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UNIVERSITY OF SAN CARLOS OF GUATEMALA.

CENTER FOR STUDIES FOLKLORE

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TRADITIONS OF GUATEMALA

9-10

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EXPLANATION

*Under the same title, we announced in issue 3 of **Tradiciones de Guatemala** that this magazine would become a biannual publication. And we kept our promise, publishing issues 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 throughout 1975, 1976, and 1977.*

Due to financial constraints, which we face today and which may persist in the future, we have been forced to consolidate issues 9 and 10, both corresponding to 1978, into a single volume.

*Therefore, we announce in advance that we will soon have to turn to individuals and institutions interested in defending Guatemala's cultural heritage to obtain the support that may allow us to save a magazine that aims to disseminate studies, documents, and other testimonies related to our popular traditions. We believe that only through their collaboration can we continue moving forward. Please accept, readers of **Tradiciones de Guatemala**, to whom we reiterate that we are motivated by the purpose of securing the fate of the magazine of the Center for Folklore Studies of the University of San Carlos of Guatemala, the excuse implicit in this note.*

The director

TREATS IN SACATEPEQUEZ

Rosa María Alvarez

An important part of the festive cycle is the procession that winds through the streets of the town or city.

In the city of Antigua Guatemala, as in other parts of the country, the convite (reception) takes place the day before. This procession can take different forms:

Carriage parade: as is especially the case during the Concepción festival in the municipalities of Jocotenango and Ciudad Vieja. The floats are mounted on trucks or ox-drawn carts, on which a set and some girls and boys are placed to create a scene, usually taken from the Bible, although it is also common to stage an apparition of the Virgin Mary.

Promenade of dancers: These dance in two ways:

. **In pairs:** for the effect, a man dresses as a woman; both he and the man forming his partner wear masks, trying to maintain anonymity.

. In front of the pairs is a marimba, either on a truck or carried by porters (this depends on the funds available to the Brotherhood organizing the celebration).

V 'Generally, the group is improvised, and sometimes they do not receive

Square dance: This type of dance requires more expense, as dancers must be hired. In some towns in Sacatepéquez, such as San Miguel Escobar and Pastores, there are groups of men who organize and rehearse, then dance in squares led by one of the group wearing a ruffian. It is also worth noting that the costumes are more complicated, custom-made for the dance.

Giants:

The giants' feast consists of two couples: one white and the other black.

The giant is made from a four-poster frame, on which the brightly colored dress with a floral design is placed.

The dancer stands inside this frame, with only his feet visible when he lifts the frame, holding it with his hands, to dance or walk.

The giant measures about three meters or more; His arms hang from his shoulders, so that as he dances and spins, they describe a semicircle, and it almost seems as if the giant is trying to swat at the onlookers crowding around him. His head and hairstyle are very well arranged, trying to give the giant the impression of an important person. The women's headdress is completed with a flower.

The dancers, both in pairs and in groups, are known as moros (moors). Furthermore, every banquet is accompanied by mico (monkeys) or fieros (fierce monkeys), indispensable figures representing animals, especially bears and monkeys. One dressed in white with black bones represents Death, and another in red with horns and a tail represents the devil.

The mico (monkeys) walk a little ahead of the banquet and their mission is to collect money from the people watching the dance, whether on the street or from their windows. To this end, they jingle a piggy bank, jumping and pirouettes, while repeating: "I'll take you out suddenly so that the Lady (or whoever) who is... (in the window or on the corner) will give me my fruit."

When giving the 'alms', the person has the opportunity to ask and

knowing where the invitation came from and, therefore, where the procession will leave from the following day, because in La Antigua it is not unusual for this to be ignored if one thinks about the number of churches there are and adds to these those of other neighboring towns that take their processions to the city, such as Jocotenango, Santa Inés, Santa Ana, San Pedro las Huertas, etc.

