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THE COLOR OF LIQUID SULFUR

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### Publication Date

1970-10-01

Communication to the Editor, Journal of  
the American Chemical Society,  
Physical Chemistry Section

UCRL-19660  
Preprint

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THE COLOR OF LIQUID SULFUR

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October 1970

AEC Contract No. W-7405-eng-48

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Communication to the Editor, Journal of the American Chemical Society,  
Physical Chemistry Section

The Color of Liquid Sulfur

Sir:

At the melting point, liquid sulfur is yellow; at the boiling point it is dark red. The color change, which is demonstrated in every freshman class, is due to an apparently monotonous shift of the absorption edge towards the red and due to an increase of the visible absorption (Figure 1). While the accompanying viscosity change is well known and well understood<sup>1,2</sup>, the color change has drawn little scientific attention.

Only three spectral studies have been reported<sup>3-5</sup>, and the latest view<sup>5</sup> is that the shift of the absorption edge is caused by thermal population of ground state vibrational modes of  $S_8$ .

We have studied the absorption spectrum of liquid sulfur in the temperature range between the melting point and 700°C. The temperature dependent shift of the red absorption edge is about  $23.6 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  per degree.<sup>6</sup> This shift is 10 times larger than the shift of the red absorption edge of  $S_8$  in solution in the temperature range between 76°K and 25°C.<sup>6</sup> The shift in the liquid is too large to be due to thermal population alone. Furthermore, the temperature dependent shift is only reversible if the liquid is very slowly cooled. Rapid quenching of the liquid to room temperature does not yield the absorption of  $S_8$ , as shown in Figure 2a, but it yields the spectrum in Figure 2b. The shoulder at 3600 Å is due to quenched, metastable polymeric sulfur.<sup>6</sup> The formation, concentration and composition of polymers in

liquid sulfur are well established.<sup>1,2</sup> The spectrum of polymeric sulfur explains the apparently large shift in the spectrum of the liquid between the melting point and 300°C and the sudden increase of the shift at 160°C.

However, above 300°C, where the concentration of polymers decreases, the color of the liquid continues to darken. If boiling sulfur is quenched in liquid nitrogen, we obtain a red glass with the spectrum shown in Figure 2c. At about -80°C the red films convert into yellow polymeric sulfur. The quenching experiments prove that the spectrum of hot liquid sulfur is not due to thermal broadening of  $S_8$  absorption alone, but due to superposition of the spectrum of  $S_8$  with that of polymeric sulfur and that of the red species which absorb at 4000 Å and 5100 Å.

In order to identify the red species, we compared the spectrum of the liquid with that of the vapor at 17 torr and 450°C, Figure 2d. The structured absorption at 4000 Å and the continuum at 5100 Å were first reported in 1910,<sup>7</sup> and later<sup>8,9</sup> assigned to either  $S_3$  or  $S_4$ . This assignment has been confirmed by a study of the intensity of this system as a function of vapor pressure and temperature, and by comparison with the mass spectroscopic data<sup>10,11</sup> on the vapor composition. We have now recorded spectra with  $^{34}\text{S}$ , and determined that the electronic origin of the 4000 Å system lies at 4235 Å. If one allows for a solvent shift and considers the temperature difference, the Franck-Condon curve and the electronic origin agree very well with that of the absorption of frozen liquid sulfur.

In order to determine whether the absorption, and therefore the red color, was really due to  $S_3$  or  $S_4$ , we decided to prepare small sulfur species in a low temperature matrix. Sulfur vapor is not a suitable source for the synthesis of  $S_3$  or  $S_4$ , because it always also contains other species.<sup>10,11</sup> Instead we used the photolysis of  $S_3Cl_2$  in an organic glass and in rare gas matrices.  $S_3Cl_2$  was prepared from  $SCl_2$  and liquid  $H_2S$ .<sup>12</sup> In this synthesis only chlorosulfanes with an odd number of sulfur atoms are formed, and  $S_4Cl_2$  is absent. 99% pure  $S_3Cl_2$  can be obtained by vacuum distillation. A  $10^{-4}$  molar solution of  $S_3Cl_2$  in 1:2 isopentane-cyclohexane at 77°K, with the spectrum shown in Figure 2g, was photolyzed with a high pressure mercury arc. The spectrum of the photolysis products is shown in Figure 2e. Figure 2f shows the photolysis products of  $S_3Cl_2$  in a krypton matrix at 20°K. The experimental techniques used in the preparation and handling of low temperature samples was similar to that described elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> The spectrum has a vibrational spacing, a Franck-Condon curve and an origin as expected for the cold gas species responsible for the absorption of sulfur vapor in Figure 2d. This indicates that the gas species absorbing at 4000 Å is the same as that produced by photolysis of  $S_3Cl_2$ , and is  $S_3$ , thiozone. The mechanism of the photolysis of  $S_3Cl_2$  yielding thiozone seems to be analogous to that of the photolysis of  $S_2Cl_2$ ,<sup>14</sup> which yields  $S_2$ , and very little  $S_2Cl$ . Whether the continuous absorption at 5100 Å, which also occurs in frozen liquid, is due to  $S_3$  or  $S_4$  has not yet been determined.

