

THE PACT OF ʿUMAR (SEVENTH CENTURY?)

ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Ghanam¹ related the following: When ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb—may Allah be pleased with him—made peace with the Christian inhabitants of Syria, we wrote him the following.

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Beneficent.

This letter is addressed to Allah's servant ʿUmar, the Commander of the Faithful, by the Christians of such-and-such city. When you advanced against us, we asked you for a guarantee of protection for our persons, our offspring, our property, and the people of our sect, and we have taken upon ourselves the following obligations toward you, namely:

We shall not build in our cities or in their vicinity any new monasteries, churches, hermitages, or monks' cells. We shall not restore, by night or by day, any of them that have fallen into ruin or which are located in the Muslims' quarters.

We shall keep our gates wide open for passersby and travelers. We shall provide three days' food and lodging to any Muslims who pass our way.

We shall not shelter any spy in our churches or in our homes, nor shall we hide him from the Muslims.

We shall not teach our children the Koran.

We shall not hold public religious ceremonies. We shall not seek to proselytize anyone. We shall not prevent any of our kin from embracing Islam if they so desire.

We shall show deference to the Muslims and shall rise from our seats when they wish to sit down.

We shall not attempt to resemble the Muslims in any way with regard to their dress, as for example, with the *qalansuwa*,² the turban,³ sandals, or parting the hair (in the Arab fashion). We shall not speak as they do, nor shall we adopt their *kunyas*.⁴

We shall not ride on saddles.

¹ He died in 697.

² The *qalansuwa* was a conical cap. See Reinhart Dozy, *Dictionnaire détaillé des noms des vêtements chez les Arabes* (Amsterdam, 1845), pp. 365-71.

³ The turban (Ar., *ʿimāma*) came to be considered the "crown of the Arabs" (Ar., *tāj al-ʿarab*) and the "badge of Islam" (Ar., *simā al-Islām*). See Reinhart Dozy, *Dictionnaire des vêtements*, pp. 305-11; and W. Björkman, "Turban," *EI*¹ 4: 885-93.

⁴ The Arabic byname, formed with *abū* (father of, or possessor of).

We shall not wear swords or bear weapons of any kind, or ever carry them with us.

We shall not engrave our signets in Arabic.

We shall not sell wines.

We shall clip the forelocks of our head.

We shall always adorn ourselves in our traditional fashion. We shall bind the *zunnār*⁵ around our waists.

We shall not display our crosses or our books anywhere in the Muslims' thoroughfares or in their marketplaces. We shall only beat our clappers in our churches very quietly. We shall not raise our voices when reciting the service in our churches, nor when in the presence of Muslims. Neither shall we raise our voices in our funeral processions.

We shall not display lights in any of the Muslim thoroughfares or in their marketplaces.

We shall not come near them with our funeral processions.

We shall not take any of the slaves that have been allotted to the Muslims.

We shall not build our homes higher than theirs.

(When I brought the letter to ʿUmar—may Allah be pleased with him—he added the clause “We shall not strike any Muslim.”)

We accept these conditions for ourselves and for the members of our sect, in return for which we are to be given a guarantee of security. Should we violate in any way these conditions which we have accepted and for which we stand security, then there shall be no covenant of protection for us, and we shall be liable to the penalties for rebelliousness and sedition.

Then ʿUmar—may Allah be pleased with him—wrote: “Sign what they have requested, but add two clauses that will also be binding upon them; namely, they shall not buy anyone who has been taken prisoner by the Muslims, and that anyone who deliberately strikes a Muslim will forfeit the protection of this pact.”

Translated from al-Ṭurṭūshī,
Sirāj al-Mulūk (Cairo, 1289/1872), pp. 229–30.

⁵ A kind of belt. See Dozy, *Dictionnaire des vêtements*, pp. 196–98.