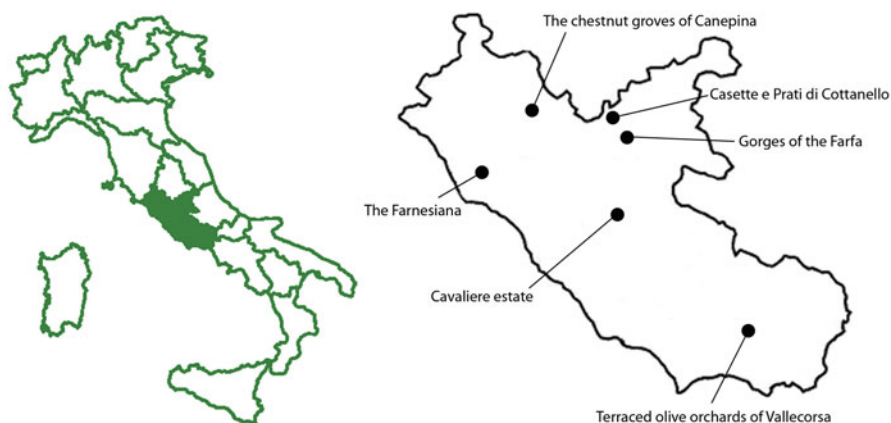


# Chapter 17

## Lazio

Piero Bevilacqua



### 17.1 Introduction

Among the regions of Central Italy, Lazio is no doubt the less homogenous territory and the one most lacking elements clearly defining its identity. From a geographical-administrative perspective, the historian Alberto Caracciolo called it a “residual” area in between great historical regions’. On the one hand, to the north, it seems artificially separated from the Maremma area of southern Tuscany; to the east, the area around Rieti resembles the mountainous area of neighboring Abruzzi, while to the south, the provinces of Frosinone and Latina have much in common with the northern territories of Campania, and indeed once belonged in part to the Kingdom of Naples. Not to mention the dramatic unbalance created by the presence and

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power of the metropolis of Rome, which undermines any possible harmony, whether demographic, territorial or scenic.

At least two major factors have altered the landscape of Lazio. The first was the agrarian reform which, since the 1950, was applied to the northern area known as Maremma laziale, in the province of Viterbo, penetrating as far as the territory of the province of Rome. The second factor was the series of reclamations, begun in the 1930s, of the marshlands in the southern part of the region, in the provinces of Latina and Frosinone, but also in the southern coast area of the province of Rome, as well as the modernizing interventions of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno.

Nowadays, the traditional landscape has been profoundly modified, though the new industrialized agriculture seems to duplicate to some extent the ancient organization. It is singular, for example, that presently one third of utilized agrarian surface is taken up by meadows and pastures, which means, if we add also the rotating forage meadows 'that about half the total agrarian surface of the region is used for feeding livestock'. In fact, Lazio was for a long time a land of pastures and wheat fields. Presently, agriculture takes up 42 % of the region and woods 35.2 %. Cultivations amount to 68.6 % of utilized agricultural surface and pastures to 31.4 %. But 'modernized persistences' take also other forms. Olive orchards, for example, which are scenically most concentrated in the Sabina area, connote the environment of many municipalities in the form of specialized monocultivations. The tree landscape has either continued in its traditional forms or adopted new ones following the development of mechanized agriculture. It is the case, for example, of the traditional vineyards of the Castelli Romani area, or that of the 'tendone' vineyards of the southern areas of the region. The modernization of the tree landscape has taken the form of specialized kiwi and peach orchards in the province of Latina, and of hazel groves in the province of Viterbo. Among traditional tree landscapes we have chosen three particularly significant areas: the chestnut groves of Canepina, in the province of Viterbo, the olive orchards of the Gole di Farfa, in the province of Rieti, and those of Vallecorsa, in the province of Frosinone. In the case of Canepina, we are dealing with an ancient rural landscape, typical of the Cimino Mountains. In this area, for centuries chestnut groves had dominated the higher lands, deeply influencing the economy and culture of local communities. Canepina is, so to speak, the emblem of this tradition, with its volcanic hills covered by 500 ha of chestnuts cultivated as high forest. The other two selected areas are significant instances of the ancient olive-tree landscape of the Lazio region. The Gole di Farfa, in the Sabina, are located on steep grassy terrain, which the patient work of farmers continues to preserve from erosion using dry-stone walls and artificial ridges. The area of Vallecorsa is a peculiar rocky landscape where olive-trees grow among calcareous outcrops conveniently modeled by farmers through the centuries. In the area of the Maremma in northern Lazio we chose the holding of the Tenuta della Farnesiana, located in the municipality of Allumiere, between Civitavecchia and Lake Bracciano. In this holding, one sees the salient features of the areas of the Maremma area and of the Tolfa hills, characterized by a balance between woods, Mediterranean scrub and extensive fields and meadows for forage, typical of the large extensive holdings of old. In the area of the Agro Romano, we chose the holding Tenuta del Cavaliere, east of Rome, characterized by pastures and fields with cereals

and forage. Finally, a significant example of the Apennine rural landscape is provided by the Prati di Cottanello. In this area, extensive pastures support herds of sheep and goats around which the economy of a number of small communities still revolves.

