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Maitreyi Villamán-Matos

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KEEPERS OF THE MYSTERY
(Preliminary Study of The FIESTAS DE CRUZ
in the Dominican Republic)

Maitreyi Villamán-Matos*

Dominican Studies Working Paper Series 4
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Background

The cross has been used as a spiritual symbol, since the dawn of Civilization to convey spiritual insight and cosmic truth. Examples of crosses have been found in Egyptian pyramids; pottery from Navajo nations, and Hindu Temples. Today, the cross is a symbol because it has literal meaning as a means of execution and it has figurative meaning as Christ’s willing sacrifice of himself for the spiritual freedom of mankind.

The early Roman Church created a Religious Feast Calendar around the “Pagan” festivals involving the cross allowing for easier acceptance of the cross as an important symbol of the Church. One example of this syncretizing is the Feast of the Holy Cross. When Catholicism spread to the Americas, The Feast of the Holy Cross was widely accepted and practiced in Puerto Rico, Mexico and the Dominican Republic.

Objective

1. conduct a preliminary study to research the history of the phenomenon of the Feast of the Holy Cross;
2. determine the extent to which there exists a body of knowledge concerning this Festival;
3. determine the geographical boundaries of the development and practice of the Feast of The Holy Cross;
4. formulate the necessary research questions to be answered by a more detailed comprehensive study.
Conclusions:

1. The Feast of The Holy Cross was indeed introduced in the Dominican Republic with the arrival of the conquistadors and survives until this day in a variety of forms.

The Feast has sustained itself for a number of reasons. Originally The Church was very active and involved in The Feasts. However, as they became more secularized, the various brotherhoods were formed primarily to insure the celebration of The Feast. As the years passed and the brotherhoods began to die out individual families, especially in the rural areas, took vows to maintain the practice of the Feast of The Holy Cross. The responsibilities for these Feasts were passed on within the families from generation to generation up to the present.

The celebrations today vary in length and extent of Festal activity. From the few that still have church and brotherhood participation allowing for a major celebration to the many family sponsored Feasts that are conducted by individual families with the support of friends and neighbors. The length of celebration runs from one to nine days.

2. The majority of the information regarding The Feast of The Holy Cross comes from the oral traditions that have been passed down over the years. There has not been a major study and reporting of this socio-cultural phenomenon. The written materials are limited to an occasional reference in a book or an article in a non-scholarly periodical.
This preliminary study has uncovered evidence that the phenomenon of the Feast of The Holy Cross is widespread in the Dominican Republic. In fact, a more extensive study of the Feasts is likely to uncover celebrations in practically all of the major provinces with widespread practice in the rural areas surrounding the larger towns.
Questions to be Answered by Additional Research:

1. What socio-cultural patterns developed out of the celebrations of the feast of The Holy Cross? How did they impact on the population?

2. Which practices exist today? Which have disappeared? Why?

3. What was the reaction of the Roman Church to these festivities and the ways in which they are practiced? How did this reaction affect the form and practice of the Feasts?

4. To what extent has the ancient Catholic Festival of the Feast of The Holy Cross been used to syncretize or “cover” African based religions?

5. What evidences are there of the Feasts of The Holy Cross continuing or are they likely to disappear with the next or preceding generations?

6. In what other ways is the cross used as a symbol of celebration of Dominican religiosity?
I. The Spanish Conquistadors brought their religious practices and beliefs to the Dominican Republic. One of these was the Festival of the Holy Cross. There are evidences of the practice of the Fiesta de la Cruz in Colonial Times. According to the well known historian Francisco Veloz Maggiolo it was an established custom in Santo Domingo in the late nineteenth century. “From this time, until the second decade of the twentieth century there were large crosses built at the main gates of every new city or town and festivals celebrating the crosses were held every May”¹ These festivals were part of the religious calendar of the Roman Church and participation was required of all. The erection of the Cross at the main gate of each new town was not only a symbolic act of dedication to the Catholic church, but was also indicative of political domination. The celebration in May always started with a mass that included adoration and veneration of the cross and proceeded to secular “festive” activities.

The dates of celebration of the Feast of the Holy Cross stem from the discovery of the relic, believed to be that of the true cross, by Helena, The mother of Constantine on May 3, 335. During the excavation of the site where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre now stands. The Roman calendar marks September fourteenth, as Holy Cross Day because this is the date of the completion of the buildings of the church of the Holy Sepulchre. This date is also suggested by the account of the dedications of Solomon’s temple in the same city in the seventh month of the Jewish Calendar hundreds of years before.²

¹ Francisco Veloz Maggiolo, La Misericordia y su contorno, pp. 279-81.
By the end of the fourth century, many knew of the tradition of the "invention" or act of finding of the true cross by Constantine's mother, Helena, on her visit to the holy place. According to the legend, three crosses had been found deep in the ground, together with the superscription placed over Christ's head and the nails with which he was crucified.

