

The Pact of 'Umar

As Islam expanded after Muhammad's death, many of the conquered lands were inhabited by Jews and Christians who, instead of converting to Islam, accepted second class status as *Dhimmis* and paid the *Jizyah* (as required by 9:29 of the Koran). The *Jizyah* is a

Head tax imposed by Islam on all non-Muslims [Dhimmis] living under the protection of an Islamic government.

This led to the necessity of creating a procedure for how the Muslims were to deal with large populations of *Dhimmis*.

The Pact of 'Umar was reportedly a treaty between 'Umar, the second "Rightly Guided" Caliph, and the conquered Christians of Syria, circa 637. And although Jews were not specifically mentioned in the *Pact*, it was nevertheless generally considered a model for how Muslims were to deal with both Jewish and Christian populations. One can find various versions of this *Pact*. The version used here is found in the *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*.

Ibn Kathir wrote about *The Pact of 'Umar* in a section titled *Paying Jizyah is a Sign of Kufr [disbelief] and Disgrace*, which was part of Ibn Kathir's explanation of the meaning of Chapter 9, Verse 29 of the Koran. This verse consists of Allah's command to the Muslims to fight against the Jews and Christians

until they pay the Jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.

Ibn Kathir said that because of this,

Muslims are not allowed to honor the people of Dhimmah or elevate them above Muslims, for they are miserable, disgraced and humiliated.

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 4, p. 406

Ibn Kathir then quoted Muhammad:

Do not initiate the Salam [greeting] to the Jews and Christians, and if you meet any of them in a road, force them to its narrowest alley.

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 4, p. 406

With this as an introduction, Ibn Kathir then wrote the following about *The Pact of 'Umar*:

The Pact of 'Umar

This is why the Leader of the faithful 'Umar bin Al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, demanded his well-known conditions be met by the Christians, these conditions that ensured their continued humiliation, degradation and disgrace.

The scholars of Hadith narrated from 'Abdur-Rahman bin Ghanm Al-Ash'ari that he said, "I recorded for 'Umar bin Al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, the terms of the treaty of peace he conducted with the Christians of Ash-Sham [Syria]:

'In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. This is a document to the servant of Allah 'Umar, the Leader of the faithful, from the Christians of such and such city. When you (Muslims) came to us we requested safety for ourselves, children, property and followers of our religion.

We made a condition on ourselves that we will neither erect in our areas a monastery, church, or a sanctuary for a monk, nor restore any place of worship that needs restoration nor use any of them for the purpose of enmity against Muslims. We will not prevent any Muslim from resting in our churches whether they come by day or night, and we will open the doors [of our houses of worship] for the wayfarer and passerby. Those Muslims who come as guests, will enjoy boarding and food for three days.

We will not allow a spy against Muslims into our churches and homes or hide deceit [or betrayal] against Muslims.

We will not teach our children the Qur'an, publicize practices of Shirk, invite anyone to Shirk or prevent any of our fellows from embracing Islam, if they choose to do so.

We will respect Muslims, move from the places we sit in if they choose to sit in them. We will not imitate their clothing, caps, turbans, sandals, hairstyles, speech, nicknames and title names, or ride on saddles, hang swords on the shoulders, collect weapons of any kind or carry these weapons. We will not encrypt our stamps in Arabic, or sell liquor.

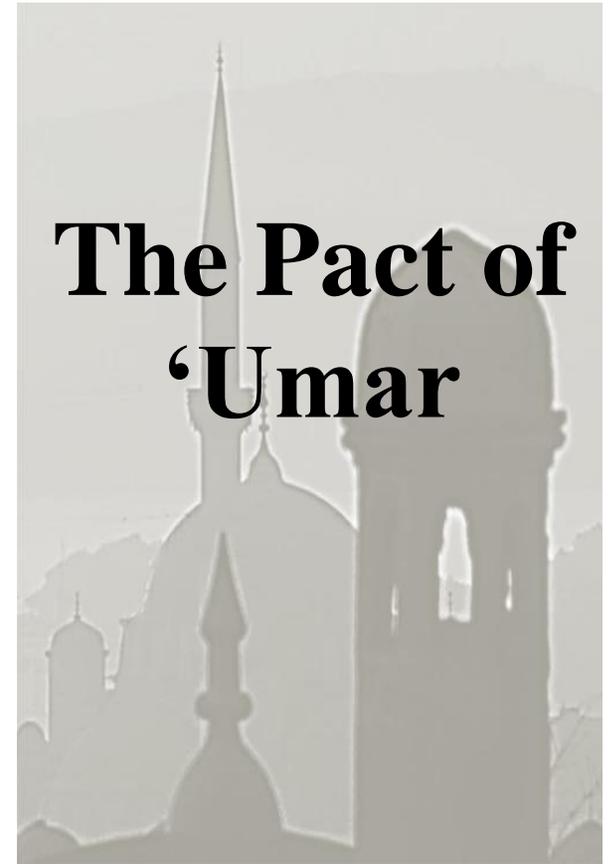
We will have the front of our hair cut, wear our customary clothes wherever we are, wear belts around our waist, refrain from erecting crosses on the outside of our churches and demonstrating them and our books in public in Muslim fairways and markets. We will not sound the bells in our churches, except discretely, or raise our voices while reciting our holy books inside our churches in the presence of Muslims, nor raise our voices [with prayer] at our funerals, or light torches in funeral processions in the fairways of Muslims, or their markets.

We will not bury our dead next to Muslim dead, or buy servants who were captured by Muslims. We will be guides for Muslims and refrain from breaching their privacy in their homes.'

When I gave this document to 'Umar, he added to it, "We will not beat any Muslim. These are the conditions that we set against ourselves and followers of our religion in return for safety and protection. If we break any of these promises that we set for your benefit against ourselves, then our Dhimmah (promise of protection) is broken and you are allowed to do with us what you are allowed of people of defiance and rebellion."

So the message of *The Pact of 'Umar* to Jews and Christians is that if they do not become subservient to, and allow themselves to be disgraced and humiliated by Muslims, then the Jews and Christians are considered defiant and rebellious and can be dealt with accordingly by the Muslims.

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Part of a series on Islam

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