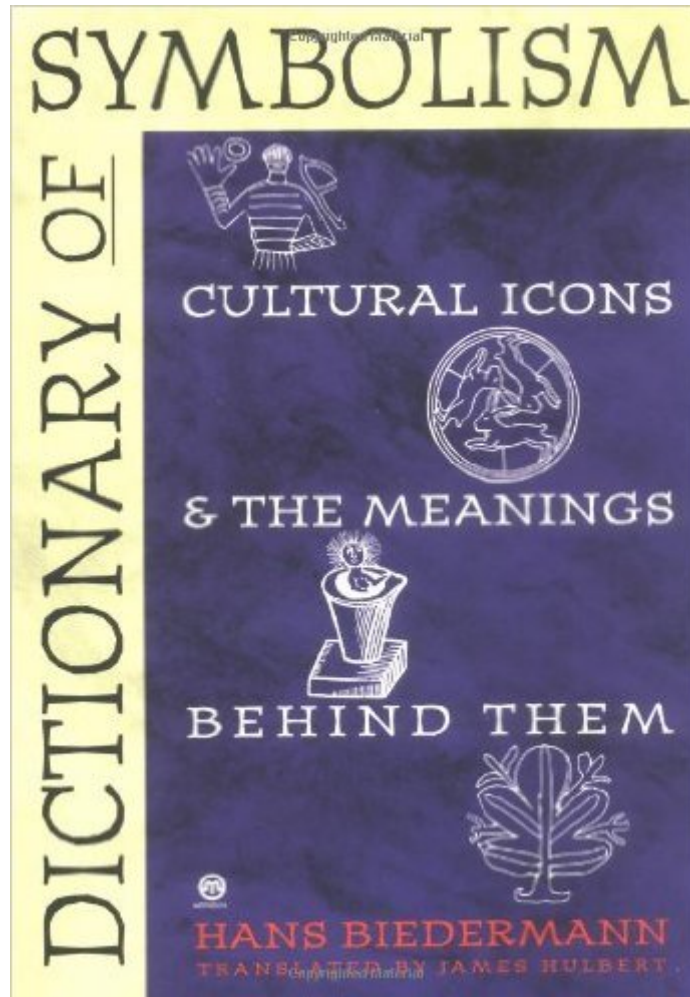


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Dictionary Of Symbolism: Cultural Icons And The Meanings Behind Them



Synopsis

This encyclopedic guide explores the rich and varied meanings of more than 2,000 symbols; from amethyst to Zodiac.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I purchased this book along with "The Encyclopedia of Symbolism" by Kevin Todeschi. While "Encyclopedia" was a huge disappointment (see that review) this book more than made up for it. It's easy to use as there's an Index of all included words in the back and a pictorial index of symbols and icons. The book covers all you would expect with many drawings. I was surprised by the level of depth and detail given for meanings to include historic facts and elaborate definitions. You probably won't find everything you're looking for in here but what it does offer is well done.

I refer to the Dictionary of Symbolism so often that I always keep it close at hand. It is a wonderful resource for anyone interested in mythology, Jungian dream analysis, biblical symbolism, cross-cultural meanings and myths, the history of symbols, etc. This is no simple listing of symbolic meanings -- it is a substantial book with extensive information on each entry, very often with illustrations. For example, someone mentioned the "Chicken Little" story recently, and I looked up the word "hen." There I found an entry describing both the positive and negative symbolism of hens as protective mothers and also as foolish, confused birds, with two illustrations and information from Matthew, Africa and Europe. I was surprised to find so much. On the same day I looked up

Prometheus, Mercury and "rock." Not only are the entries detailed, but there are an enormous number of them. The index at the back is a great cross-listing. Unfortunately, for every symbol in the universe to be listed, there would need to be several volumes. But for a single volume, this one is pretty comprehensive.

I ordered this book from along with two other dictionaries of symbols. I like this one the least. While it seems to be relatively thorough, it had misinformation (or, to put it kindly, "ambiguous and incomplete language") and bias in the first two entries I looked up. This dictionary says that Joan of Arc "died by the sword" (without the quotes). Everyone knows she was burned at the stake. If the author was being figurative, he should have been more careful, esp. when he doesn't elaborate on Joan's actual history. Second, under "sword" he states that because Genesis describes an angel posted at the gate of the Garden of Eden "with a flaming sword," and swords weren't invented then (traditionally, 4,000 BC), this shows that "the Biblical account does not date from the era it describes." This is an astoundingly stupid statement, especially from someone who presumably specializes in historic research. By definition, ALL history is written after the events that took place, especially accounts (or myths) set in pre-history. Plus, the sword in question is wielded by an angel, a supernatural figure not constrained by time or human (physical/geological) limitations. This author also says that the Japanese short sword, the wakizashi, was used for ritual suicide. Maybe, sometimes. But usually it was the tanto, or long knife that was used for sepeku. Buy Jack Tresidder's "Complete Dictionary of Symbols" instead. It has the same number of entries (2000), but is about 60 pages longer. It has a much more attractive layout, very useful cross-referencing and specially highlighted "boxed" articles. More important, it also footnotes many of its key sources--something Biedermann doesn't bother with.

This is an essential lexicon for the numerous symbols and cultural icons that have appeared or have their origins mainly in the western tradition. After reading the many definitions, it dawned on me that many symbols are simply misunderstood by popular culture and used in the wrong context. This text also takes the meaning of certain symbols and traces their root derivations, showing that meaning changes as the culture changes; and that different cultures use the same icon or symbol for entirely different purposes. Because our world is rife with signifiers, it would be a daunting task indeed to provide a comprehensive collection. Though what Biedermann has done is capture those symbols and icons that he believes have been the most significant throughout western civilization. A good example of a symbol that has been appropriated is the swastika. Anyone seeing this symbol in

present time will associate it with Adolf Hitler's Nazi party. However this symbol has its roots from a pre-Aryan civilization, Mohenjo-Daro, circa 2000 B.C., in ancient China. It was also seen in old Buddhist traditions and certain Gnostic sects in late antiquity. This important text would be invaluable in any researcher's library as it contains nearly 600 entries and over 2000 symbols. Highly recommended for students of history, religion and philosophy.

This book has great inaccuracies due to research and cross references of symbology, I first thought this to be of mythical story telling style differences yet find it misleading beyond interpretation. This reading has a religious undertone which confirms its cultural iconic view, though I find symbolism Universal and often transcendent among cultures this reading has great bias from my view, I can see a student of certain religious path benefit from this work.

This is a nice book it mentions so much it talks about the so called Star of David and Solomon's Cupid gods the ark the worship of a penis and so much more highly recommended get this book nicely detailed information black and white pictures a easy read you will be happy to add this to your library.

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