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Fountaineer or Fraud? The Activities of Giovanni Antonio Nigrone in Late Sixteenth-Century Italy

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In his manuscript compiled in Naples during the final decades of the sixteenth century, Giovanni Antonio Nigrone styles himself a “fountaineer and water engineer” (*fontanaro et ingegniero de acqua*). The manuscript, in two richly illustrated volumes (never published), was catalogued as “Discorsi varii” because of the essays and occasional information on a wide range of subjects that it contains—from meteorology to earthquakes, from esoteric recipes to hydraulics. It has received some attention from scholars of fountain and garden history because of the beautiful designs and plans Nigrone includes, but the text itself has hardly been studied. In any case, virtually everything that we know about this curious figure is limited to what he tells us in his manuscript. The work and its author remains an enigma. My paper will try to tease out what we have learned about Nigrone and why he repays serious investigation, based on the findings of a two-day international conference recently held at the National Library in Naples.