

Entertainment

by

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Palau Society of Historians

Ongelaod – Entertainment

Palauan Series 8

1. Palau - Traditional Culture.
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Hatohobei

This small island is also called Tobi. People live so isolated they take any event as an occasion to celebrate, sing, and dance.

Habungur – Feasts

There are several occasions to hold a feast. They are usually accompanied by the distribution of a lot of food as well as performances of dances and chants. Generally women sing and dance first then the men dance.

Witeri tamor is the name of the feast when a new chief is inaugurated. It starts with a prayer. Again the women dance first, because they were the ones who chose the new chief. During these dances *haping tamor*, songs about the chiefs, are sung. Afterwards the new chief receives from Romohoparuh, the highest title-holding woman of the island, a necklace made of turtle shell. This necklace has been handed down to him and is a sign of his title. Only the chief himself can eat the food prepared for him. Then *koritamor*, the second part of the inauguration feast for the new *tamor*, chief, is celebrated. It can also be held in honor of the chief's birthday or when he is leaving the island. The food prepared for this feast can be distributed and consumed by everybody.

A very special feast is the one held for a *taungch*, a girl that has her menarche. This is a feast that is celebrated within the family. The girl spends this time in the *imeriporu*, menstruation hut, where Romohoparuh, the highest title-holding woman of the island, takes care of her. She and the other women will sing a sort of lullaby

for the young girl, telling her that soon she will feel better, that she should have a good night's sleep, and that she soon will go home again.

A rare feast is *hoho*, which happens only once a year and no incidents such as accidents or deaths should have happened before it. When the chiefs announce *hoho* the women prepare taro, which is considered a value on Tobi Island, and the men go fishing. The oldest woman of the family brings her taro to a man who is no relative of her. She approaches him on the beach when he returns from his fishing trip. When the taro is presented the woman sings *taiau*, a song in which she will sing about herself and her feelings, generally depicting herself. This song is accompanied by a dance where she sways her hips, while the man shouts "*merio itetiu*" – "go down" (meaning dancing with more bent knees). Older women can dance more daringly than young ones. In the end the man has to give his catch of fish for the offered taro.

A feast without any dancing is *pau ri wa*, where the completion of a canoe is celebrated with the distribution of a lot of food.

Dances

On Hatohobei there are many kinds of dances and many names for them. There are no sitting dances. All dances are performed standing. Dancing is taught in the family; the mother will teach her daughters and the father his sons. During the dance training, drinking coconuts are worn around the waist in order to help to study the hip movements. A good dancer has smooth movements,

is mobile in the hips and has coordinated hand movements with the other dancers. Men and woman perform separately. The dances performed by women are called *bahuh*. In contrast to the men the movements of the women are smoother, they slap their backside and their thighs. During the dance of the men, called *pong*, the dancers are moving their hips in the rhythm of the song they slap their upper arms and make bold movements.

Before the dances start the dancers are decorated. Their arms, legs, waist and head are adorned with strips of *ubud*, the young fronds of the coconut tree. Women paint their face and body with *heng*, turmeric. The men also use feathers of frigate birds as decorations.

All the dancers stand in one long line facing their teacher, who is sitting in front of them and singing ahead of the others. In the middle of the line stand the oldest dancers, while the young ones, who are just learning how to dance, stand at the end of the line, looking carefully and imitating the others. During the performance clowning persons will appear, focusing their attention on the best dancers of the group and trying to confuse and distract them. When the women dance, men bring presents and vice versa. Thus a dance on Tobi is a very merry occasion.

Peter Black¹ mentions the *wari hoho* gift dance, performed only once a year on Christmas day. After the women have performed their dances they slip away to their houses and tie cords around their waists from which they hang valuables such as fishhooks, bars of soap,

parcels of food, sometimes even a live rooster tied by his feet. Decked out like this they return to the dance ground. They form a circle, face inwards and begin to dance, swaying and stomping in unison. They chant a special song, heard only in this one dance, insulting and teasing the men:

*nga hichaho shifire / nga sibe uheri bangora ba
mangi / mangare chamahe / ba ibe buhau
iyahomu / wore mahahaera ba hobe faisai /
ngoyae faisong hoho / nga euteri sohu wamo
nga chataliato rotor*

we, the women dancers / we dance early in the morning / in anticipation of meeting our lovers who went fishing / he will kiss me when his canoe has been filled with his catch / and he will bring forth his canoe

The men, who were until now in the canoe house, come out and one by one join the dancers. While teasing the women they untie the presents and actually dance this once together with the women.

Before the men go fishing they perform a *pongori iafiefirih*, fishing dance, to make sure that they will have a good catch. The movements of this dance imitate those of the actual fishing. *Pongori totogoriuor* is a turtle dance also performed before the men go turtle hunting. While dancing they sing songs about their hunting skills and former hunting events. Women also have a dance to make sure that their taro is growing well; this is the *gesibemir ueni farohach iuane yach purpur*, female taro patch dance. They dance it before going to their taro patch to work.

