

"IT IS THEIR DRINKING THAT HINDERS THEM":
BALCHÉ AND THE USE OF RITUAL
INTOXICANTS AMONG THE COLONIAL
YUCATEC MAYA, 1550-1780

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*This is the green blood of his daughter for which he asks: it is Maya wine or balché [...]
This is what the bone of his daughter is: it is the flexible bark of the balché tree.
This is the thigh of which he speaks: it is the trunk of the balché tree.
This is what the arm of his daughter is: it is the branch of the balché.
This is what he calls weeping: it is a drunken speech [...]
Chilam Balam of Chumayel*

*This is the taking of the occasion. This is the balché ceremony.
As we honor him here. We, the rulers spread in many separate parts,
we worship them, the true gods. There they are as stones,
the established representation of the true gods [...]
Chilam Balam of Chumayel*

*They gave to each of those who danced and sang a small cup of balché to drink.
They gave it to them so frequently that they became drunk with it and did
and said so many extravagant things and made such grimaces that it was a sight to behold [...]
Juan Farfán, Spanish encomendero in Yucatán, 1579*

*The reason why they prohibited this drink or native wine [balché] was
because when they became drunk from it they committed idolatry and had carnal relations
with their sisters, daughters and other relatives, and in order to avoid such great sins,
they prohibited the drinking of balché [...]
Relación de Nabalám, Tahcabó and Cozumel, 1579*

*You should place much caution and be efficient in prohibiting
the dangerous beverage called Balché, impeding totally the cutting
and trade of the bark of this tree so that under no pretext will the Indians have access to it [...]
This is to be done because this drink is very prejudicial for the true conversion
of these natives and it is their drinking that hinders them from becoming good Christians [...]
Dr. Don Agustín Francisco de Echano, juez provisor of the Diocese of Yucatán, 1765*

On December 12, 1694 Captain Don Miguel de Espinar y Ugarte ordered the arrest of Don Tomás Chablé, the *batab* or governor of the Maya town of Chuchuen. Chablé's crime, according to the Spanish Captain, was the illicit making and use of the traditional Maya intoxicating drink called *balché*, "an act believed to be a malicious thing closely related to idolatry."¹ Along with the Maya *batab*, the Spanish Captain also reportedly confiscated a "great quantity of the bark shavings of the *balché* tree" used to ferment the native honey-based drink.² Only four days later a bitter dispute arose between the Captain and the local parish priest and ecclesiastical judge of the town of Kikil, Vicente Alfonso de Miranda, over the investigation and jurisdiction concerning the crime of idolatry and the use of the ritual intoxicant *balché*.

However, things were not as they seemed. As the ecclesiastical judges' investigation subsequently revealed, the Spanish Captain framed the Maya leader in revenge because Chablé had earlier punished a Spanish soldier for committing adultery with one of the Maya women of his village. Captain Miguel de Espinar ordered the *batab's* arrest, demanding that another Maya governor from the neighboring town of Panabá search for and bring "a large amount of the bark shavings of the *balché* tree" in order to use them as evidence against him. The Spanish captain then had the *batab* beaten unconscious with a wooden staff.

But the question remains, why such a serious punishment for a little drinking? The answer was simple. The ritual intoxicant *balché* remained the most important liquid libation connected with religious rituals for the Maya from the colonial period to the present day.³ A type of mead-like alcoholic beverage, *balché* is made from fermented honey and the addition of the bark of the *balché* tree [*Lonchocarpus longistylus/violaceus*] which serves as a mild euphoric and an alcohol potentiator.⁴ Possessing the bark shav-

¹ See *Auto del vicario juez eclesiástico de Kikil sobre una denuncia de idolatría y la usurpación de la jurisdicción eclesiástica por el capitán a guerra, don Miguel de Espinar*, 15 de diciembre, 1694. AGFN, Inquisición, Vol. 535, Exp. 6, 2 folios.

² See *Respuesta del capitán a guerra don Miguel de Espinar al mandamiento del vicario juez eclesiástico*, 16 de diciembre, 1694. AGN, Ramo de Inquisición, Vol. 535, Exp. 6, folios 538r-539v.

³ The Motul dictionary describes *balché* as "the wine made from the tree of the same name." See *Calepino de Motul*, Tomo I, p. 74. Regardless of the colonial prohibitions and the extirpators' best attempts at rooting out its cultivation, the ritual use of the intoxicant *balché* continues among the modern Lacandon and Yucatec Maya. Jon McGee is perhaps the most recent scholar to study the continued ritual use of *balché* among the Lacandon. For studies of colonial and modern uses of *balché* see Jon R. McGee, *Life, Ritual, and Religion Among the Lacandon Maya*, (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990; also see McGee, "The *Balché* Ritual of the Lacandon Maya" in *Estudios de Cultura Maya*, UNAM, Centro de Estudios Mayas, Vol. XVIII (1991), pp. 439-457. Virginia Dale Davis' own dissertation examines the rituals of the Lacandon in greater detail [see Virginia Dale Davis "Ritual of the Northern Lacandon Maya," Ph.D. Dissertation, Tulane University, 1978. Villa Rojas and Tozzer also both studied the use of *balché* among the Lacandon and the Yucatec Maya. See Alfonso Villa Rojas, "Los Lacandones: sus dioses, ritos y creencias religiosas" in *Estudios Etnológicos: Los Mayas* (México: UNAM, 1995) and Alfred M. Tozzer, *A Comparative Study of the Mayas and The Lacandones*. The Macmillan Co., New York, 1907. I can personally attest to the continued ritual inebriation involved in the drinking of *balché* among the modern Yucatec Maya. I celebrated and ritually drank *balché* [the honey based mead like drink] on several occasions in 1996-1997 in the Maya towns of Sanahcat, Oxkutzcab, Hocabá, and Acanceh.

⁴ For specific descriptions of the chemical make-up and functions of the bark of the *balché* tree in the fermentation of the *balché* drink see Oswaldo Gonzales de Lima, "La fermentación de las mieles de abeja y su

ings of the *balché* tree itself was a punishable crime. The mere accusation of the use of *balché* was enough to destroy a Maya leader's political career.

Don Thomás Chablé later testified that he had neither used nor made the intoxicating drink, and that the Spanish captain had used the *balché* bark to frame him.⁵ He also acknowledged the seriousness of making this fermented drink. He confessed that many days earlier, he had seen several Maya making the fermented drink in a cornfield. He fought with them and overturned the wooden containers in which they fermented the drink. He then reportedly shouted at them, "If you make this drink again I will punish you myself!"

Hoping to win his freedom, Chablé gave the authorities a list of names of those Maya who made and drank *balché* in religious ceremonies. The list included many of the most prominent Maya men from the surrounding towns of Kikil, Suquilá and Panabá. It became evident from subsequent investigations that hundreds of Maya residents of several towns fermented the drink and consumed it in public and private rituals that ended in drunkenness as well as open worship of stone and clay idols or images of their traditional gods. The authorities arrested the suspects and launched a massive yearlong investigation into the use and making of the illicit fermented drink. The trials uncovered an entire underground network that dealt in the trade of the illicit bark of the *balché* tree. A type of "drug-smuggling" ring existed by which the prohibited bark of the *balché* tree became a highly prized illicit commodity. This case, however, is not unique. More than a hundred cases against colonial Maya uses of the fermented beverage *balché* can be found in the archival records.⁶

Regardless of the truth of the initial allegations, or the jurisdictional dispute that evolved, one simple fact remains clear: the making, use or consumption of the Maya intoxicant *balché* was expressly forbidden and punishable by both civil and ecclesiastical law. Hundreds of cases against Maya for the ritual and ceremonial use of *balché* are extant in the surviving colonial documentation. As this brief summary of the Chablé case reveals, both Church and State viewed the use of the ritual intoxicant *balché* as a formal act of idolatry and a dangerous form of social rebellion. But, what was this *balché* drink and why did both Church and State view it as a threat to Christianity and the colonial order? Similarly, if the use of this drink was expressly prohibited and harshly punished by both Church and State why did the Maya persist in making and using the fermented drink despite the availability of Spanish alcoholic drinks such as wine

actividad antimicrobiana" in Oswaldo Gonzales de Lima, *Pulque, Balché y Pajauaru: en la etnobiología de las bebidas y de los alimentos fermentados*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1990, pp. 171-188.

⁵ As if framed in a modern "drug-bust" don Thomas Chablé denied the charges and claimed the evidence [i.e., the *balché* bark] was planted and the accusations fabricated. See *Confesión de don Tomás Chablé, batab del pueblo de Chuchúén, en la averiguación sobre el caso de ydolatría*, 18 de diciembre, 1694, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 535, Exp. 6, folios 540v-542r.

⁶ For a few examples see *Testimonio contra Cristóbal May, Pablo Chablé y Mateo Mocul, principales del pueblo de Yobain por ydólatras*, 1606, AGI, Audiencia de México, 3048, folio 215; also see *Sumaria información contra don Gaspar Chán, cacique del pueblo de Chunhuhub, por ydólatra*, 1596, AGI, Audiencia de México, 294; similarly also see *Denuncia contra Francisco Pech, indio principal del pueblo de Peto, por idólatra Ah Kin*, 1598, AGI, Audiencia de México, 292. The list is endless. Also see cases of *balché* drinking found in AGN, Inquisición, Vols. 679, 690, 693, 1109, 1147; also see AGI, Audiencia de México, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 304, 305 369, 370, etc; and AGI, Indiferente General, 190, 191, 192-206, 207, etc.

and *aguardiente*? These are the questions that this paper attempts to answer as it examines the nature, uses and cultural perceptions of the drink known as *balché*.



