

Revision 1

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Vacancy infilling during the crystallization of Fe-deficient hematite:

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An in situ synchrotron X-ray diffraction study of non-classical crystal growth

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ABSTRACT

24 The crystallization of hematite from precursor ferrihydrite was studied using time-
25 resolved, angle-dispersive synchrotron X-ray diffraction in aqueous solutions at pH 10
26 and 11 and at temperatures ranging from 80 to 170 °C. Rietveld analyses revealed a
27 nonclassical crystallization pathway involving vacancy infilling by Fe as defective
28 hematite nanocrystals evolved. At 90 °C and pH 11, incipient hematite particles
29 exhibited an Fe site occupancy as low as 0.68(2), and after 30 min, Fe occupancy
30 plateaued at 0.84(1), achieving a metastable steady state with a composition
31 corresponding to “hydrohematite”. During crystal growth, unit-cell volume increased
32 with an increase in Fe occupancy. The increase in Fe occupancy in hydrohematite was
33 accomplished by deprotonation, resulting in a shortening of the long Fe-O(H) bonds and
34 decreased distortion of the octahedral sites. Once the occupancy stabilized, the unit-cell
35 volume contracted following further nanoparticle growth. Our study documented a
36 variety of synthetic routes to the formation of “hydrohematite” with an Fe vacancy of 10-
37 20 mol% in the final product.

38 The structure refined for synthetic hydrohematite at 90 °C and pH 11 closely
39 matched that of natural hydrohematite from Salisbury, CT, with a refined Fe occupancy
40 of 0.83(2). Dry heating this natural hydrohematite generated anhydrous, stoichiometric
41 hematite, again by continuous infilling of vacancies. The transformation initiated at 150
42 °C and was complete at 700 °C, and it was accompanied by the formation of a minor
43 amorphous phase that served as a reservoir for Fe during the inoculation of the defective
44 crystalline phase.

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INTRODUCTION

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Hematite occurs as a naturally abundant coating on sediments and soils, often controlling the sorption and redox states of dissolved metals and organic pollutants (Barrón and Torrent 2013; Colombo et al. 2017). Hematite also has been used as a paleoclimate proxy for environments thousands to millions of years in the past, via hematite:goethite ratios (Ji et al. 2004; Hyland et al. 2015) and also as the primary carrier of natural remanent magnetization in redbeds, enabling plate tectonic reconstruction (e.g., Walker et al. 1981; Løvlie et al. 1984; Szaniawski et al. 2012). In addition, hematite is an important industrial material that is widely used in pigments, catalysts, batteries, sensors, photoelectrochemical water splitting devices, heavy-metal decontaminants, and many other applications (Paterson 1999; Walter 2006; Lu et al. 2014; McBriarty et al. 2018; Guo et al. 2020).

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The presence of vacancies in hematite greatly enhances its efficiency as a photocatalyst (Guo et al. 2020), as an adsorbent of radiotoxic elements (Wang et al. 2015; McBriarty et al. 2018), as a charge-storage capacitor (Hahn et al. 2011; Lu et al. 2014), and as an electrical conductor (Yang et al. 2013). Many studies have focused on the effects of oxygen vacancies and surface iron deficiencies in hematite (Yang et al. 2013; Hu et al. 2016; Kim 2020). In this paper, we explore hematite that exhibits bulk Fe cation deficiencies.

