

**“The Real Unicorn”: An Investigation into the Conceptions and Cultural  
Significance of Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros in the British Empire, 1600-1800.**

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## Introduction

February 26<sup>th</sup> 1789. January's frost had thawed by the time Captain Philip Dundas prepared his crew for their journey to Diamond Harbor. Winds from the southwest persisted, but Dundas was a seasoned captain of the East India Company's fleet; he assuredly prepared the Melville Castle for her usual route to the Bay of Bengal. The ship was charged with the routine transport of Indian goods to England. Soft cottons, raw silks, and black teas were among the East Indiaman's most popular passengers. Dundas would see to it that the bustling stalls of London's marketplace would soon be supplied with the stocks of South Asia. That morning, the Melville Castle was ready. Dundas was equipped for his freight. What he could not have anticipated, however, was entirely different kind of cargo. A commuter.

In the spring of 1790, while en route to Britain, Captain Dundas was instructed to collect a passenger in Lucknow; he too was bound for London. The mysterious male was a handsome young specimen. He was described as a docile fellow. He eagerly obeyed his Captain's orders and graciously welcomed visitors to his chambers. He was, apparently, a voracious vegetarian who ate nearly twenty-eight pounds of ship biscuit and an even greater quantity of greens.<sup>1</sup> Untrained in the conventions of civilized British etiquette, the male enjoyed his meals without restraint; he inhaled his food without ever using a single utensil. With such brazen eating habits, it was no wonder that his drinking habits followed suit. The male's meals were accompanied by troughs of water, which he reportedly drank in large gulps until the water was entirely exhausted. The passenger's nearly insatiable thirst for water was only matched by his affinity for sweet wines,

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<sup>1</sup> Bingley, William. *Animal Biography, or, Popular Zoology. 4th ed., with an addition of more than one hundred and forty species.* London: Printed for F.C. and J. Rivington, 1813, 488.

which enjoyed in doses of three to four bottles in a single sitting. Perhaps the Lucknow local would acclimate to London living after all.

Fortunately for the stocks of the *Melville Castle*, the ship landed in London on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1790. Eager to unload his guest, Captain Dundas ushered the male into the arms of his new accommodator: Thomas Clark. While others shied from the responsibility of sustaining such an insatiable boarder, the metal-ware dealer turned menagerist excitedly welcomed the new arrival. He had, after all, come into new real estate in the Strand that was sure to accommodate him. In the end, the halls of the Strand became a home-away-from-home for the male. He welcomed visitors from all over the continent to his abode abroad, and even earned a nickname in the streets of the Strand: The Real Unicorn, The Rhinoceros.<sup>2</sup>

Three Greater One Horned Rhinoceros were recorded in Britain between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first rhinoceros arrived aboard the East Indiaman *Herbert* in 1684. The second arrived in the care of Dutch sea captain, Douwemout Van der Meer in 1758. And the third rhinoceros arrived aboard the East Indiaman *Melville Castle* in 1790. Prior to their arrival in England, each rhinoceros lived in the Indian subcontinent. Their arrivals in Europe were facilitated by the imperial trade networks that defined the geopolitical boundaries of the early modern world. The British and Dutch East India Companies were responsible for the transports of the rhinoceroses; the British were responsible for the first and third rhinoceros, while the Dutch were responsible for the second.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See *Figure 1* for "Advertisements and Notices." World, 1 July 1790. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2001522031/BBCN?u=prov98893&sid=bookmark-BBCN](http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2001522031/BBCN?u=prov98893&sid=bookmark-BBCN). Accessed 8 Oct. 2023.

<sup>3</sup> It is worthy of note that by the time the Dutch rhinoceros arrived in England in 1758, it was no longer property of the Dutch East India Company, rather the property of a single enterprising Dutchman, Douwemout Van der Meer.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European nations expanded their empires, and accessed new natural resources, by establishing colonies abroad. European imperial projects were concerned with the development of international trade routes and the expansion of commodity economies. The imperial projects were also concerned, however, with the perpetuation of European imperialist philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Colonial officials, merchants and naturalists sought to encounter, and exert control over, environments abroad. While this control partly manifested in the commodification of nature, it was equally reflected in the production of knowledge on nature.<sup>5</sup> Natural knowledge was a central feature of European Enlightenment. During this period, ‘Enlightened’ intellectuals asserted right and wrong methods for producing knowledge. Enlightened philosophers favored the production of objective, rational and secular knowledge, while delegitimizing knowledge produced through religion, narrative and emotion. European imperial projects became increasingly suffused with the Enlightened philosophy of accessing, studying and exerting control over nature. The British Empire’s acquisition, and subsequent interpretation, of the Greater One Horned Rhinoceros exemplifies the intersection between empire, Enlightenment and natural knowledge production.

The following thesis offers a history of the Greater One Horned Rhinoceros in Britain between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The argument of my thesis is two-fold. Firstly, I argue that Britons were exposed to, and subsequently conceptualized, rhinoceros. Different sectors of British society conceptualized rhinoceros differently, and their conceptions developed

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<sup>4</sup> European imperial philosophy was concerned with the perpetuation of economic and social justifications for European colonial expansion. Imperial philosophy emphasized the importance of accessing new natural resources, producing new trade markets, civilizing non-European societies, and asserting European cultural, moral and racial supremacy.

<sup>5</sup> This is discussed by Paula Findlen in *Empires of Knowledge Scientific Networks in the Early Modern World*, which provides for a comprehensive account of imperial knowledge production, circulation and transformation in early modern Europe.

over time. In general, Britons conceptualized rhinoceros as curiosities of nature, symbols of South Asian culture, and testaments to British imperial dominion in India. The second part of my argument contends that contemporary conceptions of rhinoceros reflected early modern Britain's cultural conditions. My project is particularly interested in how conceptions of the rhinoceros reflected Britain's imperial project in India, and the Enlightenment. Physical possession of the rhinoceros in Britain testified to British imperial control in India. While artistic and literary interpretations of the rhinoceros perpetuated imaginings of Indian animal relations, and contributed to Enlightened constructions of European civility and Indian incivility. The arguments of my thesis are largely delivered through description and narration. The history of the rhinoceros in Britain is documented through natural histories and news stories; it is a history characterized by narrative. The stories that Britons decided to tell about the rhinoceros revealed their thinking on the animal. In a similar way, the stories I retell in this thesis reveal my interpretations of Britons' conceptions of rhinoceros, and reflect my thinking on their greater cultural significance.

I selected the parameters of my research for a number of reasons. Firstly, I was inspired by my encounter with British natural history literature during my early college career. My sophomore year, I worked with Edward Topsell's *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts* and was immediately captured by the bestiary's elaborate descriptions and illustrations of animals. While reading, I imagined that Topsell's *Historie* introduced Europeans to the distant natural world, in a way that was similar to the animal encyclopedias of my childhood. Topsell's work inspired the question at the heart of my thesis project: how did exotic animals take shape in the early modern imagination? Given the provenance of Topsell's work, Britain was a logical starting point for my research. I ultimately selected Britain as my project's geographic focus because of the country's colonization of India: where the story of the rhinoceros in early modern Europe starts. In the seventeenth

century, Britain's South Asian trade network introduced the rhinoceros to Europe. I selected the Greater One Horned subspecies of the rhinoceros because it the first to be introduced in Europe. Thus, early modern conceptions of the rhinoceros were generally based off of the Indian subspecies. I selected the chronological focus of my project because it was the only period where rhinoceros physically appeared in early modern England. Additionally, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries marked an incredibly interesting juncture in British history where British colonization in India, and Enlightened natural knowledge production, simultaneously, and symbiotically, expanded.

This thesis contends that the history of rhinoceros in early modern Britain represents a point of entry into some of the largest, and most complicated, topics of this period and geography. The history is a small set of stories, recounting the lives of three rhinoceros, which offer a window into the topics of early modern imperialism, Enlightenment and natural knowledge production. The history of the rhinoceros uniquely contributes to a broader history of early modern Britain. Unlike other animals procured through Britain's Indian imperial networks, the rhinoceros was not defined by its capacity for production and profit; the British Empire did not conceptualize the rhinoceros in economic terms. Instead, Britons conceptualized the rhinoceros through imagination, story-telling, and rumor. The analysis of British imaginings of the rhinoceros offers a glimpse into early modern epistemologies and the cultural conditions from which those epistemologies were formed. Britons' conceptions of the rhinoceros reveal their understandings of British occupation in India, Indian animal relations, and natural knowledge production in Britain.

### Historiography



My history of the rhinoceros in early modern Britain draws upon, and intervenes into, three main historiographical literatures. The first concerns early modern Britain and the expanding British Empire in South Asia. The second engages with the Enlightenment and the flourishing natural knowledge tradition of early modern Europe. The third attends to animal histories and the ways in which non-human actors meaningfully contributed to history. In conjunction, these literatures provide a critical framework for studying the conceptions and cultural significance of rhinoceros in early modern Britain.

The production of this thesis is largely indebted to the scholarship of zoology historian, Leendert Cornelis (Kees) Rookmaaker. In two brief and descriptive – but regrettably unfootnoted – articles, Rookmaaker pointed the way to much of the literature relevant to the history of the rhinoceros in Britain. His works, ‘The First Rhino in Britain’ and ‘The Lives of Three Rhinoceros Exhibited in London’ succinctly summarized the histories of rhinoceros in Britain, and were the roadmaps from which I navigated my research. My thesis also relied upon Rookmaaker’s chronology of rhinoceros history in Britain. The primary source material of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tended to report contradictory chronologies; different authors reported different dates of the rhinoceroses’ travel to, and within, Britain. In his online database – the Rhino Resource Center – Rookmaaker compiled and analyzed a breadth of primary source material, relating to rhinoceroses in Britain, and established a thorough, well-informed timeline of the rhinoceroses’ presence in Britain.

The first chapter of this project is concerned with the enterprise responsible for the rhinoceros’ arrival in Britain: the British East India Company (EIC). Many historians of the British EIC have approached the EIC from an economic and geopolitical perspective. These historians emphasized the ways in which the British EIC developed commerce in Britain and expanded

territories in South Asia. Historian Edmond Smith focuses on the impact of London's commercial community on the activities of the British EIC.<sup>6</sup> Smith contends that the British EIC was a vehicle for the interests of British merchants and commercial actors who sought to establish their own trade connections and portfolios. Smith's bureaucratic interpretation of the British EIC provided context for my project's understanding of the Company's rationale for global territorial expansion. My project departs from Smith's work, however, by focusing on the Company's imperial and intellectual motivations for settling in South Asia. The work of Kirti N. Chaudhuri provided my thesis with thorough context on the British EIC's activities in South Asia. His monograph, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760*, paid particularly close attention to the Company's trade patterns, politics, and products. Like Chaudhuri, my project is interested in the politics implicated in the Company's trade, but expands upon his account of diplomatic protocol by analyzing the relationships between India's ruling class and Company officials. My first chapter seeks to discern the knowledge exchanges implicated in those relationships.

The work of historian Anna Winterbottom takes a different approach to the history of the British EIC, and examines the Company as a knowledge-producing institution. Winterbottom argues that by introducing new plant and animal species, the British EIC fostered the production of new natural knowledge in London. For Winterbottom, natural knowledge is produced through physical exposure to nature. Hence, by physically introducing new species to England, the British EIC produced new natural knowledge. While I concur that the Company's extraction and transport of natural products facilitated knowledge-producing encounters in Britain, my project seeks to

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<sup>6</sup> See Edmond Smith's, 'The Global Interests of London's Commercial Community, 1599-1625: Investment in the East India Company'.

expand upon Winterbottom's argument. I assert that the appropriation of indigenous knowledge systems – in conjunction with physical exposure – led to the production of new natural knowledge in Britain. Through cultural exchange with the subjects of their settlements, the Company produced new, hybrid, understandings of the natural world.

To understand colonial knowledge exchange between Britain and India, I consulted the work of historian, Sujit Sivasundaram. Sivasundaram provided my project with an invaluable framework for understanding how Britons appropriated Indian knowledge systems to produce knowledge on animals. In his work, Sivasundaram explores how British colonizers appropriated Indian uses of elephants as modes of warfare, trade, and hunting. Sivasundaram emphasizes the importance of South Asian indigenous knowledge systems in the production of natural knowledge in early modern Europe. He argues that conceptions of animals in this period reflected a hybrid of indigenous and colonial epistemologies. My thesis completely concurs with Sivasundaram's proposition and hopes to add a new perspective to his argument by investigating colonial knowledge exchange in the context of the rhinoceros. Unlike the elephant, the rhinoceros was not conceptualized by the British Empire in terms of industrial and militaristic capacity. Britons therefore, relied upon Indians' interpretations of the rhinoceros and replicated Indian forms of art, consumption, decoration, and entertainment.

The latter half of my first chapter investigates how material representations of the rhinoceros contributed to their conception in early modern Britain. To provide context for this investigation, my project turned to British representations of India. The scholarship of Jyotsna Singh provided invaluable insights to British conceptions of Indian culture. Singh analyzes British art and literature to determine how British colonial narratives depicted India. She concludes that these narratives characterized India as an exotic and mysterious land where a primitive society,

steeped in mysticism, was governed by despotic rulers.<sup>7</sup> My project understands British conceptions of India and rhinoceros as being related; rhinoceros are an Indian species and were understood as a symbol of their country of origin. I used Singh's analysis of British conceptions of India as a reference point for my own analysis of British conceptions of rhinoceros.

To locate material representations of the rhinoceros in early modern Britain, I looked to the scholarship of Mildred Archer and R.W. Lightbown. Archer and Lightbown's *India Observed* pointed the way to the British artists and naturalists whose work I analyzed in the second half of chapter one. My project equally relied upon the work of Benjamin Schmidt to identify representations of the rhinoceros in the decorative arts. Schmidt argues that objects depicting the 'exotic' precipitated knowledge production on the non-European world. Decorative depictions of the rhinoceros are important for understanding their conception in Britain. My project deviates from Schmidt, however, by focusing on how decorative arts reflected broader British cultural conditions, rather than specific conceptions of animals. Schmidt analyzed the particularities of rhinoceros iconography, whereas, I am interested in why rhinoceros iconography appeared on decorative objects in the first place. My project argues that the rhinoceros motif in material arts reflected Britons' subscription to imperialist, orientalist and Enlightened philosophies.

The second chapter of this thesis is concerned with Britons' interpretations of the rhinoceros, and engages with historians of natural history. Paula Findlen provided me with an invaluable guide to the production of natural history in early modern Europe. Her work pointed me to the natural histories I analyzed in this thesis, and provided critical context to the natural

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<sup>7</sup> See Jyotsna Singh's *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism* for a more thorough analysis of British representations of India.

tradition history in early modern Europe.<sup>8</sup> Findlen's work enabled me to situate my primary sources within a broader tradition of natural history production. I concur with Findlen's emphasis on literary animal representations; these representations were formative to conceptions of animals in the early modern period. My project, however, expands upon her scholarship by analyzing the particular histories produced on the rhinoceros and examining how those histories reflected broader cultural conditions.

The work of historian Palmira da Costa was equally important to my understanding of conceptualizations of animals in the early modern imagination. Da Costa offered my project perspective on the important role that natural objects and collections played in the conceptions of animals. Da Costa argues that the culture of curiosity – fostered by the acquisition and collection of natural objects – promoted inquiry, education, and entertainment for early modern audiences. My project seeks to extend Da Costa's argument to the case of rhinoceros in Britain. I argue that encounters with the rhinoceros – whether artistic or material – simultaneously educated and entertained Britons, leading to rhinoceroses' varied conceptions and uses in early modern Britain.

The third chapter of my project concerns the physical encounters between Britons and rhinoceros in early modern Britain. My research focused largely upon the history of animals in early modern Europe, encountering two settings for animal encounters: menageries and sports. Zoologist Caroline Grigson was foundational to my understanding of menageries in early modern Britain. In her work, Grigson locates where rhinoceroses were in England and traced their travel across the country. She indicates how rhinoceros were received by early modern audiences, and

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<sup>8</sup> See Paula Findlen's, 'Natural History' chapter in *The Cambridge History of Science*, edited by Katherine Park and Lorraine Daston for a comprehensive review of early modern natural history.

argues that menageries functioned as both education and entertainment for Britons.<sup>9</sup> I concur with Grigson's argument; menageries simultaneously educated and entertained British audiences. My project deviates from *Menagerie*, however, by seeking to amplify Grigson's analysis of popular engagements with the rhinoceros. There is a distinct lack of popular perspective in the historical record on the rhinoceros in Britain. This thesis attempts to mediate this absence by closely examining itinerant menageries: the space where ordinary, working class, Britons encountered rhinoceroses.

