

Update of ichnofaunal units and link with footprint biochrons in the late Palaeozoic to early Mesozoic of the Southern Alps: towards a better correlation with the marine realm

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Abstract:

Tetrapod footprints have recently proven to be a valid and useful stratigraphic tool in the late Palaeozoic-early Mesozoic continental stratigraphy. The Southern Alps of Italy (SA) show a number of very thick and well-exposed successions and preserve one of the best tetrapod footprint records of this time interval, either for the abundance, quality and diversity of the ichnoassociations. Furthermore, the stratigraphy of this area is well-constrained by radiometric datings, microfloras from both continental and marine units, invertebrate fossils and microfossils, sequence stratigraphy, carbon stable isotopic stratigraphy and magnetostratigraphy from interspaced marine units (Fig. 1).

We revised the stratigraphic record of tetrapod footprints of this area, updating existing ichnofaunal units (IFUs) and describing ichnoassociations that may represent IFUs. IFUs are informal ichnoassemblages of possible biostratigraphic value (CONTI et al., 1997; AVANZINI et al., 2001a). IFUs and ichnoassociations have been correlated with tetrapod footprint biochrons as listed in the following.

A) The oldest tetrapod footprint record in the SA occurs in the latest Carboniferous (Ghzelian) continental Corona Formation (Carnic Alps), which yielded probable anamniote tracks (MIETTO et al., 1986). This record is considered too small to represent a proper IFU.

B) The first extensive ichnoassociation is from the Lower Permian (Kungurian) continental Collio, Doso dei Galli, Pizzo del Diavolo, Monte Luco and Tregiovo formations, all well-constrained by radioisotopic methods (e.g., SCHALTEGGER & BRACK, 2007; MAROCCHI et al., 2008). It is characterized by common non-archosauromorph eureptile and parareptile tracks, anamniote tracks and rare synapsid tracks (e.g., CEOLONI et al., 1987; SANTI & KRIEGER, 2001; MARCHETTI et al., 2015a, b, c; MARCHETTI, 2016). It constitutes the Collio IFU (CONTI et al., 1997), characterized by the lowest occurrence (LO) of *Erpetopus* and the highest occurrence (HO) of *Amphisauropus* (Fig. 1). The Collio IFU is the reference for the *Erpetopus* footprint biochron in the Kungurian (VOIGT & LUCAS, 2018) and represents the reptile radiation started by the mid Cisuralian (MARCHETTI et al., 2019a).

C) The subsequent tetrapod ichnoassociation follows a hiatus of at least 15 Ma marked by a regional unconformity, and occurs in the continental marginal marine Val Gardena Formation, dated through sporomorphs as late Permian (late Wuchiapingian/Changhsingian; e.g., PITTAU, 2001). This ichnoassociation is characterized by common diapsid and parareptile tracks, synapsid tracks and rare anamniote tracks (e.g., CONTI et al., 1977; CEOLONI et al., 1988; VALENTINI et al., 2007, 2009; MARCHETTI et al., 2017). It constitutes the Bletterbach IFU (CONTI et al., 1997), characterized by the *Rynchosauroides* LO and the *Pachypes* last appearance datum (LAD) (Fig. 1). It is the reference for the *Paradoxichnium* footprint biochron (VOIGT & LUCAS, 2018). However, the lack of *Erpetopus* and *Hyloidichnus* and the possible first appearance datum (FAD) of *Protochirotherium* (e.g., BERNARDI et al., 2015; PETTI et al., 2015) differ from other Late Permian assemblages.

D) The Lower Triassic is characterized by scattered neodiapsid footprints found in the continental

to shallow marine Werfen Formation (almost entirely Lower Triassic according to the conodont and bivalve biozones; e.g., POSENATO, 2019), in the Campil and Cencenighe members (e.g., AVANZINI & MIETTO, 2008), but findings are too scarce to build a valid IFU. This ichnoassociation coincides with the *Rhynchosauroides schochardti* Assemblage of AVANZINI & MIETTO (2008).

