

Calcutta Mint – Early Coins, 1757 to 1761

Summary

In 1756, the Nawāb of Bengal attacked and captured Calcutta whereupon the British sent an army and fleet to recapture the town, which they did in January 1757. Following this they obliged the Nawāb to grant them the right to establish a mint and they began to strike coins, at first showing the mint name Alīnagar Kalkutta, Alīnagar being the name given to the town by the Nawāb. However, later in the year, following the battle of Plassey, the new Nawāb allowed the EIC to strike coins with the mint name Kalkutta. Coins with this mint name were struck in years 4, 5 and 6 of Ālamgīr II, but the shroffs imposed a heavy *batta* on these and it proved impossible to get them into circulation. At the very end of 1760, the EIC requested, and obtained, permission to strike coins with the mint name Murshīdābād. These new coins were first issued in the name of Ālamgīr II, AH 1174, RY 6. The Calcutta authorities also decided to begin minting silver coins with the mint name Arkot, in Calcutta and applied to Madras for the dies.

The only copper coins issued, were tickets struck for the use of the workers employed in repairing and expanding the town's fortifications.

During these early years the method of operation of the mint was established, although it was not until later that a truly professional approach was adopted.

Detailed Discussion

The rich trade of Bengal meant that Calcutta gradually grew to become a major centre for the trade of the East India Company and was declared a Presidency in 1681. However, trade required money to be available for the purchase of goods for export. The British imported coin from their mint at Madras in the form of Arkot rupees, which became the main coin of trade in East Bengal. However, if other coins were needed, for instance the Murshīdābād rupee, the main coin of trade in other parts of Bengal, then bullion had to be sent to the mint of the Nawāb of Bengal at Murshīdābād, and the relevant taxes had to be paid. The British tried hard to persuade the Nawāb that they should be allowed to establish their own mint in Calcutta but were unsuccessful for many years.

For reasons that are not relevant here, in 1756, Siraj al-Dowla, the Nawāb of Bengal, attacked and captured Calcutta. He renamed the city Alīnagar and issued coins bearing this mint name, presumably from a mint established in the city, although they may have been struck elsewhere 1.



‘Alīnagar’ Rupee, RY 3 of Ālamgīr

These coins are extremely rare but the example shown here clearly shows the mint name, Alinagar, in the top line on the reverse and regnal year 3 of Ālamgīr II.

A British army led by Admiral Watson, with Colonel Robert Clive in charge of land forces, was despatched to retake the city, and this they did on the 2nd January 1757 and followed this with a series of demands to the Nawāb, including the rights to issue coins from their own mint.

The Alīnagar Kalkutta Coins

On the 10th January 1757, only eight days after retaking the city, the Bengal Council decided that they would establish a mint 2:

Agreed that we do establish a mint and coin sicca rupees with the name of the Moghul on one side and the Company on the other, to be of the same weight as Muxadavad rupees and to pass in the town for 2 p cent more

This was put to the Nawab, *inter alia*, through an intermediary, Coja Wajid, on 21st January 3:

4. That he suffer the Company to erect a mint in Calcutta, endowed with the same priviledges with the mint at Muxadavad, and that if the rupees of Calcutta be of equal weight and fineness with those of Muxadavad they may pass current without any deduction of batta

but the reply was not encouraging 4:

4. As regards the fourth article he says that, seeing that the English nation has never had this priviledge in Bengal, it is not right to demand it, and further the Nawab is not able to grant a right which depends upon the Mogul and which might damage the currency of that Prince.

As well as Coja Wajid, the British appear to have been negotiating with the Nawāb through the French because in a letter from the Council at Bengal to the Court of Directors in London later in January they stated 5:

Bengal Presidency, Calcutta Mint, Early Coins, 1757-1761

The demands we verbally made the French deputies were in substance: to have the restitution of our losses and satisfaction for the damages and charges sustained in consequence of the suba's violences, to have permission to erect such fortifications as we might think proper in whatever part of the country we chuse to settle a factory, and to be allowed a mint in Calcutta.

By the 1st February the Bengal Council was able to report to London 6:

I have little to observe on the terms obtained from the Nabob except that they are both honorable and advantageous for the Company. The grants of a mint and the villages hereto detained from us are very considerable and the abolishing of the duties lately exacted by the chowkies as well as confirming the free transportation of goods without customs of any kind, and the rest of the priviledges of the royal phirmaund, are no small points gained.

