Coloring Jupiter's clouds: Radiolysis of ammonium hydrosulfide (NH₄SH)

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A B S T R A C T
Here we present our recent studies on the color and spectral reflectance changes induced by ~0.9 MeV proton irradiation of ammonium hydrosulfide, NH₄SH, a compound predicted to be an important tropospheric cloud component of Jupiter and other giant planets. Ultraviolet-visible spectroscopy was used to observe and identify reaction products in the ice sample and digital photography was used to document the corresponding color changes at 10–160 K. Our experiments clearly show that the resulting color of the sample depends not only on the irradiation dose but also the irradiation temperature. Furthermore, unlike in our most recent studies of irradiation of NH₄SH at 120 K, which showed that higher irradiation doses caused the sample to appear green, the lower temperature studies now show that the sample becomes red after irradiation. However, comparison of these lower temperature spectra over the entire spectral range observed by HST shows that even though the color and spectrum resemble the color and spectrum of the GRS, there is still enough difference to suggest that another component may be needed to adequately fit spectra of the GRS and other red regions of Jupiter’s clouds. Regardless, the presence of NH₄SH in the atmosphere of Jupiter and other gas giants, combined with this compound’s clear alteration via radiolysis, suggests that its contribution to the ultraviolet-visible spectra of any of these object’s clouds is significant.

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1. Introduction

It is well-known that the optical properties of many solid materials can be modified by radiolysis and photolysis. For salts that are formed from the representative elements, radiation-induced modification can often be observed in the visible region, as the pristine material, which is typically white or colorless, will change color. These optical changes can be quantified using ultraviolet-visible (uv-vis) spectroscopy. For many salts, such as alkali halides (Schulman and Compton, 1962), such color changes are attributed to the formation of defect/color centers, which preferentially absorb visible light.

A salt that we have had an interest in over the last few years is ammonium hydrosulfide (NH₄SH). This salt is composed of NH₄⁺ and HS⁻ ions, yet is somewhat unlike many other salts found on Earth in that under typical atmospheric conditions and room temperature it is unstable and promptly decomposes into H₂S and NH₃ gases. However, condensed NH₄SH is believed to be found in the clouds of many giant planets in our Solar System (e.g. Atreya et al., 1999; Sromovsky and Fry, 2010a,b; Roman et al., 2013), most notably Jupiter, where it is believed to be one of the main components found in the tropospheric clouds (Weidenschilling and Lewis, 1973).

The prediction of a significant presence of NH₄SH in the jovian atmosphere is particularly interesting given that there are color regions throughout the jovian clouds. One of the most well-known regions is Jupiter's Great Red Spot (GRS). Interestingly, although the GRS may have been observed as early as the 1660s by Hooke and Cassini, the origin of its color is still unclear. Many candidates, including NH₄SH, have been suggested (West et al., 1986), with the most recent proposals coming from a residue produced by photolysis of a NH₃ and C₂H₂ gas mixture (Carlson et al., 2016; Sromovsky et al., 2017). One difficulty in correlating the color of the GRS or any other red region to a specific absorber is that such regions have no strong absorption bands in the uv-vis region, where most of the observational data is acquired. Thus, in this context “color” refers to the spectral slope below ~600 nm, which is steeper than the full-disk geometric albedo spectrum of Jupiter (Karkoschka, 1994). Furthermore, it has been shown that the GRS's color (i.e., spectral slope) varies with time being brown,
red, beige, white, or even blue (Simon et al., 2015), indicating that the composition of the GRS may also be changing, potentially further complicating the discovery of a unique solution for the origin of the colors of Jovian clouds and the GRS.

Given that condensed NH$_4$SH is an important Jovian cloud component and that many salts change color via irradiation, it seems likely that this compound contributes to colors in Jupiter's atmosphere. However, there are few laboratory studies on NH$_4$SH to test this hypothesis. This is perhaps partly because NH$_4$SH must be synthesized in the laboratory, and that the most straightforward low-temperature synthesis involves two reactants, as shown in (1), that are toxic, odiferous, and somewhat detrimental to laboratory equipment.

$$\text{NH}_3(g) + \text{H}_2\text{S}(g) \rightarrow \text{NH}_4\text{SH}(s)$$

(1)

