

Shorter Notices

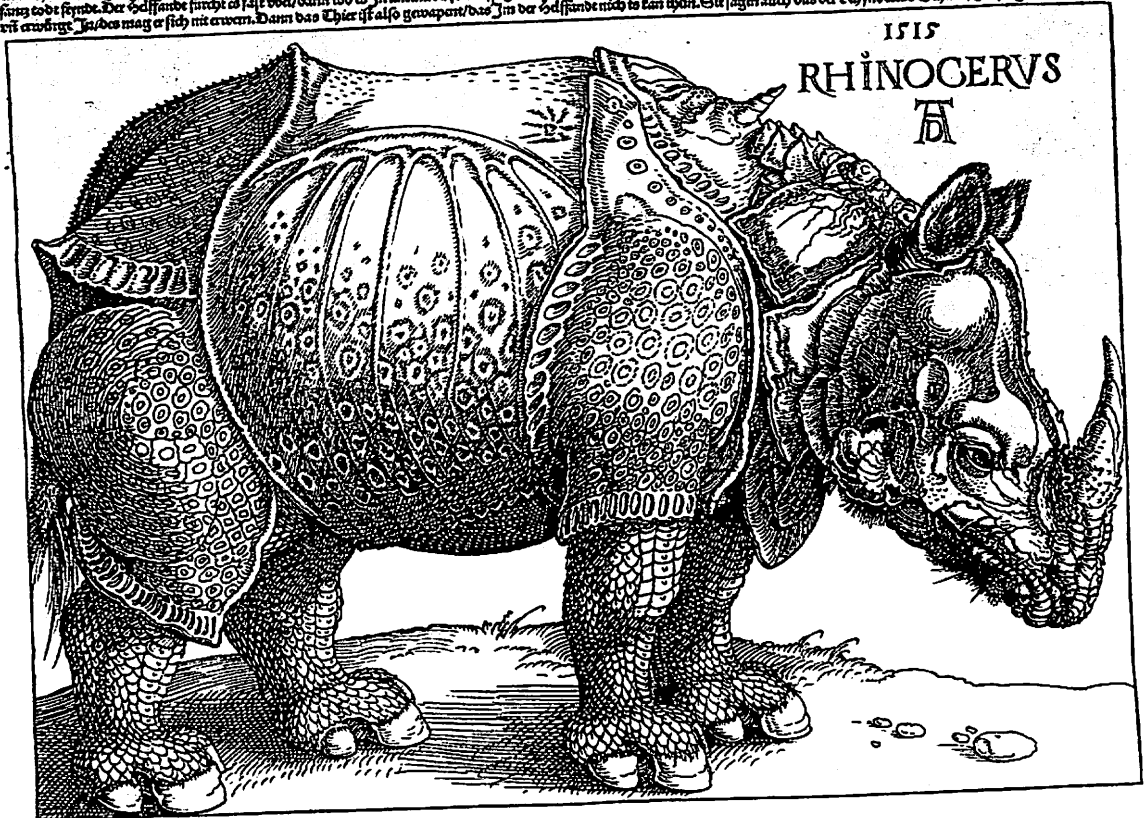
The Source for the *Rhinoceros*

Jim Monson

The story behind Albrecht Dürer's woodcut broadsheet the *Rhinoceros* is well-known (fig. 38). On 20 May 1515 the ruler of Portugal, Dom Manuel I, received the gift of a live rhinoceros from his provincial governor in India. The rhino was of the Indian variety and had been given by Sultan

Muzafar II of Gujarat. For his part, Dom Manuel was eager to test the validity of Pliny's writings that the rhinoceros was the mortal enemy of the elephant, so on Trinity Sunday, 3 June, he arranged a confrontation of the two animals. The combat was short, since at first sight the elephant turned in

Nach Christus geurt. 1515. Jar. 26.1. May. Hat man den großmichtigen König von Portugall den antw. gen. Lyfasona pacht auf Indis/die sollich lebendig Thier. Des namen sie Rhinoceros. Das ist hie mit aller seiner gestalt beschriben. Es hat ein horn wie ein geschnitten Schloßhorn z. Und ist vñ dicker Schalen überlegt fast fest. Und ist in der groß als der Schiff. Der erberochtiger von payron/ und fast wach ziffig. Es hat ein scharff hant. Sein wort auff der nasen. Das beynde es alweg zu wezen wo es bey flammen ist. Das beilig Thier ist des Schiff sing todt sündt. Der Schiffande sündt es fast vñel/dann wo es in antw. der so laufft. In das Thier mit dem topff zwischen drey fordem payr. und rufft das Schiffande vnder am pauch auff vñ erwingt. Ja/ des mag er sich mit erweren. Dann das Thier ist also geuopen/ das in der Schiffande nicht to lan dert. Die sagen auch das der Rhinoceros Schindl/ zuybig und ziffig ist.



