

# THE STORY OF DÜRER'S GANDA

BY CAMPBELL DODGSON

1930

ONE of the most popular of Dürer's drawings is that which bears the title "Rhinocerous" with the date 1515, the property of the British Museum since it was founded in 1753 by the acquisition of Sir Hans Sloane's collection. Many people must have wondered how Dürer was able to draw such a relatively accurate portrait of an animal that he can never have seen, even though, in some of its details, the portrait is imaginary, the artist being evidently unable to resist the temptation to invent fish-like or reptilian adornments for the pachyderm. The answer is that a sketch sent from Lisbon must have provided the material for his drawing. He is confused about dates; having first written "153" in the inscription on the drawing, he corrected this in the woodcut to "1513," which is still wrong; the day of the month is also incorrect. The woodcut—dated, like the drawing, 1515—went through many editions, and is, of course, owing to its wide dispersion, far better known than the original drawing. Of the woodcut I shall soon have more to say.

The beast itself excited great interest, and all its doings were "news" in the years 1514-16, for it was the first rhinoceros to be seen in Europe since the days of ancient Rome. Pliny records that there was one at Rome at the time of Pompey the Great. I have in my collection an engraving made at Dresden by M. Bodenehr in 1751 (actually a copy from a better anonymous engraving of 1746) from a rhinoceros caught in Assam and brought to Holland in 1741 at the age of three, which claims to be the second of its kind ever brought to Europe. The allusion here is probably to Dürer's rhinoceros as the first. Be this as it may, let us now return to Dürer's "sitter" himself. This rhinoceros was brought from India by the Portuguese. In 1901, when writing the text to the Dürer Society's fourth portfolio, I took great pains, with the aid of Mr. R. S.

Whiteway, author of "The Rise of the Portuguese Power in India," to extract such references as could be found in Portuguese historians to this animal. The results were also published, much abridged, in my better-known work, "Catalogue of the Early German Woodcuts in the British Museum," 1903, Vol. I. p. 307. But more documents have since been discovered, and the fuller story of the beast's "deambulations," as he calls them, has recently been published at Lisbon, in rather quaint English, by the Portuguese writer, Senhor A. Fontoura da Costa.

