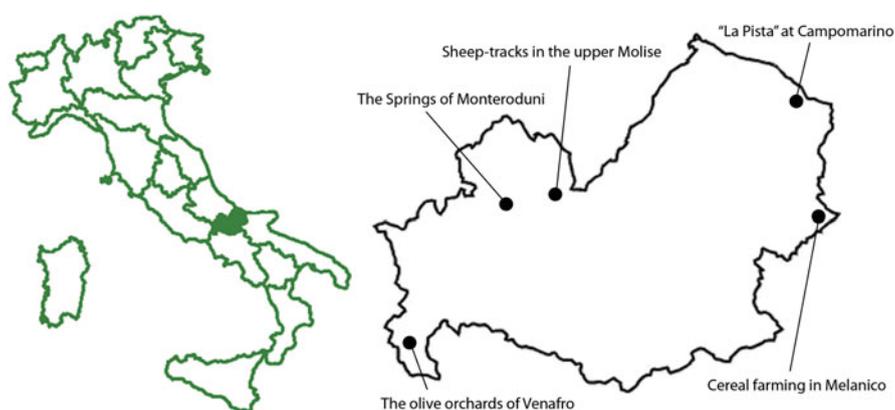


Chapter 19

Molise

Piero Bevilacqua



19.1 Introduction

Molise is a secluded Italian region, with a rugged and mostly mountainous terrain, few plains, some of which marshy, and few plateaus. The soil is generally poor and shallow. However, in Molise farmers have managed to develop their own distinctive agriculture, centered especially on cereals, and, on the century-old practice of transhumance, or migrant animal-farming, bringing sheep to and from the plains of the nearby Puglia region, using a thick network of tracks. Molise is traditionally associated with neighboring Abruzzi, with which it shares a common landscape and history, while maintaining its own distinctive profile. Nowadays, it offers an interesting mosaic of traditional agricultural landscapes, especially in the inland areas. Here, we find the typical view of the latifundium, or large landed estate, in

P. Bevilacqua (✉)
Dipartimento di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea,
Università la Sapienza di Roma, Rome, Italy
e-mail: pierobevilacqua@yahoo.it

which pastures and cereal fields alternate over vast areas, among hills and small plains.

Among the wheat areas that for centuries have dominated this countryside we have chosen the area of Melanico. Notwithstanding the land reform of the 1950s, which divided up the *latifundium*, adding vegetable gardens and olive orchards in the proximity of rural houses, much remains of the old landscape. A testimony of traditional peasant polyculture is found in the land of Monteroduni. In this area, the presence of a system of water springs made possible the development of irrigated agriculture, based on wheat, fodder, vegetables and fruit. The land is subdivided into many small properties as evidenced by the thick network of borders between holdings. Local economy seems to easily achieve a balance between market and self-consumption. Peaches are an important product and there is a well-known local variety. The land still shows evidence of the ramified network of canals serving the various holdings.

Among the various areas where fruit-trees are grown we chose to focus on the olive orchards of Venafro. These orchards extend from the plain to the beginning of the steep slopes of the overlooking mountain, and are often located on rocky terrain. The local olive oil has been known and appreciated since the days of old and we find references to it in the works of Columella, Horace, Varro, Pliny the Elder, Cato and Juvenal. A legend says the olive-tree was introduced to Venafro by a certain Licinius, perhaps one of the many Roman veteran-farmers, after whom the local "Licinian" olive is named. The most famous oil of Venafro was the *aurinus*, which was made with Licinian olives and thus named for its color (from Latin *aurinus*, "golden.") Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65–8 B.C.) in an ode describes Venafro as verdant because covered with olive groves, while Horace, in one of his Satires celebrates a sauce made of saffron and special herbs, with the oil of Venafro as mandatory ingredient. Because of its historical, economic and scenic importance, the entire area is to be included in a Regional Olive-Tree Park. Here, one finds many monumental olive-trees, some of them with a circumference of almost 6 m. The olive orchards of Venafro can be at times as thick as woods. They grow on terraces supported by dry-stone walls. This aesthetic aspect of the traditional scenery bears also witness to the work done by farmers to control the hydro-geological features of the land and properly maintain it. The notion of "rural park" seems particularly suited to the area, providing an adequate context to these forms of agriculture, which do not fit the criteria adopted in traditional parks.

