

THE RHINOCEROS IN EUROPE

Early Appearances

To the Editor of the Manchester Guardian.

Sir,—The Indian rhinoceros which was landed at Lisbon in 1515 and immortalised by Albrecht Dürer was not even the first received in Western Europe. It had a predecessor of the African variety, which was housed along with elephants in a menagerie built for the purpose at Ribiera, near Cintra, in Portugal, in 1499. Earlier still, in 1475, at Turin, Yolande, Duchess of Savoy, and sister of the French King Louis XI., had, with certain Moorish animals, an "ire-corne," which may well have been a rhinoceros.

The Turks, at this time paramount in Europe, were great naturalists, and had wonderful collections of rare wild animals, which they installed in (among other places) the Christian churches. As they had (as we know) both the two-horned rhinoceros and the pygmy hippopotamus before the end of the sixteenth century, I conjecture, from their close touch with Egypt and the East, that they had both rhinoceros and hippopotamus in the fifteenth century.

This is a reasonable guess, but with regard to the Roman Empire we are on sure ground. The first rhinoceros was shown by Pompey in 55 B.C. The chronicles also mention the exhibition of the animal by Augustus in 29 B.C. and A.D. 5, and by Domitian—two specimens of the two-horned rhinoceros—in A.D. 81. Commodus (A.D. 180) is said to have slain several. Caracalla (A.D. 211) had one killed; also Elagabalus (A.D. 219) showed the two-horned variety, and there was one recorded at the games of Philip the Arabian in A.D. 248.

A dozen, we may say, have crept into history. But they are as nothing to those that died unsung. Pausanias, for instance, saw "those Ethiopian bulls, which people call rhinoceros." Pliny (A.D. 70), describing Pompey's exhibit, mentions "the rhinoceros which is often seen," and Ælian, in his "Natural History," refuses to describe the animal because its shape and characteristics are so well known to so very many of the Greeks and Romans.—Yours, &c.,

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