Phonon and crystal field excitations in geometrically frustrated rare earth titanates
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I. INTRODUCTION

The term "geometrical frustration"\(^1\)–\(^3\) applies to a system when it is unable to simultaneously minimize all of its magnetic exchange interactions solely due to its geometry. Magnetically interacting spins residing on such lattices are unable to order into a unique magnetic ground state due to the competing magnetic interactions between different lattice sites. Instead of selecting a single, unique magnetic ground state at low temperatures, a pure magnetically frustrated system has a macroscopically degenerate ground state. In real systems, however, any secondary, smaller term (arising from single-ion or exchange anisotropy, further neighbor interactions, dipolar interactions, small lattice distortions, or a magnetic field, for example) in the system's Hamiltonian can favor certain magnetic ground states at very low temperatures, thereby (partially) lifting this peculiar degeneracy. In this fact lies the origin of the vast richness and diversity of the low-temperature magnetic behavior of different frustrated systems in nature.\(^1\)\(^,\)\(^4\)–\(^7\)

Geometries suitable for exhibiting frustration typically consist of infinite networks of triangles or tetrahedra, which share one or more lattice sites. One of the most common structures known that is able to induce magnetic frustration is that of the pyrochlores, \(A_2B_2O_7\), where both the \(A^{3+}\) ions (rare earth element, coordinated to eight O atoms) and the \(B^{4+}\) ions (transition-metal element, coordinated to six O atoms) reside on a lattice of corner-sharing tetrahedra, known as the pyrochlore lattice. Thus, if either \(A^{3+}\) or \(B^{4+}\) is a magnetic species, frustration may occur due to competing interactions. A subclass of the pyrochlores is formed by the rare earth titanate family, \(R_2Ti_2O_7\), where the \(R^{3+}\) ion is the only (para-)magnetic species, since \(Ti^{4+}\) is diamagnetic (3\(d^0\)). For the pyrochlore lattice, both theory\(^8\)–\(^10\) and Monte Carlo simulations\(^10\)\(^,\)\(^11\) predict a "collective paramagnetic" ground state, or the lack of long-range magnetic ordering, for classical Heisenberg spins at finite temperature. The quantum Heisenberg spin (\(S=1/2\)) model for the pyrochlore lattice also predicts a quantum disordered system at finite temperatures, a state often referred to as a "spin liquid."\(^12\) However, in reality the different perturbative terms in the corresponding Hamiltonian result in quite diverse low-temperature magnetic behaviors among the different rare earth titanates,\(^4\) of which the Gd, Tb, Ho, and Dy variants are studied here.

The supposedly least complex case is that of gadolinium titanate, \(Gd_2Ti_2O_7\). The \(Gd^{3+}\) ion has, in contrast to the \(Tb^{3+}\), \(Ho^{3+}\), and \(Dy^{3+}\) ions, a spin-only \(^8S_7/2\) (\(L=0\)) ground state, rendering the influence of crystal field levels and possible induced Ising-type anisotropy insignificant in \(Gd_2Ti_2O_7\). The experimentally determined Curie-Weiss temperature of \(Gd_2Ti_2O_7\) is \(\approx -10\) K,\(^13\)\(^–\)\(^15\) indicating antiferromagnetic nearest-neighbor interactions. Thus, \(Gd_2Ti_2O_7\) could be considered as an ideal realization of the frustrated Heisenberg antiferromagnet with dipolar interactions. Experimentally, \(Gd_2Ti_2O_7\) has been found to undergo a magnetic ordering transition at \(\approx 1\) K.\(^13\) However, this transition corresponds to only partial ordering of the magnetic structure, as only three spins per tetrahedron order.\(^16\) In this partially ordered state, the spins residing on the \([111]\) planes of the crystal (which can be viewed as kagome planes) are ordered in a 120° configuration, parallel to the kagome plane, while the spins residing on the interstitial sites remain either statically or dynamically disordered.\(^17\) Subsequent experimental investigations revealed a second ordering transition at \(\approx 0.7\) K, corresponding to the partial ordering of the interstitial disordered spins.\(^15\)\(^,\)\(^17\) which, however, do remain (partially) dynamically down to 20 mK.\(^18\)\(^,\)\(^19\) Despite that \(Gd_2Ti_2O_7\) is supposedly well approximated by the Heisenberg antiferromag-
net with dipolar interactions, theoretical justification for this complex magnetic behavior remains difficult.\textsuperscript{13,18,20} In Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$, the dominant interactions are antiferromagnetic, as indicated by the experimentally determined Curie-Weiss temperature, $\theta_{\text{CW}} \approx -19$ K.\textsuperscript{21} A study of the diluted compound (Tb$_{0.02}$Y$_{0.98}$)$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ revealed that the contribution to $\theta_{\text{CW}}$ due to exchange and dipolar interactions is $\approx -13$ K, comparable to the $\theta_{\text{CW}}$ value found for Gd$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$.\textsuperscript{22} Despite the energy scale of these interactions, the "Tb" moments do not show long-range magnetic order down to as low as 50 mK, making it the system closest to a real three-dimensional (3D) spin liquid to date.\textsuperscript{21,23} However, crystal field (CF) calculations indicate a ground-state doublet and Ising-type easy axis anisotropy for the $^{7}F_{\text{g}}$ Tb$^{3+}$ magnetic moments along their local (111) directions (the direction toward the center of the tetrahedron the particular atom is in), which would dramatically reduce the degree of frustration in the system.\textsuperscript{22,24,27} Theoretical models taking this anisotropy into account predict magnetic ordering temperatures of about 1 K.\textsuperscript{22,28} A subsequent theoretical work suggests that the magnetic moment anisotropy is more isotropic than Ising type, which could suppress magnetic ordering.\textsuperscript{29} Recently, Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ was argued to be in a quantum mechanically fluctuating "spin ice" state.\textsuperscript{30,31} Virtual quantum-mechanical CF excitations (the first excited CF doublet is separated by only $\approx 13$ cm$^{-1}$ from the ground-state doublet\textsuperscript{22,25,27}) are proposed to rescale the effective theoretical model from the unfrustrated Ising antiferromagnet to a frustrated resonating spin ice model. Nevertheless, the experimentally observed lack of magnetic ordering down to the millikelvin range and the true magnetic ground state in Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ still remain enigmatic.\textsuperscript{31,34}

