



EDITED BY
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VENICE AND THE VENETO DURING THE RENAISSANCE

THE LEGACY OF BENJAMIN KOHL



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**Venice and the Veneto during the
Renaissance: the Legacy of Benjamin Kohl**

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Land and Economic Policy in Later Fifteenth-Century Padua

by Michael Knapton

1. *Premise*

The research presented in this essay is concerned with the exercise of power and the conduct of policy-making by the civic institutions and élites of formerly independent urban polities absorbed into the regional states of northern and central Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – a destiny shared by Padua, which was subject to Venice from 1405 to the fall of the Serenissima. The primary target is in fact the Paduan civic council in the half century or so preceding 1509: a phase when the Venetian mainland dominion, nearly all created anew in the early decades of the fifteenth century, had acquired a relatively settled nature, before Venice's unexpected defeat at Agnadello temporarily but radically altered perspectives¹. This essay chooses to focus on the economy, and indeed on just one theme concerning economic relations and policy: the various, important issues pertaining to land.

The short second and third sections of the essay contain a very summary profile of the Padovano and the Paduan civic council and élite in the period concerned, and linkage to historical debate on economic policy in the Venetian Terraferma dominion and in Italian regional states in general. The long fourth section addresses matters directly and indirectly concerning land, and relates the city council's deliberations on this theme to the broader framework of power sharing between the different political players in the Venetian regional state, especially Venetian government authority, itself an important policy-maker in this sphere.

¹ Recent surveys of the Terraferma state: Knapton, 2012; Knapton, 2013. For comparison in the Italian and European dimension: Shaw; Berengo. Need for concision has limited bibliographical and archival references, and also potential comparison between Padua and other Terraferma contexts. The *campo (padovano)* used as a unit of surface measure corresponds to 3,862.57 square metres. In the text and notes, sums in ducats and *lire di piccolli* are expressed using the forms D. and L. (the equivalence was D. 1 = L. 6.2). Thanks to Reinhold Mueller, Luciano Pezzolo and Gian Maria Varanini for advice on the essay.

The essay is based on archival sources documenting both the activity of the Paduan council and the more general conduct of government by Paduan and Venetian institutions². The relevant primary research was very largely conducted for a doctoral thesis written in the 1970s, and much of the elaboration of those archival findings has been overlong delayed by other scholarly concerns, though previous publications have tackled fiscal and judicial features of the Venice-Padua relationship³. The essay is indebted to the example and advice of many other scholars, including a prestigious quartet of historians of Padua, all now deceased, to whose memory it is dedicated: Sante Bortolami, Kenneth Hyde, Benjamin Kohl and Gérard Rippe⁴.

2. The Padovano and the Paduan city council

With the exception of the Euganean hills, south-west of the city, the Padovano was flat agricultural land, crisscrossed or bordered by numerous major and minor waterways including important rivers like the Adige, Bacchiglione and Brenta – though for agrarian purposes the presence of water was as much a liability as a resource in low-lying eastern and southern areas⁵. The contado included a few sizeable towns, especially those east and south of the Euganean hills (Este, Monselice, Montagnana), but Padua's development in communal and seigneurial times gave it clear economic dominion over the Padovano, together with much more than local importance as a commercial and manufacturing centre; the presence of a prestigious university also contributed to this urban economy.

In the 1390s the city's population of 30-35,000 had recovered its pre-Black Death level, but subsequent crisis lasting through the early Venetian decades is evident from data of 20,000 or less for 1411, 1430 and 1435, after which gradual recovery brought it to around 27,000 by 1509. This increase of at most 50% from the lowpoint of the early fifteenth century contrasts unfavourably with the dynamism of other dominion cities, especially Verona and Brescia, whose urban population rose by about 150% and 200% respectively – to about 35,000, and well over 40,000 – from their numbers at or soon after Venetian annexation. The contado, whose inhabitants had been 130,000 or more in 1397, was affected by fluctuations similar to the city's in trend and timing.

² For the council's deliberations, Archivio di Stato di Padova, Archivio Civico Antico (henceforth ASP), Atti del Consiglio, registers IV-IX (also numbered 7-12), covering respectively 1461-69, 1470-76, 1476-85, 1486-91, 1492-1501, 1501-20 but interrupted in December 1506 (henceforth Atti, IV etc.). The main series of Venetian missives to Padua in ASP are Ducali, vols. 2-4, 71-77, here cited respectively as Rubeo, Verde, III and with the letters A-G (henceforth Ducali, A etc.); occasional use is also made of vols. 20, 111 and 121.

³ Knapton, 1981b (and Knapton, 1998); Knapton, 1992.

⁴ Socio-political studies by the three non-Italians cover in sequence the centuries preceding the period analyzed here: Rippe; Hyde; Kohl.

Population increase in the mid and later fifteenth century reflects lower plague mortality but also more liveliness especially in the agrarian economy, although urban manufacturing – whose cornerstone in the later fourteenth century had been woollen textiles, thanks too to strong Carrarese support – seems to have been less resilient⁶.

As happened elsewhere in the mainland state, a Golden Bull granted by Venice to newly annexed Padua in January 1406 emphasized the consensual features of a political relationship initially created by military might⁷. Venetian government made use of few noble officials on the spot – a podestà (civil governor), a captain, two camerlenghi in charge of the Venetian exchequer, and two castellans – while delegation of much government activity to local political partners primarily favoured the resumption of decision-making by urban institutions and élites, moreover responsible for most of the coordination of ordinary administrative activity by the city commune's officials. Padua's Golden Bull also guaranteed such key features of continuity in government as the validity of the city's statutes and customs, and support to the university and the wool guild.

Urban control over the contado emerged strongly from the Carrarese period, with no significant separate jurisdictions, and now received overall confirmation, though local control over single contado districts was divided between Paduan and Venetian officials: the former in the vicariates of Anguillara, Arquà, Conselve, Mirano, Oriago and Teolo, the latter in *podesterie* with partial autonomy from authority in Padua – very limited for Camposampiero, Castelbaldo and Piove di Sacco, a little more substantial for Cittadella, Este, Monselice and Montagnana.

In Padua, as elsewhere, the seigneurial regime had brought the decline of municipal councils' role in public life. The formally constituted Maggior Consiglio still referred to in the Paduan statutes of 1362 had waned from ordinary existence in the later Carrarese period, as had also happened gradually to the Anziani, formerly the commune's main executive magistracy⁸. Thus the general councils called in Padua at critical junctures for the dynasty and the city – 1372, 1388 – had been improvised revivals. The practice of government had however continued to rely heavily on laws, procedures and offices created in the communal period⁹.

In the very early years of Venetian domination of Padua there is little trace of activity by a city council. However, the revision of the statute book conducted

⁵ A general description of the Padovano in the Quattrocento in Favaretto, 1-22.

⁶ Collodo, 1990, chapters XI-XIV (on population, esp. 414-15). On population of the Terraferma cities: Ginatempo-Sandri, 75, 81, 250-54.

⁷ See the recent edition: Melchiorre.

⁸ See the coming edition of the 1362 statutes by Ornella Pittarello; comment in Varanini, 1992, 18-19.

⁹ Ventura, 1993, 15-30; in general, Kohl, to be read with Collodo, 2007; see too the essay by Varanini in this volume.

in 1420 not only updated communal law but also underlined the general valency of the commune's jurisdiction and institutions¹⁰. It also prescribed a council of forty eight members; though increased to sixty in 1425, this was much smaller than its thirteenth- and fourteenth-century predecessors. Its meetings were generally attended by one or both of the city's Venetian governors. The deputies *ad utilia*, together with the deputies *ad ecclesias*, took over the executive role formerly discharged by the Anziani¹¹. The 1420 statutes allowed every citizen of Padua residing there and paying taxes to hold municipal office *secundum condicionem suam*, but in practice access to the council was reserved to far fewer Paduans¹². Tightening control by a small group and growing tension over membership numbers and criteria for election induced Venice in 1446 to increase the ordinary members from sixty to a hundred, limiting to two those from any single *agnatio* among the hundred, and disqualifying serving councillors from re-election the year immediately following.

These were the numbers present and these the rules applying in the later fifteenth century, when more powerful families were commonly represented by four councillors alternating in pairs from year to year, often reinforced by others sitting *ex officio* as deputies etc. The deputies' role as all-purpose executive had expanded piecemeal after 1420, and was then much in evidence, not only in such usual functions as flanking the Venetian governors and organizing the agenda for council meetings but also, for example, in dealings with the representatives the city frequently sent to Venice¹³.

As to the identity of council members, in the fifteenth century each Terraferma city's civic élite had begun but by no means completed its longer term evolution into "a restricted body of families monopolizing high municipal office, possessing great and honourable wealth and... fabulous genealogies", enjoying mostly hereditary succession to seats in councils "formally closed and highly resistant to newcomers". Still permeable, Quattrocento élites can be identified, but not categorized according to "firm principles of demarcation"¹⁴. In contemporary sources their members are often called *cives* or *cittadini*, primarily meaning those occupying municipal office; by the later fifteenth century, *cives* and *nobiles* were tending to become interchangeable terms in Paduan council records. In fourteenth and fifteenth century Padua there was significant upward social mobility fed mostly from Padua and the Padovano,

¹⁰ On the 1420 statutes, still unpublished, see Varanini, 1992, 24 ff., 39 ff.; Pino-Branca, 1933-38, XCIII, 348 ff.

¹¹ Ventura, 1993, 47-72, is the general source of what follows. On the deputies: Pino-Branca, 1933-38, XCIII, 343 ff., and data in ASP, Deputati e Cancelleria (henceforth Deputati), regs. 3-5.

¹² On requirements for citizenship and the rights and duties deriving: Pino-Branca, 1933-38, XCIII, 373 ff.

¹³ On the deputies' expansion of competence: Pino-Branca, 1933-38, XCIII, 344 ff.

¹⁴ Comprehensive discussion in Grubb, ch. 7 (quotations from 156-57); on Padua, Ventura, 1993, especially 70. On civic élites and public life see too the useful *status quaestionis* in Varanini, 2013.

but partly by prestigious immigrants too, with university teaching posts – especially in arts and medicine – fairly often a key factor in new families' emergence. The Carrarese lordship was itself an important factor of both promotion and demotion, while in the fifteenth century the élite of the Carrara years was weakened during the early decades by some members' misplaced support for anti-Venetian plots¹⁵.

As in other Terraferma cities, political pre-eminence attested by presence in the council coincided with high economic standing, documented by councillors' *estimo* ratings (inclusion of wealth actually possessed in these lists of taxable assets was often incomplete, especially for richer taxpayers); all families with conspicuous patrimony were indeed always present at least to some extent in the council. As to the forms of their wealth, many members of the Paduan élite mingled land and housing, mercantile and financial investment (including banking and tax collection), and also assets deriving from careers in the professions – occasionally ecclesiastical but more frequently secular (as jurists, judges and notaries, doctors of arts and medicine, university teachers)¹⁶.

In terms of power-sharing between Venetian authority and mainland power-holders, research on the Venetian dominion has established clearly the comparative debilitation of Padua's and Treviso's civic élites in their relationship with the Venetian state. This debilitation partly reflected the relative weakness of both cities for bargaining with the Republic at the moment of their annexation; once they were subject to the Republic, moreover, their proximity to the capital brought more precocious and intense intervention by Venetian government authority, and greater attention from Venetian private interests, especially to landowning and ecclesiastical benefices. But Treviso, annexed as early as 1338, had a much flatter profile of local political life, with no fully regular civic council at all, whereas in the fifteenth century the experience of Paduan municipal institutions was closer to that of other sizeable cities of the mainland state like Vicenza, Verona, Brescia and Bergamo, even though subject to tighter Venetian control – with a correspondingly weaker Paduan profile – in such institutions as the city's Venetian exchequer and its *camera dei lavorieri* (a sort of office of works)¹⁷.

In the mass of the Paduan council's deliberations and in other relevant documentation, there are common threads linking the handling of different matters of government. One such thread is the dialectic between the city and political agencies of the Padovano, essentially regarding the extent and exercise of the city's jurisdiction over the contado. In the Padovano, as nearly everywhere else in the Terraferma, the *corpo territoriale* representing the

¹⁵ In addition to works already cited, see: Ulvioni, 807-08, on fifteenth-century newcomers; De Sandre, 1968, especially 34 ff., on university careers' importance.

¹⁶ On banking and other non-landed wealth, see especially Demo.

¹⁷ Varanini, 1992, 215; Knapton, 1981b, 21.

contado rural communities, and especially its towns and social élite, was to develop only in the course of the sixteenth century as a formally constituted institution with a cohesive political programme. During the fifteenth century, moreover, Venice tended to maintain the status quo in city-contado relations, which mostly meant robust urban hegemony, including explicit reference to the superiority of Paduan statute law if the Padovano towns' statutes were reformed (thus for example Montagnana's in 1446)¹⁸. But action especially by the towns with minor Venetian governors kept the civic élite's nerves on edge, not least where proximity to Venice and the existence of Venetian residents and property rights were a further stimulus to erosion of the city's jurisdiction – thus especially Piove di Sacco, in the eastern Padovano¹⁹.

Another common thread between council deliberations tackling different aspects of government is their testimony of the balance of power between the urban commune and Venetian authority in general: an aspect central to this essay. This issue was especially important in a later fifteenth century phase characterized by gradually stronger Venetian government action, albeit in a partly haphazard fashion, with the effect of stimulating defence of their prerogatives by the mainland civic councils. Such defence, it must be noted, might rely on more assiduous lobbying in Venice, via patronage relations reaching into the nobility that could seem slightly at odds with the very purpose of the operation. An extension or reflection of this issue concerns the posture assumed by the council in its discussions and deliberations: the extent to which it took the initiative, or reacted to Venetian moves; whether it reached decisions in substantial autonomy, sought their approval by Venetian authority, or merely tried to alter decisions already taken elsewhere.

3. Economic relations and economic policy

In scholarship from the 1970s onwards concerning the Italian regional states, the theme of economic relationships and policy within the state was overall a late developer compared to mainline political issues like defence, taxation and justice, but the gap has now been at least partly filled. A preliminary point to emerge from the debate is the risk of anachronism, applied both to the more general question of ruling groups' sense of the state, and more specifically to their choices in matters modern historians define as economic. Those choices were made without fully possessing either the concepts of modern economic analysis or the instruments of modern policy, and indeed often developed as the answer to problems or needs such as revenue, which were primarily perceived in administrative or political terms. It is nonetheless useful for historians to examine those choices in relation to

¹⁸ Varanini, 1995, 350.

¹⁹ On the towns: Favaretto, 4-13.

the economy, but it would for example be mostly unrealistic, especially for the late medieval and Renaissance phase, to evaluate policy by central authority principally in terms of its capacity to harness strengthened sovereignty to the promotion of economic growth via market integration with the reduction of transaction costs, or to practise the optimum allocation of resources via competition and rationalization.

Scott's recent summary of the debate and his stimulating plea for the application of urban network analysis to the Italian regional states' economic policies may shift the parameters of discussion, and it certainly broadens the horizon of comparison, but his provisional findings seem to stretch his theoretical models to the limit. Common features identified by Franceschi and Molà in those states' economic policy during the Renaissance indeed place empirical issues centre stage, and indicate modest and variously focused aims at work: the considerable relevance of taxation, with fifteenth century trends characterized overall by a relatively lower profile of excises on urban consumption and by increasing direct taxation; the importance of economic decisions as a negotiating tool in general dealings between governments and their subjects, with duly targeted indirect tax rates as a favourite instrument of policy – lower rates to promote economic activity, higher as a form of protection against competition; the “tenacious survival of a municipal vision of the management of the economy”, favouring cities' privileged status over the countryside, and that of the capital over other cities (though the use of exploitation as a moralizing category is inappropriate to historical analysis); the gradual trend towards greater overall public control of the economy, especially by higher authority²⁰.

In the field of Terraferma studies, economic themes in general have received uneven coverage, with greater overall attention to manufacturing and trade than to finance and agriculture; on the more specific matter of economic policy, there has been greater attention to action by Venetian government than by public bodies within the dominion, while for the fifteenth century Verona stands out as the best recipient of recent, specific analysis²¹. A provisional general picture has however emerged. Most historians examining the evolution of urban economies and city-country relations in early modern northeast Italy have seen the obvious influence exercised by the economy of Venice itself, but no emergence of a substantially integrated economic region with a clear distinction and hierarchy of functions, even in the later stages of Venetian mainland rule. This orientation largely reflects key general characteristics of the Terraferma economy, dating from the pre-conquest era but much longer

²⁰ Scott (with full further bibliography), especially 243-51; Franceschi and Molà, especially 448-51, 455-57, 463-66 (the quote at 464).

²¹ For the Terraferma in general: Lanaro; Knapton, 2010; Pezzolo, 2011; Scott, especially 228-30. For the fifteenth century: Knapton, 2013, 98-99 and passim, and – for Verona – Varanini, 1996b, especially 135-37, 155 ff.

lasting: the presence of large cities together with an overall imprint of economic development high on sophistication but low on regional integration.

In the fifteenth century, indeed, Venetian economic policy towards the mainland dominion may be seen as the partial adaptation of a city-state vision of government to a broader, more complex context, which involved no very drastic changes and left much regulation of production and movement of commodities to local bodies. This strong element of continuity was to a considerable extent due to the imprint already given to economic relationships by the combined effect of Venetian treaties with the Terraferma's previous rulers and *de facto* market forces. That legacy of pre-conquest directives and practices favoured trade flows to and from Venice, placed Venetian-supplied salt in mainland monopolies, facilitated the inflow to Venice of foodstuffs from the more immediate hinterland, and eased Venetian access to inland supplies of timber and other raw materials for ship-building – all of this favouring Venice's shipping, port, market and *dazi* (indirect taxes). There were elements of carry-through from the pre-conquest period in other matters too: full Venetian control over minting for the mainland, established after conquest, was preceded by the downgrading of Terraferma rulers' coinage to a provincial profile in the fourteenth century, when – in a somewhat parallel fashion – the more sophisticated Venetian money market already drew significant mainland investment.

In other ways, though, fifteenth-century Venetian economic policy towards the Terraferma remained *laissez-faire*, and in any case distances, logistics, and political muscle did not allow central authority to exercise serious constraint on the central and western mainland cities' long-distance trade flows and business links. Each mainland city jurisdiction basically maintained rules and tax tariffs which protected local trading circuits and commodity movements, including food supply policy, and promoted local manufacturing, notwithstanding the limited incidence of Venetian protection of some manufacturing based in the capital – especially glass – against mainland production. Action towards market integration may be seen in some features of fifteenth century Venetian directives concerning woollen textile manufacturing, but much of their impact was blunted by mainland subjects' opposition, often strong enough to result in their withdrawal or drastic reduction²². These policies favouring single cities' interests also upheld each provincial Venetian exchequer's revenue, largely based on *dazi* taxing local economic activities and circuits.

