

**The sixteenth Century Debate on the Zoological Status of the Unicorn.
A drawing from the school of Pierre d'Alost 1**

Arthur Ewart Popham, a great art historian of his time and keeper of prints and drawings at the British Museum in London, in 1932 published an anonymous drawing (fig.1) that when applied to a grid reveals a cartoon for a tapestry. The English publisher proposes the date of the mid-sixteenth century and gives it the generic title: 'Various animals in the woods'. He attributes the cartoon to the school of Pierre Coecke von Aelst, or as known in France, Pierre d'Alost, a Flemish painter who died in 1555. 2

Recently George Marlier dedicated an important monograph to Pierre d'Alost, who had until then been neglected by the art history world, that reconstructs his work with a series of successful attributions. For the London drawing, however, Marlier gives yet another vague title: 'Animaux sauvages'. 3

The titles given by the two scholars and accepted by others, do not correspond to the intention of the cartoon in a satisfactory way. Obviously the artist aspires to something more than a simple 'beastuary'. If his aim was really to focus solely on the rendering of the figurative world of the animals, he would have staged it differently: either in haphazard fashion or according to compositional criteria. Actually the animals in the cartoon (the elephant, monkey, mountain goat, otter and so on) all have a specific detail in common: they all conspicuously stare at the rhinoceros. The rhinoceros is not only centrally placed in the drawing, it is also the center of attention and for what action?

The rhinoceros in the London sketch is either a direct or indirect copy of Albrecht Dürer's woodcut entitled '1515 RHINOCERVS' (fig. 2). This fact brings up the discussion of why the Dürer print, already famous at this time, fascinated Pierre d'Alost: possibly for the very bizarre representation of the pachyderm? Or possibly for the historical episode the master of Nürnberg recalls in the legend linked to the woodcut.

The rhinoceros, in fact, was one of the presents exchanged between Mussafar II, the Sultan of Cambaia (1511-1526) and the viceroy of Goa, Alonso de Albuquerque in 1514 during the crisis of Diu. The Portuguese wanted to use this island (situated in a strategic position in the Gulf of Cambaia) as a military and merchant stronghold, but the project was strongly resisted by the Sultan. The diplomatic controversy risked to become a real war. Given as a gift, Albuquerque immediately sent the rhinoceros to Emmanuel the Great (known also as 'the Fortunate'), King of Portugal (1495-1520). The rhinoceros had been sent with the first ship available from Goa to Lisbon and the

- 1) Special thanks to Mrs. Antonella Nardi (Bologna) for checking the Italian version of the present contribution.
- 2) A.E.Popham, *Catalogue of Drawings by the Dutch and Flemish Artists*, Oxford 1932 (=Catalogue of Prints and Drawings Preserved in the British Museum, Vol. 5), tav. IX e p.25: "The drawing is, however, quite in the manner and technique of Orley and Koeckes designs for tapestry, and must come from that school and date from about 1550." The note <<P V Aelst fe 1549>> (not visible in the reproduction) is dated according to Popham, in the XVII or XVIII century.
- 3) G.Marlier, *La renaissance flamande*. Pierre Coeck d'Alost, Bruxelles 1966, p. 351, attributes the drawing to Pierre d'Alost the Younger, son of Pierre d'Alost.

'Na Sa da Aiuda', with the rhinoceros on board, landed in Belem on May 20th 1515. 4 The Ganda of Mussafar II ('Ganda' was the indian name given to the beast) became the sensation of the year. 5 It was the first rhinoceros in a millennium to arrive in Europe alive. This occasion allowed Don Emmanuel the possibility to verify (or falsify) with much fanfare, the thesis supported by Pliny the Elder and other ancient authors, that there is an innate hostility between the elephant and the rhinoceros and that the elephant, though the strongest animal in nature, in certain conditions could succumb to the rhinoceros's attack. 6

On the Sunday of the Holy Trinity in the year 1515, the people of Lisbon witnessed a spectacle that hadn't been seen since the time of the Roman emperors. 7 The rhinoceros found itself in front of one of the king's elephants in the courtyard enclosed by the Royal Palace and the India House. The rhinoceros won the duel. Actually, there wasn't even a fight. As soon as the elephant saw its enemy nearby, it became frightened and ran away. The elephant broke through an iron gate with its trunk and ran out into the crowded main street, spreading panic left and right, then disappearing into its stable. 8

The fame of the victorious Ganda, as well as Dürer's description of the animal in his woodcut became known throughout Europe. 9 This is why Pierre d'Alost had good reason to use the fight between the two pachyderms as the main theme of his work. 10 We would now like to ponder some more specific connections between the Ganda of Lisbon and the drawing in the British Museum, also because the elephant and rhinoceros are situated in such a particularly privileged proportion and position.