Over the past decade, we have made a concerted effort to study compounds that have astrochemical relevance, but that may have received little attention because of inherent difficulties associated with their preparation. Recent projects relevant to the Jovian system are the formation (Moore et al., 2007b), radiation stability (Loeffler et al., 2011), and thermal regeneration of sulfuric acid hydrates (Loeffler and Hudson, 2012), as well as the low-temperature thermally induced reactions between SO$_2$ and H$_2$O (Loeffler and Hudson, 2010), SO$_2$ and H$_2$S (Loeffler and Hudson, 2013), H$_2$O$_2$ and NH$_3$ ices (Loeffler and Hudson, 2015), and O$_3$ and SO$_2$ ices (Loeffler and Hudson, 2016). In light of the problem concerning the GRS's color, we have recently begun studying the radiation chemistry of NH$_4$SH, using both IR (Loeffler et al., 2015) and uv-vis spectroscopy (Loeffler et al., 2016) as our main analytical tools. We are focusing on radiation chemistry because Jupiter's atmosphere is subject to energetic particle bombardment and solar-UV photolysis, which alter the chemical composition and perhaps color the originally featureless cloud components. Our studies showed that the sulfur reaction products possess broad absorption bands in the uv-vis spectra of NH$_4$SH (Loeffler et al., 2016), which were reasonably consistent with the only other laboratory work on NH$_4$SH chemistry (Lebofsky and Fegley, 1976). We also found in our previous studies that although irradiated NH$_4$SH shows a strong spectral feature that is absent from GRS spectra, causing our samples to appear green, warming such ices to temperatures still within the range of the atmospheric clouds removes this absorption, significantly improving the fit between the laboratory and remotely acquired spectra.

Given that our most recent paper only reported irradiations at one temperature, 120 K, and that heating our sample appears to change its composition, we decided to investigate how the radiation chemistry of NH$_4$SH changes with temperature. As in our previous studies, we use ~0.9 MeV protons as an analog to the low-energy, and more-abundant, cosmic rays present in the Jovian atmosphere. Specifically, we irradiated crystalline NH$_4$SH at 10–160 K with ~0.9 MeV protons, while monitoring the sample with uv-vis spectroscopy and digital imaging. These in situ measurements allow us to determine stability and chemical changes in our sample as a function of temperature and radiation dose and complement our previous IR studies over roughly the same temperature range. The results of such measurements reveal the role of irradiation temperature in altering chemical composition and whether any of the products formed from irradiated NH$_4$SH are plausible candidates for coloring the GRS or other regions in Jupiter's clouds.

2. Experimental

The experimental approach and NH$_4$SH preparation were as described in our first uv-vis study of NH$_4$SH (Loeffler et al., 2016), so only a brief summary is presented here. All experiments were performed in a high vacuum system (~1 × 10$^{-2}$ torr) on a sandblasted aluminum substrate, and all samples of solid NH$_4$SH were synthesized by depositing a mixture of H$_2$S and NH$_3$ at 90 K and warming it at 2 K min$^{-1}$ to 160 K, where it was annealed for 30 minutes to ensure crystallization. We chose to focus on the crystalline phase of NH$_4$SH, because this is likely the starting phase of the ice at the temperature of the Jovian clouds (Loeffler et al., 2015), yet we point out that in this spectral region the initial phase of the ice did not appear to strongly affect our results. After crystallization, the samples were then cooled to the desired irradiation temperature. The thickness of all samples studied was ~17 μm.

We irradiated our NH$_4$SH ices with 0.924 MeV p$^+$ (referred to in the text as ~0.9 MeV) which were of sufficient energy to pass through the entire ice sample; with the average energy loss being ~0.00035 eV μm$^{-1}$ (Ziegler, 2010). Samples were biased at +35 V to minimize the loss of secondary electrons. The proton beam current typically was 100 nA, for an incident dose rate (flux) of about 1.3 × 10$^{11}$ p$^+$ cm$^{-2}$ s$^{-1}$ in NH$_4$SH.

