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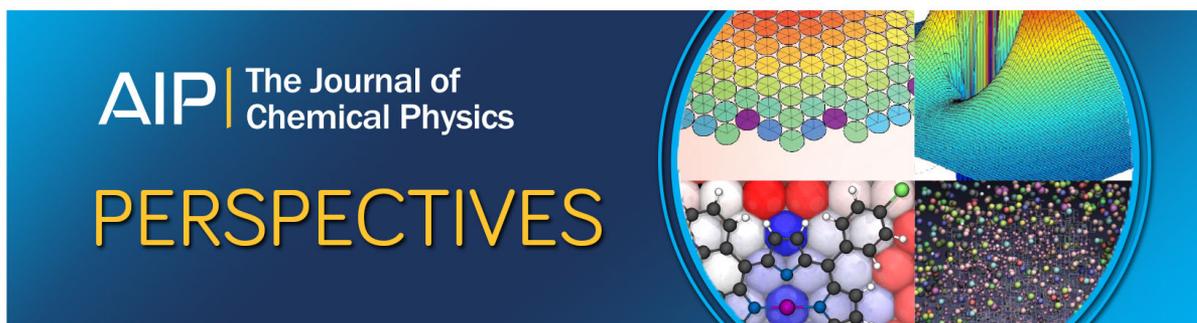
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# Synthesis and stability of hydrogen selenide compounds at high pressure

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The observation of high-temperature superconductivity in hydride sulfide ( $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ ) at high pressures has generated considerable interest in compressed hydrogen-rich compounds. High-pressure hydrogen selenide ( $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$ ) has also been predicted to be superconducting at high temperatures; however, its behaviour and stability upon compression remains unknown. In this study, we synthesize  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  *in situ* from elemental Se and molecular  $\text{H}_2$  at pressures of 0.4 GPa and temperatures of 473 K. On compression at 300 K, we observe the high-pressure solid phase sequence (I-I'-IV) of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  through Raman spectroscopy and x-ray diffraction measurements, before dissociation into its constituent elements. Through the compression of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  in  $\text{H}_2$  media, we also observe the formation of a host-guest structure,  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ , which is stable at the same conditions as  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$ , with respect to decomposition. These measurements show that the behaviour of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  is remarkably similar to that of  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$  and provides further understanding of the hydrogen chalcogenides under pressure. *Published by AIP Publishing.* <https://doi.org/10.1063/1.5004242>

## I. INTRODUCTION

The recent claim of high-temperature superconductivity in hydrogen sulfide at megabar pressures has drawn attention back to the formation of hydrides with exotic properties.<sup>1</sup> The superconductive mechanism, composition, structure, and stability field of sulfur hydride at high pressures have been extensively investigated, although decisive conclusions have yet to be reached.<sup>2–10</sup> Despite this interest and predictions of high  $T_c$  superconductivity, the heavier hydrogen chalcogenides (i.e.,  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{Te}$ ) remain experimentally unexplored.<sup>11,12</sup>

$\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  is known to form from the direct reaction between Se and  $\text{H}_2$  at high temperature. However, experimental studies of the solid state are limited to ambient pressure, low temperature investigations.<sup>13–16</sup> As the heavier sister molecule to hydrogen sulfide, hydrogen selenide is likely to exhibit similar behaviour at high pressure; indeed, theoretical studies at the megabar regime find similarities in the solid phases.<sup>11,17</sup>

$\text{H}_2\text{S}$  exhibits three solid phases between pressures of 0.5 GPa and 27 GPa at 300 K: transitioning from a rotationally disordered solid (I-I') to an ordered hydrogen-bonded structure (IV), before dissociating.<sup>18–26</sup> To date, there have been no experimental high-pressure investigations of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$ , but low temperature studies at ambient pressure find strong similarities in the crystal structures and Raman characteristics of phases

I–III, with their corresponding phases in  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ .<sup>14,16</sup> Mixtures of  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$  and  $\text{H}_2$  are known to form  $(\text{H}_2\text{S})_2\text{H}_2$ , a host-guest compound at pressures as low as 3.5 GPa.<sup>27</sup> High  $T_c$  superconductivity has been predicted in high-pressure simulations of both  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$  and  $(\text{H}_2\text{S})_2\text{H}_2$  compounds.<sup>28,29</sup> Combined experimental and theoretical efforts have suggested the high- $T_c$  phase as an  $\text{H}_3\text{S}$  compound, with a maximum  $T_c$  of 203 K at 155 GPa.<sup>1,8,29</sup> With Se being larger and slightly less electronegative, computational studies predict lower stability with respect to pressure but propose the formation of superconducting phases  $\text{H}_3\text{Se}$  and  $\text{HSe}$  above  $\sim 120$  GPa, with maximum  $T_c$  estimated between 110 and 130 K.<sup>11,17</sup> To further understand the predicted exotic phenomena, it is important to first investigate the formation and high-pressure stability of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  and to compare the behaviour with that of the extensively studied  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ .

In this study, we report the direct synthesis of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  from its constituent elements at conditions of 0.4 GPa and  $\sim 473$  K. We find that phase I of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  undergoes a phase transition at 12 GPa, similar to the transition to phase IV in  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ . In  $\text{H}_2$ -rich mixtures, we observe the formation of a host-guest  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  structure above 4.2 GPa. This compound is identified by characteristic vibrational Raman spectra differing from pure  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$ . The structure and stoichiometry of this compound were confirmed through x-ray diffraction measurements whereby we find  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  to crystallize in a body-centered tetragonal structure, space group  $I4/mcm$ , analogous to that observed in  $(\text{H}_2\text{S})_2\text{H}_2$ . Both  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  and  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  are stable to 24 GPa at 300 K, after which both decompose into their constituent elements.

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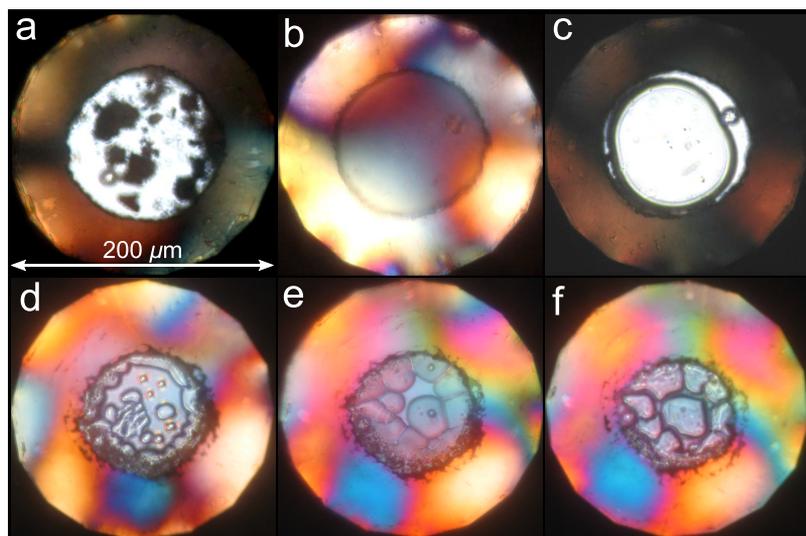


FIG. 1. Photomicrographs of the synthesis of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  in a diamond-anvil cell sample chamber. The sample chamber is formed by a rhenium gasket. (a)  $\text{H}_2$  and solid Se at 0.4 GPa and room temperature, (b)  $\text{H}_2\text{Se-H}_2$  mixture at 0.4 GPa and 473 K, (c) liquid phase separation of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  (central bubble) and  $\text{H}_2$  (surrounding area) at 0.4 GPa and room temperature after heating, (d)  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  beginning to solidify, (e) slow coalescence of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  regions, (f) completely solidified  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  at 1.5 GPa.

## II. EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

At ambient condition,  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  is a highly toxic and flammable gas. Such hazards can be avoided by the direct synthesis of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  from Se and fluid  $\text{H}_2$  in a diamond-anvil cell. Moreover, this technique also allows precise control of the ratio of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  to  $\text{H}_2$ . High purity selenium (99.999%) was loaded into a diamond-anvil cell with a small chip of ruby and subsequently gas loaded with research grade hydrogen (99.9999%) at 0.2 GPa [Fig. 1(a)].<sup>30</sup> Rhenium gaskets were used to form the sample chamber in all experimental runs. Sample sizes ranged between 100 and 125  $\mu\text{m}$  once in the solid state. Once loaded, Se- $\text{H}_2$  mixtures were then compressed to 0.4 GPa and heated to 473 K for at least 2 h until all the Se had reacted [Fig. 1(b)]. On slowly cooling to room temperature, liquid  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  was obtained with clear phase separation from fluid  $\text{H}_2$  as a consequence of non-stoichiometry [Fig. 1(c)]. We found that heating was necessary to promote the reaction of Se and  $\text{H}_2$ . Leaving Se- $\text{H}_2$  mixtures at pressures between 0.2 GPa and 3 GPa for one month did not promote synthesis at room temperature.

