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El Hierro eruption

1 **Causes and mechanisms of El Hierro submarine eruption (2011-2012) (Canary Islands)**

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26 **Abstract**

27 El Hierro eruption started on 10 October 2011 after an unrest episode that initiated on 17 July, 2011.  
28 This is the first eruption in the Canary Islands that has been tracked in real time. Although being  
29 submarine and not directly observable, the data recorded allowed its reconstruction and to identify  
30 its causes and mechanisms. Seismicity, surface deformation, and petrological data indicate that a  
31 batch of basanitic magma coming from a reservoir located at depth of about 25 km below El Hierro  
32 island was emplaced at shallower depth creating a new reservoir about 10-12 km above, where  
33 magma evolved till the initiation of the eruption. The characteristics of seismicity and surface  
34 deformation suggest that the necessary space to accumulate magma at this shallower position,  
35 which coincides with the crust/mantle boundary beneath El Hierro, was created in about two  
36 months by elastic deformation and magma-driven fracturing of the crust. After this first intrusion  
37 episode part of the magma started to migrate laterally toward the south-east for nearly 20 km,  
38 always keeping the same depth and following a path apparently controlled by stress barriers created  
39 by tectonic and rheological contrasts in the upper lithosphere. This lateral migration of magma  
40 ended with a submarine eruption at about 5 km offshore from the southern corner of El Hierro  
41 island. The total seismic energy released during the unrest episode was of  $8.1 \times 10^{11}$  Joules, and the  
42 total uplift previous to the onset of the eruption was of 40 mm. Combining geological, geophysical,  
43 petrological data and numerical modeling, we propose a volcanological model of the causes and  
44 mechanisms of El Hierro eruption that shows how the stress distribution in the crust beneath El  
45 Hierro, which was influenced by rheological contrasts, tectonic stresses, and gravitational loading,  
46 controlled the movement and eruption of magma. We also discuss the implications of this model in  
47 terms of eruption forecast in the Canary Islands.

48 **1. Introduction**

49         The Canary Islands is a populated ultraperipheral Spanish region and one of the most  
50 popular touristic destinations in Europe (Fig. 1). The Canary Islands is one of the major volcanic  
51 ocean island groups of the world, where all islands, except for La Gomera, show Holocene volcanic  
52 activity. Historical volcanism (last 600 years) has been reported on the islands of La Palma (1585,  
53 1646, 1677, 1712, 1949, 1971), Tenerife (1704, 1706, 1798, 1909) and Lanzarote (1730–1736,  
54 1824), and has been mainly characterized by short lived (from few weeks to few months), hawaiian,  
55 strombolian, to violent strombolian eruptions of mafic magmas, which have generated scoria cones  
56 of different sizes and lava flows of various extend [Romero, 1991]. All the eruptions occurred in  
57 the historical period, from 1402 till present, have typically been separated a few tens of years but  
58 occasionally some have occurred in a very narrow period of time (e.g. Arafo (1704), Fasnía (1705),  
59 Siete Fuentes (1705) in Tenerife), or have lasted for several years (Timanfaya eruption in Lanzarote,  
60 1730-1736).

61         Historical chronicles document how most of the Canarian historical eruptions were  
62 preceded by seismic unrest episodes of different duration, which were perceived by the local  
63 population [Romero, 1991]. Also, several seismic swarms not directly related to volcanic eruptions  
64 occurred in historical times [Romero, 1991]. Unfortunately, systematic monitoring in the Canary  
65 Islands did not start until early eighties, when the Spanish Geographic Institute (IGN) installed a  
66 seismic network as part of the national network for seismic monitoring, so there are not monitoring  
67 records of the most recent eruptions and all what we know from previous volcanism is based on  
68 historical chronicles and volcanological studies of past eruptions [Romero, 1991; Sobradelo et al.,  
69 2011]. The IGN monitoring network was significantly improved and redesigned for volcano  
70 monitoring following an unrest episode occurred in Tenerife in 2004 [Martí et al., 2009].

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71 El Hierro eruption started on 10 October 2011 on the southern submarine flank of the island,  
72 at about 5 km distance from the town of La Restinga and at a depth of 900 m bsl (Fig. 1). The  
73 eruption was preceded by nearly three months of unrest in which more than 11,000 seismic events,  
74 a total of 4 cm in surface deformation, and anomalous gas emissions, were recorded by the Spanish  
75 National Geographic Institute (IGN) monitoring network [www.ign.es; *López et al.*, 2012]. The  
76 eruptive activity decreased drastically on February 27 and since then to the time of this writing  
77 (June 14, 2012) only residual gas emissions are registered from the main vent site. This eruption  
78 marked the end of a 40 years period of quiescence in the Canary Islands following the 1971  
79 eruption of Teneguia in La Palma.

80 El Hierro eruption is the first one that has been fully monitored in real time since the  
81 beginning of unrest, so the amount of information available is significant. Despite being a  
82 submarine eruption without continuous observation of its evolution in terms of physical  
83 volcanology, the appearance in different days of fragments of lavas and pyroclasts floating on the  
84 sea surface has permitted to have a good record of the volcanic products for petrological studies  
85 [*Sigmarsson et al.*, in press; *Martí et al.*, accepted\_b]. Also, the acquisition of bathymetric data by  
86 the Spanish Oceanographic Institute (IEO) and the Spanish Research Council (CSIC) at different  
87 days during and after the eruption and their comparison with data obtained before the eruption has  
88 permitted to estimate the volume of emitted products and eruption rates.

89 Combining all available data with mathematical modeling we elaborate a volcanological  
90 model on the causes and mechanisms of this eruption and discuss it in terms of eruption forecasts  
91 for the Canary Islands. We analyze the temporal evolution of geophysical and geochemical  
92 indicators during the unrest and eruptive episodes and use all this information to build a model that  
93 explains how magma movement progressed during the whole period. Then, we use this model to  
94 discuss the causes for magma movement and the mechanisms that controlled erupting on Earth's

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95 surface. Finally, we compare this with previous information on historical eruptions in the Canary  
96 Islands, in order to deduce any possible guideline to interpret reawakening of volcanism and to  
97 forecast future eruptions in this region.

98

## 99 **2. Geological setting**

100 The Canary Islands are a roughly linear 500 km long chain grown on the passive margin of  
101 the African Plate within the eastern Central Atlantic Ocean (Fig. 1). The Canarian archipelago is the  
102 result of a long volcanic and tectonic activity that started at around 60 Ma ago [*Robertson and*  
103 *Stillman*, 1979; *Le Bas et al.*, 1986; *Araña and Ortiz*, 1991; *Marinoni and Pasquaré*, 1994]. Several  
104 contrasting models have been proposed to explain the origin of the Canary Islands. These include a  
105 hotspot origin [*Schmincke*, 1982; *Hoernle and Schmincke*, 1993; *Carracedo et al.*, 1998], a  
106 propagating fracture from the Atlas [*Le-Pichon and Fox*, 1971; *Anguita and Hernán*, 1975], and  
107 mantle decompression melting associated with uplift of tectonic blocks [*Araña and Ortiz*, 1991].  
108 However, each and every one of the latter hypotheses presents some inconsistencies with the local  
109 and regional geology. A unifying model has been proposed by *Anguita and Hernán* [2000] who  
110 consider the existence of a residual of a fossil plume under North Africa, the Canary Islands, and  
111 western and central Europe defined through seismic tomography [*Hoernle et al.*, 1995]. Thus,  
112 volcanism is assumed to occur there where an efficient fracture system allows the magma to ascent  
113 [*Anguita and Hernán*, 2000], i.e. the central European rift system, the volcanic provinces of the  
114 westernmost 60 Mediterranean (Balearic and Alboran basins), Iberia, the Canary Islands and Cape  
115 Verdes [*Hoernle et al.*, 1995].

116 Although all islands, except for La Gomera, show Holocene volcanic activity, historical  
117 volcanism has been restricted to La Palma, Lanzarote and Tenerife islands. In all cases, historical  
118 eruptive activity has been related to mafic magmas ranging in intensity from hawaiian to violent

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119 strombolian, and has originated scoria cones and lavas. Commonly, the historical eruptions have  
120 occurred on active rift zones along eruptive fissures occasionally generating alignments of cones.  
121 The duration of the eruptions ranges from a few weeks to a few months, except in the case of the  
122 Timanfaya eruption in 1730 that lasted for six years. The total volume of extruded magma ranges  
123 from 0.01 to  $>1.5 \text{ km}^3$  (DRE), the latter in the case of Timanfaya. The eruption sequences that may  
124 be deduced from the successions of deposits differ from one eruption to another and reveal that  
125 eruptions did not follow a common pattern. In all cases the resulting volcanic cones were  
126 constructed during single eruptive episodes (i.e.: they must be referred to as monogenetic)  
127 commonly including several distinctive phases that do not show significant temporal separations  
128 between them.

129 El Hierro is the youngest of the Canary Islands with the oldest subaerial rocks dated at 1.12  
130 Ma and is situated at the southwestern corner of the archipelago [Guillou *et al* 1996]. El Hierro rises  
131 from 4,000 m depth to an altitude of about 1,500 m above sea level and has an estimated volume of  
132 about  $5,500 \text{ km}^3$  [Carracedo *et al* 2001]. El Hierro corresponds to a shield structure formed by  
133 different volcanic edifices and includes three rift zones on which recent volcanism is concentrated  
134 [Guillou *et al.* 1996; Carracedo *et al.*, 2001] (Fig. 1). Other relevant morphological features are the  
135 collapse scars of El Golfo, Las Playas, and El Julan (Fig. 1). The emerged parts of these rifts are  
136 defined by narrow and steep topographic ridges corresponding to aligned dike complexes with  
137 clusters of cinder cones. Pre-historical eruptions have been recognized on all three rifts of El Hierro  
138 [Guillou *et al.* 1996; Carracedo *et al.*, 2001].

139 Subaerial recent volcanism at El Hierro is monogenetic and has been mostly characterized  
140 by the eruption of mafic magmas ranging in composition from microbasalts to basanites [Stroncik *et*  
141 *al.*, 2009], which have preferentially erupted along the rift zones forming cinder cones and lava  
142 flows. The erupted volume of magma in these eruptions typically ranges from 0.001 to  $0.1 \text{ km}^3$

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143 (DRE), these values being of the same order than most of the historical eruptions in the Canaries  
144 [Sobradelo *et al.*, 2011]. One of the most important eruptive episodes of the last few thousand years  
145 of El Hierro corresponds to the Tanganasoga eruption (Fig. 1). This eruption occurred inside the El  
146 Golfo depression, along a N-S oriented fissure on which several cones and emission centers formed,  
147 giving rise to the construction of one of the largest volcanic edifices of the island by accumulation  
148 of ankaramitic lavas and pyroclastic deposits [Carracedo *et al.*, 2001] (Fig. 1). In addition to the  
149 subaerial volcanism, bathymetric studies [Gee *et al.*, 2001] have revealed that a significant number  
150 of well preserved volcanic cones exist on the submarine flanks of the island, in particular on the  
151 continuation of the southern rift, which suggests that significant submarine volcanic activity has  
152 also occurred in recent times. Despite no historical chronicles exist on any of these eruptions, some  
153 authors [Hernandez-Pacheco, 1982] have suggested that the Lomo Negro eruption, located at the  
154 NW corner of the island (Fig. 1) could have occurred in 1793, together with an important seismic  
155 swarm that was felt by El Hierro inhabitants and reported in their local chronicles.

156

### 157 **3. Data**

#### 158 **3.1 The unrest episode**

159 A detailed description of the procedures and monitoring data recorded during the unrest  
160 episode by the Spanish National Geographic Institute (IGN), the institution responsible for volcanic  
161 monitoring in Spain, can be found in López *et al.* [2012] and data are available at [www.ign.es](http://www.ign.es) an  
162 Data Repository so in this section we will only summarize the most relevant features of this  
163 episode.

164 Before the volcanic reactivation on El Hierro volcano, volcano monitoring basically  
165 consisted in two seismic stations that formed part of the Spanish seismic network for the whole  
166 Canarian archipelago and one GPS station, FRON (Fig. 1), belonging to the Canarian Regional  
167 Government, which was included in IGN processing since Summer 2010. As soon as the beginning



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168 of seismic unrest was detected in mid July, the monitoring network was significantly improved with  
169 the deployment of eight new seismic stations, a seismic array, three accelerometers, nine new GPS  
170 stations, a permanent continuous gravimeter, four magnetic stations and five continuous Radon,  
171 CO<sub>2</sub>, temperature and pressure stations [see *López et al.*, 2012, for location and details]. In addition,  
172 periodic surveys were conducted for microgravimetry and microgeodesy control, CO<sub>2</sub>  
173 measurements, and physical-chemical analysis of water springs all over the island.

174 During nearly the first two month of unrest, seismic activity concentrated at the north of the  
175 island in the offshore and inland sectors of El Golfo depression, the hypocenters being located at a  
176 depth of 10-15 km (Fig. 2A and Data Repository Table 1). Variation in epicentral location with time  
177 during this period defined a very irregular path going and turning back in all directions, always  
178 around a same area of 5 km<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1) [*Martí et al.*, 2012]. This episode of seismicity is interpreted as  
179 corresponding to the main pulse of magma intrusion and accumulation at a depth of 10-15 km  
180 [*López et al.*, 2012; *Martí et al.*, accepted\_a]. The characteristics of seismic events during this  
181 period clearly indicated the occurrence of volcano-tectonic events, probably caused by magma-  
182 driven fracturing of the host rock induced by the movement of magma and associated fluids [ *López*  
183 *et al.*, 2012; *Martí et al.*, accepted\_a].

184 During the second week of September the location of epicenters marked a migration of  
185 seismicity towards the south, which was interpreted as a lateral migration of magma (Fig. 1) [*Martí*  
186 *et al.*, accepted\_a]. The depth of seismic events was kept nearly constant during this migration. The  
187 path defined by the location of seismic events described how magma turned around the eastern side  
188 of the Tanganasoga volcano and then continued towards the south for more than 14 km (Fig.1),  
189 coinciding in location and orientation with one of the main linear high gravity gradients found in the  
190 Canaries [*Carbó et al.*, 2003; *Montesinos et al.*, 2006]. The beginning of this lateral migration of  
191 magma coincided with a drastic acceleration on surface deformation (it reached 10 mm of a total

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192 of 40 mm of uplift in just one week) (Data Repository Table 2). The accumulated seismic energy  
193 released [Fig. 4 in *López et al.*, 2012], which in this case is a measure of the resistance of the rock  
194 against the overpressure exerted by the magma [*Yokoyama*, 1988], exceeded the value of  $1.0 \times 10^{11}$   
195 Joules on September 27, thus indicating that the crust beneath el Hierro was highly strengthened.  
196 Since September 27 to the onset of the eruption on October 10, 2011, the IGN reported a new  
197 dramatic increase in the seismic activity, with more than 1,100 new seismic events, over 90 felt by  
198 the residents of the island, with a maximum intensity value of IV (EMS-98) [Fig. 4 in *López et al.*,  
199 2012]. The total accumulated seismic energy released for the whole period of unrest was of  
200  $8.1 \times 10^{11}$  Joules, which may be considered as a very high value if we compare with other eruptions  
201 [*Yokoyama*, 1988]

202 During the whole unrest period very few deeper seismic events, which could suggest  
203 intrusion of deeper magma, were recorded. A seismic event of magnitude 4.3 MbLg, located in the  
204 submerged part of the southern rift zone at a depth of 14 km, occurred 33 hours before the onset of  
205 a submarine eruption at about 5 km from the southeast corner of the island, at a depth of 900 m.  
206 After this seismic event very few shallow earthquakes occurred before the culmination of the unrest  
207 episode. This suggests that magma used one of the main fissures of the southern rift system to rise  
208 aseismically to the surface at a velocity of  $0.13 \text{ ms}^{-1}$ .

