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IN THIS ISSUE:

JOHN R. WINCKLER (1916–2001), PAGE 639
SECTION NEWS: HYDROLOGY, PAGE 639
BOOK REVIEWS, PAGE 642

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Eurasia-Africa Plate Boundary Region Yields New Seismographic Data

The tectonic plate boundary between Eurasia and Africa is complex, in that it cannot be characterized as a single discrete plate boundary. Deformation near this plate boundary varies from trans-tensional in the Azores archipelago, through strike-slip in the eastern Atlantic basin, to overall compressional between the European and African continents, with extensional sub-domains in the Mediterranean Sea. This complex pattern of deformation, related plate motion, and underlying driving forces leads to strong variations in seismic hazard throughout the region. A better understanding of the plate boundary processes requires knowing crust and upper mantle structure in the region, which is best investigated with three-component, broadband seismic data. To investigate the region's three-dimensional crust and upper mantle structure, we are carrying out a multi-institutional project (MIDSEA) involving seismologists from 10 countries on the northern, southern, and western sides of the plate boundary.

Within this multinational project, 25 three-component, broadband seismic stations were installed in the plate boundary region. Their locations were carefully selected to complement the coverage provided by existing networks

(for example, MedNet, GEOFON) and stations in the region. The data obtained are being analyzed for three-dimensional structure of the crust and upper mantle in the plate boundary region. Preliminary results indicate that crustal thickness varies spatially by dozens of kilometers and that uppermost mantle structure is dominated by low seismic velocities.

Plate Boundary

The tectonic plate boundary region between Eurasia and Africa extends from the Azores triple junction with the North American plate to the easternmost Mediterranean Sea. Uncommonly, the plate boundary does not manifest itself as a relatively focused zone of seismicity and surface deformation. Surface deformation, seismicity patterns, and earthquake focal mechanisms indicate a wide, branched plate boundary region with strong spatial variations in the type, amount, and frequency of faulting [McKenzie, 1970]. Moreover, the plate boundary has changed location, shape, and character throughout geological time

Seismographic Data (cont. on page 645)

Seismographic Data (cont. from page 637)

