

The Luminescence of Mercury-like Ions in and the Crystal Structure of SrLaBO₄

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The crystal structure of SrLaBO₄ contains triangular borate groups. The luminescence of mercury-like ions (Sn²⁺, Sb³⁺, Tl⁺, Pb²⁺, Bi³⁺) in this host lattice is characterized by a large Stokes shift. The Pb²⁺ is a very efficient activator at room temperature. The luminescent properties are discussed in terms of earlier models related to an off-center position of the metal ion. The emission of Eu³⁺ shows that the crystal structure has a disordered nature and confirms an off-center position. Energy transfer from Pb²⁺ to Eu³⁺ and Tb³⁺ was studied and found to be inefficient. © 1984 Academic Press, Inc.

1. Introduction

Van de Spijker and Konijnendijk (1) have given crystallographic and Pb²⁺ luminescence data for SrLaBO₄ and CaLaBO₄. They suggest isomorphism with BaAl₂O₄, which seems hard to believe in view of the radii of the ions involved. The Pb²⁺ luminescence shows a large Stokes shift and high efficiency at room temperature. In view of earlier work on luminescences of this type in this laboratory (2), this seemed to be a tempting case to investigate in more detail. In the course of this study we also investigated the luminescence of other ions in SrLaBO₄. The results are interesting from a luminescence as well as a crystallochemical point of view.

2. Experimental

Samples were prepared as described in

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Ref. (1). They were checked by X-ray powder diffraction.

Vibrational spectroscopy and luminescence measurements were performed as described in Ref. (3). The infrared and Raman spectra were obtained at room temperature. Infrared spectra were obtained using the KBr-pellet technique. The luminescence spectrometer is a Perkin-Elmer MPF-3A equipped with a helium-flow cryostat. Decay times were measured using a setup described in Ref. (2).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Vibrational spectra and crystal structure. Table I shows the infrared and Raman spectra together with data for LaBO₃ from the literature (4). All vibrational frequencies observed below 450 cm⁻¹ are ascribed to lattice vibrations, i.e., vibrations of the Sr²⁺ and La³⁺ ions relative to the borate sublattice. Those above 550 cm⁻¹ are internal borate vibrations. These results show that the borate group in SrLaBO₄ is a

TABLE I
INFRARED AND RAMAN SPECTRA OF SrLaBO_4^a

SrLaBO_4		LaBO_3^c $\text{BO}_3^{3-} (D_{3h})$	
Infrared ^b	Raman ^b		
~900(br,w)	950,920,905(m)	939	$\nu_1(A'_1)$
690(m)	—	741	$\nu_2(A'_2)$
~1200(vs,br)	—	1330	$\nu_3(E')$
590(w)	580(br,m)	606	$\nu_4(E')$
~400(vbr)	440(m)		
	320(s)		
	290(m)		
	240(s)		
	205(w)		
	190(m)		
	175(s)		

^a All values in cm^{-1} .

^b Symbols: br = broad, v = very, s = strong, m = medium, w = weak.

^c From Ref. (4).

triangular BO_3^{3-} group like in LaBO_3 . For tetrahedral BO_4^{5-} groups especially the infrared stretching mode at $\sim 1200 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ is expected at considerably lower wavenumbers ($1000\text{--}1050 \text{ cm}^{-1}$, Ref. (5)).

This shows that the original proposal that SrLaBO_4 (and CaLaBO_4) should have the stuffed tridymite structure (BaAl_2O_4) is incorrect, because this implies tetrahedral borate groups. Since BaAl_2O_4 has one large and two small ions, and SrLaBO_4 two large and one small ion, this proposal was unlikely anyhow.