Songs

People on Tobi like to *mauhari*, sing, as this is one way to express feelings. Women sing while working in their gardens or taking care of their children. Men sing when they go fishing but also at night when they meet for their *tuba*-circle on the beach, where they drink fermented palm wine. They will sing about their girlfriends, wishes and dreams. But the singers do not *hur*, compose, their songs themselves, they have them created by some old men who are renowned for such talent. Provided with all the information needed, they will create a custom-made song for the client and get payment in form of *horohor*, rope made of coconut fiber, and food. Then the song will become the property of the customer. Nevertheless, everybody who likes the song can sing it; thus, a good song is widely sung and popular.

Hureri Fariuou

*mechichetahe mar simoto matari farech sihator
/ tirareor toborior neiahafi / efosonguchich
meraoch eyahuyohungara hech / ba etiue bisiria
hem / etiue mahaeiruh eitiudu meniuar / sieri
taheahaos sihesia ueri faroh / hoia me
hamahemam / emousu ma tarifarech nieri
hango riaer / uan tap itpna / ehasoias me tipei
ematahutohu ngaroch / iueni peih yahem itiro
haugerih uuei mamatareahaua / hobe hatoh
hamahech ba samane hapitehi /
beteingamihousaho / ba rangirae hasafarea
eitara rani pepa / ebuk ngarahech wait man ri
hapeach ba sarue rangir / ema serap iuaoch /
ngayauari bonguto ho meuari ra touauh / eyah
bahoni fangoch ngae tiua uerifaroh
kebesengeiri bongur*

we young men, we sit in front of our boathouse
looking at the sunset / children are shouting informing
us that there are groups of people coming on shore /
I am calling and asking for my loved one in the crowd
/ I made a stop in front of our boathouse and my
sweetheart was standing in front of a women's group /
I screamed in fear with my heart pounding while
standing in the crowd / I called to my friend to give me
my sweetheart because I love her very much / it is not
your decision for it is written in heaven that we will go
there someday / tonight is our moment

Hureri fariou, love songs, are usually sung at two occasions. First when you have a heart full of love or a broken one and want to express your feelings, you have such a song composed for you. Later on this *hurerifariouu* will be sung at the funeral of its owner as a *tangi*, a funeral song, chanted in order to remember the person, who was once alive and in love.

Hachuhochuh, lullabies, were written a long time ago. They are sung while children are rocked to sleep in the cradle. Lullabies describe how beautiful, strong and diligent the children will be one day. During funerals lullabies are also sung, as *tangi* or wailing songs.

When men go fishing they not only sing love songs to pass the time but also *hureriseiroho*, fishing songs, in order to lure the fish to the boat.

The island of Tobi is divided in two halves, the north and the south. At the time of big feasts these halves will have competitive performances and will tease each other with *haping*, teasing songs.

A special song connected with a game played by children is *ueicherier*, the fire-ant-pain-song. While singing this song, children squeeze the skin of each other's hands. The child who cannot tolerate the pain any more will run away and has lost. Such songs are composed by old women.

A recent introduction is *singen* church songs. Today Tobi has an extensive canon of church songs, also comprising Christmas songs, like this one:

Haifouri Hamau Hari Fasari Tamor

*sibe mayahamo hehei bis / sibe mayahamo
hehei bis sibera Bethlehem / ifiri Hesus ue
sibera hauenger /ngae masuh Tamor rani
imerimer / etai tipar me ebetaitei esaraha ho
fahol / sina ue, esahoharangomeraur ariweich /
irenitepieri henimer raetaimoh / erap seua yar
homouer / ariweich hahofahof / engei seua ifiri
yar fou / emamayahih / esasohuriweich / bito ba
hobe hahapaipai ba hobe hamama uh / hobe
hatahama / faringorongorum / ba hobe fahoho
hariweich hobe hari me bechi /*

*Chorus: Dios yeai / tipei emesari seuaho /
efasato ngae hahofahof / nga tipei ehamarie*

look up to Bethlehem and learn from Jesus / our father
sleeps in a manger and does not care for wealth as he is
modest / the mother places the baby in rugged bedding
/ the poor baby shivers from the cold of the night / the
baby looks upon you and says, " come closer so you
will care for me" / open your heart and have pity for
the child and give him warmth

Chorus: my god / I love you very much / if you were
poor or just a baby I would still love you very much

***Kokom wer i pie* – Games on the Beach**

Many of the below mentioned games are played in the cool of the night on the beach as a favorite pastime.

Competitions are called *hihim*. The whole population enjoys them. Women have special competitions, like basket or mat weaving, whereas the men compete in climbing coconut trees and husking coconuts or they hold a *hihim merir fatur*, a paddling race.

Children have many of their own competitions. They hold *hihim merir iaf*, a swimming contest or play *hapesi*, where they dive down and hold their breath as long as possible. Another game played in deep water is *rumoh*. Boys dive deep down under water, where they stand on each other's shoulders until the head of the last one surfaces above the water. The one who can no longer hold the others or his breath will be the last one, whose head is sticking out of the water in the next game.

When children play *hatri moromor* they bury one child in the sand so that only the head looks out, and then run away. The buried child has to struggle out of the sand in order to get free and chase after them.

Storytelling

Often old people tell stories to the young ones, but adults also enjoy listening to them. The legends from the past talk about the many ghosts of the island, about the ancient times of Tobi and past historical events. Storytelling is a nightly entertainment, to educate and entertain at the same time.