

الدَّرَايَةُ :

# *Ad-Dirāyah*

International Journal of Islamic Studies (DIJIS)  
Vol. 8 No.1 July, 2017 | ISSN: 2350-1987

Special Edition from the 1st Annual International  
Conference, 2016

A Publication of the Department of Islamic Studies,  
Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nasarawa State,  
Nigeria

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Department of Islamic Studies, Nasarawa State University,  
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The articles in this publication examine many topical issues and cover quite a variety of areas which include Islamic law, Jurisprudence, Humanities and others that contribute to the growth of Islamic Studies as an academic discipline.

The articles are informative and educative. The contributors are distinguished, versed and authoritative in the respective areas they have written on. They are also drawn from various Universities across Nigeria.

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**Bank Details:**

Ad-Dirāyah International Journal of Islamic Studies (DIJIS);  
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## **AHL ADH-DHIMMAH UNDER UMAYYAD AND ABBASID CALIPHATES**

**Dr. Kazeem Adekunle Adegoke**

### **Abstract**

This paper is an attempt to study the affairs of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* (non-Muslims) in the Islamic State under Umayyad and Abbasid period of Islam. Personality of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* in an Islamic state are highlighted, as well as their status in the earlier period of Islam from the historical perspective. It also underlines the rights and status of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* during the Umayyad and Abbasid period of Islam with some checkmates on their rights. The paper concludes with findings and suggestions for the peaceful co-existence of Muslims and non-Muslims in a multi-religious community.

### **1.0 Introduction**

Several non-Muslims (*Ahl Adh-Dhimmah*) became the subjects of the Islamic states as a result of the spread of Islam beyond Arabian peninsula in the earlier seventh century of Christian era. By this, the then Islamic state did not inhabit the only Muslim subjects, but as well as other non-Muslim subjects of other faiths ranging from the adherents of the previous revealed faiths such as Judaism (Jewish religion), Christianity, Magians (*Majūs*) and Sabians (*Sabi<sup>c</sup>ūn*) and non-revealed faiths which comprises various forms of polytheistic belief (*Abdatu'l – Awthān*). Since the management of an ideal Islamic state is not based on racial subjugation, various people from several walks of life are eligible to reside therein as peaceful subjects, irrespective of their faith and nationality, and they automatically deserve the rights of protection of their personality, property and religion.<sup>1</sup> This administrative policy of an Islamic state was culled out from the non-interference policy of the Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.) in the religious affairs of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* in the first Islamic state of Madinah in the earlier seventh century of Christian era. It was



this policy that was later adopted by the rightly-guided caliphs (*Khulafā'ur-Rāshidīn*), Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs during their period of caliphate.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this administrative policy of the treatment of *Ahl Adh-Dhimma* (non-Muslims) in an Islamic state, several Jews, Christianity and Magians preferred residing under the hegemony of Islamic state to residing under the governance of Roman, Greek and Persian emperors respectively in the tenth century of Christian era despite the fact that they belonged to the same faith and belief.<sup>3</sup> It is on this line that the study decides to look into the affairs of *Ahl Adh-Dhimma* (non-Muslims) during the period of Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates between later part of seventh century and thirteen century of Christian era, 661-1258C.E to be precise.

## 2.0 Who are the *Ahl Adh-Dhimma*?

The term "*Dhimma*" literary means pledge (*Ahd*), guarantee (*Damān*) and safety (*Amān*). Technically, it means protection, care, custody, covenant of protection or compact.<sup>4</sup> The term "*Dhimma*" is use to designate the sort of contract and guaranteed protection through which the Islamic state accords hospitality and welfare to the members of non-Islamic religions on the condition of their acknowledging the governance of an Islamic state. The people of other religious faith enjoying the *Dhimma*'s contract of protection and safety are popularly referring to as *Dhimmiyyūn* or *Ahl Adh-Dhimma*. *Ahl Adh-Dhimma* can be bestly described as a free non-Muslim subjects living or residing in an Islamic state who in return paying the capital tax called "*Jizyah*" for the welfare, protection and safety they enjoy in the state.<sup>5</sup> Thus, they are members and citizens of an Islamic state known as *Jinsiyyah al-Islāmiyyah* which is equivalent to the modern and contemporary nationality given to people through which they acquire their rights as nationalists of a state and liable to responsibilities towards such a state.<sup>6</sup> *Ahl Adh-Dhimma* are also known as *Mu'ahadūn* (contractees) since they are granted citizenship of an Islamic state by the contract made by them with the state.



