

DICTIONARY  
SOCIETY of NORTH  
AMERICA

# DSNA

N E W S L E T T E R

VOLUME 21 NUMBER 1 ~~WINTER~~ 1997

SPRING

abcdefghijklmnopq

## ■ BIENNIAL MEETING OF DSNA

The meeting of DSNA, to take place on May 29-31, 1997, will be located at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison. The actual host is the Dictionary of Regional English. Chairs of the Local Committee are Joan Hall and Luanne von Schneidemesser. Registration materials are on the way to members. Please send them in at once if you are planning to attend. A program of non-academic activities has been planned.

**Review:** *The Harper-Collins Dictionary of Religion* Ed. Jonathan Z. Smith, William Scott Green, et al. New York: HarperCollins, 1995. Pp. xxx + 1154.

This work, edited by a team of a dozen persons appointed by the American Academy of Religion, includes some 3200 entries written by 327 scholars. They have aimed to "provide an accessible guide to religion and the breathtaking scope of the world's religions." More specifically, the work aims at presenting "the best of contemporary scholarship on the

world's religions" as well as "an account of the most significant issues and categories that inform . . . the academic study of religion" (xix).

The entries range from one-liner cross-references ("anchorite. See hermit.") to a seventeen-page "feature article" on Hinduism, which is surrounded by seventeen more pages of twelve supplementary articles on more specialized aspects of the subject: Hinduism's "domestic ritual," "authoritative texts and their interpretation," "festal cycle," "life cycle," "mysticism," "performing arts," "poetry," "temple art and architecture," "thought and ethics," and "worship," as well as "Hinduism in America" and the modern "Hindu Renaissance." In addition to these articles dealing with general topics in Hinduism, a variety of specialized articles cover specific aspects of the subject, for example, to cite only those beginning with the letters ma: Madhva, Mahabharata, Mahadeviyakka, Mahanubhava, Maharaj Ji, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, maithuna, Manasa, mandala, Manikkavacakar, mantra, Laws of Manu, matha, maya.

(continued on page 2)



To bring coherence to the vastness of its subject, The HarperCollins Dictionary uses an extensive system of cross-references. A brief entry, such as that for “hatha yoga” may end with references to subtopics such as “asana” and “breath,” to coordinate topics such as “chakras” and “kundalini,” and to larger topics such as “yoga.” The dictionary also includes eleven feature articles that present overviews of major areas within the field of religious studies: Religions of Antiquity, Buddhism, Chinese Religion, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Japanese Religion, Judaism, New Religions, The Study of Religion, and Religions of Traditional Peoples. Between the large overview articles and the abundant cross-references, the work can be used to gain a tolerable command of the major topics within the field of religion.

Four of the feature articles deal primarily with “issues and categories” rather than particular religions. The article on “The Study of Religion,” as one might expect, surveys theoretical approaches to the subject: intellectual and rationalist, psychological, functionalist, phenomenological, and structuralist (though the latter types do not necessarily have much connection with similarly named theories in philosophy and linguistics).

Three other articles also deal with religious categories. The article on “Religions of Antiquity” is misleadingly named in that it deals in general terms with certain pre-Christian concepts that are anomalous from the standpoint of conventional Christianity but appear in the area where Christianity became dominant by Medieval times.

The article on “Religions of Traditional Peoples” is also oddly named. What makes one people “traditional” and another not? In fact “traditional peoples” seems to be a politically correct euphemism for what used to be called “primitive peoples,” namely the tribal cultures of Africa, pre-Columbian America, Australia, Indonesia, and Oceania. Those cultures are so diverse that embracing them all in a single overview allows scope for few particulars. One wonders whether their combination in a single category is not condescending, whatever it is called.

“New Religions” is a technical term referring not to religions that are relatively new, for example, Baha’i or Mormonism. It refers rather to “independent groups that have arisen from the encounter of existing religious traditions, particularly through the latter part of the postcolonial period” (771). The feature article on the subject is less concerned with particular “new religions” than with the phenomenon as a general pattern.

The remaining seven feature articles focus on particular traditions. For example, that on “Chinese Religion” treats its characteristic practices, such as ancestor veneration, polytheism, sacrifice, temple worship, divination, talismans, shamanism, a concern for longevity and immortality, and messianism. But it also deals with specific traditions in China: the three major religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, and also others such as Nestorian Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.



