

Mercantile Gentlemen and Inquisitive Travellers: constructing *The Natural History of Aleppo*¹

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‘The mosques, the minarets, and numerous cupolas form a splendid spectacle, and the flat roofs of the houses which are situated on the hills, rising one behind another, present a succession of hanging terraces, interspersed with cypress and poplar trees.’²

Introduction

So much has been written about the rise of Romantic Orientalism in the nineteenth century that it seems important to explore influences on European travellers, such as the physicians Alexander and Patrick Russell who lived in Aleppo in the mid-eighteenth century, to understand more of the history of East-West contact in the Levant. *The Natural History of Aleppo* (1756; second edition 1794) is more than a traveller’s account of the city in the eighteenth century. The book also influenced the mid-nineteenth-century ethnographer and lexicographer, Edward W. Lane (1801-76), whom Edward Said associated with the rise of Romantic Orientalism, in the light of which Said erroneously talks of Dr Russell’s account as ‘a forgotten

¹ Draft of article currently in press to be published in *Travellers in the Levant*, edited by Charles Foster (Stacey International, 2004)

² *The Natural History of Aleppo: containing a description of the city, and the principal natural productions in its neighbourhood; together with an account of the climate, inhabitants, and diseases; particularly of the plague, with the methods used by the Europeans for their preservation* (London: printed for the bookseller, Andrew Millar, 1756), 1. Hereinafter *Aleppo* (1756).

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work'.³ According to Sari J. Nasir,⁴ in his Preface to *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, Lane mentions that the English reader's knowledge of the Middle East at the end of the eighteenth century was primarily based on *Aleppo*. Lane certainly continued Russells' fine tradition for exquisite recording and fine detailed descriptions of the country and social customs in his own works. The Russells not only made their own observations, but provide fine comparative detail from classical and Arabic texts as well as British and European travel accounts. They also attempted to keep abreast of the times: the use of Linnaean terminology for botanical specimens is evidence enough.

Alexander Russell (c.1715-68) published *The Natural History of Aleppo* in 1756, a book that he began shortly after his arrival in Aleppo in 1740. After Alexander Russell's death in 1768, the second edition of *The Natural History of Aleppo and parts adjacent....*, was revised, enlarged and illustrated with notes by his half-brother, Patrick Russell, M.D. (1726-1805) and published in two volumes with wonderful illustrations in London in 1794,⁵ with many additional notes and references to earlier travellers in the Levant and to Arabic sources on the city and medical practice. The 1794 edition of *Aleppo* also includes paintings by the Anglo-Egyptian artist, the famous flower painter George D. Ehret, and a colleague of Alexander's friend, Dr John Fothergill.⁶ Preparation of the second edition was not without stress for Patrick as he wrote: 'The death of

³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 159-60.

⁴ Sari J. Nasir, *The Arabs and the English* (London: Longman, 1979), 63.

⁵ It was produced in London and printed for G. G. and J. Robinson [bookseller] in 2 volumes in 1794, with magnificent plates and a map (26 x 32 cm). This was reissued in 1856 in one volume. Reprinted versions are available published by Aldershot, Gregg International Publishers, 1969, 2 vols. Hereinafter *Aleppo* (1794).

⁶ Sarah Searight, *The British in the Middle East* (London: East-West Publications, 1979), 231; B.C. Corner and C.C. Booth (eds), *Chain of Friendship: selected letters of Dr John Fothergill of London, 1735-1780* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971), 290n.

the Author, in 1768, caused a temporary interruption of studies, which his Brother found himself unable to resume, without suffering, by association, many painful recollections, which for a long while, too sensibly perhaps, affected his mind.⁷

The Russells: European Outlook and the Scottish Enlightenment

Alexander Russell, M.D., F.R.S., third son (by his second wife) of a lawyer, John Russell, was born about 1715 in Braidshaw, Midlothian and was educated at Edinburgh High School and later at the University of Edinburgh. Alexander Russell worked as the physician to the Levant Company in Aleppo from 1749 to 1753 and then returned to London in 1755. Alexander's half-brother, Patrick Russell, M.D., F.R.S., was born in Edinburgh on 6 February 1726/7. Educated possibly at King's College, Aberdeen, he took his M.D. in Edinburgh University. Arriving in Aleppo in 1750, Patrick was also a physician with the Levant Company from 1753, a position that he held until 1771.

The Russells went to university at a time when the city of Edinburgh was flourishing as a centre of the arts and philosophical thought at the beginning of the Scottish Enlightenment. The classic period of the Scottish Enlightenment, from the early 1740s to late 1790s, witnessed many scientific and pioneering publications, alongside the founding of philosophical clubs and societies in the major Scottish cities. Edinburgh was a centre of excellence in a wide range of fields including medicine, geology, agriculture, natural history, philosophy, poetry and painting.

The development of a high standard of education within the five important universities in Scotland during this period was enhanced therein by vigorous dialogue on ideas generated by a small group of thinkers, possessing originality and even genius. Yet at the time that Alexander Russell went to the University of Edinburgh, the average age of students was between fourteen and sixteen years old. A disproportionate number of university students were from the middle

⁷ *Aleppo* (1794), I, v.

ranks of society, the very group of people who exported the ideas of the Enlightenment through commercial ties and developed colonial infrastructures in India, America and Africa. It is against this background that we can place Alexander Russell during his medical training in the University of Edinburgh between 1832 and 1834.

Despite the Union with England in 1707, Scotland in the 1730s to 1750s was more in tune with Continental attitudes than those of London, with Scots educated in both Scottish and European traditions. There were significant links in Scotland with the French Enlightenment in Paris and strong connections with Leyden, especially in the field of medicine. Scottish scholars went to European universities and then returned to teach in Scottish universities. Almost all Alexander's medical lecturers, including the five members of the College of Physicians, had studied in Leyden with the Dutch physician and Professor of Medicine, Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738), or in other centres including Rheims, Genoa and Paris. Boerhaave is credited with founding the modern system of teaching medical students by using a clinical or 'bedside' manner rather than simply relying on classical textbooks. He was renowned as a brilliant teacher and students from all over Europe came to hear his lectures. Through his pupils, he exerted great influence on later medical teaching in Edinburgh, Vienna and Germany. These included Alexander Russell's teachers: the founder (in 1720) of the Edinburgh Medical School, the Professor of Anatomy, Alexander Monro *primus* (1697-1767); John Innes (d.11 Jan 1778), the Professor of Medicine with John Rutherford (1695-1779) — and it was Rutherford who promoted the establishment of a botanical garden in the city of Edinburgh; the Professor of Materia Medica and botanist, Charles Alston (1683-1760); Dr Sinclair who lectured on the Theory of Physic and the Professor of Chemistry, Dr Plummer. Boerhaave's approach was to encourage students to seek answers to problems for themselves and their influence is reflected in the Russells' approach to their account of life in Aleppo.

Neither Patrick nor Alexander worked in the Syrian city of Aleppo in isolation for they maintained friendships formed during their university and medical careers. These friendships were to have profound influence on the creation and format of *Aleppo*. William Cuming (1714-88), George Cleghorn (1716-89) and Alexander Russell founded a small but active student medical society at the

University of Edinburgh in 1834 that was to become the Royal Society of Edinburgh.⁸ Alexander's fellow student, John Fothergill, the famous Quaker medical practitioner and botanist, who had a long and distinguished career in London (and was a friend of many distinguished figures, including Benjamin Franklin in the States and Carolus Linnaeus in Upsala), joined this medical society in his second year (1735). About 400 letters written by Fothergill have been found and reflect his devotion to this whole group of fellow students. It was Fothergill who urged Alexander Russell to put the results of his studies in Aleppo into a book after the latter returned to London in 1755. Fothergill was even present at Alexander's deathbed in London 1768.

