

GEOCHEMISTRY OF GOLD CRYSTALS IN EPITHERMAL, GOLD PORPHYRY, AND GOLD-RICH COPPER PORPHYRY DEPOSITS: A DISCRIMINATION MODEL

C. PALACIOS⁽¹⁾, G. HERAIL⁽²⁾, C. ULLOA⁽¹⁾, V. MAKSAEV⁽¹⁾, B.
TOWNLEY⁽¹⁾, P. PARSEVAL⁽³⁾,

R. ORELLANA⁽¹⁾, A. LAHSEN⁽¹⁾ AND M. PARADA⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ Dept. of Geology Univ. Chile. P.O. Box 13518 Correo 21. Santiago-Chile.

⁽²⁾ IRD, 209-213 Rue La Fayette, 75480 Paris Cedex 10, France

⁽³⁾ Laboratoire de Mineralogie-UMR 5563, Univ. P. Sabatier, 39 Allées Jules Guesde, 31.000 Toulouse, France.

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INTRODUCTION

The morphology of gold grains in stream sediments evolves during transport, as a function of the distance from the source (e.g. Herail et al., 1999 a,b), being an excellent exploration tool. Additionally the compositional categorization of native Au may be significant for exploration of different types of ore deposits mainly in areas of thick soil and/or dense vegetation. Native gold accepts limited solid solution with Ag, Cu, Fe, As, and Bi among other elements, depending mainly on physico-chemical conditions of transport and crystallization-deposition, and on total element content of the respective system (Rubin and Kyle, 1997; Gammons and Williams-Jones, 1995; Morrison et al., 1991). The chemical composition of gold grains from stream sediments may indicate the type of deposit from which the gold particles were eroded. The deep-seated porphyry type mineralization and shallow epithermal deposits are commonly associated with the evolution of an intrusion-related hydrothermal system (e.g. Far Southeast-Lepanto orebodies, Philippines; Hedenquist and Arribas, 1998). Thermodynamic conditions in which gold precipitate differs in each of these type of deposits. Considering that the core of the gold particles in supergene environment maintain the composition of the precious metal in the primary mineralization source (e.g. Groen et al., 1990; Herail et al, 1990), we compare the chemistry of gold crystals from epithermal, gold porphyry, and gold-rich copper porphyry deposits, in order to attempt a discrimination between these types of mineralization. In this study the epithermal deposits are represented by the Guanaco and Pimenton orebodies in northern and central Chile (21 samples, Ulloa, 1999) and ore deposits from central-south Bolivia (249 samples, Ulloa, 1999). Gold porphyries are represented by the Cerro Casale gold porphyry, Maricunga belt, northern Chile (180 samples, Rivas, 1999,

Sepúlveda, 1999), and gold-rich copper porphyries by the Grasberg porphyry, Indonesia (11 samples, Rubin and Kyle, 1997) and the Santo Tomas II porphyry, Philippines (10 samples, Tarkian and Koopman, 1995).

RESULTS

The available data indicate Ag and Cu content in native gold as the most useful elements for discrimination. The Au-Ag-Cu ternary diagrams evidence significant compositional differences in the gold crystals from the studied ore deposits (Fig. 1 to 3). Gold crystals from epithermal deposits are Cu-depleted and tend to be Au-rich. Gold crystals from the gold porphyry orebody are also Cu-depleted and tend to be Ag-richer in comparison to epithermal gold crystals. In addition, gold crystals for gold porphyry exhibit a tendency of increasing Cu-content with the more Au-rich composition. In total contrast, gold crystals from gold-rich copper porphyries show high contents of Cu and variable Ag concentration, defining an area which is well discerned from the other two types of gold-bearing ore deposits.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the available chemical data in gold crystals from different types of hydrothermal ore deposits, allows to delineate that the gold-silver-copper ternary diagram (Fig. 4) seems to be appropriate for the discrimination between epithermal mineralization, gold porphyries and gold-rich copper porphyries. Although more research is needed, it seems that the method may be an appropriate procedure to help in the discrimination between gold-bearing hydrothermal deposits.

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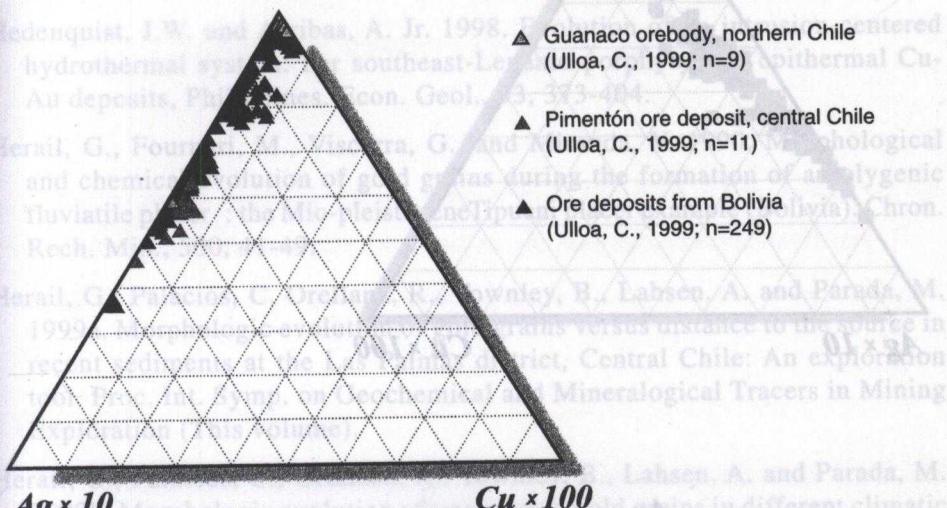
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On top of gold porphyry, we describe the types of deposits found in Chile. We also discuss the evolution of the Chilean mining industry, from the colonial period to the present. The main focus is on the development of the copper industry, particularly the Chuquicamata and Escondida mines. We also mention the tin and silver industries, and the recent discovery of gold deposits in the Atacama Desert. The paper concludes with a discussion of the future prospects for Chilean mining.

