

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CALCUTTA MINT, 1757 TO 1765

By Dr Paul Stevens

Introduction

For many years prior to 1757 the EIC had attempted to obtain the right to mint coins in their own mint, which they hoped to establish in Calcutta. In this they were not successful and it was not until Robert Clive recaptured Calcutta in January 1757 that the Nawab could be induced to grant this right. Pridmore has provided a comprehensive review of events occurring at that time with regard to the Calcutta mint and the coinage, and initially my intention in re-examining the records pertaining to these events was merely to identify the sources of the many quotes used by Pridmore, for which he failed to give references. However, a number of new facts have emerged from this work and they provide an interesting addition to the story for those interested in the numismatics of the EIC.

Background

For reasons that are not relevant here, in 1756, Siraj al-Dowla, the Nawab of Bengal, attacked and captured Calcutta. He renamed the city Alinagar and issued coins bearing this mint name, either from a mint established in the city or from his mint at Murshidabad.



'Alinagar' Rupee, RY 3 of Alamgir II

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

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

The Alinagar Kalkutta Coins

On 10 January 1757, only eight days after retaking the city, the Bengal Council decided that they would establish a mint¹:

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 21 January²:

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 encouraging³:

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 Nawab through the French because, in a letter from the Council at Bengal to the Court of Directors in London later in January, they stated⁴:

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 1 February the Bengal Council was able to report to London⁵:

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 6 February, Clive received confirmation that the Nawab would grant the right of minting⁶:

...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 siccas in your mint at Calcutta or Allenagar,...

and Clive conveyed this to the Select Committee at Fort St George Madras on the same day⁷:

... 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 again agreed to the proposal for minting coins⁸:

Article 5. That we shall have liberty to coin siccas 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 Nawab endorsed this article

I consent to the English Company's coining their own bullion into siccas. 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 February⁹:

That siccas 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 was asked to clarify the matter further¹⁰:

...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, probably 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 23 February the Calcutta Council felt that the matter had advanced far enough for them to ask for an Assay Master to be sent out from England¹¹:

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 Nawab and was able to report back on 10 March¹²:

The Nawab says you may coin siccas 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 10 April he wrote directly to the Nawab¹³:

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 siccas coined at Calcutta alias Alinagore

On 17 April Mr Watts finally managed to get the treaty (perwannah) but it was still not quite satisfactory¹⁴:

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 siccas 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 26 April the Nawab told Clive that he had acceded to Mr Watts demands¹⁵:

... 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 follows¹⁶:
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 siccas are begun to be stamped, and through all the mint houses, the new siccas 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 Murshidabad and a committee was established to look into the operating procedures¹⁷:

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 siccas, 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 work¹⁸) rupees had been produced¹⁹:

The Committee appointed for coining of siccas 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 Alinagar Kalkutta



'Alinagar Kalkutta' Rupee, RY 4 of Alamgir II
(Photo from Pridmore)

A gold mohur has also been reported although the records contain no reference to gold being struck at this time²⁰.

On 23 of June, Clive won the battle of Plassey and the Nawab was replaced by Mir Jafar Ali Khan (though not until 29 June when he also confirmed the right to have a mint in Calcutta²¹)

Coins with the Mint Name Kalkutta

The new Nawab was required to confirm the coining rights of the Company again, and this he duly did on 15 July²²:

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

and on 28 July he signed a Perwannah confirming the Company's right to strike coin, this time with the mint name Calcutta²³:

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 siccas 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... 1th Zeerlaida [Zilkada] 4th of the King's reign [= 28th July 1757]

(for a slightly different translation see reference below²⁴)

The Company's servants at Murshidabad had been discussing the minting rights with the Nawab, 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 impoted by native Indians was dealt with in this way and 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 Company²⁵.

By 8 August the mint had begun producing the new coins and fifty new coins were shown to the Calcutta Council²⁶:

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 20 August, Calcutta reported the new arrangement back to London²⁷:

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.



Silver 'Kalkutta' Rupee, RY 4

In September 1757, Messrs Frankland and Boddam were appointed joint Mint Master²⁸ and the mint swung into full operation sending 3050 Rs to Cozimbazaar for the approval of the Nawab and five to London²⁹. At the same time the mint was supplied with 35,000 old (Sonaut) rupees and 805 Persian rupees for recoining, and in October a further 50,000 old rupees were sent to the mint³⁰. Also in October a significant amount of gold that had been received from the Nawab was sent to the mint where it was to be coined into *Fooley* (i.e. star or flower) mohurs³¹.