Animal historians who study popular engagements with animals mainly focus on animal sports. Allan Guttman highlights the popularity of "blood sports" among early modern Britons, arguing that animal sports were enjoyed across England's social classes, but largely defined the lower classes' relationship with animals. Guttman's work provided important context to the kinds of animal encounters popular classes had before the advent of the itinerant menagerie. This project employs Guttman's work as a kind of starting point for understanding popular engagements with animals in early modern Britain. I compare the popular classes' engagement with animal sports to their later engagement with menageries. Guttman's work provided my project with critical context to understanding animal conceptions among Britain's lower classes, and informed my chapter's conclusion: menageries facilitated animal encounters that unprecedentedly included working classes, women, and children in England.

### Primary Sources

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<sup>9</sup> See Caroline Grigson's *Menagerie: The History of Exotic Animals in England, 1100-1837* for a comprehensive history of animal displays and menagerie culture in Britain.

To understand conceptions of rhinoceros in early modern Britain, my project consulted a variety of primary source types, including advertisements, newspaper articles, natural history literature, and children's literature. My research relied upon the archives and special collections available at Brown University and mainly consulted the primary sources available at the *Albert E. Lownes Collection of Significant Books in the History of Science* in the John Hay Library.

The genre of natural history is central to this project. Natural history literature indicated what conceptions of the rhinoceros were circulated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Certain natural histories produced religious accounts of the rhinoceros, relating the animal to scripture. Some histories produced utilitarian accounts of the rhinoceros, conceptualizing the animal through its horn. While other natural histories entertained audiences, crafting elaborate stories about the rhinoceros' behaviors and relations in the wild. Natural history literature is one of the greatest resources for understanding how early modern Britons conceptualized rhinoceros. It is limited, however, by its privileged nature. Natural history was reserved for Britons who possessed the ability to read and the financial means to purchase a book for leisure. Thus, natural histories are useful sources for understanding elite conceptions of the rhinoceros, but are unable to discern popular conceptions.

Advertisements and newspaper articles played an equally important role in this project. Published advertisements not only indicated where and when rhinoceros were showcased in Britain, but demonstrated Britons' conceptions of the species. In a popular advertisement used to promote the Exeter Change Menagerie, for example, periodicals described the rhinoceros as "The Real Unicorn," revealing the religious and mythological conceptions of the species. News articles similarly provided me with a roadmap to the presence of rhinoceros in early modern Britain; they recounted where rhinoceros were seen while travelling. Some news articles speculated the histories

of the rhinoceros, others described audiences' impressions of the animal, while a few perpetuated specific mythologies about the rhinoceros. The entirety of articles and advertisements employed by this project were accessed through the online Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection.

In previous histories on the rhinoceros in early modern Britain, historians have used primary sources independently. Historians have either used natural history literature, or newspaper articles, to provide context for rhinoceroses' locale in Britain, or suggest Britons' perceptions of rhinoceroses. Historians have not, however, used these sources in conjunction with one another. Historians have not combined primary sources to discern precise conceptions of the rhinoceros, nor the contemporary cultural conditions which informed those imaginations. My thesis closely analyzes these natural history literature and newspaper articles to determine how early modern Britons understood rhinoceros and how their understandings reflected investments in Enlightened and imperial philosophies. Furthermore, I have uniquely employed my primary sources – specifically news material – to identify popular encounters with the rhinoceros. My primary source analysis not only speculates what Britain's lower classes thought of the rhinoceros, but seeks to tell a larger story of increasing access to the natural knowledge production in early modern Britain.

### Project Outline

The first chapter of this thesis focuses on the acquisition and transport of the rhinoceros. It contextualizes the acquisition of the rhinoceros within the reality of British colonial occupation in India. The chapter first examines how diplomatic relations between the Indian Nabob class and British East India Company precipitated the gifting of the rhinoceros. The chapter argues that the rhinoceros represented a site of cultural transference from India to Britain; British understandings



of the rhinoceros replicated Indian understandings. The chapter proceeds to investigate how artistic representations of rhinoceroses communicated British dominion in India. British art rendered the rhinoceros through distinctly British artistic techniques, which functioned to familiarize the rhinoceros to British audiences, and integrate them into Britons' imagining of the British Empire. By analyzing the acquisition of the rhinoceros, in conjunction with artistic representations, the chapter concludes that rhinoceroses implicated Britons' appropriation of Indian animals and culture.

The second chapter of the thesis transitions to intellectual interpretations of the rhinoceros. The chapter closely analyzes curiosity cabinets and natural history literature to understand how Britons conceptualized the rhinoceros. The chapter situates the knowledge produced on the rhinoceros within the broader project of Enlightenment. Within the Enlightenment, individual naturalists and larger intellectual institutions laid claim to natural knowledge production. The chapter argues that Britons' conceptions of rhinoceroses – which were implicated in curiosity cabinets and natural history – reflected early modern Britons' imperialist and Enlightened philosophies. Britons understood the rhinoceros as a natural resource to be extracted from the British Empire in India, and conceptualized British uses of the rhinoceros as being more sophisticated than those of Indians.

The third chapter of the thesis focuses on the physical displays and popular engagements with the rhinoceros in early modern Britain. The chapter highlights the role of the menagerie in fostering unprecedentedly inclusive encounters between Britons and the rhinoceros. The chapter contextualizes the menagerie as a new setting for early modern animal entertainment in England. By widening their appeal to Britain's working class, women and children, animal shows and menageries broadened Britons' access to the rhinoceros. Demographics that were previously

excluded from animal encounters – like early modern blood sports – were now actively incorporated in them. The chapter concludes that animal shows and menageries allowed Britain’s working class, women and children to witness the rhinoceros, inviting them to produce knowledge on the rhinoceros and participate in England’s natural knowledge economy.<sup>10</sup>

It is the hope of my project to immerse my reader in the history of Greater One Horned Rhinoceros in Britain between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I seek to guide my reader through a unique historical moment in which humans engaged with nature in new and fascinating ways. My project aims to illustrate how the rhinoceros took shape in the western imagination and suggest how those imaginings inform our current understandings of the rhinoceros. I endeavor to enrich existing histories on the rhinoceros, and demonstrate the utility of animal histories. I believe they are a lens through which historical societies can be understood.

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<sup>10</sup> In this thesis, “natural knowledge economy” refers to the systems and spaces where natural knowledge was produced, circulated, and transformed in Britain.

## Chapter One: Introducing the Rhinoceros

The Hunter was about to enjoy the finest hunt of his career. Earlier that day, his assistant rushed to his chambers and declared, "I have seen the rhinoceros!". Two of these animals had been observed in the middle of the neighboring plain, standing quietly beside each other. The Hunter knew that such a hunt would be exceedingly dangerous. To attack such a formidable enemy, he would need to use great precaution. That afternoon, a local guide, three hunters, and a pack of English foxhounds set out for the plains. The Hunter proposed a plan, "We should advance upon them gradually," he advised "contracting a circle so as to unite the very moment we commence our attack." The guide disagreed; the Hunter's plan was apparently impracticable for these kinds of creatures. The Hunter turned towards his companions. "Very well," he conceded, "I give myself up to the discretion of the savages." It was settled. The company approached the rhinoceros, forming a circuit to gain the leese of the plains. The Hunter kept his hounds tightly leashed as they crossed the river running before him and his prey. Just a quarter of a league away now. The Hunter observed the beasts from the cover of the brush. He noticed that one of the creatures was much larger than the other. That must be the male, he thought. The creatures stood motionless side by side, only occasionally raising their noses to the wind. The guide informed them that it was customary for rhinoceros to place themselves in the direction of the wind in order to detect their enemies. Quite clever, the Hunter thought. They would prove to be worthy adversaries. Holding a glass to his eye, the Hunter inspected the rhinoceros. At that exact moment, the two hideous monsters turned their frightful heads, stomped their crushing feet, and swiftly charged the company. They received the Hunter's fire. The male was wounded and released a horrid cry. Enraged, he rushed for their group and was closely followed by the furious female. The Hunter's heart was agitated by the most violent emotion, and his fear was carried to the utmost extent. A

sweat diffused over his entire body and his heart beat with such force that it prevented him from breathing. Yet, as the beasts neared, the Hunter's fear gave way to joy. The moment he had waited for had arrived; he was prepared to receive the rhinoceros. He ordered his hounds loose and encouraged their attack. The rhinoceros pivoted their charge, dodging the canines, and proceeded towards another member of their group. The second hunter fired. The rhinoceros pivoted again and charged the third member of their company. The third hunter fired. The beasts kicked their feet in a most terrible manner and ploughed their horns in the ground, showering the men with pebbles and stones. By then, the hunters had surrounded them. Just as the male prepared his final attack, the female cried and fled for escape; she had surrendered. Alone, the male was reduced to despair. Desperate for shelter, he retreated towards the bushes. The Hunter signaled for his company to advance thither. They were thirty paces from the beast. Ready. They took possession of their posts, presented their pieces, and discharged their shots. The rhinoceros fell instantly and never rose again.<sup>11</sup>

This following story, "Hunting the Rhinoceros" was published anonymously in the 1799 edition of *The Sporting Magazine*<sup>12</sup>. The story was inspired by the etching of artist, Samuel Howitt: *Rhinoceros Hunting*. The etching represented a larger corpus of artwork commissioned and popularized by British colonial officials in India. Officials of the British East India Company (EIC), who settled in India, commissioned artwork that rendered the vibrant culture and lifestyle of the Indian people<sup>13</sup>. Officials were interested in procuring pieces for their personal collections,

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<sup>11</sup> "Hunting the Rhinoceros." *The Sporting Magazine or Monthly Calendar of the Transactions of the Turf, the Chase, and Every Other Diversion Interesting to the Man of Pleasure, Enterprise and Spirit*, 1799.

<sup>12</sup> The full title of the periodical was, *The Sporting Magazine or Monthly Calendar of the Transactions of the Turf, the Chase, and Every Other Diversion Interesting to the Man of Pleasure, Enterprise and Spirit*.

<sup>13</sup> Bhowmik, Ritwij. "Company Painting as Hybrid Style: On Europeanism in Indian Art." In *Okzidentalismen: Projektionen Und Reflexionen Des Westens in Kunst, Ästhetik Und Kultur*, edited by Birgit Mersmann and Hauke Ohls, 1st ed., 211–38. transcript Verlag, 2023. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv371chtx.11>.

or as gifts to their families in England in order to display the Indian people and animals living among them. The rhinoceros was one of those animals, and became a popular subject of Company style artwork. Company artwork characterized the rhinoceros as a feature of the Indian landscape, informing Britons' conception of the rhinoceros as a symbol of South Asia. Company artists either situated rhinoceros within a broader Indian landscape, or illustrated them as the quarry of British hunts. Artists used British artistic conventions to convey the rhinoceros in terms that were legible for their British audiences. By familiarizing the rhinoceros to Britons, Company art reflected contemporary colonial conceptions of India; Britons saw India as an extension of Britain.

The British EIC was central to Britons' imperial imaginings of India. The commissioned artwork of India, which perpetuated British imperial narratives, and was responsible for the arrival of the first rhinoceros in England in 1684. The British EIC, therefore, is the logical starting point for this thesis. The following chapter investigates how the Company acquired the rhinoceros, examines the cultural transfer implicated in the rhinoceros' acquisition, and explores how Company-affiliated art informed Britons' conceptions of the rhinoceros and India.

When I began my research for this chapter, I had hoped to learn about the acquisition of the rhinoceros from the official database of the East India Company. Much to my disappointment, official documentation of the East India Company offered no record of the rhinoceros. It is surprising – if not all together impossible – that such a large animal elicited so little attention in the Company's record. The sheer amount of food necessary to sustain the rhinoceros during transport would be worthy of note...let alone the 4,000 pound ungulate who consumed it. Furthermore, documentation of the first rhinoceros in England, who arrived the East Indiaman *Herbert* in 1684, is negligible. There is no record indicating where the rhinoceros came from in India, nor where he went once arrived in England. The following chapter, therefore, focuses upon

the Company's second transport of the rhinoceros in 1790, and relies upon the accounts of revisionist historians to understand the context of its acquisition.

### The Rhinoceros as a Gift

In 1790, the British EIC acquired the rhinoceros as a diplomatic gift. Since the Middle Ages, European rulers and delegations exchanged animals as diplomatic gifts. Gifted animals were often functional – like horses, dogs, and falcons – and were used for hunting or warfare. Other animals were selected for their rarity and denotation of the exotic. The relative rarity and strength of the species was central to its perception in the eyes of royal recipients; the greater the rarity and strength of the animal, the greater its value.<sup>14</sup> In the wake of a new form of European exoticism – precipitated by the construction of overseas empires – the gifting of rare animal species became especially salient in the early modern period.<sup>15</sup> In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Europeans engaged with a range of materials that emphasized the abundant variety of the non-European world. Early modern audiences consumed exotic things and imagined themselves as partakers in the pleasures of an exotic overseas world.<sup>16</sup>

Rulers of early modern Europe similarly desired to partake in these pleasures by amassing and displaying exotic natural objects. To appeal to these desires, other rulers and diplomats gifted exotic *naturalia*, which included live animals. Some gifted animals represented the strength of a nation or the dependence of one nation upon another, while others fostered mutual obligation and

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<sup>14</sup> Radić, Radivoj, and Marko Šuica. “Animals as Gifts: From the Treasury of Medieval Diplomacy.” *Etnoantropološki problemi* 11, no. 4 (2016): 1073–1100.

<sup>15</sup> Schmidt, Benjamin. *Inventing Exoticism : Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World*. 1st ed. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

cultivated ties of fidelity between nations.<sup>17</sup> In the sixteenth century, King Manuel I of Portugal adopted the use of animal gift giving. In 1513, having established his territory in India, King Manuel sought to confirm his seaborne empire with the newly elected Holy See: Pope Leo X.<sup>18</sup> Appealing to the Pope's interest in menagerie, King Manuel sent an extensive collection of rare beasts, including a young male Indian elephant. On March 12<sup>th</sup>, the Portuguese mission entered the Eternal City and presented the pachyderm to the Pope before the Borgia Tower. Eight days later, the Pope formally received the Portuguese ambassadors and expressed his pleasure with Portuguese imperial endeavors, confirming their importance to Christendom.<sup>19</sup> King Manuel's elephant gift earned the recognition and support of the papal court; it was an undeniable success as a diplomatic link between Portugal and Italy.

Indian rulers similarly used animal gifts to achieve their diplomatic goals. In the fifteenth century, Bengali Sultan, Saifuddin Hamzah Shah sought to confirm his courtly position in the wake of his father's death. The Sultan desired recognition from, and diplomatic relations with, the Ming Dynasty Emperor, Zhu Di Yong-le. In 1414, as a part of his appeal to the Chinese court, Sultan Saifuddin Hamzah Shah presented Emperor Zhu Di Yong-le with a giraffe. The Chinese Emperor received the giraffe with great pleasure; his court was mesmerized by the ungulate's unusually long neck, and commissioned several royal portraits by the reputed Chinese painter, Shen Du. In

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<sup>17</sup> Carrió-Invernizzi, Diana. "Gift and Diplomacy in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Italy." *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 4 (2008): 881–99. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20175207>.

<sup>18</sup> Bedini, Silvio A. "The Papal Pachyderms." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 125, no. 2 (1981): 75–90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/986637>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

the time thereafter, Emperor Yong-le approved China's diplomatic missions with India and encouraged the countries' trade relations.<sup>20</sup>

Much like elephants and giraffes, rhinoceros were a logical choice for diplomatic gift-giving in Europe. Rhinoceros were equally as strong and just as rare to European recipients. In fact, in 1515, the King of Portugal, Manuel I attempted to repeat the success of his elephant gift and earn even greater favor from the Holy See through the gift of a rhinoceros. Unfortunately – for all parties involved – a storm off the coast of Genoa sank the ship carrying the rhinoceros, and prevented the pachyderm from fulfilling its diplomatic function in Italy. Although the rhinoceros' ability to fortify diplomatic relations between Portugal and Italy was unrealized, its diplomatic function in the context of India and Britain was.

