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*See letter*

CHONTAL (MAYAN)  
Tabasco

KOJOBLE

Chontal Tabasco

Report of Margaret Harris  
for January 1948

## K'OJOBLE

K'ojoble is a combination of a masked dance and music furnished by drums, fifes, and another type of instrument called a 'ujte in Chontal. This celebration is held the night before the religious fiestas to the certain images in the church. There are usually three or four images in each village church. In the town of Tapotzingo<sup>1</sup> the four days of celebration are San Antonio--June 13, Virgin de Carmen--July 16, San Miguel--September 29, and Santa Concepciona--December 8.

The celebrations are started about eight o'clock the evening preceding the fiesta. The mayordomo<sup>2</sup> is always in charge of this celebration. Four masked dancers and musicians either gather at the church or go directly to the home of the mayordomo where the celebration is to be held. There are always four dancers in every town. Often there are not enough drummers for the four drums because only a few men know how to play them. Any person from another town may offer to play and is willingly accepted.

A plate with a rosary on the one side is placed on the altar in the home. During the evening any of the invited guests or any of the uninvited onlookers who crowd in at the door of the mayordomo's house may come in, kneel in front of the altar, kiss the rosary and leave a donation on the other side of the plate. They are then given the native corn drink which has been donated by the people and which the women have spent hours in preparing. The money given on the plate is used to pay the expenses of the candles and incense, or it may be

used for church repairs that are needed.

At midnight, referred to as "The gloria" or the ushering in of the special religious fiesta day, the corn drink *maç'* (*chorroado* in Spanish) is served. The dance continues until about four in the morning when the village 'resador' comes and says 'c?u] t'an' (church words) and thereby ends the dance. Often the guests are unable to walk home due to having drunk too much liquor.

The masks are carved from cedar wood. A dried wooden fibre is sewed onto a braided palm base and this false hair is fastened to the top of the face. The mask is worn on the top of the head and the white fibre hair hangs down below the shoulders. The masks are the personal property of the owners and when not in use they are well wrapped and stored near the altar in their homes. In case of illness of a dancer the mask may be borrowed and used by another. In case of death, the mask may be inherited by the family (one family known to the author has one three generations old) or it may be sold.

The instruments held in the hand are a calabasha (rattle) and a fan. The dried calabash is still in use. Before the calabash is dried a hole is put in the bottom and the pulp is taken out. After it is dried small pebbles or seeds are put in and the hole plugged shut with wax. To make the fan woven palm braid is sewed in circular fashion about a handbreadth in diameter. A short stick is fastened to this to serve as a handle for the fan. The masks represent the Jews who are ridiculed and jeered. The dance is a kind of a jumping-hop-step which everyone knows. The dancers shout "Hi ho" in a high pitch with a final down glide to low at the end of the last syllable.

The musical instruments are town property. Each town has two large drums and two smaller drums and a small fife. These are used throughout the entire fiesta. The drums are hollowed from cedar logs with deer skin stretched over the ends. A pliable vine holds the skin in place. A silky looking plant fibre called 'nijab' is twisted together into cord on a Thursday, and in order to insure a good tone to the drum the skins must be laced tightly over the sides of the drum on a Friday. Any piece of wood a handbreadth long can serve as a drum stick. The fife called 'amay' is made from yellow carrizo (Spanish for a strong reed) about a foot long and an inch in diameter. A smaller piece is pasted at the top with bee's wax to make a narrow mouthpiece. There are six holes at the other end which are held shut with the fingertips as the instrument is played. These instruments are stored in the church when not in use.

Other instruments, also stored in the church and used only at the k'ojoble, are poco? a larger fife made from black carrizo, and the ?ujte? which is made from a large piece of hollowed out tulum (Chontal) tree about two yards long, a foot wide and a foot high. This instrument is like an inverted lidless box. It is given what is called a backbone by cutting a slit from side to side through the center of the top. This instrument is placed on four standards with the open side near the floor. The standards are made from four even piles of corn cobs covered with leaves and tied firmly then a board is placed over the top. The player sits on a chair and drums the entire two yard surface which is at right angles with his knees. Any stick will do to beat this type of instrument, but the ends should be covered with rubber and cloth. The poco? is about

two feet long and made exactly like the amay, the smaller fife. These last two instruments are always kept for the masked dance and never used at any other time.

All musical instruments and masks are regarded as being alive. At the k'ojoble warapo (a fermented drink) and corn drink are poured into little holes in order to feed the abiding spirits. Little children are cautioned not to touch them. Before using the mask it is made alive for the fiesta by waving incense in front of it. A mask is never alive until it has been used. The people believe that the "Eggchild"<sup>3</sup> said they should celebrate in this manner. During the k'ojoble the special instruments peco<sup>?</sup> and p'u<sup>?</sup>alte<sup>?</sup> alternate their music with the fife and the drums always played at the fiesta, at a signal from the mayor-domo.