38. Albrecht Dürer, *Rhinoceros*, 1515, pen and ink, 213 × 300 mm (London, British Museum).

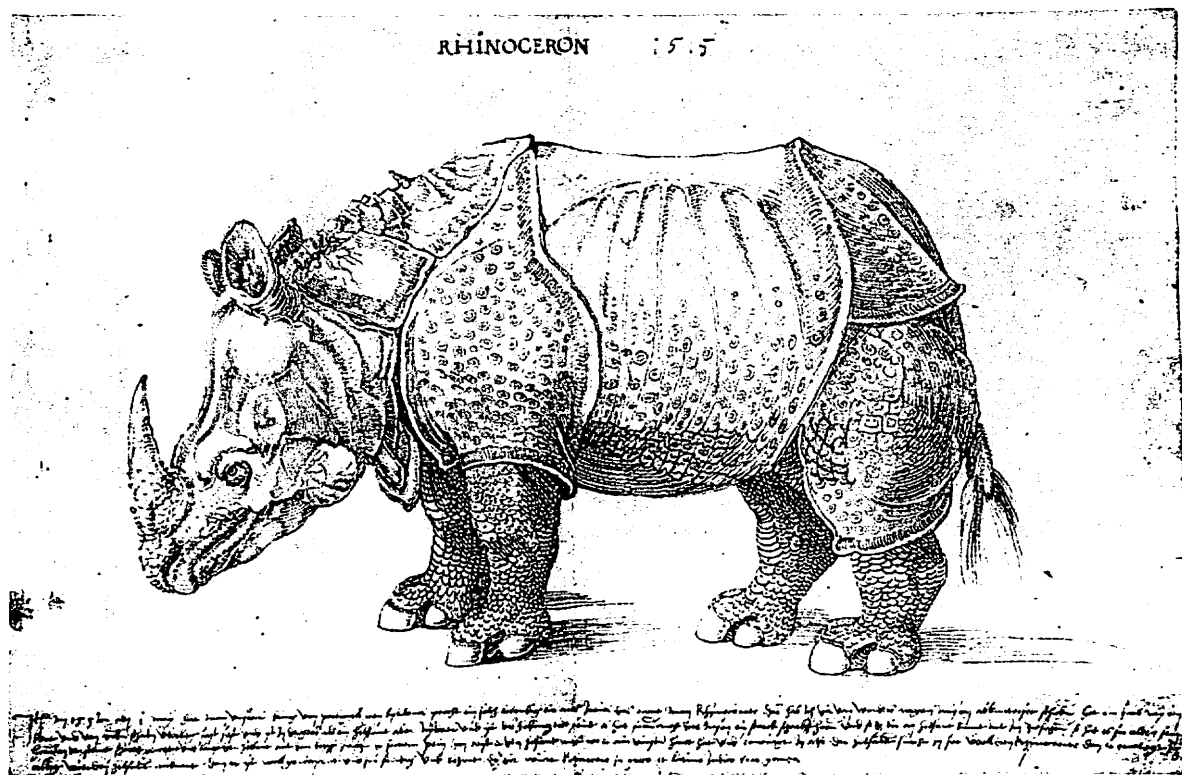
fright. By the end of the year, Dom Manuel decided to send his *ganda*, as the Indians called it, to Pope Leo X. The tale ended tragically when the boat transporting the beast was swamped and sank in heavy seas off the Bay of La Spezia, south of Genoa. Nevertheless, the presence of the rhinoceros on European soil was an immediate and newsworthy sensation.

The importance of Dürer's image can hardly be overstated, since it had a lasting effect on the representation of the species in illustrated natural histories as well as in more popular publications for centuries. It has often been pointed out that Dürer's drawing (fig. 39), and the woodcut made after it, distort many features of the animal. It is covered with hard plates like armour, with a scallop at its jaw and scales on its feet. The most curious element about the beast was the addition of a smaller second horn at the base of the neck, the utility of which puzzled naturalists for centuries afterwards. Faults aside, Dürer's rendition was commonly accepted as accurate for some 200 years. Dürer never actually saw the beast himself. He apparently based his version on a drawing and a written account sent from Lisbon. Valentin Ferdinand, a Moravian printer in Lisbon, is said to have had a drawing made of the animal that he then sent to his humanist