In the seventeenth century, the British EIC began the dramatic expansion of the British Empire in South Asia.<sup>21</sup> In the first century of their Indian occupation, the Company approached territory and trade route development through diplomacy with the Mughal Empire.<sup>22</sup> Mughal Emperors relinquished portions of their land to the Company through the approval of land grants or formal sale.<sup>23</sup> By the eighteenth century, however, the Company's funds were loaned to the English Crown, which infused the expansionist goals of the British Empire into Company operations in India. In 1709, the Crown instructed the British EIC to establish settlements with

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<sup>20</sup> Kapadia, Aparna. 2021. "Rhinos to Lisbon, Turkeys to Agra: Recalling the History of Animal Gifts in Pre-Colonial Times." Scroll.in. June 26, 2021. <https://scroll.in/article/998301/rhinos-to-portugal-turkeys-to-delhi-recalling-the-history-of-animal-gifts-in-pre-colonial-times>.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, Edmond. "The Global Interests of London's Commercial Community, 1599–1625: Investment in the East India Company." *The Economic history review* 71, no. 4 (2018): 1118–1146.

<sup>22</sup> While partnership between the British East India Company and the Mughal Empire allowed for the acquisition of many territories, these partnerships were not the only way the Company acquired land in India. Company territory was also acquired through alliances with other European powers. The Company acquired the island of Bombay, for example, through the dowry of Portuguese Princess Catherine of Braganza who married King Charles II of England.

<sup>23</sup> Sapra, Rahul. *The Limits of Orientalism : Seventeenth-Century Representations of India*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011.



their own procedures of government, courts of law, municipal systems, and military forces. The Crown wanted to expand British territory outside of the Mughal Empire's control and influence.<sup>24</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century, the British Empire employed increasingly militaristic tactics to expand their territory in India. On June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1757, Britain employed military tactics to establish dominance in the Indian region of Bengal during the Battle of Plassey.<sup>25</sup> The acquisition of Bengal was integral to the British Empire's consolidation of power in India. Bengal offered the Empire access to India's thriving textile industry, and control over vital trading ports, which extended the reach of Britain's imperial trade network. Britain's acquisition of Bengal was also significant to its colonial operation in India because of its injury to Anglo-Indian diplomacy. The Battle of Plassey exacerbated tensions between British EIC officials and the viceroys of the Mughal Empire: the Nawabs. To consolidate British power in Bengal, and establish broader hegemony across its Indian settlements, the Company expanded into Bengal's neighboring state, Awadh.<sup>26</sup> There, the Company appointed the British-sympathetic viceroy, Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula, who facilitated Britain's access to the Awadh military. Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula was, therefore, crucial to the Company's continued control in Bengal. Consequently, the Company needed to maintain the favor of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula, which, in 1790, culminated in the acceptance of a gift: a rhinoceros.

In 1790, Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula presented British EIC officials with a rhinoceros in Lucknow. Although Company records fail to indicate who exactly delivered the rhinoceros to the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>25</sup> See William Dalrymple's *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company* for a more thorough explanation of the British East Company's political and militaristic maneuvers in India during the eighteenth century.

<sup>26</sup> Chancey, Karen. "Rethinking the Reign of Asaf-Ud-Daula, Nawab of Awadh, 1775-1797." *Journal of Asian History* 41, no. 1 (2007): 1–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41925390>.

ship, the coincidence between the Nawab's residence in Lucknow – where rhinoceros were regularly exhibited<sup>27</sup> – and the exact arrival point of the rhinoceros at the *Melville Castle* is too significant to dismiss. Given the Company's appointment of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula, he likely gifted the rhinoceros to demonstrate his continued allegiance to the British Empire and maintain his viceroy position. The Company's acceptance of the rhinoceros, on the other hand, reflected British colonial officials' participation in Indian diplomatic practices. While the rhinoceros' subsequent use in England reflected an even further participation in Indian culture. In England, Britons imitated the Nawab's exhibition of the rhinoceros in Lucknow, and displayed the animal in menageries. The rhinoceros, therefore, functioned as both a diplomatic link, and a site of cultural transfer, between India and Britain.

The display of rhinoceros in England reflected Britons' appropriation of Indian entertainment. British settlers learned about Indian exhibitions of rhinoceroses, and appropriated the practice as their own. India's exhibition practices were foundational to Britons' conception, and use, of the rhinoceros in England. India's relation to the rhinoceros made the animal functional in a British context. Britons' replication of Indian rhinoceros exhibitions reflected an affirmation – albeit unintentional – of Indian animal relations. When placed in the context of contemporary imperialist epistemologies, Britons' validation of Indian natural knowledge systems is fascinating. Despite justifying colonial expansion in India with Anglo supremacist ideology, Britons replicated the very practices of the society they deemed uncivilized. Rhinoceros display in England, thus, represented an exception to the salience of supremacist ideology in the British Empire. The

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<sup>27</sup> Rookmaaker, L.C. 1997. "The Royal Menagerie of the King of Oudh." *Newsletter of the Society for Promotion of History of Zoos and Natural History in India* 2 (1).

rhinoceros was a site of cultural transfer, and colonial knowledge exchange, between India and Britain.

### The Rhinoceros as a Symbol

In the eighteenth century, Britons increasingly traveled to Company settlements in India. As they did, Britons at home increasingly imagined the country their contemporaries traveled to. Jyotsna Singh calls this imagining process the “colonizing imagination”.<sup>28</sup> In the colonizing imagination, Britons imagined that Britain had discovered and civilized an exotic land of alterity: India. This land was characterized by images of jeweled emperors, countrysides dominated by palm trees, and domed temples dedicated to monstrous gods.<sup>29</sup> In the beginning of the eighteenth century, the colonizing imagination was largely shaped by the colonial and mercantile officials who traveled to India for professional obligation. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, more British artists were intrigued by the images conjured by colonial officials and wanted to observe India for themselves. The rhinoceros was a recurring motif in British artwork depicting India. The animal became a lens through which Britons conceptualized the British Empire in India.

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<sup>28</sup> Singh, Jyotsna G. *Colonial Narratives/cultural Dialogues : “Discoveries” of India in the Language of Colonialism*. London: Routledge, 1996, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Archer, Mildred., and R. W. Lightbown. *India Observed : India as Viewed by British Artists, 1760-1860 : an Exhibition Organised by the Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum as Part of the Festival of India, 26 April-5 July 1982*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum in association with Trefoil Books, 1982, 8.



Figure 2 – Thomas Daniell, 'Indian Rhinoceros,' 1790

On December 1<sup>st</sup> 1784, artist Thomas Daniell obtained permission from the British EIC to travel to India as an engraver. On April 7<sup>th</sup> 1785, Daniell boarded the East Indiaman *Atlas* in London and sailed for Calcutta. In India, between 1786 and 1795, Daniell produced a series of colored sketches and paintings commissioned by the Company's Court of Directors: the *Oriental Scenery* collection. In 1790, Daniell produced the oil painting, *The Indian Rhinoceros*, which formed a part of this collection. The painting depicted a solitary rhinoceros in the foreground of an Indian environment. The rhinoceros appeared above a river bank from which two flowering trees protruded. Behind the rhinoceros, a large rock formation was illuminated and overgrown with foliage and flowers on its left side. In the background behind the rock, Daniell depicted several

large green trees forming a canopy in the painting's right corner. On the left side of the painting, Daniell illustrated three rolling hills, which are set in front of an obscured mountain range.

Daniell rendered the rhinoceros with realistic quality; the animal's body is proportional and the skin is correctly plated. Daniell's only deviation from reality was the dramatic slope of the animal's face, which elongated and emphasized the horn. The emphasis of the horn implicated Daniell's conception of the rhinoceros; he saw the rhinoceros as an animal defined by its horn. It is important to note that the artist's focus on the horn informed future utilitarian accounts of the animal in natural history literature. In those accounts, rhinoceros were conceptualized through their horn's capacity for commodification.<sup>30</sup> Apart from the animal's physicality, Daniell did little to portray the rhinoceros' personality. The rhino appeared solitary in its habitat, and remained unmoving. Despite the title of Daniell's portrait – *Indian Rhinoceros* – the Indian landscape was the main subject of his painting. Daniell's particular attention to the Indian environment, as well as the shape of his painting, reflected two conventions of contemporary British art: the oval portrait and the picturesque landscape. *Indian Rhinoceros* represented a critical historical moment where British artists replicated the conventions of British portraiture, but introduced new Indian subjects.<sup>31</sup>

In eighteenth-century Britain, oval portraits were used to create formal, intimate portraits of individuals and families. The oval shape of the painting drew viewers' attention to the subject of the portrait, which created a sense of closeness and connection between the audience and the art. The soft edges of the portrait invited the viewer into the frame, and contributed to the audience's sense of intimacy; the audience was made comfortable with the subject. Daniell's use

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<sup>30</sup> The utilitarian conceptualization of rhinoceros will be revisited in the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>31</sup> Archer, Mildred. "British Painters of the Indian Scene." *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 115, no. 5135 (1967): 863–79. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41371691>, 871.

of the oval portrait created a similar sense of intimacy between his audience and the rhinoceros. Daniell juxtaposed the intimidating and foreign figure of the rhinoceros with the intimacy and softness of the oval-style portrait. Daniell placed the rhinoceros and the Indian landscape in terms that were familiar for his British audiences. Daniell suggested that, just as the oval portrait of the British family belonged in the British household, so too did the portrait of the rhinoceros. *Indian Rhinoceros* indicated, therefore, that Britons increasingly conceptualized India as an extension of Britain.<sup>32</sup> British paintings, which traditionally depicted British landscapes, now naturally depicted Indian landscapes as well. British art increasingly conceptualized rhinoceroses as features of the British Empire, rather than distinctly Indian animals. The art's familiarization of the rhinoceros reflected the salience of imperial paternalism in contemporary British epistemologies. The Indian environment was not a separate foreign place, but an extension of the British Empire. Portraits of India were just as suitable for British portraiture as any other British landscape, and they belonged in Britons' possession.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 868.

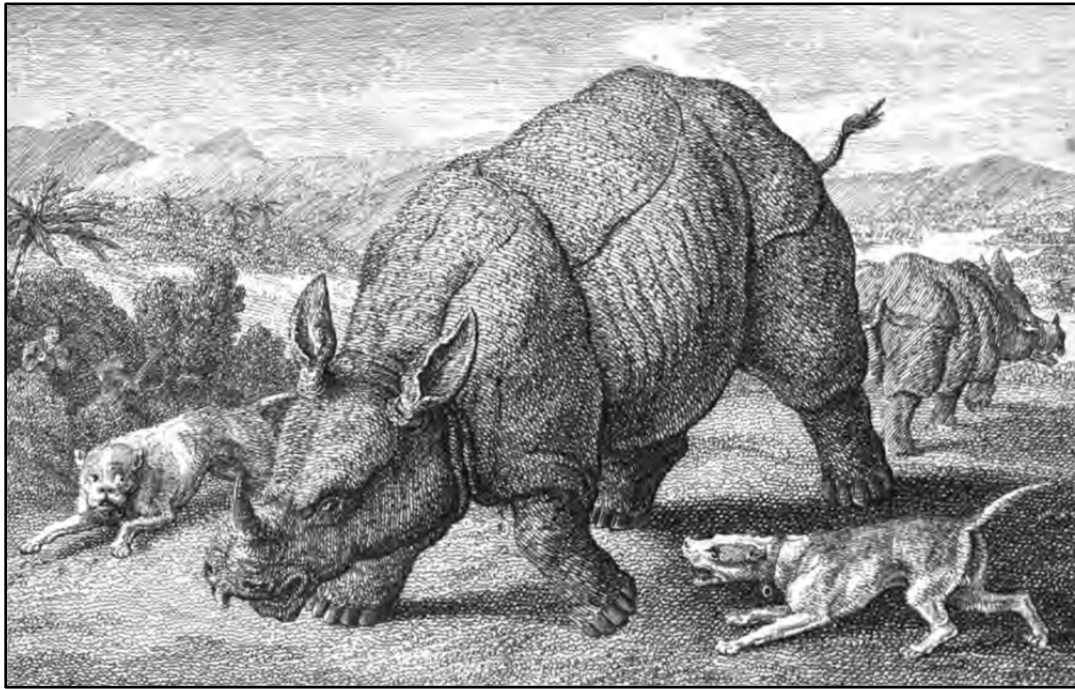


Figure 3 – Samuel Howitt, ‘Rhinoceros Hunting,’ 1790

In the same year, 1790, artist Samuel Howitt depicted another scene of the Indian rhinoceros. Howitt’s friend, British EIC Captain Thomas Williamson, recently returned from his station in Bengal and recounted the stories of his extravagant hunts in India to his friend. Howitt was inspired by the Captain and produced the etching *Rhinoceros Hunting* for the periodical, *The Sporting Magazine*<sup>33</sup>. In the etching, Howitt rendered a large rhinoceros in agitated movement. The rhinoceros was shown with its head low, its legs bent, and its tail flared high in the air. Howitt suggested to his audience that the rhinoceros was inspecting its attackers and preparing for its next move. The rhinoceros was depicted between two herding hunting dogs and, on the right-hand side of the image, Howitt etched a second rhino fleeing the scene of the hunt. On the left-hand side of

<sup>33</sup> Payne, MTW, and JE Payne. “Samuel Howitt’s Funny Turn: Samuel Howitt (1756-1823), Sporting and Wildlife Artist.” *The British Art Journal* 12, no. 1 (2011): 19–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41615212>.

the image, Howitt illustrated several palm trees amidst patches of dense vegetation. In the background of the etching, Howitt rendered a range of mountains shrouded in mist. Howitt's *Rhinoceros Hunting* portrayed a similar environment to Daniell's *Indian Rhinoceros*. The etching characterized India as a land of lush vegetation and large mountains, which aligned with Britons' colonizing imagination of India.

*Rhinoceros Hunting* established the sports hunt as the context to which rhinoceros belonged in India. Howitt led Britons to conceptualize the rhinoceros as the quarry for British sports hunters, rather than the living feature of the Indian landscape. Like Daniell, Howitt introduced the rhinoceros into an existing artistic tradition in Britain: hunting art. Instead of deer or rabbits, however – which were the common subjects of British hunting art – Howitt depicted the rhinoceros.<sup>34</sup> The placement of the rhinoceros in the English hunt familiarized the rhinoceros for Britons. The rhinoceros was compared to any other subject of the English hunt, which suggested that Britons were just as entitled to kill a rhinoceros as they were an English animal. *Rhinoceros Hunting*, therefore, characterized the rhinoceros as a belonging of the British Empire. Howitt's etching appealed to the interests of English sportsmen, and perpetuated British imperial philosophy. British hunters would have eagerly conceptualized the rhinoceros as the new quarry, and India as the new setting, for their sports hunts. *Rhinoceros Hunting* revealed that Britons did not conceptualize India as the complete land of alterity as the colonizing imagination would suggest. Rather, Britons conceptualized India as an extension of Britain where British hunting practices could be comfortably continued.

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<sup>34</sup> See Appendix for *Figure 4*, which is an example of Samuel Howitt's British hunting art





*Figure 5* – Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory, ‘Dish,’ 1752-1756

Several decades prior to Daniell and Howitt, between 1752 and 1756, a Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory produced a 32.4 by 24.8 centimeter dish depicting a highly stylized, Düreresque, rhinoceros.<sup>35</sup> In the center of the *Dish*, a rhinoceros is seen standing upon an island of lush grass, surrounded by water. In the background of the illustration, a faint mountain range is portrayed. On either side of the rhinoceros, two large winged insects are painted in light yellow and purple hues, while a colorful wreath of flowers – tied in a pink ribbon bow – encompassed the rhinoceros’ image. At the top of the plate, a large pink English rose was centrally illustrated between another winged insect and ladybug. The appearance of the rhinoceros in the *Dish* offers a unique

<sup>35</sup> See Appendix for *Figure 6*, Albrecht Dürer’s original rhinoceros print from 1515.

perspective on Britons' conceptions of the rhinoceros. Decorative objects implicated an entirely different interaction than visual arts, and implicated the acts of consumption and entertainment. Britons' conceptions of the rhinoceros, which were derived from the dish, were therefore bound in those interactions.

The Manufactory's selection of the rhinoceros motif reflected Britons' orientations towards the rhinoceros and India in the eighteenth century. The highly stylized design of the rhinoceros implicated the appropriation of non-European nature for decorative use. The Manufactory treated the Indian environment as an aesthetic to be evoked, and the rhinoceros as a decorative ornament to Britons' tableware.<sup>36</sup> The rhinoceros' decorative appearance represented its absorption into British vernacular life, and Britons' increasing consumption of the non-European world. In the case of the *Dish*, an Indian rhinoceros was painted upon a Chinese porcelain plate, which served food made from internationally procured ingredients<sup>37</sup>. Britons, therefore, enthusiastically participated in the British Empire's trade networks, and suffused their consumption and decoration with imperialism. The *Dish's* rendering of the rhinoceros also reflected Britons' sense of dominion over India. By depicting the rhinoceros in a way that catered to Britons' decorative interests, rather than reality, British art exerted control over rhinoceroses' conception in Britain. Furthermore, the evocation of the rhinoceros motif reflected Britons' sense of ownership over India and the Indian environment. The rhinoceros was treated as a suitable subject for the items that served, and were possessed by, Britons. In a similar way, Britons treated India as a country that served Britain's economic needs, as was possessed by the British Empire.

