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2005 J. Phys.: Condens. Matter 17 7599

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# Optical transitions in $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$ and $\text{FeBO}_3$ under high pressures\*

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Received 3 October 2005

Published 11 November 2005

Online at [stacks.iop.org/JPhysCM/17/7599](http://stacks.iop.org/JPhysCM/17/7599)

## Abstract

The optical properties of  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$  under high pressures have been investigated experimentally and theoretically, and the results are compared with the properties of  $\text{FeBO}_3$ . A model of the  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$  band structure is derived within the multielectron model taking into account the strong electron correlations. Crossover of the  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  ion high-spin and low-spin states, collapse of the magnetic moment, the relaxation Coulomb correlations, and insulator–semiconductor transition are predicted. Optical transitions in  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$  and  $\text{FeBO}_3$  under high pressures were discovered.

## 1. Introduction

$\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$  (GFB), having both 3d- and 4f-transition elements, is a rare magnetic material that is transparent in the visible range. The crystal lattice has the rhombohedral (trigonal) symmetry of huntite type with space group  $R\bar{3}2(D_{3h}^7)$  and with lattice parameters  $a = 9.5491(6)$  Å and  $c = 7.5741(5)$  Å. The iron ions  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  are in oxygen octahedra, and the gadolinium ions  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  are in oxygen prisms. The material is antiferromagnetic with a Néel temperature of  $T_N = 38$  K [1].

$\text{FeBO}_3$  (FB) is a well known material that is transparent in the visible range and has spontaneous magnetization at room temperature. It is known that the crystal lattice of FB has rhombohedral symmetry of calcite type with space group  $R\bar{3}c(D_{3d}^6)$  and with lattice parameters  $a = 4.612$  Å and  $c = 14.47$  Å. The iron ions  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  are in oxygen octahedra, and interionic distances are  $(\text{Fe}-\text{O}) = 2.028$  Å and  $(\text{Fe}-\text{Fe}) = 3.601$  Å, while the angles of the bonds

\* This paper was intended to be part of the Special Issue containing papers from the Second International Symposium on the Physics of Solids Under High Pressure Using Nuclear Probes, 22–25 July 2004, Cologne, Germany, Journal of Physics: Condensed Matter Volume 17, Number 11, 23 March 2005, but was omitted in error.

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(O–Fe–O) are  $91.82^\circ$  and  $88.18^\circ$ . Thus, the oxygen surrounding of Fe is almost cubic. At ambient conditions FB is an easy-plane antiferromagnet with weak ferromagnetism and with  $T_N = 348$  K [2].

In the present work the optical properties of GFB are investigated experimentally at ambient and high pressures and the results are compared with those of FB. The multielectron model of the GFB band structure is derived taking into account the strong electron correlations. Predictions of the model are confirmed by the jump of an energy gap observed in GFB at a pressure of 43 GPa.

## 2. Experimental details

Single crystals of GFB and FB have been grown by a flux method. Both grown single crystals had green colour, and are transparent in the visible range. For optical measurements at ambient pressure, thin planar samples (plates) were cut from bulk isometric crystals parallel and perpendicular to the  $C_3$  crystallographic axis. The thicknesses of the plates were  $\sim 53$   $\mu\text{m}$  and  $\sim 42$  (37)  $\mu\text{m}$ ; the area in both samples was  $\sim 2$   $\text{mm}^2$ . At room temperature, optical absorption spectra  $D = \text{Ln}(I_0/I)$  for GFB and FB were obtained in using a two-beam spectrometer in the range  $10\,000$ – $40\,000$   $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (1.24–4.96 eV). The spectral slot width of the lattice monochromator was  $10$   $\text{cm}^{-1}$ . The accuracy of absorption measurements was 3%.

