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ESSAYS



# UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTARY SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF HOLY WEEK IN GUATEMALA

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## **Introduction**

Holy Week constitutes one of the three cycles into which the study of traditional festivals in Guatemala is divided: 1) Christmas Eve, 2) Holy Week, and 3) **Corpus Christi**.

The second cycle, Holy Week, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter Sunday, gives rise to multiple popular manifestations throughout the country.

On this occasion, we will try to establish the historical background of some traditional events that occur during Holy Week, and in particular, the processions and all their folkloric aspects.

During these dates, several processions parade through the streets of Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción, passing over pine and flower carpets and in front of balconies adorned with purple curtains, flowers, and bows made of tissue or crepe paper, also of the same color, which signifies penitence.

The same can be observed in Antigua Guatemala where the processions walk on carpets of dyed sawdust, spread over the cobblestone streets of the old city of Santiago, a city that precedes Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción in popular manifestations, as they matured there and then moved to the latter after 202 years of permanent validity.

The Holy Week processions studied in this essay will be approached based on unpublished documents from the colonial era located in the General Archive of Central America and in parish archives, because we are convinced



that to understand their long permanence through time - despite their scarce innovations - we must delve into their deepest historical roots.

This is the purpose of the following pages.

M.A.A.

Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción, 1977

## Processions

During the major week, as Holy Week is called, and on the day of the patron saint, "processions" are seen parading through the streets of the towns of Guatemala. (In December, these parades are called *rezados* and are also very frequent).

Both the parade and the presence of the float are customs that occurred simultaneously and independently in Spanish and pre-Columbian indigenous societies. In the murals of Bonampak, for example, one can see how the indigenous people carried their kings on processional floats. And there are abundant testimonies that accredit the existence of processions in Spain that preceded the discovery.

According to an 18th-century inventory, the processions organized during the colonial period were formed in the following manner:

- 1 Drum and whistle
- 2 High cross and candleholders, often made of silver
- 3 Penitents with hoods covering their faces, who collect alms and carry crosses or march bleeding
- 4 Angels carrying the insignias of the passion ("eleven tunics for little angels... fourteen crowns of thorns, a whip, a silver cross, a dish with dice, a beakless rooster, and a heart with three nails, all insignias of little angels"<sup>1</sup>)
- 5 Saint Peter ("And a very old Saint Peter **mui** of the Brotherhood, which I ordered to be repaired... he comes out in the procession"<sup>2</sup>)
- 6 Veronica ("... and a Veronica dress"<sup>3</sup>)

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1 Ecclesiastical Archive of the Church of Our Lady of Mercedes (hereinafter AEINSM). Book of the Brotherhood of Jesus Nazareno.

- 7 Standards ("procession standards and governing cross... three very purple coffee standards with their cords and wooden poles... a banner and a standard"<sup>4</sup>)
- 8 Insignias of the brotherhood, possibly next to the standard as an escort ("silver rods with the insignia of Jesus")
- 9 Bells ("a small silver bell that follows the procession"<sup>5</sup>)
- 10 The image on the processional float  
According to the inventory consulted, the float of yesteryear was not as large as today nor did it require more than four bearers ("float of the Lord - the document refers to the one of La Merced - with its four silver knobs and tortoise shell arms"; "four old purple velvet cushions for the float of Jesus... four unequal forks, one of them unequal, four governing crosses"<sup>6</sup>) The decoration of the floats was very simple ("two float tablecloths, one white and one pink filigree"<sup>7</sup>)  
The float had legs covered with skirts, as is still customary in the *rezados* of La Concepción, in San Francisco and the cathedral of the capital city ("Four purple skirts of espioneta silver point, for the float of the Lord that make up a set, another four of said purple damask gold point... purple damask canopy with its skirts for the Lord's float with its silver knobs"<sup>8</sup>)  
This reference contained in the inventory could correspond to the floats of Jesus, the Sorrowful Mother, Saint John, and Mary Magdalene.
- 11 A canopy covering the image ("A purple espigueta canopy... a new blue and white brocade canopy with silver thread fringes"<sup>9</sup>)  
The custom of using this canopy existed even at the beginning of the 20th century, as some photographs prove.
- 12 Music band ("a famous music band that had been prepared was added"<sup>10</sup>; "having sent the bugles and banners ahead"<sup>11</sup>; "a famous music band followed"; "Music for the Procession..., O"<sup>12</sup>) The previous data correspond to the years 1778, 1789, and 1832. 13

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2 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

3 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

4 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

5 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

6 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

7 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

8 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

13. The Virgin of Sorrows (Dolorosa), accompanied by Saint John and Mary Magdalene ("the two images of Saint John and the Magdalene that were newly made and are the ones that come out in the Procession and each cost 12 pesos..."; "two floats were made for Saint John and Saint Mary Magdalene that they did not have with turned feet which cost ten pesos with wood, workmanship, and painting... it also says... a glass or knob of Saint Mary Magdalene of mistreated wood"<sup>13</sup>)
14. Lanterns, in the case of nocturnal processions ("176 lanterns and 187 poles"<sup>14</sup>).

All the above information corresponds to the procession of Jesús Nazareno of La Merced church.

The called Holy Burial procession that left and continues to leave from the Santo Domingo temple paraded in Antigua at sunset and in Nueva Guatemala starting at 3 p.m. The oral tradition says that Jesús de la Merced enters at three, and meanwhile, the Lord of Santo Domingo cannot leave.

The processional parade of Santo Domingo, sponsored during the colonial period by the city council, marched preceded by floats with four weeping angels carrying the insignias of the passion.

These angels were dressed and arranged by members of the guilds existing in the city until 1766 when such a custom was prohibited.

Regarding the aforementioned prohibition, the representatives of the guilds made this request in 1768:

"among other orders and provisions of this Royal Audience that His Majesty has declared null and void, outrageous and notoriously unjust in his Royal Decree of November 28, 1766, is one which determined that the minor guilds should not dress the Angels that were taken out in the Good Friday Procession, and as a result of this Royal Determination, the aforementioned Determination of this

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9 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

10 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

11 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

12 AGDCA B79.44 exp. 19379 leg.746

13 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

14 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

Royal Audience has been abolished and without value or effect, and consequently this noble council has been reinstated in the right and profession that it enjoyed as before that determination of commissioning the said guilds to dress the aforementioned Angels in this regard. I beg Your Lordship, as delegate of His Majesty for the execution of all that is contained in the aforementioned Decree, to please order in consequence to the aforementioned guilds that they comply with this charge in the same way as they did before, dressing eight angels in the immediate Good Friday procession, and the others in the successive ones, having the records created on the matter in view for this purpose."<sup>15</sup>

The partially translated request gives an idea of the importance that the minor guilds had in the Santo Entierro (Holy Burial) procession of Santo Domingo. And the data provided by the consulted documentation show that the characteristics of that parade remain fundamentally the same.

## **Carpets**

The custom of carpeting the streets for the passage of processions has antecedents in the pre-Hispanic world and in the Canary Islands. The Tlaxcaltecas used feather carpets for the passage of their important parades and the Canary Islanders used sawdust. It is probable that both influences converged in Guatemala after the conquest - relations with the Canary Islands were constant - and that the origin of the tradition we know today dates back to then.

