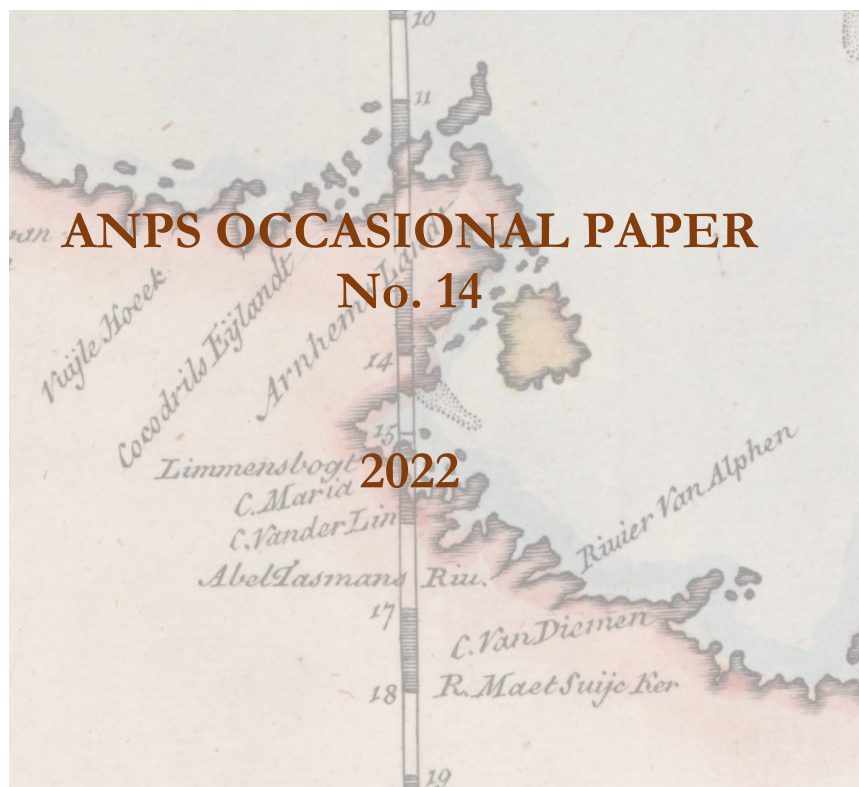


# Who named Groote Eylandt?





# WHO NAMED GROOTE EYLANDT?

Jan Tent

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon in the field of toponymy to encounter placenames whose origins cannot be determined. Their purported origins are often based on folk-etymologies or on a misattributed namer. I believe the naming of Groote Eylandt is a case of the latter.

Groote Eylandt is Australia's fourth largest island, measuring some 50 km east-to-west by 60 km north-to-south, with an area of 2,326.1 km<sup>2</sup>. It lies just off the eastern coast of Arnhem Land. The traditional owners of the island are the Warnindhilyagwa people who speak the Anindilyakwa language.<sup>1</sup> David Nathan (Linguist, Groote Eylandt Language Centre, p.c. 24/4/2020) notes *Ayangkidarrba* is the Anindilyakwa name for the island, and simply means 'island'.<sup>2</sup>

It is generally claimed Groote Eylandt was named by Abel Tasman in 1644. The Northern Territory Place Names Register (Northern Territory Government) cites Ingleton (1988, p. 216): 'Flinders correctly supposed this to be Tasman's 'Groote Eylandt' shown on the old Dutch charts. He retained Tasman's name and the Dutch spelling is still used on the modern charts'. Appleton and Appleton (1992, p. 126) are also cited: '[...] an island in the Gulf of Carpentaria named by Abel Tasman in 1644.' The Dutch Wikipedia webpage for Groote Eylandt makes the following claim based on David Hill's book *The Great Race* (2013):

Groote Eylandt werd voor het eerst door Europeanen bezocht in 1623, met name door de Nederlander Willem van Coolsteerd met zijn schip de Arnhem. Het was echter Abel Tasman die het eiland in 1644 zijn Nederlandse naam gaf.

([https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groote\\_Eylandt#cite\\_note-1](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groote_Eylandt#cite_note-1))

[‘Groote Eylandt was first visited by Europeans in 1623, in particular by the Dutchman Willem van Coolsteerd with his ship the Arnhem. However, it was Abel Tasman who gave the island its Dutch name in 1644.’]

The English language Wikipedia entry likewise attributes the name to Tasman, as does the online *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Groote-Eylandt>), McHugh (2006, p. 94), Cole (1983), and Reed (1973, p. 111). Reed declares: ‘**Groote Eylandt** NT The island was noted in 1623 from the *Arnhem* and again in 1644 by Tasman, who gave the name, which means Great Island.’ The Anindilyakwa Land Council's website declares the same:

First contact with the later arriving Europeans is well-documented although slightly contentious. According to historical records, Willem van Coolsteerd first sighted the island in 1623 aboard the Dutch ship Arnhem. In 1644, Abel Tasman, in the service of the Dutch East India Company, arrived on the island's shores pronouncing it 'Groote' or great – meaning large.

Anindilyakwa Land Council (2020)

One author, McCarthy (2005), dissents from this conviction, intimating the island was named by Carstenszoon 'and his men' in 1623:

Some of the features visited [by the Dutch] a decade or so later [i.e. after Willem Janszoon in 1606] by Jan Carstensz and his men in the *Pera* and *Arnhem* also have names that are commemorative in nature. Arnhem Land, for example is one, and Groote Eylandt another (Schilder 1975 [sic]; McKnight 1976).

McCarthy (2005, p. 28)

<sup>1</sup> Van Egmond (2012, p. 9) claims the term 'Warnindhilyakwa', which is often used, properly refers to the Warnindhilyakwa clan of Groote Eylandt.

<sup>2</sup> Although not common, generic terms functioning as simplex placenames constitute a distinct class of toponym, and are found in many languages and regions (see Tent, 2020).

In 1623, Carstenszoon and Willem Joosten van Colster (aka van Coolsteerdt) were commissioned by the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC)*, ‘Dutch East India Company’, to further explore the southern coast of New Guinea and to follow up the reports of land sighted further south during the 1606 voyage of Willem Janszoon in the *Duyfken*. Carstenszoon was in command of the yacht *Pera*, and van Coolsteerdt the *Arnhem*. After reaching the Staaten River, Carstenszoon decided to head back to Ambon, their point of departure, but van Coolsteerdt decided to venture on, crossing the Gulf of Carpentaria, arriving at and naming the east coast of Arnhem Land.

Given this history, McCarthy’s claim is not only ambiguous, but also flawed at a number of levels. Firstly, we know Carstenszoon never reached the west coast of the Gulf, and thus could not have been party to the naming of *Groote Eylandt*. Secondly, there is no evidence (documentary or cartographic) that the island had this name conferred upon it by van Coolsteerdt, let alone by Carstenszoon. Thirdly, the name itself cannot be considered ‘commemorative’, it being a purely descriptive one. Finally, neither Schilder (1976) or McKnight (1976) make the claim that Groote Eylandt was named by Carstenszoon or van Coolsteerdt. Indeed, Schilder (1976, p. 94-95) points out that van Coolsteerdt touched upon the east coast of Arnhem Land to the north of Groote Eylandt, notably, present-day Cape Grey, indicated on the ‘Arnhem chart’ (**Figure 1**) as *de Caep Mauritius*. I find Schilder’s hypothesis convincing, and if he is correct in his reckoning, it cannot be assumed van Coolsteerdt charted, let alone named, Groote Eylandt. Finally, McKnight does not discuss the naming of any part of the Gulf of Carpentaria or northern Australia by the Dutch in the entirety of his book.

In short, I have not been able to discover any cartographic or documentary evidence to corroborate the claim that Tasman named Groote Eylandt. Moreover, none of the authors who make the claim provide any evidence to substantiate their assertion.

## 2 CARTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE?

The *VOC*, interested in expanding its markets, seeking new regions for resources, and a more direct route to Chile, sent out a number of expeditions to further explore the then known and unknown parts of the Southland. The two *VOC* expeditions of relevance here are those of van Coolsteerdt in 1623, and Abel Tasman in 1644. The third expedition of significance is, of course, that of Flinders (1801-03).

### 2.1 van Coolsteerdt (1623)

The first to chart any part of the coastline of present-day Northern Territory was van Coolsteerdt. He was part of the 1623 Jan Carstenszoon expedition off the west coast of Cape York Peninsula. The *Arnhem* suffered a number of mishaps which made it much less seaworthy, so van Coolsteerdt decided to surreptitiously abandon the expedition between Staaten River and nearby Nassau River to the north.<sup>3</sup> In order to return as quickly as possible to Ambon via the Aru and Kai islands, he proceeded westwards across, what would become known as the *Gulf of Carpentaria*. Neither his journal or original chart of the voyage has survived—only a scant few documents and an anonymous manuscript chart made in about 1670 (Anon. 1670) (**Figure 1**), showing the discoveries made by him, and

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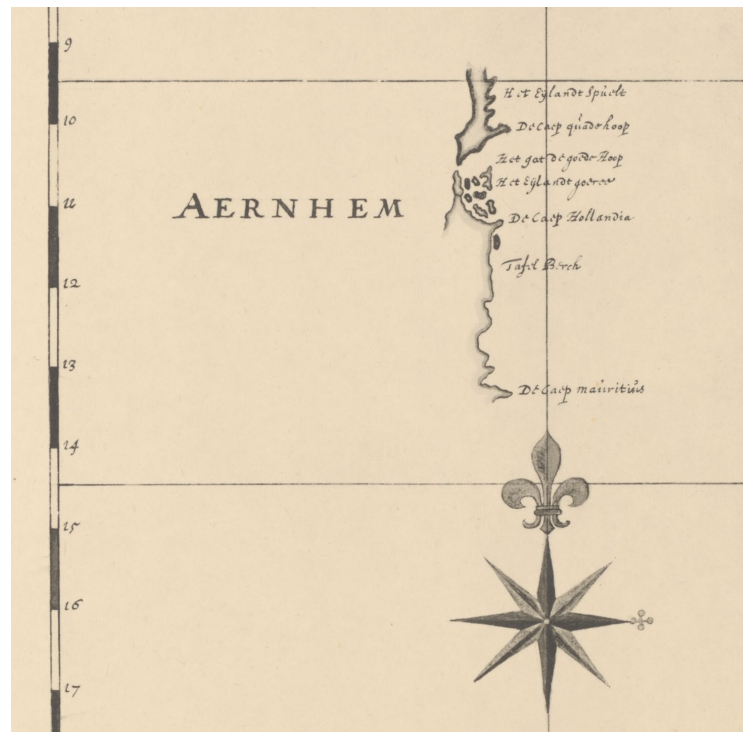
<sup>3</sup> Both of which were named during the expedition.



which provide evidence that he subsequently came across the eastern coast of Arnhem Land, and charted part of its north-eastern coastline.