209

### 210 3.2 The eruption

211 The first phases of the eruption were explosive and generated bombs and scoria fragments  
212 up to 30 cm in diameter that accumulated directly on the eruptive fissure, as it was reported by the  
213 first bathymetric survey carried out by the Spanish Institute of Oceanography  
214 [[www.ieo.es/hierro.htm](http://www.ieo.es/hierro.htm)] on 24-26 October 2011. Some of these pyroclastic fragments had low  
215 densities due to its high porosity and appeared floating at the sea surface. One of the particularities  
216 of the highly vesiculated volcanic bombs that appeared floating on 15 October 2011, was that they

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217 contained a pumice-like white core surrounded by a black scoriaceous carapace. The black  
218 component corresponded to a basanite, while the white one had a silicic composition (see Table 1).  
219 The basanite is a typical composition of mafic magmas in El Hierro and in the Canaries in general.  
220 However, the felsic component is an uncommon product in the Canarian volcanism. Some authors  
221 [Troll *et al.*, 2011; Pérez-Torrado *et al.*, 2012] have suggested that it corresponds to xenoliths from  
222 pre-island sedimentary rocks that were picked up and heated by the ascending magma causing them  
223 to partially melt and vesiculate. However, Sigmarsson *et al* [in press] using trace element and  
224 isotopic compositions conclude that an intrusion of gas-rich basanitic melt remobilized a stagnant  
225 trachytic melt present as a late differentiate in the volcanic edifice and that the trachyte incorporated  
226 and dissolved 10-15% of quartz sand present on the sea floor below El Hierro. This would explain  
227 the final rhyolitic composition of the white pumice without altering much the trace element  
228 composition of the original trachyte. The presence of sedimentary quartz involved in the generation  
229 of the white pumice of El Hierro, which Sigmarsson *et al* [in press] attribute to turbidity sediments  
230 coming from the Saharian platform, suggests that the assimilation and mingling processes that gave  
231 rise to its formation initiated at the boundary between the pre-island basement and the bottom of the  
232 volcanic edifice, at a depth of 4,000 m below sea level, and continued inside the eruption conduit.  
233 The fact that the first samples appeared a few days after the onset of the eruption constraints the  
234 time taken to form these anomalous white pumices. The rest of samples that were collected and  
235 analyzed from the El Hierro eruption were all basanitic without any contamination by silicic  
236 material [Martí *et al.*, accepted\_b] (Table 1), thus indicating that the formation of the white pumices  
237 was an anecdotic episode in this eruption.

238         During the first three days of eruption, the eruptive focus migrated along the eruptive fissure  
239 to the north for about 3 km until reaching a depth of 300 m below sea level, at about 1,800 m from  
240 the coast. At this point, its advance was halted by intersecting a NE-SW regional normal fault (Fig.

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241 3). This favored the formation of a central eruptive conduit at the intersection between the two  
242 fracture planes and the construction of a volcanic edifice by accumulation of pyroclastic material at  
243 the vent. This new volcanic edifice reached a total height of nearly 220 m, the diameter of the base  
244 being of more than 1000 m at the end of the eruption [www.iew.es/hierro.htm]. A lava flow was  
245 also emplaced from the base of the cone on a SW direction. A few parasitic vents also opened in  
246 later stages of the eruption around the main cone. The total amount of volcanic material erupted has  
247 been estimated from the extend and thickness of erupted products mapped by the marine surveys  
248 [www.iew.es/hierro.htm] and is of the order of  $0.25 \text{ km}^3$ , thus giving an averaged eruption rate of  
249  $15\text{-}20 \text{ m}^3/\text{s}$ . Assuming an average density of  $2,800 \text{ kg/m}^3$  for the basanitic magma, the total amount  
250 of erupted magma is about  $0.16 \text{ km}^3$  (DRE). which is in good agreement with the volumes of most  
251 of the historical eruptions in the Canaries [Sobradelo *et al.*, 2011].

252 During the first days of the eruption, the associated seismicity was very weak, but almost ten  
253 days after, strong tectonic and volcano-tectonic seismicity concentrated at the north of the island  
254 and located mostly at a depth of 20 to 25 km and ten days latter also at 10-15 km (Figs 4 and 5).  
255 Since the beginning, the eruption was accompanied by a continuous strong tremor located at the  
256 vent. The amplitude and stability of the volcanic tremor changed during the eruption and  
257 occasionally these variations were clearly associated with the occurrence of new seismic events in  
258 the north of the island, suggesting a direct connection between the site of the eruption and what was  
259 happening to more than 20 km north. In this sense, it is worth mentioning that the initiation in early  
260 November of intense seismicity located north at a depth of 20-25 km (Fig. 5), coincided with the  
261 maximum expression of the eruption at the sea surface with the formation of giant bubbles and  
262 other visible manifestations (Fig. 6). This also coincided with a significant increase of the tremor  
263 intensity (Fig. 5).

264 The syn-eruptive tectonic and volcano-tectonic seismicity observed at the north of the island

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265 first at a depth of 20-25 km and later also at 10-15 km had slightly different orientation and  
266 epicentral location than the seismicity recorded during the first weeks of unrest. We interpret most  
267 of syn-eruptive seismicity as mainly caused by readjustments of the whole plumbing system  
268 following the decompression caused by withdrawal of magma during the eruption, as it has  
269 occurred in other similar eruptions [*Sigmundsson et al.*, 2010; *Tarasewicz et al* 2012 ]. Some of  
270 these new seismic events reached a magnitude of 4.6 and showed focal mechanisms compatible  
271 with N-S oriented strike slip faults [Data Repository].

272 The petrology and geochemistry of the eruptive products indicate that magma composition  
273 was nearly constant during the whole process, only showing different equilibrium conditions of  
274 pyroxenes and olivines as corresponding to the storage and differentiation of magma at different  
275 depths [*Martí et al.*, accepted\_b] (Table 1). Disequilibrium observed in some olivine phenocrysts  
276 suggests a deeper provenance of the original magma. These petrological results are in good  
277 agreement with previous studies from the shallow plumbing system beneath El Hierro [*Stroncik et*  
278 *al.*, 2009]. The temperature of the magma, estimated from pyroxene geothermometers and  
279 experimental petrology, showed a maximum variation of 126 °C, from 1206 °C to 1080°C [*Martí et*  
280 *al.*, accepted\_b]. Although the general tendency of magma temperature is to decrease progressively  
281 from the first episodes to the last ones, in detail it showed an irregular pattern that suggests the  
282 existence of various magma inputs into the shallow reservoir during the eruption. A similar pattern  
283 is shown by the degree of crystallinity, which ranges from 3% to more than 44% (Fig. 7).

284

### 285 3.3. Variation of the main pre and syn-eruptive parameters with time

286 The patterns showed by seismicity and surface deformation suggest that the deeper  
287 reservoir (at ~20-25 km) started to decompress a few days after the initiation of the eruption, while  
288 the shallower reservoir (at ~10-15 km) remained overpressurised nearly till the end of November  
289 2011. As a summary of the data acquired by the monitoring network and petrological study of the

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290 erupted products, we show in Figures 5 and 7 a comparison of the variation of the main physical  
291 and petrological parameters, respectively, with time (unrest plus eruption).

292 One of the most interesting aspects of this eruption is the correlation of the main  
293 deformation episodes with the dynamics of each magma reservoir. In other words, we can see how  
294 each magma reservoir responded to stress changes triggered by decompression of the plumbing  
295 system, in a similar way to what occurred in the Eyjafjallajökull eruption in 2010 [Tarasewicz *et al*  
296 2012]. Seismic anelastic deformation is a measure of irreversible deformation of the rock [Voight,  
297 1968; Matsuki, 1991] and can be used to estimate the total volume necessary to place the magma in  
298 the crust corresponding to fracturing occurred when the elastic response has been exceeded. Figure  
299 5a shows the temporal variation of anelastic strain as a measure of the response of the magma  
300 reservoir to the seismic deformation imposed by inflation (overpressurization) and deflation  
301 (decompression) episodes. To calculate it we selected the corresponding IGN seismic catalogue data  
302 [www.ign.es, Data Repository Table 1] for the seismic series associated with El Hierro unrest and  
303 eruption, which accumulated more than 12,000 events in total. The scalar seismic moment,  $M_o$  (in  
304 N m), was estimated from the IGN calculated earthquake magnitude,  $mb$ , using the general equation  
305 of *Chen and Chen* [1989]:

306

$$307 \log M_o = 1.5 mb + 9.0 \text{ for } mb \leq 5.2 \quad (1)$$

308

309 The cumulative seismic moment release for the earthquakes sequence is:

310

$$311 \sum M_o = \sum \mu A d \quad (2),$$

312

313 Where  $\sum M_o$  is the fundamental parameter for the strength measurement of an earthquake caused by

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314 fault slip;  $\mu$ , is the shear modulus of the host rock;  $d$ , is the slip across the fault; and,  $A$ , the fault  
315 surface area for each individual event.

316  $\sum Mo$  represents a measure of the size of the irreversible anelastic deformation involved in  
317 the earthquake sequence during the magmatic process, and the accumulated product,  $\mu Ad$ ,  
318 represents a source volume required to produce the anelastic deformation in a shear dislocation  
319 approximation [Aki and Richards, 1980, Hill et al., 2003]. Taking a typical value for  $\mu$  of 40 GPa  
320 [Watts, 1994, Watts et al. 1997] for the studied area, we computed the cumulative time variation of  
321  $\sum Mo/\mu$  (in  $m^3$ ) for two selected groups of seismic data: earthquakes located at a depth less than 20  
322 km (blue dots in Fig. 5a), and earthquakes deeper than 20 km (red dots in Fig. 5a). As can be  
323 observed on the depth-time variation curve at Figure 5a, all the pre-eruptive events were located at  
324 a depth less than 20km, and most of the syn-eruptive seismicity, including the most energetic  
325 events, correspond to depths greater than 20 km. This shows how before the eruption the anelastic  
326 deformation (associated with brittle fracturing) involved accommodation of magma in the shallow  
327 part of the plumbing system until it became stabilized with the beginning of the eruption (vertical  
328 black line (1) in Fig. 5). This situation is maintained during the next 20 days after the eruption  
329 onset, until 30 October 2011 (vertical black line (2) in Fig. 5) and included, approximately on 18  
330 October 2011, the initiation of deeper seismicity at the north (see Fig. 5b). From 30 October 2011  
331 to 21 November 2011 (vertical black line (3) in Fig. 5) deformation associated with the deeper  
332 reservoir is intensified, coinciding with major vertical deflation recorded by the GPS network (Fig.  
333 5c, Data Repository Table 2). This suggests that the deepest reservoir started to collapse when it  
334 could not maintain its internal pressure. The difference in seismic anelastic strain volume between  
335 the two curves shown in Figure 5a, suggests that the deeper reservoir was larger than the shallower  
336 one.

337 Figure 5c shows the north, east, up coordinates variations of the FRON permanent GPS

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338 station (Frontera, GRAFCAN network) (Fig.1) located at El Hierro, using precise ephemerides in a  
339 local reference system. Even the vertical component shows higher scatter, it can be observed that  
340 the three components of the surface deformation experience a continuous increment until the onset  
341 of the eruption. Subsequent deflation can be recognized in the vertical component coinciding with  
342 the increment of seismic energy released associated with the deeper reservoir, remaining stable  
343 thereafter.

344 The Gutenberg-Richter  $b$  values [Gutenberg and Richter, 1944, 1949; Aki, 1965] are  
345 commonly used to discriminate between purely tectonic ( $b < 1.5$ -1) and volcano-tectonic events ( $b$   
346  $\geq 1.5$ ), the latter being usually related to magma-driven fracturing of the host rocks induced by the  
347 movement of magma and associated fluids [Yokoyama, 1988]. In the case of El Hierro, to calculate  
348 the  $b$  value we used the IGN earthquakes catalogue for event magnitudes greater or equal to 2.0  
349  $M_{BLg}$ , giving a total of 2,228 events. We calculated the  $b$  value using the maximum likelihood  
350 method. Results (Fig. 5d) show that there was a significant variation of the Gutenberg-Richter  $b$   
351 values with higher values at the beginning and a progressive decrease of  $b$  values as the process  
352 advanced and in particular once the eruption started [Martí et al ., accepted\_a].

353 The onset of the eruption was accompanied by the appearance of a strong tremor signal in  
354 all seismic stations. The amplitude of this tremor experienced several changes during the eruption  
355 probably related to changes in pressure in the eruptive conduit or/and in the whole plumbing system  
356 [see Chouet, 1996; McNutt, 2005; Jellinek and Bercovici, 2011]. Figure 5e shows the time evolution  
357 of the one-hour average amplitude module (normalized) of the continuous seismic signal at CHIE  
358 station (Fig. 1) filtered from 1 to 10 Hz . From the beginning of the eruption to the 21 November  
359 2011 it was recorded the most energetic phase coinciding with the stable behavior of the plumbing  
360 system during that period. A significant change in the amplitude of the continuous seismic signal  
361 occurred on 21 November, probably associated with a significant collapse of the deeper part of



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362 plumbing systems following decompression, as mentioned before, and also to important changes in  
363 the rheological properties of the erupting magma [Martí et al, accepted\_b]. This implied a  
364 progressive decrease of the intensity of the tremor, being this tendency maintained till the end of the  
365 eruption.

366 The petrological study of quenched lava samples has permitted to identify the main physico-  
367 chemical time variations experienced by the erupted basanitic magma and to distinguish between  
368 two main eruptive episodes (Fig. 7) [Martí et al., accepted\_b]. Results indicate that magma erupted  
369 till late November 2011 (i.e.: during the first eruptive episode) corresponded to a fractionated  
370 basanite (MgO  $\approx$ 5 wt%) that evolved into more primitive compositions with time, thus suggesting  
371 extraction from a zoned magma chamber. The erupted magma was reequilibrated at about 400 MPa,  
372 which corresponds to a depth of 12-15 km coinciding with the location of the crust/mantle  
373 discontinuity beneath El Hierro [see *Bousshard and McFarlane, 1970; Watts, 1994*]. Diffusion  
374 modelling data from olivine zoning [Martí et al., accepted\_b] suggest that the time scale for  
375 basanite fractionation in that shallow magma chamber was of the order of 3 months, which  
376 coincides with the duration of the unrest episode preceding the eruption. Abrupt changes in magma  
377 compositions and crystal content were observed at the end of November 2011, starting a second  
378 eruptive episode characterised by the emission of more primitive, less crystalline magma till the end  
379 of the eruption. The transition between the two eruptive episodes is correlated with an intrusion of  
380 fresh, more primitive magma into the shallow reservoir [Martí et al., accepted\_b].

381

## 382 **4. Mechanistic model**

383 As shown by seismicity and deformation data, magma migrated, following a complex path,  
384 during twelve weeks, before finding its way to reach the surface on 10 October 2011. This  
385 migration occurred at a depth around 15 km, which appears to correspond to the crust-mantle

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386 boundary. Magma migration was clearly influenced by the local stress field as evidenced by the way  
387 it turned around some volcanic edifices in its migration to the south-east and the fact that its final  
388 ascent occurred along a fault plane belonging to the southern rift zone system (Figs. 1 and 3).  
389 However, at first order, we can consider that the magma first moved laterally towards the edifice  
390 center, then continued its way towards the other side to feed an eruption at some distance on the  
391 opposite flank. This behavior presents some similarities with the migration of the magmatic  
392 intrusion observed through InSAR measurement between August 1999 and April 2000 at  
393 Eyjafjallajökull volcano, where the feeding source was located on the northern flank of the volcano  
394 and magma migrated horizontally southwards producing inflation on the southern flank before a  
395 cessation of the unrest episode without any eruption [*Pedersen and Sigmundsson, 2006*].

