

Editor's Introduction

The background of Danish activity in Guinea and the West Indies

When Isert first arrived at the Gold Coast in 1783 the Baltic Guinea Company, chartered in 1781, was taking full advantage of an opening in the slave trade, both in Guinea and the West Indies. The American War of Independence had drained off some of the resources of Britain and France from its commencement in 1776, and in 1780 the Dutch, too, became involved in a war with England. These events tended to reduce the economic activities of the other nations involved in the trade in Guinea, and the Danes were able to expand into the ground vacated. There were echoes in Africa of the conflicts elsewhere when British ships attacked the Dutch forts in Guinea and destroyed Fort Crèvecoeur at Accra, thus ending the Dutch presence there and eastward along the coast. Now that there was nothing to stop him, the new Danish Governor, Jens A. Kiøge, set about expanding the Danish area of control eastward. The small English fort at Prampram was evidently no obstacle. Kiøge made treaties of alliance with former Dutch allies along the coast – Teshie, Dutch Accra, Tema, Kpone – and inland with the Krobo. Kongensten Fort was built at Ada in 1783 to support the Ada against the Awuna. The *Sagbadre War* in 1784, with victory for the Danes and their allies, resulted in more treaties, all the way eastward to Little Popo. The Danish Fort Prinsensten at Keta was built during this period.

Called the *'florissante'* period of Danish history in Guinea, its days were numbered. The American War of Independence ended with the Treaty of Versailles in 1783, and when the war between Britain

and the Netherlands was concluded in 1784, the Danes returned to them their former areas and rights on the Gold Coast. This was an immediate threat to Kiøge's plan for expansion, a plan which was looking even farther eastward, to Whydah. The English, uneasy about this, had supplied the Awuna with war material, and some groups in Little Popo were asking the English for aid against the Danish advance. A number of new allies of the Danes now wanted to change their allegiance, and Kiøge had to work very hard to keep control. In 1786 there was a conflict in Keta but the anti-Danish groups were driven out. In 1787 Kiøge, still bent on consolidating Danish trade on the coast, built the last of the Gold Coast forts, 'Augustaborg' at Teshie, and started the construction of 'Isegram' at Kpone. However, the trade was ineluctably on the wane. The Baltic Guinea Company was taken over by a consortium, The Guinea Entrepreneurs, that same year, and sold again two years later, to four of the staff at Christiansborg, who were permitted to trade privately upon payment of a fee of 50,000 riksdaler annually. It was against this background that Isert was to launch his project.

Danish history in the West Indies starts after 1660 when, upon the conclusion of the long period of wars in Europe, Frederick III established himself in Denmark-Norway as absolute monarch, and interest could again be directed overseas. Private excursions had been made to the Caribbean earlier, but with little impact. The post-1660 voyages produced cargoes enticing enough to whet the appetites of Danish and Norwegian merchants. The Danish West India Company was granted a royal charter in 1671. The Danes had already found an uninhabited island, St. Thomas, which boasted an excellent harbour, and they were now 'graciously permitted' by the king to retain this island and to build forts, lodges, offices, etc. on St. Thomas and on other equally 'uninhabited' islands 'uninhabited' obviously meaning not previously claimed by any other European power. Section 16 of the Company charter permitted it to take up the work of the already existing Glückstadt African Company if the latter showed signs of being unable to live up to the premises

on which it had been established, that is, to supply slaves to West Indian islands. Clearly, the need for assuring a constant supply of slaves was anticipated as early as 1671, and the merger of the two companies did in fact occur in 1697, producing the Danish West India and Guinea Company.

The acquisition of islands continued. ‘Crab’ [Vieques] Island had been a bone of contention for many years, with several nations vying for possession. Foremost among the contenders were the Brandenburgers. Denmark managed to take formal possession in 1694, beating the Brandenburgers by two days. St. John was occupied in 1712, and St. Croix was purchased from France in 1733. In 1754 the Company sold its shares to the king, thus making the Danish islands royal colonies.

