Unusual Kondo-hole effect and crystal-field frustration in Nd-doped CeRhIn₅

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We investigate single crystalline samples of Ce₁₋ₓNdₓRhIn₅ by means of X-ray diffraction, microprobe, magnetic susceptibility, heat capacity, and electrical resistivity measurements. Our data reveal that the antiferromagnetic transition temperature of CeRhIn₅, $T_N^\text{Ce}$ = 3.8 K, is linearly suppressed with $x_{\text{Nd}}$, by virtue of the “Kondo hole” created by Nd substitution. The extrapolation of $T_N^\text{Ce}$ to zero temperature, however, occurs at $x_c \sim 0.3$, which is below the 2D percolation limit found in Ce₁₋ₓLaₓRhIn₅. This result strongly suggests the presence of crystal-field frustration effects. Near $x_{\text{Nd}} \sim 0.2$, the Ising AFM order from Nd ions is stabilized and $T_N^{\text{Nd}}$ increases up to 11 K in pure NdRhIn₅. Our results shed light on the effects of magnetic doping in heavy-fermion antiferromagnets and stimulate the study of such systems under applied pressure.

I. INTRODUCTION

A remarkable variety of unexpected phenomena arises when magnetic impurities are introduced in a metal. One of the most striking examples is that of Gold (Au) metal, which, in its pure form, is a good conductor displaying a temperature as function of $T$.

In the series Ce₁₋ₓLaₓCoIn₅, the system evolves at low temperatures as a function of $x$ from a coherent Kondo lattice ($x = 0$) to a collection of incoherently scattering Kondo impurities at $x \sim 0.4$. Interestingly, this cross-over coincides with the percolation limit of a 2D square lattice on which the La/Ce ions sit.

Magnetic doping has not been extensively studied in CeCoIn₅ or other members within the CeₙMₘInₙ₊₂m (M = transition metals Co, Rh, Ir, Pd, Pt; $n = 0, 1, 2$; $m = 1, 2, 3$) family of which it is a part. Recently, however, Nd-doping in CeCoIn₅ at concentrations 5 – 10% has been shown to induce an unexpected magnetic state inside the zero-field superconducting (SC) phase [7]. Remarkably, the propagation vector and moment size of the incommensurate magnetic order in Ce₀.₉₅Nd₀.₀₅CoIn₅ are identical to those observed in the field-induced magnetically ordered phase in pure CeCoIn₅ (Q-phase) [8, 9]. These results indicate that the Nd ions are fundamentally changing the electronic system and not acting simply as a Kondo hole. To our knowledge, there is no report on the effects of magnetic doping in the antiferromagnetic (AFM) member CeRhIn₅ up to date. In the following we address the open questions: (i) how will Nd interact with the AFM order of CeRhIn₅? (ii) will there be a “Kondo-hole” effect? We note that “Kondo-hole” behavior has been observed in Ce₁₋ₓLaₓRhIn₅ where AFM order decreases linearly with La. In the limit $T_N \rightarrow 0$, the critical La concentration, $x_c \sim 40\%$, also reflects the percolation limit of the 2D square lattice [10].

In this work, we report the first study of magnetic doping in CeRhIn₅ by means of X-ray diffraction, microprobe, magnetization, heat capacity, and electrical resistivity measurements. Our data show that the AFM ordering temperature of CeRhIn₅ ($T_N^\text{Ce}$ = 3.8 K) decreases linearly with Nd concentration, $x_{\text{Nd}}$, and extrapolates to zero at a critical Nd concentration of $x_c \sim 30\%$. Hence, in the dilute regime, Nd ions behave as a free paramagnetic impurity, i.e. a moment-bearing “Kondo-hole” in the Ce system. The fact that $x_c$ is below the percolation limit indicates that there is another mechanism frustrating the magnetic order of the Ce sublattice. We argue that this mechanism is the crystal-field frustration due to the different spin configurations of CeRhIn₅ (easy c-axis magnetization but with ordered moments in-plane) and NdRhIn₅ (Ising spins along c-axis). In fact, around $x_{\text{Nd}} \sim 0.2$, the Ising AFM order of the Nd sublattice is stabilized and $T_N^{\text{Nd}}$ increases up to 11 K in pure NdRhIn₅.

