

# Geochronological data processing with R and IsoplotR

Pieter Vermeesch

Department of Earth Sciences

University College London

[p.vermeesch@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:p.vermeesch@ucl.ac.uk)

---

# Contents

<b>I Basic geochronology</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2 Basic Notions</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Isotopes and radioactivity . . . . .	9
2.2 Radioactivity . . . . .	9
2.3 The age equation . . . . .	11
2.4 Decay series . . . . .	12
<b>3 Analytical techniques</b>	<b>15</b>
3.1 Mass spectrometry . . . . .	15
3.2 Isotope dilution . . . . .	18
3.3 Sample-standard bracketing . . . . .	19
<b>4 Simple parent-daughter pairs</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1 $^{14}\text{C}$ dating . . . . .	20
4.2 The Rb-Sr method . . . . .	21
4.3 Isochrons . . . . .	22
4.4 The Sm-Nd method . . . . .	22
<b>5 The U-Pb system</b>	<b>24</b>
5.1 The U-(Th)-Pb method . . . . .	24
5.2 The Pb-Pb method . . . . .	25
5.3 Concordia . . . . .	26
5.4 Detrital geochronology . . . . .	26
<b>6 The K-Ar system</b>	<b>28</b>
6.1 K-Ar dating . . . . .	28
6.2 $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ dating . . . . .	28
6.3 Applications . . . . .	29
<b>7 Thermochronology</b>	<b>31</b>
7.1 The U-Th-He method . . . . .	31
7.2 Fission tracks . . . . .	32
<b>8 U-series dating</b>	<b>36</b>
8.1 The $^{234}\text{U}$ - $^{238}\text{U}$ method . . . . .	36
8.2 The $^{230}\text{Th}$ method . . . . .	37
8.3 The $^{230}\text{Th}$ -U method . . . . .	37

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>3</b>
-----------------	----------

<b>9 Error propagation</b>	<b>39</b>
9.1 Some basic definitions . . . . .	39
9.2 Examples . . . . .	40
9.3 Accuracy vs. precision . . . . .	41
<b>10 Exercises</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>11 Programming practicals</b>	<b>45</b>
11.1 Introduction to R . . . . .	45
11.2 U-Th-Pb data reduction . . . . .	48
11.3 $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ data reduction . . . . .	49
11.4 Error propagation . . . . .	50
11.5 Fission tracks . . . . .	51
<b>II Advanced geochronology</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>12 Introduction</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>13 Statistical considerations</b>	<b>54</b>
13.1 The normal distribution . . . . .	54
13.2 The method of maximum likelihood . . . . .	55
13.3 The mean square of weighted deviates (MSWD) . . . . .	58
13.4 Dealing with overdispersion . . . . .	60
13.5 Error correlations . . . . .	61
13.6 Linear regression . . . . .	63
13.7 Confidence intervals . . . . .	66
<b>14 Generic functions</b>	<b>70</b>
14.1 Weighted mean and outlier detection . . . . .	70
14.2 Frequency distributions . . . . .	71
14.3 Radial plots . . . . .	72
14.4 Mixture models . . . . .	74
<b>15 U–Pb geochronology</b>	<b>79</b>
15.1 Input formats . . . . .	79
15.2 Concordia diagrams and ages . . . . .	81
15.3 Discordia/isochron regression . . . . .	84
15.4 Common Pb . . . . .	86
15.5 Initial disequilibrium . . . . .	89
15.6 Discordance filters . . . . .	92
<b>16 Pb–Pb and Th–Pb</b>	<b>96</b>
16.1 Pb–Pb . . . . .	96
16.2 (inverse) isochrons . . . . .	96
16.3 The Stacey-Kramers growth curve . . . . .	97
16.4 Th–Pb . . . . .	98
16.5 Single grain ages . . . . .	99

<b>17 Ar–Ar and K–Ca</b>	<b>100</b>
17.1 Ar–Ar . . . . .	100
17.2 Age spectra . . . . .	101
17.3 K–Ca . . . . .	102
<b>18 Rb–Sr, Sm–Nd, Lu–Hf and Re–Os</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>19 U–Th–(Sm)–He</b>	<b>105</b>
19.1 The $\alpha$ -ejection correction . . . . .	105
19.2 Isochrons . . . . .	107
19.3 Compositional data analysis and the ‘helioplot’ . . . . .	107
<b>20 Fission tracks</b>	<b>110</b>
20.1 The external detector method . . . . .	110
20.2 LA-ICP-MS based fission track dating . . . . .	111
20.3 Compositional zoning . . . . .	112
20.4 Zero track counts . . . . .	113
<b>21 <math>^{230}\text{Th}</math>–U</b>	<b>115</b>
21.1 Data formats . . . . .	116
21.2 Isochrons . . . . .	116
21.3 Th–U evolution diagrams . . . . .	118
<b>22 Detrital geochronology</b>	<b>120</b>
22.1 Maximum depositional age estimation . . . . .	120
22.2 Multi-sample plots . . . . .	121
22.3 Multidimensional scaling . . . . .	123
<b>III IsoplotR manual</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>23 Introduction to IsoplotR</b>	<b>128</b>
23.1 Software architecture . . . . .	128
23.2 The Graphical User Interface (GUI) . . . . .	129
23.3 The Command Line Interface (CLI) . . . . .	130
<b>24 Generic functions</b>	<b>133</b>
24.1 Radial plots . . . . .	134
24.2 Regression . . . . .	136
24.3 Weighted means . . . . .	138
24.4 Age spectra . . . . .	139
24.5 Kernel density estimates . . . . .	140
24.6 Cumulative age distributions . . . . .	141
<b>25 U–Pb</b>	<b>143</b>
25.1 General options . . . . .	144
25.2 Concordia . . . . .	146
25.3 Isochrons . . . . .	149
25.4 Radial plots . . . . .	151
25.5 Weighted mean . . . . .	153
25.6 Kernel density estimates . . . . .	153

25.7 Cumulative age distributions . . . . .	154
25.8 Ages . . . . .	154
<b>26 Pb–Pb and Th–Pb</b>	<b>157</b>
26.1 Pb–Pb . . . . .	157
26.2 Pb–Pb isochrons . . . . .	157
26.3 Pb–Pb ages . . . . .	158
26.4 Th–Pb . . . . .	160
26.5 Th–Pb isochrons . . . . .	160
26.6 Th–Pb ages . . . . .	161
26.7 Radial, weighted mean, KDE and CAD plots . . . . .	161
<b>27 Ar–Ar and K–Ca</b>	<b>164</b>
27.1 Ar–Ar . . . . .	164
27.2 K–Ca . . . . .	165
27.3 Isochrons . . . . .	165
27.4 Ages . . . . .	166
27.5 Ar–Ar age spectra . . . . .	167
27.6 Radial, weighted mean, KDE and CAD plots . . . . .	168
<b>28 Rb–Sr, Sm–Nd, Lu–Hf and Re–Os</b>	<b>170</b>
28.1 Stable isotope ratios and decay constants . . . . .	170
28.2 Isochrons . . . . .	171
28.3 Ages, weighted means, radial, KDE and CAD plots . . . . .	172
<b>29 U–Th–(Sm)–He</b>	<b>175</b>
29.1 Helioplots . . . . .	176
29.2 Ages and other plots . . . . .	177
<b>30 Fission tracks</b>	<b>179</b>
30.1 Radial plots . . . . .	181
30.2 $\zeta$ -calibration . . . . .	182
30.3 Age, weighted mean, KDE and CAD functions . . . . .	183
<b>31 <math>^{230}\text{Th}</math>–U</b>	<b>184</b>
31.1 Isochrons . . . . .	185
31.2 Evolution diagrams . . . . .	186
31.3 Ages . . . . .	188
31.4 Radial, weighted mean, KDE and CAD plots . . . . .	189
<b>32 Detrital geochronology</b>	<b>191</b>
32.1 Kernel density estimates . . . . .	191
32.2 Cumulative age distributions . . . . .	193
32.3 Multidimensional scaling . . . . .	193
<b>IV Extending IsoplotR</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>33 Application Programming Interface</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>34 json schema</b>	<b>200</b>

# **Part I**

## **Basic geochronology**

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The use of naturally occurring radioactive isotopes to date minerals and rocks is the oldest branch of isotope geology. The foundations of these so-called isotopic or radiometric dating methods were laid shortly after the turn of the XX<sup>th</sup> century with the discovery of the laws of radioactive decay by eminent physicists such as Ernest Rutherford and Frederick Soddy (Rutherford and Soddy, 1902a; Rutherford and Soddy, 1902b). The application of these principles to the field of Geology and the calibration of the geological time scale were pioneered by Arthur Holmes (1911), Holmes (1913), and Holmes (1947). Initially, radiometric geochronology was exclusively based on uranium and its daughter products, but with the development of increasingly sensitive analytical equipment, ever more isotopic ‘clocks’ were added over the course of the century: Rb/Sr (Hahn et al., 1943), <sup>14</sup>C (Libby, 1946), K/Ar (Aldrich and Nier, 1948), <sup>238</sup>U fission tracks (Price and Walker, 1963), <sup>40</sup>Ar/<sup>39</sup>Ar (Merrihue and Turner, 1966), Sm/Nd (Lugmair, 1974), etc.

The first part of these lecture notes provides a basic introduction to all these methods. Chapter 2 reviews the basic principles of radioactive decay, which form the basis of all isotopic dating techniques. It will derive the fundamental age equation and introduce the concepts of secular equilibrium, which will be revisited in later chapters. Chapter 3 provides the briefest of introductions to the world of mass spectrometry. It will sketch the basic operating principles of the instruments used to acquire the datasets that will be used for R programming exercises later on. Chapters 4–8 provide basic introductions to the radiocarbon, Rb–Sr, Sm–Nd, U–Pb, Ar–Ar, U–Th–He, fission track and Th–U methods, which will be fleshed out further in Part 2 of the notes.

Chapter 9 presents a primer in error propagation which is extremely important because, to quote K.R. Ludwig “The uncertainty of the age is as important as the age itself” (Ludwig, 2003). Chapter 10 contains a collection of exercises that are meant to be solved by pencil on paper, whereas Chapter 11 contains a collection of practical exercises that require the R programming language. In these exercises, you will process some raw data files for the U–Pb, Ar–Ar and fission track methods. The purpose of these exercises is to provide a glimpse into the ‘black box’ data processing software that is normally used by geochronologists to turn mass spectrometer data into tables of isotopic ratios for further processing with the **IsoplotR** package that is the subject of Part 2 of this book.

The core of these notes is formed by Prof. Peter van den Haute’s lecture notes (in Dutch) at the University of Ghent. This was expanded with additional material, exercises, and practicals. Some figures were modified from published sources, including Allègre (2008), Braun, Van Der Beek, and Batt (2006), and Galbraith (2005). These books are recommended further reading

material, as is the detailed textbook by Dickin (2005), from which both Allègre (2008) and van den Haute heavily borrowed. Additional lecture material, including the data files used in the programming practicals of Chapter 11, can be found at <https://github.com/pvermees/geotopes/>.

## References

- Aldrich, L. T. and A. O. Nier (1948). “Argon 40 in potassium minerals”. In: *Physical Review* 74.8, p. 876.
- Allègre, C. J. (2008). *Isotope geology*. Cambridge University Press, p. 512.
- Braun, J., P. Van Der Beek, and G. Batt (2006). *Quantitative thermochronology: numerical methods for the interpretation of thermochronological data*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dickin, A. P. (2005). *Radiogenic isotope geology*. Cambridge University Press, p. 492.
- Galbraith, R. F. (2005). *Statistics for fission track analysis*. CRC Press, p. 219.
- Hahn, O. et al. (1943). “Geologische Altersbestimmungen mit der strontiummethode”. In: *Chem. Zeitung* 67, pp. 55–6.
- Holmes, A. (1911). “The association of lead with uranium in rock-minerals, and its application to the measurement of geological time”. In: *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London. Series A, Containing Papers of a Mathematical and Physical Character* 85.578, pp. 248–256.
- (1913). *The age of the Earth*. Harper & Brothers.
- (1947). “The Construction of a Geological Time-Scale”. In: *Transactions of the Geological Society of Glasgow* 21.1, pp. 117–152.
- Libby, W. F. (1946). “Atmospheric helium three and radiocarbon from cosmic radiation”. In: *Physical Review* 69.11-12, p. 671.
- Ludwig, K. R. (2003). “Mathematical-statistical treatment of data and errors for  $^{230}\text{Th}/\text{U}$  geochronology”. In: *Reviews in Mineralogy and Geochemistry* 52.1, pp. 631–656.
- Lugmair, G. (1974). “Sm-Nd ages: a new dating method”. In: *Meteoritics* 9, p. 369.
- Merrihue, C. and G. Turner (1966). “Potassium-argon dating by activation with fast neutrons”. In: *Journal of Geophysical Research* 71.11, pp. 2852–2857.
- Price, P. and R. Walker (1963). “Fossil tracks of charged particles in mica and the age of minerals”. In: *Journal of Geophysical Research* 68.16, pp. 4847–4862.
- Rutherford, E. and F. Soddy (1902a). “The cause and nature of radioactivity – Part I”. In: *The London, Edinburgh, and Dublin Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science* 4.21, pp. 370–396.
- (1902b). “The cause and nature of radioactivity – Part II”. In: *The London, Edinburgh, and Dublin Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science* 4.23, pp. 569–585.

# Chapter 2

## Basic notions of radiometric geochronology

### 2.1 Isotopes and radioactivity

Thanks to discoveries by Niels Bohr, Ernest Rutherford, Arnold Sommerfeld, Joseph Thomson and James Chadwick, we know that rocks and minerals are made of atoms, atoms are made of a nucleus and an electron cloud, and the nucleus is made of *nucleons* of which there are two kinds: protons and neutrons. The total number of nucleons in the atomic nucleus is called the *mass number* ( $A$ ). The number of protons (which equals the number of electrons in a neutral atom) is called the *atomic number* ( $Z$ ). The chemical properties of a nuclide solely depend on the atomic number, which therefore forms the basis of the Periodic Table of Elements. The number of neutrons in the atomic nucleus may take on a range of values for any given element, corresponding to different *isotopes* of said element. For example,  $^{16}_8\text{O}$  is an isotope of oxygen with 16 nucleons of which 8 are protons (and  $N = A - Z = 16 - 8 = 8$  are neutrons). Adding one extra neutron to the nucleus produces a second oxygen isotope,  $^{17}_8\text{O}$ , with identical chemical properties as  $^{16}_8\text{O}$ , but slightly different physical properties (e.g. boiling temperature). Adding another neutron produces  $^{18}_8\text{O}$  which, with 8 protons and 10 neutrons, is more than 10% heavier than  $^{16}_8\text{O}$ . Due to this mass difference, the  $^{18}_8\text{O}/^{16}_8\text{O}$  ratio undergoes *mass fractionation* by several natural processes, forming the basis of  $^{18}_8\text{O}/^{16}_8\text{O}$  palaeothermometry (see the second half of this course). When we try to add yet another neutron to the atomic nucleus of oxygen, the nucleus becomes unstable and undergoes radioactive decay. Therefore, no  $^{19}_8\text{O}$  exists in nature.

### 2.2 Radioactivity

As mentioned before, the Periodic Table of Elements (aka ‘Mendeleev’s Table’) arranges the elements according to the atomic number and the configuration of the electron cloud. The equally important *Chart of Nuclides* uses both the number of protons and neutrons as row and column indices. At low masses, the stable nuclides are found close to the  $1 \div 1$  line ( $N \approx Z$ ), with the radionuclides found at higher and lower ratios. At higher atomic numbers, the stable nuclides are found at higher mass numbers, reflecting the fact that more neutrons are required to keep the protons together. For example,  $^{208}_{82}\text{Pb}$ , which is the heaviest stable nuclide, has 44 more neutrons than protons. The unstable nuclides (or *radionuclides*), such as  $^{209}_{82}\text{Pb}$  or  $^{19}_8\text{O}$  may survive for time periods of femtoseconds to billions of years depending on the degree of instability, which generally scales with the ‘distance’ from the curve of stable nuclides. Radionuclides eventually disintegrate to a stable form by means of a number of different mechanisms:

### 1. $\alpha$ -decay

The atomic nucleus (e.g.,  $^{238}_{92}\text{U}$ ,  $^{235}_{92}\text{U}$ ,  $^{232}_{90}\text{Th}$ ,  $^{147}_{62}\text{Sm}$ ) loses an  $\alpha$  particle, i.e. the equivalent of a  $^4_2\text{He}$  nucleus. When these nuclei acquire electrons, they turn into Helium atoms, forming the basis of the U-Th-He chronometer, which is further discussed in Section 7.1. The recoil energy of the decay is divided between the  $\alpha$  particle and the parent nucleus, which eventually relaxes into its ground state by emitting  $\gamma$ -radiation, i.e. photons with a wavelength of  $10^{-12}\text{m}$  or less. In addition to the aforementioned U-Th-He method,  $\alpha$ -decay is central to the  $^{147}\text{Sm}$ - $^{143}\text{Nd}$  (Section 4.2),  $^{235}\text{U}$ - $^{207}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{238}\text{U}$ - $^{206}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{232}\text{Th}$ - $^{208}\text{Pb}$  methods (Section 5).

### 2. $\beta$ -decay

Comprises negatron ( $\beta^-$ ) and positron ( $\beta^+$ ) emission, in which either an electron or a positron is emitted from the nucleus, causing a transition of  $(N,Z) \rightarrow (N-1,Z+1)$  for  $\beta^-$  decay and  $(N,Z) \rightarrow (N+1,Z-1)$  for  $\beta^+$  decay. For example, the oxygen isotope  $^{19}_8\text{O}$  discussed in Section 2.1 decays to  $^{19}_9\text{F}$  by  $\beta^-$  emission. In contrast with  $\alpha$  particles, which are characterized by discrete energy levels,  $\beta$  particles are characterised by a continuous energy spectrum. The difference between the maximum kinetic energy and the actual kinetic energy of any given emitted electron or positron is carried by a neutrino (for  $\beta^+$  decay) or an anti-neutrino (for  $\beta^-$  decay). Just like  $\alpha$  decay,  $\beta$  decay is also accompanied by  $\gamma$ -radiation, arising from two sources: (a) relaxation into the ground state of the excited parent nucleus and (b) spontaneous annihilation of the unstable positron in  $\beta^+$  decay.  $\beta^-$  decay is important for the  $^{40}\text{K}$ - $^{40}\text{Ca}$ ,  $^{87}\text{Rb}$ - $^{87}\text{Sr}$  (Section 4.2) and  $^{14}\text{C}$ - $^{14}\text{N}$  (Section 4.1) clocks. It also occurs as part of the  $^{235}\text{U}$ - $^{207}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{238}\text{U}$ - $^{206}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{232}\text{Th}$ - $^{208}\text{Pb}$  decay series (Sections 5 and 8).  $\beta^+$  decay is found in the  $^{40}\text{K}$ - $^{40}\text{Ar}$  system (Section 6).

### 3. electron capture

This is a special form of decay in which an ‘extra-nuclear’ electron (generally from the K-shell) is captured by the nucleus. This causes a transformation of  $(N,Z) \rightarrow (N+1,Z-1)$ , similar to positron emission, with which it often co-exists. The vacant electron position in the K-shell is filled with an electron from a higher shell, releasing X-rays ( $\sim 10^{-10}\text{m}$  wavelength), which is the diagnostic signal of electron capture. This mechanism occurs in the  $^{40}\text{K}$ - $^{40}\text{Ar}$  decay scheme (Section 6).

### 4. nuclear fission

Extremely large nuclei may disintegrate into two daughter nuclei of unequal size, releasing large amounts of energy ( $\sim 200$  MeV). The two daughter nuclei move in opposite directions from the parent location, damaging the crystal lattice of the host mineral in their wake. The two daughter nuclides are generally radioactive themselves, giving rise to  $\beta$ -radiation before coming to rest as stable isotopes.  $^{238}_{92}\text{U}$  is the only naturally occurring nuclide that undergoes this type of radioactive decay in measurable quantities, and even then it only occurs once for every  $\sim 2 \times 10^6$   $\alpha$ -decay events. Nevertheless, the fission mechanism forms the basis of an important geochronological method, in which the damage zones or ‘fission tracks’ are counted (Section 7.2). Nuclear fission can also be artificially induced, by neutron irradiation of  $^{235}\text{U}$ , e.g.:



Note that every neutron on the left hand side of this formula generates three neutrons on the right hand side. The latter may react with further  $^{235}\text{U}$  nuclei and generate a chain reaction. This forms the basis of nuclear reactors, the atom bomb and the ‘external detector’ method (Section 7.2).

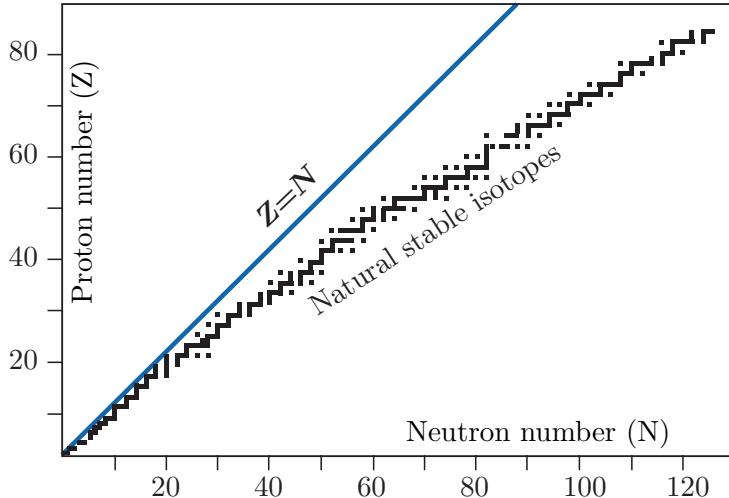


Figure 2.1: A schematic ‘*Chart of Nuclides*’ (modified from Allègre, 2008).

## 2.3 The age equation

A characteristic property of radioactive decay is its absolute independence of external physical and chemical effects. In other words, it is not affected by changes in pressure, temperature, or the molecular bonds connecting a radioactive nuclide to neighbouring atoms. This means that the rate at which a radioactive parent decays to a radiogenic daughter per unit time, i.e.  $dP/dt$  only depends on  $P$ , the number of parent atoms present. The *decay constant*  $\lambda$  expresses the likelihood that a radioactive disintegration takes place in any given time (i.e.,  $\lambda$  has units of atoms per atoms per year). This can be expressed mathematically with the following differential equation:

$$\frac{dP}{dt} = -\lambda P \quad (2.2)$$

Integrating this equation over time yields:

$$P = P_0 e^{-\lambda t} \quad (2.3)$$

where  $P_0$  is the number of parent atoms present at time  $t = 0$ . Since this number is generally unknown (one exception is  $^{14}\text{C}$ , see Section 4.1), Equation 2.3 generally cannot be used in this form. We can, however, measure the *present* number of parent and daughter nuclides in the sample. Rewriting Equation 2.3:

$$P_0 = Pe^{\lambda t} \quad (2.4)$$

and bearing in mind that  $P_0 = P + D$ , we obtain:

$$D = P(e^{\lambda t} - 1) \quad (2.5)$$

This equation forms the foundation of most geochronological methods. It can be rewritten explicitly as a function of time:

$$t = \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \left( \frac{D}{P} + 1 \right) \quad (2.6)$$

The degree of instability of a radioactive nuclide can be expressed by  $\lambda$  or by the *half life*  $t_{1/2}$ , which is the time required for half of the parent nuclides to decay. This follows directly from Equation 2.3:

$$\frac{P_0}{2} = P_0 e^{-\lambda t_{1/2}} \Rightarrow t_{1/2} = \frac{\ln(2)}{\lambda} \quad (2.7)$$

As a rule of thumb, the detection limit of a radiometric geochronometer is reached after about 10 half lives. Thus,  $^{14}\text{C}$  goes back  $\sim 50,000$  years,  $^{10}\text{Be}$  10 million and  $^{40}\text{K}$  10 billion years.

## 2.4 Decay series

Sometimes the radiogenic daughter ( $D_1$ ) of a radioactive parent is radioactive as well, decaying to a daughter of its own ( $D_2$ ), which may be radioactive again etc., until a stable daughter ( $D_*$ ) is reached. Considering the simplest case of one intermediate daughter:

$$P \xrightarrow{\lambda_P} D_1 \xrightarrow{\lambda_1} D_* \quad (2.8)$$

The increase (or decrease) of the number of atoms per unit time for each of the nuclides is given by:

$$\text{for } P : dP/dt = -\lambda_P P \quad (2.9)$$

$$\text{for } D_1 : dD_1/dt = \lambda_P P - \lambda_1 D_1 \quad (2.10)$$

$$\text{for } D_* : dD_*/dt = \lambda_1 D_1 \quad (2.11)$$

The number of parent atoms  $P$  can be written as a function of  $t$ :

$$P = P_0 e^{-\lambda_P t} \quad (2.12)$$

Plugging Equation 2.12 into 2.10 yields

$$dD_1/dt = \lambda_P P_0 e^{-\lambda_P t} - \lambda_1 D_1 \quad (2.13)$$

Solving this differential equation yields the evolution of  $D_1$  with time. Assuming that  $D_1 = 0$  at  $t = 0$ :

$$D_1 = \frac{\lambda_P}{\lambda_1 - \lambda_P} P_0 \left[ e^{-\lambda_P t} - e^{-\lambda_1 t} \right] \quad (2.14)$$

If  $\lambda_P \ll \lambda_1$  (by a factor of 10 or greater), and  $t \gg 1/\lambda_1$  then  $e^{-\lambda_1 t}$  becomes vanishingly small relative to  $e^{-\lambda_P t}$  so that Equation 2.14 can be simplified:

$$D_1 = \frac{\lambda_P}{\lambda_1 - \lambda_P} P_0 e^{-\lambda_P t} \quad (2.15)$$

or, alternatively:

$$D_1 = \frac{\lambda_P}{\lambda_1 - \lambda_P} P \quad (2.16)$$

This means that the ratio of  $D_1$  and  $P$  remains constant through time. If  $\lambda_P \ll \lambda_1$ , then  $\lambda_1 - \lambda_P \approx \lambda_1$ , from which it follows that:

$$D_1 = \frac{\lambda_P}{\lambda_1} P \quad (2.17)$$

Rearranging:

$$D_1\lambda_1 = P\lambda_P \quad (2.18)$$

or, equivalently:

$$\frac{P}{D_1} = \frac{t_{1/2}(P)}{t_{1/2}(D_1)} \quad (2.19)$$

This is the *secular equilibrium* in which the number of atoms of both radioactive members is proportional to their respective half lives. In the geochronological isotope systems  $^{235}\text{U}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{238}\text{U}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{232}\text{Th}/^{207}\text{Pb}$ , the lead isotopes are the end points of a long decay series comprised of several  $\alpha$  and  $\beta^-$  disintegrations, in which the decay constants of the parent nuclide is orders of magnitude shorter than the other nuclides in the chain. For a decay series like that, Equation 2.18 can be generalised to:

$$D_n\lambda_n = \dots = D_2\lambda_2 = D_1\lambda_1 = P\lambda_P \quad (2.20)$$

This means that the entire series is in equilibrium, so that all members occur in mutually constant proportions. The number of atoms of the stable end member  $D_*$  is given by:

$$D_* = P_o - P - D_1 - D_2 - \dots - D_n \quad (2.21)$$

Using Equation 2.20, this becomes:

$$D_* = P_o - P - \frac{P\lambda_P}{\lambda_1} - \frac{P\lambda_P}{\lambda_2} - \dots - \frac{P\lambda_P}{\lambda_n} \quad (2.22)$$

or

$$D_* = P_o - P \left( 1 + \frac{\lambda_P}{\lambda_1} + \frac{\lambda_P}{\lambda_2} + \dots + \frac{\lambda_P}{\lambda_n} \right) \quad (2.23)$$

Since each of the ratios  $\lambda_P/\lambda_1$ ,  $\lambda_P/\lambda_2$ , etc. are vanishingly small, we can simplify Equation 2.23 as:

$$D_* = P_o - P = P \left( e^{\lambda_P t} - 1 \right) \quad (2.24)$$

This means that the accumulation of the final Pb isotope of the aforementioned three decay series is only a function of the decay of the parent isotope. All intermediate decay steps are therefore inconsequential. In rare cases, however, the isotopic equilibrium is disturbed by a dissolution or recrystallisation event, say. The intermediate parent/daughter pairs can then be used to date phenomena occurring over much shorter time scales than those probed by the U-Pb method (Section 8).

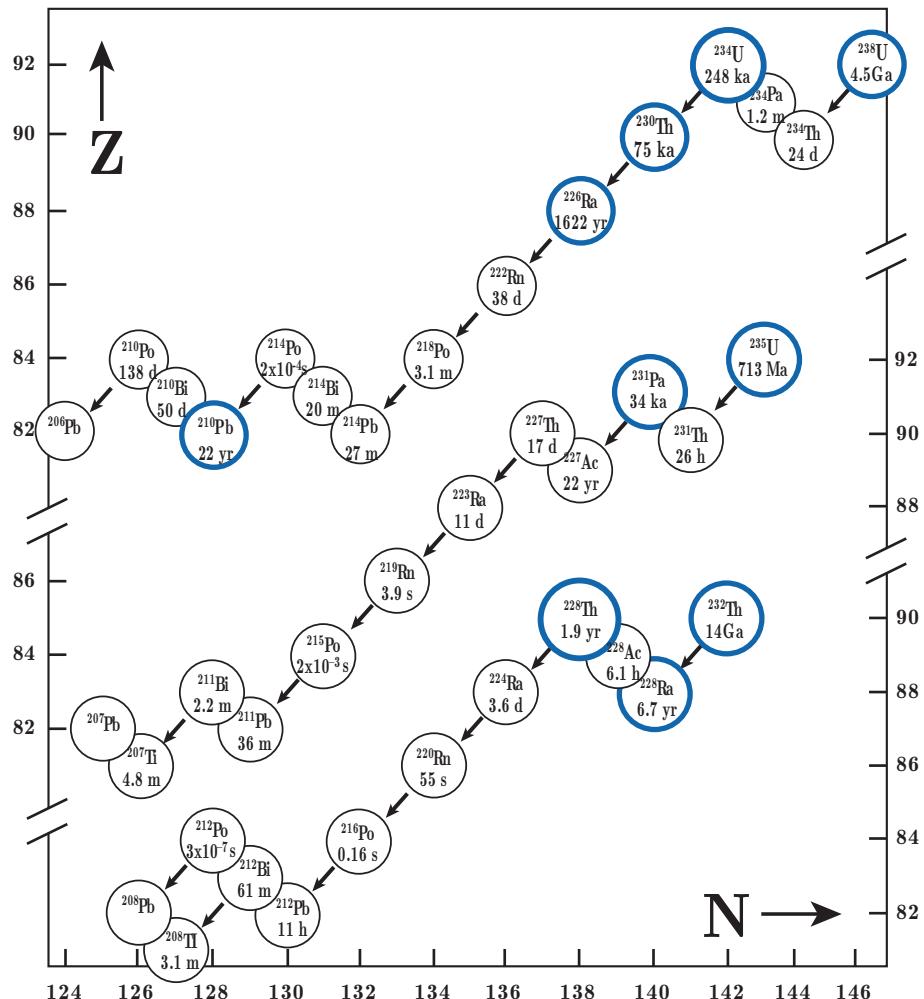


Figure 2.2: The decay series of  $^{232}\text{Th}$ ,  $^{235}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$ , which form the basis of the U-Th-Pb, U-Th-He and U-Th-series methods (modified from Allègre, 2008).

# Chapter 3

## Analytical techniques

Isotope geochemistry is based on the accurate and precise determination of elemental and isotopic compositions of rocks and minerals. Although some of the earliest geochronological methods (notably the  $^{14}\text{C}$  method, see Section 4.1) were based on the detection of radioactivity by means of Geiger-Müller counters and liquid scintillation detectors, nearly all modern isotope geochemistry is done by mass spectrometry.

### 3.1 Mass spectrometry

A mass spectrometer is a device that separates electrically charged atoms or molecules based on their mass, enabling precise measurement of the isotopic composition. A mass spectrometer consists of the following parts:

1. ion source: this can be either a filament (similar to that found in an incandescent light bulb), a plasma torch, a primary ion beam, or a spray chamber, among other possibilities.
2. mass analyser: this can be an electromagnet (possibly combined with an electrostatic field), or a rapidly fluctuating electric field.
3. ion detector: this is, essentially, a volt meter.

In the remainder of this section, we will assume the source to be a filament and the mass analyser to be an electromagnet.

After pumping the mass spectrometer down to (ultra-)high vacuum conditions ( $10^{-6}$  to  $10^{-9}$  mbar), the sample enters the ion source as a gas, where it is bombarded with electrons. The resulting ions (with charge  $e$ ) are accelerated in an electric field (with potential difference  $V$ ) and collimated to a narrow beam. This beam is sent through a magnetic field (with strength  $H$ ) which deflects it into a circular trajectory with a radius proportional to the ion mass ( $m$ ). This results in a physical separation of the incoming ion beam into various outgoing beams. The beams of interest are steered into the ion detector which, in its simplest design (the so-called ‘Faraday Cup’) consists of a long and narrow cup. The ion beam is neutralised in the cup by electrons flowing from ground through a resistor. The potential difference across this resistor is measured and registered on a computer for further processing.

The electric field transfers a certain amount of kinetic energy to the ions:

$$E = eV = \frac{mv^2}{2} \quad (3.1)$$

With  $e$  is the electrical charge (in multiples of  $1.60219 \times 10^{-19}\text{C}$ , which is the elementary charge of an electron. Because each type of ion has a different mass ( $m$ , in multiples of  $1.660538 \times 10^{-27}\text{kg}$ , the atomic mass unit), their terminal velocity ( $v$ ) differs as well:

$$v = \sqrt{\frac{2eV}{m}} \quad (3.2)$$

The mass analyser deflects the ions according to the following equation:

$$Hev = \frac{mv^2}{r} \quad (3.3)$$

Substituting Equation 3.2 into 3.3 yields:

$$H\sqrt{\frac{2eV}{m}} = \frac{2V}{r} \quad (3.4)$$

from which it follows that:

$$r = \frac{1}{H} \sqrt{\frac{2mV}{e}} \quad (3.5)$$

and  $H = \frac{1}{r} \sqrt{\frac{2mV}{e}}$

Equation 3.5 allows us to calculate the radius of the ion trajectory for any given mass-to-charge ratio  $m/e$ . Note that light isotopes are more strongly deflected than equally charged heavy ones. Equation 3.5 can also be used to calculate the magnetic field strength required to deflect an ion beam with a given  $m/e$  ratio into the collector. This is more practical because most mass spectrometers have a fixed radius so that the different ions must be collected by varying  $H$ . Some modern mass spectrometers are equipped with multiple ion collectors the enabling simultaneous analysis of several ionic masses.



Figure 3.1: Schematic diagram of a sector-field noble gas or TIMS mass spectrometer (modified from Allègre, 2008).

Several types of mass spectrometers are used for geoscience applications:

1. *Thermal Ionisation Mass Spectrometry (TIMS)*.

The sample is dissolved and subjected to careful chemical separation procedures (liquid chromatography) in order to separate the parent and daughter elements to a high level of purity. The resulting solutions are spiked and deposited on a tungsten or tantalum filament, which is brought to a glow by an electric current and thus produces ions. These are separated by a

large electromagnet and analysed in one or more Faraday cups. TIMS is very time consuming but produces extremely precise results ( $\text{‰}$ -level precision on the ages).

## 2. *Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS)*

The sample is vapourised in one of two ways: either by introducing a liquid into a spray chamber, or by firing an ultraviolet laser at a solid sample and transporting the resulting aerosol into the ion source with a carrier gas (typically helium). The ion source itself consists of an argon flow which is heated to a temperature of approximately 10,000K by sending a radiofrequency current through a coil. This breaks up all the molecular bonds and produces a plasma (i.e. a ‘soup’ of ions and electrons) which enters the high vacuum chamber through a tiny opening. The mass analyser can either be a sector magnet or a quadrupole (which consists of four metal rods generating a rapidly fluctuating electrical field). ICP-MS offers a higher throughput than TIMS, especially in laser ablation mode, where hundreds of ages can be measured per day. However, this increased throughput comes at the expense of precision, which is on the percent level (better in solution mode).

## 3. *Secondary ion mass spectrometry (SIMS)*

Prior to the development of laser ablation (LA-) ICP-MS, the only other method to produce spot measurements in solid samples was by firing a beam of negative (e.g. oxygen) or positive (e.g. caesium) ions at the target under high vacuum. This releases (‘sputters’) positive (or negative, in the case of a Cs beam) *secondary* ions from the sample surface, which are accelerated by an electrostatic field and sent to a sector field mass spectrometer. Although SIMS has been replaced by LA-ICP-MS in some applications, it remains an important instrument in the geochronological toolbox because (a) it offers higher spatial resolution than laser ablation ( $5\text{-}10\mu\text{m}$  vs.  $25\text{-}50\mu\text{m}$ ) and (b) can measure light ions (e.g. hydrogen) more reliably than LA-ICP-MS.

## 4. *Noble gas mass spectrometry*

The noble gases (He, Ne, Ar, Kr, Xe) require a different class of mass spectrometer than the rest of the periodic table because, as their name suggests: 1) they are gases 2) that do not ionise easily. Noble gasses are liberated from solid state materials by heating or laser ablation under ultra-high vacuum conditions. To remove any unwanted gas species (such as CO,  $\text{CO}_2$ , hydrocarbons, etc.) that may interfere with the noble gas measurements, the released gas is exposed to reactive metals, liquid N<sub>2</sub> ‘cold traps’ and other ‘gettering’ devices in a ‘noble gas extraction line’ for a duration of 5–30 minutes. The extraction line removes all the reactive gas species until only the inert noble gases remain. It is only after this lengthy delay that the purified noble gases are ionised by electron bombardment, and analysed on the actual mass spectrometer.

## 5. *Accelerator Mass Spectrometer (AMS)*

The AMS combines two mass spectrometers with a (‘tandem’ type) particle accelerator. Ions are produced by a SIMS source and steered through a first mass analyser, which selects all ions of a desired mass (e.g., mass 14:  $^{14}\text{C}^-$ ,  $^{12}\text{CH}_2^-$ , …). The resulting beam is accelerated in the first part of the tandem accelerator by a potential difference of several million eV, and sent through a thin chamber filled with a ‘stripper’ gas. Collisions of stripper gas atoms with the incoming ions destroys any molecular bonds and forms 3+ ions in the process. The beam now consists of purely atomic ions, which are accelerated in the second part of the accelerator and steered into a second mass analyser. The AMS has revolutionised the  $^{14}\text{C}$  method by enabling the analysis of extremely small (mg-sized) samples (see Section 4.1), and has enabled a whole new field of geochronology based on the analysis of terrestrial cosmogenic radionuclides. The

main limitation of AMS is its high cost. Currently only two AMS facilities are operating in the UK (in Oxford and Glasgow).

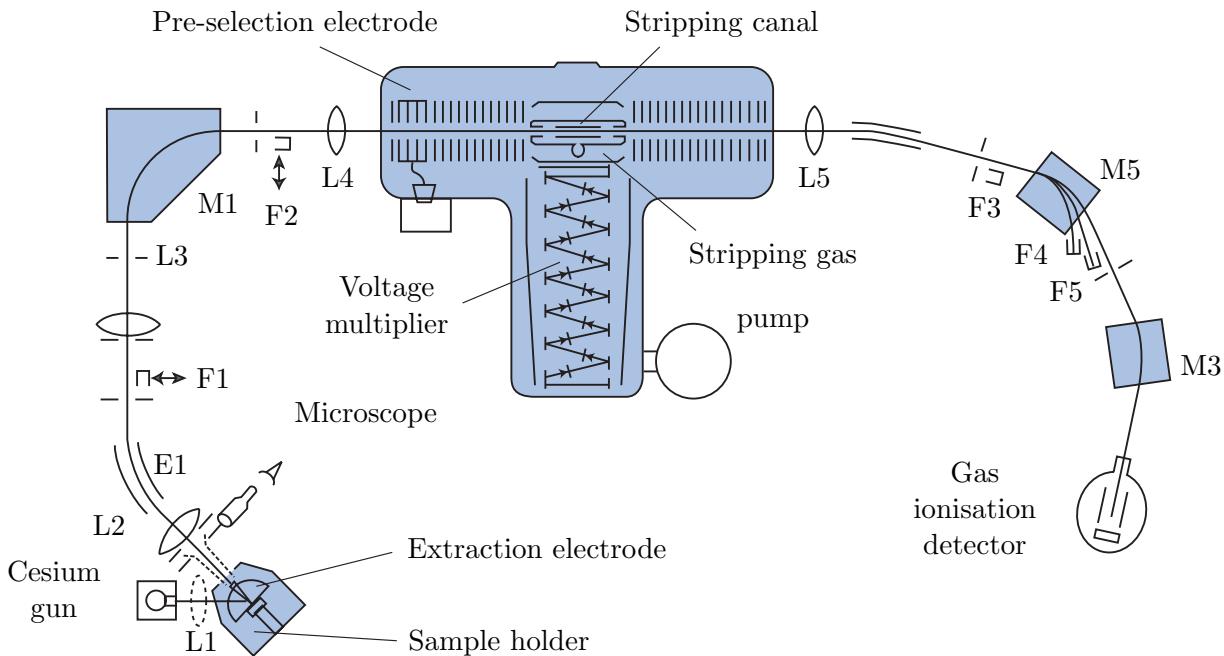


Figure 3.2: Schematic diagram of an Accelerator Mass Spectrometer (AMS) (modified from Allègre, 2008).

### 3.2 Isotope dilution

Besides determining isotopic compositions, the mass spectrometer can also be used to measure elemental concentrations, using a method called *isotope dilution*. This is done by mixing the sample solution (whose isotopic composition has already been determined) with a known quantity of a solution with a different (but known) isotopic composition and known elemental concentration. The latter solution is called the *spike*. The isotopic composition of the mixture is analysed by mass spectrometry. The measured isotopic ratio  $R_m$  for an element with two isotopes ( $^aX$  and  $^bX$ ) is given by:

$$R_m = \frac{N^a X_N + S^a X_S}{N^b X_N + S^b X_S} \quad (3.6)$$

with

- $N$  = the number of atoms of X in the sample
- $S$  = the number of atoms of X in the spike
- $^aX_N, ^bX_N$  = the atomic abundance of isotope a (or b) in the sample
- $^aX_S, ^bX_S$  = the atomic abundance of isotope a (or b) in the spike ( $^aX_N + ^bX_N = ^aX_S + ^bX_S = 1$ )

$N$  is the only unknown in Equation 3.6, which can therefore be rewritten as:

$$N = S \frac{^aX_S - R_m ^bX_S}{R_m ^bX_N - ^aX_N} \quad (3.7)$$

$N$  can also be expressed as a function of the isotopic ratios in the sample  $R_N (= {}^aX_N / {}^bX_N)$  and in the spike  $R_S (= {}^aX_S / {}^bX_S)$ . The atomic abundance of  ${}^aX$  and  ${}^bX$  in the sample are given by:

$${}^aX_N = \frac{R_N}{R_N + 1} \text{ and } {}^bX_N = \frac{1}{R_N + 1} \quad (3.8)$$

and in the spike:

$${}^aX_S = \frac{R_S}{R_S + 1} \text{ and } {}^bX_S = \frac{1}{R_S + 1} \quad (3.9)$$

Substituting Equations 3.9 and 3.8 into 3.7 yields:

$$N = S \frac{(R_N + 1)(R_S - R_m)}{(R_S + 1)(R_m - R_N)} \quad (3.10)$$

Equations 3.7 and 3.10 give the atomic concentration of  $X$  (in atoms/g). Dividing  $N$  by Avogadro's number  $N_A$  and multiplying with the atomic weights (g/mol) yields the corresponding weight percentages. Isotope dilution is a very powerful method because:

1. It does not require quantitative separation of the elements of interest.
2. Chemical purification removes unwanted interferences from other species.
3. The method is very sensitive, so extremely low concentrations can be measured (ppb or less).

### 3.3 Sample-standard bracketing

Isotope dilution is the ‘gold standard’ for isotope geochemistry, recommended when the most accurate and precise results are desired. Unfortunately, isotope dilution is also very time consuming and cannot be readily applied to micro-analytical techniques such as LA-ICP-MS and SIMS. In those cases, an alternative method is used, which is less precise (%- rather than ‰-level precision) but quicker. The idea is to normalise the signal ratios recorded by the mass spectrometer to a standard of known age. As before, let  $P$  be a radioactive parent which decays to a radiogenic daughter  $D$ . Suppose that we can measure both nuclides on the same mass spectrometer, yielding two electronic signal intensities  $S_P$  and  $S_D$ . These signals may be recorded in units of V, A, or Hz. We cannot directly use the signal ratios as a proxy for the isotopic ratio:

$$\frac{D}{P} \neq \frac{S_D}{S_P}$$

because the parent and daughter are two different elements with different chemical properties and ionisation efficiencies. We can, however, assume that the isotopic ratio is proportional to the signal ratio:

$$\frac{D}{P} = C \frac{S_D}{S_P} \quad (3.11)$$

Thus, if we double  $D$  (and thus  $D/P$ ), we would also expect to double  $S_D$  (and thus  $S_D/S_P$ ). To determine the constant of proportionality  $C$ , we analyse a standard of known age ( $t_s$ ) and, hence  $(D/P)$ -ratio (due to Equation 2.5):

$$C = \left( e^{\lambda_P t_s} - 1 \right) \frac{S_P^s}{S_D^s} \quad (3.12)$$

where  $\lambda_P$  is the decay constant of the parent and  $S_P^s/S_D^s$  is the (inverse) signal ratio of the standard.

# Chapter 4

## Simple parent-daughter pairs

### 4.1 $^{14}\text{C}$ dating

There are two stable isotopes of carbon:  $^{12}\text{C}$  and  $^{13}\text{C}$ , and one naturally occurring radionuclide:  $^{14}\text{C}$ . The half life of  $^{14}\text{C}$  is only 5,730 years, which is orders of magnitude shorter than the age of the Earth. Therefore, no primordial radiocarbon remains and all  $^{14}\text{C}$  is *cosmogenic*. The main production mechanism is through secondary cosmic ray neutron reactions with  $^{14}\text{N}$  in the stratosphere:  $^{14}\text{N} (\text{n},\text{p}) ^{14}\text{C}$ . Any newly formed  $^{14}\text{C}$  rapidly mixes with the rest of the atmosphere creating a spatially uniform carbon composition, which is incorporated into plants and the animals that eat them. Prior to the industrial revolution, a gram of fresh organic carbon underwent 13.56 ( $\beta^-$ ) decays per minute. When a plant dies, it ceases to exchange carbon with the atmosphere and the  $^{14}\text{C}$  concentration decays with time according to Equation 2.2:

$$\frac{d^{14}\text{C}}{dt} = -\lambda_{14} \times {}^{14}\text{C} \quad (4.1)$$

where  $\lambda_{14} = 0.120968 \text{ ka}^{-1}$ . Thus, the radiocarbon concentration is directly proportional to the radioactivity, which can be measured by  $\beta$ -counting. This can then be used to calculate the radiocarbon age by rearranging Equation 2.3:

$$t = -\frac{1}{\lambda_{14}} \ln \left[ \frac{d^{14}\text{C}/dt}{(d^{14}\text{C}/dt)_o} \right] \quad (4.2)$$

where  $(d^{14}\text{C}/dt)_o$  is the original level of  $\beta$  activity. This method was developed by Willard Libby in 1949, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1960. As mentioned before,  $(d^{14}\text{C}/dt)_o$  was 13.56 prior to the industrial revolution, when thousands of tonnes of ‘old’ carbon were injected into the atmosphere, resulting in a gradual lowering of the radiocarbon concentration until 1950, when nuclear testing produced an opposite effect, leading to a doubling of the atmospheric  $^{14}\text{C}$  activity in 1963. Since the banning of atmospheric nuclear testing, radiocarbon concentrations have steadily dropped until today, where they have almost fallen back to their pre-industrial levels. But even prior to these anthropogenic effects,  $^{14}\text{C}$  concentrations underwent relatively large fluctuations as a result of secular variations of the Earth’s magnetic field and, to a lesser extent, Solar activity. These variations in  $(d^{14}\text{C}/dt)_o$  can be corrected by comparison with a precisely calibrated production rate curve, which was constructed by measuring the  $^{14}\text{C}$  activity of tree rings (*dendrochronology*).

Since the 1980’s,  $\beta$ -counting has been largely replaced by accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS, see Section 3.1), in which the  $^{14}\text{C}$  concentration is measured directly relative to a stable isotope such as  $^{13}\text{C}$ . Although this has not significantly pushed back the age range of the

radiocarbon method, it has nevertheless revolutionised the technique by reducing the sample size requirements by orders of magnitude. It is now possible to analyse individual seeds or tiny fragments of precious objects such as the Turin Shroud, which was dated at AD1260-1390.

## 4.2 The Rb-Sr method

Trace amounts of Rb and Sr are found in most minerals as substitutions for major elements with similar chemical properties. Rb is an alkali metal that forms single valent positive ions with an ionic radius of 1.48 Å, which is similar to K<sup>+</sup> (1.33 Å). Rb is therefore frequently found in K-bearing minerals such as micas, K-feldspar and certain clay minerals. Strongly evolved alkalic rocks such as syenites, trachites and rhyolites often contain high Rb concentrations. Rb contains two isotopes of constant abundance: <sup>85</sup>Rb (72.1854%) and <sup>87</sup>Rb (27.8346%). Sr is an alkaline earth metal that forms bivalent positive ions with a radius of 1.13 Å, similar to Ca<sup>2+</sup> (ionic radius 0.99 Å). It therefore substitutes Ca<sup>2+</sup> in many minerals such as plagioclase, apatite, gypsum and calcite in sites with 8 neighbours, but not in pyroxene where Ca<sup>2+</sup> has a coordination number of 6. Native Sr<sup>2+</sup> can also substitute K<sup>+</sup> in feldspars (where radiogenic Sr is expected to be found), but this substitution is limited and requires the simultaneous replacement of Si<sup>4+</sup> by Al<sup>3+</sup> in order to preserve electric neutrality. Sr therefore predominantly occurs in Ca-rich undifferentiated rocks such as basalts. Sr contains four isotopes (<sup>84</sup>Sr, <sup>86</sup>Sr, <sup>87</sup>Sr and <sup>88</sup>Sr) with variable abundance due to the variable amount of radiogenic <sup>87</sup>Sr. However, the non-radiogenic <sup>84</sup>Sr/<sup>86</sup>Sr and <sup>86</sup>Sr/<sup>88</sup>Sr-ratios are constant with values of 0.056584 and 0.1194, respectively. The Rb-Sr chronometer is based on the radioactive decay of <sup>87</sup>Rb to <sup>87</sup>Sr:



Where  $\nu$  indicates an antineutrino. The number of radiogenic <sup>87</sup>Sr atoms produced by this reaction after a time t is given by:

$$^{87}\text{Sr}^* = ^{87}\text{Rb}(e^{\lambda_{87}t} - 1) \quad (4.4)$$

where <sup>87</sup>Rb is the actual number of <sup>87</sup>Rb atoms per unit weight and  $\lambda_{87}$  is the decay constant  $1.42 \times 10^{-11} \text{ a}^{-1}$  ( $t_{1/2} = 4.88 \times 10^{10} \text{ a}$ ). In addition to this radiogenic <sup>87</sup>Sr, most samples will also contain some ‘ordinary’ Sr. The total number of <sup>87</sup>Sr atoms measured is therefore given by:

$$^{87}\text{Sr} = ^{87}\text{Sr}^* + ^{87}\text{Sr}_o \quad (4.5)$$

with <sup>87</sup>Sr<sub>o</sub> the initial <sup>87</sup>Sr present at the time of isotopic closure. Combining Equations 4.5 and 4.3, we obtain:

$$^{87}\text{Sr} = ^{87}\text{Sr}_o + ^{87}\text{Rb}(e^{\lambda_{87}t} - 1) \quad (4.6)$$

Dividing this by the non-radiogenic <sup>86</sup>Sr yields

$$\frac{^{87}\text{Sr}}{^{86}\text{Sr}} = \left( \frac{^{87}\text{Sr}}{^{86}\text{Sr}} \right)_o + \frac{^{87}\text{Rb}}{^{86}\text{Sr}}(e^{\lambda_{87}t} - 1) \quad (4.7)$$

The method can be applied to single minerals or to whole rocks. Given the very long half life, the optimal time scale ranges from the formation of the solar system to the late Palaeozoic (300-400 Ma). To measure a Rb/Sr age, the weight percentage of Rb is measured by means of X-ray fluorescence, ICP-OES or similar techniques, and the <sup>87</sup>Sr/<sup>86</sup>Sr ratio is determined by mass spectrometry (isotope dilution). The <sup>87</sup>Rb/<sup>86</sup>Sr-ratio is then calculated as:

$$\frac{^{87}Rb}{^{86}Sr} = \frac{Rb}{Sr} \frac{Ab(^{87}Rb)A(Sr)}{Ab(^{86}Sr)A(Rb)} \quad (4.8)$$

Where  $Ab(\cdot)$  signifies ‘abundance’ and  $A(\cdot)$  ‘atomic weight’.

### 4.3 Isochrons

Equation 4.8 can be used in one of two ways. A first method is to use an assumed value for  $(^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr})_0$ , based on the geological context of the sample. This method is only reliable for samples with a high Rb/Sr ratio (e.g., biotite) because in that case, a wrong value for  $(^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr})_0$  has only a minor effect on the age. A second and much better method is to analyse several minerals of the same sample and plot them on a  $(^{87}\text{Rb}/^{86}\text{Sr})$  vs.  $(^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr})$  diagram (Figure 4.1). Due to Equation 4.7, this should form a linear array (the so-called *isochron*) with slope  $(e^{\lambda_{87}t} - 1)$  and intercept  $(^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr})_0$ . Both parameters can be determined by linear regression, allowing us to quantify the ‘goodness of fit’ of the data and obviating the need to assume any initial Sr-ratios.

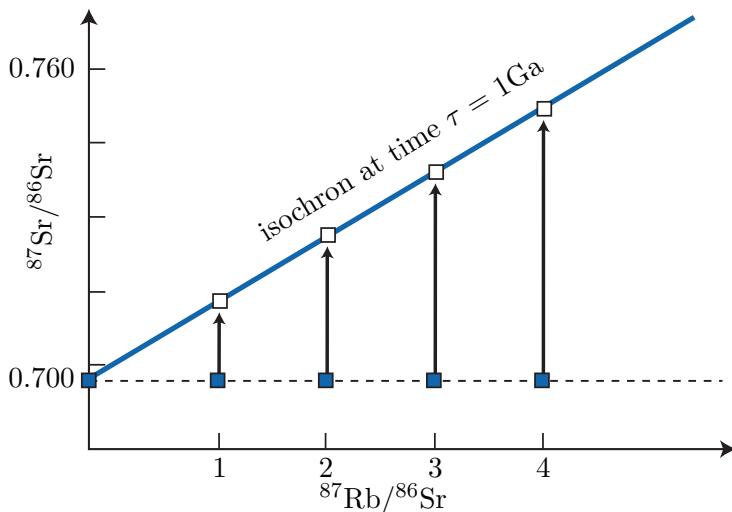


Figure 4.1: Schematic evolution of the  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ -system as a function of time for multiple aliquots of a hypothetical sample with initial ratio  $(^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr})_0=0.700$ . The slope of the isochron is a function of the age as per Equation 4.7 (modified from Allègre, 2008).

### 4.4 The Sm-Nd method

The elements Neodymium ( $Z=60$ ) and Samarium ( $Z=62$ ) are so-called ‘rare earth elements’. All elements of this family have similar chemical properties. They nearly all form  $3+$  ions of roughly equal albeit slightly decreasing size with atomic number. The ionic radius of Nd and Sm is 1.08 and 1.04 Å, respectively. As the name suggests, rare earth elements rarely form the major constituents of minerals. One notable exception is monazite, which is a rare earth phosphate. In most cases, the rare earth elements are found in trace amounts of up to 0.1% in apatite  $[\text{Ca}_5(\text{PO}_4)_3(\text{OH},\text{Cl},\text{F})]$  and zircon  $[\text{ZrSiO}_4]$ . Both Sm and Nd are slightly enriched in feldspar, biotite and apatite and thus tend to be found in higher concentrations in differentiated (alkalic) magmatic rocks.

Because their chemical properties are so similar, geological processes are rarely capable of fractionating the Sm and Nd concentrations. Therefore, the Sm/Nd ratio in most rocks generally falls in a narrow range of 0.1 to 0.5 (the Sm/Nd ratio of the solar system being 0.31). One

exception is garnet, in which Sm/Nd ratios  $> 1$  have been found. Partial melting of mafic minerals such as pyroxene and olivine produces lower Sm/Nd ratios in the fluid phase than the solid residue. The Sm/Nd ratio of magmatic rocks therefore decreases with increasing differentiation.

Natural Sm contains seven naturally occurring isotopes, three of which are radioactive ( $^{147}\text{Sm}$ ,  $^{148}\text{Sm}$  and  $^{149}\text{Sm}$ ). Only  $^{147}\text{Sm}$  has a sufficiently short half life to be useful for geochronology. Nd also contains seven isotopes, of which only one is radioactive ( $^{144}\text{Nd}$ ) but with a very long half life.  $^{143}\text{Nd}$  is the radiogenic daughter of  $^{147}\text{Sm}$  and is formed by  $\alpha$ -decay. This forms the basis of the Sm-Nd chronometer. Analogous to the Rb-Sr method (Equation 4.4), we can write:

$$^{143}\text{Nd}^* = ^{147}\text{Sm}(e^{\lambda_{147}t} - 1) \quad (4.9)$$

Hence:

$$t = \frac{1}{\lambda_{147}} \ln \left( \frac{^{143}\text{Nd}^*}{^{147}\text{Sm}} + 1 \right) \quad (4.10)$$

With  $\lambda_{147} = 6.54 \times 10^{-12} \text{a}^{-1}$  ( $t_{1/2} = 1.06 \times 10^{11} \text{a}$ ). Since most samples contain some initial Nd, the preferred way to calculate Sm/Nd ages is by analysing several minerals in a rock and create an isochron, similar to the Rb/Sr method (Section 4.3):

$$\frac{^{143}\text{Nd}}{^{144}\text{Nd}} = \left( \frac{^{143}\text{Nd}}{^{144}\text{Nd}} \right)_0 + \frac{^{147}\text{Sm}}{^{144}\text{Nd}} (e^{\lambda_{147}t} - 1) \quad (4.11)$$

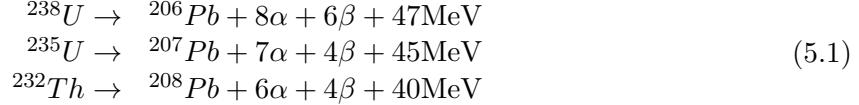
All measurements are done by mass spectrometry using isotope dilution. Because of the identical atomic masses of  $^{147}\text{Sm}$  and  $^{147}\text{Nd}$ , it is necessary to perform a chemical separation between Sm and Nd prior to analysis.

The Sm/Nd method is generally applied to basic and ultrabasic igneous rocks (basalt, peridotite, komatiite) of Precambrian to Palaeozoic age. The method thus complements the Rb/Sr method, which is preferentially applied to acidic rock types. The Sm/Nd method can also be applied to high grade metamorphic rocks (granulites, eclogites) as well as meteorites (shergottites, nahklites). Since the rare earths are significantly less mobile than Rb and Sr, the Sm/Nd is more reliable in rocks that have been disturbed by weathering or metamorphism.

# Chapter 5

## The U-Pb system

U and Th are found on the extremely heavy end of the Periodic Table of Elements. All their isotopes are radioactive and exhibit  $\alpha$ -decay and sometimes even spontaneous fission (see Section 7.2).  $^{232}\text{Th}$ ,  $^{235}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$  each form the start of long decay series comprising multiple  $\alpha$ - and  $\beta$  emissions which eventually produce various isotopes of Pb:



Each of these three decay series is unique, i.e. no isotope occurs in more than one series (Figure 2.2). Furthermore, the half life of the parent isotope is much longer than any of the intermediary daughter isotopes, thus fulfilling the requirements for secular equilibrium (Section 2.4). We can therefore assume that the  $^{206}\text{Pb}$  is directly formed by the  $^{238}\text{U}$ , the  $^{207}\text{Pb}$  from the  $^{235}\text{U}$  and the  $^{208}\text{Pb}$  from the  $^{232}\text{Th}$ . Several chronometers are based on the  $\alpha$ -decay of U and Th:

- The U-Th-Pb method (Section 5.1)
- The Pb-Pb method (Section 5.2)
- The U-Th-He method (Section 7.1)

### 5.1 The U-(Th-)Pb method

Natural Pb consists of four isotopes  $^{204}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{206}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{207}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{208}\text{Pb}$ . The ingrowth equations for the three radiogenic Pb isotopes are given by:

$$\begin{aligned} ^{206}\text{Pb}^* &= ^{238}\text{U} (e^{\lambda_{238}t} - 1) \\ ^{207}\text{Pb}^* &= ^{235}\text{U} (e^{\lambda_{235}t} - 1) \\ ^{208}\text{Pb}^* &= ^{232}\text{Th} (e^{\lambda_{232}t} - 1) \end{aligned} \quad (5.2)$$

With  $\lambda_{238} = 1.55125 \times 10^{-10} \text{a}^{-1}$  ( $t_{1/2} = 4.468$  Gyr),  $\lambda_{235} = 9.8485 \times 10^{-10} \text{a}^{-1}$  ( $t_{1/2} = 703.8$  Myr), and  $\lambda_{232} = 0.495 \times 10^{-10} \text{a}^{-1}$  ( $t_{1/2} = 14.05$  Gyr>). The corresponding age equations are:

$$\begin{aligned} t_{206} &= \frac{1}{\lambda_{238}} \ln \left( \frac{^{206}\text{Pb}^*}{^{238}\text{U}} + 1 \right) \\ t_{207} &= \frac{1}{\lambda_{235}} \ln \left( \frac{^{207}\text{Pb}^*}{^{235}\text{U}} + 1 \right) \\ t_{208} &= \frac{1}{\lambda_{232}} \ln \left( \frac{^{208}\text{Pb}^*}{^{232}\text{Th}} + 1 \right) \end{aligned} \quad (5.3)$$

Some igneous minerals (notably zircon) conveniently incorporate lots of U and virtually no Pb upon crystallisation. For those minerals, the non-radiogenic Pb can be safely neglected (at least for relatively young ages), so that we can assume that  $Pb \approx Pb^*$ . This assumption cannot be made for other minerals, young ages, and high precision geochronology. In those cases, the inherited component (aka ‘common Pb’) needs to be quantified, which is done by normalising to non-radiogenic  $^{204}\text{Pb}$ :

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{^{206}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} &= \left( \frac{^{206}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right)_o + \frac{^{238}\text{U}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} (e^{\lambda_{238}t} - 1) \\ \frac{^{207}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} &= \left( \frac{^{207}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right)_o + \frac{^{235}\text{U}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} (e^{\lambda_{235}t} - 1) \\ \frac{^{208}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} &= \left( \frac{^{208}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right)_o + \frac{^{232}\text{Th}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} (e^{\lambda_{232}t} - 1) \end{aligned} \quad (5.4)$$

where  $\left( \frac{x\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right)_o$  stands for the common Pb component for isotope x. The corresponding age equations then become:

$$\begin{aligned} t_{206} &= \frac{1}{\lambda_{238}} \ln \left( \frac{\left( \frac{^{206}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right) - \left( \frac{^{206}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right)_o}{\frac{^{238}\text{U}}{^{204}\text{Pb}}} + 1 \right) \\ t_{207} &= \frac{1}{\lambda_{235}} \ln \left( \frac{\left( \frac{^{207}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right) - \left( \frac{^{207}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right)_o}{\frac{^{235}\text{U}}{^{204}\text{Pb}}} + 1 \right) \\ t_{208} &= \frac{1}{\lambda_{232}} \ln \left( \frac{\left( \frac{^{208}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right) - \left( \frac{^{208}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right)_o}{\frac{^{232}\text{Th}}{^{204}\text{Pb}}} + 1 \right) \end{aligned} \quad (5.5)$$

U-Pb dating grants access to two separate geochronometers ( $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$ ) based on different isotopes of the same parent-daughter pair (i.e. U & Pb). This built-in redundancy provides a powerful internal quality check which makes the method arguably the most robust and reliable dating technique in the geological toolbox. The initial Pb composition can either be determined by analysing the Pb composition of a U-poor mineral (e.g., galena or feldspar) or by applying the isochron method to samples with different U and Th concentrations. As is the case for any isotopic system, the system needs to remain ‘closed’ in order to yield meaningful isotopic ages. This sometimes is not the case, resulting in a loss of Pb and/or U. Such losses cause the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$ - and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$ -clocks to yield different ages. Note that isotopic closure is required for all intermediary isotopes as well. Critical isotopes are the highly volatile  $^{226}\text{Rn}$  ( $t_{1/2}=1.6\text{ka}$ ) and  $^{222}\text{Rn}$  ( $t_{1/2}=3.8\text{d}$ ). Initially, the U-Pb method was applied to U-ores, but nowadays it is predominantly applied to accessory minerals such zircon and, to a lesser extent, apatite, monazite and allanite.

## 5.2 The Pb-Pb method

The  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  method is based on the U-Pb method and is obtained by dividing the two U-Pb members of Equation 5.2 (or 5.4), and taking into account that the average natural  $^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$ -ratio is 137.818:

$$\frac{^{207}\text{Pb}^*}{^{206}\text{Pb}^*} = \frac{\left( \frac{^{207}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right) - \left( \frac{^{207}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right)_o}{\left( \frac{^{206}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right) - \left( \frac{^{206}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right)_o} = \frac{1}{137.818} \frac{e^{\lambda_{235}t} - 1}{e^{\lambda_{238}t} - 1} \quad (5.6)$$

The left hand side of this equation contains only Pb isotopic ratios. Note that these are *only* a function of time. Equations 5.6 has no direct solution and must be solved iteratively. The Pb-Pb method has the following advantages over conventional U-Pb dating:

- There is no need to measure uranium.
- The method is insensitive to recent loss of U and even Pb, because this would not affect the isotopic ratio of the Pb.

In practice, the Pb-Pb method is rarely applied by itself but is generally combined with the U-Pb technique. The expected  $(^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb})^*$ -ratio for recently formed rocks and minerals can be calculated from Equation 5.6 by setting  $t \rightarrow 0$ :

$$\left(\frac{^{207}\text{Pb}}{^{206}\text{Pb}}\right)_p^* = \frac{\lambda_{235}}{137.818\lambda_{238}} = 0.04607 \quad (5.7)$$

This ratio was progressively higher as one goes back further in time. It was  $\approx 0.6$  during the formation of Earth.

### 5.3 Concordia

It sometimes happens that the U-Th-Pb trio of chronometers does not yield mutually consistent ages. It is then generally found that  $t_{208} < t_{206} < t_{207} < t_{207/206}$  which, again, shows that the Pb-Pb clock is least sensitive to open system behaviour. From Equation 5.2, we find that:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{^{206}\text{Pb}^*}{^{238}\text{U}} &= e^{\lambda_{238}t} - 1 \text{ and} \\ \frac{^{207}\text{Pb}^*}{^{235}\text{U}} &= e^{\lambda_{235}t} - 1 \end{aligned} \quad (5.8)$$

If we plot those  $^{206}\text{Pb}^*/^{238}\text{U}$ - and  $^{207}\text{Pb}^*/^{235}\text{U}$ -ratios which yield the same ages ( $t$ ) against one another, they form a so-called ‘concordia’ curve. The concordia diagram is a very useful tool for investigating and interpreting disruptions of the U-Pb system caused by ‘episodic lead loss’. This means that a mineral (of age  $T_0$ , say) has lost a certain percentage of its radiogenic Pb at a time  $T_1$  after its formation (e.g., during metamorphism), after which the system closes again and further accumulation of radiogenic Pb proceeds normally until the present. On the concordia diagram of multiple aliquots of a sample, this scenario will manifest itself as a linear array of datapoints connecting the concordant  $^{206}\text{Pb}^*/^{238}\text{U}$  -  $^{207}\text{Pb}^*/^{235}\text{U}$  composition expected at  $T_0$  with that expected at  $T_1$ . With time, the data shift further away from the origin. The upper intercept of the linear array (aka *discordia* line) can be used to estimate the crystallisation age, whereas the lower intercept yields the age of metamorphism. The greater the distance from the expected composition at  $t$ , the greater the degree of Pb loss and the greater the linear extrapolation error on the crystallisation age (Figure 5.1).

### 5.4 Detrital geochronology

Zircon ( $\text{ZrSiO}_4$ ) is a common U-Th-bearing accessory mineral in acidic igneous rocks, which form the main proto-sources of the siliciclastic sediments. Zircon is a very durable mineral that undergoes minimal chemical alteration or mechanical abrasion. Therefore, zircon crystals can be considered time capsules carrying the igneous and metamorphic history of their proto-sources. The probability distribution of a representative sample of zircon U-Pb ages from a detrital population can serve as a characteristic fingerprint that may be used to trace the flow of sand through sediment routing systems. As a provenance tracer, zircon U-Pb data are less susceptible to winnowing effects than conventional petrographic techniques. Using modern microprobe technology (SIMS and LA-ICP-MS, see Chapter 3.1), it is quite easy to date, say, a hundred grains of zircon in a matter of just a few hours. Due to the robustness of zircons as a

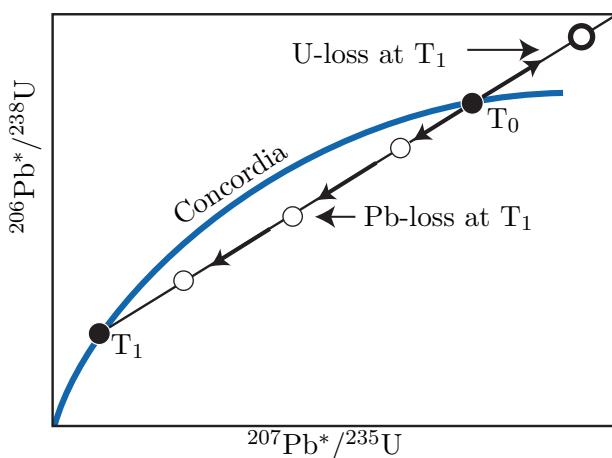


Figure 5.1: ‘Wetherill’ concordia diagram showing concordant (filled symbols) and discordant (empty symbols) analyses affected by different degrees of Pb (or U) loss (modified from Allègre, 2008).

tracer of sedimentary provenance, and the relative ease of dating them, the use of detrital zircon U-Pb geochronology has truly exploded in recent years. A literature survey using the keywords ‘detrital’, ‘zircon’, and ‘provenance’ indicates that the proliferation of detrital zircon studies has followed an exponential trend, with the number of publications doubling roughly every five years over the past two decades. At present, nearly a thousand detrital zircon publications appear each year.