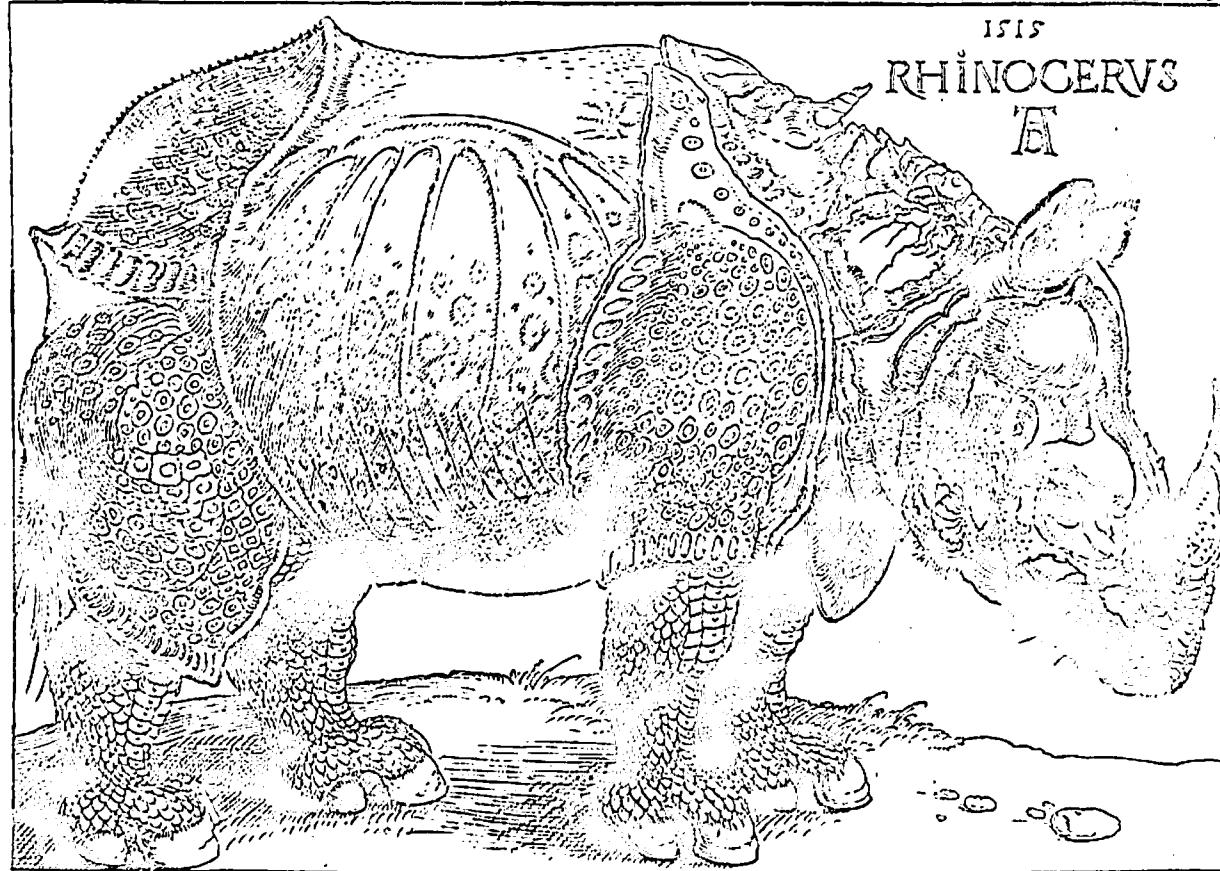
Before relating it, let me translate the inscription on the drawing, which ranks before the woodcut as a first-hand document, for it explains how much Dürer knew about the matter. It appears, by the wording, to be the copy of a German translation of a letter from Lisbon, the author of which was perhaps a Portuguese, for he speaks of Emanuel I as "our King." I cannot agree with Mr. Fontoura da Costa that the drawing in the British Museum is itself of Portuguese origin, and that Dürer only wrote on it a translation of the accompanying letter from Lisbon, for all experts agree that the drawing itself is indisputably by Dürer's hand. He wrote under it as follows:—"It was in the year 15 (1)3, on May 1st, they brought our King of Portugal at Lisbon such a beast alive from India, which they call a Rhinoceros. For the wonder's sake, I have had to send you a likeness of it. It has a colour like a tortoise and is covered nearly all over with thick scales, and in size is like the elephant but lower, and is the elephant's mortal enemy. It has in front on its nose a strong sharp horn, and when the beast comes at the elephant to fight him, it has always first whetted its horn sharp against the stones and runs at the elephant with its head between his forelegs, and rips him up where his skin is thinnest, and so kills him. The elephant is very badly afraid of the rhinoceros, for it kills the elephant whenever it comes at him, being well armed and very lively and active. This beast is called 'rhinoceros' in Greek and Latin, but in the Indian language 'ganda'."

In the woodcut the text is slightly modified: Emanuel is called "the mighty King of Portugal;" the Indian name "ganda" is not mentioned; the tortoise to which the colour is compared is called