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II. EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

Single crystalline samples of Ce$_{1-x}$Nd$_x$RhIn$_5$ ($x = 0, 0.05, 0.1, 0.15, 0.2, 0.3, 0.5, 0.7, 0.9, 1$) were grown by the In-flux technique. The crystallographic structure was verified by X-ray powder diffraction at room temperature. In addition, several samples were characterized by elemental analysis using a commercial Energy Dispersive Spectroscopy (EDS) microprobe.

Magnetization measurements were performed using a commercial superconducting quantum interference device (SQUID). The specific heat was measured using a commercial small mass calorimeter that employs a quasi-adiabatic thermal relaxation technique. The in-plane electrical resistivity was obtained using a low-frequency ac resistance bridge and a four-contact configuration.

III. RESULTS

Figure 1a shows the actual Nd concentration obtained by EDS ($x_{\text{EDS}}$) as a function of the nominal Nd concentration $x_{\text{nominal}}$. The smooth and monotonic relationship between the $x_{\text{EDS}}$ and $x_{\text{nominal}}$ indicates that Nd is being incorporated in the lattice. Further, the small error bars, $\Delta x$, point to a rather homogeneous distribution of Nd. In the extremes of the series, $x_{\text{EDS}}$ has an error bar of $\Delta x \sim 0.02$. For Nd concentrations around 50%, a larger variation of $\Delta x = 0.05$ is observed, which is expected for concentrations in the middle of the series. We note, however, that $\Delta x$ is the standard deviation accounting for different samples from the same batch and not for a single sample. On average, the variation within a single crystal ($\sim 0.01$) is smaller than the standard deviation. These results indicate that Nd substitutes Ce homogeneously instead of producing an intergrown of NdRhIn$_5$. Herein, we will refer to the actual EDS concentration.

Figure 1b shows the lattice parameters obtained by powder X-ray diffraction as a function of Nd concentration. The X-ray powder patterns show that all members of the series crystallize in the tetragonal HoCoGa$_5$ structure and no additional peaks are observed. A smooth decrease is found in both lattice parameters $a$ and $c$, in agreement with Vegard’s law. This result implies that the volume of the unit cell is decreasing with Nd concentration, suggesting that Nd doping produces positive chemical pressure. Using the bulk modulus of CeRhIn$_5$, we estimate that a rigid shift of the lattice parameters from CeRhIn$_5$ to Ce$_{0.95}$Nd$_{0.05}$RhIn$_5$ corresponds to $\Delta P = 0.25$ GPa of applied pressure. From the phase diagram of CeRhIn$_5$ under pressure [11], this $\Delta P$ would correspond to an increase of $T_N$ by 0.1 K. We will see below that the AFM order actually is suppressed in Ce$_{0.95}$Nd$_{0.05}$RhIn$_5$, indicating that chemical pressure is not the main tuning parameter determining $T_N$.

Figures 2a and b show the T-dependence of the magnetic susceptibility, $\chi(T)$, for a field of 1 kOe applied along the $c$-axis and $ab$-plane, respectively. For low Nd concentrations ($x_{\text{Nd}} = 0.05, 0.14$), there is no evidence of $T_N$ in the $\chi_c(T)$ data, i.e., when $H|\vec{c}$-axis. This result is somewhat unexpected because AFM order is observed by a clear peak in heat capacity measurements of both CeRhIn$_5$ and Ce$_{1-x}$Nd$_x$RhIn$_5$. Instead of an expected peak in $\chi(T)$, we observe a low-$T$ Curie-tail, suggesting that the Nd ions are free paramagnetic impurities embedded in the Kondo lattice. When $H|ab$-plane, however, $\chi_{ab}(T)$ displays a very similar behavior when compared to pure CeRhIn$_5$: there is a maximum in $\chi(T)$ followed by a kink at $T_N^{\text{Ce}}$. We attribute this difference to the fact that the spins in NdRhIn$_5$ point along the $c$-axis and the magnetic susceptibility along this direction is much larger than the in-plane susceptibility. Thus, $\chi_{ab}(T)$ data reveals a linear decrease of $T_N^{\text{Ce}} = 3.8$ K with $x_{\text{Nd}}$ up to $x_{\text{Nd}} = 0.14$. Between $x_{\text{Nd}} = 0.14$ and $x_{\text{Nd}} = 0.23$, the transition temperature starts to increase again, suggesting that the AFM order due to Nd ions starts to develop at $T_N^{\text{Nd}}$. Though not obvious in these data, $\chi_{ab}(T)$ reaches a maximum at $T_N^{\chi_{ab}} > T_N^{\text{Ce}}$ in CeRhIn$_5$ and lightly Nd-doped samples. The temperature $T_N^{\chi_{ab}}$ also decreases with $x_{\text{Nd}}$, from $\sim 7.5$ K in pure CeRhIn$_5$ to $\sim 3.2$ K at $x_{\text{Nd}} = 0.23$. Evidence for $T_N^{\chi_{ab}}$, however, is lost for $x_{\text{Nd}} > 0.23$ due to the dominant contribution from the Nd AFM order. We will return to this analysis when discussing the phase diagram of Fig. 5. Finally, for higher Nd concentrations, both $\chi_c(T)$ and $\chi_{ab}(T)$ show AFM behavior of a typical local moment system.