## 17.2 Casette e Prati di Cottanello (42° 25' 00'' N; 12° 41' 00'' E)

The area called the Prati of Cottanello, divided into Prati di Sotto and Prati di Sopra, occupies about 1,000 ha within a wider area of 3,600 ha, of which 2,400 are woods and mountain pastures and 1,200 are crops. It is located within the municipality of Cottanello, in the province of Rieti, at altitudes varying between 800 and 900 m a.s.l. The area is partly private and partly public and is protected under act 431/85. It can be reached from Rieti by taking state road SS 675/SS 79 to Contigliano and then via Fontecerro Nord for 13 km to Cottanello; Shortly before arriving in town you turn right in Via dei Prati and arrive at the locality I Prati e le Casette di Cottanello, while the part called Prati di Sopra can only be reached on foot. The area consists of meadows of karstic origin, on a substratum of whitish limestone with very fine grain, with veins of spathic calcite and flintstone, or of varyingly stratified white ceroid and subcrystalline limestone. The area of Cottanello owes its present morphology to the presence of quarries of pink marble, used in many Roman churches during the Renaissance.

It is particularly significant on account of the historical persistence of a landscape characterized by the alternation of pastures and woods, an encounter between human presence and natural environment, and is endowed with elements of great historical, productive and environmental value. The first reliable attestation of the existence of the *castrum* of Cottanello dates to 1027 A.D. Still visible are the remains of the ancient defensive system, based on two walls, and an interesting tower-gate in Via dello Steccato. Mention should be made also of the Eremo di San Cataldo, a picturesque hermitage built into the mountain and dedicated to saint Cataldo of Taranto. In the area there are also the remains of a Roman villa, probably built between the first century B.C. and the latter half of the second century A.D., evidence of the ancient land management system and of an intense agricultural activity. Pastures are used for many varieties of animals: horses, cows, sheep and goats and often free ranging pigs. Cultivations, consisting mainly of olives and wine-grapes, are found in the proximity of the town of Cottanello. As for woods, the holm oak is the main tree of the area, but chestnuts, oaks, downy oaks, beeches and Turkey oaks are also present. Among Turkey oaks, mention should be made of the Cerro Monumentale of Cottanello, a gigantic specimen 31 m high and with a circumference of 4.60 m, and of two monumental beeches the Faggio scritto and the Faggio con l'acqua, located in the area called the Fondo dei Faggi. From Prati di Sotto one reaches the locality of Casette (little houses), so-called on account of the presence of small stone rural buildings, previously the residence of the farmers of the Orsini family, the owners of the castle, later abandoned or used as stables or shepherds' huts. In the area of Casette, mentioned should be made of an articulated system of water canals in stone



**Fig. 17.1** Pastures and woods are the main elements of the landscape of Casette and Prati di Cottanello

with drinking troughs. A very popular bicycle route also goes through the area and on Sundays people come on excursions, while the area of Prati di Sopra and the woods are less frequented.

The integrity of the area is a result of its use for extensive pasture and of the continuing interaction of humans and nature, which has created a significant scenery from an historical and environmental perspective. Rural settlements have been only partially affected by the modernization of industrial animal breeding of the second half of the twentieth century, in regards to machinery, structures and the organization of animal-breeding and the work of breeders has remained a synthesis of modern and ancient. The growing of olive trees and vineyards in the valley and on the mountain slopes are integrated with human settlements. Some experimentation with organic agriculture are being carried out, and for certain types of cultivations modern systems have been adopted alongside traditional ones. An important factor is the maintenance of the canals used for water and to protect the land. The canals are presently in good shape and are organically integrated in the overall structure of the area. Casette and the surround areas are characterized by an undoubtedly attractive scenery, also thanks to the activity of the Township and to a number of small local tourist activities, which are careful to defend the landscape, notwithstanding their interest in increasing tourism.

The vulnerability of the area is tied to the advance of the woods on abandoned pastures and to the fact that some of the stone buildings are nowadays in bad condition and liable to collapse. This is partly the result of the depopulation of the area, which occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. Erosion and landslides, however, are still infrequent. Further intensification of modern cultivations could further modify the historical features of the landscape (Fig. 17.1).

