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DANCES OF MOORS AND CHRISTIANS: HISTORY,
LEGEND AND PRACTICE IN THREE CONTEMPORARY
PERFORMANCES IN PORTUGAL, SPAIN AND BRAZIL

Performances of dramatized encounters between “Moors” and “Christians” can be found in many European countries, with particular emphasis on Portugal and Spain, as well as in many countries of Latin and South America, where they are important elements in local patron-saint festivals and other religious celebrations. These encounters consist of choreographed sequences of varying complexity, duration and content, which in some instances are referred to as dances (see: AMADO, 1966; ALGE, 2010; RAPOSO 1998; CARRASCO URGOITI, 1996; HARRIS, 2000). I focus on three of these dramatizations, incorporated in contemporary performances in northern Portugal Sobrado town, in southern Spain Benexama village and in the city of Pirenópolis in Brazil, respectively. Although the three performances are quite different in composition and context, they are comparable at the level of their underlying theme: the dramatized enactment of a “battle” between “Moors” and “Christians”. The article opens with a historical account of the form and content of “dances of Moors and Christians” in the European context, and how these dances have been defined and interpreted by different researchers, followed by performances descriptions in the three celebrations mentioned above, with particular regard to their relation with dance. The article concludes with a brief analysis of the role these performances played in the local community in terms of sociability and social status. The data presented is based on participant observation and interviews, carried out during

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fieldwork on the performances between 2008 and 2011, and combined with the analysis of secondary documentary information.

Keywords: Moors and Christians; dance; performance; history; sociability.

INTRODUCTION

Performances of dramatized encounters between ‘Moors’ and ‘Christians’ can be found in many European countries, with particular emphasis on Portugal and Spain, and in many countries of Latin and South America, where they are important elements in local patron-saint festivals and other religious celebrations. These encounters, represented in the form of choreographed sequences of varying complexity, duration, and content, are in some instances referred to as dances (see: AMADO, 1966; ALGE, 2010; RAPOSO 1998; CARRASCO URGOITI, 1996; HARRIS, 2000).

In these dramatizations, the theme of ‘Moors and Christians’ appears in many guises, and may contain the following elements: the re-conquest of a castle by the Christians in a battle involving the capture of a patron saint statue; skirmishes between a group of Turks or Pirates, and coast guards; the intervention of mythical beings, such as giants, devils and monstrous snakes; the so-called *coloquios* or *parlamentos*, dialogues proclaimed respectively by a Muslim and a Christian; a Christian lady’s struggle to free herself from the servitude to a Moorish king; *cavalhadas*, a horse race in the form of a medieval tournament; and romances between a Christian knight and a Moorish lady (AMADES, 1966, p. 71).

In this article I focus on three contemporary dramatizations of Moors and Christians: the *Festa da Bugiada* in northern Portugal Sobrado town, the *Festas de Moros i Cristians* in southern Spain Beneixama village and the *Cavalhadas* in the city of Pirenópolis in Brazil, respectively – in which various of these elements and themes are present in varying degrees.

The data presented was collected during fieldwork carried out in Sobrado (2008, 2010), Beneixama (2008, 2009, 2011) and Pirenópolis (2009, 2011) in cycles of three to four months. Since the objective was to conduct participant observation on each celebration at least twice during the course of the investigation, the locations were chosen considering the constraints of the calendric period in which each celebration took place (Sobrado in June, Beneixama in September, and Pirenópolis in April/May). Other considerations, apart from the difference in cultural context, were the existence of previous research on the celebrations and the difference in scale between each location, ranging from small village, to medium-sized town, to not too large city.

DANCES, CHOREOGRAPHIES, COMEDIES AND DRAMAS: 'MOORS AND CHRISTIANS' IN EUROPE

Dances of Moors and Christians have been studied and analyzed from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, ranging from Ethnography and Anthropology to History, Theatre and Literature studies. The category of performative expressions designated as 'dances of Moors and Christians', also known as *moriscas*, *mouresca*, *mauresque*, *morisma*, and *morris*, in reality comprises a wide range of practices and genres, such as ritual dances, dance dramas, folk theatre plays, written comedies and romances, as well as festive celebrations (see i.e. AMADES, 1966; CARRASCO URGOITI, 1996; ALGE, 2010).

The designation '*morisca*', Amades (1966, p. 10) states, is originally referred to the hybridized cultural expressions and habits that arose out of the coexistence¹ of Christians and Arabs on the margins of Western Europe (the Iberian Peninsula, notably), following the Arab invasion and conquest of the European continent (715-756 AD) and the subsequent battles with the Charlemagne army (778-800 AD), during the Iberian context known as *Carlomagno*. Some expressions of this hybridized culture spread out far beyond the territories actually inhabited by the Arabs. Among these were the dances that came to be known as '*moriscas*', which imitated the dance style of Moorish dancers and became very popular at European courts, performed at feasts of the nobility. The character of the *moriscas* supposedly changed after the Moors' expulsion from Spain, taking on a different connotation regarding the 'Moorish' culture.²

During the fifteenth century, the *morisca* is mentioned in documentation on court festivals and noble celebrations (AMADES, 1966, p. 11; CARRASCO URGOITI, 1996). According to Caro Baroja (AMADES, 1966, p. 71), "armed dances" of the *morisca* or *Morisma* were performed all over the European continent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and subsequently, following the colonization, they were introduced on other continents.