From fits of the polycrystalline average of the data (inset of Fig. 2b) to a Curie-Weiss law, we obtain effective magnetic moments of 2.5(1) $\mu_B$, 2.7(1) $\mu_B$, 3.2(1) $\mu_B$, and 3.7(1) $\mu_B$ for $x_{\text{Nd}} = 0.05, 0.14, 0.47, 0.9$, respectively. These calculated values are in good agreement with the theoretical values of 2.59 $\mu_B$, 2.69 $\mu_B$, 3.05 $\mu_B$, and 3.52 $\mu_B$, respectively. We also obtain the paramagnetic Curie-Weiss temperature, $\theta_{\text{poly}}$, which averages out crystal electrical field (CEF) effects. The inset of Fig. 2b...
shows $\theta_{\text{poly}}$ as well as $\theta_c$ and $\theta_{ab}$. In a molecular field approximation, $\theta_{\text{poly}}$ is proportional to the effective exchange interaction, $J$, between rare-earth ions. The fact that $\theta_{\text{poly}}$ is negative is in agreement with the AFM correlations found in the series. A reduction of $\theta_{\text{poly}}$ is observed going from CeRhIn$_5$ ($\theta_{\text{poly}} = -31$ K) to NdRhIn$_5$ ($\theta_{\text{poly}} = -17$ K), which suggests within a molecular field model that $J$ also decreases along the series. As a consequence, this reduction in $J$ would be expected to decrease the AFM ordering temperature. The experimental data, however, shows the opposite behavior: $T_N$ in NdRhIn$_5$ ($T_{N}^{\text{Nd}} = 11$ K) is almost three times larger than in CeRhIn$_5$ ($T_{N}^{\text{Ce}} = 3.8$ K). Moreover, in a Kondo lattice like CeRhIn$_5$, $\theta_{\text{poly}}$ also includes the AFM Kondo exchange that tends to reduce $T_N$ relative to that expected solely from the indirect Ruderman-Kittel-Kasuya-Yosida (RKKY) interaction [12]. Because there is no Kondo effect in NdRhIn$_5$, the variation in $\theta_{\text{poly}}$ with $x_{\text{Nd}}$ implies a suppression of the Kondo contribution and increased dominance of the RKKY interaction. This is reflected in the ratio $T_N/\theta_{\text{poly}}$, which is 0.12 in CeRhIn$_5$ and 0.65 in NdRhIn$_5$. As illustrated in the inset of Fig. 2, $\theta_{\text{poly}}$ reaches a plateau between $x_{\text{Nd}} = 0.23$ and 0.47, suggesting that Kondo interactions are essentially quenched before $x_{\text{Nd}} = 0.47$. Consequently, one might expect $T_N$ to increase initially as Nd replaces Ce and then to remain approximately constant for $x_{\text{Nd}} > 0.47$. As we will come to, this is not the case and $T_N$ is a non-monotonic function of Nd content. The above discussion indicates that there is another relevant mechanism determining the magnetic ordering in the series Ce$_{1-x}$Nd$_x$RhIn$_5$. From the nearly constant values of $\theta_c$ and pronounced change of $\theta_{ab}$, which anisotropy is a consequence of CEF effects, it is reasonable to expect that CEF effects play an important role. In fact, from the high-temperature expansion of $\chi(T)$ we can readily observe that the main tetragonal CEF parameter, $B_2^0 \propto (\theta_{ab} - \theta_c)$, systematically decreases with Nd concentration.

