Aging in K$_{1-x}$Li$_x$TaO$_3$: a domain growth interpretation

F. Alberici-Kious$^1$, J.P. Bouchaud$^2$, L.F. Cugliandolo$^3$, P. Doussineau$^1$, A. Levelut$^1$

$^1$ Laboratoire des Milieux Désordonnés et Hétérogènes, Université P. et M. Curie, Case 78, 75252 Paris Cedex 05, France
$^2$ Service de Physique de l’Etat Condensé, CEA-Saclay, 91191 Gif-sur-Yvette CEDEX, France
$^3$ LPTENS, 24, rue Lhomond, F-75231 Paris Cedex 05, France and LPTHE, Tour 24, 4, Place Jussieu, F-75251 Paris Cedex 05, France.

The aging behaviour of the a.c. susceptibility of randomly substituted K$_{1-x}$Li$_x$TaO$_3$ crystals reveals marked differences with spin-glasses in that cooling rate effects are very important. The response to temperature steps (including temperature cycles) was carefully studied. A model based on thermally activated domain growth accounts for all the experimental results, provided one allows for a large distribution of pinning energies, in such a way that ‘slow’ and ‘fast’ domains coexist. Interesting similarities with deeply supercooled liquids are underlined.

The a.c. susceptibility of ‘glassy’ materials becomes time dependent at low temperatures: this is the aging phenomenon [1]. Such a behaviour has been observed on spin-glasses [2,3], on disordered dielectrics such as ammonium perchlorate [4] or K$_{1-x}$Li$_x$TaO$_3$ (KLT) (which is an orientational glass [5]), and more recently on a deeply supercooled liquid (glycerol) [6]. All these systems share common properties, but also important differences. The prominent features are the following:

- When the system is cooled to a certain temperature $T_1$ below the glass transition $T_0$, its frequency dependent response (which in the present paper is the real part of the dielectric constant $\epsilon'$) depends on the time $\Delta t$ since the quench. This dependence can be parametrized as [7]:

$$\epsilon'(\omega, t) = \epsilon'_{st}(\omega) + f(\Delta t)g(\omega)$$

where $f(\Delta t)$ is a (slowly) decreasing function describing the aging part and $\epsilon'_{st}(\omega)$ is the stationary part of the response. In spin glasses, the functions $f(u)$ and $g(u)$ both behave similarly (as $u^{-b}$ [3]), which means that the aging part of the response obeys approximately a simple $\omega \cdot \Delta t$ scaling (but see [2,4]). On KLT crystals, $g(\omega)$ is nearly independent of frequency, at least for temperatures not too close to $T_0$, while $f(\Delta t)$ behaves as a power law with a small exponent [8] or a logarithm, see Fig. 1. The situation is intermediate for glycerol, where the variation of $g(u)$ is somewhat weaker than that of $f(u)$ [6].

- The stationary part of the susceptibility is nearly independent of the cooling rate $R$ in spin glasses [9]. This is in striking contrast with the case of KLT, where $\epsilon'_{st}(\omega)$ markedly depends on the cooling rate (see Fig. 1), decreasing roughly as $\log R$, as the cooling rate is reduced. In other words, the apparent asymptotic value of the dielectric constant depends on the history, and thus certainly cannot be associated to an ‘equilibrium’ response function. Several cooling histories were probed in ref. [3], with the conclusion that it is essentially the time spent around $T_0$ which determines the value of $\epsilon'_{st}(\omega)$.

- Upon a negative temperature cycling $T_1 \rightarrow T_2 = T_1 - \Delta T \rightarrow T_1$, the a.c. response function shows both rejuvenation and memory, in the sense that new out of equilibrium processes are induced during the low temperature interval, but are erased once the temperature is back at $T_1$: dynamics resume as if the intermediate regime had not taken place. Memory is nearly perfect in spin-glasses when $\Delta T > 1K$, while in KLT (or glycerol) there appears an interesting ‘overshoot’ – see Fig. 2 below – before the dynamics corresponding to the initial temperature can resume. The amplitude of this overshoot grows with the time $t_2$ spent at temperature $T_2$.

