

1 Pre/syn-lithification tectonic foliation development in a
2 clastic sedimentary sequence.

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14 **ABSTRACT**

15 The current view regarding the timing of regionally developed penetrative
16 tectonic fabrics in sedimentary rocks is that their development postdates lithification of
17 those rocks. In this case, fabric development is achieved by a number of deformation
18 mechanisms including grain rigid body rotation, crystal-plastic deformation and pressure
19 solution. The latter is believed to be the primary mechanism responsible for the domainal
20 structure of cleavage in low-grade metamorphic rocks. In this study we combine field
21 observations with strain studies to characterize considerable (>50%) Acadian crustal
22 shortening in a Devonian clastic sedimentary sequence from southwest Ireland. Despite

23 these high levels of shortening there is a marked absence of the domainal cleavage
24 structure and intra-clast deformation, which are expected with this level of deformation.
25 Fabrics in these rocks are predominantly a product of rigid body rotation and repacking
26 of extra-formational clasts during deformation of a clastic sedimentary sequence before
27 lithification was complete.

28 **INTRODUCTION**

29 Attempting to understand the key physical/chemical processes of tectonic
30 foliation formation has occupied the minds of some of the leading geologists for nearly
31 200 years (Darwin, 1846; Sorby, 1849) with answers to some fundamental questions still
32 outstanding. Research since the early seventies has emphasized the central role pressure
33 dissolution plays in the formation of tectonic cleavage (Wood, 1974, Vernon, 1998). As a
34 consequence, cleavage foliations are typically domainal with alternating phyllosilicate-
35 rich dissolution cleavage domains and lithon domains of relatively un-deformed host
36 lithology (Powell, 1979; Borradaile et al., 1982; Vernon, 1998). Deformation
37 mechanisms involved in the formation of these fabrics include grain rigid body rotation
38 producing grain shape preferred orientation (GSPO), crystal-plastic deformation and
39 pressure dissolution (Vernon, 1998). The current orthodoxy is that these processes
40 predominantly operate to produce a slaty cleavage after the host lithology has become
41 fully lithified (Vernon, 2004, *and references therein*). While there have been advocates
42 for pre-lithification development of tectonic fabrics (Maxwell, 1962; Alterman, 1973)
43 these examples are viewed as 'local' aberrations that are not regionally significant
44 (Geiser, 1975). However in recent years there has been a growing awareness of the role
45 of 'lateral compaction' in producing a distributed shortening strain in partially lithified

46 sediments (Paterson and Tobisch, 1993; Henry et al., 2003; Butler and Paton, 2010,
47 Alsop and Marco, 2014). Butler and Paton (2010) estimated up to 25% distributed
48 longitudinal strain in a gravity driven thrust system from the Orange Basin offshore
49 Namibia. Here we describe a Devonian clastic sedimentary sequence from southern
50 Ireland that has experienced considerable shortening associated with tectonic foliation
51 development yet exhibits minimal evidence of structures typically associated with
52 deformation of lithified rocks. Evidence is presented that regional tectonic shortening was
53 achieved by translation and rigid body rotation of clasts with possible concomitant
54 sediment dewatering of a not fully lithified sedimentary sequence.

55 **BACKGROUND GEOLOGY**

56 The Dingle Peninsula of southwest Ireland consists of a series of distinct tectono-
57 stratigraphic units representing alternating periods of localized crustal extension and
58 compression extending from the late Silurian to the early Carboniferous. One of these,
59 the Dingle Group represents the early continental infilling of the Lower Devonian Dingle
60 Basin. This basin extends for ~60 km along the axis of the Dingle Peninsula and has been
61 described as a pull-apart structure within the Caledonian Iapetus Suture Zone (Todd,
62 2000). The basin fill, the Dingle Group, is predominantly fluvial and includes two
63 marginal conglomerate units, the Glashabeg Formation preserved along the northern
64 margin of the basin and Trabeg Formation along the southern margin (Horne, 1974). This
65 study focuses on the Glashabeg Formation in the Wine Strand area (52.17871°N,
66 10.38488°W) on the northwestern side of the peninsula (Fig. 1). Compositionally the
67 Glashabeg Formation consists of a series of fining-upward cycles consisting of polymict
68 basal conglomerates overlain by red sandstones, siltstones and mudstones. The

