



Rebibbia-Casal de' Pazzi: discovery and first investigations of the site documented through the archives of the Istituto Italiano di Paleontologia Umana (Italian Institute of Human Paleontology)

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ABSTRACT - Since its foundation, the Istituto Italiano di Paleontologia Umana (Italian Institute of Human Paleontology) has been a point of reference for the development of paleontology and prehistoric archeology in Italy. Particularly in Lazio, the Institute's scholars excavated several sites, and thanks to their constant presence and systematic surveys during major building works in the Rome area, they significantly contributed to research developments and the discoveries, during the 20th century, of several well-known sites referable to the Lower and Middle Paleolithic. The activities carried out were accurately recorded in scientific reports, excavation diaries, or simply in notes, accompanied by drawing, maps, and sections with relevant remarks for the subsequent sites' interpretations. All the field documentation, enriched by a large photographic collection, is preserved in the historical archive of the Institute, which was recently enlarged thanks to the donation of Aldo G. Segre's personal collection, which had previously incorporated part of Alberto Carlo Blanc's archive. When the site of Casal de' Pazzi is concerned, it is important to notice that in the years immediately preceding the 'official' discovery of the site, the Soprintendenza Archeologica with the scientific support of the Istituto Italiano di Paleontologia Umana carried out surveys of the yards near the site area, to investigate the vertebrate paleontology and local geology. The Institute's original documentation shows that banks of fluvio-lacustrine deposits containing fauna had already been identified, and the recovered faunal remains were arranged in the Institute for research activities. When the deposit was identified in 1981 the ongoing collaboration continued; in fact, the first studies and the original geochronological interpretations are documented in the archive of the Institute. Some photographs and original stratigraphic sections by Aldo G. Segre and collaborators particularly significant in this regard are published here for the first time.

Keywords: Istituto Italiano di Paleontologia Umana; early research at Rebibbia-Casal de' Pazzi; Casal de' Pazzi site discovery; Aldo G. Segre; documentary archive; photographic archive.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The archives of the Istituto Italiano di Paleontologia Umana have already proven to be a valuable source of information for well-recognized archeological sites as well as for less-known deposits located along the Italian peninsula (Parenti and Sanso, 2014; Tarantini and Parenti, 2011). As is often the case, published data are only a part of the large amount of information collected in the preliminary phases of research or during regular excavation campaigns. In fact, in publications a selection is generally made in order to make data clear, limiting it

to the most certain and apparently significant. Months, years, or decades later, the necessity to refine or revise the research force to check unpublished original notes, sketches, and photos to reconstruct excavation history, stratigraphy, and finding contexts.

This is also the case of Casal de' Pazzi, 40 years after the discovery of the archeological deposit, which can now be visited thanks to its musealisation, and which has been valorized by educational and cultural initiatives, the conference organized in spring 2022 offered the opportunity to update the knowledge about the data from the first excavation years.

2. BEFORE THE DISCOVERY OF THE SITE: DOCUMENTS ON STUDIES AND RESEARCH CARRIED OUT IN THE AREA

Graphic and photographic documentation of Casal de' Pazzi has been selected from the archives of the Istituto Italiano di Paleontologia Umana, including documents from the personal archive of Prof. Aldo G. Segre. The latter passed away in November 2018 at the age of 100; he was an eminent geologist, interested in speleology, topography, paleontology, and prehistoric archeology. After many decades at the helm of the Istituto Italiano di Paleontologia Umana together with his wife Eugenia Segre Naldini, who passed away in February 2023, he left to the Institute part of his personal collections comprising a huge amount of research and field documentation regarding several Italian deposits, Lazio, and Rome in particular (Fig. 1). Among these, we have found several interesting data about the first investigations in the Casal de' Pazzi area, some of which predate the discovery of the site. Part of the documentation was acquired at high resolution by DIGILAB of SAPIENZA University in the framework of a specific agreement active since 2014.

Among Aldo G. Segre's manuscripts, preliminary bibliographical notes provide the first significant evidence. For example Segre as an attentive scholar of the past and collector of relevant works, consulted writings from past centuries, among which he transcribed a phrase by Ponzi

(1862): "This is a fact I have observed many times in the riverbeds of the Tevere and the Aniene, that the bones of the great pachyderms worn out and scattered, and their teeth even reduced to rounded breaches, lie mostly together with the large boulders carried along the most energetic current flows; ..." (translation by the authors, compare Fig. 2B).

Of exceptional interest are also all the preparatory sketches that have been the base of the general geological sections of the Aniene Valley (Fig. 3). These sketches are particularly significant to contextualize the observations made even a century ago in the area east of Rome (Aldo G. Segre often refers to the stratigraphic and geological investigations of Alberto C. Blanc in the Roman Campagna), establishing correlations between the various prehistoric deposits and their chronological attributions (Blanc, 1938, 1955, 1957).

