

1882. Ktesias

T. W. Rhys David
Temple 1882

ANCIENT INDIA

AS DESCRIBED BY

KTESIAS THE KNIDIAN;

BEING

A TRANSLATION OF THE ABRIDGEMENT OF HIS "INDIKA"
BY PHÔTIOS, AND OF THE FRAGMENTS OF THAT
WORK PRESERVED IN OTHER WRITERS.

BY

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WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES, AND INDEX.

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stomach, this root towards evening acts as an emetic, and they vomit up everything quite readily.

25. Among the Indians, he proceeds, there are wild asses as large as horses, some being even larger.⁷¹ Their head is of a dark red colour, their eyes blue, and the rest of their body white. They have a horn on their forehead, a cubit in length [the filings of this horn, if given in a potion, are an antidote to poisonous drugs]. This horn for about two palm-breadths upwards from the base is of the purest white, where it tapers to a sharp point of a flaming crimson, and, in the middle, is black.⁷² These horns are made into drinking cups, and such as drink from them are attacked neither by convulsions nor by the sacred disease (epilepsy). Nay, they are not even affected by poisons, if either before or after swallowing them they drink from these cups wine, water, or anything else. While other asses moreover, whether wild or tame, and indeed all other solid-hoofed animals have neither huckle-bones,⁷³ nor gall in the liver, these *one-horned asses*⁷⁴ have both. Their huckle-bone is the most beautiful of all I have ever seen, and is, in ap-

⁷¹ See Frag. xxv.

⁷² Conf. Bruce's account (*Travels*, vol. V, p. 93) who describes its surface as of a reddish-brown.

⁷³ Ἀστράδαρος, conf. *Aristot. Hist. An.* II, 2, 9.

⁷⁴ Tychsen thinks the rhinoceros is here meant, but the colour and other details do not quite agree with that animal. Heeren, *As. Nat.* vol. II, pp. 364 ff.

pearance and size, like that of the ox. It is as heavy as lead, and of the colour of cinnabar.⁷⁵ both on the surface, and all throughout. It is exceedingly fleet and strong, and no creature that pursues it, not even the horse, can overtake it.

26. On first starting it scampers off somewhat leisurely, but the longer it runs, it gallops faster and faster till the pace becomes most furious.⁷⁶ These animals therefore can only be caught at one particular time—that is when they lead out their little foals to the pastures in which they roam. They are then hemmed in on all sides by a vast number of hunters mounted on horseback, and being unwilling to escape while leaving their young to perish, stand their ground and fight, and by butting with their horns and kicking and biting kill many horses and men. But they are in the end taken, pierced to death with arrows and spears, for to take them alive is in no way possible. Their flesh being bitter⁷⁷ is unfit for food, and they are hunted merely for the sake of their horns and their huckle-bones.⁷⁸

27. He states that there is bred in the

⁷⁵ That is, vermillion.

⁷⁶ This is what Bruce relates of the rhinoceros.—*Travels*, vol. V, pp. 97 and 105.

⁷⁷ Bruce says it has a disagreeable musky flavour.

⁷⁸ Cf. Frag. xxv, and the account of the unicorn in Kosmas Indikopl. (conf. also Aristotle, *de Part. An.* III, 2, and *Hist. Anim.* II, 1; and also Philostrat. *Vit. Apoll.* III, 2 and 3. Ælian's account in the above Frag. of the wild ass may be compared with his account of the *Kartasón*,—*Ind. Ant.*, vol. VI, p. 128.

Indian animals first became known to the Greeks, and he has therefore co-operated so far to propagate zoological knowledge among his countrymen. To represent this addition to science is the business of zoology; for a history of Greek knowledge about India it is sufficient to enumerate the animals which he has mentioned—an exception being allowable only when an animal through some real or imaginary peculiarity appears pre-eminent over others, or when the form of the representation is characteristic of the way the author views things.

Concerning the animal most remarkable to foreigners on account of its size, docility and multifarious uses, the elephant I mean, he had been misled by the Persians into making the exaggerated statement that in war the king of the Indians was preceded by one hundred thousand of them, whilst three thousand of the strongest and most valiant followed him.³⁰ It can just as little be true that these animals were used to demolish the walls of hostile towns. On the other hand, he truthfully reports what he had seen with his own eyes, that in Babylon, elephants pulled up palm-trees, roots and all. He is the first Greek who mentioned the peculiarity of the female elephants that when they were in heat a strongly smelling fluid issued out from an orifice in their temples.³¹ Of the parrots he remarked with charming simplicity that they spoke Indian, but also spoke Greek if they had been taught to do so. The

³⁰ Frag. i, 3, iv, and v.

³¹ Frag. i, 3, and v.

Indian name of the jackal he was the first to communicate to the Greeks under the form, *Krokottos*, and it follows from what he says, as well as from the fables current about this animal, that the Ethiopian kind cannot be meant.³² The qualities attributed to it, such as that it imitates the human voice, has the strength of the lion, and the swiftness of the horse, show that the jackal already at that time played a prominent part in animal fables, and that such were generally current in India, if there were any need of such an argument.

Of the four yet remaining animals, two must be considered as real, though it is not easy to identify them. The other two have on the contrary been invented but not by the Indians themselves. The wild ass was specially distinguished by his horn, because, of the horns cups were manufactured which protected those who drank out of them from certain kinds of diseases and from poison.³³ He was further distinguished from solid-hoofed animals by the gall on his liver and by his ankle-bone. The first mark suits the rhinoceros, as it possesses a large gall bladder, but not the second, because all quadrupeds have ankle-bones. This, however, may only be an error of the author, though one that is surprising since he was a physician and had himself seen such ankle-bones. According to him, they were red, which is likewise false. The great strength attributed to the animal points to the rhinoceros, but not the great swiftness. At the same time the name, *kartazonon*, does

³² Schwanbeck, *Megasth. Ind.* p. 3. The Greek is a form of *kotpharaka* from *krosphuka*, a jackal.

