

# Paleogene kinematics of the central Catalan Coastal Ranges: temporal constraints from magneto-chronology and provenance analysis in synorogenic deposits in the SE margin of the Ebro Basin (NE Spain)

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## ABSTRACT

The precise determination of the tectonic deformation timing such as thrust emplacement has always been a challenge for understanding the evolution of fold-and-thrust belts. In the Catalan Coastal Ranges, this issue has traditionally been addressed through the mapping and the analysis of the syn-tectonic successions preserved in the SE margin of the Ebro Basin. However, the age of the Paleogene contractional structures located towards the hinterland and responsible of the inversion and uplift of the inherited Mesozoic structure remained uncertain due to the lack of preserved syn-kinematic strata in these areas. With the aim of better understand the contractional evolution of the area during the Paleogene, this work presents a tectono-stratigraphic analysis approach that combines structural reconstructions, provenance analysis and magnetostratigraphic dating in well-exposed synorogenic sediments in the central SE margin of the Ebro Basin. The results of the study allow to establish the precise age of the main contractional structures present in the central Catalan Coastal Ranges. The combined analysis has revealed that: i) the inversion of the Montmell-Vallès Faults System started in the Bartonian and continued up to the late Priabonian, and ii) the emplacement of the Gaià-El Camp Thrust and the formation of the Cabra-Carme Anticline took place from early to late Priabonian and was the responsible of the sudden increased of the sedimentation rates. A later decrease of the sedimentation rates during late Priabonian (chron C15n) has been interpreted as the prelude of the end of the Paleogene compressional phase in the area.

## KEYWORDS

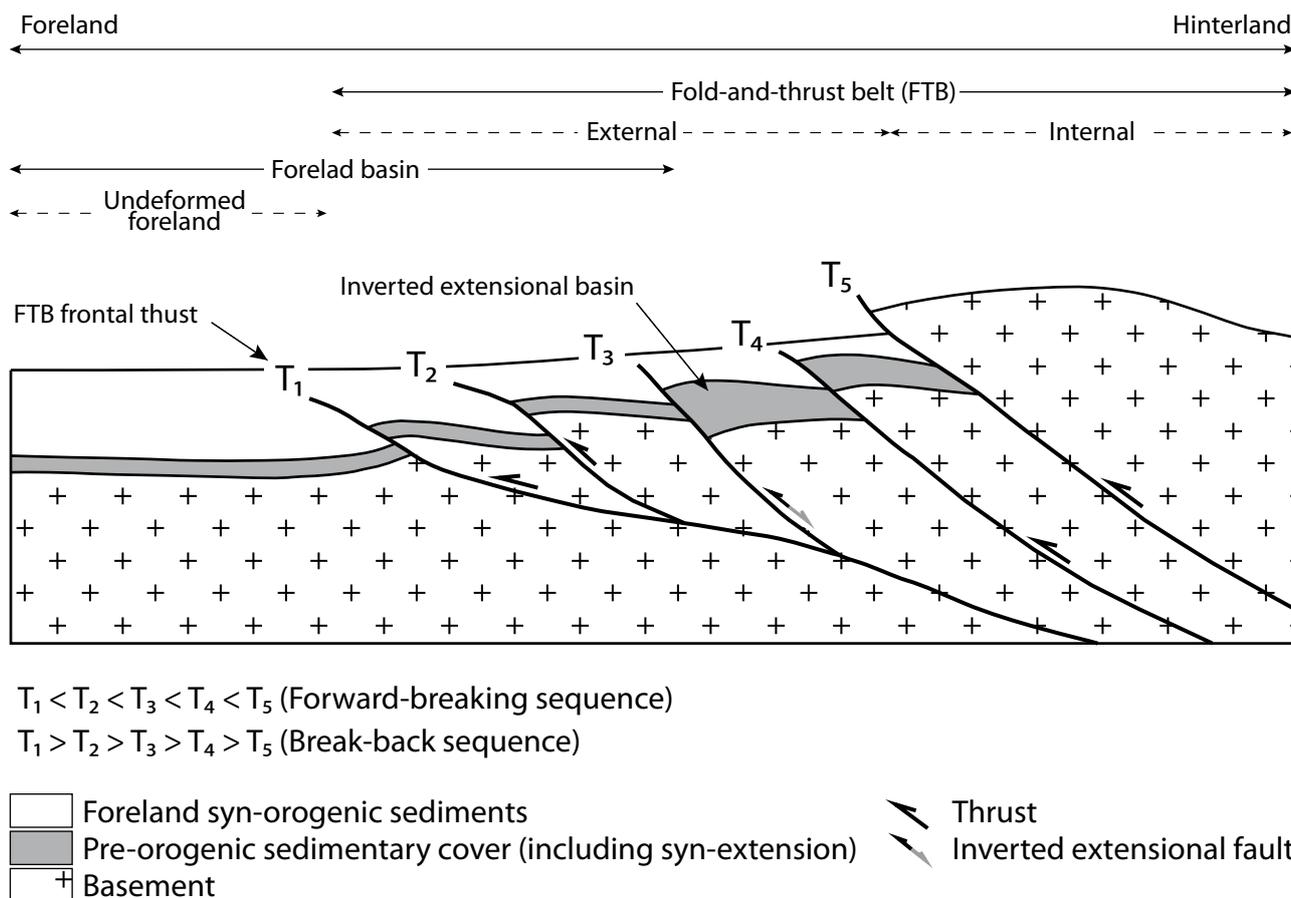
Catalan Coastal Ranges. Ebro Foreland Basin. Synorogenic. Magnetostratigraphy. Provenance Analysis. Paleogene.

## INTRODUCTION

Thrust systems in orogenic belts have traditionally been interpreted as usually propagating toward the foreland in a forward-breaking thrusting sequence (Boyer and Elliott, 1982; Butler, 1982, 1987). In this sequence, foreland basin sediments are progressively incorporated in the deformation wedge (Fig. 1). Thrusting can also develop towards the hinterland, a process known as break-back sequence (Boyer and Elliott, 1982; Butler, 1982, 1987). Moreover, out-of-sequence thrusts might develop in the hinterland of the fold-and-thrust belt, thus conditioning the advance of deformation as well as the configuration of the orogen (McClay, 1992). On the other hand, the configuration of fold-and-thrust belts can also be influenced by the presence of pre-existing extensional faults. The reactivation of these faults can lead to the development of inversion-related structures such as footwall shortcuts, hanging-wall folding and backthrusting as the effect of the buttressing (e.g. Amilibia *et al.*, 2008; Butler, 1989; Coward *et al.*, 1991; Coward, 1994; Ferrer *et al.*, 2023; Hayward and

Graham, 1989; Scisciani *et al.*, 2001) or by changes in the mechanical stratigraphy (Couzens *et al.*, 1996; Ferril *et al.*, 2008; Gross *et al.*, 1997). Understanding the sequence of emplacement of thrusts is important in order to better interpret the changes in the sedimentation pattern over time due to the fact that tectonics and sedimentation are closely interconnected in orogenic belts. Thus, changes in depositional systems are often interpreted as responses to regional or local tectonic activity, such as the uplift and growth of nearby thrusts or folds. Moreover, the geometrical and genetic analysis of syn-tectonic strata can be used to understand the kinematics of individual structures (e.g. Burbank *et al.*, 1992; Fernández *et al.*, 2004; Ford *et al.*, 1997; Hardy *et al.*, 1996; Salvini and Storti, 2002; Suppe *et al.*, 1992; Vergés and Muñoz, 1990; Vergés *et al.*, 2002).

A thorough understanding of key geological elements and their critical moments is essential for accurately assessing natural resources like hydrocarbons, CO<sub>2</sub> storage, minerals, and geothermal energy. Determining the absolute and relative ages of structures is vital to assess

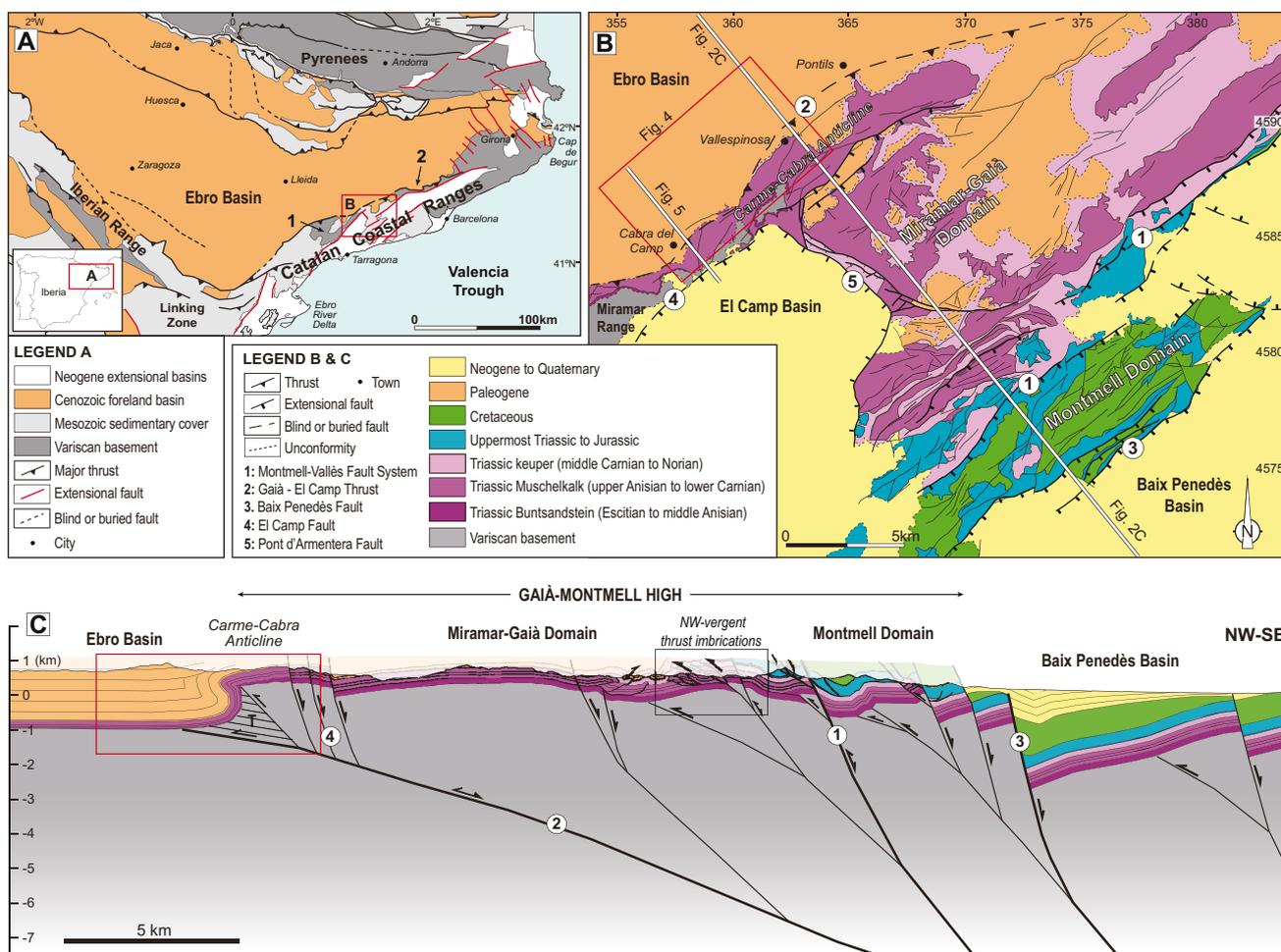


**FIGURE 1.** Schematic diagram of a thick-skinned fold-and-thrust belt, which includes an inverted extensional basin and its related foreland basin. T<sub>i</sub> to T<sub>v</sub> stand for relative timing of deformation. End-member thrusting sequences (forward-breaking and break-back) are also specified. Other combinations of relative timing imply out-of-sequence thrusting.

uncertainties and exploration risks, like the timing between hydrocarbon generation and trap formation (Al-Hajeri *et al.*, 2009; Magoon, 1987; Makeen *et al.*, 2016) or cross-cutting relationships in non-accessible areas. Analyzing syn-kinematic sedimentation and growth geometries is crucial to determine the age and movement of structures in orogenic belts.

