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One of the more welcome trends in the study of medieval literature and language is the movement away from the anachronistic Platonizing national paradigms that long shaped the discipline. The development of languages, literatures and systems of writing was a messy process characterized by acculturation, adaptation and borrowing. This is particularly clear in the Mediterranean world, where various scriptural and vernacular linguistic traditions, and various writing systems were current often within the same societies. What is striking is not only the number of linguistic traditions that came into contact here, but their diversity – including Latin, Hellenic and Semitic alphabets, and a whole gamut of spoken and written languages ranging from Romance to Armenian, and including Berber and Slavic tongues, not to mention the emblematic scriptural languages: Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic, and languages from further afield, such as Persian or Ethiopic. Scholars now recognize the broad multilingualism that characterized not only the region but its inhabitants, who created hybrid alphabet systems and produced multilingual documents as a response to this environment. The study of such documents is not only a valuable end in itself, but provides a window into larger processes of cultural evolution that were so essential to the region.

This handsome and well-produced volume gathers papers delivered at “Manuscritos plurilingües y plurigráficos de Oriente y Occidente,” a conference held in 2012 at the CSIC in Madrid. The focus of the collection is on pre-Modern Italy, with an emphasis on Sicily – together these parts account for thirteen of the eighteen essays, including chapters surveying linguistic interactions in Latin, Arabic, Hebrew Greek and Maltese from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries. While most essays are essentially case-studies of specific documents and genres, each of the three sections in this part of the book features an opening chapter that serves as an introductory survey. Following this, three chapters discuss multilingualism and multilingual texts in the Iberian Peninsula, from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, including a chapter that surveys Jewish multilingual and multigraphic texts here. The book concludes with two further case studies from the Levant.

As is common with conference proceedings, the collection may lack a certain overall coherence, but this is off-set by the excellent quality and variety of the contributions. Whereas most readers will pick and choose the chapters relevant to their own fields, as a whole the collection serves as an excellent overview of the subject and those who work on other regions of the Mediterranean will undoubtedly find the perspectives outlined here useful and relevant. Considering the high quality of the book’s production and the generous allotment of color and
black-and-white plates, *Multilingual and Multigraphic Documents and Manuscripts of East and West*, is well-priced at $120, and should certainly be on the shelf of any research library.

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