Some stratigraphic sections drawn by Aldo G. Segre (Figs. 4, and 5), from respectively 450 m east and 700 m south-east of the Rebibbia Tower, date back to 1979. In fact, we know from the first reports published on Casal de' Pazzi (Anzidei et al., 1984), that already in the years immediately preceding the discovery of the site, the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, in collaboration with experts from the Istituto Italiano di Paleontologia Umana, including Amilcare Bietti, had conducted research and excavation tests "in the area of Via Casal de' Pazzi", collecting also faunal remains studied and preserved at the Institute.

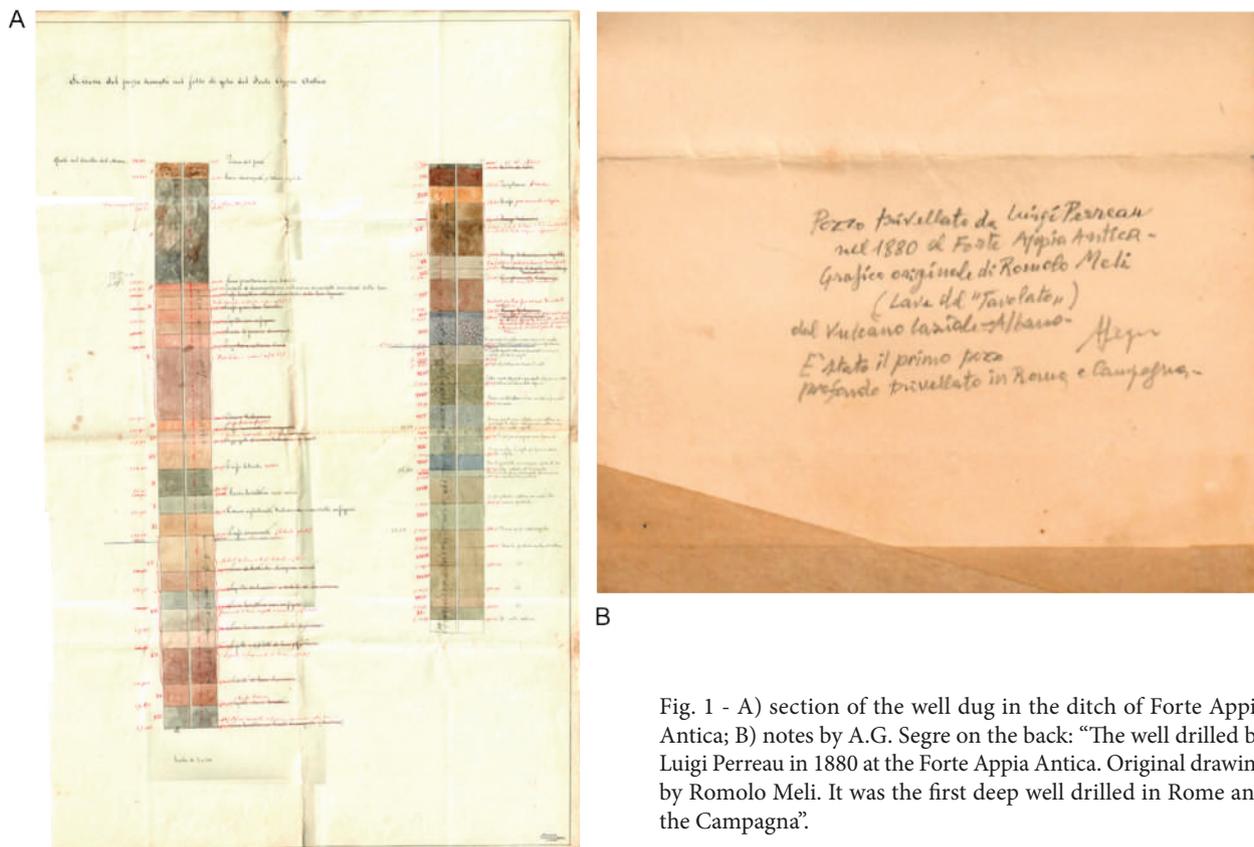


Fig. 1 - A) section of the well dug in the ditch of Forte Appia Antica; B) notes by A.G. Segre on the back: "The well drilled by Luigi Perreau in 1880 at the Forte Appia Antica. Original drawing by Romolo Meli. It was the first deep well drilled in Rome and the Campagna".

