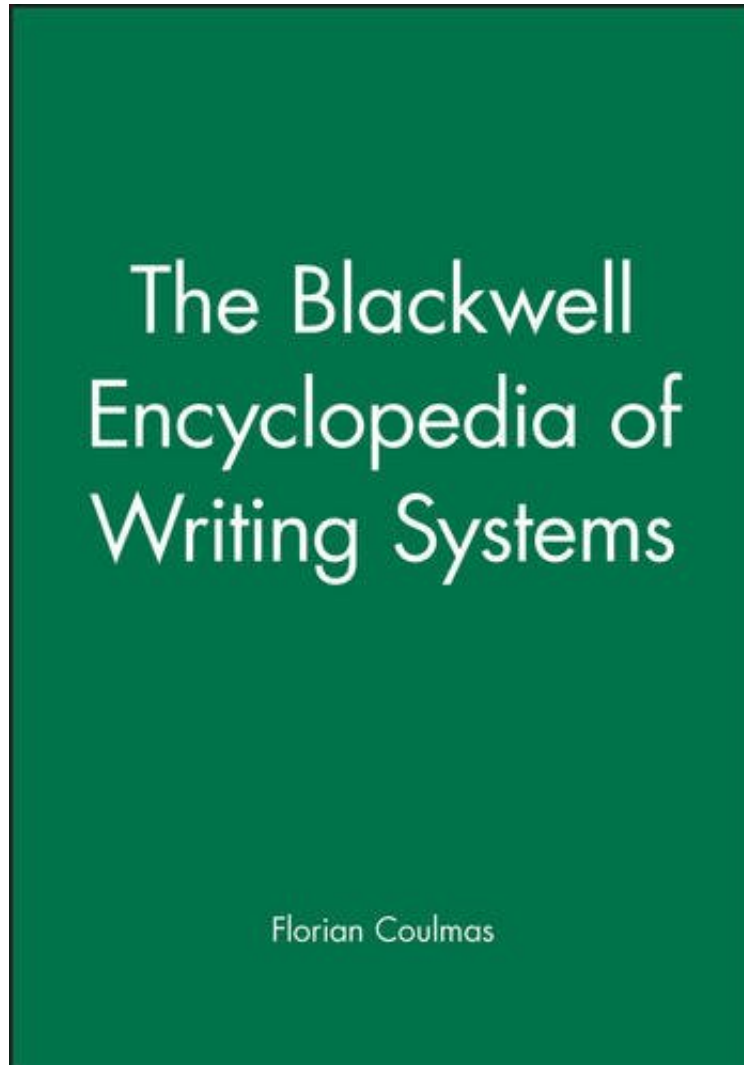


(Download) The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems

The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems

Florian Coulmas

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Florian Coulmas : The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems:

22 of 22 people found the following review helpful. A fascinating vademecum By S. Gustafson This is the only book that I have yet found that compares to David Diringer's -The Alphabet: A Key to the History of Mankind-. It is not quite so complete in its coverage of obscure scripts as Diringer, and it makes far fewer attempts to analyse the history of the scripts. On the other hand, because it covers less such territory, the exemplars of the scripts and the tables of the characters and their values in this book are far more legible. The alphabetic arrangement of the material makes it easy to find which system you want. Another of this book's strengths is that at least some attempt is made to explain how

the phonemes of the many languages are expressed by the scripts in question; in many languages, from Tibetan to English, the relationship between alphabet and speech is subtle and complex. Obviously, this information will be cursory and incomplete, but having some is better than having none, and it is at least handy to know whether you are dealing with phonemic or with etymological spellings. This will help you not only to transliterate, but also to read, them. If you are fascinated by the history of writing, and obscure scripts and arcane alphabets, you NEED this book, and will spend hours leafing through it. 14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Not Quite the Best By E. Crapo After reading previous reviews, I was excited about flipping through my own copy of the encyclopedia; however, I quickly became disappointed. For all the work and study that went into the production of the book, there is no doubt to its value to the linguistic community; however, keep the following points in mind: 1) the entry on the Anglo Saxon alphabet contradicts itself (identifying 25 letters in the text, but showing a different set of 25 letters, demonstrating 26 in total). 2) The entry on the misnamed "Mormon Alphabet" is appalling--those who used it over a century ago called it the Deseret Alphabet; and its creation was commissioned by Brigham Young in the 1840s--it was not revealed to Joseph Smith on Gold Plates in the 1830; to claim such shows marked assumptions of the author based solely on previously-known knowledge of the sect. Furthermore, the Figures and table are of photocopies quality, some of the characters so small that distinction between them cannot be easily recognized. Nor do the tables of alphabets line up with their entries. Nor are the tables uniform, but seem to be cut-and-paste tables from other sources. The text has value, but some of the scholarship is dubious, and the graphic presentation is shambles. 12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Great overview of a fascinating topic By David G. Durand This book is a great starting place for people who are interesting in the many ways people have encoded language by means of writing. The descriptions of most systems are complete enough that one can get a real feel for how they work (if not perhaps all the details of the most complex systems). It also includes brief articles on topics such as calligraphy, the status of alphabetic writing versus other systems, and the like. While some of these are subjects of heated scholarly debate, Coulmas provides balanced explanations of the issues. A wonderful overview of the intricate and beautiful ways people write the world over. Other books that would interest readers of this are: "The World's Writing Systems" from Oxford University Press is the best single reference for complete descriptions of scripts. But at nearly [\$\$\$] in hardcover, it's relatively inaccessible to the general reader. It's also targeted to a more professional audience and is not as good for browsing around. As an anthology of articles by experts it is both more authoritative, and a bit more uneven than Coulmas. "Writing Systems: A Linguistic Introduction" by Geoffrey Sampson is more of a discussion of the issues raised for linguistics by a variety of writing systems. Sampson's book includes a detailed discussion of the Chinese system.

