

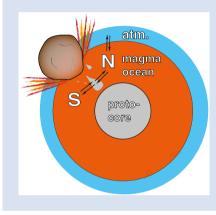
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High pressure redistribution of nitrogen and sulfur during planetary stratification

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Abstract





Nitrogen is essential to life, and yet is also the most depleted element in the Earth relative to gas-rich chondrites. A key expression of Earth's N depletion is its elevated sulfur-nitrogen (S/N) ratio. Primordial stratification into a core, mantle, and atmosphere is the largest mass transfer process that terrestrial planets experience, but the data required to evaluate how S/N ratios respond to primordial stratification of Earth-sized planets do not exist. We report new metal-silicate partitioning experiments on N up to 26 GPa and 3437 K. Our data indicate that nitrogen becomes more siderophile with increasing pressure and less siderophile with literature data for S partitioning to a core formation-primordial atmosphere degassing model. Our model demonstrates that the S/N ratio of the observable Earth can be set during primordial stratification under the same extreme P-T conditions that satisfy refractory siderophile element budgets while also yielding a bulk planet with S contents near that estimated from Earth's volatility trend.

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Introduction

Nitrogen is the most depleted element in the observable Earth when compared to CI chondrites, materials that most faithfully record the bulk composition of the solar system (observable Earth is the sum of the atmosphere, oceans, crust, and mantle) (*e.g.*, Marty, 2012; Halliday, 2013). The depletion of N is a fundamental expression of the integrated processes that determine the volatile budget of planets (Fig. 1).

There are many early acting processes that can deplete nitrogen and other volatile elements, either in a bulk planet or its observable reservoirs. Chondrites have various volatile element patterns that may reflect formation in regions of the Solar System with fractionated volatiles or the operation of incomplete condensation/evaporation reactions (Bergin *et al.*, 2015). With accretion and differentiation, terrestrial bodies form atmospheres, and these atmospheres can be lost (Tucker and Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Schlichting *et al.*, 2015). Core formation occurs in parallel to planetary accretion, and because nitrogen can display both siderophile and lithophile behaviour, the effect of core formation on the apparent nitrogen depletion in Earth remains uncertain (Roskosz *et al.*, 2013; Kadik *et al.*, 2015; Li *et al.*, 2016; Dalou *et al.*, 2017; Grewal *et al.*, 2019a,b; Speelmanns *et al.*, 2019). The role of pressure and temperature on core formation chemistry become larger for larger planetary bodies, as indicated by the refractory siderophile element concentrations observed for Earth, Mars, and Vesta (Righter and Drake, 1996). Studies agree that increasing temperature makes nitrogen less siderophile (Grewal *et al.*, 2019a; Speelmanns *et al.*, 2019). Extrapolating the temperature effect on metal-silicate partition coefficients for nitrogen $(D_{m/s}^{N} = [X_{metal}^{N}]/[X_{silicate}^{N}]$, atomic) to the average core formation temperature for Earth implies lithophile behaviour (*e.g.*, Speelmanns *et al.*, 2019). In the absence of a large effect of pressure, core formation would apparently have little ability to modify the observable budget of nitrogen during the accretion of larger rocky worlds, such as Earth.

Previously published high pressure experiments suggest that pressure favours N incorporation into cores (Roskosz *et al.*, 2013, Grewal *et al.*, 2019a); however, the pressure effect cannot be confidently resolved to be different from zero (Grewal *et al.*, 2019a). Towards this end, we report $D_{m/s}^N$ values from experiments conducted up to 26 GPa and 3437 K, using a laser heated diamond-anvil cell (LH-DAC). We supplement our LH-DAC data, with a systematic series of piston cylinder experiments to enable a robust parameterisation.

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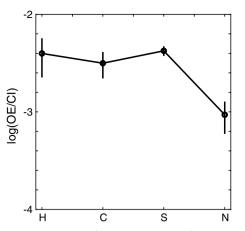


Figure 1 Concentrations of volatile elements (H, C, S, and N) in Earth's observable reservoirs normalised to CI chondrites. Nitrogen appears depleted in Earth compared to other volatiles. Data are from Hirschmann (2016) and Wasson and Kallemeyn (1988).

