



## Casal de' Pazzi: The Pleistocene on the outskirts between past, present, and future. The reasons for a conference

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Some recurrences are so special that they should not be overlooked. Celebrating them allows a community to gather, share values and visions, renew commitments towards common goals, and open new horizons for cooperative work. This was precisely the case of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the discovery of the Pleistocene site of Rebibbia-Casal de' Pazzi, which occurred in November of 1981 and was celebrated by the International Conference “40 Years of Casal de' Pazzi in the framework of Pleistocene archaeo-paleontological sites (400,000-40,000 BP): current knowledge and new research perspectives”, held in Rome from 30<sup>th</sup> March to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.

This discovery triggered a chain of events and collaborations that have positively affected countless people over the last four decades from academic scholars, researchers, and antiquity enthusiasts to the local community, schools, cultural institutions, heritage professionals, tourists, and marginalized groups.

Most of the institutional and scientific efforts made since the 1980s regarding this site have been flowing into the creation and consolidation of the Museum of Casal de' Pazzi, an inclusive cultural entity that has established itself as a reference point in its territory as well as in the broader realm of public dissemination of Pleistocene-related themes. The success of this Museum, which has welcomed over 50,000 physical and virtual visitors over the last eight years, proves that well-researched, innovative, and thought-out communication strategies can break down the time and conceptual barriers between the present and early Prehistory, making it no longer such a distant and unrelatable field of knowledge for the general audience.

In our view scientific research, museum practices, and dissemination must always be closely bound together - which is reflected by the thematic sessions of the Conference and the resulting chapters of these Proceedings - to contribute towards the democratization of knowledge, and its social function. Open access was, therefore, an imperative choice for this publication which found a suitable place in the Journal of Mediterranean Earth Sciences.

The Conference was our way to celebrate the achievements of a 40-year-long journey, as well as to acknowledge, reflect upon and learn from the inevitable failures, with an eye to the future in a wider context going well beyond Casal de' Pazzi.

The Middle Pleistocene lower Aniene Valley and, more generally, the Rome area cannot be seen in isolation. In a virtuous circle, a better understanding of the Rebibbia-Casal de' Pazzi deposit can - and must - contribute to enhancing the reconstruction of geo-paleontological and archeo-anthropological processes and events at other Middle Pleistocene sites. That is why these Proceedings include a section on “New Archival finds on Roman Pleistocene” and one about multidisciplinary studies on the site protagonist of the Conference (*The site of Casal de' Pazzi: a multidisciplinary state of the art and some future perspectives*). In a broader perspective, data are presented and discussed at regional (*Beyond Casal de' Pazzi: new data from Middle-Late Pleistocene archeo-paleontological sites of Latium area*) and international scale (*Middle-Late Pleistocene*

*archaeo-paleontological sites in and out of Italy*), with case-studies from as far as Germany and Ethiopia. In line with our firm belief that academic research and public dissemination cannot be separated, for the good of both academia and the general public - ultimately, of society - the two final sections are devoted to the museumization and dissemination of Prehistory. These sections are titled “*Case-studies on Pleistocene museology*” and “*Case-studies on Pleistocene dissemination and communication strategies*”.

Despite our best intentions over the years to balance those two sides of the same coin - namely science and museum studies - we must admit that the energy expended to make the Museum come true could not equal, for a long time, that employed to progress with the research studies.

However, we can proudly say that the Museum has now gained enough strength and independence to start reinforcing the research process, which will eventually also contribute to enriching the Museum setup and experience. In this context, the Conference, as well as these Proceedings, can be considered the starting point for a new page in the history of Casal de' Pazzi.

A page where multidisciplinary investigations, cutting-edge scientific approaches, and community involvement go hand in hand more than ever with the aim of shedding new light on the deposit's still open questions, as well as making this museum-heritage site a prehistory and museology international research center. In this respect, a project of expansion is under discussion with the local Municipality, the next long-term goal for this little gem in the outskirts of the city that has already witnessed - and often prompted - the achievement of so many unthinkable goals.

Such accomplishments could not have been possible without the academic, institutional, cultural, and local, entities that have always worked for Casal de' Pazzi with enthusiastic dedication. We are extremely grateful to Maria Vittoria Marini Clarelli, Sovrintendente of the Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali at the time of the conference, and her staff, furthermore the current Sovrintendente Claudio Parisi Presicce and Director Fabio Pacciani for their support. Our heartfelt gratitude also goes to our friend and colleague Maria Gabriella Cimino, esteemed archeologist of the Sovrintendenza Capitolina who passed away a few months after the Conference. She never stopped encouraging us, even during her final and hardest days.

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