$\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  is very sensitive to both laser light and x-ray synchrotron radiation, which causes the sample to decompose, therefore precautions were required during data acquisition. Raman spectroscopy measurements were made using a custom-built micro-focused Raman system.<sup>31,32</sup> The laser power of the system was kept below 10 mW to prevent decomposition of the sample to Se and  $\text{H}_2$ . We have found that 647 nm laser emission was favorable over shorter wavelengths and did not cause any degradation of the sample during data acquisition. We found that the sample in the liquid state was much more prone to laser damage; thus, measurements were collected above pressures of 3.8 GPa. X-ray diffraction data were collected at beamline 16-IDB at the Advanced Photon Source (USA). Angle-dispersive x-ray diffraction patterns were recorded on a Pilatus 1M-F image-plate detector with a micro-focused synchrotron radiation of 30 keV. Data were integrated with DIOPRAS<sup>33</sup> to yield intensity vs.  $2\theta$  plots. Patterns were indexed with GSAS-II,<sup>34</sup> and Le Bail<sup>35</sup> refinements were carried out in JANA2006.<sup>36</sup> Exposure

of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  to synchrotron x-ray radiation resulted in the formation of amorphous Se at the point of exposure, requiring the acquisition of data from a different sample position at each pressure point. Powder quality was very poor in all samples excluding the possibility of Rietveld profile refinement.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On compression above 1 GPa,  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  began to nucleate in fluid  $\text{H}_2$  [see Figs. 1(d)–1(f)] with full crystallization occurring at pressures of 1.5 GPa [Fig. 1(g)]. Strong vibrational modes are observed in the Raman spectra, the most intense being the symmetrical  $\nu_1$  and asymmetrical  $\nu_3$  stretching modes, shown in Fig. 2(a). In phase I, these modes appear as a single broad band ( $\sim 2250 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  at 2.5 GPa). The  $\nu_2$  molecular bending mode, observed at frequencies of  $\sim 1010 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ , is largely unaffected by pressure due to the “bent” molecular geometry. The behaviour of the vibrational Raman spectra of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  is very similar to that of  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$  but shifted to lower frequencies. In phase I, the Raman frequencies of  $\nu_1$  and  $\nu_3$  of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  differ by  $300 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  compared with the equivalent modes of  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ , whilst the bending mode differs by  $175 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  (see Fig. 3).<sup>26,39</sup> In all our experimental runs,  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  tended to form multiple single crystals (see the insets of Fig. 4); however, due to the sensitivity of the sample to synchrotron x-ray exposure, it was difficult to acquire data capable of completely refining a structure. Despite this, we were able to determine the structure of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  at 4.1 GPa, confirming that  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  crystallizes into cubic phase-I [ $Fm\bar{3}m$ ,  $a = 5.424(3) \text{ \AA}$ ], shown in Fig. 4. The structure of phase I of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  is equivalent to that of phase I of  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ .<sup>18</sup>

At pressures of 7.7 GPa, the unresolved  $\nu_1$  and  $\nu_3$  modes begin to differ in intensity, with  $\nu_1$  being the more intense. This was determined previously for  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$  to indicate transformation to an intermediate phase I'.<sup>39</sup> Above pressures of 12 GPa, there is a further transformation to phase IV, characterised by the splitting of  $\nu_1$  and  $\nu_3$ , and from a reduction in peak width and increase in intensity. The asymmetrical stretching