One of us has shown that CaYBO_4 (Ref. (6)) is isomorphous with Y_2BeO_4 (Ref. (7)). This structure contains BO_3^{3-} (BeO_3^{4-}) groups. The Ca^{2+} and Y^{3+} ions are in octahedral coordination. Note that one of the four oxygen ions has only Y(Ca) neighbors, i.e., no Be(B) neighbors. Although SrLaBO_4 and CaLaBO_4 have definitely a different structure, there may exist a stronger analogy than suspected in Ref. (1). Again one of the four oxygen ions does not coordinate the boron. The Sr^{2+} (Ca^{2+}) and La^{3+} sites have probably a higher coordination

than octahedral. Evidence for this follows from the luminescence studies. A structure determination of SrLaBO_4 or CaLaBO_4 remains necessary to confirm these results and to establish all the other structural details.

3.2. Eu^{3+} luminescence. The luminescence of the Eu^{3+} ion was investigated, because usually the spectra give information on the site symmetry. For $\text{SrLa}_{0.97}\text{Eu}_{0.03}\text{BO}_4$ we observed a bright orange luminescence under ultraviolet excitation at room temperature and below. The spectra contain the well-known transitions within the $4f^6$ configuration of Eu^{3+} . In addition there is a broad and intense excitation band with a maximum at about 300 nm. This corresponds to a charge-transfer transition. Comparison with charge-transfer transitions in different Eu^{3+} complexes shows that (a) octahedral coordination can be excluded, because then the charge-transfer transition should be at about 250 nm, (b) the coordination number is about 10 (Ref. (8, 9)).

Excitation into the charge-transfer transition yields an emission spectrum as given in Fig. 1. We note the following details: (a) the intensity of the $^5D_0\text{--}^7F_0$ emission line is very high. This shows the presence of a linear crystal field on the Eu^{3+} site (10), which indicates an asymmetrical coordination. It may well be that the oxygen ion which does

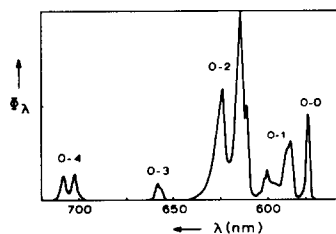


FIG. 1. Spectral energy distribution of the Eu^{3+} emission of $\text{SrLaBO}_4\text{--Eu}^{3+}$ at LHeT, under charge-transfer excitation ($\sim 300 \text{ nm}$). The notation $0 \rightarrow J$ denotes the transitions $^5D_0\text{--}^7F_J$. The Φ_λ denotes the photon flux per constant-wavelength interval in arbitrary units.

not coordinate boron, plays a role in this effect. (b) The lines are broad. The line-widths observed are not limited by the spectral resolution of the instrument. Especially the 5D_0 – 7F_1 transition is instructive. In first approximation there are two components but each of these contains a whole family of sublines. This leads to the conclusion that the crystal field at the Eu^{3+} site varies from site to site, i.e., the structure is disordered. An obvious possibility for this is disorder between the Sr^{2+} and La^{3+} ions, because these ions have nearly equal ionic radii. It cannot be excluded that these ions occupy even one and the same sublattice. The literature contains many examples of this [e.g., SrLaAlO_4 (Ref. (11)), SrLaNiNbO_6 (Ref. (12))]. Also in CaYBO_4 the Ca^{2+} and Y^{3+} ions are distributed statistically among the two yttrium sublattices (6).

That the La^{3+} site is too large for Eu^{3+} becomes also clear from the following. We tried in vain to prepare SrEuBO_4 (and SrGdBO_4). The X-ray pattern showed a.o. EuBO_3 . However, even for $\text{SrLa}_{0.97}\text{Eu}_{0.03}\text{BO}_4$ we found indication for a second phase containing Eu^{3+} . The spectra mentioned up until here, are the same for 4.2 and 300 K. If excitation is at about 395 nm, i.e., into $^7F_0 \rightarrow ^5L_7$, the 300 K emission spectrum is like the one in Fig. 1. The 4.2 K emission spectrum, however, shows a weak, but clear, second $^5D_0 \rightarrow ^7F_0$ emission line (at lower energy than in Fig. 1) and an additional 5D_0 – 7F_1 emission line in between the two components given in Fig. 1. These extra lines disappear between 50 and 100 K. We assign them to a second Eu^{3+} -containing phase with low quenching temperature of the emission. The $^7F_0 \rightarrow ^5L_7$ excitation will excite all Eu^{3+} ions in every phase, because they have about equal and low oscillator strength. If the charge-transfer excitation in the second phase is at higher energies than in SrLaBO_4 , excitation at 300 nm excites mainly the Eu^{3+} ions in SrLaBO_4 .