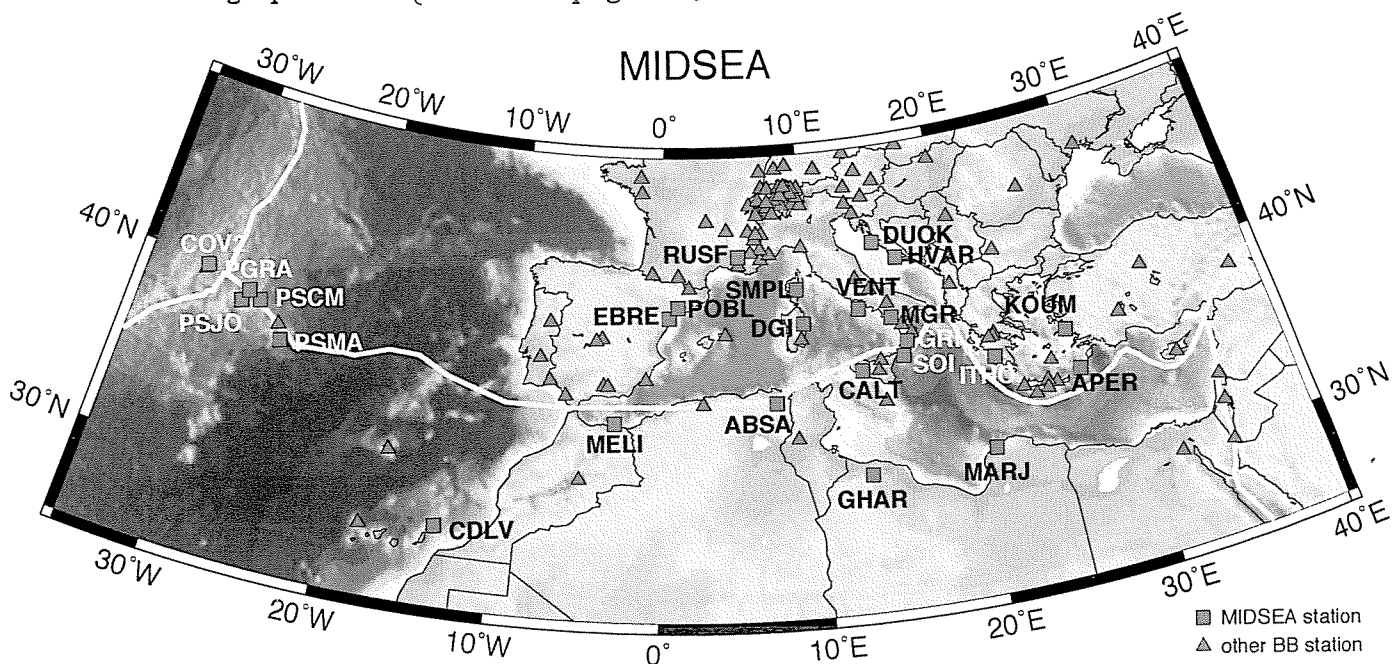


Fig. 1. This topographic map shows the configuration of MIDSEA stations (squares) and other seismic stations (triangles) in the Eurasia-Africa plate-boundary region. MIDSEA is a multinational project with participating organizations from three continents. A rough approximation of the Eurasia-Africa plate boundary is provided by the NUVEL-1 model (pink line) [DeMets, 1990].

[*Dercourt et al.*, 1986]. Tectonic evolution in the western part of the plate boundary region, from the Azores to the Mediterranean Sea, is characterized by steady Cenozoic accretion of young lithosphere to both plates at the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, hot spot activity in the Azores, strike-slip along parts of the Gloria fault, and distributed deformation, including reverse faulting, in the easternmost Atlantic basin and adjacent continental margin.

Tectonic evolution in the eastern part of the plate boundary region—the Mediterranean—is dominated by slow convergence between Africa and Eurasia, which created paleo- and Neogene arcuate orogenies such as the Alps, Carpathians, Betics and Rif, Calabria and Apennines, Hellenides and Dinarides, and Maghrebides. For Calabria (southern Italy) and the Hellenides (southern Greece), this convergence is accommodated by the subduction of Mesozoic oceanic lithosphere. During this overall convergent period, episodes of relatively fast extension, related to trench migration and back-arc opening, have formed the Algero-Provençal, Tyrrhenian, and Aegean basins.

This complex evolution and current geodynamic processes yield a heterogeneous pattern of stress and strain in the plate boundary region, which leads to strong spatial variations in seismic hazard. Fundamental to understanding the present and past geodynamics of this region is knowledge of the three-dimensional structure of the crust and upper mantle in the region, which is as complex [*Meissner et al.*, 1987; *Wortel and Spakman*, 2000] as the surface observations described above. Seismograms from three-component broadband instruments carry more information on three-dimensional crust and upper mantle structure than any other type of geophysical data collected at the Earth's surface. Consequently, the number of such seismological stations in the plate boundary region is large.

Seismography

The first permanent, three-component, broadband seismic station near the Eurasia-Africa plate boundary (ANTO) was installed in Ankara, Turkey, in 1978 as part of the Global Seismographic Network (GSN). During the 1980s, temporary broadband stations of the mobile NARS network were installed as far south as Spain, followed by the installation of a permanent broadband station in southern Algeria as part of the global GEOSCOPE network. One decade after the installation of ANTO, the MedNet project [*Boschi et al.*, 1991] was initiated and the first permanent stations of MedNet were installed on both sides of the Mediterranean part of the plate boundary [*Giardini et al.*, 1992]. The purpose of MedNet has been to use the broadband data for research purposes, as well as for monitoring seismic hazard in the Mediterranean region.

