High-field spin-flop state in green dioptase

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(Dated: January 22, 2021)

The high-field magnetic properties and magnetic order of the gem mineral green dioptase Cu6[Si6O18]·6H2O have been studied by means of single-crystal neutron diffraction in magnetic fields up to 21 T and magnetization measurements up to 30 T. In zero field, the Cu2+-moments in the antiferromagnetic chains are oriented along the c-axis with a small off-axis tilt. For a field applied parallel to the c-axis, the magnetization shows a spin-flop-like transition at Bc = 12.2 T at 1.5 K. Neutron diffraction experiments show a smooth behavior in the intensities of the magnetic reflections without any change in the periodicity of the magnetic structure. Bulk and microscopic observations are well described by a model of ferromagnetically coupled antiferromagnetic XXZ spin-3/2 chains, taking into account a change of the local easy-axis direction. We demonstrate that the magnetic structure evolves smoothly from a deformed Néel state at low fields to a deformed spin-flop state in a high field via a strong crossover around Bc. The results are generalized for different values of interchain coupling and spin anisotropy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to recent progress in solid-state chemistry, a lot of materials relevant to both practical and fundamental applications can be nowadays produced in the laboratory. However, there remain sample preparation conditions that are difficult or impossible to reach experimentally, especially for large samples, either because of extreme pressures and temperatures required or the time-scales needed. As a result, some compounds, especially in large single-crystal form, can be found only in nature. Natural minerals were the first materials whose magnetic properties were studied and used by mankind. Recently, they have again drawn the attention of the magnetism community [1]. Materials containing spin-3/2 ions or exhibiting a suppressed magnetic order have turned out to be a perfect playground for the study of quantum many-body effects such as dimensional crossover [2], fractionalized magnetic excitations [3], condensation of magnetic excitations [4] and spin-liquids [5]. In this work we focus on high-field magnetic properties of green dioptase, a gemstone whose name and first description appeared more than two centuries ago [6].

The correct chemical composition of green dioptase, Cu6[Si6O18]·6H2O, was established in the 19th century [7]. Its rhombohedral crystal structure (SG R3) is quite complex and consists of corrugated Si6O18 rings interconnected by Cu2+ ions, see Fig. 1 [8–11]. Analogous rings of H2O molecules alternate with the silicate rings along the c-axis (hereafter we use the hexagonal notation). The magnetic spin-3/2 Cu2+ ions, occupying a single Wyckoff site, form helical chains along the c-axis.

The magnetic properties of green dioptase have been studied since the 1950s. Early NMR and specific heat measurement indicated that it orders antiferromagnetically (AFM) below 21 K [12, 13]. This is close to the results from the most recent susceptibility, specific heat and neutron diffraction measurements reporting Néel temperatures of about 15 K [9, 14–16] and much lower than Tc obtained from susceptibility measurements [17, 18]. The ordered magnetic moment stemming from the Cu2+ ions is reduced and equals to 0.4–0.5μB [9, 15, 18, 19].

The arrangement of magnetic ions in green dioptase described above implies that each Cu-ion has two nearest neighbors along the chain and one in the ab-plane. Based on this geometry, two major exchange interactions are expected: intrachain, Jc, and interchain, Jcb (Fig. 1). Neutron diffraction shows that the magnetic structure is AFM with propagation vector kM=(0,0,2π/3). The magnetic moments point predominantly along the c-axis, but are inclined to it by about 13°. They are ordered AFM in the chains and ferromagnetically (FM) between them (Fig. 1) [9]. This is in agreement with the theoretical work of Janson et al. [16] and the inelastic neutron scattering report of Podlesnyak et al. [19], which indicate Jc > 0 and Jcb < 0. It is, however, in disagreement with the Quantum Monte Carlo calculations of Gros and co-workers who obtained only AFM couplings [20]. Nonetheless, even if the right sign was obtained, the magnitudes of
As single-ion anisotropy is not expected in the case of S
The dehydration significantly reduces the
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number of available facilities in which such an experiment
can be performed, especially as neutron scattering is needed
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the required field direction coincides with that of magnetic
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here are the transition field is quite high,
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along the c-axis at 1.5 K [14]. Although a spin-flop transition
would be expected in the case of the AFM chains in
dioptase, the authors noted a difference in the slopes of the
magnetization curves for B || c and for B \perp c beyond 13 T.
As single-ion anisotropy is not expected in the case of S = \frac{1}{2}
antiferromagnet, further investigations are required. In addition,
the experimentally observed transition, which in the case of a classical spin-flop transition should be a sharp first
order transition, is rather smooth. This is not the first time
spin-flop transitions over a broad magnetic-field range have
been observed, but this was previously attributed either to
domain effects or to a misalignment of the applied magnetic
field with respect to the AFM easy axis [22–24]. On the other
hand, intermediate phases between the AFM and spin-
fi
lapped states have been predicted theoretically [25–28].

