A n informed assessment of a scholarly work, especially one of an era quite different from our own, must begin with an introduction to its author and his scholarly world. 1 Fabretti’s De aquis is no exception: the three dissertations therein were completed within a two-year period between 1677 and 1679 but represent the fruits of long study and exploration of the Roman Campagna by one of the leading antiquarians and scholars of seventeenth-century Italy. 2

Raffaello Fabretti (ca. 1619–1700) was among the most learned men of his day. Born the second of six sons within a prominent family of Urbino, he undertook an ecclesiastical career, in accordance with both the long established custom of primogeniture in force at the time and the prestige of his family. Following his education in the classics and law, first at

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1. For summary accounts of Fabretti’s life and career, see DBI, 43:739–42 (M. Ceresa); Sandys, 2:280; EHCA, 422. G. Mennella’s Il Museo Lapidario del Palazzo Ducale di Urbino: Saggio storico su documenti inediti (Genoa, 1973) presents a valuable discussion focusing on Fabretti’s epigraphical work (13–32), with a balanced overview of his career (13–18) and a full review of earlier biographical studies (13–14 n. 1). Among the more useful longer biographies, see in particular that of Fabretti’s assistant Domenico Riviera, written in Latin soon after his death and later translated into Italian and published by G. M. Crescimbene in Le vite degli arcadi illustri (Rome, 1708), 1:89–111; see also G. Marotti, “Raphael Fabrettus,” in Vitae Italorum doctrina excellentium qui saeculis XVII et XVIII floruerunt, ed. A. Fabroni (Pisa, 1780), 6:174–229.

2. The first dissertation is dated to December 31, 1677; the second to August 12, 1679; the third to October 27, 1679.
Urbino and Cagli and then in Rome, where he went in his late teens to complete his studies, Fabretti entered the priesthood, a calling that was quite congenial to a man of comfortable scholarly interests: he was able to devote to research and scholarship whatever time he had free from ecclesiastical duties.3

Fabretti’s privileged background and personal ability led to important assignments within the church. He first undertook service for thirteen years as a papal diplomat in Spain (1651–64), where he continued his classical studies during his time not spent in ecclesiastical duties and where he appears to have formed his intense interest in archaeology. Recalled to Rome in 1664, he visited Paris and other European cities on his return trip, made with Cardinal Carlo Bonelli, the papal nuncio in Spain; on this journey, he became acquainted with leading scholars, such as Jean Mabillon and Bernard Montfaucon, with whom he corresponded and maintained a close friendship for the rest of his life.4

In Rome, Fabretti next served for six years as an ecclesiastical judge of appeals (1664–70), a position that prompted him to begin his own collection of inscriptions. Because farmers in the Roman Campagna regularly brought archaeological materials and inscriptions found on their property into the city for sale at ridiculously low prices, Fabretti began to purchase antiquities and inscriptions that became the nucleus of a private museum.5 He was then called to his native city, Urbino, for three years (1670–73), as a member of the episcopal staff of Cardinal Carlo Cerri, but in 1673, he accepted the invitation of his patron Cardinal Gaspare Carpegna, the cardinal vicar of Rome, to return to Rome to oversee the publication of papal edicts. As superintendent of excavations of the catacombs and custodian of relics and antiquities (custode delle ss. reliquie e dei cimiteri), a position he held for more than ten years, Fabretti found major focus for the remainder of his life and career. This assignment gave him direct access to primary source materials and opportunities to excavate, as well as ample time for his own investigations and research, opportunities for which, in the introduction to the second dissertation in the De aquis (II.1), Fabretti warmly

3. Fabretti himself acknowledges much the same thing in his introduction to the second dissertation (II.1), addressed to Cardinal Carpegna.
4. When Mabillon visited Italy in 1685–86, Fabretti served as his personal guide. See DBI, 43:741 (M. Ceresa).
5. See Mennella, Museo Lapidario, 18–19.
thanks Carpegna, himself a well-known antiquarian and collector of books and coins.6