Illustrating the diversity in magnetic behavior due to the subtle differences between the rare earth species of the titanates, the situation in both Dy$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ (Refs. 35–37) and Ho$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ (Refs. 38–41) is again different. The R$^{3+}$ ions in these compounds have a $^{9}H_{\text{f1-2}}$ (Dy$^{3+}$) and a $^{13}F_{\text{g}}$ (Ho$^{3+}$) ground state, respectively, with corresponding free ion magnetic moments $\mu = 10.65 \mu_B$ (Dy$^{3+}$) and $\mu = 10.61 \mu_B$ (Ho$^{3+}$). These systems were first thought to have weak ferromagnetic nearest-neighbor exchange interactions, as indicated by the small positive values of $\theta_{\text{CW}} \approx 2$ and $\approx 1$ K for Dy$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ and Ho$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$, respectively.\textsuperscript{42} More recently, however, the nearest-neighbor exchange interactions in Dy$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ and Ho$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ were argued to be antiferromagnetic.\textsuperscript{43} The effective ferromagnetic interaction between the spins in fact is shown to be due to the dominant ferromagnetic long-range magnetic dipole-dipole interactions.\textsuperscript{28,44} The R$^{3+}$ ions in both Dy$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ and Ho$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ are well described by a well separated Ising doublet (first excited states are at $\approx 266$ and $\approx 165$ cm$^{-1}$, respectively) with a strong single-ion anisotropy along the local (111) directions. Unlike for antiferromagnetically interacting spins with local (111) Ising anisotropy, ferromagnetically interacting Ising spins on a pyrochlore lattice should be highly frustrated.\textsuperscript{38,45} As Anderson\textsuperscript{46} already pointed out half a century ago, the resulting model is analogous to the ice model of Pauling,\textsuperscript{47} which earned both Dy$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ and Ho$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ the title "spin ice compound."\textsuperscript{38,44,45,48} Although numerical simulations predict long-range order at low temperatures for this model,\textsuperscript{43} experimental studies report no transition to a long-range ordered state for either Dy$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ (Refs. 28, 35, 49, and 50) or Ho$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ (Refs. 38, 51, and 52) down to as low as 50 mK.

As apparent from above considerations, the low-temperature magnetic behavior of the rare earth titanates is dictated by the smallest of details in the structure of and interactions in the material. Therefore, a comprehensive experimental study of the structural, crystal field, and magnetic properties of these systems may serve to clarify unanswered questions in their understanding. In this paper, dc magnetic susceptibility measurements, polarized Raman scattering experiments, and terahertz time domain spectroscopy on aforementioned members of the rare earth titanates family are employed to gain more insights into the details that drive them toward such diverse behaviors. Raman scattering allows for simultaneous investigation of structural and CF properties through the observation of both phononic and CF excitations, while the comparison between the various members helps to identify the nature of the different excitations observed.

## II. EXPERIMENT

### A. Sample preparation

Polycrystalline samples of $R_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ (where $R$=Gd,Tb, Dy,Ho) were synthesized by firing stoichiometric amounts of high purity (>99.9\%) TiO$_2$ and the appropriate rare earth oxide (Gd$_2$O$_3$, Tb$_2$O$_7$, Dy$_2$O$_3$, or Ho$_2$O$_3$, respectively) in air for several days with intermittent grindings. The resulting polycrystalline powder was subsequently prepared for single-crystal growth, using the method described by Gardner et al.\textsuperscript{53} The following single-crystal growth (also done as described in Ref. 53) using the floating zone technique yielded large, high quality single crystals of all of the $R_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ variants. Disks ($\approx 1$ mm thickness) with $(a,b)$-plane surfaces were cut from oriented single crystals and subsequently polished, in order to optimize scattering experiments. The Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ sample used in Raman experiments was subsequently polished down to $\approx 250$ $\mu$m thickness to facilitate terahertz transmission measurements.

