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Title of the Thesis: **Travelling to Damascus: The Image of the City in Select English Narratives from the Colonial Era**

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The thesis tackles literary representations of Damascus city in three English travel narratives from the British colonial era. The primary texts chosen for analysis are Alexander William Kinglake's *Eothen: Or Traces of Travel, Brought Home from the East* (1844), Josias Leslie Porter's *Five Years in Damascus, Including an Account of the History, Topography, and Antiquities of that City* (1855), and Gertrude Lowthian Bell's *Syria: The Desert and the Sown* (1907). The three English travellers, whose works are examined, visited Damascus at different times from the nineteenth century onwards, when the city was still an Ottoman province, motivated by the exploratory impulse of an expansionist British Empire.

The thesis starts with a foreword. The first chapter offers a brief history of Damascus city and is entitled "Damascus through the March of Time". It traces the political history of the city in particular, focusing on its cultural encounter with European civilisation over the centuries. This helps formulate an understanding of the city's cultural identity as it evolved over time. Following the transformation of Damascus from a Hellenistic and later a Roman centre into the capital of the first Islamic Empire forms an important part of this chapter. Knowledge of the history of Damascus is significant to this study as it has often influenced the manner in which the city was portrayed by European travellers.

The second chapter, entitled “Alexander W. Kinglake’s Damascus: Lost Paradise”, analyses Kinglake’s writing growing out of his brief stay in Damascus city during his two-year journey to the Near East between 1834-1835. This journey was later documented in *Eothen: Or Traces of Travel, Brought Home from the East*. Kinglake visited Damascus during a troubled phase in its history. By the early 1830s, the city had sunk into a swamp of political unrest and economic depression. The chapter examines Kinglake’s personal motives for travelling to Syria, and then describes the socio-political reality of Damascus at the time of his journey, focusing on the fragile situation of religious minorities. It attempts to analyse and assess Kinglake’s representation of Damascus city as a dystopic environment.

Josias Leslie Porter’s work *Five Years in Damascus, Including an Account of the History, Topography and Antiquities of that City* (1855), is examined in chapter three of the thesis, entitled “Josias L. Porter’s Damascus: The Biblical Land”. This is a traditional travel guide book. It describes the city’s urban characteristics in detail. Its deeper implications, however, draw one’s attention to historical geography as it engages in the revival of the city’s pre-Islamic past. Porter’s main objective was to validate his Christian beliefs. The major theme of his narrative is Damascus’ original identity as a biblical territory that was usurped by Muslims. Porter emphasised what he saw as the Muslims’ endeavour over the centuries to obliterate the city’s Christian past. This chapter attempts to critically examine these ideas.

The fourth chapter follows Gertrude Bell’s journey to Greater Syria in the early twentieth century and is entitled “Gertrude L. Bell’s Damascus: A Desert Capital”. The chapter examines the image of the city in Bell’s book *Syria: The Desert and the Sown* (1907). Bell’s narrative portrays Damascus city as having already entered the modern era. It is characterised by a romanticisation of the landscape, a concentration on political matters, and an intentional neglect of the archaeological sites in the city. The chapter critiques her stereotypical exoticisation of Damascus. Bell’s mission as an English spy is also addressed in the chapter.

The last chapter, entitled “Kinglake, Porter and Bell: Propagating the Colonial Project” compares and contrasts the three colonial narratives. It assesses the factors that have contributed to the final outcome of each text concerning the portrayal of Damascus city. It concludes that the three travellers shared colonial roots and attitudes. They have all served the imperial apparatus via their writings. They were, therefore, colonialist harbingers who helped pave the ground for the occupation of Syria in the early twentieth century.

### Findings of the Thesis:

\* A close reading of the texts revealed a number of dominant factors that shaped the way Damascus city was portrayed by the three travellers, exposing the ideological tilts of each. In doing so, each revealed his/her specific area of interest in relation to the city’s cultural and social realities. These factors are elaborated upon in the final chapter of the thesis.

\* Kinglake, Porter and Bell visited the city of Damascus with different objectives and impressions. All three shared the reality of being loyal soldiers of the colonial aspirations of Britain and nurtured the dream of contributing to the expansion of the British Empire and its colonial project. Along with hundreds of explorers, diplomats and missionaries, their narratives and their actions have unquestionably facilitated the implementation of the British colonial scheme in Syria.