The aim of this paper is to show that a picture based on domain growth, where domain walls are pinned by

![Figure 1](image-url)
static impurities, does account very well for all the experimental data on KLT, provided one takes into account the fact that the growth rate is actually very inhomogeneous, which leads to the existence of both ‘slow’ and ‘fast’ domain walls. The relation with the ‘droplet picture’ for spin-glasses will also be discussed in detail. Interestingly, the similarities between KLT and glycerol suggest that some sort of pinned domain growth, with a characteristic length scale, might also be present in supercooled liquids.

When lithium is absent, KTa0.5Nb0.5O3 is known to be an ‘incipient’ ferroelectric at T = 0, where quantum fluctuations prevent total ordering. Thus, the ferroelectric correlation length ξ(T) is expected to be large at low temperatures: assuming that ξ ≈ ξ2, one finds that ξ(T) ≈ 1/√T. When lithium ions are randomly substituted, they create large local dipoles which are known to freeze individually around T0 = 40K, due to the energy barrier for dipole reorientation. Below this temperature, the lithium ions can thus be seen as giving rise to a random static electric field, which acts as a pinning field for the ferroelectric domain walls. The growth of the ferroelectric order towards its equilibrium value ξ(T) is thus strongly impeded. The model we have in mind in thus the random field Ising model (RFIM) above its ferromagnetic transition, but close to it so that the equilibrium domain size is somewhat larger than the lattice spacing a. A numerical simulation of the three dimensional RFIM with different cooling rates actually reveals qualitatively similar features (Fig 1 – inset) 3.

In the presence of pinning, several arguments [10,11] suggest that the typical energy barrier which impedes upon the motion of a domain of size R is of the order of E(R) = Υ(R/ℓT)0 where θ = 2 for nearest neighbour interactions in three dimensions and Υ is an energy scale which depends both on the random fields and on the surface energy of the domain walls. Note that dipolar fields are long range, so that θ might have a somewhat larger value (θ ≈ 2). The effect of pinning becomes noticeable when E(R) ≈ kT. For large times, the growth law is thus governed by thermal activation t ≈ t0 exp [E(R)]/θ, where t0 is a microscopic time scale, and the Boltzmann constant k has been set to one. One thus obtains [10,11]:

\[ R(t) \approx \left( \frac{T}{\Upsilon} \log(t + \exp(R_0^2/T)) \right)^{1/2} \quad R_0 = R(t = 0) \]  \( (2) \)

where from now on we measure t in units of τ0 and R in units of a. Eq. (2) holds until the equilibrium size ξ(T) is reached, beyond which domains no longer grow. Taking the derivative of Eq. (2), one obtains the growth rate Γ(t, T), in which the temperature can now be considered as time dependent, for example as T(t) = T0 − αt. Noting that at t = 0 domains are in equilibrium at T0 (i.e. R0 = ξ(T0)), one can integrate back Γ(t, T(t)), and find the domain size as a function of time at temperature T1. In order to compare with experimental results, we make the natural assumption that the domain walls contribute to the dielectric susceptibility proportionally to their total surface. Per unit volume, this leads to an excess susceptibility given by:

\[ \Delta \epsilon'(\omega, t) \propto \langle R(t)^2 \rangle / (R(t)^3) g(\omega) \]  \( (3) \)

where g(ω) is the (frequency dependent) wall mobility and ⟨...⟩ denotes an average over all the domain sizes present in the sample.

Numerically, however, this simple model fails to reproduce the experimental results in the following sense: Υ is either too small, and one observes a decay of ε’, which can be slow but towards an asymptotic value which is independent of the cooling rate, or too large, in which case ε’ indeed strongly depends on the cooling rate but does not relax at all at T1 (at least over the experimental time window). The simultaneous observation of the two effects actually requires some fast growing domains coexisting with slower ones, corresponding to different local barrier heights Υ. This is actually expected: since the pinning field is random, Eq. (3) can only describe a typical behaviour, with large fluctuations corresponding to particularly efficient (or inefficient) pinning regions. We shall thus assume that Υ has a rather broad distribution. Let us first consider the situation at time t1 when the temperature T1 is first reached (i.e. T0 − Rτ1 = T1). There, three types of domains can be distinguished:

- ‘Fast’ domains, which have been able to remain in equilibrium during the whole cooling phase, and follow the evolution of the equilibrium length ξ. Their size is thus ξ(T1) and they no further evolve after t1. Imposing that Γ(t, T) > dξ/dt, one can check that fast domains correspond to Υ(T1) > ℓT1 − ξ(T1)/θ, where Υ(T1) is the ‘initial’ pinning energy and ℓ is approximately given by ln[T1/Υτ0].

