Table of Contents

Chapter 9: Shared Conventions of *Baile de la Conquista* Performances.........................................................2

9.1 Extra-performance Ceremonial Activities ........................................................................................................2
  9.1.1. Preliminaries ...............................................................................................................................................2
  9.1.2. Welcoming the Masks and Final Rehearsal ............................................................................................4
  9.1.3. Feria Participation Outside of Regular Performance ...........................................................................6

9.2. Performance Conventions ...........................................................................................................................6
  9.2.1. Morerías and their Costume Styles ........................................................................................................6
  9.2.2. Personages in Their Groups: Costumes and Props ..............................................................................12
  9.2.3. Staging ....................................................................................................................................................22
  9.2.4. Music .....................................................................................................................................................24
  9.2.5. Dance ....................................................................................................................................................31
  9.2.6. Text Recitation ....................................................................................................................................35
  9.2.7. Pantomime ............................................................................................................................................37

9.3 Brief Comparison: East versus West .............................................................................................................42
Chapter 9: Shared Conventions of *Baile de la Conquista* Performances

Before embarking on a comparison of distinct trends in Conquista performance in four K'iche' communities, it is necessary to introduce those elements that would likely characterize the Conquest Dance for any largely Maya community in the Guatemalan highlands. Activities both within and outside of performance of the *Conquista* dance drama are governed by a series of conventions as well as considerable latitude for articulation of distinctions. Activities outside the performance include ceremonial acts preceding the *feria*, participation in *desfiles* and saints’ processions during the *feria*, and some form of *despedida* (sendoff) at its termination. Conventions that shape the dance performance include the characteristic costumes, masks and props of different characters or groups of characters, the text used, additional pantomime, music and dance.

9.1 Extra-performance Ceremonial Activities

Those activities that I have seen to be shared by teams performing other dance, including preliminary activities such the announcement of intent to dance, requests made at the morería, rehearsals, and *costumbres*, as well as participation in saints’ processions and school parades (*desfiles*) during the *feria*, have been introduced in the chapter on *Costumbre*. Here I touch on events that directly lead up to the first performance within the *feria* and those aspects of performance distinctive to the *Conquista* that are shared among some or all of the four communities under discussion. These will include performance conventions involving text recitation, music and dance, staging, and pantomime, followed in the next chapter by a summary of the full performance. Subsequent chapters will then treat the distinctive aspects of each community's performance of both the general dance features previously discussed and the distinctive aspects of *Conquista* dance that occupy this chapter.

9.1.1. Preliminaries

As I have not been present at all of the events leading up to the public performance in the *feria*, I will be discussing those that I have seen, those that have been recounted to me, and those that have been published. An example of the latter category is Horace Peck’s (1971) brief treatment of the Conquest Dance at San Juan Ostuncalco, a Maya–Mam community on the outskirts of Quetzaltenango, provided by his informant, Eleuterio Gómez. Peck’s project was to investigate “Maya shamanism” so he emphasized those ceremonies performed by a *Costumbrista* priest. A more extensive source is the book *Mayan Folktales* translated and compiled by James Sexton (1992). These narratives were dictated by a Maya–Tzutujil person of San Juan La Laguna whose name was concealed under a pseudonym by the translator. The section entitled “Story of the Dance of the Conquest” is not a folk tale but an
accurate recounting of parts of the performance and some of its preliminaries (Sexton 1992: 97–115). ¹

The narrator’s account of how dancers are conscripted by the autor (the host and sponsor, here called tutor) is far more detailed than in other available sources and helps fill in a gap in what I have been able to witness, though aspects of it have been recounted to me concerning a similar process in Momostenango. Neither account covers every aspect of the preliminary activities of the dance team. Further information will be considered in the section on the Baile de la Conquista in Cunén. This will include the ceremonial announcement to the patron saint and the community that La Conquista will be performed at the next fiesta patronal.

The initial process involves the formation and consecration of the dance team, followed by the first rehearsal. An individual must first declare his intention to sponsor the dance for the coming feria as autor. In the San Juan la Laguna account, the autor then enlists the services of a chuchkajaw, here called “the shaman.” At night, the autor and chuchkajaw perform a costumbre either on a hilltop altar or at the autor’s house, for which the autor has supplied candles, incense, sugar, and liquor. The autor relates the names of those men he would like to conscript as his lead dancers and who are thus vital for any rehearsals to begin. The chuchkajaw recites the names of these dancers and the characters they may portray as part of his prayers accompanying the offerings. One aspect of this ritual not corroborated in any other source is the invocation of Tekum, asking him to be present at the costumbre and in rehearsals, to bless the autor’s house, and to ensure that the rehearsals go well, without any injuries, as well as offering other forms of protection to the dance team and the autor’s house. The prospective maestro for teaching the text and the dance is also discussed.

The next step at San Juan la Laguna is for the autor and his assistant to visit the houses of men they hope to enlist, having already decided which role is appropriate for each man. They bring cigars and liquor to help convince prospective dancers to agree to take on the heavy burdens of time and money. To enlist the two musicians and the maestro, they may have to travel to nearby communities. When sufficient team members have been enlisted, the chuchkajaw officiates at a second costumbre with the maestro, musicians, and dancers. The chuchkajaw calls up each dancer to kneel and invokes the spirit of the personage that this man will come to embody, while at the same time the musicians play that character’s son—his signature tune.

When the time for the first rehearsal has arrived at San Juan la Laguna, the maestro and musicians meet with the autor at the autor’s house. The musicians sanctify their instruments by pouring a bit of liquor on them. The autor and chuchkajaw then go to dancers houses and conduct them to the autor’s house. When they arrive, the musicians begin playing and the rehearsal begins. The team rehearses the entire performance with a break for lunch provided by the autor.

¹ In this account, the narrative of the performance sequence is actually divided between a section on a rehearsal and a section on the public performance.
The account from Ostuncalco differs in several respects. There, shortly after the conclusion of the *feria*, the *autor* communicates his intention to sponsor the dance team in the next year. Although San Juan Ostuncalco is named for San Juan Bautista, the main *feria* occurs in early February to celebrate the Virgen de Candelaria, so this announcement would occur in February as well. The *autor* waits until he has enlisted ten men for the dance team before hiring musicians, and he waits until a full complement of twenty men have joined before securing the services of a *chuchkajaw*. The ceremony of consecration, referred to as the “planting of the dancers”, takes place both in the *autor’s* house and at a *Costumbrista* shrine on the river bank, containing a cross and a stone altar. Each dancer kneels to be blessed with a bundle containing incense and candles, after which the incense is burned on the altar and the ashes scattered into the river (Peck 1971:73–74, 132–33). A second ceremony at the river occurs six months later (Peck 1971:74) but Peck does not specify at what point rehearsals begin.

The performance of multiple *costumbres* preceding the collecting of costumes from the *morería* was also noted by Barbara Bode (1961:233–34), citing informants from San Cristóbal Totonicapán and a *maestro* named Catarino Moreno originally of Palajunoj, near Quetzaltenango. *Maestro* Moreno is said to be describing *costumbres* viewed in the Los Altos region centering on Quetzaltenango. These include a *costumbre* on a mountain to bring success in enlisting dancers for the team, and a *costumbre* at the *autor’s* house at the midpoint of rehearsals to ensure success of the dance. The latter ceremony includes the *cruzada* (crossing) ritual in which dances are performed around small fires in which incense is burned. The name of the ritual is derived from the arrangement of fires in an X pattern.

I have not seen preliminary *costumbres* at Momostenango, where from 2008 to 2012 the *autor*, Juan Elogio Vicente is also a *chuchkajaw*, but I have been told that these include a ceremony of “preparing the road” for the dancers to participate. Of major importance are *costumbres* performed by the *autor* and assistants on specific days in the Maya calendar, requiring pilgrimage to the peaks of the four sacred mountains surrounding Momostenango territory. Considering the traditionalism of *costumbre* at Momostenango, these pilgrimages to four sacred peaks may once have been much more widespread.

Comparing this information from different sources and communities reveals the general use of multiple *costumbres* at altars in spiritually potent locations, including mountain peaks and a river. But note that the available information is limited to the Los Altos regions west of Santa Cruz del Quiché. Equivalent information has not been found for the regions to the north and east that include the researched communities of Cunén and Joyabaj, and as will be seen the practice of preliminary *costumbres* for these two communities is much less elaborate. This is one of the many differences that may be noted between Momostenango and San Cristóbal Totonicapán on the one hand, and Cunén and Joyabaj on the other.

9.1.2. Welcoming the Masks and Final Rehearsal
I have been able to witness and to some extent participate in ceremonies for welcoming the masks and trajes and the last rehearsal, two events that may be juxtaposed in the same place and on the same day but are not necessarily united in this way. In Momostenango, unlike the other three municipios studied, collecting costumes from the morería is accomplished individually, and thus “welcoming the mask” is performed privately in the dancer’s household, among family and guests. In other municipios studied the masks and trajes are all brought together from the morería by the autor and a few others who assist him. Further, as all participants gather soon after to welcome the masks and trajes in the autor’s house, it is convenient to continue with the last rehearsal on the evening of the same day.

At San Juan la Laguna as elsewhere, the return of team members with the group’s masks and trajes is met by bombas. Here individual dancers care for their own costume until the ceremonial welcoming of the masks. This takes place on June 20 in San Juan la Laguna, two days before the first public performance. Dancers bring their trajes and masks to the autor’s house. Carrying these, along with candles, bombas, and other offerings, the team climbs to a hilltop altar, which they adorn with pine needles and flowers. The chuchkajaw calls up each group of dancers, beginning with the royal court. The dancers kneel before him and for each he passes over the dancer a lit candle which is then placed on a rock in the place corresponding to that dancer’s position in the dancing ground. In order to transform the mask and traje from merchandise to embodied spiritual being through union with the dancer, the chuchkajaw calls on the “gods,” the “dueños” (owners) of the hills, community patron and other saints, ancestors and the spirits of the personages of the dance, requesting that these holy beings protect the dancers and ensure that they are not injured in the dance and that all turns out successfully. After sharing a meal, participants descend to town, arriving near dawn. They circumambulate the church, enter it, and renew their contact with the patron saint. Leaving the church, the dance team returns to the autor’s house for a rest and then to their own houses. Around 10 pm on the same night, the musicians begin a circuit of the dancers’ houses, playing at each in return for bread and chocolate. The circuit lasts all night and is repeated on the next two nights (June 22 and 23).

The final rehearsal may or may not involve dancers wearing parts of their traje, but even so, because it often takes place at night or before dawn, masks are not worn. Either as part of or following the rehearsal, ceremonial fires are often lit on the dance ground in a crossing arrangement, more or less complicated depending on the municipio. In those examples (San Cristóbal and Momostenango) in which dancers must navigate these fires as they dance, this ceremonial rehearsal serves to both reveal and heighten dancers concentration and commitment.

Treatment of the same occasion at San Juan Ostuncalco provides a comparison. On January 10, dancers go as a group to San Cristóbal Totonicapán to pick up their costumes at the morería. About 5 pm, the

---

2 The text states this as June 21, but the next day is also called June 21.
sound of the drum calls the dancers to gather at the autor’s house. The chuchkajaw leads the dance team with costumes to the riverbank altar, arriving about 7 pm. The costume bundles are laid out in two rows in front of the altar. The dancers kneel near them and the chuchkajaw blesses them with the bundled incense and candles, while asking the supernaturals including the patron, Virgen de Candelaria, to prevent quarrels or injuries and ensure a successful run of dance performances. The bundle is unwrapped to place the incense and candles on the altar. A rooster is then killed on the altar and its blood sprinkled on the incense and candles as well as in the river. After coffee, more rituals, and coffee with liquor, dancers don their trajes and masks to dance for 2–3 hours before returning to the autor’s house around 1 am.