During the nineteenth century there was a steady economic decline in the West Indies due both to competition from the newly developed process of extracting sugar from sugar beets and to the abolition, first of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and then of slavery. In 1867 Denmark began what was to be a long and tortuous process of trying to sell the islands to the United States. After much negotiation, aborted attempts, lapsed treaties and the vagaries of world politics during the next fifty years, the islands were finally sold to the United States in 1917 for \$25,000,000, to become the U.S. Virgin Islands.

What remains of the Danish-Norwegian presence in Ghana today? A few ruins of plantation buildings can be found. We are told that tamarind trees were usually planted in avenues by the Danes, and that these provide clues as to where the early plantations were located.¹ Family homes of Danes who settled in Accra in the nineteenth century, such as Richter’s house and Wulff’s house, remain.²

¹ Henningsen 1970: 117-8.

² Johan Emanuel Richter was a trader on the Gold Coast 1793-1805, and governor December 1815-October 1817. Wulff Joseph Wulff was Assistant at Christiansborg 1836-42. He died in Osu. See *Da Guinea var Dansk: Wulff Joseph Wulff’s Breve og Dagbogoptegnelser fra Gudkysten 1836-1842*, Copenhagen 1917; *A Danish Jew in West Africa: Wulff Joseph Wulff, Biography and Letters 1842*, by Selena Axelrod Winsnes, Trondheim 2004.

More than 70 Danish family names are extant in Ghana today.³ I myself used to drive down Dr. Isert Road in Accra almost daily.⁴ But the most visible, permanent and handsome reminders of the tie between the two countries are two imposing buildings, dissimilar in architecture but sharing name and function. They are the two seats of government, Christiansborg Castle in Copenhagen and Christiansborg Castle in Accra.

Biography of Isert

Paul Erdmann Isert was born on 20 October, 1755, in Angermünde, Brandenburg, the son of a master weaver. Having been appointed chief surgeon to the Danish establishments on the Guinea Coast he sailed from Copenhagen in July, 1783, and arrived at Christiansborg, the Danish headquarters in Africa, in November, 1783. He was immediately called upon to participate in the *Sagbadre War*, in the Anlo country on the east bank of the Volta River, where the Danes were allied with the Adas in their long-standing conflict with the Anlo Ewes. The war started on 25 February 1784, and ended in victory for the Danes and the Adas four months later. Isert's descriptions of the war in his second, third, fourth and fifth letters are detailed, informative, and lively. He remained on the Coast for three years, during which period he was sent eastward to Whydah, as a trader, and, at a later date, he journeyed inland as far as Akuapem, north of Accra, on a private excursion. Isert started the latter journey from Accra on 7 June 1786. He planned to spend some time in Akuapem on the way to his ultimate goal, Asante, having been invited by the sister of the Asantehene to visit the nation. To his great disappointment the trip was aborted after a ten-day stay in Akuapem by a call back to service at Christiansborg. Angry and embittered, Isert decided to leave Africa at the first possible opportunity. On 7 Oc-

³ Henningsen 170:116

⁴ This is a small side-road in the 'Ridge' area in Accra on which the Danish Embassy is located.

tober 1786, he sailed on the *Christiansborg*, bound for Copenhagen by way of the West Indies with a cargo of slaves. Just two days out to sea the slaves revolted, directing their attack against Isert himself in the mistaken belief that he was the owner of the ship. He was very seriously injured but had recovered by the time the ship reached its destination in the West Indies two months later. The entire episode is described in the eleventh letter.

Isert spent the next eight months in the West Indies where he saw slave auctions and witnessed the maltreatment of the slaves. Fully aware, albeit not admitting it openly, that he too had had a hand in providing slaves for the plantations, he was badly shaken by the revelation. Apparently, he had believed that the slaves were put to work as ordinary field hands and were treated accordingly. Isert resolved to do something to end the practice of sending slaves across the Atlantic to be subjected to such abuse. He lost no time in preparing a scheme for the establishment of a plantation on the Gold Coast, where he would raise the same crops as those cultivated in the West Indies and the black workers could remain in their own land, thus making the trans-Atlantic slave trade redundant.