Maya ts'an balché from Tixhualactún making *balché*

Photo by Mario Humberto Ruz



Offering *balché* to the Virgin of Candelaria. Tixhualactún, Yucatán

Photo by Mario Humberto Ruz

The Maya concocted their intoxicating beverage by combining the bark of the *balché* tree [*Lonchocarpus violaceus* Pittier] with equal parts of honey and water and allowing the mixture to ferment during a ritual period of four days.⁷ According to the ethnohistorical sources, the ritual use of *balché* remained a common feature of colonial Maya religion.⁸ Friar Diego de Landa wrote "they make wine of honey and water and a certain root [bark] of a tree, which they cultivate for this purpose in order to make the wine strong and stinking."⁹ An anonymous Franciscan friar of the 17th century described *balché* as:

[...] a drink that was made from the bark of tree called *balché* [...] and they make it by soaking this bark for several days in water in several wooden casks and afterwards in order to ferment the drink they add more water and honey and after another period of several days they put this drink into large jugs called *haltunes* and then they take and use it as a libation to their demons [...]¹⁰

The clergy associated the ritual intoxicant *balché* more with idolatry than any other liquid or food offering. According to a report written by Lic. Bartolomé Mallén de Rueda, an ecclesiastical judge and extirpator of idolatry:

[...] This wine called *balché* is [...] a vile and potent beverage with which the natives get drunk to the extent that for three days they drink it and do not come back to their senses and this is what the idolaters do after they have offered sacrifices to their idols [...] Without this *balché* they cannot commit idolatry according to their ancient rites and ceremonies, because this wine serves them as their sacred offerings in their ceremonies conducted by their infernal priests [...]¹¹

Due to the intimate connection between the consumption of *balché* and the conducting of Maya ceremonies and rituals, the Church and colonial officials prohibited both the tree and the fermented drink. They declared:

[...] the said beverage is prohibited with very serious punishments for those Indians who drink it. It is also ordered that they do not plant these trees in their homes or plots of land nor in any other place because they are used in order to provoke the rites and ceremonies of their idolatries which offend God, Our Lord and cause them to commit very grave sins against God and nature [...]¹²

⁷ For a description and information on the *Balché* tree see Bricker, *A Dictionary of the Maya Language as Spoken in Hocabá, Yucatán*, University of Utah Press, 1998, p. 26.

⁸ Jon McGee, "The *Balché* Ritual of the Lacandon Maya" in *Estudios de Cultura Maya*, Vol. XVIII, UNAM, 1991, p. 439.

⁹ Alfred M. Tozzer, *Landa's Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, p. 92.

¹⁰ *Costumbres, ritos y ydolatrias de los yndios de estas provincias de Yucatán*, Anonymous Manuscript, Private Collection in Mérida, 17th Century, folio 8.

¹¹ See *Carta del juez de comisión de la idolatría*, Lic. Bartolomé Mallén de Rueda, sobre la idolatría el uso de *balché* y la complicidad de los frailes franciscanos, 24 de julio, 1648, LAL-Tulane, VEMC, Legajo 66, Exp. 37, folios 1r-2r.

¹² See *Auto del juez de comisión con información contra frailes franciscanos que permiten a los indios a idolatrar*, 14 de abril, 1648, LAL-Tulane, VEMC, Legajo 66, Exp. 37, folios 6v-7v.

As can be imagined, the use and consumption of *balché* and the cultivation of the *balché* tree was intimately related in the minds of the Spaniards and the Maya with traditional Maya rituals and ceremonies.¹³ From the earliest arrival of the Franciscan friars, the Spanish authorities attempted to outlaw the production and use of the ritual intoxicant *balché*, much to the Maya's consternation.¹⁴

Trade & Cultivation of Balché Bark

As the most sacred libation to the gods, *balché* and the bark of the *balché* tree were prized commodities for the colonial Maya. Royal law and ecclesiastical prohibitions made it illegal to cultivate the *balché* tree or even have one on someone's private property and clergymen systematically hunted down and destroyed the *balché* trees used to make the feared native intoxicant.¹⁵ If they found *balché* trees on someone's private land or in their *milpas*, they cut them down. In a classic example of the law of supply and demand, as the *balché* trees became less numerous, their bark became more profitable. Maya commented that in the northern part of the peninsula, and especially near Mérida, "the bark of the *balché* tree is not very easy to find."¹⁶ As a result many Maya, even *caciques*, began to grow *balché* trees on their distant *milpa* plots, far from the towns and the watchful eyes of the clergy.

A type of regional underground illicit trading network evolved. As the colonial period progressed, local Maya noblemen, especially *caciques* or *batabs*, would come to control the trade in *balché* bark. The Maya nobility dominated the illicit trade because they had the resources and the skills to conduct the trade. Similarly, the Maya nobility,

¹³ In many societies, the ritual consumption of alcoholic drinks is an integral part of religion and religious ceremonies. For a discussion of the nature of drinking in many societies see Chandler Washburne, *Primitive drinking: a study of the uses and functions of alcohol in preliterate societies*, N.Y., College and University Press, 1961. The specific case of the religious and social nature of ritual drinking in the Andes see Carmen Salazar-Soler et al., *Borrachera y memoria: la experiencia de lo sagrado en los Andes*, La Paz: Hisbol; Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 1993.

¹⁴ Throughout the "*Relaciones Histórico-Geográficas*" the Maya informants of the *encomenderos* complained that the prohibition of the ritual intoxicant *balché* not only affected their religion but also their health. They claimed that it was a great purgative and very useful for them.

¹⁵ For clerical opinions on the dangers of the *balché* tree and the native intoxicant, see *Carta del juez de comisión de la idolatría*, Lic. Bartolomé Mallén de Rueda, sobre la idolatría y el uso del *balché*, 24 de julio, 1648, LAL-Tulane, VEMC, Leg. 66, Exp. 37, folios 1r-2r. The later vicario of the town of Kikil called *balché* and its use a "malicious thing that is very close to idolatry itself." See *Auto del vicario de Kikil sobre un denuncia de ydolatría y el uso de balché*, 15 de diciembre, 1694, AGN, Ramo de Inquisición, Vol. 535, Exp. 6, 2 folios. Another Franciscan friar, fray Josef María Ortiz, who wrote a treatise on Maya idolatry, wrote that *balché* was an "infernal drink" used by the Maya. See *Costumbres, ritos e ydolatrías de los yndios de estas provincias de Yucathan*, 1663, Private Collection, Mérida. As late as 1765, the ecclesiastical authorities still warned about the "dangerous beverage." In that year, the Juez Provisor Dr. Augustin Francisco de Echano, in his instructions to his parish priests, warned "you should place much caution and be efficient in prohibiting the dangerous beverage called *Balché*, impeding totally the cutting and trade of the bark of this tree so that under no pretext will the Indians have access to it." See *Ynstrucción para los curas de almas y sus tenientes*, 19 de julio, 1765, AHAY, Asuntos Terminados, 5 folios.

¹⁶ *Declaración de Gaspar Chablé en el proceso de la idolatría de balché*, 4 de abril, 1674, AGN, Ramo de Inquisición, Vol. 629, Exp. 4, 5 folios.

denied much of their pre-Hispanic prerogatives and tribute, found in this illegal "drug trade" a means of amassing wealth and prestige.¹⁷ As the Spanish clergy's war on drugs increased, the price of the illegal commodity rose and greater profits were possible. At this time, the Maya nobility maintained their domination of the illicit trade. The Maya of the island of Cozumel, for instance, where *balché* trees were rare, actively traded idols and *balché* bark with the Maya nobility of the mainland. In 1590, the local parish priest caught the *cacique* of the coastal town of Ppolé, Don Diego Malah, bringing *balché* bark and other *balché* instruments to trade with the Maya of the island of Cozumel.¹⁸ In another case in 1674, the *cacique* from the town of Santa Catalina near Mérida had the only access to *balché* trees because he grew them in his private *milpa* plot.¹⁹ In other cases, the Maya of the western peninsula imported *balché* bark from Maya nobility as far away as the towns of Mopilá and Ichmul. These two towns near the forest produced and traded a great quantity of *balché* bark and their nobility dominated the underground trade throughout the colonial period.

Special members of the Maya community conducted the actual trading in the illicit bark. Each Maya village had several officials, called *Ah Chun Than*, who served as the buyers and traders of the *balché* bark. In other instances, they purchased the finished product. Two officials from the town of Santa Catalina, *Ah Chun Than* Couoh and *Ah Chun Than* Pol, made the journey in 1674 to the town of Mopilá where they searched for and bought the *balché* used by other town officials in their ceremonies to the gods.²⁰ *Ah Chun Thanob* from other Maya villages, or *cahob*, went in search of the *balché* tree "in different towns and they served as the traders of the said *balché* bark."²¹

Balché bark, however, was not the only ingredient in the ritual intoxicant. The Maya also needed honey, which they traded and collected from the forests along the pagan frontier. Along with the bark of the *balché* tree, Maya traders transported ceramic containers full of honey from the interior to the other towns along the coast and in the northern part of the peninsula. Many Maya left their towns for months searching for wild sources of honey and beeswax.²² Other Maya had large beehives in their fields

¹⁷ For a similar case of indigenous *caciques* and nobility's use of alcoholic religious rituals for prestige and wealth in colonial Colombia see Francisco de Santiago, "Teogonía indígena mosca. Autos en razón de prohibir a los *caciques* de Fontibón, Ubaque y otros no hagan las fiestas, borracheras y sacrificios de su gentilidad. Año de 1563," in *Revista del Archivo Nacional*. Bogotá, Colombia, Vol. 6, no. 68-69, dic. 1945, pp. 323-330. This interesting article shows how traditional drinking rituals among the Mosca natives persisted and were actually aided by native *caciques*.

¹⁸ *Auto y sentencia contra los yndios ydólatras del pueblo de Ppolé hecha por el vicario y juez comisario de ydolatrías*, Baltazar de Herrera, 18 de diciembre, 1590, AGI, Audiencia de México, 292, 4 folios.

¹⁹ *Declaración de Gaspar Chablé, en los autos de ydolatría contra los yndios de Santa Catalina*, 4 de abril, 1674, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 629, Exp. 4, folios 343r-344r.

²⁰ *Confesión de Marcos Uc, hijo de Juan Uc, alcalde del pueblo de Santa Catalina, en los autos de ydolatría*, 26 de abril, 1674, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 629, Exp. 4, folios 352r-356r.

²¹ *Ibid.*, folio 356r.

²² So great were the numbers of Maya foragers and traders who went into the forests that in the late 17th century the clergy complained that they left their towns virtually abandoned for months on end. See complaints and information from the clergy on this illicit trade and Maya foraging for honey in order to pay tribute and conduct rituals. See *Carta de los curas beneficiados de las doctrinas de los pueblos de la provincia de Yucatán y Campeche, en que representan las molestias y malos tratamientos que hazen los gobernadores a los indios con los repartimientos*, AGI, Audiencia de México, 366, 12 folios.

from which they harvested the massive quantities of honey demanded as tribute. Although a legal item of trade, the Maya secretly used much of this honey in the production of the ritual intoxicant, *balché* (See map).

