Solid-State Synthesis of Monazite-type Compounds Containing Tetravalent Elements

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To cite this version:


HAL Id: emse-00509266
https://hal-emse.ccsd.cnrs.fr/emse-00509266
Submitted on 19 Aug 2010
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1. Introduction

In the framework of the French research law related to the specific conditioning of long life radionuclides in dedicated ceramics, phosphate matrices were extensively studied. On the basis of several properties of interest such as weight loading, sintering capability, resistance to aqueous alteration or to radiation damage, monazites \((M^{III}PO_4)\), brabantites \((M^{II}_{0.5}M^{IV}_{0.5}PO_4)\) and associated monazite/brabantite solid solutions \((M^{III}_{1-2x}M^{II}_xM^{IV}_xPO_4)\) were selected to perform advanced kinds of experiments through, as instance, the French Research Group NOMADE (CNRS/CEA/AREVA/EDF/French universities) in the field of the so called “Technical Feasability”.

The synthesis of monazites, especially pointing out the preparation, the process or the optimization of specific properties required was already described. On the basis of their redox properties, the actinides considered for the development of such matrices, could be mainly trivalent (Pu, Am, Cm) or tetravalent (Th, U, Np, Pu) which strengthens the interest of designing matrices which could accept both tri- and tetravalent elements in their structure, \(e.g. \ M^{III}_{1-2x}M^{II}_xM^{IV}_xPO_4.\)

From a geochemical point of view, monazite \((LnPO_4 \text{ with } Ln: \text{La–Tb})\) is the most abundant lanthanide phosphate observed in natural samples. Such minerals appear as the major thorium source on earth, especially in several ores which contain up to 14.3 wt.% and 15.6 wt.% in ThO\(_2\) and UO\(_2\), respectively. Some other observations revealed the presence of samples containing up to 50 wt.% of thorium and consequently no indication of the presence of lanthanides in the minerals. The incorporation of both tetravalent elements in the monazite structure was usually explained by the two following coupled substitutions:

\[
2 \ Ln^{3+} \leftrightarrow (Th,U)^{4+} + Ca^{2+} \tag{1}
\]
\[
Ln^{3+} + PO_4^{3-} \leftrightarrow (Th,U)^{4+} + SiO_4^{4-} \tag{2}
\]

Some analyses carried out on natural samples revealed that the mechanism described by (eq 1) is widely predominant. It leads to a complete and ideal solid solution \(M^{III}_{1-2x}M^{II}_xM^{IV}_xPO_4\), between pure monazite and pure brabantite \((M^{II}_{0.5}M^{IV}_{0.5}PO_4).\) Van Emden et al. also noted that in several samples containing cerium, the \((Ca+Si)\) content was higher than \((Th+U)^{32}\) leading to the conclusion that
tetravalent cerium was probably incorporated in the monazite structure through both coupled substitutions. However, no analysis was carried out to validate this hypothesis. In the field of the second coupled substitution (eq 2), one of the ThSiO₄ form is isostructural from LaPO₄ (monoclinic system, S.G.: P2₁/n) which is not the case for USiO₄ (tetragonal system, S.G.: I4₁/amd). It is worth noting that ThSiO₄ could exist in both crystallographic forms; the phase transition from tetragonal to monoclinic occurring at about 1200°C. Moreover, USiO₄ is unstable at temperatures higher than 500°C in air (1 atm.) and decomposes into UO₂ and SiO₂.

The preparation of synthetic actinide bearing monazites was driven either by wet or dry chemistry methods. Among the methods based on wet chemistry processes, a large part involved the precipitation of initial crystallized precursors (e.g. rhabdophanes of formula LnPO₄·½H₂O) then an heating treatment above 700°C.

For trivalent actinides, these methods allowed the preparation of AnPO₄ (with An = U, Pu, Am-Bk). The incorporation of trivalent uranium, which appears rather curious from a redox point of view, was obtained in anoxic conditions and in presence of formic acid from a mixture of Na₃PO₄ and trivalent uranium solution. The preparation of PuPO₄ was reported from PuPO₄·½H₂O precipitated between 75°C and 90°C from a mixture of trivalent plutonium and phosphoric acid in presence of concentrated sulphuric acid or from a mixture of plutonium trichloride and (NH₄)₂HPO₄. After heating above 950°C, this blue well crystallized precursor was fully transformed into Pu-monazite. More recently, the preparation of La₁₋ₓAmₓPO₄ with large amounts of ²⁴¹Am was reported by Aloy et al. from associated precipitated rhabdophanes. The same way was finally applied to prepare Am-monazite samples from Am-rhabdophane at the gram scale and CmPO₄, BkPO₄, CfPO₄ and EsPO₄ at the microgram scale. The main conclusion is that, excepted for U-monazite which preparation remains doubtful due to the low stability of trivalent oxidation state of uranium, An-monazite samples can be obtained easily from plutonium to einsteinium by using wet chemistry methods.

On the contrary, some other actinides (Th, Pa, Np) can not be incorporated in their trivalent oxidation state in the monazite structure that requires their incorporation by the way of coupled substitution, as
described in (eq 1) and (eq 2). Moreover, brabantites and monazite/brabantite solid solutions are rather
difficult to obtain through wet chemistry methods. In this field, Podor et al. synthesized several single
crystals of La$_{1-2x}$Ca$_x$An$_x$PO$_4$ solid solutions (with An(IV) = Th, U) by putting mixtures of La(OH)$_3$,
Ca(OH)$_2$ or CaO and An(OH)$_4$ or AnO$_2$ with concentrated phosphoric acid in hydrothermal conditions
near to geological conditions ($t = 24$ hours, $T = 780^\circ$C, $P = 200$ MPa, Ni/NiO buffer to control the
dioxygen fugacity and to avoid the oxidation of uranium (IV) into uranyl).$^{47,48}$ By this way, polyphase
systems composed by Ca$_{0.5}$U$_{0.5}$PO$_4$ and U$_2$(PO$_4$)(P$_3$O$_{10}$)$^{49}$ were always prepared, leading to the same
conclusions than that given by Muto et al.$^{50}$