The historic interpretation would merit a more concrete reference, but actually the effects of the proportions and placement are not completely convincing. Upon careful examination, the artist's intentions could not have been the representation of the fight itself. If so, the two animals would have been opposite one another and in a more threatening position. On the other hand, Pierre d'Alost had no sufficient reasons to be content with this stance (artistically not so effective) that came immediately before the fight. If anything we could explain the exaggerated attention mentioned

- 4) A. Fontoura da Costa, *Deambulations of the Rhinoceros (Ganda) of Mussafar, King of Cambaia, from 1514 to 1516*, Lisbon 1937; for a more detailed and updated bibliography on the Ganda of Lisbon, look in L.C. Rookmaaker, *Bibliography of the Rhinoceros. An analysis of the literature on the recent rhinoceroses in culture, history and biology*, Rotterdam 1983; T.H. Clarke, *The Rhinoceros from Dürer to Stubbs 1515-1799*, London & New York 1986
- 5) Vgl. D.F. Lach *Asia in the making of Europe*, London & Chicago 1965, vol. II, bk. 1 (The Visual Arts), p. 162.
- 6) A. Steier, 'Nashorn' in RE, vol. 16, Stuttgart 1935, coll. 1780-1788 (spec. 1785s).
- 7) According to Cassius Dione, there had been a fight between an elephant and a rhinoceros organised for the Emperor Augustus.
- 8) D. de Gois *Chronica do felicissimo rei D. Manuel*. Nova edicao conforme a primeira de 1566, Coimbra. 1955; a French translation of the text describing the spectacle of Lisbon in *Le magasin pittoresque* 33, 1855, pp. 202s. ✓
- 9) For the numerous printings and the diffusion of Dürer's woodcut, see C. Dodgson, *The Story of Dürer's Ganda*, in A. Fowler, *The Romance of fine prints*, Kansas City 1938, pp. 44-56 (spec. pp. 51-55); another biography in Rookmaaker (see above n.4), pp. 16s (<<Illustrations before 1800>>; <<Iconography of Dürer's rhinoceros>>).
- 10) To be brief in this attribution, we will call this anonymous artist of the London drawing Pierre d'Alost.

earlier, as the respect that the animal demonstrates towards the 'Winner of Lisbon'. This theory too has its' weak point: it does not consider the fact that the elephant would not fit in the jubilant choir of the other animals. Besides, the lake that the rhinoceros is approaching would be left with no specific meaning. Do we have to go back to the beginning then, to the vague and generic interpretation given by Popham and Marlier ?

At this point we have to make a methodic observation. No one that I know of, has ever tried to give an interpretation of the London drawing according to the zoological and literary tradition of the rhinoceros. The word 'rhinoceros' in a not so distant past, also meant 'unicorn'. In fact, throughout the middle ages the 'rhinoceros' was considered an equivalent to the 'monoceros' (unicorn). The aim of this essay then is to fill this gap.

In the late Byzantine edition of the *Physiologus* (XIV century) it was said, in reference to the unicorn: "*In that region there is a large lake, where animals from all around come to drink. The snake though, is always the first to get there and he pollutes the water with it's poison. The animals, knowledgeable of this fact, dare not drink. They wait for the unicorn to intervene. Upon the arrival of the unicorn, he goes into the water and draws the sign of a cross with its horn, nullifying the effect of the poison. At this point the animals can drink their fill.*" 11

This 'physis' of the unicorn fits well with the London cartoon. If the artist had put the unicorn instead of the rhinoceros, no one would hesitate to entitle the drawing <<The unicorn purifying the water from the snake's poison>>. Even without considering the fact that there is a rhinoceros and not a unicorn, it would not be incorrect to assume that there is a relationship of dependency between the Greek *Physiologus* of the XIV century and the Pierre d'Alost studio in Antwerp. At first glance this relationship seems improbable; the theme of the 'purification of the water' is lacking both in the Latin edition of *Physiologus* as well as in the western bestiaries.

It can however, be found in other kinds of medieval literary texts. The Presbyter John Witte de Hese from Utrecht, 12 wrote a diary during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1389. In this diary he includes a theological detail about the river Marath in Palestine 13: "*Prope illum namque campum est fluvius qui vocatur Marath valde amarus quem Moyses percussit virga, et accepit dulcedinem de quo filii Israel biberunt. Et adhuc hodiernis temporibus ut dicitur animalia venenosa intoxicant illam aquam. De mane vero post ortum solis venit unicornis ponens cornu suum ad predictum fluvium expellendo venenum ex illo ut in die cetera animalia sumant potum . . .*" 14 John the Presbyter adds

- 11) *Physiologi Graeci singulas variarum aetatum recensiones codicibus fere omnibus tunc primum excussis collatisque in lucem protulit F.Sbordone*, Milan 1936, p.321 (ms. B, cod.par. gr. 1140 A, sec. XIV) For the healing virtues of the unicorn, see Jürgen W.Einhorn, *Spiritualis Unicornis. Das Einhorn als Bedeutungsträger in Literatur und Kunst des Mittelalters*, München 1966, pp. 241-4 (<<Das Einhorn am Wasser>>) and pp. 244-247 (<<Das Horn in der Geschichte der Pharmazie>>) also the Bibliography by Rookmaaker (see above n.4), p. 15.
- 12) *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 50, Leipzig 1905, pp. 271-272.
- 13) One can note the similarities between the typological-metaphorical balance mentioned by the Presbyter, and the natural phenomenon (the purification of the water by the unicorn) and the historical episode (the purification of the river Marath by Moses; Exodus 15, 23 ss); cf. L. Châtelet-Lange, The grotte of the unicorn and the garden of the Villa di Castello, *The Art Bulletin* 50, 1968, pp. 51-58.
- 14) *Itinerarius Johannis de Hese, presbiteri a Jherusalem per diversas mundi partes*, Colonia, J.Guidenschaff 1490 (Hain:*8535); as quoted from Einhorn (see above n.11), p.242