Making of Balché & its Ritual Use: A Typical Colonial Balché Ritual

For the Maya, the use of *balché* as a sacred offering usually involved the ritual inebriation of the participants after the drink had been offered to the gods. By examining several dozen documented cases involving *balché* rituals, it is possible to reconstruct a typical colonial *balché* ritual. In an early description from 1579, Giraldo Díaz de Alpuche, the Spanish *encomendero* of the town of Dzonot described *balché* production and rituals. He wrote that:

[...] they made a type of wine out of water and honey, and they threw into it a root called *balché* in their language and they made it in several large wooden containers like large casks, and they added to the mixture from twenty to thirty and even fifty arrobas of water and they cooked it and boiled it there for two days and it made a very strong drink which smelled very bad [...] and in their dances and ceremonies they gave all the participants small cups of this [*balché*] to drink and in a very short time they all became drunk [...]²³

The Maya emphasized purity in the making of the *balché* offerings for the ceremonies to the gods.²⁴ Ritually prepared *balché* had to be made using fresh honey collected from the forests and "virgin water" or *Zuhuy Ha*.²⁵ This water, for example, had to be ritually collected by appointed men from distant caves and *cenotes* where no woman had ever been.²⁶ Therefore, *Zuhuy Ha* came from distant *cenotes* collected from the dripping water from stalagmites in caves.²⁷ The impurity of women in ritual circumstances in Maya religion has been a frequent topic of discussion among colonial and modern ethnographers. The supposed ritual impurity of women prohibited their participation and attendance in many of the Maya religious ceremonies. It comes as no surprise that many Maya women denounced their husbands or fathers for participating in the very same *balché* rituals from which they were excluded.²⁸

²³ De la Garza et al., *Relaciones histórico-geográficas de la gobernación de Yucatán*, Tomo II, "Relación de Dzonot" pp. 84-85.

²⁴ In the summer of 1997 the author assisted several local *Ah Men* from the towns of Motul, Tahmek and Sanahcat in the procuring of "virgin water" from several distant and lesser known *cenotes* and caves. The *Ah Men* used this virgin water to make the ritual intoxicant *balché*. Don Marcelino Mo'o, the *Ah Men* of Sanahcat described the use of "agua virgen" as an important part of the making of the ritual *balché*.

²⁵ Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, p. 184.

²⁶ Tozzer, *Landa's Relación*, p. 153.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

²⁸ For a few examples see *Testimonio de Ana Quimí en el proceso contra los ydólatras de Peto*, 6 de abril, AGI, Audiencia de México, 292, 4 folios. Also see *Testimonio de Ines Dzul en el proceso contra los ydólatras de Peto*, 6 de abril, AGI, Audiencia de México, 292, 3 folios. Also see *Declaración de Nicolasa Pech en la ynformación contra la ydolatría de don Thomás Chablé*, 21 de diciembre, 1694, AGN, Ramo de Inquisición, Vol. 535, Exp. 6, 3 folios; *Declaración de Maria Chablé en la ynformación contra la ydolatría de don Thomás Chablé*, 21 de diciembre, 1694, AGN, Ramo de Inquisición, Vol. 535, Exp. 6, 3 folios.

The actual fermentation of the beverage occurred, as the *encomendero* wrote, in large wooden vats, most often long wooden canoes or containers called *Balché Chem* or *Maben* that were placed in a sacred place within someone's milpa or their house plot (See image).²⁹

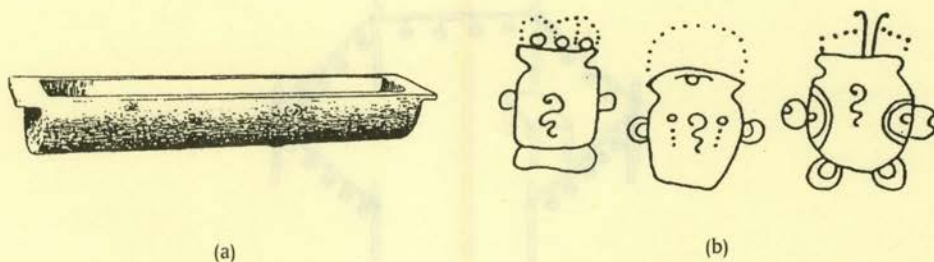


Figure 2: (a) A *Balché Chem* or *Maben* (b) images from the Maya Codices of containers filled with *Balché*

After fermentation, the drink was placed into large gourds or wooden containers and transported to the site of the ritual. At the spot chosen for the *balché* ritual or other ceremony, the Maya would build a wooden altar upon which they placed the stone or clay idols or images of their gods, and a wooden enclosure upon which they placed the liquid offerings of *balché*.

The Maya placed these libations of *balché* in small gourds hung with string around a central altar. On the altar they placed their idols on a bed of sacred *Habin* [*Piscidia piscipula* (L.) Sargent] leaves.³⁰ The ritual gourd tied to the altar was called *Ch'uyubil luch* ["suspended gourds in which they place ritual drinks"].³¹ The Maya traditionally used combinations of nine and thirteen gourds of ritual libations in their ceremonies, and the significance of the numbers nine and thirteen and their connection with the thirteen Maya heavens and nine Maya hells is obvious.³² In many instances, the combination of twenty-two gourds of liquid offerings hung around the altar, symbolizing the Maya universe.³³

²⁹ *Autos que remitió el comisario de la Villa de Valladolid de Yucatán, contra Gaspar Medina, Juan de Andrada, Antonio Chiquito, y otros por idolatría*, Yucatán, 1697, AGN, Inquisición, Tomo 535, Exp. 6, Fs. 1-36. Since ancient times, the Maya have made *balché* by brewing it in a canoe or container called a *balché chem*. These containers are still used by the pagan Lacandon Maya. See R. Jon McGee, *Life, Ritual, and Religion Among the Lacandon Maya*, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1990), p. 55.

³⁰ For a description and classification of the *Habin* tree, see Victoria R. Bricker, Eleuterio Po'ot Yah and Ofelia Dzul de Po'ot, *A Dictionary of the Maya Language as Spoken in Hocabá, Yucatán*, Salt Lake City, The University of Utah Press, 1998, p. 92. The leaves, flowers and bark of the *Habin* tree were used medicinally by the Maya.

³¹ *Calepino de Motul: Diccionario Maya-Español*, UNAM, Tomo I, p. 269.

³² Eva Alexandra Uchmany de de la Peña, "Cuatro casos de idolatría en el área maya ante el Tribunal de la Inquisición" in *Estudios de Cultura Maya*, Vol. 6 (1967), pp 267-300. See p. 281.

³³ During my own participation in several *Chaa Chac* ceremonies in 1997, I observed that the Maya offered 22 gourds of *balché* hung around the altar. The *Ah Men*, don Marcelino Mo'o explained that the number was significant and symbolized the heaven and the earth. Although his confusion of the earth with the underworld is probably in error, it is reminiscent of colonial descriptions of similar rituals. No doubt the numerical significance refers to the Heavens and the Hells of Maya cosmology.

With the altar and the gods placed in the center around a wooden enclosure made from the branches of the sacred *Habin* tree, the actual ritual recreated the Maya universe. Below is a reconstruction of a typical colonial Maya altar with its hanging gourds of libations [see figure 3].

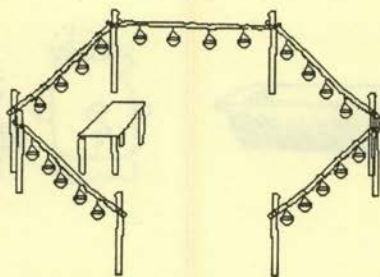


Figure 3: (a) A Typical Colonial Altar for a *Balché* Ritual (Author's reconstruction)
(b) Modern Maya Altar for *Balché* Ritual (Photo taken at Kiuic by John F. Chuchiak)

The Maya first offered gourds of *balché* directly to the images of the gods and the priests poured some out from the gourds onto the idol's lips, saying, "an offering of *balché* I am pouring out upon your mouth, upon your lips ... an offering of *balché* I am giving you, come, come down and receive it."³⁴ After the gods received their offerings and sacrifices, the Maya engaged in a ceremonial type of ritual drinking that ended in the inebriation of all of the participants.

However, the ritual did not follow a haphazard order. Each step and every "gourdful" of *balché* was intricately choreographed according to each participant's religious

³⁴ According to colonial testimonies, this ritual incantation was said when offering the *balché* to the idols. See *Auto del vicario juez eclesiástico de Kikil, sobre la ydolatría de balché*, 15 de diciembre, 1694, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 535, Exp. 6. Also see Tozzer's comments on a similar invocation of the gods in a typical offering of *balché* to the Lacandon's god pots. The Lacandon says similar words when he pours out a little *balché* on the face of the pots. See Tozzer, 1907, pp. 180-182.

role and their social position. Even the very nature of ritualized drinking was dictated by Maya cultural conceptions of religion and the sacred world. No participant could begin drinking until after the Maya priest, or *Ah Kin*, had offered the stone or clay images of the gods their offerings.³⁵ Even then, the entire ritual's progression was highly ordered and dictated by tradition. After this offering, the priest would pour out four gourds of *balché*, offering them in the four cardinal directions. Then the priest drank the fifth gourd of *balché*. After these ceremonial steps, the ritual's host, usually a member of the Maya nobility, would partake of the libations of *balché*, usually also offering four gourds to the sacred cardinal directions.

After the host had finished, the rest of the ceremony's guests began to partake of their own gourds of *balché* and consume the ritual foods offered. Each guest drank *balché* in the order of their social rank, or political position. The highest-ranking members of the banquet drank the first gourds of *balché*. Afterward, the commoners received their own gourds of *balché*. The commoners had no social distinctions among them, so they drank their *balché* simultaneously. Once each gourd was empty, it was filled again until each participant had consumed at least four gourds of the drink.

The ritual came to a close after all of the *balché* had been consumed, leaving the celebrants inebriated. Each participant then gathered the drinking vessels and idols they had brought and returned home. The ritualized drinking implements, the gourds and containers for the *balché* were viewed as sacred objects and often stored next to treasured idols.

At the end of the *balché* ritual, one of the other participants would be named the next "host" and in this manner the reciprocal cycle of ritualized drinking continued. Most often, the "hosts" were chosen from among the most prominent or wealthy Maya, due to the cost of preparing the *balché* and the ritual food offerings. By hosting a *balché* ritual, a Maya created a social network and gained social and religious prestige. Although primarily imbued with sacred religious significance, as this reconstruction of a typical *balché* ritual suggests, there were many social, political and medicinal connotations to the *balché* ritual.

Maya Perceptions of Balché: Medicinal & Curative Effects

The Maya attributed curative and healing powers to the ritual intoxicant *balché*. During the early colonial period when the Catholic clergy and Spanish conquerors attempted to outlaw their use of *balché*, the Maya complained that the medicinal properties of the drink enabled the Maya to remain healthy. Several Maya informants later blamed the rapid population decrease in colonial Yucatán to the Spaniard's prohibition of this intoxicating drink. According to the Spanish *encomendero* of the town of Temul in 1579:

³⁵ For a detailed description of the colonial Maya priesthood and their role in perpetuating *balché* rituals and other religious ceremonies see John F. Chuchiak, "Pre-Conquest *Ah Kinob* in a Colonial World: The Extirpation of Idolatry and the Survival of the Maya Priesthood in Colonial Yucatán, 1563-1697" in Ueli Hostettler and Matthew Restall (eds.), *Maya Survivalism*. Acta Mesoamericana Vol. 12, Markt Schwaben, Germany: Verlag Anton Saurwein, 2001, pp. 135-160.

