European Names in a 17th Century Atlas of the Dutch East India Company

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Abstract

In 1690, the board of the Dutch East India Company (VOC "Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie") in Amsterdam commissioned the cartographer Isaak de Graaf to produce an atlas of the company's trading area, which stretched from Cape Town to Japan. The atlas, produced to support the strategical decisions of the VOC board, contains about 10 000, mostly coastal, names. These have been identified and analysed.

First, the feature categories discerned were noted, and subsequently the names imposed by the European nations identified; these were compared with the feature categories, in order to find out the kind of features named preferentially by the Europeans. Some national characteristics in the naming behaviour of the various European nations were tentatively marked.

This paper then zooms in on the names imposed by the VOC mariners; a distinction was made between descriptive names, conceptual names, religious and commemorative names. This last category is subdivided into features named for the home country, the explorer's ship, its officers, its patrons or its home town. The Dutch explorers seem to stand out by their custom to name groups of small islands for the towns in their home country or province. This phenomenon is christened nostalgia archipelagos.

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Introduction

In 1690 the board of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Amsterdam commissioned the cartographer Isaak de Graaf to produce a manuscript atlas of the company's trading area, which then stretched from Cape Town to Japan. This atlas, produced to support the Company's strategic decisions, was completed about 4 years later and contained some 300 maps and drawings. These could be categorised as overview maps (at scales 1:18 million to 1:6 million), general charts (scale 1:2 million), larger scale charts, river charts, route maps, town plans, maps of fortifications, geographical maps and views. After two pairs of overview maps, one pair for the Indian Ocean trade and one pair for the Far East, the skeleton of the atlas was formed by a set of 26 general charts at the scale 1:1,900,000, two of which have subsequently been lost. Where the trading company's interest warranted it, larger scale charts were inserted. Route maps show overland routes to foreign courts from which trading permits had to be obtained. The company's interest had to be defended by a system of strategic forts, plans of 80 of which were published here. To support maritime trade, mainly coastal areas were portrayed. The smaller scale overview maps have colour-coded names: countries or ports with black names are trading partners, whereas places with red names have no lodges or warehouses of the company (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Overview map of South Asia with colour-coded toponymy

The larger scaled charts have all kinds of information for mariners, such as soundings, and information on shoals and coral reefs. Town maps generally show the trading company's lodges as well as those of its competitors. The geographical maps show more inland areas, the one of Japan showing its provincial subdivision as do the geographical maps of Java, while the map of Malabar shows land-use.

The cartographic production of the Dutch East India Company mainly consisted of charts, and many of those were reduced and incorporated into this atlas. However, much detailed information was left out in this process. To show the management back home the navigational hazards, some of those details were retained in the atlas maps, and from those we can get a fair idea of the contents of the original charts. There were special symbols for settlements (a Dutch flag denotes a VOC trading lodge), anchorages, cliffs, shorelines, coral reefs, sand banks, soundings, and symbols for the dominant vegetation (see figure 2).

