

South African bibliography: a survey of bibliographies and bibliographical work

Musiker, Reuben

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South African bibliography is essentially a selective bibliography of South African bibliographies, providing at the same time an overview of bibliographical work in the country dating from the earliest times to the present. The third edition published by Mansell updates the earlier editions published in 1970 by Crosby Lockwood and 1980 by David Philip. As with earlier editions, the selection here focusses on bibliographies produced in South Africa. Emphasis is placed on more recent bibliographies, but there is still extensive listing of older bibliographies (published and unpublished), including bibliographies compiled by students in librarianship when such bibliographies were a course requirement at some library schools.

The third edition of *South African bibliography* follows the same pattern as the second edition, with the first part of the

book identifying in a narrative style a selection of bibliographies and the second part being a numbered, alphabetical author listing of the bibliographies mentioned and identified by number in the first part. The volume has an excellent author, title and subject index. The eight chapters in Part 1 embody the same domains which were covered in the previous edition, namely retrospective national bibliographies, current national bibliographies, subject bibliographies, indexes and lists of periodicals and newspapers, theses and research, official publications, archives and manuscripts, and bibliography in South Africa. Part 2 contains bibliographic descriptions for 869 items listed in Part 1. Compared with the 585 entries in the second edition (and bearing in mind that the choice in both instances was selective), this shows a considerable increase in the number of bibliographies which have appeared in – and on – South Africa.

Indeed, in the 16 years since the publication of the second edition, the bibliographical scene in South Africa has changed dramatically as a result of advances in technology. Consider, as the most obvious examples, the extensive activities of the South African Bibliographic and Information Network (SABINET) which was established in 1983 (from 1997 the company is trading as SABINET Online), the phenomenal growth in the creation, availability and use of online bibliographic databases, and the use of the CD-ROM format which, barely a decade after its introduction, is already commonplace. A useful new feature in this third edition is an appendix listing 'Southern African bibliographic databases on CD-ROM, 1996'. The brief list here includes *inter alia* details of NISC's *African studies* and *South African studies* anthology CD-ROMs, and the several CD-ROMs (most being full-text) published by Butterworths Electronic Publishers and by Jutastat. A new chapter detailing how information technology has influenced bibliographic work in South Africa would also have been most appropriate. The lack of particulars on SABINET's bibliographic activities is especially notable; the brief section which has been tacked uncomfortably into Chapter 2 does not include the expected historical survey of the extensive bibliographic services provided by this company. However, many of the local bibliographic databases which can be accessed via SABINET Online are in fact mentioned elsewhere in the book. A further problem relates to the lack of clarity in the descriptions of some of the main general bibliographies for the Southern African region, including the *SACat* which is SABINET Online's most significant local database. Where the principal developments in South African bibliographic activities are discussed in Chapter 8, the period after 1970 is sketchy, and the impact of information technology is mentioned only in passing. There were many important national and regional bibliographic developments in the year of imprint (1996) and these could understandably not be included in this brief survey. Developments characteristic of the second half of the 1990s (such as the establishment of library consortia like GAELIC

and CALICO, and problems surrounding SAMARC) will no doubt be incorporated in the next edition.

This being said, solid acknowledgement must be given to the author for the revision of the book. Bibliographic works such as this are unequivocally a labour of love, the discipline of bibliography representing a time-intensive and generally unappreciated vocation. The book provides a good overall 'historico-bibliographical record' (p.19) for South Africa. The extensive coverage achieved in the earlier editions is maintained, with most of the earlier text being retained and new (as well as some older) bibliographies being added to bring the review up to date.

Updating is most evident in Chapter 3 which covers subject bibliographies, the subjects arranged in broad Dewey Decimal Classification sequence. Whilst most of the previously-listed bibliographies still feature here thus ensuring the necessary retrospective coverage, it is the expansion of this chapter which is mainly responsible for the increase in the number of bibliographies listed in Part 2. Subject fields covered in this chapter range from the inconsequential (e.g. Philately, with two entries) to the significant (e.g. Politics and race relations, with over 40 entries). New categories added to this edition certainly reflect changed times ('Women's issues' with 10 entries and 'Black literature' with 17 entries), as do subtle changes in subject labels ('Race relations' replacing 'Race problem').

The expansion – or lack – of local bibliographic activity which is represented in the coverage of the chapters on periodicals and newspapers, theses, archives and manuscripts, and official publications is a telling tale of the measure of progress which has taken place in South Africa in the past two decades. To take government publications as an example, a quote from Chapter 6 (p.49):

'The bibliographical situation regarding official publications in South Africa has never been very satisfactory ... if one can judge by the example set in other countries, then the fault lies with the Government Printer, who, in South Africa, has never issued a comprehensive catalogue of publications'.

The same sentiment was expressed in the earlier edition, and the need to repeat the statement indicates the extent to which

bibliographic control of South Africa's government publications is sliding even further backwards.

Experts in specific subject fields, and compilers of some of the larger and better-known general bibliographies, will no doubt detect omissions and minor errors in the listings and narrative descriptions respectively. It has to be recognized that bibliographies of bibliographies like *South African bibliography* must of necessity be highly selective (and, to a certain extent, unavoidably subjective), and the sleuth work required to compile a work of this nature is unfailingly difficult and time consuming. This third edition of *South African bibliography* marks professor Musiker's fortieth year in the bibliographic field. He established an international reputation as an excellent distinguished bibliographer during his professional years at the University of the Witwatersrand and is unwaveringly continuing his love for bibliography during his retirement, with several other new works in press. Bibliography in South Africa would be much the poorer without such dedicated individuals who compile and publish bibliographies which have a very limited commercial market, but whose publication fortunately continues to ensure that the bibliographic activities of the country are recorded for posterity.

Even with the publishers' special price of £25.00 for the local market, our present problematic exchange rate makes *South African bibliography* rather pricey for smaller South African libraries to consider buying and certainly inevitably too steep for the bibliography student's pocket. The volume represents an important source internationally and is recommended for Africana collections, research and university libraries worldwide. Its scope is not paralleled elsewhere.

(*South African bibliography* is not to be confused with Reuben Musiker and Naomi Musiker's *Southern Africa bibliography*, a completely different bibliographic work which is to be reviewed in a later issue of this journal.)

SHIRLEY J. BEHRENS

Department of Information Science, University of South Africa, Pretoria.