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The hematite structure (space group $R\bar{3}c$) contains sheets of oxygen anions that are hexagonal closest packed, and Fe fills 2/3 of the octahedral sites (Blake et al. 1966). The substitution of $3\text{H}^+ \leftrightarrow 1\text{Fe}^{3+}$ yields the following general formula for hydrohematite:

69 $\text{Fe}_{2-x/3}(\text{OH})_x\text{O}_{3-x}$ (Fig. 1). Wolska and Schwertmann (1989) designated the term
70 “hydrohematite” for the compositional range $0.5 \geq x > 0$, and “protohematite” for $1 \geq x >$
71 0.5. “Protohematite” with Fe vacancies up to 10 mol% has been observed as an
72 intermediate during the heating of goethite (Gualtieri and Venturelli 1999; Burgina et al.
73 2000). In their study of the transformation of akageneite to hematite, however, Peterson
74 et al. (2015, 2016) reported transient hematite-like precursors with Fe vacancy
75 concentrations greatly exceeding 10 mol%. Despite the importance of hematite for
76 commercial, technological, and paleoenvironmental applications, little is known about its
77 tolerance for Fe deficiencies and the range of Fe occupancies in natural and synthetic
78 hematite minerals.

79 Figure 1 represents the Fe stoichiometries along a join connecting compositions
80 extending from “ferrihydrite” (simplified to $\text{Fe}(\text{OH})_3$) to endmember hematite (Fe_2O_3),
81 all having the $R\bar{3}c$ symmetry of stoichiometric hematite. When only $3/4$ of the octahedral
82 sites of hematite are filled (i.e., $\text{Fe}_{\text{occ}} = 0.75$), then the ratio of Fe to O is $2/3 \times 3/4 = 1/2$,
83 yielding a formula of FeOOH , with H serving to charge balance. To distinguish this
84 phase from FeOOH -goethite with space group (S.G.) $Pnma$, we will describe “ $R\bar{3}c$
85 hematite-type FeOOH ” as “Hm- FeOOH ” hereafter in this paper.

86 Despite the modern definition of “hydrohematite” introduced by Wolska and
87 Schwertmann (1989), the mineral name actually was first proposed in the 1840s.
88 Hermann (1844) and Breithaupt (1847) reported the discovery of hematite-like minerals
89 with chemistries exactly halfway between the compositions of goethite and hematite,
90 such that $\text{Fe}_{\text{occ}} = 0.875$. Hermann (1844) called this mineral “turgite” (a term now
91 employed by collectors to describe iridescent goethite), and Breitmann (1847) christened

92 this phase “hydrohematite”. In terms of crystallographic Fe occupancy, the
93 “hydrohematite” of Wolska and Schwertmann (1989) includes compositions for which $1 >$
94 $Fe_{occ} > 0.917$, whereas “protohematite” includes phases for which $0.917 > Fe_{occ} > 0.833$.
95 Therefore, Breitmann’s “hydrohematite” would be classified by Wolska and
96 Schwertmann (1989) as “protohematite” rather than “hydrohematite”.

97 Our analyses of Fe-deficient hematite-like phases from historical collections
98 (Chen et al. 2021b) revealed that Fe occupancies are highly variable in natural specimens.
99 Despite the groundbreaking character of the studies by Wolska and co-workers (Wolska
100 1981, 1988; Wolska and Schwertmann 1989), we regard their revised nomenclature as
101 historically problematic. In this article, we use the term “superhydrous hematite” to
102 represent $R\bar{3}c$ structures over the range of stoichiometries between $Fe(OH)_3$ and Fe_2O_3
103 (Fig. 1). Although the International Mineralogical Association has not approved the
104 name “hydrohematite” for any usage, we will employ hydrohematite (without quotations)
105 to refer to compositions that lie halfway between those of Fe_2O_3 and $FeOOH$ – formally,
106 near $Fe_7O_9(OH)_3$ (Fig. 1).

107 We have performed a detailed atomic-scale study of the transformation of two-
108 line ferrihydrite to hydrohematite, and hydrohematite to endmember hematite, by time-
109 resolved synchrotron X-ray powder diffraction (TRXRD). Using freshly prepared
110 ferrihydrite in alkaline (pH 10, 11) solutions as the starting material, we synthesized
111 metastable Fe-deficient hydrohematite over a range of temperatures and monitored Fe
112 occupancy parameters as nanocrystalline hematite evolved. To further explore the
113 metastability of hydrohematite, we dry-heated natural hydrohematite and documented its
114 conversion to stoichiometric hematite. Our study highlights a non-classical