Legend for the charts in the VOC Atlas
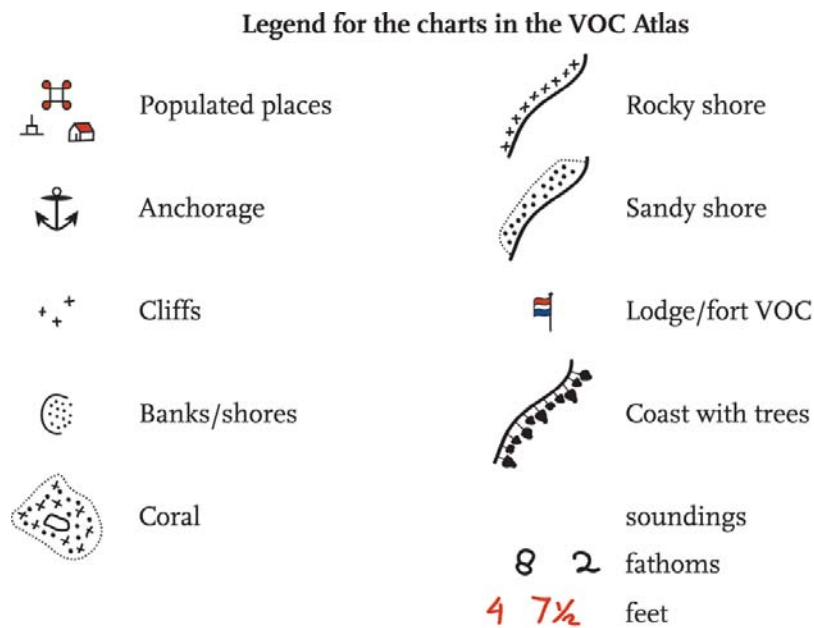
Figure 2. Legend for the charts in the VOC atlas

Geographical names

The 300 maps in the *Atlas Isaak de Graaf* altogether contain some 10,000, mostly coastal, names. In 2006 a facsimile edition of the atlas was published (Schilder et al 2006), and to help the reader, all the texts on the maps were transcribed; these texts consisted of geographical names, generic names such as anchorage, or pagoda, coastal descriptions (high cliff or white foreland), sailing directions (here fresh water, or 3 fathoms at ebb tide) or information on the surveying of the chart. In this paper we will only look at the geographical names. For the facsimile edition all the geographical names were matched with their modern equivalents, they had their coordinates and feature categories added. For the register their location on the map sheet was also indicated. This file was converted to an Access file which gave us many opportunities for analysis. The names could be studied alphabetically, or per map sheet, per feature category, even by date, as the years when the various charts had been surveyed originally were still known.

The following options for analysis presented themselves:

> – categories of named features
> – % of indigenous vs. foreign names
> – names copied from earlier explorers versus newly given names;
> – geographical names vs. designations
> – different naming behaviour of exploring nations
> – type of names:
>   – commemorative names
>   – descriptive names
>   – religious names
>   – conceptual names
> – reasons for naming: skipper's diaries/journal
> – changes in time

Box 1. Subjects for study of names in this atlas

First the feature categories discerned were noted, and subsequently the names imposed by the European nations identified; these were compared with the feature categories, in order to find out the kind of features named preferentially by the Europeans. Some national characteristics in the naming behaviour of the various European nations were tentatively marked.

Feature categories discerned

| category	all names	Dutch names	% of all names	% of Dutch names
populated places	4651	65	43	4
islands	2549	815	24	44
rivers	940	137	9	7
capes	874	273	8	15
regions	475	38	4	2
bays	421	182	4	10
hydrographic items	221	123	2	7
mountains	178	77	2	4
fortresses	151	63	1	3
straits	97	35	1	2
miscellaneous	75	35	1	2
buildings	62	1	1	0
peninsulas	37	5	0	0
total	**10705**	**1849**	**100**	**100**

Table 1. Relation between named features

Table 1 shows the relationships between the named feature categories, and so also the naming preference of the Dutch. Populated places/settlements account for 44% of all names, but for only 4% of Dutch names. On the other hand the percentages of Dutch island names, cape names, names of bays and hydrographical items are twice as high as that of all names. So there seems to be a specific preference of the Dutch for naming maritime features: islands, capes, bays - all features that can be named without reference to the local population, while only a very few settlements have been given Dutch names.

It has not been easy always to differentiate between names and designations or generic elements. An island can be referred to as a long island, until a moment when it becomes *The Long Island*, which is not always clear to assess. For me a white cliff was a designation, but 'the white eagle's cliff' became a name, when more specific elements were added. Other map texts not considered as names were sailing notices, catering remarks and indications of functions of buildings.