This suggests that the structure of SrLa

BO_4 is only stable for the largest trivalent rare-earth ions.

We were not able to obtain any Eu^{2+} emission from samples $(\text{Sr},\text{Eu})\text{LaBO}_4$ prepared in a reducing atmosphere. Only Eu^{3+} luminescence was observed.

3.3. Luminescence of other lanthanides. Two other activators were tried, viz. Ce^{3+} and Tb^{3+} . For a composition $\text{SrLa}_{0.97}\text{Ce}_{0.03}\text{BO}_4$ we observed at 4.2 and 300 K a blue luminescence. The emission exists of a band peaking at 450 nm. It has a weak shoulder at about 420 nm. The excitation spectrum shows a band at 350 nm and some weaker ones at shorter wavelengths. There is a long thermal quenching range, which starts at about 50 K and ends above 300 K.

These spectra are characteristic of Ce^{3+} (Ref. (13)). The excitation bands correspond to the crystal-field split $4f \rightarrow 5d$ transitions. The emission is the reverse transition from the lowest crystal-field component to the ground state which is split by about 2000 cm^{-1} ($^2F_{5/2}$ – $^2F_{7/2}$). It may well be that the 450- and 420-nm peaks correspond to these two transitions. However, due to the variation in the crystal field as a result of the disordered crystal structure, there may also be different types of Ce^{3+} ions, so that the $^2F_{5/2}$ – $^2F_{7/2}$ cannot be observed at all in the spectra.

If the Stokes shift of the emission of SrLaBO_4 – Ce is compared with those of other phosphors (14), it is found that it is fairly large, so that low thermal quenching can be expected. The long quenching region may also indicate the presence of several, slightly different, Ce^{3+} ions.

For $\text{SrLa}_{0.97}\text{Tb}_{0.03}\text{BO}_4$ we observed a green emission. This is hard to excite efficiently with conventional ultraviolet radiation. The spectra contain the well-known transitions within the $4f^8$ shell of Tb^{3+} (Ref. (13)). The excitation spectrum shows an $f \rightarrow d$ transition above 250 nm. As for Eu^{3+} the emission lines in the Tb^{3+} spectrum remain

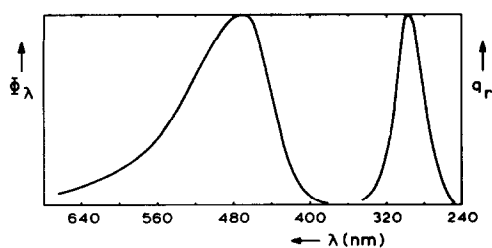


FIG. 2. Emission (left-hand side) and excitation (right-hand side) spectra of the luminescence of SrLaBO₄-Sn²⁺ at LHeT. The q_r denotes the relative quantum output.

broad, even for narrow slits. This confirms the interpretation given above.

3.4. Luminescence of mercury-like ions. We observed luminescence for the following ions: Sn²⁺(5s²), Sb³⁺(5s²), Tl⁺(6s²), Pb²⁺(6s²), Bi³⁺(6s²). Studies were restricted to SrLaBO₄, because Pb²⁺ in SrLaBO₄ and CaLaBO₄ gives essentially the same results. The emission consists of a broad band in the visible. The excitation band is in the short-wavelength ultraviolet, so that the Stokes shift is large. This behavior is illustrated in Figs. 2 and 3 for SrLaBO₄-Sn²⁺ and SrLaBO₄-Pb²⁺, respectively.

