

**AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF AGOSTINO STEUCO'S *DE AQUA  
VIRGINAE IN URBEM REVOCANDA* (LYON: GRYPHIUS, 1547) [ON BRINGING  
BACK THE ACQUA VERGINE TO ROME]**

Chiara Bariviera\* and Pamela O. Long\*\*

## Introduction

Agostino Steuco (1496-1549) was appointed librarian of the Vatican library in Rome by Pope Paul III Farnese in 1538, and served in that capacity until his death in 1549. A learned theologian and humanist, early in his career he wrote polemical tracts against the Protestants, as well as biblical commentaries, but when he arrived in Rome in 1535 he turned to problems of urban renewal and hydraulic engineering. As Ronald Delph has shown, he began thinking about the city as a whole and how it could be transformed to better reflect the glory of the popes and the Catholic Church. He adopted the humanist view that prevailed in Rome in the 1530s and 1540s—that the popes were the legitimate heirs of the Roman *imperium* and should rightly work to return the city to its ancient splendor. The ideologies of *renovatio imperii* and *renovatio Romae* guided Stueco's writings. In a series of small tracts he proposed that the Tiber River between Rome and Perugia be widened and deepened to allow commercial river traffic from Gubbio (his native city) into Rome, traffic that at the time was severely curtailed by sandbars and other obstacles in the river. He also suggested that within the city itself great avenues be constructed from the city's second river harbor, the Porto di Ripetta, to the Porta Flaminia (the gate at Piazza del Popolo) and from there to the Capitoline. He

---

\*Chiara Bariviera ([chiara.bariviera@gmail.com](mailto:chiara.bariviera@gmail.com)) is a classical archaeologist who has worked on several research projects in Rome, Pompeii, and Veii. Her studies center on Roman topography and the development of urban and agrarian landscapes, with a special interest in public architecture and the reconstruction of monumental complexes. She contributed chapters to *Atlante di Roma antica: Biografia e ritratti della città*, ed. A. Carandini (2012).

\*\*Pamela O. Long ([pamlong@pamelaelong.com](mailto:pamlong@pamelaelong.com)) would like to thank Ron Delph for first introducing her to Steuco and his tract on restoring the Acqua Vergine. She is a historian who has published widely in the history of technology and science, esp. focused on fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe. She is currently writing a history of engineering and cartography in late sixteenth-century Rome. For more information see [www.pamelaelong.com](http://www.pamelaelong.com)

We thank Craig Martin for critiquing the first draft of our translation, which has improved it greatly.

© Chiara Bariviera and Pamela O. Long 2015

proposed that this second wide avenue be ornamented with dramatic fountains and renamed the Via Pauli, after Pope Paul III. Finally, he wanted the ancient Aqua Virgo (called the Acqua Vergine in the sixteenth century) to be repaired and made fully functional, so that water might be provided for the proposed new fountains.<sup>1</sup>

The Aqua Virgo had been built by Agrippa under the emperor Augustus in 19 BCE to bring water to the low-lying Campo Marzio.<sup>2</sup> It was used to supply a public bath near the Pantheon (the Baths of Agrippa). The aqueduct was built mostly underground and was supplied initially by the Salone Springs to the northeast of Rome (at the eighth ancient milestone, today Km. 10.5). It was supplemented by other streams that entered along its course. The only ancient aqueduct in almost continuous use from antiquity, it still functioned in the sixteenth century (as it does today). The aqueduct was repaired periodically in the medieval period and in the fifteenth century. However, by Steuco's time in the 1540s, its output was much reduced, because it was fed only by streams close to the city. Moreover, the full route of the conduit, which was underground, had been forgotten.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> An anonymous manuscript, BAV, Vat. lat. 7246, 17r-25v, which discusses these urban projects, has the same handwriting as Vat. lat. 3587, "Augustinus Steucus de restituenda navigatione Tiberis," confirming the suggestion of Cesare D'Onofrio, *Le fontane di Roma*, 3d ed. (Rome: Romana Società Editrice, 1986), 54-59, that it is by Steuco. For the printed versions of Steuco's urban tracts, see Agostino Steuco, *De via Pauli et de fontibus inducendis in eam* (Lyon: Sebastianus Gryphius, 1547), Steuco, *De Aqua Virgine in urbem revocanda* (Lyon : Sebastianus Gryphius, 1547) ; and Steuco, *De restituenda navigatione Tiberis* (Lyon : Sebastianus Gryphius, 1547). For Steuco's life and thought, see esp., Ronald K. Delph, "Polishing the Papal Image in the Counter-Reformation: The Case of Agostino Steuco," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 23 (1992): 35-47; Delph, "From Venetian Visitor to Curial Humanist: The Development of Agostino Steuco's 'Counter'-Reformation Thought," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1994): 102-39; Delph, "Renovatio, Reformatio, and Humanist Ambition in Rome," in Ronald K. Delph, Michelle M. Fontaine, and John J. Martin, eds., *Heresy, Culture, and Religion in Early Modern Italy: Contexts and Controversies* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2006), 73-92; and see Theobald Freudenberger, *Augustinus Steuchus aus Gubbio, Augustinerchorherr und päpstlicher Bibliothekar (1497-1548) und sein literarisches Lebenswerk* (Münster in Westfalen: Verlag der Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1935).

<sup>2</sup> For the Campo Marzio in antiquity, see Maria Teresa D'Alessio, "Regione IX. Circus Flaminus," in Andrea Carandini with Paolo Carafa, eds. *Atlante di Roma Antica: Biografia e ritratti della città 1: Testi e immagini 2: Tavole e indici* (Milan: Electa, 2012), 1:493-541 and 2: Tav. 207-246.