### B. Instrumentation

X-ray Laue diffraction, using a Philips PW 1710 diffractometer equipped with a Polaroid XR-7 system, was employed to orient the single-crystal samples of Gd$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ and Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ for the polarized Raman spectroscopy experiments, while simultaneously confirming the single crystallinity of the samples. The Dy$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ and Ho$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ single crystals were oriented using an Enraf-Nonius CAD4 diffractometer.

The magnetic susceptibilities of the obtained rare earth titanates were measured using the Quantum Design MPMS-5 superconducting quantum interference device (SQUID) magnetometer of the Laboratoire de Physico-Chimie de l’Eiat Solide (LPCES) at the Université Paris-Sud in Orsay, France. The $R_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ samples, about 100 mg of single crystal (in the form of disks of approximately 4 mm diameter and 1 mm thickness), were placed in cylindrical plastic tubes and...
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III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Magnetic measurements

The magnetic susceptibility $\chi$, defined as the ratio of the magnetization of the sample to the applied magnetic field, of all the rare earth titanate samples was measured in a 100 Oe applied magnetic field. Since the samples used were platelike disks, the data have been corrected by a demagnetization factor as calculated for flat, cylindrical plates. Figure 1 shows the inverse molar susceptibilities of all samples in the low-temperature regime. For each sample, the data were fitted to a Curie-Weiss form for the molar magnetic susceptibility of an antiferromagnet,

$$\chi_m = \frac{2C}{(T - \theta)} + B,$$

where $C$ is the Curie constant in cgs units ($C = N_A\mu_r^2\mu_0^2/3k_B = \mu_0^2/8$, in [emu K mol$^{-1}$]), $\theta$ is the expected transition temperature (which gives an indication of the sign of the magnetic interactions), and $B$ is a temperature independent Van Vleck contribution to the susceptibility. The model was fitted to high-temperature experimental data (100 K and up, where the demagnetization correction is on the order of 1%). Linear regression analysis of $\chi_m^{-1}$ yielded the experimental values for $\theta_c$, $\mu_r$, and $B_c$. These are tabulated in Table I, together with several values reported in literature.

In general, the experimentally obtained data compare (where possible) favorably to the various values reported in literature (Table I). The extracted $\theta$ parameters for Dy$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ and Ho$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ do slightly deviate from literature values, presumably due to the estimation of the demagnetization factor, which is larger in these materials (fits to uncorrected data yield $\theta$ values of approximately 1 and 2 K). The experimentally determined paramagnetic moments obtained for Gd$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ and Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ are also in excellent agreement with the corresponding free ion values, which are $\mu_r = 7.94\mu_B$ and $\mu_r = 9.72\mu_B$ for the Gd$^{3+}$ ($^8S_7/2$) and Tb$^{3+}$ ($^5F_5$) free ions, respectively. The large negative Curie-Weiss temperatures for Gd$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ and Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ indicate antiferromagnetic exchange coupling. In contrast, the small, positive $\theta$ values for Ho$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ and Dy$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ initially led to the assumption of weak ferromagnetic exchange interactions between nearest-neighbor Dy$^{3+}$ and Ho$^{3+}$ ions. As stated above, however, since the Ho$^{3+}$ and Dy$^{3+}$ ions have a large magnetic moment [free ion values are $\mu_r = 10.607\mu_B$ ($^7I_8$ ground state) and $\mu_r = 10.646\mu_B$ ($^6H_{15/2}$ ground state)], the dipolar interactions between neighboring $R^{3+}$ ions are dominating the effective nearest-neighbor (nn) interactions. The nn exchange interactions are in fact antiferromagnetic, while the dominant dipolar nn interactions are of ferromagnetic nature. Consequently, the effective nn interactions are slightly ferromagnetic, resulting in the positive $\theta$ values. Another consequence of the dipolar interactions and their dominance is the fact that extracting the real values of $\mu_r$ and $B$ from the inverse susceptibility curves becomes nontrivial, since more elaborate models taking the dipolar interaction into account are needed.
B. Raman spectroscopy

1. Room-temperature spectra

To determine the Raman-active vibrations of the single crystals, group theory analysis was employed. This predicts that for the cubic rare earth titanate structure (R<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub>) of space group F<sub>d</sub>d<sub>m</sub> (O<sub>h</sub>), the sublattices of the unit cell span the following irreducible representations:

16(c) site: Ti<sup>4+</sup> sublattice = A<sub>2u</sub> + E<sub>u</sub> + 2F<sub>1u</sub> + F<sub>2u</sub>,

16(d) site: R<sup>3+</sup> sublattice = A<sub>2u</sub> + E<sub>u</sub> + 2F<sub>1u</sub> + F<sub>2u</sub>,

48(f) site: O(1) sublattice = A<sub>1g</sub> + E<sub>g</sub> + 2F<sub>1g</sub> + 3F<sub>2g</sub> + A<sub>2u</sub> + E<sub>u</sub> + 3F<sub>1u</sub> + 2F<sub>2u</sub>,

8(a) site: O(2) sublattice = F<sub>1u</sub> + F<sub>2g</sub>.