that he witnessed the miracle with his own eyes (*quod idem ipse vidi*). For what concerns our argument, it is not important that his diary was actually literary fiction. The topic of the purification of water by a unicorn will be, a century later, part of the common cultural patrimony. Pier Candido Decembrio (1392-1477), who believed the unicorn and rhinoceros to be the same animal, dedicated a chapter of his encyclopedia *De Natura avium et animalium* to the unicorn. He wrote: *Tanta vero cornu eius contra venena vis est, ut locis, in quibus magna serpentum copia est, nullum animal ad potum accedere audeat nisi unicorno precedente.* 15 --- Lorenzo de' Medici in *Selve d'Amore (Forests of Love)* writes two verses to recall the unicorn to the reader's mind: . . . *ne gli animali al fonte han pazienza che 'l licorno facci la credenza.* 16

The tale in the *Physiologus* started a literary and iconographical tradition. During the XV century it was not rare to find representations in books and medals of unicorns dipping their horn in water (fig.3). 17 In the early Cinquecento, it was not so common to find the unicorn as our protagonist of the purification. A little later at the end of the first part of the Cinquecento, the representation of the animals waiting for the saving action of the unicorn was added to the composition (fig.4). 18 A monumental version of this motif can be found in the park of the Villa di Castello in Florence. The famous 'Grotta degli animali' (the grotto of the animals) by Niccolo di Raffaello Pericoli (1500-1550) has recently been reinterpreted as the purification of the water by the unicorn, according to the writings in the *Physiologus* in regards to the unicorn's power to purify water. This healing power, in fact, is in perfect harmony with the iconographic theme of the park and the intentions of its founder, the Grand Duke Cosimo de' Medici to create an 'earthly paradise' in the territory of Florence and Tuscany. 19

The London cartoon does not represent a unicorn, but a rhinoceros. Are we still free to transfer the healing virtues of the unicorn to the rhinoceros? The artist of the drawing, it is apparent, agreed with ancient zoology that declared that the rhinoceros possessed healing properties. 20

The rhinoceros replacing the unicorn is in fact often documented in literature of the XV and XVI century. The Dutch traveller and cartographer Jan Huygen Linschooten (1563-1611), during his journey in India (1594/5), wrote in his diary about Bengalese fauna: *Sane Lusitani adfirmant et Bengalae homines adstruunt, circa Gangem in regno Bengalae multitudinem magnam esse harum*

- 15.) C. Pyle, *Das Tierebuch* by Petrus Candidus. Codex Urbinas Latinus 276, Stuttgart 1985, p. 132s; cf. Einhorn (see above n.11), p. 242.
- 16.) Lorenzo de' Medici, *All of his works; Love essays*, Milan 1985, Vol.II, p.308 *Second Forest*, v.91 "the animals are no longer forced to wait for the unicorn" Châtelet- Lange p.54: Two verses are mentioned in the entry on the unicorn in the <<Vocabulário degli Accademici della Accademici della Crusca>>.
- 17.) Antonio Marescotti (expert in medals from 1444-1460): bronze medal of Borso d'Este, 1460; Einhorn, p. 301, fig.49; other examples p. 241; Châtelet-Lange, (see above n.13), p.54; For a strange example from the XIII c. see A.Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, vol.3, p. 933, fig.833 (Font of the Pisa Baptistery by Guido da Como, 1246)
- 18.) Jean Duvet (1485-1561) The unicorn purifying water, engraving (Châtelet-Lange p.55, fig.7) also Einhorn p.243 300-02 (Catalogue); *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 13 (formerly vol.7, part 4) *Sixteenth century artists*, ed.W.L. Strauss, New York 1981, p. 253, no.42 (314); O.Shepard, *The Lore of the Unicorn*, New York 1979(1930) p.60
- 19.) Châtelet-Lange, pp. 51-8
- 20.) Cf. Steier, col. 1787

belluarum, ibique caeteras bestias ad potum convenientes operiri, donec rhinoceros biberit, quem post illae sitim explent. Cornu enim naribus impositum aquam tangit, ob vicinitatem narium et rostri. Et probatur illud ab Indis adversus venena, aliosque morbos summopere. Quin et dentes, ungulas, carnem, corium et sanguinem, immo stercus contra venena laudant, ut ipse experimento subinde didici. 21 Jurgen Andersen and Volquard Iverson wrote something similar in their diary of 1650, which was published in 1669 by Adam Olearius: *Among the other considered wild animals, there are also quite a few Rhinoceroses or Abada, as they were then called. One esteems the horn as it has it on its nose, as strong against poison as that of the unicorn. It is curious if true what the Indians say, that if a rhinoceros comes to drink at the river and other animals also arrive there to drink, they should out of respect towards him, wait until he has drunk first.* 22 Johann Joachim Becher (1635-82), a German rhymist of approximately the same time, describes the virtue of the rhinoceros in a misogynous verse: *Ein Skrupel Nashorn tut das Gieffft vergraben / Ich meine solches nicht, das böse Weiber haben.* 23 Though the quoted evidences are from later than the time of the Pierre d'Alost drawing, they are still important documents. The similarities between the modern traveller's journal and the medieval sources, show that there is a continuous tradition. I suggest, then, that the London cartoon be entitled 'The animals wait for the rhinoceros to purify the water'.

