

In 1907, when the present portrait was painted, there were two internationally famous residents of Tangier – Walter Burton Harris and Ion Perdicaris. Both had been kidnapped by the notorious warlord, El Raisuli, and held for ransom. The latter, a Greek-American, sparked an international incident in 1904, while Harris, the year before, escaped from Raisuli's stronghold at Zinat after nine days, more through his own guile, than through any action taken by the British Foreign Office on his behalf. Up to this point, Harris's profile as imperial adventurer derived from his success as a travel writer and regular correspondent to *The Times* and other papers. Ten years younger than his friend, John Lavery, he was the son of a London shipping insurance broker and his wealthy Scots wife. After one year at Cambridge University, he gave up academia to travel at the age of nineteen (see James Chandler, 'Afterword', in Walter Harris, *Morocco That Was*, Eland ed., 2002, pp. 233-245). Not long after he arrived in Tangier, he joined a diplomatic mission to Sultan's court in 1887 and soon settled in the city, publishing his first book on travels in Morocco in 1889. Further explorations of Arabia and the Maghreb, as far south as the Yemen and the Atlas Mountains, followed, and were published in book form in 1893 and 1895 respectively. At a time when the novels of Rider Haggard and GA Henty were immensely popular, he was avidly read, and such was his fame that he provided inspiration to the writers of *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*, an American television series of the 1990s.

Lavery's encounter with Harris is likely to have taken place during one of the artist's first trips to Tangier. It may have coincided with his meeting with the flamboyant Scots anti-imperialist writer, RB Cunninghame Graham, who was also a regular visitor to the celebrated 'White City'. Although the painter's career flourished in Europe and North America in the intervening years, he was back in Tangier by the early years of the new century and in the spring of 1906, he, Harris, and Cunninghame Graham visited the court of the young pro-British Sultan, Mulai Abd al-Aziz IV at Fez. Lavery recounts their tense encounter with warlike native tribesmen, *en route* (*Life of a Painter*, 1940, p. 96), and Harris's nonchalance in persuading them that, as a friend of Raisuli, he could write them a note of safe passage through the lands controlled by the brigand. Arriving in the Moroccan capital, the artist had ambitions to penetrate and paint the Sultan's harem, efforts that were not entirely successful.

Throughout subsequent visits to Tangier, there were *soirées* with mutual friends at the handsome Villa Harris on the outskirts of the city, where many of Lavery's sketches looking west to the Medina and east towards Cape Malabata, were painted. Portrait sittings may also have taken place there. Clearly, the confident bravura of *Walter B Harris* matches that of other male portraits by Lavery in the early years of the century. While the sitter's starched collar and linen jacket are swept on to the canvas with ease of mastery, close attention is paid to Harris's careful grooming, for this great imperial adventurer, now in middle age, was something of a dandy. An Arab-ist who would frequently patrol his gardens in a *jellabah* (fig 1), here he adopts the pro-consular stance of a European grandee for the painter.



Fig 1 Anon, *Walter Burton Harris, (1866-1933)*, c. 1900, photograph

The two remained friends and when Lavery's daughter, Eileen, was married in Tangier in March 1912, Harris was one of the family guests. The Great War effectively ended their regular contact. Lavery was confined, save for one brief holiday at St Jean de Luz, to Britain, and thereafter he transferred his allegiances to the Riviera. Harris remained in the city of his adoption, using it as a base for expeditions to the Far East. On one such enterprise in 1933, he suffered a fatal stroke and his body was returned to St Andrew's, the English church in Tangier for burial. Here, in 1907, however, Lavery's portrait shows him in his heyday.