modern world, the social and economic consequences of seemingly minor innovations would not have been apparent until it was too late to return to former *mores*. The discovery of agriculture, which at the beginning of the Neolithic had been such a positive step by women, was by the end of the period to have had unforeseen, and unfortunate, consequences for them.

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RAMON A. GUTIERREZ

When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away

Agriculture originated in the Western Hemisphere between seven and ten thousand years ago, independently of the slightly earlier Neolithic revolution in Eurasia. Evidence of corn cultivation has been found on the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, dating from 7000 B.C.E. From there it spread north and south, reaching modern New Mexico sometime between 1500 and 1000 B.C.E. Native Americans had a smaller range of edible plants to domesticate than those available to the peoples of Eurasia, but the combination of corn, beans, and squash as staples provided all of the necessary ingredients for a healthy diet. This brief selection comes from a history of the Spanish cultural conquest of New Mexico. Gutierrez begins by recounting a Pueblo myth of origins. He then describes the actual workings of Pueblo society around 1500 C.E. What did it mean to be a man or a woman in Pueblo society? Who had more power or greater status in that society? What were the sources of that power or status? In what ways was the impact of agriculture on gender similar to, and different from, what occurred in the Eastern Hemisphere?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

What can this society from five hundred years ago tell us about the agricultural revolution ten thousand years ago? The title of the book from which this selection is drawn suggests that women’s prestige was undermined by the Spanish conquest and Christianity. But the previous selection argues that different changes disempowered women in Eurasia much earlier. What were those changes, and why did they not occur in the society of the Pueblo?


In the beginning two females were born underneath the earth at a place called Shipapu. In total darkness Tischtinoa (Thought Woman) taught the sisters, taught them language and gave them each a basket that their father Uchtsiti had sent them containing the seeds and fetishes of all the plants and animals that were to exist in the world. Tischtinoa told the sisters to plant the four pine tree seeds they had in their basket and then to use the trees to ascend to the light. One grew so tall that it pushed a hole through the earth. Before the sisters climbed up the tree from the underworld, Thought Woman taught them how to praise the Sun with prayer and song. Every morning as the Sun rose, they would thank him for bringing them to the light by offering with outstretched hands sacred cornmeal and pollen. To the tones of the creation song, they would blow the offering to the sky, asking for long life, happiness, and success in all their endeavors.

When the sisters reached the earth’s surface it was soft, spongy, and not yet ripe. So they waited for the Sun to appear. When it rose, the six directions of the cosmos were revealed to them: the four cardinal points, the earth below, and the four skies above. The sisters prayed to the Sun, and as they did, Thought Woman named one of the girls Iatiku and made her Mother of the Corn clan; the other she named Nautsiti, Mother of the Sun clan.

"Why were we created?" they asked. Thought Woman answered, "Your father Uchtsiti made the world by throwing a clot of his blood into space, which by his power grew into the earth. He planted you within it so that you would bring to life all the things in your baskets in order that the world be complete for you to rule over it."

When the first day ended, the girls slept. They awoke before dawn to greet the Sun with a prayer on their lips and an offering of cornmeal and pollen. When Sun rose and gave them warmth, the sisters were very happy. Tischtinoa then took several seeds from their baskets and showed the sisters how to plant corn. With a dig stick she poked holes into Mother Earth and deposited seeds in her womb. The corn germinated and grew. When its ears were ripe and plumy, Thought Woman showed them how to pick it, how to collect its pollen, and how to mill its kernels into the meal they would offer their father daily.

That night a flash of brilliant red light fell from the sky and when it touched the earth, it exploded into fire. "Your father Sun gives you fire to cook your food and to keep you warm," explained Thought Woman. "The fire’s tongues will stay alive if fed branches from the pine tree that gave you passage from the underworld." From that day forward, Iatiku and Nautsiti had fire with which to cook corn. They flavored the corn with the salt they found in their baskets and ate to their hearts’ content.

Next, Thought Woman taught the sisters how to give life to the animal fetishes in their baskets so that the animals would give them life in return. Mice, rats, moles, and prairie dogs were created and were given grasses on which to forage and multiply. The sisters cast pebbles in various directions
and from these emerged mountains, plains, mesas, and canyons. From the seeds they next sowed about, pine, cedar, oak, and walnut trees grew and under them beans and squash sprouted and yielded their fruit. Rabbits, antelope, bison, and deer were dispatched to the open plains. To the mountains went the elk with their predators the lions, wolves, wildcats, and bears. Eagle, hawk, and turkey were cast into the sky, but turkey fell back to earth and never learned to fly. In the earth's waters fish, water snakes, and turtles were placed, and there they flourished and multiplied. Now Thought Woman told the sisters to kill an animal. “Roast meat and corn together and flavor it with salt,” she instructed. “Before you eat, always pray and offer morsels of these to your father Uchtsiti who created the world and lives in the fourth sky above.”