The *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* could be classified into three categories based on their status, condition and the circumstances surrounding their residing or living in an Islamic state. They are as follows:

## 2.1 *Dhimmī*

The *Dhimmī* are the non-Muslims residing in an Islamic state under a treaty or covenant or contract with the government of the Islamic state on a mutual agreement that the state must guarantee their security, safety and protection of their life, property and religion. They would also pay the annual tribute called *Jizyah* for the service and security they enjoy under the governance of the Islamic state. This is the reason why they are referring to as *Ahl al-Mu'ahidah* which means contractee. The *Dhimmī* status is primarily given to the members of the recognized people of the book *Ahl al-Kitāb* who are the Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians since there is no single instance of the Prophet receiving *Jizyah* from any non-Muslims. This is the view of Shafii School of Thought. But the schools of thought of Ḥanafī, Malikī and Ḥanbalī argue that Qur'anic injunction in the twenty-ninth verse of *Sūrah at-Tawbah*<sup>7</sup> does not exclude the idolators *Ahl al-Awthan* as there is no discrimination against the non-Muslims who do not belong to the people of the book, *Ahl al-Kitāb*. Ḥanafī added that the only idolators in the Arabian peninsula should not be given *Dhimmī* status.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2 *Maghlūb*

These are the conquered or defeated group of non-Muslims after their engagement in war or battle with an Islamic state. They automatically become the *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* who will pay the annual tribute of *Jizyah* into the purse of the Islamic state in lieu of the protection of their lives, property, honour and places of worship. Thus, they would not be treated as a conquered in the hand of his conqueror as they could not be subjected to undue harassment and harsh treatment. Their faith, irrespective of their



religion, shall not be tampered with since they are immuned from the state interference.<sup>9</sup> This is the reason why the Prophet (S.A.W) said:

If you fight a people and overpower them, and they agree to pay a fixed indemnity (*Jizyah*) or land revenue (*Kharaj*) to you in order to save their lives and those of their progenies, then do not take a *dirham* more than the fixed amount, because that will not be valid.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.3 *Musta'mīn*

These are the non-Muslims in an Islamic state who are going to stay for a short period of time. They may be an ambassador or a consulate or a tourist from a non-Muslim country. They may also be a foreigner or temporary sojourner or resident aliens opted voluntarily to live in an Islamic state or be rented the right of residing in an Islamic state for a certain period of time. This kind of non-Muslims has to enter into a treaty with an Islamic state to maintain peace and abide himself or herself with the constitution of Islamic state. Their life, property, honour and faith is well protected under the treaty protection known as '*Amān*'. The annual tribute of *Jizyah* or land tax of *Kharaj* are not levied on the *Musta'mīn* since their stay in an Islamic state is temporary.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.0 *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* in Historical Perspective

Prophet Muhammad's (S.A.W.) first duty after *Hijrah* in 622C.E. as soon as he got to Madinah, was to conclude a treaty with the Jewish community of Madinah, and he established an Islamic state running with a new formulating constitution. This treaty and Madinah constitution aimed at unifying the whole people residing in Madinah as a single community irrespective of their professing faith. It was a form of confederal state as the new established Islamic state was made up of the multiplicity of the people of various groups, tribes and faiths. Thus it embraced the category of people who believed in the prophethood and spiritual guidance of Prophet Muhammad and those people who were only willing to accept his authority as a political head.<sup>12</sup> During the



expansion of Islam from Madinah to its neighbouring towns, Prophet Muhammad concluded treaties of submission and protection with the Jewish communities of other localities outside Madinah such as Khaybar and with the Christian communities such as Najrān and Dhumah al-Jandal. The first treaty entered by the Prophet Muhammad with the *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* (non-Muslims) in Madinah was the treaty between him and the Jewish communities of Madinah in which he guaranteed them the security and protection of their life without any form of religious intolerance and oppression against them. In the same way, he concluded a treaty with another fold of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* Christians of Najrān and its environs. It should be noted that Najrān was the biggest centre of Christianity in Arabia district of Northern Yemen in which there was a large cathedral which the Arabian Christians regarded as their sanctuary and sacred place.<sup>13</sup> The contract of *Dhimmah* of the non-Islamic religious adherents commenced during the later period of the Prophet in Madinah when most of the polytheist Arab tribes had been subjugated and converted to Islam. It was the time that the following revelation was revealed that the Prophet (S.A.W) started collecting the stipend known as *Jizyah* from the non-Muslims residing in an Islamic state for the welfare services they enjoy in the state<sup>14</sup> in response to the saying of Allah which goes thus:

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day. Not hold that forbidden which has been forbidden by Allah and this Apostle nor acknowledge the religion of truth, (even if they are, of the people of the book, until they pay *Jizyah* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, he started sending his companions to various localities of Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians that fall under the jurisdiction of Islamic empire in Madinah for the collection of the tax which was annual stipend or tribute (*Jizyah*). Initially, the status of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* was accorded only to Jews and Christians, later the Zoroastrians (*Majūs*) was included as they were later recognized as a member of people of the book *Ahl al-Kitab*.<sup>16</sup>



These limited members of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* enjoyed various rights, benefits and security under the Islamic state under the able leadership of Prophet Muhammad, a kind of status which are never accorded to them under the administration and jurisdiction of any other worldly religions. The prophet (S.A.W) said:<sup>17</sup>

whoever hurts a Dhimmī, I am his adversary, and I shall be an adversary to him on the day of resurrection.

He also said:

He who hurt a Dhimmī hurts me, and he who hurts me annoys Allah.<sup>18</sup>

The Prophets (S.A.W) also used to receive the delegation of non-Muslims ruler under the Islamic empire in the Madinah mosque from time to time. There was a time when a delegation was sent to the Prophet (S.A.W) from the Najrān Christians and he received them inside the mosque. After their discussion with Prophet (S.A.W), their time for their service came, they stood up to observe it and the Muslims wanted to stop them from doing so in the mosque but the Prophet (S.A.W) told the Muslims to allow them doing their service.<sup>19</sup> The same kind of benevolent was also accorded to the delegation of Abbysinia Christians whom the Prophet received and arranged for their stay in the mosque with honouring hospitality and respectable treatment.<sup>20</sup> He also used to go into religious discuss and dialogues with the non-Muslims through which he listened attentively to their arguments respectfully, gently and with courtesy. He used to reply to their religious assertion without offending their feeling. Such are the inter-personal relationship between the Prophet (S.A.W) and the non-Muslims in the Islamic state to the extent that the Prophet (S.A.W) used to send them gifts and receive gifts from them.<sup>21</sup>

The four rightly-guided Caliphs (*Khulafā' ar-Rashīdīn*) who ruled the Islamic empire after the death of the Prophet (S.A.W) ruled on the same lines and maintained the policy of welfarism to the members of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah*.<sup>22</sup>



#### 4.0 Umayyad Caliphate and the *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah*

Umayyad Caliphate came into power in Islamic power in 661C.E. with the ascension of Mu'āwiyah Ibn Abu Ṣufyān to the Caliphate office as a Monarch. He transformed the Islamic republic inaugurated by the four rightly-guided Caliphs of Islam into a monarchy by establishing Sufyanid dynasty which later ushered in Marwanid dynasty in 683C.E. Umayyad Caliphate fell between 661 and 750C.E. with the capital in Damascus which was previously Jews and Christian dominated part of Hijaz. Under Umayyad caliphate, the Arabs maintained their aristocracy and the non-Arab Muslims, though theoretically equal but ranked second to the Arab, while the *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* were the lower class.<sup>23</sup> Despite the lower class of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* under Umayyad, they enjoyed tolerance and freedom to a degree that was unparalleled in the political heritage of the world history. They were given the right to practice their religious rituals and keep their houses of worship. They are allowed to build their houses of worship in their self-determined area under the Islamic empire. It was reported that a Buwayhid ruler, Adūd ad-Dawlah, gave permission to his Christian minister Nasr ibn Harūn to build new Churches for the Christians in his domain.<sup>24</sup> Muztar asserted that there were construction of new Churches in Syria and Baghdad, the seat of Umayyad Caliphate and a citadel of learning in which various scholars of repute in the various fields of Islamic sciences lived. The first Umayyad Caliph, Mu'āwiyah was so much generous to the Christians that he even re-built their house of worship destroyed by the earthquake in a town called Edessa. The *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* were allowed to celebrate their religious festivals such as displaying of their crosses and their religious identification during their festivity period.<sup>25</sup> They were also allowed to keep their properties and conquered land in their possession, this is the reason why the profession of agriculture was left for the *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah*, as Arab Muslims considered it below their dignity to engage in such a profession. They were only required to pay *Kharaj*, the land possession tax just as the Muslims have to pay the same tax.<sup>26</sup>



