

Lahore City as Recorded by Travelers

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The historic accounts of the ancient city of Lahore, especially the travel logs, bear witness to the frequent 'invaders'¹, along with the 'Travelers' whose interests may not have been solely to conquer the city but also to experience it and gather information for the benefit of their financial interests, political partialities or scholarly inclinations. This paper analyzes these 'Travelers' through their travelogues in their 'Contextual Timeline'. The term 'Contextual Timeline' in this paper refers to the time period during which the 'Traveler' arrived and departed from the city of Lahore keeping in view their interests, agendas and the experiences during their stay.

Consideration must be given to a traveler's past experiences, family or cultural affiliations, professional and political inclinations, which may constitute probable biases in his travel narrative. Historians very often take these accounts as the gospel truth, ignoring the particularity of the individual traveler, and thus, sometimes, the narrative can develop facets which may or may not reflect reality. These travel accounts, nevertheless, have helped scholars to see beyond the official 'Dynastic' chronicles and to understand the everyday events of the city by providing a second perspective on the recorded events. Study, with a Contextual Timeline basis, can render these accounts more objective by comparing experiences and descriptions of several travelers through the history of the city.

Further, the 'Traveler' referred to in this paper does not undertake traveling for the sake of tourism but is defined as a person who has taken upon himself the hardships of traveling in order to better serve his own agendas and interests, such as:

1. **To gain knowledge**, whether philosophical, cultural, religious, historical, scholarly or espionage.

2. **To trade**, whether as a merchant of a particular produce, a jeweler, or a representative of foreign powers.
3. **To represent a government**, as an Ambassador, an envoy or part of a commission.
4. **To advance his own fortunes**, as an Adventurer, a Geographer, Astronomer or Physician.

Considering the above criteria, the earliest available travel accounts come from the Chinese pilgrims², the first of whom came during the 4th century AD. The Contextual Timeline shows that their visits coincided with the decline of Buddhism and the ascendancy of Hinduism, during the Gupta Period, called the Golden Period by Indian Chroniclers. The Pilgrims from China primarily came to study Buddhism, with visits to the Buddhist centers and their disappointment is reflected when they observe about these that *'they are in the state of ruins'*³. However the Chinese travellers do not mention Lahore as a place of importance.

With the advent of Islam, the Muslim rulers of present-day Iraq took over the existing trade in the Gulf and Arabian Sea and many expeditions were directed towards 'Al-Hind' in order to acquire knowledge about the region and to secure trade. Muhammad bin Qasim came for a similar purpose, that is, to avenge the capture of Arab trade vessels by the Sindh ruler and to secure the region from further such incidents. All of these conquests, as well as earlier ones, have been mentioned in Yahya's *Kitab-ul-Fatah-ul-Buldan*. Another travel book written by an Arab historian, Murtaza Husain, describes the situation in Lahore, "... when by lapse of time, the population of this city (Lahore) decreased, the seat of the government was established in the town of Sialkot...and when Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni conquered Hind, Malik Ayaz made endeavours to populate it (Lahore), and he built a new city and a fort of solid masonry work"⁴.

The next records occur during the period of the Mughal Emperors and their *Ferangi Travelers*⁵. Analysis with the Contextual Timeline shows that it was the time of the establishment of the Tudor Dynasty in England, and England, flexing its new strength, declared independence from the central Papal control exercised from Rome. King Henry VIII revolted against the Roman control

and established his own version of the Protestant religion, becoming the supreme head of both state and religion. Upon his death the fight between the two religions flared up once again as his daughter Mary supported the Catholics and his other daughter, Elizabeth, took over the cause of her father's new religion. Elizabeth proved to be more sagacious with a better insight into history. She won the day and launched a period of peace and growth in England which was to take it to great imperial glory. Elizabeth launched the era which brought the English to India. In the Sub-continent Babar invaded the region and established the Mughal Dynasty, interrupted for a short while by the Afghan, Sher Shah Suri, during the reign of Humayun⁶. In the Sub-continent, Akbar found a way to 'unite' the populace under one religious concept⁷. Curiously in a historical parallel, the reign of Elizabeth proved to be the golden period for Britain and the religious philosophy started by Akbar simultaneously helped in generating a peaceful and prosperous environment for the evolution of the Mughal era in India.