Methods

We conducted lower *P*-*T* partitioning experiments (1773–2413 K, 0.95–2.38 GPa) using a piston cylinder (PC) and higher *P*-*T* experiments (3046–3437 K, 23.2–25.6 GPa) using a LH-DAC (Tables 1, S-1). Experimental fO_2 conditions ranged from ΔIW –6.6 to ΔIW –1.0 (log unit deviations from the iron-wüstite buffer). We quantified the composition of reacted metal-silicate pairs using field emission electron microprobe analysis (Table 1). An example backscatter image is provided in Figure S-1, along with a typical time-temperature path for LH-DAC experiments. We also compare major element partitioning data of LH-DAC experiments to literature data in Figure S-2 as an evaluation of data quality. Table S-2 reports starting materials compositions. Further details on methods are provided in the Supplementary Information.

Results

We completed independent series of experiments to quantify the *P-T-X* controls on $D_{m/s}^N$ values (Fig. 2, Table 1). Individual series correlations indicate $D_{m/s}^{N}$ values depend strongly on fO_2 ($R^2 = 0.99$, p value = 0.005, n = 4), temperature ($R^2 = 0.97$, p value = 0.001, n = 6), and pressure ($R^2 = 0.98$, p value < 0.001, n = 9) over other conditions relevant to magma oceans (Fig. 2a,d), whereas $X_{\text{metal}}^{\text{C}}$, $X_{\text{metal}}^{\text{Ni}}$, $X_{\text{metal}}^{\text{S}}$, and the ionic porosity of silicate liquid have significant (p values < 0.05) but minor effects (Figs. 2b,c, S-4, S-5). Our fO₂ and temperature findings accord with previous work (Dalou et al., 2017; Grewal et al., 2019a; Speelmanns et al., 2019). Our lower pressure experiments indicate that N-C interactions in Fe alloy make both elements less siderophile and yield an epsilon value ($\epsilon_{\rm C}^{\rm N}$) of 7.6 ± 1.4 ($R^2 = 0.90$, p value = 0.004, n = 6; Fig. S-4), qualitatively consistent with the Steelmaking Data Sourcebook (1988) and $D_{m/s}^N$ values collected under C-free conditions (Grewal et al., 2021). Our e value calculations follow the approach of Ma (2001).

Our LH-DAC experiments consistently demonstrated siderophile behaviour (Fig. 2d) despite their high temperature, and this requires a large, positive pressure effect. These high *P*-*T* experiments contain C and Ni, and were relatively oxidising. Quantifying the pressure effect therefore requires simultaneous consideration of these other parameters, which is enabled by our PC experiments (Eq. 1, see below). Our determination of a

positive effect of pressure is consistent with previous work, but the larger range of *P* we investigated results in more precise determination of the *P*-*T* coefficients in Equations 1 and 2 (*c.f.*, Roskosz *et al.*, 2013, Grewal *et al.*, 2019a).

To parameterise our data, we first recalculate experiments to a carbon-free baseline using our newly derived $\varepsilon_{\rm C}^{\rm N}$ value. We then conduct an equal weight, least squares regression on parameters identified as significant in their individual series $(1/T, P/T, X_{\rm metal}^{e\rm Ni}, X_{\rm metal}^{e\rm S}, and \Delta IW)$. Our approach yields the following expression ($R^2 = 0.95$, p value < 0.001, n = 22; Fig. 2e):

$$\begin{split} \log(D_{\rm m/s}^{\rm N,C-free}) &= 6172 \pm 9541/T + 222 \pm 33 \ P/T \\ &+ 5.08 \pm 1.42 X_{\rm metal}^{e\rm Ni} + 1.52 \pm 0.72 X_{\rm metal}^{e\rm S} + 0.59 \\ &\pm 0.04 \ \Delta {\rm IW} - 0.55 \pm 0.48 - \log(\gamma_{\rm metal}^{\rm Fe}) \end{split} \quad \mbox{Eq. 1}$$

or if the effect of carbon is included in the parameterisation

Uncertainties are reported as 1σ . Note that $X_{\text{metal}'}^{e\text{Ni}} X_{\text{metal}'}^{e\text{S}}$ and $X_{\text{metal}}^{e\text{C}}$ refer to the expanded concentration expression associated with the e notation of Ma (2001), and that positive coefficients indicate a reduction in the $D_{\text{m/s}}^{\text{N}}$ value. Application of Equation 1 to a mantle liquidus geotherm at ΔIW –2 indicates a monotonic increase in $D_{\text{m/s}}^{\text{N}}$ with depth (Fig. 2f).

