Crowdsourced-based mapping of historical west-to-east routes from the textual accounts of European Travelers

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Abstract

Through the centuries, numerous travellers and orientalists visited Persia (Iran) and described the country and its inhabitants in their travel writings. These travel accounts comprise valuable historical information about the people and their traditions. A literature on travel writings indicate that surprisingly, despite the importance of these recordings, the studies related to the different aspects of these travels, such as the travel routes and the varieties of the possible application of them on the modern time are relatively scarce. The current research deals with the travel routes of nine the most famous early modern European explorers. Accordingly, in addition to digitalizing and mapping the taken routes, the dynamics of their itineraries are analysed.

1 Introduction

Historically, Persia, the land between Inner Asia and Arabian, India and Mesopotamia, from early history has attracted the attentions of several travelers, who visited the country with a variety of motivations such as explorers, diplomats, merchants, missioners, pilgrims, soldiers, etc [1,2]. Through the centuries, numerous travelers and orientalist have described and reported their journeys through different geographical places in their travel writings [2,3]. To name the most famous ones, Herodotus (484-425 BC) was the first known traveler to Persia and Marco Polo (1254 - 1324) after his father Niccolo in a trade expedition to China crossed Persia, and Sven Hedin - (1865-1952) traveled across the two largest Iranian deserts of *Lut* and *Dasht-e Kavir* [1,3,4]. They have recorded remarkable and unique information about the details of their journeys beginning from their origins towards their destinations into a number of documented accounts. Apart from their literary importance, these travel accounts comprise valuable historical information about the chosen routes, the visited places and people, and the existing traditions [1,5]. Furthermore, they have depicted their geographical observations very carefully so that a number of books from their observations and experiences have been published [1-4]. These literature provide us a variety of geographical evidences about the morphology of routes, urban areas, and natural features such as lakes, rivers, deserts, mountains, and so on. These travelogues in fact, offer a kaleidoscopic panorama of a specific region, which is in this case Iran, and permit us to convert their descriptions to map object features. In fact, historical travel writings make the picture of the past come to life by mapping them through the textual evidences in the early modern centuries [7,8]. Considering the periods that European travelers have visited and reported from Persia, the early-modern time might be assumed as the Golden Time. Especially when Shah 'Abbas I

(r. 1588-1629) came to power and ran an outward looking agenda, the country has opened its doors to travelers, and in particular, the Europeans. It has been mentioned in their travel writings that the people in Europe and Iran became familiar with each side's traditions. The descriptions of the travel routes in the travelogues reveal a lot of information about the history and the historical development of the roads and travel corridors through/in Iran [3,4]. For instance, one can identify the common routes between cities which they were being taken in their itineraries. The travelogues provide us information about the conditions of the travel's amenities including security, travel permission, overnight and restaurant facilities, etc. The on-the-way cities and their physical appearance as shown in Figure 1 can be rebuilt through mapping their textual reports.

Figure 1: The painted landscapes of Saba city in ancient Persia by Adam Olearius in 1633

The main objective of this study is to crowdsource the travel routes of some travelers based on their explanation of the itineraries in order to map these routes. The most famous European explorers in the early-modern time were chosen for this study, namely Pietro Della Valle (1586-1652), Heinrich von Poser (1599- 1661), Adam Olearius (1603-1671), Sir Thomas Herbert (1606-1682), Jean de Thévenot (1633-1667), and Sir Jean Chardin (1643-1713), Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716), Moritz von Kotzebue (1789-1861), and Heinrich Brugsch (1827-1894). To achieve this, their documented itineraries were manually read and the textual accounts were interpreted to delineate their chosen routes. Considering the history of travels of European indicates that from ancient time, Persia was very much part of this general trend and was a coveted destination for European travelers in search of adventure or trade.

2   Materials and methods

From the perspective of tourism studies, the historical routes that were taken by these travelers, not only were one of the important elements and facilitators of these travels, but also are the cultural and historical evidences of these movements. Accordingly, these routes together with the attractive descriptions about tangible and intangible cultural heritages along them ("tourist icons") are assumed as the most important "cultural tourism routes". The textual accounts of the nine abovementioned traveleres were studied and intepreated. The name of known places, regions, and routes were then marked and digitalized on a map.

3   Results

Having the travelers' accounts enabled us to result in a map, which illustrates the approximate geometrical representation of the taken routes. Figure 2 displays them in different symbols.
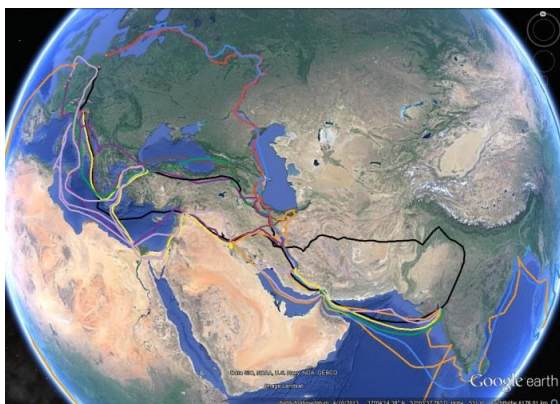

Visual analysis of the taken routes reveals that the Iran plateau and its southern marine territories were the main corridor of explorations and travels from west to east. To be more precise, while these travellers started their journeys from different places of Europe and they navigated themselves through different corridors until the Iran plateau, they all pursued their routes either through the central Iran or the Persian Gulf sailing ways. This could be due to geographical conditions or cultural attractiveness. The literature review confirms that the latter is the case.

4   Conclusion

In this study, it was intended to highlight the power and potential of crowdsourcing in tourism industry and historical cultural mapping [9-11]. The market of the tourism industry is undergoing widespread and penetrating changes in both the behavioral and technological attributes of the global tourist. The growth in global media and communications are creating an experienced, value-conscious tourist looking for a meaningful interaction with the local communities. Many people no longer want the "sand, sun, and sea" of the past [5], but an experiential, multi-activity tourism. Among the significant methods of motivating the tourists to visit a destination (especially in the less-developed regions) is to develop the so-called "cultural tourism routes". According to the primary results of the current research, the routes of the pioneer European explorers "potentially" have the capacity to be developed as new cultural tourism routes in Iran. Consequently, as future work, the possibility of designing, modelling, and developing these historical routes as cultural and/or literary "tourism routes" should be considered.

Through the centuries, travel has been considered as a cultural mean, which has connected the countries and regions. The analysis of cultural routes, as a development and environmental improvement instrument, is undoubtedly among the most interesting topics within the specific scientific community and, perfectly in line with the concept of cultural heritage expressed both on a national and international level within such organizations as INCOMOS, UNESCO, Council of Europe and European Commission. In fact, tourism trails

and routes, offer a means to interpret history, culture and nature [4].

Future works should be directed towards the following specific research objectives, namely to determine:

- The historical aspects of the visits of these European explores in Persia such as the situations of travel enmities (i.e. travel security, the quality of the roads, means of transportation, accommodation and catering facilities etc.) as well as social status, *profession, destination,* and motivations of these travelers,

- Digitalizing the travel routes of these European explorers in Persia with more literature and through a semantic approach,

- The tourism ''icons'' as well as tangible and intangible cultural heritages along these routes should be recognized.

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