

## A Document of Acknowledgement for the Remaining Land Tax (Al-Kharaj) between Prince Khushqadam bin Abdullah and the Farmers of Tanamil in 842 AH/1438 CE

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### Abstract

*This study aims to investigate a rare type of debt document that was written in Arabic regarding farmers and one Mamluk prince, which sheds light on the characteristics of the feudal Mamluk system in Egypt. This study reveals the reasons that a written document was drafted regarding a land tax debt, Al-Kharj, between the farmers of Tanamil and a prince in Egypt. This led us to explore the method of drafting these documents between the parties as well as the writing style to ascertain the identity of the writer. Additionally, this study seeks to elucidate the reasons for the farmers' failure to fulfill their land tax obligations since they represent a sample of Egyptian farmers who had a specific relationship with feudal princes. This study employed a historical-analytical method, wherein historical information from the document was collected, linked to the works of historians from that era, and then compared and analyzed to meet the research objectives. The study concluded that the Mamluk prince made sure that his rights over the farmers were documented in writing to avoid any loss of information. Thus, writing method used was precise in order safeguard it from forgery. The identity of the writer of this type of document remains unknown. However, it appears that the farmers' debts were caused by the Mamluks. Moreover, the relationship between the farmers and the Mamluk prince was purely material and was not intended to assist agricultural development. Even farmers were forced to migrate to the cities.*

**Keywords:** *feudal system, historical document, farmers, Mamluks, Al-kharaj.*

### Introduction

Arabic historical documents, particularly those that have never been extensively studied or researched, are considered a significant primary source in historical studies. Among these documents is the Land Tax Acknowledgment document—the subject of this study—which has provided us with new information. Documents are typically deemed to be authentic when they are written in a natural manner that is free of personal biases or influence, unlike some historical writings. This document, which serves as proof of the debt owed by certain individuals, sheds light on the suffering of the farmers in Egypt brought about by the ruthless actions of the Mamluks against them. The farmers of Tanamil village were unable to fulfill their land tax obligations to one of the Mamluk princes. These farmers represent the struggles faced by Egyptian farmers and their dealings with the feudal princes.

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This document reveals the relationship between the feudal prince and the farmers and confirms the rights of the prince over them. This specific type of interaction between the two parties is unique and has never been explored. Therefore, this study aims to investigate several aspects, including the reasons behind the insistence of feudal princes on documenting the remaining land tax debts of farmers and the writer's approach in formulating appropriate phrases. Additionally, this study seeks to explore the identity of the writer responsible for handling such transactions and the reasons why farmers were unable to pay their imposed land tax as well the nature of the relationship between the farmers and the prince.

Previous studies on this topic are scarce, as most of them focused on the suffering of Egyptian farmers under the tyranny of the Mamluks in implementing the feudal system. No researcher has delved into this specific type of indebtedness or its formulation. Thus, this study stands out by highlighting the documentation practices used by the feudal Princes when farmers failed to pay their remaining land taxes. It reveals the difficult conditions faced by Egyptian farmers due to debts and other hardships as evidenced by the case of the farmers of Tanamil village.

### **Research Objectives**

This historical document is crucial as it revolves around two figures who played key roles in Egypt's feudal system: the feudal princes and the farmers. The main objective of this study is to seek answers to the following question: Why did the feudal prince document in writing the remaining Al-Kheraj debt of the farmers of Egypt? The primary research question has raised several pertinent inquiries, which are as follows:

1. Who was responsible for written documentation of the debts the farmers owed to the Mamluk princes?
2. What writing style was employed in the document of the remaining land tax debt owed to the princes by the farmers?
3. Why did some farmers in Egypt fail to fulfill their land tax obligations?
4. What was the relationship between the farmers in Egypt and the feudal princes of the Mamluks?