Currently, the carpets that are customary and native to Guatemala are made of dyed sawdust with baroque decorations; of pine with corozo and flowers with motifs alluding to the passion or simply decorative, and of flower stems and corozo as are typical in San Bartolomé Becerra in Antigua Guatemala.

The carpets made in Nueva Guatemala are often made of pine, decorated in such a way that the dominant color is that of bougainvillea.

Let's look at some documentary references to the carpets: "The streets with splendid hangings and were sprinkled with flowers and roses"<sup>16</sup>; "and roses and other flowers were sprinkled"<sup>17</sup>.

## Penitents

Penitents The penitent of Spanish origin is a figure characteristic of Holy Week celebrated in the past, who collected alms for the procession, carried crosses, bled himself, etc. He wore a tunic and hood and covered his face.

The *cucurucho*, which still exists, is the bearer in the processions, wears a purple or black tunic depending on whether it is the procession of Jesús Nazareno or Jesús Sepultado (Buried Jesus), and contributes alms to cover the expenses caused by these festivities.

In a document from 1838, this additional information is recorded: "and four young men at a real to carry floats and canopies"<sup>18</sup>, although it should be said that the floats and the canopy were also carried by members of the civil and religious government, as well as members of the nobility.

Regarding the tunics of the *cucuruchos*, the brotherhood book of Jesús de la Merced offers this information contained in its inventories: "66 reasonable and not very old tunics"<sup>19</sup> (inventory of April 27, 1716); "forty new manta tunics more than 66 were given to me, and each cost eight"<sup>20</sup> (inventory of December 3, 1728); "one hundred sixty-nine discolored, torn, and rotten manta tunics"<sup>21</sup> (inventory of December 7, 1800); "seventy-five new manta tunics were made which cost one hundred ninety-three pesos and seven reales as recorded in the detailed account"<sup>22</sup>(inventory of 1802); "187 manta tunics with their hoods"<sup>23</sup> (18th-century inventory).

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16 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

17 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

18 AGDCA B78.44 exp. 60065 leg. 2553.

19 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

20 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

21 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

21 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

22 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

23 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

## Participation of the Penitents

The documentary testimonies also provide some news in this regard: "more than 500 men of penitence went ahead"<sup>24</sup> (September 28, 1783); "and the general penitence procession was held, which left at four in the afternoon, in which more than fifteen hundred people, including men and boys with crosses and their faces uncovered, went ahead, so that if the President had not ordered that they not be impaled or bleeding, such a sight would have been seen as never before in any era"<sup>25</sup> (1801). This prohibition was in effect since 1797.

From this, it is inferred that the penitents participated not only in Holy Week processions but also in rogation processions.

## Prohibitions

On March 20, 1797, the following case was heard in an ordinary Justice session: "in the procession that left on the 17th of the current month from the church of San Francisco, and the brotherhood of San Benito, a very large number of people, dressed as Nazarenes with their faces covered, and using expensive handkerchiefs, petticoats, and other vain feminine adornments, and this corruption is observed not only in the subsequent processions of Holy Week, Lent, but also on Good Friday, impaled and flagellant penitents, these abuses being contrary to the Laws and Royal Decrees of His Majesty, who, by strictly prohibiting them, have recognized, on the one hand, the excesses, disorders, and audacity to which having their faces covered and wandering in this manner through the public streets, and especially through remote neighborhoods, easily leads, and on the other hand, that such penances, far from attracting edifying communion, cause indecision and disorder, commonly serving as entertainment and shouting for young people, and astonishment, confusion, and fear for children and women, the people who are inflamed with a true spirit of penitence should choose other more rational, more secret, and less contrived forms with the concept and direction of their confessors."<sup>26</sup> The text continues: "Warning that it is the obligation of the Tribunal to watch with the greatest

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24 AEINSM, *opus cit.*

25 AEINSM, *opus cit.*

26 A1.11 Exp. 2156 leg. 100 (AGDCA).

vigilance over the fulfillment of such beneficial and successful deliberations and proceed against offenders according to the august laws that prescribe the penalties, and the demonstration that corresponds according to the circumstances for which the justices who do not do so will be responsible: They agreed that with a testimony of this order, the corresponding official letter should be sent to the President, Governor, and Captain General of the Kingdom so that in compliance with the indicated decisions, he should arrange for the publication of a proclamation, of which the corresponding copies should be printed."<sup>27</sup>

The preceding considerations led to this provision:

"The participation of covered penitents, impaled penitents, and flagellants is absolutely prohibited in all processions, without concealing the slightest contravention, and with the just objective that the ecclesiastical authority cooperates on its part, for the desired establishment of better order according to its just zeal, in the faithful observance of the Royal Mandates"<sup>28</sup>

In 1801, the Royal Audience informed His Majesty that they had prohibited flagellant penitents from walking with their faces covered.<sup>29</sup>

## **Second Prohibition**

Flagellants and public acts of penitence were prohibited by the interim superior political chief of the province of Guatemala, Dr. Alejandro Díaz Cabeza de Vaca, according to an order promulgated on March 26, 1824.<sup>30</sup> On March 29 of that year, the order promulgated by the Secretary of State and of the dispatch of Justice and ecclesiastical affairs, regarding the prohibition of flagellants and the use of hoods in Holy Week processions, was made known.<sup>31</sup>

The superior political chief of the State reported to the municipality of the city of Guatemala on this prohibition, saying that he had granted permission to the brotherhood of Jesús Nazareno de Candelaria for a squadron of men with their faces covered to participate during the procession that leaves on the afternoon of Holy Thursday. The report is dated April 12, 1824.<sup>32</sup>

27 **Ibid.**

28 **Ibid.**

29 AGDCA A1.28.1 Exp. 40.049 leg. 4669

30 AGDCA B.78.50 exp. 21228 leg. 864 fol.66

31 AGDCA B.68.5 exp. 83454 leg. 3605.

32 AGDCA B.78.50 exp. 21228 leg. 864 fol. 95.

To the same brotherhood of Jesús de Candelaria, also in the year 1830, permission was granted to collect alms: "Having verbally approached this government, the steward of the image of Jesús de Candelaria requested permission to solicit alms for the procession... the government grants the requested permission and assists the stewards with their needs, it being understood that the people who attend the service of the procession must pay in the customary manner."<sup>33</sup>

### **Third Prohibition**

On March 5, 1836, the mayors, aldermen, and councilmen of the municipality of the city of Guatemala published a proclamation again prohibiting the use of penitents in the processions of Holy Week. In the document containing this proclamation, we can note the influence of the liberal ideas prevailing at the time: "The custom of men going out in Holy Week, covered and disguised with the object or pretext of collecting voluntary offerings for the functions of Holy Week itself, is offensive to the religion itself that is pretended to be served, due to the excesses, disorders, and licenses to which it gives rise: that it is contrary to good public order, as under the guise of disguise, the act of asking for and collecting alms turns into reasoning and dialogues offensive to decency and good behavior, which should characterize large gatherings".<sup>34</sup>

The restriction was immediate: "The custom of men going out with their faces covered in Holy Week, with the object or pretext of asking for and collecting alms, whether forming a body with the processions, or wandering alone through the streets of the city and its suburbs... those who violate what is ordered in article 1º shall be immediately subject to the authority of the mayors... who shall impose the correctional penalties they deserve."<sup>35</sup>

Let's see how the liberal government insists on justifying its measures: "Such a practice of men going out in Holy Week, covered, with the hinted object, is contrary to the current advanced civilization of the world; and that with it the capital of the State presents itself to the eyes of the same civilization, and even of enlightened piety, as a semi-barbaric town, still immersed in the

33 AGDCA B119.4 exp. 60065 leg. 2553.

34 AGDCA B78.25 exp. 17203 leg. 736.

35 AGDCA, *ibid.*



labyrinth of absurd and ridiculous customs; has come to agree and order..."<sup>36</sup>

## **The Earthquakes**

### **Of San Miguel, 1717**

Little or nothing has been said about Holy Week processions during earthquakes. We will say something below.