### **17.3 The Chestnut Groves of Canepina (42° 23' 19" N; 12° 12' 24" E)**

The chestnuts of Canepina are part of the chestnut groves of the Cimini mountains. They extend for about 1,000 ha in the small municipality of Canepina, in the province of Viterbo, at altitudes varying between 450 and 95 m a.s.l. The orchards are mostly privately owned. The area is located in part to the SCI (Site of Community Importance) and SPA (Special Protected Area) "Monte Cimino", and is protected under act 431/85. It can be reached by taking the provincial road Canepinese SP 25, which starts from the center of Canepina and cuts through the orchards till the intersection for Viterbo, or by taking the via Cassia Cimina (SP 1), which borders the chestnut orchards on the south-western side. As in all the Cimini mountains, the soil in this area is of volcanic origin. It consists of rhyolites and rhyodacites, and is tendentially acid, light and rich in organic substances. The nature of the subsurface favors the drainage of water and the soil is dry and friable. These characteristics, combined with heavy rainfall and a climate mitigated by the presence of the Lake of Vico, make the area of the Cimini mountains particularly suited to chestnuts trees and to their fruits.

The significance of the area is due to the historical persistence of chestnut grove, a type of woods that for centuries was the economic and nutritional basis of the populations of the Apennines. In the past, chestnuts had played a fundamental role in the farming economy of these mountain areas. For centuries they were exsiccated, boiled or made into flour for bread, replacing up to the post-World War II period the role of other cereals in the diet of farm-owners and sharecroppers. Chestnut trees were grown both as high forest for the production of chestnuts, and as coppice for the production of wood. The wood of the chestnut trees supported a long tradition of barrel making by local artisans, active in Canepina up to a few decades ago. This activity is attested by numerous documents since the Middle-Ages. It acquired a significant and long-lasting economic role, stimulated by the demand of wine producers of nearby Viterbo. Sheep were commonly allowed to graze in the orchards used for producing chestnuts, an activity which profoundly characterized both the internal structure of chestnut orchards and the scenery, a result of two different but complementary activities taking place in the same area. Grazing served to keep the undergrowth to a minimum, making it easier to pick up the chestnuts. The cultivation of chestnuts became less profitable in the 1950s and 1960s, when the fruit market crashed due to changes in taste and eating habits. The crisis was compounded by the increasing cost of chestnut gathering and the decline in the demand of wood for



**Fig. 17.2** The chestnut groves of Canepina

barrels, replaced by containers made with other materials. As a consequence many centennial plants were cut down for firewood for the ceramic furnaces of nearby Civita Castellana. In the last few years, chestnut cultivation is again on the rise, thanks also to the institution of the PDO label “Castagna dei Monti Cimini” extended to the entire territory of Canepina. The annual production currently amounts to 2,000 tons of chestnuts and 500 tons of the “marrone” variety.

The integrity of the area is due to the rise of chestnut cultivation of the last 20 years after the crisis of the mid-twentieth century. Presently, the chestnuts orchards extend for over 500 ha, and constitute one of the largest chestnut areas of the Lazio region. The area reserved for coppices, whose wood is used by local carpenter shops, is slightly inferior. The chestnut orchards of Canepina are in good condition, having survived the attack of parasites and the changes in the rural economy of the area. About 60–70 % of the holdings are of small size (1.5–5 ha) and the remaining 30–40 % is between 5 and 20 ha. Mentioned should also be made of the marked tendency towards organic agriculture by local producers.

Notwithstanding the good general condition of the chestnuts of Canepina and the marked effort that has been made by the Township to counter the decline in this cultivation and promote its importance, elements of vulnerability remain present. Unfortunately, chestnut trees of notable size have become increasingly rare and tend to fall victim to various diseases. Among these, besides the various typical diseases of chestnut trees, the greatest threat is represented by the spread of an insect recently introduced from China, the *Dryocosmus kuriphilus*, which seriously compromises the production of chestnuts by trees. While not a threat to the health of the trees itself, the decrease in productivity caused by this parasite could lead to

Land uses 2008	Surface (ha)	Surface (%)
Urban area and courtyard	39.17	2.30
Shrubland	17.15	1.01
Conifer forest	19.84	1.16
Chestnut coppice	672.47	39.40
Mixed forest	20.43	1.20
Chestnut orchard	788.76	46.21
Fruit orchard	2.49	0.15
Fallow	6.41	0.38
Hazelnut orchard	86.51	5.07
Hazelnut orchard with chestnut tree	4.51	0.26
Olive grove	9.08	0.53
Olive grove with hazelnut and chestnut tree	1.64	0.10
Vegetable garden	2.59	0.15
Pasture	19.67	1.15
Wooded pasture	1.29	0.08
Meadow	5.07	0.30
Meadows with chestnut tree	3.19	0.19
Meadows with olive tree	0.80	0.05
Arable land	5.06	0.30
Vineyard	0.48	0.03
Vineyard with olive tree	0.31	0.02
<i>Total</i>	<i>1706.92</i>	<i>100.00</i>

