

The contentious Border between Venice and Padua Territory as represented by the Cartography of 16th-18th Century

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Abstract. This paper describes the most important phases of the conflict between Padua and Venice, initially for the state border and ultimately between private landowners and the Venetian Republic, by mean of a diachronical analysis of historical maps from 16th to 18th centuries such as those of Ruffoni (1678), Fabris (1587), Formaleoni (1776), Valle (1784), Milanovich (1786) and Valle (1801). They provide an important contribution in the geo-historical reconstruction of the contentious border between Venice and the Padua territory, in particular near the village of Pettorazza, located along Adige River, just behind the southern Venice Lagoon.

Keywords: Venice, Padua, border, Adige River

1. Introduction

Adige River is the second Italian river by length and, since ancient times, allowed the connection between Central Europe on the one hand and the Adriatic Sea on the other (Piovan et al. 2010). It was also an hydrogeological risk for the villages nearby and the surrounding cultivated areas with its continuous crevasses and floodings.

Its present-day course in the southern Venetian plain is related to an important avulsion, occurred in the high part of the river during the High Middle Ages, that has shifted the river about 12 kilometres more to the south (Piovan et al. 2012). After this event, the area suffered a swampy condition until the new territorialisation by the Benedictine monks in the Low Middle Ages (Trolese 2010).

Paduan territory, which included the lands reclaimed by Santa Giustina monks, was ruled by the powerful Da Carrara family from 1318 but after

many territorial conflicts passed under Venetian rule in 1405 and so remained until the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1797 (Gullino 2010). The conflicts between Padua and Venice continued between private landowners and the State.

This work aims to provide a contribution for geo-historical reconstruction of the contentious border and the frontier area near the village of Pettorazza, by mean of the diachronical analysis of historical maps. The study area is of particular interest because, during the time, was claimed by several contenders due to its strategic proximity to Adige River and the salt flats located behind the southern Venice Lagoon (Simonetti 2009).

2. Presentation of the study area

2.1. Geographical context

At the present-day, after that the Adige River leaves the mountain to enter in its alluvial plain, it marks first the border between Padua and Verona and then between Padua and Rovigo provinces.

The study area lies in the Adige River low alluvial plain, between the cities of Rovigo and Adria. In particular, the present village of Pettorazza Grimani is located on the southern bank of the Adige River, in the province of Rovigo, about 45° latitude N and 12° longitude E. The area, whose elevations ranges from about 4 meters a.s.l. to -2 meters a.s.l. is characterized by a rich hydrography that, since the proto-historical times (Piovan 2012), influenced the territory, defined as the result of interactions between man and environment (Bertoncin 2004).

During the medieval period, the economic activities in the southern Venetian Plain consisted mainly in grain production, so much so that the area was known as the breadbasket of the Venetian Region (Bullo 1864), supplemented by hunting, gathering wild fruits and collection of reeds. The fishing was of paramount importance in all those areas where there was the presence of water and the breeding of horses, cows and oxen has also played an important role for the local activities and interregional trading (Lugaresi 1988). On the other hand, the salt production was a major activity in the areas just behind the coast (Hocquet 1992, Gullino 2010).

2.2. Historical context

A number of archaeological sites, found in the proximity of the river, its palaeochannels and alluvial ridges, indicate a deep relationship between people and watercourses since Bronze and Iron Age (Piovan et al. 2010). Among the major sites, we mention that of Frattesina (11th century B.C.)

which was of particular importance in an active trade between south Venetian Region and the Dalmatian coast, the transalpine areas and the Eastern Mediterranean (Bietti Sestieri & De Grossi Mazzorin 2001).

On 6th century B.C., the city of Adria was an active venetic emporium along the Amber Road that reached the Baltic Region (Peretto 1997). According to the words of Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis Historia*, 1st century A.D.) the Etruscans practiced major hydraulic works in order to foster these trade activities (Zorzi 2005). The invasion of the Celts in the 4th century B.C., overwhelmed this trading system and marked its decline (Bonomi & Zega 2010).

The subsequent Roman occupation led the land division provided for the establishment of colonies (*centuriatio*). Behind this restructuring of the agricultural context there was a need for technical and political control of the territory (Zerbinati 1993).

In the High Middle Ages there was a significant change in climate and anthropogenic management of water. According to Veggiani (1994) a deterioration of climatic conditions, coinciding with the gradual abandonment of the land after the fall of the Roman Empire, produced disastrous effects in the hydraulic conditions.

