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MnO/MgO ratios of arc basalts highlight the role of early garnet fractionation

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Abstract

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Multiple lines of evidence suggest that garnet may play an important role in the generation of arc magmas, either as a residual phase during mantle melting or subsequently during crystallisation differentiation. Moreover, garnet stability is strongly pressure sensitive, and therefore garnet fractionation can serve as an indirect indicator of fractionation pressure. Here, we introduce MnO/MgO ratios as a compositional proxy uniquely sensitive to garnet fractionation. We show that primary mantle melts have nearly invariant MnO/MgO ratios that are in equilibrium with mantle olivine. Therefore, the subsequent evolution of this ratio is only a function of magmatic differentiation. Further, based on compiled experimental studies, garnet is the only phase that crystallises from basaltic magmas and preferentially partitions MnO relative to

MgO. Thus, limited increases in MnO/MgO ratios during magmatic differentiation, as we observe in most continental arcs, are strong evidence for early garnet fractionation and require that crystallisation differentiation begins at or below the Moho of many arcs.

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Introduction

The fractionation of garnet from subduction zone magmas is hypothesised to play a critical role in several fundamental arc processes: delamination of garnet-rich, density unstable cumulates may be critical to the production and stabilisation of continental crust (Jagoutz and Behn, 2013), while fractionation of ferrous iron-rich garnet may contribute to the generation of oxidised, calc-alkaline arc magmas (Tang *et al.*, 2018). These hypotheses are supported by observations from exhumed arc lower crustal sections and xenoliths, which commonly include garnet-rich lithologies (Ducea and Saleeby, 1996; Jagoutz, 2010), and by experimental studies that show that garnet is a stable phase in hydrous magmas at typical arc lower crustal conditions (Alonso-Perez *et al.*, 2009; Ulmer *et al.*, 2018). However, primary garnet phenocrysts are rare in typical arc lavas, making the ubiquity of garnet fractionation at modern arcs difficult to assess.

As an alternative approach, many researchers have highlighted the distinctive heavy rare earth element (HREE)enriched trace element signature of garnet and argued that garnet must play an important role in the petrogenesis of evolved magmas with complementary HREE depletions. Early applications of this approach focused on Archean tonalite-trondhjemitegranodiorite suites (TTGs) and modern dacites with elevated Sr/Y and La/Yb ratios and argued that these magmas represent partial melts of garnet-bearing subducted crust (Drummond and Defant, 1990). More recently, trace element ratios including Sr/Y, Dy/Yb, and La/Yb were proposed as proxies for crustal thickness (Chapman *et al.*, 2015; Profeta *et al.*, 2015), based on the interpretation that they reflect increased extents of differentiation at pressures high enough to stabilise garnet (*e.g.*, Davidson *et al.*, 2007).

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These two approaches use the same trace element ratios to infer distinct processes at different locations within subduction zone systems. Therefore, in the absence of additional observations, interpretations of these ratios alone are necessarily non-unique. In this paper, we introduce melt MnO/MgO ratios as an alternative indicator of garnet fractionation based on two findings: primary mantle melts have comparatively uniform MnO/MgO ratios; and the Mn-Mg partition coefficient between garnet (gt) and melt, defined as $K_D^{Mn-Mg} = (Mn_{gt}/Mn_{melt})/(Mg_{gt}/Mg_{melt})$, is greater than 1, unique among typical early fractionating phases.

Variability of Subduction Zone Primary Melts

Proxies for garnet differentiation and crustal thickness using trace element ratios, including Sr/Y and La/Yb, have been developed primarily for application to relatively evolved lavas. The rationale for these proxies is that fractionation of garnet-rich cumulates or, equivalently, extraction of partial melts from garnet-rich residues, causes depletions in HREEs, resulting in differentiated melts with elevated trace element ratios. While garnet fractionation may generate this signal, inferring this process based on only the values of these ratios in differentiated magmas requires independent knowledge of the derivative magma's parental melt composition. Without this information, it is not possible to attribute elevated trace element ratios in differentiated magmas to garnet fractionation rather than to inherited parental magma compositions.

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A recent compilation of primary arc lava compositions (Schmidt and Jagoutz, 2017) highlights this problem. These samples have compositions in equilibrium with typical mantle peridotite, and thus have necessarily undergone minimal differentiation within the crust. However, these lavas display a wide range in both Sr/Y and La/Yb ratios that show no correlation with crustal thickness (Fig. 1). In contrast, both ratios are strongly correlated with primary melt type, regardless of crustal thickness or upper plate type: tholeiitic magmas have uniformly low Sr/Y and La/Yb ratios, while calc-alkaline magmas span a wide range. This large range in primary arc magma incompatible trace element ratios reflects several factors, including variable contributions from the slab (*e.g., Elliott, 2004*) and degree of prior mantle depletion (*e.g., Kelley et al., 2006*).

