

Toponymy and the History of Cartography

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Within the last few years historians of cartography have become increasingly aware of the potential value of toponymy for the elucidation of early cartographical enigmas. One of the most notorious of these is the real identity of the apparent continent of *Jave-la-Grande* which figures exclusively on a number of French manuscript maps made in Dieppe in the mid-sixteenth century. Its position south of Java gave rise to the understandable supposition that it was an inaccurate, primitive map of Australia, since Australia is the only landmass that really does exist very approximately in that position. The east coast of *Jave-la-Grande*, though vaguely similar to Australia's east coast, has one feature which conspicuously fails to correspond to any on Australia's east coast, namely the huge triangular projection of *cap de fremose*. Only the most vivid imagination can find any resemblance whatsoever between the two west coasts.

It has long been recognised that a number of the inscriptions on both coastlines of *Jave-la-Grande* on all those Dieppe maps that portray it are clearly of Portuguese origin, though in many cases in Gallicised renderings. Since there is no substantiated record of any sixteenth-century Portuguese exploration nearer Australia than Timor, and no extant Portuguese map or chart showing any trace of land in the vicinity of Australia before the earliest Dutch discoveries, there arose the hypothesis that there must have been some earlier Portuguese voyages in the area of which the only possible evidence is that provided by the coastlines of *Jave-la-Grande* on the Dieppe maps. The incredibly poor correspondence between *Jave-la-Grande's* coastlines and those of Australia encouraged some enthusiasts to invent ingenious explanations to account for the east coast divergences, though the west coast ones defeated them. All these explanations have

now been conclusively shown to be based on false hypotheses and faulty argumentation.

The advocates of an unknown Portuguese discovery of Australia completely ignored the potential evidence of the inscriptions on both coastlines, with the exception of the naive acceptance by some of the suggestion that *coste dangereuse* ('dangerous coast') on *Jave-la-Grande's* east coast indicated the Great Barrier Reef, as if it were the only piece of dangerous coast in the world. George Collingridge managed to misread two local place-names on what he maintained was the north coast of Australia, but which was actually part of Indonesia. He then proceeded to render them as a grammatically impossible Portuguese sentence which he 'translated' into English as 'No boats go here'; this he interpreted as indicating the shallow Gulf of Carpentaria. Generations of historians have accepted his interpretation in good faith.

In the 1930's a Portuguese historian proposed that linguists should examine the *Jave-la-Grande* inscriptions, hoping that such investigations would produce confirmation of the Australian identification. Nobody apparently responded to his suggestion until 1980, when I undertook the task.

It is a basic principle of toponymy that a single spelling of any place-name is untrustworthy evidence, not least because consistent spelling conventions are of very recent date in all languages using the Roman alphabet, and these, in any case, vary in their spellings of different sounds. It is consequently essential to examine and compare as many renderings of a given inscription as possible, from a wide variety of sources, preferably covering a broad time span.

Since *Jave-la-Grande* only figures on maps emanating from the Dieppe school of cartography, though it is not included on all of them, I obtained detailed photographic and microfilm coverage of all the Dieppe maps, and was able to examine some of the originals as well, including those in the so-called 'Vallard' atlas. The results of comparing the various spellings of the inscriptions on the different Dieppe maps have been published and they are listed in the notes in the published version of a public lecture I gave in the National Library of Australia in 1988, under the title *The Portuguese Discovery of Australia: Fact or Fiction?* This was reviewed in an issue of the *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* in October 1990.

So vast is the number of misconceptions concerning the Dieppe maps and *Jave-la-Grande* accumulated from the past that it is a pity that Mr Frank Dunn, in his review, adds to them. Moreover, he leaves

his readers with the distinct impression that I have not looked 'at all the maps and all the evidence' and that the issues have not been 'taken seriously', so that 'none of the theories can be given much credence'. He even suggests that it is possible to prove the negative hypothesis that *Jave-la-Grande* is 'pure fiction', even in the face of all the evidence contained in my lecture and the much more detailed treatment contained in earlier articles.

He upbraids me in particular on the subject of 'The Vallard map, which shows only the east coast of the mythical continent', clearly suggesting that I had not looked at it. It will be appreciated that within the time constraints of a lecture it is impossible to go into the details of every work consulted. The 'Vallard' map to which he refers was not mentioned in my lecture precisely because it is 'deviant'; both it and the 'Vallard' west coast map, of whose existence he seems to be unaware, are dealt with in other articles of mine. In view of the 1547 date of the 'Vallard' atlas, five years after the first reliably dated Dieppe map to portray *Jave-la-Grande*, that of Jean Rotz, one wonders on what evidence he claims that it 'seems intellectually prior to the others'.

