

'DUTCHMEN IN ILLIGH'
IS VERSCHENEN IN
'CAHIER MAISON D'ILLIGH'

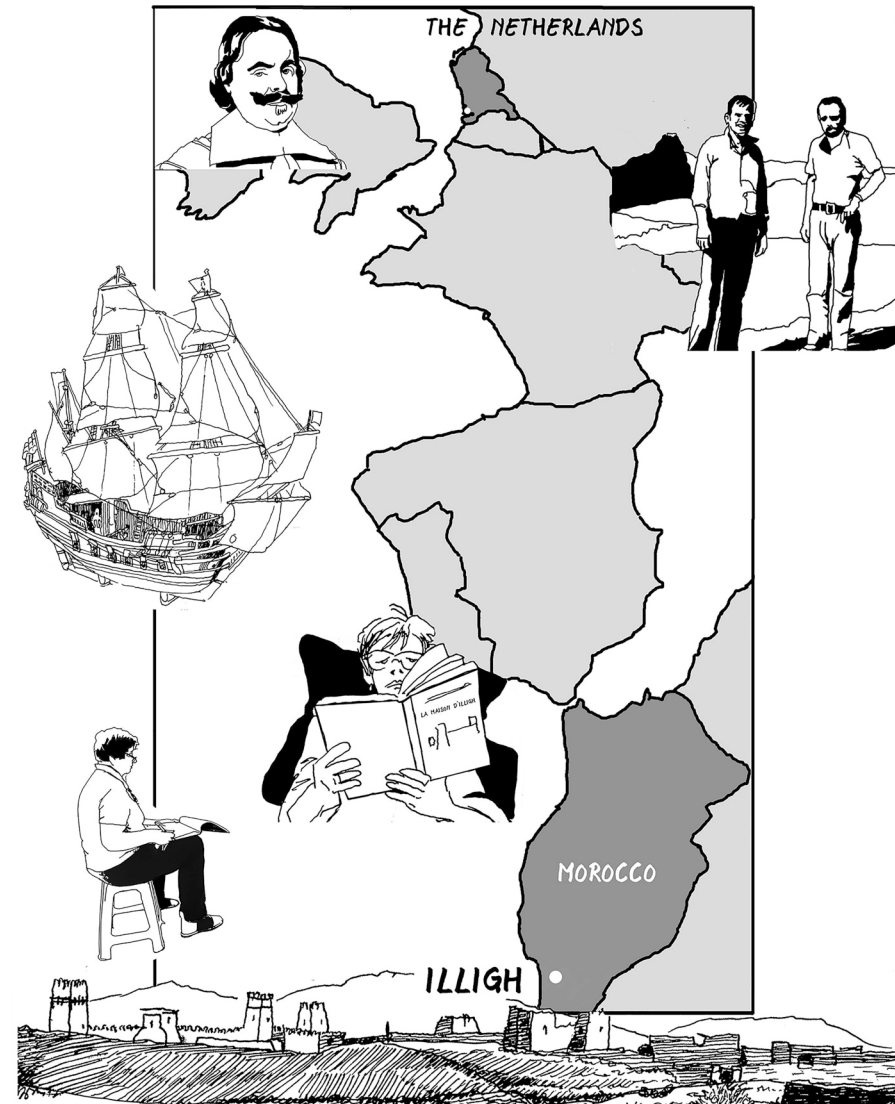
DUTCHMEN IN ILLIGH

a graphic article

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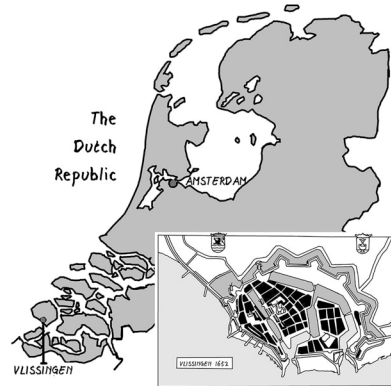
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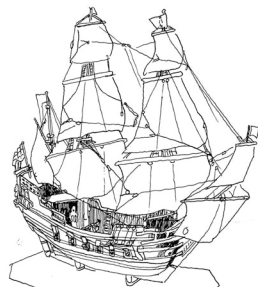
ABOUT MICHIEL DE RUYTER



