



SAS

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HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

SAS ACTIVITIES 2017 to acquire transferable skills

History of science

Trees of Life from Ancient Rome to DNA

David J. Archibald

Camerino 2017

Restaurant 'Torre del Parco' - loc. Torre del Parco

May 22, from 11.00 am to 12.00 am

Seminar programme

In Western Civilization, where science arose, a rich history of visual metaphors for biological order extends from ancient times to the present, influencing our perception of our place in nature. We went from viewing ourselves as standing on the top rung of the biological ladder to being but one of millions of tiny twigs on the tree of life. Although the ladder metaphor still exists in our cultural fabric to show biological order, the tree metaphor triumphed, starting with ancient Roman representations of seasonal cycles and familial relationships.

The early Christian Church appropriated trees to represent biblical genealogies. The late eighteenth century saw the tree reclaimed to visualize relationships in the natural world, sometimes with a creationist view, but in other instances suggesting evolution. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) exorcised the exclusively creationist view of the "tree of life," and his ideas sparked an explosion of trees, mostly by younger acolytes in Europe.

Another revolution of tree building began in the later 20th century generated by the development of new theories on how to assemble trees, the birth of powerful computing, and the emergence of molecular technology.