Magnetic order in non-centrosymmetric CePt$_3$B

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Abstract.

CePt$_3$B exhibits two magnetic phases, an antiferromagnetic and a weak ferromagnetic one. To determine these magnetic structures of CePt$_3$B, neutron diffraction and $\mu$SR experiments have been carried out. Neutron diffraction experiments provided no evidence of either antiferromagnetic or ferromagnetic order. In contrast, in zero field muon-spin relaxation ($\mu$SR) experiments, magnetic transition temperatures $T_N = 7.8$ K and $T_C \sim 6$ K are observed from the onset of spontaneous muon precession.

In recent years, the observation of heavy fermion superconductivity in non-centrosymmetric intermetallics such as CePt$_3$Si [1] has initiated a multitude of experimental and theoretical studies. Especially, in terms of superconductivity the nature of the pairing states has been of interest [2]. Conversely, the lack of inversion symmetry gives rise to an additional magnetic exchange term, the Dzyaloshinsky-Moriya (DM) interaction [3, 4]. This term tends to align spins perpendicular to each other, which combined with the common (for instance Heisenberg like) magnetic exchange effectively gives rise to spin canting or complex magnetic structures.

Already for CePt$_3$Si, which crystallizes in a tetragonal lattice with the space group $P4mm$ [1], the DM interaction could be a relevant issue for the magnetic behaviour, since the system orders antiferromagnetically below $T_N = 2.2$ K. However, it has been shown that the antiferromagnetically ordered state is collinear ($Q = (0, 0, 1/2)$), with small magnetic moments $\mu_{ord} = 0.16 \mu_B$ [5]. In contrast, CePt$_3$B, which is isostructural and related in electron count to CePt$_3$Si [6, 7, 8, 9], exhibits a complex magnetically ordered state at low temperatures, with an antiferromagnetic phase below $T_N = 7.8$ K and a second weakly ferromagnetic transition below $T_C \sim 6$ K. While the weak ferromagnetism might point to the relevance of the DM interaction, the microscopic nature of these magnetic phases has not been revealed so far. Here, we present a first study of these magnetic phases by means of neutron diffraction and $\mu$SR experiments.

The polycrystalline sample CePt$_3$B, using $^{11}$B in the production, was prepared by melting high-purity elements in a water-cooled copper crucible using a high frequency generator under
argon atmosphere. Subsequently the sample was annealed at 880°C for 14 days. The magnetization and susceptibility was measured employing a commercial SQUID magnetometer. Neutron diffraction experiments were performed using the E6 spectrometer of the Berlin Neutron Scattering Center (BENSC) of the Helmholtz Zentrum Berlin, with a neutron wave length of $\lambda = 2.444$ Å in a standard Orange cryostat ($T \geq 1.6$ K). The $\mu$SR experiments were carried out at the Swiss Muon Source of the Paul Scherrer Institute. Measurements were performed on the GPS instrument using a He-flow cryostat ($T \geq 1.7$ K).

For sample characterization, magnetization measurements on CePt$_3$B at low temperatures $T = 1.8 - 8$ K have been carried out (Fig. 1). A ferromagnetic hysteresis below $T = 5$ K is observable, and which has vanished for 8 K. In the limit of zero temperature, an extrapolated remanent magnetization of $\mu \approx 0.09\mu_B$/Ce atom is obtained, in agreement with Ref. [6] (inset of Fig. 1). Further, at low temperatures the inverse susceptibility $\chi^{-1}$ indicates two magnetic phase transitions into long range ordered states, an antiferromagnetic and a weak ferromagnetic one (Fig. 2). The antiferromagnetic $T_N$ and ferromagnetic temperatures $T_C$ for CePt$_3$B are determined as $T_N = 7.8$ K and $T_C \sim 6$ K from $\chi^{-1}$, in good agreement with the Refs. [6, 8].

![Figure 1](source.png)  
**Figure 1.** The magnetization of CePt$_3$B, as function of temperature. Inset: The remanent ferromagnetic moment as function of temperature of CePt$_3$B; solid line as guide to the eye.

Neutron diffraction patterns of CePt$_3$B, taken at 1.6, 6.6 and 15.3 K are depicted in Fig. 3. The data at 15.3 K are successfully fitted with the tetragonal structure model (space group $P4mm$) of Sologub et al. [7] (not shown in the plot for clarity). In these fits, a few minor peaks could not be associated to this structure, indicating the presence of a second phase (volume fraction $\sim 10$ %). In the refinement, by excluding the secondary phase peaks a value $R_{Bragg} = 6.2$ % is obtained. In Tab. 1 we summarize the result of our refinement. All parameter are in a good agreement with the values obtained of Sologub et al. [7]. The smaller lattice parameters are reflecting a shrinking of the lattice due to the lower temperature used in our experiments, as compared to the room temperature experiments carried out by Sologub et al. [7].

