

The Itinerary of the Syrian Army

Historians have recorded their itinerary stage by stage, although there are minor differences between various sources.

Istakhr¹ has noted the distance between Syria and Medina to be twenty stages (*manzil*),¹ without recording the names of the stages; but Ibn Rusta has named some of the stages and regarded them to be twelve.²

Ibn Bat³ta has named seventeen stages between Syria and Medina,³ but since Ibn Bat³ta has written his book in 779 A.H. (1377 C.E.), and Ibn Rusta wrote his in 290 A.H. (902 C.E.), Ibn Rusta's view seems to be more authentic in terms of its chronological proximity to the time of the incidence. He has not pointed out to all the names, though.

Ibn Khurd⁴dhbih has also considered the itinerary to be the same as what Ibn Rusta noted.⁴ Due to the long period between these two sources, we will proceed to give a brief list of the stages between Syria and Medina as follows:

1. Kuswa (the first township which was at a 12 mile⁵ distance from Damascus),
2. J⁶sim (24 miles from Damascus),
3. F⁷q (or Af⁸q, 24 miles from J⁶sim),
4. Sanamayn (12 miles from F⁷q),
5. Zar'a (15 or 18 miles from Sanamayn),
6. Busr⁹ (4 stages from Damascus and the same place where the Prophet (s), before his mission and during his business travel to Syria, met the Christian Monk and the latter recognized on his features, the signs of prophethood),⁶
7. Karak,
8. Ma¹⁰n,

9. Hism,
10. Dhāt al-Manār (the beginning of Syrian territory from Medina),
11. Laj'n,
12. Saragh (a village near Tabk),
13. Dhāt Haj,
14. Taym' (name of a river north of Tabk),
15. Hajar,
16. Wād al-Qur,
17. 'Ulm,
18. Junayna,
19. Janb,
20. Ruhba,
21. Dh al-Marwa,
22. Marr,
23. Jurf,
24. Suwayd,
25. Hudayya,
26. Dh Khushub.

Obviously, the above-mentioned stages are the known villages and townships on the way between Syria and Medina and it does not mean that the distance between each one of them is a day's journey.

However, when the Syrian army reached Wād al-Qur, they met with the Umayyids who were expelled or had escaped from Medina.

Muslim b. 'Uqba first inquired about the military preparedness and spiritual conditions of the people of Medina and the number of their fighters in order to plan how to penetrate into Medina and triumph over the people.

Muslim b. 'Uqba asked Marwān b. Hakam how to triumph over the people of Medina. Marwān answered: “The number of Medinans is more than your troops, but not all of them have enough arms. On the other hand, they lack enough motivation, purpose, and goal and are unable to withstand the swords.”

Marwān b. Hakam said to Muslim b. 'Uqba: “Your biggest problem is the trench they have dug around Medina to block your way and in order to guard them they have assigned their resolute men who will not easily leave the trench. I know how to break up this blockade but I will reveal it to you in due course. 7

Muslim b. 'Uqba did not content himself with Marwān's statements and tried to obtain more accurate information about Medina from the Umayyids, but they refused to give more information with the pretext that “we have taken an oath to the people of Medina not to give you any information, but 'Abd al-Malik, son of Marwān, has not taken any oath of secrecy and you can acquire more information from him.”⁸⁸⁶

The Umayyids were apparently afraid that Yazīd's army will not be able to conquer Medina, so they did not wish to endanger the prospects of their stay as well as their property and lands in Medina; otherwise, the Umayyids were not such people as to keep their oath.

As recommended by the Umayyids, Muslim b. 'Uqba consulted the young and inexperienced 'Abd al-Malik in a private session, and asked him about the people of Medina, their insurgency, and how to confront them. Declaring his readiness for any cooperation, 'Abd al-Malik said:

“In my opinion, you must advance to the palm groves near Medina and do not hasten to enter the city. Settle the army next to the palm groves and order the troops to rest and enjoy the date palms and other facilities available there. After a one day rest, move toward Medina. You should not enter the city from the west; rather, you should choose an entrance in which Medina may lie on your left. This necessitates that you enter the battle with the people of Medina through Harrah which is on the eastern side of Medina, for if you fight with those people during the first half of the day, the sun will be behind you, and hurt the eyes of the Medinan fighters and block their visibility. This way, you will see them well, but they will be dazzled by the glittering of your swords, lances, and helmets.”

Muslim b. 'Uqba welcomed and admired 'Abd al-Malik's advice.⁹⁸⁷

For the itinerary of Syrian army from Damascus to Medina, see the following map.

1. Istakhrī, *Masālik al-Mamālik*, p. 27.

2. Ibn Rusta, *A'līq al-Nafīsa*, p. 214.

3. Ibn Batūta, *Al-Rihla*, p. 129–133.

4. Ibn Khurdādhbih, *Al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik*, p. 105.

5. Every three miles has been regarded as one parasang; see: Turayhī, *Majma' al-Bahrayn*, vol. 5, 476.

6. Abū al-Fidā', *Taqwīm al-Buldān*, p. 277.

7. Ibn Qutayba, *Al-Imāma wa al-Siyāsa*, vol. 2, p. 9.

8. Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, p. 373; Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, p. 112.

9. Tabarī, Taʾrīkh, vol. 4, p. 372; Ibn Athīr, Al-Kāmil fī al-Taʾrīkh, vol. 4, p. 112.

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