<sup>3</sup> For the Aqua Virgo or Acqua Vergine, see the classic accounts of Thomas Ashby, *The Aqueducts of Ancient Rome*, ed. I. A. Richmond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 167-182; Carlo Fea, *Storia: I. Delle acque antiche sorgenti in Roma perdute, e modo di ristabilirle II: Dei condotti antico-moderni delle acque, Vergine, Felice, e Paola e loro autori* (Rome: Stamperia della R. C. A., 1832), 9-28 and 63-71; Rodolfo Lanciani, *I commentarii di Frontino intorno le acque e gli aquedotti* (Rome: Tipi del Salviucci, 1880), 120-130; and Esther Boise Van Deman, *The Building of the Roman Aqueducts* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1934), 167-178. More recent studies include Peter J. Aicher, *Guide to the Aqueducts of Ancient Rome* (Wauconda, Ill.: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1995), 39-41 and 68-74; David Karmon, "Restoring the Ancient Water Supply System in Renaissance Rome: The Popes, the Civic Administration, and the Acqua Vergine," No. 3 (August 2005) in *Waters of Rome*, ed. Katherine W. Rinne, <http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/waters/first.html>; Vittorio Nicolazzo, *Acqua Vergine a Roma: Aquedotti e fontane* (Rome: Colosseo Grafico Editoriale, 1999); Lorenzo Quilici, "Sull'acquedotto

Steuco urged Paul III to restore the aqueduct along its full original length as part of a plan to renew the capital city. There is evidence that the pope indeed wanted such a restoration, but other preoccupations prevented him from initiating it.<sup>4</sup> The first step, in any case, would be to find again the course of the aqueduct from the city to its original source. To do this, Steuco vacated his library post for several months in 1545 to personally go out into the Roman countryside to search for the lost conduit. He and the group of skilled men that accompanied him (whose identity is unknown) laboriously traced the buried aqueduct through the fields and hills until they discovered its original source at the Salone Springs. He then wrote the tract that is translated below. In it, he combines a record of his exploration of the pathway of the aqueduct with an attempt to persuade the pope that restoring it was an urgent task that should be taken up immediately.

The text that we have used is a copy of the first (1547) edition held by the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. (sig. 180-899q). We would like to thank Michael Witmore, Director of the Folger Library, Daniel De Simone, Head Librarian, and Julie Ainsworth, Head of Photography and Digital Imaging, for digitalizing the Folger edition and making it available on their Luna site:

<http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/2pb837>

We have tried to keep our translation as close to the Latin structure as possible, while at the same time translating the text into comprehensible, colloquial English. This has meant breaking up many of Steuco's long sentences into shorter ones, simplifying the structure, changing the passive voice into the active, and inserting terms for clarification.

---

Vergine dal Monte Pincio alle sorgente," *Studi di Topografia Romana* 5 (1968) 125–160; Katherine W. Rinne, *The Waters of Rome: Aqueducts, Fountains, and the Birth of the Baroque City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), esp. 38–55; *Il trionfo dell' acqua: Acque e acquedotti a Roma, IV sec. a. C. – XX sec.* Mostra organizzata in occasione del 16º Congresso ed esposizione internazionale degli acquedotti, 31 Ottobre 1986 – 15 gennaio 1987 (Rome: Paleani, 1986), 65–71 and 205–208; and Marcello Turci, "Gli acquedotti (tavv. VII–VIII)," and Maria Cristina Capanna, "Regione VII. Via Lata," in Carandini with Carafa, ed., *Atlante di Roma antica*, 1: 92–100 and 2: Tav. VII–VIII, and 1: 477–492, esp. 482, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Paul III's desire to repair the Acqua Vergine was unfulfilled during his reign. See esp. Karmon, "Restoring the Ancient Water Supply," 9; and Giorgio Simoncini, *Roma: La trasformazioni urbane nel Cinquecento*, I: *Topografia e urbanistica da Giulio II a Clemente VIII* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2008), 127. A record of Paul III urging the Capitoline Council to renovate the Acqua Vergine is in the Archivio Storico Capitolino (hereafter, ASC), Camera Capitolina, Cred. I, t. 17, cat. 17 (sub die Vegisima septima mensi Novembris [27 November 1535]), fols. 25v–26r (modern folio numeration 40v–41r). Also in ASC, Camera Capitolina, cred. I, t. 36, cat. 36, fol. 319r. And see Fea, *Storia*, 63–64.

## ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF TEXT

### Title Page

*On Bringing Back the Acqua Vergine to Rome* by Agostino Steuco from Gubbio,  
Librarian

[Colophon of Sebastian Gryphius]  
Lyon: Sebastian Gryphius, 1547

### [Page 3]

*On Bringing Back the Acqua Vergine to Rome* by Agostino Steuco from Gubbio,  
Librarian

The Mistress of the World, Mother of all People, Life-giving Parent of good things<sup>5</sup> arouses [my] incredible desire to call back the grandeur of her memory, so that I [might] see her indeed with my own eyes, if not of the kind and greatness she once was, at least a certain image of such great magnificence, which might make all people look at her and talk about her again. And [she arouses my desire] to see that everyone on earth, recognizing the common parent, hasten to restore her brilliance. But this desire of mine can be considered neither prodigious and strange, nor belonging to what the powers of nature do not admit, but rather belonging to what indeed are both natural, so that they are feasible, and easily visible to our eyes, if our princes<sup>6</sup> possessed some desire for public good and glory. And [my desire would not be prodigious and strange] if at the same time, [our princes], keeping in mind the past and all of the future, considered which aspirations have provided today's greatness to Rome, [and] the reasons why all nations very greatly valued the necessity of venerating and honoring this place. Or [if they considered] the reasons why Rome received the piety and veneration of all people; then [if they considered] what else has survived from these who took power,

### [Page 4]

who accumulated riches as much as they wished, and increased [their own] patrimony, who have put their own [men] in the greatest position of power; [and finally] if they considered what is the glory and the fame of great deeds. What else should the people in charge consider which might push them to act, other than assiduously to pursue the glory of the High God and His eternity, all of which is understood through the increase of public good? The ancient popes, striving with every effort and force of mind toward this [public good], simultaneously considering nothing more important than the love of the people, and embracing everyone with paternal benevolence, made all nations worship this place, considering it holy as the home of piety, and [made them] send

---

<sup>5</sup> I.e., the city of Rome.