On 6th February, Clive received confirmation that the Nawab would grant the right of minting 7:

...The Nawab agrees to give you back Calcutta with all the priviledges of your phirmaund and whatever goods you lost at Cossimbuzar or elsewhere, and will grant you permission to coin siccās in your mint at Calcutta or Allenagur,...

and Clive conveyed this to the Select Committee at Fort St George, Madras on the same day 8:

... The Nawab has decamped with his whole army, has wrote me a letter that he will comply with all our demands except a sum of money for the inhabitants, viz. that he will put us in possession of everything granted by the royal phirmaund, liberty to fortify Fort William as we please, and liberty of a mint

The next day Clive submitted his draft treaty and the Nawab agreed to the proposal for minting coins 9:

Article 5. That we shall have liberty to coin siccās both gold and silver, of equal weight and fineness as those of Muxadabad, which shall pass current in the province, and that there be no demand made for a deduction of batta

The Nawāb endorsed this article

I consent to the English Company's coining their own bullion into siccās. English coin shall be stamped in the name of Allenagar

An important point to note from this extract is that the Nawab consented to the English striking coins, but with the mint name Alinagar.

The final treaty was laid before Council on the 14th February 10:

That siccās shall be coined at Allenagar, Calcutta in the same manner as that at Muxadabad, and that if the money struck at Calcutta be of equal weight and fineness with that of Muxadabad, there shall be no demand made for a deduction of batta.

But this was still not sufficient for Clive, and Mr Watts in Murshidabad was asked to clarify the matter further 11:

...Secondly. You must get the article of the mint explained in fuller terms and extend the liberty of coining to all bullion and gold imported into Calcutta by the English

This extract implies that the minting rights were somewhat limited, perhaps to bullion imported by the Company (and not, therefore, by private individuals) and that the authorities at Calcutta wanted this extended to all bullion.

By 23rd February the Calcutta Council felt that they should ask for an Assay Master to be sent out from England 12:

The establishment of a mint being consented to by the Nabob, we have to request your Honors will send us out an Essay Master with other persons and materials for the better managing of that branch of business.

Mr Watts, meanwhile, had been negotiating with the Nawāb and was able to report back on the 10th March 13:

The Nawab says you may coin siccās in Calcutta whenever you please, and swore this morning before me by God and his Prophet he would comply with every part of his contract

Clive was still not happy and on 10th April he wrote directly to the Nawāb 14:

It is a long time since Your Excellency promised to fulfill everything in 15 days... I therefore take the liberty of putting down in writing what parts of the treaty so solemnly sworn to I desire to be complied with...

...3rd Parwannahs for the currency of siccās coined at Calcutta alias Alianagore

On the 17th April Mr Watts finally managed to get the treaty (perwannah) but it was still not quite satisfactory 15:

On the 24th we received a letter from W Watts Esq dated the 18th instant...That he had the day before [17th April] received a perwannah for coining of siccās in Calcutta, but as it only mentions Allenagore he returned it,

and hopes to get it altered - that he is applying for a general perwannah for the currency of our trade in the three provinces...

And on 26th April the Nawāb told Clive that he had acceded to Mr Watts demands 16:

... The several perwannahs for the currency of the Company's business, which are wrote agreeable to Mr Watts's desire, together with that for erecting a mint in Calcutta Alinagar have been put into his hands, of which you have no doubt been informed by his letter.

It is interesting that the Nawab now refers to Calcutta Alinagar and not just Alinagar. Perhaps this was the compromise that Watts was able to negotiate. The actual Perwannah was as follows 17:

Perwannah of the Nabob Serajah Dowlah to the Company for erecting a mint in Calcutta

From the date of the first of the moon shaboon [21st April, 1757] the 4 sun siccās are begun to be stamped, and through all the mint houses, the new siccās of the 4 sun are coined. Take care, and erect a mint in Calcutta (called Allenagore) and stamp gold and silver rupees, out of bullion and gold imported by your nation, of the weight of the gold and silver coined at Muxadavad, under the name of Allenagore, Calcutta, shall you coin your money. It shall pass for land revenues etc and nobody will ask, or set, any batta upon them; only to take care not to coin the gold and silver of other nations.