The similarity among the matrix spectrum, the vapor spectrum at 450°C and that of quenched red sulfur indicates that hot liquid sulfur contains  $S_3$ .  $S_3$  and  $S_4$  have similar thermal properties and always occur together.<sup>10,11</sup> Thus, hot liquid sulfur contains  $S_3$  and  $S_4$ .

We conclude that the color change upon heating of sulfur is due to formation of  $S_3$  and  $S_4$ . The optical density at 4000 Å and 5100 Å indicates that at the boiling point sulfur contains from 1 to 3%  $S_3$  and  $S_4$ .

Detailed data and analysis will be presented later.

Acknowledgement:

This work was partly supported by the National Science Foundation and the National Air Pollution Control Administration. Part of this work was performed under the auspices of the U. S. Atomic Energy Commission.

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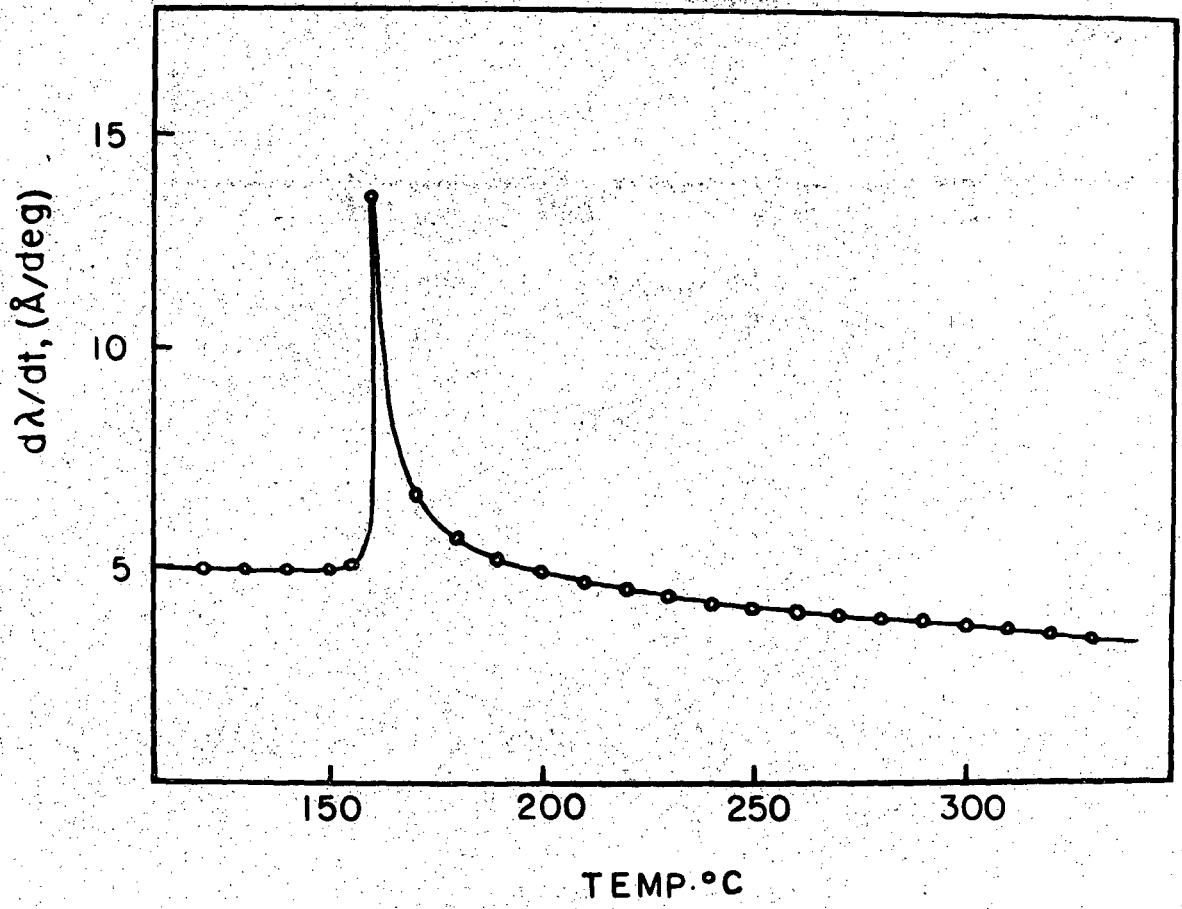
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Figure Captions