### **Previous Studies**

Several historians have written about the feudal system in Egypt, and their works have been beneficial in understanding the topic of land tax (Al-Kheraj) and the relationship between feudal princes and farmers. The following are some of these works:

1. Isma'il, Al-Bayoumi (1998). *Financial Systems in Egypt and Syria during the Mamluk Sultanate*. General Egyptian Book Organization.
2. Awda, Jawad (2018). "The Impact of Economic Reality on the Life of the Egyptian farmers during the Era of the Burji Mamluks (784/923 AH)." *Al-Diwaniyah: Al-Qadisiya Journal of Literature and Educational Sciences*.
3. Tarakhan, Ibrahim (1986). *Feudal Systems in the Middle East in the Middle Ages*. Arab Book Printing and Publishing House.
4. Magdi, Bahar (1999). *The Egyptian Village during the Era of the Mamluk Sultans*. General Egyptian Book Organization.

## **Research Methodology**

This study employed a scientific methodology that entailed the analysis of a historical document containing rare information. To answer the research questions, this study attempted to reconcile the contents of the document with the information contained in various Islamic historical books and relevant research on the subject.

### Overview

This study includes an Introduction, two main sections, and a Conclusion, as follows:

1. Analysis the document of the Land Tax (Al-Kheraj) Acknowledgment Remaining:
2. The factors that led to some farmers in Egypt failing to pay the land tax to some of the Mamluk princes.

1. Analysis the document of Land Tax (Al-Kheraj) Acknowledgment Remaining:

When researchers delve into past historical events, they often require multiple sources by which to form judgments on specific matters. Historical sources from Mamluk books are sometimes insufficient, which is why Arabic historical documents serve as the primary source of historical information that may be missing from the writings of contemporary historians. This document (Princeton University Library, 842 AH /1438 CE) serves as a prominent example of a document that provides information that cannot be found in Mamluk books (see Figure 1).

