

DINNINGS LAND: A CASE OF MISTRANSSCRIPTION?

Jan Tent¹

Abstract: On some early maps of Australia the name *Dinnings Land* or *Terres de Dinning* appears near the Swan River. Who or what was *Dinning*? This article explores this question, and argues it is a case of mistaken interpretation or erroneous transcription.

Early maps of the Australian coastline (between the late 17th century and the mid-19th century) often show stretches of coastline with eponymous names (after explorers, their ships, or notable people), for example: *'t Landt van P. Nuyts*, *G.F. de Wits Landt*, *Arnhem Land*, *'t Landt van de Leeuwin*, *Anthonij van Diemenslandt*, *Terre Napoléon*, etc.

On a number of maps—Anon. (1808), Canzler (1795, 1805, 1806 & 1813), de Vaugondy (1756), Djurberg (1780 & 1786-1800), Fenner (1835), Laurie & Whittle (1803), Mollo (1810), Plant (1793), Reinecke (1801, 1804, 1806 & 1812), Sayer (1787), Sotzmann (1796 & c.1840), Streit (1817, c.1830 & c.1834), and von Reilly (1795)—there appears near the Swan River an enigmatic coastal region name, *Dinnings Land*, *Dinning's Land*, *Dinning Land*, *Terres de Dinning*, or *Pais de Dinning* (for an example, see Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Detail from von Reilly (1795), *Karte von des Inselwelt Polynesien odei deem Funften Welttheile [...]* (National Library of Australia, MAP NK 1545)

Who or what is *Dinning*? There was no Dutch or French explorer by that name, nor is there any evidence that it was the name of a ship or notable person.

It is my contention that the name is a result of misspelling or mistranscription. My argument is based upon a map by Pieter Goos and Johannes van Keulen (c.1690) (Fig. 2.) on which appears

¹ **Jan Tent** is a retired academic. He taught linguistics at the University of Sydney, the University of the South Pacific (Suva, Fiji) and Macquarie University (Sydney). His research interests include: varieties of English (especially Fiji English), early Dutch exploration of Australia and the Pacific, historical linguistics, lexicography and toponymy. He is the former Director of the Australian National Placenames Survey, and is currently an honorary senior lecturer in Linguistics at the Australian National University (Canberra), and an honorary fellow in Linguistics at Macquarie University. Contact: jan.tent@anu.edu.au

the following description where the above mentioned maps show *Dinnings Land*: “Duyning land boven lage Ruigte Gelyk Verdronke Boomen en Boschaghe” (roughly translated: ‘Duny land/land with dunes above low scrub like drowned trees [mangroves?] and boscaige’) (c.f. *Mapping Our World* 2013: 149).¹