First we mention some trivial difficulties. It was hard to obtain Tl⁺-activated samples. Probably the thallium ion with its large size and deviating charge does not fit very well into the lattice. The low Tl⁺ concentration in the samples is the reason for the low light output observed. There is no thermal quenching up until 300 K. The Sb³⁺ ion and

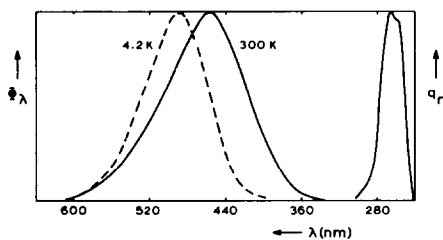


FIG. 3. Emission (left-hand side) and excitation (right-hand side) spectra of the luminescence of SrLaBO₄-Pb²⁺ (1%) at 4.2 and 300 K. The excitation spectra for both temperatures coincide.

especially the Bi³⁺ ion prefer the LaBO₃ phase which is later washed out (1). It was hard to obtain samples with reasonable activator concentrations and without luminescent second phases.

Our results are summarized in Table II. Visually the lead-activated compounds are the most efficient ones, also at room temperature. This is due to the fact that Pb²⁺ can be easily substituted for Sr²⁺ and to the high quantum efficiency (1). The spectral characteristics (and efficiency) resemble closely those of the lamp phosphor Ca₅(PO₄)₃F-Sb³⁺. Note from Table II that the Stokes shift increases (and the quenching temperature T_q decreases) in the sequence of 6s² ions Tl⁺, Pb²⁺, Bi³⁺. The same is true for the 5s² ions Sn²⁺, Sb³⁺. The Stokes shift is smaller for the 5s² ion than for the corresponding 6s² ion, but T_q is lower.

The large Stokes shifts observed suggest strongly that the mercury-like ions are off-center in SrLaBO₄. Unfortunately the structure is not known. Above we presented evidence that the coordination of La³⁺(Sr²⁺) consists of many anions, part of which are not coordinated to borium. This situation may be favorable for an off-center position.

TABLE II
LUMINESCENT PROPERTIES OF MERCURY-LIKE IONS
IN SrLaBO₄

Sample ^a	Emission maximum (nm)	Excitation maximum ^c (nm)	T_q (K)
Sr _{0.98} Sn _{0.02} LaBO ₄	475 ^b	295	200
SrLa _{0.99} Sb _{0.01} BO ₄	465 ^b	285	100
Sr _{0.98} Tl _{0.01} La _{1.01} BO ₄	445	260	>300
Sr _{0.99} Pb _{0.01} LaBO ₄	460(490) ^b	265	>300
Sr _{0.95} Pb _{0.05} LaBO ₄	460(490) ^b	275	>300
Sr _{0.5} Pb _{0.5} LaBO ₄	460(490) ^b	285	>300
SrLa _{0.99} Bi _{0.01} BO ₄	530 ^b	260	250

^a Starting composition.

^b At 4.2 K, others 300 K.

^c All values for 4.2 and 300 K.

In line with this the larger Stokes shift is observed for the smaller, i.e., higher-charged ions. This is most clear from the series Tl⁺, Pb²⁺, Bi³⁺. The smaller the ion, the more possible an off-center position becomes. Note that the value of the Stokes shift determines also the quenching temperature: the smaller the Stokes shift, the higher T_q (see, e.g., Tl⁺, Pb²⁺, Bi³⁺ in Table II). This follows immediately from the configurational coordinate diagram (15).

Relations of this type hold in the series of 6s² ions and in the series of 5s² ions. A comparison between the two series (Table II) shows that the relations are not valid on going from 5s² to 6s². For example, Sb³⁺ is smaller than Bi³⁺, but has a smaller Stokes shift too. Also T_q is lower. It cannot be excluded that this is due to a difference in bonding. This point is under study in our laboratory. Since the Sn²⁺- and Pb²⁺-activated samples were most easily prepared and had the highest light output, we studied these in more detail.