On the night of September 29, 1717, the city of Santiago de Guatemala was seriously affected by the earthquakes named after the Archangel Michael due to the date on which they occurred.

The following year, the city was seen thus: "The Most Illustrious Lord Bishop ordered that there should be no processions since the entire place was ruined and the houses had fallen, and indeed, none came out, neither that of the Holy Burial (Santo Domingo) nor that of the Veracruz (San Francisco), nor any other during Holy Week or the rest of Lent, as stated in the minute book of this very Noble City where the Holy Burial and the Veracruz processions are ordered, to which I refer because everyone refused to hold said processions, and I did everything possible to ensure that the procession of Jesús Nazareno (of La Merced) did not fail to leave, as it was my obligation, being the Steward, and although the Secular Council and those of Santa Veracruz strongly opposed it, not holding theirs, despite everything, it was overcome with the favor of God, and the procession of Jesús Nazareno came out as always and without any novelty. I put the reason here so that it may be known in the future. Guatemala and April 20, 1780".<sup>37</sup>

### **Of Santa Marta, 1773**

The city was shaken again on Thursday, July 29, 1773, by the Santa Marta earthquakes, which caused the transfer of the city to La Ermita.

For the following year's Lent, in 1774, a proclamation was published prohibiting processions. A historical source informs us of what happened: "And on Holy Tuesday, the usual La Reseña procession was held with the same solemnities as in previous years, and the Holy Thursday night Penitence

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36 AGDCA *ibid.*

37 AEINSM, *opus cit.*

Procession did not leave, because a proclamation was published by order of the Superior Government ordering that no procession should leave." <sup>38</sup>

Notwithstanding the prohibition of processions, the city council agreed to hold a rogation procession with the image of Jesús de la Merced to ask for the plague of grasshoppers (locusts) that was damaging the crops to pass. The procession was held on May 2, 1774, and a few days later, on the 7th of the same month, another one left with the perimeter of the Mercedarian temple. <sup>39</sup>

In the Lent of 1775, the brotherhoods requested permission to hold their usual processions. The resolution dictated in the case of the brotherhood of San Benito, in San Francisco, says: "In merit of which they have alleged several reasons, and the first mayor has investigated others, and from their conjunction it results that this devout act, which walks through the streets where there is no danger for its transit, nor for the people who come to see it and adore the Images, is seen." <sup>40</sup>

In the same document, we read: "Because likewise, more permissions may be requested for others, especially for that of Jesús Nazareno de la Merced, which is accustomed to leaving at midnight. And that of the Holy Burial, which leaves at the beginning of the night on Good Friday and walks towards the Calvary, from where it returns to San Francisco... permission may be granted if they come to request it, as there will be no danger in anything, and the spiritual consolation that the neighbors wish to have will be achieved." <sup>41</sup>

Also, the brotherhoods of the parish of San Sebastián made their request: "Germán Morales from the Department of Animas, Nicolás de Paz from Santo Ecce Homo, and Joseph Estefanía from that of Jesús Nazareno, as it may be appropriate before Your Lordship, we appear and say, that annually on the fifth Friday of Lent, the procession called Las Animas has left from said parish, with the floats of the images of said brotherhoods through the churches of the Republic of said city, which, being ruined, the passage of people in processions and other public functions has been denied by this Superior Government, due to the fear of the same ruins that threaten, mainly in the Republic, with the other reasons that Your Lordship may have deemed convenient, for the aforementioned prohibition: in this understanding and having chosen the streets that leave from said Parish for the patio of La Merced of this city for

38 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

39 AEINSM, **opus cit.**

40 AGDCA A1.11 exp. 2156 leg. 100.

41 AGDCA, **ibid.**

the collection from there to the stone cross, as these are currently passable without any risk so that the Las Animas procession can walk, we have decided to present it to Your Lordship so that if you deem it convenient to grant the necessary permission for the purpose of said procession, please issue your decree that serves as your dispatch, granting it, in whose terms.”<sup>42</sup>

Said license was used by the Captain General Martín de Mayorga, in the settlement of La Ermita, on March 17, 1775.

The cofrades of my Jesús Nazareno de la Cruz del Milagro, an image that was transferred to San José de la Nueva Guatemala in 1780, also requested permission: “Cofrades of the Cruz del Milagro as it may be most fitting before You, we appear and say that giving worship to the Majesty of God our Lord is so decided and appropriate especially at this time when we remember the Sacred Passion of our Redeemer: for this reason and because it has been customary to celebrate Holy Tuesday in the afternoon for the most sacred image of Jesus with a procession that goes through the public and customary streets of this city, to serve You by granting your permission for this devout act to take place and therefore...”<sup>43</sup> “This permission that is requested is under the same conditions that were granted to the other brotherhoods.”<sup>44</sup>

One of the licenses granted on this occasion contains these arguments: “The requested permission is granted, provided that the procession must be back in its church by six in the afternoon and in no way at another time that corresponds to the night, regarding which the corresponding charge will be made to the Ordinary Mayor, and as for the streets through which it must pass, they must be such that no fatality or damage can be experienced in any way. Let the provision be issued and added where it corresponds. Which the Most Illustrious Lord Don Martín de Mayorga, President, Governor, and Captain General of this Kingdom, provided and signed. La Ermita, March seventeenth, seventeen seventy-five.”<sup>45</sup>

The licenses, in addition to authorizing the processions, make comments: “It cannot be denied that processions are customary acts in the Church of God and from which a known spiritual fruit can be obtained, but it is sadly noted that the disorders that result from them are greater than the benefits,

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42 AGDCA, *ibid.*

43 AGDCA, *ibid.*

44 AGDCA, *ibid.*

45 AGDCA, *ibid.*

and that it has been necessary for the Secular Magistrates to already prevent the hours at which they should leave and already order that no procession should leave without their license, as established by order 27 of book 2 title 4 of the agreements of Castilla, the state in which the City of Guatemala finds itself obliged the notorious as Your Lordship sees in the past year not to allow any processions to leave on the public streets, consulting in this the common health, and keeping in mind the risk of demolishing some building at the time of the processions, it seems that this is not fearful according to the information from the Ordinary Mayor.”<sup>46</sup> Then it is emphasized: “only granted if they are permitted to be precisely during the day and in no way at night.”<sup>47</sup>

## Appendix

Synopsis of the processions mentioned in the documents

Fifth Friday of Lent, Las Animas Procession, with the floats of the Brotherhoods of Animas, Ecce Homo, and Jesús Nazareno, Parish of San Sebastián.