These accounts from San Juan la Laguna and San Juan Ostuncalco will provide counterpoint for the similar preliminaries witnessed at the four municipios under investigation.

9.1.3. Feria Participation Outside of Regular Performance

The first and last performances of a feria are often marked with special ritualized activities. Before the first performance, it is customary in most municipios for the dance team, in costume, to first visit the church. The last performance is often also related to the church and important cofradías but can involve much more complex procedures including a complex dance of despedida (sendoff) that honours the performers as well as the patron saint.

Extra-performance activities during the feria are not particularly distinctive for Conquista teams except for two points. First, whether in the procession of a saint on his or her anda, or whether participating in the school desfile, or even simply processing from the posada used for dressing in costume to the dance venue, dancers maintain the spatial organization dictated by performance on the dance ground and echoed in the arrangement of trajes or candles at the welcoming ceremony. Second, in processions with saints, the Conquista team usually occupies a privileged position as the oldest and most politically and religiously important dance still common at the feria. This position is usually behind the other dance teams and closest to the saint’s anda, but it can also be leading the procession, depending on the community.

9.2. Performance Conventions

9.2.1. Morerías and their Costume Styles

As noted, three prominent morerías or pairs of morerías serve the four communities studied. These are two morerías in San Cristóbal Totonicapán, two in Chichicastenango, and one in Joyabaj, resulting in three distinctive styles. Although the morería styles to be described also apply to costumes they produce for other dances, I have chosen to distinguish their styles in this chapter in order to refer to
some particular items of costume worn in, though in some cases not exclusive too, La Conquista. In this section, however, only the essential stylistic distinctions will be introduced, thereby saving some of the broader distinctions in costume composition for chapters on individual communities.

Similarities among the three morerías may be mentioned first. All three share costumes made of velvet panels and borders in contrasting colours onto which are sewn various brightly coloured and/or reflective materials that combine Indigenous interest in bright reflective surfaces with European passemonterie decorative traditions. Basic decorations consist of various widths and configurations of “galloon” trim material usually in silver or gold, but with thread of other colours woven in. These trim materials outline and border design fields, and usually the lower border of a design field includes a hanging fringe. Galloon trim materials also outline decorative motifs within the design fields. Interior spaces of design motifs formed by this application of trim material are then decorated with lines of sequins. In narrower border bands, zigzags and rounded undulations have lines of sequins filling the interstices on both sides. Over this more two dimensional level of decoration are other elements that stand out from the velvet surface. These include circular and oval mirrors with heavy silver- or gold-coloured frames, in some styles placed against a stiffened velvet backing. Mirrors especially punctuate the cuffs and chest panel of pecheros (shirts), the thighs of pantalones (pants), as well as the back of the military coat and the lower panel of K'iche' capes. Dangling gold and silver cords that usually end in tassels also stand out from the surface and are commonly juxtaposed to these mirrors.

Distinctions between the styles may be characterized according to such details as the forms of mirror assemblage, but more comprehensively according to the more basic elements such as the choice of colours for the velvet and the arrangements of trim and sequins.
In the style of San Cristóbal, trim lines delineating design motifs are open, loose and curvilinear, forming not only leaf and plant–like motifs but also loops and maze–like meanders. Sequins that fill these design interiors tend to be widely spaced and homogeneous or alternating in colour for each area of design. All of these motifs sewn onto a velvet cloth in a colour palette that emphasizes warm colours with yellow predominating. On the K'iche' cape, it is noteworthy that the upper panel is normally decorated only with lines of trim material, rather than trim designs with sequined interiors. The mirrors that decorate stripes on the lower panel are set on sometimes very elaborate symmetrical backings. Both San Cristóbal and Momostenango dance teams use San Cristóbal trajes produced in the Tistoj morería. The style of the Morería San Cristóbal, formerly the Chaclán morería, is similar except that the designs are more densely packed and large design areas tend to feature a central spine formed of a wide band of trim material.

In contrast, Joyabaj costumes are distinguished by a contrast of materials onto which these decorative elements are sewn. Some panels and most borders use velvet backgrounds in exceptionally deep, rich colours in which cool colours predominate, particularly in the blue to red range, but contrasting with a golden yellow. In other areas, such as the stripes on the K'iche' cape, the background for the design is a white material filled with small areas of silver thread that together suggest a shiny satin. The same colours of trim and sequins have boldly different effects when they appear on these contrasting light and dark backgrounds. Another important distinction in Joyabaj is that the fringes are made not of cloth but of cylindrical transparent yellow beads strung onto orange or blue thread. Mirrors are used more sparingly in Joyabaj, while sequins are used more lavishly.

Motifs executed in narrow and undulating trim in Joyabaj trajes are tighter and more repetitive in structure than those developed in San Cristóbal. The predominant motif is a leaf shape alternating vertical and diagonal orientations, in which any vertical leaf seen with two adjoining diagonal leaves in bilateral symmetry suggest a three–leaf plant formation. As the band continues, the orientation of this plant–like motif alternates direction through rotation. While it may be noted that in all localities
studied, dances of the K’iche’ members of the court and Cacique group also alternate directions, and while the structure of the drama as a whole and the opening dance in particular involves bilateral symmetry, I would not suggest any structural connection other than an ideological/religious emphasis on symmetry through balanced paired elements. A further example of design based on this principle involves the stripes of the K’iche’ cape, where the arrangement of these repeating forms in two adjoining stripes will also be related in bilateral symmetry (mirror reflection).

As with many banded geometrical designs, one can visually understand that they involve small design units repeated through bilateral and rotational symmetry. In this Joyabaj style banded design, the most basic and often-repeated unit is a rectangle composed of one diagonal leaf and half of a vertical leaf. As the band progresses, this unit repeats in bilateral or reflection symmetry, and as noted above it composes a bilateral three-leaf motif that suggests a floral structure. The point here is that in contrast to the maze like interconnections of loose curvilinear lines in San Cristóbal style design, the Joyabaj approach is based more on small, repeated and thus separable units. Seen on the scale of a design element, one may note that in the U-shaped panel on the pantalones thigh, the San Cristóbal examples feature a continuous design, while in Joyabaj the panel is compartmentalized into three distinct spaces related in fairly strict bilateral symmetry.

Fillers in these Joyabaj design units are longer and more closely-spaced lines than in San Cristóbal. In any particular leaf-like space all the sequins in the line will be the same colour, but within each larger unit such as a three-leaf figure, the sequins in the different small spaces will contrast. Further, in some more elaborate versions, as on the borders of some capes, lines of sequins also outline the leaf forms, enhancing the sense of parallel and repeating lines that alternate trim and sequins.
San Cristóbal and Joyabaj styles may also be compared and contrasted in terms of the secondary design layer consisting of mirror assemblages and tasseled cords. While the San Cristóbal cords end in small and simply designed tassels, the tassels of Joyabaj involve different colours of velvet stuffed with another material to form large cylinders and with a beaded fringe. Mirrors are sometimes sewn alone into the fabric but most commonly are combined with a stiffened velvet backing that is then sewn onto the basic velvet layer. Both morería styles most commonly use a fairly small and symmetrical backing element consisting of a central leaf form that passes behind the mirror, with arc-shaped wing-like forms at the side, suggesting to some observers the shape of a butterfly. In San Cristóbal, the points of the central lanceolate shape are evident and the wings are symmetrical across a horizontal axis. The Sequin fillers are often arranged in a vertical arc of sequins, to each of which is attached a horizontal line of narrow beads. In Joyabaj, the points of the central lanceolate are barely visible, and the wing elements are upswept, with fillers only in sequin lines. In San Cristóbal, and particularly on the stripes for the lower part of the K’iche’ cape as well as the thigh panel of the pantalones, there is additionally considerable play with a variety of mirror backings in four-lobe (quatrefoil) and composite leaf-like shapes.

Trajes of the Chichicastenango morerías are the most distinctive and, indeed, spectacular. Although the lower part of the K’iche’ cape is somewhat comparable with the vertical stripes and border outlined in trim, and with trim-outlined leaf-shaped forms with lines of homogeneously-coloured sequins along the centre, currently blossom-like arrangements of multicoloured ornaments of shiny tin are added. Most areas of design on Chichicastenango trajes are so heavily ornamented with tin leaves and petals that the velvet background is scarcely visible. The choice of deep and rich velvet colours, evident on the pechero sleeves and backs of the pantalones, is largely comparable to preferences noted at Joyabaj.
Looking at how the design might be built up progressively to create this *horror vacui* effect in Chichicastenango *trajes*, it is evident that mirrors are more fully integrated into the overall two-dimensional design than in the products of San Cristóbal and Joyabaj morerías. Here mirrors, both round and oval, feature wide frames of elaborate arabesques. Around these, coloured tin elements form a second frame, suggesting a flower-like arrangement. Intervening spaces are filled with more coloured tin, including the leaf or petal shaped elements organized into clear floral designs complete with stem and leaves, and other elements in the shape of stars and five-petal flowers. Winding through these floral arrangements are lines of the usual faceted round sequins. This reluctance to leave spaces unelaborated even leads to sewing sequins onto the trim of panel borders. Covering cloth with these reflective metallic elements renders them dazzling in sunlight, with the secondary effect of casting star-like reflections on the pavement. With this two-dimensional base pattern in place, three dimensional elements are added, including much more abundant use of gold-coloured tassels and dangling braided cords. Brass bells are also regularly attached to the dangling cords in these *trajes*. Even the exceptionally long silver fringes, actually part of the trim on lower borders, adds to the three-dimensional effect.

The capes of K'iche' characters produced in Chichicastenango morerías are also distinctive in shape. In Joyabaj, it is only the Malinche’s cape that is distinguished by a triangular form with undulating lower border, in contrast to the two straight panels of the male cape. But in the Chichicastenango style the upper section of the male cape shares the same undulating triangular form, in contrast to the rectilinear lower cape segment.

These three styles do not represent the full range of morerías in Guatemala, but only those used in the four communities under investigation. Further, these style characterizations represent the current stage in an evolution of *traje* design that has gone on for centuries and is still continuing. For example, in 2008 workers at the Ignacio morería of Chichicastenango showed me a comparison of the current and just previous styles of cape. The earlier version did not display the elaborate mirror-centred starburst designs that dominate the present style. Instead much use was made of undulating bands of galloon trim setting off smaller floral configurations.
Unfortunately there is insufficient visual documentation to characterize the evolution of morería styles even for the most recent century. One of the best resources consists of the photographs Barbara Bode took of Conquest dancers in 1957, deposited with the rest of Bode’s Conquest Dance materials in the Latin American Library at Tulane University. Bode photographed dancers at San Cristóbal, Tactic and Cobán. The image of Spaniard at Cobán in particular seems very close in style to current trajes produced at the San Cristóbal morerías. A bit farther back, several articles of Maya festival dances were published in travel-oriented magazines and books in the early 1940s, some of which include photographs of Conquista and other dances that are similar to Bode’s photos. In general the styles are similar to those in use today in San Cristóbal, but also in some trajes the design appears to be simpler and more open.