As before conquest, such economic policy as there was by the state towards the Terraferma tended to parallel and mingle with the support and promotion of Venetians' private interests, so affecting the Trevigiano, the Padovano and later the Polesine – where penetration by those interests had preceded conquest most strongly, and developed apace after it – much more intensely

²² Mozzato.

and more precociously than the rest of the dominion. Thus especially in the market-driven flows of foodstuffs and in directives over food supply policy, as already stated, but also in matters of landholding and agriculture, and in the regulation of mainland waterways: authority in Venice considered waterways in terms of overall communications and also – increasingly – with a view to protecting the lagoon, while individual Venetians exploited them to drive mills and industrial machinery functional to the capital's economy.

On acquiring the dominion, Venetian government reluctance for closer direct involvement in the provinces' economy was evident in the decision to cover urgent state cash needs of the very early fifteenth century by immediately selling off the large Carrara and Della Scala patrimonies of lands and other rights between the Padovano and the Veronese, rather than retaining and exploiting them directly – though in the Padovano, unlike the Veronese, this significantly strengthened private Venetian economic interests. Such reluctance relates, moreover, to the more generally selective stance in direct Venetian exercise of governmental authority in the Terraferma, compounded by often limited or erroneous knowledge of the Terraferma among the ruling nobility.

Overall, therefore, very much regulation of the economy was left to a multiplicity of local bodies, all of them urban: as well as the city council and communal officials, this mainly meant the guilds, numerous and ranked with their own hierarchy of importance – a pattern to which Padua was no exception²³. If council deliberations' coverage of economic issues was uneven and selective, this was largely because much communal officials' ordinary application of statutory norms proceeded without any sort of attention by the council, as did the ordinary activity of the guilds in regulating the practice of the city's many trades. Though only marginally considered in this essay, the urban statutes as revised in 1420 offer a broad picture of the city commune's economic concerns²⁴. As in other matters of government, moreover, there were fuzzy and partly mobile borders between Venetian and local authority in policy-making, and also some degree of syncopation or even contradiction between single Venetian choices, especially when different government agencies were involved. Nor must we forget the variable incidence of the actual efficacy of any such policy.

Specific to Padua, as well as the various economic effects of proximity to Venice just mentioned, was the absence of a major economic coordinating agency close to the city commune, similar to Verona's *Domus mercatorum*. The Paduan wool industry and its guild were important enough, however, to merit an explicit mention in the *deditio* documents of 1405-06, where Venice

²³ On Paduan guilds in general, Roberti; the transcription of very many self-regulating decisions by the Paduan wool guild in the fifteenth century in Gementi.

²⁴ Padua, Biblioteca Civica, ms. B.P. 1236. *Volumen statutorum magnifice civitatis Padue reformatorum* [1420].

committed itself to promote the development of the university and to favour the “wool guild and every other good trade practised in the city”²⁵.

Paduan requests and Venetian answers on that occasion also covered other important matters relating to the economy: the same regime as before conquest for *dazi* and gabelles including a specified ceiling on the milling *dazio* (though Venice refused to set a ceiling on the selling price of salt, which was subject to government-controlled monopoly); the same treatment as other subjects over direct tax; respect of custom in citizen landowners’ rights to bring their revenues freely from the contado to the city. There were also decisions on more contingent problems, almost all concerning rights over landed property, its cultivation and the rents currently or recently due on it: the very urgent issue of the uncertain ownership of both Carrara family and Paduan communal property recently alienated by Francesco da Carrara; the repayment of loans made to him, and compensation for extortion by him; the return of peasants who during the war had fled the lands entrusted to them, together with the issue of their past debts to citizen landowners and the destiny of the latest season’s crops (grain, wine, olives); a loan of barley seed-corn by Venetian government; and also requests – refused by Venice – for a temporary abatement of the *dazi* on foodstuff brought into Padua and sold there, as too on the import of draught animals for agricultural use. As with other matters, the *deditio* documents’ coverage of economic themes is partial, and some of the specific issues raised were manifestly of only temporary importance.

A reasonably complete analysis of economic relations and policies might develop around five main, partly overlapping themes: the questions concerning land; the Padovano’s network of waterways and roads; trade and manufacturing (especially the wool industry), guilds, and *dazi*; the coverage of basic consumption needs, especially grain, wine, fish and meat, and firewood; credit. This thematic spectrum is somewhat broader than that considered in Varanini’s pioneering study of fifteenth-century Verona, focused primarily on the relationship between Venetian regulation of *dazi* and the local economy, on the coverage of Verona’s and Venice’s food supply needs, on the relationship in Verona between the civic élite and mercantile and manufacturing interests, and on Venetian action to defend manufacturing in the capital²⁶.

Every one of the five themes just listed over-reaches the confines of more strictly economic issues, if such a thing indeed exists, and analysis obviously needs to encompass their social and political implications, stretching beyond the policy choices themselves to take account of the role played in their adoption by the various political players, and the very measure of harmony or divergence in policy-making between these players. This necessity for a suitably complex analysis is one of the main reasons why the four other

²⁵ Here and for what follows: Melchiorre, especially 144-70 (the final version of the *deditio*; the passage quoted – “ars lane et quodlibet aliud bonum misterium civitatis Padue” – *ibid.*, 149).

²⁶ Varanini, 1996b.

principal themes just mentioned are left aside in this essay, to allow satisfactory examination of the issues connected with land.

4. *Land and economic policy*

As we have just seen, the enormous importance for the Paduan élite of issues connected with land emerges clearly from the 1405-1406 process of *deditio*. The emphasis of the requests is clearly on the continuity and protection of existing rights and practices, and the revision of the urban statutes conducted in 1420 was equally heavily characterized by continuity from the preceding code in matters concerning land: for example, the general norms over the protection and transmission of property, and concerning relations between landowners and tenants; the twenty-year period of peaceful possession necessary to establish prescriptive rights; the seller's relatives' and neighbouring landowners' preemptive right to buy land put on sale; the norms over tithes; the rules for *damna data* (compensation for damage to property and crops) and for the custody of agricultural land and crops by *saltari* (field watchmen); the norms concerning the tax liability of land, according to the status of its owners; mortmain restrictions²⁷. Such continuity also incorporated existing balances in the overall relationship between landowners and tenants, and between the city and the contado – in both cases highly favourable to the former. And all this reflected long-term continuity in an absolutely fundamental datum, in no way peculiar to Padua if compared to the rest of Renaissance Italy: the overall social primacy of land. As stated by Leslie Steer, in a sadly neglected doctoral dissertation of fifty years ago on landownership in the late medieval Padovano:

In the fifteenth, as in the thirteenth or tenth centuries, Paduan society was a society of landowners and landholders. Neither the upper nor the lower urban classes were completely divorced from the land...²⁸.

The historiography of landowning and agriculture in the Padovano has prestigious ancestry, especially an 1855 survey by Andrea Gloria, but for the fifteenth century no adequate recent survey has built on Steer's research of fifty years ago, though there are both narrower studies and analyses of broader areas or longer periods²⁹. Nor, it is important to emphasize, would the archival sources used for this essay permit anything like a systematic or balanced account of such matters as the social distribution of property and other rights

²⁷ Gloria, 1855, 1:CCL-LIV. More in general on the 1420 code, Varanini, 1992, 24-34, 39-40.

²⁸ Steer, III; see too Ventura, 1993, 57-64.

²⁹ As well as Gloria, 1855, especially 2:255-304, and Steer, 201 ff., see Varanini, 1996a (the nearest thing to a recent survey, with further bibliography); also Varanini, 2012, and Collodo, 1999, ch. 5, especially 99-101. More in general: Pezzolo, 2011; Knapton, 2010; Ferrarese; Ventura, 1968.

over land, the degree of their concentration or fragmentation, the size and organization of farming units (including their endowment of buildings), types of tenure and forms of payment, use of land for arable or other purposes, crops grown and their yields, techniques of cultivation, stock-raising or the availability of draught animals. And the same is true for the incidence of investment, improvement, specialization of production, irrigation, reclamation of marginal land, and still more general phenomena like the commercialization of agriculture.

A very summary account of such matters, sufficient for the purposes of an essay which anyway has different priorities, can be drawn from research done on other sources. The Padovano's mainly alluvial plain soil was mostly used for non-specialized cultivation; the one major exception was the Euganean hills area, where the primacy of vines and olive trees also made protection of cultivation a particularly delicate issue; marshy wetlands were extensive especially towards the south and east – the river Adige and the boundary with the dogado (lagoon and coastal territories near Venice). For Padovano agriculture in general, the first half of the fifteenth century was overall a period of recovery and stabilization after the decades of material destruction, population loss and periodic disruption from the Black Death till the fall of the Carraresi; some previously cultivated land had in fact reverted to pasture, scrub, woodland and marsh. But from about 1450 there was a new phase of expansion and greater dynamism, which included scattered land reclamation especially by larger landowners. This trend seems mainly attributable to population growth, including consequent increase in urban demand both Paduan and Venetian, which indeed put pressure on both cities' provisioning mechanisms. Analysis of choices specific to Venetian landowners in the Padovano of the later fifteenth century does not suggest any special blend of ethics and initiative on their part, or greater capital investment, such as to differentiate them substantially from other landowners. In the overall picture, certainly varied and equally certainly subject to slow evolution, crop priority went to wheat and wine; contracts with tenants were often in the form of five-year leases or of *livelli* (with terms of tenure more favourable to the occupier-cultivator), with a lesser incidence of sharecropping, of salaried labour paid by the landowner in lieu of tenancies, and of *boaria* and *soccida* contracts (leases of livestock as draught animals or for more general purposes). Unsurprisingly, the area nearer the city was more intensively cultivated, and characterized earlier by tenancies with brief duration and the specification of money payments.

As to the social distribution of property and other rights over land, the fifteenth century inherited from Carrara days the distinction between the classic trio of social groups – citydwellers, ecclesiastics and *distrettuali* – with separate tax-listing of their assets in the *estimi*, and also diversity of obligations in terms of taxes, corvées and the like. Venetian ownership constituted a category more or less separate from these in some cases but not in others. The trends evident, especially in the later fifteenth century, are for the further

concentration of rights over land in the hands of citydwellers in general. As to the church, despite marked differences between single owners in the control and management of land, the overall trend was for the recovery and indeed increase of ecclesiastical landowning. Venetians' property, both ecclesiastical and secular, had been significant from well before the Republic annexed the province, and was considerably increased by the sale of the Carrara patrimony immediately following annexation. Venetians' purchases then proceeded apace through the fifteenth century, freed from previous legislative obstacles both Paduan and Venetian, and also from uncertainty about the security of their investment, spreading further away in the later Quattrocento from their initial concentration in the eastern plainland and Euganean hills. As happened with Treviso, the concentration of landed wealth in the hands of citydwellers in Venice too, signified considerable pressure – both material and psychological – on the Paduan élite's principal patrimonial assets and on its sense of security, identity and prestige. The council's concern with a broad range of issues concerning land was therefore a matter of social and political as well as economic valency, with far-reaching implications; it was also, to judge by the archival evidence examined, a matter on which divisions within the élite were rare, and the policy aims pursued generally the object of broad consensus³⁰.

The analysis presented here deals with the following issues: forests and commons; property rights confiscated and sold by the Signoria; sheep-shearing, grazing and transhumance; relations between city landowners and the peasantry; the weight and distribution of tax on land, agricultural produce and the rural labour force, including the incidence of privileges and exemptions. As stated above, reasons of space unfortunately prevent consideration of other issues closely connected with these themes, which were often among the Paduan council's concerns: how to supply Padua, and to some extent the Padovano in general, with such products of the land (and of its inland waters) as grain, wine, fish, meat and firewood – matters which had to do with the profitability of the civic élite's revenues from land, and which also inevitably overlapped with the Venetian government's concern to cover the needs of Venice itself³¹.

a. *Forests and commons*

In the Padovano and the other eastern Terraferma provinces there was much untilled land in the fifteenth century, subject to a variety of uses but in many cases woodland, and to a great extent made up of commons for a variety of community uses, including grazing. The commons or *comugne*, which

³⁰ On land management: Steer, 202 ff.; Varanini, 1996a, especially 854-57 (more cautious than Steer on Venetians' approach). On land reclamation: De Sandre Gasparini, especially, 39-72, and Stella, 1980. On Venetians' Padovano property: Varanini, 1996a, 808-09, 812-22, 831 ff.

³¹ See Collodo, 1999, 47-67; Faugeron; and the bibliography cited in these studies.

gradually came to be called *beni comunali*, ultimately belonged to the prince, though for most interested parties that right was remote and vaguely conceived. Commons were also subject to a perennial risk of erosion and privatization via alienation or usurpation, mostly but not exclusively by citizen landowners, especially when the demand for arable land increased, as began to happen about mid fifteenth century³².

During the later Quattrocento the *comugne* became a major target of Venetian government action to preserve mainland forestry resources, largely through a law made in January 1476 by the Collegio at the Senate's bidding, which was to be the cornerstone of much of the Republic's later forest policy. Its preamble stated that deforestation was a widespread problem in the lower plainland of the Padovano, Trevigiano and Friuli, comparing these areas' past usefulness as a source of timber and firewood for Venice with the current situation of "woods... destroyed and uprooted and reduced to farmland" (thus the Padovano)³³. As well as specific provisions for protecting hardwood, reinforcing flows of timber towards Venice and lowering firewood prices there, the law contained rules for the preservation of the *comugne* (distinguished from land owned outright by the communities, which was nonetheless to remain woodland): banning any sort of alienation, lease or privatization, and demanding the reversal of any such process; forbidding usage of *comugne* detrimental to their trees, especially burning so as to clear new arable land; and imposing a ten-year cycle of rotation in the cutting of woodland. Not all of these measures were entirely new: ten-yearly rotation of cutting was anyway frequent practice in community woodland, while a Senate law of 1463 had attacked the usurpation of *comugne*. And already in March 1470 the Paduan council had reacted to a ducal letter requesting the despatch to Venice of men well informed about Padovano woodlands, to help the *Provveditori sopra legna e boschi* (a wood supply magistracy) cope with the shortage of firewood and timber in Venice caused by deforestation for conversion to farmland.

Venetian rulings subsequent to 1476 both clarified and developed state policy aims over woodland and commons. A Senate law of 25 September 1488 enhanced the protection of oaks; it demanded their registration, it banned unauthorized cutting, and it obliged villages with *comugne* in the eastern Terraferma, the Dogado and Istria to reserve 10% of their commons to growing oaks, to be set aside as a reserve for purchase and use by the Arsenal³⁴. A Council of Ten law of 20 June 1495, valid for the whole mainland and

³² The history of commons in the Padovano villages of Canfriolo and Grantorto is very well charted from the Carrara age to the early Venetian period (and very beset by conflicts): Bortolami, 1997, 29-37, 40; Bianchini, 66-72.

³³ Barbacetto, 19-21, and Appuhn, 111 ff., also for what follows. The quotation in Barbacetto, 19: "nemora... destructa et eradicata et ad possessiones reducta". See too analysis of the relevant laws in Ferrari. *Atti*, V, fol. 8: 11 March 1470.

³⁴ Barbacetto, 22-23; documents in Gloria, 2:275 ff., including (295-98) a Senate deliberation of 9 March 1489 easing the procedure and practicality but not the principles of the 1488 law.

fundamental for later Venetian policy, confirmed that *bona comunalia* were not to be sold, alienated or privatized – though in the financial emergency of the post-Agnadello phase of the Italian Wars these principles were to be partly waived by the state itself, anxious to raise money via sales³⁵. Equally important for our analysis are the declared causes of the 1495 law: widespread protests had been received from mainland society against action by local Venetian governors, Sindici inquisitori (occasional touring inspectors of the Venetian dominions) and magistracies of the capital – the Rason vecchie, the Rason nuove and the Provveditori sopra camere (the first two auditing offices with a mandate over state property, the last the magistracy supervising Terraferma exchequers). They had conducted investigations into rights over much land, confiscating commons which they claimed had belonged to rebels whose property had passed to the Venetian state – meaning essentially the former Carraresi and Scala lordly dynasties, and therefore especially land in the Padovano and Veronese. For future purposes, the law decreed, thirty years' peaceful possession of commons by a community was to guarantee it from such harassment.

In Padua the council had reacted to these Venetian policy directives with various deliberations from 1476 onwards. In August 1476 it noted that proclamations banning wood-cutting (“prohibentes ligna fieri”) consequent on the new rules had resulted in many accusations for their violation, and such confusion threatened coverage of the city's needs. It asked for authorization for cutting to cover those needs, and – an eloquent admission about the use or abuse of *comugne* in previous decades – it requested removal of the order that woodland had from the rural communes (“nemora capta a communibus villarum”) and reduced to cultivation, be returned to woodland. In October it then told the city's representatives in Venice, anyway instructed to deal with these matters, to argue the impossibility of ten-yearly rotation in cutting, especially as applied to the firewood from the Bassano area serving the city's needs (ten-year old wood was not to be found, it said), though accepting the ten-year rule for timber “ab opera” (hardwood) and indeed demanding a ban on its consumption by kiln owners³⁶.

On returning to the matter the following January it was more optimistic about the availability of ten-year old firewood in the Padovano and authorized its cutting, while saving “lignami da opera” (hardwood) as desired by Venice. It moreover took initiatives of its own. It resuscitated a provision in the 1420 city statutes, to be applied immediately and for four years' duration: cultivators (*lavoradori*) were to plant fifty new trees a year (two thirds willow or walnut, and one third poplar) for every twenty *campi* of land possessed, and this was also to apply to citizens with land worked “a boaria”, and for some pastures. Though there were fines for non-compliance, with checking delegated to the

³⁵ Barbacetto, 45-47 (and 39 ff. for a fuller account of the years 1476-95).

³⁶ Atti, VI, fols. 56v, 65: 6 August, 22 and 29 October 1476.

villages' chief officials (*degani*), the efficacy of the measure may be very seriously doubted, especially since a significant minority of councillors opposed it (voting was 52-40), and there is no further mention of it or its eventual effects in the sources consulted³⁷.

The council's decision of January 1477 on tree-planting was obviously a reaction to the Venetian law of a year before, and may have been intended to justify hostility to the provision in that law for the reversion to woodland of *comugne* previously acquired by families of the council élite. In March 1477 this issue was indeed the object of debate, with specific mention of woods held at *livello* from the Padovano villages by the heirs of Galeazzo Mussato, but also of a great many *cives* ("plurimorum civium") who had bought and cleared woods, and of the consequent clash of interests with villagers; the council decided to send ambassadors to Venice to request the provision's withdrawal. It also instructed them that if the issue of communal or public rights emerged, they should insist on the general principle banning further appeal in lawsuits after a second instance judgement had confirmed the first, and should defend the jurisdiction of the city's podestà and his judges – instructions clearly aiming to pre-empt disturbance of the status quo by Venetian authority. The commission given also specified that reversion to woodland should be opposed for all such land, whether belonging to citizens or to the villages – perhaps an attempt to defuse tension with the villagers, some of them certainly inclined to extend cultivation and appropriate commons, especially with population rising³⁸.