The following text was given by Senon Luciano May, a twenty-three year old bi-lingual informant. The content of this text was observed as a celebration in four towns in the near-by area, Tetla, Wanc'ie<sup>?</sup>, Yasub and Tapotzin. (The mayordomo who had charge of the dress and masks in Tapotzin sold them and made a good profit for himself.) At present these people will not show these masks or k'ojoble instruments to an outsider and refrain from talking about these things. They seem to feel that people will laugh at them.

4  
Kʔojoble  
Masks

Kʔojob u kʔanantan u jut u ni? u ti? u  
masks it has it face it nose it mouth it

ʔikin u yej tʔ? tʔABA ka? ʔitam u yakbinte  
ears it teeth very big like pig it is ginen

y tʔ? pʔeros u jut y ʔaninte silaw. u kan-  
and very rough it face and is seen ugly. It has

antan u noj tamal ʔuk sak. y lakʔe? tan u  
it lots long hair white. And put on his

pan maska u ʔe u yakʔotnoman. jini winik ʔakʔotba  
head the one who will he cause dancing. this man man-dancer

u kʔeʔe? tu kʔab umpʔe yok buʔ tuba u  
he takes hold in his hand one thing small gourd his he

ʔejan y tu ʔʔeja. U kʔeʔe? une umpʔe ka? yok  
shakes and to his left. He holds it one thing like little

pʔi? pʔe ʔuyu de jitʔib ʔan. jinkʔin u mme  
small fan sewed from woven palm. when he goes

tʔ kʔojoble o tʔ akʔot jini winik si ane a ʔanen u  
to masks or yo dance this man if you you see he

tʔʔbenet o u yeʔbenet th jini buʔ kon teʔe u yok  
points at or he shows you this gourd with all his little

pʔe. jinkʔin u mme tʔ akʔot jini winik u ʔen swat.  
fan. when he goes to dance this man he makes shouts.

jiganteba ʔʔi ʔjni ʔʔi ka? u jut untu noj  
Giant they say there was like his face one person big  
they say

krʔʔ winik y u kʔanantan ʔʔi ti? u jut  
mad man and he had they say near his eye

ka? u noʔan umpʔe saktok? ʔʔi de oro  
like its bigness one thing egg they say from gold

y u ʔanob akʔot taka ʔʔi u jele? u ba  
and they make dance also they say they dress up themselves

joʔtujob ʔʔi y untu yok pʔi? ʔjlo? ʔʔi.  
five persons they say and one person little small boy they say.

jini ʔjʔʔabala u jele? u bajob tʔok u muk  
these men adults they dress up themselves with their big

wes u muk buk y kase? ump?e šak payu  
 pants his big shirt and tie one thing red handkerchief

tan u head ump?e kada u k?ab y ump?e tu  
 on his pam one thing each his arm and one thing on his

lukib y ump?e tu muk? y ump?e pan u pešu  
 neck and one thing on his and one thing on his chest  
 waist

y tok u šanabob y t?ok u šojte? jelojtak. y  
 and with his shoes and with his scepter decorated. And

ni jigante mas u jele? uba. Upete u nok? u den  
 this giant more he adorns himself. All his clothes it make

šana y t?ok u noj tamal mašit te? a?i tu  
 shine and with his big long knife wood they say in

k?ab tu noj. unoja jini ak?otob t?ok u  
 his hand to his right. The leader these dances with his

noj tamal šojte? a?i tam ka? us?e metros. tu  
 big long scepter they say long like three meters. On its

ni? jini šojte? u kanantan kua? ti jini de  
 end this scepter it has something vague this from

palib tuba u šejan bajka u mumejob ta ak?ot.  
 metal its it rattles there they pass to dance.

y jini yok ajlo?ba k?alin jele taka t?ok u  
 and this little boy well dressed up too with his

