

Geochemistry, Geophysics, Geosystems®



RESEARCH ARTICLE

10.1029/2022GC010434

Constraints on the Magma Source and Rift Evolution From Geochemistry of the Stratoid Flood Basalts (Afar, Ethiopia)

G. Tortelli^{1,2} , A. Gioncada¹, C. Pagli¹ , E. Braschi³ , E. F. Gebru^{4,5} , and D. Keir^{2,6} 

¹Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra, Università di Pisa, Pisa, Italy, ²Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra, Università degli Studi di Firenze, Florence, Italy, ³CNR, IGG, Sezione di Firenze, Firenze, Italy, ⁴Department of Geosciences, University of Fribourg, Fribourg, Switzerland, ⁵School of Earth Sciences, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, ⁶School of Ocean and Earth Science, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK

Key Points:

- Metasomatized, amphibole-bearing lithospheric component in the mantle sources of the 4.5–0.6 Ma basaltic magmatism in Afar
- Deeper partial melting column for the Upper Stratoid Series mantle source with respect to the Lower Stratoid and the Gulf Series
- Stratoid Series flood basalt volcanism related to rift jump of the Red Sea rift branch and not to a single magmatic event

Supporting Information:

Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article.

Correspondence to:

G. Tortelli,
gianmaria.tortelli@unifi.it

Citation:

Tortelli, G., Gioncada, A., Pagli, C., Braschi, E., Gebru, E. F., & Keir, D. (2022). Constraints on the magma source and rift evolution from geochemistry of the Stratoid flood basalts (Afar, Ethiopia). *Geochemistry, Geophysics, Geosystems*, 23, e2022GC010434. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2022GC010434>

Received 6 APR 2022

Accepted 7 JUL 2022

Author Contributions:

Conceptualization: G. Tortelli, A.

Gioncada, C. Pagli, D. Keir

Formal analysis: E. Braschi

Funding acquisition: C. Pagli, D. Keir

Investigation: G. Tortelli, A. Gioncada,

E. Braschi, E. F. Gebru

Project Administration: C. Pagli, D. Keir

Resources: E. Braschi

Supervision: A. Gioncada, C. Pagli

Validation: G. Tortelli, A. Gioncada

Visualization: G. Tortelli

Writing – original draft: G. Tortelli

Abstract The relationship between rifting and continental flood basalt eruptions is debated, and a control by mantle plume is commonly invoked for flood basalts production. In this work, we investigate the relationship between magmatism and rifting by studying the flood basalts erupted in Afar (4.5–0.6 Ma), known as the Stratoid and Gulf Series. We present new field observations and petrography, major and trace elements analyses and mineral chemistry of lavas collected during a regional campaign in Afar. The Series are characterized by E-MORB magmatism and residual amphibole in the mantle source, consistent with the contribution of metasomatized sub-continental lithospheric mantle during partial melting. Differences in garnet-compatible elements indicate a shallower melting column for the oldest and youngest products (4.5–2.6 Ma Lower Stratoid Series; 1.1–0.6 Ma Gulf Series), and deeper for the products erupted at 2.6–1.1 Ma (Upper Stratoid Series). Incompatible element ratios (Th/Nb, Th/Zr) indicate a higher degree of partial melting for the Gulf with respect to the Upper Stratoid Series. Accordingly with independent geophysical and stratigraphic evidence, we explain our results with rift re-localization: the Pliocene rift caused thinning of the lithosphere and the Lower Stratoid eruptions in Southern Afar, then the Pleistocene rift jumped to Central Afar under a less-extended lithosphere, producing the Upper Stratoid and, subsequently, as stretching of the lithosphere localized, the Gulf Series formed. Our findings suggest that rift migration and localization can exert a fundamental control on the spatial variability and character of flood basalts without requiring variations on the activity of the mantle plume.

Plain Language Summary Afar is a volcanically active low-lying area in Ethiopia, where the separation of the tectonic plates is breaking up the African continent and leading to the formation of new oceans (i.e., Red Sea, Gulf of Aden). It is therefore an excellent place to study the role of volcanism and related subsurface movements of magma during this transition from continent to ocean. In this work, we studied the Stratoid Series, a huge succession of basaltic lava flows covering much of the Afar depression, and the younger Afar Gulf Series lava flows, which were jointly erupted from 4.5 to 0.6 Ma. This study allows us to identify different mantle sources producing the magmas erupted during the breaking-up process and to recognize two distinct episodes of “break-up” in Afar. We interpret the process that guides the passage from one to the other and identify the “evolutionary stages” of the break-up process toward what is going to be a new ocean.

1. Introduction

Magmatism in rift systems plays a key role along with tectonics in breaking up the continental lithosphere and eventual initiation of oceanic spreading (Acocella, 2014; Bosworth et al., 2005; Corti et al., 2015; Hayward & Ebinger, 1996; Manighetti et al., 1997; Stab et al., 2016; Wolfenden et al., 2005). However, ambiguity remains about the origin of one of the largest magmatic provinces associated with continental rifting, the Stratoid flood basalts in Afar, and how rifting evolved in space and time during the magma production. Both in Afar and globally, it is debated whether flood basalts associated with continental breakup are driven by the activity of a thermally anomalous mantle plume, or by plate extension and related thinning causing decompression melting (Buck, 1991; Corti et al., 2003; Farnetani et al., 2011; Frizon de Lamotte et al., 2015; Griffiths & Campbell, 1991; Koptev et al., 2016; Schmeling, 2010; Turcotte & Emerman, 1983). Geochemical, petrological, and volcanological studies are crucial to characterize the magmatism (e.g., magma source/s, magma productivity, magma storage, and ascent) in order to understand the links with rift related processes.

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Writing – review & editing: A. Gioncada, C. Pagli, E. Braschi, E. F. Gebru, D. Keir

In this work, we target the spatial and temporal variations of the Stratoid Series erupted over Southern and Central Afar at 4.5–1.1 Ma (Barberi & Santacroce, 1980; Varet, 2018) and the following Gulf Series erupted at 2.8–0.3 Ma near the current rift axis (Kidane et al., 2003; Rooney, 2020a). These Series allow us to investigate the origin of the widespread basaltic volcanism and the transition to the formation of narrow magmatic segments at the Afar Rift-Rift-Rift triple junction. In this work, we present new results of petrographic, microanalytical, and geochemical analyses as well as field observations from a regional campaign in Central and Southern Afar in February 2020. Furthermore, we complement this data set with new analyses of samples collected during the French-Italian campaigns in 1967–1973 (<https://repositories.dst.unipi.it/index.php/afar-repositories>). This geochemical work is based on samples that are temporally and spatially distributed over the Stratoid and the Gulf Series and hence allow us to identify variations in the mantle source between these previously undistinguished Series. These observations have therefore been used to interpret the evolution of the Afar rift magmatism from 4.5 to 0.6 Ma. Our results are also compared to independent stratigraphic reconstruction of the Afar basins and crustal thickness models derived from seismic imaging, to explore links between the shifts in volcanism and tectonics.

2. Geological Background

At the northern end of the EARS (East African Rift System) the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Main Ethiopian Rift (Figure 1) intersect at the Afar depression and represent a classic example of a rift-rift-rift triple junction at the transition from continental rifting to oceanic spreading (Bastow & Keir, 2011; Bastow et al., 2018; Makris & Ginzburg, 1987). Volcanism in EARS began around 45 Ma in central and southern Ethiopia with the emplacement of the Ethiopian flood basalts and kimberlite magmas along the margins of the Tanzanian craton. During the Oligocene the flood basalt volcanism mainly emplaced over only ~1 Myr, at about 30 Ma, associated with the onset of rifting and the effect of a mantle plume (Ebinger et al., 1993; Eid et al., 2021; C. Hofmann et al., 1997; Kieffer et al., 2004; Marty et al., 1996; Pik et al., 1999; Steiner et al., 2022; Zumbo et al., 1995).

Rifting in Afar is thought to have started ~29 Ma, with tectono-magmatic reconstructions suggesting that the locus of strain of the southern Red Sea rift migrated eastward, from the western Afar border fault system toward the rift center (Wolfenden et al., 2005). This migration was associated with a progressive narrowing of the active zone of extension and magmatism until 7 Ma by which time strain was mainly accommodated through dike intrusion (Wolfenden et al., 2005). The migration of extension was not only caused by strain localization, but also due to triple junction tectonics. Using regional structural analysis, Tesfaye et al. (2003) reconstruct ~160 km northeast migration of the triple junction, from southernmost Afar (10°N–40°E) to the current position near Lake Abbe (11.2°N–41.8°E) in central Afar. Supporting this hypothesis, detailed anthropological studies in the Woranso-Mille region and Awash valley (Figure 1) reveal a northeast migration of the paleo-depocenter formation across Southern Afar during ~10–3 Ma (Kalb, 1995) until the development of the Hadar Basin depocenter (ca. 3.8–2.9 Ma; DiMaggio et al., 2015; Wynn et al., 2008; Figure 1). The sedimentary succession of the Hadar basin is topped by an angular unconformity separating it from the overlying Busidima Formation (ca. 2.7–0.15 Ma) and marking an important change in fluvial sedimentary processes in Afar (Campisano, 2012; Quade et al., 2008; Wynn et al., 2008). Wynn et al. (2008) and Campisano (2012) suggest that the changes following the Hadar Basin deposition were the response of a major tectonic reorganization in Afar.

Volcanism in Afar started at ~31–29 Ma with the eruption of the Ethiopia-Yemen flood basalt province (Baker et al., 1996; C. Hofmann et al., 1997). From 20 to 10 Ma the Mabla Series was emplaced along with the Afar rift margins. The Mabla Series was dominated by the explosive silicic activity (Stab et al., 2016; Wolfenden et al., 2005). Then, the Dalha Series succession (10–5.6 Ma) began with mainly silicic activity and was followed by the basaltic fissural activity of the Dalhoid Series (5.6–3.9 Ma; Rooney, 2020a). In the Pliocene starting at 4.5 Ma, the largest volcanic succession of Afar was erupted, the Stratoid Series covering an area of ~55,000 km² in Central and Southern Afar and reaching ~1,000 m in thickness. The Stratoid are mostly made of flat lying fissural basalts, minor rhyolitic lavas, and pyroclastics. The basaltic emission centers have not been identified in the field and the base of the lava succession is not exposed (Barberi & Santacroce, 1980; Varet, 2018). The Stratoid Series are dissected by graben-forming normal faults, striking NW–SE to NNW–SSE in Central Afar (Red Sea trend), while south of the Tendaho Goba'Ad Discontinuity (T.G.D., separating the E–W extension direction of the MER from the NE–SW one of the Red Sea) the faults mainly strike NNE–SSW (Main Ethiopian Rift trend) (Figure 1). The precise timing of the Stratoid Series emplacements is still not well established. Overall, the literature data indicate ages ranging from 4.5 ± 0.19 Ma to 1.25 ± 0.09 Ma (Barberi et al., 1975; Courtillot

