Among the multifarious coin issues of the Mongol Empire, silver-washed copper dirhams with Chinese characters 不花 bu-hua and 貶 ke, struck at Bukhara in the 60-s of the 13th century, undoubtedly raise particular interest. These coins, known for a long time, have been described or mentioned in many publications; however, not all questions about them are clear yet.

1) Coins with Chinese characters 不花 bu-hua, 660 AH (fig. 1)

Obverse: in the centre of ornamental cartouche – Ᾱbdī É, sikkah / Buxārā ‘the coin of / Bukhara’. Marginal legend – issue data:

* Russia


2 Image source: ZENO.RU – Oriental Coins Database <www.zeno.ru>, no. 15222; weight 7.33 g, diameter 39.5 mm.

3 Here and elsewhere (including endnote references), the letter x is used for the Latin transcription of Arabic d [h] and Russian ‘x’ [kh].
duriba ḥāḍā al-dirham bi[‘l]-baldat al-fāxirah sanat sittīn wa sittami’ah ‘this dirham was struck at the Glorious City in year six hundred and sixty’.

**Reverse:** in the centre of ornamental cartouche – two Chinese characters 不 花 bu-hua. Marginal inscription as on the obverse.

Since Ch.M. Fraehn’s first publication\(^5\), all experts would agree that the Chinese characters bu-hua on the first coin mean nothing but a shortened version of the mint name ‘Bukhara’\(^6\). Ch.M. Fraehn, without further elucidation, generally defined this coin as follows: ‘This coin belongs to Alghu, son of Baydar\(^7\), a Chaghatayid khan from the time of Arīgh Buqa’s reign who, being in the moment more suitable than his brother Qubilai for the role of the Great Khan of the Mongols, and personally laying the claim on the Imperial reign, undertook this coinage’\(^8\). However, he even did not try to explain the

---

\(^4\) The reading of Arabic legends is given according to E.A. DAVIDOVIČ (op. cit., p. 12–13) with some additions and corrections by Dr. Vladimir N. Nastich (Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow).

\(^5\) CH.M. FRAEHN, op. cit., p. 423, descriptions 2 and 3.

\(^6\) Numerous Chinese written sources of the 13–14\(^{th}\) centuries contain the toponym Bukhara transcribed in a few different ways: among them, 不花剌 or 不華剌 (bu-hua-la), 不華 (bu-hua), 卜哈兒 (bu-ha-er), 蒲華 (pu-hua or bo-hua) can be found. The Middle Chinese reading of the legend 不花 is pəw-hua. It is worth noticing that one of the cited transcriptions, namely 不華 bu-hua, was used in Yuan Shi for the Mongol proper name Buqa, but no specific person virtually hiding then behind this name could have anything in common with the examined coinage.

\(^7\) P. D. BUELL (op. cit., p. 137, note 76) has inaccurately translated Fraehn’s Latin comment to no. 2 (see below, note 8): to him, the coin ‘was issued by the Čaγaday princes Aluγu and Baidar (our accentuation. – V.B., S.S.) in the name of the pretender Ariq-böke in 1261. Inscribed on the coin are the two Chinese characters Pu-hua, a transcription of Bukhara’.

\(^8\) ‘N. hic ad Alghu filium τυ Baidar (ΌΧΕΑΙ Α ΙΒ Α) Chanum Dschaghataidicum referendus ab eoque auctoritate τυ Arrigh-Buga, qui, quo tempore Kubilai frater supremum Mongholorum Chanatum auspicaturus erat, et ipse sibi hoc imperium vindicaverat, cusus esse censendus est’. – The authors express their sincere gratitude to Dr. Vladimir N. Nastich for the translation of Fraehn’s quotations from Latin into Russian and English.
possible reason for the appearance of Chinese characters on the coins struck by Alghu in Central Asia – the area so distant from China proper.

2) Coins with Chinese character 課 ke, 663 AH (fig. 2)

Obverse: in the centre of ornamental cartouche – Ḁb ḅm / Buxārā ‘the coin of / Bukhara’. In outer “petals” – the same word repeated 3 times: Ḃm al-mulk ‘the power / authority’ (probably a shortened version of the popular invocation ʿAllahu al-mulk ‘the power belongs to Allah’).