An extensive survey of late Archaean sandstones from the Jack Hills in Australia have revealed a subpopulation of detrital zircons with Hadean (4.1-4.2 Ga) U-Pb ages. These are the oldest terrestrial minerals known to science, predating the oldest igneous rocks by 300 million years. The isotopic composition of oxygen, hafnium and other elements in the zircon represents a unique window into the earliest stages of Earth evolution. They indicate that liquid water was present on the surface of our planet early on in its history. This isotopic evidence is corroborated by the geological observation that the Hadean zircons are preserved in fluvial deposits.

# Chapter 6

## The K–Ar system

Potassium has three naturally occurring isotopes:  $^{39}\text{K}$ ,  $^{40}\text{K}$  and  $^{41}\text{K}$ .  $^{40}\text{K}$  is radioactive and undergoes branched decay to  $^{40}\text{Ca}$  (by electron emission  $\lambda_{\beta^-} = 4.962 \times 10^{-10} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ ) and  $^{40}\text{Ar}$  (by electron capture  $\lambda_e = 0.581 \times 10^{-10} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ ) with a combined half life of 1.248 billion years. The positron emission mechanism mentioned in Chapter 2.2 has an extremely long half life and can therefore safely be neglected. In addition to  $^{40}\text{Ar}$ , argon has two more stable isotopes:  $^{36}\text{Ar}$  and  $^{38}\text{Ar}$ . Argon makes up  $\sim 1\%$  of the terrestrial atmosphere, with a fixed isotopic composition of  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{36}\text{Ar} = 298.5$  and  $^{38}\text{Ar}/^{36}\text{Ar} = 0.187$ . The argon contained in K-bearing minerals is made up of a mixture of radiogenic ( $^{40}\text{Ar}^*$ ) and non-radiogenic gas ( $^{40}\text{Ar}_o$ ):

$$\begin{aligned} {}^{40}\text{Ar} &= {}^{40}\text{Ar}_o + {}^{40}\text{Ar}^* \\ \text{where } {}^{40}\text{Ar}^* &= \frac{\lambda_e}{\lambda} {}^{40}\text{K} (e^{\lambda t} - 1) \end{aligned} \quad (6.1)$$

with  $\lambda$  the total decay constant of  $^{40}\text{K}$  ( $\lambda = \lambda_e + \lambda_{\beta^-} = 5.543 \times 10^{-10} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ ).

### 6.1 K–Ar dating

The  $^{40}\text{K} \rightarrow {}^{40}\text{Ar}^*$  decay scheme forms the basis of the K–Ar geochronometer, with the following age equation:

$$t = \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \left[ 1 + \frac{\lambda}{\lambda_e} \left( \frac{{}^{40}\text{Ar}^*}{{}^{40}\text{K}} \right) \right] \quad (6.2)$$

Taking into account the ‘contaminated’ (aka ‘excess’ or ‘inherited’) argon component  ${}^{40}\text{Ar}_o$  and analysing several cogenetic rocks or minerals with different K (and therefore  ${}^{40}\text{Ar}^*$ ) contents, an *isochron* equation can be formed by division through  ${}^{36}\text{Ar}$ :

$$\frac{{}^{40}\text{Ar}}{{}^{36}\text{Ar}} = \left( \frac{{}^{40}\text{Ar}}{{}^{36}\text{Ar}} \right)_o + \frac{\lambda_e}{\lambda} \frac{{}^{40}\text{K}}{{}^{36}\text{Ar}} (e^{\lambda t} - 1) \quad (6.3)$$

which can be solved for  $t$ . Alternatively, we can simply assume that all the inherited argon has an atmospheric origin, so that  $({}^{40}\text{Ar}/{}^{36}\text{Ar})_o = 298.5$ .

### 6.2 ${}^{40}\text{Ar}/{}^{39}\text{Ar}$ dating

From an analytical perspective, K–Ar dating is a two step process. Because K (an alkali metal) and Ar (a noble gas) cannot be measured on the same analytical equipment, they must be analysed separately on two different aliquots of the same sample. This limitation is overcome by the  ${}^{40}\text{Ar}/{}^{39}\text{Ar}$  technique, which is a clever variation of the K–Ar method. The idea is to

subject the sample to neutron irradiation and convert a small fraction of the  $^{39}\text{K}$  to synthetic  $^{39}\text{Ar}$ , which has a half life of 269 years. The age equation can then be rewritten as follows:

$$t_x = \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \left[ 1 + J \left( \frac{^{40}\text{Ar}^*}{^{39}\text{Ar}} \right)_x \right] \quad (6.4)$$

where ‘x’ stands for ‘sample’ and J is a constant of proportionality which encapsulates the efficiency of the  $^{39}\text{K}$  (n,p)  $^{39}\text{Ar}$  reaction and into which the factor  $\lambda/\lambda_e$  is folded as well. The J-value can be determined by analysing a standard of known age  $t_s$  which was co-irradiated with the sample:

$$t_s = \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \left[ 1 + J \left( \frac{^{40}\text{Ar}^*}{^{39}\text{Ar}} \right)_s \right] \quad (6.5)$$

In which the subscript ‘s’ stands for ‘standard’. The great advantage of equation 6.4 over 6.2 is that all measurements can be completed on the same aliquot and using a single instrument, namely a noble gas mass spectrometer, which can analyse extremely small (down to  $\mu\text{g}$ -sized) samples.

The  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ -method also allows the analyst to investigate the extent of *argon loss* by means of stepwise heating experiments. This is done by degassing the sample under ultra-high vacuum conditions in a resistance furnace. At low temperatures, the weakly bound Ar is released, whereas the strongly bound Ar is released from the crystal lattice at high temperatures until the sample eventually melts. Plotting the *apparent ages* against the cumulative fraction of  $^{39}\text{Ar}$  released yields an  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  age spectrum (Figure 6.1). If a rock or mineral has remained closed since its formation, the  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ -ratio should remain constant over the course of the different heating steps, forming an ‘age plateau’. More complex (e.g. rising) release spectra, on the other hand, are diagnostic of complex thermal histories featuring partial argon loss. ‘saddle’ shaped release spectra are indicative of ‘excess’ argon. The composition of the inherited argon gas can be determined using a variant of the isochron method, assuming that all  $^{36}\text{Ar}$  is inherited:

$$\frac{^{40}\text{Ar}}{^{36}\text{Ar}} = \left( \frac{^{40}\text{Ar}}{^{36}\text{Ar}} \right)_o + \frac{^{39}\text{Ar}}{^{36}\text{Ar}} \frac{e^{\lambda t} - 1}{J} \quad (6.6)$$

If the Ar contamination is constant throughout the entire sample, then the  $\frac{^{40}\text{Ar}}{^{36}\text{Ar}}$ -measurements will be arranged along a linear trend whose slope is a function of  $\frac{^{40}\text{Ar}^*}{^{39}\text{Ar}}$  and, hence, the age.

## 6.3 Applications

The K-Ar and  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ -methods are some of the most widely used geochronometers and important tools in the calibration of the geologic time scale. The method is applicable to rocks and minerals  $> 10^6\text{yr}$ . Obviously, younger materials require more careful treatment of the inherited argon components.

- Magmatic rocks: formation ages can only be obtained for rapidly cooled volcanic rocks, using either mineral separates (sanidine, biotite, hornblende) or whole rocks. Pyroclastics and obsidian may yield reliable ages only if they are unaltered and contain little non-radiogenic argon. Plutonic rocks typically cool much slower than volcanic rocks and generally yield cooling ages rather than formation ages.

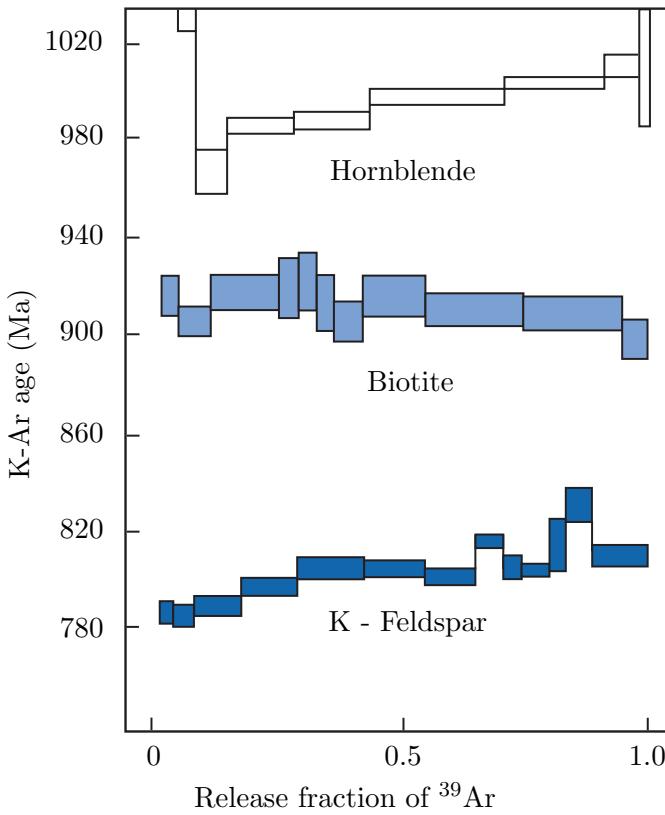


Figure 6.1:  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  age spectra obtained by stepwise heating of three different K-bearing minerals. Biotite exhibits a flat ‘plateau’, indicating a simple history of rapid crystallisation and/or cooling. K-feldspar shows a rising age spectrum, consistent with a more complex evolution comprising multiple growth phases and/or thermal resetting. Finally, hornblende shows a ‘U-shaped’ release spectrum in which the first heating step releases a large amount of ‘excess’ argon (modified from Allègre, 2008).

- Sedimentary rocks: K-Ar dating of *authigenic* mineral phases has often been attempted but remains difficult. Glauconite has been used successfully in some cases. Dating detrital minerals such as white mica (muscovite, phengite) in fluvial sediments is frequently used to study the metamorphic history of the hinterland.
- Metamorphic rocks: pelitic metamorphic rocks tend to be rich in K-bearing micas and amphiboles, which can easily be dated with the K-Ar and  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  methods, but require careful interpretation. In high grade metamorphic terranes, the apparent ages can either reflect the metamorphic crystallisation history or the postmetamorphic cooling history. Low grade metamorphic terranes, on the other hand, carry a risk of containing inherited argon components from previous evolutionary stages.

# Chapter 7

## Thermochronology

The temperature sensitivity of the K-Ar system (Section 6) is a characteristic feature not only of this method, but of a separate class of geochronometers known as ‘thermochronometers’. The most important of these methods are the U-Th-He 7.1 and fission track 7.2 techniques, which are becoming increasingly popular as a means of investigating Earth surface processes.

### 7.1 The U-Th-He method

When U and Th decay to various isotopes of Pb (Section 5.1), they do so by  $\alpha$ -emission (Section 2.2). When  $\alpha$  particles acquire electrons, they become helium atoms. Thus, not only Pb content, but also the He content increases relative to U and Th through time, forming the basis of the U-Th-He chronometer:

$$[{}^4\text{He}] = \left[ 8 \frac{137.818}{138.818} (e^{\lambda_{238}t} - 1) + 7 \frac{1}{138.818} (e^{\lambda_{235}t} - 1) \right] [\text{U}] + \\ 6(e^{\lambda_{232}t} - 1) [\text{Th}] + 0.1499(e^{\lambda_{147}t} - 1) [\text{Sm}] \quad (7.1)$$

where  $[{}^4\text{He}]$ ,  $[\text{U}]$ ,  $[\text{Th}]$  and  $[\text{Sm}]$  are concentrations in atoms or moles per unit mass or volume. The values ‘8’, ‘7’ and ‘6’ refer to the number of  $\alpha$ -particles produced in the decay chains of  $^{238}\text{U}$ ,  $^{235}\text{U}$  and  $^{232}\text{Th}$ , respectively (Figure 2.2), 137.818 is the  $^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratio of naturally occurring uranium in accessory minerals, and the last term accounts for the (often negligible) accumulation of helium by Sm-decay (Section 4.4). It was Ernest Rutherford who first proposed that the U-Th-He decay scheme could be used as an absolute dating technique, making it the oldest radiometric chronometer. Early experiments on uraninite ( $\text{UO}_2$ ) by Robert John Strutt (4<sup>th</sup> Baron Rayleigh) at Imperial College London in 1905 yielded ages that were systematically too young. This was correctly attributed to the volatile nature of the helium atom, which diffuses out of most minerals at low temperatures and therefore yields only *minimum ages*. As a result, the method was largely abandoned until 1987, when American geochronologist Peter Zeitler realised that this ‘leaky’ behaviour provided a powerful means of reconstructing the thermal evolution of rocks and minerals.

Let  $C(x,y,z)$  be the He-concentration as a function of the spatial coordinates x, y and z. The evolution of C with time (t) is given by the diffusion equation (‘Fick’s law’):

$$\frac{\partial C}{\partial t} = D \left( \frac{\partial^2 C}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 C}{\partial y^2} + \frac{\partial^2 C}{\partial z^2} \right) \quad (7.2)$$

Where D is the ‘diffusion coefficient’, which varies exponentially with temperature (T) according to the ‘Arrhenius Law’:

$$D = D_0 e^{-\frac{E_a}{RT}} \quad (7.3)$$

with  $D_0$  the ‘frequency factor’,  $E_a$  the ‘activation energy’ and  $R$  the ideal gas constant (8.3144621 J/mol.K). By taking the logarithm of both sides of Equation 7.3, we obtain (Figure 7.1):

$$\ln(D) = \ln(D_0) - \frac{E_a}{RT} \quad (7.4)$$

Both the frequency factor and the activation energy can be determined from *diffusion experiments*, in which a He-bearing mineral is subjected to a step-heating experiment similar to the kind we saw in the  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  method (Section 6.2).

Let us now consider the situation of a mineral which (a) accumulates He through radioactive decay of U and Th, (b) loses He by thermal diffusion, and (c) undergoes monotonic cooling at a variable rate  $dT/dt$ . At high temperatures, the He will be lost quickly but as time progresses, the thermal diffusion becomes increasingly sluggish until the He is eventually ‘locked’ into the crystal lattice and the isotopic system is effectively *closed*. If the thermal history is so that  $1/T$  increases linearly with time, then it is possible to calculate an equivalent ‘closure temperature’  $T_c$ . This is known as ‘Dodson’s equation’:

$$\frac{E_a}{RT_c} = \ln \left( \frac{ART_c^2 D_0 / r^2}{E_a dT/dt} \right) \quad (7.5)$$

where  $r$  = is the effective grain size (radius) of the mineral and  $A$  is a geometric factor (55 for a sphere, 27 for a cylinder and 8.7 for a plane sheet). Thus the U-Th-He age calculated at the end of the aforementioned thermal history equals that which would have been obtained if He accumulated linearly since the rock passed through  $T_c$ .

Although the closure temperature concept is an oversimplification of reality, it has great intuitive appeal. Consider, for example, a vertical transect in a rapidly exhuming mountain range. The *apparent* U-Th-He ages along such a transect are approximately given by the time elapsed since the respective rocks have passed through  $T_c$ . For apatite  $[\text{Ca}_5(\text{PO}_4)_3(\text{OH},\text{F},\text{Cl})]$ , this is  $\sim 60^\circ\text{C}$ , which corresponds to a depth (assuming a thermal gradient of  $30^\circ\text{C/km}$ ) of 1.5–2km. Thus, the rocks at the high elevations along the transect will have passed through  $T_c$  before those collected at the bottom of the transect, and the corresponding U-Th-He ages will therefore increase with elevation. Moreover, the rate of increase of age increase with elevation can be used to estimate the *exhumation rate* of the orogen.

## 7.2 Fission tracks

In addition to  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$  decay, which form the basis of the U-Th-Pb (Section 5) and U-Th-He (Section 7.1) methods, a tiny fraction (1/1,000,000) of the  $^{238}\text{U}$  atoms decay by *spontaneous fission* (Section 2.2). In this decay mechanism, the parent nuclide (i.e.,  $^{238}\text{U}$ ) decays into two daughter nuclides of roughly equal mass (e.g., Ba and Kr). These two particles carry a large amount of energy ( $\sim 170$  MeV) and, having a positive charge, strongly repel each other. Each of the two fission fragments travels through the crystal lattice of the host mineral, leaving a trail of damage behind. Although fission tracks can be directly observed by transmission electron microscopy (TEM), a more practical approach is to etch (a polished surface of) the host mineral



Figure 7.1: ‘Arrhenius’ diagram of three step-heating experiments of  ${}^4\text{He}$  in apatite, showing simple diffusion behaviour in agreement with Equation 7.3. Extrapolating the linear trend to geological time scales yields a ‘closure temperature’ of  $\sim 60^\circ\text{C}$  (Equation 7.5). Modified from Braun, Van Der Beek, and Batt (2006).

with acid. This enlarges the damage zones and makes it possible to count them under an ordinary petrographic microscope. The volume density  $n_s$  (in  $\text{cm}^{-3}$ ) of the fission tracks is given by:

$$n_s = \frac{\lambda_f}{\lambda} [{}^{238}\text{U}] \left( e^{\lambda t} - 1 \right) \quad (7.6)$$

where  $[{}^{238}\text{U}]$  stands for the volume density the  ${}^{238}\text{U}$  atoms,  $\lambda_f$  is the fission decay constant ( $8.46 \times 10^{-17} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ ) and  $\lambda$  is the total decay constant of  ${}^{238}\text{U}$  ( $1.55125 \times 10^{-10} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ , see Section 5). The (unobservable) volume density of the tracks is related to the (observable) surface density  $\rho_s$  (in  $\text{cm}^{-2}$ ) by:

$$\rho_s = g_s L n_s \quad (7.7)$$

Where  $g_s$  is geometry factor ( $g_s=1$  if determined on an internal and  $g_s=1/2$  on an external surface) and  $L$  is the etchable length of a fission track ( $\sim 15\mu\text{m}$ ). Rearranging Equation 7.6 for time:

$$t = \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \left( \frac{\lambda}{\lambda_f} \frac{\rho_s}{[{}^{238}\text{U}] g_s L} + 1 \right) \quad (7.8)$$

In practice,  $[{}^{238}\text{U}]$  is determined by irradiating the (etched) sample with thermal neutrons in a reactor. This irradiation induces synthetic fission of  ${}^{235}\text{U}$  in the mineral (Equation 2.1). These tracks can be monitored by attaching a mica detector to the polished mineral surface and etching this monitor subsequent to irradiation (Figure 7.2). The surface density of the induced tracks in the mica detector ( $\rho_i$ ) is a function of the nuclear cross section of the neutron-induced fission reaction on  ${}^{235}\text{U}$  and the neutron fluence in the reactor, both of which are unknown. A pragmatic solution to this problem is found by irradiating the sample along with a standard of known age, and lumping all the unknown parameters together into a calibration factor ( $\zeta$ ), so that the age of the sample reduces to:

$$t = \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \left( 1 + \frac{g_i}{g_s} \lambda \zeta \rho_d \frac{\rho_s}{\rho_i} \right) \quad (7.9)$$

where  $g_s = 1$ ,  $g_i = 1/2$  and  $\rho_d$  is the surface density of the induced fission tracks in a dosimeter glass of known (and constant) U concentration. The latter value is needed to ‘recycle’ the  $\zeta$  value from one irradiation batch to the next, as neutron fluences might vary through time, or



within a sample stack.

Laboratory experiments have revealed that fission tracks are sensitive to heat. For example, it suffices that apatite is heated to 500°C for 1 hour for all the latent fission tracks to anneal. Moderate heating shortens the tracks and reduces their surface density and, hence, the apparent age of the sample. In boreholes, the apparent fission track age remains constant until a depth is reached where the ambient temperature is high enough for the tracks to be reduced in size and number. This region is called the *Partial Annealing Zone* (PAZ). Below the PAZ, no tracks are retained (Figure 7.3). The reduction of the surface density of the spontaneous tracks per unit time can be written as a function of temperature ( $T$ , in Kelvin):

$$\frac{d\rho_s}{dt} = -C\rho_s e^{-E_a/kT} \quad (7.10)$$

where  $C$  is a material constant,  $E_a$  is the activation energy for track shortening and  $k$  is the Boltzmann constant ( $8.616 \times 10^{-5}$  eV/K). Integration of Equation 7.10 yields:

$$\ln\left(\frac{\rho_\circ}{\rho}\right) = C t e^{-E_a/kT} \quad (7.11)$$

where  $\rho_\circ$  is the initial track density prior to heating. Taking logarithms:

$$\ln(t) = \frac{E_A}{kT} + \ln \left[ \ln \left( \frac{\rho_o}{\rho} \right) \right] - \ln(C) \quad (7.12)$$

For any given *retention coefficient*  $\rho_o/\rho$ , there exists a linear relationship between  $\ln(t)$  and  $1/T$ . This is an *Arrhenius trend* similar to the one described by Equation 7.3 in the context of U-Th-He thermochronology. By extrapolating the Arrhenius diagram to long time scales ( $t \sim 10^6$  yr), it is possible to calculate a ‘closure temperature’  $T_c$  similar to that which is calculated for the U-Th-He system. For apatite,  $T_c \approx 100^\circ C$ , whereas for zircon,  $T_c \approx 240^\circ C$ .

If a sample has spent some of its time inside the PAZ, then the subpopulation of its fission tracks formed during that time will be shorter than those that subsequently formed above the PAZ. The probability distribution of the fission track lengths can be determined by measuring the distance between the two tips of a large number of (100, say) *horizontally confined* fission tracks under the optical microscope. Sophisticated inverse modelling algorithms have been developed to interpret these length distributions and extract continuous time-temperature (t-T) paths from them. Such modelling exercises have become an integral part of modern fission track studies.

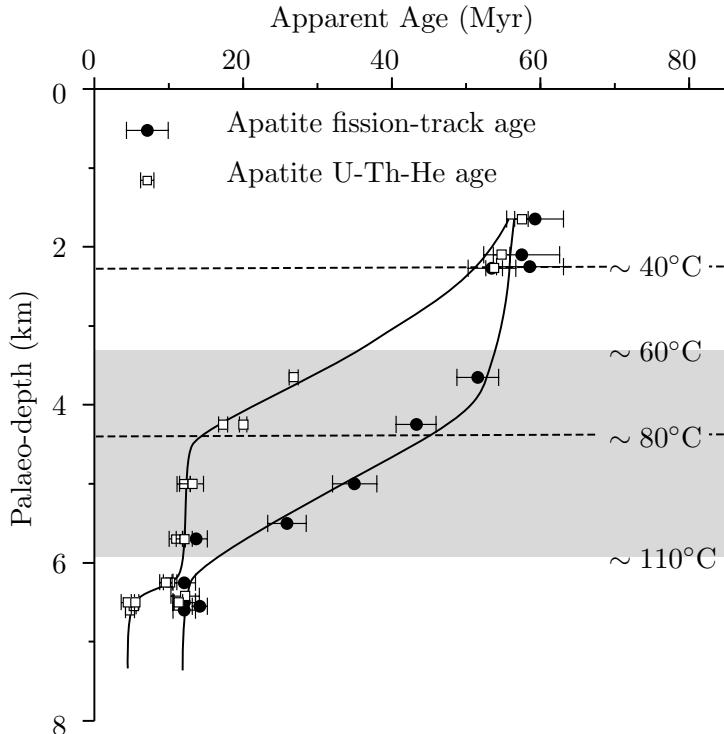


Figure 7.3: Vertical profile of U-Th-He and fission track ages in apatite, collected along the footwall of an exhumed normal fault block in the White Mountains of eastern California. Samples at the highest elevations have resided at shallow depths for up to 55 Myr. Dashed lines show the extent of the ‘Partial Retention Zone’ (PRZ), in which apatite has partially lost its radiogenic helium. The grey area indicates the ‘Partial Annealing Zone’, where fission tracks have been shortened. At low elevations, young ages are observed, indicating rapid exhumation by the normal fault at 12 Ma. Additionally, the U-Th-He data show a hint of a second exhumation phase at 5 Ma (modified from Stockli, Farley and Dumitru, 2000, *Geology* v. 28, no. 11, p. 983-986).

# Chapter 8

## U-series disequilibrium methods

In Section 2.4, we saw that the  $^{235}\text{U}$ - $^{207}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$ - $^{206}\text{Pb}$  decay series generally reach a state of *secular equilibrium*, in which the activity (expressed in decay events per unit time) of each intermediate daughter product is the same, so that:

$$D_n\lambda_n = \dots = D_2\lambda_2 = D_1\lambda_1 = P\lambda_P$$

as described by Equation 2.20. However, certain natural processes can disturb this equilibrium situation, such as chemical weathering, precipitation from a solution, (re-)crystallisation etc. This leads to two new types of chronometric systems:

1. An intermediate daughter isotope in the decay series is separated from its parent nuclide incorporated into a rock or sediment, and decays according to its own half life.
2. A parent nuclide has separated itself from its previous decay products and it takes some time for secular equilibrium to be re-established.

This idea is most frequently applied to the  $^{238}\text{U}$ -decay series, notably  $^{230}\text{Th}$  and  $^{234}\text{U}$ . The first type of disequilibrium dating forms the basis of the  $^{234}\text{U}$ - $^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{230}\text{Th}$  methods (Sections 8.1 and 8.2). The second forms the basis of the  $^{230}\text{Th}$ - $^{238}\text{U}$  method (Section 8.3)

### 8.1 The $^{234}\text{U}$ - $^{238}\text{U}$ method

The activity ratio of  $^{238}\text{U}$  to its third radioactive daughter  $^{234}\text{U}$  in the world's oceans is  $A(^{234}\text{U})/A(^{238}\text{U}) \equiv \gamma_o \approx 1.15$ . The slight enrichment of the  $^{234}\text{U}$  over  $^{238}\text{U}$  is attributed to  $\alpha$ -recoil of its immediate parent  $^{234}\text{Th}$  and the fact that  $^{234}\text{U}$  is more 'loosely bound' inside the crystal lattice of the host mineral, because it is preferentially seated in sites which have undergone radiation damage. Once the oceanic U is incorporated into the crystal structure of marine carbonates, the radioactive equilibrium gradually restores itself with time. The total activity of  $^{234}\text{U}$  is made up of a component which is supported by secular equilibrium (and equals the activity of  $^{238}\text{U}$ ) and an 'excess' component, which decays with time:

$$A(^{234}\text{U}) = A(^{238}\text{U}) + A(^{234}\text{U})_o^x e^{-\lambda_{234}t} \quad (8.1)$$

where  $A(^{234}\text{U})_o^x$  is the initial amount of excess  $^{234}\text{U}$  and  $\lambda_{234} = 2.8234 \times 10^{-6} \text{ yr}^{-1}$  ( $t_{1/2} = 245.5 \text{ kyr}$ ). Let  $A(^{234}\text{U})_o$  be the initial total  $^{234}\text{U}$  activity. Then:

$$A(^{234}\text{U}) = A(^{238}\text{U}) + [A(^{234}\text{U})_o - A(^{238}\text{U})] e^{-\lambda_{234}t} \quad (8.2)$$

Dividing by  $A(^{238}\text{U})$ :

$$\frac{A(^{234}\text{U})}{A(^{238}\text{U})} = 1 + [\gamma_0 - 1]e^{-\lambda_{234}t} \quad (8.3)$$

Which can be solved for  $t$  until about 1 Ma.

## 8.2 The $^{230}\text{Th}$ method

U and Th are strongly incompatible elements. This causes chemical fractionation and disturbs the secular equilibrium of the  $^{238}\text{U}$  decay series in young volcanic rocks. It is commonly found that the activity ratio  $A(^{230}\text{Th})/A(^{238}\text{U}) > 1$ . As expected, the secular equilibrium between  $^{234}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$  is not disturbed by chemical fractionation, so that  $A(^{234}\text{U})/A(^{238}\text{U}) = 1$ . The total  $^{230}\text{Th}$  activity is given by:

$$A(^{230}\text{Th}) = A(^{230}\text{Th})_0 e^{-\lambda_{230}t} + A(^{238}\text{U})(1 - e^{-\lambda_{230}t}) \quad (8.4)$$

where  $A(^{230}\text{Th})_0$  is the initial amount of  $^{230}\text{Th}$  at the time of crystallisation and  $A(^{238}\text{U}) = A(^{234}\text{U})$  due to secular equilibrium of the U isotopes. Thus, the first term of Equation 8.4 increases with time from 0 to  $A(^{238}\text{U})$  while the second term decreases from  $A(^{230}\text{Th})_0$  to 0. Dividing by  $A(^{232}\text{Th})$  yields a linear relationship between  $A(^{230}\text{Th})/A(^{232}\text{Th})$  and  $A(^{238}\text{U})/A(^{232}\text{Th})$ :

$$\frac{A(^{230}\text{Th})}{A(^{232}\text{Th})} = \frac{A(^{230}\text{Th})_0}{A(^{232}\text{Th})} e^{-\lambda_{230}t} + \frac{A(^{238}\text{U})}{A(^{232}\text{Th})}(1 - e^{-\lambda_{230}t}) \quad (8.5)$$

This forms an isochron with slope  $(1 - e^{-\lambda_{230}t})$ , from which the age  $t$  can be calculated. This method is applicable to volcanic rocks and pelitic ocean sediments ranging from 3ka to 1Ma.

## 8.3 The $^{230}\text{Th-U}$ method

Uranium is significantly more soluble in water than Th. As a result, the intermediate daughter  $^{230}\text{Th}$  is largely absent from sea water. Thus, lacustrine and marine carbonate rocks contain some U but virtually no Th at the time of formation. The  $^{230}\text{Th}$  activity increases steadily with time as a result of  $^{234}\text{U}$  decay. The total  $^{230}\text{Th}$  activity consists of a growing component  $A(^{230}\text{Th})^s$  that is in secular equilibrium with  $^{238}\text{U}$  and a shrinking component  $A(^{230}\text{Th})^x$  of ‘excess’  $^{230}\text{Th}$  produced by the surplus of  $^{234}\text{U}$  commonly found in ocean water (see section 8.1):

$$A(^{230}\text{Th}) = A(^{230}\text{Th})^s + A(^{230}\text{Th})^x \quad (8.6)$$

$$\text{with: } A(^{230}\text{Th})^s = A(^{238}\text{U})(1 - e^{-\lambda_{230}t}) \quad (8.7)$$

$$\text{and: } A(^{230}\text{Th})^x = \frac{\lambda_{230}}{\lambda_{230} - \lambda_{234}} A(^{234}\text{U})_0^x (e^{-\lambda_{234}t} - e^{-\lambda_{230}t}) \quad (8.8)$$

In which the expression for  $A(^{230}\text{Th})^x$  follows from Equation 2.14 and  $A(^{234}\text{U})_0^x$  denotes the initial amount of excess  $^{234}\text{U}$  activity (as in Section 8.1). Taking into account that  $A(^{234}\text{U})_0^x = A(^{234}\text{U})_0 - A(^{238}\text{U})$ , and dividing by  $A(^{238}\text{U})$ , we obtain:

$$\frac{A(^{230}\text{Th})^x}{A(^{238}\text{U})} = \frac{\lambda_{230}}{\lambda_{230} - \lambda_{234}} (\gamma_0 - 1) (e^{-\lambda_{234}t} - e^{-\lambda_{230}t}) \quad (8.9)$$

in which  $\gamma_0 \equiv A(^{234}\text{U})/A(^{238}\text{U})$  as defined in Section 8.1. The formation age of the carbonate can be calculated by substituting Equations 8.7 and 8.9 into 8.6 and solving for  $t$ .

$$\frac{A(^{230}Th)}{A(^{238}U)} = 1 - e^{-\lambda_{230}t} + \frac{\lambda_{230}}{\lambda_{230} - \lambda_{234}}(\gamma_0 - 1) \left( e^{-\lambda_{234}t} - e^{-\lambda_{230}t} \right) \quad (8.10)$$

If  $\gamma_0 = 1$  (i.e., the water is in secular equilibrium for U), then Equation 8.6 simplifies to:

$$\frac{A(^{230}Th)}{A(^{238}U)} = 1 - e^{-\lambda_{230}t} \quad (8.11)$$

If  $\gamma_0 \neq 1$ , Equation 8.11 yields ages that are systematically too old (if  $\gamma_0 > 1$ ) or too young (if  $\gamma_0 < 1$ ).

# Chapter 9

## Error propagation

All the methods and equations presented thus far have assumed that all parameters are either known or measured with infinite precision. In reality, however, the analytical equipment used to measure isotopic compositions, elemental concentrations and radioactive half-lives is not perfect. It is crucially important that we quantify the resulting analytical uncertainty before we can reliably interpret the resulting ages.

For example, suppose that the extinction of the dinosaurs has been dated at 65 Ma in one field location, and a meteorite impact has been dated at 64 Ma elsewhere. These two numbers are effectively meaningless in the absence of an estimate of precision. Taken at face value, the dates imply that the meteorite impact took place 1 million years after the mass extinction, which rules out a causal relationship between the two events. If, however, the analytical uncertainty is significantly greater than 1 Myr (e.g.  $64 \pm 2$  Ma and  $65 \pm 2$  Ma), then such of a causal relationship remains very plausible.

### 9.1 Some basic definitions

Suppose that our geochronological age ( $t$ ) is calculated as a function ( $f$ ) of some measurements ( $x$  and  $y$ ):

$$t = f(x, y) \quad (9.1)$$

Suppose that we have performed a large number ( $n$ ) of replicate measurements of  $x$  and  $y$ :

$$\begin{cases} x = \{x_1, x_2, \dots, x_i, \dots, x_n\} \\ y = \{y_1, y_2, \dots, y_i, \dots, y_n\} \end{cases} \quad (9.2)$$

It is useful to define the following *summary statistics*:

1. The mean:

$$\begin{cases} \bar{x} \equiv \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n x_i \\ \bar{y} \equiv \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n y_i \end{cases} \quad (9.3)$$

is a useful definition for the ‘most representative’ value of  $x$  and  $y$ , which can be plugged into Equation 9.1 to calculate the ‘most representative’ age.

2. The variance:

$$\begin{cases} s[x]^2 \equiv \frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})^2 \\ s[y]^2 \equiv \frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \bar{y})^2 \end{cases} \quad (9.4)$$

with  $s[x]$  and  $s[y]$  the ‘standard deviations’, is used to quantify the amount of dispersion around the mean.

3. The covariance:

$$s[x, y] \equiv \frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y}) \quad (9.5)$$

quantifies the degree of correlation between variables  $x$  and  $y$ .

$\bar{x}$ ,  $\bar{y}$ ,  $s[x]^2$ ,  $s[y]^2$  and  $s[x, y]$  can all be estimated from the input data  $(x, y)$ . These values can then be used to infer  $s[t]^2$ , the variance of the calculated age  $t$ , a process that is known as ‘error propagation’. To this end, recall the definition of the variance (Equation 9.4):

$$s[t]^2 \equiv \frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n (t_i - \bar{t})^2 \quad (9.6)$$

We can estimate  $(t_i - \bar{t})$  by differentiating Equation 9.1:

$$t_i - \bar{t} = (x_i - \bar{x}) \frac{\partial f}{\partial x} + (y_i - \bar{y}) \frac{\partial f}{\partial y} \quad (9.7)$$

Plugging Equation 9.7 into 9.6, we obtain:

$$s[t]^2 = \frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n \left[ (x_i - \bar{x}) \left( \frac{\partial f}{\partial x} \right) + (y_i - \bar{y}) \left( \frac{\partial f}{\partial y} \right) \right]^2 \quad (9.8)$$

$$= s[x]^2 \left( \frac{\partial f}{\partial x} \right)^2 + s[y]^2 \left( \frac{\partial f}{\partial y} \right)^2 + 2 s[x, y] \frac{\partial f}{\partial x} \frac{\partial f}{\partial y} \quad (9.9)$$

This is the general equation for the propagation of uncertainty with two variables, which is most easily extended to more than two variables by reformulating Equation 9.9 into a matrix form:

$$s[t]^2 = \begin{bmatrix} \frac{\partial t}{\partial x} & \frac{\partial t}{\partial y} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} s[x]^2 & s[x, y] \\ s[x, y] & s[y]^2 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \frac{\partial t}{\partial x} \\ \frac{\partial t}{\partial y} \end{bmatrix} \quad (9.10)$$

where the innermost matrix is known as the *variance-covariance matrix* and the outermost matrix (and its transpose) as the *Jacobian matrix*. Let us now apply this equation to some simple functions.

## 9.2 Examples

Let  $x$  and  $y$  indicate measured quantities associated with analytical uncertainty. And let  $a$  and  $b$  be some error free parameters.

1. addition:

$$\begin{aligned} t &= ax + by \Rightarrow \frac{\partial t}{\partial x} = a, \frac{\partial t}{\partial y} = b \\ \Rightarrow s[t]^2 &= a^2 s[x]^2 + b^2 s[y]^2 + 2ab s[x, y] \end{aligned} \quad (9.11)$$

2. subtraction:

$$t = ax - by \Rightarrow s[t]^2 = a^2 s[y]^2 + b^2 s[y]^2 - 2ab s[x, y] \quad (9.12)$$

3. multiplication:

$$\begin{aligned} t = axy \Rightarrow \frac{\partial t}{\partial x} = ay, \frac{\partial t}{\partial y} = ax \\ \Rightarrow s[t]^2 = (ay)^2 s[x]^2 + (ax)^2 s[y]^2 + 2a^2 xy s[x, y] \\ \Rightarrow \left( \frac{s[t]}{t} \right)^2 = \left( \frac{s[x]}{x} \right)^2 + \left( \frac{s[y]}{y} \right)^2 + 2 \frac{s[x, y]}{xy} \end{aligned} \quad (9.13)$$

4. division:

$$t = a \frac{x}{y} \Rightarrow \left( \frac{s[t]}{t} \right)^2 = \left( \frac{s[x]}{x} \right)^2 + \left( \frac{s[y]}{y} \right)^2 - 2 \frac{s[x, y]}{xy} \quad (9.14)$$

5. exponentiation:

$$t = a e^{bx} \Rightarrow \frac{\partial f}{\partial x} = ab e^{bx} \Rightarrow s[t]^2 = (bt)^2 s[x]^2 \quad (9.15)$$

6. logarithms:

$$t = a \ln(bx) \Rightarrow \frac{\partial f}{\partial x} = \frac{a}{x} \Rightarrow s[t]^2 = a^2 \left( \frac{s[x]}{x} \right)^2 \quad (9.16)$$

7. power:

$$t = ax^b \Rightarrow \frac{\partial f}{\partial x} = b \frac{ax^b}{x} \Rightarrow \left( \frac{s[t]}{t} \right)^2 = b^2 \left( \frac{s[x]}{x} \right)^2 \quad (9.17)$$

### 9.3 Accuracy vs. precision

Recall the definition of the arithmetic mean (Equation 9.3):

$$\bar{x} \equiv \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n x_i$$

Applying the equation for the error propagation of a sum (Equation 9.11):

$$s[\bar{x}]^2 = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n s[x_i]^2 = \frac{s[x]^2}{n} \quad (9.18)$$

where we assume that all  $n$  measurements were done *independently*, so that  $\text{cov}(x_i, x_j) = 0 \forall i, j$ . The standard deviation of the mean is known as the standard error:

$$s[\bar{x}] = \frac{s[x]}{\sqrt{n}} \quad (9.19)$$

This means that the standard error of the mean monotonically decreases with the square root of sample size. In other words, we can arbitrarily increase the *precision* of our analytical data by acquiring more data. However, it is important to note that the same is generally not the case for the *accuracy* of those data. The difference between precision and accuracy is best explained by a darts board analogy:



Whereas the analytical precision can be computed from the data using the error propagation formulas introduced above, the only way to get a grip on the accuracy is by analysing another sample of independently determined age. Such test samples are also known as ‘secondary standards’.

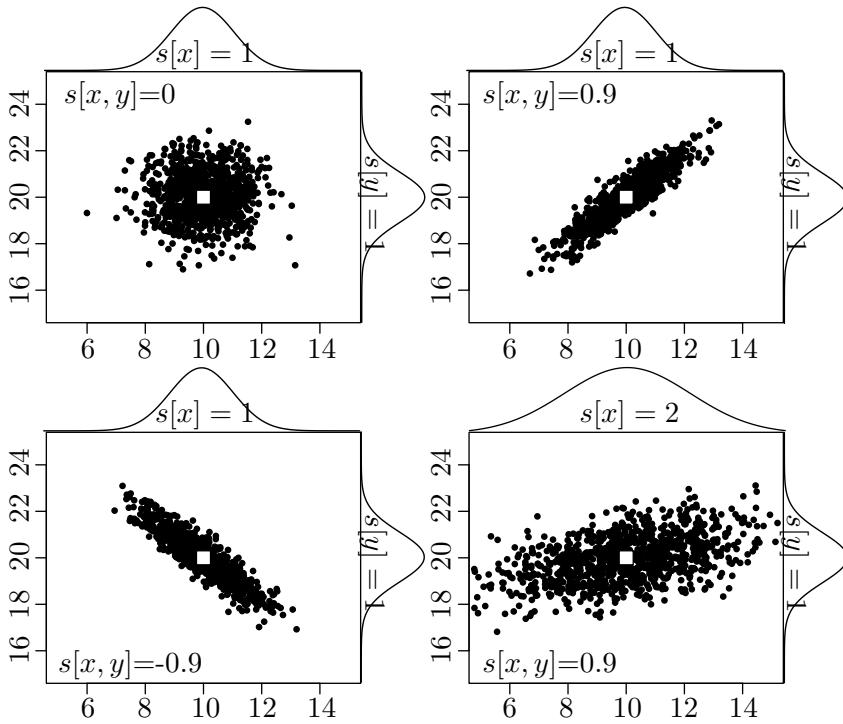


Figure 9.1: Four datasets of 100 random numbers (black dots) which have the same means (white squares) but different (co-)variance structures. The marginal distributions of the  $x$  and  $y$  variables are shown as ‘bell curves’ on the top and right axis of each plot.

# Chapter 10

## Exercises

1. If helium ions (mass number = 4) are accelerated with a voltage of 10 kV in a mass spectrometer, at what speed are they emitted from the source? Recall that 1 atomic mass unit (amu) =  $1.66 \times 10^{-27}$  kg and the elementary charge is  $1.602 \times 10^{-19}$  C. [Answer: 569 km/s]
2. We are trying to estimate the Rb concentration in a rock for the purpose of whole rock Rb-Sr dating. To this end, we use a spike with a Rb concentration of 7.5 ppm containing 99.4%  $^{87}\text{Rb}$  and 0.6%  $^{85}\text{Rb}$  (these are atomic abundances). We mix 3.5g of the spike with 0.25g of sample dissolved in 50g. The  $^{87}\text{Rb}/^{85}\text{Rb}$ -ratio of the mixture is 1.55, as measured by mass spectrometry. What is the Rb concentration in ppm? Note that natural Rb comprises of 27.825%  $^{87}\text{Rb}$  and 72.165%  $^{85}\text{Rb}$ . [Answer: 120 ppm]
3. A biotite contains 465ppm Rb and 30ppm Sr with a  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ -ratio of 2.50. Given an initial  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ -ratio of 0.7035, what is the age of the biotite? Natural Rb has an atomic mass of 85.4678 and comprises 72.165%  $^{85}\text{Rb}$  and 27.825%  $^{87}\text{Rb}$ , which has a half life of  $t_{1/2} = 48.8$  Gyr. Sr has an atomic mass of 87.62. Its non-radiogenic isotopes occur with the following abundances:  $^{84}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr} = 0.056584$  and  $^{86}\text{Sr}/^{88}\text{Sr} = 0.1194$ . [Answer: 2.36 Ga]
4. Consider a zircon with the following composition: U = 792.1 ppm, Th = 318.6 ppm, Pb = 208.2 ppm. Atomic masses for U, Th and Pb in the zircon are 238.04, 232.04 and 205.94, respectively. The isotopic composition of the Pb is as follows:  $^{204}\text{Pb} = 0.048\%$ ,  $^{206}\text{Pb} = 80.33\%$ ,  $^{207}\text{Pb} = 9.00\%$ ,  $^{208}\text{Pb} = 10.63\%$ . Assume the following initial Pb composition: 204 : 206 : 207 : 208 = 1.00 : 16.25 : 15.51 : 35.73. The decay constants for  $^{238}\text{U}$ ,  $^{235}\text{U}$  and  $^{232}\text{Th}$  are given in Section 5.  $^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U} = 137.818$ . Calculate the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$ ,  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$ ,  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{232}\text{Th}$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$ -age of the zircon. Give an account of its formation history.  
[Answer: 1.405, 1.523, 1.284 and 1.689 Ga]
5. A biotite was separated from granite and dated with the K-Ar method. The analytical data are as follows:  $\text{K}_2\text{O} = 8.45$  weight %, radiogenic  $^{40}\text{Ar} = 6.015 \times 10^{-10}$  mol/g. What is the K-Ar age of the biotite? The atomic mass of K is 39.098 (and oxygen 15.9994), with an isotopic composition that comprises 93.258%  $^{39}\text{K}$ , 6.730%  $^{41}\text{K}$  and 0.01167%  $^{40}\text{K}$ , which has a half-life of  $t_{1/2} = 1.248$  Gyr. Recall that only 10.72% of the  $^{40}\text{K}$  decays to  $^{40}\text{Ar}$ , with the remaining 89.28% turning into  $^{40}\text{Ca}$ . [Answer: 47.7 Ma]
6. Consider a biotite with a conventional K-Ar age of 384Ma. A  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  step-heating experiment yields the following data:

% $^{39}\text{Ar}$ released	7	15	20	25	35	70	100
$^{40}\text{Ar}^*/^{39}\text{Ar}$	2.27	4.97	6.68	9.58	10.25	10.10	10.26

The analysis was done using a co-irradiated 1.062 Ga biotite age standard yielding a  $^{40}\text{Ar}^*/^{39}\text{Ar}$  ratio of 27.64. Construct the  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  age spectrum and use this to comment on the thermal history of the host rock.  $t_{1/2}(^{40}\text{Ar}) = 1.248 \text{ Gyr}$ .

[Answer: 115, 243, 319, 442, 470, 463 and 470 Ma]

7. How many cm<sup>3</sup> of helium does a rock weighing 1 kg and containing 2 ppm of uranium produce after 1 billion years? The molar volume of an ideal gas is 22.414 litres. Uranium has an atomic mass of 238.04 with  $^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U} = 137.818$ . Decay constants of U are given in Section 5. [Answer: 0.27 cm<sub>3</sub>]
8. Repeated analysis of the Fish Canyon zircon age standard ( $t=27.8 \text{ Ma}$ ) yields the following fission track data:

$\rho_s$ ( $\times 10^5 \text{ cm}^{-2}$ )	$\rho_i$ ( $\times 10^6 \text{ cm}^{-2}$ )	$\rho_d$ ( $\times 10^5 \text{ cm}^{-2}$ )
36.56	6.282	2.829
38.97	7.413	3.313
56.53	7.878	2.457
41.05	8.578	3.485
45.87	6.985	2.482

Compute the average  $\zeta$ -calibration factor and use this to calculate the zircon fission track ages of the following rocks:

	$\rho_s$ ( $\times 10^5 \text{ cm}^{-2}$ )	$\rho_i$ ( $\times 10^6 \text{ cm}^{-2}$ )	$\rho_d$ ( $\times 10^5 \text{ cm}^{-2}$ )
Tardree rhyolite	60.49	2.66	1.519
Bishop tuff	6.248	1.299	0.081

The half-life of  $^{238}\text{U}$  is  $t_{1/2} = 4.47 \text{ Gyr}$ .

[Answer: Tardree - 57 Ma; Bishop - 643 ka]

9. A fossil mollusc has been found in a Quaternary beach formation and its activity ratio measured as  $A(^{230}\text{Th}) / A(^{238}\text{U}) = 0.6782$ . Determine the age of the fossil assuming that  $\gamma_0 = 1.15$  and given that the half lives of  $^{230}\text{Th}$  and  $^{234}\text{U}$  are 75,380 and 245,500 years, respectively. [Answer: 100 Kyr]

# Chapter 11

## Programming practicals

In this Chapter you will process some real geochronological datasets using R. R is a free and open programming language that works on any operating system, including Windows, OS-X and Unix/Linux. It can be downloaded and installed from <http://r-project.org>. Section 11.1 presents a brief R tutorial, which covers most commands that you will need for the subsequent computer practicals.

### 11.1 Introduction to R

A number of different graphical user interfaces (GUIs) are available to interact with R. The most popular of these are Rgui, RStudio, RCommander and Tinn-R.

1. Starting these applications or running R in a text terminal presents the user with a command line prompt. Anything that is typed after the > symbol will be evaluated immediately. Thus, we can use R as a calculator:

```
> 1 + 1  
> sqrt(2)  
> exp(log(10))  
> 31 %% 14
```

2. Alternatively, code can also be saved as text (using a built-in text editor) and saved as `mycode.R`, say. This code can then be copied and pasted at the command line prompt. Or it can be called from the command line using the `source()` function:

```
> source('mycode.R')
```

3. In the remainder of this tutorial, we will assume that your code is run from a text file unless explicitly stated otherwise. The # symbol marks the beginning of a comment. R ignores anything that follows it:

```
1 # The arrow symbol is used to assign a value to a  
2 # variable. Note that the arrow can point both ways:  
3 foo <- 2  
4 bar  
5 print(foo*bar)
```

```

7 # Defining a vector of multiple values:
8 myvec <- c(0,1,2,3,4,5)
9 # or, equivalently:
10 myvec <- seq(0,5)
11 # or
12 myvec <- seq(from=0,to=5,by=1)
13 # or
14 myvec <- 0:5
15
16 # Turn myvec into a 2x3 matrix:
17 mymat <- matrix(myvec,nrow=2)
18
19 # Accessing one or more items from a vector or matrix:
20 x <- myvec[3]
21 y <- myvec[1:3]
22 z <- mymat[1,2:3]
23
24 # Change the 2nd value in mymat's 3rd column to 10:
25 mymat[2,3] <- 10
26
27 # Change the entire second column of mymat to -1:
28 mymat[,2] <- -1
29
30 # Transpose of a matrix:
31 flipped <- t(mymat)
32
33 # Element-wise multiplication (*)
34 # vs. matrix multiplication (%*%):
35 rectangle <- mymat * mymat
36 square <- mymat %*% flipped

```

- Lists are used to store more complex data objects:

```
1 mylist <- list(v=myvec,m=mymat,nine=9)
```

The three components of `mylist` can be accessed in a number of equivalent ways. For example, the first item (`v`) of `mylist` can be accessed either as `mylist$v`, as `mylist[[1]]` or as `mylist[['v']]`.

Data frames are list-like tables:

```
1 myframe <- data.frame(period=c('Cz','Mz','Pz','PC'),
2                         SrSr=c(0.708,0.707,0.709,0.708),
3                         fossils=c(TRUE,TRUE,TRUE,FALSE))
```

You can access the items in the data frame `myframe` either like a list (e.g. `myframe$period`) or like a matrix (`myframe[, 'period']`):

- If you want to learn more about a function, type `help()` or `?` at the command line prompt:

```
> help(c)
> ?matrix
```

6. In addition to R's built-in functions, you can also define your own:

```
1 cube <- function(n){
2   return(n^3)
3 }
4
5 # Using this function to take the cube of 3:
6 c3 <- cube(3)
7
8 # Conditional statement:
9 toss <- function(){
10   if (runif(1)>0.5){ # runif(n) draws n random
11     print("head")  # numbers between 0 and 1
12   } else {
13     print("tail")
14   }
15 }
16
17 # Use a for loop to toss 10 virtual coins:
18 for (i in 1:10) {
19   toss()
20 }
```

7. The purpose of the practical exercises in Sections 11.2-11.5 is to process datasets contained in external data files. For this you will need to be able to navigate through your file system and load the necessary files:

```
> ls()          # list all the variables
> rm(list=ls()) # clear the current workspace
> getwd()       # get the current working directory
> setwd("path_to_a_valid_directory")
```

8. Use the above commands to navigate to the directory containing the file named `RbSr.csv`. Then read this file into memory:

```
1 RbSr <- read.csv("RbSr.csv",header=TRUE)
```

Type `names(RbSr)` or `colnames(RbSr)` at the command prompt to list the variable names (column headers) contained in this dataset.

9. Let us now perform an isochron regression (Section 4.2) through these Rb-Sr data:

```
2 # Plot Sr87Sr86 against Rb87Sr86:
3 plot(RbSr[, 'Rb87Sr86'], RbSr[, 'Sr87Sr86'], type="p")
```

```

4
5 # fit a linear model to the data
6 fit <- lm(Sr87Sr86 ~ Rb87Sr86, data = RbSr)

```

10. `fit` is a ‘list’ object. Type `str(fit)` at the command prompt to see its structure. One of its items is `fit$coefficients`, which contains the slope and the intercept of the linear fit. Alternatively, we can also access these values using the `coef()` function. The following code uses this function to calculate the isochron age:

```

7 # define the 87Rb decay constant (in Ma-1):
8 lam87 <- 1.3972e-5 # according to Villa et al. (2015)
9 # compute the age from the slope:
10 tRbSr <- log(1 + coef(fit)[2])/lam87
11
12 # add the best fit line to the existing plot:
13 abline(fit)
14 # label with the isochron age:
15 title(tRbSr)

```

11. One of the most powerful features of R is the availability of thousands of ‘packages’ providing additional functionality to the built-in functions. For example, let us download and install the `IsoplotR` package from the ‘Comprehensive R Archive Network’ (CRAN):

```
> install.packages('IsoplotR')
```

12. We can use `IsoplotR` to redo the isochron regression exercise using a more rigorous weighted regression algorithm that takes into account the analytical uncertainties in both the  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ - and  $^{87}\text{Rb}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ -ratios:

```

1 # load the functionality of the IsoplotR package:
2 library('IsoplotR')
3
4 # load the data (see ?read.data for details):
5 RbSr2 <- read.data('RbSr.csv',method='Rb-Sr',format=1)
6
7 # compute and plot the isochron diagram:
8 isochron(RbSr2)

```

Even though `IsoplotR` is powerful, convenient, and popular, we will not use it in the remainder of these notes. Instead, we will carry out all our calculations in base R because this will give you a more fundamental understanding of geochronology.

## 11.2 U-Th-Pb data reduction

You are supplied with two data files that were produced by the quadrupole laser ablation ICP-MS system at UCL’s London Geochronology Centre. At the time of the analysis, this instrument could not resolve  $^{204}\text{Pb}$  from the isobaric interference at  $^{204}\text{Hg}$ . Therefore, it is not possible to

apply a common lead correction as explained in Section 5. However, this does not cause any major issues to us because:

1. The mineral analysed is zircon, which incorporates very little common Pb in its crystal structure during crystallisation.
2. The ages are sufficiently old for the radiogenic Pb to dominate the common Pb component by orders of magnitude.

In this exercise, we will use standard-sample bracketing (Section 3.3) to process some raw mass spectrometer data in R :

1. Load the input files `91500.csv` (sample) and `GJ1.csv` (standard) into memory.
2. Plot the  $^{238}\text{U}$  signal against time. The resulting curve consists of three segments: (i) the first 20 seconds record the background ('blank') signal of the ICP-MS, measured while the laser was switched off; (ii) 20 seconds into the run, the laser is turned on and the ions arrive in the ICP-MS; (iii) After the signal has ramped up quickly, it slowly drops over time as the laser goes out of focus whilst drilling deeper into the sample. This is the 'signal'.
3. Compute the arithmetic mean U and Pb blank (measurements before 20 seconds), and subtract them from the signal (measurements after 25 seconds). Do this for both the sample and the standard. You will get two times four vectors, for  $^{206}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{207}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{235}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$ .
4. Use the four blank corrected signal vectors to form two pairs of  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  vectors.
5. Take the arithmetic mean of the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratio vectors. You will now have two pairs of numbers representing the *measured*  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratios for the sample and the standard.
6. Given that GJ-1 has a known age of 600.4 Ma, what are its *expected*  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$ , and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratios? Is there a significant difference between the measured and the expected ratios? What could be causing this?
7. Calculate a correction factor by dividing the expected GJ-1 ratios by the measured values.
8. Apply the correction factor calculated in step 7 to the measured ratios for sample 91500. This gives us two estimated atomic  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratios.
9. What is the age of 91500?
10. Can you plot the results on a Wetherill concordia diagram?

### 11.3 $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ data reduction

In this exercise, we will reduce some synthetic  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  data. You are provided with three input files:

1. `smp1.csv`:  $^{36}\text{Ar}$ ,  $^{39}\text{Ar}$  and  $^{40}\text{Ar}$  as a function of time (t) for the sample.
2. `stnd.csv`: the same data for the standard, which is a Fish Canyon sanidine with a conventional K-Ar age of 27.8 Ma.

3. `b1nk.csv`: a ‘blank’ run, i.e. a measurement of the background levels of Argon present in the mass spectrometer in the absence of a sample.

To perform the data reduction, please follow the following steps:

1. Load the three input files.
2. Plot the  $^{40}\text{Ar}$  signal of the sample against time. Do the same for the  $^{36}\text{Ar}$  signal in the blank. What is the difference?
3. Perform a linear regression of the  $^{36}\text{Ar}$ ,  $^{39}\text{Ar}$  and  $^{40}\text{Ar}$  signals through time and determine the intercept at  $t=0$ .
4. Subtract the ‘time zero’ intercepts of the blank from those of the sample and standard.
5. Apply an atmospheric correction assuming that all  $^{36}\text{Ar}$  has an atmospheric origin.
6. Calculate the J-value of the standard.
7. Calculate the age of the sample.

## 11.4 Error propagation

This exercise will build on the results from the previous two practicals.

1. Plot the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$ -ratios of the sample against those of the standard (data from Section 11.2). Verify that the covariance between the two can safely be neglected.
2. Calculate the standard errors of the mean  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  signal ratios for the sample (91500) and the standard (GJ-1) using the `mean` and `sd` functions.
3. Propagate the standard errors of the atomic  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$ -ratios calculated in step 8 of Section 11.2.
4. Propagate the analytical uncertainties of the U-Pb age, ignoring the covariance terms. Recall that

$$t = \frac{1}{\lambda_{238}} \ln \left( 1 + \frac{^{206}\text{Pb}}{^{238}\text{U}} \right)$$

If you want you can use the simplifying approximation that  $\ln(1 + X) \approx X$  if  $X \ll 1$  (this assumption may not be correct for the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$ -age).

5. Compute the analytical uncertainties associated with the linear extrapolation of the argon signals of the sample and the standard in Section 11.3. In R, the covariance matrix of the slope and intercept can be simply obtained from the `vcov(fit)` function, where `fit` is the output of the `lm` function (see item 9 of Section 11.1). The corresponding standard errors are then found by taking the square root of the diagonal elements of this matrix.
6. Use these error estimates to propagate the analytical uncertainty of the J-value and the sample age. Again you can use the linear approximation to the age equation mentioned in point 4.

## 11.5 Fission tracks

In this exercise, you will use your programming skills to calculate some fission track ages. You are given the following datasets:

1. DUR.csv: a table with two columns listing the number of spontaneous tracks  $N_s$  and induced tracks  $N_i$  counted in 25 grains of an apatite age standard ( $t = 31.4$  Ma) from Durango, Mexico. Note that these pairs of tracks were counted over the same area, so that  $\rho_s/\rho_i = N_s/N_i$  in Equation 7.9.
2. MD.csv: a similar table for an apatite sample from Mount Dromedary, Australia.

You will need to:

1. Rewrite Equation 7.9 in terms of the  $\zeta$  calibration factor and use this new formula to calculate the  $\zeta$  factor for each single grain analysis of the Durango age standard. Use a dosimeter track density of  $\rho_D = 300,000 \text{ cm}^{-2}$ .
2. Use the mean of these  $\zeta$  factors to calculate the age of the Mount Dromedary sample (i.e., the single grain ages and their mean).
3. Propagate the analytical uncertainties for each of those single grain ages, using the fact that fission track counts ( $N$ , say) follow a Poisson distribution for which it is true that:

$$\sigma_N^2 = N$$

To simplify the calculations, you can also use the following approximation:

$$\frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \left( 1 + \frac{g_i}{g_s} \lambda \zeta \rho_d \frac{N_s}{N_i} \right) \approx \frac{g_i}{g_s} \zeta \rho_d \frac{N_s}{N_i}$$

4. How does the single grain age precision of the fission track method compare to the U-Pb and  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  age uncertainties in Sections 11.2 and 11.3? Also compare with the standard deviation and standard error of the mean age of Mount Dromedary apatite.

## Part II

# Advanced geochronology

# Chapter 12

## Introduction

Part 1 of these notes gave a very basic introduction to geochronology. At this basic level, it is possible to write one's own data processing software from scratch, as we have done in the R practicals. Unfortunately this is not so easy at a more advanced level. Research-grade geochronological data processing chains involve several layers of highly specialised software packages:

1. A first layer of software controls the mass spectrometer and extracts the raw time resolved isotopic signals from it. This software generally comes with the mass spectrometer, and was written and designed by engineers who may be completely unfamiliar with the geological applications of the equipment.
2. The output files from this low level software are passed on to a second layer of software, which processes the raw mass spectrometer, combines standard with standards, performs isotope dilution calculations, etc. This 'middleware' is sometimes written by geologists, and sometimes by companies. Examples are `Iolite`, `GLITTER`, `Squid`, `LADR` and `ET_Redux` for U–Pb geochronology; `ArArCalc` and `Pychron` for Ar–Ar geochronology, etc.
3. The output files produced by the second layer of data processing software require further processing for more advanced statistical analysis and visualisation. `IsoplotR` is a software package that fulfils this role.

Part 2 of these notes provide an overview of the mathematical underpinnings of `IsoplotR`. The structure of this collection of chapters is very similar to that of Part 3, which contains a detailed manual of `IsoplotR`'s graphical and command line user interfaces. Chapters 13 and 14 discuss some basic statistical principles and generic plot devices on which all the subsequent analytical devices are based. This is followed by a systematic discussion of all the chronometers in the toolbox, including U–Pb (Chapter 15); Pb–Pb and Th–Pb (Chapter 16); Ar–Ar and K–Ca (Chapter 17); Rb–Sr, Sm–Nd, Lu–Hf and Re–Os (Chapter 18); U–Th–(Sm)–He (Chapter 19); fission tracks (Chapter 20); U-series disequilibrium dating (Chapter 21) and detrital geochronology (Chapter 22).

# Chapter 13

## Statistical considerations

### 13.1 The normal distribution

Geochronological data processing is generally concerned with isotopic ratio measurements, which are acquired by mass spectrometers and are affected by random detector noise. Unless explicitly specified otherwise, we will assume that this noise follows a Gaussian distribution. In one dimension, this distribution is described by the following probability density function (pdf):

$$\mathcal{N}(x|\mu, \sigma^2) = \frac{1}{\sigma\sqrt{2\pi}} \exp\left[-\frac{(x-\mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}\right] \quad (13.1)$$

where  $\mu$  is the **mean** and  $\sigma$  is the **standard deviation**.

1. the **mean**  $\mu$  controls the **location** of the distribution.
2. the **standard deviation**  $\sigma$  quantifies the **dispersion** of the distribution.

The interval from  $\mu - \sigma$  to  $\mu + \sigma$  covers 68.27% of the area under the pdf, and the interval from  $\mu - 2\sigma$  to  $\mu + 2\sigma$  covers 95.45%. Conversely 95% of the area under the normal pdf is contained within an interval of  $\mu \pm 1.96\sigma$ .

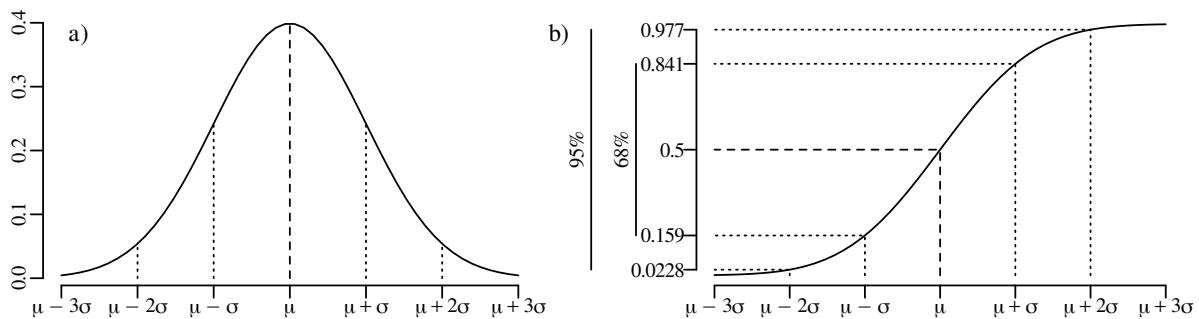


Figure 13.1: a) pdf and b) cumulative distribution function (cdf, i.e., the integral of the pdf) of the normal distribution. The  $\mu \pm \sigma$  and  $\mu \pm 2\sigma$  intervals cover  $\sim 68\%$  and  $\sim 95\%$  of the distribution, respectively.

It can be mathematically proven that the *sum* of  $n$  randomly selected values converges to a Gaussian distribution, provided that  $n$  is large enough. This convergence is guaranteed *regardless of the distribution of the original data*. This mathematical law is called the **Central Limit Theorem**. Physically processes such as thermal diffusion are characterised by white noise and

Brownian walks which are, in effect, additive processes. So it makes sense that these give rise to Gaussian distributions. In fact, these additive processes are so common that the Gaussian distribution is also known as the normal distribution, implying that all other distributions are ‘abnormal’.

The normal distribution can be generalised to two dimensions using a pdf that comprises five parameters: the means  $\mu_x$  and  $\mu_y$ , the standard deviations  $\sigma_x$  and  $\sigma_y$ , and the covariance  $\sigma_{x,y}$ :

$$\mathcal{N}(x, y | \mu_x, \mu_y, \sigma_x^2, \sigma_y^2, \sigma_{x,y}) = \frac{\exp\left(-\left[(x - \mu_x)(y - \mu_y)\right] \begin{bmatrix} \sigma_x^2 & \sigma_{x,y} \\ \sigma_{x,y} & \sigma_y^2 \end{bmatrix}^{-1} \begin{bmatrix} x - \mu_x \\ y - \mu_y \end{bmatrix} / 2\right)}{2\pi \sqrt{\left|\begin{bmatrix} \sigma_x^2 & \sigma_{x,y} \\ \sigma_{x,y} & \sigma_y^2 \end{bmatrix}\right|}} \quad (13.2)$$

where we recognise the **covariance matrix** as

$$\Sigma_{x,y} = \begin{bmatrix} \sigma_x^2 & \sigma_{x,y} \\ \sigma_{x,y} & \sigma_y^2 \end{bmatrix}.$$

Finally, we can define the **correlation coefficient** as:

$$\rho[x, y] \equiv \frac{\sigma[x, y]}{\sqrt{\sigma[x]\sigma[y]}} \quad (13.3)$$

$\rho[x, y]$  is akin to a normalised covariance, whose values range from  $-1$  (perfect negative correlation) to  $+1$  (perfect positive correlation).

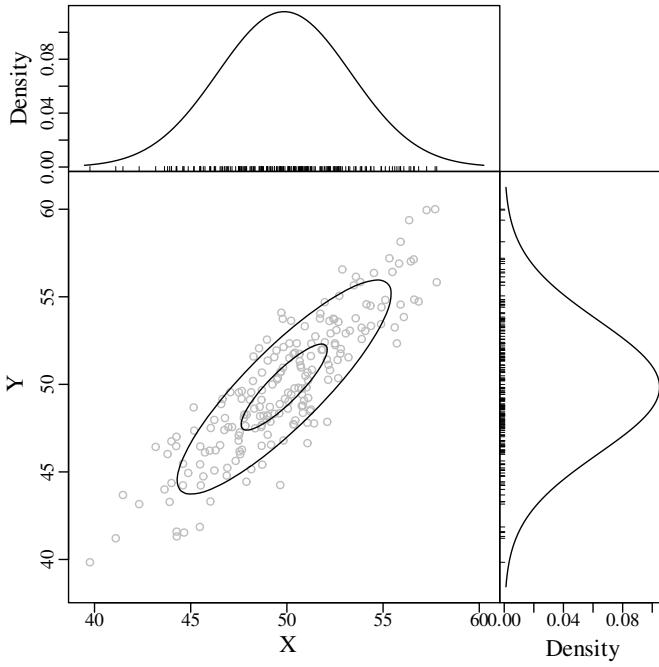


Figure 13.2: The main panel shows a bivariate normal distribution of data (grey circles), and the best fitting bivariate Gaussian distribution as 1 and 2- $\sigma$  contours. The side panels show the marginal distributions of the  $X$ - and  $Y$ -variable, which are both univariate Gaussian. The means and standard deviations of the marginal distributions equal the means and the standard deviations of the bivariate distribution. The bivariate distribution has a fifth parameter, the covariance  $\sigma_{x,y}$ , which controls the angle at which the elliptical contours are rotated relative to the axes of the diagram. Note that, whereas the 1 and 2- $\sigma$  intervals contain 68% and 95% of the univariate normal marginals, the 1 and 2- $\sigma$  ellipses contain only 39% and 86% of the bivariate normal distribution.

