

## Measurement of thermal expansion anisotropy in Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V

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### ABSTRACT

Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V are promising candidates for neutron multipliers in solid breeding blankets, which is used in a bulk form to achieve the fuel tritium self-sufficiency. Previously, significant anisotropic thermal expansions were predicted for Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V along different crystallographic axes using density functional theory (DFT) calculations. Nevertheless, empirical confirmation through experimental data on thermal expansion anisotropy remains lacking. In this study, the thermal expansion behaviors of these materials were experimentally investigated by using high-temperature X-ray diffraction. Diffraction data were collected temperatures up to 873 K under vacuum condition, and structural refinement was carried out by Le Bail analysis using a partial structure. The results demonstrate that these materials exhibit moderate anisotropic expansion along the *c*-axis direction, contrary to previous prediction for Be<sub>12</sub>Ti. The average thermal expansion coefficients were compared with those of ceramic breeder pebble beds and structural steel material to discuss thermo-mechanical compatibility in a breeding blanket.

### Introduction

In the breeding blanket of a fusion reactor, a neutron multiplier is used for a self-sufficient production of fuel tritium. Be intermetallics (i. e., beryllides) have been developed as advanced neutron multiplier. An advantage of beryllides is their oxidation resistance at elevated temperatures, which can significantly reduce hydrogen production by the reaction with water vapor in a loss-of-coolant accident [1–3]. Experimental investigations have shown that Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V exhibit superior irradiation resistance and tritium release properties compared with conventional pure Be neutron multiplier [4–9]. Computational assessments have been extensively performed for Be-rich beryllides to investigate their electron structures [10,11], H and He retention [4,12,13], tritium diffusion [14], and defect formation [15,16]. While neutron multipliers were originally planned for use in the pebble form in blanket, current DEMO blanket design proposes loading it in block form to increase the tritium breeding ratio and reduce the fabrication cost. In the water-cooled solid breeding blanket for JA-DEMO, the beryllide block contains Li<sub>2</sub>TiO<sub>3</sub> ceramic breeder pebbles [17], while hexagonal beryllide block is employed in the European helium cooled pebble bed (HCPB) blanket with Li<sub>4</sub>SiO<sub>4</sub>-Li<sub>2</sub>TiO<sub>3</sub> bi-phasic pebbles [18,19].

Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V have tetragonal crystal structure with the unit cell parameters  $a = b \neq c$  and  $\alpha = \beta = \gamma = 90^\circ$ . The thermal expansion

coefficient  $\alpha$  is a fundamental and crucial parameter for blanket design because it is operated at elevated temperatures. A previous study has computationally investigated the thermal expansion coefficients  $\alpha$ , the heat capacity, and thermal conductivity of Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V using density functional theory (DFT) in combination with the quasi-harmonic approximation [11]. It is predicted that Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V have significant anisotropic thermal expansion characteristics towards opposite directions while having the same crystal symmetry; Be<sub>12</sub>Ti has a significantly high anisotropic thermal expansion along the *a*- and *b*-axes ( $\alpha_a/\alpha_c \sim 2.9$  at 873 K), while Be<sub>12</sub>V preferentially expands along the *c* axis direction ( $\alpha_a/\alpha_c \sim 0.4$  at 873 K). These magnitudes of anisotropy were at least two times larger than that of hexagonal close-packed Be ( $\alpha_a/\alpha_c = 0.8$  at 873 K [20]). Such thermal expansion behavior requires an experimental validation because significant anisotropy could induce thermal stress when operating at high temperatures. However, no experimental data on anisotropy in thermal expansion have been reported to date, and the only available data pertains to the average thermal expansion coefficient [21]. Herein, thermal expansion anisotropies of Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V were investigated using high-temperature X-ray diffraction (XRD). The diffraction patterns from polycrystal beryllide specimens were measured at high temperatures up to 873 K and analyzed by Le Bail method using a partial structure. The thermal expansion data obtained were compared with the computational results