Reverse: in the centre of ornamental cartouche – Chinese character 課 ke. Marginal legend (reconstructed by means of bringing in all accessible specimens, each having preserved it in different parts):

\[\text{{\textit{Nf}} A\textit{m} A\textit{m} \textit{C} j \textit{y}}\]

Concerning the interpretation of the character 課 ke on the second coin type, numismatists have not achieved a mutual opinion. Ch.M. Fraehn, basing on Chinese-French-Latin dictionary of Basilii de Glemona, gave its meaning as “levy/duty, mandative (ordered) money?”. E.A. Davidovič who published the reconstruction of the Arabic legend and established the date of this issue as 663 AH, however, virtually avoided a discussion on the Chinese character.

Paul D. Buell\(^9\) incorrectly described this coin as ‘a bronze piece completely in Chinese style with a hole in the center, probably issued during the last years of Möngke’s reign. One side contains the Chinese character k‘o, «revenue»’. Of course, the date 663 AH read by E.A. Davidovič clearly indicates that the coin was issued after the reign of Möngke who had passed away in 1259 AD (657 AH). And of course, the replacement of the term ‘levy’ by ‘revenue’ in the translation of the Chinese character was unjustified. St. Album notes that the meaning of ke is unknown\(^11\). Mongolian numismatist

---

\(^9\) Image source: <www.zeno.ru>, no. 30527; weight 6.6 g, diameter 40.5 mm.

\(^10\) Op. cit. Buell’s mistake was caused by his wrong understanding of Fraehn’s Latin description of no. 3 (‘A e r. mod. max. rar. & notab. in med. perforatus’); the correct meaning of the passage – ‘C o p p e r , large size, rare and remarkable, pierced in the middle’ (V.N. Nastich’s translation).

\(^11\) St. ALBUM, op. cit., p. 98.
Nyamaa Badarch suggests that the character means ‘taxation’ and the Chinese inscription in general should be interpreted as “a warning and reminder to pay taxes”\textsuperscript{12}. Yet such interpretation does not answer the question to whom the inscription in Chinese could be addressed in Central Asia. P.D. Buell claims that ‘the presence of large numbers of Chinese in Samarqand is also evidenced by Bukhara’s unique bilingual (Chinese and Arabo-Persian) coinage first published in 1826 by Frähn’\textsuperscript{13}. In our opinion, despite the noticeable presence of the Chinese among the administration and artisans in Bukhara, it was hardly possible that the coin issue would be addressed exclusively to that community. We assume that the Chinese language, spread at that time in Northern China (part of the main ulus of the Mongol Empire) only, could not be in common use by Bukharan tax-payers in general; hence, the inscription could not serve as a warning or reminder to most of them.

The analysis of information from Yuan Shi “The History of Yuan” concerning the taxes allows us to draw a conclusion that the character 財 ke was not used as part of the name of some specific tax, but rather appeared as a variety of a more common term – ‘taxes’\textsuperscript{14}, particularly in the titles of tax departments\textsuperscript{15} and, which is especially interesting, in expressions like ‘tax paper money’, ‘tax money’, ‘tax silver’\textsuperscript{16}.

According to P.N. Petrov, the most plausible interpretation must be “ke meaning «tax [coin]»”\textsuperscript{17}, so the coins in question should relate to the system of tax farming. Let us take a look at the historical background of the period when these coins were issued.

The term ‘tax farming’\textsuperscript{18} was known in China at least as far back as the Northern Song dynasty\textsuperscript{19}, in Central Asia – since the 7th century, when the tax

\textsuperscript{12} Nyamaa Badarch, *The Coins of Mongol Empire and Clan Tamgha of Khans (XIII-XIV)*, Ulaanbaatar 2005, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{13} P.D. Buell, op. cit., p. 137, note 76.
\textsuperscript{14} 財 ke-shui.
\textsuperscript{15} 徵收課税所 zheng-shou ke-shui si, “Department of tax collecting”. Such departments were established in the beginning of Ögedey’s reign on the proposal of Yelü Chucai. See the details in Yuan Shi, ch. 2 and 146.
\textsuperscript{16} 財鈔 ke-chao, 財錢 ke-qian, 財銀 ke-yin accordingly.
\textsuperscript{17} Private conversation with P.N. Petrov (September 2006).
\textsuperscript{18} 撲買 pu-mai – a term introduced in China in the 3rd year of the kai-bao period 開寶 (970 AD) for the designation of tax farming system.
money (known today as ‘Bukharkhuda’ dirhams) appeared in Bukhara. This system of tax collecting had been in use in Central Asia for about 600 years, until it became a clear and legalized tradition for the population.

