

Chemical and Molecular Science

Abderrahman Atifi	Investigation of molecular and interfacial processes of the electrocatalytic conversion of nitrogen to ammonia under ambient conditions using rare earth element and room temperature ionic liquid-based system
Chris Zarzana	Intrinsic Bonding and Reactivity of Actinide Clusters
Corey Efaw	Development, Characterization, and Testing of Solid-State Electrolytes for Batteries
Robert Fox	Investigating the mobility of rare earth element ligand complexes in an electric field

Interrogating the Interfacial Processes during Ambient Nitrogen Reduction to Ammonia



PRESENTER:
Abderrahman Atifi

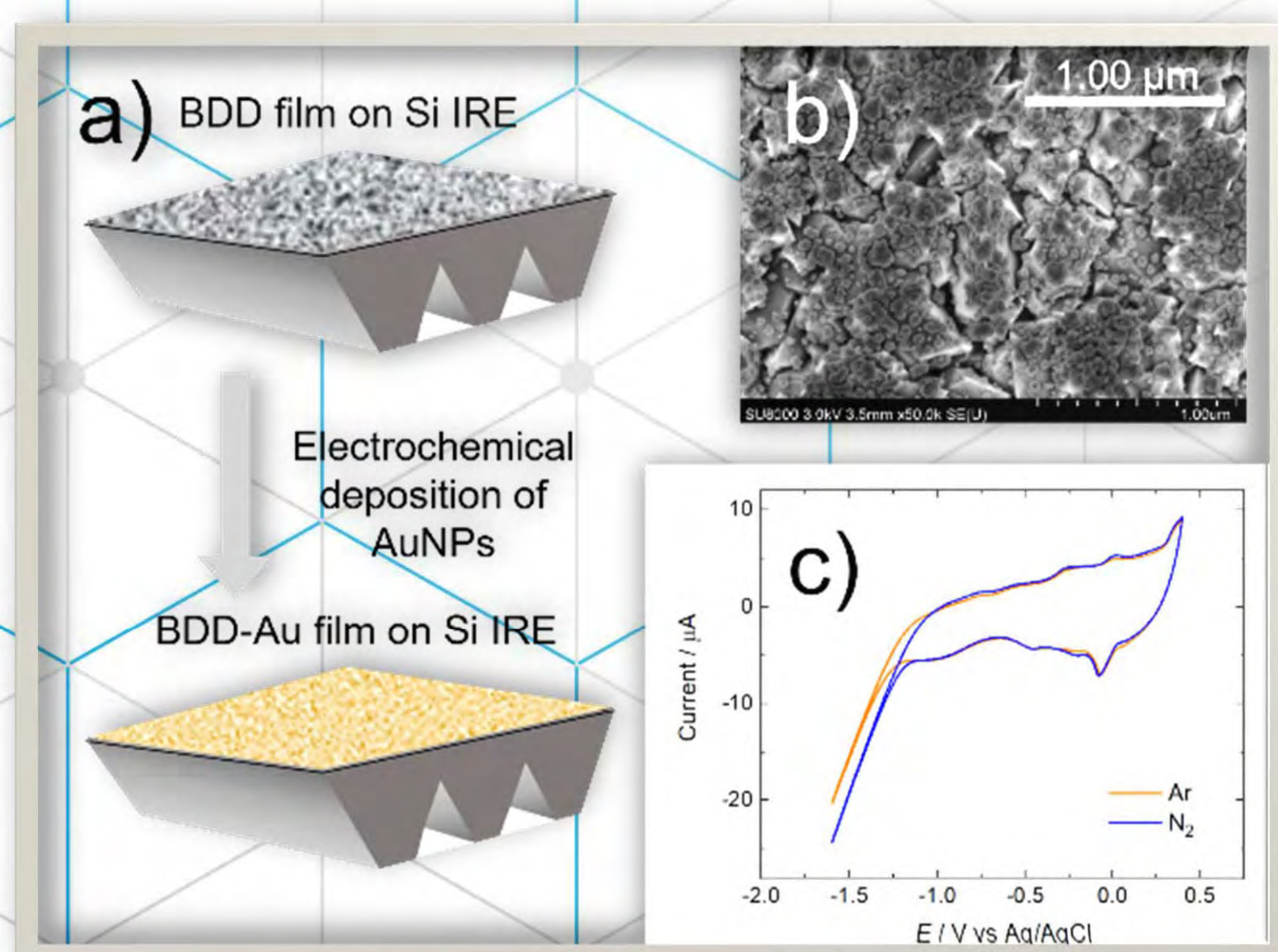
BACKGROUND: Ammonia is a highly desired hydrogen storage and energy carrier medium. Ambient electrochemical conversion of nitrogen to ammonia ($e\text{-N}_2/\text{NH}_3$) is a sustainable alternative to the industrial Haber-Bosch, an energy-intensive and non environmental process. Due to low efficiency and production yield, probing the interfacial processes under ambient $e\text{-N}_2/\text{NH}_3$ is a major challenge.

METHODS

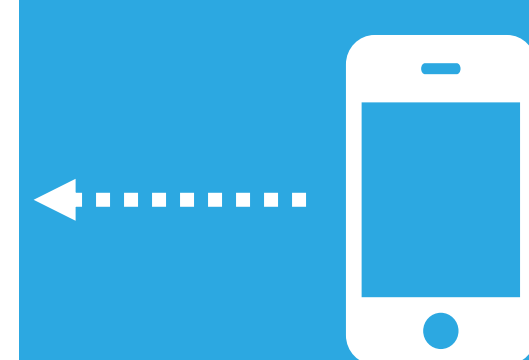
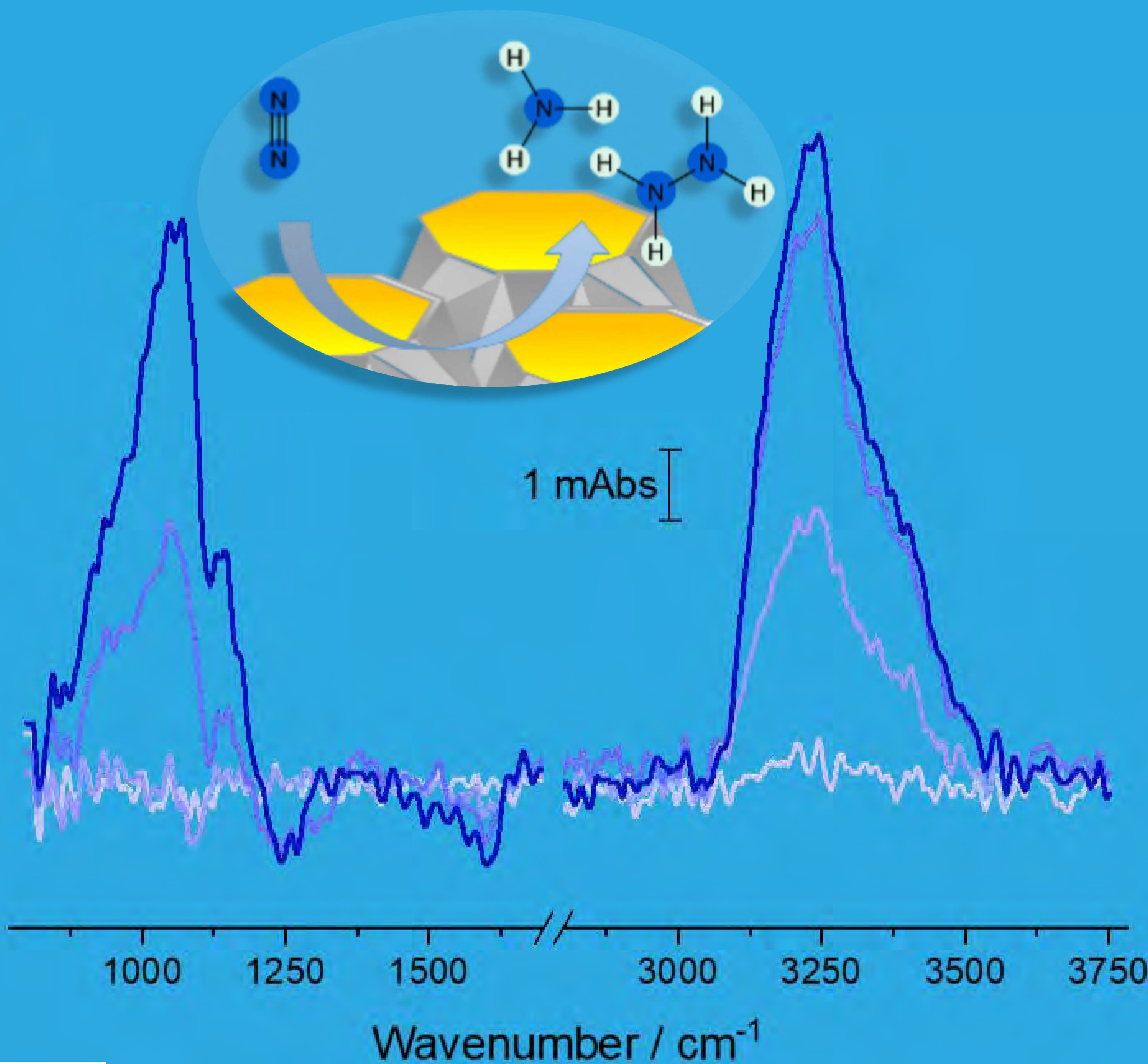
1. Spectroscopic and DFT study of $e\text{-N}_2/\text{NH}_3$
2. Using Attenuated Total Reflection Surface Enhanced Infrared Absorption Spectroscopy

RESULTS

- Conductive BDD features an extended mid-IR and no degradation under electrolysis
- Direct spectroscopic evidence is provided for N_2 reduction to NH_3 and hydrazine



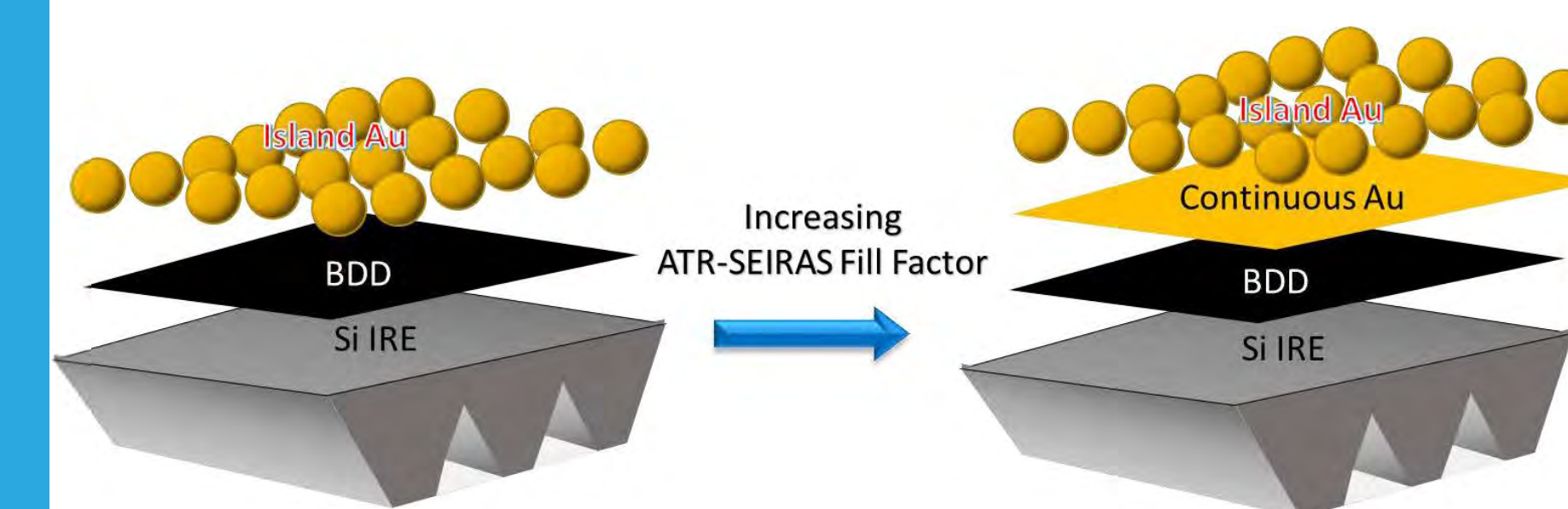
Metal-modified boron-doped diamond with continuous substrate layers provide new opportunities to deploy surface enhanced spectroscopy for interfacial studies under harsh electrocatalytic nitrogen reduction to ammonia conditions



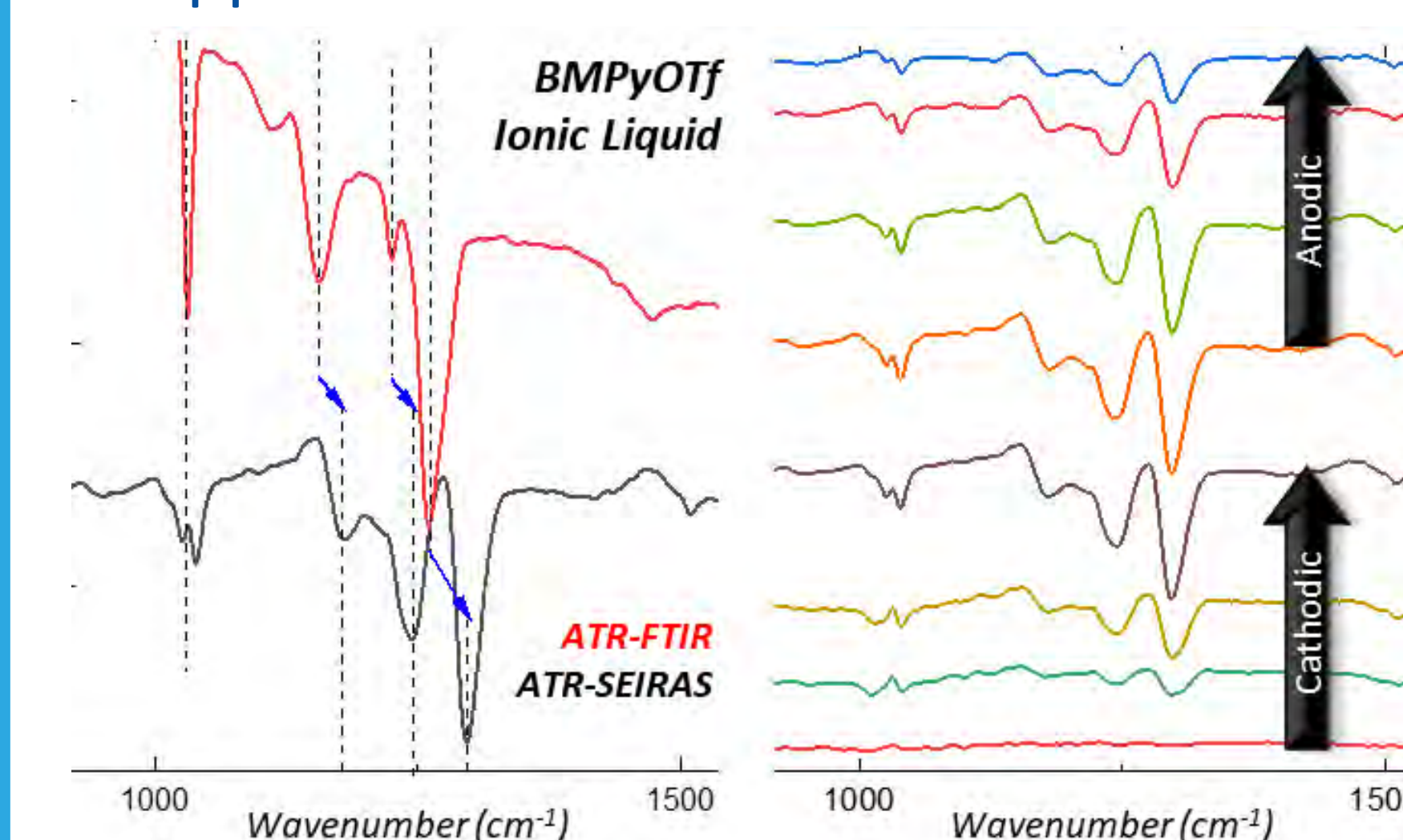
Download the **full paper**

Analytical Chemistry **2023**, 95, 28, 10476–10480

Ionic Liquid Interface under $e\text{-N}_2/\text{NH}_3$

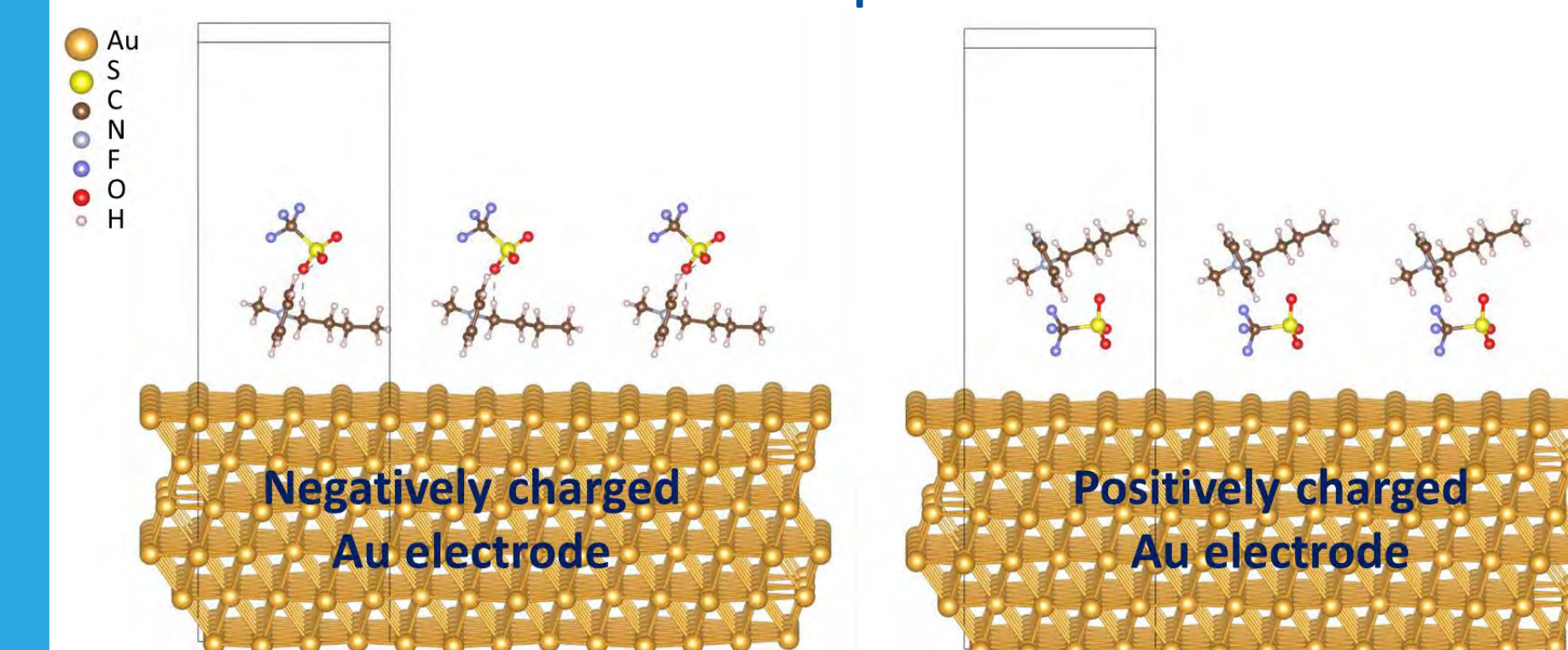


- Continuous Au is key to probe IL interface
- Ionic liquid (IL) is reversibly re-structured under selected potential window
- Irreversible IL interfacial changes under harsh potential conditions may lead to a passivating interface and $e\text{-N}_2/\text{NH}_3$ suppression



DFT/VASP Calculations

- The IL microstructures at charged Au electrode demonstrate that the applied voltage alters the interfacial arrangement of IL ions
- Fluctuations in the chemical environment at the interface are expected to influence the electrochemical process



O. Clarke, A. Rowley, R. Heft, E. Engmann, M. Li, K. Sharmistha, R. Fox, I. Burgess and A. Atifi*

*Contact: abderrahman.atifi@inl.gov

Project Number: 22A1059-040FP

LRS Number: INL/EXP-23-74221

Intrinsic Bonding and Reactivity of Actinide Clusters

PRESENTER: Christopher Zarzana

BACKGROUND: The purpose of this project is to develop new capability to study transuranic elements, increasing our understanding of chemical bond formation at the far edges of the periodic table. This is critical for solving technical challenges such as development of advanced nuclear fuel cycles and efficient rare earth separations, as well as a broader understanding of bonding across the entire periodic table.

RESULTS

- Established the capability at INL to study gas-phase complexes containing transuranic atoms.
- One of only three instruments in the world
- Spectra collected using approximately 500 ng (~0.2 μCi) of ^{243}Am . We believe we can cut that amount down by at least a factor of 10, decreasing the radiolytic hazards and expanding the envelope of transuranics that can be investigated.