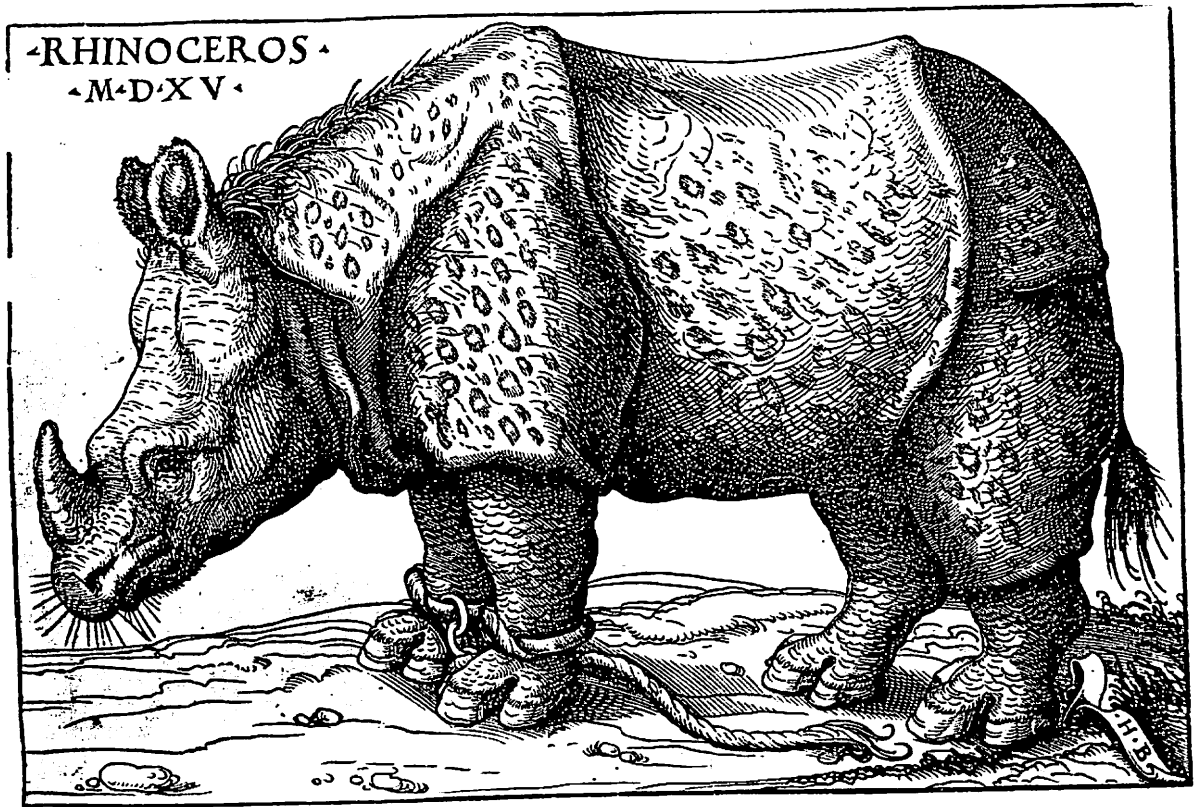
acquaintances in Nuremberg along with a brief description. Ferdinand's letter and the accompanying drawing have long been regarded as lost.

Dürer was not the only artist to depict the rhinoceros in 1515. Hans Burgkmair also made a woodcut that many would consider a more accurate depiction of the creature (fig. 40). Curiously, only one impression of this print is known to have survived, in the Albertina collection in Vienna. Close examination reveals some similarities with Dürer's woodcut, but the differences are more evident. For example, the animal is covered with a spotted skin and not thick plates. The second horn is absent, and there is hair on the shoulders. Could both of these prints have been inspired by the same drawing sent from Lisbon?

In 1988 Ingrid Rowland uncovered a drawing of a rhinoceros in the Vatican Library, also dated 1515. The drawing is pasted into a manuscript that forms part of the *Historia Senensium*, a ten-volume work compiled by Sigismondo Ticci (fig. 41). The *Historia* was Ticci's lifelong effort, a rambling encyclopaedic account of his epoch. The drawing is inserted next to an account of the Lisbon rhinoceros. In 1989 Hermann Walter published Rowland's discovery in an attempt to reconstruct the recension of the artist's famous



39. Albrecht Dürer, *Rhinoceros*, 1515, pen and ink, 247 × 420 mm (London, British Museum).



40. Hans Burgkmair the Elder, *Rhinoceros*, 1515, woodcut, 213 × 317 mm (Vienna, Albertina).

image.¹ Walter proposed that Dürer first made an initial sketch, now lost, before he made the well-known drawing in the British Museum collection, and that the Vatican drawing derived from this first lost sketch. Of course, Dürer might well have made more than one drawing, and at first glance the Vatican drawing looks like just another of the many copies inspired by Dürer's print. However, closer examination reveals that there are elements in the drawing not found in the Dürer print and, more importantly, other elements in the drawing found only in the Burgkmair print.