MICHIEL DE RUYTER WAS BORN NEAR VLISSINGEN HARBOUR IN THE SPRING OF 1607. IT WAS A LIVELY PLACE, FULL OF THE COMINGS AND GOINGS OF MERCHANT SEAMEN, WHALERS AND FISHERMEN. MICHIEL FIRST WENT TO SEA AT THE AGE OF 11. HE LEARNED ALL THE TRICKS OF THE TRADE AND ENDED UP AS THE DUTCH REPUBLIC'S ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET. HE COULD DO ANYTHING AND WAS OPEN TO EVERYTHING. TRADING AND FIGHTING AT SEA EARNED HIM A REPUTATION OF BEING BOTH A SKILLED SAILOR AND A DARING STRATEGIST AND DIPLOMAT. ALL THIS BENEFITTED HIM AND BY THE AGE OF 35 HE'D BOUGHT HIS OWN SHIP, THE SALAMANDER.



Vlissingen

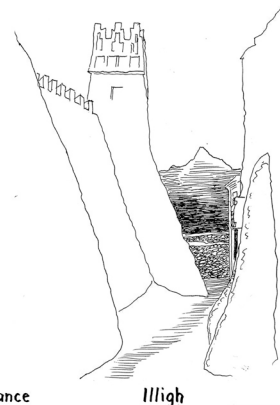


from 1643 till 1652 Michiel de Ruyter owned a galleon named De Salamander

IMMEDIATELY HE SET OFF WITH A CARGO OF MERCHANDISE FOR MOROCCO WHERE HE ACQUIRED A JEWISH INTERPRETER AND GUIDE. ONCE IN THE HARBOUR OF SANTA CRUZ (AGADIR) HE WAS ADVISED TO MEET THE POWERFUL SIDI ALI BOUDMIA, WHO CONTROLLED THE SAHARAN TRADE. THIS INVOLVED A DIFFICULT, THREE-DAY JOURNEY FROM THE COAST TO SIDI ALI'S RESIDENCE IN ILLIGH. ALL THAT MICHIEL KNEW WITH ANY CERTAINTY ABOUT ILLIGH WAS THAT DOZENS OF DUTCH SAILORS WERE IMPRISONED THERE.



landscape with Illigh in the distance

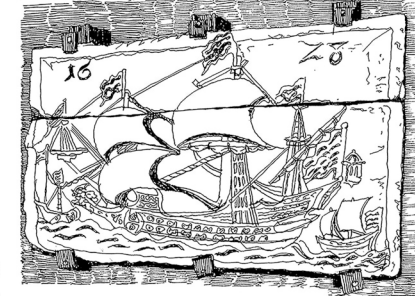


Illigh

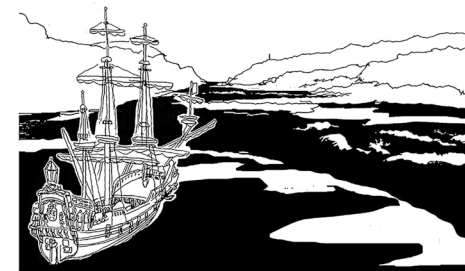
CAPTURED SAILORS

SEVERAL YEARS PREVIOUSLY IN 1639, THE DUTCHMAN ISAAC PALLACHE HAD ALSO TRAVELLED TO ILLIGH IN AN ATTEMPT TO RANSOM THE PRISONERS. BUT THIS FAILED MISERABLY AND CAUSED QUITE A STIR IN THE REPUBLIC. ISAAC CAME FROM A FAMILY OF JEWISH, ARABIC-SPEAKING ENVOYS, WHO REPRESENTED THE SULTAN OF MOROCCO IN THE NETHERLANDS.

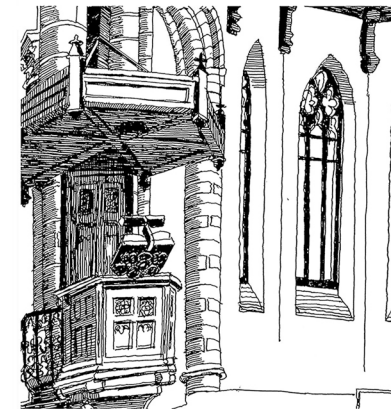
SEA VOYAGES WERE DANGEROUS AT THAT TIME. PRIVATEERS, PIRATES AND COMPETITORS WERE OUT FOR EACH OTHER'S BLOOD. FOR THAT REASON, COMMERCIAL SHIPS WERE EQUIPPED WITH CANNONS AND THE SALAMANDER WAS NO EXCEPTION. FOR SECURITY REASONS THEY FREQUENTLY SAILED IN A CONVOY.



