
Book review

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Africa: a guide to reference material by John McIlwaine. 2nd revised and expanded edition. Lochcarron: Hans Zell Publishing, 2007.

Following on the 1993 edition, this 2nd revised edition represents a substantial expansion of the *Guide*. The compiler, John McIlwaine, has long been an inspiration to library and information studies students and professionals. He enjoys a golden reputation as an African Studies scholar and bibliographer. He is Professor Emeritus of the Bibliography of Asia and Africa, at the School of Library, Archive and Information Studies, University College London. In 2001 he received the United Kingdom's Library Association Walford Award for his sustained contribution to the art and science of bibliography. A former Chair of the Standing Conference on Library Materials on Africa (SCOLMA) he was editor of *African Research and Documentation* for many years.

The first edition of the *Guide* was awarded the Library Association's Besterman Medal for 1993. The medal, an annual award, denotes outstanding bibliography. This new 2007 edition updates a classic reference work and an essential item in any African Studies collection. It provides evaluative comments on the principal sources of information on Africa South of the Sahara, that is, Africa excluding the countries of the Mediterranean littoral: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. It includes sources which have been published in English, French and a number of European languages. It does not, however, include bibliographies or indexes and abstracts.

The new edition is greatly expanded and has some 3,600 entries, most of which carry evaluative annotations. Some older publications have been excluded. It covers encyclopedias, dictionaries, directories, handbooks, atlases and gazetteers, almanacs, yearbooks, topographic reference sources, directories of organizations and biographical and statistical sources. The titles which have

been included carry a description and analysis of their contents. Inclusion of an item does not imply recommendation and for some items it was “appropriate to voice warnings about their use” (p.xxx). Most of the items included have been examined by the compiler himself (some 80 percent) and these annotations are extremely useful, reflecting a depth of first-hand knowledge.

This edition carries the new material that has become available since 1992 up to and including the European Spring of 2006. The *Guide* also includes electronic sources which have also been evaluated and reviewed. New sections include a selection of the principal reference sources in the biological and earth sciences. Another new feature is the inclusion of some 700 reviews from 80 plus journals. These are drawn from the leading Africanist and professional library journals such as *Choice*. For major sources, references to articles and reviews about their compilation are provided. The idea behind the inclusion of reviews was to provide librarians and researchers with information about the circumstances surrounding the compilation of titles and their strengths and weaknesses.

An introduction is provided in this new edition, in addition to a preface, and it most usefully explains the rationale behind the *Guide* and choices made regarding the inclusion of material. The *Guide* covers reference material in the narrow sense of the term, that is those items primarily and broadly concerned with providing factual data and those employing an arrangement designed to facilitate rapid consultation. Categories of sources which have been excluded are also described and usefully include identification of other bibliographical sources in which they may be found.

The *Guide* opens with a section on Africa in general, followed by broad regions of Africa with subdivisions by special subjects and then by individual countries. Coverage for South Africa is much more selective than that for the less well recorded countries of North-East, West and Central Africa and the Indian Ocean islands.

The *Guide* is cross referenced throughout. It contains an author and title index and this edition has a separate subject index with expanded coverage for the new content. There is no attempt made to provide detailed subject entries as these were considered unhelpful in view of the arrangement of the guide but the subject index does seek to complement the arrangement of the guide.

As with the first, this edition is based on personal knowledge accumulated over decades of teaching courses related to area studies bibliography and draws on a wide scan of source materials. The introduction lists the library collections most

frequently used for compiling this edition, as well as the library catalogues available on the internet which were visited. A useful section on other complementary sources which could be consulted by enquirers is provided in the introduction. These include bibliographies by Al Kagan, Hans Zell, and Reuben and Naomi Musiker as well as the internet portals which are developed and maintained by Karen Fung, Joe Caruso, Peter Limb and Ibra Sene.

The value of the *Guide* lies in its geographical and historical coverage. Close examination of the entries on South Africa reveals a remarkable knowledge of many informally published sources which are difficult to trace. I found it extremely useful for catching up on the electronic versions of earlier print sources like the *PRODDER directory*, the free online NGO and development directory that served us so well in the 1990s. The quality of the annotations is excellent and a reminder in this electronic information age of the need for the painstaking and scholarly work of dedicated bibliographers.

As mentioned by at least one reviewer of the first edition, possibly some form of electronic update could be made available to cover the lean times between editions, as is the case with Hans Zell's *African studies companion*. The *Guide* is another fine book and a core reference work from Hans Zell Publishing. For me based in a university dedicated to African scholarship, the *Guide* is a salutary reminder of the wealth of material emerging from or about African scholarship.