<sup>6</sup> I.e., the popes.

offerings of money from every place to this very holy treasury, which the excellent princes spent for public use. Thus, if the princes who came after had loved the same glory and eternal honor, by now it would have been possible that Rome, with aid flowing here from the whole Christian realm, would appear to be nearly restored to pristine splendor. In the very many years following from that time, such great abundance of money would have been brought in to this [city], that these works—which certainly would have derived from the ancient power of Rome and from the greatness of [her] monuments—could have been built. Surely it is necessary to marvel that [the past princes of Rome], themselves encouraged on this occasion, conceiving in the mind great things that would be useful first to the city and then to the whole of Christendom, show themselves with outstanding deeds to be very similar to God. Indeed, such a great space opens to glory, and princes are able to prove their magnanimity in many works—greatly esteemed among all nations and by which rulers might be pleased to be known. Let everyone lift with praises these [princes] into heaven while they are living, greeting [them] with favorable acclamations and wishing them health and prosperity. Let everyone honor them just as gods when [they are] dead, recalling their memory with admiration.

### [Page 5]

But who does not perceive how great [is] the opportunity for future glory, since many works lying here and there need the piety and charity of some prince, who might seize for himself the glory of structures restored, [that were] neglected by others. Others, involving their minds with vain cares and with futile and pernicious deeds, neither perceived [this glory] by common sense, nor turned their eyes to this better side, so that their untimely death was awaited by all while they lived, and they were scorned and damned when dead. Surely it is suitable that he who presides over the citadel of this high religion, is someone about whom the philosophers are accustomed to repeat, [that he is] known by everyone to burn with love of justice, which for these same [princes]—they say—is superior in brilliance to the evening and morning star. They say that not Lucifer, not the evening star<sup>7</sup> is so admirable. Therefore, since I wished to see Rome with the ancient religion and piety flowering again—as illustrious people had created for us with their own blood—and restored to her pristine elegance and splendor, the desire led me, filled with sorrow, at this point to inspect carefully many things and to examine the ancient ruins. Thus I could see the Acqua Vergine coming back again into the city and abundantly flowing into houses and gardens and *piazze* as before. So that it doesn't seem that unfounded and impractical reasoning have affected my desire, not only reason itself and the contemplation of things, but also experience and practice and evidence examined with my own eyes vehemently inspired [the desire] that this one [i.e. the Vergine], above all more plentiful and more abundant than all [the other aqueducts] and very suitable to today's city, can be restored with minor expense. For of all the aqueducts which long ago the Romans, loving their own country and public good, led

---

<sup>7</sup> Lucifer or the evening star refers to the planet Venus.

into the city—from which the whole city, according to the witness of Strabo,<sup>8</sup> was abundant in water—[the Vergine] flowed just as if another very copious Tiber.

## [Page 6]

Moreover, the source of this aqueduct can be recognized from Julius Frontinus,<sup>9</sup> [and] the end [can be recognized] from the arch<sup>10</sup> and from evidence existing here and there through the city. Moreover, it is possible to acquire knowledge of the whole aqueduct, if you follow the still-existing vestiges of the aqueduct and the airshafts that descend to the subterranean aqueduct through the Roman countryside from the origin to the end, and then if you have an overview of the whole course of the aqueduct. But the terminus of the Acqua Vergine is evident to everyone, since all who dwell in the Campo Marzio, where now the greater part of the city's population is settled, draw water from the fountain, and since the inscriptions incised in the marble testify that this is the Acqua Vergine. And there is also [the mention of] the gate of the *Saepta*<sup>11</sup> which closed off and separated the Campo Marzio from the rest of the city, and the aqueduct going at that time to its terminus, flowing under the Campo Marzio, brought water to orchards, groves and also to the lake of the Naumachia.<sup>12</sup> At this gate, a great number of marble inscriptions testify to the aqueduct passing by—the arches of which, having collapsed from age, Titus Claudius Caesar restored.<sup>13</sup> Also Nicholas V, leaving memory of his deeds to posterity, had inscribed in the marble, which all who draw water saw that he himself had restored the Vergine fountain<sup>14</sup> at his own expense. But Sixtus, the pope of

---

<sup>8</sup> Strabo, *Geographia*, 5.3.8.

<sup>9</sup> Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae*, 1.10.

<sup>10</sup> Steuco is probably referring to the arch (called Arco di Portogallo in the sixteenth century) that stood in the Via del Corso, near Piazza Sciarra. The arch was demolished in 1662. It may have carried a branch of the Acqua Vergine.

<sup>11</sup> The *Saepta* was a porticoed building in ancient Rome used for citizens' meetings and for casting votes. Steuco refers here to a passage of Frontinus indicating that the Acqua Vergine ended at the facade of the *Saepta* (Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae*, 1.22).

<sup>12</sup> I.e., Piazza Navona, where the ancient stadium of Domitian was located.

<sup>13</sup> Claudius's restoration of the aqueduct is testified to in the inscription on the arch still visible in Via del Nazareno (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968), hereafter, *CIL*—*CIL VI*, 1252, and by a boundary stone, *CIL VI*, 40880. Other inscriptions record Tiberius's restoration: *CIL VI*, 1253 a-b, 40879.