A comparison of the spectra at 1.6, 6.6 and 15.3 K and the difference spectra (lower panel) at 1.6 K/15.3 K and 6.6 K/15.3 K are also shown in Fig. 3. All the data are normalized to a secondary phase peak, which should not change intensity upon transition into the magnetically ordered state. Surprisingly, within experimental solution no additional diffraction intensity has been found for any of our examined Bragg peaks, nor have additional peaks been observed.

To estimate the magnetic moment that ought to be detectable in our experiment, magnetic...
Figure 3.
Neutron diffraction pattern of CePt$_3$B, taken at 1.6 (red), 6.6 (green) and 15.3 K (black). In the lower panels, the difference between the data at 1.6/6.6 K and the 15.3 K data are shown.

Table 1. Results of a refinement of powder neutron diffraction data on CePt$_3$B at $T = 15$ K, in comparison to x-ray powder diffraction at room temperature carried out by Sologub et al. [7]. Here, the lattice parameter $a$, $b$ and $c$ and the positional parameter $x$, $y$, $z$ are summarized.

|                  | 15.3 K          | Sologub et al. [7] |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| $a$ (Å)          | 3.9943(4)        | 4.0031(3)         |
| $b$ (Å)          | 3.9943(4)        | 4.0031(3)         |
| $c$ (Å)          | 5.0620(1)        | 5.0736(4)         |
| $R_{Bragg}$ (%)  | 6.2              | 4.8               |
| Ce               | 0 0 0            | 0 0 0             |
| Pt(1)            | 0 0.5 0.522(1)   | 0 0.5 0.5132(13)  |
| Pt(2)            | 0.5 0.5 0.131(3) | 0.5 0.5 0.1174(11)|
| B                | 0.5 0.5 0.713(8) | 0.5 0.5 0.688 (17)|

Structure simulations with magnetic moments of different size and arrangement have been performed. In particular, a ferromagnetic arrangement of the magnetic moments and an antiferromagnetic one with a doubling of the unit cell in $a$ direction have been assumed. These simulations indicate that a magnetic moment of 0.5 $\mu_B$ in the ferromagnetic and 0.2 $\mu_B$ in the antiferromagnetic case should be observable.

Since the neutron diffraction experiments did not deliver information about the magnetic
phases, zero field $\mu$SR measurements were carried out on the same sample. In these experiments a distinctive $\mu$SR oscillatory signal below the antiferromagnetic transition temperature $T_N$ is observed, clearly indicating the presence of static magnetic fields from long range magnetic order in the bulk of the sample (Fig. 4). In a next step, we determined the temperature dependence of the muon oscillation frequencies.

These zero field spectra have been analyzed using a sum of three precession signals associated with different muon sites in the lattice. Plotted is the highest frequency as a function of temperature, the other frequencies are proportional to it. The results are depicted in Fig. 2, together with the inverse susceptibility $\chi^{-1}$.

![Figure 4. Time dependence of the $\mu^+$ spin polarization of CePt$_3$B for temperatures $T = 1.6$ K (black), 6 K (red) and 9 K (green).](image)

Both transition temperatures $T_N$ and $T_C$ can also be identified in the $\mu$SR measurements. From Fig. 2 it is seen that $T_N$ denotes the temperature of onset of spontaneous muon precession, while at $T_C$ there is a change of slope of the temperature dependence of the muon oscillation frequency. The weak ferromagnetic behavior likely is formed by canting of magnetic moments of the antiferromagnetic structure of CePt$_3$B.

In conclusion, the structural properties, investigated by neutron diffraction experiments, are in good agreement with those reported in Sologub et al. [7]. Further, we have unsuccessfully attempted to identify scattering intensity in our neutron study upon transition into the magnetically ordered phases. However, our $\mu$SR experiments clearly show the existence of long range magnetic order in the bulk of our sample. Taken together, neutron diffraction and $\mu$SR experiments suggest that the magnetically ordered phases in CePt$_3$B carry magnetic moments of medium size, probably with an ordering vector different from the one in CePt$_3$Si.

Altogether, CePt$_3$B exhibits an antiferromagnetic and a weak ferromagnetic phase, with $T_N = 7.8$ K and $T_C \sim 6$ K. In view of the data presented here, a possible explanation for the weak ferromagnetic behavior below $T_C$ could be the canting of antiferromagnetic ordered spins with decreasing temperature. The DM interaction might be, most likely, the cause for this canting of magnetic moments in non-centro symmetric CePt$_3$B.

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