This chart shows the label *AERNHEM* on what we now know is the mainland, where the current Arnhem Land is, and *Het Eijlandt Spieult* [‘The Island Speult’], named after Herman van Speult the then Governor of Ambon. It was not clear whether these features were islands or parts of the mainland the Council of the *VOC* in Batavia nevertheless originally referred to them as islands.<sup>4</sup>

Further to this, Groote Eylandt lies between  $-13^{\circ}5'$  and  $-14^{\circ}5'$ , much further south than *Het Eijlandt Spieult* as recorded on the chart of 1670 (Figure 1) where it lies between  $-9^{\circ}5'$  and  $-10^{\circ}5'$ . If the 1670 chart is at all accurate in terms of latitude, then *De Caep Mauritius* [‘Cape Mauritius’] is the closest geographic feature to Groote Eylandt, and could, at a pinch, refer to the island’s north-eastern peninsula.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore difficult to concede that the first European to sight Groote Eylandt was van Coolsterdt, as maintained by Robert (1973, p. 25), Burnett (2019), the Anindilyakwa Land Council (2020), *inter alia*. Van Coolsterdt *may* have spotted it, but the 1670 chart does not substantiate this.



**Figure 1.**

Detail of ANON. (1670). *The discovery of Arnhemland, Australia, by the Yacht Arnhem, 1623— from the secret atlas of the East India Company, c. 1670*. In Wieder, F.C. (Ed.). *Monumenta cartographica*. Vol. V, Plate 126. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff [1925-1933]. (Nat. Lib. of Australia, MAP Ra 265 Plate 126. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-230898588>)

<sup>4</sup> This issue is discussed in further detail below.

<sup>5</sup> Burnett (2019, p. 134) makes the claim that *De Caep Mauritius* ‘is a southern point of Groote Eylandt’.

## 2.2 Tasman (1644)

Tasman's 1642-43 voyage along the southern coast of Van Diemensland (Tasmania), the western coast of Staeten Landt (New Zealand), and through the Tonga archipelago was considered a failure in the eyes of the VOC Council in Batavia. He was subsequently ordered to follow in the tracks of Carstenszoon and van Coolsteerdt, and Pool and Pieterszoon (1636) in order to find a new passage to Chile and to see if the stretch of water between Arnhem Land and Carpentaria (Cape York Peninsula) led to the southern coastline of the Southland and to the islands of St. Peter and St. Francis.<sup>6</sup>

This second expedition comprised the yachts *Limmen* (named after a Dutch village), *de Zeemeeuw* ['the Seagull'] and the galliot *de Bracq/Brack* ['the Brach'].<sup>7</sup> The fleet left Batavia on 30th January, 1644 and returned there on 10th August. Tasman's route took an easterly direction tracing the south coast of New Guinea, thence southeast following the curve towards *Drooge Bocht* ['Shallow/Dry Bight'] (Torres Strait). The ships then followed the route taken by Carstenszoon and van Coolsteerdt along the west coast of the Cape York Peninsula, then continued westwards along the southern coast of the Gulf, and northwards following its west coast up to Arnhem Land. Finally, the northern coastline of the Southland was tracked, leading to the west coast which was followed to a latitude of -22°. Neither Tasman's log nor the original chart of that voyage has been located.

## 2.3 The 'Tasman-Bonaparte Map' and its descendants

It did not take long after Tasman's 1644 voyage for his findings to be made public. Probably the first map to do so was the so-called 'Tasman-Bonaparte Map' (Anon. [1644?]) (**Figure 2**). This chart shows the hitherto discoveries of the Dutch along the coastlines of New Guinea, New Holland, and Staeten Landt, and the south-western Pacific. It includes the sailing tracks of Tasman's voyages of 1642-43 and 1644, and clearly indicates Tasman's route between Groote Eylandt and Arnhem Land. The former, remaining unnamed on the chart.

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<sup>6</sup> Pool and Pieterszoon were instructed to follow the track of Carstenszoon and van Coolsteerdt along the southern coast of what is now known as West Papua, then cross the Arafura Sea to Arnhem Land and survey its northern coastline. However, Pool was killed in West Papua, and Pieterszoon continued the expedition but only as far as the northern coasts of Melville Island and the Coburg Peninsula naming them *Van Diemensland* and *Marias Land* respectively. He never ventured into the Gulf of Carpentaria.

<sup>7</sup> *Bracq / brack / brak* was a general term for a hunting dog (hound) (*Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*). *Brach* [bratʃ] (obs.) was the English equivalent (*Oxford English Dictionary*).



There has been much discussion regarding the publication date of the Tasman-Bonaparte Map and its creator(s), see for instance Destombes (1941), Sharp (1968), Schilder (1976), Anderson (2001), Nat. Lib. of Australia (2013), Hooker (2015), and Burnet (2019), *inter alia*. Dates of its creation range between c.1644 and c.1695, and views on its creators and contributors range from Abel Tasman, Isaac Gilsemans, Frans Jacobsz. Visscher, to a Frenchman either living in Batavia or Amsterdam. The chart clearly shows four different styles of handwriting and various spellings of names, especially toponym generics, all suggesting more than one contributor. Table 2 (below) shows names and appellations bestowed by Tasman on his two voyages of discovery; numbers 1 to 41 from his 1642-43 voyage and those from 42 to 67, from the 1644 voyage. In particular, the spelling of the toponyms' generics differs significantly (e.g. *Eylandt/Eijlandt* vs *Eylant* vs *Eylam*), in addition, those of the 1644 voyage generally have lower case spellings. As noted by Anderson (2001:142 ff.), this is strongly suggestive of the Tasman-Bonaparte Map having a number of creators.<sup>8</sup> The handwriting of Gilsemans has been identified as one of those appearing on the chart (Anderson, 2001, p. 157). This is significant, because he accompanied Tasman on both voyages and would have been a valuable advisor and contributor in the compilation of the chart.

Further discussion of the Tasman-Bonaparte Map's origins will not be entered into here, since it is not the subject of this article, and has been comprehensively covered by the historians and cartographic experts mentioned above. Nevertheless, it is reasonably safe to assume that it was the first published chart to show the results of Tasman's 1644 voyage, and was the model from which a series of other significant charts were derived, e.g. Willem Jansz. [Blauw] (1619 [1645-6]); Thevénot [1663]; Anon. [1670?] aka 'Eugene Map'; Anon. [1685-88] aka 'Bowrey Map'; and Bowen [1744], *inter alia*. As a result, and as is common when something is serially copied over a period of time, this led to many cartographic mutations originating from the common ancestor Tasman-Bonaparte Map. It is akin to an evolutionary (or phylogenetic) tree, or to put it into common parlance, it is comparable to 'Chinese whispers'. In every case, slight variations will creep into in each copied and recopied chart until quite radical mutations occur. Prescott (2006, p. 7) has dubbed the period from the mid-seventeenth to late-eighteenth centuries the 'era of armchair geography' during which 'some widely imaginative maps were produced.' This is certainly evidenced when the charts enumerated in Table 1 are individually examined and compared to one another.

---

<sup>8</sup> Throughout the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries Dutch spelling had not yet become standardised, and as a result, disparate spellings of names and words were commonplace.