They say among them that before they used to live much longer because they worked much less than they do now and also because they drank a certain native wine [called *balché*] made from the bark of a certain tree mixed with water and honey which they say purged them and made them healthy [...]³⁶

The Maya believed that their ingestion of massive quantities of *balché* caused them to expel their illnesses by vomiting profusely.³⁷ According to their beliefs *balché* caused them to:

vomit from their mouths and from below in such a manner that there was no greater purgative in the world which is better suited for them and this purging proved helpful to them because once they were purged they remained cleaned and had good appetites [...]³⁸

The Maya continued to use *balché* illicitly in their curing and healing ceremonies due to their belief in its curative effects.³⁹ Even mixed caste, mulattos, and blacks in colonial Yucatán adopted this Maya belief in the curative powers of *balché*. For instance, in 1724 a mulatto *curandero* named José Zavala practiced an almost purely Mayan form of traditional medicine. He confessed to burning and perfuming his clients with copal incense, as well as divining the cause of their diseases by the use of shark bones called *xooc* and a Mayan sorcerer's stone called a *sastun*. Zavala also set up altars upon which he offered the sacred native intoxicant *balché*, as well as ordering all of those present in the curing ceremony to liberally partake of the drink along with him. The consumption of *balché*, he said, "returned health to the patient."⁴⁰

Whether viewed as a necessary purgative, or a divine beverage that brings about a direct connection with the gods, the belief in the medicinal uses of *balché* continues to the present day among the Yucatec and Lacandon Maya.

The Ritual and Communal Role of Balché Drinking: Balché rituals and Social Cohesion

The colonial Maya, however, consumed *balché* not only for medicinal and religious reasons, but also for social and political reasons as well. The colonial Spanish clergy uncovered many instances of the social and communal use of *balché* as a means of building social cohesion and acquiring social prestige. The extirpators' investigations

³⁶ De la Garza et al., *Relaciones histórico-geográficas de Yucatán*, Tomo II, "Relación de Temul" 1579, p. 103.

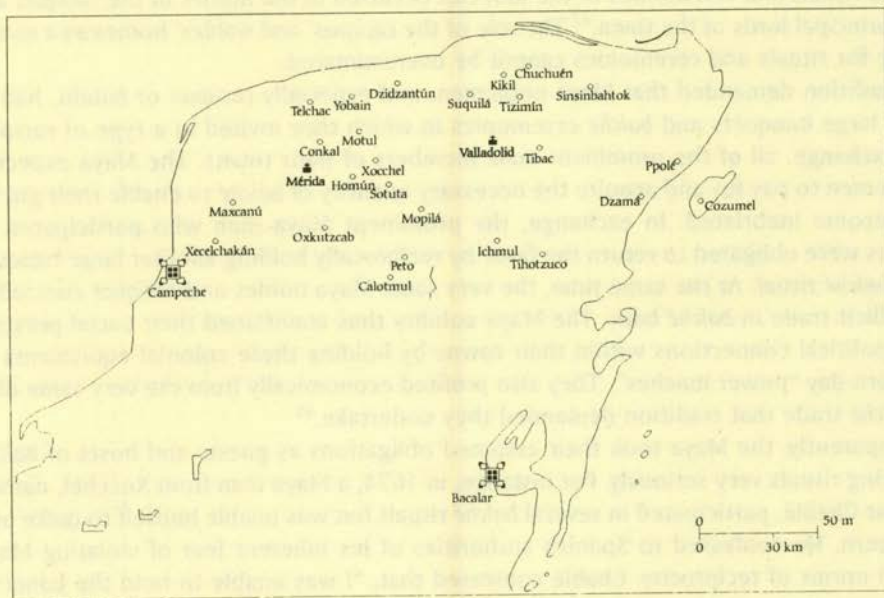
³⁷ The author of this paper can testify to the fact that ingesting massive quantities of *balché* makes one "vomit profusely."

³⁸ De la Garza et al., *Relaciones histórico-geográficas de Yucatán*, Tomo II, "Relación de Dzonot", pp. 84-85.

³⁹ Later colonial Maya medicinal texts mention the medicinal use of *balché* bark and *balché* leaves. For a few examples see Roys *Ritual of the Bacabs*, 1965; *El Libro del Judío o Medicina Doméstica: Descripción de las virtudes de las yerbas medicinales de Yucatán*, por el Dr. Ricardo Osado, Siglo XVII, edited by Dorthy Andrews Heath de Zapata (Mérida: 1979, 296 pp.); also see the rare manuscript entitled *Yerbas y hechicerías del Yucatán* [401 folios] from Tulane University's Rare Manuscript Collection. Similarly, see the studies of traditional Maya medicine and herbal remedies by Ruth Gubler.

⁴⁰ *Proceso contra un curandero, José Zavala, de color pardo, vecino del pueblo de Xecelchekán, por maléfico, idolatría y hechicería, Yucatán, 1724*, AGN, Ramo de Inquisición, Vol. 1164, Exp. n.a., fs. 211-272.

led them to deduce that for the Maya, *balché* rituals and their corresponding reciprocal feasting and drunkenness were a means of maintaining social cohesion. In every example of public and mass idolatry uncovered, ritualized drinking of *balché* played an important part in the public social ritual (see chart).



Major Incidences of Idolatry Dealing with Public balché Drinking Rituals

The consumption of *balché* played such an important role in constructing socio-cultural and communal identity during colonial Maya rituals that even traditional taboos against Maya women participating in public drinking were sometimes disobeyed in order to build a sense of social cohesion during troubled times. In one case during a terrible famine and drought in 1640, the Spanish clergy were surprised that the local Maya *cacique* of the town of Tibac conducted an elaborate *balché* ritual that included the participation of the town's leading men and women. According to the bishop, in the town of Tibac more than seventy Maya families were found guilty of committing idolatry. What amazed the bishop the most was that women participated in this ritualized drinking, something that the bishop remarked was "[...] very seldom seen among these natives."⁴¹ According to the local clergyman the Maya of Tibac gathered together in the milpa and house of the *cacique* and they drank massive quantities of *balché* until they all became inebriated.

⁴¹ Carta del obispo Juan Alonso Ocón al rey, sobre las ydolatrías y borracheras de los yndios de Yucatán, 24 de febrero, 1643, AGI, Audiencia de México 369, folios 447-450.

While the Spanish authorities showed surprise in finding the local Maya *cacique* as the chief proponent of the ritualized consumption of *balché*, Maya tradition demanded that local Maya elite celebrate religious rituals and ceremonies that ended in ritualized consumption of *balché*. As a public act of social cohesion, *balché* rituals maintained the social status of the Maya nobility among their commoners. Landa mentioned that many of the rituals and ceremonies of the idol cult occurred in the homes of the *caciques* and the principal lords of the town.⁴² The role of the *caciques* and nobles' homes as a sacred place for rituals and ceremonies cannot be overestimated.

Tradition demanded that Maya noblemen, and especially *caciques* or *batabs*, had to hold large banquets and *balché* ceremonies in which they invited in a type of reciprocal exchange, all of the prominent male members of their towns. The Maya expected noblemen to pay for and acquire the necessary quantity of *balché* to enable their guests to become inebriated. In exchange, the prominent Maya men who participated as guests were obligated to return the favor by reciprocally holding another large banquet and *balché* ritual. At the same time, the very same Maya nobles and *caciques* controlled the illicit trade in *balché* bark. The Maya nobility thus maintained their social prestige and political connections within their towns by holding these colonial equivalents of modern-day "power lunches". They also profited economically from the very same illicit *balché* trade that tradition demanded they undertake.⁴³

Apparently, the Maya took their assumed obligations as guests and hosts of *balché* drinking rituals very seriously. For instance, in 1674, a Maya man from Xocchel, named Gaspar Chablé, participated in several *balché* rituals but was unable himself to make one in return. He confessed to Spanish authorities of his inherent fear of violating Maya social norms of reciprocity. Chablé confessed that, "I was unable to hold the banquet in my own house in return for those who had invited me because I did not have the *balché* bark to make the beverage because the trees are not found very easily [...]".⁴⁴ Other Maya were even denounced by their peers who believed that they were attempting to avoid their reciprocal duties to host *balché* rituals.⁴⁵ In many of these cases, the Maya nobleman who made the denunciation was in turn accused and convicted of participating in *balché* rituals.

Nevertheless, by the decade of the 1590s, hereditary Maya nobility began to lose their political control, traditional rights, and privileges as the Spanish authorities removed them from office. During this heightened period of anxiety, Maya noblemen began to rely more heavily upon their social and cultural traditions in order to maintain their prestige in the rapidly changing colonial world. It is no surprise then, that the post 1590 period

⁴² Tozzer, *Landa* p. 115, note 531.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 166. Landa remarked that the Maya priesthood often "sought in the town, among those who were the richest" to serve as sponsors for these *balché* ceremonies. Apparently, during the colonial period, the same *balché* ceremonies actually helped the wealthy Maya nobles remain the "richest" members of the community.

⁴⁴ *Declaracion y confesion de Gaspar Chablé, indio natural del pueblo de Xocchel, en los autos de idolatría*, 4 de abril, 1674, AGN, Ramo de Inquisición, Vol. 629, Exp. 4, folios 343r-344r.