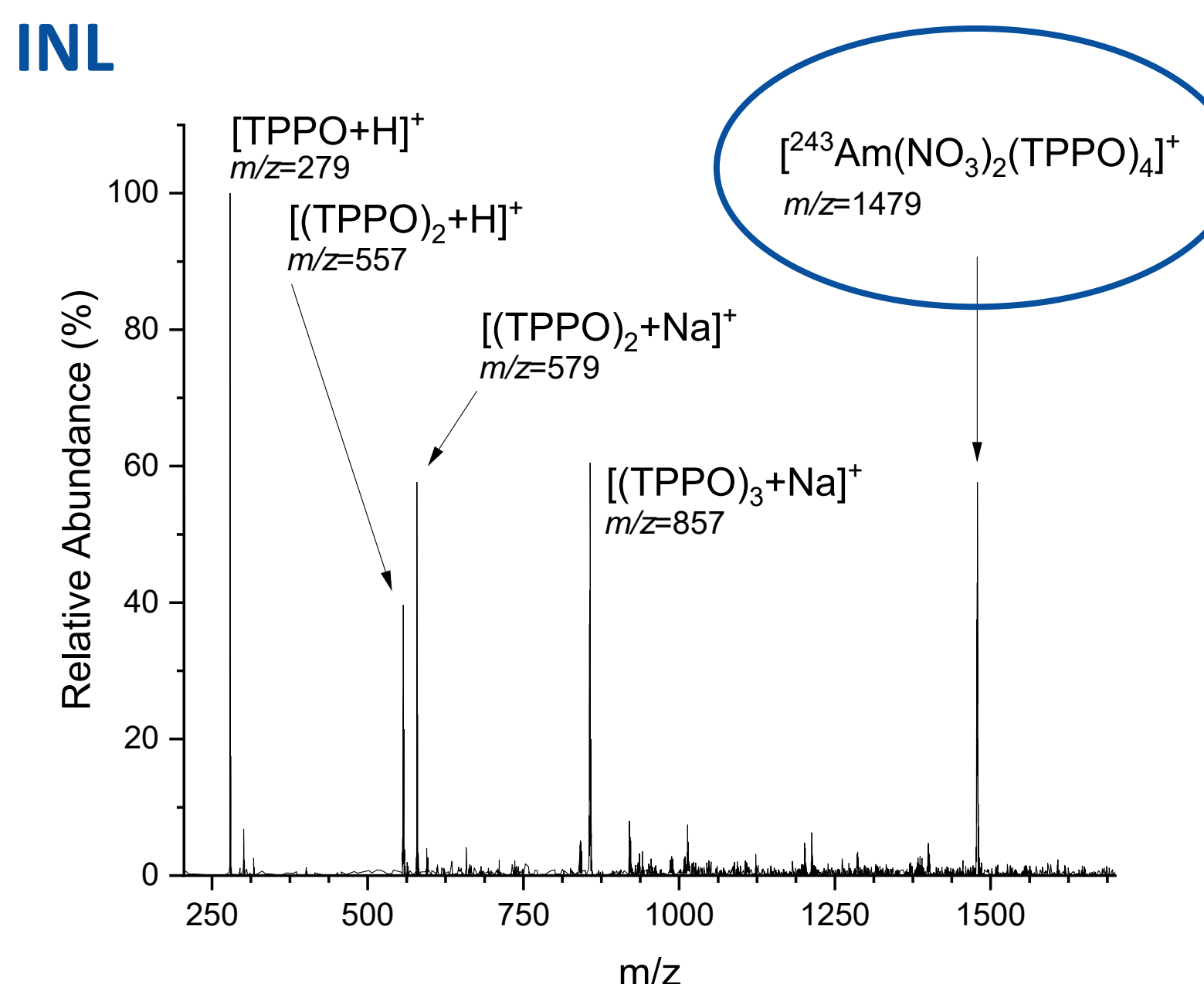
New capability at Idaho National Laboratory for studying transuranic elements



Approach:

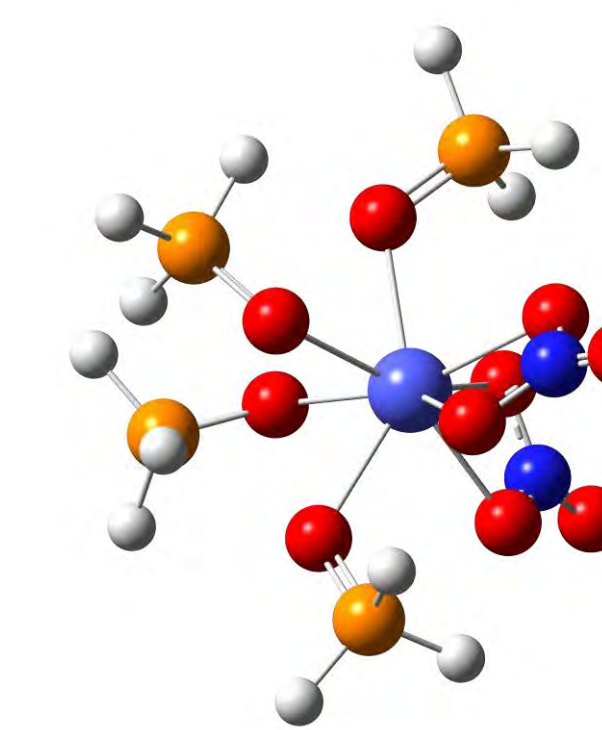
- Atmospheric pressure ionization mass spectrometry can form clusters containing actinide atoms from extremely small quantities of radioactive material
- Metal-ligand interaction is probed in the gas phase, revealing intrinsic behavior

First spectra of transuranic cluster ions at INL



TPPO=triphenylphosphine oxide

Quantum chemistry calculations are underway to understand electronic structure



Zarzana, Christopher; Pilgrim, Corey; Kim, JungSoo; Hodges, Brittany

Project Number: 21A1057-017FP

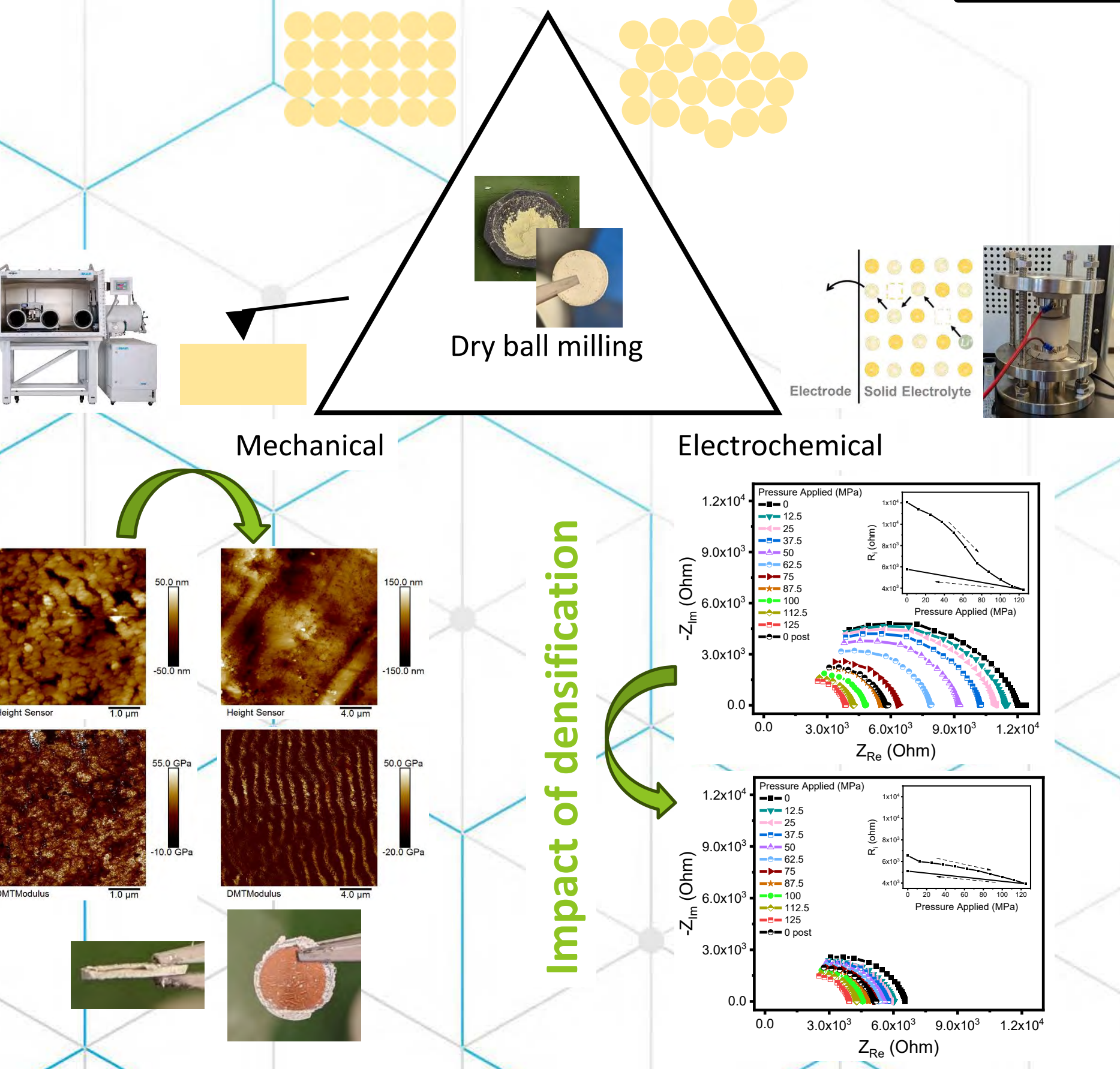
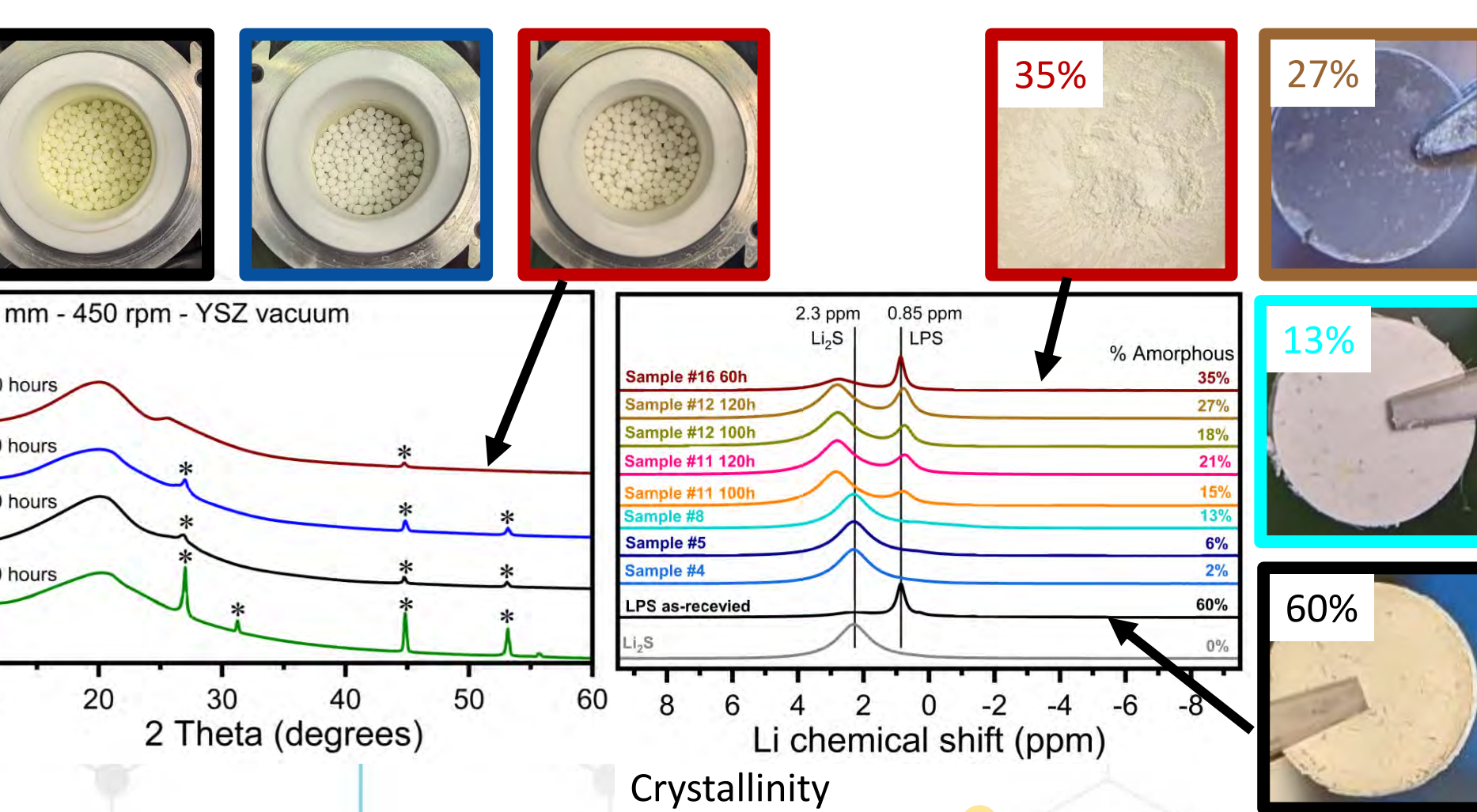
LRS Number: INL/EXP-23-74184

Title: Development, Characterization, and Testing of Solid-State Electrolytes for Batteries



Presenter:
Corey Efaw

BACKGROUND: Batteries are needed to support the decarbonization movement, especially in the transportation sector (16.2% of all GHG emissions).¹ Lithium metal, solid-state batteries, could address many of the barriers seen in traditional Li-ion, liquid battery chemistries. In this work, *sulfide-based solid-state electrolytes* are synthesized through *dry ball-milling* and examined through various forms of characterization, to better understand the impact of synthesis parameters on make-up and performance.

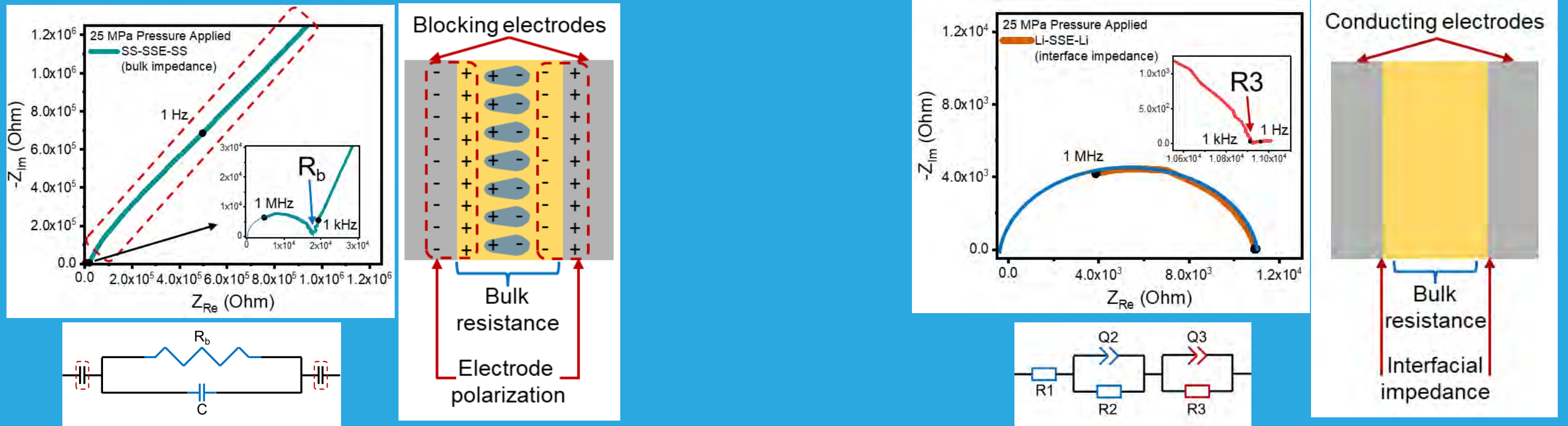


Literature is inconsistent to provide sufficient information on dry ball milling of solid-state electrolytes.

DOI		Year		mol ratio Li ₂ S:P ₂ S ₅		Total active mass (g)		Material		Size(s)		Appx. Mass (g)		Count		Media: active (g/g)		Material		Size (mL)		RPM		Time (hr)		Milling Interval		Hand Milling		Jar Cleaning		Amorphous vs. Crystalline		Notes on Water Prevention	
10.1111/j.1151-2916.2001.tb00685.x		2001		75:25		0.5-1		Alumina		10 mm		20		10		10-20		Alumina		45		370		20		Continuous		Y before		X		Amorphous		Milling in a glovebox	
10.1016/j.elecom.2009.07.028		2009		70-80% Li ₂ S		1		ZrO ₂		12 & 15 mm		15		1 each		X		ZrO ₂		vial (Spex)		X		20		Continuous		X		X		Glass		Milling in a glovebox	
10.1016/j.elecom.2009.07.028		2009		70-80% Li ₂ S		1		ZrO ₂		12 & 15 mm		15		1 each		X		ZrO ₂		vial (Spex)		X		20		30 min ON, 30 min OFF		X		X		Glass		Milling in a glovebox	
10.1039/c0jm01090a		2011		80:20		X		ZrO ₂		5 mm		60		160		X		ZrO ₂		45		500		20		X		X		X		"Almost amorphous"		X	
10.1016/j.ssi.2010.10.013		2011		67-80% Li ₂ S		X		ZrO ₂		4 mm		120		500		X		ZrO ₂		45		510		8-24		X		X		X		Glass & glass-ceramic		Dry Ar atmosphere	
10.1038/srep02261		2013		75:25		X		ZrO ₂		4 mm		120		500		X		ZrO ₂		45		510		10		X		Y before		X		Amorphous		Dry Ar atmosphere	
10.1016/j.jpowsour.2015.10.040		2015		75:25		1		ZrO ₂		4 mm		120		500		X		ZrO ₂		45		510		45		X		X		X		Unconfirmed		X	
10.1038/energy.2016.30		2016		77:23		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		120		X		X		X		Crystalline		Milling in a glovebox	
10.1038/srep21302		2016		67-75% Li ₂ S		X		ZrO ₂		10 mm		32		10		X		ZrO ₂		45		370		80		X		X		X		Mixture		Dry Ar atmosphere	
10.1016/j.ssi.2015.11.034		2016		70:30		X		ZrO ₂		3 mm		X		X		X		X		ZrO ₂		80		510		144		10 min ON, 20 min OFF		Y, every 8h		X		Amorphous below 75mol% Li ₂ S	
10.1039/c7ta06067j		2017		50-75% Li ₂ S		5		ZrO ₂		3 mm		110		X		22		ZrO ₂		45		510		100		5 min ON, 15 min OFF		X		X		Amorphous		Milling in a glovebox	
10.1149/2.1831712jes		2017		75:25		X		ZrO ₂		4 mm		120		500		X		ZrO ₂		45		510		10		X		X		X		Glassy		X	
10.1038/s41467-018-04762-z		2018		77.5:22.5		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		Stainless Steel		500		X		20		X		X		X		X	
10.1021/acs.jpcc.9b01425		2019		75:25		4		ZrO ₂		3 mm		8.5		X		25		ZrO ₂		45		510		117		5 min ON, 15 min OFF		X		X		Amorphous		Dry Ar atmosphere	
10.1002/aenm.202101111		2021		75:25		X		ZrO ₂		10 mm		36		12		X		ZrO ₂		X		510		20		Y before		X		X		Crystalline		Sealed with parafilm & tape	
10.1039/d1ta02754a		2021		75:25		2.5-5.2		ZrO ₂		5 or 10 mm		32-64		X		6-16		ZrO ₂		45		350-510		15-80		0-5 min OFF/hr		Varied		Varied		Amorphous		Screw-top clamp for sealing	
10.1021/acsaem.0c02771		2021		75:25		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		ZrO ₂		45		600		10		X		X		X		Milling in a glovebox	
This work		22-23		75:25		2		YSZ		1.2-10 mm		20-70		varied		8-24		YSZ or Teflon		45-500		370-850		10-120		Varied		Varied		Varied		Commonly crystalline		Tape or screw-top clamp	

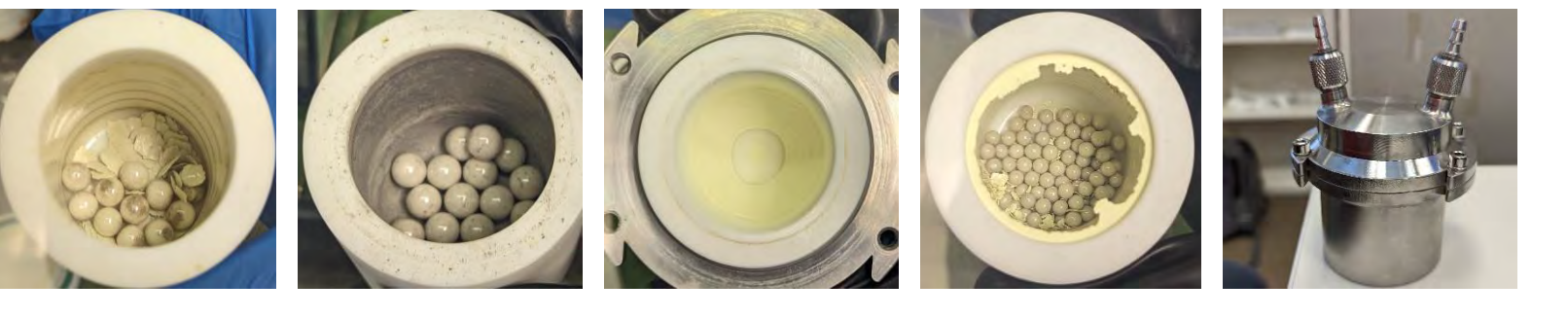
METHODS:

XRD & NMR – XRD provides a go/no-go for crystalline/amorphous presence. NMR is more quantitative.²
Pelletization – 4 metric ton loading done for multiple samples. As-received LPS resulted in lower density (~40±2%), in-house prepared LPS (highly crystalline) samples had much higher density upon pelletization (>60%).
Mechanical testing (AFM – QNM) – Only as-received sample analyzed, both after pelletization and after testing at 1 metric ton load in a symmetric test with SS. Material density changed after operation at high pressure, but mechanical properties did not vary in range.
Electrochemical testing – Only as-received samples operated in the non-resistive regime. Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) was used to measure SSE Bulk conductivity (R_b) with an ion-blocking electrodes (SS), while interfacial charge transfer ($R3$) is characterized with ion-conducting electrodes (Li). Cycling was run in a constant-current design, within a ± 1V range. EIS was measured after each cycle. Artificial solid-electrolyte interphases (SEIs) were tested against pure Li to observe interfacial charge transfer.

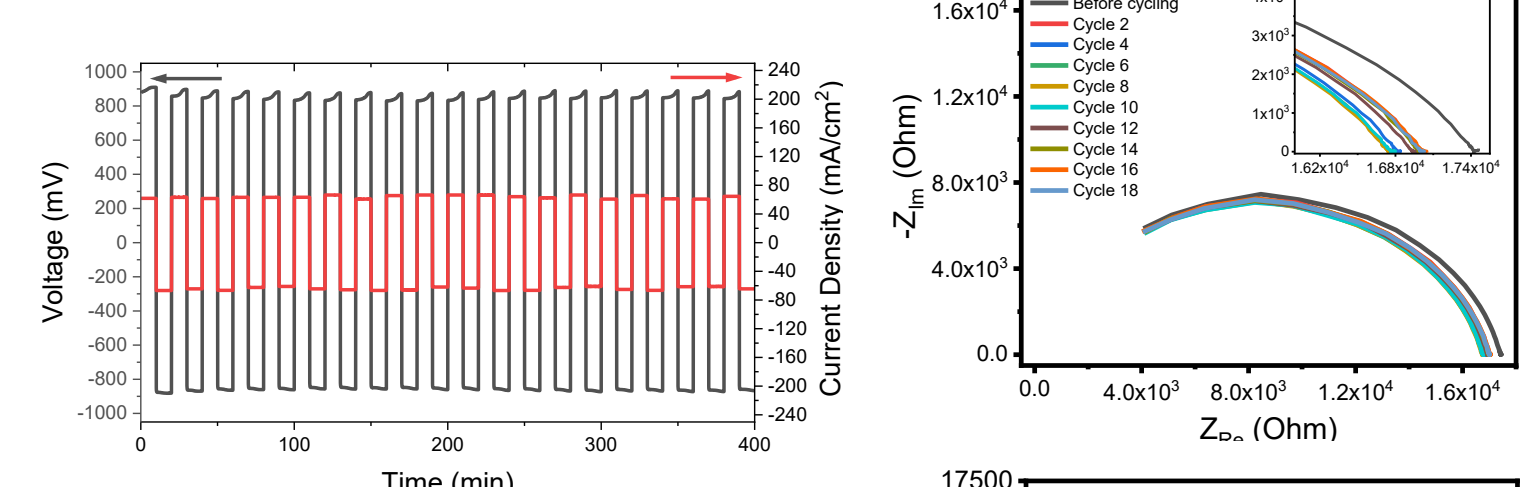


OTHER FINDINGS:

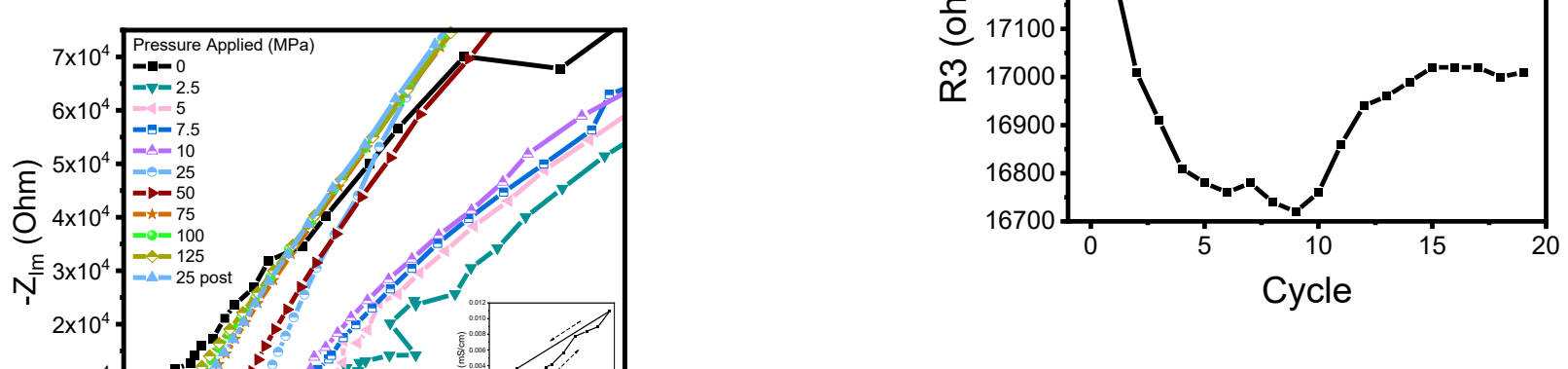
- Milling parameters to consider:
- Milling rate**
 - 370-540 rpm shows no clear trends
 - Time**
 - Extending time increases amorphous behavior
 - Extending time also increases "burn effect"
 - Media**
 - Benefit to use same media as container (YSZ)
 - Size doesn't reveal any trends...particle size TBD
 - Number of media has no trends
 - Container**
 - Use of an isolation container is key to achieve higher amorphous content with less time milling
 - Small jar + large media = greater edge adhesion
 - Cleaning**
 - DMF cleaning + ethanol/DI rinse = reduced adhesion to edges & less flakes
 - Hand milling improves uniform powder size