All these issues question the nature of the transition at
13 T and the magnetic states around and above it in green
dioptase. To-date there has been neither a direct confirmation
of the spin-configuration at high fields nor information
of their field evolution. The main experimental challenges
here are the transition field is quite high, B_c = 12.5 T, and
the required field direction coincides with that of magnetic
propagation k_M = (0,0,\frac{2}{3}). This significantly restricts the
number of available facilities in which such an experiment
can be performed, especially as neutron scattering is needed
to directly probe the microscopic alignment of the magnetic
moments. In this paper we report a direct observation of the
high-field phase in green dioptase using the High Field
 Facility for Neutron Scattering (HFM/EXED) at the BER II
research reactor at Helmholtz-Zentrum Berlin (HZB) [29].
The unique combination of the High Field Magnet and the
dedicated time-of-flight (TOF) Extreme Environment Diffrac-
tometer enables neutron scattering experiments in continuous
magnetic fields up to 25.9 T and temperatures below 1 K [30, 31]. The neutron data are supported by bulk magnetization measurements up to 30 T as well as Chain Mean Field Theory and Quantum Monte Carlo calculations. The experimentally revealed spin-flop-like transition at B^* = 12.2 T is interpreted in terms of the field-induced crossover from the low-field deformed Néel state to a high-field deformed
spin-flop state, due to the involvement of several nonequiv-
alent magnetization sublattices.

II. EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

The natural single crystals of green dioptase for the exper-
iments described in this paper were obtained commercially.
They originate from the Okawandasi Mine, Kunene Region,
Namibia, and Reneville, Brazzaville Department, Republic
of Congo. These are the same crystals that were used in
Ref. [19]. The samples were characterized by x-ray powder
diffraction indicating a single phase. Absence of magnetic
impurities was also confirmed by the magnetization mea-
surements which show only the anomalies associated with
the main phase.

Bulk magnetic characterization of the samples was carried
out by means of dc magnetic susceptibility and magnetization
measurements up to 7 T using MPMS-3 at the Max
Planck Institute in Dresden. High-field magnetization measure-
ments were performed using a 30 T pulsed magnet and a
\(^4\)He flow cryostat at the Institute for Materials Research,
Tohoku University (Sendai). For the magnetization measurements small crystals \((m = 17.6\) and \(14\) mg) with dimensions of about 2 mm in length (along the \(c\)-axis) and about the same size in the basal plane have been used.

Single crystal neutron diffraction data in zero field were collected at the TOF Cold Neutron Chopper Spectrometer (CNCS) \([32, 33]\), at the Spallation Neutron Source at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. The crystal was aligned in the \((h,0,1)\) scattering plane. The measurements were done at temperatures of \(T = 1.7\) and \(25\) K with a fixed neutron wavelength of \(\lambda = 4.96\) Å.

Neutron diffraction experiments in magnetic fields up to \(21\) T were carried out using the HFM/EXED high-field neutron facility at the BER-II research reactor at Helmholtz-Zentrum Berlin \([29]\). The facility consists of a hybrid High Field Magnet (HFM) and a dedicated TOF Extreme Environment Diffractometer (EXED) \([30, 31]\). The horizontal-field magnet has 30° conical openings on both ends, where the position-sensitive detectors are placed (Fig. 2). In addition the HFM can be rotated with respect to the incident neutron beam by an angle of \(\omega_{\text{mag}} \leq 12°\), which in combination with the TOF technique, extends the reciprocal space coverage. For the current experiment the magnet was rotated by \(11.85°\) deg with respect to the incident beam. The sample was mounted in a He-flow cryostat inserted into the room temperature bore of the magnet. The cryostat is equipped with a rotation stage around the vertical axis with an angular range of \(\omega_v \approx 180°\), allowing the sample orientation to be adjusted in-situ. The crystal was oriented such that the scattering plane was spanned by the vectors \((1,0,0)\) and \((0,0,1)\). The \(c\)-axis was deliberately misaligned relative to the magnetic field, in order to access the magnetic reflections having finite component along the \([0,0,1]\) direction. A rotation of \(\omega_c = 13°\) around the vertical axis was applied for this purpose. A sketch of the scattering geometry is shown in Fig. 2. The covered momentum transfer \((Q)\) range presented as \((h,k)\)-maps for selected \(l\)-values is displayed in Fig. 3. The data collection was performed with a fixed \(\omega_v\) (i.e. fixed direction of the magnetic field with respect to the sample). All the measurements were performed at \(T = 1.4\) K.

For the neutron diffraction experiments much larger sample \((m = 0.6\) g) with 11 mm along the \(c\)-axis and 5 mm across the diameter has been chosen (Fig. 1). Neutrons interact with matter weakly forcing to use samples with larger volume. Moreover, the ordered Cu-moment, the elastic neutrons scattering is sensitive to, is quite small for a \(S = \frac{1}{2}\) system. To deal with the above issues the EXED instrument configuration was optimized to maximize the neutron flux on the sample for the given \(Q\)-range of interest. This is achieved by trading the wavelength bandwidth for the repetition rate and increasing the measurement time. For the current measurements the bandwidth was set to 0.7-2.65 Å leading to the instrument repetition rate of 30 Hz. At each field the data collection constituted 3 hrs. The magnet ramping time at fields below 18 T was about 0.5 T/min and 0.3 T/min above it.

The MANTID \([34]\), FULLPROF \([35]\), BASIRREPS \([35]\) and VESTA \([36]\) software packages were used for data reduction, analysis and visualization.