Its deviance is due to two factors. Firstly, it has some fifty inscriptions on the east coast of *Jave-la-Grande*, whereas all the other detailed Dieppe maps, except for Guillaume Le Testu's of 1556, and the much later 'Pasterot' one adapted from it, have about a dozen; a similar numerical discrepancy applies in the west coast names. Since the 'surplus' names do not occur on the other maps, the inference is clear: the 'Vallard' cartographer invented them and placed them on a coastline somewhat sparsely identified, in order to impress a wealthy patron who was unlikely to be able to check on them even had he felt so inclined; several are duplicated on the west coast map. The extra names cannot conceivably be considered evidence of intellectual priority or some would surely have appeared on 'later' maps.

The other deviant factor about the 'Vallard' east coast map, and the west coast one too, for that matter, is the nature of the inscriptions. Mr Dunn, perhaps resurrecting Ernest Scott's 1929 uninformed, unsubstantiated and unsustainable suggestion of a Catalan source for the Dieppe maps, states: 'On this map the language is Catalan... The east coast map shows nothing which is clearly Portuguese'. The first statement is simply not correct; so far as the second is concerned, it is true that there is *little* that is 'clearly Portuguese', but this is not very surprising, since the Portuguese, above all in Asia, adopted and adapted local names, rather than give Portuguese ones; there are very

few exceptions. At least three inscriptions on the east coast of *Javela-Grande* are made up entirely of correctly spelled Portuguese words, *Rio seguro* ('safe river'), *terra alta* ('high land') and *Rio pescadores* ('river fishermen'); all six words are admittedly also identical in Catalan, but whether they are Catalan or Portuguese, a word meaning 'of the' is missing between the last two words. A few inscriptions are in French, *Illes grandes*, *Illes basses*, *cap: double* and *cap bon espoir*, for example. Most, however, are peculiar linguistic hybrids, such as *bonno porto*, *bon sinal*, *dos portobonos*, *Ille grossa*, *tres Illes*, *Rio S jacque*, *Rio grant*, *rio dernerio*, *cap frimosa*, *c:ap fria [sic]*, *Rio bassa*, *port malla*, *Rio malla* and *cap Veloza*, which can only be really appreciated by those who are well acquainted with French, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian. They will recognise that the last six show that the writer could not even make his adjectives agree with their nouns. Such linguistic monstrosities also occur on the 'Vallard' west coast map, and appallingly inaccurate copying is evident throughout the atlas. These inscriptions therefore provide no evidence whatsoever either of a Catalan source, of of the intellectual priority of the 'Vallard' east or west coast maps. Rather they clearly suggest that they are the work of an inventive, but extremely careless copyist who was a very poor linguist, whatever his nationality was.

Mr Dunn's preoccupation with a Catalan source even extends to the best known of the Dieppe maps, for he states: 'Even the debased language of the Dauphin is nearer Catalan than Portuguese'. This likewise is not correct. The place-names all over the Dauphin or Harleian map are vastly less 'debased' than those in the 'Vallard' atlas, though a large number have been Gallicised. The following names on the east coast of the Dauphin, or Harleian map are, as they stand, clearly French: *Gouffre*, *Baye neufue*, *Coste des herbaiges*, *R. de beaucoup disles*, *Baye perdue* and *Coste dangereuse*. There are only two other inscriptions actually on the east coast; one is *C: de fremose*, *fremose* being a Gallicisation of a Sixteenth century variant spelling of the Portuguese (and Catalan) adjective now spelled *formosa* ('beautiful'), in its feminine form. The other is *coste de gracal*; the latter word is a mistranscription of the Portuguese word *prancel*, the Portuguese original having undoubtedly been *costa do prancel* ('shoal coast'). Another mistranscription of *prancel* is to be found in the Mozambique channel on Pierre Desceliers' 1550 map, for example, where it is rendered as *y^e de grace* ('island of grace'), the cartographer having misread the 'p' on the original he was copying from as a 'g', and the 'l' as and 'I' presuming the latter to be an abbreviation for *Ilha* ('Is-

land').

Errors of transcription, translation and transliteration proliferated on early manuscript maps and charts, especially, but by no means exclusively, on those of little known areas of the world. In addition, place-names were frequently misplaced, not least because of the faulty transmission of degrees of latitude and longitude, distance figures and compass directions, which themselves may or may not have been originally correct. Theoretically geographers in particular were liable to allow their judgement to be clouded by over zealous respect for classical authorities and by such age-old concepts as the necessary existence of a vast southern continent. A few non-Iberian cartographers were not averse to inventing coastlines and inscriptions.

For all these reasons, even the most obvious and innocent-looking inscriptions on early maps and charts need to be regarded with suspicion. All relevant information needs to be consulted, including geographical treatises, sailing directions and travellers' narratives. Moreover, such critical examination needs to be carried out by toponymists with detailed historical knowledge of the languages concerned, and an intimate acquaintance with the handwriting of the period. Historians of cartography who are not linguists should enlist the aid of toponymists. From personal experience I can assure the latter that they will find in such co-operation plentiful scope for the exercise of their expertise in a field which has hitherto been only too frequently disregarded.

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