No such volume could hope to be comprehensive, and this one is not. Despite hundreds of entries, not every term is included. Sedna, for example, the Inuit woman who lives at the bottom of the sea and regulates food supplies by controlling sea mammals, is described briefly but satisfactorily; but Sila, another major figure in Inuit mythology, is not mentioned at all. But this limitation is hardly a shortcoming, given the extensive compass of the subject. The book does a solid job of introducing material from 150 Native American languages and referring the reader to additional sources.

Basic, simple, and direct, Dictionary of Native American Mythology can play an important role in assisting students, especially those new to the field. It might mean the difference between a quick reference point and a tedious search for information.


Lynn Gelfand

At first glance, The Mining Company’s Ancient/Classical History website may seem to have more breadth than depth—but the sheer diversity of the site is stimulating enough to warrant attention. Its purpose, declares the site’s webmaster, N.S. Gill, is to “shake the dust out of history by making it lively, relevant, and entertaining.” The site succeeds in so far as it is interdisciplinary and multi-media in every sense. For example, an analysis of an esoteric subject such as Gill’s essay exploring the hexasigimally-based Babylonian mathematical system is juxtaposed with Wilson Bertram’s review of Sid Meier’s popular computer simulation game, Civilization II. Static read-only page formats, such as Clyde Winter’s essay tracing African influence on Olmec writing, mix freely with interactive online activities, such as Serge Rosmorduc’s page, which allows a user to type in his or her name phonetically to see how it would appear rendered into Ptolmaic hieroglyphs. Text and graphics intertwine: a user can click on a linked picture of a Greek scroll fragment in an essay about Homer to call up a detailed catalogue description including its date, contents, and material components. Gill skillfully mixes the high and the low, the traditional and the cutting-edge, and word and image to create a fascinating—if at times dizzying—information environment.
The Mining Company is a computer search engine and directory that "mines" the World Wide Web to make materials selectively available to computer browsers. The Mining Company's main directory (http://home.miningco.com/), where Gill's site can be located under News/Issues, was specifically designed and continues to be maintained by The Mining Company's webmasters or "expert guides" to any given subject area. Gill traces her interest in ancient history to a fourth-grade teacher who inspired her students to learn about ancient Egypt by creatively extending historical concepts into geography, spelling and etymology, literature, and art. Beyond mention of a college major in Latin and an allusion to graduate work, little is given concerning Gill's scholarly credentials. Nonetheless, she has succeeded in creating an absorbing and entertaining site where both the scholar and layperson can find informative gems.

Ancient/Classical History's homepage is divided into three main sections. The first is its vertical navigation bar. Included in the navbar are links to a bulletin board (where one may "ask questions, share your knowledge with others, discuss history ... and meet other people with a similar love for Antiquity"), a calendar that highlights ritual and other events of historical significance (updated monthly), and an electronic newsletter to which users may subscribe.

The second main section, "In the Spotlight," features links to articles written by Gill, listed chronologically (most recent on top). A new one is added about once a week. An archive of past essays can be found by clicking on the Previous Features link at the bottom of each article page. Some are written to stand alone, while others contribute to a series. Topics range from Queen Boudicca and the differences between Roman and Celtic views on rape to the Homeric Question and explorations of oral-formulaic poetry. The content of "Featured Essays" can be described as "user-friendly" or "a good start": it is informative for those unfamiliar with the subject but not as in-depth as one would find in an academic journal.

The articles are carefully designed to be read online. Paragraphs tend to be brief and concise, and peppered with links to other pages (internal and external to the site), which yield greater detail when clicked by the user. The layout is more akin to a multifaceted medieval manuscript than to the modern printed book. Gill fills her pages with rubrics, differently sized and colored fonts, clickable pictures, and links to glosses and commentaries. Such layouts, when done well (as is the case here), break up and reorganize text and image in such a way as to reduce eye fatigue, common among users who can only access materials while online.
The third main section, "Net Links," is the largest and most varied in content. It consists of a vertical menu of about forty links, with subjects arranged alphabetically, from Ancient Celts to Women. Each subject link leads to a page containing thirty to fifty links covering various aspects of the subject by different authors. The essays in "Net Links" vary widely in form, content, and quality. For example, clicking the Ancient Meso-American link will lead the user to a link for a text-heavy history of Mexico or to a graphics-intense virtual tour through Maya ruins in the Yucatan. Clicking the "Economics" link, the user can find a table depicting a comparative chronology of exchange values (from cows in 9000 BCE to metal coins in 14 CE) or a detailed study of the relationship between the origin of writing and the specialized economy of Mesopotamia. Clicking on Games and Contests will take the user to a page of Latin cryptograms and riddles or to a page where a computerized version of the Egyptian board game, Hounds and Jackals, can be downloaded onto the user's home system. Approximately 1600 links can be found in "Net Links" alone—not counting those that lead outside The Mining Company's Ancient/Classical History site itself.

With its intricate and seemingly endless passageways, Ancient/Classical History is not unlike the multicursal Minoan labyrinth, and like the labrys from which it takes its name, such a structure can be double-edged. A user can discover unexpected treasures among the links, pages, and linked sites, or can become hopelessly disoriented and lost in an overwhelming data environment. However, for those with a taste for adventure, this informative and entertaining website is well worth exploring.


Liz Locke

In 1996, an e-mail message came in to the students of the Folklore Institute from a person inquiring about written sources on the subject of matriarchy. I responded by suggesting Sherry Ortner's oft-cited article, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" and Joan Bamberger's "The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society," both included in Rosaldo and Lamphere's anthology, Women, Culture, and Society, from Stanford University Press. Because both of these articles make the case that there has never been a human society whose political, military, economic, and religious power and authority rested primarily in the hands of women, I also suggested