

An extensive natural history of the New World, accompanied by delightful woodcuts.

Nieremberg, Juan Eusebio. *Historia Naturae, Maxime Peregrinae, Libris XVI*. Antwerp: Balthazar Moretus, 1635. 14 1/16 inches x 8 1/2 inches (357 mm x 216 mm), 614 pp.

Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (1595–1658) was a Spanish Jesuit of Tyrolian descent. The prolific author of some fifty books, he prayed and heard confession by day and wrote by night. Most of his publications were devotional or ascetic; they include a life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola (founder of his order), a Spanish translation of *The Imitation of Christ*, accounts of *The Glories of Divine Grace* (1638), and *The Difference between the Temporal and the Eternal* (1640). His collected works on the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Immaculate Conception were published in a fat omnibus folio volume under a delightful title that might easily have served to advertise an American laundry detergent three centuries later: *Opera Parthenica de super-eximia et omni-moda Puritate Matris Dei* (Leiden, 1659).

While engaged in pastoral work, he was able to study the local botany and mineralogy to such effect that he was appointed Professor of Natural History at Madrid. Nieremberg's major scientific work is the volume reproduced here, the first comprehensive work on the natural history of the Spanish colonies of America. A compendium of "animal, vegetable, or mineral," it includes species new to science, often with native names, as well as notes on Aztec and Inca religion. Nieremberg relied largely on missionary reports and other sources, some of which were suspect. He did have access to the unpublished manuscripts of Francisco Hernandez. The many vigorous woodcuts in the text by Jan Christoffel Jegher were rarely drawn from life, and are often the pictorial embodiment of an exaggerated prose description. The botanical illustrations are copied from those published by Clusius.

The mammals of New Spain (with charming depictions of the ocelot, the vicuna, the peccary, three armadillos, and the first published illustration of an opossum) fill **Spreads**

82–108, the birds **Spreads 109–127**, the fish **Spreads 128–139**, the reptiles (introduced by a splendid coiled snake) **Spreads 140–148**, the insects **Spreads 149–152**, the plants **Spreads 153–190**, the minerals **Spreads 190–197**. Every minute detail is accessible through a massive subject index filling **Spreads 262–304**. At the end, Nieremberg included a separate account of the curiosities of natural history, the grottoes and the fountains, to be found in Europe and Palestine, *De Miris et Miraculosis Naturis in Europa* (**Spreads 197–255**)—much of this part, at least, was drawn from life.

The volume, handsomely bound in contemporary blind-stamped pigskin with clasps, concludes (**Spread 306**) with the printer's device that Moretus inherited from Plantin, with the noble motto "*Labore et Constantia.*" Like many an important Spanish book of the period, Nieremberg's *Historia Naturae* had benefited from the superior typography and editorial acumen of the Low Countries.

Nieremberg's *Historia Naturae* is now in the Cecil H. Green Library, which comprises roughly a third of the Stanford University Libraries' 8.5 million volumes. The Green Library houses special collections amounting to a quarter million rare volumes; among the rarities are an extensive collection of Aldine editions and numerous incunables.