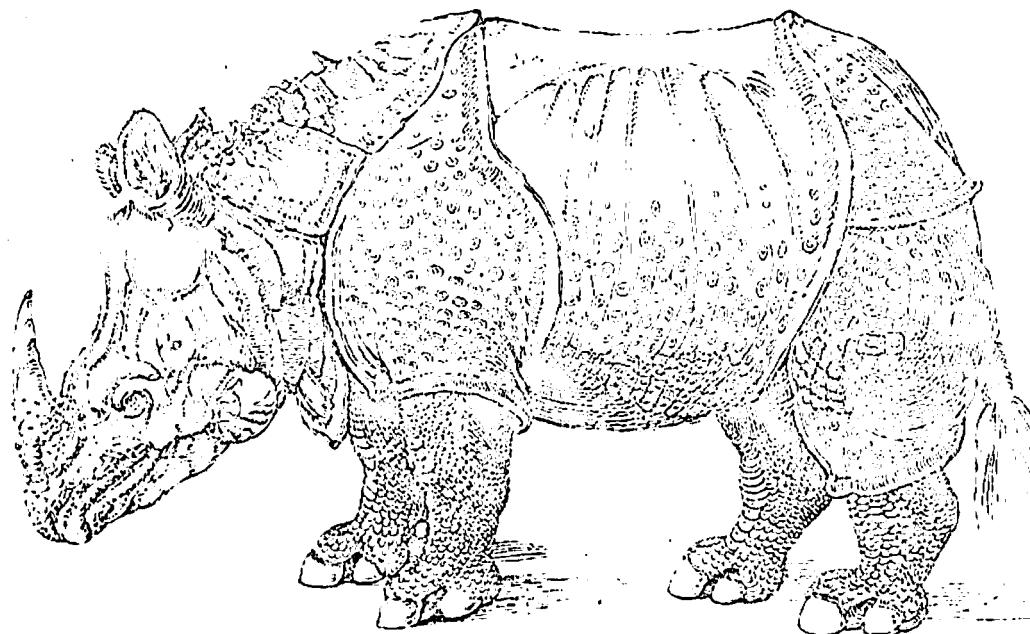
17. Nach Chrysostomus gesp. 1513, Jar. 2. Bl. 4, May. Hat man den grossmächtigen Künig von Portugall Em anuell gan Lysbona: pracht auf India, ein sollich lebendig Thier. Das mannen sie Rhinocerus. Das ist hennet aller füner gefalte Absonderheit. Es hatzen sind vee: ein gespück der Schildeker. Und ist vü dicken Schaloer überleges fast. Und ist in der gross alder Häfende über und unterteilt von paynen und fast wechafsig. Es hatzen schauff staret Horn vom aus der nein. Das beynnde es albeg zu weten wo es bei steynau ist. Das doßig Thier ist des Velpf hinz tode sond. Der Häfende fürchtet es fast vels dann wo es in anumber so laufft. Im das Thier mit dem Kopffizischen die hiden payn vnd roß den Häfende vnd vber am pauch auf vñ emwüge. In das mag er sich mit ervern. Dann das Thier ist aljo gewapont das in der Häfendendicht zu kan ihun. Sie sagen auch das der Rhinocerus Schnell/Starvlig und Lästig ist.

1515

RHINOCERVUS  
A



RHINOCERON



1753. In my opinion, the number of species of the genus *Lepturus* is not known, but it is very probable that there are many more than are now known.

“ein gespreckelte Schildkrot,” instead of simply “ein krot;” its lower (i. e., less than elephantine) height is explained by its legs being shorter, and it is said to have a regular habit of sharpening its horn against stones, not only when it is spoiling for a fight. But on the whole the information given is just the same, though the sentences are differently arranged, and the last epithet (*listig-wily*) is peculiar to the woodcut. The account of the enmity between elephant and rhinoceros is taken from Diodorus Siculus; as we shall presently see, the quotation moved Emanuel to test its correctness by experiment.

We are told by Bodenehr a good deal about the early life of Rhinoceros No. 2, and learn that it was tame as a lamb, having been only one month old when caught with ropes in Assam, and having acquired, at an early age, the habit of walking round the dining-room table at meal times; its own meals, when a “calf,” as Bodenehr calls it, at the tender age of thirteen, consisted of sixty pounds of hay, twenty pounds of bread and fourteen pails of water. As to the youth of Rhinoceros No. 1, on the other hand, history is silent. The known life of the *ganda* begins with its presentation to the Portuguese envoys, in 1514, by Muzafar, King of Cambay or Sultan of Guzerat, in return for presents sent by Albuquerque in the hope of obtaining permission to build a fort at Diu. Albuquerque, Teixeira, and Béja received the rhinoceros at Surat on May 16th, and then sailed to Goa, arriving on September 15th. On October 20th, Albuquerque ordered presents to be given to the native Oçem, who was taking the *ganda* to Portugal. The Portuguese fleet sailed early in January, 1515, Teixeira and the rhinoceros being on board *Na. Sa. da Ajuda*. The return voyage from India lasted 120 days, and the route lay between Madagascar and the Continent, touching at Moçambique, then round the Cape of Good Hope to St. Helena, and thence to Lisbon. Though deprived of grass, its main article of diet, the rhinoceros, fed presumably on hay and rice, reached Lisbon safely on May 20th. It was, doubtless, not stabled at Paço dos Estaos, Rossio, where King Emanuel kept elephants, but probably in some outhouse of the Palacio da Ribeira. Adjoining this palace there was the Casa da Mina, which had a courtyard in front of it

surrounded by high walls and battlements, with iron-barred windows.

