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1 **Combined U-Pb isotopic signatures of U mill tailings from France and**
2 **Gabon: A new potential tracer to assess their fingerprint on the**
3 **environment.**

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10 **Abstract**

11 Uranium milling activities have produced high volumes of long-lived radioactive processed
12 wastes stored worldwide in near surface environment. The aim of this study is to highlight
13 relevant tracers that can be used for environmental impact assessment studies involving U
14 mill tailings. A multi-tracer study involving elemental content, ^{238}U decay products
15 disequilibria and stable Pb isotopes was performed in different types of U mill tailings
16 (alkaline, acid, neutralized acid) collected from five Tailings Management Facilities in
17 France (Le Bosc, L'Ecarpière, Le Bernardan, and Bellezane) and Gabon (Mounana). Our
18 results showed that U and Pb concentrations range between 30-594 ppm and 66-805 ppm,
19 respectively. These tailings have a strong disequilibrium of ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) and ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$)
20 activity ratios (1.27-1.87 and 6-65, respectively), as well as higher $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ (1.86-7.15) and
21 lower $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ (0.22-2.39) compared to geochemical background (($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) and
22 ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) equal to unity; $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb} = 1.20$; $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb} = 2.47$). In situ analyses (SEM,
23 SIMS) showed that Pb-bearing phases with high $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ are related to remaining U-rich
24 phases, S-rich phases and potentially clay minerals or oxyhydroxides. We suggest that the
25 combination of the $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ with the ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) ratio is a relevant tool for the
26 fingerprinting of the impact of U milling activities on the environment.

27

28 **Keywords**

29 Radioactive waste; Geochemistry; ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$); $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$; Environmental science

30

31 **1 Introduction**

32 U mill tailings are the radioactive residual waste of the mining and milling of U-ores (crushed
33 and leached ore residue), which is the first step of the nuclear fuel cycle (Landa, 1980, Landa,
34 1999, IAEA, 2004; Landa, 2004, Abdelouas, 2006, Campbell et al., 2015). Uranium mining
35 and milling activities involved around 250 sites in France from 1948 to 2001, and produced
36 50 Mt of tailings resulting from the chemical extraction of U from the U-ore, as well as 170
37 Mt of mine waste rock (database: Programme MIMAUSA, 2019). These tailings are now
38 disposed into 17 Tailing Management Facilities (TMFs) spread over 16 sites in France (e.g.
39 L'Ecarpière, Jouac, Bellezane, Le Bosc; Fig. 1). In Gabon, uranium mining and/or milling
40 activities involved around 5 sites from 1961-1999 and produced 7.5 Mt of tailings from
41 Mounana milling plants (Loueyit et al., 2000). The tailings were disposed into the Mounana
42 Tailing Management Facility.

43 Milling consists of the mechanical and the chemical processes allowing the concentration of
44 the uranium fraction from the ore (Landa, 1999). Ores that contain limestones contents
45 greater than 15% are usually leached with alkaline solutions using sodium carbonate-
46 bicarbonate, while most other ores are leached using sulfuric acid. The uranium extracted by
47 the leaching solution is concentrated by solvent extraction or solid-phase extraction using
48 ion-exchange resins and subsequent precipitation (with ammonia, magnesium oxide,
49 hydrogen peroxide) of a uranium ore concentrate (~85 wt. % of U). The leached ore residues
50 (i.e. tailings) are transferred into a waste-retention pond, or in a mine-out underground-
51 working. Sometimes, the mill waste solution is also added to the tailings in the disposal. The
52 waste slurries (barren solid and liquid) at acid leach mills are sometimes neutralized (usually
53 with lime or calcium carbonate) prior to discharge in order to precipitate contaminants (e.g.
54 calcium sulfate, Fe-oxyhydroxide) (Nirdosh, 1987; Somot et al., 2002; Ballini et al., 2020;

55 Chautard et al., 2020). The water released from tailings impoundments is typically treated
56 with Ba chloride to allow the precipitation of radiobarite (Ra-rich barite) (Ring, 1982;
57 Snodgrass, 1990).

58 U-ores are enriched in U decay products, mainly U-238 series that include ^{234}U (half-life:
59 0.246 Ma), ^{230}Th (half-life: 75.4 ka), ^{226}Ra (half-life: 1602 a), ^{210}Pb (half-life: 22.3 a). After
60 the chemical extraction of U (~90%) from U-ores, ^{238}U decay products and one part of initial
61 U remain in the U mill tailings. Therefore, U mill tailings hold ~ 85% of the radioactivity of
62 the initial U-ore (Landa, 2004), and thus provisions are taken with regard to their potential
63 radiological impact. Uranium and its radioactive decay products can be transferred from U-
64 mine sites or TMFs in the environment via mine drainage, mine water runoff, or erosion even
65 decades after cessation of the mining activities (Abdelouas, 2006; IAEA, 2004; Cuvier et al.,
66 2016; Stetten et al., 2018; Mangeret et al., 2020; Gourgiotis et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2020).
67 However, weathering and erosion of local bedrock, such as U-rich granite, could also allow
68 the transfer of a significant amount of U and its radioactive products in the environment
69 (Bernhard, 2005; Owen and Otton, 1995; Regenspurg et al., 2010; Lefebvre et al., 2021a,
70 Lefebvre et al., 2021b). Fingerprinting the potential sources of radioactive elements in the
71 vicinity of TMF would help for the management of U mine tailings as well as contaminated
72 sediments or soils.

73 Various tracers, such as elemental content, rare earth elements, and also isotopes (e.g. U, Th,
74 Pb) have been previously suggested in order to fingerprint the origin of U-rich material, such
75 as U-ores and U ore concentrate (Keegan et al., 2008; Varga et al., 2009; Svedkauskaite-
76 Legore et al., 2007; Svedkauskaite-Legore et al., 2008; Keegan et al., 2012; Spano et al.,
77 2017a, b; Corcoran et al., 2019). Geochemical studies of U mill tailings were mainly focused
78 on their elemental content, U speciation and U-series disequilibrium (Somot, 1997; Somot et
79 al., 1997a; Somot et al., 1997b; Somot et al., 2000; Somot et al., 2002; Pagel and Somot

80 2002; Othmane et al., 2014; Déjeant et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2017; Robertson et al., 2019;
81 Ballini et al., 2020, Chautard et al., 2020) and only one study focused on stable Pb isotopic
82 signatures of bulk U mill tailing samples (Santos and Tassinari, 2012). Two others studies
83 provided Pb isotopic values for only one bulk U mill tailing that was used as an endmember
84 in environmental studies (Dang et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018), while Pb isotopic values from
85 particles retained on filters related to the filtration process of waters collected in boreholes in
86 U mill tailing dam were also reported (Gulson et al., 1989).

87 Natural uranium is a mixture of three radioactive isotopes: ^{238}U (99.274%; half-life: 4.468
88 Ga), ^{235}U (0.720%; half-life: 0.704 Ga) and ^{234}U (0.005% half-life: 0.246 Ma). ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$)
89 activity ratios are widely used in geosciences and environmental sciences as a powerful
90 process tracers, as this ratio can show a disequilibrium during fluid-rock interaction due to
91 the so-called alpha recoil effect: (1) direct ejection of the α -recoiled ^{234}Th (which decay into
92 ^{234}U) from the solid phase into the solution (Kigoshi, 1971) and (2) damages to the crystal
93 lattice and/or (3) the oxidation of $^{234}\text{U}(\text{IV})$ into $^{234}\text{U}(\text{VI})$ during the alpha decay results in the
94 preferential release of the ^{234}U into solution (e.g. Chabaux et al., 2003). Thus, it comes that
95 the waters are generally characterized with ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) > 1, while the recently weathered
96 product usually show ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) < 1 (e.g. Osmond and Cowart, 1976; Dequincey et al.,
97 2002; Chabaux et al., 2003; Dosseto et al., 2008). The ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) ratios measured in
98 worldwide waters (e.g. river, seawater, groundwater) range from 0.5 to 40 (Osmond and
99 Cowart, 1976; Gilkeson and Cowart, 1987; Osmond and Ivanovitch, 1992), and ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$)
100 ratios measured in altered product (e.g. soil, laterite) range from 0.5-1.8 (Suhr et al., 2018 and
101 references therein). Waters that interacted with U mill tailings could exhibit high U content,
102 and ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) close to unity, as shown by studies of groundwater samples in the vicinity of
103 U mill tailing disposals (Zielinsky et al., 1997; Kamp and Morrison, 2014), while weathered
104 profiles developed on U mineralized area show ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) that range from 0.89 to 1.20

105 (Shirvington et al., 1983; Lawson et al., 1986; Ahamdach et al., 1991). The average
106 ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratio value recorded in worldwide U-ores of various deposit types is
107 1.00 ± 0.10 (2σ , $n=181$; Richter et al., 1999; Uvarova et al., 2014; Keatley et al., 2021).

108 ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) and ($^{226}\text{Ra}/^{230}\text{Th}$) activity ratio are widely used in geosciences and
109 environmental sciences as powerful process tracers, as U-Th-Ra fractionate during fluid-rock
110 interaction, U and Ra being preferentially mobilized into the fluid phase compared to Th
111 (Chabaux et al., 2003). For instance, the ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) tracer allow to fingerprint the addition
112 (low $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) or loss (high $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) of U in a weathering profile. The ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$)
113 activity ratio was used to highlight the U mobility (Mangeret et al., 2018; Gourgiotis et al.,
114 2020) in wetlands mainly impacted by particle transport from U mining activities. For U mill
115 tailings, the ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratio was also used to quantify the extraction yield of
116 uranium (Somot, 1997), while the ($^{226}\text{Ra}/^{230}\text{Th}$) was used to fingerprint the mobility either of
117 ^{226}Ra or of ^{230}Th in the disposals (Somot et al., 2002; Pagel and Somot, 2002).

118 ($^{210}\text{Pb}/^{226}\text{Ra}$) activity ratio is also used in geosciences as a geochronometer for processes
119 occurring within the time scale of a century, as the selective high mobility of gaseous ^{222}Rn
120 radionuclide (which is the decay product of ^{226}Ra) can create a disequilibrium between ^{226}Ra
121 and ^{210}Pb (Reagan et al., 2017; Li et al., 2021). ^{226}Ra and ^{210}Pb activities were also used in
122 environmental sciences as tracer of the impact of U milling activities on the environment
123 (Strok and Smodis, 2013a; Strok and Smodis, 2013b; Sauvé et al., 2021).

124 Radiogenic lead isotopes ^{206}Pb , ^{207}Pb , ^{208}Pb are respectively the stable end-products of the
125 decay chains of ^{238}U (99.27%; half-life: 4.47 Ga), ^{235}U (0.72%; half-life: 0.70 Ga) and ^{232}Th
126 (99.98%, half-life: 14.1 Ga) radionuclides, while the stable ^{204}Pb isotope is only primordial.
127 These isotopes are widely used in geosciences and environmental sciences as a powerful
128 source tracers, as they do not fractionate significantly during geological processes or

129 chemical processes occurring in industrial plants. Moreover, radiogenic lead isotopes have
130 commonly been used for U-ore exploration purposes (Dickson et al., 1985, Dickson et al.,
131 1987; Quirt and Benedicto, 2020) and also in a few studies related to isotope fingerprinting of
132 the dissemination U mine material in the environment (France: Cuvier et al., 2016;
133 Gourgiotis et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2020; Worldwide: Bollhöfer et al., 1989; Coetzee et al.,
134 2006; Santos and Tassinari, 2012; Dang et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018), as U-rich minerals (e.g.
135 ~88 wt. % of U in uraninite) are highly enriched in both uraniumogenic ^{206}Pb (the most
136 abundant) and ^{207}Pb (the second most abundant) compared to ^{208}Pb and ^{204}Pb isotopes.
137 Therefore, U-ore have a specific Pb isotopic signature compared to Pb-bearing rocks (e.g.
138 peridotite, basalt, granite, Pb-ore; Stacey and Krammers, 1976) or leaded materials coming
139 from anthropogenic activities (e.g. gasoline or industrial emissions; Monna et al., 1997) on
140 Earth's (^{204}Pb : 1.0-1.7%; ^{206}Pb : 20.8-27.5%; ^{207}Pb : 17.6-23.7%; ^{208}Pb : 51.3-56.2%; Berglund
141 and Wieser, 2011). This specific isotope signature depends on the U-ore content in U and Th,
142 the age of mineralization and the rate of mixture between the radiogenic (Pb from the U-ore)
143 and common Pb.