Chart number	Chart reference	Depicts Groote Eylandt	Appellation
1.	Anon. [1644?] 'Tasman-Bonaparte Map'	✓	—
2.	[Blaeu], Willem Jansz. (1619 [1645-6])	✓	—
3.	Blaeu, J. [1645-48]	✓	—
4.	van Schagen [post 1644]	✓	—
5.	Anon. [post 1644]	✓	—
6.	Anon. [1648?]	x	—
7.	Blaeu, J. [1648]	✓	—
8.	Blaeu, J. [c. 1650]	✓	—
9.	van Langren [c. 1650]	✓	—
10.	Vingboons, J. [1650-70]	✓	—
11.	Plancius (1651)	✓	—
12.	Allard, H. [1652]	✓	—
13.	Anon. [1659]	x	—
14.	Thevénot [1663]	✓	—
15.	Blaeu, J. (1663)	✓	—
16.	Duval (1665)	✓	—
17.	Allard, H. [1665?]	✓	—
18.	Anon. [de Graaff?] [17 <sup>th</sup> century a]	✓	<i>Vander Lyns Eyl.</i>
19.	Anon. [17 <sup>th</sup> century b]	✓	<i>Vander Lyns Eyl.</i>
20.	Doncker [1669?]	✓	—
21.	Anon. [1670] 'Chart of the <i>Arnhem</i> '	x	—
22.	Anon. [1670?] 'Eugene Map'	✓	—
23.	Danckerts [1670-1710]	✓	—
24.	de Wit [1675?]	✓	—
25.	van Keulen, J. & van Loon (1680)	✓	—
26.	Jacobsz. [1681]	✓	—
27.	Robijn [1683]	✓	—
28.	Cantelli [1685?]	✓	—
29.	Allard [1685?]	✓	—
30.	Anon. [1685-88] 'Bowrey Map'	✓	—
31.	Valck [1686?]	✓	—
32.	van Keulen, J. (1689)	✓	—
33.	Allard, C. [1690?]	✓	—
34.	Anon. [1690?]	✓	—
35.	Visscher [1690?]	✓	—
36.	Goos [1690?a & b]	✓	—
37.	Coronelli [1692-1693]	✓	—
38.	de Berey (1695)	✓	—
39.	Anon. [1696?]	✓	—
40.	Moll (1697)	✓	—
41.	van Keulen, J. [1697]	x	—
42.	Nolin (1700)	✓	—
43.	Hondius [1700]	✓	—
44.	Loots [c.1700]	✓	—
45.	Mortier [1700?]	✓	—
46.	Zuerner [1700?]	✓	—
47.	Scherer [1702-10]	✓	—
48.	Loots & de Hooghe [c. 1707-08]	✓	—
49.	Thornton (1711)	✓	—
50.	Moll (1717)	x	—
51.	van Keulen, G. [1720-1726]	✓	—
52.	van Braam [1724-26]	✓	—
53.	van Braam [1726]	x	—
54.	Wetstein [1728?]	✓	—

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55.	Dampier ([1729?])	✓	—
56.	Cushee (1731)	x	—
57.	Bowles (1740)	✓	—
58.	Bowen [1744]	✓	—
59.	Seutter [1744?]	✓	—
60.	de L'Isle [1745?]	✓	—
61.	Martensz. (1746)	✓	—
62.	Bellin (1753)	✓	—
63.	van Keulen, J. [1753]	✓	—
64.	Buache (1754)	✓	—
65.	de Vaugondy (1756)	✓	—
66.	de Broses (1756)	✓	—
67.	Anon. [1759]	✓	—
68.	de Haan [1760?]	✓	<i>Vanderlijns Eijlandt</i>
69.	Delahaye (1761)	✓	—
70.	Delisle [1762-70]	✓	—
71.	Bellin (1764)	✓	—
72.	Callander (1766)	✓	—
73.	Stockdale [1770-1814]	✓	—
74.	de L'Isle [177-]	✓	—
75.	Whitchurch [177-]	✓	—
76.	Cassini [1772-1801]	✓	—
77.	Zatta [1779-85]	✓	—
78.	Jeffreys (1780)	✓	—
79.	Bonne [1780]	✓	—
80.	Buache de la Neuville (1785)	✓	—
81.	Sayer (1787)	✓	<i>Groot Eyland</i>
82.	Lodge (1787)	x	—
83.	Dalrymple [1787]	✓	—
84.	Jeffreys (1788)	✓	—
85.	Anon. [1790?]	✓	<i>Great I.</i>
86.	[Laurie & Whittle] [179-]	✓	<i>Groote I.</i>
87.	Arrowsmith (1790)	✓	—
88.	Allen (1792)	✓	—
89.	Plant (1793)	✓	—
90.	Anon. (1794)	x	—
91.	Conder [1794?]	✓	—
92.	Dunn & Kitchin (1794)	✓	—
93.	Laurie & Whittle (1794)	✓	<i>Groot Eyland</i>
94.	Schneider [1794-1805]	✓	<i>Gr. Eyland</i>
95.	Weigel & Schneiderschen (1796)	✓	—
96.	Laurie & Whittle (1797)	✓	<i>Groot Eyland</i>
97.	Laurie & Whittle (1798)	✓	—
98.	Arrowsmith et al. (1798)	✓	—
99.	Wilkinson (1798)	✓	<i>Groot Eyland</i>
100.	Laurie & Whittle (1799)	✓	<i>Great Land</i>
101.	Russell (1800)	✓	—
102.	Anon. [1800-1810]	✓	<i>Great I.</i>
103.	Reinecke (1801)	✓	—
104.	de Freycinet [1802-03]	✓	—
105.	Delarochette (1803)	✓	<i>Great Isle</i>
106.	Reinecke (1804)	✓	—
107.	Schneider (1808)	✓	—
108.	Lapie (1809)	✓	—
109.	de Freycinet (1811)	✓	—
110.	Reinecke (1812)	✓	—
111.	Steel & Co. (1813)	✓	<i>Great Land</i>
112.	Flinders (1814)	✓	<i>Groote Eylandt</i>

113.	Streit (1817)	✓	<i>Grooder Eyland</i>
114.	Streit (1819)	✓	<i>Groote Eyland</i>
115.	Norie & Co. (1821)	✓	<i>Groote Eylandt</i>
116.	King (1825)	✓	<i>Groote Eylandt</i>
117.	Weiland (1830)	✓	<i>Grosse I.</i>
118.	Stucchi (1830)	✓	<i>Groote Eyland (la Grande Isola)</i>
119.	Daussy (1840, 1848)	✓	<i>Groote Eylandt</i>
120.	Streit (1841)	✓	<i>Grosse I.</i>
121.	Weiland (1846)	✓	<i>Grosse I.</i>
122.	Stieler (1847)	✓	<i>Gr. I.</i>
123.	Ravenstein (1857)	✓	<i>Groote I.</i>
124.	Bogaerts (1857)	✓	<i>Groot Eiland</i>
125.	van Dijk (1859)	✓	—
126.	Swart (1859)	✓	—

**Table 1.**

Selection of early charts showing the Gulf of Carpentaria

The table shows Groote Eylandt was generally depicted from the mid-seventeenth century, but remained largely unnamed until the late-eighteenth century when increasingly more charts indicate, in one form or another, its current name. Some charts (e.g. nos. 13, 40, 61, 64 and 65) are small-scale charts and show few names, so it is not surprising that Groote Eylandt might remain unnamed.

The first charts to show a name for the island are charts 18 and 19 (Anon. [de Graaff?] [17<sup>th</sup> century a.] and Anon. [17<sup>th</sup> century b.] respectively). These are held in the map collection *Kaartcollectie Buitenland Leupe* [‘Leupe Map Collection Abroad’] in the National Archive in The Hague. Neither chart has a title, but are described as *Kaart van den Indischen Archipel, tusschen Sumatra en Nova Guinea, zoomede de Westkust van Hollandia Nova enz.* [‘Map of the Indian Archipelago, between Sumatra and New Guinea, including the West coast of New Holland etc.’] and *Kaart van de Indische Zee, van de Kaap de Goede Hoop tot Japan* [‘Map of the Cape of Good Hope to Japan’], respectively. On both charts Groote Eylandt bears the name *Vander Lyns Eyl.* A facsimile reproduction of chart 19 appears in Heeres (1899, p. 87) as *Uitslaande kaart van den Maleischen Archipel, de Noord- en West-kusten van Australië, 1690-1714* [‘Folding chart of the Malay Archipelago, the North- and West-coast of Australia’]. Heeres dates the charts as c.1700, and he, and others, attribute the charts to Isaac de Graaff, cartographer with the VOC.<sup>9</sup> A subsequent chart by the VOC mapmaker Gerrit de Haan (1760) also labels the island *Vanderlijns Eijlandt* (Table 1, map 68).

The general confusion regarding the location of named places on charts can also be seen on the Anon. [n.d.] *Nova Guinea en Nova Hollandia* chart (Table 1, chart 51; see **Figure 3**) which shows *de kaep Hollandia*, *de Tafel berg*, and *C. de Mauritius* on the east coast of Groote Eylandt. These placenames derive from the anonymous ‘*Arnhem* chart’ of 1670 map (**Figure 1**). Whilst the ‘*Arnhem* chart’ is very crude (due to the difficulty in reconciling much of the chart’s depicted geographic features with the actual geography of the region) it nonetheless shows the three features lying roughly between latitudes -11° to -13°5'. Groote Eylandt lies between -13°5' and -14°5', a mere one degree of latitude in length, therefore, the ‘Anon. *Nova Guinea en Nova Hollandia*’ chart has squeezed the three features which range across 2½ degrees of latitude into one degree of latitude. This chart may therefore have

<sup>9</sup> The chart is given a publication date between 1690 and 1714 by the Nat. Lib. of Australia.  
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-44459078>

given rise to the notion that van Coolsteerdt was the first European to have sighted the island and charted part of its east coast.



**Figure 3.**

Detail of ANON. [n.d.]. *Nova Guinea en Nova Hollandia*. [s.n.].

(Kaartcollectie Buitenland Leupe, Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

NL-HaNA\_4.VELH\_237.