At last, they had the authority to strike their own coins and now all they needed were people with the necessary skills to undertake the work, and the rules and regulations to make it happen. By June, skilled workmen had arrived from Murshīdābād and a committee was established to look into the operating procedures 18:

The coiners and others for carrying on the mint business being arrived from Muxadavad the Board took into consideration the establishing of that privilege upon a proper and beneficial foundation, but as it is utterly impossible for them to judge how it ought to be conducted for the advantage of our Honble Masters till the method of coining, assaying etc is ascertained and known, the Board are of opinion that a committee should be appointed to inspect into the fineness of silver proper for siccās, how much a hundred ounces of the different kinds of bullion produce and what the charge of coining will be. This, once known, we can with greater propriety establish the mint under proper regulations.

Agreed the President, Mr Frankland and Mr Boddam be appointed to inspect into the forementioned particulars and report them to the Board as soon as possible

By early July, 4000 (not 40,000 as stated by Pridmore several times in his work 19) rupees had been produced 20:

The Committee appointed for coining of siccās inform the Board a sum of 4000 R has been coined from new Mexico Dollars and that as soon as they have coined two or three other kinds of bullion they will deliver in the Acc't

The coins struck at this time must have been the very rare rupees with the mint name Alīnagar Kalkutta (Cat No.xxx). A gold mohur has also been reported although the records contain no reference to gold being struck at this time 21.

Coins with the Mint Name Kalkutta

On the 23rd of June 1757, Clive won the battle of Plassey and the Nawab was replaced by Mir Jafar Ali Khan (though not until the 29th June when he also confirmed the right to have a mint in Calcutta 22).

The new Nawab was required to confirm the coining rights of the Company again, and this he duly did on the 15th July 23:

... A mint is established in Calcutta, coin siccās and gold mohurs of equal weight and fineness with the siccās and gold mohurs of Muxadavad they shall pass in the King's treasury...

and on 28th July he signed a Perwannah confirming the Company's right to strike coin, this time with the mint name Calcutta 24:

Perwannah from the Nawab Mir Jafar Ali Khan

To the High and Mighty, the bold and valient Commanders, the greatest of merchants, the English Company in whom may the King's favour rest forever. A mint has been established at Calcutta; continue coining gold and silver into siccās and mohurs, of the same weight and standard with those of Moorshedabad; the impression to be Calcutta; they shall pass current in the province of Bengal, Behar, and Orissa, and be received into the Codganna; there shall be no obstruction or difficulty for Cussore...11th Zeerlaida [Zilkada] 4th of the King's reign [= 28th July 1757]

(for a slightly different translation see reference below 25)

The Company's servants at Murshidabad had been discussing the minting rights with the Nawab and his advisors, Jugganat Seth and Dulab Ram, and their attention was drawn to the fact that although the minting rights would allow the Company to mint bullion brought to Calcutta by any means, the Nawab and his advisors would not be pleased if all of the bullion imported by native Indians was dealt with in this way so that none of

it reached the mint at Murshidabad. If that happened, then the mint at Murshidabad would have no work and the Nawab might be obliged to withdraw the rights of coinage that he had granted to the Company 26.

By the 8th August the mint had begun production and fifty new coins were shown to the Calcutta Council 27:

The Committee appointed for assaying the coinage of the different sortments of bullion lay before the Board 50 rupees coined from Dollar silver agreeable to the Perwannah received from Jaffir Ally Cawn Ordered them to be transferred to Muxadavad for a trial, and agreed our mint be established on the same footing as that at Madrass

And on the 20th August, Calcutta reported the new arrangement back to London 28:

In the packett to the Honorable the Court of Directors translate of the general sunnud and the perwannah for the mint are forwarded. You will observe by the last, the impression is to be Calcutta only, without the addition of Allenagore.



Half Rupee with Mint Name Kalkutta

In September 1757, Messrs Frankland and Boddam were appointed joint Mint Master 29 and the mint had swung into full operation, sending 3050 Rs to Cozimbazaar for the approval of the Nawāb and five to London 30. At the same time the mint was supplied with 35,000 old (Sonaut) rupees and 805 Persian rupees for re-coining, and in October a further 50,000 old rupees were sent to the mint 31. Also in October a significant amount of gold that had been received from the Nawāb was sent to the mint where it was to be coined into Fooley (i.e. star or flower) mohurs 32.