Apart from the Access file, the other analytical tool was formed by maps. On an overview map (see figure 3), the various feature categories or the various languages to which the names belonged were indicated. On such a map we can study the distribution of the indigenous names, the names given by the predecessors of the Dutch maritime traders, that is the Portuguese and the Spanish; there were some Latin names copied from Ptolemy and then there were the Dutch names. The resulting image is quite interesting, as it shows clearly our debt to the Portuguese who had cleared the way. It also shows the Dutch settlement at the Cape and the Dutch discoveries in

New Holland, or Australia. There are some Spanish names in the Philippines and the Moluccas, and Madagascar has a few French names. The densely settled Asian realms almost have no European names at all.
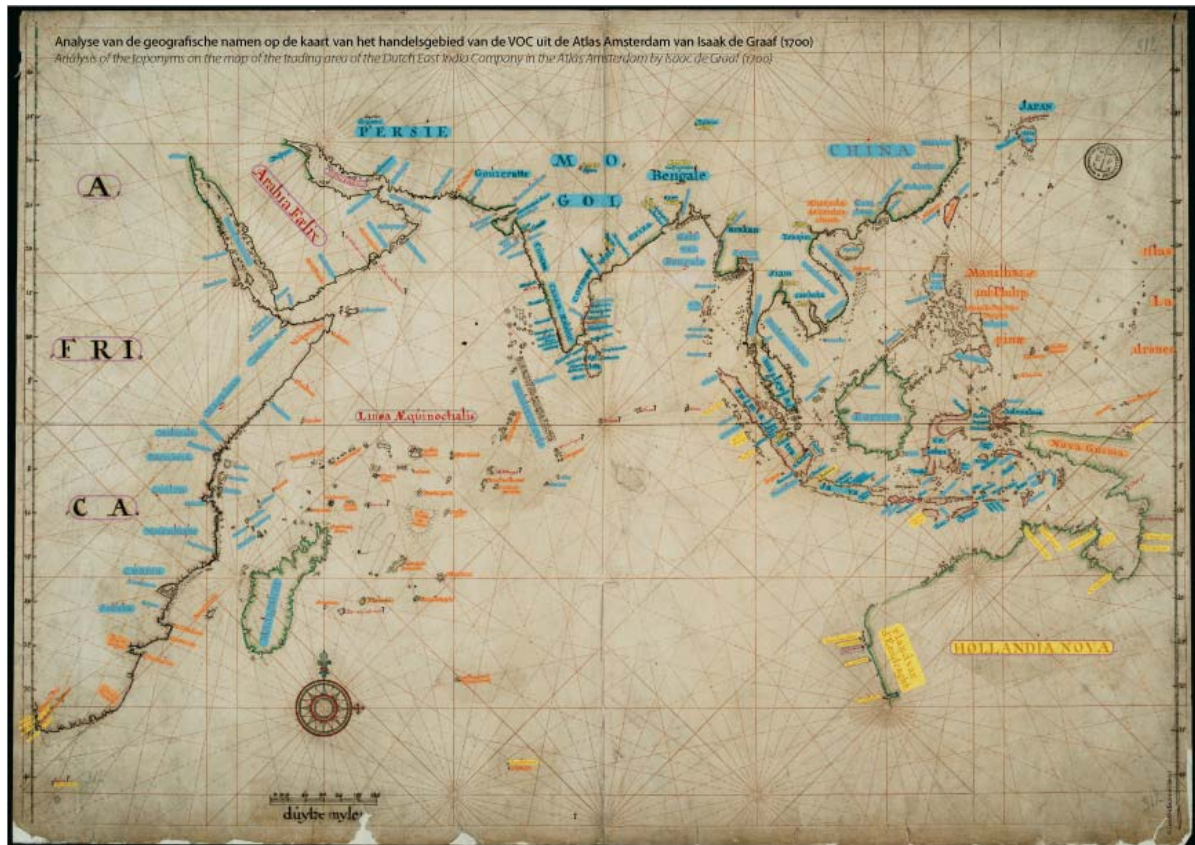
Figure 3. Names on the overview map of the Dutch East India Company's trading area: Dutch names yellow, Spanish and Portuguese names orange, Latin names purple, indigenous names blue

That is made even clearer when one zooms in on atlas maps of the Indonesian archipelago, within the area of which the languages were understood by the Dutch (Arab and Malay), thus allowing them to communicate with the indigenous population, no foreign names were bestowed. Only beyond this ecumene, where the Dutch had no way to communicate with them, as in New Guinea and Australia, were Dutch names given.