Most distinctive are three portraits of men wearing Conquista trajes photographed by Tomasso Zanotti in the first two decades of the 20th century in his studio in Quetzaltenango/Xelajú. Published portraits show dancers dressed as Tekum, a lesser Cacique, and a Spaniard. Unpublished photos in the CIRMA fototeca archive in Antigua show another Cacique performer. Judging from what can be discerned in these photographs, trajes appear to be more densely detailed than even those in use today in San Cristóbal. The decorated front panel, cuffs and border on the pecheró and the panels on the thighs appear larger in proportion to the size of the clothing and the ornament appears more densely packed, closer to the current style of Chichicastenango than San Cristóbal. Perhaps they were brought from that city. Unlike the other two dancers in this group of portraits, the Tekum dancer also wears a long necklace made of large coins. This is the same dancer whose headdress was noted previously to include cross, chalice and angel motifs.

9.2.2. Personages in Their Groups: Costumes and Props

A complete cast of the Dance of the Conquest includes twenty personages divided into four distinct groups. As their characterization, whether as individuals or groups, affects most other performance conventions, these groups will be introduced first, specifying their appropriate masks, trajes and props or attributes. The four groups are the royal court, Caciques, priest–diviners, and Spaniards.

9.2.2.1. Royal Court

The royal court consists of the ruler, called Rey K’iche’ (K’iche’ King) or just K’iche’, and his four young children: the two Principes (Princes) and the two princesses called Malinches. Of these five, only Rey K’iche’ is ever addressed by a personal name, which is K’ik’ab, written as Quicab, a royal name used by rulers in several generations of the K’iche’ dynasty. The four youths, as Barrientos (1941: 11) pointed out, fulfill a generic plot function and are thus nameless. As noted in the discussion of the text and its

3 Akkeren (2007: 58); CIRMA, Imágenes de Guatemala 80.
modifications, this factor caused some confusion concerning the events narrated in the text, requiring additions in movement or text to seek clarification. Although the royal court was located in Q’umarcaaj (Uatatlan), the name of this city is not mentioned in any but the most recently revised texts.

Rey K’iche’ is advanced in years and thus his mask shows partial baldness. His brow is creased by deep furrows representing his concern and sadness over the Spanish invasion, by which he foresees the fall of his kingdom and the death of his family. The Princes wear generic “young male” masks that feature a mustache as a sign of gender rather than age. Sideburns are also prominent. Depending on the community, the Malinches may wear a similar mask without a mustache that designates female gender. Alternately, they may have their face covered in a veil of lace, or with the cloths that are normally worn under the mask to protect their face, or their face may be completely revealed. As the dance is an opportunity to involve and show off one’s children, Princes and Malinches are now danced by young children, in some communities far too young to dance properly or learn any text. Masks of these five royal court members bear the same light skin and hair as the Spaniards, contrasted with the dark skin and hair of the Caciques, visually documenting their intermediary position between the two opposed forces. However they share the dark eyes of the Caciques.

4 Malinches wear these masks in Nebaj, but not in any of the four municipios studied for this project.
The costume of male members of the royal court consists mainly of short pants, shirt, cape, and headdress with feathers. The short pants or *pantalones* have a lower decorative border band and a panel on the front of each thigh. The panel is composed of a mirror assemblage above and U-shaped area below with a lower fringe and additional dangling gold braided cords ending in tassels. The shirt or *pechero* is tied in back with leather cords, and it is plain on the back because it is covered by the cape. The front of the *pechero* is decorated with two design panels that in some styles may be combined into one. The neck panel above is largely rectangular but bowed on the bottom. The chest panel below is a horizontal S-shape. Both have a lower fringe and between them, over the heart, is a mirror. The lower border of the *pechero* is zigzagged. The peaked cuffs are stiffened and decorated. The cape ideally reaches to the ankles and is divided into upper and lower panels. The upper panel is shorter, covering roughly from shoulder to waist, and features a series of decorated vertical bands or stripes on a plain ground, bordered by a wide strip with spaced linear designs loosely suggesting a floral or vegetal quality. The lower and longer panel is also vertically banded and bordered but additionally features mirrors on each of the decorated vertical bands. The two part division of the cape
may be traced to European royal ermine robes, used by royalty (and British peers) especially at coronations from the late middle ages to the present.

Headdresses of the Rey K’iche’ and the two Princes are built around crowns (made of tin), since they represent the male dynastic line. Depending on the municipio, these crowns may be topped with crosses or bulbs. While in the context of the Conquest Dance the cross decoration may be considered to anticipate the baptism and conversion of the court, the origin is probably an adaptation of crowns worn by Christian figures in the dances of the Moors and Christians. The front and back of the crown are decorated with stiffened velvet panels featuring a central mirror with surrounding linear designs in sequins. Dyed ostrich feathers, and in some communities sticks of assorted dyed chicken feathers are attached to these headdresses and sometimes sewn directly to the velvet panels.

For Malinches, not only masks but also the headdresses and trajes differ considerably by community. In the two more western K’iche’ municipios studied (San Cristóbal, Momostenango), Malinches wear local everyday traje, with no mask, headdress, or cape. In Cunén, Malinches wear full dance traje including a broad-brimmed hat. In Joyabaj, Malinches wear the everyday traje of Santa Cruz del Quiché with a headdress and ostrich feathers.

Members of the court carry a small cylindrical turned-wood device representing a royal sceptre. Rey K’iche’ initially carries the present Guatemalan flag, minus the quetzal emblem, as a sign of K’iche’ sovereignty, until he hands it over to Tekum to give him the authority to lead the resistance.⁵ Until the flag is returned to him after Tekum’s death, and in some municipios throughout the performance, Rey K’iche’ also carries the scepter. As well, all members of the court carry the plato, a circular tin plate with coins or other small metal elements strung on chains so that when the plato is shaken, it serves as a rattle to accentuate dance steps as well as declamations of text. The distinctive circular shape of this Conquista rattle was likely designed to suggest a war shield. Sceptres and platos have decorative cloth pañuelos tied around them, likely as a sign of respect for their sacredness in this context.

9.2.2.2. Caciques

⁵ Krystal (2012) interprets the resonance of the flag in the Conquest Dance by emphasizing the quetzal emblem and its (largely post 1870) association with Tekum. However, in the five communities in which I have seen the conquest dance, only one used a flag with the quetzal emblem. In the others, the flags only featured the blue and white bands.
A second group consists of those who fight to defend the K'iche' kingdom, called *Caciques*, a Caribbean term applied by the Spanish colonists to noble Indigenous community leaders. In the *Conquista*, these *Caciques* are led by Tekum, who is referred to as the king of Quetzaltenango. As some modified texts make clear, and historical references show, Tekum was the eldest son of the ruler and heir to the throne, governing the secondary capital in order to administer territory formerly controlled by Mam peoples and conquered only a century earlier by the K'iche'. Tekum also has his own palace in this city that the Spaniards, from their Tlaxcalan allies, knew as Quetzaltenango. In the text, this location is referred to as Xelajuj, though as noted earlier the community called Quetzaltenango was originally Salcajá and only moved to Xelajuj Noj in 1529. As the heir, Tekum also commands all K'iche' armies (Akkeren 2007). Alvarado referred to Tekum as the captain general, whereas in K'iche' his title was *Nima Rajpop Achi*, as documented in the *títulos* that recount his duel with Alvarado.

The other *Caciques* are subordinate rulers of communities in the Quetzaltenango area that are part of the K'iche' dominion and loyal to the K'iche' ruler in the capital. Each of these *Caciques* stands in for an unseen contingent of
fighters that he leads. In the text, Huitzitzil Tzunun, Tekum's second-in-command, is referred to as the Cacique of Zunil, though his título identifies him with the new Quetzaltenango.

Caciques are most commonly distinguished by dark tinted masks, with dark hair and brown eyes, signaling not only a racial but also a cultural and religious distinction from the Spaniards. However in some communities the less important Caciques wear light-colored masks like those of the Princes. As with the Princes, the mustache denotes male gender and sideburns are prominent. Tekum's mask is further distinguished by the carving of two quetzal birds on the forehead, an addition that likely dates to the end of the 19th century when Tekum came to be associated with this notoriously freedom-loving bird. His leading subordinate, Huitzitzil Tzunun, is given two names that both mean hummingbird, though in different languages (Nahuatl and K'iche'), so a hummingbird is carved on the forehead of his mask. His face is also surrounded by solar rays, as the hummingbird was a solar symbol among Mesoamericans. Other Caciques usually feature generic floral designs in their headbands, a standard male mask type that can be used for different purposes in different dances by painting in different colours.

For the most part, Cacique costume elements are identical to those of Rey K'iche' and Princes, however headdresses differ somewhat. While they feature the same front and back decorated velvet panels and feathers, the tin armature of a Cacique headdress is formed of circular tiers reminiscent of a contemporary wedding cake, rather than a crown. The top tier may be plain or feature a lunar crescent, adapted from headdresses of Moor figures in dances of Moors and Christians. Tekum's headdress is similar except that to the top tier is attached a stuffed effigy of the quetzal, its two long emerald coloured feathers hanging down over his back. A photograph from the 1970s hanging in the salon of the morería Tistoj in San Cristóbal Totonicapán demonstrates that in some cases an actual stuffed quetzal was used in Tekum's headdress.

While Tekum, as the heir to the throne, carries the royal sceptre, in addition to or except when he carries the flag, the other Caciques carry the flecha, a wood device meant to represent an arrow strung

---

6 In Nebaj, all the Caciques wear masks of the same colour: a very light brown.
7 Thompson (1970) includes several versions of a Maya story in which the sun deity takes the form of a hummingbird to seduce an earth goddess jealously guarded by an old earth lord. The Mexica of Tenochtitlan took as their patron a solar deity named Huitzilopochtli (Hummingbird on the Left/South).
on a bow and ready for launching. Tekum as well as all the Caciques also carry the plato. Both attributes have pañuelos tied around them.

9.2.2.3. Ajitz Group

Attached to Tekum are two priest-diviners. All but the most recently revised texts only have lines for the adult diviner, called Ajitz Grande or just Ajitz, so the child who accompanies him, called Ajitz Chiquito or just Chiquito, is a later invention. As with the members of the court, their names are generic: Aj Itz means “he of magic / sorcery.” Although in staging, Ajitz and Chiquito occupy the end of the line of Caciques, they are understood to be in a different locality than Tekum’s palace in the secondary capital. They are in a mountain shrine overlooking the secondary capital, where they perform ceremonial offerings and seek advice from the gods through divination.

Ajitz Grande and Chiquito are visually distinguished from other K’iche’ personages by several features, many of which are coloured red. Their clothing is red and they carry a red morral or shoulder bag. They may even wear red gloves. They carry a red-painted wooden axe along with a chain. Ajitz Grande also carries a doll dressed in red that represents his idol. Their masks, often of the general male type, are painted red. Some have Ajitz’s axe symbol carved onto the forehead. Often their masks lack the prominent sideburns of masks worn by Princes and Caciques. They wear the short pants worn by other Maya personages but distinguished by use of only red velvet. Instead of wearing the pechero and cape shared by other K’iche’ personages, Ajitz Grande and Chiquito wear a military jacket with epaulettes, again using only red velvet. This jacket usually features the same front and cuff decorations as the K’iche’ pechero in combination with a design on the back that is almost identical to those of the Spanish jackets. Unlike either the Spanish jacket or the K’iche’ pechero, the Ajitz jacket has a straight lower border. Further, Ajitz and Chiquito wear the shako, a military cap with a front peak. The shako is decorated with a mirror, sequined linear designs and feathers.

In some years the jackets supplied by the Tistoj morería to Ajitz dancers in San Cristóbal and Momostenango feature a heart design surrounded by rays on the front of the chest. Ernesto Ixcayauh Alvarado, who dances Ajitz in Momostenango, mentioned in another context that Ajitz is the heart of
La Conquista. I specifically asked Francisco Rodolfo Hernández, who dances Ajitz in San Cristóbal, for an explanation of the heart design, and he explained similarly that Ajitz is the heart of the K'iche' people.