396 Magma migration through the Earth's brittle part of the lithosphere, takes place by dike  
397 propagation, which implies crustal fracture associated with magma transport [*Lister and Kerr, 1991*;  
398 *Rubin, 1993*; *Petford et al., 2000*]. This phenomenon depends on the magma driving overpressure,  
399 the physical properties of the magma (mainly its density and viscosity), and the surrounding crust  
400 (mainly its density, elastic properties and tensile strength), as revealed by the analytical studies  
401 [*Lister, 1990*; *Lister and Kerr, 1991*]. Magma migration is also clearly influenced by the local  
402 surrounding stress field as proven by analogical [*Watanabe et al, 1999*], as well as numerical  
403 models [*Pinel and Jaupart, 2004, Maccaferri et al., 2011*]. At El Hierro the local stress field is  
404 influenced by the tectonic context as well as the lithospheric flexure induced by the edifice load.  
405 Here we will focus on the second aspect using an axisymmetric numerical model in order to  
406 quantify the stress field within the elastic part of the lithosphere, but without taking into account  
407 volcano spreading. Stress and strain within the crust are numerically calculated solving the  
408 equations for linear elasticity with the “Finite Element Method” (COMSOL software). A mesh of  
409 about 100 000 triangular units that is refined around the volcanic edifice is used. No displacement is

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410 allowed at the lateral boundary. A normal stress is applied at the upper boundary corresponding to  
411 the water and to the edifice loads (Fig. 8). The whole medium is submitted to gravity field. As El  
412 Hierro Island started its construction more than 1 Ma ago, the volcanic load is sufficiently long in  
413 duration to consider that a final relaxed state in isostatic equilibrium has been reached. It follows  
414 that the medium can be assimilated to an elastic lithosphere of given thickness lying over an  
415 inviscid fluid (the mantle). Due to the load, there is a flexure of the lithosphere (Watts, 1994), which  
416 gets partially immersed in the denser mantle. As a response to the lithospheric deflection, a buoyant  
417 restoring force acts at the bottom of the lithosphere, in a normal direction, opposing flexure. Such a  
418 boundary condition is classically used and sometimes called a "Winkler" foundation in the literature  
419 (Galgana et al., 2011). The lithosphere being under sea level part of this "Winkler" foundation,  $\sigma_B$   
420 is compensated by the water load, such that it can be expressed through the following relation:

421

$$422 \quad \sigma_B = (\rho_m - \rho_w) g U_z \quad (3)$$

423

424 where  $\rho_m$  and  $\rho_w$  are the mantle and the water density, respectively, and  $U_z$  the vertical displacement  
425 at the base of the crust. The sign convention used is such that tensile stresses are negative.  
426 Numerical solutions were validated using analytical solutions for the displacement induced by the  
427 loading of a thick elastic plate lying over an inviscid medium provided by *Pinel et al* [2007].

428 As already explained by *McGovern and Solomon* [1993], lithospheric flexure due to the  
429 edifice load generates lateral stress characterized by a «dipole» pattern with horizontal extension in  
430 the lower lithosphere and compression in the upper lithosphere, at the axis beneath the edifice. The  
431 amplitude of this effect decreases when going laterally away from the edifice. This effect acts  
432 together with the gravity field to produce the resulting stress field. Figure 9 shows the horizontal  
433 component  $\sigma_{\theta\theta}$  of the stress field within the crust, when considering the parameters listed in Table

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434 2. In absence of edifice load at the surface (Figure 9a), the compression increases with depth due to  
435 the lithostatic load. Whereas, when an edifice induces a lithospheric flexure (Figure 9b), this  
436 lithostatic load is, in the lower part of the crust, partly compensated by the tension due to the  
437 flexure, such that the compression is almost invariant with depth beneath the edifice axis. This  
438 effect decreases when going laterally away from the edifice.

439 Fig. 10 shows, on the same graph, the pressure profile ( $P_{magma}$ ) within a basaltic magma  
440 (density  $2800\text{kg/m}^3$ ) rising vertically from a slightly overpressurized source located at 25 km depth  
441 and the stress component  $\sigma_{\theta\theta}$  profiles.  $\sigma_{\theta\theta}$  being the normal stress acting on a vertical dyke  
442 propagating radially away or towards the edifice, the pressure difference  $P_{magma} - \sigma_{\theta\theta}$  can be directly  
443 related to the dyke opening, dyke being opened only when this term is positive. This figure  
444 illustrates three important points. Magma rising vertically through the mantle reaches the crustal  
445 bottom with a large overpressure, such that it would be expected to keep on propagating vertically.  
446 At the bottom crustal boundary, the horizontal stress  $\sigma_{\theta\theta}$  increases when going away from the axis  
447 as a consequence of the flexural effect being maximal at the axis. It follows that a dyke intruding  
448 laterally at the crustal/mantle boundary should propagate towards the edifice center. This deduction  
449 is based on numerical calculation results showing that a surrounding decreasing stress favors lateral  
450 propagation versus vertical extension [Traversa *et al.*, 2010]. The third important point concerns the  
451 vertical gradient of the overpressure available for dyke opening  $d(P_{magma} - \sigma_{\theta\theta})/dz$ . This gradient is  
452 negative, which is usually the case when the magma is denser than the surrounding crust. Here we  
453 consider a magma less dense than the surrounding crust. With no edifice load, the vertical gradient  
454 of the overpressure would be positive ensuring the dyke ascent towards the surface. However, the  
455 edifice induces a flexure of the lithosphere and compression in the upper part of the crust, such that  
456 the vertical gradient of magma overpressure becomes negative. It means that when the dyke  
457 propagates vertically towards the surface, its progression is inhibited: the vertical extension of a

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458 dyke is limited. At some depth, when rising the magma pressure  $P_{\text{magma}}$  become lower than the  
459 surrounding stress field  $\sigma_{\theta\theta}$ , which prevents dyke opening. On figure 7, we can see that this  
460 phenomenon occurs at a shallower depth at some distance from the edifice center than directly  
461 beneath the edifice because the compressive effect of the edifice load in the upper part of the  
462 lithosphere, decreases when going away from the edifice.

463 At El Hierro, vertical progression of magma was stopped when it reached the crustal bottom  
464 boundary. Considering only the stress field induced by the lithospheric flexure it should not be the  
465 case because the magma should be well overpressurized at the crustal bottom boundary (see Fig 9).  
466 To explain this behavior, we have to consider a local effect as the presence of an intrusive complex  
467 characterized by a different rheology. Then magma started propagating laterally towards the edifice  
468 centre but the eruption only occurred at the opposite flank. This first order behavior is well  
469 explained by the flexural effect. If magma is stacked at the lower lithospheric boundary, it will  
470 extend laterally, possibly forming a local sill (Kavanagh et al, 2006). It will then tend to propagate  
471 laterally towards the edifice center because of the stress field generated by the lithospheric flexure.  
472 However, magma ascent towards the surface is not expected to occur directly beneath the edifice  
473 centre due to the compressive effect induced in the upper part of the lithosphere, such that this  
474 lateral migration should overshoot the edifice centre and result in a vertical ascent at some distance  
475 on the edifice flank. The fact that magma migration occurred through a north-east fracture zone  
476 indicates that the regional/local tectonics also played an important role, which should be taken into  
477 consideration in a future three-dimensional model. It is worth noting that the path followed by El  
478 Hierro magma, as well as the orientation of the eruption fissure, define a stress configuration in  
479 which the maximum compressional stress is oriented approximately north-south and the minimum  
480 compressional stress is east-west. A north-south tectonic stress would have prevented the opening  
481 of magma fractures oriented east-west (i.e. the western rift zone, see Fig. 1), but would have

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482 facilitated the opening of structures oriented north-south, as it was the eruption fissure [*Martí et al.*,  
483 accepted\_a].

484 This simple numerical model only takes into account the flexural effect and we assume that  
485 the stress field induced by this effect should have been constant during the Holocene, as no  
486 significant modifications of the morphology of the island have occurred in that time. This could  
487 lead us to question why, if the stress field is the same, magma has not followed the same path than  
488 previous eruptions. However, having the same stress field does not mean that magma propagation  
489 should follow the same path for each eruption, as each path will depend on the initial position of the  
490 ascent and on the balance between the driving pressure and the influence of the local stress field  
491 [*Watanabe et al.*, 1999]. Also, the tectonic effect should be added to the flexural one. For the effect  
492 of the tectonic stress field, dyke opening should occur in the direction of smallest compressive  
493 stress, such that an ascent along the southern rift is clearly consistent with a north-south  
494 compression, as suggested by [*Martí et al.*, accepted\_a]. Anyway, a complete model should consider  
495 both the flexural effect and the regional tectonic stress field, so it would require a 3D model, but  
496 this is beyond the scope of this paper and will be developed elsewhere.

497

## 498 **5. Discussion**

499 The comparison of the temporal evolution of the main geophysical and petrological  
500 variables, and the elaboration of a mechanistic model on magma propagation in the crust, allow us  
501 to obtain a volcanological model that explains the causes and mechanisms of El Hierro eruption  
502 (Fig. 11). This model helps to understand how the eruption was preparing some months before its  
503 onset on 10 October 2011 and how it then developed. The model aims to contribute to correctly  
504 interpret the geological significance of the precursory signals. This is a key aspect in volcano  
505 forecasting and will be useful to anticipate future eruptions in the Canary Islands or other areas

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506 with similar characteristics.

507         The evolution of seismicity and surface deformation reveals that magma accumulated for  
508 two months at the north of the island, at the crust/mantle discontinuity (12-15 km deep), and then  
509 migrated south-east maintaining the same depth for nearly 20 km before triggering the eruption.  
510 Geophysical and petrological data suggest the existence of two main eruptive episodes marked by  
511 different patterns of seismicity, surface deformation, and amplitude of the tremor signal, and by  
512 significant changes in composition and rheology of the erupted magmas. The main changes  
513 observed between the two episodes seem to correspond to stress and rheological changes in the  
514 plumbing system induced by decompression during eruption. Unfortunately, the lack of a  
515 continuous record of samples of the erupted products impedes to set up a more precise correlation  
516 between geophysical and petrological variations, but we consider that the main changes have been  
517 identified. Therefore, we may tentatively propose a volcanological model that explains the  
518 preparation and development of El Hierro eruption.

519         An overpressurized batch of magma, probably coming from a deeper reservoir located at 20-  
520 25 km, raised up vertically through an aseismic channel defined by a major structural discontinuity,  
521 and progressively accumulated for nearly two months at the crust/mantle boundary beneath the  
522 north of El Hierro, forming a new magma chamber. The absence of deeper seismicity during this  
523 period suggests that the internal (over)pressure was maintained in the deeper reservoir during the  
524 formation of the new shallower reservoir. This may be explained by new inputs of deeper magma  
525 into the deeper reservoir, as seems to be suggested by the petrological data (Martí et al.,  
526 accepted\_a). The minimum volume of magma intruded at a depth of 10-15 km had to be of the  
527 same order than the total erupted volume ( $\sim 0.2 \text{ km}^3$ ) or larger, but it has not been calculated in this  
528 study.

529         The stress field imposed by the flexural effect of the island on the site where magma was

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530 accumulating to form the shallower reservoir, together with the prevailing tectonic stress, favored  
531 the lateral migration of magma towards the south along the crust/mantle discontinuity, instead of  
532 allowing to continue its vertical ascend to the surface. Moreover, this lateral migration was affected  
533 by the existence of stress barriers created by rheological contrasts in the lower crust probably due to  
534 the presence of high-density bodies that correspond to the roots of previous eruptions [*Martí et al.*,  
535 accepted\_a]. Under this stress configuration, magma could not find a suitable path to reach the  
536 surface until it did not meet a north-south oriented fracture with sufficient low strength to be opened  
537 by the driving overpressure of magma, and this occurred when magma reached the southern rift.

538         During this episode of magma accumulation and migration magma started to differentiate by  
539 fractional crystallization at a depth of 12-15 km in the newly formed magma chamber, which also  
540 underwent extensive zonation. When the eruption started the first magmas to reach the surface  
541 where the most differentiated, and progressively lesser evolved magmas were emitted, thus  
542 confirming the existence of zonation in the magma chamber. The time scale at which this  
543 differentiation occurred was tree months, as it is indicated by the duration of the unrest episode and  
544 confirmed by the diffusion modeling results, which show that the equilibration of olivine crystals  
545 occurred in a time period of 1.5 to 3 months [*Martí et al.*, accepted\_b].

546         The analysis of seismicity and surface deformation shows how during the inflation episode  
547 preceding the eruption, the oceanic crust deformed elastically and then brittlely when the elastic  
548 response was exceeded. This deformation clearly account for the space that magma needed to  
549 accommodate at the base of El Hierro oceanic crust. Most of the seismicity occurred during this  
550 first part of the unrest episode corresponded to magma-driven fracturing, probably caused by a  
551 radial expansion of magma when forming the new magma chamber (Fig. 5d). However, the  
552 seismicity pattern changed significantly when the lateral migration of magma occurred, recording the  
553 strongest earthquakes of the whole unrest period. During this episode seismicity was mostly



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554 associated with shear fracturing rather than with magma-driven fracturing (Fig. 5d) and this  
555 suggests that magma opened its path by pushing away the crust and readjusting previous fractures  
556 and faults. Therefore, most of the deformation recorded during the unrest episode was due to the  
557 formation and pressurization of the plumbing system due to the arrival of overpressurized magma at  
558 shallower levels and its degassing during cooling and crystallization. In fact, anomalous gas (CO<sub>2</sub>)  
559 emissions were detected during the unrest episode in some places, coinciding with the concentration  
560 of seismic events [López *et al.*, 2012], so indicating massive degassing of magma but also an  
561 increase in the permeability of the host rock induced by fracturing.

562         The eruption of magma progressively decompressed the plumbing system, which had to re-  
563 accommodate to the new stress conditions. During eruption, seismicity was mostly due to shear  
564 fracturing and responded to gravitational and tectonic readjustments of the plumbing system. These  
565 stress changes marked also the way in which magma was extruded, causing changes in the intensity  
566 of the eruption that were also recorded as changes in the intensity of the tremor signal at the vent  
567 (Fig. 5e). Also, the composition and rheology of the erupting magma was influenced by these stress  
568 changes that facilitated the arrival of new inputs of fresher magma at the shallower part of the  
569 plumbing system. Once the eruption initiated, the plumbing systems remained overpressurized for  
570 some days, after which the lower part started to readjust to the decreasing internal pressure. This  
571 was marked by an intense seismicity located at the north of the island at a depth of 20-25 km (Fig.  
572 2). A few days later seismicity also started at a depth of 10-15 km, thus indicating the readjustment  
573 of the upper part of the plumbing system too. The readjustment of the deeper part of the plumbing  
574 system ended by late November 2011, coinciding with a recharge episode of the shallow magma  
575 chamber that was marked by changes in composition and rheology of the erupting magma. After  
576 that and till the end of the eruption by late February 2012, most of seismicity concentrated at a  
577 depth of 10-15 km and not only at the north but also at the south along the path that magma

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578 followed to reach the eruption site. This suggests that during this second eruptive episode  
579 decompression of the plumbing systems mostly affected its uppermost part, playing the deeper part  
580 a passive role. After the eruption some seismicity has continued in the whole area at depths ranging  
581 from 10 to 25 km ([www.ign.es](http://www.ign.es)), which indicates that the oceanic crust was trying to recover its  
582 former state of stress from the perturbation caused by the intrusion of magma at shallower levels.  
583 On 24 June 2012 a new strong seismic swarm started and lasted till mid July, having associated  
584 significant surface deformation [[www.ign.es](http://www.ign.es)]. This correlates with a new intrusion of magma below  
585 El Hierro, this time at a depth of 20-25 km, and suggests that magmatic activity has not ended yet  
586 and that new eruptions might occur in the near future. However, the analysis and interpretation of  
587 this possible new intrusion episode is beyond the scope of this paper and is not considered here.

588 El Hierro eruption has confirmed the results of a probabilistic analysis of having a new  
589 basaltic eruption in the Canary Islands, which concluded that the probability for the next 20 years  
590 was of a 99% [*Sobradelo et al.*, 2011]. This probabilistic study also suggested that the highest  
591 likelihood of hosting a future eruption corresponded to the islands of Lanzarote, Tenerife and La  
592 Palma, as these were the only ones that show historical volcanism. The fact that El Hierro island  
593 was not considered as a potential location for a new eruption may be due to the incompleteness of  
594 the historical records which would have biased the results obtained. In fact, *Hernandez Pacheco*  
595 [1982] postulated that an eruption from which no historical records (chronicles) exist could have  
596 occurred in 1793 at Lomo Negro, at the western corner of the island, at the same time than a strong  
597 seismic swarm that was felt by El Hierro inhabitants and registered in their reports. However, there  
598 were not direct observations of that eruption, so it was not included in the catalogue of historical  
599 volcanism of the Canary Islands [*Romero*, 1991] used to perform the statistical analysis by  
600 *Sobradelo et al* [2011]. Moreover, the fact that this new eruption has been submarine opens the  
601 possibility that other submarine eruptions may have occurred in historical times without having

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602 been recorded in the historical volcanism catalogue. In fact, several seismic crisis apparently not  
603 associated with volcanic activity have been reported in the Canarian historical chronicles [*Romero,*  
604 1991]. Also, bathymetric studies [*Romero et al., 2000; Gee et al., 2001*] show that a large number of  
605 well preserved volcanic cones are present on the submarine flanks of the Canary Islands, so we  
606 cannot rule out the possibility of having a larger number of historical eruptions than that  
607 corresponding to the subaerial ones recorded in the local chronicles. If that was the case, then the  
608 recurrence of basaltic volcanism in the Canary Islands would be shorter than suggested by  
609 *Sobradelo et al.* [2011], so the associated volcanic hazard and risk would be higher.