<sup>14</sup> I.e., the Trevi Fountain. For the Trevi Fountain and Nicolas V, see esp. Maurizio Gargano, "Niccolò V, la mostra dell'acqua di Trevi," *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria* 111 (1988): 225-266; Karmon, "Restoring the Ancient Water Supply System, 4-6; John Pinto, *The Trevi Fountain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), esp. 28-34; and Simoncini, *Roma: Le trasformazioni I: Topografia*, 132-135.

greater fame,<sup>15</sup> because he had repaired certain damages in this aqueduct, succeeded in having the poets sing of him:

*because you repaired the Virgineas aqueduct of the Trevi.*<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, there is no one to whom it is not clearly known that the Fountain of the Acqua Vergine is what now they commonly call the Fountain of Trevi, because the inscriptions of the ancient emperors and [those] of recent popes attest [to it]. But the greatest confusion and multifarious ignorance has been an obstacle because, if anyone traces back the channel from the Campo Marzio in order to search for the starting point of the gushing waters, you may see no trace of this, no arch, not even a sign. In fact,

### [Page 7]

the water soon hides itself in an underground channel, recognized from those shafts at barely a thousand paces from the city. Moreover, [the channel], having gone out of sight, cannot be identified any more by any signs, even though, due to the very deep valleys, it had even been necessary [for the ancients] to go above ground with arched structures. But Julius Frontinus<sup>17</sup> teaches that at the eighth mile from the city, the Acqua Vergine collects itself in the Lucullean field in the marshy places along the Via Collatina, then explaining the whole path of the aqueduct, he demonstrated that it flowed mainly within substructures or within underground conduits, but in some places because of the lower valleys, [it flowed] on arches from one slope to another. But although you see many springs produced near this road, nevertheless you will see that today none flows down to the city, either on conspicuous work of arched structures or in subterranean conduits. Up to the present age, seemingly, no one is known to have tried to engage his intellect and direct his mind, so that we might discover the Acqua Vergine as described by Julius [Frontinus] that flows into the city. Indeed, in the city we have a great number of inscriptions as evidence, and the flowing water itself, but we hadn't surveyed the Roman countryside anywhere. So [no one is known] who might resolve the issue of what this small amount of water is that today flows from the Fountain of the Vergine, since the Vergine that Julius described doesn't arrive in the city, and today's

---

<sup>15</sup> For Sixtus IV's repair of the Trevi Fountain and part of the aqueduct, see esp. Egmont Lee, *Sixtus IV and Men of Letters* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1978), esp. 142-143; and Simoncini, *Roma: Le trasformazioni, I: Topografia*, 190.

<sup>16</sup> This line comes from the inscription painted on the image called "Sixtus IV Reorganizes the Vatican Library and Appoints Platina Its Librarian" by Melozzo da Forlì (1438-1494). For the painting, see esp. Ingrid D. Roland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance: Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31-33, Figure 6, and 264, note 63 (for the full Latin inscription). When Steuco was Vatican librarian, the painting decorated the Vatican Library as a fresco. Now (transferred to canvas) it is in the Pinacoteca Vaticana, Room IV.

<sup>17</sup> Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae*, 1.10. This distance corresponds approximately to Km. 11 of today's Via Collatina.

fountain itself, as I said, is not only small, but also the short channel continues out of the city barely a thousand paces. Therefore, with my work, with my devotion towards this Mother of all the People,<sup>18</sup> light of the whole world, everything has been revealed. If only God might send someone from heaven to pursue this immortal deed, leaving to the city eternal witness of his goodness—not the mediocre things concerning this aqueduct of Sixtus, nor the minute things of Nicholas—but

### [Page 8]

[someone who], having grasped the whole substance of such great glory, could call back all that water, so many years exiled from the walls of the city, so that he could bring back the incredible utility and benefit to this great homeland. Indeed, who does not wish all good, all light, and all beauty for the venerable mother of the good arts, benefactor of all mortals? Thus, with incredible effort, I discovered its whole path, from the very large springs themselves to the city, [by] wandering through the Roman countryside, and following the air vents. For I was carried by the desire of discovering these things, which I saw would be of great utility to the very bright land and [by the desire of] inspiring to that glory those destined to it by God. [This was] not certainly [the channel] of the water flowing nowadays, but of that [water] which in the happy age of the ancient Romans—perhaps still at the time of the Goths—flowed into the city, lapping the Campo Marzio in the way that I explained before. This place, as Strabo wrote, was the most beautiful and pleasant place on the whole earth.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, [this water] was discovered neither by a small effort nor in a small amount of time, since almost the whole aqueduct from its beginning is underground and [its] great antiquity had mixed it up in the fields after such a long period of time. So that when you discover four or seven shafts showing the channel of the aqueduct inside, after having discovered nothing more than the essential [remains] even with much searching, not knowing on which side the airshafts run, you might give up at the very beginning. But what can mortals not achieve with study and industry, even in spite of every difficulty? To which [goal] that you have conceived, does desire not aspire to, with observation and at the same time with the exercise of the mind? Rightly the ancients said: God helps those who take action. Thus, near the Via Prenestina and Collatina at the seventh or eighth milestone in a marshy place,<sup>20</sup> very abundant springs bubble, and nowhere in the whole Roman countryside,

---

<sup>18</sup> I.e., Rome.

<sup>19</sup> Strabo, *Geographia*, 5.3.8.

<sup>20</sup> This distance corresponds approximately to Km. 11 of today's Via Collatina and Prenestina, which are connected at this point by Via dell'Acqua Vergine.