Before, during, and after irradiation, spectra of ice samples were recorded at 250–1000 nm at a resolution of 1.5 nm using an Avantes UL2048XL fiber optic spectrometer. Light was aimed directly at the sample's surface (0° incidence) and reflected light was collected at 9°. The small phase angle was chosen to make our results more directly comparable to Jovian observations. The reflectance of our samples is given by $R = (I_{\text{sample}} - I_{\text{dark}}) / I_{\text{reference}} - I_{\text{dark}}$. In addition to measuring spectral reflectance, we also photographed our samples with a Canon EOS Rebel T3i camera. During the experiments the camera was mounted on a tripod and photographs were taken so that the field of view included both the sample and the surroundings to ensure that the lighting was consistent; the images were subsequently cropped to show only the sample. Preliminary experiments revealed that our uv source could alter an NH$_4$SH ice sample on the timescale of our experiments in a manner that was qualitatively similar to what we observed with low ion irradiation fluences. To minimize this problem, the light needed to collect reflectance spectra passed through a glass (BK-7) window, which decreased the intensity of uv light ($λ < 300$ nm) by an order of magnitude compared to a fused silica window. However, we also observed that the light source could alter the transmission properties of the window itself if left on for long periods of time, and thus we minimized the time our window was illuminated with the uv source and performed multiple checks to ensure that the observed spectral changes shown here were only due to changes in the ice sample. Future studies will investigate in more detail the effect of photolysis.

3. Results

3.1. Color formation

We irradiated crystalline NH$_4$SH at 10, 50, 120, and 160 K with ~0.9 MeV protons. Fig. 1 shows each sample after the same four radiation doses. Before irradiation, each sample was transparent and colorless, and thus only the gray aluminum substrate was evident. However, at low irradiation fluences (left columns), each sample developed a yellowish hue that was most evident at the lower irradiation temperatures. With increasing fluence, the yellowish hue evolved into a more reddish color at lower irradiation temperatures ($T < 50$ K), while at the higher irradiation temperatures it became green, rather than red.

We also irradiated NH$_3$ and H$_2$S ices at 50 K. These samples were grown so that they contained the same amount of nitrogen (or sulfur) atoms as the NH$_4$SH samples, i.e., they were about half as thick. Both NH$_3$ and H$_2$S were transparent and colorless before irradiation, and thus, like the NH$_4$SH ices, only the gray aluminum substrate is evident in photographs. Irradiation did not produce
any colors in the NH$_3$ samples (see Fig. 2 inset), but it did cause the H$_2$S ice to change color (see Fig. 3 inset). In fact, the color change observed in H$_2$S was qualitatively similar, albeit fainter, to that in NH$_4$SH irradiated at 50 K: initially the ice developed a yellowish hue and at higher fluences became reddish.

3.2. UV-visible spectroscopy

In addition to photographing our irradiated samples, we also monitored them with uv-vis spectroscopy. The uv-vis spectrum of unirradiated crystalline NH$_4$SH is shown in the top of Fig. 4. Longer than 300 nm, the spectrum is essentially featureless and the reflectance increases slightly with wavelength. The decrease in reflectance below 300 nm is due to absorption by SH$^-$, which is centered near 230 nm (Ellis and Golding, 1959; Guenther et al., 2001). The remaining reflectance spectra in the top panel of Fig. 4 were taken after irradiation with $\sim$0.9 MeV protons at 50 K. At low fluences an absorption band centered near 425 nm is clearly resolved. At higher fluences, the band becomes broader, particularly on the low wavelength side, and another band centered near 610 nm becomes evident as well. Changing the irradiation temperature did not alter the spectra drastically, although differences were observed (see 160 K irradiation in middle panel of Fig. 4). For instance, the 610 nm absorption was seen at lower fluences and was better resolved at 160 K than at 50 K (see Fig. 4).

We also compared our NH$_4$SH spectral results with those from reference (blank) experiments in which NH$_3$ and H$_2$S ices and the bare aluminum substrate were irradiated at 50 K. As expected, the bare substrate showed no change within the error of our measurements ($\sim$1%). The evolution of the ultraviolet-visible reflectance spectra of our NH$_3$ and H$_2$S ices during irradiation at 50 K is shown in Figs. 2 and 3, respectively. Longer than $\sim$350 nm, the NH$_3$ spec-

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Fig. 1. Photographs of crystalline NH$_4$SH before and during irradiation at temperatures of 10, 50, 120 and 160 K with $\sim$0.9 MeV protons. Each column corresponds to the following ion fluence (left to right): 0.08; 0.31, 2.5, and 5.0 $\times$ $10^{13}$ p$^+$ cm$^{-2}$.}

Fig. 2. Ultraviolet-visible spectra of crystalline NH$_3$ during irradiation at 50 K with $\sim$0.9 MeV protons. The ion fluence is given at the right (in units of $10^{13}$ p$^+$ cm$^{-2}$) of each spectrum. The spectra have been vertically offset for clarity. Photographs (from left to right) correspond to spectra taken after 0 and 5.0 $\times$ $10^{13}$ p$^+$ cm$^{-2}$. The unshifted reflectance spectra have been included as supplementary data.