This makes the following decomposition into zone-center normal modes (excluding the F<sub>1u</sub> acoustic mode):

\[ \Gamma = A_{1g} + E_{g} + 2F_{1g} + 4F_{2g} + 3A_{2u} + 3E_{u} + 7F_{1u} + 4F_{2u}. \]

Of these normal modes, only the A<sub>1g</sub>, E<sub>g</sub>, and the four F<sub>2g</sub> modes are Raman active. The seven F<sub>1u</sub> modes are infrared active and the remaining modes are optically inactive. The symmetry coordinates for the optically active normal modes are given by Gupta et al.\textsuperscript{57} Based on the symmetries of the Raman-active modes, the A<sub>1g</sub> and E<sub>g</sub> modes are expected to be observed in parallel polarization (||) spectra, while the F<sub>2g</sub> modes are expected in the perpendicular polarization (⊥) spectra. Surprisingly, the room-temperature spectra of R<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> show all the Raman-active modes in both polariza-

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TABLE I. Experimentally determined and literature values for \( \theta_{i} \), \( \mu_{i} \), and \( B_{i} \) for the different R<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> compounds. The numbers inside parentheses give the accuracy in the last digit of the values.

| Compound i (source) | \( \theta_{i} \) (K) | \( \mu_{i} \) (\( \mu_{B} \)) | \( B_{i} \) (emu mol\(^{-1}\)) |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Gd<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> (expt.) | –11(2) | 7.95(9) | 0\textsuperscript{a} |
| Gd<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> (Ref. 13) | –9.6 | 7.7 | |
| Gd<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> (Ref. 14) | –11.7 | 7.8 | |
| Gd<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> (Ref. 42) | –8.95(6) | 7.224(3) | 6.0 \times 10^{-4} |
| Tb<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> (expt.) | –18(2) | 9.67(7) | 3.4(9) \times 10^{-3} |
| Tb<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> (Refs. 21 and 22) | –19 | 9.6 | |
| Dy<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> (expt.) | 2(2) | b | b |
| Dy<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> (Ref. 42) | –1.0 | 9.590(6) | 1.1(1) \times 10^{-2} |
| Ho<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> (expt.) | 6(2) | b | b |
| Ho<sub>2</sub>Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> (Ref. 42) | –2.0 | 9.15(3) | 1.2(1) \times 10^{-2} |

\textsuperscript{a}When fitting \( \chi_{0} \) with a nonzero \( B \) term, it becomes negligibly small. The best fit is obtained with \( B = 0 \).

\textsuperscript{b}Since dipolar interactions are dominant in this case, no reliable values were extracted (see text).
tions. Angle dependent Raman measurements (varying the angle between the incoming light polarization and the $b$ axis from $-45^\circ$ to $45^\circ$) reveal no orientation in which the theoretical selection rules are fully obeyed. Polycrystallinity and/or crystalline disorder is, however, not believed to be the cause, since other techniques (x-ray Laue diffraction and magnetic measurements) reveal no such signs. Also, to our best knowledge, no Raman spectrum of any of these rare earth titanates fulfilling their phononic selection rules has been published. Although no full compliance of phononic selection rules was observed, the nature of the Raman-active modes was clearly identified through their angular dependence. Their assignment is indicated in Fig. 2 as well as in Table II. The figure depicts the room-temperature (RT) parallel polarization spectra of the rare earth titanates and the corresponding modes. The assignment of the Raman-active modes to the observed peaks is indicated by the filled Lorentzian line shapes.

TABLE II. Experimentally determined and literature values of the frequencies (in cm$^{-1}$) of observed Raman modes in $R_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ at room temperature and their respective symmetry assignments (inside parentheses).