Problems with the Kalkutta Rupees

By January 1758 the mint was working flat out, sending 80,000 Rs to Cossimbazaar to be used as a trial in purchasing the investment for that year, but some difficulty had been encountered in getting the Kalkutta coins into circulation 33:

We have been constantly employed in coining both for the Company and some private persons, but as yet there is some difficulty in passing our siccās, of which we have complained to the durbar, and have the satisfaction to learn from Mr Scrafton that the currency of them has been ordered by beat of the dandurra through the streets of Muxadavad and a mutchulka given by the principal shroff that they shall be received the same as Muxadavad siccās. We therefore flatter ourselves that our money will very shortly be as current as that coined in the metropolis of the subaship, when we have hopes the Company will reap very considerable advantages from their mint, as will likewise the private inhabitants of this place. In order to make a tryal of the force of the late orders and proclamation we have sent eighty thousand Calcutta siccās to Cossimbuzar for the ensuing year's investment and shall advise Your honors if they are received without difficulty or if any objections are made to them...

By February 1758, the problem of getting the coins into circulation was getting worse and even British residents were refusing to receive the coins in payment 34:

...Mr Charles Douglas... Upon his application of the discharge of those notes we ordered the Committee of the Treasury to pay him the amount of the principal and interest of the bonds in his possession – being in all current rupees 119643 – which they offered him in Calcutta siccās, but he peremptorily refused taking the amount of his bonds in that coin, and on 12th January wrote a letter to the Board upon that subject protesting against the Company and their representatives for all loss of batta, interest and risque if he was not paid in some other species of rupees.

Nevertheless, the mint had produced quite a large number of coins with the mint accounts showing the following outputs 35:

December	220,275
January	101,337
February	243,890

These figures show the *value* of the output of the mint not the actually number of coins produced, some would have been rupees and some mohurs plus silver fractions and copper.

In the meantime the problems of getting the coins into circulation were continuing. The gold mohurs that had been struck from the Nawāb's gold were stuck in the mint and a decision was taken to send 100 to the Ballasore factory where it was believed they may be sold for a good price 36.

This problem seems to have caused the mint to be little used during 1759 because at the end of that year Calcutta wrote to London 37:

Our Mint is at present of very little use to us as there has been no bullion sent out of Europe this season or two past, and we are apprehensive that it will never be attended with all the advantages we might have expected from it, as the coining of siccās in Calcutta interfere so much with the interests of the Seats that they will not fail of throwing every obstacle in our way to depreciate the value of our money in the country, notwithstanding its weight and standard is in every respect as good as the siccās of Muxadavad, so that a loss of batta will always arise on our money, let our influence at the Durbar be ever so great.

The 'Seats' referred to in this extract, were members of the great Seth banking family who controlled the mint at Murshīdābād, amongst other things.

The lack of use of the mint seems to have continued in 1760, although rupees with the mint name Kalkutta continued to be struck and they exist with regnal years five and six of Ālamgīr. This is confirmed by an entry in the records of June 1760 38:

Notice to be given that after the 23rd inst. Five sun siccās will be rec'd into the Company's treasury at 13 p cent batta only and that six sun siccās will be struck & pass current from that day

Copper Tickets

A further entry from a meeting held in October instructed Mr Frankland (by then apparently the sole Mint Master) to produce copper tickets for the use of the labourers rebuilding the fortifications of the city 39:

The Committee of works represent to the Board that it will be extremely troublesome and inconvenient to pay the cowleys, labourers and bricklayers, to be employed on the fortifications, in cowries. They recommend therefore that copper, brass or tutenague tickets may be stamp'd of different values for the payment of those people, which shall be taken back at the value stamp'd on the respective tickets.

Ordered: Mr Frankland to stamp a number of such tickets.

Pridmore has identified two denominations of these copper tickets/coins. A one anna and a six pice. A smaller, two pice, denomination has been identified by Rhodes 40 and it is possible that a three pice coin was also produced (see catalogue).

Coins with the Mint Name Murshīdābād Struck in the Calcutta Mint

Pridmore seems to have missed the important point about the inability to get the Kalkutta coins into circulation and the actions taken to correct this problem. This led to a very different outcome to that supposed by Pridmore. By December of 1760 the Calcutta Council had decided that they would never succeed in getting the Kalkutta coins widely accepted into circulation and they agreed to approach the Nawab and ask for permission to strike Murshīdābād rupees 41:

And as we find that notwithstanding our frequent application to the Nabob concerning the want of currency of our rupees in the country from whence many inconveniencies proceed such as their being frequently refused for goods, the risk of carrying them from place to place to be exchanged (by which a boat passing from Malda to Murshudabad with 4000 Calcutta siccās for that purpose was lost in the Great River) & the loss in exchange. Those evils have never been remedy'd, the only means to effect it is to gain the Nabob's consent to our coining Muxadabad siccās in our mint in the same [way] as Arcot rupees are coined at Madras. Agreed therefore that the President endeavour to prevail on the Nabob to give his consent to our coining Murshudabad siccās in our mint.

