



# HISTORY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

CELIA BOCOBO OLIVAR

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BY CELIA BOCOBO-OLIVAR

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## FOREWORD

This volume represents the efforts of an educator to put between covers the evolution of physical education as part of the curriculum of colleges and universities in the Philippines. She has given the subject-matter a new historical dimension. As a pioneer work the book illustrates the various ways in which early educators endeavored to promote the inclusion of physical training as part of the formal education of the young.

The book begins with pre-Spanish forms of physical training. This consisted largely of dances and the art of self-defense. The emphasis on these two types of physical activity is understandable since the daily life of the people involved physical exertion nearly all the time; they were mostly hunters and gatherers. Thus the training of the young was geared to the development of skills in self-defense or in ritual and festive dances. Festivities were, as they still are, part of Filipino tradition. The most skillful dancer or singer acquired a special status in the community. Thus, the kind of training the early Filipinos received was closely linked to the needs of the community.

With the coming of the Spaniards and later of the Americans, new ways of life, new concepts of status, new work-patterns, and many other significant changes in the social life of the people were introduced. All these demanded new modes of adaptation. Correspondingly, the training of the young was modified to suit the requirements of the new social and cultural environment. The physical training aspect of education emphasized the acquisition of new skills in the performing arts, in athletic competition, and in new forms of exercise for physical fitness.

Whatever the cumulative result of these developments, it cannot be denied that physical training constitutes the necessary precondition

to good health and therefore to wholesome living. It is worth noting that even during pre-Spanish times, as the author's findings suggest, our ancestors were engaged in competition in sports and the performing arts. The new skills acquired in later years as a result of contact with the West reinforced the national spirit for excellence in athletics and other related activities. Nor did the war years dampen this spirit. Today, it has acquired new vitality as evidenced by the various international awards and honors received by Filipinos in sports and athletics and in the performing arts, especially folk music and dance.

Professor Celia Bocobo-Olivar provides, in this small volume, a fresh historical insight into the development of our national love for athletics. She traces the development of physical education as part of the present-day school curriculum. This is a valuable contribution not only to the history of education in our country but also to the earnest search for the elements that constitute the Filipino national tradition. Sports and the performing arts have always played an important part in our national life. The fact that we can assert this with pride is the measure of the important service rendered by Professor Olivar in writing this book.

SALVADOR P. LOPEZ

*President*

*University of the Philippines*

# PREFACE

Chroniclers have praised the grace and agility of the Filipinos. An important part of the national heritage are the dances, sports, and games that the Filipinos have enjoyed through the years. This book records the growth of physical education from pre-Spanish times to the present. It shows how the political and social philosophies of the various eras have influenced the development of physical education in the country. The vision, dedication, and perseverance of the leaders both in and out of the field of education are described. It is hoped that students today recall the early efforts of the pioneers and look back proudly to the nation's records and rich heritage in dance, sports, and games as they enjoy themselves in these and other similar activities.

This book is based on a master's thesis submitted to the University of Oregon. It has since been revised, expanded, and updated to this present form. I am profoundly grateful to Dean Ralph W. Leighton of the School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation for granting the fellowship that enabled me to pursue this study. My sincere thanks also go to Professor Janet Woodruff, my adviser, for her patient guidance throughout the research. I am indebted to Dr. Jaime C. Laya for his solicitude in the publication of this book. For several illustrations used here, I am thankful to the *Manila Times* and its editor, Mr. Jose Luna Castro. Grateful acknowledgments are due to the publishers and authors quoted and cited in the work. I am grateful beyond measure to my husband George, whose encouragement sustained a large part of this effort, and to my children—George, Jr., Cheryl, Gary, Godfrey, Gene, and Gordon—for their faith and patience.

While grateful for the help of several persons and friends, I must assume responsibility for any shortcomings of this book.