Originally presented in the form of dances, over time the theme of Moors and Christians was developed into theatre plays performed on village and town squares, in so-called *farsas* or *comedias de plaza*, losing the specific

¹ As Amades (1966, p. 99) indicates this coexistence lasted until 1609 when the Arab population, including the converted Muslims known as *Moriscos*, was expelled from Spain.

² It was only in the period leading up to their expulsion that sentiments of aversion and negativity towards the 'Moors' and everything associated with them arose and displaced sentiments of friendship and admiration that had dominated during the Golden Age (CARRASCO URGOITI, 1996, p. 49).

choreographies of the original *moriscas*, and the accompanying dance and music in the process (AMADES, 1966, p. 82).

According to Amades (1966, p. 71) the dances of Moors and Christians, generally speaking, “[...] depict the conflict between the Cross and the Crescent, between the East and the West, between civilization and barbarism”. Carrasco Urgoiti (1996, p. 27), however, is of the opinion that the theme of conquest and reconquest depicted in these dances does not always transmit a negative sentiment regarding the cultural ‘other’, that is to say, the Moors. The latter’s defeat, invariable and inevitable in all performances of this kind, is ascribed to their belief in a false god, Allah, who failed them in their hour of need, which is why some dramatizations end with the conversion and baptism of the conquered Moors.

The tradition of ‘dances of Moors and Christians’, as said, was wide and far spread in medieval Europe, including Portugal. At the end of the fifteenth century, the famous playwright Garcia de Resende mentions, in poetic verse, royal celebrations in which Moors and Moorish dances are represented (LOPES, 2008, p. 6). Even in the late nineteenth century, as Lopes (2008, p. 4) points out, *mouriscas* were frequently performed in many parts of the country, along with *cavalladas*, ritual dances and mock battles between Moors and Christians, often organized by local corporate associations. Dances alluding to the influence of ‘the Moors’ on popular imagination, such as the *Baile dos Turcos* or the *Dança dos Ferreiros*, were part of many Corpus Christi celebrations, and some of these are still represented today.

In Spain, during the ‘golden’ sixteenth century, the theme of ‘*moros y cristianos*’ was recurrent in all kinds of artistic and social expressions, but this changed during the centuries that followed. The ‘Moors and Christians’ tradition – expressed in dances, dramas and in the tournament art – disappeared as entertainment in the aristocratic circles of society, but gained popularity among other classes. Rustic battle simulations, considered a typical rural entertainment by the illustrated minority of those days, continued to be represented during the eighteenth century. The tradition of the representations of Moors and Christians was taken over by the rich artisans guilds, which infused them with new splendor and also adopted the former aristocratic custom of dressing up as Moors to participate in parades and processions. Horse races or *cavalgatas*, pantomimes and comedies were other frequent elements in these celebrations (CARRASCO URGOITI, 1996, p. 64).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the festive tradition of Moors and Christians began to decline in the province’s major cities and capitals but was taken up in minor towns and cities that had a previous tradition of parades of Moors and Christians. Here, influenced by the “romantic orientalism” in

Europe, members of the illustrated local elites helped (re)introduce and revive the tradition (CARRASCO URGOITI, 1996, p. 65)

The variety of guises in which the theme of Moors and Christians is presented at contemporary performative expressions, particularly in the three cases that were my research object, makes it difficult to decide on a single and uniform designation for them. Should we classify them as dances, as Alge (2010), Amades (1966) and others have done? If so, how do we classify the other performative, but non-dance, expressions that make up these performances? Should we classify them as ‘dramatized choreographies’ as Raposo (1998, p. 194) does?

However defining dance and choreography, we run into the same problem: some elements might in fact be considered choreographies – for instance, movements performed by *escuadras* during *pasacalles* and *evoluciones* in Beneixama, or *carreiras* performed by the knights during *Cavalhadas* in Pirenópolis – just as some might be considered dance – such as the choreographed movements of *bugios* and *mourisqueiros* in Sobrado. Others, however, can’t easily be placed in either category. All elements presented, however, are dramatizations, although not all in the strict theatrical sense. Whatever expressive genres are chosen – dance, choreography or theatre – they are all combined in one expressive whole, a performance, through which a particular content is given meaning.

An analytic perspective taking the performance concept as an entry point allows the incorporation and conciliation of all the sometimes paradoxical elements that make up these festive expressions: parades, social critique, music, recitals, dances and choreographies, battles, equestrian episodes, gunshot volleys, rituals and religious ceremony.

*FESTES DE MOROS I CRISTIANS*³ IN VALENCIA

Since the 1950s, the number of *Festes de Moros i Cristians* in the *Comarca*⁴ of Valencia has increased from about thirty to almost two hundred celebrations a year (ALCARAZ I SANTONJA, 2006, p. 37). These *festes*, as Carrasco Urgoiti (1996, p. 64) indicated, bear a striking resemblance to the public festivities celebrated in this region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Combining religious ceremony regarding the local patron saint and secular entertainment in the form of the evocation of real or imagined historical events by means of recited dialogue and staged battle scenes, the celebrations are of great audiovisual and emotional impact. During three to five days, a large

³ I used here the Valencian name for celebrations of this kind. In Castilian they are called ‘Fiestas de Moros y Cristianos’.

⁴ In Catalonia and Aragon, the *comarca* exists as a local government area, and has a representative comarcal council. In the Valencian Community, the *comarca* exists only as a traditional region with no administrative competences.

part of the local populations participates in parades, processions, dancing and mock battles.

