THE NATURAL HISTORY OF EGYPT: Vol. IV

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with Jana Osbornová

# THE MAMMALS OF ANCIENT EGYPT

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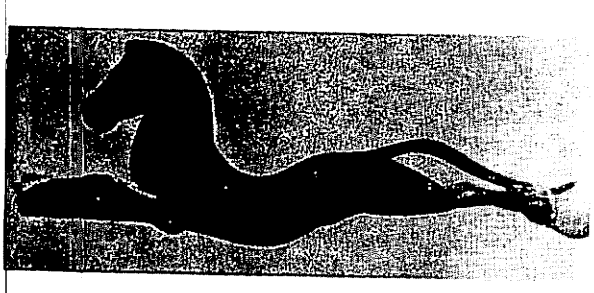
*12-19 A painted wooden statuette of a horse being ridden by its young groom from early Dynasty XVIII at Sohag. Source: Phillips (1948: fig. 38).*



*12-20 A charioteers' whip handle in the shape of a horse carved from ivory and painted. Dynasty XVIII, Thebes. Source: Phillips (1948: fig. 39).*

Phillips (1948: fig. 38) remarked that the statuette is one of the earliest reproductions of the horse in Egypt. Schulman (1957: 266) and Rommelaere (1991: 48) said the white lines respresented either piebald patterns or artistic decorations. The latter is more probable.

**Zebras**

Zebras were apparently unknown to Ancient Egyptians as no artistic depictions were found.

Palaeozoological research, however, revealed the existence of the following species of this group in the territory of Egypt.

**Burchell's Zebra *Equus burchelli*** (Gray, 1824)

F Zèbre de steppe; G Steppenzebra

*Nomenclature*: Dorst and Dandelot (1969: 162) listed this zebra as *Equus (Hippotigris) burchelli* Gray; and Haltenorth and Diller (1980: 113) as *Hippotigris (Quagga) quagga* (Gmelin, 1788).

*Distribution*: According to Churcher (1974: 374) "the absence of zebras from Sinai or Palestine for the Pleistocene suggests that *E. burchelli* was the original equid inhabitant of north eastern Africa." Replacement in northern Africa by *Equus asinus* was already mentioned above (see *Natural history* in Wild Ass). The present distribution is the eastern and south eastern part of Africa south of the Sahara.

*Prehistoric records*: Although Churcher (1982: table 1) listed this species from Dakhla Oasis in Late Neolithic sites, his later finds (Churcher, 1983: fig. 2; 1986b: 420) indicated that *E. burchelli* was no longer part of the Neolithic fauna of Dakhla Oasis.

**Grevy's Zebra *Equus grevyi*** (Oustalet, 1882)

F Zèbre de Grévy; G Grevyzebra

*Nomenclature:* Dorst and Dandelot (1969: 159) list it as *Equus (Dolichohippus) grevyi* Oustalet, and Haltenorth and Diller (1980: 112) as *Hippotigris (Dolichohippus) grevyi* (Oustalet, 1882).

*Distribution:* This zebra lives in arid areas of southern Ethiopia, northern Kenya, and southwestern Somalia (Churcher, 1993b: 1 f., fig. 5).

*Prehistoric records:* Remains dated to the early Neolithic have been collected in two localities in Dakhla Oasis by Churcher (1983: 179; 1986a: 1; 1986b: 415 ff., 420; 1993b: 2).

**[Cape Zebra *Equus capensis*]**

Fragmentary Quarternary remains from Dakhla Oasis have been tentatively identified as the extinct Cape zebra, *E. capensis* (Churcher *et al.*, 1997).

# Rhinoceroses
## Family *Rhinocerotidae*

 *jrb3* irba Wb I, 115

*General description:* African rhinos are large, thick-skinned, and hairless, except for fringes on the ear

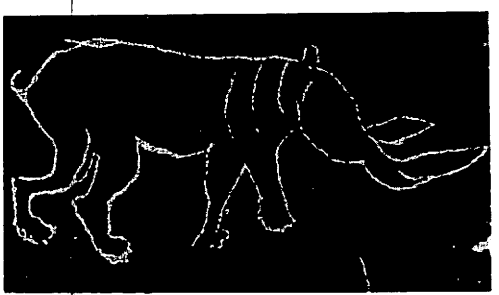
tips and tassled tails. The ears are long and tubular; tails of medium length. The feet have five hoofed toes. There are usually two horns on the upper nose; the front one being the longest (fig. 12-21).

