitir un mensaje diverso que abarcaba tanto los persuasivos argumentos para la conversión de los naturales como los principios básicos de la enseñanza doctrinal y moral o incluso determinados planteamientos ideológico-políticos.

with the hows, or ways, of knowing. The plays developed by the friars and acted by native peoples set out to maintain native performance forms while transforming the content. Even though they were performed in native languages and looked familiar—staged with thousands of flowers, arches, artfully created landscapes, and fabulous stagecraft—the worldviews were radically different.

Aracil Varón (1999: 129–38) discusses peninsular precedents for evangelizing theatre in the Americas in European medieval religious festival theatre, performing both within and outside of the church, especially in relation to Corpus Christi processions. She notes that, especially for the exterior performances, both participants and audience were jointly affirming their Christian faith and membership in a Christian community, while also allowing some of the vulgarity of the street to emerge in satire that serves to diminish the powerful and elevate the downtrodden. Aracil Varón (1999: 142–43) also notes a close relation between Franciscan evangelizing theatre in New Spain and religious theatre especially of the Extremadura region in Spain, among playwrights such as Diego Sánchez de Badajoz, an author to be mentioned again in a later chapter of this study.

Considerable debate has developed concerning the degree to which evangelizing theatre in early Colonial Mesoamerica also involved incorporation of Indigenous ritual theatre, as judged by information on Aztec public rituals compiled by Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagun and Dominican friar Diego Durán. Elements most likely to be incorporated are those that the two traditions, of Europe and Mesoamerica, had independently grown to share. Of these, Aracil Varón (1999: 178–79) emphasizes the focus on religious themes, use of natural decoration with vegetation and animals, along with the use of masks and costumes, music and dance. But we may note that descriptions of artificial mountains used as settings for *autos sacramentales* in Tlaxcala in the late 1530s bear a strong similarity to the setting for Aztec farces representing disease that Durán (1971: 134–35) describes for a ceremony dedicated to Quetzalcoatl: a platform decorated with featherwork and flowered arches along with birds and rabbits.

Burkhart (2011: 18) clarifies the social aspects of these attractions as constructing solidarity in a community and prestige for its leaders:

Nahuas who put on a play presented themselves in public as Christians, as good and pious subjects of the colonial system. They also brought the community together for an enjoyable event that expressed its solidarity. An impressive play also glorified one's own *altepetl*, and thus one's own group identity, over others. It attracted visitors and drummed up business for local merchants. In this way theater played a role similar to the imposing churches that native Mexicans constructed for their communities. A play or a church was a public, visible assertion of political legitimacy, community pride, and devotion to the sacred powers—however people actually conceived of those. Within the community, nobles or relatively well-off individuals who

sponsored a performance, paid for the sets and costumes, fed the actors, and so on would gain prestige as would the actors themselves if they did a good job. All of these benefits existed on top of whatever spiritual or moral messages priests hoped the audience would absorb.

Friars and Indigenous persons collaborated on the production of theatrical presentations of various lengths and type including pageants, cantares, mysteries, bailes, and autos sacramentales (Hutcheson 2003: 189-91). Louise Burkhart (2011: 22-23) details the kinds of roles that would be entailed in this collective enterprise of evangelizing theatre. Friars would engage the collaboration of Indigenous fiscales to call on their skills in organizing the Indigenous community for religious observances. An Indigenous person relatively fluent in Spanish would be necessary to assist the friar with translation of his text into Nahuatl, and a literate notary would then be needed to copy the scripts and help dancers learn their parts. Burkhart also notes that friars would depend on collaboration with the maestro cantor or maestro de capilla who was responsible for care of the instruments and training of singers, dancers and musicians and who would play Spanish instruments himself. Burkhart suggests that the *maestro* cantor may have had the greatest responsibility for producing the play. Perhaps persons trained in Nahuatl dance styles were also called upon to instruct and rehearse performers in dance movements. And, since the music often differs from European style in important ways, musicians fluent in Indigenous musical forms may have collaborated in composing the sones that accompany dances. Finally Burkhart notes that cofradías were likely involved in supporting the production and providing resources, and that many in the community could participate in constructing a stage set or in preparing props and costumes. In this collaborative process, Indigenous participants would naturally be introducing many of their own conventions of music, dance, song, recitation, staging, costuming, pantomime, and so on.

3.3.2. Form and Content of Evangelizing Theatre Performance

Various authors have attempted to chart the history of evangelizing theatre in Mesoamerica from the well documented spectacles of the late 1530s, especially in Mexico City and Tlaxcala, to the end of the century and in some cases beyond. This early evangelizing theatre was large scale and often spectacular. Two prominent genres of this early evangelizing theatre are conquest-and-conversion pageants and biblical-themed *autos sacramentales*.

Conquest-and-conversion pageants were usually planned to celebrate a political event associated with the monarchy and foreign relations. These performances combined the religious aspect of the conversion of non-Christians to Christianity with the political aspect of claiming territory and populations for Christendom, at this time associated particularly with the Spanish empire. Aracil Varón (1999: 250–51) traces this form of celebratory spectacle to European traditions of courtly pageants involving tourneys, jousts, assaults on castles and other activities. Beginning perhaps in the 12th century and according to Aracil Varón regularly by the 15th century, these pageants came to involve

specific historic content associated with the *reconquista*, the centuries-long process of wresting the Iberian peninsula from the Moors that culminated in the taking of Granada in 1492 and the program of converting its Muslim population to Christianity.

At the core of this conquest-and-conversion framework is the conflict between Christians and Muslims that leads to the defeat and conversion of the Muslim enemy. This framework expanded to include early crusades and battles especially associated with Charlemagne, as well as an anticipated new crusade against the Ottoman Turk empire to take Constantinople and the Levant that had been under discussion since 1517, and that came to be seen as vital when the Ottoman Empire besieged Vienna in 1529. A fantasy of the Moors as evil and in league with Satan grew to become equated with all non-Christians, and thus in several theatrical productions Muslims are shown unjustly to be pagan idolaters, quite the opposite of Islamic tradition. Moros y Cristianos pageants and the offshoot mock battle between the two forces called the juego de cañas (game of canes) became popular and were carried into the invasion of the Americas (Harris 2000: 57-59). The first documented occasion in New Spain was the presentation to Cortés and his troops in 1524 in Coatzacoalcos, on their way to subdue Olid in Honduras (Harris 2000: 118). A similar mock battle, perhaps a juego de cañas, was apparently performed in Guatemala in 1526, when Jorge de Alvarado's expedition met the Spanish soldiers who were holding the outpost at Olintepeque. This mock battle is represented on the Lienzo of Quauhquechollan, painted by returning Quauhquecholteco fighters obligated to accompany Alvarado because he had been awarded their community as an encomienda (Akkeren 2007).

As a component of evangelizing theatre, spectacles of the *Moros y Cristianos* framework not only celebrated the conversion of a population to Christianity but also served to reinscribe Spanish political and economic domination over Indigenous Americans. Both friars and *conquistadores* saw the usefulness of presenting pageants of the *Moros y Cristianos*, the one to encourage conversion and the other to celebrate a righteous identity as conquerors for the Christian faith. Additionally, these pageants gave the colonial an opportunity to display their finery while allowing native *Caciques* to demonstrate their Christian faith and loyalty to the crown and thereby increase status, privilege, and wealth (Aracil Varón 1998: 42).

The three best documented *Moros y Cristianos* spectacles in New Spain were all celebrated in 1539 (in Oaxaca, Mexico City, and Tlaxcala) to commemorate the peace treaty with France in 1538, called the Treaty of Nice, that ended France's alliance with the Ottoman empire and was believed to pave the way for the new crusade to begin (Aracil Varón 1999: 454–58). The theatrical spectacle in Mexico City, called the Siege of Rhodes, continued the Iberian tradition of a courtly celebration, with a castle constructed to stage the *Moros y Cristianos* pageant and accompanied by feasts, bullfights, *juegos de cañas*, and a show of finery by the colonial elite (Aracil Varón 1999: 459–61).

In contrast to the staging of Moros y Cristianos battle pageants for such political celebrations, religious

festivals were attended by the performance of *autos sacramentales*: plays recounting biblical stories and the lives of the saints as well as dramatizing other aspects of Christian theology. In Spain, these theatrical pieces were presented at various liturgical celebrations. Some *autos* were associated with specific annual commemorations, such as Adoration of the Magi for Christmas, the Passion and Resurrection of Christ for Easter, and the Assumption of the Virgin for her festival on August 15 (Aracil Varón 1999: 231–46). But the focus was on Corpus Christi, a ceremony that gained in importance through the counter–reformation in the 16th century (Burkhart 2011: 6). This close relation of religious drama to Corpus Christi was maintained by the missionary orders in the Americas, presenting *autos sacramentales* at various stages along the processional route. Many of these works were furnished with scripts in the local Indigenous language. These include plays in Nahuatl originated by the late 1530s in Mexico particularly by Franciscans, and plays in K'iche' developed in Guatemala by Dominicans, initially under the leadership of Bartolomé de las Casas from 1537–1542.

Focusing on Franciscan autos in Nahuatl performed in New Spain and primarily in the large centres of Tenochtitlan/Mexico City and Tlaxcala, Aracil Varón (1999: 295-305) explains the relationship between missionary goals and theatrical content. Foremost among Franciscan goals was the conversion of the Indigenous population. Aracil Varón identifies several themes of evangelizing theatre designed to inspire conversion. Of these the more directly religious themes included: 1) demonstration of conversion as a movement from darkness into the light; 2) the threat of hell for non-conversion, as in plays concerning the Last Judgment; and 3) temptations, both those of Christ and the Saints that present successful resistance, and those such as that of Adam and Eve that show the punishment for succumbing. More overtly political themes related to the context of New Spain included:1) depiction of Indigenous deities as inferior or false gods, Indigenous icons as idols, and non-Christians as deluded by the devil; 2) showing Christian deities providing victory in battle as they overcome non-Christian forces both human and supernatural; and 3) depiction of rulers and other leaders as converting or already converted, so that their subjects or followers will imitate their example. Other missionary goals served by evangelizing theatre according to Aracil Varón include: 1) moral and doctrinal instruction including proper Christian lifestyle; 2) extirpation of idolatry, including suppression of episodes that would remind the audience of non Christian activities and possibly inspire their resumption; 3) deprecation of priests and healers considered to be in league with the devil, classifying their activities as witchcraft, so that in plays such "sorcerers" were consigned to hell; 4) allowing converted performers and audience to demonstrate the sincerity of their faith and their participation in a Christian community; and 5) demonstrating the success of the missionary enterprise to the Spanish colonial authorities, both in religious and governmental institutions.

In this early phase of evangelizing theatre, *autos* were also conceived as spectacles with large scale staging, but in the form of artificial hills rather than castles. Motolinia described two religious festivals in Tlaxcala in 1538 that each featured a set of four such *autos*. The Corpus Christi celebration included *autos* on the themes of Adam and Eve, the Temptation of Christ, and the stories of St. Jerome and St.

Francis. Auxiliary elements for the procession included ten large triumphal arches and more than a thousand small arches (Aracil Varón 1999: 189–91). Shortly after, the feast of St. John the Baptist featured four related *autos* on themes leading from the assumption to the infancy of this saint, and culminating with the actual baptism of an eight day old baby (Aracil Varón 1999: 192, 260). Motolinia also described the four *autos* for Corpus Christi in Tlaxcala in 1539 but this celebration was more complicated because it included the staging of the *Moros y Cristianos* spectacle, here called the Conquest of Jerusalem, in celebration of the same treaty of Nice honoured earlier in the year in Oaxaca and Mexico City. Though featuring a cast of thousands and several large–scale constructions, this battle spectacle was situated as the first of the four *autos*, the others of which were The Temptation of Christ, the Sermon of Saint Francis to the Birds, and the Sacrifice of Abraham (Aracil Varón 1999: 200–02). Also to honour the religious festival in which it occurred, the Conquest of Jerusalem pageant culminated in a mass baptism. Thus in Tlaxcala in 1539 the two basic forms of evangelizing theatre, the *Moros y Cristianos* conquest–and–conversion pageant and the biblical *autos sacramentales*, were combined into one event.

3.3.3. Dances Narrating Spanish Victories in the Americas

Cortés biographer, Francisco López de Gómara (1922) succinctly expressed a pervasive Spanish view: "They began the conquest of Indians when they had finished that of the Moors, because the Spaniards would always make war on infidels...." Naturally then, the *Moros y Cristianos* spectacle gave rise to an offshoot Conquest Dance genre in which Spanish conquests of the Americas were the text rather than one of the subtexts. The key issue of the offshoot genre of conquest pageants is that they do not readily admit mixtures of geography and date as does the flexible template of the Moors and Christians, due to the latter's reliance on events that took place far away and sometimes long before. With the conquest genre, events were recent and filled with remembered happenings, especially since they could depend for effect on retaining local or at least regional significance.

