

# Dynamic and controlled rate thermal analysis of halotrichite

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**Abstract** Three halotrichites namely halotrichite  $\text{Fe}^{2+}\text{SO}_4\cdot\text{Al}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3\cdot 22\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , apjohnite  $\text{Mn}^{2+}\text{SO}_4\cdot\text{Al}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3\cdot 22\text{H}_2\text{O}$  and dietrichite  $\text{ZnSO}_4\cdot\text{Al}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3\cdot 22\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , were analysed by both dynamic, controlled rate thermogravimetric and differential thermogravimetric analysis. Because of the time limitation in the controlled rate experiment of 900 min, two experiments were undertaken (a) from ambient to 430 °C and (b) from 430 to 980 °C. For halotrichite in the dynamic experiment mass losses due to dehydration were observed at 80, 102, 319 and 343 °C. Three higher temperature mass losses occurred at 621, 750 and 805 °C. In the controlled rate thermal analysis experiment two isothermal dehydration steps are observed at 82 and 97 °C followed by a non-isothermal dehydration step at 328 °C. For apjohnite in the dynamic experiment mass losses due to dehydration were observed at 99, 116, 256, 271 and 304 °C. Two higher temperature mass losses occurred at 781 and 922 °C. In the controlled rate thermal analysis experiment three isothermal dehydration steps are observed at 57, 77 and 183 °C followed by a non-isothermal dehydration step at 294 °C. For dietrichite in the dynamic experiment mass losses due to dehydration were

observed at 115, 173, 251, 276 and 342 °C. One higher temperature mass loss occurred at 746 °C. In the controlled rate thermal analysis experiment two isothermal dehydration steps are observed at 78 and 102 °C followed by three non-isothermal dehydration steps at 228, 243 and 323 °C. In the CRTA experiment a long isothermal step at 636 °C attributed to de-sulphation is observed.

**Keywords** Evaporite · Jarosite · Halotrichite · Sulphate · CRTA

## Introduction

The minerals in the halotrichite group have been known for a long period of time [1–6]. This no doubt is because of their occurrence in environmental systems. These minerals are referred to as the pseudo-alums [7–9], and are often found in the environment as post-mining phases [7–9]. The minerals are monoclinic sulphates of general formula  $\text{AB}_2(\text{SO}_4)_4\cdot 22\text{H}_2\text{O}$  where A is  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Fe}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Ni}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Zn}^{2+}$  and/or some combination of these cations and B is  $\text{Al}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  or  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  or even a combination of these cations. These minerals have often been referred to as the pseudo-alums. The minerals as with other alums based upon monovalent cations can be readily synthesised in the laboratory. Ions of metals such as manganese, ferrous iron, cobalt, zinc and magnesium will form double sulphates. These sulphates are related to the halotrichites mineral series and often form solid solutions. These alums are not isomorphous with the univalent alums. Typically the end member formulae are  $\text{FeSO}_4\cdot\text{Al}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3\cdot 22\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (halotrichite) or  $\text{MgSO}_4\cdot\text{Al}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3\cdot 22\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (pickeringite), but other  $\text{M}^{2+}$  cations substitute and solid solutions in the series are extensive. Apjohnite is the manganese equivalent of

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halotrichite. Wupatkiite is the cobalt analogue, which may have some other divalent metal substitution for the cobalt cation [10]. The minerals are all isomorphous and crystallise in the monoclinic space group  $P2_1/c$  [11]. In the structure of the pseudo-alums, four crystallographically independent sulphate ions are present [11–15]. One acts as a unidentate ligand to the  $M^{2+}$  ion, and the other three are involved in complex hydrogen bond arrays involving coordinated water molecules to both cations and to the lattice water molecules [13].

The thermal decomposition of halotrichite related minerals jarosites has been studied for some considerable time [16–20]. There have been many studies on the Fe(II) and Fe(III) sulphate minerals [21–26]. Interest in such minerals and their thermal stability rests with the possible identification of these minerals and related dehydrated paragenetically related minerals on planets and on Mars. Recently thermogravimetric analysis has been applied to some complex mineral systems [27–29]. It is considered that TG-MS analyses may also be applicable to the jarosite minerals [30–39]. The thermal stability of minerals such as halotrichites which are only formed from solution is important especially for the analysis of minerals on planets such as Mars. Thermal analysis has been used extensively for testing the stability of minerals. To the best of the authors' knowledge no thermoanalytical studies of halotrichites have been undertaken; although differential thermal analysis of some related minerals has been published. In this work we report the thermogravimetric analysis of the thermal decomposition of synthetic halotrichite  $FeAl_2(SO_4)_4 \cdot 22H_2O$ , apjohnite  $MnAl_2(SO_4)_4 \cdot 22H_2O$  and dietrichite  $ZnAl_2(SO_4)_4 \cdot 22H_2O$ .

