

1684 - A description of the rhinoceros

No author mentioned

1684 A description of the rhinoceros, lately brought from the East Indies, and sold the 25th of this instant August, to Mr. L. for 2320l. London: Printed for S.Libourn, pp. [1-2]. – Pamphlet, copy in Folger Shakespeare Library.

English text of London, 1684

[1]

The Rhinoceros is accounted the second wonder in Nature; being a Beast every way admirable for its outward shape and greatness, as also for its inward courage, dispoftion, and mildness. For as the Elephant is the first wonder, so is this Beast next to the Elephant, being every way as much to be admired as he, if he do not exceed him, except in bulk and height.

First of all, that this Beast was not unknown to the Ancients, Pliny, Solinus Diodorus, Lampridius, Aelianus, Strabo and others, are most undeniable Testimonies. Suetonius makes mention of one which was publickly shown to the People of Rome by Augustus. Holiogabolus had another, and before either of them Pompey produc'd a Rhinoceros in his publick Spectacles; as Seneca witnesses. And Antonius Pius, amongst the Gifts that he bestowed upon the People, is said to have given them for their publick pastimes, Tygers, Rhinoserusses and other wild Beasts. And Martial in one of his Epigrams, confirms it to us, That in the Reign of Domitian, there was a Rhinoceros, which in the Emperors presence toss'd up a wild Bull into the Air, as if he had been a meer Tennis Ball. And of latter days there was a Rhinoceros brought alive to Lisbon in Portugal, whose Picture was taken by Gesner, and inserted into his History of Animals, nothing varying fom the shape and figure of. the Beast which is now to be seen: From whence it is apparent that this is the same Beast, to which the Ancients gave the Name of Rhinoceros. It was called Rhinoceros by the Greeks, from Rhin, which signifies a Nose, and Keras, a Horn; as much as to say the Nosehorn'd Beast. Nor have the Latins alter'd the name, in regard, that although there are several Beasts that have but one Horn, yet there is not any that has a Horn growing out of the Nose, but this alone.

[2]

This Beast is also thought to be the same, which in the Hebrew is called Reem; and therefore Munster fo translates the place, Deut. 33. His Beauty shall be like the beauty of a Bull, and his Horns lik the Horn of a Rhinoceros, &c. And Tertullian writing against the Heretick Praxeas, translates it afer the same manner, which being so, it appears to have been a Beast well known in the World long before the times of the Romans already mentioned.

But now to come to the Desriptions of this Beast (as Pliny describes) it is equal in length, if not longer, than an Elephant, but withal somewhat lower and with shorter Leggs; his outward form and proportion being like a wild Boars, especially in his Mouth, except, that out of his Nose grows a Horn harder then any Bone, which he makes use of instead of Offensive Arms, as a Boar does of his Tushes; and that he has two kind of scalie Aprons, on each side, like the Wings of a Dragon, reaching from his Back down to his Belly, and spreading one way toward his Neck, and the other way towards his hinder parts; his colour is like the Bark of a Box-tree, which is not much unlike that of the Elephants, and upon his Forehead there grows Hairs that seems a little red; his Skin is so hard that a dart cannot penetrate it; upon which there appears many divisions like the shells of a Tortoise, set over with Scales, without any Hair. In like manner the legs are scaled down to the very hoofs, which are parted with four distinct Claws. Upon his Nose there grows a hard and sgarp Horn, bending a little toward the Head, but not so high; flat and not round; and therefore the more sharp and strong. Whatever is set to it, it either throws up into the Air, or else bores it through, whether Iron or Stones.

By the way, we are not so nicely to consider the bulk and colour of the Elephant, in regard it is but rational to believe, that as among all other Beasts there is a difference in bigness and colour, so there may be the same variety among these Rhinoceroses.

As to their Nature and Disposition, Martiall makes 'em slow to Anger, but fierce when they are engaged; and therefore he says, that the Rhinoceros was provok'd and vex'd by his Master, before he tossed up the Bull like a Tennis Ball into the Air before Domitian. But it is farther said of 'em, that when they are to fight, they whet their Horn upon a Stone, and fight with the Elephant, not only for their food but out of a Natural Antipathy, and overcomes the Elephant by fastning their Horns in the lower part of his Belly, and so ripping open his Gutts; insomuch that when the Rhinoceros that was at Lisbon was brought into the presence of an Elephant, the Elephant ran away from him.

They are taken as the Unicorn is taken, for Authors of good credit affirms, that above all Creatures they love Virgins, and that be they never so wild, they will lie down and fall a sleep before a true Maid; and so being asleep are easily taken.

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First of all, that this Beast was not unknown to the Ancients, *Pliny*, *Solinus*, *Diodorus*, *Lampridius*, *Ælianus*, *Strabo* and others, are most undeniable Testimonies. *Suetonius* makes mention of one which was publickly shown to the People of *Rome* by *Augustus*. *Heliogabalus* had another, and before either of them *Pompey* produc'd a *Rhinoceros* in his publick Spectacles; as *Seneca* witnesseth. And *Antonius Pius*, amongst the Gifts that he bestowed upon the People, is said to have given them for their publick pastimes, *Tygers*, *Rhinoferusses* and other wild Beasts. And *Martial* in one of his Epigrams, confirms it to us, That in the Reign of *Domitian*, there was a *Rhinoceros*, which in the Emperors presence toss'd up a wild Bull into the Air, as if he had been a meer Tennis Ball. And of latter days there was a *Rhinoceros* brought alive to *Lisbon* in *Portugal*, whose Picture was taken by *Gesner*, and inserted into his History of Animals, nothing varying from the shape and figure of the Beast which is now to be seen: From whence it is apparent that this is the same Beast, to which the Ancients gave the Name of *Rhinoceros*.

It was called *Rhinoceros* by the *Greeks*, from *Rhin*, which signifies a *Nose*, and *Keras*, a *Horn*; as much as to say the *Nosehorn'd* Beast. Nor have the *Latins* alter'd the name; in regard, that although there are several Beasts that have but one Horn, yet there is not any that has a Horn growing out of the *Nose*, but this alone.

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