144 The main objective of this study was to explore if ^{238}U -series disequilibrium and stable lead
145 isotopes can be used as potential relevant tracers to highlight the uranium mine and mill
146 tailings impact on the environment. Actually, there is no or little information in the literature
147 on this topic. In order to answer this question, we analyzed in this study the elemental
148 content, ^{238}U -chain disequilibrium (bulk sample analysis) and Pb isotopes composition (bulk
149 sample and in situ micro-analysis) of different types of U mill tailings collected in five
150 Tailings Management Facilities: alkaline mill tailings (Le Bosc, France), neutralized acid mill
151 tailings (L'Ecarpière, Le Bernardan, Bellezane, France), and acid mill tailings (Mounana,
152 Gabon). The ^{238}U -chain disequilibrium was studied first in order to determine if there is a
153 specific signature associated to the U mill tailings. Secondly, particular attention was paid to

154 stable Pb isotopes to figure out if the specific Pb isotope signature of the U-ores (hereafter
155 radiogenic Pb) is preserved in the U mill tailings. Moreover, a first insight into Pb-bearing
156 phases in U mill tailings was carried out using SEM and SIMS in-situ techniques in order to
157 determine whether the Pb from the U-ore is still associated with the remaining primary U-
158 bearing phases or with post-treatment neo-formed mineral phases. This work bring new
159 insights into the fingerprinting of the impact of U milling activities in the environment.

160

161 **2 Materials and Methods**

162 **2.1 Site description and sampling**

163 The U mill tailings of this study were collected between 1985 and 2011 by the IRSN (French
164 Institut of Protection and Nuclear Safety (IPSN) before 2002) and are now stored at IRSN-
165 Fontenay-aux-Roses (Table 1). This set of samples cover various types of U mill tailings
166 treatments from different types of U-ores of various ages: four neutralized acid U mill tailings
167 derived from Paleo-Mesozoic granite-related ores from France (ECA-85, JOU-97, JOU-DT,
168 BZN samples), two alkaline U mill tailings derived from Mesozoic sandstone-related ores
169 from France (LOD-FS, LOD-MA samples) and one acid U mill tailing derived from
170 Proterozoic sandstone-related ores from Gabon. The samples have been stored in special
171 ventilated cabinets at room temperature (20 °C) and have not been conserved under anoxic
172 conditions nor under specific sealing conditions preventing ^{222}Rn emanation. The precise
173 sampling area and method in the respective TMFs is not known.

174 The alkaline U mill tailing samples are from Le Bosc (France). U-mineralization are tectonic-
175 lithologic sandstone-related deposits and are located in the Lodève basin. U-ores (0.28 wt. %
176 on average) were mainly mined in two deposits (Mas Lavayre and Mas d'Alary). U

177 mineralization formed during two events 183-172 Ma and 103-113 Ma ago and consist
178 mainly of pitchblende and U associated with organic matter. The extraction of U from U-ore,
179 using an alkaline chemical treatment with sodium carbonate and bicarbonate solution due to
180 their high carbonate content, generated 4.1 Mt of dynamic mill tailings at the SIMO (Société
181 Industrielle des Minerais de l'Ouest) Le Bosc mill between 1950 and 1997.

182 The acid U mill tailing sample is from Mounana Tailing Management Facility (Gabon
183 sample). U mineralizations are tectonic-lithologic sandstone-related deposits and are located
184 in the Franceville Basin. U-ores (0.37 wt. % on average) were mainly mined in five deposits
185 (Mounana, Oklo, Okelobondo, Boyindzi, Mikouloungou). U-mineralizations formed 2.05 Ga
186 ago (Gancarz, 1978) and consist mainly of pitchblende-uraninite associated with organic
187 matter (Pagel and Somot, 2002; Lecomte et al., 2020). The extraction of U from U-ore using
188 a chemical treatment with sulfuric acid generated 7.5 Mt of mill tailings between 1961 and
189 1999 by the COMUF (Compagnie des Mines d'Uranium de Franceville).

190 The neutralized acid mill tailing samples (chemical treatment with sulfuric acid at 65°C and
191 neutralization of barren residues and solutions with CaCO₃ and/or lime) are from l'Ecarpière,
192 Le Bernardan and Bellezane Tailings Management Facilities. The related U-mineralizations
193 are granite-related deposits.

194 U-ores (0.10 wt. % on average) milled at the SIMO Ecarpière plant were mainly mined in
195 three deposits (Ecarpière, Commanderie, Chardon) located in the Mortagne granitic massif
196 and its surrounding metamorphic series. U mineralization formed 322-308 and 286-264 Ma
197 ago and consists mainly of pitchblende-uraninite (Cathelineau et al., 1990; Horie and
198 Hidaka, 2019). The extraction of U-ore generated 11.4 Mt of tailings (7.6 from dynamic
199 leaching and 3.8 from heap leaching) from 1952-1990.

200 Mill tailings disposed at the Bernardan open pit were generated at the SMJ mill (Société des
201 Mines de Jouac, ex-Dong Trieu ; Jouac, France) from 1978 to 2002 from U-ores (0.57 wt. %
202 on average) that were mined in the Mailhac sur Benaize mining division (mainly Bernardan
203 and Les Loges deposits). The U-ores came mainly from Western Marche granitic Massif (e.g.
204 Bernardan episyenitic deposit) and from surrounding gneisses (Piégut deposit). The U
205 deposits at Piégut formed 280 Ma ago (Turpin and Leroy, 1987), while those at Bernardan
206 formed 170-140 Ma ago (Patrier et al., 1997) and consists mainly of pitchblende and
207 coffinite.

208 1.57 Mt of mill tailings (1.51 Mt from dynamic leaching and 0.06 from heap leaching)
209 disposed in the two open pits at Bellezane Tailing Management Facility (from 1989-1993)
210 were generated at the SIMO mill located at Bessines sur Gartempe (Ballini et al., 2020). The
211 U-ores (0.143 wt. % on average) were mined in the La Crouzille mining division and came
212 from the Saint Sylvestre granitic Massif. The U deposits formed 276-270 Ma ago and 183-
213 170 Ma ago (e.g. Margnac Fanay deposits: Leroy and Holliger 1984; Cathelineau et al., 1990)
214 and consists mainly of pitchblende and coffinite, as well as surficial minerals, such as
215 autunite and gummite.

216 Sample information is summarized in Table 1 and supplementary information about the
217 milling processes can be found in the supplementary materials section.

218

219 **2.2 Elemental and isotopic analyses**

220 Around 50 mg of sample were fully digested using a mixture of concentrated HF-HNO₃-
221 HClO₄ (1:1:0.3) ultrapur® acids in Savillex® PFA vials at 90°C on a hotplate during 48h,
222 then dried down at 160°C overnight until full dryness. Then, the residues were taken up two
223 times in 10 drops of concentrated HNO₃ and dried down. Finally, the residues were dissolved

224 in 40 ml of 3M HNO₃. Aliquots of these stock solutions were used for elemental analysis
225 (ICP-AES and QQQ-ICP-MS), as well as U, Th and Pb isotopic analysis performed by QQQ-
226 ICP-MS and HR-ICP-MS.

227 **2.2.1 Elemental analyses**

228 All samples were analysed for major and trace elements. Major element analyses (Al₂O₃,
229 Fe₂O₃, MgO, CaO, Na₂O, K₂O, P₂O₅, MnO, TiO₂) of whole rock samples were performed in
230 solution by ICP-OES Thermo Scientific ICAP-7000®. S content of the samples was
231 analysed using an elemental analyser FlashSmart (ThermoScientific) in CHNS mode, after
232 calcination of the sample under oxygen steam at 1400°C and further oxidation of the
233 produced gas by contact with Cu oxides. Trace element concentrations (Pb and Ba) of whole-
234 rock samples were determined in solution by QQQ-ICP-MS Agilent Technologies 8800®
235 (PATERSON analytical platform, IRSN Fontenay-aux-Roses, France) using a standard
236 calibration regression based on the analysis of standards having various elemental content
237 that encompass the range of variation of elemental content of the analysed samples. A
238 machine drift correction based on a Bi spike was also applied. Thus, a Bi solution was mixed
239 with the sample before the introduction into the nebuliser using a 3 port T-junction. The Pb
240 content was calculated by taking into account the concentrations of each Pb isotope (²⁰⁴Pb,
241 ²⁰⁶Pb, ²⁰⁷Pb, ²⁰⁸Pb) due to the important contrast of the Pb isotope composition between the U
242 mill tailing samples and the Pb calibration standards (natural Pb abundances). Uncertainties
243 for all analyses are lower than 10 % (Supplementary Table 1).

244 **2.2.2 Stable Pb isotopes analyses**

245 Aliquot of the solutions (3M HNO₃) containing more than 200 ng of Pb were taken up and
246 dried down on a hot plate at 90°C. Then, the residues were evaporated and dissolved two

247 times in 10 drops of concentrated ultrapur® HBr. Then, the residues were dissolved in 1 mL
248 of ultrapur® 0.2M HBr.

249 Chemical separation of lead from others elements was carried out in a class 10000 laminar-
250 flow hood using only reagent produced from ultrapure® acid (Merck) and 18.2 MΩ.cm⁻¹
251 ultrapure water (Milli-Q ultrapure water system, Merck Millipore). Pb was separated from the
252 matrix and interfering element by ion-exchange gravity chromatography, using 100 µl of
253 anionic resin BioRAD AG1-X8 100-200 mesh loaded into a 1 mL pipet tips, based on a
254 protocol adapted from Manhès et al. (1984). After 4 cleaning steps of the resin (1 mL of
255 0.25M HNO₃, water, 0.2M HCl, water) and a conditioning step of the resin with 1 mL of
256 0.5M HBr, the dissolved sample was introduced into the column. Then, the matrix elements
257 were eluted with 5 mL of 0.5M HBr, and finally the Pb was eluted with 5 mL of 0.2M HCl.
258 The overall Pb yields after the purification were higher than 90%, while the total procedural
259 chemistry blanks during the course of this study were less than 150 pg. These values are
260 totally negligible in comparison to the amount of Pb present in the samples (higher than 1µg).

261 Lead isotopes analyses were performed using an HR-SF-ICPMS Thermo Scientific Element
262 XR (PATERSON analytical platform) using the standard-sample bracketing technique. The
263 certified reference material NIST981 was run before and after each sample in order to correct
264 all the Pb isotopic ratios for the mass bias using an exponential law with the values
265 recommend by Doucelance and Manhes, 2001. Each run consists of 15 runs of 100 passes, of
266 10 ms per canal (i.e. 2 canals). The average ²⁰⁴Pb/²⁰⁷Pb, ²⁰⁶Pb/²⁰⁷Pb, ²⁰⁸Pb/²⁰⁷Pb ratios
267 measured for certified reference materials were 0.065±0.002, 1.09±0.01, 2.35±0.05, (2SD,
268 n=4) for NIST981 (common lead), and 0.00503±0.00001, 14.0±0.1, 0.197±0.002, (2SD, n=3)
269 for NIST983 (radiogenic lead) and for international rock standards were 0.064±0.002,
270 1.21±0.01, 2.46±0.03, (2SD, n=3) for AGV2 and 0.064±0.001, 1.20±0.01, 2.48±0.01, (2SD,
271 n=3) for BCR-2.