At the same meeting they agreed that they should also strike Arcot rupees, which, at that time, were produced in the Madras mint and sent to Calcutta:

And as the want of Arcot rupees in the place has raised their value to 3 p cent above the usual currency & that specie is very useful for many occasions of the Presidency.

Agreed we coin Arcot rupees of equal weight & fineness with those of Fort St George.

The right to strike Murshidabad rupees was granted by the end of December 1760 42:

The President acquaints the Board he has at last after much solicitation prevailed upon the Nabob to consent to our coining Murshudabad siccās in our mint...

... Ordered the Mint Master to prepare stamps for coining the Muxadabad rupees.

In July 1761 the Calcutta Council received notice that the Nawāb had begun striking coins in the name of Shāh Ālam II, regnal year 2 and they agreed that coins issued from the Calcutta mint should follow suit 43:

...The Nabob supplied him [Shah Alam] with considerable sums of money during his residence at Patna, & at the time of his departure [for Dehli] caused siccās to be struck in his name throughout these provinces of which, having advised the President, it was agreed that the siccās in the name of Shah Allum should also be struck in our mint on the fifteenth of July which was accordingly done, the usual notice being first given.

From the above discussion, it seems clear that the Calcutta mint starting producing Murshīdābād rupees at the very end of 1760 or, more likely, early in 1761, before agreement was reached to produce coins in the name of Shāh Ālam II. During the first half of 1761, therefore, these Murshīdābād rupees would have been struck in the name of Ālamgīr II, regnal year 6. The question is, can we differentiate those coins struck at Calcutta from those struck at Murshīdābād?

A typical Murshīdābād sicca rupee is shown below



Murshīdābād Rupee, Ālamgīr II RY 6 (Photo from Nick Rhodes)

An example exists with three extra dots below the *shāh* of *bādshāh* on the obverse, and an extra group of dots next to the star on the reverse. In an earlier paper 44, I speculated that these dots might be a secret mark of the Calcutta mint. However, further consideration of the dates involved mean this is unlikely because the beginning of 1761 would equate to the hijri year 1174, and the coin with the extra dots clearly shows the last numeral of 1173 on the reverse.



Murshīdābād Rupee, Ālamgīr II, RY 6. 3 dots below *shāh* and extra dots on reverse (Photo from Nick Rhodes)

However, a rupee dated 1174 has been discovered and this coin has the style of the earlier Calcutta mint coins. This coin is shown in the catalogue and almost certainly emanates from the Calcutta mint.

Fractional Rupees of 'Ālamgīr II



Quarter Rupees, Rys 2, 5 & 6



Eighth Rupees, R.Ys 4 & 6



Sixteenth Rupee, R.Y 6

The fractional rupees (i.e. quarters and below) of Ālamgīr II issued from the Murshīdābād or Calcutta mints cause some problems of attribution. In considering this matter, several points need to be taken into consideration.

Firstly, these coins were issued by the Nawāb of Bengal from his mint of Murshīdābād, with the regnal years 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6.

Secondly, the EIC issued silver coins with the mint name Kalkutta and dates of RY 4, 5 & 6. These coins were very similar to the Murshīdābād silver coins issued by the Nawāb, except for the mint name. Since the mint name is almost never visible on the silver fractions, and assuming that denominations below a half rupee were issued, the problem of distinguishing between the Kalkutta and Murshīdābād coins arises. Pridmore illustrates a quarter (Pr. 10) clearly showing the mint name Kalkutta. However, he also lists eighths and sixteenths (Pr. 11-13) with either no illustrations, or with illustrations that do not show the mint name. These could therefore equally well be coins issued from the Murshīdābād mint. At present, no way of attributing the coins to the two mints is known, unless the mint name is visible. Auction sale catalogues are misleading on this point.