To develop a bit our interpretation, we must consider the position of the debate about the relationship between the rhinoceros and the unicorn after the year 1515, when the Ganda of Mussafar II arrived in Lisbon. That zoological syncretism of the middle ages that wanted the rhinoceros and unicorn to be the same animal, could not last. Because of Dürer's woodcut, the image of the rhinoceros became too well known. Moreover, it was impossible to talk about the rhinoceros without mentioning the Lisbon episode. Gerardus Suberinus Corquius, a Dutch humanist, wrote a precious document on the lasting resonance throughout Europe of the fight between the two pachyderms. In 1595, almost a century later, Corquius dedicated a series of anagrams celebrating the memorable event to Abraham Ortelius, the great cartographer from Antwerp. As the most important happenings of century, the poet recalls the birth of emperor Charles V in 1500, Wittenberg's printed Bible in 1517, Martin Luther's 95 theses and the arrival of the Lisbon rhinoceros in 1515. 24

- 21) Johann Hugo Linscotanus, *Navigatio ac Itinerarium . . . in orientalem sive Lusitanorum Indiam . . .*, Hagae Comitum 1599, p.57 (cap.XLVII). --- Cf. AndreweThevet, *The new found worlde, or anatarctike, wherin is contained wonderful and strange things . . .* by A.Th., London 1568, p.35 (title of original work: *Les Singularitez de la France Antarctique, autrement nommée Amerique: & de plusieurs Terres & Isles decouvertes de nostres temps*, Paris 1557): "I sawe one (sc. wild ass) being in the citie of Alexandria, that is in Egypt, that a LordeTurke brought from Melcha, the which horne he sayde, had the lyke vertue agaynst poyson as had the horne of an Unicorne. Aristotle calleth these Asses with horne, Asses of India . . ."
- 22) Jürgen Andersen und Volquard Iverson, *Orientalische Reisebeschreibungen*. In der Bearbeitung von Adam Olearius Schleswig 1669. A cura di D.Lohmeier, Tübingen 1980, p.14- Cf. *The Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, The Maldives, the Moluccas and Brasil*. Transl. by A.Gray, vol.1, pp. 331s (=Works issued by The Hakluyt Society, 1. ser., no. 76, 1887 (original title of this work: François Pyrard, Voyage, contenant sa navigation aux Indes Orientales, Maldives, Moluques, Brasil ... Paris 1619) :<<There are rhinoceros also, and some say unicorns too, which are said to be found in this land only. They say other animals will not drink at a well until a female unicorn has steeped her horn in the water, so they all wait on the bank till she comes and does so>>.
- 23) Cf. Horstius, *Gesnerus redivivus, auctus et emendatus oder Allgemeines Thier Buch ...*, Frankfurt am Main 1669, p. 306.
- 24) Gerardus Suberinus Corquius (XVI-XVII) in a letter to Abrahamus Ortelius (27 April 1595) <<1500. Natalis Caroli V. Imperatoris: Nascere clare Puer Reges tracture triumpho./ Atque Duces. et quis par tibi Rex fuerit? - 1517. Martinus Lutherus innotescit, Leone X. Pont.Rom. Indulgentias (ut vocant) vendente: Lux Evangelii per te Luthere revixit./ Romulei extincta haec fraude Leonis erat.--- 1515 Lusitanorum Rex Emanuel spectaculum Vlissipponeae edidit, a multis retro saeculis non usurpatum. Pugnavit Elephantus cum Rhinocerote: Certabant Tagi ad Ostia Rhinocerosque Elephasque: / Palma sed et belli Rhinocerota beat>> (*Abraham Ortelii, Geographi Antverpiensis et vtrorum*

Starting from that year (1515), the attention of the learned world was focused on the unicorn-rhinoceros relationship, and they could not resolve the problem. There were two options which reconciled Dürer's vision of the pachyderm and the traditional way of representing the unicorn in the middle ages. On one hand there was ancient zoology in which the unicorn and rhinoceros were two different animals. Dürer, Gesner as well as all sixteenth century zoological literature followed this option. On the other hand, there was the alternative to remain faithful to the authoritative medieval writings of St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Gregory Magnum, Albert Magnum and many others. They all defended the identity of the rhinoceros as the monoceros. 25 Choosing this second alternative, the image that remained consistent throughout the middle ages and the age of humanism had to be sacrificed. This was the iconography resembling a small horse on whose forehead protruded an elegant long twisted horn.

