

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21

Identification of di- and triterpenoid lipid tracers confirms the significant role of autoxidation in the degradation of terrestrial vascular plant material in the Canadian Arctic

Jean-François Rontani^{a*}, Marie-Aimée Galeron^a, Rémi Amiraux^a, Lise Artigue^{a,b}, Simon T. Belt^c

^a Aix Marseille Université, Université de Toulon, CNRS/INSU/IRD, Mediterranean Institute of Oceanography (MIO) UM 110, 13288 Marseille, France

^b Laboratoire d'études en géophysique et océanographie spatiales (LEGOS), Université Paul Sabatier, 31400 Toulouse, France

^c Biogeochemistry Research Centre, School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Plymouth, Drake Circus, Plymouth, Devon PL4 8AA, UK

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +33-4-86-09-06-02; fax: +33-4-91-82-96-41.

E-mail address: jean-francois.rontani@mio.osupytheas.fr (J.-F. Rontani).

22 ABSTRACT

23 Autoxidation products of specific lipid components of angiosperms (betulin, α - and β -
24 amyryns) and gymnosperms (dehydroabiatic acid) and their parent compounds were quantified
25 in surface sediments collected from different regions of the Canadian Arctic. The high
26 autoxidation proportions observed in all the sediments investigated (mean values $60.1 \pm$
27 14.0% , 91.8 ± 1.1 , 98.7 ± 2.2 and $96.6 \pm 5.4\%$ for dehydroabiatic acid, betulin and α - and β -
28 amyryns, respectively) confirms, unambiguously, the important role played by autoxidation in
29 the degradation of vascular plant material in the region and its enhancement in seawater. The
30 enhancement of these processes in Arctic waters could be the result of intense photooxidation
31 during the senescence of the organisms within the terrestrial environment.

32

33 **Key words.** Canadian Arctic; Surface sediments; Autoxidation; Vascular plants; lipid tracers;
34 Angiosperms; Gymnosperms.

35

36

37 **1. Introduction**

38 Understanding the alteration of organic matter (OM) discharged by rivers to the
39 oceans has been an increasing area of research over the past few decades. Indeed, rivers play a
40 major role in exporting terrestrial organic carbon (TerrOC) from the continents to the oceans
41 (Burdige, 2005; Bianchi et al., 2009; Cui et al., 2016). TerrOC is a heterogeneous mixture of
42 recent vascular plant detritus, associated soil OC, petrogenic OC and black carbon (Galy et
43 al., 2007; Hedges, 1992). Vascular plant residues, characterized by a high content of
44 recalcitrant biomacromolecules such as lignin, tannin, cutin and suberin, have been considered
45 to be refractory with respect to further decomposition in the ocean (e.g. de Leeuw and
46 Largeau, 1993; Wakeham and Canuel, 2006). However, it was estimated recently that the
47 amount of C delivered to inland waters is about twice that delivered to the ocean (1.9 Pg C/yr
48 vs. 0.9 Pg C/yr; Cole et al., 2007), suggesting that TerrOC in these systems is more labile than
49 previously thought. Several recent studies have confirmed that, under some oceanographic
50 conditions, particulate OM (POM) delivered by rivers may be sensitive to microbial
51 remineralization in the Arctic shelf areas (van Dongen et al., 2008; Karlsson et al., 2010;
52 Vonk et al., 2010). These observations are consistent with the role of estuaries as a source of
53 CO₂ for the atmosphere (Raymond et al., 1997, 2000; Frankignoulle et al., 1998; Cai et al.,
54 2006, 2014). This unexpected microbial lability of terrestrial OM (TerrOM) may be attributed
55 to: (i) the fact that bacterial assemblages in the marine environment can use specific parts of
56 terrestrial POM more effectively than such assemblages in soils and rivers (Garneau et al.,
57 2008), (ii) the involvement of a ‘priming effect’ (enhanced remineralization of terrestrial OM
58 in the presence of fresh substrates from an algal source; Bianchi, 2011; Ward et al., 2016), or
59 (iii) the formation of free radicals from extracellular non-enzymatic steps, including those
60 generated during wood decomposition by certain Basidiomycotina fungi (i.e. brown-rot fungi;
61 Goodell, 2003).

62 It is important to note, however, that the degradation of TerrOM is not restricted to
63 biotic processes. Indeed, although often under-considered, abiotic processes such as
64 photooxidation and autoxidation (spontaneous free radical reaction of organic compounds
65 with O₂) can also play a role in the degradation of TerrOM. Due to the presence of
66 chlorophyll, an efficient photosensitizer (Foote, 1976), visible light-induced photosensitized
67 oxidation may be intense during the early senescence of vascular plants. Such photooxidation
68 reactions involve mainly singlet oxygen (¹O₂) as the primary oxidant, which can act not only
69 on the unsaturated lipid components of membranes (Rontani et al., 1996), but also on cutin
70 (Rontani et al., 2005). In contrast, the mechanism by which autoxidation is initiated in
71 senescent vascular plants seems to be via homolytic cleavage of photochemically produced
72 hydroperoxides (Girotti, 1998; Rontani et al., 2003).

73 It is generally thought that the Arctic should provide the earliest and most dramatic
74 manifestations of global change (Stroeve et al., 2007), with the destabilization of permafrost
75 and its consequences for hydrology and plant cover expected to increase the input of
76 terrigenous carbon to coastal seas (Benner et al., 2003; Schuur et al., 2009, 2015). However,
77 before the influence of global change on the delivery and preservation of OC over the Arctic
78 shelves can be predicted with greater confidence, a more complete understanding of the
79 fundamental processes that control the degradation and preservation of terrigenous OM is
80 required.

81 One approach to tackling this research theme is through the quantification of source
82 specific lipids and their degradation products, especially if the latter are characteristic of
83 unique transformation pathways. Recently, certain sterols and their biotic and abiotic
84 degradation products in suspended particulate matter (SPM) from surface waters in the
85 Mackenzie River mouth to the Beaufort Sea shelf (Canadian Arctic) were quantified (Rontani
86 et al., 2014). Strong autoxidation of 24-ethylcholesterol (sitosterol) and 24-methylcholesterol

87 (campesterol) - components of vascular plants (Lütjohann, 2004) - was observed in some
88 samples from the outer boundaries of the plume, suggesting that these radical processes play
89 an important role in the degradation of vascular plant debris in near-coastal Arctic regions.
90 However, since these sterols may be also produced by certain phytoplankton (Volkman, 1986;
91 2003), this conclusion remained equivocal. As such, in a subsequent study, we then identified
92 (Rontani et al., 2015; Galeron et al., 2016a,b) autoxidation products of well-known di- and
93 triterpenoid tracers of vascular plants (Fig. 1), i.e. dehydroabietic acid (8,11,13-abietatrien-18-
94 oic acid; DHAA, **1**), betulin (lup-20(29)-en-3 β ,28-diol, **2**) and α - and β -amyrins (urs-12-en-
95 3 β -ol and olean-12-en-3 β -ol) (**3** and **4**).

96 Here, we aimed to quantify these same di- and triterpenoid lipids and their oxidation
97 products in surface sediments from different regions of the Canadian Arctic, in order to
98 confirm the key role played by autoxidation during the degradation of vascular plant material
99 at high latitude settings. Indeed, often under-considered abiotic processes such as
100 photooxidation and autoxidation may contribute to the degradation of the increasing amounts
101 of organic carbon contained within permafrost released into Arctic waters.

102

103 **2. Experimental**

104

105 *2.1. Sediment sampling*

106 Sediment material was collected from 19 locations (Fig. 2) as part of the ArcticNet
107 and IPY-CFL system studies on board the CCGS Amundsen in 2005 and 2008. In each case,
108 surface samples (ca. 0–1 cm) were collected from box cores, freeze dried, and stored (< 4 °C)
109 prior to analysis.