Many European Travelers arrived in the South Asian region during the 15th and 16th century, mainly, to bypass the Arab 'middleman'⁸. It is a period which can be described as the European effort to spread to the East having already expanded westward and discovered the immense riches in America. During Akbar's rule, the visitors had distinguishable characteristics which may have influenced them. Some commonalities between these characteristics are stated as: over-indulgence in scientific experimentations, exploration, education, travel and trade, collecting 'exotic' items and merchandising antiquity, portraiture, painting, raising conspiracies, adventuring, fortune seeking and fortune building⁹.

The records of the earliest traveler of this time period, Monserrate, indicate that the sole purpose of this Portuguese priest was to convert Akbar to Christianity, although, the consistent mention of Lahore in his travel accounts¹⁰ emphasize the significant impression the city may have made on his mind. These travel accounts show that they are the words of a person who underwent an extraordinary experience when he ventured on his travels, with his own biases and agendas. He says:

*“I must now give some account of ‘Lahore’. This city is **second to none**, either in Asia or in Europe, with **regard to size, population and wealth**. It is crowded with **merchants**, who foregather there from all over Asia. In all these respects it excels other cities as also in the **huge quantity of every kind of merchandise which is imported**. Moreover there is no art or craft useful to human life which is not practiced there. The **population** is so large that men jostle each other in the streets. The citadel alone, which is built of brickwork laid in cement, has a circumference of nearly three miles. Within this citadel is a bazaar which is protected against the sun in summer and the rain in winter by a **high-pitched wooden roof – a design whose clever execution and practical utility should call for imitation**. Perfumes are sold in this bazaar and the scent in the early morning is most delicious. The remainder of the city is widely spread. Its buildings are of brick.”*

Father Antonio Monserrate

Portuguese Jesuit Priest

1580 – 82 / at the court of ‘Akbar’

Monserrate’s statement that the city is ‘second to none’, with an emphasis on its population and mercantile activities presents an image of a prosperous city that is also innovative in its architectural creativity. Despite the warm welcome by the philosophically inquisitive Akbar, Monserrate did not secure the Emperor’s conversion. Nevertheless an image of a flourishing Lahore is mentioned in his travelogue.

The first English merchant to set foot in the Sub-continent was ‘Master Ralph Fitch –Merchant of London’ as he liked to call himself. During his journey he visited Tripoli, Aleppo and Syria and experienced the hostile situations of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. He shared his journey with John Newbery and Eldred, who were merchants, William Leeds, a jeweler, and James Story, a painter, a team formed due to the fact that “such men were known and welcome enough in the Mughal courts”¹¹.

He went to Agra and Allahabad but there is no proof that he ever came to Lahore¹². His importance lies in the fact that he

is considered to be ‘the most remarkable Elizabethan Adventurer’, and is important for his role in the formation of the East India Company, when he shared his knowledge of the Indian markets and produce in detail with his countrymen.

William Finch was among the first travelers to represent the East India Company. Finch arrived in Surat with one Hawkins, and remained under his wing until an unfortunate situation occurred in the city of Bayana and caused Hawkins a setback at the Mughal courts.

The story is that Finch went to Bayana at the prompting of Hawkins in order to purchase a stock of Indigo¹³. As it happened the trading agents of the Mughal Queen Mother were also in that city and had concluded their purchase of Indigo when Finch arrived. Ignoring the Royal deal, he proposed a better trading deal to the Indigo seller, which was accepted. A complaint of this sharp practice reached Jahangir and Hawkins’ position, as an honest trader, was compromised. Hawkins, the ‘Inglis Khan’, an Elizabethan sailor, with a drinking habit and grasp of the Turkish language, in the beginning scored him the favors of Jahangir, but in the end he seems to have annoyed the Emperor. He describes the court ritual as,

“First, the nobleman stays at the gate of the palace till the Vizier, the Lt. General and the Knight Martial come to accompany him unto the King. Then he is brought to the gate of the outermost railings..., where he stands in the view of the King, in the midst of those nobles. Then he touches the ground with his hand and also with his head, very gravely, and does thus three times. This done, he kneels down, touching the ground with his forehead, he is carried forward towards the King, and midway he is made to do this reverence again. Then he comes to the door of the red rails... Then the King commands him to come up the stairs of seven steps, that he may embrace him”.

