Phosphorus dynamics around the sulphate-methane transition in continental margin sediments: Authigenic apatite and Fe(II) phosphates

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ABSTRACT

The formation of authigenic phosphate minerals in marine sediments is an important process for the burial and long-term storage of the bio-essential nutrient phosphorus (P). In this context, we report the composition of pore waters, bulk sediments, and the speciation of P in four sediment cores recovered on the continental margins off the Amazon, Rio de la Plata and Zambezi rivers. Here, pronounced sulphate-methane transitions (SMTs) occur between 4.5 and 6.5 m sediment depth where sulphate is consumed by the anaerobic oxidation of methane and free hydrogen sulphide builds up in the pore waters. This leads to the reductive dissolution of primary Fe (oxyhydr)oxides (FeOx) by hydrogen sulphide, and the subsequent liberation of FeOx-adsorbed phosphate into pore waters at the SMT. The released phosphate builds up to significant concentrations, making it available for the precipitation of authigenic minerals within and below the SMT. Using a sequential P extraction, we find consistently high contributions of carbonate fluorapatite (CFA) to the total P pool within the SMT, where it likely precipitates due to high local phosphate concentrations, high alkalinity and abundant dissolved Ca in the pore waters. PHREEQC calculations confirm these results, with highest saturation states with respect to authigenic apatite calculated at all SMTs. CFA authigenesis, however, is insufficient to completely consume pore water phosphate, leading to diffusive loss of phosphate from the SMT. While the upward decrease in phosphate above the SMT is relatively gentle, the significantly steeper phosphate gradient into underlying sediments suggests the formation of another authigenic mineral phase. Sequential P extraction and PHREEQC results clearly show that the dominant authigenic phase below the SMT is not CFA. Instead, geochemical conditions below the sulphidic zone at all four sites are favourable for the precipitation of Fe(II) phosphate minerals (e.g., vivianite). These conditions are summarized as the absence of sulphate and free hydrogen sulphide, but the presence of Fe²⁺ and phosphate in pore waters, and low calcium carbonate contents in the sediment. While we did not directly detect or quantify Fe(II) phosphate minerals, Fe-bound P clearly increases in the sediments below the sulphidic zones at all studied sites, and this is where highest pore water saturation states with respect to vivianite are calculated with PHREEQC. In addition, geochemical inverse models performed in PHREEQC show that vivianite formation is an important geochemical process controlling the observed patterns of dissolved P and Fe, pH and redox potential of the pore waters analysed below the SMT. We therefore argue that Fe(II) phosphate minerals are formed in these ocean margin sediments on a large scale, and pore water and sediment data indicate that this Fe-bound P largely originates from FeOx-adsorbed phosphate liberated within the sulphidic SMT. This study suggests that under specific but not unusual depositional conditions, SMTs are hotspots for biogeochemical P cycling in marginal marine sediments worldwide, with CFA precipitating within the SMT, and Fe(II) phosphates forming below it. It also adds to the growing evidence that Fe(II) phosphates may contribute significantly to the long-term burial of reactive P phases in Fe-rich, methanic marine sediments, and thus act as a previously underestimated sedimentary P sink.

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1. Introduction

Continental margins are transitional zones between land and ocean, receiving a mixture of continentally derived siliciclastic and marine biogenic material. Particularly high amounts of detrital sediments are deposited off large river mouths, often accumulating on deep-sea fans or other continental slope depocenters. These sediments are usually rich in terrigenous Fe (oxyhydr)oxides (FeOx; e.g., ferrihydrite, goethite, hematite) that are both important sorbents of dissolved metals and phosphate, and terminal electron acceptors for microbial organic matter remineralisation (e.g., Goldberg, 1954; Froelich et al., 1979; Feely et al., 1991). Phosphate ions have a strong affinity to amorphous and poorly crystalline FeOx surfaces, which can lead to significant scavenging of phosphate from solution (e.g., Einsele, 1938; Berner, 1973; Slomp et al., 1996a; Delaney, 1998; Canfield et al., 2005). Once deposited at the seafloor and buried below the oxic zone, these FeOx are partially dissolved by dissimilatory Fe reduction (Lovley and Phillips, 1988), liberating the adsorbed phosphate into the adjacent pore waters. This dissolved phosphate is either transported (by diffusion and/or advection) to the water column located above the sediments, or re-adsorbed to/co-precipitated with freshly precipitated authigenic FeOx at the iron redox boundary. While the coupling of Fe and P in the marine environment has been recognised as an important component in global biogeochemical cycles, it is often only considered as relevant in the water column or around the zone of dissipatory Fe reduction (e.g., Slomp, 1996b; Anschutz et al., 1998; Küster-Heins et al., 2010a, 2010b). However, at continental margins characterised by high accumulation rates of terrigenous siliciclastics, a substantial fraction of FeOx and adsorbed phosphate may escape this shallow Fe redox cycle and get buried into subsurface sediments (e.g., Hensen et al., 2003; Riedinger et al., 2005; März et al., 2008). These FeOx are available for diagenetic processes in deeper parts of the sediment, in particular around the sulphate-methane transition (SMT). At the SMT, a consortium of archaea and bacteria use sulphate to anaerobically oxidize deeper-sourced methane (anaerobic oxidation of methane, AOM; e.g., Hinrichs et al., 1999; Boetius et al., 2000). During AOM, HS− is generated that reductively dissolves FeOx, leading to the precipitation of Fe sulphides (e.g., greigite, mackinawite, pyrite; Berner, 1970, 1984; Canfield and Berner, 1987; Poulton et al., 2004; Riedinger et al., 2017). During reductive FeOx dissolution, the FeOx-associated phosphate is released to the ambient pore waters and accumulates as dissolved phosphate at the SMT (e.g., Schulz et al., 1994; Burns, 1997). This phosphate then diffuses out of the SMT into the overlying sediments. Upward-diffusing phosphate will likely re-adsorb onto, or co-precipitate with, detrital or authigenic FeOx above the SMT as long as their surface adsorption capacities are not exhausted (Berner, 1990; Sundby et al., 1992; Slomp et al., 1996a; McManus et al., 1997; Mucci et al., 2000). The phosphate diffusing downwards from the SMT into the Methanic Zone may precipitate in authigenic form. Detailed insight in the relevant processes is of particular importance for our understanding of the global marine P cycle, as any phosphate buried below the SMT is removed from the oceans over long time scales.