Two festivals of the cross commemorate the Jerusalem traditions. The more ancient one, a major feast of the eastern churches is the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Holy Cross Day) on September fourteenth which as previously mentioned, goes back to the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in 335. The feast was introduced in the West in the seventh century, when it had become doubly famous by the emperor Heraclitus' recovery and restoration of the true cross in 629, which the Persians had taken when they captured Jerusalem in 614. In the same century a Feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross on May third appears in calendars of Galian servia books; this feast was added to the Roman calendar in the ninth century. The Feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross on May third is the precursor of what is now celebrated as the Feast of the Holy Cross in the Spanish speaking countries of the Caribbean.

Another service of the veneration of The relic of the Cross took place on Good Friday and was widely disseminated throughout the early church. Accounts of the devotion of this service can be found as early as the late fourth century and it surfaces today in the Good Friday rites of the Roman Catholic Church as the Veneration of (or "Creeping" to) The Cross.
Establishment of the Feast of the Holy Cross in the Dominican Republic.

As mentioned earlier, the conquistadors brought their religion, Roman Catholicism, to this part of the world. Their most prominent symbol, the cross, was displayed at the main gate of each new city and town and churches and cathedrals were erected for purposes of worship. Religion was the primary tool for controlling and politicizing the indigenous population. Everyone was forced to submit to and accept the religion of the conquerors. The religious practices that may have existed previous to the arrival of the conquerors were absolutely forbidden, at the risk of death. The practice of the imposition of Christianity was continued with even greater ferocity after the introduction of a slave population to the economy of the Dominican Republic.

The Christianizing of the indigenous and slave populations quite naturally included mandatory participation in the rituals of the church as well as the feasts and fasts of the Roman Calendar. In fact, the feast days on the early Roman Calendar were marked to indicate the degree of ritual celebration just as they are today. When a feast day was marked with a single cross it was only for priest and clergy celebration. Two crosses indicated participation by the white population. Three crosses meant that everyone, including the indigenous and slave populations had to participate. The Feast of the Invention of The Holy Cross was just such a "three cross" feast.

The feast of the Holy Cross was one of the most popular with the indigenous and slave populations. It came after the solemn high mass rituals when a truly festive atmosphere took place. This feast was a genuine holiday that, in addition to freedom from the
hardship of enforced labor, offered an opportunity to break the isolation of plantation living; to dance; to parade in the center of the town; to see and fellowship with friends and relatives not seen since the last such feast. As one might expect, the feast of the Holy Cross was embraced wholeheartedly by these people. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that there exists, among the descendants of these populations, brotherhoods that have been formed, under church auspices, to perpetuate the celebration of the Feast of The Holy Cross.

In addition to satisfying a necessary social need, the feast provided the opportunity for these populations to fulfill their desire for a religious and spiritual experience. Having been forced to abandon the highly developed religious practices that they were accustomed to and adopt the religion of the conquerors created a kind of spiritual bankruptcy in the beginning. Eventually, these people began to see similarities and value in Christianity. Over the decades many of the beliefs and practices of their original religions began to be syncretized into the practices of the rituals and feasts of the Roman Church. As a result of this, the original, specific expression of the Feast of The Holy Cross began to slowly change and take on a distinctively indigenous and/or slave characteristic. For example, dance, song and eventually the drum gained greater prominence in their celebrations of this feast. As time went on, there arose a resistance to these practices from the established church and government. In fact, in 1857 a rule for good government was published that contained an article prohibiting the dance in the Feast of The Holy Cross. Further, the rule provided for a fine to be executed on those persons who were found to be in violation. These rules of government, however, were
not in and of themselves successful in eradicating these highly individualistic practices of the Feast of The Holy Cross. Until the beginning of this century it was the practice of the descendants of the indigenous and slave populations to begin a dance from their poor neighborhoods that led onto the main streets of Santo Domingo as part of their celebration of The Feast of The Holy Cross. This dance was very picturesque with a mixture of sound, gesture and showy costumes.  

Another form of celebration characteristic of the early twentieth century featured an after mass procession led by the Priest and the President of the brotherhood. The brotherhoods were specifically formed to conduct the post liturgical part of the Feast of the Holy Cross. The procession would go from the church to several of the houses in the city which had adorned their doors with very festive decorations. Many of the houses had very luxurious crosses and altars in front of them. It was considered a mark of honor by the residents to have the priest stop the procession in front of their house and reverence their cross. During this period and until the latter half of the twentieth century the brotherhoods of the Feast of the Holy Cross were powerful, wide spread and central to the organization of the feast.