The situation of conflict generated by the Lombards occupation of Venetian lands (e.g. Padua destruction in High Middle Age) (Zorzi 1929) led a reorganization of the territory. People abandoned the cities and rushed into the islands of the lagoon to seek protection: according to the legend, Venice was founded on 25th March 421 (Zorzi 2005).

In 774, Charlemagne, King of the Franks, came to Italy and defeated the Lombards. In the 9th century the northeastern Italy comprised between Friuli and the Adige River was divided by Charlemagne into four committees governed by earls (Ceccolin & Casna 1999): Verona, Vicenza, Treviso and Monselice that included Padua (Castagnetti 1988), while Venice maintained its autonomy by the Franks. Acting within a framework of formal link with the Byzantine Empire, the *Venetia maritima* was able to carve out space for economic and military manoeuvres. According to the *Pactum Lotharii* (840), the Dogado, that stretched from Grado to Cavarzere, had bonds of friendship with the neighbouring countries, notably not Padua that was closely linked to the Frankish Empire (Simioni 1968).

In that period the Church had a strong influence in the Italian peninsula and the bishops controlled large landholdings (Abrami et al. 1983). In 897 the bishop of Padua held power over the paduan territory thanks to a series of donations by the king Berengar (Gloria 1877; Abrami et al. 1983). However, in the same 9th century, the setting of Commons induced the decrease

of the bishop supremacy (Zorzi 1929). In Padua, the episcopal domain was especially formal and the real power was distributed among the different seigneurs (Ceccolin & Casna 1999), the most important of which became Da Carrara (Zorzi 1929). In the sixties and seventies of the 10th century, Padua suppressed the committee and incorporated the territories of Monselice (Bortolami 1978) including those of Agna and Correzzola. This Padua's strategy, consisting in territorial acquisition, led a kind of political-administrative conquest and an expansion of the city to the east. Among other disputes, this caused territorial conflicts with the Venetians for supremacy along the Adige River for the control of salt trade (Simonetti 2009).

3. The contentious Border between Padua Territory and Venice as represented by the Cartography of 16th-18th Century

3.1. The map of Ruffoni (1678): the fortifications along the Adige River

As a result of the situation created, the contenders began to fortify a series of outposts along the Adige River waterway. In this standing, the last cornerstone of Padua was represented by the village of Anguillara while the Venetian one was represented by the town of Cavarzere (Ceccolin & Casna 1999). In particular, in 1230, the paduan seigneur Jacopino da Carrara built two castles, respectively in Anguillara and in Borgoforte.

On the other part, the Venetian Senate applied every mean to prevent the spread of Padua, already dominating the Polesine of Rovigo. So, it set up defenses in Cavarzere, against possible attacks to the salt trade on the Adige River. The construction of fortifications along the Adige River was represented in the map of I. Ruffoni (1678), published by Sertorius Orsato (1678) (Figure 1). According to the historiographic tradition, this map is directly inspired by the 15th century's (1465) parchment of Francesco Squarcione (1397-1468). The map, entitled *Antiqui agri patavini Chorographia* (1010x1070 mm) is oriented with the North on the right (Padua is in the centre of the map and Venice is at the bottom).

Although the map is schematic and synthetic, it shows interesting features of the area: a varied symbolism is used to represent castles, dictated by the desire to represent the structural diversity of the castles themselves.