### III. RESULTS

#### A. Bulk Properties

The magnetic properties of green dioptase have been reported by a number of authors \([14, 16–18, 20]\). We have performed bulk characterization of our sample, and the results agree with those reported in Refs. \([16, 20]\). Figure 4 displays the temperature dependence of the static spin susceptibility \(M/B\) measured in magnetic fields of 0.1 and 7 T applied both parallel and perpendicular to the \(c\)-axis. Above approx-
approximately 150 K the data can be fitted with the Curie-Weiss law. The obtained fit parameters, the Weiss constant 48 K and the effective magnetic moment $\mu_{\text{eff}} = 1.94 \mu_B$ ($g = 2.2$), agree well with those reported in Ref. [16]. Around 100 K the susceptibility curves measured with the field applied along and perpendicular to the c-axis start deviating from each other, though they still show similar temperature dependencies (including a broad maximum around 45 K) down to $T_N = 15$ K. Below this temperature, the curve for $B \perp c$ shows an upturn, while the susceptibility for $B || c$ changes its slope and drops rapidly as detailed in the inset of Fig. 5. These data are in good agreement with the single crystal measurements reported by Gros et al. [20].

Figure 5 displays the field dependence of the magnetization measured in pulsed magnetic fields up to 30 T applied parallel and perpendicular to the c-axis. The absolute value of the magnetization was checked against the low-field measurements on a SQUID magnetometer. For $B \parallel c$ there is a metamagnetic-like transition at about $B^* = 12.2$ T. This is slightly less than the transition field of 13 T reported by Ohta et al. [14]. The inset in Fig. 5 shows the first derivative of the magnetization, in which the transition field is clearly visible.

For $B \perp c$ the magnetization grows linearly with the field and does not show any saturation up to the highest field applied. Contrary to Ohta et al., however, the slope of the magnetization beyond 13 T for $B \perp c$ coincides with the one for $B \parallel c$ within the experimental precision of the sample alignment of 1-2°.

### B. Neutron Scattering

To get a microscopic insight into nature of the above metamagnetic transition we performed single crystal neutron diffraction in high magnetic fields. First, we checked the zero-field ground state of our sample using the CNCS instrument at ORNL. The pattern, taken at $T = 1.7$ K, shows weak extra peaks not seen in the data measured above the Néel temperature at $T = 25.0$ K, as illustrated in Fig. 6. The observed magnetic reflections can be indexed with a magnetic propagation vector $k = (0,0,1)$ r.l.u. (bottom) Contour plot of the magnetic scattering in the $(h,0,l)$ plane, integrated over wave vector $k = [-0.1; 0.1]$ r.l.u.

The difference of elastic scattering intensity (integrated over energy $E = [-0.1; 0.1]$ meV), obtained by subtracting the CNCS data sets measured at temperatures $T = 1.7$ and 25 K. (top) The $Q$-cut along wave vector $(h,0,\frac{2}{3})$, integrated over $l = [0.4; 0.6]$ r.l.u. and $k = [-0.1; 0.1]$ r.l.u. (bottom) Contour plot of the magnetic scattering in the $(h,0,l)$ plane, integrated over wave vector $k = [-0.1; 0.1]$ r.l.u.

FIG. 5. Magnetization curves (solid line) of green dioptase measured at 1.5 K for a field applied parallel and perpendicular to the $c$-axis. The pulsed-field data have been normalized to the DC-field measurements at low fields. The theoretical magnetization curve was obtained from ChMFT simulations of model Eq. 1 at $T = 0$. The inset displays a first derivative of the experimental magnetization as function of field.
which can be used to define possible magnetic structures and the theoretical calculations for both the experimental setting, \( \omega_s = 13^\circ \), and the setting \( B \parallel c \), \( \omega_s = 0^\circ \) (dashed line). The vertical dash line corresponds to the transition field corrected for the experimental angular offset \( \omega_s = 13^\circ \).

(b) A profile of the \((-4, 1, \frac{1}{2})\) reflection at different fields.

As previously noted with respect to the magnetization data, the transition does not look abrupt. Instead, the intensity decreases rapidly through the transition. Above 16 T the intensity of \((-4,1,\frac{1}{2})\) reflection levels off and remains finite. The intensity of the \((-3,1,\frac{1}{2})\) reflection also decreases with the field. However, it is about five times weaker the \((-4,1,\frac{1}{2})\) reflection, resulting in noisier data preventing us from obtaining its accurate field dependence.

According to Belokoneva et al. [9], the ground state AFM structure consists of FM-coupled chains in which the Cu moments are aligned predominantly along the c-axis (see Fig. 1). Table I contains the irreducible representations (irreps) which can be used to define possible magnetic structures with \( k=(0,0,\frac{1}{2}) \). Those that allow FM coupling between the chains are \( \Gamma_1, \Gamma_2 \) and \( \Gamma_3 \). Among them the irreps \( \Gamma_3 \) and \( \Gamma_5 \) lead to amplitude modulated structures and thus can be neglected. As a result, the experimentally determined magnetic structure [9] is in agreement with irrep \( \Gamma_1 \) with a dominant \( S_{\parallel c} \) spin-component. Important to note here that the moments are tilted off the c-axis by 13° making finite in-plane \( S_{\perp} \) spin-components. Because of the crystal symmetry, the in-plane spin component rotates by 120° when going from one layer to the adjacent one along in the chains while keeping the handedness of the helicity in neighboring chains opposite. The magnetic unit cell is shown in Fig. 8a on the left hand side.

