Raman and weak ferromagnetism in Eu$_2$CuO$_4$

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Abstract

We show that there is a subtle instability of the T' structure for the R$_2$CuO$_4$ (R = rare earth) compounds at the center of the R series with the boundary at R = Eu. Crystals grown in Pt crucibles and PbO flux show weak ferromagnetism (WF) and two temperature-dependent forbidden Raman peaks. Crystals grown in alumina crucibles and CuO flux do not show WF and the forbidden Raman peaks are much weaker. The WF and forbidden Raman peaks in Eu$_2$CuO$_4$ suggests that the instability of the T' structure is associated with O(1) displacement in the CuO$_2$ planes.

1. Introduction

The R$_2$M$_4$CuO$_8$ compounds of T'-type structure (R = rare-earths and M = Ce, Th) have been intensively studied since their discovery. For R = Pr, Nd, Sm, Eu and x ≤ 0.15, n-type superconductivity is achieved after appropriate thermal treatments in reducing atmospheres [1], but compounds with R = Gd to Tm are not superconductors for any doping concentration [2]. In R$_2$CuO$_4$, the Cu moments order antiferromagnetically (AF) below $T_N$ ≈ 240–280 K [3]. For heavier R these compounds show weak ferromagnetism (WF), with a boundary at R = Eu$^+$. For R = Tb, Dy, Ho, Er, Tm and Y the T' structure can be synthesized only under high pressure, with again a boundary for structural stability at the center of the R series [5]. The WF is due to a canting in the ab-plane of the Cu moments away from perfect AF alignment. Although WF is forbidden in the T' (14/mmm) structure, lattice distortions in the CuO$_2$ planes may allow WF. Lattice distortions in Gd$_2$CuO$_4$ and Tm$_2$CuO$_4$ were invoked to explain X-ray and Mössbauer data [6]. It was argued that a lateral displacement of the oxygen ions O(1) away from their symmetric positions in the CuO$_2$ planes gives rise to an antisymmetric Dzyaloshinsky-Moriya exchange interaction between the Cu moments [7, 8]. This distortion may also be responsible for the extra Raman lines seen in Nd$_{2-x}$Gd$_x$CuO$_4$ [9] and Gd$_2$CuO$_4$ [10, 11].

Here we give results of Raman and magnetization measurements in single crystals of Eu$_2$CuO$_4$, grown in Pt crucibles from PbO flux (hereafter, Pt/PbO) and in alumina crucibles from CuO flux (hereafter, Al$_2$O$_3$/CuO).

2. Experimental details

The crystals were of plate-like shape, with the e-axis perpendicular to the large face. They were grown from stoichiometric mixtures of the oxides, using PbO and CuO fluxes in Pt and alumina crucibles, respectively. The Pb content was less than 1% of the Cu content [12]. In Raman experiments, we used the cold finger of a closed-cycle Displex He refrigerator, the 514.5 nm line of an
argon laser, and a Jobin Yvon T6400 triple spectrometer with a CCD camera. A backscattering geometry was used throughout. Magnetic measurements were made with a Quantum Design DC SQUID magnetometer.

3. Results and analysis

A group-theoretical analysis predicts four Raman active modes in the tetragonal T' structure: $A_{1g} + B_{1g} + 2E_g$. Denoting by $z$ the direction parallel to the crystal $c$-axis, the modes appear at the configurations: $Y(ZZ)Y(A_{1g})$, $Y(ZX)Y(E_g)$ and $Z(XX)Z(B_{1g})$. In the Raman spectrum of the Pt/PbO sample, we identified Raman active modes at 229 cm$^{-1}$ ($A_{1g}$), 499 cm$^{-1}$ ($E_g$) and 324 cm$^{-1}$ ($B_{1g}$) (Fig. 1). As in Nd$_2$CuO$_4$ [13] and Pr$_2$CuO$_4$ [14], the low-frequency $E_g$ mode was not seen.

The peaks at 413 cm$^{-1}$ for XX polarization and 398 cm$^{-1}$ for XY polarization, which we label $B_{1g}^*$ and $B_{2g}^*$, respectively [10,11], do not correspond to any mode allowed in the T' structure. We tentatively attribute them to local modes associated with oxygen displacements in the CuO$_2$ planes [7,8]. The intensity of the $B_{1g}^*$ peak, relative to the $B_{1g}$ mode, is greater for samples grown in Pt/PbO than for those grown in Al$_2$O$_3$/CuO. The $B_{2g}^*$ peak was not seen in Al$_2$O$_3$/CuO samples (inset of Fig. 1).

The most striking result is the temperature dependence of the intensity of the anomalous peaks (Fig. 2). The intensity of the $B_{1g}$ mode was independent of temperature, so we used it to normalize the intensity of the $B_{1g}^*$ peak. In another set of measurements we observed the $B_{1g}$, $B_{1g}^*$, and $B_{2g}^*$ peaks simultaneously, by rotating the incoming polarization about 22° away from the X-axis without using analyzer. The intensities of the $B_{2g}^*$ and $B_{1g}^*$ had almost the same temperature dependence.

Magnetization in the $ab$-plane was measured at 100 K, after field cooling (FC) and zero-field cooling (ZFC) (Fig. 3). The sample grown in Pt/PbO showed hysteresis...
Eu$_2$CuO$_4$ ab-plane magnetization at $T = 100$ K for ZFC and ab-plane FC for (a) crystals grown in Pt/PbO and (b) crystals grown in Al$_2$O$_3$/CuO. The inset shows the FC hysteresis with $M_r \approx 18(3)$ emu/FU and $H_c \approx 40$ Oe.

4. Discussion

We measured slightly larger lattice parameters for samples grown in Pt/PbO than for samples grown in Al$_2$O$_3$/CuO. The difference may be due to contamination by Pt from the crucible, by Pb from the flux, or both. Pt atoms replacing Cu atoms in the lattice may cause displacement of O(1) atoms, thus being responsible for the WF and stronger anomalous Raman peaks found in samples grown in Pt/PbO. Owing to their large ionic radius, Pb atoms would probably substitute Eu atoms, and hence not contribute directly to the O(1) displacements.

Our Raman and WF results, along with other work [15], show that a subtle instability in the T' structure occurs at a value of about $a_0 \approx 3.905(5)$ Å for the ab-plane lattice parameter. Compounds with $a < a_0$ show WF, whereas those with $a > a_0$ may become superconductors when properly doped with Ce [15].

Since the anomalous Raman $B_{1g}$ peak (Fig. 2) is still seen above the Néel temperature ($T_N = 241$ K, determined by the appearance of WF), the distortions responsible for the $B_{1g}$ and $B_{2g}$ peaks may be associated with short-range magnetic ordering. Spin-dependent Raman scattering [16] may be responsible for the greater intensity of the $B_{1g}$ and $B_{2g}$ peaks at lower temperatures. However, lattice contractions, resulting in a larger number of these distortions, also could increase the intensity of these Raman peaks at low temperatures.

5. Conclusions

Our results suggest that the anomalous Raman peaks in Eu$_2$CuO$_4$ are related to the WF. That the anomalous peaks appear at about the same energy for all the R$_2$CuO$_4$ compounds showing WF, regardless of crucible and flux used, supports the assumption that these peaks are associated with local vibrations due to O(1) displacement. However, lattice dynamics calculations are needed to see if the anomalous Raman peaks can actually be associated with O(1) displacement in the CuO$_2$ planes.

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