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1 Resupply of mesopelagic dissolved iron controlled by particulate iron composition

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- 24 Dissolved iron supply controls half of ocean primary productivity. Resupply by
- 25 remineralization of sinking particles, and subsequent vertical mixing, largely sustains

this productivity. However, our understanding of the drivers of dissolved iron resupply, and their influence on its vertical distribution across the oceans, is still limited due to sparse observations. There is a lack of empirical evidence for what controls subsurface iron remineralization due to difficulties in studying mesopelagic biogeochemistry. Here, we present estimates of particulate transformations to dissolved iron, concurrent oxygen consumption and iron-binding ligand replenishment based on in situ mesopelagic experiments. Dissolved iron regeneration efficiencies (i.e., replenishment/oxygen consumption) were ten- to one hundred-fold higher in low-dust Subantarctic waters relative to higher-dust Mediterranean sites. Regeneration efficiencies are heavily influenced by particle composition. Their make-up dictates ligand release, controls scavenging, modulates ballasting, and may lead to differential remineralization of biogenic versus lithogenic iron. At high-dust sites these processes together increase the iron remineralization length-scale. Modelling reveals that in oceanic regions near deserts, enhanced lithogenic fluxes deepen the ferricline, which alter vertical patterns of dissolved iron replenishment, and set its redistribution at the global scale. Such wideranging regeneration efficiencies drive different vertical patterns in dissolved iron replenishment across oceanic provinces.

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Globally, the productivity of major phytoplankton groups, including diatoms and diazotrophs, is set by dissolved iron (DFe) supply¹. Twenty years of research has revealed diverse modes of DFe supply, from dust to hydrothermal vents, and their regional influences^{2,3}. Iron biogeochemistry is a rapidly evolving field, driving the development of global modelling initiatives⁴. However, iron cycling in the oceans' interior, a fundamental component of iron biogeochemistry^{5,6}, represents a major unknown, and critically is hindering model development⁷.

Deep winter mixing is a key vector in the annual resupply of upper ocean DFe stocks⁸. At depth, DFe is replenished via biotic (e.g., microbial solubilization) and abiotic (e.g., dissolution) transformations (also termed remineralization or replenishment here) of particulate Fe (PFe)⁷. To date, internal iron cycling has been investigated using three distinctive approaches, each of which has improved it's representation in biogeochemical models⁹⁻¹¹. Firstly, studies deploying trace metal-clean multi-depth sediment traps, in regions dominated by biogenic PFe, provided initial evidence of subsurface decoupling in PFe remineralization relative to phosphorus (P), carbon (C) or nitrogen¹²⁻¹⁵. Second, bacterially-mediated PFe remineralization – suppressed in sediment trap studies due to preservatives – was investigated in shipboard time-series incubations of resuspended mesopelagic particles in which the release of DFe and Fe-binding ligands resulted from particle degradation^{9,16}. Third, dust addition experiments within nearshore 15 m deep mesocosms demonstrated that lithogenic Fe, conventionally viewed as a major source of external Fe to surface waters^{1,2,17}, can either release (dissolution) or remove (scavenging) DFe depending on the initial biogeochemical conditions¹⁸⁻²⁰.

These three approaches to internal iron cycling targeted different processes, such as ligand and DFe release^{9,16}, patterns in PFe flux attenuation¹²⁻¹⁵, or scavenging and dissolution¹⁸⁻²⁰. However, it is difficult to compare the findings of these studies as they each sampled particle assemblages with differing contributions from biogenic and lithogenic iron. Hence, no study so far has examined the relative role of the different processes associated with biogenic versus lithogenic Fe on internal iron cycling. The hypothesis⁹ that the composition of particles will largely determine mesopelagic patterns of DFe replenishment remains untested due to difficulties in studying this stratum²¹ and in discriminating between biogenic and lithogenic

PFe within sinking particles⁷. Here, we overcame both limitations by targeting regions dominated by biogenic, a mix of biogenic/lithogenic, or lithogenic sinking PFe, and applying a novel *in situ* particle interceptor/incubator – RESPIRE²² – to iron biogeochemistry to concurrently elucidate the roles of biogenic and lithogenic PFe and their fate within the upper mesopelagic zone (~100-200 m depth).

Contrasting biogeochemical areas – Mesopelagic Fe cycling was studied using a trace metal-clean version of RESPIRE (TM-RESPIRE; Supplementary-Fig. 1) on a surface-tethered free-drifting mooring to non-intrusively intercept settling particles, and then immediately (i.e., at the end of the 1-2 d collection period) incubate them within this device at *in situ* pressure and temperature. RESPIRE²² provides rates of remineralization by particle-attached bacteria based on an oxygen consumption time-series (Fig. 1a-b). TM-RESPIRE provides the PFe/P/C sinking fluxes and associated DFe/P/C replenishment rates along with concurrent release of iron-binding ligands. In doing so, the TM-RESPIRE approach (along with subsequent analysis to estimate scavenging) combines all three previous approaches and permits the investigation *in situ* of the different processes driving the Fe remineralization and their interplay.

RESPIRE and TM-RESPIRE were deployed (vertically separated by <20 m; Methods) at 1 or 2 depths in the upper mesopelagic (110-200 m depth) during GEOTRACES process studies in the Subantarctic Zone (SAZ) and Mediterranean Sea (Supplementary-Table 1; Methods). These sites span wide-ranging dust deposition and productivity regimes (Fig. 1c). At SAZ, High-Nitrate-Low-Chlorophyll (HNLC) surface waters are characterized by low dust deposition and biologically-limiting DFe levels²⁴. In contrast, Fe-rich oligotrophic waters of the Eastern Mediterranean (ION site) encounter intense Saharan dust deposition event²³. In

addition, a site within the Algerian basin (Western Mediterranean, ALG site) was selected since it had intermediate characteristics between these end-members (Fig. 1c).