As the propagation vector does not change above the transition, the same irreps can, in principle, be used to determine the high-field structure. Indeed, a change of the interchain coupling from FM to AFM is only physically possible if there is a structural change, which we do not expect to occur in green dioptase when a magnetic field is applied. However, as the field-induced structure must possess a ferromagnetic component in field direction, one has to consider a combination of the above irreps with those for \( G_k \) with \( k=(0,0,0) \). In our case the little group of the propagation vector \((0,0,\frac{1}{2})\) is the full group \( R3 \), meaning that the same Table I holds for both cases. We come back to this issue in the next section.

C. Theoretical Analyses

As only a very limited number of magnetic reflections is accessible in the current neutron scattering experiment we turn to the theoretical modelling of the magnetic order in green dioptase and its field evolution. We modelled the magnetic interactions in green dioptase using the following Hamiltonian:

\[
\hat{H} = J_s \sum_{\langle i,j \rangle} (\hat{S}_i^x \hat{S}_j^x + \hat{S}_i^y \hat{S}_j^y + \Delta \hat{S}_i^z \hat{S}_j^z) + J_{ab} \sum_{\langle i,j \rangle} \hat{S}_i \cdot \hat{S}_j - g \sum_i B_i \cdot \hat{S}_i
\]

where \( \langle \ldots \rangle \) represents intrachain nearest-neighbor bonds and \([ \ldots ]\) represents interchain bonds. The interaction be-
The sequence of magnetic moments is inverted from one chain to the adjacent one and ii) spins coupled by ferromagnetic bonds have the same expectation value.

Having clarified symmetry constraints, we quantitatively analyzed Eq. 1 by means of Chain Mean-Field Theory (ChMFT). Technical details are provided in Appendix A. The first goal was to determine the parameters $J_x$, $J_{ab}$, and $\Delta$ by a least-squares optimization of the magnetization curve for $B \parallel c$ obtained by ChMFT on a $N = 252$ one-dimensional cluster. In this case we can choose local spin reference frames such that $B_i = B\sin(13^\circ), 0, \cos(13^\circ)$ ∀i). The estimated parameters were $J_x = 6.09$ meV (70.7 K), $J_{ab} = -0.44 J_x$, $\Delta = 1.09$. This set of parameters generated an agreement within 10% with the experimental magnetization curve as visualized in Fig. 5. The obtained value for $J_x$ is close to the one reported in a theoretical analysis [16], while the value of $J_{ab}$ lies between those reported in Refs. [16, 19]. In Ref. [19] the parameters were obtained via a linear spin-wave fitting of the magnetic excitation measured by inelastic neutron scattering. Such a method is known to overestimate the $J_x$ by a factor of about $\frac{\pi}{2}$ (the latter being the quantum correction factor of the AF Heisenberg chain), which is close to the difference with our value. Also, it underestimates the anisotropy $\Delta$, which was reported to be only 1.013.

The actual microscopic spin components as a function of the magnetic field in spherical coordinates ($|\mathbf{S}|$ is the spin expectation value (the size of the magnetic moment)), $\theta$ is the inclination of the moment with respect to the $c$-axis and $\phi$ is the azimuthal angle with respect to the $a^*$-axis) are shown in
significant problem as the temperature of the magnetization measurement is only 2% of the exchange coupling $J_c$. Second, we utilized the saturation field value ($H_s$) of ~100 T [37] and related two of our parameters via the approximation $g\mu_B H_s \approx J_c (1 + \Delta)$ (note that the equality would be exact if the local easy axes were directed along the $c$-axis, so that the magnetic field contained only a longitudinal component).

Given the above optimized parameters, it is now possible to perform the ChMFT calculation for the neutron experiment, (Fig. 2), in which the magnetic field lies in the $a^*\, c$ plane and forms an angle $\omega_s = 13^\circ$ with the $c$-axis. The values of the magnetic moments $S_{\alpha}$, obtained in the reference frame defined above, are displayed in Fig. 10b. As the magnetic field is progressively increased, the higher symmetry of the Néel state is lost due to the orientation of the field and all the six nonequivalent $S_{\alpha}$ values become apparent. We may call this a “deformed Néel state”. Around $B = 12.2$ T the spin structure crosses over smoothly to a high-field “deformed spin-flop state”. Both structures are visualized in Fig. 8d-e. The magnetic moments undergo the biggest quantum depletion (reduction in the moment size $|S_{\alpha}|$ from its classical value $1/2$) in the vicinity of $B^*$, more specifically at the onset of the deformed spin-flop state (see Fig. 10, left panels, where the $\omega_s = 0^\circ$ ($B \parallel c$) and $\omega_s = 13^\circ$ settings are compared). This is due to the fact that quantum fluctuations are enhanced by the competition between the spin-anisotropy and the magnetic field, whose magnitudes are comparable in this region. Moreover, drawing from the analogy with Néel and spin-flop states, we can argue that the deformed spin-flop state has softer excitations and therefore is more subject to reduction of the moments.