115 crystallization mechanism involving vacancy inoculation with Fe during crystal growth,
116 and it demonstrates that hematite can accommodate high concentrations of Fe vacancies
117 and maintain structural integrity. The exceptionally Fe-deficient hydrohematite phases
118 that we observed have the potential to tolerate high levels of dopants in their structures
119 and to serve as candidate materials for adsorbents and photoelectrochemical energy
120 conversion devices. In addition, they will exhibit magnetic properties that markedly
121 depart from those observed in endmember hematite (Hill et al. 2008; Jiang et al. 2022).

122

123 **EXPERIMENTAL METHODS**

124 **Ferrihydrite preparation**

125 Ferrihydrite was the starting material for hydrohematite crystallization. Fresh
126 ferrihydrite was prepared at room temperature using the method described by
127 Schwertmann and Cornell (2003). We dissolved 4.039 g iron nitrate nonahydrate
128 ($\text{Fe}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 9 \text{H}_2\text{O}$) in 10 mL deionized water to produce a 1 M solution of $\text{Fe}(\text{NO}_3)_3$.
129 This solution was titrated with 5 M KOH drop by drop until the pH held steady for >10
130 mins at pH 10 and 11. The drop-by-drop titration was completed about 40 minutes.
131 Two-line ferrihydrite, as identified by synchrotron X-ray diffraction, precipitated as a gel
132 (containing ~ 0.5 M ferrihydrite) immediately upon the reaction of the $\text{Fe}(\text{NO}_3)_3$ and
133 KOH. We used this fresh ferrihydrite (aged no longer than 4 hours) as the reaction
134 precursor. When the ferrihydrite aged longer than 24 hours at the room temperature, X-
135 ray diffraction (XRD) patterns still revealed two-line ferrihydrite, but the aged
136 ferrihydrite failed to transform to either hematite or goethite upon heating at 80 to 170 °C

137 for at least 12 hours. Therefore, we utilized freshly prepared ferrihydrite for all of our
138 TXRD experiments.

139 Using a 1 mL syringe, we injected ferrihydrite gel into a thin-walled quartz glass
140 capillary (4.0 cm long and 1.0 mm outer-diameter; Charles Supper Company). UV-cured
141 epoxy (OG142-87, EPO-TEK) then was injected to seal the capillary. The epoxy caps
142 were cured using a full-spectrum UV lamp (EXFO X-Cite Series 120). The ferrihydrite
143 gels were masked during this step to minimize interaction of UV light with the gels, and
144 each capillary was rotated during curing to ensure even curing of the epoxy. The
145 volumes of the ferrihydrite gels (~30 μL), the aging times of the gels (within 4 hr), and
146 the amount of headspace in the capillary (1 mm away from the top of the gel surface)
147 were maintained as similar as possible to minimize sample variations. Capillaries were
148 inserted into a standard Cu brass mounting pin for loading in an X-ray goniometer head.
149 The capillary was secured within the brass pin by a small amount of clay.

150

151 **Time-resolved synchrotron X-ray diffraction (TRXR)**

152 TRXR patterns were collected at the GeoSoilEnviroCARS (GSECARS) 13-
153 BM-C beamline at the Advanced Photon Source (APS), Argonne National Laboratory
154 (ANL). The monochromatic X-ray wavelength was refined as 0.8291(5) Å using a LaB₆
155 standard. The distance from the sample to the camera was refined to be 108.45(6) mm.
156 The partially focused X-ray beam measured approximately 0.3 mm in height and 0.4 mm
157 in width, and it was directed to the center of the capillary. Capillary orientation was
158 maintained perpendicular to the forced-gas heater (described below). Capillaries were
159 rotated 30° about their long axes at 1° per second to minimize preferred orientation

160 effects in the XRD patterns. Each pattern was collected with an exposure time of 30
161 seconds using either a MAR 165 CCD detector or a Dectris PILATUS 1M pixel array
162 detector. Full-circle images were integrated into linear intensity-versus- 2θ XRD datasets
163 using the program Dioptas (Prescher and Prakapenka 2015).

