Edward Topsell Encyclopedia Article

Edward Topsell

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Edward Topsell

1572-1638

English clergyman and author who is best known for two works of natural history, *The Historie of Four Footed Beastes* (1607) and *The Historie of Serpents, Or the Second Book of Living Creatures* (1608). He completed his studies at Cambridge University in 1592. He served as curate or vicar at a number of Anglican churches while authoring at least three volumes of religious writings and sermons. Basing his later material in large part on the earlier studies of the Swiss naturalist Conrad Gesner, Topsell also included many of the prevailing zoological ideas of his time and place. Each of his animals, some of them fantastical (such as flying dragons), were given personal characteristics, reflecting moral lessons that Topsell wanted to impart. Most of his illustrations were taken from Gesner's woodcuts.