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These site-specific characteristics were reflected in the widely-differing particulate organic carbon (POC) and PFe sinking fluxes (Fig. 2; Supplementary-Table 1). SAZ had low POC fluxes (0.9-1.2 mmol m⁻² d⁻¹), but in contrast to the seasonal biological trends evident in Fig. 1c, ~4-fold higher POC fluxes were measured at ION and ALG relative to SAZ, suggesting that a higher proportion of productivity was exported at these higher dust sites. This trend was probably due to lithogenic ballasting which is often associated with a high proportion of the POC export in the Mediterranean Sea^{25,26}. PFe fluxes at the Mediterranean sites were also ~15-fold higher (8.0-12.5 µmol m⁻² d⁻¹ at 115 m depth) relative to the Subantarctic. This order-of-magnitude difference was driven by dust-derived lithogenic (Supplementary-Fig. 2b and f), a major constituent of Mediterranean sinking fluxes²⁶ but negligible at SAZ²⁷. Indeed, the Fe/C ratio of the sinking particles, a proxy of the biogenic:lithogenic PFe (Methods), ranged >30-fold (~460-13970 μmol/mol) confirming the SAZ site as the low lithogenic Fe end member (Fig. 3b-c). At ALG and ION, contrasting POC and PFe flux attenuation patterns were evident, with PFe increasing with depth while a 3-fold attenuation of POC flux occurred between 115-195 m depth (Fig. 2). Consequently, a decrease in the relative proportion of biogenic PFe occurred over this stratum, evident by increased Fe/C ratios (Fig. 3b-c).

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Mesopelagic bacterial remineralization – Oxygen-based remineralization rates were correlated linearly to the POC concentrations within the RESPIRE (i.e., the intercepted POC flux; Fig. 3a). The absence of significant relationship(s) with other flux characteristics (Supplementary-Fig. 2a-d), reveals that POC exerted a first-order control on remineralization

rates. To assess whether DFe replenishment is largely driven by microbial solubilization of biogenic Fe in settling particles, we investigated trends in Fe regeneration efficiency ($R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$). Both site-specific and water-column processes contributed to the wide range of $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ (Fig. 3b). High $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ efficiencies were observed at the SAZ site (148-421 µmol/mol) but were one-to two-orders of magnitude lower at both Mediterranean sites. These trends in $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ are consistent with vertical DFe stocks increasing with depth at SAZ, and in contrast decreasing at the Mediterranean sites (Supplementary-Fig. 3). Similarly, replenishment rates of P and C were highest at SAZ (Supplementary-Table 2). Although the present study offers a snapshot of the annual cycle of mesopelagic remineralization, our observations are consistent with high-latitude studies characterized as sites with relatively labile particles prone to microbially-mediated remineralization^{28,29}.

Despite the complex transformations that characterize the internal cycle of Fe, a strong inverse relationship is observed between $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ and the composition of the PFe flux estimated from the particulate Fe/C ratio (Fig. 3b). Critically, this inverse relationship reveals that $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ is not determined by the magnitude of the PFe flux but rather by its particle composition (Supplementary-Fig. 2g-h). Furthermore, this negative relationship strongly suggests that biogenic PFe is efficiently regenerated while the dissolution of lithogenic PFe (predominant at the Mediterranean sites; Fig. 2) takes place at much lower rates, corroborating 1D model simulations showing that biogenic and lithogenic PFe fluxes exhibit distinctly different vertical attenuation⁹.

Drivers of mesopelagic iron remineralization – To develop a better understanding of the drivers of mesopelagic iron biogeochemistry, $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ was converted into a Fe/C regeneration ratio ($R_{\text{Fe/C}}$; Methods) and compared with the Fe/C and biogenic Fe/C (Fe_{bio}/C)

stoichiometries of the intercepted particles (Fig. 3c). A positive linear relationship (i.e., similar biogenic flux and regenerative stoichiometries) should be observed if bacterial solubilization exerts a first-order control on DFe resupply. Here, the absence of such a relationship, along with systematically lower DFe replenishment rates relative to P and C (Supplementary-Table 2), confirm that DFe resupply results from a combination of biotic and abiotic transformations of sinking PFe^{15,17}. As highlighted in Fig. 3c, dissolution of lithogenic Fe (i.e., DFe release without O_2 consumption) increases R_{Fe/O_2} and hence $R_{Fe/C}$, whereas Fe scavenging (i.e., DFe removal without O_2 consumption) has the opposite effect. As expected for areas dominated by biogenic PFe such as the subantarctic, bacterial solubilization explained most of the $R_{Fe/C}$ relative to that of scavenging (Fig. 3c). The relatively large excess in post-incubation Fe-binding ligands (L*) observed at SAZ (Fig. 4), driven by bacterial degradation of biogenic-dominated sinking particles 9,16 , is consistent with these low scavenging rates pointing to complex interplay between processes associated with biogenic and lithogenic PFe.

In contrast, a pronounced mismatch was observed between $R_{Fe/C}$ and the biogenic flux stoichiometry at ALG at the deeper depth (195 m) and both depths at ION (Fig. 3c). Although this trend results from the dominance of particle scavenging over solubilization/dissolution (Fig. 4), the increase of this mismatch with depth may be explained by increasing scavenging and/or decreasing solubilization/dissolution. Saharan dust-derived Fe dissolution rates are reported to remain constant for several days in lab-studies³⁰, arguing for a relatively constant dissolution rate over this 115-195 m stratum that particles will sink through on this timescale^{7,9}. Although changes in the bacterial solubilization rate of PFe, over this depth range, cannot be directly assessed, the increasing proportion of C respired with depth (Supplementary-Table 2) is not consistent with decreased bacterial solubilization rate of PFe

(by assuming constant or increasing biogenic Fe/C ratio¹⁵). Thus, increased scavenging (Fig. 4), is the most likely mechanism to account for the trend in $R_{\text{Fe/C}}$ with depth.

