

Los matachines - Research notes by Stanley A. Lucero

The origins of the dance of the matachines appears to be unknown. Some claim it is from the Moors, Italy, Europe, Spain and some from Tlaxcala.

I'm thinking that we should not focus on the origins of the matachines but discuss how widespread the matachines are being performed in the Americas. We might also do a timeline to demonstrate when and where the matachines dances have been documented. The timeline should mention all of the places that we can find evidence of any variation of the matachines being performed.

We might also discuss how the matachines appears to be a blending of the indigenous matachines dance with Catholic doctrine, European/Moorish traditions and the conquest of the Aztecs. The Tlaxcalans played a major role in taking the matachines north to the settlements they founded. The matachines also appears to have been modified according to the local traditions and history of the performing community.

Here are some of the places mentioned in the articles and websites that I have quoted.

Bernalillo, New Mexico [315 years straight]

Bustamante, Nuevo Leon

Columbia

Guadalupe, Nuevo Leon

Huajuapán

Lampazos, Nuevo Leon

Laredo, Texas

Linares, Nuevo Leon

San Antonio, Texas

San Miguel de Aguayo, Texas

Sonora

Taos, New Mexico

Tezoatlán de Segura y Luna, Oaxaca

Tlaxcala

Tortugas, New Mexico

Villa Aldama

Zacatecas

In 1521 the Tlaxcalans allied themselves with Hernan Cortes against their common enemies, the Aztecs. Following the conquest of the Aztecs, the Tlaxcalans joined the Spaniards in their exploration and conquests of the Americas (South America, Central America and North America). In 1591, 400 Tlaxcalan families traveled north to colonize, pacify and acculturate the conquered Chimchimecas. In six smaller groups they established colonies in San Luis Potosi, Jalisco, Zacatecas, Nuevo Leon, Coahuila, Texas and New Mexico.

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They also took with them their language, culture, traditions, skills, foods and also the dance of the matachines. The monks had modified this Tlaxcalan dance to incorporate Catholic beliefs.

Here are a few quotes regarding the origins of los matachines. Read them and reach your own conclusions.

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New Mexico Arts (Rodriguez)

<http://www.nmarts.org/matachines/essays.php?p=rodriguez>

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The Upper Rio Grande Matachines. Dance Sylvia Rodriguez.

"The Matachines is the only ritual drama that both Pueblo Indian and Hispano communities perform in the Upper Río Grande Valley. Some perform the dance in midwinter, others in summer. Style and detail vary widely from place to place, but common elements define a distinctive regional complex that stretches between Taos in the north and Tortugas in the south."

"Some scholars trace the Matachines to the morisca, a dance said to have originated in Medieval Spain in the twelfth century or earlier as a pantomime of Moorish-Christian combat."

"Some Pueblos attribute the dance not to church fathers like their Hispano neighbors, but to a Mexican-Indian king, identified in the dance as the figure of Monarca or Montezuma."

El Sol de Tlaxcala (**Gonzalez, 2007**)

<http://www.oem.com.mx/elsoldetlaxcala/notas/n425533.htm>

La danza de los Matachines es de origen tlaxcalteca. Carmen Gonzalez. 21 de septiembre de 2007.

"Tlaxcala, Tlaxcala.- La danza de los "Matachines", que es un baile tradicional de varias regiones del país, es originaria de Tlaxcala, porque los pobladores tlaxcaltecas que fueron llevados al norte de México llevaron esta expresión cultural que se ha difundido en varias entidades; señaló Jaime Castro Ramírez, investigador de las danzas tradicionales del estado."

Translation: [Tlaxcala, Tlaxcala.- The dance of los "matachines, which is a traditional dance from various regions of the country, is originally from Tlaxcala, because the Tlaxcalan settlers that were taken to the north of Mexico took this cultural expression that has been spread to various entities; explained Jaime Castro Ramirez, state historian of the traditional dances.]

"Después de confrontar varios estudios en torno a esta danza y exponerlos en el coloquio, los investigadores participantes en el mismo, Sabino Cruz, de Jalapa, Veracruz; José Hernández Castillo, de Huamantla, y Jaime Castro, de Tlaxcala, concluyeron que en esta entidad surgió dicha danza con la influencia española de danzas como la de "Moros y Cristianos".

Translation: [After reviewing various studies one at a time regarding this dance and presenting them in the conversation [presentation?], the participating historians including, Sabino Cruz, from Jalapa, Veracruz; José Hernández Castillo, from Huamantla, and Jaime Castro, from Tlaxcala, concluded that in this discussion said dance originated with the influence of Spanish dances like the Moors and the Christians.]

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Además, dijo el investigador, "concluimos en que los de Tlaxcala tenemos la oportunidad de que en algún momento se registre como originaria del estado la danza de los Matachines y vamos a luchar por eso, para lo cual esperamos el apoyo de las autoridades para lograr un registro de esta danza".