272 **2.2.3 U-Th isotopes analyses by ICP-MS**

273 The $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ isotopes ratios as well as the ^{238}U and ^{230}Th content used for the calculation of
274 the $^{238}\text{U}/^{230}\text{Th}$ were determined by isotope dilution mass spectrometry ($^{238}\text{U}/^{236}\text{U}$,
275 $^{230}\text{Th}/^{229}\text{Th}$).

276 Aliquots of the stock solutions (3M HNO_3) were taken up and mixed with a ^{233}U - ^{236}U - ^{229}Th
277 triple spike (mixture of certified reference materials ^{233}U - ^{236}U enriched solution IRMM3636
278 with ^{229}Th -enriched solution described in Essex et al. (2018)).

279 Chemical separation of U and Th from the other elements was carried out following the
280 protocol described in Douville et al. (2010) in a fume-hood using UTEVA resin and high
281 purity reagent made from distilled acids (evapoclean system for HCl, Savillex DST1000
282 system for HNO_3) and ultrapure water. Column were cleaned and conditioned using 3M
283 HNO_3 . Samples were introduced into the column. Matrix elements were discarded using 4
284 mL 3M HNO_3 . Th was then eluted using 4 mL 3M HCl, and finally U was eluted using 5 mL
285 1M HCl. After separation, Th fractions were spiked with IRMM3636 solution.

286 U and Th analyses were performed using a QQQ-ICPMS Agilent Technologies 8800®
287 (PATERSON analytical platform). The instrumental mass bias correction was performed
288 using the certified $^{233}\text{U}/^{236}\text{U}$ ratio of the IRMM3636 solution. In order to assess the precision
289 and the accuracy of our measurement (Supplementary Table 1), we prepared solutions from
290 Harwell Uraninite (HU-1) which is known to be close to secular equilibrium with respect to
291 $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U} = (54.903 \pm 0.011) \times 10^{-6}$ and to $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U} = (1.6953 \pm 0.0003) \times 10^{-5}$ (Cheng et al.,
292 2013).

293 **2.2.4 Th-230, Ra-226 and Pb-210 analyses by gamma spectrometry**

294 The activities of ^{238}U -series nuclides were determined in the U mill tailing samples at the
295 IRSN/LUTECE laboratory using either (i) a High Purity coaxial Germanium detector (EGPC

296 20, Intertech) or (ii) a well-type HP Ge detector (GWL-220-15, ORTEC®). The first detector
297 displays a better resolution (0.75 and 1.75 keV at the photopeaks 122 keV of ^{57}Co and 1332
298 keV for ^{60}Co), two times lower than the well-type detector, while for the latter a significant
299 higher efficiency was obtained for low energy rays (i.e. the peak of ^{210}Pb at 46.5 keV) which
300 was therefore appropriate for the analysis of low-weight solid samples. These two detectors
301 were calibrated according to the international IAEA standards RGU-1 and RGTh-1, two
302 silica-diluted ores of U and Th respectively, as it was performed previously (Mangeret et al.,
303 2018, Mangeret et al., 2020, Supplementary Table 1). The ^{230}Th activities were measured at
304 67.7 KeV, ^{226}Ra activities were measured from the ^{214}Pb rays at 295.2 and 351.9 keV and the
305 ^{214}Bi ray at 609.3 keV. ^{210}Pb activities were determined from the ray at 46.5 keV. The
306 samples have been sealed (to prevent any loss of gaseous ^{222}Rn) 3 weeks before the analysis
307 in order to reach the complete regrowth of both ^{214}Bi and ^{214}Pb . From 39 to 94 g of sample
308 were used for analysis performed by the coaxial detector, while lower amounts (from 1.4 to
309 2.6 g) of sample were used for analysis with the well-type detector.

310

311 **2.4 In situ analysis**

312 In order to identify radiogenic Pb-bearing phases, two U mill tailings (Gabon and JOU-97)
313 containing the highest level of radiogenic Pb were selected for further in-situ analysis using
314 secondary electron microscopy (SEM) and secondary ion mass spectrometry (SIMS)
315 techniques. For this study, around a hundred milligrams of U mill tailing samples were
316 embedded in an Epoxy resin (modified recipe of EMBED-812 kit, EMS, Hatfield; with BDMA
317 replacing the DMP-30 in order to reduce the resin viscosity) and degassed under vacuum
318 before being transferred into a 10 mm diameter stainless steel ring holder. The resin
319 polymerization was reached after 48h at 60°C in an oven. The samples sustained several

320 polishing steps (1) using a 5 μm Si-C disk, followed by (2) a 3 μm and then a 1 μm diamond
321 powder onto soft-disks. The samples were finally coated with a thin layer of C.

322 **2.4.1 SEM analyses**

323 In order to identify the Pb-rich phases, the secondary electron microscope (SEM) Hitachi
324 S3500N (LUTECE platform, IRSN, Fontenay-aux-Roses) was used to localize the phases
325 that host heavy elements using the SEM-Back Scattered Electron (BSE) detector under a
326 voltage of 25 kV accelerating voltage. Then, the SEM-Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectroscopy
327 (EDS) analysis was performed with two EDS Brücker 5030 XFlash SDD detectors working
328 under a voltage of 25 keV at a working distance of 16.8 mm in order to characterize the
329 elemental composition of the phases, especially with respect to Pb and U. The SEM-EDS
330 data were acquired at 8 μs /pixels at 100 kcps/s using the Esprit software 1.9 for a pixel size of
331 0.3 μm .

332 **2.4.2 SIMS analyses**

333 The SIMS analyses of Pb-rich phases were performed using a CAMECA IMS 4F-E7
334 instrument (PATERSON Platform, IRSN, Fontenay-aux-Roses) in order to localise the
335 radiogenic (uranogenic) Pb-bearing phases (i.e. ^{206}Pb -rich, ^{208}Pb -poor) at the grain scale. For
336 this preliminary study, only images were acquired, not isotope ratios, as the isotopic
337 difference between the common Pb and the radiogenic Pb is very high. A homemade three
338 holes sample holder were especially designed in order to introduce 3 samples (hosted in 1
339 mm diameter rings) at the same time in the analysis chamber (pressure of 5×10^{-9} mbar) of
340 the instrument. Analysis were performed with a 1 nA, 12 kV O_2^- primary beam projected on a
341 $\sim 1 \mu\text{m}$ area which scan the area of interest (raster of 250 μm x 250 μm for JOU-97 and 500 x
342 500 μm for Gabon). The positively charged secondary ions or molecules were accelerated at
343 10 kV into the mass spectrometer, measured with a mass resolution of 400 by ion counting in

344 monocollection mode and sequentially converted into an image with a lateral resolution of
345 around 1 μm . Each analysis was preceded by a 5-min pre-sputtering performed with a ~ 100
346 nA primary beam. The analysis of JOU-97 sample consisted in 65 integration cycles of 1 s
347 for ^{23}Na , ^{24}Mg , ^{27}Al , ^{28}Si , ^{39}K , ^{40}Ca , ^{56}Fe (major elements) and 300 integration cycles of 5 s
348 for ^{204}Pb , ^{206}Pb , ^{207}Pb , ^{208}Pb , and of 2 s for $^{238}\text{U}^{16}\text{O}$. The analysis of Gabon sample consisted
349 in 80 integration cycles of 1 s for major elements and 700 integration cycles of 10 s for Pb
350 isotopes and $^{238}\text{U}^{16}\text{O}$. The mass calibration of the instrument was performed using enriched
351 material, such as for instance a Si-rich plate, a Pb-rich metal plate having a common Pb
352 isotopic composition, or a U-doped resin.

353

354 **3 Results and discussion**

355 **3.1 Elemental content of U mill tailings**

356 The major elements contents (Al, Mg, Fe, Ca, Na, K, Ti, Mn, P) of U mill tailings from
357 France are close to the average value reported for the upper continental crust (UCC) (Rudnick
358 and Gao, 2014; Fig. 2). However, the major elements contents of the U mill tailings from
359 Gabon show a strong depletion of Mg, Ca, Na, and Mn (in a lesser extent for Al, K, Fe, Ti, P)
360 compared to UCC, which is probably due to the low content of these elements in the
361 mineralized quartzite sediment (Gauthier-Lafaye et al., 1986; Bankole et al., 2020).

362 The Ba content of U mill tailings is similar to UCC. This suggests either that the potential
363 addition of radiobarite (precipitated during the treatment of the liquid effluent with BaCl_2)
364 into the U mill tailings had only a minor impact on the bulk Ba content of U mill tailings or
365 that the Ba content of U-ores was lower compared to the UCC.

366 The neutralized acid mill tailings show a high enrichment in S with values that range from 20
367 to 60 times higher than the one for the UCC, while the alkaline U mill tailings do not display
368 a S enrichment or depletion. This demonstrates the impact of the addition of S during the
369 milling via sulphuric acid leaching and the precipitation of secondary sulphate on the U mill
370 tailings composition. The lack of S enrichment in U mill tailings from Mounana, Gabon
371 could be related to the lack of neutralization process (the addition of Ca-carbonate or lime
372 allows the precipitation secondary CaSO_4 into the U mill tailing). The low S content of Le
373 Bosc (LOD-FS, LOD-MA) alkaline mill tailing samples could be explained by the lack of
374 sulfuric acid involved in the treatment of the U-ores.

375 All U-mill tailings of this study exhibit a strong U enrichment with values that range from 10
376 to 200 times higher than the UCC's one. This U enrichment is consistent with the uncomplete
377 U extraction (i.e. extraction yields $< 100\%$) from the U-ore (Fig. 2). U mill tailings display
378 also a high enrichment in Pb with values that range from 6 to 80 times higher than the UCC's
379 one. Except some particular U mineralization (e.g. parsonsite which is a hydrated phosphate
380 of U and Pb related to weathering processes) that contains high common Pb concentrations,
381 the Pb enrichment is generally related to the accumulation of stable radiogenic Pb produced
382 by the U-ore. In addition, the U mill tailings show no Th (^{232}Th) enrichment, which suggests
383 that the U-ores were not enriched in Th (^{232}Th).

384 Detailed information about element concentrations can be found in table 2.

385

386 **3.2 U-238 decay chain disequilibrium in U mill tailings**

387 In a closed system the secular equilibrium (activity ratios equal to one) of the U-238 decay
388 chain is reached in about 2 million years (i.e. ~ 8 times of the longer half-life decay product:

389 ^{234}U). Any deviation from the secular equilibrium can be used to highlight physicochemical
390 processes that led to the gain or loss of the chain radionuclides.