## Experimental

### Synthesis of the halotrichites

#### *Halotrichite*

Synthetic halotrichite was prepared by dissolving precisely equimolar masses of iron(II) sulphate and aluminium(III) sulphate in degassed ultra-pure water (18.2 M $\Omega$ ) the resulting solution was evaporated by a constant stream of nitrogen isolated from atmospheric conditions by an ethylene glycol gas trap. The solution was left to dry under the nitrogen for 5 days. Preliminary studies indicated that the addition of heat to the solution was deleterious to the process of co-precipitation.

#### *Apjohnite and dietrichite*

A solution saturated by both aluminium(III) sulphate and manganese(II) sulphate was prepared by adding sufficient

quantities of both salts to supersaturate the solution at 353 K, the resulting solution was allowed to cool to room temperature and centrifuged at 3,500 rpm for approximately 30 min. To this solution an equimolar amount of aluminium(III) sulphate and manganese(II) sulphate was added in filter paper bags and left to stand for approximately one week. The resulting precipitate was filtered under vacuum filtration and washed twice with ethanol. Dietrichite was prepared using identical methods as above replacing magnesium(II) sulphate for zink sulphate.

The minerals were analysed by X-ray diffraction for phase purity and by electron probe using energy dispersive techniques for quantitative chemical composition.

### Thermal analysis

#### *Dynamic experiment*

Thermal decomposition of the samples was carried out in a Derivatograph PC type thermoanalytical equipment (Hungarian Optical Works, Budapest, Hungary) capable of recording the thermogravimetric (TG), derivative thermogravimetric (DTG) and differential thermal analysis (DTA) curves simultaneously. The sample was heated in a ceramic crucible in static air atmosphere at a rate of 5 °C/min.

#### *Controlled rate thermal analysis experiment*

Thermal decomposition of the samples was carried out in a Derivatograph PC-type thermoanalytical instrument in an open ceramic crucible in static air atmosphere at a pre-set, constant decomposition rate of 0.10 mg/min. (Below this threshold value the samples were heated under dynamic conditions at a uniform rate of 1 °C/min.) With the quasi-isothermal, quasi-isobaric heating program of the instrument the furnace temperature was regulated precisely to provide a uniform rate of decomposition in the main decomposition stage.

## Results and discussion

### Dynamic thermal analysis of halotrichite

The dynamic TG pattern together with the DTG and DTA patterns for synthetic halotrichite are shown in Fig. 1. The results of the dynamic experiment are summarised in Table 1. Mass losses observed at 74, 95.5, 102 and 123 °C are assigned to water loss as is confirmed by ion current mass spectrometric results. Mass losses of 1.0, 11.5 and 19.7% are observed. Two further decomposition steps are observed at 319 and 343 °C with mass losses of 2% each. Three higher temperature decomposition steps are

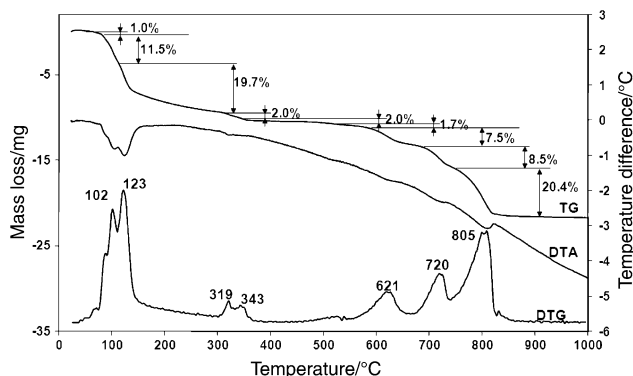


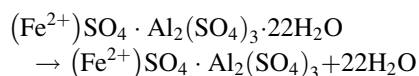
Fig. 1 Dynamic thermal analysis of halotrichite

