

The bronze black rhinoceros from Port Vendres III

D. COLLS, C. DESCAMPS, M. FAURE & C. GUERIN

In 1972 Monsieur Dali Colls, of the Centre de Recherches Archéologiques Sous-Marines, Perpignan, discovered the remains of a wreck at a depth of 7 m, 20 m from Port Vendres (Pyrénées Orientales). It was dated by epigraphy to the reign of Claudius, middle of the 1st century AD. Designated Port Vendres II and excavated under the direction of M. Colls, it was published in 1977 (Colls et al., 1977). Further excavation has brought to light a more recent wreck—more than a century later—partly lying across Port Vendres II. Designated Port Vendres III this has not yet been published, but M. Colls and his collaborators have kindly allowed us to publish a small statue of a rhinoceros. M. Cyr Descamps also works for the CRAS-M at Perpignan. Their collaborators, Martine Faure and Claude Guérin, are at the Centre de paléontologie stratigraphique, Université Claude Bernard, Lyon I, Villeurbanne, Rhône.

Like the wreck Port Vendres II the new wreck of Port Vendres III was broken in many pieces and neither the form of the ship nor the position of its cargo could be observed. The two shipwrecks were certainly caused by the same forces: a ship blown by a very strong wind (Tramontane) from the nearby mountains sought shelter in the natural harbour of Port Vendres. Once inside the harbour it would be unable to change direction and, driven on to the rocks at a place called Redoute Bear, broke up.

At present the Port Vendres III level forms a layer which averages about 10 cm in thickness and covers an area of 25 sq. m with a maximum thickness of 40 cm. This layer is not continuous and is found at depths varying between 5 and 7 m, and at a distance from 5 to 25 m from the coast. Covered by a carpet of *Posidonia* and sea shells of varying thickness, this site is separated in general from the Port Vendres II site by the same plants, but in places only the type of potsherd allowed us to distinguish one layer from the other as they are in direct contact (FIG. 1).

Large pieces of wood (one of them is more than 5 m long) and many square bronze nails are all that remains of the ship. The cargo is composed of small Gaulish wine amphorae with flat bottoms of the Pélichet 47 type (also called Gauloise 4). None is intact and the remains of those found up to the present moment comprise about 50 vessels. Graffiti of simple geometrical shape are scratched on the shoulders of amphorae, in one instance a graffito is

in the form of a ship. Two other types of amphorae not yet classified, but seeming to resemble African types, are found in small numbers.

An unexpected element of the cargo is a pile of thin rectilinear iron blades (c. 80 cm long, 3–4 cm wide, 0.5–1.5 cm thick); they were very oxidized and covered with calcareous concretions. It was not possible to remove the concretions without breaking the blades; in several instances there were iron rivets perpendicular to the axes of the blades. We estimated that there were about 30 of these blades and postulate, without any proof, that they might be sword blades.

A few household articles were found: sherds of pottery, probably of lamps, and glass. Three bottles were pieced together; they are square, flat bottomed, with geometrical designs stamped into the glass before it cooled, the necks cylindrical with a well-developed horizontal lip. One is 10 cm high with sides between 6 and 7 cm wide, the two others are much larger (24 cm high, sides 10 cm wide) having thin handles with sharp elbows.

Finally there were a few metallic objects, among them a ring and the base of a vase or pedestal showing a winged figure on a three-legged stand.

What was the business of the ship, where was it coming from, when did it sink? We may offer hypotheses in answer to the first two questions. A ship which was used for military or administrative purposes rather than for trade, sailing from a port in southern Gaul.