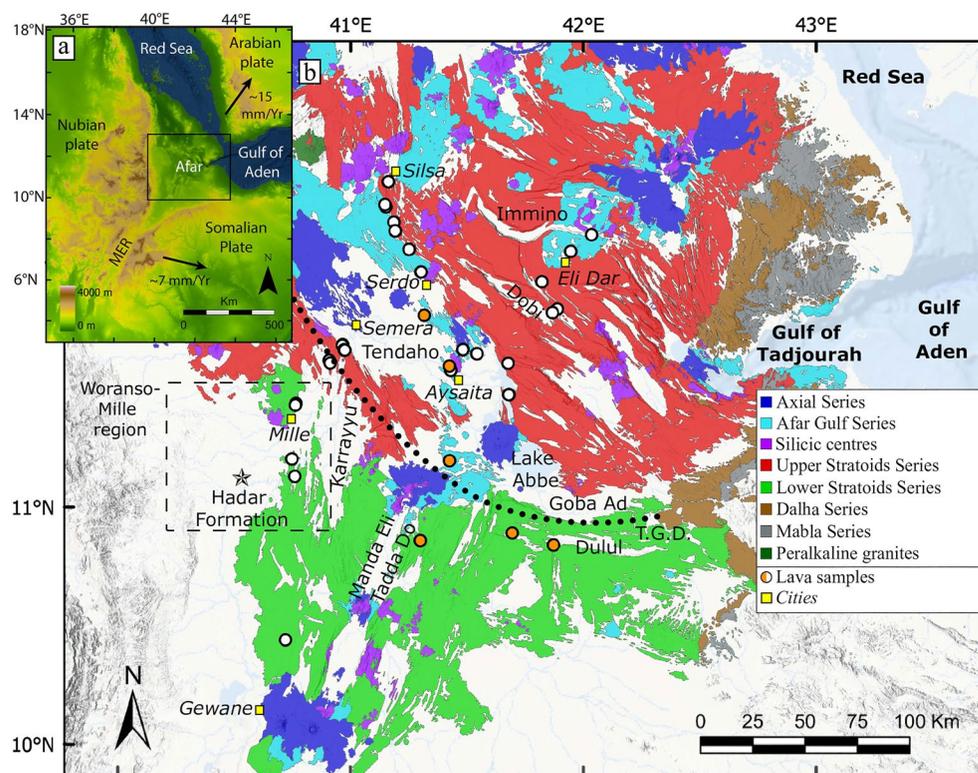


Figure 1. (a) Topographic map of the East African Rift System with plate boundary, name, and spreading vector with respect to Nubia fixed plate. The black box encloses the Afar depression represented in picture (b). (b) Geological map of the Afar depression modified from Varet (1978), Kidane et al. (2003), and Stab et al. (2016). Lava samples are from the 2020 campaign (white circles) and the Afar repository of the University of Pisa (orange circles). The dashed box represents the approximate location of the Woranso-Mille region. Dotted line indicates the Tendaho Goba Ad Discontinuity (T.G.D.). Datum WGS1984, background Multi-Directional Hillshade.

et al., 1984; Feyissa et al., 2019; Kidane et al., 2003; Kunz et al., 1975; Lahitte, Gillot, Kidane, et al., 2003; Zumbo et al., 1995). Acocella (2010) indicated a rejuvenation of the Stratoid Series along a direction perpendicular to the Dobi and the Tendaho graben, with ages getting younger toward the inner portions of the graben. Kidane et al. (2003) divided the Stratoid Series based on their age and morphology in Upper and Lower Stratoid Series, respectively, younger and older than 2.6 Ma. Toward the end of the Stratoid Series, central silicic volcanoes produced effusive and pyroclastic products (Barberi & Santacroce, 1980; Lahitte, Gillot, & Courtillot, 2003).

After the Stratoid Series, the Gulf Series are emplaced. These were previously identified as the Upper part of the Stratoid Series (Varet, 1978) and later distinguished based on their younger age (2.8–0.3 Ma) and the decrease in the volume of the flows with respect to the Stratoid Series (Daoud et al., 2011; Kidane et al., 2003; Lahitte, Gillot, Kidane, et al., 2003; Le Gall et al., 2015; Rooney, 2020a). The Gulf Series volcanism is located along the faults of the main grabens in central Afar and in the Gulf of Tadjoura (Figure 1) (i.e., Tendaho-Manda Hararo, Tat'Ali, and Manda Inakir). Gasse et al. (1983) and Stab et al. (2016) hypothesized that the Gulf Series are the first products associated with the progressive localization of the extension to the magmatic segments, starting at ~1.1 Ma in central Afar (Kidane et al., 2003; Lahitte, Gillot, Kidane, et al., 2003) and at ~3 Ma in the Gulf of Tadjoura (Daoud et al., 2011; Le Gall et al., 2015). The Gulf Series products cover a much smaller area than the Stratoid lavas (Figure 1).

The Stratoid and Gulf Series basalts are both originated from transitional to subalkaline magmas modified by fractional crystallization processes with major and trace elements (e.g., REE, La_N/Sm_N , and Zr/Nb) and isotopic composition ($^{143}Nd/^{144}Nd$, $^{87}Sr/^{86}Sr$, $^{206}Pb/^{204}Pb$, $^{207}Pb/^{204}Pb$, and $^{208}Pb/^{204}Pb$) that largely overlap (Barberi & Santacroce, 1980; Feyissa et al., 2019; Rooney, 2020a). Rooney (2020a) and Rooney et al. (2014, 2017), based on the observed geochemical patterns (Ba peak, U-Th trough, and Nb-Ta peak) and modeled patterns of primitive, depleted and lithospheric mantle partial melting, identified the Stratoid and Gulf Series lavas as a mix of plume,

depleted mantle, and African lithosphere. Moreover, Feyissa et al. (2019) and Rooney (2020a, 2020b), based on isotopic compositions show that the source of the Stratoid and Gulf Series lavas is a mixture of Afar plume, depleted mantle and African lithosphere (Rooney, Hanan, et al., 2012; type III magmas of Rooney [2020b]). Furthermore, Rooney (2020a) recognized a group of Stratoid Series samples within the Woranso-Mille region (Figure 1) and the Hayyabley basalts (near Djibouti) of the Gulf Series as lavas originated from a source extremely depleted in the most incompatible element and enriched in LILE (type VI).

Seismic imaging studies sensitive to discontinuities struggle to image the lithosphere-asthenosphere boundary (LAB) beneath Afar. However, a weak discontinuity at ~65–70 km depth has been interpreted as potentially the LAB (Lavayssiere et al., 2018). Seismic tomography beneath Afar shows slow velocity lobes of ~100–150 km length scale in the uppermost asthenosphere that are interpreted as the melt zone (Chambers et al., 2022; Gallacher et al., 2016). The slow seismic velocities are explained by partial melt at ~60–110 km depth (Chambers et al., 2022), broadly consistent with expectations that the melt zone is directly beneath the lithosphere. This current depth of melting is also consistent with a ~95 km depth of base of melt zone derived from modeling REE compositions of young basaltic rocks in Afar (Ferguson et al., 2013). The crust beneath most of central and southern Afar is ~25–30 km, but locally thins to ~20 km beneath the magmatic segments and beneath previous zone of strain such as the Woranso-Mille region (Ahmed et al., 2022; Hammond et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2021). Furthermore, tectonic and geophysical studies (Stab et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2021) suggest the presence of lower crustal intrusions/magmatic underplating near the Moho in the Afar Depression that could potentially play an important role in the magmatic evolution of the erupted products.

3. Data

We analyzed 44 new samples of lava flows from the Lower and Upper Stratoid Series and the Gulf Series, plus 4 new lava samples from the current magmatic segments, collected during a campaign in February 2020. The rationale was to cover as much as possible of the Stratoid and the Gulf Series in Southern and Central Afar (Figure 1). To improve the sampling distribution, we also studied 9 Stratoid and Gulf Series samples (orange circles in Figure 1) from the Afar Repository of the University of Pisa (<https://repositories.dst.unipi.it/index.php/home-afar>). Furthermore, previous major element analyses of 46 samples of the Upper Stratoid Series from Santarnecchi (1978, unpublished thesis of the University of Pisa) were included in this work.

With respect to the Gulf Series, we took into consideration only the lavas outcropping in the Tendaho and Immino grabens (Figure 1) and not in the Tadjoura Gulf. Thus, in this work we name these Gulf Series lavas as Central Afar Gulf Series (hereafter CAG Series).

4. Methods

4.1. Petrography

Thin sections were prepared for all lava samples (Table S1). The samples have been described with regard to their phenocryst abundance, mineral assemblage, and micro-texture. The phenocrysts and micro-phenocrysts have been identified based on their size, and relation with the groundmass. The phenocryst abundance has been evaluated qualitatively by comparison with volume % estimation diagrams. Rock samples with phenocrysts less than 2% have been considered aphyric.

4.2. Analytical Methods for Mineral Chemistry

Six samples from the Upper, Lower, and CAG Series at different sites have been selected for electron microscopy and microanalysis (Table S2). Polished thin sections were studied by scanning electron microscopy-back scattered electron imaging (SEM-BSEI) and energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDS) microanalysis with the field emission scanning electron microscope FEI Quanta 450 ESEM-FEG provided with a Bruker QUANTAX XFlash Detector 6/10 at the Centro per la Integrazione della Strumentazione della Università di Pisa (CISUP). The samples were then analyzed using the JEOL JAX8600—EMPA device of the CNR-IGG, hosted in the “Filippo Olmi” laboratories (Department of Earth Sciences of Florence). The analytical conditions were 15 kV of accelerating voltage with 20 nA of beam current and 3 μm beam size for olivine, pyroxene, and oxide and 10 nA beam current and 5 μm beam size for plagioclase. The counting time is 15 s on peak and 7 s in the background

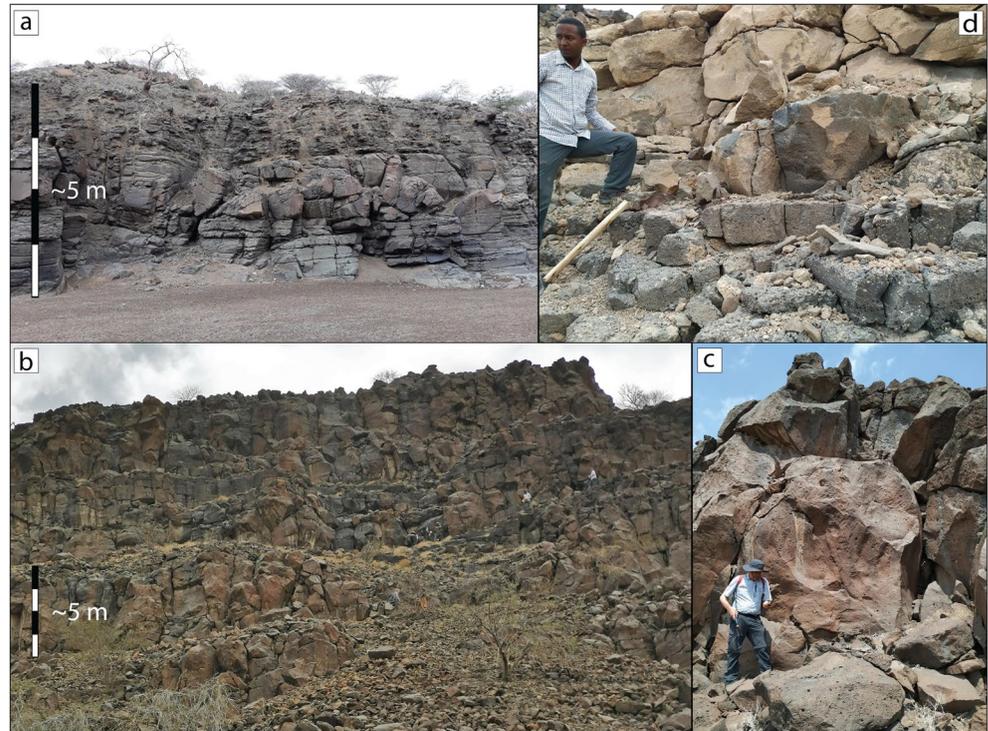


Figure 2. Field photographs of the three Series. (a) Lower Stratoid Series massive blocky-jointed lava flows. (b) Upper Stratoid Series typical blocky-jointed flows escarpment. (c) Closer look of the top flow of panel (b). (d) Central Afar Gulf Series lava flows alternating vesiculated and massive portions, less voluminous with respect to the Stratoid Series.

for major elements (except for the Na counting 10 s on peak and 5 s in the background). For the trace elements the counting time varies between 30 and 40 s on peak and between 15 and 20 s on the background. The primary standards used for calibration are albite Astimex for Si and Na, plagioclase Astimex for Al, olivine Astimex for Mg, diopside Astimex for Ca, sanidine Astimex for K, ilmenite Smithsonian for Ti and Fe, apatite Astimex for P, and barite Astimex for Ba and celestite Astimex for Sr.

