

Book Review

By the Prophet of the Earth: Ethnobotany of the Pima. L. S. M. Curtin. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1984. 156 pp., illus., \$6.95, paperback.

The title, *By the Prophet of the Earth*, pays homage to the Piman diety *Jewed Makai*, the Earth Doctor, whose gifts are celebrated in this book. These gifts provided food, shelter, medicine, and raw materials for the *Akimel O'odham*, "Running Wash People" or northern Pima, and their ancestors for countless millenia in the Sonoran Desert.

Leonora Curtin's book provides descriptions and uses for seventy-six plants, both wild and cultivated, important to Piman culture. She also has accounts of Piman games, legends, and miscellaneous beliefs. One chapter is devoted to material culture, from houses to ceremonial rattles, with brief descriptions of how these are made and the plants that are used. Scientific, Piman, and Anglo or Spanish common names are given for each species.

By the Prophet of the Earth was first published in 1949, and most of the field research was conducted immediately before World War II. This was the period of time when the impact of Anglo diet, with its dubious gifts of white bread, canned goods, and convenience food, was first being felt on the Piman reservation. L. S. M. Curtin hoped that her book would both preserve some of the native Piman dietary knowledge and also awaken a scientific interest in evaluating its nutritional "virtues". The new forward to the book, written thirty-five years later by ethnobiologist Gary Nabhan, suggests that some of this latter purpose has been accomplished. Recent research published by Doris Calloway, Ruth Greenhouse, Harriet Kuhnlein, Charles Weber, and their collaborators has demonstrated that native Piman foods, prepared in traditional ways, are nutritionally comparable or superior to modern Anglo foods now available on the reservation. Native plant foods were seasonally important sources of vitamins, trace elements, carbohydrates, essential oils, and high quality proteins. A recent study in Mexico (*Arizona Daily Star*, p. 8D, May 27, 1984) has suggested that a 100 gram serving of prickly pear pads can reduce 60 mgs. of glucose in the blood of diabetics, demonstrating another link between traditional diets and the reduction of nutrition-related diseases. Robert Corruccini and his colleagues reported that older Pimans raised on traditional diets had better overall dental health than younger individuals who consumed refined commercial foods (*Am. J. of Physical Anthropology* 62(3):317-324, 1983).

This edition of *By the Prophet of the Earth* is a direct photographic reproduction of the original text, with a new foreward by Gary Paul Nabhan. With the recent publication of Amadeo Rea's *Once a River*, this re-issue of Curtin's book, and forthcoming works by Richard Felger on Seri ethnobotany and Alfred Whiting on Havasupai habitat, The University of Arizona Press is rapidly becoming a leader in ethnobiological publications.