I have found, tentatively, some characteristic naming behaviour with the various European exploring nations: see box 2:

■ **Spain and Portugal**: descriptive and religious names mainly, few native names used

■ **Britain**: religious and commemorative names mainly, more native names used

■ **The Netherlands**: descriptive and commemorative names mainly, mostly native names used

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Box 2. National characteristics on naming behaviour of European explorers

These characteristics are based on maps of the same area surveyed independently by different explorers. There is an example from the north coast of New Guinea, mapped by the Portuguese Ribero and the Spaniard de Retez around 1530, and a map from the Dutchman Tasman, a century later. The Spanish map was secret, so could not have been studied by Tasman. When we compare the two sets of names, situated between St John's Island in the east and the island of Cainam or Canam in the west, the following differences appear: on the Spanish map (with 21 names) two thirds of the names are descriptive, there are four religious names, and there is one indigenous name. On the Dutch map (with 16 names) there is only one religious name, but there are both five indigenous names and commemorative names, and both three descriptive names and conceptual names (see Ormeling 2004).

The other area mapped by two different exploring nations simultaneously, here the Dutch and the English, is New England with Long Island, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and part of Massachusetts. On the map titled "Pascaerte van Nieu-Nederlandt en de Engelsche Virginies" produced by Pieter Goos ca 1660, this area was called New Netherlands by the Dutch, and the peninsula ending in Cape Cod was called after one of its provinces, New Holland. When we compare the name sets from this Dutch map and from contemporary English maps of the same area, for the same features, three quarters of the Dutch names are commemorative, as is only a quarter of the English names. Of the English names a quarter is religious; a quarter is descriptive, as is the case also among the Dutch names. The English also have a quarter of their names as indigenous names. These samples are too few to base general conclusions on, but I deem them indicative at least (see box 3 for a sample of the name pairs found).

On British maps	On Pieter Goos' map
Peconic Bay	Cromme Gouwe
Elisabeth Islands	Kabeljauws Eilanden
Martha's Vineyard	Texel
Nantucket Island	Vlieland
Nantucket Sound	Zuyderzee
Cape Cod Bay	Noordzee
Cape Cod Peninsula	Nieuw Holland
(New York, Delaware, New Jersey)	Nieuw Nederland
Cape Cod	Staten Hoeck
Connecticut River	Verssche Rivier
Thames River	Vriesche Rivier

Box 3. Comparison of English and Dutch names for the same features in the Northeastern United States, 17th century (Ormeling 2004).

Of all the names in the atlas I could only analyse the European names, as the meaning of the Arab, Indian, Thai and Chinese names eluded me. For the names imposed by the Portuguese, Spanish and VOC mariners, a distinction was made between descriptive names, conceptual names, religious and commemorative names.

To give an indication of the **conceptual names**, a few of them are translated here in order to show the kind of names thus categorized. No system has been found in their conferral, and they have been conferred during the whole trading period of the Company: Cape of Good Hope, False Bay, Victory Bay, Hopeless Bay, Good Start Bay, Peace Bay, Bay without End, Welcome Bay, Bad Luck Island, Cape Cold, Evil Island, Difficult Island, Sad Island, Lost Island, Fortune Island, Fort Distrust, Fort Accuracy, Fort Lackey, Fort Protection, Cape Joy, Harmfull Cape.

