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2	Revision 1
3	Nitrogen and Carbon Concentrations and Isotopic Compositions of
4	the Silica Clathrate Melanophlogite
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ABSTRACT

26	The concentrations and isotopic compositions of N and C were obtained for five
27	melanophlogite samples, ideal formula 46SiO ₂ ·6(CO ₂ , N ₂)·2(CH ₄ , N ₂), from various localities in
28	Italy and California, USA. The melanophlogite crystals enclathrate 132 to 1674 ppm N presumed
29	to be speciated as molecular N_2 and with $\delta^{15}N_{air}$ ranging from -6.1 to +5.7‰. The higher $\delta^{15}N$
30	values overlap those for organic/sedimentary N, the latter largely with values between 0 and
31	+10‰. The samples also contain 1.2 to 2.9 wt. % total C, with $\delta^{13}C_{VPDB}$ of -42.9 to -8.7‰,
32	obtained from analyses of the bulk C in samples with probable varying proportions of CO_2 and
33	CH_4 in the melanophlogite cages. Although the lower $\delta^{15}N$ values for the melanophlogites (-6.1
34	and -2.8‰) are near upper mantle values (-5 \pm 2‰), the full range in $N_2~\delta^{15}N$ can be explained
35	by equilibration with $\mathrm{NH_4}^+$ in clay minerals bearing an organic-influenced N isotope signature, at
36	temperatures of near 100°C estimated for melanophlogite crystallization. The lower δ^{13} C values
37	(as low as -42.9‰) are suggestive of equilibration with carbonaceous matter (poorly
38	recrystallized organic material) at high cage CH4:CO2, perhaps representing lower oxygen
39	fugacities. The growing number of reports of melanophlogite at terrestrial localities, and its
40	occurrences in organic-rich settings, makes this clathrate mineral an intriguing candidate for
41	preserving records of past surface or near-surface biogeochemical cycling on Earth and perhaps
42	on Mars.
43	Keywords: melanophlogite, nitrogen isotopes, carbon isotopes, microporous minerals, mass

44 spectrometry, silica clathrate, biogeochemistry

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INTRODUCTION

48	Nitrogen-bearing minerals crystallizing in low- T surface or near-surface environments can
49	potentially reveal information regarding the pathways for biogeochemically processed N into the
50	solid inorganic Earth (Bebout et al., 2016). It is well known that various layer silicates, such as
51	the clay minerals (e.g., illite), are important in this regard because they can incorporate NH_4^+ into
52	their crystal structures, in general substituting for K^+ (Busigny and Bebout, 2013). Other
53	minerals could also be of interest in terms of N incorporation and, here, the microporous class of
54	phases deserves attention. Melanophlogite, ideally 46SiO ₂ ·6(N ₂ , CO ₂)·2(CH ₄ , N ₂), a rare porosil
55	or silica clathrate (Liebau 1988), is worthy of consideration because it can crystallize in near-
56	surface hydrothermal environments and it can enclathrate N_2 as well as CH_4 , CO_2 , and H_2S
57	molecules (Kamb, 1965; Gies et al., 1982; Gies, 1983; Kortus et al., 2000; Kolesov and Geiger,
58	2003; Tribaudino et al., 2008; Momma et al., 2011; Momma, 2014; Miyajima et al., 2016).
59	Melanophlogite shares some general similarities with the higher- T microporous minerals
60	beryl and cordierite, but there are differences as well. In terms of similarity, all of these phases
61	can contain various single, neutral molecular species in small pores in their crystal structures.
62	The geochemical behavior of N_2 in beryl and cordierite was recently investigated and the latter
63	could serve as a sink for N in the shallow and middle continental crust (Bebout et al., 2016).
64	Melanophlogite, unlike cordierite, occurs in lower-T, near-surface geologic environments. Also
65	unlike beryl and cordierite, melanophlogite is hydrophobic and does not contain the polar $\mathrm{H_2O}$
66	molecule in its structure.
67	A good deal of structural, crystal-chemical and thermodynamic work has been conducted
68	on melanophlogite, but relatively little study has been done investigating its geochemical

69 properties, as revealed by its enclathrated molecules. In this brief contribution, we present, for

the first time, N concentrations and isotope compositions for five different melanophlogite samples, taken from well-known localities in Italy and California, USA. We discuss the degree to which this phase could serve as a host for storage of N (as N₂). We also present bulk C concentrations and δ^{13} C values of the same samples. These results hopefully will serve to encourage further investigation of biogeochemical processes attending the crystallization of this unusual mineral phase and the extent to which the volatiles in its cages can provide records of these processes.