Was there still someone that supports this medieval position? By the 1500's, the answer leaves us a bit perplexed: concerning the Bengalese - a doctor and herbalist Carolus Clusius of Arras (1526-1609) mentions our problem in his essay on Indian spices. In this text he attributes this belief to the Bengalese: *Mihi hactenus Rhinocerotem videre non contigit: illud tamen scio Bengalae incolas eius cornu adversus venena usurpare, unicornu esse existimantes, tametsi non sit, ut ii referunt, qui se probe scire autumant.* 26 --- The other authors are very general on this topic. Andrea Marini writes in his famous *Discussions on the false opinion on the alicorn* published in Venice in 1566: *There are people who say that the unicorn is the rhinoceros.* 27 - Not even Linschooten mentions the name: *Quidam hoc animal pro Monocerote habent, quod nullus uspiam hactenus sit visus, auditu tantum intellectus.* 28

The only eyewitness that I could find in all of the sixteenth century literature is the one by Giulio Cesare Scaligero (1484-1576) --- and I am not sure if it is reliable: He proclaims, while talking about the controversy with Gerolamo Cardano (1501-76) *Quonam malo fato a Grammaticorum toties subductus in Philosophorum plagas incidisti? Neque queo tibi, Cardane, optulari, qui Monocerota Rhinocerotis nomine pinxisti, quum duae sint belluae longe diversissimae . . .* 29 This denunciation is baseless, and said in bad faith. Cardano did not say anything but: *Constat hunc (sc. rhinocerotem) longe alium esse a monocerote, cum quo solum nominis similitudine colludit . . .* 30 The emphasis with which the antagonists express themselves in favor of a contemporary solution

eruditorum ad eundem . . . Epistulae . . . Cambridge 1887, p.637 (=Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum, I, reimpr. anastatica, Osnabrück 1969).

25. St. Jerome translates the Hebrew word "re'em" (the seventy: <<monokeros>>) with 'rhinoceros' (Job 39, 9f. <<Numque morabitur rhinoceros ad praesepe tuum? Numquid alligabis eum ad arandum loro tuo?>>). ---In the *Carmina Burana*, the rhinoceros is often mentioned as 'aeinhurn'; cf. Einhorn (see above n.11), p. 133, n. 399. ---Marco Polo realised, but did not quite understand the fact that the unicorn from Burma did not correspond with the western iconography of the animal; cf. Einhorn (see above n.11), pp.42ss, 133, 137, 122
26. *Aromatum et simplicium aliquot medicamentorum apud nascentium historia*, 1567, p. 66 (trad. lat. dell'originale portoghese Coloquios des simples e drogas e cousas medicinais da India).
27. P. 9.
28. Linschooten 1599 (see above n. 21), p. 56
29. *Exoticae exercitationes de subtilitate adversus Cardanum*, Paris 1557, p. 626.
30. *De subtilitate libri XXI*, Basileae 1560, p. 719

shows however, the relevance to this discussion.

In the 1600's, the situation changes. The authors are still hesitant in revealing their sources. 31 There are, however, some 'attributed' texts identifying the unicorn with the rhinoceros. Filippo Picinelli (ca. 1604-1667) in his significant collection 'Mundus symbolicus' mentions under the title 'Incarnatio' how a virgin captures the rhinoceros (the idea being borrowed from the myth of the unicorn): *Aiunt, Rhinocerotem, quantumvis furibundum, si intra virginis brachia recipiatur, totum mansuescere.* 32 Picinelli, however, is not too reliable as a source; his zoological interests were clearly subordinate to his allegorical interests. Athanasius Kircher (1602-80) is more explicit: *Non itaque alia ratio assignari potest, illud (sc. unicornu) in Arca non fuisse susceptum, nisi quod Tale, prout ab Authoribus describitur, nullibi in hunc usque diem visum sit. Per Unicornu itaque, alia similia huic speciei animalia supra recensita intelligi debent, ut Sacrae Scripturae Textus servetur. Ego per Monocerotem nil aliud intelligi existimo, nisi Rhinocerotem, animal in naso cornu portans.* 33 The French traveller François Leguat (1637-1735) took the same outlook when he describes with complete honesty in his diary the fauna of the Cape of Good Hope: *Pour la licorne, c'est une chimere: les plus anciens & plus curieux habitans du Cap en sont persuadez. Celui qui a fait les 'Commentaires de César' étoit un menteur, aussi bien que les autres. Le Rhinoceros est le vraye Licorne quadrupède . . .* 34

I propose then, as a title for the London cartoon: <<The animals wait for the rhinoceros to purify the water.>> Now that we have researched the relationship of the 'rhinoceros-monoceros', we can now be more precise in developing our discussion: the London drawing is a figurative interpretation, knowledgeable and intentional in the scientific debate of its' time.

Pierre d'Alost's work does not constitute the only figurative art intervention in the discussion of the 'rhinoceros-unicorn' relationship. We have another point of view though, of a quite different nature in an essay by the Alsatian humanist Michael Herr (1490/95-1550) entitled <<Accurate descriptions of all four legged animals>> 35 (fig.5). This essay was published in Strasbourg in 1546.

31 The Danish travellers Iverson and Andersen, note in their diary (op. cit., see above n.22, p.13):<<Several believe that the animal (the rhinoceros) is the unicorn which is referred to in the Holy Bible, but according to the circumstances, this does not resemble the truth.>> The German naturalist and doctor, Georg Horstius (1626-61) at almost the same period, distances himself in regards to the thesis of the sameness of the rhinoceros and unicorn by stating : <<Among the old scholars, none mention anything about some kind of medicine, which is derived from such an animal, although several more recent scholars attribute his horn to medicine, they are influenced by Isidoro and Alberto, who did not know the difference between the present animal and the unicorn . . .>>until now he had been following the old model (Gesner), but from now on' he will detach himself from it<< . . . those who still find approval today.>> In the German translation of the *Historia animalium* by Gesner, published by Konrad Forer (*Thierbvch.*: this is a short description of all the quadrupeds/as they live on the earth and in the water . . . now here translated into German by Cuonrat Forer . . . in das Teütsch gebracht, Zürich 1563, fol. CXXXIX vo) the passage sounds like this << Among the old scholars are none who mention medicinal properties / but the more recent ones do/ because they are betrayed by Isidoro and Alberto, who did not know the difference among the present animal and the unicorn.>> There is no indication of the source of this information.

