



# The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe

*Brian W. Ogilvie*

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Out of the diverse traditions of medical humanism, classical philology, and natural philosophy, Renaissance naturalists created a new science devoted to discovering and describing plants and animals. Drawing on published natural histories, manuscript correspondence, garden plans, travelogues, watercolors, and drawings, *The Science of Describing* reconstructs the evolution of this discipline of description through four generations of naturalists.

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, naturalists focused on understanding ancient and medieval descriptions of the natural world, but by the mid-sixteenth century naturalists turned toward distinguishing and cataloguing new plant and animal species. To do so, they developed new techniques of observing and recording, created botanical gardens and herbaria, and exchanged correspondence and specimens within an international community. By the early seventeenth century, naturalists began the daunting task of sorting through the wealth of information they had accumulated, putting a new emphasis on taxonomy and classification.

Illustrated with woodcuts, engravings, and photographs, *The Science of Describing* is the first broad interpretation of Renaissance natural history in more than a generation and will appeal widely to an interdisciplinary audience.

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