



# The First Caliphs

Sneaker's Corner



# Who am I?

- My mother's name is Amina.
- One of my wives is called Zaynab.
- Another one of my wives is called Aisha.
  
- Caliph Marwan, Abd al-Malik's father.



# The First 4 Caliphs

- This presentation's purpose is not to assert that the first 4 caliphs didn't exist but to point out what shaky, historical ground they rest on, particularly as to the extent and duration of their domains.

# Caliph?

- There is no rock inscription that ever uses *الخليفة* Caliph in the 7th century. The term used was Amir Al Mu'minin (commander of the faithful) which doesn't even denote a sense of a successor. Caliph was a shortening of *Khalīfat Rasūl Allāh* and meant "successor of the messenger of God".

Standard  
Chronology  
according to  
Islamic  
tradition

632 -634 Abu Bakr



634 - 644 Umar

644 - 656 Uthman

656 -661 Ali

Contemporary Sources: Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam)*, The Darwin Press 1998

- The *Doctrina Jacobi* mentions an unnamed Arabian prophet "armed with a sword" alive in 634
- Thomas the Presbyter mentions a battle between the Byzantines & the Tayaye d'Mhmt, east of Gaza in 634.
- If he was still alive in 634, then the dates for Abu Bakr's and Umar's caliphates are in doubt.

Ah, but what about the Umar rock inscription?



Transcription, translation, and tracing:

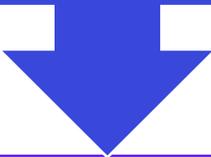
1. بِسْمِ اللَّهِ
2. أَنَا زُهَيْرٌ كَتَبْتُ زَمَنَ تَوَفِّي عُمَرَ سَنَةَ أَرْبَعِ
3. وَعِشْرِينَ

'In the name of God. I am Zuhayr. I wrote [this] when 'Umar died, the year 24.'

أنا زهير كتبت زمن توفِّي عمر سنة أربع  
وعشرين  
بِسْمِ اللَّهِ  
عمر سنة أربع  
و عشرين

## Two problems

First, it doesn't refer to Umar as Amir Al-Mu'minin, let alone the Caliph. He is given no title, so he could be anyone.



The date of his death fits with the Islamic tradition. It says he died in the year 24, which is 644/645 AD.



But if the Byzantine-Arab Chronicle (741) is correct that Umar reigned for 10 years, then there is no time for Abu Bakr to have reigned, given Muhammad is said to be still alive in 634.

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# The Chronology has insurmountable problems

- We could throw out the Doctrina Jacobi and Thomas the Presbyter as evidence to Muhammad being still alive in 634...
- But we still have Sebeos (660s) who says that Muhammad led the invasion into Palestine. The invasion of Palestine is commonly accepted as having happened in 634-638. So the problem persists...

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Chronology  
according to  
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tradition

~~632 - 634 Abu Bakr~~

~~634 - 644 Umar~~

644 - 656 Uthman

656 - 661 Ali

?

Two of the earliest historical references to Ali contradict the much later Islamic version of events

- **Maronite Chronicle** (late 7<sup>th</sup> century)  
AG 969 = 658AD  
AG 969: Mu'awiya has his sister's son Hudhayfa killed. **'Ali was slain "while praying at Hira."** Mu'awiya went down to Hira and received allegiance from all the Arab forces there.
- [Ali was killed in **658**, not 661]

# But was Ali (Abu Turab) even a caliph?

- **George of Resh'aina (d. ca. 680)**

After Maximus went up to Rome, the Arabs seized control of the islands of the sea and entered Cyprus and Arwad, ravaging them and taking captives. They gained control over Africa and subdued almost all the islands of the sea; for, following the wicked Maximus, the wrath of God punished every place which had accepted his error.

When Maximus saw that Rome had accepted the foul mire of his blasphemies, he also went down to Constantinople at the time when **Mu'awiya made peace with the emperor Constans, having started a war with Abu Turab, the emir of Hira, at Siffin and defeated him.**

[Hoyland's Note: Abu Turab is the nickname of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, 'Ali was emir of Hira, not a caliph!]

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# Conclusion

- The historicity of the first 4 caliphs is seriously in doubt.
- Attempts at getting their story straight have failed.
- Abu Bakr couldn't have been a caliph as contradictory evidence rules that out.
- Umar's historicity rests on one rock inscription that could be about anyone of that name.
- Ali was never a caliph and he died 3 years before his reign was meant to have ended.