⁴⁵ This is the case of don Pedro Chán, the *cacique* of Suquilá and his denunciation against the *cacique* of Chuchué, don Thomas Chablé whom he believed interfered with the production and maintenance of the reciprocal *balché* banquets held in the Kikil region.

witnessed the largest number of cases involving Maya noblemen, *caciques*, and town governing officials involved in *balché* rituals.⁴⁶

The *Chilam Balam* books chronicled the preoccupations of the traditional Maya nobility in the maintenance of their social and political positions. In order to stop Maya whom they believed to be "usurpers of the lordship," the Maya *caciques* and nobility created a secret language and code, called the Language of *Zuyua*. This code was meant to ensure that all Maya who held positions in the government knew about traditional Maya religious practices, especially the cultivation and use of the ritual intoxicant *balché*. This language of *Zuyua* refers to the mythical language of the Maya nobility that supposedly descended from early central Mexican invaders of the peninsula. *Zuyua* language may indeed be a type of ritual test to examine the religious purity of a *cacique* taking office by ensuring his knowledge of traditional Maya religion. In several passages, the prospective *cacique* is required to answer riddles and prove that he is a legitimate candidate for the office. These tests enabled the Maya to perpetuate their religious beliefs and keep unqualified prospective *caciques* from holding office. One passage describes the *Zuyua* language stating that:

[...] these are the things to be understood in order to become chiefs of the town, when they are brought before the ruler, the first chief. These are the words. If the chiefs of the towns do not understand them, ill omened is the star adorning the night. Frightful is its house. Sad is the havoc in the courtyard of the nobles. Those who die are those who do not understand; those who live will understand it. This competitive test shall hang over the chiefs of the towns [...]⁴⁷

⁴⁶ This Maya belief that the nobility and town officials were obligated to hold *balché* rituals is supported by many testimonies of Maya arrested for idolatry. For example, Nicolás Chablé on January 8, 1695, testified that the local *Alcalde Ordinario* of the town of Kikil, Joseph Canché, had thrown a *balché* ritual for the entire town because he was obligated to do since "he was the *Alcalde Ordinario*..." See *Confesión y declaración de Nicolás Chablé en la informacion de idolatría*, 8 de enero, 1695, AGN, Ramo de Inquisición, Vol. 535, Exp. 6, folios 551v-552r. Also for more detailed examinations of the role of *caciques* and local town officials in continued acts of Maya idolatry see John F. Chuchiak, "The Indian Inquisition and the Extirpation of Idolatry: The Process of Punishment in the *Provisorato de Indios* in the Colonial Diocese of Yucatán, 1563-1821" Ph. D. Dissertation, Tulane University, 2000.

⁴⁷ Ralph L. Roys, *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967, p. 91. It is interesting to note that all of the information requested of these *caciques* pertained to the use of *copal*, *balché*, and other ceremonial offerings used in Maya religious rituals and prohibited by Church law during the colonial period. This may also suggest that even if a *cacique* was a "Christian," his people still demanded that he have the required ritual knowledge of Maya religion to hold office. The documentary evidence appears to bolster this interpretation, since in many cases *caciques* participated in acts of idolatry and even when they did not participate, they knew of idolatrous rituals and did nothing to stop them "for fear of losing their position." An example of this type of an excuse for complicity in idolatry by a *cacique* occurred in the case against the *cacique* of the town of Dzismop. See *Carta del gobernador don Francisco de Solís, sobre unas idolatrías en los pueblos de Dzismop y Calotmul*, 11 de marzo, 1584, AGI, Audiencia de México, 359, FVSC, Tulane, LAL, folios 479-482. The Spanish governor wrote that "... In one village called Dzismop ... fathers, sons and their women were all discovered to be idolaters ... After imprisoning the *cacique* and having taken his confession I asked him "How do you feel seeing that your entire village has been serving the devil in idolatry?" and he responded to me "If I should prohibit them, they would take from me my lordship." [folio 480]. Another case of the complicity of *caciques* in public idolatry involved the *caciques* of Tixcatal and Yaxcabá in 1686. See *Memorial y autos del cura y vicario del partido de Yaxcabá, Dr. Alonso de Padilla, sobre la idolatría de su partido*, 7 de enero, 1686, AGI, Audiencia de México, 369, 2 folios. Perhaps another interesting passage from the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* mentioned the reason for their fears. The passage states that if "true"

Therefore, colonial *caciques* and the Maya nobility used *balché* ceremonies to reinforce social prestige and political legitimacy by hosting them in their homes.⁴⁸

Balché Rituals and Inter-Ethnic Relations

Balché and its consumption also served to reconcile the differences that resulted from inter-ethnic conflicts. Throughout the colonial period, Maya communities came into contact with other ethnic groups, such as the large group of mixed castes, Spaniards, blacks and mulattos. As they began to discern the differences and even the different legal statuses given to each ethnic group under the Spanish system, the Maya sought ways in which to interact with, incorporate, dominate, or relate to members of other ethnic groups. The ritual consumption of *balché* became one way in which the Maya dealt with the changing ethnic environment that rapidly evolved after the conquest. Just as ritualized *balché* consumption enabled the Maya to maintain social cohesion within their own traditional communities, it also created and maintained positive interactions with members of other ethnic groups. By including members of different ethnic groups in their ritualized *balché* drinking ceremonies, the Maya in effect, "Mayanized" or incorporated these different peoples into their own world. In some cases, non-Mayas who refused to participate in these reciprocal exchanges of *balché* were "run out of town" or forced to live marginally in the Maya community. All non-Maya residents quickly realized that participation in ritualized *balché* drinking was an essential act in becoming "Maya" and creating a mutual communal identity with a particular Maya *cah* or town.

rulers had the knowledge of the ceremonies and rituals they will be saved, and those who did not know about the sacred offerings and rituals [ie. Christian Maya] would be killed. The passage states that the "true ruler" will "demand the planted wine, the *balché* ... he who has none will be killed ... he who obeys, godly is his action according to the law ... but perhaps God [Dios] will not desire all the things which have been written to come to pass..." [p. 92].

⁴⁸ There are many cases in the archives of Maya *caciques* and nobles inviting and hosting idolatrous *balché* rituals in their homes. For just a few see *Mandamiento de prisión contra los caciques y los demás ydólatras de la ysla de Cozumel hecho por el teniente de gobernador, Lic. León de Salazar*, 8 de Octubre, 1590, AGI, Audiencia de México, 292, 2 folios; *Testimonio de los procesos hechos contra ydolatrías hecho por el padre vicario Antonio de Arroyo*, 12 de marzo, 1603, AGI, Audiencia de México, 294, 3 folios; *Carta del obispo de Yucatán sobre varios casos de ydolatría que se descubrieron en el Obispado*, 2 de mayo, 1606, AGI, Audiencia de México, 359, 3 folios; *Autos y diligencias que se hicieron sobre la junta, pláticas y idolatrías de algunos indios del pueblo de Yobain*, 30 de marzo, 1607, AGI, Audiencia de México, 3048, folios 205-234 and *Ynformación contra Cristóbal May, Pablo Chablé and Mateo Mocul, indios principales del pueblo de Yobain*, 1606, AGI, Audiencia de México, 3048, folio 215. Also see *Carta del obispo Juan Alonso Ocón, al rey sobre las ydolatrías y borracheras de los yndios de Yucatán*, 24 de febrero, 1643, AGI, Audiencia de México, 369, folios 447-450; *Carta del Br. Pedro de Sepúlveda y Figueroa, maestrescuela de la santa Iglesia a su magestad, dando quenta de la continuación con que los indios perseveran en sus idolatrías*, AGI, Audiencia de México 370, ff. 198-200; *Carta del obispo de Yucatán, Dr. Marcos de Torres y Rueda, sobre el pecado de la ydolatría en que persisten los yndios de esta provincia*, 1646, AGI, Audiencia de México, 369, 4 folios. Also see *Carta y definitorio de los capellanes del Orden de San Francisco de Yucatán sobre la ydolatría de los yndios y los capítulos celebrados en este año*, 1668, AGI, Audiencia de México, 306, 22 folios; *Auto del testimonio de los yndios ydólatras contra los mulatos enculpados por el crimen de ydolatría*, 18 de julio, 1674, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 629, Exp. 4; and *Relación del cura y vicario de Nabalám, Lic. Lorenzo de Lara Bonifaz, sobre la ydolatría de los yndios de su partido, hecha durante la visita pastoral*, 1679, AGI, Escribanía de Cámara, 317, 5 folios.

The documentary evidence shows that by the middle of the seventeenth century, a large number of cases of ritualized *balché* ceremonies involved the participation, or the hosting of the *balché* ritual by Spaniards, Mestizos, Africans, or mulattos.⁴⁹ The clergy implicated and tried other non-Mayas for their participation in acts of idolatry involving *balché* consumption. For instance, the Holy Office of the Inquisition in 1674 tried three mulattos, Baltazar Martín, Manuel Canché, and Nicolás Lozano for idolatry involving the ritual consumption of *balché*.⁵⁰ Moreover, several cases of Maya idolatry at the village of Kikil in 1697 also involved the participation of several *mestizos*. In this case, one *mestizo*, Antonio Chiquito, actually served as the *Ah Kin* or priest, who made much of the *balché* "in a canoe hidden in his milpa."⁵¹ He and a few other *mestizos* conducted large-scale *balché* rituals.⁵²

When discovered, these non-Maya participants in *balché* rituals generally received harsher punishments in formal inquisition trials. In a few instances, the non-Mayas attempted to justify their participation to the Spanish authorities by stating that they had participated "out of fear of the Indians" or "because they knew no better."⁵³ However, the truth was that the non-Maya gained some benefit and social prestige by participating in *balché* rituals. In most cases, the *mestizos*, mulattos and Spaniards who participated in these socially cohesive drinking binges would gain some economic benefit or other means of social prestige.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ For only a few examples see *Proceso del Santo Oficio contra Cristóbal, negro esclavo de Pedro Ynterian, vecino de Campeche, por haber comido de la comida que los indios ofrecieron a sus idólos*, 19 de octubre, 1582, AGN, Ramo de Inquisición, Vol. 125, Exp. 76; *Carta del cura beneficiado y vicario, Pedro Mallén de Rueda con una denuncia contra el capitán Alonso del Puerto, mulato, por idólatra*, 1650, AGN, Ramo de Inquisición, Vol. 908; also see *Autos remitidos por el comisario de Yucatán, contra Baltazar Martín, Manuel Canché y Nicolás Lozano, mulatos, por idólatras*, 1674, AGN, Inquisición, Tomo 629, exp. 5; and finally for a case of a mulatto conducting *balché* rituals in the later 18th century see *Auto de remisión de la sumaria de ydolatría contra Apolonia de Casanova y sus cómplices al comisario del Santo Oficio*, 5 de diciembre, 1786, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 1177, Exp. 7, folio 26r-v.

⁵⁰ *Autos remitidos por el comisario de Yucatán, contra Baltazar Martín, Manuel Canché y Nicolás Lozano, mulatos, por idólatras*, 1674, AGN, Inquisición, Tomo 629, exp. 5.

⁵¹ *Autos que remitió el Comisario de la Villa de Valladolid de Yucatán, contra Gaspar Medina, Juan de Andrada, Antonio Chiquito y otros, por idolatría*, Yucatán, 1697, AGN, Inquisición, Tomo 535, Exp. 6, Fs. 1-36. Also, since ancient times, the Maya have made *balché* by brewing it in a canoe, called a *balché chem*, still used by the pagan Lacandon Maya. See R. Jon McGee, *Life, Ritual, and Religion Among the Lacandon Maya* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1990), p. 55.

