

Manuscript Number: CERI-D-20-01052R4

Title: Mechanical properties and thermal shock in thin ZrO₂-Y₂O₃-Al₂O₃ films obtained by the sol-gel method

Article Type: Full length article

Keywords: Thin films; dip-coating; zirconia; mechanical behavior; thermal shock.

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July, 2020

Editor
CERAMICS INTERNATIONAL

RESPONSE TO REVIEWER:

Dear Editor,

We appreciate the comments made, as they suppose contributions that undoubtedly, clarify and improve the text and interest of this article.

I attach the entire revised article, indicating in yellow the contributions and changes for the manuscript entitled: "*Mechanical properties and thermal shock in thin films of the ZrO₂-Y₂O₃-Al₂O₃ system obtained by the sol-gel method*"

Reviewer #3:

1. Raman analysis of optimized sample should be added.

Raman spectroscopy is undoubtedly one of the most powerful analytical techniques available today and complements the XRD technique.

We have included in the text the figure and the description requested by the reviewer.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best regards,

Antonio Macías-García, Ph.D

University of Extremadura

Mechanical properties and thermal shock in thin ZrO_2 - Y_2O_3 - Al_2O_3 films obtained by the sol-gel method

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Abstract: Thin multilayer coatings of ZrO_2 - Y_2O_3 - Al_2O_3 were prepared using the sol-gel method and dip-coating technique in order to advance in the study of what influence the incorporation of Al_2O_3 has on films of Y_2O_3 -doped ZrO_2 , investigating its role in the synthesis of the solutions and in the characteristics and properties of the coatings. After the characterization of the solutions used in the process, the microstructure of the films was studied and their mechanical behaviour and resistance to thermal shock were determined so as to optimize the characteristics and functionality of these coatings. With increased alumina content, 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (20 mol%), the cubic phase of the zirconia disappeared completely at the sintering temperature used (700°C), resulting in the tetragonal phase with Al in solution. There was also a decrease in the coatings' hardness and Young's modulus, and an increase in toughness and resistance to thermal shock. These results allow guidelines to be established for the design of multilayer structures that are, tougher, more resistant, and have improved surface properties.

Keywords: thin films; dip-coating; zirconia; mechanical behaviour; thermal shock.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1 Surface protection using ceramic coatings is an excellent option for their interesting
2 physicochemical properties and high-temperature stability, rigidity, and resistance to wear
3 and tear [1-3] in technological applications in which materials operate in aggressive
4 environments or under extreme conditions of temperature or pressure. In particular, the
5 manufacture of materials covered with base layers of zirconia (ZrO_2) have prompted
6 numerous investigations due to their interesting properties and applications in various
7 technological fields.

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19 The sol-gel process is one of the most interesting options for obtaining thin films of
20 oxides, and there are multiple examples in the literature that illustrate its versatility and
21 simplicity [4, 5]. In addition, this method has certain advantages over other techniques,
22 such as low processing temperatures, precise control of chemical composition, excellent
23 adhesion to substrates, etc. The immersion method, *dip-coating*, is a deposition technique
24 used to obtain coatings that has some advantages such as the ability to cover large
25 surfaces, the simplicity of the equipment needed, and low cost.

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37 The performance of sol-gel coatings depends to a large extent on their structural quality,
38 since the presence of cracks and pores degrades their mechanical properties, and hence
39 their effectiveness as protection [6]. For this reason, it is very important to control the
40 degree of densification of the coatings during the different stages of the process. Another
41 point of great technological importance to highlight is control of the coating's thickness,
42 d , which depends on properties of the sol-gel solution (density, viscosity, etc.) and the
43 actual deposition process (withdrawal rate of the substrate from the sol-gel solution). It is
44 important to note that the thicker the coating, the greater the degree of chemical, thermal,
45 and mechanical protection the substrate will offer.

1 The aforementioned two aspects, structural quality and maximum thickness, are
2 sometimes difficult to reconcile. A certain limiting value inevitably results in the
3 appearance of cracks in the coating which degrade its efficiency as a protective barrier.
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5 This gives rise to the notion of maximum thickness limit, called the critical thickness, t_c ,
6 and defined as the maximum coating thickness free of cracks that can be obtained in a
7 single deposition process (monolayer coating). Nonetheless, it is possible to obtain
8 coatings free of cracks with thicknesses greater than the critical thickness by depositing
9 successive layers (multilayer coating). This method involves repeating the monolayer
10 process as many times as suggested by the ratio between the desired thickness, t , and t_c .
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13 To manufacture multilayer coatings, it is advisable to determine t_c and the necessary
14 experimental conditions beforehand. This will make it possible to ensure that all the
15 layers are free of cracks and maximize the process of obtaining coatings of several layers.
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18 The controlled design of zirconia-based sol-gel coatings is a challenge of major
19 technological significance due to the interesting physicochemical properties of these
20 materials [7], as well as the aforementioned advantages of the sol-gel method itself.
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23 However, one of the properties that partly limits their applicability is low resistance to
24 thermal shock. When the surface of a ceramic material is subjected to a sudden change in
25 temperature, this produces stresses that can cause it to rupture. These stresses arise due to
26 differential expansions induced during the application of a specific temperature gradient.
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29 These can also form in polycrystalline or multiphase materials due to differential
30 expansions between adjacent phases or grains [8].
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33 The sensitivity of a material to these deformations determines its resistance to sudden
34 changes in temperature. Therefore, a material's response to thermal shock depends on its
35 mechanical and thermal properties. To assess the stresses induced by thermal shock, one
36 needs to consider a great number of parameters such as Young's modulus, Poisson's ratio,
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1 the coefficient of thermal expansion, the thermal conductivity of the material, the size and
2 shape of the sample, and those that refer to the characteristics of the tempering treatment
3 such as the temperature gradient and heat transfer coefficient of the medium in which the
4 heat is produced [9-10].
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9 Various parameters have been developed to assess the thermal shock of ceramic
10 materials, many of them introduced by Hasselman [11], among which are the coefficient
11 of thermal expansion, elasticity, and mechanical resistance. Tancret and Ostertock [12]
12 have recently proposed that one of these parameters be used to study ceramic materials
13 with cracks produced by indentation. The main advantage of using indentation cracks is
14 that, contrary to other methods where a great number of parameters need to be known to
15 assess resistance to thermal shock, one only needs to know the development of the
16 fissures.
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29 In order to improve the mechanical, thermal, and chemical protection properties of ZrO_2
30 coatings, researchers have tested various compositions and proportions of certain oxides
31 to use as dopants, such as Al_2O_3 , MgO , etc. [13-15]. The present work seeks to obtain and
32 characterize multilayer coatings with a ZrO_2 and $ZrO_2-Al_2O_3$ base through the use of the
33 sol-gel method and dip-coating technique to study the effect of a wide range of % Al_2O_3
34 (between 0-20 % Al_2O_3) incorporated into the coatings on their micro-structural and
35 mechanical properties and their behaviour when confronted with thermal shock. The
36 intention is to establish guidelines to follow when designing multilayer structures that are
37 tougher, more resistant, and have better surface properties.
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52 **2. EXPERIMENTAL METHOD**