Measurements of size and concentration of particles collected at the Mediterranean sites revealed decreasing cumulative particle volume concentrations with depth (Supplementary-Table 4), excluding these two parameters as possible drivers of increased scavenging rate. Therefore, the increase with depth in the relative proportion of lithogenic material being exported (Supplementary-Fig. 2b and f), and the resulting decrease in the release of Febinding ligands (Supplementary-Table 3), are most likely jointly responsible for this shift within the upper mesopelagic (115-195 m; ALG/ION) stratum in the balance between remineralization of biogenic PFe (DFe and ligand release), dissolution of lithogenic PFe (DFe release) and scavenging processes. These findings demonstrate the confounding role played by dust-derived lithogenic particles, conventionally viewed as a major pelagic DFe source^{2,5}, but shown here in the upper 100-200 m stratum to act primarily as a scavenging-modulated sink for DFe, and as a ballasting agent^{25,31,32}, each influencing where in the water column DFe is replenished.

Vertical resetting of mesopelagic biogeochemical conditions – Figure 4 summarises how the interplay of biogenic and lithogenic processes establish iron biogeochemical conditions at each site, and importantly reset conditions with depth. Biogenic PFe is the main source of DFe replenishment via bacterial solubilization, and this is also the case for the concurrent release of iron-binding ligands. By combining the observations from TM-RESPIRE with dissolution rate and scavenging ratios derived from prior dust-addition studies^{18,30}, it is evident that lithogenic PFe contributes ~10 times more to Fe scavenging relative to Fe dissolution in the upper mesopelagic (Fig. 4) supporting our observations in Fig. 3c. It is

important to note that high scavenging rates were reported even when L* was (slightly) positive (Fig. 3c and 4). It is probable that the higher the value of L* the less likelihood of pronounced scavenging, however, this trend, of scavenging when L* is positive, points to an unknown or unexplored mechanism (e.g., sorption of complexed Fe, colloidal aggregation). These contrasting biogenic and lithogenic roles point to the importance of the composition of the PFe flux in setting the Fe remineralization length-scale, with high PFe attenuation at the biogenic end-member site, and in contrast an increase in PFe sinking flux at the lithogenic end-member site.

Conceptually, depth-dependant changes in the relative proportion of biogenic vs. lithogenic PFe, driven by their different attenuation length-scales, result in an ongoing resetting of the biogeochemical conditions (e.g., L*, ballasting via changes to the specific gravity of the particle) while particles are settling in the water column (Fig. 4). The vertical trend observed at the ALG site – characterized by intermediate surface characteristics relative to the two other sites (Fig. 1c) – illustrates this dynamic situation. At 115 m depth, bacterial degradation of heterogenous (i.e., biogenic/lithogenic) particles resulted in a relatively high post-incubation L* (Fig. 4) and a low scavenging rate (Fig. 3c and 4). However, 80 m deeper, alteration of the composition of the PFe flux resulted in a decrease in post-incubation L* (Fig. 4; Supplementary-Table 3) and a marked increase in the scavenging rate (Fig. 3c and 4). A similar increase in scavenging with depth was observed at the ION site (Fig. 4). The dynamic interplay between biogenically- and lithogenically-modulated mechanisms explain the unexpected high spatial (and by analogy, temporal) and vertical variability in the PFe remineralization reported in this study, but not so far captured in biogeochemical models⁷.

We report a ~thousand-fold range in the DFe replenishment rate, while only modest changes in P and C remineralization rates occurred at all sites (Supplementary-Table 2). At the SAZ, the decoupling between Fe and C remineralization was relatively low and comparable to that reported for sinking diatoms in subtropical waters¹⁵. In contrast, a pronounced decoupling between Fe and both C and P remineralization was observed at ALG and ION. Critically, the lithogenic component of the sinking flux, by having virtually no influence on C and P remineralization, amplifies the decoupling between the Fe and both the C and P remineralization length-scales. This finding highlights that the multi-faceted effects of particle composition and dynamics on mesopelagic iron recycling needs to be considered in global biogeochemical models, to better explain the spatial variability in the decoupling of nutrient recycling.

Controls on the global iron distribution – The most straightforward route to examining the broader role of biogenic:lithogenic particle composition on iron distributions was to focus on the links to lithogenic iron, as dust supply is a well-established component of iron biogeochemical models⁴. The modelling simulations exploited the observed Fe/O₂ relationship with dust (Fig. 3b-c) to develop a simple first-order parameterization that captures observed links between Fe/O₂ and dust (Fig. 5a). Thus, an additional modulator of Fe remineralization, based on the atmospherically-derived lithogenic particle concentration, was added to the PISCES model parameterization, which enabled the sensitivity of iron biogeochemistry to the impact of lithogenic particles on mesopelagic DFe cycling to be addressed (Methods).

This simulation was employed to assess the wider implications of the multi-faceted roles of lithogenic Fe on ocean iron cycling. Projections of the upper mesopelagic (100-250 m) DFe

inventory, in this amended simulation, decreased by 23.7% relative to the control run (Fig. 5b) and as expected, this trend was especially marked in areas influenced by high dust deposition (i.e., North Atlantic, North Pacific, and Indian Oceans). In parallel, the DFe inventory between 1000-1250 m depth increased by 6.4% across the global ocean (Fig. 5b). Ultimately, the effect of lithogenic particles on PFe remineralization is to deepen the vertical profile of DFe and therefore drive the replenishment of DFe deeper in the water column (Fig. 5c). This significant redistribution of DFe over the upper 1000 m has important ramifications when considering that this depth stratum is heavily influenced by mode and intermediate waters lateral transport³³, which can then alter DFe supply to different ocean regions and the associated primary production (Supplementary-Fig. 4b). Therefore, the vertical redistribution of iron in regions dominated by settling lithogenic particles may be pronounced when changes in dust delivery to the ocean³⁴ may be accompanied by altered ocean circulation in the coming decades⁵.

