

THE GEOLOGY OF THE NORTHERN PART OF NORTH ARM MASSIF,
BAY OF ISLANDS OPHIOLITE COMPLEX, NEWFOUNDLAND:
WITH APPLICATION TO UPPER OCEANIC CRUST LITHOLOGY
STRUCTURE, AND GENESIS

by

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ABSTRACT

Detailed mapping (1:15,800) of the northern half of North Arm Massif shows the area to be underlain with a complete, although thin, ophiolite assemblage consisting, from top to base, of basalts, sheeted diabase dikes, isotropic and layered gabbroic rocks, layered ultramafic rocks and harzburgite tectonite. The assemblage represents a preserved piece of Cambrian oceanic crust analogous to present-day oceanic crust. Sheeted dikes and isotropic gabbros comprise the majority of the rocks exposed, with this sequence at present flat-lying to gently warped into open, upright but nonsystematic folds. Basalts occupy a shallow discontinuous N-S trending trough within the west-central part of the area. The remaining lithologies are exposed in lesser amounts along the western, eastern and northeastern edges of the surveyed area.

Volcanics consist of pillowed lavas, massive flows and breccias plus intercalated red sediment, all crudely layered, with layer attitudes intersecting the lower horizon of the unit with large angles. Volcanics are fed by underlying diabase dikes, and grade into sheeted dikes by downward increase in numbers of dikes across a transition generally less than 50 m thick. The sheeted dikes unit consists entirely of multiple diabase dikes of .90 m mean thickness, subparallel throughout and trending NNW-SSE across the massif. The dike intrusion process includes a mode wherein several dikes each intrude the previous dikes, with the position of these very narrow, short term spreading axes episodically shifting within a wider but still narrow overall zone of intrusion and spreading. Dikes intersect the upper and lower contacts of the unit with mean angles of 60° and 75° respectively, and dip away from the spreading center, located to the west of the present position

of the section on the basis of dikes attitudes and chill margin analysis. The sheeted dikes unit ranges between 400 and 600 m thick. An estimated 40% of the diabase shows extensive in situ fracturing in distinct zones subparallel to dikes trends. Major zones of fracturing extend downward into gabbro metamorphosed to foliated and lineated amphibolite. This fracturing is interpreted to reflect oceanic crustal fissuring and faulting. Sheeted diabase dikes grade downward into isotropic gabbro across a complex transition wherein numbers of dikes decrease downward with corresponding increase of thickness of intervening screens of gabbro, with complete transition commonly occurring over as little as several meters, and wherein gabbro locally intrudes and stopes overlying sheeted diabase. Largely homogeneous throughout, isotropic gabbros near the base of the dikes unit vary widely in texture and locally show extensive development of ductile shear zones.

The lithology and igneous structure of the upper units of the ophiolite and the sense of tilting of the sheeted dikes suggest that upper oceanic crust, viewed as forming as a floating roof zone, or lid, to a spreading center magma chamber, behaves as a rigid beam and forms by accretion along a narrow central zone with subsequent subsidence and rotation away from the accretion axis as a consequence of loading of the lid by extrusives. Continued steady-state spreading of a lid forming in this manner generates a lid surface topography and structural morphology identical to that observed at present-day spreading centers and an internal structure which is consistent with that of ophiolites. The model indicates that the zone of dike intrusion and basalt extrusion is narrow and remains so with continual spreading. Because the model predicts a specific internal geometry of sheeted dike and volcanic

layering attitudes, it can be tested against other detailed reconstructions of upper oceanic crustal structure as such attitudes would affect magnetic inclinations in oceanic crust.

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Eric J. Rosencrantz

under the title

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WITH APPLICATION TO UPPER OCEANIC CRUST LITHOLOGY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT	
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
TABLE OF CONTENTS	
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	
LIST OF TABLES	
LIST OF PLATES	
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: NORTH ARM MAPPING	4
1.1: Location and general description	4
1.2: Previous mapping	7
1.3: Current mapping	9
1.4: Mapping procedure of this investigation	9
CHAPTER 2: THE ORIGIN OF THE OPHIOLITE IN VIEW OF ITS REGIONAL SETTING	11
2.1: Brief geologic history of the Bay of Islands Area	14
2.2: Source area of the Bay of Islands Ophiolite	17
CHAPTER 3: STRUCTURES RELATED TO THE EMPLACEMENT OF THE NORTH ARM MASSIF	27
3.1: Large scale structure components	28
3.2: Faulting	31
3.2.1: Basal thrust fault	31
3.2.2: Trout River Fault	33
3.2.3: Gregory River Fault	36