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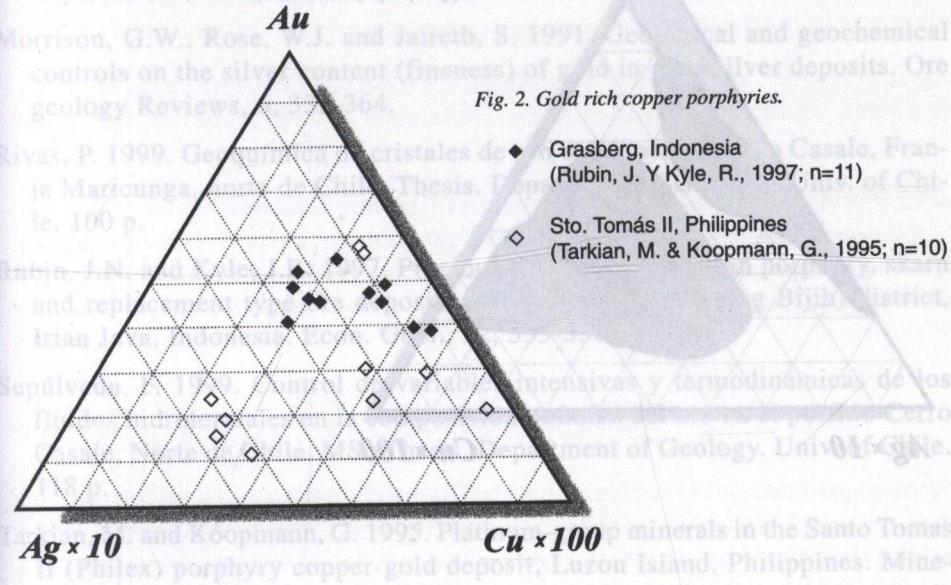
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Fig. 1. Gold rich epithermal deposits.



Lahsen, A. and Parada, M. 1995. Gold mineralization in different climatic regions of Chile. In: Ulloa, C. (ed.), Chronostratigraphic Tracers in Mining Exploration (This volume), pp. 21-30.

Fig. 2. Gold rich copper porphyries.



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Sepúlveda, 1999), an
Indonesia (1) sample
Philippines (10 samp

Fig. 3. Cerro Casale gold porphyry, northern Chile
(Rivas, P., 1999; Sepúlveda, F., 1999; n = 180).

RESULTS

The discrimination diagram of Cu content in native gold as the most useful element to discriminate between different types of hydrothermal deposits is shown in Fig. 3. The Au-Ag-Cu ternary diagrams evidence significant differences in the composition of gold crystals from the studied deposits. Gold crystals from the Cerro Casale gold porphyry are Cu-depleted and textureless. Gold crystals from the epithermal deposits are Cu-depleted. In addition, the gold crystals from the epithermal deposits exhibit a higher Cu content than those from the gold porphyry. Gold crystals from the gold-bearing ore deposits are Cu-enriched, defining an area which is in total contrast to the other two types of gold-bearing ore deposits.

Cu content in native gold as the most useful element to discriminate between different types of hydrothermal deposits is shown in Fig. 3. The Au-Ag-Cu ternary diagrams evidence significant differences in the composition of gold crystals from the studied deposits. Gold crystals from the Cerro Casale gold porphyry are Cu-depleted and textureless. Gold crystals from the epithermal deposits are Cu-depleted. In comparison to epithermal gold crystals, gold porphyry crystals exhibit a tendency of increasing Cu content. Gold crystals from the gold-bearing ore deposits are Cu-enriched, defining an area which is in total contrast to the other two types of gold-bearing ore deposits.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the available types of hydrothermal ore deposits, allowing the use of a ternary diagram (Fig. 3) to be applied for the discrimination between epithermal mineralization and gold-rich copper porphyries. Although more research is needed, it is believed that the method may be an appropriate procedure to help in the discrimination of gold-bearing hydrothermal deposits.

Fig. 4. Discrimination diagram between epithermal deposits (light grey), gold porphyry (dark grey), and gold-rich copper porphyries (black).

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CONICYT, Chile.

Ag × 10

Cu × 100

Cu × 100

Ag × 10

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