

# Giornate di Paleontologia 2018

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## Programma e libro degli abstract

A cura di Massimo Bernardi e Riccardo Tomasoni



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## THE EUROPEAN CROASSROAD: EARLY PLEISTOCENE PALEOENVIRONMENTS OF THE ITALIAN PENINSULA

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The Plio-Pleistocene transition was characterized by the onset of Quaternary glacial cycles marked by a 41 ka periodicity, which led to a gradual drop in global temperatures. Through the early Pleistocene these climatic oscillations deeply affected terrestrial ecosystems of the Mediterranean region, with the development of drier conditions, reduction of sub-tropical vegetation and the dispersal of several large open dwellers mammals. In this period the Italian peninsula represented a crossroad between Europe and Africa, East and West, thus making the Italian fossil record an exceptional laboratory to study the palaeoenvironmental conditions that favoured the spread of many mammal taxa, among which the *Homo* genus. During the earliest Pleistocene, the paleoenvironment of the middle Villafranchian faunal assemblages was characterized by the presence of a mosaic of habitats as attested by the variety of large mammals and by highly diversified feeding behaviors of the fossil ungulates from the site of Coste San Giacomo (2.1 Ma). The middle/late Villafranchian transition was marked by significant climatic oscillations which led to the disappearance of certain biomes in favour of an expansion of colder and more arid environments, and to important bioevents such the first occurrence of the large carnivore *Pachycrocuta brevirostris*. In this phase herbivore ungulates display a narrower range of diet types as testified in the late Villafranchian Faunal Unit of Olivola (1.8 Ma). During the late early Pleistocene (late Villafranchian/Epivilafranchian faunas) antelopes-*Eucladoceros-Leptobos* are replaced by ovibovines-*Praemegaceros-Bison* assemblages and the presence of the first human populations are testified in the site of Pirro Nord. Preliminary results on the dietary adaptations of the large herbivores from this locality, suggest that heterogeneous environments may have favoured the radiation of these taxa in the Italian Peninsula.

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