Fig. 3. Ultraviolet-visible spectra of crystalline H$_2$S during irradiation at 50 K with $\sim$0.9 MeV protons. The ion fluence is given at the right (in units of $10^{13}$ p$^+$ cm$^{-2}$) of each spectrum. The spectra have been vertically offset for clarity. Photographs (from left to right) correspond to spectra taken after 0, 0.62, and 5.0 $\times$ $10^{13}$ p$^+$ cm$^{-2}$. The unshifted reflectance spectra have been included as supplementary data.
4. Discussion

4.1. Radiation chemistry

One characteristic of ammonium hydrosulfide that makes its radiation chemistry interesting is that this solid is not composed of NH₄SH molecules, but rather of ammonium (NH₄⁺) and bisulfide (SH⁻) ions. Thus, the chemical changes induced by radiolysis are complex, as the products may not only form from each of these individual ions but also from a combination of the two. The only publications on the reaction chemistry of NH₄SH are the radiation-chemical studies from our laboratory (Loeffler et al., 2015, 2016) and an earlier paper on the photochemistry of NH₄SH (Lebofsky and Fegley, 1976). The later work and our most recent publication (Loeffler et al., 2016) were restricted to one temperature, with UV-vis reflectance spectroscopy as the main analytical technique, whereas our initial study (Loeffler et al., 2015), used IR spectroscopy as the main analytical tool and covered 10–160 K. The following discussion is based on those previous studies.

Exposure of solid ammonium hydrosulfide to ionizing radiation, such as our p+ beam, produces tracks of ionizations and excitations through the sample from the thousands of secondary electrons generated by each incident proton. The expected initial reaction steps for NH₄⁺ are

\[
\text{NH}_4^+ \rightarrow \text{NH}_4^+ + \text{H} 
\]

(2)

\[
\text{NH}_4^+ \rightarrow \text{NH}_4^+ + \text{NH}_2^+ + e^- 
\]

(3)

The NH₃⁺ is expected to remain in our ices to temperatures as high as 170 K (Cole, 1961; Hyde and Freeman, 1961), while the NH₂⁺ shown in (3) should react with the anion, SH⁻ (a strong base) to form H₂S

\[
\text{NH}_3^+ + \text{SH}^- \rightarrow \text{NH}_3^+ + \text{H}_2\text{S} 
\]

(4)

In addition to (2) or (3), the excited ammonium ion could also react with SH⁻ to form H₂S. Combination of NH₃⁺ and e⁻ will regenerate NH₃. Alternatively, if an adjacent ion pair is excited, then NH₃ and H₂S will be produced. If NH₃ and H₂S are produced in close proximity, then they should react to reform the original cation and anion in the sample.

For SH⁻, we expect reactions similar to those described for NH₄⁺ involving ionization

\[
\text{SH}^- \rightarrow \text{SH}^+ \rightarrow \text{S}^2^- + \text{H}^+ 
\]

(5)

\[
\text{SH}^- \rightarrow \text{SH}^+ \rightarrow \text{S} + \text{H} + \text{e}^- 
\]

(6)

\[
\text{SH}^- \rightarrow \text{SH}^+ \rightarrow \text{SH} + \text{e}^- 
\]

(7)

The mercapto (SH) radical in (7) has been reported as one of the main products formed in low-temperature photolysis of H₂S (Stiles et al., 1966). The sulfur atoms in (6) can react, resulting in longer-chained species, such as:

\[
\text{S} + \text{SH}^- \rightarrow \text{HS}_2^- 
\]

(8)

\[
\rightarrow \text{H}^+ + \text{S}_2^- 
\]

(9)

The 425 nm band seen in our spectra is likely caused by the sulfur products in (8) and (9), which have also been observed in liquid solutions (Giggenbach, 1972). Either of the anions formed in (8) or (9) could also produce the S₃⁻ radical we observed at 610 nm (Holzer et al., 1969; Chivers and Drummond, 1973; Chivers and Lau, 1982; Dubois et al., 1987) through a reaction with the SH radical produced in (7):

\[
\text{SH} + \text{HS}_2^- \rightarrow \text{S}_3^- + \text{H}_2 
\]

(10)

Buildup of a significant amount of S₃⁻ can cause dimerization, forming S₆²⁻ through

\[
2 \text{S}_3^- \rightarrow \text{S}_6^- 
\]

(11)

which also likely contributes to this broad shorter wavelength absorption, given that S₆²⁻ has been observed between 410 and
480 nm in solution (Dubois et al., 1988, 1989; Prestel and Schindewolf, 1987). Other key contributors to this shorter wavelength region could be neutral amorphous sulfur (Dubois et al., 1988), which would result from a build-up of sulfur atoms in the ice.