By 1995, eight MedNet stations had been installed throughout the region. Around this time, the GEOFON program [*Hanka and Kind*, 1994] was launched with the installation of permanent as well as mobile broadband stations, primarily in eastern European and Mediterranean countries. During the same period, a second GSN station was installed in Spain, while Portugal, Spain, and France installed individual stations in their respective countries, including one in Corsica. One GSN station in the Azores and more than 60 broadband stations in the Mediterranean region were operating by 1999. From then on, more and more mobile broadband stations have been deployed in the region for limited periods of

time; an inventory of these is maintained at the ORFEUS site at <http://orfeus.knmi.nl>.

However, data availability for some of the permanent and temporary stations varies and the geographical coverage is far from uniform. This non-uniformity poses problems for the assessment of seismic hazard through spatial variations in, for example, the detectability of seismicity and the reliability of hypocenters and focal mechanisms. In addition, seismological research into Mediterranean upper mantle structure has shown that the non-uniformity limits the resolution of the derived models for seismic velocity.

Our primary goal is to derive more complete models for the crust and upper mantle structure in the Eurasia-Africa plate boundary region. To do so, we must improve the distribution of three-component, broadband seismic stations in the region. This can be achieved, on the one hand, by eventually using a network of ocean bottom seismometers in the waters of both the Mediterranean Sea and the mid- and eastern Atlantic Ocean and on the other hand, by better coverage of the land parts of the Eurasia-Africa plate boundary region.

We have complemented presently existing seismic stations in the plate-boundary region with a temporary network of 25 three-component, broadband seismic stations (Figure 1). Target locations for our new stations were regions on all sides of the plate boundary that are far from existing broadband stations in the region. With our new stations, we have not only increased the number of stations in the region, but have also smoothed the heterogeneity in coverage.

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MIDSEA

The aim of the 25-station seismic network is a mantle investigation of the deep suture between Eurasia and Africa (MIDSEA). The temporary stations of the MIDSEA network were sited to optimize station coverage for investigating crust and upper mantle structure along the Eurasia-Africa plate boundary. Consequently, many of the MIDSEA stations are located on islands, as well as in northern Africa (Figure 1). Each MIDSEA station will operate for a period of 1 to 2 years some time between June 1999 and April 2002. Twenty-two of the 25 stations are equipped with broadband STS-2 sensors and the remaining three have CMG3T sensors. The data acquisition systems used are MARS88, RefTek, Titan, Quanterra, and Orion.

The data recorded by the stations are locally stored, regularly recovered, and shipped to one of the four data processing centers: The Federal Institute of Technology (ETH, Switzerland), Géosciences Azur (CNRS/UNSA, France), the National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology (INGV, Italy), and the Department of Terrestrial Magnetism of the Carnegie Institution of Washington (DTM, USA). These organizations are also the main MIDSEA partners, representing Switzerland, France, Italy, and the United States. The other MIDSEA partners are the National Observatory of Athens (NOA, Greece); the University of Zagreb (Croatia); the Ebre Observatory, the Institute of Catalan Studies, the Lanzarote Cabildo, the San Fernando Naval Observatory (ROA), and the Universidad Complutense-Madrid (Spain); the Institute of Meteorology (Portugal); the Research Center for Astronomy, Astrophysics, and Geophysics (CRAAG, Algeria); and the Libyan Center for Remote Sensing and Space Sciences (LCRSSS, Libya). The Institute of Catalan Studies and