Table 1 Mass loss and temperature data of halotrichite under dynamic conditions and under CRTA conditions

Decomposition process	Temperature range (°C)	Mass loss	
		mg	%
<i>Dynamic conditions, sample mass: 29.47 mg</i>			
Dehydration	27–74	0.3	1.0
	74–112	3.4	11.5
	112–299	5.8	19.7
	299–333	0.6	2.0
	333–429	0.6	2.0
Desulphation	429–553	0.5	1.7
	553–667	2.2	7.5
	667–739	2.5	8.5
<i>CRTA conditions, sample mass: 89.53 mg</i>	739–875	6.0	20.4
	27–88	9.9	11.1
	88–124	12.7	14.2
	124–272	7.4	8.3
<i>CRTA conditions, sample mass: 55.93 mg</i>	272–426	3.6	4.0
	426–542	1.5	2.7
	542–652	6.8	12.2
	652–712	7.5	13.4
Desulphation	712–795	18.1	32.4
	795–936	0.9	1.6

observed at 621, 720 and 805 °C with mass losses of 7.5, 8.5 and 20.4% making a total mass loss at these temperatures of 36.4%.

The theoretical mass loss of water calculated using the halotrichite formula is 35.68%.



The measured mass loss for water is 36.2%. Due to the non-standardized storage conditions this difference can be realistic for hydrated minerals. In the three higher

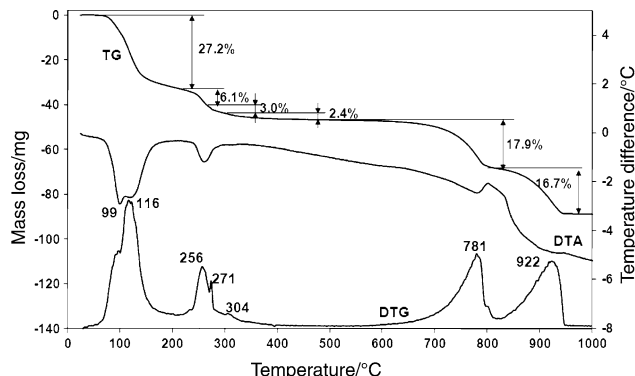


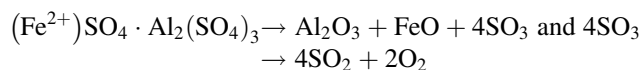
Fig. 2 Dynamic thermal analysis of apjohnite

Table 2 Mass loss and temperature data of apjohnite under dynamic conditions and under CRTA conditions

Decomposition process	Temperature range (°C)	Mass loss	
		mg	%
<i>Dynamic conditions, sample mass: 120.64 mg</i>			
Dehydration	54–211	32.8	27.2
	211–265	7.3	6.1
	265–297	3.6	3.0
	297–434	2.9	2.4
	434–537	2.9	2.4
Desulphation	537–820	21.6	17.9
	820–965	20.2	16.7
<i>CRTA conditions, sample mass: 194.67 mg</i>			
Dehydration	26–67	10.6	5.4
	67–163	45.0	23.1
	163–263	13.3	6.8
	263–417	5.2	2.7
<i>CRTA conditions, sample mass: 93.21 mg</i>			
Desulphation	417–719	23.4	25.1
	719–789	3.3	3.5
	789–869	25.9	27.8
	869–989	0.5	0.5

temperature steps SO<sub>2</sub> is evolved which was confirmed by mass spectrometry.

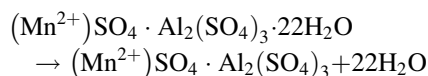
The following decomposition is proposed.



Dynamic thermal analysis of apjohnite

The dynamic thermal analysis curves for apjohnite are shown in Fig. 2. The results of the thermal decomposition of apjohnite are shown in Table 2.

A multiple of dehydration steps can be observed up to 400 °C with a total mass loss of 38.7% (the theoretical value is 44.5%):

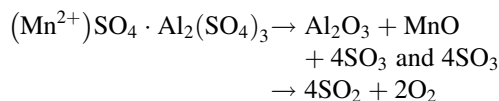


Based upon the formula above the total theoretical mass loss is 44.95%.

