

Lava Domes: Eruptions in Chemical Disequilibrium

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Active lava domes display a range of eruptive behaviours which are defined by the local rheological properties of the magma. Magma ascent results in changes in P-T-X which forces volatile exsolution and crystallisation; yet, as these conditions are transient, the magma remains in constant disequilibrium with its surroundings. Volatiles, and principally water, have been argued to be the most important control on magma rheology; they influence the viscosity of the melt and the total production of gas bubbles, which define ascent rates via buoyancy and challenge the physical coherence of magma prompted to fragment. Decompression has long been considered the main variable controlling volcanic eruptions; however, here we assess the effects of temperature.

We present field and experimental results which argue for the importance of thermally-driven disequilibrium in water content. First we test effects of cooling using in situ hydration measurements in a unique simultaneous thermal analyser: Cooling is shown to increase the solubility of water in the melt (both in the relaxed and unrelaxed states), which we find resorbs at rapid rates with the implication that sintering can be accelerated several-fold. This may have significant implications for tuffsite formation in volcanic conduits. Second we test the effect of rapid heating using a high-velocity rotary shear apparatus. Rapid heating is found to trigger foaming and melting of surrounding crystals. The textures developed in these experiments match those observed in ash collected from gas-and-ash explosions at Santiaguito volcano. We use these results to elaborate a new model of fragmentation, in which the mechanical work of ascending magma may induce superheating that triggers partial melting, foaming and fragmentation. Comparison of our findings with current water solubility models suggests that heat may be an overlooked control on eruptive behaviour.

Keywords: foaming, volatiles, fragmentation, fault, frictional melting, sintering