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<sup>36</sup> See "Imaginative Geography and Its Representations: Orientalizing the Oriental" in Edward Said's *Orientalism* for a more thorough explanation of how European artists aestheticized the natural world in their artwork.

<sup>37</sup> Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism*, 282.

## Conclusion

Encounters between the rhinoceros and the British EIC offer two frameworks for understanding Britons' conceptualizations of rhinoceroses. The Company's acquisition of the rhinoceros in 1790 reflected Britons' conception of the rhinoceros as a diplomatic, and cultural, link between India and Britain. Whereas, Company affiliated art reflected Britons' conceptions of rhinoceroses as animals that belonged to the British Empire. India and the rhinoceros were increasingly incorporated into Britons' artistic and decorative milieu, which familiarized rhinoceroses to Britons and portrayed them as belongings of the British Empire.

## Chapter Two: Interpreting the Rhinoceros

They were all wrong about the rhinoceros. Dr. James Parsons was sure of it. In the past three years, Parsons and his former employer, Dr. James Douglas, inspected a profusion of rhinoceros figures. They determined that every engraver, painter, and sculptor had been wrong. Art may imitate life, but there was nothing life-like about these artists' renderings of the rhinoceros. The first to fail were, of course, the ancient Romans. In the first century, Roman civilization was the first to host the rhinoceros in Europe, and so were the first to produce an illustration of the animal. Perhaps time had not been fair to the Domitian quadrans, which depicted the rhinoceros. But Parsons was quite sure that the Romans were equally unfair to the rhinoceros' likeness. He always thought the figure was too rotund; the body wasn't much more than a few lumps held together by four stumps.<sup>38</sup> Albrecht Durer was the second to take up the torch of artistic error in 1515 when he captured the rhinoceros during its second appearance in Europe. The animal was decorated beyond recognition: scales, scallops, and other fictitious forms.<sup>39</sup> Parsons was told that Durer had been present for the rhinoceros' visit in Lisbon, but such error induced Parsons to believe that the painter never actually saw the animal. If Dürer had seen the rhinoceros, how could he have been so mistaken in his performance?<sup>40</sup> Fortunately physician Jacobus Bontius remedied some of Durer's errors in his plainer production of the pachyderm. Unfortunately, however, his remedy turned fatal at the rhinoceros' feet, which appeared to be the paws of a rather bulky dog.<sup>41</sup> As for the poor figure's eye, the feature was placed at the corner of the rhinoceros' mouth. It seemed as though the

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<sup>38</sup> See Appendix for *Figure 7*.

<sup>39</sup> See Appendix for *Figure 6*.

<sup>40</sup> Dr. Parsons. "A Letter from Dr. Parsons to Martin Folkes, Esq; President of the Royal Society, Containing the Natural History of the Rhinoceros." *Philosophical Transactions (1683-1775)* 42 (1742): 523–41.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/104208>, 524.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 526.

creature was bestowed with a pimple, rather than a pupil.<sup>42</sup> French traveler Jean Chardin abandoned reality all together in his rendering of the rhinoceros and gave the creature a human eye in the place of its own.<sup>43</sup> Oh yes, Parsons thought, they had all been wrong.

The imperative to correct these errors was the reason for Parson's writing. During his lifetime, Dr. Douglas let no opportunity of improving natural knowledge slip.<sup>44</sup> The recent passing of Parson's mentor inspired Parsons to do the same. He remained diligent in their mission: to correct their predecessors and produce a new, true, history of the rhinoceros. With his recent Fellowship to the Royal Society in London, and budding acquaintance with Society President, Martin Folkes, Parsons was confident that his letter would be enthusiastically received. After all, what was the mission of the Society if not to pursue the Truth? And Parsons was sure that his monograph was the truth of the rhinoceros.

In the vast chronicles of early modern natural knowledge production, the story of Dr. James Parson occupies but a humble footnote. In early modern period, Britons became increasingly curious about the natural world. The expansion the British Empire implicated a rapid increase in travel from Britain, exposing more Britons to new natural environments. During their travels, Britons 'discovered' new commodities, technologies, and knowledge from the natural world.<sup>45</sup> The Greater One Horned Rhinoceros of India represented one of Britons' natural 'discoveries'. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Britons interpreted the rhinoceros through tactile encounters with rhinoceros horn and literary encounters with natural histories. The following chapter will examine how cabinets of curiosity and natural history literature informed Britons' conceptions of

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<sup>42</sup> See Appendix for *Figure 8*.

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix for *Figure 9*.

<sup>44</sup> Dr. Parsons, "A Letter", 527.

<sup>45</sup> Carey, "Compiling Nature's History", 270.

the rhinoceros, and argue that curiosity cabinets commodified rhinoceros horn, while natural histories furthered the intellectual agenda of individual natural historians.

Britons' interpretations of the rhinoceros were influenced by the increasing salience of Enlightened philosophy in early modern natural knowledge production. The Enlightenment, as defined by Dorinda Outram, was "a group of capsules or flash points where intellectual projects changed society and government on a world-wide basis".<sup>46</sup> The Enlightenment, she continued, was largely characterized as a period in which there was increasing desire for human affairs to be guided by rationality, rather than faith, superstition or revelation. It was a world view based on science, not tradition.<sup>47</sup> Other philosophers, including Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, described the Enlightenment as a shift towards totalitarianism. The Enlightenment abandoned quest for meaning and sought to exert power over nature and the world. Meanwhile philosopher Jürgen Habermas argued that the Enlightenment emancipated individuals from restrictive particularism and gave rise to the "public realm". Through the Enlightenment, men escaped their role as subjects and gained autonomy through the exercise and exchange of their ideas.<sup>48</sup> If placed in conjunction with one another, the perspectives of Outram, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas form a comprehensive definition of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was period in which individuals increasingly prioritized rationality over tradition, and felt empowered to not only produce knowledge, but exercise autonomy and exert control.

The Enlightened tendency to exert control over nature became particularly prominent in Britain's natural knowledge economy. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Enlightened

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<sup>46</sup> Outram, Dorinda. *The Enlightenment*. Fourth edition. Cambridge, United Kingdom ; Cambridge University Press, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 6.

and imperialist philosophies operated symbiotically to justify and perpetuate British expansion. Britons conceptualized nature as the physical and metaphoric subject of their Empire. Nature was physically controlled through commodification and trade, while metaphorically controlled through observation and recording. The production of knowledge on the rhinoceros was similarly entrenched in Britons' exertion of control over nature. Britons conceptualized rhinoceros in ways that commodified the animal and perpetuated narratives of British dominion over the natural world.

### The Rhinoceros in Curiosity Cabinets

Early modern Britons interpreted rhinoceroses through physical encounters with the rhinoceros horn. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, aristocratic Britons collected natural objects for study, display, and admiration. These collections were commonly known as cabinets of curiosity.<sup>49</sup> Curiosity cabinets contained a variety of natural items, including anatomic preparations, petrified specimens, figured stones, and exotic plants and animals.<sup>50</sup> Cabinets were kept in elite and private spaces: intellectual institutions and residential estates. Aristocratic Britons used curiosity displays to demonstrate their intellect and integrity to their peers. Curiosity was considered a praiseworthy attribute, while the accumulation of curiosities was considered an invaluable endeavor.<sup>51</sup> Curiosities offered Britons a form of learned entertainment: a leisurely

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<sup>49</sup> See Anthony Alan Shelton's chapter, "Cabinets of Transgression: Renaissance Collections and Incorporation of the New World" in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal's *The Cultures of Collecting* for a comprehensive summary of curiosity cabinets in early modern Europe.

<sup>50</sup> Costa, Palmira Fontes da. "The Culture of Curiosity at The Royal Society in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century." *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 56, no. 2 (2002): 147–66.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3557664>.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

activity that intersected intellectual scholarship and enjoyable diversion.<sup>52</sup> The essential materiality of curiosities appealed to the British aristocracy. Aristocrats were offered the opportunity to partake in, and express ownership over, the non-European world. Curiosity culture reflected Britons' contemporary orientations towards nature and empire. Britons enthusiastically participated in imperial trade networks to commodify, and privilege, nature. The rhinoceros horn was similarly commodified and privileged.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, rhinoceros horn appeared in two collections: the Repository of the Royal Society and the private collection of Sir Hans Sloane. In 1681, four rhinoceros horns were reported in the Society's Repository.<sup>53</sup> The catalogue's author, Nehemiah Grew, supplemented the horns' listing with a brief explanation, "the Rhinoceros horn...[is] much esteemed and used against poison".<sup>54</sup> The Royal Society, therefore, understood the rhinoceros horn as a medical material. Britons, like Grew, conceptualized the horn as a natural resource, characterizing the rhinoceros as more of a source for medicine, than a living animal. Britons' materialistic interpretation of the rhinoceros reflected the salience of imperialist philosophy in British epistemologies. The British Empire employed a utilitarian framework to conceptualize nature; its economic viability depended upon the continuous commodification of natural resources. Thus, when Britons encountered the resource of the horn, they naturally conceptualized it in terms of its material application. However, Britons' antidotal interpretation of the horn did more than commodify the rhinoceros, it privileged the animal as well. Poison was not, after all, the concern

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>53</sup> See *Musæm Regalis Societatis, or, A Catalogue and Description of the Natural and Artificial Rarities Belonging to the Royal Society and Preserved at Gresham College* for the full register of all Repository items.

<sup>54</sup> Hanson, Craig Ashley. "Representing the Rhinoceros: The Royal Society between Art and Science in the Eighteenth Century." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 4 (2010): 545–66. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-0208.2010.00322.x>, 554.



of the ordinary Briton. It was associated with power and political intrigue implicated in the positions of high-ranking nobility. The only individuals who might have needed an antidote in Britain were prestigious political figures. Britons, therefore, conceptualized rhinoceros horn as an especially privileged medical material, and the Repository's curiosity cabinet functioned to purport the medicinal qualities of the rhinoceros, while underscoring the prestige of its collection.

Britons' alexipharmic conception of rhinoceros horn also reflected the salience of earlier British interpretations of nature in early modern natural knowledge. The perceived antidotal power of the rhinoceros horn was an extension of classical beliefs in the antidotal power of the unicorn horn. Since the second century, the unicorn horn was attributed with the ability to neutralize poison.<sup>55</sup> When early modern Europeans first encountered rhinoceros horn – through colonial expansion in South Asia – they mistook the rhinoceros horn for the fictitious unicorn horn instead.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, early modern Europeans attributed the rhinoceros horn with the antidotal interpretation of the unicorn horn. Because Grew continued to purport the antidotal conception of the rhinoceros horn, he implicated the persistence of classical epistemologies in early modern interpretations of nature. In the seventeenth century, Britons replicated classical expertise in contemporary iterations of natural knowledge.

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<sup>55</sup> This belief was originally purported, and ultimately popularized, by the second century Christian text, *Physiologus*. The *Physiologus* was originally composed in Alexandria, Greece and was a collection of moralized descriptions of plants and animals.

<sup>56</sup> Stark, Marnie P. "Mounted Bezoar Stones, Seychelles Nuts, and Rhinoceros Horns: Decorative Objects as Antidotes in Early Modern Europe." *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 11, no. 1 (2003): 69–94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40663065>, 85.



*Figure 10 – Mughal Empire, Cup, 1525, British Museum*

Later, in the eighteenth century, another rhinoceros horn appeared in Britain's curiosity cabinets. The horn appeared in the private collection of Royal Society President, Sir Hans Sloane. Throughout his life, Hans Sloane hunted nature's treasures. In the beginning of his medical career, Sloane traveled to the Caribbean and served as the personal physician to the English Governor of Jamaica, Sir Christopher Monck. While in Jamaica, between 1687 and 1689, Sloane studied the natural world and began his collection of animals, plants and minerals. Upon his return to England, Sloane's collection rapidly expanded. He collected physical and literary materials documenting the natural world, which included botanical, zoological and ethnographic specimens.<sup>57</sup> In 1713, Sloane acquired an addition to his collection: a rhinoceros horn in the form of a cup.

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<sup>57</sup> Delbourgo, James. *Collecting the World : Hans Sloane and the Origins of the British Museum*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018.

The *Boat Cup of Rhinoceros Horn* was shaped like a pointed oval. The *Cup's* rim was ornamented with a light relief carving, which matched a similar decoration along the object's silver mount below.<sup>58</sup> In a note accompanying the *Cup*, Sloane wrote, "A boat cup of Rhinoceros horn as transparent as tortoise shell...probably Indian".<sup>59</sup> Sloane's hypothesis on the *Cup's* provenance was correct. British Museum curators later confirmed that the object was produced by the Mughal Dynasty in India in 1525. The Indian provenance of the horn, and the horn's cup form, informed Britons' conceptions of the rhinoceros horn as a symbol of Indian cultural practices. The object's carving led Britons to conceptualize the horn as a material that was suitable for artistic application in India. The horn was more than an animal's appendage, but an artistic medium carefully selected for a particular set of aesthetic qualities: brown coloration, hardened texture and translucent opacity. The ornamental carving along the *Cup's* rim indicated to Britons that the horn used for consumption and display in India; the *Cup* was not just functional, it was decorative. Thus, Sloane's rhinoceros horn *Cup* implicated the artistic and decorative practices of the Mughal Empire. The *Cup* perpetuated Britons' imaginings of Indian culture; they imagined the setting in which the *Cup* was used, and the individuals who used it.

More than suggesting Indians' material uses of the rhinoceros horn, Sloane's *Cup* implicated Britons' broader imperialist attitudes towards India. By displaying the *Cup* in his curiosity cabinet, rather than using it for consumption, Sloane assigned the *Cup* with new meaning. Unlike its vernacular use in India, the *Cup* evoked curiosity in Britain. Indian cultural practices were, therefore, something to be displayed in a Briton's collection, not replicated. Symbols of Indian culture were just like any other ethnographic or natural specimen for Britons. Sloane's

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<sup>58</sup> The British Museum. N.d. "Cup." [www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org). Accessed April 8, 2024.  
[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W\\_SLMisc-1713](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_SLMisc-1713)

<sup>59</sup> See section "Miscellanies" in Sir Hans Sloane's *Miscellanea*, 1713.

rhinoceros horn *Cup* demonstrated how Britons conceptualized Indian cultural objects as items to be possessed and collected. Britons' interest in possessing symbols of Indian culture, reflected the broader interests of the British Empire: to possess India. In the context of Sir Hans Sloane's collection, rhinoceros horn was conceptualized materialistically. Britons understood the horn as a symbol of artistic and decorative practices in India, which rendered it a suitable item for their collection and display in Britain.

Early modern curiosity cabinets inherently objectified nature. It is no wonder then that, through encounters with the rhinoceros horn in curiosity displays, Britons conceptualized rhinoceroses materialistically. The rhinoceros was understood as either a source for antidotal medicine, or a symbol of Indian culture, which reflected the salience of classical and imperialist philosophy in Britons' early modern epistemologies.

### The Rhinoceros in Natural History Literature

Early modern natural knowledge enjoyed new and exciting iterations in Europe. Expanding imperial networks enabled Europeans' access to 'undiscovered' species, which precipitated the production of new natural histories. The discipline of natural history, however, was far from new. Natural history was an ancient form of scientific knowledge. Throughout history, natural historians have sought to interpret the natural world and produce accounts of nature. The following section will explore three accounts of the rhinoceros in natural history literature. Each account epitomizes a distinct approach to natural history production, each of which precipitated distinct conceptions of the rhinoceros.

Conceptions of the rhinoceros in early modern natural history literature was largely informed by Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis* (ca. 77-79 A.D.). *Historia Naturalis* was one of

the oldest, and most influential, natural history texts published in Europe. The *Historia* broadly described the natural entities found in ancient Rome. In his work, Pliny defined the individual profiles (or units) of natural history as “factums”. These factums were the products of hearsay, words of authorities, and other forms of indirect evidence.<sup>60</sup> In the *Historia*, Pliny compiled twenty thousand factums to produce a comprehensive guide to the existing abundance of natural knowledge information in antiquity. Pliny’s factum on the rhinoceros was critical to the animal’s legacy in future natural history literature. In the *Historia*, Pliny wrote,

*At the same [Pompeius Magnus] games the rhinoceros was also exhibited, an animal which has a single horn projecting from the nose; it has been frequently seen since then. This too is another natural-born enemy of the elephant. It prepares itself for the combat by sharpening horn its horn against the rocks; and in fighting directs [its horn] chiefly against the belly of its adversary, which it knows to be the softest part. The two animals are of equal length, but the legs of the rhinoceros are much shorter: its skin is the colour of box-wood.*<sup>61</sup>

The account of the rhinoceros appeared in chapter twenty-nine in book eight of *Historia Naturalis*. In book eight, the rhinoceros factum was preceded by at least ten chapters dedicated to the elephant: the elephant’s “capacity,” their first experience with a harness, their docility, their “wonderful” accomplishments, their first appearance in Italy, their “combats,” their entrapment,

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<sup>60</sup> Findlen, Paula. “Natural History.” Chapter. In *The Cambridge History of Science*, edited by Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, 3:435–68. *The Cambridge History of Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521572446.020, 437.

