

PLUTO'S HYPERVOLATILE SURFACE ICES SOURCED FROM KBO AMORPHOUS WATER ICE COMPOSITES

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Introduction: The New Horizons (NH) mission flyby of 14 July 2015 verified the presence of an extensive surface ice sheet consisting of CO + N₂ ice in Sputnik Planitia, and a near global covering of layered and structured CH₄ ice around the planet [1]. At first glance, assuming Pluto was aggregated out of billions of cometary planetesimals, the prominence of large amounts of N₂ ice seems in tension with the ~0.2% vs water abundance found in comets. A similar tension results when the ~1.0 % CH₄ vs water in comets is analyzed. Using the new results of the 01 Jan 2019 New Horizons flyby of KBO MU69 [2], we have new constraints on the icy makeup of the smaller KBOs, which differ substantially from the icy makeup of comets in having abundant composite amorphous water ice and pure hydrogen-bonded ice phases [3]. In this paper we use this new information and new modeling of the thermodynamic properties of MU69's and Pluto's ices to argue that **slow accretion of hypervolatile rich amorphous ice phases present in small KBOs is the most likely source of the hypervolatiles observed in the large KBOs today.**

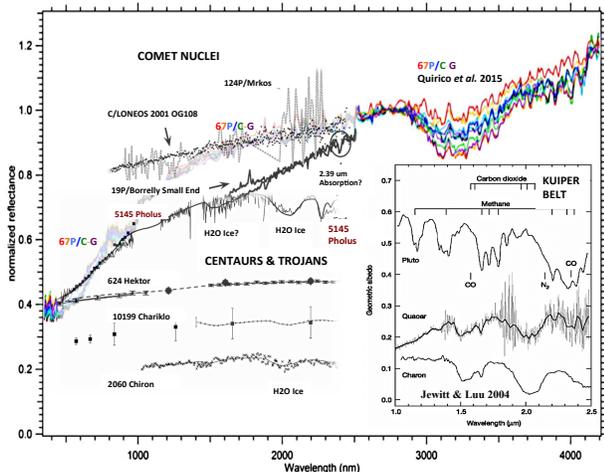


Figure 1 – Compendium of NIR reflectance spectra for Solar System comets, Centaurs, and Trojan small bodies, as published in [4]. Centaur Pholus, which is relatively good match for MU69 spectrally, is commonly known as the 'reddest object in the solar system', but in reality is only very red from 0.4 - 1.5 um. Longwards of 1.5 um H₂O ice absorption on its surface takes over and the reflectance becomes flat to slightly blue with increasing wavelength. (*Inset*) Typical KBO NIR reflectance spectra, dominated by hypervolatile surface ice absorptions, are grey to slightly blue in the NIR.

Evidence for Abundant Hypervolatile Ices on Large KBOs, But No Evidence for Them on MU69 or the Most Distant Centaurs: Water and methanol, but also the hypervolatile ices (N₂, CO, and CH₄), are known to be present on the largest KBOs, like Pluto [5-6]. By contrast, MU69 & the Centaurs show absorptions only due to H₂O and CH₃OH

ices [5-7; Fig. 1]. Correlations of the activity of 23 Centaurs with their perihelion distance from the Sun led Jewitt [8] to conclude that the activity of the inner (r_h < 10 AU) Centaurs is driven not by CO or CO₂ ice sublimation, but instead by crystallization of amorphous water ice and the “squeezing out” of other icy molecules unable to fit into the lattice pores of the newly crystallized ice. SP comet surface spectra do not show any obvious absorption features due to ices [9-11]; however, their comae, produced most actively by water ice sublimation, show an abundant range of icy species [12-13], with most species on the order of 0.1 – 1.0 % of the H₂O gas abundance, with the exception of CO (0.5 – 25%), CO₂ (2-12%), and CH₃OH (0.5 – 5.0%). The comet minor species abundances are consistent with their being sourced from crystalline water ice clathrate phases [14]. One final piece of important evidence is that on Pluto and Charon, we see extensional surface features & extremely spherical morphologies from internal processing & differentiation [15-16].