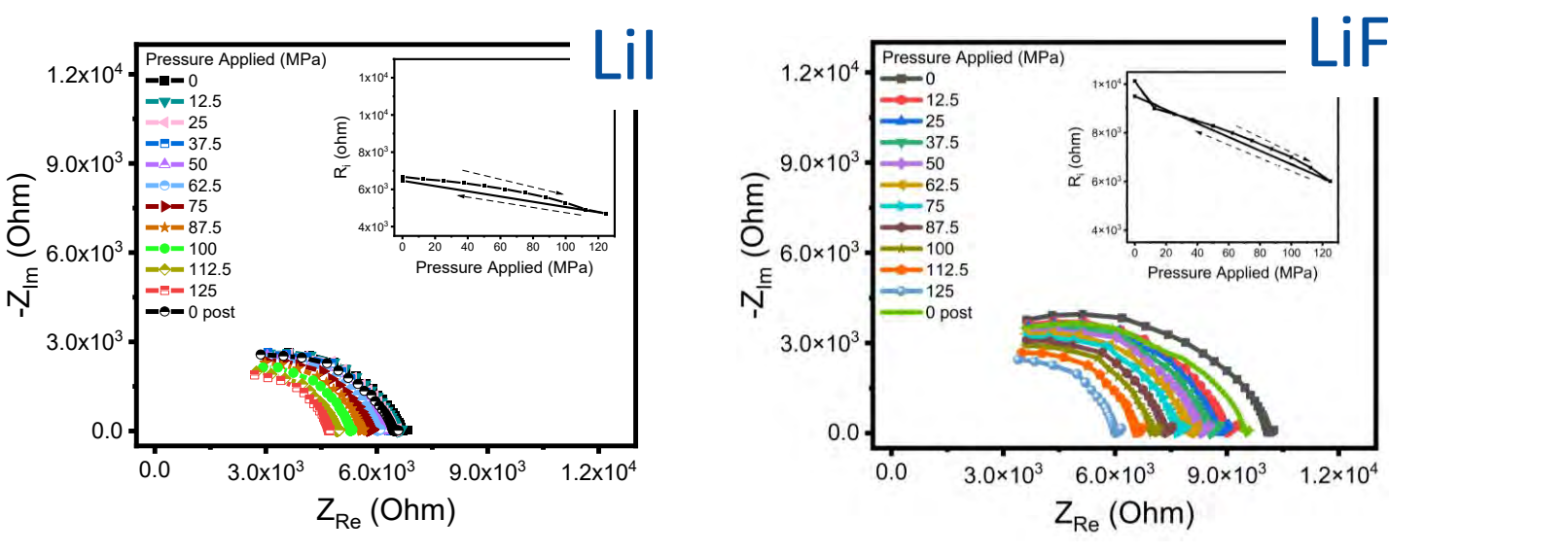
Cycle testing



Bulk electrolyte testing



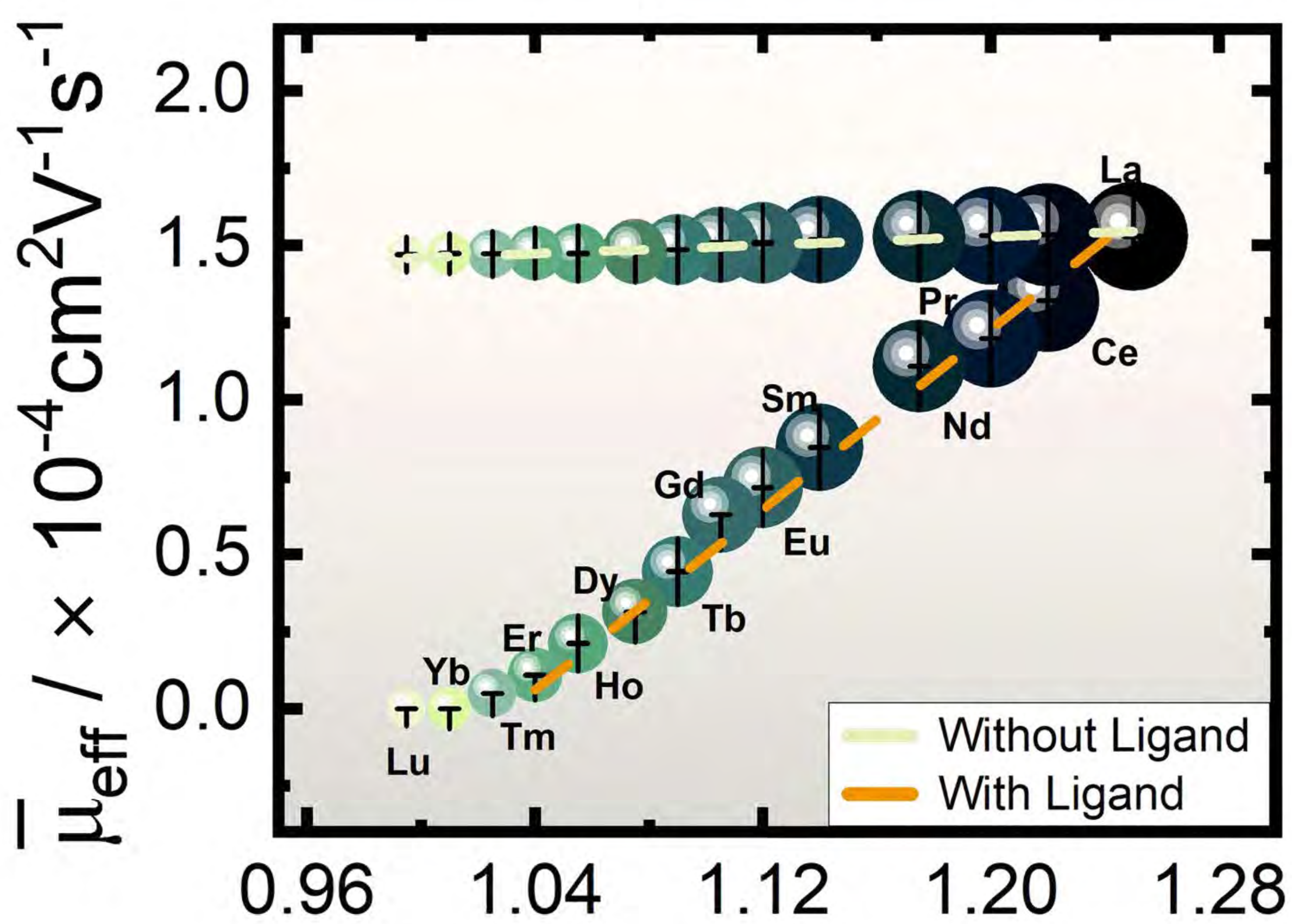
Artificial Solid-electrolyte interphase (SEI) testing



¹OurWorldInData.org
²Mirmira et al, doi: 10.1039/d1ta02754a

Acknowledgments: Corey Pilgrim, Pete Barnes, Bor-Rong Chen, Bumjun Park, Bin Li, Eric Dufek, Josh Gomez, Dong Ding (INL), Paul Davis, Elton Graugnard, JD Hues (Boise State)

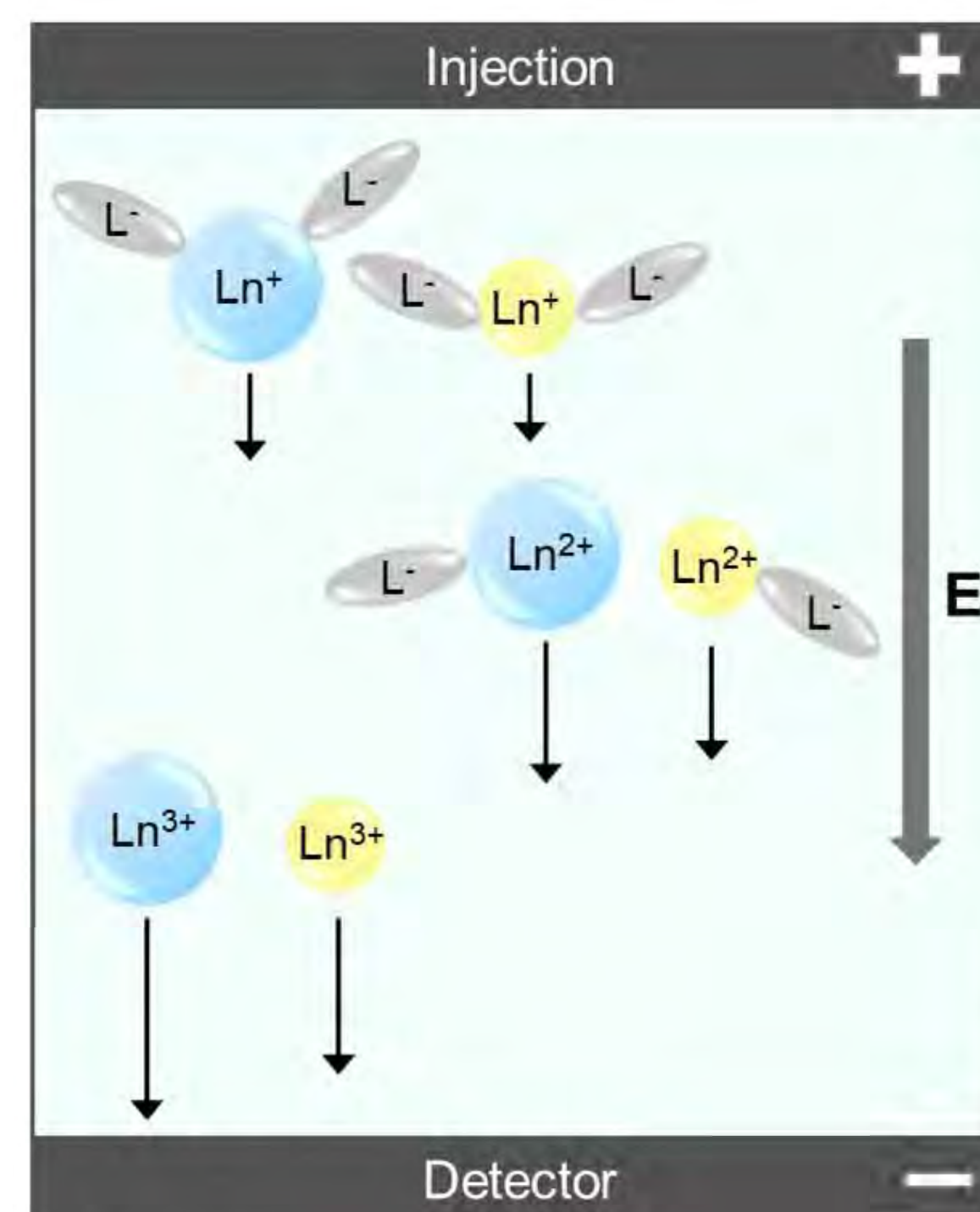
Transport properties of lanthanides strongly influenced by ligand addition



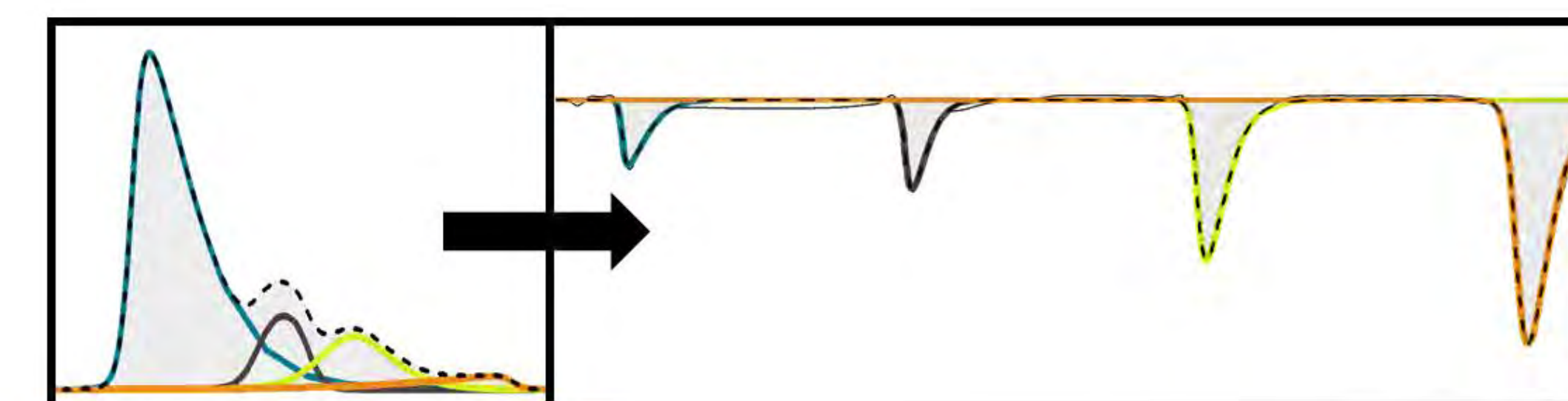
Chloe Tolbert, Swapnil Bamane, Gorakh Pawar, Mary Case, Caleb Hill, Robert Fox

Method

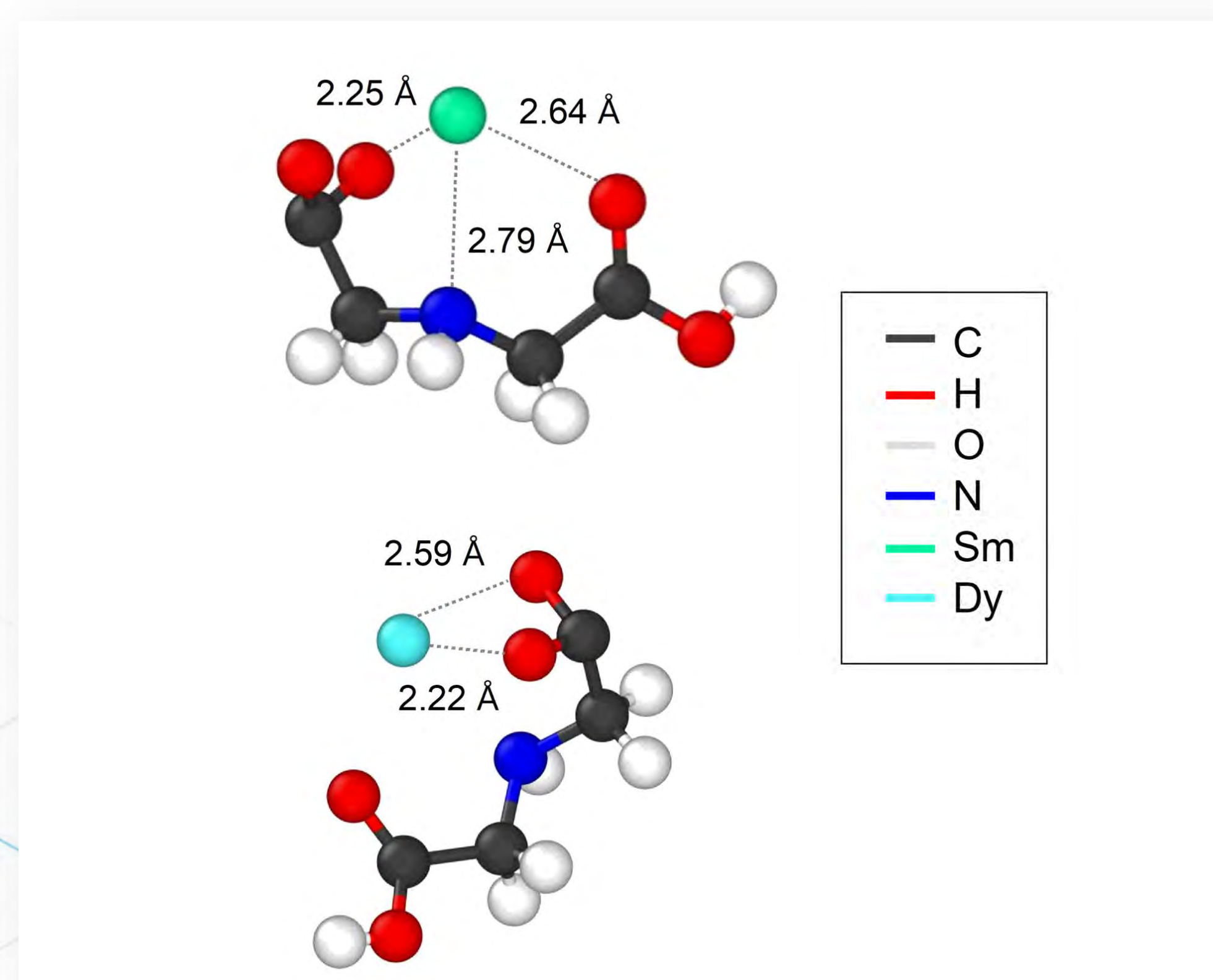
Ligands **alter** the chemical environment of lanthanides.



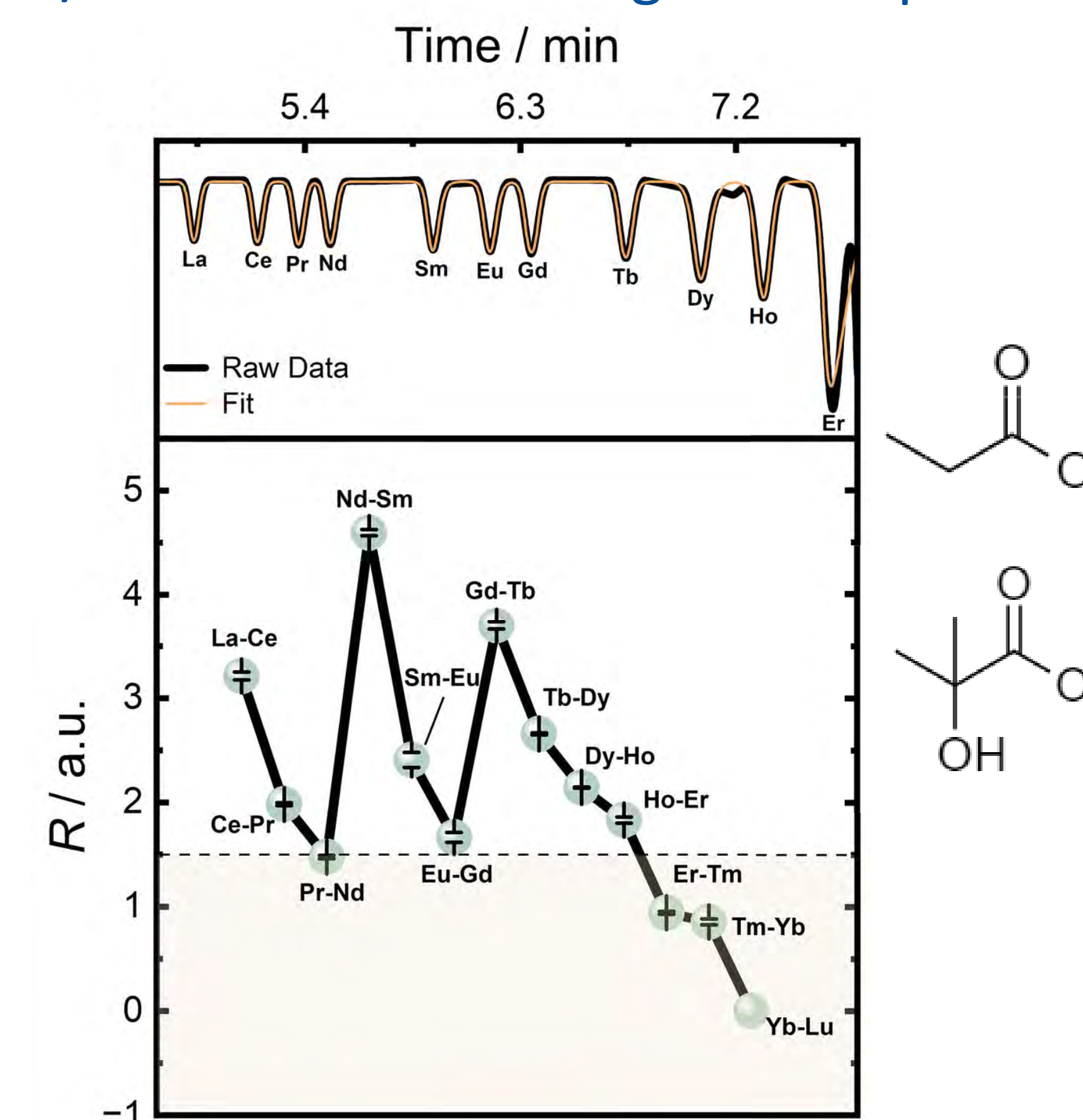
Changes in transport properties allow for **enhanced** separations!



Preferential coordination is responsible for enhanced light/heavy separations.



Baseline resolution achieved between 10/13 lanthanides *via* ligand competition.