	<u>Page</u>
3.2.4: Internal faults and crush zones	38
3.3: Folding	40
3.4: Emplacement events	41
CHAPTER 4: LITHOLOGY AND STRUCTURE	43
4.1: Ophiolite lithology and structure	43
4.1.1: Sediments	48
4.1.2: Volcanics	50
4.1.2.1: Internal morphology	51
4.1.2.2: Basalt petrology in brief	60
4.1.2.3: Internal structure	63
4.1.2.4: Thickness of the volcanics unit	65
4.1.2.5: Volcanics-sheeted diabase dike contact	65
4.1.3: Diabase dikes	66
4.1.3.1: Internal morphology	69
4.1.3.2: Diabase petrology in brief	80
4.1.3.3: Dike attitudes	81
4.1.3.4: Thickness and shape of the sheeted dikes unit	82
4.1.3.5: Lower boundary of the sheeted dikes	82
4.1.4: Massive porphyritic diabase	88
4.1.5: Isotropic gabbros and related rocks	90
4.1.5.1: Gabbro	90
4.1.5.2: Fabrics within the uppermost isotropic gabbros	94
4.1.5.3: Amphibolite	100
4.1.5.4: Minor lithologies included within isotropic gabbros	102
4.1.5.5: Thickness of the isotropic gabbros	108

	<u>Page</u>
4.1.5.6: Lower boundary of the isotropic gabbros	108
4.1.6: Layered gabbroic rocks	109
4.1.6.1: Western exposures of layered gabbroic rocks . .	110
4.1.6.2: Eastern exposures of layered gabbroic rocks . .	115
4.1.7: Layered ultramafic rocks	120
4.1.8: Harzburgite tectonites	123
4.2: Summary of the ophiolite section	127
4.3: Non-ophiolite lithology and structure	127
4.3.1: Metamorphic aureole	127
4.3.2: Parallochthonous sediments	133
4.3.3: Blow-Me-Down Brook Formation	135
CHAPTER 5: STRUCTURE AND PROCESS WITHIN THE LID	137
5.1: Dike attitude and rotation of the lid	138
5.2: Chill margin bias, dike thickness and the process of dike intrusion	147
5.3: Sheeted dike unit boundaries and the process of dike intrusion	160
5.4: Fractured diabase: zone of fissuring and faulting . . .	162
5.5: Summary	165
CHAPTER 6: EVOLUTION OF UPPER OCEANIC CRUST: A MODEL	167
6.1: Introduction	167
6.2: Geomorphology of mid-oceanic spreading center axes . .	169
6.3: Internal structure of upper oceanic crust	176
6.4: Model	182
6.5: Discussion	196

	<u>Page</u>
6.6: Paleomagnetic evidence for lid rotation	202
6.7: Summary	208
CHAPTER 7: NOTES ON THE PLUTONIC SECTION	210
7.1: Deformation within the gabbroic rocks	210
7.2: Processes associated with igneous layering: a comment .	214
CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY	218
APPENDICES	225
A: COMMENT ON 'THE SEISMIC VELOCITY STRUCTURE OF A TRAVERSE THROUGH THE BAY OF ISLANDS OPHIOLITE COMPLEX, NEWFOUNDLAND, AN EXPOSURE OF OCEANIC CRUST AND UPPER MANTLE' by Matthew H. Salisbury and Nikolas I. Christensen	225
B: COMMENT ON 'SEISMIC ANISOTROPY IN THE UPPER OCEANIC MANTLE: EVIDENCE FROM THE BAY OF ISLANDS OPHIOLITE COMPLEX' by Nikolas I. Christensen and Matthew H. Salisbury	232
C: HETEROGENEOUS NATURE OF OCEANIC CRUST AND UPPER MANTLE: A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE BAY OF ISLANDS OPHIOLITE COMPLEX .	236
C.1: Introduction	236
C.2: The Bay of Islands lithology and structure	239
C.2.1: Harzburgite tectonite	242
C.2.2: Plutonic complex	244
C.2.2.1: Lithologic units of the plutonic complex . . .	244
C.2.2.2: Layering and layering attitudes	248
C.2.2.3: Cryptic chemical variations within the plutonic complex	251
C.2.2.4: High temperature ductile deformation	252
C.2.2.5: Variation within the plutonic complex	254
C.2.3: Intrusive-extrusive carapace	
C.2.3.1: Sheeted diabase dikes - gabbro transition . .	257