Besides chemical reactions that form primarily N-bearing or S-bearing products, we also expect products that contain both of these atoms. The one product that is consistent with our spectra and previous IR studies (Loeffler et al., 2015) is the S₃N⁻ anion. A possible pathway to form S₃N⁻ would involve radiolytically produced NH₃ and a large number of sulfur atoms. A likely candidate, given the published IR (Bojes et al., 1982), Raman (Chivers and Lau, 1982), and UV absorptions is S₂N²⁻ (Chivers and Lau, 1982), which shows absorptions at 666 cm⁻¹ (15.015 μm), 686 cm⁻¹ (14.577 μm) and 425 nm, respectively. A possible formation pathway would resemble that given by Dubois et al. (1987):

\[ \text{S} + 3 \text{NH}_3 \rightarrow \text{S}_2 \text{N}^+ + 2 \text{S}_2 \quad \text{(12)} \]

4.2. Sample color

The reflectance spectrum of unirradiated NH₃SH only changed by 4% across the visible spectral region (390–700 nm), making it colorless to the eye. However, irradiation quickly caused the sample to change color, producing various shades of red, yellow, or green, which depended on both the ion fluence and the irradiation temperature (see Table 1 for summary). The first spectral band, likely from HS⁻, S₂⁻, or S₃N⁻, is at 425 nm, at the edge of the visible region and causing the sample to appear yellow. Other contributors to the yellow color could be S₂⁻, which may precede the formation of S₃⁻, or the dimer, S₆²⁻ (Chivers and Drummond, 1973; Raulin et al., 2011). Further irradiation broadened this band, causing the yellow wavelengths to become absorbing, leaving the red wavelength as the most reflective. At low irradiation temperatures, this reddish color dominated, yet at the higher irradiation temperature the S₃⁻ radical’s absorption band near 610 nm, which by itself would cause the sample to appear blue (Chivers and Elder, 2013), was more pronounced. This absorption covered the longer wavelength region that preferentially absorbed red light, resulting in giving the sample a greenish hue.

4.3. Comparison with previous work

Besides our recent work (Loeffler et al., 2016), the only other published study of NH₃SH over our wavelength range is the UV photolysis work of Lebofsky and Fegley (1976), which we show for comparison in the bottom panel of Fig. 4. Our uv-vis spectra before proton irradiation in Fig. 4 (top), which show that the sample lacks absorption features over the visible region, are consistent with Lebofsky and Fegley (1976). In addition, the position and general shape of the absorption features observed in our NH₃SH ice’s spectra after proton irradiation are also in agreement with those observed after photolysis (see Fig. 4 bottom). The similarity of the two spectra after the ice has been modified by UV photons or MeV protons, suggesting the formation of similar products, is consistent with what we have observed previously for other ices (e.g., Gerakines et al., 2000; Hudson and Moore, 2001) and is evidence that most of the chemical changes result from the secondary electrons being formed during ion irradiation and UV photolysis.

Although the new products appear to be similar in the two experiments, the different assignments given by each study merit comment. Lebofsky and Fegley (1976) attributed absorptions below 500 nm to ammonium polysulfides, (NH₄)ₓSₓ, where x = 5–7, but since NH₄⁺ does not absorb there, the actual chromophore must be one or more polysulfur anions (S₃²⁻–S₇²⁻). This is consistent with our and previous identifications, although we suggest that the polysulfur anion could also be a shorter chain (e.g., x = 1) as well. We also point out that S₃N⁻ ions, such as S₃N⁺, will also contribute to absorption below 500 nm. Saying more to definitively identify the exact sulfur anion that is formed using absorptions in this region would be difficult, as spectral overlap is considerable. Besides the shorter wavelength absorption observed, both studies also clearly showed an absorption near 600 nm. Lebofsky and Fegley (1976) used Extended Hückel calculations to suggest S₅ radical (x = 5–7) as the source. While our post-irradiation heating results (Loeffler et al., 2016) are consistent with this absorption being from a radical, we think S₃⁺ is a more likely candidate, which is consistent with previous Raman (Holzer et al., 1969; uv-vis (Holzer et al., 1969; Chivers and Lau, 1982), and IR studies (Holzer et al., 1969; Loeffler et al., 2015).