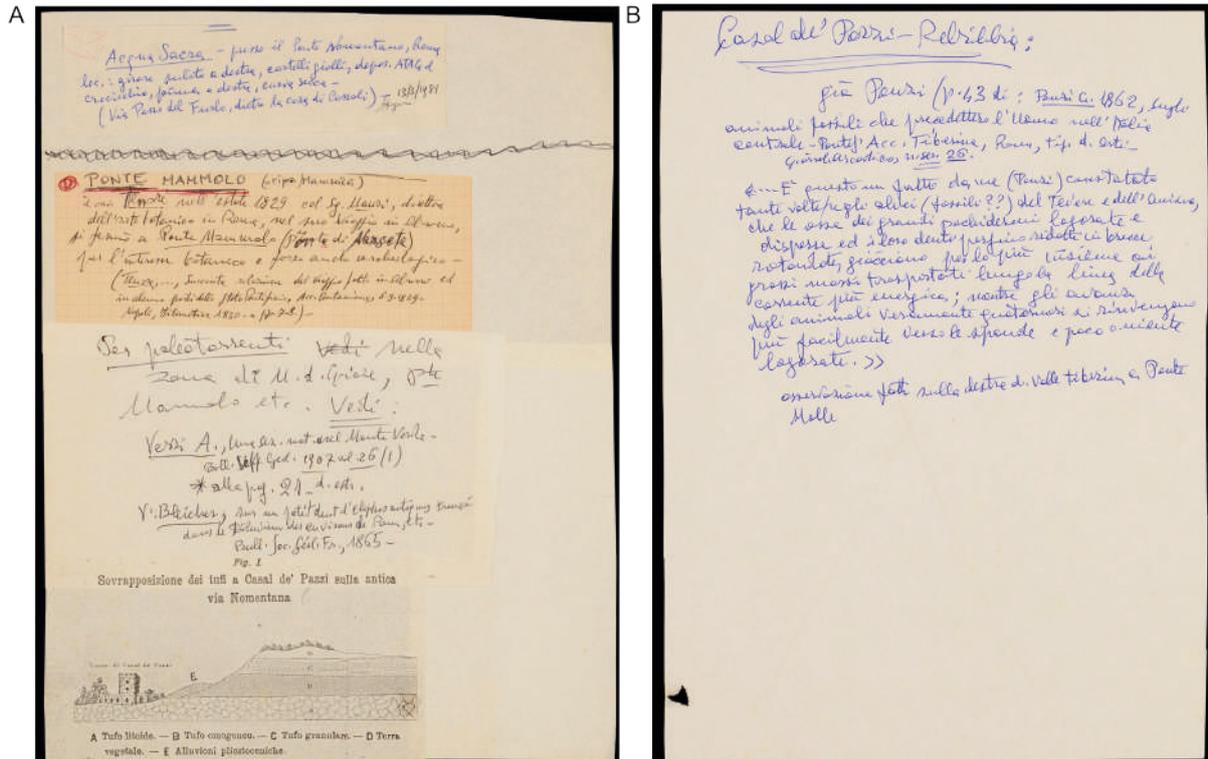


Fig. 2 - A) notes and bibliographic references transcribed by A.G. Segre; B) transcription of a passage by Giuseppe Ponzi in which the author describes the difference of the bone surface preservation according to the flow of the river.