The *Mariola* Mountains and the *Vinalopó* valley, in the Alicante province, part of the Valencian *comarca*, are well known for their *festes* of Moors and Christians. The region boasts some of the eldest celebrations of this kind (Alcoi, Vilhena, Biar, Banyeres, Bocairent), most of which are said to have appeared in their current form during the first half of the nineteenth century, in the wake of the industrialization of the region.

PASACALLES AND EVOLUCIONES IN THE *FESTES DE MOROS I CRISTIANS* (BENEIXAMA)

Beneixama, a village of about 1800 inhabitants⁵ situated in the fertile valley of *Vinalopó*, celebrates its annual *festes* between the 6th and the 11th of September, in honor of the local patron saint, the Divine Aurora. The celebration's history in Beneixama can be traced back to 1841 (ALCARAZ I SANTONJA, 2006, p. 145). The *festes* are organized by a committee, instituted in 1949,⁶ in which representatives of the Town Council and of the four cultural associations, called *comparsas*, are united.

The celebration extends over five days, its sequence of ritual and festive acts following the general pattern characteristic of these celebrations in southern Spain. Several parades take place during which the *escuadras*, sub-divisions of the *comparsas*, march dressed in their finery through the village streets performing *evoluciones*, a type of military choreography; several processions are held in the honor of the patron saint, the Divine Aurora, in which the *comparsas* parade in pride of place; and, finally, the battle, consisting of the Moors' attacks and their conquest of the Christian castle erected on the village square, followed by Christians' counter attacks on the Moorish invaders and the re-conquest of their castle, and finally, after their surrender, the Moors' conversion.

According to Alcaraz i Santonja (2006, p. 23) contemporary *festes* of Moors and Christians combine simulated battles commemorating Christian victories over "the *Almoravides*, the barbarians, or the Turks", which used to be performed during aristocratic public festivities, with *alardes* and *soldadescas* of the former militia. These militia, armed groups of local men that used to patrol the boundaries of towns and villages in times of trouble, in the sixteenth century participated as *comparsas* of soldiers in parades during festivities (CARRASCO URGOITI, 1996, p. 46).

⁵ Source: Institut Nacional de Estadística (2011).

⁶ Dates referred by Alcaraz i Santonja (2006).

In the *alardes*, which are still present in many of these contemporary celebrations, the militia fired thundering *salvos* with their harquebuses and performed dramatized exercises ‘waving their flag’. At the end of the religious processions these militias, divided into two groups, representing Moors and Christians, sometimes performed a simulated battle, the *soldadesca*.⁷ Over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, *soldadesca* became the main folk celebration in the villages and towns of *Mariola* Mountains and *Vinalopó* valley (ALCARAZ I SANTONJA, 2006, p. 33).

Two elements in contemporary *festes de moros i cristians* can be considered as related to dance: *pasacalles* and *evoluciones*. The *pasacalles* are parades – or ‘marches’ as the participants prefer to call them – of the *comparsas* members through the village streets. Costumes and style of movement express preferences of the *comparsas* members. The Moors and Christians march to the sound of a *marcha mora* and a *pasodoble*, respectively. The music of the *marcha mora*, with its slow rhythm and somewhat melancholic sound, is meant to transmit a ‘Moorish feeling’ which is also expressed in *el paso*, the basic style of movements of the performers, which is slow and languid. The *pasodobles*, on the other hand, are much more lively and energetic compositions, associated in the cultural imagination with Spanish, or more precisely Castillian, Christian culture. The *paso* of the performers in this case is more ‘military’ in style, corresponding, as in the *marcha mora*, to the tone and rhythm of the music.



FIGURE 1 – THE ENTRADAS IN BENEIXAMA

AUTORIA: MARIA J. C. KROM, 2011

People participate in the celebration through their membership of one *comparsa*. Beneixama has four *comparsas*: *Moros*, *Cristians*, *Maseros*, and *Es-*

⁷ The term *soldadesca* literally refers to a ‘troop of soldiers’ or ‘military exercises’ (Diccionario Enciclopédico Vox 1. © 2009 Larousse Editorial).

tudians, all organized as described above, but only those of the *Moros* and *Cristians* are involved in the battle scene performances. All four *comparsas* participate in the festival opening parade, the *entradas*, in the rest of the *pasacalles* and in the processions.

Each *comparsa* is headed by a *capitán*, which, once again, can be a man or a woman, who, with his family, represent the *comparsa* in all important acts of the festival. The *escuadras*, the most important subdivision of the *comparsa*, are usually formed by people within the same age group, often a group of friends or classmates, of the same gender or mixed, that parade together during official acts of the festival. All the *comparsa* members can participate in the *entradas*, which offer the *escuadras* the opportunity of showcasing their best costumes and prowess in the *evoluciones*. Their leader, the *cabo*, – who can be male or female – is chosen by his or her fellow members in the *escuadra*, based on his or her abilities as a performer. The *cabo* leads the *escuadra* during the *entradas* and in the *evoluciones*, military choreographies, and he or she has to incite the members of his or her *escuadra* to a perfect performance and elicit applause from the spectators by the way he or she directs the choreographed movements of his group. The *cabo* is the only *escuadra* member to perform what might be called a choreography, using a sword to accentuate the movements. The other *escuadra* members follow their *cabo* in a closed horizontal line, moving in a synchronized slow rhythm to the sound of the *marcha mora* if they belong to the *Moros*, or the more martial *pasodoble* if they belong to the *Cristians*.