In the latter half of the twentieth century the Brotherhoods, as structured overseeing organizations, began to die out, however, the celebration still exists in various forms. In their period there was a diminished participation on the part of the church, in the post liturgical aspects of the celebration. It is possible that the practice of a mass celebrating

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the “Invention” of The Holy Cross began to phase out shortly thereafter. This might have been due partially to the secularization of the Feast of The Holy Cross as well as ecumenical examination in preparation for the Second Vatican Council which ended in 1965. Consequent to these events, the undivided members of the old brotherhoods, along with the people, began to take control of the celebration of the individual Feasts of the Holy Cross. At this point the feast began to assume the identity of a religious festivity organized and supervised by certain people in their various communities. This transformed the feast into an intimate, personal celebration in individual households supported by the community.

From the middle of the twentieth century up to present times the celebration of the Feast of The Holy Cross took one of three forms. The first was a celebration initiated as a result of a pledge by an individual to conduct the feast for a certain number of years. These feasts took place in the individuals home, at a specially erected altar, and involved members of the family and a few neighbors.

The second type of feast was characterized by wide spread community endorsement. The celebration usually took place in and around a chapel which had been erected in veneration of the cross that was erected in the town by either the original town settlers or the Roman Church. As mentioned, this feast was larger and involved more town residents than did the individual in-home feasts. In some instances, these feasts were a direct outgrowth of individual feasts that were no longer celebrated by the original pledgees.
Thirdly, we have the much larger celebration organized and implemented in a city such as El Seibo by one of the last remaining brotherhoods with some participation by the Church. At one time, there may have been as many as seven or eight of these "brotherhood" celebrations in cities where the cross was so important that the status of "Patron Saint" had been ascribed to it. Eventually the Brotherhoods died out and church participation diminished to the extent that the feast in El Seibo is the only one of these larger feasts that still exists.

Since the church's practice was to venerate saints by praying for their intervention over a period of nine days with a feast on the tenth day, it was logical for the Feasts of The Holy Cross, which originally started with the praying of the Rosary, to last for a period of nine days. Today, this is a very common form of celebration for this Feast. A nine day celebration during which prayers are said, songs are sung, candles are lit, and flowers are placed in front of the cross which has been placed on an altar constructed, or designated for this Feast. Occasionally one might encounter a Feast of shorter duration, but the majority of the Feasts last for nine days.
II. One of the objectives of this preliminary research was to determine the extent to which there exists a body of knowledge concerning the Feast of The Holy Cross. Research indicates that whatever knowledge exists, quite naturally is stems from an oral tradition. Written sources are almost exclusively those works which deal with the folklore and cultural aspects of the Dominican Republic. To date, the research has not uncovered any written works that deal exclusively or in depth with the Feast of The Holy Cross.

The material compiled describes the Feast of The Holy Cross as an expression of the popular Dominican religiosity, most particular by as a veneration to the cross. Other means of devotion to the cross include pilgrimages to Calvary where rosaries are recited and vows are reaffirmed and ritual dances such as those that are included in the ceremonies in places like Palma Sola. In addition, the cross is used in the rituals to Saint Elias (The Baron of the Cemetary) and his guedeses as a symbol on the altar.

*The Feasts of the Holy Cross are mentioned as such in:*


"Las Fiestas de Cruz de la misericordia se realizaban todo el mes de mayo desde el siglo XIX hasta los primeros años del siglo XX. Una sociedad formada para este fin se encargaba de hacer una pequeña colecta para reunir los fondos necesarios para las celebraciones. La Cruz de la Misericordia se encontraba en la calle de la Puerta de la Misericordia esquina Espaillat. Todos los días del mes una orquesta iba por las calles del sector con acordes de vals o alguna danza de moda y echando los concurrentes vivas a la Cruz de la Misericordia. Se cantaba la salve al son de la orquesta delante de un altar que se adornaba al frente de la Cruz. También como parte de las celebraciones se realizaban bailes a los que iban los jóvenes de las más alta sociedad de entonces. Las calles se adornaban con papelitos picados que colgaban de cordeles y se
escuchaban las explosiones de cohetes, montantes, garbanzos y se realizaban juegos y concursos como la “comida de soco”, la “gallinita ciega” y el “palo encebado”.

Alejandro Ramos took the information for his dictionary from the book “La Misericordia y su Contorno” by Francisco Veloz Maggiolo. To understand this quote it is necessary to know “the colonial customs that lasted until the first decades of the twentieth century that in some streets of Santo Domingo, roads and entrances of the town could be found across implanted. These crosses were almost always placed in a wide lot or in the crossroads. They were named The Cross of Mercy, of Saint Michael, of Saint Francis, la del solar de la piedra and la del solar Santana.

It is implied that these crosses remained in place all year long out in the open in sight of the people of the area. In May came they paid homage to the crosses celebrating a feast where the sacred (prayers, rosaries, etc.) and the profane (dances, games, etc.) were united. The Cross of Mercy enjoyed a special importance because it was situated in the colonial zone in the door of the wall surrounding the city. The Cross gets its name from this door because it was the entrance to the area where executions were carried out (hangings, beheadings) and perhaps was a very well attended area.