Descriptive names had more points of contact. Box 4 shows that we can discern the following types:

a) Descriptions of the relative location of the named feature, or its relative size. Four similarly sized islands would be called the four brothers or four sisters; if one of the islands would be substantially larger, the group would be called the Hen and Chickens. An island that blocked the approaches would be called "In the way", and an island that afforded a good view of a harbour could be called "Look in the pot".

b) Descriptions of the shape of the feature: this would apply to islands or mountains, and the names here refer by analogy to different types of hats, to sugar loafs, etc.

c) Descriptions of the inhabitants of the named geographical locations be they human or animal. There could be a description of the occupation of the local population or its character traits. That is nothing new, as the Spaniards called some island groups already after their thieving inhabitants, such as the Ladrones, the first western name for the present Mariana archipelago. A description of the vegetation cover would also fit in here. An example of the descriptions of shape are the many leftovers of crater pipes, that stand out in the sea, and that were named after the various types of hats worn by 17th century sailors (see figure 4).

Mountains that could be seen from the sea show the same feature shape naming: mountains that looked like saw teeth were called Saw Mountain; they could also be called Camel Mountain if they had two bumps, pointed or tapering mountain, haystack, coffin or upturned boat.

-location and size of the feature: Noorder Wagter, Kijk in de pot, Dwars in de weg, Hen en kiekens, 4 Gebroeders;

-shape of the feature/physical characteristics: hat or cap, sugarloaf, peak, volcano;

-inhabitants of the feature:
– fishermen/hunters or:
– murderers, man-eaters, thieves, bandits, traitors;
– animals: pigs, fowls, turtles, mosquitoes;
– vegetation of the area: coconut palms, lush/sparse vegetation.

Box 4. Types of descriptive names discerned.

Figure 4. Former crater pipes stand out in the sea, named after sailor's caps

The category of **religious names** contains about 240 names, 80 of which refer to pagodas or temples, 70 of them in India; only 3 refer to Muslim shrines, so the remaining 160 refer to Christian (Roman Catholic) names, mainly names of saints. Here Mary, St John, Clara, Sebastian and Thomas have the highest scores. This will be based on the random aspect of the day in the year when discoveries were made being devoted to a particular saint. Most Roman Catholic religious names occur for islands. All of them have been given by the Portuguese and Spanish. There are hardly any Dutch examples in this atlas, the best-known feature receiving a religious name from Dutch explorers was Paaseiland or Easter Island, discovered by Jacob Roggeveen in 1722, and that was after the atlas was produced. Off New Guinea there are two capes called after Whitsunday in the De Graaf atlas.

Just to indicate the difference in naming character between the Dutch and the Portuguese, I have defined the percentages of the names given by the Dutch and those copied from Portuguese charts, in the various categories discerned (table 2):

| Types of names	Dutch names (1850)	Portuguese names (580)
Descriptive names	72%	50%
Commemorative names	21%	6%
Religious names	1%	21%
Conceptual names	6%	6%
Not assigned	–	7%
Total	100%	100%

Table 2. Comparison of Dutch and Portuguese Names on Dutch charts
(The Portuguese names were copied by the Dutch from Portuguese charts)

This last category, that of **commemorative names**, is subdivided into features named for the home country, the explorer's ship, its officers, its patrons or its home town. In a few cases it is not quite clear whether the feature was named for the home town or for the ship that was named after the home town. Names were also derived from sponsors who launched exploration journeys (some 50 features were named after them). New Holland, and Fort Belgica were named after the home country. Some 23 examples were found of the feature named after the ship, such as the Geelvinksbaai, or Arnhemland.

Examples of explorers that named places after themselves are more numerous. Abel Tasman named the island he discovered south of Australia Van Diemensland, after his patron, the governor general of the Dutch Indies, Van Diemen. As this name had associations with daemons, the British later exchanged it for his own name, Tasmania. Van Diemen himself had a sea strait, a region, two capes and a river named after him, and his wife Maria van Diemen had a region and a cape named after her by Dutch mariners.