In most marine sediments, authigenic apatite (carbonate fluorapatite = CFA, also francolite, Ca10(PO4,CO3)6F2) is regarded as the most important long-term P sink (Filippelli, 1997; Delaney, 1998; Ruttenberg, 2003; Canfield et al., 2005). The formation of this mineral has been studied in modern and ancient sedimentary environments (continental shelves, upwelling regions, deep-sea basins; e.g., Sheldon, 1981; Jahnke et al., 1983; Ruttenberg and Berner, 1993; Slomp et al., 1996b; Schuettet al., 1998; Kim et al., 1999; Schenau et al., 2000; Arning et al., 2008, 2009). However, the formation of Fe(II) phosphates (e.g., vivianite, Fe(II)3(PO4)2•8(H2O)), typical for freshwater systems (e.g., Nriagu, 1972; Mucci et al., 2000; Fagel et al., 2005), has received increasing attention in recent years as evidence of Fe(II) phosphate formation in marine settings is mounting. Formation of vivianite in Chesapeake Bay and Long Island Sound sediments was suggested as early as the 1970s (Bray et al., 1973; Martens et al., 1978; Berner, 1990), mainly based on saturation state calculations from pore water data. Berner (1990) attributed the formation of this marine vivianite to “a rather unusual set of circumstances” including high organic matter input that rapidly consumes sulphate via bacterial sulphate reduction. The lack of sulphate restricts HS− generation, allowing Fe2+ to build up in the pore waters below the sulphate penetration depth. This Fe2+ is then available to react with phosphate released by organic matter degradation to form vivianite. Supporting this hypothesis, recent studies applying sequential extractions and advanced spectroscopic methods (Li et al., 2015; Joshi et al., 2015) identified vivianite (as well as potential Fe(III)-bound P) in anoxic Chesapeake Bay sediments. Applying an unusually wide range of optical, geochemical and mineralogical techniques to sediments of the shallow, brackish Baltic Sea, a close coupling of Fe and P in anoxic sediments below an SMT was recently observed, and the presence of Fe(II) phosphates was unequivocally shown (Jilbert and Slomp, 2013; Slomp et al., 2013; Egger et al., 2015b; Reed et al., 2016; Dijkstra et al., 2016, 2018a, 2018b). Hsu et al. (2014) reported the formation of vivianite below the SMT in South China Sea sediments, including the intergrowth of Fe sulphides with the vivianite micro-aggregates. Even in fully anoxic and sulphidic Black Sea sediments, Fe(II) phosphate formation could play a role for reactive P burial (Dijkstra et al., 2014; Kraal et al.,17), most likely within sulphate-reducing bacterial cells in AOM consortia (Milucka et al., 2012) and/or below the penetration depth of sulphide (Egger et al., 2016).

All the above settings with tentative or proven vivianite formation are coastal, relatively shallow, marine to brackish environments where organic matter input and burial is high, leading to vigorous early diagenetic processes that favour the formation of authigenic minerals, including Fe(II) phosphates. There are, however, a number of deep, fully marine, relatively organic-poor locations where Fe-P coupling resulting from Fe(II) phosphate formation below the SMT has been identified. On the Amazon Fan (ODP Leg 155; Flood et al., 1995), Burns (1997) reported the occurrence of mm-sized vivianite nodules below the SMT, and attributed their presence to an excess of FeOx over HS− produced in the SMT. In Zambezi deep-sea fan sediments, März et al. (2008) reported a close Fe-P coupling below the SMT based on pore water and sequential extraction data, which they attributed to Fe(II) phosphate formation, but without identifying discrete Fe(II) phosphate minerals. They also, for the first time, suggested a direct link between the sediment dynamics of the deep-sea fan system and P diagenesis around the SMT, following an approach developed by Riedinger et al. (2005) for continental margin sediments off the Rio de la Plata.