Mr. Fontoura da Costa has discovered, in a letter written by a German, Valentin Ferdinand of Moravia, addressed to a friend at Nuremberg, and extant in an Italian translation, a description of the encounter which took place on Trinity Sunday, 1515, between the *ganda* and one of the King's elephants. The brief narrative of an eye-witness is somewhat embellished by the more imaginative pen of the modern Portuguese author. "On June 3rd," he writes, "the Royal Family with Court and guests gathered in the courtyard. The native Oçem had led the rhinoceros by a chain and placed it behind the tapestries hanging from the passage, where it remained well hidden. Then, from a stable at Paços dos Estaos, was brought the youngest of the elephants kept there. The elephant entered the arena, and the King ordered that the tapestries be drawn. The rhinoceros appeared furious and ready for the attack, and rushed forward so violently that it broke loose from the chain. The elephant was standing with its back to the *ganda*, but, as soon as he perceived the enemy, turned round and, lifting its trunk, uttered a tremendous cry, then seeing with its bright eyes the strong horn of the rhinoceros, got such a fright that it fled in the direction of one of the barred windows. Wrenching off, with its trunk, the iron bars which were as thick as an arm, the elephant succeeded in getting its head through the window, then with mighty strength the bars gave way and broke, and it got its whole body through and, finding itself free, started on a mad career until it reached the stables at Rossio. Thus ended this interesting festival, which enlivened the 1515 life of Lisbon."

The wealthy and splendour-loving Emanuel I, had sent Tristão da Cunha to Rome in 1514 with rich presents to Leo X, including an Indian elephant and a cheetah, whose powers Leo promptly tested in the Vatican gardens. There is a graphic account of the arrival at the embassy in Rome in a letter of March 18, 1514, addressed to the King, which describes the friars hanging over the walls to look at the elephant, which made a triple genuflexion before the Pope, and then performed all sorts of tricks and squirted water over

the people, while the Pope shouted with laughter like a boy at its antics. Emanuel resolved in the following year still further to impress the Pope, with the aim of obtaining concessions, and to send him the rhinoceros as a gift—perhaps, as Giovio says, with the further intention of providing a rhinoceros-elephant fight at the Vatican. In a document dated October 20, 1515, Emanuel specifies vessels of silver and gold, adding “and for the *ganda* the following articles: gilt-iron chain; green velvet collar with gilt roses and carnations, trimmed with fringe.” “How dandy poor *ganda* must appear in such harness!” is the comment of our Portuguese author. João de Pina, captain of a sailing vessel unnamed, was charged to take the presents to Rome. The ship arrived at Marseilles in January, 1516, and the rhinoceros was put ashore on one of the islands in the bay, probably Pomègue or Ratonneau, to be seen by Francis I, King of France, who with Queen Claude was at Marseilles, returning from La Sainte Baume, where he had gone to render thanks for the victory at Marignan. Late in January, or in February, João de Pina sailed for Rome, but a storm caught the vessel in the Gulf of Genoa, and it was lost with all aboard, being washed against the rocks a little north of Porto Venere. Paolo Giovio describes the wreck in his “Dialogo dell’ Imprese Militari et Amoroſe” (1555), saying “it was impossible for the beast to save itself, although it swam wonderfully, since it was in chains, and the rocks are very high on all that coast.” Damião de Goes adds that the corpse of the *ganda* was washed ashore, and after being stuffed, was sent to the Pope. “And so,” concludes our author, “in this sad manner ended the deambulations of the *ganda* of Muzafar; King of Cambay.”