## 13.2 The method of maximum likelihood

The parameters  $\mu$  and  $\sigma$  of the normal distribution are *unknown* but can be *estimated* from the data. This can be done using the **method of maximum likelihood**. Given  $n$  data

points  $\{x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n\}$  drawn from a normal distribution, we can formulate the normal likelihood function as

$$\mathcal{L}(\mu, \sigma^2 | x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n) = \prod_{i=1}^n \mathcal{N}(x_i | \mu, \sigma^2) \quad (13.4)$$

$\mu$  and  $\sigma$  can be estimated by maximising the likelihood or, equivalently, the log-likelihood:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{LL}(\mu, \sigma^2 | x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n) &= \sum_{i=1}^n \ln [\mathcal{N}(x_i | \mu, \sigma^2)] \\ &= \sum_{i=1}^n -\ln[\sigma] - \frac{1}{2} \ln[2\pi] - \frac{(x_i - \mu)^2}{2\sigma^2} \end{aligned} \quad (13.5)$$

Taking the derivative of  $\mathcal{LL}$  with respect to  $\mu$  and setting it to zero:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial \mathcal{LL}}{\partial \mu} &= -\sum_{i=1}^n \frac{x_i - \mu}{\sigma^2} = 0 \\ \Rightarrow n\mu - \sum_{i=1}^n x_i &= 0 \\ \Rightarrow \bar{x} &= \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n x_i \end{aligned} \quad (13.6)$$

which is the same as Equation 9.3. Using the same strategy to estimate  $\sigma$ :

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial \mathcal{LL}}{\partial \sigma} &= \sum_{i=1}^n -\frac{1}{\sigma} + \frac{(x_i - \mu)^2}{\sigma^3} = 0 \\ \Rightarrow \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{(x_i - \mu)^2}{\sigma^3} &= \frac{n}{\sigma} \\ \Rightarrow \hat{\sigma} &= \sqrt{\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \mu)^2} \end{aligned} \quad (13.7)$$

which is nearly identical to the formula for the standard deviation that we saw in Section 9.1:

$$s[x] = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})^2} \quad (13.8)$$

There are just two differences between Equations 13.8 and Equation 13.7:

1. Equation 13.7 uses the population mean  $\mu$ , whereas Equation 13.8 uses the sample mean  $\bar{x}$ .
2. Equation 13.7 divides the sum of the squared differences between the measurements and the mean by  $n$ , whereas Equation 13.8 divides it by  $(n - 1)$ .

These two differences are related to each other. The subtraction of 1 from  $n$  is called the **Bessel correction** and accounts for the fact that by using an estimate of the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), rather than the true value of the mean ( $\mu$ ), we introduce an additional source of uncertainty in the estimate of the standard deviation. This additional uncertainty is accounted for by subtracting one **degree of freedom** from the model fit.

Using the method of maximum likelihood, it is also possible to estimate the covariance for bivariate normal distributions as (proof omitted):

$$\hat{\sigma}_{x,y} = \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{1}{n} (x_i - \mu_x)(y_i - \mu_y) \quad (13.9)$$

or, if  $\mu_x$  and  $\mu_y$  are unknown and must be estimated from the data:

$$s[x, y] = \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{1}{n-1} (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y}) \quad (13.10)$$

Thus we can estimate the covariance matrix (Equation 9.10) of the bivariate normal distribution as:

$$\Sigma_{x,y} = \begin{bmatrix} s[x]^2 & s[x, y] \\ s[x, y] & s[y]^2 \end{bmatrix} \quad (13.11)$$

Finally, we can define the correlation coefficient as:

$$r \equiv \frac{s[x, y]}{\sqrt{s[x]s[y]}} \approx \frac{\sigma[x, y]}{\sqrt{\sigma[x]\sigma[y]}} \equiv \rho \quad (13.12)$$

Besides providing a powerful tool to estimate parameters from data, the method of maximum likelihood can also be used to estimate the standard errors of those parameters. Let  $\hat{z}$  be the maximum likelihood estimate of some parameter  $z$ . Then we can approximate the log-likelihood with a second order Taylor series in the vicinity of  $\hat{z}$ :

$$\mathcal{LL}(z) \approx \mathcal{LL}(\hat{z}) + \frac{\partial \mathcal{LL}}{\partial z}(z - \hat{z}) + \frac{1}{2} \frac{\partial^2 \mathcal{LL}}{\partial z^2}(z - \hat{z})^2$$

By definition,  $\partial \mathcal{LL}/\partial z = 0$  at  $\hat{z}$ . Therefore, the likelihood ( $\mathcal{L}(z) = \exp[\mathcal{LL}(z)]$ ) is proportional to:

$$\mathcal{L}(z) \propto \exp \left[ \frac{1}{2} \frac{\partial^2 \mathcal{LL}}{\partial z^2}(z - \hat{z})^2 \right]$$

which can also be written as:

$$\mathcal{L}(z) \propto \exp \left[ -\frac{1}{2} \frac{(z - \hat{z})^2}{-\frac{1}{\frac{\partial^2 \mathcal{LL}}{\partial z^2}}} \right]$$

This equation fits the functional form of the normal distribution (Equation 13.1):

$$\mathcal{L}(z) \propto \exp \left[ -\frac{1}{2} \frac{(z - \hat{z})^2}{\sigma[z]^2} \right]$$

which leads to

$$\sigma[z]^2 = \frac{1}{-\frac{\partial^2 \mathcal{LL}}{\partial z^2}} \quad (13.13)$$

$-\frac{\partial^2 \mathcal{LL}}{\partial z^2}$  is known as the **Fisher Information**. Equation 13.13 can be generalised to multiple dimensions:

$$\Sigma = -\mathcal{H}^{-1} \quad (13.14)$$

where  $\Sigma$  is the covariance matrix and  $(\mathcal{H})^{-1}$  is the inverse of the ('Hessian') matrix of second derivatives of the log-likelihood function with respect to the parameters.

### 13.3 The mean square of weighted deviates (MSWD)

Let  $t = \{t_1, \dots, t_n\}$  be a set of  $n$  age estimates determined on different aliquots of the same sample with a true age  $\mu[t]$ , and let  $\sigma[t] = \sigma[t_1] = \dots = \sigma[t_n]$  be their identical normally distributed analytical uncertainties. Then we can estimate  $\mu[t]$  and  $\sigma[t]$  with Equations 13.6 and 13.8, respectively. However, if each of the  $n$  age estimates has a different analytical uncertainty ( $\sigma[t_1] \neq \dots \neq \sigma[t_n]$ ), then it is important to account for this *heteroscedasticity*. Consider, for example, the following dataset of four samples:

$i$	1	2	3	4
$t_i$	1005	1000	995	1125
$\sigma[t_i]$	10	10	10	100

Table 13.1: Heteroscedastic dataset of four age estimates (in Ma).

Then the arithmetic mean is 1031 Ma, which plots outside the  $2\sigma$  uncertainty limits of all three of the four aliquots. The **error weighted mean** addresses this issue:

$$\bar{t}_w = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (t_i/\sigma[t_i]^2)}{\sum_{i=1}^n (1/\sigma[t_i]^2)} \quad (13.15)$$

Applying Equation 13.15 to the example dataset attaches a smaller weight to the imprecise fourth measurement, yielding a  $\bar{t}_w$  value of 1000.4 Ma:

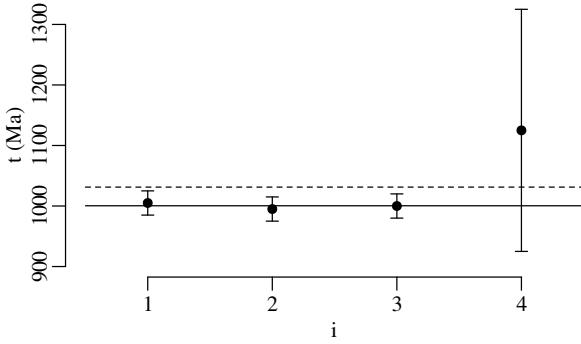


Figure 13.3: The data of Table 13.1 with  $2\sigma$  error bars, the weighted mean as a dashed horizontal line and the error weighted mean as a solid line.

The extent to which the observed scatter in the data around the weighted mean can be explained by the analytical uncertainties can be assessed using a chi-square test. To this end, we define the chi-square statistic as:

$$\chi_{stat}^2 = \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{(t_i - \bar{t}_w)^2}{\sigma[t_i]^2} \quad (13.16)$$

For the data of Table 13.1:

$$\chi_{stat}^2 = \frac{(1005 - 1000.4)^2}{10^2} + \frac{(1000 - 1000.4)^2}{10^2} + \frac{(995 - 1000.4)^2}{10^2} + \frac{(1125 - 1000.4)^2}{100^2} = 2.06$$

We can compare this value with a chi-square distribution with  $df = n - 1$  degrees of freedom. In the case of the example dataset,  $n = 4$  and  $df = 3$ . The **p-value** is defined as the probability of observing a value greater than  $\chi_{stat}^2$  under this distribution:

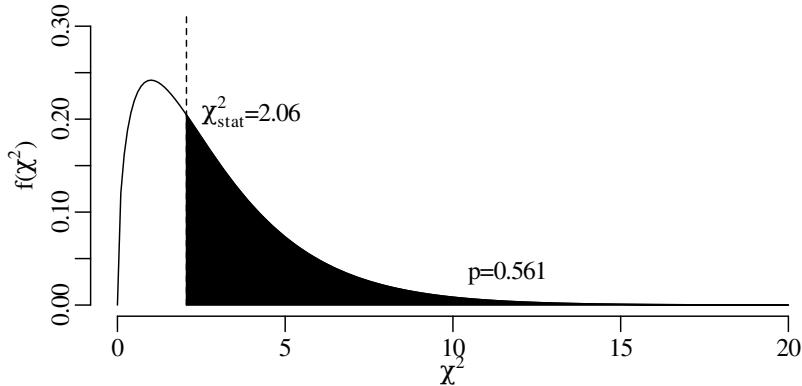


Figure 13.4: Chi-square distribution with 3 degrees of freedom. The p-value for an outcome of  $\chi^2_{stat} = 2.06$  is the integral of the black area.

A cutoff of  $\alpha = 0.05$  (the **significance level**) is often used to assess whether the observed scatter of the data around the weighted mean can be accounted for by the analytical uncertainty alone. For the example dataset, the p-value is 0.561, which is greater than  $\alpha$ . Therefore, we have no reason to suspect that there are any other sources of dispersion in the data besides analytical uncertainty.

An alternative way to assess the data scatter is by dividing the chi-square statistic  $\chi^2_{stat}$  by the number of degrees of freedom  $df$ . The resulting numerical value is called the ‘Mean Square of the Weighted Deviates’ (MSWD, McIntyre et al., 1966) by geochronologists, but is known as the ‘reduced chi-square statistic’ elsewhere.

$$MSWD = \frac{\chi^2_{stat}}{df} \quad (13.17)$$

For sufficiently large samples and, hence, degrees of freedom, the distribution of the MSWD statistic converges to a normal distribution with a mean of 1. However for small samples there is a comparatively greater probability of obtaining an MSWD value that is greater or smaller than 1:

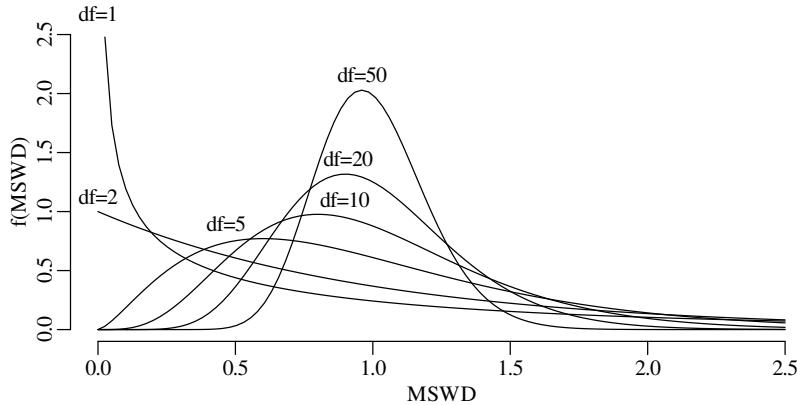


Figure 13.5: Expected distribution of the MSWD for different degrees of freedom. With increasing sample size, the distribution of the MSWD converges to a normal distribution with mean 1.

The MSWD is a very useful device to assess the degree to which the observed scatter of the data around the best fit can be explained by the analytical uncertainties. Three scenarios are possible:

1. If the analytical uncertainties alone explain the total scatter around the true mean, then the MSWD is expected to take on a value of  $\approx 1$ .
2. Data sets that exhibit MSWD values close to zero are said to be “underdispersed” with respect to the analytical uncertainties. This indicates some problem with the error propagation, which may be due to inappropriately handled systematic effects.

3. Finally, MSWD values  $> 1$  can often be attributed to some form of geological dispersion. This overdispersion may therefore be scientifically significant.

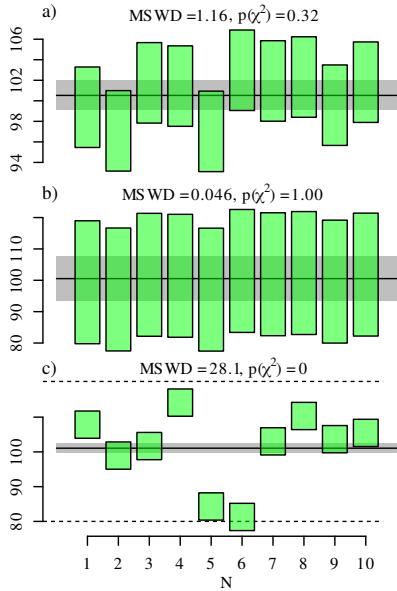


Figure 13.6: Three different synthetic data sets shown as weighted mean plots. Each of the data sets consists of 10 aliquots that are affected by a combination of analytical and geological dispersion. The relative importance of these two sources of scatter can be assessed using the mean square of weighted deviates (MSWD) and the p-value of the chi-square test. The case where  $\text{MSWD} \approx 1$  is the easiest to interpret: it means that the scatter of the data around the best fit line can be completely explained by the analytical uncertainty. The case where  $\text{MSWD} < 1$  may seem like a good outcome but it is in fact a bad one because it indicates that there may be a problem with the error propagation. A high p-value or low MSWD may happen occasionally but red flags should go up if all samples in a study show this type of behaviour. Finally the case where  $\text{MSWD} > 1$  is not good or bad but ‘interesting’. The dashed lines mark the 95% confidence limits of a normal distribution whose mean equals the weighted mean age, and whose standard deviation is given by the overdispersion parameter ( $\omega = 10 \text{ Ma}$ ) as discussed in Section 13.4.

## 13.4 Dealing with overdispersion

`IsoplotR` offers three strategies (‘models’) to deal with overdispersed datasets:

### 1. Model-1: inflate the analytical uncertainties until $\text{MSWD}=1$

A ‘model-1’ average assumes that the overdispersion of the data is due to an underestimation of the analytical uncertainties by a common factor  $f$ . To ‘fix’ the overdispersion, the model-1 fit simply multiplies the uncertainties with this number and plugs the resulting value into Equation 13.17:

$$\sum_{i=1}^n \frac{(t_i - \bar{t}_w)^2}{(n-1)(f s[t_i])^2} = 1 \Rightarrow f = \sqrt{\text{MSWD}}$$

### 2. Model-2: ignore the analytical uncertainties

Although the  $\sqrt{\text{MSWD}}$  trick is attractive from a mathematical point of view, the physical meaning of the overdispersion factor is not always clear. It effectively means that the reported analytical uncertainties are not reliable. But if this is the case, then one might wonder why the degree of unreliability should be the same (i.e. a factor of  $\sqrt{\text{MSWD}}$ ) for all aliquots. An alternative way to deal with unreliable uncertainty estimates is to ignore them altogether and use the ordinary arithmetic mean as a fallback solution.

### 3. Model-3: quantify the overdispersion

The most sophisticated, and arguably most realistic method to deal with overdispersed dataset is to attribute them to geological effects. A ‘model-3’ weighted mean assumes that the data

were drawn from a normal distribution with two sources of variance:

$$\mathcal{N}(x_i|\mu, s[t_i]^2 + \omega^2) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi(s[t_i]^2 + \omega^2)}} \exp\left[-\frac{(x_i - \mu)^2}{2(s[t_i]^2 + \omega^2)}\right] \quad (13.18)$$

where  $\omega$  is the **overdispersion**.  $\mu$  and  $\omega$  can be estimated by maximising the following log-likelihood function:

$$\mathcal{LL}_w \propto \sum_{i=1}^n -\frac{1}{2} \ln(s[t_i]^2 + \omega^2) + \left[-\frac{(x_i - \mu)^2}{2(s[t_i]^2 + \omega^2)}\right] \quad (13.19)$$

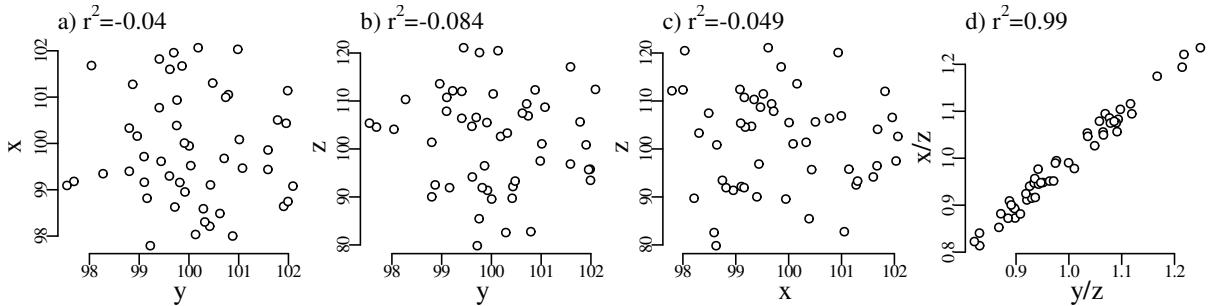
In mathematical terms, model-3 is known as a **random effects model**. The overdispersion  $\omega$  has physical meaning and may be as useful as the mean age itself. Consider, for example, a batholith whose emplacement age is determined by TIMS U–Pb geochronology of igneous zircon. The analytical precision of TIMS measurements is on the order of a few %. So if the batholith was intruded at 20 Ma, then the zircon ages can be determined to within 20 ka. However, large intrusions often take much longer than 20 kyr to crystallise. Therefore it is unlikely that all the zircons have exactly the same age. The resulting geological dispersion will cause high MSWD values. The  $\omega$  parameter of a model-3 weighted mean would quantify this dispersion and thereby estimate the residence time of zircon in the magma chamber.

## 13.5 Error correlations

Consider the generic age equation for a radioactive parent  $P$  that decays to a radiogenic daughter  $D$  in the presence of an inherited component that can be traced by normalising to a non-radiogenic isotope  $d$  of the daughter element:

$$t = \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \left( \frac{[D/d] - [D/d]_0}{[P/d]} - 1 \right) \quad (13.20)$$

For example,  $P$ ,  $D$  and  $d$  might be  $^{87}\text{Rb}$ ,  $^{87}\text{Sr}$  and  $^{86}\text{Sr}$  for Rb–Sr geochronology, or  $^{238}\text{U}$ ,  $^{206}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{204}\text{Pb}$  for U–Pb geochronology. Chapter 9 showed that error propagation of the age  $t$  requires the characterisation of the full covariance structure of the isotopic ratio data including their mean values, their standard errors and their covariances or error correlations. This covariance structure is estimated from the raw mass spectrometer data using the low level data processing software mentioned in Chapter 12. The error propagation of isotopic ratio data is greatly simplified if the covariances can safely be neglected. Unfortunately this is generally not the case. To prove this point, consider the following set of synthetic mass spectrometer data:



$x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$  are uncorrelated (normally distributed) random numbers, but the ratios  $y/z$  and  $x/z$  are strongly correlated. The *spurious correlation* between ratios like this was first described

by Pearson (1896). It is strongest when the common nuclide  $z$  is measured less precisely than the remaining two nuclides  $x$  and  $y$ . If the summary statistics of  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$  are known, then it is possible to predict the correlation coefficient:

$$r \left[ \frac{x}{z}, \frac{y}{z} \right] \approx \frac{(s[z]/z)^2}{\sqrt{(s[x]/x)^2 + (s[z]/z)^2} \sqrt{(s[y]/y)^2 + (s[z]/z)^2}} \quad (13.21)$$

For example, consider the following hypothetical Re–Os abundance estimates:

$$x = {}^{187}\text{Re} = 30,000 \pm 100 \text{ fmol}; y = {}^{187}\text{Os} = 2,000 \pm 10 \text{ fmol} \text{ and } z = {}^{188}\text{Os} = 200 \pm 2 \text{ fmol}$$

then the  $({}^{187}\text{Os}/{}^{188}\text{Os})$  and  $({}^{187}\text{Re}/{}^{188}\text{Os})$  isotope ratio estimates exhibit a correlation coefficient of

$$r \left[ \frac{{}^{187}\text{Re}}{{}^{188}\text{Os}}, \frac{{}^{187}\text{Os}}{{}^{188}\text{Os}} \right] = \frac{\left( \frac{2}{200} \right)^2}{\sqrt{\left( \frac{100}{30,000} \right)^2 + \left( \frac{2}{200} \right)^2} \sqrt{\left( \frac{10}{2,000} \right)^2 + \left( \frac{2}{200} \right)^2}} = 0.85$$

The strong error correlation between the two variables on the Re–Os isochron diagram are manifested as narrow and steeply inclined error ellipses. The same phenomenon manifests itself in all isotopic ratio data to a lesser or greater degree:

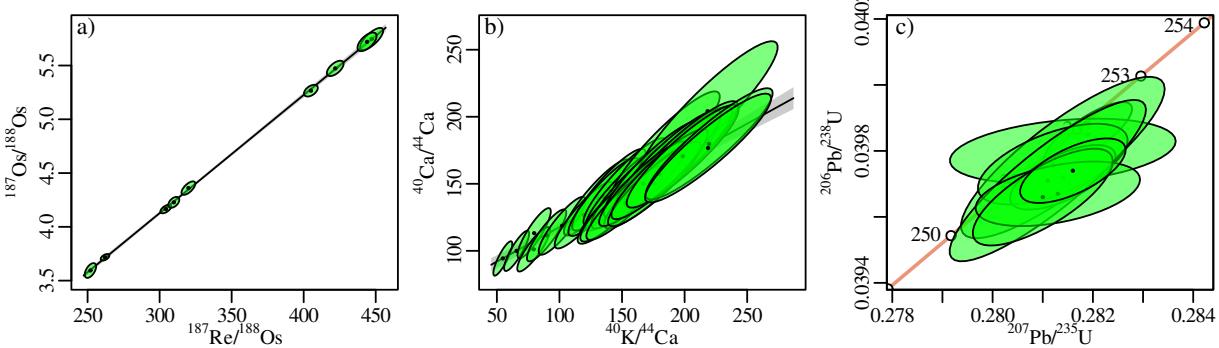


Figure 13.7: Examples of correlated uncertainties shown as error ellipses in a) Re–Os and b) K–Ca isochron and c) Wetherill U–Pb concordia space.

For some geochronometers, the error correlations can be reduced by recasting the isotopes into two new ratios  $z/y$  vs.  $x/y$ . If  $y$  is measured more precisely than  $x$  and  $z$ , then this reduces the spurious correlation coefficient. For example, revisiting the earlier Re–Os example:

$$r \left[ \frac{{}^{187}\text{Re}}{{}^{187}\text{Os}}, \frac{{}^{188}\text{Os}}{{}^{187}\text{Os}} \right] = \frac{\left( \frac{10}{2000} \right)^2}{\sqrt{\left( \frac{100}{30,000} \right)^2 + \left( \frac{10}{2000} \right)^2} \sqrt{\left( \frac{2}{200} \right)^2 + \left( \frac{10}{2000} \right)^2}} = 0.37$$

The same change of variables can be applied to other geochronometers as well:

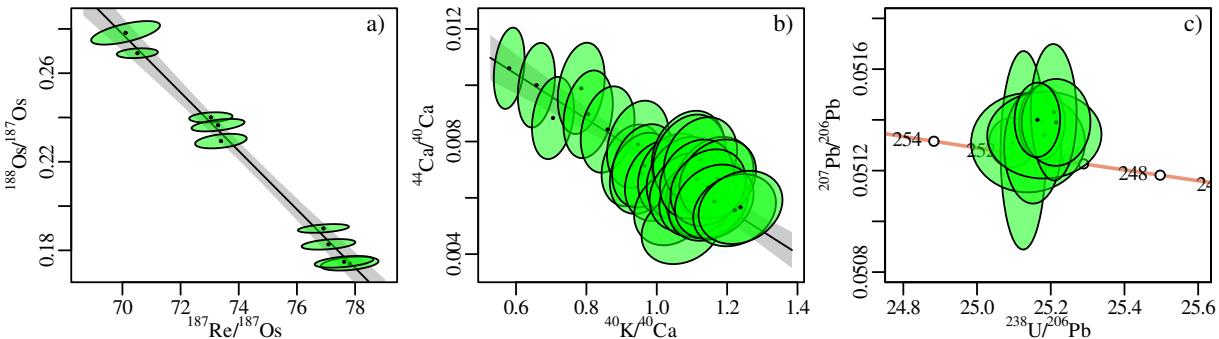


Figure 13.8: Recasting the data of Figure 13.7 into an inverse ratio form reduces the error correlations for the Re–Os, K–Ca and U–Pb data.

Given a data table of conventional ratios ( $X = x/z$  and  $Y = y/z$ ), it is possible to calculate the inverse ratios ( $X' = x/y$  and  $Y' = z/y$ ), their uncertainties ( $s[X']$  and  $s[Y']$ ) and error correlations ( $r[X', Y']$ ) using the following equations (Li and Vermeesch, 2021):

$$\begin{cases} X' = \frac{X}{Y} \\ Y' = \frac{1}{Y} \\ \left(\frac{s[X']}{X'}\right)^2 = \left(\frac{s[X]}{X}\right)^2 - 2r[X, Y] \left(\frac{s[X]}{X}\right) \left(\frac{s[Y]}{Y}\right) + \left(\frac{s[Y]}{Y}\right)^2 \\ \left(\frac{s[Y']}{Y'}\right)^2 = \left(\frac{s[Y]}{Y}\right)^2 \\ r[X'Y'] = \left(\frac{X'}{s[X']}\right) \left[ \left(\frac{s[Y]}{Y}\right) - r[X, Y] \left(\frac{s[X]}{X}\right) \right] \end{cases} \quad (13.22)$$

This transformation is perfectly symmetric in the sense that it can also be used to convert inverse isochron ratios to conventional ones. To do this, it suffices to swap  $X'$  and  $Y'$  for  $X$  and  $Y$  and vice versa.

## 13.6 Linear regression

As briefly discussed in Chapter 4, isochrons are an important instrument of high precision, high accuracy geochronology. Given several aliquots from the same sample, they allow the non-radiogenic component of the daughter nuclide to be quantified and separated from the radiogenic component. A conventional isochron is obtained by fitting a straight line through the conventional isochron ratios introduced in Section 13.5. The slope and intercept then yield the radiogenic daughter-parent ratio and the non-radiogenic daughter composition, respectively (Nicolaysen, 1961). In its simplest form, isochrons are fitted by ordinary least squares regression.

Consider a set of  $n$  bivariate data points  $x = \{x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n\}$  and  $y = \{y_1, y_2, \dots, y_n\}$ . The best fit straight line through these data can be found by minimising the sum of the squared residuals:

$$S = \sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - a - bx_i)^2 \quad (13.23)$$

where  $a$  is the intercept and  $b$  the slope. However this method does not take into account the analytical uncertainties of the isotopic ratio measurements. In a first step, let us consider the situation where only the dependent variable ( $y$ ) is affected by significant analytical uncertainty, and let  $s[y] = \{s[y_1], s[y_2], \dots, s[y_n]\}$  be the corresponding standard errors. Then the least squares criterion can be modified to create a weighted regression algorithm:

$$S_w = \sum_{i=1}^n \left( \frac{y_i - a - bx_i}{s[y_i]} \right)^2 \quad (13.24)$$

Alternatively (and equivalently), the best fit line can also be obtained by maximising the log-likelihood:

$$\mathcal{LL} = - \sum_{i=1}^n \ln(2\pi s[y_i]) - \frac{S_w}{2} \quad (13.25)$$

To illustrate the usefulness of the weighted regression algorithm, consider a simple three-point example. Let  $\mathbf{x} = \{10, 20, 40\}$  and  $\mathbf{y} = \{20, 30, 50\}$  be the *true* x- and y-coordinates of the

three points. It is easy to see that these fall on a perfect line with intercept  $a = 10$  and slope  $b = 1$ . Let  $s[\mathbf{y}] = \{1, 1, 10\}$  be the analytical uncertainties of  $\mathbf{y}$ , so that the third point is ten times less precise than the first two. Further let  $y = \{20, 30, 60\}$  be a random realisation of  $\mathbf{y}$ . Then the best ordinary least squares fit through  $x = \mathbf{x}$  and  $y$  has an intercept of  $a = 5.0$  and a slope of  $b = 1.36$ . This poor result is strongly influenced by the third, least precise data point. Subjecting the same dataset to weighted linear regression yields  $a = 9.4$  and  $b = 1.04$ :

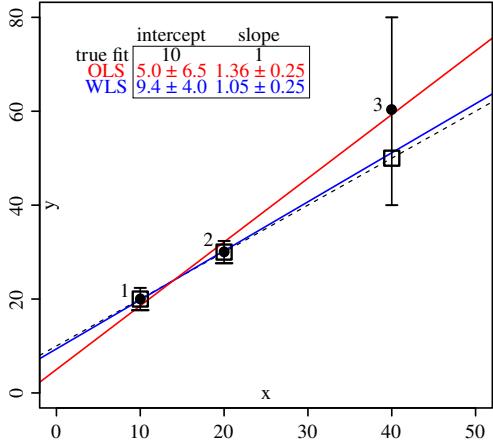


Figure 13.9: Illustration of the benefits of error-weighted linear regression. The black squares mark the true  $(x, y)$ -coordinates of three samples drawn from a (dashed) line with intercept  $a = 10$  and slope  $b = 1$ . The black dots mark random realisations of these samples, given Gaussian uncertainties with uncertainties shown as 95% confidence bars or ellipses. The three samples have analytical uncertainty in the  $y$ -variable only. The ordinary least squares fit ignoring these uncertainties is shown in red ( $a = 5.0, b = 1.36$ ), the weighted least squares fit in blue ( $a = 9.4, b = 1.04$ ).

In isochron regression, it is typical for not only  $y$  but also  $x$  to be affected by analytical uncertainty. In this case, the best fit line can be found by modifying the likelihood function (Titterington and Halliday, 1979; York, 1969; York et al., 2004):

$$\mathcal{LL} = -\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n \ln(2\pi|\Sigma_i|) - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n [X_i - \hat{X}_i]^T \Sigma_i^{-1} [X_i - \hat{X}_i] \quad (13.26)$$

where

$$X_i = \begin{bmatrix} x_i \\ y_i \end{bmatrix}, \hat{X}_i = \begin{bmatrix} \hat{x}_i \\ a + b\hat{x}_i \end{bmatrix} \text{ and } \Sigma_i = \begin{bmatrix} s[x_i]^2 & s[x_i, y_i] \\ s[x_i, y_i] & s[y_i]^2 \end{bmatrix} \quad (13.27)$$

where  $\hat{x}_i$  are the *estimated* values of  $\mathbf{x}_i$  for any value of  $a$  or  $b$ , and  $s[x_i, y_i]$  is the covariance of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  measurement's  $x$ - and  $y$ -uncertainties. To illustrate the importance of these covariance terms, consider a second three-point example:

$i$	$\mathbf{x}$	$s[\mathbf{x}]$	$\mathbf{y}$	$s[\mathbf{y}]$	$s[\mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{y}_i]$
1	10	1	20	1	0.9
2	20	1	30	1	0.9
3	30	1	40	1	-0.9

which again defines a straight line with intercept  $a = 10$  and slope  $b = 1$ . Let  $x = \{10, 20, 28\}$  and  $y = \{20, 30, 42\}$  be a random realisation of  $\mathbf{x}$  and  $\mathbf{y}$ . Suppose that we ignored or did not know the covariance terms. In that case the ordinary and weighted regression algorithms would yield the same outcome because all the samples have the same standard errors ( $s[x_i] = s[y_i] = 1$  for all  $i$ ). The resulting intercept and slope would then be  $a = 7.2$  and  $b = 1.21$ . However, if we do take into account the covariances, then the maximum likelihood algorithm yields  $a = 9.3$  and  $b = 1.05$ , which is much closer to the true values of  $a = 10$  and  $b = 1$ :

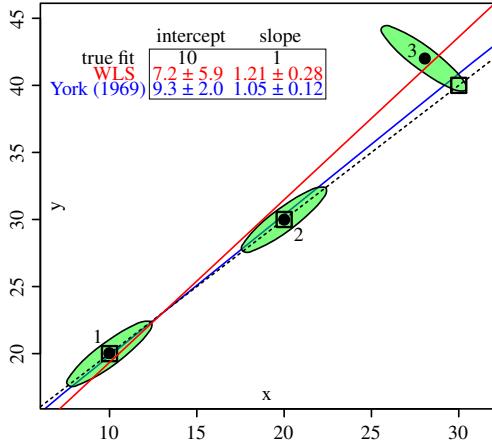


Figure 13.10: Illustration of the benefits of error-weighted linear regression. The black squares mark the true  $(x,y)$ -coordinates of three samples drawn from a (dashed) line with intercept  $a = 10$  and slope  $b = 1$ . The black dots mark random realisations of these samples, given Gaussian uncertainties with uncertainties shown as 95% confidence bars or ellipses. The three samples have correlated uncertainties in both the x- and y-variable. Ignoring the error correlations yields the red fit ( $a = 7.2, b = 1.21$ ). Accounting for the error correlations produces the blue fit ( $a = 9.3, b = 1.05$ ).

The extent to which the observed scatter in the data around the best fit isochron line can be explained by the analytical uncertainties can be assessed using a chi-square test, in nearly exactly the same manner as described for the weighted mean in Section 13.3. In the case of linear regression, the chi-square statistic is defined as:

$$\chi^2_{stat} = \sum_{i=1}^n \left[ X_i - \hat{X}_i \right]^T \Sigma_i^{-1} \left[ X_i - \hat{X}_i \right] \quad (13.28)$$

where we recognise the second term of Equation 13.26, which is the matrix formulation of the sum of squares. We can compare this value with a chi-square distribution with  $df = (k-1)(n-2)$  degrees of freedom, where  $k$  is the dimensionality of the linear fit. Thus, for bivariate regression,  $df = n - 2$  and for trivariate linear regression,  $df = 2n - 4$ . The MSWD is again defined by Equation 13.17.

In complete analogy with Section 13.3, the MSWD can be used to assess whether the scatter of the data falls within the range expected from the analytical uncertainties, or whether the data are over- or underdispersed. In the case of overdispersion, there are again three ways ('models') to deal with this overdispersion:

1. model-1: inflate the analytical uncertainties by a factor  $\sqrt{MSWD}$ ;
2. model-2: ignore the uncertainties and fall back to ordinary least squares regression;
3. model-3: attribute the overdispersion to a second source of uncertainty in the intercept or slope of the line.

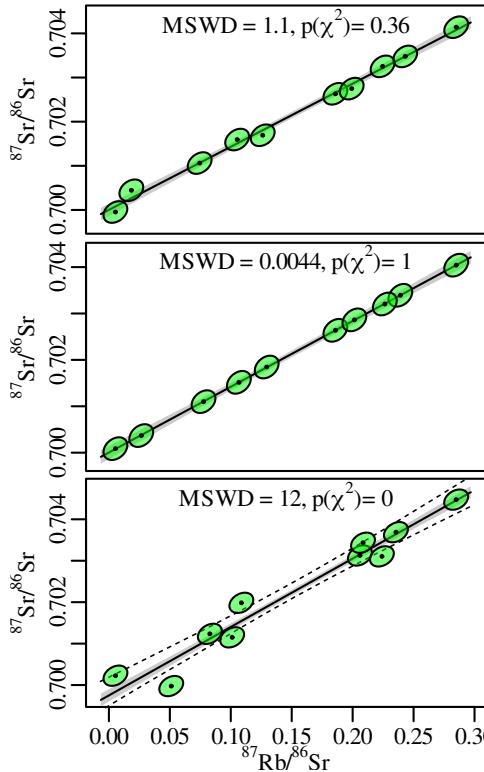


Figure 13.11: Three different synthetic Rb–Sr data sets shown as conventional isochron plots. The analytical uncertainties are shown as 95% error ellipses. The grey band represents a 95% confidence envelope for the best fit line using the York (1969) algorithm. Each of the data sets consists of 10 aliquots that are affected by a combination of analytical and geological dispersion. The relative importance of these two sources of scatter can be assessed using the mean square of weighted deviates (MSWD) and the p-value of the chi-square test. The case where  $\text{MSWD} \approx 1$  is the easiest to interpret: it means that the scatter of the data around the best fit line can be completely explained by the analytical uncertainty. The case where  $\text{MSWD} < 1$  may seem like a good outcome but it is in fact a bad one because it indicates that there may be a problem with the error propagation. A high p-value or low MSWD may happen once but red flags should go up if all samples in a study show this type of behaviour. Finally the case where  $\text{MSWD} > 1$  is not good or bad but ‘interesting’. The dashed line marks the ‘overdispersion’ estimated by a model-3 regression.

## 13.7 Confidence intervals

Figure 13.1 showed that approximately 95% of the univariate normal distribution falls within two standard deviations of the mean. Thus, if we know that  $x$  was drawn from a normal distribution with standard deviation  $\sigma$  and an unknown mean  $\mu$ , then 95% of all  $x$ -values are expected to fall in the interval

$$\mu - 2\sigma \leq x \leq \mu + 2\sigma$$

Subtracting  $\mu$  and  $\mu$  from both terms:

$$-\mu - 2\sigma \leq -\mu \leq -x + 2\sigma$$

and multiplying with  $-1$ :

$$x + 2\sigma \geq \mu \geq -x + 2\sigma$$

gives rise to the following 95% confidence interval for  $\mu$ :

$$\mu \in \{x \pm 2\sigma\}$$

which corresponds to the popular ‘2-sigma’ confidence interval. Chapter 9 showed that the standard error of the mean is given by

$$s[\bar{x}] = s[x]/\sqrt{n}$$

One might be tempted to assume that  $\bar{x} \pm 2s[\bar{x}]$  constitutes a 95% confidence interval for  $\mu$ . However, this would be incorrect because  $\bar{x}$  does *not* follow a normal distribution. To construct a 95% confidence for  $\mu$  based on  $\bar{x}$ , we first define the ‘t-statistic’ as follows:

$$t = \frac{\bar{x} - \mu}{s[\bar{x}]} \tag{13.29}$$

where  $\mathbf{t}$  is written in bold to avoid confusion with the geological age  $t$  used elsewhere in these notes.  $\mathbf{t}$  follows a ‘t-distribution with  $n-1$  degrees of freedom’. By definition, the 95% confidence interval is the collection of all those values of  $\mu$  for which

$$t_{df,\alpha/2} \leq \mathbf{t} \leq t_{df,1-\alpha/2}$$

where  $t_{df,\alpha/2}$  and  $t_{df,1-\alpha/2}$  are the  $\alpha/2$  and  $(1-\alpha/2)$  quantiles of a t-distribution with  $df$  degrees of freedom, respectively. Hence:

$$t_{df,\alpha/2} \leq \frac{\bar{x} - \mu}{s[\bar{x}]} \leq t_{df,1-\alpha/2}$$

Rearranging:

$$\bar{x} - t_{df,\alpha/2}s[\bar{x}] \geq \mu \geq \bar{x} - t_{df,1-\alpha/2}s[\bar{x}]$$

Because the t-distribution is symmetric around zero, we can also write:

$$t_{df,1-\alpha/2} = -t_{df,\alpha/2}$$

Hence

$$\bar{x} + t_{df,\alpha/2}s[\bar{x}] \leq \mu \leq \bar{x} - t_{df,\alpha/2}s[\bar{x}]$$

or

$$\mu \in \{\bar{x} \pm t_{df,\alpha/2}s[\bar{x}]\} \quad (13.30)$$

For large samples (and, hence, degrees of freedom), the t-statistic is approximately equal to 2. But for small samples, it is greater than 2 and the 95% confidence interval for  $\mu$  is wider as a consequence.

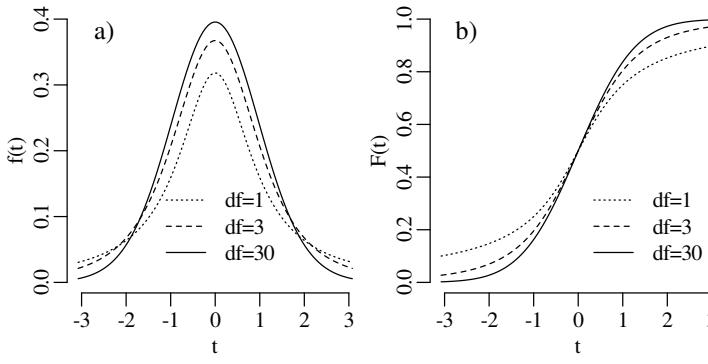


Figure 13.12: a) pdfs and b) cdfs of the t-distribution for three different degrees of freedom ( $df$ ). For small sample sizes (low  $df$ ), the t-distribution has long tails towards low and high values. With increasing sample size, the tails become shorter and the t-distribution sharper. When  $df > 30$ , the t-distribution is indistinguishable from a standard normal distribution with  $\mu = 0$  and  $\sigma = 1$ .

Given an age estimate  $\hat{\tau}$  and its standard error  $s[\hat{\tau}]$ , IsoplotR reports the age uncertainties in the following form:

$$\tau = \hat{\tau} \pm x(|y|)$$

where

$x = f \times s[\hat{\tau}]$  is either reported at one standard error ( $f = 1$ ), at two standard errors ( $f = 2$ ), or as a  $100(1 - \alpha)\%$  confidence interval ( $f$  = the  $1 - \alpha/2$  quantile of a standard normal distribution), in absolute or relative (%) units.

$y = t_{df,1-\alpha/2}\sqrt{MSWD} \times s[\hat{\theta}]$  is the uncertainty for  $\hat{\tau}$ , adjusted for overdispersion. This value is only reported for model-1 fits when the p-value of the chi-square test is less than 0.05.

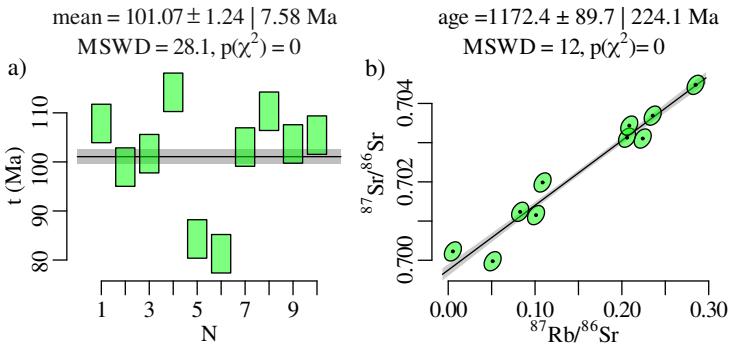


Figure 13.13: a) weighted mean (Figure 13.6c) and b) Rb–Sr isochron (Figure 13.11c) regression using a model-1 fit. The legend reports the best fit age and uncertainties reported as absolute ‘2-sigma’ errors without and with overdispersion.

With regards to error propagation, it is important to make a distinction between **random** and **systematic** sources of uncertainty. Random uncertainties can be reduced to arbitrarily low levels by averaging an arbitrarily large number of aliquots. In contrast, systematic uncertainties impose absolute limits on the precision of geochronological dates. For example, no absolute age determination can be more precise than the decay constants involved. Similarly, for dating methods such as  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  or fission tracks, no sample date can be more precise than the  $J$  and  $\zeta$  calibration factors, respectively.

When solving Equation 13.15, only the random sources of uncertainty should be incorporated into  $s[t_i]$ . To include the systematic uncertainties as well, one should first compute the isotopic composition corresponding to the weighted mean age (and its uncertainty), and then re-propagate the analytical uncertainty of the weighted mean age, this time including the decay or calibration constant uncertainties. Note that this procedure is unable to handle the systematic uncertainties associated with stable isotope ratios, molar masses etc. Those comparably small uncertainties demand a different approach in which not the ages but the isotopic data are averaged. Doing so would require the error correlations between samples. A new generation of low-level data-processing software is being developed to make this possible (Vermeesch, 2015; McLean, Bowring, and Gehrels, 2016).

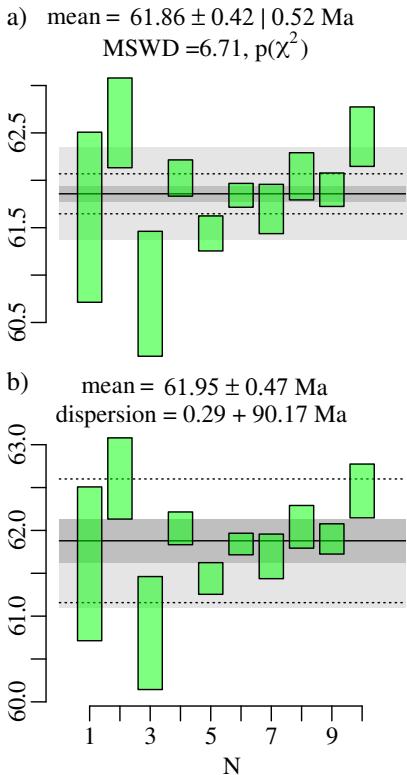


Figure 13.14: a) an ordinary weighted mean (model-1) and b) random effects model (model-3) of the same dataset. The dark and light grey bands show the 95% confidence intervals the weighted mean without and with external uncertainties, respectively. The dashed lines have a different meaning for the two plots. For panel a), they mark the 95% confidence interval with overdispersion (i.e., the dark grey band augmented with a factor  $\sqrt{\text{MSWD}}$ ). For panel b), they mark the 95% confidence limits of a normal distribution whose mean equals the weighted mean from the random effects model, and whose standard deviation equals the dispersion parameter ( $\omega$ ).

## References

- Li, Y. and P. Vermeesch (2021). “Inverse isochron regression for Re–Os, K–Ca and other chronometers”. In: *Geochronology Discussions*, pp. 1–8.
- McIntyre, G. A. et al. (1966). “The Statistical Assessment of Rb-Sr Isochrons”. In: *Journal of Geophysical Research* 71, pp. 5459–5468.
- McLean, N. M., J. F. Bowring, and G. Gehrels (2016). “Algorithms and software for U-Pb geochronology by LA-ICPMS”. In: *Geochemistry, Geophysics, Geosystems* 17.7, pp. 2480–2496.
- Nicolaysen, L. (1961). “Graphic interpretation of discordant age measurements on metamorphic rocks”. In: *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 91.1, pp. 198–206.
- Pearson, K. (1896). “Mathematical contributions to the theory of evolution.—on a form of spurious correlation which may arise when indices are used in the measurement of organs”. In: *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London* 60.359–367, pp. 489–498.
- Titterington, D. M. and A. N. Halliday (1979). “On the fitting of parallel isochrons and the method of maximum likelihood”. In: *Chemical Geology* 26, pp. 183–195.
- Vermeesch, P. (2015). “Revised error propagation of  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  data, including covariances”. In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 171, pp. 325–337.
- York, D. (1969). “Least squares fitting of a straight line with correlated errors”. In: *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 5, pp. 320–324.
- York, D. et al. (2004). “Unified equations for the slope, intercept, and standard errors of the best straight line”. In: *American Journal of Physics* 72.3, pp. 367–375.

# Chapter 14

## Generic functions

### 14.1 Weighted mean and outlier detection

`IsoplotR` uses a modified version of Chauvenet's criterion for outlier detection. Given a set of  $n$  age estimates  $t = \{t_1, \dots, t_n\}$ , and their standard errors  $\{s[t_1], \dots, s[t_n]\}$ , the conventional version of this criterion proceeds as follows:

1. Compute the (unweighted) arithmetic mean ( $\bar{t}$ ) and standard deviation ( $s[t]$ ) of the  $n$  age determinations:

$$\bar{t} = \sum_{i=1}^n t_i/n \text{ and } s[t] = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (t_i - \bar{t})^2 / (n - 1)}$$

2. For each of the  $t_i$ s, compute the probability  $p_i$  that  $|\tau| > |t_i - \bar{t}|$  for

$$\tau \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu = 0, \sigma^2 = s[t]^2)$$

3. Let  $p_j \equiv \min(p_1, \dots, p_n)$ . If  $p_j < 0.05/n$ , then reject the  $j^{\text{th}}$  date, reduce  $n$  by one (i.e.,  $n \rightarrow n - 1$ ) and repeat steps 1 through 3 until all the surviving dates pass the third step.

Although this procedure is effective at removing outliers in *homoscedastic* datasets, in which all datapoints are derived from a single normal distribution, it is unable to account for *heteroscedasticity*, in which different samples are characterised by different analytical uncertainties ( $s[t_i]$  in Equation 13.15). `IsoplotR` introduces a heuristic modification to Chauvenet's criterion that detects outliers among heteroscedastic data. For model-1 fits:

1. Compute the error-weighted mean of the  $n$  age determinations  $t_i$  using their analytical uncertainties  $s[t_i]$  by solving Equation 13.15 for  $\mu$ .
2. Let  $\hat{\mu}$  be the maximum likelihood estimate for  $\mu$  and let  $\sigma[\hat{\mu}]$  be its standard error. For each  $t_i$ , compute the probability  $p_i$  that  $|\tau| > |t_i - \hat{\mu}|$  under a normal distribution with mean  $\mu = 0$  and variance  $\sigma^2 = MSWD \times s[t_i]^2$ .
3. Proceed as before.

For a model-3 fit, the algorithm becomes:

1. Compute the error-weighted mean of the  $n$  age determinations  $t_i$  using their analytical uncertainties  $s[t_i]$  by solving Equation 13.19 for  $\mu$  and  $\omega$ . Let  $\hat{\mu}$  and  $\hat{\omega}$  be their respective maximum likelihood estimates.

2. For each  $t_i$ , compute the probability  $p_i$  that  $|\tau| > |t_i - \hat{\mu}|$  under a normal distribution with mean  $\mu = 0$  and variance  $\sigma^2 = s[t_i]^2 + \hat{\omega}^2$ .
3. Proceed as before.

If the analytical uncertainties are small compared to the scatter between the dates (i.e., if  $\omega \gg s[t_i]$  for all  $i$  in a model-3 fit), then this generalised algorithm reduces to the conventional Chauvenet criterion. If, on the other hand, the analytical uncertainties are large and the data do not exhibit any overdispersion, then the heuristic outlier detection method is similar to Ludwig (2003)'s 'modified 2-sigma' approach.

The weighted mean calculation is accompanied by a diagram that consists of a number of rectangular boxes (one for each date) whose vertical position and height reflect the ages and their analytical uncertainties, respectively (Figure 13.6). Outliers are marked in a different colour if so requested. The weighted mean plot offers an effective way, although arguably not *the* most effective way, to assess the dispersion of geochronological data. A better alternative is discussed in Section 14.3.

## 14.2 Frequency distributions

Empirical cumulative distribution functions or 'Cumulative Age Distributions' (CADs) are the most straightforward way to visualise the frequency distribution of multiple dates. A CAD is a step function that sets out the rank order of the dates against their numerical value:

$$\text{CAD}(t) = \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbf{1}(t < t_i)/n \quad (14.1)$$

where  $\mathbf{1}(*) = 1$  if  $*$  is true and  $\mathbf{1}(*) = 0$  if  $*$  is false. CADs have two desirable properties (Vermeesch, 2007). First, they do not require any pre-treatment or smoothing of the data. We will see that this is not the case for all data visualisation methods. Second, it is easy to superimpose several CADs on the same plot. This facilitates the intercomparison of multiple samples.

The interpretation of CADs is straightforward but not very intuitive. The prominence of individual age components is proportional to the steepness of the CAD (Figure 14.2.a). This is different from probability density estimates such as histograms, in which such components stand out as peaks (Figure 14.2.b). Peaks are arguably easier to identify than inflection points and this is probably why CADs are not more widely used as a data visualisation tool. But the ease of interpretation of density estimates comes at a cost, as they require smoothing and cannot as easily be combined as CADs. **IsoplotR** implements two kinds of density estimates.

Histograms smooth data by binning. **IsoplotR** uses Sturges' Rule ( $\log_2[n] + 1$ , where  $n$  is the number of data points) to determine the default number of histogram bins, but this can be changed to any other positive integer by the user. Alternatively, 'Kernel Density Estimates' (KDEs; Vermeesch, 2012) smooth data by applying a (Gaussian) kernel:

$$\text{KDE}(t) = \sum_{i=1}^n \mathcal{N}(t|\mu = t_i, \sigma^2 = h_i^2) / n \quad (14.2)$$

where  $h_i$  is the smoothing parameter or 'bandwidth' of the kernel density estimate. Using a constant value for  $h_i$  across the entire range of measurements produces a 'fixed' bandwidth estimator. If  $h_i$  varies between the sample points, then  $\text{KDE}(t)$  is known as an 'adaptive' KDE.

The rationale behind adaptive kernel density estimation is to use a narrower bandwidth near the peaks of the sampling distribution (where the ordered dates are closely spaced in time), and a wider bandwidth in the distribution's sparsely sampled troughs. Thus, the resolution of the density estimate is optimised according to data availability.

The default bandwidth used by **IsoplotR** is calculated using the algorithm of Botev, Grotowski, and Kroese (2010) and modulated by the adaptive smoothing approach of Abramson (1982), whereby:

$$h_i = h \sqrt{G/kde(t_i)}$$

in which  $kde(t_i)$  is the ‘pilot density’ using a fixed bandwidth ( $h$ ) evaluated at  $t_i$ , and  $G$  is the geometric mean of the pilot density over all the sample points (Van Kerm, 2003).

Kernel density estimates are not to be confused with **Isoplot**’s ‘probability density plots’ (PDPs). The mathematical definition of a PDP closely resembles that of the KDE, the only difference being the substitution of the bandwidth  $h_i$  by the analytical uncertainty  $s[t_i]$  in Equation 14.2. The similarity in appearance and definition between PDPs and KDEs is the source of much confusion.

The rationale behind PDPs is to emphasise the ‘good’ data (the most precise measurements stand out as peaks), and to reduce the prominence of ‘bad’ data (imprecise measurements are smoothed out by a broad kernel). Reasonable though that might seem at first glance, this procedure does not stand up to further scrutiny. For example, when applied to high precision datasets, where  $s[t_i]$  is very small compared to the range of  $t_i$ -values, the PDP breaks down into a sequence of spikes. Further examples and a more complete discussion of the case against PDPs are presented by Vermeesch (2012) and Vermeesch (2018a).

This discussion leaves us with one question: if PDPs are not a valid data visualisation tool, then how should one account for the heteroscedasticity of geochronological data? **IsoplotR** implements two alternative options. The first of these is the weighted mean plot (Section 14.1). Although this diagram does show both the individual age estimates and their analytical uncertainties, it is not very effective at revealing components of clustered ages, especially in large ( $n > 50$ , say) datasets. The second option is the radial plot, which is discussed in Section 14.3.

### 14.3 Radial plots

The radial plot is a graphical device that was specifically designed to display heteroscedastic data, and is constructed as follows. Consider the usual set of dates  $t_i$  and uncertainties  $s[t_i]$  (for  $1 \leq i \leq n$ ); define  $z_i = z(t_i)$  to be a transformation of  $t_i$ ; and let  $s[z_i]$  be its propagated analytical uncertainty. For example,

$$\begin{cases} z_i = \ln[t_i] \\ s[z_i] = s[t_i]/t_i \end{cases} \quad (14.3)$$

in the case of a logarithmic transformation. Then the radial plot is a scatter plot of  $(x_i, y_i)$  values, where

$$\begin{aligned} x_i &= 1/s[z_i] \\ \text{and } y_i &= \frac{z_i - z_o}{s[z_i]} \end{aligned} \quad (14.4)$$

in which  $z_o$  is some reference value such as the mean. The slope of a line connecting the origin of this scatter plot with any of the  $(x_i, y_i)$ s is proportional to  $z_i$  and, hence, a function of the date  $t_i$ .

It is helpful to draw a radial scale at some convenient distance from the origin and annotate it with labelled ticks at the appropriate angles. While the angular position of each data point represents the date, its horizontal distance from the origin is proportional to the precision. Imprecise measurements plot on the left-hand side of the radial plot, whereas precise age determinations are found further towards the right. Thus, radial plots allow the observer to assess both the magnitude and the precision of quantitative data in one glance:

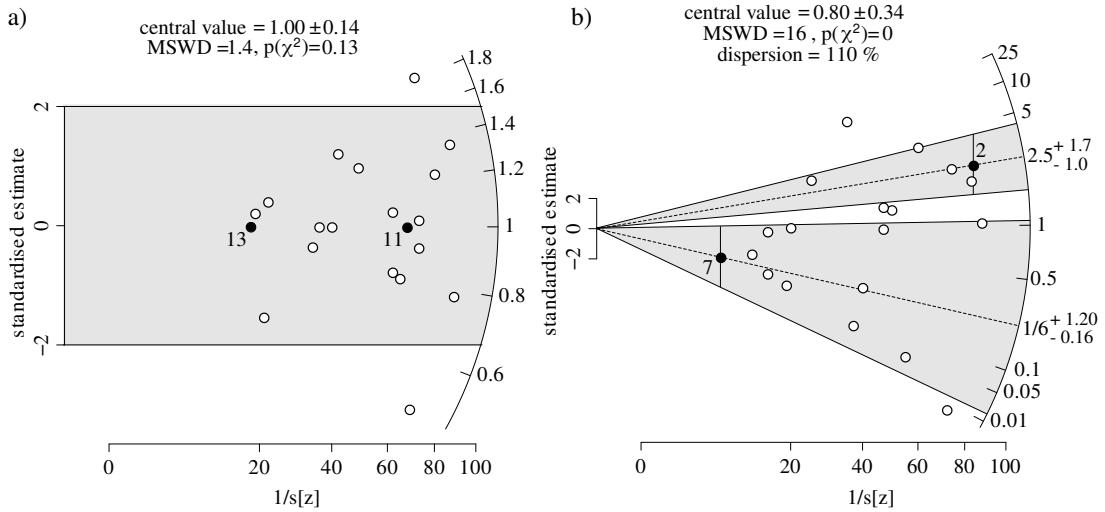


Figure 14.1: Radial plots for two synthetic datasets from Vermeesch (2018b). a) approximately 95% of the samples in the first dataset plot within a symmetric ‘2-sigma’ band around the origin. These data are therefore compatible with a single homogeneous population, and pass the chi-square test. b) the age of each aliquot can be obtained by projecting the corresponding scatter point onto the radial scale. Projecting a ‘2-sigma’ error bar onto the same scale yields the 95% confidence intervals of  $t_2 = 2.5 + 1.7 / - 1.0$  and  $t_7 = 0.17 + 1.20 / - 0.16$ . The second sample does not fit within a ‘2-sigma’ band, and is more adequately described by a random effects model with two parameters: the central ratio and the dispersion.

Radial plots are widely used in fission track and luminescence dating (Galbraith, 1990; Galbraith et al., 1999), but are yet to find their way into other branches of geochronology. **IsoplotR** generalises this valuable tool to all types of geochronological data. In addition to being an effective way to visualise heteroscedastic data, the radial plot also represents a convenient vehicle for further data interpretation and modelling, as will be discussed Section 14.4.

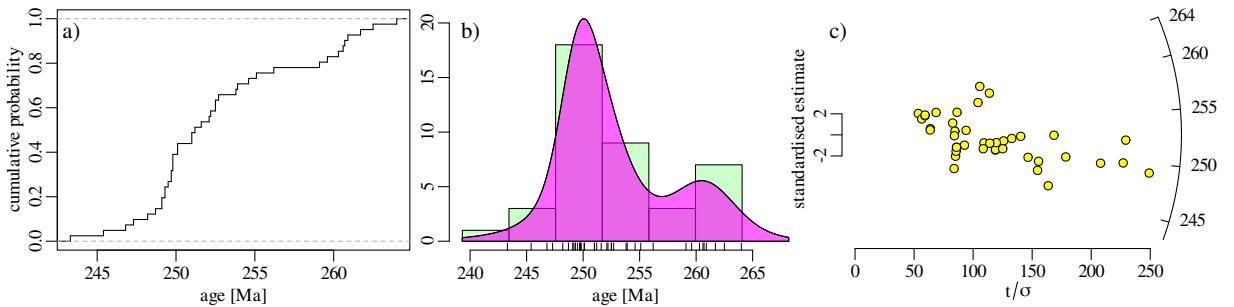


Figure 14.2: a) CAD, b) histogram/KDE and c) radial plot of the same dataset (from Ludwig, 2003).

## 14.4 Mixture models

The weighted mean algorithm outlined in Sections 13.3 and 14.1 assumes that geochronological data obey normal statistics. This assumption may be approximately correct for high precision datasets but must inevitably be incorrect for low precision ones.

Geologic time is a strictly positive quantity that is incompatible with the symmetric Gaussian bell curve, which is defined over the range of values from  $-\infty$  to  $+\infty$ . Because geochronological datasets must be strictly positive, their uncertainty distributions must be asymmetric, with skewness being inversely proportional to precision. This asymmetry is removed by the logarithmic transformation that is used to construct radial plots (Equation 14.3), and which can also be applied to KDEs:

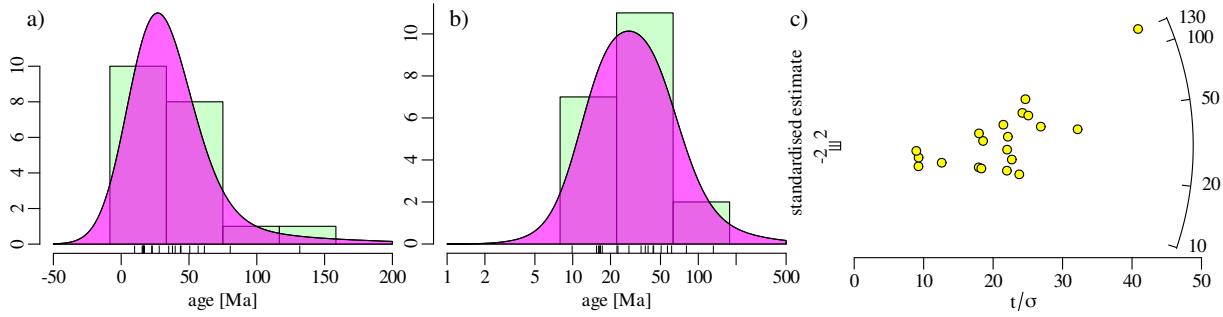


Figure 14.3: Young U-Pb carbonate dates shown a) on a linear scale, whose KDE spills over into nonsensical negative data space, and b) on a logarithmic scale, which fixes this problem. c) shows the same data as a radial plot with a logarithmic time scale.

We can reformulate Equation 13.15 in terms of the transformed variables  $z_i$ :

$$p(z_i|\mu, \omega) = \mathcal{N}(\mu, \sigma^2 = s[z_i]^2 + \omega^2) \quad (14.5)$$

which can be solved by the method of maximum likelihood as before, yielding two estimates  $\hat{\mu}$  and  $\hat{\omega}$ . The **central age** is defined as  $\exp(\hat{\mu})$ , and  $\hat{\omega}$  represents the (over)dispersion of the data. This is a relative quantity (due to the log-transform) that estimates the **coefficient of variation** ( $= \sigma/\mu$ ) of the true ages. The difference between the central age and the weighted mean age is usually small unless the data are imprecise and/or strongly overdispersed. In those cases, the central age yields the geologically most meaningful value.

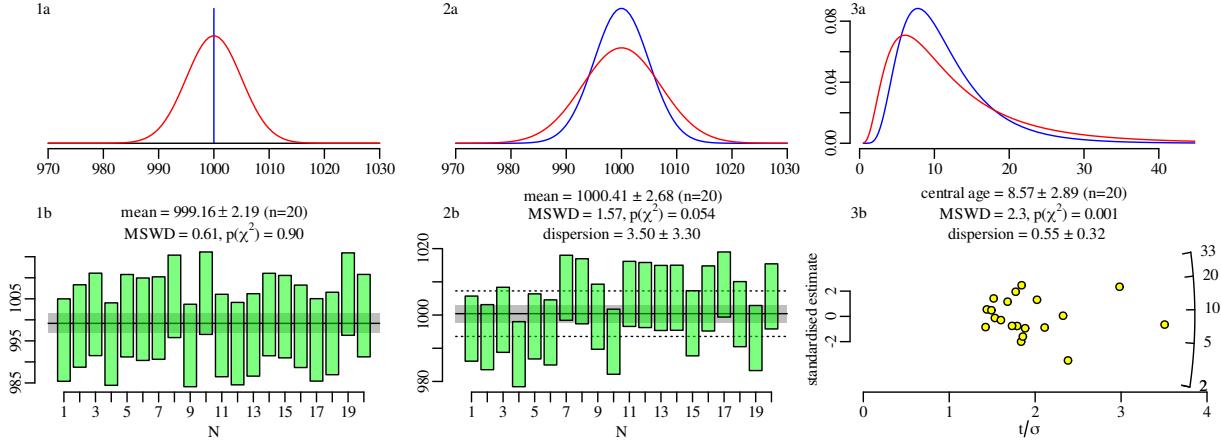


Figure 14.4: Three different age models implemented in `IsoplotR`. 1a) If the true age is a discrete event (blue peak at 1000 Ma), and the analytical uncertainties follow a normal distribution with zero mean and 5 Ma standard deviation, then the predicted distribution of the dates (red line) is a normal distribution with mean at 1000 Ma and a 5 Ma standard deviation. 1b) In this case the ordinary weighted mean (Equation 13.15) is the most appropriate estimator of the true age. 2a) If the true age is drawn from a normal distribution with a mean of 1000 Ma and a standard deviation of 5 Ma (blue line), and if the analytical uncertainties follow a normal distribution with zero mean and 5 Ma standard deviation, then the predicted distribution of the dates (red line) is a normal distribution with mean at 1000 Ma and a  $\sqrt{50}$  Ma standard deviation. 2b) In this case the random effects model of Equation 13.19 is the most appropriate estimator of the mean *and* the standard deviation of the true ages. The latter parameter is reported as the dispersion in the legend. 3a) If the true ages are drawn from a lognormal distribution with location parameter  $\exp[\mu] = 10$  Ma and dispersion parameter  $\sigma/\mu = 50\%$  (blue line), and the analytical uncertainties are  $\sim 50\%$ , then the distribution of the measured dates (red line) is a lognormal distribution with  $10/\sqrt{2}\%$  dispersion parameter. 3b) In this case the random effects model of Equation 14.5 is the best way to average the data, and the radial plot with logarithmic scale is the best way to visualise the results. Note that the dispersion is reported in absolute units on the weighted mean plot (panel b), and in relative units on the radial plot (panel c).

The random effects model represented by Equation 14.5 is referred to as a **continuous mixture** model. It assumes that the overdispersion of the data is caused by a continuous process that yields a (log)normal distribution of true ages. As previously mentioned in Section 13.4, one example of such a process is the fractional crystallisation of plutons, which may take hundreds of thousands of years, resulting in a range of zircon U-Pb ages. A second example is the gradual cooling of tectonic blocks during exhumation, which may cause the fission track system in compositionally heterogeneous apatite populations to ‘close’ at different times. However, such continuous processes are by no means the only cause of overdispersion in geochronology.

Consider, for instance, a detrital mixture originating from two or more differently aged sources. Such a **discrete mixture** is more adequately described by the following equation:

$$\mathcal{LL}(\boldsymbol{\mu}, \boldsymbol{\pi} | \mathbf{z}, \mathbf{s}[\mathbf{z}]) = \sum_{i=1}^n \ln \left[ \sum_{j=1}^k \pi_j \mathcal{N}(z_i | \mu_j, s[z_i]^2) \right] \quad (14.6)$$

where  $\boldsymbol{\mu} = \{\mu_1, \dots, \mu_k\}$ ,  $\boldsymbol{\pi} = \{\pi_1, \dots, \pi_k\}$ ,  $\mathbf{z} = \{z_1, \dots, z_k\}$ ,  $\mathbf{s}[\mathbf{z}] = \{s[z_1], \dots, s[z_k]\}$ ,  $k$  is the number of components,  $\mu_j$  is the mean of the  $j^{\text{th}}$  component (so that  $\exp[\mu_j]$  is the corresponding age), and  $\pi_j$  is the proportion of the population that belongs to the  $j^{\text{th}}$  component.

Equation 14.6 comprises  $n$  measurements and  $2k - 1$  unknowns ( $\mu_j$  and  $\pi_j$  for  $1 \leq j \leq k$  with  $\pi_k = 1 - \sum_{j=1}^{k-1} \pi_j$ ). It can be solved by the method of maximum likelihood.

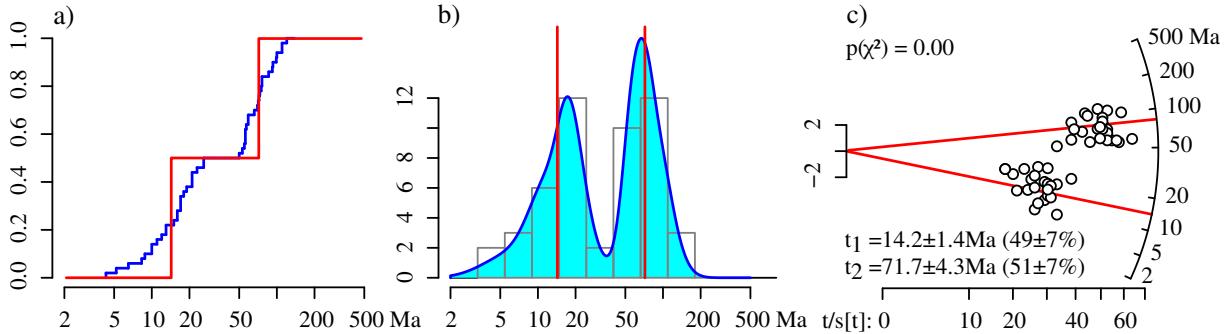


Figure 14.5: a) cumulative distribution of the true ages of a binary mixture of two discrete age components (red) and the CAD of the measured ages of 50 measured dates (blue). b) histogram and KDE of the binary mixture. c) results of the mixture model, shown as a radial plot.