- ‘Slow’ domains, which are in equilibrium in the first stages of the cooling process, but fall out of equilibrium before the temperature reaches T1. This occurs when the domain growth rate Γ(t, T) becomes less than dξ/dt, which occurs at a temperature Tp < ℓT1 − ξ(T1)/θ. This corresponds to ℓT1 − ξ(T1)/θ < τp < ℓT0.

- ‘Frozen’ domains, which fall out of equilibrium as soon as T < Tp because of a large local pinning energy Tp > ℓT0. Of course, these domains are not really frozen but only evolve on extremely long time scales.

Collecting the contribution of these different domains to (R(t)^2)/⟨R(t)^3⟩, and assuming that the scale T* of the distribution of pinning energies Υp is much larger than ℓT1, we find [19] that the contribution of the walls to the dielectric susceptibility is proportional to 1 − αT1/Υ*T, where α is a certain function of T1/Υ0 [19]. Hence, this model predicts that the excess dielectric susceptibility is linear in ln R, as indeed reported
to asymptote a cooling rate dependent value here (3 10

Our analysis shows that, even on the rather long time scales investigated

point is that the logarithm is such a slowly varying function of

sequently, the domain wall density is smaller than it should

happen. First, the ‘fast’ domains now have to shrink

the ‘frozen’ ones) reach their equilibrium size

Of course, for exponentially long times, all domains (even

shrinking is very slow. A more efficient process then occurs:

the temperature decrease, resume their dynamics in perfect continuity with the first period of time. Concerning the ‘overshoot’, its amplitude \( A(t_2) \) depends on the time

t spent at low temperature, since the number of net nucleation of domains is proportional to the volume occupied by domains which have grown beyond \( \xi(T_1) \). We thus expect \( A(t_2) \) to grow slowly with time (since \( R(t_2) \) only grows logarithmically) and then to saturate for very long times. This is indeed what one observes experimentally. The overshoot contribution can be parametrized as

\[
A(t_2) \propto (\Delta t/\tau_1),
\]

where \( A(t_2) \) grows slowly with \( t_2 \), and decreases with \( T_1 \), a feature which our model also predicts [19], \( \tau_1 \), on the other hand, only weakly depends on \( t_2 \) or \( T_1 \) (see Figure 3).

The interpretation of the cycling experiments, shown in Fig 2, follows very similar lines. The main ingredient is again the existence of the ‘fast’ and ‘slow’ domains discussed above. When the temperature is reduced from \( T_1 \) to \( T_2 \), the equilibrium length \( \xi \) suddenly increases. Hence, the ‘fast’ domains are driven out of equilibrium and must restart growing. Since the temperature has decreased, this is now a slow process, which accounts for the fact that \( \epsilon' \) decreases much like after the initial quench.

(Note that the large positive instantaneous change of \( \epsilon' \) is due to the bulk contribution which is itself temperature dependent). The ‘slow’ domains, which were already slow at \( T_1 \), are completely frozen at \( T_2 \) and hardly move. Now, when the system is heated back to \( T_1 \), two things happen. First, the ‘fast’ domains now have to shrink back to their equilibrium size. They have grown beyond \( \xi(T_1) \) during their stay at lower temperature and consequently, the domain wall density is smaller than it should be. However, since the size of these domains is large, the barriers they have to jump are now high at \( T_1 \) and their shrinking is very slow. A more efficient process then occurs: internal nucleation of smaller domains. These nuclei grow according to Eq. \( \text{Eq. (4)} \) from an initial size of the order of the lattice parameter \( a \), until they reach the equilibrium domain size \( \xi(T_1) \). This growth, rapid at the beginning, generates new walls which induce an increase of the dielectric constant. This accounts for the ‘overshoot’ observed just after the temperature step. Second, the ‘slow’ domains which have been nearly unaffected by the temperature decrease, resume their dynamics in perfect continuity with the first period of time. Concerning the ‘overshoot’, its amplitude \( A(t_2) \) depends on the time