Our findings suggest that predicted changes in dust inputs³⁴, by altering the biogenic:lithogenic composition of the sinking particle assemblage, may impact the replenishment of the subsurface DFe inventory and vertical supply of DFe not only in dusty regions, but across the global ocean. This alteration, across many oceanic provinces, of DFe resupply may in return have profound effects on the carbon sequestration efficiency of the biological pump³⁵. Our study enhances the wider understanding of the role of dust in altering particle composition which in turn influences the replenishment of the subsurface DFe inventory. This research points to the need for further studies on the internal cycling of trace metals if we are to fully understand how they are returned to surface waters via their biogeochemical cycles.

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Figure 1. In situ particle remineralization measurements at contrasting biogeochemical sites. a, Conceptual alteration of particles within the (TM-)RESPIRE. Sinking particles are intercepted for \sim 36h and regularly transferred into the inner chamber. Next, particles are immediately incubated for >24h at in situ pressure and temperature during which bacterial solubilization (i.e., diminished green particles) releases elements. See Methods for chemical assays, and corrections applied to obtain pre-incubation particulate concentrations. b, Typical oxygen optode time-series measured within RESPIRE. Bacterially-mediated remineralization is derived from ΔO_{2max} and Δt (i.e., the time-period where the slope of the linear regression is maximum). c, Weekly chlorophyll climatology from Modis-Aqua (green; 2003–2017; 1°x1°

resolution) and monthly climatology of simulated dust deposition (brown; 0.9°x1.25° resolution)²³ in the subantarctic (SAZ: upper-panel), and Mediterranean Sea (ALG: middle; ION: lower-panel). Grey vertical bars are (TM-)RESPIRE sampling periods.

Figure 2. Summary of downward particle fluxes and composition from (TM-)RESPIRE at SAZ (green), ALG (red) and ION (blue). Coloured solid circles denote POC fluxes (mmol m⁻² d⁻¹; averaged (TM-)RESPIRE fluxes) at each depth (left-hand downward arrow, corresponding to the centre of each circle). PFe fluxes (μmol m⁻² d⁻¹) are represented by coloured circle rims, and the partitioning of the PFe flux by the proportion of grey (lithogenic) and white (biogenic) within each circle (Methods). All fluxes were corrected for bacterial remineralization during the incubation (Methods). The circle size represents the flux magnitude (Supplementary-Table 1) and are enlarged 10-fold (inside the dashed rectangle) at the low-flux SAZ site. At SAZ, fluxes are the mean of two successive deployments (same depth).

Figure 3. Bacterial particle remineralization and iron regeneration efficiency at SAZ (green), ALG (red) and ION (blue). a, Remineralization versus POC concentrations (corrected for remineralization during the incubation) measured within RESPIRE at 115 m (triangles), 160 m (circles), and 195 m (diamonds). The best-fit of the linear model is plotted. b, Regeneration efficiencies ($R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$) versus the Fe/C molar ratios of intercepted particles (a proxy for PFe flux composition, higher ratios have more PFe_{litho}; Methods). The best-fit of the power law model is presented. c, Fe/C regeneration ratios ($R_{\text{Fe/C}}$), obtained from $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ and a C:O₂ conversion factor (Methods), versus the bulk (open symbols) and biogenic (Fe_{bio}/C; Methods; closed symbols) Fe/C molar ratios. To aid interpretation, Fe-specific processes (vertical arrows) in relation to $R_{\text{Fe/C}}$ and Fe_{bio}/C are displayed. The grey triangle illustrates the

increasing proportion of lithogenic PFe across sites and with depth. Error bars were derived using uncertainty-propagation laws (Methods). Fluxes were expressed as concentrations to permit cross-comparison between sites (different collection/incubation times employed).

Figure 4. Synthesis of key processes that together set the PFe remineralization length-scale expressed as a function of the relative proportion of sinking biogenic:lithogenic PFe. Sites and depths are assigned into each of three idealized categories: biogenic-dominated (SAZ), heterogeneous (biogenic/lithogenic; ALG 115 m), and lithogenic-dominated (ALG 195 m, ION 115-195 m) PFe fluxes. Note, how intercepted sinking particles at ALG shift categories with depth. For PFe attenuation, + and – denote the magnitude of the decrease or increase in the flux with depth, respectively. Note, the dynamic nature of concurrent ligand release and scavenging as particles settle, means that L*>0 may not impede scavenging (see Fig. 3c). Nevertheless, the higher the value of L* the less likelihood of pronounced scavenging.

Figure 5. Results of model simulations using lithogenic particle-dependent modulation of iron remineralization. **a**, Relationship between $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ and lithogenic PFe concentrations in offshore regions (>3000 m depth; 30°S-30°N) employing different lithogenic particle-dependent modulators of iron remineralization (kd; Methods). **b**, Change in DFe inventory vertically integrated over 100-250 m (upper-panel) and 1000-1250 m (lower-panel) depth strata relative to the control run. This simulation is based on a 500-year simulation employing a kd of 0.1 μg m⁻³ (i.e., which reproduced the inverse relationship observed between $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ and the lithogenic PFe concentration in panel **a**). **c**, Alteration of the global mean vertical DFe profile from a simulation employing a kd of 0.1 μg m⁻³ relative to the control run.