**[Page 9]**

[do other ones] spring forth into light [that are] more beautiful, or larger and more abundant than these. And from the nearby hills such abundance of water, as is fitting, is gathered in that place so that you might see everything well watered by the springs and wide bubbling springs running out from everywhere. As Julius [Frontinus] rightly wrote, it is a marshy place certainly not because of torpid water or stagnant pools, but because of the great number and abundance of ice-cold and salubrious springs. From these [springs], a large and very clear stream, which formed not far away, merges into the Anio, which cascades from the hill of Tivoli, and then, running rapidly in a headlong rush, hastens to join itself to the Tiber a little further on. It is clear that this rapidity and this precipitous course of the Anio near the bubbling waters of those springs was a sign to the Romans that [the water of] those springs could be brought to Rome, even though high hills intervene, just as the Anio, moving rapidly with the Tiber, is brought to her. For indeed, Rome—certainly the Campo Marzio—is among the more low-lying places and with lower elevation. Thus, once they had lined [the inside] of the structure with hydraulic mortar,<sup>21</sup> which is very solid and very suitable for containing the waters, and once they had gathered all the bubbling springs into one, once they had tunneled through these slopes, which are in the way [and] very abundant in the Roman countryside, once they had avoided deep valleys, making the aqueduct always go around them through the slopes, or, in these valleys, raising arches, they led the water to Rome into the Campo Marzio, which was at a lower elevation, even though in Rome [in ancient times] the hills [also] were inhabited. You will discover these vestiges here and there through the Roman countryside, sometimes as hollowed-out mounds, which the sequence of the numerous and closely-spaced airshafts correspond to. Through these airshafts, they carried away the excavated material while they were digging out the aqueduct, but thereafter they cleaned the aqueduct itself [through them] when it was necessary. Or in other valleys you will see in some places whole arches, in other places fragments of them. But from the same springs,

**[Page 10]**

because [the waters] come to the surface at a lower place, it was necessary to make the channel immediately pass through the intervening hills and to lead the water a very long way through the underground channel near Via Prenestina and Via Collatina. So, after you go three or four thousand paces<sup>22</sup> near this road, the water turns toward the Via

---

<sup>21</sup> “*Signino*” or *Opus signinum* in Steuco’s text is waterproof plastering used by the Romans in the interior of their aqueduct conduits and other hydraulic structures such as cisterns or pools. It prevented the water from leaking out. See A. Trevor Hodge, *Roman Aqueducts and Water Supply*, 2d ed. (London: Duckworth, 2002), 95-98.

<sup>22</sup> A pace [*passus*] in sixteenth-century Rome was 4.887 feet or 1.4895 meters. See William Barclay Parsons, *Engineers and Engineering in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968), 626 and 632; and Ronald E. Zupko, *Italian Weights and Measures from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, 145 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981), 187-188.

Tiburtina<sup>23</sup> in order to go back to the Anio, which it had left at the beginning of the route. Here in a wide valley, through arches that overlook the banks of the river not far from the Ponte Nomentano, it goes back to the Via Nomentana, after having crossed [it]. The water having been led through an excavated hill and having encountered another deep valley, and ascending onto arches, turns toward Rome to the Via Salaria or Via Collatina, or Via Pinciana. From there, having entered into vineyards and turning towards the east and the south, having left the west and the north, it goes under the walls of the city between the Porta Flaminia and the Porta Pinciana. [It goes on] always through a subterranean channel, until, at the foot of the hills in the Campo Marzio, having gone over the gate of the *Saepta*,<sup>24</sup> it pours through the streets of the city. Therefore, the streets themselves are indications of [its] route. Moreover, the value of [my] work results from having recognized that the water that now is taken from the Fountain of the Vergine,<sup>25</sup> is not that which starts at the marshy places at the seventh milestone from the city in the Lucullean fields according to Julius [Frontinus]. But [these waters] are clearly those that form today's fountain barely a thousand paces to the east out of the city. Since the same Frontinus asserts in [his] description of that water, that it, in that subterranean channel, becomes more abundant because of the many acquisitions, which evidently were discovered while slaves were digging the aqueduct, and because some [other] streams of water joined these [acquisitions]. Therefore, these are not those principle and very abundant waters, those copious and well-known springs, but small streams that originate not far from the city. The size itself of the aqueduct indicates that it was not prepared for those small streams.

### [Page 11]

Moreover, the traces of running water marked on the right and left wall show that it had flowed with [its] channel full. Therefore, since today's fountain brings to [Rome's] inhabitants an incredible amount [of water], even with this scantiness, how do you think it would be, if as much [water] as there is at the gushing springs would flow? So help me God, we would see all the *piazze*, the houses, the palaces, the gardens well watered by fountains. With the benefit of this aqueduct, we would see the city itself completely flowering again with a great increase of new inhabitants as a consequence. Therefore, the fact that these admirable and well-known springs form the Acqua Vergine, celebrated by all the poets and historians, is clearly confirmed not only by the whole aqueduct—following which using the airshafts as evidence, we can arrive at the city—but also [is confirmed] by the description of Frontinus. In fact, today the place is full of bubbling springs, it is marshy, the distance from the city is the same and it is near the

---

<sup>23</sup> The path of the aqueduct intersects today's Via Tiburtina in the area called Pietralata.

<sup>24</sup> See note 11 above.

<sup>25</sup> In Steuco's time, the Trevi Fountain was far different in appearance from the eighteenth-century extravaganza that now functions as the fountain's *mostra*. For the long history of the fountain, see esp. Pinto, *Trevi Fountain*.