High-pressure optical absorption spectra were measured for a  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$  crystal at pressures up to 60 GPa at room temperature in a diamond-anvil cell. Diamond anvils of flat diameter  $\sim 400$   $\mu\text{m}$  were used. The hole in the centre of the rhenium gasket had a diameter of  $\sim 120$   $\mu\text{m}$ . Measurements were performed with a thin plate of size  $\sim 50 \times 40 \times 15$   $\mu\text{m}^3$  obtained from a massive  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$  single crystal. The light beam was directed perpendicular to the basis plane of the crystal. Pressure was applied to the sample through a PES-5 liquid providing quasihydrostatic compression. The single crystal remained undamaged after the removal of pressure. The optical setup for the study of the absorption spectra allows one to perform measurements in the visible and near-IR ranges from 0.3 to 5  $\mu\text{m}$ . The light-spot diameter on the sample was  $\sim 20$   $\mu\text{m}$ . The absorption spectrum was calculated from the expression  $I = I_0 \exp(-\alpha d)$ , where  $d$  is the sample thickness,  $I$  is the reference signal intensity outside the sample, and  $\alpha$  is the absorption coefficient.

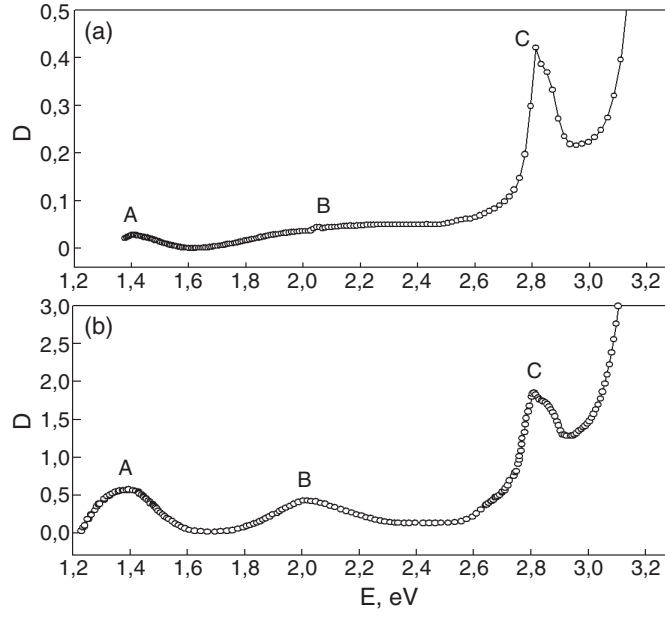
## 3. Results and discussion

### *Optical spectra at ambient pressure*

The optical absorption spectra of GFB and FB at ambient pressure are given in figure 1. It was found that the absorption bands in GFB and FB are similar. The  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  ion has no absorption bands of its own up to 4 eV [3], therefore bands **A**, **B**, **C** are identified as  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  ion absorption bands. The local structures of  $\text{FeO}_6$  octahedra in GFB and FB are very similar. So, bands **A**, **B** and **C** observed in GFB, as well as in FB (figure 1(b)), result from d–d transitions of  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  ion:  ${}^6\text{A}_{1g} \rightarrow {}^4\text{T}_{1g}$ ,  ${}^6\text{A}_{1g} \rightarrow {}^4\text{T}_{2g}$ , and  ${}^6\text{A}_{1g} \rightarrow {}^4\text{A}_{1g}^4, \text{E}_g$ . Moreover, Fe–O and B–O distances (table 1) in GFB and FB are practically identical, and this allows us to suggest that in the vicinity of the Fermi level the electronic structures of these two crystals are similar in the energy range up to 4 eV.

The multielectron band structure model of  $\text{FeBO}_3$  was derived in [4]. Here, we apply similar ideas to the GFB crystal thus taking into account the strong electronic correlations.

It was established [5], that the sp-hybridization of B and O ions is very strong whereas the d- and sp-electrons hybridization is very weak. The valence ( $E_v$ ) and conductivity ( $E_c$ ) bands are separated by a band gap,  $E_c - E_v = E_{go} = 3.1$  eV. The great intensity of



**Figure 1.** Optical absorption spectra at ambient conditions: (a)  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$ , (b)  $\text{FeBO}_3$ . The thickness of the  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$  sample is  $53 \mu\text{m}$ , and that of the  $\text{FeBO}_3$  sample is  $42 \mu\text{m}$ .