The matter was the object of further commissions to the city's representatives in 1479, perhaps again in May 1481, in August 1481, and then in May 1483, when specific reference was made to peasants and villages seeking to deprive citizens of fields and woods purchased long before³⁹. Though Venetian-produced documentation survives in a fragmentary fashion, some action seems to have been taken to enforce reversion to woodland: in May 1482 the podestà of Cittadella was told to interact with the Savi del Consiglio⁴⁰. In May 1487 Padua's representatives in Venice were charged with defending the Abriani family in appeal proceedings in Venice, concerning its rights over wetlands bought twenty-six years earlier from the commune of Megliadino, near Montagnana⁴¹. *En passant*, no particular malice is required to suspect

³⁷ Atti VI, fols. 79v-80: 2 and 3 January 1477; Pino-Branca, 1933-38, XCVII, 89-90. For the tree-planting obligation in the statutes: Gloria, 1855, 1:CCLI.

³⁸ Atti, VI, fols. 8-9r, 6 and 12 March 1477; *ibid.*, fol. 14, 13 April 1477. The Mussato woodland is probably the wood of Busiago (near Campo San Martino, in the northern Padovano), bought by Galeazzo Mussato from five villages before 1464: Vigato, 1997, 81-82.

³⁹ Atti, VI, fols. 161v, 167r, 246v-47r, 253v-54r, 359v: 22 May, 15 Sept 1479; 16 May 1481 (a generic reference to the Paduan statute about twenty years' peaceful possession as the basis for prescription); 25 August 1481; 24 May 1483.

⁴⁰ Archivio di Stato di Venezia (henceforth ASVe), Avogaria di Comun, busta 3584, 6 May 1482.

⁴¹ Atti, VII, fols. 89v-90r, 15 May 1487.

that the Abriani had acted unscrupulously in acquiring those rights. They were a wealthy family based in the Montagnana area, who in the later fifteenth century established themselves in Padua, and the omissions in their 1472 *estimo* declaration (L. 25,249 worth of property at Megliadino, assessed with neither the city nor the *contado*) were such as to warrant the belated but repeated hostile attention of the council and *deputati* between 1492 and 1509 (a rare honour indeed): action to reassess their wealth; an attempted arbitration; a conviction of the Abriani for frauding the *estimo*, against which they appealed to Venice; doubling of their *estimo* rating; and attempted re-measurement of their lands, which they then were fined for opposing forcibly⁴². (In any case, Paduan citizens certainly had no monopoly on illicit appropriation of commons: in 1497, for example, the podestà of Camposampiero applied the June 1495 Council of Ten law to block alienation of land by a local village to the Venetian noble Francesco Giustinian – who then invoked the Avogadori di Comun to get his money back from the villagers.⁴³)

By comparison with this prolonged attrition over the privatization of *comugne* and reforestation, the early stages of Venetian policy for protection of hardwood aroused no such visible hostility in the Paduan council. It showed formal willingness to comply with restrictions on the cutting of oak, though requesting in March 1481 that to save a trip to Venice, permission to cut could be given by the city's governors for timber needed in maintenance work on river banks, bridges, citizens' mills and houses and the like. This seems to have been approved and become general practice, to judge by explanations given in the council's protest in 1501 against renewed insistence on authorization only by the Arsenal magistracy – though in previous years some larger requests had been handled in Venice, as in 1484 when the Arsenal granted 100 oaks from the Feltre area for use on a bridge⁴⁴. But as policy over hardwood was extended by the September 1488 Senate order to protect and plant oaks, so the council became hostile on this issue too.

In March 1488 it had reacted to a general order by the Paduan *rettori* against cutting oaks, requesting that timber suited to Arsenal needs be marked, however leaving the rest free for cutting, and in August again requested that the Arsenal do this, so as to allow citizens to cut what was licit without risking denunciations which led to citations to Venice. In October it reckoned the newly formulated rules for replanting impossible to apply, criticizing the fines

⁴² On Abriani riches: ASVe, Senato, Terra, 15, fol. 151v, and Sanudo, VI, 512, 17 December 1506: Alvise Abriani had died, leaving a patrimony of D. 60,000, including a legacy to the Signoria. On Abriani tax evasion and action against it: Atti, VIII, fol. 39v, 23 November 1492; *ibid.*, VIII, fols. 117r, 172r, 271v: 16 March 1495, 17 December 1496, 23 February 1499. ASP, Deputati, 3, fol. 25v, 3 August 1472; *ibid.*, 4, entries dated 14 May to 31 July 1499 and 23 December 1500; *ibid.*, 5, fol. 90r, 12 January 1509.

⁴³ ASVe, Avogaria di Comun, busta 3584, 9 June 1497.

⁴⁴ Atti, VI, fols. 243r, 244v: 26 March and 2 April 1481. Atti IX, fol. 6v, 11 February 1501. Atti, VI, fol. 402r: 10 and 12 June 1484.

prescribed for non-compliance, and estimating that 4,000 *campi* (1,545 hectares) would be lost to other use if the scheme went ahead. It suggested that oaks be planted and protected as the law prescribed on specific sites: the Carpaneda wood (at the northern end of the Euganean hills, near Rovolon), other woodland once belonging to the Signoria, and in the Camposampiero area⁴⁵. The Carpaneda wood – a far smaller area than what became great Arsenal forests like the Montello in the Trevigiano, or the Cansiglio in the Bellunese – was in fact reserved for Arsenal use, under the protection of the Council of Ten, via a series of decisions taken from 1486 onwards⁴⁶. Though it may be doubted whether tree-planting ordered by the Venetian 1488 rules actually happened to any significant extent in these early decades, forestry policy seems to have been added to the repertoire of the council élite's rhetoric of forbearance and/or resentment. In trying to negotiate a reduction of the extraordinary direct tax – the *campatico* – requested by Venice in early 1501 to fund war against the Turks, the council listed burdens already borne by the Padovano, including its acceptance that there were woods “obligadi al arsenado”, adding the tendentious comment that “li contadini taiano e dirupano el più de essi boschi”⁴⁷.

As a postscript to this section, brief mention must be made of two further matters concerning the assertion of public rights over land use, which seem not to have drawn the attention of the Paduan council. The first is the cultivation of hemp destined for ropemaking in the Arsenal, practised on several hundred *campi* on the southwest border of the Padovano, between Montagnana and Cologna Veneta from 1455 onwards (and later on other sites, especially in the Ravennate and Trevigiano). In the Padovano this involved hemp monoculture in a reclaimed marshy area of commons leased to cultivators, and also the obligation for local landowners and farmers to sow hemp on part of their land, following government directives for its cultivation, together with the presence on site of vats and equipment necessary for the first stage of transformation of the raw material. In 1476 the area between Montagnana and Cologna used for growing hemp amounted to about 820 *campi*, 550 of them (196 hectares) in Montagnana and around⁴⁸. The second is the assertion of control by Venetian government over mining rights in the Terraferma, with concessions issued by authority in Venice and the whole matter regulated by general legislation passed in 1488 by the Council of Ten, which also appointed and supervised a

⁴⁵ Atti, VII, fols. 156r, 177r, 182v-83r: 19 March, 21 August and 26 October 1488. On the Camposampiero area: below, text and notes 63-64. See Grandis, 93: on the considerable extent of woodland at Rovolon and around in the mid fifteenth century, especially over 1,000 hectares of oak forest; on two sales in the period 1464-1470 for a total of 747 *campi*, and on deforestation in general.

⁴⁶ For more detail on these decisions: Knapton, 1981a, especially 238. For the history of the wood: Grandis, 93 ff.

⁴⁷ Atti, IX, fol. 6: 11 February 1501.

⁴⁸ Celetti: 21-22 and ch. III, especially 189 ff.; for the 1476 datum, *ibid.*, 190.

vicar responsible for mines. The mostly flat Padovano was in fact only very marginally involved in something typical of more hilly or mountainous regions – in 1479 there was a rather generic concession by the Senate mentioning, among other sites, the Teolo and mount Venda area of the Euganean hills⁴⁹.

b. *Property rights confiscated and sold by the Signoria*

The council repeatedly invoked authority in Venice in 1496-97 – obtaining the matter’s delegation by the Council of Ten to the podestà of Padua – when the Venetian noble Bernardo Bembo intervened as Avogadore di Comun over the division of *comugne* woodland near Arsego, where his own family held property once belonging to the Carraresi⁵⁰. This case was rendered particularly sensitive by the suspicion that Bembo made wrongful use of his official status to further private interests, but it aptly illustrates a more general issue. Tensions over the destiny of *comugne* and woodland tended to overlap with those concerning property and other rights connected with land once held by rebels whose patrimony had been confiscated (in their way the Carraresi had exercised princely rights over *comugne*), over which Paduans claimed rights sanctioned at the very least by prescription, or long-term possession without disturbance. Here also there was periodic action by Venetian authorities in investigating such rights, despite an accumulation of contrary declarations and assurances – these too by Venetian authorities – intended to regulate and limit it.

On 11 June 1496 there was indeed an important ruling by the Council of Ten, applying the same principle as in its June 1495 law on *comugne* – thirty years of peaceful possession – as the basis of prescriptive rights to property held by private parties; the Ten then reinforced this law in 1506, at the request of Friulan representatives⁵¹. The preamble to the 1496 ruling specifies that the decision arose after protest by Terraferma representatives from Padua, Verona, Treviso and Friuli: in other words, the provinces nearest Venice and/or most subject to confiscations by the Signoria of property rights once pertaining especially to the Carraresi, Scaligeri, and – less important overall – to the Dal Verme and Caminesi.

Given the Ten’s specific function in enforcing respect for mainland subjects’ privileges, the 1496 ruling probably gave greater bite to principles that the Senate had recently proclaimed. In February 1489 it had asserted the thirty-year principle for the Bresciano, though it had significantly decided not to extend it to all Venetian dominions; the text of the law referred back to a decision by the Ten in June 1461, whose territorial coverage had been gradually

⁴⁹ Braunstein, 559 ff. (591 for the 1479 grant).

⁵⁰ Knapton, 1981a, 253-54: council deliberations dated 19 February, 5 April, 4 August 1496, and 7, 18, 26 January 1497; Lazzarini, 281.

⁵¹ ASVe, Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti Miste, 26, fol. 70r : 11 June 1496; *ibid.*, 31, fol. 74r: 19 May 1506.

extended by 1467 from its initial valency for the Padovano to cover the Ravennate, Friuli and Treviso⁵². In December 1490, at the request of Padua's representatives, the Senate had confirmed for Padua the principle already proclaimed for Brescia: the thirty-year term of prescription for peaceful possession of property rights once of the Carraresi or of rebels, or in any way attributable to the Signoria, with a few specified exceptions (especially buyers of rights from the state who overstepped the limits of their purchase)⁵³.

In the Padovano, confiscation and sale of rights had indeed been massive in scale: first and foremost the patrimony of the former Carraresi lords, an issue whose importance we have seen in the negotiations between Venice and its new Paduan subjects in 1405-06, but also the estates of some of those who had supported pro-Carraresi rebellions, which continued till 1439⁵⁴. The Padovano was also massively affected by the liquidation of the patrimony of two of Venice's senior *condottieri*, the marquis Bertoldo d'Este and his father Taddeo (cousins of the ducal branch in Ferrara), taken over at Bertoldo's death by the Signoria – which sold it, prompted by the money needs of war against the Ottomans. A series of Senate deliberations from January 1465 to July 1470 document the tortuous process of identification of the considerable Estense property rights in the southern Padovano but also of the many creditors of the estate. Actual sales, with the specific exception of the Vighizzolo wetlands near Este, were conducted between June 1468 and October 1469, and residual competence passed from a specially created temporary magistracy to the *Provveditori sopra Camere*. Authority in Venice was still convinced that other assets remained to be discovered, and ordered anybody possessing them to come forward – though in July 1470, at the request of the Ferrarese ambassador, the Senate choked off any further action on the matter. The rights sold netted the considerable sum of D. 23,005, the vast majority from Venetian noble buyers, and – as we shall see – sales went on intermittently after 1469⁵⁵.

The process of identification and confiscation of the Carrara patrimony had been a source of irritation for the Paduan élite right from the beginning of the Venetian regime, enough to induce a temporary suspension of the process between July and November 1406, and long-term attrition was guaranteed by the exemptions from Paduan taxes accompanying the property sold, and by

⁵² *Ibid.*, 16, fols. 66, 234r: 17 June 1461 and 24 May 1466; *ibid.*, 17, fol. 53r: 14 January 1467.

⁵³ ASVe, Senato, Terra, 10, fol. 136v: 24 February 1489; *ibid.*, 11, fols. 41v-42v: 10 December 1490. For the council's request: Atti, VII, 259, 274r: 7 January and 14 August 1490.

⁵⁴ Segarizzi. See for example the sale as late as 1448 of tithe rights confiscated from Lodovico Buzzacarini: ASVe, Senato, Terra, 4, fol. 178r, 1 August 1461.

⁵⁵ ASVe, Senato, Terra, 5, fol. 106r, 8 January 1465; *ibid.*, 6, fol. 24r, 65v, 72v: 10 June 1468, 5 August and 8 October 1469; ASVe, Senato, Secreta, 24, fol. 123r: 19 July 1470. For lists of buyers and sums paid, divided between sales before and after 1483: Ducali, 20, 6r-10v, 19 and 26 May 1509 (the *Provveditori sopra Camere* were meeting Paduan demands for payment of the *dadie* due to the city, since Bertoldo d'Este had agreed to pay L. 150 yearly). On Taddeo and Bertoldo d'Este: Rossi.

Venice's deliberate preference for rights in the Padovano passing to Venetian nobles rather than into foreign hands ("manus alienas"), since it was safer, superior and more advantageous for the Signoria ("securius, prestantius et utilius est pro nostro Dominio"): thus the motivation of one of the many *grazie* granted to noble buyers, to ease their terms of payment⁵⁶. Doubts and investigations by Venice of property rights in the Padovano, linked primarily to the confiscated Carrarese patrimony, were the source of Paduan discontent explicitly mentioned in ducal letters of 1427 and 1436, and a further general irritant was caused by the suspension, in the sale of confiscated property, of the statute favouring the preemptive rights of purchase by relatives and possessors of neighbouring holdings. In 1439 and again in 1442, the Senate ruled in favour of a prescriptive term of thirty years' peaceful possession of property, to apply even if a challenge arose from the supposition that it was rebels' property ("ex praesumptione quod fuerint bona rebellium")⁵⁷. But investigation resurfaced sporadically, sometimes for particularly large holdings: in 1462 a secret denunciation against Albertino Papafava – whose family were cousins of the Carraresi – resulted in a court hearing in the Paduan exchequer concerning about 6,000 *campi* between Arquà, Cona and Borgoforte, which were then recognized as legitimate Papafava property⁵⁸.

Paduan discontent focused with particular frequency on the area known as the "serraglio di Arino", situated near Dolo, halfway between Padua and Venice. A natural defensive system in the Carrara period, when it had been wooded wetland, during the fifteenth century it was subject to gradual drainage and clearance, and figures in complaints at the disturbance of Paduan owners' rights by Venetian authority at least from 1436. In 1461 Paduan protests at the recent sale of former Carraresi rights there, which were supposedly justified by a judgement of the Provveditori sopra Camere in 1451, resulted in the already mentioned June 1461 deliberation by the Council of Ten, which invoked previous rulings of 1406 and 1436, annulled the 1451 judgement and reserved for itself future questions concerning the *serraglio*⁵⁹.

During the 1460s the Ten were at least sporadically involved in other single cases concerning various Terraferma areas, including – hard on the heels of the June 1461 pronouncement – the Euganean hill village of Arquà. In December 1461 they approved the Paduan governors' annulment of a gift by the commune of Arquà to the bishop of Padua of no less than 2,000 *campi* of land which, like the Arino area, had been kept as a *serraglio* or marsh, but had now become a mix of grazing, arable land and wetlands. The Ten's decision that the land remain the Signoria's suggests that they considered it part of former Carraresi

⁵⁶ Lazzarini, 274 ff. (the quote from 275n4).

⁵⁷ Pino-Branca, 1933-38, XCVI, 739-42. Senate laws of 28 February 1439 and 3 March 1442: Ferrari, 12.

⁵⁸ Ceoldo, 146.

⁵⁹ For the 1461 Ten ruling, above note 52. For copies of this and other documents on the *serraglio*: Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice (hereafter BNM), ms. It. VII 2397 (10134).

rights – the sales of half a century before had indeed included the former lords' *gastaldia* of Arquà⁶⁰. The Ten's function in these proceedings was primarily to authorize, and therefore to screen and limit, investigations of this kind. We find them approving an inquiry by Padua's governors concerning land in the Merlara area, in November 1461; in December 1465 they authorized the Governatori alle Entrade to value and sell 100-120 *campi* of woods on the Trevigiano-Padovano border, though preserving them as woodland; and in 1466-67 they evaluated possible investigation in a very complex dispute partly concerning former Carrara rights at San Giorgio in Bosco⁶¹.

Like many of their initiatives concerning the Terraferma in these decades, this development of interest by the Ten was primarily a reaction to the uncoordinated nature of conduct by different government authorities, but any restraint it may have exercised seems largely to have ceased in the mid 1470s⁶². The investigation and sale of mainland property belonging to the Signoria was indeed officially relaunched when the Senate voted a series of measures, starting in October 1474, in its efforts to cover the costs of the long-drawn out Turkish war of 1463-79. Inspectors called "provisores super recuperatione possessionum de extra" (officials in charge of recovering property in the dominion), later given the same powers of arrest as Sindici Inquisitori (the inspectors usually sent to the dominion), were to divide up the Signoria's lands, woods and property in the Terraferma into saleable lots, report back to Venice, and then sell them. Excluded were specified rights in the Padovano – the wetlands at Vighizzolo, the Rovolon woods (mentioned above) – and any other woods providing timber for the navy or firewood. The rights for alienation included the *gastaldia* of San Donà in the Trevigiano, which was to be sold by these officials and the Rason vecchie – it was specified – using the same procedure already followed with woods and lands in the Camposampiero area, though keeping the woods for the Signoria: a specification then changed into instructions to cede these areas via *livello* contracts, with the obligation that they remain woodland⁶³.

The Camposampiero property mentioned can be identified in all probability with marshes and woodland at Loreggia and Fratta sold for L. 1,400 to the Paduan governors in 1444 by the Querini, who had previously bought the Carrarese *gastaldia* of Camposampiero and other land at Loreggiola. Instead of being sold off again, these rights had been kept as a source of rental income for the Paduan exchequer, as documented by receipts of the early 1470s. In

⁶⁰ ASVe, Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti miste, 16, fols. 79v-80r: 12 and 18 November 1461; the Ten suspected the Paduan vicar of Arquà had been a beneficiary of the operation. Lazzarini, 281.

⁶¹ ASVe, Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti miste, 16, fol. 79v, 224r, 241r: 12 November 1461 and 30 December 1465, 27 August 1466; *ibid.*, 17, fol. 72v: 26 August and 23 September 1467.

⁶² On the Ten's function, Knapton, 1981a.