According to literature, single crystals of monazite and monazite/brabantite solid solutions were
usually prepared by the flux method from a mixture of rare-earth oxide and lead diphosphate at
1300$^\circ$C.$^{51}$ The crystals of monazite (or monazite/brabantite), formed during the cooling step ($975^\circ$C $\leq T$
$\leq 1300^\circ$C) were finally isolated by preferential dissolution of PbP$_2$O$_7$ in hot concentrated nitric acid. By
the way, several authors reported the formation of samples doped with uranium (up to 10 wt.%),
neptunium (3.0 wt.%), plutonium (6.0 wt.%), americium (up to 0.5 wt.%) or curium (0.1 wt.%).$^{6,52,53}$
While the formation of Am– or Cm–doped monazite samples is not surprising taking into account the
stabilization of the trivalent oxidation state of these actinides, the incorporation of the two tetravalent
actinides (U, Np) in monazite samples could not be explained by the formation of vacancies for the
weight loadings considered but probably involves the formation of Ln$_{1-2x}$Pb$_x$An$_x$PO$_4$ solid solutions as
an explanation of such weight loadings with tetravalent actinides.$^{54}$ For Pu–doped samples, the
stabilization of both oxidation states could be also evoked$^{39,40,55}$ even though the probability of the
presence of Pu(III) appears to be more important on the basis of the reduction of Pu(IV) into Pu(III), as
already discussed in literature.$^{56,57}$

Consequently, the incorporation of high weight loadings of tetravalent actinides in the monazite
structure requires one of the two coupled substitutions discussed in (eq 1) and (eq 2). This
incorporation, which appears difficult to reach by wet chemistry methods, seems to occur only
considering dry chemistry methods. Indeed, samples of Ca$_{0.5}$An$_{0.5}$PO$_4$ (An = Th, U or Np) were
prepared as single phase after heating a mixture of AnO₂, CaCO₃ and (NH₄)₂HPO₄ at high temperature under inert conditions.\textsuperscript{58,59} Tabuteau et al. reported the formation of Ca₇₅Np₃₅Pu₁₅PO₄ through the simultaneous incorporation of tetravalent neptunium and plutonium.\textsuperscript{59} According to some recent experiments, samples of Pu\textsuperscript{III}0.4Pu\textsuperscript{IV}0.3Ca₀.₃PO₄ monazite/brabantite solid solution were also obtained at high temperature.\textsuperscript{16} On the contrary, the application of the same procedure to the preparation of Ca₇₅Pu₇₅PO₄ remained unsuccessful, probably due to the reduction of Pu(IV) into Pu(III) during the heating treatment, leading to the formation of PuPO₄.\textsuperscript{59} The same conclusion was given on the basis of several attempts to stabilize tetravalent cerium as Ca₇₅Ce₇₅PO₄. Heindl et al. used the high temperature solid state route to synthesize M\textsuperscript{II}₇₅Ce\textsuperscript{IV}₇₅PO₄ (with M\textsuperscript{II} = Ca, Ba and Sr).\textsuperscript{60} All the resulting powders were green colored. Moreover, the XRD lines exhibited a shift towards the small 2θ angles compared to the diagram of CePO₄ which is not in agreement with the fact the \(\frac{1}{2}(\text{Ce}^{IV}+\text{Ca}^{II})\) couple is smaller than Ce\textsuperscript{III}. More recently, Pepin et al. performed the same experiment but observed neither green color, nor shift in the XRD lines. They also noted the presence of a secondary phase, Ca₂P₂O₇.\textsuperscript{61} The relationship between the Ca content and the powder color of (Ce,Ca)PO₄ was recently used by Imanaka et al. and Sivakumar et al. for the elaboration of green pigments.\textsuperscript{62,63} Nevertheless, the authors did not determine the valence state of cerium in these powdered samples.

On the basis of such results, Podor et al. described the limit of incorporation of tetravalent element in brabantite samples, M\textsuperscript{II}₇₅M\textsuperscript{IV}₇₅PO₄, versus the ionic radius of divalent cation, \(\overline{\text{IX}_r(M^{II})}\), tetravalent cation, \(\overline{\text{IX}_r(M^{IV})}\) and the average cationic radius \(\overline{\text{IX}_r(M^{IV+II})}\) in the nine-fold coordination through the two following relationships: \textsuperscript{47,48}

\[
1.107 \text{ Å} \leq \frac{\text{IX}_r(M^{IV+II})}{\text{IX}_r(M^{IV})} \leq 1.216 \text{ Å} \tag{3}
\]

\[
1.082 \leq \frac{\text{IX}_r(M^{II})}{\text{IX}_r(M^{IV})} \leq 1.238 \tag{4}
\]

which becomes:

\[
1.107 \text{ Å} \leq \frac{\text{IX}_r(M^{III+IV+II})}{\text{IX}_r(M^{IV})} \leq 1.216 \text{ Å} \tag{5}
\]

\[
1 \leq \frac{\text{IX}_r(M^{III+II})}{\text{IX}_r(M^{III+IV})} \leq 1.238 \tag{6}
\]
with \[ \frac{\overline{I}X_r(M^{III+IV+II})}{\overline{I}X_r(M^{III})} = (1 - 2x) \overline{I}X_r(M^{III}) + x \overline{I}X_r(M^{II}) + \overline{I}X_r(M^{IV}) \] (7)

and

\[ \frac{\overline{I}X_r(M^{III+II})}{\overline{I}X_r(M^{III+IV})} = \frac{[(1 - 2x) \overline{I}X_r(M^{III}) + x \overline{I}X_r(M^{II})]}{[(1 - 2x) \overline{I}X_r(M^{III}) + x \overline{I}X_r(M^{IV})]} \] (8)

when discussing about the simultaneous substitution of trivalent lanthanide by divalent and tetravalent cations in monazite/brabantite solid solutions, \( M^{III}_{1-2x}M^{II}_xM^{IV}_xPO_4 \).

