

Escape tectonics and foreland basin evolution: The Austrian-German Molasse basin

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The Alpine peripheral foreland basin formed during Eocene collision of the lower, European plate and the upper, Adriatic plate. Two marine to continental megasequences fill the basin. The transition from deep marine to continental deposits of the first megasequence at the Early – Late Oligocene boundary has been related to a change from predominant horizontal to vertical movements in the core of the orogenic wedge. The second megasequence is, however, poorly understood, and different models have been put forward. I present an alternative explanation for the development of this second megacycle, based on an analysis of the Subalpine Molasse thrust belt east of the Rhine river (Ortner et al., 2015).

The main characteristics of the Subalpine Molasse thrust belt are:

- 1) A frontal anticline/thrust started to develop during deposition of the older, marine portion of the second megasequence. Structures continued to grow throughout deposition of the younger, continental part of the megasequence. Structural growth is documented by growth strata.
- 2) The thrusts in the Subalpine Molasse evolved in a break-back sequence.
- 3) The amount of shortening during deposition of the second megasequence reduces from 40-50 km near the Rhine valley to zero in the east in the Salzburg area.

The onset of the second megasequence in the foreland north of the Subalpine Molasse thrust belt is characterized by an angular unconformity documenting a tilt of the foreland toward the orogen, and therefore ongoing flexure of the lower plate. East of the eastern end of the Subalpine Molasse thrust belt, the deposits of the second megasequence are in a horizontal position, lower plate flexure had stopped.

In the internal part of the Alpine orogenic wedge, shortening, exhumation and E-directed stretching of the Tauern Window as a consequence of escape tectonics was active. Most probably shortening was transferred from the Alpine front into the zone of lateral escape, causing the break-back thrust sequence at the Alpine front. Active thrusting in the Subalpine Molasse, and probably also in more internal parts of the Alps, would bring the orogen closer the foreland, and therefore cause more loading in the foreland, but at a much smaller rate, as material was continuously transported out of the zone of shortening by lateral escape.

The contemporaneous onset of the second megasequence of the foreland basin fill, and of escape tectonics is therefore not a coincidence. East of the Subalpine Molasse thrust belt, onset of lateral escape terminated shortening and thus lower plate flexure. Marine conditions in the lower part of the second megasequence, that exist also in the eastern part of the foreland basin, are therefore not dependent on flexure, but rather on reduced sediment input into the basin.

Ortner, H., Aichholzer, S., Zerlauth, M., Pilser, R. & Fügenschuh, B. (2015): Geometry, amount and sequence of thrusting in the Subalpine Molasse of Western Austria and Southern Germany, *European Alps-Tectonics*, 34: 1-30, doi: 10.1002/2014TC003550