Condensed Matter Physics and Materials Science

Kaustubh Bawane	Phase Stability of Yttrium-Titanium Oxides
Kris Gofryk	Electronic and transport properties of single-crystalline neptunium telluride
Michael Benson	Investigation of stability in the uranium-zirconium intermetallic compound
Mukesh Bachhav	Thermal diffusivity measurement in nano-crystalline oxides using laser assisted atom probe tomography
Shuxiang Zhou	Point defects in uranium dioxide by density functional theory Hubbard model: defect local environment and occupation matrix control

Phase Stability of Yttrium Titanium Oxides

Xiaofei Pu, Eitan Hershkovitz, Fidelma DiLemma, **Kaustubh Bawane**, Honggyu Kim, Lingfeng He

Background

YTO – a critical nuclear material

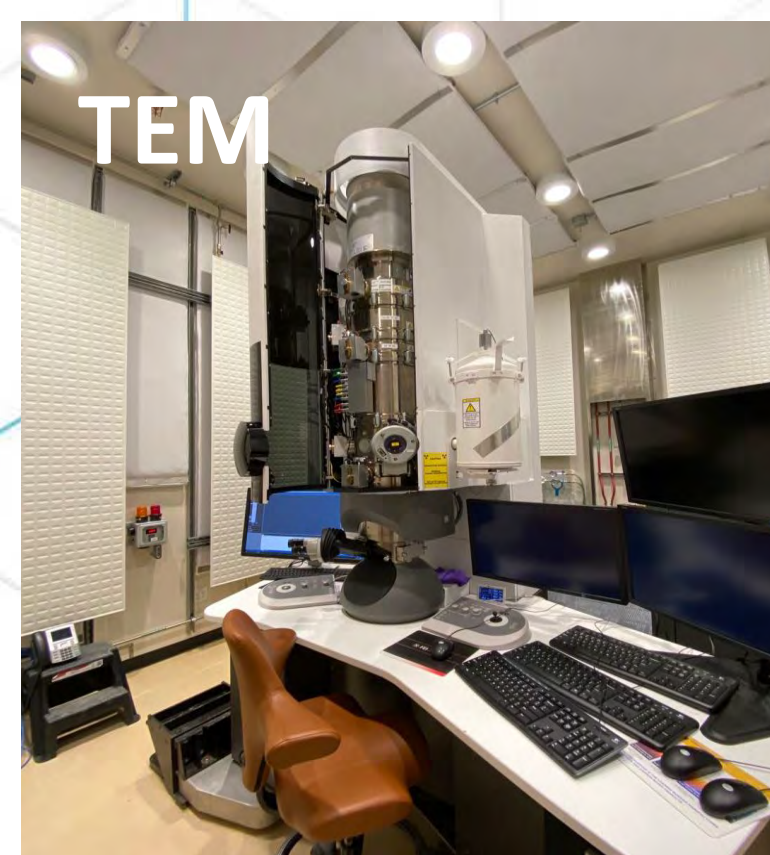
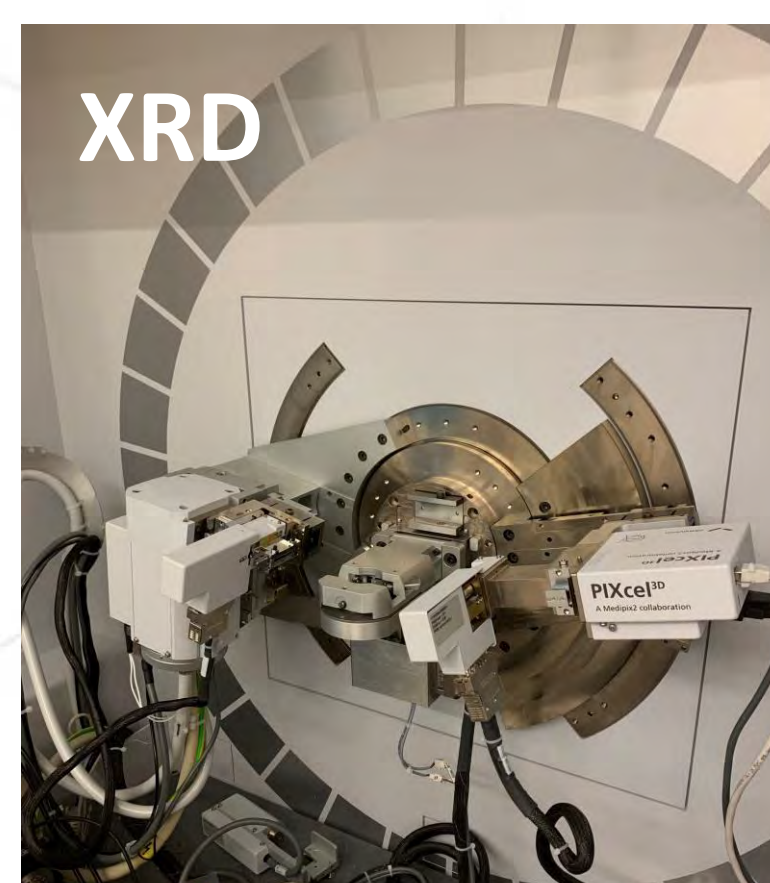
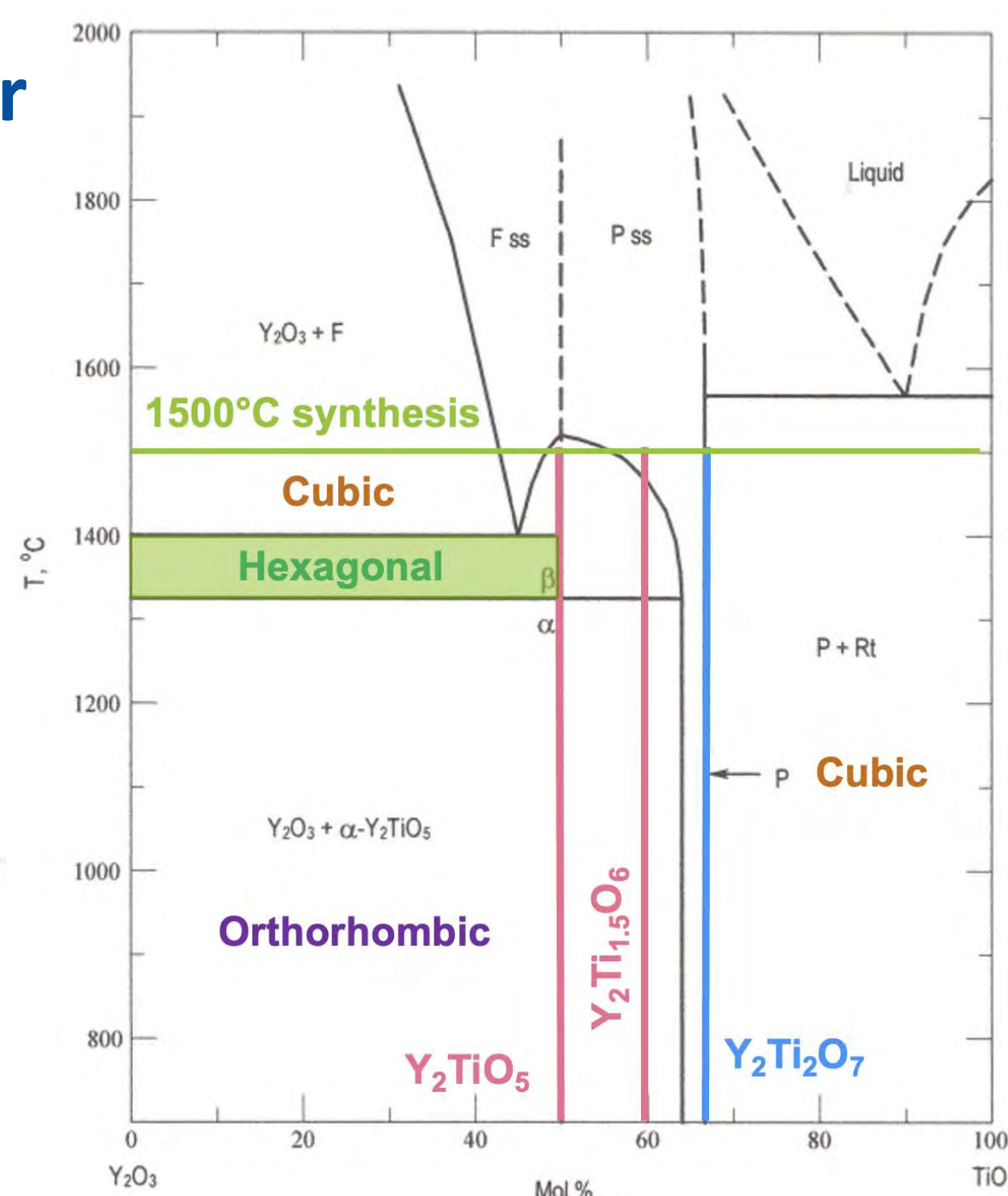
- ❖ Nanoparticles in ODS steels
- ❖ Rare-earth titanate pyrochlore for nuclear waste immobilization
- ❖ Important to study phase transitions in extreme conditions

Methods

Materials (powder and bulk)
 Y_2TiO_5 , $Y_2Ti_{1.5}O_6$, $Y_2Ti_2O_7$

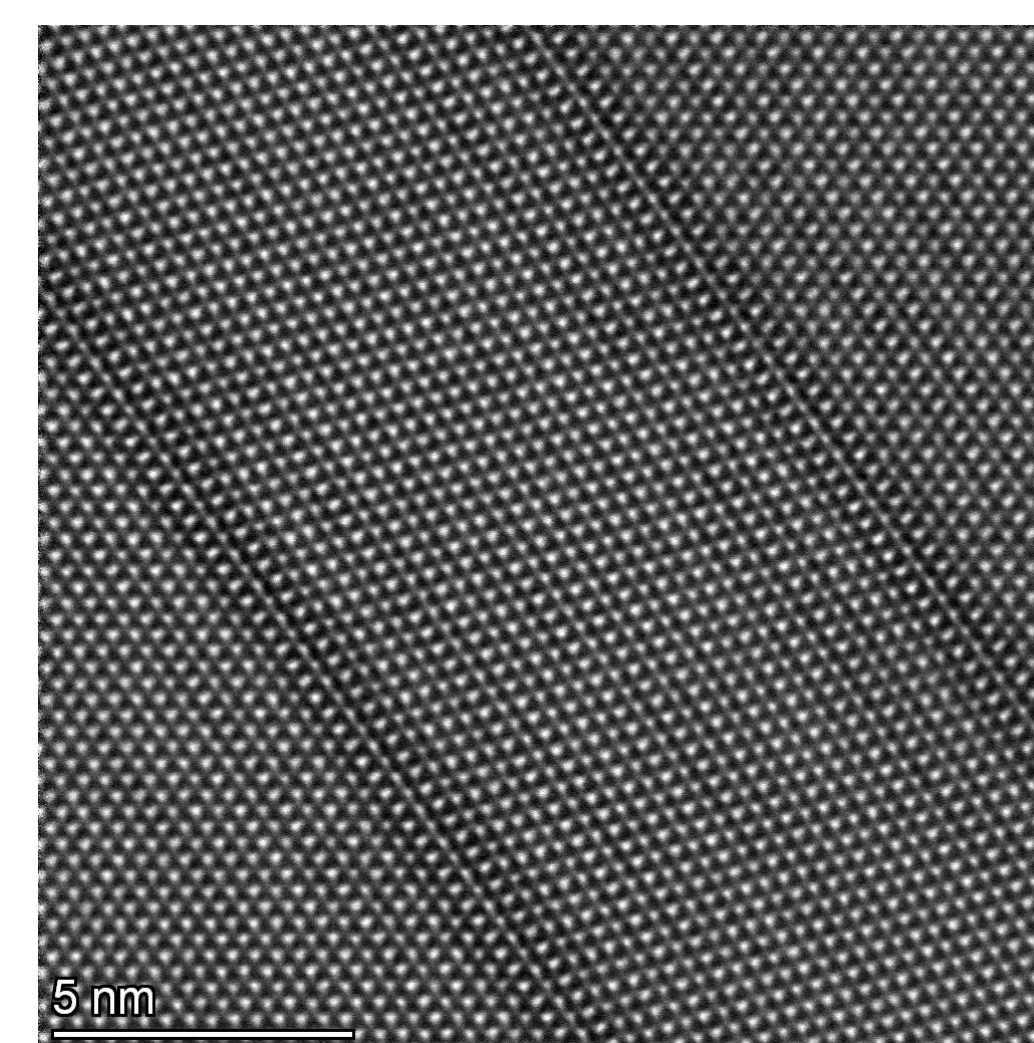
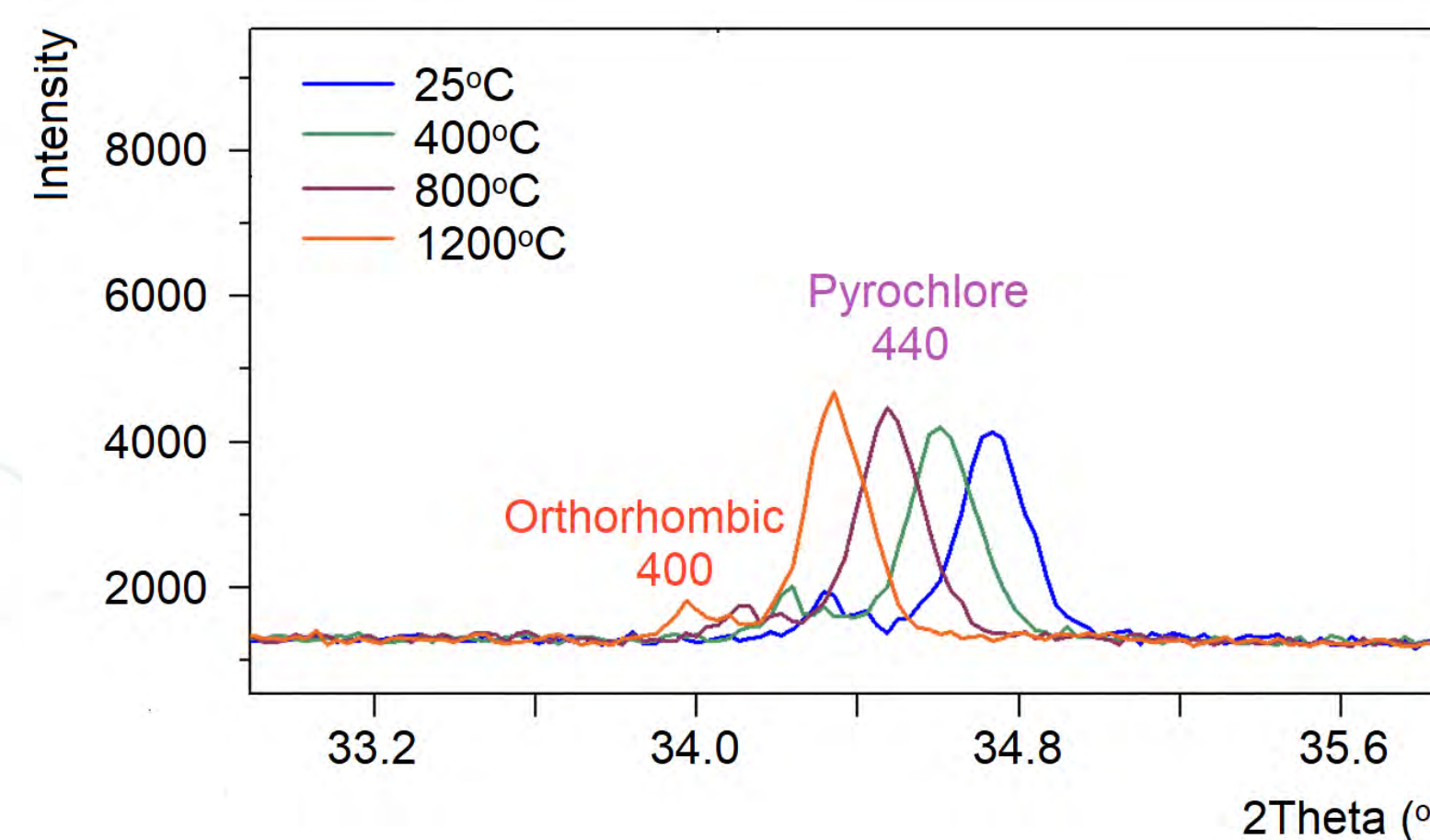
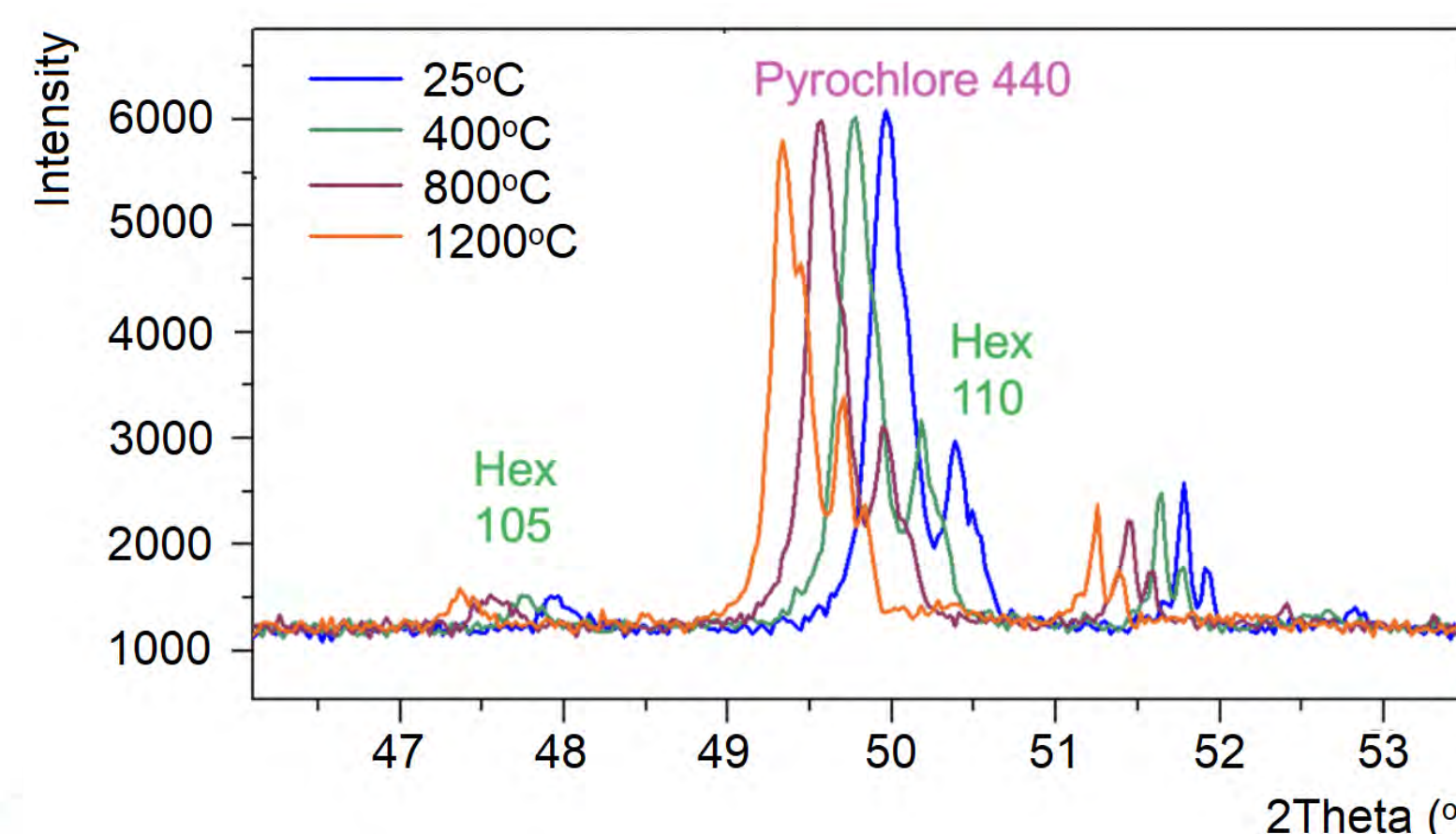
In-situ high-temperature XRD up to 1200°C to study phase and microstrain evolution

Ex-situ and In-situ TEM up to 1200°C – atomic scale imaging of phases and defects

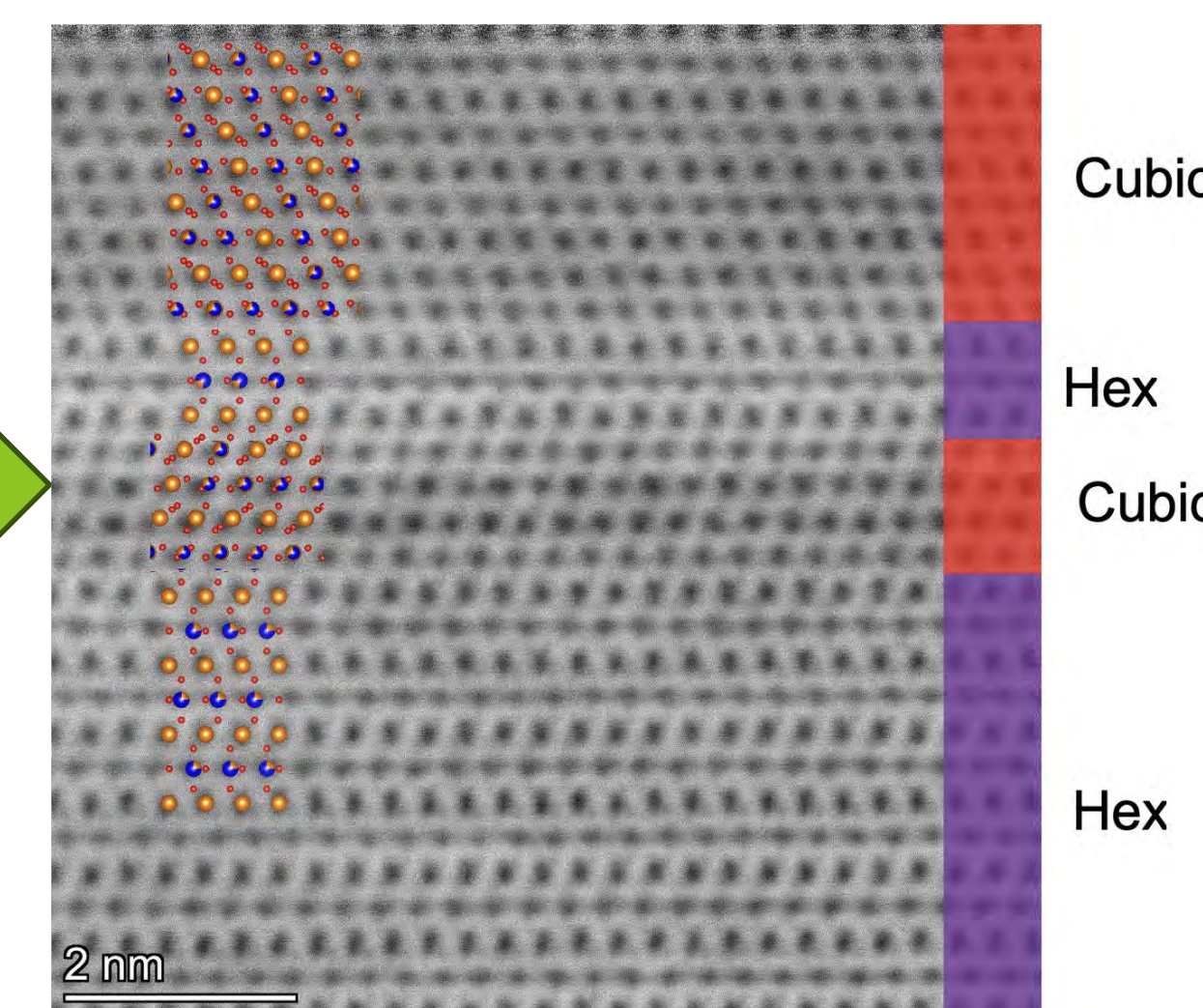


We studied phases in YTO using in-situ XRD and TEM techniques. TEM images of hexagonal phase in Y_2TiO_5 were recorded for the first time!