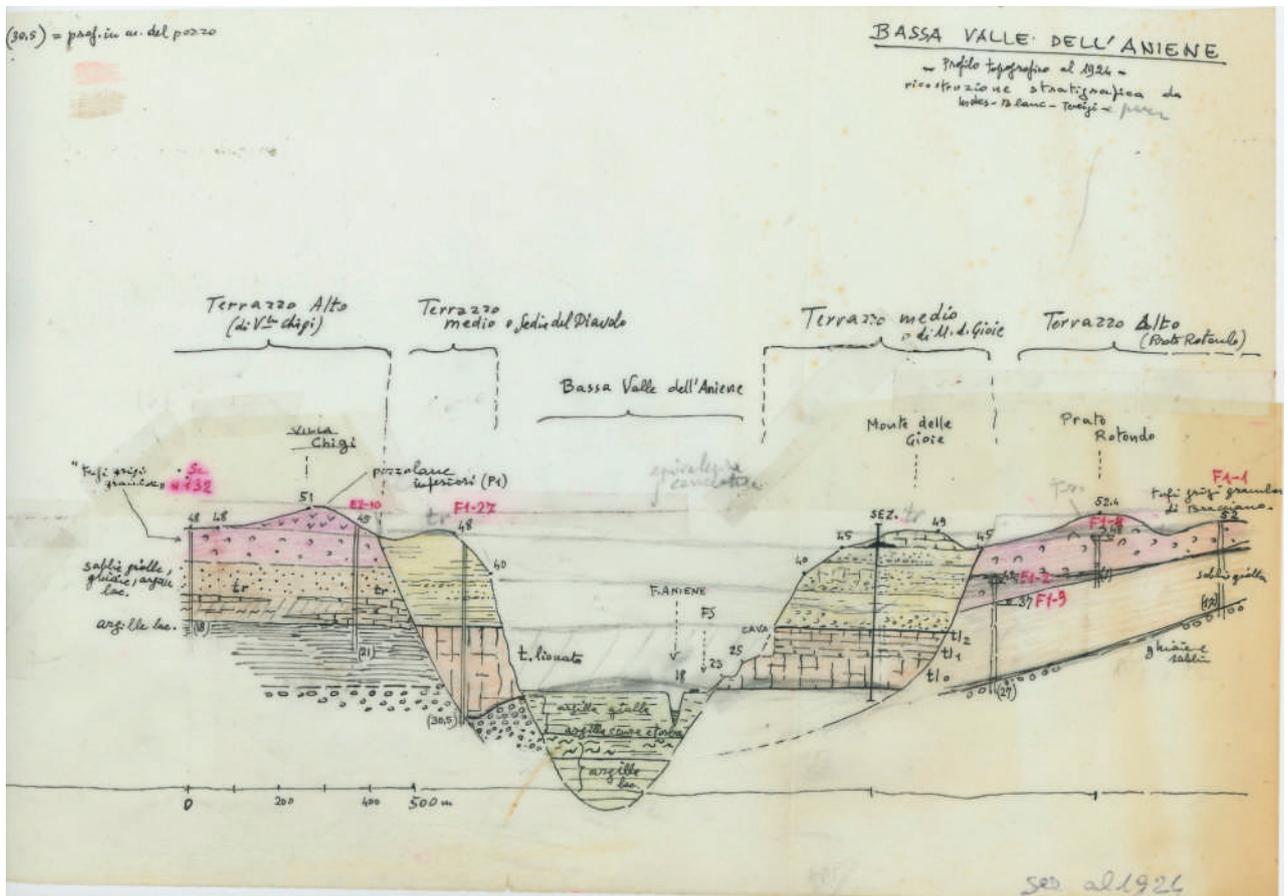


Fig. 3 - Topographic profile of the lower Aniene valley showing the stratigraphy of the area and the localization of core drilling points.

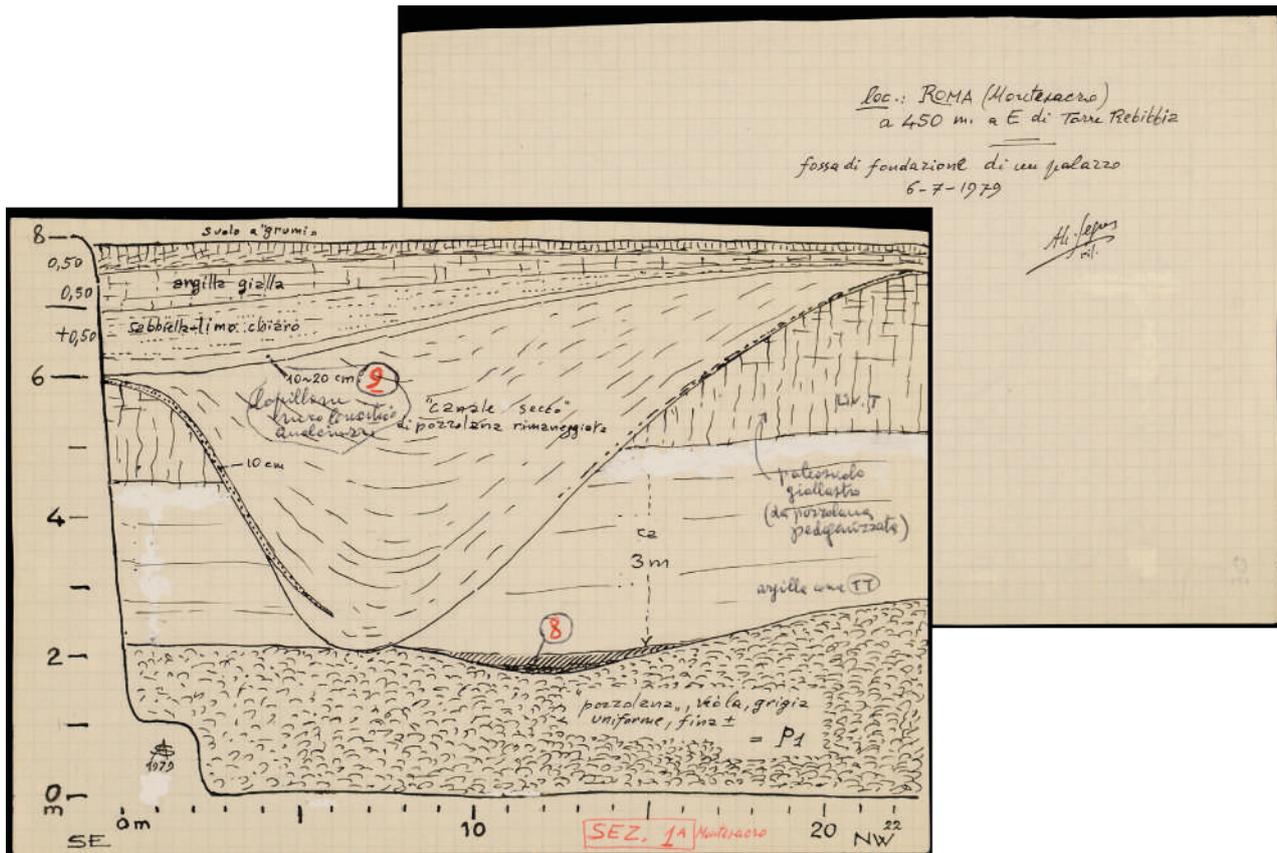


Fig. 4 - Stratigraphic section described by A.G. Segre during the excavation for the foundations of a building in 1979, 450 m east of Rebbibia Tower.