The Ajitz group controls more props than any other personages. In addition to the axe, chain, and doll, they must manipulate a rope and bandanas to bind and blindfold the Spanish Ambassadors. They use several props for divination, including a table with two chairs (often painted red), a cloth to cover the table, a shoulder bag (morral), a smaller bag of divination equipment called the vara, which contains red seeds of the tz’ite, and sometimes also a quartz crystal.

Ajitz’s association with the colour red may have been influenced by the original text, in which Ajitz is linked with the devil, referred to as Lucifer. Like the devil, Ajitz was ascribed characteristics of goats: he is described as jumping like a goat and having a tail. However, and particularly in the western K’iche’ or Quetzaltenango region, Ajitz has merged with an older animistic spirit of the mountains representing the red lightning, called the K’ak’ Koxol, and it is to his identity as Koxol that the red colour now refers in that region. In general, but more commonly in Momostenango, Ajitz may be referred to as Tzitzimit. This name derives from a Nahuatl term for beings of horrific countenance (partially skeletal, with clawed animal hands and feet and often with skulls attached to knees and elbows as well as on the belt) that Spaniards identified with the devil.8

Though characterized as a brujo (sorcerer) in league with the devil, the part of Ajitz is also written as a gracejo, a semi–comic character typical of Spanish siglo del oro theatre where it is referred to as a gracioso. Gracejos are the typically lowest ranked members of their group, often defined as servants of the group leader. Thus Ajitz is characterized as a sorcerer in the service of Tekum. A siglo de oro gracejo was also expected to directly address the crowd and demonstrate the moral or political relation between events in the play and circumstances of their lives. This ability to interact with the audience likely led to another facet of Ajitz’s character in current performance: Ajitz is responsible for controlling the crowd and keeping both audience and dogs off of the dance ground. Recently much of his crowd control has expanded to asking for donations from those audience members who take photographs or video of the dance, though now that cellphones with cameras are ubiquitous, this becomes impossible. In some communities Monkey dancers take on such ancillary roles, and they wear the same jacket and shako hat but coloured black. I thus suspect that this “policing” function led to Ajitz’s adoption of a partial military uniform, and thus that the uniform is designed to both signify and reinforce such authority.

Also on the Cacique side is a personage rarely seen at present, the messenger from Motecuhzoma, variously known as Azteca, Lacandón, or Jicaque. Lacandón and Jicaque are two ethnic groups living to

8 Map 2 of Cuauhtinchan shows a tzitzimitl head in the form of a horned European devil.
the north who resisted colonization and conversion, a trait represented in the dance by the depiction of the character as a wild man of the forest, dressed in loincloth and sometimes with a feathered traje. The Lacandón mask is also characterized by a headband composed of upright feathers. He holds a bow and arrow and on his back wears a quiver with arrows.

Lacandón’s lack of “civilization” allows him to be portrayed as stupid, timorous, and easily surprised or confused. According to Francisco Hernández of San Cristóbal Totonacapan, the slightest sound shocks him, new things surprise him, and it is very easy for Spaniards to take advantage of him. This interaction between Spaniards and the guileless Lacandón is comically executed and partially extemporized through pantomime. Due to his instructor’s insistence that Lacandón is a traitor, when Krystal saw a performance in an aldea of San Cristóbal Totonacapan called Patachaj, he interpreted this pantomime as depicting Lacandón going over to the Spanish side and betraying the K’iche’ (Krystal 2001: 340–43). In contrast, Krystal notes the absence of betrayal in a performance he saw in Santiago Atitlán (Krystal 2001: 343–44) and interprets what he understands as this disparity in character by the different historical relations that the K’iche’ and Tzutujil had with the Spanish Conquerors. But as performed now in the K’iche’ municipio of San Cristóbal, there is similarly no evidence of such betrayal. Perhaps Lacandón does not fulfill the role of traitor in either linguistic community but merely acts out of an exaggerated cluelessness in all three locations.

9.2.2.4. Spaniards

The fourth group involves the Spaniards, led by Pedro de Alvarado. Alvarado is accompanied by his officers, again each representing that portion of the invading armies that they command. All but the gracejo, who occupies the final position have historically known names, including Juan de Leon y Cardona to whom Alvarado granted Salcay (the original Quetzaltenango) as an encomienda. Alvarado’s costume, mask, and attributes do not differ significantly from those of the other Spaniards in his command.

In the Conquista, Spaniards wear a military coat with epaulettes, usually in the cool colours of blue or green, depending on the community. The cuffs and front of the coat are decorated similarly to the K’iche’ pechero, but as the coat closes in front, the neck and S-panels are used to hide the buttons. The back of the coat is decorated with a broad pattern, the looped structure of which is formed by a symmetrical line creating an open volume above and ending in angular legs below. Further design elements surround this spine in the broader open spaces. Sleeves of the Spanish coat may be multi-
coloured and puffed like the *pechero* or they may be straight and decorated with the same pattern as on the back. Depending on the municipio, Spaniards may wear short pants similar to those of the K'iche' characters, or long, relatively plain military dress pants in either red or white. These dress pants are enhanced by a long decorated band on the outer sides. Spaniards wear either a cocked (admiralty) hat or a suggestion of a 16th conquistador helmet, both topped with ostrich feathers. Often they wear white gloves. Until a generation ago, they regularly processed into the dance area on horseback. Masks of Spaniards are designed to demonstrate a racial and cultural contrast to those of the *Caciques*. They feature not only mustaches but also long beards and all are golden haired as well as light skinned and blue-eyed, drawing on historical information that Alvarado was blond. For attributes, most Spaniards carry a sword, which may be sheathed or unsheathed depending on the action involved. However Portocarrero carries a Spanish flag, and during the battle scene Alvarado will exchange his sword for this flag.

The last in the line of Spaniards is Don Quirijol, often written and pronounced “Crijol.” Quirijol is a fictional character invented to fulfill the *gracejo* role. He is thus paired with Ajitz who is the *gracejo* at the end of the *Cacique* line. In *siglo de oro* convention, Quirijol is of lower social standing, characterized randy and gluttonous. He is particularly concerned with acquiring some Indigenous wives to meet both those needs.

### 9.2.2.5. Comparisons

In his apprenticeship with the government–sponsored *morería* in San Miguel Totonicapán, Matthew Krystal found that masks of the two opposing leaders, those of Tekum and Alvarado, could be distinguished from those of their followers by a more fierce expression, produced especially by creases over the bridge of the nose. In my experience with the Conquest dance at four communities, this distinction was not made. Indeed at Momostenango, the fiercest Spanish mask I saw was worn by the comic character Quirijol. Some dancers claim that the hierarchy of Spaniards affects the size of the mask but I have not been able to appreciate such distinctions.
Many elements of these *trajes* are shared with those of other dances such as the *Baile del Torito* (Dance of the Bull) or *Baile del Venado* (Dance of the Deer). The short pants in particular are common to multiple dances. More numerous overlaps occur with the *Moros y Cristianos* (Moors and Christians) dance, which in some regions uses the same cape and headdress type as the *Caciques* in the *Conquista*. It is well known that the *Moros y Cristianos* was brought to Spanish America from Spain in the early years of the conquest, and that the more localized Conquest dances grew out of it, but this does not mean that elements shared between the *Moros and Conquista* dances developed first in the former. Costumes for both dances have changed radically over the last four centuries and, considering that the same *morerías* supply *trajes* for both dances, their evolution has long been in tandem. Hence the paired quetzals that distinguish the mask of Tekum also appear on *Moros y Cristianos* masks in some regions.

9.2.3. Staging

When *Conquista* dancers and musicians arrive at the church plaza, or at a *cofradía*, their first task is to establish the dancing space. The *Conquista*, like other dances, may be performed in any open space, and often it is performed either in the patio of a *cofradía* or in the street out front. A rectangular space is defined as a dance area with a series of meaningful theatrical locations dominated by its cosmography. That is, the rectangular dance ground becomes a cosmogram with sides associated to the four directions, emphasized in dance not only by the circular turning movement or *vuelta* at each corner that is used in other dances as well, but also and marked by the restricted and particular use of the central point. Within this five-part structure is also a three-part hierarchy that focuses on the Rey K’iche’ as sovereign. The four groups are assigned to specific positions according to this five-part cosmography and three part hierarchy.
The dominant position in the staging hierarchy is that of the Rey K'iche' and his royal court at Q'umarcaaj. The side occupied by the royal court may be referred to as the head of the dance ground. Within that position, the five members of the court are also arranged in a hierarchic bilateral symmetry, with Rey K'iche' in the centre, flanked immediately by the two Princes and then the two Malinches. Hierarchy continues onto the dance ground with the royal court flanked by the two opposing military forces. The side of the dance ground that is to the left, when seen from Rey K'iche's position, is occupied by Tekum and the Caciques, and represents Tekum’s palace in Quetzaltenango. Caciques are arranged in linear hierarchy, usually with Tekum farthest from the court, and with Ajitz and Chiquito at the end nearest the court. The side of the dance ground to the right, when seen from Rey K'iche's position, is the encampment occupied by the Spaniards who are also arranged in linear hierarchy. In most communities Alvarado is farthest from the court and Quirijol is closest to it. The four corners of the dance ground may thus be spoken of in terms of the personage normally occupying that corner: Tekum, Ajitz, Alvarado, and Quirijol. While Ajitz and Chiquito have a position at the end of the Cacique line, they are also permitted to move freely throughout the central space and occupy its centre, presumably because, although they are outside the social hierarchy, they represent a superior position in a spiritual hierarchy. They also occupy a central position during divination.

![Procession in Cunén, 2010.](image)

The importance of the assignment of the priest-diviners to the central space is underlined when the dancers participate in processions, including more formal movements to and from the location in which they dress for the dance. In such processions, the court is at the back centre of the group, the
Caciques and the Spaniards line up on the two sides, with Ajitz and Chiquito toward the front of the central space. The difference from the arrangement of dancers on the dance ground is that in procession is that the hierarchy of the Cacique and Spanish lines are reversed so that the leaders, Tekum and Alvarado, are closest to the royal court. The same relative placement obtains when the dancer’s costumes are displayed in front of an altar for their ceremonial welcome to the community.

The four communities studied reveal a clear contrast in terms of the presence or lack of architectural support on the dance ground. In Cunén and Joyabaj (and also Nebaj), dance performances circulate between the church plaza and various cofradías, so any architectural support would be impractical. But in San Cristóbal Totonicapán and Momostenango, where all full performances are in a plaza near the church, a platform is used for the royal court and a taller structure, representing a mountain shrine, for Ajitz and Chiquito to pray and perform divinations. In Momostenango, the tall priestly platform adjoins the platform for the royal court, on the side closest to the Ajitz corner. Staging at San Cristóbal is more unusual, given the use of a permanent structure for the court platform. A secondary platform is built for Tekum and the caciques, and a separate tall structure for the priest-diviners occupies the far corner. This results in other accommodations to staging and movement that will be presented in the chapter on San Cristóbal’s Conquista. Architectural support also affects the placement of the two musicians: when a platform is used, the musicians share it with the royal court; when there is no platform, they occupy the side of the plaza opposite to the court.

