

Book Reviews/Boekresensies

Guide to South African reference books. 6th ed.

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The *Guide to South African reference books* remains a primary bibliography for reference work in Southern Africa. The coverage of the book is evident in its title. The guide has a long history under the authorship of professor Reuben Musiker, with its first seminal edition listing 325 entries being published in 1955 by the University of Cape Town Libraries. It has grown and improved considerably with each new edition; the latest edition lists 1 139 titles (with annotations) of reference books on South Africa. Still under the helm of Reuben Musiker who is now joined by his wife Naomi Musiker (also an eminent bibliographer and indexer), the 6th edition brings us up to date, listing reference sources published up to 1996. Some of the original entries have been retained when they are of enduring reference value and thus remain basic reference sources for the country. The compilers of the *Guide to South African reference books* can only be praised for the extensive and excellent bibliographic work which they have put into this new edition.

For each reference source which is listed, the citation includes author, title, statement of edition, publisher, place of publication, date, pagination, and illustrative matter, followed by the annotation. The compilers personally examined the publications wherever possible, but have not attempted to evaluate the contents of each. The annotations are now more extensive than in earlier editions and range from a concise sentence to detailed paragraph descriptions of major reference books.

In the main sequence of the book, the sources are arranged under broad subject headings following the Dewey Decimal Classification sequence, but the DDC numbers are not featured. This type of classified arrangement does make it difficult to use the contents pages as a point of entry, but the extensive indexes at the back of the book – an author-title index and especially these parate subject index – are the way to go. The finer detail in the subject index makes access particularly easy and successful. The indexes refer to the item numbers of the reference sources listed in the main sequence.

Since its inception the aim of the bibliography has been to list reference books which provide information and facts

on any given South African subject (p.2). Thus there is an eclectic mix of conventional reference books like encyclopaedias and yearbooks which are supplemented by other reference sources such as handbooks, manuals and even histories, to cover subjects as diverse as taxation, labour law, political history, architecture, rock art, flora, fauna, genealogy, cookery, child rearing and long-distance running. Social and economic changes in South Africa are reflected in entries under several subject categories, but the coverage of the reference sources themselves remains essentially Eurocentric Western. The compilers are naturally dependent on publishing output, for example as reflected in publishers catalogues and existing bibliographies. Most of the reference sources are published *locally*, but important sources which are published abroad are also listed.

The *Guide to South African reference books* can be used happily to find titles of reference sources of a recreational nature. Twitchers, for example, will find 30 birdbooks listed here. Gardeners, keen cooks and wine lovers can likewise find titles to suit their fancies. But it is as a guide to more serious reference sources that the book has its most value, both locally and abroad. The Law section, for example, lists the major general bibliographies, biographies, dictionaries, directories, encyclopaedias, surveys and histories, and then has categories for legal guides, copyright law, patents and trademarks, constitutional law, labour disputes, labour law, human rights and consumer rights. There are several useful categories which reflect topical issues in South Africa, such as the section for 'Study opportunities and financial assistance to students' which has details for eight reference books, all published in the 1990s. There are dozens of professional, business and commercial directories listed. Dictionaries for various indigenous languages are identified. The History section is extensive, and has subcategories for different regions. Fauna and flora are exceptionally well covered. The guide provides very wide subject coverage and it is unfortunately not possible to identify all the possibilities here.

With the exception of a few subject bibliographies, the *Guide to South African reference books* does not list bibliographies. Almost 900 such bibliographies are listed in the third edition of Reuben Musiker's companion volume *South African bibliography*, published by Mansell in 1996 (for a review see Volume 65(2) June 1997 of this journal). These two volumes used together, provide an excellent guide to South African reference sources and as such should be available at reference points in all our libraries and information services, likewise in large public, academic and research libraries abroad. Mansell offers a special price of £45.00 in South Africa if both volumes are purchased together, and even at our present unhealthy exchange rate the volumes are highly recommended for their currency and the breadth of coverage they provide.

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