Gold 'Kalkutta' Mohur, RY 5

(Photo from Pridmore)

A further entry from a meeting held in October instructs Mr Frankland (now apparently the sole Mint Master) to produce copper tickets for the use of the labourers rebuilding the fortifications of the city³²:

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 (shown here) and a six pice.



Copper 1 Anna Ticket

and a smaller denomination has been identified by Kathotia³³



Copper 2 Pice Ticket

(Photo from Rhodes)

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 them into circulation³⁴:

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 siccas, 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 siccas. 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 siccas 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 payment³⁵:

...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 siccas, 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 outputs³⁶:

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.

In March 1758, the Court wrote to Calcutta with instruction about how the mint should be run³⁷:

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 must 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 Madrass. When the contractors are chose, 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 with³⁸ although it was not immediately put into practice.

In the meantime the problems of getting the coins into circulation were continuing. The gold mohurs that had been struck from the Nawab's gold were stuck in the mint and a decision was taken to send 100 to the Ballasore factory where it was believed they might be sold for a good price³⁹.

This problem of getting the coins into circulation seems to have caused the mint to be little used during 1759 because, at the end of that year, Calcutta wrote to London⁴⁰:

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 siccas 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 siccas 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 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 Alamgir. This is confirmed by an entry in the records of June 1760⁴¹:

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



Five sun 'Kalkutta' Rupee



Six sun 'Kalkutta' Rupee

Coins with the Mint Name Murshidabad Struck in the Calcutta Mint

Up until this point in the story, everything written in this paper, with a few minor additions and corrections, agrees with the account laid out by Pridmore. However, 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 Murshidabad rupees⁴²:

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 siccas 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 siccas 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 siccas 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 and the authorities in Calcutta finally felt able to implement the instructions about the operation of the mint that they had been sent in 1758⁴³:

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

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.

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

In March, 1761 the mint was duly put up for contract⁴⁴:

Ordered the secretary to draw out an advertisement setting froth 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 it became obvious that nobody was prepared to bid for this contract⁴⁵:

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 1761⁴⁶:

...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.

In July, the Calcutta Council received notice that the Nawab had begun striking coins in the name of Shah Alam II, regnal year 2 and they agreed that coins issued from the Calcutta mint should follow suit⁴⁷:

...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 siccas to be struck in his name throughout these provinces of which, having advised the President, it was agreed that the siccas 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 disussion, it seems clear that the Calcutta mint starting producing Murshidabad rupees early in 1761, before agreement was reached to produce coins in the name of Shah Alam II. During the first half of 1761, therefore, these Murshidabad rupees would have been struck in the name of Alamgir II, regnal year 6. The question is, can we differentiate those coins struck at Calcutta from those struck at Murshidabad? A typical Murshidabad sicca rupee is shown below



*Murshidabad Rupee, Alamgir II RY 6
(Photo from Nick Rhodes)*

An example exists with three extra dots below the *Shah of Badshah* on the obverse, and an extra group of dots next to the star on the reverse. Perhaps these represent the marks of the Calcutta mint but this is mere speculation at present.



Murshidabad Rupee, Alamgir II, RY 6. Three dots below Shah and extra dots on reverse (Photo from Nick Rhodes)

From July 1761, the Calcutta mint started striking Murshidabad rupees in the name of Shah Alam II and these coins showed his second regnal year. Again, the question arises, how to distinguish between those coins struck at Murshidabad and those struck at Calcutta? A normal Murshidabad rupee is shown below:



Normal Murshidabad Rupee of Shah Alam II, RY 2 (Photo from Nick Rhodes)

However, a very rare rupee exists with a somewhat different style that could represent the output of the Calcutta mint although, once again, this is mere speculation:



Murshidabad Rupee of Shah Alam II, RY 2, with Unusual Arrangement of Legend. (Photo from Shailen Bhandare)

By September 1761, the dies for the Arcot rupees had been received and it was resolved that from then onwards the army would be paid in Arcot rupees. This, as well as the fact that the Arcot rupees had become the accepted medium of exchange in several parts of the Presidency (e.g. Chittagong) explains why the Arcot rupee became the major coin produced in the Calcutta mint for the next few years⁴⁸:

As Arcots will pass current at Dacca, Luckypore and some of the Aurangs equal with the Sicca, there will yet be a gain of 7 per cent by employing the Arcots on all such occasions and it is therefore resolved to pay the military in future in Arcots instead of sonauts, which through the scarcity of the other specie have been used for some years past without any deduction of batta so this will be a further considerable saving.