32 *Mundus Symbolicus in emblematum universitate formatus, explicatus . . .*, Colonia 1694, p. 421.

33 *Arca Noë in tres libros digesta*, Amsterdam 1675, p. 59.

34 *Voyage et aventures de François Leguat et de ses Compagnons, en deux isles desertes des Indes Orientales*, Londres 1708, tom. II, p.145.

35 *Gründliche Beschreibung wunderbarer Art aller vierfüssigen Thiere . . .*, Strasbourg 1546.

To illustrate in a completely conventional way, the chapter on the rhinoceros uses Dürer's iconographical tradition with the difference, however, that he illustrates his exotic animal with hooved feet, like an artiodactyl. Unfortunately, we do not know either the figurative or literary source that inspired this anonymous artist. 36 But it is still quite clear that the artist was sensitive to the 'rhinoceros-unicorn' question.

Michael Herr was a very consequential man, his renown is documented in many depictions of the rhinoceros, some from the late sixteenth century and others from the early seventeenth century. There is one in the *Discours a sçavoir de la mumie, des vénins, de la Licorne* by Ambroise Paré (ca.1510-90), who was the 'father of modern surgery' (fig. 6), 37 another is found in the 'Album' of the Flemish zoologist and painter Anselmus de Boodt (1550-1632) who worked at the court of Rudolph II (fig. 7) 38 and a third in a series entitled 'Fighting Animals' by the Roman engraver Antonio Tempesta (1555-1630) (fig. 8). 39

The attempt of the Indian rhinoceros to invade the mythical domain of the unicorn failed on the artistic level. The power to purify water could perhaps have been attributed to the rhinoceros, but how could such a colossal beast be seduced by a tender maiden? Marco Polo (1254-1323/4) notes this absurd idea: *Il ne sunt pas ensi come nos de ca dion e devison: que dient qu'ele se lai prendre a la poucelle. Mes vos di qu'il est tout le contraire de celz que nos qui dion que il fust.* 40

On an aesthetic note, the importance of the fame of Pierre d'Alost's drawing could be crucial. Not many years ago, a tapestry from the early 1600's attributed to the school of Francois Tons, was for sale on the antique market in Milan (fig. 9). 41 Tons first worked in Bruxelles, and then in Pastrana, Spain. 42 There is no doubt that this tapestry is influenced by the London cartoon, even without the rhinoceros, which in the Pierre d'Alost version was the main character. Tons turns the <<histoire>> of the cartoon into a <<verdure>> with animals. In this way he avoids the aesthetic

36 According to Claus Nissen, *Die zoologische Buchillustration. Ihre Bibliographie und Geschichte*, vol. 2, Stuttgart 1978, p.62, it would be by the monogramist 'I.K', the student of Hans Weiditz

37 *Les oeuvres d'Ambroise Paré*, Paris 1585, p. 514 (cf. Chr. Coste, *Anciennes figurations du rhinocéros de l'Inde, Acta tropica* 3, 1956, pp. 116-129); Frank Lestringant kindly tells me that Ambroise Paré copied the woodcut of André Thevet; cf. Clarke 1986 (see above n.4), p.207 (fig.121):<<Indeed, Paré seems to have used the same woodblock initiated by André Thevet (1502-90), traveller and author of *La cosmographie universelle* 1575, p. 403>>

38 Vgl. Marie Christiane Mazelis, Arnout Balis, Roger H. Marijnissen, *De Albums van Anselmus de Boodt (1550-1632). Geschilderd natur observatie aan het Hof van Rudolf II te Praag*, Tielt (Belgio) 1989, no.64; Galerie Koller, Zürich, Ramistr. 8, Auktion vom 15-23 Mai 1990 (Katalog 4: *Die Alben des Anselmus de Boodt*), p. 5

39 *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 36 (formerly vol.17, part 3), Antonio Tempesta. Italian masters of the sixteenth century, ed. Sebastiano Buffa, New York 1983, p. 170, no. 916 (161).

40 *Livre des merveilles*, ed.L.F.Benedetto, Firenze 1928, CLXVII, 30-32 (citation from Einhorn) see above n.10, p.122

41 E. Cittone, Via Bigli, Milano

42 For Francois Tons see Thieme-Becker, vol. 33, p. 278 and M.Ferrero Viale, *Quelques nouvelles données sur les Tapestries de l'Isola Bella, Bulletin des MuséesRoyaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 6. sér., 45, 1973, pp. 108ss. The manuscript of Mr.Asselberghs, Une tapisserie bruxellois activ en Espagne: Francois Tons*, mentioned by Mr. Ferrero Viale (loc. cit.) has yet to be published.

controversy that would have been brought by the interpretation of the rhinoceros, in the myth of the unicorn. There is another tapestry from almost the same period (fig. 10), which comes from the studio of Jan Raes (1610/31), that also takes its inspiration from the Pierre d'Alost drawing. 43 Raes minimalizes the original concept even while following the London model ('the rhinoceros moves towards a lake'). He, however, subdues the reverence of the waiting animals for the rhinoceros and instead creates a simple 'beastuary'.