METHODS

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447 Site selection – Datasets were acquired during two GEOTRACES process studies, in the 448 Subantarctic Zone (SAZ) southwest of Tasmania, aboard the RV Investigator (March 2017; 449 SOTS project), and in the central (Ionian Sea, ION) and western (Algerian Basin, ALG) 450 Mediterranean Sea aboard the RV Pourquoi Pas? (May/June 2017; Peacetime project). Sites 451 were selected for their contrasting magnitude and composition of the downward particle flux. 452 In particular, ~30-fold higher lithogenic fluxes have been reported at ~1000 m depth at ALG $(12.7 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1})^{36}$ and ION $(13.9 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1})^{37}$, relative to SAZ $(0.4 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1})^{27}$. In contrast, 453 POC fluxes at ~1000 m depth are relatively similar at SAZ (1.1-1.4 g m⁻² yr⁻¹)³⁸, ALG (1.4-454 $1.7 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1})^{36}$, and ION $(0.7-0.9 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1})^{37}$. 455 456 The SAZ represents >50% of the areal extent of the ice-free Southern Ocean. This HNLC area has both low silicate and DFe concentrations year round²⁴ along with moderate 457 phytoplankton biomass³⁹. The low dust flux to this area originates primarily from Australia, 458 with the highest fluxes between October and March⁴⁰. POC (0.91-1.23 mmol m⁻² d⁻¹) and PFe 459 $(0.48-0.67 \text{ }\mu\text{mol }\text{m}^{-2}\text{ }\text{d}^{-1})$ fluxes measured in this study compared well with POC (3.34 ± 1.81) 460 mmol m⁻² d⁻¹)⁴¹ and PFe $(0.17 \pm 0.09 \mu mol m^{-2} d^{-1})^{42}$ fluxes measured at the same site and 461 462 depth, but in January/February. 463 The Mediterranean Sea has a west-to-east gradient of increasing oligotrophy, with a deficiency of phosphorus and nitrogen. Relatively weak winter convection⁴³ prevents efficient 464 465 uplift of nutrients to the surface waters. Deposition of Saharan desert dust, characterized by strong variability and dominated by extreme events⁴⁴, constitutes the main source of new 466 467 nutrients. ION is an ultra-oligotrophic area, while the ALG is one of the most productive areas in the Mediterranean Sea⁴⁵. At ALG/ION, POC fluxes measured at 195 m depth (1.14-468 1.67 mmol m⁻² d⁻¹) are consistent with previous measurements (0.4-3.0 mmol m⁻² d⁻¹, 1st/3rd 469 quartiles)⁴⁶, but ~4-fold higher than fluxes simultaneously measured at 250 m depth with a 470

PPS5 sediment trap (0.32-0.37 mmol m⁻² d⁻¹; N. Leblond, pers. comm.). Similarly, 2-fold higher PFe fluxes were collected at 195 m depth with the TM-RESPIRE (13.4-16.1 μmol m⁻² d⁻¹) compared to PFe fluxes at 250 m depth (PPS5; 4.5-8.5 μmol m⁻² d⁻¹; N. Leblond, pers. comm.).

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(TM-)RESPIRE – The conceptual view, functioning and potential artefacts of the RESPIRE particle interceptor are detailed in ref.²². TM-RESPIRE, a trace metal-clean version of RESPIRE, was developed to quantify PFe remineralization rates. TM-RESPIRE is constructed from polycarbonate (PC) except for the PVC indented rotating sphere (IRS), and has identical dimensions to RESPIRE (Supplementary-Fig. 1). The IRS excludes mesozooplankton from the incubation chamber, and delivers particles every ~10 min into this chamber. When the IRS is not rotating, the chamber beneath it is completely closed, avoiding any exchange with the upper part of TM-RESPIRE. Trace metal cleanliness and optode-based oxygen measurements are not reconcilable since plastic material essential for trace elements studies often have high oxygen permeability, and optodes require a metal window. To circumvent these issues, TM-RESPIRE was systematically deployed concurrently with the RESPIRE fitted with an Aanderaa 3830 oxygen optode (resolution < 1 µM; accuracy < 5 uM). Optodes were post-calibrated using the Winkler method, and oxygen time-series were corrected for pressure and salinity (Aanderaa operating manual). A pressure sensor (RBR, Canada) was deployed alongside RESPIRE to determine the deployment depth. The vertical distance between the TM-RESPIRE and RESPIRE (10-20 m; Supplementary-Table 1) was constrained by the ship's dimensions (i.e., distance above the waterline) and the necessity to keep a minimum distance between the two traps to avoid contamination through contact with the vessels' hull or propeller wash during deployment/recovery.

Remineralization rates measured within the RESPIRE were assumed to be comparable in the TM-RESPIRE. This assumption is supported by similar rates obtained at SAZ after two successive deployments several days apart $(5.1 \pm 0.2 \text{ mmol O}_2 \text{ m}^{-3} \text{ d}^{-1}; \text{ Fig. 3a})$, and by previous replicate RESPIRE measurements exhibiting small variability in the remineralization rates⁴⁷. In the present study, POC fluxes from RESPIRE and TM-RESPIRE (vertically separated by 10-20 m) varied on average by a factor of $1.8 \pm 0.6 \text{ (n} = 6$). Similar POC flux variabilities were observed at ALG/ION (250 m depth) and SAZ (150 m depth) across individual 12-24 h samples obtained by conventional sediment traps which varied on average by $1.6 \pm 0.8 \text{ (N. Leblond, pers. comm.)}$ and $3^{(41)}$, respectively. This relatively high variability in successive upper mesopelagic POC flux measurements suggests that the differences observed in the present study is driven largely by inherent variability in the POC flux in this stratum⁴⁸, rather than by the vertical spacing between the RESPIRE and TM-RESPIRE.

