



DUYFKEN: CHARTING A SEA OF MISCONCEPTIONS

Nick Burningham

At the time of writing, the Duyfken replica is sailing from Geraldton to Denham, making eight knots as she approaches Kalbarri at the start of her “Chevron 2000 Expedition” voyage to re-enact the original Duyfken’s historic landfall on the Cape York Peninsula of Queensland.

The Duyfken replica has already had a scrape with a coral head in the Abrolhos (a tradition with Dutch sailing ships) but she is sailing well. During her first twenty-four hours out of Fremantle she covered about 150 nautical miles, a respectable days run for a small square rigger of 16th century design. As Captain Peter Manthorpe, first mate Gary Wilson, and the crew get more familiar with the ship, performance should improve further. They will need to get pretty good at persuading her to go to windward if they are to beat all the way up to Cape York against the dry season southeasters.

The construction of the *Duyfken* is widely regarded as a very successful project and the finished ship is certainly an aesthetic triumph. One of the project’s aims was to increase public awareness of the original ship’s historic voyage and the important part played by Dutch mariners in the early recorded history of Australia.

The original *Duyfken* made the first historically recorded voyage to *Australia*, and that message is probably fairly well absorbed by the public. The details of the original ship’s voyage are still little known, and almost everything that is “known” by historians and the public is WRONG!

Matthew Flinders knew about *Duyfken*’s voyage. On 8th November, 1802, exploring the same part of Cape York Peninsula that *Duyfken* had surveyed almost two hundred years earlier, Flinders gave the name “Duyfhen Point” to the low headland on the northern side of the bay now called Albacross Bay. Two days later he recorded in his journal “. . . noon, our latitude was then 14° 32’ 35”, longitude 141° 32’, being nearly the position of Cape Keer-weer, at which point the Yacht Duyfhen gave up her examination”.

In the introduction to his “A Voyage to Terra Australis” he succinctly set out what was understood about *Duyfken*’s voyage.

“The Course of the Duyfhen, from New Guinea, was southward, along the islands on the west side of Torres strait, to that part of Terra Australis, a little to the west and south of Cape York ; but all these lands were thought to be connected, and to form the west coast of New Guinea.”

Flinders knew about *Duyfken* because back in Cook’s time, the RN hydrographer Dalrymple accessed documents including the instructions given to Abel Tasman for his second voyage of exploration — a voyage to Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf of Carpentaria. Those instructions do suggest that Cape York was thought to be part of New Guinea.

Since then other historical evidence has come to light, and has been the subject of further study. Much the most impor-

tant evidence is a chart in the “Atlas van Hem” (sometimes known as the “Secret Atlas of the Dutch East India Company”) which clearly and explicitly shows the course followed by *Duyfken* in 1605–6. The inscription on the chart states that it “shows the routes taken by the jacht Duijfen on the outward, as well as the return voyage . . .” *Duyfken* did not follow the New Guinea coast to Torres Strait, nor did she follow the islands of the Strait then work down the Cape York Peninsula coast as far as Cape Keer-weer before turning for home. Her route ran in the opposite direction, surveying Cape York Peninsula before turning north across Torres Strait and finding the barrier of reefs on the southern coast of New Guinea, yet Flinders’ understanding of the voyage has not been superseded in most histories.

Some historians, starting with Gunter Schilder, have spotted the course shown on the chart, but have still not analysed the significance. Schilder has accepted that Willem Janszoon and everyone on *Duyfken* thought Cape York to be joined to New Guinea. On the face of things, there is a very good reason for making this assumption — Janszoon, or whoever drew the original chart, labelled the Cape York Peninsula “Nova Guinea”.

But things are not always what they seem. What would Jansz have understood by “Nova Guinea”?

There is no doubt that he was looking for Nova Guinea. The instructions issued by Governor Veerschoor to Jansz and his supercargo Rosengein direct them “. . . to discover the great land Nova Guinea and other undiscovered east and southlands.” John Saris, an English merchant based in Bantam Java, noted the departure of *Duyfken* on her voyage of discovery:

“The eighteenth [November, 1605], heere departed a small pinasse of the Flemmings, for the discovery of the Island called Nova ginnea, which, as it is said, affordeth great store of Gold.”