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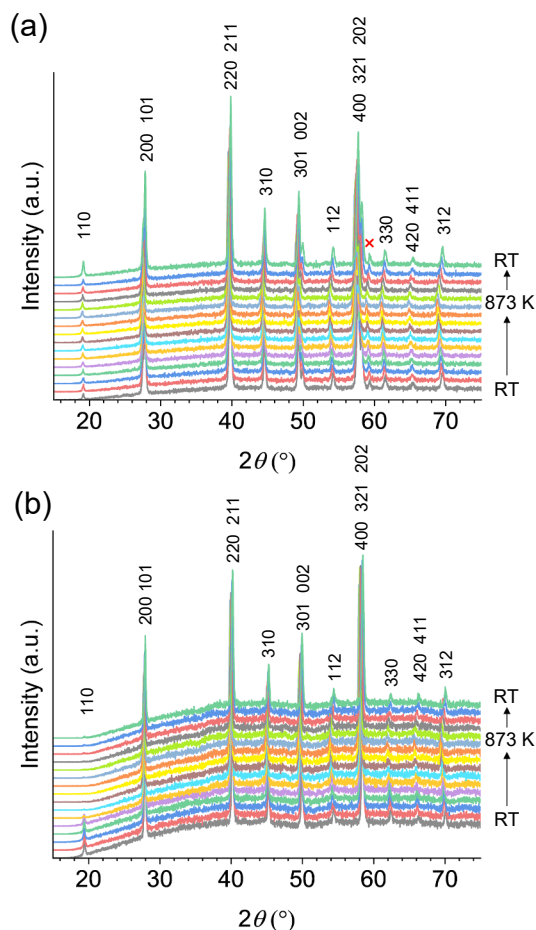
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**Fig. 1.** High temperature X-ray diffraction patterns of the (a)  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  and (b)  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$  samples measured from room temperature (RT) to 873 K. Red cross in panel (a) represents impurity peak.

and those of other blanket materials, including reduced activation ferritic martensitic (RAFM) steel and ceramic breeder pebble beds.

## Methods

$\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  and  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$  specimens were prepared by plasma-sintering method [3]. The starting materials were Be (Materion Brush, USA, purity: 99.4 wt%), Ti (>99.9 wt%), and V (>99 wt%) powders. The powders were mixed at an atomic ratio of 92.3% (Be) and 7.7% (Ti or V). The powder mixtures were cold-pressed and then plasma-sintered at 1050 °C for 20 min at 50 MPa. The sintered specimens were cut into plates with thickness of 1.2 mm.

High temperature XRD was performed with RINT TTR-III diffractometer (Rigaku) using  $\text{Co-K}\alpha$  radiation in a  $2\theta$  range from 15 to 75° at intervals of 0.02°. To avoid possible scale formation, hydrogen generation, or powder scattering in high temperature XRD, the experiments were conducted in a vacuum condition at relatively low temperatures (i. e. maximum 873 K). The measurements were performed by parallel beam mode. XRD patterns were collected at room temperature (RT), 423, 473, 523, 573, 623, 673, 723, 773, 823, and 873 K by heating up at a heating rate of 10 K/min. During cooling, the data were collected at 773, 673, 573, 473, and RT at a cooling rate of 50 K/min. Temperature of the sample was monitored using a thermo-couple attached to the sample holder. The measurements were performed under vacuum conditions, in which the pressure was maintained at <1 Pa. Le Bail analysis using the partial structure was performed with the RIETAN-FP software [22]. Thermal expansion coefficient along  $a$  and  $c$  axis are calculated as

**Table 1**

Results of Le Bail analysis on the X-ray diffraction data of (a)  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  and (b)  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$  at 300–873 K. The equations are linear functions with temperature  $T$  (K) obtained from the data measured during heating.