Cuming, the son of a prominent Edinburgh merchant, studied with Boerhaave in Leyden from 1735.⁹ Cleghorn went on to practise in Minorca in 1736 for thirteen years as an army surgeon with the Twenty-Second Regiment of Foot. Fothergill kept him supplied with books and letters filled with information about the latest scientific trends.¹⁰ Cleghorn regularly sent botanical specimens back to Fothergill and, at the latter's instigation, published *Observations on Epidemical Diseases of Minorca* (1751).¹¹ Like Russell, Fothergill and Cuming, Cleghorn was thoroughly competent in Latin and quoted copious classical sources. In many ways *Aleppo* conformed to the model set out by Cleghorn for both books contain much medical detail, with observations on the climate, vegetable and animal life, and the conditions of life of the inhabitants. As Fothergill

⁸ S.M. Devlin-Thorp (ed.) *Fellows of the Royal Society of Edinburgh Vol 2: Literary Fellows Elected 1783-1812* see <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/090769201X/qid%3D1024674075/202-3022236-6247062>.

⁹ Cuming later set up in practice in Dorchester in 1739. Fothergill proposed that Cuming move to London after Russell died in 1768 but Cuming preferred to remain in Dorchester.

¹⁰ Corner and Booth (1971).

¹¹ George Cleghorn, *Observations on the Epidemical Diseases in Minorca. From the year 1744 to 1749. To which is prefixed, a short account of the climate, productions, inhabitants, and endemial distempers of that island* (London: D. Wilson, 1751).

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mentioned, both Cleghorn and Russell ‘have acquired much reputation, and have done their country most signal service’ by their publications.¹²

The Natural History of Aleppo

Russell published *Aleppo* the year after his return to London and the same year was elected as Fellow of the Royal Society. He also contributed several papers to its *Transactions*.¹³ The quarto monograph, with its large print, illustrations, footnotes and wide margins, was an instant success and a Dutch translation was published in 1762. In 1882 selections from *Aleppo* were translated into Arabic.¹⁴

There were also several contemporary abbreviated versions including *A Description of Aleppo, and the Adjacent Parts*. This was published in the second volume of *A Compendium of the most Approved Modern Travels* in 1757,¹⁵ with excerpts from other

¹² Letter to Lieutenant-Colonel Gilbert Ironside 22 December 1774, in Corner and Booth (1971), 433. In 1751 Cleghorn settled in Dublin, by 1771 he had become a lecturer in anatomy in Trinity College, Dublin (*ibid*, 343), was made Professor of Anatomy in 1785 and was an original member of the Royal Irish Academy. Hingston Fox, *Dr John Fothergill and his Friends: chapters in eighteenth-century life* (London: Macmillan, 1919), 121-7.

¹³ He wrote papers on palsy, hydatids, general emphysema, the use of corrosive sublimate and of mezereon in syphilis, Fox (1919), 120.

¹⁴ Wadi’ ‘Abd Allah Qastan as *al-Ifranj f Halab* [Foreigners in Aleppo], published, romanised in 1969.

¹⁵ *A Compendium of the most Approved Modern Travels: containing a distinct account of the religion, government, commerce, manners, and natural history, of several nations, illustrated and adorned with many useful and elegant copper-plates* (London: published for John Scott, 1757). Russell’s section hereinafter as *Aleppo* (1757). Also translated into French by Philippe-Florent de Puisieux (1713-1772), *Les Voyageurs modernes, ou, abrégé de plusieurs voyages faits en Europe*,

travellers, including Dr Richard Pococke travelling in the East from 1737 to 1740; Alexander Drummond, who first visited Aleppo in 1745 and later became its Consul 1754-6,¹⁶ and to whom the first edition was dedicated along with the ‘Gentlemen of the British Factory at Aleppo; and those now in England, who have formerly resided there’;¹⁷ and Revd Henry Maundrell, with a section from his *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter, AD 1697*.¹⁸ Another edition of Russell’s abridged version of 1757 appeared in *The World Displayed* (1779).¹⁹ Other extracts in this 1779 volume are from Dr

Asie & Afrique, traduit de l’Anglois (Paris: chez Nyon, Guillyn & Hardy, 1760), in volume 4 as ‘Voyage d’Alexandre Drummond ... en Chypre & en Syrie. Description d’Alep & des pays voisins.’

¹⁶ Alexander Drummond, *Travels through different cities of Germany, Italy, Greece, and several parts of Asia as far as the banks of the Euphrates* (London: printed by W. Strahan for the author, 1754).

¹⁷ *Aleppo* (1794), I, xix.

¹⁸ 4 volumes. Volume 1. ‘A journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem’, by H. Maundrel.[Henry Maundrell]; The travels of Dr. Thomas Shaw, ‘An account of a journey to Palmyra, otherwise Tedmor in the desert’. Volume.2. The travels of Dr. Richard Pococke; The travels of Alexander Drummond, Esq.; ‘A description of Aleppo and the adjacent country’, by A. Russel. [Alexander Russell]; ‘The travels of Mr.[Jonas] Hanway through Russia, Persia, and other parts of Europe, for settling a trade upon the Caspian Sea’ (chap.I-III). Volume 3. ‘The travels of Mr. Hanway’ (chap.IV-XVII); ‘The natural history of Norway’, by ... E.[Erich] Pontoppidan. Volume 4. ‘The Travels of Frederick Lewis [Frederik Ludvig] Norden through Egypt and Nubia’. Also excerpts by Robert Wood. Copies of this 1757 version are in libraries in Leeds, Oxford. A copy Russell’s extract, published in London, is in the Library of Congress dated 1762–90.

¹⁹ *The World Displayed: or, a Curious Collection of Voyages and Travels, selected from the Writers of all Nations. In which the conjectures and interpolations of several vain editors and translators are expunged; every relation is made concise and plain, and the Divisions of Countries and Kingdoms are clearly and distinctly noted. Embellished with Cuts* (Dublin: James Williams, 1779, 6th edn, corrected), XIII, 63–103. The compendium was compiled by

Richard Pococke's travels through Egypt and his Journey to Palmyra. The book also contains 'The Travels of the Ambassadors from the Duke of Holstein into Moscovy, Tartary, and Persia by ***'. The last chapter of the 1779 version is a summary of text in *Aleppo* (1756), with associated plates.²⁰

The first volume of the 1794 edition contains a description of city and inhabitants. Topics in volume II include natural history, descriptions of Syria and Aleppo, with much detail on domestic culture, manners and customs, monuments, and common diseases, including a vivid description of effects of smallpox. The book has been described by Sarah Searight as 'a delightful and exhaustive survey of the society, flora, fauna and particularly the plague' (on which Patrick became an expert) of a major Ottoman city.²¹ It is a better known and better written example of erudite travelogue feeding 'somewhat indigestibly the [West's] growing curiosity in the eastern Mediterranean, the Levant and Egypt'.²²

The Russells, like John Fothergill, William Pitcairn and many others of their Edinburgh colleagues, were fascinated by the natural world. The 1756 edition, third chapter of the 1757 version and Volume II of the 1794 edition are full of detail about birds, animals (domestic and wild), trees and flowers.