53 **2.1. Preparation and characterization of stable solutions**

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55 The starting solution was prepared by mixing and stirring zirconium (IV) n-propoxide
56 (ZNP) 70 wt.% diluted in propanol (PrOH) and with nitric acid (HNO_3) as catalyst in an
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1 anhydrous nitrogen atmosphere to avoid hydroxide precipitation. To prepare precursor
2 solutions for 3 mol% yttria-stabilized zirconia (3YSZ), the starting solution was mixed
3 with a second solution of yttrium (III) acetate (YAc·4H₂O) dissolved in PrOH and HNO₃.
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5 The ZNP/PrOH/H₂O/HNO₃ molar ratios of the final solution were 1/15/6/1 [13].
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9 The Al₂O₃ sol was prepared by mixing aluminium tri-sec-butoxide with propanol, then
10 adding HNO₃ as catalyst. The aluminium tri-sec-butoxide/propanol/H₂O/HNO₃ molar
11 ratio was 1/15/6/1. The alumina sol was added into the 3YSZ sol under continuous
12 stirring for 1 h to prepare 3YSZ-Al₂O₃ (5 mol%) and 3YSZ-Al₂O₃ (20 mol%) coating
13 solutions.
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22 The 3YSZ, 3YSZ-Al₂O₃ (5 mol%), and 3YSZ-Al₂O₃ (20 mol%) sols were characterized
23 by measuring their density and viscosity at room temperature, using a 10-mL Gay-Lussac
24 pycnometer for liquids and a modified Ostwald viscometer, respectively (see Table 1).
25 The solution pH, measured by paper indicator (Acilit, Merck) was approximately 0.5 in
26 all solutions. As expected, the prepared sols were stable, clear, and transparent.
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36 === TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE ===
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40 **2.2. Preparation and characterization of the coatings**

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42 AISI 310 stainless steel (Fe/Cr25/Ni20) sheets of dimensions 75 × 25 × 1 mm were used
43 as substrate. To increase and facilitate the coatings' adhesion, these stainless steel pieces
44 were first mechanically modified by sanding, polishing, and a final thermal treatment at
45 300°C in air for 1 h. Soda-lime glass sheets with the same dimensions were used as
46 transparent substrates to determine the thickness of the films by means of transmittance
47 spectra in accordance with the previously reported procedure [13]. All of them were
48 cleansed before use with dilute acetic acid solution, distilled water, and 96% ethanol.
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1 The prepared sols were deposited onto the substrates at room temperature by dip-coating
2 by means of a HOYTON HM-20D electromechanical testing machine using different
3 withdrawal rates (4–14 cm/min). Finally, the coated substrates were air-dried at 100°C for
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5 1 h, at ambient pressure. The dried coated substrates were annealed (sintered) at different
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7 temperatures depending on the substrate employed (500°C for soda-lime glass substrates
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9 and 700°C for AISI-310 stainless steel substrates) using a quartz-tube furnace with a
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11 heating-cooling rate of 3°C/min and soaking time of 2 h under air atmosphere. The
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13 procedure for obtaining multilayer coating films involved from 3 to 5 repetitions of the
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15 above consecutive stages.
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21 A standard Spectronic Helios Alpha UV–Vis spectrophotometer (Thermo Fisher
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23 Scientific) was used over the spectral range of 200-1000 nm to analyse the
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25 $ZrO_2/Y_2O_3/Al_2O_3$ -based monolayer and multilayer films coated onto transparent
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27 substrates, determining the refractive index and transmittance curves of the different
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29 coatings. The porosity of the coatings and thickness they reached using different
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31 withdrawal rates were determined by applying Swanepoel's method [16]. A Nikon
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33 reflected-light optical microscope (Epiphot 300) was used to assess the structural quality
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35 and check for the presence of possible fissures and cracks in the $ZrO_2/Y_2O_3/Al_2O_3$ -based
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37 monolayer and multilayer films. The XRD pattern was obtained using a Philips PW-1800
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39 powder diffractometer with CuK_{α} radiation ($\lambda = 1.54183 \text{ \AA}$) and a secondary graphite
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41 monochromator with generator settings of 40 kV and 35 mA. The diffraction data were
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43 collected over a 2θ range of 20–80° with a step width of 0.02° and a counting time of 5
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45 s/step. A Nicolet Almega Dispersive Raman spectrometer (Thermo Scientific) has been
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47 used. The spectra have been obtained with a 633 nm laser at 100% power, with
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49 fluorescence correction and subsequently applying a smoothing.
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1 The mechanical responses of the uncoated and the zirconia and zirconia-alumina coated
2 steel samples were studied using a Berkovich (three-sided pyramid) indenter at loads of 5
3 mN to 20 mN, obtaining the values of ultra-microhardness (H) and Young's modulus (E)
4 from the indentation load–unload curves (load versus penetration depth) [17].
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9 The coating materials are ceramics with a relatively high coefficient of expansion and
10 toughness. Applying a Vickers indenter to their surface creates imperfections in the form
11 of indentations from whose vertices appear what are known as Palmqvist cracks [18]. To
12 study the response to thermal shock, indentations were made with a Shimadzu Micro
13 Hardness Tester Type M Vickers indenter, applying a load of 5 N to induce residual
14 stresses which are responsible for the expansion of the cracks during the indentation
15 process. Different temperature gradients were applied (550-20°C, 400-20°C and 300-
16 20°C), and different cooling media and curves: abrupt cooling in water at room
17 temperature at a cooling rate of around 300°C/s; cooling inside the oven (Figure 1) at a
18 cooling rate of 0.7 °C/s for the first 240 s, and then approximately 0.2°C/s; air cooling
19 (Figure 2) with a cooling curve of two well-differentiated parts – first, a relatively fast
20 and strong cooling rate of about 35 °C/s for 10 s, and then, starting from 10 s, a second
21 cooling phase at an approximate rate of 1° C/s when the sample was in contact with air. A
22 Flir Systems InfraCAM thermal imaging camera, and a GM 900 infrared thermometer
23 were used to check the temperatures.
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53 54 **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION** 55

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57 To obtain coatings with good structural quality using the dip-coating technique, we first
58 needed to determine the maximum withdrawal rate in the deposition stage allowing us to
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1 obtain the thickest possible coatings without cracks. This withdrawal rate depends on the
2 physicochemical properties of the solutions used, especially their viscosity [13].
3 Therefore, for practical purposes and due to the aging of the solutions over time, the
4 product resulting from multiplying the maximum withdrawal rate by its viscosity needed
5 to be determined ($v_{max} \times \eta$). This product (see Table 1) remained constant over the time of
6 use of the fresh solutions, i.e., without excessive aging time. The values showed a
7 decrease as the Al_2O_3 content of the compositions increased, which led us to use slower
8 withdrawal rates in the deposition processes and thus obtain slightly smaller thicknesses
9 for each layer of coating deposited.
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22 Once the optimal conditions for the coating had been determined in accordance with the
23 withdrawal rate and viscosity, the coatings were made under the conditions set out in
24 Table 1. Micrographs resulting from the above process are shown in Figure 3. In
25 particular, Figures 3a and 3b show the micrographs of coatings deposited onto soda-lime
26 glass and AISI-310 stainless steel substrates, respectively, that indicate the start and
27 appearance of cracks resulting from a withdrawal rate slightly greater than the critical
28 value, and Figures 3c and 3d the respective major progressive cracking resulting from the
29 use of a withdrawal rate very much greater than the critical value. It should be noted that
30 these cracks do not disappear with the application of subsequent deposition layers.
31 Therefore, it is especially important to be careful not to exceed this critical deposition rate
32 for each layer.
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53 Once the critical deposition rate had been set and the coatings made, different parameters
54 of the coatings were determined by UV-visible spectrophotometry. Figure 4 shows the
55 transmittance curves of monolayer films obtained from sols 3YSZ, 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (5
56 mol%), and 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (20 mol%) coated onto a soda-lime glass substrate employing a
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1 withdrawal rate of 14 cm/min and heat-treated at 500°C. The presence of a greater
2 number of peaks and interference bands, as well as the greater amplitude of these bands,
3 it should be interpreted as that the sample will present higher densification
4 (approximation to the theoretical refractive index, n , as well as a lower porosity, P), even
5 also a greater film thickness. However, the final value of such parameters will also be
6 conditioned by the relative positions (wavelength of max/min) at which these peaks
7 appear. Therefore, a thorough analysis of these transmittance curves is essential. From the
8 transmittance curves and applying Swanepoel's method, it is possible to obtain the
9 coating's refractive index, n , thickness, t , and porosity, P [13, 16]. The results are
10 presented in Table 2 (the estimated errors are around 3%). A slight decrease in the
11 thickness of the films is observed, as well as a lower densification as the %Al₂O₃
12 increases in the samples.
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36 The phases present in the coatings were analysed by X-ray diffraction. Figure 5 shows the
37 experimental XRD pattern obtained from each of the coatings used in this study and
38 deposited onto AISI-310 stainless steel substrates. Peaks appear in the austenitic phase of
39 the substrate (γ -Fe), while the other peaks correspond to the cubic phase of zirconia (c-
40 ZrO₂) and in smaller measure to its tetragonal phase (t-ZrO₂). The main X-ray diffraction
41 peaks of c-ZrO₂ (with 3mol% Y₂O₃ as stabilizing oxide) are the Miller indices 111, 200,
42 220, 311 and 400, which in a typical Cu K α incident radiation experiment appear at the
43 positions angle 30.2, 35.0, 50.4, 59.8 and 74.0 °2 θ , respectively. The quantitative analysis
44 of the XRD data (Table 3) showed the cubic phase of the zirconia to be present in the
45 3YSZ and 3YSZ-Al₂O₃ (5 mol%) coatings, with the latter having a greater presence of a
46 tetragonal phase of zirconium oxide appearing in stable form. On the other hand, in the
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3YSZ-Al₂O₃ (20 mol%) coating samples, the cubic phase of zirconia had disappeared, giving way to the tetragonal phase of zirconia and its tetragonal phase with aluminium in solution. The calculated crystallite size, D , corresponds to homogeneous regions of the coating that produce coherent diffraction, and not necessarily to the grain or crystal size which typically is greater. It has to be noted that we tried to calculate the mean quadratic micro-deformation, e^2 , but determined that it was impossible since the partition factor of the pseudo-Voigt function (function used to fit the diffractograms) was greater than 0.328.

==== FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE ====

The crystallite size implies the presence of different regions and borders within the grain of the material, and consequently entails a certain discontinuity in its crystalline structure that prevents or hinders certain phenomena such as the movement of dislocations, the propagation of fissure tips, etc. This constitutes a mechanism for strengthening the material.

==== TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE ====

The result of the presence of the cubic phase of zirconia was somewhat unexpected since previous works about sol-gel powders have suggested a tetragonal structure or some uncertainty between the tetragonal and cubic phases for similar contents of yttria [19, 20]. However, we would argue that the crystalline structure of the zirconia coatings obtained via the sol-gel method does not depend exclusively on the yttria content as is the case in traditional sintering of zirconia from particles, but rather on a wide range of factors such as drying rate, the pH of the solution, areas under compression stress, etc. [21].

In order to confirm the crystalline structure of the sample, the Raman spectrum of the 3YSZ coating was obtained and shown in Figure 6. Basahel et al. [22] reported that the Raman spectrum for c-ZrO₂ is characterized by a band at 145 cm⁻¹, a broad bands

centered at 246, 301, 436 and 625 cm^{-1} , and a strong band between 607 and 617 cm^{-1} .

Likewise, the t-ZrO₂ shows peaks at 149, 224, 292, 324, 407, 456 and 636 cm^{-1} .

Therefore, Raman spectroscopy indicates that the 3YSZ sample shows bands that correspond to a combination of both types of phases. Although X-ray diffraction did not show this clearly, probably due to the overlap of the diffraction peaks.

=== FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE ===

To study the mechanical behaviour of the coatings, ultra-microhardness tests were carried out. Figure 7 shows the experimental Berkovich load/penetration depth curves corresponding to a load of 20 mN for the different composition coatings used in this work. For comparison, also presented are the AISI-310 stainless steel substrate curve to make it easier to appreciate the reinforcing effect of the coatings, and the curve obtained for a massive zirconia sample to show its similarity and proximity to that of the coating of zirconia without added alumina.

=== FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE ===

Nonetheless, the large penetration depths reached in these experiments relative to the thickness of the coatings (400-500 nm) mean that one can argue that the substrate clearly contributes to the observed mechanical response of the samples [23, 24]. Therefore, to obviate the effect of the substrate and obtain the exclusive properties and mechanical response of each coating, we carried out ultra-microhardness tests with loads of 5 mN (see Figure 8). From these tests, we obtained values for the coatings' hardness, H , and Young's modulus, E . The results are presented in Table 4 (the estimated errors are around 3%).

=== FIGURE 8 ABOUT HERE ===

=== TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE ===

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2 These results indicate a significant progressive decrease in the coatings' surface hardness
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4 and Young's modulus with increasing amounts of alumina in solution. Although this result
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6 was somewhat unexpected a priori, it does not necessarily have to be associated with a
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8 decrease in the coatings' mechanical properties since, although it certainly causes a
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10 reduction in their hardness, it also leads to an increase in their toughness. Basically, the
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12 results can be attributed to three effects. One is that the porosity of the layers or
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14 multilayers increases as the alumina content of the coatings increases for sintering in the
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16 range 500-700°C [13]. Another is that, at these thermal treatment temperatures, there is
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18 still no clear presence or formation of alumina compounds in the coatings, as shown by
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20 the quantitative X-ray analyses. And a third is the qualitative fact that the densification of
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22 crystalline coatings necessarily implies the activation of diffusion mechanisms which will
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24 logically only be effective at sufficiently high temperatures (approximately greater than
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26 0.4 times the fusion temperature) [25].
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35 In order to analyse the response of the coatings to thermal shock, optical micrographs
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37 were obtained after abruptly cooling them in water from 550°C to 25°C. Figure 9 shows
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39 these micrographs after the creation of indentations with the Vickers indenter at a 5 N
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41 load. The images show that there are fewer cracks and less growth in the 3YSZ-Al₂O₃
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43 (mol20%) coatings, Figure 9(c), than in the 3YSZ and 3YSZ-Al₂O₃ (mol5%) coatings,
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45 Figures 9(a) and 9(b), respectively.
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51 These results indicate greater resistance to the propagation of the cracks in the coatings as
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53 the presence of Al₂O₃ in solution increases. This is consistent with both the mechanical
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55 properties determined in the ultra-microhardness tests and the presence of the zirconia
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57 tetragonal phase. Effectively, the progressive reduction of hardness and elastic modulus
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59 of the coatings as the presence of Al₂O₃ in solution increases leads to a decrease in
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1 fragility and increase in toughness. Likewise, it is well known that when the metastable
2 tetragonal phase is present it is susceptible to a martensitic transformation to the
3 monoclinic phase driven by the crack propagation energy, causing an increase in volume
4 at the fissure tip that compresses the area and prevents propagation of the cracks [26].
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6 Similarly, the decrease in crystallite size as the proportion of Al₂O₃ increases leads to the
7 presence of more borders and discontinuities in the granular structure of the coatings, and
8 this translates into a greater number of obstacles to the advance and propagation of the
9 fissure tips, thereby increasing the toughness of the material. All this is reflected in the
10 values of the stress concentration factor, K_{IC} (Table 4), which determine the material's
11 fracture toughness, with resistance against the propagation of cracks.
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24 === **FIGURE 9** ABOUT HERE ===
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27 The cracks propagate irregularly and multi-directionally around the indentation areas, and
28 the greater presence of micro-cracking near the vertices of the indentation is very likely
29 to be associated with the relaxation of residual stresses that accumulate during the drying
30 and sintering stages of these coatings [27]. On the one hand, the volumetric expansion
31 that occurs when the micro-cracks appear tends to close the faces of the cracks during
32 their propagation, and on the other, the appearance of this type of crack leads to a
33 decrease in the elastic modulus in the cracked area, making it more deformable and less
34 rigid than the rest of the material. Nonetheless, there is a limit to this reinforcing
35 mechanism, so that, from a certain density of micro-cracks onwards, a crack can
36 propagate more easily through this area [28, 29].
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53 The results of the experiments carried out with different heat steps (400°C-25°C and
54 300°C-25°C) again showed a behaviour of the coatings similar to that of the heating to
55 550°C discussed above, with the number and growth of the cracks decreasing as the
56 thermal gradient is smaller. In the experiments involving thermal shocks with different
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1 curves or cooling media (air cooling or cooling inside the oven), we observed that the
2 damage produced and the growth of the induced cracks were very similar in behaviour to
3 the case of cooling in water. This demonstrates that these materials are affected more by
4 the thermal step or gradient to which they are subjected than by the medium in which the
5 cooling takes place or by its severity as long as the temperatures are within the moderate
6 range that we tested.
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13 4. CONCLUSIONS