Much of the island we know as New Guinea had already been discovered by 1605, and it had not afforded great store of gold. How could Veerschoor direct exploration for an island that was already known? Why did Saris think it was said that great store of gold came from that island?

The Nova Guinea in question was not our New Guinea. It was either a theoretical island lying just off the Great Southland, or it was a region of that undiscovered Southland. Which ever it was, it was the land from which King Solomon’s fleet had brought great store of gold.

The existence of a huge southern continent (to counterbalance the landmasses of the northern hemisphere) was a tenet of theoretical geography (for which Ptolemy is sometimes blamed). The location of Ophir and Tharshish (where King Solomon’s mines were), somewhere away to the south-east, beyond the furthest Indies, had been “proved” by biblical scholars. Guinea in Africa had afforded great store of gold and, when discovered, this hypothesised land would be a new Guinea.



The island that we call New Guinea had been discovered, but it wasn't the hoped for new Guinea.

Janszoon would have been familiar with Dutch world maps such as those of Ortelius, Hondius and Mercator which showed the Great Southern Continent (*Terra Australis Incognita*) including the region called Nova Guinea. Ortelius's map shows it as an island separated from Terra Australis by a narrow strait, but the inscription on his map states that it is not known whether Nova Guinea is an island or joined to the Southern Continent.

Duyfken sailed east-south-east from the Spice Islands of Banda, first to the Kei islands, then to the Aru islands, visiting the entrepot at Dobbo, and perhaps talking to Asian merchants who visited New Guinea to trade products such as bird of paradise feathers. From Aru, they sailed east-south-east again until they came on the low lying and muddy coast of New Guinea, an area never previously visited by Europeans. The chart shows that they made detailed survey of the estuary of the Digul river (which has a fearsome tidal bore) and visited a village called Tiuri, but they did not label the land "Nova Guinea". The area is labelled "Larghlandt modderlandt" (Low land, muddy land).

From there, perhaps, because of thick wet season weather and the lee shore, *Duyfken* stood away to the south, out into the Arafura Sea, and was within a day's sail of the Wessel Islands before resuming the exploratory course east-south-east. That course brought them to the Cape York Peninsula at the river now known as the Pennefather river. Curiously, the coast running north-south conformed very well, both in location and alignment, with the west coast of the theorised Nova Guinea of Ortelius' map and Linschoten's highly respected 1597 map.

From Pennefather, *Duyfken* worked southwards past the point that Flinder's named Duyfken Point and into the wide but shallow bay now called Albatross Bay. Janszoon obviously didn't notice any albatross there because he called it Vliege bay (Fly Bay). From there they continued south, noting rivers and bays until the low and featureless coast trended away somewhat to the southeast in about 14° south (by their imprecise reckoning). At that point Janszoon decided to turn around, naming the point Cabo Keer-weer (Cape Turnaround).

We can only guess why they decided to turn north because *Duyfken's* log books have been lost since sometime in the 17th century.

Carstenszoon who led the subsequent Dutch expedition to the area did have access to *Duyfken's* log and in his own log noted, on 12th May 1623:

"... in their . . . huts on the beach we have found nothing except . . . a piece of metal which the wounded man had in his nets and which he possibly received from the Duyfken."

On 15th May he observed that the Aborigines in the area towards Cape Keer-weer *"... have also knowledge of muskets whose terrible effects they learned in 1606 from the men of Duyfken who landed here."*

Sailing northwards beyond the original landfall at Pennefather river, *Duyfken* evidently put into Port Musgrave and sent an expedition up one of the three rivers which de-

bouch there. Again we know this from a comment in Carstenszoon's journal:

"On 11th [May] we sailed close inshore past a large river (which in 1606 the men from the jacht Duijffken went up with a boat, on which occasion one of them was killed by projectiles of the natives) . . ."