(TM-)RESPIRE procedure – RESPIRE were cleaned following ref.²². Before each voyage, TM-RESPIRE were soaked in 2% Neutracon (7d), 2 M HCl (reagent grade; 30d), 1.2 M HCl (TM grade; 7d), and copiously rinsed with Ultrapure water. Before deployment, each TM-RESPIRE was filled overnight with 0.12 M HCl (TM grade), rinsed with Ultrapure water and pre-conditioned with low-Fe filtered seawater to remove all trace of acid. Several hours before deployment, RESPIRE and TM-RESPIRE were filled with filtered seawater collected at the deployment depth. Clean polyethylene (PE) bags covering the traps were removed just prior to deployment. Upon recovery, RESPIRE and TM-RESPIRE were immediately covered with PE bags. TM-RESPIRE's were transferred into a class-100 clean laboratory. Seawater above the IRS was siphoned off using clean Teflon PFA tubing, and the incubation chamber was sampled via a Teflon PFA stopcock valve. The absence of mesozooplankton in the chamber was confirmed by visual inspection. Samples were split into equal fractions and

subsamples for DFe, Fe-binding ligands, and nutrients were filtered through acid-cleaned 0.2µm PC membranes. DFe samples were stored in low density PE (LDPE) bottles and acidified to pH 1.8 (quartz-distilled HCl). Fe-binding ligand samples were transferred to high density PE bottles (cleaned following **GEOTRACES** protocols, http://www.geotraces.org/science/science-highlight/intercalibration/222-sampling-andsample-handling-protocols-for-geotraces-cruises), double-bagged and stored at -20°C. 0.2-µm PC membranes were dried under a laminar flow hood and used for particulate trace element analysis. Subsamples for POC were obtained by filtration onto pre-combusted 13-mm QMA or GF/F filters. RESPIRE was sampled for POC and nutrients. All steps were performed within 2-3 hours of recovery of (TM-)RESPIRE. TM-RESPIRE procedural blank measurements were performed onboard during voyages. Blanks comprised incubating <0.2-µm seawater from 150 m depth within the TM-RESPIRE. After 72 h, the blank samples were subjected to identical processing protocols (i.e., subsampling, filtration) as for deployments. The average DFe blank (DFe_{blank}; 0.38 ± 0.03 nM) was used to correct DFe release (see Calculation of metrics). However, we acknowledge that deployment and recovery are two steps with high risk of contamination. Concentrations in trace elements other than Fe (such as Zn) measured within the TM-RESPIRE were used to assess possible contamination (not necessarily conspicuous with DFe) that could have occurred during deployment/recovery. This approach allowed us to reject one contaminated deployment (Subantarctic voyage, April 2016). Water column sampling - Samples were collected using a Titanium Rosette mounted with Teflon-coated 12 L Niskin (SAZ) or Go-Flo bottles (ALG/ION) deployed on a Kevlar cable. After recovery, bottles were transferred inside a class-100 clean laboratory container. Seawater samples were directly filtered from the bottles through acid-cleaned 0.2-um capsule

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filters (Sartorius Sartobran-P-capsule 0.45/0.2-μm). DFe samples were stored in LDPE bottles and acidified to pH 1.8 (quartz-distilled HCl), while nutrient samples were analyzed at sea. Suspended particulate trace elements were sampled using in situ pumps (McLane; acid-cleaned 1-μm PC membranes) at SAZ and pressurized Go-Flo bottles at ALG/ION (acid-cleaned 25-mm diameter Supor 0.45-μm polyethersulfone filters; 4.8 L on average) following GEOTRACES recommendations.

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Analytical methods – DFe concentrations were measured by flow injection with online preconcentration and chemiluminescence detection^{3,49}. An internal acidified seawater standard was measured daily to control the stability of the analysis. During the analysis of TM-RESPIRE and water-column samples, the detection limit was 15 pM and the accuracy of the method was controlled by analyzing the SAFe S (0.086 \pm 0.010 nmol/kg (n = 3); consensus value 0.093 ± 0.008 nmol/kg), SAFe D1 (0.64 ± 0.13 nmol/kg (n = 19); consensus value $0.67 \pm 0.04 \text{ nmol/kg}$), GD ($1.04 \pm 0.10 \text{ nmol/kg}$ (n = 10); consensus value 1.00 ± 0.10 nmol/kg), and GSC (1.37 \pm 0.16 nmol/kg (n = 4); consensus value not available) seawater standards. Dissolved nutrients were analysed onboard with a segmented flow analyser (AAIII HR Seal Analytical; detection limits were 0.02 μ M for P, 0.05 μ M for N, and 0.08 μ M for Si) ^{50,51}. Iron organic speciation measurements were performed using CLE-CSV with 2-(2-Thiazolvlazo)-p-cresol (TAC) as the competing ligand⁵². Reagent blanks for Fe were undetectable and the detection limit for ligand concentrations was calculated as 3 times the standard deviation of the concentrations (ranging from 0.09-0.99 nM and always lower than the concentration). Particulate trace element samples were digested (10% HF/50% HNO₃ (v/v)) following the protocol described in the "GEOTRACES Cookbook" and ref.⁵³. Procedural blanks consisted of unused acid-cleaned filters. Analyses were performed on a high resolution ICP-MS (Element XR, Thermo-Fisher Scientific). The accuracy of the measurements was established using a range of Certified Reference Materials, including MESS-4. The recoveries in these reference materials were 80-130% for iron.

POC samples were acidified overnight with 2 M HCl to remove inorganic C, and then dried at 60°C for 2 d. Samples were analyzed on a CHN analyser (Thermo Finnigan EA 1112 Series Flash Elemental Analyser).

Calculations of metrics – Mesozooplankton, free-living and particle-attached heterotrophic bacteria drive mesopelagic remineralization⁵⁴. By excluding mesozooplankton (using the IRS) and boosting particle-attached bacterial abundances relative to free-living bacteria (through particle interception), the measured remineralization rates were dominated by the particle-attached microbial assemblage²².

