1. Sallam’s itinerary

All versions of Sallam’s journey (except that of Yaquq) say that the homeward journey took twelve months and a couple of days. According to Ibn Khurradadhbih’s version, it led from the barrier of ‘the two-horned one’ to al-Lub, to the principality of the ruler of Tabanuyan, and further to Isfijab–Usrushana–Samarkand–Bukhara–Tirmidh–Nishapur–Rayy and finally Samarra. This sequence will be discussed below.

al-Idrisi’s version gives four other names of places by which Sallam is said to have passed on his way home: Lakhman, Ghuriyan, Barsakhan and Taraz. They are found on the highway from China to Tashkent and were probably mentioned in al-Jayhani’s lost work. According to al-Idrisi, the guides who were to lead Sallam from the barrier, possibly Yumenguan, to Khurasan, were taken from among the inhabitants of the fortresses near the barrier. If the latter can be identified with Yumenguan, the direct route to Khurasan from there was the southern branch of the Silk Road to Kashgar and the Farghana valley. However, al-Lub, mentioned as the first stage after the barrier, probably stands for Lop (Nor). In that case Sallam, upon leaving Yumenguan, did not return to Igu but embarked at the Jade Gate upon the Loulan route to Lop Nor.

The travel account further mentions Taraz (al-Idrisi) and Isfijab (Ibn Khurradadhbih), places lying far to the north-west on the above-mentioned trade route from Suyab through the Yeti-su or Semiryechye

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127 In the notes to the French translation of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s text, De Goeje links al-Lub with Ghuriyân (Ibn Khurradadhbih, Kitâb al-masâlik, p. 130f.; id., De murr, p. 115). However, Ghuriyân lay far to the north on lake Issyk-köl.
region to Samarkand. In order to join that route, Sallam must have travelled from Loulan in northern direction. There were at least two important routes leading from lake Lop Nor to Isfijab and Taraz: one went along the southern branch of the Silk Road to Miran, Khotan, Yarkand, Kashgar, Naryn, lake Khatir-köl, Kurem-aldi (on lake Issyk-köl) and Taraz; the other turns north to Korla and/or Kucha, from where the above-mentioned trade route to Taraz and Isfijab could be joined.

Neither Ibn Khurradadhbih nor al-Idrisi give any indication as to whether he travelled to Taraz and Isfijab through Kashgar or through Korla. The account only says that Sallam left the place of the ruler called al-Lub and that he came to the place of a ruler called tabanuyan, the head of the poll-tax. He spent a couple of days with each of them, and then travelled from that place until he arrived in eight months at Samarkand.

As already remarked, many sections of the outward and homeward journeys of the Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang in the 7th century shed light on parts of the alleged outward and homeward journeys of Sallam. For the section Lop Nor–Korla their itineraries do not coincide, but both travelled on the Kucha–Taraz section of the Silk Road, Xuanzang on his journey from China to India, Sallam probably on his journey from Yumenguan to Samarra. It may have been the route the guides had in mind when they directed Sallam on what he calls the “route of Khurasan”. The respective itineraries of the Chinese traveller and Sallam up to Kucha, however, were different: Xuanzang came from Igu and Urumchi, Sallam from Lop Nor.

Since Xuanzang’s itinerary is so much better documented than Sallam’s homeward journey, it is useful for our purpose to follow the monk again, now from Yumenguan to Tirmidh. The report of his travels is rich in details, precise observations about religious life, society and cultural customs, rather the opposite of Sallam’s account.

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