In 1541, two years after the above-mentioned Tlaxcala celebration of Corpus Christi, Tlaxcalan soldiers were drafted into the Mixton War against rebellious peoples in the north. This combat of converted against non-converted Amerindians, presaged in the staging of the Conquest of Jerusalem spectacle, became the source for a particular genre of conquest dances called the Dances of the Chichimecs (Aracil Varón 1999: 499).

Another and more widespread genre of Conquest dances concerned the Spanish defeat of the Mexica Aztec, dramatized as a conflict between Hernán Cortés and the emperor Motecuhzoma. The first recorded example of this type of conquest dance may be the mock battle of Aztec and Spanish staged

¹² "Comenzaron las conquistas de indios acabada la de moros, por que siempre guerreasen españoles contra infieles...."

in 1565 in Mexico city (Harris 2000: 148). Martín Cortés, who played the role of his father Hernán Cortés in this performance, soon left for Spain as did his sister, Juana Cortés (Harris 2000: 213), so it is not surprising that in Alcalá in 1571 the same events were dramatized in another pageant, accompanied by a *juego de cañas* and other mock battles on the Moors and Christian themes. The Alcalá conquest pageant, called the Capture of Motecuhzoma, involved hundreds of performers in costume, and at least some wearing masks. As described by Max Harris (2000: 213), Motecuhzoma is encountered within his palace, represented by a painted tent. Cortés in this case sends an embassy to Motecuhzoma with the terms of surrender, which are refused. Motecuhzoma then leads his forces against Cortés and the Spaniards but is defeated and captured. A major difference is that the battle is not settled by a duel as in the *Moros* and *Conquista* genres, but by the Spaniards firing their artillery, startling the Mexicans and allowing Motecuhzoma to be captured.

In Oaxaca, Mexico, an Indigenous story of a Mixtec king triumphing over a Zapotec enemy king was transformed by a Dominican friar into the story of Cortés and Motecuhzoma (Brisset Martín 2001: 10), but, as Shelton (2004: 289) notes, in this Danza de Plumas, Motecuhzoma defeats Cortés and retains his nation's autonomy. While the conflict of Cortés and Motecuhzoma may be spread throughout Mesoamerica, in Peru a conquest story presented in 1555 concerns the defeat of the Inka emperor Atawalpa (Brisset Martín 2001: 9–10).

3.3.4. Regional Variations in Evangelizing Theatre

Beginning in the 1540s the Church establishment began to curtail Indigenous participation in dance and song at religious festivals, under archbishops Juan de Zumárraga in 1545 and Alonso de Montúfar in 1555 (Romero Salinas 2005: 5-6). Under these prohibitions the *Moros y Cristianos* celebratory battle spectacles continued more-or-less as before but the *autos sacramentales* were scaled down and diminished as a tool for conversion and indoctrination. Filling this gap in conversion practices, in 1546 a *doctrina* was published in Mexico city for use in Indigenous communities (Early 2006: 125). When theatre prohibitions were lifted in 1565, the smaller scale forms of evangelizing theatre were already established and continued evolving as popular theatre even after the conversion project was considered largely accomplished (Aracil Varón 1999: 522).

Aracil Varón (1999: 522-56) sees this shift as a decline of the tradition of evangelizing theatre that was tied in with larger social and political changes. She notes that in contrast to the Emperor Carlos V, his successor Felipe II, who took the throne in 1556, led a movement to break down the system of separate communities (following a syncretic religion) established under the missionaries, instead preferring secular priests and the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into Spanish society as second-class citizens. In particular, Aracil Varón considers evangelizing theatre to have declined in the late 16th century because scripts in Indigenous languages were being replaced by scripts in Spanish, which in some cases were Spanish translations of earlier Nahuatl works. She notes that Spanish playwrights were

arriving in New Spain in the late 16th century and began creating theatrical scripts in the style of the *siglo de oro* in Spain which were designed primarily for the non-Indigenous population. However she admits that her chronological reconstruction functions best for metropolitan centres, noting that Ciudad Real's account of Alonso Ponce's *visita* tour in the 1580s shows that Indigenous-directed evangelizing theatre was still popular in rural communities. This proviso would also apply to western Guatemala in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, when missionaries still held sway in the large Indigenous communities and friars were likely the only persons in such communities with the education to create a *siglo de oro* style script like that of the *Baile de la Conquista*.

These exceptions highlight a central problem with the literature on evangelizing theatre of the early colonial period, which is its limited focus on Franciscan-directed plays in Nahuatl performed in the larger centres of what is now central Mexico. This focus has led to marginalization of plays by Dominicans and Jesuits, plays originated in areas such as Western Mexico or Guatemala, and plays written in languages such as Spanish or K'iche'.

My concern here is particularly with plays in Spanish like the *Baile de la Conquista*, following, to a lesser or greater extent, the style of *siglo de oro* theatre in Spain. I believe it is unjustified to classify such plays as peripheral to or even excluded from the category of evangelizing theatre. But as a result of this treatment, dance-dramas with scripts in Spanish poetry tend to be neglected and, if they are intensively investigated, it is in a distinct discourse. An example of the latter would be the genre of the *pastorela*, a story of Christ's nativity narrating the trials of shepherds wishing to visit the Christ child to honour him, but who are beset by the devil in their journey. Ultimately the Archangel Michael defeats the devil and the shepherds succeed in their quest. Several scripts for this dance-drama have been published and many more have been collected, dating as early as 1595 (Romero Salinas 2005: 8).¹³

In line with its early origin, Flores (1994: 271) relates the theme of the simple shepherd to the *Pastor Bobo* of Spanish *siglo de oro* theatre. Bauman (1996: 306) notes that the text in use in the *municipio* of San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, is in Spanish poetry in the style of *siglo de oro* theater scripts. Using terms that will be explained in a chapter four, Bauman mentions the octosyllabic line and describes the *romance* form as well as mentioning rhymed couplets, *redondillas*, and *décimas*, all equally characteristic of the early style texts for the Guatemalan *Baile de la Conquista*. ¹⁴ Early *pastorelas* ended with a *villancico*, a popular Spanish and Latin American song form that was adopted to specifically Catholic religious uses by the late 16th century, especially for concluding an *auto* (Aracil Varón 1999: 146).

¹³ It is not known whether the *pastorela* performed in 1578, in honor of the *visita* by Fray Alonso Ponce, was scripted (Romero Salinas 2005: 6).

¹⁴ The *pastorela* text from 1595 published by Romero Salinas (2005: 87–130) has both 11– and 8–syllable lines, the latter often in the *quintilla* form.

Romero-Salinas also provides a forceful argument that the *pastorela* form was developed by Jesuit rather than Franciscan missionaries. He notes that there is no reference to this story before the arrival of Jesuits in New Spain in 1572, and from 1578 and thereafter the regions in which it is performed are specifically those proselytized by Jesuits. Romero-Salinas also explains that the story is more amenable to Jesuit philosophy. As "soldiers of Christ," Jesuits identified more with the martial image of the Archangel Michael, thus their nativity play involves a battle between this saint and the devil, in contrast to the Franciscan preference for the story of the three Magi as a nativity theme.

While the introduction of the Spanish-scripted *pastorela* in the late 16th century accords with Aracil Varón's chronology, it appears to represent not a decline of evangelizing theatre but a new genre within that category. At the same time that it amplifies Aracil Varón's point about maintenance of older practices in peripheral regions outside of highland central Mexico, it speaks to an unfair marginalization of Spanish-scripted plays to the discourse on evangelizing theatre. In several ways then, it helps flesh out the context within which the Guatemalan *Baile de la Conquista* was likely produced.

3.3.5. Evangelizing Theatre in Guatemala

Guatemala provides another geographically and politically peripheral context in which evangelizing plays in Spanish appear to have been introduced by the late 16th century, added to or even replacing

autos in Indigenous languages. In this form, evangelizing theatre continued to flourish in Guatemala even as it may have been declining in highland central Mexico. Documentation on specific authors and examples of this theatre of conversion is scarce for the Guatemalan context but there is some useful if scattered information that has been assembled and analyzed by Mace (1970: 33–50), Tedlock (2003:187–79) and Hutcheson (2003: 189–206).

The first steps toward a Guatemalan theatre of conversion, in the K'iche' and Q'eq'chi languages, were taken in 1537–1542 by Dominicans under the supervision of Bartolomé de las Casas. Las Casas was granted this five-year period to demonstrate the



San Jorge Mudo (St. George without text), Rabinal, 2009

 $^{^{15}}$ These efforts were documented by Dominican friar Ant 2009 .

¹¹ and 15 of his *Historia*, though some of his information would be corrected a century later by Francisco Ximenez.

validity of his belief that Indigenous souls could better be won by persuasion than by force and to spare Indigenous peoples the brutality of the *encomienda* system. The test region was the rebellious "Lands of War" (*Tuzulutlán*) that would be pacified under the Dominicans to become the *Verapaz* (true peace). After a preliminary use of song and dance to win converts in Sacapulas (Remesal 1619: I: 227–30), Rabinal was founded as a *reducción* and there Fray Luis Cancer, along with Fray Pedro de Ángulo and other Dominican friars, worked to compose hymns and as well as mystery plays on biblical themes and miracle plays concerning the lives of the saints (Tedlock 2003: 188). Remesal (1619: 250–51) also records their request for a royal cedula in 1540 to bring Indigenous musicians from other monasteries with them to increase the use of music and song for teaching. The life of these performance works did not cease with successful instruction and conversion but instead remained in the festival calendar to reinforce Catholic identity and maintain established traditions. Thus a play on the martyrdom of Saint Paul was performed in Rabinal until recently, and two versions of the story of St. George and the Dragon are still performed there. The scripted version, now in Spanish, narrates how St. George saved a Princess from a dragon and in so doing converted her kingdom to Christianity (Mace 1970: 62).

Hutcheson (2003: 221–22) clarifies that stories of the saints' conversion and especially their martyrdoms were derived from the *Legenda Aurea* or Golden Legend, translated into Spanish in the early 1500s and widely disseminated through print. He notes that these accounts and their derivative theatrical works are more about drama than theology, focusing on the saint's manifestations of supernatural power and steadfastness in the face of martyrdom (Hutcheson 2003: 226). His point is illustrated by Thomas Gage's (1928: 270) description of such martyrdom plays as performed in the early 17th century in Pokomam or Kagchikel regions:

But the dance which doth draw to it the people's wondering is a tragedy acted by way of dance, as the death of St. Peter, or the beheading of John the Baptist. In these dances there is an Emperor, or a King Herod, with their Queens clothed, another clothed with a long loose coat who represents St. Peter, or John the Baptist, who whilst the rest danceth, walketh amongst them with a book in his hands, as if he were saying his prayers, all the rest of the dancers are appareled like captains and soldiers with swords, daggers, or halberds in their hands. They dance at the sound of a small drum and pipes, sometimes round, sometimes in length forward, and have and use many speeches to the emperor or king, and among themselves concerning the apprehending and executing the saint. The king and queen sit sometimes down to hear their pleading against the saint, and his pleading for himself; and sometimes they dance with the rest; and the end of their dance is to crucify St. Peter downwards with his head upon a cross, or behead John the Baptist, having in readiness a painted head in a dish which they present unto the king and queen, for joy whereof they all again dance merrily and so conclude, taking down him that acted Peter from the cross.

From Gage's description, the central core of plays on the martyrdom of saints depicts the trial

officiated by the ruler followed by execution, a characterization that would apply as well to the Rabinal Achí. Tedlock (2003: 188) suggests that the friars would have taken advantage of this parallel to explain the Rabinal Achí as a prefiguration of the conversion and martyrdom of Rabinal's patron saint, Saint Paul.

The fact that these plays on the life and death of saints continued to be performed into the 20th century shows that they had exceeded their original proselytizing function and had become an established part of religious tradition, regulated by the liturgical calendar and thereby producing expectations of repetition. Hutcheson (2003: 204) explains their continuing popularity and relevance after the period of proselytizing through the interests of the Catholic establishment in maintaining the doctrine as well as maintaining the attraction of their nucleated settlements against the tendency to re-disperse. However, one should not underestimate the importance to *Costumbristas* of continuing traditions laid down by ancestors. For example, even after the Church ceased to control the dances, the restriction to male performers was maintained, even for adult female characters, until the end of the 20th century.

