Extracts from the diary of Christopher Henrik Braad, a Swede in Surat

Translated from the original, unpublished manuscript by Jeremy Franks (m-18694@mailbox.swipnet.se) with a biographical note.

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Christopher Henrik Braad (1728-81)

A generation after Braad's death in 1781, the Swedish-speaking world that knew him came to an end. Since time out of mind, its core had been the coasts and hinterlands of the western and northern Baltic, and its internal lines of communication across this sea had made its waters a part of this world. In 1809, Sweden was sundered from her former province of Finland. Adjacent to the Russian Baltic capital of St. Petersburg, Finland acquired the status (kept until 1918) of an Imperial Russian Grand Duchy. Sweden was not only severed from her pre-1809 history, of which Braad was a part, but, as never before in her history, was now shut in behind her Baltic, or eastern, coastline.

By the 1840s, a novel political philosophy that re-defined Sweden ahistorically was required to be learned by Uppsala undergraduates who would be public servants. Following their teacher - to them the Swedish Plato, to himself (in print) Professor B - they learned to evade whatever might conflict with his "rational idealism". Anything less like the Uppsala Braad had known a century earlier is hard to imagine, but, as a late 20th-century historian of ideas has said, this manner of thinking became the official late 19th-century ideology of Sweden. While it cannot be more closely addressed here, it may be suggested as having caused the neglect of Braad's work in India, and, indirectly, the failure of the one known 19th-century effort, by August Strindberg, to remedy this neglect.

In the 1880s, when Strindberg was employed in the Royal Library in Stockholm, he published an article asserting that Braad's Indian and eastern papers were neglected. This might have brought them the scrutiny they deserved had not Strindberg's first novel, The Red Room, made fun of what Professor B himself had taught Sweden to call SamhÄlle: Society, or the servants of the crown as an entity. It was not but might have been Professor B who admonished a brash young man to "never speak disrespectfully of Society: only those who cannot get into it do that." In taking umbrage at Strindberg, Society failed to make Braad's acquaintance and so could not make him and his work known to the compilers or readers of an unprecedented scholarly work on India.

Since 1886, the encyclopedic volume called Hobson-Jobson. A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases has run through many editions in the British Isles and India. Of the 600 works in its bibliography (London, 1994), one is the English-language edition (1771) of Pehr Osbeck's book about his voyage to Canton. It (or Osbeck's original Swedish) mentions the young fellow-servant of the Swedish East India Company whom Osbeck met outside Canton and called "the observant Braad".

That Osbeck commented accurately on this fellow countryman is apparent from only a slight acquaintance with Braad's Indian and eastern papers. But who was he, and what induced him to spend a third or more of his adult life in India, or at sea on Indian voyages?

Christopher Henrik Braad was born in Stockholm to Paul or Poul Braad, a Dane from Jutland, and his wife Gertrude. She was from northern Sweden, her father being an official in TorneÅ, a tiny port at the mouth of a northern river.

The times were hard. Sweden was still recovering from 20 years of war. That with Russia had been definitive. Peace had been enforced on Sweden by amphibious operations by galley squadrons, a product of Peter the Great's naval genius, against which Swedish Baltic ports, from far-northern PiteÅ to NorrkÃping, south of the capital, were helpless.

In 1734, the Braads moved to NorrkÃping. They placed their six-year-old son sub informatione privata Dni Magistri Erici Walbom, as an Uppsala clerk would note of this 15-year-old undergraduate in 1743. By then, Walbom had coached him into a command of Latin, and maybe also of Greek, and become a friend for life.

Despite an English poet's opinion, some parents do benignly affect their offspring. Paul's influence as a father who made a living in trade is perhaps plainest in his son's decision to study it at Uppsala and practise it in India and China. There is no saying whether Gertrude told her son of what she would have seen as a child in TorneÅ: how river craft came downstream in spring with loads of tar to be transhipped for the capital, the only market in Sweden for "Stockholm tar". (Tar being vital to northern European sailing vessels, the trade persisted until the early 20th century, when such river craft, up to 14-m long, carried up to four tons of tar or, poled upstream again, flour, sugar or coffee, as well as mail.)