Tsichtnako cautioned Iatiku and Nautsiti to handle their baskets carefully. At first they did. But as they were giving life to the snakes one fetish fell out of a basket unnoticed and came to life of its own power as the serpent Pishuni. Pishuni bred selfishness and competitiveness between the sisters. Soon Nautsiti became sullen and refused to associate with Iatiku. When this occurred, Pishuni asked Nautsiti: “Why are you lonely and unhappy? If you want what will make you happy, I can tell you what to do. If you bore someone else, you would no longer be lonely. Tsichtnako wants to hold back this happiness from you,” he said. … Nautsiti believed Pishuni and agreed to meet him near a rainbow. On a rock near the specified rainbow, Nautsiti lay on her back, and as she did drops of rain entered her body. From this rain she conceived and bore twin sons. Father Sun had strictly forbidden the sisters to bear children, and when he learned that Nautsiti had, he took Thought Woman away.

When Nautsiti's sons grew up, the sisters separated. Nautsiti departed East with her favorite child; Iatiku remained with Tiamuni, the son Nautsiti disliked. Iatiku and Tiamuni eventually married and had many daughters to whom they gave clan names representing all the things that their father had given them at emergence: Sky, Water, Fire, and Corn.

The Pueblo Indians viewed the relations between the sexes as relatively balanced. Women and men each had their own forms of wealth and power, which created independent but mutually interdependent spheres of action. The corn fetish1 every child was given at birth and the flint arrowhead with which boys were endowed symbolized these relations and expressed the basic preoccupations of a people living in a semi-arid environment. Corn and flint were food and water, but they were also the cosmic principles of femininity and masculinity. Female and male combined as corn seeds and rain combined to perpetuate life. Corn plants without rain would shrivel and die; water without corn was no life at all. The ear of corn infants received represented the Corn Mothers that had given life to all humans, plants, and animals. At Acoma Pueblo this corn fetish is still called Iatiku, because it contains her heart and breath. For this reason too the Hopi called this corn fetish “mother.” “Corn is my heart, it is to [you] . . . as milk from my breasts,” Zia’s Corn Mother told her people. Individuals kept this corn fetish throughout their entire lives, for if crops failed its perfect seeds held the promise of a new crop cycle.

If the corn ear represented the feminine generative powers latent in seeds, the earth, and women, the flint arrowhead represented the masculine germinative forces of the sky. Father Sun gave men flint arrowheads to bring forth rain, to harness heat, and to use as a weapon in the hunt. The noise emitted by striking together two pieces of flint resembled the thunder and lightning that accompanied rain. Rain fertilized seeds as men fertilized their women. Without rain or semen life could not continue. The flint arrowhead was the sign of the hunter and warrior. Sun gave his sons, the Twin War Gods, arrowheads with which to give and take away life. From flint too came fire. When men struck flint and created that gift Sun gave them at the beginning of time, they transformed that which was raw into that which was cooked. To the Pueblo Indians flint, rain, semen, and hunting were to male as corn, earth, and childbearing were to female. This idea is conveyed in the Hopi word posuni, which means both corn seed and nubile woman. We see this too in the ceremony Zuñi women perform to celebrate the sex of their babies. Over a girl's vulva the women place a large seed-filled gourd and pray that her sexual parts grow large and her fruit abundant. The boy's penis is sprinkled with water, and the women pray that it remains small. Men became very angry when they saw this ritual, for through it women asserted that their life-bearing capacity was immense in comparison to that of men. Men vigorously contested this claim in their rituals to vivify the earth, sporting large artificial penises to show women that their fructifying powers were really more immense, "singing about the penis being the thing that made the women happy."

The natal home was the primary unit of affiliation in Pueblo society. Everyone belonged to a home. Humans, animals, deities, and even the natural forces were believed to each have a home within which they lived. In the sixteenth century the Pueblos were matrilocal, anchoring maternity to matrilocal households. “The houses belong to the women, they being the ones who build them,” observed Espinosa in 1601.