Translation: [In addition, said the historian, 'we concluded with those from Tlaxcala that we have the opportunity that someday it will be registered as originating from the state [of Tlaxcala] the dance of the Matachines and we will fight for this, for which we hope to have the support of the authorities to enable the registration of this dance.]

"En el coloquio Sabino Cruz, José Hernández Castillo y Jaime Castro, generaron supuestos hipotéticos en torno a que la danza de los matachines "es nuestra y partió junto con los pobladores tlaxcaltecas con la salida de las 400 familias al norte del país".

Translation: [In the conversation Sabino Cruz, José Hernández Castillo and Jaime Castro generated their hypothesis that the dance of the matachines is "ours and left with the Tlaxcalan settlers with the departure of the 400 families to the north of our country."]

México desconocido.com (Ortiz Garay, 1999)

[http://www.mexicodesconocido.com.mx/notas/6065-Los-matachines:-soldados-de-la-Virgen-\(Chihuahua\)](http://www.mexicodesconocido.com.mx/notas/6065-Los-matachines:-soldados-de-la-Virgen-(Chihuahua))

Los matachines: soldados de la Virgen (Chihuahua). Andres Ortiz Garay. Mexico desconocido No. 263 / enero 1999.

"El origen europeo de las danzas matachines y de otros bailes asociados a éstas --conocidos como "Danzas de Conquista" o de "Moros y Cristianos"--, es bastante evidente. En las cortes del Viejo Mundo se presentaban las actuaciones de losmattachinsen Francia, losmatacinioen Italia y losmoriskentänzeren Alemania. Aunque la palabra árabemudawjjihen, que significa "los que se ponen cara a cara" o "los que se ponen cara" --tal vez en referencia al uso de máscaras-- podría sugerir un origen arábigo de la danza."

Translation: [The European origin of the matachines dances and the other dances associated with this - known as "Dance of the Conquest" or the "Moors and the Christians" - is very evident. In the courts of the Old World they presented the performances of 'losmattachinsen' in France, 'losmatacinioen' in Italy and 'losmoriskentänzeren' in Germany. Even though the word

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'árabemudawajjihen', meaning "those who stand face to face" or "those who put on a face" -- possibly in reference to the masks - could suggest an Arabic origin for the dance.]

New Mexico Arts (Harris)

<http://www.nmarts.org/matachines.html>

Matachines!

One Name, Many Dances: Differentiating the Danzas de los Matachines. Max Harris

"Patterns of migration have taken this dance at least as far north as Kansas and as far south as Tlaxcala."

"The Zacatecas matachines seem equally as certain to be native in origin. The origin of the matachines of northern New Mexico is more difficult to determine, given the frequent overlay of European dress, music, and narrative. But, if I were to guess, I would say that these, too, are of native American rather than imported European origin."

La primera (Cirigo, 2008)

<http://www.xeouradio.com/2008/03/29/san-jos-cuna-de-los-matachines/>

San José, cuna de los matachines. Francisco Cirigo. 29 de marzo de 2008.

"Aunque existen diversas versiones en torno de su origen, y hay discrepancias sobre la fecha de su llegada a Huajuapán, la mayoría de las fuentes coinciden en que las cabezas de los Matachines fueron traídas de Tezoatlán de Segura y Luna por vecinos del barrio de San José, a principios del siglo XX, por iniciativa del sacerdote José Cantú Corro."

Translation: [Although diverse versions exist regarding its origin, and there are discrepancies regarding the date it arrived in Huajuapán, the majority of the sources agree that the heads of the Matachines were brought from Tezoatlán de Segura y Luna by people from the barrio of San José, about the beginning of the XX century, by the initiative of the priest José Cantú Corro.]

"Según una versión los matachines eran una manifestación de celebración victoriosa de los cristianos sobre los árabes. Los primeros grupos o cuadrillas habrían surgido en Toledo, España, probablemente en el año 1571 y llegado a México con posterioridad a la conquista."

Translation: [According to one version the matchines were a manifestation of the victorious celebration of the Christians over the Arabs. The first groups or movements probably came from Toledo, Spain, probably in 1571 and arrived in Mexico following the conquest.]

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Complejista. Revista multilingüe del Centro Cultural de Estudios Europeos (Delgadillo Torres, 2007)
<http://ccdeentornos.blogspot.com/2007/09/great-indian-migration-transferring.html>

The Great Indian Migration: Transferring Culture, Religion and Technology in New Spain. Rosalba Delgadillo Torres. 13 de septiembre de 2007.