When Christopher was eight, the great world impinged on his family. Led by Pierre-Louis Maupertuis, French scientists came to TorneÅ to make observations to determine whether the terrestrial globe were spherical. Satisfied by spring 1737 that it was not, they returned to Paris augmented (says La Grande EncyclopÊdie) by a young Lapp girl, whom Christopher's autobiographical note identifies as one of his maternal aunts. Voltaire's crack about 'Maupertuis flattening the Earth' suggests her pregnancy by Maupertuis was already apparent. Her child, who was also Christopher's cousin, was born in Paris and died probably there.

Braad's agreeable character begins to show during his Uppsala years, from the regularity of Walbom's letters (his to Walbom seem not to have survived) and the appearance among the names of his most regular later correspondents of those of five or six of his fellow undergraduates. Of his European friends in India (of whose letters he probably lost most in a shipwreck in 1758), the English might have said he had "a bottom of good sense", meaning (as Samuel Johnson did of the lady of whom he hilariously said this) a "fundamentally sound" character.

In 1747, on his first voyage east, to Canton, Braad exemplified what his recently completed Uppsala education meant to him, if not also an unexpected turn to Johnson's remark that "he who would carry home the wealth of the Indies must carry the wealth of the Indies with him." Braad spent the eight-month voyage reading and annotating over 100 books in Swedish, German, French, Dutch, English and Danish. His sharp comment on La Vraye Histoire comique de Francion (Leyden, 1685) suggests his reading of this pornographic work reminded him of Maupertuis: "the most shameful and obscene of the sort I have ever read or seen". More apposite work in French included Du Halde on China (four volumes, 1736). As a newly-engaged servant of the Swedish East India Company, Braad knew he might trade in pacotille goods, or those stowed as personal effects on the voyage home: it is a nice question what his homebound book-box contained.

His second voyage kept him in Surat from September 1751 to January or February 1752. Europeans would usually hire one or more armed retainers to precede their persons in public. Braad followed his own nose: merchants importune him in the street, a swirl of its dust blinds him, coiners at work in the mint catch his eye, he jots down funeral inscriptions in the European burial grounds, paces the town walls, counts their cannon, peers into the fortress and, perhaps in relief, finds some large green trees by the river. A Moorish garden outside the town delights him with camellias, poppies, unfamiliar white lilies, arcades of orange trees, a water garden where, in the sun, jets of dew become rainbows. He compiles data, draws maps and illustrations, maybe also pens his text. Why he should have done so much work and then spent most of the next ten years on India would be incomprehensible were not his fascination clear between the lines of his 400-page journal. On his return in 1752, he presented it to the directors of the Swedish East India Company.

Commissioned by them to investigate whether a Swedish trading station in Surat were feasible, he

sailed east for the third time in 1753. Crucial events were impending. In 1757, after the battle at Plassey, the English Company dominated Bengal; and the emperor in Delhi; and could begin to force its European rivals out of India. Braad left for Sweden in 1758 but seems to have inspired an exceptional degree of trust by then.

Back in Surat in September 1760, he was at once allowed by the French Capuchin mission to read and make extracts from a diary it had kept since the 1680s. Known now only from his manuscript, it was probably then a secret, for, relied on sometimes as mediators, the worldly-wise Capuchins may be supposed to have relied on informers in the European and India circles that relied on them. While, in December 1760, with his extracts mostly done, Braad speaks in a letter of writing a history of India, what we know of his character suggests why he did not: what he had learned in confidence might not be published. He was not the man to endanger the mission. In the event, it existed until early in the next century; if its papers survived, their present location is unknown.

Aged 35 on his return from India, Braad declined a directorship in the Swedish company: four eastern voyages and a shipwreck in fifteen years was enough. He returned to NorrkÃping, where he married thrice. He and his first wife had three daughters, before he was left a widower. His second wife died childless within two years of marriage. He married his third wife in 1772; they had a son.

With the help of correspondents, he compiled the work by which Sweden now knows him: Ostragothia literata, the men of letters of Ostergotland, his home province. He built up a library; its new works on India and the east suggest he never turned his back on his years there. His book buying must sometimes have almost provoked domestic trouble, but we have his widow to thank for engaging a bookseller whose listing of Braad's "beautiful and well-treated book collection" has its own beauty. Its 3,000 books may be scattered but the list is enough to suggest something of what made their owner such a distinguished figure.