This is an encyclopedia of writing systems, scripts and orthographies of all the world's major languages, past and present. It provides both a fully illustrated description of over 400 writing systems and an account of the study of writing in many different disciplines, from anthropology to psychology.

.com Covering over 400 of them, The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems is a vital reference resource not only for the serious scholar of writing but for anyone with a passing interest in the history of writing. Sociolinguist Florian Coulmas, editor of The Handbook of Sociolinguistics and associate editor of The International Journal of the Sociology of Language, draws on disciplines ranging from psychology to epigraphy to present a work that is both far-reaching in its scope and deep enough to be of interest to serious theorists. The encyclopedia itself consists of articles and entries of various lengths, all laid out in a typical A-to-Z format, with copious cross-referencing providing a wealth of threads for the inveterate browser. The entries themselves range from short definitions of concepts to longer articles on more complex topics, such as morphogenesis (the idea that all writing can be traced back to a single system), orthographic reform, and dyslexia. Over 400 figures and 1,600 tables illustrate not only the world's orthographies but also such things as the Mormon alphabet, the elements comprising Mayan logograms (written signs representing whole words), and Babylonian clay tablets. All this, plus a comprehensive bibliography, makes The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems an indispensable reference work for scholars and a thoroughly enjoyable browse for anyone interested in human communication. From Library Journal Nearly 80 international scholars, the editors among them, have contributed entries in The World's Writing Systems covering all scripts officially used throughout the world as well as their historical origins, each with an extensive bibliography. Included are tables of alphabets and syllabaries as well as script samples, usually featuring transliteration, transcription, and gloss of the text. The essays are grouped by topics, but a detailed index guides the user to specific terms or languages desired. There is even a section with entries treating notation systems used for music and movement. The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems is arranged in dictionary format without an index, but with a substantial bibliography. Coulmas's (Writing Systems of the World, Blackwell, 1989) coverage is not nearly as comprehensive as the Oxford publication. In the article on the Cree Syllabary all scripts are mentioned, but tables are not provided for Inuktitut (Inuit language) or Chipewyan. "Gothic" script is discussed with only incidental reference to the term Fraktur, for which an interesting history is provided in the Oxford work. This, however, does not mean that the Coulmas encyclopedia is not a useful

reference tool. Both publications are recommended for most reference collections, but *The World's Writing Systems* is clearly the more technically detailed. The determining factors for purchase will be price and needs of library clientele. There is a third choice for public or school libraries with limited resources: Akira Nakanishi's *Writing Systems of the World* (Tuttle, 1980). This inexpensive (pap. \$14.95) ready-reference tool concentrates on modern languages and their scripts, with examples from newspapers, a color map of world writing systems, an index, and a bibliography.

Edward K. Werner, St. Lucie Cty. Lib. Sys., Ft. Pierce, Fla. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Florian Coulmas provides a coherent and sophisticated interpretation of the forms and functions of written language. And he shows how important the development of writing systems has been in the development of linguistic description." Michael Stubbs, University of Trier "This book offers a thorough modern coverage of the writing systems of the world. I believe that it will quickly become a standard reference work in its field." Henry Rogers, University of Toronto "What makes this encyclopedia a great whole is the synthesis of all the little fascinating things about writing systems, scripts, and orthographies, which Coulmas differentiates in clear conceptual terms...The reviewer recommends it to the specialist and the layman enthusiastically and with no reservations whatsoever." P.G. Patel, University of Ottawa "A good work of this kind is an indispensable reference tool for the student or scholar of writing systems...C's encyclopedia does an excellent job of presenting hundreds of terms used in the analysis of writing systems...It does so... in prose of clarity that makes each entry a pleasure to read." Janet S. Smith, University of California, Davis