Preface

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, it has become clear that the water supply of peoples all over the world is in danger. Environmental pollution threatens water quality. Shortage and distribution problems, intensified by mounting competition, are at the base of political conflicts on the Iberian Peninsula, for instance, and contribute to the unrest in the Near East. As a consequence, water management ranks high on the international agenda. In addition, a renewed interest in the water supplies of earlier civilisations has arisen, so that water supply has once again become an object for historical research.

My fascination with ancient Roman waterworks started well over ten years ago, when I visited ruins of Roman cities in Tunisia. My fellow travellers and I – teachers and students from the history and classics departments of the Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen – were amazed by the apparently lavish water use in public baths and private domus. The assumed abundance of the ancient Roman water supply contrasted sharply with the disquieting reports of modern water shortages. My interest in the issue of Roman water supply deepened while exploring its technical aspects. I came to admire the technical skills of Roman engineers. Moreover, I wondered whether data derived from our knowledge in this field of research might be useful in other fields. The publications of Eck (1982) and Bruun (1991) prepared the way. I decided to investigate whether data derived from the water supply of ancient Rome might add to our understanding of the social fabric, the population size, and the extent of the urbs.

From the beginning over ten years ago, the discussions with my promotor Lukas de Blois, and his encouragement of have been essential stimuli to my research. I owe him special thanks for his constant support.

My understanding of various aspects of Roman water supply has greatly benefited from the work of members of the Frontinus-Gesellschaft and other scholars, which has been presented at the conferences Cura Aquarum in Campania (1994) and Cura Aquarum in Sicilia (1998). Discussions with Jos de Waele, Nathalie de Haan, and Gemma Jansen, with whom I have served on preparatory committees for both conferences, have also been most valuable.

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