šimpan a?i tan u pam y jini šimpan jele išta  
 cap they say on his head and this cap adorned up to

iski tan u pam t?ok k?en u muk?u a?i ta  
 up on his head with many its feathers they say from

mut šak yaš k?an šak ik? jini u muk?u a?i--ta  
 bird red green blue yellow white black this his feather

y t?ok un?it u krus tu k?ab a?i y ump?e  
 and with one thin his cross on his arm they say and one thing

yok jil?un a?i y t?ok k?en u mop?k?ab a?i  
 little stone they say and with many his rings they say

de oro y u ša?š?itna u k?ab u kase? payu piš  
 from gold and his two thin his hand he tie handkerchief pretty

tu k?ab. jink?in u šak?e?ob ak?ot jini jigante  
 on his arm. when they start dance this giant

u den ka? buys t?ok jini yok ajlo? . jil?pat u  
 he makes like fight with this little boy . Then he

den gana. jink?in u den ak?ot a?i jini jigante  
 makes gain. when he makes dance they say this giant



tʔok jini yok ajloʔ jigante u susuk ʔepeʔ tʔok  
 with this little boy giant he pretends cutting with  
 u maʔit tem . jiʔpat u meʔʔan u maʔit u sakan  
 his knife wood . then he examines his knife he looks for  
 ʔiʔ: ʔa jini maʔit teʔ. jinkʔin maʔ u poʔlen une  
 blood on this knife wood. when no he finds he  
 mas kraʔ. U nune u sakan jini yok ajloʔ . jiʔpat  
 more angry. He goes he looks for this little boy . then  
 u ʔen uba kaʔeʔ a bon boʔo jin u pʔuleʔ  
 he makes himself like recently got tired he puffs out  
 u noʔ ʔoʔ ukʔa ʔankak kaʔeʔ tʔʔ boʔojin y  
 his his cheeks because may be seen that very tired and  
 y kaʔ u biʔe tʔ kab.  
 and like he goes to the ground.

jini yok ajloʔ u mukʔe jini jiʔtun ajjigante  
 this little boy he hides this stone giant  
 u yale tʔ kab ukʔa ʔankak kaʔeʔ une u sati.  
 he falls to ground because may be seen that he he lost.  
 u lotob u meʔʔben jini ʔan tiʔ u jutba. u  
 his friends they examine this is there near his eye. they  
 yaleʔob kaʔeʔ jini jiʔtun ajni tu kʔab yok  
 say that this stone was in his hand little  
 ajloʔ yaʔan tiʔ u jut ajgoliath.  
 boy there is near his eye goliath.

#### english free translation

masks have a face, a nose, mouth, ears, and teeth, like big pig's teeth and it is given a rough finish to appear ugly. It also has a lot of long white hair. It is made from the fibrous inner bark of a certain tree and for this reason is white. The one who does the dancing puts this on his head, this man, dancer, has a small dried calabash in his left hand, he holds something like a small fan sewed from woven palm. When he goes to the mask or dance if he sees you he will paint  
 There was a giant, they say, near his eyes, was something as

and show you his calabash and fan. It is because he goes to the dance that he makes these shouts.

There was a giant, they say, near his eye they say was something of gold as large as an egg. He had the face of a big mad man. They make a dance also, they say, he adorns himself, all five including the little boy. The big ones make dances too, they say. The big ones dress up themselves with big pants, big blouses and tie a red handkerchief on their head, one on each of their arms and one around their neck and one at their waist and one on their chest and have shoes and decorated scepter or canes. The giant is more dressed up. All his clothes glisten (like silk) and he has a long wooden knife, they say, in his right hand. The leader of this dance has a big long scepter, they say, about three meters long. On the end of <sup>this scepter</sup> it has something made from metal which makes it rattle when they go about dancing, and this little boy is well dressed too with a cap on his head, they say. This cap is adorned from its up to the top with many bird feathers, they say, red, blue, green, yellow white and black. Along with the feathers he has a cross. In his hand he has a <sup>small</sup> stone, they say, and many gold rings on both hands and a pretty handkerchief tied on his arm. When they start to dance this giant pretends to make a fight to make a fight with this little boy. The giant pretends to cut with his wooden knife. Then he examines the knife and looks for blood on it. When he does not find it he is more angry. Then he makes himself appear that he is very tired by <sup>puffing</sup> blowing out his big cheeks and is unable to stand.

The little boy hides this stone and the giant falls to the ground and it may be seen that he has lost. His friends examine him and find this near his eye. They say it is the same stone that was in the little boy's hand which is now near the eye of Goliath.

#### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Tapotzingo where this material was gathered, under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- <sup>2</sup>The mayordomo is appointed by the town president to lead all church functions and be care-taker of all religious property. He usually serves a year or two.
- <sup>3</sup>The Egg-child according to a widely spread legend was a wise good person who has given reasons for many animal characteristics and has initiated certain religious beliefs. This character is similar to the legend in Popoluca El Homshuk by Ben Elson, TLALOCAN Vol. II 1947 Page 195.
- <sup>4</sup>All the symbols used in the text are phonemic. The symbol ɤ nearly approaches high back close unrounded vocoid. a is used for the low center open unrounded vocoid. ɣ represents a free variant of the voiceless velar fricative and the non-syllabic vocoid h.