The Ebro Basin is the southern foreland of the Pyrenean orogen (northeastern Iberia) that developed from Late Cretaceous to middle Miocene times (Mouthereau *et al.*, 2014; Muñoz, 1992; Vergés and García-Senz, 2001). To the southwest and southeast, the Ebro Basin is limited by two intraplate chains that resulted from the inversion of pre-existent Mesozoic basins: the Iberian Range, and the Catalan Coastal Ranges (CCR) respectively (Fig. 2). The

Ebro Basin infill is made up by both marine and continental sediments that thickens northwards and northwestwards up to over 5,000m (Rioja-3 borehole; Lanaja, 1987). At the basin margins, these sediments record the growth of the three mountain ranges. World-class examples of growth strata have been documented along the three margins (*e.g.* Anadón, 1978; Anadón *et al.*, 1985, 1986; Colombo, 1994; Ford *et al.*, 1997; Gómez-Paccard *et al.*, 2011; Lawton *et al.*, 1999; López-Blanco, 2002; Riba, 1973, 1976; Suppe *et al.*, 1992, 1997; Vergés and Muñoz, 1990). Such growth strata geometries in the southeastern margin, together with clast composition and paleocurrents analysis performed in the alluvial and fan-delta sediments deposited at the toe of the CCR have been used to decipher the age and kinematics of some frontal fold-and-thrust structures both, regionally (Anadón, 1978a, b; Anadón *et al.*, 1985, 1989; Colombo,



**FIGURE 2.** A) Geologic map of NE Iberia showing the major Cenozoic structural units including its three bounding orogenic belts: the Pyrenees and the intraplate Iberian and Catalan ranges. Cenozoic foreland basin-fill is highlighted in orange. Coordinates in geographical system. Labels 1 and 2 respectively correspond to the Prades Block and the Montserrat-Sant Llorenç del Munt areas referred in the text. B) Geological map of the Gaià-Montmell High in the central Catalan Coastal Ranges and adjoining areas. The area corresponds to the linkage zone between the Neogene Montmell-Vallès Fault System and El Camp Fault. Coordinates in UTM kms. C) Cross-section across the Gaià-Montmell High and its neighbouring areas. The hatched area labelled with "T" indicates the zone of distributed shear at the tip of the Gaià-El Camp Thrust (modified from Marín *et al.*, 2021). Legend for B and C is the same.

1994; Gómez-Paccard *et al.*, 2011; López-Blanco, 2002; López-Blanco *et al.*, 2000a, b) and of the study area (Anadón, 1978a, b; Anadón *et al.*, 1986).

The study area is located along the central southeastern margin of the Ebro Basin, between Cabra del Camp and Vallespinosa towns (Fig. 2B). Previous studies have suggested the presence of a progressive unconformity at this location, indicating that the growth and uplift of the frontal structure of the central CCR (Carme-Cabra Anticline) were contemporaneous with the deposition of conglomeratic units during the middle Eocene (Anadón *et al.*, 1985, 1986; Benzaquen *et al.*, 1973) (Fig. 2). Nevertheless, the age of the contractional structures located towards the hinterland and responsible for the inversion and contractional uplift of the pre-existent Mesozoic basins (Montmell Domain in Fig. 2B, C) remain uncertain due to the lack of preserved syn-kinematic strata in the footwall of the Montmell Fault.

To address this problem, the current study presents a detailed tectonostratigraphic analysis of the whole Paleogene succession preserved in the central southeastern margin of the Ebro Basin along the northwestern limb of the Carme-Cabra Anticline which in the study area resembles more of a monocline (Fig. 2). It integrates results from a detailed geological map, clast composition and paleotransport direction analysis, and a magnetostratigraphic section performed across the 1,450m of the well-exposed Ebro Basin infill succession in the area. This approach enables the precise determination of the age and kinematics not only of the Carme-Cabra Anticline but also of the structures responsible for uplift and denudation of the inner parts of the central CCR during the Paleogene compressional phase.

## GEOLOGICAL SETTING

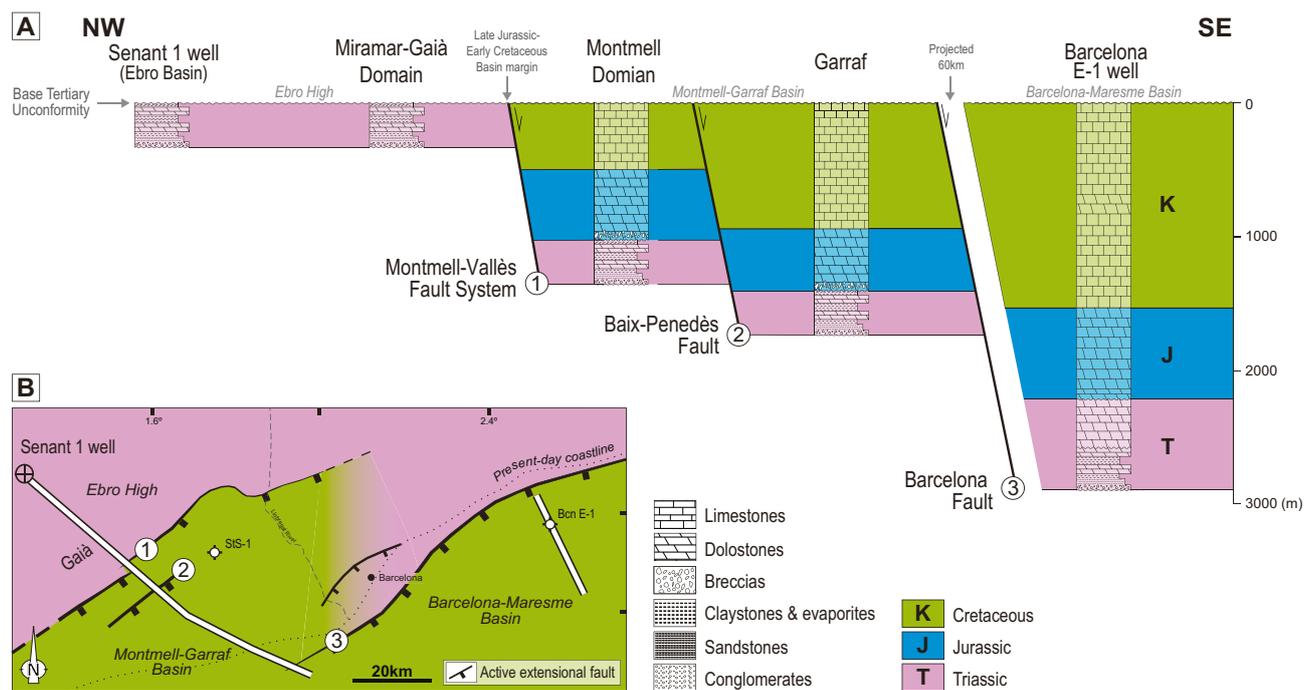
### Tectonostratigraphic framework

The CCR is a NE-SW-oriented structural unit that extends for up to 250km parallel to the NE coastline of Iberia (Fig. 2A). It is around 30km wide, and its basin-and-range configuration constitutes the onshore expression of the mainly extensional, divergent continental margin that separates the thicker crust of the Iberian Plate from the thinned crust of the Valencia Trough (Dañobeitia *et al.*, 1992; Roca and Guimerà, 1992; Vidal *et al.*, 1995). The current structure of the CCR is the result of three main tectonic phases: i) a multiphasic extensional phase from late Paleozoic to Mesozoic, ii) a compressional phase during the Paleogene and iii) an extensional phase from latest Oligocene to middle Miocene (Anadón *et al.*, 1979; Bartrina *et al.*, 1992; Baqués *et al.*, 2012; Cantarero *et al.*, 2014a, b; Llopis, 1947; López-Blanco *et al.*, 2000a, b; Marín *et al.*, 2021; Roca and Guimerà, 1992).

The Late Jurassic to Early Cretaceous extensional episode, well recorded in the neighbour Iberian Range (Guimerà, 2018; Salas and Casas, 1993), is represented by two right-stepped extensional basins, the Montmell-Garraff and Barcelona-Maresme basins bounded towards the northwest by two main extensional faults: the Montmell-Vallès Fault System and the Barcelona Fault (Fig. 3). These faults limit towards the NW the upper crust extensively deformed during the opening of the Tethys, in such a way that in their footwall blocks there are no Upper Jurassic or Lower Cretaceous sediments (Gaspar-Escribano *et al.*, 2004; Marín *et al.*, 2021; Roca and Guimerà, 1992; Salas, 2001).

Convergence and later collision between the Iberian and Eurasian plates took place from Late Cretaceous (Santonian) to middle-late Oligocene (Andeweg, 2002; Angrand and Mouthereau, 2021; Angrand *et al.*, 2020; Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2002; Srivastava *et al.*, 1990). In the NE of Iberia, this period led to the formation of the Pyrenees (García-Senz *et al.*, 2019; Muñoz, 1992; Muñoz, 2017; Vergés *et al.*, 2002), the Iberian Chain (Guimerà, 1984; Guimerà, 2018; Guimerà *et al.*, 1995; Nebot and Guimerà, 2016), and the Catalan Intraplate Chain (CIC) in the current location of the CCR (Anadón *et al.*, 1985; Guimerà and Álvaro, 1990; López-Blanco, 2002; Salas *et al.*, 2001) (Fig. 2A). In the study area, this entailed to the formation of the CIC from early Eocene to early Oligocene (Anadón *et al.*, 1985; Guimerà, 1984; Guimerà and Santanach, 1978; López-Blanco, 2002) by the tectonic inversion of the inherited Mesozoic extensional basins, and, towards the northwest, of the Ebro Foreland Basin (Anadón *et al.*, 1985; Baqués *et al.*, 2012; Juez-Larré and Andriessen, 2006; Marín *et al.*, 2021; Roca and Guimerà, 1992; Salas *et al.*, 2001). The CIC fold-and-thrust belt growth was controlled by the emplacement of major NW-directed NE-trending basement involving thrust sheets that incorporated the marginal parts of the developing Ebro Basin (Anadón *et al.*, 1986; Colombo, 1994; Gómez-Paccard *et al.*, 2011; López-Blanco, 2002; López-Blanco *et al.*, 2000a, b; Marín *et al.*, 2021).

The Paleogene contractive structure in the study area includes two domains with a differentiated stratigraphy in the Gaià-Montmell High (Marín *et al.*, 2021) (Fig. 2B, C). The Miramar-Gaià Domain in the NW comprises a very thin Mesozoic succession uplifted over the Ebro Basin by a NW-directed low-angle basement thrust (the Gaià-El Camp Thrust). On the other hand, the Montmell Domain includes a well-developed Jurassic-Cretaceous succession (Fig. 3). The boundary between both domains corresponds to the Montmell-Vallès Fault System, a high-angle SE-dipping Mesozoic fault that was inverted during the Paleogene compressional phase as it is attested by the presence of NW-directed thrust imbrications developed along its



**FIGURE 3.** A) Mesozoic thicknesses across the central Catalan Coastal Ranges and the present-day offshore Barcelona-Maresme Basin. Upper reference datum corresponds to the base of the Tertiary. Mesozoic thicknesses based on Salas (1987), Lanaja (1987) and ICGC (2005). B) Tectonostratigraphic map of the central Catalan Coastal Ranges and offshore areas at the end of the Late Jurassic - Early Cretaceous extensional phase. Bcn E-1: Barcelona Marina E-1 well; StS-1: Sant Sadurní-1 well.

footwall (Fig. 2C) (Baqués *et al.*, 2012; Marín *et al.*, 2021).

Throughout the Neogene, an extensional period associated to the rollback of the Tethyan Ocean plate during its subduction beneath the Iberian Plate took place (Carminati *et al.*, 1998; Roca, 1994; Roca *et al.*, 2004; Romagny *et al.*, 2020; Sabat *et al.*, 1995; van Hinsbergen *et al.*, 2014, 2020). This period resulted in the present-day horst-and-graben configuration of the CCR and the display of series of NNW-tilted blocks limited by major SE-dipping extensional faults (Fig. 2C). These faults resulted from the negative tectonic inversion (*i.e.* extensional reactivation) of the Paleogene faults (Baqués *et al.*, 2012; Bartrina *et al.*, 1992; Gaspar-Escribano *et al.*, 2004; Marín *et al.*, 2021; Roca, 2001). In this scenario, the study area comprises the footwall block of the northeastern end of one of these major Neogene extensional faults (El Camp Fault) and the northeastern edge of the extensional relay zone developed between this fault and the Montmell-Vallès Fault System (Fig. 2B).

