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Changes in the Red Sea Overturning Circulation during Marine Isotope Stage 3

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Abstract. The oceanography of the Red Sea is controlled by the restricted exchange of water masses with the Indian Ocean and by high evaporation rates due to the arid climate of the surrounding land areas. In the northern Red Sea, the formation of oxygen-rich subsurface waters ventilates the deeper parts of the basin, but little is known about the variability of this process in the past. The stable oxygen and carbon isotope records of epibenthic foraminifera from a sediment core of the central Red Sea allow for the reconstruction of changes in the Red Sea Overturning Circulation (ROC) during Marine Isotope Stage 3. The isotope records imply millennial-scale variations in the ROC, in phase with climate variability of the high northern latitudes. This suggests an immediate response of dense water formation to the regional climate and hydrology of the northern Red Sea. The ROC was intensified under hyper-arid conditions during Heinrich stadials and was diminished during Dansgaard-Oeschger interstadials. While these changes are reflected in both stable oxygen and carbon isotope records, the latter data also exhibit changes in phase with the African-Indian monsoon system. The decoupling of the stable carbon and oxygen isotope records at the summer monsoon maximum centred around 55–60 ka B.P. may be associated with an increased inflow of nutrient-rich intermediate waters from the Arabian Sea to the central Red Sea. This process fuelled local surface-water productivity resulting in enhanced remineralization of sinking organic matter and release of ^{12}C at intermediate water depths.

1 Introduction

The landlocked basin of the Red Sea is bordered by the semiarid to arid regions of the Arabian Peninsula and northern Africa (Fig. 1). The oceanography of the Red Sea is characterized by the restricted exchange with the Indian Ocean through the narrow and only 137 m deep Hanish sill of the Bab al-Mandab strait (Smeed, 1997, 2004). The exchange processes exhibit distinct seasonal contrasts, which are closely linked to the monsoonal wind system. During the NE monsoon in winter, a two-layer system prevails with inflowing surface waters from the Gulf of Aden and the deeper water masse outflow of Red Sea Water (RSW). During the summer SW monsoon, a three-layer system develops with outflowing surface waters and diminished RSW outflow, but the intrusion of nutrient-rich Gulf of Aden Intermediate Water (GAIW) (Smeed, 1997, 2004). Enhanced evaporation rates result in high sea-surface salinities (SSS) with maximum values above 40 psu in the northern Red Sea. As a

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result, warm (21.6–21.8 °C) and saline (40.5–40.6 psu) intermediate and deep-water masses form in winter by cooling of highly saline surface waters in the Gulfs of Suez and Aqaba, and occasionally in the northernmost open Red Sea (Cember, 1988; Eshel et al., 1994; Woelk and Quadfasel, 1996; Papadopoulos et al., 2015). As part of the Red Sea Overturning Circulation (ROC), the newly formed subsurface water masses extend southward and ventilate the deep-sea ecosystems, with estimated residence times of 40 to 90 years (Fig. 2) (Woelk and Quadfasel, 1996). Finally, RSW flows over the sill at Bab al-Mandab and spreads southward into the Indian Ocean along the African continental slope where it can be traced back to the Agulhas Current (Roman and Lutjeharms, 2009).