4.3. Analytical Methods for Geochemistry

A total of 42 samples (9 of the Lower Stratoid Series, 20 of the Upper Stratoid Series, 9 of the CAG, and 4 of the axial samples) have been analyzed for major and trace elements (Table S3). The pulp was prepared by crushing and milling the samples in agate jars. Major element analyses were carried out at Activation Laboratories Ltd. (Ontario, Canada) by means of inductively coupled plasma-optical emission spectroscopy (ICP-OES) whole rock analysis. Trace element analyses were carried out at University of Pisa, Earth Sciences Department ICP-MS laboratories; 50–60 mg of each powdered sample was dissolved by means of multiple steps in a mixture of HF and HNO₃ on a hot plate at ~170°C in a screw-top perfluoroalkoxy (PFA) vessel and analyzed using inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) with a PerkinElmer NexION 300X. A procedural blank and one reference sample (WS-E, Whin Sill Dolerite; Govindaraju, 1994) underwent the same procedure. A solution containing ¹⁰³Rh, ¹⁸⁷Re, and ²⁰⁹Bi has been added to our samples, to the blank and to the reference sample, to be used as an internal standard.

5. Results

5.1. Field Observations

The Lower Stratoid Series lavas have been observed in outcrops along the road from Gewane to Mille (Figure 1). They consist of horizontally jointed and massive blocky-jointed lava flows, reaching thickness of a few meters (Figure 2a). The thickness of the observed lava successions is moderate (~5 m), but to the east a lava succession

of up to 400/500 m thick occurs (e.g., Karrayu and Manda Eli Adda Do graben; satellite observations). The Upper Stratoid Series have been observed mainly along the Tendaho and Dobi graben escarpments with observed flow thickness on the order of 10 m (Figures 2b and 2c). The thick succession of sheet flows is cut by up to 1,000-m-high graben-bounding faults in the Tendaho graben. The thickness of the single flows and the total volume are, however, smaller with respect to the typical flood basalt volcanism, for example, the Oligocene Ethiopian trap reaching pluri-decamic thick single flows for a total volume of $\sim 720,000 \text{ km}^3$ (Krass et al., 2018; Mohr, 1983; Rooney, 2017). The Upper Stratoid lava flows are rather homogeneous, tabular, mainly massive, and predominantly blocky-jointed (Figures 2b and 2c). However, horizontal jointed and, to a small extent, well-formed columnar-jointed deposits have also been observed. Some flows show an increase in vesiculation toward the top. Subordinate pillow lavas have also been found, suggesting that water bodies may have existed during the Upper Stratoid emplacement and therefore an environment with episodic depressed areas and humid conditions. No evidence of long hiatuses, such as the ones marked by thick sedimentary deposit interbedded with basalt flows in the Awash valley (Alemseged et al., 2020; DiMaggio et al., 2015), has been recognized on the observed outcrops. This suggests an overall high eruption rate, which potentially also contributed to forming a relatively flat surface morphology. The CAG Series lava flows are overall less thick with respect to the Stratoid Series flows and show inner variations regarding structure and vesiculation. In central Tendaho, north-east of Aysaita, and in the Immino area (Figure 1) meter-thick (up to 2 m) massive and blocky-jointed flows interlayered with thin vesiculated facies were observed (Figure 2d). In Tendaho, a subaqueous lava forming hummocky-like flows (e.g., Self et al., 1998) shows clinker, tilted block and pressure ridges suggesting flow inflation (Duraiswami et al., 2001; Rossi & Gudmundsson, 1996; Walker, 1991). Near Eli Dar (Figure 1) a reworked volcanoclastic deposit has been observed at the base of the meter-thick massive flow, suggesting a period of stasis in the magmatic activity. In the same area, Varet (2018) observed an erosive boundary and clastic sedimentation between the Stratoid Series and the CAG Series.

Overall, the Stratoid Series, have the characteristics of flood basalt volcanism, such as the thick, massive, and jointed sheet flows, but they are less voluminous with respect to the typical flood basalt province (e.g., Deccan Traps, Columbia River Basalt province). Sporadic pillow lavas indicate episodes of subaqueous activity while the absence of hiatuses is consistent with continuous volcanic activity. A stasis can be instead suggested between the Stratoid and the CAG Series. The CAG Series shows an important decrease in total and single flow thickness with respect to the Stratoid Series, and more variable features with respect to the more homogeneous lavas of the Stratoid Series.

5.2. Petrography and Mineral Chemistry

The Lower Stratoid Series are mainly aphyric or micro-porphyrific, with some scarcely porphyritic samples (Table S1). The populations of phenocrysts and microphenocrysts are dominated by plagioclase with minor olivine and clinopyroxene. The plagioclase phenocrysts are often sieve-textured and external resorption features are common (Figure 3a). Fe-Ti oxides and apatite are accessory minerals. The groundmass is mostly intergranular with subordinate hyalopilitic samples, and it is composed of plagioclase, olivine, clinopyroxene, and Fe-Ti oxides.

The lavas of the Upper Stratoid Series, similarly to the Lower Stratoid Series, are mainly aphyric and micro-porphyrific (Table S1). Four Upper Stratoid samples are scarcely porphyritic and only one sample (AF20-12) reaches 35% of phenocryst abundance with phenocrysts of plagioclase and olivine. The most abundant phase is plagioclase, with minor olivine and clinopyroxene (Figure 3b). In some samples, plagioclase phenocrysts show internal and external resorption features. With regard to accessory minerals, Fe-Ti oxides have been observed in most of the samples, apatite in the more evolved samples, while sulfides (pyrrhotite and Cu-rich sulfide) have been found in two mafic samples (AF20-04 and AF20-19). The groundmass is mostly intergranular with subordinate intersertal samples and composed of plagioclase, olivine, clinopyroxene, and Fe-Ti oxides. The five more evolved lava samples are porphyritic and dominated by plagioclase with minor clinopyroxene and olivine, also found as glomerocrysts. Fe-Ti oxides and apatite are accessory phases. The groundmass is mostly intersertal and, subordinately, intergranular and is composed of plagioclase, olivine, clinopyroxene, and Fe-Ti oxides.

The CAG Series lavas are instead generally porphyritic and micro-porphyrific, with only two aphyric samples (Table S1). One sample has an ophitic texture with plagioclase enclosed in clinopyroxene. As for the Stratoid Series, plagioclase is the most abundant phenocryst mineral, but olivine and clinopyroxene phenocrysts are also

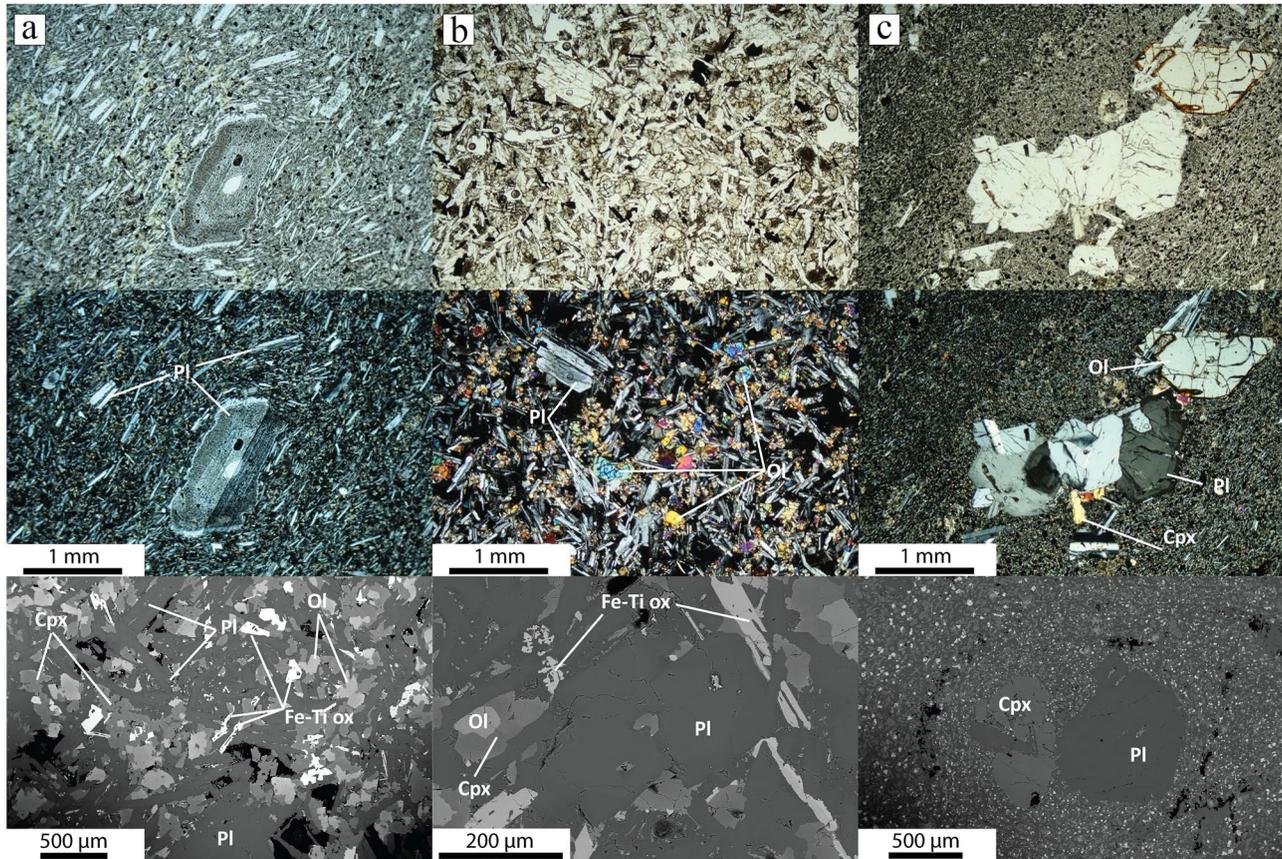


Figure 3. Transmitted light petrographic (PPL and XPL) and SEM images (from top to the bottom) of the three Series, respectively. (a) Lower Stratoid Series sieved and resorbed plagioclase in hyalopilitic groundmass. Note that the SEM image is not from the same sample of the petrographic images. (b) Upper Stratoid Series sample with phenocryst and micro-phenocryst in intergranular groundmass. (c) Central Afar Gulf Series porphyritic lava. Pl, plagioclase; Cpx, clinopyroxene; Ol olivine; Fe-Ti ox, Fe-Ti oxides.

common (Figure 3c). In some samples, plagioclase phenocrysts have sieve textures and/or show external resorption features, together with olivine and clinopyroxene they form glomerocrysts. Quartz xenocrysts with pyroxene corona have been found in one sample. Fe-Ti oxides have been observed as accessory minerals. The groundmass is mostly intergranular and subordinately intersertal and composed of plagioclase, olivine, clinopyroxene, and Fe-Ti oxides.