The country also produces several kinds of forest trees, as the plane, the white poplar, the horn-beam, a very few oaks, the ash, the tamarisk, the turpentine tree, and many others.

There are here likewise a great variety of garden plants and flowers, which render the country extremely pleasant in spring, before the great heats have scorched them up, and after the succeeding rains have revived their beauties.²³

Christopher Smart, Oliver Goldsmith and Samuel Johnson and with an introduction by Samuel Johnson.

²⁰ See Searight (1979), 89, for copy of 'Plate of Goat and fat-tailed sheep'.

²¹ Nasir (1979), 46.

²² Searight (1979), 77.

²³ *Aleppo* (1757), 102-103.

They also describe the Aleppine gardens that provided most of the seasonal fruit and vegetables for the town. ‘Of the fruits of this country, there are only two or three sorts of apples, and those very bad. They have cherries, apricots, peaches; indifferent good pears, quinces, pomegranates of three sorts, mulberries, oranges, lemons, figs of four kinds, walnuts, hazle-nuts, pistachio nuts &c. These trees are all standards planted promiscuously, and little improved by culture.’²⁴

Alexander Russell spent considerable time defining classification systems to order the various classes of Natural History, including plants, animals, reptiles and insects and ‘arrange nature’ in the 1756 edition. The 1756 edition, however, was written before Carolus Linnaeus (1707-78) established the binomial classification of plants. Sir Joseph Banks²⁵ and Daniel Carl Solander (1736-82), a pupil of Linnaeus who went to help Joseph Banks at the British Museum in 1759, helped to rework the botanical terminology in *Aleppo*, as Patrick acknowledged: ‘The Catalogue of Plants, growing in the vicinity of Aleppo will be found to have undergone material alternation, and to be much improved. But it is my duty to acknowledge that this is to be ascribed to the friendly assistance of Sir Joseph Banks, (and the late Doctor Solander,) who, with their usual readiness to countenance every attempt tending to the advancement of Natural History, bestowed many hours on the examination of a large Collection of Specimens from Syria; and, after correcting numberless errors in the former arrangement, composed the classical catalogue now substituted for the old one.’²⁶

The brothers shared an interest in Natural History with other ex-student friends, medical colleagues and professors. Alexander sent seeds of an elegant shrub, the true scammony plant from Aleppo, to the nurseryman James Gordon and to the Quaker and botanist Peter Collison FRS (1693-1767) who had a garden at Mill Hill from 1749. In 1754 he also sent seeds of *Arbutus andrachne* (a strawberry tree) collected from the mountains above Aleppo to be propagated by

²⁴ *Aleppo* (1757), 102.

²⁵ H.C. Cameron, *Sir Joseph Banks, the Autocrat of the Philosophers* (London: Batchworth Press, 1952).

²⁶ *Aleppo* (1794), I, ix.

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James Gordon in his nursery in Essex Road, Mile End and by Fothergill.²⁷ No doubt both Russells sent other samples back to their friends and when in London would have visited Fothergill's botanical gardens in Upton Park. William Pitcairn (1711-91), who was present by Alexander's deathbed also maintained a botanical garden in Islington 'second only in size and importance to Dr Fothergill's at Upton'.²⁸

The Russells in Aleppo

The city of Aleppo was founded in the fourteenth century BC and was closely associated with Saladin (d. AD 1193). Patrick Russell used contemporary Arabic sources, sometimes in Latin translation, to describe the history of the city in *Aleppo*.²⁹ The town was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in 1516 and remained prosperous until the end of the eighteenth century. From 1517,

²⁷ *Philosophical Transactions of Royal Society*, 57 (December 1767), 117. James Gordon, one of London's well-known nursery gardeners, specialised in the sale of North American plants (Corner and Booth (1971), 305). It flowered for the first time in Fothergill's garden in May 1766 and grew to twelve feet. E.D. Ehret, the painter who illustrated *Aleppo* (1794), gave a paper about it at the Royal Society in 1767, *ibid.*, 57, 114.

²⁸ William Pitcairn, a Scot from Fifeshire, studied medicine with Boerhaave in Leyden and in Rheims. From 1750 to 1780 he was physician to St Bartholomew's Hospital, London. Pitcairn had a fine botanical garden in Upper Street, Islington (William Munk, *The Roll of the Royal College of Physicians of London &c* (London: published by the College, 1878), II, 172-4, quoted in Fox (1919), 185) at a time when Fothergill was developing his Upton Park gardens, and collected plants in West Africa with Sir Joseph Banks, the Earl of Tankerville and William Brass.

²⁹ For example, the *Sirat Salah ad-Din* [Life of Saladin], finished by 1228 by *qadi* Ibn Shaddad (539-632 AH/AD 1145-1234), using a Latin translation of 1732.

Aleppo was the chief town of a Turkish *vilayat* in the Ottoman Empire, that was ruled by Sultan Mahmud I (1730-54), Osman III (1754-7) and Mustafa III (1757-74). It must be remembered that Ottoman expansion into Europe continued as late as 1687, at Mohacs, and that the Ottoman Empire was still a great military power until the 1760s. Charles Perry MD (1698-1780), a traveller in the region in 1739 and 1740, wrote in *View of the Levant*,³⁰ of the 'present weak, feeble condition of the Turkish Empire' and of the idyllic life of traders in Aleppo.³¹ Alexander Russell became a friend of and adviser to the Pasha in Aleppo and his kindly reputation spread throughout the Ottoman Empire.

Aleppo was an important trading centre between Asia and Europe, across the eighty miles of desert and mountains to the Mediterranean ports of Lattakia (al-Ladhiqiyya), Antioch (Antakya), and Scanderoon (Iskenderun). The vitality of East-West mercantile contacts based in Aleppo were stimulated by its position as entrepôt, despite the unreliable shipping schedules in the Mediterranean. Aleppo was an emporium through which passed a constant stream of traders and officials from the East India Company, especially in the mid-eighteenth century, for the city commanded the 'Great Desert

³⁰ There are several excellent modern sources on eighteenth-century Aleppo: *The Desert Route to India* (London: Hakluyt, 1928; repr. Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1967), edited by Douglas Carruthers; Ralph Davis, *Aleppo and Devonshire Square* (London: Macmillan, 1967); Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the eighteenth century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance in the Middle East: mercantilism and the Islamic economy in Aleppo, 1600-1750* (London: London University Press, 1988) and Eldem Edhem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters, *The Ottoman City between East and West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) amongst others.

³¹ Charles Perry, *A View of the Levant: particularly of Constantinople, Syria, Egypt, and Greece* (London: T. Woodward, 1743; repr 1763), 141.