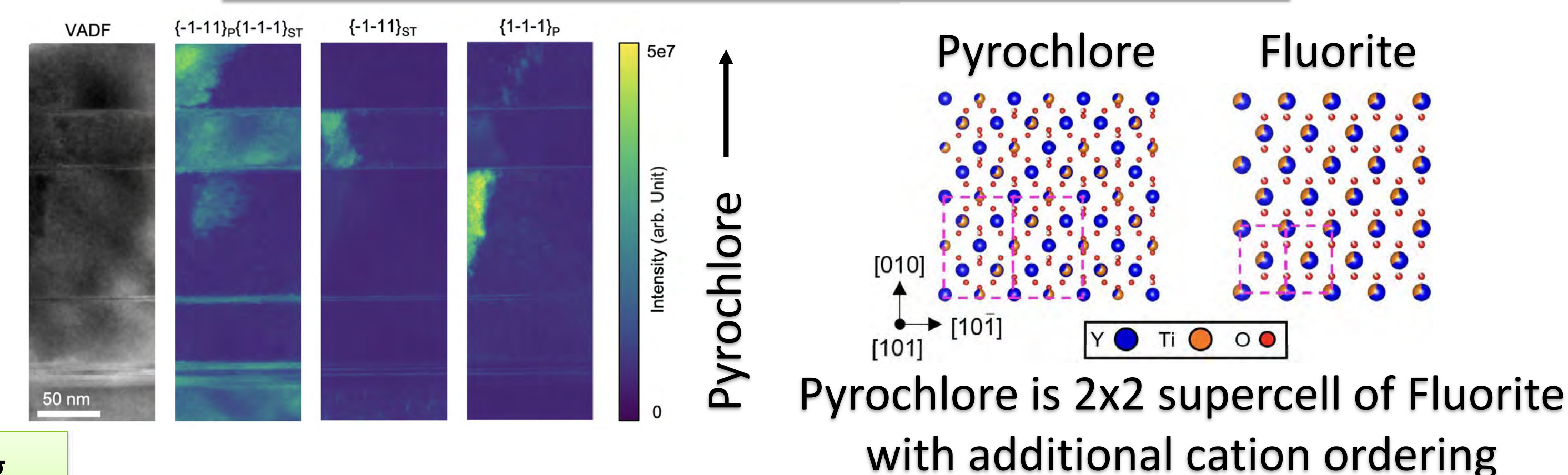
In-situ heating of Y_2TiO_5 in XRD - No phase transition up to 1200°C



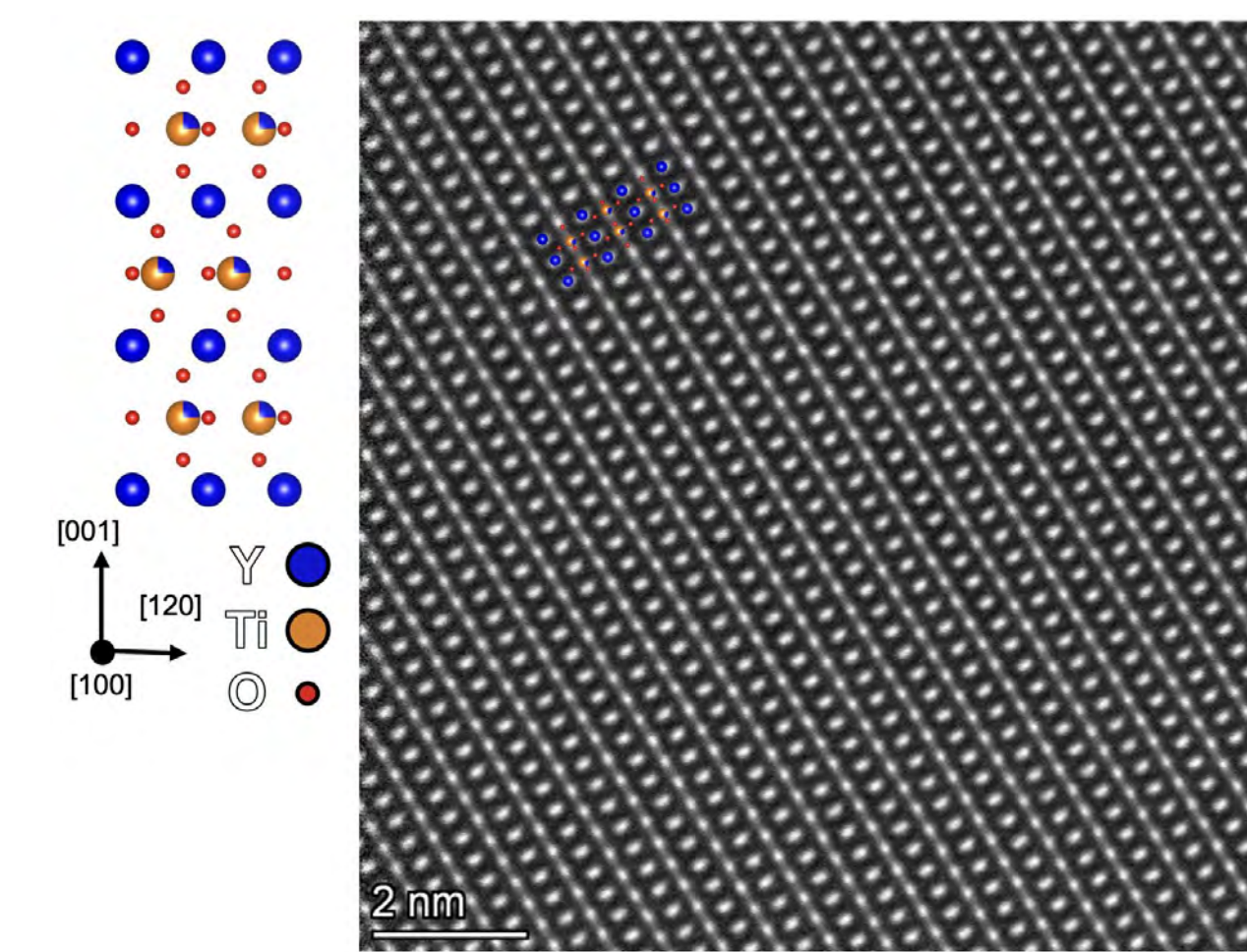
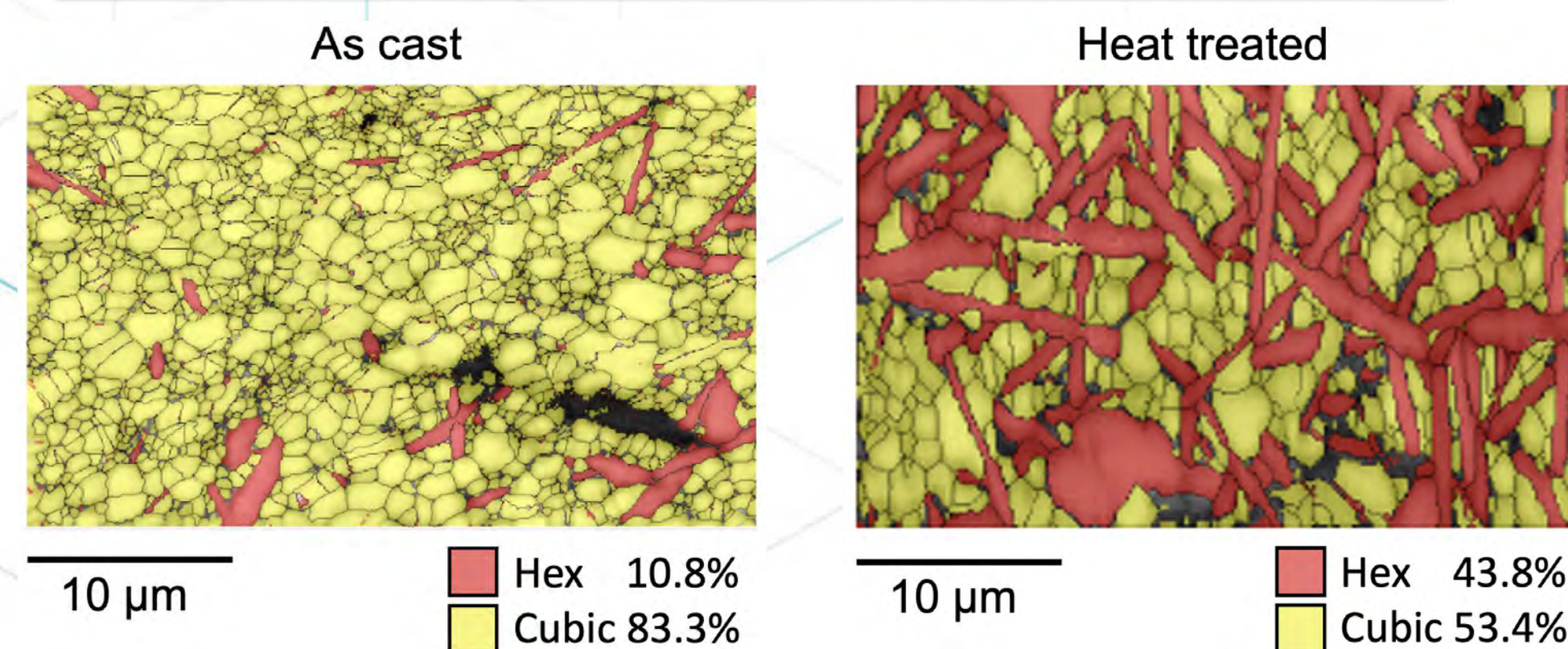
Hexagonal stacking fault induced twinning defects in Y_2TiO_5



Cubic phase shows mixed pyrochlore and fluorite structures – confirmed by 4D STEM mapping



EBSD Phase analysis of Y_2TiO_5 showing increase in hexagonal phase after heating



First ever HAADF-STEM image of hexagonal phase in Y_2TiO_5

Project Number: 22P1065-024FP

LRS Number: INL/MIS-23-74287

Narayan Paudel (co-PI),
Daniel Murray (co-PI),
and Krzysztof Gofryk (PI)

Electronic and transport properties of single-crystalline neptunium telluride

Background

Binary chalcogenides occur abundantly in nature, have a variety of applications, and exhibit many novel behaviors. For instance, UTe_2 was recently shown to exhibit an unprecedented electronic phase diagram with unconventional superconductivity, enormous upper critical fields, possible spin triplet pairing, and non-trivial electronic structure. These diverse behaviors motivated us to investigate the actinide analogue $NpTe_2$.

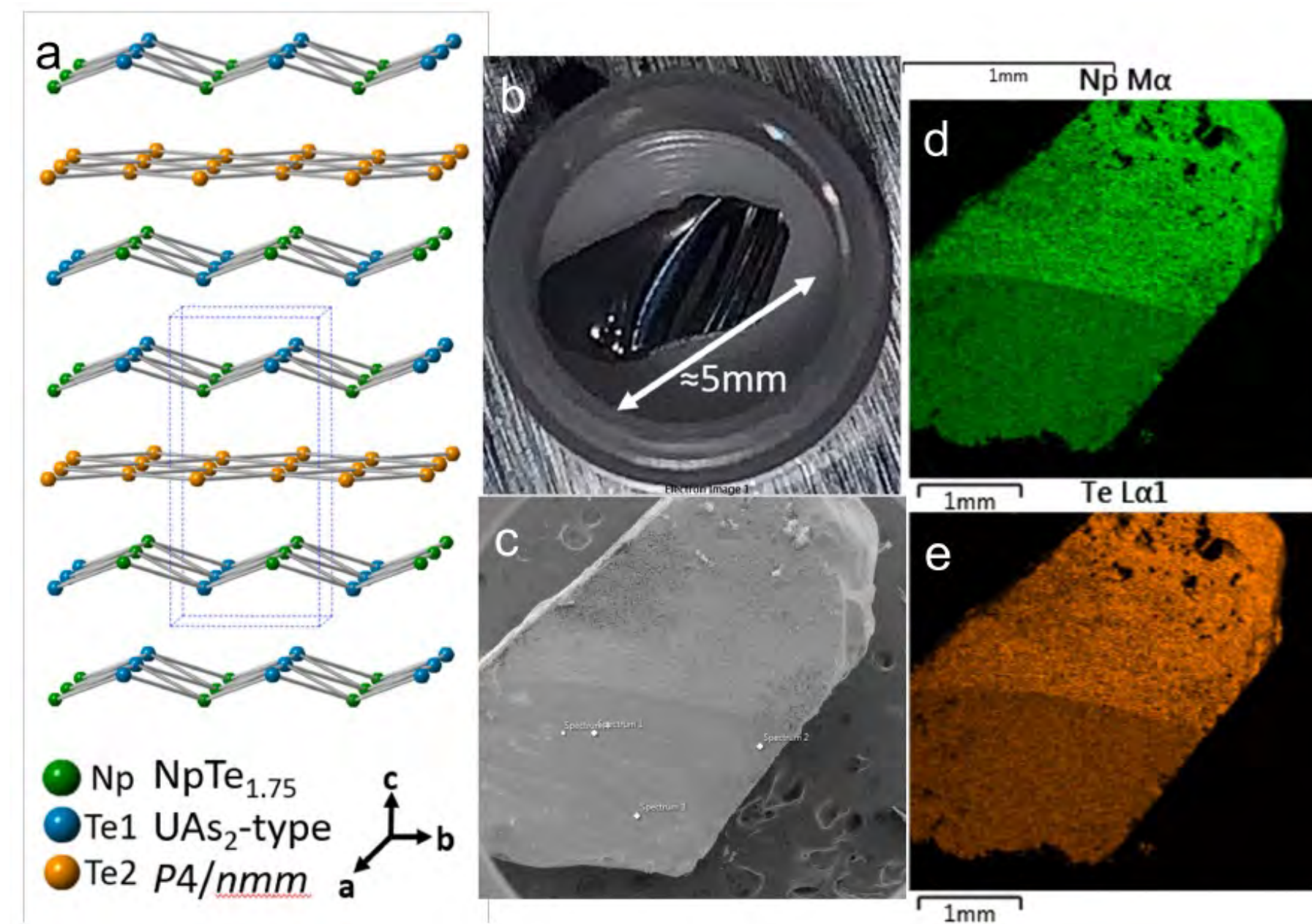
Methods

Single crystal synthesis - iodine vapor transport with elemental starting components (neptunium metal 99.9%, tellurium 99.999%, and iodine 99.999%)

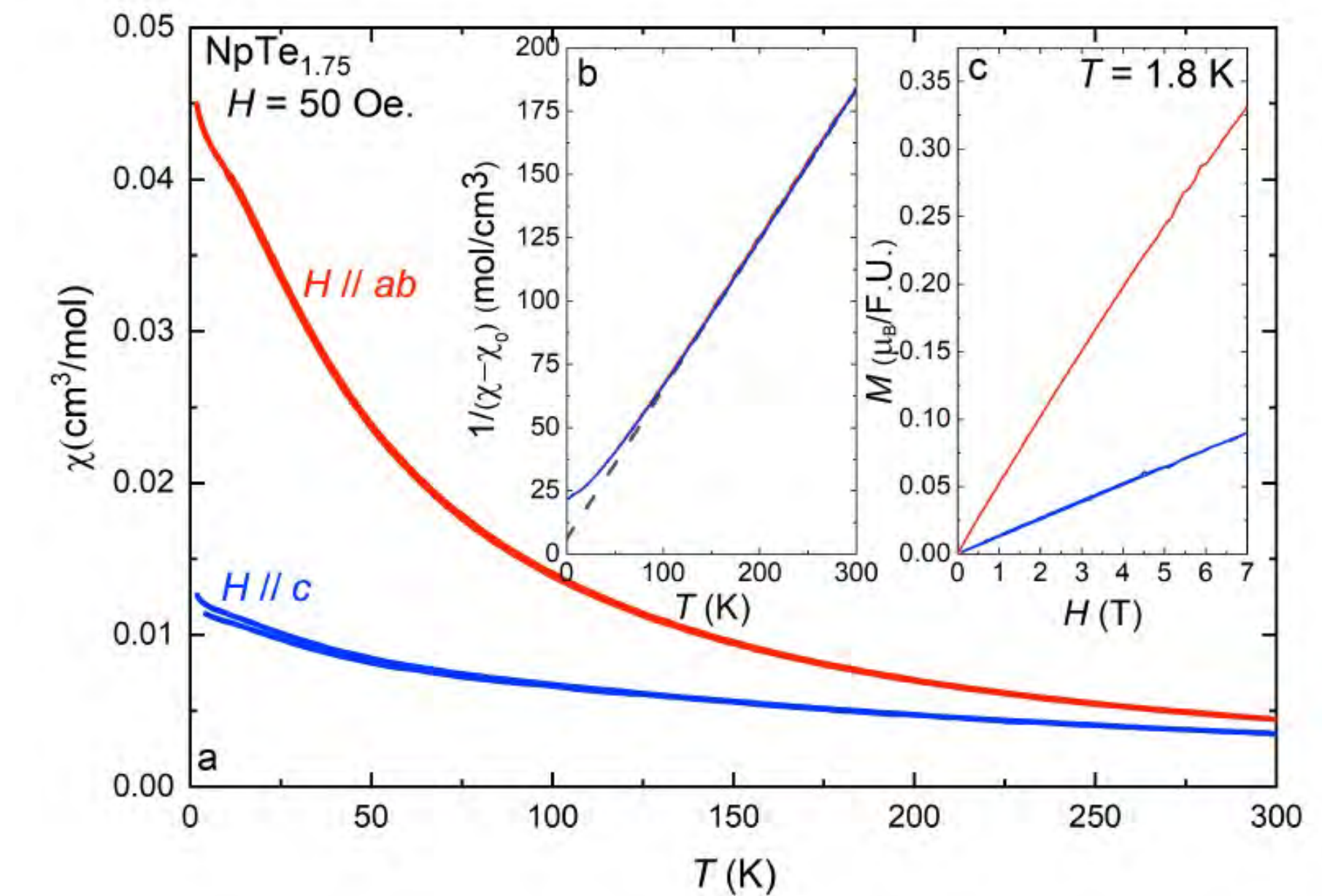
Characterization – single crystal diffraction, scanning electron microscope, dispersive X-ray spectroscopy,

Low temperature Magnetic and transport measurements – Quantum Design MPMS and PPMS, plasma Focuses Ion Beam micromachining

W. L. Nelson, A. S. Jayasinghe, Joseph M. Sperling, N. Beck, Todd N. Poe, D. Murray, N. Poudel, R. Kennedy, S. Lattner, Thomas E. Albrecht-Schonzart, Jianxin Zhu, K. Gofryk, and R. E. Baumbach
"Kondo Lattice Semimetallic Behavior in $NpTe_{1.75}$ single crystals"
- in preparation (intended for Phys. Rev. Letters)

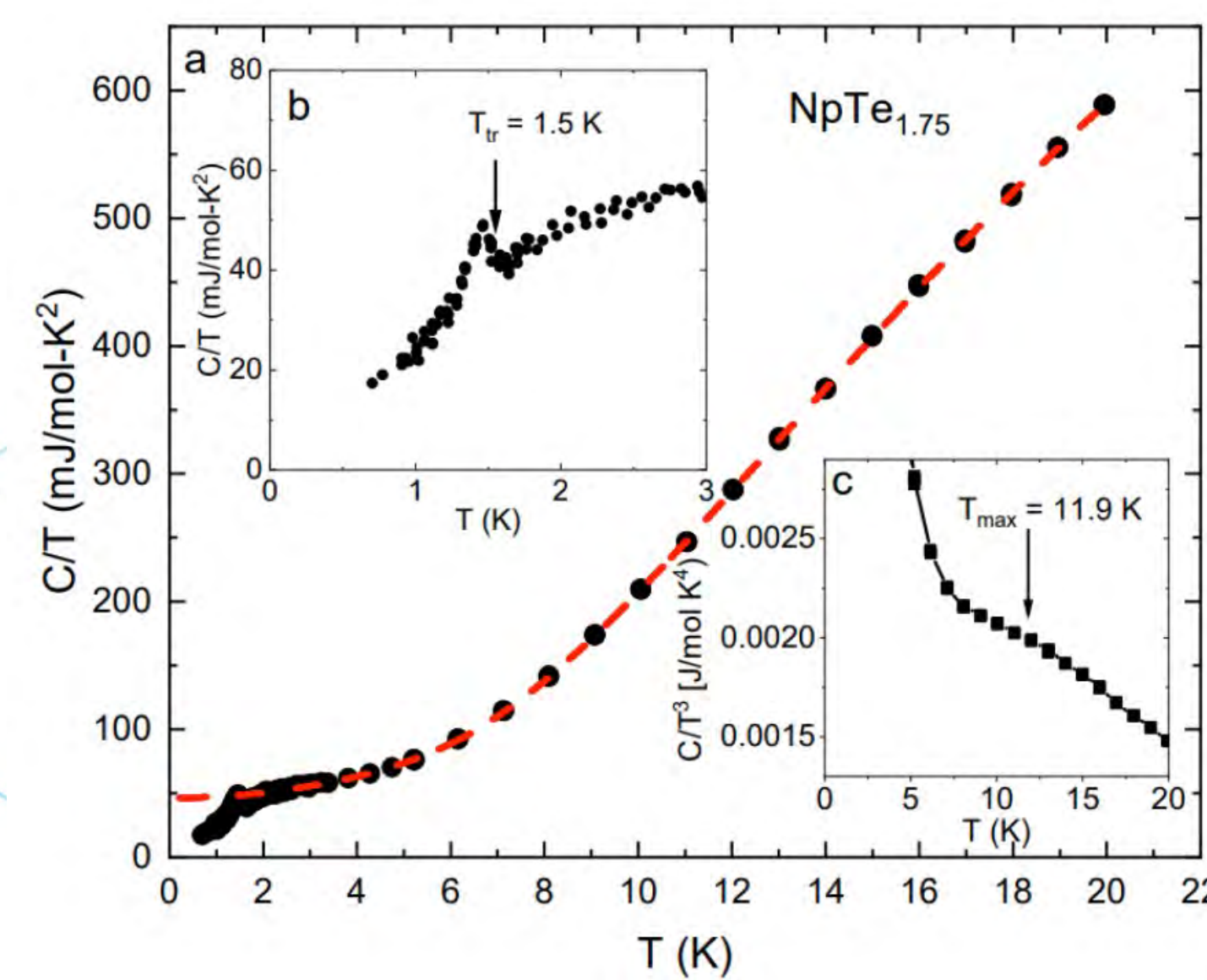


Structure Type	UAs_2
Space Group	$P4/nmm$
Molar Mass (g/mol)	460.3
Density (g/cm ³)	8.934
Lattice Constants (Å)	a = 4.3559(5) b = 4.3559(5) c = 9.0167(11)
Volume (Å ³)	171.08
Z	1
μ (mm ⁻¹)	44.684
F(000)	367.9
Theta (max) °	30.458
h,k,l (max)	6, 6, 12
Reflections	R1 = 0.0384(189) wR2 = 0.0856(190)