Six samples have been analyzed for mineral chemistry, two lava flows of the Upper Stratoid Series (AF20-04 and AF20-19, respectively, MgO 4.76 wt% and 4.54 wt%), one flow of the Lower Stratoid Series (H436, MgO 5.44 wt%), and three lava flows of the CAG Series (AF20-46, AF20-66 and AF20-25, respectively, MgO 5.17 wt%, 4.69 wt% and 5.84 wt%) (Table S2). They have been selected based on composition (most of the mafic lavas range between MgO 4.5 wt% and 6.5 wt%) and on the presence of phenocrysts and micro-phenocryst (Figure 4).

Both in the Upper and the Lower Stratoid Series, plagioclase crystals are normally zoned with a compositional gap between the bytownite and the labradorite fields (Figure 4a). The cores are mainly bytownite ranging from An 75 to An 85 and the rims are mainly andesine-labradorite (An 43–58) with some bytownitic composition (An 76–85) (Figure 4a). The CAG Series plagioclase crystals are mostly normally zoned, with mainly bytownitic cores and some reaching more evolved compositions (An 50–65). Rims are mainly labradoritic (An 50–70) and no compositional gap has been observed (Figure 4a). The groundmass plagioclase has overall similar compositions for the three Series (Figure 4a). The olivine crystals of the Upper Stratoid Series are normally zoned, with cores Fo 54–63 and rims Fo 29–44 (Figure 4b). The olivine crystals in the Lower Stratoid Series are normally zoned, and cores reach more Fo-rich composition with respect to the Upper Stratoid Series (up to Fo 76). The olivine crystals in the CAG Series are normally zoned with overlapping compositional ranges for cores (Fo

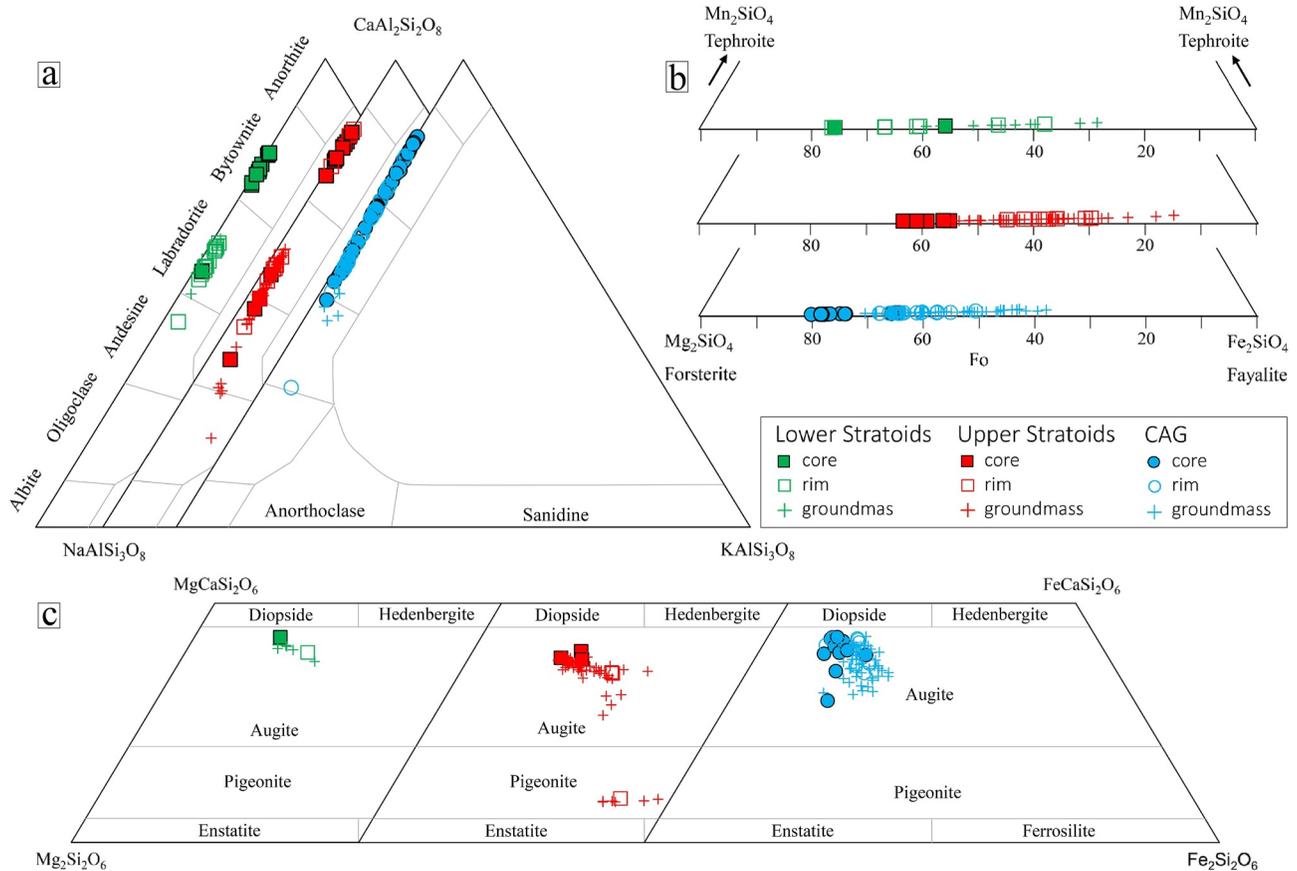


Figure 4. (a) Feldspar (An-Ab-Or), (b) olivine (Fo-Fa-Tep), and (c) clinopyroxene (En-Fs-Hd-Di) classification diagrams of the three Series: Lower Stratoid Series (green), Upper Stratoid Series (red), and Central Afar Gulf Series (blue). Different symbols identify phenocrysts core (full symbols), rim (empty symbols), and groundmass (crosses).

62–79) and rims (Fo 54–69). The groundmass compositions are overall similar between Lower and Upper Stratoid Series, while they are more mafic for the CAG Series (Figure 4b). The clinopyroxene is mainly augite for all the Series, with the exception of pigeonite in the Upper Stratoid Series groundmass and rim (Figure 4c). The CAG Series and the Lower Stratoid Series reach more diopsidic composition with respect to the Upper Stratoid Series (Figure 4c). The presence of only few clinopyroxene and olivine phenocrysts in the Lower Stratoid Series does not allow a robust comparison with the other Series. Lower and Upper Stratoid Series have both ilmenite and titanomagnetite and in sample AF20-04 the titanomagnetite forms preferentially the rims around an ilmenite core. For the CAG Series, AF20-46 have titanomagnetite only while in AF20-66 and AF20-25 both ilmenite and titanomagnetite are present (Table S2).

5.3. Major and Trace Element Data

The Stratoid and CAG Series analyzed samples are subalkaline, with transitional to tholeiitic affinity, and in the Total Alkali-Silica (TAS) classification diagram are mainly basalt-basaltic andesite, with two andesite, one trachyte and one rhyolite (Figure S1 in Supporting Information S1; Table S3). The CAG Series is on average more mafic (Table 1; Table S3) and includes the most primitive samples (up to MgO 8.38 wt%, 345 ppm of Cr and 168 ppm of Ni) compared to the Lower and Upper Stratoid Series (respectively, up to MgO 6.47 wt% and 6.60 wt%; Figure 5; Table 1; Table S3). The Lower and Upper Stratoid Series basalts are mainly Qz-normative and subordinately Hy-Ol normative, while the CAG Series is mainly Hy-Ol normative.

The major element distributions of the three Series in variation diagrams are rather scattered, particularly for TiO_2 , FeO , P_2O_5 , and Al_2O_3 , and no single trend for each Series is recognized (Figure 5; Figure S2 in Supporting

Table 1

Summary Table of the Main Petrographic and Chemical Characteristics of the Lower Stratoid, Upper Stratoid, and Central Afar Gulf (CAG) Series

Petrography													
Series	No. of samples	Mafic samples			Silicic samples								
		Mean vol% ph			Mean vol% mph			No. of samples			Mean vol% ph		
Lower Stratoid	12	1.8			7.3			0			–		
Upper Stratoid	25	2.5			5.8			5			20		
CAG	11	9.6			0.7			0			–		
NORM and major element chemistry													
Series	No. of samples	NORM	MgO wt%			TiO ₂ wt%			Tot. alk. wt%				
			Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max		
Lower Stratoid	9	Mainly Qz norm	3.75	4.85	6.47	1.42	2.61	3.41	2.68	3.68	4.66		
Upper Stratoid	20	Mainly Qz norm	0.58	4.54	6.60	0.82	2.89	3.61	2.95	4.04	7.13		
CAG	9	Mainly Hy-Ol norm	4.69	6.03	8.38	1.60	2.68	4.15	2.89	3.58	4.33		
MgO > 4 wt% trace element chemistry													
Series	No. of samples	Sr ppm			Nb ppm			Th ppm			Nb/Ta		
		Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max
Lower Stratoid	7	197	239	291	14.24	27.53	39.29	1.05	3.14	6.74	11.76	15.29	16.05
Upper Stratoid	15	295	341	390	23.20	34.46	44.78	1.79	2.78	3.93	15.28	15.96	16.52
CAG	9	272	338	458	17.99	30.35	44.51	0.88	2.40	4.54	14.49	15.82	17.15
MgO > 4 wt% trace element chemistry													
Series	No. of samples	Ti/Y			Nb/U			Rb/Nb			Ce/Pb ^a		
		Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max
Lower Stratoid	7	369	420	512	8.01	42.39	53.10	0.14	0.76	3.06	8.18	22.83	28.38
Upper Stratoid	15	255	468	558	44.25	50.32	59.14	0.12	0.41	0.57	10.94	23.54	31.61
CAG	9	329	418	493	22.52	58.97	81.54	0.17	0.46	1.04	24.79	28.23	32.84

Note. The complete data sets are presented in Table S1 and Table S3.

^aDue to Pb being below the detection limit, Ce/Pb values are the means of five Lower Stratoid samples, six Upper Stratoid samples and three CAG samples.

Information S1; Table S3). CaO, Na₂O, and K₂O have overall similar trends for the three Series with CaO showing a more scattered behavior for the CAG Series (Figure 5; Figure S2 in Supporting Information S1).

A group of samples, formed by two CAG Series samples from the Tendaho graben (AF20-22 and AF20-29) and two Lower Stratoid Series samples from the Woranso-Mille region (AF20-61 and AF20-62a) can be distinguished outside of the overall trend. The group is remarkably depleted in TiO₂ and FeO_t and enriched in SiO₂, Al₂O₃, and K₂O with respect to the rest of the samples for the same MgO wt% (Figure 5; Figure S2 in Supporting Information S1), and is hereafter called the low Ti-Fe samples group.