9.2.4. Music

Surprisingly, the music of the Conquista has been more thoroughly studied than any other aspect. However, most of these studies are unpublished masters and doctoral theses, and several focus on
Rabinal where the *Conquista* has evolved in a different direction under ladino leadership. Glen Horspool’s 1982 dissertation on dance music of the *Moros y Cristianos* and the *Conquista* in Momostenango, based on fieldwork in 1977–78, has been the most useful to this project. However, even Horspool’s work suffers from the drawbacks of ethnomusicology as a form of music-oriented anthropology, in that it lacks engagement with either regional variation or change through time, other than identifying the gross change attendant on Spanish invasion, colonization, and missionization.

9.2.4.1. Instruments and Musicians

The two instruments that traditionally play for the Dance of the Conquest are the *chirimía* and the *tambor*, providing respectively the melody and the rhythm. These two instruments were introduced to the Americas as a pair through the Spanish invasions. One of the four pages remaining from an early (mid-16th century) version of the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, called the Texas Fragment, shows a marching soldier playing both instruments as he and a flag-carrier lead the cavalry (Kranz 2007: fig. 2).

The *chirimía* is a double reed shawm flute that came to Spain through the Moorish occupation. It is considered the ancestor of the oboe and has a similarly thick and reedy sound. It features 6 holes or stops on the top and one on the bottom. Horspool (1982: 213) points out that the *chirimía*, introduced by Catholics as a substitute for the organ, came to be accepted into the niche already occupied by the Indigenous 6-hole cane-made duct flute or *pito*, noting that in K’iche‘, both *pito* and *chirimía* are called “suu’. The *chirimía* soon became so popular, both for religious and non-religious occasions, that by 1555 the church was led to curtail its use (Horspool 1982: 32–33).

The *tambor* is a parade or military drum made of a hollow log with goat skin heads at either end. These skins are kept taut by leather thongs adjusted to regulate pitch. The *tamborista* holds the instrument off the ground, often resting on his shoes, so the sound resonates better (García Escóbar 1990: 40). He uses two rubber-tipped mallets to play on the drumhead. In addition, most rhythms for the *Conquista* include a note in which the stem of the mallet is also hit against the rim of the drum. To emulate the

---

9 At Rabinal also, the dance is not given at the *fiesta patronal* but usually in November.
caja redoblada or snare drum for the Spanish march, a string or chain is stretched across the drumhead and the tamborista strikes the skin with the other end of the drumsticks, without rubber tips.

Howell, in his 2004 thesis on the dance-drama music of Rabinal and Cobán, points out that although the combination of “flute and drum” was popular in Spain before the Spanish invasion, there is evidence for a similar combination in pre-Hispanic Maya dance practice. He refers to references not only in the 16th century títulos (Título C’oyoi and Memorial de Solola) but also in the Rabinal Achi which originated in pre-Hispanic times. He argues that these references associate this instrumental combination specifically with the related themes of war, conquest, and sacrifice. In this way, the combination becomes doubly relevant for the Moros y Cristianos, which uses the pito and tambor, and for the Conquista, which uses chirimía and tambor, not only because they were both developed by the Spaniards but also because both centre around wars (Howell 2004: 211–12). Horspool (1982: 50, 88, 136, 139, 226) notes that as mutually pertaining to the category “suu”, both pito and chirimía pair with drum for cofradía ceremonies and festivals. His explanation is that cofradías preserve Indigenous traditions. However, as Hutcheson (2003) has pointed out, dances tend to preserve the instrumentation with which they were introduced, so it may be that cofradías do as well. In that case the combination of pito and tambor or chirimía and tambor recall the introduction of cofradías, of the Moros y Cristianos and of the Conquista in the early colonial period (16th to early 17th centuries) when these were the currently fashionable instruments and instrument combinations.

Robert Nuestadt’s 2007 study of Guatemalan Indigenous music as a continual process of transcultural negotiation also sheds light on the reason for maintaining the original instrumentation of a dance even as current musical tastes evolve. And one might add that for the most part the original sones of the dance are likewise maintained. Using sources such as Rigoberta Menchu Tum’s famous testimonio and a documentary on Indigenous music by the Chiapas Media Project, Neustadt (2007: 10–13) recognizes that maintaining these musical instruments and forms the way their ancestors had played them is an important method of continuing traditions laid down by the ancestors—a central tenet of Costumbre, the religious belief and practice that is itself a product of continual transcultural negotiation between Catholic and Indigenous Maya communities and religions.

Horspool’s brief ethnographic sketch of the musicians (1982: 276–80) accords well with my observations and conversations thirty years later. While musicians are specialists, they are not formally trained, but instead learn by imitation of an adult who is often their father or another family member. Many of the Conquista musicians can play both instruments because they first learned to play the tambor to accompany their father on the chirimía. Then when their father is no longer able to play, they may take over the chirimía and teach their own son to play the appropriate rhythms on the tambor. While the sponsor (autor) and dancers change from year to year, musicians, like the maestro, contribute to the team over decades. Thus like the maestros, musicians function as repositories of knowledge, contributing to the coaching of dancers particularly in dance steps and choreography.
9.2.4.2. Sones

With the exception of the Spanish march and the battle music, other set musical pieces for the Conquista are of the type known as a son or air. Sones distinguish individual characters as well as particular situations. Each son is characterized both by its melody on the chirimía and by the rhythm provided by the tambor. The Baile de la Conquista is noted for the large number of sones but in fact its repertoire was previously much larger. Many sones are being lost through disuse. These are particularly the sones that were previously used to introduce each of the Caciques and Spaniards in solo dances. Ironically, all of these individual dances are still performed at Joyabaj, but these and many other sones have already been excluded from Conquista performance in that community. In a useful appendix, Bode (1961) includes scores providing themes for all of the K'iche' personages but none of the Spanish personages. These scores were notated for Bode by Jacinto Amezquita based on their presentation in the municipio of Sololá.

Identifying a particular son with a major character is still recognized at times, but usually not verbalized. Horspool (1982: 212–13) recorded thirty–one of the sones for the Momostenango Conquista and recorded the names given by the chirimiiista, Dionysio Pantuj, father of Don Cristóbal, the current chirimiiista. In 2014, I recorded Don Cristóbal with the tamborista Alejandro Hernández Pérez playing through the Conquista music as it is currently performed and Don Cristóbal also spoke the name of each piece before playing it. I had hoped to include the sones for individual characters but another commitment by the musicians prevented this plan from being realized. Titles for sones used in the Conquista at San Cristóbal were collected by Carlos Fredy Ochoa when he taped the Conquista music several years ago as insurance against the potential unavailability of a chirimiiista, most of whom are elderly. I also questioned the current San Cristóbal chirimiiista, Don Florentín Elías, concerning the names of sones. As with other sources, Don Florentin named the pieces according to the situation. In all of these sources it has become clear that even if at one time the sones were named according to a personage, they are no longer. A few sones are named according to the musical material (e.g. balonia, Santa Cruz) or dance style (e.g. Tres Pasos), but most are named according to the situation, including the name of the dancer or dancers and the place or person to whom they are going or from whom they have come (e.g. embajada Tekum). Therefore the same son or musical material may be repeated in several different contexts and thus given different titles.

Here follows a chart comparing names for sones provided by these three sources as well as an indication of their function within the Conquista performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within Narrative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prologue (San Cristóbal)</strong></td>
<td>Re' b'e El Camino</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opening:</strong> Entrance of K'iche' Personages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction of Aztec speech</strong></td>
<td>Azteca</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction of Malinches</strong></td>
<td>Malinches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction of prologue divination and prophecy</strong></td>
<td>Baile de la Entrada</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Out of place</strong></td>
<td>Encuentro de Tekum y K'iche'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajitz goes to Tekum to deliver prophecy</td>
<td>Ajitz va a Tekum, Same as entrada</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajitz returns to his shrine</td>
<td>Regreso de Ajitz, Regreso de Ajitz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part I</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction for Part I and Rey K'iche': Tekum and Rey K'iche' dance together</strong></td>
<td>K'iche', su baile, Rey K'iche', Introduction, Entrada</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tekum Interruption</strong></td>
<td>Embajada Tekum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Princes go to fetch Tekum</strong></td>
<td>Principes, Principes, Principes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Princes lead Tekum to Court</strong></td>
<td>Tekum va con K'iche', Regreso de Principes, Embajada Tekum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tekum returns to Quetzaltenango with flag</td>
<td>Tekum regresa a su palacio, Trayando el Pendón, The Middle: Tres Pasos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exit to finish morning</strong></td>
<td>Baile final de Parte 1, Ajitz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part II</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Not done now]</td>
<td>Entry of the Spaniards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spanish Entrance March</strong></td>
<td>Marcha, March of the Spaniards, Marcha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drum rolls for Individual Spanish exchanges only at San Cristóbal</strong></td>
<td>Entradas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spanish Dance</strong></td>
<td>Baile, Baile de los Españoles, Alvarado + company dance, Primera Balonia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ambassadors Dance to court</strong></td>
<td>Embajadores, Embajadores, Ajitz [Ambassadors] arrives with K'iche', Dos Embajadores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ambassadors Dance to Ajitz</strong></td>
<td>Ajitz [Ambassadors] Returns, Dos Embajadores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajitz goes to advise Tekum of Ambassadors’ arrival</td>
<td>Ajitz va con Tekum, Ajitz, Arrival with Tekum Ajitz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajitz returns to explain Tekum’s conditions to Ambassadors</td>
<td>Regreso de Ajitz?, Ajitz, Return of Ajitz with [from] Tekum, Regresa Ajitz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajitz leads Ambassadors to Tekum</td>
<td>Ajitz lleva a los embajadores, Ambassadors review orders from Tekum, Dos embajadores se van con Ajitz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajitz leads Ambassadors back to his divination place</td>
<td>Regreso de Ajitz, Ajitz, Spanish Ambassadors carry message from Tekum to Alvarado, La regresada de los embajadores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambassadors return to Spanish Camp</td>
<td>Regresan embajadores, Regreso de embajadores, Alvarado’s Ambassadors return for orders, Dos Embajadores se van a Alvarado</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish dance ends Part II</td>
<td>Baile, Baile de los Españoles, Segunda Balonia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part III</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caciques' dance introduces Part III</strong></td>
<td>Sale Tekum</td>
<td>Valse</td>
<td>Tekum dances with companions</td>
<td>Embajada Tekum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tzunun dances to Ajitz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tzunun dances</td>
<td>Tzunun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tzunun dances to Q'umarcaaj</td>
<td>Huitzitzil embajada</td>
<td>Tzunun</td>
<td>Tzunun with Tzitzimit</td>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tzunun returns to Quetzaltenango</td>
<td>Regreso de Huitzitzil</td>
<td>Tzunun</td>
<td>Tzunun + Tzitzimit return</td>
<td>Tzunun, regresada de K'iche'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part IV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caciques' dance introduces Part IV</strong></td>
<td>Tres pasos Tekum</td>
<td>Tres pasos</td>
<td>Three Steps… Farewell to go to field of battle</td>
<td>Tres Pasos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despedida by the court youths</td>
<td>Principes y Malinches despiden a Tekum</td>
<td>Valse de Principes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal youths return to Q'umarcaaj as Caciques advance to battlefield</td>
<td>Regreso Principes y Malinches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish Dance</td>
<td>Balonia</td>
<td>Balonia</td>
<td>Alvarado Dances</td>
<td>Segunda Balonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish march to battlefield</td>
<td>Marcha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle music</td>
<td>Guerra, cruzadas</td>
<td></td>
<td>Battle</td>
<td>Batalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish march to occupy Quetzaltenango</td>
<td>Marcha de victoria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tzunun conducts body of Tekum to Q'umarcaaj</td>
<td>Tzunun a K'iche'</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tekum is buried</td>
<td>Enterramiento de Tekum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tzunun takes body of Tekum for burial</td>
<td>Entierro de Tekum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tzunun returns from burial place</td>
<td>Regreso de entierro</td>
<td></td>
<td>Subjects Return after burying Tekum</td>
<td>Tres Embajadas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Not done now]</td>
<td>Alvarado’s Victory Alegría</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tres Embajadas?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Not done now]</td>
<td>Spanish Ambassadors going to see if war will continue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Not done now]</td>
<td>Two Spaniards return</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rey K’iche’ sends Princes to Quetzaltenango to invite Spanish</td>
<td>Principes van a Quirijol</td>
<td></td>
<td>Principes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quirijol goes to Alvarado for permission for Princes to enter</td>
<td>Quirijol</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quirijol soldado</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quirijol returns to Princes</td>
<td>Quirijol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quirijol conducts Princes to Alvarado (San Cristóbal) or Moreno (Momostenango)</td>
<td>Alvarado con K'iche'</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quirijol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princes dance from Moreno to Alvarado (Momostenango)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Principes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princes precede Spaniards to Q'umarcaaj</td>
<td>Reconciliación</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alvarado and subjects go to house of K'iche'</td>
<td>Primera Balonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Not done now]</td>
<td>Alvarado and Rey K’iche' converse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>El Rey K’iche’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Farewells (3)</td>
<td>Despedida 1 Despedida 2 El Último</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