110

111 2.2. Sediment treatment

112 Sediments were placed in MeOH (15 ml) and hydroperoxides were reduced to the
113 corresponding alcohols with excess NaBH₄ (70 mg, 30 min at 20°C). Due to their relatively
114 high stability, hydroperoxides derived from autoxidation of amyrins and betulin (Fig. 1) were
115 unaffected by this reduction step (Galeron et al., 2016a,b). Saponification was carried out on
116 each reduced samples. After NaBH₄ reduction, water (15 ml) and KOH (1.7 g) were added
117 and the mixture directly saponified by refluxing (2 h). After cooling, the contents of the flask
118 were acidified (HCl, to pH 1) and extracted 3x with dichloromethane (DCM) (30 ml). The
119 combined DCM extracts were dried over anhydrous Na₂SO₄, filtered and concentrated to give
120 the total lipid extract (TLE).

121

122 2.3. Derivatization

123 The TLE was derivatized by dissolving them in 300 µl
124 pyridine/bis(trimethylsilyl)trifluoroacetamide (BSTFA; Supelco; 2:1, v/v) and silylated (50
125 °C, 1 h). After evaporation to dryness under a stream of N₂, the derivatized residue was
126 dissolved in hexane/BSTFA (to avoid desilylation) and analyzed using gas chromatography–
127 electron ionization quadrupole time of flight mass spectrometry (GC–QTOF).

128

129 2.4. GC-QTOF

130 DHAA (**1**), betulin (**2**), α- and β-amyrins (**3** and **4**) and their oxidation products were
131 identified and quantified using an Agilent 7890B/7200 GC-QTOF System (Agilent
132 Technologies, Parc Technopolis - ZA Courtaboeuf, Les Ulis, France). A cross-linked 5%

133 phenyl-methylpolysiloxane (Macherey Nagel; Optima 5-MS Accent) column (30 m × 0.25
134 mm, 0.25 μm film thickness) was employed. Analysis was performed with an injector
135 operating in pulsed splitless at 280 °C and the oven temperature programmed from 70 °C to
136 130 °C at 20 °C/min, then to 250 °C at 5 °C/min and then to 300 °C at 3 °C/min. The carrier
137 gas (He) was maintained at 0.69×10^5 Pa until the end of the temperature program.
138 Instrument temperatures were 300 °C for transfer line and 230 °C for the ion source. Accurate
139 mass spectra were recorded across the range m/z 50-700 at 4 GHz. The QTOF-MS instrument
140 provided a typical resolution ranging from 8009 to 12252 from m/z 68.9955 to 501.9706.
141 Perfluorotributylamine (PFTBA) was utilized for daily MS calibration. Compounds were
142 identified by comparison of their TOF mass spectra, accurate masses and retention times with
143 those of standards, either purchased or synthesized in the laboratory (see following section).
144 Quantification of each compound involved extraction of specific accurate fragment ions, peak
145 integration and determination of individual response factors using external standards.

146

147 2.5. Standards

148 DHAA (**1**), betulin (**2**) and α- and β-amyrins (**3** and **4**) were obtained from Sigma-
149 Aldrich. The synthesis of 7α/β-hydroxydehydroabietic acids (**7** and **8**), lupan-20-one-3β,28-
150 diol (**10**), 3β,28-dihydroxy-lupan-29-oic acid (**11**), 3β-hydroxy-urs-12-en-11-one (**13**) and 3β-
151 hydroxy-olean-12-en-11-one (**15**) (Fig. 1) was described previously (Galeron et al., 2016a, b;
152 Rontani et al., 2015).

153

154 3. Results and discussion

155

156 3.1. Autoxidation of angiosperms

157 A variety of pentacyclic triterpenoids with structures based on the ursene (e.g. α -
158 amyirin, **3**), oleanene (e.g. β -amyirin,**4**) or lupene (e.g. betulin, **2**) skeletons are common in
159 angiosperm material such as leaves, bark, roots and wood. Due to their ubiquity, such
160 compounds are typically used as general tracers of vascular plant input (Pancost and Boot,
161 2004; Otto et al., 2005; Vàsquez et al., 2012). Diagenetic degradation processes of
162 triterpenoids have been studied extensively in previous studies and involve initial loss of any
163 oxygenated functionality at the C(3) position, which leads to the formation of the
164 corresponding di-unsaturated counterparts (ten Haven et al., 1991), subsequent cleavage of
165 ring A, and progressive aromatization of the skeleton (Diefendorf et al., 2015).

166 We demonstrated previously that autoxidation of betulin (**2**) affords two main products
167 (Galeron et al., 2016a) (Fig. 1): 29-peroxy-20-hydroperoxy-lupan-3 β ,28-diol (**9**) and 3 β ,28-
168 dihydroxy-lupan-29-oic acid (**11**). Compound **9** appeared to be unaffected by NaBH₄
169 reduction employed during the treatment of samples and was thermally cleaved to lupan-20-
170 one-3 β ,28-diol (**10**) during GC injection. Compounds **10** and **11** could be detected in
171 significant proportion in dry leaves of vascular plants and were thus selected as tracers of
172 autoxidation of angiosperm material (Galeron et al., 2016a). Autoxidation of α - and β -
173 amyirins (**3** and **4**) affords 11 α -hydroperoxy-urs-12-en-3 β -ol (**12**) and 11 α -hydroperoxy-
174 olean-12-en-3 β -ol (**14**), respectively, which are also unaffected by NaBH₄ reduction and were
175 cleaved to the corresponding ketones (**13** and **15**) during GC injection (Fig. 1; Galerón et al.,
176 2016b). 3 β -Hydroxy-urs-12-en-11-one (**13**) and 3 β -hydroxy-olean-12-en-11-one (**15**) could
177 be detected in dry leaves of vascular plants and in natural samples and thus were selected as
178 tracers of autoxidation of angiosperm material (Galerón et al., 2016b).

179 GC-QTOF analysis allowed detection and quantification of these different tracers and
180 their parent compounds in TLEs from all the surface sediment samples, despite the
181 considerable spatial coverage (Figs. 3 and 4). The results, summarized in Tables 1 and 2,
182 demonstrate, unambiguously, the extremely high efficiency of autoxidation towards lipid
183 components of Arctic angiosperms. Thus, the mean autoxidation proportions for betulin (**2**)
184 and α - and β -amyrins (**3** and **4**) were 91.8 ± 1.1 , 98.7 ± 2.2 and $96.6 \pm 5.4\%$, respectively.
185 Despite careful target analyses (± 10 ppm) of TOF chromatograms using accurate fragment
186 ions of the main diagenetic degradation products of these triterpenoids (triterpenes,
187 triterpadienes, triaromatic triterpenoids) (Diefendorf et al., 2014), we failed to detect
188 significant amounts of such compounds in any of the TLEs.

189 It is important to note, however, that diagenetic remineralization processes could also
190 act to varying extent on biological triterpenoids and their autoxidation products, thus
191 influencing our autoxidation estimates. For example, it was shown previously that the
192 simultaneous presence of an oxygenated functionality and a Δ^{12} double bond in the ring C of
193 triterpenoids (as is the case for compounds **13** and **15**) can facilitate their aromatization
194 (Poinsot et al., 1995). The diagenetic remineralization of autoxidation products of α - and β -
195 amyrins (**3** and **4**) should thus be enhanced relative to their parent compounds, with
196 consequential underestimation of autoxidation extent. The same influence is also likely for the
197 autoxidation products of betulin (**2**), due to the presence of oxygenated functionalities (ketone
198 or acid) on the isopropyl group.