From C.H. Braad: 1751-52 Journal, Book 2, Chapter 3

THE MINT IN SURAT

The Mint, or Xaraffa han, lying across the Meydan, is amongst the worst buildings in Surat, being made only of bamboo daubed with earth, with a tiled roof and bricked floor. It comprises long galleries, or rather sheds, divided into rooms. The longest of them, where smelting is carried out, holds forty or more small bricked kilns arranged in a horseshoe; they are open above. At each is a man equipped with a small hand-operated bellows. The crucible is round, with a rim that is six centimetres high, and about 25 cm in diameter neatly matching the upper aperture of the kiln. Once the silver in it has melted and been purified, and cast into narrow thin sheets, it is borne into another room, where it is assayed, and cut up into small pieces of the same size that are beaten into discs with hammers and weighed; if any is deficient a hole is made in it and a small bit of silver that makes good the deficiency is hammered into it, then they are brought into another room to be minted. One seldom comes across a rupee that has more than half the impression of the minting die, for they do not flatten the silver so much that it has the same width as the stamp, which is roughly as large as our Caroliner. I have heard it said that 40,000 Rupees are minted here every day and thus 30,000 lod is minted at a time. Undoubtedly this must be understood to mean on the days when minting is actually done, for they never do more than either melt or cut or mint each day.

Book 2, Chapter XIII

On weights, measures and coinage in Surat together with maritime information

Shirah[1], an Indian mountain king who reigned in India between 1540 and [15]50, who had previously driven off its real lord Homayum, who was forced to seek shelter in Persia, was the first who, in this country, established a certain mensuration and weight that were previously not established, which are still in use over the whole country, as well as in Surat, and are as follows.

An ordinary ser ought to contain 30 peis, and a peis weighs 3 miscal. 40 ser are reckoned as a

simple man or maund, that after the same accurate weighing is found to come close to 37 English pounds or 40 Swedish pounds[2] so that between a Swedish pound and a ser is but a small difference. 20 man make a candi.

There is, nevertheless, a great variation in this weight, all depending on the goods one buys or sells. Such goods as have no waste product, such as iron, copper, quicksilver, cinnabar and indigo, is weighed in simple man, excepting that from Agra that is sold in Agra mans of 54 ser.

All the goods that have waste or in which contamination can be mixed, have from 41 to 44 ser per man, depending on how the buyer and seller agree, as in the preceding 'Price Current'.

A ser of coral or ambergris contains 18 Bhrapeis or 27 ordinary [ser].

When selling elephants' tusks, they are sorted by weight, so all tusks that weigh over 16 ser are taken at 40 ser to the man; from 16 to 10 ser a piece at 60 ser per man; and under 10 ditto at 80 ser/man; if one does not want to replace those that are cracked or spoiled, they must be included with the rest.

Pucka ser are those of Bengal and contain 2 ordinary Surat ser; one sells cochineal, silk and incense in these weights.

Brotschia[3] weight is 5 per cent more for cotton, sugar & etc, so a brotschia candi cotton is 21 man Surat which they must carefully observe who send any goods to or from Surat.

Gold and silver weights are 6 chowls make 1 Rutta; 3 Rutta = 1 val. 32 val = 1 thola. 82 val are an English ounce troy weight, and 31 thola are 12 ounces, giving one thola against 2 1/2 Persian miscal or 11 1/2 massa [?] of which 41[4] massa are the same as one ser.

Diamonds and pearls are sold by Rutti. 20 viz are 1 Rutti - 24 Rutti = 1 Thanck and 100 Rutti go to 88 English carats.

People use here indifferently Roman balances4 or other European scales. Ordinary sellers have just simple weights, comprising scales of wood with small baskets for scales and worked stones for weights. To weigh diamonds and pearls they have a sort of small red berries with a black spot at one end, lall in Surat, and called sagga in Malay[5] which are trimmed [to match] how many go to a Rutti or Viz.

Mensuration of length is Cobit or Gouis, which has 24 Taya, and corresponds accurately to 27 English inches, or Swedish [?]. All goods are sold accordingly, except cloth, velvet and satin, that are measured in yards, English liqueurs, wood & etc that go by weight.

The usual coinage here is silver rupees; each should weigh 2 1/2 Miscal or 11 1/2 Massa[6].They are struck in Surat, no wider than a six-stiver piece, but 4 to 5 times as thick, and thus not more than half the die comes onto it. The inscription is in Persian: Seckej Zerba Surat Zaraff khanÊ which is 'Coin struck in the mint at Surat', and on the other side Ahmet Shah Batchia Gazi: 'Ahmet the Ruler, Descendant of Mahomet', together with the year of his reign, which is altered each year on the die[7]. Europeans who are willing to pay the outgoings may cause rupees to be struck here from their own silver.