⁶³ ASVe, Senato, Terra, 7, fols. 54r, 65v, 71v, 73r, 86v, 88v: 6 October 1474; 13 February, 3 April, 9 August, 4 and 22 September 1475. Sale of the Vighizzolo lake was contemplated during the Ferrara war: *ibid.*, 9, fol. 12v, 26 May 1483.

1473, though, the noble Antonio Zorzi – whose family already owned former Carrara land in the area – petitioned for the grant of this land to compensate for material and moral damage sustained in the Turkish capture of Negroponte, and so received 192 *campi* of meadows, subject to flooding but worth L. 450 in annual rent from local peasants, and about 800 *campi* of woodland⁶⁴.

Receipts from the sales ordered by the Senate in October 1474 were modest – in September 1475 takings totalled D. 4,000 of the D. 11,000 due – but the operation had significant consequences in the activity of the Paduan council⁶⁵. It had indeed been anticipated by a resumption of investigations concerning the patrimony of Bertoldo d'Este: in April 1474 a commission to the city's envoys in Venice demanded a stop to citations before authority in the capital, stirred up by malicious denunciations, and in July they were told to present the *Provveditori sopra Camere* with a list of Estense property rights⁶⁶. In February 1475 the Council reacted to investigations of unspecified Paduans' property by the *Provveditori sopra Camere*, voting that its representatives in Venice demand an end to practices forbidden by previous rulings, and the matter figures in three commissions to its representatives in Venice between March and October – the last of these referring specifically to ex-Carrara and ex-Estense property, and demanding that any hearing be before a court in Padua, instead of involving what it described as the yearly expense and trouble of hearings in Venice⁶⁷.

In September 1476 the Senate reacted to the growing financial difficulties caused by war with the Turks: deciding to ignore previous contrary rulings, it accepted a proposal made by the *Provveditori sopra Camere*, recently sent to inspect the Arino *serraglio* by the Signoria. They noted that it had been transformed from marsh to meadows, some of which had been privatized, and some held in place of grazing (“partim occupata fuerunt, partim possidentur in locum pascuorum”), without any gain to the Signoria; so the Senate authorized the measuring and sale of property there, assigning the proceeds to the Arsenal⁶⁸. This initiative may be the main target of an August 1477 Paduan council deliberation referring to the *Provveditori sopra Camere*, and to property once belonging to the Carraresi or rebels supporting them, demanding that the city's representatives in Venice halt their action⁶⁹.

⁶⁴ See Lazzarini, 286. Ducali, B, fol. 154: 24 Nov 1473. Numerous small rents paid for Loreggia and Camposampiero meadows, where the last lease is a one-year renewal in November 1472: Ducali, C, fols. 1-7. The exchequer accounts of 1475-76 include other rents but nothing from this source: Varanini, 1992, 115. The Zorzi had purchased 260 *campi* and a residence nearby, between Guizza and Massanzago, where they were later owners of a villa: Lazzarini, 287.

⁶⁵ ASVe, Senato, Terra, 7, fol. 86v: 4 September 1475.

⁶⁶ Atti, V, fols. 215r-16r, 224r: 16 April and 16 July 1474. On Estense rights, see too n. 55, above.

⁶⁷ Atti, V, fols. 256r, 257, 271v, 273v-74r: 24 February, 8 March, 5 and 14 October 1475

⁶⁸ ASVe, Senato, Terra, 7, fol. 130v: 9 September 1476.

⁶⁹ Atti, VI, fol. 22r, 16 August 1477.

The Arino *serraglio* surfaces again in the Paduan council deliberations in the second half of 1482 – the timing is perhaps no coincidence, since the major impact on Paduan territory of the War of Ferrara, launched that summer, may have nourished hopes of more benevolent attention in Venice. In August the council complained at the Provveditori sopra Camere's invoking ex-Carrara rights to justify disturbance of citizens' property in *serragli*, especially at Arino; its representatives in Venice were to demand respect for contrary rulings by the Senate and Ten, both for this and future similar instances, and five weeks later there was indeed an injunction by the Capi of the Ten⁷⁰. Similar arguments convinced the Avogadori di Comun to respond positively the following year to a complaint against the Provveditori sopra Camere lodged by two Paduan owners of land there⁷¹, and the Avogadori were called on by the council in 1486 after the execution of orders by the judicial appeal magistracy of the Auditori Nuovi, for the destruction of ditches and hedges in the *serraglio* so as to allow villagers to graze animals – a sign of probable conflict between ordinary peasants and citizen landowners⁷². In 1487 and 1488 the Capi of the Ten met Paduan requests in demanding that the Rason vecchie not disturb the 210 *campi* of a citizen landowner in and around the *serraglio*, and in 1491 the city governors satisfied similar requests by several Paduans – including the two who had complained in 1483 – in ordering a halt to action by the Provveditori sopra Camere, based on a denunciation of 550 *campi* of ex-Carrara land in the *serraglio*⁷³.

Other cases, too, drew the council's attention and protests in these years. In May and June 1481 a generic commission to defend the Paduan statutes' twenty-year term of prescription before authority in Venice was given to the jurist Saliono Buzzaccarini and another envoy, and resulted in a ruling by the Capi of the Ten applying its 1461 thirty-year rule to Buzzaccarini's own property, against the Rason vecchie: certainly not the only instance of blurring between collective and individual interest in council deliberations and requests to Venice⁷⁴. In February 1482 a similar commission ordered defence of the Zacco against Provveditori sopra Camere investigation of supposed Carrara rights, and another in January 1483 entailed protest against the summoning to Venice of longstanding Paduan owners of land in Teolo and neighbouring villages, to demonstrate their rights over land supposedly confiscated from the condottiere Alvise Dal Verme in 1437⁷⁵.

⁷⁰ Atti, VI, fol. 315v, 9 August 1482; ASVe, Consiglio dei Dieci, Capi, Notatorio, I, fol. 24r: 13 Sept 1482.

⁷¹ BNM, ms. It. VII 2397 (10134), 16 May 1483.

⁷² Atti, VII, fol. 35r, 2 August 1486.

⁷³ ASVe, Consiglio dei Dieci, Capi, Notatorio, I, fols. 76r, 85v: 18 December 1487, 25 October 1488. BNM, ms. It. VII 2397 (10134), 22 June 1491.

⁷⁴ Atti, VI, fols. 246v-47r, 249: 16 May and 14 June 1481; ASVe, Consiglio dei Dieci, Capi, Notatorio, III, fol. 19r, 11 January 1482.

⁷⁵ Atti, VI, fols. 304r-05r, 350v: February 1482, 16 January 1483.

Cases different from the Arino lands again drew the council's attention in July 1487, when it protested against the summoning to Venice by the Rason vecchie of citizens and monasteries with lands and woods at Rovolon and elsewhere, demanding that even if proceedings were legitimate, they be conducted in Padua. Rovolon was once more the focus in November 1489, when a deliberation denounced the instigation of spiteful individuals ("homines malevoli") behind continuing investigation by the Provveditori sopra Camere at Rovolon, specifically directing the city's representatives to appear before the Capi of the Ten⁷⁶. In January 1488, moreover, referring to the high incidence of magistracies in Venice citing Paduans over rights to ex Carrara property, the council significantly gave blanket authorization for its representatives in Venice to be commissioned in such cases, invoking the relevant general rulings in their favour, though specifying that the interested parties pay the expenses thus incurred⁷⁷. Another deliberation of March 1488 criticized Provveditori sopra Camere investigation of tithe rights possessed by Paduan citizens from Carrara times onwards, and not sold by their magistracy, so meddling in the bishop of Padua's jurisdiction; action by the city's representatives in the capital resulted in a ducal letter ordering the Provveditori to desist, and respect the bishop's jurisdiction⁷⁸.

From 1492 to 1494 there were five commissions to Padua's envoys in Venice, starting in March 1492 with action to try and reverse the confiscation of wetlands and grazing long held by the community of Codevigo; in July there was similar action to protect Castelbaldo from disturbance by the Provveditori sopra Camere over former Carrara rights, held for eighty years. This extension of the city's assistance to contado communities is an interesting novelty, suggesting some nexus with *cives'* private interests. In June 1493 the charge was to try and reverse confiscations and auctions by the same magistracy in the Piove di Sacco area, damaging many parties. In November 1493 it was to protect lands long held by the monks of San Benedetto, and in June 1494 there was again attempted remedial action after the event, concerning lands in the Teolo vicariate already confiscated from many citizens and sold as former rebels' property. A year and a half later, in January 1496 the council deliberated about extensive confiscations in the Piove di Sacco *podesteria* by the Provveditori sopra Camere and Rason vecchie, which had been followed by a generalized demand that landowners document their rights to property, so causing confusion and expense as well as great discontent and fears⁷⁹.

⁷⁶ Atti, VII, fols. 96r, 243v: 28 August 1487, 13 November 1489. On woods round Rovolon: above, n. 45.

⁷⁷ Atti, VII, fol. 154r, 29 January 1488.

⁷⁸ Atti, VII, fols. 156v-57r: 19 March 1488; Ducali, Verde, fol. 55v, 28 April 1488.

⁷⁹ Atti, VIII, fol. 18v, 7 March 1492; fol. 30r, 17 July 1492 (in 1506 the Provveditori sopra Camere were trying to bring a case concerning the Castelbaldo area before the court of the Quarantia: ASVe, Maggior Consiglio, Deda, fol. 39r, 25 April 1506); fol. 60v, 9 June 1493, fol. 68r, 3 November 1493; fol. 94, June 1494; fols. 152v-53r, 7 January 1496 (perhaps concerned with this is a note

It would be useful to relate the volume of Paduan protest to documentation of the activity of the Venetian magistracies concerned, but for those most active – the *Provveditori sopra Camere and Rason vecchie* – there is only fragmentary survival of material relevant to this period in their archives, and virtually nothing attesting their activity during their sporadic mainland tours (in November 1464, for example, a *Provveditore sopra Camere* went to the Terraferma with a mandate including the recovery of the Signoria's property)⁸⁰.

The richer records are those for the *Rason vecchie*, with good documentation of the leasing of minor fortifications considered of no military use (another phenomenon concentrated in the provinces nearer Venice), but with only very occasional mention of the sort of rights this essay is more concerned with. For example, in 1481 they investigated rights over wetlands and grazing in the village of Arzergrande, supposedly ex-Carrara but currently possessed by the Paduan family of the Buzzacarini, who were cited to Venice and later sent documents supporting their case, including a family tree. Another example concerns the lease of a *valle* or canal – the “*valle del Cornio*” – probably near today's Sant'Angelo di Piove di Sacco, where despite the lease of rights by the magistracy in 1475 and 1480, local peasants insisted on fishing freely (as presumably they had always done)⁸¹. Waterways and activity concerning them also appear after the deviation of the main course of the Brenta in the eastern Padovano, begun in 1488: in January 1501 the Paduan council protested at the recent leasing of fishing rights along the new riverbed by the *Rason vecchie*, mandated by the Senate, and demanded respect for an earlier ruling by virtue of which fishing was to be a common right, as in other river *piscationes* (fisheries)⁸².

As to the *Provveditori sopra Camere*, more concerned with rights over land, the occasional surviving documents of sales in these years are illuminating. Thus, in particular, the sale at Rialto in June 1493 of about 1,500 *campi* of grazing, wood and wetlands at Vo di Bojon, near today's Campolongo Maggiore in the eastern Padovano. The deed safeguarded specified minor property rights of a couple of Paduan elite families, but explicitly excluded any claims based on the rights of *parenti* and *choerenti* (relatives and neighbouring landowners) – a formula common to other sales too⁸³.

about Paduan representatives awaiting a confrontation with the *Provveditori sopra Camere* before the Capi of the Ten: ASVe, Consiglio dei Dieci, Capi, Notatorio, II, 124r, 19 May 1496).

⁸⁰ The Senate ordered he be given patent letters to mainland governors: ASVe, Senato, Terra, 5, fol. 99v, 22 November 1464.

⁸¹ Most useful are ASVe, Ufficiali alle Rason Vecchie, buste 52, 54. For the cases cited, *ibid.*, 52: fol. 54v, 13 September 1475; fols. 160v, 163r, 10 July and 31 August 1480; fols. 71r, 174v, 5 and 12 January, 22 February 1481.

⁸² Atti, VIII, fol. 307v, 14 Jan 1501. For the Senate mandate: ASVe, Senato, Terra, 13, fol. 145r, 4 September 1500 (it hoped to raise more than D. 300 p.a. by leasing the new Brenta's “*porti et peschaxon*”).

⁸³ ASVe, *Provveditori sopra Camere*, busta B-I, 1: fols. 43v-44v, 10 June 1493.

Obviously, it would be absurd to suppose that the *Provveditori sopra Camere* and *Rason vecchie* acted out of animosity against Paduan landowners; as we saw in the matter of commons, there are also cases of Venetians protesting at these same magistracies' disturbance of their rights in the Padovano with the justification of investigating *ex-Carrara* rights⁸⁴. But the bridle put on their action in the 1490s came late, after decades in which they had been quite as much as spurred on as held back by the councils of state; in 1479, for example, the Senate decreed that the Signoria alone hadn't the power to suspend judgements by the *Provveditori sopra Camere* of property pertaining to the state, reserving such power to the *Provveditori* themselves or the appeal courts⁸⁵. Moreover, the general rulings produced by first the Senate and then the Ten in 1489, 1490 and 1496, mentioned at the beginning of this section, seem to have had only a limited effect. In December 1497 the city's representatives in Venice were commissioned to oppose confiscations in the Piove di Sacco area from Padua's bishopric and citizens; in the spring of 1500 commissions again concerned the Arino *serraglio*, so often cited above, where the *Provveditori sopra Camere* apparently intended to conduct detailed measurements. And in April 1504 the council voted to defend the Brazolo against the *Rason vecchie's* lease to a Venetian noble of rights over waters near Tribano which had been theirs for a century: the passage or ferry of the village of Paluello, jurisdiction of the Brazolo nobles ("passum seu tragetum ville Paludelli iurisdictionis nobilium de Bradiolo")⁸⁶.

For the Paduan élite, therefore, there does seem to be some degree of justification for rooted and lasting animosity. And there certainly were instances of open enmity between some of the Paduan and Venetian parties whose opposing interests were dealt with by these magistracies in the capital. In March 1499 the diarist Marin Sanudo reported a Collegio hearing – a sign of the importance attributed to the incident – in which a leading member of the Paduan élite, the knight Francesco Dotto, complained of the "vilanie" said to him by the eminent Venetian noble and banker Vettor Pisani, owner of very extensive landed rights in the southern Padovano. The dispute concerned court jurisdiction over a *livello* due from Dotto to Pisani. In 1468 the Pisani had purchased grazing and wetlands near Solesino from the inheritance of the marquis Bertoldo d'Este, and then in 1483 had bought the so-called "camerlengaria estense", Padovano lands confiscated from the ducal branch of the Estense dynasty during the war of Ferrara. In 1499 the *Provveditori sopra Camere* wanted to assert competence over the case, but it was based on a contract stipulated in Padua, and the Collegio assigned it to the podestà's court

⁸⁴ Thus for example an order by the Capi of the Ten, at the request of the Bragadin: ASVe, Consiglio dei Dieci, Capi, Notatorio, II, 93v: 28 October 1489.

⁸⁵ ASVe, Senato, Terra, 8, fol. 60r, 23 August 1479.

⁸⁶ Atti, VIII, fols. 214v-15r, 295r, 297v: 2 December 1497, 5 March and 19 April 1500. BNM, ms. It. VII 2397 (10134), ducal letter of 19 April 1500. Atti, IX, fol. 139r, 21 April 1504 (source of the quotation).

in Padua, specifying that there was no direct Signoria interest in the Estense inheritance, and so no reason for hearing the issue in Venice: an interesting statement of the criteria in current use in deciding on judicial jurisdiction⁸⁷.

Jurisdiction was indeed one of the problems, even among authorities in the capital. The evidence found confirms the involvement not just of the *Provveditori sopra Camere* and the *Rason*, but other magistracies both financial and judicial: the *Governatori alle Entrade*, who for example sold former *Dal Verme* rights, including the tithes at Boccon in 1471; the temporary magistracy in charge of recovering Signoria property from 1474, which in 1475 won a conflict of competence with the *Provveditori sopra Camere* over the patrimony of Bertoldo d'Este; the *Tre savi sopra Rialto*, who were assigned competence in 1480 over usurpation of land by buyers from the Paduan exchequer who occupied more than their due; the *Sindici Inquisitori/Auditori Nuovi*, who we find bringing cases of unlawful occupation of former rebels' property in the Vicentino and Padovano before the *Quarantia* courts in 1484 (while their successors ten years later were told to investigate *fraudes* concerning *comugne* when touring the *Terraferma*); the three *Savi* in charge of auditing, who were told in 1505 that they were to verify the execution of judgements and confiscations of wrongly occupied Signoria property⁸⁸. Procedures were indeed subject to mishap, so – for example – we find the same *Piove di Sacco* area *Malavolta* land up for sale by the *Rason vecchie* in 1480, and again in 1492, because the initial purchasers had never paid over the D. 1,200 due. And the reference to secret denunciation by ill-intentioned parties in starting proceedings of this kind was not just slanted rhetoric used by the Paduan civic élite: in June 1501 the *podestà* of Cittadella sought approval from the *Capi* of the Ten to act on an indication concerning some 200 *campi* of former Carrara property, explaining that his informant had other revelations ready, if the first went ahead – certainly with the hope of a reward⁸⁹.

A final comment on these issues: action by Venetian authorities over property rights confiscated by the Signoria much resembled their action over commons. In some cases the juridical categories of ex Carrara property and commons evidently mingled, as in the example concerning Bernardo Bembo with which this section starts, but the resemblance was most evident in practical terms, when Paduan possessors of land or other rights risked losing

⁸⁷ Sanudo, II, 498-99; Ducali, Verde, fol. 109r (the decision in a ducal letter of 11 March 1499); Atti, VIII, fols. 272v, 273v, 282r: 4 and 16 April, 4 November 1499 (eight months later the council's support was sought, to defend this decision against ongoing Pisani opposition). On the Pisani purchases: Varanini, 1996a, 849; on their action to define and strengthen their many rights, and consequent local conflicts: Vigato, 1997, 73-76.

⁸⁸ Ducali, B, fol. 121r, 11 May 1471; ASVe, Collegio, Notatorio, 12, 13 November 1475 and 6 August 1480; ASVe, Maggior Consiglio, Stella, fol. 42r, 15 February 1484; ASVe, Senato, Terra, 12, fol. 30v, 31 January 1494; *ibid.*, 15, fol. 79v, 10 June 1505.

⁸⁹ ASVe, Collegio, Notatorio, 12, 29 July and 3 August 1480; ASVe, Senato, Terra, 11, fol. 107v, 20 March 1492, ASVe, Consiglio dei Dieci, Lettere rettori ai capi, busta 80, 23 June 1501.

what they considered to be justly theirs, or at the very least had to fight to keep it. Moreover, with or without the sporadic direct involvement of third parties such as village communities, there was a common pattern in the conduct and outcome of action by Venetian magistracies. It almost inevitably forced Paduan possessors or claimants to defend their rights in Venice rather than Padua, with extra cost and disturbance and the fear of a less sympathetic hearing – though at least on some occasions they were able to prove those rights. Very often, moreover, the beneficiaries from their eventual loss of rights were Venetians acquiring those same rights from the authorities involved.