While studies by Burns (1997) and März et al. (2008) imply vivianite formation in fully marine deep-sea deposits below the SMT, a more systematic understanding of the link between depositional conditions and P diagenesis around the SMT is still lacking. Thus, the aim of this study is to better constrain this understudied part of the P cycle by analysing pore waters, sediments, and P phases around and below the SMT in continental margin sediments off the Zambezi, Amazon, and Rio de la Plata rivers (Fig. 1). We demonstrate that in these settings, coupled cycling of Fe and P occurs within and below the SMT, leading to FeOx dissolution and CFA precipitation within the SMT, and Fe(II) phosphate precipitation below it.

2. Material and methods

Pore water and sediment samples were collected from gravity cores during several research cruises onboard RV Meteor. Details on the respective cruises, core numbers, locations and lengths as well as water depths are listed in Table 1. Although the cruises took place in different years, the sampling and extraction procedures followed the same protocols, and all sediment analyses were performed on splits of the same sample aliquots. We are therefore certain that results based on material and data from different cruises are consistent and comparable to each
Cores were cut into 1 m sections and capped directly after recovery, then stored immediately at 4 °C. Within < 2 days, the core sections were split, and the working half was immediately transferred into an argon-filled glove box for pore water extraction and sediment sampling. Sediments for pore water extraction were sampled in 25 cm depth resolution. Pore waters were extracted with a Teflon squeezer setup operated under argon pressure (up to 5 bar) with integrated cellulose acetate filters (0.2 μm pore size) that were stored in oxygen-free distilled water. Sediment samples for sequential Fe and P extractions were taken under anoxic conditions every 10 cm with cut-off plastic syringes, and stored in argon-purged glass bottles at −20 °C in darkness.

Pore waters were analysed for total alkalinity, HS⁻ (Σ: \( \Sigma H_2S = H_2S + HS^- + S^{2-} \); here defined as HS⁻), SO₄²⁻, PO₄³⁻ and Fe²⁺, either on the ship or at Bremen University. Continuous sediment sampling for total element analyses was performed in 2 cm depth resolution under oxic conditions. These samples were frozen, freeze-dried, ground in an agate mortar and completely dissolved using a microwave digestion system (conc. HNO₃/HCl/HF mixture). Subsequently, total Fe and P contents were determined by Inductively Coupled Plasma Optical Emission Spectrometry (ICP-OES, Perkin-Elmer Optima 3300RL). More details on pore water and sediment analyses of the studied cores can be found in Kasten et al. (1998), Riedinger et al. (2005), Schulz (2006) and März et al. (2008).

Selected anoxic samples from the four gravity cores were subjected to sequential Fe extractions. For details concerning the selected sample sets and extraction procedures, we refer to Kasten et al. (1998), Hensen et al. (2003) and März et al. (2008). In brief, the operationally defined

Table 1
Names, longitudes/latitudes, research cruises, water depths, core lengths, and related publications of the four studied sediment cores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gravity core</th>
<th>Cruise</th>
<th>Core location</th>
<th>Water depth</th>
<th>Core length</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GeoB 1514</td>
<td>M16/2</td>
<td>5°08.4’N, 46°34.6’W (Amazon deep-sea fan)</td>
<td>3509 m</td>
<td>710 cm</td>
<td>Kasten et al. (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GeoB 6223</td>
<td>M46/2</td>
<td>35°44.42’S, 49°40.86’W (Rio de La Plata depocenter)</td>
<td>4280 m</td>
<td>867 cm</td>
<td>Riedinger et al. (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GeoB 6308</td>
<td>M46/2</td>
<td>39°10.00’S, 53°08.70’W (Rio de La Plata depocenter)</td>
<td>3620 m</td>
<td>1166 cm</td>
<td>Riedinger et al. (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GeoB 9309</td>
<td>M63/1</td>
<td>18°55.8’S, 37°30.7’E (Zambezi deep-sea fan)</td>
<td>1219 m</td>
<td>625 cm</td>
<td>März et al. (2008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
extractions allowed to determine (1) amorphous and poorly crystalline Fe oxyhydroxides extracted using a buffered ascorbate solution (e.g., ferrihydrite, lepidocrocite; Fe₃O₄), and (2) crystalline Fe oxides using a citrate-buffered dithionite solution (e.g., goethite, hematite; Fe₂O₃) (Ferdelman, 1988; Kostka and Luther III, 1994; Haese et al., 2000; citrate-bu...
steep at all sites. At sites GeoB 1514 and GeoB 9309, phosphate is completely removed from the pore waters within 1 m or less below the SMT, while in cores GeoB 6223 and GeoB 6308 phosphate declines to 50–100 μmol/l.

Dissolved Fe²⁺ concentrations (Fig. 2) show a strong relationship to the SMT and the availability of free sulphide at the four study sites. While no Fe²⁺ is detectable within the sulphidic zone around the SMT, its concentrations generally increase above and below this zone, despite some scatter in the data. While maximum Fe²⁺ concentrations below the SMT reach ~100 μmol/l in the sediments at Site GeoB 1514, they are ~18 μmol/l in core GeoB 6223, ~10 μmol/l in core GeoB 9309, and ~2 μmol/l in core GeoB 6308. Elevated Fe²⁺ concentrations above the SMT are only observed at sites GeoB 1514 (up to 50 μmol/l in ~400–100 cm depth) and GeoB 9309 (up to 12 μmol/l in ~250–100 cm depth).