*William Hawkins- East India Company’s Trader
1609 – 1611 / in the court of Jahangir*

These two incidents and their after-effects may have in-

duced a little of the sarcastic undertone in the descriptions of both Finch and Hawkins when they describe the formalities of the Mughal court one had to observe while attending an 'Imperial' audience. Observation must be made of the obsessive mention of 'railings'¹⁴ showing the extreme annoyance towards the presence of strict hierarchy.

*"You enter into a spacious court with guardrooms round about, like shops or open stalls... A little further you enter within a **railing** into a more inward court, within which none but men of sort are admitted. Being entered, you approach the King's durbar before which is also a small court enclosed with **rails**..., No other without calling dares to go up to him, , Within these **rails** below, none under the degree of four hundred horses are permitted to enter".*

*William Finch
An English trader of Indigo – East India Company
Traded between Agra and Lahore under William Hawkins*

Arrived in India - 1608

These incidents were also recorded in John Jourdain's Journal¹⁵. He reported that Finch, after becoming one of the causes in disgracing Hawkins in the Mughal court, and Hawkins accusing Finch of this wrong doing, Finch did not want to encounter Hawkins. The city of Lahore became a 'non-profitable' city for him as he used this reason to go to Aleppo and not return to Agra to join the rest of the party. Eventually Hawkins thought that Finch was running away with the merchandise of the East India Company.

*"Feb 16 – I departed from Jarowe (Jaju), in companie with Captaine Hawkins and aboutnoone wee came to Agra to Captaine Hawkins howse (house) where I found many other English.....Mr. Finch beinge gone for Lahor to sell his Indico which hee bought attBianna for the Worshipfull Companie". Finch informed that he wished to go to Aleppo and "carrie the indico with him for the Worshipfull Companies... **For that atLahour there was noe proffitt to bee made...**"*

*John Jourdain
1610 / at the court of 'Jahangir'*

Description of Lahore Fort

*"...it is a greate walled cittye (city). And in these twelve coses there are manye (many) sarrayes (sarra) for travailours (travelers) to lodge in, because it is a thievish (thievish) countrie (country) and noe villages in these twelve coses. There is belonging to this cittye a very statelie (stylish) castle (Lahore Fort), a mile longe. It hath bene (been) very famous, butt nowe (now) decayed."*¹⁶

The impression one gets after reading the journals of these three merchants is that their luck was certainly not with them and they were far from understanding the culture of India at large, so that they were bound to encounter hindrances at every step; and due to this uncomfortable, irritating situation amongst themselves, the city of Lahore was declared as 'non-profitable'.

After these three East India Company's early merchants, it is appropriate to mention the first official English Ambassador representing King James I at the court of Emperor Jahangir. The commission headed by Sir Thomas Roe was all about courtly manners and very official language.

"PEN-JAB [Punjab], which signifieth five waters, for that is seated within five rivers. The cheefecyttye (chief city) is called Lahor. It is a great kingdome and most fructfull. The cittye is the mart of India for trafique" (over here maybe 'trafique' is written in the sense of 'trade').

*Sir Thomas Roe
Ambassador of King James I of England
Chief Trade Delegate, The first English Ambassador to be attached to the
Mughal Court*

1616 – 1619 (In India) at the court of Jahangir

Due to his privileged circumstances of being an experienced English Diplomat, an Elizabethan Knight, and a Jacobean Ambassador, Roe had the privilege of frequently visiting Jahangir in the Exclusive Audience Hall. This advantage provided him with the opportunity of observing the proceedings of the court, and that of Jahangir, much more closely than any of his predecessors. Unlike

Finch, he has described Lahore as 'fruitful' and the 'mart of India', the 'sales capital' .¹⁷

Then there were some travelers who are more difficult to trace, who belong to the espionage team of a certain country. They not only represent themselves with an altered name but may also have adopted a different occupation. In written history their identity usually gets either mixed up or completely wiped out.