Concerning trace elements, a marked discrimination among the three Series is provided by the Sr content, which is higher in the CAG and Upper Stratoid Series with respect to the Lower Stratoid Series (Figure 5). Incompatible trace elements are positively correlated with Zr showing overall overlapping trends for the three Series, except for Y and HREE (Figure S3 in Supporting Information S1; Table S3). Furthermore, the low Ti-Fe samples show definitely different incompatible trace elements contents and ratios (i.e., higher Th, U and Rb for the same Zr) with respect to their respective Series (Figure S3 in Supporting Information S1).

The incompatible trace elements and REE patterns, normalized to primitive mantle and chondrite concentrations, respectively (McDonough & Sun, 1995), are presented in Figure 6. The Lower and Upper Stratoid Series basalts have E-MORB type REE patterns and are characterized by a slight U-Th trough and a Nb-Ta peak. The CAG Series also shows E-MORB-type REE patterns, but the Nb-Ta peak and U-Th trough are more pronounced with respect to the Stratoid Series (Figure 6). The four low Ti-Fe samples have a positive peak in Th-U, high K and

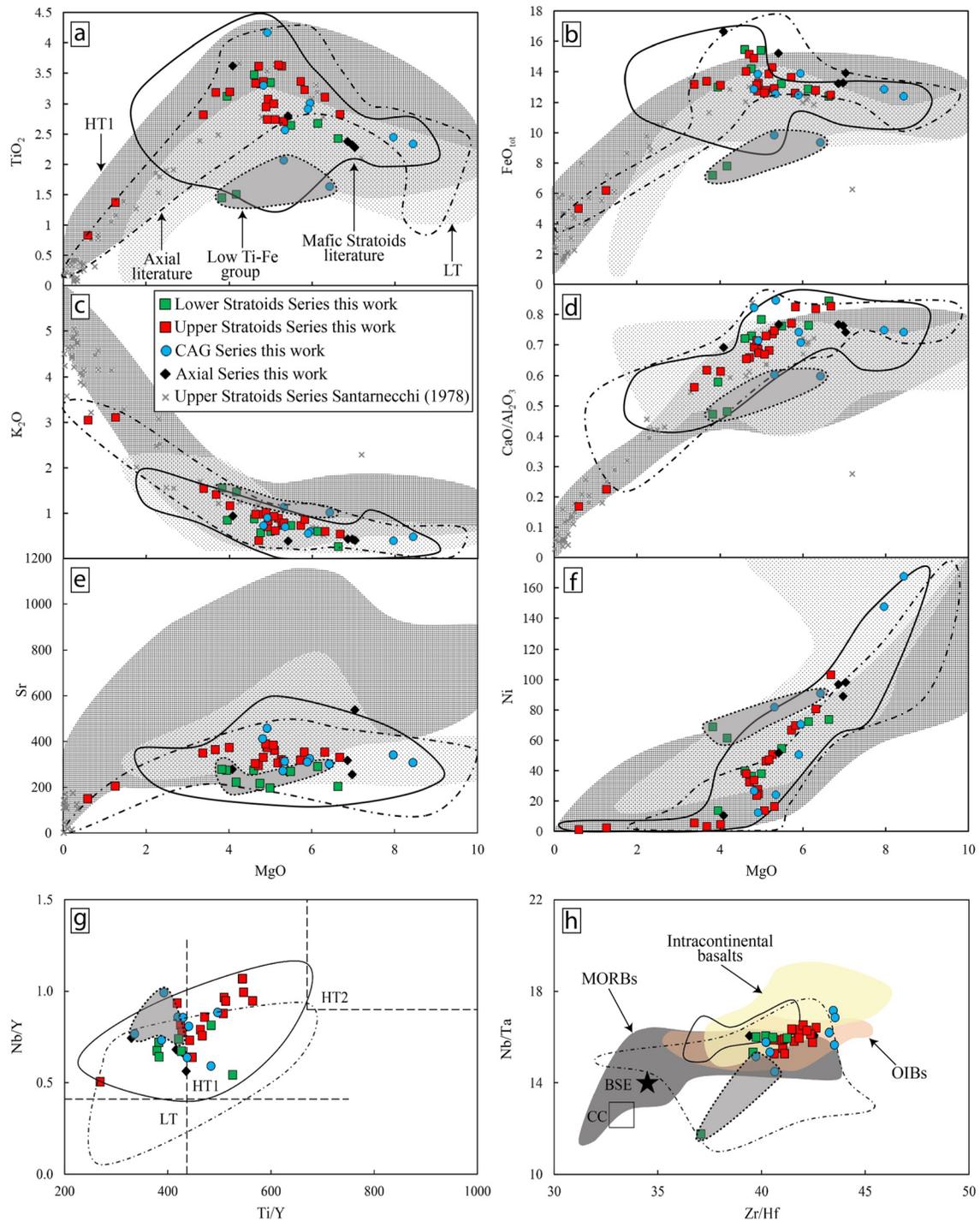


Figure 5. (a–f) Major and compatible trace elements binary diagrams of Stratoid, Central Afar Gulf (CAG), and Axial Series. Data of silicic central volcanoes intercalated in the upper part of the Upper Stratoid Series are from Santaracchi (1978) and reported in Table S3. LT and HT1 fields are from Kieffer et al. (2004) and Pik et al. (1998). (g) Classification diagram Nb/Y versus Ti/Y from Pik et al. (1998) (LT, low-Ti type; HT1, high-Ti1 type; HT2, and high-Ti2 type) for mafic rock (MgO > 4 wt%) of Stratoid, CAG and Axial Series. (h) Nb/Ta versus Zr/Hf diagram for mafic rock (MgO > 4 wt%) of Stratoid Series, CAG Series, and Axial Series. Fields for MORBs, OIBs, and intracrustal basalts are from Pfänder et al. (2012). CC is continental crust (Rudnick & Gao, 2003), and BSE is the Bulk Silicate Earth. Stratoid Series literature data of Central and Southern Afar (solid line) are from Barberi and Santacroce (1980), Deniel et al. (1994), and Feyissa et al. (2019). Axial literature data of Manda Hararo and Manda Inakir (dashed line) are from Barrat et al. (2003), Deniel et al. (1994), and Feyissa et al. (2019).

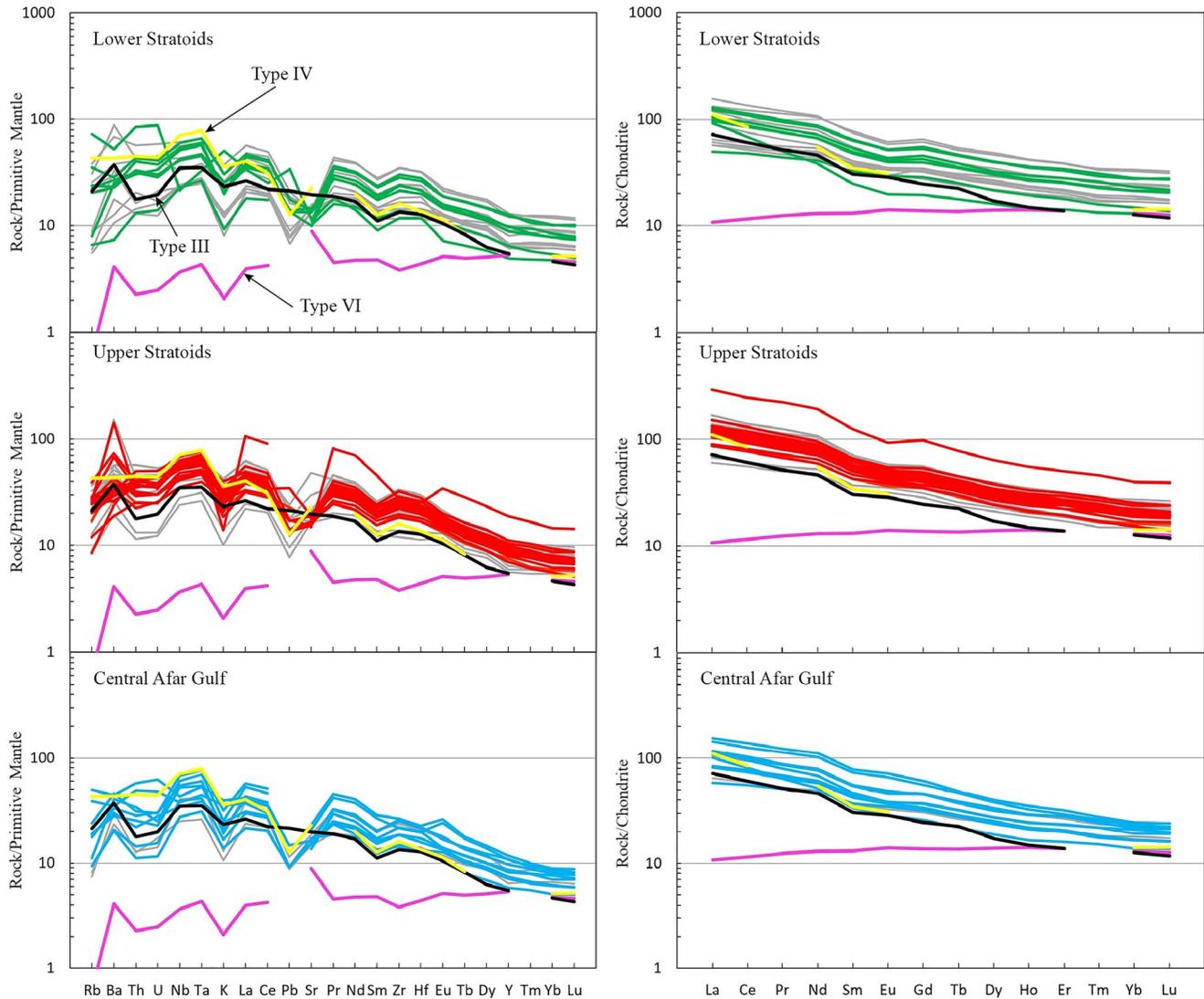


Figure 6. Chondrite-normalized REE patterns and primitive mantle-normalized trace element spider diagrams of Lower and Upper Stratoid Series and Central Afar Gulf Series. Gray lines are from Feyissa et al. (2019) and the distinction between Upper and Lower Stratoid Series has been made based on their location and the map of Kidane et al. (2003). Magma types III, IV, and VI of Rooney (2020b) are shown for comparison. Normalizing values after McDonough and Sun (1995).

Rb, high La/Sm and low and scarcely fractionated MREE and HREE (Figure 6; Table S3). Moreover, two of the low Ti-Fe samples have positive anomalies in Pb (for the other two samples Pb is below the detection limit; Figure 6; Table S3).