During the Mongol reign in China, the practice of giving away taxes for farming was renewed in Ögedey’s reign, despite the resistance by Yelü Chucai, a Qidan-descended adviser and administrator of the first two Great Qa’ans. N.C. Munkuev writes: ‘Despite the fixed tax rates, arbitrariness prevailed during tax collecting. It was assisted by the tax farming system described in Song Zizhen’s inscription. During the period since 1230 AD, when more or less fixed taxes were introduced in Northern China, and until the tax reform of 1236 AD, we have no records about the mode of tax collecting. It is probable that tax farming was already used in that period. More widely tax farming was practiced after the reform of 1236 AD. We can suggest that tax farming in Central Asia was restored even earlier, right at the beginning of Ögedey’s reign (sure if it had eventually been interrupted after the Mongol invasion).

As a rule, the tax farmers in China were rich Muslim merchants from Central Asia. For example, in the 12th month of the year zi-hai a Muslim merchant Abdurrahman voiced his wish to pick up the taxes for farming in China. Granted the permission, he commenced on controlling the activity of all tax departments in all divisions (lu) of Northern China. In this relation,

---

19 N.C. Munkuev, Kitayskii istočnik o pervyx mongol’skix xanax: nadgrobnaia nadpis’ na mogile Eliy Chucai. Perevod i issledovanie [A Chinese Source on the First Mongol Khans: The Inscription on the Grave of Yelü Chu-Cai. Translation and Research], Moscow 1965, p. 120.
21 Song Zizhen 宋子貞 (1187–1267 AD), author of the stone inscription known as “Stele on the spirit-way of His Excellence Chief of the Great Imperial Secretariat Yelü Chucai” (中書令耶律公神道碑).
22 N.C. Munkuev, op. cit., p. 58.
23 27.12.1239 – 25.01.1240 AD.
24 奥都剌合蛮 Ao-du-la-he-man. According to N.C. Munkuev, he was a rich merchant. After the death of Ögedey he achieved a higher position at the court and in fact headed the tax department of Northern China.
25 路 lu – unit of administrative division; usually translated as ‘circuit’. During the period in question, lu in the Northern China was the highest unit of administrative division.
26 Yuan Shi, ch. 2.
the next paragraph from the biography of Yelü Chucai\(^{27}\) seems to be interesting:

‘Starting with the year *geng-yin*\(^{28}\), [when there were] defined tax quotes, till the year *jia-wu*\(^{29}\), when Henan was pacified, the volume of taxes was rising every year; in the year *wu-xu*\(^{30}\) [the amount of] “tax silver” (our accentuation. – V.B., S.S.) increased up to 1,100,000 *liang*\(^{31}\). Translator An Tianhe, carrying the favour before Chinqai\(^{32}\), [brought to him] Abdurrahman, [who offered to pick up] the taxes on farming, [and the quote] increased to 2,200,000 *liang*’.

The tax farming system was closely connected with the system of appanages, which was created during the very first stage of the Mongol state\(^{33}\). The extension of area and quantity of inhabitants depended on the merits of the owner and on the good will of the Great Qa’an who, standing at the head of the Empire, could own his personal appanage\(^{34}\). The owners of granted appanages received the right of collecting taxes from their “sustenance lands”\(^{35}\).

In the territory of Northern China, the system of granting appanages was adopted by the Mongols in August 1236, soon after the census following the fall of the Jin dynasty\(^{36}\). Half the inhabitants of Northern China (900,000 households of the 1,830,000 accounted during the census) were granted to the

\(^{27}\) *Ibid.*, ch.146.

\(^{28}\) 16.01.1230 – 03.02.1231 AD.

\(^{29}\) 31.01.1234 – 20.01.1235 AD.

\(^{30}\) 18.01.1238 – 05.02.1239 AD.