Thirdly, the EIC started issuing silver rupees in the name of Ālamgīr II, with the mint name Murshīdābād, in RY 6 (see above) and it is possible that fractions were also issued. Once again, the problem of distinguishing those issued from Murshīdābād from those issued at Calcutta, arises. The photos above reveal an interesting change in one of the dot patterns on the coins. The group of dots on the reverse, to the left of the numeral expressing the regnal year and above the beginning of the word *julūs*, is either a group of 5 dots or a group of three dots. Earlier years always seem to have the group of 5, but some RY 6 coins have the group of five and others the group of three. Not very many coins have yet been examined, but it is interesting to speculate that perhaps one of these groupings represents the secret mark of the Calcutta mint, for RY 6 coins struck with the mint name Murshīdābād. If this were true, then the coins with the three dots would be a likely candidate for Calcutta. However, the different dots also occur on the rupees (see above), but the hijra date visible on the rupee with three dots, shown above, seems to be 1173, which is too early for the Calcutta mint to have begun striking Murshīdābād silver. Since the dies for the rupees also seem to have been used for the fractions, it seems unlikely that these dots indicate different mints. Coins with RY 6 were issued for some time after Ālamgīr's death so perhaps the change in dot markings has something to do with this.

Minting Methods

In March 1758, the Court wrote to Calcutta with instruction about how the mint should be run 45:

This branch must be by contract, one month's public notice or more to be given, that you will receive proposals in writing and sealed for the coining of gold and silver, the lowest bidder to have the contract. Each party to put down the price of one hundred ounces of gold and silver of every specie that has or may be brought into Calcutta; this will clearly enable you to determine the preference. They are previously to be acquainted that the Mint House and its repairs shall be at our expence, every other charge whatever on the contractors' account. As the coinage will be a great trust, we apprehend none but persons of large capitals or credit will offer themselves, for you muct exact security in a sum equal to the amount you may judge will at one time

dwell in the mint. If two or more distinct families of opulence and character could be brought to join in their proposals, and should obtain the contract, it would be pleasing to us for many reasons. And for your better guidance we transmit to you under No. [] what is allowed us for the several species coined in the mints of Bombay and Madras. When the contractors are chosen, and the prices of bullion fixed, you are then to enter upon the following regulations: a Mint Master must be appointed from servants below Council, whose business will be to attend all receipts of bullion, and issue of rupees; no person is to send silver or gold to the mint but by application in writing to the Mint Master expressing species and quantities, who must then give his order to the contractors for receiving the same, and when such bullion is coined, a second order from the Mint Master must be obtained for delivery of the rupees. These methods pursued will prevent our being defrauded of our duties.

The coinage you are to collect on all silver is two and half per cent upon the contractors' prices, which you are to appropriate in the following manner: one per cent bring to our credit, one per cent we indulge our Governor for the time being, and half per cent to the Mint Master as an encouragement to discharge this trust with fidelity and application; but if this coinage should raise the silver to a higher rate than at Bombay where the like duties are collected, you are then to lower the coinage until you give the trader equal to what he receives at our other Presidencies. Otherwise we cannot expect this mint to flourish. And in this case let our duty be one per cent and what may remain divide to our Governor and Mint Master in the above mentioned proportion.

The Mint Master is to enter in one book the persons, species, if silver or gold, they deliver to the mint, their amount, the coinage duty, and the several payments; in another book the receipt and delivery of all the Company's silver; monthly accounts of each are given into the Board, and the Mint Master in the same distinct manner is to transmit us those distinct accounts annually, which are to be signed by him. We settle no duties on the coinage of gold; it's left to you; and you have liberty to lessen them in such manner as may preserve the credit of your mint.

It will require great care and circumspection that the rupees are kept up to their standard, and it's not in our power to send you a capable Assay Master. However, if our Governour will frequently, in a private manner, deliver a few rupees of different coinages to goldsmiths intirely independent of the contractors, their assays will be a better check upon the mint than any person we can procure here. Your secretary must also annually take himself of four different coinages forty rupees, from each ten promiscuously. These are to be sealed up separately and transmitted to us to be assayed at the Tower.

We will suffer no bullion imported at Calcutta to be coined or sold elsewhere. It shall be coined in our mint only, and those who do not chuse to do this may carry or return the same to the place it came from. But as the indulgence may be abused and under pretence of carrying back, may convey it to our European or other neighbours, we order that all such bullion shall pay us a duty of half per cent when exported. And for the better knowing what gold and silver is brought into Calcutta, our Sea Custom Master must certify to our Mint Master the persons and quantities imported; and though bullion pays no customs, still let the same be entered on our customs books as regularly as merchandize.