Pore water concentrations of Ca²⁺ and F⁻ (Fig. 3) display different patterns across the SMT in the studied sediments. While Ca²⁺ at sites GeoB 6223 and 6308 follows a linear trend from the sediment surface to the SMT where it is partially consumed, the Ca²⁺ profiles at sites GeoB 1504 and 9309 cross the SMT without any obvious changes. The F⁻ profiles show minima in the SMT at sites GeoB 1504, 6223 and 6308, while no F⁻ data are available for core GeoB 9309.

All pore water and sediment data are available from the data archive PANGAEA operated by the World Data Centers for Marine Environmental Sciences (http://www.pangaea.de/PangaVista).

3.2. Solid phase data

The results of sequential FeOx extractions show minimum contents
of amorphous and crystalline Fe (oxyhydr)oxides (sum of Fe_{asc} and Fe_{edith} fractions) at the SMT (Fig. 2). Below the SMT, FeOx contents are equal to, or higher than, FeOx above the SMT (Fig. 2). Amongst the two extracted FeOx pools, Fe_{asc} contents are < 20 \( \mu \text{mol/g} \) within the SMT, while Fe_{edith} values are below 100 \( \mu \text{mol/g} \) (Fig. 4; no data for core GeoB 1514). These values correspond to < 3 relative percent (rel%) and < 10 rel% of total sedimentary Fe, respectively. Above the SMT, Fe_{edith} is higher than Fe_{asc} while the opposite is true below the SMT (Fig. 4). In detail, the Fe_{asc} contents directly below the SMT increase to ~70 \( \mu \text{mol/g} \) (8–10 rel% of total Fe) at sites GeoB 9309 and GeoB 6223, and to ~40 \( \mu \text{mol/g} \) (6 rel% of total Fe) at site GeoB 6308 (Fig. 4).

The P fractions extracted in each of the five extraction steps are displayed in Fig. 5 (in \( \mu \text{mol/g} \) of dry sediment) and Fig. 6 (as rel% of P_{total}). There are significant similarities in P speciation at all sites. The P_{loose} fraction is relatively minor at all sites, displaying highest contents as well as relative percentages to total P close to the sediment surface (< 4 \( \mu \text{mol/g} \), < 22 rel% of P_{total}), and lowest contents below the SMT (< 1 \( \mu \text{mol/g} \), < 4 rel% of P_{total}). At sites 6308 and 9309, P_{loose} is also higher (~15–17 rel%) within the SMT (Fig. 6).

The Fe-bound P (P_{Fe}) fraction is dominant at all sites but GeoB 6308 (Figs. 5, 6). It constitutes on average 41 rel% of P_{total} in core GeoB 9309, 33 rel% in core GeoB 6223, 46 rel% in core GeoB 1514, and 17 rel% in core GeoB 6308. At the three former sites, the P_{Fe} fraction is lowest within the SMT, accounting for 25 rel% in core GeoB 9309, 30 rel% in core GeoB 6223, and 42 rel% in core GeoB 1514 of P_{total}. In contrast, the P_{Fe} fraction tends to increase below the SMT (on average 54 rel% in core GeoB 9309, 38 rel% in core GeoB 6223, 49 rel% in core GeoB 1514 of P_{total}).

Authigenic carbonate fluorapatite (P_{CFA}) is a significant fraction in sediments off the Rio de la Plata (on average 29 rel% and 42 rel% of P_{total} in cores GeoB 6223 and GeoB 6308, respectively), but less important at the Amazon and Zambezi deep-sea fan sites (on average 160 rel% of P_{total} in cores GeoB 6223 and GeoB 6308, respectively).
rel% and 11 rel% of P\textsubscript{total}, respectively). In contrast to the P\textsubscript{Fe} fraction, P\textsubscript{CFA} exhibits maxima within the SMT at all sites (Fig. 6). In contrast to authigenic carbonate fluorapatite, detrital fluorapatite (PFA) is quantitatively more important at the Amazon and Zambezi sites (on average 24 rel% and 18 rel% of P\textsubscript{total}, respectively) than off the Rio de la Plata (on average 13 rel% and 14 rel% of P\textsubscript{total}, respectively). At all sites, PFA exhibits highest absolute and relative contents below the SMT (Figs. 5, 6). This fraction will not be discussed any further in this study, as detrital fluorapatite is the most stable P mineral in marine sediments and unlikely to participate in early diagenetic dissolution-precipitation reactions on the time scales discussed here.

Organic P (P\textsubscript{org}) is a minor P fraction at all four sites, ranging from 5 rel% off the Rio de la Plata to 13 rel% off the Amazon, typically with highest relative contributions near the sediment surface (Fig. 6).

### 3.3. PHREEQC results

The aqueous speciation calculations performed in PHREEQC reveal that at all sites the saturation index (SI) for hydroxyapatite is highest within the SMT, consistently reaching oversaturation (Fig. 7). Above and below the SMT, the hydroxyapatite SI decreases and the pore waters become undersaturated at the top and bottom of each sediment column, except for GeoB 6223 where the pore waters are oversaturated throughout the sediment column (Fig. 7).