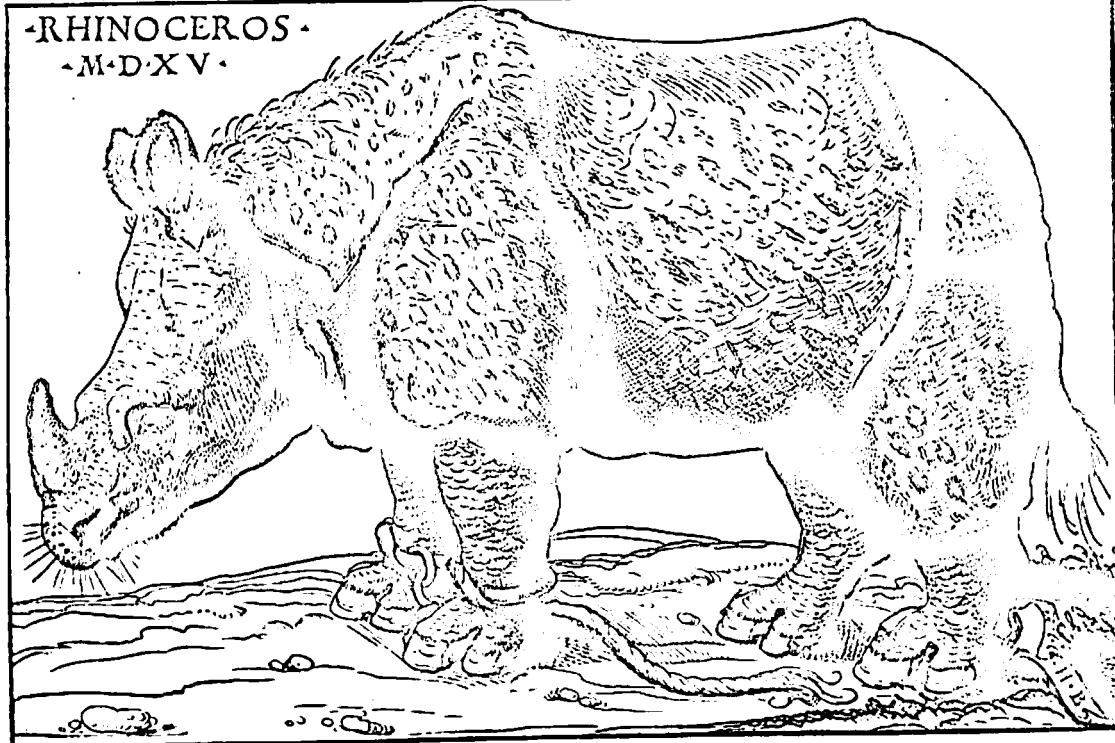
It is known to all students and collectors of Dürer that the woodcut of the rhinoceros went through many editions. Bernhard Hausmann, who possessed a large variety of editions in his Dürer collection, which descended to his daughter, Frau Blasius, at Brunswick, described eight varieties in his Dürer catalogue of 1861. Four of these are represented in the British Museum, which possesses, in addition to the “eighth” (chiaroscuro), with the tone-block printed in green, a rarer and finer impression of the same edition, more recently acquired, in which the tone-block is printed in a beautiful

shade of greyish blue. Joseph Meder, author of the most recent complete catalogue of Dürer (Vienna, 1932), also describes eight editions, or varieties of printing, but his eight are not quite the same as Hausmann's eight, for he omits one of these, and adds as the eighth, after Janssen's chiaroscuro edition, a still later edition in black. Meder's dating of these various issues, based upon watermarks and the condition of the block, is interesting; according to him the second edition is already as late as 1540, only the first, to which the impression here reproduced belongs, being of Dürer's time. All of the first five editions differ in respect of the text. The first has five full lines, as reproduced here. The second, with modernised spelling, has five and one-half lines, and ends "der Rhynocerus Schnell, fraydig vnd Listig sey." The third (about 1540-50), has five and three-quarters lines and ends with "Der Rhinocerus/Schnell fraitig (or "fraytig," as at Dresden), und auch Lustig/sey." The fourth has five and one-half lines and ends with "Schnell, Fraydig/vnd auch Listig sey." The fifth, with five and one-half lines, ends with "Schnell fraidig und auch Listig sey" (Meder has not met with this variety, which he describes after Hausmann). In the case of impressions from which the text has been cut off, the edition can only be recognised by a watermark or by the progress of a crack from left to right across the block, in stages described by Meder. After these five issues in black, follow two which were printed in Holland about 1620 or a little later. The earlier, still in black, with six and one-half lines of text in Dutch, in which the right date, 1515, appears for the first time, should have, if quite complete, the address "Men vintse te coope by Hendrick Hondius Plaetsnijder in 's Gravenhage." The latter, of which no copy with the text preserved seems to exist, was printed by W. Janssen at Amsterdam after 1620 with the addition of a tone block, generally printed in green or brown. On the analogy of Janssen's edition of the Varnbüler portrait in chiaroscuro, it is probable that text with his address was originally attached to these impressions in colour. A copy, earlier than the chiaroscuro editions of the original, was printed by Jan Liefrinck at Antwerp both with Flemish and with French text.

