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Book Review of Libraries and Information in the Arab World : An Annotated Bibliography

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Citation Details

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

Libraries and Information in the Arab world : an Annotated Bibliography.
Compiled by Lokman I. Meho and Mona A. Nsouli. Westport, Conn. :
Greenwood Press, 1999. Pp. xi, 349. ISBN: 031331098X (alk. paper)

Locating scholarly material on libraries and information in the Arab
world can be a daunting and frustrating task. This remarkably well con-
ceived bibliography will greatly ease the search for material written on
subjects related to the library and information field in the region. The
compilers' proficiency in organizing information is evident from the com-
position of this work. In addition to the more than one thousand citations
comprising the bibliography itself, prefatory and historical background in-
formation is included in opening sections, and useful indexes are placed at
the conclusion of the bibliography.

Most of the bibliographic entries refer to works published within the last
quarter century and are primarily in Arabic, English, and French. The most
notable advantage of the work is that a great number of the bibliography's
citations are annotated, some in significant detail. If available, annotations
provided by the original authors are presented. Perhaps because material
the editors could not obtain was left unannotated, the Arabic entries tend
to be less often described. Major library and information databases such
as ERIC, Library and Information Science Abstracts, Library Literature,
and Dissertation Abstracts International were consulted to select the non-
Arabic titles. For the Arabic sources, significant library and information
science periodicals and periodical indexes were searched, including ʿĀlam
al-Kutub, ʿĀlam al-Kitāb, and al-Majallah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Maʿlūmāt. For
all titles, the compilers browsed the reference sections of several libraries,
primarily in North Carolina, and at the Institute for Palestine Studies, for
suitable entries. The citations noted in dissertations and research papers
chosen for the bibliography were gleaned for inclusion as well.

The bibliography begins with a preface explaining the contents and ar-
rangement of the entries. A preliminary chapter written by Nsouli, Head
Librarian at the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut, follows the preface.
This succinct introduction provides a brief history of books and libraries in
the Arab world, beginning with the arrival of Islam. She notes that accom-
panying the rise and intellectual vigor of Islam, public and private libraries
were established throughout the Islamic world. The era of modern libraries

commenced with the French occupation of Egypt in the early nineteenth century, during which time religious denominational institutions that held libraries were founded.

At the conclusion of the opening chapter, Nsouli addresses the current state of libraries in the region and the challenges facing them. The last two centuries have seen the development of national, academic, special, and public libraries in the Arab world. Nsouli mentions the important contribution of international organizations, Unesco, for example, to these efforts. While the recent implementation of technology in libraries has increased access to information and library services, many challenges continue to face libraries in Arab countries individually and regionally. Lack of national information policies, insufficient funding, shortage of skilled staff, poor facilities, and limited cooperation and coordination do not contribute to a healthy environment for libraries.

The initial chapter of the bibliography itself is entitled "general works." Subsequent to the "general" subheading section, separate sections in this chapter range alphabetically from "academic libraries" to "transliteration." The remaining chapters are each devoted to an individual country and the Arabian Gulf region and provide citations also arranged under topical headings. The Arab world for this work is broadly conceived geographically, and references, although few, for libraries and information in Djibouti, Somalia, and Mauritania are included.

Each chapter employs subheadings as required to cover the subject matter of entries relevant to the chapter's country or region. Overall, the subject matter covered in the bibliography is comprehensive in scope. The editors have made the bibliography accessible by using widely accepted library terminology for their headings. In some cases established, but more stilted subject headings such as "bibliography-methodology" have been replaced with the more familiar "bibliographic control." Important additions for this bibliography are headings particular to this area, as in "Arabic script and bibliographic records/tools." Some of the chapters are much more extensive than others. As expected, technologically advantaged countries in the Gulf are the source of substantially more citations related to, for example, "networks and networking," "computer networks and networking," "information storage and retrieval," and "online catalogs." In contrast, the beleaguered state of libraries in Somalia is revealed in relatively few entries listed.

Topical headings and geographical entities, authors and citation titles form the content of the subject, author, and title indexes that follow the bibliography. As with most bibliographies, it is worthwhile taking a flexible approach in searching for related entries on a particular topic in the indexes. For example, in looking for entries on the "Internet"—a standard Library of Congress subject heading—the more profitable discoveries are in the title index (with four entries), whereas the subject index provides only one on "Internet access and use, school libraries, in," and another, most likely placed in error under Iraq, on "Internet access and use," which in fact refers to the Internet in the Persian Gulf.

The bibliography offers an admirably well-organized compilation of resources that reflects the issues and challenges confronting librarianship in the Arab world over the period of time covered by the work. With the relentless, fast-paced development of technology and its integration into all aspects of the library and information arena, the bibliography may soon require a sequel, perhaps online.

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Encyclopædia Iranica. Edited by Ehsan Yarshater. Vol. IX: fascicles 1–3. New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 1998–1999. Each fascicle 112 pp. Includes Bibliography. Price $32 (each fasc.) paperback. ISBN: 0933273258, 0933273274, and 0933273312.

The *Encyclopædia Iranica* is the most extensive compendium on the past and present culture of the Persian-speaking people and their contribution to human civilization. It is an elaborate reference work on the lands, life, culture, religion, and history of the Iranian people and of those outsiders who left lasting impact on the life and culture of the Iranians. Chronologically, it covers from prehistoric period to our own times and geographically encompasses the regions from Anatolia and Central Asia to India and the Arabian Peninsula. Humanities, social sciences and natural sciences are its main focus areas. So far the Encyclopædia contains contributions of about nine hundred scholars from all over the world. It is an ambitious project of the Center for Iranian Studies at Columbia University and is sponsored, *inter alia*, by the National Endowment for Humanities, a federally funded sponsor of academic research projects in the United States.