

ARTIS Project Report – The Polledrara of Cecanibbio



The Municipal Pre-School "Legno Verde" of Rome took part in the Artis Project (Accessibility Rome 3 Innovation Sustainability). The aim of the project dealt with an educational path designed to make pupils aware of the relationship between man and nature, human life and the river environment. Without any doubt, a significant intervention, a communication level, to make the contents of the archaeological site accessible to children in the kindergarten. Identified in 1984 following a survey conducted by the Superintendency for Archaeological Heritage of Rome, La Polledrara of Cecanibbio is among the most important and spectacular paleontological sites (considered as museums) in Italy. Since 1985, the area has been subjected to numerous excavation campaigns. At the end of the 90s, given the exceptional nature of the remains, their abundance, the presence of rare species and the extraordinary state of preservation, a museum project was approved, created in 2001 with the inauguration of an exhibition structure that currently covers about 900 square meters: a surface corresponding to the banks and the riverbed of a stream set in a small graben (tectonic pit) which, during the upper-middle Pleistocene, engraved the layers of granular tuff erupted by the Sabatine apparatus. A detailed and recent environmental reconstruction interprets the sediments of the La Polledrara site as the final expression of a filling phase of an engraved valley, at the end of an important glacial phase. Very numerous are the remains referring to elephants and mammoths. Nevertheless, not only that, skeletal parts related to carnivores, such as the wolf, the fox, the wild cat, and the badger have been found. There are also numerous remains of reptiles, amphibians, and birds, still under a study

phase. The frequentation of the area by primitive men is then testified indirectly by numerous stones and worked bones, and directly by the discovery of a milk molar. In the area studied so far, several phases of development of the layer can be recognized, due to different phases of the river cycle. The first phase of flow is documented in the southern part of the area, in which engravings and shapes of the river bottom are recognizably shaped by the water. In the central area of the excavation, a phase referable to a moment immediately following a flood is preserved. During this phase, two specimens of elephants were trapped in the muddy sediment as evidenced by some vertebrae and ribs found in anatomical connection and a sub-physiological position. A similar situation is documented a few meters to the west, where an adult specimen of the elephant lies trapped in the muddy sediments of the flood fill. The carcass is almost complete: the skull and the jaw are in connection, part of the hyoid apparatus is dislocated a few centimetres to the left of the skull, while the forelimbs are in physiological position and the posterior ones in anatomical connection. Around, a multitude of stone-worked elements suggests that the carcass had been slaughtered and worked on-site by primitive men. My work took place at the time I visited, last Monday 10th June 2019, at the Municipal Pre-School "Legno Verde" in Rome to interview the small students between the ages of five and six, of the teacher Maria Carmela Romano's class. After introducing myself to the teacher and the children, through short interviews, they told me about their experience at the archaeological site of La Polledrara and they showed me the background of the site they later reproduced in class. Later the teacher and the children invited me to see their archaeological site reproduced in the schoolyard. The enthusiastic children told me how this site was created, how they reproduced the bones and everything they saw on the La Polledrara site. The second day I went to the school to take care of the preparation of the four project posters to create experiential paths of reading. The first poster consists of the presentation of the project, of those who are part of it and the preparation of the children for the visit to the site. The second poster is one of the visits to the site of La Polledrara with the relative drawings, thoughts of the children and photos. Then there is the photo of the place chosen for the site to be recreated at school and finally, the photo of the site created. The third poster deals with the work

at school, where the children reproduced the fake bones, caps, and cords and then put them in the sandbox and recreated the background of the archaeological site in a large billboard to be placed on their site in the courtyard. The fourth poster is finally that of the comparison between the real site and that reconstructed one with photos and drawings of the children with their thoughts. On June 21 the presentation of the project, the experiential reading path and the visit to the reconstructed site in the garden took place at the school premises. Professors responsible for the interdepartmental project, Mrs. Franca Orletti and Mrs. Sandra Chistolini, the President of the town hall, teachers, pupils and parents all, were present at the event. For sure, it was a highly educational experience primarily for me and above all, for the students themselves from whom we could find positive feedback of interest, didactic acquisition and a great spirit of collaboration. The little students told their experience in front of everyone with great joy and showed with great satisfaction their recreated site describing once again in detail all the steps. An excellent result was obtained; just think that thanks to this project the children visited a place considered "difficult" for their age. On the contrary, they acquired a new language, new words, they remembered how the site was and they reproduced it with great interest. In short, what children tell us exactly what scientists tell us, but with a simpler language.