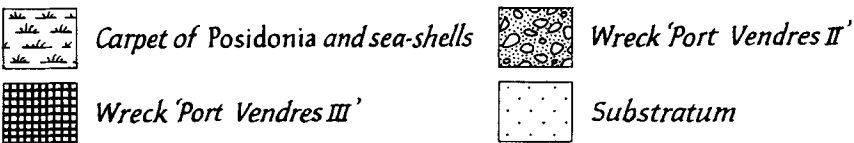
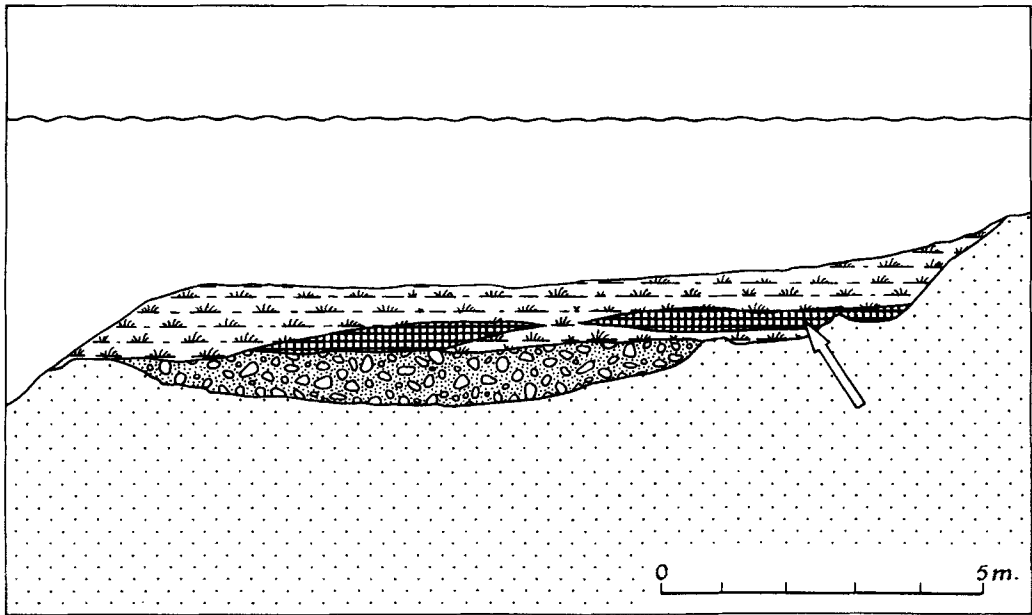
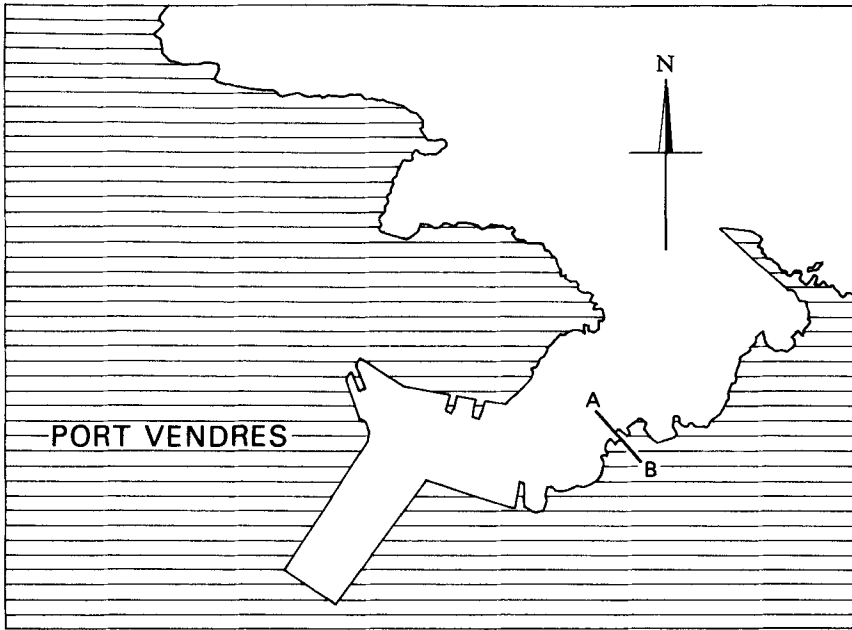


Fig. 1. Localization of the shipwreck and the stratigraphical situation of the statuette (white arrow)

As for its date three coins have given us a terminal point. On one is the head of the Emperor Hadrian (117–138 AD), on the second that of the Empress Faustina the Elder (with the inscription *diva faustina* minted after her death in 141 AD), and on the third coin is the head of Faustina the Younger, wife of Marcus Aurelius (161–176 AD). Port Vendres III should therefore be dated, at the earliest, in the second part of the 2nd century AD.

THE STATUETTE (PL. XVII)

The statuette of a rhinoceros was discovered (square A'03) in the middle of a jumble of potsherds of Pelichet 47, from 15 to 20 cm thick at this spot. The statuette was lying on its side, oriented N–S. When it was brought out of the water it was covered with an oxidized layer to which adhered diverse calcareous debris all forming a matrix of about 1 mm thickness. After 15 days this matrix fell apart leaving only two small oxidized zones, one on the forelegs and one on the hindquarters.