The other ices irradiated, NH₃ and H₂S, also merit a few comments. Spectra of ion irradiated H₂S in our work and UV photolyzed H₂S in Lebofsky and Fegley (1976) are similar, and also resemble spectra of irradiated NH₃SH. In each case they have a single absorption near 600 nm and decrease in reflectance below ~500 nm. These similarities support the idea that the main observable products formed during UV photolysis and ion irradiation are predominately sulfur-bearing ions and molecules. However, spectra of our proton-irradiated H₂S ices differ from those of both the NH₃SH ices and the photolyzed H₂S ices in that the characteristic absorptions appear to be shifted to shorter wavelengths, with higher wavelength absorption appearing near 535 nm and the decrease in the UV beginning between 425 and 475 nm (depending on irradiation dose). Given the similarity of the photolyzed and radiolyzed ices in NH₃SH experiments, it is unclear why there is this difference for H₂S ices. Regardless, we can make spectral assignments in our experiments based on previous studies. The 535-nm absorption is likely due to longer-chained sulfur molecules, in particular S₄, which has been observed to absorb at ~530 nm in low-temperature (20 K) inert gas matrices (Meyer et al., 1972). Similarly, other molecules of the form Sₙ strongly absorb in this region (Eckert and Steudel, 2003) and likely contribute to the shorter wavelength absorption as well, even if their concentration is low. Finally, previous IR studies have shown that one of the main products resulting from irradiation of H₂S-ices is of the form H₂Sₓ (Moore et al., 2007b; Strazzulla et al., 2009; Loeffler et al., 2015), where x ≥ 2, making it also a likely contributor to the shorter wavelength absorption. For NH₄-ice, UV photolysis induces a nominal change in the reflectance spectrum, whereas we observe an absorption near 300 nm at high doses in our experiments. This difference is likely because the absorptivity of solid NH₃ is very low (Dawes et al., 2007) at the range of wavelengths emitted by the xenon lamp (220–300 nm) used by Lebofsky and Fegley (1976). From the expected products of NH₃, the most likely candidate is N₅⁺ (Delcourt et al., 1976; Moore et al., 2007a, Parent et al., 2009), although it absorbs at a slightly higher wavelength than expected from liquid studies.

Table 1: Summary of absorption band positions, colors, and identifications in our ices after ion irradiation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Irradiated NH₃SH</th>
<th>Irradiated H₂S</th>
<th>Irradiated NH₃</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S₃N⁻</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample color</td>
<td>Irradiated NH₃SH</td>
<td>Irradiated H₂S</td>
<td>Irradiated NH₃</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All T, low doses</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Pale yellow</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50K, high doses</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Pale red</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120K, high doses</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4. Giant-planet considerations

A robust quantitative comparison of our laboratory data to atmospheric spectra, which depend on a number of parameters in addition to composition (Strycker et al., 2011), would require derivation of optical constants of our irradiated ice sample. However, the similarity between the viewing geometry used to observe the GRS as well as other red regions of Jupiter and our experimental configuration still lends itself well for a qualitative comparison. Although the uv-vis region is difficult for diagnostic purposes, we see that the spectrum of the GRS is characterized by having high reflectance at the longer wavelengths, a strong slope at intermediate wavelengths, and being relatively flat at the shorter wavelengths (Fig. 5). In the data presented here, the best fit and corresponding best color is that of the low-temperature spectrum at low doses (Fig. 5 top). However, one can see that these data seem to diverge below 400 nm. Higher dose irradiations improve the fit at shorter wavelengths, but the appearance of S$_2$H$^-$ lessens the quality of the fits in the region responsible for the color. A similar comment can be made about the sample irradiated at the higher temperatures (see Fig. 4 middle panel), yet the discrepancy at longer wavelengths is more drastic. Regardless, even though the visible appearance of our sample (red color) at low temperatures has the reddish color routinely ascribed to the GRS, it is clear that none of these irradiation temperatures can completely reproduce the entire spectrum of the GRS, underscoring the importance of using the largest spectral range for comparison as possible. We note that we have previously reported (Loeffler et al., 2016) that warming any of these samples to 200 K causes the long wavelength absorption to disappear, improving the spectral fit significantly (see Fig. 5 top). Thus, upon considering both our old and new data, the spectrum of annealed irradiated NH$_3$SH still gives the best fit to the spectrum of the GRS.