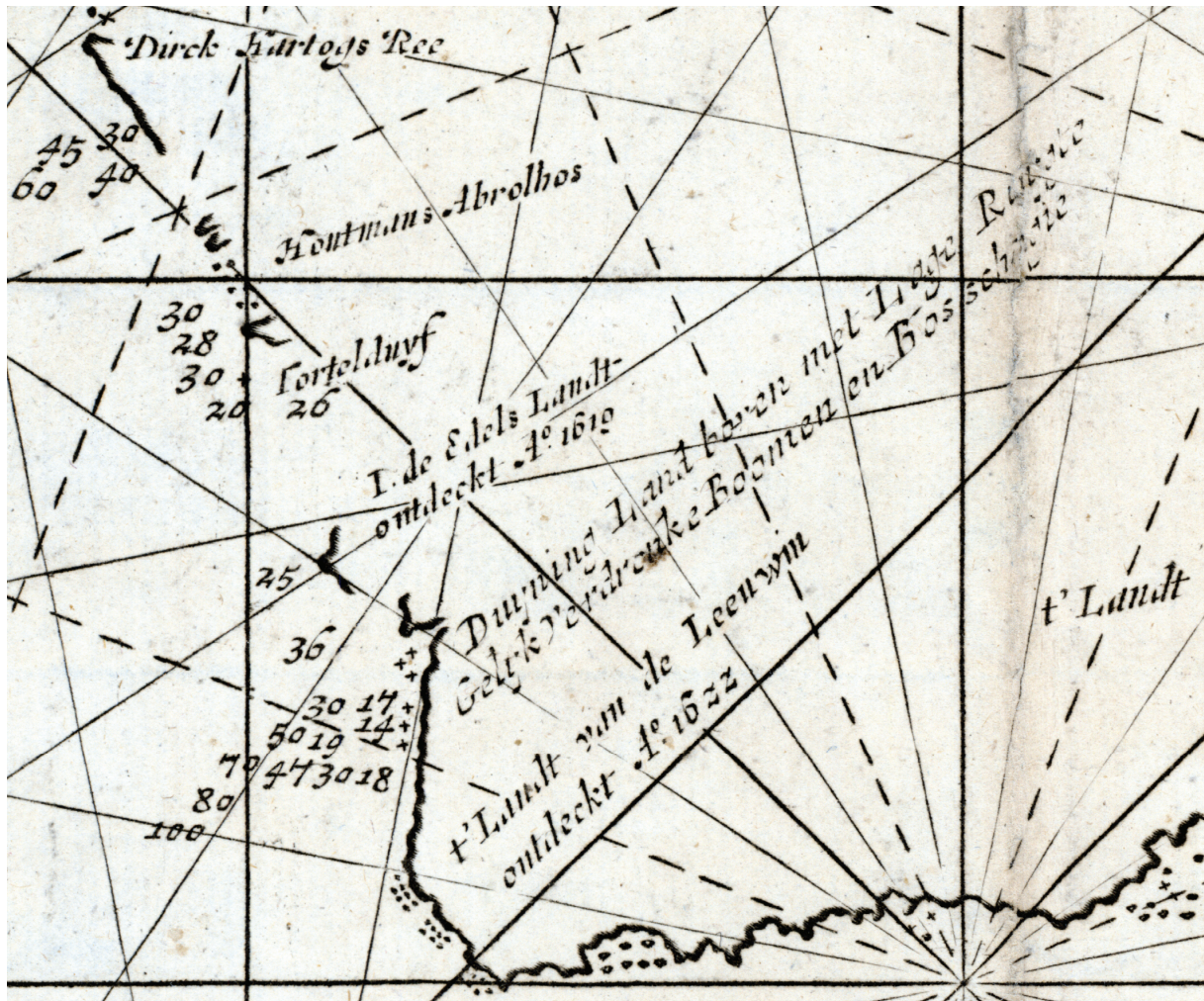


Figure 2. Detail from Goos/van Keulen (c.1690), *Oost Indien* (National Library of Australia MAP RM 2215)

The crucial word in the description is *duyning*. What is probably meant by it is *duyning/duynigh*, i.e. ‘duny; land with dunes’ because *duyning/duynigh* is an obsolete word meaning ‘pertaining to cloudiness; nonsense; drunkenness’ (*Taaldacht* website), none of which are convincing senses for toponyms or topographic descriptors.²

The description on the Goos/van Keulen (c.1690) map is a typical topographic descriptor seen on 17th and 18th century Dutch maps, which often show other descriptors such as: “waterplaets” (watering place), “Soute rivier/Zout rivier” (Salt(y) river), and on Willem Janszoon’s 1606 map of Cape York: “Laegh landt” (Low(-lying) land), “Marasich Landt” (Marshy Land), “Modder Landt” (Mud(dy) Land), “Rivier met het Bosch” (River with forest/bush) (see the ‘Duyfken Chart’ 1925-1933) (Tent 2006). The Gerard van Keulen and Johannes van Keulen maps (1697-1726 and 1753 respectively) depicting de Willem Vlamingh’s charting of a section of the Western Australian coastline also show various descriptors: near the Swan River “Vol boomen en bossaghien” (Full of trees and boscaiges); and further north “Heel Doragtig Landt” (Very Barren Land), “Roode en zeer kenbare hoek” (Red and very recognisable point), “Hooge roode schorre Zandhoek” (High red rough, steep Sand(y) point)³, and “Steyle Hoek” (Steep Point).

Descriptions of the dunny country along the west coast of the Southland are quite common and are found either on maps or in mariners' journals. Willem De Vlamingh provides one for his journal entry of January 15, 1697, noting that the low and dunny country reminded him of Vlieland (one of the West Frisian Islands, lying in the Wadden Sea) (Schilder 1985:128). In addition, the entry for the same day by Gerrit Koelaart's journal (captain of the accompanying ship *Nijptang*) notes that the land seen along the coast was "barren land and dunes not fit for animals, let alone humans, to inhabit" (Schilder 1985:157). Schilder (1985:54) also notes that Pelsaert (the captain of the ill-fated VOC ship *Batavia*) describes the coast south of the Houtman Abrolhos as "bare bad land with occasional sand dunes".⁴

The tendency of Dutch explorers and cartographers to include topographic descriptors on their maps of the Southland is most likely due to their overall lack of interest in it because the VOC saw no potential for profit in this land, and unlike the British and the French in the latter years of the 18th century, had no territorial designs or scientific interest in exploring the Southland other than for navigational purposes to aid their ships in reaching Batavia. The placenames on Dutch charts were therefore generally applied to topographic coastal features that had some significance for navigation or respite (Tent & Slatyer 2009).

