

<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 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 ~~xxxxxxx~~ about the extent of our longing and yearning after you. May God bring us together soon in the happiest of circumstances.