CELIA BOCOBO-OLIVAR

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PART I  
PRE-SPANISH TIMES ( -1521)



# THE EARLY FILIPINOS

## MANNER OF LIVING

The first known inhabitants of the Philippines were the Pygmies from Southern Asia who probably came to Luzon from Borneo over the then existing land bridge by way of Palawan and Mindoro, and to Mindanao over the Sulu land bridge. These people used the blow-gun and the arrow as weapons, utilized small stone implements for cutting, wore raiment of bark and leaves, and lived in quarters consisting of tree branches and foliage. They were followed by the Indonesians, a tall and slender group more culturally advanced than the Pygmies. The latter people were seafarers who built and sailed boats made of plank, used polished stone tools, lived in grass-roofed shelters of wooden frame, practiced dry agriculture with yam and rice as chief crops, and wore attire of skin and bark. The last wave of immigrants were the Malays who came about 200 B.C. and who were the most numerous as well as the most advanced people to migrate to the Philippines. They came in three groups—the headhunting Malays from whom are descended today's Ifugaos, Bontocs, and Tinguians of Northern Luzon; the alphabet-using Malays who are the ancestors of present-day Tagalogs, Visayans, Ilocanos, Pampangos, and other Christian Filipinos; and the Mohammedans, from whom the present Muslims of Mindanao are descended.

There is no doubt that the Malays were truly civilized. They built their bamboo and wooden houses high above the ground or water. They possessed horses and carabaos which helped them in their chores. They wore woven fabrics and adorned themselves with ornaments of shells, beads, metal, and bone. Diligently, they planted trees as well as medicinal and ornamental plants, and made capital out of products

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of the sea. Their skill was most apparent in their practice of weaving, pottery, carving, metallurgy, pearl-diving, distillery, and irrigated agriculture. These highly-advanced Malays succeeded in pushing back the earlier inhabitants inland and into the mountains.

The early Filipinos had commercial and cultural contacts with India, China, Japan, Arabia, and Malaysia. It is no wonder that when the Spaniards came to the Philippines in 1521, they found that the inhabitants had attained a relatively high degree of civilization and had a definite culture of their own. There were about half a million people in the country living in settlements with the family forming the basic unit of society. Although the early Filipino family was highly patriarchal, still the woman occupied a high position in society. Matrimonial ties were strong even if divorce was permitted among certain groups. Four social classes were recognized: the nobility or *maharlika*, the freemen or *timaua*, the serfs or *aliping namamahay*, and the slaves, or *aliping sagigilid*.

The unit of government was the *barangay* which consisted of thirty to one hundred families ruled by a headman called a *dato*. For mutual protection and assistance, the *barangays* were located close together, thereby forming a village under one chief called a *rajah*. Conduct of living was regulated by a system of laws issued by the *rajah* with the advice of a council of elders. The laws safeguarded life, women, the aged, and the dead, in addition to giving due regard to private ownership. As a deterrent to wrongdoing, punishment for such crimes as adultery, desecration of sepulchers, robbery, and murder ranged from flogging, mutilation, and slavery, to death penalty.

The people dressed in short-sleeved loose jackets and breeches made of silk and cotton. For ornaments, they wore gold earrings, rings, necklaces, and pendants. They cooked their food which they tastefully placed in porcelain dishes and cups. Truly a literary-musical race, they had their own system of writing and an alphabet composed of seventeen letters. They wrote their codes, epic, tales, proverbs, poems, and songs on palm leaves, bamboo, canes, and tree barks, using a pointed iron pen. They gave expression to their musical talents by means of

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drums, gongs, and little bells, and communicated with each other in various dialects of the Malay-Polynesian type.

A definite standard of weights and measure was already in existence. Barter was used in commercial transactions with tin, shells, and iron as the common media of exchange. In various instances, they proved that they were scientifically inclined. Their unusual engineering skill made possible the construction of rice terraces in the mountain-sides. Even the practice of medicine is evident in their use of juice, herbs, and oil to cure the sick. To keep track of time, they devised their own calendar which was divided into months, weeks, and days.

Although they were pagans, the early Filipinos believed in one Supreme God called *Bathala Maycapal*, or God, Maker of All. However, they worshipped several other inferior gods, heavenly bodies, and the souls of the departed. They believed in life after death and were of the conviction that the good went to a place of rest called *Calushatian* but the bad were consigned to a place of remorse called *Casanoon*. Prayer was a part of their lives to which they often resorted especially in times of war, during planting and harvest seasons, before going hunting, and at weddings.