Both \( \overline{I}X_r(M^{IV+II}) \) and \( \frac{\overline{I}X_r(M^{IV+II})}{\overline{I}X_r(M^{III})} \) values were determined from (eq 3) and (eq 4), on the one hand, and from the ionic radii of actinides determined according to Shannon\textsuperscript{64} with the assumption that the evolution of the actinide ionic size follows a linear function of the atomic number as well as in the eightfold coordination,\textsuperscript{16} on the other hand. These values reach 1.105 Å and 1.14, 1.10 Å and 1.16 and 1.09 Å and 1.17 for \( Ca_{0.5}NP_{0.5}PO_4 \), \( Ca_{0.5}Ce_{0.5}PO_4 \) and \( Ca_{0.5}Pu_{0.5}PO_4 \), respectively. Based on these results, the formation of \( Ca_{0.5}Pu_{0.5}PO_4 \) and \( Ca_{0.5}Ce_{0.5}PO_4 \) brabantites would be difficult since the \( \overline{I}X_r(M^{IV+II}) \) value does not satisfy the inequality given in (eq 3) while that of \( Ca_{0.5}NP_{0.5}PO_4 \) and \( Ca_{0.5}NP_{0.35}Pu_{0.15}PO_4 \) remains possible, as described in literature. In the same way, the maximum incorporation of tetravalent actinide/element in \( M^{III}_{1-2x}M^{II}_xM^{IV}_xPO_4 \) was evaluated for \( M^{III} = La \) and \( M^{II} = Ca \). The results are reported in Table 1. One can note that the coupled substitution 2 \( Ln^{III} \leftrightarrow M^{IV} + M^{II} \) would not be complete for cerium (\( x_{max} = 0.47 \)) or plutonium (\( x_{max} = 0.45 \)).

**Table 1.** Ionic radii of some tetravalent actinides in the ninefold coordination and their maximum incorporation in \( LaPO_4 (La_{1-2x}M^{IV}_xCa_xPO_4) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( M^{IV} )</th>
<th>Ce</th>
<th>Th</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>Np</th>
<th>Pu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( \overline{I}X_r(M^{IV}) )</td>
<td>1.02 Å</td>
<td>1.09 Å</td>
<td>1.05 Å</td>
<td>1.03 Å</td>
<td>1.01 Å</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( x_{max} )</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The aim of this paper is thus to investigate (reexamine) the incorporation of three tetravalent elements (Th, U, Ce) in the brabantite structure through high temperature solid state route. In this work, thorium is considered on the basis of its stabilized tetravalent oxidation state which excludes other redox
reactions. On the contrary, tetravalent uranium that can be oxidized and cerium (used as a plutonium surrogate) that can be reduced have been considered in a second part of the work. A particular aspect of this study consists in the description of the schematic scheme of incorporation of these three tetravalent elements (Th, U, Ce) in the brabantite structure, as a preliminary work dedicated to the formation of monazite/brabantite solid solutions including tetravalent thorium and/or uranium.

2. Experimental section

All the samples were prepared by firing initial mixtures containing MO₂, Ca(HPO₄)·2H₂O (or CaO for cerium compounds) and NH₄H₂PO₄.¹⁷ In order to increase the reactivity of the initial mixtures, the starting materials were ground for few minutes by mechanical grinding in zirconia bowls before being fired under inert atmosphere (M = U and Th) or in air (M = Ce) in alumina boats with heating and cooling rates of 10°C.min⁻¹. In the field of the improvement of the final homogeneity of the samples, the optimization of the grinding conditions was already described for several phosphate ceramics doped with thorium and/or uranium such as thorium phosphate-diphosphate solid solutions, britholites, monazites and monazite/brabantite solid solutions.⁷

The thermal behaviour of the mixtures was followed by differential thermal analysis (DTA) and thermogravimetry (TG) using a Setaram TG 92–16 apparatus in platinum crucibles. All the XRD analyses were performed on powdered samples at room temperature using a Bruker D8 Advance X-ray diffractometer (Cu Kα = 0.15418 nm). The unit cell parameters were refined using U-Fit or PowderCell software.⁶⁵,⁶⁶

The Electron Probe MicroAnalyses (EPMA) experiments were carried out using Cameca SX 50 and SX 100 apparatus (operating with an acceleration voltage of 15 kV and a current intensity of 10 nA). The calibration standards used were mainly LaPO₄ and CePO₄ monazites (Kα emission of phosphorus and Lα emission of cerium, respectively), wollastonite Ca₂SiO₄ (Kα emission of calcium), ThO₂ (Mα emission of thorium) and UO₂,12 (Mβ emission of uranium). It is worth noting that some interferences were detected during the EPMA analyses in the samples containing simultaneously large amounts of
calcium and uranium, leading to the systematic over-estimation of the calcium content, as already discussed for Ca$_9$Nd$_{0.5}$U$_{0.5}$(PO$_4$)$_{4.5}$(SiO$_4$)$_{1.5}$F$_2$ (U-britholites) samples.$^3$

$\mu$-Raman spectra were recorded with a microspectrometer LABRAM (Dilor – Jobin Yvon) using an argon laser operating at 514.5 nm with a power in the range 1-10 mW. The sample position was checked thanks to an Olympus microscope.

Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and Electron Energy Loss Spectroscopy (EELS) analyses were performed in the SACTEM–Toulouse, using a Tecnai F20 (FEI) equipped with an objective lens aberration corrector (CEOS) and imaging filter (Gatan Tridiem).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Preparation of Ca$_{0.5}$Th$_{0.5}$PO$_4$

The synthesis of Ca$_{0.5}$Th$_{0.5}$PO$_4$ was followed, from a starting mixture of Ca(HPO$_4$)$\cdot$2H$_2$O, ThO$_2$ and NH$_4$H$_2$PO$_4$, versus the heating temperature (400 ≤ $T$ ≤ 1400°C) using DTA/TG experiments (Figure 1).
Figure 1. Thermal analysis under argon and X-ray diffraction analysis of a ThO₂-Ca(HPO₄)·2H₂O-NH₄H₂PO₄ mixture.

