Introduction

Since the early days of the Renaissance, aqueduct hunting in and around Rome has been a favorite outdoor sport for both casual visitors to the city and scholars interested in the topography and monuments of ancient Rome itself. The activity is documented as early as the mid-fifteenth century, when Flavio Biondo describes an expedition of Pope Pius II and his court in September 1461 to the valley of the Empiglione east of Tivoli and provides an account of the aqueducts seen there and along the Via di Carciano. Aqueduct hunting continues to this day: the recent publication of a detailed guide to the ruins, both inside and outside the modern city of Rome, is clear indication that interest in these imposing monuments to Roman greatness is not flagging and will no doubt continue to flourish. Indeed, ongoing concerns about the preservation


and protection of the conduits in the city and Campagna point to their critical importance as part of the patrimony of Roman civilization.³

Serious aqueduct hunting had its beginning in the seventeenth century, with Raffaello Fabretti’s De aquis et aquaeductibus veteris Romae dissertationes tres, our earliest topographical work focused on the aqueducts of the ancient city. Since its first publication in 1680, Fabretti’s De aquis has received ample praise from topographers and ancient historians. Rodolfo Lanciani, who cites Fabretti often, describes him as “oculatissimo ricercatore del vero” [a most observant investigator of the truth].⁴ Thomas Ashby, in his own magisterial study of the Roman aqueduct system, an irreplaceable work recently republished in Italian translation, describes Fabretti’s treatise as “among the most valuable works on the subject.”⁵ In addition, Lorenzo Quilici, in his comprehensive and closely focused study of Collatia, has praised Fabretti’s work as “opera titanica . . . per noi la prima grande opera di ricerca storica-topografica del territorio” [a titanic work, for us the first grand work of historical-topographical research of the territory], citing his “attente descrizioni e vagliate notizie, spesso oggi irrepetibili” [careful descriptions and closely examined reports, often not to be repeated today].⁶

In marked contrast to much of the topographical study of the ager Romanus (Roman Campagna) in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, Fabretti’s work on the aqueducts had an enormous impact on later scholarship; all commentators on Frontinus and the aqueducts, from the early eighteenth century to the present, cite him frequently.⁷ A complete reprint of the original 1680 edition of the De aquis is available within the series The Printed Sources of Western Art, chosen no doubt for inclusion within that collection because of the many carefully detailed plans and maps it presents.⁸ Yet to date, no scholarly assessment of Fabretti’s treatise

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3. See, for example, the many discussions of the problem presented in different articles in Trionfo II, 175–259.
4. Lanciani, 352.
5. Ashby, 1 (20).
7. The practice began with Giovanni Poleni’s famous edition, Sex. Iulii Frontini de Aquaeductibus Urbis Romae Commentarius (Padua, 1722), and continues to the present day; a full listing is unnecessary.
8. R. Fabretti, De aquis et aquaeductibus veteris Romae dissertationes tres (Rome, 1680; reprint, 1788; original edition reprinted in the series The Printed Sources of Western Art, ed. T. Besterman, no. 3 [Portland, Oregon, 1972]).
as a whole has been attempted, and no translation of his original Latin has appeared in any modern language.

In some ways, it is not surprising that no translation of the original has been attempted: Fabretti’s Latin is itself baroque and quirky, and it is certainly not presented in a style that recommends itself for translation into idiomatic English. The result, however, is that his work is not readily accessible to modern scholars, not to mention the much larger group of general readers interested in the history of archaeology and epigraphy.

The present study, a full English translation of the *De aquis*, with commentary focusing primarily on the topographical problems discussed in the text, seeks to make accessible to a much wider audience this important work of a leading scholar of the seventeenth century—and certainly that century’s most important aqueduct hunter—and to demonstrate more clearly Fabretti’s contributions to our understanding of the Roman aqueduct system.

The *De aquis* is worth much closer attention than it has received, especially since Fabretti frequently cites and describes physical evidence in the Roman Campagna that has long since disappeared or been destroyed. But even more important than Fabretti’s text itself is the evidence it provides for assessing the state of topographical research in Rome during his period, a time of intense interest in antiquity. The *De aquis* gives us an extremely valuable picture of a serious scholar at work, writing for an equally serious audience of fellow learners and attempting to put archaeological investigations on a sound scientific basis by integrating them with ancient literary evidence.

As it has well been stated in a recent exemplary study of Joseph Justus Scaliger, “It is not easy to meet the great scholars of the later sixteenth century on terms of intimacy.” Much the same can be said for a pioneer epigrapher and aqueduct hunter working a century later, in Rome of the seicento. But given the importance of both Fabretti’s topic itself and the scholarly world in which he worked, it will be well worth our effort to do more than simply make his acquaintance.

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