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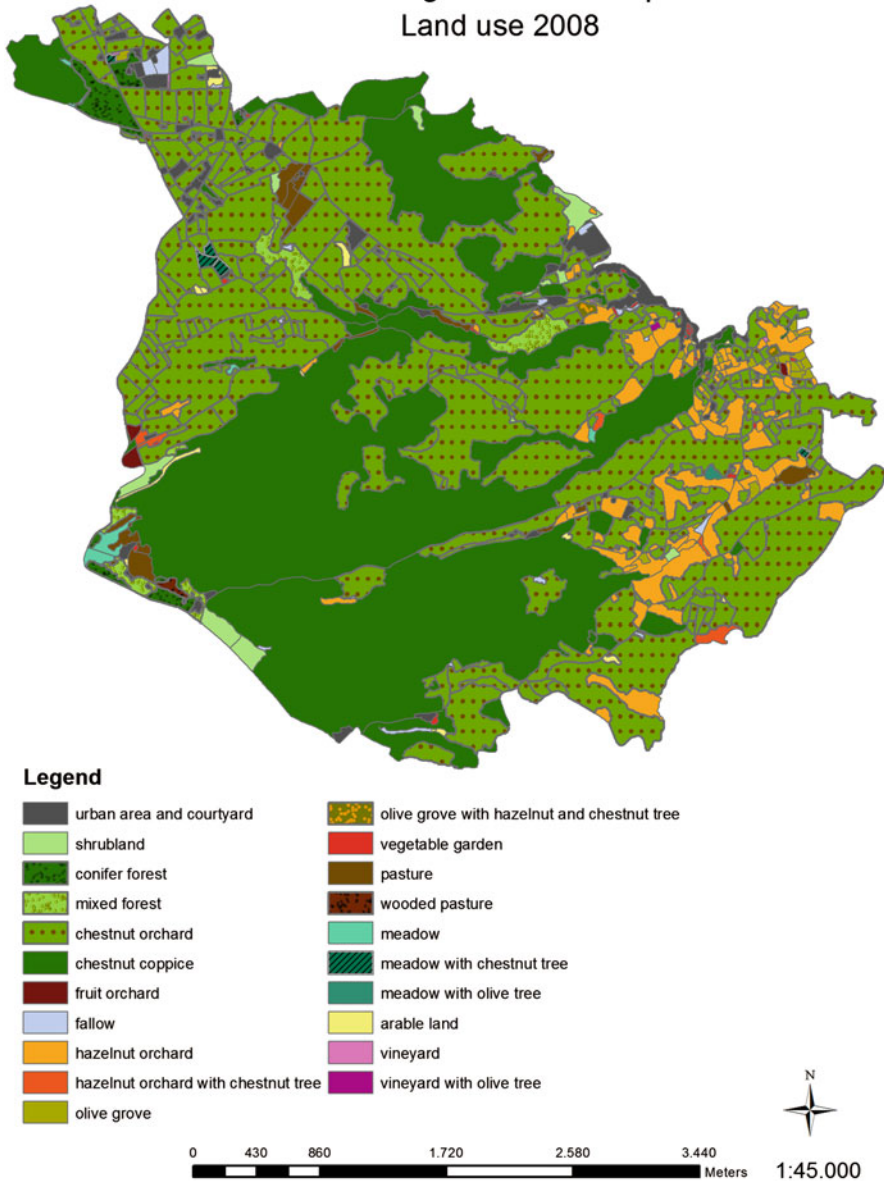
*Evaluating indices of landscape*

Number of land uses	21
Number of patches	694
Total surface area (ha)	1706.92
Average surface area of patches (ha)	2.46
Average surface area of arable land patches (ha)	0.57
Average surface area of chestnut orchard (ha)	2.58
Hill's diversity number	3.72
Class of landscape integrity (I–VI)	VI

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another crisis in local chestnut farming. Sheep no longer graze under the chestnuts which are instead periodically mowed. Chestnut gathering has been almost entirely mechanized, while manual gathering is only done on the steeper terrains. Mechanization has significantly reduced the time and cost of gathering, but the absence of livestock has determined the loss of that interaction between chestnut growing and sheep farming that for centuries had shaped a good part of the Apennine landscape (Figs. 17.2, 17.3).

### Chestnut groves of Canepina Land use 2008



Laboratory for Landscape and Cultural Heritage, DEISTAF, University of Florence

**Fig. 17.3** Chestnut orchards historically dominate the area around the village of Canepina, while chestnut coppice can be found in the steeper mountain slopes. An interesting feature of the area are the hazelnut orchards, pure or mixed with olive trees, chestnut trees or vineyards, representing the third land use in terms of extension. Both the forest and the agricultural mosaic is made up of many small patches, with a reduced average size. Overall, the historical landscape shows a high degree of integrity; it owes its vulnerability in various diseases affecting the chestnut trees and in the interruption of traditional grazing in the chestnut orchards, used to clear undergrowth and to bring fertility to the soil