³³ Frag. i, 25, 26, and xxv.

not furnish us with any certain means of identification. The explanation of this word from new Persian is not tenable—we might rather think that Ktésias had altered the Indian name of the rhinoceros, *Kadja* (which can be easily changed to *Kharga*) to *Karta*, in order to assimilate the sound to that of Greek words whose significations are very suitable to the animal.³⁵

By piecing these remarks together it would appear most probable that by the wild ass is to be understood the rhinoceros, because there is no other Indian animal which the description suits better. If Ktésias attributes to it a red head and a white body, whilst its colour is really grey-brown, he had perhaps been so informed. With reference to this so-called Indian unicorn, and also to the two fabulous animals, the griffin and the martikhoras, I have already remarked that it is incorrect either to recognize them in the wonderful animals of Persepolis, or to attribute to them a Baktro-Indian origin. In opposing this view, I have shown that the similarity of the sculptured animals to those described by Ktésias is only general—that in both cases the animals have been composed from parts of such as were real, and further that an ethico-religious symbolism through miraculous animals was unknown to the Indians. The conjecture there thrown out that the old Persian miraculous animals are of Babylonian-Assyrian origin, have been confirmed by the recent discoveries at Nineveh.

About the bird, *Dikairos*, which was not larger

³⁵ *kapra* strong, and *ῥῶν* animal.

than the egg of a partridge, the dung of which was dug up, and first produced sleep and afterwards death,³⁵ I can say nothing more satisfactory than others. That it is not fictitious appears from the fact that the King of India had sent some of it to the King of Persia, who preserved it as something very precious, because it was a remedy against incurable diseases. That opium, as has been suggested, cannot be meant by it, is certain, since the cultivation of that drug was introduced much later into India. It would be futile to try to explain the name because it is explained by the word *just*, and has been altered to assimilate its sound to that of a Greek word.

If the *griffins* have been indicated as Indian animals,³⁶ there is no confirmation of this discoverable in the Indian writings—and so the griffins must be classed along with the Issedonians,³⁷ the Arimaspians, and other fictions of the more northern peoples, which had found admission also among the Persians, where they survived till later. Just as foreign to the Indians is the *Martikhoras*, whose name is correctly explained as *the man-eater*,³⁸ but in old Iranian, because *Martijaqdra* has this meaning, but the second part is foreign to the Indian language. If Ktésias has reported that he had seen such an animal with the Persian King to whom it had been presented by the Indian king, he cannot in this instance be acquitted of mendacity.

³⁵ Frag. i, 17, and xviii; the name is also written *Dikeros*.

³⁶ Frag. i, 12, and xiv.

³⁷ Lassen, *Ind. Alt.*, vol. II, p. 609.

³⁸ Frag. i, 7, and viii—xi; Herodot. III, 116; IV, 13, 27.

APPENDIX.

ON CERTAIN INDIAN ANIMALS.

From Kosmas Indikopleustes⁶¹ *De Mundo*, XI.

1. *The Rhinoceros.*

This animal is called the rhinoceros from having horns growing upon its nose. When it walks about the horns shake, but when it looks enraged it tightens them, and they become firm and unshaken so that they are able to tear up even trees by the roots, such especially as stand right in their way. The eyes are placed as low down as the jaws. It is altogether a most terrible animal, and is especially hostile to the elephant. Its feet and its skin closely resemble those of the elephant. Its skin, which is dry and hard, is four fingers thick—and from this instead of from iron some make ploughshares wherewith they plough their lands. The Ethiopians in their language call the rhinoceros *arou* or *harisi*, prefixing the rough breathing to the *alpha* of the latter word, and adding *rasi* to it, so that the word *arou* is the name of the animal, while *harisi* is an epithet which indicates its connexion with *ploughing* arising from the configuration of its nose and the use made of its hide. I have seen a living rhinoceros, but I was standing some distance off at

⁶¹ A monkish traveller of the 7th century.

the time. I have also seen the skin of one, which was stuffed with straw and stood in the king's palace, and I have thus been enabled to delineate the animal accurately.⁶²

2. *The Taurelaphos or Ox-deer.*

This is an animal found in India and in Ethiopia. But those in India are tame and gentle, and are there used for carrying pepper and other stuffs packed in bags; these being slung over the back one on each side. Their milk is made into butter. We eat also their flesh, the Christians killing them by cutting their throat, and the Greeks by beating them with cudgels. The Ethiopian ox-deer, unlike the Indian, are wild and untameable.

3. *The Caméopardalis or Giraffe.*

This animal is found only in Ethiopia, and is, like the hóg-deer of that country, wild and untameable. In the royal palace, however, they bring up one or two from the time when they are quite young, and make them tame that the sight of them may amuse the king. In his presence they place before them milk or water to drink contained in a pan, but, then, owing to the great length of their feet, breast, and neck they cannot possibly stoop to the earth and drink unless by making their two forelegs straddle. When they make them straddle they can of course drink. I have written this from my own personal knowledge.

4. *The Agriobous or Wild Ox.*

This is an animal of great size and belongs to

⁶² Referring to the picture of the animal in his book.