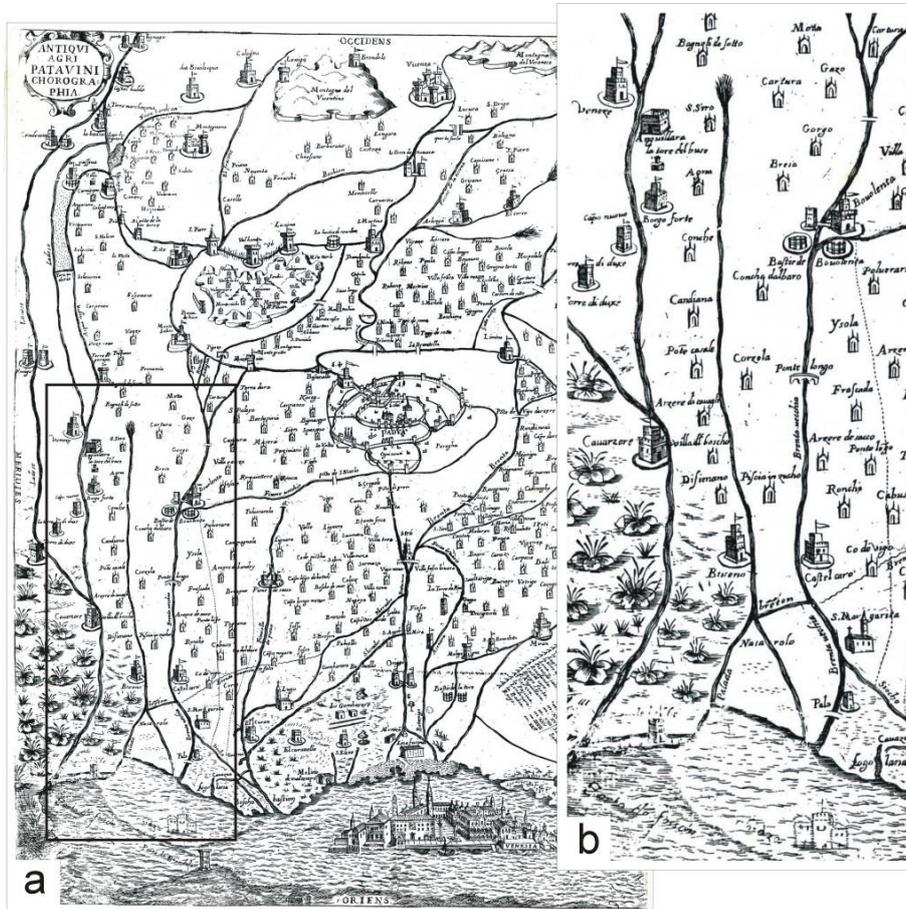


Figure 1. a) I. Ruffoni's map, inspired by Squarcione's parchment (15th century) and published by S. Orsato in the 17th century (Orsato 1678); b) The particular of the fortifications along the Adige River. The North is on the right.

3.2. The map of Ottavio Fabris (1587): from the “Borders War” (1374) to the “Malipiera line” (1519)

The contention between Padua and Venice fell into the “Borders War” in the 1373. The peace treaty of 1374 between the venetian winner and Francesco il Vecchio da Carrara, seigneur of Padua, led to a precise definition of the border: a first borderstone was placed in the northern side of the Volta Pettorazza meander, in the direction of Borgoforte.

This delimitation brought the loss of some territories that Padua did not accept permanently (Borgato 2009): this led to the “War of Chioggia” in which Venice won again (1381). After the war, it was decided to relocate the boundaries between the two contenders with the mediation of the Ferrara

Marquis (Trolese 2010): the position of the stones, laid in 1382, slightly expanded the territory of Padua (Cessi 1965, Benucci 2011). In addition, the reclamation made during this period by the monks of Santa Giustina helped to improve the fertility of the fields actually going to benefit Padua in the new setting (Lovison 2009).

After many territorial conflicts, the city and the territory of Padua passed under Venetian rule in 1405 and so remained until the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1797 (Gullino 2010).

At this point there was no longer an international political border, but only an administrative boundary. The controversy moved on the possessions of some lands which Venice considered public and other landowners claimed as their landholdings. For example, Benedictine monks were several times accused of having moved the boundaries in their favour and despite they claimed their rights through documentation, the Venetian nobility interference was very strong (Trolese 2010).

In 1452, the venetian Francesco della Sega relocated the boundary stones to the alleged position of 1374, making some reduction in the territory of Padua and so to the monastery of Correzzola. According to Ortolani, a chronicler of the time, the pleas from the monastery continued until 1534 (Lovison 2009) but the Council of Ten continued to support the possession of the Dogado, unleashing the "*Lite fiscale di Correzzola*" ("Correzzola tax quarrel") (Borgato 2009).

In 1513, when Venice was in need of money to cope with the huge military expenses related to the war against the League of Cambrai (1509-1516), the parties reached an agreement, upon the payment of a large sum of money by the monks. In this way, the monks legitimized their landholdings that were passed in Dogado (Lovison 2009).

However, in 1519, Venice revoked the agreement and the Council of Ten established a commission to re-draw the border between the territory of Padua and Venice (Lovison 1982) as much as possible coherent with those of 1374 and 1452 (ASPD, CRS - S. Giustina, b. 12). So, on May 9th 1519, the commission laid down the stones of the "Malipiera Line", that takes its name by Gasparo Malipiero, the Venetian patrician which was part of the commission (Lovison 2009).