In contrast, various conquest pageants were staged in the 17th century in the capital of the Guatemalan colony, Santiago de los Caballeros, now called Antigua Guatemala. In 1631 Captain Martín Alfonso de Tovilla (1960: 153) attended a celebration in the Guatemalan capital that included *juegos de cañas* and a conquest pageant. Tovilla understood the pageant story as involving the capture of Motecuhzoma. In comparison, Domingo Juarros's (1857: II, 356–64) description of festivities in 1680 dedicating the new cathedral in the capital in celebration of the birthday of King Carlos II and his marriage to a French princess (Lamothe 1986: 92), mentions that boys danced as Motecuhzoma and presumably other characters in the story of his defeat. This and other dances were accompanied by the *palo volador* and four fireworks castles. On the final of eight nights a parade took place in which were represented the Aztec led by Motecuhzoma, Ottoman Turks led by "El Gran Turco", Spanish led by la Malinche, and Moors led by "the Sultan." Juarros (1857: II, 363) records that during the following week, along with bull fights and *juegos de cañas*, four plays were presented in the main plaza, but as these were small-scale productions, he did not record their titles or subjects.

Fuentes y Guzmán provides the most elaborate description of a conquest pageant, probably the 1682 pageant that he had organized (Hill 1992: 9). Typical of the conquest theme as it developed in colonial times, the spectacle presented a battle considered to be of local importance particularly to the foundation of the preceding capital, located in Almolonga from 1527–41, with the historical events distorted significantly to emphasize that meaning. This dramatic spectacle was variously referred to as "El Volcán" or "El Peñol," both names referring to the massive construction of an artificial hill in the central plaza on and around which the spectacle was staged. The story concerns the rebellion of the Kagchikel and K'iche' against the Spanish under Pedro de Alvarado, and portrays the recapture and

¹⁶ Peñol appears is a variant of peñon, for a large rock outcrop, thus also signifying a rocky height.

submission of the Kaqchikel rebel king Sinacán in the mountain redoubt of Nimache¹⁷, near the abandoned Kagchikel capital Patinamit/Iximche, during the 1527 expedition of Jorge de Alvarado.

Fuentes y Guzmán (1969-72: I, 346-50) describes the artificial volcano constructed in the plaza, sturdy enough to climb, supporting a small structure at the top for Sinacán's refuge, that was decorated with plants and punctuated with caves in which animals were placed. Finishing this construction the night before the pageant occasioned an initial celebration, with musicians accompanying residents as they toured the locale. The pageant itself involved hundreds of participants. Kaqchikel men representing the Kagchikel forces of the time entered first, then came the elaborately costumed members of the rebel king's escort, performed by the wealthiest members of the suburban community of Jocotenango, who performed regal dances. The governor of Jocotenango, lavishly outfitted as King Sinacán, was carried in a gilt litter adorned with quetzal plumes and placed in the structure atop the volcano. The residents of Ciudad Vieja, the community settled by Tlaxcalan soldiers who assisted in the Spanish conquest, then entered as the Spanish conquistadores with whom their ancestors were allied, all presided over by the governor of Ciudad Vieja.

As the drama was staged, the conquistadores assaulted the mountain and scaled its front, while the Kagchikel army fled from the rear, leaving King Sinacán defenseless. Sinacán was taken prisoner and brought in chains to be arraigned before the presidente of the Santiago, rendering the submission that signified the foundation of the colony and its capital city.18 In addition to the unlikelihood of fleeing army leaving the ruler behind, a significant distortion applied for historical impact is that historically Sinacán actually escaped the battle and was captured a few years later.

While such large-scale spectacle performance continued for political celebrations, ceremonially reinforcing colonial domination over Indigenous populations, small-scale Spanish-scripted narrative plays were being developed and disseminated throughout Guatemala. Earlier, a contrast was noted in the celebrations in central Mexico in the late 1530s between conquest-and-conversion pageants of the Moros y Cristianos framework timed to celebrate political events such as treaties, military victories, and life cycle events of the monarchy, and the autos sacramentales dramatizing biblical stories, lives of the saints, and Christian theology, presented as part of in Catholic festivals regulated by the liturgical calendar. Both types of performance could be performed as spectacles with lavish stage settings: a castle and mountain respectively. By the late 16th century, and perhaps due in part to the series of midcentury prohibitions, this contrast had altered somewhat. Politically-motivated conquest spectacles continued, as noted for Antigua Guatemala in the 17th century, but the religious-themed plays

¹⁷ Fuentes y Guzmán misinterpreted the location, assuming the artificial hill to represent the cone of Santa María volcano overlooking Quetzaltenango.

¹⁸ Although Sinacán actually escaped the battle and was captured a few years later, this Spanish victory led to the foundation of the first Guatemalan capital in the Valley of Almolonga, the capital that was destroyed in the landslide of 1541 leading to the foundation of the city in the Valley of Panchoy now called Antigua Guatemala.

presented in Catholic festivals were now smaller in scale, and often using a poetic Spanish script. While the large-scale spectacles took place in the larger cities with significant Spanish populations and involved community leaders in their performance, small-scale scripted dance-dramas took place in communities of all sizes, including those of almost exclusively Indigenous population, danced by teams of male commoners. Speeches were not the focus of the large-scale spectacles and were not preserved, in contrast to the poetic, Spanish-scripted texts of the small-scale dance dramas which were preserved and continually renewed through copying and diffusion.

But while the main contrast was now in scale and participation as well as timing and location, thematic material now overlapped considerably, since some of the scripted team dances treated similar conquest-and-conversion themes to the large-scale spectacles. This is the time, in the late 16th or early 17th centuries, when Spanish-scripted, small-scale dance-dramas of the *Moros y Cristianos* and conquest type entered the festival repertoire. This shared content has caused some confusion in the literature on the history of dance-drama, particularly in Guatemala but also in greater Mesoamerica. But the functions of these conquest-and-conversion performances were different, not only in terms of the type of celebration, but also the political or religious content. Further, while the large scale pageant was increasingly directed toward a non-Indigenous audience in celebration of their past military triumphs in the name of Christianity, small-scale dance dramas were designed for Indigenous participants and spectators, and the narrative looks forward anticipated conversion and resulting *convivencia* or living together harmoniously. Small-scale conquest-and-conversion dances also place more emphasis on theological aspects, emphasizing conversion as a choice based not so much on defeat as on realization of the truth of Christian theology.

This shift in the nature of the contrast between large- and small-scale performance was not unprecedented. Antonio Warman Gryj (1972: 32-44) traces a contrast between two types of performance to developments within the *Moros y Cristianos* genre in Spain. He notes that mass spectacles, also called *escaramuzas* (skirmishes), involved hundreds of participants and stagecraft comprising temporary constructions such as castles. He notes that these spectacles were often combined with tournaments and chivalrous jousts, *juegos de cañas*, bullfights, masquerades and parades. He describes some of these mass spectacles staged in celebration of events affecting the royal family, each with a different story of Christian victories enacted within the *Moros y Cristianos* structure. Warman refers to the contrasting small-scale dance dramas as theatre pieces connected with biblical-themed *autos* that were an important part of Corpus Christi festivals, but adapting their form to more secular themes. He attributes their smaller scale to a process of passing from the hands of clerics to those of religious societies such as *hermandades* and *cofradías*. In New Spain and Guatemala, this process led to the scripted and recopied dance-dramas. Warman (1972: 118-23) notes that once introduced and accepted by Christianized Indigenous populations, these scripted Spanish-language dance-dramas tended to be spread by them and to be performed in festivals of the Corpus Christi,

Holy Cross, and local patron saint. As Indigenous control increased, so did the tenacity with which such dances were perpetuated (Warman 1972: 118-23).

It is often assumed in the literature on colonial performance in Guatemala that the small-scale dancedramas replaced the large-scale pageants, but this history is more complicated because the two configurations remained contemporary forms of performance that fulfilled contrasting functions. Both types are highlighted in different parts of Tovilla's 1635 text. On the one hand, Tovilla describes a 1631 celebratory pageant in the Guatemalan capital, organized by the Mayor (Tovilla's cousin), in celebration of a prince's birth, involving a mountain-shaped stage construction and costly plaza decoration, and seen as an occasion for the colonial aristocracy to display their finery. On the other hand, in the same 1635 publication Tovilla also quotes a 1625 ordinance directed to an area in the Verapaz, far removed from the capital, and designed to curtail Indigenous participation in small-scale dramas for Catholic festivals in order to spare them the cost of renting feathers and costumes (Tovilla 1960: 138,153). Around the same time (circa 1630) Gage describes dancers learning and rehearsing texts for such scripted dramas to present at the *fiesta patronal* of Kagchikel or Pokomam communities.

Due to their distinct functions, it was also possible to present both types of performance in the same community around the same time. Father Celso Narciso Teletor (1955: 176) recorded his observations of both types in Rabinal around 1900, nearly three centuries after Tovilla's publication. As noted, the large-scale spectacles and small-scale dance dramas had come to share a similar thematic content. Thus both Rabinal performances described by Teletor represented the same story: the battle between Spanish invaders under Pedro de Alvarado and K'iche' defenders under Tekum.

Teletor first viewed the pageant type, which did not employ masks or script, but did involve the construction of a miniature mountain with bushes and plants over a large hole in which K'iche' fighters led by Tekum were hidden. When performers representing Spanish invaders, led by Alvarado, arrived on horseback, K'iche' forces emerged from hiding and a battle ensued, with K'iche' shooting arrows and Spanish using shotguns. Teletor noted that Tekum's princess was dressed and ornamented as befits her rank. Ajitz the priest-diviner was present throughout and screamed when Tekum was killed. At that time a *totoboque* a bird resembling a quetzal (of which none was available) was released to fly away, perhaps representing the departing but still living spirit of Tekum, but interpreted by Teletor as signaling K'iche' defeat. The hole under the mountain and the release of a bird are not reported from other spectacles, which is to be expected since such constructions were largely improvisational in that each iteration of the story differs significantly in staging from its predecessors.

Teletor then describes a subsequent small-scale performance on the same theme and with many of the same personages. He found the small-scale performance to be entirely lacking in spectacle and remarks that it was more like the Dance of the Moors and Christians. He notes that dancers used a script that has been copied over time. He also notes the use of masks, clothing ornamented with

mirrors, and the quetzal figure in Tekum's headdress. He describes mimed divination by Ajitz Grande and Chiquito. He also notes there were two Princesses but not lavishly dressed. Teletor's description of the second performance matches exactly the *Baile de la Conquista* as it is performed today among K'iche' and other Maya groups. By 1900 this dance was becoming popular in Guatemalan regions outside its place of origin, most likely related to the liberals of the 1870–71 revolution adopting Tekum as a national hero, as discussed in a later chapter. This popularity must have influenced the spectacle version as well, since the character of Ajitz is certainly the creation of the friar who wrote the small–scale dance drama that Teletor saw second. Thus, in Guatemala, large–scale public pageants and small–scale festival dance–dramas, including those specifically related to the Spanish conquest, have coexisted and evolved for at least three centuries, rather than representing two evolutionary stages of a single tradition. See the table for a summary of differences between these two performance formats.

	Pageant or Mass Spectacle	Small-Scale Scripted Team Dance-
		Drama
Timing	Celebration of unpredictable political events	Regulated by liturgical calendar
Location	Major cities, especially capitals	Cabeceras of any municipio
Scale	Hundreds or thousands of participants	About 20 participants
Organizers	Ladino city officials	Indigenous sponsors
Performers	Community leaders with general population	Dance team
Dramatic focus	Battle strategies, siege, victory	Moral choices, conversion
Set	Elaborate mountain or castle in main plaza	Sometimes a simple palace construction
Characters	Leaders and followers primarily	Leaders primarily
Staging	Swarming armies and camps	Parallel lines
Masks	Usually absent	Present
Gracejos	Absent	Present

While it seems clear that Friars adapted the tradition of Corpus Christi *autos sacramentales* to create these scripted small-scale dance dramas that would serve their evangelizing agenda it is not clear when this development took place. The archive is conspicuously silent on this matter since, as Warman (1972: 100) and Harris (2000: 61) point out, the large scale metropolitan productions that are often used to celebrate political events were more likely to be recorded than small scale dances in rural areas. It was noted above that Juarros identified the characters impersonated in a large-scale parade but made no mention of the topics for the small-scale dramas presented on the same occasion in the late 17th century. In comparison, Burkhart (2011: 14) notes that of more than a hundred publications in Nahuatl printed in Mexico, not a single example of Nahuatl evangelizing theatre received that treatment. All ingredients for these small-scale dance dramas or *bailes* were present since at least the late 16th century: Jesuit friar Joseph (José) de Acosta writes that by this time there were dances with music, dialogues, masks and appropriate costumes (García Escobar 1990: 21).