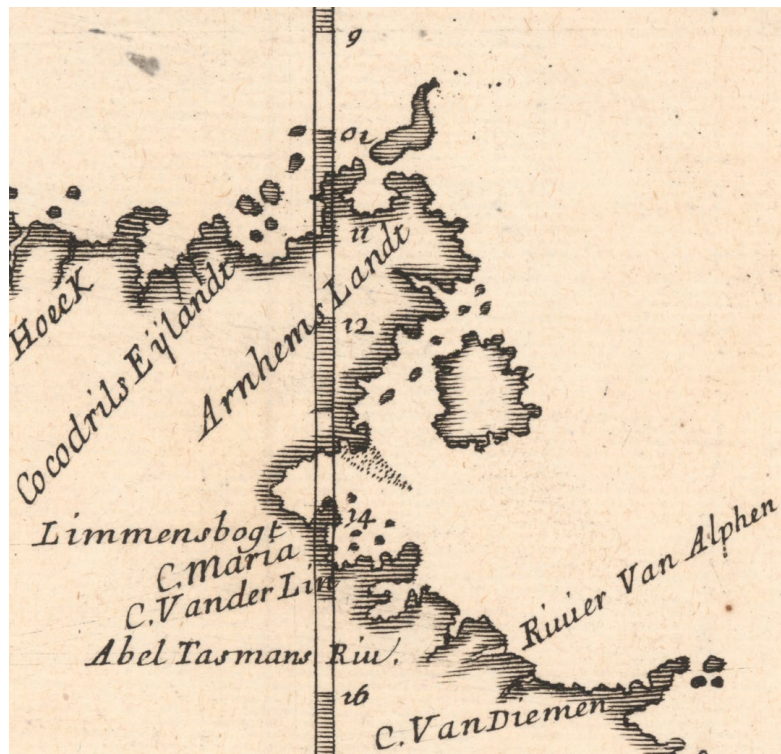
<http://proxy.handle.net/10648/b7113b8b-5cc3-4e91-81af-553d8e759271>)

Several cartographic enigmas concerning the naming and depiction of Groote Eylandt endure. The first concerns Sayer’s (1787) labelling the island *Groot Eyland* (Table 1, chart 81). I have not been able to find any chart prior to this that identifies the island under that



name (or some form of the name). Robert Sayer (1725–1794) was a leading London publisher and seller of prints, charts and maritime charts. Upon his death, his business was taken over by Robert Laurie and James Whittle, both of whom had worked for him (British Museum). This would explain Laurie and Whittle’s employing the label on their charts of 1794, 1797 and 1799 (Table 1, charts 93, 97 and 100). The chart of Schneider [1794-1805] (chart 88), and in all likelihood that of Wilkinson (1798) (chart 99), may have been based on those of Laurie and Whittle. The question remains, however, from where did Sayer source the name *Groot Eylandt*? Being a seller of maps and maritime charts, he would have had access to these from far and wide (including, of course, Dutch ones). Either the name must have been published on a chart or charts prior to the publishing his 1787 chart, or was gleaned from some other documentary source.

The second enigma concerns the actual depiction of Groote Eylandt on charts predating Flinders’ 1814 map. Most of the charts before Flinders’ circumnavigation of the island show it being approximately the same size relative to the rest of the features on the chart, and depict it as an oddly shaped, highly embayed island, hinting at its true contours (e.g. **Figure 4**). Firstly, this suggests that these charts had a common ancestor or ancestors. Secondly, it suggests the creators of the Tasman-Bonaparte Map had a fairly good idea of its size and shape. Groote Eylandt’s northern and eastern coastlines are highly irregular, with many crenulate-shaped bays and ‘embayed beaches’ (**Figure 5**).<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 4.**

Detail of THÉVENOT, M. [1663] *Hollandia Nova detecta 1644; Terre Australe decouverte l’an 1644*. [Paris: De l’imprimerie de Jacques Langlois, 1663].  
(Nat. Lib. of Australia, MAP RM 4667. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-334686747>)

<sup>10</sup> Also variously referred to in the geographic literature as: ‘logarithmic spiral-shaped’, ‘hook-shaped’, ‘zeta-shaped’, ‘half-heart’ or ‘pocket’ beaches. Such bays and beaches are formed in the lee of headlands where erosion or littoral drift is inhibited in the face of a dominant oblique direction of onshore waves. This results in bay forms very similar to logarithmic spirals (Hurst, Barkwith, Ellis, Thomas & Murray, 2015).



**Figure 5.**

*Groote Eylandt* (Image source: Wikimedia Commons. NASA image STS033-79-44)

If the Tasman-Bonaparte Map is based on Tasman's original chart, and if his sailing track was between the east coast of Arnhem Land and the west coast of Groote Eylandt, it is difficult to comprehend how Tasman was able to assess the island's size and rough shape, given its considerable size (i.e. approx. 50 km x 60 km).

## 2.4 Flinders (1801–03)

In January 1801, Flinders was given command of HMS *Investigator* to chart the coastline of New Holland and New South Wales. He set sail from Spithead on 18 July, calling at the Cape of Good Hope before crossing the Indian Ocean and reaching Cape Leeuwin on 6 December. The expedition then skirted the southern coast of the continent, then northwards up the east coast, arriving at Port Jackson on 9 May 1802. Two and a half months later the *Investigator* continued her voyage, sailing north along the east coast, and passing through the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait. It then entered the Gulf of Carpentaria where her timbers were discovered to be in extremely poor condition. The coastal survey was suspended and the ship sailed back to Port Jackson to undergo repairs. However, the circumnavigation was completed on 9 June 1803, when Flinders re-entered Port Jackson. For his return to England, Flinders was given command of the HMS *Cumberland*, however, he had to put in at the French-controlled island of Mauritius for repairs on 17 December. Since Britain was at war with France, he was held captive on the island until June 1810.

Flinders remains among the world's most accomplished navigators and hydrographers for his time. He is remembered not only for his achievements in exploration, but also for significant improvements in the science of navigation, as well as his cartography. According to the State Library of NSW, Flinders' charting of the Gulf (Figures 6 & 7) was used for the next 150 years.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> No documentary evidence is provided to support this claim, however. The article which makes this claim draws on the exhibition 'Matthew Flinders: The Ultimate Voyage', State Library of New South Wales, 1 October 2001 to 13 January 2002. However, Dr Martin Woods, Curator of Maps at the Nat. Lib. of Australia, notes that Flinders' individual charts of sections of the Australian coastline were in use until substantially superseded and reframed, renamed and renumbered. So, for example his 'Chart of Terra Australis - South coast' was in use well into the 1800s (Martin Woods, p.c. 2/3/2020).



Figure 6.

FLINDERS, M. (1814). *Chart of Terra Australis. Sheet II, North coast* / by M. Flinders, *Commr. of H.M. Sloop Investigator, 1802-3*. [London]: Published as the Act directs by G. & W. Nicol. (Nat. Lib. of Australia, MAP T 583. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-230977275>)



Figure 7.

Detail of FLINDERS, M. (1814). *Chart of Terra Australis. Sheet II, North coast* / by M. Flinders, *Commr. of H.M. Sloop Investigator, 1802-3*. [London]: G. & W. Nicol.  
(Nat. Lib. of Australia, MAP T 583. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-230977275>)

Flinders' adoption of the Dutch descriptive toponym *Groote Eylandt* remains enigmatic. He does not specifically say he adopted the name from 'Dutch charts', nor does he mention the name was conferred by Tasman, but merely says 'the old charts'. In Book 1, Chapter 1, Volume 1 of his *A Voyage to Terra Australis* he makes oblique references to the charts he had in his possession on the voyage:

[MAY, 1801]

On the 22nd, a set of astronomical and surveying instruments, for the use of myself and officers, was sent down by direction of the Navy Board; as also various articles for presents to, and barter with, the native inhabitants of the countries to be visited, and many for our own use and convenience. Amongst the latter were most of the books of voyages to the South Seas, which, with our own individual collections, and the Encyclopedia Britannica, presented by the Right Hon. Sir Joseph Banks, formed a library in my cabin for the use of all the officers. Every chart at the Admiralty, which related to Terra Australis and the neighbouring islands, was copied for us under the direction of the late hydrographer, Alexander Dalrymple, Esq.; who also enriched our stock of information by communicating all such parts of his works as were appropriate to the voyage.

Flinders (1814, Vol. I, pp. 5-6)

On several other occasions, however, he does refer to the ‘Dutch chart’, the ‘chart in the Dutch journal’, ‘a Dutch manuscript’, ‘the Dutch accounts’, or ‘the Dutch recital’ when referring to the other sections of the voyage. Hence, the ‘old charts’ could imply Dutch charts. Flinders, mentions he had Melchisédech Thévenot’s 1663 chart *Hollandia Nova* at his disposal, as is clearly evident from the inclusion of a section of this chart in the top centre of his *Chart of Terra Australis, Sheet II, North coast* (**Figure 6**). Morgan (2018, p. 124) lists the charts and documents Flinders purportedly had in his possession; they included:

- Arrowsmith’s *A Chart of the World on Mercator’s Projection* (1790)
- Arrowsmith’s *Chart of the Pacific Ocean* (1798 )
- the charts of Beautemps-Beaupré from d’Entrecasteaux’s voyage (1791-1793 ) in search of La Pérouse
- a copy of Thévenot’s chart
- an unpublished memoir by Dalrymple on the winds and tides in the Indian Ocean
- Dalrymple’s translation of Abel Tasman’s instructions for the 1644 expedition

Bréelle (2013, pp. 8-10) claims Flinders did not initially name many of the geographic features he encountered on the 1802-03 voyage, instead labelling them with a letter of the alphabet, generally in upper case. She argues this was common a practice on rough survey charts in European surveying work, with toponyms replacing the letters only in the final stages of the map editing process. She notes Groote Eylandt was first labelled by Flinders as ‘m’.

During his seven year confinement on Mauritius, Flinders worked on editing his charts and journals, only completing the work after his return to England in 1810. His *A Voyage to Terra Australis* with accompanying appendix of charts was completed a few months before his untimely death, and published in 1814, just one day prior to his passing. It seems reasonable to assume that between 1810 and 1814, he would have had at his disposal further charts, among which may have been a copy or copies of Sayer (1787), Laurie and Whittle (1794, 1797 & 1799), or Wilkinson (1798), and perhaps Schneider [1794-1805]. However, none of these, or any other chart prior to Flinders’ naming the island, are Dutch. His phrase ‘the old charts’ (from which he says obtained the name) is ambiguous, and may not imply that they were Dutch. If any of these ‘old charts’ were Dutch, it has yet to be determined which ones they were.