164

165 **Electrically resistive forced helium heaters**

166 A low-temperature forced-gas heater was fabricated at GSECARS for heating
167 experiments below 250 °C, similar to the one described by Heaney et al. (2020). This
168 low-temperature heater consisted of wound Ni coils around an inner ceramic tube, with
169 an applied DC voltage using a Sorensen 33 V x 33 A (Model XHR 33-33) power supply
170 to achieve resistive heating. This assembly was encased in an outer ceramic sleeve, and
171 He gas was forced through the interior of the heated cylinder.

172 A second forced-gas heater was fabricated for high temperature heating
173 experiments from room temperature to 1000 °C. The design of this high-temperature
174 heater was nearly identical to that of the low-temperature heater but used freestanding W
175 coils instead of Ni wound around a central ceramic support.

176 Both heaters were placed below the capillary with the gas flowing out of a 6 mm
177 nozzle directed perpendicular to the capillary's long dimension and centered on the
178 region where XRD measurements were made. The temperature was measured by placing
179 the tip of a type-K thermocouple into the center of the He gas flow approximately 3
180 millimeters from the heater's exit and a few millimeters from the capillary. The
181 temperature was monitored with a Keithley 2700 Multimeter. We heated samples from
182 room temperature to the target temperature using proportional-integral-derivative (PID)

183 software. The low-temperature furnace heated at a rate of 14 °C/s, such that the target
184 temperatures were achieved in few seconds before the start of the second pattern, and
185 these temperatures stabilized at ± 0.5 °C.

186 Temperature was calibrated using phase transitions of RbNO₃ (Alfa Aesar,
187 99.8%, metals basis) and the melting point of metallic silver for both heaters. We
188 monitored the transformation of RbNO₃ loaded in a 1.0 mm quartz glass capillary and
189 heated from 25.7 to 400 °C. Based on this standardization, we estimate that the
190 temperature measured by the thermocouple was within ± 1.5 °C of the actual temperature
191 inside the capillary.

192

193 **Heating temperatures**

194 For experiments involving the low-temperature hydrothermal transformation of
195 ferrihydrite to hydrohematite, runs were conducted using the low-temperature heater at
196 the following constant temperatures: 80, 90, 100, 110, 130, 150, and 170 °C, all at pH 10,
197 and 90 °C at pH 11. We terminated data collection after reaction progress ceased, with
198 run times of 9, 2, 1.5, 1, 1, 0.5, 2, and 1.6 h respectively. Individual 2-dimensional
199 diffraction patterns were collected for 30 s, and we allowed 8 seconds for software
200 integration of the 2-dimensional ring patterns into 1-dimensional intensity-versus- 2θ
201 patterns, for a total data collection time of 38 s per XRD pattern.

202 To analyze the transformation of hydrohematite to hematite, we used the high-
203 temperature furnace to heat dry natural hydrohematite powders from Salisbury, CT
204 (Genth 255-3, Chen et al. 2021b) according to the following schedule: 1) Initial heating
205 up to 90 °C at 13 °C/min; 2) Ramping from 90 to 1000 °C at 2 °C /min; and 3) Sustained

206 heating at 1000 °C for 0.5 h, to match the protocol of Gualtieri and Venturelli (1999).
207 We loaded the natural hydrohematite powders from Salisbury in a 0.7 mm thin-walled
208 quartz capillary with one end unsealed to allow for the release of water vapor and other
209 gases during heating. The diameter of quartz capillary in high-temperature dry heating
210 experiment was smaller from our low-temperature hydrothermal experiments, 0.7 versus
211 1.0 mm, because of the significant higher X-ray absorption among the well-packed dry
212 powders.