To conclude, the London drawing has served as a pretext to bring forth an instructive event from a secular process, the reading of the great Book of Nature. The fortunes of the unicorn in art and European literature teaches us a great deal about how much perseverance we must have in investigating these issues, as modern zoology evolves from a tradition. For many this evolution is towards a more stimulating view, but at the same time futile.

43 Cf. Clarke (see above n.4), pp.84s, 196, fig. 56.

rifa al disegno di Pierre d'Alost.⁴³ Il Raes, pur attenendosi all'impostazione del modello Londinese ('il rinoceronte s'avvicina ad un lago'), ne attenua la concezione originale. Sopprime, infatti, quella riverenza offerta al rinoceronte dagli animali in attesa. Quello che nell'arazzo di Jan Raes rimane dell'originale non è che un semplice 'bestion'.

Per finire, il disegno di Londra ci è servito da pretesto per rievocare una vicenda istruttiva di quel processo secolare che è la lettura del grande Libro della Natura. La fortuna dell'unicorno nell'arte e nella letteratura europee ci insegna una buona volta quanti sforzi si dovette fare perché la zoologia moderna si emancipasse da una tradizione per molti versi stimolante, ma a pari tempo anche sterile.



Fig. 1

⁴³ Cf. Clarke (v. sopra n. 4), pp. 84s, 196, fig. 56.