$T$ (K)	$R_{\text{wp}}$	$R_{\text{B}}$	$S$	$a$ (Å)	$c$ (Å)	$V$ (Å <sup>3</sup> )
(a)						
303	8.86	4.70	1.18	7.3763(6)	4.2003(3)	228.54(3)
423	8.93	4.42	1.19	7.3846(3)	4.2077(2)	229.46(2)
473	8.99	4.85	1.19	7.3889(6)	4.2109(3)	229.89(3)
523	9.16	4.42	1.21	7.3949(3)	4.2156(2)	230.53(2)
573	9.11	4.04	1.20	7.3995(3)	4.2196(2)	231.03(2)
623	9.24	4.18	1.22	7.4059(3)	4.2238(2)	231.67(2)
673	9.21	0.28	1.21	7.4099(5)	4.2275(3)	232.11(3)
723	8.83	4.40	1.16	7.4146(6)	4.2312(3)	232.61(3)
773	9.12	4.33	1.20	7.4179(5)	4.2345(3)	233.00(3)
823	8.95	3.76	1.17	7.4256(5)	4.2401(3)	233.80(3)
873	8.98	4.01	1.18	7.4309(3)	4.2444(2)	234.37(2)
773	8.99	4.10	1.18	7.4197(3)	4.2357(2)	233.18(2)
673	9.31	4.45	1.23	7.4101(3)	4.2273(2)	232.12(2)
573	8.77	4.28	1.16	7.3976(3)	4.2180(2)	231.83(2)
473	9.26	0.42	1.22	7.3877(3)	4.2098(2)	229.76(1)
300	8.51	3.41	1.20	7.3732(4)	4.1991(2)	228.28(2)

Temperature dependency of the lattice parameters:  $a = b = 7.344 + 9.754 \times 10^{-5} \times T$ ,  
 $c = 4.175 + 7.820 \times 10^{-5} \times T$ ,  $V = 225.1 + 1.038 \times 10^{-2} \times T$

$T$ (K)	$R_{\text{wp}}$	$R_{\text{B}}$	$S$	$a$ (Å)	$c$ (Å)	$V$ (Å <sup>3</sup> )
(b)						
301	5.89	4.80	1.29	7.3383(4)	4.2301(3)	227.79(3)
423	5.85	5.29	1.27	7.3498(5)	4.2385(4)	228.96(3)
473	5.63	6.20	1.21	7.3558(4)	4.2432(3)	229.59(2)
523	5.86	5.42	1.26	7.3619(4)	4.2465(3)	230.15(2)
573	5.59	5.51	1.20	7.3676(3)	4.2501(3)	230.70(2)
623	5.73	6.52	1.20	7.3720(4)	4.2534(3)	231.16(2)
673	6.05	6.94	1.27	7.3816(4)	4.2597(3)	232.10(3)
723	5.85	6.88	1.23	7.3869(4)	4.2629(2)	232.61(2)
773	5.76	6.58	1.21	7.3920(5)	4.2684(2)	233.23(2)
823	5.97	6.31	1.26	7.3952(4)	4.2703(2)	233.54(2)
873	5.74	5.85	1.22	7.3973(6)	4.2731(3)	233.82(3)
773	5.97	6.39	1.26	7.3904(5)	4.2682(3)	233.12(3)
673	5.93	6.23	1.25	7.3803(4)	4.2595(2)	232.05(2)
573	5.82	6.74	1.22	7.3678(6)	4.2500(3)	230.71(3)
473	5.87	7.38	1.23	7.3536(6)	4.2392(4)	229.24(4)
300	5.86	5.79	1.23	7.3380(5)	4.2293(4)	227.73(4)

Temperature dependency of the lattice parameters:  $a = b = 7.304 + 1.109 \times 10^{-4} \times T$ ,  
 $c = 4.206 + 7.847 \times 10^{-5} \times T$ ,  $V = 224.3 + 1.121 \times 10^{-2} \times T$

$\alpha_a = da/dT/a_0$  and  $\alpha_c = dc/dT/c_0$  where  $a_0$  and  $c_0$  are the lattice parameters at RT. The average thermal expansion coefficient is given by  $\alpha_V = d(V)^{1/3}/dT/(V_0)^{1/3}$  where  $V_0$  is the unit cell volume at RT.