3.4. Comparison of the *Moros y Cristianos* and *Conquista* Scripted Genres in Guatemala

3.4.1. Shared traits

Small-scale Spanish-scripted dance-dramas on the subjects of the Moors and Christians and of the Spanish Conquests in the Americas share several features. Both appear to have been adapted by friars as a continuation of their program of a theatre of conversion. In comparing these performance works with stories from the Bible and lives of the saints, often written in the local Indigenous language, it may be suggested that the Moors and Christians and Conquest dances, written in Spanish, place much less emphasis on instruction in Christian doctrine. In contrast, they place more emphasis on the act of conversion that they are designed to encourage by identifying the Indigenous population with the defeated group that willingly converts at the dance's conclusion. However, as Christianity came to be more inculcated, the Indigenous population could identify with the Christian victors, and instead associate the defeated converts with still unconquered or rebellious groups.

In both genres os small-scale dance-dramas, dances are accompanied by instruments popular in the early Colonial period: the *tambor* and *pito* (cane flute) for the *Moros y Cristianos* genre; and the *tambor* and *chirimía* for the *Baile de la Conquista*. Dances of individuals and groups alternate with declamation of poetic texts. With the use of a set script for speaking, improvisation emerged in segments of pantomime lacking both text and music.

The Spanish texts for these dance-drama scripts were designed to imitate the style of Spanish theatre of the *siglo de oro*. Thus they are written in verse, usually octosyllabic and using a variety of the appropriate and popular forms such as the *décima*, *quintilla*, *redondilla*, *copla de arte menor* and especially *romance*. As Díaz Roig (1983: 184-85) notes, the common assumption that scripts designed

for use in rural Indigenous communities will be crude is belied by their evident literary sophistication.

Agreeing with Aracil Varón, Hutcheson (2003: 191) suggests that the writing of texts in Spanish verse obeying rules of *siglo de oro* drama would also appeal to resident Spaniards by celebrating European cultural sophistication. However it is not clear to what extent Spaniards would have been exposed to these dance-dramas in Guatemala, performed in largely Indigenous communities away from the metropolitan settlements and Spanish ranches and other enclaves. So it might instead be the case that friars, well educated in Spain before coming to the Americas, were interested in demonstrating their own sophistication to themselves and to each other. In Guatemala, intense rivalry between Franciscan and Dominican orders might have further stimulated friar-authors to compete with each other on the perfection of their texts.



Moros y Cristianos, Rabinal, 2009.

In adapting the *Moros* y Cristianos and Conquista theme to the play format, protagonists were divided into two forces of equal strength, arranged in parallel lines for performance. The oppositions binary that structure these narratives are thus made visually explicit, and in so doing, the construction of identity through confrontation with the Other is made more forceful (Brissett Martín 2001:

12). As Armas (1990: 50–51) and Tedlock (2003: 165) both note, the parallel line format introduced to stage the opposing forces led to a very different style of dancing. Whereas Indigenous dances like the Rabinal Achí favoured circular movement, in these dance-dramas the two lines of dancers face each other, and one or more of these personages will dance into the intervening space or in a rectangular circuit. What may be an Indigenous cosmographic adaptation to this circuit is the practice of marking the four corners with a *vuelta* in which two dancers pivot in a tight circle around each other. Armas (1990: 51–52) makes the acute observation that dancers' motion is most prominent and concentrated

¹⁹ García Escobar (1990: 20) suggests that the parallel line arrangement derives from European courtly dances such as the quadrille. Actually the contradance would be the most analogous formation. The contradance became widespread in Europe in the late 17th and early 18th century, so if it is the source for dance formations in Guatemala, it would have replaced an earlier arrangement.

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with the steps, whereas arm movement is largely the practical motions necessary to manipulate their props. Often this involves shaking a rattle to punctuate a step. Dances that involve a circuit are most commonly but not always counter-clockwise.

In both genres, texts stress a precise hierarchy within each of the two adversarial lines. Characters stand, march, and dance in this specific hierarchic order. They speak in the same order in sections that do not advance the action but provide formulaic expressions of fealty to the leader and willingness to contribute to the military effort. I suspect either that this focus on protocol was an Indigenous contribution to the texts or at least that it was a shared interest among Spaniards and Indigenous that was therefore elaborated in the texts to stress commonalities and ease the transition in politics, religion and lifestyle that the plays promote. Besides rank, identity is also stressed for the purpose of performance participation: at some point, each character will be granted a solo dance accompanied by his particular *son* or tune. This solo introduction takes considerable time and in many communities it is going out of fashion so that many *sones* are already lost or in danger of being lost. Judith Armas (1990: 50–51) adds the important point that the hierarchically ranked places on the dance ground that they occupy when in line is maintained fixed, even when dancers move away from those places.

In the standard order of these hierarchically arranged lines, the king or other leader of each side is positioned at one end, usually closest to the musicians who in some ways stand in for the church, and in many cases are closest to the Church or *cofradía* to which the performance is being offered (Armas 1990: 48–49). The line descends in rank order to finish with the *gracejo* in the lowest position at the opposite end. The *gracejo* is a convention of *siglo de oro* plays, in Spain normally referred to as *gracioso*. The *gracioso* character is considered to have reached its peak of evolution under Lope de Vega during the *siglo de oro*, but had important earlier precedents. In the dances, the *gracejo* is the comic figure, usually a servant or otherwise attached to the most heroic fighter on each side, and variously guilty of a huge appetite for food and sex as well as cowardice.

3.4.2. Distinctive Characteristics of the *Moros y Cristianos* Genre

Although the *Moros y Cristianos* genre involves a template that could include stories like the conversion of Saint Paul, and although the names, eras, and geographic regions of the characters can differ greatly (even allowing Napoleon to enter) most of the stories share a common foundation in tropes of chivalry, including feudal fealties (Howell 2004: 196), a decisive single combat or duel in which divine assistance determines the victor, and even love-at-first sight in the case of the Moor princess and Christian knight. Members of this genre in Guatemala also share a narrative thread. They begin with conflict between the two groups that the Moors have caused before the beginning of the play, and that demands forceful response. The Christians king sends Ambassadors to the Moor king to demand that the wrong be righted and often as well that the Moors convert to Christianity. The Moor king's response is doubled: he not only tells the Christian Ambassadors that he refuses the conditions

of surrender but also sends his own Ambassadors to the Christian court to carry his challenge for warfare. A battle then takes place that is inconclusive, and here different versions diverge considerably, as will be shown. But in most cases the leading Moor fighter, often the son of the Moor king, decides to convert to Christianity and help the Christian Kings. Thus in the second battle, with this hero's help, the Moors are defeated. The hero leads other Moors in conversion but the Moor king, depending on the text, may also agree to convert or may choose death instead.

For the divergent central parts in which the distinctive narrative is concentrated, there are two prominent stories in the Guatemalan versions, though they go by different names, as is typical with dance texts. The simpler story involves the Moor hero Muley and is variously referred to as *La Historia de Muley* or *El Cerco de Argel* (the Siege of Argel). The premise in this type is that the Moors have occupied Christian territory and especially a Christian castle which is now their fortress. In the central part of the story, after the indecisive battle, Muley and his *gracejo* companion encounter the body of the Christian knight Enrique on the battlefield. Without knowing his identity, Muley insists on a proper burial for Enrique. The death of Enrique spurs the Christians on to a renewed assault and in it Muley and his *gracejo are* captured and imprisoned in the Christian castle. In prison, Muley is visited by the ghost of Enrique, who encourages Muley to convert to Christianity, since the good deed of the burial, will mean he will go to heaven. Muley agrees and allies with the Christians against the Moor king. When the Moor king sees Muley advancing at the head of Christian soldiers, he first believes that Muley has defeated the Christians. When he learns the truth, he either attacks Muley and is killed or he dies of rage. Muley then surrenders the castle and territory to the Christian king.

The text for the more complex story is quite long and there are reports that it takes more than a single day to perform. In this version the conflict is caused by the Moor King, Almirante Balán, who has stolen relics and treasures from Rome and is now obsessed to destroy Carlomagno (Charlemagne) and the Christians. His daughter Princess Floripes wants him to desist, as she fell in love with a Christian knight who she saw in Rome. But Almirante Balán refuses her. Embassies and battles differ in this variant, but the crucial aspect is the decisive duel. The Moor prince Fierabras insists on fighting with a Christian hero of equal stature. Roldan is reticent so Oliveros, though badly wounded, steps in. Fierabras is concerned about this disadvantage so he first uses a balsam to heal Oliveros. Their several episodes of dueling alternate with Oliveros preaching Christian theology to Fierabras. When Fierabras is badly wounded and loses the duel, he realizes that since the Christian god made Oliveros win, then Christianity must be the true religion, and he asks to be converted. Oliveros leaves Fierabras in a hidden place in the mountains and goes to get help. The Moors meanwhile have attacked the Christian castle, and Oliveros is captured along with the knight Ganalón, so they are imprisoned in the Moor castle tower. There Floripes visits them and tells about her desire to marry the Knight Guido and become a Christian. They contemplate a possible escape. Back at the Christian castle, Emperor Carlomagno sends Roldan and Guido to reconnoiter and they come across Fierabras. He is brought to Carlomagno and declares his desire to be Christian and ally with the Christians. Roldan and Guido are

then sent as embassy to the Moor king to tell him about Fierabras' conversion and encourage the Moor to convert as well, but instead the Ambassadors are imprisoned. Floripes visits them also and a marriage is arranged with Guido. When Almirante Balán learns of Floripes' plan he orders her to prison as well, but she and the four Christian knights manage to escape. They reach Carlomagno's castle just before the Moors attack again. In this final battle the Moor king Almirante Balán is taken to Carlomagno and given the opportunity to convert. He refuses and is hanged, though in some versions he converts. Princess Floripes and Prince Fierabras are converted and Fierabras is sent to rule his kingdom as a Christian vassal.

Tedlock (2003: 191) traces the source of this second narrative ultimately to the eighth century event that was seen to presage the *reconquista*, when Charlemagne attempted unsuccessfully to wrest Zaragoza from the Saracens. Returning to France, his forces were ambushed by Basques in the canyon of Roncesvalles in the Pyrenees, resulting in the deaths of Roland and other knights. This defeat was transformed through literary retelling not as a defeat by other Christians but as a victory over Muslims. Of the many forms this retelling took in the following centuries, one was the epic *Fierabras*, first printed in 1486. The Spanish translation of *Fierabras* retitled *Carlomagno y las doce pares de Francia*, was printed first in 1521. As this book became readily available in the Americas, friars could adapt it into the structure of a play in verse, enabling it to be continually repeated in festivals timed to the liturgical calendar.

3.4.3. Distinctive Differences of the Conquest Dance Genre

As with the Moros y Cristianos genre, the offshoot Conquest Dance genre was transformed by friars into a series of small-scale dance-dramas. However, these are not based on a single literary text; like the Conquest pageants they tend to tell local stories of Spanish forces defeating an Indigenous kingdom. Friar-authors thus relied on the structure of the *Moros y Cristianos* plays, with the embassy, battle, duel of leaders, Christian victory and conversion of the defeated survivors.

The local reference must however be qualified. Throughout several regions of Mexico, conquest dances depict the conflict between Spanish under Cortes and Aztec under Motecuhzoma, even when performed outside the Nahua region. In Guatemala only two scripted conquest dances have survived. In contrast, there is no evidence that the capture of the Kaqchikel ruler Sinacam depicted in the *Volcán* pageant was ever translated into the small-scale format.