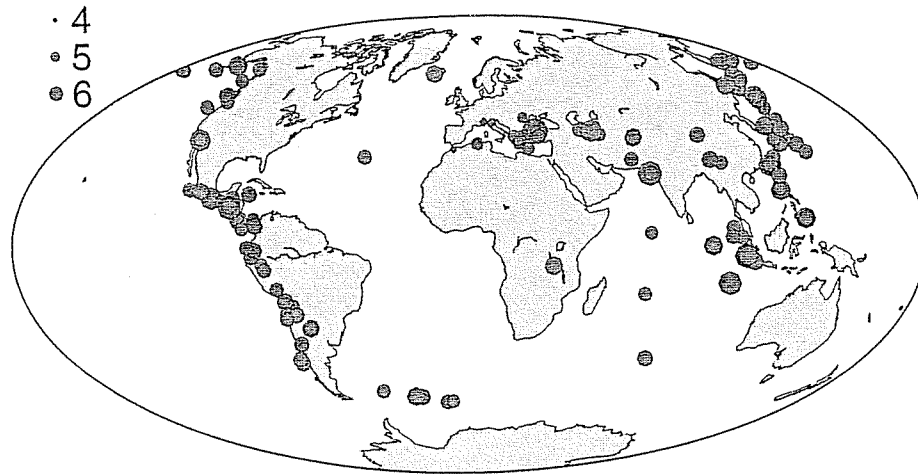


Fig. 2. This map of the distribution of earthquakes is used to investigate three-dimensional crust and upper mantle structure in the Eurasia-Africa plate-boundary region. The numbers in the legend represent an earthquake's magnitude on the Richter scale.

ROA are locally processing the data recorded at stations POBL and MELI, respectively.

Despite the temporary character of the MIDSEA network, some of the station sites have proven to be excellent locations for the operation of more permanent stations. For example, one MIDSEA station on Sicily was recently converted to a permanent MedNet station, and two of the MIDSEA stations in northern Africa are now operating jointly with the GEOFON program, providing a longer-term perspective for these broadband stations. Simple noise analysis shows that noise levels at seismic frequencies are close to the low-noise model of Peterson [1993] for some of the sites that will continue to operate narrower band sensors in the future (Algeria, Croatia, Greece, and Lanzarote). The Greek and Croatian island sites show a very low microseismic noise level, while the Atlantic island sites show significant levels of microseismic noise. As usual, long-period noise is higher on the horizontal components than on the vertical components. For some sites, cultural noise above 5 Hz increases during the day.

The MIDSEA project can be monitored through <http://www.sg.geophys.eth.ch/midsea>.

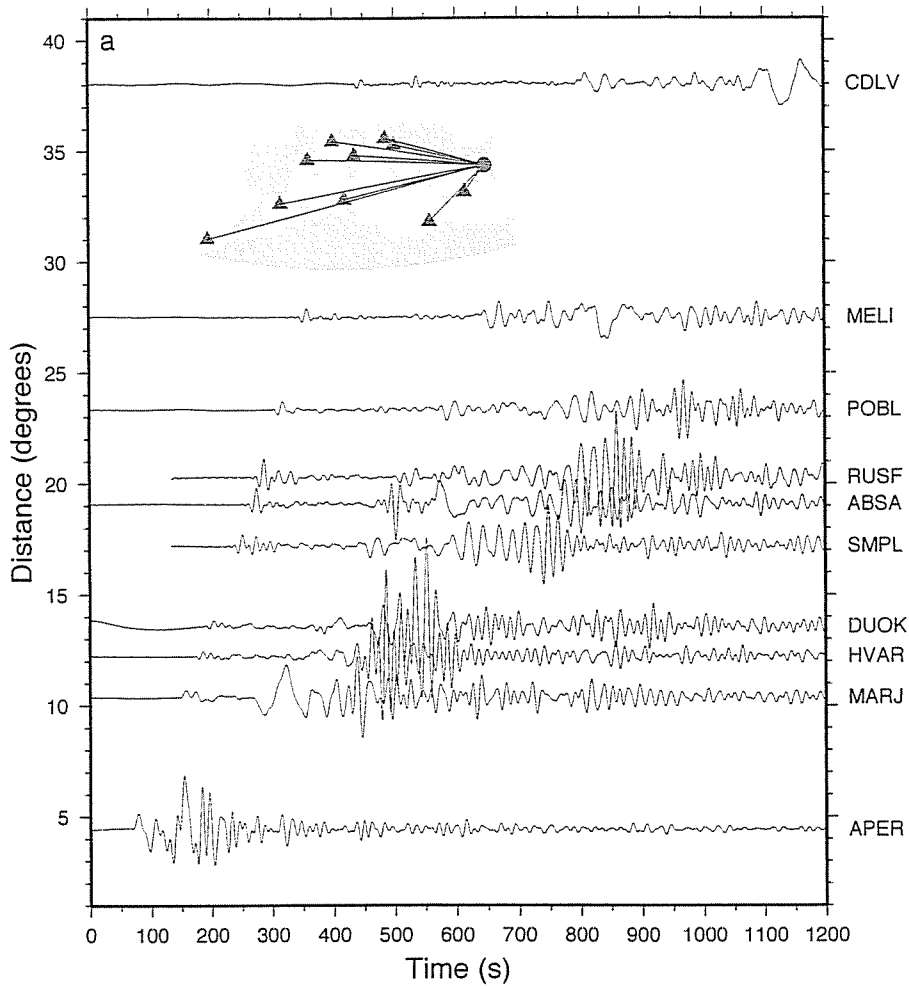
The stations in the Azores (Figure 1) are the most recent additions to the MIDSEA network. Along with one broadband station managed by the Institut de Physique du Globe in Paris and another broadband station managed by the University of Lisbon, these stations also represent the coordinated seismic experiment in the Azores (COSEA), which aims to investigate the hot spot origin of the Azores Archipelago.