THEN THERE WAS MOROCCO'S ATLANTIC COAST WITH ITS ROCKS, REEFS AND SAND BANKS, WHERE MANY A SHIP HAD RUN AGROUND OR WAS SMASHED TO SMITHEREENS. AND WHEN, FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIVES, THE SHIPWRECKED SAILORS TRIED TO REACH THE SHORE, THE LOCALS WERE ALREADY LINED UP TO CAPTURE THEM. SAILORS WERE VALUABLE LOOT AND COULD BE SOLD ON AS SLAVES, PUT TO WORK OR RANSOMED IN DUE COURSE.



THE VOC* MAINTAINED A BUDGET FOR PURCHASING THE FREEDOM OF ANY KIDNAPPED SAILORS FROM ITS OWN MERCHANT FLEET. BY CONTRAST, THE CREWS OF INDEPENDENT MERCHANT SHIPS HAD TO RELY ON ECCLESIASTICAL AND FAMILY DONATIONS.



Sermons from the pulpit of Vlissingen's St Jacob's Church exhorted parishioners to provide De Ruyter with money for the release of the city's sailors.



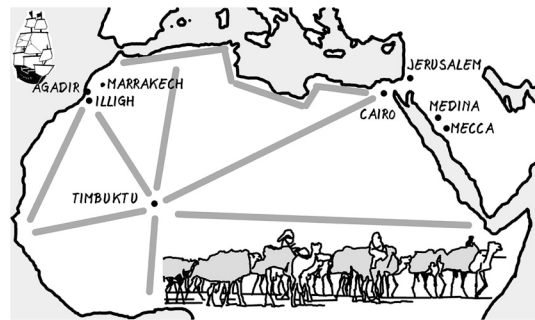
* V.O.C. The Dutch East India Company (1602-1800) was a private trading company, which - at that time - was one of the largest in the world. It had a monopoly on overseas trade in the areas east of the Cape of Good Hope and west of the Straits of Magellan.

MICHEL DE RUYTER AND SIDI ALI BOUDMIA



DE RUYTER WAS PERSONALLY RECEIVED BY SIDI ALI BOUDMIA, A RULER OF ROYAL STATURE AND RELIGIOUS PRESTIGE, WHO SURROUNDED HIMSELF WITH A GUARD OF SUB-SAHARAN SOLDIERS. DE RUYTER REFUSED TO BE INTIMIDATED. THE TOUGH NEGOTIATIONS THAT FOLLOWED INITIALLY CAUSED SIDI ALI TO FLY INTO A RAGE, BUT MICHEL'S FEARLESS REPLIES ULTIMATELY EARNED HIS ADMIRATION. AND SO BEGAN A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL TRADE RELATIONSHIP THAT WAS TO LAST FOR 8 YEARS. TIME AND TIME AGAIN, MICHEL RANSOMED DUTCH SAILORS FROM SLAVERY. ONE OF THEM WAS HIS FORMER CREW MEMBER JAN VAN MAREN, WHO LATER WROTE THAT HE HAD GIVEN UP ALL HOPE OF EVER BEING RELEASED FROM ILLIGH.

YET, DESPITE THE DIFFERENCES, THE WORLDS OF MICHEL AND SIDI ALI HAD MANY SIMILARITIES. BOTH THE DUTCH REPUBLIC AND ILLIGH WERE RECENT CENTRES OF POWER, MODEST IN SIZE BUT VAST IN TERMS OF TRADE AND PUGNACITY. AND WHERE ILLIGH FILLED A WEAK SULTAN'S POWER VACUUM, THE REPUBLIC NO LONGER WISHED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE KING OF SPAIN'S AUTHORITY OVER THE NETHERLANDS.



map of 17th century Saharan trade routes

ONE CONTROLLED THE OCEANS, THE OTHER THE SAHARAN TRADE. THE YOUNG SEA CAPTAIN AND THE OLDER SIDI ALI BOTH UNDERSTOOD THE RISKS OF LONG-DISTANCE TRADE JOURNEYS FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE. FOR SAHARAN CARAVANS SUFFERED SIMILAR HARDSHIPS TO SHIPS AT SEA: SANDSTORMS THAT KNOCKED THEM OFF COURSE, LACK OF WATER AND FOOD BUT, WORST OF ALL, VIOLENT ROBBERS.