The phenomena discussed in these first two sections link and partly overlap with a further, broad category of the council's concerns, since it repeatedly sought to defend the property rights of Paduan citizen owners when there was a dispute over jurisdiction between courts in Padua and Venice, as an example from 1494 demonstrates. In April, instructions were given to the city's representatives in Venice for various matters, including a specific case of land in the Castelbaldo area held for half a century by the Polcastri, but now assigned to a Venetian by the capital's Giudici del Procurator. As the commission makes clear, there were more general legal principles to uphold, to be spelled out with mention of the daily incidence of Venice's "cives et subditi" dispossessed of long-held land. As already admitted in previous rulings, courts in Venice could not assign property rights in the Padovano unless their current Paduan holder was cited and heard before his rightful judge, that is in Padua, and this norm – the representatives were to say – should apply even in the case of property contracts stipulated between Paduans in Venice, which otherwise blunted claims presented in Padua concerning the seller's property ("presentationes virtute coherentiarum aut aggravationes"). And – the instructions continued – if those buying Padovano property from magistracies in Venice occupy more than their rightful purchase, damaged Paduan parties should be heard before Paduan courts and not in Venice, or at least the podestà should block any citation to Venice. This example must suffice, but as demonstrated in a previous essay, Padovano property rights were significantly affected by the activity of first instance courts in Venice, since they were dealing not only with the sort of situations just specified, but also with an increasing number of Venetians' dowries and wills referring to Padovano property, and such activity was indeed repeatedly the subject of deliberations by the Paduan council⁹⁰.

c. Sheep-shearing, grazing and transhumance

Various aspects of the presence of sheep in the Padovano, both native and "foreign", were the object of policy-making. The wool shorn from them was a

⁹⁰ Atti, VIII, fols. 90v-91v: 12 and 16 April 1494. See discussion of first instance courts in Venice in Knabton, 1992, 159 ff., especially 161-62.

key source of raw material for urban Padua's main manufacturing activity, but the rules governing its place and conditions of sale were the cause of tensions between city authorities and sheep-owners (*pecudarii*), with the latter fearing the constraints of a purely local market and inclined to look beyond Padua, including to Venice itself. The seasonal transit of transhumant flocks, or their wintering in the Padovano, was part of a complex pattern of stock-raising covering plain and mountain areas under foreign as well as Venetian government, with implications for the shearing and marketing of their wool, the grazing they used (and the revenue to be had by leasing it to them), and also taxes levied on their passage. Transhumant flocks wintering in the Padovano in fact made seasonal use of leased grazing sites (*poste*), which were often the property of Venetians – mostly as a result of the sale of the former Carrara patrimony. Since ownership of the *poste* and the grazing rights (*pensionatico*) associated with them were independent of ownership rights over the land used for grazing, some degree of incompatibility with other agricultural practices – especially arable crops and hay-making – was guaranteed. Nor were the interests of transhumant and local shepherds necessarily reconcilable. The resulting knot of problems was not satisfactorily solved even in the eighteenth-century phase of agrarian reform⁹¹. Unsurprisingly, therefore, in the later fifteenth century Venetian decisions were as important as the policy-making practised in Padua.

Padovano wool – meaning wool usually shorn only once yearly from animals raised locally, rather than that taken from transhumant flocks wintering there – was considered to be of especially high quality, and the question of wool supply for Paduan producers was the object of four council deliberations in the 1440s and 1450s concerning the trade in both wool and sheep, especially the wool shorn from sheep grazing in the Padovano; the council, left free to decide by Venice, confirmed the existing ban on the export of such wool. This issue remained the object of intermittent tension and renegotiation between the city authorities and the owners of the sheep, with Venetian authority insisting – as it did with other mainland provinces – that as an exception to the export ban, Padovano wool be free to reach the capital. In January 1461 the council deliberated over contraband wool export from the Padovano, requesting approval for enforcement action by the guild in the contado, and in 1465 and again in 1467 (this time at the Paduan council's request) the Senate ordered collaboration in setting wool prices between representatives of the guild and the shepherds, with Padua and Venice as the only two venues authorized for sale⁹².

⁹¹ Panciera; Simonetto; Gloria, 1851.

⁹² ASVe, Senato, Terra, 5, fols. 113v, 186v: 21 March 1465, 6 June 1467; Collodo, 1999, 76 ff. (general discussion), 88 ff. (on the fifteenth century, with much use of Gementi); Varanini-Demo, 281-82; Pino-Branca, 1933-38, XCVI, 755-62 for council deliberations of 1443, 1444, 1446, 1459, 1461; Mozzato, 54-55.

In 1488 the council sought to favour Paduan production of high quality cloth by enforcing the shearing of local sheep only once a year, by the end of March; Venetian approval was sought and obtained, but then contested by the shepherds before the Avogadori, so requiring further insistence in Venice by the council⁹³. The issue seems to have remained contentious, and returned in a lengthy, wide-ranging council deliberation of 30 April 1497, where – among remedial action for the guild’s general difficulties – shearing obligations were partly relaxed: for local sheep, the March wool was to be sold in Padua by mid-April, and the August wool by mid-September (owners could choose whether to shear once or twice); for shepherds of “foreign” flocks wintering in the Padovano, the obligation was simply to shear and sell the wool in the city before leaving⁹⁴.

As to these “foreign” sheep, in the mid and later fifteenth century Venetian policy favoured mountain flocks wintering especially in the Padovano and Trevigiano; it imposed a transit *dazio* there on sheep which wintered further south in the Ferrarese and Mantovano, and reassured shepherds who did use Paduan and Trevisan *poste* about the prices to be got for spring-shorn wool, allowing them to sell it anywhere in the Terraferma after offering it for a month in Padua or Treviso⁹⁵. In April 1470 the council named delegates to negotiate with the shepherds over the seasonal duration of grazing rights, especially their claim to free winter access to grassland in general through to St. George’s day (23 April). Previous Venetian rulings on the matter had been contradictory, though including a ducal letter dated 4 April 1470 in favour of the term set by the statutes, and again no final answer seems to have emerged as to whether to follow the Paduan statutes, which were more restrictive since they banned grazing after the end of March in meadows where there would be two cuts of hay⁹⁶. (That transhumant flocks stayed in the Padovano till April before returning to the mountains is evident from the seizure in April 1487 of sheep from the Habsburg lands, held near Castelbaldo and perhaps elsewhere during that year’s short war over Rovereto)⁹⁷.

⁹³ Atti, VII, fols. 177r, 238v: 21 August 1488, 2 September 1489; Ducali, Verde, fol. 58r: 30 August 1488.

⁹⁴ Atti, VIII, fols. 199v-203r: 30 April 1497.

⁹⁵ This explanation in a ducal letter temporarily suspending the *dazio*: Ducali, B, fol. 79v (26 March 1463), referring implicitly to Senate decisions of 1451 and 1454 (*ibid.*, fols. 96v-97r: 14 July 1451, 11 October 1455, 19 December 1461). See too Ducali, 111, fols. 195-99: other rulings of 1443 and later, including a 1480 order to the podestà of Camposampiero not to “tuor regalie de formazo a pegorari”.

⁹⁶ Atti, V, 13v: 11 Apr 1470. For repeated indications from Venice between April 1469 and April 1471 (among them the ducal letter of 4 April 1470), also concerned with the transit *dazio* on flocks moving north from the Ferrarese and Mantovano: Ducali, B, fols. 112r-21r. For disputes producing other Venetian rulings: Ducali, B, 83, 93v: 12 May 1463, 24 March 1464, 19 March 1465. As early as 1416 the Paduan exchequer had ruled that grazing rights last until St. George’s day, with the exception of “ortis, brodulis et bladis”: Ducali, 111, fol. 108, 14 October 1416.

⁹⁷ Ducali, E, fols. 25r, 26v: 25 April and 17 May 1487; Atti, VII, fols. 90v-91r, 18 May 1487.

With a background of disputes occasionally reaching Venice, the same issue resurfaced in a council deliberation of May 1488. Noting the contrast between the date set by the city statutes (the end of March) and the St. George's day term claimed by both local and foreign shepherds, it sought to save hay yields by proposing that Venice approve the compromise date of 15 April, restricting access to sheep which had wintered in the Padovano – presumably to exclude flocks transiting northwards from other plain areas. Venetian approval was granted, but disputed by the shepherds before the Avogaria di Comun, so requiring a further council deliberation in September 1489⁹⁸. Complaints to the Avogadori in 1494 and 1506 by aggrieved parties on both sides of the argument – the holder of a *posta*, against the community of Galzignano for expelling shepherds from lands supposedly subject to grazing rights too early; *distrettuali*, against shepherds insisting on grazing in hayfields through to St. George's day – prove that the issue remained at least partly unsettled. In 1508, indeed, the Avogadori dismissed another dispute, stating they were fed up with so much wrangling over the ducal letter of 4 April 1470⁹⁹.

d. *Relations between landowners, tenants and peasantry*

Among the council deliberations on this theme there are occasional curiosities. In January 1492, meeting the requests of a great many *cives*, especially young men (“*quamplures cives et maxime iuvenes*”), and with a view to their confirmation by Venice, the deputies had a crowded meeting approve the same detailed regulations recently adopted by Vicenza for hunting and bird-snaring within a radius of five miles of the city. Quite apart from the intrinsic interest of the detailing of species, methods and seasons, and the by no means routine choice of imitating another Terraferma city in law-making, these regulations offer a nice contrast: between the recognition of well-off *cives*' right to practise a leisure activity that was also part of their ideal lifestyle, moreover at a convenient distance from the city; and the declared aim, applied to an area whose products were particularly important in covering the city's food needs, of bringing back to their farming duties peasants some of whom had abandoned them in favour of the chase – something most improper for them (“*quod eis minime convenit*”)¹⁰⁰. That peasants should attend to their duties on the land crops up elsewhere in the council's deliberations: for example in June 1488, when it requested a postponement for the despatch of Paduan peasant labour to river works in the Valcellina in western Friuli.

⁹⁸ For a 1482 dispute: Ducali, C, fol. 83v, 6 March 1482. Atti, VII, fols 165r, 238v: 10 May 1488, 2 September 1489.

⁹⁹ Ducali, F, fol. 1r, 4 July 1494; ASP, Lettere dei magistrati veneti e dei rappresentanti di Terraferma, 1500-06, I, 25 Feb 1506; Ducali, G, fol. 35r, 27 May 1508. On the 1470 ducal letter, above n. 96.

¹⁰⁰ Atti, VIII, fols. 8v-9r, 7 January 1492.

Mobilizing manpower for *corvées* on an interprovincial level was anyway an almost complete novelty, but the objection was framed with reference to seasonal work in the fields, hay-making and harvesting (Venice replied suggesting the work in Friuli be contracted out, implicitly at the Paduan *distrettuali's* expense)¹⁰¹.

What council records and other documentation do not offer, though, is mainline policy directives on key issues like forms of land tenure. The matter was partly addressed by the city statutes (and also relevant to matters of tax liability as we shall see below), but its complexity and its slow, empirical evolution have to be reconstructed from the practice recorded by notarial deeds and estate documents. What follows is therefore mainly concerned with other issues relevant to relations between landowners and peasants, for which – as for the matters concerning tax, discussed below – the documentation reveals an important dimension of role-playing and rhetoric: the Paduan council mingled the severity and distance towards the peasantry of landowners whose wealth and status depended on maintaining its subordination, with traits of paternalist benevolence; Venetian authority, though in many ways representing identical or similar interests, made more play of benevolence in at least implicit competition for the sympathy of humble subjects, as has been observed a propos of the measures concerned with the impact on peasants of forced levying for debt¹⁰².

The binomium dominium directum – dominium utile

One issue connected with tenures that does emerge in a significant fashion from the documentation is that of long-standing possession of rights of *dominium utile*, in practice the occupier's right to live on land, work it and keep most of the profits so generated. Sometimes specifically referred to by the term *livello* (itself polyvalent), these were situations in which the rights of control and revenue associated with *dominium directum* were extant but diminished, and the owner of those rights often but by no means always ecclesiastical. Gloria's collection of laws and pronouncements concerning Paduan agriculture includes a number of fifteenth-century Venetian rulings favourable to *livellari* and the like. The most important is a general Senate ruling of December 1451, stating that forty years' possession of land with payment of a *pensio*, even without a formal contract of lease or *livello*, was to be considered a *livello*, and if the land were ecclesiastical, the possessor also had the right to investiture with it. The purport of ducal letters containing other rulings for specific cases of both lay and ecclesiastical property, is in line with this principle: thus in December 1438, December 1468, August 1476 and September 1495 – in this last case, not explicitly a *livello* but tantamount to

¹⁰¹ Atti, VII, fol. 168, 1 June 1488; Ducali, Verde, fol. 56r, 7 June 1488.

¹⁰² See Favaretto, 19-21, referring to Cervelli, especially 383.

one, concerning former woodland at Strà now converted to cultivation, with the decision taken also referring explicitly to respect of the Paduan statutes¹⁰³.

To Gloria's findings other material can be added, in particular a couple of council deliberations of January 1472 and April 1473, instructing Padua's representatives in Venice to oppose the urban monastic house of Santa Margherita (together with San Cipriano of Murano), but also mentioning the city monastery of Santa Giustina and the Padovano abbey of Santa Maria di Praglia. A pious bequest of *dominium utile* over urban housing had been thwarted by the first two religious houses' action to recover full possession, and this needed reversing. But both deliberations emphasized the risk of such behaviour becoming general practice by churches and monasteries with property in the city and contado held at *livello*, demanding general application of the decision in favour of their *livellari* already reached in negotiation between the large Benedictine abbeys of Santa Giustina and Praglia, and the city commune, and indeed requesting its extension to all spiritual brotherhoods, hospitals and pious institutions¹⁰⁴.

Here, needless to say, there were major matters of principle and equally major concrete interests at stake. Though abbots of Praglia granted much land via *livello* in the late fifteenth century, both Santa Giustina and Praglia were engaged in the long-term, systematic recovery and consolidation of their patrimonial rights, parts of which had certainly filtered into the possession of members of the Paduan civic élite. Landholding of just over 4,000 *campi* declared by Praglia in the 1518 *estimo* had risen to almost double the 2,306 *campi* assessed in 1477, when Santa Giustina's holdings were 3,550 *campi* (and their subsequent growth would top out at almost three times Praglia's acreage)¹⁰⁵.

Similar issues seem to be at stake in a council deliberation of 1492, opposing summons by the Venetian convent of Santo Spirito of the Paduan holders of long-possessed land in many villages of the southeast Padovano, between Conselve and Anguillara. In this case it invoked the thirty-year prescription rule – otherwise nobody would be sure of his rights, nor would he ever have any power to bequeath his assets (“*nemo esset sui juris, neque quis de suis bonis ullum unquam haberet testandi arbitrium*”)¹⁰⁶.

Private debt-levying

Debt-levying was a key meeting point between the monetary economy and the possession and transfer of resources in kind, and therefore also between

¹⁰³ Gloria, 1855, 2:259-60 (10 December 1438), 266 (23 December 1451), 272-73 (19 December 1468), 280-81 (30 August 1476), 299-300 (30 September 1495).

¹⁰⁴ Atti, V, fols. 114r, 158v: 2 January 1472, 1 April 1473.

¹⁰⁵ Silvano, 2012: 16n15, 19, 25, 27. For *livello* holders of the Praglia monastery's land at Abano (citydwellers 135 *campi*, villagers 70 *campi*): Bortolami, 1983: 185. On church property's contribution to direct taxation: below, text and notes 133-34.

¹⁰⁶ Atti, VIII, fol. 40r, 30 November 1492.

stronger and weaker components of economic relationships. It was characterized by the high frequency of recourse to forced levying via the seizure and sale of pledges and/or the arrest of debtors, which reinforced its function as a perennial focus of social tension. The 1420 Paduan statutes regulated the officials and procedures involved in private debt-levying, including the working of the city's agency for handling debtors' pledges, the *Camera dei pegni*; they perhaps incorporated Venetian directives given the very recent introduction, in 1418, of the *dadia delle lance*, the first regular direct tax due to the Venetian exchequer (the levying of tax debt is partly discussed below). An important component of the tension accompanying the recovery of all debts was the combination of licit and illicit profit opportunities for officials involved, and therefore the incidence of abuse and complaints, as well as greater difficulty in recovering the sums actually owed rather than the expenses due to the officials; issues of this kind, though not relevant to the purposes of this essay, drew considerable attention from both the Paduan council and Venetian authority¹⁰⁷.

Obviously enough, creditors' action against private debtors very often involved dealings between landowners and tenants. But levying debts of any nature from peasant debtors could weaken or paralyze their work on the land, if it took the form of seizure of the material means necessary for that purpose, or their arrest, while the risk of action by creditors could deter them from bringing produce into the city, so damaging the urban market's availability of basic necessities. Moreover, the frequent incidence of debt-levying in dealings between citydwellers and *contado* inhabitants linked with the more general friction between Padua and rural areas, which also took the form of sporadic jurisdictional disputes between urban authority in Padua and the lesser towns of the *Padovano*. These latter were inclined to dispute various features of the exercise of urban jurisdiction with implications for the *contado* economy, including when lawsuits concerned such matters as rights to property and contracts between landowners and tenants. An important element of this conflict was the proving and collection of debts, in which the *contado* towns' *podestà* – in harmony with the leaders of local society – might oppose debt-collecting by city officials and assert their own competence over claims by citizen creditors against inhabitants of their jurisdictions.

The two *podestà* of Piove di Sacco and Camposampiero, both of them nearer Venice and endowed with more severely limited judicial competence than their colleagues in other *Padovano podesterie*, emerge from the later fifteenth century documentation as the most active in disputes of various kinds with Paduan urban jurisdiction; on the specific issue of debt-levying, clashes are documented with some frequency for Piove di Sacco. A Senate ruling of March 1457 had already regulated debt-levying in the *podesteria* of Piove di Sacco: to avoid the cost for at least some local debtors of recourse by creditors

¹⁰⁷ See in general, also for what follows, Varanini, 1992, 125-61, especially 127, 137 ff.; Pino-Branca, 1933. Eloquent examples of tension over debt-levying at Grantorto in Bortolami, 1997, 43.

to urban levying procedures and judicial citations to Padua, it asserted the competence of Piove di Sacco's court and levying officials for minor debts (up to L. 10) and contracts stipulated locally. The 1457 ruling was confirmed by later ducal letters, with instructions to Paduan officials to desist: in April 1473 (cancelling contrary indications contained in ducal letters of November 1472 and April 1473), and February 1504¹⁰⁸. But as these confirmations suggest, both Paduan officials and the city council tried at intervals to reverse or ignore the 1457 ruling: thus, for example, council deliberations denouncing the Piove podestà for blocking urban debt-levying officials (April 1487), and for fining Paduan merchants and levying officials (December 1493)¹⁰⁹.