Fabretti’s De aquis appeared in 1680, published both in Rome and in Paris. The treatise, the result of long interest in antiquity and extensive research undertaken throughout his life, was his very first publication, but it appeared only when Fabretti was already sixty years old. The three dissertations therein seem to have enjoyed an instant success; they quickly established his reputation as a leading antiquarian among European scholars, and there are frequent reports that students of antiquity consulted him regularly during visits to Rome.7 Among his Roman associates, Fabretti was well known for making long excursions into the Campagna in search of antiquities and inscriptions, always riding the same horse, which friends jokingly named Marco Polo; the horse was reported to have had a unique ability to detect ancient monuments and inscriptions, as if by smell, and to have stopped near them, indicating their location. Fabretti himself, amused by the name given to the horse by his friends, even wrote a letter to one of them in Marco Polo’s name.8

Fabretti is described as a tall and slender individual, with lively eyes and disheveled hair, which indicated to his contemporaries an intense seriousness.9 He was also famous for carrying out his archaeological explorations under all sorts of conditions, regardless of weather and rough roads, not to mention physical danger to himself.10 An excursion he undertook on the Via Nomentana in late 1699 at an advanced age resulted in a serious illness, to which he succumbed in early January 1700. Cardinal Carpegna, who witnessed Fabretti’s will, and Cardinal Gianfrancesco Albani, who later became Pope Clement XI, visited Fabretti regularly at his home during his final sickness. Fabretti’s death was mourned by all of Rome, where he had been given the extraordinary honor of citizenship, and he was buried, in accordance with his instructions, at the Church of

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6. For Carpegna’s career, see DBI, 20:589–91 (G. Romeo).
7. See DBI, 43:740 (M. Ceresa); Marotti, “Fabrettus,” 195.
8. See Crescimbene, Le vite, 1:97; Marotti, “Fabrettus,” 192–93. The story is repeated in numerous accounts of Fabretti’s life and work: see, for example, Sandys, 2:280; EHCA, 422.
10. His descriptions in the De aquis of exploring the conduit of the Aqua Appia (I.4e) and discovering a cippus (milestone) of the Via Sublacensis (II.4c) in the bed of the Anio River vividly illustrate this.
S. Maria Sopra Minerva, where his funeral monument, erected by his nephew Gaspare, may be seen today in the north aisle of the basilica.  

Fabretti’s scholarly energy never seems to have flagged, and in the last twenty years of his life, he produced a number of other important topographical studies, much longer and more ambitious than the three dissertations on the aqueducts. Three years after the publication of the De aquis, Fabretti completed a monumental work on Trajan’s Column, De columna Traiani syntagma (Rome, 1683), in a folio volume that included two additional monographs, the first scholarly discussion of the recently discovered Tabula Iliaca (Explicatio veteris tabellae anaglaphae Homeri Iliadem, atque ex Stesichoro Arctino et Lesche Ilii excidium continens) and a study of Claudius’s engineering works for draining the Fucine Lake (Emissarii lacus Fucini descriptio).  

Fabretti’s study of Trajan’s Column, a detailed discussion of the spiral reliefs of the monument, focusing on construction techniques and the military engineering represented on them, was in large part a sharply critical response to the recent major publication of the monument by Pietro Santi Bartoli and Giovanni Pietro Bellori (Colonna Traiana . . . accresciuta di medaglie, iscrizioni e trofei da Gian Pietro Bellori (Rome, 1672)) and a more sympathetic correction of an earlier interpretation of the column by the Spaniard Alfonso Chacon (1540–99); Fabretti included in his volume the complete text of Chacon’s Historia utriusque belli Dacici a Traiano Caesare gesti (Rome, 1576).  