199

200 *3.2. Autoxidation of gymnosperms*

201 Although DHAA (**1**) is only a minor component of fresh resin conifers, its abundance
202 increases with age, at the expense of the corresponding abietadienic acids. DHAA in

203 sediments is thus often used as a biomarker of gymnosperms (Brassell et al., 1983; Otto et al.,
204 2005), although its selectivity in paleobotanical and geochemical studies was challenged
205 recently by Costa et al. (2015), following its detection in several cyanobacteria. However, in
206 the environment, the amount of DHAA (**1**) of plant origin is likely to be much higher than that
207 of cyanobacterial origin, and the validity of most of the studies using it as tracer of
208 gymnosperms is unlikely to be called into question by these recent findings. In oxidizing
209 environments, diterpenoids are decarboxylated and/or dehydrated and then progressively
210 aromatized (Diefendorf et al., 2014). Thus, the degradation of DHAA (**1**) leads to the
211 formation of abietatetraenoic acids, norabietatrienes and norabietatetraenes (Otto and
212 Simoneit, 2001).

213 Autoxidation of DHAA (**1**) mainly involves the formation of hydroperoxide groups at
214 the thermodynamically favored allylic (C-7) position (Fig. 1; Rontani et al., 2015). $7\alpha/\beta$ -
215 Hydroperoxydehydroabietic acids (**5** and **6**) could therefore act as potential tracers of the
216 autoxidation of OM from gymnosperms in the environment. However, due to their thermal
217 instability, it is necessary to first reduce these primary oxidation products to the
218 corresponding $7\alpha/\beta$ -hydroxydehydroabietic acids (**7** and **8**) (Fig. 1) in order to quantify them
219 in natural samples using GC-MS. It may be noted that some bacteria are also able to oxidize
220 DHAA (**1**) to $7\alpha/\beta$ -hydroxydehydroabietic acids (**7** and **8**; Doménech-Carbó et al., 2006).
221 However, they generally do not accumulate these metabolites and so should not significantly
222 bias the use of **7** and **8** as tracers of autoxidation of gymnosperm material.

223 Target analyses (± 10 ppm) of TOF chromatograms using accurate fragment ions of
224 the main diagenetic degradation products of DHAA (**1**) (abietatetraenoic acids,
225 norabietatrienes and norabietatetraenes) (Otto and Simoneit, 2001), clearly showed that these
226 processes did not act significantly on DHAA (**1**) in the surface sediment samples investigated.

227 In contrast, and consistent with our lipid autoxidation data for angiosperms, 7- α/β -
228 hydroxydehydroabietic acids (**7** and **8**) could also be detected in significant amounts in the
229 TLEs of all the Arctic surface sediment samples (Table 3, Fig. 5), although the extent of
230 autoxidation for gymnosperms (mean $60.1 \pm 14.0\%$), was somewhat lower than that for
231 angiosperms (see above). This difference of autoxidative degradation state could potentially
232 be attributed to: (i) the trapping of DHAA (**1**) and other diterpenoids within the resinous tissue
233 of the conifers (Otto and Simoneit, 2001), which could limit exposure to O₂, or (ii) the
234 expected greater aqueous solubility of products **7** and **8** relative to their parent compounds,
235 which would result in an underestimation of autoxidation extent.

236

237 *3.3. Biogeochemical implications of the results*

238 Autoxidation, largely ignored until recently for the marine realm, proceeds by a radical
239 chain reaction and acts mainly on organic compounds possessing C=C or C-H bonds whose
240 bond energies are relatively low (e.g. allylic, tertiary, α to oxygen etc.; Fossey et al., 1995). It
241 can act not only on unsaturated lipids (e.g. sterols, unsaturated fatty acids, chlorophyll phytyl
242 side chain, alkenes, tocopherols and alkenones; Rontani, 2012), but also (and often at a
243 similar or higher rate; Davis, 2005) on amino acids (Seko et al., 2010), nucleic acids (Pryor,
244 1982) and carbohydrates (Lawrence et al., 2008). Consequently, the strong autoxidation state
245 of di- and triterpenoid components of vascular plants in Arctic surface sediments described
246 here, suggests strongly that numerous other organic components of these organisms should
247 also be strongly affected. Moreover, it is interesting to note that autoxidation can also affect
248 biopolymers (Schmid et al., 2007), lignin (Palmer et al., 1987; Waggoner et al., 2015) and
249 kerogen (Fookes and Walters, 1990), inducing ring opening and chain cleavage, which may
250 then enhance bacterial degradation of these (generally considered) recalcitrant substrates

251 (Bianchi, 2011; Bianchi and Bauer, 2011). Such interactions could play a role in the loss of
252 lignin often observed during export of terrestrial OM from points of deposition in soil to
253 DOM in natural waters (Opsahl and Benner, 1997).

254 The high efficiency of autoxidation in vascular plant debris from the Canadian Arctic
255 might be attributed to enhanced photooxidation of senescent vascular plants in the region.
256 Indeed, homolytic cleavage of photochemically-produced hydroperoxides (relatively
257 stabilized at low temperature) can initiate free radical oxidation chains (Girotti, 1998; Rontani
258 et al., 2003). Moreover, photooxidation processes can degrade phenols (Opsahl and Benner,
259 1993), which are present in significant concentrations in higher plants (Zapata and McMillan,
260 1979), and can inhibit autoxidation processes due to their strong antioxidant properties. This
261 is supported by the enhancement of Type II (i.e. involving $^1\text{O}_2$) photosensitized oxidation of
262 phytoplankton lipids observed in the Arctic (Rontani et al., 2012). This apparent paradox (i.e.
263 increased photooxidation despite relatively low temperature and solar irradiance) has been
264 attributed recently by Amiraux et al. (2016) to: (i) the relative preservation of the sensitizer
265 (chlorophyll) at low irradiance, which permits a longer production time for $^1\text{O}_2$, and (ii) the
266 slower diffusion rate of $^1\text{O}_2$ through the cell membranes at low temperature (Ehrenberg et al.,
267 1998), thereby favoring the intracellular involvement of type II photosensitized reactions.

268 Autoxidation of vascular plant debris can be initiated within their native terrestrial
269 setting or during their riverine or atmospheric transport towards the marine environment as
270 demonstrated by the recent detection of significant proportions of autoxidation products of α -
271 and β -amyrins (**3** and **4**) in particles collected in the Mackenzie River ($41.5 \pm 17.7\%$ and 20.1
272 $\pm 6.4\%$ for α - and β -amyrins, respectively) (Galeron, 2016). Interestingly, these proportions
273 were considerably lower than those observed at the stations close to the mouth of the
274 Mackenzie River (i.e. stations 434 and 428) (Table 2). The use of specific lipid tracers
275 therefore shows that autoxidative degradation processes are strongly enhanced in vascular

276 plant debris following their discharge from Arctic rivers into the adjacent seas, thus
277 confirming our previous conclusions based on the use of sterol tracers (Rontani et al., 2014).

278 In summary, it is becoming increasingly clear that biodegradative, autoxidative and
279 photooxidative degradation processes within such systems are inextricably linked, and that an
280 understanding of their interactions, although complex, is fundamental to the precise
281 identification of the balance between degradation and preservation of vascular plant material
282 during sedimentation.

283

284 **4. Conclusion**

285 Quantification of specific di- and triterpenoid lipid tracers (betulin, α - and β -amyirin
286 and DHAA) and of their autoxidation products in a suite of surface sediment samples from
287 across the Canadian Arctic allowed us to confirm preliminary results obtained from the
288 Beaufort Sea (Rontani et al., 2014) and to demonstrate, unambiguously, the strong tendency
289 for vascular plant debris to undergo autoxidation in the region. This strong autoxidation has
290 the potential to increase the bioavailability of the detrital fragments of higher plants. It is
291 proposed that this enhancement of autoxidation results from a very intense photooxidation of
292 senescent vascular plants on land and in Arctic rivers. These processes may be especially
293 significant for such regions in the future, since climatically induced destabilization of
294 permafrost is expected to increase the input of terrigenous carbon to coastal seas.