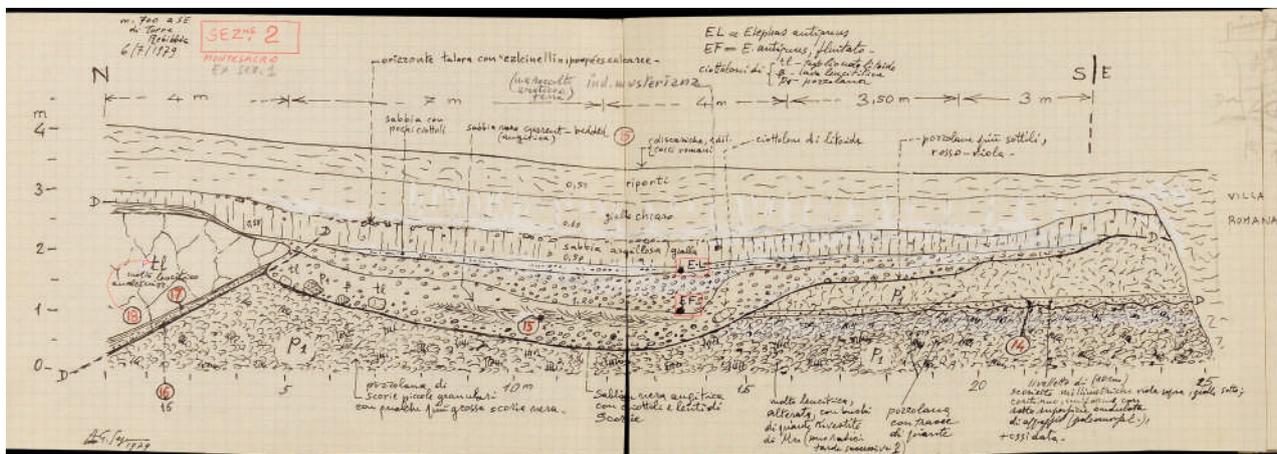


Fig. 5 - Stratigraphic section described by A.G. Segre 700 m southeast of Torre Rebbibia Tower, showing the position of Elephas fossils remains (EL, EF).

3. THE FOUND DOCUMENTATION: FROM DISCOVERY TO EXCAVATION

This was the background to the identification of the paleoriver containing faunal and archeological remains; only later the site became the object of a regular excavation campaign started in November 1981, when a large tusk of *Paleoloxodon antiquus* was found inside levels immediately correlated with other well-known Pleistocene sites along

the Aniene Valley such as Sedia del Diavolo, Monte delle Gioie, Saccopastore and Ponte Mammolo. Aldo G. Segre took part also in the first field research (Segre 1983), realizing the first geological correlations and stratigraphic interpretations (Figs. 6, 7, and 8).

Among the documents kept at the Institute, there are also copies of the detailed reports by Massimo Ruffo, a fellow archeologist, and member of the Institute, who was appointed by the Soprintendenza Archeologica di

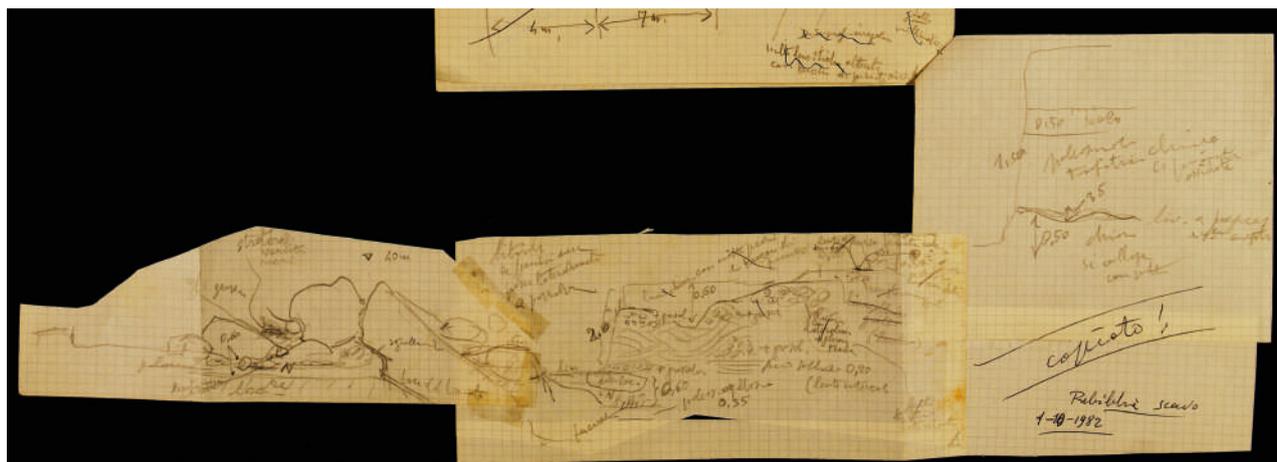


Fig. 8 - First sketches of the Casal de' Pazzi site excavation drawn by A.G. Segre.