3.5. Pb²⁺ luminescence. The emission spectrum of SrLaBO₄-Pb²⁺ shifts to longer wavelengths upon cooling, whereas the excitation spectrum remains essentially the same (see Fig. 3). Exactly the same behavior was observed for Ca₅(PO₄)₃F-Sb³⁺ (Ref. (16)). Here the shift is from 470 to 515 nm (300 and 4.2 K, respectively). In the halophosphate we are dealing with off-center Sb³⁺ which occurs as an associate (Sb_{C_a} · O_F)^x. It was suggested that the Sb³⁺ ion goes further off-center, when the temperature is lowered. The same may be true for the Pb²⁺ ion in SrLaBO₄.

Further we measured decay times of the Pb²⁺ luminescence. Results are given in Fig. 4. All decay curves were exponential. The data were analyzed with a three-level scheme: level 3 (³P₁) > level 2 (³P₀) > level (¹S₀), where the free-atom notation has been used. The drawn line in Fig. 4 is a fit for $\Delta E_{23} = (153 \pm 17) \text{ cm}^{-1}$, $\tau_0 = (540 \pm 13) \mu\text{sec}$ and $\tau_1 = (0.15 \pm 0.1) \mu\text{sec}$. Here ΔE_{23}

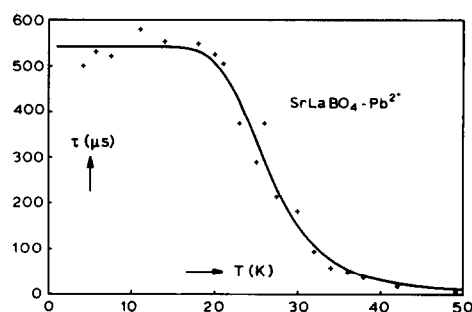


FIG. 4. Decay times of the emission of SrLaBO₄-Pb²⁺ as a function of temperature.

is the energy difference between levels 2 and 3 and τ_r the purely radiative decay time of the level ³P_J. The results are well in line with those observed for Pb²⁺ and Bi³⁺ in off-center position (2).

In view of the large Stokes shift of the Pb²⁺ emission in SrLaBO₄, energy transfer between Pb²⁺ ions mutually is highly improbable (13, 15). This is because the resonance condition is not fulfilled. To investigate this further we increased the Pb²⁺ concentration in Sr_{1-x}Pb_xLaBO₄ considerably. According to X-ray data replacement of Sr²⁺ by Pb²⁺ is possible up to $x = 0.5$. Samples with $0 < x \leq 0.5$ are all efficient luminescent materials at room temperature, i.e., no concentration quenching was observed. This agrees with the expectation that energy transfer does not take place. From Table II it can be seen that the emission maximum does not depend on the values of x , whereas the excitation maximum shifts slightly to lower energies for increasing value of x , a rather general phenomenon.

At 4.2 K we observed for $x = 0.5$ also a weak emission at 530 nm with excitation maximum at 370 nm. We assume that this is the first indication for second-phase formation, i.e., the emission is ascribed to Pb²⁺ ions in a second phase. It was not investigated further.

3.6. Sn²⁺ luminescence. Also for

$\text{SrLaBO}_4\text{-Sn}^{2+}$ the decay times were measured. All decay curves are exponential. Results are shown in Fig. 5. The drawn curve was fitted as described above with the following parameters: $\Delta E_{23} = (178 \pm 11) \text{ cm}^{-1}$, $\tau_0 = (301 \pm 5) \mu\text{sec}$ and $\tau_1 = (2 \pm 1) \mu\text{sec}$. The value of τ_1 is one order of magnitude larger than the one for $\text{SrLaBO}_4\text{-Pb}^{2+}$. This agrees with the stronger spin-orbit coupling in the case of the Pb^{2+} ion. It is this coupling which lifts the spin-selection-rule on the $^3P_1 \rightarrow ^1S_0$ transition. The value of ΔE_{23} is unexpectedly large for Sn^{2+} . For KI-Sn^{2+} $\Delta E_{23} = 34 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ has been reported (17). In view of the lack of structural data, we have to abandon further discussion.

