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Pharmacist is new suspect for Monster of Florence murders

From Richard Owen in Rome

ITALIAN police yesterday re-opened an inquiry into the murders of eight courting couples in the Tuscan countryside by the "Monster of Florence". They have questioned a 60-year-old retired pharmacist, Francesco Calamandrei, from San Casciano, near Florence, and confirm that he is under investigation.

Gabriele Zanobini, Signor Calamandrei's lawyer, said the allegation that his client was involved was "completely absurd".

The eight double murders were carried out in isolated woodlands between 1968 and 1985. They caused widespread fear in and around Florence. A semi-literate farmworker was originally blamed.

In all cases the couples were shot with a .22 Beretta pistol and then stabbed. The sexual organs of the female victims were mutilated "with surgical precision" in what investigators said appeared to be a black magic ritual.

Pietro D'Amico, a former farm labourer who frequented the

Paolo Canessa, the Florence prosecutor, said a police search of the former pharmacist's villa at San Casciano had unearthed "documents, diaries and pornographic videos" which cast new light on the affair. He said that the villa had been searched before but nothing had been found except "a review specialising in esoteric practices". He said that three other people, including a local doctor, were also under investigation.

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