## Results and discussion

Fig. 1 shows the diffraction patterns of the  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  and  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$  specimens during heating and cooling measured at temperatures ranging from RT to 873 K. The peaks were indexed to the tetragonal structures of  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  and  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$  with the space group of  $I4mmm$ . The weak peak at  $\sim 59.3^\circ$  in the  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  specimen was unindexed, which could be an impurity phase. The peak intensity at  $2\theta = 19.4^\circ$  in the  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$  specimen became weak above 350 °C and remained constant at the background-level during the cooling process. Although the peak position corresponds to the diffraction from the (1 1 0) plane of  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$ , the peak below 350 °C could correspond to another Be–V intermetallic phase that decomposed during heating. The diffraction data in the  $2\theta$  range from 20 to 75° were used in the Le Bail analysis, in which the data from 58.7° to 59.5° were excluded for  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  to exclude the unindexed minor peak.

The reliability factors and refined lattice parameters of the Le Bail analysis with the partial structure are summarized in Table 1. Fig. 2 shows the results of the analysis on the diffraction data at 873 K. The observed diffraction patterns were indexed with the  $I4mmm$  structure

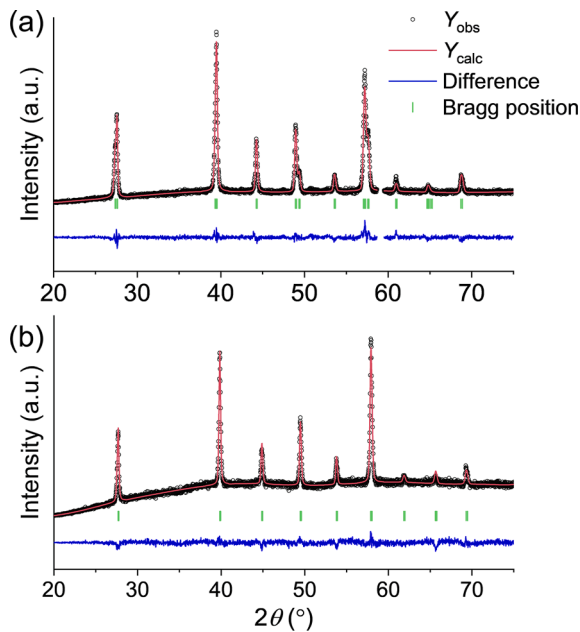


Fig. 2. Le Bail analysis of the diffraction patterns of the (a)  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  and (b)  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$  specimens at 873 K. The black circle, red solid line, blue solid line, and green tick marks denote the observed intensity  $Y_{\text{obs}}$ , calculated intensity  $Y_{\text{calc}}$ , the difference  $Y_{\text{obs}} - Y_{\text{calc}}$ , and calculated Bragg peak positions, respectively.

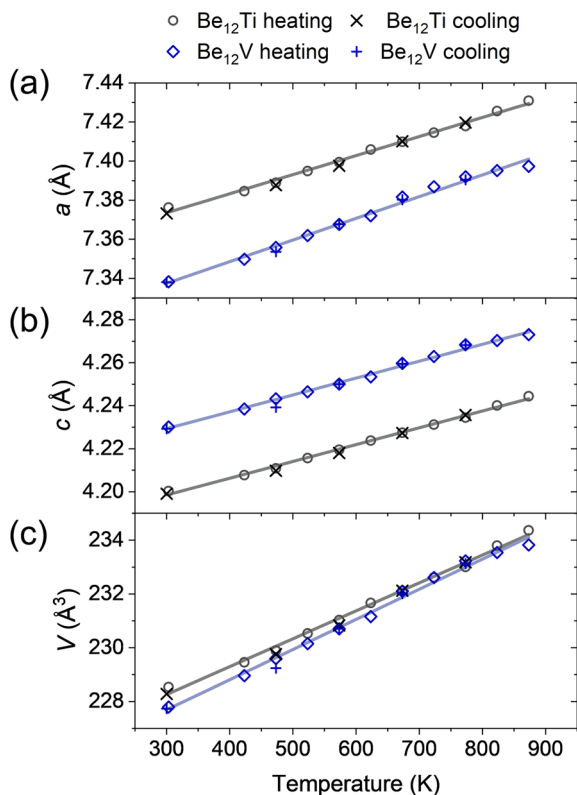


Fig. 3. Temperature dependence of the lattice parameters (a)  $a$ , (b)  $c$ , and (c) lattice volume  $V$  with line fittings for the data obtained during heating. The equations of line fittings are shown in Table 1.

