



## Invited Review

# Crustal modelling of the Ivrea–Verbano zone in northern Italy re-examined: Coseismic cataclasis versus extensional shear zones and sideways rotation

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## ABSTRACT

New field and microstructural observations in the Ivrea–Verbano zone (IVZ), northern Italy, reveal extensive post-Hercynian cataclasis, indentation structures, microtectonic escape structures, microcataclastic injectites and occasional true pseudotachylytes. The deformation occurred in situ and was governed by pure shear. These observations are incompatible with prevailing crustal models of the IVZ. Most of these models assume the presence of lower-crustal, originally flat-lying extensional shear zones, sideways block rotation and exposure of the petrological Moho, although the original structural observations from the central IVZ suggested that the post-Hercynian deformation was cataclastic rather than shear-dominated. Other, already published information also contradicts the sideways rotation of a crustal block comprising the IVZ and the adjacent Serie dei Laghi (SdL) after the Early Permian, as assumed in the models. The IVZ and SdL have different detrital zircon populations and are separated by a steep shear zone and a transcurrent fault (not rotated listric faults as assumed in the models). Rotation is also prevented by a flat-lying zone of miarolitic cavities in the Early Permian Baveno granite and by contemporaneous, vertical basic dykes. The widespread in-situ cataclasis is interpreted as due to coseismic deformation by high-frequency seismic waves generated by earthquakes along the Insubric fault, and exerting oscillatory compression, dilation and torsion in a  $\leq 10$  km wide zone along the footwall of the Insubric line. The in-situ post-Hercynian cataclasis, absence of lower-crustal extensional shear zones and lack of sideways rotation of the IVZ and SdL call for a new and simpler crustal model of the region.

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## Contents

1. Introduction	292
2. Previous observations of cataclastic rocks, mylonites, pseudotachylytes and the proposed high- and low-temperature shear zones in the IVZ	293
3. New observations on cataclastic rocks and pseudotachylytes in the Ivrea–Verbano zone	293
3.1. General observations	293
3.2. Descriptions of selected localities with cataclasis, block rotation, fluidisation and frictional melting in Val d'Ossola and Val Strona d'Omegna	294
3.2.1. Cataclasis, rotation of tectonic blocks and microtectonic mineral indentation structures in metabasic rock near Premosello, loc. 2013/20	294
3.2.2. Outcrop-scale indentation structure in metabasic rocks at Premosello, loc. 2013/5a	295
3.2.3. Cataclastic and tectonic extrusion structures in metasedimentary rocks at Premosello, loc. 2013/5b	295
3.2.4. Cataclasis and rotation of tectonic blocks in metabasic rock 500 m west of Cuzzago, loc. 2014/20	297
3.2.5. Fanning of microcataclasite west of Cuzzago, loc. 2014/25	298
3.2.6. Cataclasite with microtectonic extrusion structures and microcataclastic injectites north-east of Colloro, loc. 2014/45 and 2014/46	298
3.2.7. Cataclastic structures in metasedimentary rocks west of Forno, loc. 2013/33–34	299
3.2.8. Quartz in felsic rocks displaying tectonic deformation lamellae, west of Forno, loc. 2013/12	299
3.2.9. Cataclastic rocks and fluidised microbreccia at Otrà, loc. 2013/13	299
3.2.10. Val Sesia Val Grande Geopark pseudotachylyte locality 1 km west of Premosello, loc. 2014/70	301
3.2.11. Pseudotachylyte s.s. with acicular microcrystals of plagioclase at Rumianca, loc. 2013/51	301

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3.3.	Low-temperature hydrothermal alteration	302
3.3.1.	Low-temperature hydration near Alpe Lut, loc. 2014/61	302
3.3.2.	Hydrothermal breccia east of Vogogna, loc. 2014/65	303
3.4.	Insubric mylonite overprinting cataclasites, loc. 2013/62	303
3.5.	The contact between the IVZ and SdL, the CMB transpressional shear zone and Early Permian intrusive rocks	303
4.	Discussion	305
4.1.	Cataclastic structures in the Ivrea–Verbano zone: summary of observations	305
4.2.	Cataclasis and formation of pseudotachylytes: some general considerations	305
4.3.	Impact-induced seismic shaking	307
4.4.	Cataclasis and formation of pseudotachylytes in the Ivrea–Verbano zone	308
4.5.	Some discrepancies between observation and interpretation in previous studies of the IVZ	308
5.	Conclusions	309
	Acknowledgements	309
	Appendix A. Supplementary data	309
	References	310

## 1. Introduction

As noted by Windley and Garde (2009) there are only few places on Earth where the transition between the lower continental crust and the upper mantle can be directly observed. The Palaeozoic Ivrea–Verbano zone (IVZ) in the footwall of the Alpine Insubric line in northern Italy (Fig. 1) has long been considered to be one of these places (Fountain, 1976). Together with the adjacent Serie dei Laghi (SdL) it constitutes one of the most intensely studied crustal sections on Earth, and the literature is very extensive. The main purpose of the present study is to re-examine the original observations and assumptions that led to the interpretation of the IVZ and SdL as a coherent, sideways rotated crustal block exposing the petrological Moho, and to propose a different and simpler interpretation of the observations.