Overall, the analyzed samples exhibit characteristics of Enriched-MORB and correspond to the type III and IV magmatism of Rooney (2020a, 2020b) (Figure 6). The three Series have similar trends and ratios of many incompatible elements but show notable differences in HREE and Y (Figure S3 in Supporting Information S1). The samples belong overall to the HT1 group (High-Ti Group 1 of Pik et al., 1998) with lower Ti content for the Lower Stratoid Series (Figure 5g). Overall, the three Series broadly overlap with the OIB, MORB, and intracontinental basalt fields (Figure 5h). However, part of the Upper Stratoid have higher Nb/Ta and Zr/Hf indicating, according to their partition coefficient during partial melting (Hart & Dunn, 1993; McDade et al., 2003; van Westrenen et al., 2001), a slightly more intracontinental affinity with respect to the Lower Stratoid, possibly suggesting two different stages of the rift evolution (Figure 5h). Nevertheless, not all the CAG show a more MORB affinity with respect to the Upper Stratoid. Despite the rather scattered behavior of the three Series, the major and trace elements suggest an evolution dominated by fractional crystallization of the minerals observed in thin sections, starting from the most primitive basalts (Figure 5, Figure S2 in Supporting Information S1). The trend is well

constrained by the evolved and intermediate samples of Santarnecchi (1978) that studied the silicic central volcanoes intercalated in the upper part of the Stratoid Series (e.g., Gad Elu, Ado Ale, and Oyma, Katahelu; Table S3), partially covering the Daly gap commonly observed in the Afar and Main Ethiopian Rift volcanism (Peccerillo et al., 2003, 2007). The constant decrease of Ni and Cr suggests fractionation of olivine from the most mafic terms. At 6% MgO a decrease in CaO and Al_2O_3 is observed suggesting fractionation of plagioclase and clinopyroxene, without a decrease in Sr. The decrease of TiO_2 and FeO at 5% MgO and of P_2O_5 at 4% MgO indicate fractionation of Fe-Ti oxides and apatite, respectively.

6. Discussion

The geochemical study of the Lower and Upper Stratoid Series and CAG Series volcanic products erupted in Southern-Central Afar allows us to investigate differences of the magma source and melt evolution throughout the 4.5–0.6 Ma magmatism. Together with geophysical and stratigraphic evidence, we use our results to interpret the evolution of rifting in Afar in the last 4.5 Ma.

6.1. Mantle Sources of the Stratoid Series and CAG Series Magmatism

The Lower, Upper, and CAG Series have similar characteristics in terms of lava composition. The lavas are mainly mafic, covering a similar differentiation range between 4.5 and 6.5 wt% MgO with few more primitive compositions (MgO up to 8 wt%). All basalts are subalkaline, Hy-OL, or Qz normative. The three Series also display overall similar trends of major and trace elements (excepting the four low Ti-Fe lavas). The mafic lavas, according to the Ba and Nb-Ta peaks, the negative K anomaly, and to the U-Th trough (Figure 6), are classified as type III and IV of Rooney (2020a, 2020b), representative of lavas erupted under conditions of lithospheric thinning by a mixing of plume, depleted mantle, and African lithosphere. Despite the samples not being primitive, crustal contamination did not have an important effect on magma evolution during its possible stationing at the base of the crust (i.e., magma underplating) nor in the shallower magma chambers during its ascent (Figure 7a; Figure S4 in Supporting Information S1). Most of the samples fall in the MORB-OIB range (Nb/U 37–57, and Ce/Pb 20–30; A. W. Hofmann et al., 1986). The only exceptions are the two evolved Upper Stratoid samples having low Ce/Pb and high Nb/Rb, and the four Low Ti-Fe lavas having low Nb/U, Ce/Pb and high La/Nb, Rb/Nb. All the Series, in agreement with the literature data and with Nb/U and Ce/Pb ratios (Figure 7a), fall in between the MORB and OIB fields (Figure 7b; Figure S4 in Supporting Information S1). In Figure 7b, the Lower Stratoid has higher Zr/Nb and lower La_N/Sm_N indicating a more MORB-like mantle source with respect to the Upper Stratoid and therefore possibly suggesting two different stages of the rift evolution. Overall, the CAG has a more scattered distribution. However, considering only the samples collected at the Tendaho graben and excluding therefore the two samples of the Immino graben (Zr/Nb < 6; Figures 1 and 7b) and the two Low Ti-Fe samples (affected by crustal contamination), the CAG also has a more MORB-like affinity with respect to the Upper Stratoid. At the same time, all the Series have a marked negative anomaly in K and the positive peak in Ba and Nb-Ta, interpreted as indicative of amphibole and/or phlogopite in the mantle source (Furman & Graham, 1999; Rooney et al., 2017; Späth et al., 2001). The ratios $\text{Na}_2\text{O}/\text{K}_2\text{O}$ and Ba/Rb can be used to discriminate between melting of phlogopite- and amphibole-bearing mantle sources, respectively, lower and higher than 1 (Foley et al., 1999; Green, 1973; Rosenthal et al., 2009) and 11 (primitive mantle value from Sun and McDonough [1989] and Furman and Graham [1999]). The $\text{Na}_2\text{O}/\text{K}_2\text{O} > 1$, the Ba/Rb > 11, and the K/Th variation obtained by modeling a partial melting process of a mantle source with and without amphibole (Shaw, 1970, Equation 15; Figure 7c) indicate an amphibole-bearing SCLM involved in partial melting. The amphibole is stable in the mantle up to 3 GPa and 1050–1150°C (Class & Goldstein, 1997; Green et al., 2010; Niida & Green, 1999), therefore indicating a contribution of a relatively cold SCLM source during the partial melting for all three Series. We therefore suggest that the presence of the anomalously hot Afar mantle (1350–1500°C; Ferguson et al., 2013; Feyissa et al., 2019; Rooney, Herzberg, & Bastow, 2012) induced amphibole metasomatism (Furman et al., 2016; Rooney et al., 2017) of the SCLM in Afar. Consequently, melting of the Afar plume and depleted mantle (Ferguson et al., 2013; Feyissa et al., 2019; Rooney, 2020a, 2020b) together with the upper, easily fusible (Pilet et al., 2008), amphibole-bearing SCLM produced the observed type III and IV magmatism of Rooney (2020a, 2020b).

The four low Ti-Fe samples, instead, lack the diagnostic positive anomalies in Nb-Ta and negative in K of type III and IV mantle source, but show positive anomalies in Th-U and Rb and high La/Sm (Figure 6). Two low Ti-Fe samples of the Woranso-Mille region, together with another sample of that region (AF20-60b), have low Zr and

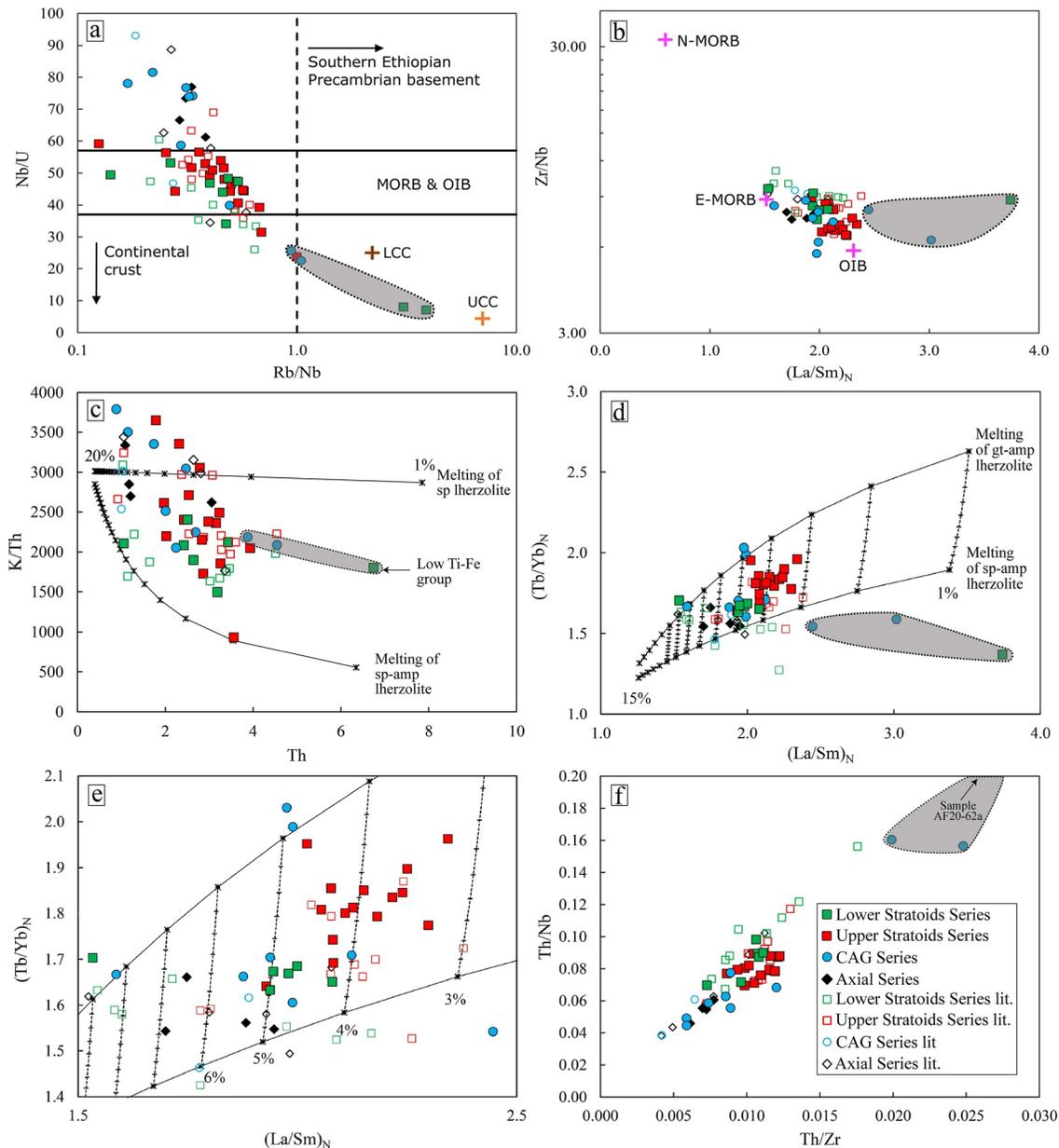


Figure 7. (a) Nb/U versus Rb/Nb indicating a minor role of crustal contamination on magma evolution for Stratoid, Central Afar Gulf (CAG), and Axial Series. The MORB and OIB field (Nb/U 37–57) is from A. W. Hofmann et al. (1986). The Southern Ethiopian Precambrian basement (Rb/Nb > 1) is from Peccerillo et al. (1998). UCC and LCC are the upper continental crust and the lower continental crust, respectively (Rudnick & Gao, 2003). (b) Zr/Nb versus La_N/Sm_N show variation in the degree of enrichment of lavas from the Stratoid, CAG, and Axial Series mafic rock (MgO > 4 wt%). OIB, N-MORB, and E-MORB values from Sun and McDonough (1989). Normalizing values after McDonough and Sun (1995). (c) K/Th versus Th for Stratoid, CAG, and Axial Series mafic rock (MgO > 4 wt%) in order to distinguish between a spinel lherzolite and spinel-amphibole lherzolite source. Partial melting of primitive mantle (McDonough & Sun, 1995) is calculated using the non-modal batch melting model of Shaw (1970), the partition coefficients from McKenzie and O’Nions (1991), and the following amphibole-garnet and -spinel lherzolites source mineral modes: garnet lherzolite: 0.58 Ol, 0.15 Opx, 0.20 Cpx, 0.02 Gt, and 0.05 Amp that melts in the proportion 0.10 Ol, 0.20 Opx, 0.40 Cpx, 0.10 Gt, and 0.20 Amp; spinel lherzolite: 0.58 Ol, 0.15 Opx, 0.20 Cpx, 0.02 Spl, and 0.05 Amp that melts in the proportion 0.10 Ol, 0.20 Opx, 0.40 Cpx, 0.10 Spl, and 0.20 Amp. Solid lines show the variation of the degree of partial melting from 1% to 20%. Literature data are from Feyissa et al. (2019) and the distinction between Upper and Lower Stratoid Series has been made based on their location and the map of Kidane et al. (2003). (d–e) Tb_N/Yb_N versus La_N/Sm_N mafic rock (MgO > 4 wt%) show variation in the depth of the melting column and in the degree of partial melting between the Series. (e) Enlargement of panel (d). Solid lines show the variation of the degree of partial melting from 1% to 15% while dashed lines identify the mixing trend from 100% amphibole-garnet lherzolite to 100% amphibole-spinel lherzolite. Primitive mantle, melting model, partition coefficient, mineral modes, and literature data are the same as panel (c). Normalizing values after McDonough and Sun (1995). (f) Th/Nb versus Th/Zr diagram shows the distinction between the CAG Series and the Lower and Upper Stratoid Series mafic rock (MgO > 4 wt%) due to the Th being slightly more incompatible than Zr and Nb during partial melting (McKenzie & O’Nions, 1991). One of the Lower Stratoid Series low Ti-Fe samples is out of the graph range (AF20-62a, Th/Zr 0.05 and Th/Nb 0.47). Literature data as in panel (c).