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SAMPLES AND ANALYTICAL METHODS

Table 1 provides the sampling localities for the five melanophlogites analyzed in this 78 study. Nitrogen concentrations and isotope compositions were measured using the methods 79 80 described by Bebout et al. (2007). Liu et al. (1997) noted that the enclathrated molecules of melanophlogite can be released by heating above 600°C. In our study, 9 to 17 mg of 81 melanophlogite were loaded into quartz tubes with 1 g of CuO_x reagent and evacuated for 24 82 hours before sealing. The tubes were heated at 1100°C for 180 minutes, with the cooling history 83 carefully regulated to ensure speciation of N as N₂ and C and H as CO₂ and H₂O, respectively. 84 The resulting N₂ was purified in an all-metal extraction line, then transferred into a Finnigan 85 86 MAT 252 mass spectrometer via a Finnigan Gas Bench II and a "homemade" U-trap interface, 87 the latter into which small amounts of N2 (typically 50-300 nanomoles) are transferred 88 cryogenically before entrainment in a He stream. The analytical uncertainties for N concentrations are <5% and, for $\delta^{15}N_{air}$ values (reported in standard delta convention, referenced 89 to the isotopic composition of atmospheric N₂ with isotopic ratio ${}^{14}N/{}^{15}N = 272$; Mariotti 1984), 90

91 uncertainty is ~0.15‰ (1 σ) for samples with > 5 ppm (see Bebout et al., 2007).

92	Extraction of C from the same samples, after pretreatment with 1N HCl to remove any
93	carbonate, was undertaken similarly by heating the samples in sealed quartz tubes. In these
94	extractions, larger amounts of melanophlogite (up to 116 mg) were required to allow
95	measurement of the resulting CO ₂ by dual-inlet mass spectrometry. This method allows a
96	measurement of the δ^{13} C (reported relative to VPDB) of the bulk C released during heating (i.e.,
97	CH_4 and CO_2 in the cages is analyzed as bulk CO_2 gas). Uncertainties in C concentration are
98	estimated at <5%, and uncertainties in δ^{13} C (1 σ) are <0.1‰, for both estimates based on analyses
99	of international and internal standards (e.g., the international NBS-24 graphite standard).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

101	The measured N and C concentrations and isotopic compositions of the melanophlogite
102	samples are presented in Table 1. They contain between 132 and 1674 ppm of N with $\delta^{15}N$
103	ranging from -6.1 to +5.7‰. Several of the samples have $\delta^{15}N$ somewhat lower than the range of
104	\sim 0 to +10‰ for organic/sedimentary materials. Bulk C concentrations in the five
105	melanophlogites range from 1.24 to 2.88 wt. %, far higher than the N concentrations in the same
106	samples (i.e., C/N ratios range from 8 to 187; Table 1). The C concentrations for melanophlogite
107	from Racalmuto, Italy, and Mt. Hamilton, California, are similar to those obtained presented by
108	Beard et al. (2013) for melanophlogite from the same localities. δ^{13} C ranges from -42.9 to -8.7%
109	and the three melanophlogites with the lowest $\delta^{13}C$ (-42.0 to -32.8‰) also have the lowest $\delta^{15}N$
110	values (-6.1 to -2.5‰).

111 Geological occurrence and stability of melanophlogite

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Melanophlogite was first described by von Lasaulx (1876) as occurring in the well-known
Sicilian sedimentary S deposits (e.g., Giona Mine, Milena, Caltanissetta Province, Sicily; see

114	Dessau et al., 1962). It has since been found at a number of different localities worldwide (see
115	Beard et al., 2013; Housely, 2013). In several cases, it occurs in near-surface, volcanic-
116	sedimentary paleohydrothermal systems in fractures or druse cavities as euhedral crystals (e.g.,
117	Mt. Hamilton, CA; Chvaletice, Bohemia; Varano Marchesi, Parma, Italy). Reed (1937) reported
118	occurrences of melanophlogite in amygdules in Columbia River volcanic rocks (USA). Skinner
119	and Appleman (1963) estimated formation temperatures of less than 112°C as indicated by
120	melanophlogites "encrusting sulfur crystals". In the laboratory, melanophlogite crystals can
121	be synthesized at 170°C and approximately 150 bar (Gies et al., 1982). In the case of the Sicilian
122	S deposits, Skinner and Appleman (1963), citing Friedel (1890), write "the sulfur mines were
123	dripping with bitumen, and it is possible that the melanophlogite may actually have been
124	deposited from the bitumen." Other geologic occurrences have been recently reported, for
125	example, melanophlogite at a seafloor vent site in the Cascadia accretionary prism (Kohler et al.,
126	1999), in marine siliceous sediments (Adorni and Tateo, 2007), and in a Miocene methane seep-
127	deposit exposed on land near Joetsu, Japan (Miyajima et al., 2016). The growing number of
128	occurrences in near-surface, relatively low-T environments indicates that melanophlogite is
129	likely to be more abundant than previously recognized.
130	The thermodynamic stability and crystallization process of melanophlogite were discussed
131	in Geiger et al. (2008). Melanophlogite often occurs with other SiO_2 minerals such as cristobalite
132	and chalcedony or opal (Žák, 1972; Cooper and Dunning, 1972; Dunning and Cooper, 2002;
133	Tribaudino et al. 2008). At Racalmuto, Italy, for example, melanophlogite occurs with opal and
134	quartz and is often nucleated around these phases (Skinner and Appleman 1963).
135	Melanophlogite's thermodynamic properties (Navrotsky et al., 2003; Geiger et al., 2008) and its
136	field occurrence are consistent with one another and indicate metastable crystallization (Geiger et