Certain Friday of Lent, Procession of the Brotherhood of San Benito, Church of San Francisco.

Holy Tuesday:

In the morning

Procession called “LA RESEÑA” from the Church of La Merced, with the attendance of the City Council since 1721.

In the afternoon

Procession of Jesús Nazareno from the Church of Cruz del Milagro (this image is in San José de la Nueva Guatemala).

Holy Thursday:

In the afternoon

Jesús Nazareno de Candelaria, Procession of Santa Veracruz, Church of San Francisco.

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46 AGDCA, *ibid.*

47 AGDCA, *ibid*

At night

Procession called Penitencia, Jesús Nazareno de la Merced.

Good Friday:

In the morning

On some occasions in the 18th century, and officially decreed for this day since the beginning of the 19th century, Jesús Nazareno de la Merced.

In the afternoon

Procession called “SANTO ENTIERRO” (Holy Burial), Church of Santo Domingo, with the attendance of the City Council.

**Margin on the request for permission for the procession requested by the brotherhood members of San Benito de San Francisco. March 1775**

AGDCA A1.11 Exp. 2156. Leg. 100 year 1775

*The fiscal of H.M. has  
seen what the Ordinary  
Mayor of Guatemala states  
on the 13th of the current  
month regarding the request  
of the Brotherhood members  
of San Benito to permit them  
to hold a procession  
And that Your Lordship  
please inform him if he  
should permit the one they call  
of Jesús Nazareno de  
Merced that leaves at  
midnight, and that of the  
Holy Burial that leaves  
at the beginning of the night  
on Good Friday. It cannot  
be denied that  
processions are customary acts*

*in the Church of  
God and from which  
a known spiritual fruit  
can be obtained; but  
it is sadly noted that there  
are more disorders than  
benefits that result from  
them, and that it has been  
necessary for the Secular Magistrates  
to already prevent  
the hours at which they should leave,  
and to order that no processions  
leave without their license, as  
established by order 27  
of book 2 title 4 of the  
agreements of Castilla.  
The state in which the  
City of Guatemala finds  
itself obliged the notorious  
as Your Lordship sees in the past  
year not to allow any  
processions to leave  
on the public streets,  
consulting in this the  
common health, and keeping  
in mind the risk of some building  
being demolished at the same  
time as the processions pass,  
it seems that this is not fearful  
according to the report  
from the Ordinary Mayor,  
and without a doubt it  
must be because the procession  
will only go through the streets  
where all the buildings are ruined,  
as only mention is made*

*of this cause and the Fiscal  
cannot give his opinion as he  
would like, assuring that no scandal,  
note, or disorder could be experienced.*

*Therefore, he can only inform Your Lordship that it is within your power by the Government to prohibit or permit the processions, and that the Fiscal who in his official letter can only agree that if they are permitted, they must be precisely during the day, and in no way at night. In such a way that the Ordinary Mayor is instructed, in case Your Lordship permits them, that he does not permit them on the public streets, but only where it is from six in the morning until five thirty in the afternoon, and in no way at night, and that he will be responsible for any disorder or damage that may be experienced, and that he does not permit the Processions that he mentions of Jesús Nazareno and the Santo Entierro on the Streets or Public Squares, but only if done during the day, and keeping in mind public tranquility and the remedy for any abuse.*

*The Fiscal is moved to feel this way by the experience that few people are devout in the processions, that it is difficult for any to be held at night without experiencing disorder and excess, and that it is more fearful in Guatemala City, given that a few days ago an assassination of a priest was experienced without any further cause being recorded in the proceedings than his being in the street at night, and if disorders are more fearful when the crowds are larger, it is easier for offenders to hide, and people are less respectable, as sacrilege should not be feared.*

*Your Lordship will deliberate on the matter with the wisdom that you are accustomed to and in justice. La Ermita, March 17, 1775.*

**Document illustrating the characteristics of the processions of the time. List of expenses for the La Merced procession, on Holy Tuesday and Good Friday of 1838.**

AGDCA B78.44 Exp. 19379 leg. 746

*Account of what was received by those who sign below  
and Expenses of the Processions that left La Merced on  
Past Holy Tuesday and Good Friday.....*

*For fifty pesos given by the Parish Priest of La Merced, Syndic*

*Diego Bas ..... ,050,,0*

*Collected alms on Palm Sunday by the Syndic Molina*

<i>Molina</i> .....	„002,,6
<i>Id by the syndic Lara</i> .....	„005,,7
<i>Id by the syndic Monzon</i> .....	„003,,7
<i>Id por el cindico Vega</i> .....	„001,,7
<i>Id of alms on Tuesday in La Reseña</i> .....	„001,,3
<i>Id Id of alms on Good Friday In the procession by the syndic</i>	„011,,6
<i>Id by the Syndic Molina</i> .....	„003,,6
<i>Id by the Syndic Vega</i> .....	„003,,1
<i>Id by the Syndic Lara</i> .....	„007,,2

*Total income \$ the amount of 95 pesos 1 R.*

*Spent on the Tuesday Procession*

<i>For six tunics for the beggars on Palm Sunday</i> .....	„003,,0
<i>For chocolate and food for id on id</i> .....	„001,0
<i>For four whistles and four drums for id id</i> .....	„002,,4
<i>For forty candles for the La Reseña of Sacay Merma</i> .....	„003,,6
<i>For a whistle and a drum for id at 2 and ½</i> .....	„000,,5
<i>For four garments for id at a real each</i> .....	„000,1
<i>For the music for id</i> .....	„008,,0

*Total spent on La Reseña*

*Spent on the Good Friday Procession*

<i>For four whistles and four drums for the beggars of said day</i> .....	„002,,4
<i>For six tunics for id on id</i> .....	„003,0
<i>Boxes of alfajor made for id and the squadrons</i> .....	„005,,2
<i>Wine, aguardiente, and refreshments for id and those who followed the procession</i> .....	„006,4
<i>Spent on bringing and taking seven floats to the houses where they were dressed</i> .....	„003,,0

<i>Carried forward</i> .....	„039,,5
<i>Gratification to the Syndic Monzon for many services he provided</i> .....	„001,,0
<i>For incense for the procession</i> .....	„000,1
<i>Wax for id</i> .....	„035,,1
<i>Music for id</i> .....	„012,,0
<i>For four acolytes for id at two</i> .....	„001,,0



<i>For fifty-four young men at a real to carry floats and canopies.....</i>	<i>„006,,6</i>
<i>Gratification to the Mayors who brought said young men.....</i>	<i>„001,,0</i>
<i>Amount spent on the Tuesday and Good Friday processions. ....</i>	<i>„100,,1</i>

#### *DEMONSTRATION*

<i>Taken from alms.....</i>	<i>„095,,1,,0</i>
<i>spent.....</i>	<i>„101,,1,,0</i>
<i>Balance .....</i>	<i>„006,,0,,0</i>

*Guatemala, May 7, 1832*



ELLO QVARTO, VM QVARTO  
TELLO, AVOS DE MIL SE-  
TECIENTOS Y OSENTA Y  
SEIS, Y OSENTA Y SEITE.