14 Based on the experiments and analyses carried out in this work, we can draw the
15 following principal conclusions:
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- 21 \blacktriangle The different precursor solutions of $\text{ZrO}_2\text{-Y}_2\text{O}_3\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ prepared allow transparent,
22 low viscosity solutions to be obtained that are ideal for the formation of
23 homogeneous coatings on soda-lime glass and AISI-310 stainless steel substrates
24 with sintering at temperatures between 500°C and 700°C.
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- 31 \blacktriangle The 3YSZ and 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (5 mol%) coatings exhibit a crystalline structure
32 comprising zirconia in the cubic phase ($c\text{-ZrO}_2$) and, to a lesser degree, the
33 tetragonal phase ($t\text{-ZrO}_2$) with Al in solution also present in stable form. At the
34 greater alumina content, 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (20 mol%), the cubic phase of zirconia
35 disappears completely, leaving its tetragonal phase with Al in solution.
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- 43 \blacktriangle The increase in alumina content in the coatings causes significant changes in the
44 material's mechanical and thermal properties, affecting its mechanical resistance,
45 toughness, and response to thermal shock. Progressive decreases in hardness, H ,
46 and Young's modulus, E , and a slight increase in toughness of the treated coatings
47 are observed. This fact is probably associated with the increase in porosity and the
48 lack of sintering and densification of the aluminium oxide which would have
49 required higher temperatures than those used in the present work.
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- 60 \blacktriangle The thermal gradient to which the material is subjected in the thermal shock has a
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decisive effect on its thermal behaviour as well as on the cracks generated and their propagation. At higher heating temperatures or with a large thermal step, the damage caused is greater, whereas the number of cracks and their growth decrease with declining thermal gradient. The curve or cooling medium used, however, has a limited effect on the appearance and development of the cracks, leading us to conclude that the thermal behaviour of these coatings is uninfluenced by the severity of the cooling medium as long as the temperatures used remain within the moderate range applied in the present study.

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

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2 **Figure 1.** Curve of cooling inside the oven, showing the section of temperatures from
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4 550°C to 300°C.
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8 **Figure 2.** Curve of cooling in air from 550°C to approximately the ambient temperature.
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11 **Figure 3.** Optical micrographs of 3YSZ coatings deposited onto soda-lime glass (a, c)
12 and AISI-310 steel (b, d), at withdrawal rates slightly greater than the critical (incipient
13 cracks) and very much greater than the critical (completely cracked).
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20 **Figure 4.** Transmittance curves of monolayer $\text{ZrO}_2/\text{Y}_2\text{O}_3/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ -based films obtained
21 from sols and coated onto a soda-lime glass substrate, with a withdrawal rate of 14
22 cm/min and sintered at 500°C.
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28 **Figure 5.** X-ray diffractograms obtained from 3YSZ (a), 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (5 mol%) (b), and
29 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (20 mol%) (c) coatings, deposited onto AISI-310 stainless steel substrates
30 and sintered at 700°C.
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36 **Figure 6.** Raman spectrum of 3YSZ sample.
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40 **Figure 7.** Berkovich load/penetration depth curves carried out with a load of 20 mN on
41 AISI-310 stainless steel, massive zirconia, and the 3YSZ, 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (5 mol%) and
42 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (20 mol%) coatings.
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48 **Figure 8.** Berkovich load/penetration depth curves carried out with a load of 5 mN on
49 3YSZ, 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (5 mol%), and 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (20 mol%) coatings.
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54 **Figure 9.** Optical micrographs at 500× of the Vickers indentations obtained in the 3YSZ
55 (a), 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (5 mol%) (b), and 3YSZ- Al_2O_3 (20 mol%) (c) coatings, showing the
56 generation and propagation of cracks in the coatings after subjection to thermal shocks in
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water from 550°C to the ambient temperature.

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TABLES

Table 1. Characteristics of the prepared sols at 25°C.

Sol nomenclature	Oxide concentration (g/L)	Density (g/cm³)	Viscosity (cP)	$v_{max} \times \eta$ (cm/min x cP)
3YSZ	77.6	0.885	5.1	85
3YSZ-Al ₂ O ₃ (5 mol%)	73.0	0.890	6.3	70
3YSZ-Al ₂ O ₃ (20 mol%)	62.8	0.898	5.5	60

Table 2. Product ($v_{max} \times \eta$), refractive index, n , critical thickness, t_c , and porosity, P , of the coatings used with an annealing temperature of 500°C.

Coating	$v_{max} \times \eta$ (cm/min x cP)	n ($\lambda = 600$ nm)	t_c (nm)	P (%)
3YSZ	85	1.98	200	24
3YSZ-Al ₂ O ₃ (5 mol%)	70	1.86	190	30
3YSZ-Al ₂ O ₃ (20 mol%)	60	1.78	185	33

Table 3. Quantitative analysis, crystalline phases present, and average crystallite size, D , in the coatings studied.

Coating	$c\text{-ZrO}_2$ (%)	$t\text{-ZrO}_2$ (%)	$t\text{-AlZrO}_2$ (%)	$\gamma\text{-Fe}$ (%)	D (nm)
3YSZ	92.6 \pm 2	-	-	7.4 \pm 1	23 \pm 2
3YSZ-Al ₂ O ₃ (5 mol%)	17.1 \pm 2	-	38.0 \pm 2	44.9 \pm 2	12 \pm 2
3YSZ-Al ₂ O ₃ (20 mol%)	-	18.9 \pm 2	65.8 \pm 2	15.3 \pm 2	11 \pm 2

Table 4. Mechanical properties (Berkovich test with 5 mN load and conventional test).

Sample	Berkovich		Conventional		K_{IC} (MPa m ^{1/2})
	H (GPa)	E (GPa)	H (GPa)	E (GPa)	
ZrO ₂	12	220	12	220	-
3YSZ	10	190	-	-	1.50
3YSZ-Al ₂ O ₃ (5 mol%)	8	170	-	-	1.94
3YSZ-Al ₂ O ₃ (20 mol%)	6.5	160	-	-	2.82
AISI-310	2	200	2	200	-



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July 24, 2020

**Editor
Ceramics International**

Subject: Declaration of Interest Statement

Dear Editor,

The manuscript entitled "*Mechanical properties and thermal shock in thin films of the ZrO_2 - Y_2O_3 - Al_2O_3 system obtained by the sol-gel method*", demonstrate how an increase of alumina content in the coatings leads to significant changes in its crystalline structure and a decrease in the mechanical behavior and causes some changes in the intrinsic properties of the materials, which affect their thermal shock resistance.