But the most numerous types of commemorative names were those referring to geographical features at home, especially the towns the sailors came from. No less than 250 times the name of a Dutch town was given to islands in the East.
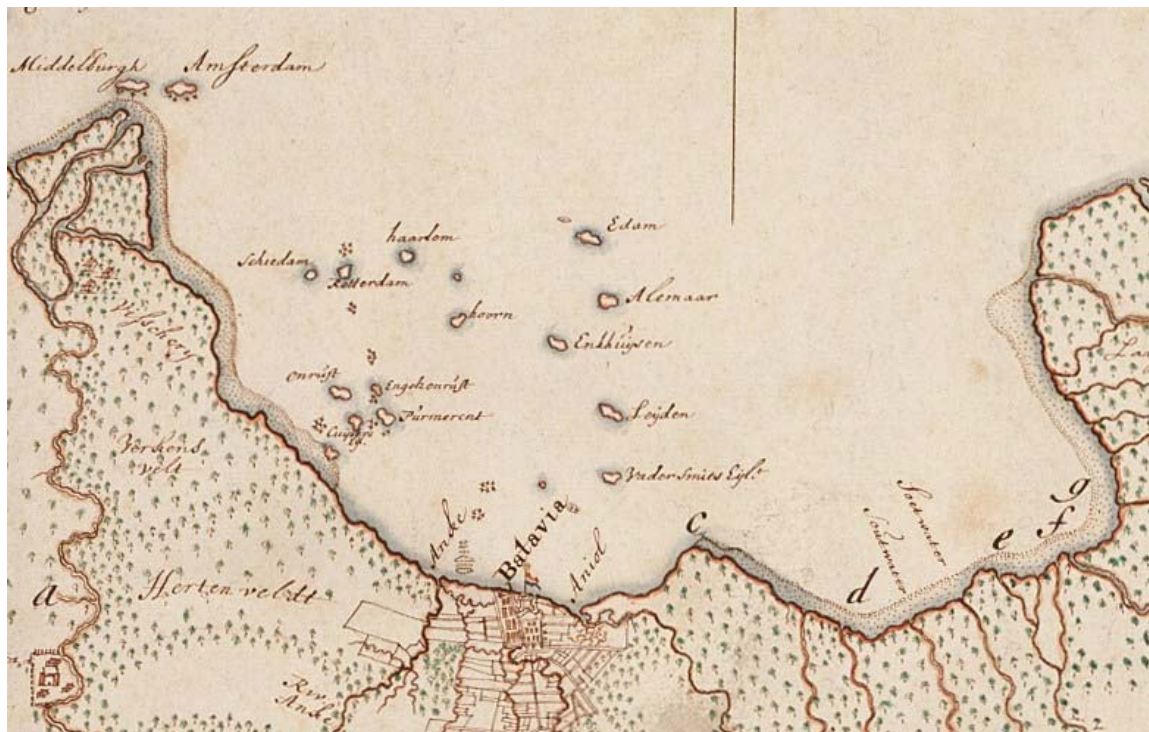
Figure 5. Nostalgia archipelago in the Bay of Batavia (Atlas Izaak de Graaf 1700) with Dutch town names for the small coral islands: Middelburg, Amsterdam, Schiedam, Haarlem, Rotterdam, Hoorn, Edam, Alkmaar, Enkhuizen, Purmerend, Leiden

Nostalgia archipelagos

The Dutch explorers seem to stand out by their custom of naming groups of small islands for the towns in their home country or province. I christened this phenomenon nostalgia archipelago, and I found at least 14 examples of it, from the Shatt el Arab in the Persian Gulf to the coast of the East China Sea, with their most frequent occurrence in eastern Indonesian waters (see figure 6).