Small parts of the Molise region are on the sea. In these areas, both in the small plains and in the lower hills, the mitigating power of the sea has made possible the development of an agriculture less hampered by problematic environmental conditions. Within this area a particularly significant agricultural landscape is found in the area known as "La Pista" in the municipality of Campomarino. In this flat area, the original large estates have been subdivided into small holdings where nowadays farmers grow vegetables, olives and fruit. Both the shape of the fields and of the houses bears witness to the continuing vitality of family-based agriculture. This harmonic landscape is free of the monotony of monocultures, while making human presence possible, by providing sufficient revenues. The sheep-tracks in the mountainous area

of the Molise region, in the municipalities of Colemeluccio and Montedimezzo, include part of the Celano-Foggia sheep-track. They partly extend in the territory of two natural parks which have been declared biosphere reserves by UNESCO. The area is a fragment of an incredibly ancient economy, centered around transhumance, which surely predated the Roman period. Migrations took place in the autumn and spring, when large flocks of sheep went by in the direction of the Tavoliere plain in northern Puglia or returned towards the Apennines. The area is typical of mountainous Molise with ample pastures dotted by woods and by fields where corn, pulse, potatoes and spelt are grown. Notwithstanding the decline of transhumance and of animal farming in general, the pastoral landscape maintains a strong integrity, favored also by the mainly public ownership of the land. The preservation of these areas is a particularly urgent problem, because they are subject not only to the decline of animal farming but also to the advance of the forest, which threatens to alter the traditional identity of this landscape, as elsewhere in Italy.

19.2 Cereal Farming in Melanico (41° 43' 00" N; 14° 59' 00" E)

“The granary of Molise” is the traditional nickname of the town of Santa Croce di Magliano, in the province of Campobasso. It refers especially to the cereals of the locality of Melanico. The locality of Melanico extends for about 950 ha of level ground in the south-east area of the municipality of Santa Croce, and is bordered by the torrent Tona and the river Fortore. It can be reached from the town of Santa Croce following provincial road SP 166 and then turning onto SP 148. Melanico also includes the locality Abbazia, so-called for the remains of an old abbey. The altitude is between 100 and 150 m a.s.l. The terrain is sandy with significant argillaceous loam rock strata and scarcely visible stratification, with occasional presence of macro-fossils.

The area is characterized by historical presence of extensive cereal cultivations, still largely dominant compared to forage and vegetables. The late-medieval settlement of Santa Croce di Magliano was positioned in the locality of Colle Alto, at a short distance from Melanico. Since that time, common rights applied to the area, a tradition that lasted till the mid-twentieth century. The land was publicly used for growing wheat and to a lesser degree as pasture land. The *Catasto provvisorio* (“Provisional land register”) of 1815 states that at the end of the nineteenth century almost three quarters of the extra-urban land of the town were used for crops, with no fruit-trees and few specialized cultivations; the rest of the land was pasture. The extension of the woods was very limited, unlike in the adjacent municipality of Rotello, where they covered almost one fourth of the surface. The century-old tradition of cereal farming has left its mark on the landscape, which is characterized by large open spaces and enriched, starting from the 1950s, by the presence of small olive orchards. Between 1860 and 1955, local populations and the Administration of Santa Croce di Magliano, through constant lobbying, put pressure on the owners to



Fig. 19.1 The landscape of Melanico is characterized by historical persistence of extensive cereal cultivations of early medieval origin

comply with common land rules and to distribute the land, which they were forced to do in the mid-1950s with the Land Reform. The century-old controversy on common land rights included the right to levy taxes on the forage for the animals that during the winter were taken through the area from Abruzzi.

The landscape too changed on account of the Land Reform, which caused the lands of Melanico to be subdivided into 28 holdings of 6–8 ha, on each one of which a red-brick rural house was built. These rural houses of the Ente Riforma, the body responsible for the Land Reform, had two stories: the stables and the kitchen were on the bottom floor, while upstairs a single bedroom was found. Houses had a small oven and sometimes a hen-house and a pigsty. The Ente Riforma also established a school in Melanico with attached a small chapel. Almost all those who were assigned a holding had a well built for domestic use. Notwithstanding the fragmentation of the property, the cultivation of cereals continued, though integrated by small olive orchards and vegetable gardens in the proximity of the houses. The rest of the land, consisting in over 700 ha, remained instead the property of the old owner. The landscape of Melanico is still rather homogeneous, well-maintained and characterized by the cultivation of durum wheat and, to a lesser degree, tomatoes and sugar-beets. The landscape is remindful of the plains of the nearby Tavoliere delle Puglie.