391 **3.2.1 ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratio**

392 The ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratios of the studied U mill tailings of this study range from 1.27
393 (LOD-FS and BZN samples) to 1.87 (Gabon sample) (Fig. 3a; Table 3). The U mill tailings
394 samples from Lodève and from Mounana have higher ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) ratios compared to the
395 values from the corresponding U-ores reported by Richter et al. (1999) (respectively 0.94 and
396 0.99). Overall, the U mill tailings of this study have significantly higher ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity
397 ratios compared to the average value ($(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}) = 1.00 \pm 0.10$, 2σ , $n=181$) recorded in
398 worldwide U-ores of various deposit types (Richter et al., 1999; Uvarova et al., 2014; Keatley
399 et al., 2021) and to typical values (0.99 ± 0.19 , 2σ , $n=335$) of natural weathered materials
400 (Suhr et al., 2018 and references therein) or weathered profiles developed on U mineralized
401 area that show ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) ranging from 0.89 to 1.20 (Shirvington et al., 1983; Lawson et al.,
402 1986; Ahamdach et al., 1991). In addition, U mill tailings have also higher ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$)
403 activity ratios compared to the average value for U-ore concentrate (0.97 ± 0.09 , 2σ , $n=56$;
404 Kayzar-Boggs et al., 2021) that derived from the U-rich leachate during the milling process.
405 Due to the high atomic mass, the high ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratios of U mill tailings cannot be
406 explained by U isotope fractionation (kinetic or at equilibrium) during mining and milling
407 processes or mill tailing disposal.

408 During the milling process, U-ore are crushed and leached using alkaline or acid solution in
409 order to dissolve the U-rich phases, leaving a leached ore residue corresponding to the U mill
410 tailings. Acid-leaching experimental studies performed on U-bearing minerals (carnotite,
411 uraninite, euxenite), using different acids (HCl, HNO₃, HF, HClO₄) have shown that the
412 resulting leachates (liquid phase) have ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) < 1 (Kobashi et al., 1979), while the acid-

413 leaching residue (solid phase) have ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratio up to 400 in the smallest grain
414 fraction (Sheng and Kuroda, 1984, Sheng and Kuroda, 1986a; Sheng and Kuroda, 1986b;
415 Essien et al., 1990). However, another study performed on U-bearing minerals (uraninite,
416 samarskite) with dilute HCl reported that the leachates from uraninite samples have
417 ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) > 1 while the leachates from the samarskite sample has ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) = 1 (Kobashi
418 and Tominaga, 1982). More recently, acid-leaching experimental studies have been
419 performed on U-ores using sulphuric acid in order to reproduce an industrial U-ore leaching
420 processing (Satybaldiyev et al., 2015; Keatley et al., 2021). In the flow-through experimental
421 study performed by Satybaldiyev et al (2015) on uraninite with dilute sulphuric acid, the
422 leachates collected containing most of the U were characterized by a ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) < 1 (0.92-
423 1.00), which is related to the oxidation and the dissolution of uraninite. In the batch
424 experimental study performed by Keatley et al., (2021) with diluted sulfuric acid of various
425 vein-type U-ores including oxidized (e.g. autunite, torbernite) and reduced (e.g. uraninite,
426 pitchblende, coffinite) U-bearing minerals, some of the leachates and residues have different
427 ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) values (ranging from 0.83 to 1.12) compared to the bulk starting U-bearing phase,
428 with both higher and/or lower values. In general, but not exclusively, the leachates from
429 oxidised U-ores tend to exhibit lower ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) values, while leachates from the reduced U-
430 ores tend to show higher ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) compared to their respective U-ores. Overall, all these
431 experiments of U-ore leaching suggest that a ^{234}U - ^{238}U radioactive disequilibria can be
432 produced between the leachate and the ore residue. The various type of experimentally
433 observed ^{234}U - ^{238}U disequilibria have been interpreted in terms of difference in oxidation
434 states between ^{238}U and ^{234}U , preferential leaching of ^{234}U from damaged crystal lattice due
435 to alpha-recoil displacement, ^{234}U implantation into a U-poor acid-resistant phase from the
436 adjacent U-rich acid soluble phase, incongruent dissolution area depleted in ^{234}U (near grain
437 boundary between U-rich phase and U poor phase).

438 Decays of ^{238}U yield alpha recoil of ^{234}Th which decay via beta decays to ^{234}Pa giving ^{234}U .
439 Emission of alpha recoiled nuclide forms ~20-30 nm-long damages in the crystalline lattice
440 (Fleischer, 1980; Ordonez-Regil et al., 1989) and part of the alpha recoiled nuclides can be
441 implanted into the outermost part of the adjacent crystal. Several authors reported that the
442 residue of acid-leaching experiments of U-ores could have $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}) > 1$ suggesting that
443 ^{234}U is recoiled from an acid-soluble U-rich phase to a neighbouring acid-resistant U-poor
444 phase in the U-ore (Sheng and Kuroda 1984; Sheng and Kuroda 1986a,b; Essien, 1990). As a
445 result, U-poor phase become enriched in ^{234}U through time with respect to ^{238}U , while the U-
446 rich phase becomes depleted (Fig. 4.1). During dissolution via leaching, U-rich phases are
447 preferentially removed, and thus the residue become enriched in ^{234}U (Fig. 4.2). Nuclides
448 located into the alpha recoil tracks may have higher reactivity with fluid, leading to their
449 preferential removal during acid leaching if the track has not been sufficiently annealed.
450 However, the U mill tailings of this study exhibit $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})$ greater than one, which suggest
451 that at least a fraction of the the recoil nuclides became trapped into the crystal lattice of the
452 U-poor phase via track annealing process (Eyal and Fleischer, 1985; Lumpkin et al., 1989),
453 thus preventing their mobility during acid-leaching.

454 In order to explain the range of $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})$ values in the mill tailings a mixing model was
455 used (Langmuir et al., 1978) between a U-rich and U-poor phases in a $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})$ vs. ^{238}U
456 diagram (Fig. 5). For the U-rich phase end-member (U-rich phases with their boundaries that
457 are depleted in ^{234}U by α -recoil effect), the U content was set to 700 mg.g^{-1} , which is a typical
458 average value for uraninite (Ecarpière, France: Horie and Hidaka, 2019; Worldwide:
459 Alexandre et al., 2016), whereas the $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})$ ratio was set to 1, which is close to the
460 average value for the U-ores (Richter et al, 1999 ; Uvarova et al. 2014 ; Keatley et al., 2001)
461 and U-ore concentrates (Kayzar-Boggs et al., 2021) that derived from the U-rich leachate
462 during the milling process. For the U-poor phase end-member, the $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})$ ratio was set to

463 400, which is the highest value reported for the acid-leach U ore residue (mixture of U-poor
464 phases implanted with ^{234}U and phases non-implanted with ^{234}U , Sheng and Kuroda, 1986),
465 while two different low level of U contents were used in order to encompass all the U mill
466 tailing data with the mixing curves. The first one was set to 0.05 ppm of U which is an
467 intermediate value between quartz ($0.01 \mu\text{g}\cdot\text{g}^{-1}$; Gotze et al., 2004) and K-feldspar ($0.09\text{-}0.26$
468 $\mu\text{g}\cdot\text{g}^{-1}$ of U; Arzamastsev et al., 2005), which are the two dominant phases in the U mill
469 tailings (Somot, 1997; Ballini et al., 2020). The second was set to 0.6 ppm of U which is
470 intermediate between the value used for quartz and K-feldspar and the value for the upper
471 continental crust ($3 \mu\text{g}\cdot\text{g}^{-1}$ of U; Rudnick and Gao, 2014). Mixing curves are drawn in Figure
472 5 and validate the process that could explain the high ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratio described
473 above. According to the mixing model, the variation of ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratios is
474 dependent to U concentration in the U mill tailing. This concentration is related to the initial
475 U content of the processed U-ore and to the U extraction yield reached during the milling
476 process.

477 **3.2.2 ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratio and U extraction yield**

478 The ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratios of U mill tailings range from 6.6 (Gabon sample) to 65 (ECA-
479 85 sample) (Table 3; Fig. 3a). For comparison, the U mill tailings from Australia display also
480 ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) values higher than 1, that range from 2.5 to 10 (Lowson and Short, 1986). In
481 addition, the worldwide U-ore concentrates, resulting from selective U extraction from the U-
482 ore exhibit ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratio values much lower than 1 (Keatley et al., 2021). The
483 high ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratio values in the U mill tailings reflect the preferential U
484 extraction from the ore while the others ^{238}U -decay products mainly remain in the U mill
485 tailing (Landa, 1999).

486 **3.2.3 ^{210}Pb , ^{226}Ra and ^{230}Th disequilibrium**

487 The ($^{226}\text{Ra}/^{230}\text{Th}$) and ($^{210}\text{Pb}/^{226}\text{Ra}$) were also investigated by gamma spectrometry.
488 ($^{226}\text{Ra}/^{230}\text{Th}$) activity ratios range from 0.60 to 3.13 (Fig. 3b, Table 3). Four U mill tailings
489 samples (LOD-FS, LOD-MA, JOU-97 and BZN) have ($^{226}\text{Ra}/^{230}\text{Th}$) activity ratios close to
490 secular equilibrium (i.e. 0.95-1.05), which suggest that ^{226}Ra and ^{230}Th were not significantly
491 fractionated during the U-ore treatment and/or subsequent U mill tailing management.
492 However, two others U mill tailings samples (Jouac-DT, Gabon) have ($^{226}\text{Ra}/^{230}\text{Th}$) > 1,
493 while ECA-85 sample has ($^{226}\text{Ra}/^{230}\text{Th}$) < 1. For Gabon sample, the ^{226}Ra and ^{230}Th
494 disequilibrium points out the selective migration of Th due to the acidity of non-neutralized
495 barren solutions and accumulation of ^{226}Ra in the samples thanks to the precipitation of Ba-
496 Pb-Ra sulfates (Pagel and Somot, 2002). For JOU-DT sample, as suggested by Somot et al.,
497 (2002), the ^{226}Ra and ^{230}Th disequilibria suggests the selective migration of ^{226}Ra via slightly-
498 acidic rain water. The slight disequilibrium of ^{226}Ra and ^{230}Th for ECA-85 samples implies
499 either an addition of ^{230}Th or a loss of ^{226}Ra probably during the milling process or
500 subsequent management steps. However, the lack of detailed information concerning the
501 milling process and the geochemical composition of liquid effluent or underground mine
502 waters that were occasionally added to the mine tailings in the pond/pile (Somot, 1997), as
503 well as the sampling area and method, prevent us to decipher precisely the origin of this
504 disequilibrium.

505 The ($^{210}\text{Pb}/^{226}\text{Ra}$) activity ratios of the studied U mill tailings are all lower than 1 (Fig. 3,
506 Table 3). This low activity ratio could be explained by the loss of ^{222}Rn leading thus to a
507 lower production of ^{210}Pb compared to the activity of ^{226}Ra . A large quantity of ^{222}Rn
508 nuclides is produced in the U mill tailings disposal and migrate into the cover materials,
509 designed to prevent significant radon fluxes to reach the atmosphere (Ferri et al., 2002, Saâdi
510 et Guillevic, 2016). The ($^{210}\text{Pb}/^{226}\text{Ra}$) < 1 recorded in the U mill tailing of this study are

511 therefore likely due to continuous ^{222}Rn loss in these porous and permeable types of materials
512 either in the disposal or during the samples storage in the laboratory.

513

514 **3.3 Pb isotope signature of U mill tailings**

515 **3.3.1 Bulk samples**

516 The Pb isotope signature of Th-poor U-ores (France: Cathelineau et al. (1990); Gabon:
517 Gancarz, (1978); Gauthier-Lafaye et al., (1996)) is characterized by higher ($^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$) and
518 lower ($^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$) ratios compared to the common Pb isotope signature of the Present Day
519 Average Crust (PDAC; $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb} = 1.20$; $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb} = 2.47$; Stacey and Krammers, 1975;
520 Fig. 6). The U mill tailings have $^{204}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$, $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$, $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ ratios that range from
521 0.00396 to 0.06111, from 1.86 to 7.15 and from 0.22 to 2.39, respectively (Table 4; Fig. 6).
522 Similarly to U-ores, the U mill tailing samples show a wider Pb isotopic range compared to
523 the whole range reported for common Pb in chemical or natural materials in the environment,
524 excluding U-ores (IUPAC, Berglund and Wieser, 2011), with higher ($^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$) and lower
525 ($^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$) ratios compared to the values reported for the PDAC. This suggests that the
526 radiogenic signature of the U-ores is preserved in the U mill tailings.