During differentiation, a range of processes beyond garnet fractionation can further modify these ratios. Plagioclase accumulation generates magmas with elevated Sr and Sr/Y ratios (Vukadinovic, 1993), while amphibole fractionation can produce magmas with elevated La/Yb ratios (Davidson *et al.*, 2007). These additional processes are much less sensitive to pressure compared to garnet fractionation, and instead are dominantly sensitive to magmatic H₂O contents. Given the range of primary melt compositions and these additional confounding processes, it is unlikely that the trace element ratios of any single suite of differentiated arc magmas provide meaningful estimates of crustal thickness.

MnO/MgO Ratios in Primary Arc Melts

In contrast to incompatible trace element ratios, the behaviour of most compatible elements in mantle melts is controlled by melting reactions in the mantle wedge. Typically, these elements and their ratios vary predictably in response to changes in mantle melting regime (e.g., Grove et al., 2013), while some canonical ratios, such as Mg# (molar Mg/(Mg + Fe)), display a relatively invariant range reflective of equilibrium with mantle olivine. In Figure 2a, we show that the MnO/MgO ratios of primary arc magmas are also tightly clustered and, based on a recent model of olivine-melt Mn/Mg partitioning (Blundy et al., 2020), are consistent with control by equilibration with mantle olivine (Fig. 2b). These primary melt compositions are inconsistent with garnet-present mantle melting, as this process produces melts with distinctively low MnO/MgO ratios (≤ 0.01 ; Walter, 1998). This is consistent with observations that most garnet is exhausted at moderate extents of melting at typical sub-arc mantle conditions (≤11 wt. % melt at 3 GPa; Kushiro, 1996), and with final mantle equilibration at pressures lower than the spinel-garnet transition (Perrin et al., 2016).

These primary lavas show a wide range of incompatible trace element ratios indicative of variable slab contributions (Fig. 1). However, their MnO/MgO ratios are uncorrelated with these trace element ratios (Fig. S-1) and show negligible evidence for control by slab contributions: subducted sediments have elevated MnO/MgO ratios compared to the sub-arc mantle (Plank, 2014), and this elevated ratio is inherited by slab-derived melts or fluids despite equilibrating with garnet-rich residue (Schmidt et al., 2004). The apparent contradiction between incompatible trace element ratios and the MnO/MgO ratios is resolved with a simple mass balance argument: unlike incompatible trace elements, slab derived fluids and melts typically contain an order of magnitude less MnO and MgO than the final melt in equilibrium with the mantle, and thus can exert only minimal control on the eventual MnO/MgO ratios of these melts. The small fraction of the primary melts with elevated MnO/MgO ratios (Fig. 2a) may reflect contributions from unusually MnO-rich slab sediments, although these melts may also



Figure 1 Variations in the trace element ratios of calc-alkaline and tholeiitic primary arc melts compared to SiO₂ (wt. %). In all panels, symbol colours are based on local arc thickness calculated from CRUST1.0 (Laske *et al.*, 2013), and empty symbols show tholeiitic lavas. Mean values are shown with solid black lines and 1 standard deviation is marked with dashed black lines. (a) Sr/Y, with equivalent crustal thickness from empirical model in Chapman *et al.* (2015) shown on right hand *y*-axis. (b) Chondrite normalised La/Yb, with equivalent crustal thickness calculated using Equation 2 in Profeta *et al.* (2015) shown in right hand *y*-axis. (c) Variations in chondrite normalised Dy/Yb ratios. REE ratios in (b) and (c) normalised to chondritic values from McDonough and Sun (1995).



Figure 2 (a) Range in MnO/MgO ratios of calc-alkaline and tholeiitic primary arc melts compared to SiO₂ (wt. %). Symbols as in Figure 1: marker colour indicates crustal thickness interpolated from CRUST1.0, with filled symbols used to show calc-alkaline primary melts and empty symbols showing tholeiitic primary melts. Field of MnO/MgO ratios in equilibrium with mantle olivine is shown in pink, and calculated using the model in Blundy *et al.* (2020) and temperatures from 1100 to 1350 °C, olivine forsterite contents from 0.88 to 0.92, and compiled olivine MnO/MgO ratios. (b) Histogram of sub-arc mantle olivine MnO/MgO ratios from manually filtered GEOROC (https://georoc.eu/) pre-compiled olivine dataset (DIGIS Team, 2022). Olivine dataset available in Table S-2.

have undergone limited fractionation of olivine ± clinopyroxene (see below).