The vivianite SI indicates that at GeoB 6308 and 9309, the pore waters are undersaturated with respect to vivianite throughout the sediment column but, despite some scatter, there are slight increases of the SI below the SMT. This is also observed at GeoB 6223 where saturation is reached in two samples below the SMT. At GeoB 1514, the pore waters become saturated with respect to vivianite below 100 cm depth down to the bottom of the core, and oversaturated in two samples below the SMT (Fig. 7).

The results of the geochemical inverse models performed in PHREEQC based on mass-balance of chemical species, pH and redox potential of the sampled pore waters, are shown in Fig. 8 and Table 3. In Model 1, the changes in water chemistry between the sediment-water interface and the SMT are explained by the dissolution of ferrihydrite, desorption of P from ferrihydrite, predominant precipitation of CFA, and minor precipitation of vivianite, pyrite and pyrochroite at the three sites (1514, 6223, 6308). In Model 2, the changes in composition from pore waters within to below the SMT are explained by the dissolution of ferrihydrite, desorption of P from ferrihydrite, and predominant precipitation of vivianite at Sites 1514 and 6308, while at Site 6223 precipitation of CFA is predominant.
4. Discussion

4.1. Re-adsorption of P onto Fe (oxyhydr)oxides below the SMT

Results of sequential iron extractions performed by Kasten et al. (1998), Hensen et al. (2003), Riedinger et al. (2005, 2014), and März et al. (2008) showed that in continental slope sediments off the Amazon, Rio de La Plata and Zambezi rivers, significant amounts of FeOx are preserved in methanic sediments below the SMT. The amorphous to crystalline minerals included in this FeOx pool (e.g., ferrihydrite, goethite, hematite, magnetite) are highly reactive with respect to HS\(^{-}\) (Poulton et al., 2004). Under sulphidic conditions similar to those prevailing at an SMT, these FeOx phases have approximate half-lives of 12 h to ~1 year, as experimentally determined by Poulton et al. (2004) (sea water, pH 7.5, 25 °C). The observed preservation of these FeOx in marine sediments deposited thousands of years ago was most likely caused by the rapid migration of the SMT under high sedimentation rates (~80–100 cm/kyr off the Zambezi and Rio de la Plata) prior to the Holocene sea level rise (Riedinger et al., 2005; März et al., 2008; Schefuß et al., 2011; Van der Lubbe et al.,

![Model 1: Within the SMT](image)

![Model 2: Below the SMT](image)

![Fig. 8. Estimated amounts of mineral dissolution and precipitation in the inverse models performed in PHREEQC for sites GeoB 1514, 6223 and 6308.](image)

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Pore water depth (cm)</th>
<th>Ferrihydrite-sorbed P (%)</th>
<th>Vivianite (%)</th>
<th>CFA (%)</th>
<th>P (aq) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1514</td>
<td>15 (initial)</td>
<td>99.997</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>510 (final)</td>
<td>9.132</td>
<td>7.322</td>
<td>83.317</td>
<td>0.229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6223</td>
<td>10 (initial)</td>
<td>9.977</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>510 (final)</td>
<td>9.492</td>
<td>6.666</td>
<td>83.434</td>
<td>0.407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6308</td>
<td>10 (initial)</td>
<td>99.978</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.022</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>635 (final)</td>
<td>11.632</td>
<td>4.681</td>
<td>83.444</td>
<td>0.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1514</td>
<td>635 (initial)</td>
<td>93.297</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>6.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>680 (final)</td>
<td>96.157</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>83.444</td>
<td>0.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6223</td>
<td>535 (initial)</td>
<td>98.049</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>3.843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>610 (final)</td>
<td>96.973</td>
<td>10.801</td>
<td>81.591</td>
<td>0.635</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6308</td>
<td>635 (initial)</td>
<td>75.164</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>25.836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>735 (final)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>87.571</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>12.429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The resulting relatively short exposure of FeOx minerals to sulphidic conditions in the SMT led to incomplete FeOx reduction and sulphidisation, and ultimately to the burial of FeOx in sediments below the SMT (e.g., Riedinger et al., 2005, 2014). Phosphate diffusing downward out of the current SMT could re-adsorb onto these buried FeOx minerals, a process that is predicted in the geochemical inverse Model 2 for Site 6223 (Table 3). This, however, would not explain the much steeper pore water phosphate gradient below the SMT compared to the gradient above. The phosphate adsorption capacity of FeOx is a function of their surface area, which decreases during progressive burial and aging of FeOx (Lijklema, 1980; Crosby et al., 1981; Wang et al., 2013). Therefore, the adsorption capacity of FeOx above the SMT should be higher than that of aged FeOx buried below the SMT. The results of the geochemical inverse models reflect this tendency, i.e., higher relative amounts of P bound to ferrihydrite in shallow pore waters (i.e., the initial waters of Model 1, in Table 3) than in the deeper pore waters (the remaining pore waters in Table 3). In contrast, pore water profiles indicate a more rapid removal of phosphate below than above the SMT, and re-adsorption onto FeOx alone cannot be responsible for this pattern, as shown in the results of the geochemical inverse models (Table 3). While we cannot exclude re-adsorption of phosphate onto FeOx surfaces below the SMT, the data point towards precipitation of an authigenic phosphate mineral, which will be discussed in the following.