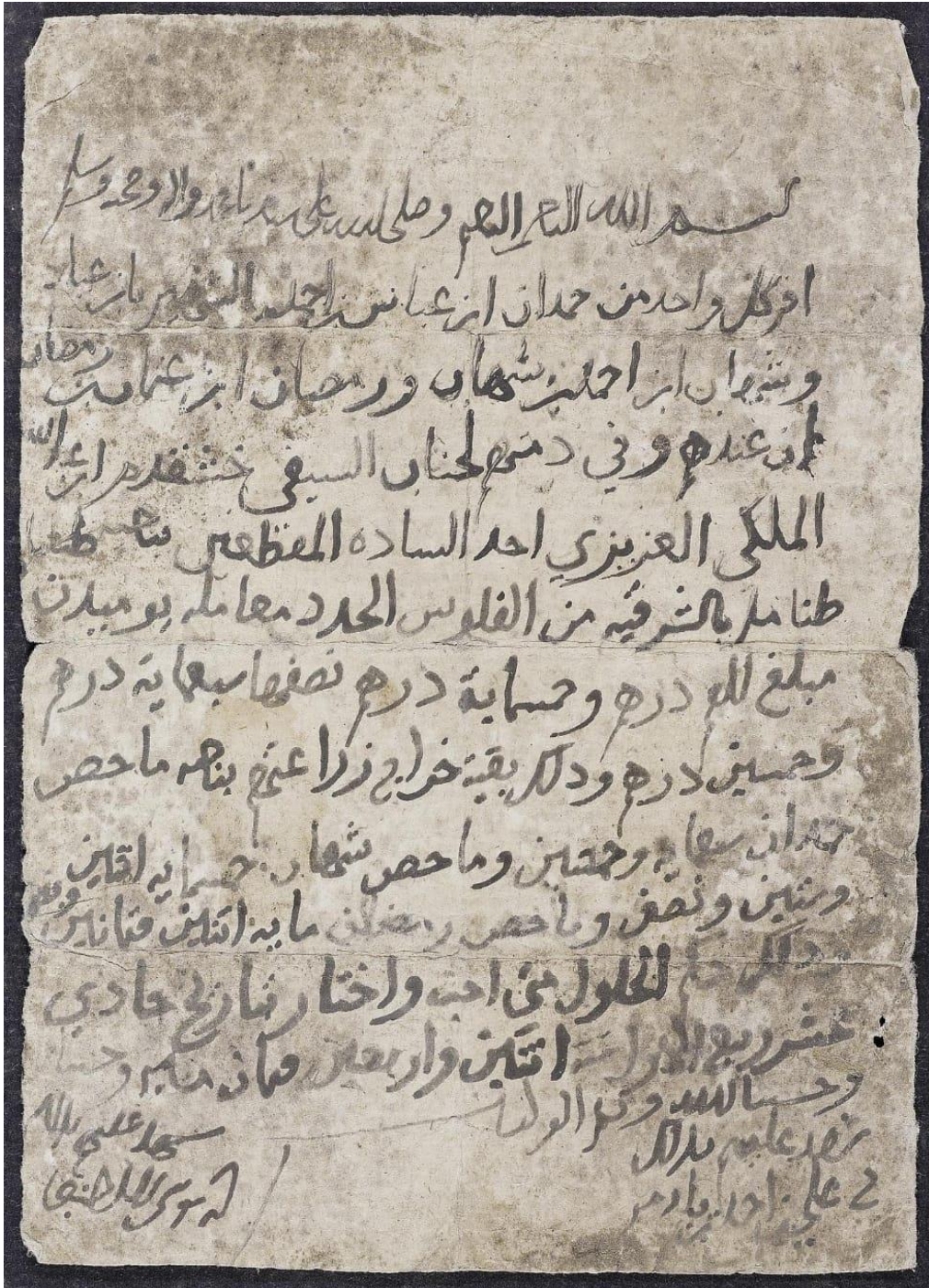


Figure (1)

Undoubtedly, the document reveals the deteriorating conditions of Egyptian farmers, who represented the weakest segment of society, particularly during the rule of the Circassian Mamluks. These poor conditions were a consequence of the Mamluks' strict implementation of the feudal system, which resulted in evident oppression. Due to the control exerted by the feudal princes, some farmers failed to fulfill their land tax obligations. The prevailing system was advantageous to the feudal princes, who maintained their allegiance to the ruling authority at that time through their services. The feudal system was like a fixed salary for a government employee and was obtained through specific lands in various regions of Egypt (Bahar, 1999).

This document confirms that a specified share of land tax was owed to the Mamluk prince Khushqadam bin Abdullah in the village of Tanamil This village had several

names, including Ta' Al-Naml in the early Islamic era, and it was mentioned by Ibn Mamati during the process of surveying the lands of Egypt as "Tanamil" in the Eastern region of the Al-Salahi survey (Ibn Mamati, 1934). Another name mentioned by Ibn Al-Ji'an during the Al-Nāşiri survey was Tunāman. This village had both an eastern and a western part.

Through the incident of the Coptic woman with the Abbasid caliph Al-Ma'mun (198 AH / 814 CE - 218 AH / 833 CE), it became clear that the village of Tanamil was fertile and thriving in agriculture. The evidence is that Al-Ma'mun ordered two thousand feddans for the lady without any of the taxes being decided upon (Al-Maqrīzī, 1997).

The total area of the village was 1575 acres, and it produced revenues of around 87 acres. All of these revenues were registered under the names of the feudal lords (Ibn Al-Ji'an, 1974). During that period, it was common for Egypt's land tax in the coastal region (Al-Wajh Al-Baḥrī) to be paid in currency, whereas in the inland region (Al-Qiblī), it was paid in yield (Al-Bayoumi, 1998).

It is worth mentioning that the document confirmed that the farmers of Tanamil acknowledged their remaining land tax debt to the feudal prince through a debt document established by the prince to secure his rights. If the farmers failed to fulfill the debt by a specified payment date, they would be punished (Al-Bayoumi, 1998). The document also revealed the individual debts of each farmer, the deadline for repayment, and other relevant details. The statements of debt contained the following information:

- Creditor's Name: The Mamluk prince, Khushqadam bin Abdullah.
- Debtors' Names: A group of farmers from the village of Tanamil, namely, Hamdan bin Abbas bin Ahmad, Shihab bin Ahmad bin Shihab, and Ramadan bin Uthman bin Ramadan.
- Reasons for the Debt: The debt was the remaining land tax debt owed by the three farmers who cultivated agricultural land within the jurisdiction of Tanamil village in the Eastern region.
- Type of Debt: The financial debt amounted to 1,500 dirhams, which was divided among the 3 farmers as follows: Hamdan bin Abbas owed half of the debt amount 750 dirhams, Shihab bin Ahmad owed 562.5 dirhams, and Ramadan bin Uthman owed 182.5 dirhams.
- Due Date for the Repayment of the Debt: 11th Rabi' Al-Awwal, 842 AH.