295

296 **Acknowledgements**

297 This work is a contribution to the Labex OT-Med (n° ANR-11-LABX-0061) funded
298 by the French Government «Investissements d’Avenir» program of the French National

299 Research Agency (ANR) through the A*MIDEX project (n° ANR-11-IDEX-0001-02). It was
300 supported by the LEFE-CYBER (Les Enveloppes Fluides et l’Environnement) national
301 program, as part of the MORTIMER (Matière ORganique Terrestre rejetée par les fleuves et
302 les rivières en MER) research program. Thanks are due to the FEDER OCEANOMED for the
303 funding of the apparatus employed during this work. We are also grateful to G. Massé, A.
304 Rochon and the officers and crew of the CCGS Amundsen for help with obtaining box core
305 sediment material. Finally, we thank Dr. T.S. Bianchi and an anonymous reviewer for their
306 useful and constructive comments.

307

308 **References**

- 309 Amiraux, R., Jeanthon, C., Vaultier, F., Rontani, J.-F., 2016. Paradoxical effects of
310 temperature and solar irradiance on the photodegradation state of killed phytoplankton.
311 *Journal of Phycology* 52, 475-485.
- 312 Benner, R., Benitez-Nelson, B., Kaiser, K., Amon, R.M.W., 2003. Export of young
313 terrigenous dissolved organic carbon from rivers to the Arctic Ocean. *Geophysical*
314 *Research Letters* 3, doi: 10.1029/2003GL019251.
- 315 Bianchi, T.S., 2011. The role of terrestrially derived organic carbon in the coastal ocean: A
316 changing paradigm and the priming effect. *Proceedings of the National Academy of*
317 *Sciences of the USA* 108, 19,473-19,481.
- 318 Bianchi, T.S., Allison, M.A., 2009. Large-river delta-front estuaries as natural “recorders” of
319 global environmental change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*
320 106 (20), 8085-8092.

- 321 Bianchi, T.S., Bauer, J., 2011. POC Cycling and Transformation. Particulate Organic Carbon
322 Cycling and Transformation. In: Wolanski, E., McLusky, D.S. (Eds.), Treatise on
323 Estuarine and Coastal Science Vol 5. Academic Press, Waltham, pp. 69–117.
- 324 Bourgeois, S., Pruski, A.M., Sun, M.-Y., Buscail, R., Lantoiné, F., Kerhervé, P., Vétion, G.,
325 Rivière, B., Charles, F., 2011. Distribution and lability of land-derived organic matter in
326 the surface sediments of the Rhône prodelta and the adjacent shelf (Mediterranean Sea,
327 France): a multi proxy study. *Biogeosciences* 8, 3107-3125.
- 328 Brassell, S.C., Eglinton, G., Maxwell, J.R., 1983. The geochemistry of organic terpenoids and
329 steroids. *Biochemical Society Transactions* 11, 575-586.
- 330 Burdige, D.J., 2005. The burial of terrestrial organic carbon in marine sediments: A
331 reassessment. *Global Biogeochemical Cycles*, doi: 10.1029/2004GB002368.
- 332 Cai, W.-J., Dai, M., Wang, Y., 2006. Air-sea exchange of carbon dioxide in ocean margins: a
333 province-based synthesis. *Geophysical Research Letters* 33, L12603
- 334 Cai, W.-J., Arthur Chen, C.T., Borges, A., 2014. Carbon dioxide dynamics and fluxes in
335 coastal waters influenced by river plumes, pp. 155-173, In: *Biogeochemical Dynamics*
336 *at Major River-Coastal Interfaces: Linkages with Global Change*, Eds. Bianchi, T.S.,
337 Cai, W.-J., Allison, M.A., Cambridge University Press, New York, 658 pp.
- 338 Cole, J.J., Prairie, Y.T., Caraco, N.F., McDowell, W.H., Tranvik, L.J., Striegl, R.G., Duarte,
339 C.M., Kortelainen, P., Downing, J.A., Middelburg, J.J., Melack, J., 2007. Plumbing the
340 Global Carbon Cycle: Integrating Inland Waters into the Terrestrial Carbon Budget.
341 *Ecosystems* 10, 171–184.
- 342 Costa, M.S., Rego, A., Ramos, V., Afonso, T.B., Freitas, S., Preto, M., Lopes, V.,
343 Vasconcelos, V., Magalhães, C., Leão, P.N., 2015. The conifer biomarkers

- 344 dehydroabietic and abietic acids are widespread in cyanobacteria. *Nature Scientific*
345 *Reports*, doi: 10.1038/srep23436.
- 346 Cui, X., Bianchi, T.S., Savage, C., Smith, R.W., 2016. Organic carbon burial in fjords:
347 Terrestrial versus marine inputs. *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 450, 41-50.
- 348 Davies, M.J., 2005. The oxidative environment and protein damage. *Biochimica et*
349 *Biophysica Acta* 1703, 93-109.
- 350 Diefendorf, A.F., Freeman, K.H., Wing, S.L., 2014. A comparison of terpenoid and leaf fossil
351 vegetation proxies in Paleocene and Eocene Bighorn Basin sediments. *Organic*
352 *Geochemistry* 71, 30-42.
- 353 Doménech-Carbó, M.T., Osete-Cortina, L., De la Cruz Cañizares, J. , Bolivar-Galiano, F. ,
354 Romero-Noguera, J. , Fernandez-Vivas, M.A. , Martín-Sánchez, I., 2006. Study of the
355 microbiodegradation of terpenoid resin-based varnishes from easel painting using
356 pyrolysis-gas chromatography-mass spectrometry and gas chromatography-mass
357 spectrometry. *Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry* 385, 1265-1280.
- 358 Ehrenberg, B., Anderson, J.L., Foote, C.S., 1998. Kinetics and yield of singlet oxygen
359 photosensitized by hypericin in organic and biological media. *Photochemistry and*
360 *Photobiology* 68, 135–140. doi:10.1111/j.1751-1097.1998.tb02479.x
- 361 Fookes, J.R., Walters, C.K., 1990. A chemical investigation of shale oil ageing. *Fuel* 69(9),
362 1105-1108.
- 363 Foote, C.S., 1976. Photosensitized oxidation and singlet oxygen: consequences in biological
364 systems. In: Pryor, W.A. (Ed.), *Free Radicals in Biology*. Academic Press, New York,
365 pp. 85-133.

- 366 Fossey, J., Lefort, D., Sorba, J., 1995. Free Radicals in Organic Chemistry. Masson, Paris.
- 367 Frankignoulle, M., Abril, G., Borges, A., Bourge, I., Canon, C., Delille, B., Libert, E., Théate,
368 J.-M. 1998. Carbon dioxide emission from European estuaries. *Science* 282, 434-436.
- 369 Galeron, M.A., 2016. Degradation of Terrestrial Particulate Organic Matter Discharged by
370 Rivers in the Mediterranean Sea: Processes, Interactions and Global Impacts. PhD
371 thesis. Aix-Marseille University, pp. 136-153.
- 372 Galeron, M.-A., Volkman, J.K., Rontani, J.-F., 2016a. Degradation products of betulin: new
373 tracers for abiotic degradation of higher plant material in the environment. *Organic*
374 *Geochemistry* 91, 31-42.
- 375 Galeron, M.-A., Vaultier, F., Rontani, J.-F., 2016b. Oxidation products of α - and β -amyrins:
376 potential tracers of abiotic degradation of vascular plant organic matter in aquatic
377 environments. *Environmental Chemistry*. doi.org/10.1071/EN15237.
- 378 Galy, V., France-Lanord, C., Beyssac, O., Faure, P., Kudrass, H., Palhol, F., 2007. Efficient
379 organic carbon burial in the Bengal fan sustained by the Himalyan erosional system.
380 *Nature* 450, 407-410.
- 381 Garneau, M.-E., Vincent, W.F., Terrado, R., Lovejoy, C., 2008. Importance of particle
382 associated bacterial heterotrophy in a coastal Arctic ecosystem. *Journal of Marine*
383 *Systems* 75, 185-197.
- 384 Girotti, A.W., 1998. Lipid hydroperoxide generation, turnover and effector action in
385 biological systems. *Journal of Lipid Research* 39, 1529-1542.
- 386 Goodell, B., 2003. Brown-rot fungal degradation of wood: Our evolving view. In: Goodell B,
387 Nicholas DD and Schultz TP (Eds.), *Wood Deterioration and Preservation*. ACS
388 Symposium series 845, Washington DC, USA, pp. 97-118.