and fit well to the calculated pattern after the refinements. No new peak arising from phase transformation or surface oxidation was observed from the measured data. The reliability factors  $R_{\text{wp}}$ ,  $R_{\text{B}}$ , and  $S$  correspond to the weighted profile  $R$ -factor, Bragg  $R$ -factor, and square root

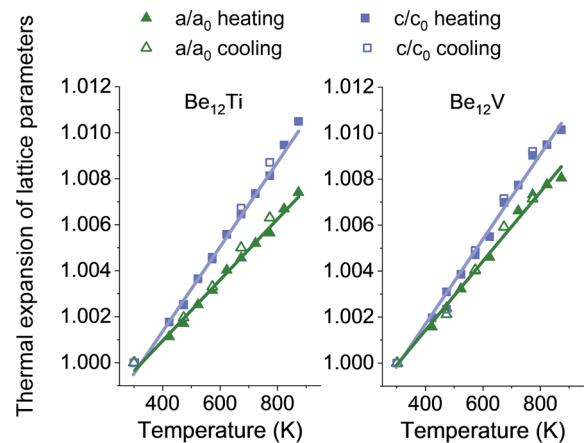


Fig. 4. Thermal expansion of lattice parameters ( $a/a_0$  and  $c/c_0$ ) of  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  (left) and  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$  (right) where  $a_0$  and  $c_0$  are the lattice parameters at room temperature.

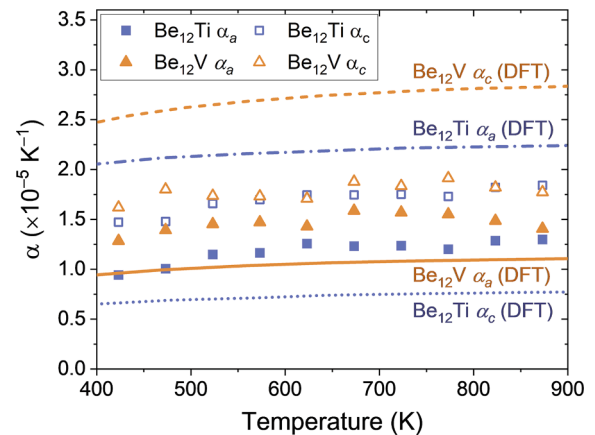
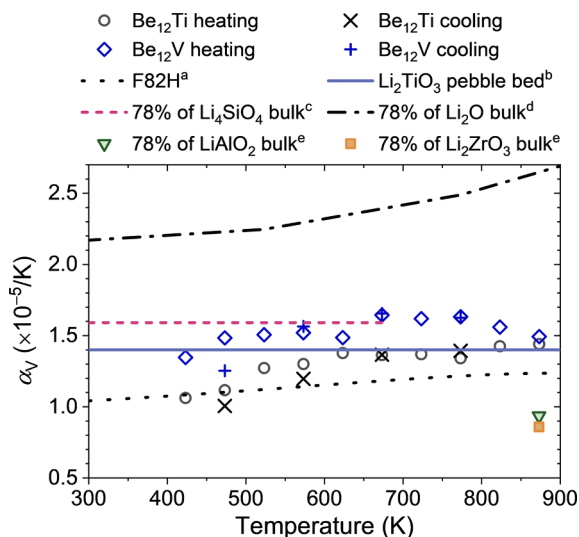


Fig. 5. Thermal expansion anisotropy in  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  and  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$ . The experimental thermal expansion coefficients obtained during heating in this work are compared with the calculation data using density functional theory (DFT) [11].

