

Chemical Abundances over Cosmic Time

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The last few years have seen major advances in the study of chemical abundances at high redshifts. It is now possible to measure directly the degree of enrichment of several elements in a variety of environments up to redshift $z = 5$, probing conditions only 1-2 Gyr after the Big-Bang. In my review I shall summarise the latest observations of Lyman break galaxies, damped Lyman alpha systems and the Lyman alpha forest with a view to uncovering the clues which these data offer to the first episodes of star formation in the universe. I shall emphasise the limitations, as well as the merits, of the techniques which have been exploited up to now, and look forward to the impact of the FIRST mission on this whole area of work.