The household was preeminently a female domain of love and ritual. Women joined together to fashion houses out of the entrails of Mother Earth, setting her stones in charcoal ash and dirt mortar, assiduously building those multistoried edifices they still call home. Though houses were clustered together in hive-like compounds, each had its own entrance, a hearth for heat and cooking, sleeping rooms, and a room for the storage of seeds, sacred fetishes, and religious objects. The interior

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1 An object believed to have the magical power to protect or assist the one to whom it belongs. [Ed.]
walls of a house were whitewashed and decorated with the clan’s eponym. Reed mats for sleeping, pottery utensils for cooking and storage, and a mill stone for grinding corn were basic furnishings. When a household outgrew its space, usually when daughters married, adjacent rooms were added as vertical or horizontal extensions to the hearth.

Towns were an aggregation of households. Each town contained anywhere from 50 to 500 houses grouped around a central plaza in which several kivas stood. Houses rarely had ground floor entrances; they were usually entered by ascending moveable ladders that connected the various terrace levels of a housing compound. This was a generally defensive architectural design. If enemies attacked, town residents climbed up to the highest terrace, removed the ladders to the lower ones, and from these heights, pelted outsiders with arrows and stones. From these heights, too, women protected their homes, rallying assistance with smoke signals or by “lifting their hands to their mouths and letting out a loud cry which could be heard far away.”

The role men played in the construction of homes was rather limited.

“The women mix the plaster and erect the wall; the men bring the [roof and support] timbers and set them in place,” observed Pedro de Castañeda in 1540. Timber came from distant mountains outside of the town—the province of men and gods. Women owned the domestic hearth, exercised authority over those that lived within it, and at death passed on the edifice to their daughters. The female household head was custodian of its rights and possessions; the agricultural plots their husbands and sons worked, all food and seed reserves, and the sacred fetishes and ritual objects of the clan. The implication of these facts for domestic politics was clear to Fray Alonso de Benavides in 1634: “[The woman] always commands and is the mistress of the house, and not the husband.”

The typical household unit consisted of a grandmother and her husband, her sisters and their husbands, her daughters and their husbands, various young children, and perhaps an orphan, slave, or stray. Women were attached to their natal dwelling throughout their lives, said Hernán Gallegos in 1582, and did “not leave except when permitted by their mothers.” Men moved from house to house according to their stage of life. During childhood boys lived with their mothers, and at adolescence they moved into a kiva to learn male magical lore. When they had mastered these skills, and were deemed worthy of marriage by their kin, they took up residence in their wife’s home. A man nonetheless remained tied to his maternal home throughout his life. For important ceremonial events, men returned to their maternal households. When this occurred the household became a matrilineage. Matrilineages that acknowledged descent from a common ancestor, usually through ownership of a similar animal or spirit fetish, formed larger, primarily religious aggregations known as clans.

When a child was born, the umbilical cord was buried—inside the household underneath the grinding stone if it belonged to a girl, outside in a cornfield if it belonged to a boy. This natal practice nicely delineated the sexual division of space and labor. The house and compound were female space invested with descendent earth-bound symbols. In the household women gave men their love and their bodies. They bore children, reared them, and engaged in that ritual activity that was at the core of kinship—feeding. Women fed their children, their mothers and grandmothers, their brothers and maternal uncles, and their husbands. Kinship was reckoned through genealogical principles—born of blood and substance. But just as importantly, kinship was created through feeding, what the Puebloans call “adoption.” Any life or spirit form was transformed into kin through feeding. Thus women regularly fed the sun and prepared food for the katsina. They fed the household animal fetishes and the scalps of enemy dead to assure that they remained content. Before hunters carried the carcass of an animal into the pueblo, the women fed it, and by so doing adopted it into a household. This feeding assured that the animal’s spirit would not haunt the hunter. When foreign chiefs and caciques were feasted, the social exchange of food that signified peace was accomplished through the role of women’s feeding.

Large portions of a woman’s day were spent preparing meals for her household. Corn, beans, and squash were the main staples of the diet. Corn was the most important and symbolic of these. It was boiled whole, toasted on the cob, or dried and ground into a fine powder easily cooked as bread or gruel. Every day a woman and her daughters knept before metates, grinding corn to feed their gods, their fetishes, and their kin. . . .

After feeding, the activity of greatest cultural import to Pueblo women was sexual intercourse. Women were empowered through their sexuality. Through sex women bore the children who would offer them labor and respect in old age. Through sex women incorporated husbands into their maternal households and expected labor and respect from them. Through sex women domesticated the wild malevolent spirits of nature and transformed them into beneficent household gods. Accordingly, then, sexuality was deemed essential for the peaceful continuation of life.

Female sexuality was theirs to give and withhold. In marriage a woman gave her husband her love and her body because of the labor he gave her mother, and because of all the marriage-validating gifts that had been given on her behalf to her in-laws. When women gave the gift of their body to men with whom no obligatory ties existed, they expected

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2 Pueblo Indian ceremonial structures that are usually round and partly underground. [Ed.]

