THE BOMBAY PICE STRUCK BY THE ENGLISH EAST INDIA COMPANY DURING THE REIGN OF CHARLES II.

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The earliest pice struck for circulation in Bombay by the English East India Company, i.e. in the time of Charles II, have always been of intriguing interest, not alone for their rarity, although this is of a high degree, but also, and mainly, for their unusual legends and the elusive way they are dated. Standing, as they do, at the head of the British East Indian copper currency they invite the close attention of the student of the coinages of the British possessions overseas, and this article is written in the hope that, with the aid of several newly discovered or unnoticed varieties, a further, if not final, step can be made toward a complete elucidation of these striking coins.

The early trading efforts of the East India Company were much hampered by the lack of possession, on the west side of India, of a settlement which they could themselves completely control, and the fortuitous acquisition, by England, of the Island of Bombay, ceded by Portugal in 1661 as a part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza, when she became the consort of Charles II, formed the opportunity of meeting the Company's need, although some years elapsed before the island was placed at its disposal. It was, in fact, not until 1665 that the transfer, to Charles II, of the island was finally arranged, and three more years elapsed, namely, in 1668, before it was ceded, at an annual rent of £10, by the King, to the Company. From the latter year the island was carefully developed with a view to the transfer to it, from Surat, of the Company's Headquarters and amongst other ideas for development was one which aimed at the
institution of a coinage bearing the superscription of the Company and showing its English origin. By this means it was hoped, as in the case of the earlier Portcullis money of Elizabeth, and of the later Britannia dollars of Victoria, largely to supersede the native currencies, at least in the districts operated in by the Company.

The initial steps towards this end are to be seen in a series of letters from the Company (preserved or recorded in the India Office) which were first fully published by Mr. William Foster. The first of these letters was dated February 22, 1671, and it ran as follows:—

"Wee doe thinck it convenient for us to have a coyne of our owne there (at Bombay). Wee would have you therefore consider of such a coyne, soe as it bee not our Kings majesties or any stampe resembling the same, and of such sorts as will best suite with the traffique and exchange of the country, both in bigger and lesser speties. And if you shall find it necessary to have for change a small sort of copper coyne let it apeare to be what it is ; but what you shall coin of gold and silver, let it have an intrinsique value as to what it is stampt for, that it may be to our honnor and the begetting and preserving the esteeme thereof. But we would not have you coin any copper or other inferiour mettall before you coyne gold or silver, for to begin with that would be a disparagement to us."

Nothing appears to have been done to carry the command conveyed in the above letter into effect until the latter part of the following year when President Aungier wrote to the Company under the date October 7, 1672, as follows:—

"Of the copper which we have taken ashoare . . . what we have not sold wee intend to coyne into pice for the use of your island which we hope will also turne you to proffitt."

A further letter from President Aungier, dated December 21, 1672, informed the Company of the erection of the mint, of the weight

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² Numismatic Chronicle, 1906, p. 351, et seq.
and fineness adopted, viz., as used for the native coins of Surat, and of the inscriptions and design. These latter were decided upon as follows, to quote from Mr. Foster’s copy of the letter:

"On the one side the Honourable Company’s armes, with this inscription within a circle inclosing the armes: Honorabilis Societas Anglicana Indiarum Orientalium, writ in short; on the other side, within the inward circle is engraven Moneta Bombayae Anglicani Regiminis Anno Septimo, and within an outward circle is inscribed the words ‘A Deo Pax et Incrementum.’"

The names adopted for the coins, their weights and relative values were also communicated in the same letter, the copper coins being known as coppersoons and the silver coins being called Anglina. Forty-eight of the coppersoons went to one Anglina, i.e. the existing rate between the native rupees and pice. With the letter were sent specimens of the money, and a request that if the design were disapproved of some indication of what was required in place could be furnished.

That the design and inscriptions met with general approval is evident from the coins which have survived to our time, and I am also able to supplement the known varieties by the addition of two decidedly different types of the copper pieces. Tavernier,¹ a contemporary writer, says of this Bombay money "that it only passes amongst the English in their fort, and some two or three leagues up the country, and in the villages along the coasts; the country people that bring them their wares being glad to take that money."