The total weight loss observed on the TG curves (i.e. ≈ 13%) occurs in several steps below 600°C. It was associated with the dehydration of Ca(HPO₄)·2H₂O and to the decomposition of NH₄H₂PO₄. Between 180°C and 400°C, the total weight loss (≈ 10.8%) was associated with three endothermic effects located at 208°C, 360°C and 474°C, assigned to the release of water, to the condensation of hydrogenphosphate groups into polytrioxophosphate entities and finally to the quantitative release of NH₃. No additional weight loss is observed above 600°C while several exothermic effects are
observed at 777°C, 827°C, 925°C, 970°C and 994°C, due to reactions occurring between several intermediates as discussed thereafter. Some of these peaks were globally associated to the formation then decomposition of thorium diphosphate (α−ThP₂O₇), calcium polytrioxophosphate (Ca(PO₃)₂) and to the formation of Th–brabantite (i.e. Ca₀.₅Th₀.₅PO₄).

The chemical reactions occurring during the formation of Th–brabantite was also followed versus the heating temperature through XRD on samples heated at several temperatures ranging from 400 to 1400°C (Figure 1). Between 400 and 700°C, the XRD patterns always reveal the presence of ThO₂ [JCPDS File # 42–1462] while the XRD lines of Ca(HPO₄)·2H₂O and NH₄H₂PO₄ progressively disappear for the benefit of that of Ca(PO₃)₂ [JCPDS File # 9–363] formed as an intermediate product. Above 750°C, all the XRD lines of Th–brabantite are observed [JCPDS File # 31–311] as a consequence of the reaction between Ca(PO₃)₂ and ThO₂. Simultaneously, the XRD lines of α−ThP₂O₇ are also observed [JCPDS File # 16–230]. This intermediate progressively disappears above 900°C. Between 800 and 900°C, the system appears thus polyphase and consists on a mixture of Ca₀.₅Th₀.₅PO₄, Ca(PO₃)₂, ThO₂ and α−ThP₂O₇ between which several chemical reactions occur leading to the numerous effects observed during the DTA experiments. The thermal effects observed between 700 and 1000°C are surely the consequence of several solid-solid reactions between all these compounds. Nevertheless, these effects can not be easily discriminated which contributes to some difficulties in their specific assignment, as already mentioned.

Above 1000°C, the XRD patterns correspond to pure and single phase Th–brabantite which chemical composition is consistent with that expected (Table 2).

Table 2. EPMA results of Ca₀.₅M₀.₅PO₄ synthesized at 1200h for 6 hours in inert atmosphere

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M = Th</th>
<th>M = U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wt.% (O)</td>
<td>25.2 ± 0.2</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The spectroscopic characterization of $\text{Ca}_{0.5}\text{Th}_{0.5}\text{PO}_4$ through $\mu$-Raman experiments confirms that all the vibration bands observed correspond to $\delta_s(\text{P}−\text{O})$ ($400 – 450 \text{ cm}^{-1}$), $\delta_{\text{as}}(\text{P}−\text{O})$ ($530 – 650 \text{ cm}^{-1}$), $\nu_s(\text{P}−\text{O})$ ($\approx 980 \text{ cm}^{-1}$) and $\nu_{\text{as}}(\text{P}−\text{O})$ ($1050 – 1150 \text{ cm}^{-1}$) associated to PO$_4$ entities as reported in Figure 2.

![Figure 2](image.jpg)

**Figure 2.** $\mu$-Raman spectra of $\text{Ca}_{0.5}\text{M}_{0.5}\text{PO}_4$.

All the data recorded appear in good agreement with that reported in literature.$^{69}$ Moreover, no vibration band associated of the P−O−P bridge characteristic of diphosphate entities or of polytrioxophosphate groups is observed (especially in the range of 700 – 800 cm$^{-1}$)$^{70}$ that confirms the complete reaction between intermediates such as $\alpha$-$\text{ThP}_2\text{O}_7$ and Ca(PO$_3$)$_2$.

Finally, the crystallinity of the Th–brabantite phase was followed through the determination of the average FWHM of the main XRD lines, corresponding to the $\bar{1}11$, 20$\bar{1}$, 120, 012, 20$\bar{2}$ and 112 reflections (Figure 3), and of the refined unit cell parameters (Table 3).

* Interferences revealed during analyses, between uranium and calcium, leading to an overestimation of calcium
Figure 3. Average FWHM of the main XRD lines (i.e. $\bar{1}1\bar{1}$, 20 1, 1 2 0, 0 1 2, 2 0 2 and 1 1 2) of Ca$_{0.5}$Th$_{0.5}$PO$_4$, versus synthesis temperature.

Table 3. Unit cell parameters of Ca$_{0.5}$M$_{0.5}$PO$_4$ versus synthesis temperature under Ar atmosphere

