

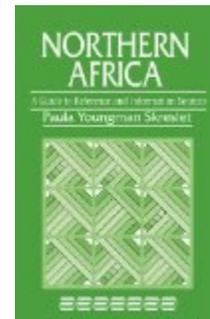
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Paula Youngman Skreslet. *Northern Africa: A Guide to Reference and Information Sources*. Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 2000. xv + 405 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-56308-684-7.

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The author, a librarian who lived and worked in Cairo for ten years as a teacher and academic librarian, demonstrates a scholarly approach to the materials covered and sensitivity to the needs of library users. She prefaces this well-organized, thorough guide with a useful introduction identifying its purpose and scope, appropriately aiming it at the beginning researcher attempting to gain a foothold in the field rather than at specialized or advanced scholars and researchers of the region.

This guide is an exemplary research tool that will be of great help to librarians and beginning researchers looking for assistance in selecting resources for work on Northern Africa including the Maghreb, Sahel, and Horn sub-regions. Thoughtful and substantial annotations transform what might otherwise be an esoteric reference work into a relevant, nuanced, and eminently useful tool. Critical comments go beyond describing the work at hand in admirable detail, directing users to its limitations or particular utility for a given purpose.

Northern Africa is treated as a region of the continent, a valid and historically justified approach that broadens the scope of literature considered for inclusion. There is an emphasis on items published during the 1980s and 1990s, while earlier works are selectively included (the author notes several helpful bibliographies published in the 1970s). In terms of original language,

the work incorporates “reference materials in English, French, German and transliterated Arabic” (p. xi).

More than fifty pages of well-crafted indexes (names, titles, subjects) provide additional assistance to researchers attempting to use time efficiently. The terms and categories are well chosen, directing users to specific item numbers. Broad topics such as “women” or “political activity” may appear on their own for general studies as well as within other headings, e.g. “Sudan” or “development.” All formats of published sources are considered including microforms, electronic materials, and statistical publications, as well as more traditional reference formats and some popular travel guides.

The table of contents outlines the organization of the nearly 1,500 works treated with general reference, area studies by subject, and country or region categories broken down into more specific topics. A graduate student reported to me that the subject section was more useful than the others, but this may reflect a greater familiarity with the general works and her own area. If only the best is good enough in reference work (p. xv), this guide is unquestionably good enough.

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