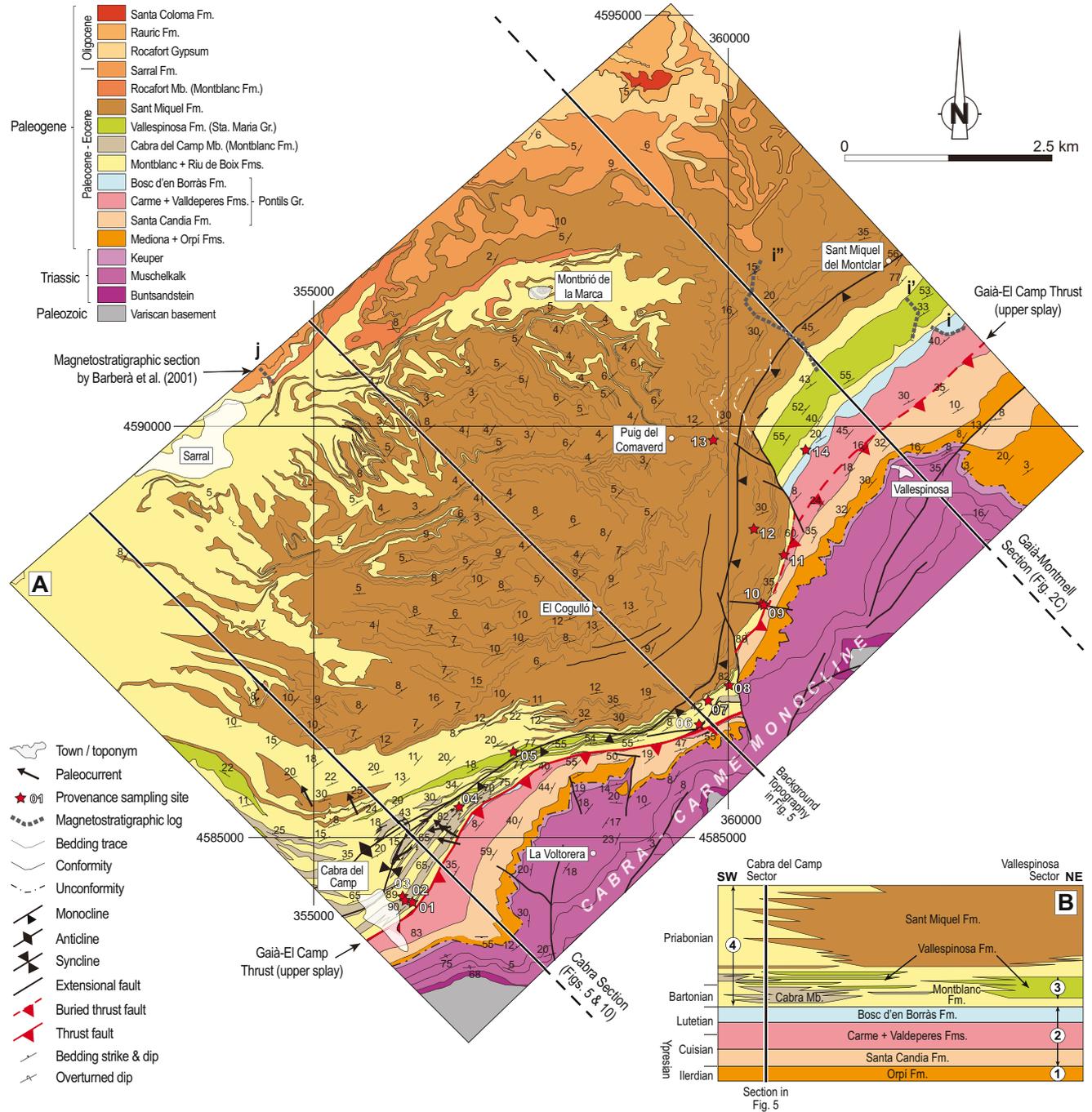
### Alpine stratigraphic record of the central CCR and the SE Ebro Basin margin

The Alpine stratigraphy of the study area includes an upper Permian-Cretaceous cover unconformably overlain

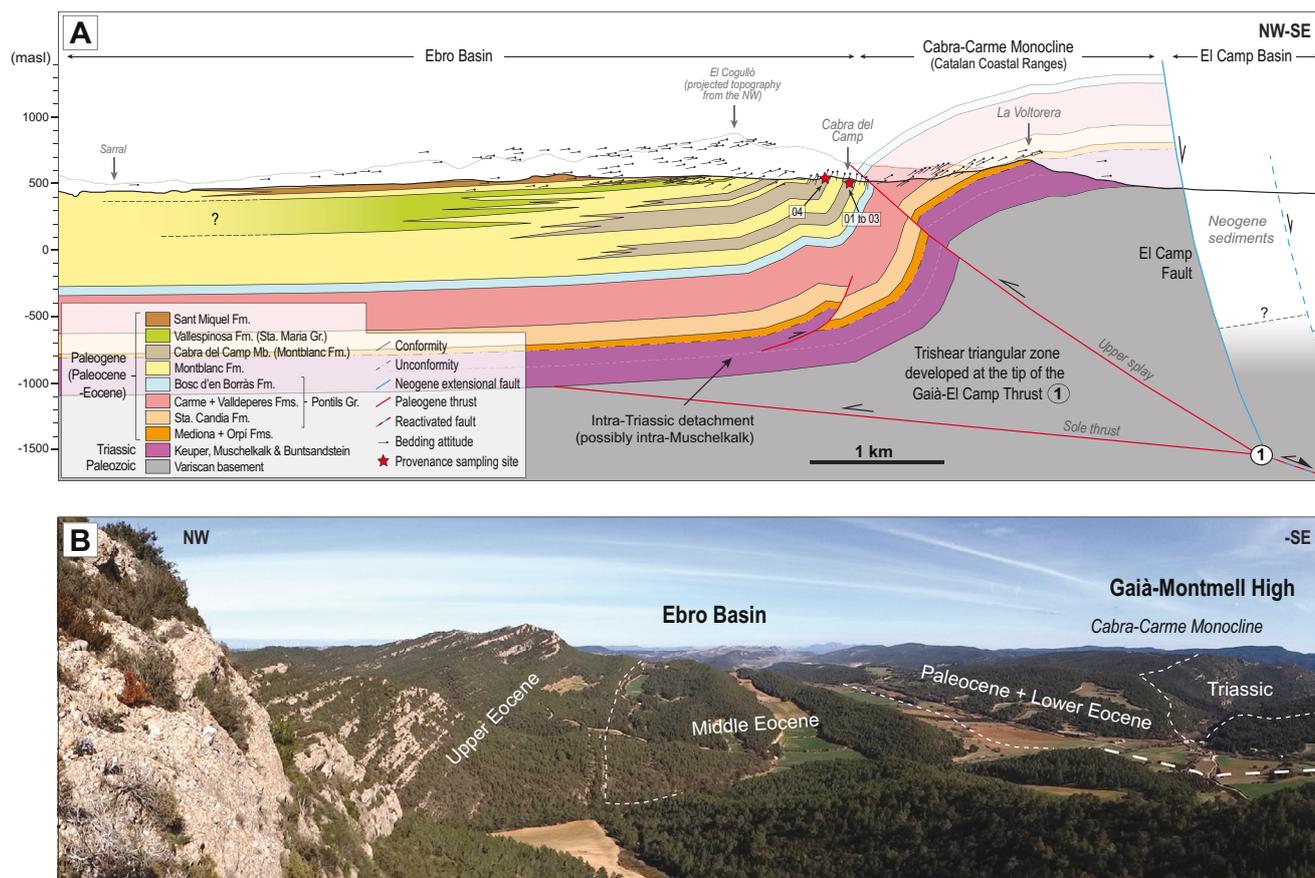
by the Paleogene sedimentary infill of the Ebro Basin. In the footwall of the Montmell-Vallès Fault System, this sedimentary cover is formed by an up to 200 to 350m succession of upper Permian-Triassic rocks (Galán-Abellán *et al.*, 2013; Mercedes-Martín *et al.*, 2014; Virgili *et al.*, 2006) (Miramar-Gaià Domain, Figs. 2; 3) encompassing siliciclastic, limestone, dolostone, and evaporitic rocks ascribed to Buntsandstein, Muschelkalk and Keuper facies (Arnal *et al.*, 2002; Calvet and Marzo, 1994; Escudero-Mozo *et al.*, 2017; Galán-Abellán *et al.*, 2013; Mercedes-Martín and Buatois, 2020; Ortí *et al.*, 2017; Virgili, 1958). In contrast, Jurassic and Cretaceous rocks are present in the hangingwall of the Montmell-Vallès Fault System (Montmell Domain, Figs. 2; 3). This succession exceeds 2 km in thickness (Salas, 1987) and includes Lower-Middle Jurassic dolomitic breccias, a relatively thick succession of Late Jurassic-Early Cretaceous (Barremian-Aptian) shallow marine limestones, dolomites, and shales (Albrich *et al.*, 2006; Salas, 1987; Salas *et al.*, 2001), and an upper Albian to Cenomanian sequence of fluvial and shallow marine carbonates that represents the youngest Mesozoic rocks preserved in the Montmell Domain (ICGC, 2005, 2018; Salas, 1987; Salas *et al.*, 2001). The Upper Jurassic to lower Albian succession is part of the extensional Montmell-Garrafi Basin (Fig. 3) that developed during this period (Anadón *et al.*, 1979; Salas, 1987; Salas and Casas, 1993).

The Cenozoic stratigraphic record in the Ebro Basin infill consists of marine and continental sediments ranging from the Paleocene to the upper Eocene (Figs. 4; 5). As reported by the well Senant-1 (Lanaja, 1987) and from the geological maps (Figs. 2; 4) the Cenozoic succession, in

some areas, rests directly on top of the Triassic succession. From the Paleocene to middle Eocene (middle Bartonian), the basin was connected to open Atlantic waters to the northwest (Garcés *et al.*, 2020 and references therein; Serra Kiel *et al.*, 2003). Yet, by the late Bartonian, the



**FIGURE 4.** A) Geological map of the SE margin of the Ebro Basin between Cabra del Camp and Vallespinosa locations based on Carrera *et al.* (2020) and extended towards the northeast using the map from Colldeforns (unpublished). Labels i, i', i'' stand for the Pontils magnetostratigraphic logs from Beamud *et al.*, (2012). The basal portion of the magnetostratigraphic log corresponding to the Carme Fm. present in Figure 8, is located in the map shown in Figure I of the supplementary material. Label j indicates the location of the Rocafort de Queralt magnetostratigraphic log from Barberà *et al.* (1999, 2001). The location of the cross-section in Figure 5 is shown. The map uses UTM projection for zone 31N (ETR96 datum) and the coordinates are in meters. B) Not-to-scale schematic lithostratigraphic panel for the Eocene units. Numbers in the panel indicate the four major lithostratigraphic units defined in the area by Colldeforns *et al.* (1994a, b): 1) basal continental unit (Mediona Fm.) and a lower marine unit (Orpi Fm.); 2) Pontils-Cornudella Group; 3) Santa Maria Group; and 4) Barberà-Anoia Group.



**FIGURE 5.** A) Geological cross-section of the SE margin of the Ebro Basin across the locality of Cabra del Camp. The section includes the NW frontal structure of the Catalan Coastal Ranges (Cabra-Carme Monocline). B) Field image of the limit between the Triassic and the succession of the foreland. See map in Figure 2 for location at regional scale and map in Figure 4 for a detail section location in the study area.

marine connections became restricted, leading to a change in sedimentation patterns over time (Costa *et al.*, 2010; Garcés *et al.*, 2020). This was recorded by the shift from marine marls to alternations of shales and anhydrite, halite, carnallite and sylvinit, recorded in the central parts of the basin and corresponding to the final stages of marine Priabonian sedimentation (Busquets *et al.*, 1985; Costa *et al.*, 2010; Pueyo, 1975; Reguant, 1967; Travé *et al.*, 1996). From the late Eocene (Priabonian) (Arasa and Cabrera, 2018; Arche *et al.*, 2010) the Ebro Foreland Basin became an endorheic sedimentary trough filled exclusively with continental deposits including siliciclastic sediments in the margins grading to lacustrine evaporites and carbonates towards the inner basin parts (Anadón *et al.*, 1989; Valero-Montesa *et al.*, 2014).

The Paleocene to Oligocene deposits present in the study area belong to the first marine basin-fill hemicycle and a part of the second endorheic hemicycle (Serra Kiel *et al.*, 2003). Colldeforns *et al.* (1994a, b) subdivided these Paleogene series into four lithostratigraphic assemblages: i) a basal assemblage formed by the Mediona and the

Orpí formations; ii) the Pontils-Cornudella Group; iii) the Santa Maria Group from which only the Riu de Boix and the Vallespinosa formations are present in the studied area and iv) the Barberà-Anoia Group, the basal part of which is a lateral equivalent of the Santa Maria Group towards the northeast.

The basal assemblage is present in the Miramar-Gaià Domain and the northwestern limb of the Carme-Cabra Monocline. It begins with the Thanethian Mediona Fm. (Anadón, 1978a, b), a discontinuous continental unit formed by alluvial shales affected by intense pedogenic processes that unconformably overlies the Triassic cover. This basal unit is overlaid by the well dated marine Ypresian (Ilerdian) Orpí Fm. (Anadón, 1978a, b; Anadón *et al.*, 1979; Ferrer, 1971), a frequently dolomitized Alveolina limestone unit deposited in a shallow carbonate platform environment.

The Pontils-Cornudella Group (Anadón, 1978a, b; Anadón *et al.*, 1979, 1983, 1992; Colldeforns *et al.*, 1994b; Colombo, 1980, 1986) mainly encompasses non-marine detrital and lacustrine units Ypresian to Lutecian

1 in age. The lower part of this unit is also present in the  
2 Miramar-Gaià Domain (Fig. 2). From bottom to top, in  
3 the study area, five formations have been distinguished in  
4 this group (Anadón, 1978): a 80 to 110m thick succession  
5 of lacustrine limestones alternating with varicoloured  
6 mudstones of the Santa Càndia Fm.; a 170m thick mud  
7 flat plain facies (red mudstones with minor sandstone and  
8 calcareous intercalations) of the Carme Fm.; a variable  
9 thickness (up to a maximum of 100m) of evaporites and  
10 lacustrine carbonates of the Valldeperes Fm.; the lacustrine  
11 and palustrine limestones with interbedded marl and chert  
12 of the Bosc d'en Borràs Fm., which reaches its maximum  
13 thickness (about 100m) at the NE end of the study area and  
14 grades towards the southwest to distal alluvial mudstones.