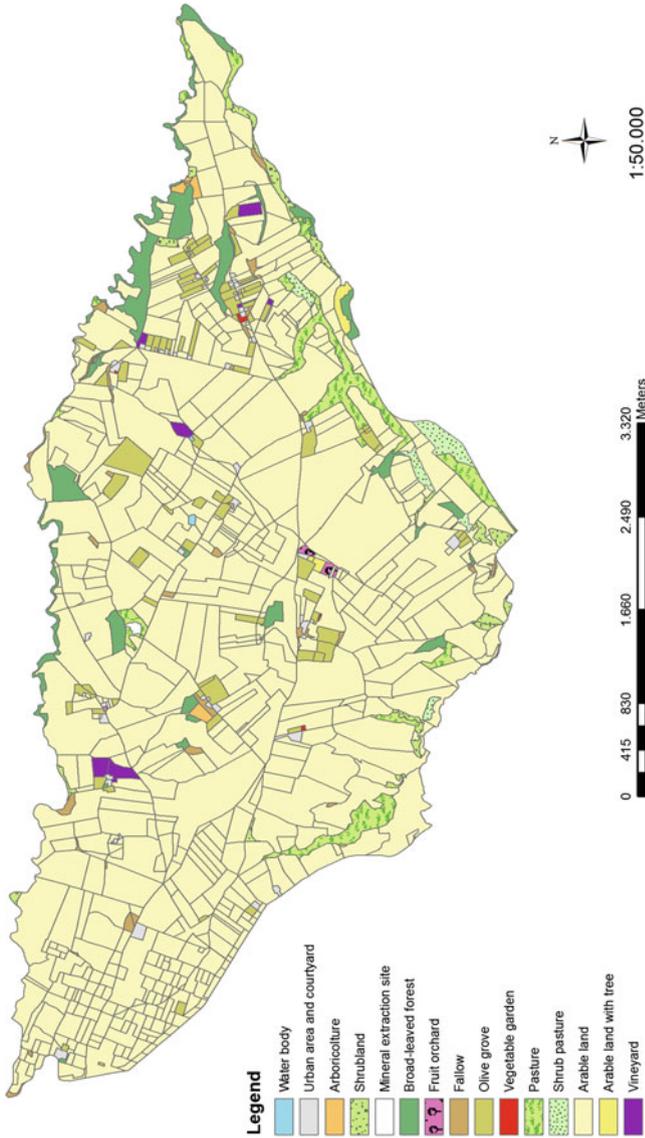
The vulnerability of the area consists in the danger of further subdivision of the land. After the privatization of the land, with second and third-generation owners, the small holdings assigned by the Ente Riforma have been further subdivided. Further fragmentation could make agriculture unprofitable. Furthermore, in this area of Molise, the scarcity of water in certain periods of the year causes low yields, leading farmers to give up agriculture. For these reasons, farms have sometimes been transformed into simple rural residences, inhabited only occasionally by families who live in town. The majority however has been simply abandoned their homes. Even when the holdings have been acquired by new farmers the houses are rarely used. The large estate that included the majority of the land of Melanico, instead, has retained its integrity. The Molise region is discussing a project that calls for the creation of an aqueduct to take the water of the artificial lake of Liscione or the Damn of Occhito, to the lands of Melanico and of Piano Palazzo, in the municipality of Rotello. The Lake of Liscione provides water to the north-eastern part of Molise, while the Damn of Occhito, on the river Fortore, is on the border with Puglia and provides water mostly to the land of the Tavoliere delle Puglie (Figs. 19.1, 19.2).

Land use 2010	Surface (ha)	Surface (%)
Water body	0.71	0.03
Urban area and courtyard	14.83	0.64
Arboriculture	4.34	0.19
Shrubland	22.35	0.97
Mineral extraction site	1.01	0.04
Broad-leaved forest	77.94	3.38
Fruit orchard	2.23	0.10
Fallow	16.70	0.72
Olive grove	75.39	3.27
Vegetable garden	0.77	0.03
Pasture	67.68	2.94
Shrub pasture	16.92	0.73
Arable land	1988.63	86.30
Arable land with tree	4.72	0.20
Vineyard	10.21	0.44
<i>Total</i>	<i>2304.43</i>	<i>100.00</i>

Evaluating indices of landscape

Number of land uses	15
Number of patches	847
Total surface area (ha)	2304.43
Average surface area of patches (ha)	2.72
Average surface area of arable land patches (ha)	3.00
Average surface area of pasture patches (ha)	4.00
Hill's diversity number	1.95
Class of landscape integrity (I–VI)	VI