Roma, in the person of the official Anna Paola Anzidei, to conduct the excavation of the site. It should be remembered that Massimo Ruffo was responsible for the discovery of the famous parietal bone and for the rendering of the original stratigraphy of the deposit by means of a lacquer peel technique, which still allows the

observation of the characteristic sands and gravels levels. Massimo Ruffo excavated Casal de' Pazzi, reconstructing the morphology of the stream that 200.000 years ago accumulated Paleolithic evidence; moreover, he carried out stratigraphic surveys, geological sampling, collecting osteological remains near the site, attempting to

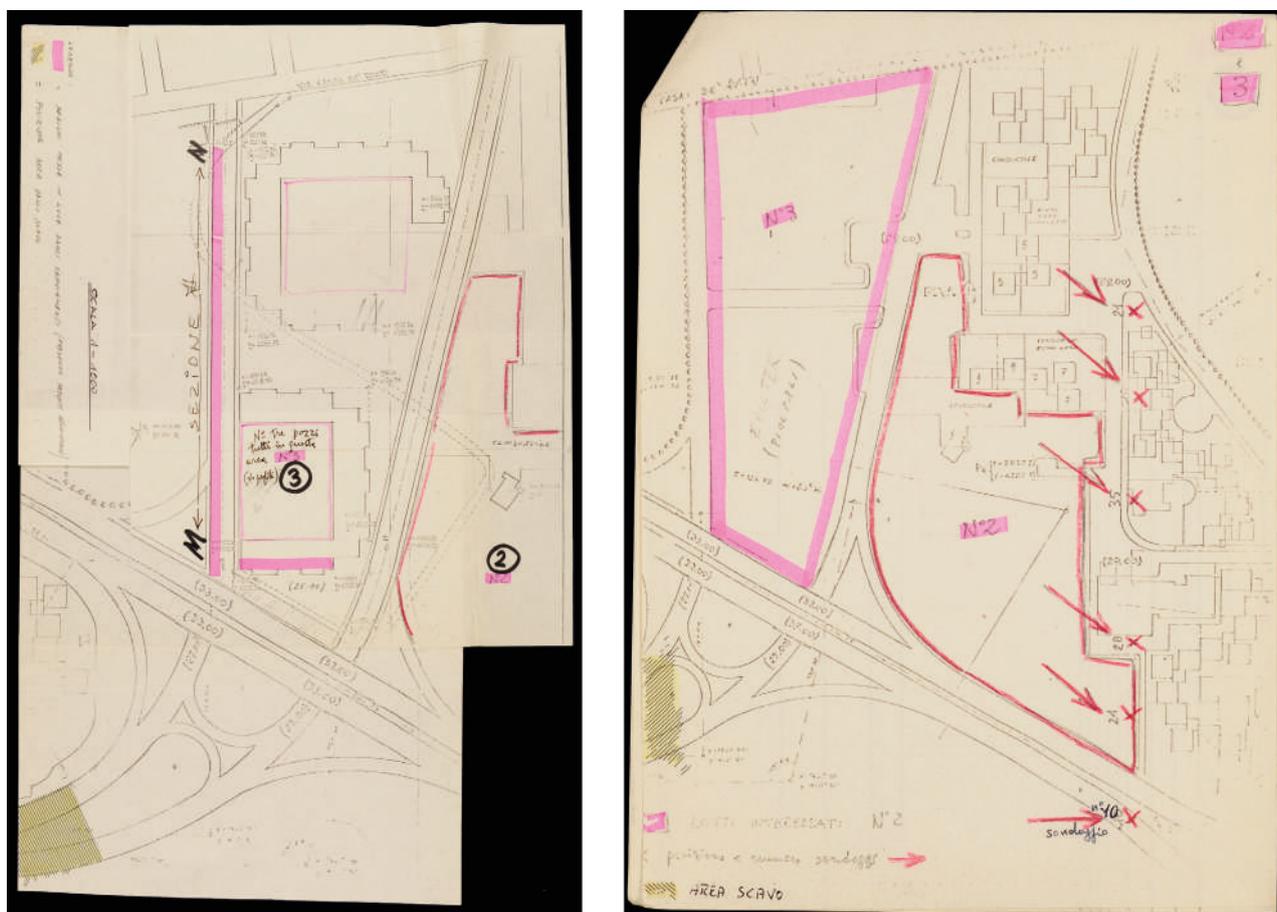


Fig. 9 - Localization of survey sections, cores, and excavation areas carried out during the construction of the buildings around Casal de' Pazzi site by Massimo Ruffo.