- 389 ten Haven, H.L., Peakman, T.M., Rullkötter, J., 1991. Δ^2 -triterpenes: early intermediates in
390 the diagenesis of terrigenous triterpenoids. *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 56,
391 1993-2000.
- 392 Hedges, J.I., 1992. Global biogeochemical cycles: progress and problems. *Marine Chemistry*
393 39, 67-93.
- 394 Karlsson, E.S., Charkin, A., Dudarev, O., Semiletov, I., Vonk, J.E., Sanchez-Garcia, L.,
395 Andersson, A., Gustafsson, Ö., 2010. Carbon isotopes and lipid biomarker investigation
396 of sources, transport and degradation of terrestrial organic matter in the Buor-Khaya
397 Bay, SE Laptev Sea. *Biogeosciences* 8, 1865-1879.
- 398 Lawrence, G.D., Mavi, A., Meral, K., 2008. Promotion by phosphate of Fe(III) and Cu(II)-
399 catalyzed autoxidation of fructose. *Carbohydrate Research* 343, 626-635.
- 400 de Leeuw, J.W., Largeau, C., 1993. A review of macromolecular organic compounds that
401 comprise living organisms and their role in kerogen, coal, and petroleum formation. In:
402 Engel, M.H., Macko, S.A. (Eds.), *Organic Geochemistry Principles and Applications*.
403 Plenum Publishing, New York, pp. 23-72.
- 404 Lütjohann, D., 2004. Sterol autoxidation: from phytosterols to oxyphytosterols. *British*
405 *Journal of Nutrition* 91, 3-4. Opsahl, S., Benner, R., 1993. Decomposition of senescent
406 blades of the seagrass *Halodule wrightii* in a subtropical lagoon. *Marine Ecology*
407 *Progress Series* 94, 191-205.
- 408 Opsahl, S., Benner, R., 1997. Distribution and cycling of terrigenous dissolved organic matter
409 in the ocean. *Nature* 386, 480-482.
- 410 Otto, A., Simoneit, B.R.T., 2001. Chemosystematics and diagenesis of terpenoids in fossil
411 conifer species and sediment from the Eocene Zeitz formation, Saxony, Germany.
412 *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 65, 3505-3527.

- 413 Otto, A., Simoneit, B.R.T., 2003. Chemosystematics and diagenesis of terpenoids in fossil
414 conifer species and sediment from the Eocene Zeitz Formation, Saxony, Germany.
415 *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 65, 3505-3527.
- 416 Otto, A., Simoneit, B.R.T., Rember, W.C., 2005. Conifer and angiosperm biomarkers in clay
417 sediments and fossil plants from the Miocen Clarkia Formation, Idaho, USA. *Organic*
418 *Geochemistry* 36, 907-922.
- 419 Palmer, J.M., Harvey, P.J., Schoemaker, H.E., 1987. The role of peroxidases, radical cations
420 and oxygen in the degradation of lignin. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal*
421 *Society of London* 321, 495-505.
- 422 Pancost, R.D., Boot, C.S., 2004. The palaeoclimatic utility of terrestrial biomarkers in marine
423 sediments. *Marine Chemistry* 92, 239–261.
- 424 Poinot, J., Adam, P., Trendel, J.M., Connan, J. et Albrecht, P, 1992. Diagenesis of higher
425 plant triterpenes in evaporitic sediments. *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 59/22,
426 4653-4661.
- 427 Pryor, A., 1982. Free radical biology: xenobiotics, cancer and aging. *Annals of the New York*
428 *Academy* 393, 1-22.
- 429 Raymond, P.A., Caraco, N.F., Cole, J.J., 1997. Carbon dioxide concentration and atmospheric
430 flux in the Hudson River. *Estuaries* 20, 381–90.
- 431 Raymond, P.A., Bauer, J.E., Cole, J.J., 2000. Atmospheric CO₂ evasion, dissolved organic
432 carbon production, and net heterotrophy in the York River Estuary. *Limnology and*
433 *Oceanography* 45, 1707-1717.
- 434 Rontani, J.-F., Cuny, P., Grossi, V., 1996. Photodegradation of chlorophyll phytyl chain in
435 senescent leaves of higher plants. *Phytochemistry* 42, 347-351.

- 436 Rontani, J.-F., Rabourdin, A., Marchand, D., Aubert, C., 2003. Photochemical oxidation and
437 autoxidation of chlorophyll phytyl side chain in senescent phytoplanktonic cells:
438 Potential sources of several acyclic isoprenoid compounds in the marine environment.
439 *Lipids* 38, 241-253.
- 440 Rontani, J.-F., Rabourdin, A., Pinot, F., Kandel, S., Aubert, C., 2005. Visible light-induced
441 oxidation of unsaturated components of cutins: a significant process during the
442 senescence of higher plants. *Phytochemistry* 66, 313-321.
- 443 Rontani, J.-F., 2012. Photo- and free radical-mediated oxidation of lipid components during
444 the senescence of phototrophic organisms. In: Nagata, T. (Ed.). *Senescence*. Intech,
445 Rijeka, pp. 3–31.
- 446 Rontani, J.-F., Charriere, B., Forest, A., Heussner, S., Vaultier, F., Petit, M., Delsaut, N.,
447 Fortier, L., Sempéré, R., 2012. Intense photooxidative degradation of planktonic and
448 bacterial lipids in sinking particles collected with sediment traps across the Canadian
449 Mackenzie shelf (Arctic Ocean). *Biogeosciences* 9, 4787-4802.
- 450 Rontani, J.-F., Charriere, B., Sempéré, R., Doxaran, D., Vaultier, F., Vonk, J.E., Volkman
451 J.K., 2014. Degradation of sterols and terrestrial organic matter in waters of the
452 Mackenzie Shelf, Canadian Arctic. *Organic Geochemistry* 75, 61-73.
- 453 Rontani, J.-F., Aubert, C., Belt, S.T., 2015. EIMS fragmentation pathways and MRM
454 quantification of $7\alpha/\beta$ -hydroxy-dehydroabietic acid TMS derivatives. *Journal of the*
455 *American Mass Spectrometry Society* 26, 1606-1616.
- 456 Schmid, M., Ritter, A., Grubelnik, A., Zinn, M., 2007. Autoxidation of medium chain length
457 polyhydroxyalkanoate. *Biomacromolecules* 8, 579-584.
- 458 Schuur, E.A.G., Vogel, J.G., Crummer, K.G., Lee, H., Sickman, J.O., Osterkamp, T.E., 2009.
459 The effect of permafrost thaw on old carbon release and net carbon exchange from
460 tundra. *Nature*, 459(7246), 556-559.