<sup>61</sup> “Pliny the Elder, the Natural History, Book VIII. The Nature of the Terrestrial Animals.” n.d. [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu). Tufts University. Accessed March 11, 2024. <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0137:book=8&force=y#note142>.

their domestication, their birth, and their native habitats.<sup>62</sup> Pliny's presentation of the elephant bordered on maternal; he devotedly recounted nearly every aspect of the elephant's life. Following the elephant's extensive account, Pliny then proceeded to describe several other species: bison, camels, camelopards, dragons, elk, lions, panthers, tigers, and "serpents of remarkable size".<sup>63</sup> If Pliny's reader were to scrutinize the sequence of his factum, they might be inclined to think that an oversized python took precedence over a two ton pachyderm. Remarkable indeed. Once finally arrived at the rhinoceros factum, however, Pliny established two important precedents for future accounts of the rhinoceros. Pliny compared the rhinoceros to the elephant, and characterized the rhinoceros as an aggressive animal. These precedents continued to permeate the natural histories of early modern England.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Britain witnessed the profusion of published natural histories. The advent of the printing press provided naturalists with access to ancient accounts of nature, while imperial expansion offered new natural subjects. With the increasing influx of natural knowledge, British naturalists produced new natural histories that interpreted the expanding natural world around them. Natural historians pursued a number of interests through their work. Some British naturalists produced encyclopedic accounts of nature, others pursued medical advancement through nature, while some still searched nature for spiritual symbolism. Different methodological approaches to natural history produced different accounts of nature, which included the account of the rhinoceros. British natural historians mainly conceptualized the rhinoceros in three ways: as a source for religious contemplation, medicine, and entertainment.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

In 1658, English clergyman Edward Topsell used a religious framework to produce his *History of Four Footed Beasts and Serpents*. Topsell's *History* was a comprehensive treatise on zoology, which compiled existing natural histories and incorporated Christian scripture into his analyses of nature. On his title page, Topsell stated the intention of his work: "Describing at Large [animals'] True and Lively *Figure*, their several Names, Conditions, Kinds, Virtues (both Natural and Medicinal), Countries of their Breed, their *Love* and *Hatred* to Mankind, and the wonderful work of God in their Creation, Preservation, and Destruction".<sup>64</sup> For Topsell, the Divine was central to natural knowledge production. Animals were living manifestations of scripture and had to be explicitly understood as wonders of the Creator. In his chapter on the rhinoceros, Topsell employed the language of divine wonder.<sup>65</sup> Topsell began, "We are now in the discourse of the second wonder in nature". The honor of first wonder was, of course, reserved for the elephant. "So strange an outside, as by figure you may perceive, yielding no doubt through the Omnipotent power of the Creator". Thus, the rhinoceros' "strange" physicality proved the omnipotence of God. But, Topsell explained, "It hath been the counsel of the Almighty himself...to keep [man] from the knowledge of many divine things". Since the time of Adam's fall from Paradise, "[man] neither knoweth God...nor the creatures as he did".<sup>66</sup> Adam's fall from Paradise, therefore, incurred the mysteries of nature, which included the rhinoceros' appearance. The *History* offered the rhinoceros as reminder of Adam's fall, and a testament to Christian scripture. Unlike other accounts, which characterized the rhinoceros as a component British-occupied India, Topsell's *History* interpreted

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<sup>64</sup> Topsell, Edward, Conrad Gessner, Thomas Moffett, Edward Topsell, John. Rowland, Edward L. Beadle, and Conrad Gessner. *The History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents ... The whole revised, corrected, and enlarged with the addition of two useful physical tables, / by J. R. ... London: Printed by E. Cotes, for G. Sawbridge ... T. Williams ... and T. Johnson ...*, 1658.

<sup>65</sup> Things are about to get a bit convoluted here, so I ask you to bear with me.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 460.

the rhinoceros as a feature of God's Creation. The rhinoceros was less of an example of Britain's imperial dominion, and more a precipitant for spiritual exploration. The *History* led Britons to conceptualize the rhinoceros as an intersection between nature and religion. His natural history challenged the increasing salience of Enlightened knowledge production, and conceptualized natural knowledge production as a religious, rather than secular, pursuit.

Three years later, in 1661, English naturalist Robert Lovell published a medically-motivated natural history. Lovell's *Zoologicomineralogica Or Compleat History of Animals and Minerals* adopted a utilitarian approach to nature and understood the rhinoceros in terms of its material application. Lovell conceptualized animals as medicinal resources, rather than evidence of empire or symbols of God. Lovell stated that the intention of his *Zoologicomineralogica* was to convey the "nature and use of all sorts of useful Animals, both dietetical, and medicinal".<sup>67</sup> The chapter written on rhinoceros reflected this intention by focusing on applications of the rhinoceros' horn. Lovell began, "The horn is good against poysons, contagions, and other affections, that have need of evacuation, and therefore may be used instead of Unicorne horne". He continued, "Some eat the flesh, which is very nervous...The bonne steeped in wine, is drunk in malignant diseases".<sup>68</sup> Thus, *Zoologicomineralogica* instructed Britons on how to use the rhinoceros, rather than conceptualize its appearance or behavior.

Lovell's utilitarian conception of the rhinoceros reflected the salience of imperialism in Britons' orientations to nature. *Zoologicomineralogica* prioritized the rhinoceros' most

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<sup>67</sup> Lovell, Robert. *Panzōoruktologia, Sive, Panzoologicomineralogia. Or, a Compleat History of Animants and Minerals, : Containing the Summe of All Authors, Both Ancient an Modern, Galenicall and Chymicall, Touching Animals, Viz, Beasts, Birds ... With the Anatomy of Man, His Diseases, and Their Definitions, Causes, Signes, Cares, Remedies ... As Also a History of Minerals, Viz, Earths, Mettals, Semi-Mettals ... Also an Introduction to Zoography and Mineralogy. Index of Latine Names, with Their English Names. Universall Index of the Use and Vertues.* Oxford: Printed by Hen: Hall, for Jos: Goodwin., 1661.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 77.



commodifiable appendage. The horn was not susceptible to the same degradation and as other animal products, and was, therefore, a preferable trade commodity. Thus, Britons conceptualized the rhinoceros' through its capacity for profit, reflecting the utilitarian tendencies of the British Empire. Lovell led his readers not only to commodify the rhinoceros, but to privilege the rhinoceros as well. He encouraged Britons' conceptualization of the horn as an antidote, which implicated the nobility of its consumer.<sup>69</sup> Those who possessed or used rhinoceros horn were, therefore, associated with the prestige of the aristocracy.

In *Zoologicomineralogica*, Lovell offered Britons another, decidedly less prestigious, use of the rhinoceros. In the regions where rhinoceros originate, Lovell described, "some eate the [rhinoceros] *flesh*, which is very nervous".<sup>70</sup> Because the first line of Lovell's chapter stated that the rhinoceros derived from "the deserts of Africa, and in many places of Asia," Lovell indicated that those "some" – who ate rhinoceros flesh – were African and Asian.<sup>71</sup> Lovell's "nervous" characterization of rhinoceros flesh consumption encouraged Britons' to interpret flesh consumption as unsafe, and flesh consumers as unintelligent. Britons, therefore, delineated between the two forms of rhinoceros consumption. Consumption of the horn – which was conducted in Europe – was considered safe and advisable. Whereas consumption of the flesh – which was conducted in Africa and Asia – was considered unsafe and questionable. Britons' preference for, and validation of, European consumption practices reflected the salience of racist, Enlightened philosophy in early modern Britain. Enlightened philosophers characterized African and Asian as less developed than Europe, depicting their inhabitants as unintelligent, uncivilized

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<sup>69</sup> See Bruno A. Martinho's "Rhino Horns and Scraps of Unicorn: The Sense of Touch and the Consumption of Rhino Horns in Early Modern Iberia" for a fascinating history of rhinoceros horn consumption in the early modern Iberian court.

<sup>70</sup> Lovell, *Panzōoruktologia*, 77.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

and in need of European intervention. Thus, Britons' the unsafe conceptions of rhinoceros flesh consumption affirmed Enlightened racist ideology; it distinguished civilized European practices from uncivilized African and Asian ones.

In 1739, English children's book author Thomas Boreman took an entirely different approach from Topsell and Lovell and treated natural history as source for young people's entertainment. In *Description of Some Curious and Uncommon Creatures*, Boreman replicated Pliny's language to describe the rhinoceros. Boreman stated, "His colour is like the bark of a box tree...not much unlike an Elephant, and near as long, but not so high, having shorter legs".<sup>72</sup> As the description progressed, however, Boreman strayed from Pliny and introduced a new, narrative account of the rhinoceros. Boreman wrote,

*He has two girdles upon his body, like the wings of a Dragon, from his back down to his belly...His skin is so hard, that no dart is able to pierce it, and covered over with scales, like the shell of a Tortoise...The horn upon his nose is so very hard and sharp, crooked towards the crown of his head, that some say it will pierce through iron or stone. He is said frequently to whet his horn against a flint, that he may be prepared whenever he is attacked by an enemy. He is a mortal enemy to the Elephant, whom he seldom meets without a battle.*<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Boreman, Thomas, Thomas Boreman, William. Constable, and Thomas Boreman. *A Description of Some Curious and Uncommon Creatures, Omitted in the Description of Three Hundred Animals, and Likewise in the Supplement to That Book; : Designed as an Addition to Those Two Treatises, for the Entertainment of Young People*. London: Printed for Richard Ware, ... ; and Thomas Boreman bookseller, ..., 1739.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

The substance of Boreman's writing replicated his naturalist predecessors, but his style was unprecedented. The *Description* embarked upon an entertaining account of the rhinoceros. Boreman's account evoked what some "say" or others "said," leading Britons to imagine a tradition of story-telling around the rhinoceros. Boreman's use of anthropomorphism animated the rhinoceros beyond a figure in a textbook and portrayed the animal as a character in larger, grander, tale of nature. The detailed description of the encounter between the rhinoceros and the elephant especially animated the rhinoceros. Boreman presented the rhinoceros as a character whose physical inferiorities precipitated cunning strategy: "He...frequently [whets] his horn...[so] that he may be prepared". Boreman led Britons to conceptualize the rhinoceros as a sentient, intentional and intelligent animal. The *Description's* entertaining and narrative style further lent his natural history to youth; the content was made accessible to immature audiences. Learned adults could deal with scientific accounts, but children could delight in stories. With Boreman's *Description*, British youth easily accessed natural history, gaining natural knowledge, instructive moral precepts, and a source for entertainment.<sup>74</sup> Boreman's intentional appeal to youth audiences reflected the increasing popularity, and widening access, of natural knowledge in early modern Britain. By the eighteenth century, more Britons – across different age groups – laid claim to knowledge on nature and validated their stake in Britain's natural knowledge economy.

### Conclusion

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Britons interpreted the rhinoceros through physical encounters with rhinoceros horn in curiosity cabinets, and textual encounters in natural

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<sup>74</sup>Ritvo, Harriet. "Learning from Animals: Natural History for Children in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." *Children's literature* (Storrs, Conn.) 13, no. 1 (1985): 72–93.

history literature. The inherent materiality of curiosity cabinets led Britons to commodify the rhinoceros horn, conceptualizing it as either an aristocratic antidote or an Indian cultural object. The antidotal conception of rhinoceros horn reflected the persistence of classical epistemology in early modern natural knowledge production. While the ethnographic conception of the horn reflected Britons' tendency to depreciate – and express possession over – Indian culture. Natural histories, on the other hand, interpreted the rhinoceros in a number of differing ways. Religious accounts of nature interpreted the rhinoceros as a manifestation of God's power. Utilitarian accounts of nature interpreted the rhinoceros as a natural resource to be capitalized upon. While entertaining accounts of nature interpreted the rhinoceros as a way to incorporate youth into Britain's natural knowledge economy. Each approach to natural history reflected Britons' contemporary epistemologies and cultural conditions. Britons linked natural knowledge and religion; they replicated the British Empire's commodification of nature; and they popularized natural knowledge production for Britain's youth.

### Chapter Three: Witnessing the Rhinoceros

August 12<sup>th</sup> 1790. Mr. Thomas Bewick sat in his Newcastle study and began to read the newspaper. At times it felt as if *The World* had become riddled with advertisements, but he regularly scoured the paper for its sizzling commentaries on the English arts scene. This year in particular, he kept a keen eye on the paper's literature review section; he was eager to see if his recent work on quadrupeds would be mentioned. As he perused the pages of the periodical, he found a number of articles. In the world of theatre, playwright, Hannah Cowley was scheduled to return to the stage. In the boxing ring, Isaac Perrins entered a bareknuckle battle with a Mr. Richards (a supposed Shropshire hero). And in the land of poetry a Mr. Oswald wrote of joy,

*Hail rosy morning! Lovely day! That gives her to my arms; And you, sweet dawn! Who, clad in gray, forerun a World of charms!*

How romantic, he thought. Bewick tucked away the poem to recite to his wife Isabella later that evening. As he read and read, it seemed that much remained the same in their country: people married, people died, and the prices of stocks increased. Typical. Then suddenly, like an oasis in a sea of bore, Thomas read, "Rhinoceros". He startled. Bewick read on eagerly.

*We hear that the most wonderful of all animals, which has so much engaged the attention of Naturalists for ages past, the Rhinoceros, is now exhibited at the Lyceum, in the Strand. This infant, only two years old, weighs near a ton. From this specimen it evidently appears, the Rhinoceros is compacter in his formation, and stronger made, than the elephant: with this matchless strength, and impenetrable coat of mail, a formidable horn on his nose, and*

*an imperious spirit, he bids defiance to the whole creation; he is not violent, except when irritated, or discomposed for want of food. This singular curiosity was a present from an Eastern Nabob, to a great personage in India*<sup>75</sup>.

The most wonderful of all animals indeed! Earlier that year, Bewick and his literary colleagues – Ralph Beilby and Solomon Hodgson – produced *A General History of Quadrupeds* in which the rhinoceros was a key feature. Their work provided clear accounts of four-footed animals' nature, habits, and dispositions, accompanied by more accurate artistic representation than had hitherto appeared in any work of that kind.<sup>76</sup> Bewick's colleagues described the rhinoceros as an especially dubious character in the animal kingdom. In fact, the animal's nature was so peculiar that it became the subject of great debate amongst naturalists. When the time came for Bewick to produce the print of the rhinoceros, he was thrilled. Bewick was, of course, indebted to the labors of many learned naturalists, but he was eager to provide his own intervention in the study of rhinoceros. Perhaps his account would even settle some ongoing debates on the rhinoceros' form. Bewick's print largely reflected description provided by the advertisement in *The World*. The circumference of the animal was nearly equal to its length, its nose was armed with a formidable weapon – a very hard and solid horn – and its skin was patterned in hard and impenetrable folds.<sup>77</sup> Bewick wondered if he might be able to visit the creature during its residency in London. He might even convince

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<sup>75</sup> "News." World, 12 Aug. 1790. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2001523590/BBCN?u=prov98893&sid=bookmark-BBCN. Accessed 8 Oct. 2023.

<sup>76</sup> Bewick, Thomas, Ralph Beilby, and Solomon. Hodgson. *A General History of Quadrupeds*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Printed by and for S. Hodgson, R. Beilby, & T. Bewick, Newcastle: sold by them, by G.G.J. & J. Robinson, and C. Dilly, London, 1790.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

his brother John to accompany him to the Strand. What an age this was, he thought, when a creature who seldom quits the banks of Asian rivers arrives in England.<sup>78</sup> Remarkable indeed!