The previous information illustrates the fundamental importance of historical documents in showing how people wrote about their debt transactions among themselves during that period. Therefore, it became clear that there was writing of another kind between the Mamluk princes and the farmers about what remained of the farmers' the tax debt, which was documented in the administration of feudalism by, for example, the Diwan al-Jaysh (The Army Department) and Diwan al-Insha (The Writing Department). The Mamluk sources never made mention of it before, which makes this document unique in its subject matter.

Naturally, the writer took great care to ensure that the document was written clearly and explicitly to prevent any possible manipulation, forgery, or fraud, which was found to have occurred during the Circassian Mamluk era (Bahar, 1999 CE). The writer recorded every detail of the debt between the parties. The document began with customary Islamic phrases, such as "Basmala" (In the name of God) and "blessings upon the Prophet," followed by the full names of the three indebted farmers. The creditor's name, along with his multiple titles as the feudal prince, was mentioned as well as the name of his assigned land tax area. The writer documented the remaining amount of land tax debt owed by the farmers of Tanamil and specified the currency in circulation at the time (currency types could be replaced over time). The currency denoted was Al-folus Al-judoud, which was

minted during the reign of Sultan Al-Nasir Hasan bin Qalawun in the year 759 AH (Al-Qalqashandi, 1985; Muhamma, 1964).

The writer meticulously recorded the exact due date for the repayment of the debt, down to the day, month, and year. He also included religious phrases at the beginning and end of the document, concluding the document with the signature and testimony of two men—Ali bin Ahmad bin Fares and Musa, whose full name was not entirely clear. These witnesses might have been part of a specialized group that was responsible for witnessing and attesting to the ownership of agricultural lands and related disputes. These witnesses were known as Al-'odūl (meaning those qualified to give testimony), and they were responsible for authenticating transactions (Al-Nawiri, 2002).

In addition to the above details, this study sheds light on the diverse methods employed by writers to combat various forms of forgery (Al-Bayoumi, 1998) as follows:

1. The writer wrote the amount of 750 dirhams, using Arabic letters to prevent substitution or tampering.
2. It was also observed that the writers adopted another method to ensure precision in their writing by completing full lines and leaving no space between words to prevent any subsequent additions. If there was insufficient space at the end of a line, the word was placed on the following line. For example, the word “Tana” was written at the end of the fifth line and continued at the beginning of the next line, becoming “Tanamil.” Similarly, the word “waḥsbonā” appeared in the twelfth line, and the phrase was completed with the name of Allah in the following line as “waḥsbonā Allāh.”

However, it remains uncertain as to why five dirhams was deducted when collecting the total debts owed by the farmers for the benefit of the feudal lord, resulting in a total sum of 1,495 rather than 1,500 dirhams. Was this an error made by the writer when summing up each farmer’s debt, or could the deduction of five dirhams have represented the fee paid to the writer of the document for carrying out the task of writing the document between the two parties?

In the same context, the specific individual responsible for writing such a document cannot be definitively identified. It could have been the direct land tax writer, who was responsible for recording all taxes owed by farmers (Al-Bayoumi, 1998). Alternatively, it might have been one of the writers of the Al-urfī registrars who handled people’s affairs in their specialized offices near the Court of Justice. These writers had less experience and were of lower rank compared than the udūl registrars who assisted judges. Another possibility is one of the farmers of the village of Tanamil that undertook the writing of the document (Hana, 1977).

## 2. Why Egyptian Farmers Failed to Pay Land Taxes to Mamluk Princes:

The document reveals that a group of Egyptian farmers from the village of Tanamil faced difficulties in fulfilling their required land tax payments, which warrants an investigation into the key factors that led them to such a challenging situation. It also necessitates a closer examination of the prevailing feudal system in Egypt at the time and its full implementation by the Mamluks to maximize their benefits (Tarkhan, 1986).