Some water is apparently retained according to ion current curves to 304 °C. Three additional mass loss steps at 256, 271 and 304 °C are also assigned to water evolution. The total observed mass loss is 38.3% which is somewhat low compared with the theoretical mass loss.

The thermal decomposition steps at 781 and 922 °C are attributed to the decomposition of the sulphate anions in the apjohnite. Such decomposition is confirmed by the ion current curves of SO<sub>2</sub> (m/Z = 64) where maxima at 780 and 922 °C are observed. Similar maxima are observed in the ion current curves of oxygen.

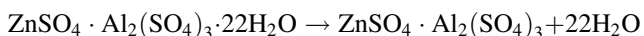
The following decomposition is proposed.



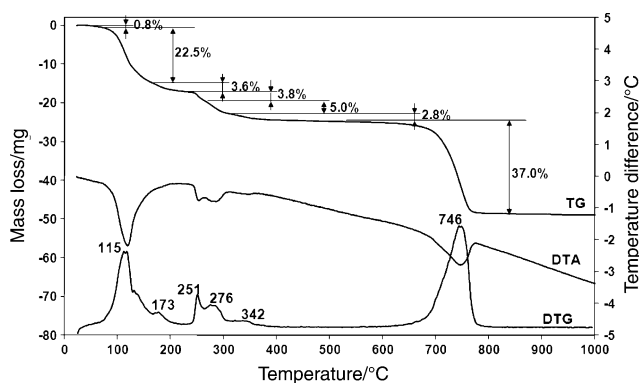
The experimental mass loss of 34.6% fits well to the theoretical figure of 36.0%. The overall decomposition is finished by 950 °C.

#### Dynamic thermal analysis of dietrichite

The dynamic thermal analysis patterns of dietrichite are shown in Fig. 3. A summary of results is reported in Table 3. Thermal decomposition steps are observed at 115, 173, 251, 276, 342 and 746 °C with mass losses of 22.5, 3.6, 3.8, 5.0, 2.8 and 37.0%. The following equation represents the overall dehydration chemistry



The ion current curves support the concept of dehydration at 251, 276 and 342 °C with m/Z = 17 and 18 showing maxima at these temperatures. It is interesting to compare the high temperature thermal decomposition of dietrichite.



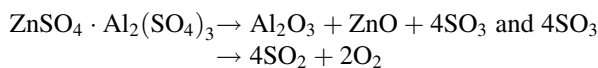
**Fig. 3** Dynamic thermal analysis of dietrichite

**Table 3** Mass loss and temperature data of dietrichite under dynamic conditions and under CRTA conditions

Decomposition process	Temperature range (°C)	Mass loss	
		mg	%
<i>Dynamic conditions, sample mass: 63.47 mg</i>			
Dehydration	27–70	0.5	0.8
	70–164	14.3	22.5
	164–227	2.3	3.6
	227–264	2.4	3.8
	264–309	3.2	5.0
	309–413	1.8	2.8
Desulphation	589–806	23.5	37.0
<i>CRTA conditions, sample mass: 140.24 mg</i>			
Dehydration	28–88	16.0	11.4
	88–125	19.3	13.8
	125–215	8.1	5.8
	215–236	2.6	1.9
	236–265	3.1	2.2
	265–409	6.0	4.3
	409–497	0.5	0.4
<i>CRTA conditions, sample mass: 84.64 mg</i>			
Desulphation	497–892	51.7	61.1

For halotrichite and apjohnite three mass loss steps are found. The DTG peak of dietrichite is strongly asymmetric and the peak may be curve resolved into three components. The thermal decomposition steps at 746 °C are attributed to the decomposition of the sulphate anions in the dietrichite. Such decomposition is confirmed by the ion current curves of SO<sub>2</sub> (m/Z = 64) where maxima at 631, 666 and 692 °C are observed. Similar maxima are observed in the ion current curves of oxygen.

