Observations, Assignments and Profiles of SiC$_2$ Absorption and Emission Bands in Carbon Stars

PETER J. SARRE$^1$, MARK E. HURST$^1$, and TOM LLOYD EVANS$^2$

$^1$ The University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom
$^2$ South African Astronomical Observatory, Cape Town, South Africa

Although observed in the blue-green spectra of some carbon stars as long ago as 1926, the Merrill-Sanford bands were not identified as arising from SiC$_2$ until 1956. In 1984 it was recognized that the molecule is not linear like C$_3$, but has an unusual T–shape. Following recent laboratory work, extensive SiC$_2$ absorption spectra of a number of stars, including W Pic, RV TrA, and T Mus, have been assigned for the first time. Hot bands involving low-frequency vibrations are generally very strong in typical N–type spectra but were greatly weakened in T Mus for a time in 1994, indicating that the bands were then formed in a much cooler region than those typical of carbon-star photospheres. Of particular interest is the spectrum of IRAS 12311–3509, where SiC$_2$ bands appear in emission, possibly indicating an edge-on disk.

These results are discussed more fully in ApJ 471, L107, 1996.