

Thanks for your help!
Erin

BBC

HISTORY

magazine

OCTOBER 2000

THIS MONTH

Just who does he think we are?

... and whose history is it, anyway? These questions arise from a thought-provoking interview with Professor Simon Schama (see page 32), whose new BBC television series and book, *A History of Britain*, are set to appear as this month's magazine is published. What is it that the historian can tell us about ourselves, and why is it that history continues to fascinate?

From your letters, telephone calls and e-mail, we know that some people want to hear familiar, exciting stories of the past. Others want that past re-examined, to find new stories, new meanings. Some people prefer the deeds of the great and the good (or the not-so good). Others want the histories of those whose lives have often been overlooked. Some people argue over history, insisting on their interpretation. Others delight in it, finding it an inexhaustible source of romance, instruction or even escapism.

This issue reflects, I hope, many of those interests and preoccupations, from the formative events of the 20th century to the 2,000-year history of rhino horn trading. Whatever the topic, however, it is surely true that through history we have the opportunity, in Prof Schama's words, to become a little more aware of what it is to be human. That is why history is important.



Greg Neale
Editor

We welcome your help in continuing to improve *BBC History Magazine*. See our reader survey with this issue



ADRIAN GREGORY, is Fellow and Tutor in Modern British and European History at Pembroke College, Oxford. On page 28, he looks at the 20th century and offers a challenging assessment of exactly what were the most important events that really shaped our world



IAN KERSHAW is a Professor of Modern History at Sheffield University and an acclaimed biographer of Adolf Hitler. In *Body of Evidence* (page 19) he writes about one of the most politically-charged episodes of the last days of the Second World War - Hitler's fate



DR KATHRYN CASTLE, an American-born academic, now teaches at the University of North London. In *Heroes and Villains* (page 12), she reaches beyond the rhetoric and looks for the historical truths behind Hollywood's controversial film, *The Patriot*



ELAINE THOMSON lectures on marketing at Napier University, Edinburgh. Researching her article on how 19th- and early 20th-century advertising used nurses to help sell their products (*Bedpans and Bovril*, page 37) was, she says, 'a fascinating exercise in social history'



ROSS KING won plaudits earlier this year when his book *Brunelleschi's Dome*, was serialised on Radio 4. This month, he pursues a fascination with the technology of early modern Europe with the extraordinary story of Cornelius Drebbel (page 47). Did he really build a submarine in 1621?

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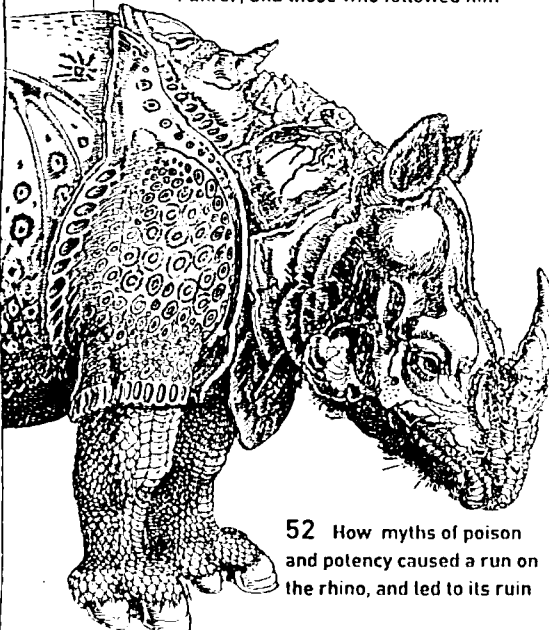
FRONT COVER: © BRISBROGEMAN ART LIBRARY/IAN MCKINSELL; © BBC/RANSTRE; TARLETON BY SIR OSKAR REYNOLDS; © NATIONAL GALLERY LONDON/ADVERTISING ARCHIVES/DAVID A MINDELL



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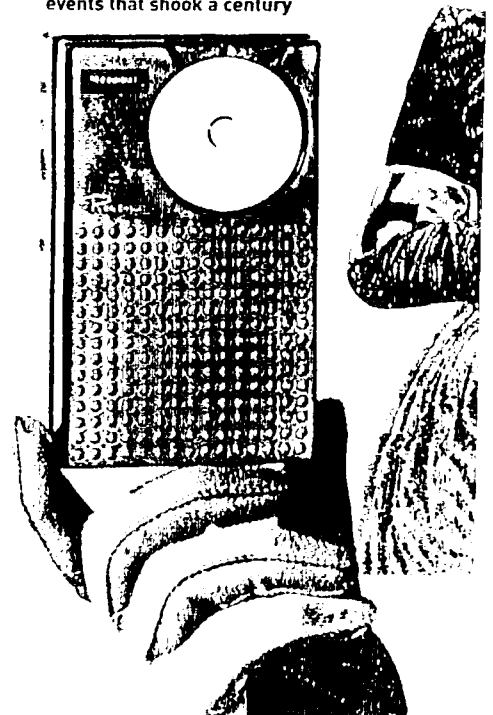
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HORN of P

Rhinoceros horn has been prized and mythologised for 2,000 years.