| R = Gd, Tb, Dy, Ho | This work | Ref. 58 | Ref. 59 | Ref. 60 | Ref. 61 | Ref. 57 | Ref. 62 |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| $\sim 104^a$      | $\sim 102^a$ | $\sim 103^a$ | $\sim 105^a$ | (-)     | (-)     | 105 ($F_{2g}$) | (-) |
| $\sim 128^a$      | $\sim 124^a$ | $\sim 122^a$ | (-)     | (-)     | 125 ($b^b$) | (-)     | (-)     | 215 (-) |
| 257               | 209       | 212     | 214 ($F_{2g}$) | 215 ($F_{2g}$) | 210 ($F_{2g}$) | 222 ($F_{2g}$) | 219 ($F_{2g}$) | 230.6 ($F_{2g}$) | 225 ($F_{2g}$) | 225 ($F_{2g}$) |
| 310               | 303       | 308     | 311 ($F_{2g}$) | 312 ($F_{2g}$) | 310 ($E_g$) | 311 ($E_g$) | 312 ($E_g$) | 318.0 ($E_g$) | (-)     | (-)     |
| 325               | 313       | 328     | 329 ($E_g$) | 330 ($E_g$) | 310 ($F_{2g}$) | (-)     | (-)     | 328.2 ($F_{2g}$) | 317 ($F_{2g}$) | 347 ($E_g$) |
| 450$^c$, 450$^c$  | 451$^c$   | 452$^c$ | (-)     | (-)     | 470 ($F_{2g}$) | 452 (-) | 455 ($F_{2g}$) | (-)     | (-)     | (-)     |
| 517               | 518       | 519     | 522 ($A_{1g}$) | 518 ($A_{1g}$) | 520 ($A_{1g}$) | 518 ($F_{2g}$) | 519 ($A_{1g}$) | 526.8 ($A_{1g}$) | 515 ($A_{1g}$) | 515 ($A_{1g}$ + $F_{2g}$) |
| 554               | 557       | 550     | 562 ($F_{2g}$) | 547 ($F_{2g}$) | 570 ($F_{2g}$) | 585 ($F_{2g}$) | 549 ($F_{2g}$) | 594.0 ($F_{2g}$) | 580 ($F_{2g}$) | 580 ($F_{2g}$) |
| $\sim 677^f$      | $\sim 689^f$ | $\sim 693^f$ | $\sim 701^f$ | (-)     | (-)     | 684 (-) | (-)     | 680 ($F_{2g}$) | (-)     | (-)     |
| $\sim 703^f$      | $\sim 706^f$ | $\sim 720^f$ | $\sim 724^f$ | 701 (-) | (-)     | (-)     | (-)     | (-)     | (-)     | 705 (-) |

$^a$These modes are very weak and barely resolved; therefore their exact positions are estimated.
$^b$Mori et al. (Ref. 60) ascribed this band to trace amounts of Gd$_3$O$_5$.
$^c$This is a very weak mode, barely resolved above the noise. Mori et al. (Ref. 60) ascribed this mode to trace amounts of TiO$_2$.
$^d$Zhang et al. (Ref. 59) indicated the lower- and higher-wave-number components of this band as the $E_g$ and $F_{2g}$ modes, respectively.
$^e$This band was calculated, rather than observed, by Vandenborre et al. (Ref. 62).
$^f$These overlapping modes comprise a weak band, in which the two modes cannot be separately resolved.
before for the rare earth titanates, hafnates, manganates, and stannates. The assignment of the $R_2Ti_2O_7$ modes in literature has been mostly consistent (see Table II), yet there are a few debated details. There is general agreement on the nature of the modes at $\approx 210$ cm$^{-1}$ [$F_{2g}$, O(2)-sublattice mode], $\approx 519$ cm$^{-1}$ ($A_{1g}$, R-O stretching mode), and $\approx 556$ cm$^{-1}$ [$F_{2g}$, O(1)-sublattice mode]. Temperature and angle dependent Raman measurements show that the band around $\approx 315$ cm$^{-1}$ consists of two modes, an $F_{2g}$ mode around 310 cm$^{-1}$ (O-R-O bending mode) and an $E_g$ mode around 327 cm$^{-1}$ [O(1)-sublattice mode], as recognized by Saha et al. and Vandenborre et al. Earlier works either interchanged the mode assignment within this band or ascribed the whole band to only one of these modes. However, our temperature and angle dependent measurements confirm the assignment made by Saha et al. The last expected phonon, an $F_{2g}$ mode, has been either not accounted for, combined with the $A_{1g}$ mode in one band, or ascribed to low intensity peaks around 105, 450, or 680 cm$^{-1}$ (Ref. 61) in previous works. Here, it is ascribed to a broad, low intensity mode around $\approx 260$ cm$^{-1}$. This mode is not clearly resolved in the RT spectra due to the fact that it overlaps largely with the neighboring strong $F_{2g}$ modes at $\approx 210$ cm$^{-1}$ and $\approx 309$ cm$^{-1}$. Fitting with those two peaks only, however, does not adequately reproduce the experimental spectral shape in the 200–300 cm$^{-1}$ window. Additionally, as the temperature is lowered, the phonon modes sharpen and the existence of this excitation becomes obvious in the spectra. Also worth noting are the two anomalous modes in Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ at $\approx 303$ cm$^{-1}$ ($F_{2g}$) and $\approx 313$ cm$^{-1}$ ($E_g$), which have lower frequencies and wider line shapes compared to their counterparts in the other isostructural rare earth titanates.