We parameterise our data alone because we completed systematic series of experiments to isolate specific effects on partitioning. Inclusion of all published data is accompanied by a large number of free parameters, and prevents resolution of N, S and C effects that are clearly observable in our results (Figs. 2, S-4). Predictions of Equation 1 are compared to literature data in Figures 2e, S-6. Additional details regarding this regression are provided in the Supplementary Information. The covariance matrix for Equation 1 is reported in Table S-3. We also report our fitting of literature data with the effects identified as significant here as Equation S-7.

Modelling N Distribution throughout Earth

Having established that pressure strongly modulates $D_{m/s}^{N}$ values, we now calculate the equilibrium distribution of N and S between cores, magma oceans, and atmospheres for a range of plausible stratification conditions. We include S because multiple high pressure studies show agreement and now constrain its metal-silicate partitioning up to extreme *P-T* conditions. Our parameterisation of $D_{m/s}^{S}$ values is applied here and is detailed in the Supplementary Information (Fig. S-8).

Mass balance is used to solve for the equilibrium distribution of N and S as required by partitioning and magma solubility constraints (Eq. 1; Libourel *et al.*, 2003). The mantle is assumed to be completely molten, and the mass fraction of the core is 0.325. Uncertainties are evaluated by varying $D_{m/s}^{N}$ and $D_{m/s}^{S}$ according to their covariance matrices and iterating the mass balance model. No S is assumed to be present in the atmosphere given its relatively high solubility in magma. All scenarios assume a bulk planet S/N ratio set by enstatite chondrite (85) and that the magma ocean contains 225 ± 25 ppm S (Hirschmann, 2016). We focus on enstatite chondrites because their average S/N ratio

	7	6	5	0	9	8	10		4	0	Ŧ	5	6	6	8	2	0	8	4	0	10	_	_	5	8	9	5
Table 1 Experimental run conditions and chemical analyses used in parameterisation.	۸IM	-1.59	-1.6	-1.80	-6.56	-5.28	-4.65	-1.61	-1.57	-2.50	-1.6	-1.6	-1.69	-1.6	-1.7	-1.5	-1.7	-2.4	-1.6	-1.6	-1.7	-1.7	-1.6	-1.8	-1.18	-0.96	-1.1
	N, atomic	0.024	0.038	0.020	0.002	0.003	0.007	0.106	0.086	0.031	0.019	0.013	0.033	0.074	0.050	0.019	0.039	0.032	0.029	0.033	0.030	0.042	0.036	0.009	0.135	0.054	0.118
	C, atomic	0.159	0.133	0.025	0.053	0.109	0.136	0.119	0.091	0.142	0.151	0.160	0.143	0.111	0.026	0.117	0.138	0.143	0.147	0.146	0.157	0.137	0.149	0.148	0.160	0.219	0.154
	S, atomic	0.000	0.014	0.372	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.109	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.012	0:030	0.301	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Ni, atomic	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.225	0.000	0.012	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.104	0.256	0.215	0.303
	log(γ Fe)	-0.08	-0.06	0.18	-0.01	-0.04	-0.06	-0.05	-0.04	-0.07	-0.06	-0.07	-0.06	-0.05	0.11	-0.05	-0.07	-0.07	-0.06	-0.07	-0.08	-0.06	-0.07	-0.07	-0.06	-0.10	-0.06
	log(D ^N), atomic	1.40	1.44	1.17	0.01	-0.68	-0.59	1.36	1.43	0.97	0.77	0.46	1.05	1.37	1.20	0.80	1.56	0.84	06.0	1.47	0.92	0.83	0.82	1.11	1.55	1.78	1.59
	P, ±	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	2.35	3.90	2.10
	P, GPa	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95	2.38	2.38	0.95	1.05	1.05	1.05	1.66	1.66	1.00	0.95	0.95	1.05	1.05	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95	23.80	25.60	23.20
	T, ±	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	46	255	13
	T, K	1973	1973	1973	1973	1973	1973	1973	1973	1973	2373	2403	2413	1973	1973	1973	1773	1973	2173	1873	1973	1973	1973	1973	3142	3437	3046
	Series	P, T, S, Ni, N, <i>f</i> O ₂ , IP	S	S	fO_2	fO_2	fO_2	Ρ	S	fO_2	Т	Т	S	S	S	Ni	<i>T</i> , N	Ni	<i>T</i> , N	<i>T</i> , N	IP	IP	IP	Ni	P	Ρ	Ρ
conditions and c	Note		low S metal	high S metal			-		high S metal				low S metal	low S metal	high S metal												
Table 1 Experimental run	Experiment	PC_N_EXP1	PC_N_EXP2	PC_N_EXP2	PC_N_EXP3	PC_N_EXP4	PC_N_EXP5	PC_N_EXP6	PC_N_EXP7	PC_N_EXP8	PC_N_EXP9	PC_N_EXP10	PC_N_EXP11	PC_N_EXP12	PC_N_EXP12	PC_N_EXP13	PC_N_EXP14	PC_N_EXP15	PC_N_EXP17	PC_N_EXP18	PC_N_EXP19	PC_N_EXP22	PC_N_EXP23	PC_N_EXP24	DAC_N_EXP1 spot 2	DAC_N_EXP1 spot 3	DAC_N_EXP1 spot 4