15  
16 Above, the Bartonian and Priabonian deposits of the  
17 Santa Maria and Barberà-Anoia groups are preserved in  
18 the northwest limb of the Carme-Cabra Monocline (Fig.  
19 4). In the study area, the Santa Maria Group embraces up  
20 of nearly 300m-thick succession of shallow marine and  
21 transitional facies (*i.e.* deltaic, fan-deltaic conglomerates,  
22 sandstones, coral-bearing limestones, and marlstones with  
23 bioclastic sandstones intercalations) (Anadón and Marzo,  
24 1986; Ferrer, 1971; Serra Kiel *et al.*, 2003) integrated in the  
25 Vallespinosa Fm. (Colldeforns *et al.*, 1994a).

26  
27 On the other hand, the Barberà-Anoia Group (Colldeforns,  
28 1994a; Colombo, 1980, 1986) comprises the Bartonian to  
29 Oligocene continental and lacustrine deposits. It includes  
30 up to six different formations: Montblanc, Sant Miquel,  
31 Sarral, Rocafort, Rauric and Santa Coloma (Colldeforns *et al.*,  
32 1994a, b; Colombo, 1980, 1986). The Montblanc Fm.  
33 is made up of distal alluvial red beds that are interbedded  
34 with the marine sandstone of the Vallespinosa Fm. in its  
35 lower part, which becomes thicker and predominant towards  
36 the northeast. To the southwest, discontinuous alluvial  
37 conglomerate intercalations of the Cabra del Camp Mb.  
38 (Colldeforns, 1994a) are present showing a maximum  
39 thickness of around 200m in the Cabra del Camp area instead  
40 (Fig. 4). The Sant Miquel Fm. (Colombo, 1980, 1986)  
41 corresponds to a 600m-thick succession of proximal alluvial  
42 fan conglomerates that unconformably overlay the marine  
43 sediments of the Santa Maria Group (Priabonian Riu de  
44 Boix Fm.) (Anadón *et al.*, 1986; Colldeforns *et al.*, 1994a).  
45 Towards the north and northeast, these conglomerates  
46 laterally change to late Priabonian to early Oligocene  
47 successions. These ones include the lacustrine carbonates  
48 and marls of the Sarral and Rocafort formations, the fluvial  
49 and lacustrine shales, marls, and lenticular conglomerates of  
50 the Rauric Fm. and the lacustrine marls and gypsums of the  
51 Santa Coloma Fm. (Benzaquen *et al.*, 1973; Colldeforns *et al.*,  
52 1994a, b; Colombo, 1980, 1986).

53  
54 The dating of these marine and non-marine  
55 lithostratigraphic units was formerly established and

1 lately refined through the definition of biostratigraphic  
2 assemblages and biozones (Agustí *et al.*, 1987; Anadón,  
3 1978a, b; Anadón and Feist, 1981; Anadón *et al.*, 1983,  
4 1987, 1992; Feist *et al.*, 1994; Ferrer, 1971; Minwer-  
5 Barakat *et al.*, 2023; Sanjuan *et al.*, 2014; Serra-Kiel *et al.*,  
6 2003; Tosal *et al.*, 2019). Further on, magnetostratigraphic  
7 studies done in neighbouring areas allowed the refinement  
8 of the biostratigraphic ages (Barberà, 1999; Barberà *et al.*,  
9 1999, 2001; Beamud *et al.*, 2012; Costa *et al.*, 2010, 2013;  
10 Garcés *et al.*, 2020; Gomez-Paccard *et al.*, 2011).

## 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55

16 The present study uses an integrated approach  
17 that combines geological mapping, the construction  
18 of a geological section, provenance analysis and  
19 magnetostratigraphic dating. A NW-SE-oriented structural  
20 section was constructed combining up to 140 bedding  
21 dips in Triassic to Eocene rocks. This section uses a  
22 new geological map of the SE margin of the Ebro Basin  
23 between Cabra del Camp and Vallespinosa towns (Carrera  
24 *et al.*, 2020), which partially covers the area of study and  
25 was extended towards the northeast using a geological map  
26 done by Colldeforns (unpublished). All the data provided  
27 with the map (Fig. 4) are obtained from the field and the  
28 location was acquired with a device equipped with a GPS.  
29 The use of both maps allows constraining the contacts  
30 between stratigraphic units, stratigraphic thicknesses as  
31 well as structural relationships and attitudes (Fig. 5).  
32 Additionally, the use of 3D digital outcrop models was used  
33 to better refine the contact of some of the stratigraphic units  
34 (Annex I of the supplementary material).

35 The provenance analysis includes two main parts: the  
36 analysis of the palaeontological content in clasts from  
37 foreland conglomerates in order to define the tectonically  
38 uplifted areas exposed to erosion in the hinterland of  
39 the orogenic system, and the integration of paleocurrent  
40 indicators (*i.e.* base marks, channels) to determine the  
41 relative location of the alluvial deposits source. Up to 14  
42 samples gathered through the Paleogene succession along  
43 the Ebro Basin margin between Cabra del Camp and  
44 Vallespinosa towns were analysed using thin sections (see  
45 map in Fig. 4 for their location).

46 The magnetostratigraphic analysis aims for an accurate  
47 reconstruction of the Paleogene compressional deformation  
48 in the central CCR by refining the age of the Paleogene  
49 succession to constrain the timing of the synorogenic  
50 sedimentation. The Pontils magnetostratigraphic section  
51 was carried out north and northwest of Vallespinosa where  
52 a relatively continuous northwest-dipping Paleogene  
53 succession occurs (Fig. 4). The sampled section consists  
54 of 238 measurement sites along ~1,430m of sedimentary  
55

record, which yields an average sampling resolution of 6 m/sample (Fig. I supplementary material). The succession shows a relatively steep dip of 64° at the base of the section which progressively decreases to a gentle dip of 15° at the top. The first 410m of the Pontils section include the Carme, Valldeperes, Bosc d'en Borràs and Montblanc formations of the Pontils-Cornudella Group, followed by 300m of the Vallespinosa Fm. of the Santa Maria Group, extending up to the meter 716. The Montblanc-Riu de Boix formations along the Pontils section were not suitable for magnetostratigraphic purposes and no samples were obtained until the meter 800, where the first Sant Miquel conglomerates of the Barberà-Anoia Group crop out (Fig. 4). Details about the sampling and laboratory procedures of the magnetostratigraphic analysis are provided in the Annex II of the supplementary material.

## RESULTS

### Structure of the central SE margin of the Ebro Basin

The structure of the SE margin of the Ebro Basin across Cabra del Camp is illustrated in the section of the Figure 5A. Overall, the margin in the study area depicts an anticline-syncline geometry developed at the tip of a low-angle thrust that uplifts the basement and the sedimentary cover over a gently northwest-dipping regional level of the Ebro Basin (Fig. 5B). The most prominent structure in the section is the Cabra-Carme Monocline, which is cored by a trishear triangular zone (understood as the model proposed by Erslev, 1991) developed at the tip of the Gaià-El Camp Thrust. This monocline represents the northwest deformation front of the CCR and involves the Variscan Basement and the unconformably overlying sedimentary cover made up by a Germanic Triassic succession (Buntsandstein, Muschelkalk and Keuper) and the Paleogene strata of the Ebro Basin fill. A splay of the Gaià-El Camp Thrust propagates up to the surface showing a relatively low displacement. The trace of this thrust can be followed at surface for around 6 km towards the northeast up to a zone characterized by the presence of NW-SE-oriented faults and the relatively thick conglomerates of the Sant Miquel Fm. (Fig. 4). From this point on, towards the northeast, the thrust appears progressively buried by the lower to middle Eocene Santa Càndia and Carme formations.

As shown by dip data and the cartographic traces, the geometry of the thrust footwall displays a pair of anticline-syncline structures that extend westward, parallel to the deformation front (Figs. 4; 5). Towards the northeast, the folds plunge and merge into a monocline structure (Fig. 4). The southern limb of the footwall syncline is characterized by the presence of nearly vertical beds of the Cabra del Camp Mb., which rapidly reduce their dip towards the

northwest. This trend continues further northwest where dips between 5° and 8° are present around the location of Sarral town (Fig. 4). At depth, the aforementioned anticline-syncline pair has been interpreted as the result of the propagation of a southeast-directed out-of-syncline thrust, probably detached within the ductile levels of the middle Muschelkalk in the Triassic succession (Fig. 5). This structure transfers slip along the anticline forelimb to accommodate the tectonic shortening (Mitra, 2002).

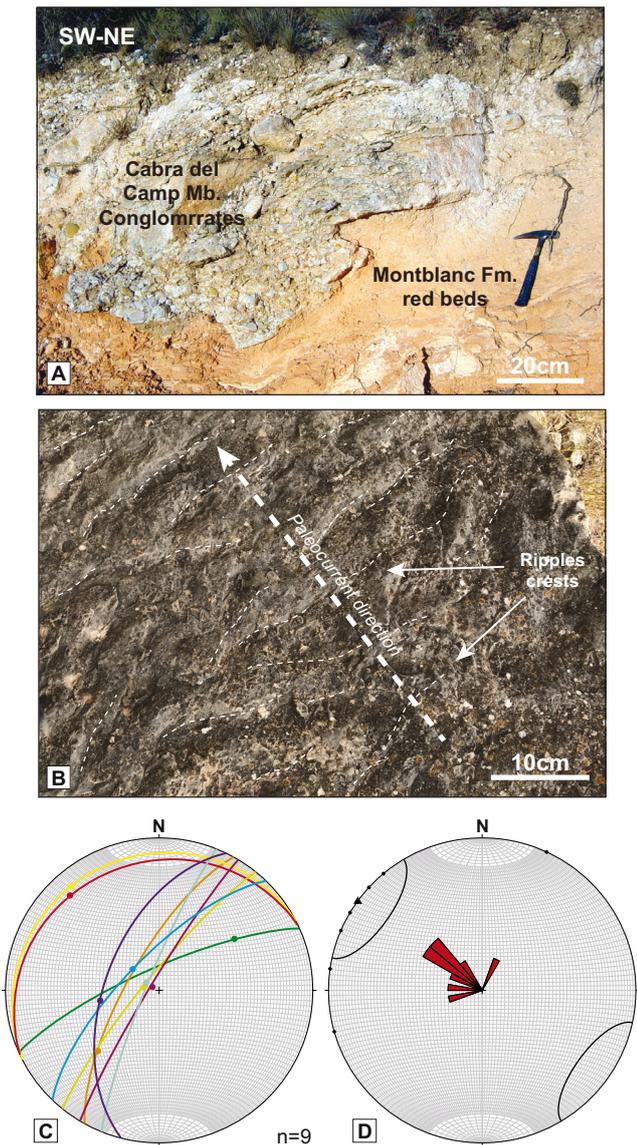
In terms of lithostratigraphy, the conglomerates of the Cabra del Camp Mb. laterally and vertically grade towards the northwest into the finer-grained sediments of the Montblanc Fm. and, towards the northwest, into the marine succession of the Vallespinosa Fm. (Figs. 4B; 5). These three formations are overlaid by the massive conglomerates of the Sant Miquel Fm.

Additionally, the Cabra-Carme Monocline is affected near its hinge by the El Camp Fault, a high-angle, SE-dipping Neogene extensional fault that is interpreted as rooted in the Gaià-El Camp Thrust. This Neogene structure bounds towards the northwest the El Camp Basin and controls the development of a semi-graben depocenter on its hangingwall (Figs. 2; 5).

### Paleocurrents and Provenance analysis

Paleocurrent indicators such as base marks, imbrications, channel base axis (Fig. 6A, B) were collected in the field in conglomeratic beds around Cabra del Camp (Figs. 4; 6C). Dips at these locations range from the nearly verticalized beds in the Cabra del Camp town area in the southern limb of the syncline at this location to the 25° of the Sant Miquel Fm. north of Cabra del Camp (Figs. 4; 5). Once restored to the horizontal, paleocurrent lineaments reveal a main flow direction towards the west and northwest (Fig. 6D), therefore implying a source area located east to southeast of the study area.

On the other hand, the analysis of the fossil content of carbonate clasts, which were sampled from coarse grained beds at 14 different sites distributed through the Paleogene succession along the margin (see locations in Fig. 4), has been performed aiming to provide information about their provenance and, therefore, the determination of the tectonically active areas. Samples 01 to 08 and 12 to 14 were collected at different levels of the Montblanc and Vallespinosa formations and Cabra del Camp Mb. Samples 09 to 11 were collected in undetermined alluvial deposits. To help in the tectonostratigraphic analysis, which is the objective of this study, only the sites close to the Cabra section (sites 01 to 04 sampled in the Cabra del Camp Mb.) are detailed while descriptions for each investigated sample can be found in the Table I of the supplementary material.