Of the two conquest dances that survive in Guatemala, one, the Dance of Cortés, or Conquest of Mexico, also sometimes referred to by the name of the Indigenous *gracejo*-like character, Zaqi K'oxol, is a Mayanized version of the Mexican conquest dance involving the defeat of Motecuhzoma, with his Tlaxcalan and K'iche' allies. The story thus reverses the historical alliance between Cortés and the Tlaxcalans. As usual with the conquest genre in its derivation from the *Moros y Cristianos* genre, there

are embassies suing for peace, a princess defecting to the Christians, a decisive battle and subsequent conversion of the defeated non-Christians. Striking parallels to the *Baile de la Conquista* include the mission to bring the K'iche' king and his leading fighter, Zaqi K'oxol (White Lightning) from Guatemala to aid in the defense and the subsequent building of a defensive fortification—here a ditch rather than a wall. The text for this dance is bilingual: while Spaniards all speak only Spanish, Indigenous groups (Mexica, Tlaxcalteca and K'iche') all speak mainly in K'iche' though sometimes they address the Spaniards in Spanish.²⁰ Instructions for dances in the text show that instrumentation may also be bicultural. For K'iche' dances, the *tun* or slit gong and *q'ohom* or *marimba sencillo* are used, while for Spanish marches and dances the Spanish snare drum (*caja*) and trumpet (*clarín*) are used. Based on text style as well as geographical references, Edmonson argues that this Guatemalan adaptation was composed by a K'iche' author (Edmonson 1997: 3–5). Judging from the most prominent characters, the original that this K'iche' author adapted may have been composed in Tlaxcala. Edmonson's list of dates on the six texts begins with two dated 1726. He does not specify how these are dated, but they would represent the oldest recovered texts for dance–dramas in Guatemala.²¹

The second and most popular of the Guatemalan conquest dances, the subject of this study, is variously entitled The Dance of the Conquest of Quetzaltenango or The Dance of the Conquest by Pedro de Alvarado. The *Baile de Cortés* and the Guatemalan *Baile de la Conquista* share an overall three-stage narrative. In the first stage, the threat of advancing Spanish is revealed, defenders are summoned, and fortifications are erected. In the second stage the two opposing forces engage in diplomatic relations with embassies but the Indigenous group refuses surrender. In the third stage, the battle takes place, and the Indigenous defenders loose and convert to Christianity.

In contrast to the *Moros y Cristianos* genre, in which the Moors have committed an act that propels Christian retribution, in the *Baile de la Conquista* the fault of the Indigenous K'iche' is inherent: they are not yet Christian subjects of the Spanish Empire. The narrative of the dance resolves that issue, when the ruler converts following the losing battle. In the Guatemalan Dance of the Conquest, the simplified but strong structure of the text reaches this resolution much more directly, without any subplots, than in the Baile de Cortés.

As will be discussed in greater depth, this Conquest Dance was likely written in or near Quetzaltenango, where the events it recounts took place, and where the *título* on which it was based was also written. If so, then it was the product of collaboration between a Franciscan friar and one or more K'iche' nobles. In contrast to the widespread popularity of the *Moros y Cristianos* genre and *Baile de Cortés*, this dance appears to have been largely confined to this western K'iche' region (Otzoyá) until the liberal revolution

 $^{^{20}}$ According to Tedlock (2003: 197-99), the K'iche' used in this dialogue bears many similarities with that of the Rabinal Achí.

²¹ The Rabinal Achí is generally accepted as a 15th century work, but no written text is known prior to 1850.

of 1870-71 made Tekum a national hero. It was also after 1871 that changes were made to the story in several localities, including a scene likely added by a Tecpán author concerning the defection of a princess, thus harmonizing it with the *Moros y Cristianos* and *Baile de Cortés*.



Dance of the Conquest, Joyabaj, 2009. Opposing forces of Spanish and K'iche' are mediated by the Royal Court: Rey K'iche' is seated at the back.

In its form previous to these drastic changes, the Conquista script conforms to the usual conventions, including lines of dancers with a leader at one end of each and a gracejo at the other end. However, there is no major female speaking character: the two princesses. Malinches, have a minor role the articulating in play, sombre moods but not taking any action. And further, the opposing lines of Spanish and

Maya forces are mediated by the Rey K'iche' (K'iche' King) and his court placed on the end and thus between the two opposing sides. There are two embassies, though the second is not to inform the Christian leader of a challenge to war but rather to inform the K'iche' king. The plot climaxes in the usual battle, culminating in single combat between military leaders, but in this form of Conquest dance it is the non-Christian champion who dies and the non-Christian ruler who subsequently asks for conversion.

Conquest dances differ significantly from the *Moros y Cristianos* genre in the portrayal of the character of the defeated group that converts to Christianity. As noted, in Spanish ideology, Moors and Christians had become polarized as representatives of Satan and Christ, evil and good. In some regions of Guatemala today, as in Rabinal, the masks of the Moors are utterly grotesque, expressing this essentialized negative. But in the Conquest dance, as Díaz Roig (1983: 187) notes, it was not desirable to represent in such negative terms the defeated heathens who ultimately convert, because dancers and spectators are descendants of those particular "heathens." Instead it was important for the play to carry its message successfully that both their Indigenous identity as a heritage from the pre-conquest past and their new faith must be presented in positive light. This results in a diminution of the glory accorded the conquerors. Along this line, Hutcheson (2003: 201) notes that the presentation of courts and battles enabled Indigenous communities to indulge in an officially sanctioned presentation of their power and autonomy before the Spanish conquest. The choreography of *convivencia* that terminates the Conquest Dance also recalls the opening panoply, making the point that submission to the

Christian religion and Spanish Crown will bring benefits of prosperity, stability and peace as well as spiritual enlightenment yet with political and cultural continuity.

This promise was and still is ironic, considering the centuries of exploitation and discrimination inaugurated by the Spanish invasions. For Indigenous peoples in general, the story told in conquest dances elicits ambivalence, since along with the Catholic faith which they profess came oppression as well. Pursuing this likely viewpoint, Díaz Roig (1983: 194) imagines the position of Indigenous scribes recopying and handing on such conquest dances:

One must be conscious of the difficulty of the position of the Mexican recreator before the trauma of confrontation of two worlds, but not external to him, rather internal: his indigeneity and his Catholicism; neither one nor the other may be vanquished. Before such disjunction, the recreated texts always reflect the existing tension between religion and nationalism.²²

3.5. Colonial period Institutionalization of dance teams

The evidence demonstrates that in the ancient past as in the present, dance was central to Maya public ritual practice. While Maya groups in Guatemala were able to continue some of the dances and some of the themes that underlay them into the colonial and later periods, they also incorporated many of the dances produced by missionaries and produced their own syntheses of the two traditions. While this much is clear, what is notably missing from these comparisons is an understanding of the institutionalization of dance in pre-Hispanic periods and how this institutionalization evolved and changed over the course of the colonial and national periods.

Some of the most detailed information on the institutionalization of public ritual dance comes from early Colonial Yucatán. Following his 1586–87 journey on the *visita* to Franciscan monasteries in New Spain with fray Alonso Ponce, Antonio de Ciudad Real took up permanent residence in Yucatán where he is thought to have authored the Motul dictionary of the Yucatec Maya language. In this dictionary, the position of *holpop* is identified as the organizer and instructor of public ritual dances. In addition, the dictionary notes that the *holpop* carried out his instruction and rehearsal of performers in the *Popol Na*, the council house also used for political deliberations. Related to these Motul dictionary entries is one of the songs of Dzitbalché, of unknown origin date but likely mid 16th century. This song also associates the "chief *holpop*" with the *Popol Na*. Finally, Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar, writing in Yucatán in 1613, provides additional information on the *holpop*:

²² Hay que estar consciente de lo dificil de la posición del recreador mexicano ante la trama que enfrenta dos mundos, pero no externos a él, sino internos: su indigenismo y su catolicidad; ni uno ni otro pueden ser vencidos. Ante tal disyuntiva, los textos recreados reflejan siempre la tensión existente entre la religiosidad y nacionalismo.

In their heathenism and now they dance and sing in the manner of the Mexicans, and they had and have their principal singer, who intones and teaches what they have to sing, and they venerate him, and revere him, and they give him a seat in the church, and in their assemblies and weddings, and they call him Holpop; in his care are the [kettle] drums and the musical instruments, like flutes, trumpets, turtle shells, and the teponaguaztli, that is of hollow wood, whose sound may be heard for two or three leagues, according to the direction of the wind (Sánchez de Aguilar 2003: 97).²³

From these sources it is clear that in Yucatán at the time of the Spanish invasions, ritual dance was considered a sufficiently important institution to assign its organizer and instructor a high status position in society and to situate its practice in the central governmental building.

For Guatemala, the narrative of Thomas Gage from the 1620s-1630s provides further detailed information on the institutionalization of colonial dance practice, including mention of rehearsals by dance teams in a manner that may be thoroughly transformed by colonial practice. Gage also describes the organization and preparation of public dances for the patron saint festival, and he (Gage 1928: 248-49) discusses the position of the fiscal, appointed by the priest as manager of the singers and musicians who perform in the church, therefore functionally similar to the Yucatec holpop. Gage also provides pertinent information on the institutionalization of dance teams and the method of their preparation under the guidance of a dance master analogous to the Yucatec holpop. He (Gage 1928: 266-67) writes that: "For every kind of dance they have several houses appointed, and masters of that dance, who teach the rest that they maybe perfected in it against the saint's day."

Gage (1928: 266-67) also describes rehearsals in the months before the Fiesta Patronal:

Before this day cometh, the Indians of the town two or three months have their meetings at night, and prepare themselves for such dances as are most commonly used amongst them; and in these their meetings they drink much both of chocolate and chicha.

For the most part of these two or three months the silence of the night is unquieted, what with their singing, what with their holloaing, what with their beating upon the shells of fishes, what with their waits, and what with their piping.

Gage (1928: 267) then goes on to describe the public performance during the festival:

²³ En su genitilidad y aora bailan y cantan al uso de los Mexicanos, y tenían y tienen su cantor principal, que entona, y enseña lo que se ha de cantar, y le veneran, y reverencian, y le dan assiento en la Iglesia, y en sus juntas, bodas, y le llaman Holpop; a cuyo cargo están los atablaes, e instrumentos de música, como son las flautas, trompetillas, conchas de tortugas, y el teponaguaztli, que es de madera hueco, cuyo sonido se oye de dos, y tres leguas, según el viento que corre.

And when the feast cometh, then they act publicly and for the space of eight days what privately they had practiced before. They are that day well appareled with silks, fine linen, ribbons and feathers according to the dance; which first they begin in the church before the saint, or in the churchyard, and from thence all the octave, or eight days, they go from house to house dancing, where they have chocolate or some heady drink or chicha given them.

What is striking about Gage's description of the early colonial fiesta patronal and the organization, rehearsals, memorization of the dance text, and public performances of the dance teams is that it applies so well to Maya traditional dances as they are prepared and performed today, nearly four hundred years later. The only ambiguity about this description concerns whether the houses in which the teams danced were specifically *cofradía* houses or private houses. Both venues are common today in some conservative communities.

Thus while analysis of legal documents such as land titles and of church licenses has allowed researchers such as Hill to document much of the history of *cofradías* in Guatemala, the same cannot be said of dance teams, which, considering the sole reference from Gage, remain very poorly documented. This absence is likely due to the issue that dance teams are organizations without landholdings, church-regulated licenses, or hierarchies of officers. By projecting backwards the current interdependent relationship between dance teams and *cofradías*, it may be possible to suggest that their rise to prominence in the religious life of Guatemalan Maya *municipios* in the colonial period was also closely related or in tandem. And as *cofradías* and dance teams evolved and peaked in tandem so also they have tended to be maintained or to decline in tandem. In those municipalities such as San Miguel Totonicapán where Indigenous *cofradías* have disappeared, so have dance teams. In those municipalities in which *cofradías* remain a vital and indispensible part of religious activity, so do dance teams. And these relations occur independently of the continuing strength of the third *Costumbre* institution—divination—in the community. Rather they are subject to the impact of broader social forces, including a shifting economy, political struggles and natural disasters.

3.6. Colonial Period Attempts to Prohibit or otherwise control festival dances

As in Mexico, evangelizing theatre did not proceed smoothly in the Maya regions of Yucatán and Guatemala. Many friars and secular priests staunchly supported this theatrical program, arguing that it illustrated and reinforced Christian doctrine and attracted audiences to the point that they were more likely to stay in the newly founded nucleated communities (*reducciones or congregaciones*). Others were strongly against it, arguing that it was only the entertainment value and not the spiritual aspects that appealed to these recent converts. Attempts to reduce and control the use of festival performance also had to do with the lavish expense for costumes that, due to institutionalized forms of exploitation

by colonial settlers and administration, Indigenous people could hardly afford. Furthermore, many friars recognized that Indigenous performers were finding subtle ways to subvert the doctrine in performance and instead revive aspects of Indigenous religion, including the retention of earlier priestly garments noted by López de Cogolludo.

With the exception of Thomas Gage, almost all mentions of Guatemalan festival dances during the colonial period refer to prohibitions or other methods of control, rather than recording what was performed. The particular targets of prohibitions and regulations, along with their descriptions, mutated with time.