Fig. 2

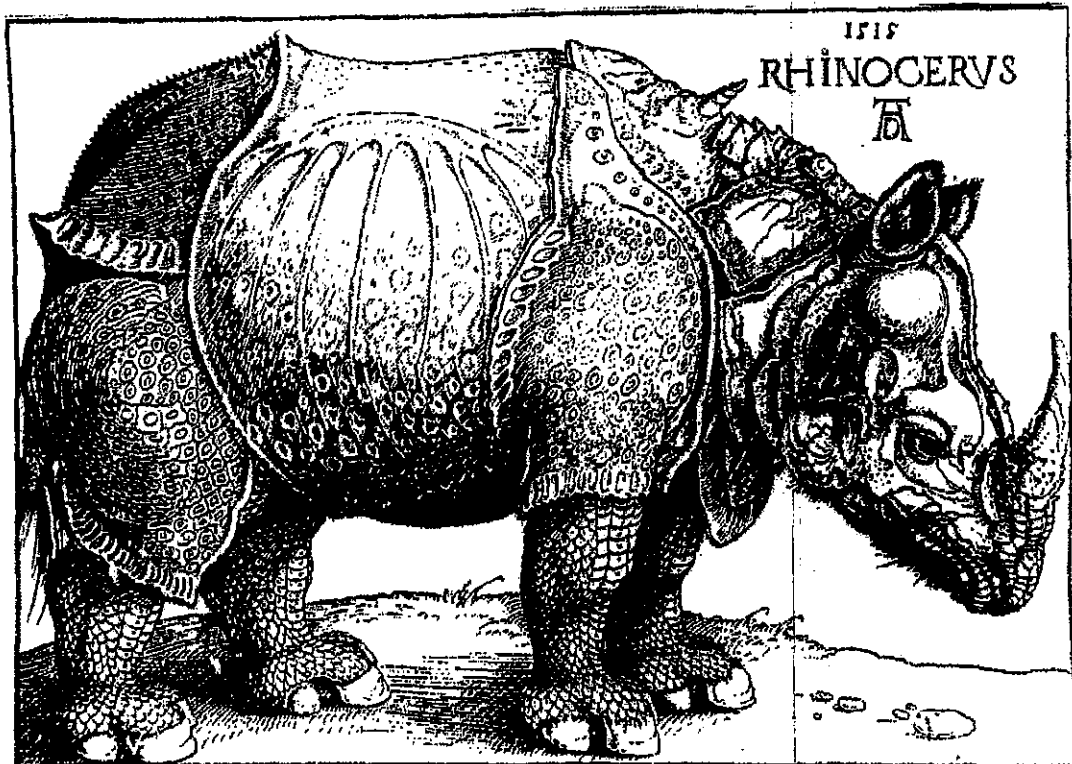


Fig. 3





Fig. 4

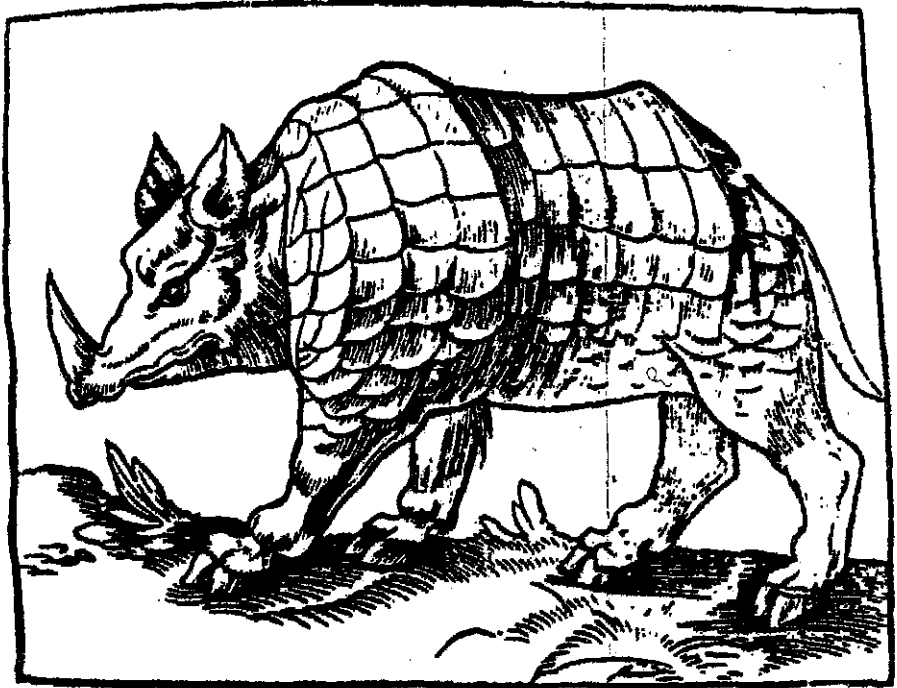


Fig. 5

Fig. 6

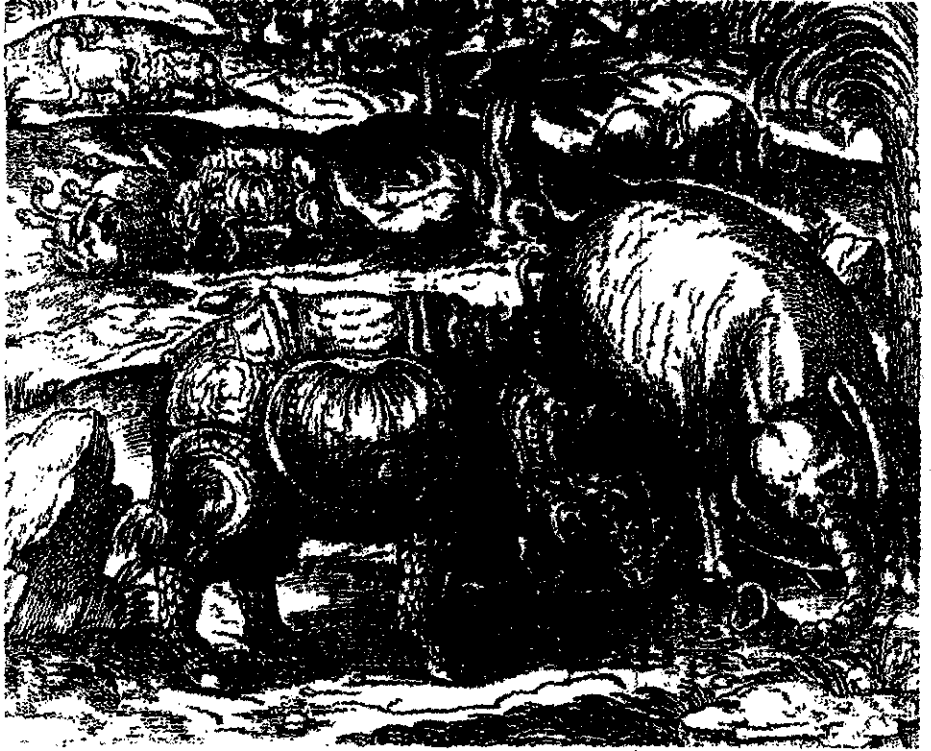


Fig. 7

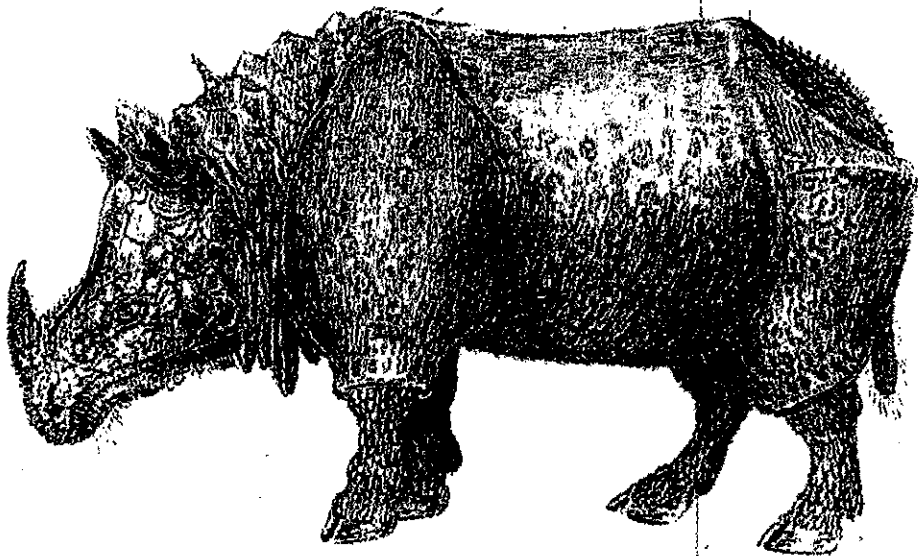




Fig. 8



Fig. 9