Best regards,

Antonio Macías-García, PhD
University of Extremadura

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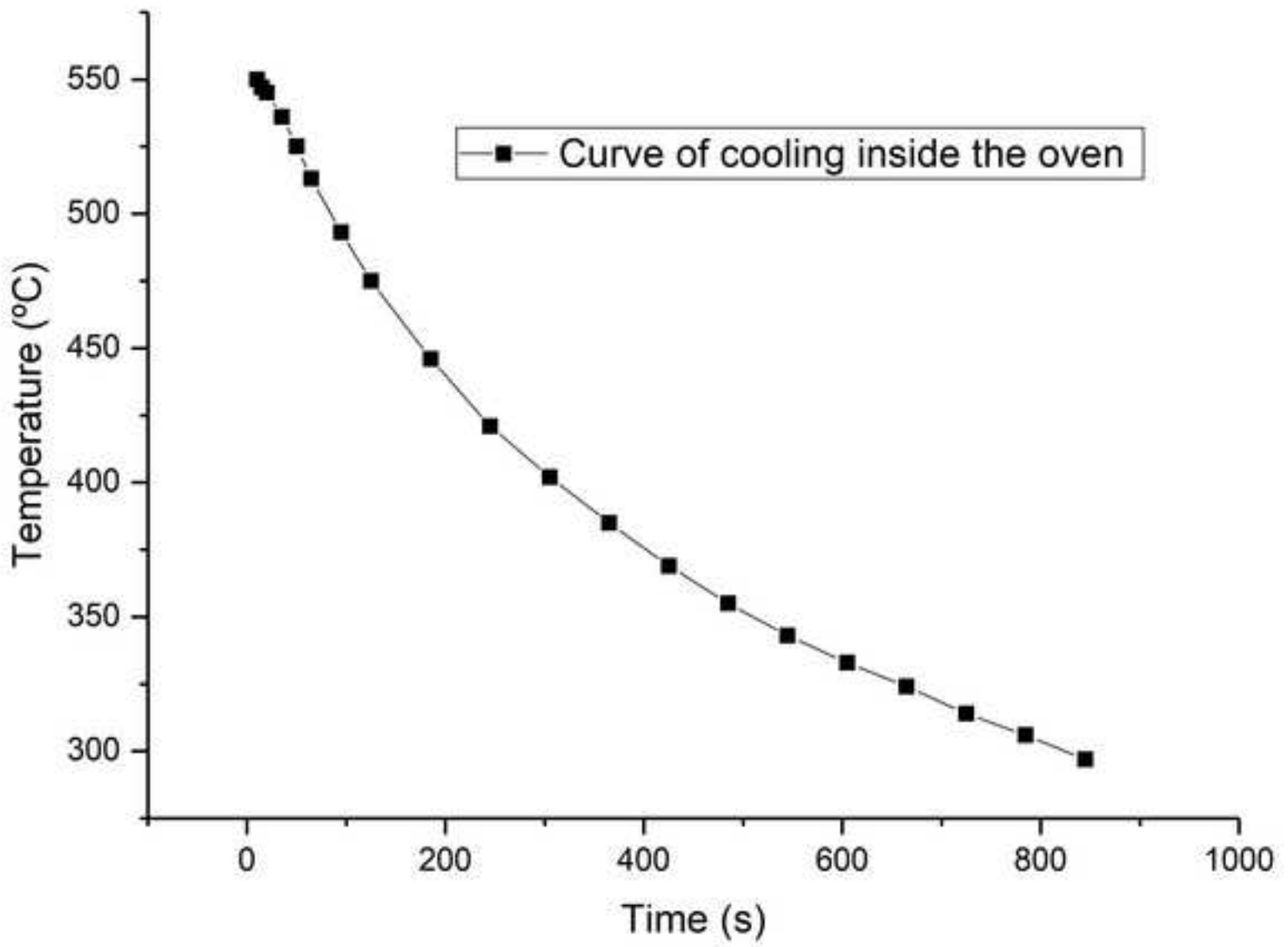


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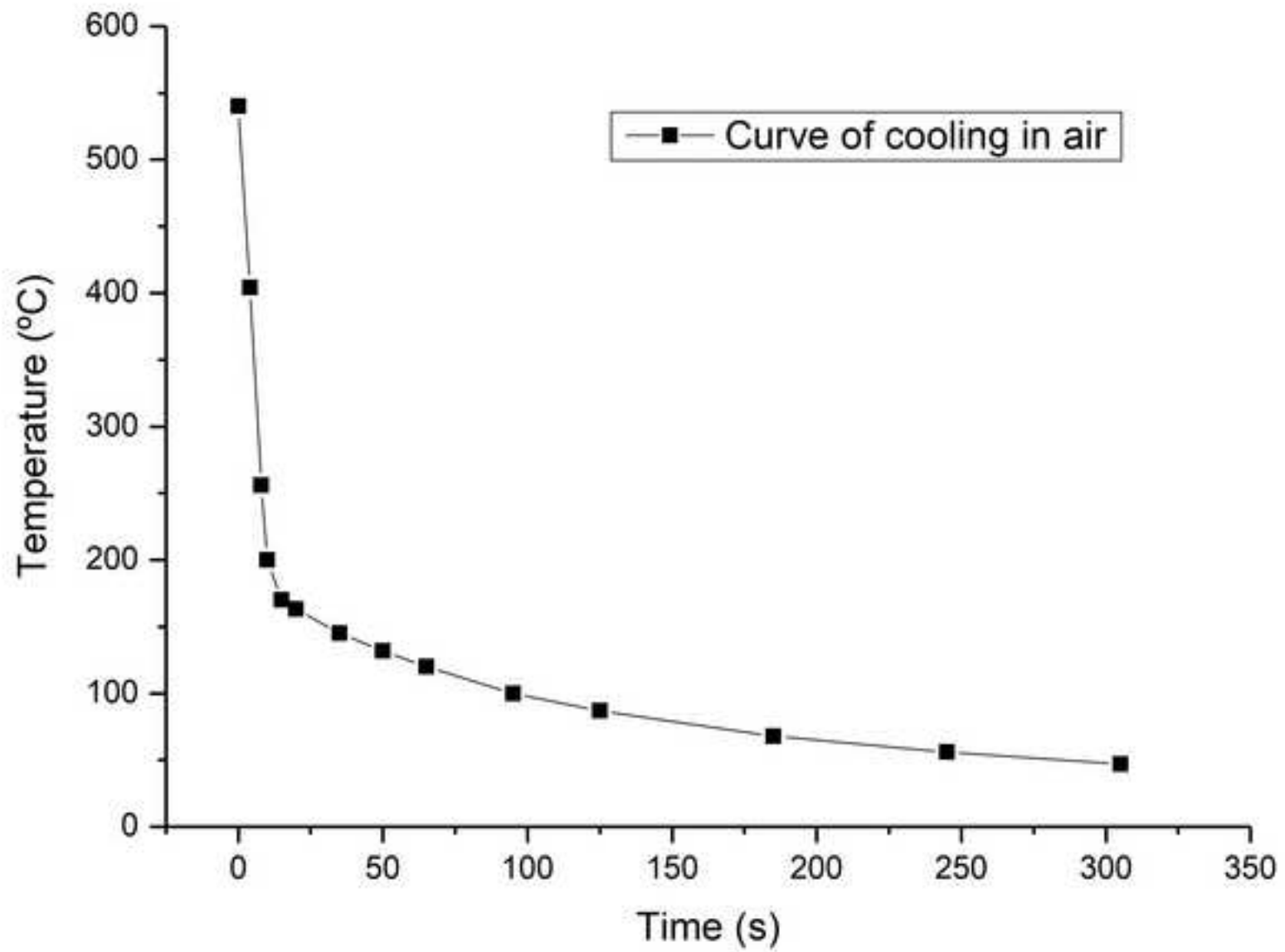