The 'horns' do not have a core and sheath, but are solid masses of keratin, a substance like that of fingernails, which is formed from skin cells (Ryder, 1962).

Two species occurred in Ancient Egypt, but both disappeared in the Late Predynastic or Early Dynastic.

**Black Rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis*** (Linnaeus, 1758)

F Rhinocéros noir; G Nashorn, Spitzmaulnashorn; A Khartteet Eswed, Karkadan



*12-21 Rock drawing by Autochthonous Mountain Dwellers of a black rhinoceros at Site 35 between Hosh and Wadi Sab'er Rigal on the west bank of the Nile opposite Silwa Bahari, about 27 km N of Kom Ombo. Source: Winkler (1938 I: pl. XXI).*

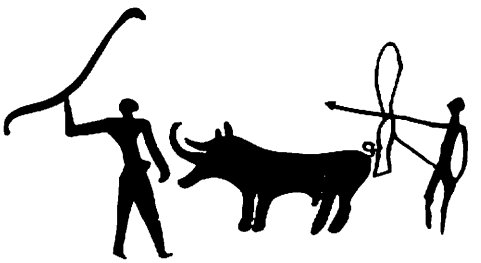
*Nomenclature:* The name derives from *di-* (dis, Gr) two; *keras* (Gr) a horn; *bi-* from *bis* (L) twice, two; *cornu* (L), genitive *cornus*, the horn of an animal; so here it is first in Greek for the genus, and then in Latin for the species; a 'two-horned two-horn' (Gotch, 1979: 199 f.).

*Description:* The black rhino is grey. There is no hump on the neck. The upper lip is narrow and has a prehensile projection; an adaptation for browsing.

*Natural history:* Black rhinos inhabit mainly bushland and open forest, although they may be found in savanna with little cover and in dense forest.

Gautier (1980: 321) commented that although both species of rhinoceros may occur together, the browsing black rhino generally occurs in lusher vegetation, which may account for the black rhino having lived along the Nile and the white rhino in the Western Desert.

Black rhinos are active during early morning and late evening, but remain in shade or in mud wallows during the heat of the day. They normally drink every day, but in the dry season can survive



*12-22 Rock drawing of a black rhinoceros in a hunting scene near Abrak in the southern Eastern Desert. Source: Červíček (1974: fig. 23).*

without water for several days. Foliage of numerous flowering plants, shrubs, and trees is browsed, but grass is rarely eaten.

These rhinos are generally solitary, except for mating pairs, females with young, small groups of immature animals, and gatherings of both sexes of various ages in mud wallows.

*Distribution:* The present distribution is in scattered areas south of the Sahara in central, southeastern, and southwestern Africa and a large area including southern Sudan, and Ethiopia southward into Mozambique (Haltenorth and Diller, 1980: 115 f.).

This rhinoceros has not been reduced by poaching as severely as the white rhinoceros, probably because it is more difficult to hunt.

*Prehistoric and Predynastic records:* Rock drawings of black rhinos are known from several localities in the Eastern Desert (figs 12-21,-22). Fossil records are rare.

Further notes on black rhinos are in the *Dynastic period* in the white rhinoceros section.

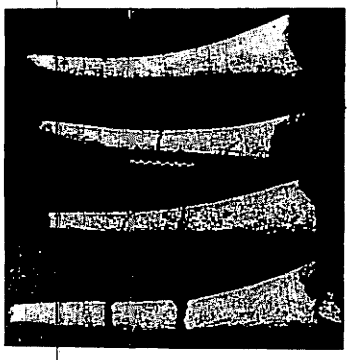
**White Rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum*** (Burchell, 1817)

E Square-lipped Rhinoceros; F Rhinocéros blanc; G Nashorn, Breitmaulnashorn; A Khartteet Abyad

*Nomenclature:* The name apparently derives from *kerato* (Gr) horn *therion* (Gr) beast and *simum* (L) snub-nosed or flat-nosed.