**FIGURE 6.** A) Paleochannel bottom outcrop in conglomerates of the Cabra del Camp Mb. used for paleocurrent measurements. B) Ripples at the bed top of marine-continental transitional facies. Dashed white arrow indicates the paleocurrent direction. C) Stereographic plot of paleocurrent measurements in the Cabra Fm. around the Cabra del Camp ( $n =$  number of measurements). See map in Figure 4 for location. D) Restored paleocurrent directions showing the predominant direction of the sediment supply.

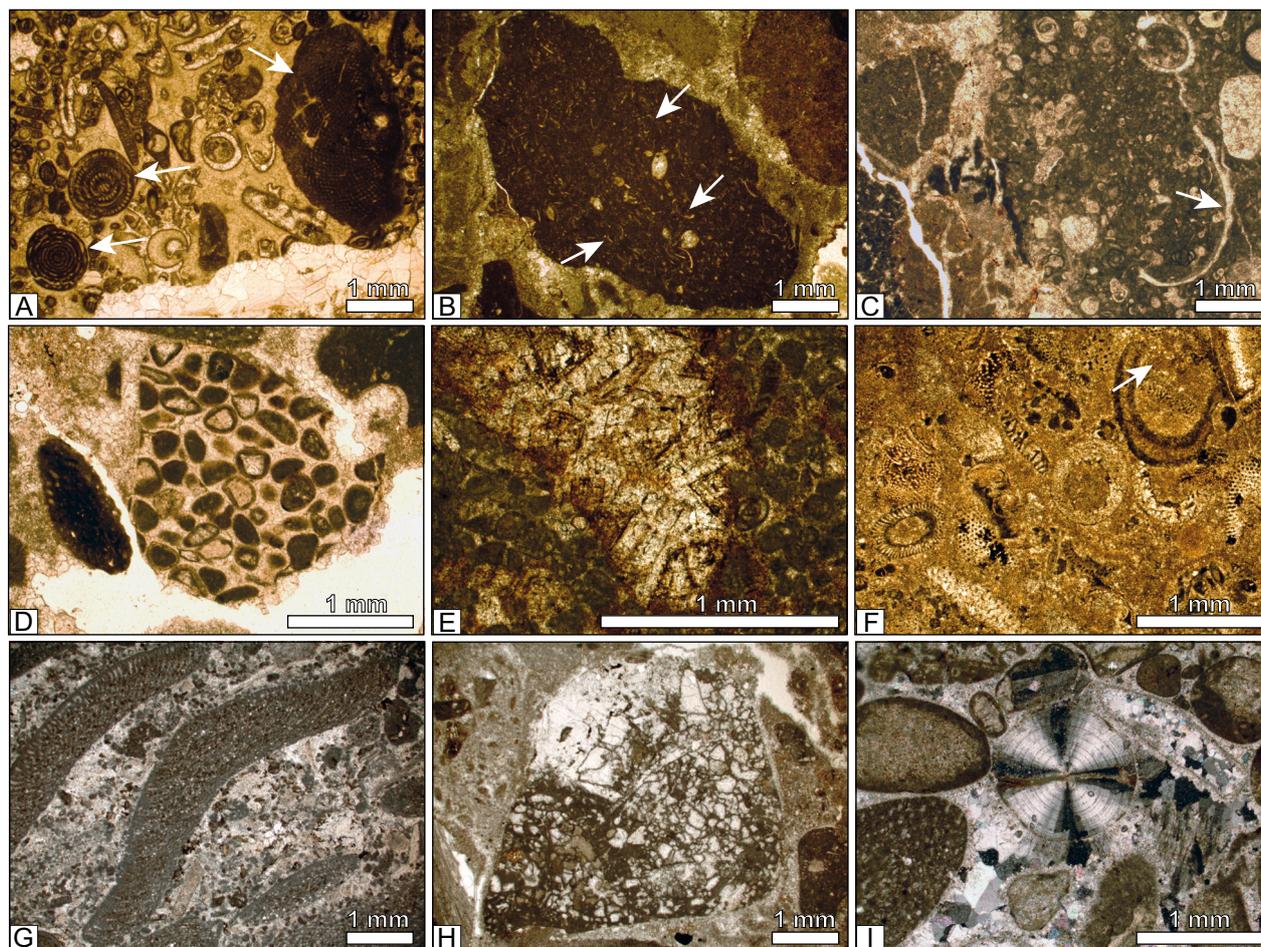
Site 1 clasts are mainly grainstones dominated by *Alveolina*, *Opertorbitolites*, miliolids, other foraminifera and recrystallized green algae (Fig. 7A), as well as packstones containing peloids, orbitolinids, and fragments of rudist bivalves, other molluscs, and echinoids. Clasts exhibiting wackestone to packstone textures with ostracods occur (Fig. 7B) and sometimes the ostracod-bearing clasts include gastropods and can show bioturbation traces. Mudstones, dolostones, and wackestone to packstone textures with small miliolids and other foraminifera (Fig.

7C), bivalves and serpulids, are also common. Other clast facies identified include sandy limestone, a mudstone-wackestone with characean remains, a grainstone with recrystallized ooids and calcareous algae, a grainstone with ooids exhibiting radial and concentric coatings (Fig. 7D), and grainstone textures with ooids, peloids, intraclasts, orbitolinids, and fragments of oysters and other molluscs. *Alveolina* and fragments of orbitolinids were also recognized within the conglomerate matrix.

Site 2 clasts are made up of dolomitic limestone with a grainstone texture containing peloids (Fig. 7E), miliolids, other foraminifera, fragments of molluscs, echinoids, and calcareous algae, as well as a highly recrystallized limestone clast with abundant calcareous green algae (Fig. 7F). Fragments of oysters, gastropods, echinoids, and bryozoans occur. Non-skeletal components found in this latter highly recrystallized grainstone include peloids, silt-sized quartz grains and intraclasts. Non-skeletal components found in the highly recrystallized grainstone also include peloids, silt-sized quartz grains and intraclasts. Intraclasts are made up of packstone to grainstone textures with scarce ooids, other coated grains, peloids and silt-sized quartz. Furthermore, conglomerate clasts with packstone to grainstone textures including miliolids, *Alveolina*, *Opertorbitolites*, small rotaliids, other foraminifera, and fragments of echinoids and molluscs, were also recognized.

Site 3 sample contains clasts with orbitolinids (Fig. 7G), encrusting and agglutinating foraminifera, other foraminifera, fragments of oysters, other molluscs, calcareous algae and serpulids, as well as non-skeletal components such as peloids, intraclasts and silt-sized quartz. An additional investigated clast was made up of a recrystallized packstone texture with peloids, silt-sized quartz, miliolids, other foraminifera, and fragments of oysters, other molluscs, bryozoans, echinoids, and calcareous algae. Further analysed conglomerate clasts exhibit wackestone textures with small foraminifera, mudstone to wackestone textures, occasionally bioturbated, with ostracods and gastropods, packstone to grainstone textures with orbitolinids, peloids, and fragments of oysters, other molluscs, echinoids, corals, and calcareous algae, and grainstone textures with miliolids, *Alveolina* and other foraminifera. Finally, a clast made up of a “bacinellid” fabric was also identified (Fig. 7H).

Site 4 clasts exhibit grainstone textures with abundant orbitolinids. Miliolids, other foraminifera, and fragments of *Marinella lugeoni*, *Permocalculus*, other calcareous algae, bryozoans, echinoids, oysters, other bivalves, corals, and sections of belemnite rostra also occur (Fig. 7I). Non-skeletal components include well-rounded intraclasts, peloids and silt-sized quartz grains. A calcithite sample with silt to sand-sized quartz grains, peloids, ooids, miliolids,



**FIGURE 7.** Clast microfacies. A) Photomicrograph of a grainstone texture from the Ypresian Orpi Fm. showing two *Alveolina* tests (left) and one of *Opertorbitolites* (upper right). Sampling site 1. B) Detail of a pebble-sized clast with ostracods giving rise to a wackestone texture. Santa Cándia Fm. (late Ypresian-Bartonian?). Sampling site 1. C) Close-up view of a packstone clast (centre to right) with small foraminifera and a section of a bivalve. Basal part of the Orpi Fm. (Ypresian). Sampling site 1. D) Sand-sized clast exhibiting a grainstone texture with ooids perhaps eroded from the Cenomanian Can Xuech Fm. Note the presence of an orbitolinid within the conglomerate matrix (right). Sampling site 1. E) Close-up view of a dolomitized miliolid and peloidal grainstone of Barremian-Aptian age. Sampling site 2. F) Photomicrograph of a recrystallized limestone exhibiting abundant sections of calcareous green algae. Cretaceous? Sampling site 2. G) Detail of an orbitolinid grainstone of Barremian-Aptian age. Sampling site 3. H) Pebble-sized clast of Aptian age showing a "bacinellid" fabric. Sampling site 3. I) Barremian-Aptian grainstone texture exhibiting a section of a belemnite rostrum (centre) under cross polarized light. Note the presence of an orbitolinid in the lower left part of the image. Sampling site 4.

other undetermined benthic foraminifera and fragments of orbitolinids was also collected. The calcilithite also includes small dolostone, mudstone and grainstone clasts. The latter is mainly made up of peloids and fragments of molluscs.

### The Pontils magnetostratigraphic section

Thermal demagnetization of the studied samples reveals, in general, two stable paleomagnetic components after removal of a low temperature component that parallels either the present-day magnetic field or the drilling direction. This low temperature component is usually removed below 200–230°C and will not be further considered. Above this, characteristic components pointing north with positive inclinations

or south with negative inclinations are found along section. The temperature intervals selected to calculate each characteristic component are compiled in the [Table II of the supplementary material](#). In general, characteristic components of grey mudstones and limestones are defined between 300–500°C pointing to (titan) magnetite as the main remanence carrier. Characteristic components in red mudstones and fine-grained sandstones are defined at higher temperatures, up to 650–690°C, pointing to hematites as the main remanence carrier. Despite this, some components are defined at temperatures around 400°C thus suggesting a mixture of (titan) magnetite and hematite in the red beds. No substantial changes in magnetic susceptibility are observed upon progressive thermal demagnetization

(Table III of the supplementary material), indicating that not significant mineral neoformation occurred inside the thermal demagnetizer. The calculated characteristic components have been assigned to three qualities. Type 1 quality is assigned when the paleomagnetic direction can be calculated with more than 3 demagnetization steps and demagnetization diagrams yield linear trends to the origin of coordinates with maximum angular deviations (MAD) around 5°. Directions are defined as type 2, when MAD > 5°, yet they can still be calculated by at least three demagnetization steps. Samples with erratic trends in which directions can be hardly calculated, often with only two demagnetization steps, yield type 3 directions, which are not considered for building the sequence of polarity zones in the magnetostratigraphic section. Nevertheless, this is not a significant issue since 205 directions out of 238 sites have been assigned to either type 1 or 2, which represents that 86% of the demagnetized samples yield reliable paleomagnetic directions. Magnetic polarities are deduced after computing the virtual geomagnetic pole latitude (VGP) from the characteristic component of each site. Positive values of VGP are interpreted as normal polarities and are represented in black when building the local magnetostratigraphic column (Fig. 8). Accordingly, negative VGP values are interpreted as reversed polarities and represented in white in the local magnetostratigraphic column. To define the magnetozones that constitute the local magnetostratigraphy at least two consecutive sites of the same polarity are needed. By doing so, 9 reversed and 9 normal magnetozones have been identified in the Pontils magnetostratigraphic section which can be correlated to the Geomagnetic Polarity Timescale (GPTS).

The magnetostratigraphic section is located a few km southwest of the Pontils village (Fig. 2B), where the fossil locality of Pontils was reported (Anadón, 1978; Anadón and Feist, 1981; Minwer-Barakat *et al.*, 2023). The Pontils fossil site was assigned to the MP15 Mammal Paleogene Reference Level by Schmidt-Kittler (1987). Lithostratigraphic correlation of the fossil site to the Pontils magnetostratigraphic section places the first levels containing significant fossil mammal remains (sample PO22 from Minwer-Barakat *et al.*, 2023) around the meter 330 and the last levels containing significant mammal fossil remains (PO39 from Minwer-Barakat *et al.*, 2023) around the meter 400. Therefore, both levels are contained respectively between the base and the top of the Montblanc Fm. (Fig. 8). Additionally, the fossil site Rocafort de Queralt (RO), assigned to MP19-20 (Anadón *et al.*, 1987), can be lithostratigraphically correlated from the neighbouring Rocafort magnetostratigraphic section (Barberà *et al.*, 2001) to the meter 1,350 of the Pontils section, within the Sant Miquel conglomerates of the Barberà-Anoia Group (Fig. 8).

## DISCUSSION

This discussion is divided into three parts: first, the attribution of age of the clasts sampled in the Cabra del Camp conglomerates; second, the age of the sampled Eocene units from the paleomagnetic study; and third, the tectono-stratigraphic interpretations and their implications in the tectonic evolution of the central CCR.

### Source area age attribution of the upper Eocene clasts in the central SE margin of the Ebro Basin

The northwest-directed paleocurrents measured within the sampled upper Eocene strata (Figs. 4; 6) suggest the presence of higher reliefs toward the southeast of the study area, indicating a possible source of sediment input from elevated terrains. This pattern implies that the southeast region may have acted as a topographic high or a tectonically active area during the deposition of these strata, influencing sediment transport and depositional processes across the basin.