Cereal farming in Melanico
Land use 2007



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

Fig. 19.2 The area is characterized by the historical presence of extensive cereal cultivations. Arable land clearly marks the area, occupying the 86.3 % of the whole surface, thus, the integrity of the landscape can be considered very high. In this case, the introduction of a higher diversification of crops, as suggested by some environmental policies, would degrade the integrity of the historical landscape

19.3 “La Pista” at Campomarino (41° 56′ 00″ N; 15° 03′ 21″ E)

The mosaic of cultivations of large estates, typical of the twentieth-century, still characterizes the locality of “La Pista,” which extends for about 400 ha in the municipality of Campomarino, in the province of Campobasso. The area can be reached taking state road SS 16, going through Campomarino towards Serracapriola, in Puglia and taking a left after the road for Portocannone. It can also be easily reached following the E2 road, which skirts Campomarino. About 3 km from the town take the road built for the reclamation in the direction of Ramitelli, and go over the bridge on the Bologna-Bari toll-road. The area, located between the localities of Lauretta (so-called for the abundance of laurel bushes, in the past) and Mucchiotti (the local name for a variety of shrub), is rather flat, except for a gentle decline in the direction of the ravine called Vallone delle Canne, which separates it from the locality of Coccioleto, closer to the town of Campomarino.

The significance of the area is due to its landscape, characterized mainly by vegetable gardens, and by small plots used for crops, vineyards, and olive, peach and apricot orchards. The locality is officially known as “Contrada Cianaluca”, after the old owner Gianluca or Giovanni Luca Carriero, an eighteenth-century nobleman, but is commonly known to locals as “La Pista,” a name dating to the 1943–1945 period, when Allied Forces constructed a runway (“*pista*”) in the area. Vegetables have been constantly farmed in the area ever since the original latifundium was divided up into small holdings, in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century. The process began in the first decade of the nineteenth century, when feudal rights were abolished. The land was divided up between the Town and a great landlord of the time, Scipione Di Sangro di Casacalenda. Later, in 1863, small quotas were meted out to 190 indigent citizens. A similar distribution was carried out in the 1936–1938 period, when the remaining forest area (180 ha) was assigned to the poor. The origin of the present rural settling instead dates back to the 1940s, when the last phase of the elimination of the sharecropping system took place. During that period, the owners, in order to avoid paying their sharecroppers compensations in money, gave them part of the land they worked, or offered their own, or sold additional plots of land. As a consequence, a small rural settlement quickly grew alongside the road. By the end of the twentieth century, the small holdings had become rather homogeneous, both in size and type of cultivation, and could sometimes be distinguished from neighboring properties only by the different direction of the plowing.

Between the road and the houses, one still finds small family vegetable gardens, established at the time of the first settlement, which still maintain a degree of integrity. Houses are symmetrically located on the two sides of the road, almost on the edge of the roadway, occupying a central position in the holding extending behind them. In the ex-feudal areas instead, grain farming was abandoned already in the early 1960s, after the creation of an irrigation system made more profitable cultivations possible: tobacco, first, later replaced by sugar beet and vegetables.

In this area a phenomenon which is rather uncommon nowadays occurred: though families were rather large there was not a gradual subdivision of properties as elsewhere in Italy. On the contrary, smaller properties were often combined through a series of arranged marriages. The families, often related, came from the Abruzzo region (Casoli, Atessa, the surroundings of Teramo) or the area of Benevento (Morcone and S. Agata dei Goti). The original houses were primitive structures offering a simple cover for people and animals, and barely sufficient for a single family. However, following the intense development of agriculture, they were redone and modernized.