The experimental amount of the crystallization water is 38.5% as compared to the theoretical figure of 44.1%. Dissimilarly to the two former minerals sulphate decomposition is carried out in a single mass loss step at 746 °C:



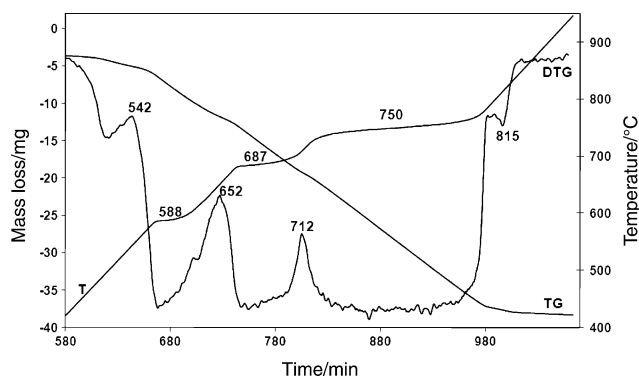
The theoretical mass loss (35.6%) compares well with the observed value of 37.0%.

#### Controlled rate thermal analysis of halotrichite

The controlled rate thermal analyses of halotrichite are shown in Fig. 4. The results of the Controlled rate thermal analysis (CRTA) are summarised in Table 1. The CRTA experiment is undertaken in two sections (a) up to 400 °C and (b) from 400 to 1,000 °C. The reason for this is that the derivatograph has a time limit of 900 min. For the second experiment, the same sample was placed into the crucible,

and with a higher heating rate (2 °C/min) was applied when the pre-set decomposition rate has not been reached (during the first measurement the heating rate was 1 °C/min under this threshold). The higher heating rate is needed to make time and enable the experiment to go in the 900 min. In this way we can resolve the decomposition stage in the higher temperature range.

The CRTA (Fig. 4) shows two quasi-isothermal steps at 82 and 97 °C attributed to dehydration. A non-isothermal higher temperature mass loss is observed at 328 °C and based upon ion current measurements is attributed to dehydration. In between the two experiments the halotrichite



**Fig. 4** Controlled rate thermal analysis of halotrichite: ambient to 430 °C, 430–980 °C

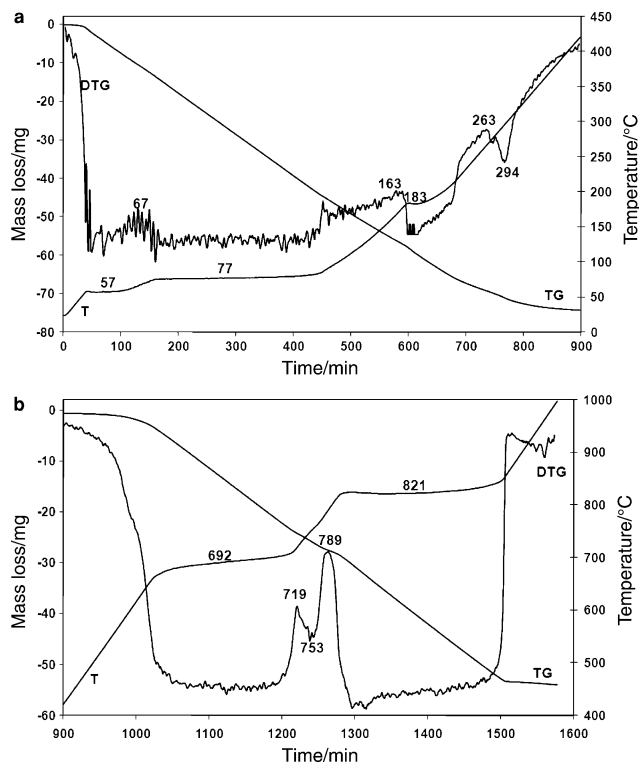
sample is cooled to ambient temperatures and adsorbs water from the atmosphere. This accounts for the dehydration step observed at 82 °C in Fig. 4. Three isothermal decomposition steps are observed at 588, 687 and 750 °C and are attributed to the decomposition of sulphate anions.