Nb for the same MgO wt% with respect to the other Lower Stratoid samples and low and scarcely fractionated MREE-HREE (Figure 6; Table S3). These characteristics resemble a group of samples of the Woranso-Mille region described by Rooney (2020a) as a rare occurrence of a depleted component “intrinsic” to the Afar plume (type VI). On the other hand, our low Ti-Fe lavas require the involvement of a crustal component (Figure 7c; Figure S4 in Supporting Information S1). Our data seem, therefore, to enhance the geochemical complexity of lavas in the Woranso-Mille area.

Considering the three Series, marked differences in garnet-compatible elements (e.g., Tb_N/Yb_N , Zr/Y; Figures 7d and 7e) and small but systematic differences in highly incompatible element ratios (e.g., Th/Nb, Th/Zr; Figure 7f) have been observed in the lavas with MgO > 4 wt%. Yb (as the other HREE and Y) is highly compatible in garnet (Salters & Longhi, 1999) and, thus, partial melting of a garnet-bearing mantle source, with residual garnet, translates in the increase of Tb_N/Yb_N ratio with respect to a spinel-bearing source. Variation to the Tb_N/Yb_N ratio due to melting of a garnet-bearing lower crust or to fractionation of garnet or amphibole in water-saturated conditions (Alonso-Perez et al., 2009) can be ruled out for Central-Southern Afar due to the low crustal thickness (Hammond et al., 2011). Furthermore, no garnet nor amphibole have been observed in the thin sections. The influence of high pressure clinopyroxene fractionation, behaving similarly to the garnet, could also be ruled out due to its lower efficiency in fractionating MREE-HREE. Lastly, we suggest that the effect on Tb_N/Yb_N of amphibole variations during partial melting could be ruled out, as no variation is observed in other amphibole-compatible elements (e.g., K in Figures 6 and 7c). Similarly, the effect of clinopyroxene fractionation on La/Sm could be ruled out as no variations between the Series have been observed in other clinopyroxene-compatible elements, such as V.

We therefore used the Tb/Yb ratio as a diagnostic parameter to discriminate the different depths of the magma-source melting column. In Figures 7d and 7e a marked distinction is evident within our samples at $Tb_N/Yb_N \sim 1.7$, with the Upper Stratoid Series having overall higher values and the Lower Stratoid Series and the CAG Series having clear lower values. We model the batch melting process (Shaw, 1970, Equation 15) of the spinel and garnet-bearing mantle sources for various degrees of partial melting and mixing between the two source types using the mass balance equation (Figures 7d and 7e). The Upper Stratoid Series are well encompassed by the model with 3.5%–4.5% of a prevalently garnet-bearing mantle source (70%–50% garnet-bearing), while most of the Lower Stratoid Series and CAG Series basalt require a degree of partial melting higher than 4.5% of a mantle source primarily out of the garnet stability field (50%–80% spinel-bearing source). According to the experimental studies of Klemme and O’Neill (2000) and to the Afar mantle temperature ranging between 1050–1150°C (residual amphibole) and 1500°C (Ferguson et al., 2013; Feyissa et al., 2019; Rooney, Herzberg, & Bastow, 2012), we identify the spinel-garnet transition between 16 and 27 Kbar (60–100 km). Therefore, the Upper Stratoid Series basalts were mainly generated at relatively larger depths (>60–100 km-deep), while the Lower Stratoid Series and CAG Series are derived from shallower (<60–100 km-deep) partial melting, and broadly consistent with the ~100 km-deep, base of melt zone constrained using seismology and geochemical modeling for the present day (Chambers et al., 2022; Ferguson et al., 2013). Notably, some samples of the Upper Stratoid Series, with ages around 1.1 Ma (Feyissa et al., 2019; Kidane et al., 2003) have Tb_N/Yb_N values intermediate between CAG Series and Upper Stratoid Series, suggesting a gradual shallowing of the melting column at the transition between the two Series (samples collected between the cities of Serdo and Silsa; Figure 1; Table S3).

We remark that only the two CAG lava flows analyzed from the Immino graben show Tb_N/Yb_N of 1.99 and 2.03, indicating a deeper melting column than the rest of the CAG. This suggests less lithosphere extension and thinning in the Immino graben compared to Tendaho graben, the historically active zone (e.g., Keir et al., 2009). Further studies on samples from the CAG Series and Stratoid Series in the Immino and neighboring grabens are, however, necessary to validate this hypothesis.

Highly incompatible element ratios, such as Th/Nb and Th/Zr, show a clear distinction between Upper Stratoid and CAG Series, suggesting variations in the relative primitive melts (Figure 7f). According to the partition coefficient of McKenzie and O’Nions (1991), Th is slightly more incompatible than Zr and Nb during partial melting. The lower values in Th/Nb and Th/Zr of the CAG Series basalts with respect to the Upper Stratoid Series, coupled with the lower values in La_N/Sm_N , indicate an increase of the degree of melting after the eruption of the Upper Stratoid Series.

In summary, the 4.5–0.6 Ma mafic magmatism of Central and Southern Afar is related to partial melting of a metasomatized SCLM that melted (or dripped into the asthenosphere; Furman et al., 2016) together with depleted

mantle and the rising Afar plume, originating the three components observed in the lavas (Figures 6 and 7). Despite the sustained stretching and thinning of the lithosphere preceding the Stratoid volcanism in Afar (e.g., Armitage et al., 2015) and the similarity of the involved mantle reservoirs (Figures 5 and 7), the Lower and Upper Stratoid Series are produced by two distinct mantle sources, respectively, with a shallower and deeper melting column (Figure 7). The CAG Series basalts were generated from a shallower partial melting column and a higher degree of partial melting with respect to the Upper Stratoid Series, suggesting more rift focusing and lithosphere thinning for the Lower Stratoid Series and CAG (Figure 7).

6.2. Melt Evolution of the Stratoid Series and CAG Series Magmatism

The mafic and intermediate samples of the three Series overlap in most of the major and trace element variations' diagrams (Figure 5) and no clear distinct trend between the Series has been recognized except for Sr. At the same time, different primitive magmas have been revealed by the trace element composition of the mafic lavas, and multiple evolutionary paths are suggested by the compositional spread of the samples with intermediate degree of evolution. Since the samples are aphyric or scarcely porphyritic, this variable composition cannot be attributed to mechanisms of phenocryst accumulation, except for one sample with high Al_2O_3 and CaO and 35% of plagioclase phenocrysts. A significant interaction with the crust can be excluded based on the element's ratios Nb/U, Rb/Nb, and Ce/Pb (Table 1), except the four low Ti-Fe samples.

We use the rhyolite-MELTS algorithm (Asimow et al., 2004; Ghiorso & Sack, 1995) to model the liquid line of descent for a range of pressures (0.5–3.5 Kbar), water content (0.5–2 wt%), and oxygen fugacity (QFM+1–QFM-2), starting from the most mafic sample for each Series, to investigate fractional crystallization conditions for mafic-intermediate products. Except for the four low Fe-Ti samples, the range of conditions that best fit each individual Series are similar, with pressure varying between 1.5 and 2.5 Kbar, the oxygen fugacity between QFM and QFM-1 and H_2O from 0.5 to 1 wt% (Figure S5a, S5b, and S5c in Supporting Information S1). These models suggest that there is no variation in time between the Series regarding the hydration state of the mantle nor regarding the oxygen fugacity. According to MELTS simulations, the variation of TiO_2 and FeO at 4–5 MgO wt% within the Upper Stratoid could be explained by an increase of the water content (up to 1 H_2O wt%) that, however, fails to fit the Al_2O_3 content (Figure S5b in Supporting Information S1). Moreover, it is difficult to explain the variation in Sr between the Series with different conditions of fractional crystallization considering the similarities of the other elements (i.e., Al_2O_3). Based on the MELTS modeling results (at 2 Kbar, QFM-0.5, and H_2O 0.5 wt%) olivine precipitates only for the CAG Series at ~ 8.3 MgO wt%. Clinopyroxene starts fractionating at ~ 7.14 MgO wt% for the CAG Series and at ~ 6.4 – 6.6 MgO wt% for the Stratoid Series. Plagioclase precipitates at ~ 6.9 MgO wt% for the CAG Series and at ~ 5.9 – 6.1 MgO wt% for the Stratoid Series. Spinel precipitates at ~ 5 MgO wt% for the CAG Series and the Upper Stratoid Series and at ~ 4.4 MgO wt% for the Lower Stratoid Series.

Despite the presence of only few phenocrysts of plagioclase, clinopyroxene, and olivine in the samples (particularly for the Lower Stratoid Series), the mineral chemistry indicates possible differences in the plumbing system between the Series. Our data reveal that the CAG Series and the Lower Stratoid Series lavas host mafic mineral phases (Fo-rich olivine and Mg#-rich clinopyroxene) suggesting an early differentiation stage not observed instead in the Upper Stratoid (Figure 4). However, given the scarcity of the clinopyroxene phase (Table S2) and the lack of equilibrium with the bulk rock for the Stratoid Series, we only use the plagioclase phenocryst analyses of the six samples to calculate the pressure of crystallization by means of mineral-melt geothermobarometer (Putirka, 2008, Equation 25a). For the modeling we used the whole rock analyses as melt composition (Putirka, 2008) and a water concentration of 0.5 wt%. The equilibrium was checked based on the distribution coefficient $KD_{(\text{An-Ab})}^{\text{pl-liq}} = 0.10 \pm 0.05$ at $T < 1050^\circ\text{C}$ and 0.27 ± 0.11 at $T \geq 1050^\circ\text{C}$ (Putirka, 2008). Plagioclase-melt equilibrium is never observed for the Upper Stratoid suggesting a fast magma ascent leading to low phenocrysts content and plagioclase-liquid disequilibrium (La Spina et al., 2016). Plagioclase-melt equilibrium is instead observed for the Lower Stratoid Series ranging from 1.3 to 1.9 ± 3.8 kbar, and for the CAG Series ranging from 2.3 to 4.2 ± 3.8 kbar. Therefore, we suggest that during its ascent magma possibly ponded at first at the base of the crust and then, rising toward the surface, at ~ 5 – 7 Km depth for the Lower Stratoid Series and at 9–16 Km depth for the CAG Series. The two-plagioclase populations could be related to an abrupt release of water driven by a decompression-induced crystallization from a H_2O -rich melt. This scenario will induce a rapid transition toward the crystallization of more Na-rich plagioclase (Lange et al., 2009).