ESMOND and CHRYSSEE MARTIN explain its fatal allure

RHINOCEROS horn has been used by the Chinese for medicinal purposes for over 2,000 years. According to the Taoist text *Pen-ts'ao kang-mu* (Great Pharmacopoeia) of 1597, it is an antidote to poisons and also relieves fevers, typhoid and headaches. There is a long tradition of using rhino horn in other Asian pharmacopias, including that of Korea where it is mixed with other ingredients to cure high blood pressure, body pains and mental disorders; and in Japan to reduce fever and stop nose bleeds.

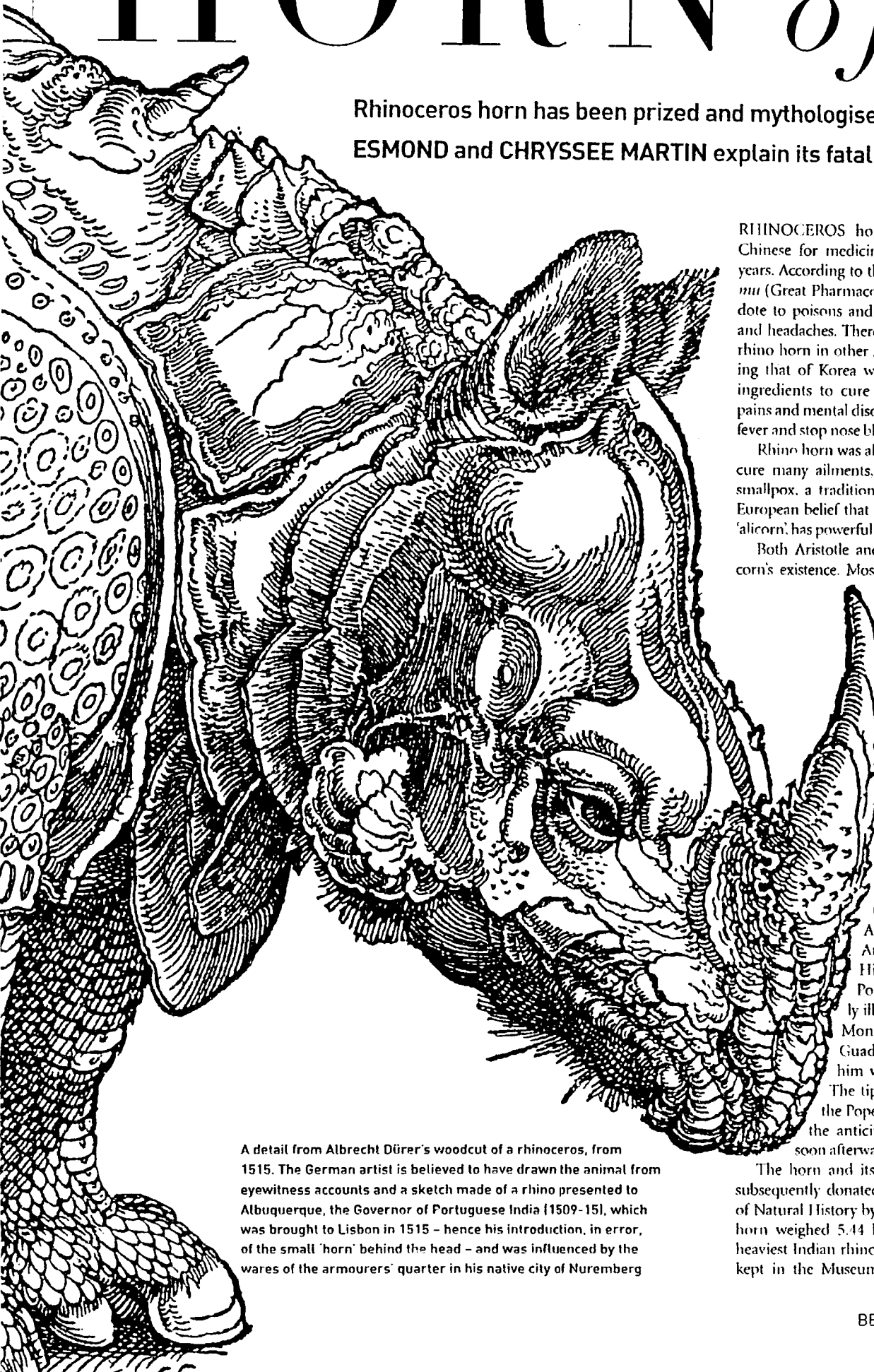
Rhino horn was also used by European elites to cure many ailments, such as fever, epilepsy and smallpox, a tradition dating back to the ancient European belief that the unicorn's horn, called an 'alicorn', has powerful medicinal properties.