He arrived in Denmark in late summer 1787 and he set about realizing the plans for the plantation. The finance minister, Count von Schimmelmann, agreed to support the attempt by giving Isert a modest sum of money and the right to buy goods and supplies on credit at Fort Christiansborg in Accra. Isert was commissioned captain in the infantry in order to give him more authority in the eyes of both the Europeans and the Africans. On 3 April 1788, Isert married Dorothea Elisabeth Plum, aged 22, daughter of a prominent Copenhagen family. She was venturesome enough to embark with him, three months later, on the pioneering project in Africa which was to cost both of them their lives.¹

The Iserts, accompanied by a number of other Europeans who were to take part in the project, left Copenhagen on 14 July 1788,

¹ For papers relating to Frederiksnopel, see Editor's Appendix 3

on the *Fredensborg* bound for Accra, where they arrived on 14 November. Isert journeyed to Mlefi on the Volta River where he had planned to establish the settlement. The location had been decided on earlier in the confident expectation of good soils for planting, and in the hope that the river could be used for transportation to the coast. However, Isert soon discovered that the area had a particular unhealthy climate, so he altered the plan and made for the hills of Akuapem, which he knew well, and whose paramount chief, Oubuobi Atiemo, was a good friend of his.

The group of settlers was very industrious. A good beginning was made on a road some 35 kilometers to the coast, and by December, the first crops had been planted and a house had been erected as headquarters. On 21 December 1788, the new settlers held an official ceremony of dedication at which the paramount chief himself raised the Danish flag and swore fidelity to the Danish king, represented by Isert. The settlement, now being called a 'colony', was named Frederiksnopel [Frederik's City] in honour of the crown prince of Denmark-Norway.² On 16 January 1789, Isert wrote a letter to Schimmelmann reporting on his progress and requesting more aid. Five days later, on 21 January 1789, he died. His wife gave birth to a daughter, christened Poulina, on 17 February. The mother died on 25 February and the child on the 18 March. Attempts by Isert's replacement, J. N. Flindt, to continue the colony failed, basically because of distance to the coast and the lack of support from Christiansborg. All signs of the settlement apart from remnants of the wall have now disappeared.

Reactions to Isert's death were strikingly various. The event seems to have been no cause for the mourning at Christiansborg but evoked expressions of great sorrow on the part of Schimmelmann and his wife. Schimmelmann was particularly distressed at the blow to the incipient colony. Isert's wife's brother, Frederik Plum, eulogised Isert in a poem which was published in a prominent journal.

² For the plans for a colony, see Editor's Appendix

J. A. Kiøge, who had been governor of the Danish establishments during Isert's term of duty in Africa, and clearly had been his friend, wrote a moving obituary in which he remarked that Isert had been ridiculed and mocked during his lifetime and that very few indeed mourned his passing.³ H. C. Monrad, who was Isert's immediate successor as a reporter of life at Christiansborg and on the Guinea Coast, made a point of contesting Isert's reporting and of belittling him whenever possible. A leading contemporary botanist honoured him in the year of his death by naming a genus of plants after him.⁴ At least one modern writer was convinced that Isert had in fact been murdered.⁵

What manner of man could have been the object of such divergent opinions? The known facts of his life are few and are restricted to the date and place of his birth, to his place of study, and to the last four years of his life. I have been unable to discover when he made his first appearance in Copenhagen. His name does not appear in the catalogues of students or medical practitioners in the Danish archives. A search by librarians at universities in Germany where he might have studied yielded negative results. However, I finally traced a letter that Isert had written from Guinea in 1785 to Sir Joseph Banks, a letter which provided some important information and revealed something of the man.⁶ In his charming and blundering English, Isert told of his studies in botany under the tutelage of the highly respected Dr. Marcus Elias Bloch in Berlin, and he declared his burning desire to undertake scientific expeditions in Africa and the West Indies, should he receive financial support from Sir Joseph Banks. Isert also wrote that he had widened his studies from pure botany to include medicine, in order to increase his chances for work in Africa. Thus, his stated motivation was scientific

³ For the obituary, see Editor's Appendix 4, pp. 246–7.