Coming to the symmetry of the field-induced state for the field applied off the $c$-axis, one should follow a similar procedure as described above for the $B \parallel c$ case. However, here it will not be sufficient to combine only the $I_1$ irreps of the active propagation vectors. Indeed, as can be seen from Fig. 10b, one would require six nonequivalent sites (moment sizes) to describe the high-field structure. One should consider also other inversion-even irreps, namely $I_3$ and $I_5$, for both propagation vectors.

Even though it is possible, in principle, to use ChMFT at finite temperature, severe limitations on the accessible system size arise (they are reminiscent of those in finite-temperature exact diagonalization). At the same time, the model shown in Eq. 1 is not amenable to Quantum Monte Carlo (QMC) simulations, because the $XXZ$ anisotropy together with the transverse component of the magnetic field (unavoidable at 2/3 of the sites, at least) brings about the well-known sign problem [38, 39]. Therefore, we chose a simplified model in which all easy-axes are aligned with the $c$-axis and the magnetic field has only longitudinal component, which in practice is equivalent to setting $B_s = (0, 0, B) \forall i$ in Eq. 1. We performed QMC simulations using the DSQSS package [40] on a system of size $N = 5184$, namely $12^2$ coupled chains of length 48. In this system, the most convincing estimate of the couplings is in the case $J_c = 5.98$ meV (69.4 K), $J_{ab} = -0.4 J_c$, $\Delta = 1.13$. In Fig. 4 we report the comparison

![Image](image_url)

**Fig. 9.** a)-b) Schematic view of the magnetic field in the neutron diffraction setting (tilted by 13° from the $c$ axis in the direction of the $a^*$ axis) and the three different local easy axes (dashed lines) in the reference frame defined by $a^* \equiv x, b \equiv y, c \equiv z$ (for convenience we display also the $z$ axis of the hexagonal coordinate system). c) Arrangement of the local easy axes along two adjacent chains of opposite helicity; here the pairs (0, +)-(0, −) and (3, +)-(3, −) share a ferromagnetic bond.

Fig. 10a. In addition, Table II comprises numerical values for zero field and 21 T. In zero field, the system is in a Néel state consistent with the orientation of the easy axes. The spin components sum up to zero pairwise and the different pairs are simply related by 120° rotations around the $c$-axis. Note that the small (less than 1 %) discrepancies in spin magnitudes in Fig. 10a are merely due to the finite size (boundary effects) of the numerical calculation. With increasing the field the moments rotate from the $c$-axis towards the plane as a result of a competition between the antiferromagnetic interaction and the magnetic field. As expected from the shape of $M(B)$ there is no sharp transition but about a 5 T broad range of crossover between the low and high-field states (see Fig. 10a). As can be seen from this figure, the crossover is governed by the same $I_1$ irrep of little group $G_k$ for both the active propagation vectors, $k = (0, 0, \frac{2}{3})$ and $(0, 0, 0)$. While the $S_{\perp}$ components become dominant for the former, the latter acquires a ferromagnetic $S_{\parallel}$ component. As a result, the high-field magnetic order is a 120°-state with a finite FM-component along the $c$-axis. For each field the magnetic order can be represented as field dependent linear combination of basis vectors of $I_1$ irrep with $k = (0, 0, \frac{2}{3})$ and $(0, 0, 0)$. The entire magnetization process can be schematically written as $I_1(k_x = \frac{2}{3}) \rightarrow I_1(k_x = \frac{2}{3}) \oplus I_1(k_x = 0) \rightarrow I_1(k_x = 0)$, where the last term is a field-induced ferromagnetic order, requiring about 100 T to be reached [37]. The high-field structures are visualized in Fig. 8b-c.

Two caveats must be considered with respect to the above analysis. First, ChMFT was performed at $T = 0$. This is not a
TABLE II. Calculated spin components (in units of \( \frac{1}{2} \)) along the chain at zero field and at 21 T applied parallel to the c-axis (magnetization measurement settings) and 13° off the c-axis (neutron diffraction settings). The reference frame shown in Fig: 9 is defined as \( a' \equiv x \), \( b \equiv y \), \( c \equiv z \).

|      | \( S_x \) at \( B = 0 \) T | \( S_y \) | \( S_z \) | \( S_x \) at \( B = 21 \) T | \( S_y \) | \( S_z \) | \( S_x \) at \( B = 21 \) T | \( S_y \) | \( S_z \) |
|------|--------------------------|-------|-------|--------------------------|-------|-------|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| \( Cu_0 \) | -0.072                   | -0.013| -0.317| -0.304                   | -0.054| 0.016| 0.007                    | -0.270| -0.073|
| \( Cu_1 \) | -0.047                   | 0.056 | 0.315 | -0.189                   | 0.225 | 0.093| -0.237                   | 0.124 | 0.123|
| \( Cu_2 \) | 0.025                    | 0.068 | -0.316| 0.105                    | 0.289 | 0.015| 0.259                    | 0.185 | -0.020|
| \( Cu_3 \) | 0.072                    | 0.013 | 0.316 | 0.290                    | 0.051 | 0.094| 0.015                    | 0.283 | 0.171|
| \( Cu_4 \) | 0.047                    | -0.056| -0.315| 0.197                    | -0.235| 0.014| 0.291                    | -0.137| -0.016|
| \( Cu_5 \) | -0.025                   | -0.069| 0.317 | -0.101                   | -0.278| 0.095| -0.211                   | -0.169| 0.132|