**Table 1.** B–O and Fe–O distances, and the energy gap in  $\text{FeBO}_3$  and  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$ .

|                                | B–O (Å) | Fe–O (Å) | $E_g$ (eV) |
|--------------------------------|---------|----------|------------|
| $\text{FeBO}_3$                | 1.3790  | 2.028    | 2.9        |
| $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$ | 1.3676  | 2.029    | 3.1        |

the absorption band **C** in the spectrum of  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$ , as in the case of  $\text{FeBO}_3$ , can be explained by the overlap of the charge-transfer absorption due to the  $p^6d^5 \rightarrow p^5d^6$  process. The creation of an additional electron in the  $\text{Fe}^{3+} \rightarrow \text{Fe}^{2+}$  transition requires the energy  $\Omega_c = E(^5T_2, d^6) - E(^6A_1, d^5)$ , while the annihilation of an electron (creation of a hole) requires  $\Omega_v = E(^6A_1, d^5) - E(^5E_1, d^4)$ , which are equivalent to Hubbard sub-bands. These levels can be presented by Racah parameters as

$$\Omega_c = \varepsilon_d + 5A + 14B - 0.4\Delta$$

and

$$\Omega_v = \varepsilon_d + 4A - 14B + 0.6\Delta.$$

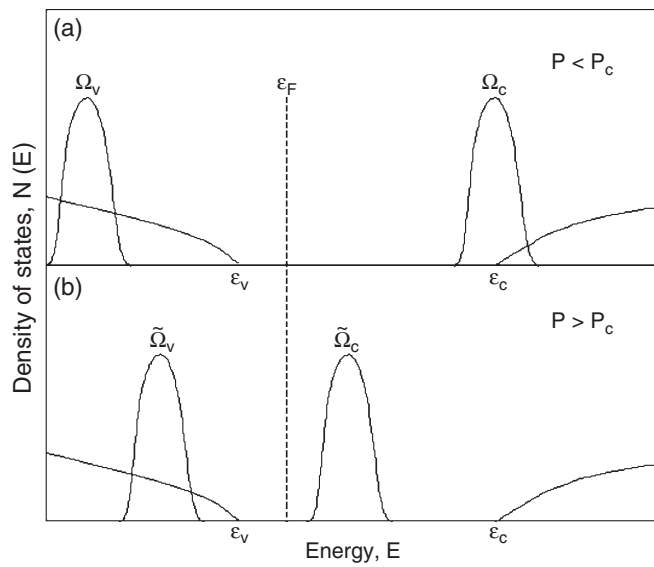
The electron structure of  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$  at ambient pressure is shown in figure 2(a). The effective Hubbard parameter is

$$U_{\text{eff}} = \Omega_c - \Omega_v = A + 28A - \Delta = 4.2 \text{ eV},$$

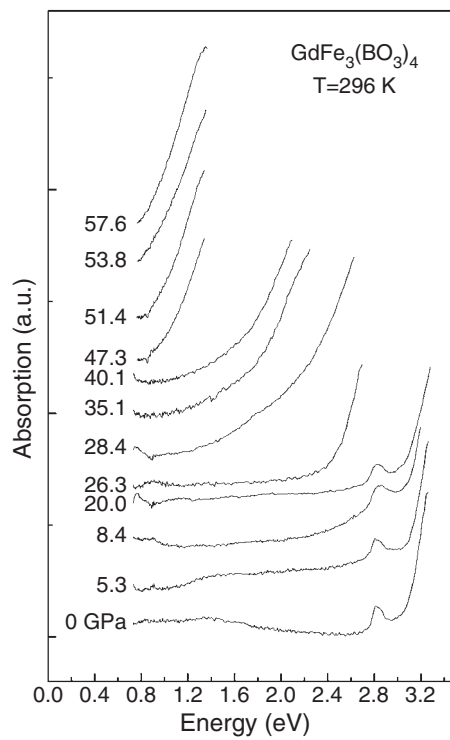
where  $A$ ,  $B$  are the Racah parameters and  $\Delta$  is the crystal field. Such a value of  $U_{\text{eff}}$  is typical for d-ions of the middle 3d-row.