69 conglomerates predominantly consist of volcanic and siltstone extra-formational clasts
70 with variable amounts of jasper, vein quartz and critically intra-formational 'rip up'
71 mud/siltstone clasts set in a very coarse grained sandstone matrix (Figs. 2a–2d). After
72 deposition, this basin fill was deformed by the mid-Devonian Acadian orogenic event
73 (Meere and Mulchrone, 2006) leading to regional fabric development, folding and
74 localized reverse faulting. The study area sits close to the core of an open and upright
75 Acadian syncline, the Ballyferriter Syncline, which plunges gently to the northeast. A
76 penetrative tectonic fabric (Fig. 2e) transects the syncline axis by $\sim 14^\circ$ anticlockwise
77 (Fig. 1) consistent with regional dextral Acadian transpression (Meere and Mulchrone,
78 2006). The xy (flattening) principle planes of finite strain (R_s) derived from oblate
79 reduction spots lie parallel to the cleavage fabric with a mean xz R_s value of 2.73 ± 0.25
80 (Meere and Mulchrone, 2006). This equates to $\sim 50\%$ bulk shortening, assuming constant
81 volume deformation, or $\sim 65\%$ shortening, assuming a volume loss deformation process.
82 The maximum principle strain x axis of the xy section ellipses consistently pitch steeply
83 in the cleavage plane indicating a component of sub-vertical thickening associated with
84 tectonic shortening. The deformation occurred under very low grade (sub-greenschist)
85 metamorphic conditions with no evidence of metamorphic mineral growth.
86 Palynomorphs taken from Dingle Group rocks are black in color (Higgs et al., 2014)
87 indicating a thermal alteration index (TAI) of 4.5–5 indicative of maximum paleo-
88 temperatures in excess of 250°C but below greenschist metamorphic facies conditions.

89 **FIELD EVIDENCE**

90 A number of features have been recognized in Glashabeg Formation lithologies
91 that are unusual for rocks that have undergone such significant levels of tectonic
92 shortening;

93 (1) With the exception of some very localized Mode 1 fracturing, there is an absence of
94 intra clast deformation in conglomerate extra-formational clasts (Figs. 1a and 1b).
95 There is no evidence of pressure dissolution indenting at clast/clast contact points.
96 Isolated extra-formational clasts in matrix-rich conglomerates display strong ‘wrap
97 around’ fabrics developed in the vicinity of the clast indicating more competent
98 behavior with respect to the enclosing matrix during deformation (Figs. 2a and 2b). In
99 addition, there is no evidence of such features as ‘rolling structures’ (Van den
100 Driessche and Brun, 1987) indicating clast rotation that would be expected with
101 ductile deformation of a fully lithified conglomerate. Similar fabrics have been
102 described in the Lafonia Diamictite of the Falkland Islands (Curtis and Hyam, 1998).

103 (2) In sharp contrast, intra-formational mud and fine siltstone ‘rip up’ clasts have behaved
104 less competently during deformation with clast/matrix boundaries often displaying
105 convex inward ‘bulging’ structures (Fig. 2c) (Waldron and Gagnon, 2011). While this
106 indicates that the ‘rip-up’ clasts were less competent than the surrounding matrix, it
107 also requires that both materials were in a less competent weakly lithified state during
108 deformation. Where competent extra-formational clasts are in direct contact with ‘rip-
109 up’ clasts they are seen to project into the less competent mudstone/siltstone of the
110 ‘rip-up’ clasts (Fig. 2b). Intra-formational clasts also consistently show very strong
111 alignment parallel to the tectonic fabric, even in areas where there is significant
112 discordance between this fabric and the primary bedding fabric (Fig. 2d).

113 (3) Overall, finer grained siltstone and mudstone lithologies exhibit a high level of less
114 competent behavior during deformation. High amplitude mullion structures are
115 typically developed at mudstone/conglomerate contacts (Figs. 2e and 2f) with the less
116 competent mudstone cusps projecting into the more competent conglomerates. This
117 mullion lineation is parallel to the regional bedding/cleavage intersection lineation.

118 (4) On a microscopic scale there is a marked absence of a pervasive domainal
119 microstructure, grain flattening and pressure solution seam development .The absence
120 of these microstructure is indicative of soft-sediment deformation fabrics the
121 development of which is characterized by rigid body grain rotation (Waldron and
122 Gagnon, 2011; Alsop and Marco, 2014). Qualitative element concentration maps of
123 the finer grained lithologies were made using a JEOL JXA-8200 electron probe
124 micro-analyzer at the Universität Potsdam (Germany) which is equipped with five
125 wavelength-dispersive spectrometers and operated at 15 kV accelerating voltage and
126 35 nA sample current. Critically, these maps confirm the absence of Si depleted
127 seams as described by Meere et al. (2013). Structures indicative of intra-crystalline
128 deformation such as pervasive undulose extinction, sub-grain development or any
129 recrystallization mechanisms are absent and ought to be present in the case of
130 pervasive deformation of lithified sedimentary rocks. Where dissolution seam
131 development occurs it is very localized, typically developing in intra-formational
132 mudstone clasts, due to high mean stress concentrations at the apices of extra-
133 formational clasts projecting into the less competent ‘rip-up’ clast material (Fig. 3b).
134 Boundaries between siltstones and coarse sandstones are often characterized by
135 isolated sandstone clasts completely embedded in siltstone (Fig. 3a).

