

9. BOY OFFERED AS A COLLATERAL AGAINST A LOAN ON INTEREST
SOUGHT FOR THE RANSOM OF A GIRL KEPT CAPTIVE BY A CRUSADER IN NABLUS.

This letter must have been written at a time when Ascalon, Palestine, was in the hands of the Crusaders (1153-1187) and a Frank from Nablus could freely visit there. Three points are remarkable in this story:

1. Ransom for an adult person was 33 1/3 dinars, as is wellknown from literature and copiously attested to in the Geniza documents, see Med. Soc., I, p. 329. For this Jewish girl far more than 60 dinars were demanded, for 60 remained as debt, as our letter reports. She was perhaps very beautiful, and for this reason her brother hoped to obtain the ransom in Egypt, namely that a young man would take her as wife and pay the ransom as her bride price. Such possibilities are referred to in the Geniza.¹

2. Giving a child as a collateral for a debt is reported for Ascalon from Roman times.² A similar case, referring to Byzantium, is reported in a Geniza letter.³ But we should not assume that this was foreign, and not Muslim, practice. A woman appealing to the community ⁴on Fustat mentions as an every day occurrence that her children¹ were given as a pledge for a debt.⁴

3. We see that Jews writing Arabic lived peacefully in Ascalon under the Franks. There must have been there a considerable number of them, for otherwise the writer would not have emphasized their lack of generosity, but their small number and inability to help.