2. *Ayer o el Santo Domingo de hace 50 años* by Luis E. Gómez. In the chapter titled “Las grandes fiestas de barrio”, the feasts are mentioned by month:

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5 Francisco Veloz Maggiolo, *La Misericordia y su contorno*, pp. 279-81
"En mayo, las ruidosas fiestas de cruz, en cuyos días eran adornadas con guimaldas y flores las varias cruces que hasta hace pocos años existieron medio a medio de algunas calles y plazas, los quijongos, sancochos, bailes, reinados en los que había que discutirle la corona a Tina Trabous y a Juan María Jiménez."\(^6\)

This book was published in 1944, during the time of Trujillo, and the reference to the Feasts of The Cross restates and confirms what was said before in reference to the Feasts of The Cross of Mercy regarding emphasis on the profane (juegos, sancochos, coronations, dances), but with almost no information about the sacred aspects. The word quijongos and the names of Tina Trabous and Juan María Jiménez require a separate study to make this quote more comprehensible.

3. \textit{Lengua y folklore de Santo Domingo} by Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi. In this book the Feasts of The Cross are mentioned twice. The first, in the chapter titled "Del folklore de Santo Domingo" Demorizi declares at the beginning:

"Ciertamente que el folklore nuestra América deriva del folklore de España, primordialmente, pero también es cierto que en cada uno de nuestros países tiene matices inconfundibles. ¿Cuáles son estos matices? Señalarlos sería objeto de largo y sugestivo estudio, ajeno a la levedad y apresuramiento de este apunte. Entre nosotros, esos matices habría que buscarlos en los usos y aficiones predominantes; en el baile, el merengue; en la bebida, el ron; en la comida, el sancocho; en las armas, el machete; en el vestido campesino, la pollera; entre los instrumentos musicales, el cuatro y luego el acordeón; entre las fiestas populares, las fiestas de cruz; en la versificación popular, la copla y la décima..."\(^7\)


\(^7\) Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, \textit{Lengua y folklore de Santo Domingo}, Editorial Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, Santiago, R.D., 1975, p. 57.
The second time that Rodriguez Demorizi refers to the Feasts of The Cross is in the chapter dedicated to San Juan de la Maguana. This time in detail:

"Las Fiestas de Cruz, en honor de la Santísima Cruz, tienen lugar durante todo el mes de mayo. Un altar con la imagen venerada, y cuajado de luces y de flores, congrega a los devotos que entonan a todo pulmón salves que casi siempre rematan con este estribillo:

Santísima, Santísima Cruz
de mayo, señora eh...

Los festivales de cada noche tienen sus abanderados que los hacen más rumbosos obsequiando licores, dulces. En estas fiestas se come, se bebe, se hacen conquistas amorosas y gozan del favor de todos aquéllos que andan a caza de aventuras donjuanescas."8

This book is based on a report compiled by the Secretary of Education using a questionnaire sent to teachers in the provinces of the country in 1921. Note that the prologue is dated 1945 and appears in an edition dated 1975. It is easy to notice that Sr. Rodríguez Demorizi is a Hispanophile who, by art of magic or cultural blindness omits the African-Taíno elements of The Dominican cultural heritage when enumerating the constituent elements of their folklore. This report, specifically, creates confusion because it places the Feast of the Cross from San Juan de la Maguana in the Province of Azua. To understand this one must know that the political division of the provinces on the map of the Dominican Republic have changed numerous times, including the names. Perhaps, in 1921, San Juan de la Maguana belonged to the province of Azua. In actuality they are two separate provinces.

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8 En Rodríguez Demorizi, po. Cit., p. 232.
The weak description of the sacred aspects of the celebration when referring to these sacred songs (salves) sung by the devotees that ended with the refrain:

Santísima, Santísima Cruz
de mayo, señora eh...

offers the hunt of the existence of a repertoire of songs dedicated specifically to The Holy Cross.

Putting the Feast of the Cross aside, I found in the book, *Lengua y folklore de Santo Domingo* in a section titled “Las villas dominicanas y sus advocaciones”; a list of the town with their complete names (always with the name of a saint). Following are the towns that have the cross as a patron saint:

Santa Cruz de Barahona
Santa Cruz de El Seibo
Santa Cruz de Gato
Santa Cruz de Palenque
Santa Cruz del Espíritu Santo Sabana Grande
Santa Cruz Valverde.

This information is judged to be very important because it points out possible places where the Feast of The Holy Cross is actually celebrated.

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9 En Rodríguez Demorizi, op. cit., p. 310
4. *Santo Domingo en el folklore universal* by Flérida de Nolasco. The chapter “El árbol y la cruz:” is the most serious study encountered up to now. In this bibliographical perusal about the Feast of The Holy Cross in the Dominican Republic, Flérida de Nolasco explains the origins of the Feasts of The Holy Cross beyond Catholicism and inserts the cross in the Greek and Roman religions that existed in Europe before Christianity. The descriptions of Feasts of The Holy Cross in Cuba, Puerto Rico, México, Perú and Brazil, accomplished the framing of this celebration in a wider perspective.