Next to the expected Raman-active vibrations, the spectra in this work show some very weak scattering intensity at low wave numbers (first two rows of Table II), which has been reported before. Vandenborre et al. were unable to account for this intensity in their calculations, while Mori et al. offered the plausible assignment to trace $R_2O_3$ in the system. The latter assignment is also tentatively adopted here. Mori et al. also suggested that the “missing” $F_{2g}$ mode might be responsible for some of this low-wave-number intensity. Additionally, a weak mode is observed at 450 cm$^{-1}$ in most $R_2Ti_2O_7$ compounds, as was also seen before. Zhang et al. and Hess et al. ascribed the missing $F_{2g}$ mode to this feature. Alternatively, Mori et al. interpreted it as being due to trace amounts of starting compound TiO$_2$, which is known to have a phonon at 447 cm$^{-1}$. The true origin of this mode is at present unclear. Finally, there is some low intensity scattering at higher wave numbers, around 700 cm$^{-1}$ (last two rows of Table II). This intensity has been observed before and is ascribed to forbidden IR modes made active by slight local nonstoichiometry in the system.

### 2. Temperature dependence

Raman spectra of the $R_2Ti_2O_7$ crystals were recorded at temperatures ranging from RT to 4 K. Figure 3 depicts the evolution of both the parallel ($\parallel$) and perpendicular ($\perp$) polarization Raman spectra of the $R_2Ti_2O_7$ crystals with decreasing temperature.

Going down in temperature, several spectral changes occur in the Raman spectra. The evolutions of the phononic excitations with temperature are very similar in the different $R_2Ti_2O_7$ lattices. Again, this is not surprising, since only oxygen atoms are displaced in the Raman-active phonons. First, the lowest-frequency phonon ($F_{2g}$, $\omega \approx 210$ cm$^{-1}$ at RT) shows a strong softening ($\omega = 170$ cm$^{-1}$ at 4 K) and sharpening with decreasing temperature, revealing the previously unresolved $F_{2g}$ mode ($\omega_{\text{RT}} \approx 260$ cm$^{-1}$), which also softens ($\omega_{4\text{K}} = 190$ cm$^{-1}$), but does not show a strong narrowing. Second, the sharpening of both the $\approx 309$ cm$^{-1}$ $F_{2g}$ and the $\approx 324$ cm$^{-1}$ $E_g$ modes decreases their spectral overlap, clearly justifying the two-mode interpretation of the $\approx 315$ cm$^{-1}$ band at RT. Additionally, both modes show a slight softening upon cooldown. Also, the $A_{1g}$ phonon ($\omega_{\text{RT}} = 519$ cm$^{-1}$) shows the familiar softening ($\omega_{4\text{K}} = 511$ cm$^{-1}$) and sharpening trend on cooling. Finally, due to its large width and low intensity, describing the temperature evolution of the highest-frequency $F_{2g}$ phonon proves rather difficult, though it seems to soften slightly. Comparison of the $R_2Ti_2O_7$ spectra in Fig. 3 yields the observation that the anomalous phonons [at $\approx 303$ ($F_{2g}$) and $\approx 313$ cm$^{-1}$ ($E_g$)] in Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ remain wide throughout the temperature range, in contrast to the corresponding modes in the other titanates. Additionally, these modes are shifting in opposite directions in Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ only: the $F_{2g}$ mode softens ($\omega_{4\text{K}} \approx 295$ cm$^{-1}$), while the $E_g$ mode considerably hardens ($\omega_{4\text{K}} \approx 335$ cm$^{-1}$). An explanation for this anomalous behavior could be the coupling of these phonons to low-frequency crystal field excitations of the Tb$^{3+}$ ions.

### 3. Crystal field excitations

Aside from the phonons in the Raman spectra of $R_2Ti_2O_7$, several spectra also show crystal field (CF) excitations of the $R^{3+}$ ions at low temperatures, as shown in Fig. 4. The CF level splitting in the different rare earth ions depends on their electronic configuration and their local surroundings. In the $R_2Ti_2O_7$ family, the simplest case is that of the Gd$^{3+}$ ion ($4f^7$), which has a spin-only $^8S_{7/2}$ ($L=0$) ground state, resulting in the absence of a level splitting due to the local crystal field. Consequently, the Raman spectrum of Gd$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ shows no CF excitations, making it a suitable “template” of the $R_2Ti_2O_7$ Raman spectrum with lattice excitations only. Combined with the strong correspondence of the phononic excitations in the $R_2Ti_2O_7$ spectra, it allows for quick identification of CF modes in the other compounds.