These copper coins are usually roughly struck on flans too small for the dies, a common fault with Indian currency, and it is very doubtful whether specimens showing the complete inscriptions are in existence. The example referred to in Atkins² is stated to be similar to the silver Anglina above referred to, and to be most

¹ Voyages through Turkey into Persia and the East Indies, London, 1678, p. 5.
² The Coins and Tokens of the Possessions and Colonies of the British Empire, 1889, p. 140, No. 32.
probably from the same dies. A specimen was formerly in my collection and an illustration and a description of it is as follows:—

![Image of the Bombay Pice](image)

**FIG. I.**

1. **Obverse:** The Shield of Arms of the Honourable East India Company within a beaded circle surrounded by an inscription as follows: HON: SOC: ANG: IND: ORI:

   **Reverse:** MON: BOMBAY: ANGLIC: REGIM: A7° in five lines, within a beaded circle, surrounded by an inscription reading: A: DEO: PAX: & INCREMENTVM.

   A similar piece formerly in the writer’s collection has the legend on the reverse retrograde. Its description is as follows:—

2. **Obverse:** Shield of Arms as before, palm branches at the sides. Around, the remains of the inscription [HON: SOC]: ANG: IND: O[R].

   **Reverse:** [MON] BOMBAY: ANGLIC: REGIM: A7, in five lines, within a beaded circle, surrounded by an inscription reading retrograde [A DEO] PAX & [INCREMENTVM].

   A further specimen of these copperoons, also formerly in my collection, is of a distinctly different type. It may be described as follows:—

3. **Obverse:** A large Shield of Arms with no palm branches and no surrounding inscription but with the letters GB on either side.

   **Reverse:** MONET: BOMBAYAE: ANGLICI: REGIM: A7 DO in five lines, within a beaded circle. No outer legend.

   One is tempted to think that the letters GB on the obverse is intended for Great Britain and, flanking the Shield of the Company
as they do, that they imply that the coin is one issued by the Trading Company of Great Britain. However that may be, it should be mentioned that the design follows a well-known type issued by the Portuguese for their possessions in India.

The only indication of the year in which these three varieties of coins were struck is the reference, at the bottom of the central inscription on the reverse, that it was in the year 7, the "Anno Septimo" of the letter sent by President Aungier to the Company on December 21, 1672. The elusive nature of this reference will be appreciated when it is recalled that the above coins bear no indication of the point from which this seventh year of the English régime was calculated, and that there were several historical events which were equally likely to have been in the mind of the engraver, or the writer of the instructions to the engraver, when the dies were in process of manufacture. If taken from the restoration of King Charles II, in A.D. 1660, the year of issue would have worked out at 1667, and that is the date which Mr. Edgar Thurston\(^1\) adopted. It was also in the mind of Atkins.\(^2\) If taken from the cession of Bombay to England, in A.D. 1661, the date would have been 1668. But the island was not handed over until A.D. 1665, and, if this were the starting-point, the date of the coins was 1672. On the other hand, the King did not transfer the island to the Company until 1668 and if this commenced the era of the coins they were first issued in 1675, the year which was adopted by Mr. Edward Thomas.\(^3\)

In view of the previous doubt as to the actual date of issue of these earliest Bombay pice arising out of the above historical events, numismatists are under a debt of gratitude to Mr. William Foster for bringing more clearly under notice than did Ruding, the letters which relate to the initiation of the coinage, for it will have been seen that this correspondence shows that, of the possible dates above enumerated,

\(^1\) *History of the Coinage of the Territories of the East India Company in the Indian Peninsula*, p. 19.

\(^2\) *The Coins and Tokens of the Possessions and Colonies of the British Empire*.

the year 1672 was the correct one, and that the coins date from the seventh year of the time when the island was handed over to Charles II by the Portuguese.

As shown by Mr. Foster, the coins were first issued between October and December, 1672, and there is little doubt that the coinage of 1672 was extended into 1673, although no specimens reading anno 8 have so far been discovered. It is quite possible that some of the coins inscribed anno 7 were actually struck in the beginning of the following year, but, however that may be, it is thought that certain hitherto unpublished coins reading simply Ao Do, of which an example formerly in the writer’s collection and described below, represent the main issue of 1673.

4. Obverse: Shield of Arms as before. Palm branches at the sides. Around, remains of an inscription reading [HON SOC] ANG IND [ORI].

Reverse: [MONET] BOMBAY ANGLIC REGIMS AO DO, in five lines, within a beaded circle, surrounded by an inscription reading: [A DEO PAX] & INCREMENT[V]M.

