



HISTORIES OF BRITISH ART

1660-1735 RECONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION

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John Slezer's *Theatrum Scotiae*: prospects of seventeenth-century Scotland'

John Slezer's *Theatrum Scotiae* was first published in 1693, and consisted of a series of engraved prospects of notable Scottish scenery, of antiquities and recent improvements in town and country. Slezer moved to Scotland in 1671 from upper Germany, serving as a surveyor of fortifications for the military. It was through his military duties that he first envisioned the *Theatrum Scotiae*, a visual compendium of townscapes, castles, ruined abbeys, public buildings and country houses, of great geographical reach. Slezer's views portray the north of Britain as both ancient and modern, and detail settlement as well as change across Scotland, but were also emblematic in alluding to the wider significance of this landscape to the nation as a whole. He enlisted a number of notable Continental engravers to translate his own drawings of these sites, and some commissioned from others, into a commercial enterprise. He also collaborated with Robert Sibbald, Charles II's Royal Geographer in Scotland, who provided the letterpress. He had encouragement from the court, from the king and his brother the Duke of York, but also sought sponsorship and patronage from the Duke of Lauderdale and the Earl of Strathmore. Although a commercial failure, Slezer's ambitious project had an extended afterlife, with his views being recycled in antiquarian studies and tour guides in the century to follow, and contributed significantly to the envisioning of Scotland. This paper will locate Slezer's novel publication, its words and images, in relation to a series of inter-related practices and cultural worlds, artistic, commercial and scholarly, military and civilian, as promoted by aristocratic and royal patronage as well as the metropolitan print trade, and the roles of collaboration and northern Continental skills and traditions in the making of a British visual culture.