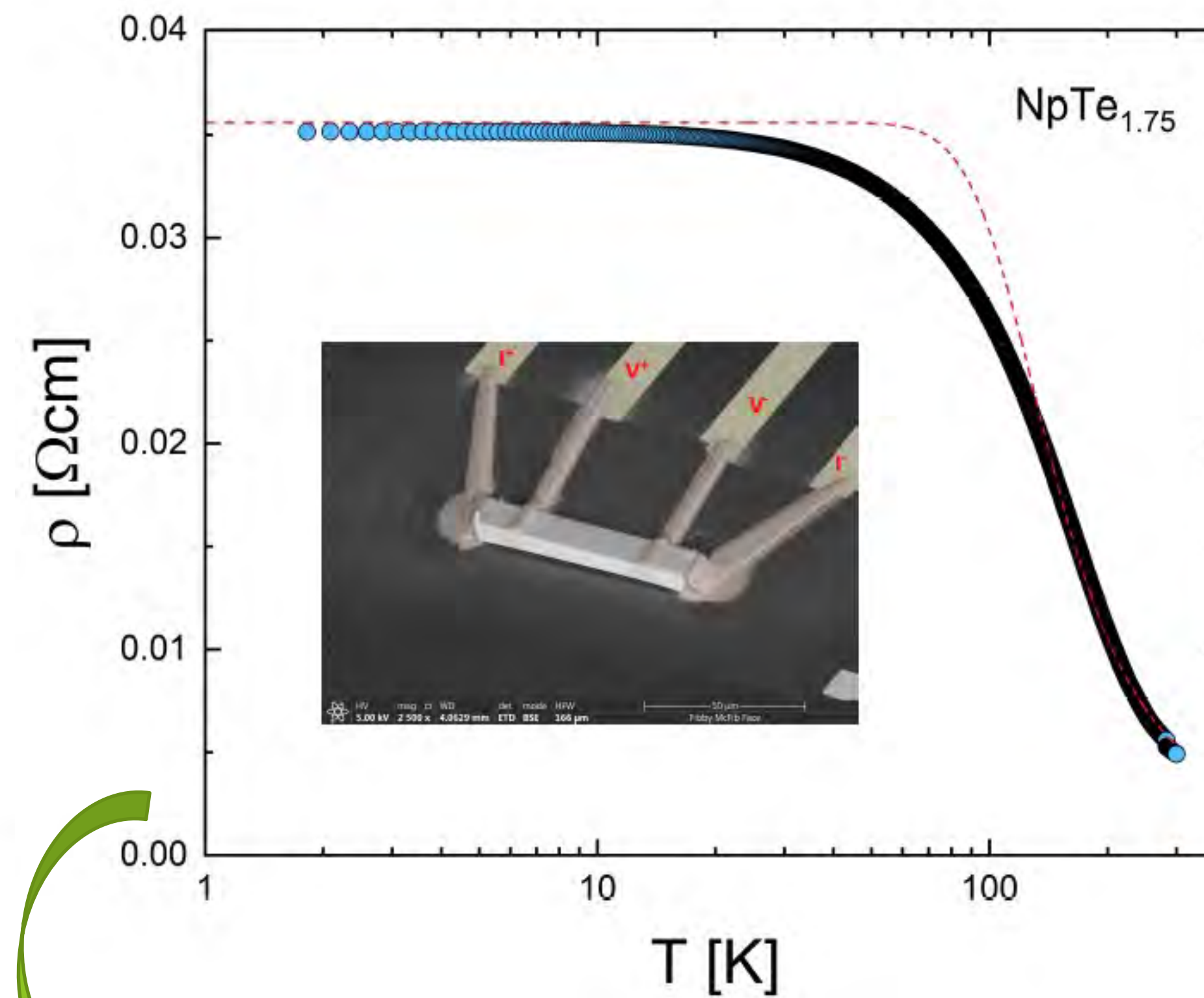


- $NpTe_{1.75}$ single crystals
- Tetragonal, UAs_2 -type, s.g. $P4/nmm$

- Curie Weiss Paramagnetic, Np^{4+}

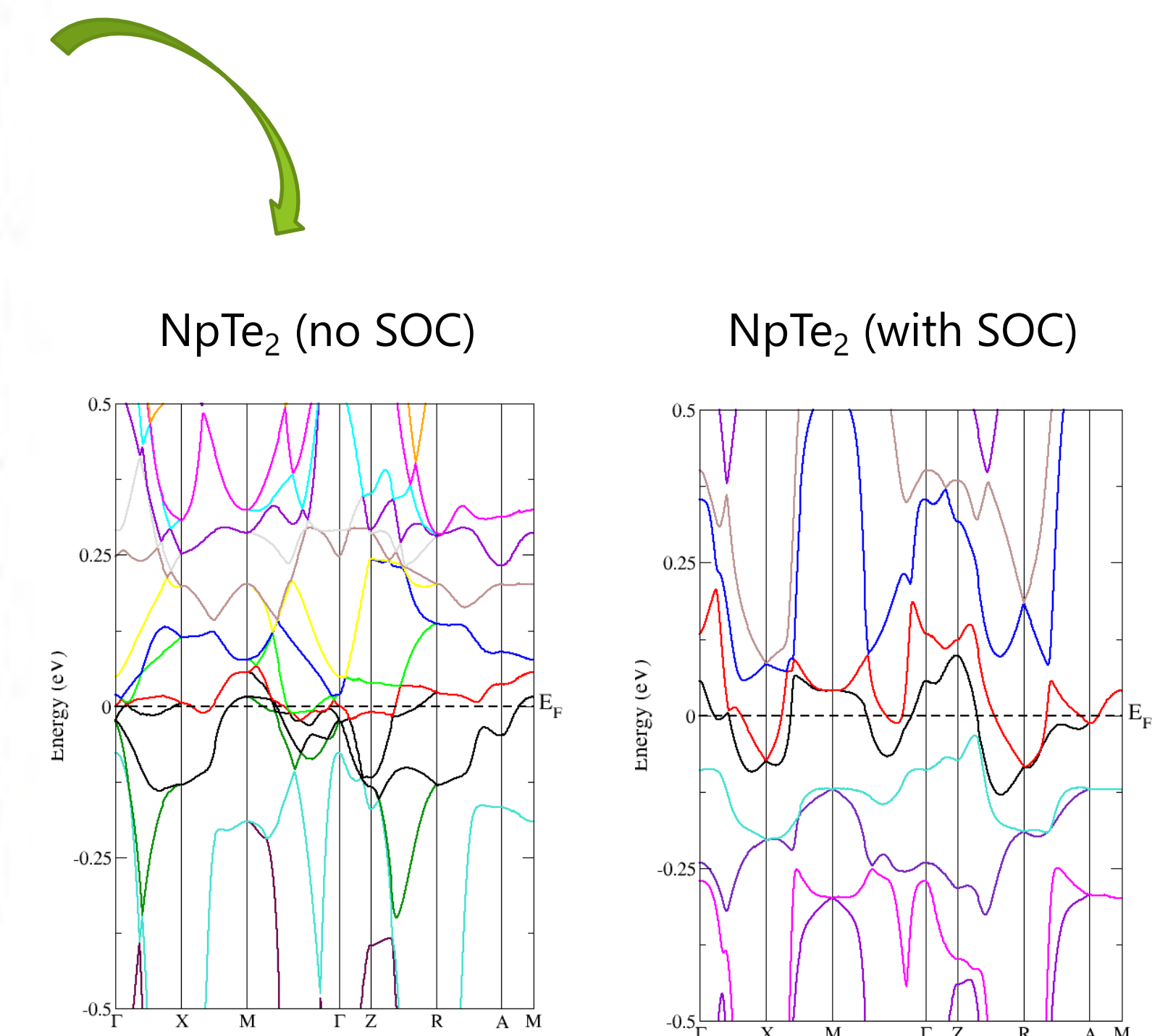


- Enhanced Sommerfeld coefficient,
 $-\gamma = 45 \text{ mJ/molK}^2$
- Transition at 1.5 K?



$$\frac{1}{\rho(T)} = \sigma_a + b \exp\left(\frac{-E_g}{k_B T}\right) \quad E_g = 45 \text{ meV}$$

- Narrow gap semiconductor
- **Topological characteristics?**



- Band inversion
- Gap opening
- **Non-trivial?**

Project Number: 22P1068-012FP

LRS Number: INL/MIS-23-74279

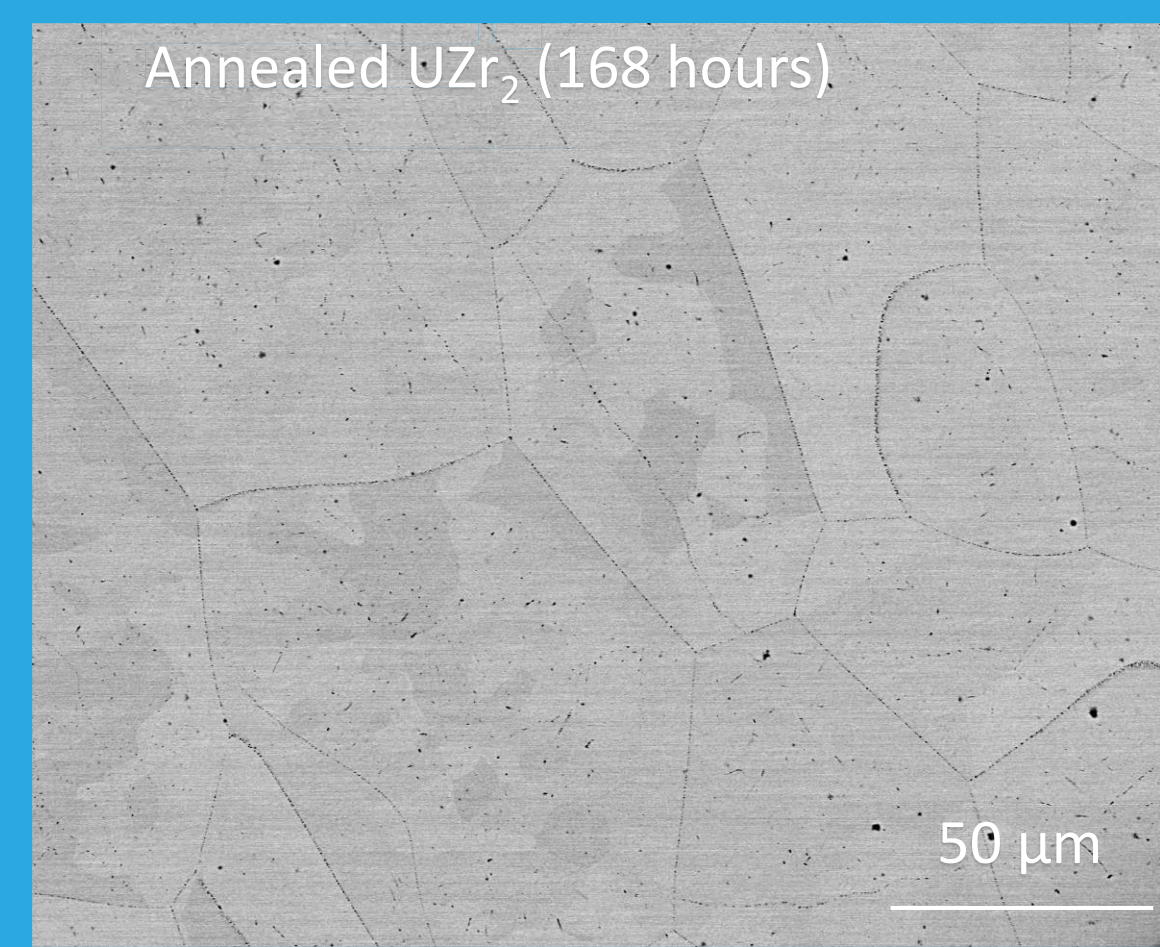
Title: Investigation of Stability in the U-Zr Intermetallic Compound

PRESENTER: Michael T. Benson

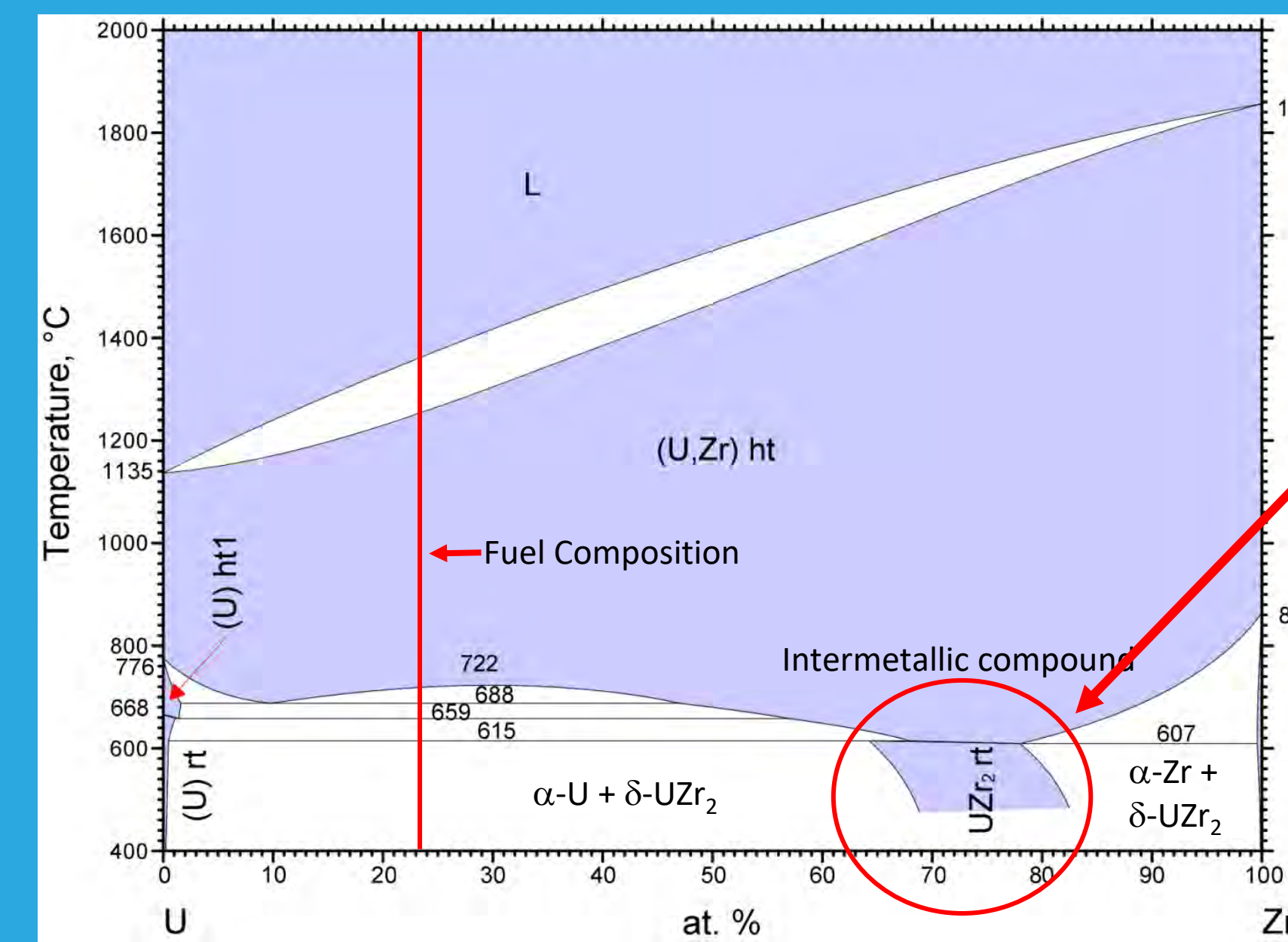
BACKGROUND: The U-Zr phase diagram has been used to interpret the behavior of U-Zr fuels, in and out of the reactor, for over 60 years, but the phase diagram is incorrect.

METHODS: Samples of UZr_2 were annealed at $500^\circ C$ while sealed in quartz tubes under vacuum. Samples characterized using scanning electron microscopy (SEM), transmission electron microscopy (TEM), X-ray diffraction (XRD), and atom probe tomography (APT). Density functional theory (DFT) calculations with the Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof functional were performed. TEM and APT are ongoing now.

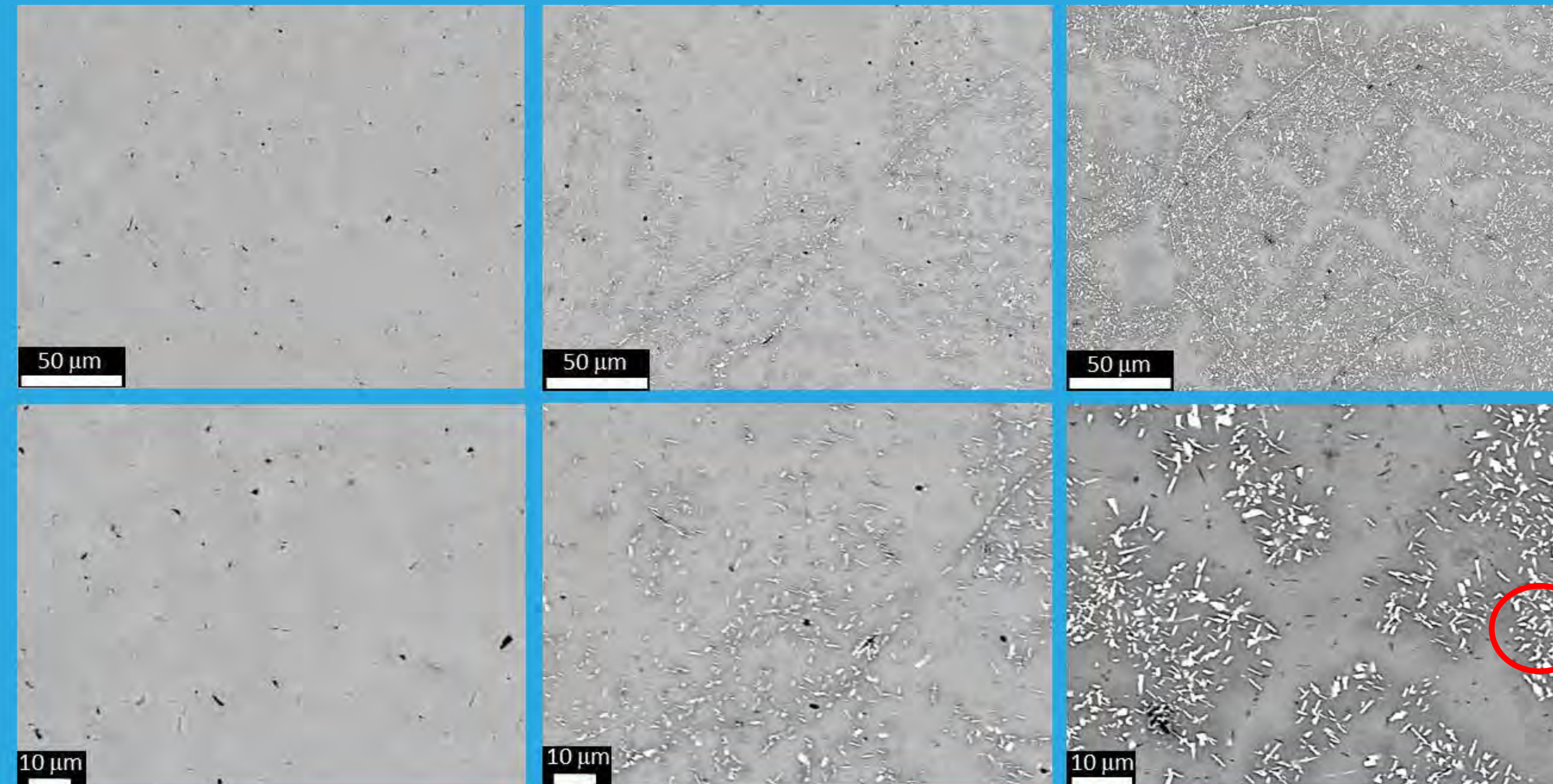
RESULTS: $\delta-UZr_2$ is a long-lived metastable phase and should not be included in the U-Zr phase diagram. As-cast $\delta-UZr_2$ (determined by XRD) decomposed into $\alpha-U$ and $\alpha-Zr$ after long annealing times. $\delta-UZr_2$ is a long-lived metastable phase.



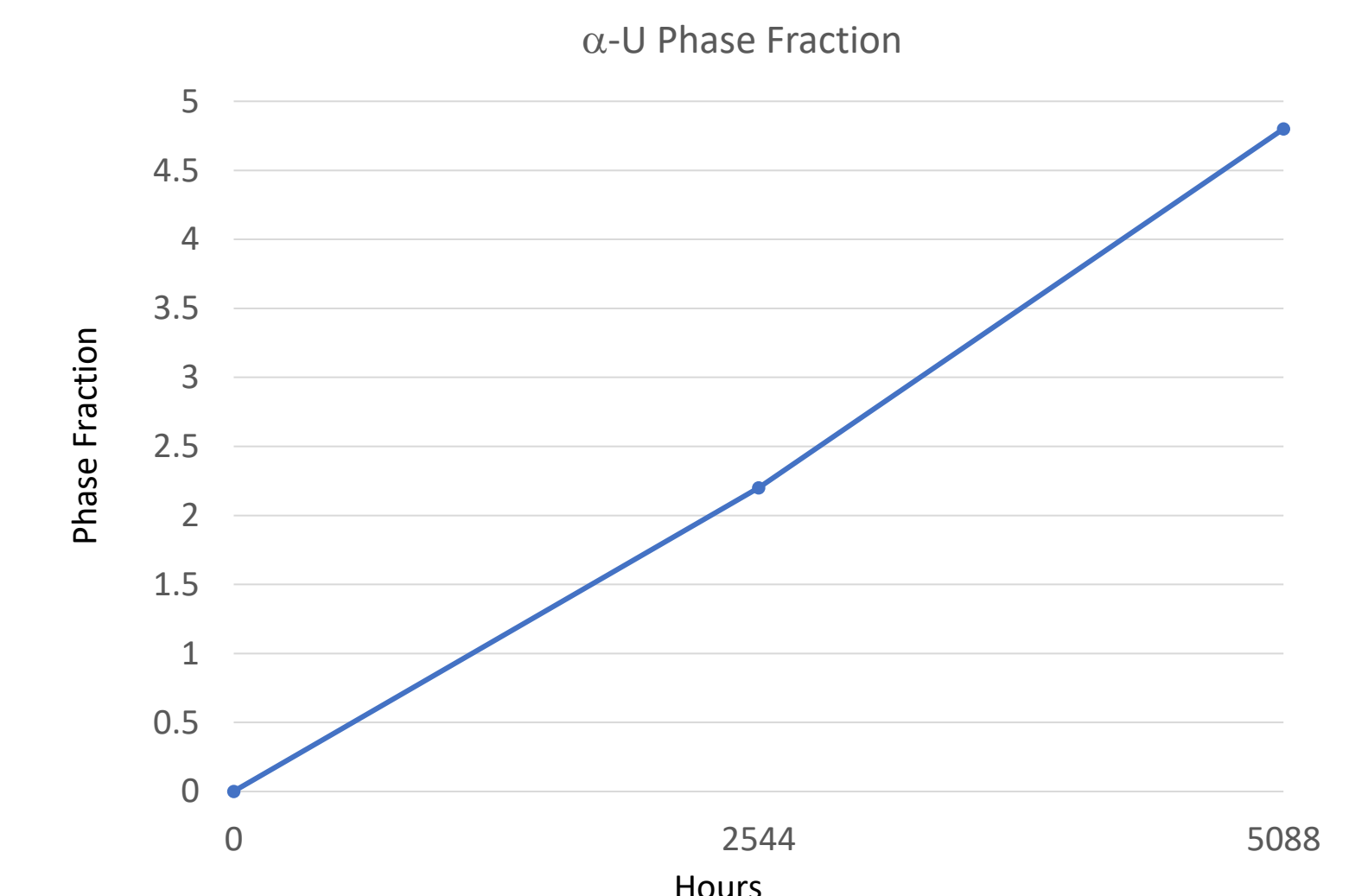
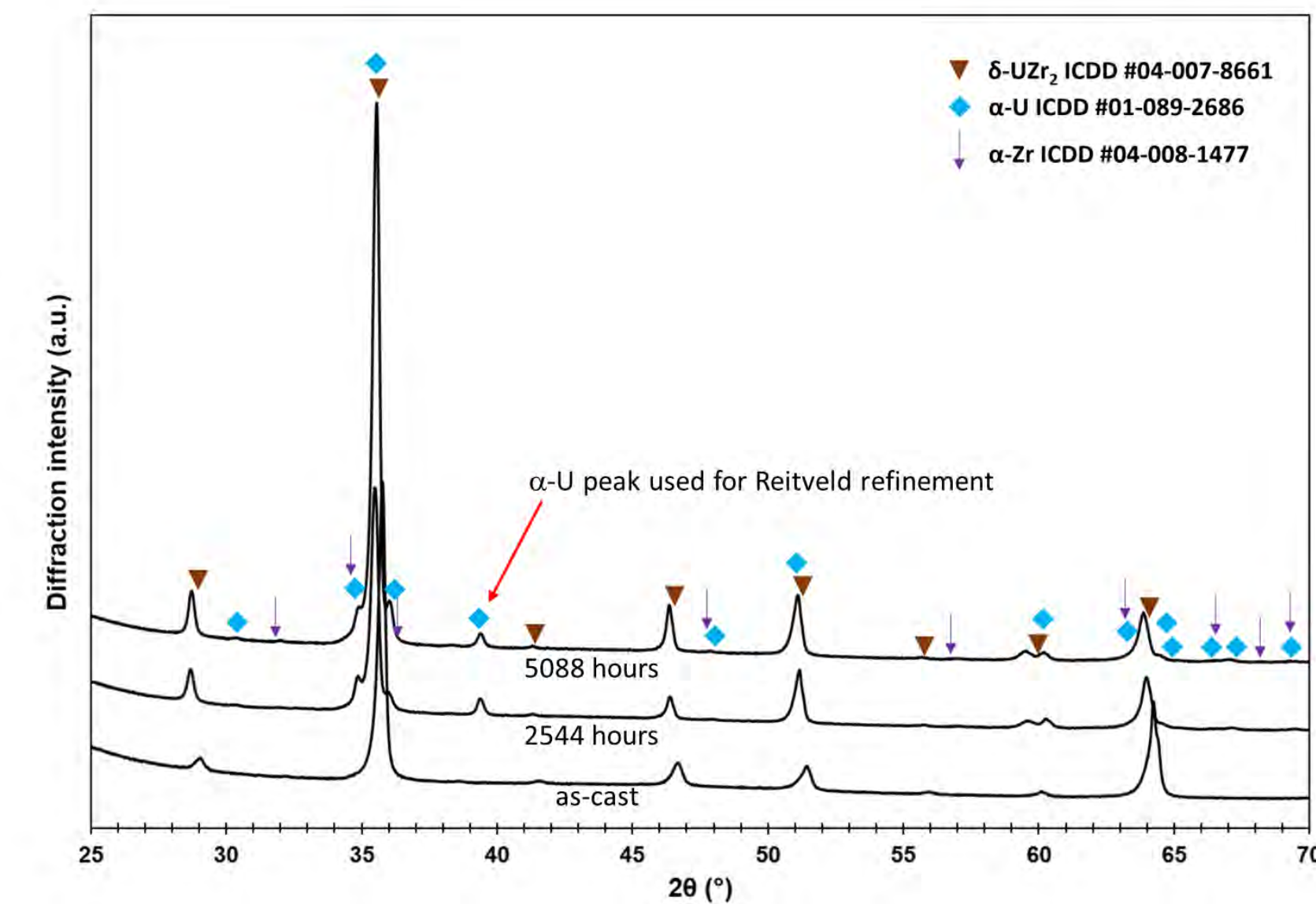
UZr_2 annealed for short time. Shown for comparison



