



HISTORIES OF BRITISH ART

1660-1735 RECONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION

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“Things resembling graves & solid rocks”: Wenceslaus Hollar and Tangier in 1669’

In 1669 Wenceslaus Hollar travelled to Tangier in his official capacity as “His Majesties Designer” with Lord Henry Howard, grandson of the Earl of Arundel, on an inglorious embassy to negotiate with Moulay Al Rashid, the Moroccan Sultan. Numerous large-scale prospects and views are extant, providing a comprehensive survey from virtually every direction of the compass of the landscape and military topography of the small colony. They are arguably the most impressive drawings of Hollar’s career, made for the benefit of King Charles II to see what his remote and costly outpost looked like, a wedding gift from Portugal, given as part of the dowry on his marriage to Catherine of Braganza. They fall into two groups: preliminary studies likely drawn on the spot and worked-up finished drawings populated with figures or ships (further completed with elaborate titles). Whereas the drawings were made for privileged royal viewing, they were also used towards a series of prints called *Divers Prospects in and about Tangier* published in 1673, aimed at the wider “curious” public.

Hollar’s drawings reveal the agenda to transform and tame this part of the African continent and make it “appear familiar and even domestic”. As well as the notorious harbour ‘mole’, forts given comically anglicized names, and long stretches of crenellated walls, Hollar also depicted the ‘Herb & Kitchin Gardens for the Towne’ and a perfectly square and neat bowling green. It is also revealing that the key of the print entitled *Prospect of the Country from Peterborow Tower* includes “Things resembling graves & solid rocks”, which in the comparable drawing are indistinct shapes, inadvertently hinting that the colony was a disaster. Indeed, the first governor, Lord Teviot, was killed by a Moorish ambush in 1664, and in 1684 the English pulled out, demolished everything and left. Hollar’s images of Tangier, despite their visual accuracy, glossed over and hid a fearful place.