The section dedicated to the Dominican Republic consists of six pages, where it mentions the feasts of The Holy Cross in Puerto Plato, Azua, Santo Domingo and El Seibo. The last one El Seibo is the one with the most detailed listing:

“Nuestros campesinos colocan la Santa Cruz a la vera del camino real adornándola con flores y papeles vistosos. Procesionalmente acuden en masa a cantar delante de la Cruz. El baile es complemento obligado en esta fiesta piadosa, va acompañado del canto coreado, cuyo ritmo marcan y sostienen “los palos grandes”, especie de tambulá, los “palitos”, instrumento rústico de la numerosa familia del tambor.”

The musical instruments mentioned in this description are indisputably of African origin as opposed to those mentioned in the book, “*Lengua y folklore de Santo Domingo*” by Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, The cuatro and the accordion.

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As for responsive "Salves", there is one cited from Puerto Plata, collected by Julio Arzeno:

Qué bonito altar,
quién lo adornaría
parece que ha sido
la Virgen María.
El día del juicio vendrá
del cielo la Santa Cruz.
su vista temblará
el judío y el francmasón,
concédenos por la Cruz
nuestra eterna salvación.\textsuperscript{11}

These two stanzas are well known because they form a part of the verses sung in the Fiestas of The Holy Cross in Puerto Rico and New York. The stanza belongs to one of the last verses of the song "Aguinaldos", with a slight difference in the second verse.

The second stanza belongs to the fifth song of the Puerto Rican book of songs titled "Oh Jesús Crucificado"

As mentioned earlier, The Feast of The Holy Cross in El Seibo receives the most attention in the work of Flerida de Nolasco. It appears that this Fiesta is one of the most important in the country because of the fervor and enthusiasm that the devotees put into its organization and celebration.

\textsuperscript{11} En Flérida de Nolasco, op. cit., p. 95.
One of Flerida de Nolasco's earliest memories of The Feasts come from her childhood.

"Hasta los primeros años del presente siglo, vividores de barriadas pobres bailaban la danza de la Santa Cruz penetrando en las calles centrales de la capital. La danza pintoresca, amalgama de sonidos, de gestos y abalorios vistosos y chocantes..."13

Although the title of Flerida de Nolasco's book is *Santo Domingo en el folklore universal*, the work is primarily limited to Europe and specifically Spain. This creates a distortion in the perception and comprehension of Dominican culture. However, this does not take away the importance of her work. It is no more than one might expect when considering the fact that her book was published in 1956 in the era of Trujillo, "the year of the Benefactor of the Country."

5. "*Fiestas patronales y juegos populares dominicanos,*" by Fradique Lizardo, J.P Muñoz Victoria.

As indicated by the name of this book one can find here a listing of the Feasts of Dominican Patron Saints, using a calendar year chronology. For example, on the third of

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12 En Flérida de Nolasco, op. Cit. P. 96
13 En Flérida de Nolasco, op. Cit. P. 97.
May under the celebration of The Invention of The Holy Cross these places are mentioned:

“Boca de arroyo (Navajo en Medio, Prov. San Cristóbal)
Santa Cruz de Barahona (Prov. De Barahona)
La Caleta (Prov. El Seibo)
Sec. Campina (Prov. Peravia)
Sec. Cuey (Prov. El Seibo); Gato (Prov. La Altagracia)
Hato Mayor del Rey (Prov. El Seibo)
Batey La Higuera (Prov. El Seibo)
Sec. Magarin (Prov. El Seibo)
Najayo en Medio (Dist. Minicipal de Yaguate, Prov. San Cristóbal)
Nizao (Prov. Peravia)
Sec. Mata de Palma (Prov. El Seibo)
Pescadería (Prov. El Seibo)
Sec. San Francisco (Prov. El Seibo)
Santa Cruz del Seibo (Prov. El Seibo)
Valverde (Prov. Valverde)
Santa de yaguate (Prov. San Cristóbal)”¹⁴

As noted earlier, this festival of the Invention of the Cross has its origins in Catholic tradition dating from 335 CE with the dedication of The Church of The Holy Sepulchre.

There is another important Catholic Feasts observed in relation to the veneration of The Cross that is called The “Exaltación de la Santísima Cruz,” celebrated on September fourteenth in Barahona, El Seibo and Valverde.¹⁵

The Exaltation of The Holy Cross commemorates, as previously noted, the Emperor Heraclitus’ recovery and restoration of the relic of the original cross of crucifixion in 629, which the Persians had taken away when they captured Jerusalem in 614.