Choosing the right number of components ( $k$ ) is a problem that merits further discussion. `IsoplotR` implements the Bayes Information Criterion (BIC) as a way to automatically pick the ‘optimal’ value of  $k$  for any given dataset (Section 5.6 of Galbraith, 2005). But this option should be used with caution because, for real datasets, the number of components always increases with sample size. This happens because the power of Equation 14.6 to resolve even the smallest degree of overdispersion increases with sample size.

Suppose that one uses the youngest component in a discrete mixture model to estimate the maximum depositional age of a sedimentary sequence. Then the resulting value would never converge to a specific value. Instead, one would find this minimum age to drift to ever younger values until a point where the youngest age component in a large dataset becomes younger than the actual depositional age. In most cases it is, therefore, best to resist the temptation to use the automatic peak fitting option. It is better to choose a specific number of components instead, based on geological considerations.

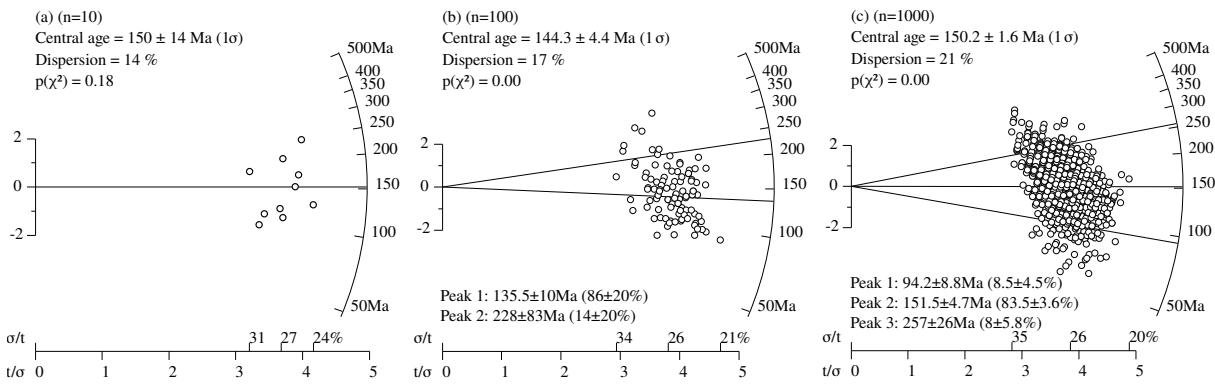


Figure 14.6: Application of finite mixture modelling to a continuous mixture. Increasing sample size from left (a) to right (c) provides statistical justification to fit more components. Note that the age of the youngest age component gets progressively younger with increasing sample size, from 150 Ma for sample (a) to 94 Ma for sample (c), and is therefore not a reliable estimator of the minimum age. Figure adapted from Vermeesch (2018c).

If one is mainly interested in the youngest age component, then it is more productive to use

an alternative parameterisation, in which all grains are assumed to come from one of two components, whereby the first component is a single discrete age peak ( $\exp[\gamma]$ , say) and the second component ( $\exp[\mathcal{N}'(z|\mu, \omega^2)]$  where  $\mu < \gamma$ ) is a continuous distribution such as Equation 14.5, but truncated at this discrete value:

$$\mathcal{L}\mathcal{L}(\pi, \gamma, \mu, \omega | \mathbf{z}, \mathbf{s}[\mathbf{z}]) = \sum_{j=1}^n \ln [\pi \mathcal{N}(z_i | \gamma, s[z_i]^2) + (1 - \pi) \mathcal{N}'(z_i | \mu, s[z_i]^2 + \omega^2)] \quad (14.7)$$

One caveat is that, if this minimum age model is applied to relatively small and/or high precision datasets such as most U-Pb measurements, then the minimum age estimate will simply be equal to the youngest date. It is only for large and/or low precision datasets (such as fission tracks), that the minimum age estimate will be older than then youngest grain. Crucially, this value will not drift to smaller values with increasing sample size, but will converge to a distinct minimum age.

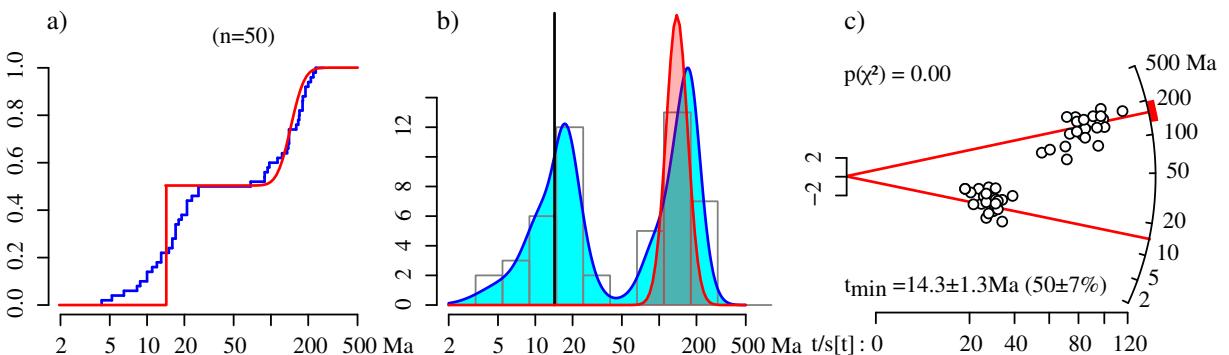


Figure 14.7: A binary mixture combining discrete and continuous age components shown as a) CADs and b) histograms and KDEs, with the true age components shown in red, and the measured age distribution in blue. c) radial plot with the minimum age model of Equation 14.7.

## References

- Abramson, I. S. (1982). "On bandwidth variation in kernel estimates – a square root law". In: *The Annals of Statistics*, pp. 1217–1223.
- Botev, Z. I., J. F. Grotowski, and D. P. Kroese (2010). "Kernel density estimation via diffusion". In: *Annals of Statistics* 38 (5), pp. 2916–2957.
- Galbraith, R. F. (1990). "The radial plot: graphical assessment of spread in ages". In: *Nuclear Tracks and Radiation Measurements* 17, pp. 207–214.
- (2005). *Statistics for fission track analysis*. CRC Press, p. 219.
- Galbraith, R. F. et al. (1999). "Optical dating of single and multiple grains of quartz from Jinmium rock shelter, northern Australia: Part I, experimental design and statistical models". In: *Archaeometry* 41.2, pp. 339–364.
- Ludwig, K. R. (2003). "User's manual for Isoplot 3.00: a geochronological toolkit for Microsoft Excel". In: *Berkeley Geochronology Center Special Publication* 4.
- Van Kerm, P. (2003). "Adaptive kernel density estimation". In: *The Stata Journal* 3.2, pp. 148–156.
- Vermeesch, P. (2007). "Quantitative geomorphology of the White Mountains (California) using detrital apatite fission track thermochronology". In: *Journal of Geophysical Research (Earth Surface)* 112.F11, p. 3004. DOI: 10.1029/2006JF000671.
- (2012). "On the visualisation of detrital age distributions". In: *Chemical Geology* 312-313, pp. 190–194. DOI: 10.1016/j.chemgeo.2012.04.021.

- Vermeesch, P. (2018a). “Dissimilarity measures in detrital geochronology”. In: *Earth-Science Reviews* 178, pp. 310–321. doi: 10.1016/j.earscirev.2017.11.027.
- (2018b). “Statistical models for point-counting data”. In: *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 501, pp. 1–7.
- (2018c). “Statistics for fission tracks”. In: *Fission track thermochronology and its application to geology*. Ed. by M. Malusá and P. Fitzgerald. Springer.

# Chapter 15

## U–Pb geochronology

The U–(Th–)Pb method is a rich and complex system of three radioactive decay chains that provide chronometric constraints on a wide range of geological processes, mineral phases and time scales. U–Pb data acquisition may focus on high throughput (using LA-ICP-MS), on high spatial resolution (SIMS) or on high precision (TIMS), and each of these analytical approaches comes with its own tradeoffs. To accommodate this diversity in equipment and applications, **IsoplotR**'s U–Pb functions are more extensive than those of any other geochronometer. This Chapter provides an in-depth overview of these functions.

Section 15.1 introduces eight different input formats that accommodate different types of input data. Section 15.2 discusses three different types of concordia diagrams that can be used to visually assess the degree to which the data form a closed isotopic system, and to calculate the best age of such ‘concordant’ data. Concordant data form the bedrock of the high precision geochronology and the geologic time scale. The remainder of the Chapter discusses various strategies to deal with discordant U–Pb compositions. Discordance can be caused by a range of mechanisms, such as:

1. non-radiogenic ('common') Pb;
2. mixing of different growth zones in a texturally complex mineral grain;
3. Pb-loss (or U-gain);
4. initial disequilibrium of the  $^{235}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$  decay chains.

The first three mechanisms give rise to linear trends in Wetherill or Tera-Wasserburg concordia space. Section 15.3 shows how to fit a line through such data by constrained optimisation. Section 15.4 shows how such isochrons (or ‘discordia’) provide one way to correct for common Pb, but introduces a few other correction strategies as well. Section 15.5 shows how initial enrichment or depletion of short-lived nuclides such as  $^{234}\text{U}$ ,  $^{230}\text{Th}$ ,  $^{226}\text{Ra}$  or  $^{231}\text{Pa}$  can bias U–Pb ages by as much as a million years, and reviews some strategies to reduce this bias. Finally, Section 15.6 introduces methods to filter discordant datasets for detrital geochronology.

### 15.1 Input formats

**IsoplotR** offers eight different input formats:

1.  $\frac{07}{35}$ ,  $\text{err}[\frac{07}{35}]$ ,  $\frac{06}{38}$ ,  $\text{err}[\frac{06}{38}]$ ,  $\text{r}[\frac{07}{35}, \frac{06}{38}]$

2.  $\frac{38}{06}$ , err [ $\frac{38}{06}$ ],  $\frac{07}{06}$ , err [ $\frac{07}{06}$ ], ( $r[\frac{38}{06}, \frac{07}{06}]$ )
3.  $\frac{07}{35}$ , err [ $\frac{07}{35}$ ],  $\frac{06}{38}$ , err [ $\frac{06}{38}$ ],  $\frac{07}{06}$ , err [ $\frac{07}{06}$ ], ( $r[\frac{07}{35}, \frac{06}{38}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{07}{35}, \frac{07}{06}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{06}{38}, \frac{07}{06}]$ )
4.  $\frac{07}{35}$ , err [ $\frac{07}{35}$ ],  $\frac{06}{38}$ , err [ $\frac{06}{38}$ ],  $\frac{04}{38}$ , err [ $\frac{04}{38}$ ], ( $r[\frac{07}{35}, \frac{06}{38}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{07}{35}, \frac{04}{38}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{06}{38}, \frac{04}{38}]$ )
5.  $\frac{38}{06}$ , err [ $\frac{38}{06}$ ],  $\frac{07}{06}$ , err [ $\frac{07}{06}$ ],  $\frac{04}{06}$ , err [ $\frac{04}{06}$ ], ( $r[\frac{38}{06}, \frac{07}{06}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{38}{06}, \frac{04}{06}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{07}{06}, \frac{04}{06}]$ )
6.  $\frac{07}{35}$ , err [ $\frac{07}{35}$ ],  $\frac{06}{38}$ , err [ $\frac{06}{38}$ ],  $\frac{04}{38}$ , err [ $\frac{04}{38}$ ],  $\frac{07}{06}$ , err [ $\frac{07}{06}$ ],  $\frac{04}{07}$ , err [ $\frac{04}{07}$ ],  $\frac{04}{06}$ , err [ $\frac{04}{06}$ ]
7.  $\frac{07}{35}$ , err [ $\frac{07}{35}$ ],  $\frac{06}{38}$ , err [ $\frac{06}{38}$ ],  $\frac{08}{32}$ , err [ $\frac{08}{32}$ ],  $\frac{32}{38}$ , err [ $\frac{32}{38}$ ], ( $r[\frac{07}{35}, \frac{06}{38}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{07}{35}, \frac{08}{32}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{06}{38}, \frac{08}{32}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{06}{38}, \frac{32}{38}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{08}{32}, \frac{32}{38}]$ )
8.  $\frac{38}{06}$ , err [ $\frac{38}{06}$ ],  $\frac{07}{06}$ , err [ $\frac{07}{06}$ ],  $\frac{08}{06}$ , err [ $\frac{08}{06}$ ],  $\frac{32}{38}$ , err [ $\frac{32}{38}$ ], ( $r[\frac{38}{06}, \frac{07}{06}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{38}{06}, \frac{08}{06}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{38}{06}, \frac{32}{38}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{07}{06}, \frac{08}{06}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{07}{06}, \frac{32}{38}]$ ), ( $r[\frac{08}{06}, \frac{32}{38}]$ )

where 04, 06, 07, 08, 32, 35 and 38 stand for  $^{204}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{206}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{207}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{208}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{232}\text{Th}$ ,  $^{235}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$ , respectively; ‘err[\*]’ stands for the analytical uncertainty of \*, which can be specified as a standard error or as two times the standard error, either in absolute or relative units; and ‘ $r[x,y]$ ’ stands for the error correlation between  $x$  and  $y$ .

Formats 1–3 are meant for mass spectrometers that are unable to accurately measure  $^{204}\text{Pb}$ . This is the case for ICP-MS instruments that are unable to resolve the isobaric interference on  $^{204}\text{Hg}$ , which is often present in the plasma gas. Formats 4–6 include  $^{204}\text{Pb}$ , as measured by SIMS or TIMS. Finally, formats 7 and 8 include  $^{208}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{232}\text{Th}$ . These nuclides can be used for hybrid U–Th–Pb dating, as discussed in Section 15.3.3.

Formats 1, 4 and 7 are ‘Wetherill style’ input formats, in which the radioactive parent appears in the denominator of the isotopic ratio data. As explained in Section 13.5 and shown in Figure 13.7, these formats are associated with strong error correlations ( $r[\frac{07}{35}, \frac{06}{38}]$ ), which must be specified so as to avoid inaccurate inferences. Formats 2, 5 and 8 are ‘Tera-Wasserburg style’ input formats, in which the most abundant radiogenic daughter (i.e.,  $^{206}\text{Pb}$ ) appears in the denominator of the isotopic ratio data. As shown in Figure 13.8, this greatly reduces the error correlations which, consequently, are optional (hence the brackets around  $r[\frac{38}{06}, \frac{07}{06}]$ ).

Finally, formats 3 and 6 provide an alternative input format designed for users whose low level data processing software does not provide error correlation data. It uses redundant ratios to infer the correlation coefficients. Let  $X \equiv \frac{07}{35}$ ,  $Y \equiv \frac{07}{35}$ ,  $Z \equiv \frac{06}{06}$  and  $U \equiv \frac{38}{35}$ ; let  $s[X]$ ,  $s[Y]$  and  $s[Z]$  be the standard errors of  $X$ ,  $Y$  and  $Z$ ; and assume that  $s[U] = 0$  for the sake of simplicity. Then it is easy to see that  $Z = X/(UY)$ , and

$$\left(\frac{s[Z]}{Z}\right)^2 = \left(\frac{s[X/Y]}{X/Y}\right)^2 \approx \left(\frac{s[X]}{X}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{s[Y]}{Y}\right)^2 - 2\frac{s[X,Y]}{XY} \quad (15.1)$$

from which the covariance (and, hence, the correlation coefficient) between  $X$  and  $Y$  can be inferred as

$$s[X,Y] \approx \frac{XY}{2} \left[ \left(\frac{s[X]}{X}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{s[Y]}{Y}\right)^2 - \left(\frac{s[Z]}{Z}\right)^2 \right] \quad (15.2)$$

It is important to note that this approach makes the crucial assumption that all three standard errors ( $s[X]$ ,  $s[Y]$  and  $s[Z]$ ) are based on the same number of data points. This means that formats 3 and 6 are not applicable to TIMS data, which measure U and Pb asynchronously.

## 15.2 Concordia diagrams and ages

**IsoplotR** implements three types of concordia diagram:

1. The **Wetherill** concordia diagram sets out the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  vs. the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratios. This format introduces relatively strong error correlations (see Section 13.5). The addition of common Pb pulls samples away from concordia along a line whose slope is proportional to the common Pb composition. Isotopic compositions above the concordia line are ‘forbidden’. They could, in principle, be caused by U-loss. But this mechanism is uncommon in practice.
2. The **Tera-Wasserburg** concordia diagram uses the inverse isochron ratios  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}/^{206}\text{Pb}$ . This format exhibits weaker error correlations. The addition of common Pb creates a binary mixing line between radiogenic and common Pb compositions (see Section 15.3). The area below the concordia line is ‘forbidden’ and the only reason why samples may plot there is due to random chance and analytical imprecision.
3. The **U–Th–Pb concordia** diagram sets out  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{232}\text{Th}$  against  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$ . Like the Wetherill diagram, the U–Th–Pb diagram also exhibits strong error correlations. But in contrast with the Wetherill diagram, the addition of common Pb does not necessarily create linear trends on the U–Th–Pb diagram. Instead, different aliquots may end up on either side of the concordia line depending on their Th/U ratio.

The Wetherill and Tera-Wasserburg concordia plots are available to datasets from any of **IsoplotR**’s eight input formats, irrespective of whether the ratios are stored in a Wetherill or Tera-Wasserburg format. **IsoplotR** automatically handles the data conversions internally. The U–Th–Pb concordia plot is only available for data formats 7 and 8, because these are the only formats that contain  $^{208}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{232}\text{Th}$ . The remainder of this Chapter will focus on the Wetherill and Tera-Wasserburg diagrams, except for Section 15.4, which will briefly mention the U–Th–Pb diagram again.

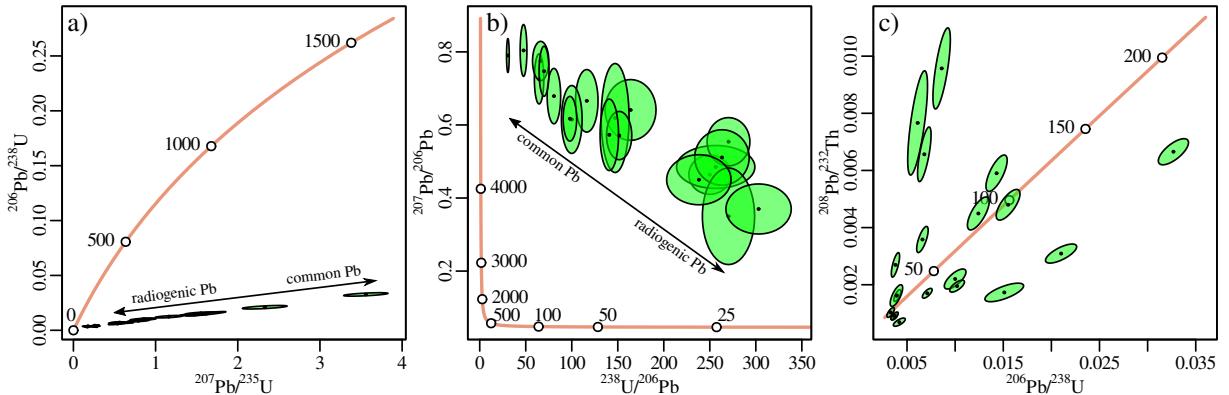


Figure 15.1: The allanite dataset of Janots and Rubatto (2014) shown on a) Wetherill, b) Tera-Wasserburg and c) U–Th–Pb concordia diagrams.

In the absence of (or after correction for) common Pb or other complications, multiple aliquots from the same sample may plot on the concordia line. Such samples are said to be concordant. Their ‘most likely’ age (in a statistical sense) is known as the **concordia age**. Calculating a concordia age involves two steps (Ludwig, 1998):

1. Calculate the two-dimensional error-weighted average  $\{\bar{x}, \bar{y}\}$  of the U–Pb ratios, by minimising the sum of squares  $S$  or, equivalently, by maximising the likelihood for equivalence  $\mathcal{LL}_e$ . In

Wetherill space:

$$\mathcal{LL}_e \propto -\frac{S_e}{2} = -\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n \left[ \begin{bmatrix} \frac{07}{35} \\ \frac{06}{38} \end{bmatrix}_i - \bar{x} \right]^T \begin{bmatrix} s_{[35]}^{[07]}_i & s_{[35]}^{[07], [06]}_i \\ s_{[35], [38]}^{[07], [06]}_i & s_{[38]}^{[06]}_i \end{bmatrix}^{-1} \left[ \begin{bmatrix} \frac{07}{35} \\ \frac{06}{38} \end{bmatrix}_i - \bar{x} \right] \quad (15.3)$$

or in Tera-Wasserburg space:

$$\mathcal{LL}_e \propto -\frac{S_e}{2} = -\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n \left[ \begin{bmatrix} \frac{38}{06} \\ \frac{07}{06} \end{bmatrix}_i - \bar{x} \right]^T \begin{bmatrix} s_{[06]}^{[38]}_i & s_{[06]}^{[38], [07]}_i \\ s_{[06], [06]}^{[38], [07]}_i & s_{[06]}^{[07]}_i \end{bmatrix}^{-1} \left[ \begin{bmatrix} \frac{38}{06} \\ \frac{07}{06} \end{bmatrix}_i - \bar{x} \right] \quad (15.4)$$

Using standard maximum likelihood theory, the covariance matrix of the weighted mean composition ( $\Sigma_{\bar{x}, \bar{y}}$ ) is obtained by inverting the Fisher information matrix.

2. Given the concordia composition  $\{\bar{x}, \bar{y}\}$  obtained in the previous step, compute the most likely age ( $t_c$ ) of this concordia composition. This is done by maximising the likelihood of concordance. In Wetherill space:

$$\mathcal{LL}_c \propto -\frac{S_c}{2} = -\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n \left[ \bar{x} - (\exp[\lambda_{235} t_c] - 1) \right]^T \Sigma_{\bar{x}, \bar{y}}^{-1} \left[ \bar{y} - (\exp[\lambda_{238} t_c] - 1) \right] \quad (15.5)$$

Or in Tera-Wasserburg space:

$$\mathcal{LL}_c \propto -\frac{S_c}{2} = -\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n \left[ \bar{x} - \frac{1}{\exp[\lambda_{238} t_c] - 1} \right]^T \Sigma_{\bar{x}, \bar{y}}^{-1} \left[ \bar{y} - \left[ \frac{35}{38} \right] \frac{\exp[\lambda_{235} t_c] - 1}{\exp[\lambda_{238} t_c] - 1} \right] \quad (15.6)$$

Again, the uncertainty of  $t_c$  is obtained from the Fisher information matrix.

The same concordia age is obtained regardless of whether the calculations are carried out in Wetherill or Tera-Wasserburg space.

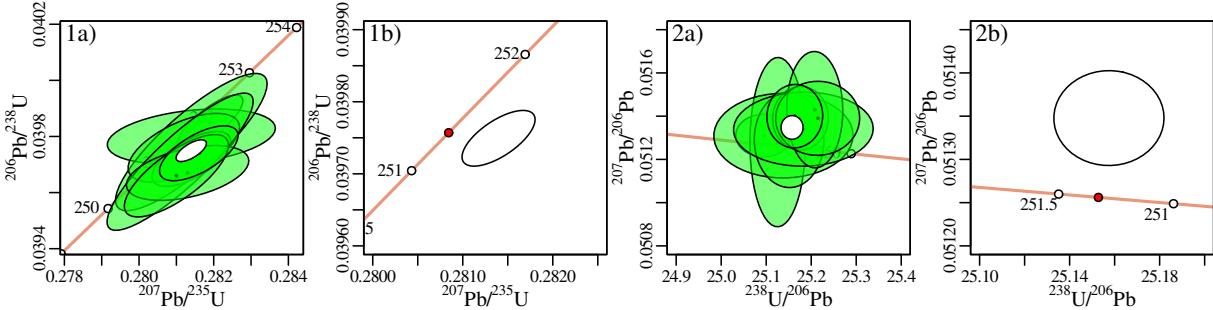


Figure 15.2: 1) Wetherill and 2) Tera-Wasserburg concordia diagram with a) the weighted mean composition shown as white error ellipse, and b) the concordia age (251.3 Ma) shown as a red circle.

The goodness-of-fit can be quantified either using a chi-square test, or with the MSWD. We can define three p-values and three MSWD values:

concordance:  $\text{MSWD}_c = S_c$

equivalence:  $\text{MSWD}_e = S_e / (2n - 2)$

combined:  $\text{MSWD} = (S_e + S_c)/(2n - 1)$

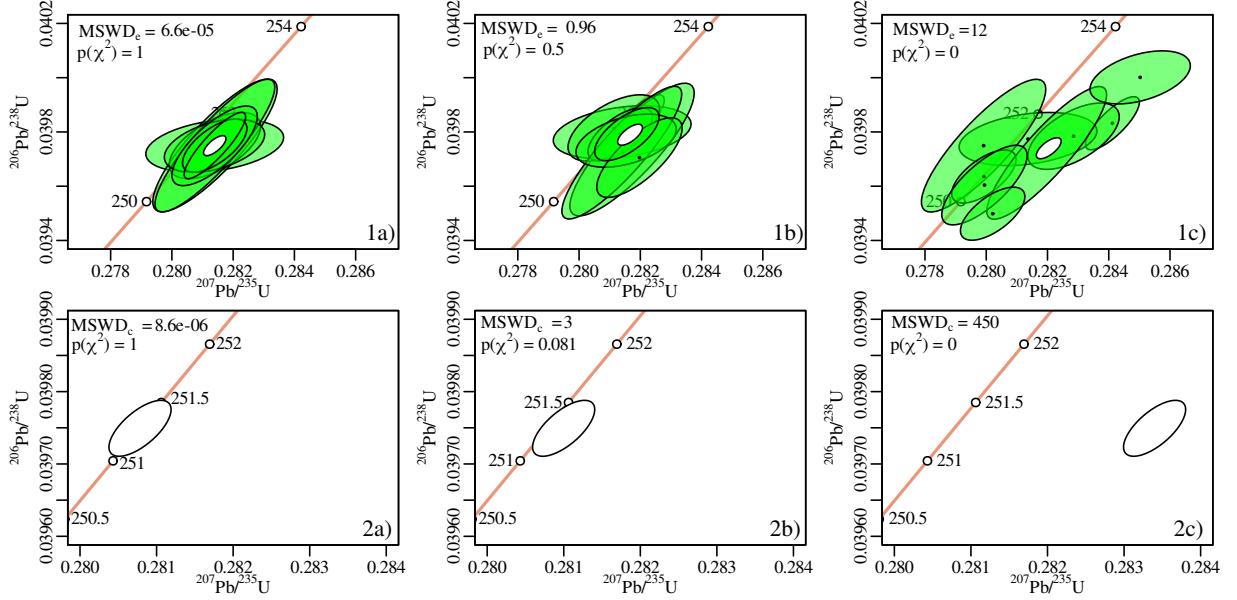


Figure 15.3: MSWDs and p-values for 1) equivalence and 2) concordance for data that are a) underdispersed, b) dispersed by an amount that is consistent with the analytical uncertainties, and c) overdispersed with respect to the analytical uncertainties.

In high precision geochronology, the analytical uncertainty of the uranium decay constants becomes a significant factor in assessing the degree of concordance. This uncertainty represents a systematic error, which can be added to the covariance matrix of the weighted mean composition:

$$\Sigma'_{\bar{x}, \bar{y}} = \Sigma_{\bar{x}, \bar{y}} + t_c^2 \begin{bmatrix} \exp[\lambda_{235} t_c] \\ \exp[\lambda_{238} t_c] \end{bmatrix}^T \begin{bmatrix} \sigma[\lambda_{235}]^2 & \sigma[\lambda_{235}, \lambda_{238}] \\ \sigma[\lambda_{235}, \lambda_{238}] & \sigma[\lambda_{238}]^2 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \exp[\lambda_{235} t_c] \\ \exp[\lambda_{238} t_c] \end{bmatrix} \quad (15.7)$$

where  $\sigma[\lambda_{235}]$ ,  $\sigma[\lambda_{238}]$  and  $\sigma[\lambda_{235}, \lambda_{238}]$  are the (co)variances of the  $^{235}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$  decay constants. IsoplotR visualises the decay constant uncertainties by increasing the width of the concordia line, and takes them into account when calculating the MSWD and p-value of concordance:

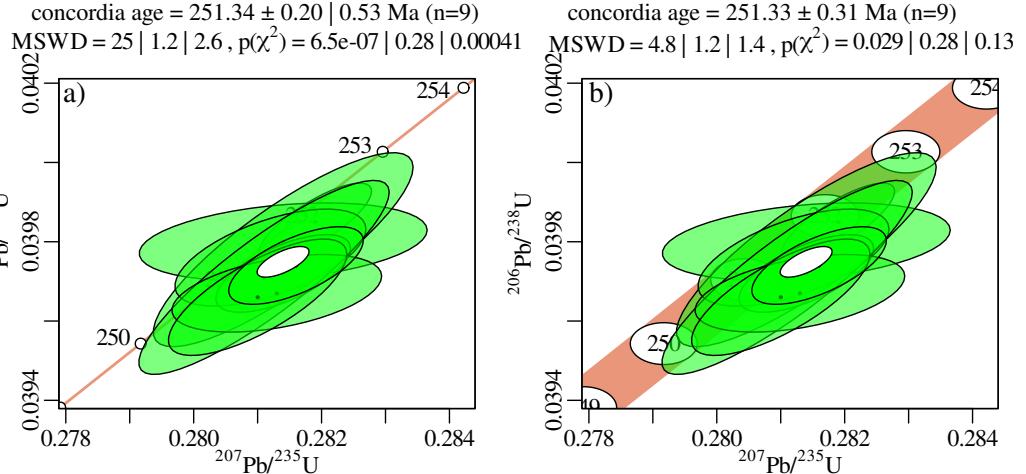


Figure 15.4: Wetherill concordia diagram with concordia age calculations a) without and b) with decay constant uncertainties. The legends report the MSWD and p-value for concordance | equivalence | concordance + equivalence. Taking into account the decay constant uncertainty decreases the value of MSWD<sub>c</sub> and increases the p-value of concordance.

### 15.3 Discordia/isochron regression

As discussed in the introductory paragraphs of this Chapter, U–Pb data can form linear trends in Wetherill or Tera-Wasserburg concordia space due to:

1. the addition of non-radiogenic Pb components ('common Pb');
2. binary mixing of different aged growth zones;
3. partial loss of radiogenic Pb.

**IsoplotR** uses three different algorithms to fit these linear trends:

1. formats 1–3: Semitotal-U/Pb regression using  $^{206}/^{207}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$ . Let  $\left[\frac{07}{06}\right]_i$  and  $\left[\frac{38}{06}\right]_i$  be  $n$   $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ratio measurements<sup>1</sup>, respectively. Then this algorithm chooses the common Pb composition  $\left[\frac{07}{06}\right]_o$  and concordia intercept age  $t$  that best fits the following mixing line in a maximum likelihood sense:

$$\left[\frac{07}{06}\right]_i = \left[\frac{07}{06}\right]_o - \left[\frac{38}{06}\right]_i \left\{ \left[\frac{07}{06}\right]_o (\exp[\lambda_{238}t] - 1) - \left[\frac{35}{38}\right]_i (\exp[\lambda_{235}t] - 1) \right\} \quad (15.8)$$

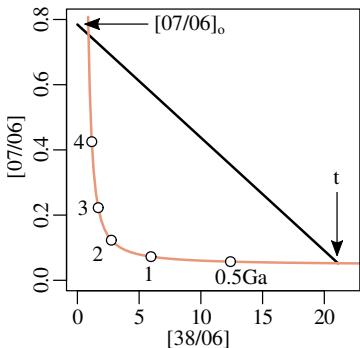


Figure 15.5: The semitotal-U/Pb isochron is a binary mixture line between a non-radiogenic Pb component with  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ratio  $[07/06]_o$  and a radiogenic  $^{238}\text{U}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ratio that marks a point on the concordia line corresponding to an age  $t$ .

2. formats 4–6: Total-U/Pb regression using  $^{204}/^{207}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{235}/^{238}\text{U}$  (Ludwig, 1998). Given  $n$  sets of three-dimensional isotopic ratio measurements this algorithm can be formulated as a system of two equations that describe two coupled mixing lines with two common Pb intercepts ( $\left[\frac{04}{06}\right]_o$  and  $\left[\frac{04}{07}\right]_o$ ) and a single concordia intercept age  $t$ :

$$\left[\frac{04}{06}\right]_i = \left[\frac{04}{06}\right]_o \left\{ 1 - \left[\frac{38}{06}\right]_i (\exp[\lambda_{238}t] - 1) \right\} \quad (15.9)$$

$$\left[\frac{04}{07}\right]_i = \left[\frac{04}{07}\right]_o \left\{ 1 - \left[\frac{35}{07}\right]_i (\exp[\lambda_{235}t] - 1) \right\} \quad (15.10)$$

<sup>1</sup>the same calculation can also be carried out in Wetherill space but is omitted here for brevity.

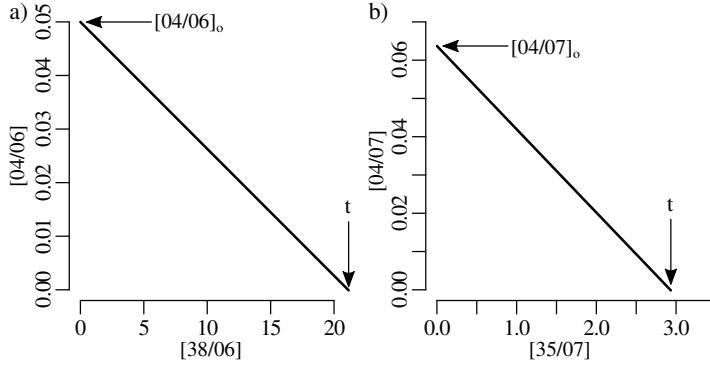


Figure 15.6: The total-U/Pb isochron is a binary mixture line between a non-radiogenic Pb component with  $^{204}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{204}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$  ratios  $[04/06]_o$  and  $[04/07]_o$ , and radiogenic  $^{238}\text{U}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{235}\text{U}/^{207}\text{Pb}$  ratios that mark a point on the concordia line corresponding to an age  $t$ . a) shows Equation 15.9, b) shows Equation 15.10.

When the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$ -system is compromised by unrecoverable initial disequilibrium, then it is beneficial to ‘disconnect’ the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  clock from the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  clock and carry out a 2D isochron regression in  $^{204}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$  vs.  $^{235}\text{U}/^{207}\text{Pb}$  space (Section 15.5).

3. formats 7 and 8: Total-U-Th/Pb regression using  $^{206/7/8}\text{Pb}$   $^{232}\text{Th}$  and  $^{235/8}\text{U}$  (Vermeesch, 2021). If  $^{204}\text{Pb}$  cannot be measured precisely enough, then we can use  $^{208}\text{Pb}$  as a proxy for common Pb, after correction for the radiogenic contribution from  $^{232}\text{Th}$ :

$$\left[ \frac{08}{06} \right]_i - \left[ \frac{32}{38} \right]_i \left[ \frac{38}{06} \right]_i (\exp[\lambda_{232}t] - 1) = \left[ \frac{08}{06} \right]_o \left\{ 1 - \left[ \frac{38}{06} \right]_i (\exp[\lambda_{238}t] - 1) \right\} \quad (15.11)$$

$$\left[ \frac{08}{07} \right]_i - \left[ \frac{32}{38} \right]_i \left[ \frac{38}{35} \right]_i \left[ \frac{35}{07} \right]_i (\exp[\lambda_{232}t] - 1) = \left[ \frac{08}{07} \right]_o \left\{ 1 - \left[ \frac{35}{07} \right]_i (\exp[\lambda_{235}t] - 1) \right\} \quad (15.12)$$

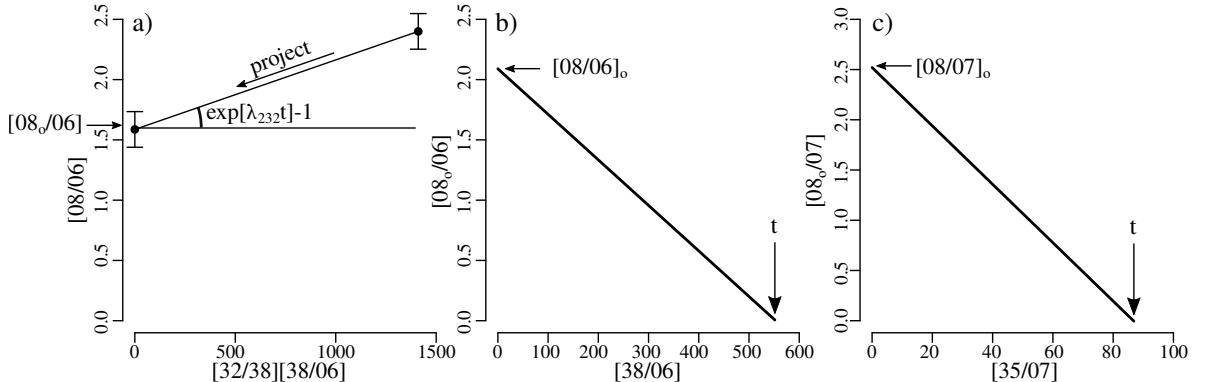


Figure 15.7: The total-U-Th/Pb isochron is constructed in a similar way to the total-U/Pb isochron of Figure 15.6, but using the non-radiogenic  $^{208}\text{Pb}$  component instead of  $^{204}\text{Pb}$ . The first step in the calculation algorithm (panel a, left hand side of Equation 15.11) is the removal of the radiogenic  $^{208}\text{Pb}$  component for each aliquot in the dataset. This is achieved by projecting the  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ratio onto the  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$ -axis along a line whose slope is given by the  $^{232}\text{Th}-^{208}\text{Pb}$  ingrowth equation. The algorithm then iterates over the parameters  $[08/06]_o$ ,  $[08/07]_o$  and  $t$  until convergence is reached. Panel b) shows Equation 15.11, whereas panel c) shows Equation 15.12.

When the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$ -system is compromised by unrecoverable initial disequilibrium, then it is beneficial to ‘disconnect’ the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  clock from the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  clock and carry out the isochron regression in  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$  vs.  $^{235}\text{U}/^{207}\text{Pb}$  space (Section 15.5).

The parameterisation of these three discordia regression algorithms implies that the discordance is caused by common Pb. However, the results can also be used to interpret different

scenarios such as Pb-loss and mixing of different aged growth zones. These mechanisms produce mixing lines between two concordant compositions on the concordia line. These intercepts can be visualised using IsoplotR's Wetherill concordia function:

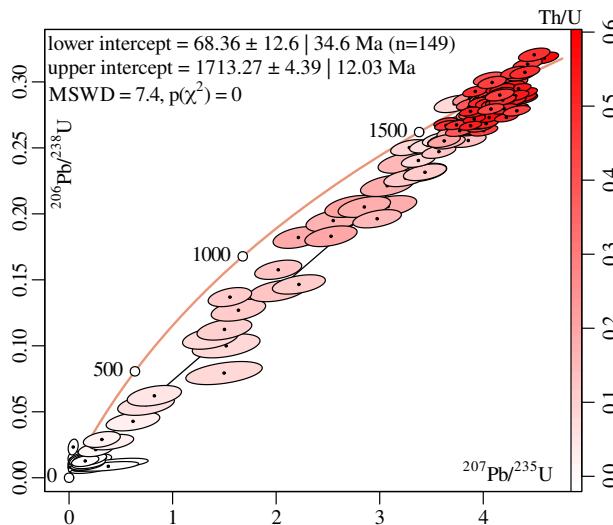


Figure 15.8: Wetherill concordia diagram of a depth-drilling experiment for a cycle-by-cycle LA-ICP-MS depth drilling experiment by J. Hourigan (UC Santa Cruz). As the laser drills through the grain, it exposes different mixtures between two compositional end members with distinct Th/U ratios as shown by the colour scale. IsoplotR fits the mixing line by semitotal-U/Pb regression (Equation 15.8), the results are subsequently used to infer the upper intercept as well as the lower intercept with the concordia line.

## 15.4 Common Pb

There are a number of different strategies to remove the non-radiogenic Pb component from U-(Th-)Pb measurements. Which of these is most appropriate depends on the data format and geological setting:

1. In igneous and ortho-metamorphic rocks, where one can safely assume that all the aliquots are cogenetic and share the same common Pb composition, isochron regression is the most reliable method.
  - (a) The common Pb composition as well as the concordia intercept age can be obtained using the methods reviewed in Section 15.3.

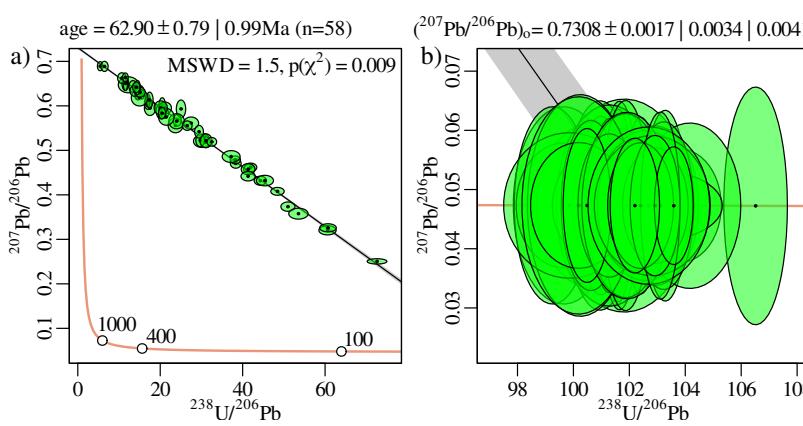


Figure 15.9: For LA-ICP-MS data stored in formats 1–3, the isochron regression is done by semitotal-U/Pb regression (a). Projecting the data onto the concordia line (b) produces common-Pb corrected U–Pb compositions that are perfectly concordant by definition. The title applies to both panels.

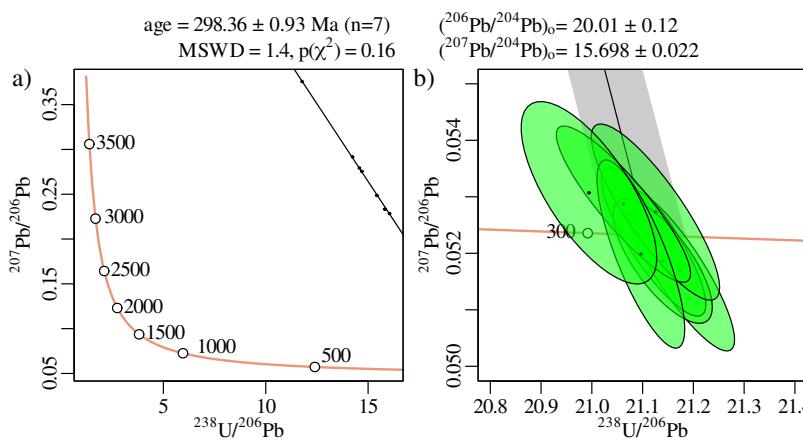


Figure 15.10: For SIMS or TIMS data (note the small error ellipses) stored in formats 4–6, the isochron regression is done by total-U/Pb regression (a). Projecting the data along this 3-dimensional isochron line produces common-Pb corrected compositions that do not plot exactly on the concordia line. The title applies to both panels.

- (b) Alternatively, a nominal common Pb correction can be made by analysing a cogenetic mineral (such as feldspar) that is poor in U, and using its Pb composition as an ‘anchor’ for a constrained discordia regression. The following example is less accurate (intentionally, for the sake of illustration) than the unconstrained regression of Figure 15.9:

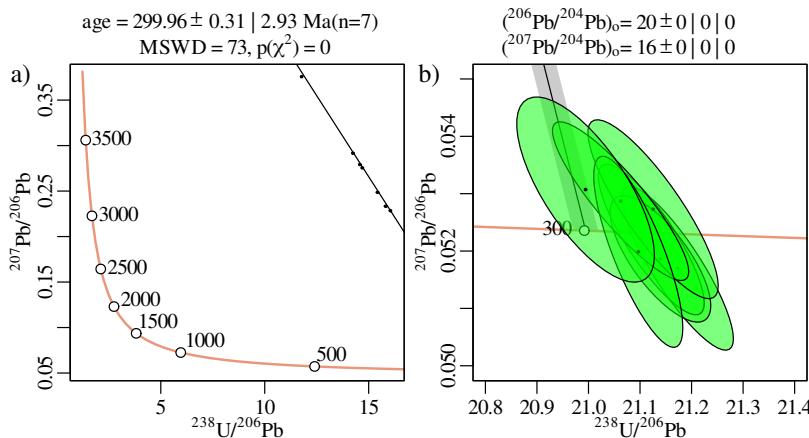


Figure 15.11: Common-Pb correction of the same data as Figure 15.9, but using an isochron that is anchored at a nominal common Pb composition of  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb} = 20$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb} = 16$  (note the zero uncertainties in the title).

2. In sedimentary and para-metamorphic rocks, in which the grains cannot safely be assumed to be cogenetic, each aliquot must be treated separately.
  - (a) If there is some independent evidence to support a shared common-Pb composition for all the aliquots, then the radiogenic composition can be obtained by two-point isochron regression between that common-Pb composition and each aliquot.

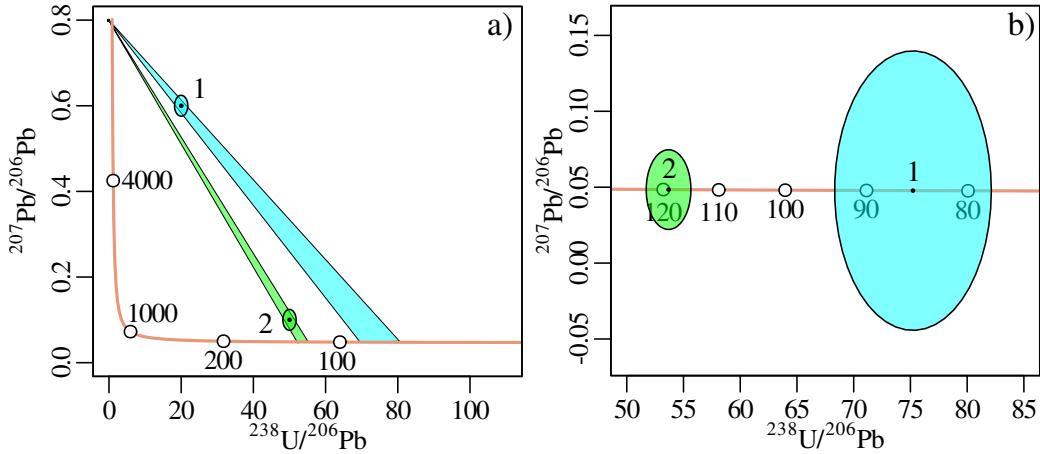


Figure 15.12: Common-Pb correction of two LA-ICP-MS based detrital measurements (formats 1–3) using the same nominal common Pb composition with  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb} = 0.8$ . Each aliquot forms its own mixing line, and its uncertainties are magnified by the extrapolation, in proportion to its distance to the concordia line. This is different from the joint isochron regression of Figures 15.9 and 15.10, in which all aliquots are projected parallel to a joint regression line and the uncertainties are only mildly affected by the extrapolation.

- (b) In the absence of external evidence about the common Pb composition, one can infer the composition from the age using a mantle evolution model (e.g., Stacey and Kramers, 1975). If  $t < 3.7 \text{ Ga}$ :

$$\left[ \frac{^{206}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right]_o = 11.152 + 9.74 (\exp[\lambda_{238}3.7] - \exp[\lambda_{238}t]) \quad (15.13)$$

$$\left[ \frac{^{207}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right]_o = 12.998 + 0.0707 (\exp[\lambda_{235}3.7] - \exp[\lambda_{235}t]) \quad (15.14)$$

$$\left[ \frac{^{208}\text{Pb}}{^{204}\text{Pb}} \right]_o = 31.23 + 36.84 (\exp[\lambda_{232}3.7] - \exp[\lambda_{232}t]) \quad (15.15)$$

Each value of  $t$  represents a mixing line between a point on the concordia line and a point on the common-Pb intercept of the concordia diagram. Using the method of maximum likelihood, IsoplotR finds the mixing line that is closest to the each U-Pb measurement in a detrital dataset. For formats 1–3, it is generally possible to find an exact solution to this problem (i.e., the mixing line goes directly through the measurement). For formats 4–7, the problem is overconstrained and the fit is generally not perfect.

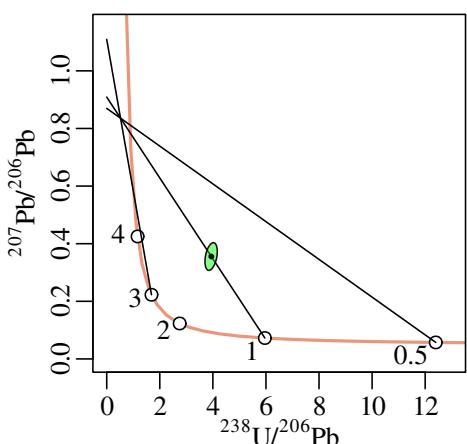


Figure 15.13: Three mixing lines between the radioactive composition of 0.5, 1 and 3 Ga samples and the inferred Pb-composition of the mantle reservoir (according to Stacey and Kramers, 1975) from which these samples were hypothetically extracted. The y-intercepts correspond to  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ratios of 0.87, 0.91 and 1.11, respectively. For the error ellipse shown on this diagram, the mixing line at  $t = 1$  Ga best describes the composition of the sample. Hence, the common-Pb corrected age of this analysis is 1 Ga.

## 15.5 Initial disequilibrium

Even though the U–Pb decay systems consist of numerous steps (14 for  $^{238}\text{U}$  and 11 for  $^{235}\text{U}$ ), this complexity is ignored in conventional U–Pb geochronology and the method is mathematically treated as a simple parent-daughter pair. Section 2.4 showed that this assumption is justified once a state of secular equilibrium is established between all the intermediate daughter products in the decay chains. Such secular equilibrium automatically emerges after 1 to 2 million years. Any disequilibrium that might exist prior to this can be used as a chronometer in its own right, as discussed in Section 8.

Initial disequilibrium of the uranium decay series also affects the accuracy of the U–Pb method. For example, ignoring any initial excess  $^{234}\text{U}$  would result in an overestimated  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  age, and any initial  $^{231}\text{Pa}$  deficit would result in an underestimated  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  age. Thus initial disequilibrium is one mechanism to produce discordant results. The effect of initial disequilibrium is relatively small in most studies. It can be neglected in many geological applications, and is usually only a matter of concern in high precision geochronology.

However in U–Pb geochronology of young carbonates, the effect of initial disequilibrium can be very significant, and may potentially result in order-of-magnitude levels of bias. **IsoplotR** offers three different strategies to deal with this bias:

1. If the intermediate daughter is sufficiently long lived, and the sample is sufficiently young to retain some of its disequilibrium, then the activity ratios can be back-calculated to the time of isotopic closure. This strategy applies to  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  disequilibrium and, for very young samples, to  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{234}\text{U}$  disequilibrium.
2. For older samples and shorter lived intermediate daughters such as  $^{226}\text{Ra}$  ( $t_{1/2} = 1599$  yr), secular equilibrium has usually been re-established and the initial activity ratio must be assumed.
3. However in the case of  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  disequilibrium in igneous rocks, the initial activity ratio can also be inferred from the  $^{232}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  ratio of the bulk host rocks. In this case we make the assumption that the bulk rock is representative for the starting material from which the datable mineral formed. Due to the chemical similarity between Th and Pa, the same procedure can be applied to  $^{231}\text{Pa}/^{238}\text{U}$  disequilibrium as well.

**IsoplotR** solves the complex evolution of the decay series using a matrix exponential approach developed by McLean et al. (2016). To illustrate the principles behind this approach, consider the  $^{238}\text{U}$ - $^{206}\text{Pb}$  decay chain expressed in matrix form:

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial t} \begin{bmatrix} n_{38} \\ n_{34} \\ n_{30} \\ n_{26} \\ n_{06} \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} -\lambda_{38} & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ \lambda_{38} & -\lambda_{34} & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & \lambda_{34} & -\lambda_{30} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & \lambda_{30} & -\lambda_{26} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & \lambda_{26} & 0 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} n_{38} \\ n_{34} \\ n_{30} \\ n_{26} \\ n_{06} \end{bmatrix} \quad (15.16)$$

where  $n**$  and  $\lambda**$  stand for “the number of atoms and decay constant of nuclide  $2**$ ”. Equation 15.16 is the matrix equivalent of the system of equations that is represented in a simplified form by Equations 2.9–2.11. Just like the ordinary decay equation is solved by an exponential function (Equation 2.12), so the matrix decay equation is solved by a matrix exponential:

$$\begin{bmatrix} n_{38} \\ n_{34} \\ n_{30} \\ n_{26} \\ n_{06} \end{bmatrix} = \text{expm} \left( \begin{bmatrix} -\lambda_{38} & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ \lambda_{38} & -\lambda_{34} & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & \lambda_{34} & -\lambda_{30} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & \lambda_{30} & -\lambda_{26} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & \lambda_{26} & 0 \end{bmatrix} t \right) \begin{bmatrix} n_{38} \\ n_{34} \\ n_{30} \\ n_{26} \\ n_{06} \end{bmatrix} \quad (15.17)$$

which expresses the present day amounts as a function of the initial amounts. Conversely, the equation can also be turned around to express the initial amounts as a function of the present day amounts:

$$\begin{bmatrix} n_{38} \\ n_{34} \\ n_{30} \\ n_{26} \\ n_{06} \end{bmatrix}_0 = \text{expm} \left( - \begin{bmatrix} -\lambda_{38} & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ \lambda_{38} & -\lambda_{34} & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & \lambda_{34} & -\lambda_{30} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & \lambda_{30} & -\lambda_{26} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & \lambda_{26} & 0 \end{bmatrix} t \right) \begin{bmatrix} n_{38} \\ n_{34} \\ n_{30} \\ n_{26} \\ n_{06} \end{bmatrix} \quad (15.18)$$

The matrix exponential approach provides an elegant solution for all three scenarios described above. Equation 15.17 can be used to construct a concordia diagram in the presence of disequilibrium:

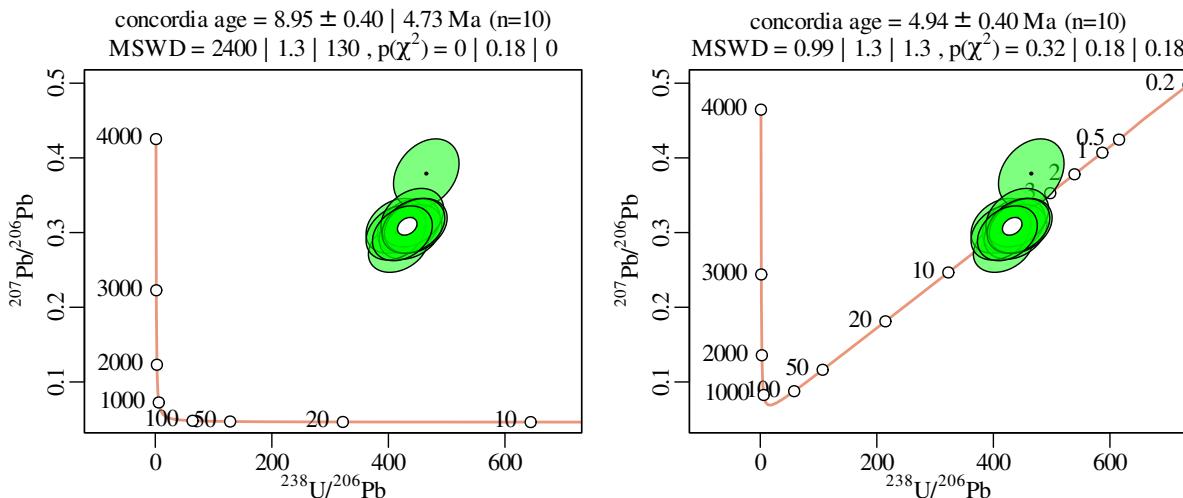


Figure 15.14: Tera-Wasserburg concordia diagram a) assuming secular equilibrium and b) accounting for secular disequilibrium with initial activity ratios of  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U} = 0$ ,  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U} = 2$ ,  $^{226}\text{Ra}/^{238}\text{U} = 2$  and  $^{231}\text{Pa}/^{235}\text{U} = 2$ . These initial conditions cause the concordia line to curve upwards for young ages. Without the disequilibrium correction, the concordia age would be wrong by 100%.

If the measured activity ratios are used to infer the initial conditions, then the concordia line terminates where those inferred activity ratios reach unrealistic values (e.g.,  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}=500$  and  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}=0$ ):

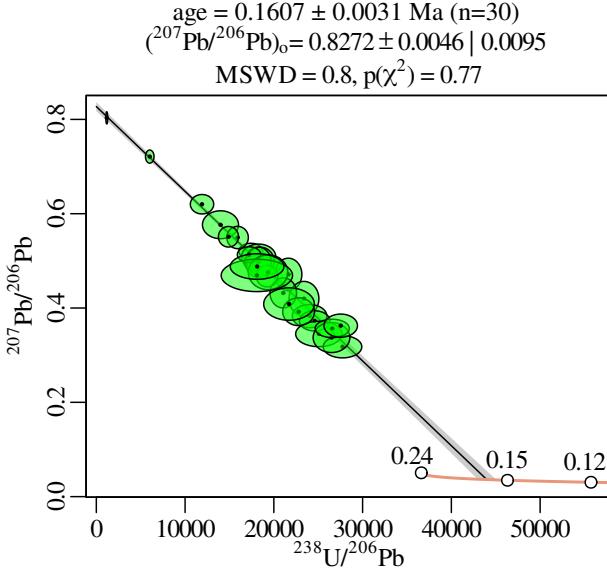


Figure 15.15: Discordia regression of carbonate sample WHC1 of McLean et al. (2016), using measured activity ratios of  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}=1.1634$ ,  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}=1.0734$ , and initial activity ratios of  $^{226}\text{Ra}/^{238}\text{U} = ^{231}\text{Pa}/^{235}\text{U} = 0$ . The measured  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratios are incompatible with U–Pb ages of more than 240 ka, i.e. at 240 ka the initial  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio would have been 0.

Beyond  $\sim 1$  Ma, it becomes very difficult to estimate the initial  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio from the measured  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio, and it is even more difficult to quantify the analytical uncertainty of the disequilibrium correction. If this is the case, and if either  $^{204}\text{Pb}$  or  $^{208}\text{Pb}$  have been measured, it is often better to abandon the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  clock and rely on the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  clock in 2D isochron space:

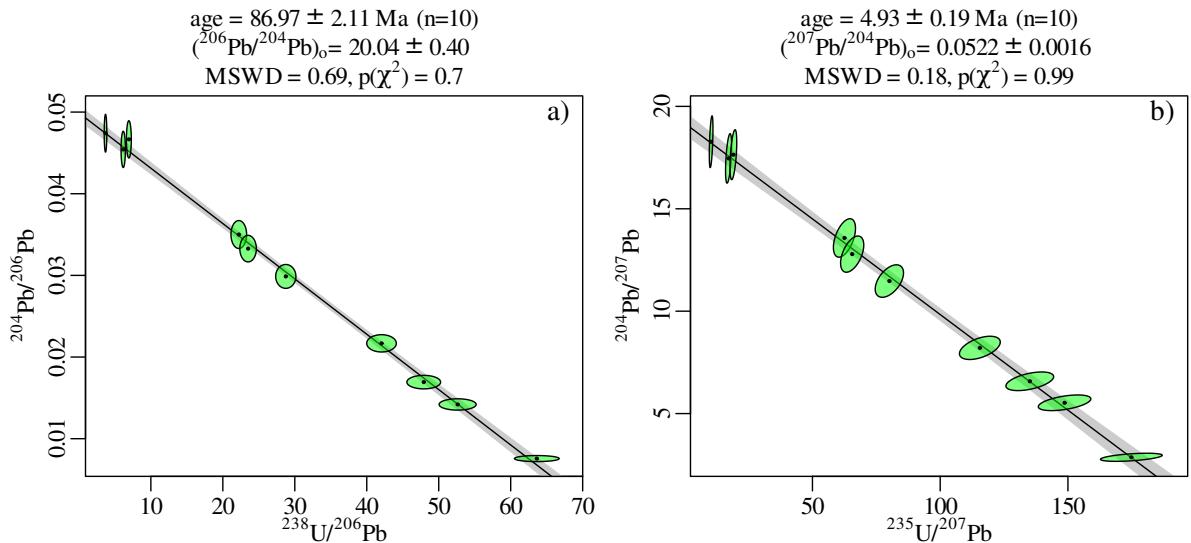


Figure 15.16: 2D isochrons of U–Pb data with a true age of 5 Ma and the following initial activity ratios:  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U} = 5$ ,  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U} = 0$ ,  $^{226}\text{Ra}/^{238}\text{U} = 0$ , and  $^{231}\text{Pa}/^{235}\text{U} = 0$ . Due to this expired initial disequilibrium, the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  isochron is wrong by orders of magnitude. In contrast, the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  isochron has been affected far less strongly, and gives a good estimate of the true age.

## 15.6 Discordance filters

In detrital geochronology it is generally not possible to compute multi-grain concordia ages and isochrons. In fact, each grain in a detrital dataset has its own age and it is the entire distribution of their values that carries scientific value. The question then arises which method should be used to constrain the age distribution. IsoplotR offers a number of options:

1. use the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  date ( $t_{68}$ ).
2. use the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  date ( $t_{75}$ ). Given that the half-life of  $^{235}\text{U}$  is more than six times shorter than that of  $^{238}\text{U}$ , and that  $^{235}\text{U}$  is more than 100 times less abundant than  $^{238}\text{U}$ , little  $^{207}\text{Pb}$  has been produced during the last billion years of Earth history compared to  $^{206}\text{Pb}$ . Consequently, the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  method is less precise than the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  method during the Phanerozoic and Neoproterozoic, but more precise prior to that.
3. use the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  date ( $t_{76}$ ). Like the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$ , also the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  method is more precise than the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  method for old grains, and less precise for young ones. The gradual shift in sensitivity between the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  methods is visible in the slope of a Tera-Wasserburg concordia line, which is steep at old ages (high  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  gradient w.r.t. time) and shallow at young ages (low  $^{238}\text{U}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  gradient w.r.t. time).
4. switch from  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  to  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  at some point during the Proterozoic. This ensures good precision for all grains but introduces two practical issues. First, it requires the selection of a discrete discordance cutoff between the two methods. Second, the sudden switch between the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  clocks may be marked by a discrete step in the age spectrum. This step is entirely artificial and obscures any geologically significant events that might occur around the same time.
5. use the single grain concordia age ( $t_c$ ), which is calculated by applying Equation 15.5 or 15.6 separately to each aliquot. This approach avoids the need to switch between different methods, and offers superior precision to any of the other methods across the entire geologic time scale.

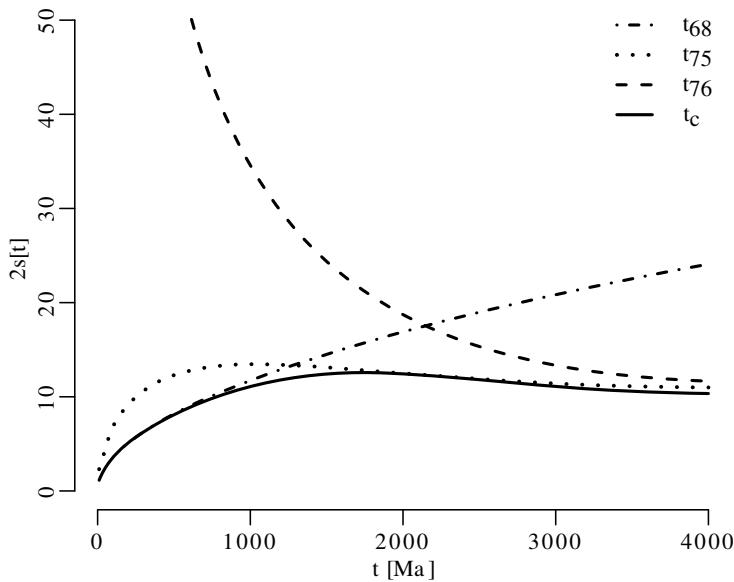


Figure 15.17: Predicted uncertainties of the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  ( $t_{68}$ ),  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$  ( $t_{75}$ ),  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ( $t_{76}$ ) and concordia ( $t_c$ ) ages for a synthetic dataset with a constant uranium concentration. Dwell times and detector sensitivities were chosen so as to yield results that are similar to those obtained from real data. The concordia age (solid line) always offers the best precision. See Vermeesch (2021) for further details about the calculations behind this figure.

Once a chronometer has been chosen, it is advisable to ‘filter’ the data before plotting them as a KDE or CAD, so as to remove the most discordant analyses. It may be so that the common Pb correction of Section 15.4 removes much (or all, in the case of formats 1–3) discordance. But the accuracy of single-grain common Pb corrections decreases quickly with increasing distance from the concordia line. For example, in Figure 15.12, aliquot 1 should probably not be used to constrain the age distribution. **IsoplotR** offers six different definitions of discordance that can be used to filter U–Pb data (Vermeesch, 2021):

1. The relative age discordance:

$$d_r = 1 - t_{68}/t_{76} \quad (15.19)$$

This is the most widely used criterion today. It is more likely to remove young grains than old ones, and strongly skews the age distribution towards old age components as a result.

2. The absolute age discordance:

$$d_t = t_{76} - t_{68} \quad (15.20)$$

This definition is not very widely used. But it illustrates the dramatic effect that the discordance definition can have on the filtered age distributions. Compared with the relative age filter, it is more likely to reject old grains, and less likely to reject young ones. It even allows physically impossible negative  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ages to pass through it.

3. The p-value based discordance filter:

$$d_p = \text{Prob}(s > S_c | S_c \sim \chi^2_2) \quad (15.21)$$

where  $S_c$  is defined in Equation 15.5/15.6.  $d_p$  may have intuitive appeal as an ‘objective’ definition. But it has an undesirable negative effect on the precision and accuracy of the filtered results. This is because the p-value definition affects grains differently depending on their analytical precision.

For example, consider a 1.5 Ga zircon that is  $d_r = 1\%$  discordant. If this grain were analysed by LA-ICP-MS with an analytical precision of 2%, say, then it would pass the chi-square test and be accepted as being concordant. However, if that same grain were analysed by TIMS with a precision of 0.2%, then the p-value criterion would reject it as being discordant.

It seems fundamentally wrong that an imprecise analytical method would be favoured over a precise one. This is a pertinent problem because technical innovations are increasing the precision of all analytical approaches to U-Pb geochronology. As precision improves, so does the ability to detect ever small degrees of discordance. Using the p-value criterion, there may come a time when no zircon passes this filter. Hence it is best not to use this filter, but **IsoplotR** offers it nonetheless for the sake of completeness and to allow reproducing published results.

#### 4. The Stacey-Kramers discordance filter:

$$d_{sk} = 1 - r_{86}/r_{86}^* \quad (15.22)$$

where  $r_{86}$  and  $r_{86}^*$  are the  $^{238}\text{U}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ratios before and after common Pb correction, assumes that discordance is solely caused by common Pb contamination. If this assumption is correct, then the  $d_{sk}$  filter will produce the most accurate age distributions, provided that a Stacey and Kramers (1975) common Pb correction is applied to the filtered data afterwards.

#### 5. The perpendicular Aitchison distance:

$$d_a = dx(t_{68}) \sin\left(\arctan\left[\frac{dy(t_{68})}{dx(t_{68})}\right]\right) \quad (15.23)$$

represents the logarithmic distance from the measurement to the concordia line in log-log space (Vermeesch, 2021).  $dx(*)$  and  $dy(*)$  are the horizontal and vertical component of this distance.  $d_a$  produces a parallel acceptance zone around the (log-transformed) concordia line. This filter is most likely to reject ‘middle aged’ zircon grains, between 1000 and 2000 Ma, where the age resolving power of the U-Pb method is greatest. Above and below this interval, the  $d_a$  criterion is more forgiving. This behaviour is desirable because natural samples tend to exhibit more age discordance below 1000 Ma and above 2000 Ma than between these dates.

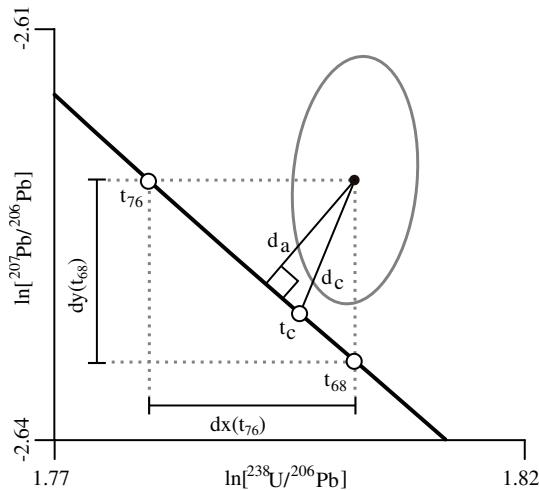


Figure 15.18: Illustration of the two logratio distance definitions of discordance.  $d_a$  is the perpendicular Aitchison distance from the measured logratio to the concordia line.  $d_c$  is the Aitchison distance measured along a line connecting the measured value and the concordia composition.

#### 6. The concordia distance:

$$d_c = \text{sgn}[t_{76} - t_{68}] \sqrt{dx(t_c)^2 + dy(t_c)^2} \quad (15.24)$$

is a modified version of the  $d_a$  criterion that takes into account the uncertainties of the U-Pb isotopic composition. It represents the distance (in log-log space) from the measurement to the U-Pb composition of the concordia age. Its effects on the U-Pb age distributions are more difficult to visualise but are similar to those of the  $d_a$  criterion. Empirical evidence

suggests that this filter is optimal in the sense that it has a minimal effect on the shape of the age distribution: it results in a tightening of subpopulations without changing their position or relative size (Vermeesch, 2020).