527 All the U mill tailings from France display a negative linear correlation and plot along a line
528 that link the PDAC to the range of highly radiogenic Pb composition of the U-ores from
529 France (Fig. 6). Moreover, the U mill tailings from Gabon do not plot on this trend and
530 exhibit a Pb isotopic composition intermediate between the PDAC and the U-ores from
531 Gabon.

532 The various proportion of mixing between two components are represented by a line in a Pb-
533 Pb isotopic diagram, suggesting that the U mill tailings are mixture between (1) phases that

534 have common Pb composition coming from either the U-ore host rock or from the reagent
535 used for the U extraction and (2) phases that have a radiogenic Pb isotope composition of the
536 U-ore (Gabon or France).

537 The proportion of radiogenic Pb from the U-ore hosted in each U mill tailing was estimated
538 using the approach (i.e. *k* factor) described in Gourgiotis et al. (2020). The Pb isotopes
539 composition of the PDAC has been used for the geochemical background end-member. The
540 $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ ratio of the radiogenic end-member used for U mill tailings from France (19.55)
541 has been determined by the intercept (1/intercept) in a $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$ vs. $^{204}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$ diagram (Fig
542 6b). Similarly, the $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ ratio of the radiogenic end-member has been calculated by the
543 intercept in a $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ vs. $^{204}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ diagram and was found to be 0.10. For U mill tailing
544 from Gabon, the Pb isotopes composition of the radiogenic end-member was calculated for a
545 Th-free U phase that crystallized 2.05 Ga ago (Gancarz, 1978; $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb} = 7.9$ and
546 $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb} = 0$). The estimated proportion of radiogenic Pb range from 14% to 66% for U
547 mill tailings from France and is 95% for U mill tailing from Gabon.

548 **3.3.2 Radiogenic-Pb bearing phases in the U mill tailings**

549 The samples having the highest ($^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$) and lowest ($^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$) ratios (GABON and
550 JOU-97) were selected in order to determine the radiogenic Pb bearing phases. The aim of
551 this preliminary study is to determine if the radiogenic Pb is associated to the remaining U
552 bearing phases (probably partially altered) in the U mill tailings or if the “radiogenic Pb” is
553 associated to neo-formed phases. Thanks to isotope imaging by SIMS, the radiogenic Pb was
554 identified when ^{206}Pb isotope signal was higher than the ^{208}Pb signal (Figs. 7 and 8).

555 Some preliminary results show that in JOU-97 sample, the radiogenic Pb was mainly
556 identified in U-rich phases and in a lesser extent in micrometric-sized U-poor phases that
557 potentially host Si, Al, Mg, Fe, K, Ca and Pb or S (interference of S on Pb for their respective

558 K α rays) based on SEM-EDX spectrum of 18 to 27 μm^2 areas (Supplemental figure A1).
559 However, the precise identification of the mineralogy of these phases is difficult to assess
560 due to the small size of the particles, as the area taken into account for SEM-EDX spectrum
561 could potentially involve neighbouring phases that do not host radiogenic Pb. In Gabon
562 sample, the radiogenic Pb was encountered in U-rich and in U-free S-rich phases that could
563 be either Pb-sulphide or Pb-sulphate. The radiogenic Pb is therefore hosted for both samples
564 in primary U-rich phases that remain after the milling process. For GABON sample the
565 radiogenic Pb is also encountered in U-free S-rich phases that could be either (i) remaining
566 Pb-sulphide (galena) related to natural hydrothermal alteration of U-rich phases (Gauthier-
567 Lafaye et al., 1996) or (ii) neo-formed Pb-Ba-Ra sulphate related to the milling process
568 involving sulphuric acid (Pagel and Somot, 2002; Schmandt et al., 2019; Rollog et al., 2020).
569 For JOU-97 sample the radiogenic Pb is also encountered in association with micrometric-
570 sized U-poor phases that could potentially be either clay minerals or oxyhydroxides related to
571 (i) the weathering of minerals from the mineralized granites or (ii) the rapid diagenesis of
572 neutralized U mill tailing after deposition in the disposal (Somot et al., 2000; Somot et al.,
573 2002, Cook et al., 2018; Ballini et al., 2020; Chautard et al., 2020; Ram et al., 2021b).
574 Moreover, U-rich phases without or with minor radiogenic Pb content were also identified
575 (Fig. 7), suggesting U or Pb mobility (Syverson et al., 2019; Ram et al., 2021a; Ram et al.,
576 2021c; Ram et al., 2021d).

577

578 **3.4 Tracking the presence of U mill tailing in the environment**

579 In the context of U mines environmental impact assessment, U mill tailings are one of the
580 source to be considered for the release of radionuclides into the environment. Transfer of
581 radionuclides related to U mining or milling activities into the environment, where they can

582 accumulate (e.g. wetlands, lake sediments, soils), could occur via particulate or dissolved
583 species transport (Bollhoefer et al., 2006; Sinclair et al., 2006; Strok and Smodis 2010;
584 Smodis 2014; Morin et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2017; Stetten et al., 2018; Dang et al., 2018, Liu
585 et al., 2018; Yin et al., 2019; Yin et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019; Mangeret et al, 2020,
586 Paradis et al, 2020; Gourgiotis et al. 2020; Wang et al., 2021; Yin et al., 2021).

587 The U mill tailings are radioactive materials that have higher content of U (30-600 ppm) and
588 Pb (60-800 ppm) compared to the average value encountered in the environment (3 and 10
589 ppm, respectively). Therefore, the transfer of U and Pb from U mill tailing into the
590 environment, via solid particles or dissolved species, would contribute to the U and Pb
591 content in the local geochemical background. However, U-ores outcrops potentially occurring
592 outside of the U mine sites present also similar geochemical signature with even higher
593 content of U and Pb. Moreover, weathering and erosion of the local bedrock that is often
594 granitic in the case of the French U-mines areas can also play an important role in increasing
595 these concentration levels. Indeed, high U contents have already been documented in sites
596 non-impacted by mining activities, such as Alpine soils (up to 4000 ppm) and lacustrine
597 sediments (up to 400 ppm) (Regenspurg et al., 2010; Lefebvre et al., 2021a, b) as well as
598 ground and surface waters (Owen and Otton, 1995) where the surrounding bedrock consists
599 mainly of crystalline rocks that commonly contain trace amounts of U (Bernhard, 2005).

600 The U mill tailings of this study have a Pb isotope signature with high $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ and low
601 $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ ratios, similar to their related U-ores (Fig. 6). Therefore, for an environmental
602 sample displaying a radiogenic isotope signature, it is not possible to decipher the origin of
603 this signature between (1) the natural weathering of U-ore, (2) the U-ore mining activities and
604 (3) the U milling activities, by using only stable Pb isotopes.

605 Previous studies have shown that ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) ratio could be used to track the impact of U mill
606 tailings in the environment, as the water that interacted with U mill tailings (Zielinsky et al.,

1997; Ketterer et al., 2000; Bush and Morrisson, 2012; Kamp and Morrison, 2014; Wang et al., 2021) could have high U content associated to a ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) near to unity, which contrast with the groundwater ($0.5 < (^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}) < 30$; Osmond and Cowart, 1992) and the dissolved load of major rivers (1.3 ± 0.5 , 2σ ; Suhr et al., 2018) that have a lower U content associated usually with a ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) > 1 . The U mill tailings of this study show a disequilibrium with higher ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratios compared to (1) U-ores, (2) the average weathered solid products, excluding U-ores ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) = 0.99 ± 0.19 (Suhr et al., 2018) or to the range covered by weathered U-mineralizations (0.89-1.20; Lawson et al., 1986).

In this study we propose to use the U-Pb isotopic composition of U mill tailings which is unique as it combines both (1) the highly radiogenic Pb signature related to U-ores and (2) the high disequilibrium with ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$), related to the milling process of U-ores. Thus, this signature is distinct compared to (1) U-ores, which exhibit radiogenic Pb isotopes signature, but are on average at secular equilibrium with respect to ^{234}U - ^{238}U , and (2) weathered solid products which exhibit mostly small or moderate disequilibrium associated to a common (weathered crust, excluding U-ores) or radiogenic (weathered U mineralizations) Pb isotopes signature.

The impact of a contamination from U mill tailings in the environment on the U-Pb signature of a contaminated sample was investigated with a mixing model (Langmuir et al., 1978) between the U mill tailings from this study and the PDAC (Stacey and Krammers, 1976; Rudnick and Gao, 2014) at secular equilibrium. The mixing curves are plotted in the figure 9. The results of this model show that only a fraction of 5 wt. % of U mill tailings added to a sediment is sufficient in most cases to get a material with a distinct U-Pb isotopic signature compared to the natural range, with both $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb} > 1.6$ and ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) > 1.2 . It is worth mentioning that combining Pb isotopes to U isotopes is more relevant than to ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratio which can exhibit important variations due to chemical fractionation. Higher

632 ^{238}U mobility compared to that of ^{230}Th can lead to ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) values similar to that
633 observed in uranium mill tailings. Chemical fractionation can also influence ($^{210}\text{Pb}/^{226}\text{Ra}$) and
634 ($^{226}\text{Ra}/^{230}\text{Th}$) activity ratios altering the initial U mill tailing signature limiting thus their use
635 as a relevant tracer of U mill tailings. Finally, regarding elemental composition, we believe
636 that S concentration seems to be a promising tracer to highlight the impact of acid U mill
637 tailings or tailing activities on the environment.