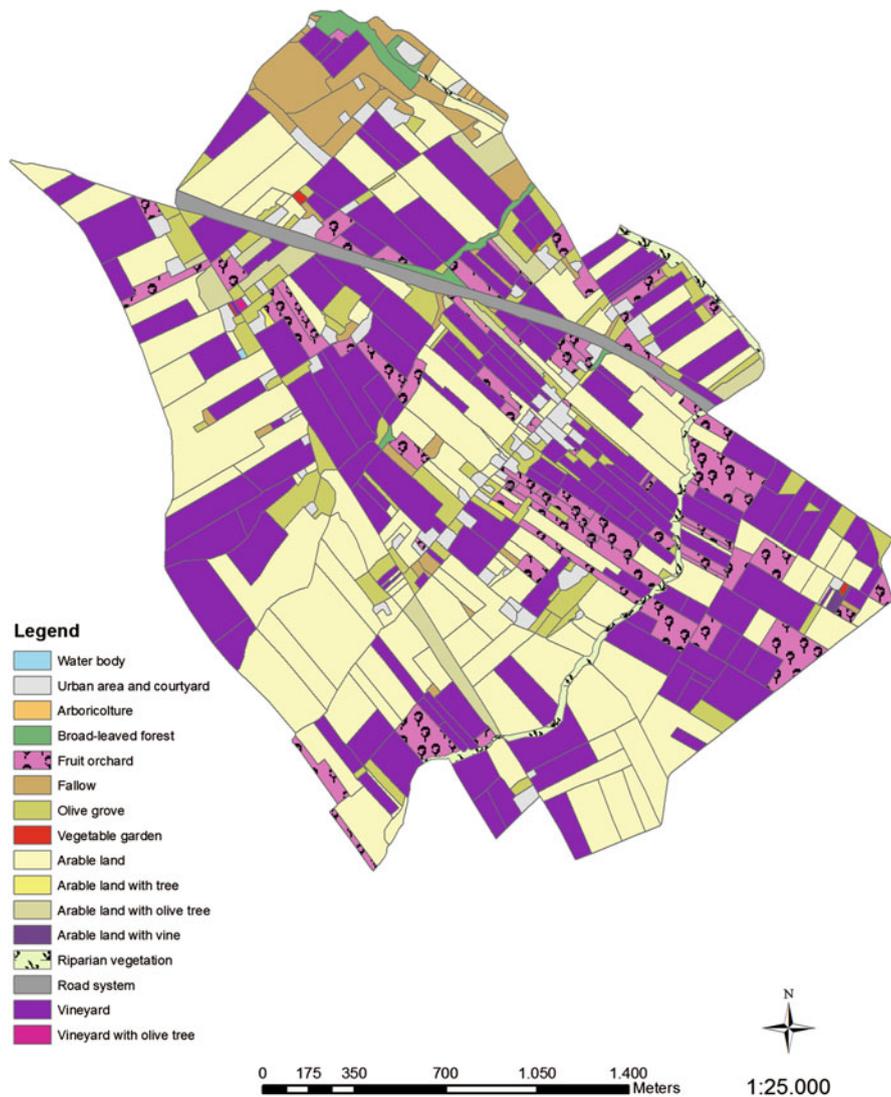
The area, one of the more fertile of Molise, was not subjected to that fragmentation of property typical of coastal areas, due to the mentality of the locals who continued to attach a lot of importance to the land. Structural modifications to the houses has turned them into actual villas, but there is no foreseeable risk of an abandoning of agriculture or significant alteration of the old settlement. New generations seem to believe in the possibility of continuing to work on the farm while holding other jobs (Fig. 19.3).

Land uses 2010	Surface (ha)	Surface (%)
Water body	0.09	0.02
Urban area and courtyard	19.74	3.32
Arboriculture	0.12	0.02
Broad-leaved forest	5.44	0.91
Fruit orchard	53.19	8.95
Fallow	24.34	4.10
Olive grove	37.00	6.23
Vegetable garden	0.39	0.07
Arable land	222.57	37.45
Arable land with tree	0.59	0.10
Arable land with olive tree	13.05	2.20
Arable land with vine	0.39	0.07
Riparian vegetation	7.48	1.26
Road system	10.48	1.76
Vineyard	199.33	33.54
Vineyard with olive tree	0.15	0.03
<i>Total</i>	<i>594.37</i>	<i>100.00</i>

Evaluating indices of landscape

Number of land uses	15
Number of patches	571
Total surface area (ha)	594.37
Average surface area of patches (ha)	1.04
Average surface area of arable land patches (ha)	1.07
Average surface area of forest patches (ha)	1.29
Hill's diversity number	5.16
Class of landscape integrity (I–VI)	VI

"La Pista" at Campomarino Land use 2007



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Fig. 19.3 The significance of the Campomarino area is due to the presence of different cultivations, such as small plots of vegetables gardens, arable lands, fruit orchards, vineyards and olive groves. 37 % of the area is characterized by arable land, and 33.5 % is covered by vineyards. Other land uses of the area are mixed cultivations (arable land with trees, arable land with olive trees and vines), orchards and vegetable gardens. The historic landscape shows a high level of integrity even in the landscape mosaic, which is still characterized by agricultural patches with a surface of about one hectare

19.4 The Olive Orchards of Venafro (41° 29' 03" N; 14° 01' 52" E)

This area consists of more than 500 ha of olive orchards in the municipality of Venafro, in the province of Isernia. The olive orchards extend from the plain to the beginning of the mountains, often on rocky and steep terrain. The area can be reached through many branches of state road SS 85 Venafrana, which goes from the town of Venafro to the Nunziata Lunga gallery, on the border with the region of Campania. The area lies at the foot of the mountain massif of Monte Sammucro, Monte Santa Croce and Monte Corno, and ranges in altitude between 150 and 600 m a.s.l. It is well-visible from the plain of Venafro. Other olive orchards are found in the valley, in numerous localities of the municipality of Venafro.