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T (°C)</th>
<th>a (nm)</th>
<th>b (nm)</th>
<th>c (nm)</th>
<th>β (°)</th>
<th>$V \times 10^3$ (nm$^3$)</th>
<th>$F_{20}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>750</td>
<td>0.6714</td>
<td>0.6921</td>
<td>0.6424</td>
<td>103.68</td>
<td>290.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800</td>
<td>0.6724(2)</td>
<td>0.6912(3)</td>
<td>0.6419(5)</td>
<td>103.94(4)</td>
<td>289.6(5)</td>
<td>13(0.0017;85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900</td>
<td>0.67156(7)</td>
<td>0.69153(5)</td>
<td>0.64190(6)</td>
<td>103.797(9)</td>
<td>289.5(7)</td>
<td>73(0.0051;54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podor et al.$^{48}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000</td>
<td>0.67118(4)</td>
<td>0.69155(5)</td>
<td>0.64170(4)</td>
<td>103.753(6)</td>
<td>289.3(5)</td>
<td>90(0.0054;41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1100</td>
<td>0.67120(4)</td>
<td>0.69152(5)</td>
<td>0.64168(5)</td>
<td>103.737(7)</td>
<td>289.3(5)</td>
<td>89(0.0057;39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200</td>
<td>0.67123(4)</td>
<td>0.69169(5)</td>
<td>0.64163(5)</td>
<td>103.738(6)</td>
<td>289.4(5)</td>
<td>115(0.0051;34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1300</td>
<td>0.67139(4)</td>
<td>0.69185(5)</td>
<td>0.64201(4)</td>
<td>103.737(6)</td>
<td>289.7(5)</td>
<td>103(0.0050;39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1400</td>
<td>0.67137(4)</td>
<td>0.69181(5)</td>
<td>0.64187(4)</td>
<td>103.732(6)</td>
<td>289.6(5)</td>
<td>96(0.0055;38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M=Th</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900</td>
<td>0.6675(2)</td>
<td>0.6853(2)</td>
<td>0.6372(2)</td>
<td>104.10(3)</td>
<td>283(2)</td>
<td>20(0.015;66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000</td>
<td>0.66728(5)</td>
<td>0.68590(5)</td>
<td>0.63733(6)</td>
<td>104.037(8)</td>
<td>283.0(2)</td>
<td>81(0.0039;63)</td>
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<td>0.66729(3)</td>
<td>0.68607(4)</td>
<td>0.63755(5)</td>
<td>104.036(6)</td>
<td>283.2(5)</td>
<td>92(0.0036;61)</td>
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<td>0.68601(5)</td>
<td>0.63766(6)</td>
<td>104.028(8)</td>
<td>283.2(6)</td>
<td>125(0.0039;41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1300</td>
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<td>0.68596(5)</td>
<td>0.63765(6)</td>
<td>104.025(7)</td>
<td>283.1(6)</td>
<td>70(0.0047;61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1400</td>
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<td>0.68607(4)</td>
<td>0.63782(5)</td>
<td>104.020(7)</td>
<td>283.2(5)</td>
<td>85(0.0041;57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montel et al.$^{68}$</td>
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<td>900</td>
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<td>0.6852</td>
<td>0.6364</td>
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<td>282.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>92(0.0036;61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200</td>
<td>0.66724(4)</td>
<td>0.68601(5)</td>
<td>0.63766(6)</td>
<td>104.028(8)</td>
<td>283.2(6)</td>
<td>125(0.0039;41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1300</td>
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<td>0.63765(6)</td>
<td>104.025(7)</td>
<td>283.1(6)</td>
<td>70(0.0047;61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1400</td>
<td>0.66706(3)</td>
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<td>0.63782(5)</td>
<td>104.020(7)</td>
<td>283.2(5)</td>
<td>85(0.0041;57)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From these data, it is clear that the crystallinity of Th–brabantite samples is significantly improved when increasing the heating temperature from 750 to 1200°C, the optimized conditions of preparation being obtained between 1200 and 1300°C. At these temperatures, the unit cell parameters obtained (a =
6.7123(4) Å, \( b = 6.9169(5) \) Å, \( c = 6.4163(5) \) Å and \( \beta = 103.738(6)° \) appear in good agreement with the data reported in the literature for Th–brabantite samples prepared through other chemical processes which confirms the full incorporation of thorium in the monazite structure through the coupled substitution examined.\(^{47,71}\) Finally, at 1400°C, the refinement of the unit cell parameters seems to indicate the beginning of the thermal decomposition of Ca\(_{0.5}\)Th\(_{0.5}\)PO\(_4\), which was especially observed when increasing the heating time at this temperature. For higher heating temperatures, some small amounts of thorium dioxide were also detected at the surface of the samples (especially when working on Th–brabantite pellets), as a consequence of the local decomposition of Th–brabantite into calcium oxide, thorium dioxide and volatile phosphorous oxide (P\(_4\)O\(_{10}\)), according to:

\[
\text{Ca}_{0.5}\text{Th}_{0.5}\text{PO}_4 \xrightarrow{T \geq 1400°C} \frac{1}{2}\text{CaO} + \frac{1}{2}\text{ThO}_2 + \frac{1}{4}\text{P}_4\text{O}_{10} \uparrow (9)
\]

### 3.2. Preparation of Ca\(_{0.5}\)U\(_{0.5}\)PO\(_4\)

From the results reported in the previous section, the full incorporation of thorium in the monazite structure appears possible when heating between 1200 and 1300°C. However, as already discussed, thorium is expected to be only tetravalent in these operating conditions of synthesis. For this reason, the incorporation of uranium which presents several stabilized oxidation states (mainly (IV) and (VI) in phosphoric medium) was also examined. In this aim, mixtures of UO\(_2\), Ca(HPO\(_4\))·2H\(_2\)O and NH\(_4\)H\(_2\)PO\(_4\) were ground mechanically then fired at several heating temperatures ranging from 400 to 1400°C.

The first indication of the progression of the solid–solid reaction was deduced from some changes in the colour of the samples which turned from black/grey (due to the presence of UO\(_2\) in the mixture) to green (characteristic of the presence of tetravalent uranium in phosphoric compounds)\(^{72,73}\) when heating above 900°C. Such an observation was correlated to the study of the variation of the XRD diagrams versus the heating temperature (Figure 4) which indicates that the incorporation of uranium in the monazite structure follows the same chemical scheme than that reported for thorium. Indeed, after the full dehydration of Ca(HPO\(_4\))·2H\(_2\)O then the decomposition of NH\(_4\)H\(_2\)PO\(_4\) between 100°C and 600°C, the XRD pattern highlights the presence of Ca(PO\(_3\))\(_2\) and \( \alpha-\text{UP}_2\text{O}_7 \) [JCPDS File # 16–263], as
intermediates above 700°C. All the XRD lines of U–brabantite (Ca₀.₅U₀.₅PO₄) are observed when heating above 900°C, correlatively to the decrease of the XRD lines of UO₂ [JCPDS File # 41–1422]. At this temperature, the Ca₀.₅U₀.₅PO₄ phase [JCPDS File # 12–279] coexists with UO₂ and α–UP₂O₇ which fully disappear at 900°C and 1000°C, respectively.