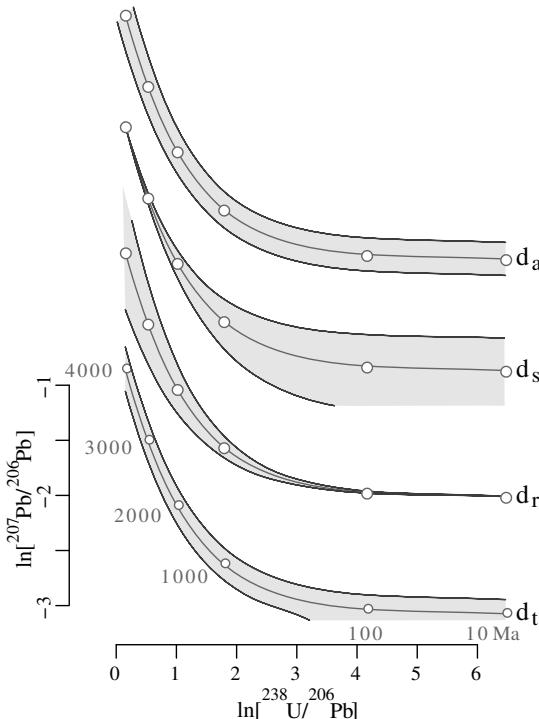


Figure 15.19: Discordance cutoffs for four of the six discordance definitions. The  $d_p$  and  $d_c$  criteria are not shown because they depend on the analytical uncertainty of the measurements, which may vary between studies. The grey envelopes mark cutoff values of  $d_r = 20\%$  (relative age filter),  $d_t = 300$  Ma (absolute age filter),  $d_{sk} = 2\%$  (Stacey–Kramers filter) and  $d_a = 15\%$  (perpendicular Aitchison distance) on a Tera–Wasserburg concordia diagram, which is plotted in logarithmic space to provide a more balanced view of the old and young ends of the time scale. The  $d_{sk}$  and  $d_t$  envelopes are truncated where they cross over into physically impossible negative isotope ratio space.

## References

- Janots, E. and D. Rubatto (2014). “U–Th–Pb dating of collision in the external Alpine domains (Urseren zone, Switzerland) using low temperature allanite and monazite”. In: *Lithos* 184, pp. 155–166.
- Ludwig, K. R. (1998). “On the treatment of concordant uranium–lead ages”. In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 62, pp. 665–676. DOI: [10.1016/S0016-7037\(98\)00059-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7037(98)00059-3).
- McLean, N. M. et al. (Dec. 2016). “Connecting the U–Th and U–Pb Chronometers: New Algorithms and Applications”. In: *AGU Fall Meeting Abstracts*.
- Stacey, J. and J. Kramers (1975). “Approximation of terrestrial lead isotope evolution by a two-stage model”. In: *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 26.2, pp. 207–221.
- Vermeesch, P. (2020). “Unifying the U–Pb and Th–Pb methods: joint isochron regression and common Pb correction”. In: *Geochronology* 2.1, pp. 119–131.
- (2021). “On the treatment of discordant detrital zircon U–Pb data”. In: *Geochronology* 3, pp. 247–257. DOI: [10.5194/gchron-3-247-2021](https://doi.org/10.5194/gchron-3-247-2021).

# Chapter 16

## Pb–Pb and Th–Pb

The Pb–Pb and Th–Pb methods are extensions of the U–Th–Pb method that do not require measuring uranium. Although Chapter 15 did discuss  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ages and the U–Th–Pb concordia diagram and isochron, the applications of  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{232}\text{Th}$  discussed in this chapter are sufficiently different to warrant separate discussion. The Pb–Pb method applies the full  $^{204}\text{Pb}$ – $^{206}\text{Pb}$ – $^{207}\text{Pb}$  composition of cogenetic minerals to construct isochrons. This method plays a fundamental role in unravelling the early history of the solar system, and has been used to date the formation of our planet. The Th–Pb method behaves very much like the Rb–Sr, Sm–Nd and other simple parent-daughter chronometers, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 18.

### 16.1 Pb–Pb

Pb–Pb data can be supplied in three data formats:

1. ‘Normal’:  $\frac{06}{04}$ , err  $\left[\frac{06}{04}\right]$ ,  $\frac{07}{04}$ , err  $\left[\frac{07}{04}\right]$ ,  $r\left[\frac{06}{04}, \frac{07}{04}\right]$
2. ‘Inverse’:  $\frac{04}{06}$ , err  $\left[\frac{04}{06}\right]$ ,  $\frac{07}{06}$ , err  $\left[\frac{07}{06}\right]$ ,  $(r\left[\frac{04}{06}, \frac{07}{06}\right])$
3. ‘Three ratios’:  $\frac{06}{04}$ , err  $\left[\frac{06}{04}\right]$ ,  $\frac{07}{04}$ , err  $\left[\frac{07}{04}\right]$ ,  $\frac{07}{06}$ , err  $\left[\frac{07}{06}\right]$

Format 3 can be converted to format 1 using Equation 15.2, and format 1 can be converted to format 2 using the following expression:

$$\begin{cases} x' = \frac{1}{x} \\ y' = \frac{x}{y} \\ \left(\frac{s[x']}{x'}\right)^2 = \left(\frac{s[x]}{x}\right)^2 \\ \left(\frac{s[y']}{y'}\right)^2 = \left(\frac{s[x]}{x}\right)^2 - 2\rho_{x,y} \left(\frac{s[x]}{x}\right) \left(\frac{s[y]}{y}\right) + \left(\frac{s[y]}{y}\right)^2 \\ \rho_{x'y'} = \left(\frac{x'}{s[x']}\right) \left[ \left(\frac{y}{s[y]}\right) - \rho_{xy} \left(\frac{x}{s[x]}\right) \right] \end{cases} \quad (16.1)$$

where  $x = [06/04]$  and  $y = [07/04]$ ,  $x' = [04/06]$  and  $y' = [04/07]$ . This transformation is perfectly symmetric in the sense that it can also be used to convert inverse isochron ratios to conventional ones, so that  $x' = [06/04]$  and  $y' = [07/04]$ ,  $x = [04/06]$  and  $y = [04/07]$ .

### 16.2 (inverse) isochrons

The ‘normal’ and ‘inverse’ monikers for the first two Pb–Pb input formats refers to their use for isochron regression:

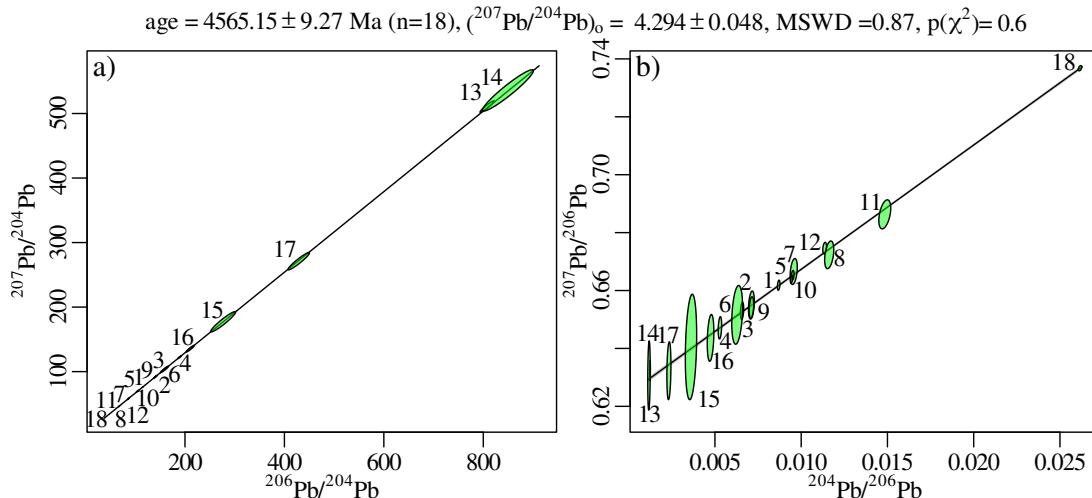


Figure 16.1: a) conventional and b) inverse isochron plot for a Pb–Pb dataset of carbonaceous chondrules, which date the oldest meteorites in the solar system. The aliquots are numbered to facilitate the comparison of the two plots. The most radiogenic aliquots plot in the upper right corner of the conventional isochron, and in the lower left corner of the inverse isochron diagram. The conventional isochron places the least abundant isotope ( $^{204}\text{Pb}$ ) in the denominator, which caused strong error correlations for reasons that are explained in Section 13.5. These correlations are greatly reduced when the more abundant  $^{206}\text{Pb}$  is used as a common denominator.

The Pb–Pb age is proportional to the slope of a conventional isochron, and to the y-intercept of the inverse isochron. Conversely, the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ -ratio of the common Pb is given by the y-intercept of the conventional isochron, and by the slope of the inverse isochron. Provided that the analytical uncertainties are reasonably small compared to the measured isotopic ratios (< 5%, say), the estimated age and common Pb composition are identical for both approaches.

### 16.3 The Stacey-Kramers growth curve

As previously discussed in Section 15.4 and quantified by Equations 15.13–15.15, the mantle evolution model of Stacey and Kramers (1975) describes the Pb composition of the mantle through geologic time. This model can be used for the common Pb correction of discordant samples, but can also be used to compute ‘model ages’ from Pb-rich mineral phases such as galena. It is also useful to compare whole rock Pb–Pb isochron ages with the mantle evolution model, in order to better understand the source of the source material from which the rock was derived. To facilitate this type of investigation, IsoplotR allows the Stacey and Kramers (1975) growth curve to be plotted alongside the isochron data, and estimates the intersection(s) between the isochron and the growth curve.

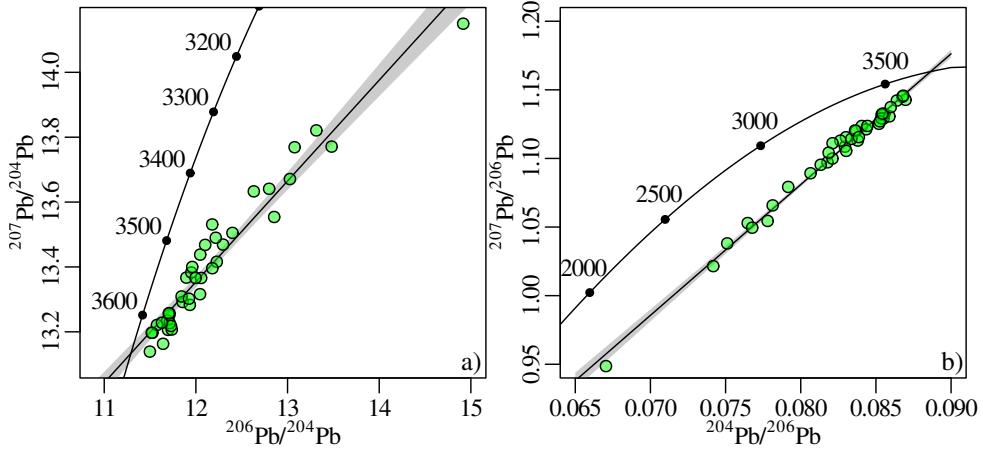


Figure 16.2: a) conventional and b) inverse model-2 whole rock Pb–Pb isochron of the Amîtsøq gneiss (Greenland, Kamber and Moorbathe, 1998), with the Stacey and Kramers (1975) growth curve. The close agreement between the isochron age ( $3550 \pm 130$  Ma) and the model age (3650 Ma) suggest that the magmatic precursor of the Amîtsøq orthogneiss was extracted from the mantle shortly before its formation.

## 16.4 Th–Pb

The Th–Pb method applies to minerals (such as allanite and monazite) that are rich in Th and relatively poor in U. IsoplotR accepts Th–Pb data in three formats that are similar to the Pb–Pb data formats:

1. ‘Normal’:  $\frac{32}{04}$ , err $[\frac{32}{04}]$ ,  $\frac{08}{04}$ , err $[\frac{08}{04}]$ , r $[\frac{08}{04}, \frac{08}{04}]$
2. ‘Inverse’:  $\frac{32}{08}$ , err $[\frac{32}{08}]$ ,  $\frac{04}{08}$ , err $[\frac{04}{08}]$ , (r $[\frac{32}{08}, \frac{04}{08}]$ )
3. ‘Three ratios’:  $\frac{32}{04}$ , err $[\frac{32}{04}]$ ,  $\frac{08}{04}$ , err $[\frac{08}{04}]$ ,  $\frac{32}{08}$ , err $[\frac{32}{08}]$

where format 3 can be converted to format 1 using Equation 15.2, and format 1 can be converted to format 2 (and vice versa) using Equation 16.1. As the names of the formats suggest, Th–Pb data can be used to form conventional and inverse isochrons, where the former place non-radiogenic  $^{204}\text{Pb}$  in the denominator, and the latter radiogenic  $^{208}\text{Pb}$ :

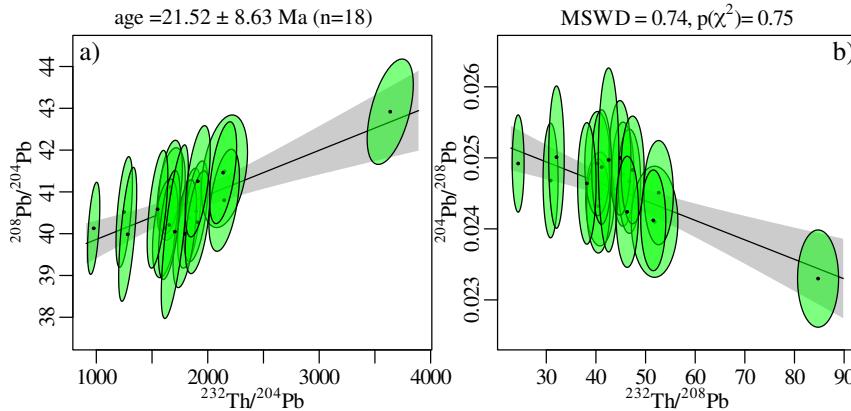


Figure 16.3: a) conventional and b) inverse model-1 isochron for the allanite Th–Pb data of Janots and Rubatto (2014). The age is proportional to the slope of the conventional isochron, and to the x-intercept of the inverse isochron. The common-Pb composition is given by the y-intercept.

## 16.5 Single grain ages

The Pb–Pb and Th–Pb methods are usually applied to multiple aliquots from the same sample, for which the isochron method can retrieve both the age and the non-radiogenic Pb components. However it can also be useful to inspect the ages of the individual aliquots, using radial plots, KDEs and CADs. There are two ways to do this:

1. Treat the aliquots together by projecting the isotopic ratio data onto the x-axis of the inverse isochron plot.

$$\left[ \frac{D}{P} \right]_i^* = \frac{b}{bx_i - y_i} \quad (16.2)$$

where  $[D/P]_i^*$  is the radiogenic daughter-to-parent ratio of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  aliquot,  $x_i$  and  $y_i$  are the independent and dependent variable of the inverse isochron diagram, and  $b$  is its slope.

2. Apply a nominal correction to each aliquot independently, by two point isochron regression. For example, in conventional isochron space:

$$\left[ \frac{D}{P} \right]_i^* = \frac{y_i - y_o}{x_i} \quad (16.3)$$

where  $y_o$  is the isotopic ratio of the inherited daughter component.

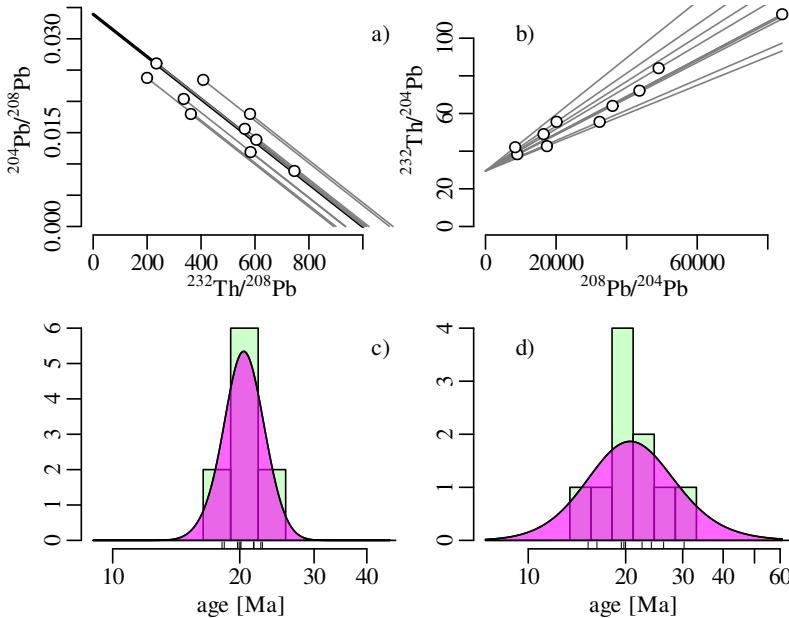


Figure 16.4: Single grain analysis of Th–Pb data by a) projecting each aliquot onto the x-axis of an inverse isochron, and b) individually correcting each aliquot by projection along a line that connects it to the common Pb composition on a conventional isochron diagram. The KDEs of the corresponding dates are shown in c) and d). The isochron-based approach yields less dispersed results.

## References

- Janots, E. and D. Rubatto (2014). “U–Th–Pb dating of collision in the external Alpine domains (Urseren zone, Switzerland) using low temperature allanite and monazite”. In: *Lithos* 184, pp. 155–166.
- Kamber, B. S. and S. Moorbath (1998). “Initial Pb of the Amitsoq gneiss revisited: implication for the timing of early Archaean crustal evolution in West Greenland”. In: *Chemical Geology* 150.1-2, pp. 19–41.
- Stacey, J. and J. Kramers (1975). “Approximation of terrestrial lead isotope evolution by a two-stage model”. In: *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 26.2, pp. 207–221.

# Chapter 17

## Ar–Ar and K–Ca

The Ar–Ar and K–Ca chronometers are based on the branched decay of  $^{40}\text{K}$  to  $^{40}\text{Ar}$  and  $^{40}\text{Ca}$ . The Ar–Ar is a widely used method that has replaced the K–Ar method in all but a few applications (Section 6). The K–Ca method is a less common method that is becoming more feasible due to analytical advances in SIMS, which have resolved the isobaric interference between  $^{40}\text{K}$  and  $^{40}\text{Ca}$  (Harrison et al., 2010). The original K–Ar method is not implemented in **IsoplotR** but may be added later.

### 17.1 Ar–Ar

**IsoplotR** offers three input formats for Ar–Ar data, which all require the user to provide the J factor and its standard error (Section 6.2), as well as the following columns of isotopic ratio data:

1. ‘Normal’:  $\frac{40}{36}$ ,  $\text{err}[\frac{40}{36}]$ ,  $\frac{39}{36}$ ,  $\text{err}[\frac{39}{36}]$ ,  $r[\frac{40}{36}, \frac{39}{36}]$ , (39)
2. ‘Inverse’:  $\frac{39}{40}$ ,  $\text{err}[\frac{39}{40}]$ ,  $\frac{36}{40}$ ,  $\text{err}[\frac{36}{40}]$ ,  $(r[\frac{39}{40}, \frac{36}{40}])$ , (39)
3. ‘Three ratios’:  $\frac{39}{40}$ ,  $\text{err}[\frac{39}{40}]$ ,  $\frac{36}{40}$ ,  $\text{err}[\frac{36}{40}]$ ,  $\frac{39}{36}$ ,  $\text{err}[\frac{39}{36}]$ , (39)

where (39) stands for the amount of  $^{39}\text{Ar}$  in each heating step, which is normalised by **IsoplotR** to form the X-axis of an age spectrum (Section 17.2). Error correlations are much stronger for format 1 than for format 2 and are therefore compulsory for the former and optional for the latter. Just like the Pb–Pb and Th–Pb methods, the names of the formats refer to the normal and inverse isochrons that they form. Despite this nomenclature, both normal and inverse isochrons are available for all three methods, with **IsoplotR** converting them in the background using Equation 15.2 for the conversion from format 3 to format 2; and using Equation 16.1 to convert format 2 to format 1 and vice versa.

In complete analogy with Figure 16.4, single grain ages can be calculated by projecting co-genetic aliquots along an isochron, or by applying a nominal ‘excess argon’ correction to each aliquot separately. The latter approach typically uses the atmospheric argon composition, which is characterised by a  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  ratio of  $298.56 \pm 0.31$  (Lee et al., 2006). The resulting ages can then be visualised as radial plots, KDEs, or CADs:

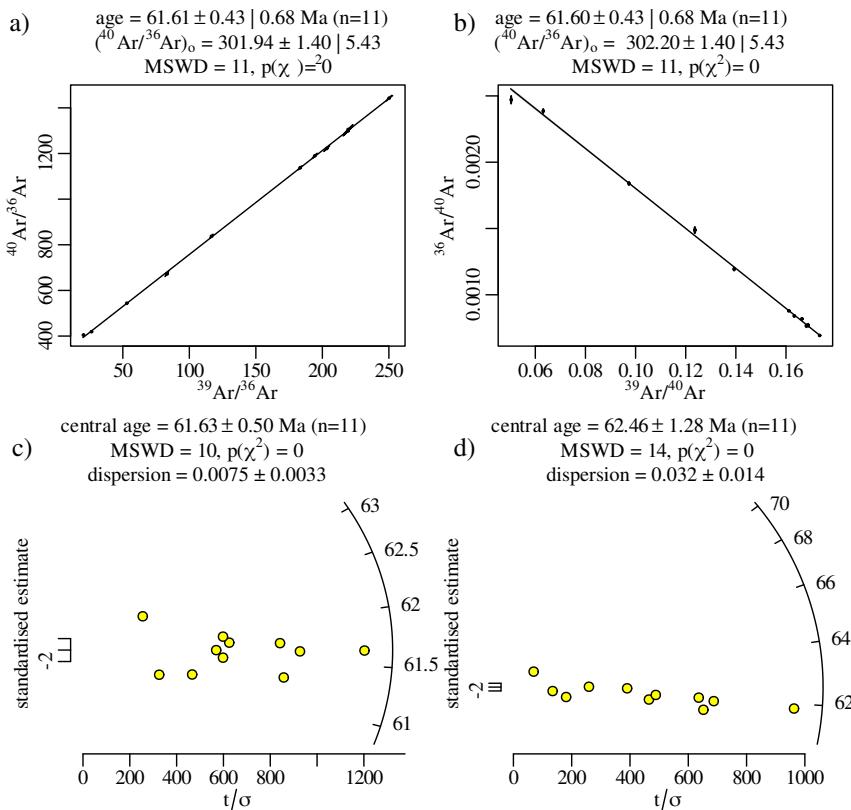


Figure 17.1: a) conventional and b) inverse model-1 isochron for Ar–Ar data. The non-radiogenic ('excess') argon is characterised by a  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  ratio of 302, which is slightly higher than atmosphere. c) shows a radial plot of the excess-Argon-corrected ages obtained by projecting the aliquots along the inverse isochron (just like in Figure 16.4.a). d) using the atmospheric ratio of  $298.56 \pm 0.31$  to correct each aliquot independently yields a slightly older and more dispersed distribution.

## 17.2 Age spectra

As explained in Section 6.2, the  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ -age spectrum is a useful tool to visualise stepwise heating measurements. Its appearance is based on the weighted mean plot (e.g., Figure 13.6), with the different heating steps arranged in order of increasing degree of degassing along the horizontal axis, and the width of the different sample boxes proportional to the corresponding amounts of  $^{39}\text{Ar}$ .

**IsoplotR** defines the 'plateau age' as the weighted mean age of the longest sequence (in terms of cumulative  $^{39}\text{Ar}$  content) of consecutive heating steps that pass the modified Chauvenet criterion of Section 14. Note that this definition is different (and simpler) than the one used by **Isoplot** (Ludwig, 2003). However, it is important to mention that all definitions of an age plateau are heuristic by nature and should not be used for quantitative inference.

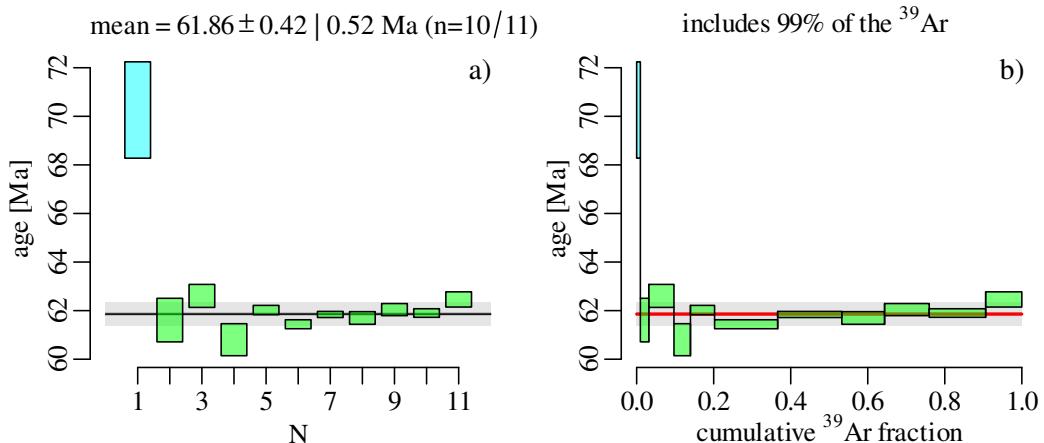


Figure 17.2: a) weighted mean and b) age spectrum for the Ar–Ar of Figure 17.1, using an atmospheric  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ -ratio for the non-radiogenic component. The plateau is shown in green and the single outlier in blue. The weighted mean age was calculated using an ordinary weighted mean. In this case the weighted mean age and the plateau age are the same but this is not always the case.

### 17.3 K–Ca

**IsoplotR** offers three input formats for K–Ca data:

1. ‘Normal’:  $\frac{^{40}\text{K}}{^{44}\text{Ca}}$ , err  $\left[\frac{^{40}\text{K}}{^{44}\text{Ca}}\right]$ ,  $\frac{^{40}\text{Ca}}{^{44}\text{Ca}}$ , err  $\left[\frac{^{40}\text{Ca}}{^{44}\text{Ca}}\right]$ ,  $r \left[ \frac{^{40}\text{K}}{^{44}\text{Ca}}, \frac{^{40}\text{Ca}}{^{44}\text{Ca}} \right]$
2. ‘Inverse’:  $\frac{^{40}\text{K}}{^{40}\text{Ca}}$ , err  $\left[\frac{^{40}\text{K}}{^{40}\text{Ca}}\right]$ ,  $\frac{^{44}\text{Ca}}{^{40}\text{Ca}}$ , err  $\left[\frac{^{44}\text{Ca}}{^{40}\text{Ca}}\right]$ ,  $r \left[ \frac{^{40}\text{K}}{^{40}\text{Ca}}, \frac{^{44}\text{Ca}}{^{40}\text{Ca}} \right]$
3. ‘Three ratios’:  $\frac{^{40}\text{K}}{^{44}\text{Ca}}$ , err  $\left[\frac{^{40}\text{K}}{^{44}\text{Ca}}\right]$ ,  $\frac{^{40}\text{Ca}}{^{44}\text{Ca}}$ , err  $\left[\frac{^{40}\text{Ca}}{^{44}\text{Ca}}\right]$ ,  $\frac{^{40}\text{K}}{^{40}\text{Ca}}$ , err  $\left[\frac{^{40}\text{K}}{^{40}\text{Ca}}\right]$

where, in contrast with previous formatting summaries, the full names of the nuclides are given because of the isobaric parent and daughter. It is precisely this isobary that prevented the K–Ca from being applicable by in-situ methods until recently. Formats 1, 2 and 3 can be converted to each other using Equations 15.2 and 16.1.

**IsoplotR** uses  $^{44}\text{Ca}$  as a normalising isotope because it is the most abundant of calcium’s non-radiogenic isotopes, accounting for up to 2% of the isotopic budget. Using a less abundant isotope such as  $^{42}\text{Ca}$  (< 0.647%),  $^{43}\text{Ca}$  (< 0.135%), or  $^{46}\text{Ca}$  (< 0.004%), would only increase the error correlations in conventional isochron space (which are already very strong as shown in Figure 13.7). However, **IsoplotR** also offers inverse isochrons, which greatly reduce these correlations as explained in Section 13.5 and shown in Figure 13.8.

### References

- Harrison, T. M. et al. (2010). “In situ  $^{40}\text{K}$ – $^{40}\text{Ca}$  ‘double-plus’ SIMS dating resolves Klokken feldspar  $^{40}\text{K}$ – $^{40}\text{Ar}$  paradox”. In: *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 299.3-4, pp. 426–433.
- Lee, J.-Y. et al. (2006). “A redetermination of the isotopic abundances of atmospheric Ar”. In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 70.17, pp. 4507–4512.
- Ludwig, K. R. (2003). “User’s manual for Isoplot 3.00: a geochronological toolkit for Microsoft Excel”. In: *Berkeley Geochronology Center Special Publication* 4.

## Chapter 18

# Rb–Sr, Sm–Nd, Lu–Hf and Re–Os

Rb–Sr, Sm–Nd, Lu–Hf and Re–Os all fall in the category of simple parent–daughter chronometers, which are based on a single parent that decays to a single daughter without additional complications such as branched decay or secular equilibrium. These chronometers usually involve liquid chromatography and mass spectrometry by TIMS or solution ICP-MS. Data can be introduced into **IsoplotR** in three formats:

1. ‘Normal’:  $\frac{P}{d}$ ,  $\text{err}\left[\frac{P}{d}\right]$ ,  $\frac{D}{d}$ ,  $\text{err}\left[\frac{D}{d}\right]$ ,  $r\left[\frac{P}{d}, \frac{D}{d}\right]$
2. ‘Inverse’:  $\frac{P}{D}$ ,  $\text{err}\left[\frac{P}{D}\right]$ ,  $\frac{d}{D}$ ,  $\text{err}\left[\frac{d}{D}\right]$ ,  $r\left[\frac{P}{D}, \frac{d}{D}\right]$
3. ‘Concentrations’:  $P$ ,  $\text{err}[P]$ ,  $D$ ,  $\text{err}[D]$ ,  $P/D$

where

$P = {}^{87}\text{Rb}$ ,  ${}^{147}\text{Sm}$ ,  ${}^{187}\text{Re}$  or  ${}^{176}\text{Lu}$ .

$D = {}^{87}\text{Sr}$ ,  ${}^{143}\text{Nd}$ ,  ${}^{187}\text{Os}$  or  ${}^{176}\text{Hf}$ .

$d = {}^{86}\text{Sr}$ ,  ${}^{144}\text{Nd}$ ,  ${}^{188}\text{Os}$  or  ${}^{177}\text{Hf}$ .

$P$  = the elemental concentration (in ppm) of Rb, Sm, Re, or Lu.

$D$  = the elemental concentration (in ppm) of Sr, Nd, Os, or Hf.

Format 1 can be converted to format 2 (and vice versa) using Equation 16.1, whereas Format 3 can be converted to format 1 with the methods that were used in Chapter 10. For example, for Rb–Sr:

$$({}^{87}\text{Rb}/{}^{86}\text{Sr}) = \frac{\text{Rb}}{\text{Sr}} \frac{M(\text{Rb})}{M(\text{Sr})} \frac{1 + [{}^{87}\text{Sr}/{}^{86}\text{Sr}] [1 + ({}^{84}\text{Sr}/{}^{87}\text{Sr}) + ({}^{88}\text{Sr}/{}^{87}\text{Sr})]}{1 + [{}^{85}\text{Rb}/{}^{87}\text{Rb}]} \quad (18.1)$$

where  $({}^{84}\text{Sr}/{}^{87}\text{Sr})$ ,  $({}^{88}\text{Sr}/{}^{87}\text{Sr})$  and  $({}^{85}\text{Rb}/{}^{87}\text{Rb})$  are constant, non-radiogenic isotope ratios, and  $M(\text{Rb})$  and  $M(\text{Sr})$  are the molar masses of Rb and Sr, respectively. Because the measured  $({}^{87}\text{Sr}/{}^{86}\text{Sr})$ -ratio appears in Equation 18.1, the covariance between  ${}^{87}\text{Rb}/{}^{86}\text{Sr}$  and  ${}^{87}\text{Sr}/{}^{86}\text{Sr}$  is nonzero and can be estimated using Equation 9.9 or 9.10.

The parent–daughter pair methods are generally used to form multi-aliquot isochrons that can either be plotted in conventional or inverse isochron space. For the U–Pb, Ar–Ar, Pb–Pb and K–Ca methods, the nonradiogenic daughter isotope is less abundant than the radiogenic isotope. However this is not the case for the Rb–Sr, Sm–Nd, Re–Os and Lu–Hf methods. Their non-radiogenic isotopes (marked as ‘d’ above) tend to be more abundant than the radiogenic isotope and they therefore exhibit weaker error correlations in conventional isotope space. Nevertheless, **IsoplotR** does offer the inverse isochron as an option because it is may still be useful

to visualise the data as a simple mixing line between non-radiogenic and radiogenic components.

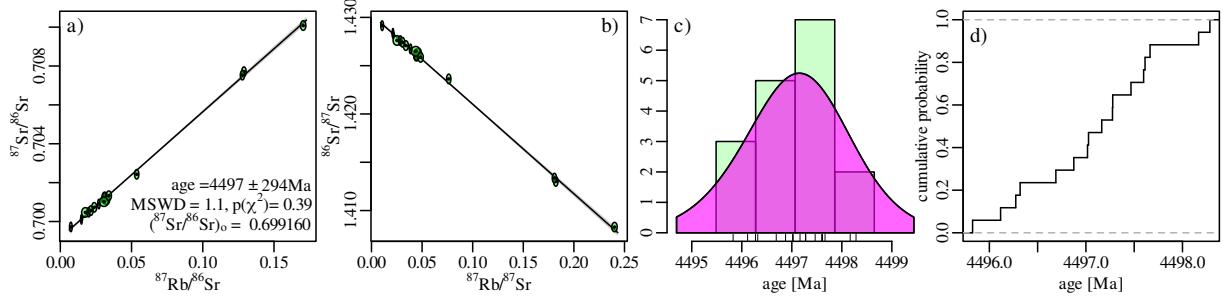


Figure 18.1: a) conventional and b) inverse Rb–Sr isochron, c) KDE and d) CAD of the single aliquot age estimates using the isochron intercept as a non-radiogenic  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ -ratio.

The distribution of the data around the best fit isochron can be visually assessed on radial plots, KDEs and CADs. This is achieved by projecting the data along parallel lines to the best fit in inverse isochron space as in Figure 16.4.a. Alternatively, the assumption of cogenetic origin may be relaxed by fixing the non-radiogenic composition and computing two-point isochrons between this composition and the measured ratios for each aliquot (Figure 16.4.b).

# Chapter 19

## U–Th–(Sm)–He

**IsoplotR** offers a single input format for U–Th–(Sm)–He data that can be captured by the following columns:

He, err[He], U, err[U], Th, err[Th], Sm, err[Sm]

which contains all the necessary information to calculate the age. Rewriting Equation 7.1:

$$\begin{aligned} [{}^4\text{He}] &= a(t)[\text{U}] + b(t)[\text{Th}] + c(t)[\text{Sm}] \\ \text{where } a(t) &= \left[ 8 \frac{137.818}{138.818} (e^{\lambda_{238}t} - 1) + 7 \frac{1}{138.818} (e^{\lambda_{235}t} - 1) \right] \\ b(t) &= 6(e^{\lambda_{232}t} - 1) \\ \text{and } c(t) &= 0.1499(e^{\lambda_{147}t} - 1) \end{aligned} \quad (19.1)$$

Because Sm (1) produces only one  $\alpha$ -particle per decay event; (2) has a very long half-life; and (3) its radioactive isotope 147 only accounts for 14.99% of total samarium, Sm can be ignored as a parent in all but the most Sm-rich samples. For this reason, some laboratories do not measure Sm at all, and the ‘Sm’ and ‘err[Sm]’ columns are optional. If omitted, **IsoplotR** will simply assume that the Sm-concentration is zero.

The He, U, Th (and Sm) measurements must be expressed in internally consistent **atomic units** such as mol, fmol, pmol, mol/cc, fmol/ $\mu\text{g}$  etc. They must not be expressed in mass units such as ppm, ppb or wt%. For U and Sm, which are poly-isotopic elements, it is the total amount that is required, and not just  $^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{147}\text{Sm}$ . A second important requirement is that the data have been corrected for  **$\alpha$ -ejection** prior to analysis, as explained in the next section.

### 19.1 The $\alpha$ -ejection correction

Helium, like argon, is a noble gas that is lost to the environment (and eventually to space) at high temperatures by volume diffusion. Additional complication is added by the physical separation of the parent and daughter nuclides in the U-Th-(Sm)-He system. This separation results from the energy released during  $\alpha$ -decay, which displaces the  $\alpha$ -particles by up to 16  $\mu\text{m}$  and may result in the ejection of helium produced by parent atoms that are sited near the edges of the host mineral. That lost helium must be taken into account when interpreting the thermal history of a sample. For rapidly cooled samples, this can be done by applying a geometric correction to the U, Th and Sm-measurements. For a sphere:

$$F_T = 1 - \frac{3}{4} \frac{S}{R} + \frac{1}{16} \left[ \frac{S}{R} \right]^3 \quad (19.2)$$

where  $F_T$  is the fraction of helium that is retained in the grain,  $r$  is the radius of a sphere with equivalent surface-to-volume ratio as the mineral habit of interest, and  $S$  is the  $\alpha$ -stopping distance:

mineral	$^{238}\text{U}$	$^{235}\text{U}$	$^{232}\text{Th}$	$^{147}\text{Sm}$
apatite	18.81	21.80	22.25	5.93
zircon	15.55	18.05	18.43	4.76
sphene	17.46	20.25	20.68	5.47

Table 19.1:  $\alpha$ -stopping distances ( $S$ ) in  $\mu\text{m}$ .

Most minerals are not spherical but elongated prismatic, and can be approximated to a first degree as cylinders with radius  $r$  and height  $h$ :

$$F_T = 1 - \frac{1}{2} \frac{(r+h)S}{rh} + 0.2122 \frac{S^2}{rh} + 0.0153 \frac{S^3}{r^3} \quad (19.3)$$

An extensive list of formulas for even more realistic geometric shapes is provided by Ketcham, Gautheron, and Tassan-Got (2011). The  $\alpha$ -ejection correction can be applied in one of three ways:

- For relatively young ( $< 100$  Ma) samples, the ejected helium can be mathematically restored to a good approximation by dividing the uncorrected U–Th–He age by  $F_T$  Farley, Wolf, and Silver (1996):

$$t^* \approx \frac{t}{\frac{a(t)[U]}{a(t)[U]+b(t)[Th]} \left( \frac{137.818}{138.818} F_T^{238} + \frac{1}{138.818} F_T^{235} \right) + \frac{b(t)[Th]}{a(t)[U]+b(t)[Th]} F_T^{232}} \quad (19.4)$$

where  $t^*$  is the corrected age;  $a(t)$  and  $b(t)$  are defined in Equation 19.1; and  $F_T^{238}$ ,  $F_T^{235}$  and  $F_T^{232}$  are the  $\alpha$ -retention factors of  $^{238}\text{U}$ ,  $^{235}\text{U}$  and  $^{232}\text{Th}$ , respectively.

- More accurate results are obtained by dividing not the age but the helium concentrations by the  $\alpha$ -retention factor (Min et al., 2003; Vermeesch, 2008):

$$[\text{He}^*] = \frac{[\text{He}]}{\frac{a(t)[U]}{a(t)[U]+b(t)[Th]} \left( \frac{137.818}{138.818} F_T^{238} + \frac{1}{138.818} F_T^{235} \right) + \frac{b(t)[Th]}{a(t)[U]+b(t)[Th]} F_T^{232}} \quad (19.5)$$

and then plugging  $[\text{He}^*]$  into Equation 19.1 instead of  $[\text{He}]$ . The difference between Equations 19.4 and 19.5 can reach several percent for early Precambrian ages.

- The most accurate approach to  $\alpha$ -ejection correction is to adjust not the radiogenic daughter product but the radioactive parents:

$$[^{238}\text{U}^*] = \frac{[^{238}\text{U}]}{F_T^{238}}, \quad [^{235}\text{U}^*] = \frac{[^{235}\text{U}]}{F_T^{235}}, \quad \text{and } [^{232}\text{Th}^*] = \frac{[^{232}\text{Th}]}{F_T^{232}} \quad (19.6)$$

and then substituting  $[^{238}\text{U}^*]$ ,  $[^{235}\text{U}^*]$  and  $[^{232}\text{Th}^*]$  for  $[^{238}\text{U}]$ ,  $[^{235}\text{U}]$  and  $[^{232}\text{Th}]$  in Equation 19.1.

**IsoplotR** assumes that the  $\alpha$ -ejection correction has been applied to the data **prior** to age calculation. This must be done using either method 2 or 3 above.

## 19.2 Isochrons

More often than not, and more often than for other geochronometers, U-Th-(Sm)-He data are overdispersed with respect to the analytical uncertainties. Several mechanisms have been invoked to explain this overdispersion, including compositional effects, radiation damage, and breakage during mineral separation.

**IsoplotR** implements four different ways to visualise, average and quantify the overdispersion. The first two of these are the weighted mean and radial plot, which were discussed in Sections 14.1 and 14.3. The third way is the isochron plot and age. This uses a first order approximation of the U–Th–He age equation:

$$t \approx \frac{[{}^4\text{He}]}{P}, \text{ where } P = \left[ 8 \frac{137.818}{138.818} \lambda_{38} + 7 \frac{1}{138.818} \lambda_{35} \right] [\text{U}] + 6 \lambda_{32} [\text{Th}] \quad (19.7)$$

which is accurate to better than 1% for ages less than 100 Ma (Vermeesch, 2008). A U–Th–He isochron is constructed by plotting the numerator of the right-hand side of Equation 19.7 against the denominator and fitting a straight line through several aliquots of the same sample:

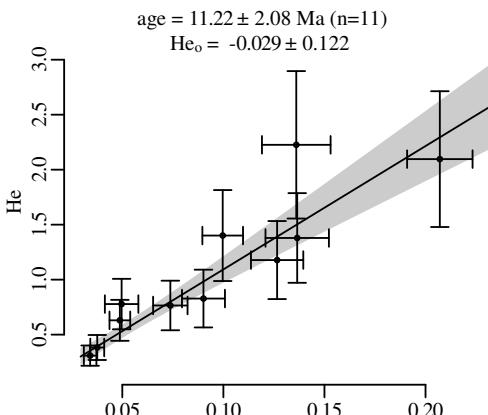


Figure 19.1: U–Th–He isochron with a model-3 fit. Because the parent and daughter nuclides are analysed separately on different mass spectrometers, their uncertainties are uncorrelated with each other. Hence the data are shown as error crosses instead of error ellipses.

## 19.3 Compositional data analysis and the ‘helioplot’

The fourth and final way to visualise and average U–Th–He data is based on the fact that U, Th and He are *compositional* data. This means that it is not so much the absolute concentrations of these elements that bear the chronological information, but rather their relative proportions. Equation 19.1 can be recast in terms of the elemental ratios U/He, Th/He, which take on strictly positive values:

$$a(t) \frac{[\text{U}]}{[\text{He}]} + b(t) \frac{[\text{Th}]}{[\text{He}]} = 1 \quad (19.8)$$

The space of all possible U–Th–He compositions fits within the constraints of a ternary diagram. If Sm is included as well, then this expands to a three-dimensional tetrahedral space (Vermeesch, 2008). The **central age** is obtained by first computing the average U–Th–He composition of a multi-sample dataset, and then calculating the U–Th–He corresponding to that composition. This is a similar procedure to the two-step process that was used to compute concordia ages in Section 15.2. Unfortunately, averaging compositional data is not as straightforward as one may think. Consider, for example, the following ternary dataset:

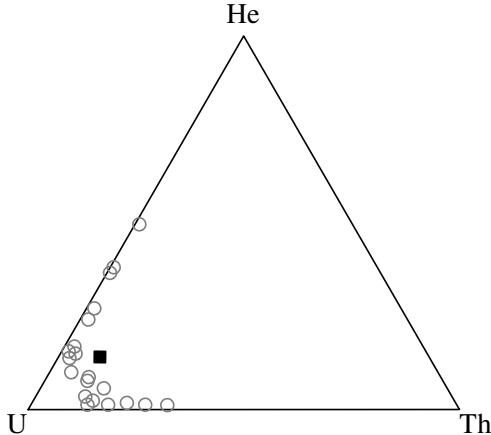


Figure 19.2: The U–Th–He age equation is scale invariant in the sense that the three elements can be renormalised to unity without loss of chronological information. This figure shows a synthetic dataset of 20 scattered U–Th–He measurements (grey circles). The arithmetic mean composition of the dataset is shown as a black square. It plots outside the data cloud, and is therefore not representative of the data.

Aitchison (1986) showed that the natural way to process compositional data is by subjecting them to a **logratio transformation**. In the case of the U–Th–He system, the logratio analysis is achieved by first defining two new variables:

$$u \equiv \ln\left(\frac{[U]}{[He]}\right), v \equiv \ln\left(\frac{[Th]}{[He]}\right) \quad (19.9)$$

and then performing the desired statistical analysis (averaging, uncertainty propagation, ...) on the transformed data. Upon completion of the mathematical operations, the results can then be mapped back to U–Th–(Sm)–He space using an inverse logratio transformation:

$$[He] = \frac{1}{[e^u + e^v + 1]}, [U] = \frac{e^u}{[e^u + e^v + 1]}, [Th] = \frac{e^v}{[e^u + e^v + 1]} \quad (19.10)$$

where  $[He] + [U] + [Th] = 1$ .

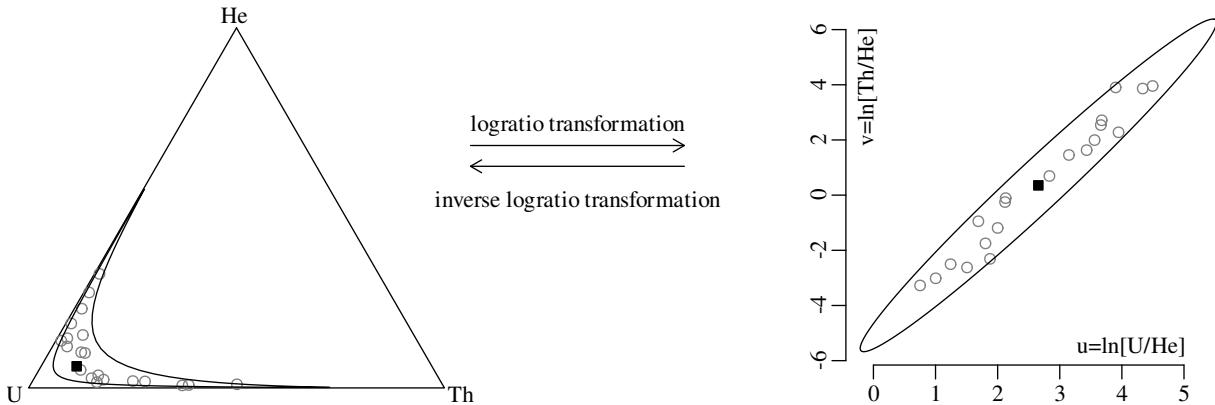


Figure 19.3: The logratio transformation maps data from an  $n$ -dimensional compositional space to an  $(n - 1)$ -dimensional Euclidean space. For the U–Th–He data, it maps the data from a ternary diagram ( $n = 3$ ) to a bivariate ( $n - 1 = 2$ ) dataspace using Equation 19.9. In this transformed space, it is safe to calculate the arithmetic mean (black square) and confidence regions (black ellipse). After completion of these calculations, the result can be mapped back to the ternary diagram using the inverse logratio transformation (Equation 19.10).

In the context of U–Th–He dating, the central age is defined as the age that corresponds to the arithmetic mean composition in logratio space. IsoplotR’s `helioplot` function performs this calculation using the same algorithm that is used to obtain the weighted mean U–Pb composition for the concordia age calculation (Section 15.2).

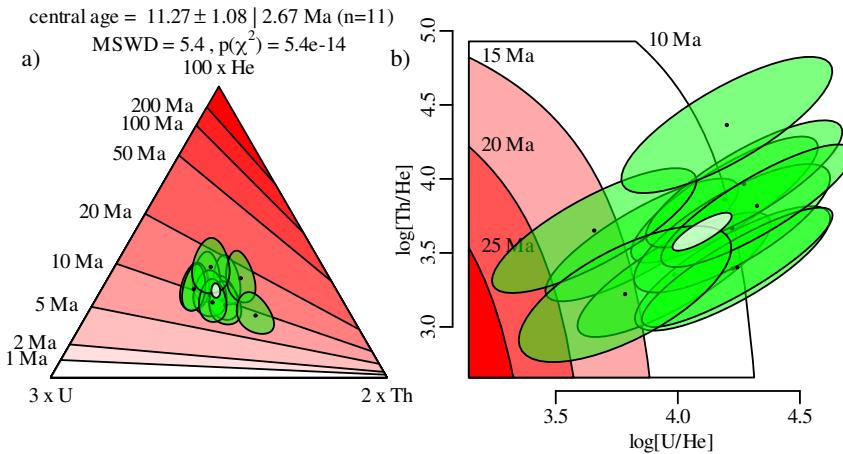


Figure 19.4: a) ternary diagram and b) logratio diagram or ‘helioplot’ of the U–Th–He data from Figure 19.1. The white ellipse marks the average U–Th–He composition.

Overdispersion is treated similarly as in a regression context (Section 13.6). Thus, there are options to augment the uncertainties with a factor  $\sqrt{\text{MSWD}}$  (model-1); to ignore the analytical uncertainties altogether (model-2); or to add an overdispersion term to the analytical uncertainties (model-3). The helioplot diagram provides a convenient way to simultaneously display the isotopic composition of samples and their chronological meaning. In this respect, they fulfil the same purpose as the U–Pb concordia diagram (Section 15.2) and the U–series evolution plot (Section 21.3).

## References

- Aitchison, J. (1986). *The statistical analysis of compositional data*. London, Chapman and Hall, p. 416.
- Farley, K. A., R. A. Wolf, and L. T. Silver (1996). “The effects of long alpha-stopping distances on (U-Th)/He ages”. In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 60, pp. 4223–4229. DOI: 10.1016/S0016-7037(96)00193-7.
- Ketcham, R. A., C. Gautheron, and L. Tassan-Got (2011). “Accounting for long alpha-particle stopping distances in (U–Th–Sm)/He geochronology: refinement of the baseline case”. In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 75.24, pp. 7779–7791.
- Min, K. et al. (2003). “Single grain (U–Th)/He ages from phosphates in Acapulco meteorite and implications for thermal history”. In: *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 209.3-4, pp. 323–336.
- Vermeesch, P. (2008). “Three new ways to calculate average (U–Th)/He ages”. In: *Chemical Geology* 249, pp. 339–347.

# Chapter 20

## Fission tracks

`IsoplotR` accepts three types of fission track data:

1. ‘EDM’:  $\zeta$ ,  $\text{err}[\zeta]$ ,  $\rho_D$ ,  $\text{err}[\rho_D]$ ,  $N_s$ ,  $N_i$
2. ‘ICP ( $\zeta$ )’:  $\zeta$ ,  $\text{err}[\zeta]$ , spot size ( $\mu\text{m}$ ),  $N_s$ ,  $A$  ( $\mu\text{m}^2$ ),  $U_1$ ,  $\text{err}[U_1]$ , ...,  $U_n$ ,  $\text{err}[U_n]$
3. ‘ICP (absolute)’: mineral, spot size ( $\mu\text{m}$ ),  $N_s$ ,  $A$  ( $\mu\text{m}^2$ ),  $U_1$ ,  $\text{err}[U_1]$ , ...,  $U_n$ ,  $\text{err}[U_n]$

$\zeta$ ,  $\text{err}[\zeta]$ ,  $\rho_D$ ,  $\text{err}[\rho_D]$ , and ‘spot size’ are scalars, whereas  $N_s$ ,  $N_i$ ,  $A$ ,  $U_i$  and  $\text{err}[U_i]$  are vectors. ‘mineral’ is a text string that either equals `apatite` or `zircon`. The three formats represent two different approaches to fission track dating:

1. The External Detector Method (EDM, Hurford and Green, 1983) implements the neutron irradiation method that was previously introduced in Section 7.2.
2. The ‘ICP’ method uses LA-ICP-MS (see Section 3.1) to determine the  $^{238}\text{U}$ -content of fission track samples. The main reasons for this change are the increased throughput achieved by not having to irradiate samples and the ease of double-dating apatite and zircon with the U-Pb method.

### 20.1 The external detector method

Recall the fission track age equation from Section 7.2:

$$t = \frac{1}{\lambda_{38}} \ln \left( 1 + \frac{g_i}{g_s} \lambda_{38} \zeta \rho_d \frac{N_s}{N_i} \right) \quad (20.1)$$

The fission track method has been a test bed of statistical approaches that have subsequently been adopted by other chronometers. A case in point is the radial plot, which is uniquely suited to deal with the large and highly variable (‘heteroscedastic’) counting uncertainties of fission track data. Spontaneous fission is accurately described by a Poisson distribution. For young and/or uranium-poor samples, there is a finite probability that the spontaneous track count is zero for some grains. To accommodate such zero values, it is customary to use an arcsine transformation for radial plots instead of the usual logarithmic transformation (Galbraith, 1990):

$$z_j = \arcsin \sqrt{\frac{N_{sj} + 3/8}{N_{sj} + N_{ij} + 3/4}} \quad (20.2)$$

and

$$\sigma_j = \frac{1}{2\sqrt{N_{sj} + N_{ij} + 1/2}} \quad (20.3)$$

The arithmetic mean is not a reliable estimator of the true age, for a similar reason why the arithmetic mean is not the best estimator of the average U–Th–He composition and age. The Poisson distribution is positively skewed, and this biases the arithmetic mean. The solution is similar as for the U–Th–He method, namely:

1. Take the average logarithm of the spontaneous and induced track densities.
2. Compute the fission track age the corresponds to this average ratio.

This procedure again gives rise to a ‘central age’. Fission track data are often overdispersed with respect to the Poisson counting uncertainties, and this dispersion carries important thermal history information. It is therefore customary to compute the average track density ratio using a model-3 style random effects model, in which the true  $\rho_s/\rho_i$ -ratio is assumed to follow a log-normal distribution with location parameter  $\mu$  and scale parameter  $\sigma$  (Galbraith and Laslett, 1993):

$$\ln \left[ \frac{\rho_s}{\rho_i} \right] \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu, \sigma^2) \quad (20.4)$$

This model gives rise to a two-parameter log-likelihood function:

$$\mathcal{L}(\mu, \sigma^2) = \sum_{j=1}^n \ln f_j(\mu, \sigma^2) \quad (20.5)$$

where the probability mass function  $f_j(\mu, \sigma^2)$  is defined as:

$$f_j(\mu, \sigma^2) = \binom{N_{sj} + N_{ij}}{N_{sj}} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \frac{e^{\beta N_{sj}} (1 + e^{\beta})^{-N_{sj} - N_{ij}}}{\sigma \sqrt{2\pi} e^{(\beta - \mu)^2 / (2\sigma^2)}} d\beta \quad (20.6)$$

in which the fission track count ratios are subject to two sources of variation: the Poisson counting uncertainty and an ‘(over)dispersion’ factor  $\sigma$ . Maximising Eq. 20.5 results in two estimates  $\hat{\mu}$  and  $\hat{\sigma}$  and their respective standard errors. Substituting  $\exp[\hat{\mu}]$  for  $N_s/N_i$  in Equation 20.1 produces the desired central age.  $\hat{\sigma}$  estimates the overdispersion, and quantifies the excess scatter of the single grain ages which cannot be explained by the Poisson counting statistics alone. This dispersion can be just as informative as the central age itself, as it encodes geologically meaningful information about the compositional heterogeneity and cooling history of the sample.

## 20.2 LA-ICP-MS based fission track dating

The EDM continues to be the most widely used analytical protocol in fission track dating. However, over the past decade, an increasing number of laboratories have abandoned it and switched to LA-ICP-MS as a means of determining the uranium concentration of datable minerals, thus reducing sample turnover time and removing the need to handle radioactive materials (Hasebe et al., 2004; Chew and Donelick, 2012; Vermeesch, 2017). The statistical analysis of ICP-MS based FT data is less straightforward and less well developed than that of the EDM. The latter is based on simple ratios of Poisson variables, and forms the basis of a large edifice of statistical methods which cannot be directly applied to ICP-MS based data. The following paragraphs

summarise Vermeesch (2017)'s solution to these issues, as implemented in **IsoplotR**.

Two analytical approaches are being used in ICP-based fission track geochronology, which each correspond to a different data format:

1. The 'absolute dating' method is based on Equation 7.8:

$$t = \frac{1}{\lambda_{38}} \ln \left( 1 + \frac{\lambda_{38}}{\lambda_f} \frac{N_s}{[U]A_s R_e q} \right) \quad (20.7)$$

where  $N_s$  is the number of spontaneous tracks counted over an area  $A_s$ ,  $q$  is an 'efficiency factor' ( $\sim 0.93$  for apatite and  $\sim 1$  for zircon, Iwano and Danhara, 1998; Enkelmann and Jonckheere, 2003; Jonckheere, 2003; Soares et al., 2013) and  $[U]$  is the  $^{238}\text{U}$ -concentration (in atoms per unit volume) measured by LA-ICP-MS. Equation 20.7 requires an explicit value for  $\lambda_f$  and assumes that the etchable range ( $R_e$ ) is accurately known (Soares et al., 2014).

2. The  $\zeta$ -calibration method folds the etch efficiency, decay constant and etchable range into a  $\zeta$ -calibration factor akin to that used in the EDM:

$$t = \frac{1}{\lambda_{38}} \ln \left( 1 + \frac{1}{2} \lambda_{38} \zeta_{ICP} \frac{N_s}{A_s [U]} \right) \quad (20.8)$$

in which  $\zeta_{ICP}$  is determined by analysing a standard of known FT age (Hasebe et al., 2004). Note that, in contrast with the 'absolute' dating method, the  $\zeta$ -calibration method allows  $[U]$  to be expressed in any concentration units (e.g., ppm or wt% of total U) or even be replaced with the measured U/Ca-, U/Si- or U/Zr-ratios produced by the ICP-MS instrument.

### 20.3 Compositional zoning

Uranium-bearing minerals such as apatite and zircon often exhibit compositional zoning, whose effects must either be removed or quantified in order to ensure unbiased ages. Two approaches are used to deal with this issue:

1. The effect of compositional zoning can be *removed* by covering the entire counting area with one large laser spot (Soares et al., 2014) or a raster (Hasebe et al., 2004). The uncertainty of  $[U]$  is then simply given by the analytical uncertainty of the LA-ICP-MS measurements, which typically is an order of magnitude lower than the standard errors of induced track counts in the EDM.
2. Alternatively, the uranium-heterogeneity can be *quantified* by analysing multiple spots per analysed grain (Hasebe et al., 2009). This is why **IsoplotR** accommodates multiple uranium measurements per aliquot ( $U_1, \text{err}[U_1], \dots, U_n, \text{err}[U_n]$ )

It is commonly found that the scatter of the different uranium-measurements within each grain far exceeds the formal analytical uncertainty of each spot measurement. **IsoplotR** assumes that this dispersion is constant across all aliquots and follows a log-normal distribution:

$$\ln[U_{jk}] \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu_j, \sigma^2 + s[U]_{jk}^2) \quad (20.9)$$

where  $U_{jk}$  is the  $k^{\text{th}}$  (out of  $n_j$ ) uranium concentration measurement,  $s[U]_{jk}$  is its standard error, and  $\mu_j$  and  $\sigma^2$  are the (unknown) mean and variance of a Normal distribution. Note

that  $\mu_j$  is allowed to vary from grain to grain but  $\sigma$  is not.  $\mu_j$  and  $\sigma$  can be estimated using the method of maximum likelihood, and the corresponding geometric mean uranium concentrations ( $\exp[\mu_j]$ ) directly plugged into Equation 20.7.

To plot ICP-MS based fission track data on a radial plot, we can replace Equations 20.2 and 20.3 with

$$z_j = \ln(t_j), \quad (20.10)$$

$$\text{and } s_j = \sqrt{\left(\frac{s[\zeta]}{\zeta}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{s[U]}{U}\right)^2 + \frac{1}{N_s}} \quad (20.11)$$

respectively (Galbraith, 2010). Alternatively, a square root transformation may be more appropriate for young and/or U-poor samples:

$$z_j = \sqrt{t_j}, \quad (20.12)$$

$$\text{and } s_j = s[t_j] / (2\sqrt{t_j}) \quad (20.13)$$

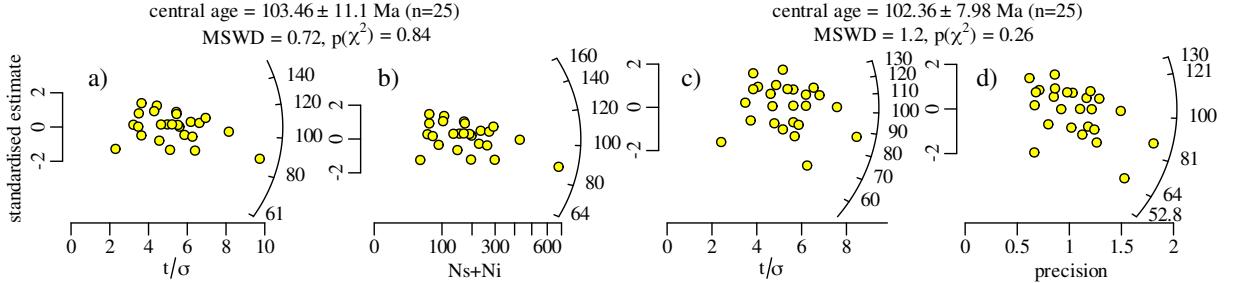


Figure 20.1: Radial plots of EDM-based fission track data using the a) logarithmic and b) arcsine transformation; and of ICP-based fission track data using the c) logarithmic and d) square root transformation.

## 20.4 Zero track counts

The standard error of a single grain fission track age estimate can be derived by standard error propagation. For the EDM, this yields:

$$s[t] \approx t \sqrt{\left(\frac{s[\zeta]}{\zeta}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{s[\rho_D]}{\rho_D}\right)^2 + \frac{1}{N_s} + \frac{1}{N_i}} \quad (20.14)$$

which returns an infinite uncertainty if either  $N_s$  or  $N_i$  is zero. For the EDM, this problem is adequately addressed by adding half a count to both the spontaneous and induced track count:

$$s[t] \approx t \sqrt{\left(\frac{s[\zeta]}{\zeta}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{s[\rho_D]}{\rho_D}\right)^2 + \frac{1}{N_s + \frac{1}{2}} + \frac{1}{N_i + \frac{1}{2}}} \quad (20.15)$$

This correction avoids the problem with zero or small counts whilst only having a minor effect on the accuracy of the estimate. Unfortunately this simple trick does not work for ICP-based fission track data, whose uncertainty estimates are given by (for the absolute dating approach):

$$s[t] \approx t \sqrt{\left(\frac{s[U]}{U}\right)^2 + \frac{1}{N_s}} \quad (20.16)$$

Adding half a count to the spontaneous fission track count would bias the data to a greater or lesser degree depending on whether the grain is poor or rich in uranium. One pragmatic solution to this problem is to approximate the ICP-MS based uranium concentration measurement with an ‘equivalent induced track density’, using the following linear transformation:

$$\hat{N}_{ij} = \rho_j A_{sj}[U_j] \quad (20.17)$$

where  $A_{sj}$  is the area over which the spontaneous tracks of the  $j^{th}$  grain have been counted and  $\rho_j$  plays a similar role as  $\rho_d$  in Eq. 7.9. From the requirement that the variance of a Poisson-distributed variable equals its mean, it follows that:

$$\hat{N}_{ij} = \rho_j^2 A_{sj}^2 s[U_j]^2 \quad (20.18)$$

from which it is easy to determine  $\rho_j$ . Thus the ICP-MS data have effectively been converted in to EDM data, and can be subjected to the same treatment as EDM data.

## References

- Chew, D. M. and R. A. Donelick (2012). “Combined apatite fission track and U-Pb dating by LA-ICP-MS and its application in apatite provenance analysis”. In: *Quantitative Mineralogy and Microanalysis of Sediments and Sedimentary Rocks: Mineralogical Association of Canada, Short Course 42*, pp. 219–247.
- Enkelmann, E and R Jonckheere (2003). “Correction factors for systematic errors related to the track counts in fission-track dating with the external detector method”. In: *Radiation Measurements* 36.1, pp. 351–356.
- Galbraith, R. F. (1990). “The radial plot: graphical assessment of spread in ages”. In: *Nuclear Tracks and Radiation Measurements* 17, pp. 207–214.
- (2010). “Statistics for LA-ICPMS fission track dating”. In: *Thermo2010 - 12th International Conference on Thermochronology, Glasgow*, p. 175.
- Galbraith, R. F. and G. M. Laslett (1993). “Statistical models for mixed fission track ages”. In: *Nuclear tracks and radiation measurements* 21.4, pp. 459–470.
- Hasebe, N. et al. (2004). “Apatite fission-track chronometry using laser ablation ICP-MS”. In: *Chemical Geology* 207.3, pp. 135–145.
- Hasebe, N. et al. (2009). “The effect of chemical etching on LA-ICP-MS analysis in determining uranium concentration for fission-track chronometry”. In: *Geological Society, London, Special Publications* 324.1, pp. 37–46.
- Hurford, A. J. and P. F. Green (1983). “The zeta age calibration of fission-track dating”. In: *Chemical Geology* 41, pp. 285 –317. ISSN: 0009-2541. DOI: 10.1016/S0009-2541(83)80026-6.
- Iwano, H and T Danhara (1998). “A re-investigation of the geometry factors for fission-track dating of apatite, sphene and zircon”. In: *Advances in Fission-Track Geochronology*. Springer, pp. 47–66.
- Jonckheere, R. (2003). “On the densities of etchable fission tracks in a mineral and co-irradiated external detector with reference to fission-track dating of minerals”. In: *Chemical Geology* 200.1, pp. 41–58.
- Soares, C. et al. (2014). “Novel calibration for LA-ICP-MS-based fission-track thermochronology”. In: *Physics and chemistry of minerals* 41.1, pp. 65–73.
- Soares, C. J. et al. (2013). “Further investigation of the initial fission-track length and geometry factor in apatite fission-track thermochronology”. In: *Am Mineral* 98, pp. 1381–1392.
- Vermeesch, P. (2017). “Statistics for LA-ICP-MS based fission track dating”. In: *Chemical Geology* 456, pp. 19–27.

# Chapter 21

## $^{230}\text{Th}$ -U

The general principles of U-series disequilibrium dating were laid out in Chapter 8. Recall that the radioactive decay of  $^{238}\text{U}$  to  $^{206}\text{Pb}$  produces short-lived  $^{230}\text{Th}$  ( $t_{1/2}=76$  kyr) and  $^{234}\text{U}$  ( $t_{1/2}=246$  kyr), which may fractionate by one of several mechanisms:

1. U and Th have contrasting chemical properties and are easily fractionated during chemical processes such as crystallisation. This fractionation disrupts any pre-existing state of secular equilibrium between  $^{230}\text{Th}$  and its parent nuclide  $^{234}\text{U}$ .
2. Preferential leaching of weakly sited  $^{234}\text{U}$  due to energetic recoil of the U-nucleus during  $^{238}\text{U}$ -decay enriches  $^{234}\text{U}$  relative to  $^{238}\text{U}$  in river and sea water.
3. Redox processes and repeated precipitation–dissolution cycles may fractionate  $^{234}\text{U}$  from  $^{238}\text{U}$ , especially in the presence of organic acids in soils. This can produce ground waters that are highly enriched in  $^{234}\text{U}$  relative to  $^{238}\text{U}$ .

Section 8.1 showed that the fractionation between  $^{234}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$  can be used to date marine carbonates; Section 8.2 showed that the fractionation between  $^{230}\text{Th}$  and  $^{234}\text{U}$  can be used to date young volcanic rocks; and Section 8.3 combined the two equations together in a single equation. Recall Equation 8.10:

$$\frac{A(^{230}\text{Th})}{A(^{238}\text{U})} = 1 - e^{-\lambda_{230}t} + \frac{\lambda_{230}}{\lambda_{230} - \lambda_{234}}(\gamma_o - 1) \left( e^{-\lambda_{234}t} - e^{-\lambda_{230}t} \right)$$

where  $A[*]$  is the activity of \* and  $\gamma_o$  is the oceanic  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio. This equation requires that  $\gamma_o$  is known and produces non-unique age solutions when  $A(^{230}\text{Th})/A(^{238}\text{U}) > 1$ . Both of these limitations can be avoided by recasting the equation into the following form:

$$\frac{A[^{230}\text{Th}] - A[^{230}\text{Th}]_o e^{-\lambda_{230}t}}{A[^{238}\text{U}]} = \frac{1 - e^{\lambda_{230}t} - \left( \frac{A[^{234}\text{U}]}{A[^{238}\text{U}]} - 1 \right) \left( \frac{\lambda_{230}}{\lambda_{234} - \lambda_{230}} \right) \left( 1 - e^{[\lambda_{234} - \lambda_{230}]t} \right)}{1 - e^{-\lambda_{230}t}} \quad (21.1)$$

where  $A[^{230}\text{Th}]_o$  is the ‘detrital’  $^{230}\text{Th}$  component, i.e. the  $^{230}\text{Th}$  that was already present in the sample at the time of its formation (Kaufman and Broecker, 1965; Ludwig, 2003). This component is unknown but can be estimated by isochron regression using long-lived  $^{232}\text{Th}$  as a normalising factor.

IsoplotR uses Equation 21.1 as the basis of all its U-series dating applications.