Series: P, pressure; T, temperature; S, sulfur; Ni, nickel; N-C, nitrogen-carbon; JO2, oxygen fugacity; IP, ionic porosity; Ni, S, C, N, atomic fraction of metal phase.

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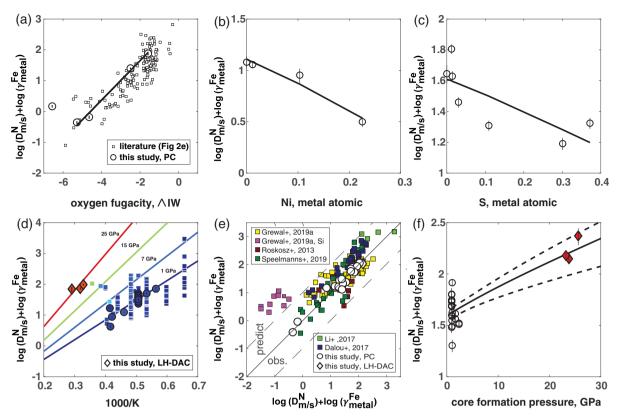


Figure 2 Controls on nitrogen partitioning. (a) Oxidising conditions make nitrogen more siderophile. Literature data are recalculated to 1973 K and 1 GPa. (b) Nickel and (c) Sulfur make nitrogen less siderophile. (d) Hotter temperatures make nitrogen less siderophile. Extrapolation of temperature effect at 1 GPa underpredicts $D_{m/s}^{N}$ values compared to values measured for higher pressure LH-DAC experiments. (e) A 1:1 comparison of $D_{m/s}^{N}$ observations versus predictions from Equation 1. The R^2 for the literature fit is 0.76. (f) Application of Equation 1 to mantle liquidus geotherm at $\Delta IW-2$. Nitrogen becomes more siderophile with depth.

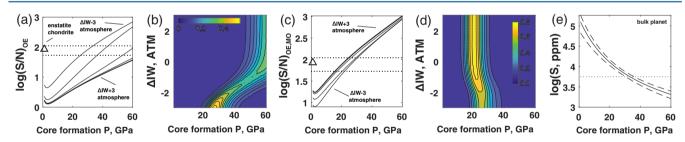


Figure 3 Models for redistribution of N and S in response to planetary differentiation. (a) An example of a model iteration of S/N_{OE} as function of core formation pressure and atmospheric fO_2 . Solid lines are model solutions for a given atmospheric fO_2 (log unit spacing). Horizontal dotted lines delineate the estimated range of S/N_{OE} for Earth (Hirschmann, 2016). Observable Earth is the sum of the atmosphere and magma ocean. (b) Fractional success of the model between iterations for producing a S/N_{OE} ratio that matches Earth. (c) An example of a model iteration of S/N_{OE} for Earth. Observable Earth is only the magma ocean. (d) Fractional success of the model between iterations for producing a S/N_{OE} for Earth. Observable Earth is only the magma ocean. (d) Fractional success of the model between iterations for producing a S/N_{OE} for Earth. Observable Earth is only the magma ocean. (d) Fractional success of the model between iterations for producing a S/N_{OE} for Earth. Observable Earth is only the magma ocean. (d) Fractional success of the model between iterations for producing a S/N_{OE} ratio that matches Earth. (e) Predicted bulk planet S as a function of core formation pressure. Dashed lines are 1 sigma that propagate uncertainties from the observable Earth S and parameterised $D_{m/s}^{S}$ values. The dotted line is the estimate of observable Earth S from the volatility trend (5600 ppm; Dreibus and Palme, 1996).

is intermediate between gas-rich (29; CI and CM) and ordinary chondrites (404; Wasson and Kallemeyn, 1988). Models that consider S/N ratios for other groups of chondrites are presented in the Supplementary Information (Figs. S-9, S-10).