Via Prenestina and Via Collatina. Moreover, the channel of the water is almost entirely underground, because the intervening hills have been excavated and have been tunneled through, because their insides have been opened up, so that it comes up to the surface at barely a thousand paces [from the city], over arched structures that were built at the more low-lying places. And although the distance from the springs to the city in a straight line extends seven thousand paces, nevertheless, because of the curves of the aqueduct—since the Romans preferred to dig the hills and divert the water rather than to raise arches in the valleys if not forced by necessity—the result is that this distance is increased by another seven thousand paces. These springs are today called Salone, [and are] very well known by everybody, except for the fact that it wasn't known that this was the Acqua Vergine, and that once these springs used to bring water to the city. And it was such an obscure matter that even the illustrious men of the Roman Curia, who built their villas near the aqueduct, had inscribed in marble that this was the Acqua Appia. They were obviously deceived by a faulty codex of Julius Frontinus, in which he, describing the Acqua Appia, said that it

### [Page 12]

originates to the left of the Via Prenestina. But because of the similarity in writing *sinistrorsus* (to the left) and *dextrorsus* (to the right), it happened that it was written wrongly, concerning the Acqua Appia, *sinistrorsus*, which [error] is present in many other [codices].<sup>26</sup> But the following part of the description of the Acqua Appia might have been able to indicate to those illustrious men, which [aqueduct] Julius [Frontinus] was describing, where he taught that the end of this aqueduct was near the Saline and entered into the city through the Porta Capena or Appia.<sup>27</sup> In fact, everyone understands that the channel [of the Acqua Appia] cannot reach the Salone Springs, because the Roman countryside in this area, that is where the Anio flows fast, is very much lower. And the ridge of the Roman countryside rises towards the equinoctial east and the eastern gates of the city. How indeed could the waters of the Salone have been able at all to rise [to that ridge]? But why do I delay? Is not the Acqua Appia very well known even to the common people themselves? So that with the memory of the ancient name still remaining [today], they call it Acqua d'Accio.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, by the same path that

---

<sup>26</sup> Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae*, 1.5.

<sup>27</sup> Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae*, 1.5. The *Salinae*, or salt works, was a place where at one time there had been salt works, but by the time of the earliest mention, was only a place name. They were located at the foot of the Aventine hill toward the Tiber, near the church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin. See Chiara Bariviera, “Regione XI. Circus Maximus,” in Andrea Carandini with Paolo Carafa, *Atlante di Roma antica: biografia e ritratti della città*, 2 vols. (Milan: Electra, 2012), 1: 421-445, esp. 424, 425, 427, and 433, and 2: Tav. 171; and L. Richardson, Jr., *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 341, s.v. “*Salinae*.”

<sup>28</sup> The Acqua Appia was the oldest of all the Roman aqueducts, built in 312 BCE. Its springs have not been identified. See Thomas Ashby, *The Aqueducts of Ancient Rome*, ed. I. A. Richmond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 49-54; Chiara Bariviera, “Regione XII. Pisina Publica,” and Marcello Turci, “Gli Acquedotti,” both in Carandini with Carafa, eds., *Atlante*, 1: 375-387, esp. 378, and 2: Tav. 154; and

Julius [Frontinus] indicated, after having flowed down near the Porta Appia or Capena, crossing only the Via Ostiense, it descends to the Tiber always toward the south. Instead the Vergine [flows] toward the west and north. Also the aqueduct of the Vergine itself could have been evidence for those illustrious men that this could not have been the Acqua Appia. For, near those springs, [the aqueduct] immediately entering into the tunneled hill, after having made a long circuitous route through the Roman countryside around the city, enters at last into the Campo Marzio, where the marble inscriptions indicate that [it] is the Acqua Vergine.

Therefore, after we have understood the origin of the remarkable aqueduct, after we have recognized and pointed out the illustrious springs, and also after we have thoroughly understood the path of these [springs], and after everyone has understood how great a utility to the city there could be from the water, we certainly understand what glory would follow, what a monument and what epitaphs would be dedicated to the one whose mind God will inspire to [do] these things, making [that man]<sup>29</sup> the great architect

### [Page 13]

of His glory. And [God's] magnanimity renders difficult things easy, so that even if some more serious difficulty might occur in this work, it does not have to discourage [this man's] great purpose, because such great utility has been held out [as a prospect]. Nevertheless, the knowledge and confirmation of facts that indicated the origin of the waters, the course, and every aspect of this thing, thus taught that no reason prevents us from restoring the memory of the very sacred structure and from repairing it. If we had concerned ourselves with it [before], it would have been less damaged and weakened than it appears to be by the injuries of time and by the gravest calamities in Italy. For it is not proposed that we dig a new aqueduct now—because the resources of today likely cannot provide [for that], and we do not bring the water to the city from far away distances—but we affirm that [the existing aqueduct] could be remade with little effort. It is prepared to stand, waiting for our work, and begging to be reconnected to its origins, demanding modest expenses, and it is for all this that our effort will be directed. The aqueduct as a whole is undamaged, those stone structures and the tunneled-through mass of the hills are unchanged. No injuries of passing time could tear [it] down and destroy [it]. The position of the hills and the nature of the places [are] the same. Almost nothing is changed from the ancient condition. In fact, the whole aqueduct is underground. It is unlike the [other] remaining [ancient] aqueducts, which transported water into the elevated [part of] Rome with high arches. Those, having collapsed from old age and from the injuries of the Barbarians, our resources could likely not restore. But in a few places at most, after having thoroughly cleaned the channel underneath, we

---

1:92-100, esp. 92, 94, 95, 96, respectively; A Mucci, "Aqua Appia," in Eva Margareta Steinby, ed. *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae*, (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 1993), Vol. 1, 61-62; and Richardson, *New Topographical Dictionary*, 15-16.

