

Book Reviews

mentioned above' and 'as I have observed' are common phrases for a narrator who thinks nothing of digression and repetition.

Obsessively noting down the exact route of his journeys is another characteristic. These most human of idiosyncrasies should not detract from the fact that *A Journal* is the most comprehensive account of plague we have. Defoe had done his homework, and the most likely printed sources he used for the novel are listed in the explanatory notes.

This edition has a new introduction by Professor David Roberts, Head of English at Birmingham City University. Roberts is particularly interesting when considering the publishing environment of Defoe's time. As a new plague epidemic threatened Europe, books on the theme became increasingly popular. Roberts identifies Richard Bradley's *The Plague at Marseilles Consider'd* as the subject's bestseller for the period. During 1721, Bradley's book went into five editions. *A Journal* did not do nearly as well, with a second reprint only appearing in 1755. In contrast, four editions of *Robinson Crusoe* were published in about as many months when it first appeared. Concentrating on *Moll Flanders* first may have cost Defoe and his publishers dearly. Roberts wonders whether they were a few months too late with *A Journal* to fully capitalise on the market. It is perhaps significant that Defoe's book was the last substantial title to appear on plague during this period. Whether the swine flu epidemic of 2009–10 inspired this new edition from OUP is unclear.

A Journal is perhaps Defoe's most undervalued novel and it is heartening to see *Oxford World's Classics* repackage it. Whether the indistinct photograph of a sixteenth-century charnel house door from France used for the front cover will stand the test of time is a small detail. The compact font sizes are perhaps more troublesome. Aside from Roberts's introduction, this edition's value lies in largely retaining Louis Landa's exhaustive notes from the 1969 edition. A four-page appendix

includes a succinct 'A Medical Note' of the plague, with an analysis of Defoe's understanding of the disease. The topographical index will be sufficient for many, but Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert's *The London Encyclopaedia* (London: Macmillan, 2008) is recommended. A screen with Google Maps or a hardcopy street atlas may also be wise as Defoe's London is still largely there for the walking.

Alice Ford-Smith,
Dr Williams's Library

Maurits H. van den Boogert, *Aleppo Observed: Ottoman Syria Through the Eyes of Two Scottish Doctors, Alexander and Patrick Russell*, The Arcadian Library (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 256, £120.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-19-95885-5.

The Russell brothers wrote their book *The Natural History of Aleppo* as the result of their passion for knowledge, their natural curiosity, and their experiences accumulated in the long years they lived and worked in the Ottoman Syrian city of Aleppo. Therefore, very soon after the initial one volume edition, written by the Scottish physician Alexander Russell, was published in 1756, this work became an important milestone of scientific and practical knowledge of the Near East. The second, a two volume edition, expanded and published by Patrick in 1794, was based on further scientific and practical knowledge that was acquired by him while serving as a physician in Aleppo, after his half-brother Alexander and following in his footsteps.

Many issues are the subject of Maurits H. van den Boogert's book *Aleppo Observed*; the most important are: the Russells' book; the scientific information it contains; the authors and their unique life stories; the period of scientific study; and research of remote lands and other religions and societies. Maurits van

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den Boogert has shown his many talents in this work, he has based this well-written work on meticulous research, and though it is a highly academic work, the book is written in an elegant and delightful way and the various issues and historical events it deals with are interwoven into a piece of solid literary and academic research.

Aleppo Observed is graced with plenty of well researched, handsome contemporary coloured images: maps, plants, animals, Aleppo sketches, Middle Eastern daily scenes, Ottoman and Arab people of all genders and classes. These images, together with the many quotations from the Russells' books, resuscitate the essence of the period in a way that almost enables the reader to sense the smells of the Arab markets, the Ottoman hookah pipes, and the local flowers; to hear the singing of the birds, the humble noise of women gossiping in the harem, and the squeal of the city's gates being closed for the night or due to the plague. Though it clearly seems that Maurits van den Boogert greatly appreciates the Russell brothers' research, writings and deeds, for very good reasons; he properly addresses in *Aleppo Observed* the criticism their book faced in their lifetime and during the two and a half decades following publication.

As we learn while reading *Aleppo Observed*, being practitioners affected the writings of the Russell brothers in many ways and contributed much to their ability to gather knowledge, medical as well as social, and to assess and analyse it in a scientific way; however, they published it in an accessible and readable way, that surely expanded their reader's horizons at that time. Indeed, the Russell chapters that deal with natural history – mainly the flora and fauna – and medicine, are shown by Maurits van den Boogart as being innovative for their time and supplying unique and important information on medicinal uses of plants and animals, and knowledge regarding diseases, treatments and particularly about the plague.

When writing the biographies of the Scottish brothers in part one of *Aleppo*

Observed, while assessing their life stories and important deeds, Maurits van den Boogart presents the readers with the reasons of their successes. He clearly shows how their experience, passion for knowledge, brave actions, sense of delegation and dedication, that were all presented in the book they wrote, brought them fame, wealth, and scientific and social status in the most prestigious learned circles of eighteenth-century Europe in general, and London in particular. Part two of the book deals with four subjects that were the essence of the Russells' book: the city of Aleppo, its natural history, medicine (most importantly the plague) and Ottoman society and Arab culture. With regard to history of medicine, readers are warmly advised to read Miri Shefer-Mossensohn's new book *Ottoman Medicine, Healing and Medical Institutions 1500–1700* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2009), to complete the picture drawn by the Russells and analysed by Maurits van den Bogart.

Aleppo Observed is a clear and well-executed piece of research, and provides an essential edition for those interested in the history of the Levant, its early modern period, its natural history, and the history of Arabic and Ottoman medicine. It is also important for scholars and students of the social and intellectual history of the Middle East, especially during the Ottoman period.

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Joan Sherwood, *Infection of the Innocents: Wet Nurses, Infants, and Syphilis in France, 1780–1900*, McGill-Queen's/Associated Medical Services Studies in the History of Medicine, Health and Science, 37 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), pp. xiii + 214, \$75.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-7735-3741-5.

Until the advent of safe artificial feeding, a good wet-nurse made all the difference to the