⁵² *Confesion y testimonio de Juan Canul, Yucatán*, 1697, AGN, Inquisición, Tomo 535, Exp. 6, Fs. 1-36.

⁵³ Apparently, this was the argument of several mulattos and one Spaniard who were accused at various times of participating in *balché* rituals. See *Informacion hecha por el Gobernador de Yucatán contra Juan de la Sosa, español por ydólatra y por tener la ternilla agujerada*, 22 de septiembre, 1679, AGN, Ramo de Inquisición, Vol. 639, Exp. 7. In this case, the Spaniard, Juan de Sosa, admitted to having become drunk on several occasions from *balché* consumption, but he argued that he did so "...out of fear from the Indians...." Also see the same excuses given by another group of mulattos arrested for drinking *balché* in *Declaracion de Baltazar Martín, mulato, en los autos de idolatría*, 4 de abril, 1674, AGN, Vol. 639, Exp. 4, folios 342r-343v.

⁵⁴ In a 1721 case, three *mestizos* and mulattos even blackmailed a local Maya *cacique*, don Pedro Coyí, from Dzonohtel for holding *balché* rituals to certain idols. The parish priest who investigated wrote: "... I have discovered that three *mestizos* were his accomplices, one Joaquín Pinzón, Ignacio Jiménez and one Julián Piña, all having before known of the *cacique's* idolatry and then having covered up the idolatry in order to extort sums of maize and money from the Indian..." See *Auto de la averiguación de la ydolatría del cacique de Dzonohtel*, 21 de abril, 1721, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 789, Exp. 31, folio 553r.

Balché & Idolatry

The Spanish authorities and ecclesiastical judges who tried cases of Maya idolatry held a decidedly negative view of Maya perceptions of *balché*. Spanish authorities also attacked Maya beliefs in the social, political, and religious significance of *balché* throughout the colonial period. The authorities singled the native intoxicant out as one of the major cultural traits to be extinguished in order to achieve the "Christian conversion" of the Maya. In the words of the Catholic clergy, the use of "*balché* was idolatry and even when consumed outside of specific rituals, it tends to lead to open idolatry and paganism."⁵⁵

The Subversive Qualities of a Maya Intoxicant: Balché & Rebellion

Not only were the colonial ecclesiastical authorities worried about the making and consumption of *balché*, civil authorities also feared that *balché* drinking contributed to local revolts and serious Maya rebellions.⁵⁶ This Spanish view of the role of *balché* in rebellion was reinforced by the secretive nature of *balché* rituals. *Balché* rituals most commonly involved large numbers of participants who attended secret nightly rituals. Before the conquest, religious rituals seldom occurred at night. After the conquest, due to the necessity of keeping their *juntas* and ceremonies secret, they took place after nightfall. As early as the 1560s, the Maya *Ah K'in* Pedro Pech, told his followers:

[...] My brothers, my companions look that this that we have done is what should be done. Be cautious and continue to offer to our gods because that which the friars preach we do not know that it is true. That which we have before us, these idols, are what our own ancestors did and we should not forget them, but rather do what they did. And this we should do at night so that we will not be uncovered nor should any news of it come to the friars [...].⁵⁷

Spanish suspicions of secret meetings and convocations of large numbers of Maya fueled fears that the drinking of *balché* helped to cause Maya rebellions and resistance to colonial rule. Spanish fears often motivated the authorities to repress and seriously punish any *balché* rituals they uncovered. This paranoid reaction to *balché* rituals as a causal factor in rebellions is best exemplified in a supposed 1607 rebellion in the Maya town of Yobain. The Spanish discovered a series of Maya *balché* "banquets" and meetings in which they drank *balché* and talked about killing the priests and all of the

⁵⁵ See *Auto del juez de comisión de la idolatría*, Lic. Bartolomé Mallén de Rueda, con información contra unos *frayles franciscanos que permiten a los yndios ydolatrar y beber la bebida prohibida balché*, 14 de abril, 1648, Tulane LAL, Vice-regal and Ecclesiastical Mexican Collection, Leg. 66, Exp. 37, folios 6r-7v.

⁵⁶ For several examples of the religious roots of rebellion see John F. Chuchiak, "Cuius Regio Eius Religio: Yucatec Maya Nativistic Movements and the Religious Roots of Rebellion in Colonial Yucatan, 1547-1697", paper presented before the American Society for Ethnohistory Conference in the panel entitled Ethnohistories of the Periphery of the Spanish Empire: Mayas and Spaniards in Yucatán, 16th to 19th Centuries," London, Ontario, Canada—18-22 October, 2000.

⁵⁷ Scholes & Adams, *don Diego de Quijada*, p. 108.

Spaniards.⁵⁸ It appeared that they were fomenting a rebellion. Many of the idolaters when arrested for drinking *balché* angrily blurted out that the "end of the world was coming and the Spaniards would be eliminated, and the priests and friars were to be the first, and even the indios ladinos would be destroyed [...]."⁵⁹ This case intimately related the consumption of *balché* in these secret nightly meetings with open rebellion and planned attempts at resistance. Thus, as the 1607 case of Yobaín illustrates, from the early seventeenth century on the consumption of *balché* and its social and cultural uses were seen not only as a religious threat, but also a contributing factor in open social rebellion.

In this manner, the consumption and making of *balché* became both a civil and ecclesiastical crime punishable by both Church and State. Spanish perceptions of the evils of *balché* explain what happened in the case of Don Tomás Chablé discussed in the introduction. Both the local Spanish Captain and the ecclesiastical judge would claim the use of *balché* as a crime under their specific jurisdictions.⁶⁰

Balché & Contamination of Non-Indians

The crown long feared the impact of inter-ethnic relations between the natives of the New World and non-natives. Earlier laws to prohibit the cohabitation and intermingling of the races in colonial Yucatán had failed. By the 18th century, the majority of the mestizo, mulatto and black population of Yucatán lived outside of Mérida in the Maya villages.⁶¹ These mixed castes intermarried and had children with the Maya. Moreover, as we have seen, many of these same non-Maya participated in drinking *balché* and some even helped make and distribute *balché* in their Maya communities.

As inter-ethnic contacts increased between the Maya world and non-Mayas, the Spanish authorities believed that the Maya intoxicant *balché* led to the corruption and "pollution" of non-Maya and to their eventual participation in idolatrous Maya rituals.⁶²

⁵⁸ See *Autos y diligencias que se hicieron sobre la junta, pláticas y idolatrías de algunos indios del pueblo de Yobaín*, 30 de marzo, 1607, AGI, Audiencia de México 3048, especially testimony on folios 205-211; similarly see *Carta del fray Francisco de Torralva a fray Francisco Ortiz de Colonia sobre las ydolatrías de los indios de Yucatán*, 13 de febrero, 1607, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 467, Exp. 97, folios 436-449, fray Torralva mentions these meetings and the idolatries of the indians of Yobaín.

⁵⁹ *Autos y diligencias que se hicieron sobre la junta, pláticas y idolatrías de algunos indios del pueblo de Yobaín*, 30 de marzo, 1607, AGI, Audiencia de México 3048, folio 232.

⁶⁰ Not only in this 1695 case were their conflicts of jurisdiction dealing with Maya idolatry and the ritualized consumption of *balché*, but also on many other occasions. For other instances see *Documentos sobre la competencia de jurisdicción en el procedimiento de casos de ydolatría hecha por el cura doctrinero fray Manuel Antonio de Armas contra el juez subdelegado, don Gregorio de Quintana*, AGN, Civil, Vol. 1454, Exp. 6, 40 folios; also see *Carta del guardián de Teabo, fray Joseph Perdomo, quejando de la usurpación de jurisdicción en casos de ydolatría por el juez subdelegado de la Sierra, Gregorio de Quintana*, 2 de abril, 1791, AGN, Civil, Vol. 1454, Exp. 6, 2 folios.

⁶¹ See Francisco Fernández & Genny Negroe, *Una población perdida en la memoria: los negros de Yucatán*, Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, 1995. Also see Matthew Restall's manuscript on "Afro-Yucatecans in Colonial Yucatán," a forthcoming book.

⁶² Some of the intricate racial interactions between Mayas and Africans were interestingly described earlier by Matthew Restall. See Matthew Restall, "The Runaway Slave and the Maya Postman: African-Maya Relations in Colonial Yucatán," paper Presented at the American Society for Ethnohistory, Portland, Oregon, November 1996.

The mere fact that a non-Maya consumed and made *balché* was proof enough for a conviction of idolatry and superstition before the Inquisition.⁶³ While the Maya perceived the consumption of *balché* by a non-Maya as a way to integrate them into their communities, Spaniards saw consumption of *balché* as tantamount to heretical apostasy and a denial of Christian Spanish society. To partake of *balché* was to deny civilized Spanish Catholicism and embrace the "darkness of the savage Maya countryside."⁶⁴ Thus, *balché* and its use became the dividing line in Spanish minds between the civilized society the Spaniards attempted to instill in the Maya, and the "backward paganism of the savage wilderness." According to this division, the Maya and all Non-Maya had to choose between drinking *balché* and or acceptable Spanish drinks such as wine and *aguardiente*, the beverages of civilized Christianity. The Spaniards thus created another division between their Christian Spanish society and the isolated *repúblicas de indios*, or separate Maya communities, that they had created.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that the traditional Maya intoxicant, *balché*, played a very important role in both Maya and non-Maya society in colonial Yucatán. Although perceptions and views of *balché* differed between the Spanish and Maya worlds, *balché* enabled both the Maya and the Spaniards to define the social, cultural and political affiliation of Yucatecan colonists. The differing views of *balché* are a symptom of the greater divisions that existed in colonial society between the Spanish/*mestizo* world and the Maya world. To the Spaniards, the ritual consumption of *balché* appeared to be an open act of rebellion and a formal act of idolatry. The Spanish world declared all consumers of *balché*, both Maya and non-Maya, as enemies not only of the state, but also enemies of Christian Spanish civilization. To the Maya, on the other hand, the consumption of *balché* was much more than a simple act of defiance or consumption of ritual intoxicants. The Maya viewed the entire organized and choreographed *balché* rituals as a means of maintaining their traditional political and cultural social order. By means of *balché* rituals, the Maya organized and ordered the world around them, fitting even Spaniards, Blacks, Mulattos, and other non-Indians into their own sacred landscape by means of a cohesive act of ritual inebriation. By consuming *balché* in these rituals, the Spaniards and other non-Mayas entered into the Maya conceptions of the natural and supernatural world.