## 17.4 The Farnesiana (42° 11' 21" N; 11° 52' 42" E)

The holding called Tenuta della Farnesiana presently occupies a surface of about 400 ha on the north-western slopes of the Monti della Tolfa mountainous region, at an altitude varying between 150 and 360 m a.s.l. The area is private property and is located in the municipality of Allumiere, in the province of Rome. It belongs to the SCI (Site of Community Interest) “Boschi Mesofili di Allumiere” and to the SPA (Special Protected Area) “Comprensorio Tolfetano-Cerite-Manziate”, and it is protected by the landscape law n. 431/85. The Tenuta della Farnesiana can be reached by taking state road Aurelia and then, at 84.2 km, the local road Melladra-Farnesiana until the locality of Farnesiana. Alternatively, from Allumiere you can take the provincial road via Farnesiana, which from the town goes north, down into the valley, towards the abandoned railway station and follow it for 7 km. The terrain declines towards Tarquinia and the medieval site of Cencelle while to the south the area penetrates the woods of Monte Palano for about 3 km. The entire area of the Monti della Tolfa is the result of one of the most ancient volcanic activities of the Lazio region. The terrain appears eroded, lowered and irregular. From the gently curving hills, made of sedimentary rock formation, rough looking and steep trachytic peaks protrude here and there. One of the most notable of these is Ripa Maiale, on the western border of the Farnesiana.

The significance of the area is due to the historical persistence of the landscape, dating back to the medieval period, which synthesizes in a few 100 ha the salient traits of the areas of the Maremma Laziale and of the Monti della Tolfa, where open range animal farming is still practiced. The landscape of the Farnesiana is characterized by a balance and integration between the role of pasture, crops and woods in the economy of the holding. The cattle of the *maremmana* variety have become perfectly adapted to this mixed environment. This species is particularly strong: it tolerates climatic difficulties and adapts well to marginal terrains and low-quality forage. The work of these animals was for centuries essential to all local economic activities, from agriculture to mining. This rural landscape has its roots in the Etruscan civilization, whose presence is attested by a number of tombs, though the first documents that attest the agro-pastoral exploitation of the area date only to the High Middle Ages. Historians date the development of the economy of the Farnesiana, the origin of the name, and the growth of a small settlement, to the late sixteenth century, when began both the extraction of alunite and other minerals from the surrounding quarries, and the expansion of agriculture, stimulated by the flourishing market of nearby Corneto, in the municipality of Tarquinia. It is in this period that the Olgiati family, who had the contract for the mines, decided to intensify the cultivation of cereals and the farming of cows and sheep, establishing a major farm in the Farnesiana area. The management of the farm was entrusted to clerics belonging to the Chiesa del Gesù, locally known as *farnesiani*. A bakery, a chapel and a small settlement for miners and farmhands were built. Towards the mid-nineteenth century a majestic Neo-Gothic church was added, which is still visible. The area of the Farnesiana remained property of nobility up to the post-World War II period. It originally extended for 11,000 ha but

**Fig. 17.4** Free-roaming cattle of the Maremmana variety in a dry pasture on the Farnesiana farm



was substantially reduced by the agrarian reform programs of the Ente Maremma, which resulted in a fragmentation of holdings of which the signs are still visible. Today, the Tenuta della Farnesiana hosts a farm which besides functioning as a tourist farmhouse continues to produce traditional food products, including beef and pork meat, vegetables, wine, olive oil, and fruit. About half of the surface of the farm is covered by Mediterranean scrub and by mixed oak woods, with a prevalence of Turkish oaks and holm oaks; on the south-western slope there are also about 20 ha of cork oaks. Both the mixed oak woods and the cork oak woods are regularly maintained. They play an essential role in the free range breeding of *maremmana* cattle, amounting to about 250 animals, which find there shelter from the heat during the summer. An ample portion of the area is used as dry meadow, with annual mowing for the pasture of the cattle, while about 70 ha are used for the rotation of crops without irrigation, among which durum wheat, oats and barley.

The integrity of the area is ensured by the balance between cultivated areas, pasture and woods, which are regularly used. The agriculture practiced at the Farnesiana shows a high degree of integration between cattle breeding, cultivations and forestry,

in contrast with the modern trend towards a clear-cut separation between woods and agriculture. The place where the farm is now located corresponds approximately to the one called Campo della Mola in the Middle-Ages, which was the site of the old farm. The presence of the old agricultural center, with its small settlement, of the imposing Neo-Gothic church, the granary, and other buildings used for the farm, increase the appeal and uniqueness of the area.

Inside the holding there are no notable vulnerabilities: agricultural activities seem stable and the land is well-maintained. Occasionally, new materials have been used to replace the old wooden fences. In general, however, in the area of the Monti della Tolfa, hay and crop fields are being replaced by bushes and other spontaneous vegetation that occupy abandoned field and pastures (Fig. 17.4).