New Data

The MIDSEA, three-component, broadband seismic stations have recorded many regional and teleseismic earthquakes. Figure 2 shows the global distribution of some of the recorded earthquakes that have actually been used to date for investigating the crust and upper-mantle structure along the Eurasia-Africa plate boundary. This figure also illustrates the central position of the plate boundary region with respect to teleseismic earthquakes from the circum-Pacific ring.

Among the largest earthquakes recorded by MIDSEA stations are the 1999 Taiwan and Hector Mine earthquakes, the 2000 Volcano

Seismographic Data (cont. from page 645)



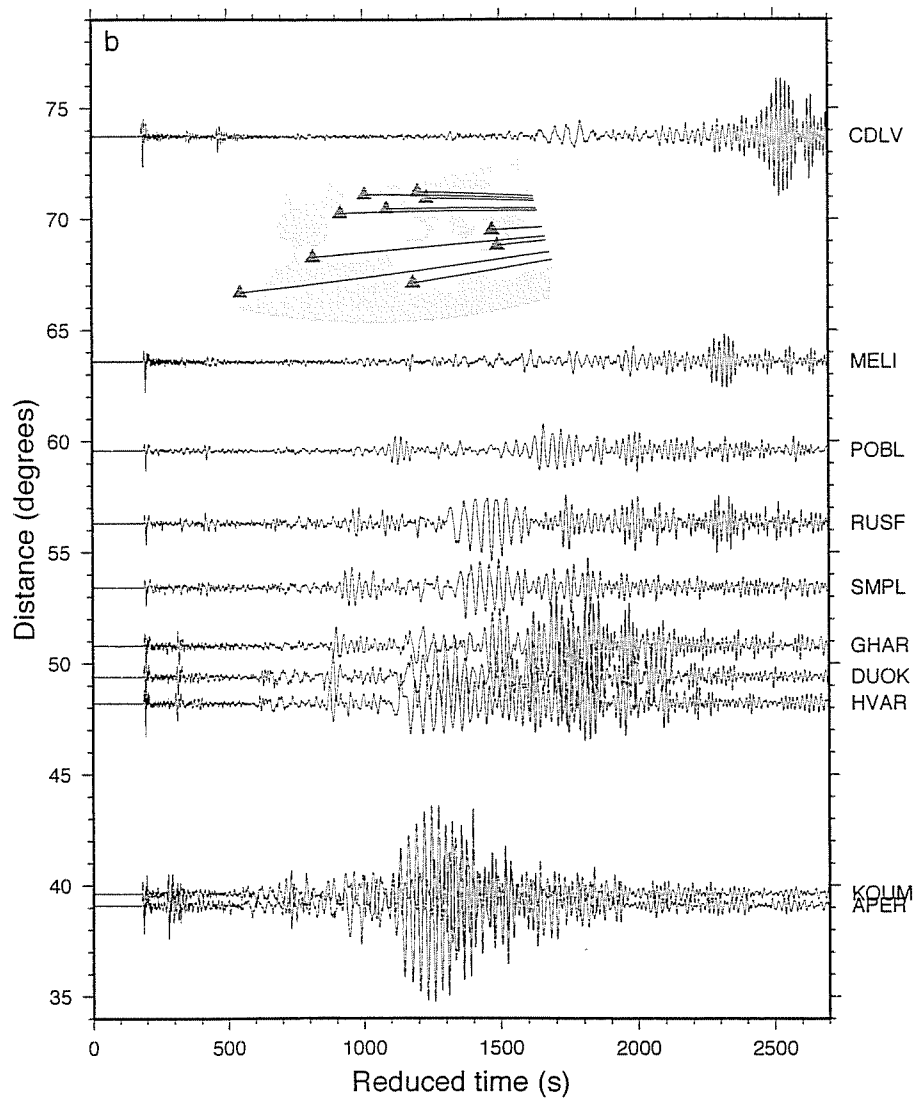


Fig. 3. Shown here is a MIDSEA vertical component seismogram section for (a) the regional $m_b = 5.1$ earthquake on December 15, 2000, in Turkey; and (b) the teleseismic $m_b = 6.9$ earthquake on January 26, 2001, in southern India. The timing of the records in (b) was reduced with a velocity of 16 km/s. The records in (a) are converted to ground displacement and filtered.

Islands earthquake, the 2000 series near Papua New Guinea, and the 2001 El Salvador earthquake. Significant regional earthquakes recorded include the 1999 Izmit-Duzce series, the 1999 Athens earthquake, and the 2000 earthquake in northern Algeria. Figure 3 shows MIDSEA seismograms for a significant regional earthquake last year in Turkey, and for the large teleseismic earthquake in southern India in January 2001. Before analysis, all seismograms are carefully and interactively checked for quality. This guarantees that a maximum amount of optimal-quality data can be used for investigating three-dimensional Earth structure.

Crust and Upper Mantle Structure

Preliminary results from MIDSEA seismogram analysis confirm the existence of a widespread low-velocity zone beneath the Mediterranean region. As a result of this discrepancy with

