

RECENSIE – REVIEW – COMPTE RENDU

Plant Resources of Tropical Africa (7)1 – Timbers 1

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This is the first of 2 volumes that PROTA will publish on timber species of Africa belonging to the 25 most important timber plant families. Some of the species are extensively marketed internationally, others if not most, however, are only used locally for construction or the production of furniture, implements and utensils. Bamboos, often used for construction are also included. As most plant species with traditional uses, the timber species presented here also and often have a number of secondary uses. PROTA, which is a consortium of European and African research institutions, assigns a primary use category to the species under review, but lists the secondary uses as well. When the most important primary use is not clear, the species has also been dealt with (or will be) in another volume, as an example we can cite: *Ceiba pentandra* which appears in this volume, but also in fibre volume 16; *Pterocarpus angolensis* had another treatment in the ‘dyes and tannins’ volume.

All in all, this volume carries 511 species, showing the rich potential of timber species from the continent. However: 113 important species are dealt with extensively (including distribution maps); 167 are treated in a simplified format, whereas 231 are only mentioned in accounts of related species.

The presentation format is the same as the one previously used in the other volumes. Species are presented alphabetically, and information is provided on botany (description, growth and development, ecology...), scientific and vernacular names, origin and geographic distribution, uses (of course), production and international trade, adulterations and substitutes, and the agronomy of the species: propagation and planting, management, diseases and pests, harvesting, and yield. It is a pity there are no more line drawings provided with the species presentation, but overall this is again top class work! Each species profile is written by one or a few authors who try to bring together formal and grey literature information. Especially the latter source is quite interesting, because basically untapped by other publications. It is, however, up to the authors to value and validate this ‘informal’ information, and present a balanced review. This being said, the

information contained in this volume highlights a number of lesser known species, and is a very rich source of interesting information for anyone working on the interface between ethnobotany and domestication, and as such a must-have...

Experience has shown that most information 'you always wanted to know, but never were able to find yourself', can be found in the respective species' monograph, or could be found from the literature lists that are each time provided.

The diskette that comes with the book has the important species presented together with the illustrations that should help in identification, but also highlight the major characteristics of the species. This being a timber volume, illustrations also focus on wood properties. However, and as with previous editions the CD-ROM does not function well (still, and again): testing it on 3 different computers (with 2 different 'operators') only yielded one satisfactory result. The CD (when functioning) comes in 2 languages, i.e. French and English. For future volumes, I would suggest the authors try to 'revamp' the CD-ROM's presentation and operational format, there is sexier and more easy accessing methods on the market...

All in all, however, and as we appreciate the content value over presentation flaws, also this PROTA volume is a must read/buy!

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