A final enigma remains regarding Flinders’ spelling of the island’s name, *Groote Eylandt*. It is interesting to note that prior to Flinders’ chart of 1814, the only chart that spells the adjectival element (*groot* ‘big, large, great’) of the name with the *-e* suffix is chart 86 (Table 1) [Laurie & Whittle] [179-] [*Asia and its islands according to d’Anville [...]*]. It may indicate Flinders had this chart at his disposal when adopting the name, and may explain why he chose the expression ‘the old charts’ rather than ‘the Dutch charts’. However, Flinders’ working sheet showing Groote Eylandt, dated 1804, reveals that he initially labelled the island *Groote Eyland*, without the final *t* on *Eyland*, suggesting he may have relied on a number of the above mentioned charts to settle upon a final spelling.<sup>12</sup> The Thévenot chart

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<sup>12</sup> *Part of the North Coast of Terra Australis from sheets N°1, 2 & 3, by M. Flinders Commr of HM Ship Investigator & Schooner Cumberland Mauritius*, Jan 18 1804 (Source: The National Archives, Kew, ADM 352/548), shown by Bréelle (2013, p. 10, Fig. 1.)

[https://www.hakluyt.com/downloadable\\_files/Journal/Flinders\\_Toponymy.pdf](https://www.hakluyt.com/downloadable_files/Journal/Flinders_Toponymy.pdf)

of 1663, of which Flinders had a copy, uses the generics *Landt* and *Eijlandt* for a variety of features; Flinders, therefore, may have derived his spelling *Eylandt* from there.

The spelling of the adjectival element of the toponym with or without the *-e* suffix may seem a minor issue; it could nevertheless also hint at the origin of Flinders' adopted name. The difference between *Groot* and *Groote* is governed by the grammar of the noun phrase. In Dutch, when an adjective is used attributively (i.e. before a noun), it will always take the *-e* suffix, except when the noun and its antecedent adjective are not premodified by an article, numeral, quantifier, pronoun, etc. In all other cases the *-e* suffix is required (Donaldson, 1981, p. 74). The noun *Eylandt* (or *eiland*) is neuter, and therefore, strictly speaking, should be rendered as *Groot Eylandt*. Only when the noun phrase is preceded by an article, such as *een* ['a/an'] or *het* ('the') (or its common contraction 't) does it obtain the *-e* suffix: *Het / 't Groote Eylandt*.<sup>13</sup>

### 3 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE?

Unfortunately, no documentary or cartographic sources exist, prior to Flinders' journal and charts, that provide any details of the naming of the island as *Groote Eylandt*. However, as mentioned above, there were some alternative names assigned to what would later become Groote Eylandt, and which were the source of some confusion concerning their actual referents. This confusion is perhaps best evidenced by a number VOC documents.<sup>14</sup>

- In the sailing instructions of 19 February, 1636 to Gerrit Thomaszoon Pool and Pieter Pieterszoon for their 1636 voyage of discovery (see Heeres, 1899, p. 65):

Ende bij aldien geen naerder informatie becompt, soo verstaen wij dat Ul. opt spoedichste van Banda sult verseijlen naer **Arnhems** ende **Speultslandt** gelegen tusschen de hoochte van negen tot 13 graden Suijderbreete, ontdekt A° 1623, gelijk naerder inde by desen gaende caerte sult connen sien : dit sijn grote landen. Ui. sal trachten te vernemen, wat daer op te haelen sy, oft met volcq sijn beseth ende waermede erneren.

[And in case you should obtain no additional information, we would have you set sail from Banda as speedily as possible for **Arnhems** and **Speultsland**, situated between nine and 13 degrees Southern Latitude, discovered A.D. 1623, as you will more fully see from the appended chart : these are large lands. You will endeavour to ascertain what may be obtained from there, whether these lands are peopled, and what the natives subsist on.]

- In a letter (dated 28 December, 1636) from the Governor-General and Councillors to the Directors of the VOC (see Heeres, 1899, p. 48):

[De schepen van Pool's expeditie deden] de negrije Taranga, geleghen op de Zt. Westhoek van Arouw, aen, vandaer om de Zuijt zeylende op hoope van Oost te winnen tot voltreckingh harer ordre, hebben niet alleen stercken Zt. Ooste winden, maer oock seer groove zee bejegent ende op 11 graden Zuijder breete ontdekt groote landen, bij haer van Diemens en Marias landt genaampt, dat wij presumeren **Arnhems** off **Speults eijlanden** te wesen, niettegenstaende ander streckingh heeft. Den Raet, van dese jachten, siende geen Oost becomen conde, resolveerde, naer dat Arnhem slant 20 mijlen om de west hadde ontdekt, voorbij d'eijlanden Timor ende Tenember haeren cours weder om de Noort te doen, ende naer Banda te keeren, alwaer de 7 Julij aengengt sijn.

<sup>13</sup> *Het* being the article used before neuter nouns.

<sup>14</sup> Relevant names are in **bold**; relevant words underscored.

[ [The ships of Pool's expedition touched at] the native village of Taranga, situated at the southwestern point of Aru, and then sailed southward, hoping to be able to run on an easterly course in order to execute their orders; they, however, met with strong south-east winds and very high seas besides; in 11 degrees S.L. they discovered large lands, to which they gave the names of Van Diemen's and Maria's Land, and which we suspect to be **Arnhems** or **Speults islands**, though they extend in another direction than the latter. The council of the said yachts, finding they could not run on an eastern course, after discovering and surveying Arnhem's Land twenty miles to westward, resolved to steer their course northward again past the islands of Timor and Tanimbar, and thus return to Banda, where they arrived on July 7.]

- In an entry in the Daily Register of Batavia, of 6 October 1636 (see Heeres, 1899, p. 67):

Op dato naer de middach arriveert uyt Ambonia 't Jacht Cleijn Wesel... [hij (Pieter Pieterszoon)] resolveerde met sijnen raed van voorder ondersoeck on d' Oost te desisteren, 't gemelte nieuw gevonden **van Diemens landt**, anders **Arnhems** ofte **Speultslandt** genaempt, t' ontdekken, naer desselffs gelegentheyte vernemen, ende cuntschap becomen hebbende, dan weder naer de Noordt te steecken, ende kennisse van de Eylanden Timor ende Temember te becomen, ende sulcx mede geeffectueert synde alsdan naar Banda te keeren enz.

[This day in the afternoon there arrived here from Ambon the Yacht Cleijn Wesel... [he (Pieter Pieterszoon)] resolved with his council to give up further investigations to Eastward, to explore and survey the situation of the newly discovered **van Diemensland**, otherwise called **Arnhems** or **Speultsland**, and, having gathered the required information, to run northward again for the purpose of obtaining perfect knowledge of the islands of Timor and Tanimbar; and all this having been duly effected, to return to Banda etc.]

- In the sailing instructions to Tasman for his 1644 voyage (see Heeres, 1899, p. 48):

De derde vojage, om met die van de Eijlanden Keij, Arou en Tenimber nader vriendschap te maeken, mitsgaders Nova Guinea, ende Suijder landen t' ontdekken, in de maent Januarie 1623 uijt Amboina met de Jachten Pera en Arnhem (onder den Commandeur Jan Carstens) aengevangen wiert, bijde welke alliantie met gemelte Eijlanden gemaect, Nova Guinees suitcust nader ontdect... en mits ontijdige separatie Arnhem nae 't ondecken van de grote Eijlanden, **Arnhem** ende **Speult**, genoegh onvruchtelijck in Amboina gekeert, maer 't Jacht Pera sijn reise vervolgende, heeft de Zuijt Cust van Nova Guinea tot aen een vlacke jmbocht op 10 graden en van daer de Westcust van 't selve lant tot aen Caep Keer-Weer, beseijlt, van waer voorder zuijtwuert tot op 17 graden aen Staten Rivier de cust ontdect, 't lant voorts westwaert sien streckende, en van daer weder na Amboina gekeert...

[The third voyage was undertaken from Ambon in the month of January 1623 with the Yachts Pera and Arnhem (commanded by Commander Jan Carstens), for the purpose of entering into friendly relations with the inhabitants of the islands of Kai, Aru and Tanimbar, and of exploring New Guinea and the South-lands, on which occasion alliances were made with the islands aforesaid and the south-coast of New Guinea was further discovered... but owing to untimely separation the Yacht Arnhem, after discovering the large islands of Arnhem and **Speult**, returned to Ambon unsuccessfully enough, while the Yacht Pera, continuing her voyage, navigated along the south coast of New Guinea as far as a shallow bay in 10 degrees, and afterwards along the west coast of the same land as far as Cape Keer-Weer, whence she further explored the coast to southward as far as 17 degrees near the Staten river, where she saw the land stretching farther to westward, after which she returned again to Ambon...]

- In Adriaan Dortsman's report of his voyage of discovery to the east and south of Banda in 1645-46 (see Heeres, 1896, pp. 273-74):<sup>15</sup>

...van welke het secker sij dat se [de Macassaren] niet een eijlant onbesocht laten, gelyck dat hare navigatien tot op Arouw (het oostelicke eylant) bevestigen, en 't is ook eenichsints te

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<sup>15</sup> Dortsman's description should be read in reference with Figure 1 the so-called 'Arnhem chart' of 1670.



gelooven dat se de grootste Zuyder eylanden, gelyck dat van U Ed<sup>s</sup> name van Diemenslant genoemt is, mitgaders **Speuls eylant**, ende 't lant by 't schip Arnhem ontdeckt, beneffens alle d'andere frequenteeren, welck **eijlant Arnhem** oogenschijnlick het grootste van allen is, streckende hem vant gadt de goede hoope, tot de ontdeckte Caap Mauritius 45 mijlen ende nadat het selve hem om de west ontvalt (op de selve hooghte daer Marias landt van den uystersten oosthoek, oostelycx op gedaen is omtrent 23 mijlen west van 't voorschreven Arnhem lant legt) soo ist waerschijnlick dattet selve gesamentlick een eijlant soude connen wesen dat dan buyten twijfel meer dan drie hondert mijlen in zijnen omvang begripen soude.