The only other recent laboratory work on the problem of Jovian colors comes from Carlson et al. (2016), who photolyzed a NH$_3$ + C$_2$H$_4$ gas-phase mixture and recorded the visible spectrum of the resulting solid residue. The data were used in a theoretical model of reflectance spectra of NH$_3$ grains with a coating of the same photolytic residue, and a reasonable fit was obtained to the GRS’s spectral slope at 400–740 nm, which is shown in Fig. 5 (bottom), along with the data from HST. The fit to the HST data is comparable to our low dose data over this spectral range, and thus it would be interesting to know how the spectrum of the Carlson et al. (2016) photolyzed mixture changes below 400 nm, as the potential for a contributor other than one of the main cloud components is an interesting possibility. The need for more data points at not only the shorter wavelengths but also longer ones is evident by this group’s most recent work (Sromovsky et al., 2017), where the Carlson et al. (2016) laboratory data (400 nm–740 nm) was linearly extrapolated so that it extended from 350 to 1060 nm. This data yielded adequate fits to multiple regions in Jupiter’s clouds, yet it is important to note that the validity of such a linear extrapolation is unknown and can only be tested via laboratory measurements.

In addition, we also point out even with a larger spectral range, it is unclear if the trace amounts of C$_2$H$_4$ in Jupiter’s upper atmosphere (Moses et al., 2010) could produce any of the spectral changes seen in the Carlson et al. (2016) laboratory experiments. For instance, at the altitude where the NH$_3$ and C$_2$H$_4$ ratio is similar to what was used in those experiments, the molar fraction of these species is only $\approx 10^{-10}$ (Moses et al., 2010). In addition, the laboratory reactions and measurements of Carlson et al. (2016) were conducted at room temperature (~295 K), not the much lower temperatures of Jupiter’s upper atmosphere, and the uv source used was not a solar simulator but rather a lamp with three wavelengths, all at 202–214 nm. Future gas-phase studies with conditions more aligned with those of the Jovian atmosphere, such as lower temperatures, a lower C$_2$H$_4$ abundance, the presence of H$_2$ and He, and over a slightly larger wavelength range could further elucidate the applicability of such photolysis experiments to the GRS’s color.

4.5. Timescales and temperatures

An important measure of the applicability of the laboratory data to the planetary environment is whether the radiation doses used in experiments are achievable on timescales relevant to the Jovian clouds. For the case of the GRS, we have made this estimate recently (Loeffler and Hudson, 2016) but give a brief summary here. Using the cosmic-ray energy flux of $9 \times 10^{-3}$ ergs cm$^{-2}$ s$^{-1}$ of given by Sagan and Thompson (1984), a dose of $\approx 10^{13}$ ions cm$^{-2}$, which is approximately between the two lab spectra shown in Fig. 5, would correspond to about 30 years of cosmic ray exposure. This is likely an upper limit for the time needed for chemical alteration of the GRS, as this feature extends to higher altitudes than other cloud features (Simon-Miller et al., 2002), which may allow other, less penetrating, forms of radiation to modify the NH$_3$SH grains. To determine whether this time is comparable to the time during which the GRS is going to be chemically altered is not trivial, but since models suggest material arising in the center of Jupiter’s Oval BA should thoroughly mix throughout the entire vortex on a timescale somewhere between months (de Pater et al., 2010) or decades (Conrath et al., 1981), we can at least say that our timescales appear reasonable. Of course we point out that the actual exposure time of an NH$_3$SH grain could be much shorter, as the signature of NH$_3$ grains detected in Jupiter’s atmosphere was lost $\sim 40$ h after they first appeared (Reuter et al., 2007). However, it is possible that another material may have simply coated the grains (Atreya et al., 2005; Reuter et al., 2007); a thin coating