Methods and Data Compilation

The previous section demonstrates that mantle-derived melts show a restricted range of MnO/MgO ratios that are reflective of equilibration with mantle olivine. To characterise the evolution of this ratio during crystallisation differentiation, we compiled Mn-Mg mineral-melt partitioning data from published experimental studies, focusing on studies that include garnetbearing experiments. As MnO is commonly included in experimental bulk compositions and is a standard electron microprobe analyte, we were able to compile large datasets of Mn/Mg partition coefficients for all typical experimental phases. The full list of compiled experimental references is available in the Supplementary Information References.

Although commonly measured, MnO is frequently present at <0.1 wt. % concentrations in experimental melts and is only rarely an emphasis of experimental studies (*cf.* Balta *et al.*, 2011). Further, in experiments conducted at relatively low temperatures, garnets can be strongly zoned. Due to these analytical complications, propagated relative uncertainties on experimental Mn/Mg partition coefficients (K_D^{Mn-Mg}) in many experiments, and particularly at lower temperatures and pressures relevant to garnet fractionation, are >50 % (1 standard deviation). To address these limitations, we reanalysed garnet and melt compositions from two previous experimental studies relevant to garnet crystallisation at crustal conditions (Alonso-Perez *et al.*,

2009; Ulmer *et al.*, 2018). We used laser ablation ICP-MS to remeasure melt MnO contents and made new electron microprobe measurements of garnet rim major element contents from 25 experiments. Detailed descriptions of analytical methods are available in the Supplementary Information, and the new analyses are presented in Table S-1. All compiled garnet partitioning data are shown in Figure 3d. As our primary focus here is on the role of garnet in subduction zone magmas, we subsequently exclude experiments conducted at pressures >5 GPa or those containing significant amounts of CO₂ or where the standard deviation uncertainty (1 σ) on garnet K_D^{Mn-Mg} is \geq 50 %.

Results and Discussion

Our compiled partitioning data shows that garnet is unique among commonly fractionating minerals: most silicate phases are characterised by K_D^{Mn-Mg} consistently <1, and typically <0.5 (Fig. 3a–c), while garnet K_D^{Mn-Mg} shows considerably more variation but is consistently higher than other phases (≥1; Fig. 3d). In contrast to non-garnet silicates, Fe-Ti oxides also typically have $K_D^{Mn-Mg} > 1$ (Fig. S-2). However, these oxides incorporate much smaller amounts of MnO and MgO compared to garnet and are usually less abundant, and thus their fractionation has a comparatively smaller influence on melt compositions. To better constrain the effect of garnet fractionation, we modelled the garnet-melt K_D^{Mn-Mg} data using an Arrhenius type function (Fig. 3e). We explored models with additional parameters including melt and garnet compositions, and fO_2 , but did not find that incorporating extra variables improved model performance.



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Additional experiments may reveal other variables that influence garnet K_D^{Mn-Mg} . However, given the robust model fit presented here, we expect other variables to be secondary to the effects of changing temperature and pressure.

The distinctive partitioning behaviour of garnet makes MnO/MgO ratios ideal for isolating the impact of garnet fractionation. Unlike MnO/FeO ratios, which were previously used to identify distinct mantle melt source regions (*e.g.*, Balta *et al.*, 2011), the evolution of MnO/MgO ratios are insensitive to variations in magmatic fO_2 : while Mn can occur in multiple valence states, the MnO-Mn₃O₄ fO_2 buffer is more than 4 log units above QFM, and thus Mn³⁺ is negligible in typical arc magmas (O'Neill and Pownceby, 1993). In comparison, the partitioning of MnO from total iron will inevitably introduce fO_2 sensitivity due to the significant quantities of Fe³⁺ present at typical magmatic fO_2 conditions. Additionally, apart from fO_2 effects, MnO and FeO are much less strongly partitioned by most silicate phases, significantly complicating the ability to isolate the effects of garnet fractionation with MnO/FeO ratios.

Using our model for garnet K_D^{Mn-Mg} , we can estimate how melt MnO/MgO ratios evolve in response to fractionation of various phases. We find that at pressures <2 GPa, the garnet K_D^{Mn-Mg} is >1 for any magma below 1300 °C. At conditions more typical to arc lower crust, the garnet K_D^{Mn-Mg} increases to values >2, and thus pure garnet fractionation will cause melt MnO/ MgO ratios to decrease. The effect of garnet fractionation is further amplified when comparing the effect of garnet fractionation in MnO/MgO to SiO₂. As garnet has much lower SiO₂ contents than typical arc melts, garnet fractionation will cause rapid increases in melt SiO₂ while hindering increases in MnO/ MgO ratios, a distinctive trend in comparison to most other phases that crystallise from arc melts.