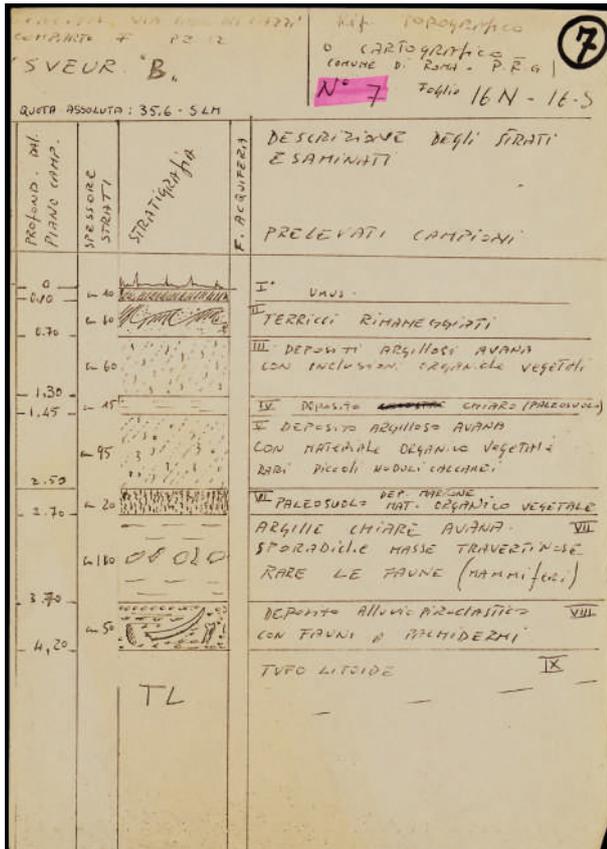


Fig. 10 - Description of a borehole (n. 7) with identification of the level containing fossil fauna carried out by Massimo Ruffo.

reconstruct the local geomorphology during Pleistocene and identifying the possible course of the paleoriver (Figs. 9, 10, and 11). As can be seen from the reports, excavation operations, and surveys were assisted by the “frequent consultations and field visits of Prof. Aldo G. Segre”.

Following the first regular excavation campaigns, the geomorphological report of Foglio 16 Nord of the P.G.R. of the Rome Municipality was drawn up by Andrea Cassoli, Maria Vittoria Molaroni and Andrea Tertulliani in 1985. Thanks to this document, it is possible to locate the findings concentrations in areas that are currently completely urbanized (Fig. 12).

The documentary collection is completed by the various pictures taken by Aldo G. Segre during the first investigations at the site, and in the phases immediately preceding the extensive excavation of the area. Thanks to the evocative images, it is possible to follow the progress phases of the research: a) the identification of the layers containing fauna in the deep trench excavated for the installation of a sewer (Fig. 13); b) the extension of the excavation area with the discovery of the first blocks of tufa eroded by the flow of water in the paleoriver and the associated levels of sands and gravels (Figs. 14, and 15); c) the in situ discovery of large faunal remains that characterize the deposit (Figs. 16, and 17) and the stone tools among the blocks of tufa.