⁶³ For several examples of these cases see *Proceso contra tres mestizos nombrados Joaquín Pinzón, Julián Piña e Ignacio Ximenes, naturales y vecinos de Campeche, por el delito al parecer de fautores de indios idólatras*, 1721, AGN, Inquisición, Tomo 789, exp. 31., ff. 550-600; also see *Auto de remisión de la sumaria de ydolatría contra Apolonia de Casanova y sus cómplices al comisario del Santo Oficio*, 5 de diciembre, 1786, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 1177, Exp. 7, folio 26r-v; similarly, see *Carta del teniente de cura del partido de Hunucmá, Br. Pedro Castro y Peraza, sobre la ydolatría del viejo Casanova y otros cómplices*, 21 de julio, 1785, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 1177, Exp. 7, folios 180-193.

⁶⁴ Many of the Spanish clergymen who wrote relations of Maya customs viewed the Maya and their rural forests and *milpas* as "savage wilderness." For several examples of this clerical view of the "dark, savage Maya countryside" see *Costumbres, ritos y ydolatrías de los yndios de estas provincias de Yucatán*, Anonymous Manuscript, Private Collection in Mérida, 17th Century, fol. 8.

Balché rituals for the colonial Maya represented both an act of communal religious worship and a cultural ritual of reciprocity. There was more to a *balché* ritual than "mere drunkenness". The *balché* ritual was a highly choreographed ritualized exchange between gods and men, between social elite and their commoners, and between Mayas and outsiders from other ethnic groups. By means of *balché* exchange the Maya elite engaged in reciprocal feasting and ritual drinking which played a major role in maintaining their social hierarchies, their political power and their economic dominance.

As the interesting 1694 case of the *batab* Don Thomás Chablé illustrates, although prohibited from the outset because of its overt religious connections, the ritual intoxicant *balché* could not be eliminated.⁶⁵ Its ritual and cultural significance went far beyond the Church and State's understanding of its religious connection. *Balché* was a useful cultural creation that helped perpetuate not only religious ceremonies, but it also played a role in social, political, and economic relations between Maya and non-Maya alike.

Although apparently framed at first, later testimony showed that Don Thomás Chablé did control the trade of *balché* bark in the region around the town of Kikil in conjunction with the *cacique* of Suquilá, Don Pedro Chan.⁶⁶ Regardless of his denial of involvement in the consumption of the illicit beverage, the historical documentation shows that the lure of *balché* was too powerful for even *batab* Chablé to resist. The sheer social, cultural, economic, and religious significance of *balché* made it impossible for any *cacique*, especially the wealthy Chablé, to refrain from the trade and consumption of such an important commodity. The continued use of *balché* to the present day among the Yucatec and Lacandon Maya is a testimony to the enduring legacy and significance of the ritual intoxicant for Maya culture.

⁶⁵ See *Auto del vicario juez eclesiástico de Kikil sobre un denuncia de ydolatría, balché y la usurpacion de la jurisdicción eclesiástica por el capitán a guerra don Miguel de Espinar*, 15 de diciembre, 1694, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 535, Exp. 6, 2 folios.

⁶⁶ *Confesión de don Tomás Chablé, batab del pueblo de Chuchúén, en la averiguación sobre el caso de ydolatría*, 18 de diciembre, 1694, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 535, Exp. 6, folios 540v-542r.

Year	Place	Participants	Charge	Investigating Ecclesiastical Judge	Sentence
1560	Tepich	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, ritual use of <i>balché</i>	Padre Rodrigo Muñoz	Lashes
1571	Maní	More than 100 Maya	Idolatry, witchcraft, <i>balché</i> rituals	Fr. Juan de Armellones	Lashes, Labor
1574	Campeche	Francisco May, <i>cacique</i> and large number of Maya	<i>Balché</i> ceremonies	Fr. Gregorio de Fuenteovejuna	Lashes, Torments
1575	Peto	Large number of Maya, <i>ah kin</i>	Idolatry, witchcraft, <i>balché</i> rituals	Fr. Diego de Landa	Lashes, Labor in Church
1575	Chancenote	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, witchcraft, <i>balché</i> rituals	Fr. Diego de Landa	Lashes, Labor in Church
1576	Tikuché	Group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> rituals	Padre Leonardo González	Lashes
1576	Tahmuy	Group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Padre Leonardo González	Lashes
1576	Yalcón	Several cases	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Padre Leonardo González	Lashes, Labor in Church
1577	Conkal	Majority of adult Maya males	<i>Balché</i> ceremonies	Fr. Alonso de Solana, Guardian	Lashes
1577	Motul	Large number of Maya	<i>Balché</i> ceremonies	Fr. Luis de Bustamante, Guardian	Lashes
1577	Izamal	Large number of Maya	<i>Balché</i> ceremonies	Fr. Alonso Gutiérrez, Guardian	Lashes
1582	Valladolid	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Pedro Maldonado	Lashes
1582	Xechelchakán	Andrés Cuyoc (<i>ah kin</i>), number of other Maya and an African slave	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, offerings	Fr. Diego de Mexía	Lashes, Labor
1582	Tizmeuac	Several dozen Maya	<i>Balché</i> ceremonies, idolatry	Vicario Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar	Lashes, Prison, Labor in Church
1583	Peto	Several dozen Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Bishop Gregorio de Montalvo	Lashes, Prison
1583	Sotuta	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, witchcraft, <i>balché</i> rituals	Bishop Gregorio de Montalvo	Lashes, Prison, Forced Labor in San Juan de Ulúa
1583	Various	Several hundred Maya, group of <i>ah kinob</i>	Idolatry, sacrifice, <i>balché</i> ceremonies	Dr. Diego García de Palacios (Visitador)	Lashes, Prison, Labor in Church, Exile of Maya <i>ah kinob</i>

1587	Xekpez	Group of Maya	Idolatrý, offerings, <i>balché</i> use	Bishop Gregorio de Montalvo	Lashes, Labor in Church
1587	Valladolid	Several hundred Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Br. Andrés Fernández de Castro	Lashes, Prison, Labor in Church
1590	Cozumel	Pedro Chí, Martín Cab, other Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Hernando de Salinas	Lashes, Labor
1590	Valladolid	Several dozen Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Br. Andrés Fernández de Castro	Lashes, Labor in Church
1591	Tixmukul	Pedro Cocom, Juan Hun (<i>ah kinob</i>) and large group of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Antonio de Arroyo	Lashes, Labor, Exile
1593	Tixolop	Group of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Antonio de Arroyo	Lashes
1593	Chancenote	Large group of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Antonio de Arroyo	Lashes, Labor
1594	Nabalam	Large group of Maya	Idolatrý, witchcraft, <i>balché</i> rituals	Antonio de Arroyo	Lashes, Labor
1594	Calatmul	Large number of Maya	Witchcraft, <i>balché</i> use	Padre Antonio de Arroyo	Lashes, Labor in Church
1595	Calatmul	Juan Puc, Juan Uh, Juan Ná, Diego Chan, Juan Mó (<i>ah kinob</i>), and other Maya	Idolatrý, <i>códices</i> , sacrifice, <i>balché</i> use	Antonio de Arroyo	Lashes, Exile, Labor
1595	Chunhuhub	<i>Cacique</i> Don Gaspar Chán, rest of town	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> rituals	Antonio de Arroyo	Lashes, Removal from office, Labor
1596	Valladolid	Maya priest/diviner	Witchcraft, <i>balché</i> use	Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar	Lashes, Labor in Church
1596	Dzismopo	<i>Cacique</i> Don Antonio Pot, large number of Maya towns people	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Antonio de Arroyo	Lashes, Removal from office, Labor
1597	Peto	Francisco Pech, <i>ah kin</i> and others	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Antonio de Arroyo	Lashes
1597	Sotuta	Andres Chi, <i>ah kin</i> and dogmatizer	Idolatrý, sacrifice, <i>balché</i> ceremonies	Vicario de Sotuta	Lashes (Civil death sentence for dogmatizing)
1598	Peto	Francisco Pech (<i>ah kin</i>) and 10 other Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use, sacrifices	Baltazar de Herrera	Lashes, Labor
1599	Cozumel	A group of 39 Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Br. Francisco Ruiz	Lashes, Fine, Labor

Year	Place	Participants	Charge	Investigating Ecclesiastical Judge	Sentence
1599	Yaxcabá	Many Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	<i>Padre</i> Antonio de Arroyo	Lashes, Labor in Church
1601	Sotuta	Juan Ya, María Cocom, Francisco Ta, Juan Ta, Martín Euan, Catalina Cocom, Francisco Catzín	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Diego Velázquez Arceo	Lashes, Misa, Labor
1604	Sahcabá	Large number of Maya, including Church servants, sacristan and Maya <i>cantores</i>	Idolatry, witchcraft, <i>balché</i> rituals	<i>Padre</i> Cristóbal de Valencia	Lashes, Fines, Labor
1604	Chancenote	More than 100 Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, sacrifices	Dr. Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar	<i>Reducción</i>
1605	Ichmul	Large group of Maya	Idolatry, copal incense, <i>balché</i> use	<i>Padre</i> Francisco Ruiz Salvago	Lashes
1605	Valladolid	More than 60 Maya from several villages	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar	Lashes, Fine, Labor
1606	Oxkutzcab	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Juan Cuevas, Guardian	Lashes
1606	Yalcobá	56 Maya men	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Parish Priest	Lashes
1606	Tidzoc	Maya <i>ah kin</i>	Witchcraft, <i>balché</i> use	Dr. Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar	Lashes, exile, labor
1606	Tixcacal	Several Maya	<i>Balché</i> ceremony, idolatry	<i>Padre</i> Diego de la Cámara	Lashes, Fine, Labor
1606	Tikaxoc	Group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Bishop Diego Vásquez de Mercado	Lashes, Labor in Church
1606	Tikuché	More than 80 Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Bishop Diego Vásquez de Mercado	Lashes, Labor in Church
1606	Telchac	María Dzul	Idolatry, witchcraft, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Rodrigo de Tinoco, Guardian	Lashes, Labor in Church
1607	Tepakán	Many Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> rituals, sacrifice of dogs	Franciscan Guardian	Lashes
1607	Baca	<i>Ah Cambezh</i> of town and other Maya	Idolatry, <i>códices</i> , sacrifice, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Francisco de Torralva	Lashes
1607	Tizimin	More than 4,000 Maya (men & women) found guilty	Idolatry, sacrifice, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar	Lashes, Auto da Fe, Fines, Labor
1607	San Cristóbal	Maya <i>ah kin</i>	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Alonso de Villalón	Lashes, exile