The impact of garnet fractionation is evident when examining the SiO_2 contents and MnO/MgO ratios of typical arc melts (Fig. 4). Clear differences are immediately apparent between relatively thin-crusted island arcs and continental arcs with thicker upper plates. Melts in both settings originate near the primitive arc compositions shown in Figure 2, but island arc magmas rapidly evolve to significantly higher MnO/MgO values, consistent with initial olivine + clinopyroxene dominated fractionation (Fig. 4a). Lavas from the westernmost Aleutian Arc and from Matthew and Hunter Volcanoes in Vanuatu are notable exceptions to the general island arc trend and are highlighted in Figure 4a. Erupted lavas at these locations are generally evolved and have very low MnO/MgO ratios, likely requiring the involvement of garnet in their petrogenesis. This is consistent with independent evidence that supports a slab-derived origin for these magmas (Yogodzinski *et al.*, 2015; McCarthy *et al.*, 2022), and suggests that in rare instances arc lavas retain a garnet-source signature without complete re-equilibration with the mantle wedge.

In contrast to the typical island arc trend, increases in MnO/MgO values at continental arcs are much more limited (Fig. 4b), requiring significant garnet fractionation in addition to olivine ± clinopyroxene. It is particularly noteworthy that this divergent behaviour occurs during early fractionation of basaltic melts. Amphibole and/or Fe-Ti oxides also have low to very low SiO₂ contents and moderate to high K_D^{Mn-Mg} , and thus can also limit the extent of increases in MnO/MgO ratios (Figs. 4, S-2). However, these phases do not crystallise from typical arc melts until cooling to temperatures below at least ~1050 °C and cannot be responsible for the divergent behaviour observed in basaltic compositions. Further, the minimum pressures at which garnet is stable increase for less evolved magmas (Fig. S-3). Early garnet fractionation from basaltic liquids therefore requires that garnet fractionation begins at pressures \geq 1.5 GPa, or equivalently ≥50 km depth. Our current data do not allow us to distinguish between ubiquitous garnet fractionation and mixing between deep garnet fractionating magmas and more shallowly differentiating magmas. However, either scenario requires that at least some magmas undergo garnet fractionation at or below the Moho of many continental arcs.

The widespread fractionation of garnet-rich cumulates at or below the Moho in modern continental arcs is difficult to verify with geophysical techniques, as these cumulates have densities and seismic velocities comparable to or greater than



Figure 4 Evolution of MnO/MgO ratios as a function of SiO₂ contents in lavas from representative modern (**a**) island arcs, and (**b**) continental arcs. Previously identified lavas with slab melt signatures from the western Aleutians (Yogodzinski *et al.*, 2015) and Vanuatu (McCarthy *et al.*, 2022) are highlighted with black triangles in (**a**). In both panels, the mean (solid) and standard deviation MnO/MgO ratios (dashed) of primary arc melts are plotted with black lines, and representative fractionation vectors are calculated for crystallisation of typical phases from near-primary arc basalts. All data downloaded from GEOROC (https://georoc.eu/) precompiled datasets for convergent margins in May 2021 (DIGIS Team, 2022).

sub-arc mantle (Müntener and Ulmer, 2006). Instead, fractionation of these cumulates near the base of the crust may contribute to the commonly poorly defined seismic Moho at many arcs. Finally, while both calc-alkaline (Fe-depletion) and tholeiitic (Fe-enrichment) differentiation sequences are observed at most arcs, calc-alkaline trends appear dominant in the thickest arcs (Chiaradia, 2014). This observation, combined with the findings here, suggests an important role for garnet fractionation in the generation of some calc-alkaline differentiation sequences (e.g., Tang et al., 2018). However, calc-alkaline sequences are produced by extensive crystallisation differentiation that includes other phases such as FeTi oxides and amphibole. The stability of these phases is controlled by variables including fO2 and magmatic H2O contents, and thus a range of variables and fractionating assemblages likely combine to drive calc-alkaline differentiation (Sisson and Grove, 1993; Sisson et al., 2005; Zimmer et al., 2010).

Conclusions

On a global scale, trace element ratios such as Sr/Y and La/Yb appear to correlate with arc crustal thickness, and thus may be broadly reflective of varying extents of garnet fractionation. However, applying these proxies to individual magmatic suites can lead to incorrectly inferring garnet fractionation in magmas that instead reflect significant slab components and/or plagioclase accumulation. We show that MnO/MgO ratios avoid many of these limitations and provide a powerful tool to illustrate the role of garnet fractionation. Arc primary melts show a restricted range of MnO/MgO ratios that are consistent with melts in equilibrium with mantle olivine. Further, during early stages of fractionation, garnet is the only crystallising phase that does not drive magmas to evolve to higher MnO/MgO ratios. This diagnostic behaviour appears to be quite common in thicker continental arcs, suggesting that crystallisation differentiation with or without increasing fO_2 begins for many continental arc magmas at or below the Moho.

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Additional Information

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