The object found is, in fact, a hollow bronze (analysis in Appendix p. 109) statuette 115 mm long, 32 mm wide and 56 mm high. It is of a two-horned male rhinoceros, in an alarm position, with its muzzle slightly lowered. On the whole the statuette is quite well preserved: only the ears are broken, the left one at the base with the break marks quite visible, and the right one 3 mm from its base; a piece of the statue is broken on the inside and rattles when it is shaken. The bronze object was probably made using the technique of lost wax or *cire perdue*.

From the admirable exactness with which the artist portrays the animal we cannot doubt that he had seen a living example. It is this realism, emphasized by such details as the sexual organs, that has allowed us to identify the zoological species of the animal: the head is slightly lowered, the anterior horn relatively short and curved. The posterior horn is much shorter; there is no bump on the neck of the animal and its back is slightly convex; the lips are well moulded, the upper lip is shaped like an almost closed U which gives him a relatively pointed muzzle. These traits, as well as the relationship between the length of the head and that of the body are characteristic of the African 'black' Rhinoceros, *Diceros bicornis*.

The black rhinoceros is the most abundant species at present. Its height at the withers varies with each subspecies from 1.3 to 2.0 m, and it can be as long as 3.6 m, with a weight of from 1.0 to 2.5

metric tons. It is found over a large area from Ethiopia in the north, to South Africa in the south, and from Somalia in the east to Chad, the Central African Republic and Zaire in the west (Guérin, 1980). The limits of its former territory at the beginning of the 20th century were the north east of the Ivory Coast (the Bouna region, which is the western boundary of the species in the Northern hemisphere), the region of Niamey in Nigeria (14° N latitude), Lake Chad, the province of Kessala in the Sudan (at c. 15° N latitude) and Northern Ethiopia (Mauny, 1956; Sidney, 1965). The limits of its range were quite a bit further north in ancient times.

If, according to R. Mauny (1956), no rhinoceros has been reported in North Africa in Classical Antiquity, we have found remains of the two present African species dating from the Holocene period in the Malian part of the Sahara, somewhat north of the 19° N latitude (Guérin & Faure, 1983).

According to G. E. Wickens (1982) rhinoceros of undetermined species were found in 6 AD in the region of Meroe (Sudan, 16°56' N), and until 1840 at Gash near Kessala (Sudan, 15°28' N).

THE RHINOCEROS IN ANTIQUITY

From descriptions it would seem that the Romans were familiar with two or three species of rhinoceros. It is specified that those exhibited at the games organized by Pompey and in the triumphal procession of Octavius were of the one-horn species (Aymard, 1951, 187; Barthelemy & Gourevitch, 1975, 246) and the rhinoceros evoked in Martial's epigram, as well as those seen by Pausanias in 170 in Rome were two-horned (Barthelemy & Gourevitch, 1975, 242; Toynbee, 1973, 127). The one-horn species is without any doubt the one-horned Asian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*). We take as proof the anatomical characteristics of the animal portrayed on the mosaic of Piazza Armerina in Sicily (Gentili, 1954, Fig. 20; Auguet, 1970, 145), and note the one short horn sloping backwards and large vertical folds of skin so very characteristic of the species. The other mammals shown with it (among them a tiger and a large aurochs) bear witness to the asiatic origin of the group of the animal portrayed. As for the two-horned species, they both correspond to one of the two species presently found in Africa, *Diceros bicornis* and *Ceratotherium simum*, possibly to both.

For W. Gowers almost all the rhinoceros presen-

ted to the Roman public were of the two-horned species, and all of them were the 'white' variety *Ceratotherium simum*. The argument of W. Gowers is based on 5 points: one can distinguish *Ceratotherium* from *Diceros* by its larger size and the length of its head in relationship to its body, its lowered head position, the hump on its neck, the large difference in size between its two horns and its raised tail when disturbed. For J. Dorst and J. Dandelot (1972), the two species can be distinguished by the greater size and the more massive appearance of the *Ceratotherium*, the hump on its neck, the larger head carried lower and the form of the upper lip. They do not mention the difference in size between the two horns which seems to be so important to W. Gowers: he even goes so far as to say that the rear horn of *Ceratotherium* is often practically non-existent, nothing more than a small lump, so small that the animal might in fact be described as having one horn only. No recent description of an adult *Ceratotherium simum* confirms this idea (Dorst & Dandelot, 1972; Groves, 1972; Kingdon, 1979; Guérin, 1980). Moreover the body of *Ceratotherium* is much longer than that of the *Diceros* and the relationship of the length of the head and that of the body demonstrates that the head of the *Ceratotherium* is relatively shorter in spite of its greater overall length.