4.2. Authigenic mineral precipitation - carbonate fluorapatite (CFA) or hydroxyapatite

While authigenic CFA in marine sediments has been studied for decades, the exact formation mechanism is still not fully understood. It appears to proceed via either poorly crystalline, Ca-rich precursor phases or hydroxyapatite (Van Cappellen and Berner, 1988, 1991; Schenau et al., 2000; Gunnars et al., 2004; Omelon and Grynpas, 2008; Oxmann and Schwendenmann, 2014), although polyphosphate storage phases or hydroxyapatite (Van Cappellen and Berner, 1988, 1991; Van Cappellen and Berner, 1991) can act as a precursor phase during active sulphidisation, and ultimately to the burial of FeOx minerals, a process that is predicted in the geochemical inverse Model 1 predicts significant CFA formation in the SMT at the three modelled sites (Fig. 8 and Table 3).

Regarding Ca and F uptake into CFA or its precursor phases, the pore water profiles of Ca\(^{2+}\) and F\(^{-}\) are ambivalent at the different sites (Fig. 3). These differences in Ca\(^{2+}\) and F\(^{-}\) profiles could be related to the formation of authigenic carbonates known to precipitate at the SMT in continental margin sediments (Meister et al., 2007; Pierre et al., 2016; Wehrmann et al., 2016), and concurrent formation of CFA and authigenic carbonates might occur at some of our study sites. At site GeoB 6223, the SMT acts as a sink for pore water Ca\(^{2+}\) and F\(^{-}\), indicating CFA formation in support of P extraction data (Figs. 5, 6). At site GeoB 1514, there is a modest pore water F\(^{-}\) gradient into the SMT, but Ca\(^{2+}\) appears to be unaffected. At site GeoB 6308, Ca\(^{2+}\) and F\(^{-}\) show a pronounced parallel minimum, but it is located ~1 m above the phosphate peak and is concurring with high P\(_{\text{pore}}\) instead of CFA contents (Figs. 5, 6). At site GeoB 9309, the P extraction data suggest formation of CFA and its precursors, but the SMT does not appear to act as a significant sink of pore water Ca\(^{2+}\), and no F\(^{-}\) data are available for this site. Overall, our data and the results of the geochemical inverse models indicate that SMTs in continental margin sediments act as zones of CFA formation, but there are significant differences between study sites. We can, however, clearly state that CFA or hydroxyapatite formation as the predominant phosphate sink below the SMT is neither supported by solid phase nor by pore water data and PHREEQC calculations.

4.3. Authigenic mineral precipitation - Fe(II) phosphates

As discussed in the Introduction, the formation of Fe(II) phosphates like vivianite represents one of the dominant burial forms of P in lacustrine and estuarine sediments (e.g., Nriagu, 1972; Nembrini et al., 1983; Mucci et al., 2000; Fagel et al., 2005; Cosmidis et al., 2014). It has also been reported in some brackish to marine settings (Nriagu, 1972; Bray et al., 1973; Martens et al., 1978; Burns, 1997; März et al., 2008; Delling et al., 2010; Taldenkova et al., 2010; Bilberg and Slomp, 2013; Slomp et al., 2013; Hsu et al., 2014; Dijkstra et al., 2014; Li et al., 2015; Egger et al., 2015b; Reed et al., 2016; Dijkstra et al., 2016, 2018a, 2018b). Based on solid phase and pore water data presented in this study, there is a strong geochemical argument for the formation of Fe(II) phosphates in the methanogenic zone below the SMT in continental margin sediments off the Zambezi, Rio de la Plata and Amazon rivers. While dissolved phosphate is released within the SMT, the source of dissolved iron below the SMT is more ambiguous. As suggested by Beal et al. (2009), iron reduction in methanic (non-sulphidic) marine sediments could potentially be coupled to the anaerobic oxidation of methane. This process has recently been proposed for the Argentine margin off the Rio de la Plata (Riedinger et al., 2014), the Baltic Sea (Egger et al., 2015a, 2017), and the North Sea (Oni et al., 2015). Alternatively, Sivan et al. (2016) suggested that high Fe\(^{2+}\) concentrations in pore waters of methanogenic sediments could result from a rapid switch between methanogenesis and dissimilatory iron reduction. While the exact nature of iron-methane coupling in anoxic/methanic marine sediments is debated, we suggest that the unambiguous presence of Fe\(^{2+}\) below the SMT-associated sulphidic zone is important for the P cycle.

As stated above, our data provide evidence of a tight coupling of Fe
and P below the SMT in the studied sediments, and suggest that this coupling is due to the precipitation of Fe(II) phosphate minerals. The SI of vivianite (Fig. 7) indicates that at GeoB 1514 this mineral is likely forming below 100 cm depth and especially below the SMT. At the other sites, despite vivianite unsaturation, the relative increase of the calculated SI indicates that this mineral is more likely to form below the SMT. In addition, vivianite precipitation in this type of sediments is most likely controlled by relatively slow reaction kinetics (which are not taken into account by PHREEQC calculations when calculating aqueous speciation and the corresponding SI). Hence, we suggest that vivianite may form even where the SI indicates unsaturated pore water conditions. This hypothesis is corroborated by the results of the geochemical inverse Model 2 for the three modelled sites where vivianite is predicted to form below the SMT.