## 21.1 Data formats

**IsoplotR** accepts U-series data in four different formats:

1.  $\frac{38}{32}, s[\frac{38}{32}], \frac{34}{32}, s[\frac{34}{32}], \frac{30}{32}, s[\frac{30}{32}], r[\frac{38}{32}, \frac{34}{32}], r[\frac{38}{32}, \frac{30}{32}], r[\frac{34}{32}, \frac{30}{32}]$
2.  $\frac{32}{38}, s[\frac{32}{38}], \frac{34}{38}, s[\frac{34}{38}], \frac{30}{38}, s[\frac{30}{38}], r[\frac{32}{38}, \frac{34}{38}], r[\frac{32}{38}, \frac{30}{38}], r[\frac{34}{38}, \frac{30}{38}]$
3.  $\frac{38}{32}, s[\frac{38}{32}], \frac{30}{32}, s[\frac{30}{32}], r[\frac{38}{32}, \frac{30}{32}]$
4.  $\frac{32}{38}, s[\frac{32}{38}], \frac{30}{38}, s[\frac{30}{38}], r[\frac{32}{38}, \frac{30}{38}]$

where ‘30’, ‘32’, ‘34’ and ‘38’ stand for  $^{230}\text{Th}$ ,  $^{232}\text{Th}$ ,  $^{234}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$ , respectively. It is important to emphasise that, unlike all of **IsoplotR**’s other data formats, the numbers in these data tables are no atomic ratios but activity ratios. The relationship between activity ratios and atomic ratios is given by:

$$\frac{A(x)}{A(y)} \equiv \frac{\text{activity}(x)}{\text{activity}(y)} = \frac{\text{atoms}(x)}{\text{atoms}(y)} \frac{\lambda_x}{\lambda_y} \quad (21.2)$$

Formats 1 and 2 are applicable to carbonate lithologies in which both the  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{234}\text{U}$  and  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  equilibrium have been disturbed. Formats 3 and 4 are applicable to igneous rocks, in which only the  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{234}\text{U}$  activity ratio has been disturbed, but  $^{234}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$  are in secular equilibrium (see Section 8.2).

The error correlations of formats 1 and 3 tend to be stronger than those of formats 2 and 4. This is because formats 1 and 3 normalise the elements of the  $^{238}\text{U}$  decay series to the highly variable amount of detrital  $^{232}\text{Th}$ . In contrast, formats 2 and 4 feature only one ratio containing  $^{232}\text{Th}$ , thus reducing a source of shared variability.

## 21.2 Isochrons

For igneous samples, in which  $A[^{234}\text{U}]/A[^{238}\text{U}] = 1$ , the second term on the right-hand side of Equation 21.1 vanishes and we can write:

$$\left( \frac{A[^{230}\text{Th}]}{A[^{232}\text{Th}]} \right)_i = \left( \frac{A[^{230}\text{Th}]}{A[^{232}\text{Th}]} \right)_o e^{-\lambda_{230}t} + \left( \frac{A[^{238}\text{U}]}{A[^{232}\text{Th}]} \right)_i \left( 1 - e^{-\lambda_{230}t} \right) \quad (21.3)$$

for  $1 \leq i \leq n$ , which can be solved for  $t$  and  $(A[^{230}\text{Th}]/A[^{232}\text{Th}])_o$  using the least squares method of York et al. (2004). Equation 21.3 (which was previously derived as Equation 8.5) forms a ‘Rosholt’-type isochron, which is akin to a conventional isochron in Rb–Sr or Ar–Ar geochronology (Rosholt, 1976). Using  $A[^{238}\text{U}]$  as the normalising factor instead yields an ‘Osmond’-type isochron, which is akin to an inverse isochron in Ar–Ar or Pb–Pb geochronology (Osmond, May, and Tanner, 1970; Ludwig, 2003):

$$\left( \frac{A[^{230}\text{Th}]}{A[^{238}\text{U}]} \right)_i = \left( 1 - e^{\lambda_{230}t} \right) + \left( \frac{A[^{232}\text{Th}]}{A[^{238}\text{U}]} \right)_i \left( \frac{A[^{230}\text{Th}]}{A[^{232}\text{Th}]} \right)_o e^{-\lambda_{230}t} \quad (21.4)$$

Note that for the Rosholt isochron, the age is a function of the slope, whereas for the Osmond isochron, it is a function of the y-intercept.

For carbonate samples, in which  $^{234}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$  generally are not in secular equilibrium, three activity ratios are needed to determine the detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$  (and initial  $^{234}\text{U}$ ) component. This in turn requires three dimensional isochron regression of the  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ -,  $^{232}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ - and

$^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ -activity ratios. IsoplotR performs this calculation using the maximum likelihood algorithm of Ludwig and Titterington (1994). This solves the following system of equations<sup>1</sup>:

$$\begin{cases} \left[ \frac{^{234}\text{U}}{^{238}\text{U}} \right]_i = a + b \left[ \frac{^{232}\text{Th}}{^{238}\text{U}} \right]_i + \delta_i \\ \left[ \frac{^{230}\text{Th}}{^{238}\text{U}} \right]_i = \alpha + \beta \left[ \frac{^{232}\text{Th}}{^{238}\text{U}} \right]_i + \epsilon_i \end{cases} \quad (21.5)$$

where  $\delta_i$  and  $\epsilon_i$  are the bivariate normal residuals. Equation 21.5 can be solved by maximising the following log-likelihood function for  $x_i$ ,  $a$ ,  $b$ ,  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ :

$$\mathcal{LL} = \text{const.} - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n \begin{bmatrix} \left[ \frac{^{32}}{^{38}} \right]_i - x_i \\ \left[ \frac{^{34}}{^{38}} \right]_i - a - bx_i \\ \left[ \frac{^{30}}{^{38}} \right]_i - \alpha - \beta x_i \end{bmatrix}^T \begin{bmatrix} s \left[ \frac{^{32}}{^{38}} \right]_i^2 & s \left[ \frac{^{32}}{^{38}}, \frac{^{34}}{^{38}} \right]_i & s \left[ \frac{^{32}}{^{38}}, \frac{^{30}}{^{38}} \right]_i \\ s \left[ \frac{^{34}}{^{38}}, \frac{^{32}}{^{38}} \right]_i & s \left[ \frac{^{34}}{^{38}} \right]_i^2 & s \left[ \frac{^{34}}{^{38}}, \frac{^{30}}{^{38}} \right]_i \\ s \left[ \frac{^{30}}{^{38}}, \frac{^{32}}{^{38}} \right]_i & s \left[ \frac{^{30}}{^{38}}, \frac{^{34}}{^{38}} \right]_i & s \left[ \frac{^{30}}{^{38}} \right]_i^2 \end{bmatrix}^{-1} \begin{bmatrix} \left[ \frac{^{32}}{^{38}} \right]_i - x_i \\ \left[ \frac{^{34}}{^{38}} \right]_i - a - bx_i \\ \left[ \frac{^{30}}{^{38}} \right]_i - \alpha - \beta x_i \end{bmatrix} \quad (21.6)$$

which uses the shorthand notation introduced at the beginning of Section 21.1. The isochron age can be obtained by substituting the estimate of  $a$  for  $\left[ \frac{^{234}\text{U}}{^{238}\text{U}} \right]_i$  and  $\alpha$  for  $\left[ \frac{^{230}\text{Th}}{^{238}\text{U}} \right]_i$  in Equation 21.1, and setting  $A[^{230}\text{Th}]_o = 0$ . Additionally, the fit parameters ( $a$ ,  $b$ ,  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ ) can also be used to estimate the following quantities:

1.  $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})_0 = a$ : the authigenic  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio;
2.  $(^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th})_0 = \beta$ : the authigenic  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$  activity ratio;
3.  $(^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U})_0 = \alpha$ : the detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio;
4.  $(^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U})_i = 1 + (a - 1)e^{\lambda_{234}t}$ : the initial  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio.

The results of the three-dimensional isochron regression can be visualised in four possible ways:

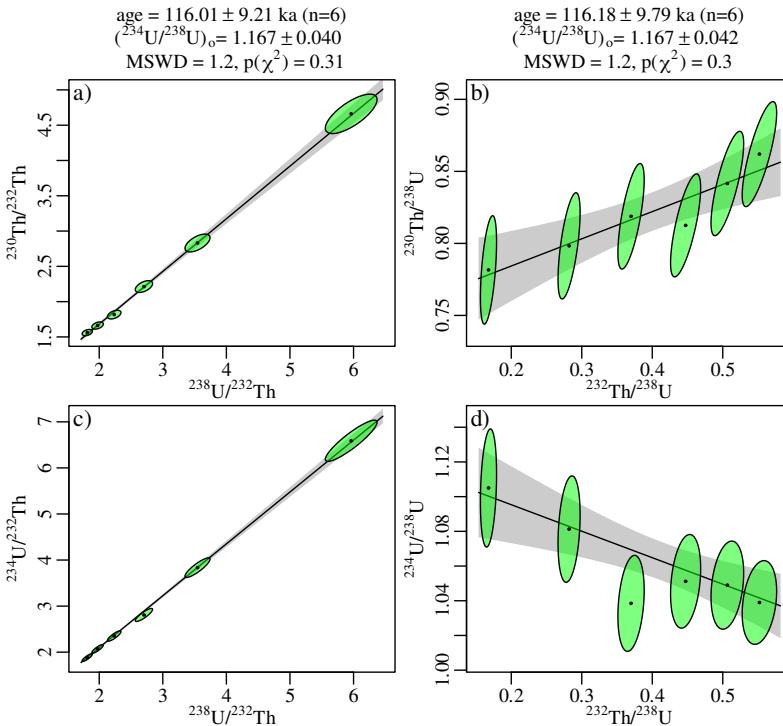


Figure 21.1: The same  $^{230}\text{Th}-\text{U}$  data shown on a) Rosholt type-I, b) Osmond type-I, c) Rosholt type-II and d) Osmond type-II isochron diagrams. Note the slight difference in the isochron age. This is due to the skewness of the uncertainty distribution, which does not allow negative values. This effect applies to all isochrons and is most prominent when the analytical uncertainties are relatively large compared to the activity ratios themselves. Solving this issue requires a reformulation of the isochron equation in terms of log-ratios, which has not yet been attempted.

<sup>1</sup>The same calculations can also be performed in ‘Rosholt space’, with  $^{232}\text{Th}$  as a common denominator, but an in-depth discussion of this is omitted for the sake of brevity.

### 21.3 Th–U evolution diagrams

In addition to (Rosholt and Osmond) isochrons and the usual weighted mean, radial, CAD and KDE plots, U-series data can also be visualised on Th–U evolution diagrams. For carbonate data, these consist of a scatter plot that sets out the  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ -activity ratios against the  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ -activity ratios as error ellipses, and displays the authigenic  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ -activity ratios and ages as a set of intersecting lines.

The Th–U evolution diagram has a similar purpose and appearance as the U–Pb concordia diagram (Section 15.2), which also displays compositions and dates simultaneously. An alternative way of doing so for carbonate samples is by plotting the initial  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ -ratios against the  $^{230}\text{Th}$ – $^{234}\text{U}$ – $^{238}\text{U}$ -ages. In both types of evolution diagrams, IsoplotR provides the option to project the raw measurements along the best fitting isochron line and thereby remove the detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$ -component. This procedure allows a visual assessment of the degree of homogeneity within a dataset, as is quantified by the MSWD.

Neither the U-series evolution diagram nor the  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  vs. age plot is applicable to igneous datasets, in which  $^{234}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$  are in secular equilibrium. For such datasets, IsoplotR produces an Rosholt type-I style regression plot that is decorated with a fanning set of isochron lines.

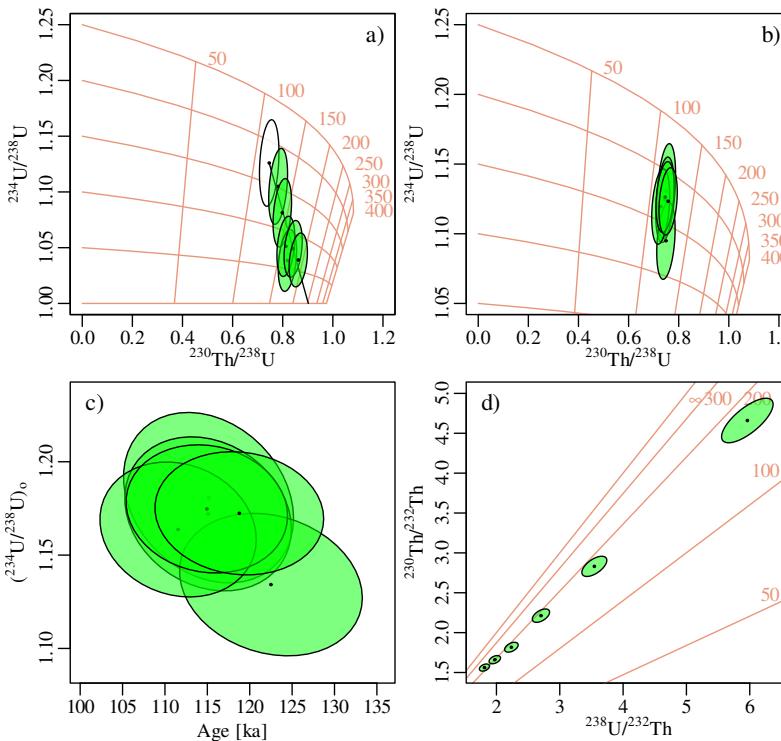


Figure 21.2: The data of Figure 21.1 visualised on a  $^{230}\text{Th}$ –U evolution diagram a) showing the raw data with an isochron fit and the inferred authigenic end member composition shown as a white ellipse; and b) showing the data projected along the isochron. c) shows the projected data in initial  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ -activity vs.  $^{230}\text{Th}$ –U age space. d) shows IsoplotR’s output for an evolution diagram of data formats 3 and 4. In this case the data are shown in Rosholt type-I space with isochrons shown in salmon red.

### References

- Kaufman, A. and W. Broecker (1965). “Comparison of  $\text{Th}^{230}$  and  $\text{C}^{14}$  ages for carbonate materials from Lakes Lahontan and Bonneville”. In: *Journal of geophysical Research* 70.16, pp. 4039–4054.
- Ludwig, K. R. (2003). “Mathematical–statistical treatment of data and errors for  $^{230}\text{Th/U}$  geochronology”. In: *Reviews in Mineralogy and Geochemistry* 52.1, pp. 631–656.

- Ludwig, K. R. and D. Titterington (1994). "Calculation of  $^{230}\text{Th}$ -U isochrons, ages, and errors". In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 58.22, pp. 5031–5042.
- Osmond, J., J. P. May, and W. Tanner (1970). "Age of the Cape Kennedy Barrier-and-Lagoon Complex". In: *Journal of Geophysical Research* 75.2, pp. 469–479.
- Rosholt, J. (1976). " $^{230}\text{Th}/^{234}\text{U}$  dating of travertine and caliche rinds". In: *Geological Society of America Abstracts with Programs*. Vol. 8, p. 1076.
- York, D. et al. (2004). "Unified equations for the slope, intercept, and standard errors of the best straight line". In: *American Journal of Physics* 72.3, pp. 367–375.

# Chapter 22

## Detrital geochronology

### 22.1 Maximum depositional age estimation

Detrital geochronology is often the only way to estimate the depositional age of siliciclastic rocks in the absence of fossils or volcanic ash layers. Detrital zircon U–Pb geochronology in particular has become a popular technique to obtain maximum depositional ages (MDAs). However other chronometers such as  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  can be used for this purpose as well, and are in fact often more useful than U–Pb. Numerous MDA estimation algorithms have been proposed over the years, such as:

1. the youngest single grain (YSG);
2. the youngest grain cluster at  $1\sigma$  (YGC $1\sigma$ ) or  $2\sigma$  (YGC $2\sigma$ );
3. the youngest detrital zircon estimated by Ludwig (2003)’s Monte Carlo resampling algorithm (YDZ);
4. the outcome of Ludwig and Mundil (2002)’s TuffZirc algorithm;
5. the weighted mean of the youngest three (Y3Z) or four (Y4Z) zircons;
6. the minimum age of grains selected by Gehrels (2003)’s AgePick algorithm.
7. the mode of the youngest graphical peak on a probability density plot (YPP); and
8. the weighted mean of the grains in the youngest peak of a probability density plot ( $\tau$ ).

The first six groups of methods gradually drift to younger ages with increasing sample size, for reasons that are essentially captured by Figure 14.6: increasing sample size increases the ‘power’ of statistical tests to subdivide a population of values into smaller subpopulations. The youngest of these subpopulations inevitably gets younger as the number of subpopulations increases. In contrast, the last two methods converge to ages that are systematically too old. The failure of YPP and  $\tau$  to retrieve the correct depositional age reflects the underlying flaws of the probability density plots (PDPs) on which they are based. The shortcomings of PDPs were explained in Section 14.2 and won’t be discussed further here.

The minimum age model of Equation 14.7 does not suffer from this undesirable sample size dependency. With increasing sample size, this model converges to a sensible value, provided that the following assumptions are met:

1. the true age distribution approximately follows the functional form shown in red in Figure 14.7; and
2. the analytical uncertainties are well characterised.

The first assumption is generally easy to verify. If the young end of the age spectrum is marked by a distinct cluster of ages, then the minimum age model will appropriately average these. And it will do so even if the old end of the spectrum does not look like a (log)normal distribution. It is not uncommon for detrital zircon U–Pb age distributions to be fat tailed at both ends of the spectrum. However, similar results are obtained by the full model (Equation 14.7) and a 3-parameter simplification in which  $\gamma = \mu$ , which suggests that even quite strong violations of the parametric assumptions do not have a major effect on the outcomes.

If the age difference between the youngest and the second youngest grains in a sample is significantly greater than their respective analytical uncertainties, then the minimum age model will simply return the youngest age as a result. In other words, for fat tailed age spectra, the minimum age model reduces to the YSG model. This is the most sensible solution from a statistical point of view. In the absence of a discrete youngest age peak, the objections to the YSG model raised before do not apply. However whether the age of the youngest grain is also the most sensible solution from a geological point of view is a different matter.

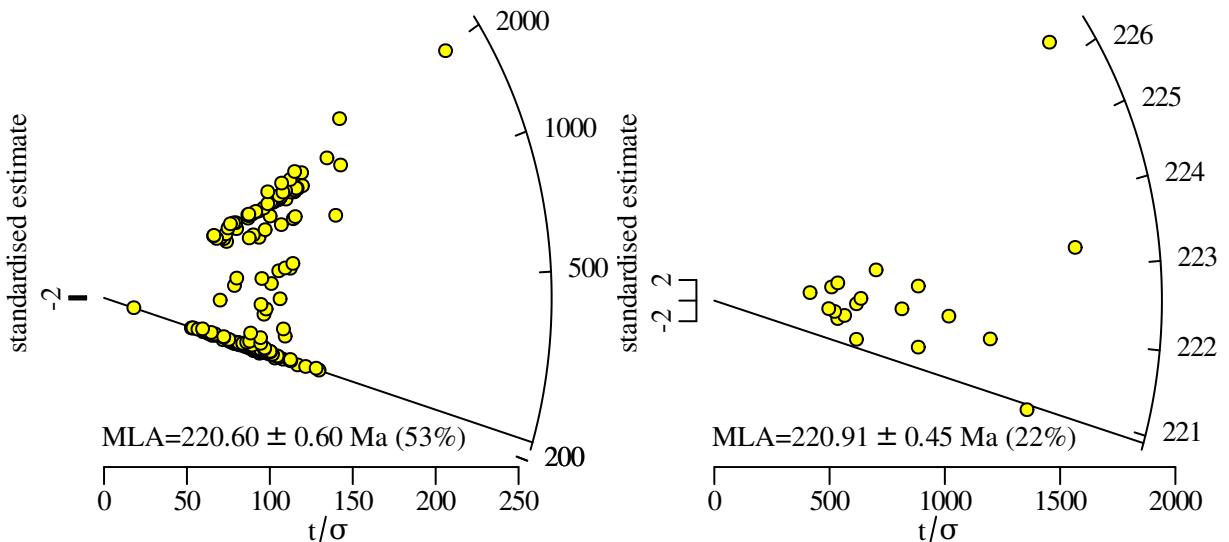


Figure 22.1: Radial plots and MDA estimates for sample 297 of Gehrels et al. (2020, LA-ICPMS data, left) and Rasmussen et al. (2020, CA-TIMS data, right), calculated with `IsoplotR`. Data have passed through a 5% discordance filter (using the concordia distance of Section 15.6). The MDA estimates agree to within 0.1% despite the great differences in sample size and analytical precision between the two datasets. The ad hoc MDA estimation algorithms listed at the start of this Section do not fare so well, resulting in differences of 2 – 17% between the LA-ICPMS and CA-TIMS data (Vermeesch, 2021).

## 22.2 Multi-sample plots

The principal aim of the methods and graphical devices discussed thus far has been to extract geologically meaningful information from multiple aliquots of a single sample. However, most geochronological applications nowadays involve multiple samples, and the differences between

these samples often has greater scientific significance than any individual date. **IsoplotR** implements a number of graphical devices to facilitate the interpretation of such multi-sample datasets. The CAD is the easiest way to simultaneously visualise multiple age distributions on a single plot.

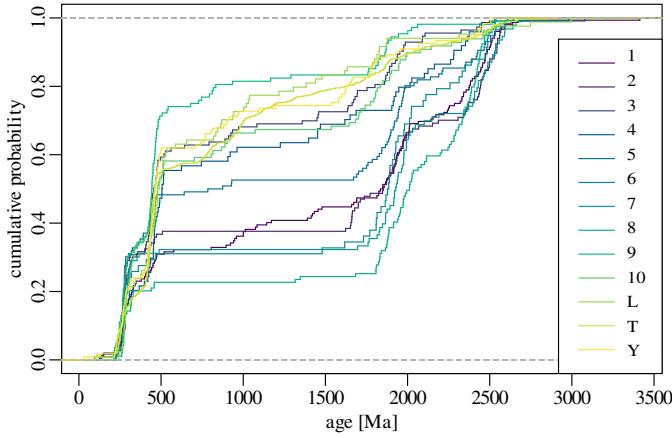


Figure 22.2: CAD plot of 13 detrital zircon U-Pb datasets from China (Vermeesch, 2013). Samples with similar age distributions have CADs that plot close together. Dissimilar samples are characterised by greater vertical separation of their respective CADs. The CAD is the only way to plot several complete datasets together on a single panel figure. However this plot becomes cluttered when used to display more than 10 or so samples.

In contrast, KDEs are better presented in a multi-panel format. To facilitate the intercomparison of multiple age distributions, **IsoplotR** offers the option to force all panels to use the same kernel bandwidth, to normalise the area under each KDE to a common value, and to plot them all on the same timescale.

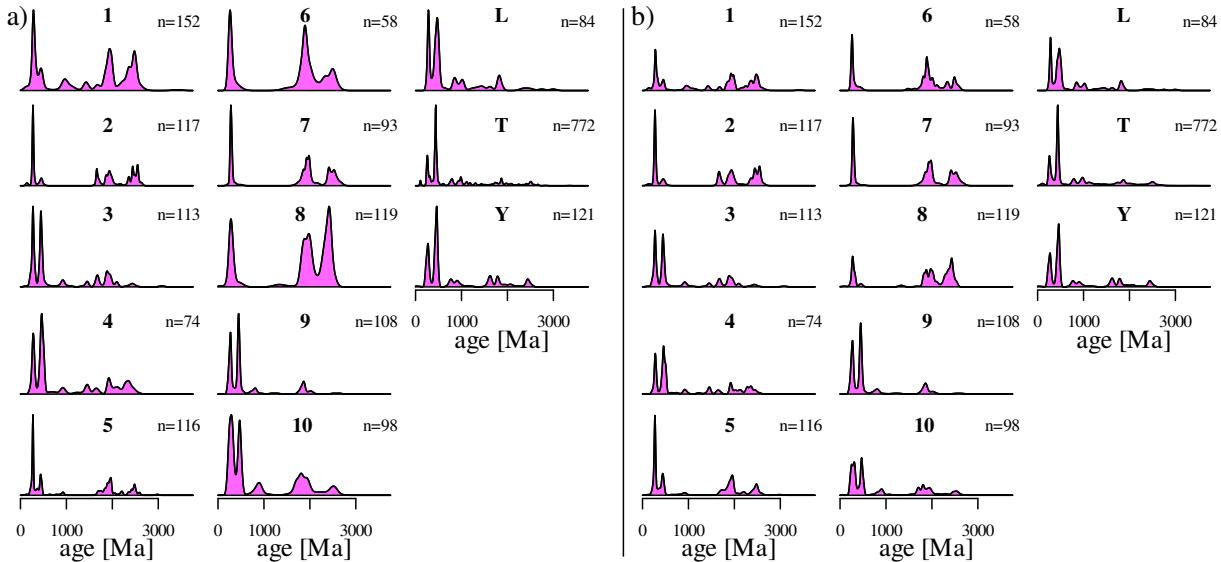


Figure 22.3: a) KDEs of the Chinese zircon data using different kernel bandwidths and scaled independently so as to display each sample to its maximum possible extent; b) KDEs of the same data using the same bandwidth (the median of all the plots in panel a) and normalised to the same area.

Visual comparison of CADs or KDEs can be an effective way to spot general trends and groupings in simple datasets. But this approach becomes impractical when the inter-sample differences are subtle or the datasets are large ( $> 10$  samples, say). Such cases call for an additional layer of statistical simplification to emphasise the geologically significant differences whilst removing the less informative similarities. Multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) is one way to achieve this goal.

## 22.3 Multidimensional scaling

Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) is a multivariate **ordination** technique that is similar in many ways to Principal Component Analysis (PCA). MDS aims to extract two (or higher) dimensional ‘maps’ from tables of pairwise distances between objects. Let us illustrate the method with a simple geographical example. Consider the following table of pairwise distances between European cities:

	Athens	Barcelona	Brussels	...	Rome	Stockholm	Vienna
Athens	0	3313	2963	...	817	3927	1991
Barcelona	3313	0	1326	...	1460	2868	1802
Brussels	2963	1318	0	...	1511	1616	1175
:	:	:	:	..	:	:	:
Rome	817	1460	1511	...	0	2707	1209
Stockholm	3927	2868	1616	...	2707	0	2105
Vienna	1991	1802	1175	...	1209	2105	0

Figure 22.4: Table of road distances (in km) between European cities. The full dataset comprises 21 cities.

Given a table of this form, MDS reconstructs the map of Europe:

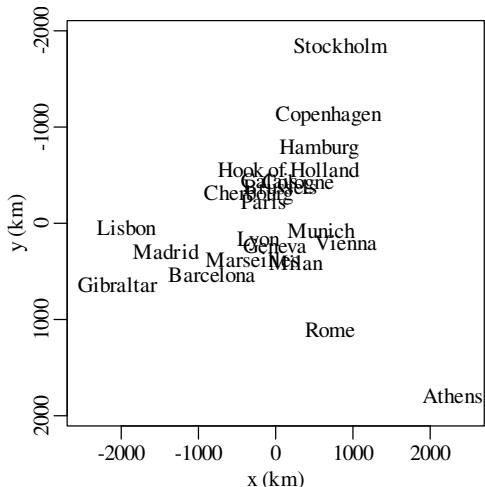


Table 22.1: MDS configuration of the European city distance data (Table 22.4). Cities (such as Lyon and Geneva) that are close together in the real world plot close together on the MDS configuration. And cities (such as Stockholm and Athens) that are far apart in the real world plot on opposite ends of the MDS configuration. But whilst the MDS configuration preserves the distances, it does not preserve the orientation of the cities. In this figure, the y-axis has been flipped, and the city locations are rotated  $\sim 15^\circ$  in a clockwise sense compared to the real map of Europe.

We can measure the distances between the cities on the MDS map (in cm, inches or any other unit) and plot them against the input distances (in km) from Table 22.4. This produces a so-called **Shepard plot**:

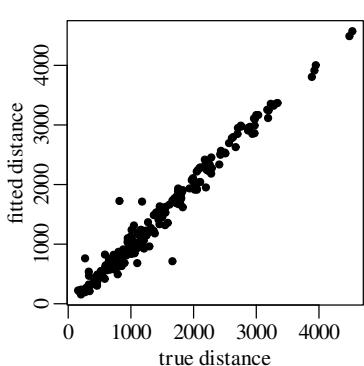


Figure 22.5: The Shepard plot of the European city distances shows a good agreement between the true input distances from Table 22.4 (x-axis) and the fitted distances measured on the MDS configuration of Figure 22.1 (y-axis). There are 21 cities in the dataset, resulting in  $21 \times 20/2 = 210$  pairwise distances. Hence there are 210 data points on this scatter plot. Most of the scatter of the data around the best fit line is caused by the fact that the input data are *road distances*, which do not perfectly agree with the straight line map distances.

The scatter of the fitted data relative to the true distances can be quantified as the **Stress**:

$$S = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=i+1}^n (f(d[i,j]) - \delta[i,j])^2}{\sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=i+1}^n \delta[i,j]^2}} \quad (22.1)$$

where  $d[i,j]$  is the input distance (for example the Euclidean distances of Table 22.1) between objects  $i$  and  $j$ ;  $\delta[i,j]$  is the fitted distance between the same objects measured on the MDS configuration; and  $f$  is a monotonic transformation that increases the flexibility of the mapping between  $d[i,j]$  and  $\delta[i,j]$  whilst preserving the rank order of the samples. The European city distance dataset is characterised by a Stress values of 7.5%, which corresponds to a ‘good’ fit:

fit	poor	fair	good	excellent	perfect
S	0.2	0.1	0.05	0.025	0

Table 22.2: Rule of thumb for interpreting the goodness of fit of an MDS configuration.

The preceding paragraphs have discussed the graphical output of MDS, but did not explain how this output is produced. It turns out that there are several ways to do so. In its simplest form (**classical MDS**), MDS consists of a simple sequence of matrix operations that are similar in many ways to the widely used principal component analysis algorithm. An alternative and more widely used approach (**nonmetric MDS**) uses an iterative gradient search algorithm to minimise Equation 22.1.

Nonmetric MDS is more flexible than classical MDS because it accommodates unconventional ‘dissimilarity’ measures that do not necessarily have to behave like conventional distances. So instead of physical distances expressed in kilometres or miles, we can also use MDS to interpret differences in chemical concentration, density, degree of correlation, and many other numerical quantities. In the context of detrital geochronology, the dissimilarity between samples is given by the statistical distance between age distributions. There are many ways to define this statistical distance. **IsoplotR** uses the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) statistic due to its simplicity and the fact that it behaves like a true distance in the mathematical sense of the word (Vermeesch, 2013; Vermeesch, 2018).

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic is defined as the maximum vertical distance between the CADs of the two samples:

$$D = \max_z |F_x(z) - F_y(z)| \quad (22.2)$$

where  $F_x$  and  $F_y$  are the CADs of  $x$  and  $y$ , respectively.  $D$  takes on values from 0 (two identical distributions) and 1 (no overlap between the two distributions). To illustrate the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method, consider two sand samples from a 13-sample dataset from China, which includes one sample from the Yellow River, and one sample from a sand dune in the Mu Us desert (Vermeesch, 2013):

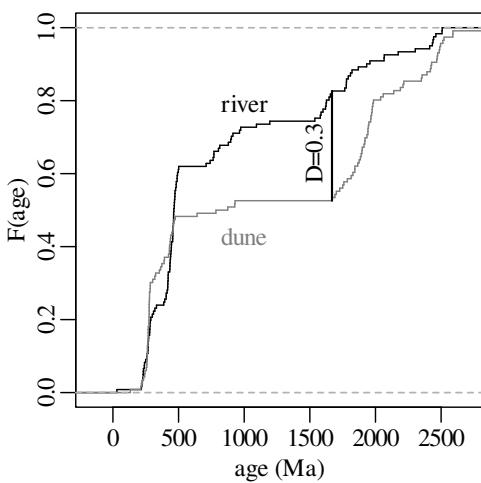


Figure 22.6: The two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic is the maximum vertical distance between two CADs. This example compares the cumulative distributions of 121 detrital zircon U-Pb ages from the Yellow River with 116 detrital zircon U-Pb ages from a sand dune in the adjacent Mu Us desert. The KS-distance is 0.3006.

Calculating the KS-distance between samples two at a time populates a symmetric dissimilarity matrix with positive values and a zero diagonal. For the Chinese dataset, this produces the following  $13 \times 13$  matrix:

$$d = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & \boxed{5} & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 & L & T & \boxed{Y} \\ 1 & 0 & 14 & 33 & 27 & 18 & 14 & 15 & 22 & 48 & 32 & 42 & 37 & 40 \\ 2 & 14 & 0 & 36 & 33 & 16 & 14 & 15 & 24 & 46 & 32 & 47 & 42 & 43 \\ 3 & 33 & 36 & 0 & 19 & 24 & 44 & 47 & 55 & 17 & 10 & 13 & 12 & 8 \\ 4 & 27 & 33 & 19 & 0 & 20 & 38 & 41 & 48 & 28 & 14 & 21 & 17 & 16 \\ \boxed{5} & 18 & 16 & 24 & 20 & 0 & 22 & 24 & 33 & 31 & 20 & 33 & 28 & \boxed{30} \\ 6 & 14 & 14 & 44 & 38 & 22 & 0 & 14 & 24 & 52 & 41 & 52 & 48 & 49 \\ 7 & 15 & 15 & 47 & 41 & 24 & 14 & 0 & 16 & 51 & 43 & 54 & 49 & 52 \\ 8 & 22 & 24 & 55 & 48 & 33 & 24 & 16 & 0 & 61 & 53 & 63 & 59 & 62 \\ 9 & 48 & 46 & 17 & 28 & 31 & 52 & 51 & 61 & 0 & 20 & 22 & 18 & 16 \\ 10 & 32 & 32 & 10 & 14 & 20 & 41 & 43 & 53 & 20 & 0 & 17 & 15 & 13 \\ L & 42 & 47 & 13 & 21 & 33 & 52 & 54 & 63 & 22 & 17 & 0 & 10 & 11 \\ T & 37 & 42 & 12 & 17 & 28 & 48 & 49 & 59 & 18 & 15 & 10 & 0 & 7 \\ \boxed{Y} & 40 & 43 & 8 & 16 & \boxed{30} & 49 & 52 & 62 & 16 & 13 & 11 & 7 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \quad (22.3)$$

where the K-S values have been multiplied with 100 to remove the decimal points. Square boxes mark the two samples shown in Figure 22.6. Equation 22.3 is a symmetric matrix containing positive values and a zero diagonal. Thus it fulfils all the requirements for MDS analysis.

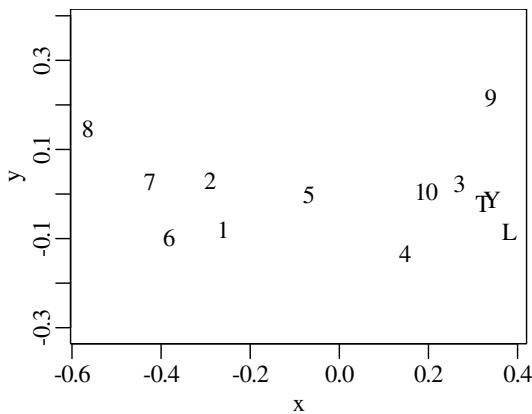


Figure 22.7: MDS configuration of the detrital zircon U-Pb data. Samples that have similar age distributions (such as ‘Y’ and ‘T’) are characterised by low K-S statistics (e.g.,  $d[Y, T] = 0.07$ ) and plot close together. Samples that have greatly differing age distributions (such as ‘Y’ and ‘8’) are characterised by high K-S statistics (e.g.,  $d[Y, 5] = 0.62$ ) and plot far apart on the MDS map.

One simple but effective way to aid the interpretation of MDS maps is to draw a solid line from each point in the configuration to its ‘closest’ neighbour in dissimilarity-space, and a dotted line to its second closest neighbour:

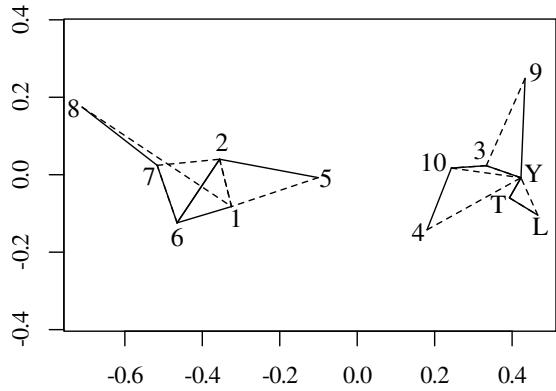


Figure 22.8: The nearest neighbour lines show that sample 8 is the closest (or ‘least dissimilar’) to sample 7 ( $D=0.16$ ), and the second closest to sample 1 ( $D=0.22$ ), while sample 7 is the closest to sample 6 ( $D=0.14$ ) and second closest to sample 2 ( $D=0.15$ ). These connecting lines define two distinct groups dividing the field area into a southwestern area containing sediments of ‘Yellow River affinity’ (samples 3, 4, 9, 10, T and Y) and a northeastern area containing sediments of a different origin (samples 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8).

## References

- Gehrels, G. (2003). *AgePick*. <https://sites.google.com/a/laserchron.org/laserchron/home/> Last accessed: 2020-06-05.
- Gehrels, G. et al. (2020). “LA-ICPMS U–Pb geochronology of detrital zircon grains from the Coconino, Moenkopi, and Chinle Formations in the Petrified Forest National Park (Arizona)”. In: *Geochronology*.
- Ludwig, K. R. (2003). “User’s manual for Isoplot 3.00: a geochronological toolkit for Microsoft Excel”. In: *Berkeley Geochronology Center Special Publication* 4.
- Ludwig, K. and R Mundil (2002). “Extracting reliable U-Pb ages and errors from complex populations of zircons from Phanerozoic tuffs”. In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta*. Vol. 66, A463–A463.
- Rasmussen, C. et al. (2020). “U-Pb zircon geochronology and depositional age models for the Upper Triassic Chinle Formation (Petrified Forest National Park, Arizona, USA): Implications for Late Triassic paleoecological and paleoenvironmental change”. In: *GSA Bulletin*.
- Vermeesch, P. (2013). “Multi-sample comparison of detrital age distributions”. In: *Chemical Geology* 341, pp. 140–146.
- (2018). “Dissimilarity measures in detrital geochronology”. In: *Earth-Science Reviews* 178, pp. 310–321. DOI: 10.1016/j.earscirev.2017.11.027.
- (2021). “Maximum depositional age estimation revisited”. In: *Geoscience Frontiers* 12.2, pp. 843–850.

# Part III

## IsoplotR manual

# Chapter 23

## Introduction to IsoplotR

For many years, a Microsoft Excel add-in called **Isoplot** has been the main data processing software of choice in geochronology. Developed by Kenneth R. Ludwig over a period of two decades, **Isoplot** is a user-friendly toolbox that allows geologists to calculate and visualise geochronological data within a familiar spreadsheet environment (Ludwig, 1988; Ludwig, 1999; Ludwig, 2003; Ludwig, 2012). Few computer programs have been as widely used in the Earth Sciences as **Isoplot**. Written in Visual Basic for Applications (VBA), **Isoplot** takes isotopic data as input and produces publication-ready figures as output.

Unfortunately, recent versions of **Excel** are incompatible with **Isoplot**, whose creator has retired and no longer maintains the code. These software issues are a major problem for the field of radiometric geochronology, to the point where some laboratories kept an old Windows XP computer with **Excel** 2003 around for the sole purpose of running **Isoplot**. **IsoplotR** is a free, open and more future proof alternative for **Isoplot** (Vermeesch, 2018). **IsoplotR**'s software architecture uses a modular design with future proofness and extendability in mind.

### 23.1 Software architecture

There are three ways to use **IsoplotR**: online, offline and from the command line.

The online version<sup>1</sup> is convenient in several ways. First, it requires no software installation. Second, the **IsoplotR** website is perfectly platform-independent. It renders on any modern HTML-5 compatible web browser, including those installed on smartphones and tablet computers. Third, by using the online version, the user is guaranteed to have accessed the most up-to-date version of the software.

An offline version of the GUI is provided for use on computers that are not (permanently) connected to the internet. This is often the case for machines that are connected to mass spectrometers, as a safety precaution. The offline version of the GUI works by emulating a web server within the default browser on the user's system. Installation instructions are provided on the **IsoplotR** website and on GitHub<sup>2</sup>.

The third way to access the full functionality of **IsoplotR** is through the command line within the **R** programming environment. The command line offers the greatest flexibility to automate, modify and extend **IsoplotR**'s functionality.

---

<sup>1</sup><https://isoplotr.es.ucl.ac.uk/>

<sup>2</sup><https://github.com/pvermees/IsoplotRgui/>

## 23.2 The Graphical User Interface (GUI)

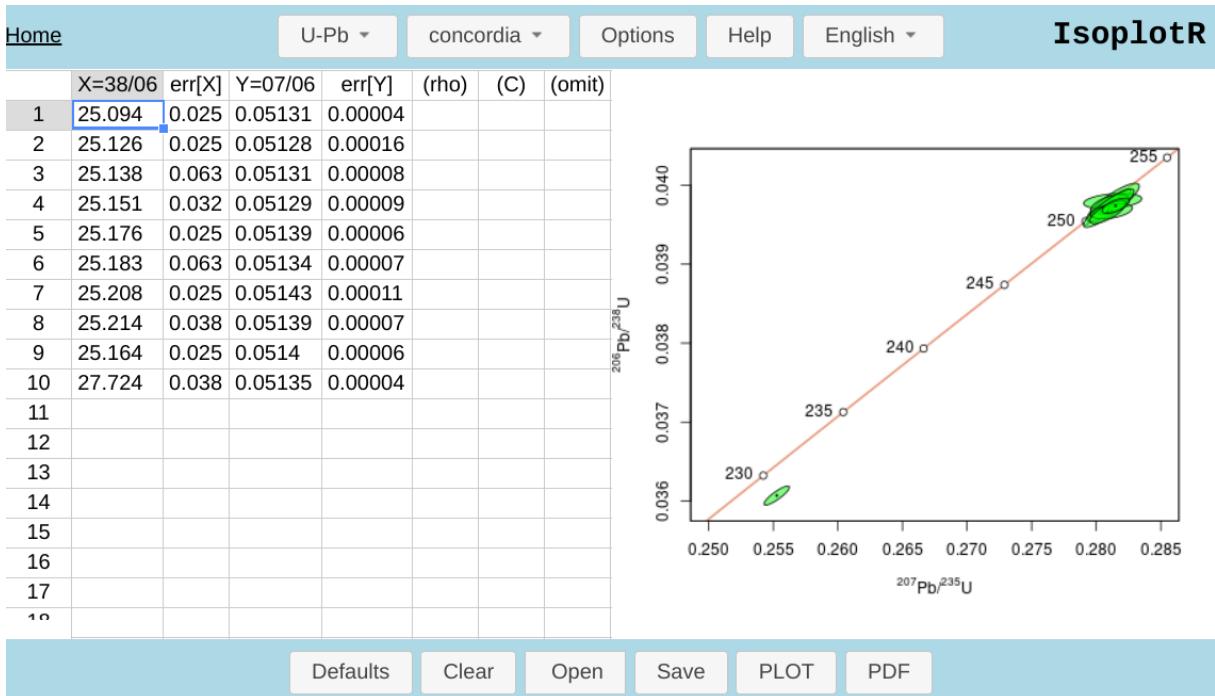
The code base for the GUI and the core data processing algorithms are surgically separated from each other. The command-line functionality is grouped in a lightweight package called `IsoplotR` that may be installed from CRAN as instructed in Section 11.1.11. The `IsoplotR` package has minimal dependencies and should work on a basic R installation. In contrast, the GUI is written in HTML and Javascript and interacts with `IsoplotR` via an interface package. It is provided in a second R package called `IsoplotRgui` that is available from CRAN as well:

```
> install.packages('IsoplotRgui')
```

Once installed, `IsoplotRgui` can be started from the R console as follows:

```
> library(IsoplotRgui)
> IsoplotR()
```

This opens the GUI in a new tab of the user's default internet browser. The GUI has four components: a top bar with selection menus for the various chronometers and plot devices, optional settings and documentation; an input table into which data can be pasted from spreadsheet applications; an output window displaying the graphical or numerical results; and a lower bar to import and export data and results:



U-Pb

IsoplotR currently implements 12 different geochronometers: U–Pb, Pb–Pb, Th–Pb, Ar–Ar, K–Ca, Rb–Sr, Sm–Nd, Re–Os, Lu–Hf, U–Th–He, fission tracks, and Th–U. Additionally, it also includes functionality for detrital geochronology and general purpose data processing.

concordia

For each chronometer there are several possible plot devices. These may vary from method to method. For example, concordia plots are only available for U–Pb data, and release spectra for Ar–Ar data.

Options

The **Options** menu allows the user to choose between different input formats and change parameters (e.g. decay constants, plot colours) that affect the numerical or graphical output.

Help

The **Help** button provides further information about the input table, about the graphical and numerical numerical results, and some references. The **Help** function dynamically responds to the settings that are listed under the **Options** menu.

Open

Save

The data and settings can be stored in a `.json` format for further processing in the future. See Chapter 34 for further details about this format.

PLOT

RUN

The **PLOT** button (or **RUN** button if `ages` or ‘get  $\zeta$ ’ is chosen as output) saves all the current settings and produces the graphical and/or numerical output.

PDF

CSV

Clicking the **PDF** button repeats the calculations but saves the output as a `.pdf` file, which can be further processed by vector editing software such as **Adobe Illustrator**, **CorelDraw** or **Inkscape**. Choosing `ages` as output type saves the results to a comma separated value (`.csv`) file.

(C)

The **(C)** column of the input table can be used to store numerical values that can be used as a fill colour for the plot symbols.

(omit)
x
X

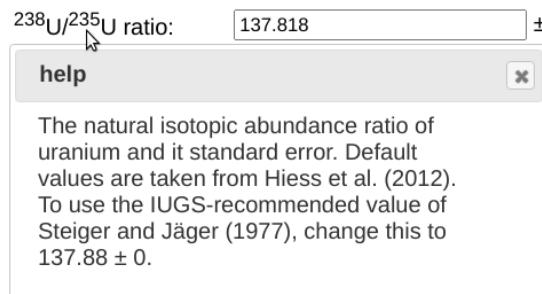
Specific samples can be omitted from the numerical calculations (e.g. isochron, weighted mean, or concordia age) by marking them with a lowercase ‘x’ in the optional **(omit)** column. To hide samples from the graphical (as well as the numerical) output, mark them with an uppercase ‘X’.

Input format:
1. Normal 2. Inverse 3. Three ratios

The **Options** menu provides access to a range of different input formats. Selecting any item from this menu replaces the input table with a different set of default data.

Input errors:
1se (abs) 1se (abs) 2se (abs) 1se (%) 2se (%)

The **Options** menu also allows the user to specify the ratio uncertainties as being absolute or relative errors at 1 or 2 standard errors. Selecting any item from this menu automatically changes the input data accordingly.



± Contextual help can be obtained by clicking any text string within the **Options** menu. For example, clicking on  $^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  in the U/Pb settings provides details about the origin of the default value, and suggestions for alternative values.

### 23.3 The Command Line Interface (CLI)

CLI offers all the functionality of the GUI, and more. A complete list of public functions can be viewed by typing

```
> help(package='IsoplotR')
```

at the command prompt. Data are read from comma-separated variable (.csv) files using the `read.data()` function. For example:

```
1 UPb_dat <- read.data('file.csv',method='U-Pb',format=1,ierr=3)
```

where

'`file.csv`' is the name of the data file  
`method='U-Pb'` specifies the chronometer  
`format=1` tells `IsoplotR` that `file.csv` contains the following columns:  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$ ,  $\text{err}[^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}]$ ,  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$ ,  $\text{err}[^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}]$ , and  $r$ , where '`err[*]`' marks the uncertainties of '\*', and  $r$  is the correlation coefficient between  $\text{err}[^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}]$  and  $\text{err}[^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}]$  (see Chapter 13).  
`ierr=3` indicates that these uncertainties ('`err[*]`') are specified as relative values at two standard errors.

Further details about these arguments can be viewed by typing `?read.data` at the console. The various plot devices are implemented in a collection of designated functions such as `concordia()`, `isochron()`, `weightedmean()`, `isochron()`, `agespectrum()`, `KDE()`, `CAD()` and `radialplot()` that are listed in Chapter 33 and will be discussed in more detail in later chapters. A table of age estimates can be obtained using the `ages()` function. Many of `IsoplotR`'s functions are *overloaded*, which means that the same function can be applied to multiple data types with potentially different results. For example, using the output of `read.data('data.csv',method='Rb-Sr')` as input to the `isochron()` function automatically produces a Rb-Sr isochron, with the correct decay constants and axis labels.

A colour scale can be added to most plots using the optional `levels` argument. For example:

```
2 ns <- length(UPb_dat)
3 concordia(UPb_dat,levels=runif(ns),ellipse.fill=c("yellow","red"))
```

assigns a vector of random numbers to some U-Pb data and uses these numbers to colour the error ellipses on a concordia diagram from yellow to red. Omitting or hiding samples from calculations and/or plots is achieved by specifying the indices of the relevant aliquots to the functions of interest. For example:

```
2 weightedmean(UPb_dat,omit=10)
```

omits the 10<sup>th</sup> aliquot from the weighted mean calculation, whereas

```
2 weightedmean(UPb_dat,hide=10)
```

removes the same aliquot from the weighted mean diagram altogether.

The GUI may be the easiest way to interact with `IsoplotR` and explore various data processing strategies with individual samples. But the CLI is more useful than the GUI when

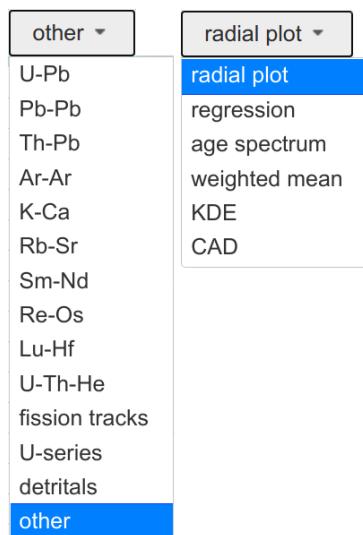
processing large datasets comprising multiple samples, and provides a powerful mechanism to produce *reproducible* science: the `.csv` data files and `.R` data processing scripts can easily be archived and shared with others and thereby provide a parsimonious way to produce FAIR science (Wilkinson et al., 2016).

## References

- Ludwig, K. R. (1988). “ISOPLOT for MS-DOS, a plotting and regression program for radiogenic isotope data for IBM-PC compatible computers, version 1.00”. In: *USGS Open-File Report OF-88-0557*.
- (1999). “Using Isoplot/EX, version 2, a geochronological toolkit for Microsoft Excel”. In: *Berkeley Geochronological Center Special Publication 1a*.
- (2003). “User’s manual for Isoplot 3.00: a geochronological toolkit for Microsoft Excel”. In: *Berkeley Geochronology Center Special Publication 4*.
- (2012). “User’s manual for Isoplot version 3.75–4.15: a geochronological toolkit for Microsoft Excel”. In: *Berkeley Geochronological Center Special Publication 5*.
- Vermeesch, P. (2018). “IsoplotR: a free and open toolbox for geochronology”. In: *Geoscience Frontiers* 9, pp. 1479–1493.
- Wilkinson, M. D. et al. (2016). “The FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship”. In: *Scientific data* 3.1, pp. 1–9.

# Chapter 24

## Generic functions



IsoplotR implements a number of plotting devices for 13 different geochronometric methods. Some of these plotting devices are shared by multiple chronometers, and can also be used for datasets of non geochronological origin. This tutorial will start with an overview of these ‘generic’ plots, whose user interface is shared by all the specific geochronological implementations that will be introduced subsequently.

In this Chapter, we will use a number of IsoplotR’s built-in datasets, which can be downloaded from the IsoplotR GitHub page, at <https://tinyurl.com/IsoplotRdata>. For the tutorial in this Chapter, we will use the following datasets:

```
1 data1 <- read.data('MountTom.csv',method='other')
2 data2 <- read.data('regression.csv',method='other')
3 data3 <- read.data('LudwigMean.csv',method='other')
4 data4 <- read.data('LudwigSpectrum.csv',method='other')
5 data5 <- read.data('LudwigKDE.csv',method='other')
```

Alternatively, the same files can also be found in the IsoplotR installation folder on your computer, using R’s built-in `system.file()` function. For example:

```
1 fn <- system.file('MountTom.csv',package='IsoplotR')
2 data1 <- read.data(fn,method='other')
```

## 24.1 Radial plots

	t	err[t]	(C)	(omit)	
1	14	2.3			
2	14.1	2.05			
3	14.1	3.65			
4	17.4	3.15			
5	18	3			
6	18.9	3.4			
7	19.2	4.15			
8	20	3.1			
9	20	3.45			
10	20.1	4.6			

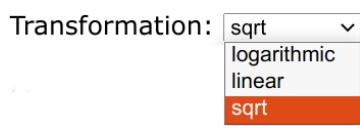
```
radialplot(data1)
```

The standard radial plot can be modified using a range of optional arguments, which can be accessed from the GUI and CLI.

1. Labelling the error ellipses can be useful to identify outliers or otherwise noteworthy aliquots.  
 **Show sample numbers?** Ticking the box replaces the plot symbols with the row numbers of the input data.

```
radialplot(data1, show.numbers=TRUE)
```

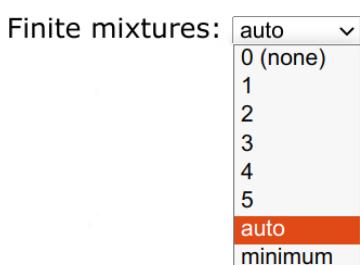
2. IsoplotR offers three types of transformations for the radial scale.



The logarithmic transformation works well for geochronological data, which are constrained to strictly positive numbers. The square root transformation is advisable for datasets that contain small numbers compared to the analytical uncertainty. The linear scale is appropriate for quantities that are free to range from  $-\infty$  to  $+\infty$ .

```
radialplot(data1, transformation='sqrt')
```

3. All of IsoplotR's mixture models functionality is covered under its radial plot function, including the discrete mixture and minimum age models:



Selecting the numbers 1 through 5 applies the discrete mixture models of Equation 14.6. Selecting `auto` applies the Bayes Information Criterion to choose the 'optimal' number of components, with the caveat of Figure 14.6. Finally, selecting `minimum` applies the minimum age model of Equation 14.7.

```
radialplot(data1, k='auto')
```

4. By default the minimum and maximum extent of the radial plot correspond to the minimum and maximum value in the dataset.

Minimum value:  These values can be overruled by entering the preferred values in the corresponding textboxes. A third box is available to specify the central value of the radial scale ( $z_0$  in Equation 14.4).

Central value:

Maximum value:

```
radialplot(data1,from=10,to=200,z0=50)
```

- Samples are represented by filled circles by default, but this can be changed to a range of other shape. These can be specified as numbers (1–25, see `?points` for further details) or a single character such as '`'o'`', '`'*'`', '`'+'`', or '`'. '`'.

Plot character:  Using character 23 replaces the filled circles with filled diamonds.

```
radialplot(data1,pch=23)
```

- By default, `IsoplotR` reports uncertainties (for the central age) as absolute 2-sigma (2 standard error) confidence intervals.

Output errors:  The confidence levels for the analytical uncertainties can be changed here, to 2 standard errors or any arbitrary confidence level, in either absolute or relative units.

```
radialplot(data1,oerr=4)
```

When choosing arbitrary confidence intervals ('`ci(abs)`' or '`ci(%)`' in the pull-down menu), the confidence level can be changed from the default  $\alpha = 0.05$  to any other value between 0 and 1:

Probability cutoff:  Set the probability cutoff to 0.01 to obtain 99% confidence intervals.

```
settings('alpha',0.01)
radialplot(data1,oerr=3)
```

- The number of significant digits can be specified relative to the analytical uncertainty. For example, if `sigdig=2`, then  $123.45678 \pm 0.12345$  is rounded to  $123.46 \pm 0.12$ .

Significant digits:  The significant digits affect all numerical output that is reported in the figure legend.

```
radialplot(data1,sigdig=3)
```

- For plot characters 21–25, the fill colour can be modified.

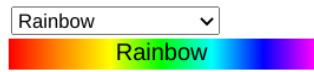
Fill colour:  Choose a fixed colour by clicking on the first from:  to: 

```
radialplot(data1, bg='green')
```

Alternatively, the fill colour can be used to visualise an additional variable, by pasting a vector of values into the optional (C) column of the input table (Section 23.2). For the sake of illustration, let us demonstrate this feature by constructing a colour scale based on the relative measurement uncertainties (uncertainty divided by age) of the test data:

```
1 relerr <- data1[,2]/data1[,1]
2 radialplot(data1, levels=relerr, bg=c('green', 'red'))
```

Fill colour:



A colour scale can be defined either by defining its start and end colour, or by choosing one of the preset colour ramps.

Colour label:

The colour scale can also be labelled for clarity.

```
2 radialplot(data1, levels=relerr, bg=rainbow(n=100), clabel='s[t]/t')
```

9. The font size of the sample numbers, axis labels, and any legend can be adjusted with a multiplier.

Font magnification:

Values greater than 1 increase the font size, values less than 1 reduce it.

At the CLI, the font size is controlled by the environment variable `cex`, which can be changed with the `par()` function:

```
1 oldpar <- par(cex=0.9)
2 radialplot(data1)
3 par(oldpar) # restore the old cex value
```

Plot symbol magnification:  The plot symbols are sized independently.

```
radialplot(data1, cex=1.5)
```

## 24.2 Regression

York et al. (2004) regression requires a table of measurements for the independent variable (`X`), the dependent variable (`Y`), their respective uncertainties (`err[X]` and `err[Y]`), and their correlation coefficient (`err[rXY]`).

Input format:

Alternatively, the data can also be supplied as redundant ratios, which allow the error correlation to be computed from the uncertainties using Equation 15.2.

```
isochron(data2)
```

An example using the second input option:

```
1 d <- read.data('PbPb3.csv',method='other')
2 y <- data2york(d,format=3)
3 isochron(y)
```

1. IsoplotR offers three options to deal with the scatter of the data around the best-fit isochron line.

**Model:**  3. Maximum likelihood with overdispersion  1. Maximum likelihood  2. Ordinary least squares  3. Maximum likelihood with overdispersion

These three models represent three different ways to capture any excess dispersion of the data relative to the nominal uncertainties (Figure 13.11).

```
isochron(data2,model=3)
```

2. Just like the row numbers of the input data could be shown on a radial plots, so can they be added in a regression context.

Show sample numbers? Ticking the box adds numbers to the error ellipses.

```
isochron(data2,show.numbers=TRUE)
```

3. The limits of the horizontal and vertical axis can be adjusted to any value.

Minimum X:	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Showing the full extent of the regression line, including the data and the origin.
Maximum X:	<input type="text" value="300"/>	
Minimum Y:	<input type="text" value="0"/>	
Maximum Y:	<input type="text" value="1500"/>	

Adjusting the x and y-limits of a model-2 regression plot:

```
isochron(data2,model=2,xlim=c(0,300),ylim=c(0,1500))
```

4. Other options are similar to the radial plot (Section 24.1).

Output errors:	<input type="text" value="ci (%)"/>
Probability cutoff:	<input type="text" value="0.01"/>
Significant digits:	<input type="text" value="4"/>
Font magnification:	<input type="text" value="1.1"/>

The default values for the output errors (2 s.e. (abs)), significance level (`alpha=0.05`), number of significant digits (`sigdig=2`), and font magnification (`cex=1`) can be changed by entering the appropriate value in these text boxes.

```
1 oldpar <- par(cex=1.1)
2 isochron(data2,oerr=6,alpha=0.01,sigdig=4)
3 par(oldpar)
```

5. Finally, the fill and stroke colour of the error ellipses can be modified and an optional colour scale added to the plot

Ellipse fill colour:	<input type="button" value="Custom colour ramp ▾"/>
	from: <input style="width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: blue;" type="color"/> to: <input style="width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: cyan;" type="color"/>
Ellipse fill opacity	0.5
Ellipse stroke colour:	<input style="width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: red;" type="color"/>
Font magnification:	1.1
Colour label:	rho

For the sake of illustration we here use a colour ramp to fill the ellipses according to the error correlation, and paint the outline of the ellipses a uniform red.

```
2 isochron(data2,levels=data2[,5],clabel='rho',
3         ellipse.fill=c(rgb(1,0,0,0.5),rgb(0,1,1,0,0.5)),
4         ellipse.stroke='red')
```

## 24.3 Weighted means

	x	err[X]	(C)	(omit)
1	248.212	2.919		
2	249.09	1.027		
3	248.678	1.606		
4	245.422	1.532		
5	249.823	2.146		
6	243.34	2.922		

The weighted mean plot serves a similar purpose as the radial plot and shares several options with it. Its input format is identical to that of the radial plot, requiring the values and their uncertainties, plus any optional colour data and flags to mark omitted or hidden aliquots.

1. IsoplotR provides functionality for both the ordinary weighted mean of Equation 13.15 and the random effects model of Equation 13.19.

**Random effects model?** Ticking the box estimates the overdispersion in a similar way to the radial plot, the only difference being that the weighted mean plot computes the arithmetic mean and the radial plot the geometric mean.

For tightly clustered datasets, the difference between the random effects models of the weighted mean and radial plots is small. But when the individual age estimates exhibit significant scatter (> 10%, say), then the central age is preferred over the arithmetic weighted mean.

```
weightedmean(data3,random.effects=TRUE)
```

2. Outliers are detected using the modified Chauvenet criterion of Section 14.1.

**Reject outliers?** The Chauvenet criterion may select different outliers for the ordinary weighted mean and random effects model.

Detecting outliers from the CLI and colouring them red on the plot:

```
weightedmean(data3,detect.outliers=TRUE,outlier.col='red')
```

3. By default the aliquots are plotted in the order of the input table.

**Rank the ages?** However they can also be ranked in order of increasing age.

```
weightedmean(data3,ranked=TRUE)
```

4. Additional formatting options can be used to modify the appearance of the weighted mean plot. These options are similar to those of the radial plot:

Minimum age limit:	220
Maximum age limit:	228
Significant digits:	1
Font magnification:	1
Fill colour:	Custom colour ramp from:  to:
Outlier colour:	
Fill colour opacity	0.5
Colour label:	

The minimum and maximum extent of the age scale can be specified; the fill colour of the rectangular segments can be modified based on an additional variable, with a designated separate colour for outliers; and the confidence level and significant digits can be specified as in the radial plots and isochron regression plots.

```

1 weightedmean(data3,from=220,to=280,sigdig=1,
2 rect.col=c('#FF880080','8CFF0080'),
3 outlier.col='#00FFFF')
```

## 24.4 Age spectra

The age spectrum is normally used for  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  data but can be used to visualise other step heating experiments as well, for helium, xenon or other noble gases.

	f	X	err[X]
1	0.021	4.4339	0.935
2	0.025	4.6771	0.1225
3	0.024	4.6533	0.0964
4	0.024	4.7417	0.0861
5	0.026	4.7153	0.0776
6	0.026	4.708	0.0734

As discussed in Section 17.2, a release spectrum is very similar to a weighted mean plot, and the input formats of the two plots are similar as well. The only difference is that the spectrum adds a column with the relative contributions of the various aliquots. These contributions are normalised to unity and control the width of the rectangular confidence boxes.

```
agespectrum(data4)
```

1. The ‘plateau’ is a weighted mean of contiguous steps that pass the modified Chauvenet outlier detection criterion of Section 14.1.
  - Extract plateau? If checked, IsoplotR computes the plateau and marks the steps belonging to it in a different colour. Otherwise the program simply returns the weighted mean.

```
agespectrum(data4,plateau=FALSE)
```

2. The plateau age can be computed either using the ordinary weighted mean algorithm of Equation 13.15, or the random effects model of Equation 13.19.
  - Random effects model? The two algorithms may result in different plateaus including different steps. This again reflects the heuristic nature of plateau age calculations.

```
agespectrum(data4,random.effects=TRUE)
```

3. The other options are exactly the same as for the weighted mean plot of Section 24.3.

Significant digits:	<input type="text" value="2"/>
Font magnification:	<input type="text" value="1"/>
Fill colour:	Custom colour ramp from: <input type="color" value="blue"/> to: <input type="color" value="red"/>
Outlier colour:	<input type="color" value="yellow"/>
Fill colour opacity	<input type="text" value="0.5"/>
Colour label:	<input type="text"/>

The fill colour of the rectangular segments can be modified based on an additional variable, with a designated separate colour for outliers, and the significant digits can be specified.

```
agespectrum(data4,plateau.col='blue',non.plateau.col='yellow')
```

## 24.5 Kernel density estimates

	x	(omit)
1	251.634	
2	245.422	
3	252.17	
4	253.803	
5	250.1	
6	261.653	

Unlike the radial plot and the weighted mean diagram, kernel density estimates and histograms do not require analytical uncertainties to be specified. They therefore only require a single column worth of data.

```
kde(data5)
```

1. The lateral extent of the KDE plot can be modified in exactly the same way as the radial plot and weighted mean plot.

Minimum value:  Note that the KDE is allowed to extend into negative Maximum value:  values as well.

```
kde(data5,from=230,to=280)
```

2. The default kernel bandwidth is given by the algorithm of Botev, Grotowski, and Kroese (2010), and the default histogram binwidth by Sturges' Rule.

Kernel bandwidth:  These default values can be replaced by any positive Histogram binwidth:  value. Be careful not to over-interpret the resulting plots!

```
kde(data5,bw=3,binwidth=2)
```

3. It is advisable to apply a logarithmic transformation to datasets that are close to zero.

Take logarithms? Otherwise the resulting KDE may spill over into physically impossible negative values.

When applying a custom bandwidth and/or binwidth to a logarithmically transformed KDE, one should use relative values rather than absolute ones. For example, instead of a 3 Myr bandwidth, a value of  $3/250 = 0.012$  would be more appropriate:

```
kde(data5,log=TRUE,bw=0.012,binwidth=0.008,from=230,to=280)
```

4. The histograms can also be removed to reduce visual clutter.

**Show histogram?** Removing the histogram also removes the vertical axis of the KDE plot. The y-values of the KDE curve itself do not have a meaningful purpose.

```
kde(data5, show.hist=FALSE)
```

5. The KDE estimate is adjusted by Abramson (1982)'s adaptive square root modifier.

**Adaptive KDE?** Unticking the box reverts to the standard Botev, Grotowski, and Kroese (2010) algorithm, which uses a constant bandwidth for all data points.

```
kde(data5, adaptive=FALSE)
```

6. The actual data values can be visualised by a 'rug plot'.

**Add rug plot?** This is a sequence of vertical ticks between the time axis and the KDE curve, which can be removed by unticking the box.

```
kde(data5, rug=FALSE)
```

## 24.6 Cumulative age distributions

	X	(omit)	The input format for the CAD is identical to that of the KDE. This is because these two plots convey exactly the same kind of information, the only difference being that the KDE requires smoothing whereas the CAD does not (Section 14.2).
1	251.634		
2	245.422		
3	252.17		
4	253.803		
5	250.1		
6	261.653		

```
cad(data5)
```

1. The different steps in the CAD are connected by vertical lines.

**Draw vertical lines at steps?** These lines can be removed by unticking the box.

```
cad(data5, verticals=FALSE)
```

2. Each aliquot can be marked by an optional plot character.

Plot character:  pch=16 produces a filled circle.

```
cad(data5, verticals=FALSE, pch=16)
```

## References

- Abramson, I. S. (1982). “On bandwidth variation in kernel estimates – a square root law”. In: *The Annals of Statistics*, pp. 1217–1223.
- Botev, Z. I., J. F. Grotowski, and D. P. Kroese (2010). “Kernel density estimation via diffusion”. In: *Annals of Statistics* 38 (5), pp. 2916–2957.
- York, D. et al. (2004). “Unified equations for the slope, intercept, and standard errors of the best straight line”. In: *American Journal of Physics* 72.3, pp. 367–375.

# Chapter 25

## U–Pb

Input format:	[38/06], [07/06]	▼ IsoplotR accommodates eight U–Pb formats. See Section 15.1 for details.
	[07/35], [06/38]	
	[38/06], [07/06]	
	[07/35], [06/38], [07/06]	
	[07/35], [06/38], [04/38]	
	[38/06], [07/06], [04/06]	
	[07/35], [06/38], [04/38], [07/06], [04/07], [04/06]	
	[07/35], [06/38], [08/32], [32/38]	
	[38/06], [07/06], [08/06], [32/38]	

Loading data files into memory using the CLI:

```
1 # U-Pb format 1, 1se absolute input errors:  
2 UPb1 <- read.data('UPb1.csv',method='U-Pb',format=1)  
3 # U-Pb format 6, 1se relative input errors:  
4 UPb2 <- read.data('UPb6c.csv',method='U-Pb',format=6,ierr=3)  
5 # U-Pb format 8, 2se relative input errors:  
6 UPb3 <- read.data('UPb8d.csv',method='U-Pb',format=8,ierr=4)
```

where `UPb1.csv`, `UPb6c.csv` and `UPb8d.csv` are files that, like the example files of Chapter 24, can be downloaded from <https://tinyurl.com/IsoplotRdata>. `read.data()` returns a list with three items:

1. `format` stores the value of the eponymous argument
2. `x` is the actual data table
3. `d` is another list with information about any initial disequilibrium of the  $^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{235}\text{U}$  decay chains (see Section 25.13 for details).

concordia  
isochron  
radial plot  
weighted mean  
KDE  
CAD  
ages

U–Pb data can be visualised on five or six different plot devices and output tables. The `isochron` option is only available for formats 4–8 and is hidden otherwise. See the remaining sections of this chapter for examples of these output options.

## 25.1 General options

1. Isotopic ratios and decay constants:

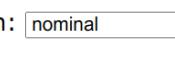
$^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratio:   $\pm$   The default  $^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratio is given  
 $^{238}\text{U}$  decay constant:   $\pm$    $\text{Myr}^{-1}$  by Hiess et al. (2012), and the  $\text{U}$  and  
 $^{235}\text{U}$  decay constant:   $\pm$    $\text{Myr}^{-1}$  Th decay constants by Jaffey et al.  
 $^{232}\text{Th}$  decay constant:   $\pm$    $\text{Myr}^{-1}$  (1971) and Le Roux and Glendenin (1963), respectively.