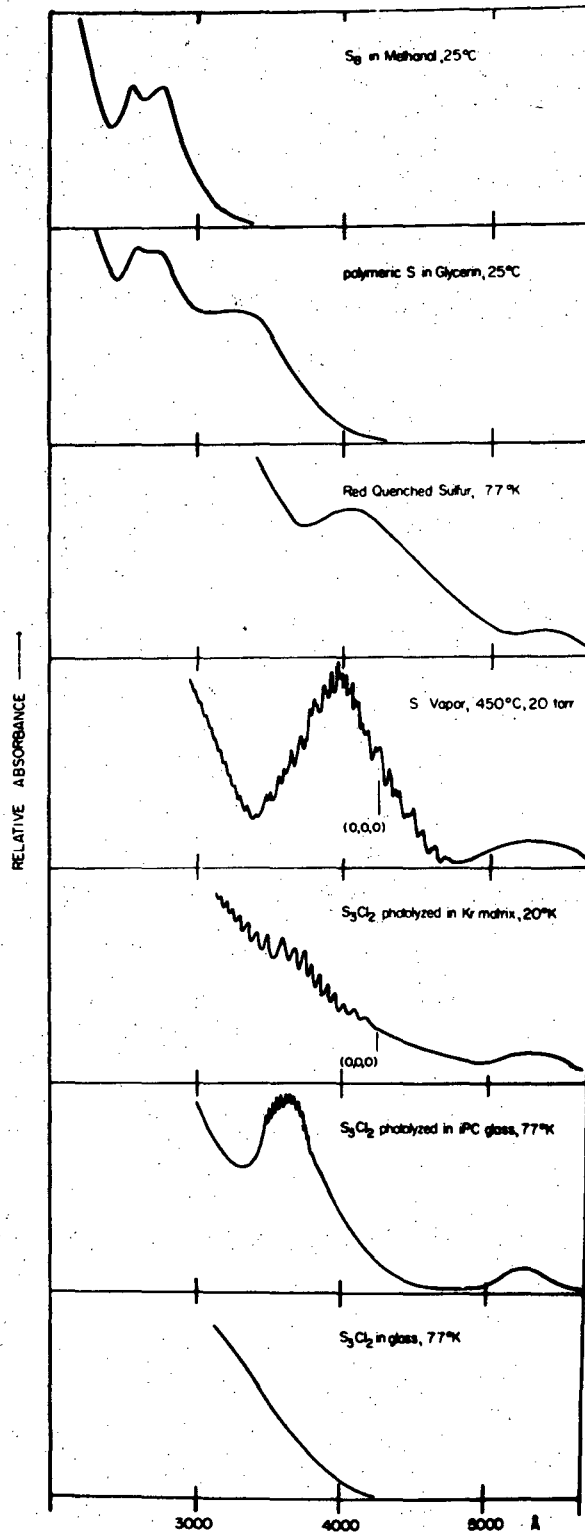
Figure 1: Shift of red absorption edge of liquid sulfur.

- Figure 2:
- a) Absorption of  $S_8$  in methanol at 25°C.
  - b) Absorption of polymeric sulfur in glycerin at room temperature.
  - c) Absorption of boiling sulfur quenched in liquid nitrogen.
  - d) Absorption of sulfur vapor at 450°C and 20 torr.
  - e) Absorption of  $S_3Cl_2$  photolyzed in a krypton matrix at 20°K.
  - f) Absorption of  $S_3Cl_2$  photolyzed in 1:2 isopentane-cyclohexane glass at 77°K.
  - g)  $S_3Cl_2$  before photolysis.



XBL 7010-6881

Fig. 1



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Fig. 2

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