¹⁵ En Fradique Lizardo, op. Cit. P. 155.
This listing of places where there are Feasts of The Holy Cross demonstrates once again the extent to which there are celebrations in the Dominican Republic. In fact, in one place, El Seibo, there are as many as nine celebrations. Providing a wonderful opportunity to gather information about the "Salves" and songs characteristic of this Fiesta. Although published in 1979, there is evidence that some of these feasts are still being celebrated.

6. "Almanaque folklórico dominicano", by Ivan Domínguez, José Castillo y Dagoberto Tejeda. This is an easy book to use. Again, the information is ordered in the form of a calendar with interesting comments and an abundance of photographs. In reference to the Feasts of The Holy Cross one’s attention is drawn to the fact that the feasts start on the 26th of April and last for nine days. The places mentioned are Matagorda, Bani, Cañafistol, El Seibo, Hato Mayor, San Pedro Macoris, Mao, Nizao. Interestingly, this book, published in 1978 mentions one individual, Mateo, who celebrated the Feast of The Holy Cross in Santo Domingo for more than forty years.

7. "El Seibo", by Francisco E. Beras, Guarinoex Aquino Morales and Manuel de Jesús Javier. This article was published in the magazine Bohio Dominicano. This magazine is written and edited for tourists and is distributed free in the airports, hotels, restaurants and travel agencies throughout the Caribbean, with the obvious intent of attracting visitors.

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16 Iván Domínguez, José Castillo, Degoberto Tejeda, Almanaque folklórico dominicano, Editora Alpha y Omega, Santo Domingo, 1978, p. 49.

17 En Domínguez, Castillo, Tejeda, op. cit., p. 83.
this brief account of The Feast of The Holy Cross receives maximum attention among listings of entertainment such as bull fights, carousels, parades and other unforgettable events.

Furthermore, there is a description of the Feasts of The Holy Cross by Nino Solano, that has been celebrated since 1910 in the sector called El Rincón. Referring to the songs in honor of the Cross the article says:

"En cada una de las salves se intercalan cántico en honor a la Santísima Cruz – patente en un altar adornado con cirios. Los cánticos y alabanzas a la patrona son constantes durante las nueve noches que se celebran los velorios."18

The dance, accompanied by the drums (palo mayor, palo menor and alcahuete) is an essential element. Emeteria Mercedes was known for dancing in The Fiesta de Cruz for more than eighty years. She died in 1965 at the age of ninety eight.

The tourist magazine "Bohio dominicano" was first published in the spring of 1967.

8. "Panorama del folklore dominicano by Edna Carrido de Boggs is an article published in the magazine Folklore Américas (1961) that mentions the Feasts of The Holy Cross in El Seibo, without going into detail, as an example of a folkloric religious feast.

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"Las Fiestas de la Santa Cruz" by Manuel de Jesús Javier García appearing in the December, 1947 Boletín del Folklore Dominicano. In this piece Sr. García makes passing mention of the Fiestas previously noted, however, he goes into more details about the solemnity, animation and splendor of the Feasts of El Seibo. This work may be the only existing written material that provides descriptive detail of the social aspects, and the actual implementation and celebration at El Seibo. This event has been referred to throughout this report. This book ends account about The Feasts of The Holy Cross is summary of another manifestation of Dominican religiosity that sheds light on the manner and the symbol of the cross as used in the Dominican Republic.

10. "Folklore de la República Dominicana", by Manuel José Andrade, the chapter "Rosarios", of his book mentions that there is a procession to Calvary, in a form of collective penitence (some of the devotees even carry stones) reciting the rosary. After arriving at Calvary they sing “Salves” to the cross. The Calvary is formed with the large and two smaller crosses placed by the side of the road. These Calvaries are generally placed in front of the house of a devotee. One of the salves sung in a rosary in La Vega is:

Dulcíssima Virgen
del cielo delicia
la flor que presento
la flor de mayo.

Con las flores a María
con flores a porfia
con flores a María
que madre nuestra es.  

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Again, we find two stanzas that relate to two distinct songs of the Puerto Rican Feasts of The Holy Cross with slight variations. The First stanza from the chorus of the song “Dulcisima Virgen” and the second stanza from the chorus of the song titled “Corramos fervorosos.” Both stanzas contain only slight variation from the Puerto Rican versions.

This preliminary study of the extent to which there exists a body of written material concerning the Feasts of The Holy Cross demonstrates that there is not a great body of written material about these Feasts. There are numerous references to the Feasts of The Holy Cross in various books and pamphlets, but the definitive study of this phenomenon of Dominican religiosity is yet to be written.

Furthermore, conversations with various experts in the areas of religious and cultural diversity in the Dominican Republic did not yield any specific details about the Feasts of The Holy Cross. This was mainly because none of the persons interviewed had ever conducted an exhaustive study of the Feast nor had they any first hand knowledge of such an understaking. However, they were very helpful in providing a general overview of the various religious practices in The Dominican Republic. Some examples follows:

**Alejandro Paulino Ramos**, professor of Dominican history at the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, provided the background for understanding the socio-cultural history that contributed to the development of the practice of the Feasts of The Holy Cross. In fact, he provided many of the books and articles, cited herein, that were soon to be listed
with the publication of his "Diccionario del patrimonio cultural y folklórico dominicano."