W. Gowers has also been criticized by J. Desanges (1964; 1978, 197-213). For the latter, the first rhinoceroses seen in Rome were *Ceratotherium* mistaken for the one-horned species. It was not until later, between 83 and 92 AD, that the *Diceros* were brought to Rome by Julius Maternus from a non-identified country called Agisymba. The argument of J. Desanges is based on three points, essentially the difference of the length of the two horns in the case of *Ceratotherium* and, incidentally, the difference in size between the two genera and the greater aggressiveness of the *Diceros*. In that which concerns his judgement about the difference of body size, we feel it should be qualified, for if the *Ceratotherium* is longer than the *Diceros bicornis*, the latter species has varieties whose height at the withers attains or attained 2 m. As for aggressiveness, it is true that *Ceratotherium simum* is generally less aggressive but Martial insists upon the presence of picadors whose work it was to excite the rhinoceros (Desanges, 1978, 206). As for the horns we have already said that the rear horn of the *Ceratotherium simum* is by no means, except in teratological cases, of negligible length; if

the front horn can attain 1.66 m in length (Groves, 1972) the rear one can measure up to 0.6 m in length (Guggisberg, 1966, 88), it is therefore of the same size as the largest one recorded in the great one-horned Asiatic rhino. The two horns are all the more distinct as their bases are never joined, which is one of the characteristics of the species. We note that the shape and relative proportions of the two horns in the two-horned species vary from individual to individual (Groves, 1971), as shown by the characteristics of the subspecies *Diceros bicornis keitloa* based on the fact that its members have a rear horn much longer than its front one! It was shown later that it was only a question of individual variation.

The problem of the number of horns of the various species of the rhinoceros has been disputed from antiquity up to the beginning of the 19th century when the problem was solved by the progress of zoology. L. C. Rookmaaker (1981; 1982) has told this 'story of horns' in detail through the ages. The exhibition in Roman circuses of one-horned rhinoceros has been very widely interpreted: if some commentators accepted this without question, many judged that only the two-horned African species were present and that someone had made a mistake in relating these events; for some it was an error in translation, for others the species shown had been the two-horned species which the spectators imagined had been the one-horned variety. It was thus supporting the assertions of A. Blanchet (1941); J. Desanges judges that a *Ceratotherium* seen at a distance might be seen to be one-horned. We have previously seen that the anatomy of rhinoceros makes this interpretation unlikely; it seems mostly to derive from the account of the trip of J. Bruce published at the end of the 18th century, according to which there was a one-horned species in Africa. At the time, G. Cuvier (1834, 49) and H. M. D. de Blainville (1839-1864, 68) thought this account was not reliable. This interpretation is also based on a faulty understanding of certain modern texts, such as that of R. Mauny (1956, 258) which alluded to a west African rhinoceros whose name in the local language signifies 'one-horn'; this animal, which formerly inhabited a territory between Niamey and Tillabery, could only have been a black rhinoceros of the subspecies *Diceros bicornis longipes*, as the white rhino has not lived in this region in historical times. A last reason for the confusion between a *Ceratotherium* and a one-horned species is the

affirmation by archaeologists (cited in Desanges, 1978, 204) 'que la seconde corne du grand rhinocéros blanc du Nil sub-équatorial est réduite ou absente'. This assertion shows that the zoological knowledge of these authors was not in accord with the wide classical scholarship of the great naturalists Cuvier and de Blainville. As was very rightly asserted by F. Poplin (1983), 'C'est après eux . . . que le divorce s'est produit . . . Les naturalistes ont expurgé leur discipline de ce qui avait rapport à l'archéologie, pendant que celle-ci se crispait sur le classicisme littéraire.' Present-day archaeozoology tends towards a constructive converging of these two disciplines. In this way a good part of the bestiary of Antiquity might profitably be studied from a zoological point of view. The statuette from Port-Vendres III seems to us to be a good example of an archaeozoological document whose study allows one to contest a generally accepted theory; according to us the majority of two-horned rhinoceros known to the Romans were black ones. However, a critical study of the rhinoceros portrayed at Piazza Armerina demonstrates that the Romans were also familiar with the great one-horned Asian rhinoceros.