\(^{31}\) Two *liang* (English tael) – a Chinese “ounce”. Its approximate value for the Mongol period of the Chinese history is nearly 37.3 g; see e.g.: N.C. Munkuev, “Novie materiali o polozenii mongol’skix aratov v XIII–XIV vv. [New Materials about the Situation with Mongol Arats in the 13–14\(^{th}\) Cts.]”, in *Tataro-mongoli v Azii i Evrope*, Moscow 1970, p. 407, note 25.

\(^{32}\) Zhen-hai – Chinqai, one of Genghis Khan’s nökörs. During the period designated in the cited quotation he occupied a position of shang-shu sheng you cheng-xiang “the Right Minister of the Department of State Affairs”.


\(^{34}\) B.I.A. Vladimirov, “Čingiz-xan”, in *Čingiz-xan* [collected articles], compiled by Ju.A. Sandulov, St. Petersburg 1998, p. 211.

\(^{35}\) The appanages in Chinese sources are designated by different terms: 分地 fen-di – literally ‘divided lands’, 投下 tou-xia, 汤沐邑 tang-mu-yi – literally ‘bath estate’, ‘bath barony’. The term tang-mu-yi is known from the period of Han dynasty.

\(^{36}\) Song Zizhen. “Stele on the spirit-way …”, in N.C. Munkuev, op. cit., p.44.
nobles and deserved officials. For example, Batu Khan received the peasant households in the circuit of Pingyang-fu\textsuperscript{37}. The similar system worked in Central Asia and Iran: ‘In each Iranian area which fell under the Mongols, to him (Batu Khan. – V.B., S.S.) belonged a certain part of it, and over that circuit, which constituted his appanage, his governors were appointed\textsuperscript{38}.

If we cast a glance at Bukhara as it was in 1251 AD, all its inhabitants were divided into three appanages: the first one of the ruling Qa’an Möngke, the second of Batu Khan and the third of Soyurkuktani Begi – one of Toluy’s wives, mother of Möngke, Qubilay and Arīgh Buqa. Rashid al-Din reports that Soyurkuktani Begi has passed away in the month of Dhu’l-Hijja, 649 AH (14 February – 13 March 1252 AD)\textsuperscript{39}. According to the Mongol tradition, her appanages were inherited by her younger son Arīgh Buqa. After the death of Batu Khan in the middle of 1250-s, his appanages were inherited by Sartaq, then Ulaghchi, and after the death of the latter in 1257 AD by Berke. Obviously, after the death of Möngke Qa’an and the simultaneous rise of Qubilay and Arīgh Buqa to power as Qa’ans, both could lay claims to tax collecting from that appanage in Bukhara, which had earlier been owned by the “ruling Emperor” Möngke.

The death of Möngke in 1259 AD (657 AH) led to the struggle for the supreme Qa’an’s throne between the two brothers, Arīgh Buqa and Qubilay. In 1260 AD Qubilay appointed Chaghatay’s grandson Abishha to rule the Chaghatayid state\textsuperscript{40}. But in the summer of 1260, while Abishha was traveling to Central Asia, he was caught and put to death by the followers of Arīgh Buqa. In the same summer armed clashes began between Qubilay and Arīgh Buqa. Arīgh Buqa appointed Alghu to the Chaghatayid throne. However, in 1261–62 AD (660 AH) Alghu submitted to Qubilay\textsuperscript{41}.

We can state that the issue of tax coins with Chinese characters became possible only after Alghu had moved under Qubilay, because it was impossible for the latter to collect taxes in his enemy’s domain prior to that moment. So the date 660 on the coins of the first type (with the characters 不花 bu-hua) could correspond to certain changes in the accessibility of Bukhara for

\textsuperscript{37} Yuan Shi, ch.2.
\textsuperscript{39} RASHID AD-DIN ṬABĪB, SBornik letopesey [A Compendium of Chronicles], vol. 3, Moscow 2002, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{40} IBID., p. 160.
\textsuperscript{41} IBID., p. 164.
Qubilay and most probably deal with his first tax collection there. Chinese characters should have served as a special, clearly noticeable sign for easy discrimination of money paid as taxes for Qubilay. According to Wassaf, in 662 AH a census was executed in Bukhara, followed by Qubilay’s decree: ‘From the total amount of 16,000 [people42] which were accounted in Bukhara, 5,000 belonged to [the ulus of] Batu, 3,000 to Qutuy Begi, mother of Hulagu, while all the rest were called the “ulugh qul”, i.e. the “great center”, which any of Genghis Khan’s sons established on the throne could manage as their own possession’43.