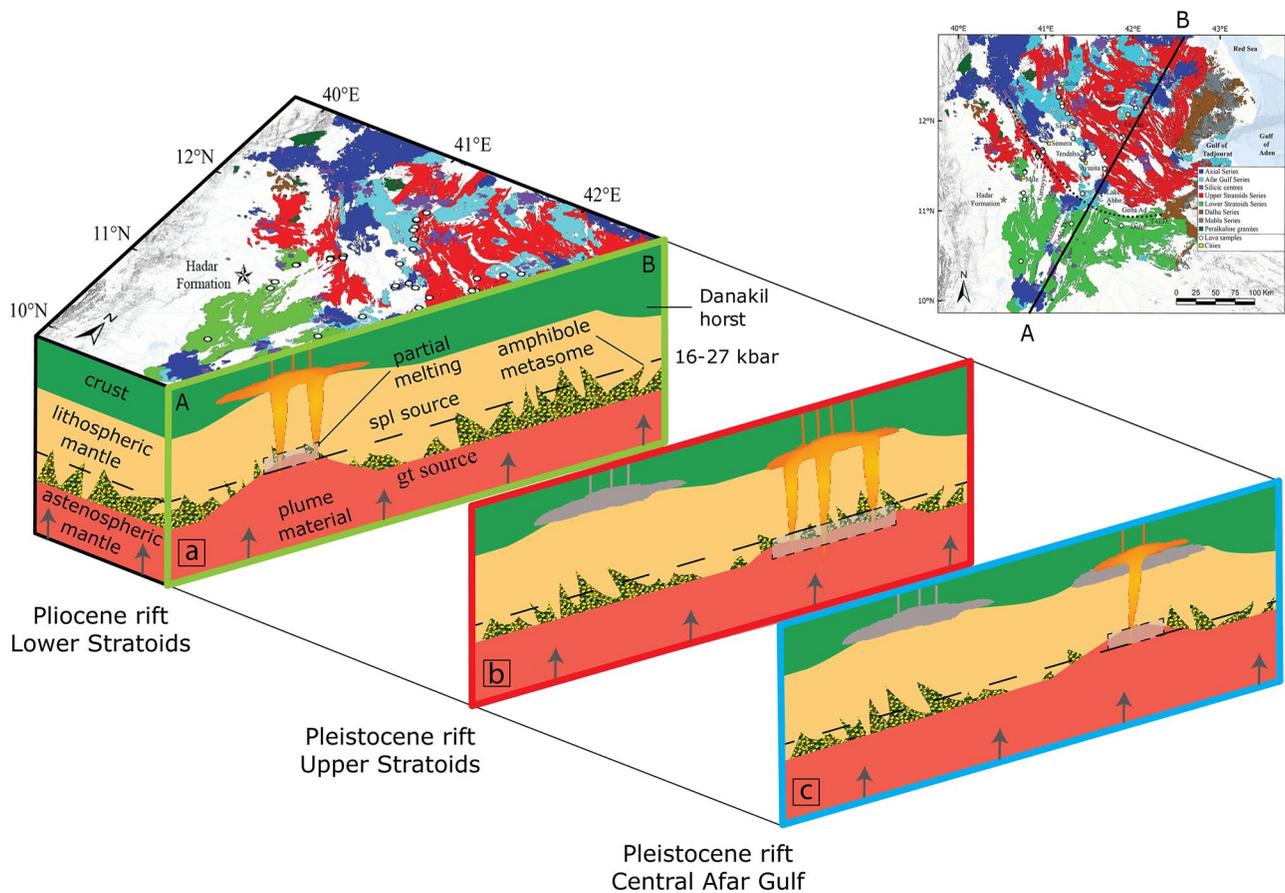


Figure 8. Schematic cartoon depicting the partial melting of the three mantle reservoirs (Afar plume, depleted mantle, and amphibole-bearing SCLM) during rifting evolution in Afar last 4.5 Ma. (a) The Pliocene rift produced the Lower Stratoid Series from a shallow melting column associated with a thinned lithosphere. (b) The jump of the rift relocates the Pleistocene rift north-east in Central Afar and led to the formation of the Upper Stratoid Series from a deeper melting column associated with a thicker, less stretched lithosphere. (c) The focalization of the Pleistocene rift led to a shallow melting column and a thinned lithosphere for the Central Afar Gulf Series mantle source. The sketch is not to scale, and the partial melting area is approximative. Spl, spinel; Gt, garnet. See text for more details.

6.3. Rift Evolution in Southern and Central Afar

The results presented in this work and the above discussion about the mantle sources inferred for the Lower and Upper Stratoid and the CAG Series can be used, together with evidence from crustal structure and depocenter locations, to interpret the evolution of rifting activity from ~4.5 Ma ago (Figure 8).

Our geochemical results show that the Lower Stratoid (~4.5–2.6 Ma), were generated by a shallower melting column (<60–100 km) with respect to the Upper Stratoid, suggesting a more stretched and thinned lithosphere (Figures 7 and 8). The Lower Stratoid Series outcrop only in Southern Afar (Figure 1) and are temporary coeval with the development of the Hadar Basin depocenter in Southern Afar (3.8–2.9 Ma; DiMaggio et al., 2015; Rooney, 2020a; Wynn et al., 2008; Figure 1), which spatially correspond to an area of thinned crust (~22 km; Hammond et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2021). We interpret these independent observations as evidence that the Lower Stratoid were produced during a phase of localized extension in Southern Afar with sufficient lithosphere thinning to allow for a shallow melting column (Figure 8). This interpretation is consistent with a number of geological and geophysical studies that interpret Red Sea related extension localized to the rift valley floor in South Afar during the Miocene (Hammond et al., 2011; Tesfaye et al., 2003; Wolfenden et al., 2005).

After the Lower Stratoid emplacement, the locus of Stratoid volcanism shifted dramatically from Southern to Central Afar to form the Upper Stratoid during 2.6–1.1 Ma. Our data indicate that the Upper Stratoid magmas were associated with a deeper melting column (>60–100 km) with respect to the earlier Lower Stratoid Series and hence consistent with melting below a thicker lithosphere (Figures 7 and 8). These results are consistent with

the locus of melting shifted NE to a new zone of extension in central Afar where the lithosphere had been thinned less. We interpret the NE shift in volcanism, the deepening of the melting column, and the geological evidence for a coeval, and pronounced change in fluvial depositional systems and locus of strain (Campisano, 2012; DiMaggio et al., 2015; Quade et al., 2008; Wynn et al., 2008), as indicative of a rift jump from the Pliocene rift in Southern Afar to the Pleistocene rift in Central Afar around the end of the Pliocene (Figure 8). We propose that the dramatic shift in strain and volcanism may have been triggered by tectonic reorganization caused by the triple junction moving north-eastward from the Hadar Basin to central Afar, possibly due to the on land spreading of the Gulf of Aden in the Tadjoura gulf at ca. 3 Ma (Daoud et al., 2011; Le Gall et al., 2015). Our observations are in agreement with the regional reconstruction of the northeast migration of the Red Sea rift during ~29–7 Ma (Wolfenden et al., 2005), the inferred northeast migration of the triple junction (Tsfaye et al., 2003) and to the more local observations of the northeast migration of the depocenter during ~10–3 Ma along the Awash valley (Kalb, 1995). Around 1 Ma, after the eruptions of the Upper Stratoid Series over a wide area in Afar, the rift activity changed again with the emplacement of the CAG Series, the first recognized magmatic activity localized along the axial faults of the depression and associated with thinned crust in the Tendaho graben (Hammond et al., 2011). The CAG Series has been associated with the localization of strain (Rooney, 2020a; Stab et al., 2016; Tsfaye et al., 2003). Our results are consistent with this interpretation since our analysis indicates a shallower melting column and a higher degree of melting for the CAG Series mantle source compared to the Upper Stratoid (Figures 7 and 8). We therefore interpret the CAG Series products as the first volcanic activity associated with the progressive focusing of rifting in Central Afar (i.e., Pleistocene rifting). Some Upper Stratoid lavas testify the progressive shallowing of the melting column and therefore the gradual focalization of the Pleistocene rifting from the Upper Stratoid Series to the CAG Series along the Tendaho Graben at ~1 Ma.

7. Conclusion

The geochemical constraints obtained by the study of mafic lavas in this work provide indication on mantle source depths of the Stratoid Series and Central Afar Gulf Series (4.5–0.6 Ma) in Central and Southern Afar. These data allow us to correlate the nature of the voluminous volcanism to the geodynamic evolution of the Red Sea rift branch in the last 4.5 Ma.

In agreement with previous studies, our data indicate that the Stratoid and Central Afar Gulf Series were both generated by partial melting of three mantle reservoirs, the Afar plume, the depleted mantle, and the SCLM. Moreover, amphibole-compatible elements indicate the involvement of amphibole-bearing metasomatized SCLM. A deeper, garnet-bearing, partial melting column is required for the Upper Stratoid (2.6–1.1 Ma) with respect to the shallower, spinel-bearing, partial melting column of the Lower Stratoid (4.5–2.6 Ma) and Central Afar Gulf (1.1–0.6 Ma). This variation in the depth of melting reveals different mantle sources for the three Series. Moreover, the Central Afar Gulf have a higher degree of partial melting with respect to the Upper Stratoid. Similar differentiation paths dominated by fractional crystallization explain the compositional range observed for the three Series. Mineral chemistry and mineral-melt geobarometer indicate differences in the depth of the magma chambers, and in the magma ascending path between the three Series.

We associated the Afar flood basalt volcanism to two episodes of rifting. The Pliocene rift stretched the lithosphere and produced the Lower Stratoid Series in South Afar suggesting, together with geophysical and stratigraphical evidence, the area was the main locus of strain during this period. Then, around the end of the Pliocene, a rift jump relocated the Pleistocene rift in Central Afar and produced the Upper Stratoid Series under a thicker, less stretched, lithosphere indicating, together with stratigraphical evidence, less focused strain during their emplacement. A progressive shallowing of the mantle source has been then inferred passing from the Upper Stratoid Series to the focused activity of the Central Afar Gulf Series.

We conclude therefore that the break-up process migrated north-eastward from South to Central Afar through time in response to the Red Sea branch evolution. Accordingly, extensional processes can exert a fundamental control on the spatial and chemical variations of the recent flood basalt volcanism in Afar by inducing decompression melting without requiring variations on the activity of the mantle plume.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest relevant to this study.

Data Availability Statement

Data presented in this work are available on EarthChem Library (<https://doi.org/10.26022/IEDA/112504>).

Acknowledgments

The research is part of the PhD of G. Tortelli and is funded by 2017 PRIN project-protocol MIUR: 2017P9AT72 PE10. G. Tortelli acknowledges support by the Tuscany Regional PhD Course in Earth Sciences. We thank R. Ishak and M. Gemelli (CISIM, University of Pisa), A. Orlando (EPMA lab., CNR-IGG of Firenze), and L. Ghezzi (ICP-MS lab., University of Pisa) for their support during analytical acquisition. We thank R. Santacroce (University of Pisa) for discussions and support. We thank the colleagues of the Addis Ababa University and the Ethiopian and Afar Regional Governments for their support and help in organizing the February 2020 campaign. We also thank the drivers of the rental agency Ethioder, and the local policeman and guides of the different wordas for their logistic support during the campaign. Open access funding provided by Università di Pisa within the CRUI-CARE Agreement. We would also like to thank Tanya Furman and one anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments and suggestions, which helped to improve the quality of our manuscript.

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