⁴ Johann Christian Daniel von Schreber, German botanist and zoologist, gave the name *Isertia* to a genus of plants of the family *Rubiaceae*, a red-dye producing madder.

⁵ Cf. Thorkild Hansen, *Slavens Øyer*, 1970.

⁶ Cf. Editor's appendix 2, pp. 219–26.

and had nothing to do with the furthering of Danish economic or political interests in Africa. It does not support the claim of a modern biographer that although German by birth, Isert was Danish in his ways of thinking and working.⁷ Since Denmark had sent foreigners out to other parts of the world as investigators earlier in the century, and since relations between Denmark and Germany were close, it is understandable that Isert turned to Denmark, which actually had establishments on the Gold Coast. And in Copenhagen he received his posting to Africa, from the Danish company. The fact that there was a real paucity of botanical material and plant specimens from Africa in Denmark at that time could scarcely have escaped his notice. But having arrived in Africa he expanded his cope of study considerably, branching into ethnography. In the preface to his book he took on the new role of historical author 'with a holy obligation' to record, the manners and customs of the Africans for posterity. Of course, he knew quite well that this type of information had been recorded earlier by others, so he may simply have been establishing himself as one who was in a position to improve upon, or even correct, older sources. He often cited previous reporters, taking issue with them at times. I have addressed these in the notes to the translation.

From the outset Isert had an unreservedly positive attitude toward Africa and the Blacks, and an equally negative attitude toward the Europeans on the Guinea coast. An admirer of Rousseau's philosophy he was eager to point out the corrupting influence of European civilization on the Blacks. It was Isert's contention that the desire for European goods had led to robbery, the pawning of debtors and to murder, a crime that he claimed was unknown to the Blacks before the advent of the Europeans and their luxury items. The one area in which the Blacks fell short of his unstinting praise was in their unquestioning obedience to fetish priests, all swindlers in Isert's eyes.

He saw Europeans as a thoroughly bad lot – lascivious, gluttonous

⁷ Kay Larsen in *Dansk Biorafisk Leksikon*, 1937

inebriates. Life at forts in the company of his adopted countrymen held no pleasure for him. In Isert's view they jeopardized, even ruined their health by consorting excessively with 'Venus, Ceres and Bacchus'. He found them men of little merit and commented that one had to have recourse to one's own resources in order to tolerate staying there. – Isert, of course, had his botanical interest to occupy him and he collected plant specimens at every opportunity. He made no allowances for the background of many of the staff, for a difficult and boring life at the fort, and for constant fear of illness and death, but he did recognize the factor of homesickness and grudgingly admitted that this could be ameliorated by taking 'a (*quasi*) wife'. The single, towering exception to this widespread degeneration, in Isert's eyes, was Governor Kiøge.

Isert's disdain, indeed contempt, for the others at the Danish establishment could not have been a secret to them. Since he wrote openly about it, it is safe to assume that he made no effort to hide his distaste. It is equally safe to conclude that this was a major cause of others 'mocking him', 'ridiculing' him, not 'understanding' him. Yet this was the man who returned to the Coast to start a new settlement.

In his new and authoritative role Isert was to be responsible directly to Copenhagen and not to Fort Christiansborg in Accra, at a time when that establishment was in serious financial straits. As if that were not provocation enough, he was also empowered to establish a military alliance with Akuapem, particularly to protect the settlement and Akuapem from other Black nations and from other Europeans, for the settlement was to be exclusive. Furthermore, he would purchase slaves, in competition with Christiansborg, since slaves were to be used in the colony. Isert explained that this was the method used in Africa for cultivation of the land, but that slavery at Fredriksnopel would permit no maltreatment, since slaves were to be only serfs, and slave-trading within the colony was prohibited. Miscegenation was also prohibited, and the European men who were married were required to bring their wives and families with them.