Each *escuadra* is accompanied by a band of musicians playing a distinctive musical composition. Some Moorish *escuadras* march to the sound of a *tabalet* or *dolçaina*, a drum traditionally associated with the peasants' musical repertoire (AMADES, 1966, p. 27). Prizes are awarded to the *cabo* and *escuadra* that give the best performance.

Only a select number of *escuadras* participate in the *pasacalles* that take place on the following days and in the patron saint processions, the Divine Aurora, each characterized by the typical swaying movement of 'Moorish marches' and *pasodobles*, as well as by their specific musical accompaniment.

A part of the *escuadras* of each *comparsa* performs *evoluciones* on the square in front of the village church, following the holy mass celebrations. These *evoluciones* are also led by the *cabo* but involve movements that are a bit more complex than the ones performed during the *entradas*, and are carried out by all the *escuadra* members executing the *evoluciones*.

THE *MOURISCA* IN PORTUGAL: DANCES AND DRAMAS

Portuguese folklorists and ethnographers researching the ‘*mouriscas*’, and particularly the *Auto da Floripes*, during the Estado Novo, in the first half of the twentieth century, tried to establish a common origin and an evolution unbroken along the centuries, from their earliest appearances in the Middle Ages to their contemporary forms (RAPOSO, 1998, p. 203). Ethnologists such as Teófilo Braga, Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira, Cláudio Basto, Luís Chaves and Fernando Pires de Lima, along with local amateur ethnologists, thus expressed the preoccupation of the Portuguese nation-state of establishing the historical foundation of a ‘genuine’ and pure ‘folk culture’ preserved in these ‘dramatized choreographies’ (ibid: ibidem).

Contemporary researchers refer in a variety of ways to the ‘dances’ of Moors and Christians, attributing them an equally diverse variety of origins. Alge (2010, p. 335) states that the term *mourisca* is referred to a courtly dance and also to a dance performed during religious processions, but it is referred as well to objects associated with the Arab presence on the continent. Finally the term also indicated dances in which such objects were used or dances that reminded of the Moors or Moorish culture in general.

Amades (1966, p. 84) mentions a *morisca* danced in Penafiel (Portugal), distant twenty five kilometers from Sobrado. The Portuguese *morisca*, according to Amado (ibid: ibidem) was a processional stick-and-sword dance, incorporating for instance the *Dança dos Ferreiros*, executed by blacksmiths, that was performed during Corpus Christi processions.

Sardinha⁸ (2012) also links the *mourisca* to Corpus Christi celebrations and, more interestingly, with regard to the *Festa da Bugiada* – to those held in nearby Valongo. Profane elements of these processions would have been suppressed following a royal prohibition in 1724, and incorporated in other calendric events, more particularly the carnival. In Valongo, the *mourisca* would have been incorporated in St. Anthony celebrations, one of the June cycle saints. Sardinha bases his affirmation on a 1904 edition on folk traditions of Valongo, which mentions *mouriscada* and *bugiada* dances, and which comments on the antics (*momices*) and jumping of the *bugios*. These two dances, according to Sardinha, might at some point after 1904 have fused through the introduction of a theatrical plot sprung from popular imagination. In the early twentieth century, according to the same author, a *dança da bugiada* was still performed in Valongo, as well as *Dança dos Odres* in Turkish clothing, but these would have disappeared over time.

⁸ Consulted at: <<http://bugiosemourisqueiros.blogspot.pt>>.

Raposo (1998, p. 194) classifies the Portuguese representations of Moors and Christians not as dances but as “dramatized choreographies”. The term would refer to a heterogeneous category of folk theatre representations, the ‘*autos populares*’, and in this particular case to folk plays about knights and their exploits, the ‘*autos cavalleirescos*’, that were based on romances, legends or epic narratives. The choreographed battles between Moors⁹ and Christians form a sub-group of these plays, according to Raposo, commonly referred to as ‘*autos do ciclo carolíngio*’, or folk plays pertaining to the Carolingian cycle.

DANCES IN THE *FESTA DA BUGIADA* (SOBRADO)

Of the three cases of Moor and Christian performances described in this article, the *Festa da Bugiada* in Sobrado contains the most elements of what might fairly be called ‘dance’. Some authors, such as Pereira (1982, p. 34), refer to *Festa da Bugiada* as *Dança dos Bugios e Mourisqueiros*.

Various types of choreographed mock battles¹⁰ between Moors and Christians are currently still performed in Portugal, amongst which *Auto da Floripes*, a folk theatre play performed in Neves small village (RAPOSO, 1998, p. 194), *Festa dos Caretos*, or *Festa de Santo Estêvão*, celebrated in *Torre de Dona Chama*, in Mirandela (ALGE, 2010, p. 81), and *Festa da Bugiada* in Sobrado, all located in northern¹¹ Portugal. Contrary to other performances¹² of this kind, these three continue to be represented on an annual basis.

The town of Sobrado, in northern Portugal Porto region, celebrates the *Festa da Bugiada* annually at the summer solstice, June 24. The highlight of the day is the enactment of a local legend about the deceit of a neighboring band of Moors and their attempted robbery of St.

⁹ Raposo notes that the term ‘mouro’ or ‘Moor’ in this context is mixed indiscriminately with the terms ‘Turks’, ‘pagans’, or ‘infidels’ (RAPOSO, 1998, p. 194, footnote 8).