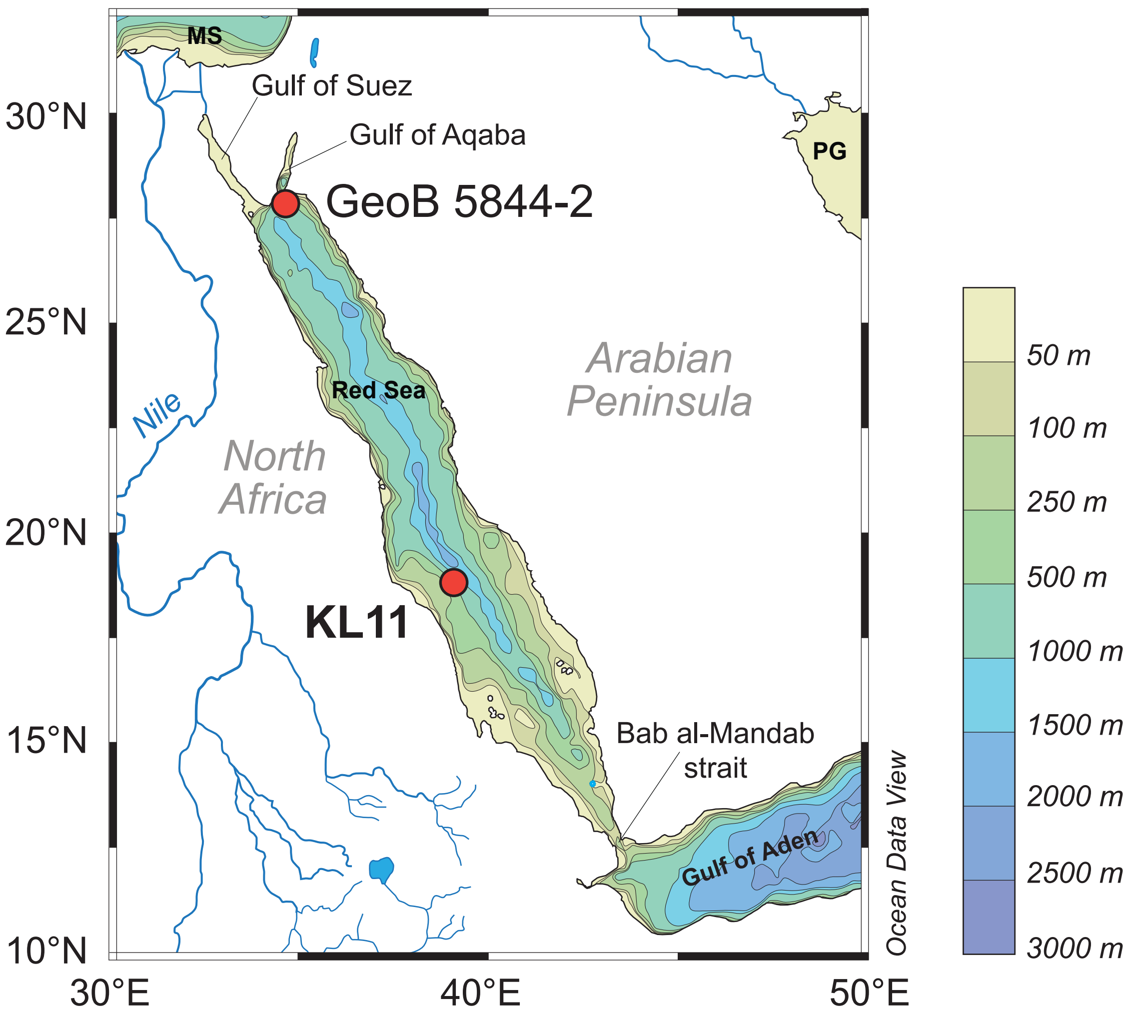

Figure 1. Bathymetric map of the Red Sea with the locations of core GeoTü KL11 investigated in this study and GeoB 5844-2 (Arz et al., 2007). Map generated with Ocean Data View (Schlitzer, 2015).

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An oxygen minimum zone is developed below the oxygen-saturated surface layer, between approximately 200 and 700 m water depth (Sofianos and Johns, 2007). The most extreme oxygen deficiencies are restricted to the central and southern Red Sea basin, with oxygen concentrations as low as 10 µmol kg^{-1} (~0.2 ml l^{-1}) (Fig. 2). The productivity in the surface water reveals regional and seasonal contrasts, with generally oligotrophic conditions in the central and northern Red Sea but meso- to eutrophic conditions south of 19° N (Raitsos et al., 2013). Maximum phytoplankton activity occurs during winter and is related to vertical mixing in the northern and central Red Sea and wind-induced horizontal intrusion of nutrient-rich water from the Gulf of Aden in the south (Naqvi et al., 1986; Eshel and Naik, 1997; Raitsos et al., 2013). Surface productivity is minimal during summer stratification in most areas of the Red Sea, but the intrusion of GAIW into the surface water results in phytoplankton blooms in the southern Red Sea (Dreano et al., 2016).

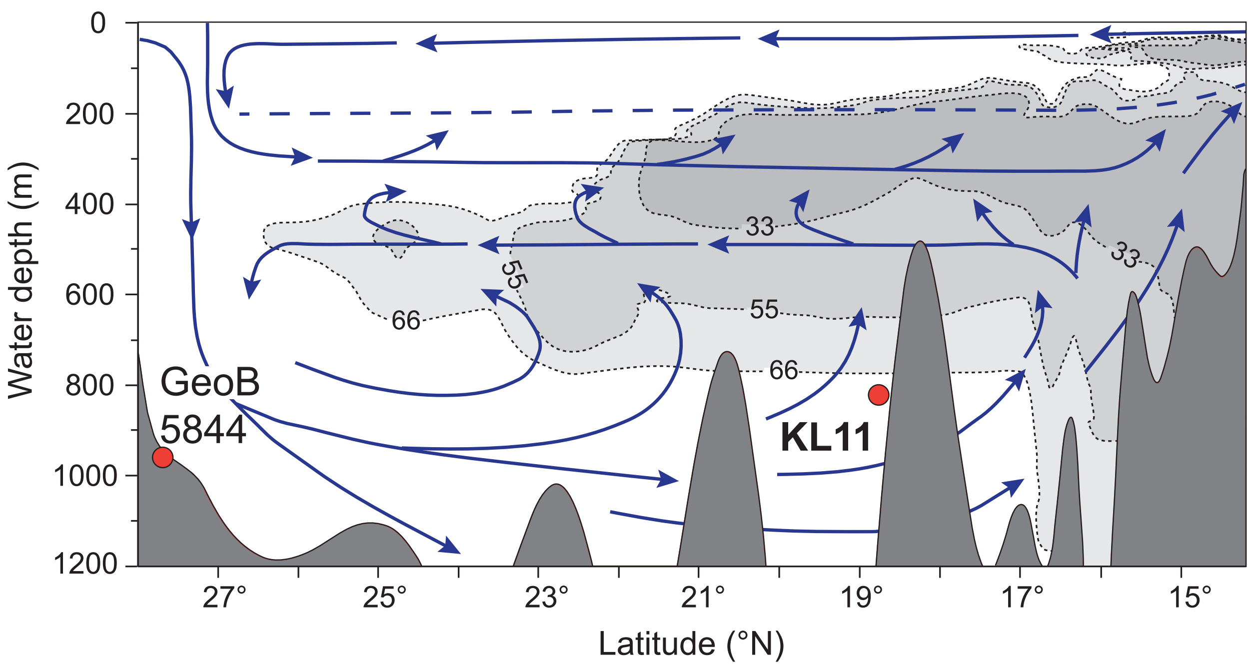

Figure 2. Generalized overturning circulation (blue arrows; Cember, 1988) and dissolved oxygen concentration (stippled lines and shadings; Sofianos and Johns, 2007) along a NNW-SSE transect of the Red Sea. Oxygen concentrations are given in µmol kg^{-1}. The depth positions of sediment cores GeoTü KL11 and GeoB 5844-2 are indicated. The blue stippled line represents the base of the pycnocline (Cember, 1988).