136 **STRAIN ANALYSIS**

137 Finite strain (R_s) estimates obtained from reduction spots were compared to those
138 derived in this study from siltstone, sandstone and conglomerate samples using the R_t/ϕ
139 mean radial length (MRL) (Mulchrone et al., 2003) strain analysis method. This method
140 assumes passive clast/matrix material behavior as well as an initial random distribution of
141 clast orientations and a radial symmetry of clast axial ratios. With increasing departure
142 from these assumptions the MRL method will increasingly underestimate the true R_s
143 value. A minimum of 150 clast aspect ratios/orientations were collected from each
144 analyzed sample to reduce error associated with the finite strain estimates (Meere and
145 Mulchrone, 2003). Data were collected from shallow dipping units where the tectonic
146 fabric was $\sim 90^\circ$ to bedding and where there was good control on finite strain from high
147 quality reduction spot data in adjacent mudstones and siltstones. Data has been extracted
148 using semi-automatic analysis of digital images (Mulchrone et al., 2013). Previous
149 studies on the reduction spots show marked discontinuities in the curvature of the
150 reduction spot boundaries between fine-grained and coarse-grained siltstone components.
151 This indicates differential shortening within these lithologies during cleavage
152 development which in turn indicates they developed before deformation and are as such
153 valid finite strain markers (Meere et al. 2008).

154 Results for all sediment grain sizes (Fig. 4a) clearly show significant
155 underestimates of finite strain with respect to the reduction spot data ($R_s = 2.73 \pm 0.25$)
156 strongly indicating that the assumptions of MRL, principally passive clast/matrix
157 behavior are not valid. In all cases the finite strain x axis is closely aligned to the trace of
158 the cleavage fabric (S_1). By contrast, the intra-formational ‘rip-up’ clast sample gives the

159 highest MRL strain estimate ($R_s = 2.2$). Field evidence which suggests less competent
160 behavior is consistent with finite strain estimates that more closely approximate the true
161 strain value.

162 **STRAIN MODELING**

163 Structures observed in the field strongly indicate that conglomerates reacted to
164 deformation in the unconsolidated state. Therefore associated clast fabrics cannot be
165 explained in terms of traditional passive behavior (Mulchrone et al., 2003). In the
166 unconsolidated state clasts behave like rigid inclusions by comparison with the enclosing
167 matrix. The motion of rigid inclusions with no-slip at the boundary is well understood
168 (Jeffery, 1922) and it is possible to relate distributions of clast long axis orientations to
169 finite strain and strain history (Mulchrone, 2007a). Models of the case of rigid inclusions
170 with slip on the boundary have also been developed (Mulchrone, 2007b). By deriving
171 probability distribution functions for both no-slip and slip boundary conditions,
172 maximum likelihood methods allow for estimation and comparison of finite strain from
173 long axis distributions (Mulchrone and Meere, 2015) for both cases. Therefore an
174 appropriate model of clast behavior can be determined by calculating clast fabric
175 intensity under these two different boundary conditions and comparing the results with
176 natural data.

177 The axial ratios and orientations of 315 conglomerate clasts from the Glashabeg
178 Formation were measured in a section normal to bedding and the tectonic fabric. The data
179 were analyzed assuming pure shear, and both 'rigid no-slip' and 'rigid slip' boundary
180 conditions. The results are summarized as a plot of fabric intensity versus bulk strain (R_s)
181 (Fig. 4b). Under the assumption of 'rigid no-slip' it takes a finite strain of $R_s > 14.0$ to

182 produce the observed clast fabric intensity whereas assuming 'rigid slip' behavior the
183 observed distribution is explained by a finite strain of $R_s = 2.4$ which is close to the bulk
184 strain estimate derived from reduction spots.

185 **CONCLUSIONS**

186 A number of lines of evidence from the Glashabeg Formation support the
187 contention that these rocks were deformed before the process lithification was complete.