GUNS AND GUNPOWDER WERE MICHEL'S MOST POPULAR MERCHANDISE. IN TURN, HE WOULD GO HOME LADEN WITH GOLD DUST, GUM ARABIC, OSTRICH FEATHERS AND LOCAL PRODUCTS SUCH AS BEESWAX AND HIDES.



a fan of ostrich feathers, detail in a 17th cent. painting by Rembrandt

PAOLO DE MAS IN SOUTH MOROCCO



The mausoleum of Sidi Ahmed Ou Moussa

SOME 320 YEARS LATER, IN 1974, AN UNSUSPECTING PAOLO DE MAS WAS STAYING NEAR ILLIGH AT THE PILGRIMAGE PLACE OF THE 16TH CENTURY SUFI SAINT SIDI AHMED OU MOUSSA, THE GREAT GRAND-FATHER OF SIDI ALI BOUDMIA. THIS YOUNG DUTCH SOCIAL GEOGRAPHER WITH ITALIAN MIGRANT ROOTS WAS RESEARCHING EMIGRATION FROM THIS VILLAGE TO THE NETHERLANDS. ALTHOUGH ILLIGH WAS NOT PART OF HIS STUDY, HE WAS TO END UP THERE, EVEN THOUGH HE DIDN'T KNOW IT YET...



1980 Herman van der Wüsten and Paolo De Mas in Illigh after a photo by Paul Pascon



Paolo De Mas in 2018

PAOLO: 'I wanted to stay in Morocco once the migration research had been successfully completed. So my professor and his number two, Herman van der Wüsten, inquired about projects with a greater emphasis on history. Soon the three of us were sitting at a table with Paul Pascon, a rising star in the firmament of Moroccan sociology. We knew of him and he knew of us. We immediately realised that he was top notch and Pascon was always on the lookout for foreign funding. With great enthusiasm, he described an enormous archive of manuscripts in Illigh that he'd been granted access to. There was a real click between us. And we too were solidly impressive as Dutchmen with a practical approach, money and campaign planning.'

SO IN 1980, PASCON INTRODUCED PAOLO DE MAS AND HERMAN VAN DER WÜSTEN TO THE ARCHIVE'S KEEPER AND HEIR MOULAY HUSAYN AND HIS BROTHER, MOULAY HASSAN ABOUDMIAA. THEY WERE DIRECT DESCENDANTS OF THE 17TH CENTURY SIDI ALI BOUDMIA AND THE SUFI SAINT SIDI AHMED OU MOUSSA.

Paul Pascon 1932 - 1985



COMMOTION AND DRAMA IN ILLIGH

PAUL PASCON HAD KNOWN THE FAMILY SINCE 1964. THAT WAS THE YEAR HE MET THE YOUNG MOULAY IMAM ABOUDMIAA IN A BOOKSHOP IN MARRAKESH AND WAS INVITED TO VISIT HIS FATHER, MOULAY HUSAYN, IN ILLIGH, SOON AFTER THE FAMILY ASKED PASCON TO WRITE A BOOK ON ILLIGH AND PROMISED TO GRANT HIM ACCESS TO PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS. IT TOOK 16 YEARS FOR THAT PROMISE TO BE FULFILLED. THE TALKS BETWEEN PASCON AND MOULAY HUSAYN WERE TRICKY. OFTEN HIS ELDEST SON, MOULAY IMAM, HAD TO BE CALLED IN TO MEDIATE. PASCON REALISED THAT OPENING UP THIS ARCHIVE WOULD TAKE LONGER THAN A SINGLE LIFETIME. SO, AT THE VERY LEAST, HE WANTED TO RAISE ITS VISIBILITY THROUGH A BROAD APPROACH.



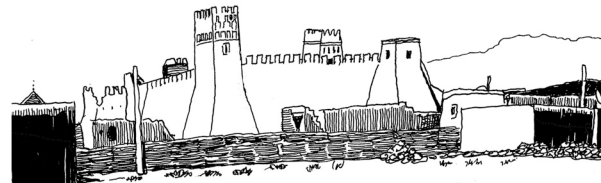
Jeannine and Paul Pascon with Hamdy, son of Hassan Aboudmiaa in 1981

HOWEVER, 30 YEARS LATER, A DUTCH EGYPTOLOGIST - AND WRITER OF THIS ARTICLE - ARRIVED IN ILLIGH. ALTHOUGH AWARE OF THE CONNECTION WITH MICHEL DE RUYTER, SHE WAS OTHERWISE COMPLETELY IN THE DARK AS SHE WANDERED THROUGH THE LABYRINTH OF ADOBE RUINS, GATES AND MASSIVE TOWERS.