The combination of Isert's aloofness towards the Danes in Accra and the apparently favoured position of Fredriksholm, against the background of deteriorating Danish trade on the coast, was certainly more than enough to assure him an unsympathetic reception at Christiansborg. Isert died, ostensibly of fever, his family followed him in death, and the dream of a utopian colony dwindled away. He was, however, remembered, and even honoured by some.

Isert can be seen as the watershed in the annals of the Danish-Norwegian settlements West Africa. Although, sent out as a government official he was also a representative of the new body of enlightened reporters who made their appearance in the 1780s.⁸ Motivated by intellectual curiosity and influenced by eighteenth century rationalism, he was the first reporter to leave Denmark with the specific, albeit private, purpose of gathering and recording information from West Africa. However, it was Isert's misfortune to have made his entrance at the wrong time in history. He was too late for the expeditions sponsored by Linnaeus from the 1740s on, and for the first expedition sent by Denmark to her tropical colonies in 1763. And he was just a few years too early for the first expedition sent specifically to gather botanical specimens in West Africa. It fell to Peter Thonning to execute that project in 1789-1803. But Isert has been acknowledged as the pioneer in the establishment of the African botanical collection in Denmark.⁹ His plant collection has been preserved in the Botanical Museum in Copenhagen, where it is kept together with that of Peter Thonning.¹⁰

The book

Reise nach Guinea und den Caribäischen Inseln in Columbia was written in the form of letters. Apart from the tenth and eleventh letters,

⁸ Philip D. Curtin. *The Image of Africa*, Madison 1973: 14

⁹ Carl Christensen, *Dens Danske Botaniks Historie*, Copenhagen 1924-6:117

¹⁰ Isert also left two descriptions and drawings of birds which are in the University Library in Copenhagen. See pp. 326-7.

which are addressed to Isert's father, there are no salutations. It is impossible to know whether it was actually a series of letters or if Isert had merely employed a literary device popular at the time. I am inclined to think that they were letters, either sent to various friends or to just one, whose name or names and all personal references were deleted in the editing. It is clear that the readers to whom the book was addressed were expected to be of similar turn of mind as was Isert himself. Sharing of the same 'code' is implicit in many of Isert's comments and asides to the reader, particularly on the behaviour of the Europeans in Africa. An example of this is his disinclination to describe the antics aboard ship after the ritual performed in crossing the 'Line', explaining that such a description would disgust reader. Perhaps the 'letters' were sent to Dorothea Plum, whom he may have come to know before he left Denmark for Africa. This guess is based upon the very short period of time that passed from his return to Denmark to the date of their marriage. He returned in late summer 1787, and from then until they married on 3 April 1788, a period of about eight months, he had his book published, launched his plans for a new settlement in Africa, made the arrangements for its initiation, and advertised for, and hired, staff and artisans for the realisation of the plan. If Isert and Dorothea Plum were not acquainted before then it must have been a hectic courtship indeed. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any reference to the pair in letters in the Plum family collection in the Royal Library in Copenhagen. The only direct reference to the journey to Africa is a touching memory book given Dorothea Plum by her family and friends before her departure. It includes a very moving farewell to them both written by her father.

Isert's book is notable for its attempt at objectivity and a scientific approach. He frequently made comparisons between African and European customs – to the advantage and, or, disadvantage of both sides equally. For example, when he found a certain musical instrument performance unpleasant he equated his reaction to what might be that of an African hearing European violin or cembalo

music for the first time. This is in contrast to earlier Danish writers who, if they mentioned it at all, concluded that the African had no music, only loud noises. Isert commented upon the same ethnographic details as did his predecessors but his handling of the materials was refreshing in its absence of eurocentrism and lack of condemnation. Pointed teeth were simply pointed teeth and not a proof of cannibalism. The apparent ease with which the African women give birth to their babies excited no comment on their having escaped God's judgement. The dietary habits of the Blacks were admirable and sensible in Isert's eyes and the Europeans were exceedingly foolish not to emulate the Blacks in that respect.