Some of the earliest attempts to control dances did not involve the nature of the dance but rather the expense in time and money to Indigenous families in far-flung communities and its impact on diminishing the income of colonists through lost labour. Two examples date from the same period in the early 17th century. One, by Gage (1928: 225) refers to the expense of renting feathers for dancing. The other, from 1625, was the aforementioned ordinance issued by the *oidor* of the *Real Audiencia* of Guatemala and directed towards communities in the Verapaz region, which was published by Captain Martín Tovilla (1960: 138). The ordinance begins:

And because the dances that the Indians do in the festivals cause many expenses in renting feathers, clothing and masks and they lose much time in rehearsals and drunkenness, because they neglect to attend to the benefit of their haciendas, payment of their tributes and sustenance of their houses, of which they carry the memory of the sacrifices and ceremonies of their heathenism and make other offenses towards Our Lord, and so that all this will cease, I order and demand that no Indians celebrate more than the festival of their pueblo at day and vespers and in the Corpus Christi and Easter each year, and in these they don't rent or wear masks, feathers or clothing other than the ordinary Indian dress....²⁴

Attacks on specific dances centred on the *Tum* (alternately *Tun*) dances discussed above, named for the long wooden trumpets, and characterized by depiction of human sacrifice, usually of a war captive. These prohibitions, dating from 1593 to 1770, are summarized by Chinchilla Aguilar (1963), Toledo Palomo (1965), Ruz Sosa (2002–2008) and Tedlock (2003: 199–201). These include the 1625

²⁴ Y porque los bailes que los indios hacen en las fiestas causan muchos gastos en alquilar plumas, vestidos y máscaras y se pierde mucho tiempo en ensayos y borracheras, porque dejan de acudir al beneficio de sus haciendas, paga de sus tributos y sustento de sus casas, de lo cual traen a la memoria los sacrificios y ritos antiguos de su gentilidad y se hacen otras ofrendas a Nuestro Señor, y para que todo cese ordeno y mando que ningunos indios celebren más que la fiesta de su pueblo en la víspera y día, y en la del Corpus Christi y pascua del año, y en ellas no alquilen ni traigan máscaras, plumas, ni vestidos más que los ordinarios de indios....

ordinance that Tovilla (1960: 138) published: "...nor may they perform the old stories of their heathenism with long trumpets or without them, nor do the dance called *tum* nor *uleutum*."²⁵

Catholic Church officials prohibited the *Tum* dances because they were appalled at the representation of human sacrifice, which they understood as an offering to the devil, sheltered within the framework of the *fiesta patronal*. They also recognized the attraction of the dance to be that of reminding Indigenous peoples of their religious practices before Catholicism, which could therefore threaten recidivism among such recent converts. Perhaps they also feared that representing the time of Indigenous power, autonomy, and autochthonous worship would encourage resistance against the authority of the Spanish crown and Catholic church. An example of these understandings from 1624 is by Prieto de Villagas, head of the Inquisition in Zapotitlán (Chinchilla Aguilar 1963: 10–11):

...the native indians of these [provinces], against the old prohibitions in which the bishops of this bishopric had prohibited the dance that they call in their language *tum teleche*, for being a bad and superstitious thing, a remembrance of the iniquitous and perverse sacrifices that those in their pagan state venerated the devil, adoring and revering him with the sacrifice that in this dance they make of men and women, taking out their hearts while alive and offering them to the devil, with which they render the highest honour and reverence that is owed to God, who being as he is the universal lord of creation, never asked that he be honoured or adored with sacrifice of men or rational creatures as these indians did to the devil and to carry now in their Christianity the memory of this iniquity and evil, represented in this dance as alive as when they sacrificed men to their idols, redounds to much detriment of the Catholic and evangelical faith and against the honour of God and of his divine cult, since these natives being so new in the faith and so appreciative of and inclined to this dance....²⁶

Another document from 1624 (Chinchilla Aguilar 1963: 14-15) reveals that the author was particularly appalled at the great excitement with which these dances were greeted, even causing women and children to rush to the performance area.

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²⁵ "...ni representen historias antiguas de su gentilidad contrompetas largas ni sin ellas, ni hagen el baile que llaman los tum ni uleutum..."

²⁶ "...los indios naturales de ellos, contra las antiguas prohibiciones en que los señores obispos de este obispado tenían prohibido el baile que llaman en su lengua tum-teleche, por ser cosa mala y supersticiosa, ye recordativa de los inicuos y perversos sacrificios con que los de su gentilidad veneraban al demonio, acordándole y reverenciándole con el sacrificio que en el dicho baile hacían, de hombres y mujeres, sacándoles el corazón estando vivos, y ofreciéndolo al demonio; con lo cual le hacían alguna reverencia, debida a Dios, el cual, aun siendo, como es, Señor Universal de lo criado, jamás le pidió que honrasen y adoraasen con sacrificios de hombres y criaturas racionales, como los dichos indios hacían al demonio; y el traer ahora en su cristiandad a la memoria aquesta iniquidad y maldad, representando en el dicho baile, tán al vivo, el modo que tenían cuando sacrificaban hombres a sus ídolos, redunda en mucho detrimento de la fe católica y evangélica, y contra la honra de Dios y su culto divino; pues, siendo estos naturales tan nuevos en la fe, y tan aficionados e inclinados a este baile

Echoing Chinchilla Aguilar, and expanding on a similar complaint by Fuentes y Guzmán from the late 17th century, were comments made in the early 18th century by Francisco Ximenez, the Dominican friar famous for copying and translating the *Popol Vuj*. Ximenez explained that while in public they perform Christian stories taught to them by the friars, in secret they perform the old histories:

You will see them with great care attending the church, more in the days they celebrate than in the days of precepts, and it is the case that they are not as filled with devotion as with the concurrence that there is then of drums and trumpets, and the sound of the bells, because they are greatly inclined to a racket, and if there is a *tun* or *baile* in which is performed some deed or old story of theirs from their heathenry...even though the old Padres told them some histories of the saints in their own language, so that they should dance them to the *tun* in place of those that they sang in their heathenry, even so I understand that they sing these in public, and where the padre hears them, and that there in secret they perform many pleasant memories of their heathenry (Quoted in Mace 1970: 51–52).²⁷

On the content of the *tum* dance, these polemics were divided and confused. Most specified that the sacrifice involved heart excision, a method best known from the Aztec, but perpetrated on women as well as men, which seems unlikely. The 1624 document (Chinchilla Aguilar 1963: 14–15) described it differently: "...it was a performance of an Indian who, having been in war, the old ones sacrificed and offered to the devil... tied to a post, and those who charge him in order to end his life, are four figures, who they say were his *nawals*: a tiger, a lion, an eagle, and another animal that is not remembered...."28 This latter description conforms better to Guatemalan Maya practice of arrow sacrifice as documented and surveyed by Akkeren (1999).

Prohibitions had widened by the late 17th century, when several other dances were linked with the *bailes del tum* in their prohibition. These dances involved representations of certain animals and especially of the devil, which even led to prohibiting a dance representing the fall of Adam and Eve. Around 1680, Bishop Juan Ortega y Montañés linked the deer dance (Ah Ceh) to the "*oxtum*,", while his

²⁷ Veráslos con mucho cuidado, acudir á la Iglesia, mas en dias que ellos celebran, que er los días de precepto, y es el caso que les llena mucho mas que la devoción, la concurrencia que entonces hay de atambores y trompetas, y ruido de campanas, porque son inclinadísimos á la bulla, y si hay tun ó baile en que se

representa alguna haberia ó antigualla de las suyas ó de su gentilidad ... aunque los Padres antiguos les dijeron ciertas historias de Santos en su lengua, que cantasen al tun en lugar de los que ellos cantaban de su gentilidad, no obstante, yo entiendo que eso cantan en público, y donde el padre los oye, y que allá en su secreto hacen muy lindas memorias de su gentilidad.

²⁸ "... era representación de un indio que, habido en guerra, sacrificaban y ofrecían los antiguos al demonio... atado a un bramadero, y los que lo embisten para le quitar la vida, en cuatro figuras, que dicen eran de sus nahuales: un tigre, un león, un águila, y otro animal, de que no se acuerda..."

successor, Andrés de las Navas y Quevado enlarged the list to include also a monkey dance (*Kalecoy*) as well as the Story of Adam (*Historia de Adán*). Bishop de las Navas used virtually the same wording in his 1684 visit to San Cristóbal Totonicapán and 1688 visit to El Salvador, language that was then picked up by Bishop Mauro Larriategui y Colón in 1707 (Ruz I: 328, 363; II, 67). As San Cristóbal Totonicapán is one of the four communities in which the Conquest Dance was studied for this analysis, I quote the relevant portion of Bishop de las Navas' entry into the baptismal record book for May 5, 1684: "do not permit nor give license that they make those dances that are called *loxtum, trompetas tum, kalecoy, Tzet, Ahtzet, la Historia de Adán*, nor others in which intervene figures of the devil."²⁹

Animal dances would seem to be innocuous and were perhaps permitted earlier, but church authorities realized that Indigenous interest in animals continued pre-Catholic religious practices that they considered idolatrous. Thus bishop de las Navas' proscription recorded during his 1684 *visita* to San Cristóbal Totonicapán includes an order to "take off from the effigies of St. Michael, St. Geronimo, St. John the Evangelist, and other male and female saints, the figures of the devil and animals that they have at their feet."³⁰ In the record of his *visita* tour a century later, Archbishop Cortés y Larraz (1958: I, 102-03) revealed the Church's discomfort with Indigenous interest the animals that appeared on the icons of particular saints, because they considered these animals to be the saint's *nawal* or alter-egos and sometimes gave more devotion to the animal than the saint, a result that called up charges of idolatry. Cortés y Larraz (1958: II, 157) also recognized the strong and continuing relation of animals to divination using the Maya divinatory calendar, with which he was also familiar for having collected two divinatory almanacs (Cortés y Larraz 1958: 157, 162).

The only masked dance mentioned that was not under prohibition was the *Moros y Cristianos*, which Archbishop Pedro Cortés y Larraz (1958: I, 133) recorded a century later in his *visitas* of 1768-70 merely as having been excluded from the church interior:

...that some dances that the Indians do in their feasts and call histories of the moors, and they dare with notable disregard to dance within the church, at which attend many people of both sexes and all ages, and the most that has been able to be accomplished is that they go out to do said dances in the cemetery.³¹

²⁹ "...no permitan, ni dan licensia para que se hagan los Bayles que llaman el loxtum, trompetas tum, kalecoy, Tzet, Ahtzet, la Historia de Adán, ni otros en que intervengan figuras de el Diablo." I suspect that Tzet and Ah Tzet represent the bishop's spelling of the Deer Dance (Ah Ceh).

³⁰ "Y que se quiten de las efigies de San Miguel, San Geronimo, San Juan Evangelista, y otros santos o santas, las figuras de el demonio y animales que tienan a los pies."

³¹ "...que unos bailes que usan los indios en sus fiestas y llaman historias de moros, se atreven con notable desacato a danzarlos dentro las propias iglesias, a que concurre mucho número de gente de ambos sexos y de todas edades y que lo más ha conseguido es, que salen a hacer dichas danzas en el cementerio."

In contrast, the archbishop had nothing to say about the dances with masks and script that were performed outdoors for Corpus Christi when he was in San Miguel Totonicapán. Cortés y Larraz (1958: II: 102) participated in the Corpus Christi rites, carrying the monstrance in procession, but found the noise of the dances with recitation of scripts bothersome when he retired to rest and never inquired what dances these might have been. He writes that: "...there were altars in the plazas and *ramadas*; they didn't lack masked dances, but I wasn't aware of the halloing until the function was already over and I retired to my room."³²

The masked dances with scripts to which Cortés y Larraz referred were likely the same dances that ecclesiastics were in a fervor to introduce in the 16th century to assist in proselytizing the Indigenous populations. Apparently, by the late 17th century proselytizing dances were no longer needed and consequently no longer of interest to churchmen unless they inspired idolatry and devil-worship or were performed within the church. It is therefore not surprising that the *Baile de la Conquista* is never mentioned in such sources.

Some practices surrounding the dance were discouraged because Church officials interpreted them as continuing Indigenous "superstitions." These included dancers lighting candles in the church, incensing their costumes, or abstaining from sex with their wives, as noted in 1679 (Ruz 2002–08: I, 327) and 1749 (Cortés y Larraz 1958: II, 286) when it was also noted that the drum used for the *tum* dance was placed on the church altar to consecrate it. However the most popular dance that was in fact free of animals, devils, or "superstitious" practices was actually the most widely vilified in the *visita* texts. This was the sarabande, a social dance of possible Mesoamerican origin with a reputation for indecency.