10 The son “tres embajadas” would logically be the return of the Caciques from the burial, since this is performed just before the Princes are sent to invite Alvarado. However, the music strikes me as similar to Spanish martial music, so the piece might have once gone with a section featuring Spanish movements that is no longer performed.
Another factor complicating an analysis of Conquista sones is that they differ from municipio to municipio. Further, I have not heard sones from the four municipios investigated for this project that correspond in melody to those published by Bode. An ethno-musicological comparative analysis of Conquista sones as they have changed through time and space is crucially necessary.

9.2.4.3. Musical style

Horspool (1982: 160–62, 213–15, 267–69, 277–79) breaks down the typical son into its component parts. He notes that each begins with an introduction of one or two musical phrases. The son then continues with the main theme, often composed of three distinct phrases: the first in a high pitch area of the scale, the second in a medium pitch area, and the third in a low pitch area. These main theme phrases are repeated, sometimes with a short interlude phrase that includes a high pitched sustained note. When the dance is complete, the chirimiista plays a short terminal phrase or “codetta” that may be the same for each son and distinctive of the chirimiista. Each son also involves a distinct rhythm on the tambor, though it tends not to be precisely synchronized with the chirimía as beats are added or deleted at will. Horspool considers the sharp–sound of the mallet stem on the tambor’s wooden rim to function as a grace note. Also those younger men I have seen playing the tambor are no longer interested in learning the distinct rhythms for each son.

Horspool (1982: 227) then characterizes the linear development of a son:

Perhaps outstanding is the non–developmental nature of the music. Other than introductions and codettas, tempo, mood and dynamics do not vary, nor is there any appreciable development of figures or themes. The musical content of the first minute or so of performance presents all the music there is other than repetition, which is the norm.

Thus while the repetition of the main theme phrases involves variations, there is no buildup of tension through volume or tempo. Because all notes are the same volume and the steady beat is maintained, performance of the music is not directed towards manipulating emotional responses, and audience attention to the son is therefore not concentrated or sustained. Correspondingly, there is no expectation of virtuosity, in part because training is informal through imitation in apprenticeship, and, according to Horspool (1982: 156–57) is devoid of conversations about musical theory or analysis. But it must be remembered that the music of the chirimía and tambor is designed solely to accompany dancers, upon whom audience attention rests.

Horspool (1982: 277–79) was particularly concerned not merely with characterizing older styles of dance music at Momostenango but also with finding criteria to distinguish Indigenous from European elements. In addition to the lack of linear development in volume or tempo, the descending contour of
main theme phrases, and the loose synchrony of chirimía and tambor, Horspool also identifies as Indigenous elements a wide ambit of an octave and a fourth, inconsistent tonal centres and scale systems, a minimum of embellishments on the melody, and reliance primarily on quarter and eighth notes with some sixteenth notes.

To situate these distinctive elements in an historical framework, Horspool (1982: 270–71, 283) develops a transculturation model involving two categories of music resulting from interaction between Indigenous and European styles. One category consists of European style music adopted by Indigenous peoples but modified by adapting to it Indigenous musical ideas. An example of this would be the march used in the Conquista which is not considered a son. The second category consists of Indigenous style music that continues under European presence, but is modified by adapting some European musical ideas. Because he found the sones to be quite distinct from European musical modes, Horspool placed music for the Moros y Cristianos and Conquista in the second category. Horspool's analysis adds more depth to the transculturation argument relative to the chirimía and tambor featured in the Conquest Dance. Just as the tambor was adapted to continue rhythms previously developed on Indigenous percussion instruments (such the standing drum and slit gong), so too the chirimía was adapted to continue melodic traditions previously evolved on the Indigenous pito or cane flute.

9.2.5. Dance

Although it is a drama with a story told primarily through declamation of text and pantomime, dance is nevertheless central to the Conquista, as with other Costumbrista festival dances. In this introduction and the more detailed analyses of the Conquista at individual locales, the term "step" will be used for particular repeated motions of the feet. The term "choreography" will be used to describe movement through the horizontal space of the dance ground. Both steps and choreography vary greatly between locales and thus will be described primarily in chapters on each of the four municipios studied. This section will instead explain some of the more general dance conventions associated with the Baile de la Conquista.

9.2.5.1. Steps

To a greater or lesser extent, depending on the community, different dance steps characterize each of the four character groups introduced above. Members of the Court and Cacique groups normally dance facing sideways to the direction of choreographic movement and reverse the direction they face about every two measures of the music. Thus when they dance a circuit, they are alternately facing into the centre of the dance ground and out to the boundary, rather than facing forward. As their dance is usually a side–to–side movement, distance is gained primarily by taking a large step in making the
turn. However, when the five dancers of the court group dance without the Caciques, they often face forwards and move together in a line, forwards or backwards. Both Court and Cacique groups punctuate movements with a rhythmic shaking of the plato, faster at the turn-around or vuelta. Spaniards have two distinct dance steps, a regular march and a more energetic step requiring one foot to temporarily move behind the other.

Ajitz Grande and Ajitz Chiquito, the priest-diviners, use the more energetic dance step, raising their feet higher and punctuating the step by lifting up either the axe held in their right hand or alternating hands as they alternate feet. Ajitz’s more energetic step may derive from the original text in which he is said to be hopping like a goat, but it also parallels the step of the Moors in the contemporary Moros y Cristianos dance. For the sequence in which Ajitz and Chiquito dance from their divination table to Tekum’s palace to inform him of the Ambassadors’ request for an interview, specialized dance steps are common. In Momostenango the two performers use a slow dance with long pauses, while in Joyabaj (formerly) and Cunén, Ajitz actually does hop. He hops on one foot down a whole side, uses both feet to perform the vuelta at the corner, then reverts to hopping down the next side.

A specialized movement is employed in many communities for choreographed sections of the battle sequence involving single-combat duels. This movement is called a cruzada, named for the diagonal pattern also shared by the ritual of the last rehearsal that is referred to by the same term. In the battle cruzada, opponents first position themselves at opposite corners of the dance ground. From this position they run at each other. As they meet at the centre, they jump into the air, and while airborne they clash weapons and rotate. Back on the ground, they continue running to the opposite corner. In some communities, they will rotate corner positions for further cruzadas.

9.2.5.2. Choreography

While the arrangement of performers in two parallel lines represents an importation and adaptation from European dance, both for the dramatic dance of the Moors and Christians and more secular, social dances, some subtler aspects of the choreography appear to be Indigenous conventions that have been perpetuated in such evangelizing contexts. These are most obvious with binary and four-part relations. Binary relations will be discussed in more detail at the conclusion of the section on the general or shared sequence of the Conquista dance, so four-part relations will be noted here.
Four-part organization underlies choreography in terms of the way that the corners are articulated through dance movement to indicate the four world-directions. All groups mark the change of direction at corners with a vuelta. In this movement, pairs of dancers circle each other while the tamborista speeds up the drum beat. In a linear dance, whether involving Caciques, Court, Spaniards, or a combination, all dancers pair and perform the vuelta when the line leader reaches the corner, rather than performing it individually. Ajitz and Chiquito are the exception, as they perform the vuelta as a pair when they reach the corner, not when the leader does. When there is an odd number of performers needing to do a vuelta simultaneously, the last member just circles by himself or herself. Punctuating the corner turns with vueltas seems likely to derive from the cosmological character of the dance ground. However, in addition to the corners, a direction change occurs and is punctuated with a vuelta at the centre of the side opposite the Court as it is necessary to show proper respect by approaching Rey K'iche's palace on its central axis. In some municipios, vueltas are also often performed with a neighbouring dancer when a personage enters or leaves his line, as well as when the line changes direction, as it must do in the battle skirmishes.

When the music is playing and one or more personages are dancing, all other K'iche' characters show respect by dancing in place, even if only Spaniards are dancing. In contrast, it is rare for Spaniards to dance in place, whether those personages dancing are Spaniard or K'iche'. In processions also, usually the K'iche' groups dance to the musical accompaniment while Spaniards just walk. The reason that Spaniards are generally excluded from this dancing-in-place convention is not likely to be they do not wish or know how to show respect. One possible explanation might be that despite a history of intermarriage, Spaniards in the context of the Conquista are not considered K'iche' ancestors as the other characters are. Therefore they are excluded from this manner of honouring the ancestors who the dancers embody. K'iche' still dance in place while Spaniards dance, so following this argument the reason would be out of respect for the part they played in the history of their K'iche' ancestors, and particularly their conversion to Christianity and formation of the Costumbre religion. Another possibility would be more practical: both Spanish steps, the march and dance, are designed for rapid forward movement and inappropriate for dancing in place, in contrast to the K'iche' characteristic side-to-side shuffle. And a third possibility would be that it demonstrates the unswerving nature of the Spanish mission to subjugate and baptize the K'iche'.

Occurrence of dance throughout the performance is regulated by two basic principles. One principle is the use of dance as introduction. On the one hand, dances introduce each of the four parts of the drama, with the opening dance serving as a more extended introduction to Part I. At San Cristóbal, a dance is also added to end the first part because it precedes a break for lunch. Dance can also introduce a character. Examples include the individual dances for each of the Caciques to report to

---

11 In this regard the Conquista in San Cristóbal Totonicapán is distinctive, because the construction of a palace for Tekum and a temple for Ajitz introduce two additional axial approaches, the latter requiring a diagonal crossing of the dance ground since it is located in the corner.
Tekum and for each of the Spaniards to report to Alvarado. At Nebaj, the Princes and Malinches dance after Rey K'iche's opening monologue to Part I as they are understood to have just entered his presence. Also, at Momostenango the revised text involves an intervention of Tekum into the first scene, so Tekum and the Caciques dance before he speaks.

A second principle is that characters must dance when they travel between the diverse locations represented by the three sides of the dance ground as well as some particular points within it. For example, Ajitz's shrine and lookout outside Quetzaltenango are considered separate from Tekum's palace within the city and thus dance is required to traverse the distance between them.

Whether traveling or introducing a character or scene, normally dancers perform two circuits of the dance ground. The circuit may be clockwise or counter-clockwise. A particular logic governs this choice of direction for each dance, though this convention too may be evolving.