E) Middle Triassic ichnoassociations are found in the continental-to-marginal marine Lower Serla, Gracilis, Voltago, Giovo, Richthofen and Morbiac formations. All these units are well dated through biostratigraphy (ammonoids, conodonts), macro and microfloras, magnetostratigraphy, sequence stratigraphy and stable isotopic chemostratigraphy from intercalated/correlated marine units in the Dolomites area, all considered to be of Anisian age (e.g., DE ZANCHE et al., 1993; MIETTO & MANFRIN, 1995; GIANOLLA et al., 1998).

The Anisian ichnoassociations coincide with the *Rhynchosauroides tirolicus* Assemblage of AVANZINI & MIETTO (2008).

The lower Anisian Lower Serla and Gracilis ichnoassociation includes few neodiapsid and synapsid tracks (e.g., AVANZINI & MIETTO, 2008; PETTI et al., 2013), therefore it is not informative enough to build a valid IFU.

The mid-upper Anisian ichnoassociation from the Voltago, Giovo, Richthofen and Morbiac formations is characterized by abundant archosauromorph tracks, non-archosauromorph eureptile and synapsid tracks and rare dinosauromorph tracks (e.g., AVANZINI & LOCKLEY, 2002; AVANZINI & RENESTO, 2002; AVANZINI & MIETTO, 2008; TODESCO et al., 2008; TODESCO & BERNARDI, 2011). It is characterized by the LOs and HOs of *Chirotherium* and *Isochirotherium* (Fig. 1). This ichnoassemblage, here named *Chirotherium-Isochirotherium* Ichnoassociation, has the potential to become a valid IFU. The most significant localities are the Gampenpass/Passo Palade site (Voltago-Giovo formations) and the Piz da Peres site (Richthofen Formation). This is largely coincident with the *Chirotherium barthii* footprint biochron, although the upper part may be transitional with the *Atreipus-Grallator* biochron (KLEIN & LUCAS, 2010) because of the LO of *Sphingopus* (AVANZINI & WACHTLER, 2012).

The Ladinian units are devoid of tetrapod footprints.

F) The Upper Triassic tetrapod ichnoassemblage is preserved in the Carnian continental marginal marine Val Sabbia, Travenanzes and Monticello formations, dated with sporomorphs in these units and ammonoids and conodonts in intercalated marine units (e.g., ASSERETO & CASATI, 1965; PRETO et al., 2005; ROGHI et al., 2010), and in the late Carnian-Rhaetian Dolomia Principale Formation, dated with brachiopods, conodonts and sequence stratigraphy (e.g., MIETTO, 1977; GIANOLLA et al., 1998; BELVEDERE et al., 2008).

The lower Carnian ichnoassociation, preserved in the Val Sabbia Formation (Zone locality, near the lake of Iseo; PETTI et al., 2009), includes only non-dinosauromorph archosauromorph tracks, and coincides with the Assemblage 1 of Bernardi et al. (2018). It is characterized by the FO of *Brachychirotherium*, here named *Brachychirotherium* ichnoassociation, and may become a valid IFU after further findings. More track occurrences are reported from the lower Carnian Dolomia Cassiana Formation (MIETTO et al., 2012), but they are unfortunately poorly-preserved.

The upper Carnian ichnoassociation comes from the Travenanzes, Monticello and Dolomia Principale formations and is characterized by abundant dinosaur tracks, archosauromorph tracks and rarer dinosauromorph tracks (e.g., MIETTO, 1988; DALLA VECCHIA, 1996; DALLA VECCHIA & MIETTO, 1998; D'ORAZI PORCHETTI et al., 2008; AVANZINI et al., 2010; BERNARDI et al., 2013). It coincides with the Assemblages 2 and 3 of BERNARDI et al. (2018) and probably represents the first dinosaur radiation with a contemporary reduction of the non-dinosauromorph archosauromorphs. It is characterized by the FAD of *Eubrontes* and *Evazoum*, the first occurrence (FO) of *Grallator* and the LO of *Brachychirotherium* (Fig. 1). This ichnoassemblage, here named *Eubrontes-Grallator* ichnoassociation, has the potential to become a valid IFU. The most representative locality is San Gottardo near Mezzocorona (Travenanzes Formation).

