

Interactive comment on “Resolving the effects of 2D versus 3D grain measurements on (U-Th)/ He age data and reproducibility” by Emily H. G. Cooperdock et al.

Emily H. G. Cooperdock et al.

cooperdo@usc.edu

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Response to:

Interactive comment on “Resolving the effects of 2D versus 3D grain measurements on (U-Th)/ He age data and reproducibility” by Emily H. G. Cooperdock et al.

Anonymous Referee #3 Received and published: 26 June 2019

Please find our response to each comment below. We have also attached a revised version of the manuscript with appendices showing tracked changes.

This paper presents 2D measurement and 3D microCT data for >100 euhedral ap-
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atites from two igneous rock samples as well as 83 (U-Th)/He dates for a subset of these grains. It presents a methodology for efficiently acquiring microCT data for a large number of apatites (≈250) with a voxel resolution of 4-5 microns. The authors then compare the volume, surface area, grain mass, ESR values, eU values, and FT corrections derived by the two methods for this apatite suite.

This is a well-written, detailed paper. The primary benefit of this contribution is description of an efficient approach for microCT analysis and Blob 3D data reduction of a large number of grains for improved FT corrections and associated grain geometry, mass, and concentration information. This will allow others to use this methodology if desired. However, it significantly oversells the quantitative comparison of the 2D measurement and 3D microCT datasets, which should be more appropriately qualified. The deviations between the two sets of measurements presented here are almost certainly minimum differences that likely underestimate those associated with most apatites analyzed in (U-Th)/He labs. It also is unclear the extent to which the 5 μm resolution of their microCT approach is an improvement over conventional 2D measurements.

1. The selection of two samples with only euhedral apatites of extremely high quality for this study means that the conclusions regarding the 2D-microCT data comparison are limited to only apatites of this kind. Arguably, such apatites comprise only a small fraction of grains analyzed in (U-Th)/He labs today. The paper casts these conclusions in the title, abstract, introduction, and discussion as being generally applicable. However, they're not. For example, the ≈2% difference in FT factors between the 2D and 3D measurements surely represent minimum uncertainties. For example, it would seem appropriate to insert the following text into this sentence in the abstract: “The data illustrate that the 2D approach...on high-quality euhedral apatites...systematically overestimates grain volumes...” The last sentence of the introduction should be similarly qualified. As should various statements in the discussion. For example, in section 4.2 the authors state that the greatest deviations are caused by user error and not the assumed grain geometry, but this may simply be because the authors only worked

on the highest quality apatite subset that most closely approximates the chosen grain geometry. The higher deviations between 2D and microCT results that likely are associated with more typically analyzed apatites might make it more likely for the microCT method described here to be more widely adopted, so I'm surprised that only exceptional apatites were used in this study. Response: We purposefully chose high quality apatite with fast cooling histories in order to target the effect of 2D vs 3D measurement techniques on final age calculations. In order to assess the error introduced by assumed grain geometries, we sought out reproducible samples so we could remove other factors that contribute to age dispersion. Although others have presented 3D CT data for apatite before, the previous comparison studies did not date the grains, and they were done on ≤ 24 grains. Here we present data for >100 grains for a more statistically robust comparison and follow it through with dating to compare final age dispersion and results.

Response: We take the point that these results are minimum estimates, and have edited the text to acknowledge this in the Introduction and the Discussion. We also sub-sampled our data to assess the deviation between 2D and 3DCT methods for a sample size of 4 aliquots – which more typically reflects the number of grains analyzed for a single sample. The results were consistent with the statistics presented for the entire population, which is further evidence that these error estimates are robust for apatite with a similar history. We also want to note that although these two samples had abundant apatite, which were 'good quality', we sampled a variety of grain morphologies, sizes, and with inclusions.

2. The title should indicate that this study is applicable to apatites only – “Resolving the effects of 2D versus 3D grain measurements on apatite (U-Th)/He age data. . .”

Response: We've changed the title.

3. The 2D-microCT comparison seems to assume no uncertainty on the microCT data despite the ~ 5 μm voxel size. Although section 2.4.2 describes various uncertain-

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ties associated with the 3D calculations, the bottom line is unclear. Could you please summarize clearly the final uncertainties on the 3D estimates and how this affects the 2D-3D comparison? In the end, how good is a 5 μm resolution for determining 3D grain-measurements, especially for apatites on the small end of what is analyzed by (U-Th)/He?

Response: We have addressed this in detail in the newly added Appendices B and C, and we show that the 4-5 micron voxel resolution is able to produce precise and accurate grain radii, even when the voxel size is 20% of the grain radius.

4. The authors seem to dismiss the importance of surface roughness on their results, but detecting it is below their ~ 5 μm voxel size. Again, I feel that this points again toward the need to qualify some of their generalized statements about uncertainties.

Response: We acknowledge that surface roughness, and relatedly, CT smoothness, is a challenging issue to quantify in 2.4.2. However, we do not believe it is important at all for FT correction, because the alpha stopping process, both in reality and as simulated, is essentially a ~ 20 - μm smoothing filter (except for Sm, of course, but there we are talking about a percent of a percent in terms of effect). We added text to clarify this point.

5. In section 4.3 Regarding the discussion of inclusions, I encourage the authors to use more cautious language. As written, non-experts could read their language to mean that inclusions don't matter and picking apatites that contain them would be fine. We know this is not the case. Of course many apatites contain inclusions that aren't U-Th bearing and may not affect the data. The issue is the inability to discriminate between inclusions that are or are not U-Th bearing. Unless there is a way to discriminate, apatites with high-density inclusions shouldn't be analyzed.

Response: We have edited this sentence to more clearly state that inclusions should be avoided.

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6. The second and third paragraphs of the introduction should include appropriate references.

Response: References have been added to these paragraphs.

Please also note the supplement to this comment:

<https://www.geochronology-discuss.net/gchron-2019-3/gchron-2019-3-AC3-supplement.pdf>

Interactive comment on Geochronology Discuss., <https://doi.org/10.5194/gchron-2019-3>, 2019.