al., 2008). Gies et al. (1982) noted that melanophlogite can transform to quartz upon grinding.
However, melanophlogite may crystallize in nature more often than realized, as it is not easily
recognized and it is readily pseudomorphed by other SiO₂ phases (e.g., cristobalite; Beard et al.,
2013, also see Housely, 2013 for description of newly reported melanophlogite occurrences in
southern California, USA).

142 Crystallization and enclathration of nitrogen and carbon in melanophlogite

143 Whether or not melanophlogite is metastable, it enclathrates various simple molecules of interest to those investigating surface/near-surface biogeochemical cycling. Diffraction and 144 vibrational spectroscopic study (Gies 1983; Kortus et al., 2000; Kolesov and Geiger, 2003), as 145 well as simple mass spectrometry measurements (Gies et al. 1982), show that, either alone 146 147 (Varano Marchesi, Parma, Italy - Tribaudino et al., 2008) or in combination, CH₄, N₂, CO₂, and H₂S molecules can be present. Melanophlogite has no essential "OH" (cf. Beard et al., 2013) or 148 H₂O molecules to the best of our knowledge (i.e., it is hydrophobic). It is clear, though, that CH₄, 149 N₂, CO₂ (Gies et al. 1982; Kortus et al., 2000; Kolesov and Geiger, 2003), and H₂S (Tribaudino 150 151 et al., 2008) molecules serve as structure-directing-agents and are a prerequisite for 152 crystallization as shown by Gies et al. (1982; 1998). There are two distinct micropores or cages in the structure, namely the smaller $[5^{12}]$ and larger $[5^{12}6^2]$ cages (Fig. 1). Where precisely N₂ is 153 located is uncertain, with Gies (1983) suggesting both cages with N₂ predominantly in $[5^{12}6^2]$, 154 while Gies et al. (1998) state "almost 100 % occupancy in the smaller...[5¹²] cages." Single-155 crystal Raman measurements at room temperature and 4 K show only one narrow N₂ symmetric-156 stretching peak at 2321 cm⁻¹, indicating that the molecule is likely enclathrated in just one cage 157 (Kolesov and Geiger, 2003). 158

159 The relatively high concentrations of N measured here confirm the results of an early mass spectrometry study (Gies et al. 1982). However, for the melanophlogite sample from Mt. 160 Hamilton, CA, Gies (1983) calculated molecular CO₂:N₂:CH₄ ratios of 1:3.6:1.8, whereas in the 161 162 Mt. Hamilton melanophlogite we analyzed, concentrations of bulk C exceeded those for N (see Table 1). There can be, though, strong variations in molecular concentrations even in the same 163 crystal (Gies et al. 1982). Variations in the N contents and N/C ratios among the five samples 164 165 point to diverse fluid compositions in the paleohydrothermal environment from which 166 melanophlogites crystallized. The Raman spectroscopy performed by Tribaudino et al. (2008) indicated varying proportions of CO₂, CH₄, and N₂ in melanophlogites from Mt. Hamilton, 167 Livorno, and Racalmuto, and among melanophlogites from specific localities, leading those 168 169 authors to suggest that concentrations of these volatiles vary considerably at any individual locality. Two simple geochemical scenarios to explain the measured N_2 isotopic compositions in 170 melanophlogite are: i) melanophlogite incorporates N_2 of the same isotopic composition as the 171 N_2 in the fluid from which it crystallizes, or ii) ^{14}N or ^{15}N is preferentially fractionated into the 172 cages during crystallization. For this second scenario, the negative $\delta^{15}N$ values could thus be 173 interpreted as indicating an enrichment of ¹⁴N relative to a coexisting fluid with a more positive 174 175 δ^{15} N value. The two scenarios would also apply to the incorporation of CO₂ and CH₄ into the melanophlogite cages, but instead involving ¹³C and ¹²C. Unfortunately, the isotopic 176 compositions of the fluids present during melanophlogite crystallization could not be determined 177 making it impossible to evaluate the two possibilities. However the vibrational IR and Raman 178 spectra of the melanophlogite from Mt. Hamilton (see Table 1) provide information regarding 179 180 the energetic state of the enclathrated molecules (Kolesov and Geiger 2003). The symmetric stretching band of N_2 in melanophlogite is located at 2321 cm⁻¹ compared to 2330.7 cm⁻¹ for the 181