Figure 6. Location of 'nostalgia archipelagos' in Indonesian waters

We must look for the archetype of this procedure in the Bay of Batavia, the present day Jakarta, where the 15 coral islands received Dutch town names shortly after 1619 when Batavia was founded. All but 4 of them were named thus: Amsterdam, Alkmaar, Edam, Enkhuizen, Haarlem, Hoorn, Middelburg, Purmerend, Rotterdam, and Schiedam (see figure 5). Characteristic of this archipelago was that all the islands had a similar small size, showed a relative concentration and were all uninhabited – because otherwise they would have had indigenous names as well.

Though not always, there are some geographical characteristics as well; the names of all the islands named for towns in Batavia Bay derived from towns in the province of Holland in the Netherlands, the names of the two adjacent islands off the coast of northern Celebes were derived from two adjacent cities in Zeeland province. Off the coast of Halmahera island there are three groups of related names: a cluster of names from the northern part of Holland province, a cluster of names from the southern part of Holland province and a cluster from Overijssel province. On the west coast of Halmahera, there are three islands referring to towns from Holland off the main island, and one referring to a town in Zeeland off the main island. On its south-western tip, there is a concentration of islands named after towns in Overijssel province. Off New Guinea's Birds Head area the references are less clear, but in New Guinea's central bay we find all islands named for towns in Holland province again. The China coast likewise has some concentrations.

Strait Palk between Ceylon and India is rendered in detail on two different maps in the atlas, whose originals were produced some 30 years apart. The first one (figure 7) shows some 7 Dutch towns named, the last one nine, but three island names at least changed places in the meantime. Apparently what counted was that the islands were named for Dutch towns, and it was not really important for which towns, as long as they were from the same Dutch province, their names were interchangeable.
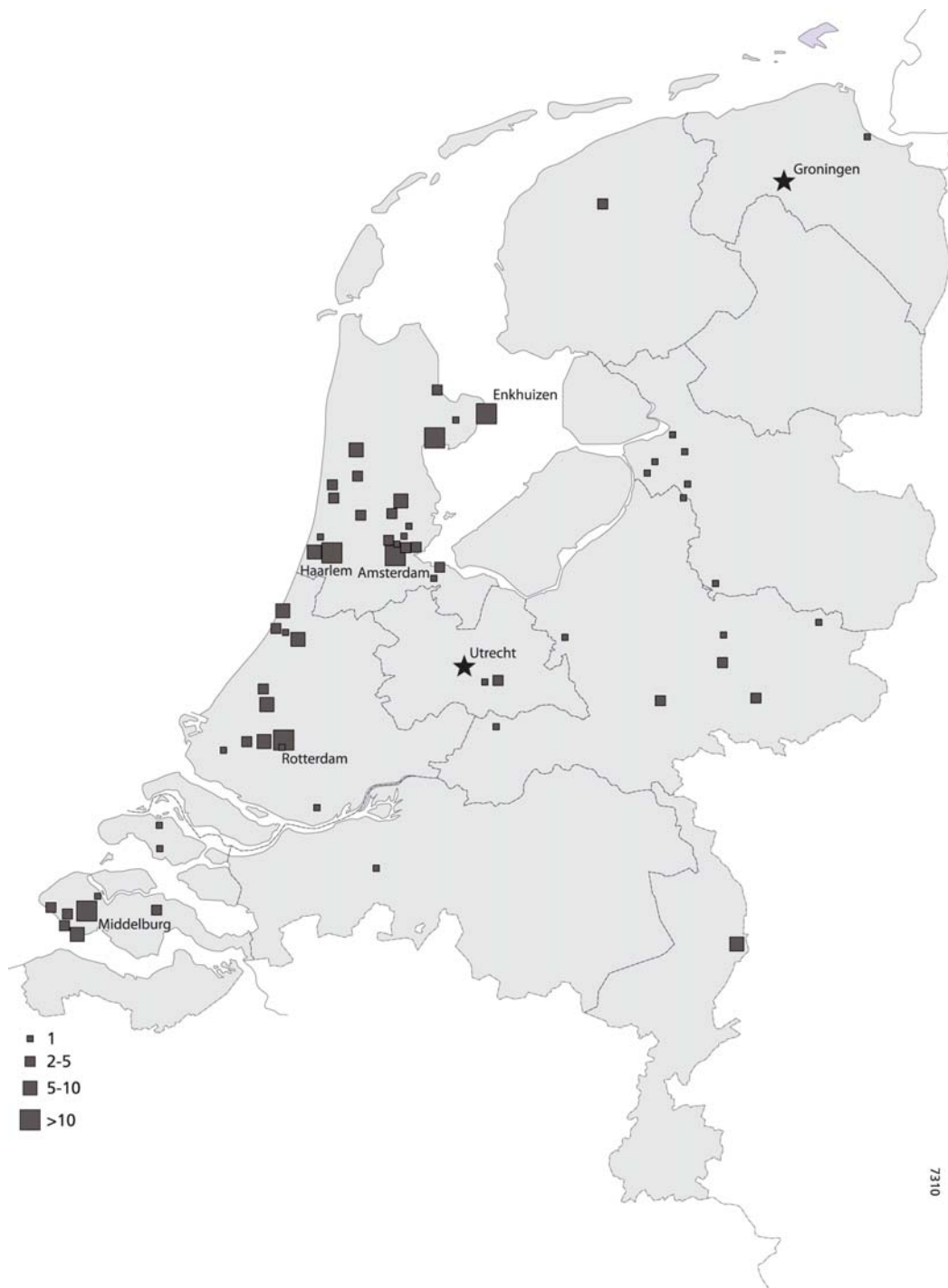
Figure 7. The islands in Strait Palk between India and Sri Lanka on the Atlas De Graaf, AD 1700