610

## 611 **6. Conclusions**

612 El Hierro eruption provides a good example on how magma prepares to erupt and how its  
613 movement in the upper lithosphere is controlled by the stress field. The driving overpressure of the  
614 magma, which is a function of its volume, density, and rheology, determines to which extend  
615 magma will move inside the lithosphere and whether or not it will erupt at surface. However, it does  
616 not determine where and when the eruption will occur. These are the two key questions we need to  
617 answer when monitoring systems detect anomalous activity that could be precursory of an eruption.  
618 Determining when and where the eruption will occur does not only depend on the identification of  
619 the geophysical and geochemical precursors, but also on their correct interpretation in geological  
620 and petrological terms. El Hierro eruption shows how important is the stress distribution inside the  
621 crust and how this is influenced by rheological contrasts, existence of tectonic stresses, and  
622 gravitational loading (topography). Also the tectonic structure exerts a significant role in controlling  
623 how magma can move and where it can erupt. The coupled interpretation of geophysical and  
624 petrological data, combined with stress modeling, made after the eruption has proved to be the  
625 correct way to interpret the eruption. Unfortunately, it is too late to forecast that eruption, but this

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626 view may help to better forecast and understand future eruptions in the Canary Islands or similar  
627 active volcanic areas.

628

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## El Hierro eruption

890 induced in the upper part of the crust and tension in the lower part. This stress acts together with the  
891 lithostatic load, such that the horizontal stress is compressive and almost invariant with depth at the  
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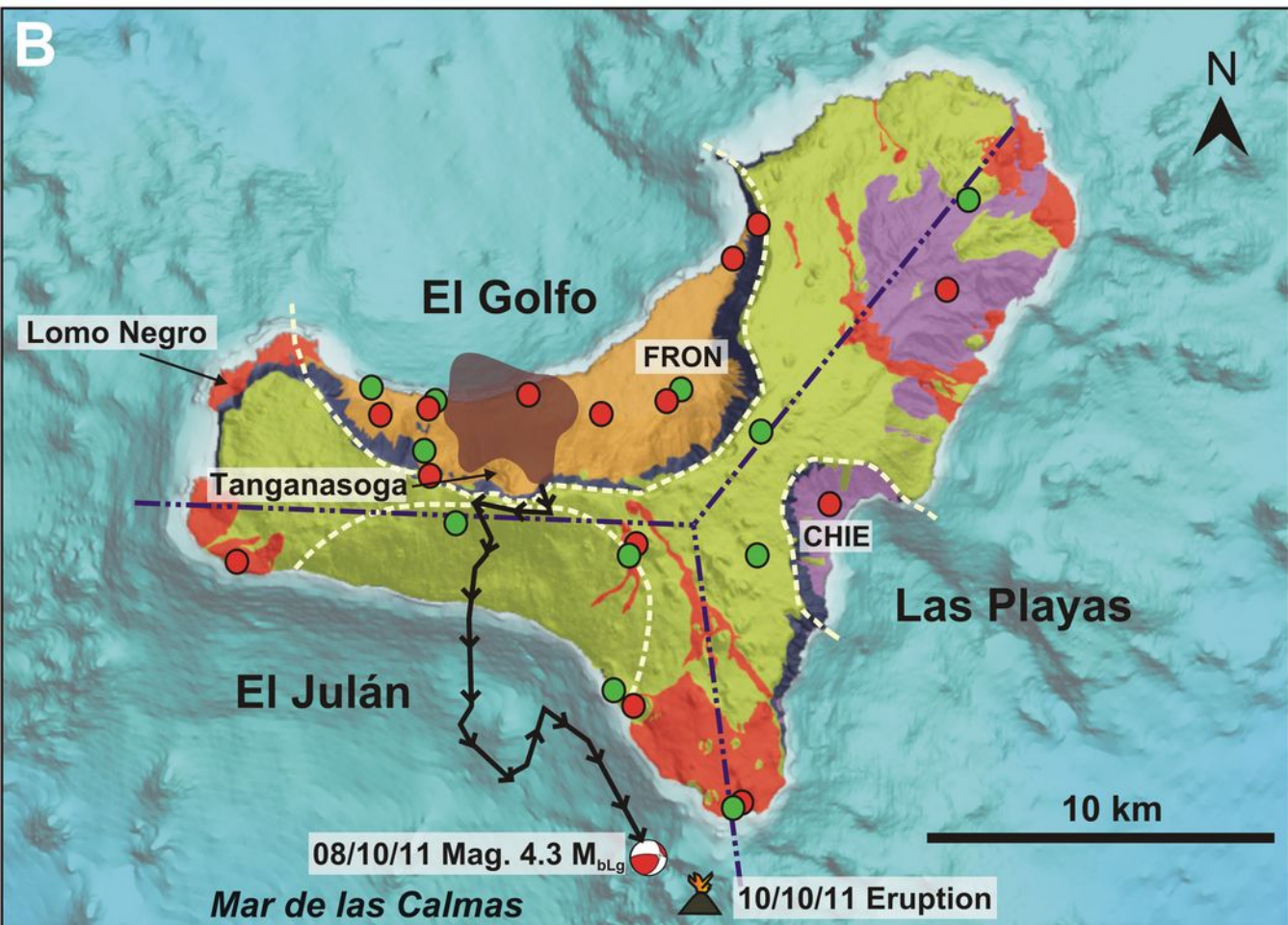
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895 Figure 10: Stress field profiles within the elastic crust at various distances from the axis of  
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904

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**Upper Pleistocene and Holocene**

- Recent eruptions
- Post-collapse deposits of El Golfo
- Rift Eruptions

**Lower and middle Pleistocene**

- El Golfo and Las Playas volcanoes
- Tiñor volcano



Magma accumulation zone



Magma migration path



Submarine eruption 2011-2012



08/10/11 Earthquake

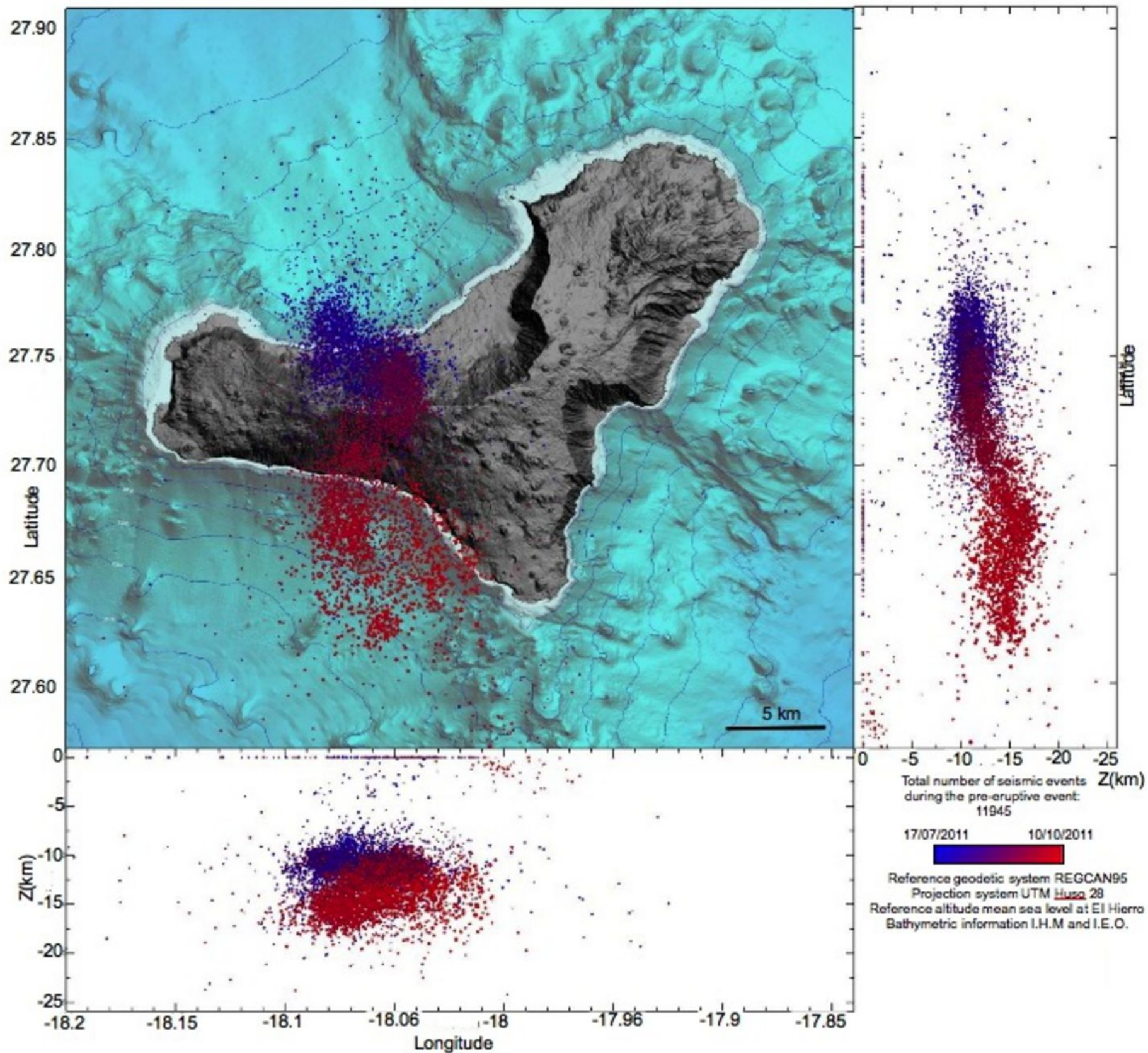
- - - Rift zones

- - - Landslide scar

● Seismic station

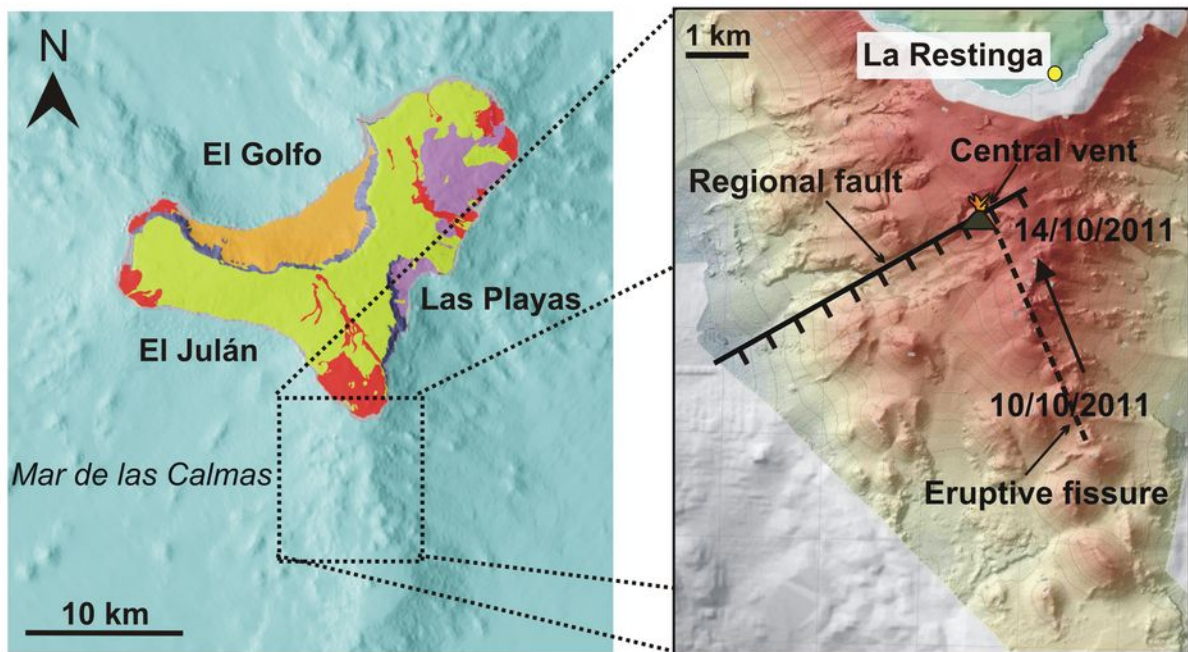
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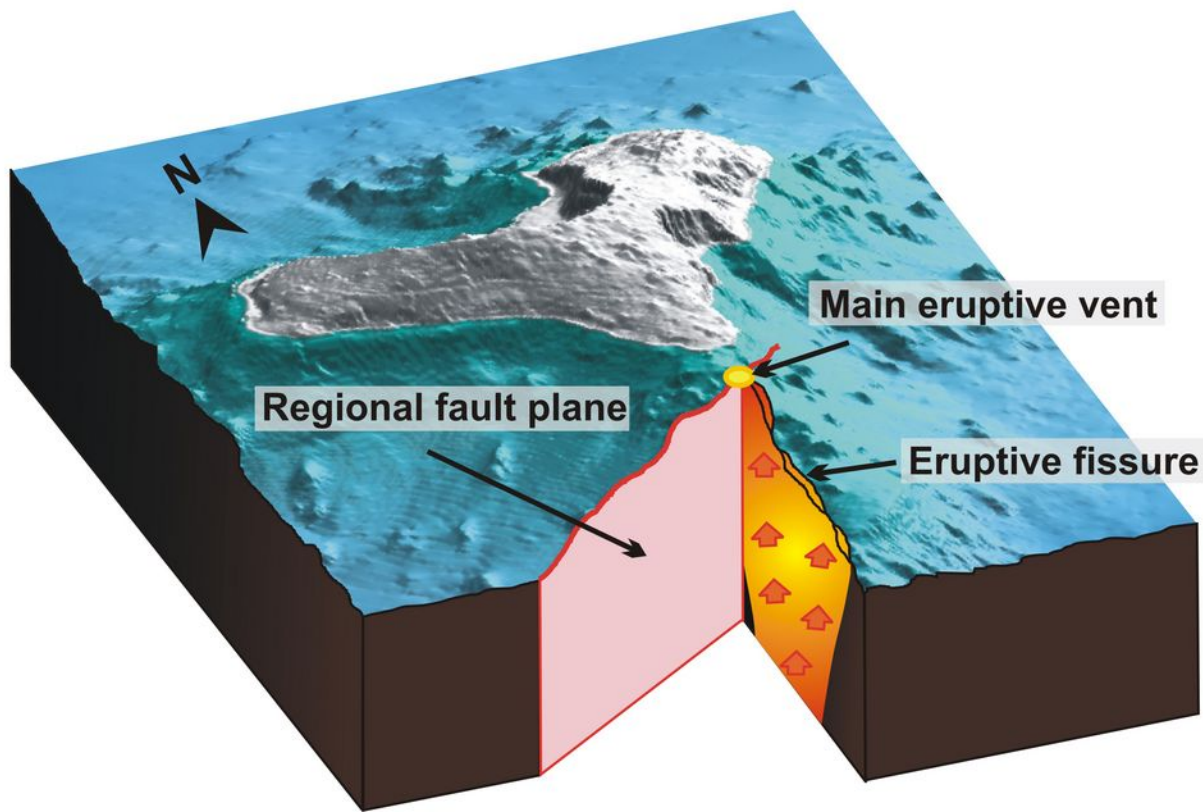