"The Tlaxcaltecas took with them the traditional fiestas. They traveled with the recently adopted Catholic devotions and transferred the images of San Esteban, Saint Michael the Archangel, San Francis, San Antonio and Our Lady of Assumption, among others, putting the names of their Patron Saints to the towns and villages. As well, to take advantage of the acceptance of the catechization of the natives, the monks used music, song, theatre and dance, activities that were realized within the Liturgical Calendar. The native people had their own dances prior to the Spanish conquest, what the monks did was to incorporate the catholic doctrine into the dances. They used such dances as "Los Matachines" which represents the rivalry between Catholics and pagans in which the Catholic's triumph. The other dance "Moors and Christians", accomplishes the same thing. They also celebrated the Christmas Fiestas."

Sabinas Hidalgo.net (Guerrero Aguilar, 2008)
<http://www.sabinashidalgo.net/content/view/4636/43/>

Los danzantes de la Guadalupeana. Antonio Guerrero Aguilar. 7 de diciembre de 2008.

"La danza de los "Matachines" que vemos en muchos sitios del noreste mexicano, es originaria de Tlaxcala, pues recordemos que 400 familias de ellos participaron en la fundación de pueblos. En los matachines se fusiona la cultura europea propia del medioevo con la prehispánica, de ahí la necesidad de preservar y difundir esta expresión de cultura popular."

Translation: [The dance of the Matachines that we see in many site in northern Mexico, is originally from Tlaxcala, because we remember the 400 families of theirs that participated in the founding of the pueblos. In the matachines are fused the European culture from the middle ages with the Prehispanic, from there the necessity to preserve and spread this expression of popular culture.]

Enciclopedia de los Municipios de México (Aguilar Lopez)
Estado de Nuevo León. Bustamante.

"Muy famosas las danzas conocidas como "comparsas" que se organizan para festejar al Señor de Tlaxcala. Grupos dancísticos mixtos ataviados al estilo de los matachines pero con penacho de plumas de guajolote y falda con espejos."

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Translation: [Very famous are the dances known as the comparsas that were organized to celebrate the Señor de Tlaxcala: mixed dance groups dressed in the matachine style but with turkey feather crests and skirts with mirrors.]

Visite Hoteles de Mexico (**Bustamante, Nuevo Leon, 2009**)

http://www.visitehotelesdemexico.com/mexico/Nuevo_Leon/Bustamante/default.aspx

Bustamante, Nuevo León

"La cultura de Bustamante encierra el encanto de viejos tiempos y costumbres ancestrales. Entre los meses del verano se realiza la tradicional Feria del Señor de Tlaxcala, donde aún perviven tradiciones de origen tlaxcalteca, como las comparsas de los matachines: grupos de danza ataviados con penacho de plumas de guajolote y falda con espejos."

Translation: [The cultura of Bustamante includes the music of ancient times and ancestral costumes. The Fair of el Señor de Tlaxcala is schedule during the summer months, filled with traditions with Tlaxcalan origins, like the comparsas of the matachines: mixed dance groups dressed in the matachine style but with turkey feather crests and skirts with mirrors.]

Nanzan University (**Martinez Saldana & Nunez Pintor, after 2000**)

http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/LATIN/kanko/documents/08MartinezNunez_000.pdf

Danzas y Matachines en Bustamante Nuevo León. Tomás Martínez Saldaña y Alejandra Núñez Pintor.

"Bustamante fundado a finales del siglo XVII como una fundación novohispana de San Esteban de la Nueva Tlaxcala conserva las tradiciones que los tlaxcaltecas reprodujeron en el norte y protegidos con las capitulaciones firmadas con el virrey don Luis de Velasco hijo en 1591." [page 3]

Translation: [Bustamante was founded near the end of the XVII century as a new hispanic settlement of San Esteban de la Nueva Tlaxcala [and] conserves the Tlaxcalan traditions reproduced in the north and protected by the concessions signed by the Virrey don Luis de Velasco, son, in 1591.]

¹¹ Tomas Martínez /Carlos Gómez Flores. Estos matachines representan las tradiciones antiguas de las celebraciones del Río Bravo llegadas con los Tlaxcaltecas allá en 1680 cuando se funda San Miguel de Aguayo y todavía se encuentran en Guadalupe Nuevo León, Linares, Villa Aldama , Lampazos y otros pueblos. "

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Translation: [These matachines represent the ancient traditions of the celebrations of the Río Bravo brought there by the Tlaxcalans in 1680 when San Miguel de Aguayo was founded and are still encountered in Guadalupe Nuevo Leon, Linares, Villa Aldama, Lampazos and other pueblos.]