FIG. 2. a) Temperature dependence of the magnetic susceptibility, $\chi_c(T)$, of representative samples in the Ce$_{1-x}$Nd$_x$RhIn$_5$ series in a field of 1 kOe applied along the c-axis. Inset shows the inverse susceptibility of the polycrystalline average vs temperature. Solid lines are linear fits to the data. b) Temperature dependence of the magnetic susceptibility, $\chi_{ab}(T)$, for the same samples in a field of 1 kOe applied along the ab-plane. Inset shows the Curie-Weiss temperature, $\theta$, for all compositions of Ce$_{1-x}$Nd$_x$RhIn$_5$.

FIG. 3. a) Field dependence of the magnetization at 1.8 K for fields along the c-axis. Data for $x_{\text{Nd}} = 0$ coincide with that for $x_{\text{Nd}} = 0.9$ for $H \leq 50$ kOe. b) Field dependence of the magnetization at 1.8 K for fields along the ab-plane.

Figures 3a and b show the $H$-dependence of the magnetization, $M(H)$, at 1.8 K for fields applied along the c-axis and ab-plane, respectively. Although $M_c(H)$ for CeRhIn$_5$ displays a linear response with field, at low Nd concentrations ($x_{\text{Nd}} = 0.05, 0.14$) there is a non-linear behavior that resembles a Brillouin function. This supports our interpretation of the origin of the low-$T$ Curie
tail in $\chi_c$ for low Nd content, namely that Nd ions at low concentrations act as free paramagnetic entities. Because the Brillouin-like contribution to $M_c(H)$ is substantially larger than expected from just a simple free Nd moment, this behavior implies that Nd moments also are locally inducing free-moment like character on neighboring Ce atoms. This is most pronounced for $H||c$ due to the much higher susceptibility of Nd moments along this direction. At light Nd doping, then, Nd acts as a rather different type of “Kondo hole” compared to that induced by non-magnetic La substitution for Ce. The Nd ions carry a net magnetic moment that is not quenched by the Kondo-impurity effect. At high $x_{Nd}$, $M_c(H)$ displays a field-induced transition to a spin-polarized state, as observed in NdRhIn$_5$. When the field is along the ab-plane, pure CeRhIn$_5$ also displays a weak field-induced anomaly in $M_{ab}(H)$ ($H_c \sim 22$ kOe), which signals a change in ordering wavevector [13] and is suppressed with $x_{Nd}$.

Figure 4a shows the temperature dependence of the specific heat, $C/T$, of LaRhIn$_5$, CeRhIn$_5$ and representative samples of the series Ce$_{1-x}$Nd$_x$RhIn$_5$. b) Magnetic contribution to the specific heat, $C_{mag}/T$, as a function of temperature. Inset shows the entropy per Ce normalized by $R ln 2$.

The magnetic entropy as a function of temperature is obtained by integrating $C_{mag}/T$ over $T$. The inset of Figure 5b shows the $T$-dependence of the magnetic entropy recovered per Ce ion. The entropy is normalized by $R ln 2$, which is the entropy of the ground state doublet. In pure CeRhIn$_5$ (black bottom curve), the magnetic entropy increases with $T$ followed by a kink at $T_N$. We observe an increase in the recovered entropy below $T_N$ even when a very small amount of Nd is introduced (e.g., $x_{Nd} = 0.05$). Increasing the concentration to $x_{Nd} = 0.14$ yields a further entropy increase. This result indicates that the magnetic entropy does not scale with the Ce concentration, in turn suggesting that the extra magnetic entropy comes from the free paramagnetic Nd ions.