Particle remineralization was calculated as follows: the pre-incubation O₂ concentration (Fig. 1b) was subtracted from each data-point obtained during the incubation, and the sign

(Fig. 1b) was subtracted from each data-point obtained during the incubation, and the sign reversed. The slope of the linear regression between this remineralization signature and the time elapsed corresponds to the particle remineralization rate. Note that the decrease in O₂ was not systematically linear, and a plateau can be attained toward the end of the incubation (Fig. 1b). The explanation for this trend remains unclear, but may be related to particle containment, a shift in the microbial community⁵⁵, and/or altered organic matter lability²². When such a plateau was evident, remineralization was calculated over the time period where the decrease in O₂ was maximum (Fig. 1b). Since remineralization rates were assumed to be comparable within the RESPIRE and TM-RESPIRE, the error in remineralization rates was calculated by propagating the uncertainty from the slope of the linear regression and the relative standard deviation of the POC fluxes collected by the RESPIRE/TM-RESPIRE. The

- error in ΔO_2 (see below) was calculated in the same way.
- The iron regeneration efficiency ($R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$; μ mol/mol; Fig. 3b) was calculated as: $R_{\text{Fe/O2}} =$
- 598 $\Delta DFe / \Delta O_2$, where $\Delta DFe = DFe_{post-incubation} (DFe_{initial} + DFe_{blank})$, and $\Delta O_2 = O_{2 pre-incubation} (DFe_{blank})$
- 599 O_{2 post-incubation} (initial, pre-incubation, and post-incubation terms are illustrated in Fig. 1a). The
- error in $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ was calculated by propagating the uncertainties from ΔDFe and ΔO_2 .
- The Fe/C regeneration ratio ($R_{\text{Fe/C}}$; µmol/mol; Fig. 3c) was calculated as: $R_{\text{Fe/C}} = R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ /
- 602 0.69, where 0.69 is a C:O₂ conversion factor (i.e., 117/170)⁵⁶. Note that different conversion
- factors can be used to convert the oxygen-based remineralization rate to carbon (discussed in
- detail in ref.²²).
- Particulate fluxes were expressed as concentrations to permit cross-comparison between
- sites in which different collection times were employed (Supplementary-Table 1). Pre-
- incubation particulate Fe, P, and OC concentrations correspond to the sum of the post-
- incubation particulate concentration, plus the concentration of the respective element released
- into the dissolved phase (i.e., ΔDFe , ΔPO_4 (= $PO_{4 post-incubation}$ $PO_{4 initial}$), and ΔOC (= $\Delta O_2 \times$
- 610 0.69), respectively).
- The replenishment rate of Fe (% d⁻¹; Supplementary-Table 2) was calculated as: (ΔDFe /
- PFe_{pre-incubation}) \times 100 / Δt , (Δt corresponds to the incubation time). The error was calculated
- by propagating the uncertainties from ΔDFe and PFe_{pre-incubation}. P and C replenishment rates
- were calculated in the same way.
- Quantification of the lithogenic and biogenic fractions of sinking PFe has large
- uncertainties. Twining et al. 15 reported a 2.3 and 4.4-fold increase in the Fe/P and Fe/S (proxy
- of Fe/C) ratios of sinking diatom by 200 m depth, respectively, highlighting difficulties in
- estimating the biogenic fraction of sinking PFe from surface cell quotas. An alternative
- approach is to estimate the lithogenic fraction of PFe by using the Fe/Al ratio. However, the
- present study encompasses different regions where lithogenic material has different Fe and Al

compositions. In addition, dissolution/scavenging of Fe and Al differ during particle settling⁶⁰, altering their pre-depositional Fe/Al ratio. Thus, lithogenic PFe estimated at ALG/ION using a Saharan dust end-member Fe/Al ratio⁵⁹ is systematically higher than total PFe. In contrast, suspended particles collected at ALG/ION had a Fe/Al ratio comparable to the crustal Fe/Al ratio⁵⁸ (Supplementary-Fig. 3). Thus, the crustal Fe/Al molar ratio was used to estimate biogenic and lithogenic PFe components in Fig. 2 and 3c. For the remainder of the study, the PFe/POC molar ratio (hereafter termed Fe/C) of the intercepted particles (Fig. 3) was used as a proxy for the composition of the PFe flux. In using this approach, we consider POC and PFe as proxies of biogenic (algal/detrital) and lithogenic PFe, respectively⁹. This ratio increases when the relative proportion of lithogenic Fe increases, and vice-versa. We acknowledge that the biogenic Fe/C ratio differs between Fe-limited and Fe-replete areas, however, we believe that this approach is relatively robust when considering such contrasting sites.

Ancillary biogeochemical information – Surface chlorophyll-a was derived from MODIS-

Aqua. The 4 km resolution eight-day composite images were averaged over the 2003-2017

period (due to extensive subantarctic cloud-cover) for a 1°x1° box centered at each site. At

SAZ, MODIS chlorophyll-a concentrations were corrected using an improved regional

algorithm⁶¹.

Monthly estimates of total (wet + dry) dust deposition annually averaged were obtained using

an atmospheric model (CAM4-BAM, case C4fn)²³ run for 30 years, of which we considered

the last 10 years, with a spatial resolution of 0.9°x1.25°.

The PISCES biogeochemical model experiment – $PISCES^{62,63}$ is a relatively complex

general ocean circulation and biogeochemistry model with two PFe pools (large and small)