	<u>Page</u>
C.2.3.2: Sheeted diabase dikes	259
C.2.3.3: Volcanics	260
C.2.3.4: Carapace thickness	262
C.2.4: Spatial distribution of metamorphic rocks	263
C.2.5: Preserved oceanic fracture zones in ophiolites .	269
C.3: Ophiolite thickness	273
C.4: Ophiolite geology, marine geological/geophysical data and a geological model of the oceanic crust	278
C.4.1: Shallow intrusive/extrusive carapace	279
C.4.2: Plutonic complex	289
C.5: Concluding remarks	294
D: FLOATING LIDS ON MID-OCEAN SPREADING CENTER MAGMA CHAMBERS	296
E: ABSTRACTS OF PAPERS PRESENTED AT MEETINGS	301
REFERENCES CITED	304

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure Number	Page
1.1: Location of the study area	6
2.1: Major tectonic divisions of Newfoundland	13
2.2: Tectonic models for Ordovician West Foundland	26
3.1: Major structural components of North Arm Massif	30
3.2: Trout River Fault	37
4.1: Spatial relationships within the upper Humber Allochthon	45
4.2: Spatial arrangement of ophiolitic sediments	49
4.3: Pillow lavas	55
4.4: Pillow lavas	55
4.5: Massive basalt flows	56
4.6: Basalt breccia	56
4.7: Thin section of intercalated cherts	59
4.8: Distribution of basalt morphology	62
4.9: Map of the distribution and trends of sheeted dikes	68
4.10: Outcrop of sheeted diabase dikes	70
4.11: Variation in dike attitudes	72
4.12: Internal complexity of intrusion among dikes	74
4.13: Detail of a dike contact	76
4.14: Thin section view of a dike contact	78
4.15: Diabase dikes cutting isotropic gabbros	84
4.16: Variety of structure and lithology at the sheeted dikes - isotropic gabbro boundary	87
4.17: Detail of massive plagioclase porphyritic diabase	89
4.18: Diffuse layering in isotropic gabbro	92

Figure Number	Page
4.19: "Clotted" gabbro	95
4.20: "Mixed" gabbro	96
4.21: Ductile shear zone	99
4.22: Foliated and sheared gabbros	99
4.23: Trondhjemite	104
4.24: Trondhjemite vein	104
4.25: Layered gabbroic rocks	113
4.26: Detail of layering in gabbroic rock	113
4.27: Layered gabbroic rocks	117
4.28: Folded layered gabbroic and ultramafic rocks	117
4.29: Layering within layered ultramafic rocks	121
4.30: Harzburgite tectonite	125
4.31: Lithological columns	130
5.1: Attitudinal relationships between volcanics and sheeted dikes	141
5.2: Synthesis of dike attitudes near the upper boundary of the sheeted dikes	142
5.3: Attitudinal relationships between sheeted dikes and gabbro	144
5.4: Synthesis of dike attitudes near the lower boundary of the sheeted dikes	145
5.5: Histograms of dikes thicknesses	151-152
5.6: Local dike intrusion patterns	159
6.1: Comparison of topographic profiles of oceanic spreading centers	172
6.2: Simplified sketches of various accretion - spreading geometries of the crustal lid	185

Figure Number	Page
6.3: Model of lid development	191
6.4: Comparison of magnetic inclinations at DSDP holes in the North Atlantic Ocean	207
B.1: Simplified geological sketch map of North Arm and Table Mountain Massifs	234
C.1: Location of the Bay of Islands Ophiolite Complex	241
C.2: Cross sections of the four massifs of the Bay of Islands Complex	256
C.3: Comparison of unit lithostratigraphic unit thicknesses among various ophiolites	276
C.4: Block diagram of oceanic crust	285

LIST OF TABLES

Table Number	Page
4.1: Characteristic lithology and structure of the ophiolite rocks	128
5.1: Thicknesses of diabase dikes	155
D.1: Selected values of basalt rock, glass and melt densities	298

LIST OF PLATES (located in back pocket)

Plate 1: Geological Map of the North Arm Massif, Northern Part,
Bay of Islands Ophiolite Complex, Newfoundland,
Canada

Plate 2: Structural Section of the North Arm Massif, Northern
Part

The main difficulty in comparing ophiolite complexes with oceanic lithosphere is the absence of detailed petrographic and structural descriptions of actual sections of oceanic crust. Any comparison between oceanic lithosphere and ophiolite must of necessity be circumstantial.

Church (1972)

Optimum Optimorum Principle: There comes a time when one must stop suggesting and evaluating new solutions, and get on with job of analyzing and finally implementing one pretty good solution.

Dickson (1978), p. 138