*Description:* The white rhino is not white, but a lighter grey than the black rhino. There is a prominent nuchal hump on the neck, and the head is usually carried low. Other features are similar to those of the black rhino, except the front horn is usually very long, the body is larger, and the upper lip is very broad, an adaptation for grazing (plucking grass).

*Natural history:* White rhinos require shrubby areas for shelter and trees for shade, and grassy plains for



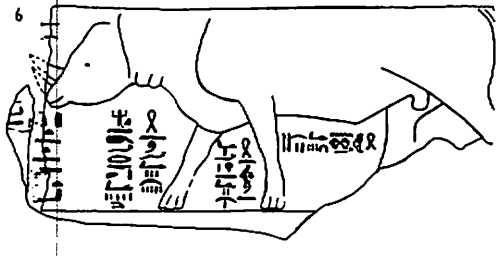
*12-23 Pottery horns of white (?) rhinoceroses in the Mastaba of Hor-Aha, Dynasty I, Saqqara. Source: Emery (1939: pl. 17,B).*

*12-24 Bone and rawhide carvings of rhinos from the Middle Kingdom site of Kerma in southern Nubia. Source: Hilzheimer (1931: figs. 1,2).*

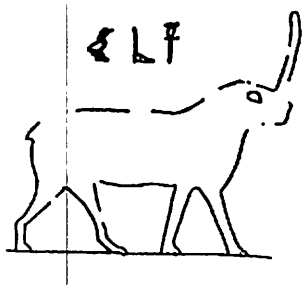
grazing. Otherwise, their habits are similar to those of the black rhino, although they can survive for longer periods without drinking water.

*Distribution:* The present distribution of this species is limited to scattered localities in the southern half of Africa (Haltenorth and Diller, 1980: 118 f.). There are recent records from southern Sudan (Setzer, 1956: 570). Migration south of the Sahara was doubtless induced by the desertification that began in the Late Predynastic to early Dynastic after 3,000 B.C.

*Prehistoric records:* The distribution of this species in ancient times from west of the Nile valley across North Africa is verified by a few archeological records. Churcher (1980: 388) found tooth fragments of *Ceratotherium simum* (?) in a Neolithic site in Dakhla Oasis. Gautier (1980: 321, table A 4.2) listed remains of white rhino from Upper Pleistocene (Terminal Paleolithic and Neolithic) at Bir Tarfawi and Bir Sahara in the southern Western Desert. Regarding north-western Africa, Kowalski and Rzebik-Kowalska (1991: 30) said that the fauna of the Acheulian Culture (Lower Paleolithic) in the Erg Tihoudaine on the edge of the Tassili n'Ajjers Mts. contained remains of *C. simum* and that fossil records were recorded in the Magreb from Pliocene to Holocene (*op. cit.*, 24, table III). Hufnagl (1972: 17 f.) listed rhinos from Miocene to Recent in Libya.



*12-25 Drawing of a sunken relief of a white rhinoceros on the Dynasty XVIII pylon of Tutmosis III, in the Temple of Armant (Hermonthis), west bank of the Nile, about 16 km S.W. of Luxor. Source: Mond and Myers (1940: pl. XCIII, 6).*



*12-26 Drawing of a fantastic beast in the Tomb of Baqt, Dynasty XI, Beni Hasan. Source: Keimer (1948c: fig. 4).*

*The Dynastic period:* Various illustrations and artifacts of black and white rhinos appeared in the Dynasties. Not all of them can be unmistakenly identified to species; therefore, both 'species' are included in this and the following subdivisions.

In the Dynasty I Mastaba of Hor-Aha at Saqqara a number of pottery rhinoceros horns were found. These were imperishable imitations along with offerings of meat, vegetables, and bread (fig. 12-23).

Rhinoceros horns were believed to have strong magical powers and for that reason the King was given these lasting and destruction-resisting imitations in his grave.