3 A Pueblo doll representing a spirit, often the spirit of a deceased who has become a rainmaker. These dolls vary from clay sculptures to painted wooden figures wearing animal masks, feathers, and ceremonial clothing (about eight inches high). [Ed.]

4 Stones used for grinding corn. [Ed.]
something in return, such as blankets, meat, salt, and hides. For a man to enjoy a woman’s body without giving her a gift in return was for him to become indebted to her in a bond of obligation.

Erotic behavior in its myriad forms (heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality) knew no boundaries of sex or age. Many of the great gods—the Zuñi Awnawilona, the Navajo First Man/First Woman, the Hopi Kawasaikita katsina—were bisexual, combining the potentialities of male and female into one—a combination equally revered among humans. If the Indians sang of sex, copulated openly, staged orgiastic rituals, and names landmarks “Clitoris Spring,” “Girl’s Breast Point,” “Buttocks-Vagina,” and “Shove Penis,” it was because nature itself around them was full of sexuality.

Sexuality was equated with fertility, regeneration, and the holy by the Pueblo Indians, a pattern Mircea Eliade has found to be common to many societies. Humanity was dependent on sexuality for its continuation. The Acoma Indians say they were conceived when Pishuni, the serpentine deity of water, entered Naustiti’s body as rain. At the beginning of time, too, Thought Woman taught the Corn Mothers that maize would give them life if planted deep within Mother Earth’s womb. When the clouds (men) poured down their rain (semen) the seeds (women) would germinate and come to live. The reader will recall that this is why a boy’s penis was sprinkled with water at birth and a girl’s vulva was covered with a seed-filled gourd.

Modesty and shame were not sentiments the Pueblo Indians knew in relationship to their bodies. Before European contact they wore little clothing and were “entirely naked except for the covering of their privy parts.” Women wore what resembled “table napkins, with fringes and a tassel at each corner, tying them around the hips.” Most men left their genitals totally exposed; some tied their penis “near the prepuce with a maguey fiber” to protect it from evil spirits.

Sexual intercourse was the symbol of cosmic harmony for the Pueblo Indians because it united in balance all the masculine forces of the sky with all the feminine forces of the earth. The solstitial rituals that renewed the union between Naustiti and Pishuni from which the Acoma Indians were born culminated in sexual intercourse. Whenever the katsina visited, these Cloud-Beings brought fructifying rain so that seeds germinated, animals multiplied, and cosmic peace prevailed. What better way to celebrate fertility than by copulating with the katsina? And this is precisely what always happened, said Fray Nicolas de Chávez in 1660: “men and women have sexual intercourse in bestial fashion.”

Society was made whole through libidinous female sexuality. Through intercourse, outsiders (men from other towns or clans) became insiders (household and community members). . . .

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Catherine Clay, Chandrika Paul, and Christine Senecal

Women in the First Urban Communities (after 3500 B.C.E.)

This selection comes from a text on women in world history. Since world history is full of patriarchal, or male-dominated, societies, one of the thorniest problems is to determine just how widespread patriarchy was. Against the commonly held assumption that patriarchy has always existed, that it is universal or natural, we have seen that male domination was not common in most hunting-gathering and early agricultural societies—that is, throughout most of human history. When and how did it come about? What is the answer given in this selection? What kind of evidence best supports the author’s conclusion?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

As already mentioned, one of the earliest, and still widely accepted, stage theories of human history postis three important stages: hunter-gatherer, agricultural-pastoral, and city-based or urban. Archaeologists use the corresponding terms of Paleolithic (Old Stone Age), Neolithic (New Stone Age), and Bronze Age. This reading suggests other developments of the urban or Bronze Age that might be better descriptions of the “third” stage than cities or bronze: states, plow agriculture, stratified, slave, and literate and writing-based societies. How does each of these new developments affect the lives of women? If you were to divide only women’s history into two, three, or four stages, what would they be?

The world’s first cities emerged in Eurasia around 3500 B.C.E. Fostered by the spread of villages, the urban centers of this continent grew up along major river systems—an environment conducive to planting and harvesting crops with relatively predictable patterns. There were four major regions where urban civilizations developed: in the Fertile Crescent along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (also known as Mesopotamia, “the land between the two rivers”), along the Nile in Egypt, along the Indus River in modern Pakistan, and along the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers in China.

* TY gruhs and Yu FRAY teez
* yang zuh

Note: Pronunciations of difficult-to-pronounce terms will be given throughout the book. The emphasis goes on the syllables appearing in all capitals. [Ed.]