<sup>29</sup> I.e., the pope who carries out this task.

will be forced to remake arches, the foundations of which indeed exist now. In other places [we will be forced] to rebuild the remaining substructures. And according to the architects themselves who were in charge [and] who often had meetings to examine these things and evaluate them with care,

[Page 14]

the whole expense would come to the sum of 15,000 *scudi* of gold.<sup>30</sup> If only someone would try to calculate correctly and think to himself how many workers are sufficient for cleaning the whole subterranean channel, or how much money is required for restoring those few arches. Consultants and experts on the matter have presented a calculation of the expenses to be recuperated immediately, once the aqueduct is repaired and the very abundant water brought back into the city. It was once the Roman custom, which some cities of Italy retain, that the waters are sold to those wishing to pipe it to their houses. For this reason, having made the calculation, the expected return is much greater than the expense of remaking the aqueduct. Moreover, this water is so abundant that it can supply the whole city, just like a flowing river. The judgment of the architects also establishes that the place where it comes to the surface in the Campo Marzio from the subterranean channels, is higher than the whole city itself, so that the water can be led throughout the whole city. In fact, this place is at the foot of the hills, and furthermore the rest of today's city is flat throughout the whole Campo Marzio and throughout the whole remaining flat area where [in the past] there were public structures, temples, theaters, and baths. Moreover, the whole city was inhabited in the hills. Right away, as soon as one enters the city in front of the Porta Flaminia, it will be possible to admire the abundant fountains in the *piazze* and to draw [from them] at public expense, then [to admire the fountains] through the whole street itself [that leads] to the Piazza San Marco.<sup>31</sup> Then, in the Piazza del Pantheon, in the Campo de' Fiori, finally through the whole city, the water having gushed out into all the houses of illustrious men, and going toward the groves of citrus trees, we will see not artificial fountains<sup>32</sup> of which already there has begun to be a great supply in Rome, but real and natural springs flowing into the very middle of buildings. What could be more pleasant than that spectacle? Who would not praise to the skies the author of this divine work, considering that Nicholas and Sixtus wanted eternal inscriptions

---

<sup>30</sup> “Quindecim millium aureorum” refers to 15,000 *scudi* in gold (or *scudi d'oro in oro*). A *scudo* was equal to ten *giuli* (a silver coin that periodically was devaluated.), or 100 *baiocchi*. The *scudo d'oro* was distinguished from and worth more than the *scudo di moneta* (a silver coin).

<sup>31</sup> That is, from today's Piazza del Popolo down the Via del Corso to present-day Piazza Venezia.

<sup>32</sup> Steuco may be referring to the fountains which became popular in Rome in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, some made from cisterns placed higher than the fountain with the water circulated by means of a siphon. See David R. Coffin, *Gardens and Gardening in Papal Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), esp. 28-57. We would like to thank Katherine W. Rinne for information about cistern-fed fountains.

**[Page 15]**

to be erected in their honor in consideration of the I-don't-know-what repairs to the damages of this aqueduct, and not even for the whole aqueduct, but only its last part? Who is there today among very powerful men who do not install this pleasurable benefit within his own palace regardless of the expense, so that he might admire bubbling and murmuring [water] from artificial fountains, when the possibility of [having] running water flowing from a real stream is denied? I propose more real and solid and useful things. Rome [already] uses salubrious water from the Tiber that is for sale. Indeed, [this water] loses all the things difficult to digest and it loses the sand, because it flows down from the hills after having tumbled down through the rocks for a long distance. Moreover, the sulfurous Nera<sup>33</sup> purifies it and gives the remaining water a lighter quality. But there are also very salubrious springs flowing down for a long distance from the nearby hills, very cold to the touch in the summer, warmer in the winter, which is a sign of salubrious water. But how much joy will there be, what very desirable change of conditions [will there be], after we have passed from water for sale—which is often scarce and which we are often forced to buy slimy and muddy and to drink immediately after it has been brought from the distant river—to water available to everybody and obtained at real and abundant springs from which all can draw with satisfaction and can use conveniently? What would this be other than clearly a new foundation of this city? But indeed what prejudice or hostility, always enemy to honest efforts and resistant to beneficial things, should cause us at the first steps, by which we might more nearly approach divine things, to fear the future expense as intolerable? Or, even if [these things] are illustrious and full of glory, what prejudice and hostility should distract and weigh down, so that they would not seem valuable enough for princes to turn their attention to them? So again I warn that we must bring every consideration and strength of mind and carefully consider whether the things that are written down are true; or,

**[Page 16]**

whether it is very important for the state to be persuaded by the reasons of the one who is writing; or, whether this is actually the Aqua Virgine and is brought to the city from these places; or, whether the ancient aqueduct is almost entirely preserved, actually underground, after [the ancient Romans] having made conduits through the hardness of mountains and rocks, and after [the ancient Romans] having excavated the tufa; or, whether this is the true aqueduct of the Vergine and whether the structure can easily be restored without great expense—great expense, I say further, that would surpass today's resources. But I contend that the popes each year are used to doing many things with very much greater expense. For this reason, if they try to eliminate these things so that the state treasury would not be hurt, let them urge the people as single individuals to contribute to this work, because this is a benefit to the whole city. For it will not be much that will be required from each person. But, these things seem very easy to me, if

---

<sup>33</sup> A tributary of the Tiber; it rises in the region of the Marches, goes through Umbria, and then flows into the Tiber near the town of Orte.

only courage, which often becomes faint before good and glorious things, does not fail or diminish. And [if] the vision of virtue does not sink. For [that vision] has led few to the heavens. Indeed, I, abandoned by all hope, looking to our path, solitary and far away from the consortium of the gods, am consumed by the anxiety that the advantages that used to comfort the lands with [their] very pleasant aspect have flown to the heavens. And that we abandoned [these lands] to the cold during a cruel and profoundly dark night, so that we see the nine sisters going into exile, and that they are prohibited from approaching.<sup>34</sup> But it will happen when we are joyful because the city is flourishing again and because the spring of the ancients has returned. Nothing desirable will escape our eyes, and after having driven out the winter, a new ardor will flow, irradiating through the lands. And the Graces will scatter lilies profusely. Therefore, what city of Italy (to return to [the topic of] the waters) is so abandoned (for often small things are rightly compared to great things as that man said)<sup>35</sup> that it will not have brought springs or rivers to itself, even by a difficult path? You will be astonished, looking at [the aqueducts] of another [city] which opened up the path to the springs between steep rocks and rugged cliffs and rough crags, not sparing any expense,