The significance of the area is tied to the presence of the traditional olive farming landscape, with orchards of aged olive trees sometimes clustering into woods. The olive oil from this area was known and appreciated since antiquity as we know from the works of Columella, Horace, Varro, Pliny the Elder, Cato and Juvenal. A legend says olive-trees were introduced to Venafro by a certain Licinius, perhaps one of the many Roman veteran-farmers, from whom the name “Licinian” used for a long-renown local variety of olives. The most famous oil of Venafro was the *aurinus*, thus named for its color (from Latin *aurinus*, “golden”), an oil produced from Licinian olives. Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65–8 B.C.) in an ode describes Venafro as verdant because covered by olive orchards, while Horace, in one of his Satires celebrates a sauce made with saffron and special herbs, with olive oil of Venafro as its mandatory ingredient. In another satire, in describing the dishes served for a banquet at the house of Nasidienus, Horace celebrates a moray cooked in Venafro oil obtained from the first pressing. In the Roman period, vineyards were also introduced, and wine grapes and olives have remained to the present day the dominant cultivation. The oldest olive orchards are in the mountainous area, in the locality of Tre Cappelle al Monte San Lazzaro. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the scholar Gabriele Cotugno wrote that “olive trees, which are so well-suited to it, and the excellent oil they produce, occupy, besides part of the plain, also the slopes of the mountains from Ceppagna to Pozzilli.” In the course of the centuries, other olive trees were planted closer to the valley. Francesco Lucenteforte, primicerius of the Cathedral of Venafro, in his *Monografia fisico-economico-morale di Venafro*, published in 1879, lists the various type of olives found in the area, among which the *Aurina* or *Aurinella* (from Latin *aureus*, meaning “golden”) so-called because of its golden color and high quality. Finally, between the nineteenth and twentieth century, olives began to be grown also in the level area towards the river Volturno. Nowadays the local oil is labeled as “Molise” DOP, and the Ministry of Agricultural Alimentary and Food Politics has included the The “*olive al naturale*” of Venafro in the Traditional Food Product list. Molise Region and the Commune of Venafro have started the procedure for the institution of a Olive-Tree Regional Agricultural Park, which calls for the identification of all monumental olive-trees, some of which are many centuries old and have a spectacular circumference. This is a very important initiative, which finally acknowledges the importance of the cultural features of the Italian landscape, which are largely prevalent compared to the exclusively natural ones, and seeks



Fig. 19.4 The landscape of Venafrò combines the historical features of olive cultivations, dating back to Roman times, with the beauty of the mountain landscape of Molise

to counter the decline of agriculture, a decline which in protected areas is on the contrary often perceived as a positive phenomenon.

The landscape continues to largely maintain its integrity. The realization of terraces supported by dry-stone walls in the hilly areas has increased the historical interest of the landscape, besides helping ensure the hydro-geological stability of the land by reducing the risk of erosion. The value of the rural landscape is increased by the magnificent natural environment, characterized by vertical cliffs and the spectacular ridges of Mount Sammucro, Corno and Santa Croce. Recently, for the construction of a new road, which goes through the Volturno valley skirting the town of Venafrò, hundreds of olive trees were uprooted, though many were replanted elsewhere. It is to be hoped that the establishing of the olive-tree park will help preserve and improve the integrity of the area.

The vulnerability of the land is largely a consequence of the decline of agriculture. While in valley areas, new olive trees continued to be planted and existing ones are properly maintained, due to easier farming conditions, on the slopes, especially in the least-accessible areas, olive orchards have been practically abandoned. Olive-trees are no longer pruned and are often surrounded by brambles and other weeds. The decline of olive-tree cultivation is also evident at first sight, in the way the silver-tipped green of olive-trees is increasingly encroached upon by the darker green of wooded areas. For the above reasons, the area, especially the one between the state road and the mountain slopes is vulnerable to fires, sometimes of

significant extension. For example, in the summer of 2007, a great fire destroyed many olive-trees. The lack of maintenance involves also dry-stone walls, many of which are now discontinuous, partially in disrepair and lower than they used to be (Fig. 19.4).