Due to the largely marshy environment and to the erosion of the river banks, the commission found many difficulties in tracing the boundary. As Malipiero said, this led that the initial borderstone in Volta Pettorazza meander, was placed 291 venetian perches to the west of the original point (ASPD, CRS - S. Giustina, b. 12). This boundary line reduced significantly

the properties of Corte di Correzzola, by returning those lands under the rule of Venice (Stella 1986).

In 1531, the Venetian Senate reaffirmed the border drawn in 1519 by Gasparo Malipiero and, in 1539, it imposed, to the monks of Santa Giustina, the building of a moat (current Rebosola canal) at their own expense that had to run along the border of Malipiera Line (Lovison 2009). This definition, which assigned permanently Volta Pettorazza to Dogado, led to a change in the landholdings of the noble family of Papafava, but the contention between Venice and the monks was to last several years longer.

The map of Figure 2, as reported in the cartouche, is a 1661 reduced copy (Archivio Storico di Santa Giustina, Padova) of the original Ottavio Fabris relief (1587) which shows the pretended boundaries between Padua and Venice traced after the “Borders War” in 1374 (MCCCLXXIII, as written on the map) by the winner Venice (red line) and that in force since 1519 and related to Malipiera Line (yellow line) (Trolese 2010).

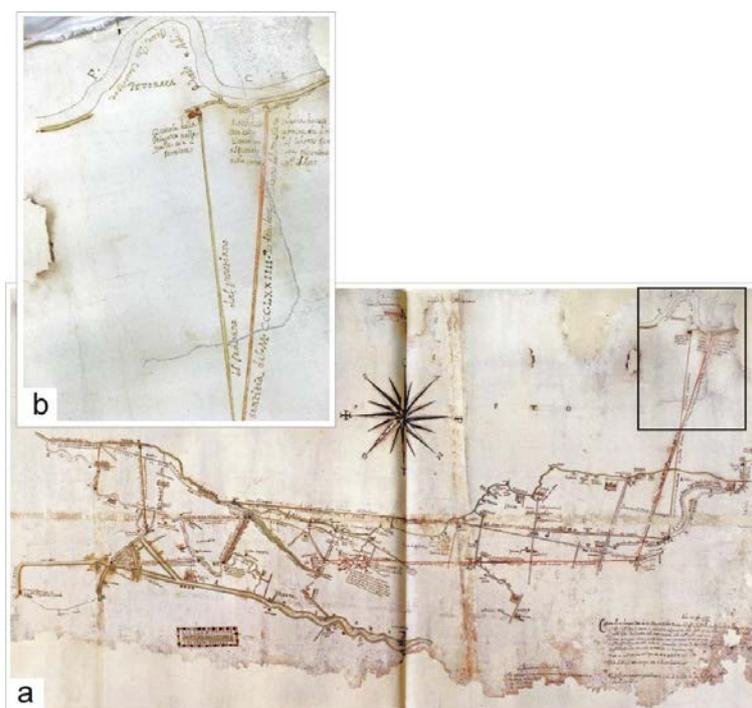


Figura 2. a) Drawing of 1661, reduced copy of the original relief (1587) of O. Fabris. b) The particular of Volta Pettorazza meander of Adige River. The North is on the bottom (Trolese 2010).

3.3. The maps of Formaleoni (1776) and Valle (1784): the ambiguity in the borders definition continues

After the tracing of the Malipiera Line, the area of Volta Pettorazza was subject to different civil administrations. The left side of the western part of Adige River was under the Vicariate of Anguillara (Padua territory) while the right side under the *podestà* of Rovigo. All the eastern part was under the rule of the *podestà* of Cavarzere (Dogado territory), nominally part of the city of Venice, in particular of the *sestiere* Dorsoduro.

Before the meander cut-off of Volta Pettorazza, which occurred in 1782-1783, the current village of Pettorazza Grimani was divided by Adige River into two parts: Ca' Grimani on the right bank, belonging to the Dogado territory and Pettorazza (Papafava), on the left bank, under the Padua territory. The two villages took their name from the noble families (Grimani and Papafava, Venetian and Paduan respectively) who had estates in those areas.

