The 1 Ma old human assemblage from the *Homo* site at Uadi Aalad, Buia (Danakil Depression of Eritrea): an updated record.

Macchiarelli R.^{1,2}, Bondioli L.³, Bruner E.⁴, Candilio F.⁵, Coppa A.⁵, Dean M.C.⁶, Frayer D.W.⁷, Friess M.⁸, Libsekal Y.⁹, Medin T.^{9,10}, Rook L.¹¹, Zanolli C.¹²

- Département de Préhistoire, UMR 7194 CNRS, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, France
- 2. Département Géosciences, Université de Poitiers, France
- 3. Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico 'Luigi Pigorini', Rome, Italy
- ^{4.} Centro Nacional de Investigación sobre la Evolución Humana, Burgos, Spain
- ^{5.} Dipartimento di Biologia Ambientale, Università di Roma 'La Sapienza', Rome, Italy
- 6. Department of Cell and Developmental Biology, University College London, United Kingdom
- 7. Department of Anthropology, University of Kansas, Lawrence, USA
- 8. Département Hommes, Natures, Sociétés, UMR 7206 CNRS, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, France
- ^{9.} National Museum of Eritrea, Asmara, Eritrea
- 10. Institut Català de Paleoecologia Humana i Evolució Social, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain
- 11. Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra, Università di Firenze, Italy
- ^{12.} Multidisciplinary Laboratory, The 'Abdus Salam' International Centre for Theoretical Physics, Trieste, Italy

Research carried out in the northern Danakil Depression of Eritrea led to the discovery of over 200 late Early to early Middle Pleistocene sites with widespread vertebrate fauna and lithic artefacts within the sedimentary succession outcropping in the Dandiero Rift Basin. Fossil human remains have been discovered in two localities near the Buia village: Uadi Aalad and Mulhuli-Amo. The assemblage from the c. 1 Ma old *Homo* site at Uadi Aalad consists of an adult cranium including the face, two isolated permanent teeth, and three pelvic portions.

UA 31 expresses a blend of *H. erectus/ergaster*-like and derived morphoarchitectural features more commonly found in Middle Pleistocene specimens. The braincase (995 cc) shows modest lateral protrusion of the mastoid-supramastoid-auriculare complex, high positioning of the maximum parietal breadth and from sub-vertical to slightly downwards converging parietal walls. Its difference between the greatest calvarial breadth and the biparietal breadth is lower than measured in all Early Pleistocene specimens reported so far. However, even if its position within the common allometric trend supports the idea that its parietal shape is more derived than its size would suggest, it remains to be considered whether parietal bossing and vertical expansion in this cranium is a structural consequence of dolichocephaly, an individual/geographical trait or a feature with possible phylogenetic relevance.

The endocast is relatively long and narrow, more than any other known fossil specimen. For the face, there is an especially large zygomatic process filled by a voluminous maxillary sinus. The orbits are tall, representing over 90% of the orbital breadth. The pelvic remains represent a right adult hip bone. The estimated body mass exceeds 65 kg. Based on extant standards, characteristics of UA 466 indicate this specimen is from a male aged within the third decade of life.

The ongoing investigations in the Danakil have the potential of providing critical information

to the debated questions about the evolutionary biohistory of *H. erectus/ergaster* near the end of the Early Pleistocene, a period poorly represented in the East African record. More research will likely also contribute to the assessment of its phylogenetic relationships with the taxon *H. heidelbergensis*.

Acknowledgements - The Buia Project (Eritrean-Italian Danakil Expedition: Anthropo-Archaeological and Geo-Paleontological Research Project), an ongoing international project developed in collaboration with the Eritrean National Museum of Asmara and the Northern Red Sea Regional Museum of Massawa, is granted by the Italian MER (COFIN and PRIN projects) and MFA, and by the Univ. 'La Sapienza' of Rome ('Grandi Scavi Archeologici' project [to A.C.]). It also benefited from the support provided by the Italian National Research Council, the Univ. of Florence, the Leakey Foundation, the National Geographic Society, the Spanish Ministry of Science and Education, the Italian MIUR (project 'Esplorazione e Scienza' to L.B.), the Univ. of Poitiers (to R.M.), the French CNRS (to M.F., R.M., C.Z.).