On a more general plane, rulings about forced levying from peasants – albeit of doubtful efficacy – came from Venetian authority in reaction to requests and complaints voiced by subjects, both Paduans and others. As early as 1415 the Senate had confirmed the indications about forced levying contained in the Paduan statutes, but insisted on penalties in case of wrongful claims by creditors. In a ruling of December 1458, formulated for the whole Terraferma and circulated again in a ducal letter of January 1467, it greatly restricted the possible seizure of draught animals. In August 1475, after complaints by *distrettuali* from Teolo, the ruling was again repeated, and reinforced with a specific ban on the seizure of beds and bedding, horses and oxen, and the equipment necessary for agricultural work¹¹⁰.

Lending to peasants

As elsewhere, the extent and variety of recourse to credit by peasants in the Padovano were considerable, with overtones of dependence on their creditors and room for various forms of exploitation of that weakness, whether in exorbitant terms of repayment or in action to dispossess them of such assets as they had. This latter eventuality was a particularly strong one when rights over land were specifically identified as security for the return of the loan. In the experience of the Terraferma state such practice would become extraordinarily widespread in the sixteenth century, with remarkably uniform contracts: the borrower actually sold his land to the creditor and then became its tenant for a rent which was really the interest on the sum loaned, maintaining the option – mostly only theoretical, and of limited duration – of being able to buy the land back. Though in a less massive and systematic fashion, some anticipation of this behaviour may be found in the Padovano during the Quattrocento, since sample research on Venetian nobles' acquisition of property there from mid century shows some of them lending with the borrower's land as security so as to gain possession of it: thus the Contarini

¹⁰⁸ Pinton, 63-64, 65-66: documents of 30 March 1457, 16 April 1473, 11 February 1504.

¹⁰⁹ Atti, VII, fols. 88v-89r, 27 April 1487; *ibid.*, VIII, fol. 70, 11 December 1493.

¹¹⁰ Gloria, 1855, 2:256-57, 271-72, 274-75.

round Valsanzibio, in the Euganean hills, and the Donà delle Rose at Pontelongo (Piove di Sacco)¹¹¹.

Publicly declared ethics were of course entirely incompatible with anything approaching extortionate practice, which was denounced as impious usury. In May 1478 the Venetian Maggior Consiglio reacted to reports received from governors in both the Terraferma and the sea empire about land bought at artificially low prices and changing hands as a result of debt recovery, also mentioning crooked deals for the supply of such things as grain, wine, oxen, horses and cloth. It therefore declared contracts of this nature illicit for the future and annulled those of the previous fifteen years, promising justice to whoever sought it and banning appeals from the resulting judgements by governors, to protect the poor¹¹². This measure applied to the entire Venetian state, but on a smaller scale the Paduan council had deliberated in similar fashion on 20 March 1477 (perhaps contributing indirectly to the emanation of the 1478 Venetian law): it targeted speculative lending to peasants of seed-corn, draught animals and agricultural equipment, including carts, ploughs and utensils for the wine harvest, which were given in return for grain and wine, and asked Venice to ban any such contracts. An answering ducal letter indeed recognized them as extortionate and authorized their cancellation¹¹³.

More than affecting real behaviour, such norms testify its existence. That it was very common practice to lend grain to peasants emerges from a council deliberation of January 1495, confirmed by Venice the following month. A Venetian ruling of 1468 (part of measures taken to ease grain flow towards the capital) stated that all wheat levied from creditors barring lent seed-corn must go to Venice; it had never been observed for wheat returned by tenants to their landlords or others in the case of loans made merely bushel for bushel (“*ad purum starium pro stario*”). But now, the deliberation reads, there is a minute and precise investigation (“*minuta et exactissima inquisitio*”) in the whole Padovano by staff of the *Provveditori alle Biade*, Venice’s grain supply agency, directed not only at merchants who lend and are repaid thus, but at landowners and anybody else, even for very small loans, with a view to applying the sanctions for non-compliance accompanying the 1468 ruling. To prevent damaging both lenders and peasants (the latter unlikely to find grain to borrow), the deliberation states, the exclusion from the 1468 rules of interest-free loans needs confirmation¹¹⁴. It is worth emphasizing that the forms of credit dealt with here – and also those giving rise to the rulings of 1477 and 1478 – seem to concern solely Christian lenders, even though during the later

¹¹¹ Corazzoli; Varanini, 1996a, 831, 862-63.

¹¹² Gloria, 1855, 2:286-88: 2 May 1478. It was preceded by a ducal letter of 19 February 1478 to all Terraferma governors ordering the investigation and repression of usury connected with grain and other commodities: Ducali, 111, fols. 50r-51r (for the 2 May law, *ibid.*, fols. 52r-53v).

¹¹³ Atti, VI, fol. 11r; Ducali, C, fols. 24v-25v: 8 June 1477 (see too Gloria, 1855, 2:283-86).

¹¹⁴ Atti, VIII, fol. 112: 31 January 1495; Ducali, Verde, fol. 105r: 11 February 1495.

fifteenth century Jewish bankers were operating in the Padovano towns, especially at Piove di Sacco, and certainly serving peasant borrowers to some extent¹¹⁵.

A little scepticism about the real availability of loans without interest for peasants, despite the words of the council deliberation of 1495, is supported by what emerged in these very same years from the early experience of Padua's new Christian pawn-lending bank, operative from August 1491. The Conservatori of the Monte in fact reported on the importance of the contribution made by Padovano peasants to its funding, and also on the advantages peasants drew from being able to borrow seedcorn, which they repaid after the harvest in kind or at the current market price – whereas previously usurious contracts had forced them to hand over a third or half their harvest by way of interest on seedcorn borrowed. Peasant borrowers must also have made use of the Monti created very soon after Padua's in the Padovano towns of Piove di Sacco, Camposampiero, Monselice and Montagnana¹¹⁶.

Compensation for damna data

Rural communities routinely appointed field watchmen (*saltari*) to guard against damage to land and crops, though this right might also be exercised by landowners as a sort of minor feudal survival – something documented, for example, for the Venetian noble family of the Bragadin, who had purchased the former Carraresi *gastaldie* of Carrara and Terrarsa, and who we find in July 1477 appointing their own guard to protect their land for a year (“saltarium suum ad custodiendum campaneam suam pro uno anno”)¹¹⁷. A key function of the *saltari* was to prevent damage to citizens' property, or at least identify a single guilty party and so prevent claims for compensation against the whole village. The urban statutes regulated procedures for compensation in terms highly favourable to the citizen landowners. They were entitled to choose between urban and contado-based authority in depositing claims against rural communities or single inhabitants, and inclined to opt for the city's Giudice delle vettovaglie. Individuals or communities named by claimants were obliged to pay up with no further ado unless they decided to contest claims and valuations before the city courts, at their own risk. Damage and compensation were a socially contentious issue, since guarding by *saltari* could only limit damage and the burden of reimbursement it entailed; the overall incidence of damage seems to have been high, and while pure negligence certainly accounted for some cases, many were probably connected with either poverty (theft might be the only solution in the face of want) or intentional action undertaken as an expression of rancour.

¹¹⁵ See Carpi; Jacoby.

¹¹⁶ Pullan, part III, ch. I, especially 504; Gios, chapter XII; Silvano, 2005, 22 ff.

¹¹⁷ ASP, Vicarie, VII, 28 July 1477. On damage and guarding: Orlando, 2000, 81-85.

Documents published by Gloria demonstrate the contentiousness: a ducal letter of April 1441 dealt with complaints from Teolo about false claims and self-inflicted or self-procured damage by citizens, and similar problems concerning the contents of their houses in the villages, kept for their occasional use. Another letter of March 1461 was issued at the city council's request to force the podestà of Cittadella to allow *damna data* procedure by the city's officials¹¹⁸. Further documentation of the following years and decades enriches this account. In May 1464 the council told Padua's representatives in Venice to block an appeal, improperly presented to the Avogadori di Comun, whereby some villagers of Tribano were challenging their conviction by a Paduan court for deliberate fire damage to the house and property of Francesco Brazolo¹¹⁹. As had happened with Cittadella in 1461, moreover, there was further action by Padovano inhabitants subject to the contado's minor Venetian podestà to try and bring all procedures of declaration and compensation before those podestà, or to block the carrying out of orders given by authorities in Padua. The city council reacted by calling for Venetian intervention, which might be verbally conciliatory towards contado claims, but seems always to have backed Paduan statute law¹²⁰.

The council was also aware, however, that citizens' claims might be imprecise and in June 1472 it reacted to complaints by villagers in calling for more rigorous conduct by the citizen vicars of minor Padovano jurisdictions, before whom citizens could claim damages instead of using the city-based judge (and from whom they could expect a much more sympathetic reaction than from the Venetian nobles set over the Padovano's *podesterie*): the vicars were to subject claimants to a more stringent oath, and to evaluate claims more carefully¹²¹.

Claims for damages could also involve more complex issues, such as the assertion of rights over land or land-based revenues. This was the tactic used by Gerolamo Capodivacca – presumably supported by the council as part of its action against Venetian courts of justice, as well as in defence of Paduans' patrimonial interests – in a dispute concerning Galta di sotto (near Vigonovo, east of Padua). He claimed damages against named parties for their failure to leave him the quota of hay due for tithes with which he had been rightfully invested, and was given council backing in January 1505 against Venice's Giudici del Procurator. Presumably asserting their competence as a result of having assigned rights there in execution of a Venetian's will, they had written

¹¹⁸ Gloria, 1855, 2:260-62, 270.

¹¹⁹ Atti, IV, fols. 119v-20r, 29 May 1464.

¹²⁰ Protests by the council variously concerning Castelbaldo, Cittadella, Montagnana and Piove di Sacco: Atti, V, fols. 262v-63r, 18 March 1475; *ibid.*, fol. 102, 29 December 1471; *ibid.*, fols. 111r-13r, 11 January 1472; Atti, VI, fols. 57v-58r, 59r-61v, 6 and 16 August 1476; *ibid.*, fols. 65r, 67r-68r, 22 October and 3 November 1476; *ibid.*, fol. 156r, 9 March 1479; Atti, VIII, fol. 3v, 2 January 1492. Venetian answers: Ducali, Verde, fol. 97v, 9 February 1470; *ibid.*, fols. 22v-23r, 31 August 1476.

¹²¹ Atti, V, fols. 122v-23r, 16 June 1472.

to Padua to block Capodivacca's claim for compensation via *damna data*, demanding that he initiate any action before them¹²².

Tithes

Tithes indeed figure among the issues raised in these decades, almost always before Venetian authority and primarily with a view to preventing their extension to produce from land previously not subject to this obligation. Though ecclesiastical authority might be involved in investing with rights or supporting claims, in many cases those collecting or claiming tithes were laymen, as a result of the church's massive loss of control over these revenues, which were often of considerable material value, whatever the partly feudal connotations still accompanying them. From long before Venetian conquest Paduan law had projected secular authorities' and courts' competence over tithes, protecting their lay holders against interference by the bishop, and many tithes had passed into the hands of the Carraresi and their supporters (and then from the former to the mainly Venetian purchasers of the Carrara patrimony). In the fifteenth century Padua's bishops' partly more aggressive stance in defence of church wealth, reversing their previous weakness, made room for conflict, which was rendered more complex by the presence of secular authority in Venice over and above the Paduan civic dimension. The resulting Venetian pronouncements however tended to be more once-off than concerted, since the issues of jurisdiction and sovereignty underlying tithes were not tackled systematically till the late sixteenth century¹²³.

The fifteenth-century pronouncements published by Gloria – ducal letters of 1433, 1436, 1444, 1457, 1465 – nonetheless conform to a basic pattern, partly based on Padua's statutes: twenty years of unchallenged possession of title rights as the basis of prescription, which the bishop was obliged to recognize by conceding investiture; the continuing obligation to pay tithes when land changed ownership, but the absence of any obligation to pay on land for which precedent had established this exclusion, even if it were land previously not cultivated; the competence of secular courts for lay defendants against claims by churchmen¹²⁴. Other documentation confirms these basic tenets: thus, for example, ducal letters of 1499 and 1502 defending Paduan owners of 90-100 *campi* bought from the Signoria between 1430 and 1440 at Loreggia and Guizza, in the Camposampiero area, from tithes claimed by virtue of episcopal investiture on property now cultivated but formerly woodland and grazing, with no history of payment¹²⁵.

¹²² Atti, IX, fol. 158r, 16 January 1505.

¹²³ Kohl, 22-24; Ferrarese, 41-47, 75, 92-93.

¹²⁴ Ferrarese, 66-71, 93 ff.; Gloria, 1855, 2:257-58, 262-63, 265-66, 267-68, 270-71.

¹²⁵ Ducali, F, fols. 52r, 102r: 4 May 1499, 28 January 1502.

e. *The weight and distribution of taxation, privileges and exemptions*

The general picture

In comparison with the issues discussed in the previous sections, there is much more of both archival material and existing historiography on taxation and public finance in general, and this partly extends to the weight and distribution of tax on land, agricultural produce and the rural labour force, including the incidence of privileges and exemptions. Consequently the analysis conducted here is both summary and selective¹²⁶.

The first point to establish concerns the overall dependence of taxation on the agrarian economy and the transformation, movement and sale of agricultural produce: hardly surprising, given economic structures and social organization in which the rural, agrarian dimension predominated, despite the relatively high percentage of urban population and city-based economic activity. Analysis of the revenue handled by all Venice's mainland exchequers in the 1470s corroborates such dependence.

As to Padua in particular, this was certainly true of the *dadie* (direct tax), distributed via the *estimi*. These were separate for each of the three main categories of taxpayers: citydwellers, clergy, *distrettuali* – the *fuoghi* assigned to each village by the main contado *estimo* acted as a coefficient determining its share of taxes, which it then subdivided among its inhabitants via its own, internal *estimo*. All the *estimi* were based very largely on real estate, though both urban and rural *estimi* also assessed other assets, including the working potential of adult men – a factor tending to inflate the contado's apparent wealth. But dependence on the agrarian economy characterized the great majority of the *dazi* as well. The officially estimated revenues for Padua's exchequer in 1475 amount to D. 66,678. In relation to this total, the *dadie* accounted for 30.87%. Indirect taxation on the rural areas contributed substantially, via the 9.68% of the *dazio dei carri e boccatico*, mostly a sort of poll tax levied only on the contado, and the 17.20% of the *dazi* distributed between the contado's *podesterie* and vicariates (almost exactly half the total from Piove di Sacco, presumably because of duties on the movement of produce towards Venice). The principal urban *dazi* on consumption and processing of locally produced food – meat, wine, milling, fish – covered 25.16%, whereas the main *dazi* less obviously connected with the land and its produce – those on *mercanzie* and goods transiting through the city gates – contributed 5.25% and 4.96% respectively¹²⁷.

¹²⁶ On public finance and the fisc in the Venetian state, Terraferma included: Pezzolo, 2006, especially 67 ff., and Pezzolo, 2003, especially 11-70. On the Padovano in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: Knapton, 1981b (main source of what follows); Favaretto; Vigato, 1989; Orlando 2001.

¹²⁷ For these 1470s data, Varanini, 1992, 93, 115-16.

Though we possess only occasional or fragmentary numerical data for it, there was an ample further dimension of public finance extraneous to the money handled by the Venetian exchequer. Part was money anyway due to the state, but filed in the accounts of magistracies in the capital: about D. 13,000 a year of salt *dazio*, mostly paid by the rural majority of the province's population, and about D. 3,500 a year of *decime* (taxes due to the state) paid by the holders of Padovano ecclesiastical benefices – mostly based, like the wealth assessed in the *estimi*, on land and land-linked assets. The *estimi*, moreover, were the main basis for the assignment of taxes and duties handled by institutions local to the Padovano: to a very limited extent the city, which had a very meagre budget of its own and only occasionally imposed minor *dadie* over and above what was needed to cover those due to the exchequer; but to a far larger extent the rural communities, responsible for a variety of monetary payments (“real”), dues in kind (“mixed”) and labour obligations (“personal”). Using revenues based on both taxes and supplementary resources, which often included income from assets such as woodland that they owned or controlled, they covered much small-scale self-government, a lot of it in connection with rules made by the city; they supported military defence, in peacetime via the lodging and victualling of permanent army units present in the Padovano, and at least sporadic work on fortifications – a support role which greatly increased in wartime, when it might also include militia service. And they executed corvées connected with public works – waterways, bridges, roads, etc. – within and occasionally beyond the Padovano, both routine and occasional¹²⁸.

It is worth adding that the city council mostly took corvées for granted, as something governed by detailed rules and procedures (the city statutes, gradually updated and filled around by later decisions) and handled by executive authority, especially the city's Venetian captain. But it did show explicit awareness of their impact in the early phases of the deviation of the main course of the river Brenta in the eastern Padovano, begun in 1488 by Venetian order so as to protect the lagoon, amidst the council's doubts and remonstrances. In November 1488 it protested that one third of the excavation for so major a project was an excessive burden for the Padovano, demanding that Venice increase the involvement of other Terraferma subjects, including Friulans, since the previous summer there had been a Padovano contribution to work in the Valcellina. The following March, grumbling at the immense scale of the work and the vast damage it would bring to cultivated land, it requested the contribution of other mainland territories so far excluded, and in July requested that work programmed to start on 1 August be delayed a fortnight to allow the peasants to cope with the harvest¹²⁹.

¹²⁸ On all these supplementary burdens: Favaretto, 72-94.

¹²⁹ Atti, VII, fols. 187v-88r, 12 November 1488; *ibid.*, VII, fol. 218 2 March 1489, for the involvement of Bassano, Cittadella (part of the Padovano, but then held as a fief by the *condottiere* family of the Sanseverino), and the Polesine; *ibid.*, VII, fols. 230v-31v, 13 July 1489.

We can express an order of magnitude for all these extra burdens on village communities with the help of rare precise data available for the Veronese rural commune of Tregnago. In the peacetime year of 1506, with a general spending pattern similar to that of Padovano villages, an admittedly lighter load of *dadie* due to the Verona exchequer accounted for only about a tenth of Tregnago's total spending¹³⁰.

Limitations to the archival data available, as well as to the dimension of this essay, preclude any attempt to develop the analysis towards – for example – an estimate of tax pressure. But what does need establishing, at least briefly, are the aims and perceptions of those seeking to shape fiscal policy in the later fifteenth century – a plurality of interested parties, with viewpoints that were at best only partly reconcilable¹³¹.