1607	Yobaín	Cristóbal May, Pablo Chablé, Mateo Mocul and 60 other Maya	<i>Balché</i> rituals, secret meetings, plots of rebellion	Bishop	Lashes, Fines, Labor
1607	Ppolé	Several Maya	<i>Balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> making, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Dr. Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar	Lashes, Labor
1607	Cacalchén	Maya <i>ah kin</i>	<i>Balché</i> Rituals, idolatry	Ecclesiastical Judge	Lashes, Labor in Church
1607	Pomolché	Several Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Francisco de Torralva	Lashes, Labor in Church
1607	Yaxcabá	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, sacrifice, <i>balché</i> ceremonies	Vicario de Yaxcabá	Lashes, Labor in Church
1607	Chancenote	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Juan Alonso de Lara	Lashes, Labor in Church
1607	Chalanté	Group of Maya	Idolatry, sacrifice of dogs, <i>balché</i> use	Franciscan Guardian	Lashes, Labor in Church
1608	Conkal	Group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Gerónimo de Porras	Lashes
1608	Tixholop	Number of Maya men	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Dr. Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar	Lashes
1608	Tixmukul	Several Maya	Idolatry, sacrifice, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Dr. Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar	Lashes, Fines, Labor
1608	Tekanxoc	Group of Maya	<i>Balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> making, confiscation of <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Dr. Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar	Lashes, Labor in Church
1610	Maxcanú	Hernando Uk, <i>Cacique</i>	Idolatry, witchcraft, <i>balché</i> rituals	Franciscan Guardian	Lashes
1610	Tecoh	Several Maya	Idolatry, witchcraft, <i>balché</i> rituals	Fr. Juan Roldán, Guardian	Lashes
1610	Valladolid	Alfonso Chablé, Francisco Canul	Heretical claims, idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar	Lashes, Labor
1610	Timucuy	11 Maya (Pedro Cocom, Juan Noh, Diego Canul, Andrés Cocom, Francisco Cocom, Gaspar Noh, Gaspar Cocom, Gaspar Tuz, Juan Cocom, Andrés Euan, Juan Chinab	Idolatry, witchcraft, <i>balché</i> rituals	Ecclesiastical Judge	Lashes, Prison

Year	Place	Participants	Charge	Investigating Ecclesiastical Judge	Sentence
1610	Bacalar	Diego Pech	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Gregorio de Aguilar	Lashes, Sent to Prison in Mérida
1611	La Ceiba	Francisco Pat, Magdalena Cauich and 3 other women	Witchcraft, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Pedro González de Molina	Lashes
1611	Tecal	Several Maya	Witchcraft, <i>balché</i> use	Franciscan Guardian	Lashes
1611	Tixkokob	Miguel Aké, Mencia, his wife	<i>Balché</i> use	<i>Padre</i> Diego de la Cámara	Lashes
1611	Homún	Andrés Chán and group of other Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Juan de Santa María	Lashes, Fines, Labor
1611	Dzamá	<i>Cacique</i> of town, other Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Ecclesiastical Judge	Lashes, Removal from office, Labor
1614	Calotmul	Large group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Nicolás de Tapia	Lashes, Labor
1617	Motul	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Gerónimo de Porras	Lashes
1618	Tixkokob	Group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Leonardo González Herrera	Lashes
1620	Cozumel	Large group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Nicolás de Tapia	Lashes
1621	Chalanté	More than 60 Maya from the village	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Gerónimo de Porras	Lashes
1622	Hocabá	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Leonardo González Herrera	Lashes
1622	Pixilá	Large group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Gerónimo de Porras	Lashes
1627	Maxcanú	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Antonio de Ramírez, Guardian	Lashes
1628	Tekantó	Great number of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Antonio de Ramírez, Guardian	Lashes
1629	Campeche	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Francisco Romero	Lashes
1631	Campeche	Large group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Francisco Romero	Lashes
1632	Mama	Several dozen Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Antonio de Ramírez, Guardian	Lashes
1633	Hoctún	Several hundred Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Eugenio de Alcántara Altamirano	Lashes
1633	Campeche	Several hundred Maya in region	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, sacrifices	Fr. Antonio de Ramírez, Guardian	Lashes, Labor, Fines
1633	Tixpehual	Number of Maya men	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Eugenio de Alcántara Altamirano	Lashes, <i>Reducción</i>
1636	Sotuta	Many Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Br. Francisco de Cárdenas Valencia	Lashes

1636	Dzindzantún	104 Maya from this town, 2 <i>ah kinob</i>	Idolatrý, sacrifice, <i>balché</i> use <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	<i>Padre</i> Bartolomé Gómez	Lashes
1636	Dzemul	31 Maya from the town	Idolatrý, sacrifice, <i>balché</i> use <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	<i>Padre</i> Juan Pérez	Lashes, Prison
1636	Telchac	34 Maya, 8 <i>ah kinob</i>	Idolatrý, Sacrifice, ritual use of <i>balché</i>	<i>Padre</i> Juan Pérez	Lashes, Prison, Labor in Church
1637	Uquí	Group of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Ecclesiastical Judge	Lashes
1637	Motul	Large number of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Ecclesiastical Judge	Lashes
1641	Valladolid	Several hundred Maya	Idolatrý, sacrifice, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Andrés Fernández de Castro	Lashes, Fines, Labor
1643	Tibac	<i>Cacicque</i> of the town and more than 70 Maya families	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Ecclesiastical Judge	Lashes, Removal from office, Labor
1644	Peto	Large group of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	<i>Padre</i> Pedro Borges	Lashes
1644	Tikuché	Group of Maya	<i>Balché</i> ceremonies in church, Profaning of Catholic chalice	Br. Pablo de Sepúlveda	Lashes, Fines, Labor
1644	Valladolid	Large number of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> ceremonies, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Br. Juan Cano	Lashes, Labor
1644	Yaxcabá	Group of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	<i>Padre</i> Francisco de Cárdenas Valencia	Lashes, Labor in Church
1646	Sotuta	Group of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Ecclesiastical Judge	Lashes
1646	Tzucopó	Large group of Maya and 20 <i>ah kinob</i>	Idolatrý, sacrifice, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Fr. Alonso Quadrón	Lashes, Labor
1647	Misnebalam	Group of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Bartolomé Mallén de Rueda	Lashes
1647	Timop	Group of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Bartolomé Mallén de Rueda	Lashes
1647	Sinsinbahtok	Francisco Chán, Diego Hau and other Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Bartolomé Mallén de Rueda	Lashes, Fines, Labor
1648	Pixoy	Group of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Bartolomé Mallén de Rueda	Lashes
1650	Tixppitah	Number of Maya and a Mulatto, Alonso el Puerto	Copal, <i>balché</i> use	<i>Padre</i> Pedro Mallén de Rueda	Remission of Mulato's Case to Inquisition
1651	Hocabá	Several Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	<i>Padre</i> Antonio Abarco de León	Lashes, Labor
1655	Cacalchén	Large group of Maya	Idolatrý, <i>balché</i> use	Ecclesiastical Judge	Lashes

Year	Place	Participants	Charge	Investigating Ecclesiastical Judge	Sentence
1659	Popolá	More than 40 Maya families	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, profaning of Catholic ornaments	Dr. Antonio de la Horta y Barroso	Reducción, Lashes
1672	Merida	Diego Chab	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Ecclesiastical Judge	Lashes
1674	Santa Catalina	Large number of Maya, several mulattos and mestizos	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> making, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Joseph de Montalvo y Vera, <i>Juez de Comisión</i>	Lashes, Fines, Labor, Remission of case of mulattos and mestizos to Inquisition
1686	Yaxcabá	Large group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Alonso de Padilla	Lashes, Labor
1693	Peto	Group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Dr. Sancho del Puerto	Lashes
1694	Chuchuen	<i>Cacique</i> and Indian officials of town	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Vicente Alfonso de Miranda, <i>Juez de Comisión</i>	Lashes, Removal from office, Labor
1695	Suquilá	<i>Cacique</i> and other Maya from town	Idolatry, <i>balché</i>	Vicente Alfonso de Miranda, <i>Juez de Comisión</i>	Lashes
1695	Kikil	Group of Maya and several mestizos and mulattos	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> making, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Vicente Alfonso de Miranda, <i>Juez de Comisión</i>	Lashes, Fines, Labor, Remission of case of mulattos and mestizos to Inquisition
1696	Homún	Group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Dr. Sancho del Puerto	Lashes
1696	Tzucupó	Group of Maya and two mestizos (Francisco Galán, Manuel Cordero)	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> making, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Eugenio Núñez	Lashes, Labor, Remission of the mestizos to Inquisition
1696	Tixcacal	Over 900 Maya implicated	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Alonso de Padilla	Lashes, Removal from office, Labor
1721	Dzonotchel	Don Pedro Coyf and other Maya (Implication of 3 mestizos)	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Diego Marcos Novelo	Lashes, Labor, Remission of the mestizos to Inquisition
1737	Temaná	More than 150 Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Felipe de Zetina y Aguilar	Lashes, <i>Reducción</i>
1747	Motul	88 Maya from the region	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Br. Juan María de Calderón	Lashes, <i>Reducción</i>
1748	Campeche	Several Maya and a Spaniard, Francisco Pantoja	Witchcraft, <i>balché</i> use	Ecclesiastical Judge	Lashes for Indians, Remission of the case

1748	Ichmul	Nicolás Chuc and other Maya	Idolatry, witchcraft, <i>balché</i> rituals	Ecclesiastical Judge	against Pantoja to Inquisition Lashes, Labor
1762	Chemax	Number of cases	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Vicente Ildefonso de Zúñiga y Solís	Lashes
1768	Tecoh	Number of cases	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Joseph Joaquín Mediano y Pavia	Lashes
1769	Tihotzuco	Number of cases	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Francisco Xavier Sugasti	Lashes
1776	Becal	Number of cases	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Francisco Xavier Sugasti	Lashes
1779	Calotmul	Large group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Gerónimo de Mimensa y Sobrino	Lashes
1779	Maxcanú	Large number of cases	Idolatry, witchcraft, <i>balché</i> rituals	Joseph María Olivera	Lashes
1781	Tihotzuco	Group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Francisco García	Lashes
1784	Xechelchakán	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Francisco García	Lashes
1784	Yaxcabá	Group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Joseph Zavalgui	Lashes
1785	Hunucmá	10 Maya and several mulattos	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use, <i>balché</i> paraphernalia	Pedro Castro y Peraza	Lashes, Labor, Remission of the mulattos to the Inquisition
1791	Tenabo	Group of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Ecclesiastical Judge	Lashes
1791	Akil	11 Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Fr. Manuel Antonio de Armas,	Lashes
1813	Tihotzuco	Large number of Maya	Illicit dances, <i>balché</i> use	Ecclesiastical Judge	Lashes
1813	Uaymá	Large number of Maya	Idolatry, <i>balché</i> use	Manuel Pacheco Fr. Pedro de Guzmán	Lashes

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