The paleoceanography of the Red Sea during the Late Quaternary was closely linked to global sea-level changes regulating the exchange of water masses between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Reduced water exchange occurred during glacial sea-level lowstands, leading to a drastic increase in Red Sea SSS (Thunell et al., 1988; Locke and Thunell, 1988). The glacial salinity increase resulted in a decrease in the abundance of pteropods and planktic foraminifera (Almogi-Labin et al., 1998), and ultimately led to the development of "aplanktic" zones, when the upper salinity limits for planktic foraminifera were exceeded (Fenton et al., 2000; Trommer et al., 2011). The strong salinity changes are reflected by high-amplitude fluctuations of the planktic $\delta^{18}O$, with glacial-to-interglacial differences of up to ~5 ‰ (Hemleben et al., 1996). The planktic $\delta^{18}O$ record facilitated the reconstruction of detailed eustatic sea-level fluctuations for the past 500 kyr, allowing for the evaluation of glacial lowstands and interglacial highstands, short-term fluctuations in response to abrupt climate change, and polar ice sheet dynamics (Rohling et al., 1998, 2004, 2009; Siddall et al., 2003; Arz et al., 2007; Bouilloux et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2014).

The glacial-interglacial changes in SSS and alternating exposure and flooding of shallow shelf areas in the Gulfs of Aqaba and Suez modulated the formation rate of intermediate and deep-water masses in the northern Red Sea, and thus the ROC. Despite strongly increased SSS during glacials (Hemleben et al., 1996), the abolition of dense water formation sites at low sea levels resulted in a reduction of the ROC as indicated by increased proportions of low-oxygen-tolerant taxa and drops in the diversity of deep-sea benthic foraminifera (Badawi et al., 2005). The available stable benthic isotope records, which could provide further insights into deep-water circulation changes, are either intermittent (Hemleben et al., 1996) or combine epi- and infaunal taxa (Arz et al., 2007), which involves potential biases concerning the influence of strong porewater and metabolic effects (Theodor et al., 2016). To date, a detailed reconstruction of changes in deep-water circulation and ventilation is still missing. Particularly, it remains unclear how the glacial ROC is influenced by the millennial-scale climate variability of the North Atlantic and if the carbon inventory of the deep-water mass is also influenced by the African-Indian monsoon system.

These open questions will be addressed with our study. Especially, we present the first high-resolution composite epibenthic foraminiferal stable isotope record of Marine Isotope Stage (MIS) 3 from intermediate water depth of the central Red Sea. The data are evaluated for (i) orbital and millennial-scale variability, and (ii) relations between the regional hydrological and biogeochemical processes with the climate variability of the high and low latitudes.

2 Material and Methods

Sediment core GeoTü KL11 (in the following referred to as KL11; Figs. 1, 2) was recovered in 1987 during RV *Meteor* cruise M5/2 (Hemleben, 1996). It was retrieved from the central Red Sea (18°44.5' N and 39°20.6' E) at 825 m water depth. Total core recovery was 21.0 m. For this study, we sampled the interval from 194 to 391 cm at 1 to 2 cm spacing, summing up to a total of 104 samples. We wet sieved 2–3 g freeze-dried sediment of each sample over a 63 µm mesh. The residue was dried at 38 °C and subsequently dry sieved over a 125 µm mesh. The fraction >125 µm was investigated in our study.

For stable isotope analyses, we selected the benthic foraminiferal species *Cibicides mabahethi*, *Discorbinella bertheloti* s.l., and *Hanzawaia boueana* s.l., all inhabiting a preferentially epifaunal microhabitat (Rathburn and Corliss, 1994; Edelman-Furstenberg et al., 2001; Murray, 2006; Margreth et al., 2009). The species were not present in all samples, but exhibited concurrent occurrences in some intervals, allowing for the generation of a composite stable isotope record. For each species,

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at least 5 individuals were selected per sample, and their diameters and preservation states were documented. The stable isotope analyses were performed on a Finnigan MAT 253 mass spectrometer in conjunction with an automatic Kiel IV carbonate preparation device at the Leibniz-Laboratory for Radiometric Dating and Stable Isotope Research, Kiel. Sample reaction was induced by individual acid addition (99 % H_3PO_4 at 75 °C) under vacuum. The evolved carbon dioxide was analysed eight times for each sample. As documented by the performance of international [NBS19: +1.95‰ VPDB (^{13}C), -2.20 ‰ VPDB (^{18}O); IAEA-603: +2.46 ‰ VPDB (^{13}C), -2.37 ‰ VPDB (^{18}O)] and laboratory-internal carbonate standards [Helal: +0.91 ‰ VPDB (^{13}C), -18.10 ‰ VPDB (^{18}O); SHK: +1.74 ‰ VPDB (^{13}C), -4.85 ‰ VPDB (^{18}O)], analytical precision of stable isotope analysis is better than ±0.08 ‰ for δ^{18}O and ±0.05 ‰ for δ^{13}C. Values are given in δ notation versus VPDB.

Various age models have been published for core KL11, mainly based on graphical correlations of the planktic δ^{18}O record with the global standard δ^{18}O record (Hemleben et al., 1996), the Antarctic ice core record (Siddall et al., 2003), the Soreq speleothem record (Grant et al., 2012), and further refinement of the latter by including AMS^{14}C ages (Hartman et al., 2020). The consideration of AMS^{14}C ages in the Red Sea may be problematic because of uncertainties in reservoir ages and potential early diagenetic effects (Rohling et al., 2008). Nevertheless, we established our age model for MIS 3 of KL11 by including two AMS^{14}C dates (Schmelzer, 1998), and correlating the composite epibenthic δ^{18}O record with the benthic δ^{18}O record of the well-dated core GeoB 5844-2 from 963 m water depth of the northernmost Red Sea (Arz et al., 2007) (Fig. 1, Table 1). The synchronization of the two cores is justified, because their benthic δ^{18}O records resemble each other due to the common main deep-water source situated in the northern Red Sea. The deep-water mass is relatively homogenous, with similar temperatures and salinities across the basin (Cember, 1988; Woelk and Quadfasel, 1996). According to our age model, the studied core section covers the time interval from 62.1 to 28.4 ka B.P., with an average sample resolution of 330 ± 90 years.