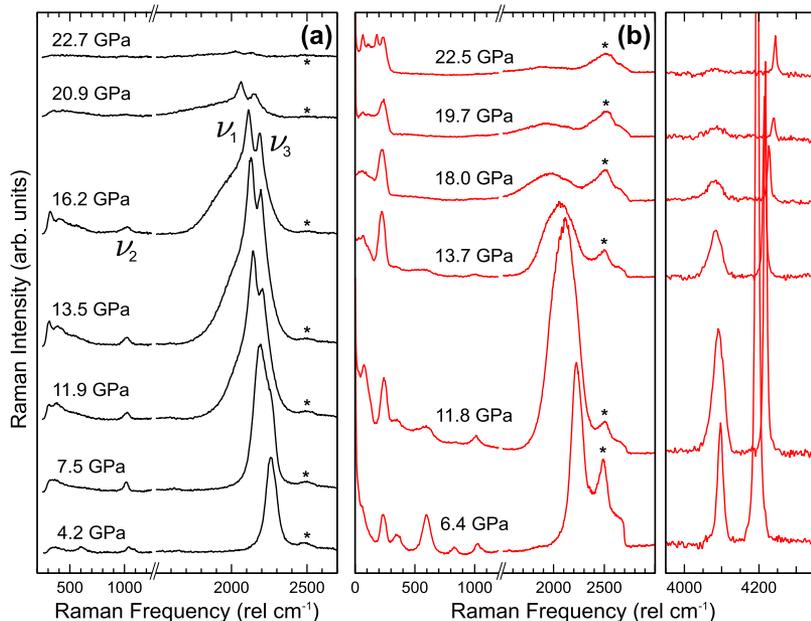


FIG. 2. (a) Representative Raman spectra of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  on compression at 300 K (black). (b) Representative Raman spectra of  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  formed from a  $\text{H}_2$ -rich mixture at 300 K (red). The second order diamond is indicated by \*.

mode,  $\nu_3$ , is higher in frequency by  $860\text{ cm}^{-1}$  compared with  $\nu_1$ . Due to the instability of the sample to synchrotron x-ray exposure, we were unable to confirm a structural transition to phase I' or IV in  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  through x-ray diffraction analysis; however, the Raman characteristics of the transitions are identical to those observed in  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ . On further compression above 20 GPa, we see the reduced intensity of all vibrational modes, and the crystallites visibly darken as  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  dissociates into its constituent elements. The decomposition is complete by 24 GPa, and at 30 GPa, the x-ray diffraction measurements showed only incommensurate monoclinic Se-IV, whilst Raman measurements showed only the characteristic Raman spectrum of Se and  $\text{H}_2$ . In  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ , the dissociation at 300 K occurs from  $\sim 27$ – $50$  GPa,<sup>23,24</sup> the onset being slightly higher than that observed here in  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  although over a much greater pressure range. Given the reduced X–H bond strength, it is unsurprising that  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  decomposes at lower pressure and within a much smaller pressure range than  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ ; hence, one would expect  $\text{H}_2\text{Te}$  to decompose at even lower pressure, if it can be stabilized at all at room temperature. This successive reduction of hydride decomposition pressure throughout group 16 reflects the trend observed in the hydrogen halides, where HCl is stable to at least 50 GPa, with HBr and HI decomposing at 42 GPa and 10 GPa, respectively.<sup>40–42</sup>

In all sample concentrations we studied with excess  $\text{H}_2$ , we observed partial or full formation of an  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$ – $\text{H}_2$  compound above pressures of 4.2 GPa, which we identify as  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ . Full formation of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  was observed in samples with high  $\text{H}_2$  concentration, as demonstrated in our x-ray diffraction measurements [Fig. 2(b)]. The formation was initially identified through the appearance of a second vibrational mode assigned to  $\text{H}_2$  within the newly formed compound [see Fig. 2(b)]. This mode is  $\sim 100\text{ cm}^{-1}$  lower in frequency compared with pure  $\text{H}_2$  and has different frequency pressure dependence. The  $\nu_1$  and  $\nu_3$  modes of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  also behave very differently in the compound than in  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$ , whereby we observe no splitting at phase IV conditions, and the modes soften rapidly

with pressures above 12 GPa. These observations are very similar to the Raman characteristics for  $(\text{H}_2\text{S})_2\text{H}_2$  above 17 GPa, which was synthesized in  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ – $\text{H}_2$  mixtures.<sup>27</sup> To confirm that this is an analogous compound formed in  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$ – $\text{H}_2$  mixtures, we have performed x-ray diffraction measurements (see Figs. 4 and 5). Due to the sample sensitivity to synchrotron x-ray exposure and propensity to form large single-crystal grains, it was difficult to collect high-quality diffraction patterns; however, we were able to obtain a sufficient number of reflections to allow indexing to a body-centered tetragonal structure, space group  $I4/mcm$  with  $a = 7.518(4)$  and  $c = 6.266(4)$  Å at 5.2 GPa, and unit-cell dimensions could be extracted to 14.9 GPa (see Fig. 5). The significant diffuse scattering observed is strongly suggestive of hindered rotational disorder in the  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  molecules.<sup>43</sup>