Most of the IVZ consists of a steeply dipping accretionary wedge of ductilely deformed, aluminous metasedimentary rocks (locally known as kinzigites and strolonites) and associated metavolcanic and metagabbroic rocks of volcanic and mantle provenance (Rivalenti et al., 1975; Sills and Tarney, 1984), as well as large tectonic lenses of peridotitic ultramafic rocks at Balmuccia and Finero close to the Insubric line (Garuti et al., 1980; Fig. 1). The

intercalated sedimentary and mafic igneous rocks were deformed and metamorphosed during the Hercynian orogeny. The supracrustal pile dips moderately to steeply NW and displays a metamorphic gradient from amphibolite facies in the south-east to granulite facies in the north-west. The supracrustal rocks with their peridotite lenses were subsequently intruded at around 270 Ma by mantle-derived noritic to dioritic rocks known as the mafic complex (e.g., Peressini et al., 2007). To the south-east the IVZ abuts the Ediacaran/lower Cambrian metasedimentary rocks and Early Permian meta-igneous rocks of the SdL (Borani et al., 1990). The IVZ and SdL are separated by a major, Early Permian, NE–SW-trending, dextral transpressional tectonic boundary zone known in the literature as the Cossato–Mergozzo–Brissago (CMB) line, see Section 3.5. This is cut by a slightly younger, likewise NW–SE-trending but sinistral transcurrent fault called the Pogallo line (Borani and Sacchi, 1973), which has an offset of c. 12 km and is likely coeval with the intrusion of an Early Permian mafic dyke swarm and felsic differentiates along the CMB (Borani and Giobbi, 2004).

The IVZ and the SdL were originally proposed to represent a coherent, sideways rotated crustal package that exposed the petrological Moho (Fountain, 1976). The proposed rotation of the presumed crustal block would have been clockwise on a horizontal axis pointing north-

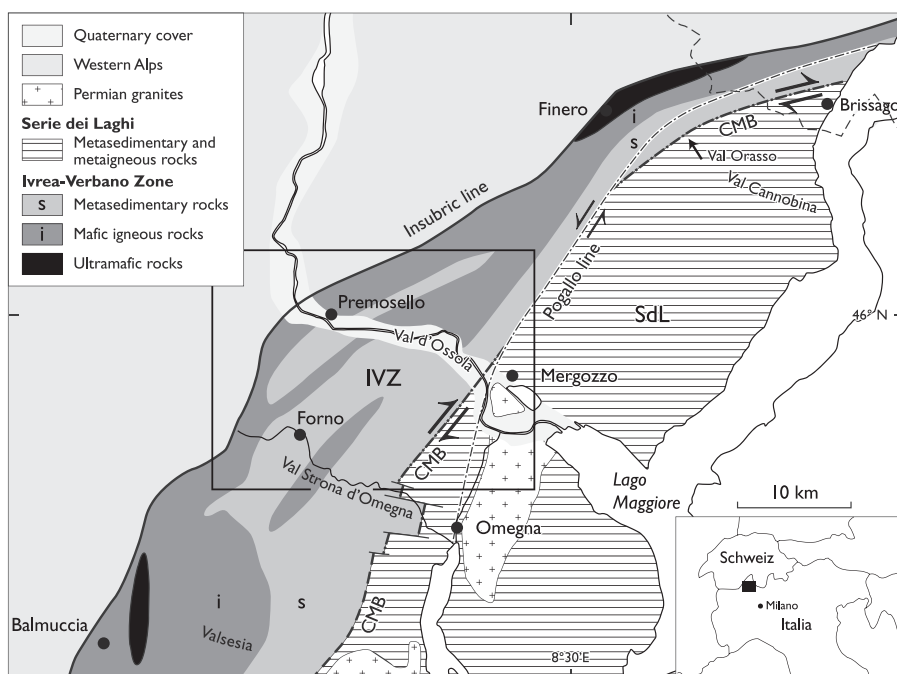


Fig. 1. Overview map of the Ivrea–Verbano zone (IVZ) and Serie dei Laghi (SdL) in the Southern Alps, northern Italy, with position of Fig. 2 (box).

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