Ordered therefore that the Mint Master coin all the short wt Arcots with all possible expedition, and that he take all opportunities of purchasing bullion for that purpose



Six sun Arcot Rupee

In November 1761, attention turned to the production of gold coins. The records make it clear that gold coins had not been produced for some time past and the mint no longer had the skills to do this⁴⁹:

There being several parcels of gold which the proprietors are desirous of coining in the Company's mint & there being at present no servants in the mint acquainted with the coinage of gold

The President is desired to write to Muxadabad to procure such as may be necessary and the Mint Master is sent for and directed to lay before the Board an estimate of the charges of gold coinage in order that the charges and customs thereupon may be settled in proportion to the silver coinage which has already been done.

Earlier, in March of 1761, a new Mint Master had been appointed as revealed in a letter from Calcutta to London, and at the same time a request was made for the necessary utensils to assay gold⁵⁰:

Immediately on receipt of your letter of 13th March 1761 we appointed Mr Beaumont to the charge of that office, & we hope in consequence of our representation last season you will send us out a capable Assay Master with all proper utensils without which it is impossible that the fineness of bullion more especially gold can be ascertained to a sufficient exactitude.

These entries are the only ones that refer to gold during this period and it must be assumed that the coins struck would have been mohurs with the mint name Murshidabad.

In January 1761, the Calcutta Council was informed that the Nawab had begun striking coins showing the third regnal year of Shah Alam II, and they resolved to follow suit, starting on 20 February. In the meantime, the Treasury was ordered to send all two sun siccas to the mint for re-stamping into three sun siccas before 20 February⁵¹:

Three sun siccas having been struck at Murshedabad agreeable to the notice before given us by the Nabob as per Consultation December.

Agreed that three sun siccars be issued in our mint and become current the 20th of next month. That advertisement be made thereof, and that two suns will be reduced to thirteen per cent and all others to sonauts.

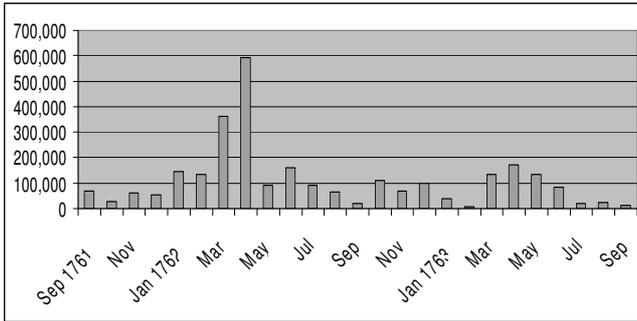
Agreed that the Committee of Treasury be directed to deliver to the Mint Master all the two sun siccars to be restamped into three suns and that the Mint Master be directed to get as many struck as possible against the 20th February.

The Mint was not able to coin all of the money sent by the treasury because of the additional work generated by private people asking for their money to be recoined. It was agreed that the mint should concentrate on the requirements of the Treasury and that private individuals would have to wait⁵²:

The Mint Master representing there is a vast quantity of money delivered to him from the Treasury to be recoined in order to prevent the loss of batta, which it is not in his power to get done while private merchants send in money daily to be recoined also.

Ordered him to defer coining for the private traders till he has finished the whole of the Company's money delivered him from the treasury to be recoined.

The large amount of work undertaken by the mint is shown in the output figures published sometime later. A clear peak can be seen in the graph in March and April 1762⁵³



Mint output from September 1761 to September 1763

By May, most of the coins from the Treasury had been re-stamped and the mint was re-opened for private traders.