Route', the shortest overland route to India and Persia,³² via the Euphrates and along caravan routes to Mosul, Baghdad and Basra in Iraq, a distance of about 760 miles. Other regions in Aleppo's hinterland included southern Anatolia, and Smyrna (Izmir). Government officials, military personnel, pilgrims to Mecca and Jerusalem (although Patrick Russell noted Aleppo's trade with Mecca and Arabia declined in the late eighteenth century),³³ as well as local villagers in the Pashalik, and Arabian and Syrian Desert Bedouin camel-drivers and herders of sheep and goats, visited the city. The most important exchange was English woollen cloth for Persian, Syrian and Ottoman silk fabrics, and Indian spices.³⁴

According to Russell's figures, in the eighteenth century Aleppo was the third largest metropolis in the region: 'The inhabitants of the city and suburbs of Aleppo are computed at about 235,000, of whom 200,000 are Turks, 30,000 are Christians, and the remaining 5000 Jews'.³⁵ As Alexander Russell noted: 'Tho' they are of such different religions, they seem to be nearly the same people: nor are the Christians much superior to their neighbours in virtue. The greatest number of them are Greeks, the most numerous next to them are the Armenians, next to them the Syrians, and then the Maronites; each of whom have a church in a part of the suburbs, where most of them reside. The vulgar language is Arabic; but the Turks of rank use the Turkish: most of the Armenians can speak Armenian; many of the Jews understand Hebrew; but few Syrians can speak Syriac; and scarce one of the Greeks understands a word of either ancient or modern Greek.'³⁶

The Russells also detail the exciting variety of ethnic groups, the domestic manners of the inhabitants of the city and Aleppo's gardens, coffee-houses, its government and commerce. They reveal

³² A.C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (1935; repr. [London]: Cass, 1964). The route was superseded when goods were transported by the East India Company via the Cape of Good Hope instead of the overland route.

³³ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 199.

³⁴ Russell describes Aleppine textile workshops in *Aleppo* (1794), I, 161.

³⁵ *Aleppo* (1757), 71.

³⁶ *Aleppo* (1757), 71.

an obsessive Halabi attention to the complexities of their elaborate dress codes in which silk and furs, symbols of their power, elegance and luxury, dominate upper-class culture (Figure 1).³⁷ They note Halabi preoccupation with elaborate rules of etiquette and ceremony that dictated proper behaviour in different situations.

Yet the Russells also witnessed emigration after religious persecution of Aleppine Christians after 1730, periodic economic slumps, and official oppression. Others migrated to trade in the major cities of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia; Christian and Jews went to Livorno and India, whilst scholars were attracted to Istanbul.³⁸ He also describes how 1756 was a very bad winter with heavy snow and loss of life, resulting crop failure and danger of famine.³⁹ By 1757 bread was scarce and the governor sold his supplies at excessive prices. In the winter of 1757-8 hunger was widespread and many were unemployed. As a result, epidemic diseases effected the malnourished and as many as 40,000 died of starvation, cold and disease. There were further food shortages in 1761 and between 1764 and 1768.⁴⁰ By the 1770s Patrick Russell noted many ruined, abandoned settlements around Aleppo: 'The Olive Tree Village and others are totally deserted. It is asserted that of three hundred villages, formerly comprehended in the Bashawlick, less than one third are now (1772) inhabited: agriculture declines in proportion.'⁴¹

Alexander had witnessed outbreaks of the plague in 1742-4 and saw the economy of Syria collapse in the 1750s. During his residence in Aleppo, Patrick experienced the food shortages of 1751 and the plague in 1760-2, which reduced the population to around 150,000 people. Alexander Russell was consulted by the Privy

³⁷ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 100-15.

³⁸ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 235; Marcus (1989), 31.

³⁹ *Treatise* (1791), 9.

⁴⁰ Marcus (1989), 356.

⁴¹ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 338-9, also mentioned by Drummond (1754), 182, Contantin-François Chassboeuf, comte de Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte pendant les années 1783, 1784 et 1785*, 2 vols (Paris: Volland et Desenne, 1787), II, 135.

Council about a threatened outbreak of the plague in England⁴² and in 1791 Patrick Russell published *A Treatise of the Plague*⁴³ with case studies of communicable diseases, especially the bubonic plague in eighteenth-century Aleppo, its hospitals, and quarantine procedures.⁴⁴ One can speculate on the association of spread of the plague with the movement of large caravans from the East. He gave a detailed breakdown of mortality estimates of 7,767 in 1761 and 11,883 deaths in 1762, that is around 15-20 per cent level of mortality in the city. He made many medical observations and public responses to the disease that established Patrick as a leading authority on the plague.⁴⁵

In addition to references to plagues in *Aleppo*,⁴⁶ there is a detailed description of local diseases and epidemics recorded between 1742 and 1753,⁴⁷ a discussion of the 'Aleppo boil', and notes on infant mortality.⁴⁸ In December 1768 Alexander and Patrick published an account of inoculation in Arabia, a note of correspondence between the two brothers in which they recount how Alexander was informed that inoculation against smallpox was practised by Bedouin.⁴⁹ Patrick

⁴² Fox (1919), 120.

⁴³ *A Treatise of the Plague: containing an historical journal, and medical account, of the plague, at Aleppo, in the years 1760, 1761 and 1762. Also, remarks on quarantines, lazarettos, and the administration of police in times of pestilence. To which is added, an appendix, containing cases of the plague; and an account of the weather, during the pestilential season*, a Government publication, printed in London for the booksellers, G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1791, 12 p. l., 583, clix p.41 ; 30 x 25 cm, see Marcus (1989), 51.

⁴⁴ *Treatise* (1791), 1-70.

⁴⁵ Especially *Treatise* (1791), 1-70, 280, 337.

⁴⁶ *Aleppo* (1794), II, 336-8.

⁴⁷ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 298-333, 344-5.

⁴⁸ *Aleppo* (1794), II, 79, 83.

⁴⁹ *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 58 (December 1768), 142.

also wrote on earthquakes in Syria⁵⁰ and both were interested in climatic effects on health. There was a high rate of sickness among Europeans who suffered from dysentery, malaria, other endemic diseases.⁵¹

*'Blending matters collected from reading'*⁵²

From the late sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century, the occasional European traveller visited Aleppo, leaving as many as twenty-three published accounts of the city.⁵³ What is particularly of interest is the use that Patrick made of travellers' accounts as he recognised: 'Since the beginning of the 17th Century, the Curious in Europe, owe most of what they have learned relating to modern Syria, either to the casual remarks of mercantile Gentlemen settled abroad, or to the researches of a few more inquisitive travellers.'⁵⁴ Accounts were often published within a relatively short period of their return to Europe but many of these contain precise records of many details with associated drawings and sketches. In addition, their use of appropriate Arabic and European texts reflect a serious scholarship. One can also speculate that the Russells had access to the medical library of their friend Dr Fothergill, a library that included Latin editions of classical, mediaeval and Renaissance medical texts, including Pliny the Elder, Dioscorides, Galen, Aristotle, the medical classics of Arabic, and Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, many of which are quoted by Patrick Russell in the notes and text of Aleppo.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ 'An Account of the Late Earthquakes in Syria', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 51 (December 1760), 529-34.

⁵¹ Davis (1967), 75.

⁵² *Aleppo* (1794), I, xiii.

⁵³ Marcus (1989), 379.

⁵⁴ *Aleppo* (1794), I, ix.

⁵⁵ Sale catalogue of Fothergill's library is in the Library of The Society of Friends in London. Corner and Booth (1971), 21.