Table 1 Data used for establishing the age model for the studied section of KL11.

Core depth (cm)	Age (cal. ka B.P.)	Datum	Reference
199.5	29.29 ± 0.35	AMS^{14}C, KL11	Schmelzer (1998)
250.5	38.00 ± 0.71	AMS^{14}C, KL11	Schmelzer (1998)
278.5	43.38	δ^{18}O of GeoB5844-2	Arz et al. (2007)
292.5	45.92	δ^{18}O of GeoB5844-2	Arz et al. (2007)
331.5	52.67	δ^{18}O of GeoB5844-2	Arz et al. (2007)
385.5	61.32	δ^{18}O of GeoB5844-2	Arz et al. (2007)

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3 Results

The stable isotope values exhibit specific offsets between the different taxa in both $\delta^{18}O$ and $\delta^{13}C$. The calculation of average offsets between the species is based on 60 paired analyses of *C. mabahethi* and *D. bertheloti* s.l. and 40 paired analyses of *C. mabahethi* and *H. boueana* s.l.. Based on *C. mabahethi* as the reference value, the mean $\delta^{18}O$ deviation of *D. bertheloti* s.l. is -0.19 ± 0.30 ‰ and that of *H. boueana* s.l. is +0.02 ± 0.24 ‰. The corresponding mean $\delta^{13}C$ deviations are -0.09 ± 0.30 ‰ for *D. bertheloti* s.l. and +0.17 ± 0.19 ‰ for *H. boueana* s.l. (Fig. 3). The mean $\Delta\delta^{18}O$ and $\Delta\delta^{13}C$ values were used to adjust the stable isotope values of *D. bertheloti* s.l. and *H. boueana* s.l. to that of *C. mabahethi* and to generate the composite stable isotope records, which are described and evaluated below.

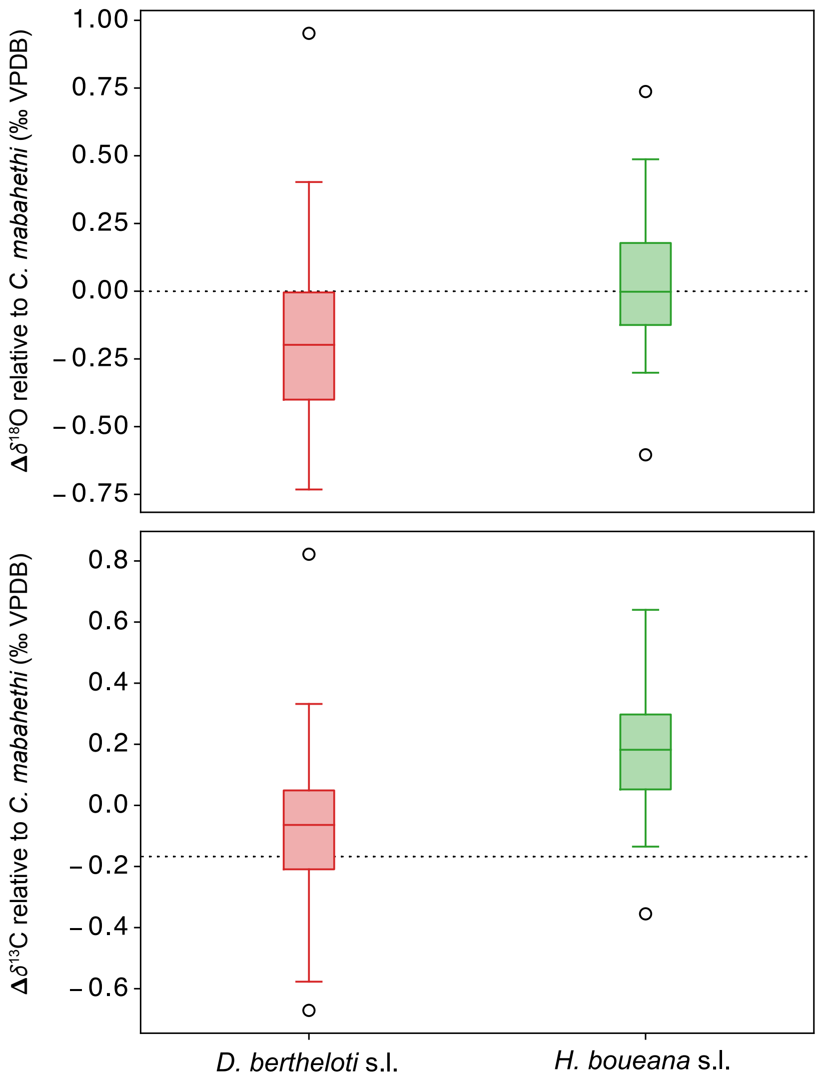

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Figure 3. Box plots for the $\delta^{18}O$ and $\delta^{13}C$ deviations of *D. bertheloti* s.l. and *H. boueana* s.l. with reference to *C. mabahethi* in samples from MIS 3 of KL11.

The composite $\delta^{18}O$ record fluctuates between approximately 2.2 and 4.2 ‰ VPDB and shows rapid millennial-scale fluctuations, superimposed by a long-term trend from high to low values and back to high values. The short-term $\delta^{18}O$ fluctuations are in the order of 0.5 to 1.5 ‰. Pronounced maxima are centred around 61 ka, 47 ka, 39 ka, and 29 ka B.P. (Fig. 4a).