¹⁰ Shown for instance as historical recreations during medieval fairs organized by local associations such as *Os Cavaleiros da Ordem do Sagrado*.

¹¹ Curiously enough, in the north of Portugal, where the Arab invaders never have been actually present, references to the ‘Moors’ abound in place names, in legends, and also in celebrations (many of which now have disappeared, see footnote 9), a fact which Alge (2010, p. 336) attributes to the continuing presence of ‘the Moors’ in the popular imagination as a result of the revival of the crusades spirit, and the creation of the image of a cultural ‘other’ during the Estado Novo.

¹² Other examples that in the mean time have disappeared or are performed only sporadically are the *Auto dos Turcos* in Crasto (Ponte Lima), *Auto de Santo António* in Portela-Susã (Viana do Castelo), *Drama dos Doze Pares de França* in Palme (Viana do Castelo), *Comédia dos Doze Pares* in Argozelo (Vimioso), *Auto do Mouro e do Cristão* in Franqueira (Galiza), *Descoberta da Moura* in Vale Formoso (Covilhã), *Baile dos Turcos* (Penafiel), *Comédia dos Mouros e Portugueses* in Pechão (Olhão), and the *Dança dos Pedreiros* in Penamacor (Paços de Ferreira) (RAPOSO, 1998, p.194).

John the Baptist statue. Interestingly enough, in the *Alpujarra* Mountains, in Andalusia, a similar plot is represented in the performance of Moors and Christians (CARRASCO URGOITI, 1996, p. 35). Here, as in Sobrado, the dispute is not over the conquest of a castle, but over the image of the patron saint, which in some cases is substituted by the figure of a high-ranking captive, like in Sobrado.

The *Festa da Bugiada* includes a number of carnivalesque interludes¹³ and sketches of social critique, not directly related to the dances of Moors and Christians. On the morning of the celebration, *bugios* (Christians) and *mourisqueiros* assemble at the houses of their respective 'kings' the *Velho* (literally 'old man') and the *Reimoeiro* ('king of the Moors'). At their kings' houses *bugios* and *mourisqueiros* perform the *Dança do Rei* (the King's Dance) where they are offered a snack, called the *mata-bicho*. Then *mourisqueiros* and *bugios* depart separately for the *Casa do Bugio* where each group will be offered a '*jantar*' (evening meal).¹⁴ On their way there, the *bugios* perform their typical 'dance' movement, a sort of hop-skip step, which makes little bells on their costumes ring, accompanied by the clattering sound of their *castanholas*. *Mourisqueiros*, on the other hand, move in orderly military fashion, running up the hill in two vertical lines behind their *Reimoeiro*. Before entering¹⁵ the hall *bugios* perform the *Dança dos Bugios*.

After leaving the *Casa do Bugio*, before the *bugios*, *mourisqueiros* dance their *Dança dos Mourisqueiros*, after which they run, once again in military style, down the hill towards the *Passal*, the village center square, where the rest of the dances and performances take place. Only then, the *bugios* emerge from the hall and start moving towards the village, performing their hop-skip-step in two somewhat unruly lines, headed by the *Velho* and his consorts.

¹³ Such as the *Cobrança dos Direitos*, *A Sementeira e Lavra Ritual* and the *Dança do Cego* or *Sapateirada*.

¹⁴ The *Festa da Bugiada* is characterized by this kind of reversal, which is expressed in various elements and acts incorporated in the performance.

¹⁵ The two groups eat in separate rooms, and they remain strictly separated for the remainder of the day, only confronting each other during some of the dances and in the final 'battle' at the end of the performance.



**FIGURE 2 – THE *DANÇA DOS MOURISQUEIROS*
IN FRONT OF THE *CASA DO BUGIO*
AUTORIA: JOSÉ M. RODRIGUES, 2008**

On the *Passal*, several more dances are performed during the day by both *bugios* and *mourisqueiros*. The variation in the *bugios*' dances is minimal. Only the *Dança da Entrada*, the opening parade performed when entering the village by all participants dressed as *bugios*, differs. Only the *Velho* and his small group of consorts perform specific dances. The consorts are divided in *guias*, two dancers that occupy the foremost positions behind the *Velho*, some six to eight *bugios* behind the *guias*, two *rabos*, and the dancers that close the group. The choreography performed by these dancers is quite simple and very similar in each dance, the only difference being whether the *Velho* interacts with all of the other dancers, or only with *guias* and *rabos*. The dances of the *bugios* are accompanied by a small band of musicians with violins, playing the same tune for each dance.

The choreography of the *mourisqueiros*' dances is a bit more complex, performed by all *mourisqueiros* together with their *Reimoeiro* and his *guias*. The *mourisqueiros* consist exclusively of unmarried young men living in the town, their number depending on the number of bachelors that want to participate, but never counting more than forty dancers. Their dances are unvaryingly performed to the sound of a drum, the *caixa*, which dictates the rhythm and pace of the movements. The names of the dances that *bugios* and *mourisqueiros* perform correspond to a specific place or act in the 'plot' of the unfolding drama.