Figure 8 shows the frequency of Dutch towns being named in these nostalgia archipelagos. Of the 265 occurrences in which one of 80 towns in the Netherlands was named for, Amsterdam and Middelburg scored most (20 and 26 references), while Hoorn (16), Enkhuizen (16), Rotterdam (14) and Haarlem (10) occurred also on many maps. Amsterdam, Middelburg, Hoorn, Enkhuizen and Rotterdam all were regional headquarters of the Dutch East India Company; Haarlem wasn't. The other remaining regional headquarters was Delft, and it only gave its name 7 times. The general picture is that it was mainly the towns in the provinces in Holland and Zeeland that were named for in these nostalgia archipelagos. It is astonishing that the two other sizeable towns in the Netherlands after Amsterdam – Utrecht and Groningen – were not named for.

Figure 8. Location in the Netherlands of the towns named in the nostalgia archipelagos

Finale

Outside the Indonesian archipelago, all these Dutch names had already disappeared before the Second World War. Sailors are a very conservative professional group, and that might be the reason why until the 1970s, these old Dutch names were still incorporated on British Admiralty charts. Examples are the Great and Small Katwijck islands, named for the Dutch ship Katwijk,

named in turn for a Dutch coastal town in the 1630s, located south of Vietnam, or the islands Nachtegaal and Noorwegen, translated into Nightingale and Norway, in the Gulf of Tonkin. But the adaptation programme of the Admiralty to the post-colonial situation has meant that these names disappeared in favour of indigenous names.

In Indonesia all these names have changed into Indonesian names after independence, although some of them still bear traces of their own names. The isle of Onrust ('Unrest') in Jakarta Bay used to have the Dutch East India Company's shipyards, and is now called Pulau Kapal, which in Indonesian means Ship Island. It is only in Sri Lanka that one of all these Dutch island names is retained, that is Delft Island. The reason for that is that the original Singhalese name, Narradiva, means Donkey Island, and the present inhabitants did not care anymore for that designation.

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