According to the political self-consciousness of Padua, after the definition of the "Malipiera Line" (1519), the land within Volta Pettorazza was the last piece of land before the border of Dogado: a position also detectable from the historical map of Valle (1784), entitled "*Il Padovano di Giovanni Valle giustinopolitano, di nuova proiezione*" (Figure 3). It is an engraving (424x327 mm) published by Antonio Zatta and Sons in the atlas named "*Atlante novissimo illustrato ed accresciuto sulle osservazioni, e scoperte fatte dai più celebri e più recenti geografi. Tomo III*" and represents the Paduan territory (Biblioteca nazionale Marciana 215.d.16).

The map of abbot Vincenzo Formaleoni (1776), entitled "Carta topografica del Dogado" (356x448 mm) represents the Dogado territory that spanned from the Po Delta ("Bocche di Po") to the Caorle Lagoon (Figure 4). The author, as written in the cartouche, dedicated the map to Pietro Gradenigo (1695-1776), which was a scholar and senator of Venetian Republic (Biblioteca nazionale Marciana 227.d.14).

The comparison between the Formaleoni map, drawing Pettorazza as the first village of Dogado (Dorsoduro district, Podestaria of Cavarzere) and that of the venetian cartographer Giovanni Valle (1784), representing it as the last of "Padovano" territory (Vicariate of Anguillara), endures the ambiguity in the definition of the border.



Figure 3. Map of G. Valle (1784) that included the Volta Pettorazza (circled in red) in the territory of Padua (Biblioteca nazionale Marciana 215.d.16). Note that the meander cut-off occurred two years before the edition of this map.

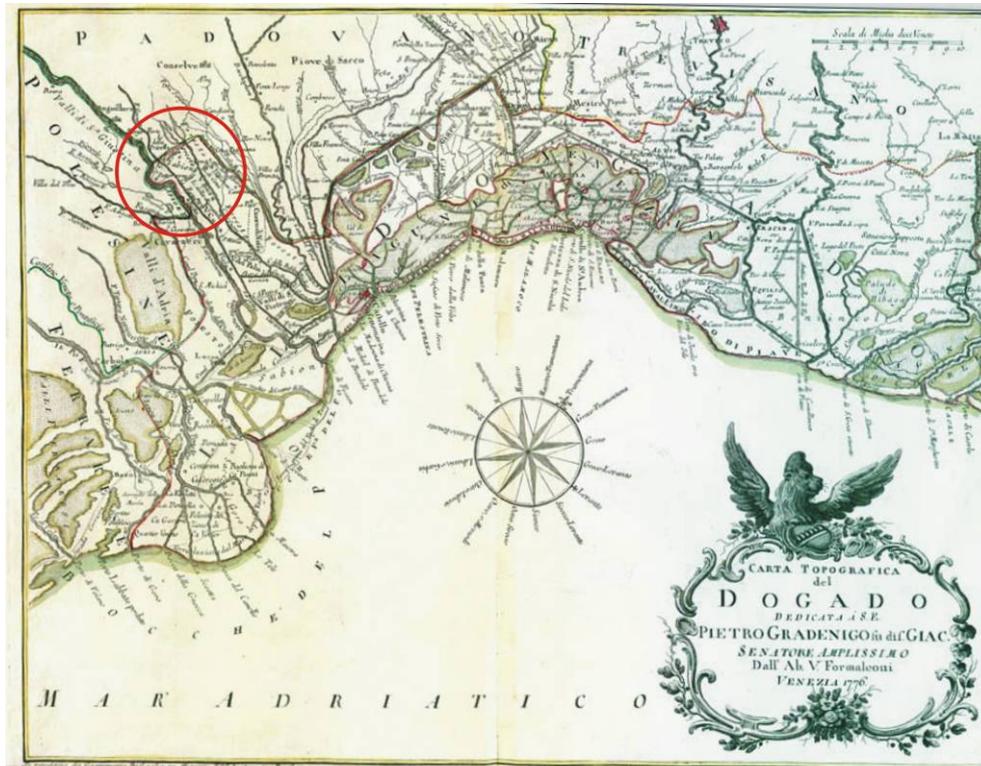


Figura 4. Map of V. Formaleoni (1776) which included Volta Pettorazza (circled in red) in Dogado. The map is oriented with the North to the right (Biblioteca nazionale Marciana 227.d.14).

3.4. The maps of Milanovich (1786) and Valle (1801): the river regulation led a new order

The topographic map of engineer Lt. Col. Alvise Milanovich (1786), is an engraving at the scale of 1:37000 entitled “Polesine di Rovigo” and printed in Venice by the printmaker Antonio Sandi (Figure 5).