3.7. Energy transfer from Pb^{2+} to Eu^{3+} and Tb^{3+} . Samples $(\text{Sr,Pb})[\text{La,Eu(Tb)}]\text{BO}_4$ were investigated for energy transfer from Pb^{2+} to Eu^{3+} or Tb^{3+} . This transfer was found to have a low probability. Even for 5% Eu^{3+} or Tb^{3+} , excitation into the Pb^{2+} ion results in an emission which consists for about 50% of Pb^{2+} emission. Since the Pb^{2+} excitation band overlaps those for Eu^{3+} and Tb^{3+} , the greater part of the rare-earth emission observed is probably due to direct excitation. Because energy transfer between Pb^{2+} ions does not take place, we have only to evaluate the $\text{Pb}^{2+} \rightarrow \text{Eu}^{3+}$ (Tb^{3+}) transfer process.

For electric dipole-dipole interaction the

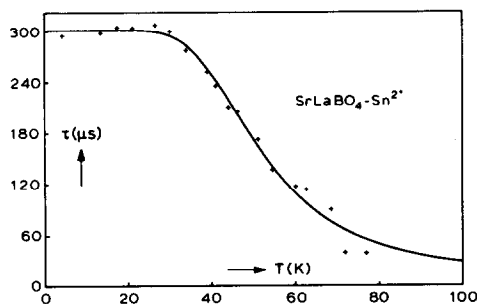


FIG. 5. Decay times of the emission of $\text{SrLaBO}_4\text{-Sn}^{2+}$ as a function of temperature.

critical distance for this transfer can be found from (Refs. (18, 19))

$$R_c^6 = 0.63 \times 10^{28} \frac{Q_A}{E^4} \int f_s(E) f_A(E) dE.$$

Here Q_A is the absorption cross section of the rare-earth ion and E the energy where maximum overlap between emission and absorption occurs. The integral presents the spectral overlap between emission and absorption. For Q_A we took as an upper maximum $25 \times 10^{-22} \text{ cm}^2 \text{ eV}$ (19). The spectral overlap is less than 0.02 eV^{-1} . With these data we find as an upper limit $R_c = 3 \text{ \AA}$. Although the crystal structure is not known, the sizes of the Sr^{2+} and La^{3+} ions in high coordination prevent the Pb^{2+} and Eu^{3+} (Tb^{3+}) to be so close together. The inefficiency of the transfer is, therefore, not unexpected.

3.8. Impurity emission. In practically all our samples we observed a weak, deep-red emission. It was most intense in a manganese-doped SrLaBO_4 sample. Since the spectra correspond to Mn^{4+} , we ascribe the emission to Mn^{4+} , which must be present in one of our starting materials (e.g., SrCO_3). It cannot be excluded that the activator is present in a second phase which is present at low concentration, since the excitation is only possible where the other activators are not excitable. The quantum efficiency of this luminescence is high and no thermal quenching is observed. The emission consists at 4.2 K of a number of sharp lines, situated at 700, 709, 718, and 726 nm. At 300 K these broaden considerably. This may be the $^2E \rightarrow ^4A_2$ transition. The excitation consists of a sharp line at 614 nm ($^4A_2 \rightarrow ^2T_2$), and bands at 470 nm ($^4A_2 \rightarrow ^4T_2$), $\sim 380 \text{ nm}$ ($^4A_2 \rightarrow ^4T_1$), and 345 nm (charge transfer). We refrain from further discussion in view of lack of structural data.

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