of goodness-of-fit [23].  $R_{\text{wp}}$  is a discrepancy indicator, obtained by weighted sum of squared differences between experimental and computed intensities scaled by the weighted intensity.  $R_{\text{B}}$  is obtained from experimental and computed Bragg reflection intensities.  $S$  is defined as a ratio of  $R_{\text{wp}}$  to the minimum  $R_{\text{wp}}$  reachable, thus  $S$  becomes 1 in an ideal refinement. The profile fittings were considered satisfactory because the  $S$  factor was  $<1.3$ . Fig. 3 shows temperature dependencies of the lattice parameters and unit cell volumes using linear fitting. The results showed linear trend in the lattice parameters in this temperature range. Fig. 4 shows the thermal expansion along  $a$ - and  $c$ -axis, where  $a_0$  and  $c_0$  are the lattice parameters at RT. In the data collected while both heating and cooling, the gradient of  $c/c_0$  was greater than that of  $a/a_0$  for  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  and  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$ . It clearly indicates the anisotropic character of the thermal expansion in the beryllides, in which the tetragonal lattice preferentially expands along the  $c$ -axis direction. The direction of the thermal expansion anisotropy is contrary to the computational prediction for  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$ , as shown in Fig. 5 and Table 2. The anisotropy was slightly greater for  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  than that for  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$  (Fig. 4). The coefficients  $\alpha_a$  and  $\alpha_c$  at 873 K were  $1.30$  and  $1.84$  ( $\times 10^{-5} \text{ K}^{-1}$ ) for  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  and  $1.40$  and  $1.77$  ( $\times 10^{-5} \text{ K}^{-1}$ ) for  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$ . The ratios of  $\alpha_a/\alpha_c$  for  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$  and  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{V}$  at 873 K were obtained to be  $0.71$  and  $0.79$ , respectively. These values are comparable with the  $\alpha_a/\alpha_c$  ratio of hexagonal close-packed Be ( $0.8$  at 873 K [20]). It is found that the anisotropy in thermal expansion is less significant than the computational prediction ( $\alpha_a/\alpha_c = 2.9$  for  $\text{Be}_{12}\text{Ti}$

**Table 2**Thermal expansion coefficients along *a*- and *c*- axes ( $\alpha_a$  and  $\alpha_c$ ),  $\alpha_a/\alpha_c$ , and volumetric thermal expansion coefficient  $\alpha_V$  of Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V obtained during heating.

T (K)	Be <sub>12</sub> Ti				Be <sub>12</sub> V			
	$\alpha_a$ ( $\times 10^{-5} \text{ K}^{-1}$ )	$\alpha_c$ ( $\times 10^{-5} \text{ K}^{-1}$ )	$\alpha_V$ ( $\times 10^{-5} \text{ K}^{-1}$ )	$\alpha_a/\alpha_c$	$\alpha_a$ ( $\times 10^{-5} \text{ K}^{-1}$ )	$\alpha_c$ ( $\times 10^{-5} \text{ K}^{-1}$ )	$\alpha_V$ ( $\times 10^{-5} \text{ K}^{-1}$ )	$\alpha_a/\alpha_c$
423	0.94	1.47	1.06	0.64	1.28	1.62	1.35	0.79
473	1.01	1.48	1.12	0.68	1.39	1.80	1.48	0.77
523	1.15	1.66	1.27	0.69	1.45	1.74	1.51	0.84
573	1.16	1.70	1.30	0.69	1.47	1.73	1.52	0.85
623	1.26	1.75	1.38	0.72	1.43	1.71	1.49	0.84
673	1.23	1.75	1.36	0.71	1.59	1.88	1.64	0.84
723	1.24	1.75	1.37	0.71	1.57	1.84	1.62	0.86
773	1.20	1.73	1.34	0.69	1.55	1.91	1.63	0.81
823	1.29	1.82	1.43	0.71	1.49	1.82	1.56	0.82
873	1.30	1.84	1.44	0.71	1.41	1.77	1.49	0.79



**Fig. 6.** Thermal expansion coefficient of Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V compared with those of F82H and Li<sub>2</sub>TiO<sub>3</sub> pebble bed. The coefficients for Li<sub>2</sub>O, Li<sub>2</sub>ZrO<sub>3</sub>, and LiAlO<sub>2</sub> pebble beds were estimated by multiplying the bulk values by 0.78. <sup>a</sup>Reference [28]. <sup>b</sup>Reference [24]. <sup>c</sup>Reference [25]. <sup>d</sup>Reference [27]. <sup>e</sup>Reference [26].

and  $\alpha_a/\alpha_c = 0.4$  for Be<sub>12</sub>V at 873 K) [11].