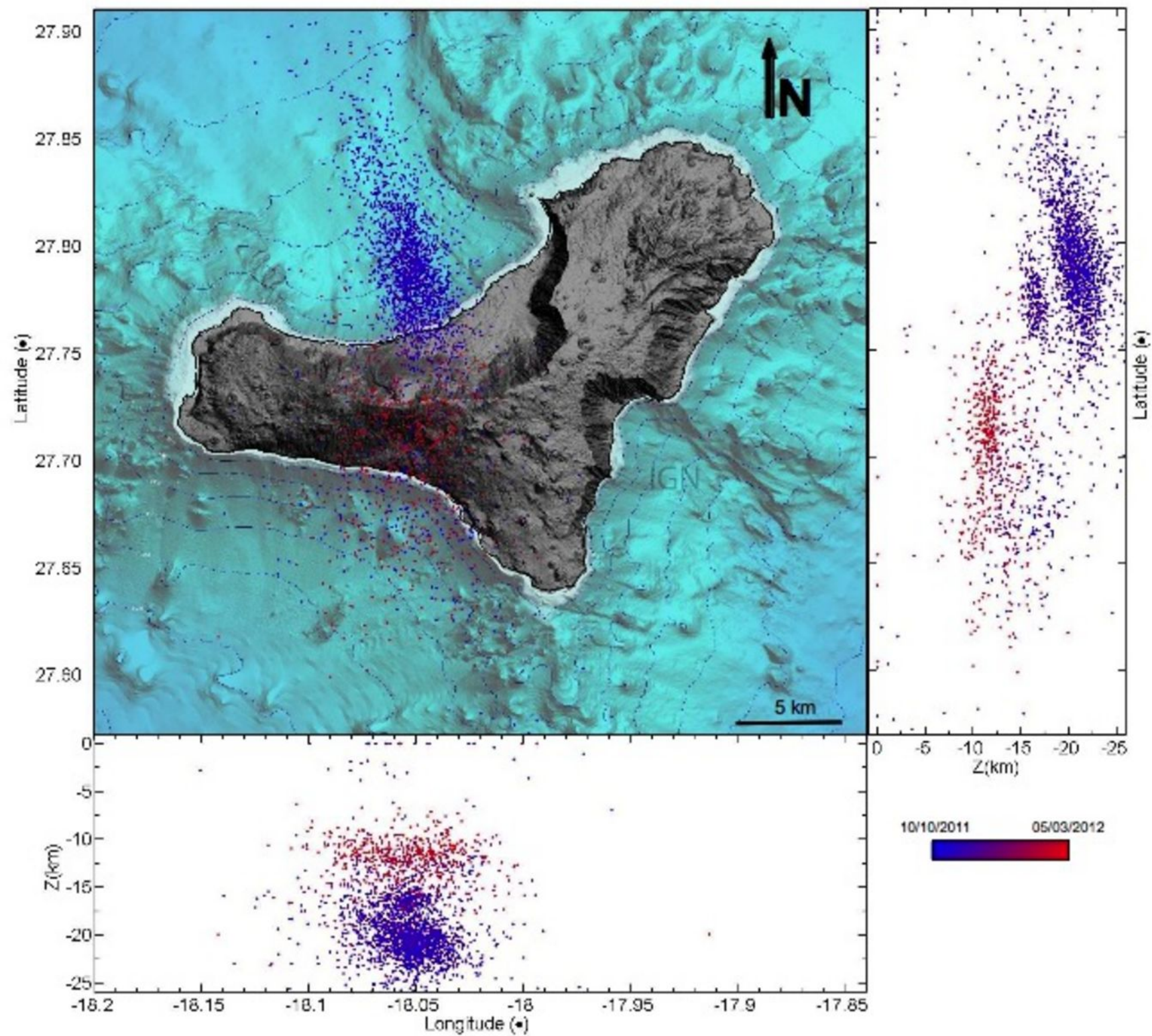


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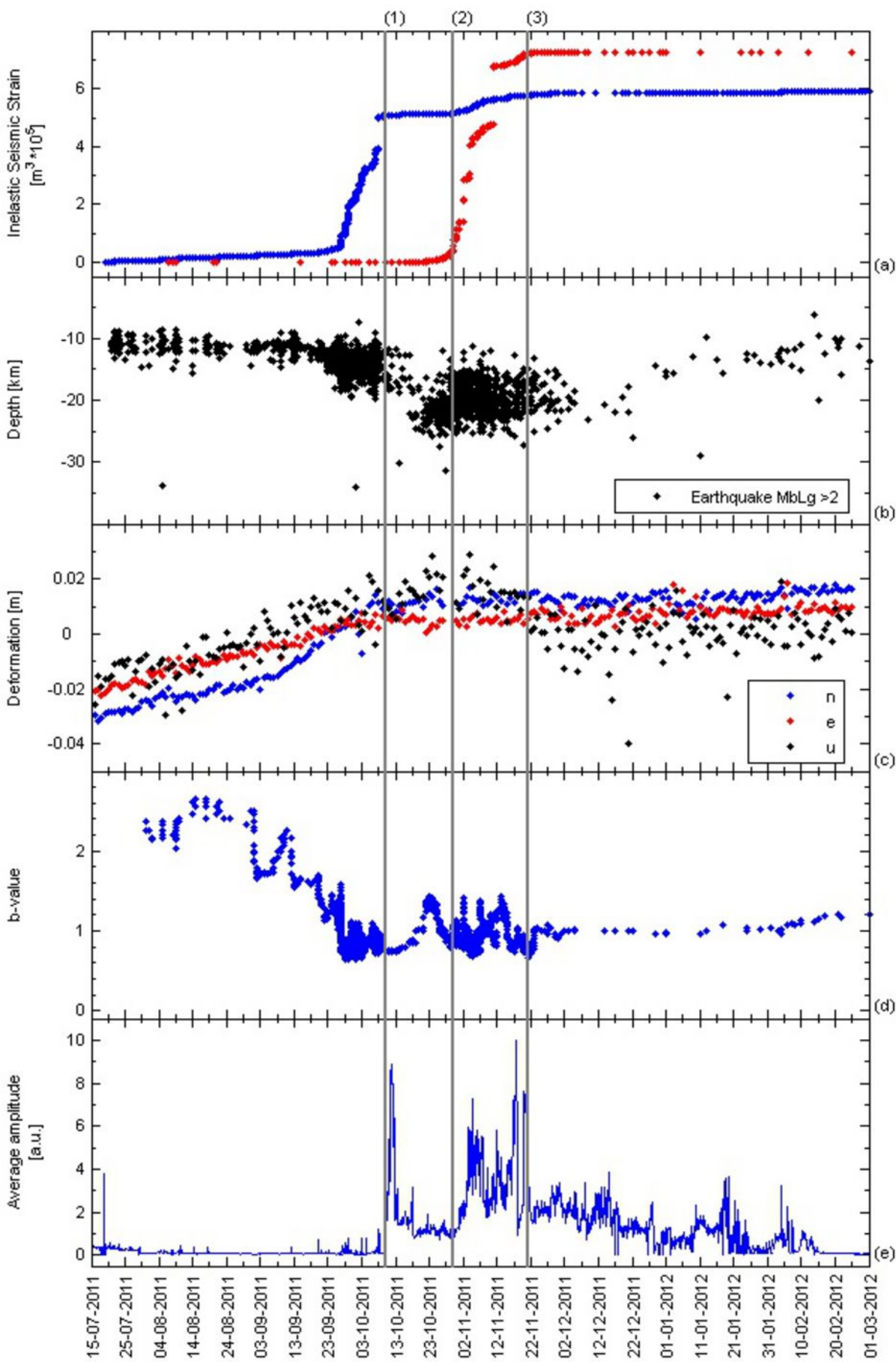


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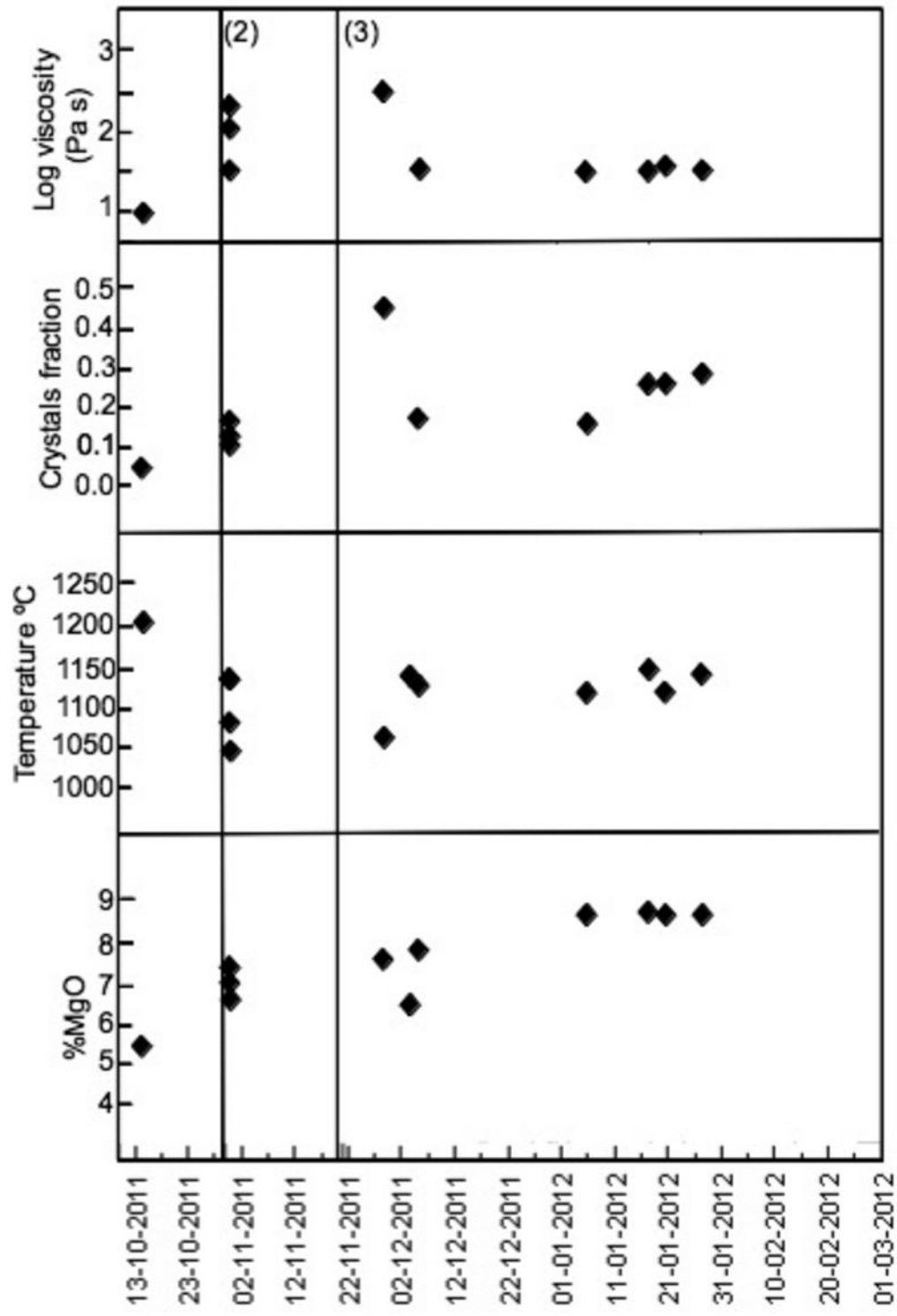