In contrast to past studies in lacustrine, brackish or marine sediments (e.g., Burns, 1997; Fagel et al., 2005; Dijkstra et al., 2016), we were not able to identify vivianite macroscopically, microscopically, or mineralogically (by XRD) in any of the studied sediment samples below the SMT. While vivianite forms micronodules in Amazon Fan sediments studied by Burns (1997) and in Baltic Sea deposits (e.g., Egger et al., 2015b; Dijkstra et al., 2016, 2018a, 2018b), no such aggregates are present in any of the continental margin sediments studied here. Instead, Fe(II) phosphates seem to be finely dispersed in the sediment, and are thus not detectable using any of the above techniques. This is supported by the results obtained in the geochemical inverse Model 2 (Fig. 8) where the amount of vivianite predicted to form below the SMT in the three modelled sites is below 0.07 wt%. This issue has been pointed out in the past, and has mainly been related to low contents, and very fast oxidation of Fe(II) phosphates in marine sediments upon recovery (Nriagu, 1972; Nembrini et al., 1983; Pratesi et al., 2003; Fagel et al., 2005). Our approach of applying sequential extraction schemes to distinguish Fe(II) phosphates from other sedimentary Fe and P fractions, especially in combination with PHREEQC calculations, is promising and has been successfully applied in the Baltic Sea (e.g., Egger et al., 2015b; Dijkstra et al., 2016, 2018a, 2018b). However, information about the selectivity of specific extraction steps for Fe(II) phosphates (or their oxidation products) is still limited. Nembrini et al. (1983) studied freeze-dried sediments (stored in a desiccator) from Lago Maggiore using Mössbauer spectroscopy, and identified vivianite with the structural Fe partly or fully oxidised. Subsequently, they showed that most of the Fe-bound P was extracted by a citrate-buffered dithionite (CDB) solution. In the study presented here, we applied P extraction (Ruttenberg, 1992; Schenau et al., 2000; Schenau and de Lange, 2000) and Fe extraction schemes (Ferdelman, 1988) where the Fe-bound P and the FeOx fractions are extracted with the same solution that Nembrini et al. (1983) used to extract vivianite. Dijkstra et al. (2014) showed that almost 100% of vivianite (synthesized, freeze-dried and extracted under strictly anoxic conditions) was dissolved by sequential hydroxylamine-HCl (HH) and CDB extractions. We hence conclude that the extraction steps used in this study to leach Fe-bound P and FeOx from deep-sea fan sediments (under anoxic sampling, storage, and extraction conditions) have also extracted Fe(II) phosphates from the samples, supporting our argument of vivianite formation at the four study sites below the SMT.

4.4. Global relevance of Fe(II) phosphate formation in continental margin and deep-sea fan sediments

Our study shows that formation of Fe(II) phosphates in marine sediments can occur under the following conditions: the absence of sulphate and hydrogen sulphide, presence of dissolved Fe and P in the pore waters, and a depositional mechanism to bury significant amounts of FeOx below the SMT. These conditions are met in a variety of depositional settings, and one prominent example that has been studied in detail over the last years is the Baltic Sea. In the episodically sulphidic Landsort Deep, lacustrine FeOx-rich deposits are overlain by organic-rich brackish sediments, allowing vivianite nodules to grow at the boundary between these sediment units as dissolved phosphate and iron are delivered from above and below, respectively (Dijkstra et al., 2016). Similar processes are responsible for vivianite formation in the Bothnian Sea (Slomp et al., 2013; Egger et al., 2015b; Dijkstra et al., 2018a), but at much shallower sediment depths. A critical aspect at all of these sites, as well as in Zambezi Fan sediments studied by März et al. (2008), is the presence of an SMT and an FeOx pool buried beneath it that is gradually reduced (Egger et al., 2015a, 2016).

While many of these conditions are typically met along continental margin settings, our study indicates that for a significant Fe(II) phosphate enrichment at a specific sediment depth, the SMT and associated diagenetic processes need to occur within the same sediment layer for a prolonged period of time (thousands of years). The fixation of an SMT within a distinct sediment horizon, but also the preservation of significant amounts of reactive FeOx beneath it, require a particular sedimentation regime: Rapid, mostly terrigenous sedimentation followed by long-lasting, much lower sedimentation rates that allow a new stable diagenetic regime to develop. As shown by Kasten et al. (1998), Riedinger et al. (2005, 2014) and März et al. (2008), these conditions are met on deep-sea fans/depocenters off large rivers. Especially around the last deglaciation, sedimentation rates on many deep-sea fans and continental slope depocenters worldwide (including those off the Amazon, Zambezi and Rio de la Plata rivers) dramatically dropped due to the trapping of riverine sediment on the flooded continental shelves (Shanmugam et al., 1985; Covault and Graham, 2010) (Fig. 9). The transitional part of the deglaciation, i.e., when new accommodation space became available on the shelf and the delivery of sediment to the continental slope was switched off, was rather short and is not expected to have left a record in pore water or sediment geochemistry. Subsequently, low sedimentation rates prevailed at the deep sea deo-enters over several thousands of years. Notably, other sediment cores from the Rio de La Plata margin show some deviations in the depth of the present-day SMT and the thickness of the sulfidic zone (Henkel et al., 2011, 2012). This heterogeneity is related to the very dynamic sedimentation processes especially at continental margins with high sediment accumulation rates, recurrent mass wasting, shifting channel-levee systems, and/or changes in methane flux from below (some of which also affected the Zambezi depocenter; Wiles et al., 2017). In addition, not all deep-sea fans or continental slope depocenters experienced the same drastic decrease in sedimentation rates during the last deglacial sea level rise. Indeed, some deep-sea fan systems have continually accumulated sediment over the last 35,000 years (Covault and Graham, 2010), preventing the establishment of non-steady state diagenetic conditions and the fixation of the SMT at a certain sediment depth. These fan systems were usually either (a) adjacent to narrow continental shelves that did not provide sufficient new accommodation space to trap most of the riverine sediment load, or (b) located in areas where freshwater input (and thus riverine sediment input) strongly increased after the last deglaciation (e.g., glacial melt water, monsoonal rainfall). Thus, the sequence of initially high, then much lower sedimentation rates across the last deglaciation only occurred on deep-sea fans and slope depocenters that are adjacent to a wide shelf on a passive continental margin, and that did not experience systematic increases in riverine sediment input.