#### *Theory of optical spectra at high pressure*

Recently [6–8] a magnetic moment collapse, sharp reduction of the energy gap, and an insulator–semiconductor transition has been found under high pressure in FB. Due to the

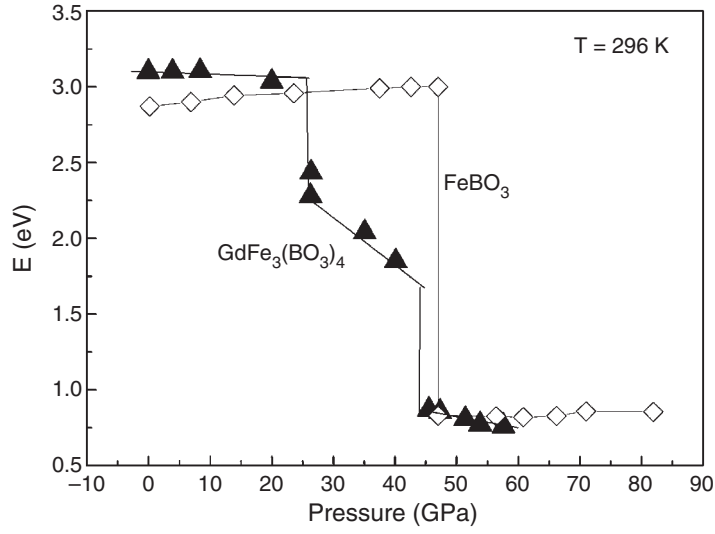


**Figure 2.** Electron structure of  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$  at (a) ambient pressure, (b) high pressure.



**Figure 3.** Optical absorption spectra of  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$  at high pressure.

similarity of the FB and GFB electronic structures we assume the same phenomena in GFB too. With increase of pressure the main change of electronic structure is induced by growth



**Figure 4.** Dependence of the energy gap on pressure in  $\text{GdFe}_3(\text{BO}_3)_4$  and  $\text{FeBO}_3$ .

of the crystal field  $\Delta$ :  $\Delta(P) = \Delta(0) + \alpha$ . The high-spin  ${}^6A_1$  ( $S = 5/2$ ) and low-spin  ${}^2T_2$  ( $S = 1/2$ ) terms of the  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  crossover take place at  $P = P_c$ , resulting in the magnetic moment collapse. In the high-pressure phase, the energies of the upper and lower Hubbard bands vary, and for  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  we have

$$\Omega_c = E({}^1A_1, d^6) - E({}^2T_2, d^5)$$

and

$$\Omega_v = E({}^2T_2, d^5) - E({}^3T_1, d^4).$$

Then the effective parameter of the Hubbard correlations reduces to  $U_{\text{eff}} = A + 9B - 7C \approx 1.45$  eV. Thus, a sharp strong electron correlation reduction occurs, and in the high-pressure phase the GFB crystal is a semiconductor (figure 2(b)). Further increase in pressure results in an increase of the d-band width, which can lead to closing of the semiconducting gap with translation to a metallic state.

#### *Experimental optical spectra at high pressure*

To verify our theoretical predictions, the experimental optical absorption spectra of GFB were studied at high pressures (figure 3). Experimental details are described in section 2 of this paper. The spectrum at ambient pressure was measured with the sample inside the diamond-anvil cell and it is therefore different from the spectrum in figure 1.

The pressure dependences of the optical absorption edge in GFB (triangles) and FB (circles) [8] are shown in figure 4. The absorption edge energies were estimated as the onset of significant absorption increase (to the power of about 4–5 in log scale).

Electronic phase transitions with two sharp jumps of the energy gap (at 26 and 43 GPa) were found in GFB (figure 4), whereas only one transition takes place in FB (from [8]). At  $P > 43$  GPa, in the high-pressure phase the optical gap is about 0.8 eV in both crystals. This indicates that the crystals are in a semiconducting state. A full account of this study will be published elsewhere.

## Acknowledgments

This work is supported by Russian Foundation for Basic Research grants 02-02-17364a, 03-02-16286, 04-02-16945-a, 05-02-16142-a and by the Program of Physical Branch of Russian Academy of Science ‘Strongly correlated electron systems’. AMP is grateful for support from the Russian Science Support Foundation.

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