

Sam D. Gill and Irene F. Sullivan. **Dictionary of Native American Mythology**. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. Pp. 425, illustrations.

Michael Robert Evans

Folklore scholars—perhaps more so than scholars in many other disciplines—take pride in the depth and breadth of their reading. It is important to understand references made by authors from many fields who are trying to anchor their work within a frame of research and a mode of inquiry. Nevertheless, when a reference is made about which the reader has no previous experience, it can be frustrating and difficult to find the basic information needed to further understanding. When such situations arise, we need a specific, detailed dictionary that will steer us in the right direction.

Dictionary of Native American Mythology provides just that service. This comprehensive volume, organized alphabetically in standard dictionary format, offers information on an impressive array of topics ranging from *aassahke* (Crow, Plains: a person involved in a special exchange relationship with a “son” or “daughter” who is not necessarily a blood relative) to *zuzeca* (Lakota, Plains: Snake, whose spirit is responsible for sly activity, going about unknown and unseen, and lying). The entries vary from brief references containing just a few words (usually with a cross-reference or a bibliographic citation) to page-long explanations of fundamental components of Native American belief systems (such as the creation and emergence of the Apache). This material is enhanced by a massive bibliography, an index by tribe, and maps of tribal areas.

The title is somewhat misleading. *Dictionary of Native American Mythology* does provide a great deal of information about its primary subject, but it also sheds light on Native American terms that only indirectly relate to mythology. Look up *Gwenhdaen nisedosyoden*, for example, and you will learn that it is “a red-breasted bird known for its beauty, often found in [Senecan] stories.” *Kassaqis* one of many Inuit words for “white person.” *Lakota* is “originally a linguistic dialectic category linked with Oglala. The Lakota are also known as the Sioux. The terms Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota originally applied to dialects of Oglala; eventually anthropologists began using these terms to define political and social units as well.” These terms are not directly linked with mythology, but students of Native American mythology would appreciate the ability to find such definitions easily when the need arises.

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.

N.S. Gill. **Ancient/Classical History**

Website, <http://ancienthistory.miningco.com/>.

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.