One aspect of the religious tolerance extended to the members of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* during the Umayyad Caliphate was the selection of the most capable and reliable among them to some important offices in the Islamic empire without looking at their religious creeds. Mu'awiyyah (661-680) appointed a Christian named Ibn Uthāl as his physician and a financial administrator of a province. He also appointed al-Akhtal, a celebrated Christian poet who was a grandson of the patriarch Mansur ibn Sarjun in Syria to be the chief poet laureate and chief entertainer of the Caliph's palace.<sup>27</sup> He also appointed another Christian named Sergeant as one of his secretaries. Marwan Ibn Hamām, (683-685) the fourth Umayyad Caliph, Marwān Ibn Ḥakām appointed Athanaseus al-Qibtī and Isaac al-Qibtī to some important post in the administration in Egypt and they were later promoted to the high post of the Public Treasury Officers. During the time of the fifth Caliph or Umayyad, Abdul Mālik Ibn Marwān (685-705), he re-appointed Isaac Al-Qibtī as a tutor of his younger brother, Abdu'l-'Azīz who became the governor of Egypt.<sup>28</sup>

### 5.0 Abbasid Caliphate and *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah*

Abbasid Caliphate in the Islamic empire fell between the year 750 and 1258 C.E. with the capital in Baghdad, which was the homeland of Iraqis and Persians who were previously *Majūs* and *Sabi'ūn*. This caliphate was a dynasty as it appeared monarchical in its political nature. For more than five centuries, Abbasid period wielded greater authority than even the Persian and the Roman aristocracy as it occupied a very significant place in the history of Islam. During the period, the Arabs were not unduly favoured to monopolize the political office in the empire. The aristocracy previously given to the Arabs was dropped as they did not enjoy any special privilege of a ruling race. The door of the political office was thrown open to accommodate any citizen under the caliphate on merit. As a result of this, any talented and professional citizen, Arab or non-Arab, Muslim or non-Muslim could rise to the high office in the Abbasid administration.<sup>29</sup>



Thus, *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* such as Jews and Christians were endowed with the political office and a wide measure of religious tolerance under the caliphate. George Bachtista was a Christian physician of the Abbasid Caliph, Abu Ja'fār Al-Manşūr (754-775) and was held in great honour and esteem till his death. Ma'mūn's tolerance of other religions was large-hearted. In 831 C.E., he exalted the status of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* in the state by appointing them to administer important offices and setting up a Council of State composed of the representatives of all communities to advise and assist the Caliph in the state affairs.<sup>30</sup> Harūn Ar-Rashīd (780-809) appointed a Christian, John Maswah as director of public instruction, and all the schools and training centers were placed under his charge. This Caliph did never consider to which country a learned person belonged nor his faith and belief, but only his excellence in the field of learning. Salmafah Ibn Banān was another Christian physician of Caliph Mu'tasim (833-742) and was held in esteem that he was ordered to be buried in the royal fashion according to the burial rite of his religion. Bachtisu Ibn Jibrīl (Gabriel) was also the personal Christian physician of Caliph Mutawākkil (847-861) and was also held in high esteem in the palace of Caliph. Caliph al-Mu'tadid (892-902) had a Christian as head of the war office while Caliph al-Mu'taqqī (940-944) had a Christian minister who held high official post in the Islamic empire.<sup>31</sup> Abbasid Caliphate gave a recognition to the Christian and Jewish Patriarchs or monks as official head of all Christians and Jewish in the empire and received their investiture from the reigning Caliph. Similarly, this kind of post generosity of the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphate was extended to other members of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah*, one of *Ṣabi'ūn* named Ibrāhīm Ibn Bilāl was appointed to a high post in the Islamic empire. The Fatimid Caliph, Azīz Ibn al-Mu'izz (975-996) was very much liberal towards the *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* in Egypt. He appointed a Christian, 'Isā Ibn Nastūr and a Jew, Masarah as administrator and minister in his royal court. He held the Christian patriarch, Ibrāhīm in high esteem

and permitted him to rebuild the ruined church of Saint Mercurial outside Fustat, a suburb town of Egypt.<sup>32</sup>

Abdul highlighted the right and tolerance given to the *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* during the both Umayyad and Abbasid periods of Islam which are as follows:<sup>33</sup>

- i. If they are attacked by an enemy, the Muslims should defend them.
- ii. They should not be dissuaded from their religion.
- iii. They should not be required to go personally to the tax collector to pay their annual tax of *Jizyah* and *Kharaj*.
- iv. Their life and property should be secured and protected.
- v. Their religious leader should not be removed from their position.
- vi. Their crosses, Churches, Synagogue, temple and any of their houses of worship should not be demolished.
- vii. They should not be forced to deviate from their religious beliefs and teachings.
- viii. They should not be coerced to participate in the military force of Islamic empire during the war.