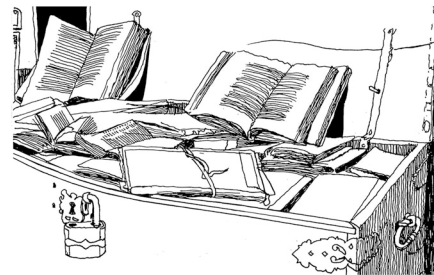
an Egyptologist in Illigh

Illigh: view of The Great House



Three former scions of the House of Illigh with on the right Moulay Husayn Aboudmiaa

AND THAT SUCCEEDED THANKS TO THE DUTCH CONTRIBUTION BOTH IN TERMS OF CONTENT AND FUNDING. AN INTERNATIONAL TEAM OF STUDENTS AND SCIENTISTS DESCENDED ON ILLIGH IN 1981. THEY CONDUCTED SOCIAL HISTORICAL FIELD RESEARCH AIMED AT PROVIDING A CONTEXT FOR PASCON'S ARCHIVAL WORK. THIS RESULTED IN AN INFLUENTIAL PUBLICATION. BUT FATE INTERVENED WHEN PASCON WAS KILLED IN A CAR CRASH IN MAURITANIA IN 1985. IT WAS ALSO A BLACK DAY FOR ILLIGH AND THE END OF AN ERA. THE ARCHIVE CEASED TO BE THE SUBJECT OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH.



One of the many chests in which the manuscripts are kept

THERE WAS NO ONE AROUND, ILLIGH WAS AN ENCHANTED PLACE BUT A VAST TERRA INCOGNITA. OVER A PERIOD OF 3 YEARS, SHE CAME BACK 3 TIMES AND 3 TIMES THE DOORS REMAINED FIRMLY SHUT. BUT SOMETHING PREVENTED HER FROM GIVING UP.

ILLIGH'S MEMORY

MEANWHILE, THROUGH THE INTERNET, THE EGYPTOLOGIST TRACKED DOWN HERMAN VAN DER WÜSTEN, WHO GAVE HER PASCON'S BOOK ON ILLIGH. IT WAS HERE THAT SHE AVIDLY READ ABOUT THE FAMILY ARCHIVE. THROUGH A PHONE NUMBER ON A WALL, THE EGYPTOLOGIST MANAGED TO REACH MOULAY IMAM ABOUDMIAA. HE REFERRED HER TO AICHA, HIS ELDEST DAUGHTER, WHOM SHE MET THAT VERY SAME DAY. AICHA EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE FRAGILE STATE OF SOME OF THE MANUSCRIPTS. AN APPOINTMENT WAS MADE FOR VISITING THE HISTORIC KASBAH WHERE THE ARCHIVE WAS KEPT. IT REVEALED A WONDROUS SURPRISE. HANGING FROM THE WALLS WERE BASKETS FULL OF BAMBOO CONTAINERS WITH ROLLED-UP, PROTRUDING MANUSCRIPTS. ALONG THE WALLS STOOD HUGE WOODEN CHESTS PILED HIGH WITH LEATHER BOUND TEXTS.



the keys of the archive



the writer and Aicha in front of the door to the archive



Bert Hogervorst, with Moulay Imam Aboudmiaa

STILL MORE EXTRAORDINARY WAS THE POINT WHEN MOULAY IMAM INTRODUCED HER TO HIS WIFE LALLA FATIMA HASSANAIN. THROUGH HER PASSION FOR THE GOLDEN AGE OF EGYPTIAN CINEMA, SHE SPOKE THE SAME ARABIC DIALECT AS THE EGYPTOLOGIST. AND SO IT WAS THAT, AT THE KITCHEN TABLE, THE STORIES UNFOLDED ABOUT ILLIGH'S PAST, A WORLD SHE BECAME PART OF AS A 16-YEAR-OLD BRIDE. THAT TIME IS DEEPLY ETCHED IN HER MEMORY. OVER MANY A MEAL SHE DESCRIBED A CULTURE THAT NO LONGER EXISTS. LALLA FATIMA IS AN INTELLIGENT OBSERVER, WHO PROVIDES FLAWLESS INSIGHT INTO THE RELATIONSHIPS OF GENERATIONS OF ABOUDMIAAS, THEIR HAREM AND SLAVES, THEIR LOCAL POWER AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ONCE VITAL FOR ILLIGH'S PROSPERITY.