Although his disapproval of the fetish priests was unconditional, his descriptions of other aspects of religion were objective. He even attempted explanations for practices which other Europeans had dismissed as based on ignorance or barbarism. The worship of the python is a case in point. Isert launched the hypothesis that a python may have once saved a person's life by killing or attacking an animal, and that as a consequence, and in gratitude, the snake was made into a godhead. His objectivity, however, did not generate sufficient respect to prevent his willingness, had he found the opportunity, to capture and preserve that same snake. Scientific curiosity held pride of place.

Isert made a strenuous attempt to find a scientific explanation for the black skin of the African, an intellectual exercise which was widespread in the eighteenth century. Having launched the theory that the skin of the Blacks had been stained by blood after excessive perspiration, he invited other theories to disapprove his, but was adamant in rejecting the idea of a hybrid resulting from a mating between a European and an ape. His counter-argument was based upon the intelligence of the Black which he claimed was, if not superior to, at least equal to, that of the European, a postulate which was not shared by his Danish predecessors.

Isert had read widely in several European languages and was careful to acknowledge a number of sources precisely in his notes.

Some were not acknowledged but I have indicated in my notes those that I have been able to identify. His language preferences appear to have been German, French and English, with Latin as his professional language. I have found no references to sources written in Danish – his citations from the earlier Danish source, Rømer, were from the German translation of 1796. There is no sign of his having mastered Dutch. His admiration for the English and French and their languages was undisguised. Given this polylinguistic background his poor performance in writing is inexplicable. Faults in the written French and English may be excused. In Latin it is worrying. But in his mother tongue, German, it is shocking. In a great number of cases my translation has perforce been influenced by informed guesses based on research, my increasing familiarity with Isert's way of thinking, and my own experience gleaned from a five year residence in Ghana and from studies at Legon. German experts to whom I have turned for aid and advice were appalled at Isert's errors of syntax and grammar. In a German review of the book in 1789 the reviewer closes with, 'Everywhere one finds printing errors in language, which, because of the wealth of useful information, one can readily ignore. Perhaps the author is not German.' (*Physikalisch-Oekonomische Bibliothek*, 1789:46–70).

It is my sincere hope that the reader will use the translation as a guide to facilitate finding material of particular interest in the original text, hence that the original will eventually be made available in a facsimile edition. Ultimately it is Isert's own words that should be read.

Previous translations

1. The first Danish translation appeared in 1789 in the collection *Gyldendals Samling af de bedste og nyeste Reisebeskrivelser I Udtog* Vol. III, pp. 247–512. The translator, who remains anonymous,

did a careful piece of work in presenting the entire text. The only changes were omission of the drawings and the meteorological appendix, inserting botanical nomenclature into the text rather than as footnotes, and placing the table of contents at the end.

2. *Reise nach Guinea und den Caribäischen, Inseln*, Berlin and Leipzig, 1790, is a second German edition containing the following changes: the foreword was rewritten and abbreviated; the introduction to the meteorological appendix from the original was placed immediately after the foreword and the meteorological observations were omitted; the 'letters' were changed to chapters, omitting headings and closing phrases. The text itself was unaltered apart from the translation into German of the English phrase in the twelfth letter. From page 319 to the end the publisher included a treatise on the slave trade, its history, its extent, descriptions of ships, loads, treatment of slaves, customs of Blacks. None of this material is Isert's work. I have been unable to identify the author or the editor of the treatise.
3. *Reize na Guinea en den Carabische Eilanden*, Dordrecht 1790, is a Dutch translation listed in H. Ehrencron-Müller 1927. I have not been successful in finding a copy of this for examination
4. *Voyages en Guinée*, Paris 1793, is a French translation of the complete text. The translator has stayed close to the text in general but has taken a few liberties, such as presenting the final paragraph of the foreword in a French far more fluent than the original German but changing the meaning in the process. He explained in a footnote following the foreword that that he would not use the name 'Columbia' for America as Isert did, since common usage contra-indicated the practice. The French text has several omissions such as the word 'monthly' in describing payments to be made to the 'mulatto treasury' (p. 241), and the last sentence of the penultimate paragraph in the seventh letter. There is an occasional inexplicable mistranslation such as *un insecte* for Isert's *thier* in describing a python (p.172). The English conversation in the twelfth letter was translated into French and the French

