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Upper Pleistocene sea level changes and human peopling at the northern margin of the Mediterranean Sea: the S-P-Heritage Project

Andrea Zerboni¹, Irene M. Bollati¹, Luca Forti¹, Silvia Gazzo², Abdelkader Moussous³, Giovanni Muttoni¹, Fabio Negrino², Olivier Notter³, Manuela Pelfini¹, Alessandro Perego¹, Serena Perini¹, Luca Ragaini⁴, Eleonora Regattieri⁵, Elena Rossoni-Notter³, Alessio Rovere⁶, Deirdre Ryan⁴, Marco Serradimigni⁴, Elisabetta Starnini⁴, Matteo Vacchi⁴, and Marta Pappalardo⁴

¹Università degli Studi di Milano, Milano, Italy (andrea.zerboni@unimi.it)

²Università di Genova, Genova, Italy

³Musée d'Anthropologie préhistorique de Monaco, Monaco

⁴Università di Pisa, Pisa, Italy

⁵CNR-IGG, Pisa, Italy

⁶Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia, Italy

Since the Pleistocene, the Mediterranean is a hot spot for climate change and human migrations, thus offering the opportunity to investigate how human populations have responded to environmental changes and sea level variations. This is the main topic of the SPHeritage Project (MUR grant: FIRS2019_00040, P.I.: M. Pappalardo) that proposes an interdisciplinary approach to investigate the human-environment interaction (in particular sea level variations) over the last 400,000 years using a combination of micro-invasive methods. The Project is re-investigating the well-known archaeological area of the Balzi Rossi (Ventimiglia, at the border between Italy and France), which represents a unique assemblage of archaeological sites dating to the Palaeolithic, distributed in a geomorphological setting rich of markers of past sea level changes. As most of the local archaeological sequences have been extensively investigated at the beginning of the last century and large part of the deposits removed, we will combine the analyses of materials preserved in museums (including strips of sediments) and the remnants still preserved inside many rockshelters and caves of the archaeological complex. Moreover, our geomorphological survey identified new sedimentary sequences preserving information on relative sea level changes. This approach will permit to obtain innovative data submitting small samples to state-of-the-art methods for dating and palaeoenvironmental reconstruction, thus offering the opportunity to better constrain the time and steps of climate change, sea level oscillations, and human settlements. Moreover, data will converge into geoheritage analyses aimed at finding the best practices for promoting and protecting the site. Here, we present an overview of the project and preliminary results from some of the major archaeological sites.