characterized by different sinking rates, and two analogous POC size classes sourced from the 'mortality' of organic Fe and C pools. Uncomplexed DFe is subjected to scavenging, while colloidal iron undergoes coagulation losses, both of which augment two PFe size classes. Scavenging rate depends on the particle abundance, including the lithogenic PFe pool (based on the dust input at the surface and a simple sinking speed). Subsurface dissolution of lithogenic PFe occurs with a ~500 m length-scale, a sinking rate of 2 m d⁻¹, and a reduced solubility. PFe remineralization takes into account changes in particle size and lability due to bacterial solubilization via reactivity continuum⁶⁴. We conducted a range of different simulations with PISCES aimed at addressing the firstorder influence of lithogenic particles (i.e., dust) on $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$. Building this parameterization on dust has many advantages. Indeed, biogenic Fe is a complex pool (detritus/algal) characterized by different cell quotas⁶⁵, while dust supply is a well-established component⁴ that does not require explicit modelling of extra pools and can be incorporated more widely into models. In the model, $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ is derived by dividing the annually integrated remineralization flux of iron from PFe by the O₂ consumption during remineralization at each model grid cell. We conducted a set of sensitivity experiments where PFe remineralization was modulated by the lithogenic particle concentration at each model grid cell. This modulator (M, an unitless quantity) is a function of the lithogenic particle concentration: M =1 – [lithogenic particles / (lithogenic particles + kd)]. M has a range of different sensitivities (kd = 0.1, 1, 5 and 10 μ g m⁻³). To avoid double accounting, Fe scavenging by dust included in PISCES⁶² was switched off. We then ran for 500 years experiments as well as a 500-year model run in which PFe remineralization was left unchanged (Supplementary-Fig. 4a). We then compared the range of $R_{\text{Fe/O2}}$ outputs from each experiment with the local lithogenic PFe concentrations (Fig. 5a), which showed that $kd = 0.1 \mu g m^{-3}$ was the most realistic as it reproduced the inverse relationship observed between R_{Fe/O2} and the lithogenic PFe

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concentrations (Fig. 3b). To minimize the impact of high iron inputs (e.g., near shelves), only offshore regions (>3000 m depth; 30°S-30°N) were considered. Finally, the impact of this new parameterization on DFe inventories, vertical DFe distribution, and surface iron-driven processes was investigated.

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Exploration of caveats – Our approach comes with some caveats, most of which were identified and discussed in ref.²². Here, we discuss potential biases that may have affected Fe cycling within the TM-RESPIRE. Specifically, we acknowledge that the pre-concentration of particles in a 1.6 L chamber, along with the widely-differing downward fluxes (Fig. 2), may have influenced the DFe replenishment rates. The potential effects of this experimental bias, related to the need of concentrating particles and to the contrasting sites, were tested via in vitro incubation experiments (Supplementary-Fig. 5). The rationale, method, and conclusions are described in the Figure caption. Results from these experiments suggest that during the <48 h incubation within the TM-RESPIRE, the limited loss of DFe by adsorption onto walls/particles was not significantly influenced by the particle concentration, and by the surface-area-to-volume (SA:Vol) ratio of the incubation bottles (0.31-0.59 cm⁻¹). This later finding allows us to conclude that a different SA: Vol ratio of the TM-RESPIRE incubation chamber (0.57 cm⁻¹) would not have changed our conclusions. In our study, the concomitant decreases in DFe replenishment and particle volume concentrations observed with depth at ALG/ION (Supplementary-Tables 2 and 4) do not support a particle concentration effect on the replenishment of Fe. This experimental bias, that would act to lower DFe concentration, has mainly been observed during dust dissolution experiments⁶⁶. This effect is likely offset in incubations with mixed biogenic/lithogenic particles (along with the associated bacterial communities) by the concurrent release of Febinding ligands (which increased on average by a factor >2 in our study; Supplementary-Table 3). Consistent with the conclusions of this study, the particle composition and/or bacterial communities, rather than experimental parameters, appear to be the primary control of the DFe replenishment rate in these *in vitro* experiments.

Data availability – Modis Chl-a concentrations (ALG and ION sites) were obtained with the Giovanni online data system, developed and maintained by the NASA GES DISC. MODIS Chl-a concentrations corrected using an improved regional algorithm for the Southern Ocean (SAZ site) are publicly available via the Australian Integrated Marine Observing System (IMOS) Ocean Portal (www.imos.org.au). Following publication, the dataset generated and analysed during the current study (mostly available in the Supplementary Information section) will be made available (i.e. open access) through the IMAS/UTAS data portal (http://www.imas.utas.edu.au/data).

Code availability – The NEMO-PISCES model we use in this work is freely available (http://www.nemo-ocean.eu/) under the CeCILL free software licence (http://www.cecill.info/index.en.html). We used a modified version of the PISCES biogeochemical model. These modifications concern the representation of the particulate iron remineralization and this is not yet present in the freely available NEMO release but will be provided upon contacting A.T.

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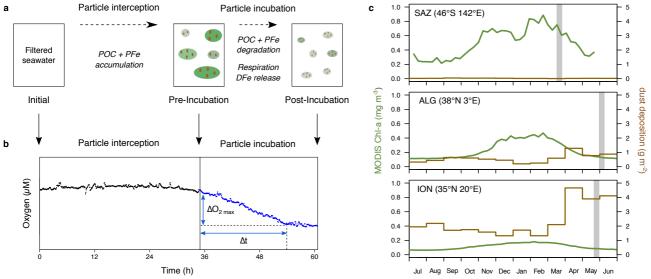
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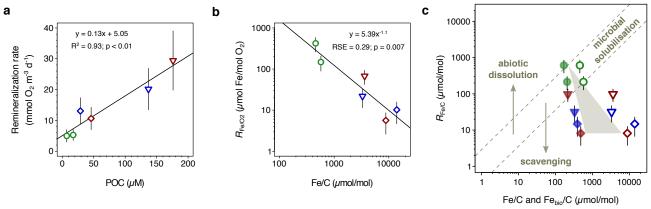
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0.43

Biogenic

Mixed

0.25

22-10 2-9%

0.18

Lithogenic

ION

0 21-0 12

0.3% 5% scavenging (3) (% of ΔDFe) PFe attenuation (4) (+++)(-)

Post-incubation L* (2)

Potential lithogenic

170% 30-130% (- - -)

Estimates based on a dissolution rate of 0.018 nmol mg⁻¹ dust d⁻¹⁽³⁰⁾ (2) L* corresponds to the excess of ligands over DFe after the incubation phase (3) Estimates based on a scavenging ratio of DFe on dust of 0.37 nmol mg⁻¹⁽¹⁸⁾ (4) At SAZ, estimate based on the balance between DFe/L release and scavenging

