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NanoSIMS triple-oxygen isotope analyses of glass-type cosmic spherules from the Sør Rondane Mountains, East Antarctica

BASTIEN SOENS1, IAN A. FRANCHI2, STEVEN GODERIS1, SEANN J. MCKIBBIN1, MATTHIAS VAN GINNEKEN1,3, VINCIANE DEBAILLE3, PHILIPPE CLAEYS3

1AMGC, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Pleinlaan 2, 1050 Brussel, Belgium. (*Email: Bastien.Soens@vub.be).
2CEPSAR, Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, United Kingdom.
3Laboratoire G-Time, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Franklin Rooseveltlaan 50, 1050 Brussel, Belgium.

We report new triple-oxygen isotope data for glass-type cosmic spherules from the Sør Rondane Mountains, East Antarctica in the size range of 478-828 µm. Measurements were performed with a Cameca NanoSIMS 50L instrument at the Open University, Milton Keynes (United Kingdom).

Following the classification scheme for glass-type spherules by [1-2], 8 samples were classified as ‘normal’, while the 4 remaining samples belong to the ‘CAT’ (A10, A48) or ‘High Ca-Al’ groups (A01, A20), based on LA-ICP-MS data and defining a possible evaporation sequence. If this model is valid, sample A01 must have experienced extreme degrees of evaporation, as suggested by the strong fractionation trends in major and trace element diagrams (e.g., CaO+Al2O3 ≈ 50%, Average REE ≈ 24).

Results suggest that the majority (7/12) of glass-type cosmic spherules are related to carbonaceous chondrite precursors. Three samples lie close to the terrestrial fractionation line (TFL) and are consequently classified as ‘ambiguous’ [3]. Sample A21 plots between the ordinary and Rumuruti chondrite fields, while sample A01 lies unexpectedly close to the ordinary chondrite fields. The latter is contradictory to the strongly vapor fractionated major and trace element patterns mentioned earlier. Indeed, ‘CAT’ and ‘High Ca-Al’ spherules do not seem to have experienced high degrees of atmospheric entry processing (i.e., atmospheric oxygen contamination and mass-dependent fractionation) based on triple-oxygen isotope data solely. In light of these results, both oxygen isotope and elemental data are essential to fully comprehend the nature of strongly evaporated glass-type spherules with refractory compositions.