FIGURE 3 – THE *DANÇA DA ENTRADA* OF THE *BUGIOS*

AUTORIA: MARIA J.C. KROM, 2010

While *bugios* and *mourisqueiros* eat their ‘*jantar*’ in the Casa do Bugio, a holy mass is celebrated downhill, at the church near the *Passal*. When the procession following the mass is over, the *bugios* make their impressive entrance in the town, performing their *Dança de Entrada*. The *Velho* leads the dance, together with *guias*, *rabos* and the group of *bugios* that will perform the remainder of the dances during the day. Behind them follow hundreds of *bugios*, men, women and children of all ages, dressed in typical *bugio* costume and mask, and performing the *bugio* hop-skip-step, clapping their *castanholas* to every fourth count of the music, and crying ‘ho, ho, ho’ in falsetto voices.

The *Dança do Sobreiro*, which follows when both groups have entered the space of the *Passal*, is performed in turn by *bugios* and *mourisqueiros*, in front of the church. During the interval that follows a number of sketches and rituals are performed on the *Passal*, such as the *Cobrança dos Direitos*, the *Sementeira*, *Gradar e Lavrar*, and the *Dança do Cego*.¹⁶

Later in the afternoon, *mourisqueiros* and *bugios* return and each group in their turn performs the *Dança do Doce*, on the patio in front of the parish priests’ house. Then, the negotiations leading up to the final battle begin. *Bugios* and *mourisqueiros* are ensconced in their ‘castles’,¹⁷ firing their arms after each round of negotiations, while a messenger on horseback rides to

¹⁶ This sketch, also called the *Sapateirada* – is about a jealous shoemaker, his unfaithful wife played by a man in drag and a young stranger who seduces the wife of the shoemaker. It is not actually a dance but a performance with many double ‘entendres’.

¹⁷ Two wooden platforms raised in the air on the trunks of previously cut pine trees, each positioned on one the side of the *Passal*.

and fro each party delivering messages. Suddenly, a group of *mourisqueiros* lead by the *Reimoeiro* charges the *bugios* castle. The skirmish ends when the *Reimoeiro* is inside the castle, holding the *Velho* captive. Together they descend while the *bugios* loudly wail their defeat. Then, a group of *bugios* charges from the church direction, carrying an enormous serpent.¹⁸ The frightened *mourisqueiros* flee the scene in disarray, leaving the *Velho* behind. St. John has once again worked his miracles, coming to the *bugios* aid.

With night already falling, the *mourisqueiros*, recuperated from their defeat, dance their *Dança do Santo*. The *bugios* in a final act perform their *Dança da Vitória* at the *Passal*, in front of the church. *Bugios* and *mourisqueiros* then join one another during the closing celebration ceremony, while the hymn of Sobrado sounds for the last time.

'MOORS AND CHRISTIANS' OUTSIDE EUROPE

Dances and dramatized choreographies of Moors and Christians were introduced in Latin and South America, by the Portuguese and Spanish colonizers during the 16th century (BRANDÃO, 1978; MACEDO, 2000; HARRIS, 2000). Some authors (for instance MACEDO, 2000, p. 17) attribute a decisive role in this process to the Jesuit priest that followed in the wake of the European colonizers, who supposedly used the performances as a conversion tool for Christianity over indigenous populations of the 'New World'. Amades (1966, p. 89-90) mentions *Bailes de los Moros* in Guatemala, comedies or *farsas* performed in Mexico and dances depicting Moors and Christians in Rio de Janeiro and other places in Brazil, without, however, giving a detailed description of the same.

More interestingly with regard to the *Cavalhadas* performed in Pirenópolis, is his mention of the highly fashionable equestrian games, in 1582, in Alcoi (Valencia), which included “*juegos de armas a base de carreras de lanzas y de ejercicios de lanzamiento de flechas y de saetas con ballesta*”, (AMADES, 1966, p. 97). Harris (2000, p. 54) mentions an even earlier example of such games, held in Jaén (Spain), in 1462, which showed knights, dressed as Moors and Christians, displaying their military skills in a variety of equestrian exercises, during a '*juego de cañas*'. The 'games' placed “the Moors at one hand of the plaza and Christians at the other [...] galloping at one another in opposed pairs [...] brandishing swords [...] and hurling their canes at one another” (HARRIS, 2000, p. 58).

Carrasco Urgoiti (1996, p. 42) observes that the *juegos de cañas*, in the sixteenth century turned from a spectacle that dramatized real life situations

¹⁸ An effigy made of a wooden frame covered with green cloth.

into a poetic memorialization, a “recuerdo poetizado” that transmitted an image of the “gallant moor” and of friendship and admiration between Christians and Moors (CARRASCO URGOITI, 1996, p. 42). These *juegos* required excellent skills in horsemanship in order to perform the rapid “evoluciones”, and offered ample opportunity for the display of gallantry, grace and vigor.

Danced ‘*cavalhadas*’ are currently still performed by *Turcs i Cavallets* in the Corpus Christi celebration in Berga (Catalonia), known as the *Patum* (NOYES, 2003, p. 46). This performance, according to Noyes (2003, p. 48) is a simple version of dances of Moors and Christians. The Corpus Christi celebration in Penafiel, near Sobrado, also incorporates *Cavalhadas*, which include the appearance of a serpent or dragon going by the name of Coca battling aside St. George, as well as dancing Turks, ‘Blacks’ and ‘stick’ dances.¹⁹

Finally, in Ribeira Grande, on the island of São Miguel, *cavalhadas de São Pedro* are performed during the celebration of the *Festa do Espírito Santo*, but it remains unclear if these are historically linked with the *Cavalhadas* of Pirenópolis.

