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ABSTRACT

A Toponymical Survey of Damascus

Including a Historical and Etymological Account of the Major Landmarks of the City

معالم دمشق التاريخية: دراسة تاريخية و لغوية عن أحيائها و مواقعها القديمة، تراثها و أصولها و اشتقاق أسمائها

This book is a compilation and a historical and linguistic study of toponyms in the Syrian capital, Damascus. It focuses on the names of the city landmarks dating back to the period before the mid-twentieth century, particularly those which are still in use.

The structure of the book is simple. It starts with a short overview of toponymy and the contributions of the most eminent, both early and contemporary, Arab scholars in the field. Before the main section the author provides their methodology. The book comprises alphabetically arranged toponyms with a short clearly-written geographical and historical account of each of them. A brief etymology of each entry is given as well. This involves an investigation into the linguistic origins of such names in languages related to the history of

the city such as Arabic, Aramaic, Turkish, French and others. Each entry is followed by its corresponding endnotes and some entries include references to other entries in the book.

The origins and implications of the studied toponyms are unusually rich and diverse. According to the authors' study, some place-names refer to prominent geographical features, *Qassyun*, certain incidents, *al-Hariqa*, specific professions, *suq al-Bzuriyyah*, or geographical directions, *al-Bab al-Sharqi*. Others are attributed to their builders, to a family name, an animal, a plant, a colour, a number, a building or to the peoples who lived in them. Some others are associated with written or oral religious texts, named after cities or streets in other countries, or related to some odd metaphors.

The book is to be commended for its thorough and comprehensive etymological study of the name 'Damascus', which runs over thirty-three pages of the book. That is in addition to its extensive and well-organised bibliography of the consulted Arabic and foreign books, dictionaries and maps, which can be useful for researchers interested in conducting further studies on toponymy in Syria as a whole. Moreover, the book might serve as an introductory reading for scholars planning to do historical, geographical, anthropological, cultural or linguistic studies on Damascus.

The book could have benefited from a map of Damascus locating the discussed landmarks as well as some modern pictures of them. Moreover, an index of their names would have been helpful for readers looking for specific information. Furthermore, an appendix of some of the collected narrations about these places would have shown some acknowledgement of the interviewees' contribution to the work. However, this book is still a valuable source on the

history and geography of Damascus and a successful documentation of a great part of its local oral history.

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