Both Aristotle and Pliny believed in the unicorn's existence. Most of the large 'alicorns' were

narwhal tusks, but some smaller ones were walrus tusks and rhino horns. By the time of the Portuguese exploration of Asia, in the early 16th century, a few horns from the greater one-horned rhinoceros (the Indian rhino) reached Europe by way of Arab traders who charged huge sums for them to the royal courts of Europe, as a medicine and a protection against poison.

Even popes believed in the efficacy of rhino horn. According to archives in the American Museum of Natural History in New York, when Pope Gregory XIV was seriously ill in 1590, the Brothers of the Monastery of St Mary of Guadalupe in Spain presented him with an 'Indian' rhino horn. The tip was removed and given to the Pope to consume. It did not have the anticipated effect: the Pope died soon afterwards.

The horn and its splendid leather case were subsequently donated to the American Museum of Natural History by John Marshall in 1920. The horn weighed 5.44 kg, twice the weight of the heaviest Indian rhino horn ever recorded (2.7 kg, kept in the Museum at the Assam State Zoo).



A detail from Albrecht Dürer's woodcut of a rhinoceros, from 1515. The German artist is believed to have drawn the animal from eyewitness accounts and a sketch made of a rhino presented to Albuquerque, the Governor of Portuguese India (1509-15), which was brought to Lisbon in 1515 - hence his introduction, in error, of the small 'horn' behind the head - and was influenced by the wares of the armourers' quarter in his native city of Nuremberg

LENTY

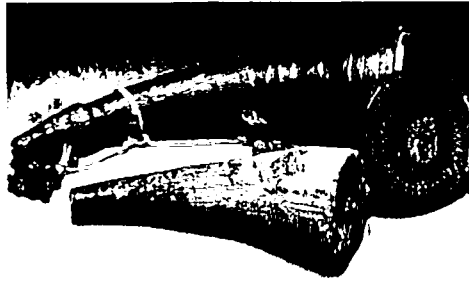
Obviously, for its weight and shape, the Pope's horn was not an Indian one, but an African white rhino: it may have come from an animal in the Sudan, probably transported down the Nile to Cairo or Alexandria.

Besides medicinal purposes, Asians, Arabs and Europeans have used rhino horn to detect poisons. A Chinese pharmacist wrote in the fourth century: 'The horn is a safe guide to the presence of poison; when poisonous medicines of liquid form are stirred with the horn, a white foam will bubble up and no further test is necessary.' As poisoning was prevalent in Europe during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and on into the 18th century, some emperors and kings bought expensive rhino horn drinking cups, believing they would detect dangerous substances. In her book, *The Art of Rhinoceros Horn Carving in China*, Jan Chapman states that the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II of Germany (1552-1612) paid high prices for rhino-horn vessels to protect himself from poison. Queen Elizabeth I kept an 'alicorn' in her bedroom at Windsor. In France, Louis XIV's food was tested with a rhino horn before being served to him. The belief that rhino horn could detect poisons continued in Europe until the 19th century and in parts of the Arab world until the late 20th century.

Rhino horn is a high-quality material for making dagger handles in the Middle East, especially in Yemen. This is probably the main use of rhino horn today, and it may be the oldest of all. *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a handbook on the commerce of the Indian Ocean, written in Greek during the first century, refers to the export of rhino horns from what is now Tanzania and Ethiopia. Many of the horns were probably sent to the Yemeni port of Muza, near present-day Mocha (quoted in *The Periplus Mans Erythraea*, L Casson, ed, Princeton, 1989). Paragraph 17 of *The Periplus* mentions knives or daggers among the main exports from Yemen to East Africa, but does not give any details on their handles. There is a bronze statue in the Sanaa Museum, which dates back to the fifth or sixth century BC, of a man with a dagger tucked into his belt. However, there is no published reference on making daggers with rhino-horn handles until the middle of the 20th century, found in Claudie Fayein's 1957 memoir, *A French Doctor in the Yemen*.