The Vatican drawing is titled with the name for rhinoceros, first written in Greek, then as *Naricornis*, followed by the Hebrew word, then *Ganda* and a line of Latin: *Sunt qui dicunt habite duo cornua* ('There are those who say that it has two

horns'). Finally there is the Biblical reference, from Psalm 28, one of several passages referring to the single-horned beast. The drawing is inserted into the manuscript vertically, and at the top of the sheet are four lines of Latin text preceded by the date *M. D. XI*, presumably Ticci's annotations. The Vatican drawing was made by a less talented hand, and one can imagine the sense of obligation felt by the competent artist to translate and ameliorate his material. The creature has short legs and almost comically large feet, which are chained and linked to a collar. It faces left, as in Dürer's drawing and Burgkmair's woodcut.

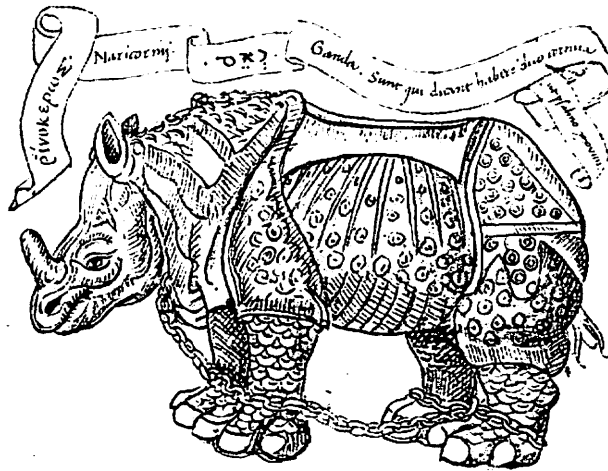
In Dürer's version the animal is filled out to more realistic proportions, with a fuller belly and a larger head. The horn is of monumental importance and perfectly shaped. The artist seems to have been caught in a sort of hornoma-

I would like to thank Dr Klaus Stopp of Mainz for encouraging me to write this article and Dr Ingrid Rowland for her assistance.

1. H. Walter, 'Contributi sulla recezione umanistica della zoologia

antica: Nuovi documenti per la genesi del "1515 Rhinoceros" di Albrecht Dürer.' *Res Publica Litterarum, Studies in the Classical Tradition*, xii, Lawrence KS 1989.

M. D. xv.
 Gener. n. her animal Rhinocerosi cuiusq. duo sunt cornu. In uno, fuit
 L. alius Rhinocerosi h. dicitur. R. dicitur. In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur.
 In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur.
 In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur.
 In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur. In alio, dicitur.



41. Anonymous Artist, *Rhinoceros*, 1515, pen and ink, sheet 160 × 280 mm (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms Chigi G-II-38, fol. 14).

nia. His virile animal even has little horns at the base, along its forehead, and hindquarters. Walter points out in his article² the different placement of the rear ear in the Vatican drawing. There are very few changes in the transition from Dürer's drawing to the woodcut, the most obvious being the elimination of a back collar-plate, which bears a strong resemblance to the second ear in the Vatican drawing. Another pronounced difference is the inclusion of an additional decorative layer of *plicae* or body folds typical of the Indian rhinoceros on the hindquarters not present in the two woodcuts. Of primary importance in the Vatican drawing is the absence of a second horn on the shoulder. There is, however, a protruding node just at the point where Dürer placed his little dorsal horn. This critical discrepancy is especially noteworthy, because the inscription on the Vatican drawing mentions a second horn although the drawing itself does not include it. Dürer's addition of the second horn and other differences point to the conclusion that the Vatican drawing was not directly copied either from Dürer's drawing or woodcut.

Furthermore, there are elements in the Vatican drawing that are closer to the Burgkmair print. The heavy chain that binds the feet has been changed in the woodcut to a cord and a few links of chain that bind the forefeet. In the drawing, pen strokes behind the head strongly suggest hair.

Burgkmair's version includes a mane. The principal nasal horn in the drawing is rounded and worn. As already noted by Walter, Burgkmair's has a stronger base, but a comparably modest size. Unlike Dürer, but in conformity with the Vatican drawing, Burgkmair's rhinoceros lacks the second hornlet. The body proportions and placement of the feet are likewise similar. The *plicae* follow the same segmentation in the drawing. In both the Dürer and the Burgkmair woodcuts as well as the Vatican drawing, the animals have three-toed feet and legs covered with scales, although in the Burgkmair print this could be construed as skin texture. In Dürer's rendition there is a pronounced breastplate under the head. Burgkmair has instead drawn soft folds of flesh as suggested in the Vatican drawing.

There is no disputing a close relationship among all three versions, and yet it is curious that there are some elements of the Vatican drawing found in one of the two woodcuts but not the other, and other elements that seem exclusive to each print. It is as if each artist chose a different approach to interpreting the drawing. Dürer chose the hard option, a body and head completely covered by plates of armour, while Burgkmair chose the soft option, with distinctive folds of soft spotty skin. Could it be that an image like this modest pen drawing was the instigator and not an emulator of these well-known prints?

2. Walter, *op. cit.*, p. 273.