Patrick describes the creation of the second edition in his introduction: 'For many years before he engaged in the present Work, he had little leisure for perusing the journals of Eastern travellers; and after his return to Britain, he resolved, with a view to avoid blending matters collected from reading, with what might be suggested by his experience in Turkey, not to look into Books of Travels, till he should have sketched from recollection, all he meant to insert as supplementary to his Brother's Book.'⁵⁶ Patrick subsequently explored earlier classical and Arabic texts and accounts from early European travellers with what we would still consider to be a thoroughly modern academic approach. The range of sources they use is impressive: 'In this a course of reading, some of the early travels were perused with much satisfaction.'⁵⁷

Classical Sources

The Russells received their medical education in Edinburgh from lectures given in English or Latin so they had no difficulty in using classical accounts of the region as well as classical sources in their medical practice. Just as Alexander's university friend, Cleghorn, used Hippocrates and Celsus in his book on Minorca, the Russells included classical sources such as Aeschylus,⁵⁸ Juvenal on blacking eyelids, for example,⁵⁹ Dioscorides, Naumachius and Pliny the Elder, for example, on *kohol*,⁶⁰ and Homer's *Odyssey*.⁶¹ He also cites Galen (d. c. AD 216) the Greek physician and medical writer and premier authority in medicine whose one hundred and fifty or more medical works were assiduously translated into Arabic. Patrick used Latin translations of his works which were published in Basel

⁵⁶ *Aleppo* (1794), I, xiii

⁵⁷ *Aleppo* (1794), I, xiii.

⁵⁸ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 383.

⁵⁹ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 368.

⁶⁰ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 373, 367.

⁶¹ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 383.

in 1538 and Venice in 1625.⁶² Galen's work was the authoritative standard for medical knowledge until the nineteenth century and was considered to be essential reading for any doctor; it was practically impossible to hold a view contrary to Galen in eighteenth-century Aleppo.

Arabic Sources

The Russells mention the professional storytellers and poets who would often recount tales from the 'Arabian Nights', and a large repertoire of exotic stories full of genies, magic, supernatural birds, erotic veiled dancing girls, entertained crowds. Story-tellers sometimes broke off in the middle of stories leaving listeners to speculate on probable the outcome until next day.⁶³ These tales were also retold by women in the privacy of their bedrooms, to send their menfolk to sleep. 'Many of the people of fashion are lulled to rest by soft music, or Arabian tales, which their women are taught to repeat.'⁶⁴ Russell only found two volumes of this scarce book in Aleppo, and only with 280 'Nights', so with difficulty had a copy made for himself. The first publication in English, translated from Galland's French translation of 1704,⁶⁵ was in 1712.

More significant was the Russells' use of Arabic sources, especially medical texts. Volume II of the 1794 edition includes a chapter on Arabic sources on medicine and literature. In particular they cited Abu al-Faraj also known as al-Isfahani, an Abbasid man of letters, political and social historian, musicologist, genealogist, philologist and poet who grew up in Baghdad. Other Arabic sources include Ibn Sina (d.428 AH/AD1037), the most renowned mediaeval Islamic philosopher; also famous as a physician, and known in the

⁶² *Aleppo* (1794), I, 368, 378.

⁶³ *Aleppo* (1757), 148-50.

⁶⁴ *Aleppo* (1757), 81.

⁶⁵ Antoine Galland, *Les Mille et une nuit: contes arabes*, 8 vols (Le Haye: chez Pierre Husson, 1704-1728).

Latin West as Avicenna;⁶⁶ Al Makin's *History* (AD 1123); Ibn Shaddad (AH 539-632/AD 1145-1234), a religious scholar and *qadi* born in Mosul and died in Aleppo. Closely associated with Saladin (d. AD 1193), he wrote Saladin's *Life* (finished AD 1228), using a Latin translation of 1732. Patrick also cites other Arabic sources from the Escorial Library in Spain. He cites *Abulfeda descriptio Aegypti, arabice et latine* (1273-1331)⁶⁷ and Ibn al-'Adim (598-660 AH/AD 1192-1262), who came from a distinguished Aleppine family and wrote a history of Aleppo, *Zubdat al-Halab* and a biographical dictionary of persons of note with any connections with Aleppo entitled *Bughyat al-talab fi ta'rikh Halab*.

The Russells' use of Arabic in footnotes in preference to Turkish shows that they were familiar with the language and is in direct contradiction to Edward Lane's statement that 'the author was not "sufficiently acquainted with the Arabic language"'.⁶⁸ Some Aleppines had valuable collections of texts and the Russells collected and exported many valuable books from Aleppo, with the help of their friend Tarblos Effendee, Mufti of Aleppo.⁶⁹ They may well have had access to the Ahmadiyya College which was founded in Aleppo in 1752 with 3000 volumes.⁷⁰ Indeed, the Russells were part of a line of European Oriental scholars who had associations with Aleppo including Edward Pococke (1604-91), the greatest Arabist of the seventeenth century who lived in Aleppo for five years between 1630 and 1636; Bishop Frampton, a chaplain in Aleppo who, like the Russells, spent his time learning Arabic and socialising with Aleppines and who remained in the city during the plague of 1667-70; and from 1671-81 the Aleppo chaplain Robert Huntingdon (1637-1701), who also collected Arabic manuscripts, now in Merton College, University of Oxford.

⁶⁶ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 372-3, for example.

⁶⁷ Edited by Joannes David Michaelis (Gottingen: Dieterich, 1776).

⁶⁸ Edward W. Lane, 'Preface', *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: 1836; repr. London: Ward, Lock, 1890).

⁶⁹ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 337.

⁷⁰ Marcus (1989), 237-8.

Mercantile Gentlemen

‘The former [mercantile Gentlemen] often possessed the advantage of speaking Arabic, but were little versed in Natural History and Antiquities;’⁷¹

Both Alexander and Patrick worked in association with the Levant Company and their brother, William, was also its Secretary and a Fellow of the Royal Society of London. William may well have been instrumental in securing their posts; he was certainly one of those who nominated Alexander Russell to the Royal Society of London in 1756.

The Levant Company (The Governor & Company of Merchants of England trading into the Levant Seas) or Turkish Company as it was known by the eighteenth century, was a firm of English Factors operating in the Ottoman Empire from 1581,⁷² though permission to trade in the empire had been obtained by the English as early as 1553. Its main factory was in Constantinople, with depots in Smyrna (modern Izmir) and Aleppo, the last seen as a haven for British merchants. As ‘Ali Bey later recounted, Aleppo ‘being continually frequented by a crowd of Europeans and strangers from every nation on account of its commerce, it is almost as well known as any European city.’⁷³

There was a strong if isolated community of European merchants resident in the *khans* of Aleppo which are described in detail by Alexander Russell. There the Levant Company merchants led a leisurely life and Russell details their feasting, drinking and hunting: ‘The Europeans table is well stocked with a marvellous assortment of game and fish for which guests were prepared by draughts of weak punch before dinner.’⁷⁴ Alexander Russell recounts that ‘the Merchants commonly dine in their apartments in the Khanes; some have victuals sent from their own kitchen, but many content

⁷¹ *Aleppo* (1794), I, ix.

⁷² Wood (1964), esp. Ch. 11.

⁷³ *Travels of Ali Bey* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1816), Vol II. Written 1803-07.