The Late Triassic ichnoassociations coincide with the *Brachychirotherium* footprint biochron (KLEIN & LUCAS, 2010).

G) The Lower Jurassic ichnoassociation comes from the tidal Hettangian-Sinemurian Monte Zugna

Formation and from the Pliensbachian Rotzo Formation (both pertaining to the Calcari Grigi Group), dated with marine fossils (e.g., AVANZINI et al., 2007). It is characterized by diverse dinosaur tracks (e.g., LEONARDI & MIETTO, 2000; MIETTO et al., 2000, AVANZINI et al., 2001b, 2003; AVANZINI & PETTI, 2008), with the LO of *Kayentapus*, *Anomoepus* and *Parabrontopodus*, and the HO of *Grallator* and *Eubrontes* (Fig. 1). This ichnoassemblage, here named *Kayentapus-Parabrontopodus* ichnoassociation, has the potential to become a valid IFU. The most representative locality is the famous megatracksite of the Lavini di Marco near Rovereto (Monte Zugna Formation). This is coincident with the Lower Jurassic footprint biochron (*Eubrontes acme*) (LUCAS, 2007).

In conclusion, two IFUs based on tetrapod footprints have been revised and four ichnoassociations that may become IFUs have been described for the late Palaeozoic-early Mesozoic continental-marginal marine ichnoassociations from the Southern Alps. In our view, because of the quality of the ichnofossil record and the high-resolution stratigraphic record in the marine units, this area constitutes an ideal reference for the continental-marine stratigraphic correlations and the combined study of the continental-marine biota during climatic crises.

Keywords: tetrapod footprints, biostratigraphy, ichnofaunal units, Palaeozoic-Mesozoic, Southern Alps

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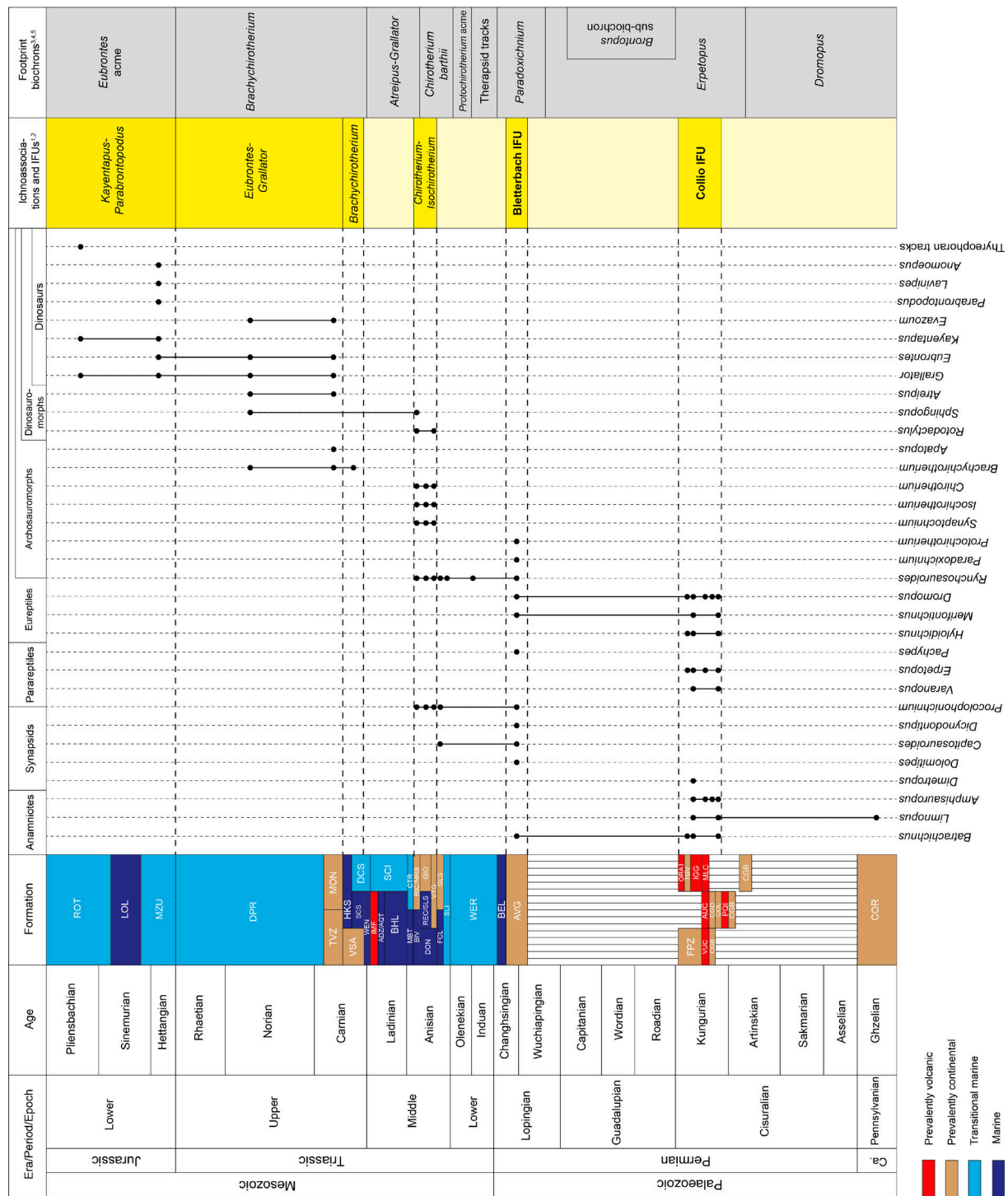