case of a free gaseous N_2 molecule. The relatively small difference in the two energies indicates a weak interaction of the N_2 molecules with the SiO₂ framework of melanophlogite. Thus, there should be no great driving force for strong N isotope fractionation between fluid and crystals during the incorporation of the N_2 (i.e., the $\delta^{15}N$ of the N_2 in the melanophlogite should be the same as that of the N_2 in the fluids during melanophlogite crystallization).

187 Interpretation of the nitrogen and carbon isotope compositions of the melanophlogites

188 Figure 2 demonstrates fluid-rock C and N isotope fractionation that could have exerted control over the isotopic compositions of the melanophlogites, applying a Rayleigh fractionation 189 190 model (for a temperature of 100°C; sources of the fractionation factors are given in the figure 191 caption). In these calculations, the C and N in the source (hydrothermally altering sedimentary 192 rocks) are in carbonaceous matter (poorly recrystallized organic matter, here modeled as 193 graphite) and as NH_4^+ in clay minerals, respectively. During the heating, fractionated C and N 194 are lost from these sedimentary rocks, resulting in shift in the isotopic compositions of the 195 residual sedimentary rock reservoirs and later-released C and N fluid species. In Fig. 2A, the dashed lines indicate the evolution of the fluid N_2 lost from a sedimentary rock with initial $\delta^{15}N$ 196 197 of 0% and +2%. The N₂ in fluids released from rocks with this range in initial compositions would be expected to have δ^{15} N values between the two dashed lines. Although the lower 198 melanophlogite δ^{15} N values are near upper mantle values (-5 ± 2‰; Cartigny and Marty, 2013; 199 200 see the range indicated on Fig. 2A), the full range of values (about -6 to +6%) can more plausibly be explained by equilibration of N_2 with NH_4^+ in clay minerals bearing an organic N 201 202 isotope signature, at temperatures of near 100°C estimated for melanophlogite crystallization. 203 Figure 2B similarly demonstrates the likely evolution in fluid C isotope compositions, showing 204 the evolution of a pure CO_2 and a pure CH_4 fluid emanating from the sedimentary source, as a

205	function of the fraction of the initial C lost from the rocks (see the dashed blue and red lines,
206	respectively). Stabilization of both $\rm CO_2$ and $\rm CH_4$ in the fluids (see the studies of mixed $\rm CO_2$ -
207	CH ₄ -N ₂ fluid inclusions by van der Kerkhof, 1990; Seitz et al., 1994) would result in evolution
208	of fluids (and rock residues) with $\delta^{13}C$ intermediate between these two end-members. The lower
209	melanophlogite δ^{13} C values (as low as -42.9‰) could reflect high cage CH ₄ :CO ₂ , perhaps
210	representing equilibration with the carbonaceous matter at lower oxygen fugacities. Relatively
211	reducing conditions during melanophlogite crystallization also are indicated by occurrences of
212	melanophlogite with elemental S and bitumen at the classic Sicilian localities.

213 IMPLICATIONS AND OUTLOOK FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

214	Melanophlogite can contain appreciable N with concentrations between 132 and 1674 ppm,
215	and C with concentrations of up to 2.9 wt. %, the latter in varying proportions of $\rm CO_2$ and $\rm CH_4$.
216	The isotopic compositions of this N and C appear consistent with release by heating of a
217	sedimentary source and the wide range of $\delta^{13}C$ values could in part reflect differing CO ₂ :CH ₄
218	possibly related to the oxygen fugacity of the environment during fluid loss. This reconnaissance
219	study points to the need for more detailed investigation of the mechanisms behind $N_{\rm 2}$
220	incorporation into melanophlogite and whether the measured isotopic compositions directly
221	reflect biogeochemical processes operative during its crystallization. Future research should
222	focus on more thorough study of the individual geological settings in which melanophlogite
223	formed, in order to identify sources and possible biogeochemical pathways for N and C. Here,
224	where possible, direct study of the geochemistry of the fluids involved would be extremely
225	useful (i.e., in modern settings in which melanophlogite is being formed).
226	Finally, it has been speculated that Mars' surface could contain abundant zeolite and
227	amorphous, perhaps opaline silica-rich phases (Milliken et al., 2008; Skok et al., 2010). This