Clerical outcries against the sarabande are noted as early as 1670 and continue in the same late 17th and early 18th century texts that decry the *tum*, animal dances and story of Adam and Eve (Ruz 2002–08, Chinchilla Aguilar 1963). Concerns are mainly with taking saint icons and altar pieces to private homes treating them to a social gathering of men and women with drinking, music, and this dance. A good example, written by bishop Juan de Sancto Mathía in 1670 (Ruz 2002–08: I, 45), criticizes priests who had:

...consented that in private homes they make altars with the pretext of doing fiestas to our lady the holy Virgin or to others of the saints, using all kinds of songs, music, dances, food and drink; men and women gathering in these private homes; and for these altars and fiestas they do 'entradas' and 'zarabandas'....³³

³² "...hubo altares en las plazas y enramadas; no faltó danza de máscaras, pero no advertí aullidos hasta ya concluida la función y retirado a mi cuarto."

³³ "...consentido que en casas particulares se hagan altares con pretexto de hacer fiestas a la Virgen santísima, nuestra señora, o a otros algunos de los santos, usando de todo género de cantares,

A century later, accusations connected with sarabandes are more extreme, no longer as concerned with the use of saint icons as with the presumed drunkenness and debauchery on private social occasions such as wakes and marriage arrangements. In a summary of what he learned about celebrations with sarabandes, Cortés y Larraz (1958: II, 251) writes:

Sarabandes (reducing their explanation to a few words) consist in that from the beginning of the night there gather in a house or hut, all kinds of people: men, women, married and single; they have their music and dances all night until dawn the following day; there are meals, drinks and drunkenness, as well as all kinds of dishonesties without the least shame or notice of this gravest disorder, as can be seen in the responses of various priests.³⁴

In earlier writings of the late 17th century, the venues for these sarabandes were usually specified as private houses, with little mention of *cofradías* despite the use of saint icons and altar pieces. Probably these celebrations took place in *guachibales*, private saint cults outside the *cofradía* system that were sponsored in their homes by well–off persons. In contrast, a century later, and on the reports of local priests, Cortés y Larras specifically accuses the *cofradías* of the same prohibited practices. This shift may be due to a decline in the incidence of *guachibales*. However it is also significant that Cortés y Larraz was writing at the time of secularization of the priesthood when monastic orders were withdrawn from communities and replaced by secular priests. It was thus in the interest of the church to show that the laxness of friars had allowed Catholicism and its *cofradía* institution to be developed and practiced in a corrupt, pagan and idolatrous manner that must be remedied (Cortés y Larraz 1958: 1, 56).

3.7. Festival Dances From the Late Colonial Period to the Present

Many other dances developed in the late colonial period and the period since Guatemalan independence, but I will limit my brief comments to two groups of dances that I have been able to view

músicas, bailes, comidas y bebidas; concuriendo hombres y mujeres en dichas casas particulares; y que para dichos altares y fiestas se hagan entradas y zarabandas...."

³⁴ "Las zarabandas (reduciendo su explicación a pocas palabras) consisten en que desde el principio de la noche se junta en una casa o jacal todo género de gentes, hombres, mujeres, casados y libres; tienen su música y bailes toda la noche hasta amanecer el día siguiente; hay comidas, bebidas, y embriagueces, como también toda especie de deshonestidades sin el menor rubor ni reparo y este gravísimo desorden, que se mira como irremediable, es común en toda la diócesis, como puede verse en las respuestas de varios curas."

because they regularly appear today in the *fiesta patronal* in the K'iche' communities studied for this project.³⁵

3.7.1 Dances of Celebration

The first group of dances to be considered are characterized by narratives involving animal-human and Indigenous-settler interactions that are framed within the context of an offering to the patron saint at the annual festival. This framework represents a logical historical shift from the context of conversion within which the *Moros y Cristianos* and Conquest dances were set. Presumably, once conversion was considered largely complete in a particular region, missionaries could turn their attention to celebrating and modeling proper Catholic behavior. A beginning of this shift is evident by the early 17th century: remarking on a dance involving the hunting of deer, Thomas Gage noted that the captured prey would be offered to the saint.

Gage was speaking specifically of a dance portraying a deer hunt, the earliest of this group of festival celebration dances to have been composed. He makes clear that the dance has an extensive text and that some performers were costumed to represent lions, tigers, and wolves. The contemporary deer dance involves a lion and a tiger but the canines involved are hunting dogs, perhaps just a misunderstanding on Gage's part. Another difference from the contemporary is the musical accompaniment. Gage notes that the instruments were a reed flute (he calls it a pipe) and a percussion instrument that could be the tun (split gong), tortoise shell, or ceramic drum. In more recent times, the one–man marimba, brought from Africa some time in the 17^{th} century, replaced the percussion instrument. As will be seen, the collected texts for the Deer Dance also suggest the context of *costumbre* which was likely to have only been in incipient form by the time of Gage's residency in the late 1620s and early 1630s.

Lise Paret-Limardo, who published an extensive study of the *Baile del Venado* or Guatemalan Deer Dance in 1963, attributes the composition of its text to missionaries. She (Paret-Limardo (1963: 15, 17) notes the Spanish poetic form of the *romance*³⁶ as well as the allegorical and moralizing names applied to the largest group of characters. These are called the captains, and are generally understood to be Spaniards. Their names include involve both Christian values and practice (*Devoción, Mérito, Celo, Fervor, Placer, Alegría, Esmero Conformidad, Armonía, Anhelo, Celebración*)³⁷ or in some texts the weapons of the hunt (*Trampa, Lanza, Flecha, Escopeta*).³⁸ Their subordinate hunters, called the *Zagales,*

³⁵ This is also the same repertoire I saw in the Kagchikel *municipio* of Solola.

³⁶ As discussed later, the *romance* involves an octosyllabic line with assonant (vowel) rhyme in alternating lines.

³⁷ Devotion, Merit, Zeal, Fervour, Pleasure, Happiness, Care, Conformity, Harmony, Yearning, Celebration.

³⁸ Snare or Trap, Lance, Arrow, Shotgun.

appear to substitute for the captains in much contemporary performance. The author or authors likely drew on the Indigenous deer dance genre. The Old Man and his wife remain central characters, but the wife is now elderly as well, so their cooperation with young hunters does not provoke the strong sexual tension noted in the *Balam Kiej* of Rabinal.

In performance, all characters, in pairs, offer their devotions to the patron saint at the beginning and end of the dance, with scripted verses of praise. The story is prefaced by a dance in which the wild animals (lion, tiger, and monkeys) chase the deer who hide in a forest. Then begins the narrative which differs among various published versions in some details and ordering of scenes, but remains consistent in the overall trajectory and intent.

According to the text, the story involves the desire of the Captains to hunt deer and offer their prey to the patron saint at the coming annual festival. The lead Captain, *Devoción*, articulates this desire, and the fourth Captain (*Fervor*) suggests that they enlist the help of an (Indigenous) Old Man who lives in the mountains and is expert at setting traps and securing supernatural aid to ensure success. The Captains and *Zagales* find the Old Man's house and on arriving, frighten his equally elderly wife, the Old Woman. The resulting commotion awakens the Old Man which puts him in a bad mood, so he requests a present from the strangers before he will listen to their request. Once accomplished, he listens and agrees to help. He tells them what supplies he will need to make the *costumbre* offerings, such as copal incense and candles, and they supply all of the necessary ritual materials. After telling his wife to bring him lunch, the Old Man sets off into the forest with his dogs.



Deer Dance, Joyabaj, 2008. At left, Old Woman threatens Tiger with her rifle as a Zagal looks on. At right, Old Man also holds his rifle. Behind him are the dog and a deer.

Following deer tracks, the Old Man decides on the proper place to set a trap. He arranges a lasso, often around a cross. He then performs the costumbre to ensure that the Earth Lord (Dios Mundo) will allow the deer to be hunted and their ensure success, burning incense and other offerings in the four of corners the dance ground and also where he has set the trap. The Old Man then sits and rests,

sometimes falling asleep, after which the Old Woman arrives with his meal, and he complains that she is late. They eat together, giving scraps to their two hunting dogs.

The Captains and *Zagales* join the Old Man, Old Woman and their dogs in pursuing the deer, interrupted by the lion, tiger, and monkeys, the latter adding considerable comedy to the scene. The lion and tiger may attack the Old Man and Old Woman, who are protected by their dogs. Ultimately the deer are cornered, with nowhere to run or hide. They lament their fate and pray to a Christian divinity or their patron saint, and when this is unsuccessful, give themselves up to the trap. The captive deer are taken, with the cross-shaped trap, to the church for the closing dedication to the patron saint.

In contemporary performance the story has shifted somewhat. As performances are often in or near *cofradía* houses, the marimba substitutes for the church and its altar as a locus for reciting the praises of and dedication to the patron saint. Also, much of the text escapes recitation and energy is instead devoted to an extended pantomime involving the wild animal attacks on the Old Man and Old Woman, each furnished with a rifle, and their defense by the two dogs. In some communities, the lion, tiger, and monkey also entertain the audience with acrobatics in the part of the story in which they beset the old man and woman before the deer are trapped. Paret–Limardo describes these acrobatics at the Maya Mam *municipio* of San Cristóbal Cucho in a way that also resembles current alternate–year performances in Momostenango. She explains that a series of trees have been cut and erected in the

dance ground, serving not only as a forest for the deer but also for the monkey performers to climb. Fruits have been attached to the branches and the monkeys cut them down to distribute to youths in the audience. A tall pole has also been erected with a rope linking it to the bell tower of the church. The lion and tiger perform on this rope, moving from the bell tower to the pole. The lion makes it across and down the pole



Monkeys and Deer Dance, Momostenango, 2010. Tiger performs acrobatics.

safely but the tiger is shot by a Zagal. A concealed cow bladder with red aniline dye gives the illusion that the tiger has been wounded but he makes it down safely nevertheless.

The syncretic aspects of *Costumbre* are evident in the script. On the one hand, the Old Man is needed as an Indigenous priest to perform the proper *costumbre* as an offering to the *Dios Mundo*, in return for which this Earth Lord is bound to facilitate the capture of deer, thus following the Indigenous relation of reciprocity or contractual obligation between human and supernatural. On the other hand, the deer pray to Christian divinities or saints for salvation, following the Catholic framework of prayer that may or may not be granted. In addition, all characters dedicate their activities to the patron saint. This context of *Costumbrismo*, along with the incorporation of the marimba and the simplification of the poetic form to a reliance on *romance* all suggest that the current Deer Dance derives from a late 17th century modification a scripted dance that had been in use since the early 17th century and the time of Gage's residence in Guatemala.

Furthermore, we can speculate that the author(s) were taking advantage of an area of correspondence between Indigenous and Catholic religion in the notion of sacrifice. Judeo-Christian tradition uses the story of Abraham and Isaac to show the movement from human to animal sacrifice, but the two are combined in the sacrifice of Christ, who is understood as the Lamb of God. Missionaries recognized that in Indigenous religion, the deer was the primary sacrificial animal and was equated with human sacrifice. This equation was made explicit in the hunting dance described by Gage (1928: 269). But the Franciscan author of the earlier *Baile de la Conquista* also recognized this equation in a passage from the text for a riddle spoken by the Indigenous priest, Ajitz:

Tres fueron los enemigos Y uno fué el crucificado

Domingo resucitó
Al que habian enclavado
Y de los tres dos cojió
Porque el otro hizo venado.

Three were the enemies,
And one was the crucified.

On Sunday He was resurrected Who had been nailed, And of the three He gathered up two Because the other became a deer.



Torito, Joyabaj, 2012.

The next entry into this group of celebration plays is the *Baile del Torito* or Dance of the Bull. The Bull Dance appears to be an outgrowth of the Deer Dance, following many of the same conventions in costuming and choreography. In both, the costumes of the human figures and the sacrificial animal are designed for their spectacular nature rather than suggestion of natural form or clothing, and the marimba again serves in place of the church altar as a locus for offering praises and prayers to the patron saint. In this dance bulls and a bullfight constitute the offering

to the patron saint at the annual festival, rather than the deer. The bullfight is understood as a *Ladino* ritual sport and the hierarchy has appropriately shifted to Ladino leadership.

Again interethnic relations are highlighted in the story but with the Bull Dance the context is the social hierarchy of a cattle ranch. The hierarchy encompasses both lines, so one moves down the social ranks by alternating lines. The highest ranking personage is the *Patrón*, the owner of a ranch or plantation, usually paired in the opposing line with a young wife who may be shown as ethnically Indigenous. Next in line and hierarchy are the *Mayordomo* (overseer) paired with the *Caporal* (foreman) in the other line. One or two *Negritos* represent African slaves or slave-descendants wearing a black mask with gold beard, who function primarily to convey messages between the *Patrón, Mayordomo, and Caporal*. A series of *Vaqueros* (cowboys) follows, who Hutcheson 2009: 875–77) considers to be ethnically Maya.

