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The initial abundance and distribution of ^{92}Nb in the Solar System

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ABSTRACT

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Niobium-92 is an extinct proton-rich nuclide, which decays to ^{92}Zr with a half-life of 37 Ma. This radionuclide potentially offers a unique opportunity to determine the timescales of early Solar System processes and the sites of nucleosynthesis for p-nuclei, once its initial abundance and distribution in the Solar System are well established. Here we present internal Nb–Zr isochrons for three basaltic achondrites with known U–Pb ages: the angrite NWA 4500, the eucrite Agouf, and the ungrouped achondrite Itirra. Our results show that the relative Nb–Zr isochron ages of the three meteorites are consistent with the time intervals obtained from the Pb–Pb chronometer for pyroxene and plagioclase, indicating that ^{92}Nb was homogeneously distributed among their source regions. The Nb–Zr and Pb–Pb data for NWA 4500 yield the most reliable and precise reference point for anchoring the Nb–Zr chronometer to the absolute timescale: an initial $^{92}\text{Nb}/^{92}\text{Nb}$ ratio of $(1.4 \pm 0.5) \times 10^{-5}$ at 4557.23 ± 0.36 Ma, which corresponds to a $^{92}\text{Nb}/^{92}\text{Nb}$ ratio of $(1.7 \pm 0.6) \times 10^{-5}$ at the time of the Solar System formation. On the basis of this new initial ratio, we demonstrate the capability of the Nb–Zr chronometer to date early Solar System objects including troilite and rutile, such as iron and stony-iron meteorites. Furthermore, we estimate a nucleosynthetic production ratio of ^{92}Nb to the p-nucleus ^{92}Mo between 0.0015 and 0.035. This production ratio, together with the solar abundances of other p-nuclei with similar masses, can be best explained if these light p-nuclei were primarily synthesized by photodisintegration reactions in Type Ia supernovae.

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1. Introduction

The proton-rich radionuclide ^{92}Nb decays to ^{92}Zr by electron capture with a half-life of 37 Ma (Holden, 1990). Since Nb and Zr can fractionate from each other during partial melting of the mantle, mineral crystallization and metal–silicate separation (Tiepolo et al., 2001; Wade and Wood, 2001; Klemme et al., 2002), the Nb–Zr system can potentially be used to determine the timescales of silicate differentiation and core segregation for infant planets (Münster and Allègre, 1982). In addition, the initial ^{92}Nb abundance in the Solar System provides constraints on the nucleosynthetic sites of p-nuclei (p- denotes proton-rich) (Harper, 1996; Yin et al., 2000; Dauphas et al., 2003; Meyer, 2003; Hayakawa et al., 2013; Travaglio et al., 2014). These applications require the initial abundance and distribution of ^{92}Nb (expressed as $^{92}\text{Nb}/^{92}\text{Nb}$) in the Solar System to be defined.

Evidence for live ^{92}Nb in the early Solar System was first obtained from the iron meteorite Toluca in which rutile with high Nb/Zr exhibits a ^{92}Zr excess (Harper, 1996). Assuming that the iron meteorite started with initial $^{92}\text{Nb}/^{92}\text{Nb}$ and $^{92}\text{Zr}/^{92}\text{Zr}$ values identical to those of the chondritic uniform reservoir (CHUR), an interpolation between Toluca rutile and CHUR data was used to estimate the initial $^{92}\text{Nb}/^{92}\text{Nb}$ to $(1.6 \pm 0.3) \times 10^{-5}$. Subsequent studies (Sanjoup et al., 2000; Yin et al., 2000; Münster et al., 2000) also reported ^{92}Zr variations in meteoritic phases with fractionated Nb/Zr: rutile from the iron meteorite Zagora, zircon from the mesosiderite Chassigny, and calcium–aluminum rich inclusions (CAIs) from the carbonaceous chondrite Allende. However, the initial $^{92}\text{Nb}/^{92}\text{Nb}$ values inferred in the same manner were two orders of magnitude higher ($\sim 10^{-3}$). In contrast, later Zr isotopic studies of zircon from the eucrite Camel Donga (Hirata, 2001) and Allende CAIs (Schönbächler et al., 2003; Akram et al., 2013; Akram et al., 2014) did not reveal ^{92}Zr variations due to ^{92}Nb decay, constraining the initial $^{92}\text{Nb}/^{92}\text{Nb}$ of the Solar System to $\sim 10^{-5}$. Moreover, Schönbächler et al. (2002) determined internal Nb–Zr isochrons for the ordinary (HO) chondrite Estacado and the

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