The `settings()` function can be used to get and change global settings, which affect all subsequent calculations:

```
1 # use the Steiger and Jaeger (1977) ratio with zero uncertainty
2 settings('iratio','U238U235',137.88,0)
3 # use the Schoene et al. (2006) decay constant and uncertainty
4 settings('lambda','U238',0.000154993,0.00000013)
```

2. Common Pb correction of the individual aliquots can be carried out using the methods of Section 15.4. This may be useful for single grain analysis tools such as the KDE, CAD, radial or weighted mean plot. For cogenetic aliquots that form an isochron, the common Pb is best left uncorrected. In this case the most reliable age estimate is given by the isochron through the uncorrected data, which can be visualised on a concordia diagram (Section 25.2) or (for formats 4–8) as a separate isochron plot (Section 25.3).

Common Pb correction:  A common Pb menu is available for all output types except `isochron`. It gives access to four different common Pb treatments that can be applied to the data before plotting.

- (a) Common Pb correction:  Selecting the `nominal` option implements the common Pb correction algorithm of Section 15.4.2a.

Initial  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ratio:  If `nominal` has been selected, and the data are of formats 1–3, a new text box appears with the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ratio of the common Pb.

```
1 settings('iratio','Pb207Pb206',1.106)
2 radialplot(UPb1,common.Pb=1)
```

Initial  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ :  Initial  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ :  For U–Pb data formats 4–6, the nominal common Pb composition is specified as a pair of  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  ratios.

```
1 settings('iratio','Pb206Pb204',9.307)
2 settings('iratio','Pb207Pb204',10.294)
3 weightedmean(UPb2,common.Pb=1)
```

Initial  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ratio:  Initial  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$  ratio:  Finally, for U–Pb data formats 7 and 8, the nominal common Pb composition is specified as a pair of  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{207}\text{Pb}$  ratios.

```

1 settings('iratio','Pb208Pb206',2.0)
2 settings('iratio','Pb208Pb207',2.5)
3 radialplot(UPb3,common.Pb=1)

```

- (b) Common Pb correction:  Selecting the **isochron** option implements the common Pb correction algorithm of Section 15.4.1a. In other words, it projects all the aliquots parallel to the isochron and onto the radiogenic dimension. It is important to reiterate that selecting this option does **not** return the isochron age!

```
kde(UPb2,common.Pb=2)
```

- (c) Common Pb correction:  Selecting the **Stacey-Kramers** option implements the common Pb correction algorithm of Section 15.4.2b.

```
cad(UPb1,common.Pb=3)
```

3. Initial disequilibrium can be activated by ticking the corresponding box in the GUI, or by calling the **diseq()** function from the CLI. The output of the latter function must be called from the **read.data()** function.

Apply disequilibrium correction?

$^{234}\text{U}$  disequilibrium:

$^{230}\text{Th}$  disequilibrium:

$^{226}\text{Ra}$  disequilibrium:

$^{231}\text{Pa}$  disequilibrium:

$^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratio:   $\pm$

$^{238}\text{U}$  decay constant:   $\pm$   Myr $^{-1}$

$^{235}\text{U}$  decay constant:   $\pm$   Myr $^{-1}$

$^{232}\text{Th}$  decay constant:   $\pm$   Myr $^{-1}$

$^{234}\text{U}$  decay constant:   $\pm$   kyr $^{-1}$

$^{230}\text{Th}$  decay constant:   $\pm$   kyr $^{-1}$

$^{226}\text{Ra}$  decay constant:   $\pm$   kyr $^{-1}$

$^{231}\text{Pa}$  decay constant:   $\pm$   kyr $^{-1}$

Ticking the initial disequilibrium box reveals the decay constants of  $^{234}\text{U}$ ,  $^{230}\text{Th}$ ,  $^{226}\text{Ra}$  and  $^{231}\text{Pa}$ , with default values (in kyr $^{-1}$ ) from Cheng et al. (2013) and Audi et al. (2003). From the CLI, these parameters can be changed using the **settings()** function in exactly the same way as shown in Section 25.1.1.

- (a) There are two ways to specify the initial disequilibrium conditions for  $^{234}\text{U}$  and  $^{230}\text{Th}$ :

$^{234}\text{U}$  disequilibrium:   $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U} =$

If the sample is young enough that secular equilibrium has not yet been re-established, then any measured remanent disequilibrium can be specified here.

CLI example:

```

1 d <- diseq(U48=list(x=1.05,option=2))
2 UPb4 <- read.data('diseq.csv',method='U-Pb',format=2,d=d)
3 concordia(UPb4,type=2)

```

- (b) For the shortest lived isotopes  $^{226}\text{Ra}$  and  $^{231}\text{Pa}$ , only one option is available:

$^{226}\text{Ra}$  disequilibrium:

$^{226}\text{Ra}/^{238}\text{U} =$

It is generally not possible to measure the remanent disequilibrium for these isotopes, so the only option is to specify the hypothesised initial activity ratio.

CLI example:

```
1 d <- diseq(RaU=list(x=1.2,option=1))
2 UPb4 <- read.data('diseq.csv',method='U-Pb',format=2,d=d)
3 concordia(UPb4,type=2)
```

- (c) Finally, for U-Pb data of formats 7 and 8 (which include the  $^{232}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  ratio of the mineral), there is a fourth way to specify the initial  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio, by supplying the measured Th/U-ratio of the magma, determined by geochemical analysis of the whole rock or volcanic glass:

$^{230}\text{Th}$  disequilibrium:

IsoplotR combines this measured ratio with the  $^{232}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ -ratio of the minerals to compute the Th/U fractionation factor.

CLI example:

```
1 d <- diseq(ThU=list(x=4,option=3))
2 UPb4 <- read.data('UPb7.csv',method='U-Pb',format=7,d=d)
3 radialplot(UPb4)
```

The different disequilibrium settings can be combined in the GUI, and from the command line using the `diseq` function:

```
1 d <- diseq(U48=list(x=0,option=1),ThU=list(x=2,option=1),
2             RaU=list(x=2,option=1),PaU=list(x=2,option=1))
3 UPb4 <- read.data('diseq.csv',method='U-Pb',format=2,d=d)
4 concordia(UPb4,type=2,xlim=c(0,5000),ylim=c(0.047,0.057))
```

## 25.2 Concordia

Concordia type:

IsoplotR offers three types of concordia diagrams. The U-Th-Pb diagram is only available for U-Pb data formats 7 and 8.

```
1 concordia(UPb1,type=1) # Wetherill
2 concordia(UPb1,type=2) # Tera-Wasserburg
3 concordia(UPb3,type=3) # U-Th-Pb
```

1. The limits of the concordia diagram can be specified in two ways:

Minimum t:

The first option is to specify the minimum and maximum

Maximum t:

age limits of the concordia line.

```
1 # Wetherill diagram from 300 to 3000 Ma:
2 concordia(UPb1,tlim=c(300,3000))
```

Minimum X:  Alternatively, the limits of the concordia diagram can  
 Maximum X:  also be specified by the minimum and maximum extent  
 Minimum Y:  of the horizontal and vertical axis.  
 Maximum Y:

```
1 # Tera-Wasserburg diagram with U238/Pb206 limits from 10 to 30
2 # and Pb207/Pb206 limits from 0.05 to 0.06:
3 concordia(UPb1,type=2,xlim=c(10,30),ylim=c(0.05,0.06))
```

2. By default, `IsoplotR` plots error ellipses and calculates confidence intervals at a 95% confidence level.

Output errors:

To plot the data as 90% confidence ellipses, change the output error format to `ci` and the confidence level to

Probability cutoff:

$\alpha = 0.1$ :

```
concordia(UPb1,oerr=3,alpha=0.1)
```

3. An extra variable can be entered in the optional (C) column of the input table to create a colour scale (see Section 23.2).

Ellipse fill colour:

The corresponding fill and stroke colours can be speci-

**Heat (reversed)**

fied by selecting the desired ramp and colours from the pull down menu and selection box.

Ellipse fill opacity:

Ellipse stroke colour:

To illustrate the different possibilities, let us consider a U–Pb dataset of format 7 or 8 and use the Th/U ratios to build a colour scale:

```
ThU <- UPb3$x[, 'Th232U238']
```

Specify the fill colours by name:

```
concordia(UPb3,type=2,levels=ThU,ellipse.fill=c('blue','red'))
```

Using red-green-blue-transparency (rgb-alpha) specifiers:

```
concordia(UPb3,type=2,levels=ThU,
          ellipse.fill=c(rgb(1,0,0,0.5),rgb(0,1,0,0.5)))
```

Specifying the stroke colours as a colour palette with 80% opacity and using a uniform white colour for the fill colour:

```
1 concordia(UPb3,type=2,levels=ThU,ellipse.fill='white',
2           ellipse.stroke=heat.colors(n=100,alpha=0.8))
```

Leaving the error ellipses empty but using a reversed colour palette for the stroke colour:

```
1 concordia(UPb3,type=2,levels=ThU,ellipse.fill=NA,
2           ellipse.stroke=rev(rainbow(n=10)))
```

Colour label:  Specifying colour levels adds a colour bar to the concordia diagram, which can be labelled for clarity.

```
concordia(UPb3,type=2,levels=ThU,clabel='Th/U')
```

- IsoplotR automatically chooses a ‘pretty’ sequence of age ticks for the concordia line.

Age ticks:  These default values can be overruled by a comma separated list of numerical values (in Myr).

```
concordia(UPb1,ticks=c(230,240,250))
```

Alternatively, the `ticks` argument can also be used to simply specify the number of ticks:

```
concordia(UPb1,ticks=10)
```

- Labelling the error ellipses can be useful to identify outliers or otherwise noteworthy aliquots.

Show sample numbers? Ticking the box labels the ellipses with the row numbers of the input data.

```
concordia(UPb1,show.numbers=TRUE)
```

- Besides a data visualisation device, the concordia diagram can also be used as a vehicle for various numerical calculations:

Calculate  age Selecting the `concordia` option adds a white ellipse with the concordia composition to the plot, as well as a legend with the concordia age, confidence intervals, MSWD and p-values.

Compute the concordia age of the first 9 aliquots. Show the 10<sup>th</sup> aliquot but do not use it for the calculation:

```
concordia(UPb1,show.age=1,omit=10)
```

- Decay constant uncertainties can be visualised as a thicker concordia line, and propagated into any derived numerical values.

Propagate external uncertainties? Ticking the box adds the decay constant (and  $^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratio) uncertainty after the concordia composition has been calculated.

The following code snippet does not only omit the 10<sup>th</sup> aliquot from the calculation, but also removes it from the plot altogether. The external uncertainties are added by the optional `exterr` argument:

```
concordia(UPb1,show.age=1,hide=10,exterr=TRUE)
```

8. IsoplotR implements three discordia regression models, as discussed in Section 15.3.

Calculate `discordia(model=1)` **age** By default the discordia regression is unconstrained so that both Anchored discordia line?  no the age and common Pb composition of cogenetic aliquots can be simultaneously estimated.

Visualising a model-1 fit in three dimensions on a Tera-Wasserburg concordia diagram, which returns the isochron age and common Pb composition:

```
concordia(UPb2,type=2,show.age=2)
```

Model-2 regression of the same data visualised on a Wetherill concordia diagram, which reports the upper and lower age intercept:

```
concordia(UPb1,type=1,show.age=3)
```

9. The discordia line can also be anchored to a particular common Pb composition.

Anchored discordia line?  **Pb** For formats 1–3, the common Pb anchored is specified via a  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  value. For formats 4–6, it is specified via a pair  **Pb** of  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  values, and for formats 7 and 8,  **age** via the initial  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{208}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{208}\text{Pb}$  values.

Specifying the common Pb composition is done in exactly the same way as the common Pb corrections of Section 25.1.2. For example:

```
1 settings('iratio','Pb206Pb204',9.307)
2 settings('iratio','Pb207Pb204',10.294)
3 concordia(UPb2,type=2,show.age=2,anchor=1)
```

10. Alternatively, the discordia line can also be anchored to a particular age intercept.

Anchored discordia line?  **age**

Selecting the **age** option adds a text box to the GUI in which the age anchor can be specified (in Ma).

Discordia anchor:

300

From the CLI:

```
concordia(UPb2,type=2,show.age=2,anchor=c(2,300))
```

11. The number of significant digits can be specified relative to the analytical uncertainty. For example, if `sigdig=2`, then  $123.45678 \pm 0.12345$  is rounded to  $123.46 \pm 0.12$ .

Significant digits:

2

The significant digits affect all numerical output that is reported in the figure legend.

Reporting model-3 discordia regression results to 3 significant digits:

```
concordia(UPb2,type=2,show.age=4,sigdig=3)
```

## 25.3 Isochrons

The option to visualise U–Pb data as isochrons is only available for data formats 4–8.

1. For formats 4–6,  $^{204}\text{Pb}$  is used as a normalising isotope (Section 15.3.2).

Type: 1. (04 or 08c)/06 vs. 38/06 ✓ Either  $^{206}\text{Pb}$  or  $^{207}\text{Pb}$  can be used as the radiogenic isotope.  
 1. (04 or 08c)/06 vs. 38/06  
 2. (04 or 08c)/07 vs. 35/07

Using the CLI to create a two-panel plot of  $^{204}\text{Pb}$ -based isochron diagrams:

```
1 oldpar <- par(mfrow=c(1,2))
2 isochron(UPb2,type=1) # 204Pb/206Pb vs. 238U/206Pb
3 isochron(UPb2,type=2) # 204Pb/207Pb vs. 235U/207Pb
4 par(oldpar)
```

2. U–Th–Pb isochrons for formats 7 and 8 can be visualised in four different ways. Let  $^{208}\text{Pb}_c$ ,  $^{207}\text{Pb}_c$  and  $^{206}\text{Pb}_c$  be the  $^{208}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{207}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{206}\text{Pb}$  component with the radiogenic component removed. Then these non radiogenic components can be used as a normalising isotope for the U- and Th-decay systems.

Type: 1. (04 or 08c)/06 vs. 38/06 ✓  $^{208}\text{Pb}_c$  is used as a normalising isotope for the uranium clock, and  
 1. (04 or 08c)/06 vs. 38/06  
 2. (04 or 08c)/07 vs. 35/07  
 3. 06c/08 vs. 32/08  
 4. 07c/08 vs. 32/08

Using the CLI to create a  $2 \times 2$  grid of isochron diagrams:

```
1 oldpar <- par(mfrow=c(2,2))
2 isochron(UPb3,type=1) # 208Pbc/206Pb vs. 238U/206Pb
3 isochron(UPb3,type=2) # 208Pbc/207Pb vs. 235U/207Pb
4 isochron(UPb3,type=3) # 206Pbc/208Pb vs. 232Th/208Pb
5 isochron(UPb3,type=4) # 207Pbc/208Pb vs. 232Th/208Pb
6 par(oldpar)
```

3.  3D regression? For formats 4–8, the isochron calculation regression can be done in three dimensions (Total U/Pb or U-Th/Pb), or in 2D. The latter option is more robust and advantageous in extreme cases of extinct initial disequilibrium.

```
1 isochron(UPb2,joint=FALSE)
```

4. Model: 1. Maximum likelihood ✓ The same three regression models that were available for discordia regression under the `concordia` function are also available under the `isochron` function. In fact, their numerical output is exactly the same.

$2 \times 2$  grid of CLI examples:

```
oldpar <- par(mfrow=c(2,2))
# model-3 regression of 204Pb/206Pb vs. 238U/206Pb:
isochron(UPb2,type=1,model=3)
# model-2 regression of 204Pb/207Pb vs. 235U/207Pb:
isochron(UPb2,type=2,model=2)
# model-1 regression of 208Pbc/206Pb vs. 238U/206Pb:
isochron(UPb3,type=2,model=1)
# model-3 regression of 207Pbc/208Pb vs. 232Th/208Pb:
```

```
isochron(UPb3,type=3,model=3)
par(oldpar)
```

5. Minimum X:	0
Maximum X:	2000
Minimum Y:	0
Maximum Y:	0.6
Significant digits:	3
Ellipse fill colour:	Custom colour ramp from: <input type="color"/> to: <input type="color"/>
Ellipse fill opacity	1
Ellipse stroke colour:	<input type="color"/>
Font magnification:	1
Colour label:	Th/U

The output of the `isochron` function can be modified using many of the same optional arguments as the `concordia` function. Thus, we can change the horizontal (`xlim`) and vertical (`ylim`) extent of the plot, adjust the number of significant digits (`sigdig`), label the error ellipses with the sample numbers (`show.numbers`), propagate the decay constant uncertainties (`exterr`), and label and colour those ellipses (`ellipse.fill` and `ellipse.stroke`) according to some additional variable (`levels`).

From the CLI, we can also store the results of the isochron regression in a variable for further processing. For example:

```
1 ThU <- UPb3$x[, 'Th232U238']
2 fit <- isochron(UPb3,type=3,model=1,xlim=c(0,2000),ylim=c(0,0.6),
3                  exterr=TRUE,sigdig=3,show.numbers=TRUE,
4                  levels=ThU,ellipse.fill=c('white','red'),
5                  ellipse.stroke='blue',clabel='Th/U')
```

## 25.4 Radial plots

1. The radial plot is a graphical device to display single grain ages. IsoplotR offers five ways to compute single grain U–Pb ages, as discussed in Section 15.6. Additionally, for U–Pb data formats 7 and 8, it also adds the option to plot the data as  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{232}\text{Th}$  ages:

Type of U-Pb age:  The default option is to calculate single grain concordia ages.

In this screenshot, that is changed to  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  ages.

```
radialplot(UPb1,type=2)
```

Type of U-Pb age:  The 6/7/8 age option applies the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  method to young ages and the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  method to old ages.

$t(6/8) \rightarrow t(7/6) @$

Ma When the 6/7/8 age option is selected, a new text box appears in which the user can specify when to switch between the two methods.

```
radialplot(UPb1,type=4,cutoff.76=1200)
```

2. A discordance filter can be applied to the U–Pb data prior to the construction of the radial plot:

Discordance filter:

For formats 4–8, the discordance filter can be applied either before or after the common Pb correction.

For formats 1–3, the discordance filter can only be applied before the common Pb correction, because this correction forces all the data to be perfectly concordant (see Section 15.4). The `before common Pb correction (if any)` and `after common Pb correction (if any)` options will only produce a different result if a common Pb correction option is applied, as discussed in Section 25.1.2. Five discordance filters are available, as discussed in Section 15.6:

Discordance filter:  Type:

Minimum discordance:

Maximum discordance:

CLI examples:

Apply a  $-2$  to  $+7\%$  concordia distance filter without common Pb correction:

```
radialplot(UPb1,cutoff.disc=discfilter(option=5,cutoff=c(-2,7)))
```

Apply a  $-5$  to  $+15\%$  relative age filter after an isochron-based common Pb correction:

```
1 dscf <- discfilter(option=2,before=FALSE,cutoff=c(-5,15))
2 radialplot(UPb2,common.Pb=2,cutoff.disc=dscf)
```

- Just like concordia diagrams and isochron plots, also radial plots can be modified using various optional formatting arguments (Section 24.1).

Show sample numbers?

The minimum and maximum extent of the radial scale can be specified, as well as the central value ( $z_0$  in Equation 14.4). Samples are represented by filled circles by default, but this can be changed to a range of other shapes. These can be specified as numbers (1–25, see `?points` for further details) or a single character such as '`o`', '`*`', '`+`', or '`.`'. For plot characters that have a fill colour (e.g., 21–25), an additional variable can be used to construct a colour scale. Both the plot symbols and any text labels in the plot of legend can be magnified or reduced via a scaling factor.

Propagate external uncertainties?

Minimum value:

Central value:

Maximum value:

Plot character:

Significant digits:

Fill colour:

from:  to:

Plot symbol magnification:

Font magnification:

Colour label:

```
1 oldpar <- par(cex=0.9) # font magnification
2 radialplot(UPb3,show.numbers=TRUE,exterr=TRUE,from=5,z0=30,to=150,
3     pch=21,alpha=0.05,bg=c('white','red'),cex=2,
4     levels=UPb3$x[, 'Th232U238'],clabel='Th/U')
5 par(oldpar)
```

## 25.5 Weighted mean

The weighted mean plot serves a similar purpose as the radial plot and shares several options with it.

Common Pb correction:	isochron
Type of U-Pb age:	5: concordia age
Discordance filter:	after common Pb correction (if any)
Type:	concordia distance
Minimum discordance:	-2
Maximum discordance:	7

Like the radial plot, also the weighted mean function can be applied to five (for formats 1–3) or six (for formats 4–8) different types of U–(Th)–Pb dates. These may or may not be corrected for common Pb and initial disequilibrium, and may or may not have passed through a discordance filter.

Using the default settings:

```
weightedmean(UPb1)
```

A more sophisticated example showing the weighted mean of the  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$  dates, after an isochron-based common-Pb correction:

```
1 dscf <- discfilter(option=5, before=FALSE, cutoff=c(-2, 7))
2 weightedmean(UPb2, type=2, common.Pb=2, cutoff.disc=dscf)
```

The remaining options of the weighted mean function are the same as for the generic version discussed in Section 24.3.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Random effects model?
<input type="checkbox"/> Propagate external uncertainties?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reject outliers?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rank the ages?
Minimum age limit: -10
Maximum age limit: 110
Significant digits: 1
Font magnification: 1
Fill colour: Heat
Outlier colour:
Fill colour opacity: 0.5
Colour label: Th/U

The ages can be averaged either using the one-parameter ordinary weighted mean algorithm, or the two-parameter random effects algorithm. Outliers are detected using the modified Chauvenet criterion, which may select different outliers for the ordinary weighted mean and random effects model. By default the aliquots are plotted in the order of the input table. However they can also be ranked in order of increasing age. The minimum and maximum extent of the age scale can be specified and may extend to negative values; the fill colour of the rectangular segments can be modified based on an additional variable, with a designated separate colour for outliers; the confidence level and significant digits can be specified as in the concordia, isochron and radial plots.

```
1 weightedmean(UPb3, random.effects=TRUE, detect.outliers=TRUE,
2           outlier.col='red', ranked=TRUE, from=-10, to=110,
3           sigdig=1, levels=UPb3$x[, 'Th232U238'],
4           rect.col=heat.colors(n=100, alpha=0.5), xlabel='Th/U')
```

## 25.6 Kernel density estimates

Like the radial plot and weighted mean plot, also the kernel density estimation function can be applied to five or six different types of U–(Th)–Pb dates.

Common Pb correction:

Apply disequilibrium correction?

Type of U-Pb age:

Discordance filter:

Type:

The U-Pb data may or may not be corrected for common Pb and initial disequilibrium, and may or may not have passed through a discordance filter.

CLI examples:

```
1 dscf <- discfilter(option=4, before=FALSE, cutoff=c(-1,5))
2 kde(UPb2, common.Pb=2, type=2, cutoff.disc=dscf)
```

Apply a 0 to +1% Stacey-Kramers filter to a detrital zircon U-Pb dataset before a Stacey-Kramers common Pb correction:

```
1 Luozi <- read.data('Luozi.csv', method='U-Pb', format=3)
2 dscf <- discfilter(option=3, before=TRUE, cutoff=c(0,1))
3 kde(Luozi, common.Pb=3, cutoff.disc=dscf)
```

Apply a -1 to +5% perpendicular Aitchison filter before a Stacey-Kramers based common Pb correction:

```
1 dscf <- discfilter(option=4, before=TRUE, cutoff=c(-1,5))
2 kde(Luozi, common.Pb=3, cutoff.disc=dscf)
```

## 25.7 Cumulative age distributions

Like the radial, weighted mean and KDE plots, also the CAD can be used to visualise five or six (depending on the U-Pb data format) different U-Pb ages.

Common Pb correction:

Apply disequilibrium correction?

Type of U-Pb age:

And like these other diagrams, the data can be corrected for initial disequilibrium or common Pb and filtered for discordance prior to visualisation as a CAD.

Discordance filter:

t(6/8) → t(7/6) @  Ma

```
cad(UPb1, common.Pb=3, type=4, cutoff.76=1000)
```

All other options are as in Section 24.6.

## 25.8 Ages

Besides plotting diagrams, IsoplotR can also generate data tables, which can be downloaded as .csv files. For U-Pb data formats 1–6, these tables contain the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$ ,  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$ ,  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  and single grain concordia ages. For formats 7 and 8, the  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{232}\text{Th}$  age is also reported. In addition to this, there is also the option to add a column with the estimate discordance of each aliquot.

1. Each aliquot can be corrected for initial disequilibrium or common Pb.

Common Pb correction:  Note that, for formats 1–3, the common Pb correction always produces perfectly concordant ages. This may not be the most informative result.

Apply disequilibrium correction?

```
age(UPb2,common.Pb=3)
```

2. By default, age uncertainties are reported as absolute 2-sigma (2 standard error) confidence intervals.

Output errors:  The confidence levels for the analytical uncertainties can be adjusted here, to 2 standard errors or any arbitrary confidence level, in either absolute or relative units.

1se (%)

3. The decay constant uncertainties can be added to each age.

Propagate external uncertainties? Note that the uncertainties of the resulting ages may be strongly correlated with each other when ticking this box.

```
age(UPb1,exterr=TRUE)
```

4. An additional column can be added to the output table listing the estimated discordance for each aliquot, which can either be calculated before or after the common Pb correction.

Show discordance:  Type:  concordia distance  
  
  
  
  
  
 p-value

In addition to the six discordance filter options that were available to the radial, weighted mean, KDE and CAD plots, the ages function also adds the option to list the p-value for concordance of each aliquot. Although this value should not be used as a basis to filter data, it may be useful for other purposes.

```
age(UPb1,discordance=discfilter(before=TRUE,option=6))
```

5. The numerical results can be reported to any number of significant digits.
6. The numerical results can be reported to any number of significant digits.

Significant digits:  This may be useful if the results are to be used for subsequent calculations.

```
tt <- age(UPb1,sigdig=4)
```

## References

- Audi, G. et al. (2003). “The NUBASE evaluation of nuclear and decay properties”. In: *Nuclear Physics A* 729.1, pp. 3–128.
- Cheng, H. et al. (2013). “Improvements in  $^{230}\text{Th}$  dating,  $^{230}\text{Th}$  and  $^{234}\text{U}$  half-life values, and U–Th isotopic measurements by multi-collector inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry”. In: *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 371, pp. 82–91.
- Hiess, J. et al. (2012). “ $^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  systematics in terrestrial uranium-bearing minerals”. In: *Science* 335.6076, pp. 1610–1614.
- Jaffey, A. et al. (1971). “Precision measurement of half-lives and specific activities of U-235 and U-238”. In: *Physical Review C* 4.5, p. 1889.
- Le Roux, L. J. and L. E. Glendenin (1963). “Half-life of  $^{232}\text{Th}$ . ” In: *Proceedings of the National Meeting on Nuclear Energy, Pretoria, South Africa*.

# Chapter 26

## Pb–Pb and Th–Pb

### 26.1 Pb–Pb

**Input format:**  IsoplotR accommodates three Pb–Pb formats. See Section 16.1 for details.

```
PbPb <- read.data('PbPb3.csv', method='Pb-Pb', format=3)
```

which returns a list with items `format` and `x` containing the input format and isotopic ratio data, respectively.

isochron  
radial plot  
weighted mean  
KDE  
CAD  
ages

Pb–Pb data can be visualised on five different plot devices. Additionally, the single aliquot age estimates can also be reported in a downloadable data table.

$^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratio:   $\pm$   The default  $^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratio is given  
 $^{238}\text{U}$  decay constant:   $\pm$    $\text{Myr}^{-1}$  by Hiess et al. (2012), and the U de-  
 $^{235}\text{U}$  decay constant:   $\pm$    $\text{Myr}^{-1}$  cay constants by Jaffey et al. (1971). These values can be changed here.

```
1 # use the Steiger and Jaeger (1977) value with zero uncertainty
2 settings('iratio','U238U235',137.88,0)
3 # use the Schoene et al. (2006) value and uncertainty
4 settings('lambda','U238',0.000154993,0.00000013)
```

### 26.2 Pb–Pb isochrons

1. IsoplotR offers the same three options to deal with the scatter of the data around the best-fit isochron line as the generic regression function of Section 24.2.

**Model:**   1. Maximum likelihood  
2. Ordinary least squares  
3. Maximum likelihood with overdispersion

These three models represent three different ways to capture any excess dispersion of the data w.r.t. the analytical uncertainties (Figure 13.11).

```
isochron(PbPb,model=1)
```

2. Data can be fitted using conventional ( $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  vs.  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ ) or inverse ( $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  vs.  $^{204}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$ ) isochrons (Section 16.2).

- Inverse isochron?** These two types of isochron yield similar ages provided that the uncertainties are relatively small compared to the isotopic ratio values.

```
isochron(PbPb,inverse=TRUE)
```

3. As discussed in Section 16.3, the mantle evolution model of Stacey and Kramers (1975) can be included with the isochron plot.

- Add Stacey-Kramers Pb-Pb growth curve?** Any intersections of the isochron with the mantle evolution curve are reported in the plot legend.

The Stacey-Kramers curve may not be easy to spot for very radiogenic samples. So here is an example of some whole rock Pb-Pb analyses that are relatively poor in uranium (Kamber and Moorbat, 1998):

```
1 PbPb2 <- read.data('Kamber.csv',method='Pb-Pb',format=1)
2 isochron(PbPb2,growth=TRUE)
```

4. The appearance and numerical behaviour of Pb-Pb isochrons can be modified using similar options as the U-Pb isochrons of Section 25.3, and as the general regression of Section 24.2.

Minimum X:  Use the textboxes to set the axis limits (`xlim` and `ylim`),  
 Maximum X:  the number of significant digits (`sigdig`), font size (`cex`)  
 Minimum Y:  and colour legend (`levels` and `clabel`). Use the pull-  
 Maximum Y:  down menu and selection boxes to adjust the fill and  
 Significant digits:  stroke colour of the error ellipses (`ellipse.fill` and  
 Ellipse fill colour:  `ellipse.stroke`). Tick the checkboxes to propagate  
     from:  to:  decay constant uncertainties (`exterr`) and label the er-  
 Ellipse fill opacity:  ror ellipses with the row numbers of the input data  
 Ellipse stroke colour:  (`show.numbers`).  
 Font magnification:   
 Colour label:

Propagate external uncertainties?

Show sample numbers?

```
2 isochron(PbPb2,exterr=TRUE,show.numbers=TRUE,
3   xlim=c(0.075,0.09),ylim=c(1.0,1.2),
4   sigdig=3,ellipse.fill=NA,ellipse.stroke="red",growth=TRUE)
```

## 26.3 Pb-Pb ages

Although, as discussed in Section 16.5, Pb-Pb ages are usually calculated by isochron regression, it is also possible to obtain the ages of the individual aliquots. Once these have been calculated, it is then straightforward to turn them into the radial, weighted mean, KDE and CAD plots. Thus,

it is useful to introduce `IsoplotR`'s age calculation function before discussing the aforementioned plots.

1. In contrast with the U–Pb method, in which common-Pb correction often does not affect the age much, this correction is crucial for single grain Pb–Pb dating.

**Common Pb correction:** `isochron`  In contrast with the U–Pb data of Section 25.4, the common Pb correction of Pb–Pb data is limited to two options: nominal and isochron. These implement the two procedures shown in Figure 16.4.

By default the CLI version of the `age()` function returns the isochron age. To produce a table of single-aliquot ages, the optional `isochron` argument must be set to `FALSE`:

```
age(PbPb, isochron=FALSE, common.Pb=2)
```

2. Nominal common Pb correction of the Pb–Pb data proceeds like the nominal common Pb correction of U–Pb data formats 4–6 (Section 25.1).

**Common Pb correction:** `nominal`  The nominal  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  ratios in this example correspond to a  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ratio of 0.625, which equals the y-intercept of the inverse isochron.

```
settings('iratio','Pb207Pb204',6.25)
settings('iratio','Pb206Pb204',10)
age(PbPb, isochron=FALSE, common.Pb=1)
```

3. The systematic uncertainty of the decay constants can be added to the single grain age estimates by ticking the corresponding box.

**Propagate external uncertainties?** Be aware that this will introduce error correlations between the different aliquots, which are not reported in the data table!

```
age(PbPb, isochron=FALSE, common.Pb=2, exterr=TRUE)
```

4. The uncertainty associated with the common Pb correction is neither a purely systematic nor a purely random uncertainty.

**Propagate uncertainty of initial daughter ratio?** Including the common-Pb uncertainty may significantly increase the single grain age errors whilst causing strong error correlations, which are not reported in the output table.

```
age(PbPb, isochron=FALSE, common.Pb=2, exterr=TRUE, projerr=TRUE)
```

## 26.4 Th–Pb

Input format: **3. Three ratios**

1. Normal	isochron
2. Inverse	radial plot
<b>3. Three ratios</b>	weighted mean
	KDE
	CAD
	ages

IsoplotR accommodates three Th–Pb formats (see Section 16.4 for details), which can be analysed by the same six functions as the Pb–Pb data (Section 26.1).

```
ThPb <- read.data('ThPb2.csv', method='Th-Pb', format=2)
```

which returns a list with items `format` and `x` containing the input format and isotopic ratio data, respectively.

Initial $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ ratio:	29.476	$\pm$	0
$^{232}\text{Th}$ decay constant:	0.0000495	$\pm$	0.0000025

Myr $^{-1}$

The default values for the initial  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  ratio and its standard error are taken from Stacey and Kramers (1975). These values are hidden from the `isochron` function. The default Th decay constant is given by Le Roux and Glendenin (1963).

```
1 # round the inherited 208Pb/204Pb ratio to 30 +/- 0
2 settings('iratio','Pb208Pb204',30,0)
3 # round the 232Th decay constant to 0.00005 +/- 0.000003
4 settings('lambda','Th232',0.00005,0.000003)
```

## 26.5 Th–Pb isochrons

Isochron regression proceeds in exactly the same fashion as the generic regression function of Section 24.2, apart from just two small geochronology-specific differences:

- Inverse isochron?** Both conventional and inverse isochrons are available, and the analytical uncertainty of the resulting ages may be augmented by the decay constant uncertainties.
- Propagate external uncertainties?**

```
isochron(ThPb, inverse=TRUE, exterr=FALSE)
```

The remaining isochron settings are identical to those of the generic regression function of Section 24.2. For example, the following code snippet creates an inverse Th–Pb isochron with empty blue error ellipses numbered by aliquot:

```
1 isochron(ThPb, inverse=TRUE, show.numbers=TRUE,
2         ellipse.fill=NA, ellipse.stroke=rgb(0,0,1,0.5))
```

## 26.6 Th–Pb ages

Th–Pb age calculation can either be done

1. by projection along the inverse isochron (Figure 16.4):

Use the isochron intercept to estimate the initial  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ -ratio?

```
age(ThPb, isochron=FALSE, i2i=TRUE)
```

where the *i2i* argument stands for ‘intercept-to-initial ratio’;

2. or using a nominal common Pb correction:

Initial  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  ratio: 38.82  $\pm$  0

Use the isochron intercept to estimate the initial  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ -ratio?

which, at the CLI, is specified via the `settings()` function:

```
1 settings('iratio','Pb208Pb204',38.82)
2 age(ThPb,isochron=FALSE,i2i=FALSE)
```

3. The systematic uncertainties associated with the decay constant errors and common Pb correction can be added to the single grain age estimates.

- Propagate external uncertainties?
  - Propagate uncertainty of initial da

This will expand the uncertainties and produce error correlations between the different aliquots, which are *not* reported in the data table.

## 26.7 Radial, weighted mean, KDE and CAD plots

The settings for the radial, weighted mean, KDE and CAD plots combine the generic settings for those graphical devices (Sections 24.1–24.6) with the settings for the age calculator (Sections 26.3 and 26.6).

Common Pb correction: isochron ▾

Show sample numbers?

### Propagate external uncertainties?

Transformation: linear

## Finite mixtures: x

Minimum value:

Central value: **1565**

Central value: **4565**  
Maximum value: **1575**

For example, here are shown the GUI settings for a radial plot of numbered Pb–Pb data, which is plotted on a linear scale that stretches from 4555 to 4575 Ma and is centred around 4565 Ma. Single grain ages are corrected using the isochron-based common Pb composition, and a single age component is fitted to them. The standard errors of the central age and the single component age include decay constant uncertainties.

```
1 radialplot(PbPb,show.numbers=TRUE,exterr=TRUE,transformation='linear',  
2 k=1.from=4555.to=4575.z0=4565)
```

Note that whilst it is possible to propagate the systematic error associated with the decay constant uncertainties, `IsoplotR` currently **does not provide a means to propagate the uncertainty of the common Pb correction** (i.e., the `projerr` argument in the `age()` function). This uncertainty is neither a purely systematic nor a purely random uncertainty and cannot easily be propagated with conventional geochronological data processing algorithms. This caveat is especially pertinent when the common Pb correction has been determined by isochron regression. You may note that the uncertainties of the central age are usually much smaller than those of the isochron. In this case the isochron errors are more meaningful, and the radial plot should just be used to inspect the residuals of the data around the isochron.

The same caveat applies to the weighted mean plot. The KDE and CAD functions are, of course, immune to this problem because they are not associated with any numerical output. These functions therefore work exactly as the generic versions of Chapter 24, with the only difference being the common Pb correction.

CLI examples:

1. The weighted mean using a nominal common Pb correction with  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb} = 9.15$  and  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb} = 10.23$ ; applying the random effects model and plotting the ranked ages:

```
1 settings('iratio','Pb206Pb204',9.15)
2 settings('iratio','Pb207Pb204',10.23)
3 weightedmean(PbPb,common.Pb=1,random.effects=TRUE,ranked=TRUE)
```

2. An orange KDE without histogram or rug plot, using an isochron-based common Pb correction, with a 20 Myr bandwidth and axis limits from 4500 to 4650 Ma:

```
1 kde(PbPb,kde.col='orange',rug=FALSE,show.hist=FALSE,
2     common.Pb=2,bw=20,from=4500,to=4650)
```

3. A CAD with without vertical lines and steps marked by ‘x’:

```
cad(PbPb,verticals=TRUE,pch='x')
```

4. A radial plot of Th–Pb isochron residuals:

```
radialplot(ThPb,i2i=TRUE)
```

where the central age is marked by an asterisk in the title of the radial plot to indicate the circularity of using an isochron-based common Pb correction to compute a central age.

## References

- Hiess, J. et al. (2012). “ $^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  systematics in terrestrial uranium-bearing minerals”. In: *Science* 335.6076, pp. 1610–1614.
- Jaffey, A. et al. (1971). “Precision measurement of half-lives and specific activities of U-235 and U-238”. In: *Physical Review C* 4.5, p. 1889.

- Kamber, B. S. and S. Moorbath (1998). "Initial Pb of the Amitsoq gneiss revisited: implication for the timing of early Archaean crustal evolution in West Greenland". In: *Chemical Geology* 150.1-2, pp. 19–41.
- Le Roux, L. J. and L. E. Glendenin (1963). "Half-life of  $^{232}\text{Th}$ ." In: *Proceedings of the National Meeting on Nuclear Energy, Pretoria, South Africa*.
- Stacey, J. and J. Kramers (1975). "Approximation of terrestrial lead isotope evolution by a two-stage model". In: *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 26.2, pp. 207–221.

# Chapter 27

## Ar–Ar and K–Ca

### 27.1 Ar–Ar

IsoplotR accommodates three Ar–Ar formats. See Section 17.1 for details. The left hand side of the GUI contains the usual input table, as well as two text boxes for the J-factor and its standard error:

J: <input type="text" value="0.007608838"/>	$\pm$ <input type="text" value="0.000019"/>	Input format: <input checked="" type="button" value="1. Normal"/> 1. Normal 2. Inverse 3. Three ratios						
	39/36	err[39/36]	40/36	err[40/36]	rho	(39)	(C)	(omit)
1	20.38	0.11	404.67	2.09	0.959	0.042		
2	26.46	0.08	419.11	1.25	0.923	0.094		
3	52.94	0.16	543.67	1.61	0.939	0.282		
4	83.1	0.58	672.05	4.64	0.989	0.185		

The input files for the CLI represent the same structure: they contain both the J factor and the isotopic ratio data.

```
ArAr <- read.data('ArAr1.csv', method='Ar–Ar', format=1)
```

The output of the `read.data()` function reflects the contents of the input file. It returns a list with three items:

1. `format` stores the value of the eponymous input argument,
2. `J` is a two-element vector with the J-factor and its standard error,
3. `x` contains the isotopic ratio data.

isochron	Ar–Ar data can be visualised on six different plot devices. Additionally, the single aliquot age estimates can also be reported in a downloadable data table.
radial plot	
age spectrum	
weighted mean	
KDE	
CAD	
ages	

The default atmospheric  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{36}\text{Ar}$  ratio is given by Lee et al. (2006), and the  $^{40}\text{K}$  decay constant by Renne et al. (2011). These values can be changed here:

Atmospheric  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{36}\text{Ar}$  ratio:   $\pm$    
 $^{40}\text{K}$  decay constant:   $\pm$    $\text{Myr}^{-1}$

```

1 # use the atmospheric ratio from Nier (1950):
2 settings('iratio','Ar40Ar36',295.5,0.5)

```

## 27.2 K–Ca

Input format:	3. Three ratios ▾ 1. Normal 2. Inverse <b>3. Three ratios</b>	isochron	IsoplotR accommodates three K–Ca formats (see Section 17.3 for details), which can be analysed by the same methods as the Ar–Ar method with the exception of the age spectra function.
		radial plot weighted mean KDE CAD ages	

```
KCa <- read.data('KCa3.csv',method='K-Ca',format=3)
```

returns a list with items `format` and `x` containing the input format and isotopic ratio data, respectively.

$^{40}\text{Ca}/^{44}\text{Ca}$ ratio:	46.48	$\pm$	0.044
$^{40}\text{K}$ decay constant:	0.00055305	$\pm$	0.00000132

$\text{Myr}^{-1}$

The default value for the inherited Ca component is given by Moore and Machlan (1972). This option is hidden from the `isochron` function. The default K decay constant is the same as for the Ar–Ar method (Renne et al., 2011).

```

1 # use the Steiger and Jaeger (1977) decay constant with zero uncertainty
2 settings('lambda','K40',5.543e-4,0)

```

## 27.3 Isochrons

1. IsoplotR offers the same three options to deal with the scatter of the data around the best-fit isochron line as the generic regression function of Section 24.2 and the Pb–Pb isochron function (Section 26.2).

Model:	1. Maximum likelihood <b>1. Maximum likelihood</b> 2. Ordinary least squares 3. Maximum likelihood with overdispersion	▼	These three models represent three different ways to capture any excess dispersion of the data relative to the nominal uncertainties (Figure 13.11).
--------	---	---	--

```
isochron(ArAr,model=3)
```

Model:	2. Ordinary least squares <b>1. Maximum likelihood</b> <b>2. Ordinary least squares</b> 3. Maximum likelihood with overdispersion	▼	The same three models are available for K–Ca data as well.
--------	--	---	--

```
isochron(KCa,model=2)
```

2.  Inverse isochron? Data can be fitted using conventional ( $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{36}\text{Ar}$  vs.  $^{39}\text{Ar}/^{36}\text{Ar}$ ) or inverse ( $^{36}\text{Ar}/^{40}\text{Ar}$  vs.  $^{39}\text{Ar}/^{40}\text{Ar}$ ) isochrons (Section 16.2).

```
isochron(ArAr,inverse=FALSE)
```

- Inverse isochron? For the K–Ca method, conventional isochrons plot  $^{40}\text{Ca}/^{44}\text{Ca}$  against  $^{40}\text{K}/^{44}\text{Ca}$ , and inverse isochrons plot  $^{44}\text{Ca}/^{40}\text{Ca}$  against  $^{40}\text{K}/^{40}\text{Ca}$ .

```
isochron(KCa,inverse=TRUE)
```

3. The appearance and numerical behaviour of Ar–Ar and K–Ca isochrons can be modified using the same options as the Pb–Pb isochrons of Section 26.2, and the general regression of Section 24.2.

- Propagate external uncertainties?

Tick the checkbox to propagate decay constant uncertainties (`exterr`) and label the error ellipses with the row numbers of the input data (`show.numbers`), use the textboxes to set the axis limits (`xlim` and `ylim`), significance level (`alpha`) and significant digits (`sigdig`), as well as the fill and stroke colour of the error ellipses (`ellipse.fill` and `ellipse.stroke`), font size (`cex`) and colour legend (`levels` and `clabel`).

Minimum X:

Maximum X:

Minimum Y:

Maximum Y:

Probability cutoff:

Significant digits:

Ellipse fill colour:

Ellipse stroke colour:

Font magnification:

Colour label:

```
1 isochron(KCa,inverse=TRUE,exterr=FALSE,show.numbers=TRUE,
2           xlim=c(0,2),ylim=c(0,0.02),ellipse.fill=rgb(0.5,1,0.5,0.2))
```

## 27.4 Ages

Like the Pb–Pb and Th–Pb methods of Chapter 26, also the K–Ca method is usually applied to cogenetic aliquots for isochron regression. However the Ar–Ar method is also commonly applied to detrital grains, which may exhibit a wide range of true ages. For both the Ar–Ar and K–Ca methods, `IsoplotR` produces data tables of the single aliquot age estimates, which can be further analysed and displayed as age spectra, and radial, weighted mean, KDE and CAD plots.

The atmospheric argon correction for the Ar–Ar ages can be specified in one of two ways:

- Use isochron intercept as initial  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{36}\text{Ar}$ -ratio? Ticking this box uses the y-intercept of an isochron fit through all the Ar data as an initial  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{36}\text{Ar}$ -ratio for the age calculations. Unticking it uses nominal atmospheric ratio of Section 27.1.

```

1 # i2i stands for 'intercept to initial'
2 age(ArAr,i2i=TRUE)

```

- Use isochron intercept as initial  $^{40}\text{Ca}/^{44}\text{Ca}$ -ratio? Similarly, for the K-Ca method, the inherited  $^{40}\text{Ca}$ -component can be removed by projection along the inverse isochron.

```
age(KCa,i2i=TRUE)
```

$^{40}\text{Ca}/^{44}\text{Ca}$  ratio:   $\pm$

Use isochron intercept as initial  $^{40}\text{Ca}/^{44}\text{Ca}$ -ratio?

Alternatively, the initial  $^{40}\text{Ca}$  can be removed by means of a nominal  $^{40}\text{Ca}/^{44}\text{Ca}$ -correction.

```

1 settings('iratio','Ca40Ca44',50,0)
2 age(KCa,i2i=FALSE)

```

- Propagate uncertainty of initial daughter ratio? The analytical error of the initial  $^{40}\text{Ar}$ - or  $^{40}\text{Ca}$ -correction can be added to the age uncertainty.

This part-systematic, part-random uncertainty may cause strong error correlations between the different aliquots of a single sample. But when considering each aliquot in isolation (for example, the  $i=2^{\text{th}}$  aliquot), the full error propagation with decay constant uncertainties (`exterr`) and initial daughter correction uncertainty (`projerr`) does provide the most faithful estimate of the true age uncertainty:

```
age(ArAr,i2i=TRUE,projerr=TRUE,i=2)
```

## 27.5 Ar–Ar age spectra

There are just two minor differences between the Ar–Ar age spectrum function and the generic age spectrum function of Section 24.4. First, an atmospheric argon correction can be made to each aliquot in exactly the same way as described in Section 27.4, either using a nominal value or the isochron intercept:

```
agespectrum(ArAr,plateau=TRUE,i2i=FALSE)
```

- Propagate external uncertainties? Second, the  $^{40}\text{K}$  decay constant uncertainty can be propagated into the plateau age.

```
agespectrum(ArAr,plateau=TRUE,exterr=TRUE)
```

The remaining options are the same as the generic age spectrum function:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Extract plateau?	If requested, the plateau age can be computed either using the ordinary weighted mean algorithm of Equation 13.15, or the random effects model of Equation 13.19.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Random effects model?		
Significant digits:	2	The rectangular segments of the age spectrum can be coloured based on any additional parameter. Here a reversed(rainbow) colour ramp is used for aliquots that belong to the age plateau, whereas segments that do not belong to the plateau are left empty.
Font magnification:	1	
Fill colour:	Rainbow (reversed)	
Outlier colour:		
Fill colour opacity:	0.5	
Colour label:	40Ar/36Ar	

At the CLI, the  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{36}\text{Ar}$ -ratio that forms the basis of the colour scale can be extracted from the `ArAr` data object, and the colour label can be typeset using an R-expression for the  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{36}\text{Ar}$  ratio that includes superscripts:

```

1 agespectrum(ArAr,levels=ArAr$x[, 'Ar40Ar36'],plateau=TRUE,
2   plateau.col=rev(rainbow(n=100,alpha=0.5)),
3   exterr=TRUE,i2i=FALSE,random.effects=FALSE,
4   xlabel=expression(''~40*'Ar/'~36*'Ar'))

```

## 27.6 Radial, weighted mean, KDE and CAD plots

The settings for the radial, weighted mean, KDE and CAD plots combine the generic settings for those graphical devices (Sections 24.1–24.6) with the settings for the age calculator.

Minimum value:	700
Maximum value:	1000
Kernel bandwidth:	0.02
Histogram binwidth:	0.02
Font magnification:	1

- Take logarithms?
- Show histogram?
- Adaptive KDE?
- Add rug plot?
- Use isochron intercept as initial  $^{40}\text{Ca}/^{44}\text{Ca}$ -ratio?

For example, here are shown the GUI settings for a KDE plot of the KCa dataset, which is plotted on a logarithmic scale that stretches from 700 to 1000 Ma and uses a fixed kernel bandwidth and binwidth of 2%.

```

1 kde(KCa,log=TRUE,from=700,to=1000,bw=0.02,
2   binwidth=0.02,adaptive=FALSE,i2i=TRUE)

```

Similarly, the weighted mean, radial plot and CAD functions work exactly like the generic versions of Chapter 24, with the only difference being the inherited daughter correction, and the ability to propagate external uncertainties.

CLI examples:

1. A radial plot on a logarithmic scale that ranges 60 to 64 Ma and is centred at 61 Ma, with samples coloured according to their measured  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{36}\text{Ar}$ -ratio:

```
1 radialplot(ArAr,from=60,to=64,z0=61,levels=ArAr$x[, 'Ar40Ar36'],  
2 clabel=expression(''^40*'Ar/'^36*'Ar'))
```

2. The weighted mean using a nominal atmospheric argon correction with Nier (1950)'s  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{36}\text{Ar}$  value; applying the random effects model and plotting the ranked ages:

```
1 settings('iratio','Ar40Ar36',295.5,0.5)  
2 weightedmean(ArAr,i2i=FALSE,random.effects=TRUE,ranked=TRUE)
```

3. A CAD without vertical lines:

```
cad(KCa,verticals=FALSE)
```

## References

- Lee, J.-Y. et al. (2006). "A redetermination of the isotopic abundances of atmospheric Ar". In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 70.17, pp. 4507–4512.
- Moore, L. J. and L. Machlan (1972). "High-accuracy determination of calcium in blood serum by isotope dilution mass spectrometry". In: *Analytical chemistry* 44.14, pp. 2291–2296.
- Nier, A. O. (1950). "A redetermination of the relative abundances of the isotopes of carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, argon, and potassium". In: *Physical Review* 77.6, p. 789.
- Renne, P. R. et al. (2011). "Response to the comment by WH Schwarz et al. on "Joint determination of  $^{40}\text{K}$  decay constants and  $^{40}\text{Ar}^*/^{40}\text{K}$  for the Fish Canyon sanidine standard, and improved accuracy for  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  geochronology" by P.R. Renne et al.(2010)". In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 75.17, pp. 5097–5100.

# Chapter 28

## Rb–Sr, Sm–Nd, Lu–Hf and Re–Os

Input format:  1. Normal  
2. Inverse  
3. Concentrations

Simple parent-daughter chronometers can be specified in three different input formats. See Chapter 18 for details.

```
1 RbSr <- read.data('RbSr1.csv',method='Rb-Sr',format=1)
2 SmNd <- read.data('SmNd2.csv',method='Sm-Nd',format=2)
3 LuHf <- read.data('LuHf3.csv',method='Lu-Hf',format=3)
4 ReOs <- read.data('ReOs2.csv',method='Re-Os',format=2)
```

returns lists with items `format` and `x` containing the input format and isotopic ratio data, respectively.

isochron
radial plot
weighted mean
KDE
CAD
ages

The simple parent daughter chronometers can be visualised on the same five plot devices as the Pb–Pb, Th–Pb and K–Ca methods. Additionally, the single aliquot age estimates can also be reported in a downloadable data table.

### 28.1 Stable isotope ratios and decay constants

$^{85}\text{Rb}/^{87}\text{Rb}$ ratio:	2.59265	$\pm$	0.00085
$^{84}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ ratio:	0.056549	$\pm$	0.0000715
$^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ ratio:	0.69938	$\pm$	0.00006
$^{88}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ ratio	8.37861	$\pm$	0.001624
$^{87}\text{Rb}$ decay constant:	0.000013972	$\pm$	4.5e-7 Myr <sup>-1</sup>

The default  $^{85}\text{Rb}/^{87}\text{Rb}$  ratio is given by Catanzaro et al. (1969), and the  $^{84}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  and  $^{88}\text{Sr}/^{87}\text{Sr}$ -ratios by Moore et al. (1982). The default value for the non-radiogenic  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Rb}$  ratio is taken from Compston et al. (1971). The latter value can, of course, be replaced by the isochron intercept in all the plotting functions. The  $^{87}\text{Rb}$  decay constant is given by Villa et al. (2015).

```
1 # change the decay constant to the Steiger and Jaeger (1977) value:
2 settings('lambda','Rb87',0.0000142,0)
```

$^{144}\text{Sm}/^{152}\text{Sm}$ ratio:	0.115117	$\pm$	0.000189
$^{147}\text{Sm}/^{152}\text{Sm}$ ratio:	0.561134	$\pm$	0.000622
$^{148}\text{Sm}/^{152}\text{Sm}$ ratio:	0.420634	$\pm$	0.000392
$^{149}\text{Sm}/^{152}\text{Sm}$ ratio:	0.516973	$\pm$	0.000393
$^{150}\text{Sm}/^{152}\text{Sm}$ ratio:	0.275438	$\pm$	0.000459
$^{154}\text{Sm}/^{152}\text{Sm}$ ratio:	0.850468	$\pm$	0.000484
$^{142}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$ ratio:	1.14101	$\pm$	0.0007
$^{143}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$ ratio:	0.51154	$\pm$	0.0004
$^{145}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$ ratio:	0.34848	$\pm$	0.00015
$^{146}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$ ratio:	0.72228	$\pm$	0.00051
$^{148}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$ ratio:	0.24186	$\pm$	0.0003
$^{150}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$ ratio:	0.23691	$\pm$	0.00042
$^{147}\text{Sm}$ decay constant:	0.000006524	$\pm$	1.2e-8 Myr <sup>-1</sup>

```

1 # change the decay constant to the Lugmair and Marti (1978) value:
2 settings('lambda','Sm147',0.000006540,0.000000049)

```

$^{185}\text{Re}/^{187}\text{Re}$ ratio:	0.59738	$\pm$	0.000195
$^{184}\text{Os}/^{192}\text{Os}$ ratio:	0.000485	$\pm$	0.00011
$^{186}\text{Os}/^{192}\text{Os}$ ratio:	0.03889	$\pm$	0.00011
$^{187}\text{Os}/^{192}\text{Os}$ ratio:	0.04817	$\pm$	0.00003
$^{188}\text{Os}/^{192}\text{Os}$ ratio:	0.32474	$\pm$	0.00005
$^{189}\text{Os}/^{192}\text{Os}$ ratio:	0.39593	$\pm$	0.00004
$^{190}\text{Os}/^{192}\text{Os}$ ratio:	0.64388	$\pm$	0.00045
$^{187}\text{Re}$ decay constant:	0.00001666	$\pm$	8.5e-8 Myr <sup>-1</sup>

```

1 # change the decay constant to the Selby et al. (2007) value:
2 settings('lambda','Re187',0.000016689,0.000000038)

```

$^{176}\text{Lu}/^{175}\text{Lu}$ ratio:	0.02668	$\pm$	0.000013
$^{174}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$ ratio:	0.00871	$\pm$	0.00005
$^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$ ratio:	0.2829	$\pm$	0.003
$^{178}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$ ratio:	1.4671	$\pm$	0.0001
$^{179}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$ ratio:	0.7325	$\pm$	0
$^{180}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$ ratio:	1.88651	$\pm$	0.00012
$^{176}\text{Lu}$ decay constant:	0.00001867	$\pm$	8e-8 Myr <sup>-1</sup>

```

1 # change the decay constant to the Scherer et al. (2001) value:
2 settings('lambda','Lu176',0.00001865,0.00000015)

```

Reset all the decay constants back to their default values:

```
settings(reset=TRUE)
```

## 28.2 Isochrones

1. Model:

- 1. Maximum likelihood
- 2. Ordinary least squares
- 3. Maximum likelihood with overdispersion



As with all the other chronometers, isochrons can be fitted using three algorithms, which represent three different ways to handle overdispersion.

```

1 isochron(RbSr,model=1) # York regression
2 isochron(SmNd,model=2) # ordinary least squares regression
3 isochron(LuHf,model=3) # maximum likelihood fit with overdispersion

```

2.  **Inverse isochron?** Data can be fitted using conventional or inverse isochrons (Section 16.2).

If P is the radioactive parent, D is the radiogenic daughter, and d is a non-radiogenic isotope of the daughter element, then the conventional isochron plots D/d vs. P/d, and the inverse isochron plots d/D vs. P/D. For example, using the CLI:

```

1 isochron(ReOs,inverse=FALSE) # 1870s/1880s vs. 187Re/1880s
2 isochron(ReOs,inverse=TRUE) # 1880s/1870s vs. 187Re/1870s

```

3.  **Propagate external uncertainties?** Ticking the box adds the decay constant error to the isochron age uncertainty.
4. All the other options are the same as the generic regression function of Section 24.2.

### 28.3 Ages, weighted means, radial, KDE and CAD plots

1.  Propagate external uncertainties?

Use isochron intercept as initial  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ -ratio?

Significant digits:

The ages of individual aliquots can be tabulated either with or without decay constant uncertainties, using either a nominal inherited daughter component or an isochron-derived initial ratio.

```
age(RbSr, isochron=FALSE, exterr=FALSE, i2i=TRUE)
```

2. Transformation:

Finite mixtures:

Minimum value:

Central value:

Maximum value:

Plot character:

Significant digits:

Fill colour:

from:  to:

Plot symbol magnification:

Font magnification:

Colour label:

Use isochron intercept as initial  $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$ -ratio?

The single aliquot ages can be plotted on radial plots, using all the same options as mentioned in Sections 24.1, 25.4, 26.7 and 27.6. In this example, six numbered Lu-Hf aliquots are plotted on a linear scale and colour-coded according to the Lu concentration, which is specified in the optional (C) column in the input table (not shown), and using an inverted topographic colour ramp. Plot symbols are magnified by a factor of 1.5. All other settings use the default values.

```

1 radialplot(LuHf, show.numbers=TRUE, transformation='linear', cex=1.5, i2i=TRUE,
2 levels=LuHf$x[, 'Luppm'], bg=c('white', 'red'), clabel='Lu [ppm]')

```

3.  Random effects model?
- Propagate external uncertainties?
- Reject outliers?
- Rank the ages?

Minimum age limit:

Maximum age limit:

Significant digits:

Font magnification:

Fill colour:   
from:  to:

Outlier colour:

Fill colour opacity:

Colour label:

- Use isochron intercept as initial  $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$ -ratio?

```
weightedmean(ReOs,detect.outliers=FALSE,ranked=TRUE,rect.col=NA,i2i=TRUE)
```

4. Minimum value:
- Maximum value:
- Kernel bandwidth:
- Histogram binwidth:
- Font magnification:

- Take logarithms?
- Show histogram?
- Adaptive KDE?
- Add rug plot?
- Use isochron intercept as initial  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ -ratio?

```
kde(RbSr,from=4495,to=4505,binwidth=1,adaptive=FALSE,i2i=TRUE)
```

5.  $^{143}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$  ratio:   $\pm$
- Draw vertical lines at steps?
- Plot character:
- Font magnification:
- Use isochron intercept as initial  $^{143}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$ -ratio?

```
settings('iratio','Nd143Nd144',0.508)
cad(SmNd,i2i=FALSE)
```

The settings shown here implement the ordinary weighted mean of Re–Os data whose non-radiogenic Os-composition is obtained from an isochron fit. Decay constants have been omitted from the weighted mean age, and the aliquots are not filtered by the modified Chauvenet outlier detection algorithm. Aliquots are ranked according to age. The plot uses the default y-axis limits, significance criterion, precision and font size. Aliquots are plotted as empty rectangles.

The settings here create a KDE of Rb–Sr data that ranges from 4495 to 4505 Ma, uses a fixed Botev, Grotowski, and Kroese (2010) kernel bandwidth and a 1 Myr histogram bin width. The non-radiogenic Sr-composition is derived from the best fitting isochron intercept. All other settings follow the default values.

Settings for a CAD plot of Sm–Nd data with a nominal inherited  $^{142}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$ -ratio of 0.508 and default values for all other settings.

## References

- Botev, Z. I., J. F. Grotowski, and D. P. Kroese (2010). “Kernel density estimation via diffusion”. In: *Annals of Statistics* 38 (5), pp. 2916–2957.
- Catanzaro, E. et al. (1969). “Absolute isotopic abundance ratio and atomic weight of terrestrial rubidium”. In: *J. Res. Natl. Bur. Stand. A* 73, pp. 511–516.
- Chang, T.-L. et al. (2002). “Absolute isotopic composition and atomic weight of samarium”. In: *International Journal of Mass Spectrometry* 218.2, pp. 167–172.
- Compston, W et al. (1971). “Rubidium-strontium chronology and chemistry of lunar material from the Ocean of Storms”. In: *Lunar and Planetary Science Conference Proceedings*. Vol. 2, p. 1471.
- De Laeter, J. and N. Bukilic (2006). “Solar abundance of  $^{176}\text{Lu}$  and s-process nucleosynthesis”. In: *Physical Review C* 73.4, p. 045806.
- Gramlich, J. W. et al. (1973). “Absolute isotopic abundance ratio and atomic weight of a reference sample of rhenium”. In: *Journal of research of the National Bureau of Standards. Section A, Physics and Chemistry* 77.6, p. 691.
- Moore, L. et al. (1982). “Absolute isotopic abundance ratios and atomic weight of a reference sample of strontium”. In: *Journal of Research of the National Bureau of Standards* 87.1, pp. 1–8.
- Patchett, P. J. (1983). “Importance of the Lu-Hf isotopic system in studies of planetary chronology and chemical evolution”. In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 47.1, pp. 81–91.
- Smoliar, M. I., R. J. Walker, and J. W. Morgan (1996). “Re-Os ages of group IIA, IIIA, IVA, and IVB iron meteorites”. In: *Science* 271.5252, pp. 1099–1102.
- Söderlund, U. et al. (2004). “The  $^{176}\text{Lu}$  decay constant determined by Lu–Hf and U–Pb isotope systematics of Precambrian mafic intrusions”. In: *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 219.3, pp. 311–324.
- Villa, I. M. et al. (2015). “IUPAC-IUGS recommendation on the half life of  $^{87}\text{Rb}$ ”. In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 164, pp. 382–385.
- Villa, I. M. et al. (2020). “IUPAC-IUGS recommendation on the half-lives of  $^{147}\text{Sm}$  and  $^{146}\text{Sm}$ ”. In: *Geochimica et cosmochimica acta* 285, pp. 70–77.
- Völkening, J., T. Walczyk, and K. G. Heumann (1991). “Osmium isotope ratio determinations by negative thermal ionization mass spectrometry”. In: *International Journal of Mass Spectrometry and Ion Processes* 105.2, pp. 147–159.
- Zhao, M. et al. (2005). “Absolute measurements of neodymium isotopic abundances and atomic weight by MC-ICPMS”. In: *International Journal of Mass Spectrometry* 245.1-3, pp. 36–40.

# Chapter 29

## U–Th–(Sm)–He

U–Th–(Sm)–He data are provided as flat tables with eight data columns (Section 19), in which the last two columns may be empty if Sm has not been measured. They can be visualised on all the generic plot devices, plus the helioplot. Before entering the U, Th, Sm and He data into `IsoplotR`, they **must be corrected for  $\alpha$ -ejection** using the procedures outlined in Section 19.1.

	He	err[He]	U	err[U]	Th	err[Th]	Sm	err[Sm]	(C)	(omit)
1	1.401	0.211	66.02	3.85	50.65	3.95				
2	2.096	0.315	138.51	6	99.49	8.8				
3	0.63	0.095	33.89	2	18.01	1.5				
4	0.765	0.115	52.26	3.35	22.82	1.9				
5	1.379	0.208	94.01	6.1	53.94	5.05				
6	0.383	0.058	26.67	1.35	11.51	0.75				
7	1.178	0.181	84.36	4.95	62.16	5.3				
8	0.309	0.047	23.33	1.2	14.07	1.05				
9	2.226	0.342	86.29	6.5	85.72	6.7				

helioplot
isochron
radial plot
weighted mean
KDE
CAD
ages

Note that, unlike all the other methods that were discussed before, it is not necessary to specify the `format` argument when using the `read.data()` function. `IsoplotR` automatically figures out whether a dataset contains Sm or not:

```
1 UThHe <- read.data('UThHe.csv',method='U-Th-He')
2 UThSmHe <- read.data('UThSmHe.csv',method='U-Th-He')
```

which returns a simple, eight-column table.

$^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratio:   $\pm$   The default U, Th and Sm decay  
 $^{238}\text{U}$  decay constant:   $\pm$    $\text{Myr}^{-1}$  constants are those of Jaffey et al.  
 $^{235}\text{U}$  decay constant:   $\pm$    $\text{Myr}^{-1}$  (1971), Le Roux and Glendenin  
 $^{232}\text{Th}$  decay constant:   $\pm$    $\text{Myr}^{-1}$  (1963) and Villa et al. (2020) re-  
 $^{147}\text{Sm}$  decay constant:   $\pm$    $\text{Myr}^{-1}$  spectively.

```
1 # change the Sm decay constant to the Lugmair and Marti (1978) value:
2 settings('lambda','Sm147',0.000006540,0.000000049)
```

## 29.1 Helioplots

IsoplotR's `helioplot` function represents a pair of two plotting devices that visualise U–Th–He data as a compositional data system (Section 19.3).

1.  **Logratio plot?** The compositional nature of the U–Th–He system can either be expressed as a logratio plot or a ternary diagram (Figure 19.4).

```
1 oldpar <- par(mfrow=c(1,2)) # set up a two-panel plot
2 helioplot(UThHe,logratio=TRUE) # logratio plot
3 helioplot(UThHe,logratio=FALSE) # ternary diagram
4 par(oldpar)
```

2.  **Show sample numbers?** Tick the box to number the error ellipses by aliquot.

```
helioplot(UThHe,show.numbers=TRUE)
```

3.  **Show central composition?** Ticking this box plots the geometric mean ('central') U–Th–He composition and its covariance matrix as a white ellipse.

```
helioplot(UThHe,show.central.comp=TRUE)
```

4. Overdispersion is treated similarly as in the context of regression (Section 13.6) or the weighted mean (Section 14.1).

**Model:**     Thus, there are options to augment the uncertainties with a factor  $\sqrt{\text{MSWD}}$  (model-1); to ignore the analytical uncertainties altogether (model-2); or to add a constant overdispersion term to the analytical uncertainties (model-3).

```
helioplot(UThHe,model=1)
```

5. By default, the error ellipses and confidence intervals are shown at a 95% confidence level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) and to 2 significant digits.

Probability cutoff:  Changing the significance level to  $\alpha = 0.61$  produces the equivalent of '1-sigma' confidence ellipses (and 39% confidence intervals).  
 Significant digits:

```
helioplot(UThHe,alpha=0.61,sigdig=3)
```

6. The scaling settings of the `helioplot` function differ between the logratio and ternary option.

Minimum log[U/He] limit:  The horizontal and vertical extent of the logratio plot is controlled by the log(U/He) and log(Th/He) limits (where 'log' stands for the natural logarithm).  
 Maximum log[U/He] limit:   
 Minimum log[Th/He] limit:   
 Maximum log[Th/He] limit:

```
helioplot(UThHe, logratio=TRUE, xlim=c(3,5), ylim=c(3,5))
```

For the ternary diagram, scaling is achieved via a three-element vector of multipliers for He, Th and U, respectively. The default scaling automatically selects scaling factors that place the geometric mean composition of the data at the barycentre of the ternary diagram.

Scaling factors: `c(150,2,3)`

Entering `c(150,2,3)` multiplies the He abundance with 150, the Th abundance with 2 and the U abundance with 3 before re-normalising and plotting on the ternary diagram.

```
helioplot(UThHe, logratio=FALSE, fact=c(150,2,3))
```

7. Ellipse fill colour:

`Custom colour ramp ▾`

from: to:

Ellipse fill opacity:

0.8

Ellipse stroke colour:



Font magnification:

0.9

Colour label:

Sm

The fill and stroke colours of the error ellipses can be used to represent additional information such as the Sm-concentration of the various aliquots.

```
1 helioplot(UThSmHe, levels=UThSmHe[, 'Sm'], clabel='Sm',
2   ellipse.fill=c('#00005080', '#00FF0080'),
3   ellipse.stroke='grey30')
```

## 29.2 Ages and other plots

1. IsoplotR's `isochron()` function uses the linear age approximation (Equation 19.7) to create a *pseudo-isochron* through multiple aliquots of the same sample. Recall that this approximation sets out the helium concentration against the present-day  $\alpha$ -production rate, which is a function of the U, Th and Sm concentrations.