⁷⁴ Searight (1979), 35 quoting *Aleppo* (1794).

themselves with bread, cheese, and fruit, or perhaps a Kabab from the bazar. Their chief repast is supper, at their own houses⁷⁵ and he describes local foods in detail with a list of one hundred and forty one local dishes.⁷⁶

Alexander Russell would have known many of the Levant Company officials in Aleppo, including Arthur Pollard, consul in 1750; Arthur Radcliffe, in Aleppo from 1734-43 with Radcliffe & Stratton, a man who was stolid and amiable with his family but severe out of it.⁷⁷ He would have known Richard Stratton (d. 1759) in Aleppo for sixteen years, first with the Radcliffe factorage in Aleppo, then as part of Stratton & Hammond from 1749. From his correspondence in the Levant Company records in the Public Record Office (London) Stratton appears competent, excessively self-confident, with a genuine concern for the London merchants he represented. On the other hand he was 'irascible, quick to take offence and quick to forgive, sharp-minded, growing from uncertainty to over confidence in his own abilities'.⁷⁸ In the 1740s Aleppo merchant houses included Frye & Mitford, the ailing H.J. & T. March, the great trader William Bellamy,⁷⁹ and William Hammond, a member of an old family of Levant merchants who came to Aleppo in 1747 and stayed until 1754, who was always content with his own judgement. He was succeeded in the factoring business by Colvill Bridger, more volatile than Hammond and the last of Radcliffe's factors in Aleppo before the business closed. The Russells would have met a large influx of new traders in 1753-4.

Colville, a weak man, troubled by conflicting interests was in Aleppo in 1765 (and possibly died shortly after) when he was Levant Company's Treasurer there.⁸⁰ Patrick would also have known John Radcliffe, a cheerful soul fresh from Eton who set out for Aleppo in March 1758 to partner Colvill Bridger. He became heir to the Radcliffe business in London in 1760 and returned home, after the

⁷⁵ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 143-4.

⁷⁶ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 73-94, 115-19, 172-7.

⁷⁷ Davis (1967), 19.

⁷⁸ Searight (1979), 19, 25, 67.

⁷⁹ Davis (1967), 54.

⁸⁰ Davis (1967), 21, 2.

death of his elder brother; a spendthrift, he died insolvent and childless in 1783. Others were Dudley Foley with Charles Lisle; Samuel Medley and Arthur Pullinger whose firm went bankrupt; Toby Channer who was apprenticed to William Hayter; Thomas Lansdown, Factor around 1755; and Samuel Bosanquet, a third generation Levant merchant in 1765. Russell would also have known the wealthy Shukri 'A'ida, Christian interpreter at the English Consulate in the 1750s-60s.⁸¹

The 1730s and 1740s, when Alexander Russell was working in Aleppo, were difficult years to make a big fortune there⁸² and English trade was declining by the 1760s though in 1738-47 there were nineteen companies of Factors and in 1748-57 fifty-eight active traders. Most of those working with the Levant Company stayed seven to ten years in the East but they had a conservative social circle, few learnt Arabic or Turkish, and few associated outside their own community.⁸³ Many continued to make profits, partly through their associations with wealthy and respected merchant families, and returned to London in their early thirties, having accumulated a small fortune via commissions and miscellaneous gains on transactions.⁸⁴ Levant merchants moved in the highest circles in City of London, even marrying gentry and peers.

Bartholomew Plaisted was certainly familiar with Alexander Russell's *Aleppo*. Plaisted was an engineer and surveyor with a quick temper who was dismissed from the East India Company in 1748 and returned to England from India. He crossed the desert to Aleppo in the company of Mr Falquir, a Frenchman he met in Busserah, with whom he had to communicate in Portuguese. He estimated the caravan he travelled with from Basra to Aleppo to include 2,000 camels, which was later joined by the Baghdad caravan, totalling 5,000 camels (about 400 laden, the rest for trade in Aleppo) and 1,000 men in total.⁸⁵ He reached Aleppo on 23 July

⁸¹ Marcus (1989), 366.

⁸² Davis (1967), 19.

⁸³ Davis (1967), 79.

⁸⁴ Davis (1967), 20.

⁸⁵ Carruthers (1928), xxxiii.

1750 and left Scanderoon (Alexandretta) on 11 August 1750.⁸⁶ His short description is a summary extracted from the 1757 version of *Aleppo* and he 'had the pleasure of being acquainted' with Alexander Russell.⁸⁷ His summary is even entitled 'A description of Aleppo, and the adjacent country',⁸⁸ the same title as Alexander's. Plaisted appears to tire of the task of summarising the third chapter of *Aleppo* (1757) which gives considerable detail about the range of animals, crops and fruit available; from fat-tailed sheep and goats, to hares, gazelles, crops and vegetables: 'With respect to the vegetables of this country, Turkey [*sic*] wheat, barley, cotton, lentils, beans, cicers, Turkey [*sic*] millet, a green kidney bean, musk-melons, water-melons, a small cucumber, bastard saffron, hemp, and several others, they sow in the fields; but about Aleppo they sow no oats, their horses being all fed with barley.'⁸⁹ Plaisted noted that 'It would take up too much room to describe the vast variety of fine flowers, herbs and plants to be met in these parts, and a catalogue of their names only would be very tedious, for which reason we shall omit them,'⁹⁰ Russell having given an excellent account anyway.

John Carmichael (late Gunner at Anjengo) dismissed from service in the East India Company at Bombay as a troublesome character, was obliged to take the desert route via Syria from London to India in order to settle his affairs. He subsequently worked for various local Indian rulers and died at Surat. Setting off from Aleppo, he made a credible survey of the 520 miles to Basra. His caravan included fifty horses, thirty mules and 1,200 camels, 600 of them carrying goods worth £300,000. He was a friend of Dr Russell, and when encamped near the village of Irzi on 6 November 1751, reported: 'Had my friend [Alexander Russell] seen him' ('a great fat

⁸⁶ Bartholomew Plaisted, 'Narrative of a Journey from Basra to Aleppo in 1750' in Carruthers (1928), 59-128. It was translated into French in 1758 and this was reprinted in Thomas Howel, *Voyage en retour de l'Inde par une route en partie inconnue jusqu'ici* (Paris: de l'Imprimerie de la république, an V [1796-1797]).

⁸⁷ Preface, see Carruthers (1928), 58.

⁸⁸ Plaisted (1757), 107-13.

⁸⁹ *Aleppo* (1757), 101.

⁹⁰ Carruthers (1928), 113.

fellow, a Sheikh', who came to Carmichael's tent in search of a doctor), 'I am persuaded he would admit my knowledge in therapeuticks.' In the absence of Russell, Carmichael bled him with a rusty razor. 'After the operation he slept for about three hours, got up, broke wind, eat a large dish of pillaw, and found himself perfectly recovered.'⁹¹

Major James Rennell⁹² was also indebted to Patrick Russell for 'The Journal of Mr. Carmichael's route across the Great Desert between Aleppo and Basrah, in 1751'. In a paper published in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, read to the Royal Society on 17 March 1791, Rennell acknowledges 'the manuscript copy of his [Carmichael's] journal was obligingly communicated by my friend Dr Patrick Russell.'⁹³

Inquisitive Travellers

'The latter [inquisitive travellers] though better qualified for inquiry by preparatory studies [than mercantile Gentlemen], may be supposed from ignorance of the language, to have sometimes led into error by the menial servants, on whose fidelity, as Interpreters, they are usually obliged to rely.'⁹⁴

The earliest mediaeval European account used by Patrick Russell is that of an Iberian Jew, Rabbi Benjamin ben Jonah of Tudela who describes Aleppo between 1160 and 1173. He was the first European

⁹¹ John Carmichael, *Narrative of a Journey from Aleppo to Basra in 1751*, in *The Desert Route to India* (1772; London: Hakluyt, 1928), 149.

⁹² *Treatise on the Comparative Geography of Western Asia* (London, 1831). Atlas.