More complicated is the CF level splitting in the Tb$^{3+}$ ion ($4f^8$), which has a $^7F_{6}$ ground state. Several studies calculating the crystal field for the Tb$^{3+}$ ion in Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ have based on inelastic-neutron-scattering results, yielded slightly differing energy-level schemes for the lowest crystal field levels of Tb$^{3+}$ in Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ as schematically depicted in Fig. 5. Here, solid lines depict CF levels observed experimentally, while dotted lines indicate CF levels obtained through CF calculations. Shown in Fig. 6, which is a zoom of the low-wave-number region of the 4 K perpendicular
lar polarization spectrum of Tb$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$, are the CF excitations that are observed using inelastic light scattering. As also clear from Fig. 5, all CF excitations previously observed using inelastic neutron scattering are also observed here. Furthermore, additional low-lying excitations can be seen, which are easily identified as CF levels, by comparison with the “lattice-only template” spectrum of Gd$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$.

The excitations from the crystal field ground state to the higher crystal field levels, with approximately calculated values of 13, 60, 83, and 118 cm$^{-1}$ (see Fig. 5), are all observed.

FIG. 3. Temperature dependence of the $R_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ parallel (∥) and perpendicular (⊥) Raman spectra. The spectra show several changes when going down in temperature (see text), most of which (the phononic excitations) are analogous for all $R_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$ lattices. In addition, at lower temperatures various crystal field excitations appear in the spectra of some of the rare earth titanates (see Fig. 4). Spectra are normalized to the integrated intensity of the depicted frequency window.
at very similar frequencies, at 12.9, 60.8, 83.1, and 119.2 cm\(^{-1}\), respectively. The 60.8 cm\(^{-1}\) level has not been observed experimentally before, though it did follow from the CF calculation made by Gingras et al. Conversely, the /H\(^{-1}\)229 135.2 cm\(^{-1}\) mode has been observed through inelastic neutron scattering yet has not been accounted for in CF calculations. Although Gardner et al. interpreted it as an optical phonon, this excitation is clearly identified as a CF excitation here, through the isostructural comparison with the other titanates. The latter assignment was also made by Mirebeau et al.

Additionally, other CF excitations are observed inelastic light scattering. A fit- ned Lorentzian centered at zero (Rayleigh line) is subtracted from the data for clarity.

FIG. 6. (Color online) The low-wave-number region of the perpendicular polarization Raman spectrum of Tb\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\) at 4 K. A fit- ned Lorentzian centered at zero (Rayleigh line) is subtracted from the data for clarity. The crystal field levels (see Fig. 5) are indicated by the filled Lorentzian line shapes that were fitted to the data. A distinction has been made between CF levels that have been calculated and observed before (yellow), CF levels that have been calculated before but so far have not been observed (blue), CF levels that have been observed before but have not been calculated (green), and additional CF levels that are observed in this study using inelastic light scattering (red).

| This work | Gingras et al.\(^{22}\) | Gardner et al.\(^{22}\) | Malkin et al.\(^{26}\) | Mirebeau et al.\(^{27}\) |
|-----------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Energy (cm\(^{-1}\) (THz)) | 135 (4.04) | 117 (3.51) | 83 (2.49) | 61 (1.83) | 47 (1.41) | 13 (0.39) | 7.7 (0.23) | 0 (0) | 13 (0.39) | 13 (0.39) | 12.1 (0.36) | 12.7 (0.38) | 12.7 (0.38) | 13 (0.4) |

FIG. 5. Various CF energy-level schemes of the Tb\(^{3+}\) ion in Tb\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\). Solid lines depict CF levels that have been observed experimentally, while dotted lines represent CF levels as calculated using CF calculations. Numbers indicate CF level energies in cm\(^{-1}\) (THz); symbols in italics indicate symmetries of corresponding levels. Solid arrows indicate all CF excitations observed in the low-temperature Raman spectrum of Tb\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\) (see Fig. 6).
at 7.7 and 47.2 cm\(^{-1}\). While the former is recognized as a CF excitation from the CF ground state to a new CF energy level, the 47.2 cm\(^{-1}\) excitation could also be interpreted as an excitation from the excited CF level at 12.9 cm\(^{-1}\) to the higher excited CF level at 60.8 cm\(^{-1}\). While such an excitation is Raman active (see below), its occurrence at 4 K seems unlikely, since at this temperature the excited CF level (12.9 cm\(^{-1}\) = 19 K) is not expected to be populated enough to give rise to a measurable Raman signal. Additionally, if it were an excitation from an excited state, its intensity would decrease upon cooling. Instead, the intensity of this mode steadily increases with decreasing temperature.