The detailed fossil content description carried out on clasts from the upper Eocene alluvial units (Cabra Mb., Montblanc Fm. and Sant Miquel Fm.) and the shallow marine units (Vallespinosa Fm.) provides key information about the formations that were exhumed and eroded in the source area at the time of sedimentation. A detailed summary with the attributed ages for each studied sample can be found in Table I of the supplementary material.

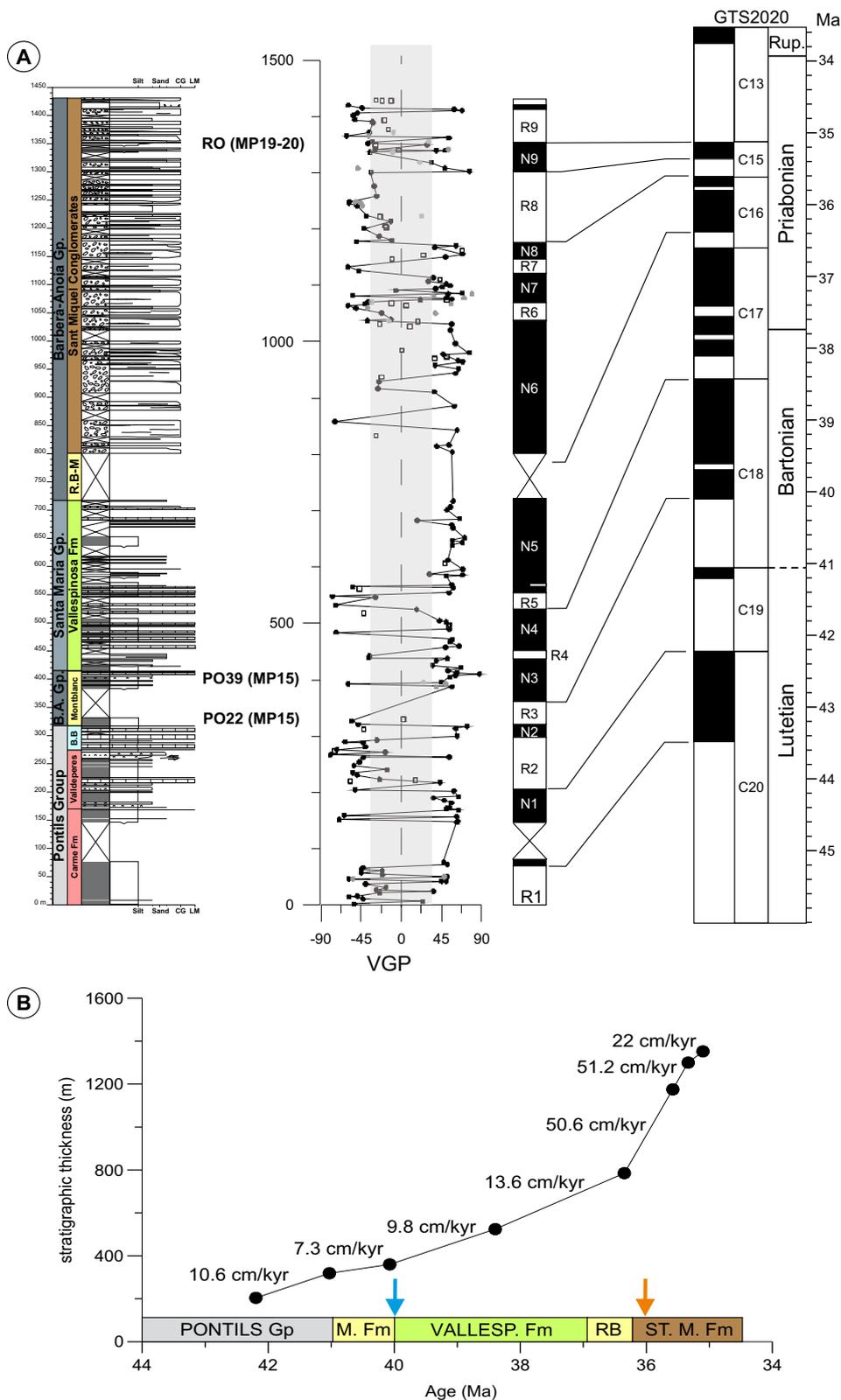
A series of clast-types have been used to determine the original stratigraphic units where these clasts are derived from. These types are described below from younger to older and are summarized in Figure 9.

#### Type A clasts: Ypresian

The wackestone and packstone textures with undetermined small foraminifera (Fig. 7C) recognized in sites 01 and 03 are characteristic of the basal part of the Orpí Fm. (see figure 28 in Anadón, 1978a, b) and, therefore, are Ypresian (Ilerdian) in age.

#### Type B clasts: Ypresian

Grainstone clasts rich in *Alveolina*, *Opertorbitolites* (Fig. 7A), miliolids, gypsinids, and algae are prevalent throughout the studied clastic deposits and consistently present across nearly all sampling sites. These clasts, as well as the *Alveolina*, *Opertorbitolites* and gypsinid tests found in the conglomerate matrix in sites 07, 08, 09, 11 and 12, were also eroded from the Ypresian (Ilerdian) Orpí Fm. (see Anadón, 1978).



**FIGURE 8.** Magnetostratigraphy of the Pontils section. A) Magnetostratigraphic section and correlation to the GPTS (*Gradstein et al., 2020*). PO and RO correspond to Pontils and Rocafort de Queralt fossil sites, respectively, with their attribution to Mammal Paleogene Reference Levels in brackets. White squares in the VGP graph represent type 3 directions, discarded to build the local magnetostratigraphy. B.A. Gp., B.B. and R.B-M stand for Barberà-Anoia Group, Bosc d'en Borràs and Riu de Boix-Montblanc formations in the stratigraphic column. B) Sedimentation rates values and evolution for the Pontils section. Blue arrow: Bartonian transgressive event at the base of Santa Maria Group. Orange arrow: time of disconnection from the ocean of the Ebro Basin.

Sampled unit	Source area age attribution			
	Cretaceous			Paleogene
	Lower Cretaceous	Upper Cretaceous		Eocene
	Barremian-Aptian	Cenomanian		Ypresian
Sant Miquel Fm.		E		B
Vallespinosa Fm.		E		B
Cabra del Camp Mb.	G	D E F H	D	C H A D H

**FIGURE 9.** Source area age attribution of the upper Eocene clasts in the central SE margin of the Ebro Basin. Clast type classification: A: Ypresian wackestones-packstones. B: Alveolina limestone. C: Cenomanian ooidal grainstones. D: Lacustrine limestones (Barremian-Aptian, Upper Cretaceous, Ypresian). E: Barremian-Aptian: orbitolinid limestone. F: Barremian Aptian grainstones. G: Undifferentiated Cretaceous limestone. H: Undifferentiated Cretaceous or Early Eocene dolostones.

### Type C clasts: Cenomanian

The grainstone with well-formed ooids (Fig. 7D) exhibiting radial and concentric coatings sampled in site 01 is probably Cenomanian in age. Esteban (1973) reported similar facies from the Cenomanian Can Xuech Fm. in the Montmell area (Fig. 2).

### Type D clasts: Barremian-Aptian, Upper Cretaceous, Ypresian

The age of the freshwater limestone facies with ostracods (Fig. 7B) and characeans recognized in clasts from sites 01 and 03 could have been sourced from the Barremian-Aptian and/or Upper Cretaceous as have been reported in the CCR (e.g. Esteban, 1973; Martín-Closas *et al.*, 2018, this volume; Salas, 1987), but also from the Ypresian (Cuisian) Santa Càndia Fm., which belongs to the Pontils-Cornudella Group and overlies the Ypresian (Ilerdian) Orpí Fm. (Anadón, 1978).

### Type E clasts: Barremian-Aptian

Clasts and matrix samples containing orbitolinids also occur in almost all sampled sites (Figs. 7D, G, I). The presence of orbitolinids, and occasionally of *Nummuloculina*, *Marinella lugeoni*, *Permocalculus*, as well as fragments of rudist bivalves and belemnites (Fig. 7I), indicate a Barremian-Aptian age (Esteban, 1973; Robles, 1982; Salas, 1987).

### Type F clasts: Barremian-Aptian

The grainstones dominated by the presence of peloids, scarce ooids, miliolids (Fig. 7E) and fragments of molluscs and echinoids found in sites 01 to 04 also show facies like those observed in Barremian-Aptian platform carbonates from the CCR (Esteban, 1973; Robles, 1982; Salas, 1987) and are therefore ascribed to this age interval. The

“bacinellid” fabric-bearing clast (Fig. 7H) recognized in sampling site 03 is also representative of the Aptian Stage (see Schlagintweit and Bover-Arnal, 2013).

### Type G clasts: undifferentiated Cretaceous

In sampling site 02, a clast made up of highly recrystallized limestone with abundant calcareous green algae was collected (Fig. 7F). The age of this sample is unknown. Similar deposits dominated by calcareous green algae, which are common in Cretaceous platform carbonates (e.g. Esteban, 1973; Salas, 1987), have not been reported in the Paleogene record of the CCR (Anadón, 1978). Therefore, the age of this sample has been ascribed to the Cretaceous.

### Type H clasts: undifferentiated Cretaceous or early Eocene

In the CCR, dolostone stratigraphic intervals that could have sourced the dolostone clasts found in the investigated conglomerate deposits of the Cabra del Camp Mb. (Sites 01 to 04) include the Barremian-Aptian succession (Robles, 1982; Salas, 1987), the Cenomanian Can Xuech Fm. (Esteban, 1973) and the Orpí Fm. of Ypresian age (Anadón, 1978). The Jurassic and Triassic record also includes dolostone intervals (e.g. Salas, 1987). However, non-dolomitized clasts older than Lower Cretaceous have not been recognized in the sampling sites. Therefore, the dolostone clasts identified are more likely to be of Cretaceous or early Eocene in age.

### Age of the Pontils magnetostratigraphic section

The proposed correlation of the Pontils local magnetostratigraphic section to the GPTS (Gradstein *et al.*, 2020) suggests that the deposition of the Pontils section occurred between C20r to C13r chrons (Lutetian to Priabonian) (Fig. 8A). This correlation is based on both the reversal pattern, the location of fossil sites PO and RO along the section and cartographic relationship with neighbouring sections (López-Blanco *et al.*, 2024). Fossil site RO (MP19-20) is located around the meter 1350 in the Pontils section coinciding with the upper part of the normal magnetozone N9 (Fig. 8A). Correlation of RO to C15n by Barberà *et al.* (2001) also favours the correlation of N9 to C15n in the Pontils section, which pins the upper part of the section. The base of the Sant Miquel conglomerates is also characterized by a long normal magnetozone N6, which we propose to correlate to C16n based on the geological mapping-deduced vertical and lateral relationships with the Tossa Fm. (López-Blanco *et al.*, 2024) that is correlated to C16n by Costa *et al.* (2013). Therefore, deposition of the Sant Miquel conglomerates occurred from C16n up to C13r (36.2Ma up to 34.5Ma according to GPTS version of

Gradstein *et al.* (2020)). The Riu de Boix-Montblanc Fm. does not provide a characteristic reversal pattern since no data are available due to bad outcrop conditions. However, it has been assigned to C16r.2r-C17n.1n (Fig. 8A). Below, the Vallespinosa Fm. within the Santa Maria Gp. yields N5, N4 and part of N3 normal magnetozones and R4 and R5 reversed magnetozones. N5 is correlated to C17n.2n and 3n (Priabonian-Bartonian), whereas R5, N4, R4 and top of N3 are correlated to Bartonian chrons C17r.3r, C18n.1n, C18r.1r and top of 18n.2n, respectively. The Montblanc Fm., in a stratigraphic position equivalent to the Pontils fossil site (MP15, Fig. 8), also records the magnetozones N3 and the reversed magnetozones R3, which are correlated to C18n.2n and the base of C18r.2r respectively. Therefore, the Pontils fossil site correlation to the GPTS confirms the Bartonian age assigned by Minwer-Barakat *et al.* (2023) and not the uppermost Lutetian age as previously suggested by Beamud *et al.* (2003) and Beamud (2013) due to an imprecise location of the fossil site on top of the Bosc d'en Borràs Fm. Limestones and the heterochronous character of its top due to the transition to SW to detrital Montblanc Fm. strata. From this correlation the fossil site spans from approximately 41Ma (PO22, reversed polarity) to 39.8Ma (PO39, normal polarity). Following down-section, the Bosc d'en Borràs, Valldeperes and Carme formations reversal pattern formed by magnetozones N2, R2, N1 and R1 are proposed to correlate to C19n, C19r, C20n and C20r respectively (Fig. 8A).