228	raises the question regarding the possible occurrence of melanophlogite. If it were to occur on
229	Mars, it would very useful for understanding surface/near-surface geologic processes involving
230	the storage of possible organically derived CO2, CH4, and N2. Minerals, such as the silica
231	clathrates, zeolites, in addition to clays, if present on Mars' surface, perhaps, in part, as alteration
232	products of volcanic rocks and as cements in clastic rocks, could contain $\mathrm{NH_4^+}$ and/or N ₂ . The
233	isotopic compositions of these two N species could provide information on any possible
234	(bio)geochemical activity on the planet.
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241	assisting in the acquisition of several specimens of melanophlogite and Gail Dunning for
242	donating his crystals from Mt. Hamilton, CA.
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344	

345	FIGURE CAPTIONS
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347	Figure 1. (a) Polyhedral structure model of the cubic high-T modification of melanophlogite.
348	The dark polyhedra are the smaller $[5^{12}]$ cages and the green the larger $[5^{12}6^2]$ cages. The
349	spheres represent enclathrated molecular species. (b) Melanophlogite from Mt. Hamilton
350	(horizontal dimension is 2 cm; photograph from http://minerals.caltech.edu; similar to sample
351	"Mt. Hamilton"). (c) Botryoidal melanophlogite from Cianciana, Agrigento, Italy (horizontal
352	dimension is 10 cm; sample 40820; photograph courtesy of J. Newman, American Museum
353	of Natural History, NY). See Figure S1 for photographs of other samples analyzed in this
354	study.
355	
356	Figure 2. Calculated Rayleigh fractionation for evolution of fluid-mineral N and C isotope
357	evolution (see Svensen et al., 2008, for a description of the application of the Rayleigh model
358	in a similar scenario). (a) Calculation for loss of N_2 from NH_4 (the latter presumed to be in
359	clay minerals in the sedimentary rock source). As isotopically light N is lost as N_2 from the
360	sedimentary NH ₄ reservoir, the sedimentary residue shifts toward higher δ^{-1} N (solid lines
361	for initial δ^{15} N of 0‰ and 2‰), thereafter releasing N ₂ with similarly increased δ^{15} N. The
362	range of mantle δ^{13} N is from Cartigny and Marty (2013). (b) Calculated loss of C as either
363	CO_2 or CH_4 from a sedimentary reservoir containing C in "graphite" (poorly recrystallized
364	organic material). Loss of the C as CO_2 or CH_4 results in opposite trends in $\delta^{13}C$, with loss as
365	CO_2 resulting in shift in the residue (and later-released fluid CO_2) toward lower $\delta^{13}C$, and
366	loss as CH ₄ resulting in shift in both the "graphite" and later released CH ₄ toward higher
367	δ^{13} C. Release of C in mixed CO ₂ -CH ₄ fluids would result in fluid and "rock" evolution
368	intermediate to the two shown paths shown in this figure. The fractionation factor for the N
369	isotope calculations in (A) was derived from polynomial constants in Petts et al. (2015; this
370	fractionation factor is similar to that calculated for 100°C by Hanschmann (1981; see the
371	compilation in Busigny and Bebout, 2013). For the calculations of C isotope compositions in
372	(B), the fractionation factors were from Horita (2001; CO ₂ -CH ₄) and Ohmoto and Rye (1979;
373	graphite-CO ₂). The "F" (x-axis) in (A) and (B) is the fraction of the initial N or C remaining
374	in the "rock."

Table 1. Nitrogen and carbon concentrations and isotopic compositions of the melanophlogite samples

Sample	Country	Province/State	County	City	N (ppm)	δ¹⁵N _{air}	C (wt.%)	$\delta^{13}C_{VPDB}$	C/N
40820	Italy	Sicily	Agrigento	Cianciana	641	5.7	2.76	-8.7	43
4361	Italy	Sicily	Agrigento	Racalmuto	1674	-6.1	1.34	-32.8	8
4367	Italy	Tuscany	Livorno	Livorno	132	-2.8	2.11	-34.3	160
81120	Italy	Sicily	Agrigento	Racalmuto	154	-1.5	2.88	-42.9	187
Mt. Hamilton	USA	California	Santa Clara		436	0.2	1.24	-29.2	28



Fig. 1