### **17.5 Gorges of the Farfa (42° 15' 00'' N; 12° 45' 00'' E)**

The area of the gorges of the Farfa river is characterized by the presence of olive orchards, common to all the municipalities of the Sabina area. It extends for about 600 ha in the municipalities of Mompeo, Castelnuovo di Farfa, Salisano, Casaprota and Montenero Sabino, in the province of Rieti, at altitudes between 140 m a.s.l. at Fosso di Salisano and 460 m a.s.l. in the town of Mompeo. The area is partly private and partly public. It was nominated Monumento Naturale (Natural Monument) Gole del Farfa, and belongs to the SCI (Site of Community Interest) and SPA (Special Protected Area) "Farfa Corso Medio-Alto", besides being protected under law 431/85. It can be reached by exiting state road Salaria (SS 4) near Osteria Nuova, provincial road Mirtense near Castelnuovo di Farfa or provincial road Tancia near Mompeo. The gorges cut through hills made of limestone and boundstones, calcarenites, sandstones and conglomerate, and, subordinately, by finely grained whitish limestone with veins of spathic calcite and cherts. The terrain is particularly varied and occasionally steep, but with generally gentle contours.

The significance of the landscape of the Gole del Farfa is tied to the millenarian persistence of traditional olive orchards combined with grassland, cultivated even on steep terrain thanks to the use of the 'lunette' (small semi-circular containing walls), which support small terraces, thus characteristically modeling the slopes and creating, along with the archeological remains, the wooded gorges and the river, a rural mosaic of great scenic, cultural and natural importance. The cultivation of the olive-tree, practiced in the Sabina area already in the Roman period, has been a unifying feature of the rural landscape. A number of extremely old olive-trees were probably planted in the Roman period. In Canneto, a sub-municipality of the commune of Fara in Sabina, there is one of the greatest olive-trees in Europe, with an estimated age of 2,000 years. With the fragmentation of the Roman latifundia during the Middle-Ages, these territories came under the rule of the Abbey of Farfa, whose rich historical documentation offers information on land usage and the economic relations with the city of Rome, with which the Abbey traded olive oil and other agricultural products. More recently, the large estates were further subdivided into



**Fig. 17.5** The agricultural mosaic of the Farfa gorges

a series of small holdings, with an extension ranging from 2 to 10 ha. The production of olive-oil was for a long time the center of the local economy. In the twentieth-century, it was increasingly combined with sheep farming and the production of meat, cheese and wool. Local olive-oil is based on the typical olives of the Sabina area: Olivastrone, Carboncella, Olivago Sabino, Oliva tonda, Fusella, Oliva nebbia, Rosciola and Raja, with which a quality olive-oil is produced with the PDO label 'Sabina'. There is also a Museum of the Olive-Oil of the Sabina at Castelnuovo di Farfa, located in the sixteenth-century Palazzo Perelli and in some traditional buildings in the historical center, such as an ancient bakery and an olive-oil mill with a mill-stone propelled by animals. An important event in the area is also the fair 'Andar per Olio e per Cultura' (On the Road for Oil and Culture), which in the month of December attracts tourists, agronomists and olive-oil fans. Local traditional architecture is also typically associated with olive-oil production, with scattered rural houses dating from the lower Middle-Ages to the modern age, and with the remains of water-mills and aqueducts along the river Farfa at the beginning of the gorges. In recent years, a few cooperatives of young people have rented marginal or abandoned olive orchards, combining farming with excursions for tourists and didactic activities in the more picturesque areas of the Gole and in the archeological sites associated with olive-oil culture, such as the water-mills Naro-Patrizi along the river and the Roman rural villa, in the Monte locality, on the western slope of the hill of Mompeo.

The integrity of the landscape is basically due to the preservation of the olive orchards, notwithstanding the increasingly old average age of the farmers and the high costs of workforce, due to the steepness of the terrain and the ensuing difficulty to use modern machinery. In the Roman villa in the locality called Monte an extensive system of underground arcades is still visible, originally used for the production and storage of olive-oil. Also visible are tanks for the sedimentation of olive-oil and the olive-oil cell. A sizable medieval mill is also present, divided into three rooms, in which the mill-stones for the olives are still visible. Many of the works used for carrying and discharging water are still intact. Still visible are the remains of an aqueduct bridge of the late Roman period and a long perfectly preserved gallery. Many olive-orchards are now cultivated using organic methods.

The vulnerability of the area is associated with the abandoning of agriculture, presently limited to marginal olive orchards and those located on steeper terrains, which are difficult to mechanize. But what has declined the most and is on the verge of disappearing for good, is the traditional pasturing of sheep in olive orchards. As a consequence, various weeds have spread, such as the *Ampelosdesmos mauritanicus*, a plant that suffocates local species and that up to a few years ago was mowed by shepherds for forage. Other elements of vulnerability result from the creation of specialized high-density olive orchards, which alter the historical and unique aspect of the traditional landscape (Fig. 17.5).