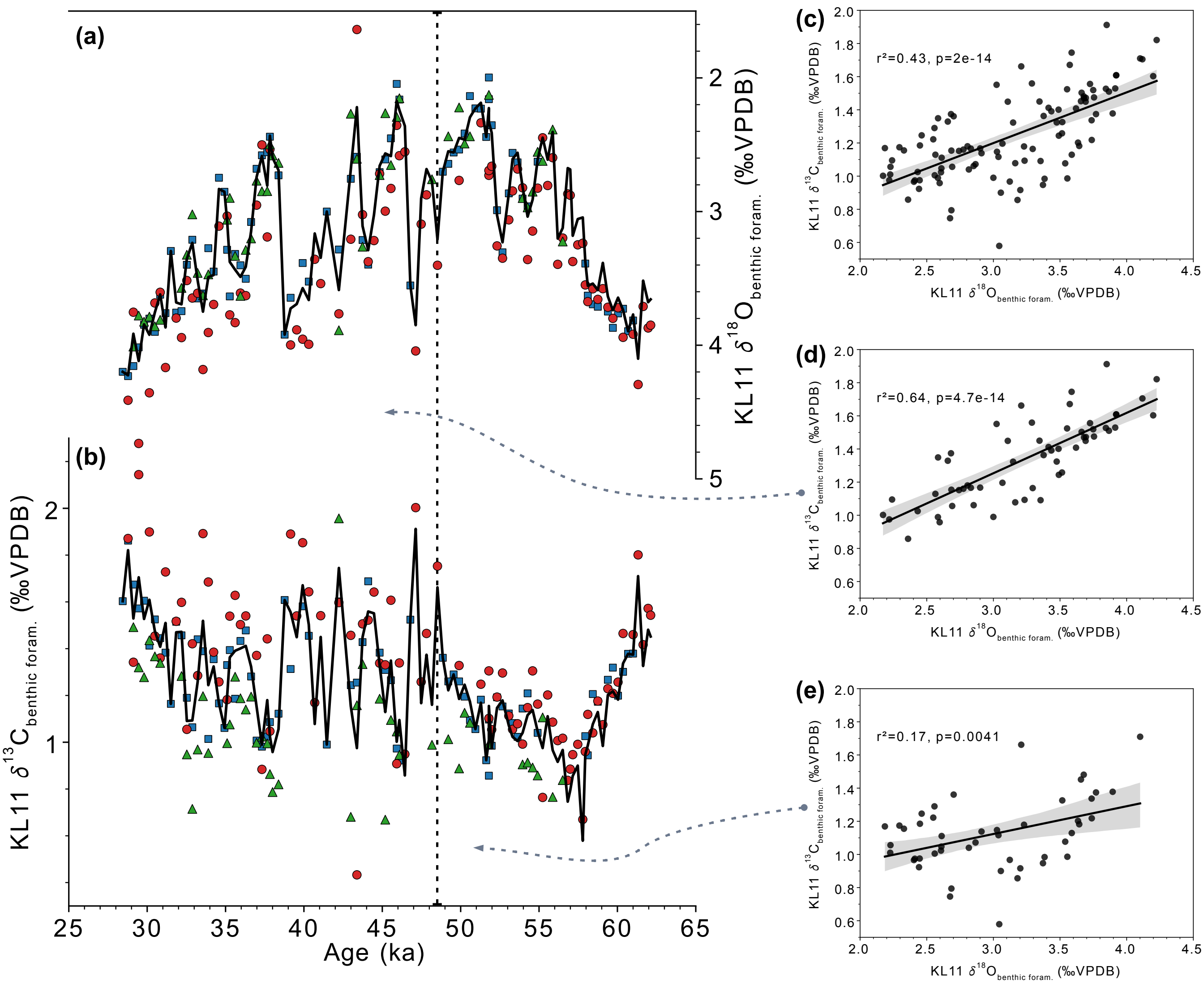

Figure 4. Composite stable **(a)** oxygen and **(b)** carbon isotope records for the interval ~62–28 ka B.P. of KL11. The markers indicate isotopic measurements of *C. mabahethi* (blue squares), *D. bertheloti* s.l. (red dots) and *H. boueana* s.l. (green

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triangles). The correlation between composite epibenthic $\delta^{18}O$ and $\delta^{13}C$ data are shown in **(c)** for the entire time interval, and separated for the intervals of **(d)** 48.5 to 28.4 ka B.P., and **(e)** 62.1 to 48.5 ka B.P.. The shaded area around the calibration indicates the 95% confidence interval of the regressions.

The values of the composite $\delta^{13}C$ record fluctuate between approximately 0.6 and 1.9 ‰ VPDB. The record is also characterized by millennial-scale fluctuations, which are, however, of lower amplitude (~0.5 to 1 ‰) when compared to those of the $\delta^{18}O$ record. In addition, the short-term changes of the $\delta^{13}C$ record are more pronounced in the interval between 48.5 and 28.4 ka B.P. while a more gradual $\delta^{13}C$ decrease is observed between 62.1 and 48.5 ka B.P. (Fig. 4b).

Accordingly, the $\delta^{18}O$ and $\delta^{13}C$ records reveal distinct differences in their correlation across the studied time interval. While the correlation of the entire composite isotope records delivers a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.43, it is considerably higher with $R^2 = 0.64$ for the interval 48.5–28.4 ka B.P. but only $R^2 = 0.17$ for the interval 62.1–48.5 ka B.P. (Fig. 4c, d and e).