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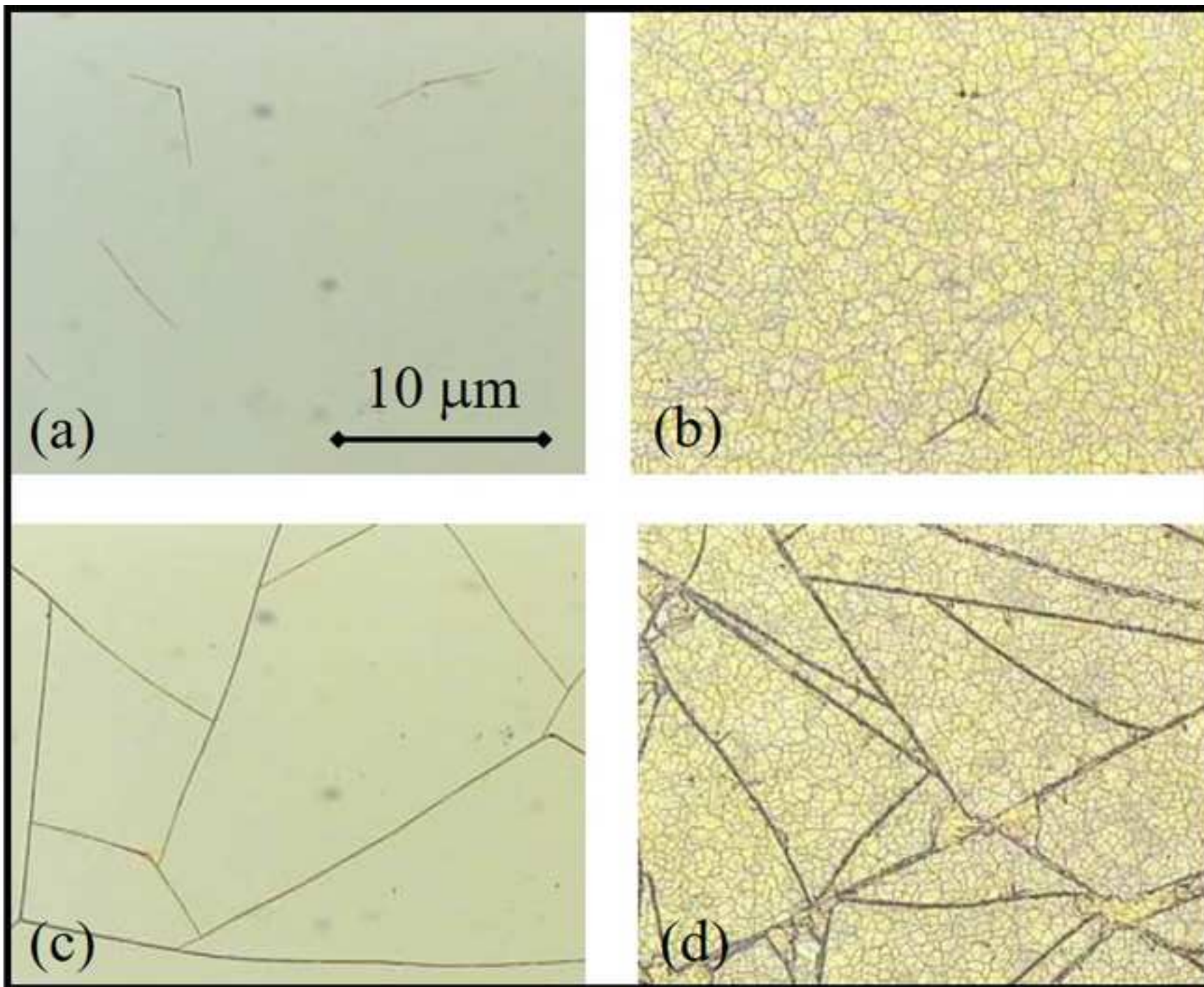


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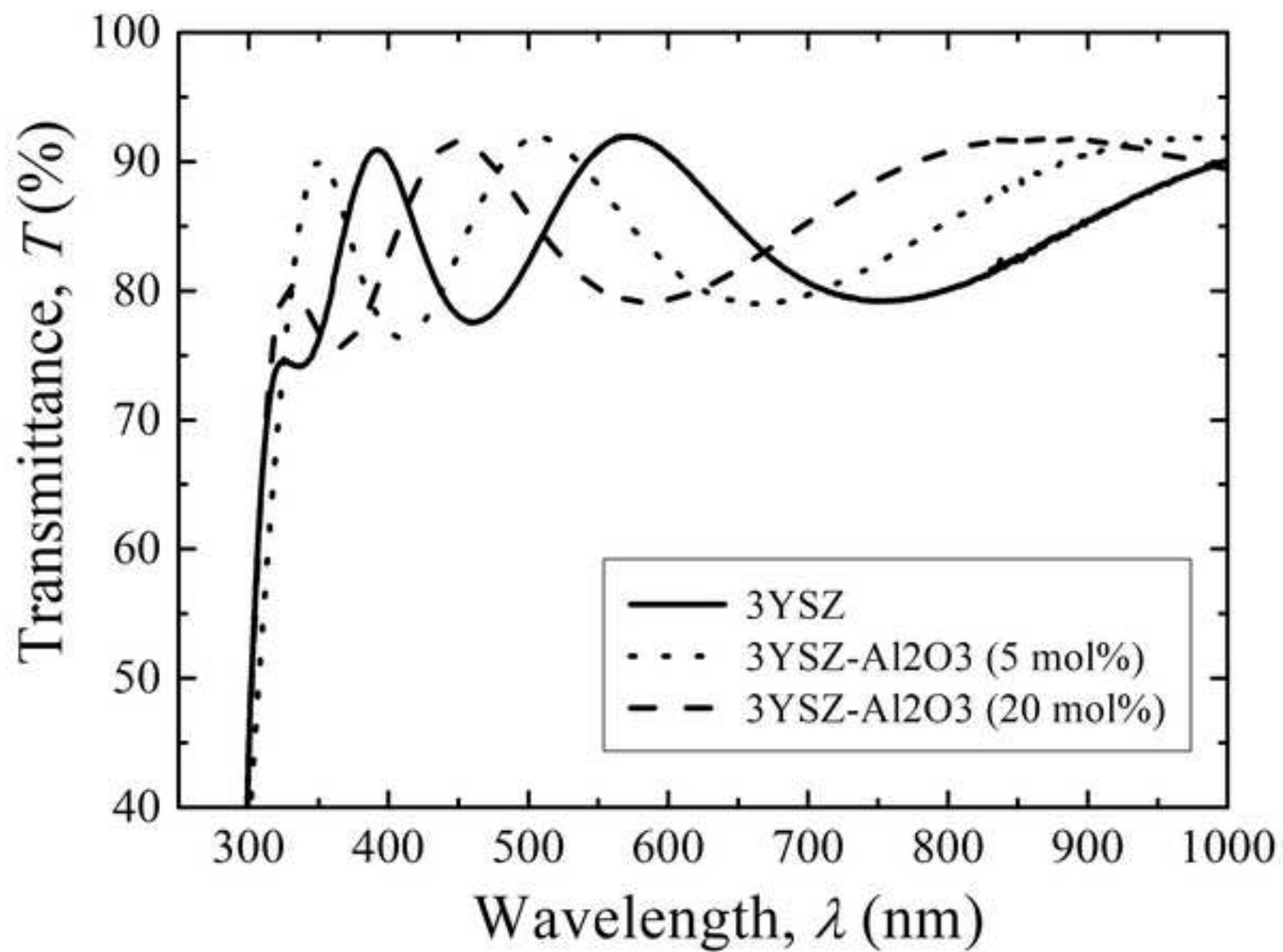