638

639 **4 Conclusions**

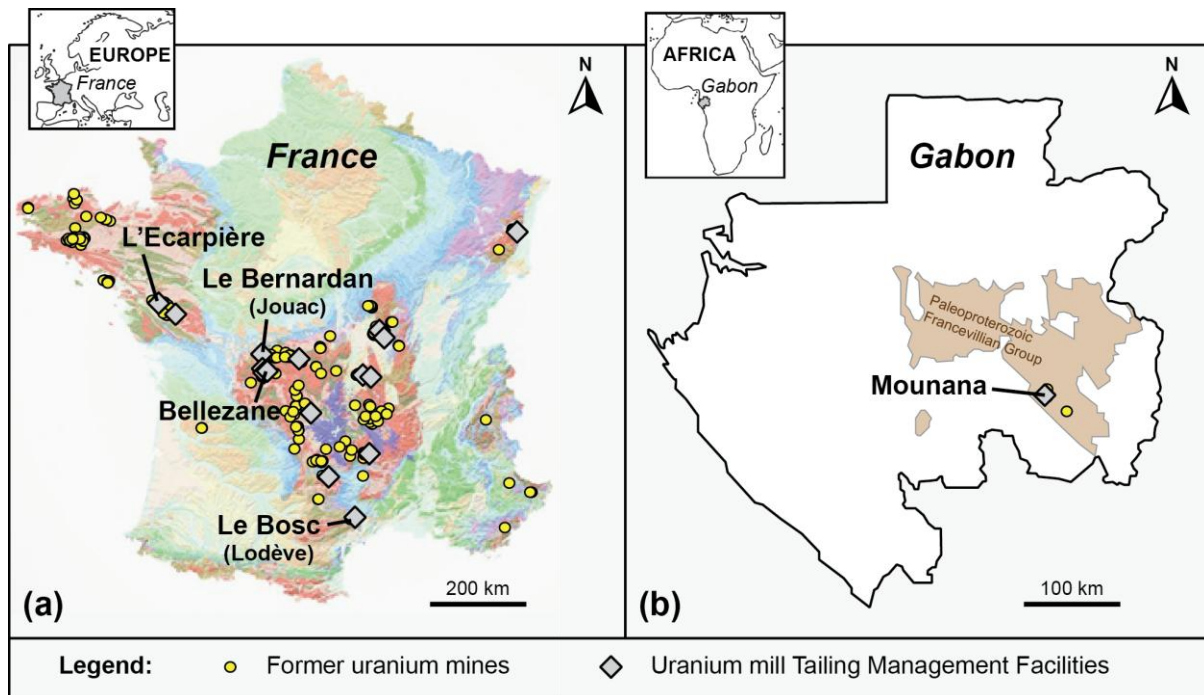
640 The goal of this study was to identify relevant tracers that can be used for environmental
641 impact assessment studies involving U mill tailings. The results put in light the U series
642 disequilibrium in the U mill tailings, especially with higher ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) compared to most of
643 the solid weathered products and high ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratios related to the selective U
644 extraction during the milling process. This high ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratios were likely
645 acquired by the removal of labile U-rich phases by dissolution, while the neighbouring
646 milling-resistant U-poor phases that are enriched in recoiled ^{234}U remain in the U mill
647 tailings. This study also suggest the conservation of the specific Pb isotopic signature of U-
648 ores into the U mill tailings with higher $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ and lower $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ compared to
649 common lead. This specific Pb signature have been encountered in the U mill tailing into the
650 remaining U-rich phases, (remaining or secondary) S-rich phases and potentially in
651 association with clay minerals or oxyhydroxides. As a consequence, we recommend to use
652 stable Pb isotopes combined with ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) activity ratios as multi-tracking tool providing a
653 relevant fingerprinting for the impact of U milling activities on the environment.

654 **5 Acknowledgements**

655 We would like to warmly thank Gilles Alcade, Olivier Diez and Cyrielle Jardin for their
656 helpful contributions on elemental analysis.

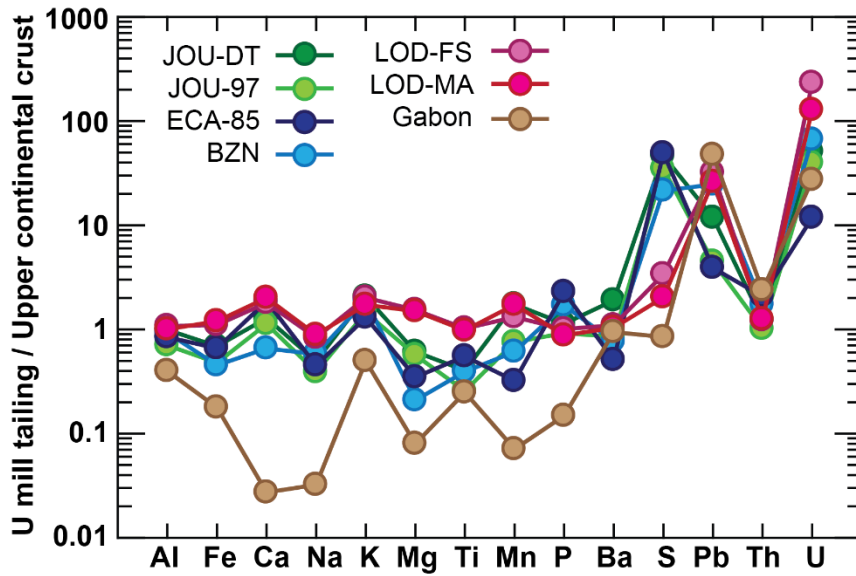
657 This is PATERSON, the IRSN mass spectrometry platform, contribution n°12.

658 6 Figures



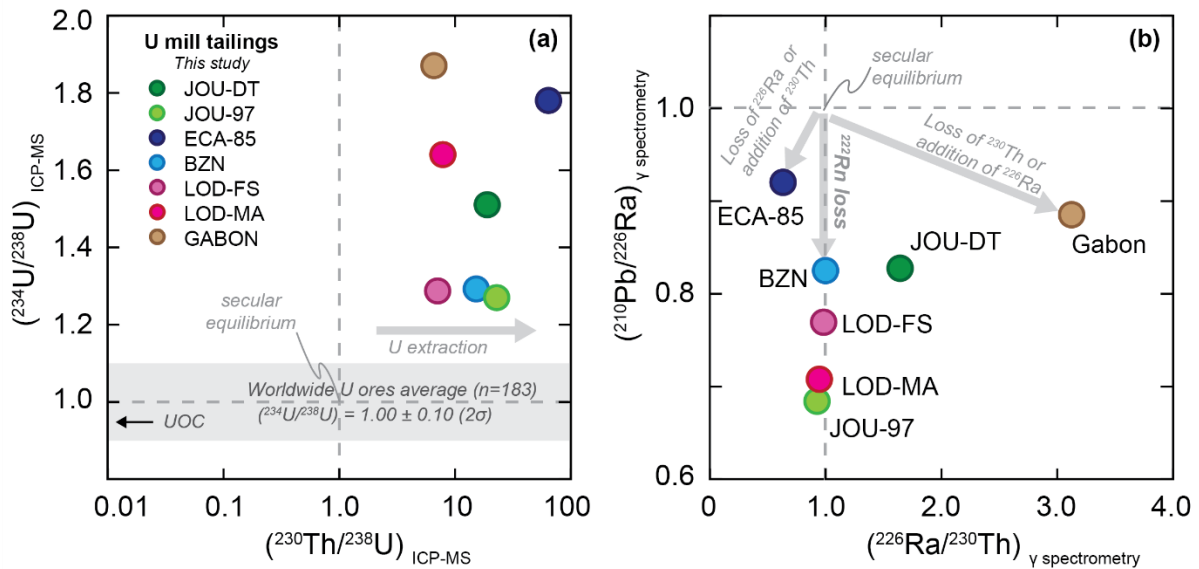
659

660 **Figure 1:** a) Geological map of France (1/1000000 series, © BRGM) and b) modified
661 geological map of Gabon (only indicating the Paleoproterozoic Francevillian Group that host
662 the U deposits; Bankole et al., 2020) showing the localization of the former uranium mines
663 and the U mill Tailing Management Facilities (France: Programme MIMAUSA database;
664 Gabon: Ossa et al., 2021). The names of the Tailing Management Facilities are reported for
665 sites where U mill tailing samples were analysed in this study.



666

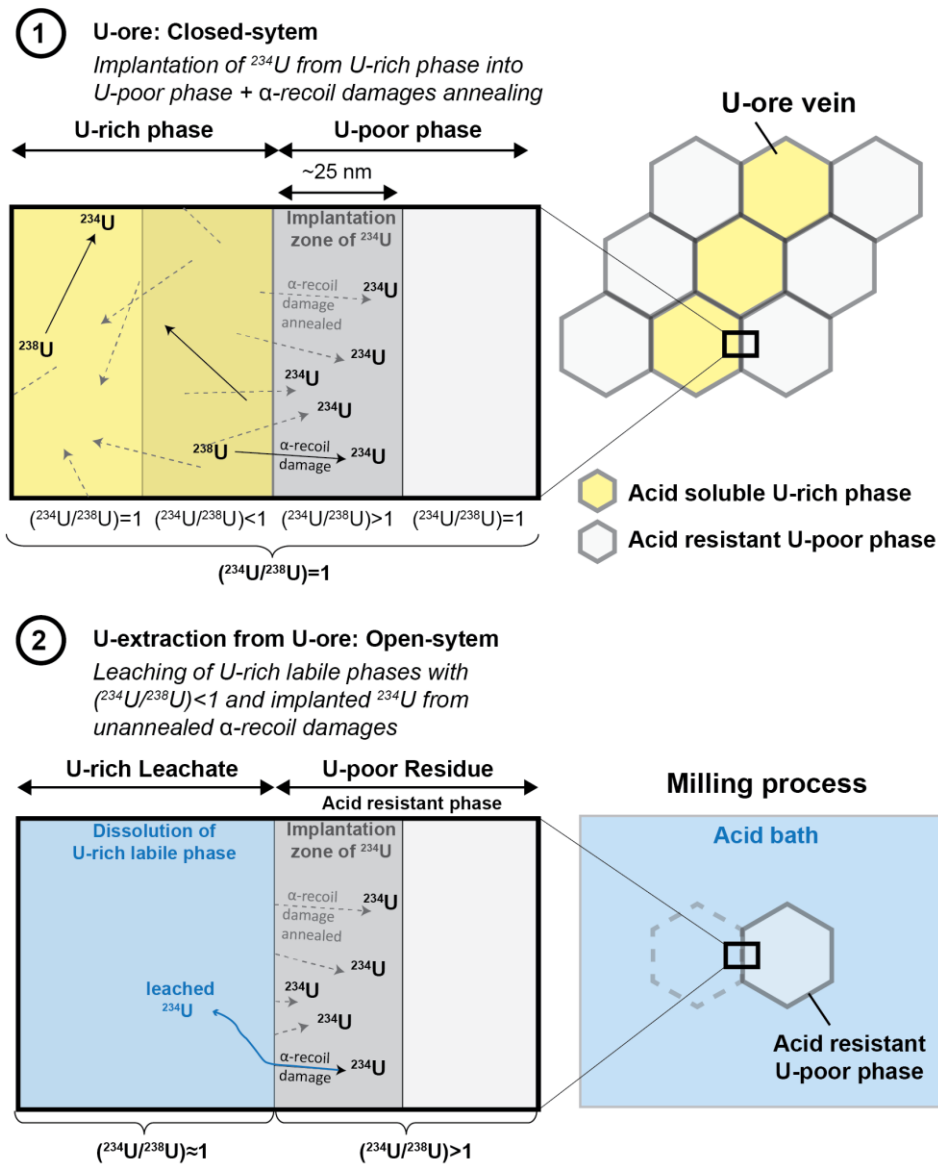
667 **Figure 2:** Major and trace elements patterns of U mill tailings from France and Gabon
 668 normalized to the Upper Continental Crust values from Rudnick and Gao (2014). The
 669 selected elements are ordered from the most (Al) to the less (U) abundant in the upper
 670 continental crust.