In December 1762, the Calcutta Council was informed that the Nawab had started striking four sun siccās and, as with the two sun siccās, it was decided that the three sun siccās should be sent to the mint for re-stamping as four sun siccās and that from 1 February, all new coins would show the fourth regnal year⁵⁴. Before this work was started, the Council reconsidered the practice of re-stamping coins and it is clear from the entry in the records that up until that time the practice had been to literally re-stamp the old coins i.e. use the old coins as blanks. This caused the coins to have a larger diameter and to be thinner than those struck at the Murshidabad mint. They could therefore be easily recognised as Calcutta mint issues, and were not so easily passed in currency. It was therefore agreed that henceforth the coins should be re-coined, i.e. melted down and then re-coined⁵⁵:

The Board now taking into consideration the practice of re-stamping rupees in the Company's mint, and the many complaints made thro-out the country regarding the Calcutta Siccās, apparently owing to the custom of re-stamping, which as it draws the rupee broader & thinner & leaves the stamp less perfect & distinct, renders it very [easy to] distinguish them from the rupees struck at Moorshedabad, & obstruct their currency – think proper to prevent in future the many bad effects, which arise therefrom, to call upon the Mint Master's opinion concerning the expense of re-coining siccās...

It is therefore agreed to abolish the custom of re-stamping & instead thereof to recoin in the mint all rupees of the sicca standard at the rate of 2 ¼ per cent – whereby there accruing a profit of 14 annas

Ordered that eight annas thereof (the same sum that was gained by re-stamping) be paid to the Company – and the remaining six annas to the Mint Master

Several times in this paper the problem of distinguishing those rupees struck at Calcutta from those struck at Murshidabad has been discussed. The above archival extract appears to offer a possible means of arriving at the answer to this question, at least for coins dated regnal year 2. Specimens that are thinner and of greater diameter are likely to be from the Calcutta mint and may help substantiate or refute a hypothesis advanced by Nick Rhodes (personal communication). He has found that coins of the early years of Shah Alam II might have been marked with different groups of dots and it is possible that these represent the different mints.



Rupee of Shah Alam II, RY 3



Rupee of Shah Alam II, RY 4



Rupee of Shah Alam II, RY 5

The three pictures above show that different coins have different dot arrangements in the top line of the obverse. The first has two dots to the right and three to the left, the second has two dots to the right and two to the left, and the third has three dots to the right and two to the left. The full set of information discovered so far is given in the following table:

Regnal year 2	2 dots right	3 dots left
Regnal year 3	2 dots right	2 or 3 dots left
Regnal year 4	2 dots right	2 or 3 dots left
Regnal year 5 and later	3 dots right	2 dots left

Regnal years 3 & 4, at least, have two sets of patterns, though which might represent which mint (if any) is not known. More information is required to help address this issue.

In 1763, the British deposed the existing Nawab and replaced him with 'the Old Nabob', Jafir Khan, whom they had deposed some years earlier. In July he signed a treaty that included a commitment to ensure that the Calcutta coins passed equal to the Murshidabad rupees⁵⁶:

9thly I will cause the rupees coined in Calcutta to pass in every respect equal to the Siccās of Moorshedabad without any deduction of batta and whosoever shall demand batta shall be punished.

Despite the fact that Calcutta had switched from minting the rupees with the mint name Kalkutta to those with the mint name Murshidabad, a rupee with the mint name Kalkutta exists dated AH 1175, RY3 (see Wiggins sale, Baldwin (2001), sale 25, lot 618) and another dated AH 1176, RY 4 (see Pr 14).



*Rupee of Shah Alam, AH 1176, RY 4. Mintname Kalkutta
(Photo from Pridmore)*

Both coins appear to be very neatly struck and could possibly have been a presentation pieces for the Nawab.

In January 1764, the Nawab informed the Council that he had begun striking 5 sun siccās in his mints of Murshidabad and Patna, and Council agreed that, from 25 February, the same regnal year would be put onto the coins of the Calcutta mint.

Mr Beaumont had ceased being Mint Master late in 1763 or early in 1764⁵⁷ and had been replaced by Mr Middleton. He lasted less than a year and by October 1764 it was agreed that Mr Marriott should take up the post⁵⁸. For some reason this never happened and in November Mr Leicester applied to be appointed Mint Master⁵⁹. However, there seem to have been a number of problems with the mint during 1764, not least was a complaint from the Nawab that the Calcutta coins were inferior to those of Murshidabad⁶⁰, although this was shown to be untrue⁶¹. However, the President of the Calcutta Council (Vansittart) considered that the mint should be put onto a more professional basis and that the Assay Master, Mr Campbell, was the only person capable of understanding the processes needed to achieve this⁶². Campbell was asked to prepare a set of regulations for controlling the mint although Mr Leicester was appointed Mint Master in the meantime.