Carlos Andújar, director of the Dominican Institute of Anthropological studies pointed out the aspects of the popular Dominican religiosity: "The popular tradition in spite of being Catholic has a strong African component as evidenced by possession, drumming and the use of Salves. Based on my experience the coloring elements of Dominican religiosity are: The messianic cult of Liborio Mateo; The cult of the dead; Haitian Voodoo and Brotherhoods.

Dr. Lusitania Martínez, of the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo has knowledge of the religious movement in Palma Sola an area in San Juan de la Maguana known for its reverence of the messianic cult of Liborio Mateo that ended in the massacre of December 28, 1962. In her book Palma Sola opresión y esperanza (su geografía mítica y social) she mentions the existence of a series of calvaries and crosses important to the Palma Sola rituals.

"Las cruces de Palma Sola eran cinco. La Cruz del Juramento era la primera cruz a visitar de acuerdo a los ritos. Frente a dicha cruz se decía: "Usted jura ser fiel a Cristo y al Maestro Liborio. Las tres niñas Santa y Bendita y a mi Madre María Santísima" "Yo juro", contestaban.

La segunda cruz, llamada Cruz Negra o de la reverencia, era la cruz destinada al perdón de los pecados. Se solía llamar la cruz del paso. Muy próximo a la iglesia estaba el cuadro o calvario, que contenía un conjunto de tres cruces, una grande, Cruz Madre Piadosa, con una pequeña a cada lado. Padre, Hijo y Espíritu Santo, ante los cuales se santiguaban los fieles y rogaban por todo el grupo."20

Interviews with June Rosenberg, a noted anthropologist and former professor at the Institute of Anthropological studies; Ivan Domínguez, a professor with Alianza Dominicana and Director of El Grupo Baile Folklórico Dominicano and Dagoberto Tejeda, Director of El Instituto de Folklore Dominicano reinforced the characteristics previously discovered about the Feasts of The Holy Cross. Namely, they reiterated that Feasts were held at Matagorda, El Seibo and Cañafistol. These interviews re-established the finding that there is no definitive written work about the Fiestas de Cruz.
An investigation into the geographical boundaries of the development and practice of the Feast of The Holy Cross shows that the Feasts have made penetration in all of the major regions of the Dominican Republic. When each region, the North, the South and the East is examined separately we find evidences of Feasts of The Holy Cross that differ in age, size as well as original and current sponsorship. This research gathered information about the Feasts of the Holy Cross in the following places:

**NORTH**

In the province of Monte Cristo in the town of Las Matas de Santa Cruz there is a Feast in the month of May that dates from colonial times. This Feast began originally under the auspices of the Church and like some of today’s Feasts is currently implemented by one of the brotherhoods that grew out of church sponsorship.

In Santa Cruz a small town not too distant from Las Matas de Santa Cruz there is a Feast of the Invention of The Holy Cross that is celebrated in September.

In the province of Valverde, the town of Mao there is a large Feast of the Invention of The Holy Cross celebrated in September with many participants, that is under the auspices of the local church, this Feast also had its origins in colonial times. The cathedral situated in this town is known as The Cathedral of The Holy Cross and they take responsibility along with their brotherhood for the implementation of the Feast.
In the province of Dajabon there is a small village called Cruz de Cabrera where there is held a Feast of The Holy Cross in May. This Feast has been the responsibility by vow of the Solí family for the past seventy years.

SOUTH

In the province of San Juan de La Maguana, around the town of Las Matas de Farfan there are four small family sponsored Feasts that are enjoyed by the communities. All four of these Feasts are celebrated at the same time in the month of May. The four communities involved are: La China; La Rancha; Caña Segura and the town of Las Matas de Farfan itself. In the town of San Juan, the seat of the government of this province, there are two family sponsored Feasts of The Holy Cross. Both Feasts are celebrated in May and they are small and intimate. As mentioned earlier in this report, all of these Feasts that are sponsored by individual families are celebrated each year as a result of a vow that has been passed down from family member to family member for more than a half century.

In the province of Barahona, the town of Santa Cruz de Barahona there was, at one time, a very active brotherhood that staged an annual Feast of The Holy Cross. In fact, the cathedral in this town, Virgen de Rosario, was originally called the cathedral de Santa Cruz. In other parts of the Dominican Republic, specifically El Seibo, one can find evidence that at one time, the brotherhood in Barahona sent representatives to the annual meeting of the various brotherhoods of The Holy Cross in the Dominican Republic. At present, there is a popular Feast staged under the sponsorship of a private chapel with
strong support from the community. In northern Barahona in the village of Jaquimeyes there is a very intimate Feast of The Holy Cross sponsored by a single family and their friends.