FIG. 10. Spin expectation values \( S_x \) in spherical coordinates as a function of the magnetic field applied a) parallel to the c-axis (magnetization measurement settings) and b) 13° off the c-axis (neutron diffraction settings) (\( \varphi_0 = 10° \) is chosen). The spherical coordinate system is defined as follows: \( |S| \) is a spin expectation value (size of the magnetic moment), \( \theta \) is an inclination of the moment with respect to the c-axis and \( \phi \) is the azimuthal angle with respect to the \( a' \)-axis.

of this model with experimental measurement of the curve \( M(T)/B \) at \( B = 7 \) T, \( B \parallel c \). The agreement within 4% is quite reasonable, given the oversimplification of the model, although a better agreement can be obtained by choosing the spin-isotropic model (\( \Delta = 1 \)) with \( J_{ab} = -0.5J_c \) [16]. However, the latter model cannot be justified since it does not present any transition or visible crossover before saturation in the magnetization curve \( M(B) \). Moreover, it does not account for the experimentally observed gap in the excitation spectrum [19].

IV. DISCUSSION

For the zero-field state, our theoretical model (Eq. 1), consisting of AFM spin chains with relatively small interchain FM coupling, clearly reproduces the experimental results of Belokoneva et al. [9]. The Cu\(^{2+} \) spins in the chains, which are reduced by quantum fluctuations by about one third, are Néel-ordered (Fig. 8a). However, while their projection along the c-axis is predominant, the chains do have in-plane components due to the tilting of the magnetic easy axes.

Application of an external magnetic field produces a smooth deformation of the spin structure, in which the six sublattice magnetizations gradually rotate into a deformed Néel state and subsequently, through a smeared spin-flop transition, into a deformed spin-flop state at higher fields (Fig. 8b-c). While this might be somewhat counterintuitive for a system of non-frustrated coupled AFM chains with easy-axis spin anisotropy, in which a sharp spin-flop transition might be envisioned, it is confirmed by all the experimental observations, in particular by the magnetization curve for \( B \parallel c \) (Fig. 5) and the intensity of the (-4,1,1) magnetic reflection as a function of the magnetic field (Fig. 7) where \( B \) is tilted off the c-axis by \( \omega_0 = 13° \). In the latter case, using the theoretically derived spin configurations, described in
the previous section, the magnetic structure factors for the covered magnetic field range (0 - 21 T) have been simulated using FullProf [35]. The calculated magnetic intensities are plotted in Fig. 7a in comparison with the measured ones. The only refined parameter in the calculated curve is a scaling factor while the intensities have been obtained from the spin configurations (Fig. 10). For the intensity calculations we assume that the magnetic structures over the entire field range are represented by three equally populated orientation domains. Their magnetic moments have equivalent directions with respect to $k_M$ and according to the hexagonal symmetry. These oriented domains contribute to the same magnetic reflections. The agreement between the experiment and the calculations is better than 10 %, providing a microscopic basis of the scenario described.

The main question arising at this point is whether our intentional field offset with respect to the c-axis is responsible for the observed crossover. In other words, whether a "classical" spin-flop transition can be realized in green diopside at any orientation of the magnetic field. To understand this in a simpler and physically transparent way, we evaluated the effect of a transverse component of the magnetic field in a standard $XXZ$ model (the easy axes at all sites are all aligned). The Hamiltonian we considered is

$$
\hat{H}_{XXZ} = J_c \sum_{(i,j)} (\hat{S}_i^x \hat{S}_j^x + \hat{S}_i^y \hat{S}_j^y) + J_{ab} \sum_{[i,j]} \hat{S}_i^z \hat{S}_j^z - B \cos(\theta) \sum_i \hat{S}_i^z - B \sin(\theta) \sum_i \hat{S}_i^x,
$$

where $B$ is the magnetic field amplitude and $\theta$ is the angle between the easy-axis and the magnetic field direction. We fixed $\Delta = 1.09$, $J_{ab} = -0.44 J_c$ as in green diopside and calculated the magnetization curve $M(B)$ as a function of $\theta$. The results of these calculations are summarized in Fig. 11. As can be seen, the first-order spin-flop transition exists only for $0 < \theta < \theta_c$, with $\theta_c \approx 0.44^\circ$, whereas for $\theta > \theta_c$ there is only a crossover between the low-field and the high-field states. In other words, the $B-\theta$ phase diagram contains a first-order line ending at a critical point, similar to a liquid-gas transition.