conversation was corrected. The appendix of meteorological observations was included but the introduction to the observations containing an explanation of the methods and instruments used was omitted. The French edition was reviewed in *L'Esprit des Journaux, François et Étrangers*, vol 9, Paris September 1793, with comments both on the original and on the translation.

5. *Bref om Guinea-Kusten och Caraibiske Öarne*, Stockholm 1795, is a translation into Swedish by J. H. Olin of excerpts from Isert's book. The excerpts are true to the original but there is no indication of what or how much, was left out.
6. *Reize van Koppenhagen naar Guinea*, Amsterdam 1797, is a Dutch translation of the entire text which is very close to the original. The appendix and index are included but the original plates were replaced by drawings by J. C. Bendorp. The plate showing women's clothing was replaced, Isert's plate showing the installation of the field marshal [Third Letter] was omitted, and an entirely new drawing depicting the entrance of the king of Afla [Seventh letter] was added.
7. *Laegen Paul Iserts Breve fra Dansk Guinea 1783-87*, Copenhagen 1917, edited and translated by Ingeborg Raunkiær, is a popular edition in modern Danish which has omitted considerable sections of the original text, without indication. All of the above translations, apart from the third one on the list, are available at the Royal Library in Copenhagen.
8. *Voyages en Guinée et dans les Iles Caraïbes en Amérique*, Paris, 1989, is a new critical edition of the earlier French translation. It contains an introduction and notes by Nicoué Gayibor.

This translation

I have refrained from capitalising nouns but have retained Isert's orthography of proper names. The modern names of persons or

places are indicated at first appearance in [-] immediately following the original, if they are totally different they have been placed in the notes.

The division into paragraphs is the same as the original. All (-) are Isert's. My editorial comments are in [-]. The original pagination is indicated throughout the text by || - ||.

Isert's footnotes were far more extensive and scientific than were those of his predecessors. Since he used an alphabetical system it was possible for me to use a numerical one and distinguish my notes from his. In the eighteenth century Germanic alphabet 'i' and 'j' were identical. When Isert had gone through the alphabet and needed to start anew he used 'a' again. I have altered this to 'aa', etc. Editorial comments to Isert's notes are [-].

The Scandinavian alphabet has been used in the bibliography, that is, Æ, Ø [Ö], and Å [AA] are at the end, in that order. Measurements are equated to modern terms at first appearance in the text, but there is a complete list in the appendix.

The ubiquitous term *Negerer* has no single English equivalent so I have used the phrase 'Black settlement'. Michel Dortmoont translated sections of the Starrenberg manuscript for me. Unless otherwise indicated all translations of Letter headings, quotations and other non-German phrases are my own.

The greatest challenge, and the most problematic aspect of the work, has been that of style. The inescapable fact is that Isert wrote badly, expressed himself clumsily and committed many grammatical errors. My original intention was to translate as faithfully to the source as possible, fairly literally, yet remaining grammatically correct. However, as the work progressed along this line it became increasingly obvious that the language was so cumbrous and distracting that it interfered seriously with perception of the content. In an earlier version I had already broken up many of the latinate sentences. Now I have aimed for even more fluency while preserving the flavour of the text. Where Isert repeats a noun several times in the same sentence or paragraph I have done the same. His ironic

circumlocutions have been retained. His obscure sentences have been translated as clearly as possible with editorial comment in the notes where necessary. The result has been a compromise whose success or failure I leave to the reader to judge.

Since the first publication of this volume, in 1992, several of the early sources cited in the notes have been published in modern English translations, and annotated. However, in every case the original pagination is indicated in the modern text. Thus, references to the original can easily be found in the modern editions; which are all listed in the bibliography.