⁹³ John Carmichael, of the East India Company, *A Journal from Aleppo, over the desert to Basserah, October 21, 1771 [1751]*, in British Library.

⁹⁴ *Aleppo* (1757), 101.

traveller to approach the frontiers of China⁹⁵ — though his translator, Baratier thought that Benjamin never went to Aleppo. Other travellers cited include Antonio Tenreiro, who was one of the first Portuguese to travel from Aleppo to Basra, in 1523 and back in 1528; and Pierre Belon du Mans (c.1517-65),⁹⁶ French naturalist and traveller, who travelled 1546-9 on a tour of the eastern Mediterranean including Aleppo, in order to identify animals, plants and places and objects given in classical writings such as Aristotle.⁹⁷ He describes the plants, animals and geographic features of the region.

Venetian and Genoese merchants traded in Aleppo before the seventeenth century and while Venice continued to trade with the Orient, Venice remained the centre of European civilization. Patrick Russell cites Frederic Caesar, the Venetian who visited Aleppo around 1563 *en route* to India and after travelling many years returned in 1581 and provided much detail on manners and customs. Other early European travellers they read included Rauwolff (1573);⁹⁸ Prosper Alpinus (1553-1616), who provided valuable additions to medical history after his travels in the region between

⁹⁵ Benjamin ben Jonah, of Tudela, *Voyages de Rabbi Benjamin fils de Iona de Tudele ... depuis l'Espagne jusqu'a la Chine: Ou l'on trouve plusieurs choses remarquables concernant l'histoire & la geographie & particulierement l'etat des Juifs au douzieme siecle. Traduits de l'Hebreu et enrichis de notes et de dissertations historiques et critiques sur ces voyages par J.P. Baratier* (Amsterdam, 1734).

⁹⁶ *Les Observations de plusieurs singularitez & choses memorables: trouuées en Grece, Asie, Iudée, Egypte, Arabie, & autres pays estranges, redigées en trois liures* (Paris: chez Guillaume Cauellet, 1555) [Observations of Several Curiosities and Memorable Objects...].

⁹⁷ Serge Sauneron, ed., *Le Voyage en Égypte de Pierre Belon du Mans 1547* (Cairo: IFAO, 1970).

⁹⁸ John Ray, *Collection of Curious Travels, &c.* (London: printed for S. Smith and B. Walford, 1705). Patrick Russell used vol. II of the 1738 edition in *Aleppo* (1794), I.

1581 and 1584 and who was also interested in its natural history;⁹⁹ and John Eldred, who resided in Aleppo in the 1580s, and travelled with Ralph Fitch and John Newberrie, setting off in 1583 via the Euphrates for East India accompanied by the jeweller, William Leedes, and a painter, James Story.¹⁰⁰ Russells' description of Arab women and dress is similar to that of Eldred. Whilst exploring the introduction of coffee to the Levant,¹⁰¹ Patrick studied the observant and very intelligent merchant John Sanderson's account of his residency in the East 1584-1602 when he lived in Constantinople between 1592 and 1598 and travelled to Syria. He also searched for early use of tobacco and coffee in *The Preacher's Travels through Syria, Persia etc* (London, 1611), written by an observant Revd John Cartwright who accompanied a London merchant, John Mildenhall from Aleppo to Persia in 1600. Patrick used the travels of the poet, George Sandys (1578-1644), who made a visit to the city in 1611.¹⁰² Another of their major English sources, Dr Richard Pococke (1704-65), later Bishop of Meath, was a wealthy clergyman in Aleppo in 1743 who painted an idyllic picture of English life in

⁹⁹ *De Plantis Aegypti Liber Accessit etiam liber de Balsamo*, 2 vols (Venice: apud Franciscum de Franciscis Senensem, 1592), [Book of Egyptian Plants] and *De Medicina Aegyptiorum Libri IV* (Venice: apud Franciscum de Franciscis Senensem, 1591). See also Prosper Alpini, *La médecine des égyptiens*; traduite du latin, présentée et annotée par R. de Fenoyl; index de Marcelle Desdames ([Cairo]: Institut français d'archéologie orientale (IFAO), [1980]).

¹⁰⁰ Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, etc*, 5 vols (1599-1600; repr. Glasgow: J. MacLehose, 1903-1907).

¹⁰¹ Coffee was exported to Europe from Aleppo from the 1650s but this supply was replaced around 1730 with West Indian coffee which was even exported to Egypt. Egypt had previously obtained all supplies from Mocha and exchanged coffee for cloth in the markets of Cairo with the English and French.

¹⁰² George Sandys, *Relation of a Journey begun Ann. Dom: 1610: Fovre bookes. containing a description of the Turkish Empire, of Aegypt of the Holy Land, of the remote parts of Italy, and ilands adioyning* (London: printed for W. Barrett, 1615; repr. [Amsterdam]: [Theatrum Orbis Terrarum]; [New York]: [Da Capo Press], [1973]).

Aleppo, and wrote the *Description of the East* in 1763.¹⁰³ Threatened by Bedouin raiders when travelling in a caravan he wrote 'I treated them with coffee, made them my friends and refused to pay anything.'

The strong links between Europe and Scotland meant that many educated Scots were familiar with texts in European languages. The Russells used many other European travellers' accounts of Aleppo. These include Jean de Thévenot (1633-7), a French traveller who travelled from Turkey to Egypt in 1656 and made a subsequent trip to Persia via Saida, Damascus, Mosul and Baghdad in 1663 and published *Voyage au Levant* in 1664. After his death in Persia in 1667, the *Voyages de M. Thévenot*, 5 vols, was published in 1689.¹⁰⁴ The *Mémoires* of Le Chevalier d'Arvieux, who was in Syria in 1664 and was French consul at Aleppo 1679 to 1686,¹⁰⁵ contain much curious information and accurate observations of the political conduct of Turks, and their character; Patrick considers his description of Aleppo in the sixth volume impartial and regularly cites d'Arvieux as an authority on a variety of topics for 'his authority I consider as very respectable'.¹⁰⁶ Patrick cites the French savant, comte Contantin Francois Chassboeuf Volney (1757-1820), who visited the city in 1783 and who describes its people, politics and antiquities in *Voyage en Égypte et en Syrie* in 1787.

¹⁰³ *A Description of the East and some other countries*, 5 bks, 2 vols in 3 (London: printed for author, 1743-5), II, part 1, 150-2; MSS 22995, 22997-8 in British Library. Travelling in region 1737-8.

¹⁰⁴ Jean de Thévenot, *The Travels of Monsieur de Thévenot into the Levant. In three ... parts: I. Turkey. II. Persia. III. The East-Indies*, transl. Archibald Lovell (London: printed by H. Clark, for H. Faithorne, J. Adamson, C. Skegnes, and T. Newborough, 1687), II, 31-32.

¹⁰⁵ Le Chevalier Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires du Chevalier d'Arvieux*, 6 vols, ed. Jean-Baptiste Labat (Paris: chez Charles-Jean-Baptiste Delespine le fils, 1735), VI, 411-28. See also Régine Goutalier, *Le Chevalier d'Arvieux: Laurent le Magnifique: un humaniste de belle humeur* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).

¹⁰⁶ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 351.

