Simplified Petrography Documentation

The ambition behind the development of the online simplified petrography thesaurus was to establish a common language between natural scientists and classicists, as well as art historians dealing with rock objects, and to have a controlled vocabulary for databases. In general, the methods of rock classification and the naming of rocks changed several times during the geosciences' history; also the different sub-disciplines within geosciences used different methods of classification.

As a consequence, the IUGS (International Union of Geological Sciences) established commissions on the systematics of igneous, metamorphic, sedimentary and superficial rocks. The results were adopted, refined and changed in the course of research projects by the British Geological Survey to establish more logical, consistent, systematic and clearly defined hierarchical systematics. The basic principle of the classification is a purely descriptive approach which avoids genetic and locative terms. Using that approach it should be possible to classify and name a rock-type without knowledge of its origin and genesis.

The hierarchical approach allows the users to assign a name to any rock at the level of the hierarchy most appropriate to the type and level of information available to them. The lower levels of the hierarchy will be used by geologists in the field, while those in the higher levels will be used where more detailed petrographic and/or geochemical information is available. The simplified petrography thesaurus displays the first three levels only; having a basic knowledge in geology and mineralogy, classicists and art historians should be able to correctly assign names. Currently the fourth level show national examples from the collections of the Natural History Museum [www.nhm-wien.ac.at/](http://www.nhm-wien.ac.at/) and the Geological Survey [http://www.geologie.ac.at/](http://www.geologie.ac.at/) in Vienna.

As an example, the old term Alabaster, originally named rocks from the Egyptian province of Alabastrites (in Ptolemaic time) was later used for soft, translucent white to light colored rocks marked with patterns of swirling bands of cream and brown. But Alabaster is composed of two different minerals, either hydrated calcite or gypsum with different genesis but similar hardness (the optical description also overlaps with the term marble). The recommended terms are calcareous sinter or gypsum stone (gypsum is the mineral and gypsum stone is the rock), the term alabaster can be used as qualifying prefix to the above mentioned names: alabastrous calcareous sinter or alabastrous gypsum stone. Of course this can be seen as a drawback, because the recommended name of the scheme is longer than the equivalent traditional term.

Used Literature:
Gillespie, M R, and Styles, M T. 1999: BGS Rock Classification Scheme, Volume 1,
Robertson, S. 1999: BGS Rock Classification Scheme, Volume 2, Classification of metamorphic rocks.