Irrespective of a specific, published reference, it seems certain that Yemenis have been making dagger handles from rhino horn for centuries; but during the past hundred years until the revolution of 1962 that overthrew the Imans, only a very few Yemenis could afford to buy them. In the early

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Chryssee Martin is an author.



The rhino horn and case given to Pope Gregory XIV in 1590. It failed to cure the ailing pontiff

In the 1990s, one antique dagger with a rhino-horn handle, and an alleged provenance dating back 400 years, sold in Yemen for the equivalent of £700,000 (\$1 million). Daggers with rhino-horn handles were also made in the 20th century in southern Saudi Arabia and in Oman, but the main centres have been Sanaa and Taiz in Yemen.

Rhino horn is a beautiful substance. When a piece is put up to light, it often appears to be translucent, with a golden brown-amber colour. Yemenis believe that the patina of dagger handles improves in beauty over time, due to continual handling. Rhino horn has been crafted into handsome *objets d'art*, such as human figures, netsukes, snuff bottles and paintbrush stands. The delicately carved cups made in Europe and China in the 17th and 18th centuries now fetch very high prices at auction houses.

Rhino horn has thus been an integral part of many cultures for many centuries, used for medicinal purposes, detecting poisons, making weapons and carving works of art. It is still being sold as medicine in eastern Asia and for making dagger handles in Sanaa. Occasionally, in India and parts of Arabia rhino horn is still employed to detect poisons and is also being carved into worry beads in the Arabian Gulf and into rings in the Sudan. The carving of *netsukes* in Japan and England ceased only in the 1980s.

Due to the sharp decline in the numbers of rhinos since 1970, and the many legal restrictions limiting international and domestic trade, the importance of rhino horn has declined sharply around the world. The 2,000-year-old traditional rhino-horn uses are coming to an end. [E]

JOURNEYS

Bibliography of the Rhinoceros: An analysis of the literature on the recent rhinoceroses in culture, history and biology, edited by LC Bookmaaker (Balkema, 1983); *The Art of Rhinoceros Horn Carving in China* by Jan Chapman (Antique Collectors' Club, 1999).

@ Rhinoceros at www.sazoo-aq.org/rhino.html provides detailed descriptions of rhino species, and links to conservation groups SOS Rhino and International Rhino Foundation.

CHINESE MYTHS

ONE OF THE enduring myths in western culture is that the Chinese have been using rhinoceros horn as an aphrodisiac for centuries. Yet the only Asians who have regularly used the horn as a sexual stimulant are a few Gujaratis in western India, who imported horns from East Africa. They ground them down into a powder, added water and applied the paste externally to the male sexual organ.

What is the origin of this myth? In the middle of the 19th century, the Sultan of Zanzibar welcomed Indian traders to his dominions, and many Gujaratis settled there. Zanzibar had become a major trading post for rhino horn and elephant ivory, and the local Gujaratis were some of the main exporters. Europeans who visited the island in the middle of the 19th century saw vast quantities of rhino horn for sale, and enquired where it was going and why. The Gujaratis correctly replied that the Chinese bought the horn, and they thought it would be for the same purpose they used it.

Curiously, westerners do not seem to have asked the Chinese about their uses for rhino horn until the late 20th century. When the Martins began major surveys of the Asian rhino horn markets, they found that no trader or traditional medicine shop employee ever mentioned it as an aphrodisiac. Perceptions began to change when the wild animal products the Chinese *do* use as aphrodisiacs, including - geckos, sea horses, and the penises of the fur seal, tiger and even the rhino - became known.

DECLINE IN THE WILD

OF ALL THE large land mammals, none has declined so rapidly over the past 30 years as the five species of rhinos. In 1970 there were an estimated 70,000; today only 16,000 remain; and two species, the Sumatran (300) and the Javan (60) are close to extinction.

This is mainly due to poaching the animals for their horns. However, rhino nails, skin, blood and meat are also in demand. In fact, more parts of the rhinoceros have been used for medicinal purposes than of any other animal. The nails are an inexpensive substitute for the horn, and the skin is sold for curing skin diseases in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. The blood is drunk as a tonic in Burma, while the meat is eaten in Nepal to strengthen the body against disease. The penis, which retails in Bangkok for about £300, is purchased by Chinese, Koreans and Japanese as an aphrodisiac; the dried penis is cut into pieces and then put into a soup, or it is soaked whole for several weeks in cognac and drunk just before intercourse.

The second reason for the recent decline of the rhino is loss of habitat and serious disturbance by man. Most has been due to the expansion of agriculture, tree felling and other economic activities, especially in south-east Asia. Logging with modern machinery and mining with noisy equipment have had deleterious effects on the Sumatran rhino in Indonesia and Malaysia.