According to Siddiqi, the rights and status of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* are briefly enumerated below thus:<sup>34</sup>

- i. Security of their life and property.
- ii. The promise of protection by the Caliph.
- iii. Freedom to practice their religious duties.
- iv. Freedom from being called upon to participate in the war (*Jihad*).
- v. Payment of mandatory annual tax of *Jizyah* and land tax of *Kharaj* if they possess land property.

#### **6.0 Checkmate Policy on the Rights of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* During the Umayyad and Abbasid Period.**

It should be rightly mention that there are Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs of Islam that do not accord the full right and freedom, especially on the issue of religion tolerance, imposed several



limitation on them. An Umayyad caliph, 'Abdu'l-Mālik introduced his own personal task on them in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, apart from the *Jizyah* and *Kharaj*.<sup>35</sup> The measure of Islamisation adopted by these caliphs in one way or the other turn out to be an indirect threat to the religious rights of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah*. The measure pointed out that *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* should neither build house of worship nor renovate the dilapidate one. They shall wear distinctive forms of dress with their belt tighten about their waist and they shall never display their crosses and scripture in the presence of Muslims.<sup>36</sup> The measure also included prohibition of adorning themselves with fine cloth, prohibition of wearing cut forelock and prohibition of house decoration. 'Umar Ibn 'Abdu'l-'Azīz (717-720), Yazīd Ibn 'Abdu'l-Mālik (720-724), Al-Mutawākkil (847-861) and Ḥakim Ibn Al-'Azīz in their neo-*Ijtihad* exercises reduced some of the traditional status of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* in an Islamic state and consequently rendered them to the second class citizens through the humiliated imposition and limitation which these caliphs imposed on them.<sup>37</sup> 'Umar Ibn 'Abdu'l-'Azīz pacified the *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* by permitting them to settle in the garrison cities in the Islamic state without impediment but with pay from *Baytu'l-Māl* which was accompanied by a severe policy towards them such as removing them from the administrations in which they had previously served so as not to tantamount to the imposition of Islam, the state religion, on them since several administrative posts in Islamic state demand that the such office holders should participate in the Islamic activities. The reason is that, the *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* may capitalize on this opportunity to sell out the Islamic state to the enemies of Islam out of their hatred and hypocritical attitude towards Islam.<sup>38</sup>

These checkmate policies of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* in some administrative posts during Umayyad and Abbasid period is never attributed to their religious difference *per se* but the inability of the state to determine their commitment, loyalty and patriotic love for the state governance.<sup>39</sup> Despite all these



limitations on *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah*, there are several evidences that they enjoyed social, economical, political and religious rights under the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates which they never experienced under the Roman and Persian and Greek empires who were their former master.<sup>40</sup>

## 7.0 Conclusion

The study examined the *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* under the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphate in which their history, classification and their status during this period of Islam were thoroughly discussed. The study reveals that:

- i. Islamic concept of *Dhimmah* is a paradigm of religious tolerance of Islam in the Islamic political and legal system in a multi-religious community.
- ii. Islamic state does not only accommodate Muslims but as well as non-Muslims of different beliefs.
- iii. Transformation of Islamic state from the caliphate system to dynasty by the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs does not totally affect the status of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* under the hegemony of Islam.
- iv. The limitation on the rights of *Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* were imposed by some Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs out of genuine reason of freeing Muslims from their hypocritical attitude towards Islam.

Based on these contributions to the knowledge, the study recommends that:

- i. Contemporary Islamic or Muslim Community should not unnecessarily discriminate against the non-Muslim minorities in their domain as much as they live peacefully under the aegis of Islam.
- ii. Islamic or Muslim community should produce enough manpower for the delicate administrative posts instead of leaving such posts in the hands of non-Muslims who do not subscribe to the Islamic thought.

- iii. The kind treatment of non-Muslim minorities under the aegis of Islam should be adopted as a paradigm by the contemporary nations in their dealing with the minorities (religious or ethnic) in their communities.

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