In green diopside, as better described by Eq. 1, the intrinsic misalignment of the local easy axes, which have three nonequivalent directions depending on the site, is such that the transverse component of the magnetic field is always too large, at least at 2/3 of the sites, for a sharp first-order transition to take place. Thus, we suggest that a crossover between low- and high-field states must occur for any orientation of the external magnetic field. Indeed, in Fig. 7a we plot the calculated intensity of the $(-4,1,1)$ reflection for the high symmetry direction $B \parallel c$. As expected, even in this case it shows a smooth variation of magnetic intensity as function of field contrary to a classical first-order spin flop transition.

In order to determine dependence of $\theta_c$ on the spin anisotropy $\Delta$ and interchain coupling $J_{ab}$ we again employed the simple model given in Eq. 2. We use it within the domain of validity of ChMFT, namely $J_{ab}$ is of order $-0.1 J_c$. Note that when $J_{ab}$ is much smaller than that, strong quantum fluctuations may stabilize incommensurate orders [41]. The results of the calculation are summarized in Fig. 12. Two salient features are apparent. Firstly, $\theta_c$ has a maximum at intermediate $\Delta$. This is expected, because no sharp spin-flop transition exists in the isotropic case ($\Delta = 1$) and in the Ising limit ($\Delta \to \infty$). Secondly, a smaller interchain coupling appears to make the sharp spin-flop transition slightly more stable against a transverse component of the magnetic field. The latter aspect can be understood if one considers that a non-vanishing $\theta_c$ is a purely quantum effect (classically $\theta_c = 0$ in the whole parameter space [42]). When $J_{ab}$ weakens (the dimensionality of the system is effectively reduced) quantum fluctuations become more important and the value of $\theta_c$ increases.

![FIG. 11. Magnetization curve $M(B)$ of the model in Eq. 2 for $J_{ab} = -0.44 J_c$, $\Delta = 1.09$ and various values of $\theta$. The maximum angle for which a first-order transition takes place is $\theta_c = 0.44^\circ$.](image)

![FIG. 12. Dependence of the critical angle $\theta_c$ on the spin anisotropy $\Delta$ at various values of the interchain coupling $J_{ab}$ for the model Eq. 2. The lines are just guides for the eye.](image)
V. CONCLUSIONS

Magnetic order and magnetic properties of green diopside in high magnetic field have been studied by means of neutron diffraction and magnetization measurements in magnetic fields up to 30 T applied close to or along the c-axis. Both experimental techniques show a smooth crossover around $B^* = 12.2$ T at 1.5 K. The results can be explained in terms of a modified model of quantum XXZ spin chains coupled by ferromagnetic bonds in the transverse plane. The crucial components of this model are the different orientations of the local easy axes (the same orientation repeating every three sites along the chain) and the opposite helicities of adjacent chains. As a consequence of this, the spins (or the majority thereof) always feel a sizeable component of the magnetic field transverse to their easy axis. Thus, even when the applied magnetic field is (nearly) parallel to the c-axis, no sharp transition takes place in going from the low-field (deformed Néel) to the high-field (deformed spin-flop) state, but a strong crossover appears around $B^* = 12.2$ T. In order to understand this phenomena more generally, we developed a more traditional model of coupled XXZ easy-axis quantum spin chains with aligned easy axes and looked for the maximum angle $\theta_*$ at which the magnetic field can be tilted to observe a first-order spin-flop transition. This critical angle, which vanishes at the classical level in our model, is greatest at intermediate spin anisotropies (between the isotropic and the Ising limits) and is enhanced by quantum fluctuations when the interchain coupling becomes smaller. These considerations provide useful directions for future experiments with analogous spin-anisotropic materials.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We greatly acknowledge R. Wahle, S. Gerischer, S. Kempfer, P. Heller and P. Smeibidl for their support at the HFM/EXED facility at the Helmholtz-Zentrum Berlin. O.P. acknowledges support by ICC-IMR, Tohoku University. S.E.N. acknowledges support from the International Max Planck Research School for Chemistry and Physics of Quantum Materials (IMPRS-CPQM). D.Y. was supported by KAKENHI from Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Grant Number 18K03525 (D.Y.), and “Early Eagle” grant program from Aoyama Gakuin University Research Institute. G.M. thanks Y. Motoyama for useful correspondence. This research used resources at the Spallation Neutron Source, a DOE Office of Energy Sciences, Chemical Sciences, Geosciences, and Biosciences Division. Powder x-ray diffraction measurements were conducted at the Center for Nanophase Materials Sciences (CNMS) (CNMS2019-R18) at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), which is a DOE Office of Science User Facility. This work was partly supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, through ZV 6/2-2, as well as by the HLD at HZDR, member of the European Magnetic Field Laboratory (EMFL).

Appendix A: Details of Chain Mean-Field Theory (ChMFT)

The idea of ChMFT, and cluster mean-field theories in general, is to reduce a many-body problem, such as Eq. 1, to a problem on a finite-size cluster supplemented by mean-field boundary conditions. Those mean fields appear in the form of effective magnetic fields to which the spins on the edge of the cluster are subject, and have the purpose of including the effects of correlation with spins outside the cluster. The solution is then obtained by an iterative procedure in which the cluster is treated in full quantum-mechanical fashion [by exact diagonalization or density matrix renormalization group (DMRG)] and the mean fields are made to satisfy self-consistency equations [43]. This method has proven quite successful, in particular in the treatment of frustrated antiferromagnets, for which the QMC method is not applicable due to sign problem [44–48].