Religion is a terminological minefield. For example, the reader is informed (812) that Old Testament is a “common Christian designation” for what might less invidiously be called Hebrew scriptures or Tanakh, though it is difficult to believe that the last term is being “increasingly used” by very many outside the specialization of Jewish studies. Neither Hebrew scriptures nor Tanakh has an entry, though Hebrew Bible does as the “preferred English term for (Christian) Old Testament.”

Although the short article on Old Testament informs the reader that Tanakh is “an acronym derived from the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible,” no fuller explanation seems to be given anywhere (at least anywhere locatable). One looks in vain for an explanation that Tanakh is from the initial consonants of Torah “law” (the Pentateuch), nebi'im “prophets” (major and minor) and ketubim “writings” everything else, including the literary works such as Ruth, Job, and the Song of Songs), with the neutral vowel short a inserted twice to make the combination pronounceable. (A plosive k in final position becomes spirantial kh by Hebrew phonotactic rules.)

A possible flaw of this volume is that it pays more attention to the concerns of scholars of religion than most general readers will care about, and consequently can devote less space to specific details in particular traditions, which are likely to be of greater interest for the average user. Despite that flaw, if it is one, this book is a useful, comprehensive one-volume treatment of its subject.

*John Algeo*

## ■ BOOKS RECEIVED

*Lexikon der Romanischen Linguistik*, Edited by Holtus, Metzeltin and Schmitt, Vol. II, 1, Niemeyer, 1996 (ISBN 3-484-50232-0).

*Oxford Dictionary of the World*, Edited by David Munro, Oxford University Press, 1995 (ISBN 19-866184-3).

*Oxford Dictionary of the Bible*, Edited by W.R.F. Browning, Oxford University Press, 1997 (ISBN 0-19-211619-6).

*The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, Edited by Angela Partington, Revised Fourth Edition, Oxford University Press, 1996 (ISBN 0-19-860058-5).

*Random House Webster's College Thesaurus*, Newly revised and updated, Random House, 1997 (ISBN 0-679-77375-4).

*Random House Webster's Dictionary of American English*, An ESL Dictionary, Random House, 1996 (ISBN 0-679-76425-9).

*Dictionary of Computer Words*, Revised Edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995 (ISBN 0-395-72834-7).

*Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, Edited by Gert Ueding, Vol. 3, Niemeyer, 1996 (ISBN 3-484-68103-9).

*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, Third Edition, Longman Dictionaries, 1995 (ISBN 0-582-23751-3).



DICTIONARY  
SOCIETY *of* NORTH  
AMERICA

Nonprofit Organization  
U. S. Postage  
PAID  
Cleveland, Ohio  
Permit No. 500

DSNA Newsletter  
RT 936/937  
Cleveland State University  
1983 E. 24th Street  
Cleveland, OH 44115-2403

( 'dik-shə-ner-ē )

■ **NEWS FROM MEMBERS**

● Ladislav **ZGUSTA** (Univ of Illinois) announces that Professor Lev Malakhovskij of St.Petersburg, Russia, has completed his Dictionary of English Homonyms, just published in Russia.

● Henry **BURGER** (Overland Park, Kansas City) has published an article "From Concept to Term: A Whole Language Reverse Dictionary." Offprints are available.

● A.J.**AITKEN** (Edinburgh, Scotland) informs us of the death of David Murison, who was Editor of the Scottish National Dictionary from 1946 to 1976.

■ **VERBATIM-DSNA AWARD**

Professor Anatoly Liberman (University of Minnesota) was awarded \$2500 in the 1996 competition. He is preparing a bibliography for an Encyclopedic Dictionary of English Etymology.

■ **CATALOGUES RECEIVED**

From Rulon-Miller Books: Catalogue 119 ("Language"), 84 pp. Copies may be requested from 400 Summit Avenue, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102-2662.

■ **DUES REMINDER**

Members who have not paid their dues for this year (or the previous year) should recall that they are expected in our office by June 30. Please participate. If you don't know how much you owe, please write, phone, fax or email us.



The Newsletter of the DSNA appears in the Spring and Fall of each year. The Editor is Louis T. Milic, to whom all correspondence and publications should be sent. Write DSNA Newsletter RT-937, Cleveland State University, 1983 E. 24th street, Cleveland OH 44115-2403. Tel: (216) 687-3953/ 4830, fax: (216) 687-9366; e-mail: l.milic@csuohio.edu.