## 17.6 Terraced Olive Orchards of Vallecorsa (41° 26' 43" N; 13° 24' 45" E)

The area consists of a series of terraced olive orchards extending for about 600 ha, obtained by excavating calcareous rock. It is located in the municipality of Vallecorsa, in the province of Frosinone, and is part of the SPA (Special Protected Area) of the Ausoni and Aurunci mountains. The area can be easily accessed through the A1 toll road. From the north, it can be reached by exiting at Frosinone and proceeding on state road SS 637 in the direction of Ceccano-Vallecorsa. From the south, it is best to exit A1 at Ceprano, and continue on the provincial road SP "Caragno" in the direction of Castro dei Volsci. Having reached Castro dei Volsci, one continues towards Vallecorsa on state road SS 637. The altitude varies between 240 m a.s.l. in the valley and 800 m a.s.l., while the town itself is located at 350 m a.s.l. Vallecorsa is located on a calcareous outcrop on the south-western slopes of the Ausoni massif. This massif is made up mostly of calcareous rock and has been profoundly shaped by karstic phenomena of often considerable magnitude. Dolines, swallow-holes, caverns and basins, dot the mountain ridges, including the one that marks the eastern border of the valley of Vallecorsa. A great quantity of calcareous rocks and carious rocks of bizarre shapes surface from the soil which is not covered by volcanic materials. The land of the municipality of Vallecorsa is mostly mountainous.





**Fig. 17.6** In the rocky scenery of Vallecorse the natural karstic modelling of limestone outcroppings has been exploited and refined by farmers to make room for olive orchards

The significance of the area lies in its traditional historical features and in the beauty of its “rocky scenery”, where the natural karstic modeling of limestone outcroppings has been exploited and refined by farmers to make room for olive orchards. These aspects are part of a general rural landscape of great beauty characterized by the historical persistence of cultivations. The terraced olive orchards are usually located between 300 and 700 m a.s.l., though in some cases go as far up as 800 m a.s.l., close to the upper limit of the olive-tree’s habitat. Using sledge-hammers, farmers broke up the boulders and used them to create countless dry-stone walls to protect their sheep and their fields, to build wells, reservoirs, and houses, but especially to support the terraces on which olive orchards were planted. According to the oral tradition, men were responsible for breaking up the hard white limestone boulders, while women brought the soil from the valley up to the terraces in baskets carried on their heads. The cultivation of olives dates probably back to the Roman period, though it is not possible to state when farmers began modeling the limestone boulders. We do have, however, thirteenth century statutes of the small community, reconfirmed by the Colonna family towards the mid-sixteenth century, that bear witness to the importance of protecting the olive-trees and especially the olives. The code established the exorbitant fine of 3 ducats for those caught gathering “the olives of someone else whether on the ground or from the plant in whatever season (...) without the owner’s permission.” Besides the olives, the statutes protected also the rocks, which in Vallecorse are inseparable from olive trees. The historical presence

of olive orchards in Vallecorsa is attested throughout the centuries by various marriage contracts and eighteenth-century inventories of the three parish churches of the town as well as by data on oil production which, towards the mid-nineteenth century, was around 21,000 libbre almost entirely reserved for export. The specialization and intensity of cultivations is confirmed by the agrarian land register of 1929, which listed 818 ha of olive orchards, with an average of 236 plants per hectare. Here, dry-stone walls bear the local name of *macere*. They have a solid imposing aspect due to their thickness (about 1 m), to their height, which varies between 2 and 3.5 m, and to the great size of the limestone blocks, placed one over the other without using any binding material. To avoid pressure that could result into landslides, almost all plants are further enclosed, so that one can find terraces built to host a single tree.

The scenery retains a high degree of integrity and is of great interest, not solely on account of the traditional olive orchards, but also of other cultivations and pastures located on the mountain slopes, which enrich and vary the scenery. The sunny and rocky slopes of the mountains of Vallecorsa are still dotted by two million cubic meters of terraces. While there no longer are teams of workers to maintain the walls, and olives belong to small properties cultivated owners as a hobby more than for profit, olive orchards still extend for about 600 ha, i.e., almost the same surface of 1907. In many cases, olives are still gathered by beating them with a long stick, though modern machines are increasingly being used.

One vulnerability is a consequence of the disappearance of sheep farming. Traditionally, sheep slept under the olive trees and provided manure, while nowadays chemical fertilizers have been adopted as well as herbicides to clear weeds. The greatest risk is that this form of cultivation be definitely lost due to the abandoning of agriculture by the local population. Besides the loss of an incredible landscape, this would also lead to significant hydro-geological problems. For example, in the areas which cannot be accessed by motor but only through paths or mule-tracks, there are already signs of landslides and other problems (Fig. 17.6).