188 These include;

- 189 (1) An absence of a pervasive dissolution seam (Si depleted) fabrics.
- 190 (2) A spectrum of clast/matrix interactions from rigid extra-formational clast behaviors
191 (e.g., fabric wrapping around clasts) to less competent behaviors (e.g., bulging) for
192 less competent intra-formational clasts.
- 193 (3) An absence of 'rolling structures' indicating clast rotation in a lithified matrix during
194 deformation.
- 195 (4) The presence of high amplitude lobate mullion structures are developed at
196 mudstone/conglomerate contacts
- 197 (5) Strain analysis results for extra-formational clasts clearly show significant
198 underestimates of finite strain while results for the more incompetent 'rip up' clasts
199 yield higher estimates ($R_s = 2.2$) closer to the true strain values from reduction spot
200 data ($R_s = 2.73 \pm 0.25$).
- 201 (6) Strain modeling indicates that the observed clast fabric intensities are consistent with
202 'rigid slip' behavior of extra-formational clasts in a weak matrix.

203 The deformation of poorly lithified sediments proposed in this study is consistent
204 with the close temporal proximity of the deposition of the Lower Devonian Dingle Group

205 sediments in the Dingle Basin and their subsequent deformation by the mid-Devonian
206 Acadian event in southwest Ireland. This study revives the argument for a mechanism of
207 developing a well-defined tectonic fabric prior to lithification (Maxwell, 1962) and
208 requires geologists to consider the possibility of such a mechanism contributing to
209 tectonic strain in a range of geological settings. It also has implications for sediment
210 mobility during deformation. This includes the preferential exploitation of pre-existing
211 tectonic fabrics by emplacement of clastic dikes (Dewey and Ryan, 1990, Phillips and
212 Alsop, 2000). These results also highlight the importance of demonstrating passive
213 clast/matrix behavior when deriving meaningful finite strain estimates using most
214 conventional strain analysis techniques based on clast population behavior during
215 deformation.

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315 **FIGURE CAPTIONS**

316 Figure 1. Geological map of the northwestern Dingle Peninsula (Ireland) with an equal
317 area projection of structural data for the Ballyferriter Syncline in the Wine Strand area
318 demonstrating anticlockwise transection of the calculated fold axis (x) by the associated
319 tectonic fabric (S_1). Filled points are poles to bedding, solid great circles are S_1 planes.
320 Gp.—Group; Fm.—Formation.

321

322 Figure 2. Meso-structural field evidence of the contrasting competencies between
323 competent extra-formational and incompetent intra-formational (rip-up) clasts, and the
324 surrounding incompetent sand grade matrix. A: Field image of deformed conglomerate
325 with competent jasper (j), mudstone (m), and volcanic clasts (v) in addition to ‘rip-up’
326 incompetent red mudstone clasts (r-u) set in a sand grade matrix. Note wrapping of
327 cleavage fabric (S_1) around jasper clast while the sand matrix is seen to ‘bulge’ into the
328 less competent ‘rip-up’ clast (23-mm-diameter coin for scale). B: View of more
329 competent volcanic clast projecting into less competent ‘rip-up’ clast, note localized
330 development of dissolution seams (ds) associated with high tectonic stress concentrations
331 at the apices of the more competent volcanic clast. Also note the highly angular nature of
332 the sandstone matrix clasts, the absence of cleavage domains and a clast shape fabric
333 parallel to S_1 in the lower third of the image. C: Bulging (arrows) of coarse-grained
334 sandstone and pebble conglomerate matrix into mudstone rip-up clast. D: Strong
335 alignment of ‘rip-up’ clasts parallel to the cleavage fabric and at a high angle to the

336 bedding fabric (S_0). E: View of mullioned contact across the cleavage (S_1), detail shows
337 reduction spot in approximately the xz plane of the finite strain ellipsoid with an R_s value
338 of ~ 3.5 . F: View of mudstone/conglomerate mullion contact in the plane of cleavage,
339 note lobate nature of contact along the mullion lineation.

340

341 Figure 3. Photomicrographs and electron microprobe Si concentration maps of siltstone
342 (Siltst.) close to a siltstone/sandstone (Sst.) boundary (A), note lack of silica depleted
343 dissolution seams in the siltstone (sample 24-6-13-3), and siltstone close to a
344 siltstone/sandstone boundary with a very large volcanic clast impinging on the siltstone
345 (B) resulting in the very localized development of dissolution seams (DS) now outlined
346 by Mn-oxides (sample 24-6-13-1b). C—chlorite, M—muscovite, P—plagioclase, Q—
347 quartz, V—volcanic clast.

348

349 Figure 4. A: Plot of finite strain (R_s) estimates with 95% confidence interval error bars
350 determined using mean radial length analysis of sedimentary clasts versus deviation of
351 principle strain axis ϕ from cleavage (S_1). B: Plot of variation in clast fabric intensity
352 versus bulk strain (R_s) for slipping and sticking clast/matrix behaviors.