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**Fig. 5.** Top: Comparison of the ultraviolet-visible spectra of irradiated crystalline NH$_3$SH with HST observations of the GRS from 1995 (.), 2008 (c), and 2015 (●). The laboratory spectra of NH$_3$SH are after the sample was irradiated at 50 K to a dose of $3 \times 10^{12}$ ions cm$^{-2}$ (dashed line) then $5 \times 10^{13}$ p+ cm$^{-2}$ (dotted line). Also included is the NH$_3$SH sample irradiated at 120 K to a dose of $5 \times 10^{13}$ p+ cm$^{-2}$ and warmed to 200 K (solid line; Loeffler et al., 2016). The laboratory spectra are vertically offset to match the GRS observational data. Bottom: Comparison of the spectra from Carlson et al. (2016) with the HST data. The laboratory spectra were derived from experiments that photolyzed NH$_3$+C$_2$H$_4$ at room temperature ($\delta R(R = 1/100$, dash-dot-dot line; $\delta R(R = 16/100$, dash-dot line). Error bars given for the HST data shown in both panels have been described previously (Loeffler et al., 2016); the error in the 2015 HST data is shown but is smaller than the symbol.
of this nature will not impede cosmic ray ions from altering the underlying grain material.

The temperatures used in our experiments also merit comment. In our experimental setup, NH$_4$SH is not thermally stable at temperatures above ~160 K, so we only performed irradiations up to 160 K. While these temperatures are lower than the predicted temperature of a pristine NH$_4$SH cloud layer (~200 K), assuming a pressure of 1–2 bar (Wong et al., 2015), they are directly comparable to the temperature of the GRS, which ranges between ~110 and 130 K, depending on the location within the cloud (Simon-Miller et al., 2002; Fletcher et al., 2010). Thus, if the GRS can upwell gas from below (Carlson et al., 2016), then NH$_4$SH would be exposed to cosmic rays at the temperatures studied in our experiments. As we have noted previously (Loeffler et al., 2016), if radiolysis of NH$_4$SH mainly occurs at the 1–2-bar level near 200 K, we suspect that the spectral characteristics of the irradiated cloud will be similar to our samples that were irradiated at 120 K and 160 K but then warmed to 200 K, as both appear similar once they have reached 200 K. Finally, even though the colder irradiation temperatures we studied were mainly motivated by the desire to determine whether the radiation effects changed significantly with temperature, they may have some relevance to other giant planets, where temperatures in the upper atmosphere can be much lower. However, as equilibrium cloud models suggest NH$_4$SH will form at temperatures similar to those predicted for Jupiter (Atreya and Wong, 2005), a process, such as upwelling, would still be needed to bring NH$_4$SH high enough in the atmosphere to experience these lower temperatures.

5. Conclusions

We have irradiated crystalline ammonium hydrosulfide, NH$_4$SH, at 10–160 K with ~0.9 MeV protons, while monitoring the sample with uv-vis spectroscopy and photography. We found that irradiation causes the initially transparent and colorless sample to acquire a color that depends strongly on both the irradiation dose and temperature. At low doses, all samples turned yellow, while at higher doses we observed that a sample irradiated at a low temperature turned red, while a sample irradiated at a higher temperature turned green. The difference between the red and green samples is due to the greater prominence of the S$_2^-$ radical in the high temperature irradiation, which preferentially absorbs the red color, leaving the sample green. We also irradiated NH$_3$ and H$_2$S ices at 50 K for comparison with our NH$_4$SH ices. The general shape of the spectrum of irradiated H$_2$S is similar to that of NH$_4$SH ice, yet the absorption positions are slightly different. The difference between these two ices is attributed to the different radiation products formed, as the likely products in the H$_2$S-ice are molecules, while the products in the NH$_4$SH-ice are sulfur anions due to acid-base shifts.

In terms of the role that irradiated NH$_4$SH may play in coloring the GRS, we find that the spectral slope of our ice irradiated at low doses and at low temperatures is a reasonable match to what has been observed in GRS spectra longer than 400 nm, yet there is deviation between 300 and 400 nm. Higher dose irradiations show a nice fit at the shorter wavelengths, but the appearance of the S$_2^-$ band at higher wavelengths does not agree with what is observed in the HST spectra. After comparison with this new low temperature data, it seems evident that the best fit of a single NH$_4$SH ice is one that has been irradiated and warmed up to higher temperatures, so as to remove the S$_2^-$ radical that absorbs at 610 nm. Now that we have studied the radiolysis of NH$_4$SH over a range of doses and temperatures for both the uv-vis and infrared regions, we plan on future studies focusing on including other compounds that could also contribute to the spectrum of the GRS and other red regions of Jupiter.

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Supplementary materials


References