It is interesting that changes in volume per formula unit ( $V/Z$ ) with pressure shows that  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  adopts a volume marginally greater (3% on average) than the sum of its constituent elements [solid line in Fig. 5(b)]. This is an indication that  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  is highly unstable, which is in agreement with our other observations. It is notable that the volume difference increases with pressure, reflecting the increased instability of  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  relative to decomposition into Se and  $\text{H}_2$  with increasing pressure. Similar behaviour is observed in pure  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  at pressure; at 4.1 GPa, we observe  $V/Z = 39.887(4)\text{ Å}^3$ , while the volume calculated from the constituent elements is  $V/Z = 37.321\text{ Å}^3$ . This behaviour, although highly unusual, is not unique; recently we have reported on the equation of state of HI, another highly unstable compound under pressure, which appears to have an experimentally determined  $V/Z$  7.3% greater than that calculated from I and H.<sup>42</sup>

On compression, we do not see any evidence for further phase transitions in  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ , such as the ordering transition observed in  $(\text{H}_2\text{S})_2\text{H}_2$ . Instead,  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  starts to decompose at exactly the same pressure conditions as  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  observing the reduced intensity of the vibrational modes. At pressures

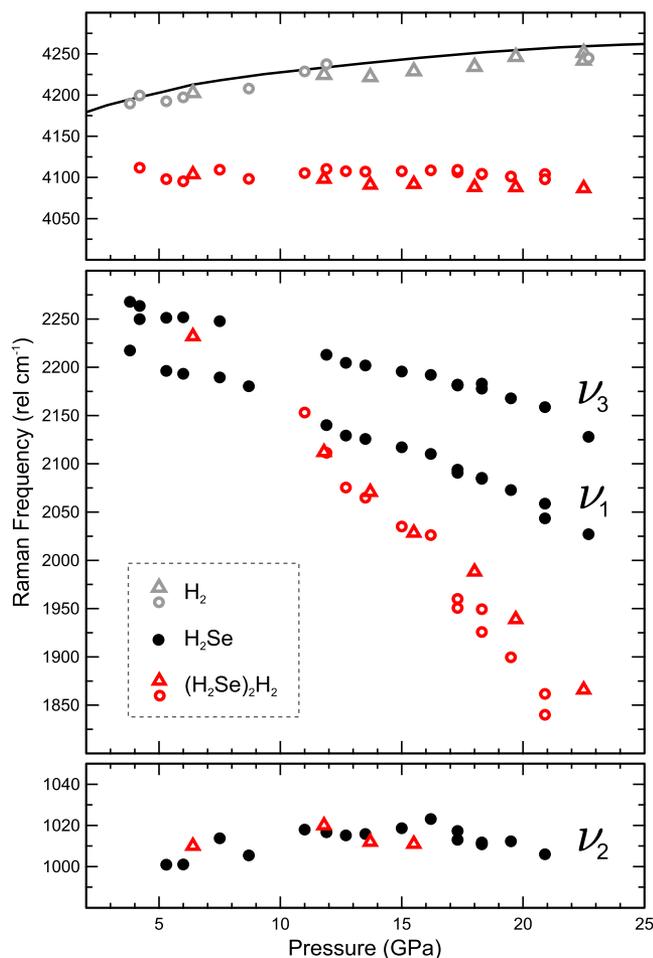


FIG. 3. Vibrational Raman frequencies of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  (black closed circles),  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  (red open circles/triangles), and  $\text{H}_2$  (grey open circles/triangles) as functions of pressure. Filled circles, open circles, and open triangles correspond to different experimental runs. Top panel: Vibrational modes of excess hydrogen (grey symbols) and hydrogen molecules within  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  (red). Solid black line corresponds to measurements of pure  $\text{H}_2$ . Middle panel: Symmetrical,  $\nu_1$ , and asymmetrical,  $\nu_3$ , stretching modes of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  (black) and the corresponding modes within  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  (red). Bottom panel: The  $\nu_2$  molecular bending mode of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  (black) and the corresponding mode within  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  (red).

approaching 22.5 GPa, the sample visibly phase separates and the transparent  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  crystals become dark and metallic, which shows the characteristic low frequency modes of Se [see Fig. 2(b)], with the remaining sample being transparent molecular hydrogen.