Date of the invitation

As mentioned above, it takes place the day before each procession, generally with one of the three types of characters, although sometimes it includes all of them, depending on the importance of the festival and the available funds.

However, the following classification can be attempted:

- A. The Rezado banquet is a parade of floats... and sometimes of floats and a group of people.
- B. The banquet for the patron saint of a church or guild (Saint Christopher, patron saint of motorists, for example) is a group of people, and sometimes of people and couples.
- C. The Corpus Christi banquet is especially for giants.
- D. During Lent, there are no banquets. They are replaced by vigils.

A convite (reception) also departs from the Church of La Merced and the Church of the School of Christ on the evening of December 24th, returning to the church shortly before 11 p.m. The convite de la Merced is a "big" convite: in addition to the giants and Moors, it includes a group of big heads.

The big heads consist of a head just over half a meter long, which, when carried by children or young men, resembles a person with a huge head. Other examples include an elephant carried by four men, a snake, etc. Significado:

Meaning:

It is evident that the purpose of the parade, given its very name, is to invite the people to the following day's procession, or in the case of the big heads and giants on the night of December 24th, to participate in the Christmas

The parade follows the same route as the procession, so it can also be taken as a reminder of the streets the honored image will travel.

However, the invitation may have previously had a different meaning; Don Ramón A. Salazar attributes a didactic meaning to it, and in his book **Tiempo Viejo**, written around **1896**, he dedicates a chapter to it when discussing the **Corpus Christi** festivities. Salazar describes the 105 giants as "big dolls three yards tall, some white, others black, all with their corresponding companion, doing pirouettes, waving their long, dislocated arms to the beat of macabre music" and asserts the existence of the popular belief in other parts of the world where tiny beings existed "the **Pinineos**, a country of little ones who lived upside down, precisely at the opposite end of the Earth's axis corresponding to Guatemala (...) there was another country very different from that of those dwarfs inhabited by tall and corpulent men called giants" and to prove their undeniable existence, they took their images out to dance in the streets and to fight with the **Tarasca**, which Salazar describes as a horrible figure, thereby proving that the giants had been created by God to defeat the monster. The origin of this tradition is evidently Spanish; according to Gómez Tabanera? Two centuries ago (1767), in Granada, 7 giants began to appear, imitations of Both Roman emperors were hostile to Christianity; in Seville, the six giants, along with the Tarasca, represent the seven deadly sins.

In Valencia, the giants represent the four continents and have been paraded since 1588.

The oldest region seems to be Catalonia, which has been parading giants and bigheads since 1320.

For Gómez Tabanera, the introduction of these figures into the Corpus Christi festivities was intended to symbolize to the people the submission to the Eucharist shown by all kinds of beings, even the most gigantic.

However, Gómez Tabanera himself points out that these abnormal and monstrous figures appear in countless towns and cities.

1. Salazar, Ramón A., *Tiempo Viejo*, 2a. ed., Biblioteca guatemalteca de cultura popular, Vol. N. 14. Ministerio de Educación. 1957, pág. 38.

2. *Ibid.*, pág. 37.

3. Gómez Tabanera, J.M. "Fiestas populares y festejos tradicionales" en *El Folklore Español*. Madrid. Instituto Español de Antropología Aplicada. 1968.

Primitive dancers, and their presence in Western European processions is a survival of an ancient megalithic ritual.

As for the dancers, their very name, "Moors," suggests that they are derived from the dance of the Moors and Christians, which spread to the Americas with the conquest and persists in many parts of the republic.

In any case, even with variations in meaning, and despite the liberal reform (which Salazar claimed would free the people from conservative ignorance), they persist in dancing to the sound of the marimba through the streets of La Antigua and other towns in Sacatepéquez (and throughout the republic), inviting the people to attend the following day's festivities. Even more so, they begin the festivities themselves, since their parade, like that of the floats, is a reason for the neighbors to stroll through the streets, chat, and have fun.