Muy Ilustre Señor: El Ayun-  
tamiento de Esta Muy Noble Ciudad  
Como mas haya lugar ante V. Señoría pade-  
se y dice: que entre otros autos y pro-  
videncias de Esta Real Audiencia que Su  
Majestad ha Declarado por nulos extor-  
sivos y notoriamente injustos en su Real  
Cédula de Vento y Ocho de Nobrem-  
bre de setenta y Seis es uno el  
en que se Determino, que los Gremios  
mentados no pudiesen los Angeles que  
acabari en la Dedicacion del Obispo  
Vento, y Como quisea que en fuerza de  
Esta Real Determinacion haya que  
dado Abolida, y sin bator ni efecto la  
Referida Determinacion de Esta Real  
Audiencia y por Consequente Mantengase  
Este Noble Ayuntamiento, en el de  
recho y posesion que gozaba antes de  
aquella Determinacion de Competer  
Ellos dichos Gremios a Verir los Refe-  
rentes Angeles en esta Atension: A V. Señoría  
replico que Como Delegado de Su  
Majestad para la Execucion de lo de  
lo Comiendo en la Referida Cedula  
se le ha mandado que con Consequencia  
alos Referidos Gremios que Cumplan  
con este Cargo en la Conformidad que

antes Lo hanan Notendo dichos Angeles  
en la inmediata Presencia del Viceroy  
dicho, y los Amos de los Subseccion ten  
yendo a la Vista para el efecto. Los au  
tor Camara sobre el particular en que  
pide Justicia para en forma en lo necesario  
H<sup>a</sup> Manuel de Larrabe = Felipe Rubio  
y Morales = Manuel de Rivas = Ruclos  
Vicente Roma = Juan Jeronimo de Hyemina =  
Miguel de Coronado =

Decretos Organos a la Vista los autos que  
Lita = El Decreto de este Decreto Pro  
uayo y Rubrica el Muy Ilustre Señor  
Presidente de esta Real Audiencia  
Gobernador y Capitan General de este  
Reyno. Goathumala y febrero Veinte y  
nuebe de mill Setecientos Setenta y ocho  
años = Andres Guerra Guzman =

Conferencia de la Vista  
El Libro de  
Conocimientos de la Oficina de Camara  
de mi Cargo. Contra que los autos  
que trata este expediente se hallan  
en el Archivo del Real Acuerdo de  
veinte y siete de Junio de diez y  
ocho de mill Setecientos Setenta y  
ocho años = Andres Guerra Guzman =

Decretos Organos por Nuncia de Real  
Acuerdo = Lo qual Donayo y Rubrica  
el Muy Ilustre Señor Presidente

Comandante y Capitan General de Oros  
Pueblo Goachamala y maso tres y mill  
Setecientos, Sesenta y ocho años = Andres  
Guerra Guierrez =

Se menciona con su Original a que me remite y  
hijo saca en virtud de Orden Real de S.  
M. D. Manuel Fernandez de Villanueva y  
Comis. de D. Magallon de D. D. y Alca.  
de de Conche de esta R. Audiencia de Goachamala  
y maso quatro y mill Setecientos y sesenta  
ochos años =

Andres Guerra Guierrez

En N. D. de Dia quatro de Mayo de Oros ano 5.  
Orosia el Sr. D. Manuel Fernandez de  
Villanueva Comis. ante mi Numerado en  
quarenta y dos Pocos de D. D. y Alca. D. D.  
que menciona en esta copia las que Nubien  
en un punto pone al may. D. D. D. D.  
y de Magallon de Oros D. D. D. D. D. D.  
Cota Nubien = Guerra



En querrelia.

SELO QUINTO, VS A V. E.  
TITULO. ASOS DE MJE ESTE  
SESTOS NOVETA Y SESE.  
NOVETA Y SESE.

En la Nueva Guatemala, a veinte  
dias del mes de Mayo, de mil setecientos  
noventa y siete. Huviéndose en  
Audiencia ordinaria de Justicia, los señores  
Don Amador Cerdan y Ponzo, Cavallero de  
la Real distinguida Orden Española de Carlos  
Tercero. Don Francisco Robledo, Don Jacobo  
de Milla Ormiza, Don Manuel el Campo,  
y Don Juan Collado, Regente, Oydores, y  
oydon Fiscal de esta Real Audiencia, y  
todos el Correo de su Magestad; Teniendo  
presente huviere advertido, en la Prohemion  
que salio, en el Viernes proximo diez y siete  
del mes corriente de la Noflesia de San Fran-  
cisco, y Coxiadia de San Benito, mas crevido  
numero de Gentios, vestidos de Naxarinos con  
los torcos en deramonte Cubiertos, y uso, de  
corrosos Panfletos, sumarios, y otros vanos a  
donos mugeriles, y obscenares no solamente  
en la Corruptela en las Prohemiones subre.

quemel y la Santa Quaresma, sino tambien en  
la el Vicario Santo, Penitency Confesores, y  
disciplinantes, y siendo esto abunco contrario  
a las Leyes, y Reales Cedula, e su Ma-  
yestad, que al prohibirlos, severamente han  
Recomendado, por una parte, los exco-  
municar, y Ostarlos, a quex binda favorable  
el tener las Casas tapadas, y bagueadas en  
esta forma por las Calles publicas, y mas  
por los bagueos, y bagueos, y por otra  
que las tales Penitencias de los se harran  
por una compundion edificatoria, o adon-  
ta indonacion, y el de borden viandias comu-  
nitas de deservido, para los pudentes, e  
diversion, y quicua para los Tobener, y el  
asombro, confusion, miedo, e incomodidad pa-  
ra los Niños, y mugeres, deviendo tan por  
estas, que se hassen inflamadas de ver-  
dadero espanto, e penitencia, e de orar  
mas Penitencias, mas Secretas, y menos co-  
pueñas, con Consejo, y Direccion de  
sus Confesores, y adon-ando sea a la  
Obligacion del Tribunal. Valen, con

la mayor vigilancia sobre el cumplimiento  
de lo que se manda, y en caso de que  
sean necesarios, y averiguados, de su  
orden, y proceder contra los contrabanderos  
conforme a las Augustas Leyes que exor-  
den las penas, y la demerzacion que  
correspondan segun las Circunstancias, y  
que sean responsables las Justicias que  
asi no lo ejecutaren. Acordaron, que  
con testimonio de este auto, se dirija, el  
correspondiente oficio al Señor Presidente  
Gobernador, y Capitan del Puerto, a fin de  
que en cumplimiento de las indicadas Re-  
ales disposiciones de suya disposicion, la  
publicacion de un bando, el cual se im-  
primen los correspondientes exemplares  
en que vasa el debido castigo con prision  
previa, en el acto mismo, a los transgreso-  
res, y a la zelosa inspeccion de los Señores  
Alcaldes de Guayaquil, los Ordinarios, y de-  
mas Justicias, a quienes se ha de dar  
luego el mas estricto encargo, se prohiba  
la salida en toda su jurisdiccion de la



