

The Roman centuriations of Patavium and Altinum

A water management system in the central Venetian plain

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The reasons of a choice

In the perspective stimulated by the rurAllure European project towards the enhancement of rural areas located in the proximity of pilgrimage roads, particular attention was immediately paid to the territory to the north-east of Padova, which gravitates around the municipality of Borgoricco. It is indeed an area, wedged between the Saint Anthony Path to the west and the Via Romea Strata to the south, which had the ideal characteristics to become a pilot area in the context of Work Package 5, dedicated to the theme of thermalism and cultural heritage along the ways to Rome.

Mostly neglected by pilgrims, tourists, and travellers of all times, it represents on the contrary a territory with a high cultural potential, being the result of one of the most significant territorial interventions of the Roman world, rightly defined as a real monument of/in the landscape: the centuriation. It is enough to virtually fly over that whole area, via Google Earth for example, to appreciate the historical value of that landscape, which resembles an enormous chessboard, formed by parallel and orthogonal lines defining plots of square shape and of equal extension (the *centuriae*). It is clearly a contemporary landscape, but the layout which has been impressed on it derives from the work of Roman land surveyors. More than two thousand years ago, they knew well how to read the landscape and to lay out, keeping in mind the *natura loci* and its morphological features, a geometric and regular grid of roads and canals, with an expertise that today leaves us almost amazed.

Within the plot of the centuriation the micro-stories of the rural communities alternated, contributing towards enriching that landscape with castles, fortresses, churches, mills, and aristocratic villas. They also kept alive that delicate territorial system, in which water, as we will see, has always represented a strongly conditioning and decisive feature, from the early Middle Ages up to a few decades ago (before the depopulation of the countryside).

Today, the Museum of the Roman Centuriation of Borgoricco, housed in the splendid building of the Civic Centre designed by Aldo Rossi, represents the ideal starting point for rediscovering the history (or histories) of that territory which closely resembles what, from a hill, Alice was