Controlled rate thermal analysis of apjohnite

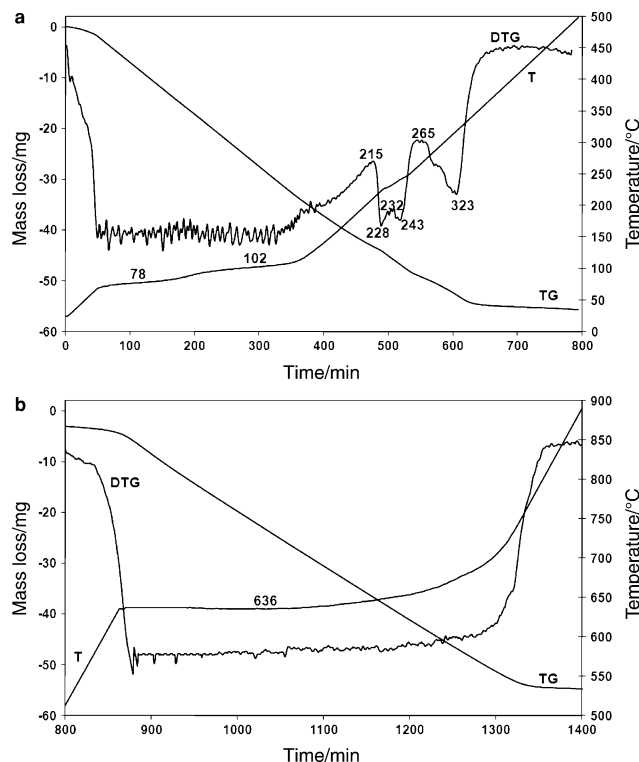
The controlled rate thermal analysis of apjohnite is shown in Fig. 5a (up to 430 °C) and 5b (From 430 to 980 °C). The summary of the CRT analyses are given in Table 2. It is apparent that there are two isothermal decomposition steps at 57 and 77 °C assigned to dehydration. Two higher dehydration mass loss steps are observed at 183 and 294 °C; the first step is a short isothermal step and the second is non-isothermal. Similarly to the dynamic pattern, sulphate decomposition also takes place in two stages under CRTA conditions. In addition to the quasi-isothermal step at 692 °C and the isothermal one at 821 °C, a shoulder peak is observed at 753 °C. This shoulder peak indicates the possible formation of an oxy-sulphate intermediate upon heating.

Controlled rate thermal analysis of dietrichite

The controlled rate thermal analysis of dietrichite is shown in Fig. 6a (up to 430 °C) and 6b (from 430 to 980 °C). The



**Fig. 5** Controlled rate thermal analysis of apjohnite: **a** ambient to 430 °C, **b** 430–980 °C



**Fig. 6** Controlled rate thermal analysis of dietrichite: **a** ambient to 430 °C, **b** 430–980 °C



thermal analysis patterns (Fig. 6a) show two isothermal steps at 78 and 102 °C which as for the dynamic thermal analysis experiment are attributed to dehydration. Three higher temperature thermal decomposition steps are observed at 228, 243 and 323 °C and are also attributed to dehydration of the dietrichite. (The possible isothermal nature of the higher temperature dehydration steps cannot be proved because the level of decomposition is under the set value of 0.1 mg/min.) Similarly to the dynamic experiment sulphate decomposition is a single step process. The fact that the temperature remained constant at 636 °C for more than 400 min is a proof that the rate-determining step of decomposition is the slow heat transport. Providing time enough for the heat and the mass transport processes to occur, quasi equilibrium decomposition can be reached.

## Conclusions

A series of halotrichites also known as pseudo-alums including halotrichite, apjohnite, and dietrichite have been studied by both dynamic thermal and controlled rate thermal analysis. EDX analysis shows the chemical formula of the minerals to be  $(\text{Fe}^{2+})\text{SO}_4 \cdot \text{Al}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3 \cdot 22\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ,  $(\text{Mn}^{2+})\text{SO}_4 \cdot \text{Al}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3 \cdot 22\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ,  $(\text{Zn})\text{SO}_4 \cdot \text{Al}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3 \cdot 22\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , respectively. X-ray diffraction showed the minerals to be phase pure except for dietrichite which showed the presence of minor gypsum.

The thermal decomposition of the halotrichite minerals occur through a series of isothermal and non-isothermal steps as is shown by the CRTA experiments. In general a number of dehydration steps are observed up to around 340 °C. These steps are isothermal in the CRTA experiment. The high temperature of the last dehydration steps (343 °C for halotrichite; 304 °C for apjohnite; 342 °C for dietrichite) provides an indication of how strongly hydrogen bonded the water is in the halotrichite structure.

With the use of the CRTA technique the thermal decomposition processes can be standardized. It means that the decomposition temperatures are independent of the experimental conditions offering a solid basis for comparison when concerning the thermal behaviour of a series of minerals is evaluated.

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