

ISOTOPIC SIGNATURES OF CARBON, OXYGEN AND STRONTIUM OF HISTORICAL MORTAR AND PLASTER IN STYRIA

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Historical buildings are constructed of geo-materials, mortar, and plaster of various compositions. Mortar and plaster are man-made materials. Thus, the chemical and isotopic composition comprises information about the historical environment with respect to the provenance of the materials, processing, and specific applications. Moreover, isotopic data may provide additional information about the ancient composition of carbon dioxide and water. The present study is focused on the mineralogical, chemical and isotopic composition of dated and well-characterized carbonate mortar and plaster of roman, medieval, and early modern (pre-industrial) times in Styria (Austria).

Mortars and plasters were sampled from historical buildings in the area of Flavia Solva, Frauenberg, Deutschlandsberg, Seggauberg, Kleinstübing, Niederhofen, Södingberg, and Graz. Sampling was conducted from the exterior to interior mortar layer, wherever applicable. The sampled materials mostly consist of a CaCO₃ (calcite) cement with aggregates of quartz and additional silicates like clay minerals. The analyzed Sr/Ca and ⁸⁷Sr/⁸⁶Sr ratios of the cement are between 0.00030 and 0.0023, and 0.7093 and 0.7104, respectively. These ratios reflect the composition of the natural deposits used for manufacturing of lime mortar. The respective values depend on the environment of formation and on the mineralogical composition (e.g. calcite or aragonite) of the primary limestone.

However, the distribution of ¹³C/¹²C and ¹⁸O/¹⁶O ratios in the carbonate mortars and plasters indicates a more complicated situation as isotopic compositions comprise a wide range of δ¹³C_{CaCO₃}(PDB) from -24.2 to -0.8, and of δ¹⁸O_{CaCO₃}(PDB) from -23.9 to -2.6 ‰. The stable carbon and oxygen isotope distributions in the carbonate cement displays an almost linear correlation. In general calcite is continuously isotopically "heavier" from the exterior to the interior mortar layer. The range and systematic correlation of the data reflect isotopic fractionation effects upon setting of the cement and during the history of the individual cement.

In principle isotope distributions depend on the composition of the gaseous CO₂ and aqueous OH⁻ according to the overall reaction



during the formation of carbonate cement. Reaction 1 is accompanied by a kinetic isotope fractionation due to the hydroxylation of gaseous CO₂ (Dietzel, 2000), resulting in an enrichment of ¹²C versus ¹³C in the precipitated CaCO₃. If gaseous CO₂ is delivered from the present Earth's atmosphere (δ¹³C_{CO₂(atm)}} = -7 ‰) a δ¹³C_{CaCO₃} value of about -25 ‰ is obtained. Evolution of oxygen isotopes is more complex and yield δ¹⁸O_{CaCO₃} values of about -20 ‰ for calcite precipitated according to reaction 1 (Dietzel et al., 1992). Upon setting of the cement, the diffusion of gaseous CO₂ and subsequent reaction to CaCO₃ leads to a continuous enrichment of ¹³C and ¹⁸O (versus ¹²C and ¹⁶O, respectively) of CO₂ within the gas

phase along the cement setting path. Accordingly, precipitated calcite is isotopically “lighter” at the exterior mortar layer.

The results show that analyses of carbon and oxygen isotopic compositions permit to follow the historic cementation process, and to detect potential variations of the composition of the atmospheric CO₂ and liquid (H₂O). Variations may be caused by natural or anthropogenic impacts, e.g. evaporation of H₂O and burning of coal, respectively. From another point of view, secondary processes like interaction with isotopically “light” soil-CO₂ or re-crystallization of carbonate cements in the presence of H₂O from various origins may be deciphered.

References

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Zeitschrift/Journal: [Berichte des Institutes für Geologie und Paläontologie der Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz](#)

Jahr/Year: 2004

Band/Volume: [9](#)

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