In the province of Azua, the town once had a very large powerful brotherhood sponsoring The Feast under the auspices of the church. These Feasts were first staged more than a hundred years ago. Presently, one family, the D’Acosta family that was part of the original brotherhood has assumed the responsibility for sponsoring a very well attended Feast. The individual tasks involved in the staging of the Feast have been handed down within different families for many years.

In the town of Peralta there is an intimate celebration of The Feast of The Holy Cross celebrated by Sra. Cristobalina Mendez with the support of her friends and neighbors. In a nearby village, Cascajal, there is a community Chapel that sponsors a Feast as well. Both of these Feasts are celebrated in the month of May.

In the province of Peravia, the town of Nizao there are five family sponsored, intimate Feasts that are supported by friends and neighbors. All of these Feasts exist and have continued as a result of personal vows. These Feasts are scheduled sequentially throughout the entire month of May so as to avoid conflict with each other. Several of these Feasts date back for more than fifty years. In one of Nizao’s neighborhoods, Don Gregorio, there is a Feast currently sponsored by the Valdez family that has been carried on since the time of Sr. Valdez’s great grand-parents.
Near the town of Bani, in Matagorda, the Holy Cross is the Patron Saint. In this village there is a community chapel that stages a huge celebration of The Feast of The Holy Cross. The celebration itself is held in the chapel but nearby there is usually a stage, with carnival type entertainment and refreshments. As one might expect the entire community looks forward to and enjoys this Feast. Begun more than a hundred years ago by a single family, it is now staged by a committee of community residents including participation by several descendants of the original sponsoring family. In another section of Bani, Cañafistol, there is a huge Feast similar to the one in Matagorda. The chapel in Cañafistol is adjacent to the church of The Holy Cross and there seems to be a struggle for control of the Feast between the chapel and the church. In May of 1998 there were two Feasts held at the same time, next to each other. One was sponsored by the community chapel and the other by the church.

In three areas of Bani, Arroyo Salado, El Alto and Rio Arriba there are Feasts of The Holy Cross that are very well attended. The ones in Rio Arriba and El Alto are family sponsored. In Arroyo Salado there is a community based (as opposed to church based) brotherhood that has been in existence for more than a hundred years passing on the tradition of the Feast of The Holy Cross from generation to generation. This Feast is usually very well attended. As in other places the celebration offers vendors of all types and music.
In the rural area of Montería, Bani, there are three small chapels each of which has a family sponsored Feast of the Holy Cross that enjoys community support. The start dates of the Feasts are staggered so as to provide maximum participation by the local residents. All of these Feast have the interest and the blessing of the church.

In the province of San Cristobal we can find four villages that have a variety of different Feasts celebrations. In Palanque there is a small Feast of The Holy Cross sponsored by an individual family with the participation of friends and neighbors. In Najayo Medio we have a chapel sponsored celebration of The Feast. In Yaguate we have a very large Feast put on by a committee formed of representatives from political, educational, social and other community organization. Of all the Feasts, this one is the least religious and the most commercial. It is a carnival like atmosphere with vendors, entertainment games of chance and the like. Finally, in Boca de Arroyo we have another small Feast of The Holy Cross sponsored by a private chapel.

In the province of Monte Plata, the rural area of Guazuma there is a very old celebration of The Feast dating back more than two hundred years. It takes place near a very beautiful community built church that grew over the years on the site of an original miracle as seen by a resident. Each of the nine nights of the Feast is the responsibility of a different family and has been passed on from generation to generation. There is at least one night that is the responsibility of a celebrant who is in his nineties.
In the province of Hato Major, in the areas known as Manchado and Doña Ana there are small Feasts. The Feast in each area is the result of a long standing familial vow and they are supported mainly by family and friends.

**EAST**

In the province of El Seibo, the town of El Seibo; as mentioned elsewhere in this report, is one of the largest Feasts in the Dominican Republic. This Feast is sponsored by one of the country's oldest brotherhoods, Fervorosos de la Santísima Cruz, and is attended by all of the religious dignitaries around the area. Running from the first through the ninth of May, there are masses, processions and a great deal of carnival type entertainment for the attendees. It has been estimated that upwards of 500 persons will be in attendance on any of the nine days. On the third of May, the day of the holy pilgrimage, attendance can exceed one thousand. Elsewhere in this province in the sections known as La Higuera, San Valerio and Magarín these are small family sponsored Feasts of The Holy Cross that date back for many decades.

As the preceding pages show the celebration of the Feast of The Holy Cross is widespread in the Dominican Republic. There is further evidence of many other such Feasts in provinces and areas not visited within the scope of this preliminary study.
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* Difícil de encontrar y por lo tanto no he podido leerlo. Requiere una búsqueda minuciosa.


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