

CONNECTIVITY FEATURE

THE OPEN GULF PROJECT

Digging into the Data of John G. Lorimer's *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Central Arabia, and Oman*

The Open Gulf Project is a collaborative initiative in the Arts and Humanities Division, involving Arab Crossroads Studies faculty members, Nora Barakat and Nelida Fuccaro, Digital Humanities professor David Wrisley, and Legal Studies professor Elham Fakhro. The project's initial pilot explores John Gordon Lorimer's *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Central Arabia and Oman*, a 5,000-page compendium of historical and geographical information produced by officers of the British Empire in the early twentieth century. The pilot utilizes novel digital techniques to analyze this large body of textual source material, explore its connections with other textual sources containing information about the Gulf, and ultimately imagine new horizons for collaborative Humanities research about the region.

The *Gazetteer* is a compilation of oral and written sources, collected by Lorimer, a civil servant working for the British Indian government, and is split into historical and geographic sections. Gulf historians have long considered these volumes an invaluable sourcebook for the nineteenth century, in a region which is not blessed by abundant archival sources. Building on Nelida Fuccaro's work on the relationship between British imperial power and knowledge production, the project analyzes the *Gazetteer* as the material byproduct of imperial knowledge and as an essential part of an enterprise in political domination, at a time when British presence in the region was not yet well established.

The resulting map pictured below is a visual representation of the ways in which the *Gazetteer* conceives of the Gulf as a set of interconnected political, historical, and geographical places and sub-regions, each one treated in a particular chapter. Mapping such a large text serves to explore how different geographic areas are mentioned in and across the chapters, triggering a host of questions about how Lorimer's *Gazetteer* portrays the intricate network of relationships binding the Gulf region to the knowledge produced about it by the Government of India.

Ultimately, the Open Gulf project aims to build on its understanding of patterns in colonial knowledge construction toward opening the history of the Gulf to new, comparative historical horizons through the creation of linked open data. This process depends on making key texts available for open exploration with innovative techniques in digital history and adopting formats and standards shared by digital historians and geographers worldwide. As our collaborative efforts reveal, the Lorimer pilot provides an alternative, complementary methodology to linear and qualitative-oriented reading of the *Gazetteer*. Our digital initiative aims to study historical agency and agents, themes, connections in the discursive and visual construction of the Gulf and its broader imperial hinterlands. The development of a new and exciting conversation about the data of the *Gazetteer* will make fresh inroads into the study and teaching of Gulf history, society and politics, integrating this region into cutting edge evolving educational and scholarly trajectories.

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Interactive Media

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NEW MAJOR:

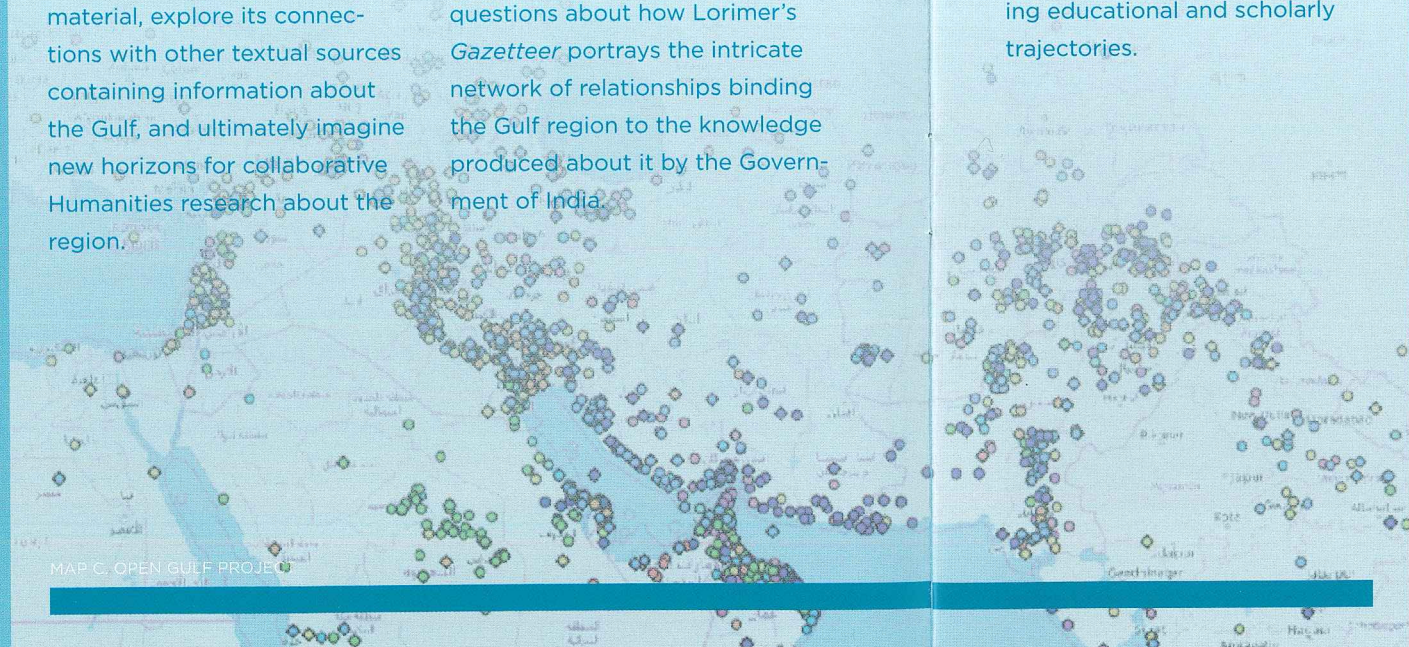
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NEW MINOR:

HERITAGE STUDIES

NEW PRE-PROFESSIONAL COURSE:

MUSEUM &
CURATORIAL
STUDIES



MAP C. OPEN GULF PROJECT