Within a few days Campbell had produced his suggested regulations⁶³ and by 22 November he had been appointed Mint Master⁶⁴. The proposed regulations were as follows:

1. *That books be kept open in the Assay office at regular stated hours in which shall be entered the receipt, delivery, assay and produce of all moneys sent to the mint, in so easy and distinct a manner that every proprietor of bullion may be satisfied by inspection that he has received the full produce. The utility of this regulation which has hitherto been totally neglected, is evident, as by resting the whole on the Mint Master and rendering him responsible, it not only deprives the minters of every opportunity of committing frauds but likewise gives reputation to the mint by the fairness and equity of the proceeding.*
2. *That all bullion be of sufficient purity to be coined into siccās or Arcots without the process of refining, be issued within 15 days after the receipt, or to the amount of 22,000 Rs per diem when it shall happen that larger entries are made than can possibly be coined in the time limited. In the neglect of this obviously useful regulation, consists one of the principal defects of our mint, which has brought it into some degree of disrepute & occasioned repeated, fruitless complaints.*
3. *That whereas in the present imperfect state of our coinage not more than 2000 sicca weight of bullion can be refined in one day, the Mint Master shall, in order to avoid the loss, charge & delay consequent on this tedious process, undertake to issue siccās or Arcots at the option of the proprietors to the amount of 11000 per diem provided the bullion to be coined into Arcots does not exceed 14 Dwts nor that for siccās 7 Dwts worse than English Standard. This regulation, which will be attended with little difficulty to a person well acquainted with the methods of assaying & mixing metals will save half the time, charges & loss incurred by refining bullion as is now practiced, of much greater purity than is here specified.*

4. *That for refining bullion of a lower standard (of which no vary considerable quantity is imported), there shall be erected under the direction of the Mint Master, flues, furnaces, [fests?] & the other necessary apparatus for refining, that this branch of the coinage may be conducted as in Europe whereby a saving of one, two or more per cent agreeable to the purity of the bullion will accrue to the merchant, as is demonstrable from the assay, besides a reduction in the wages paid to servants who will then be unnecessary.*
5. *But as some time must be allowed for establishing an undertaking attended with considerable trouble & labour in a country where the process is utterly unknown, the Mint Master shall in the meantime apply the only possible remedy to this capital defect in the present method of refining, by adjusting to the purity of the metal the quantity of lead to be used in [Fluesing?] and directing the due management of the fire, in which [con...?] the great art of assaying and refining. By this single regulation it is evident a saving will ensue to the merchant, when the money refined happens to differ from the required standard; a case that must frequently occur & of which there is now an instance in the mint*
6. *That as soon as a competent number of assays can be made, the prices for all bullion usually imported shall be adjusted with the most scrupulous exactness to the mint produce and assay, whereby the merchant may judge at a glance of his eye whether he shall reap more advantage by disposing of his bullion to the mint for ready money or by waiting the time prescribed for coinage.*
7. *That previous to adjusting the price of bullion, it will be expedient to fix upon some invariable standard for the sicca by which alone the real value of bullion to the purchaser can be ascertained, the iniquitous practices of shroffs in enhancing the price of silver beyond its intrinsic worth prevented & the frivolous unjust clamours raised by artifice against the quality of the Calcutta rupees effectively silenced.*
8. *That the Mint Master shall introduce some improvement in the method practiced of casting bullion into ingots, whereby a considerable loss ensues to the merchant, distinguished among the minters by the name of nearah.*
9. *That an immediate reduction take place of the monthly charge incurred by unnecessary servants about the mint, a charge which in the space of three years has increased, if I am not mistaken, from little more than twenty to thirty six thousand rupees per annum & which will continually decrease as the mint approaches perfection.*
10. *That all the necessary regulations for the coinage of gold be established with the same degree of accuracy & to the same advantage as silver. A branch of mintage with which we are at present perfectly unacquainted [with] to the great prejudice of merchants who are obliged to dispose of their Chequins & Ducats to considerable disadvantage or run the hazard & expense of sending their gold to be coined at Muxadabad, by which the Company also are deprived of their duties*

During 1765, Campbell worked hard to implement his regulations and to finally get the mint onto a professional and profitable basis and in this he appears to have succeeded so well that by September 1765 he was able to inform the Council that the mint was now more profitable than it had ever been⁶⁵

The accompanying accounts will explain the advantages to the Company & the publick arising from the late regulations established in the mint for the particulars of which I had the honor to present to the Board in the month of January last.