- 461 Schuur, E.A.G., McGuire, A.D., Schädel, C., Grosse, G., Harden, J.W., Hayes, D.J., Hugelius,
462 G., Koven, C.D., Kuhry, P., Lawrence, D.M., Natali, S.M., Olefeldt, D., Romanovsky,
463 V.E., Schaefer, K., Turetsky, M.R., Treat, C.C., Vonk, J.E., 2015. Climate change and
464 the permafrost carbon feedback, *Nature*, 520(7546), 171-179.
- 465 Seko, H., Tsuge, K., Igashira-Kamiyama, A., Kawamoto, T., Konno, T., 2010. Autoxidation
466 of thiol-containing amino acid to its disulfide derivative that links two copper(II)
467 centers: The important role of auxiliary ligand. *Chemical Communications* 46, 1962-
468 1964.
- 469 Stroeve, J., Holland, M.M., Meier, W., Scambos, T., Serreze, M., 2007. Arctic sea ice decline:
470 faster than forecast. *Geophysical Research Letters* 34, doi: 10.1029/2007GL029703.
- 471 Vázquez, L.H., Palazon, J., Navarro-Ocaña, A., 2012. The pentacyclic triterpenes, α,β -
472 amyryns: A review of sources and biological activities. In: Rao, V. (Ed.),
473 *Phytochemicals - A Global Perspective of Their Role in Nutrition and Health*. ISBN:
474 978-953-51-0296-0, InTech.
- 475 van Dongen, B.E., Zencak, Z., Gustafsson, Ö., 2008. Differential transport and degradation of
476 bulk organic carbon and specific terrestrial biomarkers in the surface waters of a sub-
477 arctic brackish bay mixing zone. *Marine Chemistry* 112, 203-214.
- 478 Volkman, J.K., 1986. A review of sterol markers for marine and terrigenous organic matter.
479 *Organic Geochemistry* 9, 83-99.
- 480 Volkman, J.K., 2003. Sterols in microorganisms. *Applied Microbiology and Biotechnology*
481 60, 495-506.
- 482 Vonk, J.E., Sanchez-Garcia, L., Semiletov, I., Dudarev, O., Eglinton, T., Andersson, A.,
483 Gustafsson, Ö., 2010. Molecular and radiocarbon constraints on sources and
484 degradation of terrestrial organic carbon along the Kolyma paleoriver transect, East
485 Siberian Sea. *Biogeosciences* 7, 3153-3166.

- 486 Waggoner, D.C., Chen, H., Willoughby, A.S., Hatcher, P.G., 2015. Formation of black
487 carbon-like and acyclic aliphatic compounds by hydroxyl radical initiated degradation
488 of lignin. *Organic Geochemistry* 82, 69-76.
- 489 Wakeham, S.G., Canuel, E.A., 2006. Degradation and preservation of organic matter in
490 marine sediments. In: Volkman, J.K. (Ed.), *Marine Organic Matter: Biomarkers,*
491 *Isotopes and DNA. The Handbook of Environmental Chemistry, Volume 2, part N.,*
492 *Springer Verlag, pp. 295-321.*
- 493 Ward, N.D., Bianchi, T.S., Sawakuchi, H.O., Maynard, W.G., Cunha, A.C., Brito, D.C., Neu,
494 V., de Matos Valerio, A., da Silva, R., Krusche, A.V., Richey, J.E., Keil, R.G., 2016.
495 The reactivity of plant-derived organic matter and the potential importance of priming
496 effects along the lower Amazon River. *Journal of Geophysical Research*
497 *(Biogeosciences)* 121, 1522-1539, doi:10.1002/2016JG003342.
- 498 Zapata, O., McMillan, C., 1979. Phenolic acids in seagrasses. *Aquatic Botany* 7, 307-317.
499
500

501 **Figure captions**

502

503 **Fig. 1.** Summary of formation of lipid tracers of autoxidation employed in the present work.

504

505 **Fig. 2.** Summary map showing sampling locations.

506

507 **Fig. 3.** Partial ion chromatograms (m/z 365.3208, 395.3310, 455.3709, 496.4149 and
508 498.3915) showing the presence of betulin (**2**) and its degradation products (lupan-20-one-
509 3β ,28-diol (**10**) and 3β ,28-dihydroxy-lupan-29-oic acid (**11**)) in surface sediment from sample
510 location NOW.

511

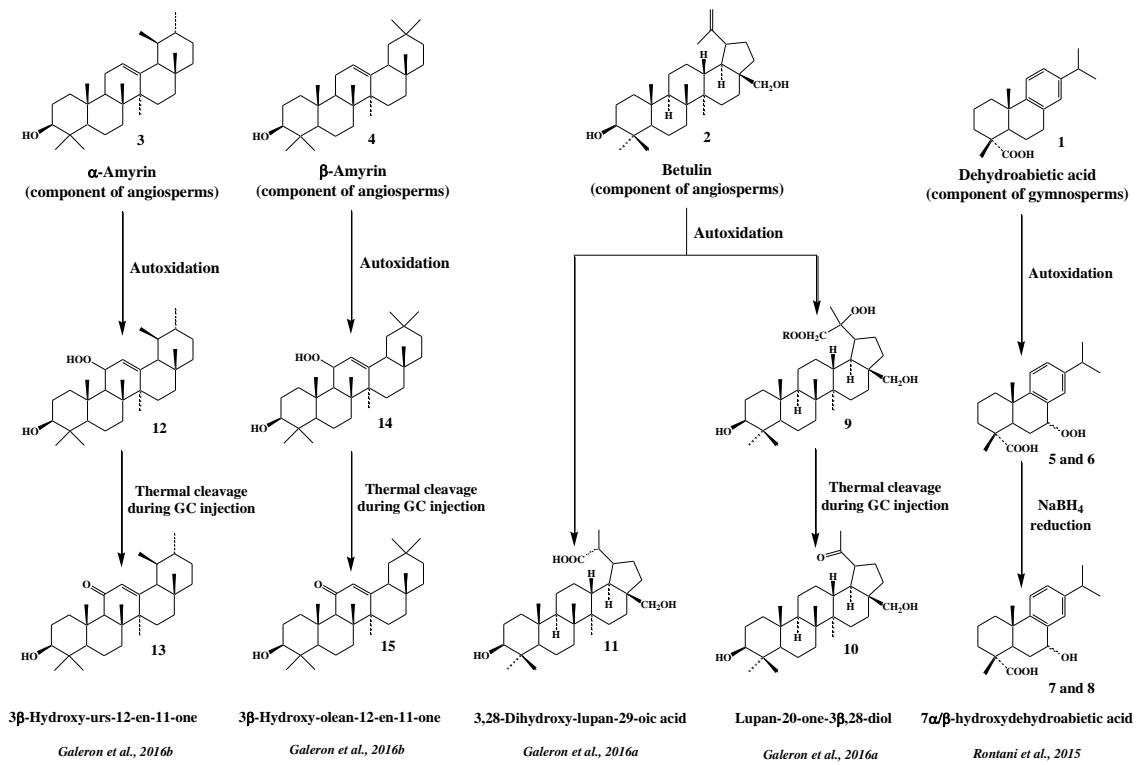
512 **Fig. 4.** Partial ion chromatograms (m/z 218.2035, 232.1839, 273.2228, 383.3329 and
513 512.4063) showing the presence of α - and β -amyrins (**3** and **4**) and their degradation products
514 (3β -hydroxy-urs-12-en-11-one, **13** and 3β -hydroxy-olean-12-en-11-one, **15**) in surface
515 sediment from sample location NOW.

516

517 **Fig. 5.** Partial ion chromatograms (m/z 191.0886, 234.0886, 237.1637 and 239.1794) showing
518 the presence of DHAA (**1**) and its degradation products ($7\alpha/\beta$ -hydroxydehydroabiatic acids, **7**
519 and **8**) in surface sediment from sample location NOW.