One such person is thought to be named Augustin. Not much is known about him except from the letters he had written from Lahore. These letters were misplaced and it was not until after 1914 that three of his letters were discovered, hence bringing this unknown French traveler back to life. As it happened these letters were found in the collection of the Pieresc Correspondence¹⁸. This collection was headed by a person who was involved in efforts of establishing a French trading espionage network first in Persia and then in India. The information gathered by this 'Augustin' was mainly regarding 'precious gems', the concerned markets and locations of precious stone mines. He was the 'Lahore' contact of Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peiresc.

His 'Indian' career as a dealer in real and false gems after his departure from France in 1609 was a much thriving one. He landed in India near Surat with several other Frenchmen in 1612 and was the sole survivor by the year 1620. He settled in Lahore as the royal court was there at the time. He claimed to be one of the favorites of Emperor Jahangir for whom he had crafted two fabulous thrones. Emperor Jahangir was the 'god-father' of one of his sons. In one the letters he also writes about his formal and informal relations with Emperor Shah Jahan, who used him for his military engineering skills and for whom he had also made a dazzling throne in Agra. His letters are full of the stories of his Indian family, Indian society, the Mughal court, the elephants and other exotic animals he has sent to King Louis XIII of France".

Augustin de Bordeaux, France

1609 - 1632

His Letter from Lahore

Bernier, on the other hand, had quite a few references regarding the city of Lahore and how he found it when he visited this once 'prestigious' city. It is noted that during the times of Shah Jahan, the city of Lahore experienced its renaissance and this account of Bernier's¹⁹ helps to indicate the situation of the city of Lahore before the royal interventions.

"It is not without reason that the kingdom of which 'Lahore' is the capital is named the 'Penje-ab' ..., The river on which the city was built is as considerable as our Loire, and is much in want of a similar embankment as that on which the road is carried on the banks of the French river; for it is subject to inundations... , Unlike the buildings of Delhi and Agra, the houses here are very lofty, but the court having resided during the last twenty years or more in one of those two cities, most of the houses in Lahore are in a 'ruinous' state... There are still five or six considerable streets, but not a few of the houses in them are tumbling to the ground ... The King's palace is no longer seated on its banks. This is a high and noble edifice, though very inferior to the palaces of Delhi or Agra."

Francois Bernier - French Physician

1655 – 68 / at the courts of Shah Jahan and Alamgir

Bernier has portrayed an extremely 'realistic' and 'accurately presumed' situation of the city. Proposing a reasonable solution to the strengthening of Ravi's embankment whilst comparing the river to the Loire, the longest river in France, also shows his nostalgic approach towards the betterment of his current context. This approach shows that his intention was to always 'record history' as much precisely and accurately as is 'experienced'. It is recorded that he funded his stay in India by being in the service of Shah Jahan as a Physician, thus securing an internal link with the Emperor. Enroute to India he also visited Palestine, Egypt, Cairo and Arabia.

The same is said by Tavernier²⁰, although his fascination with the later Grand Trunk Road of India shows his passion for travel. Tavernier was a French 'diamond' merchant who was traveling at

his own expense, and who successfully managed to complete six voyages.

“Lahore is the capital of a kingdom and is built on one of the five rivers..., The town is large and extends more than a coss in length but the greater part of the houses, which are higher than those of Agra and Delhi, are falling into ruins, the excessive rains having overthrown a large number...The palace of the King is rather fine, and is no longer, as it was formally, on the margin of the river..., One can obtain wine at Lahore... nearly all the way from Lahore and Delhi, and from Delhi to Agra, is like a continuous avenue planted throughout with beautiful trees on both sides, which is very pleasant to the view. But in some places they have been allowed to perish, and the people have not taken care to plant others”.

*Tavernier – French traveler and Jeweler
1605 – 1689 / at the court of Shah Jahan
Three Voyages to India – 1638-43, 1657-62, 1664-68*

While in attendance at the royal court of Shah Jahan, Tavernier managed to visit some of the major diamond mines in the country and afterwards traveled as a merchant of the highest rank, trading in costly jewels and other precious commodities. In his ‘letters of nobility’ he became the first traveler ever to attempt to describing the Indian culture he was trading in.