As to the Venetian government, through to 1494 there were more years of peace in Italy than in the decades preceding 1454, with the War of Ferrara (1482-84) as a costly exception, but it was anyway committed to maintaining a permanent Terraferma army, and also fought a long war against the Turks (1463-79), partly funded – especially during the 1470s – by mainland revenue too. Between 1494 and 1509, thanks to both the Italian Wars and another Turkish war (1498-1503), the stresses and strains greatly increased, both in general cash needs and in Venetian pressure on the mainland exchequers and fisc. With overall spending anyway tending to exceed income, Venice expected that mainland revenues cover ordinary costs of governing and defending the Terraferma. It insisted that they be collected as fully and punctually as possible, seeking to avoid changes to the taxes themselves in recognition of differences between the economy of the capital and the Terraferma but also of the diverse political relationship. Transforming direct tax due to the state from occasional to permanent in the first half of the century had been difficult, especially because – unlike *dazi*, farmed by the exchequers to *dazieri* – the *estimi* for its assignment and responsibility for collection were delegated to Venice's local political partners, predominantly the civic élites. Direct levies remained much the most politically sensitive feature of taxation, given their impact on the land and real estate of which civic élites were the main possessors, but fixed yearly totals had anyway emerged for each province, subdivided among its main categories of taxpayers (citydwellers, *distrettuali*, churchmen).

Peculiar to the Padua exchequer were the implications of its relative wealth and greater proximity to Venice, which meant important assignments on its funding (often including the salary of the general commanding the Venetian army), frequent inspection and interference from the capital, and limited patience there with delayed or incomplete handover of taxes due. This peculiarity was compounded by the fact that direct tax had a higher overall

¹³⁰ Knapton, 1981b, 60; Knapton, 1986, 311-23 (the datum for Tregnago at 322). See too data for the Vicentine village of Castelgomberto in the mid fifteenth century: Soldà-Knapton.

¹³¹ What follows is based on Favaretto; Vigato, 1989; Knapton, 1981b.

profile in Padua than elsewhere: loyalty to Venice after the Visconti invasion of the Terraferma in 1437 and renegotiation of political relationships meant that in Brescia and Bergamo the *dadie* (known there as *colta ducale*) had disappeared with that war, while in Verona they had been cut from D. 16,000 to D. 6,000 p.a.¹³². But in Padua, where they represented nearly a third of exchequer revenue, Venetian impatience for *dadie* receipts generated growing uncertainty and tension around delegation to the city of responsibility for their collection, and threatened to spill over into exertion of direct Venetian influence on their share-out between urban, contado and ecclesiastical tax-payers.

The lines of tension threading through the policy aims of the Paduan civic élite over direct tax were multiple, though throughout there were common, interdependent aims. The first, albeit never stated in such crude terms, was to pay as little tax on land and real estate as possible, partly by using its position of relative political strength to unload the burden on taxpayers different from citydwellers: *distrettuali*, churchmen, and also Venetian owners of Padovano assets, at least some of whom figured in both urban and rural *estimi* rather than constituting a separate category of taxpayers. Such reluctance also meant hostility to additional direct taxation, demanded by Venice in the Turkish wars. In 1473-74 the council agreed to an extraordinary subsidy of D. 12,000 a year, of which 8,500 due from the city, then strongly – but unsuccessfully – opposed its extension to 1475-76; in 1499 it agreed to a subsidy of D. 10,000, probably paid by the city alone, and in 1501 it reacted with bitter but vain hostility to what was specifically a tax on landed property, the *campatico*, which as a result of its non-collaboration was assessed and exacted by Venetian officials.

The second aim was to exercise (and defend) as much power as possible over the frequency, rules, conduct and outcome of the *estimi*, especially the urban *estimi* and the contado's *fuoghi*. The third was to protect the council-named exactor's power over collection of *dadie* due to the Venetian exchequer by both citydwellers and *distrettuali*, especially against Venetian interference; such protection tended to extend to the main exactor of the *dazio dei carri e boccatice*, levied on the contado – though not chosen by the council, he was a citizen.

The policy aims of other political players involved are in many ways the mirror opposite of those just stated. The main threat to the civic élite's landed wealth, and to Paduan citizens' landholding in general, was perceived by the civic élite – correctly, we can say with hindsight – as that posed by Venetians' acquisitions of property, though their aggregate value cannot be usefully quantified. All through the fifteenth century, but intensifying in later decades, there was attrition between the Paduan élite and Venetian authority over Venetians' taxable assets in the Padovano. Such property might be variously exempt from Paduan *dadie*, subject to forced loans and then (after 1463) to *decime* in Venice, or subject to Paduan *dadie*, but in practice its owners often eluded taxation by omitting to declare property or under-declaring its worth,

¹³² Varanini, 1992, 84-85.

or via straight failure to pay the taxes assigned. Authority in the capital discounted part of the city's *dadie* share for taxable wealth lost because of Venetian purchases through to 1446, and passed measures to combat evasion and elusion by Venetians, but with poor results; these can plausibly be partly attributed to the tacit action of a sort of lobby, so widespread was Padovano landowning among Venetian nobles (and also non-nobles). But the sources also suggest that government in Venice could perceive the Paduan council's often outspoken insistence on these matters as an irritating attempt to divert attention from its own failings. The Paduan civic élite was indeed prone to the same vices it attributed to Venetians owning Padovano land: taxable assets un-declared or under-declared, reluctance or failure to pay, and so on.

Representatives of the Padovano's rural jurisdictions slowly tackled the obstacles posed by long-term urban administrative hegemony and their own lack of a tradition of common action and aims, especially in acquiring responsibility for the sharing of the *dazio dei carri e boccatico*, which they managed to block at a fixed annual total in 1443. Their joint action was an early manifestation of the *corpo territoriale*, formally constituted in about 1520, and it also addressed direct tax sharing, especially the making of the *estimi* and their application to determining the overall shares of exchequer *dadie*. Despite the fall in aggregate *distrettuali* taxable assets registered from mid century, the city council's greater political strength allowed it to block reassignment of shares, so that in the later fifteenth century the tax rate applied to the city's *estimo* was about half that used for the contado's. This imbalance, compounded by the considerable burden of local finance at the village level, significantly increased contado residents' vulnerability in the face of citizens' drive to acquire further land, which was certainly a widespread phenomenon in these decades. In 1488-1489 and 1501-1502 the *distrettuali* got paper undertakings from the city – then approved by Venice – on the issue of taxable assets' transfer between urban and rural *estimi*, when changes of ownership crossed the boundaries between categories of taxpayers, but such mechanisms only became effective much later in the sixteenth century.

As to ecclesiastical landowners (and taxpayers), the council might adopt an attitude of benevolent protection towards some property fiscally classified as ecclesiastical. In August 1475 it voted its approval of a swap of ownership of about five *campi* by the city's Lazaretto – but this rare instance concerns one of Padua's main pious institutions, each of whose wellbeing was supported by council-named advisors assigned to it. (Much more frequent in the documentation are authorizations by the Venetian Senate for the alienation, sale or gift of landed rights by any ecclesiastical body in Venetian territory, by the terms of a 1412 law – including, in February 1489, approval for a *livello* by Padua's Lazaretto of forty-two *campi* outside Porta Codalunga)¹³³.

¹³³ Atti, V, fols. 267v-68r, 28 Aug 1475; ASVe, Senato, Terra, 10, 136r, 20 February 1489; Del Torre, 2010, 39-40: the Senate law of 27 October 1412.

The council obviously supported civic religion in its various manifestations, and individual members made gifts or bequests of property to ecclesiastical beneficiaries, but it certainly wanted church property to pay as high a share of tax as possible. In discussing the issue of *dominium utile* above, we saw the council's fear of action undertaken especially by the big Benedictine monasteries to recover full control over property subject to *livello* rights. Church property in the Padovano in general was indeed on the increase, despite the diverse situations of single ecclesiastical owners. Research demonstrates that its fourteenth-century decline had been less disastrous than once thought: mortmain laws had been evaded, with land given especially to monasteries in the area of influence or control of the Carraresi and their supporters. After 1406, that coterie's indirect takeover of ecclesiastical landed incomes in the Padovano was in a sense replicated by Venetians, especially nobles, who progressively occupied a very considerable proportion of high- and middle-income benefices. Venetian mortmain legislation only became tough at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when sharper concepts of sovereignty allied with awareness of the cumulative increase in church property – whereas a 1472 Senate ruling that any new real estate acquisition by ecclesiastical bodies pay secular taxes was representative of the pragmatic attitude prevalent in the later fifteenth century.

In the fourteenth century Venice had in fact blocked Papal demands for *decimae* on benefices in Venetian lands, whose holders paid forced loans to the state on their landed wealth, then and later. Terraferma expansion vastly increased the ecclesiastical wealth that individual Venetian clerics could hold, and the state in turn tax. Despite difficulties in their initial acceptance by the papacy and some lasting anomalies, the *decime* (state direct tax) introduced in 1463 were extended to all holders of benefices in the state, whether Venetian or not. In the Padovano Venetian holders of local benefices did not contribute to the direct tax – *dadie* – due to the Venetian exchequer, though non-Venetians did, resulting in a heavier overall burden on the latter. Partly for this reason, churchmen emerge from the council deliberations as a more heterogeneous, less cohesive category of taxpayers, much more the target of others' policy-making over tax on their landed assets than an agency visibly active as a political player – though in 1508 their dispute with the city about their respective shares of the *dadie* nearly resulted in a Senate committee throwing open the question of sharing between all the groups of taxpayers¹³⁴.

After the Cambrai crisis, there was indeed considerable change: new *estimi* begun in 1517 for both city and contado, with the major involvement of

¹³⁴ On the Carrara period: Kohl 21-27. On the Quattrocento: as well as Varanini, 1996a, see De Sandre Gasparini on Santa Giustina, and Silvano, 2012, on Praglia; Stella, 1958, esp. 62-64, on Benedictine houses and more in general; Steer, especially 236-55 (listing nearly 8,700 *campi* acquired by church ownership in the years 1424-1509); Del Torre, 2010, 27 and 153-74 on church property and state finance. On mortmain legislation: Sperling, 196 and bibliography cited. On 1508: Knapton, 1981b, 55.

Venetian authority and a more concerted though still incomplete reckoning of Venetians' property; the formal institutional emergence of the Padovano's *corpo territoriale*. But in the period through to 1509 none of this could have been imagined¹³⁵.

From the point of view of the overall relationship between land and taxation, especially direct taxation, the preceding paragraphs have indicated how economic issues intersected with the tensions and balances of the exercise of power. A more close-up vision can be obtained by examining the way in which the problems of collecting direct tax – and to some extent assigning shares for payment – interacted with difficulties apparent in the ordinary course of agricultural activity. The themes which best lend themselves are those of peasant poverty, the impact of weather or other “external” damage, and their relationship with direct taxation, including the function of temporary exemptions or forms of tax relief. These were largely different from the tangle of permanent privileges typical of early modern tax systems, which in the Padovano mainly concerned property over which the state had former or current rights, including assets once belonging to the Carraresi, the marquis Bertoldo d'Este, and rebels – though the full list is much longer¹³⁶.

The discussion of course relies on sources reflecting Paduan and Venetian authorities' respective perception or representation of such matters, where divergence between versions is likely, and a general mix of hyperbole, subjectivity and bias may almost be presumed upon. But a word of caution is justified: the data for collection of *dadie* do demonstrate a very significant degree of shortfall and/or arrears, and collection mechanisms were burdened with a major overload of exaction costs even without the episodes of malversation which Venetian investigation at least occasionally identified as the responsibility of individual tax collectors or officials¹³⁷.

Peasant poverty, the fisc and agriculture

Peasant poverty and its effects on agriculture are an established topos of early modern European agricultural history, and – quite apart from disquisitions in the eighteenth-century season of reforms, more theoretical than practical and if anything more concerned with peasant ignorance and education – entered Paduan agrarian historiography with Andrea Gloria's strictures in the mid nineteenth century¹³⁸.

Peasant indebtedness to the fisc is a recurrent theme in the Paduan council's deliberations, albeit without any admission or sign of awareness that the problem might derive at least in part from the imbalance in overall sharing

¹³⁵ Favaretto, 149-207.

¹³⁶ Vigato, 1989, 51-55

¹³⁷ See Varanini, 1992, 125-61; Pino-Branca, 1933; Knapton, 1981b, 36, and 53, on malversation.

¹³⁸ Simonetto, especially 175-188; on the fifteenth century, Gloria, 1855, 1:CCLVIII-IX.

of the tax burden between citydwellers and *distrettuali*. A perusal of the council's pronouncements and requests also shows up other traits of inconsistency in its attitude. In March 1475 the city's representatives in Venice were commissioned to obtain a ruling against peasants' arrest – particularly their sons (“*fili* familias”) – for one another's debts, especially their communities', since this enforced collective responsibility threatened to ruin the Padovano. But only the previous May Padua's representatives had been charged to obtain Venetian approval for the levying of *dadie* owed by rural communities not only from their *degani*, often poor, but from any other inhabitants – as was already allowed, the commission pointed out, for the *dazio dei carri e boccatice*. And in March 1477 the council criticized the exaction mechanisms of that very same *dazio*, asserting that debtors arrested for it were dying in gaol, asking Venice to remit old debts or at least grant extended terms of payment so as to prevent peasant emigration¹³⁹.

The council did indeed consider tax pressure, and especially the weight of unpaid arrears, as a perennial link in the chain of difficulties affecting agriculture. That March 1477 deliberation was one of three voted in the same meeting, targeting the issue of peasant poverty, in terms partly critical of action by Venetian authority. Another, already discussed above, attacked usurious lending to peasants of seed-corn and so on. And the third complained at the effect of temporary tax exemptions granted after storm or other damage, which resulted in redistribution of overall burdens that increased others' due (an inevitable consequence of the fixed totals to be met in the yields of direct dues like the *dadie* due to the Venetian exchequer, and also the *dazio dei carri e boccatice*). It therefore requested that supplicants affected by such damage be given longer terms of payment instead. In June it received conciliatory answers from Venice: a lighter hand was to be used in exaction of the *dazio*, with fewer collateral costs, and there would be no more grants of temporary tax exemptions; there was also recognition that the pressure of public and private debt hindered peasants coming to Padua to sell produce, thus simultaneously damaging the city's supply system, its *dazi* receipts and their creditors, and they were given a safe-conduct for their debts one day a month (increased to two between August and October). In August and September, moreover, the city governors ordered exchequer staff to credit the city's *dadie* exactors with sums due from various contado villages then incapable of paying (“*impotenti a pagar al presente*”) – L. 14,750 from 1474 onwards; L. 5,064 for the period 1462-73 – whose terms of payment the governors would decide¹⁴⁰.

This switch of competence does not appear to have guaranteed more lenient treatment for the villages, to judge by the experience of Boccon. To cover its debts of L. 750 for the *dazio dei carri e boccatice* and *dadie*, and

¹³⁹ Atti, V, fol. 257, 8 March 1475; Atti, V, fol. 221, 25 May 1474; Atti VI, fol. 11v, 20 March 1477.

¹⁴⁰ Atti, VI, fol. 11r, 20 March 1477; Ducali, C, fols. 24v-25v, 26v-27r, 28: 8 June, 12 August and 10 September 1477.

accompanying fines, in August 1479 the Paduan exchequer confiscated and sold about sixty *campi* of grazing and wetland (which ended up in the hands of a Venetian noble), so depriving the village of valuable resources. It managed to get them back in 1496 through the appeal courts in Venice, perhaps helped by recent developments in the norms about *comugne*, but such tenacity was probably not typical, especially considering the costs (L. 166 just for the appeal)¹⁴¹.

The council's attitude on temporary tax exemptions seems to reflect more than the mere logic of numbers invoked to dissuade Venice from making grants which increased the burden on others. Between the lines there appears some degree of hostility to grants made by Venice as such, concerning the matter of direct taxation in which the city exercised significant delegated powers, especially since it was often *contado* communities which bypassed the city's authority in seeking and obtaining exemptions. Counterproof of this may be found in council deliberations in later decades, as a brief parenthesis can demonstrate. After itself making sporadic grants of temporary exemption in preceding decades, in September 1493 it deliberated to ban them in future, bluntly observing that exemptions given to *cives* after damage from fire, hail, flood and the like upset the poor, who had to pay in their stead, and that all should accept the hand of God with equanimity ("equo animo"). But this concession to the urban *popolo* – perhaps a result of consciousness heightened by the recent launch of the city's Monte di Pietà – did not prove watertight, and we find occasional later instances of grants made despite the ban: for example, the following January Giovanni de Lazara was given a five-year *dadie* exemption after suffering damage by flooding to crops sown and by fire in a storage building¹⁴². The underlying idea seems to be that *cives* should be able to live off their landed income as befitted their status, and it is worth noting that this premise supported a similar, sporadic incidence of grace and favour grants of the offices to which the council elected, here again despite rules to the contrary formulated by the council itself. In June 1503, for example, after suffering storm damage in his property at Rovolon, Giacomo Papafava was assigned the vicariate of Oriago for one year¹⁴³.

Returning to the general issue of rural tax debt, it remained serious for both the *dadie* and the *dazio dei carri e boccatico* through the 1480s and later – hardly surprisingly given the impact of plagues in 1478 and 1485 and of the nearby War of Ferrara (1482–84). However, attention both assiduous and inconsistent to it by the council may also be explained by the fact that its implications were not only economic – the effects on agriculture and citizen landowners' revenues of peasant poverty and even migration – but also

¹⁴¹ Ducali, 121: 27 May 1497, with a Quarantia verdict of 4 November 1496.

¹⁴² Atti, VIII, fols. 66v, 79: 7 September 1493, 8 January 1494.

¹⁴³ Atti, IX, fol. 122r, 19 June 1503.

¹⁴⁴ Atti, VII, fols. 16, 232v–33r: 5 April 1486, 30 July 1489.

inseparable from the general political tension over tax between the civic élite and Venice, which tended to intensify during the later fifteenth century. For example, instructions given to the city's representatives in Venice in April 1486 seem to be targeting indirectly the greater vigour given to forced levying of tax debts by the extraordinary presence in Padua of one of the capital's *Provveditori sopra Camere*, together with the use of levying officials controlled by the city's Venetian authorities rather than by the urban commune. The request for leniency was accompanied by criticism of a phenomenon that was common to all distraint and long had been, the intolerable expenses for officials sent to take pledges ("intollerabilibus expensis officialium euntium ad pignorandum"). And the same specific criticism accompanied a deliberation of July 1489, when the council requested leniency especially for exaction procedures connected with the work begun in 1488 to deviate the course of the river Brenta east of Padua: another Venetian choice many of the civic élite were less than happy with¹⁴⁴.

Peasant poverty and the functioning or malfunctioning of the fisc also had to do with differences in status and obligations among those living in the contado and working the land, and the manipulation or distortion of rules over liability for tax¹⁴⁵. A first, obvious situation of this kind was created by *cives rustici*, present in the Padovano as elsewhere, permanently resident in the villages and working the land but claiming the privileged status of citizenship to avoid the extra "gravedines" burdening *distrettuali*; in January 1501 the council went back to a Senate law of 1448 in demanding that they take up residence in Padua, or else lose their status as citizens. A second, more complex situation had to do with villagers' length of residence in their communities. The problem was not posed by routine new arrivals from outside the Padovano, who could obtain a ten-year exemption from many but not all taxes¹⁴⁶, but arose when incoming peasants, aware of collective responsibility for debts, tried to dodge answering for their new villages' old debts. In 1494 the *deputati* were involved as judges in a dispute at Legnaro, in the jurisdiction of Piove di Sacco, where adversaries of some newcomers claimed that thanks to this advantage they had managed almost to monopolize tenancies over land there, forcing other families to migrate¹⁴⁷.