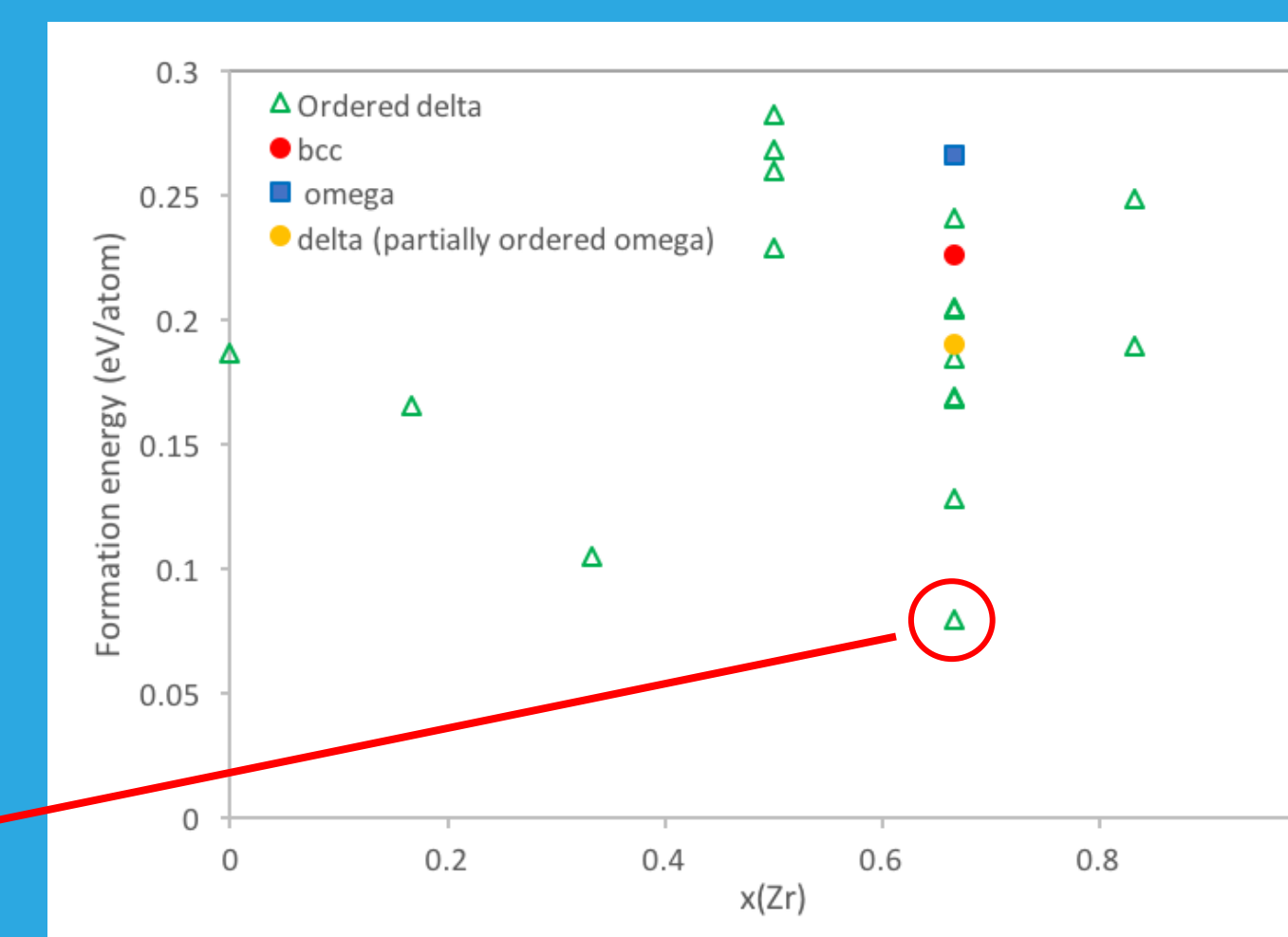
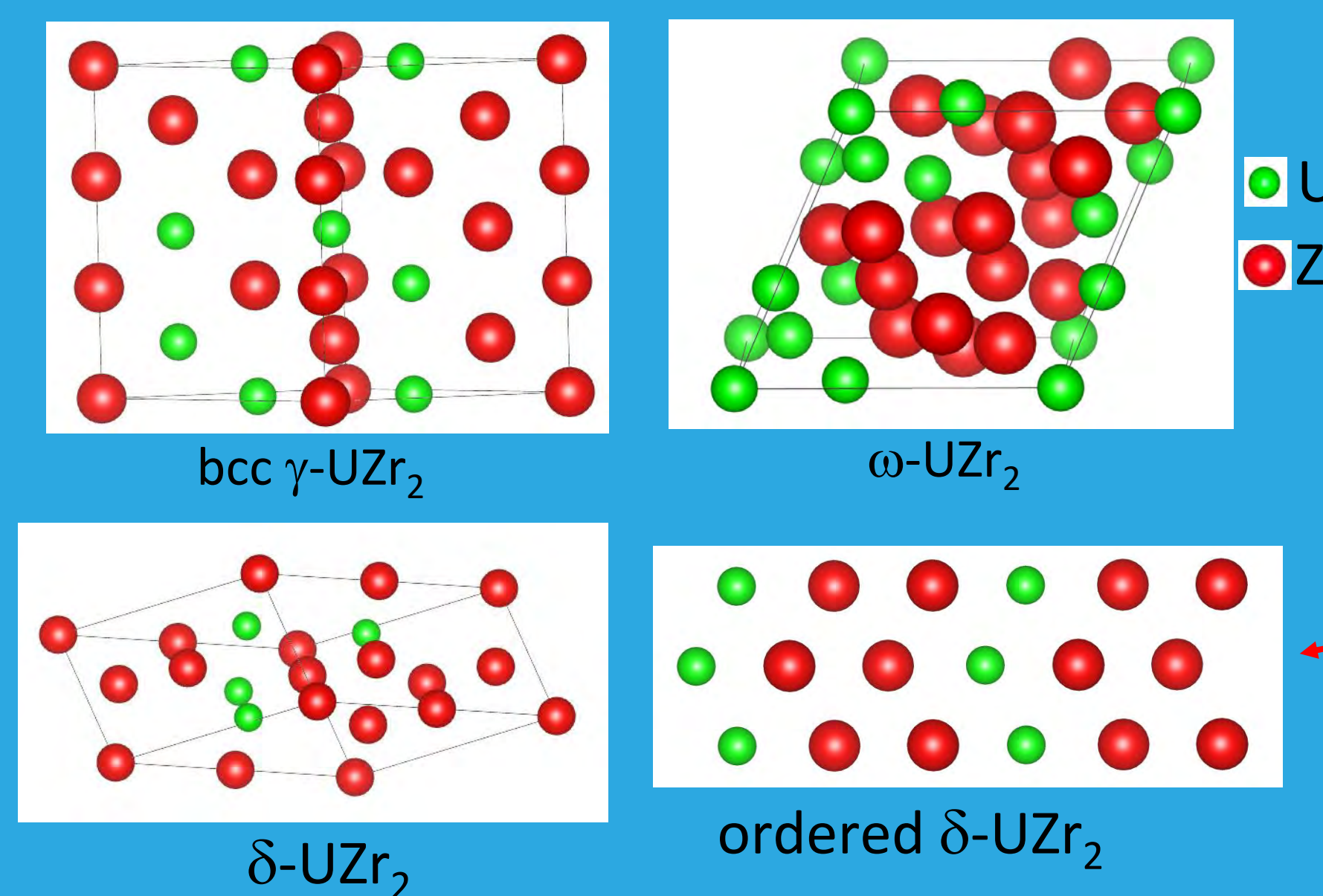
Indicates thermodynamically stable intermetallic phase



as-cast 2544 hours 5088 hours
SEM images of UZr_2 alloy, as-cast and after annealing



XRD results shown, with plotted $\alpha-U$ phase fraction



DFT calculations indicate most stable UZr_2 structure is ordered $\delta-UZr_2$, a phase separated state. Onset of spinodal decomposition?

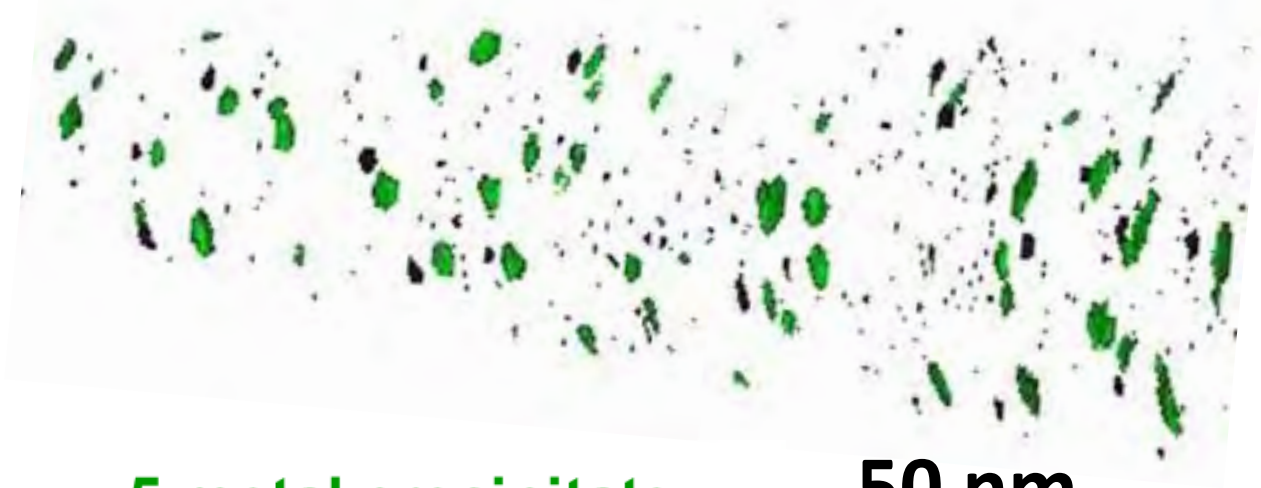
White precipitates are $\alpha-U$. Black precipitates are $\alpha-Zr$ (can't be quantified due to peak overlap).

Michael Benson, Josh Zelina, Tiankai Yao, Chao Jiang, Mukesh Bachhav, Jennifer Watkins

Adding another dimension to Atom Probe analysis: *Thermal diffusivity measurement of ceramic fuels at nanoscale*

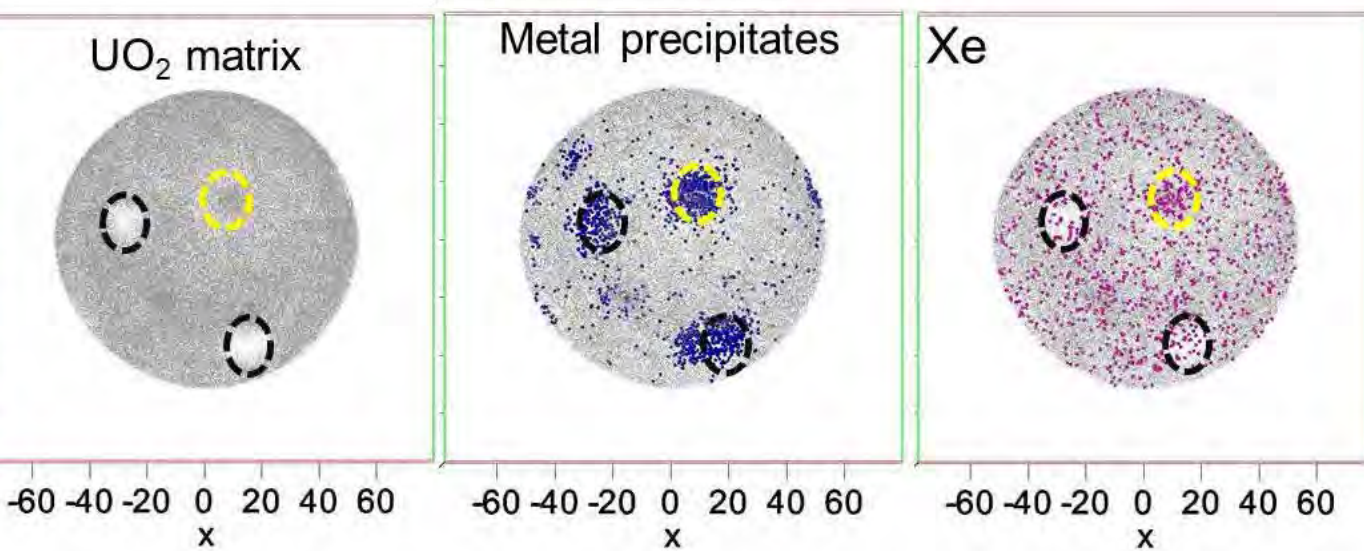
What APT does well?

3D microstructure at sub-nanoscale



- 5 metal precipitate (Rh, Ru, Pd, Tc, Mo)
- Xe

50 nm



Fission product distribution in spent UO₂ ceramic fuel

Quantitative chemical analysis at nanoscale

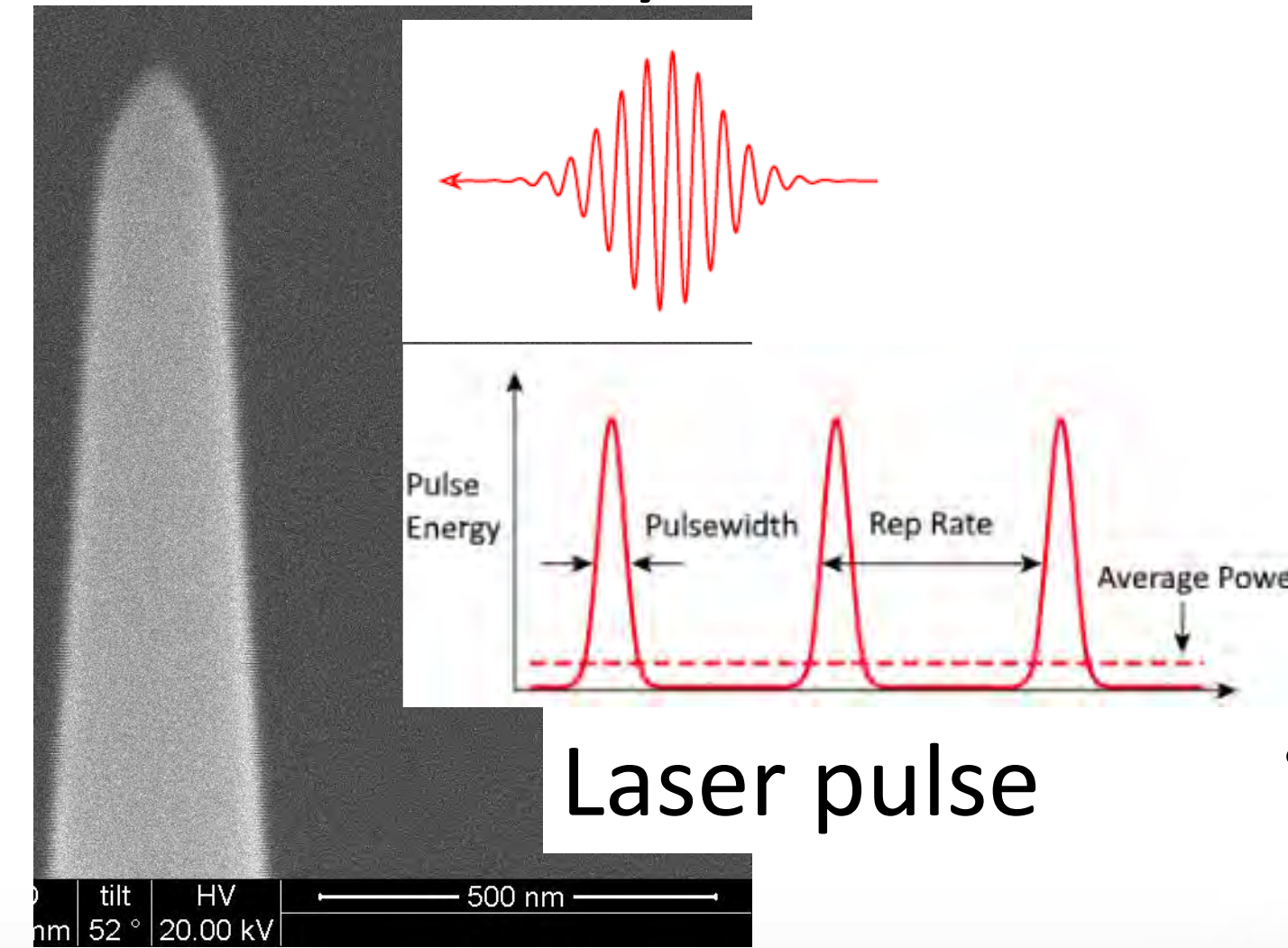


	Center	Edge
Center		
Edge		
Cladding		
Solid solution	0.18	0.26
Metal precipitates	0.41	0.77
Volatile fission products	0.37	0.53
Oxide precipitates	0.20	0.42
Total fission products	1.16	1.98

Compositional analysis from UO₂ and fission products in spent fuel [1]

Method: Thermal diffusivity assessment based on laser-tip interaction in Atom Probe Tomography (APT)

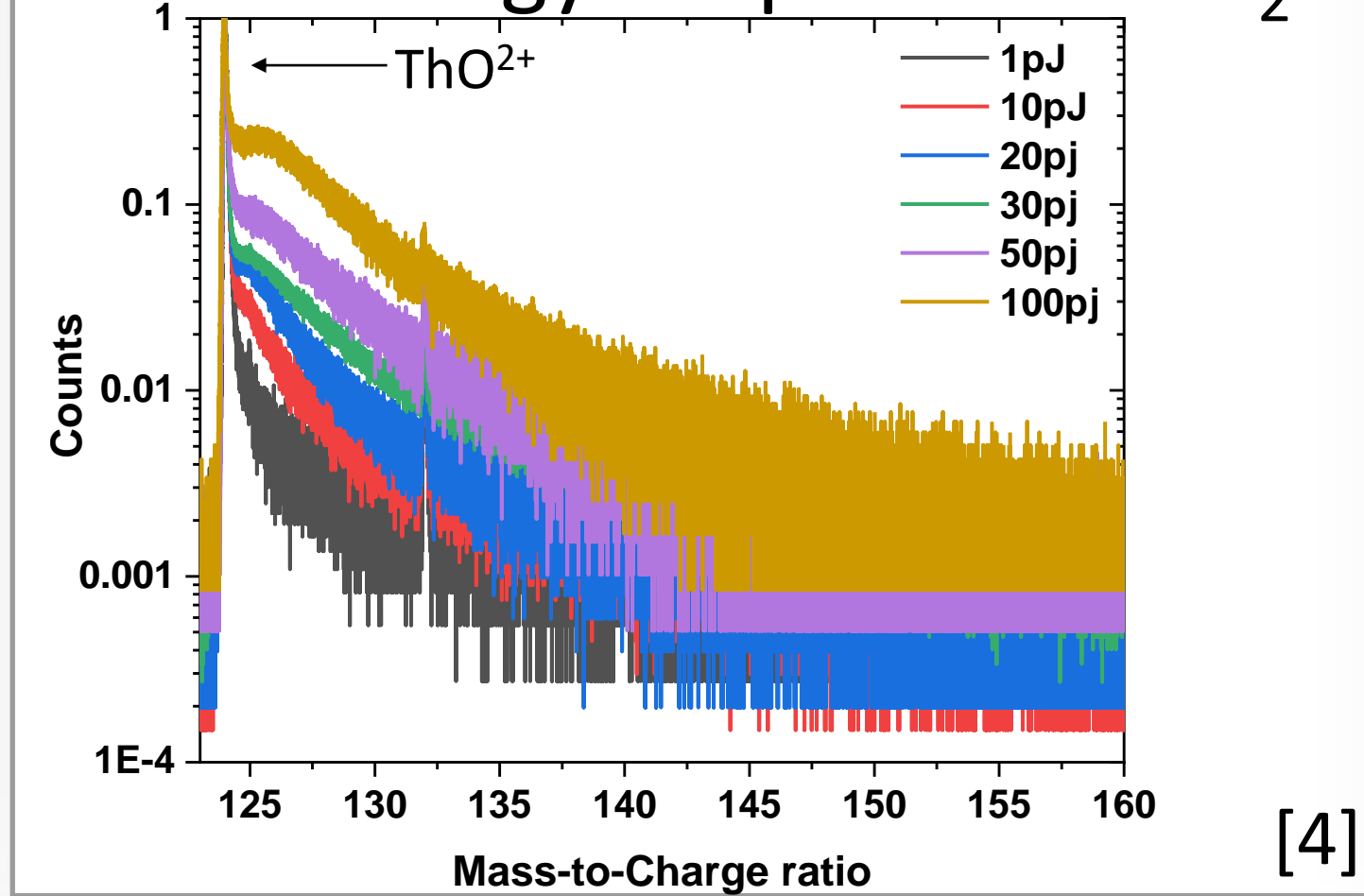
Laser locally "heats" nanometric tip during field evaporation process



- Field evaporation process in APT $N_{ions}(t) = n \exp(-\frac{Q}{k_b T_s(t)})$
- Thermal diffusion $\frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = D \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial z^2}$
- Modified analytical solution $T_s(t) = T_{max} \left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{1 + \frac{tD}{\sigma^2}}} + \frac{f(E_p)}{\sqrt{1 + \frac{tD}{\sigma^2}}} e^{-\left(\frac{z^2}{2\sigma^2 \sqrt{1 + \frac{tD}{\sigma^2}}}\right)} \right)$
- Temperature rise due to laser-tip interaction $T_{rise} = T_0 + \alpha E_p$

