UISPP – Session Proposal

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Title: Surviving change: human journey through MIS 3 in the evolving landscapes between Central Asia and the Levant

Main organiser: Ana Abrunhosa[1,2]*
Co-organisers: Angelica Fiorillo[3,4], Lorenzo Monaco[5,6]

Affiliations:
1 - Material Culture PaleoLAB, School of Archaeology and Maritime Cultures, University of Haifa (Israel)
2 - ICArEHB - Interdisciplinary Center for Archaeology and Evolution of Human Behaviour (Portugal)
3 - Bones Lab, Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Bologna (Italy)
4 - Department of History, Humanities and Society, Tor Vergata University of Rome (Italy)
5 - Department of Physical, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Siena (Italy)
6 - Institute of Environmental Geology and Geoengineering - National Research Council, Rome (Italy)
*member of the Middle Palaeolithic and Middle Stone Age Commission

The crossroads between the African, European, and Asian continents hold the potential for preserving archaeological and paleoenvironmental records that can provide fundamental insights into human dispersal, adaptation, and evolution. Marine Isotope Stage 3 (60-30 ka) was a period of significant climatic fluctuations from Central Asia to the Levant, during which Neanderthals, Denisovans, and early *Homo sapiens* expanded, overlapped, and adapted to rapidly changing environments. Paleoecological records indicate shifting habitat mosaics that structured population dispersal and settlement persistence, while fossil and archaeological evidence document varying tempos of cultural change and local extinctions. The transition from late Mousterian to Initial Upper Palaeolithic (IUP) industries in Central Asia remains a major unresolved issue, marked by scarce stratified sequences, technological overlap, and uncertain taxonomic associations.

Recent advances in archaeological sciences, particularly in palaeoanthropology, zooarchaeology, and biomolecular methods, including ZooMS and ancient DNA, allow for increasingly more precise reconstructions of population diversity, subsistence strategies, and palaeoecological contexts. Furthermore, lithic studies integrating techno-typological analysis, use-wear analysis, and raw-material characterisation can contribute to assessing functional adaptations and identifying evidence of cultural traditions. Finally, combined geoarchaeology and paleoenvironmental studies can reconstruct the climatic, ecological and geomorphological framework in which these cultural and biological changes occurred.

By bringing together new archaeological, technological, biological and environmental research, this session aims to i) provide new insights into the resilience, niche exploitation, and potential interactions of Neanderthals and *Homo sapiens* during MIS 3 and ii) to reassess the state of the art and advance our understanding of this critical cultural and evolutionary shift, underscoring the broader role of environmental variability in shaping hominin evolutionary trajectories.

We welcome contributions that integrate biological, cultural, and paleoenvironmental datasets to examine how Neanderthals and *Homo sapiens* responded to climatic instability, adapted to evolving environments, developed mobility strategies, exploited resources, and demonstrated dietary and technological flexibility.

Keywords (max. 10 words): Bioarchaeology, Paleolandscape, Material Culture, Palaeoclimate, Lithic Technology, Population Dynamics, Neanderthal Extinction, Data integration