### [Page 17]

like the aqueduct of Gubbio, my own city. Or, [you will be astonished] seeing the water, which runs into lead pipes from a high mountain to a deep valley, arrive at Perugia from very far away, and from there rises up again some distance toward another hill and ascends into the *piazza* of the city, which is in a very elevated place. [And the city] certainly had great but calculated courage, without taking a loan for expenses. Brescia, city of the Cenomani,<sup>36</sup> takes so much benefit from the aqueduct, having brought it to the city from a great distance, that no one, either private or public, is forbidden from bringing purchased water into courtyards, orchards, and into every house. Why do you, aware of other cities, explain matters obvious to the eyes of everyone? Will the Queen of the World alone be deprived forever of her commodities and ornaments by the neglect of the princes? Will not the ancient beauty, which can return easily, return to her again? But what are the princes themselves waiting for—that we, while taking them by the hands, bring them to the very springs by way of the whole aqueduct to the last wells and airshafts in the city and point out to them, the excavated hills, the path cut into the ridges, and show [them] the internal channel of the water, [and that] we explain that we are referring not to fabulous and arbitrary things, but to something very much proven? I reiterate that it is necessary to clean the aqueduct of dirt and of other debris that dropped

---

<sup>34</sup> The nine sisters are the nine Muses who inspired the arts—Calliope (epic poetry), Clio (history), Euterpe (music, song, and elegiac poetry), Erato (lyric poetry), Melpomene (tragedy), Plyhumnia (hymns), Terpischore (dance), Thalia (comedy), and Urania (astronomy).

<sup>35</sup> Cicero, *Orator ad M. Brutum*, 4.14. Steuco refers to the fact that he will be comparing small things (i.e., small cities) to Rome (i.e., a great thing).

<sup>36</sup> A Celtic people

down during the long time since indeed [the water] had broken out [of the channel] near these springs—the aqueduct and the hydraulic mortar,<sup>37</sup> by which the waters later entering the subterranean channel were contained, having been destroyed. [The water], after having flowed down through the plain, went back to the Anio, after having left the route to the city. Then, the inner channel itself, running from there empty of water, cuts through the middle of the ridge, having been inspected from above by means of the repeated succession of the shafts. Following these [shafts], you go first into Via Prenestina, having them always on your left, where

[Page 18]

many fig trees have grown near the openings. But when you approach closer to the city, after a wide valley has appeared, the channel turns from the Via Prenestina toward the north, through the fields until, after having crossed the Via Tiburtina, [the channel] always going toward the north, descends toward the Anio. Moreover, it proceeds forward with a curved path because the valleys were obstructing, and the Romans thought it preferable to lead the water through the excavated tufa by channels or underground passages that extend for a very long distance, rather than on arched structures, unless necessity compelled [them to do otherwise], since in this [way] there were fewer expenses. For, in building an arched structure with lime, sand, and bricks, it was necessary then to employ those skilled in building, but in excavating the hills, the goal was achieved by a multitude of slaves. Certainly it happens that in some places you fail to recognize [the path anymore] and lose traces of the aqueduct, and not understanding, you are compelled to wander through the fields, like someone following the hunt. But at last the row of the airshafts appears again. Farmers say that they have filled up many of these airshafts due to the frequent falls of the oxen. Moreover, the whole path of the airshafts can be easily inspected, and those investigating would have no other doubt, if entering [into it], they discovered the conduit of the aqueduct [itself], thoroughly cleaning it, and they began to keep the path to the city always open and clear before their eyes. Anyway they advise that it is better not to do it in the summer, because the cold fleeing inward from the heat above, [makes it] intolerable for men. Instead in the winter, the inner conduit is warm for a different reason, because the natural heat doesn't take in the cold above so that it comes into the shafts and springs.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the only remaining task is that if in our time we intended to make ourselves worthy of glory and what is most important, pleasing and accepted by the gods, by bringing forth a thing of great utility, and if we had been persuaded that we must strive after this thing in every way, the only remaining task, I repeat, is

---

<sup>37</sup> I.e., *Opus signum*. See note 21 above.

<sup>38</sup> He refers to the principle of antiperistasis, an Aristotelian idea that referred (in the sixteenth century) to the notion that certain qualities such as heat and cold both intensify and repel one another. See Aristotle, *Meteorology*, 1.3 and 1.9, and Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2d ed. rev. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18. We thank Craig Martin for elucidating this passage.

**Page 19]**

that we not let the opportunity of gaining so much glory slip away and that we not allow the damage to the abandoned springs to deteriorate any longer, or allow this memory to be erased. And notwithstanding that [the aqueduct] has suffered some injuries, nevertheless, it couldn't be broken into pieces and destroyed, even though falling apart from age and lack of use. [The only remaining task is] that we not let this aqueduct become so utterly ruined that no human memory can restore [it] in the future. And certainly I won't be reluctant to say that this loss would be a great calamity for the city. And since the brilliance of the times now has begun to shine again after the darkness has been driven away, [the only remaining thing is that] day after day the city resurge little by little from the very loathsome miseries that overwhelmed it. For now the madness of seditious citizens who have ravaged [the city] with daily destruction has been suppressed. Now thieves [who were] accustomed to lying in wait in public thoroughfares or woods, whose horrible barbarity had made every street dangerous, have been removed. Moreover, their hiding places, the very thick woods, have been completely exposed, and everywhere fields have started to be opened up. Now those who were ready to bring to [Rome] every injury at any time have long been expelled. And then, day after day by the dwellings, by the beauty of the streets, and by the pleasantness of the houses, she shines with pristine magnificence. And this results in a great concourse of new residents to this [city]. Moreover, the times require that the happiness about the return of the water also joins to [happiness] about the other returning benefits.