## PHYSICAL TRAINING

The early Filipinos were a hardy, adventurous, and energetic people endowed with a vigorous and strong physique. Valiant and unafraid, they frequently engaged in battles.

Early in life, the boys were taught the manly arts by their fathers while the girls were tutored in the household crafts by their mothers. Physical training during this period was of the informal type with the parents teaching the children in their homes. Physical activities were concerned mainly with self-defense, the search for food and shelter, and religious ceremony. Thus, the boys were trained to be fighters, farmers, hunters, fishermen, sailors, miners, shipbuilders, and smiths. On the other hand, girls were taught cooking, sewing, weaving, stock-raising, and other domestic skills. Many a mother taught her daughter sex hygiene because the Code of Kalantiao was precise in

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providing for this detail by pronouncing thus: "It is an obligation of every mother to teach matters pertaining to sex secretly to her daughter and to prepare her for motherhood."

Children were instructed in the proper use of spears, bows and arrows, and swords. This knowledge was essential because the skills involved were useful in catching animals for their daily meals, securing clothing articles, finding shelter materials, fighting off enemies whether man or beast, and also in providing props for their religious ceremonies.

While the men built houses and tilled the soil, the women contributed their share by working in the fields, weaving cloth, and carrying the produce to the market. As the elders worked, the children took time out from their household chores to indulge in frolics dear to the young heart—climbing trees, running and jumping all over the wide open spaces, crossing streams and rivers, and playing their own game of make-believe wherein they imitated their parents engaged in such activities as hunting, fishing, housekeeping, making weapons and tools, and worshipping.

Since several thousand islands compose the Philippines, water inevitably played an important role in the lives of the people. It was to the seas that the people went with their bamboo traps and three-pronged spears to catch fish, the favorite Filipino viand. Again, it was to the seas that they turned to cool and relieve themselves of the tropical heat as they enjoyed swimming with family and friends. The double underarm was the favorite stroke although long-distance underwater swimming was frequently indulged in. Many early Filipinos became expert swimmers and divers as they assiduously fished for pearls which they sold at a profit to neighboring countries.

Water was the most common means of transportation, which explains why the people were such expert rowers. The *banca* was a kind of watercraft carved out of a single log and equipped with bamboo outriggers on both sides for better stability. In paddling the banca, the men developed powerful arms and massive chests. The beaches of Philippine coastal villages were lined with these bancas.



Even in early times, the Filipinos were a religious people. They performed, for example, certain rituals which contributed greatly to their physical development. To glorify God, they performed rituals involving various body movements and deep breathing exercises.

### PRIMITIVE DANCE

Dancing was a popular and common activity among the early Filipinos; almost all occasions were celebrated by dancing. Spanish chronicles testify that the Filipinos of old were fond of music and the dance. Father Gaspar de San Agustin, for example, described them as music lovers and composers of poems so lyrical that they could be, and were, easily sang and danced to. More important still, there were all manner of dances which could be classified into the religious, festival, courtship, and mimetic types.

Particularly exciting were the war dances. These were performed in order to incite the fighting spirit and were danced to the quick rhythmic tempo of a drum. Movements expressed the hatred the people harbored against their enemies and the type of vengeance they had planned. Oftentimes, the members of the war council danced solemnly while trying to decide the course of a war. When tribesmen captured an enemy, they performed a torture dance as they circled the captive. Sometimes, two warriors, armed with bolos or bows and arrows, executed a duel dance which simulated a fight. When one fell down, the other pretended to cut off his opponent's head. At other times, after having accomplished dreadful contortions and springs accompanied by weird cries, some warriors finished their dance by shooting their arrows into the air, often hitting a bird in the process.

The *Tchungas* was a victory dance which sought to glorify the courage and daring of the warriors who had slain the enemies. As two men performed a war dance, the priestess implored the spirits of their ancestors to furnish her with the names of the valiant warriors. A typical war dance was the *Saut*. This was characterized by quick runs, distinct body elevations, and much body quiverings; it was performed to the rhythm of the *guimba*, or drum. The *Himog* or death dance