After 1617 all VOC ships sailing to Batavia were required to head in an easterly direction between latitudes 35°-40°S after rounding the Cape of Good Hope. The Roaring Forties and currents between these latitudes allowed ships to make a very swift crossing of the Indian Ocean. After having sailed for some 4000 miles along this line, they were to turn north to Java, further benefiting from the counter-clockwise Indian Ocean currents. This route reduced outward-bound voyages from twelve months to about six months. However, this route had its distinct perils. An error made in calculating longitude, as was very easily done, could result in the ship unexpectedly finding itself upon the treacherous west coast of the Southland. This happened on no less than 21 known occasions, and on at least five with disastrous results, for example, the loss or running aground of *'t Wapen van Hoorn* (1622), *Batavia* (1629), *Vergulde Draeck* (1656), *Zuytdorp* (1712), and the *Zeewijk* (1727).⁵ The accurate charting and description of the Southland's west coast was therefore vital, hence the abundance of topographic descriptors appearing on their charts.

Linguistically, the distinction between a topographic descriptor and a descriptive toponym can be difficult to determine. "Steyle Hoek" (Steep Point) is an example. It may have been intended to be merely a topographic descriptor, but it has been interpreted as a descriptive toponym because today the headland bears the calqued (literally translated) name *Steep Point*. The initial two words of the descriptor "Duyning land boven lage Ruigte Gelyk Verdronke Boomen en Boschaghe" on the Goos/van Keulen map (c.1690) may have been interpreted as a descriptive toponym.

The first appearance of the toponym using *Dinning* as the specific is *Terres de Dinning*, on Didier Robert de Vaugondy's map (1756) (**Fig. 3**). It next appears as *Dinnings Land* on Daniel Djurberg's *Karta over Polynesien eller femte delen af jordklotet* (1780).

The vast majority of maps that show *Dinnings Land* published after Djurberg's (1780) map also use the name *Ulimaroa* for Australia.⁶ Like lexicographers, who often take advantage of previously published dictionaries for definitions and senses of their lemmata, cartographers also often rely on previously published maps. It seems reasonable to assume that the cartographers who use the *Ulimaroa* appellation based their maps on Djurberg's, and therefore have perpetuated the use of *Dinnings Land*. Whilst de Vaugondy seems to be the first cartographer to have used this appellation, it should nevertheless be noted that Djurberg was well known for the rather bizarre habit of bestowing his own names to already named places and countries, for example: *Vingandacoa* for North America; *Hare-Vildarnas Land* (Land of the Savage Rabbit People) for Alaska; and *Glänsande Åsen* (Shiny Ridge) or *Missouriska Bårgåsen* (Missouri Mountain Ridge) for the Rocky Mountains (see Djurberg & Åkerman 1815). So Djurberg's use of *Dinnings Land* does not seem out of character.