Their copper coins are called pice, mostly four cornered or uneven in shape, with some Persian characters on either side. Each and every one should weight 3 Miscals. Formerly, 64 of them corresponded to a rupee but now only 48 ordinarily, but they rise [in number], as the price of copper or the need for small denominations of coins rises, and therefore in January and February 1751 it went so far that they would not offer more than 46-47 pice for a rupee.

Just as cowries are valid for small monies as change in Bengal, so in Surat they have a sort of small bitter almond, that they call badams and [they] are brought probably from Persia, where they are taken from [the kingdom of?] Lar where they grow superabundantly. Sixty-four are more usual to a pice, but rise and fall in response to the quantity imported.

In bookkeeping there are 3 pice to an anna and 16 annas to a rupee. Books are kept in rupees and taka; one hundred of the latter to a rupee.

Gold coins are Mohurs, struck to 13 rupees[8] but rise and fall between 12.75 and 14 rupees.

Similarly Persian silver Mahmudis[9] are valid, at 2 1/2 to 1 riya.

A round, full-weight Spanish piastre contains 73 Vals, for 100 of them one gets 214 to 216 rupees; the squared [sort] exchange at [?] percent less.

Thus all other European gold and silver coinage is valid, dependent on content; and also on account of the superfluity of the first metal.

Counting on a large scale is done in lacks: one lack of rupees is 100,000. One hundred lacks make a cror, and one hundred of them make an arib. Information as to how in other respects they count, and about their figures, is given elsewhere in this chapter.

I had almost forgotten that they also have a sort of counting on their fingers that first came into use on the Coromandel [coast] in the pearl fisheries. When, being in a crowd of many buyers, one will conceal the price he offers another, he raises his hands [over the skirt of his coat or with a handkerchief?], whereupon the seller takes him by the hand, and, by bending or squeezing their fingers, [bargain over?] the goods, when the other makes known in the same way how much he wants. The end of the finger signifies one (when large sums are in question this signifies ten, one hundred or one thousand), a bent finger five, a straight finger ten, a wholly open hand one hundred, a closed hand one thousand and so on, so, without uttering a single word, the largest purchase can be decided in the presence of many people, without anyone but the parties concerned being aware of it.