The beryllide block will be directly contacted with either ceramic breeder pebbles or RAFM structural steel in the solid breeding blankets [17,18]. To assess the thermal compatibility, the average thermal expansion coefficients  $\alpha_V$  were compared with those of the RAFM and ceramic breeder pebble bed, as shown in Fig. 6. The thermal expansion coefficient of Li<sub>2</sub>TiO<sub>3</sub> pebble bed at RT to 973 K is reported to be  $(1.4 \pm 0.2) \times 10^{-5} \text{ K}^{-1}$  in the packing factor range of 65.3–68.3% [24]. It is reported that the thermal expansion coefficient of the pebble bed corresponds to 78% of the bulk material. Accordingly, the thermal expansion coefficients of the pebble bed for the ceramic breeder candidate materials (Li<sub>2</sub>O, Li<sub>4</sub>SiO<sub>4</sub>, Li<sub>2</sub>ZrO<sub>3</sub>, and LiAlO<sub>2</sub>) [25–27] were estimated by multiplying the bulk values by 0.78. The volumetric thermal expansion coefficients  $\alpha_V$  ( $\text{K}^{-1}$ ) of Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V at 873 K were given to be  $1.46 \times 10^{-5}$  and  $1.51 \times 10^{-5} \text{ K}^{-1}$ , respectively. These values are in good agreement with the previous data by the thermo-mechanical analysis for Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V [21]. The thermal expansion coefficients of the bulk beryllides had a good agreement with those of the Li<sub>2</sub>TiO<sub>3</sub> and Li<sub>4</sub>SiO<sub>4</sub> pebble beds. The  $\alpha_V$  values of the bulk beryllides also showed a good agreement with the empirical equation for the thermal expansion of the F82H steel [28]. In contrast, the estimated values for the Li<sub>2</sub>O pebble bed were larger than the  $\alpha_V$  of the beryllides, indicating a significant mismatch. The estimated coefficients for Li<sub>2</sub>ZrO<sub>3</sub> and LiAlO<sub>2</sub> were estimated to be  $8.6 \times 10^{-6}$  and  $9.4 \times 10^{-6} \text{ K}^{-1}$  at 873 K respectively, which were slightly lower than those for F82H and beryllides. This comparison indicates that Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V are highly

compatible with the promising candidates of ceramic breeder materials and RAFM steel.

## Conclusion

In this study, the thermal expansions of the advanced neutron multipliers, Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V, were investigated using high-temperature X-ray diffraction (XRD) and subsequent Le Bail analysis with the partial structures. The results showed that the tetragonal unit cell of the beryllides expanded preferentially along the *c*-axis direction, with a moderately anisotropic characteristic comparable with that of hexagonal close-packed Be. The ratios of thermal expansion along *a*- and *c*-axes,  $\alpha_a/\alpha_c$ , for Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V were 0.71 and 0.79 at 873 K, respectively. In contrast, significant and opposite anisotropy computationally predicted for Be<sub>12</sub>Ti (i.e.,  $\alpha_a/\alpha_c \sim 2.5$  at 873 K) was not observed in this experiment. The volumetric thermal expansion coefficients of Be<sub>12</sub>Ti and Be<sub>12</sub>V at 873 K were  $1.46 \times 10^{-5}$  and  $1.51 \times 10^{-5} \text{ K}^{-1}$ , respectively. The coefficients of the beryllides are in good agreement with those of F82H and pebble beds of Li<sub>2</sub>TiO<sub>3</sub> and Li<sub>4</sub>SiO<sub>4</sub>, whereas a large mismatch is seen for Li<sub>2</sub>O pebble bed.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Keisuke Mukai:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Data curation, Visualization. **Jae-Hwan Kim:** Methodology, Funding acquisition, Writing – review & editing. **Masaru Nakamichi:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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