[... that they [the Macassans] do not leave an island unvisited, as their navigations up to Aru (the eastern island) confirm, and it is also quite believable that they frequently visit the largest southern islands, like that of Your Honour's name called van Diemensland, including **Speults Island**, and the land discovered by the ship Arnhem, and also all the other (islands), which **Arnhem Island** is apparently the largest of all, stretching from the Gap/Strait of Good Hope, to the known/discovered Cape Mauritius 45 miles and since this disappears from sight in the west/ westward (at the same latitude where Maria's Land from its extreme eastern point, has appeared eastwards, [and] lies about 23 miles west of the aforementioned Arnhem land), it is likely that the group would be one island that would then beyond doubt be more than three hundred miles in magnitude.]

Dortsman's description vividly highlights the existent confusion in proposing van Diemensland, Speults island, Arnhem island and Maria's land together form one island. His detailing of the 'gadt de goede hoope' and the 'Caap Mauritius' shows he must have had the original chart of van Coolsteerd, drawn in 1623.

- In the sailing instructions (dated 20 January, 1705) to Maerten van Delft for his ill-fated voyage to the northern coastlines of New Holland (see Heeres, 1899, p. 88):

[...zij] sullen moeten 't zeyl gaen van de N.O. hoek des gemelten eylants, en haren cours Z.O. aanstellen, tot op de Z. breete van 11 graden en lengte van 148½ graden, omme van daer oostwaert aan Van Diemensland op Hollandia Nova in het gesigt te loopen, welken hoek geseget werdt enemael in Eylanden te bestaen dat nader sal warden ondervonden. Hier van daen sal dan die cust oostwaerd moeten vervogt warden tot aen **Aarnemsland** en het **Drooge eyland**, hetwelcke aan de binnen en buytenkant sal dienen gepasseert en besogt te warden, omme dan alsoo voorschreven cust al verder langs te loopen tot aan **Van der Lijns eylant**.

[...[they] will thence set sail from the N.E. point of the said island, and shape their course south-eastward as far as 11 degrees S. Latitude and 148½ degrees Longitude, whence on an eastward course they will run in sight of Van Diemensland in Hollandia Nova, which point is said to consist altogether of islands, a matter that will thus be cleared up. From there this coast will have to be further followed to eastward as far as **Arnemsland** and the **Dry island**, which will have to be skirted and surveyed both on the inside and outside; next, the coast aforesaid will have to be followed as far as **Van der Lijns island**...]

The *Van der Lijns eylant* in van Delft's instructions may have its origin in the charts 18 and 19 (Table 1) (i.e. Anon. [de Graaff?] [17<sup>th</sup> century a.] and Anon. [17<sup>th</sup> century b.]) if they were indeed published during the seventeenth century as is claimed by the National Archive in The Hague.

The thriving confusion concerning the identity of Van der Lijns eylant and Speultsland / Speults Eiland is also inferred by the renowned Dutch historian Heeres in Part III 'The Netherlanders in the Gulf of Carpentaria' (p. vi) of the introduction to his book *Het aandeel der Netherlanders in de ontdekking van Australië 1606-1765* ['The part borne by the Dutch in the discovery of Australia 1606-1765']:

## Who named Groote Eylandt?

Op dezen zelvden tocht is ook ontdekt **Arnhemsland** aan de west kust der Golf van Carpentaria en hoogstwaarschijnlijk ook de z.g. **Groote eyland** of **Van de Lijns-eiland (Van Speultsland)**. Geheel echter het zuidelijk gedeelte der golf bleef onbezocht.

Heeres (1899, vi)

[In the course of the same expedition [i.e. that of Carstenszoon & van Coolsteerdt in 1623] discovery was also made of **Arnhemsland** on the west-coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, and almost certainly also of the so-called **Groote Eyland** or **Van der Lijns-island (Van Speultsland)**. The whole of the southern part of the gulf remained, however, unvisited.]

and on the following page:

...Ook de westkust der golf werd op dezen tocht langs gezeild en verkend; Tasman zeilde tussen deze kust en het **Groote (Van der Lijn's) eiland** door.

Heeres (1899, p. vii)

[...Also the west-coast of the gulf was skirted and surveyed in this voyage; Tasman passed between this coast and the **Groote (Van der Lijn's) island**.]

Although none of the above documents unequivocally assist in solving the source of Groote Eylandt's name, they nevertheless may provide a clue to its naming. The sailing instructions to Pool and Pieterszoon, the letter to the Directors of the *VOG*, the sailing instructions to Tasman, and Dortsman's report, all contain references to 'groote landen' or 'groote Eilanden', in reference to Arnhem and Speult. Dortsman's report is especially intriguing in that he specifically refers to Arnhem island being the largest of the islands east of van Diemensland:

...welck eijlant Arnhem oogenschijnlick het grootste van allen is, streckende hem vant gadt de goede hoope, tot de ontdeckte Caap Mauritius 45 mijlen...

[...which Arnhem Island is apparently the largest of all, stretching from the Gap/Strait of Good Hope, to the known/discovered Cape Mauritius 45 miles...]

Given Dortsman never reached the Gulf of Carpentaria to verify these facts, he must have obtained them from his sailing instructions, other *VOG* documents and charts (e.g. the original chart made by van Coolsteerdt and/or the Tasman-Bonaparte Map), or both. If he had access to the Tasman-Bonaparte Map, his 'eijlant Arnhem' possibly refers to the unnamed Groote Eylandt.

Considering Groote Eylandt is the largest island in the region, and in the absence of any specific or accurate designation for the so-called islands of Arnhem, Speult or van der Lijn, the possibility of the descriptive phrase 'groote eijland' or the like, being applied, either in official documents or on charts, to designate Groote Eylandt cannot altogether be discounted. The documents cited above (and likely others) may have been the source for the island's ultimate name.

## 4 LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE?

Another method of establishing whether or not Tasman named Groote Eylandt involves analysing his naming practices; in other words, his language use. The examination of linguistic style (language use) is known as 'stylometry', and utilises statistical analyses of texts in evaluating an author's style to attribute authorship. This practice has legal as well

as academic applications in that it is often used to attribute authorship to anonymous or disputed documents and texts (e.g. the authorship of purported Shakespeare works).

For the present case, all of the names and appellations bestowed by Tasman on his two voyages of discovery are itemised (see Table 2). The column ‘Toponym type’ is based on the toponym typology developed by Tent & Blair (2014 [2009], 2011); and the column ‘Feature class’ designates the type of geographic feature to which the name refers (see Blair, 2014).

Number	Tasman’s <i>Toponyms &amp; Appellations</i>	Translation	Toponym type	Feature class
1	<i>Antonio van diemens Landt</i>	Anthony Van Diemens Land	Eponymous	ISLAND
2	<i>Wits Eylam</i> [sic]	Wits[en] Islands	Eponymous	ISLAND
3	<i>Suweers Eylam</i> [sic]	Sweers Island	Eponymous	ISLAND
4	<i>maet suijckers Eylam</i> [sic]	Maatsuyker Islands	Eponymous	ISLAND
5	[ <i>Pedra Brancka</i> ]	Pedra Branka	Copy	ISLAND
6	<i>verthoont als een Plompen toren</i>	exhibits itself as a Plump/Squat tower	Topographic descriptor	ISLAND
7	<i>Borel Eijlam</i> [sic]	Boreel Islands	Eponymous	ISLAND
8	[ <i>Suyt Caep</i> ]	South Cape	Descriptive	CAPE
9	[ <i>Storm Baai</i> ]	Storm Bay	Occurrent	BAY
10	[ <i>Frederick Hendrick Baai</i> ]	Frederick Hendrick Bay	Eponymous	BAY
11	<i>Tasman Eylam</i> [sic]	Abel Tasman Island	Eponymous	ISLAND
12	<i>maria Eylam</i> [sic]	Maria Island	Eponymous	ISLAND
13	<i>Schouten Eijlam</i> [sic]	Schouten Island	Eponymous	ISLAND
14	<i>Vander Lins Eylam</i> [sic]	Vander Lijn Island	Eponymous	ISLAND
15	<i>Staeten Landt</i>	States Land	Eponymous	ISLAND
16	<i>Clippen boeck</i>	Rocky Point	Descriptive	POINT
17	<i>Steijle boeck</i>	Steep Point	Descriptive	POINT
18	[ <i>Moordenaersbaai</i> ]	Murderers Bay	Occurrent	BAY
19	<i>abel tasman Baai / Reede</i>	Abel Tasman Bay/Road(stead)	Eponymous	BAY
20	<i>Zeebaen Bocht</i>	Zeehaan Bight	Eponymous	BIGHT
21	<i>cabo Pieter Boreels</i>	Cape Pieter Boreel	Eponymous	CAPE
22	<i>Cabo maria Van diemens</i>	Cape Maria van Diemen	Eponymous	CAPE
23	<i>De drie coninghen eylam</i> [sic]	The Three Kings Island	Occurrent	ISLAND
24	<i>pijlstaert eyland</i>	Tropic Bird Island	Associative	ISLAND
25	[ <i>Hooch Eijlant</i> ]	High Island	Descriptive	ISLAND
26	<i>middelburg</i>	Middelburg (Island)	Copy	ISLAND
27	<i>amsterdam</i>	Amsterdam (Island)	Copy	ISLAND
28	<i>rotterdam</i>	Rotterdam (Island)	Copy	ISLAND
29	<i>maria Bay</i>	Maria Bay	Eponymous	BAY
30	<i>van diemen Reede</i>	Van Diemen Road(stead)	Eponymous	ANCHORAGE
31	[ <i>Cornelis Vanderlijns Reede</i> ]	Cornelis Vanderlijn Road(stead)	Eponymous	ANCHORAGE
32	[ <i>Justus Schoutens Baij</i> ]	Justus Schouten Bay	Eponymous	BAY
33	[ <i>Hooch Eijlandeken</i> ]	High Islet	Descriptive	ISLAND
34	<i>prins Willems Eijlanden</i>	Prince Willem Islands	Eponymous	ISLAND
35	<i>Heemskerck Drooghte</i>	Heemskerk Shoals	Eponymous	SHOAL
36	<i>Drommels Lage Eijlandkens met een rij of den Eylanden Van Ontong java</i>	Diabolically Low Islets with a reef or the Islands of Ontong Java	Topographic descriptor + Copy	SHOAL + ISLAND
37	<i>Het Lage kleine Eijlandekens</i>	The Low small Islets	Topographic descriptor	ISLAND
38	<i>gerrits denis eylam</i> [sic] / <i>gerrit denys</i> / <i>gerrit de nijs</i> / <i>Gardenijs</i>	Gerrit de Nijs Island > Gardenijs Island	Epomymous	ISLAND
39	<i>Visschers eylam</i> [sic]	Fishers Island	Occurrent	ISLAND
40	<i>Cornelis Witzens Rede</i>	Cornelis Witsen Road(stead)	Eponymous	ANCHORAGE