How many other travellers passing through Aleppo during the mid-eighteenth century made the acquaintanceship of the Russells we may never know though we can identify several of them. Carsten Niebuhr¹⁰⁷ (1733-1815) a German geographer and traveller and sole survivor of the first scientific expedition to Arabia sponsored by King Frederick V of Denmark was a colleague. Niebuhr used Carmichael's account of Aleppo and Carmichael had, in turn, used Russells'. Niebuhr is cited by Patrick on various matters from fashion to dance, and Niebuhr even provided a plan of the city of Aleppo opposite page 13 in the 1794 edition of *Aleppo* (Figure 2): 'In this plan, which I received from my esteemed friend Mr Nieburh, with permission to make whatever use of it I thought fit.'¹⁰⁸ One could continue to cite many other friendships, such as that between Patrick and James Bruce (who travelled in the Middle East and North Africa between 1768 to 1773) that reinforce the scholarship of the Russells and the coherence and interrelationships between travellers to Aleppo. Yet Patrick also recognized the drawbacks of relying on reports of travellers: 'while from the mode of travelling, and their short stay in places, such matters were left unexplored, as, requiring a greater length of time to investigate, more naturally became fit objects for persons resident in the country.'¹⁰⁹

After The Natural History of Aleppo

In 1760 Alexander Russell obtained his Licence of the Royal College of Physicians of London and his MD degree from the University of Glasgow and was appointed a physician to St Thomas's Hospital, London, then near the present site of Fenchurch Street railway

¹⁰⁷ Carsten Niebuhr, *Voyage en Arabie et en d'autres pays circonvoisins, traduit de l'allemand*, 3 vols, maps (Amsterdam: S.J. Baalde, 1780).

¹⁰⁸ *Aleppo* (1794), I, 12.

¹⁰⁹ *Aleppo* (1794), I, ix.

station, in 1760.¹¹⁰ He was a colleague of the haughty physician and poet Dr Mark Akenside at St Thomas's Hospital. Alexander died suddenly of 'putrid fever' in November 1768 at his house at No. 1 Church Court, Wallbrook, despite the efforts of his old friends, John Fothergill and William Pitcairn. Fothergill published a tribute to 'our Russell' presented at a meeting of the Society of (Licentiate) Physicians in October 1769, a society in which Alexander Russell had been active.¹¹¹ 'Fothergill dwells upon his even, cool and consistent temper, polite without flattery, with a freedom of behaviour as remote from confidence as from constraint, disinterested and generous. His mind was imbued with a just reverence for God and with duty towards his fellows; a gentleman, without reproach.'¹¹²

Patrick eventually left Aleppo and settled in London in 1772 where he was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of London in 1777. Even before he left Aleppo Patrick had shown an interest in marine life and published an account of a remarkable marine production in 1761.¹¹³ In 1781 he went to India to Vizagapatam, accompanying a younger brother, Claud. There Patrick served the East India Company as a botanist and physician in the Carnatic from 1785. In the Carnatic he made large collections of specimens and drawings of plants, fishes and reptiles, which on his retirement from the East India Company medical service in 1789, were left to a museum in Madras. After Patrick retired from the East India Company he proceeded to publish many of his findings. He wrote a preface to William Roxburgh's *Plants of the Coronadel Coast* (1795)

¹¹⁰ James Gordon, to whom Alexander Russell sent seeds from Aleppo, also had a seed shop in Fenchurch Street. Gordon also supplied Fothergill; see Corner and Booth (1971), 302; Fox (1919), 193.

¹¹¹ John Fothergill, 'Essay on the Character etc' (1769) in J. Fothergill, *The Works of John Fothergill*, ed. J.C. Lettsom, 3 vols (London: printed for C. Dilly in the Poultry, 1783-4), II, 361-79.

¹¹² Fox (1919), 120. There is also a stippled portrait of Alexander Russell by Trotter in J.C. Lettsom, *Memoirs of John Fothergill, M.D. &c*, 5 vols (London: printed for C. Dilly, 1786).

¹¹³ *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 52 (December 1761), 554.

and went on to publish *An Account of Indian Serpents* (1796).¹¹⁴ This was followed by ‘*A Continuation of An account of Indian Serpents; ..*’ issued in parts between 1801 and 1809,¹¹⁵ and *Descriptions and Figures of Two Hundred Fishes* (1803).¹¹⁶ He died on 2 July 1805 and never married. As Patrick concludes in his Preface: ‘How far the Author’s abilities have been equal to the task he has undertaken, the Public will judge; and he intreats their candour.’¹¹⁷

Conclusion

Before 1801 a central element of European scholarship was based on classical traditions. As more classical and Arabic sources were translated into European languages and as more people travelled and wrote about their experiences, so Middle Eastern studies in the West developed. In *Orientalism* Edward Said claims that through this study of classical texts Europe articulates its vision of the Orient, rather than through any ‘actual encounter with the real Orient’.¹¹⁸ He also noted that the early Orientalists, often lawyers or doctors, saw the route to a proper knowledge of the Orient began with a thorough

¹¹⁴ *An account of Indian serpents, collected on the coast of Coromandel; containing descriptions and drawings of each species; together with experiments and remarks on their several poisons*, Presented to the Hon. The Court of Directors of the East India Company, and published by their order, under the superintendence of the author (London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co. for George Nicol, 1796).

¹¹⁵ Including *A Continuation of An account of Indian Serpents: containing descriptions and figures from specimens and drawings, transmitted from various parts of India to the East India Company* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer & Co., for G. and W. Nicol, 1801) for the East India Company.

¹¹⁶ *Descriptions and Figures of Two Hundred Fishes: collected at Vizagapatam on the coast of Coromandel*, 2 vols (London: G. & W. Nicol, 1803).

¹¹⁷ *Aleppo* (1794), I, xix.

¹¹⁸ Said 1978, 80.

study of classical texts.¹¹⁹ Their Orient helped ‘to define Europe’, but not as a ‘contrasting image’¹²⁰ but rather as a repository of lost or useful knowledge. The incorporation of classical texts and their descriptions of the ways of life meant that the Orient was to become ‘an integral part of European *material* civilisation and culture’.¹²¹

This essay has explored the considerable and often ignored scholarly contacts between East and West in a ‘Pre-Orientalist’ era in Aleppo and reflects on the continuing transmission of scientific expertise until the end of the eighteenth century. Like their academic predecessors, Alexander and Patrick Russell played their small part in reintroducing classical texts, available in Arabic, back to Europe, along with various Arabic classical manuscripts. For the Russells this scholarly approach also embraced a study of other Oriental cultures and languages, as well as the study of earlier travellers’ reports. From the late sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century a few European travellers visited Aleppo, leaving as many as twenty-three published accounts of the city. As the Russells relied not only on their own long-term experiences but on classical and Arabic texts, and earlier travel writing, does this mean that their written descriptions hold more value and efficacy than many other travel reports of the area? By using such a wide variety of sources from Syria and Europe, as well as intimate details of the city in which they worked for years do the Russells’ descriptions come close to the ‘real thing’, the(ir) Orient?

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¹¹⁹ Said, 1978, 79.

¹²⁰ Said, 1978, 2.

¹²¹ Said 1978, 2.

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CAPTIONS (illustrations and captions to be inserted in final version, to be published by Stacey international in *travellers in the Levant*, forthcoming March 2004)

Figure 1. A Plan of the City of Aleppo drawn by Carsten Niebuhr and printed opposite page 13 in *Aleppo* (1794), I.

Figure 2. Aleppo merchants and officials. Plate II in *Aleppo* (1794) I, opposite p.102.

JCS 25 March 2004