Fabretti’s ecclesiastical career was far from over at the age of sixty. In the years following the publication of the De aquis, Fabretti served as secretary of papal memorials under Pope Alexander VIII (1689–91), who conferred on Fabretti canonries in two churches in Rome, S. Lorenzo in Damaso and S. Pietro. In 1691, Pope Innocent XII appointed Fabretti prefect of the Archivio Apostolico at Castel Sant’Angelo, a highly sensitive assignment that points to papal confidence in his judgment and discretion. Fabretti’s archaeological and epigraphical studies continued, and he also carried on extensive correspondence with leading scholars of his day, while finishing his largest and most important work, Inscriptionum anti-

11. For the text of Fabretti’s funerary inscription, composed by his assistant Domenico Riviera, see Crescimbene, Le vite, 1:103; Marotti, “Fabrettus,” 228.  
12. The work had been in progress for some time, because Fabretti alludes to his study of the column in his second dissertation (II.4d).  
quarum quae in aedibus paternis asservantur explicatio et additamentum (Rome, 1699), a monumental compendium of more than four thousand ancient inscriptions, intended to be a supplement to and updating of Janus Gruter's magisterial corpus published early in the seventeenth century. More than four hundred of these inscriptions were in Fabretti’s own collection at Urbino; his holdings later became the nucleus of the epigraphical collection of the Palazzo Ducale in that city. A major work long in progress on the topography of ancient Latium (De veteri Latio), to which he alludes twice in the De aquis (I.4g, III.6), was left unfinished at the time of his death.

Fabretti is worth attention not simply for his own highly significant contributions to scholarship but also because of his position as the leading antiquarian and epigrapher of his day. He was a man in the center of Rome’s scholarly world, well connected with figures prominent in the city’s learned circles, among them Giovanni Ciampini, founder of the Accademia Fisico-matematica in the city, and many individuals in Queen Christina’s Accademia Reale, which later became the nucleus of the famous Accademia degli Arcadi established in 1690. Fabretti himself was a member of the Arcadians, by whom he was called, by pastoral name, “Iasitheus Naflius,” and he appears to have been active in the Academy. He names throughout the De aquis many figures prominent in the intellectual circle of Queen Christina.

Rome was a major center of scholarly and intellectual interest at this time, a reputation it had enjoyed since the flourishing of Renaissance humanism. Although the political influence of the papacy had declined in the aftermath of the Thirty Years’ War, with the court of Louis XIV in France becoming the leading power in Europe in the last half of the sev-

14. Gruter’s Inscriptiones antiquae totius orbis Romani in corpus absolutum simul redactae (Heidelberg, 1603), the CIL of its day and in many ways the symbol of seventeenth-century scholarship, certainly needed updating in light of the many discoveries since its publication. See Mennella, Museo Lapidario, 26–27.
16. See Ashby, 3 n. 2 (21 n. 18). Fabretti’s notes for his work left unfinished seem to have been lost after his death; see Mennella, Museo Lapidario, 30–31.
18. For a presentation of this heritage, see A. Grafton, ed., Rome Reborn: The Vatican Library and Renaissance Culture (Washington, D.C., 1993).
The city of Rome was still a most stimulating place. Thanks to its growth during the previous two centuries, the cultural impact of the Counter-Reformation, the rise of baroque architecture, recent advances in scientific research, and the ambitious urban renewal projects of popes from Sixtus V (1585–90) through Alexander VII (1657–69), Rome was effectively transformed into the image of the grand theater of the world. Fabretti played a key role in the scientific and scholarly life of the city, and his house in the Borgo, built according to a design by Baldassare Peruzzi, became the center of conversations, discussions, and meetings among Roman antiquarians.

All of Fabretti’s research merits further analysis for understanding how a seventeenth-century scholar worked and communicated with fellow scholars. This book focuses on Fabretti’s treatise on the aqueducts. His first publication, the De aquis, is a work of manageable scope that shows this aqueduct hunter at his most innovative and original, engaged in a topic to which his own investigations made extremely important contributions.