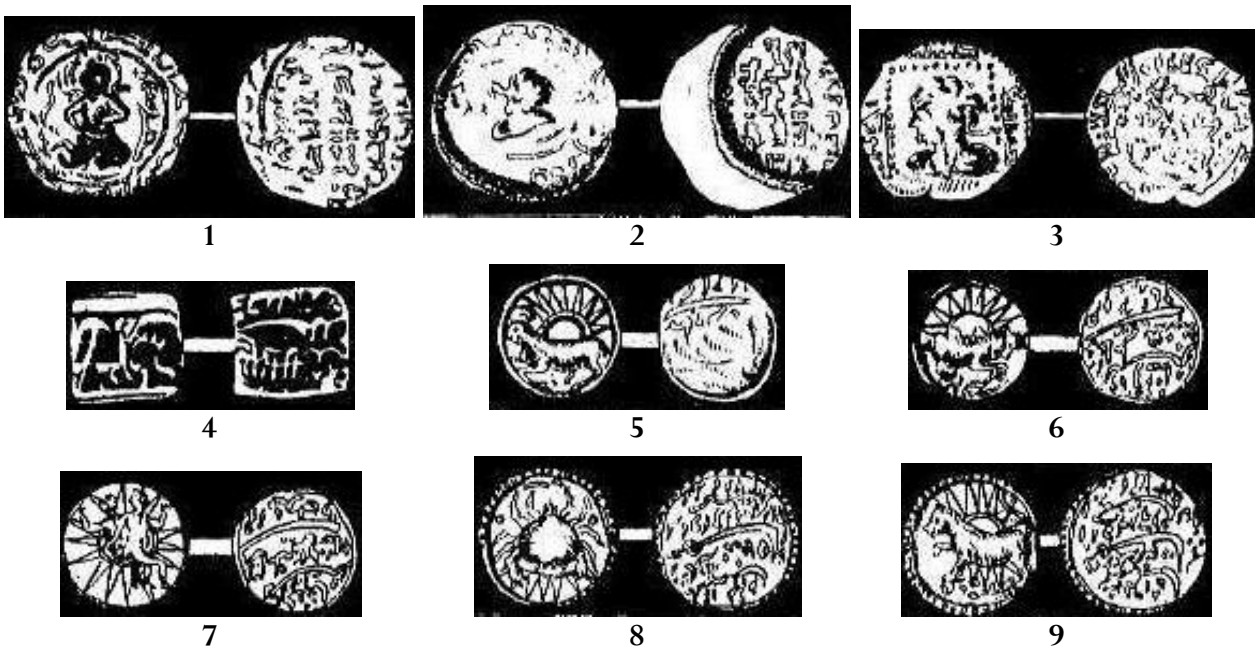

Table XXVI: p. 229 Rare sorts of Indian coins

Nos: 1, 2 & 3 are of copper and were said to be old Indian coins[11]; I leave it to those who understand their inscriptions to determine in what places they were struck or what they say. No. 2 was covered with a greenish-white varnish, so little could be made of the die mark. No. 3, not finer copper than the others seems not to be very old. No. 4, of fine silver, was said to have been struck by Tamerlaine, as one who is familiar with Arabic could easily say[12]. Nos. 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9 are silver Zodiac rupees, struck by the command of Noer Djiehan Begum.

I cannot say whether the Hindus formerly had any coinage. In the drawing are some that were issued thus, of which No: 1 should represent one of their deities[11], but in as much as I do not know what its inscription signifies I can draw no conclusion from it. No: [not given] is said to be from Malabar, as well as No. [not given].

Among the Mahometan [coins] there is none with figures on, other than the well-known Zodiac rupees, struck at the command of Noer Djuhaan Begum, Shah Selim's consort, of which I have drawn

the five I was able to see[13], but they are so rare hereabouts that those who have been fishing for them for as long as twenty years have not made a catch; and I have seen those among them that have been false; but they were so unlike them that no great effort was needed to distinguish them from the real. If No. 4 is a coin of Tamerlaine's, as I have been told, they may say who can understand its characters[12].

1. 'Shirah' was Sher Shah Suri (reigned 1538-45). Of Afghan stock, he was one of the ablest of all the Muslim rulers of India. He introduced a uniform coinage consisting of silver rupees weighing around 11.5 g and copper paisas weighing around 20 g. 'Homayum' was Humayun (reigned 1530-40 and 1555-56), the second of the Mughal emperors." Note contributed by Stan Goron, Oriental Numismatical Society.
2. Each of these two figures of pounds is, in the Swedish ms, followed by an illegible fraction.
3. Probably refers to the port of Broach, north of Surat.
4. That is, steelyards.
5. Braad writes malleiska.
6. "The silver rupees of this period should weigh around 11.5 g. Surat was a very prolific mint; by the reign of Ahmad Shah Bahadur (1748-54) it would have been under the control of the local Nawabs of Surat, rather than the Mughals. The coins would still have borne the name of the Mughal emperor." Note contributed by Stan Goron, Oriental Numismatical Society.
7. "Braad has made a bit of a mess of the coin legends: the legend of the Surat rupees should be obverse: ahmad shah bahadur badshah ghazi sikka mubarak (Ahmad Shah Bahadur, emperor, slayer of infidels, auspicious coin); reverse: zarb surat jalus maimanat manus sanah… (struck in Surat year … of his accession associated with prosperity)." Note contributed by Stan Goron, Oriental Numismatical Society.
8. The figure of 13 is followed by an illegible fraction.
9. The word is unclear in the manuscript. It "is perhaps meant to be Mahmudis though this was usually applied to a type of Indian coin weighing around 5 g and named after Mahmud I, Sultan of Gujarat." Note contributed by Stan Goron, Oriental Numismatical Society.
10. Two semi-legible fractions here; the second is probably one quarter.
11. These copper coins are not Indian but Turkoman - the first one may in fact be an Ayyubid coin (Ed.)
12. This coin would appear to be a rupee of Akbar or a copy of one, such as has been struck as a religious token. (Ed.)
13. "The Zodiac coins were struck originally by the emperor Jahangir (1605-28) but were much copied thereafter. They were struck mostly in Agra and Ahmadabad but a few are known from other mints. Selim is the pre-accession name of Jahangir. A few coins were struck in this name at the start of his reign." Note contributed by Stan Goron, Oriental Numismatical Society. It should be noted that the legend side of the coins depicted have been drawn either upside down or sideways!

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