41	<i>Johan Maatsuykers Rede</i>	Johan Maatsuyker Road(stead)	Eponymous	ANCHORAGE
42	<i>prince reuier</i>	Prince River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
43	<i>Reuier carpantier</i>	Carpentier River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
44	<i>visschers reuier</i>	Visscher River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
45	<i>reuier arnhem</i>	Arnhem River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
46	<i>reuier pera</i>	Pera River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
47	<i>van dimens reuier</i>	Van Diemen River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
48	<i>van der lins reuier</i>	Van Der Lijn River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
49	<i>reuier maet suykere</i>	Maatsuyker River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
50	<i>suwers reuier</i>	Sweers River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
51	<i>laegh lant</i>	low country/land	Topographic descriptor	PLAIN
52	<i>cabo van diemens</i>	Cape Van Diemen	Eponymous	CAPE
53	<i>demmers reuier</i>	Demmer River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
54	<i>wittes reuier</i>	Wits[en] River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
55	<i>reuier croock</i>	Croock River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
56	<i>van alphens reuier</i>	Van Alphen River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
57	<i>abeltasman reuier</i>	Abel Tasman River	Eponymous	ESTUARY / STREAM
58	<i>water plaets</i>	watering place	Topographic descriptor	SPRING / STREAM?
59	<i>cabo van derlins</i>	Cape Van Der Lijn	Eponymous	CAPE
60	<i>cabo de marie</i>	Cape Maria	Eponymous	CAPE
61	<i>limmens bocht</i>	Limmen Bight	Eponymous	BIGHT
62	<i>laegh lant</i>	low country/land	Topographic descriptor	PLAIN
63	<i>crocodils eylant</i>	Crocodile Island	Associative	ISLAND
64	<i>moeylicke bogt</i>	difficult bight	Descriptive	BIGHT
65	<i>Vnylle boeck</i>	Treacherous/Shallow point	Descriptive	POINT
66	<i>Van diemens baij</i>	Van Diemen Bay	Eponymous	BAY
67	<i>Witte Water</i>	White Water	Descriptive /	BAY

Table 2.

Tasman's names and appellations as recorded on the Tasman-Bonaparte Map<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Appellations and names between brackets are not depicted on the Tasman-Bonaparte Map, but do occur on other maps and in Tasman's journal of the 1642-43 voyage (Roepel & Wildeman, 2006). 'Eponymous' = commemorating or honouring a person or other named entity by using a proper name, title, or eponym substitute as a toponym; 'copy' = re-using an existing toponym, in whole or in part; 'descriptive' = indicating an inherent characteristic of the feature; 'occurrent' = recording an event, incident, occasion (or date), or action associated with the feature; 'associative' = indicating something associated with the feature or its physical context; 'topographic descriptor' = defined here as 'a descriptive common noun, noun phrase or sentential description not functioning as a toponym (i.e. as a proper name)'. For an in-depth examination of topographic descriptors on early Dutch charts, see Tent (2022).

The table shows 67 separate locations named by Tasman on his two voyages. Item 36 contains two separate appellations, a topographic descriptor and a copied toponym, making a total of 68 distinct namings. If the five copied toponyms are added to the 43 eponymous ones (because these copied toponyms share some semantic resemblance with the eponyms and stand apart from the other categories), then there are a total of 48 such names. The relative frequency probability (RFP) of an eponymous toponym is  $48/68 = \mathbf{0.70}$ .<sup>17</sup> There are eight descriptive toponyms (giving a RFP of  $8/68 = \mathbf{0.12}$ ), six topographic descriptors (RFP  $6/88 = \mathbf{0.09}$ ), four occurrent toponyms (RFP  $4/68 = \mathbf{0.06}$ ), and two associative toponyms (RFP  $2/68 = \mathbf{0.03}$ ). It may be concluded from these figures that the probability of Tasman conferring an eponymous name upon Groote Eylandt is significantly higher than his giving it a descriptive name (which *Groote Eylandt* is): RFP **0.70** vs **0.12**.

Table 3 (next page) consolidates the geographic feature class of each appellation and toponym in Table 2 and the toponym type of each.<sup>18</sup> It reveals that islands, estuaries/streams, bays, capes, anchorages and bights mostly bear eponymous names. These geographic features may be considered the most conspicuous and important because they either posed threats to navigation or were places of refuge and potential succour. Headlands (capes and points) were especially important because they posed a significant hinderance and danger to early sailing vessels because they needed to stay 'above' the headland in order to retain the wind in their sails so as to safely navigate the vessel (van Lennep, 1856, p. 83).<sup>19</sup> Points and capes were therefore often given descriptive names to aid identification for future mariners.

Very similar patterns of RFPs are seen when the naming patterns of the 25 island names are considered: eponymous (+ copied) names (RFP  $17/25 = \mathbf{0.68}$ ), descriptive (RFP  $2/25 = \mathbf{0.08}$ ), occurrent (RFP  $2/25 = \mathbf{0.08}$ ), associative (RFP  $2/25 = \mathbf{0.08}$ ), and topographic descriptor (RFP  $2/25 = \mathbf{0.08}$ ). From this second perspective it can again be seen that the probability of Tasman bestowing the descriptive name *Groote Eylandt* on the island is significantly less than an eponymous name: RFP **0.08** vs **0.68**, respectively. Moreover, given Groote Eylandt is such a prominent terrestrial marine feature, it seems highly unlikely, at least from a stylometric standpoint, that Tasman would have furnished it with a descriptive name. This is corroborated by probability theory. The other conspicuous features, estuaries/streams, bays, capes, anchorages, and bights all bear more eponymous names than any other type of feature, thus also increasing the RFP of Tasman conferring an eponymous name on Groote Eylandt.

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<sup>17</sup> The 'relative frequency probability' (RFP) (or 'empirical probability') of a specific type of toponym occurring is the proportion of times that toponym type occurs over the total number of toponyms recorded. If  $A$  is the type of toponym in which we are interested, then the RFP of  $A$ s occurring, denoted by  $P(A)$ , is computed from:

$$P(A) = \frac{\text{Frequency of type of toponym}}{\text{Number of recorded toponyms}}$$

A RFP of **1.0** indicates that a toponym of that type will occur in 100% of cases. Hence the RFPs of **0.70** (overall) and **0.68** (for islands) for eponymous toponyms mean that they will occur 70% and 68% of the time.

<sup>18</sup> For a comprehensive overview and glossary of feature classes refer to Blair & Tent (2015).

<sup>19</sup> There is even a Dutch proverb which states: *Den boek te boven zijn* [lit. 'To be above the point/headland', i.e. 'to avoid an obstacle'] (van Lennep, 1856, p. 83).

FEATURE CLASS	Toponym type					
	Eponymous	Copy	Descriptive	Occurrent	Associative	Topographic Descriptor
ISLAND ( <i>n.</i> 25)	12	5	2	2	2	2
ESTUARY / STREAM ( <i>n.</i> 14)	14					
BAY ( <i>n.</i> 8)	5		1	2		
CAPE ( <i>n.</i> 6)	5		1			
ANCHORAGE ( <i>n.</i> 4)	4					
POINT ( <i>n.</i> 3)			3			
BIGHT ( <i>n.</i> 3)	2		1			
PLAIN ( <i>n.</i> 2)						2
SHOAL ( <i>n.</i> 2)	1					1
SPRING / STREAM? ( <i>n.</i> 1)						1

**Table 3.**  
Toponym types by their FEATURE CLASS

## 5 EXCURSUS: AN ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT NAME?

There are a number of maps upon which Groote Eylandt bears a very different name. These are Daniel Djurberg's maps of New Holland showing the continent named as *Ulimarua* (see Tent & Geraghty 2011, 2012). Djurberg's 1780 chart labels Groote Eylandt as *I. Büsching* (**Figure 8**), as do his subsequent charts of 1790, 1797, and 1786-1800.

