



## Physical activities in Ancient Peru

by Alberto F. Cajas U. (1st part)



*For over forty-five years, Alberto F. Cajas U., has devoted his life to the teaching of physical education and sport both in Colombia where he is considered a pioneer and in Peru where he is at present lecturing at the Higher Centre for Research on Leisure, Sport and Physical Education. A coach for various sports, he was especially responsible for the Peruvian football team. An international basketball, water polo and volleyball judge, he is continually training new officials. Finally, as a writer, he is the author of an encyclopedic dictionary on physical education.*

as they settled in their new surroundings, they developed an agricultural system, raising large crops with marked characteristics of their own. Numerous archaeological sites have already been discovered, including the Toquepala cave in the department of Tacna<sup>2</sup>, which contains cave paintings undoubtedly done by the hand of man. There are scenes of men hunting. Similarly, at Paccaicasa, in the department of Ayacucho, rudimentary objects in stone<sup>3</sup> have been found, proving the existence of human life. But it is only at Lauricocha, in the department of Huanuco, that human skeletons<sup>4</sup> have been found, whose reaction to the carbon 14 test shows that they were 10,000 years old.

### The territory of ancient Peru and its inhabitants

By the "autochthonal" period, we mean the history of Peru before the arrival of the Spaniards. This is studied in two chapters. The first deals with the pre-Inca period and the second, the Inca period. In the first article, I shall be dealing with the physical activities of pre-Inca man.

Ancient Peru<sup>1</sup> lay, for the most part, along the western coast of South America. The origin and age of its inhabitants are still not known. According to the "aloctonista" theory, they came from the north (Central America) while still in their primitive state, over 25,000 years ago ; but as soon

### The physical activities of the early Peruvians

Physical exercise satisfies a biological need. For this reason, it has existed, in various forms, in all primitive human groups. The inhabitants of ancient Peru were no exception.

<sup>1</sup> Garcilaso Inca de la Vega, the first historian and writer of mixed ancestry tells us that the land discovered by Vasco Nunez de Balboa was given the name of Peru in 1515 or 1516.

<sup>2</sup> It was discovered by the Peruvian archaeologist Jorge C. Muelle in 1963.

<sup>3</sup> The American archaeologist Richard MacNeis discovered and studied these objects in 1969.

<sup>4</sup> The Peruvian archaeologist Augusto Cardich Loarte discovered them in 1958. and his brother, the geologist Lucia, determined their age in 1977.



What kind of physical activity did the ancient Peruvians practise? They could not have had any organised systems. All their activities were oriented towards everyday life : hunting, fishing, climbing, walking, running, throwing and swimming.

The first dances were also being created at that time, seeking through their movements to express joy, sadness or an invocation to the gods imploring them for some gift.

Subsequently, when the “ayllus” — an incarnation of the first concept of a fatherland — were formed, physical activities started to develop through their inclusion in military training. The ancient Peruvians began to be trained in the handling of arms which until then had been used exclusively for hunting, fishing or protection against wild animals ; the first armies were formed in this way. As can be seen, all these activities were common to the first inhabitants of the five continents.

### Physical activities in pre-Inca civilisations

There were many of these civilisations and all were highly developed ; they emerged in the vast territory of ancient Peru. From the 11th century on they were gradually incorporated in the Inca Empire, either peacefully, or by force of arms.

Thanks to the ceramics discovered in the excavations carried out in the “huacas” proof of physical activities has been found at the following places :

- On the coast : Vicus, Mochica, Chimu and Nasca.
- In the mountains : Tiahunaco

#### *The Vicus civilisation*

Site of the archaeological zone : at the foot of Mount Vicus, 60 km. east of the town

of Piura, capital of the department of the same name.

It is thought to have existed between 200 B.C. and 300 A.D. The discovery is a recent one, dating back approximately to 1960. A large number of “huacas” (ceramics) were found and, to the surprise of collectors, several pairs of wrestlers can be seen holding each other by the body and head. There is another ceramic showing an Indian bending over backwards supported by his feet and head. This exercise reminds us of the posture known as “the bridge”. In his mouth is a “guera” (American Indian flute). They also enjoyed sailing. Proof of this may be seen on another ceramic showing a raft with two oarsmen : the one in the stern is kneeling, while the one in the prow seems to be resting.

#### *The Mochica civilisation*

Established in the department of Lambayeque, it flourished between 200 and 700 A.D.

Two ceramics belonging to this civilisation have come down to us. The stylised representation of one of them is contained in a book entitled “The Mochicas”. It seems to portray the game known as “Apaytalla”. which was played by bouncing “frijoles” (a kind of red bean growing in America). The man who succeeded in making his beans bounce was the winner. The score was marked on a table with holes bored through it. The other Mochica ceramic is in the University of Trujillo Archaeological Museum. It shows two Indians facing each other ; one of them holding a racket in his right hand. The two men are leaning forward slightly in order to make the ball between them bounce better. As we can see, this game resembles the game of pelota.

#### *The Chimu civilisation*

Like the one above, situated at Lambayeque, it exerted its influence towards the north



as far as the department of Tumbes and towards the south, almost as far as the department of Lima. It had its capital at Chan Chan, near the present town of Trujillo, capital of the department of Libertad.

Its history covers the period from the year 1200 to 1470 A.D. It started with the arrival of the mythological hero Naymlap from the sea, accompanied by a large fleet of rafts propelled by oarsmen. For coastal navigation, they used light craft made of a vegetable called "totora"<sup>5</sup>. In principle, the oarsman sat astride the boat, both feet in the water, propelling it by means of a large oar, which he held with both hands and cast alternately from one side of the boat to the other. They were certainly very skilled at utilitarian navigation. Nowadays, these light craft are called "caballitos de totora" (little totora horses) and they are still used on the north coast for fishing as well as in sports contests resembling surfing.

#### *The Nasca civilisation*

This was located about 134 km. to the south-east of the town of Ica, capital of the department of the same name. It flourished for about 300 years A.D. Its inhabitants were responsible for the "Great Calendar", marked out in the Soco Pampa (plain), whose big geometric and animal figures are visible only from the sky. A large number of theories have been put forward regarding the significance of this calendar ; according to one of them, it was a landing ground for extra-terrestrial beings. If such were the case, they must have known some form of aerial navigation. To date, however, this theory remains unconfirmed.

With regard to physical activities, they seem to have played a game of pelota. Professor R. N. Wegner discovered a crook-shaped racket, the inside being covered with cords

and ending in a handle. This relic would suggest that they played a type of pelota.

#### *The Tiahuanaco civilisation*

This was located to the south of the Lake Titicaca, some 35 km. to the south of the village of Desaguadero, on territory which now belongs to Bolivia. Owing to its great antiquity, it is the most interesting of the mountain civilisations ; it is thought to have been at its peak about 1000 B.C. This civilisation, like that at Victis, was interested in something resembling physical exercise. An example of this can be seen on a ceramic displayed in the University of Trujillo Museum of Anthropology. An Indian is shown lying on his stomach on two cylinders. An individual, in this position and on two rolling objects, leads us to suppose that he is practising some kind of physical activity. In addition, although they did not have wheels as we know them, they were nevertheless familiar with the technique of rolling.

A.C.

*(To be continued)*



<sup>5</sup> The Indians of Arica and Ica, towns still existing in the south, made boats out of the skins of seals inflated with air. The inhabitants of Tumbes, another town still existing in the north, used wooden rafts propelled by sails and oars.