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Autore	Seidov Dan
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Sommario/riassunto	Until a few decades ago, scientists generally believed that significant large-scale past global and regional climate changes occurred at a gradual pace within a time scale of many centuries or millennia. A secondary assumption followed: climate change was scarcely perceptible during a human lifetime. Recent paleoclimatic studies, however, have proven otherwise: that global climate can change extremely rapidly. In fact, there is good evidence that in the past at least regional mean annual temperatures changed by several degrees Celsius on a time scale of several centuries to several decades.