We combine the compilation of Covault and Graham (2010) of true deep-sea fans where sedimentation rates dropped following the last deglaciation with size estimates of the fans (Barnes and Normark, 1985) to put the importance of sub-SMT vivianite formation into a global context. With the Amazon fan (~330,000 km²) and the Nitanfan (~23,000 km²) alone, the potential loci for sub-SMT vivianite formation on continental margins cover an area about as large as the Baltic Sea. Realistically, the conditions for sub-SMT vivianite formation are given along vast stretches of low to mid-latitude passive continental margins where the spatial extents of the fine-grained, riverine sediment depocenters (that are often not true submarine fans) are poorly
quantified (e.g., off the Zambezi and Rio de la Plata). This applies in particular to the passive continental margins of North and South America, Asia, Africa and Europe bordered by wide continental shelves, unaffected by uplifting mountains or an ice sheet in the hinterland, and supplied with sediment by major rivers. Our data also show that sub-SMT vivianite formation can occur in water depths of ~1200 m (Zambezi) to ~4200 m (Rio de la Plata), depending on the geometry and sedimentation pattern of the specific continental margin. We hence propose that the sub-SMT formation of vivianite in continental margin sediments is of global importance for the marine P budget.

5. Conclusion

Our compilation of geochemical data from three deep-sea fan systems off the Zambezi, Amazon and Rio de la Plata river mouths provides new insights into the dynamics of P cycling in marine sediments affected by anaerobic oxidation of methane and deep iron reduction within the methanic zone. While CFA appears to be an important sink for P directly within the SMT, we find that in the studied sediments the formation of CFA below the SMT is not the dominant sink for pore water phosphate. Pore water and sediment analyses reveal that the geochemical conditions found below the SMT at the four studied locations are favourable for the formation of Fe(II) phosphate minerals like vivianite. The required geochemical pre-conditions for Fe(II) phosphate formation in general are: (a) Dominantly terrigenous sediment input to provide sufficient reactive FeOx as phosphate adsorption sites; (b) high sedimentation rates to quickly bury FeOx and associated phosphate into the sediments; (c) low rates of reactive organic matter accumulation to preserve FeOx below the zone of dissimilatory Fe reduction; (d) reactive FeOx within the SMT to limit HS\(^-\) to a thin sulphidic zone; (e) dissolution of FeOx within the sulphidic zone to release phosphate into the pore waters; (f) the lack of biogenic carbonate surfaces to act as nuclei for CFA precipitation; and (g) the diagenetic release of Fe\(^{2+}\) into the pore waters below the SMT. In addition, our study shows that, to allow for the development of significant authigenic Fe(II) phosphate mineral enrichments below the SMT, this diagenetic zone needs to be fixed at a specific sediment interval for thousands of years, for example in response to glacial-interglacial sea level changes.

These conditions are met in deep-sea fan and continental slope depositional systems adjacent to wide shallow shelf areas that experienced a sudden shift from high to low sedimentation rates (Fig. 9). Our results therefore add to the mounting evidence that authigenesis of Fe(II) phosphates is wide-spread in marine systems and constitutes a currently underestimated P sink in the ocean. The estimation of any Fe(II) phosphate budgets for the marine environment as a whole is still compromised by poor data coverage, in particular when it comes to the quantification of Fe(II) phosphates in settings where these phases do not occur as readily identifiable micronodules. Our study, however, offers a systematic attempt to understand Fe(II) phosphate formation in the marine environment that may assist in identifying depositional settings where these minerals are likely to form, and to assess the relevance of authigenic Fe(II) phosphates for global marine P and Fe.

Fig. 9. Schematic illustration of relevant depositional and diagenetic processes leading to iron-phosphorus cycling in continental margin settings affected by drastic decreases in sedimentation rates during (top) and after (bottom) the last deglaciation.
cycling. Promising alternative approaches are offered by combining standard pore water and sediment analysis with cutting-edge spectroscopic and microanalytical techniques (as applied, e.g., by Jilbert and Slomp, 2013; Dijkstra et al., 2014; Egger et al., 2015a; Li et al., 2015) and modified, more selective sequential extraction schemes (Gu et al., 2016).

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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References


For the full references, please refer to the original publication.