4 Discussion

4.1 Variability of deep-water formation in the northern Red Sea

The epibenthic stable oxygen and carbon isotope records of KL11 display high-amplitude millennial-scale fluctuations (Fig. 5e, f), suggesting rapid changes in deep-water temperature and/or salinity, and shifts in the carbon inventory of the central Red Sea. Despite potential uncertainties in the age model, the pattern in the epibenthic $\delta^{18}O$ record of KL11 closely resembles that of the high-latitude climate variability as documented in the Greenland NGRIP ice core record (Fig. 5a) (NGRIP member, 2004; Svensson et al., 2008; Wolf et al., 2010). Specifically, low $\delta^{18}O$ values in KL11 coincide with Dansgaard-Oeschger interstadials with also exhibits the three typical phases of these interstadials' events. A sharp and rapid increase phase, a plateau phase and slower decrease phase (e.g., 51, 46, 38 ka). High $\delta^{18}O$ values in KL11 coincide with stadials. Particularly high $\delta^{18}O$ values are related to Heinrich stadials, suggesting the formation of highly saline and/or cold deep-water masses during these time intervals.

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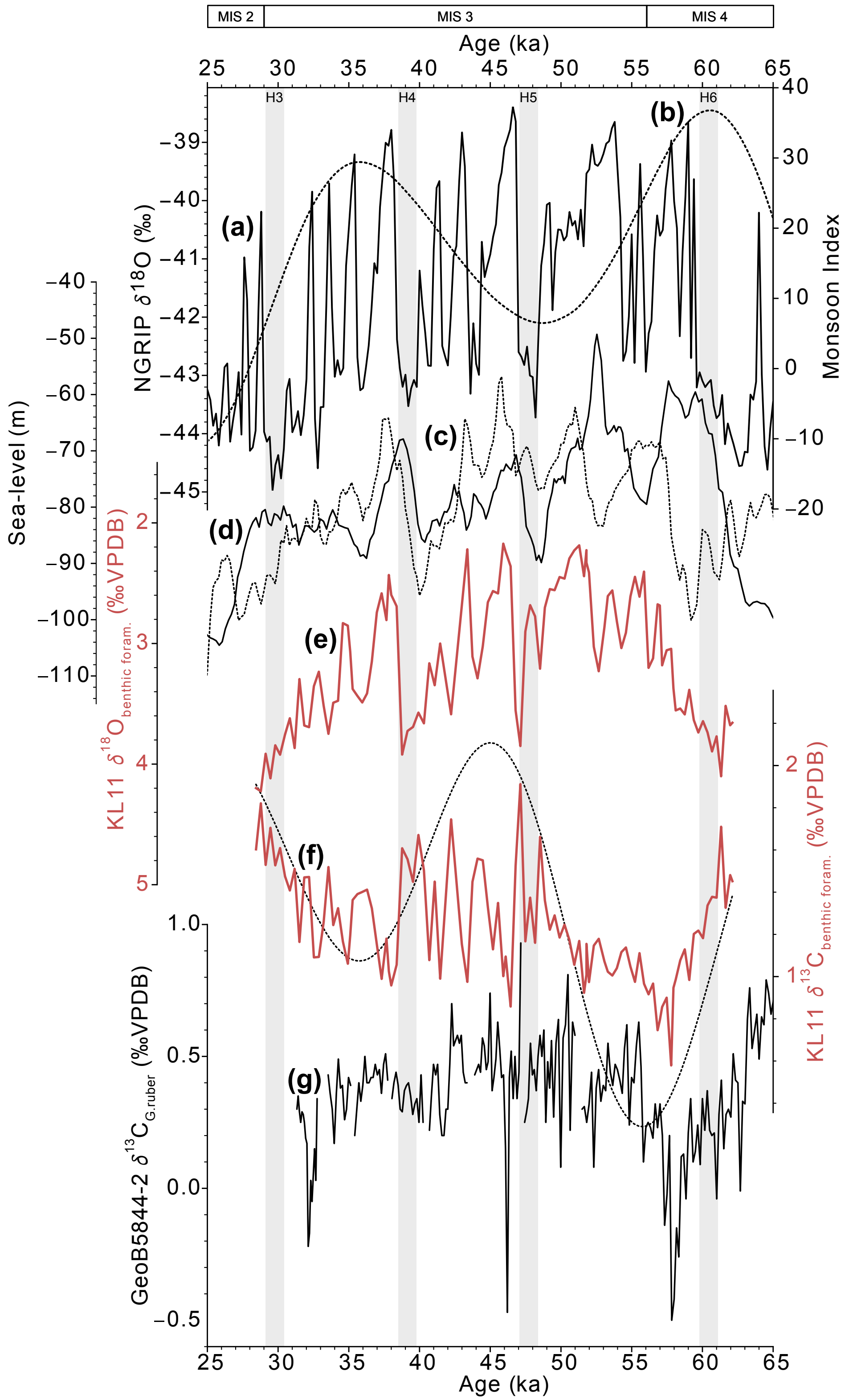

Figure 5. Composite epibenthic stable oxygen and carbon isotope records of the central Red Sea compared with the planktic stable carbon isotope record of the northern Red Sea, sea-level reconstructions for the Red Sea, and climate changes of the high northern latitudes for marine isotope stages (MIS) 2 to 4. **(a)** δ^{18}O record of the North Greenland Ice Core Project (NGRIP members, 2004) against the extended GICC05 age scale (Svensson et al., 2008; Wolf et al., 2010). **(b)** Monsoon index calculated according to Rossignol-Strick (1983), based on the June 21 insolation at 23.45° N and at the equator (Laskar et al., 2004). **(c)** Sea-level reconstructions for the northern Red Sea (dashed line, Arz et al., 2007) and **(d)** central Red Sea (black line, Siddall et al., 2003; Rohling et al., 2008). **(e)** Composite epibenthic δ^{18}O record of KL11 from the central Red Sea. **(f)** Composite epibenthic δ^{13}C record of KL11 from the central Red Sea. The stippled line represents the band pass filtered precession (23 kyr) component of the epibenthic δ^{13}C record. Note that minima in the δ^{13}C precession component correspond to maxima in the monsoon index. **(g)** δ^{13}C record of the planktic foraminifer *Globigerinoides ruber* white of GeoB 5844-2 from the northern Red Sea (Arz et al., 2007). Note that the insolation maximum centered around 58–62 ka B.P. is associated with a transient decrease of planktic and epibenthic δ^{13}C values. The positions of Heinrich stadials H3–H6 are indicated by light grey bars.