671

672 **Figure 3:** (a) $(^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U})$ vs. $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})$ and (b) $(^{210}\text{Pb}/^{226}\text{Ra})$ vs. $(^{226}\text{Ra}/^{230}\text{Th})$ activity ratio
 673 diagrams. (a) Data from ICPMS measurements and (b) data from gamma spectrometry
 674 measurements. The gray dashed lines represent the secular equilibrium value for each activity
 675 ratio. The light gray field represents the $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})$ activity ratio values recorded in

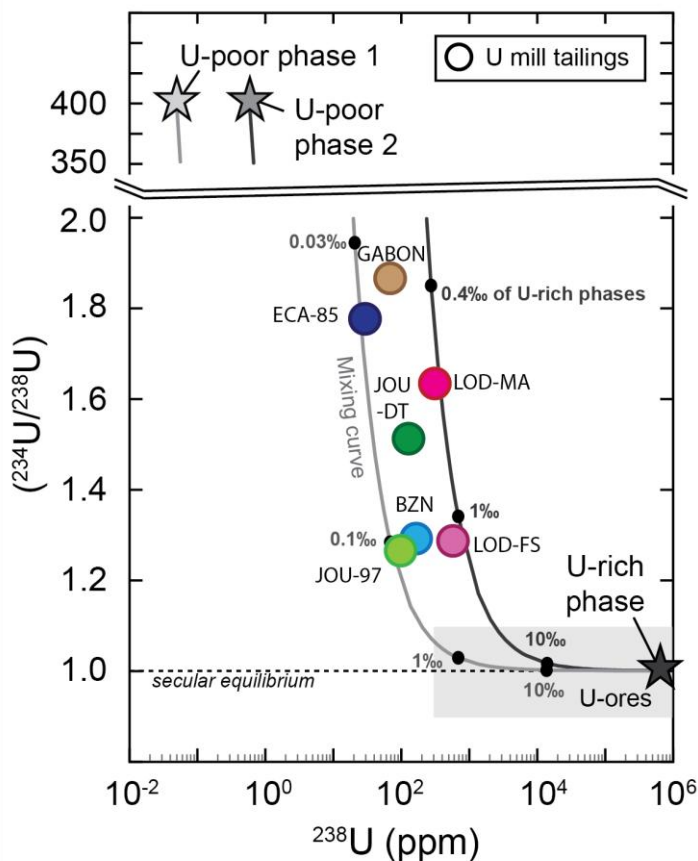
676 worldwide U ores from different types of U deposits (Richter et al, 1999; Uvarova et al.
 677 2014; Keatley et al., 2001; Kayzar-Boggs et al., 2021). The values recorded in worldwide U
 678 ore concentrates (UOC) from different types of U deposits plot outside the diagram field with
 679 low ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$) ratios and are indicated with the arrow (Kayzar-Boggs et al., 2021).



680

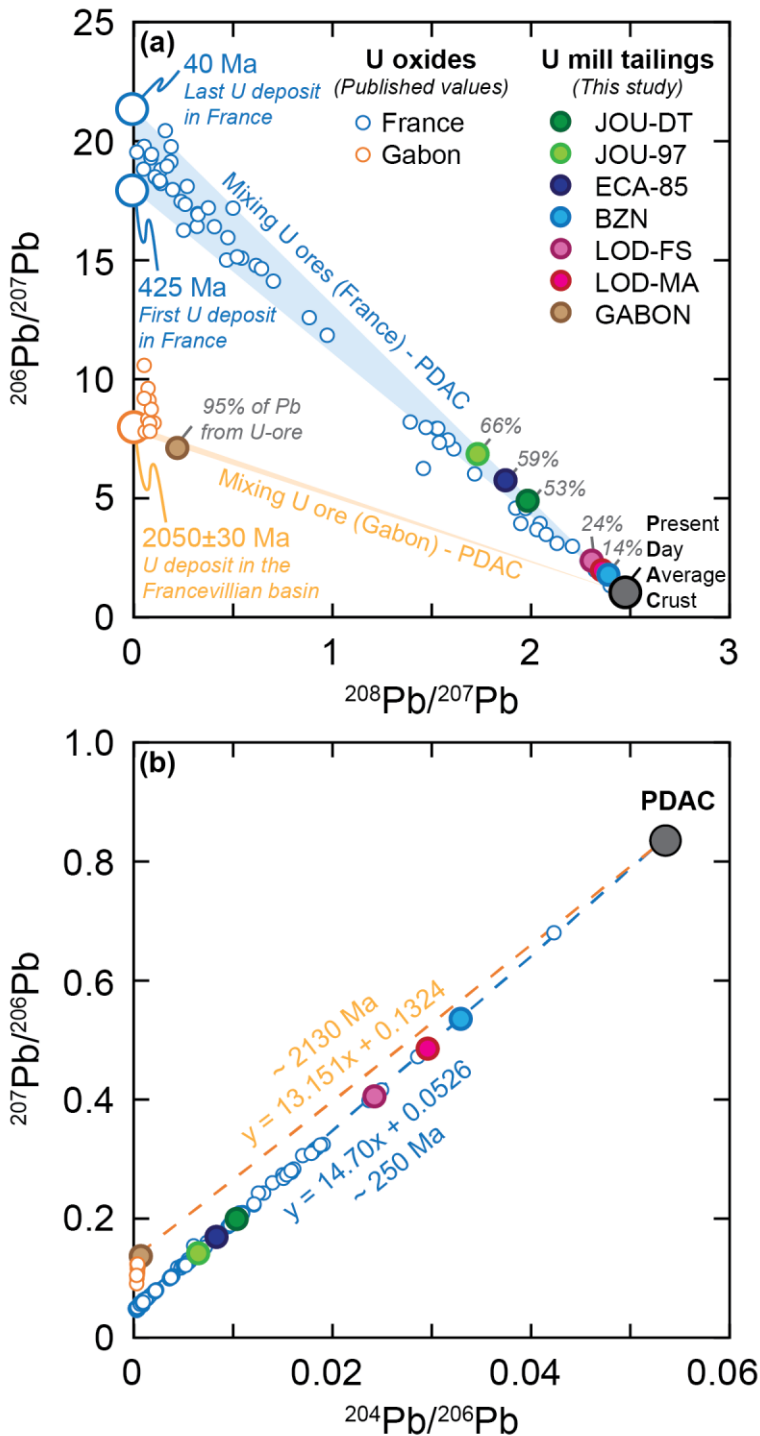
681 **Figure 4:** Sketch showing the process suggested by Sheng and Kuroda (1986) that would
 682 produce the $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})>1$ in the U mill tailings. The implantation of ^{234}Th (which decay into
 683 ^{234}U) from a U-rich phase into U-poor phase by alpha-recoil effect (Kigoshi, 1971) associated
 684 to the annealing of the alpha-recoil damage (Eyal and Fleisher, 1985; Lumpkin et al., 1990).

685 The size of alpha recoil damages (20-30 nm) is coming from (Fleischer, 1980; Ordonez-Regil
 686 et al., 1989). The $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}) \approx 1$ is derived from the average value (0.97 ± 0.09 , 2σ , $n=56$) of U-
 687 ore concentrates (Kayzar-Boggs et al., 2021) that derived from the U-rich leachate during the
 688 milling process.



689

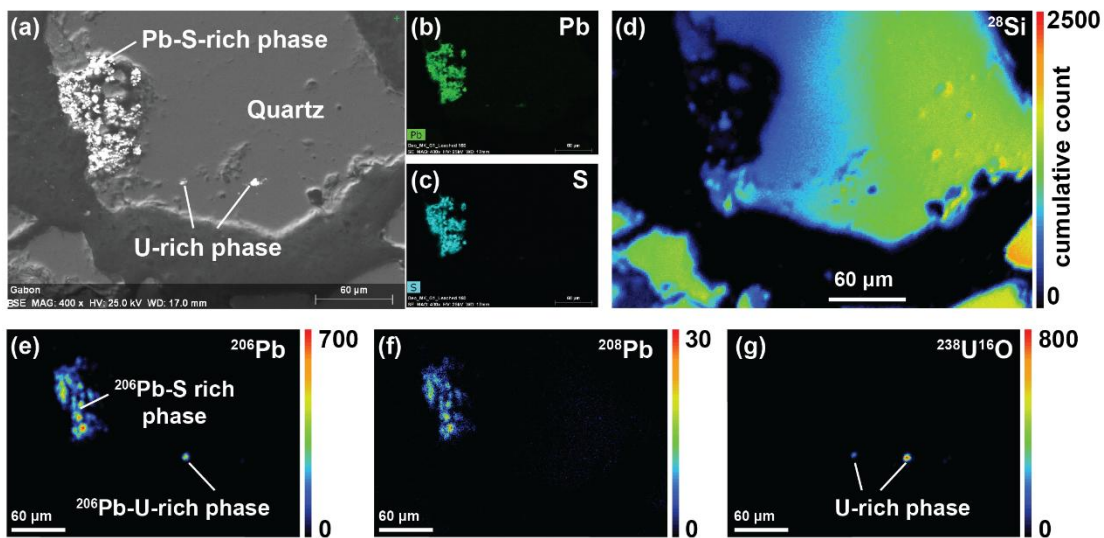
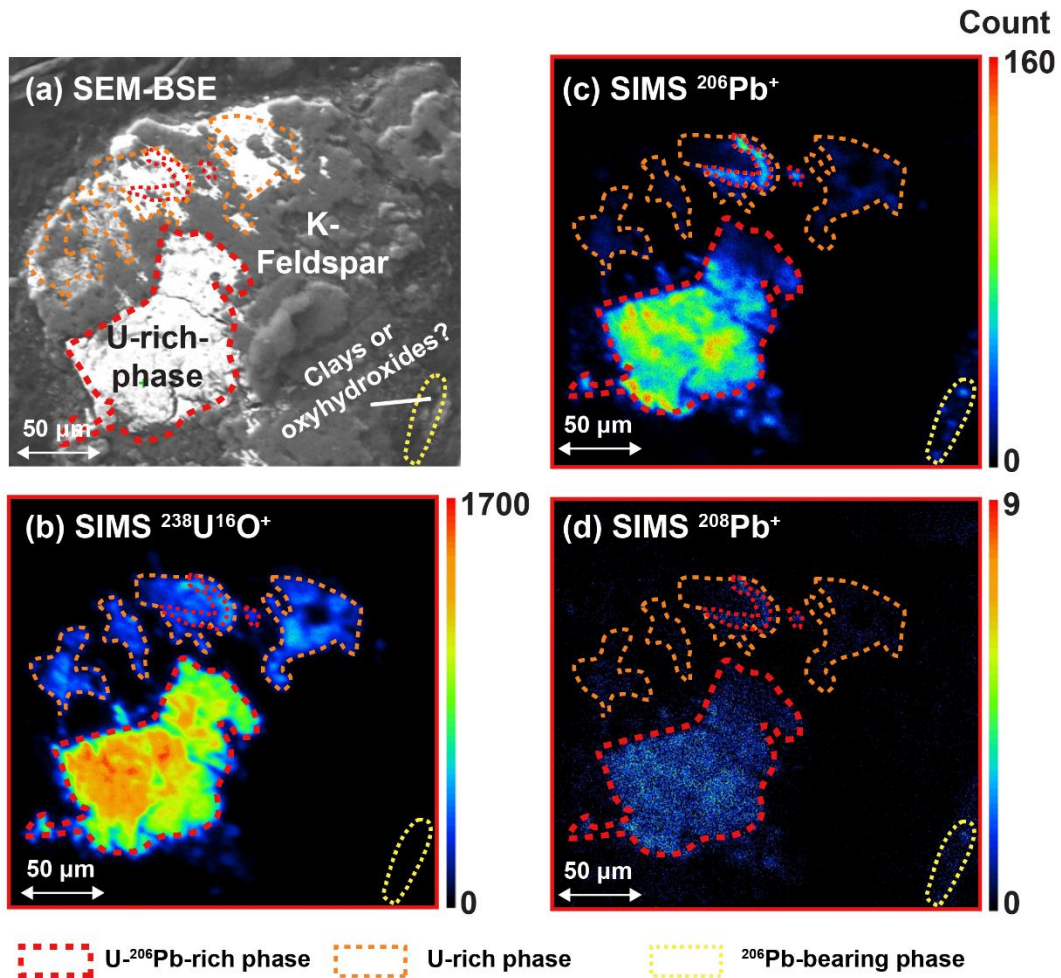
690 **Figure 5:** $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})$ vs. U diagram. Solid gray lines represent the mixing curves between a
 691 U-rich phase at secular equilibrium (black star, 700000 ppm of U) and two different U-poor
 692 phases (grey stars) that have different U contents (0.05 ppm and 0.6 ppm of U) and a
 693 $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})$ activity ratio of 400. The weight fractions of U-rich phase in the mix are
 694 represented with a black dot. The grey field correspond to the U-ores composition.