A council deliberation of March 1491 had formulated a similar problem in general terms: when a village's land was worked by peasants residing elsewhere, only contributing partly to its overall burden of taxes and dues, it could endanger the village's ability to shoulder that burden, appoint *degani* and *saltari*, provide labour – in other words, to operate as an administrative

¹⁴⁵ On the variety of status and obligations, Favaretto, 52 ff.

¹⁴⁶ See e.g. Atti, IV, fol. 305, 23 January 1469: a grant by the *deputati* to a foreigner now resident in Galzignano, of exemption from all real & personal obligations, though not from specified *dazi* (milling, *carri e boccatico*, salt), nor for any real estate bought during the period of exemption. Other grants in ASP, Deputati, 3-5.

¹⁴⁷ Atti, VIII, fols. 87r-88r: 7 March 1494.

unit and cover the needs of citizen landowners. The problem particularly concerned peasants living in the villages immediately surrounding the city, the area defined as inside the *termini* or *campanea*, where the much more favourable urban fiscal regime applied; the council formulated rules to oblige them to serve as *degano* and *saltaro* if they took tenancies of five or more *campi* in ordinary villages on land where in the last twenty-five years there had been buildings for resident tenants (“casamenti e coverti da lavoratori”), and anyway to make them pay the full range of taxes¹⁴⁸. Ten years later the council returned to the problem, which had apparently worsened in the meantime. In many villages land was being worked by technical non-residents for whom citizen landowners built dwellings beyond village boundaries, while their contribution to taxes and dues, anyway inadequate, was the object of negotiation and agreement with village administrators in terms which were tantamount to an exemption; the council voted to ask the Signoria to ban such practice – though a significant minority of councillors present disagreed (voting was 75-40)¹⁴⁹.

Rather similar in its effects was another practice documented by the sources, whereby landowners named or pretended to name as managers (*gastaldi*) of their farms peasants who received salary and expenses, which placed them in a privileged position regarding taxes and dues on villages’ ordinary inhabitants. It had already been the object of a ducal letter of 1457, concerning Venetians’ property in the Piove di Sacco area, and the council deliberated twice on the subject half a century later. In February 1497 it denounced deceit in these terms by both Venetian and Paduan landowners and their peasants, especially in the Piove di Sacco area, with the consequence of unloading a greater burden on other villagers: Venetian authority should establish their full liability to contribute. In January 1502 the target was Venetian landowners in the nearby Mirano area who made their tenants and workers *gastaldi* or *boari* and got round a ruling by Padua’s podestà by appealing to the Auditori Novi: the norms resulting from 1497 should apply to the whole Padovano, and *gastaldi* be proven such, also swearing an oath about their status¹⁵⁰.

Solutions for these matters of discrepancy between peasants’ place of residence, status in relation to the working of land, and liability for tax and dues then became part of the agreement negotiated between the city and *distrettuali* in their 1502 agreement over the *estimo*¹⁵¹.

¹⁴⁸ These and other provisions, also contemplating e.g. non-Padovano peasants, in Atti, VII, fols. 311v-13r, 12 March 1491; Favaretto, 67. On the twentyfive villages of the *termini/campanea*, Vigato, 1989, 69n57.

¹⁴⁹ Atti, VIII, fol. 303, 8 January 1501.

¹⁵⁰ Pinton, 159 (14 June 1457); Atti, VIII, fols. 190v, 310v: 28 February 1497, 15 January 1501. On the exemption of *boari*, Favaretto, 51.

¹⁵¹ Favaretto, 66-67: the agreement also dealt with the issue of temporary tax exemptions.

Taxation, flooding and bad weather

The perennially precarious outcome of the agrarian year was a commonplace in early modern agriculture, its effects on peasant families exacerbated by the scant resources that they were able to set aside. Especially in flat areas like the Padovano poor control over watercourses was an important risk factor, and from the 1480s agriculture there was more exposed than in previous decades to the danger of flood damage, firstly as a result of interference with watercourses during the War of Ferrara (1482-84), when Estense action to impede Venetian invasion had included sabotaging embankments on the Padovano's southern boundary. Numerous resulting requests for temporary tax exemption were met by Venetian grants in favour of many *distrettuali* and some citydwellers, and in January 1484 the city council protested at the losses of taxable wealth, which would mean larger shares for other taxpayers, demanding that Venice either annul the portion of tax thus due, revoke such exemptions or anyway solve the problem – so returning to the logic behind its 1477 request for no more temporary tax exemptions, as seen above. Venice's answer, though partly deferred till after the captain of Padua had inspected the area and reported, met the city's request more than halfway by limiting the valency of the exemptions given – some for other causes, including hail damage – to obligations of a personal nature, so excluding taxes based on real property. The council quickly returned to the subject in a March 1484 deliberation whose main intent was to resist Venetian pressure for higher monthly payments of *dadie* by its tax collector to the Venetian exchequer. But its polemical tone is not reason enough to invalidate wholly the picture it painted: apart from the complications caused by tax exemptions, there had been flood and hail damage, major defence expenses met by *distrettuali*, and – in what was also a year of serious grain supply difficulties – we read that peasants were living off the roots of plants (“*radicibus erbarum*”)¹⁵².

The damage done to the southern Padovano embankments during the war also left a legacy of danger. Documentation produced in 1489 by the captain of Padua and podestà of Este indicated the absence of adequate repair to banks in the Este area after their cutting in 1482, an absence partly attributable to failure to collect the extra, specific taxes from those due to pay them, which had left local land more vulnerable to flooding, as had happened especially in 1486 and 1488¹⁵³.

A new element of risk came from the major work undertaken on watercourses in the period from 1488, primarily but not only to deviate the river Brenta; from that date the council's attention to the Padovano's

¹⁵² Atti, VI, fol. 396r: 13 January 1484; Ducali, Verde, fols. 47v-48r: 29 February 1484; Atti, VI, fols. 398v-99r, 21 March 1484

¹⁵³ ASP, Territorio, 405, fol. 49 ff: 21 January and 19 March 1489.

waterways was significantly more frequent, especially as the failings of the new Brenta bed became apparent. The permanent occupation of land for the new course of the river justified a demand by the council, made in October 1491 and repeated in March 1495 (but not met by Venice), that Venetian tax demands cease for property lost by landowners in this fashion and that the city's overall share of tax liability be correspondingly reduced¹⁵⁴. In January 1495 the council requested remedial action after the new bed had revealed insufficient capacity to absorb waters from drainage ditches, resulting in flooding in the *podesteria* of Piove di Sacco; it deliberated in very similar terms four years later, pointing out that flooding had prevented autumn sowing. In February 1502 it alerted Venice to the need for work on the watercourses there and elsewhere, again emphasizing the flood risks for the Piove area. Yet another deliberation in October 1503 told of floods there the previous year as well as more recently, demanding higher and broader banks for the river's new bed, and delegating the city's representatives to appear before the Collegio – which they did together with a delegation from the Piove area, as the diarist Sanudo reported¹⁵⁵. On the same occasion they also complained, together with representatives of Este, Monselice and Montagnana, at damage to the southern Padovano by work done on the Rotta Sabadina: deviation of water from the main channel of the Adige on the Padovano side so as to lessen flood risks to the south of the river, in the Polesine di Rovigo (here one of the problems was that Paduan owners on the north bank had recently reclaimed land which needed adequate drainage). In December 1504 Sanudo again reported flooding in the Piove area, adding the pithy comment “per la Brenta nuova el piova’ si aniega” (the Piove area is drowning because of the new Brenta). A month later Padua's representatives in Venice were told to emphasize that the area risked depopulation and poverty, in support of requests that Venice plan remedial action, also indicating how the costs were to be shared. It returned to the subject in November 1506, offering a complex technical analysis and this time adding the jurisdictions of Conselve and Monselice to that of Piove in describing the area damaged¹⁵⁶.

The nexus between weather damage to agriculture and taxation takes on a significant profile in the council's agenda in these same years either side of 1500, and this seems to reflect its sensitivity to anything concerning *dadie* precisely when Venetian pressure was threatening the terms and the very continuation of the council's responsibility for their collection – but without necessarily invalidating its description of difficulties. A long commission given to a

¹⁵⁴ Atti, VII, fols. 337v-38r: 21 October 1491; Atti, VIII, fols. 116v-17r, 16 March 1495. On the Brenta deviation, Bortolami, 2003.

¹⁵⁵ Atti, VIII, fols. 110v, 282r: 17 January 1495, 4 November 1499; Atti, IX, fols. 56v, 125r: 4 February 1502, 12 October 1503; Sanudo, V, 207-08: 25 October 1503.

¹⁵⁶ Sanudo, VI, 110: 12 December 1504; Atti, IX, fols. 156, 211v: 14 January 1505, 20 November 1506. ASVe, Senato, Terra, 12, fols. 143v-45v: 28 May 1496 debate about the Rotta Sabbadina, mentioning the needs of “padoani per scolar dele loro possessione noviter facte”.

prestigious party of representatives sent to Venice in January 1492 dealt, amongst other things, with how to solve issues pending between landowners and tenants, more precisely over what monetary equivalent was to be used for the latter's payment of rents due in wine after the loss of vines and trees in 1491 (it was to be made clear in Venice that the creditors had not had anybody imprisoned). The same misfortune was to support a request for a discount ("restaurum") – presumably of *dadie* due to Venice – for both citydwellers and *distrettuali*. Two months later the council again referred to the death of vines – on account of which the people are drinking only water: "propter quod populus ex aqua vivit" – in a deliberation stressing both citizens and others' inability to pay debts in general, including *dadie*, and requesting benevolence ("humanitas") by Venice. And in June 1492 the dead vines made a third appearance in a deliberation protesting against Venetian-ordered seizure of property belonging to the current *dadie* collector. Similar logic, finally, lay behind a January 1498 request for clemency over *dadie* debts, which strung together very extensive hail damage in 1495, the bad harvest of 1496, and 1497's drought¹⁵⁷.

5. Conclusion

First of all, this essay has sought to demonstrate that in the discussion of economic relationships and economic policy in the fifteenth-century Terraferma state, issues connected directly or indirectly with land deserve greater attention by historians. Such issues certainly had a significant overall profile in the Paduan council's activity in the later fifteenth century, and this was equally true for Venetian authority. Despite confusion over competence, and the fact that in many cases those choices emerged empirically, with some incidence of inconsistency, there is solid evidence to substantiate the importance of the main themes discussed above: especially forests and commons, and land over which the Signoria claimed rights via confiscation; but also grazing and sheep, several important aspects of landowner-tenant-peasant relations, and various features of the incidence of taxation on land and its cultivation.

Secondly, in the overall framework of power sharing Venetian authority occupied considerable space – both on its own initiative and when called into play by others – so posing significant limits to the Paduan council's autonomy in policy- and decision-making. As a result, the council was as often involved in reacting to Venetian choices, and maybe seeking to modify them, as it was in making the first move. And very few of the matters concerning land it discussed, reached any sort of operative decision without at least final approval by Venetian authority. Certainly, there was convergence between the Paduan civic élite and Venetian government in fundamental tenets of policy regarding

¹⁵⁷ Atti, VIII, fols. 12v-16r, 19r, 33r, 246: 11 January, 9 March and 27 June 1492, 29 January 1498.

land: among them, the fact that the interests of cities and citizens counted over the country and countrymen, and those of landowners over tenants and labourers, with obvious consequences in such matters as debt-levying and *damna data* (whatever the rhetoric of consideration towards poorer subjects, used especially by Venetian authority). But there was a gradual accumulation of issues and decisions which simply went beyond the possible protection of Paduan interests offered by the city's jurisdiction and statutes and by the council's faculty of policy-making, most notably in the matter of woodland and commons. If the evidence presented suggests a partial, gradual trend towards greater overall public control of the economy, this was by state (Venetian) rather than by delegated (Paduan) authority. And it anticipates features of policy towards land and the landscape that Venetian historiography has so far mostly tended to associate with the sixteenth century and its very visible development of more cohesive policy by agencies in the capital – including new magistracies like the Beni inculti and the Beni comunali – towards such matters as forestry and firewood, commons, land reclamation and food production, the control and exploitation of watercourses¹⁵⁸.

Moreover, this tendency towards more action in mainland government by Venetian authority fits trends apparent in a wider range of policy sectors than those affecting the economy. In the half century or so before the Agnadello crisis – despite the lack of any sort of blueprint, and amidst quite a lot of muddling – Venetian authority indeed broadened the sphere and increased the intensity of its intervention in Terraferma matters, albeit with the effect of stimulating defence of their prerogatives by the mainland civic councils¹⁵⁹.

Thirdly, despite the scarcity of adequate research on other mainland provinces with which to compare Padua's experience, it also seems clear that for important single features analyzed here two other, overlapping hypotheses receive further confirmation. In economic terms, earlier and more intense policy intervention by Venetian authority in the eastern mainland areas nearer Venice is apparent: this was especially the case for woodland and for the Signoria's rights over confiscated land. In political terms, the limits evident in the exercise of power by the council may be considered further proof of the Paduan civic élite's earlier and greater relative weakness in comparison with those of other Terraferma cities, apart from Treviso.

Fourthly, there was significant overlap between Venetian state policy and needs specific to the capital, and also Venetians' private interests, with at least partial implications of conflict with the interests represented – in a broader or narrower sense – by Padua's civic institutions and élite. This was certainly true of policy over woods and woodland, and of most of the practical effects of the attribution of rights connected with land by Venetian authorities, especially those in the capital.

¹⁵⁸ Knapton, 2013, 101-02.

¹⁵⁹ The question is discussed in Varanini, 2010, 58-63.

Fifthly, important Venetian choices were wholly or largely determined by needs which were more contingent than strategic, and more political than economic in their conception, especially where the aim was to increase or protect state income, whether fiscal or from other sources: thus the concern with identifying and selling the Signoria's landed rights, and also many decisions about direct taxation affecting land. This does not detract, however, from the economic consequences of such choices, which in some cases took on a higher and clearer profile over time, acquiring a broader rationale, as was to happen with commons.

Lastly, let us return to the Paduan civic élite's perspective. Though this essay seeks to avoid any sort of teleology based on its behaviour during the 1509 crisis of the Terraferma state, the evidence offered above does help to understand some events of that year. For Padua, rights over land indeed featured massively, with economic and political issues overlapping very heavily. In the city's brief period under imperial rather than Venetian control, the status of Venetians' property in the Padovano was a key issue; more conciliatory, prudent initial choices by the civic élite were overridden mainly by imperial authority bent on confiscating it, and the élite then seems to have aligned with this view. In discussion of where to destine these assets, the Monte di Pietà was an early candidate for half, but the principal proposal was for government use, including funding the university, and some action was taken to list them and to seize that year's crops. Individual Venetian owners took steps to defend their possession of their lands and their receipt of crops and rents, and government representatives supported their rights via negotiation with authority in Padua. Then, once defeated, many of the Paduan élite were punished by confiscation of their property. While free of Venice, the élite had cancelled arrears of the *dadie* due to the exchequer (exaction records were burnt), and abolished the tax itself, so cancelling direct state levies on land – a major policy reversal, however ephemeral. Landowner-peasant relations also featured massively during the period of crisis, though in less simplistic terms than those hallowed by the myth of Venice, with its account of straight peasant hostility to the *cives* and loyalty to Venetian landowners and government¹⁶⁰.

Evidence offered above also helps explain statements made in 1509, especially the accusations launched in the city's name during the hiatus of Venetian government. Long-term loss of rights or control over land in fact figures largely in Sanudo's account of the words the city's representative spoke before the emperor Maximilian:

Et quella città di Padoa, che se dice esser de' padoani, non hè parte alcuna che sia sua, non le mure, non le case, non chiese, né officii, né beneficii, né preminentie alcune; e cussì fora di la terra, né campo coltivato... niente è che più sia nostro, ma tutto extorto et tiratone da le mane per essi venetiani, parte con uxure, parte per altre vie indirete...¹⁶¹.

¹⁶⁰ Bonardi, 27-28, 31, 33-34, 36-41, 44-47, 62 ff.; Varanini, 2011, 133-34, 158-161.

¹⁶¹ Sanudo, VIII, 468-69: "And the city of Padua is said to belong to the Paduans, but no part of it

It is worth remembering that another Paduan representative had conveyed a similar message, albeit in less harsh terms, in protesting before authority in Venice against the *campatico*, the extraordinary direct tax imposed on landowners in 1501, eight years before the cataclysm which followed Agnadello. On that same occasion representatives of other Terraferma cities also did their rhetorical best in pleading poverty, but the words used by Padua's representative perhaps struck deeper, as well as confirming that these stereotypes were already present in the civic élite's self-representation before 1509. The province's landowning split one third each between churchmen, Venetians and Paduans, the Paduan envoy said, and the majority of ecclesiastical benefices were in Venetian hands, so that – referring to one of the versions of the myth current over the origins of Venice itself – “padoani haver dà principio a questa terra [*Venice*], et è povera al presente”¹⁶².

The diarist Girolamo Priuli gives a more pondered interpretation than Sanudo's of the Paduan *cives*' behaviour in 1509, dwelling on the extent of voluntary sale of Padovano land to Venetian buyers by Paduans in the decades preceding, and consequent Paduan resentment: an interpretation at least partly supported by research findings about such sales, though this essay has confirmed the economic and political significance of numerous episodes of attribution to Venetians of rights over Padovano land by authority in Venice. The exercise of authority by Venetian government over and above Padua was indeed such that Paduan *cives* could feel partly insecure, or at least insufficiently reassured, in their priority quest to protect and if possible increase their landed assets, and the evidence concerning policy over land examined for the half century before Agnadello demonstrates this element of insecurity, mixed with irritation¹⁶³.

is theirs: neither the walls nor the houses, the churches, the offices, the benefices nor any sort of pre-eminence; so too outside the city, no ploughland... nothing remains as ours, but it has all been extorted and pulled from our grasp by Venetians, partly by usury, partly through other devious methods...”.

¹⁶² Sanudo, III, 1381-82, 4 February 1501: “Paduans founded this city [*Venice*], and are now reduced to poverty.”

¹⁶³ On the diarists in 1509: Cervelli, 47-50 (and 54-57 on 1501). See Varanini, 1996a, 831, on Venetians' purchases of land from mid fifteenth century onwards from leading Paduan families.

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Abstract

This essay examines the political destiny and function in government of the civic institutions and élites of formerly independent urban polities once they had settled into the new political context of the Italian regional states in the fifteenth century. Research conducted from the 1970s onwards has established the greater weakness of Padua's municipal institutions and élite in relation to Venice, as compared to the experience of many other cities of the Terraferma dominion. The essay focuses on the profile of issues connected with land in the Paduan civic council's activity in the later fifteenth century, also seeking to gauge the extent of its autonomy in policy-making and its perception of its role, especially in relation to the action of Venetian authority. The archival material used concerns both the activity of the Paduan council and the more general conduct of government in Venice and Padua.

Keywords

Middle Ages; 15th century; Padua; Venice; politics; economy; land

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