

Royal Patent of Patronage for Carl Peters' Society for German Colonization (February 27, 1885)

Abstract

Colonial ruler and administrator Carl Peters (1856–1918) founded the Society for German Colonialization [Gesellschaft für deutsche Kolonisation] in March 1884. In November, after organizing an expedition to Zanzibar, he persuaded some tribal chiefs to enter into contracts written in German by signing them with the mark of a cross. After that, he demanded official protection for “his” territory, which became known as German East Africa, which included present-day Rwanda, Burundi, the continental portion of Tanzania, and a small part of Mozambique. Bismarck initially rejected his demand but eventually gave way, and Kaiser Wilhelm I signed a Royal Patent of Patronage—a kind of letter of safe-conduct, or *Schutzbrief*—in February 1885. In documents of this type, the definition of royal patronage was often quite vague, sometimes consisting of little more than the appointment of a consul, with or without a German gunboat stationed offshore.

Source

We, Wilhelm, by the grace of God, German Emperor and King of Prussia, declare and ordain the following:

According as the then chairman of the Society for German Colonization, Dr. Carl Peters, and our Chamberlain, Felix, Count Behr-Bandelin, have petitioned us for protection for the territorial acquisitions of the society in East Africa, west of the territory of the Sultan of Zanzibar, outside the authority of other powers; and according as the said Dr. Carl Peters in November and December of last year concluded treaties with the rulers of Usagara, M guru, Useguba, and Ukami, by which these territories were taken over by the Society for German Colonization with the right of sovereignty, and has petitioned me to place these territories under our authority; so do we confirm that we have taken over this authority and we have placed these territories [...] under our imperial protection.

Under the conditions that the aforesaid society remains a German society and that the directorate or other leaders of the organization, as well as their successors, remain citizens of the German Reich, we grant authorization to it for the exercise of all rights stemming out of the treaties, including legal justice for the natives and citizens of the Reich and other nations who may settle in the territories for business or other purposes, and we place it under the control of our government through this our Letter of Safe-Conduct, reserving further regulations and supplements.

In witness whereof this Letter of Safe-Conduct has been drawn up and attested with our imperial seal.

Given at Berlin, February 27, 1885.

Wilhelm
von Bismarck

Source of English translation: Louis L. Snyder, ed., *Documents of German History*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1958, p. 255.

Source of original German text: Johannes Hohlfeld, *Deutsche Reichsgeschichte in Dokumenten 1849–1926*, vol. 1. Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1927, pp. 186–87.

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