Although bio- and chronostratigraphic implications of the European Paleogene reference levels are beyond the scope of this study, it is worth pointing out that the Bartonian age of the Pontils fossil site derived from this work only refers to the Pontils fossil site and not to the calibration of the MP15 reference level. As an example, the Sant Jaume de Frontanyà (SJF) fossil site (Busquets *et al.*, 1992; Moyà-Solà and Kohler, 1993), which is also assigned to MP15 reference level, has been traditionally dated as early Bartonian (Bonilla-Salomón *et al.*, 2016). However, a new 6.5km thick composite magnetostratigraphic section within the Ripoll syncline, in the south Pyrenean foreland, correlates the SJF fossil site to C20n (late Lutetian) (Juvany *et al.*, 2024). This implies a time span of more than 3Myr between SJF and Pontils fossil sites, both belonging to the MP15 reference level. Therefore, further studies are needed in order to understand the chronostratigraphic significance of the Paleogene mammal reference levels.

Using the absolute ages obtained from the correlation of the magnetostratigraphic log with the GPTS 2020 and the stratigraphic thickness corresponding to the different magnetozones, values of sedimentation rates have also been calculated (Fig. 8B). The Pontils-Cornudella Group (C20n to C19n) correlates to low sedimentation rates with an average value of 10.6cm/kyr. The Montblanc, Vallespinosa

and Riu de Boix formations (C18n to C16r) also represent low sedimentation rates, although slightly increasing the values between 7.3 at the base and 13.6cm/kyr towards the top (Fig. 8B). Conversely, the base of the Sant Miquel Fm. at C16n shows an abrupt change in the sedimentation rates to much higher values sustained for 1Myr (from 50.6cm/kyr at C16n to 51.2cm/kyr at C15r), finally decreasing to 22cm/kyr at C15n.

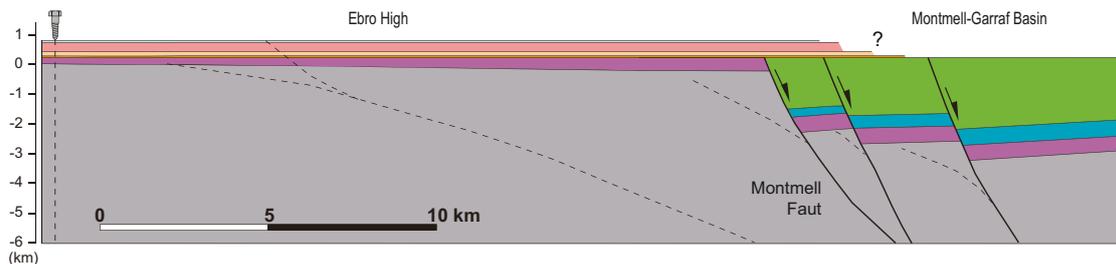
### Tectonostratigraphic evolution of the central Catalan Coastal Ranges during the Paleogene compression: relative and absolute timing of thrust emplacement

The compressional phase related to the convergent motion between the Iberian and Eurasian plates started in the late Santonian (Late Cretaceous) (Roest and Srivastava, 1991; Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2002). However, the first evidence of the transmission of the compressional stresses into the CCR area occurs at the end of the Cretaceous (possibly Maastrichtian), as recorded in the Miramar-Gaià Domain by the presence of a paraconformity that brings in contact basal Paleogene and Triassic (Keuper) strata (Figs. 4; 5). This unconformity denotes a period of regional uplift linked to either, a Late Cretaceous contractional deformation, or an isostatic adjustment after the Late Jurassic to Early Cretaceous rifting phase (Marín *et al.*, 2021). A subsequent period of tectonic quiescence from Paleocene to middle Eocene (late Lutetian) is illustrated by the sedimentation of conformable fine-grained terrigenous and carbonate beds deposited in the distal areas of the South-Pyrenean foreland (Anadón, 1978 a, b; Anadón *et al.*, 1985). The presence of *Alveolina* and *Opertorbitolites*, as well as freshwater limestone facies in clasts from the first conglomeratic beds present in the basin margin suggests that, at least, Paleocene-Ypresian (Ilerdian to lower Cuisian) strata from the Mediona, Orpí and Santa Càndia formations and, probably, upper Cuisian to Lutetian from the Carme, Valldeperes and Bosc d'en Borràs formations, were unconformably overlying Cretaceous rocks of the Montmell-Garraf Basin area (Fig. 10A). This stratigraphic succession indicates the absence of significant deformation or creation of relief in the adjacent areas and its extension towards the southeast remains uncertain.

The first significant compressional period in the study area corresponds to the beginning of the tectonic inversion of the Montmell Fault, which drives the uplift of Montmell-Garraf Basin and the overlying strata over the undeformed Ebro Basin (Fig. 10B). This inversion is characterized by the development of footwall shortcuts in the upper part of the reactivated faults as well as the presence of minor buttressing (*e.g.* SE-directed backthrusts and pop-up structures) in the Montmell Fault hangingwall (Marín *et al.*, 2021). The uplift of the Montmell-Garraf Basin controlled the denudation of the positive reliefs and the deposition

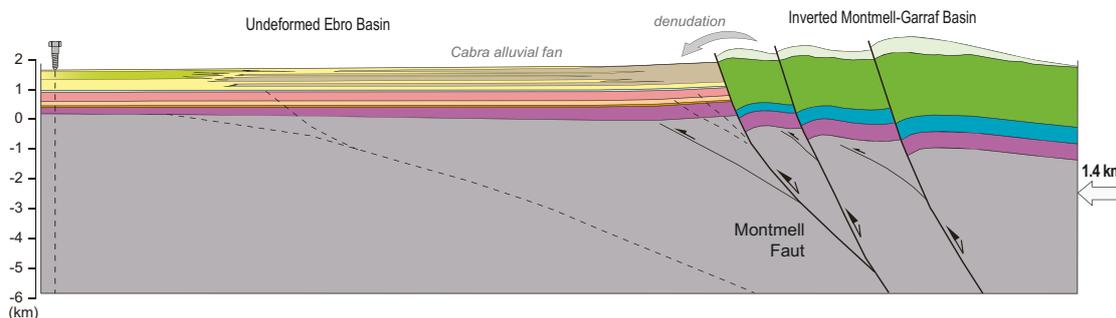
**A: Paleocene to late Lutetian (pre-compression stage)** NW-SE

Mesozoic sediments of the Montmell-Garraff Basin overlaid by a pre-compression Paleocene to lower Eocene succession.



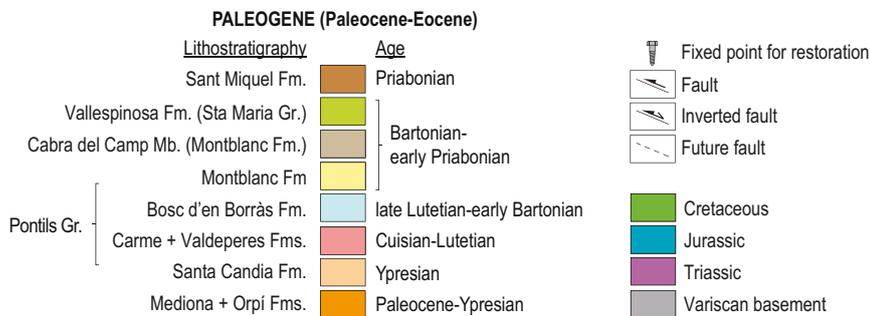
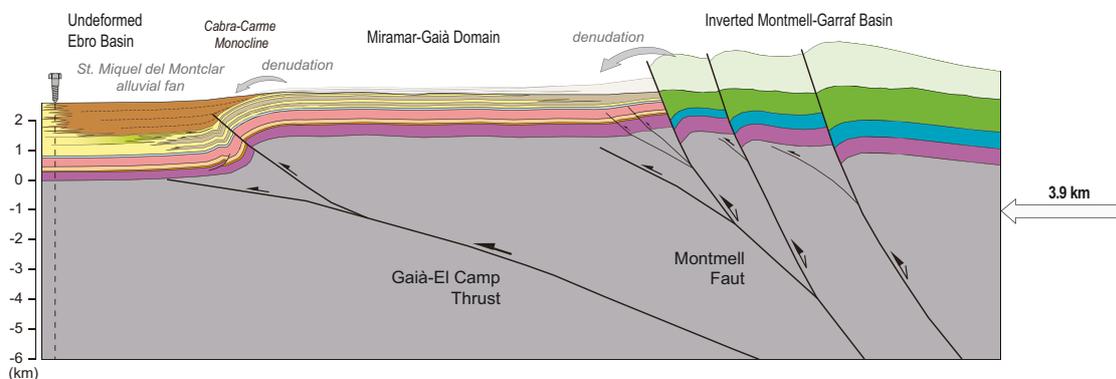
**B: Bartonian - early Priabonian (syn-compression I stage)**

Tectonic inversion of the inverted Montmell-Garraff Basin. Start of the Catalan Intraplate Chain build-up: uplift, denudation and sediment transport of exhumed the Mesozoic towards the NW. Deposition of the syn-compression I (syn-inversion) sequence north of the Montmell Fault.



**C: Early to late Priabonian (syn-compression II stage)**

Development of the Gaià-El Camp Thrust as a major short-cut of the Montmell Fault. Uplift and erosion of the Miramar-Gaià Domain including the syn-compression I sequence. Deposition of the Sant Miquel del Montclar conglomerates (syn-compression II sequence).



**FIGURE 10.** Schematic sequential structural restoration of the Gaià-Montmell section applying flexural slip and bed length preservation. A) late Lutetian pre-compressional stage. B) late Lutetian – middle Bartonian syn-compressional stage. C) middle Bartonian to late Priabonian latest stages of the compressional stage. No vertical exaggeration.

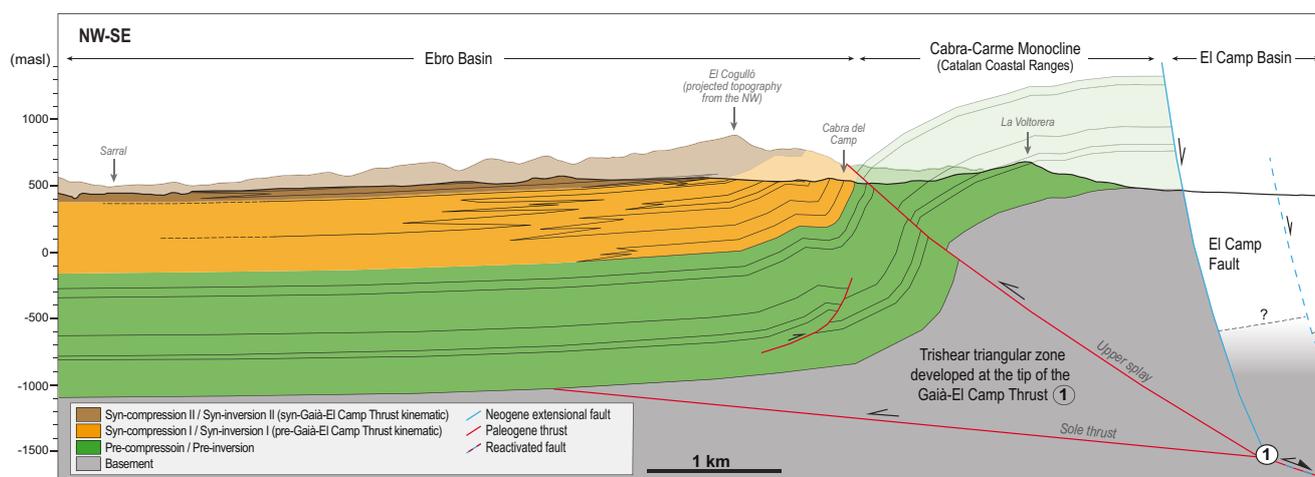
of the first syn-compression succession recorded in the studied sector of the Ebro Basin margin (Fig. 11). The base of this succession corresponds to the first conglomerates of the Cabra del Camp Mb. (Montblanc Fm.). The observed parallelism with the strata underneath denotes that their deposition was before the emplacement of the Gaià-El Camp Thrust (pre-Gaià-El Camp Thrust kinematic, Fig. 11) therefore contradicting previous interpretations that included these conglomerates as part of a growth sequence (*i.e.* Anadón *et al.*, 1986).