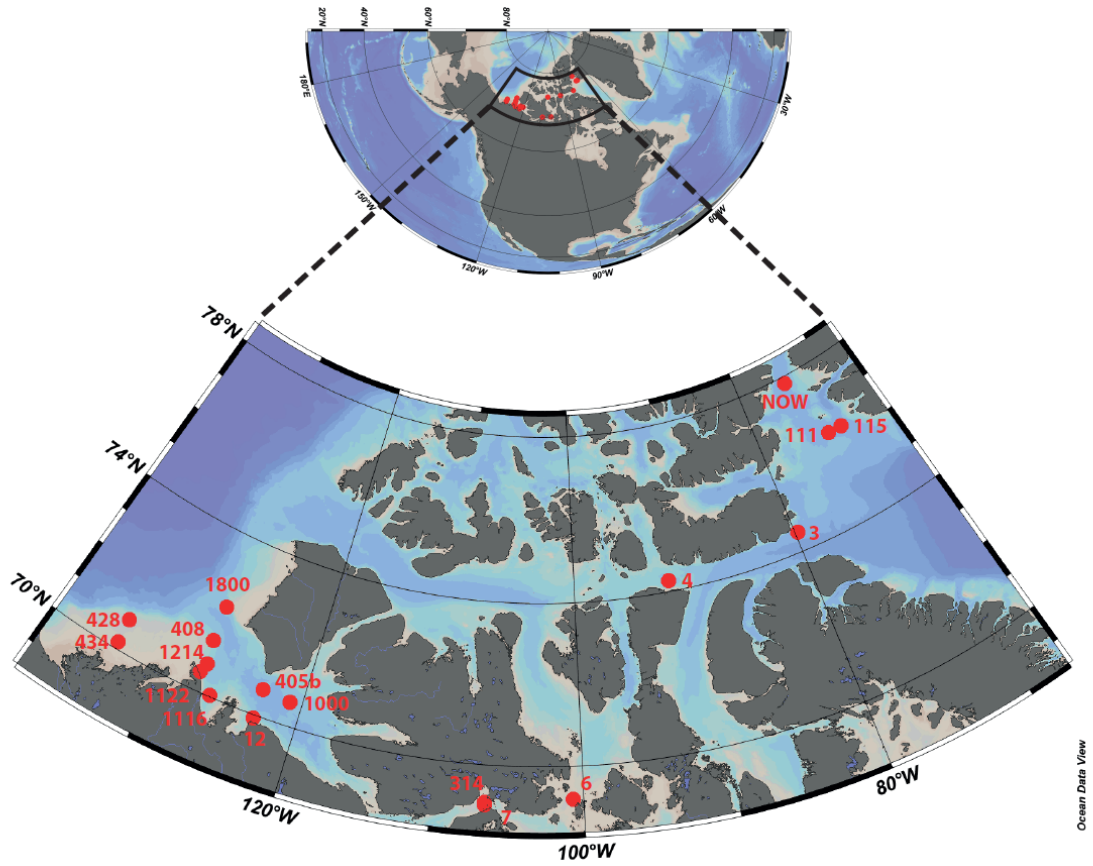
520

521



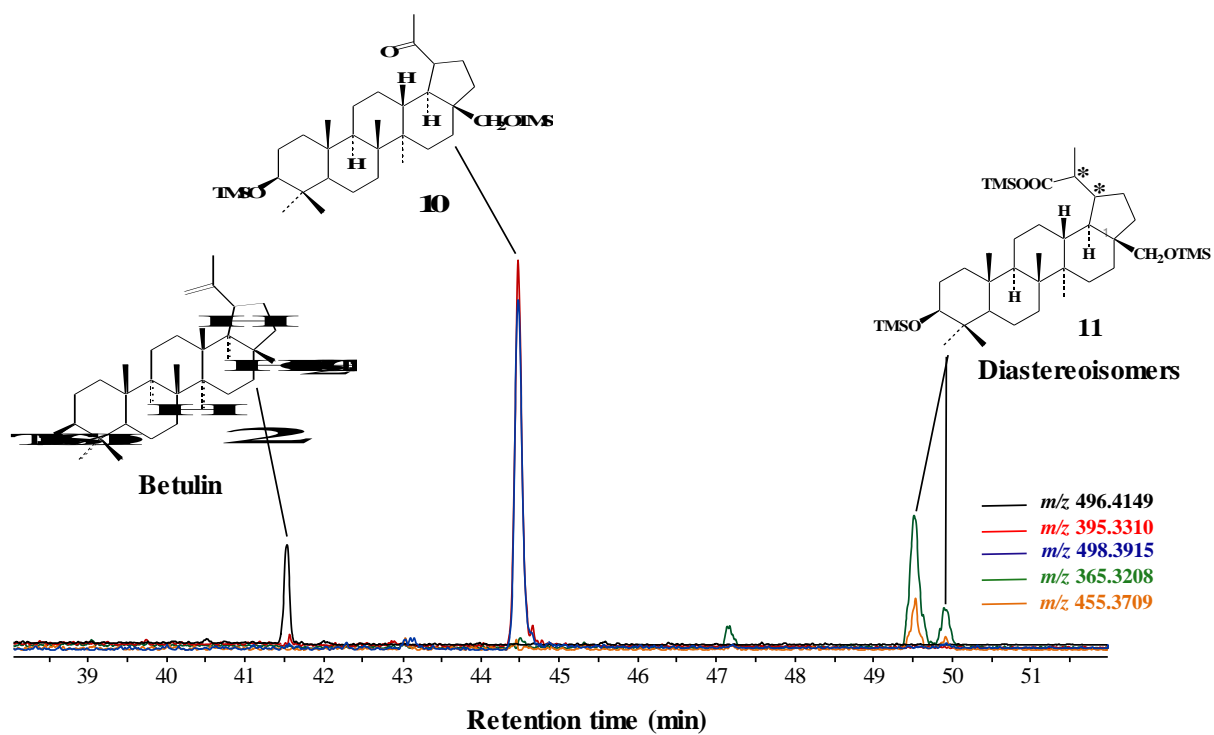
522

523



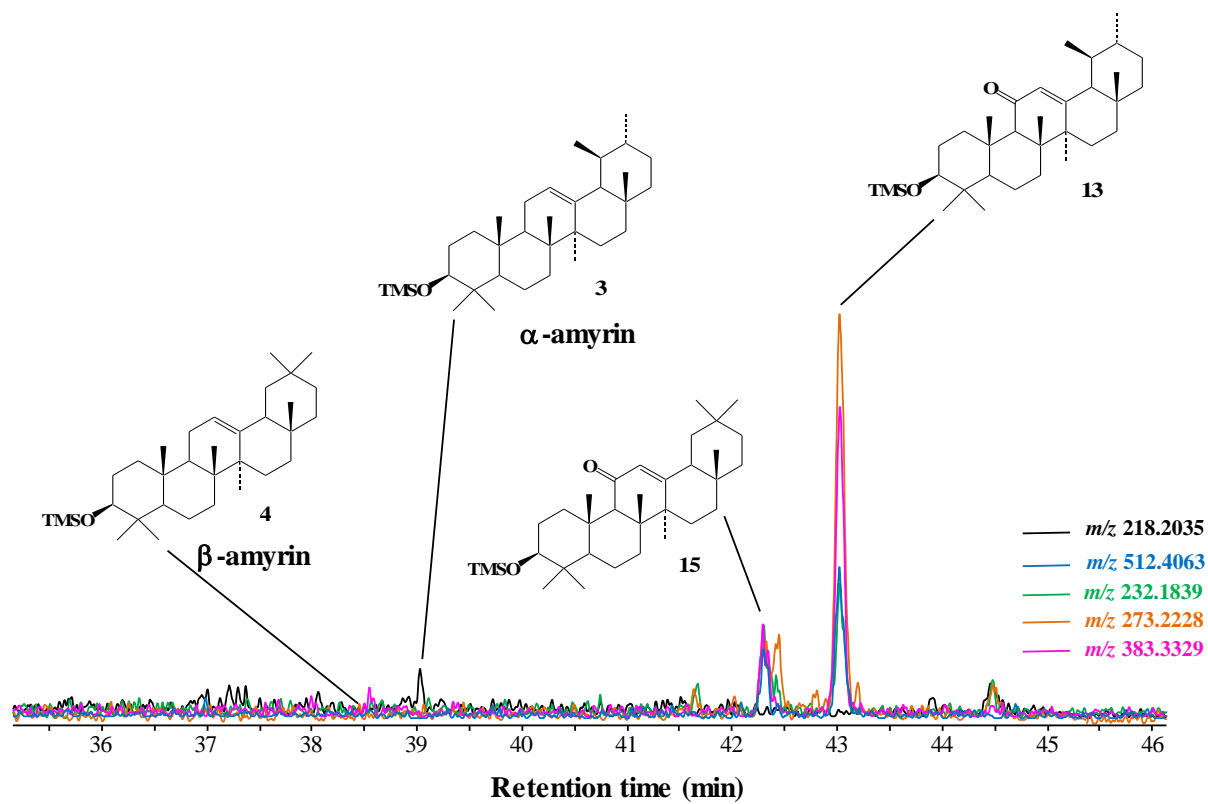
524

525



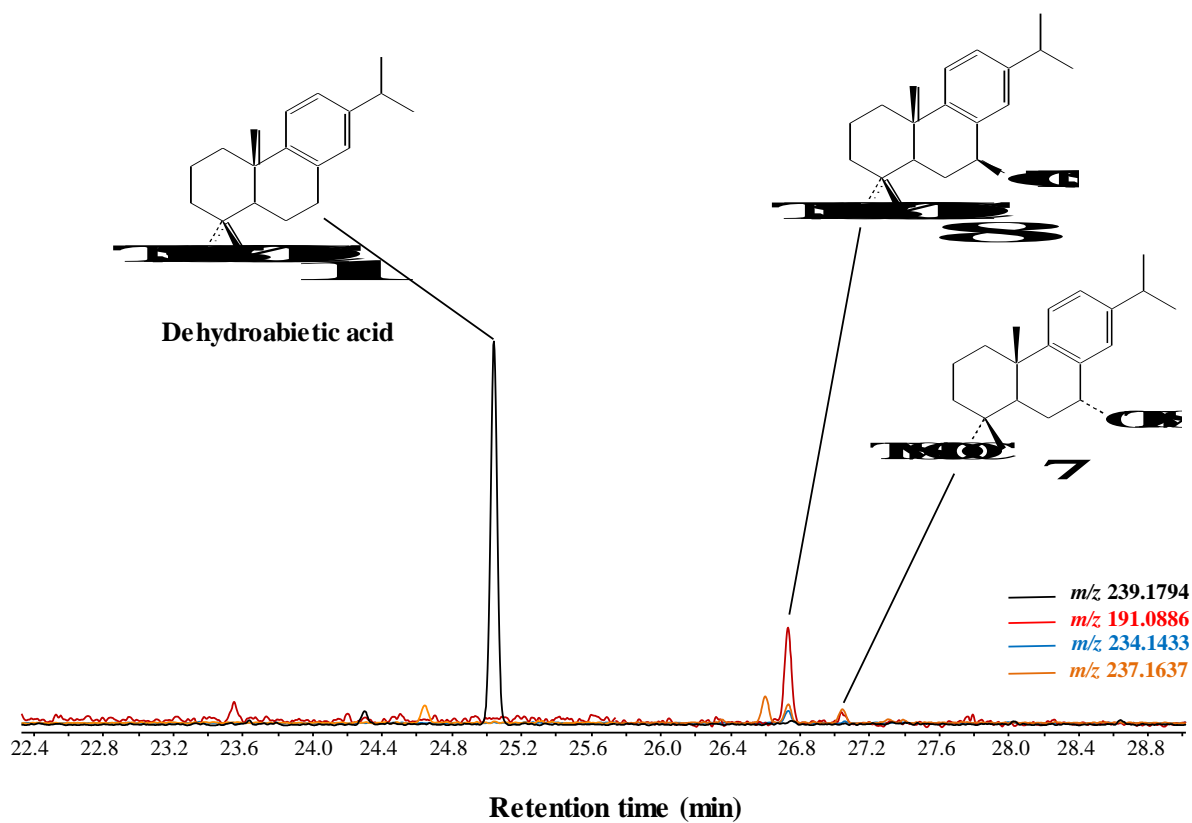
526

527



528

529



530

531

Table 1

Autoxidation of betulin (**2**) in the surface sediments investigated

Sampling station	Betulin (2) (ng/g dw)	Lupan-20-one-3 β ,28-diol 10 (ng/g dw)	3 β ,28-Dihydroxy-lupan-29-oic acid 11 (ng/g dw)	Betulin autoxidation (%)
1	38.2	272.7	109.1	90.1
2	24.2	179.0	96.8	91.1
3	20.0	140.0	70.0	91.1
4	24.6	177.1	63.9	90.1
5	26.3	236.8	105.3	92.1
6	20.5	148.1	75.9	91.1
7	36.6	329.3	197.6	93.1
8	22.7	190.9	63.6	91.1
9	17.8	182.8	42.2	92.1
10	20.7	185.2	107.4	93.1
11	17.5	115.0	57.5	90.1
12	32.0	238.4	127.9	92.1
13	26.9	182.1	41.4	89.1
14	25.9	197.8	65.9	91.1
15	15.6	161.3	60.5	93.1
16	28.0	189.1	84.8	90.1
17	32.4	270.0	126.0	92.1
18	31.8	252.9	135.3	92.1
19	32.9	214.3	109.5	90.1

^a Oxidation product / (parent compound + oxidation product) * 100

532

533

534

535

Table 2

Autoxidation of α - and β -amyryns (**3** and **4**) in the surface sediments investigated

Sampling station	β -Amyrin 4 (ng/g dw)	3β -hydroxy-olean-12-en-11-one 15 (ng/g dw)	β -Amyrin autoxidation (%) ^a	α -Amyrin 3 (ng/g dw)	3β -hydroxy-urs-12-en-11-one 13 (ng/g dw)	α -Amyrin autoxidation (%) ^a
4	1.49	8.07	84.4	3.90	36.92	90.5
1	0.93	3.68	79.7	0.44	20.75	97.9