There are two representations of a rhinoceros by other hands,

•RHINOCEROS•

•M.D.XV•



both dating from the very year, 1515, in which Dürer's woodcut was published, which cannot be independent of this print, though their exact relationship to it is not very easy to explain. One of these is drawn in red ink at the foot of one of the marginal illustrations (fol. 102 in Gichlow's edition), to that portion of the work known as the Emperor Maximilian's Prayerbook which is now preserved at Besançon. It is one of the drawings which bear (added later) the monogram of Altdorfer, but of which the authorship is disputed. The animal faces to the left, as in Dürer's drawing. It differs from the latter in that the forefeet are raised and rest on a flat stone, while both the forelegs have a rope round them, cut off short and tied with fluttering ends. There is a chequered pattern across the ridge of the back which Dürer left blank both in the drawing and in the woodcut, and there is much less accentuation of the rib-like structure on the animal's flank, suggestive of the ribs of an umbrella, which is so conspicuous, and so surprising as Dürer drew it. The Altdorfer drawing, I suspect, is itself founded upon the other version of which I have yet to speak. This is the fine and large woodcut by Hans Burgkmair (Bartsch 76), signed and dated MDXV, of which only one impression exists, in the Albertina at Vienna. It is No. 516 of Geisberg's great facsimile work as indexed in the "Bilderkatalog," but otherwise has been little reproduced. Here the animal's forelegs are bound by a rope, which passes through a link of a short metal chain. There are more hairs on the snout than in Dürer's woodcut; the tail is of a more plausible appearance; the leathery hide on the legs looks more credible and less like scales. The curious ribs on the back are omitted, so is the little horn, like a spiral shell, on the neck. The neck itself is covered with long hair instead of a hard substance resembling the shell of a crustacean. It can hardly be denied that Burgkmair's rhinoceros resembles the real thing more closely than the celebrated woodcut by his contemporary at Nuremberg, and I feel bound to retract the opinion which I formerly expressed that Burgkmair copied Dürer. Did he obtain at Augsburg a better representation of the Lisbon rhinoceros than had reached Dürer at Nuremberg? It is impossible to answer the question, for we know absolutely nothing of the circumstances in which Burgk-

mair's woodcut was produced, and if it was published, as it very likely was, to illustrate a sheet with explanatory text, that text has utterly vanished. That Burgkmair was even more in touch than Dürer with the doings of Portuguese traders and explorers in the Indies is proved by his rare series of woodcuts of the year 1508 (Geisberg 509-514), representing members of various Asiatic and African races and their domesticated animals (sheep, cattle, elephants and camels). The first voyage of German merchants to the Portuguese Indies, on ships fitted up by the Welsers, Fuggers and other Augsburg families, took place in 1505-6. Ten years later Burgkmair may have had, through their help, a well-informed correspondent at Lisbon, able to supply him with an authentic representation of the chained "Behemoth" arrived from India. He cannot have improved upon Dürer by the help of his imagination alone. Dürer himself is not known to have had relations with the Portuguese at an earlier date than 1520-21, when the diary of his travels in the Netherlands abounds in references to Rodrigo and others of his nation then residing at Antwerp.

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