We do not know the reasons of changing of the bu-hua tax coin type to the ke type; however, it could take place after the census of 662 AH, which was undertaken for the purposes of new tax collecting. No data are also at hand about the probable concurrent circulation of both types; hopefully, a detailed information about the findings of these coins will enlighten this question some day. So far we can just surmise that the cited change of coin types was called upon the responsible tax collectors to distinguish the current tax money from other coin issues44.

At the end of 1264 AD (662 AH) the position of Arīgh Buqa became hopeless. He sent Orqïna Khatun, the widow of Qara Hulagu, and Mas’ud Beg to Alghu who then married Orqïna Khatun and appointed Mas’ud Beg governor of Samarqand and Bukhara. So it is well admissible that in 663 AH the second emission of tax coins on behalf of Qubilay, now with the Chinese character 質 ke, was initiated by the new governor.

Soon after the death of Alghu in 664 AH Orqïna Khatun raised Mubarak Shah, her son born from Qara Hulagu, to the Chaghatayid throne. This deed caused the displeasure of Qubilay, because ulus governors were to be appointed by himself. In September of the same year Qubilay, alluding to Mubarak Shah’s minority, raised Chaghatay’s grand-son Baraq to the post of co-regent of the Chaghatay ulus, ‘until Mubarak Shah grows up’45. Baraq claimed himself as a plenipotentiary ruler and removed amir

42 Here in the sense of “taxable population”.
43 “Istoriia Vassafa [Wassaf’s History]”, in Zolotaia Orda v istočnikax, p. 265.
44 In Hei-da shí-lüe (A Brief Account of the Black Tartars) an interesting testimony is cited: ‘Concerning the [documents] distributed in the deceased states, [namely] among the Northern Chinese, Qidan, Jurjen – then only Chinese script is used’ (黑鞑事略, 海寧王靜安先生遺書, 第37, 1940). The passage means that for a darughachi appointed by Qubilay, mastering the Chinese script was a working tool, while he ought not necessarily to be a native Chinese.
45 Rashîd ad-Dîn Ṭâbîb, op. cit., p. 167.
Mughultay, Qubilay’s governor in Turkestan. From that time on, the rulers of the Chaghatayid state became independent. Soon clashes and wars began between those of them who were allied with Qaydu on one side, and Qubilay and his descendants on the other side, which continued for about 40 years. Since then on, Qubilay Khan had hardly any possibility to collect the taxes from his appanage in Bukhara.

**Conclusion**

The coins involved in this paper, in our opinion, are nothing but the tax money. This attribution, insofar as it is correct, may shed some light on the peculiarities of the Mongol tax policy in Central Asia and allow us to say that the old practice of handling tax coins was resumed in the middle of the 13th century, at least in Bukhara. The “Chinese trail” on the Bukharan tax coins owes its appearance to the unique concourse of circumstances, namely the place and the time of their issue. Obviously, there was no need to place the Chinese inscriptions on the copper coins intended for local circulation in Bukhara. Virtually the Chinese characters must point to the special destination of these coins. We believe that these coins were issued for collecting taxes from the populace of Bukhara, which comprised an important part of Qubilay Qa’an’s appanage; the Chinese inscriptions were called to help the persons responsible for tax collection to discriminate between the tax coins and any other kinds of currency. The term of circulation of these coins must have been directly connected to the Great Qa’an’s means of collecting the taxes from his appanage in Bukhara. Those means were only available to the Qa’an in the period between Alghu’s siding with Qubilay in 660 AH and the refusal of Chaghatayid Baraq to submit to Qubilay in 664 AH. From the above we may deduce the most possible chronological scope of circulation for these coins: 不花 *bu-hua* type – 660 to 663 AH, 謀 *ke* type – 663 to 664 AH.
Apropos of the 13th Century Copper Dirhams of Bukhara with Chinese Characters

Fig. 1. AE (silver-washed) dirham with Chinese inscription 不花 bu-hua, Bukhara 660 AH.
Fig. 2. AE (silver-washed) dirham with Chinese inscription 諾 ke, Bukhara 663 AH.