Using \(E_g\) and \(E_i\), and \(A_{2g}\) and \(A_{1g}\) irreducible representations\(^{22,26}\) for the ground state and excited CF levels, respectively, it can be confirmed that indeed all these ground state to excited state transitions are expected to be Raman active. Through analogous considerations, the lowest excitation (\(E_g - E_i\), 13 cm\(^{-1}\)) is found to be symmetry forbidden in a direct dipole transition. In this respect, terahertz time domain spectroscopy (TTDS) in the range of 10–50 cm\(^{-1}\) (0.3–1.5 THz) was employed to probe the absorption of Tb\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\) at various temperatures. By using this technique, it is possible to extract complex optical quantities in the terahertz range through the direct measurement of the time trace of the transmitted terahertz pulse. The obtained curves for the real \([\varepsilon_i(v)]\) and imaginary \([\varepsilon_r(v)]\) parts of the dielectric constant at various temperatures are plotted in Fig. 7. The plots clearly show an absorption around 0.45 THz (15 cm\(^{-1}\)) at low temperatures, corresponding to the 13 cm\(^{-1}\) CF level also observed in the Raman spectra of Tb\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\). This is corroborated by the identical temperature dependences of the mode in both methods: its spectral signature decreases with increasing temperature, vanishing around 90 K. The fact that the 13 cm\(^{-1}\) CF level is observed in a direct dipole transition indicates that this level is not a true \(E_g - E_i\) transition, since such a dipole transition would be symmetry forbidden.

Overall, the existence of the additional CF levels in Tb\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\), unaccounted for by CF calculations, suggests the presence of a second Tb\(^{3+}\) site in the structure with an energy-level scheme different from those reported previously. Three additional CF levels are observed experimentally, while four would naively be expected for a slightly differing Tb site in this low-wave-number region. A fourth additional CF level might be unresolved due to the strong CF level at 83 cm\(^{-1}\) or might simply be symmetry forbidden in a Raman transition. Moreover, the fact that the ~13 cm\(^{-1}\) CF level is simultaneously Raman and dipole active indicates the breaking of inversion symmetry in the system, which questions the validity of its current symmetry interpretation. Recently, the exact symmetry of the Tb\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\) lattice has been extensively studied. Han et al.\(^{71}\) performed neutron powder diffraction and x-ray absorption fine-structure experiments down to 4.5 K, revealing a perfect pyrochlore lattice, within experimental error. Ofer et al.\(^{72}\) found no static lattice distortions on the timescale of 0.1 \(\mu\)s, down to 70 mK. Most recently, however, Ruff et al.\(^{73}\) found finite structural correlations at temperatures below 20 K, indicative of fluctuations above a very low–temperature structural transition. The present experimental results suggest these fluctuations may even induce a minute static disorder, resulting in the observed CF level diagram.

In Dy\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\) the Dy\(^{3+}\) ions \(4f^9\) have a \(^{6}H_{15/2}\) ground state. Crystal field calculations have been performed by Jana et al.\(^{74}\) who deduced an energy-level scheme consisting of eight Kramers doublets, with a separation of \(\approx 100\) cm\(^{-1}\) of the first excited state. Malkin et al.\(^{26}\) and Rosenkranz et al.\(^{75}\) estimated the first excited state gap to be \(\geq 200\) and \(\approx 266\) cm\(^{-1}\), respectively. The Raman spectrum of Dy\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\) shows only one extra excitation compared to the “lattice template” spectrum of Gd\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\), at the energy of \(\approx 287\) cm\(^{-1}\). This excitation is tentatively ascribed to the first excited CF level, comparing most favorably to the estimation of Rosenkranz et al.

For Ho\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\) ground state \(5f^8\) (Ho\(^{3+}\), \(4f^{10}\)), several CF energy-level schemes have been calculated,\(^{26,75–77}\) all with first excited state separations around 150 cm\(^{-1}\). However, the Raman spectrum of Ho\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\) does not show any clear inelastic light scattering from CF levels to which these calculations can be compared. Although there is some weak intensity around \(\approx 150\) cm\(^{-1}\), which compares favorably with all of the calculated level schemes, the intensity of this scattering is insufficient to definitively ascribe it to a CF level.

### IV. CONCLUSIONS

To summarize, several members of the rare earth titanates family \(R_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\) were studied using magnetic susceptibility measurements and polarized inelastic-light-scattering experiments. Lattice excitations were found to vary only slightly between crystals with different rare earth ions. Temperature dependent measurements also revealed completely analogous behaviors of the phononic excitations except for two anomalous phonons in Tb\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\), which seem to be coupled to the low-energy crystal field excitations in that compound. Such crystal field excitations were observed in Tb\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\) and possibly also in Dy\(_2\)Ti\(_2\)O\(_7\). Only one nonphononic excitation is
clearly observed in Dy₂Ti₂O₇, its energy consistent with estimates of the first excited crystal field level. For Tb₂Ti₂O₇, all of the previously determined crystal field energy levels were confirmed. Moreover, the resulting energy-level diagram was expanded by three additional observed CF levels, only one of which has been calculated before. Also, one previously reported level was found to be both Raman and dipole active, contradicting its current presumed symmetry. These findings may reflect the existence of two inequivalent Tb sites in the low-temperature structure or a static symmetry reduction of another nature, suggesting the recently found structural correlations to induce a minute static disorder in Tb₂Ti₂O₇ at very low temperatures. This crystal field information may serve to help elucidate the complex theoretical enigma of Tb₂Ti₂O₇.

Note added in proof. Recently, some additional indications of low-temperature structural changes in the rare earth titanates have been found both experimentally and theoretically.

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