Thomas Bewick was not alone in his enthusiasm for nature. As the previous chapters have mentioned, Britain's courtly and intellectual elite were thoroughly interested in engaging with exotic animals. By the early modern period, royal menageries were relatively standard and knowledge producing institutions regularly published written material on the distant natural world. Popular engagements with exotic animals, however, remained less certain in England. Britain's working classes were excluded from courtly collections, and did not have the income – nor literacy – to access natural history. So how did these individuals engage with the exotic? How did they witness the rhinoceros? The following chapter argues that working class Britons – as well as women and children – accessed the rhinoceros through travelling animal shows and menageries. Menageries allowed excluded demographics to witness the rhinoceros, and invited them into Britain's natural knowledge economy.

In the eighteenth century, animal shows public and menageries attracted a variety of visitors. They fostered social inclusivity, which had yet to be seen in the world of animal entertainment and exotic animal display. Itinerant menageries travelled beyond courtly borders and transcended literary domains. They reached sectors of the English population who – based on class or geography – lacked access to zoological exhibitions.<sup>79</sup> Admittedly, different individuals attended menageries for different reasons; we should not assume that all menagerie patrons were motivated by intellectual curiosity. We can, however, assert that menageries critically exposed working class

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>79</sup> Cowie, Helen. "Elephants, Education and Entertainment: Travelling Menageries in Nineteenth-Century Britain." *Journal of the History of Collections* 25, no. 1 (February 9, 2012): 103–17. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhr037>.

Britons to exotic animals. Regardless of age, gender, or socioeconomic status, Britons were invited into a new space of natural knowledge production.

### Early Modern Animal Entertainments

Prior to the advent of animal shows and menageries, Britain's working classes were exposed to animal display through the world of blood sports. Bear baiting, bull baiting, and cock fighting were all conventional animal spectacles in early modern England. Although blood sports were popular among Britain's lower classes, they were equally enjoyed by aristocratic audiences. In the Tudor period, for example, Queen Elizabeth I and King James I delighted in blood sports. Queen Elizabeth was reported to prohibit theatres from performing on Thursdays, so as to prevent any interference with the "game of bear baiting...maintained for her Majesty's pleasure".<sup>80</sup> By the eighteenth century, however, blood sports were increasingly criticized for their barbarity and violence. In 1737, *The Gentleman's Magazine* condemned the "rude exercises of cock-throwing, bull baiting, prizefighting, [and] Bear garden diversions".<sup>81</sup> The article described blood sports as barbarous and cruel, charging them with the crime of inspiring "savage dispositions and ferity of temper"<sup>82</sup> in the minds of children and young people. The *Magazine's* article articulated the rising bourgeois fear of the tumultuous and uninhibited behaviors of the lower classes. Britain's upper and middle classes feared lower classes' absenteeism, drunkenness, and gambling – all of which appeared to be encouraged by blood sports. Aristocratic Britons became increasingly inspired by the contemporary Malthusian conviction that the working class was suffuse with bestiality,

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<sup>80</sup> Guttman, Allen. *Sports Spectators*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, 54.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 57.



improvidence, intemperance and lack of sexual restraint.<sup>83</sup> This conviction, in conjunction with Enlightened conceptions of civility, encouraged aristocratic Britons to abandon blood sports.<sup>84</sup>

At the same time, Enlightened conceptions of gender dictated animal sport spectatorship. Women – who were expected to act with civility, domesticity, and virtue – were deemed inappropriate audience members of blood sports.<sup>85</sup> If seen fraternizing at a blood sports spectacle, women ran the risk of association with the “butcherly sports”.<sup>86</sup> Even if women accepted the ramifications of “butcherly” associations, many blood sport arenas actively excluded women. The realm of cock fighting, for example, was reserved for men. The sport combined the excitement of deadly combat with the thrill of phallic representation, which proved irresistible to men and lethal for chickens. The cock fight offered men vicarious self-validation, which was inaccessible to women. Apparently the fairer sex was not as invested in their cock’s ability to win a fight. Given the distinctly male appeal of cock fighting, it is unsurprising that women were excluded from the sport. Women’s exclusion from civilized sports, on the other hand, is unexpected. In 1710, for example, women resorted to masquerade just to attend the Epsom horserace: “expecting a rough day, many females wore male’s clothing and came on horseback rather than in carriages”.<sup>87</sup> Thus, regardless of the sport’s perceived level of civility, women were excluded from animal entertainment in early modern England. Women lacked access to encounters with animals, and were prevented from contributing to Britain’s natural knowledge economy.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>84</sup> Given the Enlightenment’s emphasis on humanism – the civility and dignity of human beings – it is more than likely that Enlightened philosophers would have disapproved of blood sports for their barbarity and cruelty.

<sup>85</sup> See Karen O’Brien’s *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* for further explanation of Enlightened gender expectations.

<sup>86</sup> Guttmann, *Sports Spectators*, 55.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 65.

The inaccessibility and unsavory perception of blood sports led to their decline in the eighteenth century. Blood sports departure, however, left Britons desiring a new kind of animal entertainment: one that would appeal to the action-seeking tendencies of the lower classes, and satisfy the Enlightened sensibilities of the aristocracy. By the mid-eighteenth century, animal shows and menageries took up this space, supplying animal entertainment across social strata and inviting more Britons into the natural knowledge production process.<sup>88</sup> Animal shows and menageries were also responsible for ordinary Britons' introduction to the rhinoceros in 1758 and 1790, respectively.

#### A Rhinoceros in England, 1758

Between 1741 and 1758, Dutch Captain, Douwemout Van der Meer toured across Europe with an Indian rhinoceros named Clara. During their seventeen years of partnership, the pair covered an impressive amount of ground, travelling from Berlin to Basel, Nuremburg to Naples, and Vienna to Versailles.<sup>89</sup> For Van der Meer, Clara represented a rare commercial opportunity. Europeans craved exposure to exotic animals in the eighteenth century, but many species presented formidable problems during transportation. The Indian rhinoceros was no exception. Once acquired in India, the rhinoceros had to be kept in stable health, and safely secured aboard a pitching ship for six months while travelling back to Europe. As the largest subspecies of the

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<sup>88</sup> It is worthy of note that menageries existed in England before the eighteenth century. The Tower of London Menagerie, for example, was established in the thirteenth century by King Henry III. Earlier iterations of the menagerie, however, were reserved for the English royal family and did not reflect ordinary Britons' access to animals.

<sup>89</sup> The actual travel itinerary of Clara and Van der Meer was, chronologically: Leiden, Hanover, Berlin, Frankfurt, Breslau, Vienna, Regensburg, Freiburg, Dresden, Leipzig, Kassel, Mannheim, Schaffhausen, Zurich, Basel, Rhine, Schaffhausen, Black Forest, Stuttgart, Ulm, Augsburg, Nuremberg, Wurzburg, Mannheim, Leiden, Rheims, Versailles, Paris, Lyons, Marseilles, Naples, Rome, Bologna, Venice, Leiden, London.

rhinoceros genus, Indian rhinoceroses were especially difficult to secure during transport; they presented sailors with an immediate two-ton headache. The domestication of the Indian rhinoceros was equally as challenging as their transport for European captors. Between their sheer size, sensory sensitivities and solitary nature, mature Indian rhinoceros were difficult to tame. As a calf, Clara was the ideal subject for Van der Meer's transcontinental travel; she was smaller and more susceptible to training.<sup>90</sup> So, in 1741, when Dutch East India Company Director Jan Albert Sichterman offered to sell Clara to Van der Meer, he accepted.



Figure 12 – Pietro Longhi, *Il Rinoceronte*, 1751

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<sup>90</sup> Ridley, Glynis. *Clara's Grand Tour: Travels with a rhinoceros in eighteenth-century Europe*. New York: Grove Press, 2004, 7.

After seventeen years of successful touring in Europe, Van der Meer decided to introduce Clara to the most important market that remained to him: England. In England, Clara was widely marketed and publicly showcased. Ordinary Britons, who witnessed Clara, conceptualized the rhinoceros as a source for entertainment. Whereas enterprising British artists saw Clara as a source for business. During Clara's tour, Van der Meer became a master of marketing. He designed and distributed a large series of handbills, all of which advertised the exact areas where Clara would be showcased next. Van der Meer's accumulation of audiences through public advertisement, rather private invitation, indicated the inclusivity of his tour. Handbills targeted the lower classes of Britain; they were stuck to public walls and printed with eye-catching imagery intended to stop passing pedestrians. The flyers could be easily removed from their postings and taken to one's family at home – or to their friends at a tavern – as a point of conversation. As the only rhinoceros in England, Clara would have been an especially exciting talking point for Britons. Van der Meer's pursuit of popular audiences in England is further implicated by his broadsheets' content. The flyers were largely graphic apart from a small description at the footer.<sup>91</sup> In that description, Van der Meer promised his potential audiences a sliding scale of admission. He offering Britons – regardless of their socioeconomic status – a chance to see the rhinoceros.<sup>92</sup> Thus, Van der Meer's advertising not only maximized Clara's audiences, but actively included Britain's working class. Ordinary Britons conceptualized the rhinoceros as an accessible form of entertainment, which popularized historically privileged encounters with the exotic.

While many Britons conceptualized the rhinoceros as a form entertainment, others saw Clara as a commodity to be profited from. In England, public and professional interest in Clara

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<sup>91</sup> See *Figure 13* for a broadsheet used to promote Clara's tour in 1758.

<sup>92</sup> Ridley, *Clara*, 54.

precipitated markets for rhinoceros merchandise. Enterprising Britons flocked to Clara's tour to produce and sell their promotional goods. Artists crafted fashion accessories, engravings, *objet d'art*, paintings, poems, and statues. While writers wrote broadsheets, encyclopedic entries, and theological tracts.<sup>93</sup> The proliferation of promotional goods during Clara's tour reflected the commercialization of rhinoceros in England. Van der Meer's show opened up new, albeit temporary, markets for enterprising Britons to capitalize upon Clara. Britons, therefore, conceptualized the rhinoceros as both a source of entertainment and business.

Promotional goods not only implicated Britons' utilitarian understandings of the rhinoceros, but marked a change in their conceptions of the animal's appearance. Prior to Clara's tour, Dürer's sixteenth century rendering of the rhinoceros was the most iconic and prolific image of the rhinoceros in Europe.<sup>94</sup> For many Britons, Dürer's figure was the only recourse for imagining what the rhinoceros looked like. This meant that Britons imagined a highly decorated animal with scaled skin and a unicorn horn protruding from its back. Witnessing Clara, however, led Britons to replace Dürer's rendition of the rhinoceros with Clara as the new archetype for the rhinoceros. The artistic merchandise associated with Clara's tour popularized a new, accurate, representation of the rhinoceros in Britain. Britons increasingly produced accurate knowledge on the rhinoceros' appearance in the eighteenth century.

Van der Meer's relationship with Clara – which was exhibited during their tour – similarly led Britons to produce new knowledge on the rhinoceros' behavior. After Clara's tour in 1758, there was a preponderance of literary references to rhinoceros in British literature. In the literature, rhinoceroses were characterized as docile, even affectionate creatures, which starkly contrasted

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>94</sup> See *Figure 6* for Albrecht Dürer's print of the rhinoceros.

their characterization in earlier natural histories. Since Pliny's *Historia*, Britons conceptualized the rhinoceros as an aggressive animal that consciously prepared itself for battle with its enemies.<sup>95</sup> Yet, by 1774, Britons' conceptions changed. In his book, *History of the Earth and Animated Nature*, novelist Oliver Goldsmith challenged the reporting of earlier natural historians and offered his own observation of the rhinoceros.

*It is reported also, that when [the rhinoceros] overturned a man, or any other animal, it continues to lick the flesh quite from the bone with its tongue, which is said to be extremely rough...that is so far from the truth, that no animal near its size has so soft a one...I have often seen it lick a young man's face who kept it, and both seemed pleased with the action.*<sup>96</sup>

Clara was the only rhinoceros present in England during Goldsmith's lifetime. She must have been, therefore, the rhinoceros that Goldsmith observed licking its keeper's face. Goldsmith's scene of Clara licking Van der Meer's face represented a contradiction of prior aggressive characterizations of rhinoceros. The scene introduced a new, friendlier, conception of the rhinoceros. By allowing Clara to lick his face, Van der Meer plainly demonstrated his confidence in the rhinoceros' docility and training. He encouraged his British audiences to conceptualize the rhinoceros as an obedient and animal. Britons' friendlier conception of rhinoceros, precipitated by Goldsmith's *History*, implicated the importance of travelling animal shows to Britons' understandings of rhinoceroses. The example of Clara's behavior led Britons to a reconfiguration of their entire behavioral characterization of the species. By witnessing the rhinoceros in real-life, Britons laid claim to new

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<sup>95</sup> Boreman, *Description*, 14.

<sup>96</sup> Goldsmith, Oliver. 1774. *An History of the Earth, and Animated Nature*. 1st ed. Vol. 1. London: A. Fullerton and Co.

knowledge on the rhinoceros. Britons appeared to prioritize knowledge that was produced through first-hand accounts. Unlike the case of Clara's appearance, however, Britons behavioral characterization of the rhinoceros was largely inaccurate. Clara's docility was not an accurate representation of all rhinoceroses temperaments. She was extracted from the wild, after her mother was killed by hunters in Assam, and placed in the home of the Dutch East India Company Director, Jan Albert Sichterman.<sup>97</sup> In Sichterman's home, Clara became imprinted upon humans and was accustomed to human society; she was not socialized with the same behaviors as wild rhinoceroses would have been.<sup>98</sup> Clara was, therefore, a poor case study for Britons to base their behavioral conceptions of the rhinoceros upon. Thus, the first-hand witnessing of the rhinoceros led Britons to conceptualize the rhinoceros in new ways. Britons' conceptions were decidedly accurate in terms of the animal's physicality, and utterly inaccurate in terms of their behavior.

#### A Rhinoceros in England, 1790

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<sup>97</sup> Ridley, *Clara*, 1.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 12.



Figure 14 – George Stubbs, *Indian Rhinoceros*, 1792

On June 5<sup>th</sup> 1790, a young male rhinoceros arrived in London aboard the East Indiaman, *Melville Castle*. Immediately upon the animal's arrival, managerist Thomas Clark purchased the rhinoceros for 700 English pounds.<sup>99</sup> Shortly thereafter, Clark brought the rhinoceros back to his property on the north side of the Strand in London: the Great Room over the Exeter Change. The Exeter Change was a two-story building with an arcade extending across the carriageway. The ground floor was home to dozens of shops and business, while the first floor housed the Great

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<sup>99</sup> Rookmaaker, Kees, John Gannon, and Jim Monson. "The Lives of Three Rhinoceroses Exhibited in London 1790–1814." *Archives of Natural History* 42, no. 2 (2015): 279–300. <https://doi.org/10.3366/anh.2015.0312>.



Room where Clark exhibited his extensive animal collection.<sup>100</sup> Two years earlier, on April 26<sup>th</sup> 1778, Clark announced the inauguration of his menagerie. He offered Britons a “Grand Collection of living Beasts and Birds, selected from Asia, Africa, and America”.<sup>101</sup> Clark’s Exeter Change collection was the longest-running and most accessible menagerie of early modern England. The menagerie fostered the inclusion of Britons across gender and socioeconomic barriers, actively appealing to working class, female, and youth audiences. Thus, upon the eventual arrival of the rhinoceros in 1790, the Exeter Change represented the most prolific site of encounter between the rhinoceros and early modern Britons. Britons conceptualized the rhinoceros as a rare Indian animal, an accessible form of entertainment, and a commodity to be capitalized upon.

In a handbill advertising Clark’s rhinoceros in 1790, the rhinoceros was characterized as a rare animal gifted by Indian royalty. The handbill stated,

*The Rhinoceros, or Real Unicorn, just arrived at the Lyceum, near Exeter-Change in the Strand. From the Empire of the Great Mogul, he was presented to an English Nobleman by an Eastern Rajah, as a Rarity seldom to be met with, and His Lordship has complimented the curious of his native Country by presenting him to a Gentleman who has carefully brought him home for their Inspection.*<sup>102</sup>

As a gift from Indian royalty to English nobility, the rhinoceros was attributed with value and indicated a diplomatic relationship between Britain and India. The handbill led Britons to

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<sup>100</sup> Grigson, *Menagerie*, 98.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

<sup>102</sup> *Rhinoceros Handbill*. 1790. Print. *The British Library, Lysons Collectanea*.