Duyfken followed the coast until the point the coast turned northeast towards the tip of Cape York. At this point Janszoon continued northerly towards Prince of Wales Island which he simply called 't Hooght Eylant (the High Island). The chart indicates a boat sent ashore there. From the high island, *Duyfken* went further north, sailing across the western side of Torres Strait, charting islands including Moa and Badu before confronting an impenetrable line of reefs which Janszoon labelled in his straight-forward descriptive style "*Vuyle Bancken*" (foul banks or vile reefs). It was there that he concluded the program of exploration. *Duyfken* stood straight out to sea. Since the *Vuyle Bancken* were some thirty nautical miles off the low-lying New Guinea coast, it is unlikely that *Duyfken's* crew saw that coast, and they did not try to close with the New Guinea coast until they had sailed well to the west, approaching False Cape, where they had ventured out from some weeks or months previous.

Did Janszoon believe that Cape York Peninsula was joined to the island we call New Guinea? The chart showing *Duyfken's* voyage gives no indication of any connection between Cape York and New Guinea. There is no evidence that Janszoon did make that mistaken assumption. We will never know for certain, but evidence suggests that he did not.

No Dutch chart showing Cape York joins it to New Guinea until after Tasman's voyage of 1644. Tasman was directed to investigate the area we know as Torres Strait but preferred to keep well out to sea, away from the reefs and dangerous currents.

The accuracy of the *Duyfken* chart shows that Janszoon spent some time in the western part of Torres Strait. The relative sizes and positions of the islands shown there make them identifiable (unlike the work of Carstenszoon and Tasman). Janszoon must have been a fine mariner. The investigation of both Torres Strait and Cape York Peninsula bespeaks remarkable seamanship. *Duyfken* was on the west coast of the Peninsula during the west monsoon or wet season, so Janszoon was exploring an unknown lee shore during a stormy season.

Perhaps the west monsoon was fading by the time he reached Torres Strait. Whatever the weather was doing, he would have experienced the very strong currents that flow unpredictably in the various passages between the islands and reefs. The strength of the currents would have suggested to Janszoon that he was not just sailing across a shallow bay. If, while he was there, either the west or east monsoon blew strongly for a few days, the current would have started to run consistently in the same direction as the wind, despite the tides, providing stronger evidence that he was in a strait with a large body of water at the other end.

It is well known that European nations involved in the exploration of distant lands were not anxious to publicise their discoveries — rather they hoped to keep them secret. How-



ever, we know that John Saris, an Englishman in Bantam, discovered what *Duyfken's* mission was. He was presumably interested to learn what *Duyfken* found. Some time after *Duyfken* got back to Banda, Saris noted:

"The fifteenth of June [1606] have arrived Nockhoda Tingall a Cling-man from Banda, in a Java Juncke, laden with mace and nutmegs, the which he sold to the Guzerats; he told me that the Flemmings Pinnasse which went upon discovery for Nova Gimny, was returned to Banda, having found the Iland: but in sending their men on shoare to intreate of Trade, there were nine of them killed by the Heathens, which are men-eaters: so they were constrained to returne, finding no good to be doene there"

Saris's information was at least secondhand, it may well be inaccurate, but it shows the difficulty of keeping secret a voyage of discovery.

The reported death of nine men has excited a good deal of speculation. Authors who believe that Janszoon mistook Cape

York Peninsula for New Guinea, tend to presume that the reported incident took place on our New Guinea, and that it happened on the outward voyage so that Jansz made most of the voyage with nearly half the crew already dead — it makes a good story.

We know from Carstenszoon that one man was killed on the Cape York Peninsula. We can only speculate where the other men were killed, if indeed they were. Again the chart offers a suggestion. If one assumes that Janszoon would not have continued his exploration with almost half the crew gone, then the deaths occurred at Tiuri, on Dolak island, near False Cape, New Guinea, on the return voyage. Until that point, the chart shows a voyage of close, coasting, survey. *Duyfken* returned to the village marked Tiuri on her way back from Torres Strait, and from there sailed away to the northwest, on a straight course, until they closed with another part of the New Guinea coast (which Janszoon called Os Papuas). They changed course by 90°, getting clear of the land again, until they reached the correct latitude for passing north of the Kei islands and running back to Banda. But a massacre at Tiuri is speculation.

A few months after *Duyfken's* return, Torres passed through the strait that now bears his name, heading for Ternate in the Spice Islands and Manila. Whether Torres and his crew were more successful than *Duyfken's* in keeping secret what they had found is another area of speculation.