And at a consultation in December 1758 the Calcutta Council, having spent several months examining the Court orders, agreed that they would be complied with 46 although they don't seem to have taken any action to achieve this. It was not until the end of 1760, that the authorities in Calcutta finally felt able to implement the instructions of 1758 47:

Agreed we now establish the mint on the footing directed by the Honble Company in their commands of 3rd March 1758, that the dollars be valued at the rate mentioned in the letter of 1st April, but as the bullion of this country is of no stated fineness arising from the prodigious variety of coins in the country which are after melted in a heap & offered to be coined, it is impossible to determine on that.

That the mint be put up for contract on the same footing as that at Madras, that is, the contractor shall bear all the charges of the mint, except the house and repairs for which he shall receive a certain allowance per cent. & whoever offers for the smallest allowance, giving sufficient security, shall have the contract.

The contractor, there being [no] refin'd standard of bullion in this country, shall deliver the exact produce of the gold & silver given in to be coined according to its value by assay, which we shall effect in the best manner we can for the present.

Agreed in the meantime we recommend it to the Company to send us out a capable Assay Master by the first opportunity.

In March, 1761 the mint was duly put up for contract 48:

Ordered the secretary to draw out an advertisement setting forth the conditions and according to the regulations contained in the Company's General Letter dated 3rd March 1758, giving notice that the mint will be put up for contract, which advertisement he is to lay before us next council day.

But by June 1761 it had become obvious that nobody was prepared to bid for this contract 49:

The Secretary reports to the Board that nobody has hitherto made any application or proposals for the farm of the mint, altho' it was advertised for the first of May last

And this seems to be because the mint had actually made a loss, of 227 rupees 6 annas, between January 1760 and April 1761 50:

...We also gave publick notice for receiving proposals from any persons who would manage the mint by contract upon the footing directed in your commands of the 3rd March 1758, but no proposals were made altho', more than two months were allowed, & upon examination of the mint account from 1st Jan 1760 to 30th April 1761, it appears that the Company are loser in that term of Current Rupees two hundred twenty seven & six annaes by undertaking the coinage at two per cent so that it was not to be expected that any private persons would accept the contract, but this loss is plainly owing to the small quantity of bullion that was delivered into the mint in that period of time....

Henceforth there is no further discussion of putting the mint out to contract, and it seems that it continued to be operated directly under the control of a Mint Master appointed by the Calcutta Council with workmen from Murshidabad.

Cooper 51, quoting from Sir John Craig, provides a vivid description of hammered coinage at Pondicherry (which must have been very similar to that at Calcutta):

...Squatted on his heels in the way of all Hindus in front of a stone anvil, and provided with scales and weights, a hammer and chisel, each man cut his bars into approximately equal slices, which he weighed. If a slice was too light, he forced a fragment of silver into it with his chisel against the anvil; if it was too heavy, he filed it, and continued these two steps till the weight was exact. The adjusted slices were passed to a second workman whose sole equipment was hammer and stone anvil, and who beat them into circular disks of correct diameter and thickness and sent them to the coiners. Each coiner sat on his heels in front of the obverse die which had been driven firmly into the earth; he held the reverse die, some 8 inches long, in his right hand and filled his left with blanks. With the index finger of that hand, he flicked away each coin as struck, and with his thumb and middle finger placed a new blank on the earthed die, with incredible rapidity, while a second coiner smote with a heavy sledge (hammer) and with equal speed on the top of the upper die.



Coining in the Calcutta Mint in 1792 (painting in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

References

- 1 Falcke G (1999), JONS, 160, p23
- 2 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p7. 10th January 1757
- 3 Hill SC (Ed) (1905). Indian Records Series. Bengal in 1756-1757. A Selection of Public and Private Papers Dealing with the Affairs of the British in Bengal During the Reign of Siraj-UdDaula. John Murray, Albemarle Street. Vol II. p126. Proposals to the Nawab enclosed in letter from Clive to Coja Wajid, dated 21st January 1757
- 4 Hill, *ibid*, p127. Translation of Coja Wajid's reply to the Gentlemen of Council, Chandernagore
- 5 Sinha HN (Ed) (1957), Fort William-India House Correspondence, Vol II (1757-59), Government of India pp179-180
- 6 Sinha, *ibid*, p201. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 1st February 1757
- 7 Hill, *ibid*, p214. Letter from Ranjit Rai to Colonel Clive, dated 6th February 1757
- 8 Hill, *ibid*, p214. Letter from Colonel Clive to the Select Committee, Fort Saint George, dated Camp, 6th February, 1757