THE ROMANS AND THE RHINOCEROSES

Rhinoceroses (and hippopotami) were much less familiar to the Romans than were elephants (Scullard, 1974; Toynbee, 1973). Rhinoceroses were shown and killed in Roman arenas on different occasions, from the games organized by Pompey in 55 BC up until the exhibition organized by Philip the Arab in 248 AD (Cuvier, 1834; de Blainville, 1839-1864; Gowers, 1950; Toynbee, 1973). However this event was so exceptional that each time it happened, mention was made in ancient texts (Pliny the Elder, Dion Cassius, Martial, Pausanias . . .). History has retained the bloody exploits of Commodius: all the large wild animals known to Antiquity, including the rhinoceros bloodied the arena, falling under the blows of the imperial gladiator (Aymard, 1951, 195).

The Romans used large numbers of animals in

the circus, which resulted in quite a considerable trade in these animals. For J. Aymard (1951, 188): 'Les animaux présentés à l'amphithéâtre, venus de toutes les parties du monde antique, apparaissent aux yeux des romains, nourris de symbolisme, comme le tribut des provinces soumises, comme l'affirmation visible de la domination de Rome.' According to R. Auguet (1970, 134): 'Le terrain de chasse, c'est l'empire: depuis la Mésopotamie jusqu'aux bords du Rhin, de la Pannonie à l'Égypte et peut-être même jusqu'au Sénégal.' The two-horned rhinoceros very probably came from Egypt and the Sudan. We are in accord with the theory of W. Gowers who stresses that the last appearance of a rhinoceros in a Roman circus preceded by a very short time the end of Roman influence in Nubia and the Meroitic kingdom. It seems also evident that they also imported rhinoceros from Asia.

In the ancient bestiary, portrayals of rhinoceros are very rare. We have not found any mention of any statuette in the catalogues of the principal museums of western Europe. S. Boucher (1976) does not mention any. The only mention of a rhinoceros statuette is that of a two-horned one which is supposed to have been preserved in the Museum of Cassel (de Blainville, 1839-1864, 75). But we have not found any mention of this statuette in the catalogue of ancient bronze statues of this Museum (Bieber, 1915). Medals, tokens and coins with a figure of a rhinoceros are less rare. M. Rostovtseff (1899; 1903) and W. Gowers (1950) have published several accounts of these figures. We have also seen that several portrayals in mosaic are known, as for example those of Palestrina, Perugia (shown in Gowers, 1950, 70) and of Piazza Armerina.

The statuette of Port-Vendres III is that of a 'black' African rhino: *Diceros bicornis*. It is to our knowledge the second known example of a Roman statuette of a rhinoceros. The zoological determinant allows us to reconsider the origin of the species of rhinoceros presented from time to time in circuses, and the trade links which permitted their acquisition.

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APPENDIX: THE STATUETTE METALLURGIC ANALYSIS

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The statuette having spontaneously lost a concretion skin nearly 1 mm thick is now only covered with a thin oxydized layer which is easily eliminated. Ten mg of metal have been taken with a 1.5 mm diameter drill. Such a technique limits the damage to the object and presents the advantage of giving alloy shavings similar to those of standard alloys. The sample is then mixed with an equal amount of graphite and burned in an electric arc (220 V direct current, 9 A). We always use this method for our bronze analyses.

The percentages of the different elements are: tin 7 per cent; lead 3 per cent; antimony 0.1 per cent; arsenic 0.06 per cent; zinc: slight traces; copper 89 per cent (calculated by subtraction; the archaeological bronzes being heterogeneous, it is not necessary to strive for an accuracy better than one per cent).

Regarding this result the rhino statuette is part of a group of bronze objects having generally about 7 per cent of tin mixed with a light lead percentage. The lead was not deliberately added; lead quantity is particularly variable, depending upon the place of sampling. According to S. Boucher (in Picon *et al.*, 1968, 253), intentional mixing of lead in the alloys, as known since Antiquity, was initiated much later in some local workshops which mastered it poorly or even were ignorant of Roman statuary methods.

The alloy found in the statuette analysis is the ideal one described in the literature: about 6 to 7 parts copper for 1 part of tin. Such a composition is often found in bronzes dating from the 5th century BC. The same alloy is found much later in local bronze workshops, as at Lyon during the first century (Picon, *et al.*, 1968, 265).