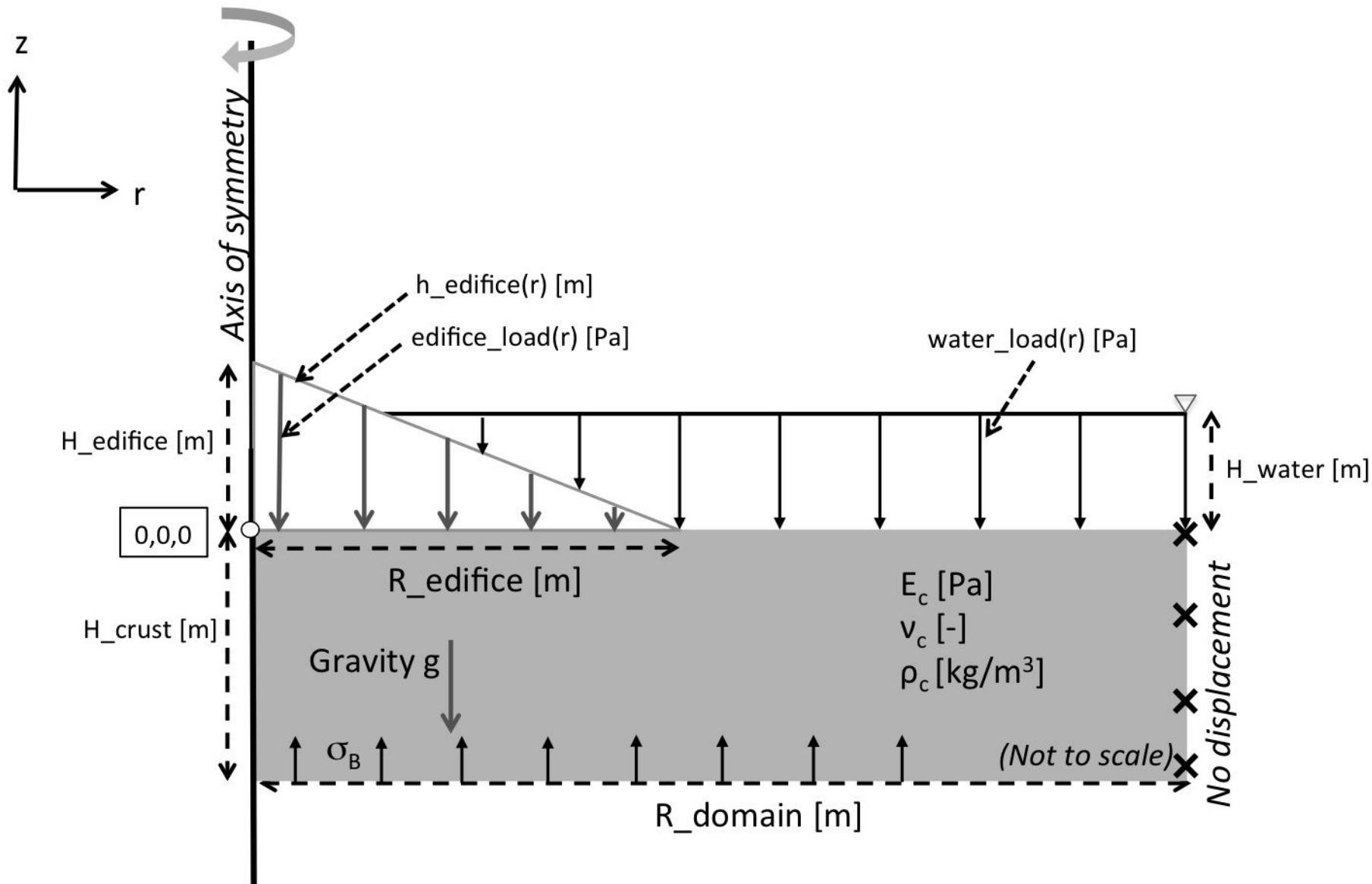




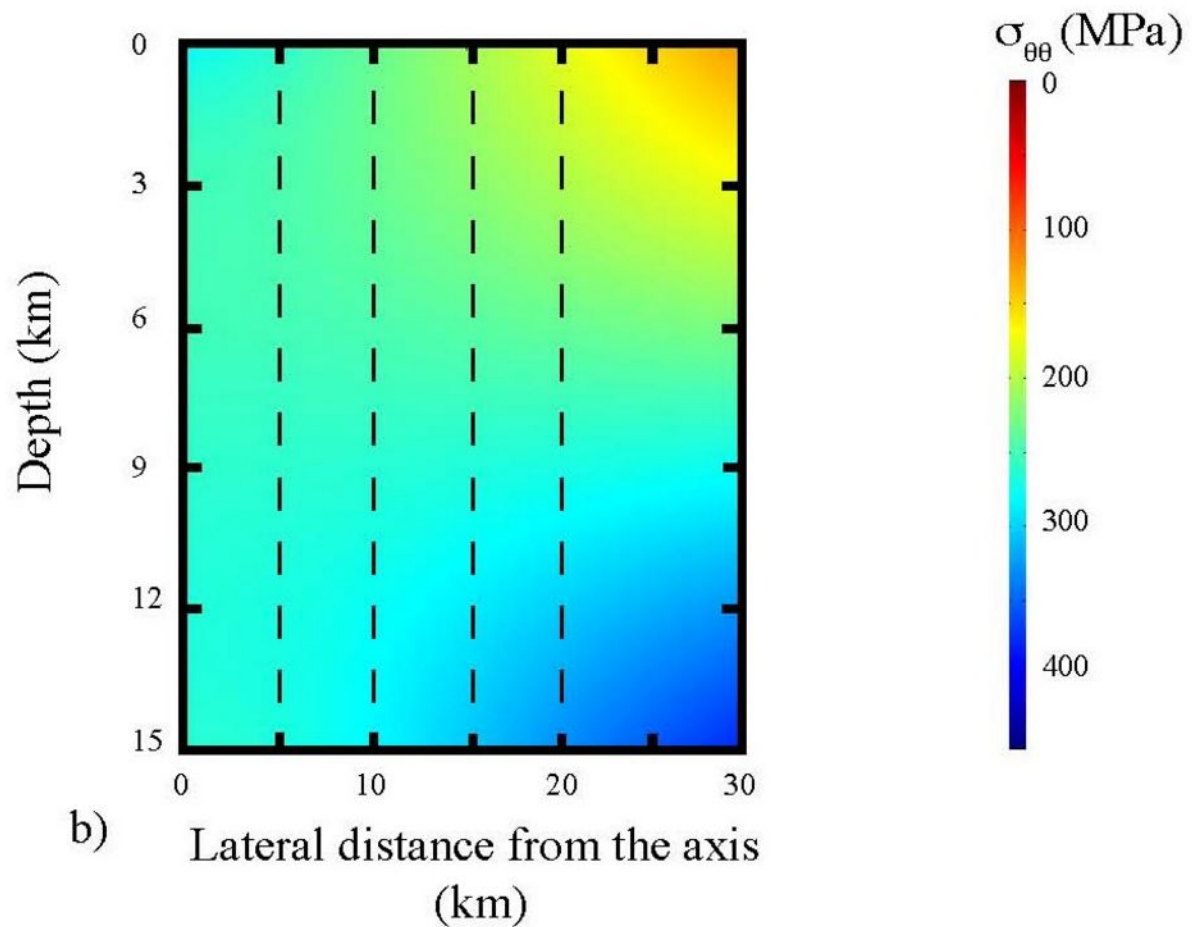
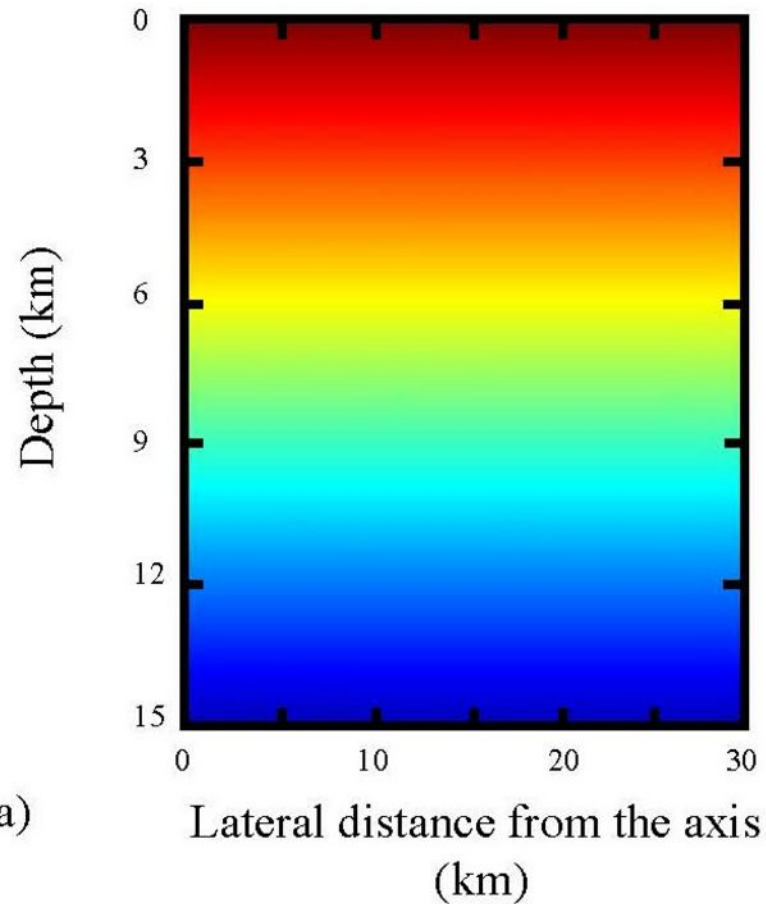


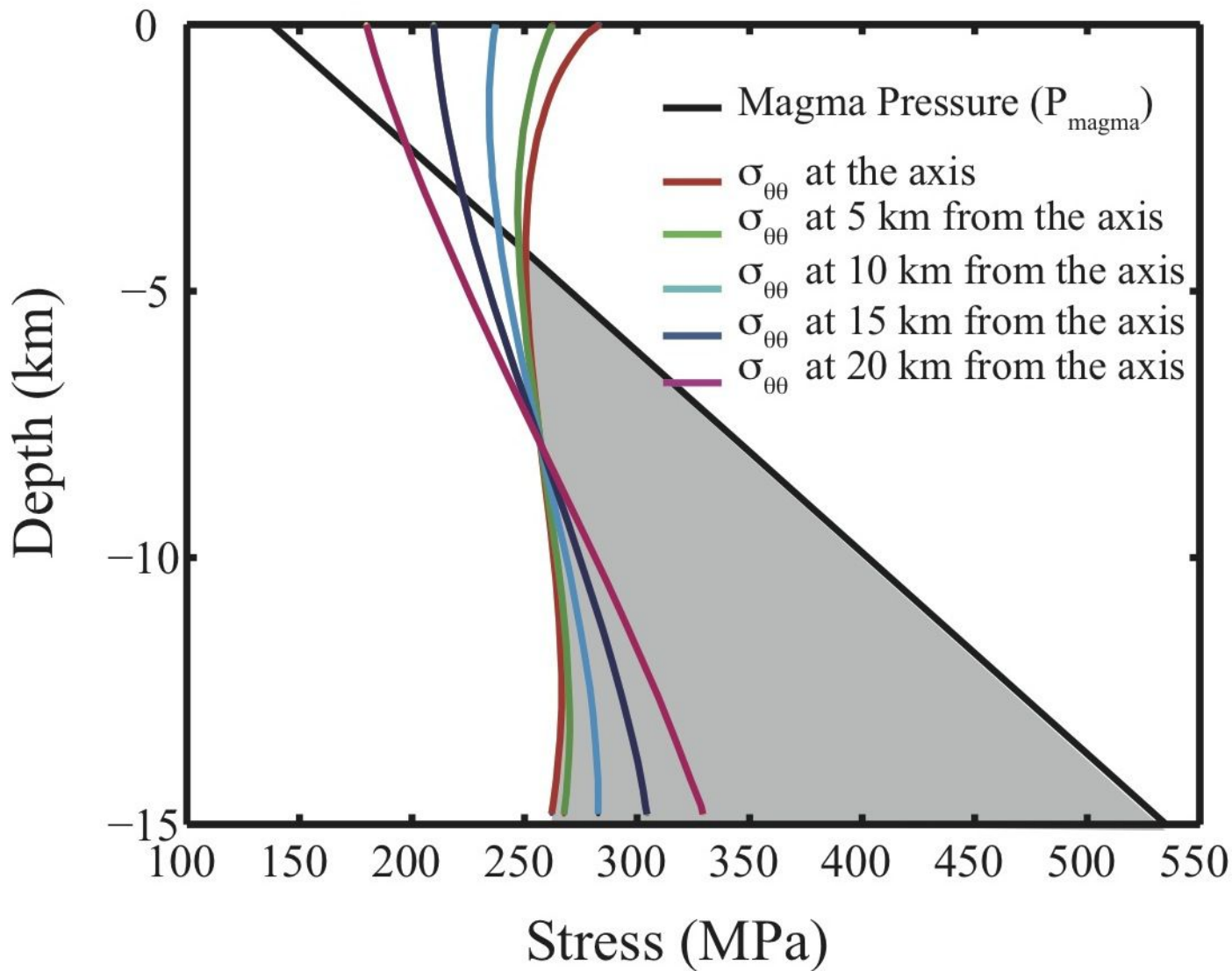


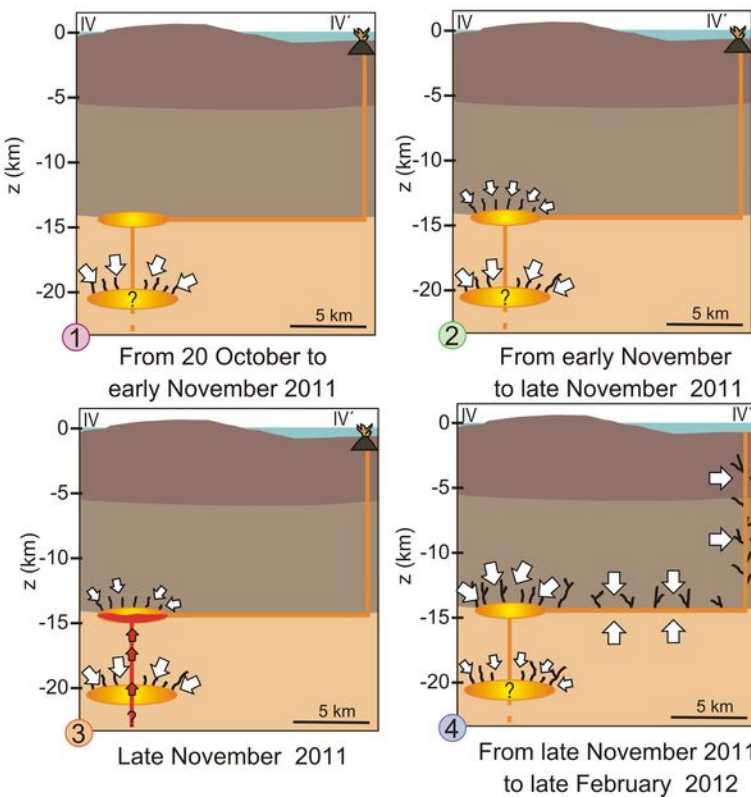
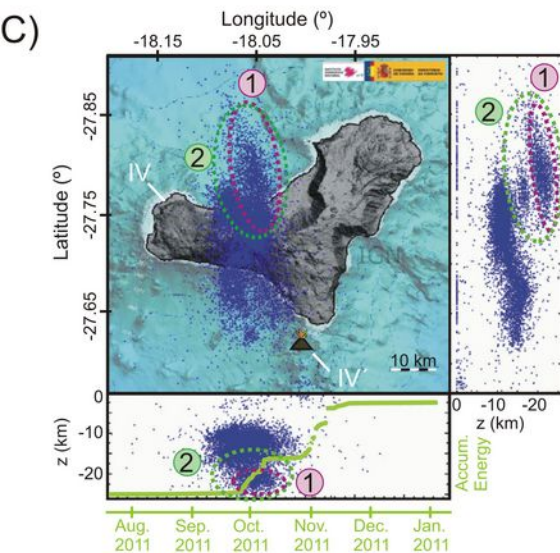
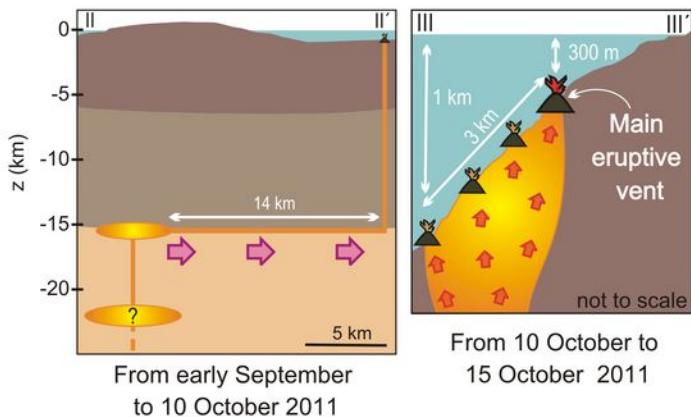
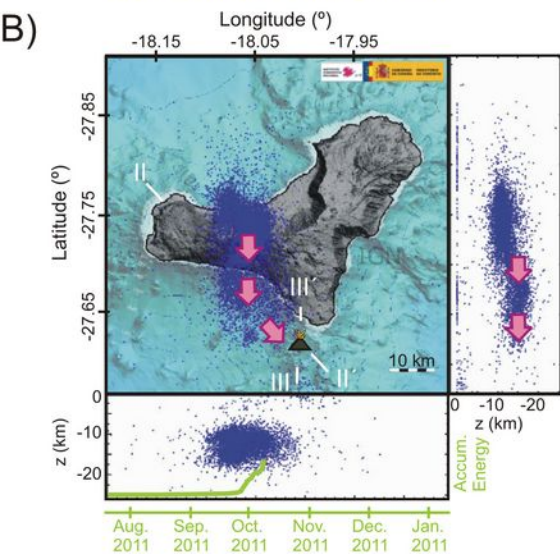
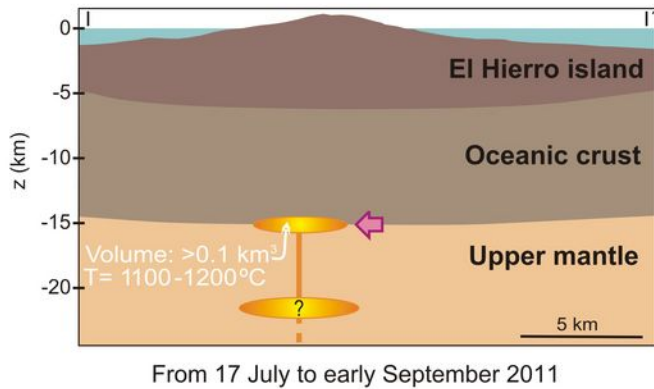
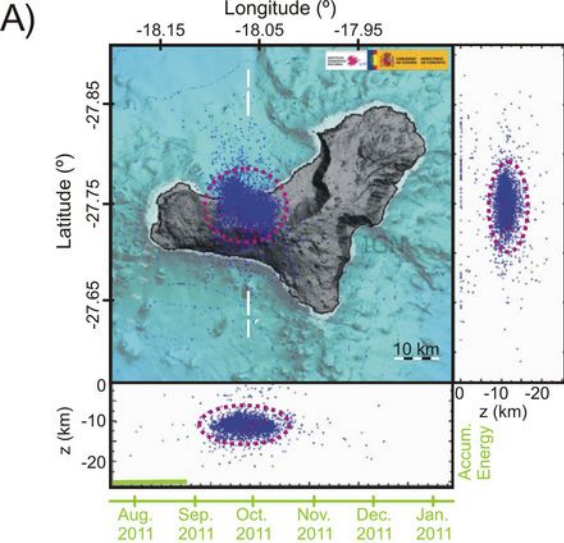