The Mamluks considered themselves to be the rightful landowners and rulers of the land, which had once been owned by the people of Egypt and its farmers. However, under the laws of the Mamluk feudal system, the rights of the people were lost, and this transformation resulted in the impoverishment and hardship of farmers (Ashour, 1992). It is worth noting that the Mamluks were not the inventors of these feudal laws; these laws had already been implemented during the Ayyubid period (Bahar, 1999). Thus, the Mamluks perfected the implementation of the feudal system in reality, whether through voluntary compliance or coercion. Their state relied heavily on military power and required loyalty and obedience from both princes and soldiers. To enforce their policy of

subduing the princes through land taxes, they considered the land tax in Egypt as a salary or reward for the princes. Fortunately for the Mamluks, Egypt's fertile land allowed them to effectively apply their system, leading to their accumulation of wealth and resources. This is evident from the contents of the document, where Prince Khushqadam benefited from the allocated land tax. Most of the princes, on the other hand, showed little interest in managing land, leaving this responsibility to the farmers of Egypt, who considered the job as their livelihood and therefore felt compelled to work hard. They often leased a specific portion of the land and committed to paying annual tax to one of the princes who owned that specific feudal land (Awdah, 2018).

Despite the farmers' diligence in caring for the land and the benefits that the princes reaped from its taxation at that time, the farmers became an oppressed class in Egyptian society. They suffered deeply from the despotism and arrogance of the Mamluks. Nevertheless, they were hoping to encourage the Mamluks through their agricultural expertise. The primary goal of the Mamluks was to collect land tax, and so they gave little thought to the agricultural development of the lands or providing suitable farming conditions (Scholars of the French Expedition, 1978). Consequently, the Mamluks' continuous animosity and disrespect toward the farmers caused the latter to become disillusioned and distressed, with many abandoning their work. This led to the degradation of Egypt's agricultural lands and resulted in widespread ruin by the end of the Circassians Mamluk rule (Al-Maqrizi, W.D).

In line with the above, if we examine the relationship between the farmers and the feudal lords, we find that it was purely materialistic. The Mamluks sought to exploit Egypt's resources and the farmers' capabilities to the fullest. Consequently, they enacted numerous taxes against the farmers, and their manner of collection was often unjust (Ibn Iyas, W.D). The number of taxes increased beyond reason, reaching nearly 23 different taxes (Al-Maqrizi, W.D & Al-Bayoumi, 1998). Many of these taxes were unjustified, leading the Egyptian farmers to feel utterly exploited by the Mamluk authority.

The phenomenon of feudal lords leasing agricultural land to other individuals emerged during the reign of Sultan Al-Nasir Faraj bin Barquq (801 AH/1399 CE - 808 AH/1405 CE) and (808 AH/1405 CE - 815 AH/1412 CE) (Al-Maqrizi, 1997). Land leasing placed an additional burden on the farmers because it meant that they would have to pay higher rent. In some cases, no direct relationship existed between the feudal lord and the farmer, which forced farmers to have to borrow money when they were unable pay their debts. Consequently, some farmers had to sell their livestock or personal belongings to avoid penalties (Mahmoud, 2010) such as imprisonment or flogging. Moreover, the Mamluks rarely released farmers or criminals from imprisonment during periods of amnesty (Bahar, 1999), which further confirms their cruelty towards farmers.

This does not mean that the matter was limited to the imposition of taxes alone. The situation became even more difficult for farmers due to the increasing application of the land confiscation system, especially during the reign of Sultan Al-Malik Al-Zahir Barquq (784 AH/1382 CE - 790 AH/1388 CE) and his son Al-Nasir Faraj (Al-Maqrizi, 1997). The frequent upheavals among the Mamluks in their quest for power led to the multiplication of factions among them. Each Mamluk leader had a group of princes and soldiers under his command who fought against other groups, resulting in either their death, imprisonment, exile, or the confiscation of their land grants, which were then assigned to others (Ibn Taghri Bardi, W.D). This method of dealing with each other was natural for the Mamluks, as they were accustomed to the use of assassination to gain power (Ibn Iyas, W.D). Undoubtedly, the abundance of power struggles had a negative impact on societal conditions, such as the lives of the farmers, who suffered numerous confiscations and plundering. Not even their animals were spared (Ibn Hajar, 1969). Their livestock was crucial for their transportation and agricultural activities (Al-Maqrizi, 1997). As evidence of this injustice, Prince Yalbugha seized the horses of the farmers of the village of Dayrout, which they used to transport wheat (Ibn Hajar, 1969). The farmers