CHOREOGRAPHIES ON HORSEBACK: THE *CAVALHADAS* IN THE *FESTA DO DIVINO* (PIRENÓPOLIS)

The town of Pirenópolis, situated in the heart of Goiás state (center-west Brazil) was founded in 1727 by Portuguese colonizers. Currently boasting a population of about 25.000 souls, the town is on its way of becoming a veritable tourist destination, due to the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape, the colonial architecture in the cities’ historical center, and a performance known as the *Cavalhadas*.

The *Cavalhadas* in Pirenópolis are said to be based on the story of ‘Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers of France’, which became widely divulged in Brazil through the so-called penny-novels, or *livros de cordel*. These novels relating the exploits of chivalrous and brave knights were also very popular in Europe. Câmara Cascudo (2000) attributes the origin of these novels to poems and stories about Charlemagne (Carlomagno) that were recorded in the original Provençal language during the thirteenth century. The translation of these into Spanish, by Nicolau de Piemonte, became very popular during the sixteenth century. Harris (2000, p. 251), however, attributes the version written by Nicolau de Piemonte to the translation of a French prose written by Jehan Bagnyon in 1478. This translation by Piemonte, in 1498, became very successful in Spain and Portugal, and would be the origin of

¹⁹ Source: <<http://bugiosandmourisqueiros.blogspot.com>>, June 5, 2012.

Latin American songs and performances about Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers of France (Harris, *ibid*: *ibidem*).

The history of *Festa do Divino* in Pirenópolis can be traced back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and a *Cavalhadas* performance is mentioned during the festival as early as 1893 (MARTINS, 2001, p. 78). However, *Cavalhadas* remained a sporadic event during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, and it was only incorporated as a recurring element in the celebration in the 1960s (MARTINS, 2001, p. 52). One reason for this late *Cavalhadas* incorporation was the difficulty in finding enough candidates, since potential ‘knights’ had to dispose of one or more horses, and of enough leisure time for practicing the various figures and tournament exercises. Another reason was that the ‘*Imperador*’, the person financing the *Festa do Divino*, had to have the means and be willing to pay for the performance.²⁰

From the 1960s onwards, *Cavalhadas* were performed on a more regular basis, over time changing from one of the many expressive elements in the *Festa do Divino* into the major attraction it is today. This change is vividly illustrated in the knights’ attire. Starting out as simple military style uniforms and continuing so until the 1970s, the knights’ costumes and the horses’ adornments over the years have become more and more lavish and exotic.



**FIGURE 4 – CHRISTIAN KNIGHTS (IN BLUE)
AND MOORISH KNIGHTS (IN RED) DURING THE CAVALHADAS**
AUTORIA: JOSÉ M. RODRIGUES, 2009

²⁰ Information provided in an interview with João Luís de Pina, May 2011.

THE CAVALHADAS

At noon on the Saturday preceding Pentecost Sunday, figures on horseback appear in the streets, dressed in all sorts of imaginative disguises complemented by masks, many of which representing oxen with big horns embellished with colorful roses. These masked figures, known as *mascarados*, are a constant element in Pirenópolis during the festival days, galloping in groups through the city streets, asking people for money for drinks and making jokes. Their appearance in the streets of Pirenópolis marks the beginning of the celebration's profane cycle and announces the imminent beginning of the *Cavalhadas*.

The *mascarados* form an interesting contrast of scenario with the Moors and Christian knights' performance. While the latter is said to be based on the story of Charlemagne's battle against the Turks – thus forming a clear reference to a literary tradition of European origin, however much adapted to the specific Brazilian context – discourses on local identity explicitly link *mascarados* to 'native' folk culture, even though their exact origin remains obscure (LIMA E ALVES, 2004, p. 131).

The *Cavalhadas*, held on three consecutive afternoons, starting on Pentecost Sunday, are presented, as said, in the form of a medieval tournament during which the twelve knights of France and their twelve Moorish counterparts prove their value and equestrian skills. The story plot is told through the performance of meticulously choreographed sequences of simulated combat with lances and pistols, called *carreiras*. Each *carreira* has a distinct name, corresponding to the scene that is being depicted, and involves a specific 'choreography', carried out in pairs by the horsemen. In each *carreira*, a Moor and a Christian perform the choreography, starting with the respective kings, followed by their 'ambassadors' and subsequently each of the Moorish and Christian knights in turn, in descending order.

The *carreiras* start and end in front of the 'castle' entrance. The Moorish castle is located on one side of the playing field, bearing the Crescent Moon symbol in red, while the Christian castle is located on the opposite side and marked with the Cross symbol, in blue.

On the first day of *Cavalhadas*, the *carreiras* express the beginning of the war between Moors and Christians. The second day is dedicated to the victory of the Christians over the Moors, ending with the baptism of the Moors by the local parish priest, symbolizing their conversion to the Christian faith. On the third and final day, the Moors and Christians fraternize by executing *carreiras* that consist of various exercises in dexterity and horsemanship.

AFFECTION, SOCIABILITY AND STATUS IN CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCES OF 'MOORS AND CHRISTIANS'

In Beneixama, *comparsas*²¹ and their sub-units, the *escuadras* play an important role in the village social life, a role that is most eloquently expressed in the festival setting. Usually, girls and boys start out as participants in the *comparsa* to which their parents belong, which they start to do at a very young age, often as babies or toddlers. As they get older, they choose either to stay in the same *comparsa* as their parents or to join another *comparsa* of their choice, based on the presence of friends or classmates. Several of my informants indicated that this system also functions as a form of social control and can cause problems if husband and wife belong to different *comparsas* or if sweethearts belonging to the same *escuadra* separate, since participation in the *escuadra* often overlaps bonds of friendship.