Though portraying a form of ranch life that began in the late colonial period, the *Torito* group of dances re-introduces the Indigenous structure discussed for the *Balam Kiej* at Rabinal in which young men (the cowboys) vie for the attentions of a young woman who is under the control of an elderly man, a structure also noted for the Hero Twins section of the Popol Vuj (Akkeren 2003). However, in the *Torito* group it is usually the old *Patrón* who dies rather than the young woman or her suitor(s). This comparison allows a disagreement with Hutcheson's (2009: 886–87) appraisal of the flirtation as a carnivalesque transgression of proper behavior. The Indigenous structure of pre-Hispanic origin instead posits the antagonism of the old man and young couple as the necessary alternation of light and dark, dry and rainy that characterizes temporal cycles. It appears as well in the drama of Holy Week at Santiago Atitlán in which Jesucristo, reborn young after mating with María Andolor, defeats the old Earth Lord, Rilaj Mam.

The offerings and dedications to the patron saint that begin and end the *Torito* dance frame narrative elements that tend to be simple and repetitive. The *Patrón* announces that he will provide bulls and a bullfight for the upcoming *fiesta patronal* and he sends *Negrito* with messages to the *Mayordomo* and *Caporal* to ensure that the *Vaqueros* will round up the bulls and transport them to the *feria*. When this is accomplished, the various ranch employees take a turn at fighting their particular bull, culminating in the *Patrón* being fatally gored by a particularly aggressive bull. In many versions he recites his



Caxuxa Dance, Chinique, 2009.

testament before dying, declaring his decision to leave his property to the *Mayordomo* and *Caporal* and sometimes as well to others of his employees.

The *Torito* dance proved so popular, in part due to the spectacular costumes topped by a panache of abundant dyed ostrich feathers, and due to the more contemporary and upbeat nature of the music and instrumentation of three-man marimba and saxophone, that it has spawned many variations with distinct names. These include: *Los Compadritos*, which Hutcheson (2009) translates as "Boon Companions," in which much of the action involves the cowboys sharing drinks and jokes; the *Caxuxa* (Laugher), which adds to the drinking pantomime a pair of ranch hands who wear grinning masks, carry dolls, and manage the other dancers with whips (recalling the whip and doll of Ajitz in the *Baile de la Conquista*). In addition, because the *Patrón, Mayordomo*, and *Caporal*, wear clothing and masks similar to the Spaniards in the *Baile de la Conquista*, both *Los Compadritos* and *Caxuxa* dances are referred to as *La Conquista* in some communities.³⁹ In viewing *Los Compadritos* at Joyabaj, I noted an element of the *Conquista* structure that has entered into the *Torito* group: when the *Patrón* is wounded, like Tekum, he is marched around the dance ground without his headdress and supported by a subordinate on either side.



Dance of the Mexicans, Momostenango, 2008. At right, the musicians' stand doubles as a cantina.

The most distinctive spinoff from the *Torito* group is the Baile de los Mexicanos (Dance of the Mexicans), which may have originated during the time of the Mexican revolution (1910-1920). The overall story maintains that of the *Torito*, so that differences involve surface features. The music has a Mexican mariachi flavour and the male personages wear mariachi costumes and masks whose long noses provide

caricature of a presumed Mexican physiognomy. Also a Mexican *cantina* is placed in front of the marimba, with the young wife as the hostess. Flirtation between the woman and the cowboys is more intense, and the story is also complicated by the cowboys getting drunk and delaying the arrival of the bulls.

³⁹ Thus my excursion to Sololá to see *La Conquista* resulted in an opportunity instead to view *Los Compadritos*, while my excursion to Chinique to do the same resulted in an opportunity to view *Caxuxa*.

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3.7.2. Convite Dances of the Last Century

In the 20th century, dances developed that broke strongly from these earlier festival dance traditions in several ways and formed a new and coexisting tradition. These dances are known as *convite* dances. The term comes from a European tradition of *convite* as a band of dancers that perambulate a community announcing a party or celebration or to gather participants for a festival procession. Instrumentation for Guatemalan *convite* dances is provided by a *marimba orquesta* consisting of a three-person marimba, electric guitars, brass instruments and a drum kit. These bands serve both Indigenous and *Ladino* communities in Guatemala, hired not only to play for festival dances but also for private functions and various public events. They play dance tunes that are currently popular in Latin America. There is no story or narrative structure to *convite* dances, but a series of musical pieces, each of which involves all of the dancers in simple unison choreography. Dancers are in pairs either in identical or thematically related costumes.

The Convite Típico is the earliest of these dances to have developed, though its origins have not been traced. Male dancers, in pairs, dress in the distinctive traje of a particular municipio, one in men's clothing and the other in women's. Masks and wigs are rented from the morería. Thus a Convite Típico dance team encompasses Guatemalan Maya



Convite Típico, Momostenango, in procession from Cemetery, 2011

ethnicity in its variety of municipio trajes. A likely origin

for the dance might be the annual national fairs that took place in the 1930s under the direction of president Ubico, to which Indigenous families were brought from around Guatemala to display their everyday and ceremonial life. This event was also imitated in Quetzaltenango, at least in 1934. Though perhaps begun as a method of folklorization for commercial exoticizing touristic purposes at such fairs, *Convite Típico* has been integrated into the *Costumbre* function of dancing for several days during the *feria* in honour of and as an offering to the patron saint as well as accompanying the saint in processions.

A more recent innovation in Guatemalan festival dances is the *Disfraces*, which involves costumes invoking globalized popular culture as culled from various forms of mass media. To understand

Disfraces, it is necessary to consider the earlier, *Ladino*-originated dance from which it derives. This is the *Convite Navideño*, which functions as an invitation to celebrate Christmas. It was designed to entertain children and get them in the mood for celebrating Christmas in North American style. Rather than portraying Christian theology associated with the event, the *Convite Navideño* focuses on children's entertainments, representing primarily characters derived from cartoons and other North American and Mexican television shows. Analogous imagery might be seen at the Macy's parade in New York City or Santa Claus parade in Toronto. As in the *Convite Típico*, males dance in pairs in related costumes, but not necessarily suggesting male-female pairs. *Morerías* did not take up the fabrication of such costumes; instead new workshops developed to meet these image requirements.

According to Fabián Zamora (2003), the Convite Navideño originated in San Miguel Totonicapán in the late 1940s, not only as an invitation to celebrate Christmas, but also crucially as a means to reclaim public space from a middle class Maya population that was becoming dominant in Totonicapán's urban core. Participants chose imagery from international popular culture as a means of Ladino selfconstruction as modern or advanced. To participate in modernity's constant search for the new, costumes could not be re-used in another Convite Navideño, though they could be rented for birthday parties. Through this construction of Ladino modernity, the Maya population was oppositionally configured as traditional and backwards. Thus Maya were prohibited from participating in the Convite Navideño. I would suggest also that the construction of Ladino society as modern was also and importantly illustrated through their adoption of a modern North American view of childhood as a time of play and fantasy, in contrast to the necessity for children to assist in household and field labour among segments of the Indigenous population, especially subsistence farmers. The dance fits with Totonicapán Ladino ideology of industriousness, because industrious parents can afford to provide their children with not only education but also leisure and toys. Thus Ladino class status, modernity, and progress were defined in part in terms of how they constructed and enacted childhood, as well as distance from the Indigenous Maya population.

Following the end of the civil war or *conflicto armado* in Guatemala (1996), Maya appropriated and repurposed the *Ladino Convite Navideño*, adapting it to the context and function of the patron saint festival, though each team performs only for a single day of the *feria*. According to Rhonda Taube (2009, 2012, 2013), Maya communities use this dance to demonstrate their more intimate contact with North American modernity than that of the *Ladino* community, due to their practice of migration to the US as undocumented labourers.

Along with paired dancers, the Maya *Disfraces* retains from *Convite Navideño* the use of the *marimba* orquesta and preference for popular Latin American dance music like the *merengue* and *cumbia*. Revelation of the dancers' identities, accomplished indoors through paid admission in the *Convite Navideño*, was changed into a public revelation during the last dance of the day in the *Disfraces*. Like the traditional dances and the *Ladino Convite Navideño*, the *Disfraces* teams were initially opened only

to men. Gradually a few women were able to enter, leading to the more recent development of all-women's *Disfraces* groups.



Disfraces, Cunén, 2009.

Although cartoon and other characters derived from North American and Mexican television were retained from the Convite Navideño, two entirely new styles of costumes were originated for the Disfraces dance through the development of new, Maya-owned workshops, especially in Santa Cruz del Quiché (Taube 2009). In contrast to the friendly, child-oriented characters of the Convite Navideño, one new style of Disfraces costume articulates adult aggression and potential force. Over the fiberglass face masks are often partial or complete

helmets of animals or monsters with long, sharp fangs. Protruding from the costume over the torso are often long spikes. Armour may cover the chest and shoulders. Many of these aggressive elements derive from online video games like Mortal Combat and World of Warcraft. A female version of this warrior type, according to Rhonda Taube, is derived from Xena, Warrior Princess of the television series. Within this general warrior category are several subcategories, including the Asian warrior (presumably Shao Lin and Samurai), Native American warriors of the Great Plains of North America, and ancient Maya rulers. Buckskin, dreamcatchers, predatory animal heads, feathers, and beadwork abound in these images, revealing not only participation in modernity as Taube argues, but also a specific association with the Indigenous anti-modern.

The overall cast, at least to this observer, speaks of forceful resistance against outside forces and protection of Indigenous tradition, as well as an assertion that Maya society is traditional and modern at the same time. The public revelation of Maya faces under masks with Asian or European features reinforces this assertion. Such a statement definitively rejects the paradigm of modernism that divides the "modern," associated with progress, technology, industry, and leisure, from the "traditional," considered to be backwards, associated with the past, close to nature, and spiritual. This discourse of modernism has been applied by the politically and economically dominant *Ladino* population in Guatemala, thrusting Maya and other Indigenous peoples into the position of representing backwardness, and thereby legitimating their exploitation and discrimination. This is the position in which the Maya were placed by the *Convite Navideño*, and to which *Disfraces* vigorously rejects.

Another contrasting style of *Disfraces* costumes was developed by the Maya workshops for use by women's groups, showing women wearing revealing clothing in bright, clear colours suggesting an archetype of sexualized femininity. Taube (2009: 192-95) argues that these Maya women would not appear in public in everyday life with this much of their bodies revealed, but they can do so in the safe group environment of the dance. She also argues that this venture is made possible by the gains in women's independent power made through their activism during and after the civil war, as mothers and wives of dead and disappeared men. I would note however that the threat of violence against Indigenous women and their families is still ever-present, through the confluence of outlaw gangs and narcotics traffickers, operating with impunity in the face of an impotent and corrupt justice system, resulting in a wave of femicide. In these circumstances it is not surprising that, although the costume makers may have borrowed these images



Nebaj Female Disfraces, 2010

of sexualized females from advertisements to sell fast cars, Maya dancers transform the image into an assertion of agency through the union of power and sexuality. It may be that the women's *Disfraces* ritually legitimates changes that have taken place in women's role within Indigenous society, normalizing their hard-won freedoms as an established value rather than a deviation.

Although much of the *Disfraces* dance seems transgressively new, in other ways it continues the tradition of Maya festival masked dancing. Like the *Convite Típico* and *Convite Navideño*, it continues to require the creation of balance through pairs of dancers. Another evidence of continuity is the nature of the dance team as a virtual community, allowing the team to embody their particular community on whose behalf they perform the dance as an offering to the patron saint at the annual *feria*. As with actual communities, the group works together to perform functions that benefit the whole (i.e. the unison dancing), but is made up of individual differences (i.e. cartoon characters, warriors, and sexualized females). As will be discussed further, the function of making an offering to the patron saint on behalf of the community is characteristic of Maya festival dances in general.

Elements that depart from festival dance tradition include dancing only for a single day, using different costumes each year, having all performers enact the same role in unison, incorporating female dancers, and revealing dancers' identity during the final dance of the day. In general, *Disfraces* looks for inspiration to the future rather than the past, to outsiders rather than ancestors.

Disfraces is now the most popular of the festival dances, drawing crowds away from the older traditional dances, due to a series of complex and overlapping reasons that I will not consider here.

Instead, my point for including this discussion of *Disfraces* is to suggest that in its time the *Baile de la Conquista*, and other newly introduced dances like the *Baile del Venado* or *Baile del Torito* may have seemed just as shockingly new and may also have become wildly popular until the next craze hit. Whether *La Conquista, Venado, Torito, or Disfraces,* each new introduction represents a series of innovations within and continuing a general structure of festival dance that links contemporary Maya ceremonial life with that of their pre–Hispanic ancestors.