[http://www.rhinosourcecenter.com/pdf\\_files/144/1443744426.pdf?fbclid=IwAR17Bgk5tPNvZHgvAdR2bDEa1I5OImSJXkR](http://www.rhinosourcecenter.com/pdf_files/144/1443744426.pdf?fbclid=IwAR17Bgk5tPNvZHgvAdR2bDEa1I5OImSJXkR).

conceptualize the British and Moghul Empires as being connected, and the rhinoceros as a testament to their connection. By evoking the imagery of the “Eastern Rajah,” the advertisement romanticized the provenance of the rhinoceros. The handbill fabricated the origin of the rhinoceros as being the Mughal Emperor, which bestowed the rhinoceros with greater importance than its actual owner: the Indian viceroy, Nawab Asaf-Ud-Daula. Britons conceptualized Clark’s rhinoceros as a symbol of British diplomacy in India. Thus, the rhinoceros led Britons to imagine an exoticized version of Indian diplomacy; Britons envisioned a distant land where a powerful Emperor gifted exceedingly rare animal species to his foreign dignitaries.

Outside of literary renderings, Clark’s rhinoceros was conceptualized as an accessible form of entertainment. At the Exeter-Change, the rhinoceros reached a breadth of audiences, including Britain’s working classes, women and children. Clark’s menagerie was not only made available to Britons across different gender and socioeconomic strata, but was intentionally advertised to them. Logistically, the rhinoceros was available for Britons’ viewing from 8 o’clock in the morning until 8 o’clock in the evening. This timing was relatively accessible for London’s laboring class. Craftsmen and tradesmen, for example, traditionally worked earlier daytime hours, and would have been available for leisurely activity in the evening. The admittance fee charged for viewing the rhinoceros was similarly accessible to working class Britons. Clark charged his visitors one shilling to witness the rhinoceros, and reduced this fee to six pence for servants and children under twelve years of age.<sup>103</sup> The Exeter Change’s admittance fee was largely feasible for England’s working class, especially for an occasion as special as viewing the rare Indian rhinoceros.<sup>104</sup> In conjunction,

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>104</sup> See Edward Palmer Thompson’s, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 1964 for a thorough account of England’s laboring class – including their social activities, leisure pursuits, and cultural practices – in the eighteenth century.

the relatively later hours and lower admittance fees of the rhinoceros exhibition rendered them accessible to popular audiences in England. Britons conceptualized the rhinoceros as a feasible opportunity to witness, and be entertained by, an exotic animal.

Clark's rhinoceros was not only advertised to working class Britons, but to women and children as well. In addition to lowering the admittance fee of children – which incentivized their appearance at the Exeter Change – Clark marketed the rhinoceros exhibition in a way that would have appealed to women, children and families. In advertisement describing the Great Room, Clark stated that his animals were “well secured in iron dens – Ladies and children may see them with the greatest safety”.<sup>105</sup> Unlike earlier early modern animal entertainments – which intentionally excluded women – Clark's public-facing menagerie actively included women. In fact, Clark not only sought the engagement of women through marketing, but encouraged the attendance of women by reducing the price of children and staff. As a businessman, Clark's marketing reflected an attempt to maximize audiences and profit. The marketing also reflected, however, Britons' increasing recognition of women and children as demographics interested in exotic animal encounters. The inclusivity of Clark's rhinoceros exhibition represented the growing popularization of menageries in eighteenth century England. Britons' increasing access to the rhinoceros meant that more Britons – across gender, age and socioeconomic strata – could claim knowledge of rhinoceros and were incorporated into Britain's natural knowledge economy.

Later on, however, Clark's rhinoceros was conceptualized as a commodity to be capitalized upon under any circumstance by Clark's successor, Gilbert Pidcock. Upon his retirement in the fall of 1792, Clark sold his animal collection – including the rhinoceros – to Pidcock. Around that

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<sup>105</sup> Grigson, *Menagerie*, 99.

time, the rhinoceros suffered an injury and dislocated the joint of its right foreleg.<sup>106</sup> Despite the rhinoceros' weakened condition, that following summer, Pidcock decided to repeat the success of his previous menagerie's tour. He intended to take the rhinoceros to Mart Fair in Portsmouth, the Post Down Fair in Cosham, and the Lansdowne Fair in Bath.<sup>107</sup> After all, how important was a functioning foreleg to travel? Unfortunately for Pidcock, it proved quite important. On July 11<sup>th</sup> 1793, Pidcock and the pachyderm made it as far Cosham before the rhinoceros passed. Once arrived in Cosham, Pidcock was reportedly forced to bury the rhinoceros: "the stench arising from the body was so offensive that the Mayor [of Cosham] was under the necessity of ordering it to be immediately buried".<sup>108</sup> Pidcock obeyed his orders....for a fortnight, at least. Having allowed the smell to subside, Pidcock ordered for the rhinoceros' exhumation. The rhinoceros' remnants were then retrieved, treated and mounted for Pidcock's increasingly macabre menagerie at the Exeter Change. As late as September 1793, Pidcock continued to advertise the rhinoceros' exhibition in the Great Room. He only neglected to mention the rhinoceros' rather lifeless condition.<sup>109</sup> Thus, even in death, Pidcock continued to capitalize upon the rhinoceros. Pidcock's posthumous display of the rhinoceros reflected both his, and Britons, commodification of the animal. Whether alive or dead, British audiences pursued, and paid for, a viewing of the rhinoceros. Britons conceptualized the rhinoceros as an animal that was worth witnessing under any circumstance.

The presence of Clark's rhinoceros at the Exeter Change led Britons to conceptualize the rhinoceros in a number of ways: an animal that was indicative of Indian diplomacy, an accessible

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<sup>106</sup> Rookmaaker, Gannon, Monson, "The Lives of Three Rhinoceros," 284.

<sup>107</sup> Grigson, *Menagerie*, 103.

<sup>108</sup> Bingley, William. *Animal Biography, or, Popular Zoology. 4th ed., with an addition of more than one hundred and forty species*. London: Printed for F.C. and J. Rivington, 1813.

<sup>109</sup> Rookmaaker, Gannon, Monson, "The Lives of Three Rhinoceros," 285.

form of entertainment that broadened Britons' claim to natural knowledge, and a continuous source for capital.

### Conclusion

In the eighteenth century, travelling animal shows and menageries were a new site of encounter between rhinoceros and early modern Britons. The exhibitions of Clara and Clark's rhinoceros in 1758 and 1790, respectively, capitalized upon Britons' contemporary interests in animal entertainment and exotic display. Rhinoceros exhibitions were widely marketed to Britons across different age, gender, and class stratifications. As more Britons witnessed the rhinoceros, they laid claim to knowledge on rhinoceros, and were incorporated into Britain's natural knowledge economy. Physical encounters with the rhinoceros precipitated new conceptions of the species, which varied in terms of their accuracy; Britons developed more realistic conceptions of rhinoceroses' appearance, but less realistic understandings of their temperament.

## Conclusion

In the British Empire, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Britons were exposed to – and conceived of – Greater One Horned Rhinoceros. Britons' conceptions of rhinoceros were shaped by a number of early modern institutions and individuals: the British East India Company, British artists, British natural historians, curiosity cabinets, travelling animal shows and menageries.

The British East India Company was responsible for the rhinoceros' physical introduction in Britain. The Company accepted the rhinoceros under diplomatic circumstances in India, and replicated Indian uses of the rhinoceros in Britain. The Company's recognition, and appropriation, of Indian cultural customs – animal gift giving and rhinoceros exhibition – reflected the rhinoceros function as a diplomatic link, and a site of cultural transfer, between Britain and India. The interpretations of rhinoceros, which were produced by British artists, collectors and natural historians, reflected Britons' conceptions of the rhinoceros as a commodity and symbol of British dominion in India. Curiosity cabinets and natural histories conceptualized the rhinoceros through its horn and imbued the animal with antidotal power, which reflected the salience of imperialist philosophy in British epistemologies. Britons tended to commodify and privilege nature, just as the British Empire did. The commodification and collection of rhinoceros horn represented Britons' sense of possession over the rhinoceros and India. The rhinoceros symbolized the curiosity of Indian medicinal and decorative culture. Thus, the display of rhinoceros horn, implicated Britons perception of Indian culture: it was suitable for their possession and display. In England, Britons witnessed the rhinoceros through travelling animal shows and menageries. In these spaces, Britons conceptualized the rhinoceros as an accessible form of entertainment and an avenue to claim natural knowledge. Animal shows and menageries were explicitly marketed to Britain's

working class, women, and children, which not only popularized natural knowledge, but increased participation in Britain's natural knowledge economy. More Britons – who were historically excluded from animal encounters and natural knowledge – were legitimized as knowledge-producing individuals and precipitated new understandings of the rhinoceros.

As the following conclusion suggests, Greater One Horned Rhinoceros were conceptualized in a number of different ways by Britons. What remains consistent across the conceptions, however, is Britons' replication of imperial and Enlightened philosophies in their knowledge of nature. British understandings of Indian rhinoceros were suffused with the Empire's colonial and supremacist orientations towards India. Despite the increasing diversification of natural knowledge producers – across different age, gender, and socioeconomic stratifications – Britons' continuously conceived of nature through an imperial lens. Thus, rhinoceros offer historians an invaluable perspective for understanding British epistemologies. The rhinoceros was a natural entity acquired through the British Empire in India, whose conception in Britain inherently implicated Britons' orientations towards empire, the non-European world, and nature.

## Appendix

Figure 1 – The World. 1790. “The Rhinoceros or Real Unicorn.” *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection*. <https://link-gale-com.revproxy.brown.edu/apps/doc/Z2001522031/BBCN?u=prov98893&sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=0b2696b5>.

<p><b>EAST INDIES.</b>  <b>A</b> DANISH SHIP of near Five Hundred Tons, coppered, with accommodations equal to any English East Indiaman, will sail for Bengal in a month at farthest.            For particulars, apply at the Bank Coffee-house, from twelve to two o'clock.</p>	<p>tranquility of the City, or impede the freedom of Election. That this Meeting, taking into consideration LORD HOOD's situation as a Lord of the Admiralty, do not expect his Lordship to make a general canvass. And should he not be able to attend their Meetings and the Hustings so frequently as on former occasions, it is hoped the Electors will, in justice to his Lordship, ascribe it to a necessary attention to the interests of his country, and not to want of respect to his Constituents, whose good opinion, we are persuaded, it ever will be his utmost ambition to preserve.            Signed, by Order of the Meeting,  <b>JOHN CHURCHILL.</b></p>
<p><b>THE RHINOCEROS or REAL UNICORN,</b>  <b>J</b>UST arrived at the LYCEUM, near EXCHANGE, in the STRAND, from the Empire of the Great Mogul. He was presented to an English Nobleman, an Eastern Rajah, as a rarity seldom to be met with, as his Lordship has complimented the curious of his native country, by presenting him to a Gentleman who has carefully brought him home for their inspection. He is about two years old, in perfect health.            This wonderful Beast, with his impenetrable Coat of Mail, and other singularities, is so fully described and admired by Naturalists in general, that we presume it is sufficient to inform those who contemplate and admire the bounteous productions of the creation, that this Herculean Quadruped is to be seen as above.            Admittance One Shilling each person.            On Monday next will be published, in One Volume Octavo</p>	<p>To the GENTLEMEN, CLERGY, and FREEHOLDERS of the COUNTY of OXFORD.  <b>GENTLEMEN,</b>  <b>T</b>RULY sensible of the distinguished honour we have this day experienced from the unanimous voice of the Electors for this County, permit us to return our most grateful acknowledgments for so singular a mark of your confidence: and we take the earliest opportunity of assuring our Constituents, that to promote the welfare and prosperity of the Kingdom in general, and the County of Oxford in particular, shall be the invariable objects of  <b>GENTLEMEN,</b>            Your obliged and most faithful            Humble Servants,  <b>BLANDFORD WENMAN.</b>            Oxford,            June 24, 1790.</p>
<p><b>L</b>ITERS to Mr. ARCHDEACON TRAVIS, in Answer to his Defence of the Three Heavy Witnesses. 1 John, v. 7.            By R. PORSON.            Sold for T. and J. Egerton, near Whitehall. Also sold Messrs. Merrill, Cambridge; and Messrs. Prince and Co, Oxford.</p>	<p>To the GENTLEMEN, CLERGY, and FREEHOLDERS of the COUNTY of DERBY.  <b>GENTLEMEN,</b>  <b>I</b>Beg leave to return my very sincere thanks for the distinguished honour you have again conferred upon me, by this day electing me one of your Representatives in Parliament. My gratitude, as well as high sense of the Trust reposed in me, will command my best exertions in the service of my Country in general, and of this County in particular. I am,  <b>GENTLEMEN,</b>            Your most obliged,            Devoted Humble Servant,  <b>EDWARD MILLER MUNDY.</b>            Derby,            June 26, 1790.</p>
<p><b>M</b>CLAGGET, Patentee for Improvements on MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, No. 16, Greek-street, who, has completed the following Articles, i. e. his Violin Tenors, Violoncellos, Harpsichord, Grand Piano Fortrench Horn, Trumpet and Guitar. Also his Tuning Machine, which enables every person possessed of an ear to keep their Harpsichords, Harps, or any other stringed Instrument, in tune. His equal Keep, for Harpsichords, which saves the study of various fingerings, and</p>	



*Figure 2 – Daniell, Thomas. 1790. Indian Rhinoceros. Oil Painting. Yale Center for British Art .  
<https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:54269>.*



*Figure 3 – Howitt, Samuel. 1790. Rhinoceros Hunting. Etching. The Sporting Magazine or Monthly Calendar of the Transactions of the Turf, the Chase, and Every Other Diversion Interesting to the Man of Pleasure, Enterprise and Spirit .*



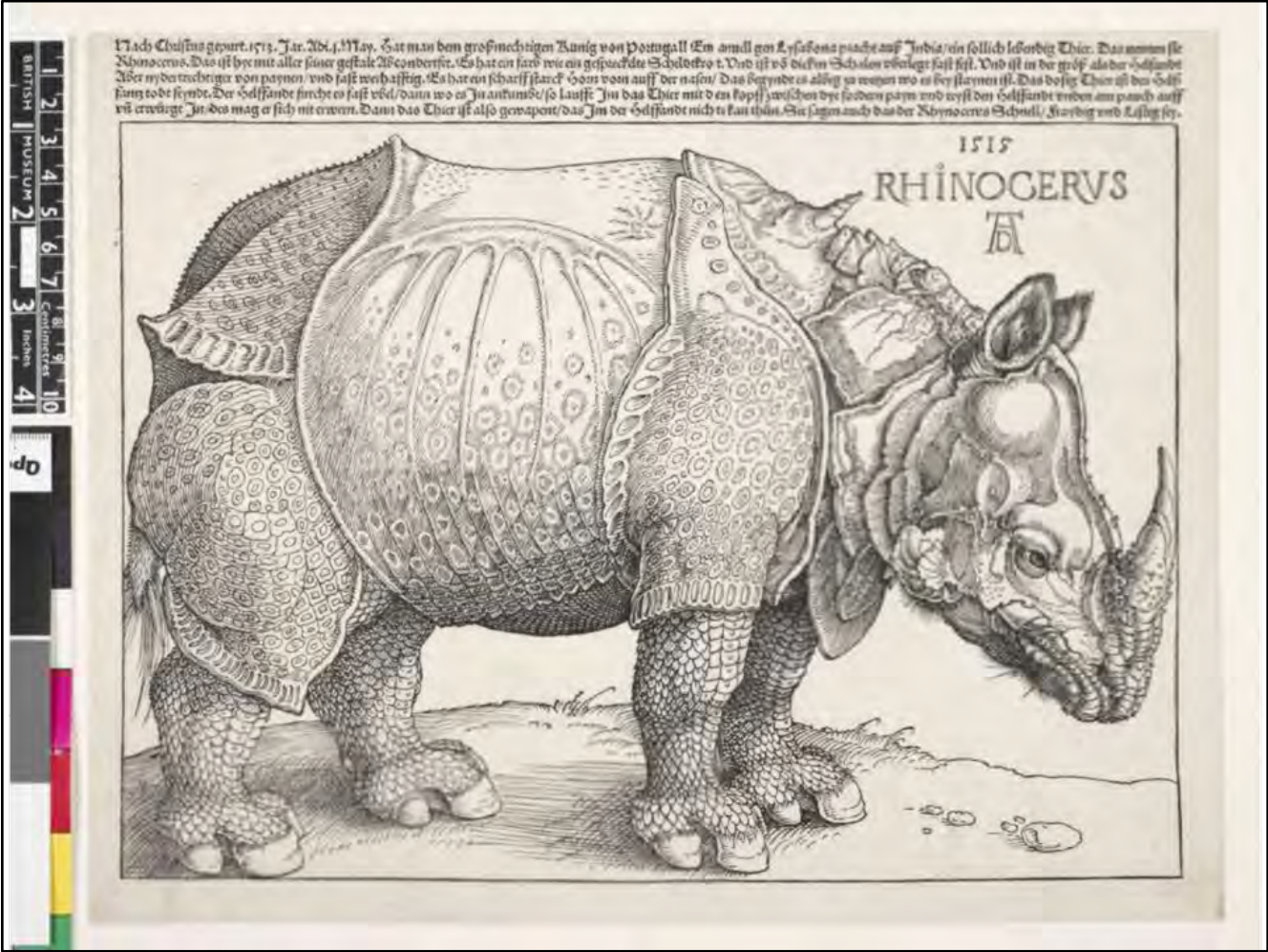
*Figure 4 – Howitt, Samuel . 1765-1822. Drawing. Sketch. The British Museum .  
[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1875-0710-2630](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1875-0710-2630).*