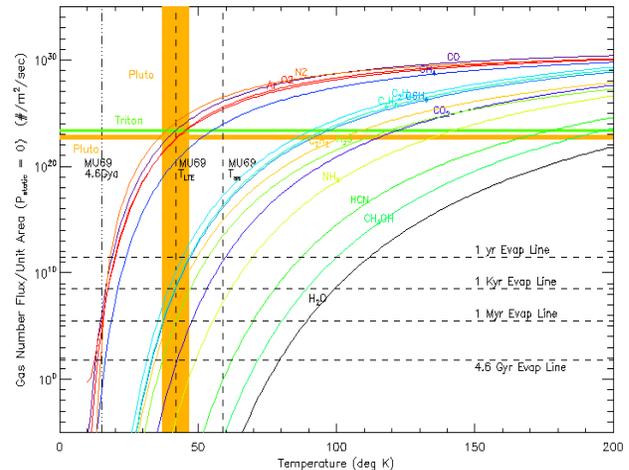


Figure 2 – Production rate of gas molecules, Q_{gas}, for a pure ice species vs ambient temperature per unit surface area, after [3]. The curves are controlled by the Vapor Pressure vs Temperature behavior for an ice. The dashed horizontal lines show the maximal Q_{gas} for which any appreciable solid ice will remain in a zero Pa environment. Above these lines, Q_{gas} * Δ(Time) > the molar surface density of an ice, ~10¹⁹/m². The MU69 flyby showed no evidence for pure hypervolatile ices in abundance today on the surface of MU69, consistent with the very short predicted residence times for pure hypervolatile ices (red KB curves) at current KB temperatures. By contrast, at the ~10 uBar surface of Pluto, the recondensation rate for hypervolatile ices (yellow horizontal line) can match the sublimation rate, and solid ice can coexist with atmospheric gas.

Possible Solutions to the Problem. Here we discuss 3 plausible physical scenarios for the formation of a hyper-

volatile rich Pluto (after rejecting an exogenous impactor hypervolatile source due to the work of Singer [17]).

(1) Since pure hypervolatile ices should be exhausted on small proto-KBOs within the first 10^5 - 10^6 yrs of their formation and warming by internal radioactivity and external sunlight (Fig. 2), one simple solution to the presence of N_2 and CH_4 is to **form Pluto and the other large KBOs very quickly, within 1 Myr of the PPD midplane clearing, while the hypervolatiles are still contained in the small source KBOs.** The ices seen on Pluto's surface in this scenario would be extracted from source KBOs by differentiation and concentrated on the surface. This scenario, while possible, is in some tension with the long dynamical time-scales found in the large heliocentric distance, low total PPD mass Kuiper Belt. It would also require that the heating effects of short lived radionuclides be minimal.

(2) Another physical possibility that explains the hypervolatile ice presence **is the formation of Pluto early on, but while there is still appreciable nebular gas in the KB region containing the hypervolatiles.** This can include the time in the first 10^6 yrs when the small KBOs are outgassing their hypervolatiles, thus acting as local secondary gas sources. The large KBOs thus act as large gravitational 'cold' traps for the ices being shed from the small KBOs as well as for any leftover primordial disk gas. The hypervolatile ices seen on Pluto's surface in this scenario are a "late Patina" accreted on top of a nearly fully developed Pluto, differentiated or not. The timescale for this scenario is also relatively quick, the **~10 Myr PPD disk gas lifetime** measured for nearby Milky Way stars in the latest surveys [18].

(3) **Extraction of hypervolatile ices from amorphous & crystalline water ice phases in differentiated Pluto.** In this scenario, the ices we see on the surface of Pluto are endogenous, and the least dense and most volatile species making up Pluto. They are analogous to the $\sim 10^{-4}$ fraction (by mass) of the Earth of water that covers $\sim 70\%$ of its surface. Whether one has to use a "strict comet crystalline water ice abundance recipe" + total complete Plutonian differentiation (in order to get enough hypervolatiles on the surface), or the higher abundances of hypervolatiles available in amorphous water ice phases of the small KBOs [3] + partial internal differentiation is a matter of debate. McKinnon+ 2017 [19] argued from impact modeling of the Pluto-Charon system that full differentiation is unlikely for these bodies.

Current evidence from the NH MU69 flyby for the "hyperabundance" of surface methanol ice, the strong similarity in the NIR surface spectrum of MU69 and the distant Centaur Pholus, and the outgassing activity patterns of the Centaurs as a whole all argue for the presence of abundant amorphous water ice phases and refractory hydrogen bonded pure non-water ice phases (CH_3OH , HCN , etc.) in the small KBOs [3]. The carrying capacity for the large pore spaces in the hypervolatile species in amorphous ice is, in general, much higher than that of clathrated material in the interstitial regions of the crystalline water ice phases [20] existing in the inner system comets.

Thus amorphous-water-ice-rich small KBOs could easily carry a few % of N_2 vs H_2O (by number), an order of magnitude higher than the $\sim 0.2\%$ found vs water in comets [9, 21]. Since Glein & Waite [22] have already calculated that Pluto can be made from fully differentiated comet stuff with the lightest phases on the surface, an object made from small KBO stuff that contains more hypervolatiles in cold amorphous water ice, rather than annealed inner system crystalline water ice, could produce Pluto's surface N_2 and CH_4 even more easily and without requiring complete internal differentiation of the body. It could also produce the surface hypervolatiles seen today in spite of earlier higher atmospheric loss rates due to an early warm Pluto, the Charon-forming impact, passing O/B stars and nearby supernovae, or periodic "super seasons" [23, 24].

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