A comparable situation can be found in the Sobrado celebration, where people also start participating as *bugios* from a very early age on. Many of these participants are not regular members of the cultural association, *Casa do Bugio*, that organizes the celebration, but pay a fee to the association to be allowed to participate in the opening parade, and many of them rent a costume for themselves and their children in order to dress up as *bugios*. A considerable part of these participants come from villages and towns surrounding Sobrado. They participate because it's fun and enjoy the camaraderie of the morning communal meal and the group dancing. According to the *Casa do Bugio*, each year between 500 to 600 people, varying in age from 4 to 70 years old, dress up as *Bugios* to participate in the celebration.

The performers that represent the *Velho* and his consorts, *guias* and *rabos*, on the other hand are always inhabitants of Sobrado, and are regular members of the association. Like the *mourisqueiro*, they form a tight-knit group bound together by the period of preparation for the celebration, and the dance rehearsals. The *mourisqueiros*, varying in number from 24 to 30, consist exclusively of unmarried young men from the town, formerly sons of families belonging to the middle and upper class of the local society, but now more mixed in terms of socio-economic background.

In Pirenópolis the *mascarados* might be compared with the general group of *bugios* in the sense that women as well as men participate as *mascarado*, even though the participation of women is still considered inappropriate

²¹ The *comparsas* are also called *filas*, depending on the 'tradition' to which they belong, that of Alcoy or that of Vilhena. In Beneixama, following the Vilhena tradition, the 'companies' participating in the festival are called *comparsas*.

by many community members. But since *mascarados*, as the name indicates, just as *bugios*, are always disguised and distort their voices, the chances of being recognized as a woman are not very great. The ‘knights’ representing in the *Cavalhadas*, on the other hand might be compared with the *mourisqueiros* in Sobrado and like the *mourisqueiros* in Sobrado they form a tight-knit unit. Their number is also small, 24 in total, and incorporation in the group is also restricted, but in this case the restriction has nothing to do with marital status, although it does have to do with gender, since only men can aspire to the position of *cavaleiro*, as the knights are called locally.

Participation in the *Cavalhadas*, nowadays, is considered an enhancement of one’s social standing, and consequently there is a waiting list of candidates for the position of ‘knight’. Being a ‘knight’ comes with a price, though. Candidates to the position of knight do not necessarily have to belong to the upper class of Pirenopolino society – many of the horsemen are in fact of middle-class background – or to be financially well off, but being a man of means certainly helps. The annual cost for the knight’s costume and the animal’s attire are high and the state funding that the *cavaleiros* receive does not cover these costs. But being a ‘knight’ also comes with its own perks, such as high status in the local community, and being provided with free meals and drinks during the two-week rehearsal period preceding the *Cavalhadas*.

Comparsas, Carrasco Urgoiti (1996, p. 32) stated, are groups of ‘*aficionados*’. In fact, *comparsas* and *escuadras* play an important role in the construction and maintenance of the social structure and cohesion of the community, actually uniting generations and gender by means of a variety of social activities throughout the year – such as – inspiring strong feelings of loyalty and belonging in its members. The *comparsa*, in this sense, functions almost as an extended family, in the context of which a major part of the social life of its members takes place. The *escuadras* are of particular importance in this respect, embodying as it were the spirit of the festival and the sociability principle of the community.

The association *Casa do Bugio* fulfills a comparable role in the Sobrado community. Apart from the celebration and other activities the association organizes for its members, it also maintains contact with a growing group of enthusiasts, through web pages on the internet where they provide information on the celebration and which serve as a virtual meeting-point for the performance aficionados.

Passion for the celebration seems to be the common thread in all three performances presented above. The *Cavalhadas*’ knights play a very specific and indispensable role in the celebrations of the *Divino*. However much

they might, at first sight, appear to be presenting a mere visual spectacle performed mainly for entertainment, the *Cavalhadas* in reality contain a strong symbolic cargo personified in the figures of the knight (see also, SPINELLI, 2008). This cargo is most vividly expressed in their relation with the *Imperador*, the main character in the *Festa do Divino*, considered the representative of the divine, to whom the knights pledge allegiance and in whose name they do combat. For the majority of the population of Pirenópolis, the *Cavalhadas* continue to be the high point of the *Divino* celebration and the culmination of a shared expression of faith and experience of *communitas*.²²

To conclude, another important motive for participants and spectators alike seem to be the sensory appeal exerted by celebrations such as these. As Bendix (2005, p.195) pointed out, 'aesthetically elaborated' practices may be singled out for the political and economic gain they might bring to their promoters, it is their impact on the senses that makes them so seductive. This sensory appeal might explain why members of all classes of the community participate in these performances, apart from the possibility of eventual social and political advancement that participation might offer.

What may persuade participants to take part in the enactment – including 'ordinary' participants that may not have a clear political or social stake in the celebration, and who are part of the 'anonymous' multitude of *bugios*, *mascarados*, and ordinary squadron members in the *comparsas* – is that performing in the celebration not only seems like but actually feels like the "real thing".

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²² I use the expression *communitas* here as defined by Edith Turner (2012:xii) as a "moment of memorable experience".

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