### **17.7 Cavaliere Estate (41° 56' 00'' N; 12° 40' 00'' E)**

The landscape characterizing the area of the Cavaliere estate (Tenuta del Cavaliere) is typical of extensive agriculture. The area is public property and extends for about 438 ha, at an altitude of 50 m a.s.l., in the municipalities of Rome (V Municipio) and of Guidonia Montecelio. The area borders to the north with the Via Tiburtina and the properties Tudini and Del Fante, to the east with the holding of the Tenuta Martellona, and to the south with the Aniene river; to the west it borders with the neighborhood of Rome called Case Rosse. The area is protected under act 1497/39. It can be accessed by turning on to Via della Tenuta del Cavaliere at 16.8 km of Via Tiburtina-Valeria at 16.8 km in the direction of Tivoli. It can also be reached by taking via Collatina in the direction of Lunghezza, up to the junction with Via della Tenuta del Cavaliere. Coming from toll-road A24 instead, you need to exit at Settecamini and then follow directions for Via della Tenuta del Cavaliere. The Tenuta extends over a flat terrain of volcanic origin, on the right bank of the Aniene river, on a substratum made partly

of lithic tuff and partly of inferior pozzolana rock. The substratum of the area closest to the Aniene river is made instead of clays, silts, sands and recent fine alluvial gravel. On a tuffaceous ridge, originally the raised center of a crater, lies a large farmhouse.

The significance of the area is due to the historical persistence of a landscape typical, in the modern age, of the extensive agriculture of the 'Agro Romano,' i.e. the countryside around Rome, owned by noble families or religious bodies and characterized by wheat and forage cultivation and animal farming. The area is therefore of extreme historical and cultural significance for the Lazio region, the more so in the light of its closeness to the city of Rome and of it being one of the agricultural areas of 'urban centers,' as defined in the National Strategic Plan for Rural Development 2007–2013. The plan refers to agricultural areas located inside or near urban settlements, which play a fundamental role in the defense of the landscape and the environment. The name *Tenuta del Cavaliere* dates to the seventeenth century, when the three holdings of Casale Nuovo, La Cementara and Palazetto were unified by the family De Militibus-Cavalieri. The ancient farmhouse has been built around a defense tower, and is the interesting result of various architectural stratifications and phases in the administration of the holding. In 1635, the *Tenuta* became part of the lands of the Hospitaler order S. Giovanni di Dio, which also owned the Fatebenefratelli hospital in Rome. In the holding, wheat and forage were cultivated, small and larger animals were farmed, and the pastures were rented out, according to a scheme typical of the Roman countryside. Most of the products were used for Roman hospitals. At the end of the eighteenth century, the holding was united with the adjacent *Tenuta di Castell' Arcione* and a number of species of trees such as elms, British-oaks, ash-trees, and poplars were planted. In 1896, the ownership was transferred to the Pio Istituto di S. Spirito e degli Ospedali Riuniti di Roma. After 1870 Rome became the capital of the new Reign of Italy the government became strongly committed towards improving the Roman countryside. In this context, important reclamation work was carried out in the *Tenuta* along with other improvements up to the 1910s. In the post-World War II period, the agriculture of the *Tenuta* centered on forage and cereals and on the breeding of cattle for milk and meat. In 1980, after the abolition of the Hospitaler orders, the *Tenuta del Cavaliere*, along with the neighboring *Tenuta di Castel di Guido*, became property of the Rome township. It continued, however, to be an agricultural area except for 140 ha, which were assigned to the new Centro Agroalimentare of Rome. Since the 1970s, near the borders of the *Tenuta*, the Roman neighborhoods of Lunghezza, Lunghezzina, Castelveverde, Case Rosse and Setteville have developed. The gradual urbanization of these areas has steadily increased the importance of the *Tenuta* as a natural and agricultural area. In the 1990s, a reforestation program has been carried out in marginal areas of the *Tenuta*, for a total of 25 ha, with the planting of pines, holm-oaks, apple-trees, walnut-trees, and oaks. A program of organic agriculture has also been started.

The *Tenuta del Cavaliere*, unlike many other areas of the Roman countryside, has maintained to a large extent its integrity and the landscape has remained highly 'legible': this rural heritage seems even more crucial when compared to adjacent areas of the Rome periphery, which are devoid of any significant green areas. Notwithstanding the change of ownership of 1980 and the growth of new residential neighborhoods





**Fig. 17.7** The historic Cavaliere estate is a representative landscape feature of the Agro Romano

nearby, the economy of the area, as shown by the holding's official plans, have remained oriented towards the cultivation of forage, now prevalent over cereal crops, and the farming of animals for milk. Milk is sold to the dairies of Castel Guido. The Tenuta is periodically opened to the public for recreational and cultural events. The quality of its food products, the beauty of the landscape, and its initiatives aimed at rediscovering the historical heritage of the Roman countryside, make it an outstanding example of multifunctional agriculture.

The vulnerability of the Tenuta is caused by the growth of surrounding urban areas, against which it has plays a fundamental role in safeguarding the landscape and the environment. Another vulnerability is tied to the periodic inundations of the Aniene River, which can be particularly destructive, as in the case of the 1937 one, compromising seasonal cultivations and damaging infrastructures. Furthermore, a complex administration by the town in collaboration with regional ASL (Local Health Agency) caused, towards the end of the 1980s, a decline in investments due to the reduced size of the Tenuta (Fig. 17.7).

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