19.5 The Springs of Monteroduni (41° 31' 00" N; 14° 10' 00" E)

The area of the Springs of Monteroduni is characterized by flat terrain of alluvial origin; it extends for 2,000 ha; there is an abundance of springs and canals have been constructed to serve the small holdings of the municipality of Monteroduni, in the province of Isernia. The area is at the foot of the Matese Massif, on the side that gently declines westwards towards the river Volturno. Its altitude ranges between 150 and 200 m a.s.l. The area can be reached following state road SS 85, and taking, between 30 and 33 km, one of the local roads on the right or left, or, alternatively, by following the provincial road Volturno-Pentria.

The old town of Monteroduni dominates the valley from a hill. At the top of the hill, rises the castle of Monteroduni, one of the most beautiful castles of Molise for its architecture, its excellent condition, and for its position. During the Norman and Swabian domination, Monteroduni was a fief of the count's seat of Molise, and was used as one of the major strongholds of the county, according to scholar Giambattista Masciotta. The construction of the first stronghold on the hill, which replaced the *statio* of Ad Rotas, dates back presumably to the Longobard period, though no reliable archeological confirmation exists of this hypothesis. Inside the castle, there is a permanent exhibit of farm tools, bearing witness to the importance of local rural culture, centered on the agricultural exploitation of the many local springs. In 1193, the town was destroyed by the troops of emperor Henry IV and remained without water-works for about 800 years. However, many houses could rely on wells and reservoirs replenished by rainwater, which were used for household chores, while the various natural springs were used for drinking water. The various springs are connected in a unitary system. The most important springs are those of S. Nazzaro, Caprionero, Capotrio and Lagozzo. At a short distance we also find the spring of Campo La Fontana. The spring of Capotrio flows from the slopes of the hill on which the old town of Monteroduni is located, and supplies water to an aqueduct that branches out to the various small rural settlements. The spring is not constant and its flow decreases significantly during dry spells. In these periods, water is supplied by a nearby artesian well activated by an electrical pump. The area has a complex network of canals serving the various holdings, typical of the irrigation-based agriculture that has characterized this area of Molise in the last few centuries. The presence of springs has made possible the cultivation of wheat, forage, vegetables and fruit-trees over a long period of time, notwithstanding the fragmentation of the original estate. One of the main products of the area are peaches, of which there is a well-established local variety. The abundance of water attracted settlements since ancient times, starting with the Pentri Sannites. Until the mid-twentieth century, hemp was also cultivated, from which comes the local place-name of "Cannavine."



Fig. 19.5 The landscape of Monteroduni

Since 1911, irrigation is regulated by a “Code for the irrigation of the fields,” issued by the Commune of Monteroduni, which applies to the entire municipality, but is particularly relevant to this area. The first true aqueduct of Monteroduni was planned in 1934, begun on March 18, 1935, tested on April 12, 1938, and fully operational by September 14, 1938. The main canals are property of the Commune, while the drainage canals and secondary canals are privately owned. “Since private citizens have no special rights or privileges in regards to the waters of the Commune”—states Article 2—“distribution must be carried out by supervisors with absolute impartiality, treating all owners and renters in the same way.” The Code also regulates the usage of the springs by the various small rural villages of the municipality and the shifts assigned to each village.

As for the integrity of the area, the canal system serving the various vegetable gardens and cultivations are still well-visible. These canals often serve also as borders between properties. Even after the introduction of chemical fertilizers and the adoption of modern machinery, the types of cultivation have remained unchanged. The products of Monteroduni are marketed throughout the region and beyond, and this helps preserve its characteristics. The original rural architecture is also well-preserved, and consists of stone cottages and other rural buildings. Notwithstanding the construction of new houses, the original rural landscape has retained its integrity. In past decades, there have been repeated efforts to channel waters using small cement canals or forced draught cast-iron tubes, but high costs prevented the projects from being carried out.

The vulnerability of the area consists in decreasing canal maintenance, which could lead to a decline in the supply of water for irrigation. In 1981, a law was approved which cancelled many dispositions of the 1911 Code, among which the prescription that “all users of each locality must gather together and ensure that, before the start of their shift in annual irrigation, the canals and the drainage ditches be cleaned and fixed,” and “their sides maintained to prevent the water from leaking or the flow from slowing down” (art. 17). Decreased canal maintenance could also lead to an abandoning of vegetable farming in favor of smaller fields of crops (Fig. 19.5).

