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Albrecht Dürer Nuremberg, 1471–1528

RHINOCEROS

1515 woodcut

21.4 x 29.8 (83/8 x 113/4)

references: Meder 1932, 254-255, no. 273; Lutz 1958. 55-56; Gombrich 1960, 70-72, fig. 59; Lach 1970-1977, 1:158-172; Nuremberg 1971, 310, no. 581; Strauss 1980, 508-510, no. 176; Clarke 1986, 16-23, pl. 1: Pass 1989, 59-64

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1910. New York

The rhinoceron (Rhinoceros unicornis L.), as Dürer calls the animal he drew in 1515, is native only to Africa and Asia and had not been seen in Europe since antiquity. Valentin Ferdinand, a German printer living in Portugal, informed the humanist Konrad Peutinger (Lutz 1958, 55-56) as well as the merchants in Nuremberg, of the arrival of a rhinoceros in Lisbon on 20 May 1515; with his letter he sent a drawing and a description of the animal. This Dürer copied in a drawing now in the British Museum, London, and reused for his woodcut, which bears the following inscription: "After Christ's Birth, in the year 1513 [in fact 1515], on May 1 [in fact May 20], this animal was brought alive to the great and mighty King Emmanuel at Lisbon in Portugal from India. They call it Rhinoceros. It is here shown in full stature. Its color is that of a freckled tortoise, and it is covered by a thick shell. It is the same size as an elephant but has shorter legs and is well capable of defending itself. On the tip of its nose is a sharp, strong horn which it hones whenever it

finds a stone. This animal is the deadly enemy of the elephant. The elephant is afraid of it because upon meeting it charges with its head between the elephant's legs, tears apart his belly and chokes him while he cannot defend himself. It is also so well armored that the elephant cannot harm it. They say that the Rhinoceros is fast, cunning, and daring."

The ganda, as the single-horned Indian rhinoceros was known, was given by the sultan of Gujarat, Muzafar 11, to Afonso de Albuquerque, governor of Portuguese India, as a gift for the king. From Goa, the governor sent it to Lisbon with the fleet that left Cochin in early January 1515 and arrived in Portugal in May of that year. Manuel dispatched the rhinoceros to Pope Leo x in December 1515; on its way to Italy it was seen near Marseilles by Francis 1 of France. But the ship that took the beast to Italy sank off Porto Venere, and the rhinoceros drowned, although its body seems to have been recovered, stuffed, and finally sent to Rome.

Dürer never saw the animal; he designed his woodcut solely on the basis of the drawing he had seen. His print was so popular that it ran to eight editions, and many copies were produced. Dürer's woodcut was so influential that it perpetuated a number of misconceptions about the rhinoceros—for example, the presence of a dorsal spinal horn, and the armored plating that forms the animal's skin. The latter imaginary feature persisted in representations of the rhinoceros for more than 250 years, sometimes even after the artist producing the image had seen a real specimen. Dürer himself included an image of the animal in the coat of arms of Asia in one of the woodcuts for the Triumphal Arch of Maximilian (1515). That same

year, Hans Burgkmair designed a woodcut of the rhinoceros, which is preserved today in only one impression, while an anonymous artist from Altdorfer's circle (known by his initials, A.A.) drew the animal on fol. 102r of the Book of Hours of Emperor Maximilian. These artists, like Dürer, had never seen the ganda but used secondary sources for their renderings.

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Albrecht Dürer Nuremberg, 1471–1528

HEAD OF A WALRUS

1521 pen and ink, with washes on paper 21.1 x 31.2 (8½ x 12½)

references: Veth and Muller 1918, 1:37, no. xxxvII; Tietze and Tietze-Conrat, 1928–1938, II.1:32–33, no. 850; Kiparsky 1952, 29, 46–47; Goris and Marlier 1971, 186, no. 73; Strauss 1974, 4:2048–2049, 4:2180–2181, nos. 1521/27, 1522/1; Rowlands 1988, 102–103, no. 74

The Trustees of the British Museum, London

This splendid drawing shows a walrus sketched by Dürer during his visit to the Netherlands. The artist dated it 1521, placed a description of the animal in the left corner, and signed the sheet with his monogram. The walrus, we are told, was caught in the North Sea, was twelve Brabant ells long, and had four feet ("Das dosig thÿr van dem jch do das hawbt/contrefett hab ist gefangen worden/jn die niderlendischen see und/was x11 ellen lang/brawendisch mit für fussen"). In Dürer's time walruses were found in Europe mainly on the north coast of Norway; as late as the nineteenth century they could be encountered occasionally in the seas around Scotland and near the Shetland Islands. Even in the twentieth century stray walruses have been sighted from time to time near the Netherlandish coast (for the walrus, see Kiparsky 1952). The chronicles of England printed by Caxton in 1480 note that in 1456 a walrus (mors marine, as he calls it) was found in the Thames near London: "This yere were taken tiii grete Fisshes bitwene Eerethe and London, that one was called mors marine, the second a swerd fisshe, and the othir tweyne were wales." Already in Dürer's time walruses were hunted for their ivory tusks and their skins. It is difficult to determine whether Dürer saw a living animal, such as the one that was brought to Holland in 1612, or a dead specimen, perhaps stuffed or possibly preserved in salt, like the walrus head sent by the Norwegian archbishop Erik Walkendorf to Pope Leo x in 1520 (Kiparsky 1952, 29, 46–47). In any case, Dürer found this animal so extraordinary that he used his illustration of it a few

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