"Los pueblos ribereños del Río Grande celebran el agua así estén en San Antonio Texas en el cañón de Tijeras, en la confluencia de la Sierra Sandia y Manzano en Albuquerque, en Trampas o Chamizal, en los barrios de Santa Fe, o en Taos, en Atrixco, en Nuevo México, en San Elizario y el Paso en Texas o en Senecú o San Lorenzo en Ciudad Juárez Chihuahua. No solo ellos sino todos los pueblos de la cuenca del Río Grande o Río Bravo encuentran esa tradición como parte de su herencia. Las fiestas a lo largo de los ríos Conchos, Pecos, Chama, Salado, San Juan hacen que el norte mexicano y suroeste norteamericano queden hermanados por herencia de sangre, de cultura y de tradiciones hidráulicas que hacen distintivos a estos pueblos."

Translation: [The riparian pueblos of the Río Grande celebrate the water whether they are in San Antonio, Texas in the Tijeras canyon, at the confluence of the Sandia and Manzano mountains in Albuquerque, in Trampas or Chamizal, in the barrios of Santa Fe, or in Taos, in Atrixco, in New Mexico, in San Elizario and El Paso in Texas or in Senecú of San Lorenzo of Juarez, Chihuahua. Not only those but all of the pueblos from the Rio Grande or Rio Bravo we find this tradition as a part of their heritage. The fiestas along the rivers Conchos, Pecos, Chama, Salado, San Juan make the northern Mexico and the southwest North American become brothers through the heritage of blood, of culture and of the hydraulic traditions that make this pueblos distinctive.]

New Mexico Arts (Torres)

<http://www.nmarts.org/matachines/essays.php?p=torres>

Understanding Los Matachines. Larry Torres.

"The dance-drama of los Matachines is an ancient tradition in the Hispanic Southwest. It is one of the very few dances shared by both Hispanic and Native peoples. Its roots can trace their influences back to the Middle Ages in Europe and at the same time, find New World influences included within their scope. Just as the sites where the dance-drama is produced are different, the 44 catalogued versions in the Americas also span places as far-flung as Pueblo in the State of Colorado and the deep rainforests of Belize."

"In the Old World los Matachines found themselves reflected in the Italian commedia dell'arte as mattachinos. The people of England would certainly recognize their own beribboned "Morris Dancers" as "Moorish Dancers."

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"Be the case as it may, it is known that the oldest unbroken tradition of dancing los Matachines can be traced to the town of Bernalillo, New Mexico, where they have been performed for 315 years straight. According to many references, the citizens of Bernalillo made a promise when they returned to their homes after The Pueblo Rebellion of 1680, that if their patron saint San Lorenzo were to keep them safe, they would dance in his honor every year."

New Mexico Arts (Lamadrid)

<http://www.nmarts.org/matachines/essays.php?p=lamadrid>

Moctezuma and the Elders, the Virgin and the Bull: the Matachines Dance of Greater Mexico.

Enrique R. Lamadrid

"A text wrought of interacting symbols always suggests more than it can mean. Historical documentation is tantalizingly scant. Etymologies abound, Arabic, Italian, Spanish, even Nahuatl sources are cited by scholars. Origins are ultimately untraceable. Eurocentric explanations of the dance drama stress the apparently Moorish elements of fringed face masks and opulent costumes, and the theme of Christian conversion. Americanists assert that the Matachines is an Aztec dance that portrays the spiritual conquest of Mexico. No one has yet explained the presence and popularity of the dance in Colombia. Whether the bearers and teachers of this tradition in the far northern reaches of the upper Río Grande were Franciscan missionaries or Mexican Indians is only speculation."

"What is clear is that for centuries, Native, Hispano, and Mestizo peoples have danced the Matachines. From Taos to Sonora, from Zacatecas to Laredo and San Antonio, they step in unison to the insistent, bittersweet music of drums and rattles, guitars, and violins."

"There are two regional styles of Matachines, both of which come together in only one community—Tortugas, a village near Las Cruces, New Mexico."

From Gregory Schaff

I have learned that in 1598 at Matachine Dance was performed by Onate's group at San Gabriel, near San Juan Pueblo.

"These ceremonies are believed to have been introduced by a mythological figure from the south: this was an Indian god who wore European clothes . . . The god is often identified with Montezuma, and the Indian names Payatemu [Keresan] and Poseyemu [Tewa] may represent phonetic distortions

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of the Aztec form of Montezuma." (Dozier 1958:44; in Gertrude Prokosch Kurath with Antonio Garcia, *Music and Dance of the Tewa Pueblos*.)

"According to historical facts, Franciscan missionaries first presented a relative to Matachines, Los Moros, at San Gabriel in 1598. They hoped to replace native ritual dramas and were pleased at the ready acceptance. Actually, the Tewa merely added the drama to their aboriginal repertoire, just as they added the Catholic pantheon to their own. In time they modified the steps and costumes to fit their style. . ." (See also Beals 1945:167-68; Kurath 1949, 1957b; Spicer 1954:85; 1962:510.)

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