There seems some probability that the Arabic numeral 8 was unintentionally omitted or, alternatively, that the central 0 represents the initial letter of octavo, comparing with the A7DO of coin No. 3, which is a specimen of the seventh year.

However that may be, coins of the year 9 are certainly in evidence, two of which, formerly in the writer’s collection, are described below. Number 5 is illustrated as figure 2.

FIG. 2.

1 In the Caldecott Sale of 1912, lot 46, a pice stated to read A DEO PAX INCREMENTVM 73 appeared, but the 3 was possibly a badly formed 8 and compares with our No. 7.
5. Obverse: Shield of Arms as before. Palm branches at the sides. Around, remains of an inscription reading:
[HON SO]C ANG I[ND ORI].
Reverse: MON|BOMBAY|ANGLIC|REGIM\(\textsuperscript{\textdegree}\)|A\(\textsuperscript{o}9\textdegree\), in five lines, within a beaded circle, surrounded by an inscription reading: A DEO PAX & INCREMENTVM 74.

The second example may be described as follows:—

6. Obverse: Shield of Arms as before. Palm branches at the sides. Around, remains of an inscription reading:
\(+[HON SOC ANG] IND ORI.\)
Reverse: MON|BOMBAY|ANGLIC|REGIM\(\textsuperscript{\textdegree}\)|A\(\textsuperscript{o}9\textdegree\), in five lines, within a beaded circle, surrounded by the remains of an inscription reading: A DEO [PAX & INCREMEN]NTVM 74.

Atkins describes a specimen of the same year although slightly varying in the form of the central inscription, but no reference is made to the figures 74 which appear on the above-described pieces. These latter coins are practically duplicates of each other, although they were struck from slightly differing dies, but they are both described here because it is impossible to get examples with complete legends. The year of issue in the central inscription on the reverse of No. 5 is, however, specially clear, and the figures 74 on the reverse at the end of the surrounding inscription of No. 6 are far more legible than the similar figures on coin No. 5.

The important point about these two coins is in the presence, on both of them, of the datal figures 74, as well as the regnal year 9; for the one supports the other and produce the year 1674 as the time of issue of the coins. Had therefore these pieces been known and appreciated by previous writers on the subject no speculation and error as to the date of these earliest Bombay piece would have arisen, and it is satisfactory now to place on record the absolute agreement of the coins with the records. In verification of the pieces dated 1674 Mr. Foster drew attention to a letter from President Aungier

\(^1\text{Op. cit.}\)
to the Company, dated January 18, 1675, reporting "The copper and tinn coyne goe currant in theise partes, but that of copper of farre greater expence than the tinn."

The coins so far considered were issued solely on the responsibility of the Company, but the well-known rupee of the date 1678, bearing a royal shield crowned, and inscriptions reading: THE RUPEE OF BOMBAIM, BY AUTHORITY OF CHARLES THE SECOND, KING OF GREAT BRITAIN, FRANCE & IRELAND, Atkins' No. 15, shows that the royal assent was subsequently given to the issue of coins by the Company for Bombay. As mentioned by Mr. Foster letters patent were granted, in 1676, authorizing the Company to coin in Bombay moneys of gold, silver, copper, tin, lead or any metal compounded of these, to be current in the East Indies, and to be called rupees, pices (sic) and budgrooks, or any other names the Company might adopt, provided they were not the names of any coins current in the King's dominions. This grant was not, however, communicated to the Company's Headquarters in Surat until 1677, and the coinage followed in 1678.

Hitherto no copper money has been associated with this new coinage, but the pice described below, illustrated as figure 3, and formerly in the writer's collection, indicates that copper pice—to use the new description—were actually struck as well as silver rupees. Unlike the latter, however, the design and inscriptions followed the earlier copperoons.

FIG. 3.

7. Obverse: The Company's shield as before, but very much larger. No palm branches at the sides or inscription.

Reverse: MONET | BOMBAYE | ANGLIC | REGM |, also in larger type, disposed in four lines within a beaded circle. Around, remains of an inscription reading: [A DEO PAX & INCREMEN]TVM 78.

It is fortunate that the remnant of the inscription on the reverse of this coin includes the datal figures 78, for, following the inscription on the earlier coins, which ends in 74, these figures must be intended to show that No. 7 was issued in 1678, as authorized in the letters patent above referred to, and they thus bring the coinage of these earliest Bombay pice, struck during the reign of Charles II, down to a date four years later than has hitherto been suspected and make the issues, so far known, range from 1672 to 1678.