



## QOPČUR

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**QOPČUR** (*QUPČUR*), capitation tax levied by the [Mongols](#) (Doerfer I, pp. 387-91). *Qopčur* first surfaces (in its Mongolian guise of *qubčiri*) as a tax on the nomadic population, when Temüjin ([ČENGİZ KHAN](#)) levied it on his followers in order to assist his ally Toğril, khan of the Kereit, who was in financial difficulties (*Secret History*, par. 151, tr. De Rachewiltz, I, p. 74; Rašid-al-Din, *Jāme' al-tawāriḵ* I, p. 363). At the *quriltai* (assembly) of 1235, Čengiz Khan's son and successor Ögödei (Ukadāy) imposed a *qopčur* of one beast in every hundred for his own establishment and one for the relief of the poor (*Secret History*, par. 279, tr. De Rachewiltz, p. 214; Rašid-al-Din, *Jāme' al-tawāriḵ* I, pp. 664-5). In around 1252 the Great Khan Möngke (Mungga; Mangu) reissued the original edict, but decreed that anyone who owned fewer than a hundred animals within a particular category was absolved from payment (Jovayni, ed. Qazvini, III, p. 79; tr. Boyle, II, p. 600). It is also under Möngke that the *qopčur* first appears as a poll tax on the sedentary population, and in this sense it frequently recurs in Persian sources.

In his edict, which was brought back to Iran by the civil governor, [Arğun Āqā](#), Möngke set graduated rates: a wealthy man was to pay ten *dinārs* per annum, and a poor man only one. [Jovayni](#)'s phrasing (Qazvini, II, p. 254; tr. Boyle, II, p. 517) suggests that the figures were modeled on the system in Transoxiana, where the governor Mas'ud Yalavač had already introduced the collection of *qopčur* (though whether this was a recent innovation or dated from the reign of Ögödei or [Güyüg](#), is not specified); and we know from the report of the Chinese envoy Ch'ang Te, who passed through Transoxiana in 1259, that there



the rich paid a higher poll-tax than the poor and that the maximum payable was ten gold coins (Bretschneider, I, p. 131). On arriving back in Khorasan with Möngke's edict, Arġun Āqā consulted his officials and set the maximum annual rate at 70 *dinārs* for every ten persons. Then in 656/1258, when the Great Khan's brother Hülegü ([HULĀGU KHAN](#)) arrived in north-western Iran, Arġun Āqā instituted a more far-reaching reform, whereby the richest paid 500 *dinārs* and the poorest one (Jovayni, ed. Qazvini, II, pp. 256, 261; tr. Boyle, II, pp. 519, 524).

Whereas traditional Islamic taxation was based on the ownership and use of land, the basis of the *qopčur*, as demonstrated by the fact that it was invariably preceded by the census, was the individual male (whether the possessor of land or not). Only those too old for physical labor were exempted, as were holy men—Muslim scholars, imams, shaykhs and sayyids, and [Christian](#) and [Buddhist](#) priests and monks. There is evidence that in Armenia in 1254 the tax was also levied on women and children (Galstian, p. 26). It could be that here the local unit of assessment was the household, as was in fact consistently the case in Mongol China, where the qaghans (Old Turkic *kaġan*, *qaġan*) retained the household as the traditional basis of taxation. The *qopčur* was bitterly resented by the Muslim population, for whom it inevitably evoked memories of the *jezya*, the head-tax formerly levied by Muslim princes on the Peoples of the Book (*ahl al-keṭāb*) or *demmis*, i.e., Christians and Jews, but discontinued by the Mongol conquerors. According to [Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi](#) Qazvini, the greater part of 'Erāq-e 'Ajam had been ruined by the *qopčur* and the inhabitants had abandoned their homes (Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi, pp. 603-4). The poet [Pur-e Bahā](#) devoted an entire *qaṣida* to the oppressive character of the *qopčur* (Minorsky, pp. 299-305).

Rašid-al-Din, eager to highlight the Il-khan [Ġāzān](#)'s (and his own) reforming endeavors and to emphasize the burdens previously borne by the Mongols' subjects, possibly exaggerates when he claims that in some localities the *qopčur* had been levied twenty or thirty times a year (Rašid-al-Din, II, p. 1415). He tells us that as a result of the reforms the tax was collected only twice yearly from the peasants and once a year from the nomads (Rašid-al-Din, II, p. 1438). Ġāzān's edict allocating *eqṭā*'s to the Mongol soldiery stipulated that the peasants should henceforth pay the *qopčur* to the *eqṭā*'-holder (Rašid-al-Din, II, pp. 1481-82; Lambton, 1988, pp. 199-202). It is noteworthy that Rašid-al-Din does not refer to earlier attempts to mitigate the effects of the tax, as when his predecessor, the vizier Ṣadr-al-Din Aḥmad Kāledi Zanjāni, had relieved the

towns of ‘Erāq-e ‘Ajam of the obligation to pay the *qopčur* and had substituted the *tamgā*, a tax on commercial transactions (Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi, p. 604).

The evidence indicates that *qopčur* continued to be levied in the post-Il-khanid period. Āmoli (*Nafā’es al-fonūn*, I, p. 327) speaks of *qopčur-e har nāḥeyati* and *qopčur-e moḥtarefa*, of which the latter was clearly a head-tax on artisans and doubtless levied at a special rate. It has been proposed that under the Jalayerids and other post-Mongol dynasties the *qopčur* appears in the guise of the pasturage tax (*marā’i*).

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