Recent x-ray synchrotron measurements have suggested that high- $T_c$  superconducting  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$  could be due to the formation of  $\text{H}_3\text{S}$ , which reforms upon partial decomposition of  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$  at high pressure.<sup>8–10</sup> Our study demonstrates that  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}-\text{H}_2$  mixtures behave very similar to  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{S}-\text{H}_2$  at high pressure and 300 K. Assuming the decomposition of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  can be stabilized by low temperatures, it is very plausible that  $\text{H}_3\text{Se}$  is formed at high pressures; if  $\text{H}_3\text{S}$  is indeed the thermodynamically stable high pressure phase of  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ . Given that the behaviour of  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$  above 100 GPa is not completely understood,<sup>2–10</sup> experiments on  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  at the conditions in which superconductivity is predicted could prove very insightful for all the hydrogen chalcogenides.

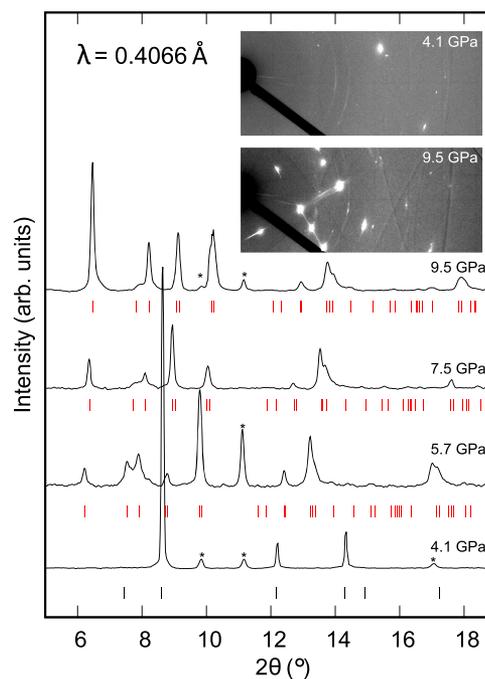


FIG. 4. X-ray diffraction data for  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  and  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  at high pressures. Below 4.1 GPa, diffraction spots due to phase-I of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  are observed (black tick marks). Above 4.1 GPa, diffraction spots corresponding to the hydrogen-bonded compound  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  are observed up to pressures of 14.9 GPa (red tick marks). Peaks marked with (\*) are due to the Re gasket. Inset: Single crystal-like x-ray diffraction patterns of  $\text{H}_2\text{Se}$  at 4.1 GPa and  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  at 9.5 GPa, the latter of which includes significant streaks of diffuse scattering.

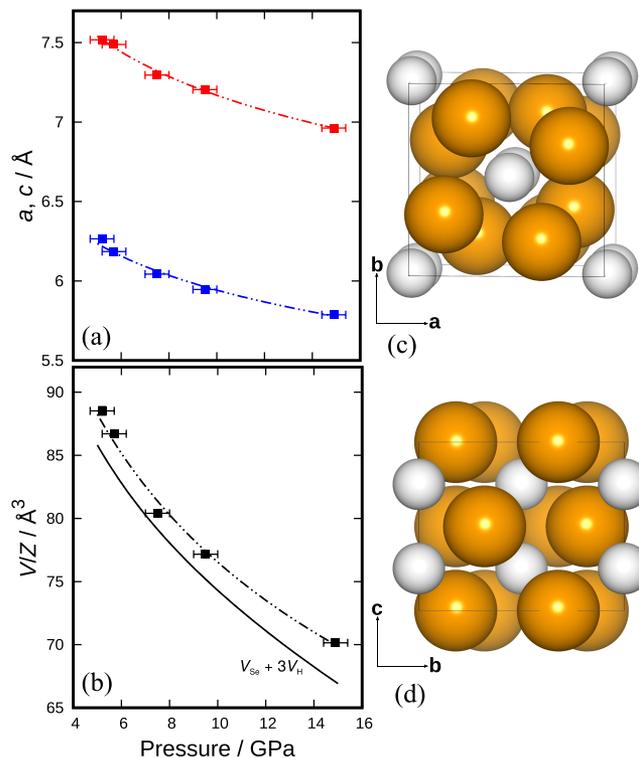


FIG. 5. (a) Changes in unit-cell dimensions for  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  as a function of pressure ( $a$ —red and  $c$ —blue). (b)  $V/Z$  as a function of pressure for  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ . The solid line indicates volume calculated according to the atomic equations of state for  $\text{H}_2$ <sup>37</sup> and  $\text{Se}$ .<sup>38</sup> [(c) and (d)] Structure of  $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$  viewed down the  $c$  and  $a$  axes illustrating the layered nature of the compound.

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