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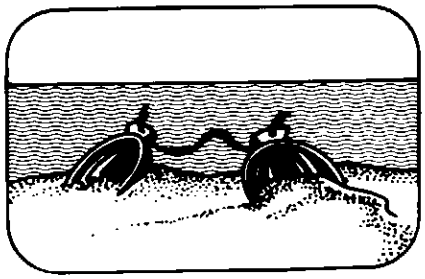

International Association of Sedimentologists Sixth European Regional Meeting Lleida (Lerida), Spain 15-17 April 1985

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In recent years, Spain (and particularly the region just south of the Pyrénées) has become a mecca for sedimentologists. First, there are many interesting sedimentary rocks, and they are well exposed in a region of rugged relief and semi-arid climate; second, these rocks have been very thoroughly studied by a great number of geologists. The Spanish workers are notably J. Rosell, who organized the Lerida meeting, C. Puigdefábregas, and M. Diaz-Molina, but also include many others too numerous to mention, and especially many younger sedimentologists whose work (mostly not yet published in English) seems to be as good as that done in any other country in the world. Besides these workers, there are numerous groups from other European countries operating in Spain: examples include those led by E. Mutti from Italy, S.D. Nio from Holland, and H. Reading from England. Several workers from universities in the south of France (Pau, Toulouse) regularly carry out research south of the border, and the region is also used as a field training school by several oil companies (notably Elf-Aquitaine and Total, both of which have research labs in the south of France). And finally, the Spanish peseta is still a bargain, compared to most other European currencies, not to mention the dollar.

Many interesting results of research in Spain have been presented at past European IAS meetings and particularly at the 1984 meeting in Marseille, but the 1985 meeting provided a splendid opportunity not only to hear papers about these rocks but also to examine them directly in field excursions. Over 500 geologists attended the meeting and participated in the 12 field excursions. The papers and posters are described in extended English abstracts (most of them 3-4 pages of text, with accompanying illustrations) and the field excursions are described in a single, well-printed and illustrated, 602-page Excursions Guidebook (edited by M.D. Mila and J. Rosell). Both of these volumes may be obtained from the IAS headquarters in Utrecht, Holland, and they should be in the library of every university with an interest in sedimentology or European geology.

Compared with other North American countries, Canada was well represented at both the 1984 and 1985 meetings: a half dozen Canadians attended each meeting. This was more than the number from the United States; but it seems unlikely that the secret can be kept much longer: European Regional IAS meetings now rival SEPM or any other North American meetings for scientific interest, and the side benefits (cultural and gastronomic) are without parallel in North America. With low trans-atlantic airfares, these meetings are not prohibitively expensive: the cost of attending the Lerida meeting and, say, one field excursion, would certainly have been less for most Canadians than the cost of attending the AAPG meeting and one field excursion in New Orleans.

No complete summary can be given of a meeting at which 140 oral papers and 60 posters were presented, but it is possible to give a few impressions. As the writers of this report are both interested mainly in clastics, we will not discuss the carbonate-evaporite papers, which made up slightly less than half of the program.

Major topics of interest to European sedimentologists include tidal deposits, fandeltas, turbidites and other deposits of sediment gravity flows, and the interaction of tectonics, sea-level change and sedimentation. The interest in tidal deposits has been stimulated by work on modern subtidal deposits in the Netherlands (see report on the North Sea IAS meeting (Middleton, 1980)) and the recognition of comparable deposits in the Eocene of northern Spain by groups from Utrecht (Field Trip 6) and Parma, Barcelona and Bordeaux (Field Trip 13). Other examples are known from England and Switzerland, but few comparable deposits have yet been described in North America. The basic criterion is the presence of sigmoidal cross-stratification and sigmoidal bars, as described in the Abstracts of the 1984, Marseille, Meeting, by E. Mutti, G.P. Allen and J. Rosell. The identification of such units as tidal becomes absolutely convincing where it can be demonstrated, as in the modern deposits of the Netherlands, in the Eocene Roda sandstone, and the Molasse of Switzerland, that there is a 14-day, semi-diurnal rhythmical variation in the thickness of individual tidal "bundles" (cross-beds deposited by the predominant part of the tidal flow (cf. Visser, 1980)). Hummocky cross-stratification, and other storm deposits, are well-known in Europe, but the current excitement is mainly over tidal rather than wave effects on shallow marine sediments.

A spectacular example of a fan delta was described from the Montserrat region near Barcelona (Field Trip 3) and other examples are known from southeast Spain, Italy, Norway, Spitzbergen, and elsewhere. The saga of submarine fans and the spectrum of sediment gravity flow facies continues: new work includes much activity on the Annot sandstone, which may soon lead to a revised interpretation of this classic turbidite unit, and a re-evaluation of the Hecho Group turbidite systems (Field Trip 12) which stresses the importance of sea level change and tectonism to explain up-section variations. For our Spanish and Italian colleagues, progradation of deep-sea fans is passé.

We close this report with a few reflections on the special problems of international meetings. The ground rules for such meetings are generally laid down by the host country, a practice which should certainly continue. But we believe it would be wise to strive for a greater transmission of experience from one meeting to another than generally seems to be the case. Problems in the presentation of papers arise from the shortage of high-quality, low-cost, convention facilities, and from the problems raised by the diversity of languages (and accents in English). It is clear that English is rapidly becoming accepted by Europeans and others as the language of science, but it seems to us unwise to insist that it be the *only* language of communication at international meetings (or of publication in international journals). It seemed anomalous at Lerida that Spanish was not officially approved as a language for the presentation of papers, though several papers were in fact presented in Spanish. Papers in an unfamiliar language can be made understandable to most of the audience by a judicious use of slides and particularly overhead transparencies prepared in another language. Overheads are so useful for this purpose that a special effort should be made to make them available at international meetings.

Attendance at a couple of European meetings can only fill a visitor from Canada with a great admiration for the European's ability to use languages other than his own: if more North American faculty and graduate students could experience such meetings perhaps the Ph.D. language requirement would not be the rapidly disappearing formality that it is today.

The 1986 European regional meeting will be in Poland, and the 1987 meeting will probably be in Tunisia.

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