Finally, we discuss the temperature dependence of the in-plane electrical resistivity, $\rho_{ab}(T)$, of Ce$_{1-x}$Nd$_x$RhIn$_5$. Figure 5a shows $\rho_{ab}(T)$ for samples with $x_{Nd} < 0.5$. At $x_{Nd} = 0.05$, $\rho_{ab}(T)$ is very similar in magnitude and $T$-dependence to that of pure CeRhIn$_5$. In particular, the broad peak at $\sim 40$ K indicates the crossover from incoherent Kondo scattering at high temperatures to the heavy-electron state at low temperatures. As $x_{Nd}$ is inc-
increased, \( \rho_{ab}(T) \) decreases monotonically with temperature and the initial peak turns into a broad feature around 70 K when \( x_{\text{Nd}} = 0.47 \). We note that the second CEF excited state of NdRhIn5 is near 68 K, suggesting that the broad feature in \( \rho_{ab}(T) \) is likely associated with CEF depopulation \( ^{15} \). This evolution is consistent with an increase in the local character of the 4f system. Further, the low-temperature data shown in Fig. 5b display an increase in \( \rho_0 \). Typically disorder scattering would be expected to be a maximum near \( x = 0.5 \), but this is not the case. As shown in Ref. \( ^{15} \), the residual resistivity of pure NdRhIn5 is much lower than that of our Ce\(_{0.1}\)Nd\(_{0.9}\)RhIn\(_5\) crystal. This difference implies that spin-disorder scattering plays a significant role in determining \( \rho_0 \) in this series.

IV. DISCUSSION

In Figure 6 we summarize our results in a \( T - x \) phase diagram, in which two distinct regimes become clear. The first one, at low Nd concentrations, presents a linear decrease of \( T_N \) with \( x_{\text{Nd}} \). Interestingly, a linear dependence of \( T_N \) also has been observed in Ce\(_{1-x}\)La\(_x\)RhIn\(_5\), where La creates a “Kondo hole” in the system via dilution. In the La-doping case, however, \( T_N \) extrapolates to \( T = 0 \) at a critical concentration of \( x_c \sim 40\% \), which is the percolation limit of the 2D lattice. Here, Nd-doped CeRhIn5 displays a smaller \( x_c \) of \( \sim 30\% \), indicating that there is an additional mechanism that frustrates Néel order in the Ce sublattice \( ^{16} \).

It has been shown — both theoretically and experimentally — that \( T_N \) in tetragonal structures is enhanced with respect to their cubic Rh\(_3\) \( (R = \text{rare-earth ions}) \) counterparts whenever \( R \) has an Ising magnetic structure, i.e., spins polarized along the c-axis \( ^{16, 17} \). This is due to the fact that the tetragonal CEF parameters in these structures favor a groundstate with Ising symmetry, as supported by the fact that the c-axis susceptibility is larger than the ab-plane susceptibility in members whose R element has finite orbital momentum. Because NdRhIn5 displays commensurate Ising-like order below \( T_N = 11 \) K, it is reasonable to assume that Nd\(^{3+}\) ions will retain their Ising-like character when doped into the Ce sites \( ^{18} \). CeRhIn5, however, has an incommensurate magnetic structure with spins perpendicular to the c-axis \( ^{19} \). Hence, a crystal-field frustration of the in-plane order in CeRhIn5 is induced by Nd\(^{3+}\) Ising spins. As a consequence, \( T_N^C \) of the Ce sublattice extrapolates to zero before the percolation limit and \( T_N^N \) of the Nd sublattice is stabilized.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, we synthesize single crystals of Ce\(_{1-x}\)Nd\(_x\)RhIn5 using the In-flux technique. X-ray diffraction and microprobe measurements show a smooth evolution of lattice parameters and Nd concentration, respectively. Across the doping series, there is a complex interplay among Kondo-like impurity physics, magnetic exchange and crystal-field effects as the Nd content changes. At low \( x_{\text{Nd}} \), there is an unusual type of magnetic “Kondo hole” and \( T_N^C \) decreases linearly with \( x_{\text{Nd}} \). The extrapolation of \( T_N^C \) to zero temperature occurs below the 2D percolation limit due to crystal-field frustration effects. Around \( x_{\text{Nd}} \sim 0.2 \), the Ising AFM order from Nd ions is stabilized and \( T_N^N \) increases up to 11 K in pure NdRhIn5. Further investigation of the Ce\(_{1-x}\)Nd\(_x\)RhIn5 series under pressure will be valuable to understand this interplay in the superconducting state.

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