After the symmetry considerations in Sec. III C, in the case of Eq. 1 we can choose the finite cluster as a one-dimensional segment of length $N$, which must be a multiple of 6. The ChMFT Hamiltonian reads

$$\hat{H}_C = J \sum_{i=0}^{N-2} (\hat{S}_i^x \hat{S}_{i+1}^x + \hat{S}_i^y \hat{S}_{i+1}^y + \Delta \hat{S}_i^z \hat{S}_{i+1}^z) - g \sum_{i=0}^{N-2} \mathbf{B}_i \cdot \mathbf{\hat{S}}_i - \sum_{i=0}^{N-2} \mathbf{b}_i^{MF} \cdot \mathbf{\hat{S}}_i,$$

(A1)

where $\mathbf{b}_i^{MF}$ are the mean-fields, coming from the mean-field decoupling $\hat{S}_i^A \hat{S}_i^B = \langle \hat{S}_i^A \rangle \langle \hat{S}_i^B \rangle - \langle \hat{S}_i^A \rangle \langle \hat{S}_i^B \rangle$, $A = x, y, z$. Specifically, they will be given by

$$\mathbf{b}_i^{MF} = J_{ab} \mathbf{S}(i \mod 6) \quad (A2)$$

$$\mathbf{b}_0^{MF} = J_{ab} \mathbf{S}_0 + J_C (\mathbf{S}_0^{\perp}, \mathbf{S}_0^{\parallel}, \mathbf{\Delta \mathbf{S}}_0^{\perp}) \quad (A3)$$

$$\mathbf{b}_N^{MF} = J_{ab} \mathbf{S}_N + J_C (\mathbf{S}_N^{\perp}, \mathbf{S}_N^{\parallel}, \mathbf{\Delta \mathbf{S}}_N^{\perp}) \quad (A4)$$

with the expectation values $S_\alpha$, $\alpha = 0, \ldots, 5$, defined as in Sec. III C. Although a relative variation of approximately 5 $%$ between the $g_{\perp}$ and $g_{\parallel}$-factors has been reported in the literature [44], the tilting of the magnetic field in our experiments does not exceed 13°. Therefore we neglect possible variations of $g$ and fix it to 2.2 throughout all the calculations. In the specific setting used in this paper, we set $N = 252$ and solve the cluster problem via DMRG calculation performed with the $\mathcal{T}$ensor package [49]. The magnetic moments are then recalculated as

$$S_\alpha = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=0}^{(N/b)-1} \frac{\text{Tr}(\mathbf{S}_{\alpha+6l} e^{\beta \hat{H}_C})}{\text{Tr}(e^{\beta \hat{H}_C})}, \quad \alpha = 0, \ldots, 5,$$

(A5)

and substituted back into $\mathbf{b}_i^{MF}$. For us, it sufficed to take the zero temperature ($\beta = \infty$) limit, as argued in Sec. III C. In this case, only the ground state contributes to the trace in A5. The procedure is repeated until convergence.
Below we describe how to calculate the magnetic field $\mathbf{B}$ in the local reference frame. Our choice of the “laboratory frame” is $a^* \equiv x$, $b \equiv y$, $c \equiv z$. In this frame the external magnetic field in the setup of Fig. 2 is $\mathbf{B} = (\sin(13^\circ), 0, \cos(13^\circ))$. The local spin reference frame is defined as follows. The local $z$ direction coincides with the local easy axis. Referring to Fig. 9 we have

$$
\hat{z}_{i,\pm} = \left( \frac{\sin(13^\circ)}{\sin(13^\circ) \sin \phi_{i,\pm}}, \frac{\sin(13^\circ) \sin \phi_{i,\pm}}{\cos(13^\circ)} \right) \quad i = 0, \ldots, 5 \quad (A6)
$$

and $\phi_{i,\pm} = \varphi_0 \pm 120^\circ \times i$. As mentioned in Sec. 1, $\varphi_0$ cannot be uniquely determined by any available experimental data, so our strategy was to perform the calculations for several values between $0^\circ$ and $60^\circ$ (symmetry arguments account for values outside this range). None of the calculated observables, most importantly the intensity of the magnetic reflections averaged over three orientation domains, showed any important difference as $\varphi_0$ was changed. The angle between the magnetic field and the local easy axis is determined by

$$
\cos \alpha_{i,\pm} = \hat{z}_{i,\pm} \cdot \mathbf{B} = (\cos(13^\circ))^2 + (\sin(13^\circ))^2 \cos(\phi_{i,\pm}) \quad (A7)
$$

We then choose the local $\hat{x}_{i,\pm}$ and $\hat{y}_{i,\pm}$ direction in such a way that in the local frame

$$
\mathbf{B}_{i,\pm} = B \begin{pmatrix} \sin \alpha_{i,\pm} \\ 0 \\ \cos \alpha_{i,\pm} \end{pmatrix} \quad (A8)
$$

In practice there are three different local magnetic field vectors (dictated by the three directions of the easy axes), whose sequencing along the chain can be read off Fig. 9.

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