![X-ray diffraction analysis of a UO₂-Ca(HPO₄)·2H₂O-NH₄H₂PO₄ mixture.](image)

**Figure 4.** X-ray diffraction analysis of a UO₂-Ca(HPO₄)·2H₂O-NH₄H₂PO₄ mixture.

Pure and single phase samples of U–brabantite are thus obtained when heating above 1100°C. At this temperature, the elementary composition determined from EPMA appears in good agreement with that expected (Table 2) while the unit cell parameters determined (Table 3) seems to confirm the incorporation of tetravalent uranium in the monazite structure.⁴⁸

The comparison of the µ-Raman spectra of Ca₀.₅Th₀.₅PO₄ and Ca₀.₅U₀.₅PO₄ does not reveal any significant differences (Figure 2). The positions of the vibration bands are very close, particularly the strong one located around 980 cm⁻¹ (which can be assigned to νₛ(P-O) in phosphate groups). As for Th–brabantite, it is worth noting that the vibrations usually associated to diphosphate or
polytrioxophosphate groups are not observed, as a confirmation of the complete reaction of the intermediates formed at lower temperatures (α−UP2O7 or Ca(PO3)2). Moreover, the absence of intense and narrow vibration band in the domain 850−870 cm−1, characteristic of the ν1 symmetric stretching mode of uranyl units (UO22+)74,76 confirms the stabilization of tetravalent uranium during all the synthesis process which was suggested by the colour of all the final samples prepared, as already discussed. These results appear in contradiction with that reported by Mc Carthy et al.77 who observed the oxidation of uranium (IV) during the heating treatment and also with the data associated to the synthesis of U−britholites3 which revealed the formation of CaUO4 then CaU2O5+y through a complex redox uranium cycle.

As it was observed for Th−brabantite, the crystallinity of U−brabantite is significantly improved when increasing the heating temperature from 900 to 1200°C (decrease of the average FWHM and improvement in the unit cell parameters refinement). Above 1300°C, the beginning of the decomposition of U−brabantite is observed, leading to the formation of uranium dioxide (which can be evidenced by the change in colour from green to grey/black). This decomposition is particularly observed at the surface of U−brabantite pellets which are finally recovered by this thin black/grey uranium oxide layer when extending the heating time. As already discussed for Th−brabantite, the associated reaction of decomposition can thus be written:

$$\text{Ca}_{0.5}\text{U}_{0.5}\text{PO}_4 \xrightarrow{T \geq 1300^\circ C} \frac{1}{2} \text{CaO} + \frac{1}{2} \text{UO}_2 + \frac{1}{4} \text{P}_4\text{O}_{10}$$  (10)

On the basis of the results obtained when studying the formation of Th−brabantite and U−brabantite from mixtures of MO2 (M = Th, U), Ca(HPO4)·2H2O and NH4H2PO4, a simplified chemical mechanism was proposed (Figure 5).
3.3. Synthesis of Ca₀.₅Ce₀.₅PO₄

As uranium, plutonium could exist with two stabilized oxidation states (III and IV) in the phosphate environment. However, the trivalent oxidation state appears as the most favorable plutonium oxidation state in the monazite structure. Nevertheless, it is questionable if Pu(IV) could exist in such a structure when calcium is simultaneously incorporated. Because of the radiotoxicity of plutonium, experiments were first developed with cerium as a surrogate, since cerium presents similar properties with plutonium, both in terms of ionic size and redox properties. To this aim, the thermal behavior of a CeO₂–CaO–2NH₄H₂PO₄ mixture was investigated.

The physical and chemical phenomena occurring during the calcination of the starting mixture were followed by thermal analysis and by XRD for Ca₀.₅Ce₀.₅PO₄ (Figure 6).
Figure 6. Thermal analysis under air and X-ray diffraction of a CeO$_2$-CaO-2NH$_4$H$_2$PO$_4$ mixture.

From room temperature to 800°C, several thermal effects and an important weight loss were observed, all assigned to the thermal decomposition of NH$_4$H$_2$PO$_4$ into NH$_3$ and H$_2$O, as previously observed for thorium (see section 3.1.). The observed weight loss (19.23%) is very close to the expected value (19.22%). Beyond 800°C, 4 thermal effects (930°C, 940°C, 946°C and 1315°C) and an additional weight loss (1.44% between 800°C and 1050°C) could be observed. With the TG derivative curve, not plotted on this graph, the latter can be assigned as the second endothermic effect occurring at 940°C. The analysis of the emitted gas by mass spectrometry revealed that this weight loss is due to a dioxygen emission. As already described for thorium and uranium, the XRD patterns revealed the presence of monazite and of calcium diphosphate Ca$_2$P$_2$O$_7$ [JCPDS File # 73-0440], as previously described by Pepin et al. Moreover, three other phosphates could be observed as transient compounds: CeP$_2$O$_7$ [JCPDS File # 30–0164] and Ca(PO$_3$)$_2$ at 700°C and 850°C, and Ce(PO$_3$)$_3$ [JCPDS File # 33–0336] at 850°C. Melting points of Ca(PO$_3$)$_2$ and Ca$_2$P$_2$O$_7$, measured by thermal analysis, was found to be located
at 985°C and 1318°C, respectively. From these results, the qualitative mechanism of reaction can be proposed (Figure 5). The reactions can be sorted into two categories:

(a) Solid state reactions ($T < 930°C$)

- From 40°C to 840°C, the phosphate precursor melts and decomposes with emission of NH$_3$ and H$_2$O before reacting with CaO and CeO$_2$ to form Ca(PO$_3$)$_2$ and CeP$_2$O$_7$:

$$2\text{NH}_4\text{H}_2\text{PO}_4 + \text{CaO} + \text{CeO}_2 \rightarrow \text{Ca(PO}_3)_2 + \text{CeP}_2\text{O}_7 + 2\text{NH}_3 \uparrow + 3\text{H}_2\text{O} \uparrow$$  \hspace{1cm} (11)

- From 840°C to 930°C, a slight weight loss is observed on the TG curve (Figure 6). According to literature, this results of the slow decomposition of $\alpha$-CeP$_2$O$_7$:

$$2\text{CeP}_2\text{O}_7 \rightarrow \text{Ce(PO}_3)_3 + \text{CePO}_4 + \frac{1}{2}\text{O}_2 \uparrow$$  \hspace{1cm} (12)

The oxygen emission appears as the consequence of the reduction of the Ce(IV) into Ce(III).