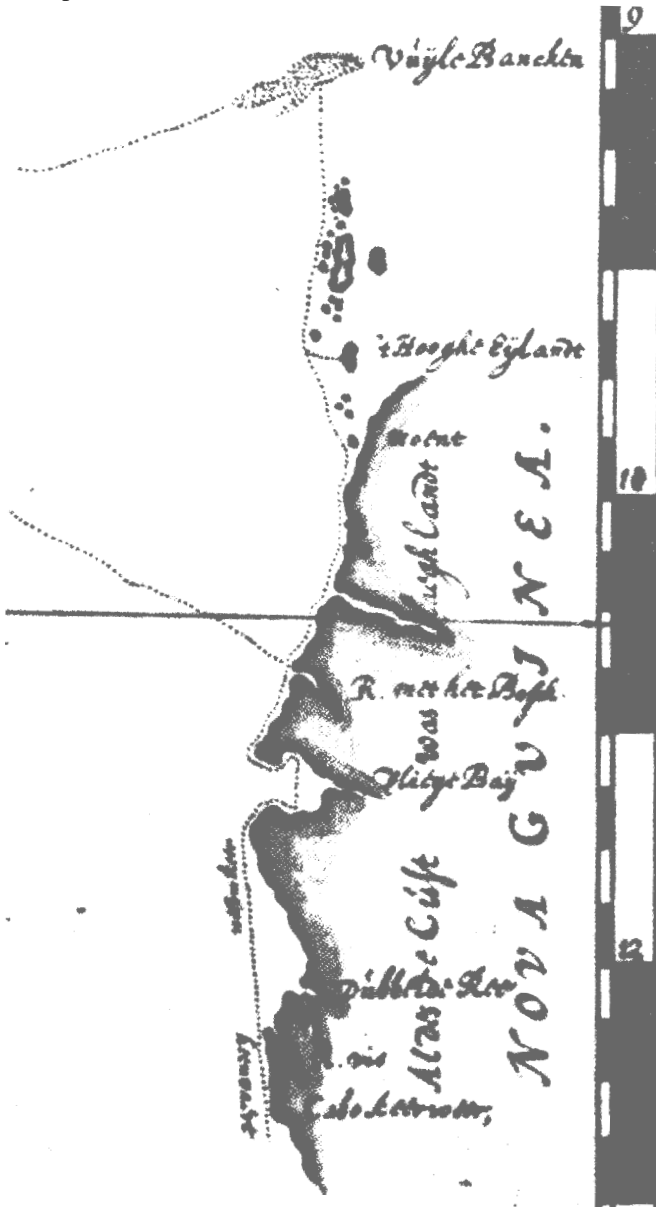
As noted above, Dutch charts before Tasman do show a gap between Cape York and (our) New Guinea, and there is some evidence that the Dutch knew that a difficult and dangerous passage south of New Guinea was possible. In 1616 two Dutch ships commanded by Schouten and Le Maire sailed across the Pacific to reach the Spice Islands, hoping to evade the VOC's monopoly. Their plan was to sail south of New Guinea but as they approached Australia/New Guinea, short of provisions, they were increasingly uneasy. Schouten still wanted to try the passage but the Le Maire and the crew preferred to take the known passage to the north of New Guinea.

On 18th may, 1616, Schouten recorded the reasons for their decision to go north:

"... if we proceeded on the same track [sailing west on 15°S] we should without doubt fall to southward of New Guinea; and in case of not finding a passage to the south (which was dangerous and uncertain), and then the ship and goods would be lost..." (Dalrymple's translation)

Schouten's comments are ambiguous, but he seems to have believed (correctly) that by sailing west in 15°S he would reach land and that he could pass between it and New Guinea somewhere north of 15°, but the passage was dangerous and uncertain. If that is what he meant, he did indeed know of Torres Strait.

Finally, we should note the inscription on the first map to incorporate *Duyfken's* discoveries: Hessel Gerritsz' 1622 chart notes "the coast from 9–14 degees . . . called here the coast of Nova Guinea, was sailed along by Jan Rosengein . . ." (*Duyfken's* supercargo). Gerritsz is making the point that on this particular chart, the name Nova Guinea is applied to our Cape York coast, not to the island later known as New Guinea.



The portion of the *Duyfken* chart showing Cape York Peninsula and Torres Strait