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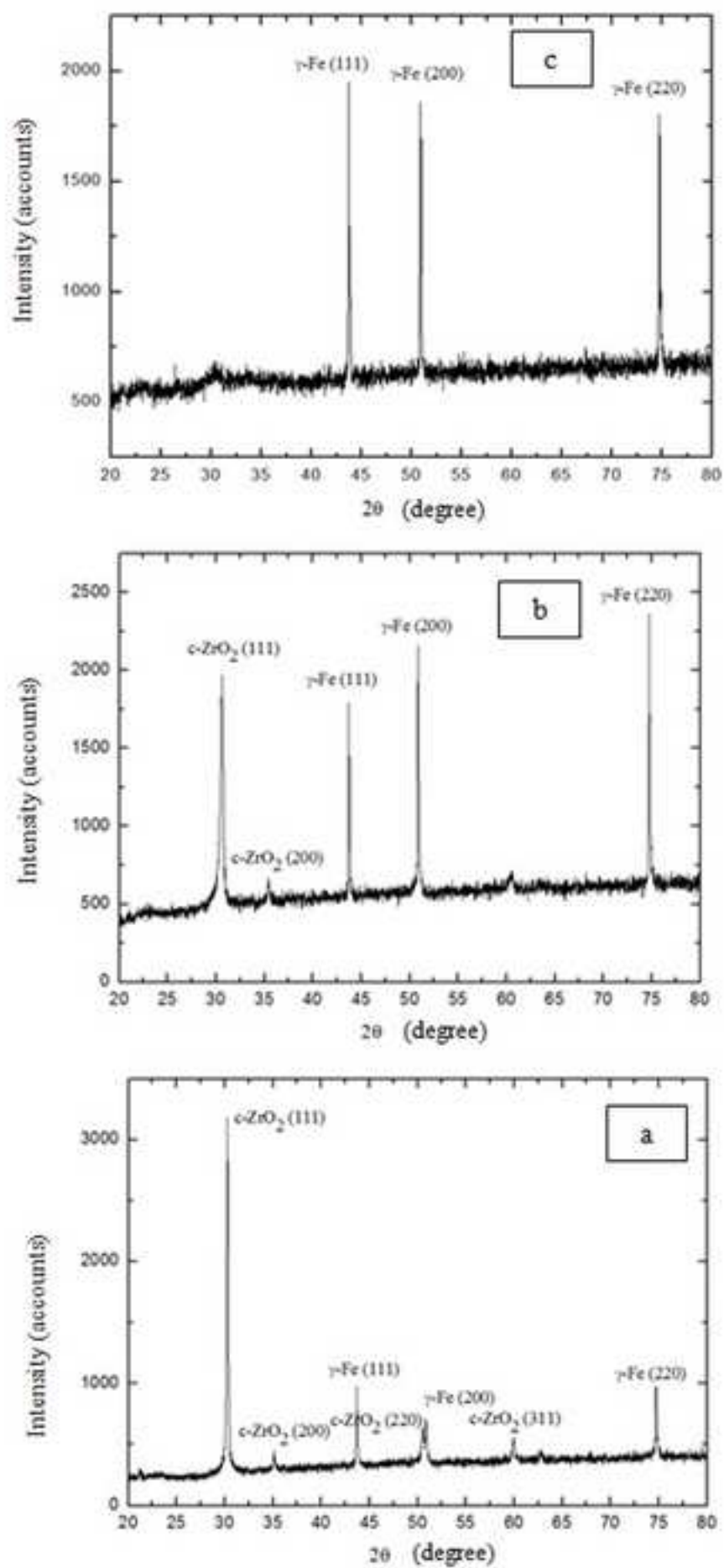


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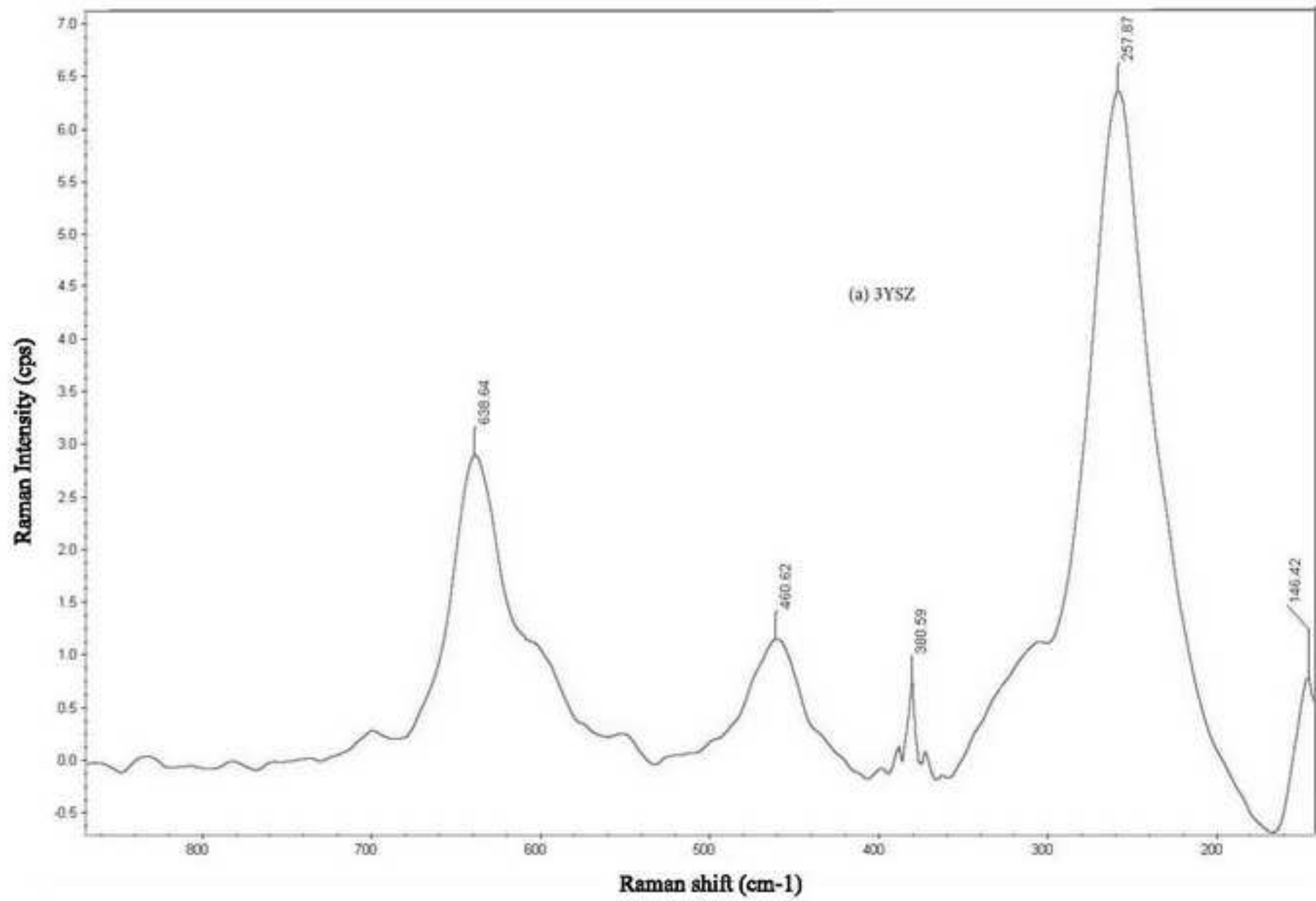