Although the diagram above applies specifically to the Cacique line, it could easily be adjusted to show approaches to and departures from the Spanish line according to the logic demonstrated, which has to do with the point of departure and arrival. Thus if the entire Cacique group is dancing they will dance clockwise. This allows them to follow their leader, Tekum, away from their position and also to return to their proper order at the end of a dance. In some cases, a visitor must approach or leave either the line leader or the gracejo at the end who serves as a sentry in a slightly different narrative location. The logic of direction helps prevent a visitor from crossing the entire line either coming or going. Thus when the Princes visit Tekum, they must dance counter-clockwise to approach him directly, but they lead him away clockwise. Later when the Spaniards have occupied the Cacique line, the Princes approach Quirijol, the sentry in the last position, in a clockwise direction but leave in a counter-clockwise direction. It should also be noted that where knowledge of the conventions is being eroded, the tendency is to select counter-clockwise movement. This counter-clockwise directional preference in dance is considered an element of continuity from ritual movement in pre-Hispanic times.
Three departures may be noted from the logic of this system but still within accepted conventions. First, the court of Rey K'iche' is entered into and often departed from on the central axis, so the choice of circuit direction can depend on other considerations. Most commonly counter-clockwise circuits are used in approaching the court and often in leaving it as well. Second, the opening and closing dances involve choreographed shifts between clockwise and counter-clockwise, though the first half of the long opening dance is entirely counter-clockwise. Third is the conventional variation for the second circuit of a leader-led dance. In San Cristóbal and Cunén the second circuit often involves diagonals. For these, dancers use the two lateral sides but avoid the music and court side by moving diagonally in a lateral figure eight. In Joyabaj a variation is used that I call the diminished circuit and involving the central axis: when the two circuits are complete and most of the dancers are in their usual position, the leader will enter into the centre of the dance ground for a solo which continues until he reaches the musician side and signals the musicians to stop. A similar solo that is less formalized than the diminished circuit is used at Cunén and San Cristóbal.

The central axis is hierarchically most important not only because it forms the approach to the palace of the Rey K'iche' but also because it symbolically, and in some settings actually, leads in the other direction to a location of Catholic sanctity. This location may be the municipal church or a cofradía. Thus a repeated dance segment used in closing that I call the honouring sequence involves all dancers present forming a lateral line and moving up and down this central axis, concluding at the end opposite Rey K'iche's platform to recite a dedication to the Virgin and patron saint. This sequence is not limited to the Baile de la Conquista. For example, in Cunén, all dance teams perform the honouring sequence in front of the two Patron Virgins on the atrium of the Church.

9.2.6. Text Recitation

The content of the text that forms the backbone of the Conquest Dance is intensively analyzed in Part II of this volume, so this section will give only a very brief introduction focusing on how the text is used in performance. To summarize the separate discussion, I have argued that the Baile de la Conquista text was originally written in the late 16th or early 17th century by a Franciscan friar in the K'iche'-speaking area around Quetzaltenango, in the heart of the region called Los Altos. Like most friars at the time, he would have been well educated in Spain before coming to the K'iche' region, so he was
able to compose a text in proper poetic style and structure for the *siglo de oro*. This text has been copied and recopied over the centuries, leading to some accidental changes. Intentional alteration, addition, and rewriting of the text dates primarily from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As a result of this intentional alteration, texts vary from around 6000 (earliest) to around 12,000 (latest) words, and they include poetry of diverse quality.

None of the extant texts—the earliest known dating from 1872—has specified divisions into acts, though a four-part structure may be discerned not only by significant shifts in participants but also by the frequent pattern of beginning an “act” with a dance sequence and monologue by a major character. In those communities where a break for lunch is taken, it occurs between the first and second or between the second and third parts.

Music and dance cease when it is time for recitation of the text. Performers often pace as the deliver text, whether moving up and down their respective line or using the central axis. The tendency is to declaim each line of the poetry in a stylized fashion, with a marked rise in volume and pitch on the last accented syllable. The common view that masks prevent audibility of the text is simply not true. Those who are “getting through” the text may not project their voice and thus are poorly heard, but many performers strive to deliver it in a clear and strong voice that is well understood despite the lack of a mouth opening in the mask. Some dancers may use vocal modulations or gestures to dramatize the words, but this practice is not common. At Momostenango, lines in K'iche' delivered in a normal speaking voice are clearly understood by the audience, as is evident from responses to the humour involved. What often does impede audience reception of the text is the enormously amplified music that accompanies neighbouring dances. The dance bands known as marimba orchestras in particular will use refrigerator-sized speakers stacked two stories high. Even traditional dances like the Dance of the Deer or the Bull (*Torito*) that use marimba will usually amplify their music with a loudspeaker.

Instruction in the *Conquista* dance text is an essential part of dance rehearsals. The maestro reads a section of the text, whether a phrase, a line, or a couplet, and the dancer repeats it. Recitation of the text in performance is a different matter, varying considerably among communities. At Joyabaj, the leading characters, particularly Tekum and Alvarado, learn most if not all of their greatly extended texts and recite them clearly with dramatic gestures. In San Cristóbal, almost all of the text is well used by all performers, but with the capacious dance ground and three raised platforms the audience is sometimes too far away from the speaker to hear clearly, and this is especially true for the speeches of Tekum and Rey K'iche'. Thus these dancers have experimented with microphones. In Momostenango the Spanish text is virtually ignored but meaning is also conveyed through extended pantomime scenes accompanied by considerable improvised joking banter in K'iche'. Cunén is intermediary. The more experienced dancers who perform a customary role know important parts of their main speeches. However, absentees call for continual reshuffling of the roles and thus some performances are given with virtually no text.
In Cunén as in Momostenango, this disuse of the text is a fairly recent phenomenon. A generation ago, careful and complete recitation appears to have been the norm rather than the exception. But even when little or no text is used, as in the *Conquista* at Cunén, both audience and performers know the outlines of the story fairly well. For example, in some cases in which performers do not know the text, they will improvise a brief statement that summarizes the content. If we use the example of the Princes dancing to Tekum’s palace and then returning with Tekum to the palace of the Rey K’iche’, most of the audience will understand that the Princes have summoned Tekum to prepare a defense against the Spanish, but almost no one knows the particular content of the Princes’ dialogues with Rey K’iche’ or with Tekum. That this does not detract significantly from the performance is probably due to the audience’s capacity to imagine what has been said to propel the action forward. While it is not possible for an outsider to single out an audience member and ask them what they were imagining, some performers have been forthcoming with their interpretation of scenes in which the text has not been used.

For readers of this volume, I cannot assume this kind of knowledge, so in the narratives of the dance in the four communities under consideration, actions of personages will be explained through brief summaries of the relevant texts even when they are now rarely or never given. This should be an indication that the goal for each of the four narratives of the *Conquista* sequence is to present the standard sequence, an ideal that as Hutcheson (2003: 20) notes is never achieved in a single performance.

9.2.7. Pantomime

Much of what one sees as physical action in the *Conquista* is not determined or regulated either by the dances or the text, and sometimes substitutes for text. Dancers use hand gestures that are part of their everyday life. Some of these are autochthonous and others adapted from other peoples. A gesture of exclamation (*Wow!*), is made by holding the arm horizontally with palm towards the body and fingers loose, then shaking the hand up and down. A gesture of question (*What?*), is made by extending the arm and hand, turning the wrist as the hand opens palm upwards. One can indicate that “It’s all over” by extending both arms at low torso level, palms down, and moving them laterally back and forth. Holding up the arm and hand at torso level, and rubbing finger tips against the tip of the thumb, means “I am afraid.” This may be combined with a sign for “No”, holding up the hand with index finger extended, and moving the hand sideways back and forth. The combination means “I am not afraid.” A diviner will also point to a limb in which he feels the blood jumping. A threatening gesture much used by Spaniards at Momostenango is to hold the two fists up, level and widely spaced, with thumbs outward, then shaking them side to side. This can also be accomplished with one hand. It means “screw you” or “you are screwed.” Insults are also used, including calling an opponent a “burro” (ass), often accompanied by a gesture of flapping with the hands beside the ears, suggesting large donkey
ears. Shading the eyes with the hand held horizontal touching the brow indicates an attempt to “look afar” or reconnoiter. Challenging an opponent can be indicated by a gesture of “drawing a line in the sand,” made by touching the tip of a weapon or flag on the ground and rapidly drawing a lateral line or arc. Shaking the plato is also a kind of general comment that can mean agreement or challenge. Some gestures are more graphic depictions of an action. Miming the act of spitting on the palm and rubbing it on a part of a person’s body demonstrates a healing method. A common insult at Momostenango is to pretend to dig in one’s butt and throw imaginary turds at an opponent. An adaptation from globalized media involves using the weapon like a spade to mime digging a grave, which means “you are a dead man.”

These and other gestures may be strung together with other movements to form elaborate pantomime narratives, particularly those involving Ajitz’s treatment of two Spanish emissaries known as the Ambassadors. Most pantomime sequences are developed as humourous episodes and these constitute one of the main attractions for the audience. A clever Ajitz can stretch out his interaction with the Spanish Ambassadors for nearly an hour if the audience is responding well to his humour. This is particularly so at Momostenango, where it has become common for Ajitz to punctuate his mime with banter in K’iche’ that is largely risqué or scatological. Ajitz may also indulge in the comic technique of parody when the Spaniards are marching, dancing or speaking. Such comedy complements the largely tragic nature of the textual narrative, playing more on character and relationships than on narrative. In contrast to the written gracejo speeches, which have largely fallen into disuse due to their obscure puns and dated references, pantomime also allows for humour to be continually updated so that is appropriate to the time, place and circumstances of the performance and the current concerns of the dancers and audience. The comedy of pantomime contrasts with the tragic character of the text and narrative, so that it can be used to undermine or contradict the text.

Seeds for some pantomimes were planted, perhaps inadvertently, by the author of the text. On the tragic side, Alvarado’s line beginning “Sin caballo me ha dejado” (He has left me without a horse) is developed at Cunén and Joyabaj into a long and ironic pantomime in which Alvarado is severely wounded and the K’iche’ celebrate victory, only to find that he has been cured and renews the attack, eventually killing Tekum. This ironic reversal parallels the historical events that formed part of Alvarado’s defeat of the K’iche’ army. Alvarado’s troops drove the K’iche’ army into the Olintepeque hills, then finding the terrain disadvantageous for their cavalry, they pretended to retreat in order to draw the K’iche’ back onto the plain. Probably assuming victory, the K’iche’ forces surged after them. But once again in flat terrain, the Spanish turned on them and surrounded them, enacting a massacre.
However the way in which this ironic twist is worked out in performance follows the preference for symmetry and parallels that structures many parts of the dance-drama.

Another example of the text containing a seed for pantomime occurs at the end of part I, when Ajitz tells Tekum that he will harass the Spaniards. This statement is followed by the Spanish entrance, and from this time almost to the end of the dance, Ajitz seeks to harass and humiliate the Spaniards. Quirijol, the counterpart gracejo, is most responsible for retaliating by harassing Ajitz. The character of Ajitz Chiquito appears to be a K'iche' invention, so he completely lacks text except in some of the latest revised examples emanating from Cantel. Thus he can be said to exist as a vehicle of pantomime. As a pair, Ajitz Grande and Ajitz Chiquito often engage in mutual harassment and clowning not only with Quirijol, the Spanish gracejo, but also with Moreno, the second last Spaniard in the lineup. A common form of harassment in Joyabaj and Cunén occurs when one group (Spaniard or Cacique) is dancing, a gracejo (or occasionally the leader) of the opposing group attempts to dampen the drum by placing a hand against the bottom membrane. The gracejo of the group vulnerable to this action will either perceive the threat in advance and rush to guard the drum, or if it has already been dampened he will rush to scare off the offender.