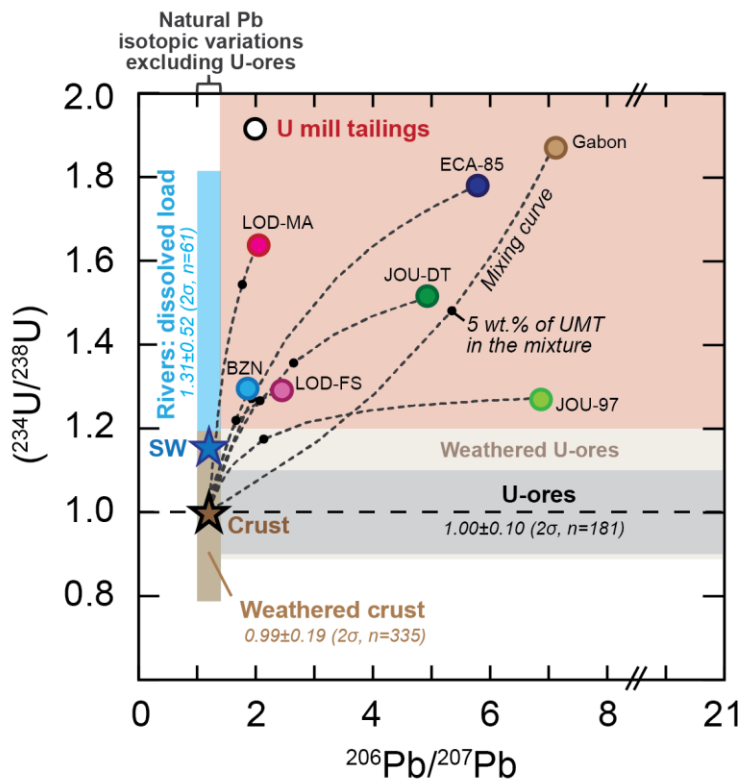
695

696 **Figure 6:** (a) $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ vs. $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ and (b) $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$ vs. $^{204}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$ diagrams for U
 697 mill tailings from France and Gabon. The dark gray circle represent the present day average
 698 crust (PDAC: Stacey and Krammers, 1975) and this circle includes the range of composition
 699 of chemical or natural materials encountered in the environment (Berglund and Wieser,
 700 2011). Small blue circles represent the Pb isotope ratios for U oxides from France

701 (L'Ecarpière: Cathelineau et al., 1990; Lodève: Lancelot et al., 1984 ; Piégut: Turpin and
702 Leroy, 1987; Pen Ar Ran and Métairie Neuve: Ballouard et al., 2017 ; Margnac and Fanay U
703 deposits: Leroy and Holliger, 1984). Large blue circles represent the theoretical $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$
704 ratios calculated for the first (Retail: 425 Ma) and the last (Bertholène: 40 Ma) U deposit in
705 France reported in Cathelineau et al. (1990) using the Pb-Pb datation method (e.g. Patterson,
706 1956). Small orange circles represent the Pb isotope ratios for U oxides from Gabon (Gancarz
707 et al., 1978). Large orange circles represent the theoretical $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ ratios calculated for the
708 U deposit in the Francevillian basin (Gabon) at 2050 ± 30 Ma (Gancarz, 1978). The blue
709 (France) and the orange (Gabon) areas represent the possible range of composition resulting
710 from the mixing between a material having the composition of the PDAC and the respective
711 U ores. The fraction of radiogenic Pb coming from the U ores in the U mill tailing (*k* factor,
712 in grey) have been determined from the equation proposed by Gourgiotis et al. (2020). The
713 Pb isotopic compositions used for the end-members are described in the text. (b) The dashed
714 lines represent the linear regression of the six U mill tailings from France (orange) and from
715 U mill tailings from Gabon and PDAC (blue). The apparent age of formation of U deposits
716 was calculated using the respective intercept values.



721 **Figure 8:** (a) SEM-BSE imaging of (U,Pb)-rich phases of GABON sample. (b) and (c) SEM-
 722 EDS mapping of Pb and S. (d), (e), (f) and (g) SIMS mapping of ^{28}Si , ^{206}Pb , ^{208}Pb , $^{238}\text{U}^{16}\text{O}$.



723

724 **Figure 9:** ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) vs $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ diagram showing the specific signature of U mill tailings
 725 (UMT). Dashed lines represent mixing curves between each U mill tailings and a material
 726 having the composition of the present day average crust at secular equilibrium (U, Pb
 727 content: Rudnick and Gao, 2014; $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$: Stacey and Krammers, 1976). The fraction of
 728 5% of U mill tailings in the mix is represented with a black dot. The average ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$)
 729 activity ratio of the weathered crust and dissolved load of major rivers comes from Suhr et
 730 al., (2018). ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) of the seawater (Osmond and Cowart, 1976). Field of weathered U-
 731 ores was drawn using the range of ($^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$) reported in Lawson et al., (1986) and the range
 732 of $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ for U-ores. The natural Pb isotopic variation (excluding U-ores) comes from
 733 Berglund and Wieser (2011).

734

735 **7 Tables**

U mill tailings	TMF	U mineralization				U-ore milling process and effluent treatment		
		Mining division	Deposit type	Geological unit	Age	Mill factory	Milling type	Effluent treatment
LOD-FS LOD-MA	Le Bosc (Lodève)	Lodévois	Tectonic-lithologic sandstone	Lodève basin	(I) 183-172Ma (II) 103-113Ma	SIMO Le Bosc	Alkaline	Not neutralized
ECA-85	L'Ecarpière	Bretagne-Vendée	Granite related	Mortagne massif	(I) 322-308Ma (II) 286-264Ma	SIMO Ecarpière	Acid	CaCO ₃ , Lime
BZN	Bellezane	La Crouzille	Granite related	Saint Sylvestre massif	(I) 276-270Ma (II) 183-170 Ma	SIMO Bessines	Acid	Lime
JOU-97 JOU-DT	Le Bernardan (Jouac)	Mailhac-sur-Benaize	Granite related	Western Marche massif	(I) 280Ma (II) 170-140Ma	SMJ Jouac	Acid	Lime, BaCl ₂
Gabon	Mounana	Mounana	Tectonic-lithologic sandstone	Francevillian basin	(I) 2050Ma	COMUF Mounana	Acid	Not neutralized

736

737 **Table 1:** U mill tailings description. Information about the U mill tailings are coming from
738 Somot et al., (1997), Pagel and Somot (2002), Ballini et al., (2020). The type of U deposit
739 comes from the classification suggested by IAEA (2018). (I) and (II) correspond to the age of
740 the main stage of U deposition from Cathelineau et al., (1990) and references therein, Horie
741 and Hidaka (2019) and Gancartz, (1978). Abbreviations: TMF, for Tailing Management
742 Facilities ; FS, for faille sud; MA, for Mas d'Alary; DT, for Dong Trieu; SIMO, for Société
743 Industrielle des Minerais de l'Ouest; SMJ, for Société des Mines de Jouac; COMUF, for
744 Compagnie des Mines d'Uranium de Franceville.

745

Sample TMF	LOD-FS Le Bosc (Lodève)	LOD-MA Le Bosc (Lodève)	ECA-85 L'Ecarpière	BZN Bellezanne	JOU-97 Le Bernardan (Jouac)	JOU-DT Le Bernardan (Jouac)	GABON Mounana
Major elements (wt. %)							
Al₂O₃	16.57	15.43	12.98	14.34	10.85	15.25	6.14
Fe₂O_{3(T)}	6.18	6.72	3.69	2.53	2.68	3.86	1.00
MgO	3.81	3.72	0.86	0.52	1.41	1.51	0.20
CaO	6.45	7.21	6.71	2.36	4.05	4.60	0.10
Na₂O	2.72	2.90	1.48	1.89	1.28	1.62	0.11
K₂O	5.65	4.82	3.64	5.34	4.07	5.78	1.39
TiO₂	0.65	0.62	0.35	0.25	0.16	0.26	0.16
MnO	0.13	0.17	0.03	0.06	0.08	0.17	0.01
P₂O₅	0.15	0.13	0.34	0.26	0.14	0.17	0.02
S_(T)	0.12	0.09	3.04	2.77	1.87	3.07	0.05
Trace elements (µg/g⁻¹)							
Ba	688	652	320	480	1193	532	592
Pb	542	443	66	418	76	201	805
Th (ID)	11.2	10.8	17.6	15.3	8.8	10.5	21.0
U (ID)	594	321	30	169	101	131	71

746

747 **Table 2:** Major and trace element contents of U mill tailings from France and Gabon. Major
748 elements were measured using ICP-OES technique, while S_(T) content was measured using a
749 CHNS elemental analyser. Trace elements were measured using an ICPMS/MS with a
750 standard calibration technique (Ba and Pb) or by isotope dilution (ID for U and Th).

751

Sample	^{238}U	2σ	(^{238}U)	2σ	$(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})$	2σ	$(^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U})$	2σ	$(^{226}\text{Ra}/^{230}\text{Th})$	2σ	$(^{210}\text{Pb}/^{226}\text{Ra})$	2σ
	$\mu\text{g/g}$		Bq/kg		AR		AR		AR		AR	
LOD-FS	590	± 1.5	7342	± 19	1.29	± 0.03	7.1	± 0.3	0.91	± 0.05	0.69	± 0.02
LOD-MA	319	± 1.1	3966	± 13	1.64	± 0.04	7.9	± 0.2	0.95	± 0.04	0.71	± 0.01
ECA-85	29.6	± 0.1	369	± 1	1.78	± 0.02	65.0	± 0.3	0.63	± 0.04	0.92	± 0.04
BZN	168	± 0.5	2086	± 7	1.29	± 0.01	15.4	± 0.2	1.00	± 0.00	0.83	± 0.01
JOU-97	100	± 0.7	1243	± 9	1.27	± 0.02	23.1	± 0.3	0.60	± 0.03	0.68	± 0.02
JOU-DT	129.7	± 0.5	1615	± 6	1.51	± 0.01	19.1	± 0.3	2.55	± 0.12	0.828	± 0.004
GABON	70.4	± 0.4	877	± 5	1.87	± 0.05	6.6	± 0.2	3.13	± 0.40	0.89	± 0.01

752

753 **Table 3:** Activities of ^{238}U and activity ratios (AR) of long-live radionuclides of U mill
754 tailings from France and Gabon. U and Th isotopes were measured by ICP-MS. ($^{230}\text{Th}/^{226}\text{Ra}$)
755 and ($^{210}\text{Pb}/^{226}\text{Ra}$) were measured by gamma spectrometry.

Sample	$^{204}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$	2σ	$^{206}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$	2σ	$^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$	2σ	$\% \text{Pb}_{\text{rad}}$
							<i>k</i>
LOD-FS	0.0592	± 0.0008	2.455	± 0.019	2.304	± 0.016	24%
LOD-MA	0.0606	± 0.0005	2.053	± 0.015	2.353	± 0.012	18%
ECA-85	0.0475	± 0.0004	5.812	± 0.049	1.871	± 0.009	60%
BZN	0.0611	± 0.0003	1.862	± 0.007	2.388	± 0.005	14%
JOU-97	0.0437	± 0.0005	6.900	± 0.126	1.731	± 0.004	66%
JOU-DT	0.0505	± 0.0004	4.948	± 0.041	1.981	± 0.014	53%
GABON	0.0040	± 0.0001	7.157	± 0.082	0.222	± 0.001	95%

756

757 **Table 4:** Pb isotopes of U mill tailings from France and Gabon measured by HR-ICPMS. The
758 fraction of radiogenic Pb ($\% \text{Pb}_{\text{rad}}$), the Pb from the U-ore, was calculating using the method
759 described in Gourgiotis et al., (2020).

760

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