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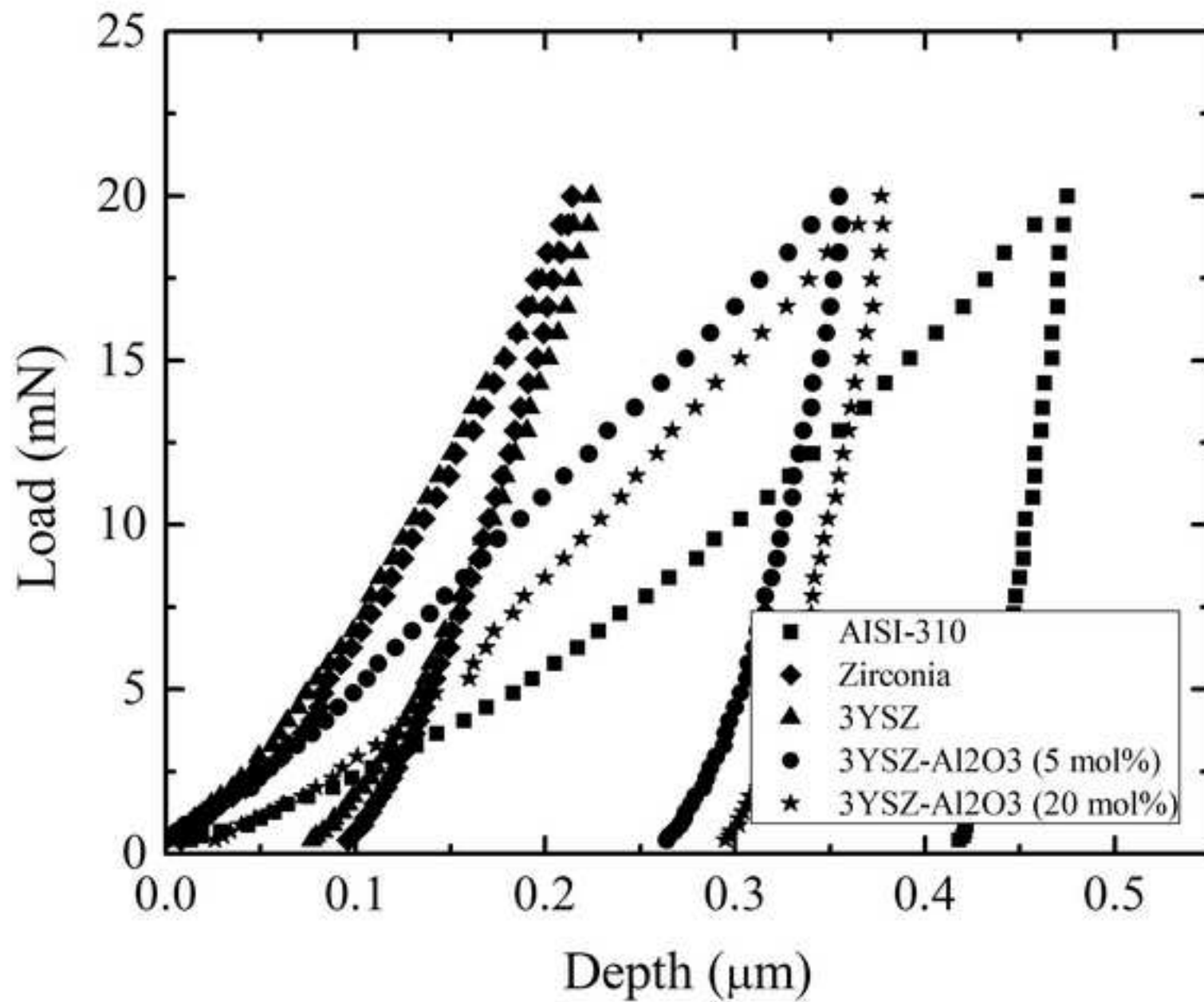


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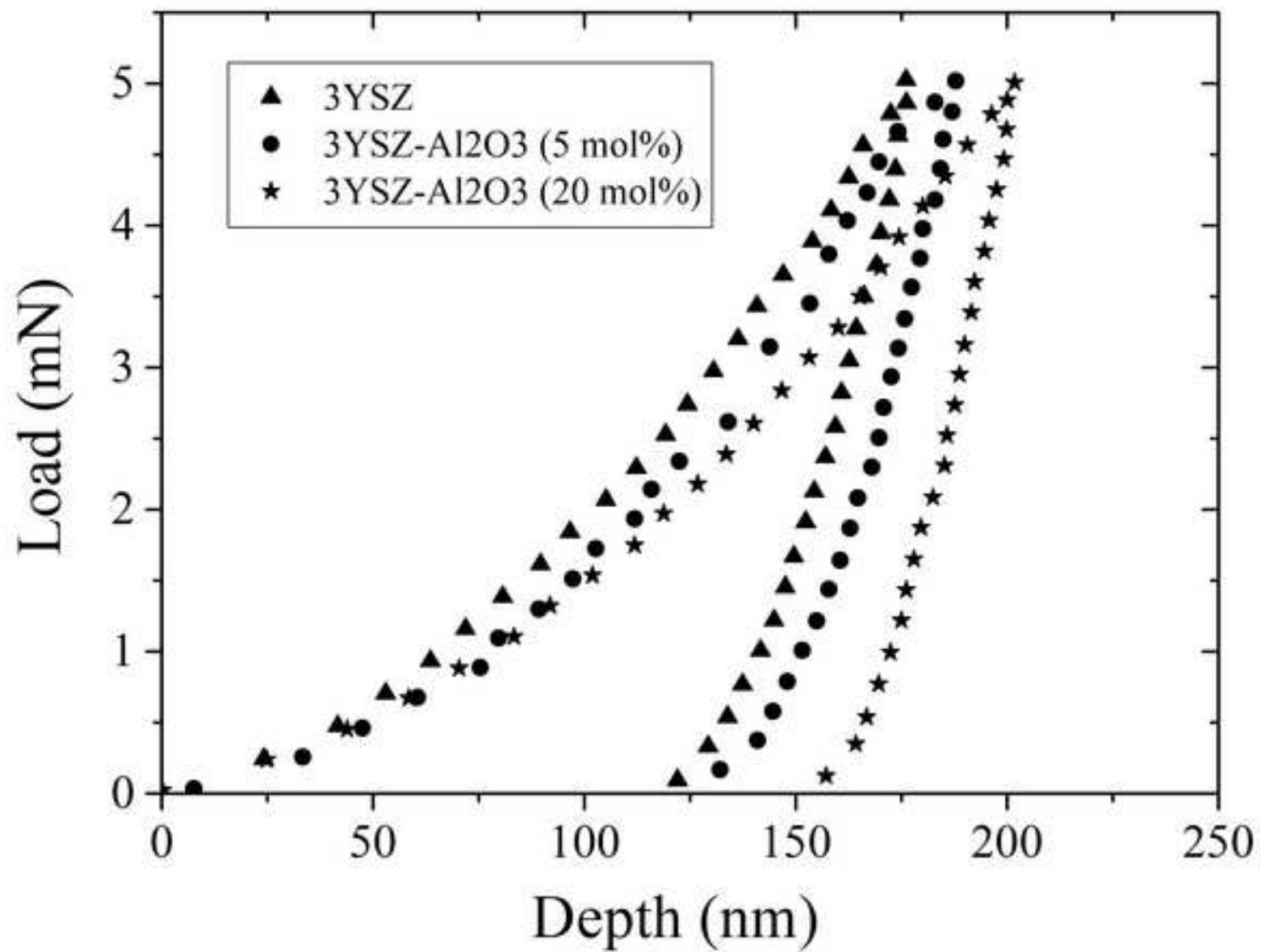


Figure 9

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