Rhinoceros horns were and continue to be important in folk medicine in Egypt and other parts of Africa and also in Asia. They are supposed to be a strong aphrodisiac when ground into a powder.

Powdered horn mixed with water and drunk is still believed by Bedouins of the Kushmaan Clan of the Maaza Tribe in the Eastern Desert to be "an excellent treatment for scorpion stings and snake bites, although few people have owned or tried this remedy" (Hobbs, 1989: 63).

Middle Kingdom bone and rawhide carvings of white and black rhinos (fig. 12-24, left and right) from Kerma in southern Nubia (Sudan), although partly damaged, are recognizable.

On the Dynasty XVIII pylon of Tuthmosis III in the Temple of Armant (Hermonthis) on the west bank of the Nile, about 16 km S.W. of Luxor, there is a sunken relief depicting a white (?) rhinoceros (fig. 12-25). Tuthmosis III reportedly killed the beast in the vicinity of Miu in the southern desert region of Nubia.

A number of measurements are inscribed below the figure. These were translated into inches by Mond and Myers (1940: 204) and said to be comparable with the measurements from black and white rhinos. Measurements listed were length of limbs; height of forleg from the ground;

circumference of the foot, and of the back leg; size of horn, and girth.

Further remarks and dating of rhinoceros figures are in the *Errors and discrepancies.*

*Greco-Roman times:* During the three centuries when rhinos appeared in Rome they were thought to have been imported through Egypt from west of the Nile in Sudan.

Keimer (1948c:50) wrote that information on rhinoceros importation to Egypt (Alexandria) and to Rome proved that importations were from Asia as well as Africa.

*Errors and discrepancies:* Various reproductions show that the Ancient Egyptian artists could not clearly distinguish rhinoceroses from elephants nor from hippopotamuses.

A good example is the 'fantastic beast' with a single horn in the Dynasty XI Tomb of Baqt in Beni Hasan (fig. 12-26), which is labelled *3bw*, elephant. It was called an 'elephant' by Hilzheimer (1926: fig. 3) and a 'fantastic animal (Elephant-Rhinoceros)' by Keimer (1948c: 52, fig. 4).

Davies (1933a: 26) said that the single horn brought it nearer to the rhinoceros and ..."At a time when knowledge of both animals could come only from second-hand reports of visitants to the far south, their characteristics could easily be confused."

Four horns labelled elephant ivory that are pictured in the Dynasty XVIII Temple of Deir el Bahari and that were called rhinoceros horns by Naville (1898 III: 14, pl. LXXVIII), are probably elephant tusks. Keimer (1948c: 52, fn. 1), said this was absolute proof that the Ancient Egyptians also gave the name *3bw* to the horns of the rhino.

The horned animal in a relief of the hieroglyph for rhinoceros (fig. 12-27) was described by Hilzheimer (1926: 167, fig. 25) as being wrongly interpreted as a rhinoceros: ..."It carries a horn-like structure on the forehead, but otherwise has not the slightest resemblance to a rhinoceros and the animal will probably with error be interpreted as a rhinoceros." Keimer (1948c: 50) said that the artist who designed the animal had certainly never observed a rhino nor an elephant and the determinative was a fantastic beast.

Although the position of the horn is incorrect, this figure could only be interpreted as a rhino despite the long snout, which is no longer than those on the rhinos in Figures 12-21,-22.

The entire figure is comparable with the hieroglyph *jrb3* for rhinoceros in Wb. I, 115, 4.

In a painting of the hieroglyph (fig. 13-27) the 'horn' on the rhinoceros protrudes from the lower jaw like the tusk of a hippopotamus or an elephant. Despite this error, the nuchal hump and other features of the head and body indicate that it represents the determinative for the rhinoceros hieroglyph.

(See also *Errors and discrepancies* in the Hippopotamus chapter).

*12-27 A relief of the rhinoceros hieroglyph in the Dynasty V Temple of Ne-User-re, Abu Gurab, N.N.W. of Saqqara. Source: Hilzheimer (1926: fig. 25).*