The map of Giovanni Valle (1801, with a reprint of 1810), entitled “*Mappa del Padovano del Polesine di Rovigo del Dogado della parte meridionale del Vicentino del Trevigiano e della parte settentrionale del Ferrarese*” (658x879 mm) is a copper engraving of Pietro Zuliani (venetian printmaker) at the scale of about 1:150.000 (Figure 6). It represents the area of central-southern Venetian Plain as the scene of deep interactions between man and environment and provides a “diachronic picture” of the hydrography (Piovan 2012).

The maps of Milanovich and Valle show Volta Pettorazza also as an emblematic case of river regulation. In 1783, the government of the Venetian

Republic here performed the largest ever meander cut-off on Adige River to preserve the surrounding area by the floods.

In the Napoleonic period (1797-1807), Volta Pettorazza closed its experiences of border conflicts between Padua and Venice and, after a decade of Ferrara jurisdiction, the municipalities of Pettorazza and Papafava merged together in 1807.

The so unified Pettorazza Papafava became part of the Rovigo province in 1815 under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus, the lands in Volta Pettorazza that once upon a time were nominally part of the city of Venice (*sestiere Dorsoduro*), fell in a territory considered marginal: geomorphologically and economically depressed.

The details of the current provincial border between Padua and Venice were settled only after 1866.



Figure 5. Excerpt of A. Milanovich map (1786). The meander cut offs on Adige River around Pettorazza Grimani are shown (Museo dei Grandi Fiumi, Rovigo).

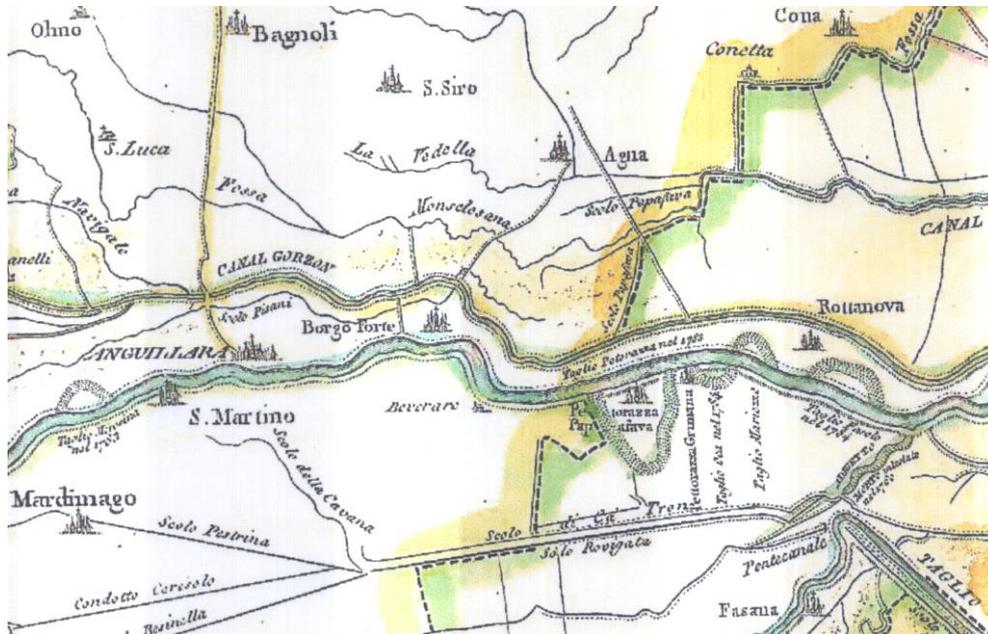


Figure 6. Excerpt of the G. Valle map (1801). The meander cut offs on Adige River around Pettorazza Grimani are shown. The border between Venice and Padua is also represented with the dotted line colored in yellow and green (Piovan 2012).

4. Conclusion

The maps presented in this work have shown that the lands localized close to the low course of Adige River, especially in the stretch between Anguillara and Cavarzere, were of particular interests for the territorial strategies pursued by Paduan and Venetian centres of power for the control of the waterways and lands facing the river.

It is also possible to consider these lands as a frontier area for the many conflicts that had affected these territories from 15th to 19th century, marking the history and identity of the living communities.

The discussion about reorganizing province borders is a current affair in Italian politics. The cartographical representation of Venice Region provinces on popular media partially resembles the ancient disputes discussed in this paper.

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