With the historic writings of Manucci²¹, I came across a breakthrough in my research because of the way he had described the architectural features of the city of Lahore and the walled city itself. True to his word, his narrative is not of a historian, although certainly not inferior. On the contrary, his is a narrative which he has experienced himself and which he has managed to record in his own words, ‘firsthand’ information.

“I must add, that I have not relied on the knowledge of others; and I have spoken nothing which I have not seen or undergone....The famous city of Lahore has 12 gates, called 1-Qadiri Darwazah, 2-Yakki Darwazah, 3-Dilli Darwazah,

*4-Akbari Darwazah, 5-Mochi Darwazah, 6-Shah Alami Darwazah, 7-Bhati Darwazah, 8-Multani Darwazah, 9-Mori Darwazah, 10-Ghakkari Darwazah, 11-Kashmiri Darwazah, 12-?...The walls are all of well-burnt bricks, high and provided with bastions. Aurangzeb ordered to build, at his charges, a wall in the nature of a bastion to protect the city of Lahore both from the enemies and from the river then encroaching on it. The houses are lofty, some having eight stories. **The city is inhabited by great and rich merchants who deal with the whole of India, kingdom of Kabul, Kashmir, Persia, Multan and Tattah..., for it is crammed with foreigners.** Round the city are fine gardens filled with various kinds of fruits, chiefly peaches, stoneless grapes, mangoes and melons. There is an abundance of wells in the city. The people here are well-built and almost white."*

*Niccolao Manucci - Venetian adventurer & historian
1639 – 1717 / at the courts of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, Also Served under Dara Shukoh*

His statement that the embankment of the river and the defensive wall of the city have been strengthened, indicates the earlier concern of Bernier. The description he gives of the city is of a thriving mercantile center 'crammed with foreigners'. Not only did Manucci describe the architectural attributes of the city but he also presented a picture of the life and stories of the common populace of 'his city' which he is 'obliged to write about as a mark of his gratitude'. He tells us mythical stories about the origin of this city intertwined with the moral stories associated with Mahmud of Ghazni and his slave Malik Ayaz, whom he mentions as 'Malik Khas'. This shows his link with the populace and being a Physician, this helped him in achieving this connection.

"I know the reader will be pleased at learning the origin of this great city of Lahore where I made my fortune (as a physician), since I have exact information of how it came to be built. I feel under an obligation to write about its origin as a mark of my gratitude to a city which did me such single benefit."

*There was a Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi, a Mahomedan King of Kabul, and his slave called 'Malik Khas'. The King loved him much and raised him up to be his Chief Minister, on whom the whole government depended. One day, to test the fidelity of his slave, he gave to Malik Khas much money and many soldiers, so that he might search for some lovely site, there to found a large and handsome city in his own name. Malik Khas obeyed and came to a bare and spacious plain near to a fine river called the Ravi. **There he constructed the handsome and beneficent city of Lahore, called by its residents 'Allah-nur', that is 'Day-dawn of God'.** When the city was completed..., he carried the King to the new city and made him ascend a high throne. Mahmud of Ghazni confided to him the kingdom of Lahore and retired himself to the realm of Ghazni.*

In the terrible times of the later reign of Shah Jahan, experiencing the fight between the four sons of this Emperor, and then a devastating showdown between Dara and Aurangzeb¹, he definitely has a positive approach towards his context. However, a sarcastic undertone sometimes becomes apparent in his statements, such as when he states that “the Mahomedans easily assign one a reputation and as easily take it away”. This sarcasm is pronounced when he describes the honest slave Malik Ayaz, by stating that “one should get a lesson from the fidelity of a slave and learn how sometimes in persons of lowly birth lies hidden great nobility of heart”.

I would like to conclude simply by saying that this may not be a comprehensive paper in regard to the travelers, but in it the start of the practical analysis of our recorded history is suggested and we should re-examine our much romanticized history and start analyzing it with a renewed sense of ownership and scholarly objectivity. To achieve this task, or even to begin this process, it becomes exceedingly essential to investigate history through ‘Historiography’ by cross referencing the ‘Contextual Timeline’ and the personal subjectivity of the travellers concerned.

Endnotes

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