Instances occur of 20th century additions to the text that appear to accommodate pantomimes developed earlier from elements in the original text. One example is the scene, introduced by Cantel authors, in which the Princes find Tekum asleep. The kernel of this addition is the first line delivered by the Princes when they come to summon Tekum: “Que descuidado estáis” (How careless you are). From this kernel and the resulting pantomime of going to sleep, the Cantel authors also devised a speech. Speeches for an entire scene were added by a Tecpán author to clarify a previously pantomimed interchange between the Ambassadors and Rey K'iche', stemming from confusion over where they would have encountered the Princes and Malinches that had long been solved by having the Ambassadors visit the royal court.

To a greater or lesser extent, depending on the municipio, the Conquista performance consists of a tragedy and a farce presented simultaneously. The conflict between Tekum and Alvarado leading to the former's tragic death, along with Rey K'iche's character arc from vacillation to resolve, constitute the dramatic play. Interaction between the gracejos, Ajitz and Chiquito for the K'iche', opposed to Quirijol.
and sometimes also Moreno for the Spanish, provide the comic element. Slapstick conflict between K'iche' and Spanish *gracejos* thus parodies the dramatic conflict of Tekum and Alvarado.

As well as combining tragedy and comedy, the addition of pantomimes to the *Baile de la Conquista* evolved into a combination of two distinct forms of staging, in terms of how the space of the dance ground is utilized and understood. The dance and text recitation components of the *Conquista* strictly follow a geographic logic by which different sides of the dance ground represent different locations: The head of the dance ground is Q'umarcaaj with Rey K'iche's palace; to his left Quetzaltenango and Tekum's palace, and to his right is the Spanish camp on the way to Palajujnoj. Because these locations are geographically separate, personages in the dance-drama must dance in order to move from one location to another. This movement normally requires two circuits with *vueltas* at the corners. The logic of this arrangement is carefully maintained to the point that, for example, the Ambassadors may dance around Ajitz at his divining table without seeing him, because conceptually they have not yet arrived at his location.

However, in pantomimed sequences, characters walk freely from one location to another, interacting by word or gesture with other characters who are conceptually distant. For example, in Momostenango, Ajitz must dance two rounds from his divination table to the palace of Tekum when the text calls for him to speak to Tekum, but when he uses an Ambassador’s sword to shave Tekum he merely walks over, performs the shaving, then walks to Alvarado’s position and hurls the residue at the Spanish leader together with verbal insults in K'iche'. In several communities, before Ajitz blindfolds the Ambassadors, he walks to various sides of the dance ground to rub the cloth in dancers armpits and crotches so that it will smell repulsive, but when the Ambassadors are fully bound, they must be danced to Tekum’s palace.
Another striking example of this freer use of staging in pantomimed narratives concerns the battle scenes in Joyabaj. Whereas the skirmishes are fully choreographed, those segments in which Alvarado and Tekum are wounded involve lengthy pantomimed sequences with structured improvisation: in the first, Tekum pursues Alvarado; and in the second, Alvarado pursues Tekum. The pursued victim hides sequentially behind the personages on the four sides of the dance ground (Rey K’iche’s court, the Caciques, the musicians, and the Spaniards). The pursuer’s gracejo discovers his hiding place and attempts to show the pursuer, while the victim’s gracejo attempts to prevent this communication. Ultimately the pursued victim is flushed out and hides at another side. A new and interesting feature was added to this sequence in 2012 when Rey K’iche’ improvised, preventing Alvarado from hiding behind him, but later embracing Tekum when he sought refuge.

In both examples a different chronotope or temporal–spatial logic governs the pantomime: the logic of co–presence in the same dance ground, collapsing geography into a unified cosmographic space, and thereby also collapsing time, since movement between geographic locales requires time signaled by the dance. This logic of co–presence frees performers from rigidly prescribed actions in order to construct a more nuanced and improvisational narrative that can be read on different levels.

I suggest that this logic of co–presence has been developing for centuries. I would also argue that by the end of the 19th century, when the Cantel and Dioses lineage texts were developed, this logic of performance space that deviates from the structure suggested by the original text, entered into a dialogue with a logic of character that is equally divergent. Whereas the early style text constructs a narrative in which information is gradually revealed, personages react and thereby may change their nature in a character arc, in the modified Cantel and Dioses texts all knowledge is available from the start and characters do not undergo a psychological transformation. Rather, interest in the narrative is maintained by enabling different shades of character to emerge according to the other characters with whom personages interact. These interactions often involve characters whose differences allow them to
function as foils for one another. The prologue added to the Cantel lineage texts even provides a
textual grounding for the contrasts of character that arise from their interaction, with Tekum’s heroism
and anger opposed to Ajitz’s knowledge and fear. But it is the pantomimed interaction between Ajitz
and the Ambassadors that has become the heart of the performance. In this scene Ajitz’s dominance
over the Spaniards is allowed to develop to the point that it contradicts the text. In the text, the
Ambassadors submit quietly to the humiliation of being disarmed, blindfolded, bound and led to
Tekum, because they know they must complete their mission and also see it as an opportunity to
discover the strength of Tekum’s forces. In performance, however, the Ambassadors resist Ajitz’s
attempts to subdue them and in San Cristóbal they even resist being led to Tekum. Contradicting the
text, the Ambassadors’ resistance to Ajitz instead illuminates the binary power relationship of
domination and resistance that arises from and structures this particular confrontation.

The altered logic of staging and character also pertains to the ways in which Rey K’iche’ and the court
become the object of unscripted actions that suggest obedience to protocol. Because the Ambassadors
encounter the Princes and Malinches before they reach Ajitz, in all municipios studied, the
Ambassadors first visit Rey K’iche’s palace. The author likely meant the encounter to take place along a
forest path, since coming from Palajujnoj to Quetzaltenango (Salcajá) would not involve passing
through the more distant Q’umarcaaj. Thus there are no lines for Rey K’iche’ in this encounter. An
added scene in the Tecpán lineages texts specifically situates this meeting as following protocol, so it
is Rey K’iche’ who sends the Ambassadors on to Tekum. Dancers in other communities understand this
encounter in the same way, so in Momostenango the Ambassadors and Rey K’iche’ mime a
conversation. In Momostenango the Spaniards also pass through Rey K’iche’s palace as they move from
the battlefield to Quetzaltenango where they will occupy Tekum’s palace, another example of protocol
that depends on co–presence rather than geography.

9.3 Brief Comparison: East versus West

Despite the fact that Cunén uses the shortest and most traditional text of the four communities
studied, while Joyabaj uses the longest and one of the most heavily and recently modified texts,
dancing the Baile de la Conquista in these two communities shares several performance conventions.
Some of these are also shared in Nebaj, which may suggest regional intercommunication, perhaps
through an early exchange of maestros, but also perhaps because, at present, musicians from Cunén
perform also for the Nebaj Conquista. In all three municipios the battle sequence is divided into equal
and parallel halves, with Alvarado seriously wounded in the first half, to the extent that Tekum leads
the K’iche’ in a victory dance, and with Tekum mortally wounded in the second half. Some dance
conventions are also similar among these municipios, with a modified second circuit for group dances
followed by the leader’s solo, and with the hopping dance for Ajitz and Chiquito to ask Tekum for
permission to bring the Ambassadors to an audience with him. All three communities also share the
attempts by gracejos to dampen the drum when it is playing for the other side. In terms of costume, Joyabaj, Cunén and Nebaj all share the use of a specialized costume for the Malinches that includes a feature hiding the face, and all share the attachment of scarves to the attributes they hold. In all three municipios, dancers perform a vuelta every time they depart from or return to the line. Finally, in the eastern municipios, Caciques as well as Spaniards still perform their individual dances prior to reporting to their leader, and in Part I, usually in scene 4, these individual dances involve carrying and exchanging Tekum’s flag. Apart from such conventions, these communities also share a closer integration with cofradías, resulting in rotation of performance between the church and several cofradías, with the further result that there is no platform for the royal court, so that musicians are situated on the opposite side from the court. Perhaps because of the greater continuing importance of multiple cofradías in these communities, costumbres for the dance team are not prominent, nor is the role of Ajitz, so the divination scene underplayed and sometimes left out.

In contrast, in San Cristóbal and Momostenango, full performances occur only in a plaza near the church so a platform is used for the royal court of the Rey K’iche’, which the musicians share. The only cofradía visibly active on the days the Baile de la Conquista is being performed is that of Santiago, the battle scene is much shorter with no wounding of Alvarado, and Malinches wear women’s traje of their own municipios with faces fully revealed. Both communities also present an unscripted despedida by members of the royal court before the Caciques go into battle. In these two western K’iche’ municipios, costumbres for the dance team are important and culminate in dancing the cruzada around offering fires at the last rehearsal. Divination is central to the action of Part II in these two communities, including a demonstration of the limb in which the blood is jumping, along with desecration of the altar table when Ajitz and Chiquito are advising Tekum of the Ambassadors’ visit, and testing of Ajitz’s powers by hiding his divination equipment or idol. The importance of Ajitz and his divination in this western K’iche’ region correlates with the importance of the K’ak’ K’oxol with whom he is identified.

Although it is not yet possible to provide historical explanations for such differences between east and west among those municipios studied, it is important to note that conventions are always subject to change. For example, use of the coffin has been suspended at Cunén and Joyabaj though it is still used at Nebaj, whereas in Momostenango and San Cristóbal the coffin remains essential. The current distribution of the royal court platform may suggest that it was a fairly recent (i.e. 20th century)
innovation in the western K’iche’ region that has not been adopted many communities outside that region. In contrast, the differential continuing importance of cofradías in the eastern communities (Cunén, Joyabaj) and of Ajitz as the K’oxol or Tzitzimit in the western communities (San Cristóbal, Momostenango) may have an earlier explanation that relates to different complexions of Costumbre arising from differential penetration of Catholic elements into Maya religion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>West</th>
<th>East</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Cristóbal Totonicapán – Momostenango</td>
<td>Cunén – Joyabaj – Nebaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance mainly in church plaza</td>
<td>Dance mainly in cofradías</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use platform for Royal Court and Musicians</td>
<td>Musicians sit opposite the Royal Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retain use of coffin</td>
<td>Coffin largely discontinued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagonal second circuits common</td>
<td>Modified second circuit with leader solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malinches wear local women’s traje</td>
<td>Malinches wear specialized dress and headdress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short battle</td>
<td>Lengthy two-part battle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal use of battle cruzadas</td>
<td>Major use of battle cruzadas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No specialized step for Ajitz to advise Tekum</td>
<td>Hopping step for Ajitz to Advise Tekum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vueltas less prominent</td>
<td>Vueltas used for entering and leaving a line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caciques do not have solo dances</td>
<td>Caciques’ solo dances with flag exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despedida of Royal Court before battle</td>
<td>No despedida before battle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divination prominent</td>
<td>Divination less emphasized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajitz prominent, identified with K’ak’ K’oxol</td>
<td>Ajitz less prominent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambassadors desecrate divination table</td>
<td>No desecration occurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costumbres for the team are prominent</td>
<td>Costumbres for the team less prominent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Costuming, staging, music, dance, text recitation and pantomime are thus the consistent foundations of Conquest Dance presentations though the ways in which these are used varies significantly from municipio to municipio, thus requiring separate exposition for each of the four communities studied.