Penitentes empalados, y disciplinados, y en  
diciéndole lo mas leve conuencion. Y  
que con el futo objeto de que la autoridad  
Cesariana coadyube, por su parte, a esta-  
blecimiento, apertible al mesor orden, se-  
gun su futo orden, en la obsequancia fiel  
de los reales mandatos, y de las disposicio-  
nes Canonicas, se indique al mismo Senor  
Presidente, para que oportuno pare al  
Dixacto Provincial, y Rector General de este  
Arzobispado, copia Certificada de este  
Acordado encargandole concurre como  
no se da, a la Consecucion de estos impor-  
tantes puntos indicados, sobre preservacion  
de las que segun lo mandado reiteradamente  
por su Magestad no deven salir. En Archa  
por Consideracion de una Sentencia de Presidencia  
en que la Senre Joven, y toda la demas vi-  
nada se vale de la Conculencia, y de las tin-  
elias para muchos de los ordenes, y de los



finen que no pueden impedir las justicias  
donde se han de celebrar, en inteligencia de que  
deben también las cosas capitales, y  
que sean recibidas, y formalizadas, comple-  
tamente, antes de ponerse a la obra, según las  
instrucciones que se han acordado, a fin de que  
efectivamente las cosas se hagan, y se  
tengan respectivamente por el mismo. Y en  
caso de que se acordare que  
así se han de hacer, no salgan con-  
tra la concurrencia de alguna autoridad pú-  
blica que venga respectivamente el  
buen Orden, y el mayor Decoro de las cosas;  
Respecto de aquellas, a que no asista el No-  
ble Ayuntamiento, sea cerrada de alguno  
de los Alcaldes Ordinarios, a quien acom-  
pañen, asistiendo el Escrivano de Cavildo, y  
o sea Real, o Público, sus Comisarios, y al-  
gun piquero de Tropa, invinuandose  
al mismo Señor Presidente la expedición

al efecto de la Orden de Procurar, de suerte  
que se logre como plácese en esta Capital  
como en las demas de la Reyna, adonde se  
comunió que este traslado, que se colocará  
entre las demas de la Real Audiencia,  
de la confirmación de los mencionados Señores se que  
Certifico = Cedeño = Proledo = Villanueva =  
Campo = Collado = Juan Huataco  
Sevicio de este negocio para pasar con oficio al  
Señor Presidente, en veinte y uno de Mayo  
de mil setecientos noventa y siete, a don Juan

Comuniqué con su original, se que va fecha monición  
con el se corrigió aquí, me Remito, y le hice sacar  
para principio de expedición. Nueva Guatemala  
a veinte y uno de Mayo y siete.

Juan Huataco  
Escritor de la Real Audiencia  
D. J. Huataco  
Escritor de la Real Audiencia  
Escritor de la Real Audiencia  
Escritor de la Real Audiencia

The Mayors, Aldermen, and Councilmen who make up the Municipality of this Court, in use of the powers granted to them by article 169 of the State constitution, which entrusts them with the economic and political government of their District, and articles 52 and 53 of the law of November 9, 1825, which details their attributions.

#### CONSIDERING.

That the custom of men going out in Holy Week, covered and disguised with the object or pretext of collecting voluntary offerings for the functions of the week itself, is offensive to the religion itself that is pretended to be served, due to the excesses, disorders, and licenses to which it gives rise: that it is contrary to good public order, as under the guise of disguise, the act of asking for and collecting alms turns into reasoning and dialogues offensive to decency and good behavior, which should characterize large gatherings; and that the same custom attacks the safety of people, since it is public and notorious that the disguised individuals themselves stop and harass individuals they encounter in the streets, and more particularly if they are of the opposite sex; entering houses, and overstepping to other larger excesses; always with the pretext of obtaining alms, which they demand by force and with tenacity: and finally.

#### CONSIDERING

That such a practice of men going out in Holy Week, covered, with the hinted object, is contrary to the current advanced civilization of the world; and that with it the capital of the State presents itself to the eyes of the same civilization, and even of enlightened piety, as a semi-barbaric town, still immersed in the labyrinth of absurd and ridiculous customs; has come to agree and order with the approval of the Supreme Government, that the following be observed.

#### ORDINANCE

Art. 1. The custom of men going out with their faces covered in Holy Week, with the object or pretext of asking for and collecting alms, whether forming a body with the processions; or wandering alone through the streets of the city and its suburbs, is absolutely prohibited.

Art. 2. It is also prohibited for those who ask for them, with their faces uncovered, to exceed the simple and brief act of asking and receiving.

Art. 3. Those who violate what is ordered in art. 1 shall be immediately subject to the authority of the mayors, who, in the exercise of the powers granted to them by the organic law of the courts and other current laws, shall impose the correctional penalties they deserve, for violating the present regulation aimed at the preservation of public order and the safety of persons.

Art. 4. The mayors, aldermen, and councilmen themselves, as well as the police lieutenants and auxiliaries of the neighborhoods and districts, shall be in charge of the execution of this ordinance, and of dictating the prompt measures required for its fulfillment.

Art. 5. The priests, stewards, and other employees of brotherhoods shall take care to entrust, with prior permission from the competent authority, the collection of alms to persons of true piety and morality; so that they respond with these qualities for the purity and fidelity with which they must exercise the charge of collecting such obligations and delivering them to whom it corresponds.

Art. 6. The present ordinance shall be printed at the expense of municipal funds and shall be posted in public places with due anticipation, for that it reaches the notice of all.

By order of the Municipality, José Llerena. Interim Secretary. Given in the session hall of the municipality of this Capital of Guatemala on March 5, 1836. - Marcos Dardon. - Francisco de Vidaurre. - Tomas Martinez. - Tiburcio Quiroz. - Santiago Machado. - José Barrundia. - Carlos Meany. - José Coloma. - Juan Matelu. - Francisco Xavier Valenzuela. - Buenaventura Mejia.

Por mandado de la Municipalidad,

*José Llerena.*

Secretario interino.

