

# RECORDINGS IN NATURAL CAVES

## MEXICO

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### Gruta de Balankanché

Chichen Itza, Xkalakooop, Yucatan

RIC-MX1 United States 1970

### ORACIONES REZADAS EN LA GRUTA DE BALANKANCHE \*

RIC – Ethnic – Choral

**Selections:**

*Side One* – Ofrecimiento del Discurso [Offering of the Speech]

*Side Two* – Ceremonia en el Altar Major a los Trece Chakes  
[Ceremony at the Main Altar to the 13 Chac Gods]

**Comp:** Romualdo Ho'il (from ancient Mayan chants)

**Perf:** Romualdo **HO'IL** (The H-men)  
& 7 Mayan boys (vocal & vocal sound effects)

**Prod. Co:** National Geographic Society;  
Washington, D.C. & Middle American Research Institute;  
Tulane University; New Orleans, LA

**Rec. Eng:** Victor Segova & Richard H. Stewart

**Rec. Date:** Oct. 17-18, 1959

**Transcript of Text:** Ramón Arzápalo

**Time:** (Side 1) 6:19 & (Side 2) 7:05

**EP:** ORACIONES REZADAS EN LA GRUTA DE BALANKANCHE  
National Geographic Society/Tulane University (No Cat. No.)  
7" 33rpm (EP) (Sides 1 & 2)

**Notes:** The Grutas de Blankanché are located 4km west of Chichén Itzá. "Blankanché" means throne of the jaguar. In 1954 after many years of systematic exploration José Gomez found a false section of cave wall that turned out to be crude masonry sealing access to the newly discovered chambers. (Andrews et al. 1970) Investigation by Mexican and American archeologists revealed numerous pottery vessels and other artifacts associated with ceremonial offerings.

Early in the project they were contacted by Romualdo Ho'il, the *h-men* or Mayan priest from nearby Xcalakooop. "The *h-men* is the practitioner of the native folk religion and magic which has survived into Catholic times. He informed us that, because of the sacred nature of the cave, it would be necessary to perform various rituals to propitiate the cave deities and escape the danger of supernatural retribution for our profanation. He named the ceremony *Tsikul t' an ti' untsilooob*, which means 'Reverent message to the Lords.'" (Andrews et al. 1970)

These ceremonies were conducted principally in Chamber 1, Altar of the Jaguar, and in Chamber 3, the Water Chamber in honor of several Mayan gods including Akan Bamam, Okomtun Chaak, K'ulu' Balam, Mistum Balam, and K'ulu' Chaak (Chac is the Mayan rain god). The *h-men* was assisted by his principal assistant, the *its'ak*, and 12 other assistants. The archeologists Dr; Andrews and Pavón Abreu were suppliant. Offerings of chickens, a turkey, and other ritual food were made and cups of saka' were drunk at both sites.

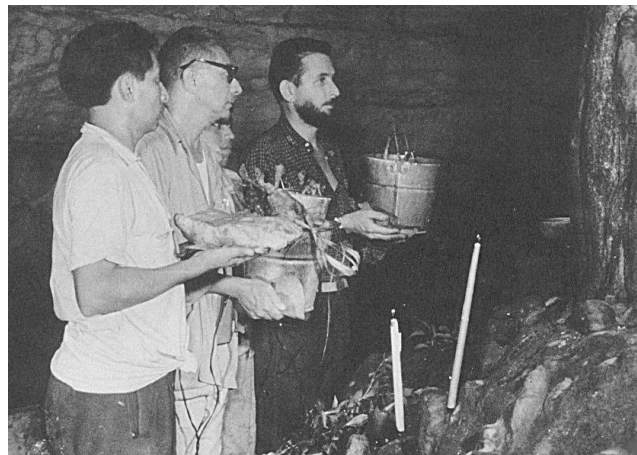
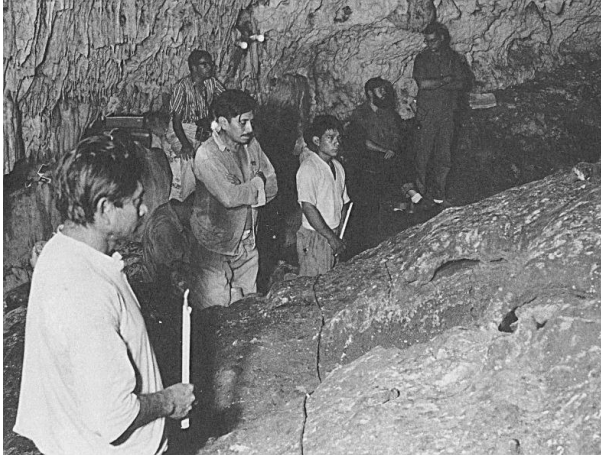


The Altar - Watercolor by Luis Covarrubias

Side One, *Ofrecimiento del Discurso*, was spoken in Chamber 1 and starts with the Catholic sign of the cross invoking the Holy Ghost. Later the “gran Cristo [grand Christ]” and “Jesús Mariá” are mentioned several times. This is a rapidly spoken prayer where the *h-men* has to stop to catch his breath once in a while. In two places he pauses for the others to respond. A full transcription of the text by Ramón Arzápalo is in Andrews’ book. The microphone was sometimes present and others distant. At one point the tape is accidentally switched to fast forward.

Side Two, *Ceremonia en el Altar Mayor a los Trece Chacs*, was delivered in Chamber 1 again. “The great offering to the 13 Chacs took place at 11:15. Seven small boys, who had been patiently waiting all night, joined the scene. These, seated in a line beside the spot where the *h-men* knelt, imitated toads and frogs; Don Fernando Barbachano and I [Andrews] officiated before the altar, kneeling, and each holding a jacara of saka’ in one hand and a lighted candle in the other. All the other participants knelt behind us. The *h-men* recited a long prayer. From time to time he made a noise resembling thunder, while the children imitated the songs of different toads and frogs.” (Andrews et al. 1970)

This side starts with the *h-men* announcing in Spanish the title of this prayer to the 13 Chacs gods. The rest is quite confusing as more than one prayer is recorded here. In the book Ramón Arzápalo has transcribed five prayers to *Los trece Chacs* [the 13 Chacs], one to *Los dioses Chacs* [the Chac gods], and three to *Los señores Chacs* [the Lord Chacs]. While the *h-men* recites the prayer the seven Mayan boys can be heard croaking in the background throughout, resulting in a sort of cacophony. At one point the *h-men* shouts and the others respond. At 4:04 he stops and, with some frog sounds in the background, there seems to be a discussion, then the prayer takes up again.



The photos (on lt.) shows the *h-men* with candle & (on rt. – lt. to rt.) An assistant, Andrews, the *its’ak*, & Alfredo Barrera standing on the highest part of the Altar, each with a pail filled with cooked fowl.

**Ref:** Andrews IV, E. Wyllys & Barrera Vasquez, A 1970, *Balankanche, Throne of the Tiger Priest*, Middle American Research Institute; Tulane University; New Orleans, LA, p. 5-7, 72-89, 123-124

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Grutas de Balankanché, Slides & Video of cave (4:11), [YouTube](#) (◀VIDEO)

Oldham, Tony 2003 & Duckeck, Jochen, Gruta de Balankanché,  [showcaves](#)

Thomas, Christian 2011, *Les Grottes du Yucatan – No. 1 – La Région de Valladolid*, Editions Xibalba, Montreuil, France, p. 96-97

Trono del jaguar, Gobierno del Estado de Yucatán, (in Spanish), [yucatan.gob.mx](#)

[caveinspiredmusic.com](http://caveinspiredmusic.com)