t spent at low temperature, since the number of net nucleation of domains is proportional to the volume occupied by domains which have grown beyond \( \xi(T_1) \). We thus expect \( A(t_2) \) to grow slowly with time (since \( R(t_2) \) only grows logarithmically) and then to saturate for very long times. This is indeed what one observes experimentally. The overshoot contribution can be parametrized as \( A(t_2) \propto (\Delta t/\tau_1) \), where \( A(t_2) \) grows slowly with \( t_2 \), and decreases with \( T_1 \), a feature which our model also predicts \([19]\), \( \tau_1 \), on the other hand, only weakly depends on \( t_2 \) or \( T_1 \) (see Figure 3).

Finally, we would like to discuss the differences between domain growth in a random field like system, which we argue to be a good model for KLT crystals, and ‘droplet’ growth in spin-glasses \([12]\), which has been advocated to be the relevant picture (as opposed to models inspired from Parisi’s mean field ‘hierarchical’ solution \([5,13,15]\), or exactly soluble dynamical mean-field models \([14]\)). First of all, domain growth cannot be trivial in spin glasses, otherwise strong cooling rate

![Figure 2](image-url)

**FIG. 2.** Effect of a negative temperature cycle on \( \epsilon'(\omega/2\pi = 100 \text{ KHz}, t) \) for KLT \( (x = 0.011) \). The first period is spent at temperature \( T_1 = 18.4 \text{ K} \) during \( 40000 \text{ s} \), then the sample is cooled to \( 4.2 \text{ K} \) for a time \( t_2 = 40000 \text{ s} \), and heated back again to \( T_1 \). The ‘overshoot’ can be seen at the beginning of the third period, where \( \epsilon'(\omega, t) \) has a non monotonic behaviour.

![Figure 3](image-url)

**FIG. 3.** Amplitude of the overshoot \( A(t_2) \) as a function of the time \( t_2 \) spent at \( T_2 = 4.2 \text{ K} \), in log-linear scales, and for different temperatures \( T_1 \). Note that \( A \) increases roughly as \( \ln t_2 \) and decreases when \( T_1 \) increases. Inset: Dependence of the relaxation time of the overshoot \( \tau_1 \) on \( t_2 \). The y-axis scale is \( 0 – 2000 \text{ s} \).
dependence would be seen, for example in the apparent asymptote of $\chi'(\omega, t)$, as is observed in KLT (see Fig. 1). This is avoided by arguing that the growing ‘phase’ depends chaotically on temperature $\Delta T$, i.e. the structure of the equilibrium phase changes altogether when temperature is varied. Hence, the growth of the domains at temperature $T + \Delta T$ is useless to bring the system closer to equilibrium at $T$. The rejuvenation effect seen in KLT was attributed above to a change of the finite equilibrium correlation length $\xi$ when the temperature is reduced, which leads to an overshoot effect not observed in spin-glasses. Conversely, in the droplet picture, the equilibrium size of the domains is infinite $\xi^\infty$. The interpretation of rejuvenation is then related to the fact that domains of the new phase (i.e. the one stable at temperature $T_2$) do grow at the expense of the old phase (the one stable at temperature $T_1$). However, this must be also compatible with the observed perfect memory upon reheating. How this is possible is still very much a subject of debate (see e.g. [16, 18]), but the conclusion that different phases must somehow coexist (at least for finite times) appears difficult to avoid.

To summarize, we have argued that the observed aging effects and strong history dependence of the dielectric susceptibility in KLT crystals could be understood in terms of slow, inhomogeneous ferroelectric domain growth in the presence of random pinning fields. An important aspect, needed to interpret the ‘overshoot’ observed after a positive temperature jump, is that the equilibrium correlation length $\xi$ is finite. It would be interesting to compare our results with similar experiments on well characterized random field systems, in particular in the ordered phase where $\xi = \infty$. We have discussed the similarities and differences with other systems, such as spin-glasses or supercooled liquids. In particular, no overshoot has been reported in spin glasses for large enough temperature jumps $T_2 - T_1$, while the data on glycerol is quite similar to the one discussed here, and raises the interesting possibility that some kind of domain growth, with a finite equilibrium size, might also be relevant in supercooled liquids.