**Table 1.** Whole rock compositions of the studied samples [from *Marti et al* , submitted]

Sample	HB1	HB2	HB3	HB4	HB5	HB6 (Ash)	HB6	HB8	HB9	HB10	HB11
Date of emission	15/10/2011	31/10/2011	31/10/2011	31/10/2011	27/11/2011	5/12/2011	6/12/2011	5/1/2012	18/1/2012	21/1/2012	28/1/2012
SiO <sub>2</sub> <sup>(1)</sup>	44.65	43.05	41.88	43.36	40.13	43.76	42.84	42.47	42.87	42.86	43.02
TiO <sub>2</sub>	4.64	4.83	4.73	4.59	4.87	4.68	4.74	4.7	4.77	4.78	4.78
Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	13.51	14.09	14.17	13.88	13.60	14.36	13.43	13.56	12.98	13.05	13.03
FeOtot <sup>(2)</sup>	12.60	12.70	13.82	13.45	17.07	12.85	13.34	12.17	13.61	13.65	13.62
MgO	5.56	6.91	7.17	7.31	7.60	6.25	7.83	8.66	8.67	8.6	8.6
MnO	0.21	0.37	0.25	0.20	0.19	0.20	0.19	0.42	0.188	0.189	0.189
CaO	10.34	11.06	11.16	10.50	10.53	10.97	10.99	10.49	11.18	11.16	11.29
Na <sub>2</sub> O	4.42	5.49	4.54	3.97	3.28	4.10	3.89	6.02	3.51	3.55	3.5
K <sub>2</sub> O	1.14	1.71	1.57	1.55	1.49	1.59	1.46	1.56	1.39	1.4	1.4
P <sub>2</sub> O <sub>5</sub>	0.88	n.d	n.d	0.92	0.78	0.95	0.84	n.d.	0.786	0.79	0.78
LOI	n.d <sup>(3)</sup>	n.d	n.d	0.25	0.50	0.60	0.43	n.d.	0.74	0.61	0.65
Total	97.95	100.22	99.29	99.98	100.05	100.31	99.98	100.05	100.69	100.64	100.86
Mg# <sup>(4)</sup>	0.44	0.49	0.48	0.49	0.44	0.46	0.51	0.56	0.53	0.53	0.53
Trace elements (ppm)											
Li	9.22	8.07	8.92	8.20	6.04	9.18	8.56	7.27	7.78	8.34	7.30
Be	2.84	2.45	2.67	2.48	2.03	2.81	2.59	2.19	2.31	2.52	2.19
Sc	16.4	20.1	22.33	20.2	19.4	24.4	26.5	24.8	26.1	29.0	24.9
V	261	277	338	302	298	321	342	337	361	399	345
Cr	23.3	123	297	179	154	110	217	354	374	340	329
Co	37.1	82	45.3	40.2	61.9	80.3	81.7	46	49.3	53.6	46.5
Ni	41.2	74.9	96.9	80.2	89.9	59.6	114	141	154	166	142
Cu	71.2	68.3	77.2	69.8	72.9	80.0	87.6	86.9	93.8	103	103
Zn	151	140	146	134	130	154	154	130	136	151	129
Ga	25.9	23.5	25.7	23.5	20.5	26.2	25.7	22.5	23.6	25.8	22.2
Rb	37.6	34.3	35.5	30.7	26.9	35.6	34.5	27.9	28.6	31.4	26.8
Sr	1079	982	993	901	707	1117	1060	831	865	951	823
Y	36.7	33.2	37.1	33.1	24.6	37.9	35.9	30.8	31.9	34.8	30.3
Zr	291	286	402	367	261	410	381	379	371	371	371
Nb	78.1	72.1	72.7	66.7	50.4	80.3	73.9	61.3	63.8	68.4	59.9
Cs	0.64	0.61	0.48	0.41	0.47	0.50	0.49	0.37	0.40	0.44	0.38
Ba	414	376	426	391	331	426	396	359	379	403	355
La	66.9	59.7	62.6	57.3	50.2	65.3	59.8	49.3	52.1	55.2	48.4
Ce	135	121	132	120	104	138	126	104	110	118	103
Pr	16.3	14.7	16.6	15.1	12.9	17.4	15.9	13.2	14	14.9	13.03
Nd	64.9	59.2	69.4	62.6	52.8	71.3	66.1	56.1	59.4	63.7	55.05
Sm	12.5	11.6	13.9	12.4	11.0	14.3	13.5	11.5	12.0	13.1	11.2
Eu	3.83	3.57	4.32	3.99	3.37	4.40	4.13	3.68	3.87	4.16	3.62
Gd	10.2	9.49	11.6	10.6	9.09	11.9	11.2	9.74	10.3	11.1	9.62
Tb	1.37	1.28	1.47	1.36	1.21	1.51	1.44	1.28	1.33	1.42	1.26
Dy	6.99	6.57	8.39	7.58	6.36	8.39	7.78	6.98	7.32	8.01	6.88
Ho	1.25	1.18	1.41	1.27	1.11	1.38	1.31	1.18	1.24	1.33	1.16
Er	3.00	2.73	3.42	2.99	2.57	3.28	3.04	2.78	2.92	3.14	2.70
Tm	0.40	0.37	0.40	0.37	0.34	0.40	0.38	0.35	0.36	0.38	0.34
Yb	2.37	2.18	2.31	2.19	1.90	2.42	2.24	1.92	2.11	2.31	1.90
Lu	0.35	0.31	0.32	0.29	0.26	0.32	0.31	0.26	0.28	0.29	0.26
Hf	4.94	5.93	10.1	9.41	7.02	10.6	9.50	8.40	9.00	9.59	8.35
Ta	5.29	5.16	5.59	5.02	4.19	5.91	5.3	4.91	5.12	5.27	4.69
Pb	4.25	3.67	4.28	3.69	3.13	4.79	3.89	3.12	3.38	3.64	3.11
Th	6.68	5.811	5.69	5.14	5.07	5.97	5.60	4.50	4.76	5.06	4.43
U	1.91	1.578	1.60	1.41	1.35	1.70	1.556	1.25	1.35	1.44	1.24

<sup>(1)</sup> Major element analyses are given in wt% oxides.

<sup>(2)</sup> Total Fe as FeO.

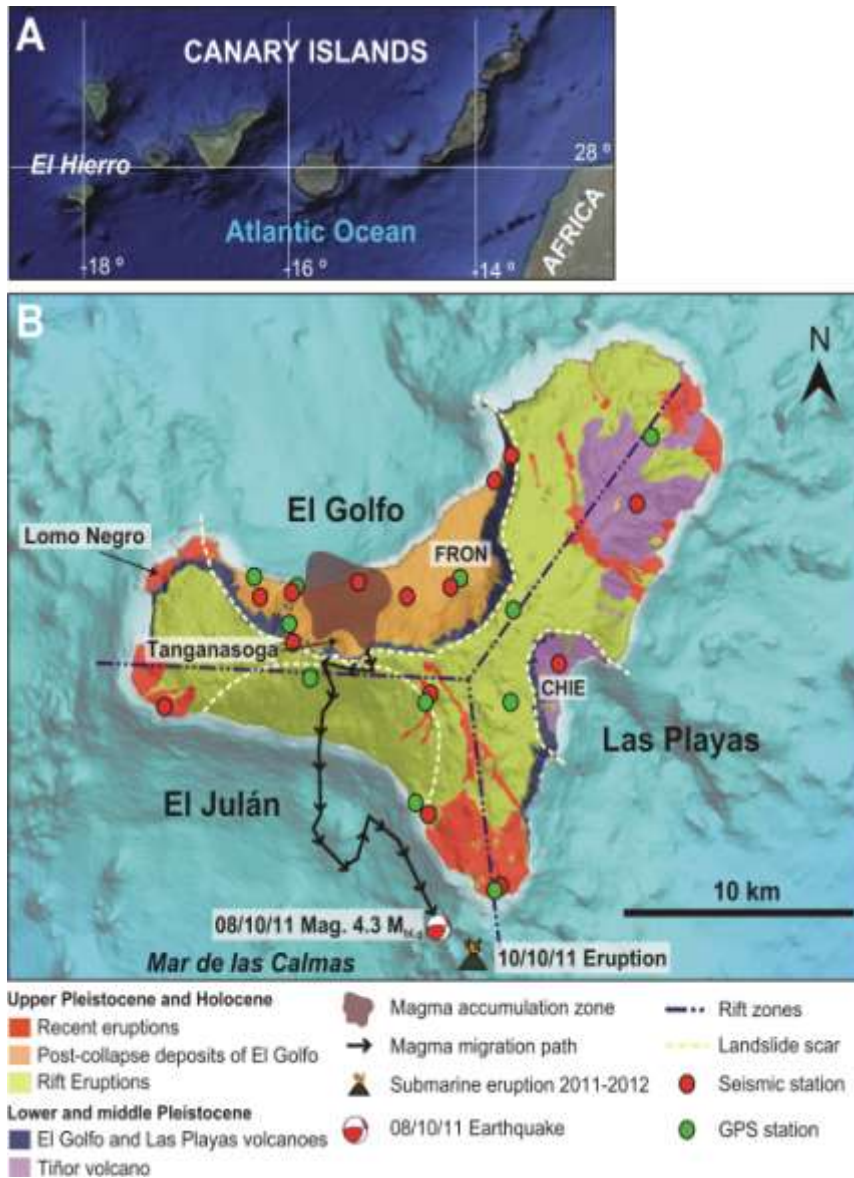
<sup>(3)</sup> n.d. not determined

<sup>(4)</sup> Mg# = molar MgO/MgO+FeO.

Table 2. Parameter values used for the numerical calculation.

<b>Geometrical parameters (km)</b>		<b>Physical parameters</b>	
<b>H_edifice</b>	5.5	Crustal density $\rho_c$ (kg/m <sup>3</sup> )	2900
<b>R_edifice</b>	29.3	Edifice density $\rho_{ed}$ (kg/m <sup>3</sup> )	2800
<b>R_domain</b>	500	Poisson's ratio $\nu_c$	0.25
<b>H_crust</b>	15	Young's modulus $E_c$ (GPa)	30
<b>H_water</b>	4	Gravity $g$ (m/s <sup>2</sup> )	9.81
		Mantle density $\rho_m$ (kg/m <sup>3</sup> )	3300
		Water density $\rho_w$ (kg/m <sup>3</sup> )	1000

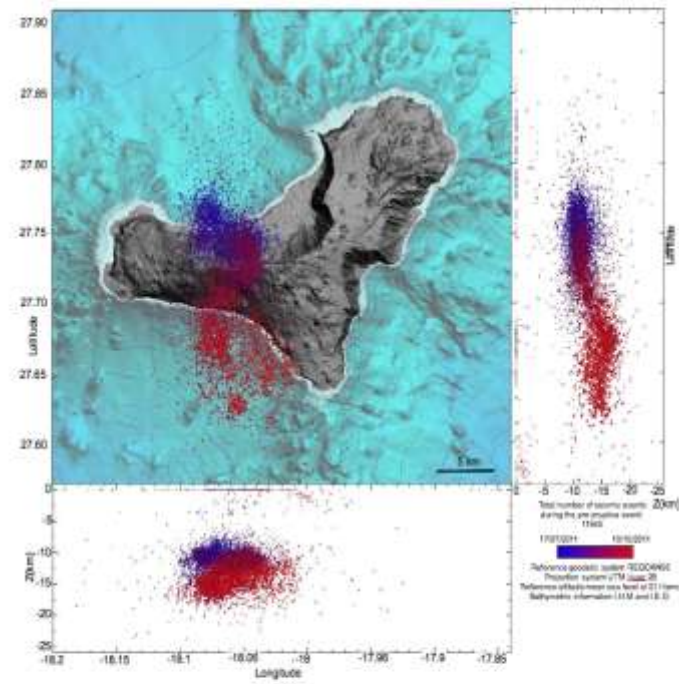




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2 Figure 1. A) Location map of the Canary Islands. B) Simplified geologic map of El Hierro [after  
 3 *Ancochea et al., 2004*] showing the main morphological and structural features, and the epicentral  
 4 migration of seismicity (simplified from Martí et al., 2012). Location and focal mechanism of the  
 5 earthquake preceding the onset of the eruption and location of the vent are also shown. Dark blue  
 6 dashed lines: trace of the rift zones. White dashed lines: trace of landslides scars. CHIE: Seismic  
 7 station FRON: Frontera GPS station

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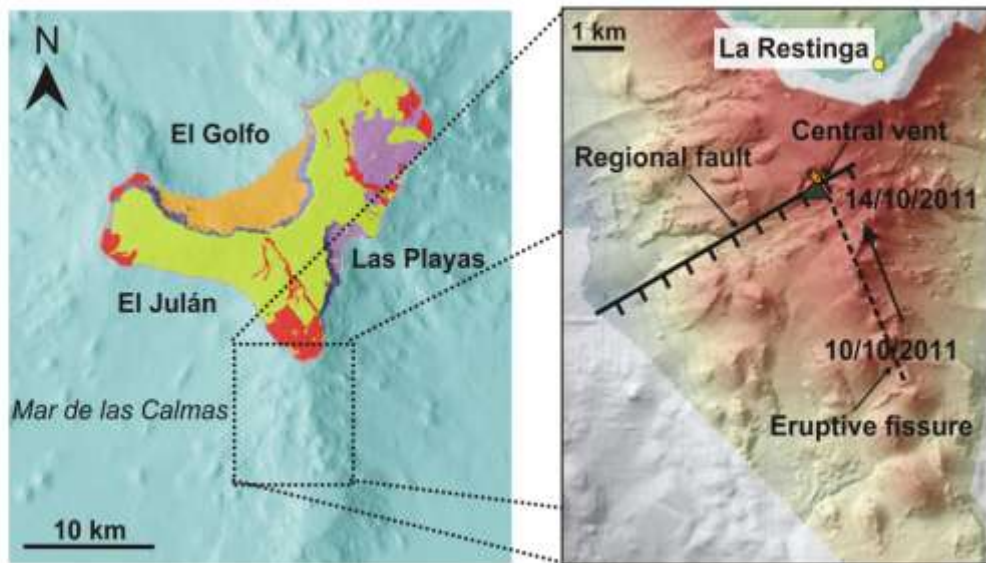
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11 Figure 2. Location epicentral and hypocentral location of seismic events recorded from 17 July to  
12 10 October 2011 (unrest episode). Data from IGN Seismic Catalogue ([www.ign.es](http://www.ign.es) and Data  
13 Repository)

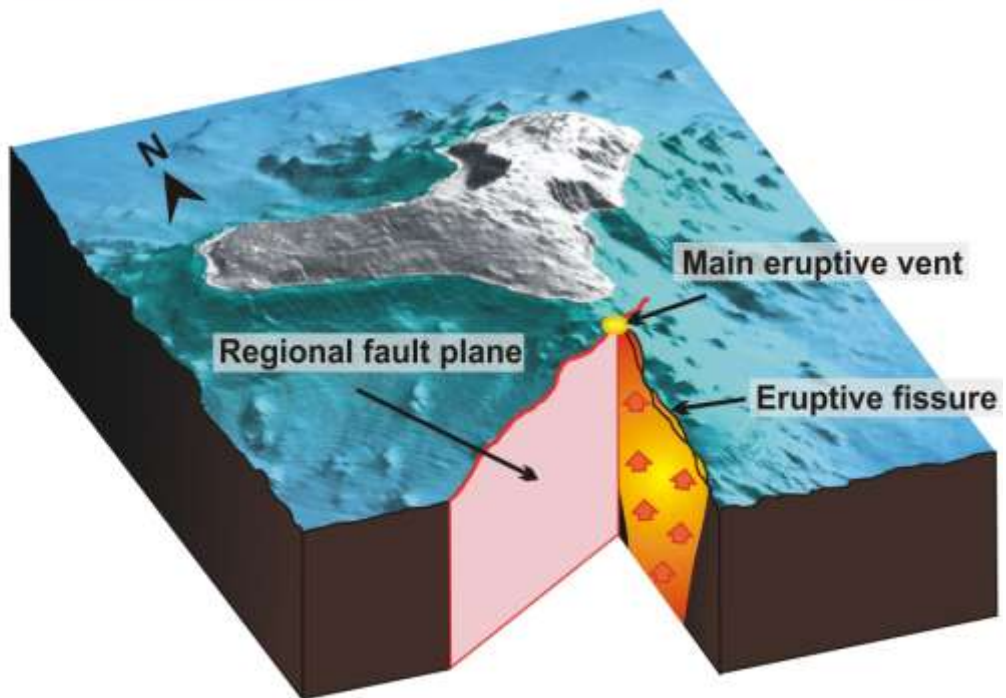
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A)



B)

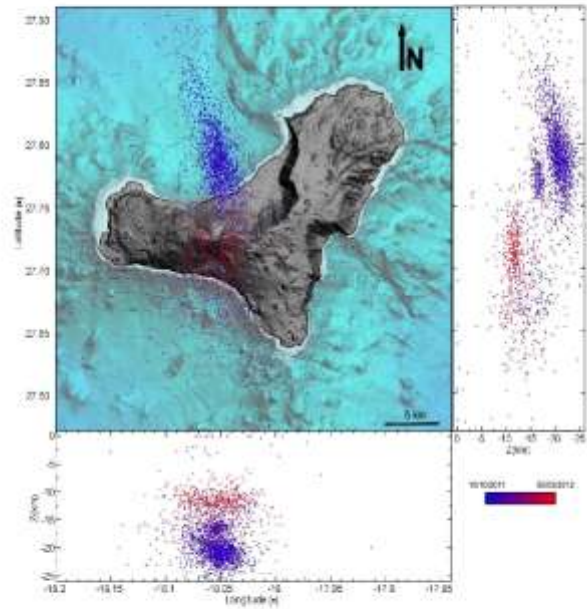


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17 Figure 3. A) DEM of the southern sector of El Hierro showing the trace of the eruptive fissure and  
18 its intersection with a NE-SW trending normal fault, where a central conduit and vent formed. B)  
19 Schematic explanation of the formation of a central conduit at the intersection of the two planes  
20 corresponding to the eruptive fissure and the normal fault, respectively

