

Claudius AELIANUS

born Praeneste (near Rome) between 150-250

On the Characteristics of Animals

Historia Animalium

3rd century AD

English translation by A.F. Scholfield, 1959

2588

XVII. 44

A description of the shape and appearance of the Rhinoceros would be state three times over, for there are many Greeks and Romans who know it from having seen it. But there is no harm in describing the characteristics of its way of life. It has a horn at the end of its nose, hence its name. The tip of the horn is exceedingly sharp and its strength has been compared to iron. Moreover it whets it on rocks and will then attack an elephant in close combat, although in other respects it is no match for it, because of the Elephant's height and immense strength. And so the Rhinoceros gets under its legs and gashes and rips up its belly from below with its horn, and in a short space the Elephant collapses from loss of blood. Rhinoceros and Elephant fight for possession of a feeding ground and one may come across many an elephant that has met its death in the above manner. If however the Rhinoceros is not quick enough to do as described but is crashed as it runs underneath, the elephant slings its trunk round it, holds it fast, drags it towards itself, falls upon it, and with its tusks hacks it to pieces as with axes. For even though the Rhinoceros has a hide so strong that no arrow can pierce it, yet the might of its assailant is extremely powerful.

XVI. 20. [Shepard p. 36]

They say that there are mountains in the interior regions of India which are inaccessible to men and therefore full of wild beasts. Among these is the unicorn, which they call the cartazon [καρταζωνος]. This animal is as large as a full grown horse, and it has a mane, tawny hair, feet like those of the elephant, and the tail of a goat. It is exceedingly swift of foot. Between its brows there stands a single black horn, not smooth but with certain natural rings, and tapering to a very sharp point. Of all animals, this one has the most dissonant voice. With beasts of other species that approach it, the cartazon is gentle, but it fights with those of its own kind, and not only do the males fight naturally among themselves, but they contend even against the females and push the contest to the death. The animal has great strength of body, and it is armed besides with an unconquerable horn. It seeks out the most deserted places and wanders there alone. In the season of rut it grows gentle towards the chosen female and they pasture side by side, but when this time is over he becomes wild again and wanders alone. They say that the young ones are sometimes taken to the king to be exhibited in contests on days of festival, because of their strength, but no one remembers the capture of a single specimen of mature age.

Aelianus, p.2

IV. 52

[Shepard p.34]

I have found that wild asses as large as horses are to be seen in India. The body of this animal is white, except on the head, which is red, while the eyes are azure. It has a horn on the bow, about one cubit and a half in length, which is white at the base, crimson at the top, and black between. These variegated horns, I learn, are used as drinking cups by the Indians - although not, to be sure, by all of the people. Only the great men use them, after having them ringed with hoops of gold exactly as they would put bracelets on some beautiful statue. And it is said that whosoever drinks from this kind of horn is safe from all incurable diseases such as convulsions and the so-called holy disease, and that he cannot be killed by poison.

Historia Animalium (Ed. Petrus Gillius, 1565]

Liber VIII, Cap. XL

De Rhinocerote & quemadmodum pugnat contra Elephantum.

Rhinocerotis figuram, nimis valde frigidum esset describere, cum permulti ex Graecis, & Romanis qui illum viderunt, eius formam plane sciant: at enim vim & illius naturam actionum non alienum est exponere: quod in summa nare cornu gerit, cuius mucro acuto existit: ex eo nomen traxit, neque ipsum illud de robore concedit ferro, quod quidem ipsum cum est contra elephantum pugnaturus, saxis exacuit & limat: caetera non eiparia cum elephanto: nam hic & procerissimus est & fortissimus. Cornu igitur cuspidato elpehanti crura subiens aluum discerpit & lacerat, isque effuso sanguine decumbit. Pugna eorum est de pastionibus, pro iisque tuendis multi mori dicuntur, ac si aluum non praeocuparit rhinoceros, sed in aliam elephanti partem averrarit: elephantis dentibus distrahitur, ac tametsi eius pellis ea existat firmitate ut aegre iaculo penetrari queat, tamen tam violentus est elephanti impetus, ut eam trajiciat.