

Thermal diffusivity of aluminous spinels and magnetite at elevated temperature with implications for heat transport in Earth's transition zone

ANNE M. HOFMEISTER*

Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, Washington University, 1 Brookings Drive, St. Louis, Missouri 63130-4899, U.S.A.

ABSTRACT

The phonon component of thermal diffusivity (D) from 12 single crystals in the spinel family was measured at temperatures (T) of up to ~ 2000 K, using laser-flash analysis. Synthetic disordered spinel, 4 gemstones near MgAl_2O_4 , nearly ZnAl_2O_4 , 4 “hercynites” [$(\text{Mg}, \text{Fe}^{2+})(\text{Al}, \text{Fe}^{3+})_2\text{O}_4$], and 2 magnetites (nearly Fe_3O_4) were characterized using optical spectroscopy and electron microprobe analysis. The magnetic transition in Fe_3O_4 is manifest as a lambda curve in $1/D$, but otherwise, D decreases with increasing T and approaches a constant (D_{sat}) at high T . Part of the decrease in D as T increases results from disordering above ~ 700 K: these two effects were distinguished by making multiple heating runs. At 298 K, D decreases strongly as either cation substitution or Mg-Al disorder increases, whereas D_{sat} is moderately perturbed by substitutions. For both ordered and (equilibrium) disordered spinels and hercynites, the temperature dependence of $1/D$ is best described by low-order polynomial fits. For spinel, combining our data with previous cryogenic studies of thermal conductivity (k) constrains the T dependence of D and k from ~ 0 K to melting.

The response of D to disorder, impurity content, and cation mass for the aluminates is used to constrain $D(T)$ for $\gamma\text{-Mg}_2\text{SiO}_4$ and ringwoodite. Pressure derivatives are provided by relationships such as $\partial \ln(k_{\text{lat}})/\partial P = \partial \ln(K_T)/\partial P$. Our results show that the phonon contribution to heat transport in Earth's transition zone is high, particularly for large proportions of ringwoodite.

Keywords: Laser-flash method, high temperature, thermal diffusivity, IR spectroscopy, spinel-family minerals, high pressure, aluminates