The antimony and arsenic percentages do not present any peculiarity and are analogous with the greater part of the analysed objects in our laboratory. The lack of zinc has been often signalized in the bronzes coming from southern Gaul and more particularly around Vienne. The bronzes coming from more northern regions very often contain a much higher percentage of zinc (Condamin & Boucher, 1973, 162-4). The rhinoceros, as we have seen, was found in a cargo containing Pelichet 47 amphorae. In view of the metallurgic composition it is possible to

state, guardedly, that he was of local gallic fabrication.

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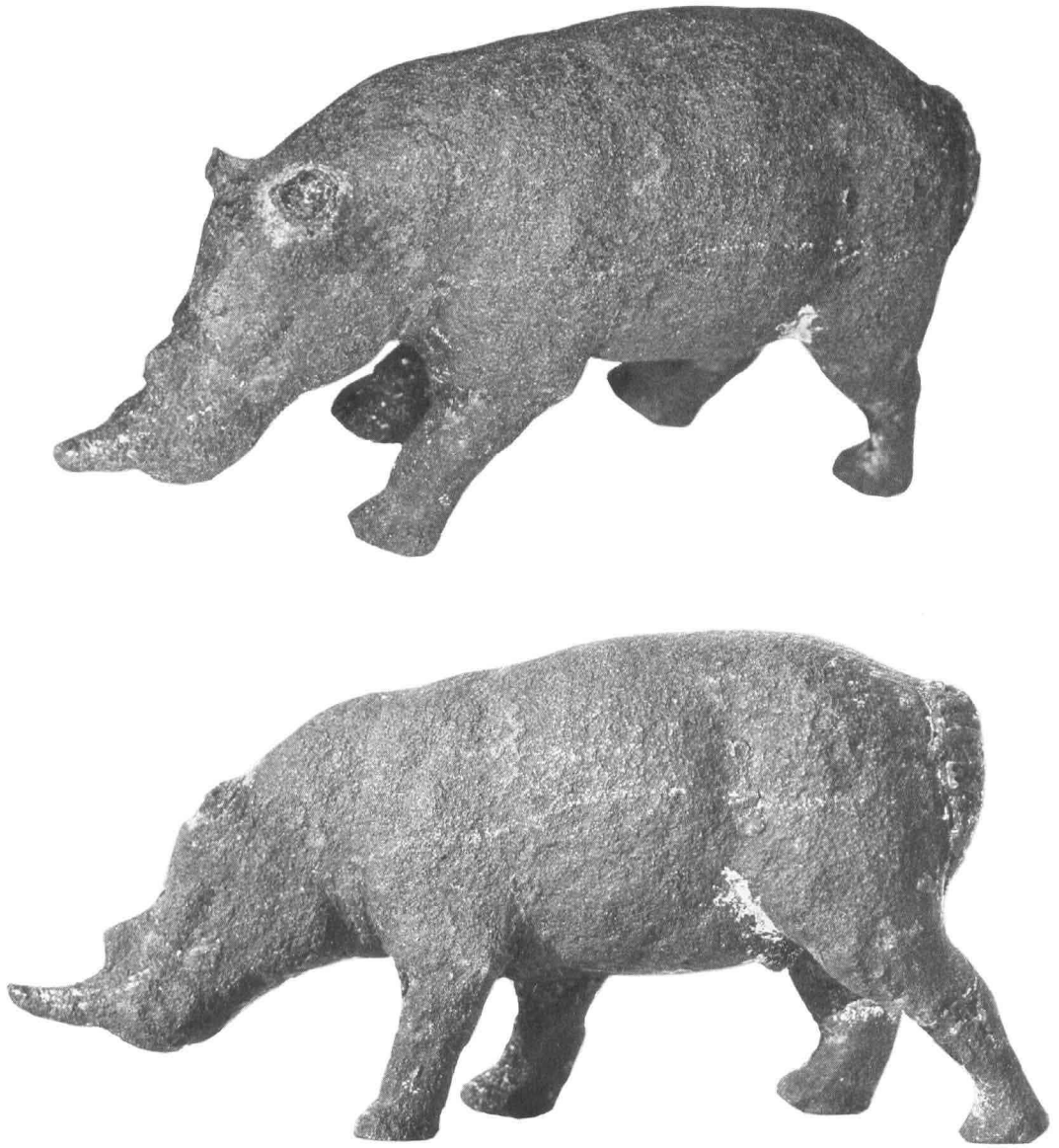


PLATE XVII: THE BRONZE BLACK RHINOCEROS FROM PORT VENDRES III

Two views of the statuette (115 mm long)

See pp. 106–112

Photos: CERASM, University of Perpignan