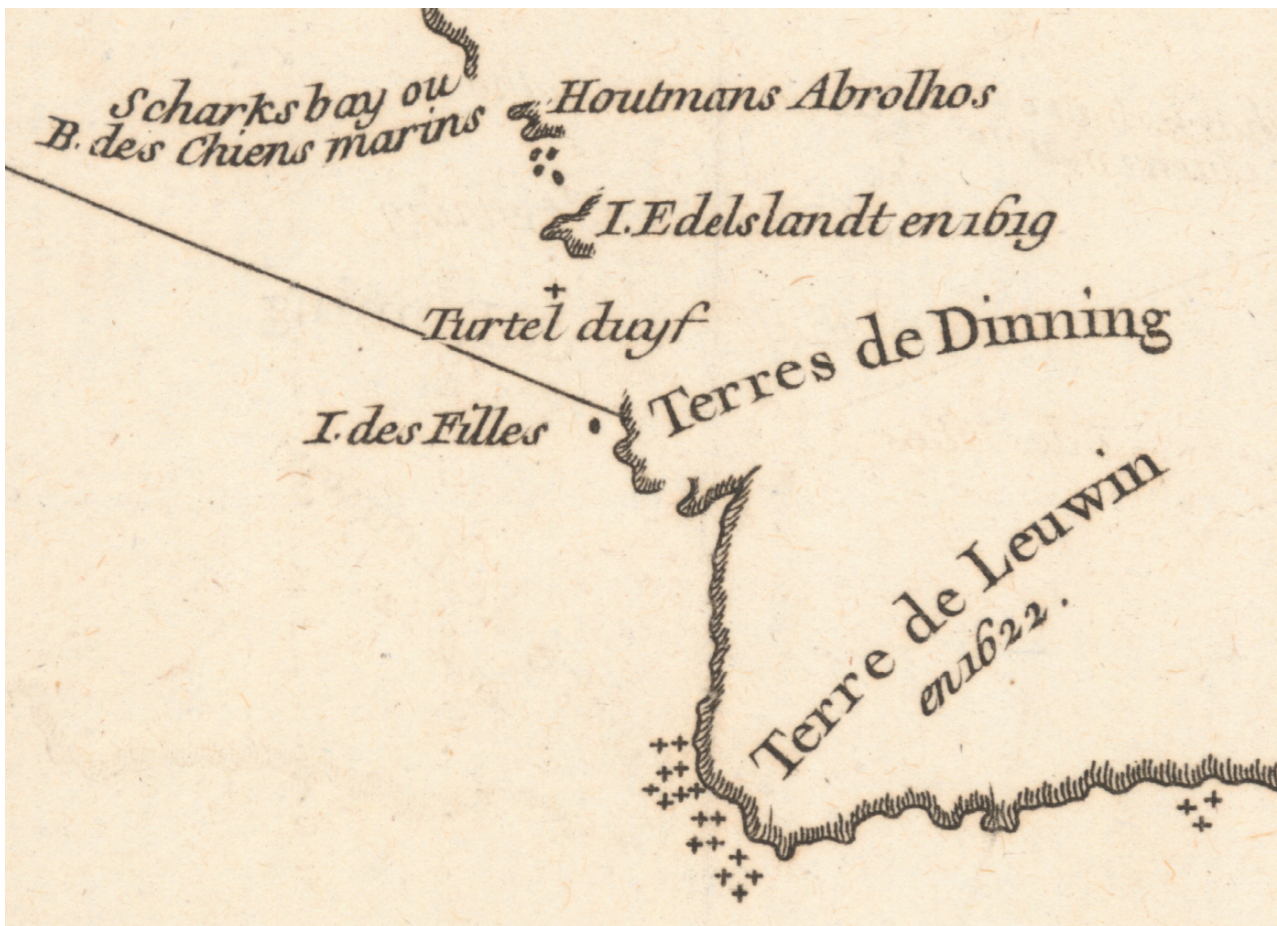


Figure 3. Detail from Robert de Vaugondy (1756), *Carte Réduite de l'Australasie, pour servir à la lecture de l'Histoire des Terres Australes [...]* (National Library of Australia, Map NK 6956)

At least three maps seem to have taken more accurate note of the Goos/van Keulen (c.1690) descriptor, portraying the coast near the Swan River as: “Ein niedriges Land dessen Baume uberschwemt zu seyn scheinen” (A low-lying land whose trees seem to be drowned) (Plant 1793; Schneider 1808), and “Parched Land *with* stragling [*sic*] trees” (Begbie 1779). Two other maps also have coastal descriptors, Sayer (1787) and Laurie & Whittle (1803), whilst still acknowledging *Dinning's Land* they add “a Low Land whose Trees appear to be drowned” directly below the toponym.

It is my contention that de Vaugondy (and perhaps Djurberg) interpreted Goos/van Keulen's “Duyning land [...]” as a toponym and not a topographic descriptor, with the change in spelling or the mistranscription not being uncommon from one language to another. If the descriptor had been accurately translated into French, de Vaugondy would have transcribed *Terres des Dune(s)* or *Pays/Pais des dune(s)*, *dune* being the French for ‘dune’.

A number of spellings occur on maps with *Dinnings Land* being the most common. The Streit (1817) map simply shows *Dinning Land*, whilst the Canzler (1795, 1805 & 1806), Sayer (1787), and Laurie & Whittle (1803) maps all show *Dinning's Land*. The use of the possessive apostrophe here adds some weight to the argument that the original descriptor was interpreted as an eponymous toponym. However, the use of this apostrophe is not a necessary condition for showing possession. Most eponymous toponyms do not appear with a possessive apostrophe.