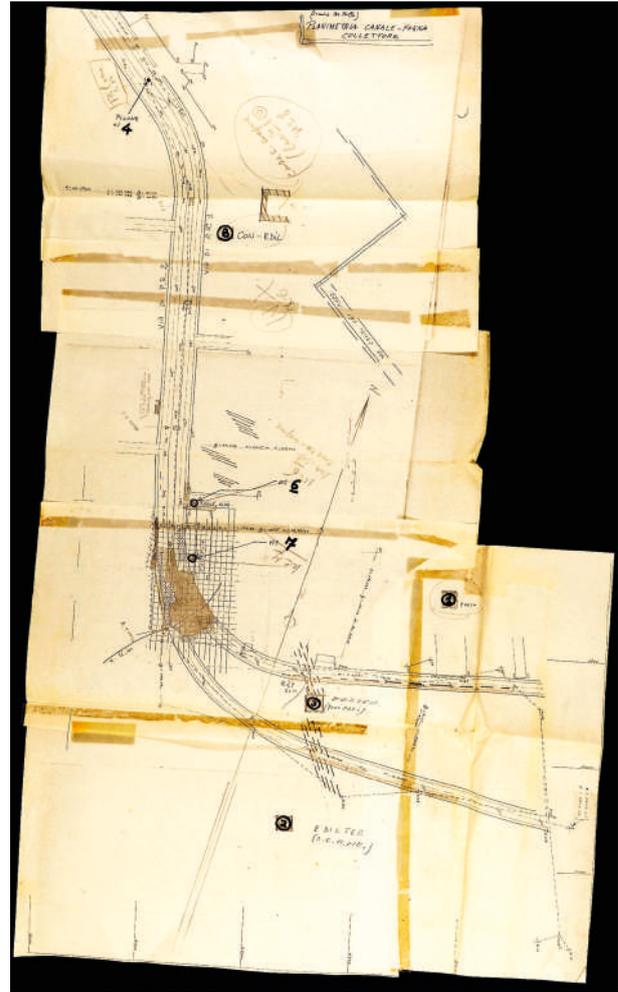


Fig. 11 - Plan view of the sewage collector under excavation with localization of the identified prehistoric deposit.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The selected archive material that is the subject of this brief article, together with other documents under cataloging, will be useful for future studies. In fact, it will be possible to correlate the data of unpublished investigations with new geological, paleontological and archeological analyses, potentially leading to the recovery of information that can still enrich the interpretation of Casal de' Pazzi, an extraordinary site offering a unique picture of Rome during the Pleistocene.

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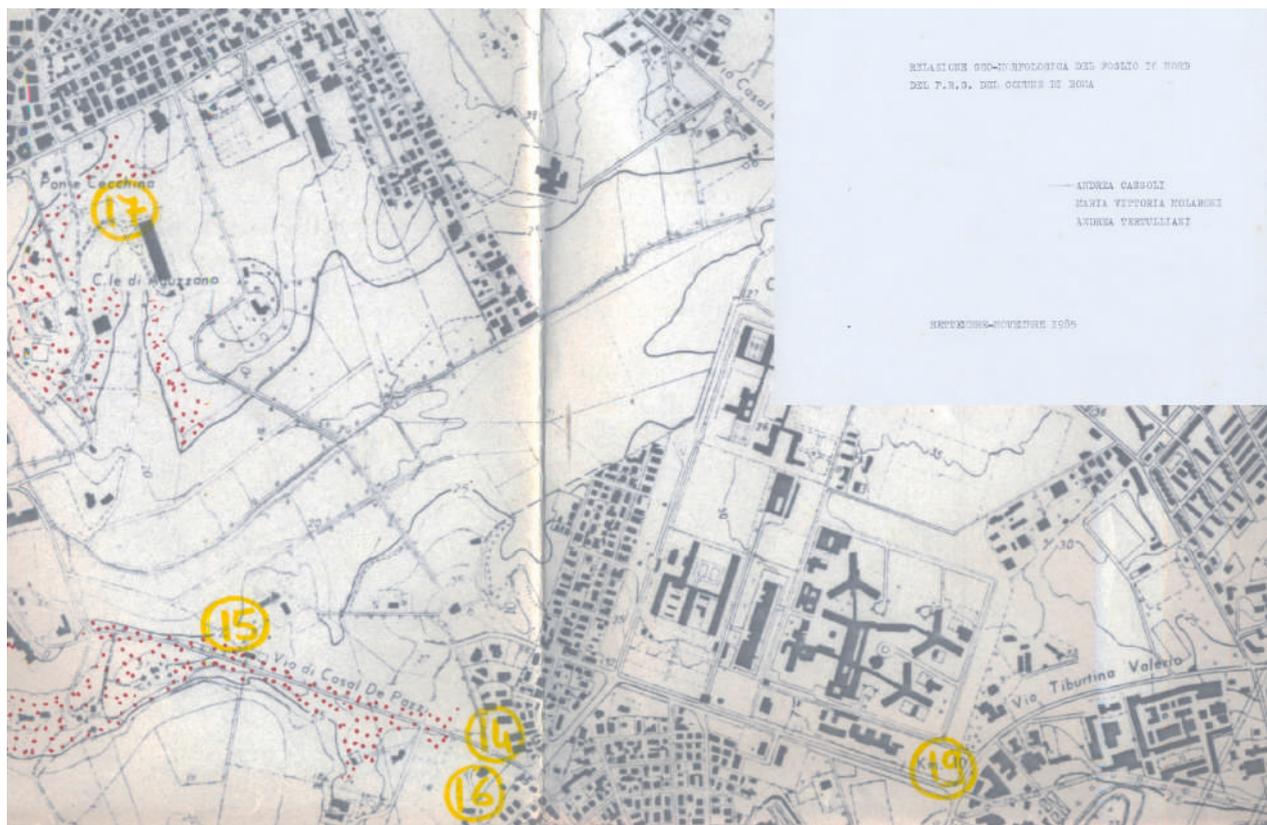


Fig. 12 - Detailed topographic map (1:10.000 scale) of the investigated area showing the location of the main outcrops of prehistoric deposits.



Fig. 13 - Digging trench of the sewer collector at Casal de' Pazzi: researchers observe levels with fossils.



Fig. 14 - Detail of the excavation area showing the fluvial deposits where the archeological site was identified.



Fig. 15 - Blocks of volcaniclastic deposits resting on sandy and gravelly deposits transported by the local stream



Fig. 16 - View of the excavation area in Casal dè Pazzi, where it is possible to observe the geometry of stratification surfaces with the fluvial deposits.



Fig. 17 - Elephas/Palaeoloxodon tusk resting on the fluvial deposits.

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