It is difficult to render descriptions of the several processes used intelligible to persons who are not conversant with the business of coinage. I apprehend therefore the most satisfactory exemplification of the above regulations will be to show that they are profitable. Accordingly I have stated the charges and profits on coinage for this & the preceding year, by comparing which it appears that a clear gain of 461399.11

arises from the mint, besides the duty to the Governor & Mint Master, and the profits are increased this year to the amount of 18887.3.6

Of this sum the Company gain by duty & the extraordinary produce of their own moneyer 13,000 rupees & the merchants the remainder, being a neat [nett?] gain more than ever produced at any former period.

It further appears from the accompanying accounts that the Company's own coinage for this year exceeds that of the proceeding by 856,599.13.3 besides near double this sum of increased coinage for the merchants as is evident from the increased dutys. Yet are the extraordinary charges for coinage no more than 2053.8.8. Hence it is demonstrable there must have been a great reduction of charges, an article which likewise ought to be brought to the Company's credit.

All these particulars will be further explained by the assay book, which I now have the honor to lay before you. This diary shows the daily issue and receipt of money, the time it is detained in the mint, the fineness of the metal entered & the neat [nett?] produce delivered. By this measure every proprietor of bullion is enabled to determine whether he has received the full amount either by comparing the produce with the assay, or with the produce of the same money at the mints of Bombay & Madras, which will prove the easiest method unless he is skilled in calculations of this nature.

Permit me, my Lord & gentlemen, to request that the papers which I now lay before the Board, the memorial I delivered in January last, the assay book, & my letter to the Select Committee on the subject of batta now before you, may all be transmitted to England by the Admiral Steevens, where by consulting the Tower office, the Honble Court of Directors may be satisfied of the nature of the improvements I have made, and how far my appointment to the direction of the mint has answered expectation.

I must beg leave to observe further that I begin the accounts from the month of June in order to complete the year, altho' I was not appointed Mint Master until the month of November. Yet, as Mr Middleton left the whole business to my direction, I claim to myself the merit of all advantages obtained for the Company from the time I first took charge of the Assay Office.

In the middle of 1765, the battle of Buxar between the British and Shah Alam II, supported by the Nawab of Awadh, led to the East India Company being granted the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and in consequence, control of all the mints in those territories, including Murshidabad, Patna and Dacca. The focus of attention shifted to the problems created by the *batta* system and how to ensure the outputs of the various mints were identical, as well as the shortage of silver for the mint, a story for another time.

Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, the EIC mint of Calcutta was established in 1757 and initially produced rupees (and possibly mohurs) with the mint name Alinagar Kalkutta. Later in 1757, following the battle of Plassey, they obtained the right to strike coins with the mint name Kalkutta but they found great difficulty in getting these coins into circulation. In 1761 they obtained the right to mint coins with the mint name Murshidabad and they continued to strike coins with this mint name throughout the time under consideration. However, they also began to strike rupees with the mint name Arcot and these coins appear to have represented a large proportion of the mint output. By 1765 a new Mint Master had managed to get the mint onto a more professional and profitable basis just as the Board of Directors in London began to question the *batta* system and the battle of Buxar led to the acquisition of more mints in the Bengal Presidency.