Heinrich stadials are associated with a strong reduction or even cessation of North Atlantic Deep-Water formation (McManus et al., 2004; Denton et al., 2010). Proxy data and model results demonstrated that the slow-down of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation also influenced the hydrology of mid- to low-latitude regions in the northern hemisphere, leading to megadroughts in northern Africa and the Mediterranean region (Mulitza et al., 2008; Hamann et al., 2008; Ehrmann et al., 2017; Allard et al., 2021), and weakening of the Indian summer monsoon (Schulz et al., 1998).
Previous studies have shown that the environmental changes in the northern Red Sea are influenced by changes in the Mediterranean and North Atlantic climate (Arz et al., 2003a, b, 2007; Lamy et al., 2006). Alkenone temperature reconstructions for the northern Red Sea display a general cooling trend during MIS 3, punctuated by short-term sea-surface temperature drops in the order of 1 to 4 °C during Heinrich stadials. Similarly, the reconstructed sea-level fluctuations in the northern Red Sea occurred also in phase with northern hemisphere climate variability, with transient sea-level rises of up to 25 m during Greenland interstadials. These results contrast with earlier findings from the central Red Sea, where estimated short-term sea-level changes are in the order of 35 m and occurred in phase with Antarctic climate changes (Siddall et al., 2003) (Fig. 5d). These discrepancies may be attributed to the different age model strategies, involving potential dating uncertainties and diagenetic biases (Rohling et al., 2008).

The close resemblance of the epibenthic δ^{18}O record with that of the Greenland ice core record suggest a direct atmospheric control on short-term changes in deep-water circulation during the last glacial period. Since maximum deep-water formation is observed during Heinrich stadials, when sea-level dropped, the moderate further exposure of shelf areas in the northern Red Sea obviously did not play a dominant role on deep-water formation. Instead, the more restricted exchange between the Red

Sea and the Indian Ocean and the associated SSS rise in the Red Sea likely facilitated dense-water formation (Arz et al., 2007) (Fig. 5a, c, d).

According to these findings, cooling and enhanced evaporation rates prevailed in the northern Red Sea region during Heinrich stadials and fostered the formation of dense waters in the deep-water formation sites. In the time interval ~49–28 ka B.P., epibenthic $\delta^{18}O$ and $\delta^{13}C$ records of KL11 show a positive correlation, with high $\delta^{18}O$ values during Heinrich stadials being associated with high epibenthic $\delta^{13}C$ values. This confirms our conclusion of more vigorous ventilation of deep-water masses with low residence times during Heinrich stadials and reduced ventilation with the presence of older and thus ^{12}C-enriched deep-water masses during Dansgaard-Oeschger interstadials.

For the correct interpretation of the deep-sea $\delta^{13}C$ record, the potential contribution of $\delta^{13}C$ changes of dissolved inorganic carbon (DIC) in the source areas of deep-water formation in the northern Red Sea must be considered. Therefore, we compared the epibenthic $\delta^{13}C$ record of KL11 with the $\delta^{13}C$ record of the planktic foraminifer *Globigerinoides ruber* white of GeoB 5844-2 from the northernmost Red Sea (Arz et al., 2007) (Fig. 5g). The epibenthic $\delta^{13}C$ composition reflects the addition of ^{12}C to the intermediate and deep water through decomposition of sinking organic matter. Despite the preferentially epifaunal lifestyle of the measured taxa, additional porewater effects of around 0.2–0.5 ‰ cannot be ruled out as suggested from analyses on morphologically similar species of the genera *Cibicides* and *Cibicidoides* (McCorkle et al., 1990; Schmiedl et al., 2004; Theodor et al., 2016). Various studies have shown that the $\delta^{13}C$ of *G. ruber* reflects not only the $\delta^{13}C$ of ambient DIC, but is also influenced by biological fractionation effects, mainly by algal photosymbiosis and the metabolism of the foraminifer (Rohling and Cooke, 1999; Schiebel and Hemleben, 2017, and references therein). Accordingly, the $\delta^{13}C$ of *G. ruber* commonly deviates significantly from $\delta^{13}C_{DIC}$. Depending on the magnitude of the different effects, the deviations of $\delta^{13}C_{G.ruber}$ from $\delta^{13}C_{DIC}$ range from +1 ‰ due to symbiotic enrichment (Bemis et al., 1998), to -0.5 to -1 ‰ due to metabolic depletion (Niebler, 1995; Katz et al., 2010; Birch et al., 2013). Despite these offsets, the epibenthic and planktic $\delta^{13}C$ records of KL11 reflect a generally similar long-term trend, particularly in the older part of the record. However, the planktic $\delta^{13}C$ record lacks systematic Heinrich-stadials-associated fluctuations. Thus, the alteration of surface water $\delta^{13}C_{DIC}$ by millennial-scale changes in productivity and addition of ^{12}C from land can be largely ruled out. These processes play a more prominent role on orbital time scales. Specifically, last glacial $\delta^{13}C$ values of the Red Sea surface waters are approximately 0.5–1.0 ‰ lower than Holocene values (Schmelzer, 1998; Bouilloux et al., 2013), suggesting the redistribution of carbon from exposed shelf areas into the Red Sea basin during glacial sea-level low-stands. In addition, the inflow of nutrient-rich water masses from the Gulf of Aden triggers changes in surface-water productivity and related addition of organic matter to the deep-sea (see discussion below).