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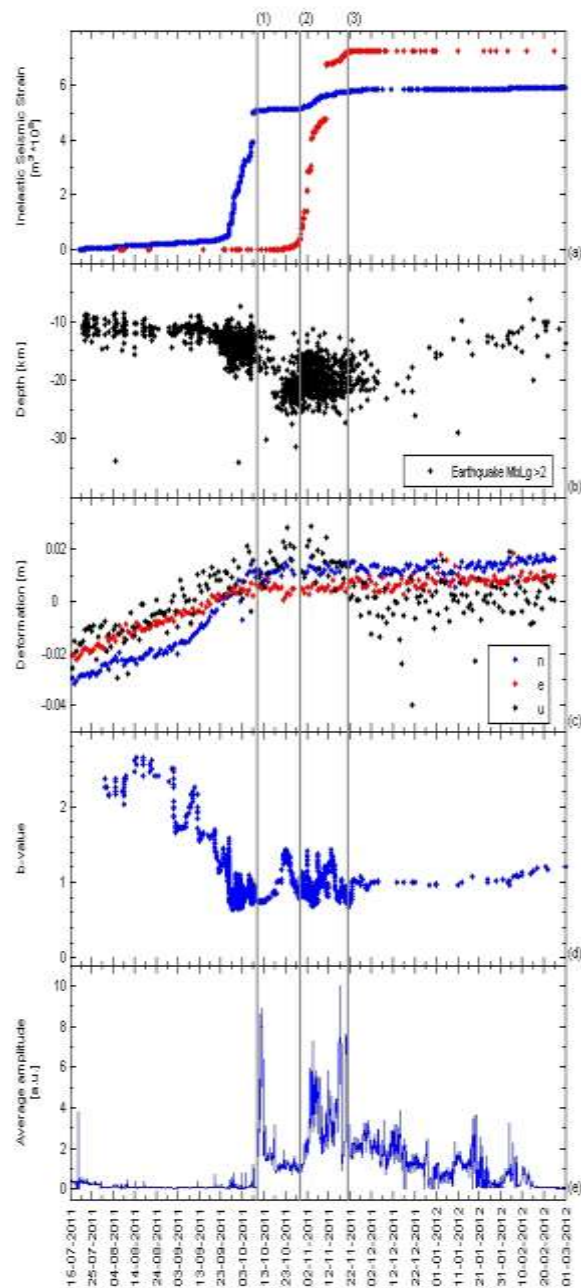
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24 Figure 4. Location epicentral and hypocentral location of seismic events recorded from 10 October  
25 2011 to 5 March 2012 (eruptive episode). Data from IGN Seismic Catalogue ([www.ign.es](http://www.ign.es) and Data  
26 Repository)

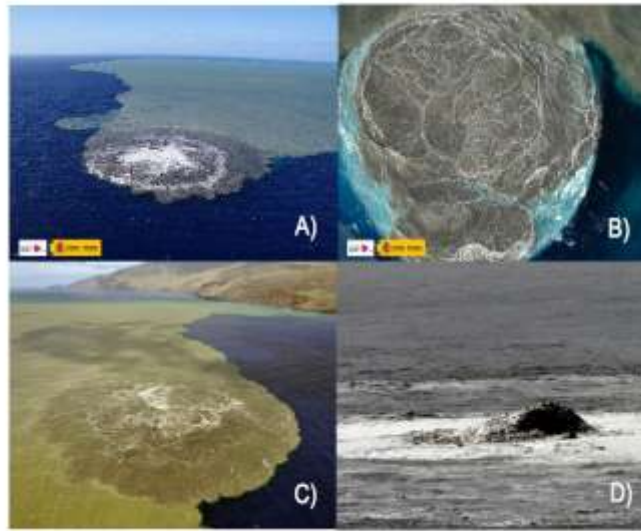
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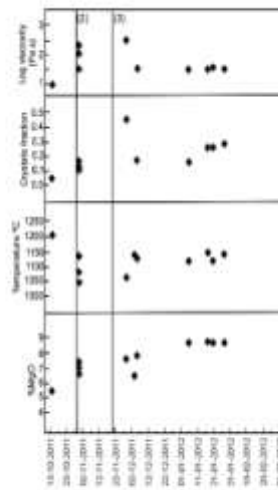


30 Figure 5. Diagram comparing the variation of the main geophysical parameters with time. A)  
 31 Inelastic seismic strain volume. B) Depth of seismic events. C) Surface deformation recorded at  
 32 FRON GPS station (see Fig. 1 for location). D) Gutenberg-Richter  $b$  value. E) Average amplitude of  
 33 the continuous seismic signal. Vertical black lines: 1) 10 October 2011 (eruption onset); 2)  
 34 October 2011; 3) 21 November 2011. See text for more explanation.



35

36 Figure 6. Photographs of the giant bubbles and other manifestations of the eruptive activity  
37 observed at the sea surface on the eruption vent in the early days of November, also coinciding with  
38 an increase of seismicity at the north of El Hierro and of the intensity of the tremor signal (see Fig.  
39 5). Images A, B and C: aerial views of the gigantic stain visible on the surface of Las Calmas Sea.  
40 Circular spot is approximately 1 km across. Image D: giant bubble formed on 4 November 2011.  
41 Source of photographs: IGN, EFE.



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43 Figure 7. Diagram comparing the variation of the main petrological parameters ( %MgO,  
44 temperature, crystals content, viscosity) with time.: Vertical black lines: same dates than in Fig. 5

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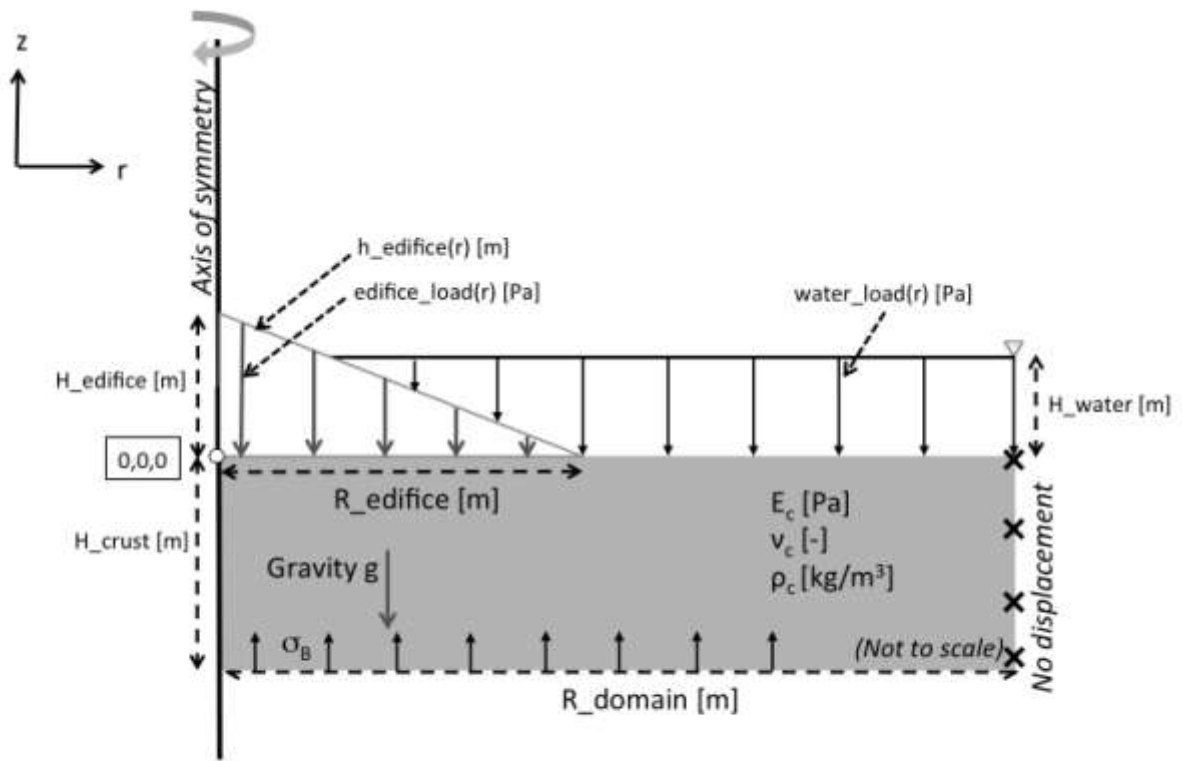
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54 Figure 8: Model geometry and boundary conditions.

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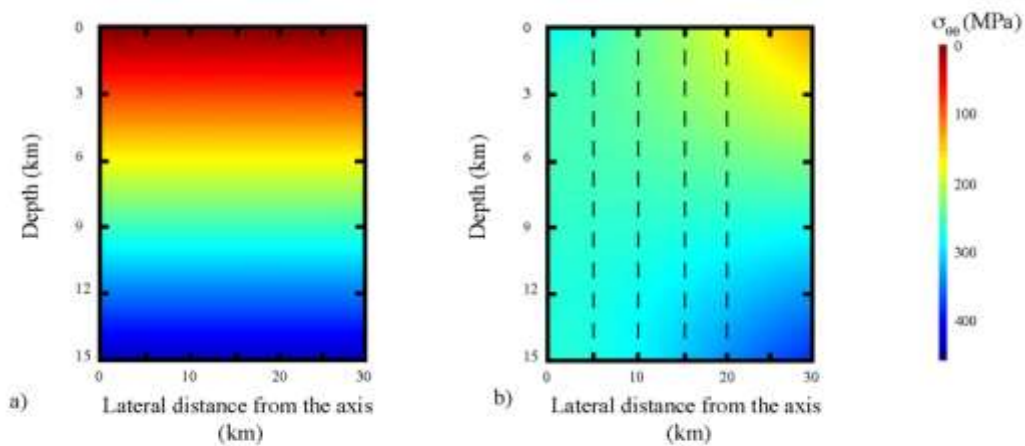
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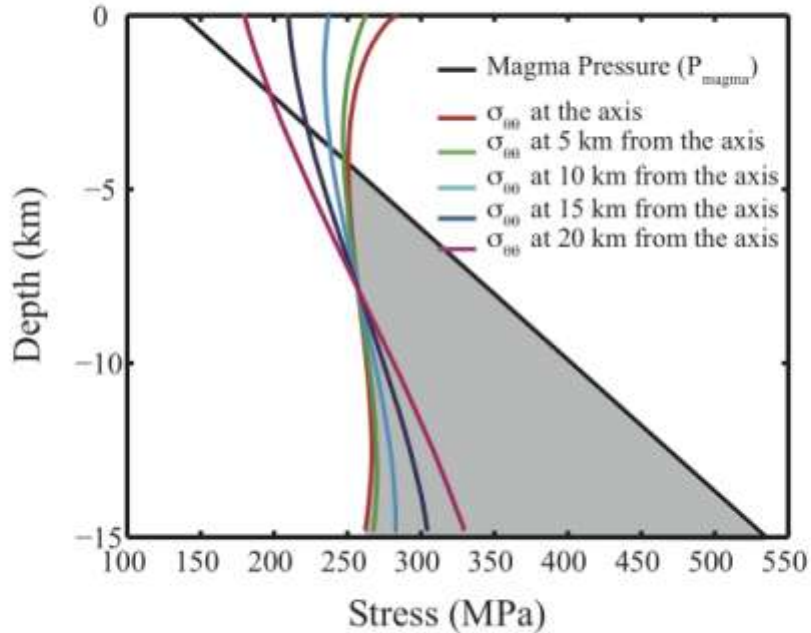
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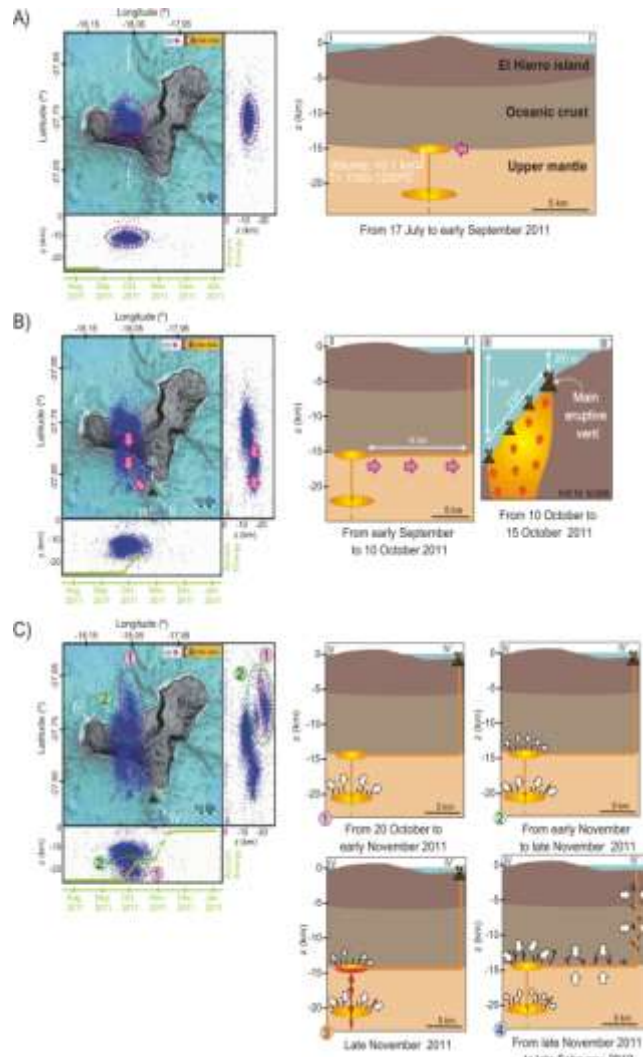
63 Figure 9: Amplitude of the horizontal stress component  $\sigma_{\theta\theta}$  (acting normal to vertical  
 64 dykes propagating radially from the edifice axis) as a function of the depth and lateral distance from  
 65 the axis. Stress are numerically calculated solving the equations for linear elasticity with the “ Finite  
 66 Element Method” (COMSOL software). By convention, compressive stress are taken as positive. a)  
 67 Case of reference, without any edifice load at the surface. There is no flexure of the crust, the  
 68 horizontal stress does not depend on the lateral distance but only increases with depth due to the  
 69 lithostatic load. b) Case studied, with an edifice acting as a load at the surface and inducing a  
 70 flexure of the crust. At the axis beneath the edifice, due to the crustal flexure, compression is  
 71 induced in the upper part of the crust and tension in the lower part. This stress acts together with the  
 72 lithostatic load, such that the horizontal stress is compressive and almost invariant with depth at the  
 73 axis. Vertical dashed lines are for the vertical profiles considered in figure 10 (at 5, 10 , 15 and 20  
 74 km from the axis).  
 75  
 76



77

78 Figure 10: Stress field profiles within the elastic crust at various distances from the axis of  
 79 symmetry (0km, 5km, 10km, 15km, 20km). By convention, compressive stresses are taken as  
 80 positive. Colored curves show the stress component  $\sigma_{\theta\theta}$ , which is the normal stress acting on the  
 81 wall of a vertical dyke propagating radially toward or away from the edifice. The magma pressure  
 82 profile within a basaltic dyke rising from a depth of 25 km is also reported in black. The distance  
 83 between the black curve and the colored ones corresponds to the elastic overpressure within a static  
 84 dyke compared to the surrounding field and is directly proportional to its opening. The grey area is  
 85 for the overpressure within a vertical dyke rising at the axis of symmetry beneath the center of the  
 86 volcano.

87



88 Figure 11. Cartoon representing a volcanological model of El Hierro eruption. Vignettes at the left  
 89 show plan views and east-west and north-south distribution of seismicity with time, from 17 July to  
 90 A) early September 2011, B) 15 October 2011, and C) late February 2012. The curve of  
 91 accumulated seismic energy released for each period is also shown (in green). Vignettes at the right  
 92 show interpretative cross sections (location is indicated on the left hand side maps) of the position  
 93 of magma and state of reservoirs at different times of the process. White arrows indicate  
 94 compression over different parts of the plumbing system due to its progressive decompression  
 95 caused by the withdrawal of magma. Intrusion of new magma into the shallow part of the plumbing  
 96 system occurred on late November 2011 is indicated in red. See text for more explanation