Aslanov, Cyril, *Le français au Levant, jadis et naguère. A la recherche d'une langue perdue*. Paris : Honoré Champion, 2006, 267 pp. 2-7453-1217-0

The term 'Levant', as the author comments on the first page of this work, 'n'est plus guère de mode aujourd'hui', due to the negative connotations it has acquired at different times. However, he chooses the term as the one which best encompasses the area under consideration, in a linguistic and cultural sense, without taking into account political boundaries. He is concerned with the area comprising all the countries bordering the Eastern Mediterranean, the coastal areas and also the 'arrière-pays', all of which have, for many centuries, enjoyed a 'rapport privilégié' with the French language. The objective of this book is to chart those relationships and consider how they have developed up to and including the present time.

Aslanov begins with a discussion of terms, including a discussion of the term *lingua franca*, explaining why he does not consider this a useful term for the role the French language has historically played in the Levant. He goes on to examine evidence of the presence of French in the region over the centuries, beginning with the evidence of ancient français at the time of the Crusades, finding it a wide variety of sources, including texts written in numerous languages. He moves on to look at the *français levantin* that developed in Cyprus and Constantinople, among others, and the presence of this language in Egypt and Turkey during the Middle Ages and through to the Modern Era. He also examines the role of French during the colonial era, and the impact of French colonial rule on the region. The work concludes with a survey of French in the region today, looking at each area in turn, and ending with a 'pronostic pessimiste'.

This work is clearly the result of painstaking research and contains a vast amount of fascinating information. However, it is not for the fainthearted: it is rather off putting for readers not familiar with Arabic, Greek, Old Armenian and other ancient scripts, to find two or more of them in one sentence. The earlier chapters are densely packed with information – linguistic, cultural, historic – but it is difficult to take it all in, particularly with the frequent references to languages not familiar to a reader without a background in Classics. The later chapters are undoubtedly much easier to read, but it is a pity the earlier chapters were not edited to make them a little more accessible. Despite this, the book does give a fascinating insight into an area of *Francophonie* often neglected, and is a valuable resource for anyone interested in this particular region, and in what Cerquiglini in the Preface calls 'le commerce des langues romanes en Méditerranée'.

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