4.2 Monsoonal influence on biogeochemical cycling in the Red Sea

The decoupling of the $\delta^{18}O$ and $\delta^{13}C$ records in the interval ~62–49 ka B.P. suggests the additional influence of orbital-scale regional biogeochemical processes on the $\delta^{13}C$ signal in the central Red Sea (Fig. 5e, f). The core position of KL11 is situated close to the border between the more oligotrophic central and northern Red Sea and the mesotrophic to eutrophic area in the southern Red Sea (Raitsos et al., 2013). According to the modern situation, changes in surface-water productivity at site KL11 depend on vertical mixing and formation of eddies during winter (Eshel and Naik, 1997; Raitsos et al., 2013) but may also be influenced by the intrusion of nutrient-rich intermediate waters from the Gulf of Aden during summer (Trommer et al., 2010; Dreano et al., 2016).

The past exchange of water masses between the Red Sea and Indian Ocean and the advection of nutrient-rich waters from the Gulf of Aden through the strait of Bab al-Mandab depend on orbital and suborbital glacio-eustatic changes, and shifts in monsoon wind intensity (Siddall et al., 2004; Trommer et al., 2011; Bouilloux et al., 2013). During the time interval ~60–50 ka B.P., the global sea-level was approximately 60 m lower than at present, but higher than during the sea-level low stands of MIS 4 (approximately -100 m) and the last glacial maximum (approximately -120 m) (Siddall et al., 2003; Rohling et al., 2004; Grant et al., 2014) (Fig. 5c, d). Within MIS 2-4, sea-level was at a maximum between ~60 and 50 ka B.P.. Accordingly, the exchange of intermediate waters likely persisted during this period, including the inflow of nutrient-rich GAIW during summer, particularly during phases of enhanced summer monsoon winds (Fig. 5b).

The time interval 58–62 ka B.P. coincides with the stronger of two maxima in the northern hemisphere monsoon index during MIS 3 (Fig. 5b). The monsoon index has been calculated according to Rossignol-Strick (1983), based on the June 21 insolation gradient between 23.45° N and at the equator (Laskar et al., 2004). Generally, maxima in African-Asian summer monsoon are coherent with insolation maxima (Cheng et al., 2016). However, upwelling proxies from marine sediment cores of the Arabian Sea exhibit significant time lags between insolation and monsoon maxima (Clemens et al., 2010). A new model study demonstrated that the observed time lag in the Arabian Sea did not necessarily document changes in Indian summer monsoon intensity. It may rather be caused by shifts of the upwelling area from coastal regions during insolation maxima to more open-ocean areas during insolation minima (Jalihal et al., 2022). In contrast to the Arabian Sea upwelling proxies, the decrease of epibenthic $\delta^{13}C$ in KL11 lags the monsoon index maximum by only ~3.5 ka B.P., which is comparable to the observed lags of Mediterranean sapropels (Lourens et al., 1996). The close relation of the monsoon index and epibenthic $\delta^{13}C$ suggests a more or less immediate response of surface-water productivity and related organic matter fluxes at site KL11 to the strength of the summer monsoon. Our results support previous evidence from planktic foraminifera, which exhibit a close correspondence between the high-productivity indicator *Globigerinita glutinata* and summer insolation at site KL11 during the last interglacial period (Trommer et al., 2011). The development of summer phytoplankton blooms in the southern part of the modern Red Sea is related to the intrusion of nutrient-rich intermediate waters from the Gulf of Aden, which can be traced as far north as 19°

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N (Trommer et al., 2010; Dreano et al., 2016). The different proxy data suggest that this process was intensified in the past during phases of increased Indian summer monsoon, and that nutrient-rich waters reached the position of KL11 temporarily during MIS 3.

5 Conclusion

We established a high-resolution composite epibenthic stable oxygen and carbon isotope record from the central Red Sea for the last glacial period. The records show high-amplitude variations during MIS 3, suggesting millennial-scale changes in the thermohaline circulation of the Red Sea. Despite generally reduced ROC during glacial sea-level lowstands, deep-water formation increased during hyper-arid and cold conditions in the northern Red Sea borderlands, increasing the deep-water formation. Inversely, the formation of dense waters was reduced during warmer and more humid conditions resulting in a diminished ROC.

The millennial-scale changes in aridity in the northern Red Sea region are in phase with the abrupt climate variability of the high northern latitudes as documented in the Greenland ice core record. Our results suggest that the regional hydroclimatic changes modulate the thermohaline circulation of the Red Sea during glacial boundary conditions and that millennial-scale sea-level changes and related changes in the exchange between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean play a subordinate role in the preconditioning of dense water formation in the northern Red Sea. This is also shown by the lack of coherent millennial-scale changes in the planktic $\delta^{13}C$ record from the northernmost Red Sea representing the general source signal in the area of deep-water formation.

The KL11 stable oxygen and carbon isotope records are decoupled in the early part of MIS 3, caused by a transient decrease of $\delta^{13}C$ values in phase with an increase of northern hemisphere summer insolation around 55–60 ka B.P.. This suggests a connection between the biogeochemical processes of the central Red Sea to the African-Indian monsoon dynamics. During the summer monsoon maximum and concomitant moderate sea-level rise, nutrient-rich intermediate waters intruded from the Gulf of Aden and delivered nutrients as far north as 19° N. The influx of nutrients fuelled surface-water productivity at site KL11 in the central Red Sea. The associated remineralization of sinking organic matter led to the observed transient decrease in epibenthic $\delta^{13}C$ values.

Data availability

The new data are available in the supplement of this paper.

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Author contributions

GS and WE initiated the initial project (REVENT). RHH was in charge of the sample processing and species selection. NA performed the stable isotope analysis. RHH and GS wrote the first draft of the paper. HWA contributed planktic isotope data. All authors contributed to the interpretation and discussion of the data, and to the writing of the submitted paper.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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