19.6 Sheep-Tracks in the Upper Molise (41° 45' 00" N; 14° 23' 00" E)

The mountainous area of the Molise region is characterized by ample pastures interspersed by woods and by fields where corn, pulse, potatoes and spelt are grown. This agricultural landscape is well-exemplified by the localities of Collemeluccio and Montedimezzo, in the province of Isernia, which are connected by the Celano-Foggia sheep-track. The area extends for more than 3,500 ha and is located between two natural parks (*Riserve Naturali Orientate*), which have been declared Biosphere Reservations and included in the MaB (Man and Biosphere) program of the UNESCO. The area can be accessed from the highways of Fondo Valle Trigno and Fondo Valle Sangro, through a network of provincial and municipal roads that connect them to the various towns. The area is characterized by a network of country roads connecting the various holdings. From a geo-morphological perspective, the area is characterized by a series of plateaus located between 700 and 950 m a.s.l., characterized by calcareous-argillaceous rock and therefore a generally gentle surface, with the exception of some calcareous areas. Its northern boundary is marked by the Celano-Foggia sheep-track and its southern boundary by the Carpinone-Sulmona railway. To the west instead it borders with the “Prati della Signora” plain of Montedimezzo and to the east with the woods and pastures of the municipalities of Pescocolanciano and Pietrabbondante and the “Abetina” of Collemeluccio.

The significance of the landscape is due to the presence of pastures and of the Celano-Foggia sheep-track, which is 110 m large and 127 km long and dates back to the time of the Sannites. It is one of the best preserved sheep-tracks of mountainous Molise. In past centuries, it played a crucial role in shaping the economic and social system revolving around transhumance, which characterized the entire area. Many signs of past human presence can be found along the sheep-track: drinking troughs, shrines, huts and inns, small nuclei of houses and villages. Many names of places are associated with transhumance. The settlements of Pescocolanciano, Civitanova del Sannio and Montalto di Rionero developed in the proximity of the Castel di Sangro–Lucera sheep-track, and that of San Pietro Avellana in the proximity of the Celano–Foggia sheep-track. For this reason, the natural museum of Montedimezzo includes everyday objects of pastoral life, mountain farming tools and woodcutting tools. If the extension of the sheep-track has remained the same, its usage has



Fig. 19.6 The Celano-Foggia sheep-track, dating back to the time of the Samnites, is one of the best preserved in upper Molise. Along this track one can still see material evidence of pastoral life

changed. It would be certainly anachronistic to think of reactivating transhumance, other than for occasional cultural events celebrating local traditions. On the other hand, well-preserved sheep-tracks could be used for cultural tourism, hiking and school-children's excursions.

The pastoral landscape retains a strong integrity, favored also by the mainly public ownership of the land. Open areas are regularly mowed while wooded areas and pastures are maintained through forest management plans. The common-land use of the pastures and woods by residents, which is characteristic of municipally owned land, is similarly regulated, though the rights are nowadays seldom exercised. Private property, with few exceptions, is very fragmented and revenues are very low. Depopulation and the decline and sometimes almost complete disappearance of sheep-farming has caused a slow expansion of wooded areas at the expense of open fields, marginal areas, and abandoned pastures, compromising the integrity of the landscape. Even more rapid was the growth of shrubs on pasture-lands. Arable land has greatly declined as well as that used for forage.

The vulnerability of the area lies in the decline of farming and the expansion of woods into pasture land. The area is subject to landscape regulations and also well-controlled by local communities, but there are no concrete actions aimed at maintaining or recreating pasture land, also on account of regulations protecting wooded areas. There is an absence of effective policies that could make

it economically convenient for younger generations to continue working as farmers, in areas such as organic farming, animal farming, or eco-sustainable tourism. Only with such policies can this historically valuable rural and pastoral landscape be saved from the advance of the woods. The maintenance work on the traditional small stone refuges, the *tholos*, is also scarce.

Recently the Corpo Forestale dello Stato (Forest State Service), through the Territorial Office for Biodiversity of Isernia, has advanced a specific proposal for the Celano–Foggia sheep-track. Having received from the regional administration of Molise the free concession of certain sheep-tracks, a preliminary project has been elaborated to ensure sheep-tracks remains accessible. The project also calls for the restoration of an inn and some fountains (Fig. 19.6).

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