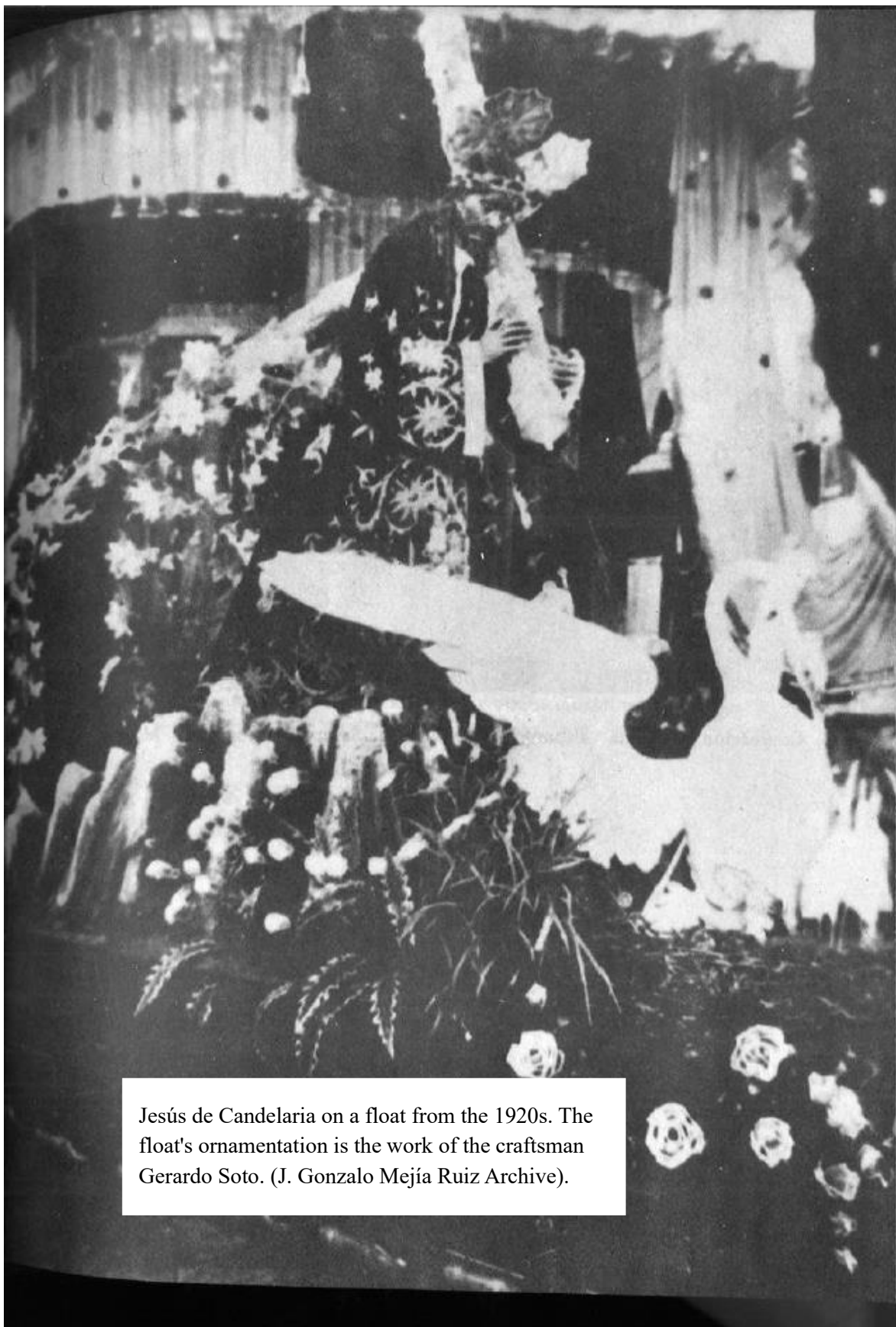




Procession of Jesús de Candelaria (Holy Thursday), late 19th century. Guatemala.  
(Arnoldo René Godoy Archive).

Jesús de la Merced and canopy used years ago. Guatemala.  
Print. (J. Gonzalo Mejía Ruiz Archive).



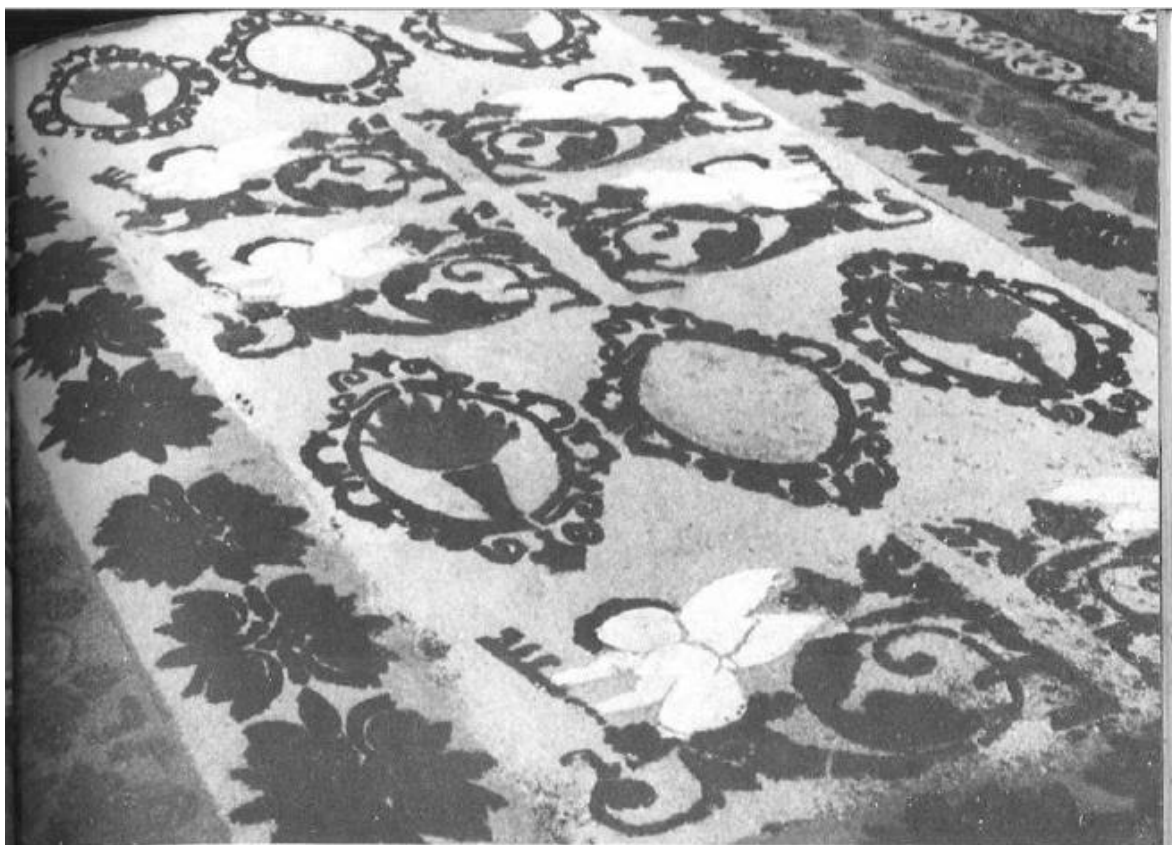


Jesús de Candelaria on a float from the 1920s. The float's ornamentation is the work of the craftsman Gerardo Soto. (J. Gonzalo Mejía Ruiz Archive).