Because U, Th and Sm are measured separately from He (and on a different mass spectrometer), the analytical uncertainties of the two isochron variables can safely be assumed to be zero. Therefore, a U–Th–He isochron consists of error crosses rather than error ellipses. Apart from this small difference, all the other parameters are the same as for generic regression function (Section 24.2) and isochron plots that were previously discussed.

```
isochron(UThHe)
```

2. Calculating single grain ages is easier for the U–Th–He method than it is for any other method discussed so far. This is because the inherited daugther component can be neglected, given the low abundance of helium in the atmosphere, and its low solubility in minerals and melts. Therefore, IsoplotR's `age()` function has very few options.

```
age(UThHe)
```

3.  Show sample numbers?

Transformation: `sqrt`

Finite mixtures: `minimum`

Minimum value:	auto
Central value:	auto
Maximum value:	auto
Plot character:	21
Significant digits:	2
Fill colour:	Custom colour ramp
from:	[ ]
to:	[ ]
Plot symbol magnification:	1
Font magnification:	1
Colour label:	Sm

The resulting single grain ages can be visualised on radial, weighted mean, KDE and CAD plots. These work in exactly the same way as the generic `radialplot()` (Section 24.1), `weightedmean()` (Section 24.3), `kde()` (Section 24.5) and `cad()` (Section 24.6) functions. For example, this screenshot shows a radial plot using a square root transformation, with grains coloured by Sm-content, using a custom-made colour ramp, and applying the minimum age model of Section 14.4. All other settings use the default values.

```
1 radialplot(UThSmHe, transformation='sqrt', k='min', xlabel='Sm',
2           levels=UThSmHe[, 'Sm'], bg=c('blue', 'red'))
```

Plotting the same data on a weighted mean diagram, using the random effects model, ranking the aliquots by age, and adding a third colour to the colour ramp:

```
1 weightedmean(UThSmHe, random.effects=TRUE, ranked=TRUE, xlabel='Sm',
2               levels=UThSmHe[, 'Sm'], rect.col=c('blue', 'white', 'red'))
```

Plotting `UThSmHe` as a KDE from 5 to 12 Ma, and using a log scale because of the high coefficient of variation:

```
kde(UThSmHe, log=TRUE, from=5, to=12)
```

Showing the same data as a CAD (which uses a linear scale):

```
cad(UThSmHe)
```

## References

- Jaffey, A. et al. (1971). “Precision measurement of half-lives and specific activities of U-235 and U-238”. In: *Physical Review C* 4.5, p. 1889.
- Le Roux, L. J. and L. E. Glendenin (1963). “Half-life of  $^{232}\text{Th}$ .” In: *Proceedings of the National Meeting on Nuclear Energy, Pretoria, South Africa*.
- Villa, I. M. et al. (2020). “IUPAC-IUGS recommendation on the half-lives of  $^{147}\text{Sm}$  and  $^{146}\text{Sm}$ ”. In: *Geochimica et cosmochimica acta* 285, pp. 70–77.

# Chapter 30

## Fission tracks

Method:

IsoplotR accepts three types of fission track data, as described in Chapter 20.

1.  $\zeta$ :   $\pm$    $\text{yr cm}^2$   
 $\rho_D$ :   $\pm$    $1/\text{cm}^2$

	Ns	Ni	(C)	(omit)	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	38	132								
2	48	187								
3	114	565								
4	13	51								
5	25	122								
6	49	249								

The External Detector Method (EDM) requires the  $\zeta$ -calibration factor and dosimeter glass track density ( $\rho_D$ ) and standard errors, as well as a table with spontaneous and induced fission track counts. It is assumed that these were counted over the same area.

```
FT1 <- read.data('FT1.csv',method='fissiontracks',format=1)
```

which returns a list with four items:

- (a) `format` stores the value of the eponymous argument,
  - (b) `zeta` is a two-element vector with the  $\zeta$ -calibration factor and its standard error,
  - (c) `rhoD` is a two-element vector with the dosimeter glass density and its standard error,
  - (d) `x` is a 2-column matrix with the fission track counts.
2. LA-ICP-MS based fission track dating is implemented in two forms. The first of these is  $\zeta$ -calibration approach that is similar to the EDM. This approach does not require that the U-concentration estimates are 100% accurate. It suffices that they are proportional to the actual U-concentrations. In fact, instead of specifying the U-concentrations, the  $\zeta$ -calibration approach also accepts U/Ca-ratios, provided that the  $\zeta$ -calibration constant has been obtained on a similar dataset. Instead of a dosimeter glass density, the ICP-MS based approach requires that the user specify the spot size of the laser that was used to extract the U, Th (and Sm) from the sample.

$\zeta$ :	9700	$\pm$	50	Myr $\mu\text{m}^2$				
spot size: 35 $\mu\text{m}$								
	Ns	A	U1	err[U1]	(U2)	(err[U2])	(U3)	(err[U3])
6	49	4410	0.7553	0.0087	0.8813	0.0094	0.7768	0.0088
7	39	4410	0.6477	0.008	0.3851	0.0062	0.5782	0.0076
8	18	1470	0.4525	0.0067				
9	26	2940	0.6265	0.0079	0.3733	0.0061		
10	24	1470	0.6665	0.0082				
11	55	4410	0.565	0.0075	0.3496	0.0059	0.661	0.0081

The data table may contain a variable number of columns, reflecting the variable number of laser spots that may be placed in each grain in order to estimate the heterogeneity of the U-concentrations. The spot size is only used if at least one of the grains contains more than one U measurement.

```
FT2 <- read.data('FT2.csv', method='fissiontracks', format=2)
```

which returns a list with seven items:

- (a) `format` stores the value of the eponymous argument,
- (b) `zeta` is a two-element vector with the  $\zeta$ -calibration factor and its standard error,
- (c) `spotSize` is a scalar with the spot size of the laser ablation system,
- (d) `Ns` is a vector of spontaneous fission track counts.
- (e) `A` is a vector with the area (in  $\mu\text{m}^2$ ) over which the spontaneous tracks are counted.
- (f) `U` is a list of vectors, the list has the same length as `Ns` and `A`, and the vectors contain the U-concentration measurements of all the spots for each grain.
- (g) `sU` is a second list of vectors that has exactly the same size as `U` but contains the standard errors of the U-concentration measurements.

3. A second approach to ICP-based fission track dating is to trust the accuracy of the U-concentration measurements and use Equation 20.7 to calculate the absolute age of each grain.

spot size:	35	$\mu\text{m}$						
	Ns	A	U1	err[U1]	(U2)	(err[U2])	(U3)	(err[U3])
9	26	2940	25.06	0.32	14.93	0.24		
10	24	1470	26.66	0.33				
11	55	4410	22.6	0.3	13.98	0.24	26.44	0.33
12	38	2940	22.5	0.3	25.33	0.32		
13	61	4410	21.88	0.3	22.48	0.3	27.53	0.33
14	82	4410	44.22	0.42	24.84	0.32	38.24	0.39

The input table of the absolute dating method looks identical to that of the  $\zeta$ -calibration method. But in contrast with the latter method, the units of the U-concentration measurements must be ppm and U/Ca-ratios are not acceptable.

```
FT3 <- read.data('FT3.csv', method='fissiontracks', format=3)
```

which returns a list with seven items:

- (a) `format` stores the value of the eponymous argument,
- (b) `mineral` is a text string that either equals `apatite` or `zircon`,
- (c-g) `spotSize`, `Ns`, `A`, `U` and `sU` have the same meaning as for format 2.

In contrast with the EDM and  $\zeta$ -based ICP-MS dating, the absolute dating method involves a host of other variables, which are usually folded into the  $\zeta$ -calibration factor. The default  $^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  ratio is given by Hiess et al. (2012), and the  $^{238}\text{U}$  decay constant by Jaffey et al. (1971). The default value for the fission decay constant is the consensus value of Holden and

Hoffman (2000). The efficiency factor ( $q$  in Equation 20.7) corrects the bias caused by the etching process. The initial track length (or etchable range,  $R_e$  in Equation 20.7) is needed to convert the surface density (tracks per unit area) into a volume density (tracks per unit volume). Finally, the mineral density is needed to convert the uranium concentration from ppm to atoms per unit volume.

$^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$ ratio:	137.818	$\pm$	0.0225	
$^{238}\text{U}$ decay constant:	0.000155125	$\pm$	8.3e-8	$\text{Myr}^{-1}$
$^{238}\text{U}$ fission decay constant:	8.5e-11	$\pm$	1e-12	$\text{Myr}^{-1}$
efficiency factor:	0.93			
equivalent isotropic track length:	16.2			
mineral density:	3.22			

The default efficiency factor for apatite is based on the mean of 3 measurements by Iwano and Danhara (1998) and 1 measurement by Jonckheere (2003). The default track length and mineral density are nominal values that are commonly used in the literature.

Mineral:  The etch efficiency, initial track length and mineral density differ for zircon and apatite. IsoplotR includes appropriate presets for both of these minerals, which can be changed to any other value.

```

1 # store the default density of zircon in a variable:
2 dens <- settings('mindens','zircon')
3 # change the density setting for apatite:
4 settings('mindens','apatite',3.23)
5 # change the etch efficiency factor for zircon:
6 settings('etchfact','zircon',0.99)
7 # change the etchable range for apatite to 15 microns:
8 settings('tracklength','apatite',15)
```

## 30.1 Radial plots

Radial plots were originally created for the purpose of visualising fission track data, and are therefore ideally suited for this purpose. For the external detector method, the radial plot is based on the raw fission track counts:

Transformation:  Like the generic radial plot of Section 24.1 and subsequent chapters, EDM-based radial plots can also be subjected to three transformations. But instead of a square root transformation, it implements an arcsine transformation (Equation 20.2) as an optimal way to deal with zero data.

```
radialplot(FT1,transformation='arcsin')
```

Transformation:  For ICP-MS based fission track data, radial plots are generated from the single grain ages rather than the raw fission track counts. So the arcsin transformation is replaced by the square root transformation again.

```
radialplot(FT2,transformation='sqrt')
```

- Propagate external uncertainties? Ticking this box propagates the  $\zeta$ -calibration and  $\varphi_D$  uncertainty into the central age uncertainty.

```
radialplot(FT2,exterr=TRUE)
```

Finite mixtures:  The mixture models for the EDM method use a different algorithm than those for the ICP-MS based data. However this complexity is hidden from the user and the interface remains exactly the same for both types of measurements.

```
radialplot(FT2,k=2)
```

## 30.2 $\zeta$ -calibration

IsoplotR does not only use the  $\zeta$ -calibration factor to compute EDM or ICP-MS based fission track ages, but also provides functionality to estimate said calibration factor.

RUN

When ‘get  $\zeta$ ’ is selected from the pull-down menu, the PLOT button changes to a RUN button.

The input data now contain the fission track counts (and U-measurements) of an age standard. These follow the same format as before, apart from the fact that the  $\zeta$ -calibration box is replaced by the age of the standard.

t:   $\pm$   Ma Enter the age of the standard and its standard error, both in Ma.

Using this standard age to compute the zeta calibration factor of FT1:

	zeta	s[zeta]	The output of the function is not reported as a plot but as a small table.
1	338.2	12.3	

Storing  $\zeta$  and its standard error in a variable at the CLI:

```
set.zeta(x=FT1,tst=c(100,1),update=FALSE)
```

Overwriting the **zeta** member of the FT1 object with new  $\zeta$ -value:

```
z <- set.zeta(x=FT1,tst=c(100,1),update=TRUE)
```

produces an object of class **fissiontracks** that is identical to FT1 except for **zeta**.

### 30.3 Age, weighted mean, KDE and CAD functions

- Like U–Th–He ages, also fission track data can be reliably (if imprecisely) determined on single crystals, without concerns about inherited daughter components.

**Propagate external uncertainties?** It is normally best not to propagate the  $\zeta$ -calibration uncertainty into the single grain age uncertainty if the resulting ages are to be jointly considered in subsequent data processing steps.  
**Significant digits:**

```
age(FT1, exterr=FALSE)
```

- The weighted mean age is less useful than the central age due to the strongly skewed error distributions of fission track data, but is provided nonetheless for the sake of completeness.

```
weightedmean(FT3)
```

- Similarly, KDEs are less informative for fission track data than the radial plot due to the large and variable measurement uncertainties.

**Take logarithms?** However, when a KDE is used, then it is advisable to use a logarithmic transformation to account for the skewness of the counting uncertainties.

```
kde(FT2, log=TRUE)
```

- Like KDEs, also CADs do not explicitly account for the heteroscedasticity of fission track data. They tend to have a steep slope at the young end of the spectrum and gently level off towards old ages.

```
cad(FT1)
```

## References

- Hiess, J. et al. (2012). “ $^{238}\text{U}/^{235}\text{U}$  systematics in terrestrial uranium-bearing minerals”. In: *Science* 335.6076, pp. 1610–1614.
- Holden, N. E. and D. C. Hoffman (2000). “Spontaneous fission half-lives for ground-state nuclide (Technical report)”. In: *Pure and applied chemistry* 72.8, pp. 1525–1562.
- Iwano, H and T Danhara (1998). “A re-investigation of the geometry factors for fission-track dating of apatite, sphene and zircon”. In: *Advances in Fission-Track Geochronology*. Springer, pp. 47–66.
- Jaffey, A. et al. (1971). “Precision measurement of half-lives and specific activities of U-235 and U-238”. In: *Physical Review C* 4.5, p. 1889.
- Jonckheere, R. (2003). “On the densities of etchable fission tracks in a mineral and co-irradiated external detector with reference to fission-track dating of minerals”. In: *Chemical Geology* 200.1, pp. 41–58.

# Chapter 31

## $^{230}\text{Th-U}$

Input format: [2/8], [4/8], [0/8]  [8/2], [4/2], [0/2]  
[2/8], [4/8], [0/8]  [8/2], [0/2]  
[2/8], [0/8]

```
1 # 238U/232Th, 234U/232Th, 230Th/232Th:  
2 ThU1 <- read.data('ThU1.csv',method='Th-U',format=1)  
3 # 232Th/238U, 234U/238U, 230Th/238U:  
4 ThU2 <- read.data('ThU2.csv',method='Th-U',format=2)  
5 # 238U/232Th, 230Th/232Th:  
6 ThU3 <- read.data('ThU3.csv',method='Th-U',format=3)  
7 # 232Th/238U, 230Th/238U:  
8 ThU4 <- read.data('ThU4.csv',method='Th-U',format=4)
```

returns a list with four items:

1. `format` stores the value of the eponymous input argument,
2. `x` is a matrix containing the isotopic ratio measurements.
3. `Th02` is a two-element vector with the initial  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$  activity ratio of any detrital component. This information is only relevant to formats 1 and 2, and is further discussed below.
4. `Th02U48` is a nine-element vector with the measured composition of the detritus, specified as the  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio and its standard error, the  $^{232}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio and its standard error, the  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio and its standard error, and the respective error correlations of these three pairs of activity ratios. Also this information is only relevant to formats 1 and 2, as further discussed below.

evolution
isochron
radial plot
weighted mean
KDE
CAD
ages

$\text{Th-U}$  data can be visualised on six different plot devices. Additionally, the single aliquot age estimates can also be reported in a downloadable data table.

$^{230}\text{Th}$  decay constant:   $\pm$    $\text{kyr}^{-1}$  Default values for the decay constants  
 $^{234}\text{U}$  decay constant:   $\pm$    $\text{kyr}^{-1}$  (in  $\text{kyr}^{-1}$ ) of  $^{234}\text{U}$  and  $^{230}\text{Th}$  are taken from Cheng et al. (2013).

```

1 # query the  $^{234}\text{U}$  decay constant:
2 134 <- settings('lambda','U234')[1]
3 # change the  $^{230}\text{Th}$  decay constant to match a half-life of 75kyr:
4 settings('lambda','Th230',log(2)/75)

```

## 31.1 Isochrons

Type:  IsoplotR implements four different types of isochrons for Th–U formats 1 and 2, which are based on three-dimensional isotope ratio measurements describing different projections of the  $^{238}\text{U}$ – $^{234}\text{U}$ – $^{230}\text{Th}$  system.

```

1 oldpar <- par(mfrow=c(2,2)) # 4 x 4 grid of isochron diagrams
2 for (i in 1:4){ isochron(ThU1,type=i) }
3 par(oldpar) # restore the graphics settings

```

Type:  Th–U formats 3 and 4 assume secular equilibrium between  $^{234}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$ . Consequently, there are only two isochron options for these formats.

```
isochron(ThU3,type=1) #  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$  vs.  $^{238}\text{U}/^{232}\text{Th}$ 
```

Isochron regression for formats 1 and 2 is done using the algorithm of Ludwig and Titterington (1994). For formats 3 and 4, the two-dimensional algorithm of York et al. (2004) is used.

Model:  Any excess dispersion of the data around the best fit line can be handled in the usual three ways, which either 1) attribute the excess scatter to a multiplicative dispersion term, 2) ignore the analytical uncertainties, or 3) attribute the excess scatter to an additive dispersion term (Figure 13.11).

```

1 # Ludwig and Titterington (1993) regression of  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  vs.  $^{232}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ 
2 isochron(ThU1,type=3,model=1)

```

Report  Along with the isochron age, IsoplotR can also report 1) the authigenic  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio; 2) authigenic  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$  activity ratio; 3) detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio; or 4) initial  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio.

```
1 isochron(ThU1,type=3,model=1,y0option=2)
```

All the other isochron options are as in the generic regression function of Section 24.2.

## 31.2 Evolution diagrams

Th-U diagrams also work differently for formats 1 and 2 than they do for formats 3 and 4.

- For the  $^{238}\text{U}$ - $^{234}\text{U}$ - $^{230}\text{Th}$  data of formats 1 and 2, the data can either be plotted as  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ -activity ratios against  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ -activity ratios:

```
evolution(ThU2)
```

Minimum  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ :  The axis limits of this type of evolution diagram can  
 Maximum  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ :  be specified in terms of the  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$   
 Minimum  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ :  activity ratios.  
 Maximum  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ :

```
evolution(ThU2, xlim=c(0.2,1.2), ylim=c(0.5,1.5))
```

Plot as  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  vs. age? Alternatively, the same data can also be visualised as initial  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ -ratios against  $^{230}\text{Th}$ - $^{234}\text{U}$ - $^{238}\text{U}$ -ages.

```
evolution(ThU2, transform=TRUE)
```

Minimum age:  In this case the axis limits are defined in terms of ages  
 Maximum age:  (in ka) and  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ -activity ratios.  
 Minimum  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ :   
 Maximum  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ :

```
evolution(ThU2, transform=TRUE, xlim=c(100,250), ylim=c(1,1.2))
```

In either case, the detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$  component can (optionally) be removed in one of three ways:

- detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$  correction:  A first option is to use the inferred detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ -ratio obtained by three-dimensional (model-1) isochron regression.

**isochron**

```
evolution(ThU1, detritus=1)
```

- $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ :   $\pm$   A nominal detrital Th-correction requires the initial  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ -activity ratio of the detritus.  
 detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$  correction:

At the CLI, the initial  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ -activity ratio must be provided to IsoplotR via the `read.data()` function:

```
1 ThU2b <- read.data('ThU2.csv', method='Th-U', format=2, Th02=c(1,0.1))
2 evolution(ThU2b, detritus=2)
```

- (c) Finally, the third way to correct for detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$  is to measure the present day  $^{230}\text{Th}$ - $^{232}\text{Th}$ - $^{234}\text{U}$ - $^{238}\text{U}$  activities of the detritus:

X= $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ :	<input type="text" value="1"/>	$\pm$	<input type="text" value="0.02"/>	, r[X,Y]:	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Y= $^{232}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ :	<input type="text" value="2"/>	$\pm$	<input type="text" value="0.1"/>	, r[X,Z]:	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Z= $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ :	<input type="text" value="1"/>	$\pm$	<input type="text" value="0.02"/>	, r[Y,Z]:	<input type="text" value="0"/>
detrital $^{230}\text{Th}$ correction:	<input type="button" value="measured"/>				

Again, the CLI accommodates these measurements via the `read.data()` function:

```
1 ThU2c <- read.data('ThU2.csv',method='Th-U',format=2,
2 Th02U48=c(1,0.02,2,0.1,1,0.1,0,0,0)
3 evolution(ThU2c,detritus=3)
```

where `Th02U48` contains the measured composition of the detritus, expressed as a 9-element vector containing the  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ ,  $^{232}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratios and their standard errors, as well as the error correlations between them.

2. For Th–U formats 3 and 4, the evolution plot is simply a Rosholt type-A annotated with a grid of isochron lines.

```
evolution(ThU3)
```

3. For all four Th–U formats, the isochron fit can be projected onto the evolution diagram.

- Calculate isochron age?  
 Propagate external uncertainties?

Regression model:

Ticking the ‘Calculate isochron age’ box adds a pull-down menu to the GUI with the same three fit models as for the isochron plot of Section 31.1, as well as a selection box to propagate the decay constant uncertainties into the isochron age. Unticking the ‘Calculate isochron age’ box hides these options.

```
evolution(ThU1, isochron=TRUE, model=1, exterr=TRUE)
```

4. Output errors:

Significant digits:   
 Ellipse fill colour:   
 from:   
 to:   
 Ellipse fill opacity:   
 Ellipse stroke colour:   
 Font magnification:   
 Colour label:

The remaining options of the Th–U evolution function allow the user to add sample numbers to the error ellipses, specify the significance level of those ellipses (as well as the confidence intervals of any isochron output), and assign a bespoke fill and stroke colour to them.

Propagate external uncertainties?

Show sample numbers?

Reporting the isochron uncertainties as relative ‘2-sigma’ errors, and colouring the error ellipses by U/Th ratio:

```
1 evolution(ThU1,oerr=5,levels=ThU1$x[, 'U238Th232'],clabel='U/Th',
2   ellipse.fill=c('#A1B2C380','#FF000080'),
3   ellipse.stroke='#1A2B3C00')
```

### 31.3 Ages

Although Th–U data are usually measured in multiple cogenic aliquots, **IsoplotR** also allows each aliquot to be assigned a separate age. Like the **evolution** function, also the **age** function behaves in a slightly different way for Th–U formats 1 and 2, and formats 3 and 4, respectively.

- For Th–U formats 1 and 2, there are four options to deal with the detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$  component. The first is to ignore it. This is equivalent to assuming a zero initial  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ -activity ratio in the detritus.

- (a) **detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$  correction:**  A second option is to use the inferred detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ -ratio obtained by three-dimensional (model-1) isochron regression.

```
age(ThU1,detritus=1)
```

- (b)  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ :   $\pm$   A nominal detrital Th-correction requires the initial  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ -activity ratio of the detritus.  
**detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$  correction:**

At the CLI, the initial  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ -activity ratio must be provided to **IsoplotR** via the **read.data()** function:

```
1 ThU2b <- read.data('ThU2.csv',method='Th-U',format=2,Th02=c(1,0.1))
2 age(ThU2b,detritus=2)
```

- (c) Finally, the third way to correct for detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$  is to measure the present day  $^{230}\text{Th}$ – $^{232}\text{Th}$ – $^{234}\text{U}$ – $^{238}\text{U}$  activities of the detritus:

$X = ^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ :	<input type="text" value="1"/> $\pm$ <input type="text" value="0.02"/> , r[X,Y]: <input type="text" value="0"/>
$Y = ^{232}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ :	<input type="text" value="2"/> $\pm$ <input type="text" value="0.1"/> , r[X,Z]: <input type="text" value="0"/>
$Z = ^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ :	<input type="text" value="1"/> $\pm$ <input type="text" value="0.02"/> , r[Y,Z]: <input type="text" value="0"/>
<b>detrital <math>^{230}\text{Th}</math> correction:</b> <input type="button" value="measured"/>	

Again, the CLI accommodates these measurements via the **read.data()** function:

```
1 ThU2c <- read.data('ThU2.csv',method='Th-U',format=2,
2   Th02U48=c(1,0.02,2,0.1,1,0.1,0,0,0))
3 age(ThU2c,detritus=3)
```

2. The detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$ -correction does not apply to Th–U formats 3 and 4. Instead, the initial  $^{230}\text{Th}$  component can be corrected for in two ways:

(a)  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ :

$\pm$

Use the isochron intercept to estimate the initial  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ -ratio?

A nominal detrital Th-correction requires the initial  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ -activity ratio of the rock.

```
1 ThU3b <- read.data('ThU3.csv',method='Th-U',format=3,Th02=c(1,0))
2 age(ThU3b,i2i=FALSE)
```

(b)  Use the isochron intercept to estimate the initial  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ -ratio? Alternatively, the initial  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ -activity ratio can also be inferred by isochron regression.

```
age(ThU3,i2i=TRUE)
```

## 31.4 Radial, weighted mean, KDE and CAD plots

The `radial()`, `weightedmean()`, `kde()` and `cad()` function(s) combine the settings of the `age()` function (Section 31.3) with their generic versions (Sections 24.1–24.6). Here are some CLI examples:

1. A radial plot of uncorrected carbonate Th–U aliquots that are numbered in blue, except for the first aliquot, which is omitted from the central age calculation but is shown in the default grey colour:

```
radialplot(ThU1,show.numbers=TRUE,col='blue',detrital=0,omit=1)
```

2. A ranked weighted mean plot of carbonate Th–U data whose detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$  component has been corrected based on its measured  $^{230}\text{Th}$ ,  $^{232}\text{Th}$ ,  $^{234}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$  activities:

```
weightedmean(ThU2c,detritus=3,ranked=TRUE)
```

3. A KDE of volcanic Th–U measurements whose initial  $^{230}\text{Th}$  component was estimated by isochron regression, plotted on a logarithmic scale from 120 to 200 ka with a kernel bandwidth and histogram bin width of 5%:

```
kde(ThU3,i2i=TRUE,log=TRUE,from=120,to=200,bw=0.05,binwidth=0.05)
```

4. A CAD of volcanic Th–U measurements whose initial  $^{230}\text{Th}$  component was removed using a nominal  $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ -activity ratio:

```
cad(ThU3b,i2i=FALSE)
```

## References

- Cheng, H. et al. (2013). “Improvements in  $^{230}\text{Th}$  dating,  $^{230}\text{Th}$  and  $^{234}\text{U}$  half-life values, and U–Th isotopic measurements by multi-collector inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry”. In: *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 371, pp. 82–91.
- Ludwig, K. R. and D. Titterington (1994). “Calculation of  $^{230}\text{Th-U}$  isochrons, ages, and errors”. In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 58.22, pp. 5031–5042.
- York, D. et al. (2004). “Unified equations for the slope, intercept, and standard errors of the best straight line”. In: *American Journal of Physics* 72.3, pp. 367–375.

# Chapter 32

## Detrital geochronology

Detrital data are arranged in columns that may have unequal lengths:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sample names on first row?
1	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	N6	N7	N8	N9	
2	645.4	2764.6	418.6	1228.4	1227	605.1	931.2	2440.3	2117.6	

If the ‘Sample names on first row?’ box in the Options menu is unticked, then the samples will be referred to by their column label (‘A’, ‘B’, ...):

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	<input type="checkbox"/> Sample names on first row?
1	645.4	2764.6	418.6	1228.4	1227	605.1	931.2	2440.3	2117.6	
2	496.9	1998.6	1036.1	1445.7	1269.7	1462.6	980	1246.4	1919.1	

From the CLI, there is no difference between data tables with or without sample names: IsoplotR automatically detects whether the first row of the input table contains text or numbers:

```
DZ <- read.data('DZ.csv',method='detritals')
```

This returns a list of named vectors, containing the detrital ages in each sample. Instead of a column labelled ‘(C)’, IsoplotR’s GUI uses a text box to report the samples that are to be omitted from subsequent analysis:

Samples to omit:  This text box contains a comma-separated list of sample names or column numbers to omit.

```
kde(DZ,hide=c('T8','T13'))
```

### 32.1 Kernel density estimates

1. The axis limits of the KDEs are the same for all samples to facilitate their intercomparison, and their default values are chosen so as to cover all the ages in the dataset.

Minimum value:  However, these values can be changed to any other values.  
Maximum value:

```
kde(DZ,from=0,to=3000)
```

2. The inherent positivity of geologic time often results in skewed error distributions, which are incompatible with the symmetric Gaussian kernel. This skewness can be removed by plotting the KDE on a logarithmic scale.

Minimum value:  When using a logarithmic transformation, the limits of  
 Maximum value:  the time axis must consist of strictly positive values.  
 Take logarithms?

```
kde(DZ, log=TRUE, from=200, to=3000)
```

3. The default kernel bandwidth is computed using the Botev, Grotowski, and Kroese (2010) algorithm, and generally varies between the different samples in the detrital dataset. To facilitate the graphical comparison of the distributions, it is useful to apply a common kernel bandwidth to all the samples.

Same bandwidth for all samples? Ticking the box applies the median value of all the Botev, Grotowski, and Kroese (2010) bandwidths to all the samples.

```
kde(DZ, samebandwidth=TRUE)
```

4. The Botev, Grotowski, and Kroese (2010) bandwidth can be replaced by any custom value. Be careful not to over-interpret the KDEs when using a bandwidth that is much smaller than the default value!

Kernel bandwidth:  When the KDE is plotted on a logarithmic scale, the  
 Histogram binwidth:  kernel bandwidth and histogram bin width are not expressed in Myr but as fractions.

Assigning a 5% bandwidth and 10% bin width to all the samples:

```
kde(DZ, log=TRUE, bw=0.05, binwidth=0.1)
```

5.  Add rug plot? Rug plots are turned off by default to remove clutter but can be turned on by ticking the box.

```
kde(DZ, rug=TRUE)
```

6. To facilitate the comparison of the different samples in a detrital dataset, it is useful to scale the y-axis of the KDEs so as to normalise the area under them to the same value.

Normalise area under the KDEs? Switching off this option expands the y-axis to its maximum allowable extent.

```
kde(DZ, normalise=FALSE)
```

7. The KDE can be adjusted using Abramson (1982)'s square root modifier in order to produce an adaptive density estimate.

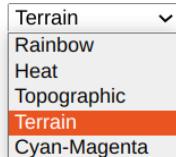
Adaptive KDE? Unticking the box uses a fixed bandwidth along the entire time scale.

```
kde(DZ, adaptive=TRUE)
```

## 32.2 Cumulative age distributions

In contrast with the KDE plot, in which each sample is shown in its own panel, the CADs of multiple samples can be combined in a single panel. The `cad()` function works just like the generic version (Section 24.6), apart from its ability to assign a different colour to each sample, using a colour ramp function such as `cm.colors`, `topo.colors`, `terrain.colors`, or `heat.colors`:

Colour map:



Each sample in the dataset can be assigned a different colour according to one of the palettes that are available from the pull-down menu.

```
cad(DZ,col='topo.colors')
```

## 32.3 Multidimensional scaling

1. By default IsoplotR uses nonmetric MDS to fit the data, but this can be changed to classical MDS (Section 22.3).
  - Classical MDS? Classical MDS is useful when the nonmetric MDS configuration collapses into a point, which can happen for small datasets (< 10 samples, say).

```
mds(DZ,classical=TRUE)
```

2.  Classical MDS? The goodness-of-fit of a nonmetric MDS can be visually assessed using a Shepard plot (Figure 22.5).
  - Shepard plot?

```
mds(DZ,classical=FALSE,shepard=TRUE)
```

3. It can be useful to augment the MDS configuration with a set of nearest neighbour lines (Figure 22.8). These lines may help assess the success of the ordination, and its ability to pull the samples apart into distinct clusters.
  - Add nearest neighbour lines? However, the nearest neighbour lines may also clutter the configuration to a point where it is better to remove them.

```
mds(DZ,nnlines=TRUE)
```

4. Plot character:

22
----

Plot symbol magnification:

1
---

Font magnification:

0.9
-----

Label position:

1
---

Outline colour:

red
-----

Fill colour:

yellow
--------

The samples can be marked by different plot characters (22 stands for a filled square), with sample labels placed either at (`pos=0`), below (`pos=1`), to the left of (`pos=2`), above (`pos=3`) or to the right of (`pos=4`) the plot character. The plot characters can be scaled separately from the rest of the figure.

```
mds(DZ,pch=22,cex=0.9,pos=1,bg='yellow',col='red')
```

## References

- Abramson, I. S. (1982). "On bandwidth variation in kernel estimates – a square root law". In: *The Annals of Statistics*, pp. 1217–1223.
- Botev, Z. I., J. F. Grotowski, and D. P. Kroese (2010). "Kernel density estimation via diffusion". In: *Annals of Statistics* 38 (5), pp. 2916–2957.

## **Part IV**

# **Extending IsoplotR**

## Chapter 33

# Application Programming Interface

`IsoplotR` aims to cover the most commonly used functions in geochronology. However geochronology is such a diverse and rapidly evolving field of science, that it is impossible for one piece of software to achieve everything. This is why, from its inception, `IsoplotR` was designed with extendability in mind. This Chapter gives an overview of the code base for the CLI, which can be used as building blocks for automation scripts, alternative visualisations and new applications. The next Chapter summarises the .json schema that is used to import and export data to the GUI. Using this schema, it is possible to connect lower level data reduction software (written in any programming language) to `IsoplotRgui`.

The complete list of all `IsoplotR`'s public functions can be viewed within R by entering

```
help(package='IsoplotR')
```

at the CLI. The number of public functions was intentionally kept small, so as to shorten the learning curve. However despite this apparent simplicity, `IsoplotR`'s API offers a lot of flexibility, because:

1. several functions serve multiple purposes. For example, the `settings()` function can be used to get or set decay constants, isotopic ratios and other global parameters, and the `peakfit()` function groups methods to compute finite mixtures as well as minimum age models.
2. `IsoplotR` is built around 13 so-called S3 classes, which are used to store different types of chronometric data. For example, a single function called `age()` can be used to calculate U–Pb, Th–Pb, Pb–Pb, Ar–Ar, Rb–Sr, Sm–Nd, Lu–Hf, Re–Os, fission track, U–Th–He or Th–U data, both from datasets of multiple aliquots, or for individual measurements.
3. some functions can be used to both compute and plot data. For example, the `kde()` function generates kernel density plots, whilst returning the plot coordinates and optimal bandwidth to the user. It is possible to suppress the graphical output but retain the numerical output. Thus, the `kde()` function can be used to write one's own visualisation. The same is true for the `isochron()` and `weightedmean()` functions.
4. `IsoplotR` is entirely written in R and does not depend on any non-standard packages. This makes the package small and easy to install. Which means that, if your R code requires uses one of `IsoplotR`'s functions, then this won't bloat your program. It also means that it is relatively straightforward to lift functions out of `IsoplotR` and copy them into another program. You have the permission to do so as long as the origin of the code is documented in the new program, and your program is released under the GPL-3 license, like `IsoplotR` itself.

Detailed documentation can be obtained from within R, using the `help` or `?` functions. For example, to view the documentation of the `isochron()` function, type

```
?isochron
```

at the command prompt. The detailed documentation covers well over 100 pages and will not be reproduced here. Instead we suffice with a simple list of the functions accompanied by a brief summary of their input and output:

function	description
<code>age</code>	Calculates U–Pb, Pb–Pb, Th–Pb, Ar–Ar, K–Ca, Re–Os, Sm–Nd, Rb–Sr, Lu–Hf, U–Th–He, Th–U and fission track ages their analytical uncertainties, either from a data object returned by the <code>read.data</code> function, or from a simple vector of isotopic ratios.
<code>age2ratio</code>	Predict $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$ , $^{238}\text{U}/^{206}\text{Pb}$ , $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$ , $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{232}\text{Th}$ , $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ , $^{40}\text{Ca}/^{40}\text{K}$ , $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{176}\text{Lu}$ , $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{87}\text{Rb}$ , $^{187}\text{Os}/^{187}\text{Re}$ , $^{143}\text{Nd}/^{147}\text{Sm}$ ratios and uncertainties for one or more ages and their uncertainties; or the Wetherill, Tera-Wasserburg or U–Th–Pb concordia ratios and covariance matrix of a single age and its uncertainty; or the Stacey-Kramers composition of a given age.
<code>agespectrum</code>	Plot a ( $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ ) release spectrum and returns the plateau age if so requested.
<code>cad</code>	Plot geochronological data as cumulative age distributions.
<code>central</code>	Calculate fission track and U–Th–He central ages and compositions using the methods discussed in Sections 14.4 and Equation 14.5 or 19.3, respectively.
<code>ci</code>	Given a parameter estimate and its standard error, calculate the corresponding 1-sigma, 2-sigma or $100(1-\alpha)\%$ confidence interval, in absolute or relative units.
<code>classes</code>	Description of the S3 classes <code>UPb</code> , <code>PbPb</code> , <code>ThPb</code> , <code>KCa</code> , <code>UThHe</code> , <code>fissiontracks</code> , <code>detritals</code> and <code>PD</code> , where the latter is the parent class of the simple parent-daughter chronometers <code>RbSr</code> , <code>SmNd</code> , <code>LuHf</code> and <code>ReOs</code> . All these classes have overloaded versions of the generic <code>length()</code> function and square bracket subsetting method.
<code>concordia</code>	Plots U–Pb data on Wetherill, Tera-Wasserburg or U–Th–Pb concordia diagrams, calculates concordia ages and compositions or discordia ages if so requested.
<code>data2york</code>	Helper function for the <code>york</code> function. Takes geochronological data as input and produces a five-column table with the variables, their uncertainties and error correlations as output. These can subsequently be used for York et al. (2004) regression.
<code>discfilter</code>	Set up one of the six U–Pb discordance filters defined by Vermeesch (2021) and specify the cutoff limits.
<code>diseq</code>	Specify any (initial or measured) disequilibrium between $^{238}\text{U}$ , $^{234}\text{U}$ , $^{230}\text{Th}$ , and $^{226}\text{Ra}$ ; or between $^{235}\text{U}$ and $^{231}\text{Pa}$ . This function returns and object of class <code>diseq</code> , which can be used as optional input to any function that accepts U–Pb data as input.
<code>ellipse</code>	Helper function for the <code>scatterplot</code> function. Constructs an error ellipse at a given confidence level from its centre and covariance matrix.

<b>evolution</b>	Plots Th–U data on a $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ – $^{230}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$ evolution diagram, a $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ –age diagram, or (if $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$ is assumed to be in secular equilibrium), a $^{230}\text{Th}/^{232}\text{Th}$ – $^{238}\text{U}/^{232}\text{Th}$ diagram; calculates isochron ages.
<b>examples</b>	An 18-item list containing U–Pb, Pb–Pb, Ar–Ar, K–Ca, Re–Os, Sm–Nd, Rb–Sr, Lu–Hf, U–Th–He, Th–U, fission track and detrital datasets that are used to test and illustrate <b>IsoplotR</b> ’s functions in the built-in documentation.
<b>helioplot</b>	Plot U–Th(–Sm)–He data on a ( $\log[\text{He}/\text{Th}]$ vs. $\log[\text{U}/\text{He}]$ ) logratio plot or U–Th–He ternary diagram.
<b>isochron</b>	Plots cogenetic Ar–Ar, K–Ca, Pb–Pb, Th–Pb, Rb–Sr, Sm–Nd, Re–Os, Lu–Hf, U–Th–He or Th–U data as X–Y scatterplots, fits an isochron curve through them using the <b>york</b> , <b>titterington</b> or <b>ludwig</b> function, and computes the corresponding isochron age, including decay constant uncertainties.
<b>kde</b>	Creates one or more kernel density estimates using a combination of the Botev, Grotowski, and Kroese (2010) bandwidth selector and the Abramson (1982) adaptive kernel bandwidth modifier.
<b>ludwig</b>	Implements the maximum likelihood algorithm for Total-Pb/U isochron regression of Ludwig (1998) and extends the underlying methodology to accommodate U–Th–Pb data (Vermeesch, 2021) and initial U-series disequilibrium (McLean et al., 2016).
<b>mclean</b>	Returns the predicted $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$ and $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{235}\text{U}$ ratios for any given time with or without initial U-series disequilibrium, using the matrix exponential approach of McLean et al. (2016), which is summarised in Section 15.5.
<b>mds</b>	Performs classical or nonmetric Multidimensional scaling analysis of detrital datasets using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic as a dissimilarity measure (Vermeesch, 2013).
<b>Pb0corr</b>	Applies a common-Pb correction to U–Pb datasets using either the Stacey-Kramers mantle evolution model, isochron regression, or any nominal initial Pb isotope composition.
<b>peakfit</b>	Implements the discrete mixture modelling algorithms of Galbraith and Laslett (1993) and applies them to fission track and other geochronological datasets.
<b>radialplot</b>	Visualise heteroscedastic datasets on Galbraith (1988)’s radial plot, using one of the transformations introduced in Sections 14.3 and 20.1.
<b>read.data</b>	Cast a .csv file or a matrix into one of the data classes that are documented under <b>classes</b> .
<b>scatterplot</b>	Takes bivariate data with (correlated) uncertainties as input and produces a scatter plot with error ellipses or crosses as output. (optionally) displays the linear fit on this diagram, and can show a third variable as a colour scale.
<b>set.zeta</b>	Determines the $\zeta$ -calibration constant of a fission track dataset (EDM or LA-ICP-MS) given its true age and analytical uncertainty.
<b>settings</b>	Get and set preferred values for decay constants, isotopic abundances, molar masses, fission track etch efficiencies, and etchable lengths, and mineral densities, either individually or via a .json file format.
<b>titterington</b>	Implements the maximum likelihood algorithm of Ludwig and Titterington (1994) for linear regression of three dimensional data with correlated uncertainties.

weightedmean	Models the data as a normal distribution with two sources of variance. Estimates the mean and ‘overdispersion’ using the method of maximum likelihood. Computes the MSWD of a normal fit without overdispersion. Implements a modified Chauvenet criterion to detect and reject outliers. Only propagates the analytical uncertainty associated with decay constants and $\zeta$ - and J-factors after computing the weighted mean isotopic composition.
york	Implements the unified regression algorithm of York et al. (2004) which, although based on least squares, yields results that are consistent with maximum likelihood estimates of Titterington and Halliday (1979).

## References

- Abramson, I. S. (1982). “On bandwidth variation in kernel estimates – a square root law”. In: *The Annals of Statistics*, pp. 1217–1223.
- Botev, Z. I., J. F. Grotowski, and D. P. Kroese (2010). “Kernel density estimation via diffusion”. In: *Annals of Statistics* 38 (5), pp. 2916–2957.
- Galbraith, R. F. (1988). “Graphical display of estimates having differing standard errors”. In: *Technometrics* 30.3, pp. 271–281.
- Galbraith, R. F. and G. M. Laslett (1993). “Statistical models for mixed fission track ages”. In: *Nuclear tracks and radiation measurements* 21.4, pp. 459–470.
- Ludwig, K. R. (1998). “On the treatment of concordant uranium-lead ages”. In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 62, pp. 665–676. DOI: 10.1016/S0016-7037(98)00059-3.
- Ludwig, K. R. and D. Titterington (1994). “Calculation of  $^{230}\text{Th}$ -U isochrons, ages, and errors”. In: *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 58.22, pp. 5031–5042.
- McLean, N. M. et al. (Dec. 2016). “Connecting the U-Th and U-Pb Chronometers: New Algorithms and Applications”. In: *AGU Fall Meeting Abstracts*.
- Titterington, D. M. and A. N. Halliday (1979). “On the fitting of parallel isochrons and the method of maximum likelihood”. In: *Chemical Geology* 26, pp. 183–195.
- Vermeesch, P. (2013). “Multi-sample comparison of detrital age distributions”. In: *Chemical Geology* 341, pp. 140–146.
- (2021). “On the treatment of discordant detrital zircon U–Pb data”. In: *Geochronology* 3, pp. 247–257. DOI: 10.5194/gchron-3-247-2021.
- York, D. et al. (2004). “Unified equations for the slope, intercept, and standard errors of the best straight line”. In: *American Journal of Physics* 72.3, pp. 367–375.

# Chapter 34

## json schema

All the data and settings that are used by the GUI can be saved in a human-readable text file, using the `.json` database format. This format provides a useful method to archive `IsoplotR` data for those users who do not want to use the CLI. The `.json` format can also be used as a data exchange mechanism between `IsoplotR` and other data processing software. If this software produces a file that follows the following schema, then its output can be used as input to `IsoplotR` for further processing. The `.json` format has a nested structure, which is summarised below from the top downwards. At the highest level, the `.json` data structure consists of four branches:

1. `"constants"`: Lists the decay constants, isotopic ratios, molar masses, and various fission track properties.
2. `"settings"`: Contains `IsoplotR`'s language settings and parameters controlling the behaviour of the various geochronometers and plot devices.
3. `"data"`: Stores the contents of the GUI's input window, i.e. all the isotopic ratio data and calibration constants.

`"constants"` contains of the following items:

- 1.1. `"lambda"`: A comma-separated lists of two-element vectors containing the decay constants and their standard errors of "U238", "U235", "U234", "Th232", "Th230", "Pa231", "Ra226", "Rb87", "Re187", "Sm147", "K40", "Lu176" and spontaneous  $^{238}\text{U}$  "fission".
- 1.2. `"iratio"`: A comma-separated lists of two-element vectors containing the natural isotopic ratios and their standard errors of "Ar40Ar36", "Ar38Ar36", "Ca40Ca44", "Rb85Rb87", " $\text{Sr}^{84}\text{Sr}^{86}$ ", " $\text{Sr}^{87}\text{Sr}^{86}$ ", " $\text{Sr}^{88}\text{Sr}^{86}$ ", "Re185Re187", "Os184Os192", "Os186Os192", "Os187Os192", "Os188Os192", "Os189Os192", "Os190Os192", "Th230Th232", "U234U238", "U238U235", "Pb206Pb204", "Pb207Pb204", "Pb207Pb206", "Pb208Pb204", "Pb208Pb206", "Pb208Pb207", "Sm144Sm152", "Sm147Sm152", "Sm148Sm152", "Sm149Sm152", "Sm150Sm152", "Sm154Sm152", "Nd142Nd144", "Nd143Nd144", "Nd145Nd144", "Nd146Nd144", "Nd148Nd144", "Nd150Nd144", "Lu176Lu175", "Hf174Hf177", "Hf176Hf177", "Hf178Hf177", "Hf179Hf177" and "Hf180Hf177".
- 1.3. `"imass"`: A comma-separated lists of two-element vectors containing the molar masses and their standard errors of "U", "Rb", "Rb85", "Rb87", "Sr", "Sr84", "Sr86", "Sr87", "Sr88", "Re", "Re185", "Re187", "Os", "Os184", "Os186", "Os187", "Os188", "Os189", "Os190", "Os192", "Sm", "Nd", "Lu" and "Hf".

- 1.4. "etchfact": a two-element comma-separated list of fission track etch efficiency factors for "apatite" and "zircon".
- 1.5. "tracklength": a two-element comma-separated list with the etchable range (in  $\mu\text{m}$ ) of fission tracks in "apatite" and "zircon".
- 1.6. "mindens": a two-element comma-separated list with the density (in  $\text{g}/\text{cm}^3$ ) of "apatite" and "zircon".

The "settings" branch of the top level `json` object contains the following attributes:

- 2.1. "language": one of "en" (English), "es" (Spanish) or "zh" (Mandarin Chinese).
- 2.2. "geochronometer": one of "fissiontracks", "detritals", "U-Pb", "Th-U", "Pb-Pb", "Ar-Ar", "K-Ca", "Th-Pb", "Rb-Sr", "Sm-Nd", "Re-Os", "Lu-Hf", "U-Th-He" or "other".
- 2.3. "plotdevice": one of "concordia", "evolution", "isochron", "regression", "radial", "average", "spectrum", "KDE", "CAD", "set-zeta", "MDS", "helioplot" or "ages".
- 2.4. "ierr": an integer from 1 to 4, corresponding to the eponymous input argument of the `read.data()` function.
- 2.5. "oerr": an integer from 1 to 6, corresponding to the eponymous input argument of the `age()`, `agespectrum()`, `ci()`, `evolution()`, `helioplot()`, `isochron()`, `peakfit()`, `radialplot()`, `scatterplot()`, `set.zeta()` and `weightedmean()` functions.
- 2.6. "alpha": an integer between 0 and 1, setting the decision boundaries of Chi-square tests and outlier detectors.
- 2.7. "sigdig": a positive number, determining the number of significant digits to which the numerical output should be reported.
- 2.8. "par": `json` object with global settings to be passed on to R's `par()` function. May, for example, contain `{"cex": 1}`.
- 2.9. "fissiontracks": a `json` object with the following attributes:
  - 2.9.1. "format": an integer from 1 to 3.
  - 2.9.2. "mineral": either "apatite" or "zircon".
- 2.10. "detritals": a `json` object with the following attributes:
  - 2.10.1. "format": either 1 (if the first row of the input contains the sample names) or 2 (if the samples are to be named "A", "B", etc.)
  - 2.10.2. "hide": a vector with the sample names or numbers of the samples to be omitted from the plots.
- 2.11. "U-Pb": a `json` object with the following attributes:
  - 2.11.1. `format`: an integer from 1 to 8, corresponding to the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
  - 2.11.2. `type`: an integer from 1 to 6, corresponding to the eponymous argument of the `age()`, `radialplot()`, `weightedmean()`, `kde()` and `cad()` functions.

- 2.11.3. `cutoff76`: stores the value for the eponymous argument of the `age()`, `radialplot()`, `weightedmean()`, and other functions.
- 2.11.4. `cutoffdisc`: either 0 (no discordance filter), 1 (discordance filter to be used before common Pb correction), or 2 (discordance filter to be used after common Pb correction).
- 2.11.5. `discoption`: an integer from 0 to 5, storing the value to be passed on to the `option` argument of the `discfilter` function.
- 2.11.6. `mindisc`: a 5-element vector of minimum discordance cutoff values (one for each of `discoption`'s values 1 through 5), to be used in `discfilter()`'s `cutoff` argument.
- 2.11.7. `maxdisc`: a 5-element vector of maximum discordance cutoff values (one for each of `discoption`'s values 1 through 5), to be used in `discfilter()`'s `cutoff` argument.
- 2.11.8. "commonPb": an integer between 0 and 3, to be supplied to the `option` argument of the `Pb0corr()` function.
- 2.11.9. "diseq": logical. If `true`, applies an initial disequilibrium correction using the `diseq()` function.
- 2.11.10. "U48": two-element vector containing the arguments `x` and `option` of the eponymous argument to the `diseq()` function.
- 2.11.11. "ThU": two-element vector containing the arguments `x` and `option` of the eponymous argument to the `diseq()` function.
- 2.11.12. "RaU": two-element vector containing the arguments `x` and `option` of the eponymous argument to the `diseq()` function.
- 2.11.13. "PaU": two-element vector containing the arguments `x` and `option` of the eponymous argument to the `diseq()` function.
- 2.12. "Th-U": a `json` object with the following attributes:
  - 2.12.1. "format": an integer from 1 to 4, corresponding to the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
  - 2.12.2. "Th0i": an integer from 0 to 3, representing different approaches to detrital  $^{230}\text{Th}$ -correction, as implemented by the eponymous argument to the `age()`, `radialplot()`, `weightedmean()`, and other functions.
  - 2.12.3. "Th02i": a 2-element vector to be passed on to the eponymous argument of `read.data()`.
  - 2.12.4. "Th02U48": a 9-element vector to be passed on to the eponymous argument of `read.data()`.
- 2.13. "Pb-Pb": a `json` object with the following attributes:
  - 2.13.1. "format": an integer from 1 to 3, corresponding to the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
  - 2.13.2. "commonPb": an integer between 0 and 3, to be supplied to the `option` argument of the `Pb0corr()` function.
  - 2.13.3. "inverse": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `isochron()` function.
  - 2.13.4. "projerr": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `age()` function.
- 2.14. "Ar-Ar": a `json` object with the following attributes:

- 2.14.1. "format": an integer from 1 to 3, corresponding to the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
- 2.14.2. "i2i": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of `age()`,
- 2.14.3. "projerr": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `age()` function.
- 2.14.4. "inverse ": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `isochron()` function,
- 2.15. "Th-Pb": a json object with the following attributes:
  - 2.15.1. "format": an integer from 1 to 3, corresponding to the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
  - 2.15.2. "i2i": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of `age()`,
  - 2.15.3. "projerr": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `age()` function.
  - 2.15.4. "inverse ": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `isochron()` function,
- 2.16. "Rb-Sr": a json object with the following attributes:
  - 2.16.1. "format": an integer from 1 to 3, corresponding to the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
  - 2.16.2. "i2i": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of `age()`,
  - 2.16.3. "projerr": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `age()` function.
  - 2.16.4. "inverse ": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `isochron()` function,
- 2.17. "Sm-Nd": a json object with the following attributes:
  - 2.17.1. "format": an integer from 1 to 3, corresponding to the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
  - 2.17.2. "i2i": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of `age()`,
  - 2.17.3. "projerr": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `age()` function.
  - 2.17.4. "inverse ": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `isochron()` function,
- 2.18. "Re-Os": a json object with the following attributes:
  - 2.18.1. "format": an integer from 1 to 3, corresponding to the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
  - 2.18.2. "i2i": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of `age()`,
  - 2.18.3. "projerr": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `age()` function.
  - 2.18.4. "inverse ": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `isochron()` function,
- 2.19. "Lu-Hf": a json object with the following attributes:

- 2.19.1. "format": an integer from 1 to 3, corresponding to the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
- 2.19.2. "i2i": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of `age()`,
- 2.19.3. "projerr": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `age()` function.
- 2.19.4. "inverse": logical. To be passed on to the eponymous argument of the `isochron()` function,
- 2.20. "U-Th-He": this attribute is just an empty placeholder.
- 2.21. "other": a json object with a single attribute, "format", which corresponds to the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
- 2.22. "concordia": a json object whose attributes correspond to eponymous arguments of the `concordia()` function, unless stated otherwise:
  - 2.22.1. "mint": either "auto" or a number marking the first value of the `tlim` argument in the `concordia()` function.
  - 2.22.2. "maxt": either "auto" or a number marking the second value of the `tlim` argument in the `concordia()` function.
  - 2.22.3. "minx": either "auto" or a number marking the first value of the `xlim` argument in the `concordia()` function.
  - 2.22.4. "maxx": either "auto" or a number marking the second value of the `xlim` argument in the `concordia()` function.
  - 2.22.5. "miny": either "auto" or a number marking the first value of the `ylim` argument in the `concordia()` function.
  - 2.22.6. "maxy": either "auto" or a number marking the second value of the `ylim` argument in the `concordia()` function.
  - 2.22.7. "type": an integer from 1 and 3.
  - 2.22.8. "exterr": logical.
  - 2.22.9. "shownumbers": logical. To be passed on to the argument `show.numbers` argument of the `concordia()` function.
  - 2.22.10. "showage": an integer from 0 to 4, to be passed on to the argument `show.age` argument of the `concordia()` function.
  - 2.22.11. "anchor": an integer from 0 to 2, marking the first value of the eponymous argument to the `concordia()` function.
  - 2.22.12. "tanchor": a number, marking the second value of the `anchor` argument to the `concordia()` function, to be used if the first value is 2.
  - 2.22.13. "ellipsefill": a json object with the following attributes:
    - 2.22.13.1. "option": either "custom\_ramp", or "rainbow", "rainbow\_reversed", "heat", "heat\_reversed", etc.
    - 2.22.13.2. "alpha": a number between 0 and 1, controlling the opaqueness of the fill colour.
    - 2.22.13.3. "ramp\_start": a text string representing a valid colour specification (e.g. "red", "rgb(1,0,0)" or "#FF0000").
    - 2.22.13.4. "ramp\_end": a text string representing a valid colour specification.

- 2.22.14. "ellipsestroke": a text string representing a valid colour specification (e.g. "red", `rgb(1,0,0)` or `#FF0000`).
- 2.22.15. "clabel": a text string.
- 2.22.16. "ticks": either "auto" or a vector of numbers.
- 2.23. "evolution": a json object whose attributes correspond to eponymous arguments of the `evolution()` function, unless stated otherwise:
- 2.23.1. "min08": either "auto" or a number marking the first value of the `xlim` argument in the `evolution()` function if `transform=false`.
  - 2.23.2. "max08": either "auto" or a number marking the second value of the `xlim` argument in the `evolution()` function if `transform=false`.
  - 2.23.3. "min48": either "auto" or a number marking the first value of the `ylim` argument in the `evolution()` function.
  - 2.23.4. "max48": either "auto" or a number marking the second value of the `ylim` argument in the `evolution()` function.
  - 2.23.5. "mint": either "auto" or a number marking the first value of the `xlim` argument in the `evolution()` function if `transform=true`.
  - 2.23.6. "maxt": either "auto" or a number marking the second value of the `xlim` argument in the `evolution()` function if `transform=true`.
  - 2.23.7. "transform": logical. If `true`, plots the data as  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio vs. age.
  - 2.23.8. "exterr": logical.
  - 2.23.9. "isochron": logical. If `true`, adds an isochron fit to the plot.
  - 2.23.10. "shownumbers": logical. To be passed on to the argument `show.numbers` argument of the `evolution()` function.
  - 2.23.11. "ellipselfill": a json object. See item 2.22.13. for details.
  - 2.23.12. "ellipsestroke": a text string representing a valid colour specification (e.g. "red", `rgb(1,0,0)` or `#FF0000`).
  - 2.23.13. "clabel": a text string.
  - 2.23.14. "model": an integer from 1 to 3.
- 2.24. "isochron": a json object whose attributes correspond to eponymous arguments of the `isochron()` function, unless stated otherwise:
- 2.24.1. "UPbtype": an integer from 1 and 4, to be passed on to `type` if "geochronometer" equals "U-Pb".
  - 2.24.2. "ThUtype": an integer from 1 and 4, to be passed on to `type` if "geochronometer" equals "Th-U".
  - 2.24.3. "y0option": an integer from 1 to 4, controlling the type of y-intercept to be reported along with the isochron age of Th-U data.
  - 2.24.4. "model": an integer from 1 to 3.
  - 2.24.5. "exterr": logical.
  - 2.24.6. "joint": logical. If `true`, carries out 3D U-Pb isochron regression. Otherwise reverts to 2D regression, which is more robust.
  - 2.24.7. "shownumbers": logical. To be passed on to the argument `show.numbers` argument of the `isochron()` function.

- 2.24.8. "ellipsefill": a json object. See item 2.22.13. for details.
- 2.24.9. "ellipsestroke": a text string representing a valid colour specification (e.g. "red", `rgb(1,0,0)` or `#FF0000`).
- 2.24.10. "clabel": a text string.
- 2.24.11. "minx": either "auto" or a number marking the first value of the `xlim` argument in the `isochron()` function.
- 2.24.12. "maxx": either "auto" or a number marking the second value of the `xlim` argument in the `isochron()` function.
- 2.24.13. "miny": either "auto" or a number marking the first value of the `ylim` argument in the `isochron()` function.
- 2.24.14. "maxy": either "auto" or a number marking the second value of the `ylim` argument in the `isochron()` function.
- 2.24.15. "growth": logical. If `true`, adds a Stacey-Kramers growth curve to the plot.
- 2.25. "regression": a .json object containing a subset of the arguments to "isochron", to be used with "geochronometer" is "other":
  - 2.25.1. "model": see "isochron".
  - 2.25.2. "shownumbers": see "isochron".
  - 2.25.3. "minx": see "isochron".
  - 2.25.4. "maxx": see "isochron".
  - 2.25.5. "miny": see "isochron".
  - 2.25.6. "maxy": see "isochron".
  - 2.25.7. "ellipsefill": see "isochron".
  - 2.25.8. "ellipsestroke": see "isochron".
  - 2.25.9. "clabel": see "isochron".
- 2.26. "radial": a json object whose attributes correspond to eponymous arguments of the `radialplot()` function, unless stated otherwise:
  - 2.26.1. "transformation": one of "log", "linear", "sqrt" or "arcsin".
  - 2.26.2. "mint": either "auto" or a number to be passed on to the `from` argument of the `radialplot()` function.
  - 2.26.3. "z0": either "auto" or a number.
  - 2.26.4. "maxt": either "auto" or a number to be passed on to the `to` argument of the `radialplot()` function.
  - 2.26.5. "pch": a valid plot character according to `?par` in R.
  - 2.26.6. "cex": a positive number.
  - 2.26.7. "bg": a json object. See item 2.22.13. for details.
  - 2.26.8. "shownumbers": logical. To be passed on to the argument `show.numbers` argument of the `isochron()` function.
  - 2.26.9. "numpeaks": "auto", "min", or an integer from 0 to 5.
  - 2.26.10. "clabel": a text string.
  - 2.26.11. "exterr": logical.

- 2.27. "average": a `json` object whose attributes correspond to eponymous arguments of the `weightedmean()` function, unless stated otherwise:
- 2.27.1. "outliers": logical. To be passed on to the `detect.outliers` argument of the `weightedmean()` function.
  - 2.27.2. "exterr": logical.
  - 2.27.3. "randomeffects": logical. To be passed on to the `random.effects` argument of `weightedmean`.
  - 2.27.4. "mint": either "auto" or a number to be passed on to the `from` argument of the `weightedmean()` function.
  - 2.27.5. "maxt": either "auto" or a number to be passed on to the `to` argument of the `weightedmean()` function.
  - 2.27.6. "ranked": logical.
  - 2.27.7. "bg": a `json` object. See item 2.22.13. for details.
  - 2.27.8. "outliercol": a text string representing a valid colour specification (e.g. "red", `rgb(1,0,0)` or `#FF0000`).
  - 2.27.9. `rect_alpha`: a number between 0 and 1, controlling the opaqueness of the outlier fill colour.
  - 2.27.10. "clabel": a text string.
- 2.28. "spectrum": a `json` object whose attributes correspond to eponymous arguments of the `agespectrum()` function, unless stated otherwise:
- 2.28.1. "plateau": logical.
  - 2.28.2. "exterr": logical.
  - 2.28.3. "randomeffects": logical.
  - 2.28.4. "bg": a `json` object. See item 2.22.13. for details.
  - 2.28.5. "nonplateaucol": a text string representing a valid colour specification (e.g. "red", `rgb(1,0,0)` or `#FF0000`). To be passed on to the `non.plateau.col` argument of the `agespectrum()` function.
  - 2.28.6. "nonplateau\_alpha": a number between 0 and 1, controlling the opaqueness of the non plateau fill colour.
- 2.29. "KDE": a `json` object whose attributes correspond to eponymous arguments of the `kde()` function, unless stated otherwise:
- 2.29.1. "ncol": either "auto" or an integer.
  - 2.29.2. "xlab": a text string.
  - 2.29.3. "showhist": logical. To be passed on to the `show.hist` argument of the `kde()` function.
  - 2.29.4. "binwidth": either "auto" or a positive number.
  - 2.29.5. "bw": either "auto" or a positive number.
  - 2.29.6. "samebandwidth": logical.
  - 2.29.7. "normalise": logical.
  - 2.29.8. "log": logical.

- 2.29.9. "adaptive": logical.
- 2.29.10. "minx": either "auto" or a number to be passed on to the `from` argument of the `kde()` function.
- 2.29.11. "maxx": either "auto" or a number to be passed on to the `to` argument of the `kde()` function.
- 2.29.12. "bandwidth": either "auto" or a number to be passed on to the `bw` argument of the `kde()` function.
- 2.29.13. "rugdetritals": logical. To be passed on to the `rug` argument of the `kde()` function if "geochronometer" is "detritals".
- 2.29.14. "rug": logical. To be passed on to the `rug` argument of the `kde()` function if "geochronometer" is NOT "detritals".
- 2.30. "CAD": a json object whose attributes correspond to eponymous arguments of the `cad()` function, unless stated otherwise:
  - 2.30.1. "pch": either "none" or a valid plot character according to `?par` in R.
  - 2.30.2. "verticals": logical.
  - 2.30.3. "colmap": the name of a valid colour palette to be passed on to the `col` argument of the `cad()` function.
- 2.31. "set-zeta": a json object whose attributes correspond to eponymous arguments of the `set.zeta()` function:
  - 2.31.1. "exterr": logical.
- 2.32. "MDS": a json object whose attributes correspond to eponymous arguments of the `mds()` function, unless stated otherwise:
  - 2.32.1. "classical": logical.
  - 2.32.2. "shepard": logical.
  - 2.32.3. "nnlines": logical.
  - 2.32.4. "pch": a valid plot character according to `?par` in R.
  - 2.32.5. "pos": an integer from 0 to 4.
  - 2.32.6. "cex": a positive number.
  - 2.32.7. "col": a text string representing a valid colour code or name.
  - 2.32.8. "bg": a text string representing a valid colour code or name.
- 2.33. "helioplot": a json object whose attributes correspond to eponymous arguments of the `helioplot()` function, unless stated otherwise:
  - 2.33.1. "logratio": logical.
  - 2.33.2. "shownumbers": logical. To be passed on to the `show.numbers` argument of the `helioplot()` function.
  - 2.33.3. "showcentralcomp": logical. To be passed on to the `show.central.comp` argument of the `helioplot()` function.
  - 2.33.4. "minx": either "auto" or a number marking the first value of the `xlim` argument in the `helioplot()` function.

- 2.33.5. "maxx": either "auto" or a number marking the second value of the `xlim` argument in the `helioplot()` function.
  - 2.33.6. "miny": either "auto" or a number marking the first value of the `ylim` argument in the `helioplot()` function.
  - 2.33.7. "maxy": either "auto" or a number marking the second value of the `ylim` argument in the `helioplot()` function.
  - 2.33.8. "fact": either "auto" or a three-element vector of positive numbers.
  - 2.33.9. "ellipselfill": a json object. See item 2.22.13. for details.
  - 2.33.10. "ellipsestroke": a text string representing a valid colour specification (e.g. "red", `rgb(1,0,0)` or `#FF0000`).
  - 2.33.11. "model": an integer between 1 and 3.
  - 2.33.12. "clabel": a text string.
- 2.34. "ages": a json object whose attributes correspond to eponymous arguments of the `helioplot()` function, unless stated otherwise:
- 2.34.1. "showdisc": either 0 (do not report the discordance), 1 (calculate the discordance before common Pb correction), or 2 (calculate the discordance after common Pb correction).
  - 2.34.2. "discoption": an integer from 0 to 5, storing the value to be passed on to the `option` argument of the `discfilter` function.
  - 2.34.3. "exterr": logical.

Finally, the "data" branch of the json schema contains the isotopic data for all the methods. Only datasets that have changed from their default values are recorded here. Thus, if only the U–Pb data have been manipulated, then all the other entries will remain empty. However if both the U–Pb and Ar–Ar data have changed, say, then both of these attributes will be filled.

### 3.1. "U–Pb": a json object with two attributes

- 3.1.1. "ierr": an integer from 1 to 4, representing the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
- 3.1.2. "data": a json object consisting of 7 to 16 named vectors (depending on the value of `settings.format`), corresponding to the columns of the input table. The last two vectors must be named "(C)" and "(omit)". Missing values are represented by `null`.

### 3.2. "Ar–Ar": a json object with three attributes

- 3.2.1. "ierr": an integer from 1 to 4, representing the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
- 3.2.2. "J": a two element vector containing the J-factor and its standard error.
- 3.2.3. "data": a json object consisting of 8 or 9 named vectors (depending on the value of `settings.format`), corresponding to the columns of the input table. The last two vectors must be named "(C)" and "(omit)". Missing values are represented by `null`.

### 3.3. "Pb–Pb": a json object with two attributes

- 3.3.1. "ierr": an integer from 1 to 4, representing the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.

- 3.3.2. "data": a `json` object consisting of 7 or 8 named vectors (depending on the value of `settings.format`), corresponding to the columns of the input table. The last two vectors must be named "(C)" and "(omit)". Missing values are represented by `null`.
- 3.4. "Th-Pb": similar to `data.Pb-Pb`, but with columns named for the Th–Pb method.
- 3.5. "K-Ca": similar to `data.Pb-Pb`, but with columns named for the K–Ca method.
- 3.6. "Rb-Sr": similar to `data.Pb-Pb`, but with columns named for the Rb–Sr method.
- 3.7. "Sm-Nd": similar to `data.Pb-Pb`, but with columns named for the Sm–Nd method.
- 3.8. "Re-Os": similar to `data.Pb-Pb`, but with columns named for the Re–Os method.
- 3.9. "Lu-Hf": similar to `data.Pb-Pb`, but with columns named for the Lu–Hf method.
- 3.10. "U-Th-He": a `json` object containing a single attribute, "data", which is a `json` object consisting of 10 named vectors, corresponding to the columns of the input table. The last two vectors must be named "(C)" and "(omit)". Missing values are represented by `null`.
- 3.11. "fissiontracks": a `json` object with a combination of the following attributes:
- 3.11.1. "ierr": an integer from 1 to 4, representing the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function (not necessary if `settings.format=1`).
  - 3.11.2. "age": a two-element vector with the age and standard error of the  $\zeta$ -calibration constant (only needed when running the 'get  $\zeta$ ' function).
  - 3.11.3. "zeta": a two-element vector with the  $\zeta$ -calibration constant and its standard error (only needed when `settings.format=1` or 2).
  - 3.11.4. "rhoD": a two-element vector with the dosimeter track density and its standard error (only needed when `settings.format=1`).
  - 3.11.5. "spotSize": a number representing the laser ablation spot size (only needed when `settings.format=2` or 3).
  - 3.11.6. "data": a `json` object consisting of 4 to 14 named vectors (depending on the value of `settings.format`), corresponding to the columns of the input table. The last two vectors must be named "(C)" and "(omit)". For formats `settings.format=2` and 3, in which different rows may have different lengths, missing values can be represented by `null`.
- 3.12. "Th-U": a `json` object with two attributes
- 3.12.1. "ierr": an integer from 1 to 4, representing the eponymous argument of the `read.data()` function.
  - 3.12.2. "data": a `json` object consisting of 7 or 11 named vectors (depending on the value of `settings.format`), corresponding to the columns of the input table. The last two vectors must be named "(C)" and "(omit)". Missing values are represented by `null`.
- 3.13. "detritals": a `json` object with a single attribute, "data", which is a `json` object consisting of a number of vectors, named "A", "B" etc., corresponding to the columns of the input table. If `settings.detritals.format=1`, then the first item of each vector must be a text string with its sample name. Otherwise the vector names will be used to label the samples in the graphical output. Missing values are represented by `null`.

- 3.14. "other": a json object with a single attribute, "data", which is a json object consisting of 2 to 8 vectors (depending on the value of `settings.other.format`). The final column must be named "(omit)". Missing values are represented by `null`.