The analysis of the fossil content in clasts from the Cabra del Camp Mb. conglomerates and coeval units (Montblanc and Vallespinosa formations) reveals that the source area contained rocks from the Lower Cretaceous (Barremian-Aptian), Upper Cretaceous (Cenomanian, Turonian and, possibly, Senonian) and lower to middle Eocene (Ypresian-Lutetian). Despite the current levels of erosion south of the Montmell Fault in the Miramar-Gaià Domain does not allow the recognition of rocks younger than Paleocene (Figs. 2B, C), an alluvial system at the footwall of the Montmell Fault and extending up to the present-day location of Cabra del Camp is proposed for this period (Cabra alluvial fan, Fig. 10B). This reconstruction contemplates the presence of (unpreserved) proximal alluvial facies at the foothills of the inverted Montmell-Garraff Basin laterally changing to distal facies towards the northwest above the still inactive Gaià-El Camp Thrust. This reconstruction is supported by the measured NW-directed paleocurrents and the fact that one of the main sources of the sediments consisted of Cretaceous rocks comparable to the formations described in the Mesozoic basins located southeast of the study area (*e.g.* Montmell-Garraff) (Esteban, 1973; Esteban and Robles, 1976; Martín-Closas *et al.*, this volume; Moreno-Bedmar *et al.*, 2017; Salas *et al.*, 2001). Consequently,

the conglomerate beds currently outcropping in the surroundings of Cabra del Camp in the Ebro Basin margin (Cabra del Camp Mb., Fig. 4) can be described as the distal remains of an alluvial system that expanded over the Miramar-Gaià Domain (Fig. 10B). To the northwest, the Cabra alluvial system would laterally transition into the finer-grained facies of the Montblanc Fm. and the marine sediments of the Vallespinosa Fm. (Fig. 4B)

The beginning of the inversion and the uplift of the Montmell-Garraff Basin can be established from the paleomagnetic analysis performed in sediments of the Santa Maria and Barberà-Anoia groups (Fig. 8), which constrains the age of the base of the Montblanc Fm. and its lateral equivalent the Cabra del Camp Mb. (Figs. 4; 5) as early Bartonian (41Ma). This age of initial contractional movements and inversion agrees with the fact that the compressional deformation in the CCR progressed from northeast to southwest up to the middle Oligocene (Anadón *et al.*, 1985; Guimerà, 1984; Guimerà and Santanach, 1978). The earliest syn-tectonic sediments recorded along the SE Ebro Basin margin are the early Eocene Cairat Fm. (Ypresian-early Cuisian in age), which were deposited northeast of the study area in the Montserrat-Sant Llorenç del Munt area (López-Blanco, 2002) (Fig. 2A).

The compressional deformation continued and the whole ensemble of the Miramar-Gaià Domain became uniformly uplifted by the Gaià-El Camp Thrust (Fig. 10C), a low-angle thrust previously interpreted as a major footwall shortcut that provided a smoother fault trajectory during the inversion of the Montmell Fault (Marín *et al.*, 2021). The emplacement of the Gaià-El Camp Thrust is the responsible of the Cabra-Carme Monocline formation, which represents the deformation front of the CCR. The deformation was first



**FIGURE 11.** Geological cross-section of the SE margin of the Ebro Basin across the locality of Cabra del Camp showing the tectono-sequences differentiated by the tectono-stratigraphic analysis. See Figure 4 for section location.

1 accommodated within a trishear triangular zone developed  
2 at the tip of the Gaià-El Camp Thrust. As deformation  
3 progressed, an out-of-syncline back-thrust developed  
4 to accommodate the shortening, folding the previously  
5 deposited syn-compression I succession (Figs. 5; 10C; 11)  
6 and resulting in the characteristic anticline-syncline pair  
7 observed north of Cabra del Camp (Fig. 4). Similar out-of-  
8 syncline structures have been previously recognized in the  
9 Miramar Range southwest of the study area by Gómez and  
10 Guimerà (1999) (see map in Fig. 2B for location).

11  
12 The Sant Miquel conglomerates were deposited during  
13 this period as the result of the uplift, denudation, and  
14 transport of coarse-grained sediments from the adjoining  
15 reliefs towards the southeast (Fig. 10C). The projection of  
16 topographically higher dip data from the Sant Miquel Fm.  
17 located to the northeast (Fig. 5), shows that this formation  
18 probably onlaps and/or truncates the strata underneath. The  
19 internal structure of these conglomerates seen northeast of  
20 the Vallespinosa town (Fig. 4), which includes at least two  
21 intraformational angular unconformities (López-Blanco *et*  
22 *al.*, 2025), is coherent with its deposition during the coeval  
23 development of the Cabra-Carme Monocline. The observed  
24 geometries would suggest that this monocline developed  
25 following a limb rotation model that generated a fan of beds  
26 with intraformational unconformities (Fig. 10C). This fact  
27 agrees with the interpretation of the frontal structure as a  
28 fault-propagation fold developed by a triangular shear zone  
29 at the tip of the Gaià-El Camp Thrust (Marín *et al.*, 2021).

30  
31 If we consider the results of the magnetostratigraphic  
32 analysis (Fig. 8) and the above-mentioned geometrical  
33 relationships of the Sant Miquel conglomerates, it is  
34 possible to refine the age of the deformation as Priabonian  
35 and not late Bartonian as previously suggested by Marín  
36 *et al.* (2021). The end of the compressional deformation  
37 is difficult to establish in the study area considering that  
38 the stratigraphic record is limited. However, it probably  
39 ended in the uppermost Priabonian, as suggested by the  
40 end of the conglomeratic sedimentation and the presence  
41 of lacustrine facies that would denote tectonic quiescence  
42 (Anadón *et al.*, 1985, 1989).

43  
44 Combining thickness and precise age control provided  
45 by magnetostratigraphic analysis sedimentation rates have  
46 been calculated for the Pontils magnetostratigraphic section.  
47 The evolution of these sedimentation rates shows a tight  
48 correlation with the deduced tectonic evolution of the Ebro  
49 Basin margin (Fig. 8B). The calculated values for the Pontils  
50 Group and Montblanc Formation (10.6cm/kyr and 7.3cm/  
51 kyr, respectively) show, in average, the lowest sedimentation  
52 rates of the section. These low values correspond to areas of  
53 low subsidence attributed to a relative quiescence episode  
54 during the Late Lutetian pre-compression stage (Fig. 10A).  
55 The Bartonian-early Priabonian units (Vallespinosa and

1 Riu de Boix Formations) show higher sedimentation rates  
2 (9.8cm/kyr and 13.6cm/kyr, respectively). These values  
3 still represent relatively low subsidence rates. However, they  
4 correspond to syn-compression I stage (Fig. 10B) and thus,  
5 associated to the first significant compressional period in  
6 the study area. In this case, it can be interpreted that the  
7 inversion of high-angle faults bounding the Montmell-  
8 Garraf Basin did not induce a major change in subsidence  
9 rates. However, the increasing trend in sedimentation rates  
10 would record a progressive rise in subsidence rates due  
11 to a change in the tectonic activity. The calculated values  
12 for Sant Miquel Formation imply an abrupt increase in  
13 the sedimentation rates of up to 51.2cm/kyr. This shift  
14 corresponds to the beginning of the early Priabonian late  
15 Priabonian syn-compression II stage (Fig. 10C) and can be  
16 interpreted as related to the continuation of the Montmell-  
17 Garraf Basin inversion and mostly to the onset of the Gaià-  
18 El Camp emplacement. This resulted in a major load of  
19 basement units causing an increase in subsidence rates in  
20 the basin. However, this period (C16n and C15r) also shows  
21 relatively high sedimentation rates in other sections and  
22 sub-basins from the South-Pyrenean foreland (Garcés *et*  
23 *al.*, 2020). In these other areas, the increase in values has  
24 been interpreted as being related to the disconnection of the  
25 South-Pyrenean foreland from the Atlantic Ocean (Garcés *et*  
26 *al.*, 2020). Thus, the abrupt increase in sedimentation rates  
27 observed in the Pontils section could be interpreted as a  
28 combination of the basin margin tectonics and the evolution  
29 of the Ebro Basin from exoreic to endorheic conditions  
30 during C16n (Costa *et al.*, 2010). The final decrease in  
31 the sedimentation rates from 51.2cm/kyr to 22cm/kyr (in  
32 C15r and C15n respectively) at the top of Sant Miquel Fm.  
33 can be interpreted as related either to the end of the whole  
34 syn-compression stage or to a gradual return to trends of  
35 the previous externally drained stage (Garcés *et al.*, 2020).  
36 This decreasing trend is also recorded by the very low  
37 sedimentation rates (6 cm/kyr) in C13r at the neighbouring  
38 Sarral section (Barberà *et al.*, 2001) corresponding to the  
39 strata just overlying the Sant Miquel conglomerates.

40  
41 Additionally, the results of the provenance analysis  
42 in clasts from the Sant Miquel conglomerates indicate  
43 that Barremian-Aptian orbitolinids and Ypresian  
44 (Ilerdian) *Alveolina* are prevalent throughout the  
45 studied samples. This denotes the continuation of  
46 tectonic inversion of the Montmell Fault, the uplift  
47 and denudation of the Montmell-Garraf Basin and, the  
48 potential cannibalization of the proximal zones of the  
49 previously deposited Cabra alluvial system (Fig. 10C).  
50 In terms of Paleogene compression, uplift and its related  
51 denudation, significant erosion estimates of up to 2-3km  
52 are reported from fission-track thermal modelling  
53 southwest of the study area in an equivalent structural  
54 position in the Prades Block (Fig. 2A) (Juez-Larré and  
55 Andersen, 2002).

## CONCLUSIONS

The integration of a new geological map, structural analysis as well as magnetostratigraphic and provenance analyses has allowed the refinement of the tectonostratigraphic evolution of the central Catalan Coastal Ranges (CCR) and the SE margin of the Ebro Basin during the Paleogene compression.

The correlation of the new Pontils magnetostratigraphic section with the Geomagnetic Polarity Time Scale allows constraining the absolute ages of the Paleogene stratigraphic units along more than 1,400m of succession from Lutetian to Priabonian. The sedimentation of the uppermost Carme Fm. occurred during the late Cuisian, while the Valldeperes and the Bosc d'en Borràs formations occurred during the Lutetian. The age of the deposition of the Vallespinosa and Montblanc formations (including the Cabra del Camp Mb.) has been established as Bartonian to early Priabonian. The paleomagnetic study also dates the Pontils fossil site (MP15 reference level) as Bartonian, ranging from 41 to 39.8Ma.

The conglomerates of the Cabra del Camp Mb. correspond to distal facies of an alluvial system (Cabra alluvial system). This system expanded to the northwest of the Montmell Fault over the Miramar-Gaià Domain due to the onset of compression and the tectonic inversion of the fault during the Bartonian to early Priabonian. This proposed age refines previous estimates for the timing of the Montmell Fault inversion that placed the reactivation in the late Ypresian (Cuisian). Additionally, it aligns with the diachronous record of the compression observed along the SE margin of the Ebro Basin, where the timing varies from Ypresian in the northern sector to Bartonian in the central area, and middle to late Eocene in the south.

The provenance analysis of the Cabra del Camp conglomerates indicates that the source area of this alluvial system was located southeast of the studied area and corresponded to the Montmell-Garraf Basin. The proximal facies of Cabra alluvial system would have been located in the footwall of the Montmell Fault although these have not been preserved due to later uplift and denudation. The composition of clasts suggests that the Mesozoic Basin included Upper Cretaceous (Cenomanian, Turonian and minor Senonian), and Lower Cretaceous (Barremian-Aptian) strata. The Mesozoic Basin was overlaid by Paleocene to Lutetian sediments (Mediona and Orpí formations and Pontils-Cornudella Group), which confirms this as a period of tectonic quiescence. However, the extent of these Paleogene successions towards the southeast remains uncertain.

A second pulse of compression is recorded by intraformational angular unconformities in the

conglomerates of the Sant Miquel Formation (syn-compression II stage) during the Priabonian. The deformation of these conglomerates is associated with the growth of a fault-propagation fold known as the Cabra-Carme Monocline, which resulted from the emplacement of the Gaià-El Camp Thrust. This thrust uplifted the Miramar-Gaià Domain over the Ebro Basin. The Cabra-Carme Monocline constitutes the deformation front of the CCR at this location. Additionally, out-of-syncline backthrusting deformed the previously deposited syn-compression I sequence, which includes the conglomerates of the Cabra del Camp Mb. The beginning of this stage is marked by the abrupt increase in the sedimentation rates, which is related to the increase in the tectonic subsidence caused by the onset of the Gaià-El Camp low angle thrust.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank the Paleomagnetic Laboratory CCiTUB - Geo3BCN (CSIC) for the support on paleomagnetic analyses. We would like to thank the kind and useful review performed by Drs. Antonio Casas and Mar Moragas as well as the Editor, Dr. Joan Guimerà, and finally, all the staff members of *Geologica Acta* for handling the paper. This research has been carried out within the framework of the following projects: the IBERINSULA (PID2020-113912GB-I00), funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033; the MCIN Project IMPACISIS (PID2019-106440GB-C21) European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); the SABREM-PID2020-117598GB-I00 funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033; the DGICYT PID2021-122467NB-C22 Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades/Agencia Estatal de Investigación/Fondo Europeo de Desarrollo Regional; GEODIGIT (TED2021-130602B-I00) research projects funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 for the European Union "NextGenerationEU"/PRTR. The Grups Consolidats de Recerca "Geologia Sedimentària" (2021-SGR-Cat 00349) and "Geodinàmica i Anàlisi de Conques" (2021-SGR 00076) of the Generalitat de Catalunya, and the UB Geomodels Research Institute are also acknowledged. The research has also been benefited by the project "Caracterització litoestratigràfica i estructural i cartografia geològica del Paleogen dels fulls de Sarra (67-31) i Montblanc (67-32) del Mapa Geològic de Catalunya 1:25000" funded by the Institut Cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya.

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48 **Manuscript received Octubre 2024;**

49 **revision accepted December 2024;**

50 **published Online January 2025.**