Fig. 1: Chronostratigraphic scheme of the Southern Alps with the Palaeozoic-Mesozoic continental and marginal marine units containing tetrapod footprints, and intercalated or correlated marine units; ichnotaxa ranges (occurrences centered in the middle of the formations); supposed trackmaker groups; ichnoassociations/ichnofaunal units (IFUs) and footprint biochrons. Note that pre-Late Triassic *Brachychirotherium* and *Parasynaptichnium* are not represented because probably assignable to different ichnogenera (e.g., PETTI et al., 2013). The tracks from the Corona Formation (MIETTO et al., 1986) are assigned to *Limnopos*, and the crocrodilomorph tracks from the Monticello Formation (DALLA VECCHIA, 1996) are assigned to *Apatopus*. The Palaeozoic units are dated with radiometric ages and palynology, the Mesozoic units mostly with marine macro- and microfossils from intercalated or coeval marine formations. Formation acronyms: COR=Corona, CGB=Basal Conglomerate, VUC=Auccia Volcanite, FPZ=Pizzo del Diavolo, PQI=Lower Porphyries, COL=Collio, CGD=Dosso dei Galli, AUC=Auccia, MLC=Monte Luco, IGG=Gargazzone, TGV=Tregiovo, ORA1=Ora Formation, Predonico Member, AVG=Val Gardena, BEL=Bellerophon, WER=Werfen, SLI=Lower Serla, FCL=Coll'Alto Limestone, GLS=Gracilis, DON=Dont, VTG=Voltago, REC=Recoaro Limestone, SLS=Upper Serla, GIO=Giovo, BIV=Bivera, RIC=Richthofen, MRB=Morbiate, MBT=Ambata, CTR=Contrin, BHL=Livinalongo/Buchenstein, ADZ=Zoppè Sandstone, AQT=Acquatona, IMF=Fernazza Volcanite, SCI=Scliar, WEN=Wengen, SCS=San Cassiano, DCS=Cassian Dolomite, HKS=Heiligkreuz, TVZ=Travenanzes, VSA=Val Sabbia, MON=Monticello, DPR=Dolomia Principale, MZU=Monte Zugna, LOL=Loppio Oolitic Limestone, ROT=Rotzo. 1=this work, 2=CONTI et al., 1997, 3=KLEIN & LUCAS, 2010, 4=VOIGT & LUCAS, 2018, 5=MARCHETTI et al., 2019b.