

<sup>2</sup>  
14. Imprisonment of wives and children of absconding debtors  
by Eschiva, Countess of Tiberias (ca. 1180).

The imprisonment (and torture) of defaulting debtors was common practice, see, e.g., p. (B II), above. The letter here tells about the imprisonment of the wives and <sup>1</sup>children of absconding debtors, who owed money to Eschiva (Echive), the countess of Tiberias and wife of the renowned Raymond III of Tripoli.<sup>1</sup>

One wonders for what services Jews could owe considerable sums to the countess so that they had to flee to Egypt in order to try to collect there funds for repayment. The most likely assumption is that the services were the same as those found so often as a source of disaster in the relations with the Muslim government, namely: tax farming, see Med. Soc. , II, pp. 361-363.

The letter is written in beautiful, clean Hebrew script and a vivid, pronouncedly vernacular Arabic, reminding the reader of the writer's contemporary Usāma b. Munqidh, except that it is far closer to the spoken language. The writer is the maternal uncle, and certainly also the father-in-law of the fugitive debtor.

TS 18 J 2, f. 10.<sup>2</sup>

In (your) name, oh Merci(ful).

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord etc." (Jeremiah 17:7).<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of these lines to my dear son, may God prolong his life, keep and take care of him, is to inform you <sup>about the extent of our</sup> ~~xxxxxxx~~ longing and yearning after you. May God bring us together soon in the happiest of circumstances.

Now, had we<sup>4</sup> known that you are able to forget your son and your wife and put them out of your heart, we would never have enabled you to travel. But we had your best interests in mind and thought you would return soon. Instead, you sit around in foreign places. What are your intentions? Who does not think of his wife and child? Have you seen anyone acting like yourself so that you should have been induced to act like him? Look at Šā'id, a foreigner<sup>5</sup> he writes in his letter - and people attest to its truth - that he is fasting most of the time hoping to collect the funds enabling him to extricate his wife and his child, but you, who know well the end of the matter<sup>6</sup>, remain cold in heart and mind.

Now, as soon as you have read these lines, expedite your return. God will not forsake you and them. The people<sup>7</sup> of Damascus, Tyre, and Acre exert themselves<sup>8</sup> for strangers. We really did not believe that it was necessary to write you all this. Come under all circumstances. When you are here, we might make promises to the Count and to the Lady, the ruler of Tiberias, pay them a "bribe" of (1)20 dinars<sup>9</sup> so that they set them free and you will refund them later what you owe them.

This harsh treatment was meted out to them only because you remained away so long. Even if you had traveled to India, you could have returned meanwhile. No doubt, the company of the Egyptians, and their food, drink, and music<sup>10</sup> are enjoyable to you. Did we not stipulate with you that you should not stay more than two months? What kept you so long? You never told us ~~what~~ exactly<sup>11</sup> what you

we were doing, nor did we receive any letter of yours giving us a satisfying report, or telling us how much you collected, but you left your wife and son imprisoned without paying attention. So please come immediately, and we two shall cooperate to get them out.

(As was often done, a note on the margin and top of the page recapitulates the subject matter).

God in his mercy will save them, even if I should be forced to (search) for you the countries.<sup>12</sup> Do not renounce hope, God will not forsake you. Most perfect greetings to you and your friends<sup>13</sup>.

"May the Lord give strength to his people, may the Lord bless his people with peace." (~~Jeremiah~~ Psalms 29:11).<sup>14</sup> And Peace.

Address:

To <sup>15</sup>Miṣr (Fustat), to Abu 'l-Ḥusayn b. Abu'l-Khayr al-'Akkāwī (native of Acre), may God keep him.

From his maternal uncle Zadok, son of R. ~~Abi~~ Nāmēr,<sup>16</sup> the member of the academy, may he rest in Eden.

Entrusted.<sup>167</sup>



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Raymond, who is referred in this letter, returned from Muslim captivity in 1173/1174, and Eschiva remained ruler over Tiberias until it was taken by Saladin in 1187. Thus the letter must have been written sometime in between these two dates. See R. Grousset, Histoire des Croisades, II, pp. 757, 771, 790; Kenneth M. Setton and Marshall W. Baldwin, A History of the Crusades, Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1969, pp. 561, 593, 611.

<sup>2</sup>Ed. S.D. Goitein, ~~Tarikh~~ Yerushalayim, 2/5 (Jerusalem, 1955), 60-62. Two misprints in the Arabic text are indicated below, but not the new insights in its understanding.

<sup>3</sup>An admonition to the fugitive to return without fear.

<sup>4</sup>"We" stands for "I" throughout the whole letter, the usual plural of modesty.

<sup>5</sup>A foreigner in Palestine, and not a native; he had therefore less reason to return.

<sup>6</sup>Namely, that his wife and child will perish in the prison. Ar. qad 'alimt min qūb al-khabar.

<sup>7</sup>Meaning the Jews.

<sup>8</sup>Ar. bit'aṣṣabū, emphasizing again, see n. 5, that the addressee must exert himself for his closest relatives at least as much as others do for strangers.

<sup>9</sup>Text: dīn' wa-'ishrīn, which cannot mean 1 dinar 20 qīrāṭs, since a mere journey to Egypt cost a multiple of this sum. With dīn' a new

line begins and I assume the writer skipped over the little word mi'a, 100. The actual payment due might have been something around 300 dinars, a reasonable sum to be paid by a tax farmer to the government, see ~~xxx~~ section B II, above.

<sup>10</sup>Ar. ~~la'bhūm~~ la'bhūm, added above the line. For the meaning "music" see p. , n. 1 (in A 39).

<sup>11</sup>Ar. mustawi for the more common sawā, or to be taken in its literal meaning "well cooked", "ripe", meaning : detailed information.

<sup>12</sup>A warning that the fugitive husband could not escape the <sup>and the</sup> vigility of the Jewish/government courts.

<sup>13</sup>In the printed text, l. 27, 'shrt' is to be corrected in 'shrth'.

<sup>14</sup>I do not remember such a conclusion from any other Geniza letter. Because of the incessant wars between Christians and Muslims, and between Muslims themselves, apocalyptic expectations were rampant in those days, see Med. Soc., III, ch. x.

<sup>16</sup>~~18~~ "Leopard", corresponding to Ar. Namir (see, e.g. B, II, 1, in the signature, above), but found also among Byzantine Jews of Greek tongue.

<sup>17</sup>~~16~~ The letter is entrusted to the carrier and the carrier to God. Ar. amāna mu'addā, often found in letters sent through private persons and not the commercial mail.

<sup>15</sup>In the printed text, verso, l. 1, the first 'ly is omitted.