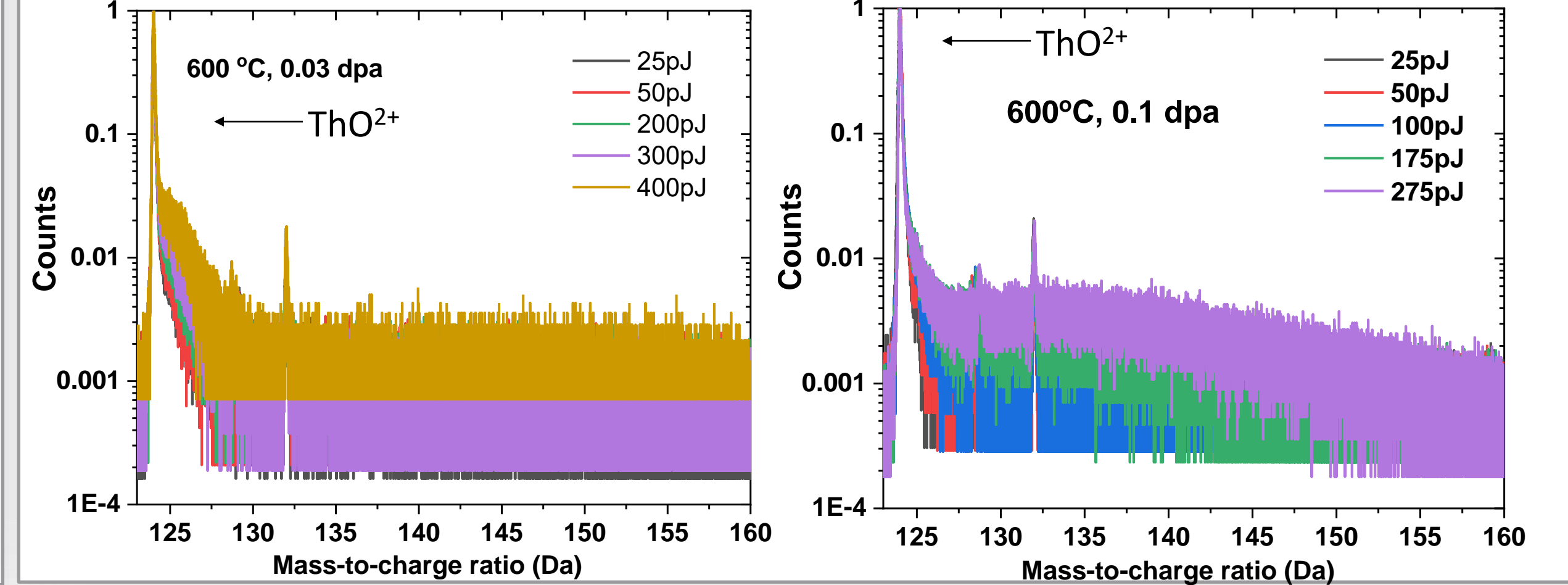
[3]

Mass spectrum showing thermal tail with "hump" with change in laser energy for pristine ThO₂

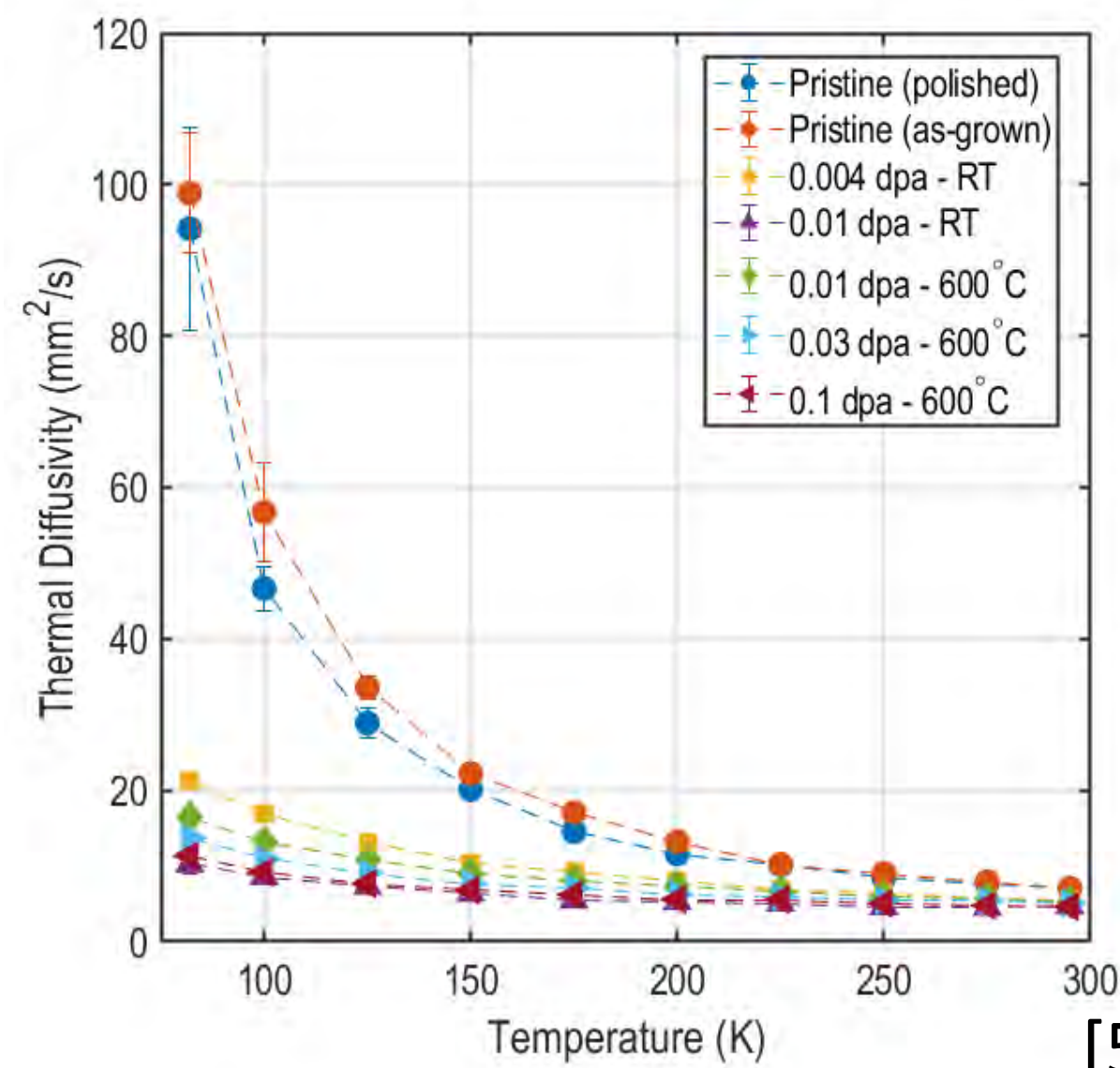


[4]

Mass spectrum for proton irradiated ThO₂ as a function of laser energy showing thermal tail

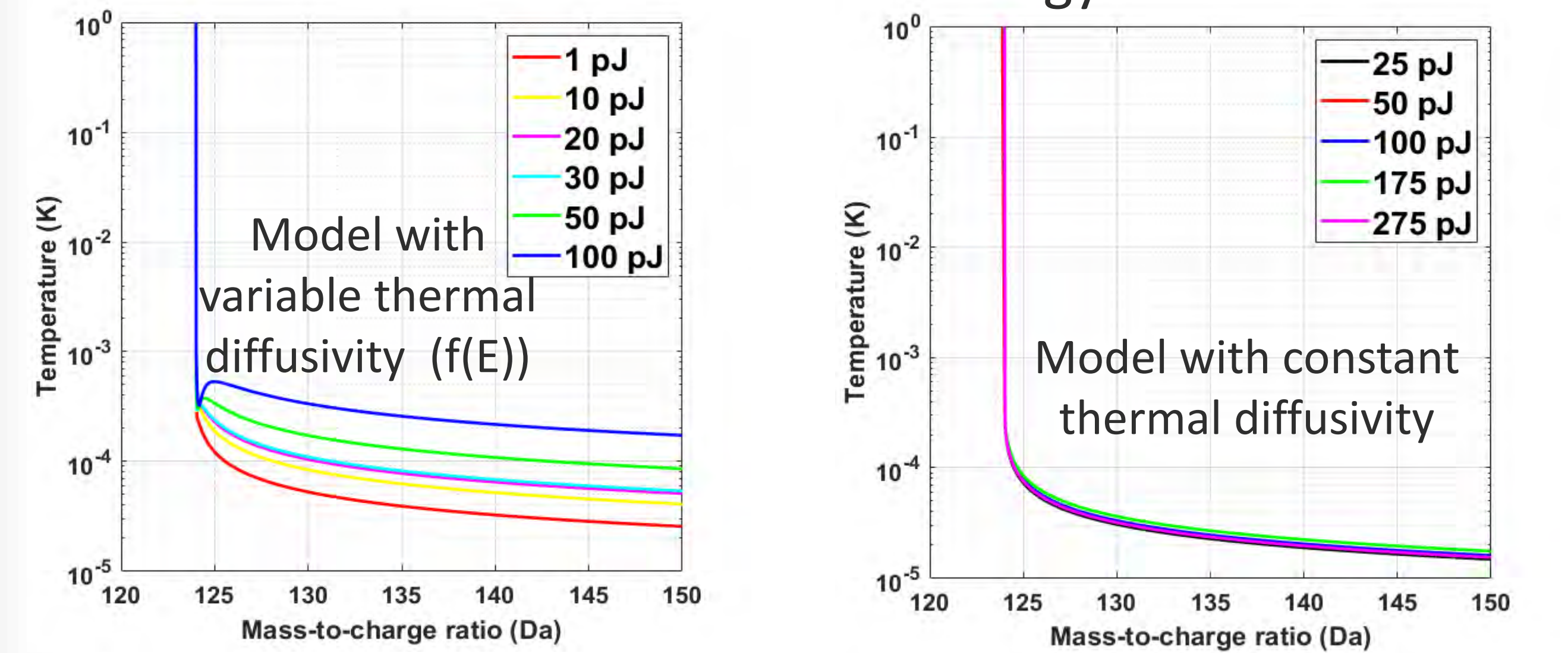


Thermal diffusivity measured on pristine and irradiated ThO₂ using spatial-domain thermoreflectance (SDTR)



[5]

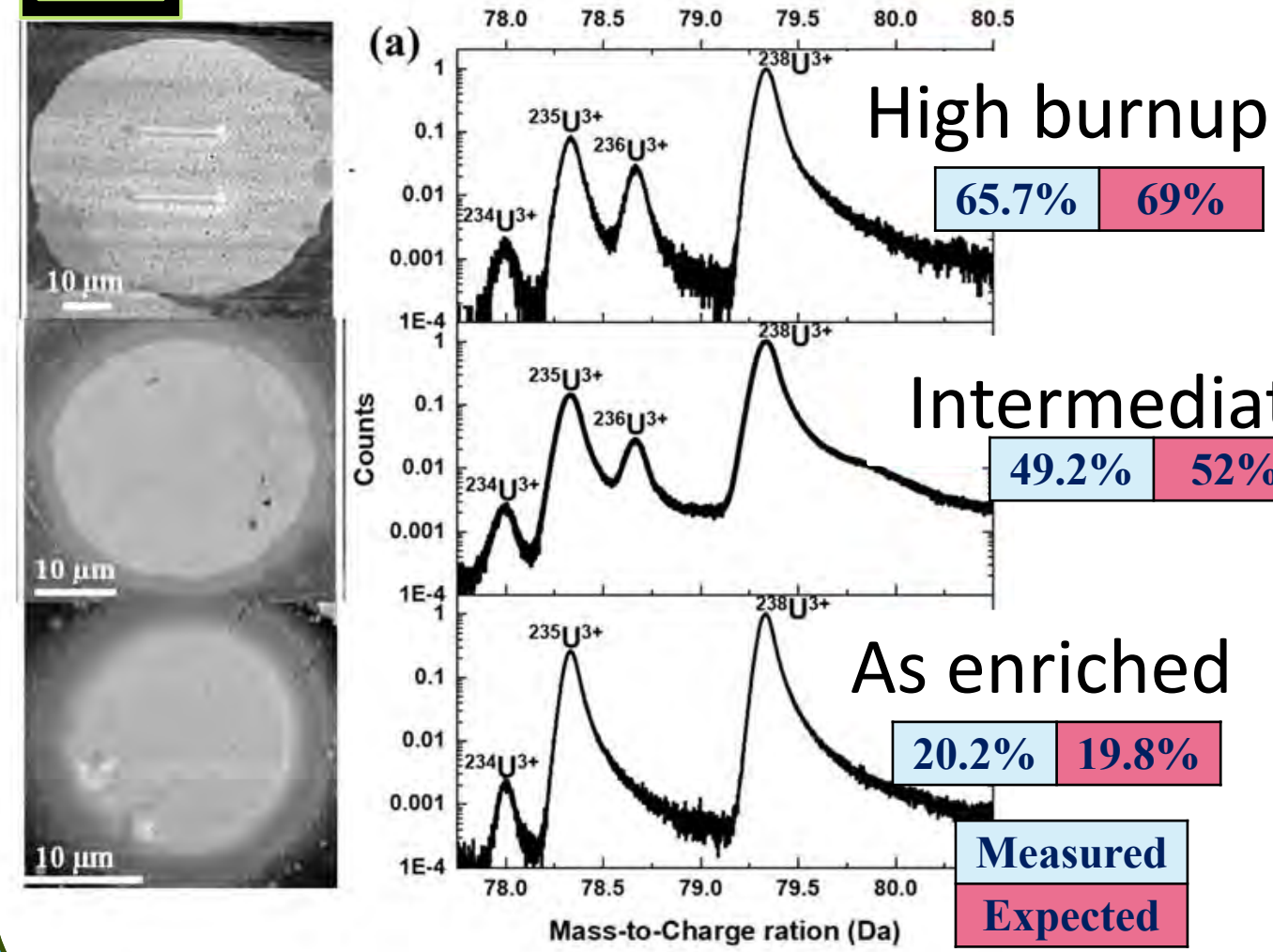
Thermal diffusivity measured by fitting experimental mass spectrum with analytical model developed using MATLAB for different laser energy



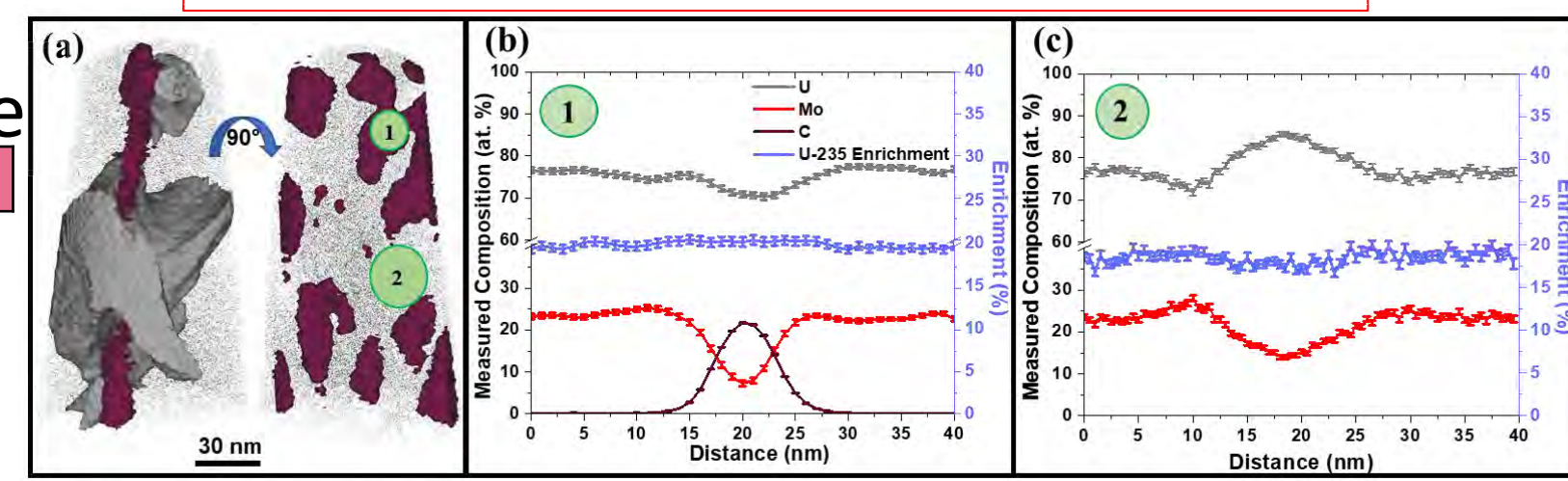
References:

- A. Ditter, M. Bachhav et al. J of Synchrotron radiation, 2021
- M. Bachhav et al. JNM, 2020
- M. Bachhav et al. APL, 2011
- A. Sen, M. Bachhav, et al. Ultramicroscopy, 2021
- C. Dennett, et al. Acta Mat, 2021

Burnup and enrichment measurement in nuclear fuel



$$U - 235 \text{ Burnup} = \frac{\frac{U_{235}}{U_{total}} - \frac{U_{235} + U_{236}}{U_{total} + P_{total}}}{\frac{U_{235}}{U_{total}} - \frac{U_{235} + U_{236}}{U_{total} + P_{total}}}_{BOL}$$



Isotopic analysis from metallic UMo fuel [2]

Mukesh Bachhav, Rahul Reddy Kancharla, Krzysztof Gofryk, Tsvetoslav Pavlov, Amrita Sen

Project Number: [22P1071-028FP](#)

LRS Number: [INL/EXP-23-74327](#)

Point defects in UO_2 by DFT+U: defect local environment and occupation matrix control

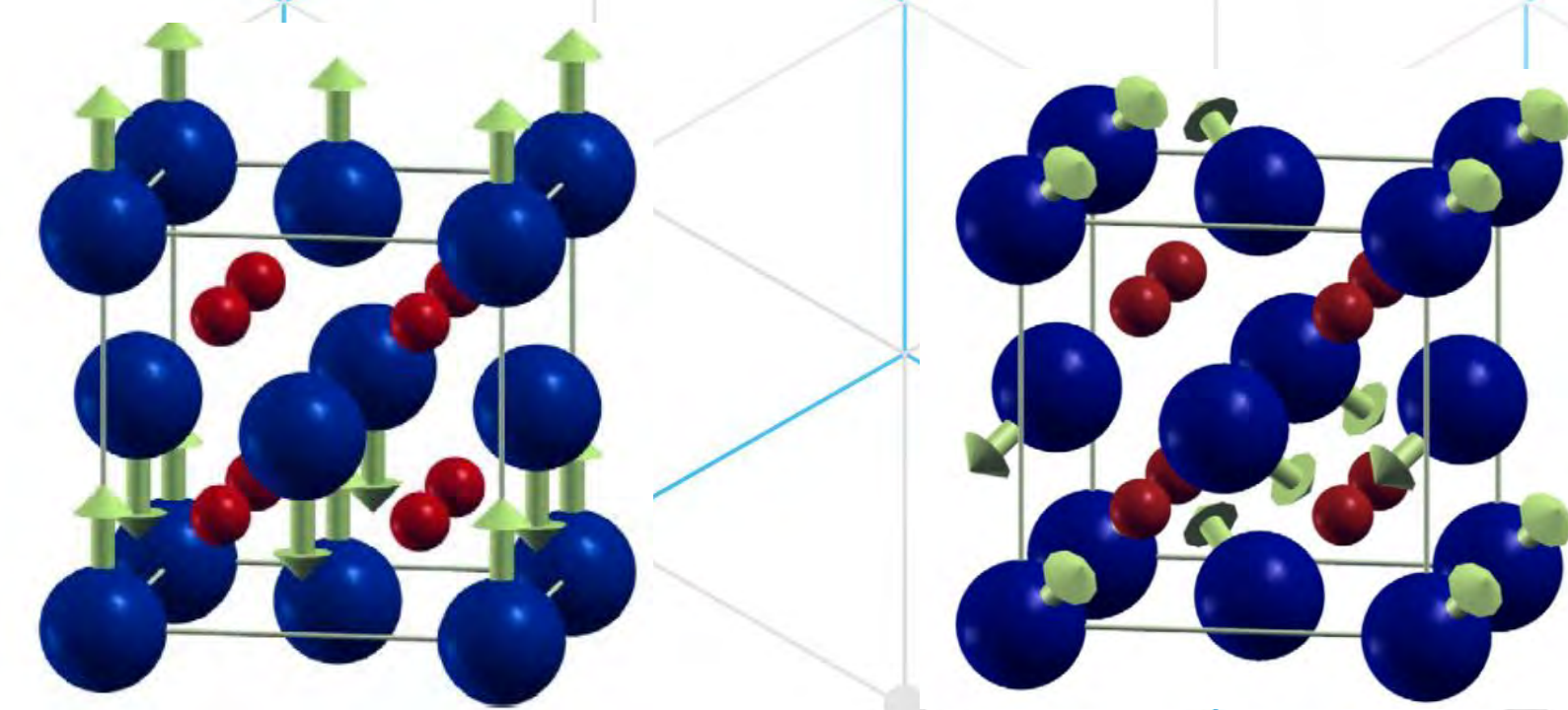
Background

Defects are critical to thermal and mechanical behavior of nuclear fuel materials, like UO_2 , under irradiation. While first-principles calculations bring up a method to compute the defect formation energy, it is still a technical challenge to model Mott insulators, due to complex interplay between Mott physics, magnetism, and spin-orbit coupling (SOC).

In fact, the intrinsic defects have only been computed in UO_2 using 1k antiferromagnetic (AFM) structure without SOC. Here, we develop a method to compute the defect formation energy under different magnetic orderings with SOC and further reveal their effects.

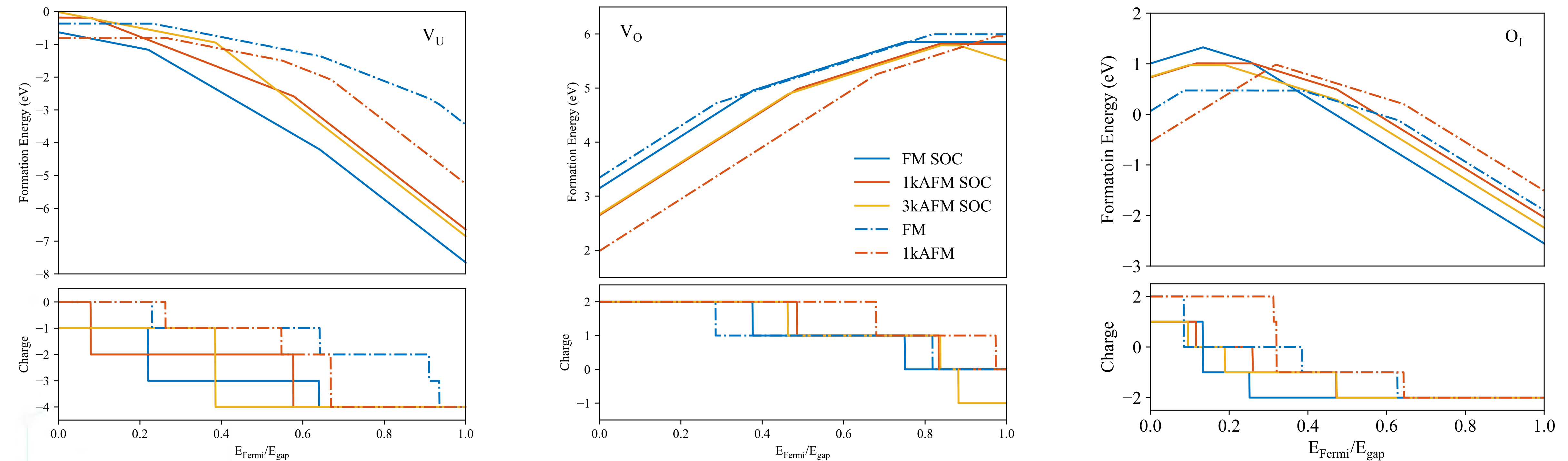
Methods

1. Density functional theory and the Hubbard U approximation (DFT+U) at 0K
2. *f*-orbital single-atom occupation matrix control (OMC)
3. 2 (3) different magnetic orderings are applied without (with) SOC: ferromagnetic, 1k AFM, and 3k AFM (only with SOC).



1k AFM (left) and 3k AFM (right) structures
From *J. Condens. Matter Phys.* 25, 333201 (2013).

The magnetic ordering and spin-orbit coupling have substantial effects on defect formation energy in UO_2 .



The difference in defect formation energy is induced by different mechanism of U atom distortion:

1. Different magnetic ordering changes the position of U^{5+} or U^{3+} cations;
2. Under SOC, rather than the presence of U^{5+} or U^{3+} cations, U tends to rotate magnetic moments;
3. 1kAFM SOC can serve as a good approximation for the noncollinear 3kAFM SOC structure.

Shuxiang Zhou and Chao Jiang