(b) Liquid state reactions ($930°C < T < 1050°C$)

- At 930°C, Ca(PO$_3$)$_2$ melts (DTA effect at 930°C) and dissociates into Ca$^{2+}$ and PO$_3^-$: 80

$$\text{Ca(PO}_3)_2 \rightarrow [\text{Ca}^{2+} + 2\text{PO}_3^-]_f$$  \hspace{1cm} (13)

- In such an ionic liquid, the Ce–O chemical bond of CeO$_2$ is probably broken 80 Consequently, the liquid phase consists of 4 ions, i.e. Ca$^{2+} + 2$PO$_3^- +$Ce$^{4+} +$O$^{2-}$. Immediately, the kinetic of the reduction of Ce$^{4+}$ strongly increases (DTA effect at 940°C). Consecutively, a slow precipitation of two phases occurs (wide DTA effect at 946°C):

$$[\text{Ca}^{2+} + \text{Ce}^{3+} + 2\text{PO}_3^- + 3/2\text{O}_2^-]_f \rightarrow \text{CePO}_4(s) + \frac{1}{2}\text{Ca}_2\text{P}_2\text{O}_7(s)$$  \hspace{1cm} (14)

The DTA effect observed at 1315°C can thus be assigned to the melting of Ca$_2$P$_2$O$_7$. In conclusion, the chemical reaction occurring during the calcination of a CeO$_2$–CaO–2NH$_4$H$_2$PO$_4$ is, with the assumption that it is a total reaction:

$$\text{CeO}_2 + \text{CaO} + 2\text{NH}_4\text{H}_2\text{PO}_4 \rightarrow \text{CePO}_4 + \frac{1}{2}\text{Ca}_2\text{P}_2\text{O}_7 + 2\text{NH}_3 \uparrow + 3\text{H}_2\text{O} \uparrow + \frac{1}{4}\text{O}_2 \uparrow$$  \hspace{1cm} (15)

However, several experiments indicate that the reaction reported in (eq 15) is not complete and that the powder contains both trivalent and tetravalent cerium. The resulting powder exhibits a green color,
as observed by Heindl et al.,\textsuperscript{60} whereas CePO$_4$ is usually white colored. Moreover, the unit cell parameters are smaller ($a = 6.711$ Å, $b = 7.036$ Å and $c = 6.384$ Å) than that reported for pure CePO$_4$ ($a = 6.800$ Å, $b = 7.024$ Å and $c = 6.474$ Å),\textsuperscript{1} which appears in agreement with the partial incorporation of Ce(IV) in the monazite structure, since $\frac{1}{2}$(Ce$^{IV}$+Ca$^{II}$) is smaller than Ce$^{III}$ (1.10 Å and 1.196 Å, respectively).\textsuperscript{64} The presence of Ce$^{IV}$ in the monazite structure was highlighted without any ambiguity by EELS (Figure 7).

![Figure 7. TEM observation and cerium EELS spectra of M$_{4,5}$-edge fine structure of CeO$_2$-CaO-$2$NH$_4$H$_2$PO$_4$ mixture fired at 1400°C.](image)

Two different types of zones were observed by TEM. The first one appears with a uniform contrast and an amorphous structure (Zone 1 on Figure 7), while in the second one, crystallized nanostructures were observed (Zone 2 on Figure 7). The analysis of the fine structure of the cerium M$_{4,5}$-edge doublet leads to several remarks:

- the spectra of Zone 1 is characteristic of trivalent cerium;
- the shift of the doublet toward the high energies, the extra shoulders observed in Zone 2 spectra and the inversion of the intensity ratio between the two peaks prove the presence of Ce(IV) in this zone, in agreement with experiments performed on Ce$^{III}$ and Ce$^{IV}$ references samples and with litterature.\textsuperscript{81,82} Moreover, calcium is only detected in the Zone 2, which is consistent with the presence of Ce$^{IV}$ in this zone.
3.4. Incorporation of Ce\textsuperscript{IV} in (La,Ce)\textsuperscript{III}PO\textsubscript{4} solid solution

The previous results highlight that only a small amount of tetravalent cerium could be incorporated in the monazite structure. Two hypotheses could explain this incomplete incorporation: tetravalent cerium is unstable in monazite because of redox properties, or the (Ce\textsuperscript{IV},Ca\textsuperscript{II}) couple is too small to incorporate the monazite structure. In that case, the incorporation should be linked to the global cationic size. Thus, the Ce\textsuperscript{IV}/Ce\textsuperscript{III} ratio should be higher in a LaPO\textsubscript{4} matrix than in a CePO\textsubscript{4} one. Consequently, the incorporation of the (Ce\textsuperscript{IV},Ca\textsuperscript{II}) couple is investigated in the LaPO\textsubscript{4} – CePO\textsubscript{4} solid solution:

$$\frac{1}{2}(1-2x)La_2O_3 + xCeO_2 + xCaO + NH_4H_2PO_4 \rightarrow La_{1-2x}Ce_{x+y}^{III}Ce_{x-y}^{IV}Ca_{y}(PO_4)_{1-x+y} + \frac{1}{2}(x-y)Ca_2P_2O_7 + NH_3 \uparrow + \frac{1}{2}H_2O \uparrow + \frac{1}{4}(1-2x)O_2 \uparrow$$  \hspace{1cm} (16)

The measurement of Ce\textsuperscript{IV}/Ce\textsuperscript{III} ratio was obtained by using two methods:

(a) EPMA experiments: in the monazite phase, the amount of tetravalent cerium was determined by measuring both Ca and Ce contents, noted (Ca) and (Ce), respectively, with the assumption that Ca\textsuperscript{2+} acts as the only charge compensation mechanism. The Ce\textsuperscript{IV}/Ce\textsuperscript{III} mole ratio is thus given by the following relationship:

$$\frac{Ce^{IV}}{Ce^{III}} = \frac{(Ca)}{(Ce) - (Ca)}$$  \hspace{1cm} (17)

This method is all the more accurate than (Ce) and (Ca) is high (i.e. for high \(x\) values). For the samples examined in this work, EPMA was not suitable for \(x < 0.2\).