the globally averaged iasp91 model the regional record sections (for example, Figure 3a) show clear, high-amplitude *P* arrivals only beyond 17° in epicentral distance. The depth to the top as well as to the bottom of the low-velocity layer varies throughout the region. Within this low-velocity zone, we image high-velocity anomalies that are possibly related to lithosphere that subducted during the convergence between Eurasia and Africa [Wortel and Spakman, 2000].

Analysis of three-component teleseismic MIDSEA records shows that the crust in subregions of continental collision, such as the Croatian margin, is over 40 km thick. Continental crust in regions that experienced extension, such as the Aegean Sea and the Alboran and Valencia margins, is up to 30% thinner than 30 km. To date, the thinnest crust beneath MIDSEA stations is found for station CDLV in the Atlantic basin.

Preliminary analysis of split shear waves shows a stable pattern of direction and size of anisotropy in southern France and a complex pattern of fast directions and splitting delays for southern Italy. The pattern emerging from the denser station configuration in southern Italy is possibly related to the presence of a fragmented lithospheric slab in the upper mantle and asthenospheric flow induced by slab retreat.

Locally, the MIDSEA data are being used for a study of attenuation structure, noise characterization for sites of senior seismographs, and for determining focal mechanisms of regional events. Completed data analyses will be submitted for publication in professional geophysical journals.

Through the improved station configuration in the region, project MIDSEA will be able to provide a more complete three-dimensional model of crust and upper mantle structure in the Eurasia-Africa plate-boundary region than is presently available. This model is envisioned to characterize three-dimensional seismic velocities, radial and transverse anisotropy, and discontinuity structure. Such a model, and its comparison with regional geology and tectonics, will improve our understanding of the geodynamic processes involved in long-term, slow convergence between two enormous tectonic plates.

The complete MIDSEA event data set will be submitted to the ORFEUS Data Management Center (<http://orfeus.knmi.nl>) for distribution.

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