Various European map-makers followed Djurberg's idiosyncratic nomenclature on their charts of New Holland. They also use the name *Büsching* / *Busching*, or *Büschings* / *Buschings*, and include the charts of Canzler (1795, 1806), Lindner [1815-16], Sotzmann (1810, [1840?]), Streit ([1830?], [1834?])<sup>20</sup>, Swoboda and Hartl (1805, 1815), von Reilly (1795), and Walch (1826). A curious map drawn by F. Ravenstein and published in 1857 has a bet each way, labelling the island *Groote or Buschings I.* Interestingly, the chart was published by a number of publishers in a number of different locations: by A. & C. Black in Edinburgh, London, Mayence (i.e. Mainz, Germany); Longman & Co.; Victor von Zabern; and Jas. J. Blundell in Melbourne. The German connections could explain the use of *Buschings*. What is intriguing is the Melbourne edition adopting the name, because by that time *Groote Eylandt* was well entrenched in Australia.

<sup>20</sup> However, Streit's charts of 1817, 1819, and 1841 label the island as *Grooder Eyland*, *Groote Eyland* and *Grösse I.* respectively.



**Figure 8.**

Detail of DJURBERG, D. (1780). *Karta over Polynesien eller femte delen af jordklotet = Carte de la Polynésie ou la cinquième partie de la terre*. Stockholm: Saljes hos Bokhandlar en Holmberg. (Nat. Lib. of Australia, MAP T 446. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.map-t446>)

Djurberg had a rather bizarre habit of bestowing his own fanciful names to already named places and countries, such as *Vingandacoa* for North America, and *Hare-Vildarnas Land* ['Land of the Savage Rabbit People'] for Alaska. Djurberg probably noted the large unnamed island in the Gulf of Carpentaria on charts of the time and in his inimitable fondness for conferring unconventional names, took it upon himself to name the island after Anton Friedrich Büsching (1724-93), a well-known contemporary German geographer. Büsching's magnum opus *Erdbeschreibung* ['Earth description'] was a highly celebrated scientific geographical work at the time and was translated into several languages. No doubt Djurberg would have been familiar with it.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Let me recapitulate and consolidate what I have been able to establish thus far:

1. No author claiming Tasman named Groote Eylandt provides any evidence to support this contention.
2. The cartographic evidence is not convincing enough to declare van Coolsteerdt was the first Dutch navigator to sight Groote Eylandt.
3. There was considerable confusion within the VOC as to the geography of the north-eastern coastline of Arnhem Land, with various appellations given to what are possibly the same feature.
4. Tasman skirted the west coast of Groote Eylandt in 1644.
5. The first cartographic evidence of Tasman's 1644 voyage is shown on the Tasman-Bonaparte Map, which was based on his original chart and was possibly drawn under supervision of Tasman, Gilsemans and Visscher.

6. For a currently unknown reason Groote Eylandt remained unlabelled on this chart.
7. The first charts to appear on which the island was labelled appeared sometime during the seventeenth century. It was identified as *Vander Lyns Eyl'*. The only other chart to bear this name is that of de Haan [1760?].
8. The first chart to show a form of its current name was Sayer's map of 1787, with other charts following suit relatively soon after, with all bearing variations of the name. None of these charts are Dutch until the Bogaerts' chart of 1857.
9. It is currently not known from where Sayer obtained the name *Groot Eyland*.
10. Flinders circumnavigates the island in 1803, and initially labels the island 'm', later adopting the name *Groote Eyland*, and subsequently *Groote Eylandt*.
11. It is currently not clear from where Flinders derived the name.
12. Stylometric evidence does not support Tasman's bestowal of the descriptive name *Groote Eylandt*.
13. Directly transparent documentary sources from the *VOC* that reference the bestowal of the name have not been found.
14. It is commonly assumed Tasman bestowed the name; however, I have not been able to discover any cartographic or documentary evidence to support this claim.
15. Several *VOC* documents refer to 'groote landen' or 'groote eyland(en)' when discussing the muddled referents to the islands/lands of Arnhem, Speult, and Van der Lijns.

There are a number of remaining unresolved issues:

1. If Tasman named *Groote Eylandt* why did it remain unnamed on the Tasman-Bonaparte Map, and on subsequent charts?
2. From where did Sayer (1787) source the name *Groot Eyland*?
3. From which chart or document did Flinders ultimately source the name *Groote Eylandt*?
4. Where is the evidence that Tasman bestowed the name?

Tasman's charts show that he was astute in showing the names of prominent and important topographic features he discerned on his two voyages. This was after all a stipulated requirement of the *VOC*, who instructed their mariners to accurately describe in their journals hither to unknown regions they encountered and to note these on their charts. The instructions made it clear that such descriptions and annotated charts were 'an aid to clarify political, military, economic, cultural, and administrative particularities in order to make sound decisions.' (Zandvliet, 2007, p. 1445; see also Posthumus Meyjes, 1919, p. 147).

Groote Eylandt features prominently on almost all the charts from the mid-seventeenth century to the late-eighteenth century. In view of Tasman's diligent bestowal of names on prominent geographic features, it seems somewhat out of character for him not to have conferred a name upon such a large island. Did he believe the island to be van Coolsteerdt's *Het Eijlandt Speult* and therefore left it unnamed? This seems unlikely because toponyms bestowed by previous explorers along the northern coastline of New Holland were included on the Tasman-Bonaparte Map. Or was Tasman unsure as to which of van Coolsteerdt's named regions it was, and left it unnamed for this reason?

An incidental comment made by renowned Dutch historian Reinier Posthumus Meyjes (1919, p. lxxxvi) supports my contention that Groote Eylandt was not named by Tasman.



In his chronicle of Tasman's course along the coastline of the Gulf of Carpentaria, Posthumus Meyjes remarks that the 'later to be named Groote Eylandt' was passed along its western coast. He does not venture an opinion on when it was ultimately named or by whom.

Misattributions are perpetuated when authors and researchers unquestioningly rely on the works of previous writers or secondary (indirect) sources. Such has been the case with Tasman's alleged naming of Groote Eylandt. And as with many investigations into the origin of a placename, this one currently does not have a totally satisfactory conclusion. Until supplementary documentary and cartographic evidence comes to light, the naming of Groote Eylandt will remain uncertain.

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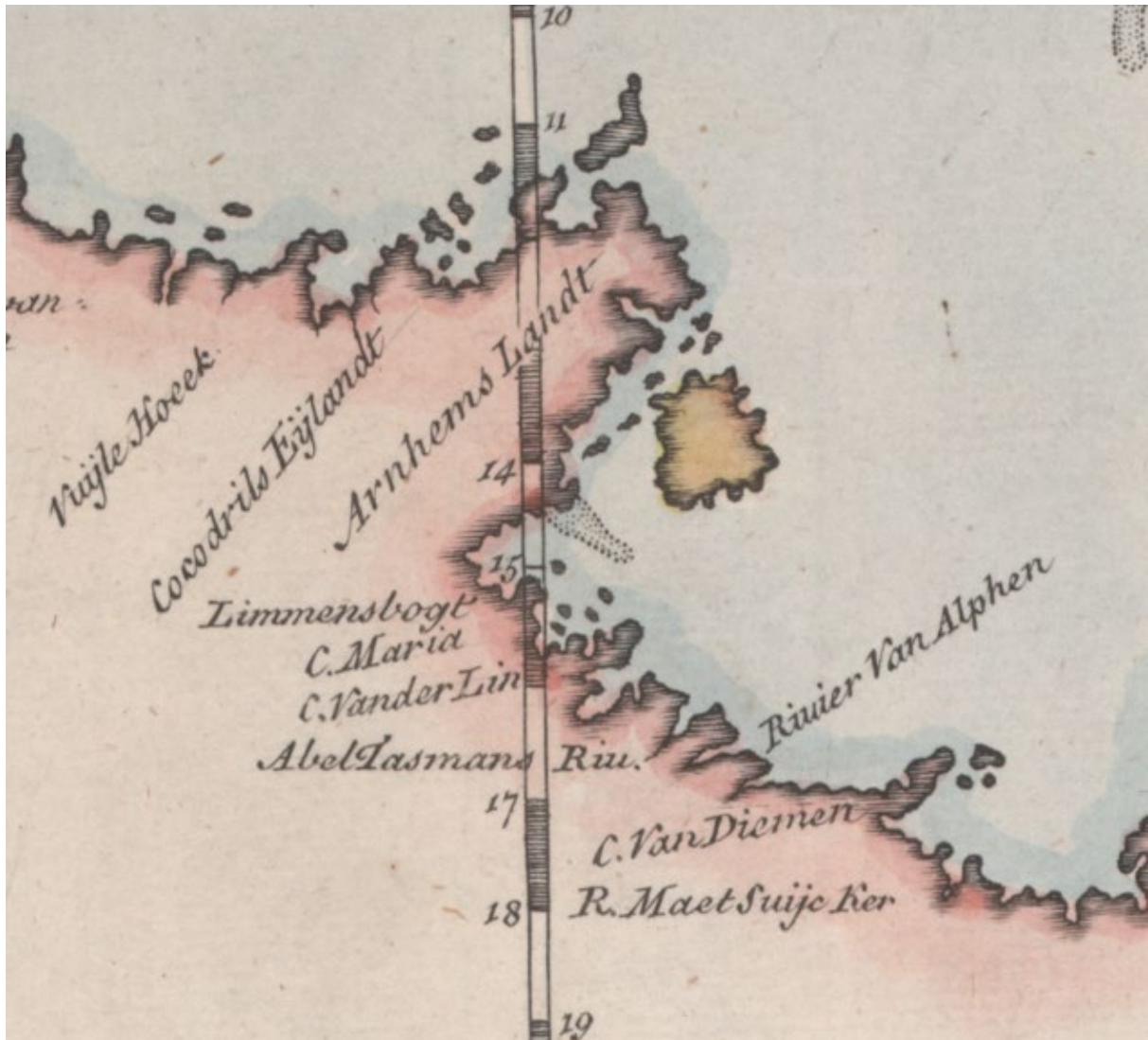
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