00	0.48	6.70	93.3	0.80	25.10	96.9
8	0.13	6.34	98.0	0.19	29.07	99.3
1	0.09	4.89	98.3	0.11	29.63	99.6
00	0.03	4.67	99.3	0.11	20.16	99.5
	0.05	6.95	99.3	0.10	32.71	99.7
	0.02	3.77	99.4	0.04	20.18	99.8
5b	0.02	5.25	99.5	0.13	22.78	99.4
OW	0.01	4.48	99.7	0.14	19.37	99.3
22	0.05	4.73	98.9	0.17	23.78	99.3
5	0.12	6.86	98.3	0.16	31.86	99.5
4	0.12	5.80	98.0	0.52	25.57	98.0
	0.10	5.75	98.4	0.19	27.83	99.3
14	0.13	3.98	96.9	0.24	26.92	99.1
8	0.06	6.39	99.0	0.17	25.89	99.3
	0.02	6.36	99.6	0.06	32.40	99.8
	0.23	7.29	96.9	0.34	37.12	99.1
16	0.08	6.90	98.9	0.27	36.19	99.3

^a Oxidation product / (parent compound + oxidation product) * 100

536

537

Table 3

Autoxidation of DHAA in the surface sediments investigated

Sampling station	DHAA 1 (ng/g dw)	7β-hydroxydehydroabietic acid 8 (ng/g dw)	7α-hydroxydehydroabietic acid 7 (ng/g dw)	DHAA autoxidation (%)
34	71.5	124.7	57.4	71.5
11	53.7	94.4	30.8	70.0
800	36.0	34.9	7.9	54.0
28	25.1	15.3	7.4	47.0
01	34.3	42.4	26.0	66.0
000	25.5	28.9	17.2	64.0
	420.4	330.1	97.5	50.0
	35.5	73.1	13.7	71.0
05b	31.7	36.2	16.6	62.0
OW	123.6	221.9	69.7	70.0
122	23.7	16.7	10.8	53.0
15	68.6	145.9	47.6	73.0
14	20.5	14.5	6.3	50.0
	611.8	559.5	134.9	53.0
214	36.1	10.1	6.1	30.0
08	29.5	94.4	31.7	81.0
	1432.8	458.6	184.6	31.0
2	200.1	386.4	140.6	72.0
116	42.3	64.4	17.4	65.0

^a Oxidation product / (parent compound + oxidation product) * 100

538