Our first goal is to quantify how the S/N ratio of observable Earth (S/N_{OE}, 82 \pm 29, dotted lines in Fig. 3a,c) varies in response to differentiation conditions. We consider models with core formation fO_2 of ΔIW –2 while varying core formation pressure and atmospheric fO_2 (Fig. 3). We focus on ΔIW –2 because the FeO content of Earth implies an average fO_2 for core formation near

this value. Pressures of metal-silicate equilibration range up to 60 GPa, an upper limit in the single stage framework for Earth (*e.g.*, Fischer *et al.*, 2015). Our model takes a single stage approach, and while accretion is a multi-step process, single stage calculations capture average *P-T-X* conditions that can be readily compared between elements (Siebert *et al.*, 2011). Atmospheric fO_2 varies in our model between $\Delta IW-3$ and $\Delta IW+3$. Atmospheric fO_2 conditions are a free parameter in light of evidence for the depth dependence of the Fe⁺³/Fe_{tot} ratio of magma in equilibrium with iron (Zhang *et al.*, 2017;

Armstrong *et al.*, 2019; Deng *et al.*, 2020) and the temperature dependence of $\text{Fe}^{+3}/\text{Fe}_{\text{tot}}$ for any fO_2 (Sossi *et al.*, 2020).

Our models demonstrate the strong sensitivity of S/N_{OE} ratios to core formation pressure; at low pressure (<10 GPa), S/N_{OR} ratios are low, but with increasing pressure, S/N_{OE} ratios rise as S becomes less siderophile and N becomes more siderophile. The rise is such that core formation near 30 GPa results in S/N_{OE} ratios that match Earth for more reducing atmospheres. More oxidising atmospheres require higher pressure core formation to satisfy Earth's S/N_{OE} ratio, as more N remains in the atmosphere, unable to partition into the core (Fig. 3a,b).

It is possible that the atmosphere is partially lost during accretion, leading to preferential depletion of N relative to S. We model this possibility as the end member of the magma ocean being the only contributor of N and S to later-forming observable reservoirs (Fig. 3c,d). In these cases $S/N_{OE,MO}$ (S/N ratio of the magma ocean) also matches Earth near 30 GPa, and model results are relatively insensitive to atmospheric fO_2 . Cases of intermediate atmospheric loss plot between the two end members for atmospheric contribution considered here (*c.f.*, Fig. 3a–d).

Taken together, our models demonstrate that higher pressure core formation scenarios can satisfy the S/N_{OE} ratio of Earth, assuming a bulk planet S/N ratio similar to enstatite chondrite. Bulk planet S/N ratios closer to gas-rich chondrites (low S/N) require even higher core formation pressures, while bulk planet S/N ratios closer to ordinary chondrites (high S/N) require lower pressure to satisfy the S/N_{OE} ratio constraint (Figs. S-9, S-10). This all serves to highlight the importance of core formation pressure for modulating planetary volatile budgets.

It is significant that higher pressure core formation (>30 GPa) and a core-mantle fO_2 of $\Delta IW-2$ can produce S/N_{OE} ratios equal to Earth because these are the same differentiation conditions implied by moderately siderophile element and FeO concentrations in the observable Earth in a single stage framework (e.g., Siebert et al., 2011; Fischer et al., 2015). Importantly, higher pressure core formation also yields a bulk planet with 6650-2050 ppm S (30-60 GPa) (Fig. 3e), and these values compare favourably with estimates of 5600 ppm S for bulk Earth based on the volatility trend (Dreibus and Palme, 1996). The multiple successes of higher pressure models for explaining Earth's volatile budget are important because they suggest that volatiles are modulated by the same core formation events that modulate refractory elements. This suggestion contrasts with previous hypotheses that smaller, volatile-rich bodies preferentially contributed to Earth's volatile budget (e.g., Grewal et al., 2019b), decoupling the accretion of life-enabling elements from refractory elements.

It is well established within the Solar System that planetary body size correlates with average core formation pressures (Righter and Drake, 1996), and our work therefore predicts a direct relationship between planet size and its distribution of volatiles. This link should enable more precise evaluations of exoplanet habitability, worlds for which size remains a central constraint on their geologic evolution.

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Additional Information

Supplementary Information accompanies this letter at https://www.geochemicalperspectivesletters.org/article2122.



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