One interesting rendering of the name is on the Anon. (1808) map, *Pais de Dinning*, appearing in italics and in a smaller font to that of other region labels, such as *Terre de Edel*, *Terre de Peter Nuijts*, *Terre de Eendragt*, *Terre de Wit*, and *T. de Leeuwin*, all appearing in a larger font and not in italics.

Pais de Dinning is printed in the same size font as all other topographic feature names (e.g. capes, rivers, islands, bays etc.). This perhaps shows the subordinate status given, in this case, to the designated area compared to those marked with *Terre*. The difference in sense between the two terms is subtle with *pais/pays* referring to a ‘district, territory, region’, or ‘country’, whilst *terre* denoting a ‘land, shore’, or ‘property’ (i.e. a delimited area).

Assorted spellings is not the only difference between the maps discussed. Not only are diverse spellings common between maps but also the locations of toponyms. A number of maps surveyed show *Dinnings Land* just to the north of the Swan River, whilst others just to the south.

I believe the descriptor on the Goos/van Keulen map (Fig. 2.) is derived from the Gerritsz. map of 1627 upon which is transcribed: “*Duynig landt boven met boomen ende bosage*” (Duny land/land with dunes with trees and bosage) (Fig. 4.). Towards the south on this map is written “*Laegh ghelijck verdroncken landt*” (Low even/level drowned land). The Goos/van Keulen map appears to have blended these two descriptions and altered the spelling of “*duynig*” to “*duyning*”. It is the latter transcription that appears to have been the source of the Dinning appellation. Moreover, a connection with the Leeuwin voyage of 1622 is made by De Heeres (1899) and later Schilder (1985: 52). Schilder, though admitting only limited surviving archival sources, credits the *Leeuwin* voyage, and translates the “*Duynich landt [...]*” text as “dunes with trees and scrub on top”.



Figure 4. Detail from Hessel Gerritsz. (1627), *Caert van't Landt van d'Eendracht [...]* (National Library of Australia MAP RM 749)

Such mistakes are not uncommon in cartography and toponymy. Indeed, it is a process by which new toponymic forms often come about. It involves the garbled transmission, misspelling, mistranscription, mistaken meaning, or the mistaken interpretation of the original toponym, all resulting in a distortion of its form. Some Australian examples include: e.g. *Coal and Candle Creek* (<? ‘Kolaan Kandhal’), *Collector* (<? ‘Colegdar’/‘Caligda’), *Tom Groggin* (<? ‘tom-a-roggin’), *Tom Uglys Point* (<? ‘Tom Huxley’/‘Tom Wogu(ly)’), *Tin Can Bay* (<? ‘Tuncanbar’), and *Dee Why* (<? ‘Dy Beach’) (Tent & Blair 2009 & 2011).

NOTES

- ¹ <uij>, <uy> and <ui> are all ways of spelling the diphthong /œy/. The word *duin* ‘dune’ dates back to the 11th century. The earliest citation of its adjective *duinigh/duinig/duinich* dates back to the 17th century: “Sijnde aldaer laech *duijnich* landt” (The land there is dunny), *Dagregister Batavia* 9, 206 [1657] (the VOC Daily Register of Batavia) (*Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* <<http://gtb.inl.nl/>>). The adjectival suffix has various spellings during the 17th and 18th centuries <-ich>, <-ig>, and <-igh>. *Duny* ‘Having many dunes’ (*Merriam-Webster* <www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/duny>)
- ² There is another term *deining* (with the variants *dijning*, *dyning*, *denying*, and *dining*) which could be confused with *duyning* or *duynig*, however, it refers to the swell of the ocean.
- ³ ‘Schorre’ (adj.) can also refer to land/beach/sandbank with a layer of shells on top.
- ⁴ VOC ‘*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*’ (United East-India Company).
- ⁵ Three other ships are known to have disappeared between Cape of Good Hope and the Batavia, they are: the *Ridderschap van Holland* (1694), *Fortuyn* (1724), and *Aagtekerke* (1726). It is generally assumed they also run aground along this coastline (*Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* <<http://gtb.inl.nl/>>).
- ⁶ See Tent & Geraghty (2011 & 2012) for a full discussion of this appellation.

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