We thank J. Kurchan for having suggested the analogy with random field systems and M. Mézard, R. Leheny, P. Nordblad and E. Vincent for many useful discussions.

* Associé au C.N.R.S., U.M.R. 7603.

[1] J.P. Bouchaud, L. F. Cugliandolo, J. Kurchan, M. Mézard, Out of Equilibrium dynamics in spin-glasses and other glassy systems, in ‘Spin-glasses and Random Fields’, P. Young ed. (World Scientific, 1997)

[2] L. Lundgren, P. Svedlindh, P. Nordblad and O. Beckmann, Phys. Rev. Lett 51, 911 (1983); P. Nordblad, L. Lundgren, P. Svedlindh and L. Sandlund, Phys. Rev. B 33, 645 (1988).

[3] E. Vincent, J. Hammann, M. Ocio, J.P. Bouchaud and L. F. Cugliandolo, in: Sitges Conference on Glassy Systems, ed. M. Rubi, Springer-Verlag, 1997.

[4] J. Gilchrist, Phys. Lett. A 156, 76 (1989), J. of Mol. Liq. 69 253 (1996).

[5] F. Alberici, P. Doussineau, A. Levelut, J. Phys I (France) 7 329 (1997).

[6] F. Alberici, P. Doussineau, A. Levelut, Europhys. Lett. 39 329 (1997).

[7] R. L. Leheny, S. Nagel, Phys. Rev. B 57, 5154 (1998).

[8] K. Jonason, E. Vincent, J. Hammann, J.P. Bouchaud, P. Nordblad, Memory and Chaos Effects in a Spin Glass, in preparation.

[9] The simulation of the 3-D RFIM was performed on a lattice with $64^4$ sites. In units of the ferromagnetic coupling, the initial temperature is $T_0 = 5$ and the final temperature is $T_1 = 0.57$. The random field is $h \approx -2$, and the cooling times are $10, 20, 40, 80, 160$ MC sweeps per spin. Note that we have simulated, for convenience, the RFIM below its ordering temperature, instead of finite tuning the temperature to obtain a large (but finite) correlation length, as is the case for KLT.

[10] see e.g. J. Villain, Phys. Rev. Lett. 52, 1543 (1984), J. Physique 46, 1843 (1985). R. Bruinsma and G. Aeppli, Phys. Rev. Lett. 52, 1547 (1984). G. Grinstein and J. F. Fernández, Phys Rev. B 29, 6389 (1984).

[11] for a review, see T. Nattermann, in in ‘Spin-glasses and Random Fields’, P. Young ed. (World Scientific, 1997). In the context of random dipolar systems: T. Nattermann, Ferroelectrics, 104 171 (1990).

[12] A. J. Bray and M. A. Moore, J. Phys. C 17, L463 (1984), A. J. Bray and M. A. Moore, Phys. Rev. Lett 58, 57 (1987).

[13] D.S. Fisher and D.A. Huse, Phys. Rev. Lett 56, 1601 (1986); Phys. Rev. B 38, 373 (1988); D.A. Huse, Phys. Rev. B 43, 8673 (1991).

[14] G.J. Koper and H.J. Hilhorst, J. Phys. (France) 49, 429 (1988).

[15] V.S. Dotsenko, J. Phys. C 18 6023 (1985), V.S. Dotsenko, M. V. Feigel’man and L.B. Ioffe, Spin-Glasses and related problems, Soviet Scientific Reviews, vol. 15 (Harwood, 1990).

[16] F. Lefloch, J. Hammann, M. Ocio and E. Vincent, Europhys. Lett. 18, 647 (1992). See also: J. O. Andersson, J. Mattsson, P. Nordblad, Phys. Rev. B 48 13 977 (1993).

[17] L. F. Cugliandolo and J. Kurchan, Phys. Rev. Lett. 71, 173 (1993); L. F. Cugliandolo and J. Kurchan, J. Phys. A 27, 5749 (1994).

[18] J.P. Bouchaud and D.S. Dean; J. Phys. I (France) 5, 265 (1995).

[19] F. Alberici-Kious, J.P. Bouchaud, L.F. Cugliandolo, P. Doussineau, A. Levelut, in preparation.