Bert with Lalla Fatima Hassanain

THE RENEWAL OF THE DUTCH CONNECTION

BACK IN THE NETHERLANDS, THERE WAS STILL CONSIDERABLE INTEREST AMONGST ACADEMICS. REASON ENOUGH FOR THE EGYPTOLOGIST TO ARRANGE FOR AICHA TO HOLD A PRESENTATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEIDEN IN THE AUTUMN OF 2017. THIS WAS THE FIRST STEP IN A PROCESS TO SAVE ILLIGH'S MANUSCRIPTS FROM OBLIVION. IT WAS FOLLOWED IN 2018 BY AN INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN TIZNIT AND ILLIGH CO-ORGANISED WITH AICHA ABOUDMIAA AND HER FATHER.



Aicha Aboudmiaa with Paolo De Mas, Herman van der Wüsten, Harry Stroomer, an expert in Southern Moroccan dialect, and Herman Obdeijn, an historian and author of books on Morocco, and co-author with Paolo De Mas of "Geschiedenis van Marokko", 2021 (History of Morocco).



Moulay Imam Aboudmiaa (centre) talking to, from left to right: Mohamed Saadouni, a manuscript expert, photographer Annie Wright and, under the leadership of Professor Léon Buskens, a delegation from NIMAR, Netherlands Institute in Morocco.

PASCON ADVISED MOULAY IMAM ABOUDMIAA TO FOCUS ON THE ARCHIVE. MOULAY IMAM, IN TURN, MOVED COUNTLESS MANUSCRIPTS ON ILLIGH'S HISTORY TO HIS FATHER AND GRANDFATHER'S FORMER RECEPTION ROOMS IN THE HISTORIC KASBAH. SINCE THEN HE RECEIVES - STRICTLY BY APPOINTMENT - STUDENTS, ACADEMICS AND VISITORS ALIKE. FOR MANY YEARS, THE MANUSCRIPTS HAVE BEEN STACKED HORIZONTALLY IN WOODEN CHESTS OR ROLLED UP IN BAMBOO CONTAINERS. THIS COMPLICATES VIEWING THEM AND MAKING A COMPLETE INVENTORY. THEIR NUMBER IS ESTIMATED TO RUN INTO THOUSANDS.

SO WHAT'S IN THE ARCHIVE AND WHAT CONDITION IS IT IN? IS THERE ANY MENTION OF MICHEL DE RUYTER? OR IS THERE OTHER LONG LOST KNOWLEDGE? THESE AND MANY OTHER QUESTIONS ARE YET TO BE ANSWERED.



Moulay Imam Aboudmiaa has been guarding the manuscripts behind an impressive set of locks for more than 35 years.

OVER BERT HOGERVORST SCHRIJVER VAN 'DUTCHMEN IN ILLIGH'

GEBOREN 27-11-1953 IN DEN HAAG
 CLASSICA EN EGYPTOLOGIE
 SPECIALISMEN: HIEROGLIEF
 EN, PARYROLOGIE, DEMOTOLOGIE EN OSTRACA
 BRACHT TUSSEN 1988 EN 2001 VEEL TIJD DOOR IN CAIRO VOOR STUDIE
 SPREEKT VLOEIEND EGYPTISCH ARABISCH
 STUDEERT KLASSIEK ARABISCH
 EIGENAAR VAN 'HET VLEIGENDE NIJLPAARD' EEN REISORGANISATIE
 VOOR INDIVIDUELE CULTURELE REIZEN IN MENALANDEN



Bert in Illigh

OVER ANNIE WRIGHT :
 ANNIE IS DE VERTALER VAN DE TEKST VAN 'NEDERLANDERS IN ILLIGH' IN HET ENGELS.
 ZE IS FOTOGRAAF EN VAN HAAR HAND IS HET FOTOBOEK:
 'THE OLD KASBAH OF ILLIGH'