- 9 Hill, *ibid*, pp215-217. The Treaty as finally signed by the Nawab on the 9th February, 1757.
- 10 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p43 (also numbered 47), 14th February 1757
- 11 Hill, *ibid*, p225 Letter from Select Committee Fort William, to Mr Watts dated 16th February 1757
- 12 Sinha, *ibid*, p206. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 23rd February 1757
- 13 Hill, *ibid*, p278. Letter from Mr Watts to the Select Committee, Fort William, dated Moorshedabad, 10 March, 1757.
- 14 Hill, *ibid*, p320. Letter from Clive to Nawab dated 10th April, 1757
- 15 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p106-7. 28th April 1757
- 16 Hill, *ibid*, p359. Letter from the Nawab to Colonel Clive, dated 26th April, 1757
- 17 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p112 (also called p76), 27th April 1757
- 18 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p167. 13th June 1757
- 19 The number of 4000 is confirmed by an report from Calcutta to the Court of Directors (Sinha, *ibid*, pp273-275. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 10th January 1758)
- ...*This Committee on the 4th July informed the Board they had coined four thousand (4000) siccas from Mexico dollar bullion and that as soon as they had made a trial of two or three sorts of bullion, they would deliver in their report...*
- 20 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p199. 4th July 1757
- 21 Reported in SCMB 1949 p372. Described as: unique gold mohur of Alamgir II regn. Year 4 with mint name Alinagar Calcutta. From a talk presented by Dr. R.B. Whitehead No Photo, & whereabouts of coin now unknown
- 22 Hill, *ibid*, p459. Letter from Clive to the Secret Committee London, dated Muxadavad, 26th July 1757
- 23 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/30, p9-10. Translation of a Sunnud under the seal of Jaffer Ally Cawn, 15th July 1757
- 24 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p259, 4th August 1757
- 25 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/32, p715.
A slightly different translation occurs in this extract
Translation of the Nabob's Pervannah for a mint in Calcutta
To the Noblest of Merchants, the English Company, be the Royal Favour. In Calcutta a mint is established. You shall coin gold & silver of equal weight and fineness with the Ashrefees & Rupees of Murshidabad in the name of Calcutta. In the subahs of Bengala, Bahar & Orissa, they shall be current & they shall pass in the Royal Treasury. And no person shall demand or insist on a discount upon them.
Dated the 11th of the month [Zilkada] in the 4th year [28th July, 1757]
- 26 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p255, 4th August 1757
- 27 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p261. 8th August 1757
- 28 Sinha, *ibid*, p249. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 20th August 1757
- 29 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p330. 26th September 1757
- 30 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p331. 26th September 1757
- 31 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p339. 3rd October 1757
- 32 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p383. 24th October 1757
- 33 Sinha, *ibid*, pp273-275. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 10th January 1758
- 34 Sinha, *ibid*, p314/15. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 27th February 1758
- 35 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/30, p266. Mint account for December 1757, Jan & Feb 1758
- 36 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/30, p232. 6th July 1758
- 37 Sinha, *ibid*, p444. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 29th December 1759
- 38 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/32, p263. 9th June 1760
- 39 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p384. 24th October 1757
- 40 Rhodes N, Personal communication. See also JONS (1999), 159, p15-16
- 41 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/32, p712. 25th November 1760
- 42 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/32, p846. 31st December 1760
- 43 Sethi RR (Ed) (1968), Fort William-India House Correspondence, Vol III (1760-63), Government of India p359. Letter from Bengal to Court, dated 12th November 1761.
- 44 Stevens PJE (2008), JONS 197 pp37-47
- 45 Sinha, *ibid*, pp79-80. Letter from Court to Bengal dated 3rd March 1758
- 46 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/30, p389. At a Committee meeting called to decide what to do about the letter from the Board in London, not clearly dated but about 27th November 1758
- 47 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/32, p846. 31st December 1760
- 48 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/33, p291. 16th March 1761
- 49 Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/33, p465. 22nd June 1761
- 50 Sethi RR (Ed) (1968), Fort William-India House Correspondence, Vol III (1760-63), Government of India p359. Letter from Bengal to Court, dated 12th November 1761.
- 51 Cooper D. R. (1988). The Art and Craft of Coin Making. A History of Minting Technology. Spink & Son