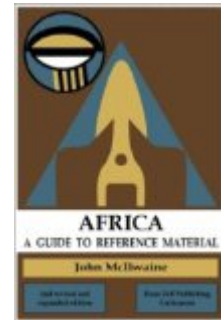


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John McIlwaine. *Africa: A Guide to Reference Material*. Lochcarron: Hans Zell Publishing, 2007. liv + 608 pp. \$260.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-9541029-3-7.

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## Comprehensive Africa

John McIlwaine is the pre-eminent African studies bibliographer in the United Kingdom. He is Professor Emeritus of the Bibliography of Asia and Africa at the School of Library, Archive and Information Studies at University College London. This work greatly expands and updates his first edition published in 1993 and is a remarkable achievement. This reference tool is as close to comprehensive a treatment of African country sources as we are ever likely to see. However, readers should note that it excludes works on the North African countries and almost all bibliographies and indexes. Although works published before 1938 noted in the first edition were deleted to save space, this work has 3600 entries in all formats, twice as many as in the previous edition. Libraries and researchers purchasing this work should retain the first edition for access to the pre-1938 sources.

The preface explains the changes from the first edition, and the extensive introduction fully explains the scope, arrangement, and methodology used. The work was done at the libraries of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London and the African Studies Centre in Leiden in The Netherlands, as well as in many other libraries in the United Kingdom, United States, France, Portugal, The Netherlands, and South Africa; it was also aided by extensive help from the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence Library. The author laments that U.K. libraries are increasingly reluctant to purchase materials from Africa and works in languages other than English. He states that this lack of access resulted in his ability to inspect personally only about 80 percent of the entries, a smaller proportion than

for the first edition.

McIlwaine includes citations to and snippets from a very large number of reviews published in respected journals in the annotations to the works cited. This is one of the most innovative and useful features. Indeed, many annotations are entirely citations to reviews. Otherwise, the annotations are descriptive and he does not directly offer his own evaluations. Winners of the (U.S.) African Studies Association's prestigious Conover-Porter Award and other ratings are also noted. Entries for ongoing works often include extensive publishing histories.

The work is arranged geographically, starting with "Africa in General" (actually focused on Africa South of the Sahara) and then by region, subdivided by works by language group within the regions and then countries. Each geographical section contains eight sections: handbooks, yearbooks, statistics, directories, biographical sources, atlases and gazetteers, earth sciences, and biological sciences. The last two sections are new to this edition. McIlwaine states that country selectivity is based on availability of relevant titles, that is, the larger the universe of reference publications for a country, the more selective the criteria for inclusion. The section on "Africa in General" includes short sections on the Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone countries, as well as one entry for the former German colonies. More importantly, this section includes seventeen short so-called "Special Subjects," from "Art and Architecture" to "Transport." As opposed to a single index in the first edition, authors and titles are separated from subjects in this new edition.

McIlwaine states that the subject index is deliberately minimal since the primary access is through the arrangement of the contents. Indexing is always a tricky business, but one might take issue with some of the choices. For example, why a subject term for “Atlases–Historical,” but not for current atlases? Titles are often deliberately shortened in the author/title index, sometimes in disconcerting ways, but this is not noted in the text. More seriously, a quick spot-check immediately turned up titles not indexed (entries 1610-1611, 1613-1614).

The introduction helpfully includes annotated entries for complementary sources: three general and two regional guides to African studies sources, two general guides to reference books, one continuing source, and three internet portals. For the sake of full disclosure and bragging rights, this author’s *Reference Guide to Africa*, 2nd ed. (2005) is included as one of the three general guides to African studies. The other two are Peter Duignan and Helen Conover’s *Guide to Research and Reference Works on Sub-Saharan Africa* (1971) and Hans Zell’s *The African Studies Companion*, 4th ed. (2006). McIlwaine notes that the Kagan and Zell volumes focus on Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole and exclude regional and country sources (p. xlvii). However, there is a problem with this statement. Both the Kagan and Zell volumes include North Africa, and in fact, McIlwaine’s own “Africa in General” section must include many sources covering the whole continent. The old imperial practice of dividing the African continent by the Sahara Desert has mostly given way to focusing on the continent as a whole. And especially for works published in the United States, authors now often take a pan-African perspective and include the African diaspora. These newer works are certainly included in McIlwaine’s “Africa in General” section. Note that both Kagan and Zell do also include a limited number of regional sources.

Zell arranges his work by format, and Kagan uses both format and subject approaches. Kagan’s subject chapters may be compared to McIlwaine’s “Africa in General Section.” Kagan has compiled seventeen subject chapters with 668 entries while McIlwaine has sixteen subject sections with 201 entries. Although there are a similar number of subjects, there is a surprising divergence in coverage. McIlwaine includes the following

subjects not found in Kagan: “education, information retrieval, law, onomastics, sociology, and transport. Kagan includes the following subjects not found in McIlwaine: agriculture and food, communications, libraries and librarianship, publishing and the book trade, and women. As opposed to McIlwaine, note that Kagan does include bibliographies and indexes, general overviews and surveys of disciplines, as well as selected periodicals. McIlwaine’s great strength is his country focus while Kagan is better for sources dealing with the entire continent. Zell has a very different focus and further discussion of his work is out of scope for this review.

Regarding Southern Africa, all the countries follow the standard arrangement described above except for South Africa, which is arranged in parallel with the “Africa in General” chapter. The author singles out South Africa as the country with the largest universe of publications and therefore he uses the strictest criteria for inclusion. Nevertheless, he hopes to provide the “most significant titles.” There is a small section on bibliographies of reference works. The “Special Subjects” section contains 55 entries in nine subject categories. The total number of references is 384 as compared to 215 in the first edition. For the other countries of the region, there are approximately two to three times more titles in this edition than in the previous one. There are 71 entries for Mozambique, 65 for Zimbabwe, 60 for Namibia, 55 for Angola, 45 for Botswana, 34 for Lesotho, and 29 for Swaziland. One surprise is that Zimbabwe is found in the Central Africa, rather than Southern Africa, section.

Perhaps it would be useful to make one last comment on terminology and selection criteria. McIlwaine defines the term “Africa” as Africa south of the Sahara and, as noted above, he therefore excludes chapters on the North African countries. In comparing the subject categories developed by McIlwaine with those used by Kagan, we can see that McIlwaine uses “economics” but not “development” and leaves out women’s studies. There are only twelve titles indexed under the term “women” in the subject index.

This is a first-rate reference work deserving of a place in every library for advanced research. But it may be fair to say that its terminology and content reflect a traditional focus.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-safrica>

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