(b) XRD analysis: this method was based on the refinement of the unit cell parameters of the monazite phase from which it is possible to deduce the average cationic radius \(\frac{IX \cdot r(M^{III+IV})}{r} \) considering, as instance, the following relation:

$$\frac{IX \cdot r(M^{III+IV})}{r} = \frac{a - 0.4718}{1.7420}$$  \hspace{1cm} (18)

with:

$$\frac{IX \cdot r(M^{III+IV})}{r} = \frac{(1-2x) \cdot IX \cdot r_{La} + y \cdot IX \cdot r_{Ce^{IV}} + y \cdot IX \cdot r_{Ca^{II}} + (x - y) \cdot IX \cdot r_{Ce^{III}}}{1 - x + y}$$  \hspace{1cm} (19)
which allows the determination of \( y \) according to:

\[
y = \frac{(1 - 2x) \times \bar{r}_{\text{La}} \times x \times \bar{r}_{\text{Ce}^\text{III}} - (1 - x) \times \bar{r}_{\text{M}^{\text{III+IV}}} \times \bar{r}_{\text{Ce}^\text{IV}}}{\bar{r}_{\text{M}^{\text{III+IV}}}}
\]

(20)

Based on the unit cell parameters determined, this method exhibits a constant accuracy, whatever the \( x \) value considered.

All the results reveal the presence of tetravalent cerium in monazite/brabantite samples (Table 4, Figure 8). Nevertheless, the incorporation rate appears weak, \( \text{i.e. Ce}^\text{IV}/(\Sigma \text{cations}) < 10\% \), which is lower from the expected value (47\%), exclusively obtained on the basis of sterical criteria (eqs 3-4 and Table 1).

**Table 4.** Determination of Ce\(^{\text{IV}}\)/Ce\(^{\text{III}}\) in monazite by XRD and EPMA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( x )</th>
<th>( \bar{r}_{\text{M}^{\text{III+IV}}} ) (Å)</th>
<th>( y )</th>
<th>Ce(^{\text{IV}})/Ce(^{\text{III}})</th>
<th>(Ca)</th>
<th>(Ce)</th>
<th>( y )</th>
<th>Ce(^{\text{IV}})/Ce(^{\text{III}})</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.214 ± 0.001</td>
<td>0.007 ± 0.001</td>
<td>0.20 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.018 ± 0.004</td>
<td>0.035 ± 0.008</td>
<td>0.02 ± 0.01</td>
<td>1.0 ± 0.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1.210 ± 0.001</td>
<td>0.010 ± 0.001</td>
<td>0.15 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.018 ± 0.002</td>
<td>0.04 ± 0.02</td>
<td>0.02 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.6 ± 0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1.211 ± 0.001</td>
<td>0.013 ± 0.001</td>
<td>0.15 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.019 ± 0.002</td>
<td>0.091 ± 0.008</td>
<td>0.021 ± 0.005</td>
<td>0.27 ± 0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>1.210 ± 0.001</td>
<td>0.011 ± 0.001</td>
<td>0.08 ± 0.01</td>
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<td>0.022 ± 0.005</td>
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<td>0.15</td>
<td>1.205 ± 0.001</td>
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<td>0.050 ± 0.007</td>
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<td>0.026 ± 0.004</td>
<td>0.06 ± 0.02</td>
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<td>0.25</td>
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<td>0.07 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.040 ± 0.005</td>
<td>0.81 ± 0.07</td>
<td>0.020 ± 0.004</td>
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<td>0.30</td>
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<td>0.015 ± 0.001</td>
<td>0.04 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.050 ± 0.007</td>
<td>0.95 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.026 ± 0.004</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>1.188 ± 0.001</td>
<td>0.022 ± 0.001</td>
<td>0.05 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.050 ± 0.007</td>
<td>0.95 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.026 ± 0.004</td>
<td>0.06 ± 0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 8. Incorporation of Ce$^{IV}$ in (La,Ce)$^{III}$PO$_4$ solid solution

Moreover, Ce$^{IV}/(\Sigma$ cations) does not appear as a function of $x$. This highlights that the incorporation of the tetravalent form of an element in the monazite crystal structure is governed by the redox potential of the M$^{4+}$/M$^{3+}$ couple with regard to O$_2$/O$_2^-$. Unfortunately, the redox potentials of the M$^{4+}$/M$^{3+}$ couples remain unknown in the conditions of synthesis considered. Nevertheless, it is possible to discuss on the basis of the values at 25°C − 1 atm. In these conditions, the redox potential of Pu$^{4+}$/Pu$^{3+}$ and Ce$^{4+}$/Ce$^{3+}$ are close to O$_2$/O$_2^-$ (1.006V, 1.72V and 1.12V, respectively), which is in accordance with the existence of monazite containing both tri- and tetravalent cerium (this work) and plutonium. Since the coexistence of the M$^{IV}$ and M$^{III}$ in monazite is all the more important as the redox potential of the M$^{4+}$/M$^{3+}$ couple is close to the one of O$_2$/O$_2^-$, this can also easily explain why Pu$^{IV}$ is incorporated in LaPO$_4$ at a higher level than Ce$^{IV}$ ($M^{IV}/(M^{IV} + M^{III}) = 0.5$ for plutonium and 0.1 for cerium, respectively).

4. Conclusion

Acknowledgment. The authors are grateful to Johan Ravaux and Alain Kolher from LCSM (Université Henri Poincaré Nancy-I, France) for performing EPMA and SEM experiments and to Thérèse Lhomme from CREGU (Université Henri Poincaré Nancy-I, France) for her extensive help.
during the characterization of the samples by the μ-Raman technique. This work was financially and scientifically supported by the French Research Group NOMADE (GdR 2023, CNRS/CEA/COGEMA) and by a CEA-CFR research grant.

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