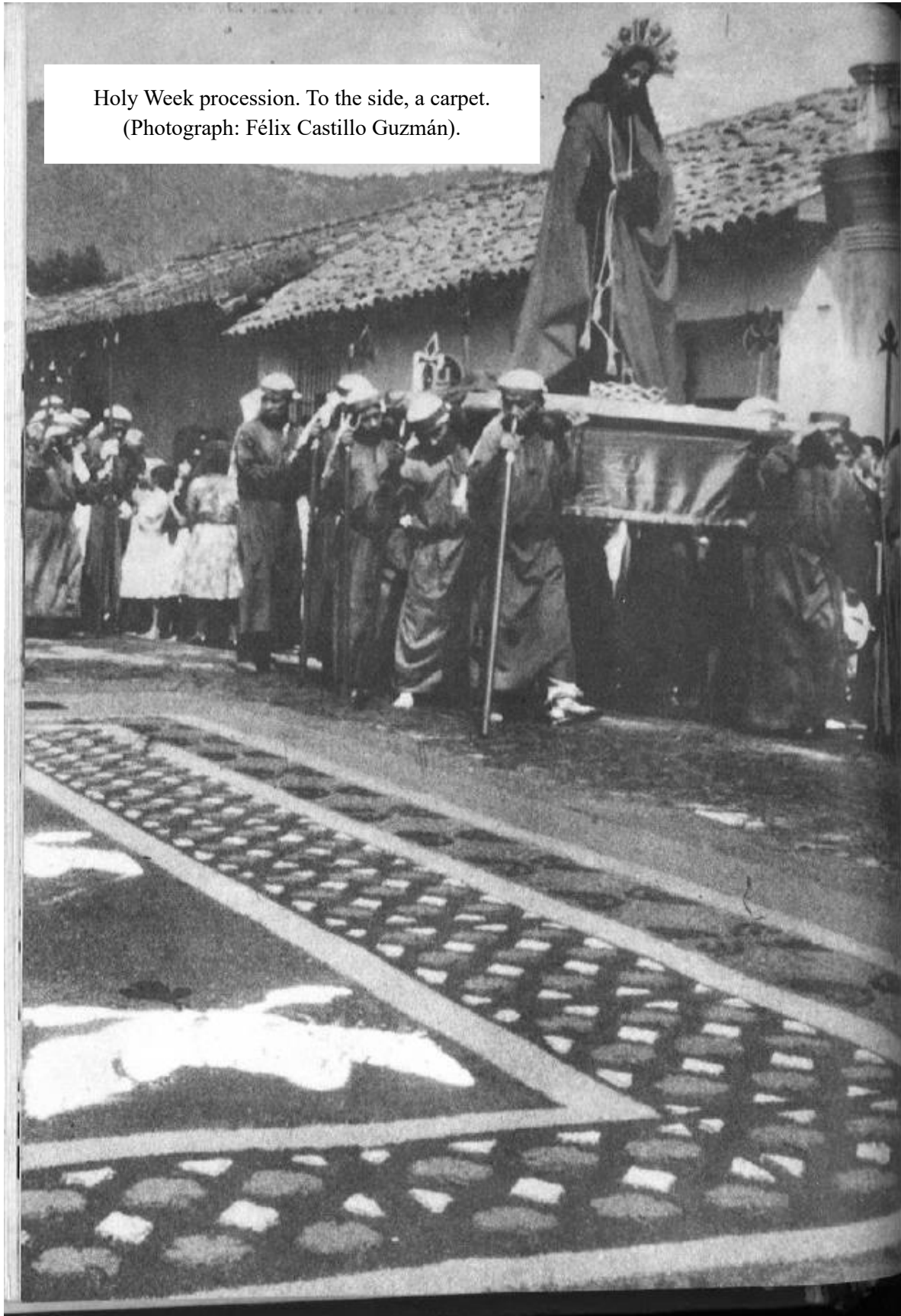
Making a Holy Week carpet. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



Detail of a Holy Week carpet. Antigua Guatemala. (Photograph: Félix Castillo Guzmán).



Holy Week procession. To the side, a carpet.  
(Photograph: Félix Castillo Guzmán).





Decorations made for Holy Week with pacaya leaves and cut paper. Antigua Guatemala. (Photograph: Julio Roberto Gil).



Carpet of pine and rose petals and tissue paper decorations made for Holy Week.  
Antigua Guatemala. (Photograph: Julio Roberto Gil).



Decorations of cut paper and pacaya leaves made for Holy Week. Antigua Guatemala. (Photograph: Julio Roberto Gil).

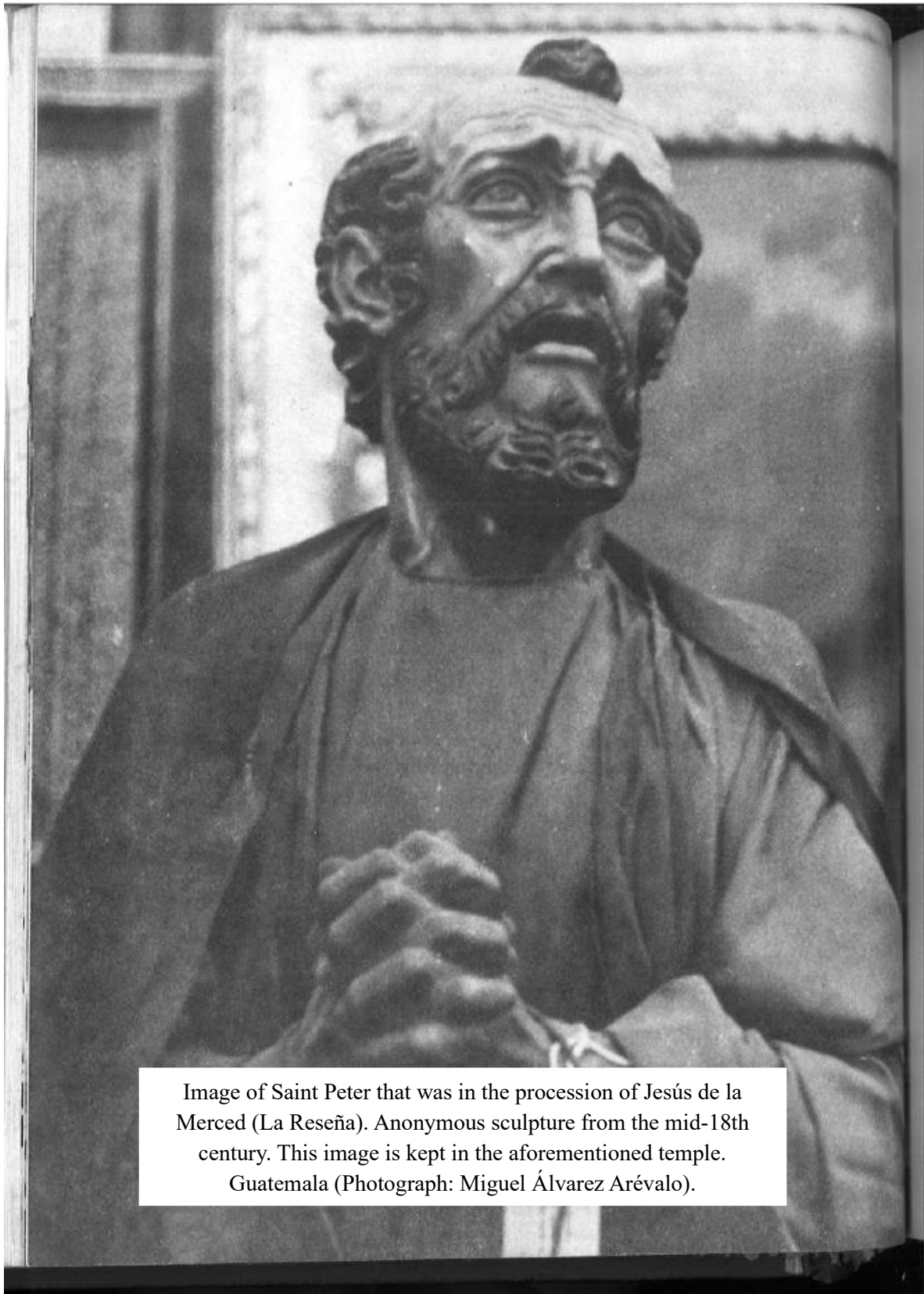


Image of Saint Peter that was in the procession of Jesús de la Merced (La Reseña). Anonymous sculpture from the mid-18th century. This image is kept in the aforementioned temple. Guatemala (Photograph: Miguel Álvarez Arévalo).