Acknowledgements

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References

- ¹ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p7. 10th January 1757
- ² 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
- ³ Hill, *ibid*, p127. Translation of Coja Wajid's reply to the Gentlemen of Council, Chandernagore
- ⁴ Sinha HN (Ed) (1957), Fort William-India House Correspondence, Vol II (1757-59), Government of India pp179-180
- ⁵ Sinha, *Ibid*, p201. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 1st February 1757
- ⁶ Hill, *ibid*, p214. Letter from Ranjit Rai to Colonel Clive, dated 6th February 1757
- ⁷ Hill, *ibid*, p214. Letter from Colonel Clive to the Select Committee, Fort Saint George, dated Camp, 6th February, 1757
- ⁸ Hill, *ibid*, pp215-217. The Treaty as finally signed by the Nawab on the 9th February, 1757.
- ⁹ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p43 (also numbered 47), 14th February 1757
- ¹⁰ Hill, *ibid*, p225 Letter from Select Committee Fort William, to Mr Watts dated 16th February 1757
- ¹¹ Sinha, *Ibid*, p206. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 23rd February 1757
- ¹² Hill, *Ibid*, p278. Letter from Mr Watts to the Select Committee, Fort William, dated Moorshedabad, 10 March, 1757.
- ¹³ Hill, *ibid*, p320. Letter from Clive to Nawab dated 10th April, 1757
- ¹⁴ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p106-7. 28th April 1757
- ¹⁵ Hill, *ibid*, p359. Letter from the Nawab to Colonel Clive, dated 26th April, 1757
- ¹⁶ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p112 (also called p76), 27th April 1757
- ¹⁷ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p167. 13th June 1757
- ¹⁸ 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...*
- ¹⁹ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p199. 4th July 1757
- ²⁰ 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
- ²¹ Hill, *Ibid*, p459. Letter from Clive to the Secret Committee London, dated Muxadavad, 26th July 1757
- ²² Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/30, p9-10. Translation of a Sunnud under the seal of Jaffer Ally Cawn, 15th July 1757
- ²³ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p259, 4th August 1757
- ²⁴ 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]
- ²⁵ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p255, 4th August 1757
- ²⁶ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p261. 8th August 1757
- ²⁷ Sinha, *ibid*, p249. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 20th August 1757

- ²⁸ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p330. 26th September 1757
- ²⁹ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p331. 26th September 1757
- ³⁰ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p339. 3rd October 1757
- ³¹ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p383. 24th October 1757
- ³² Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/29, p384. 24th October 1757
- ³³ Kathotia IK (2006), JONS 188, p23. See also Rhodes N (1999), ONS NL, 159, p15-16
- ³⁴ Sinha, *ibid*, pp273-275. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 10th January 1758
- ³⁵ Sinha, *ibid*, p314/15. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 27th February 1758
- ³⁶ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/30, p266. Mint account for December 1757, Jan & Feb 1758
- ³⁷ Sinha, *ibid*, pp79-80. Letter from Court to Bengal dated 3rd March 1758
- ³⁸ 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
- ³⁹ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/30, p232. 6th July 1758
- ⁴⁰ Sinha, *ibid*, p444. Letter from Bengal to Court dated 29th December 1759
- ⁴¹ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/32, p263. 9th June 1760
- ⁴² Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/32, p712. 25th November 1760
- ⁴³ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/32, p846. 31st December 1760
- ⁴⁴ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/33, p291. 16th March 1761
- ⁴⁵ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/33, p465. 22nd June 1761
- ⁴⁶ 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.
- ⁴⁷ Sethi, *ibid*.
- ⁴⁸ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/33, p829. 14th September 1761
- ⁴⁹ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/33, p1065. 5th November 1761
- ⁵⁰ Sethi, *ibid*.
- ⁵¹ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/34, p23. 21st January 1762
- ⁵² Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/34, p143/220. 1st March 1762
- ⁵³ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/36, p389. 21st November 1763
- ⁵⁴ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/35, p18. 21st December 1762
- ⁵⁵ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/35, p140. 24th January 1763
- ⁵⁶ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/36, p168. 11th July 1763
- ⁵⁷ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/36, p389. 21st November 1763
- ⁵⁸ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/37, p390. 30th October 1764
- ⁵⁹ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/37, p425. 15th November 1764
- ⁶⁰ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/37, p400. 1st November 1764
- ⁶¹ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/37, facing p422. 12th November 1764
- ⁶² Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/37, p425. 15th November 1764
- ⁶³ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/37, facing p442. 19th November 1764. Letter from the Assay Master (Alex Campbell) to Bengal Council, dated 17th November, 1764
- ⁶⁴ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/37, facing p449. 22nd November 1764
- ⁶⁵ Bengal Public Consutations. IOR P/1/38, p370 also numbered p737. 25th September 1765