*Figure 5 – Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory . 1752-1756. Dish. Ceramic. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/203351>.*



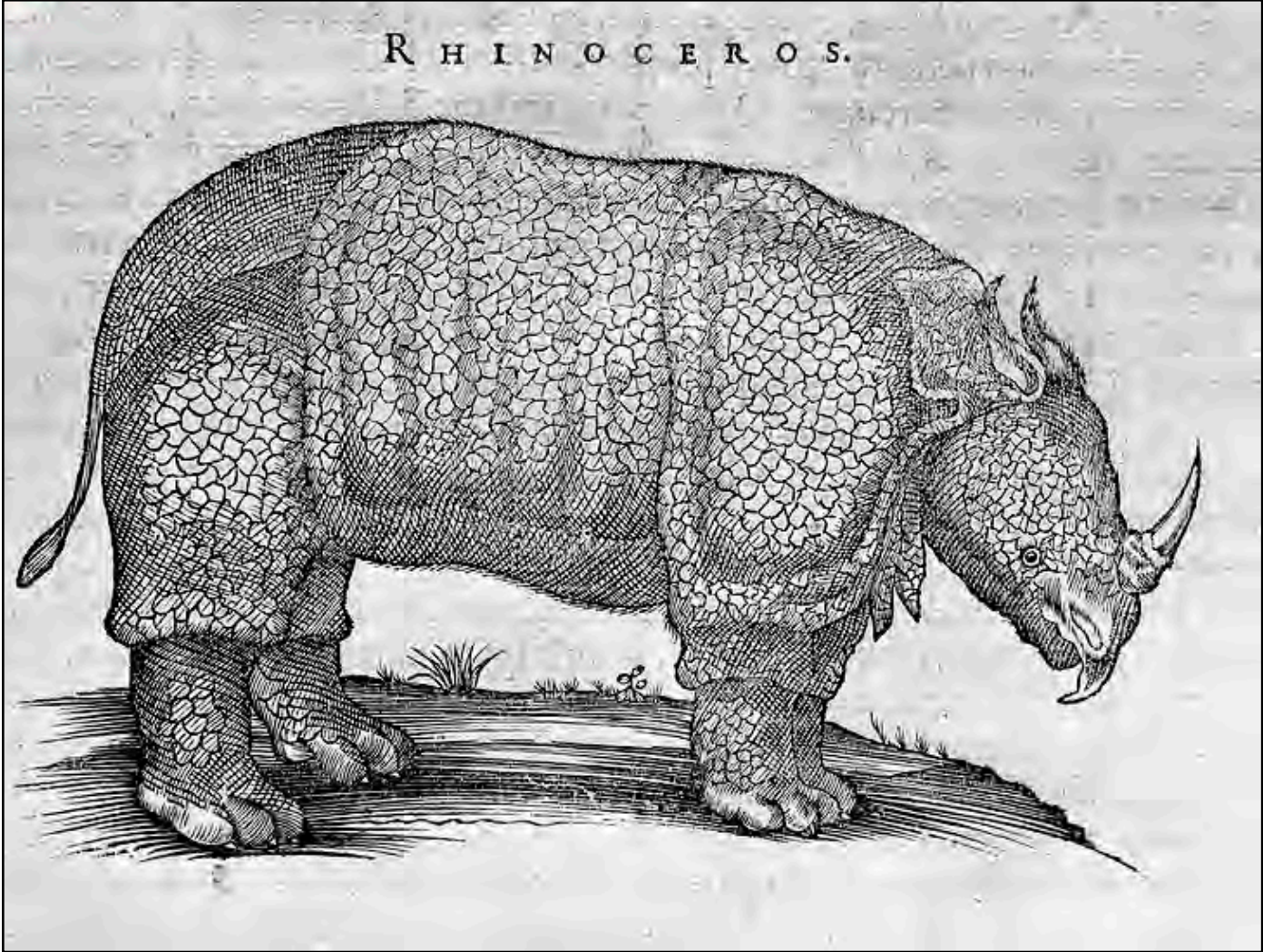
Figure 6 – Dürer, Albrecht. 1515. *Broadside; Print. Print. The British Museum .*  
[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1895-0122-714.](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1895-0122-714)



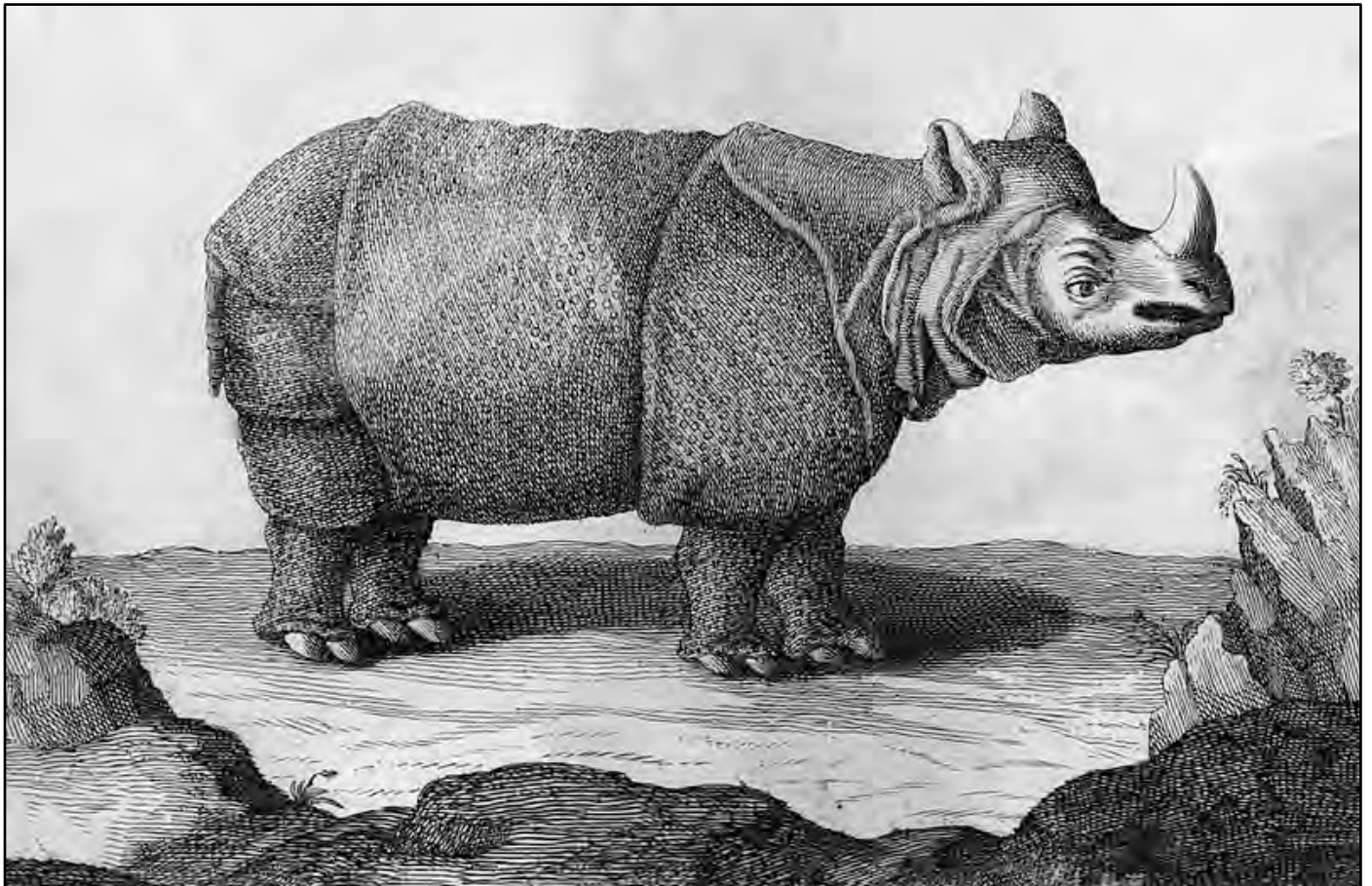
*Figure 7 – Coin. 84AD. Copper Alloy. The British Museum .*  
[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C\\_R-11458.](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_R-11458)



*Figure 8 – Bontius, Jacob. 1642. Rhinoceros. Engraving. Linda Hall Library .  
[https://www.lindahall.org/about/news/scientist-of-the-day/jacob-bontius/.](https://www.lindahall.org/about/news/scientist-of-the-day/jacob-bontius/)*



*Figure 9 – Chardin, Jean. 1675. Rhinoceros. Print. Rhino Resource Center.*  
[http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/images/Chardin-1711\\_i1190624443.php?type=all\\_images&sort\\_order=asc&sort\\_key=year.](http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/images/Chardin-1711_i1190624443.php?type=all_images&sort_order=asc&sort_key=year)





*Figure 10 – The British Museum . 1525. Cup. Rhinoceros Horn. The British Museum .  
[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W\\_SLMisc-1713](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_SLMisc-1713).*



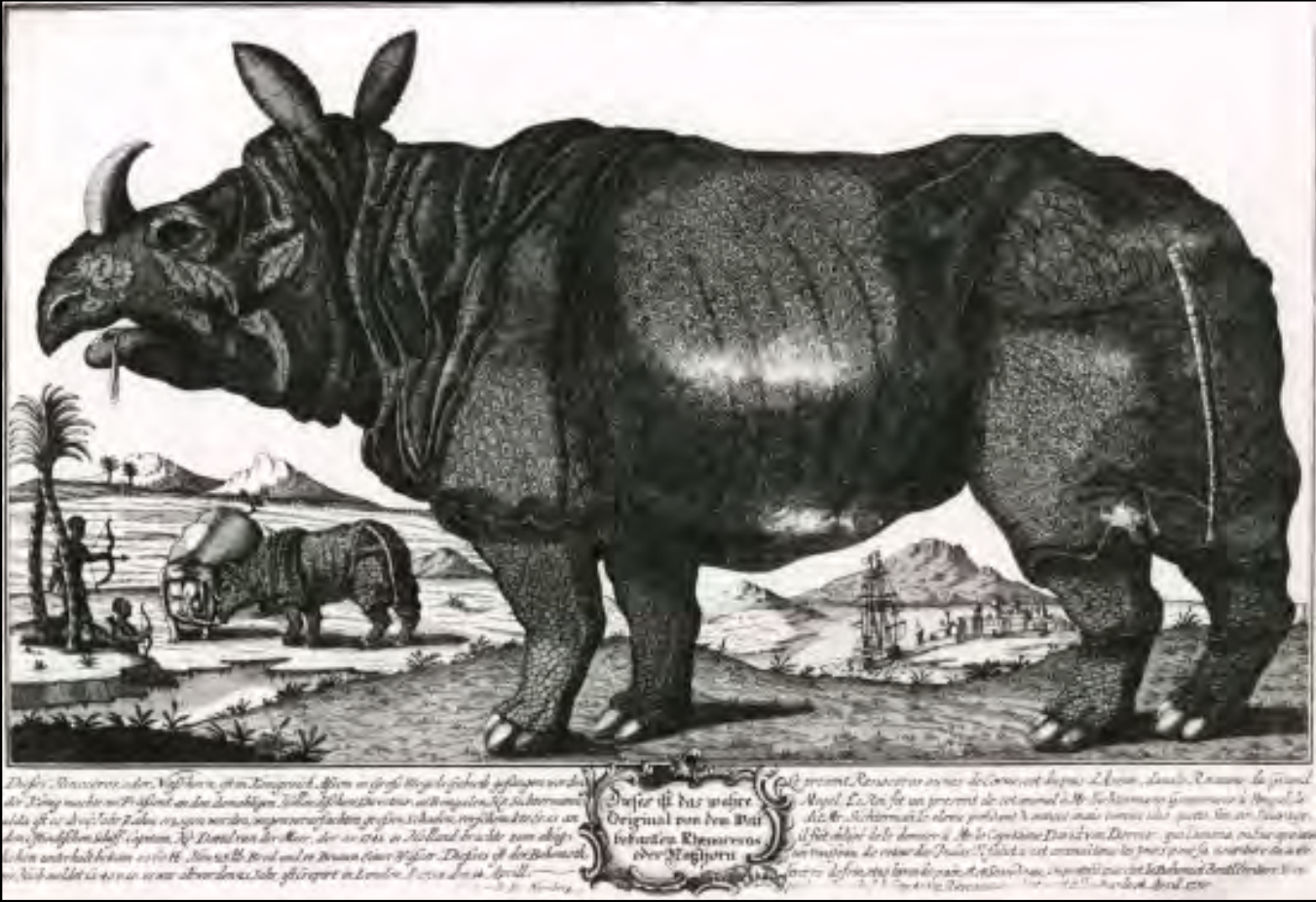
Figure 11 – Hogarth, William. 1759. *The Cock Pit*. Print. *The Victoria and Albert Museum* .  
<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1681973/the-cock-pit-print-hogarth/>.



*Figure 12 – Longhi, Pietro. 1751. Il Rinoceronte. Oil Painting. Getty Center .  
[https://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/oudry/enlarge\\_rhinoceros148.html/](https://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/oudry/enlarge_rhinoceros148.html/).*



Figure 13 – Berndt, Johann Christoph. 1758. *Clara Broadsheet*. Print. *Rhino Resource Center*. [http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/images/Johann-Christoph-Berndt-1707-98\\_i1219868130.php?type=search&keywords=clara%20broadsheet&sort\\_order=desc&sort\\_key=year](http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/images/Johann-Christoph-Berndt-1707-98_i1219868130.php?type=search&keywords=clara%20broadsheet&sort_order=desc&sort_key=year).

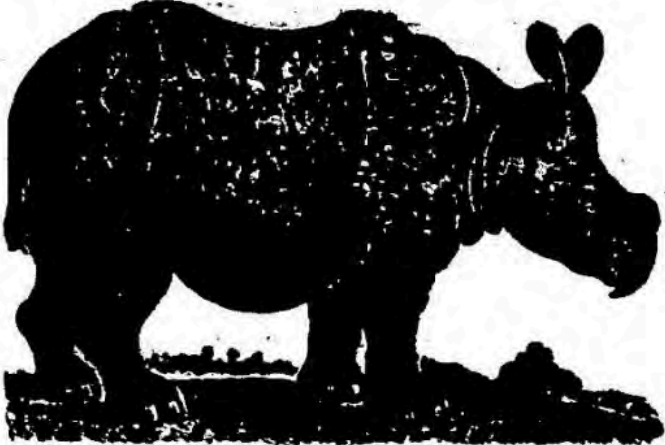


*Figure 14 – Stubbs, George. 1792. Indian Rhinoceros. Oil Painting. The Royal College of Surgeons of England, Hunterian Museum. <https://hunterianmuseum.org/digital-hunterian/games/jigsaw-puzzle-indian-rhinoceros-by-george-stubbs>.*



Figure 15 – Rhinoceros Handbill. 1790. Print. *The British Library, Lysons Collectanea.*

[http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/pdf\\_files/144/1443744426.pdf?fbclid=IwAR17Bgk5tPNvZHgvAdR2bDEa1I5OlmsJXkR.](http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/pdf_files/144/1443744426.pdf?fbclid=IwAR17Bgk5tPNvZHgvAdR2bDEa1I5OlmsJXkR)



**The RHINOCEROS,  
OR  
Real UNICORN,  
Just arrived at the  
LYCEUM,  
NEAR  
EXETER - CHANGE  
In the STRAND,**

**FROM** the Empire of the GREAT Mogul, he was presented to an English Nobleman by an EASTERN RAJAH, as a Rarity seldom to be met with, and His Lordship has complimented the curious of his native Country by presenting him to a Gentleman who has carefully brought him home for their Inspection

**HE** is about two Years old in perfect Health

**THIS** wonderful Beast with his Impenetrable Coat of MAIL and other singularities is so fully described and admired by Naturalists in general, that we presume it is sufficient to inform those who Contemplate and Admire the boundless Productions of the Creation, that this Herculean Quadruped is to be seen as above.

**Admittance One Shilling each Person.**

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