were also subject to raids by the Bedouins (Ibn Iyas, W.D). These are sufficient indications of the persecution experienced by the Egyptian farmers as well as their dire living conditions at the hands of the Circassian Mamluks (Awdah, 2018).

The competitive atmosphere among the Mamluks caused the feudal lords to focus only on collecting money from land taxes. The continuous coups and frequent changes in the decisions of the Mamluk authority led the Mamluks to neglect the development of their assigned land grants, fearing that they might lose them over time (Al-Zahabi, 1985). As a result, the burden of responsibility for the agricultural land and the tyranny of the princes fell solely on the farmers. Moreover, owing to the neglect of the Mamluks, the agricultural lands faced severe water shortages and the dams required constant repair after collapsing. This negatively affected the agricultural crops (Al-Asadi, 1986). For example, Alexandria was granted to Prince Fares Al-Din Aqta'i as a completely feudal land in the year 651 AH/1253 CE, but he failed to care for it (Al-Dhahabi, 1985).

As a result of the continuous oppression, the farmers of Egypt were forced to live an impoverished life, as their houses were made of mud and built on the trunks of trees, which confirms the frailty of their condition. At one point, the farmers were prevented from riding horses or possessing weapons, and anyone who violated such rules would be punished (Ibn Taghri Bardi, d.t.). This persecution befell them despite their importance as a group in revitalizing the economic situation. (Odeh, 2019).

In response to the continuous tyranny and hardships, the farmers of Egypt revolted against the Mamluks, despite their tragic circumstances. One of these uprisings occurred during the rule of Sultan Barquq in the year 796 AH/1394 CE, but they suffered significant losses during these confrontations due to the Mamluks' military superiority (Al-Maqrizi, 1997). Ultimately, the farmers abandoned their lands and moved towards the major cities (Al-Asadi, 1986), as they had faced numerous calamities that resulted in the death of many and the loss of their livestock. In addition, the sultans opposed their migration, ordering them to stay in the countryside after exerting pressure on the princes to prevent their repeated migration (Abdou, 1994). These facts indicate reflect a decline in Egypt's conditions, particularly in agriculture (Abdou,1994), which threatened the food security of Egyptian society during the Circassian Mamluk rule. Such circumstances can be attributed to the mismanagement of the feudal system, which nurtured the selfishness of those in power, who then became absorbed in their own interests, thereby eroding humanity from their consciences (Al-Sayrafi, 1973).

In conclusion, the Mamluk feudal system was unjustly applied to the farmers of Egypt, resulting in debt and hardships for farmers such as those of Tanamil. The incidents mentioned in the historical sources confirm the suffering of the farmers in Egypt, which corresponds to the dire situation described in the document regarding the three farmers from the village of Tanamil.

#### Document Index

The following summarizes the contents and physical quality of the document:

- Document Number: e584.
- Location of the Document: Princeton University Library, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series.
- Writing Material: Black ink.
- Material Written on: Possibly Egyptian paper commonly used during that period in Egypt.
- Language: Written in Arabic language, in a regular Arabic script not belonging to any of the famous Arabic calligraphic styles.
- Number of Lines: 15 lines.



- Document Dimensions: Approximately 51 × 16.5 cm.
- Document Condition: Good, but some words and letters have faded and are not clear.
- Document Subject: A document acknowledging the remaining debt of three farmers from Tanamil village to Prince feudal Khashkadam bin Abdullah.
- Date of Document Issuance: Before the eleventh of Rabi' Al-Awwal in the year eight hundred and forty-two Hijri.

