Pact of Umar, 7th Century

**(The Status of Non-Muslims Under Muslim Rule)**

*After the rapid expansion of the Muslim dominion in the 7th century, Muslims leaders were required to work out a way of dealing with Non-Muslims, who remained in the majority in many areas for centuries. The solution was to develop the notion of the "dhimma", or "protected person". The Dhimmi were required to pay an extra tax, but usually they were left alone. This compares well with the treatment meted out to non-Christians in Christian Europe. The Pact of Umar is supposed to have been the peace accord offered by the Caliph Umar to the Christians of Syria, a "pact" which formed the patter of later interaction.*

In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate. This is a letter to the servant of God Umar Commander of the Faithful, from the Christians of such-and-such a city. When you came against us, we asked you for safe-conduct (aman) for ourselves, our descendants, our property, and the people of our community, and we undertook the following obligations toward you:

We shall not build, in our cities or in their neighborhood, new monasteries, Churches, convents, or monks' cells, nor shall we repair, by day or by night, such of them as fall in ruins or are situated in the quarters of the Muslims.

We shall give board and lodging to all Muslims who pass our way for three days.

We shall not give shelter in our churches or in our dwellings to any spy, nor bide him from the Muslims.

We shall not teach the Qur'an to our children.

We shall not manifest our religion publicly nor convert anyone to it. We shall not prevent any of our kin from entering Islam if they wish it.

We shall show respect toward the Muslims, and we shall rise from our seats when they wish to sit.

We shall not seek to resemble the Muslims by imitating any of their garments...

We shall not mount on saddles, nor shall we have swords nor bear any kind of arms nor carry them on our- persons.

We shall not engrave Arabic inscriptions on our seals.

We shall always dress in the same way wherever we may be...

We shall not display our crosses or our books in the roads or markets of the Muslims... We shall not bury our dead near the Muslims.

We shall not build houses overtopping the houses of the Muslims.

(When I brought the letter to Umar, may God be pleased with him, he added, "We shall not strike a Muslim.")

We accept these conditions for ourselves and for the people of our community, and in return we receive safe-conduct.

from Al-Turtushi, *Siraj al-Muluk*, pp. 229-230.

QUESTIONS:

1) What was life like under Muslim rule for non-Muslims? Can we describe this as tolerance, why/why not?

2) Does it appear the Muslims conquerors are trying to convert the population to Islam? Why/why not?

3) Which rule seems most unfair to the local non-Muslims? Why?

4) Why might these rules push you to convert to Islam?