#### Document Text

This is one of the Mamluk documents written in Arabic. Some vocabulary is difficult to accurately translate, such as the word "Hasbuna." In any case, the lines of the document have been translated in the order in which they were written and are aimed at reflecting the essence of the original document as closely as possible.

1. In the name of Allah the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, and peace be upon our master Muhammad and his family and companions.
2. acknowledged each one of Hamdan bin Abbas bin Ahmed famously known as Ibn Abbas
3. and Shihab bin Ahmad bin Shihab and Ramadan bin Uthman bin Ramadan
4. that they have and are in their custody of Janab Al-Saifi Khashkadam bin Abdullah
5. Al-Maliky Azizi one of the feudal gentlemen in the area of Tanamil.
6. Tanamil of the East with Al-folus Al-judoud treated that day.
7. the amount is one thousand and five hundred dirhams, half of which is seven hundred
8. fifty dirhams and that is the remainder of the tax that is due for the cultivated land assigned to them
9. Hamdan is seven hundred and fifty and Shihab is five hundred two
10. sixty and a half, and what pertains to Ramadan is one hundred and eighty-two and a half.
11. that is the rule of solutions when he likes and chooses the date of eleven
12. the tenth of Rabi` Al-Awwal in the year eight hundred and forty-two Hasbuna
13. for us Allah sufficeth, and He is the best disposer of affairs
14. Witnessed by Witnessed by:
15. Wrote it Ali bin Ahmad bin Fares Wrote it Mosa Al-L...

#### Document Text in the Arabic language

1. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد وآله وصحبه وسلم
2. أقرَّ كلُّ واحد من حمدان بن عباس بن أحمد الشهير بابن عباس
3. وشهاب بن أحمد بن شهاب ورمضان بن عثمان بن رمضان
4. أنَّ عندهم وفي ذمتهم لجناب السيفي خشقدم بن عبد الله
5. الملكي العزيزي أحد الساده المقطعين بناحية طنامل
6. طنامل بالشرقية من الفلوس الجدد معاملة يومين
7. مبلغ ألف درهم وخمسمئة درهم نصفها سبعمئة درهم

8. وخمسين درهم وذلك بقية خراج زراعتهم بناحية ما خص
9. حمدان سبعمئة وخمسين وما خص شهاب خمسمئة اثنين
10. وستين ونصف وما خص رمضان مئة اثنين وثمانين ونصف
11. وذلك حكم الحلول متى أحب واختار بتاريخ حادي
12. عشر ربيع الاول سنة اثنين وأربعين وثمانمئة وحسبنا
13. وحسبنا الله ونعم الوكيل
14. شهد عليهم بذلك شهد عليهم بذلك
15. ..كتبه علي بن أحمد بن فارس كتبه موسى الل

## Results

At the conclusion of the study, the following seven findings were reached:

1. Feudal Princes meticulously documented the remaining tax debts, Al-kharaj, owed by farmers to secure their rights and prevent any loss, and to take punitive actions against those who failed to fulfill their obligations.
2. The identity of the writer responsible for drafting the private debt document remains unclear, as it could have been someone from Tanamil village, the direct land tax writer, or another writer near the Court of Justice who handled people's affairs.
3. The writing style employed in the feudal transactions was clear enough to elucidate the rights of the debtors and prevent any ambiguity.
4. The writing method used for the Mamluk transactions was designed to prevent forgery and fraud through the manipulation of phrases. For example, the writer filled the entire space of each so that a manipulator would not be able to add in extra words. Moreover, the writer designated the exact amounts required of each farmer to ensure clarity and prevent the information from being tampered with.
5. The analysis of the writing style of the document revealed that forgery was prevalent in the dealings of people during the Mamluk era.
6. The Farmers of Tanamil village and others failed to fulfill some of their tax obligations due to the harsh conditions they endured under the implementation of the feudal system by the Mamluks in Egypt. Some of them were forced to migrate from their agricultural lands.
7. The relationship between the feudal princes and Egyptian farmers was based solely on material interests without any consideration for the future development of the agricultural lands.

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