213

214 **Rietveld structure refinement**

215 Rietveld structure refinements were performed using the EXPGUI interface of the
216 General Structure Analysis System (GSAS) program (Larson and Dreele 2000; Toby and
217 Von Dreele 2013). The starting structural parameters for hematite (S.G. $R\bar{3}c$), goethite
218 (S.G. $Pnma$), and magnetite (S.G. $Fd\bar{3}m$) came from Blake et al. (1966), Gualtieri and
219 Venturelli (1999), and Haavik et al. (2000), respectively. The Gaussian peak shape
220 coefficients GU , GV , and GW determined by refinement of a LaB_6 standard analyzed at
221 the start of our data collection and fixed for the remainder of the refinements. First, we
222 refined background, weight fraction, sample displacement, and unit-cell parameters.
223 Backgrounds were best fit for all patterns using a shifted Chebyshev polynomial with 12
224 terms. Peak profiles were modeled using a pseudo-Voigt function described by
225 Thompson et al. (1987). Second, the profile parameters sensitive to crystal size
226 broadening (LX), strain broadening (LY), anisotropic crystal size broadening ($ptec$), and
227 anisotropic microstrain broadening (S_{hkl}) were refined. After the above parameters had
228 converged, atomic positions, and finally Fe occupancies in hematite were allowed to

229 refine. When the refinement of isotropic temperature factors (U_{iso}) generated negative
230 values, values for U_{iso} were fixed to 0.006 for Fe and 0.012 for O.

231 Refinements were performed over a d-spacing range from 1.36 -5.94 Å (35.50° to
232 8.00° 2θ). Goodness-of-fit parameters indicated high-quality refinements (Fig. S1), with
233 χ^2 ranging from 0.1 to 1.2 (\pm 0.03 to 0.05), R_{wp} from 0.001 to 0.005 (\pm 0.001 to 0.002),
234 and R_{Bragg} from 0.010 to 0.014 (\pm 0.001 to 0.002).

235

236 **Crystallite size determination**

237 We estimated the crystallite size using the Scherrer (1918) equation:

$$238 \quad \tau = \frac{K\lambda}{\beta \cos\theta} \quad (1)$$

239 where τ is the mean particle size; K is the crystal shape factor, in this case, 0.9 (Bagheri et
240 al. 2013); β is the full width at half maximum of a Bragg peak (FWHM, corrected for
241 instrumental broadening by a LaB₆ standard); λ is the X-ray wavelength; and θ is the
242 Bragg angle. In order to account for instrumental broadening, the FWHM of the (211)
243 diffraction peak of a LaB₆ standard was measured using the MDI JADE 2010 software
244 (Materials Data, Inc. Livermore, CA), and that value was subtracted from the FWHM of
245 the (116) diffraction peak of the emergent hydrohematite.

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247

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RESULTS

249 **Transformation pathway**

250 Two-line ferrihydrite transformed to hydrohematite and goethite in all of our
251 experiments. Despite prior reports that this reaction sequence involves a maghemite-like

252 phase as an intermediate (Barrón et al., 2003; Cao et al., 2017), diffraction peaks for
253 maghemite were never detected in any of our experiments. A representative TRXRD
254 sequence (90 °C and pH 11) is shown in Figure 2 and a complimentary stacked 2D plot is
255 shown in Supporting Information (Fig. S2). Precursor two-line ferrihydrite is indicated
256 by two broad peaks at 2.54 and 1.46 Å. Within a data collection time of 38 s, the
257 strongest diffraction peak for hydrohematite (01 $\bar{4}$) typically appeared shortly before
258 (within 2 min of) the appearance of the strongest goethite peak (101). One should note,
259 however, that hematite diffracts more strongly than does goethite; the reference intensity
260 ratio (RIR) for hematite is 3.18 whereas that for goethite is 2.63 (Gates-Rector and
261 Blanton 2019). Moreover, the peak-to-background ratios for these emergent phases are
262 extremely low. Despite these uncertainties, our analyses from the suite of experiments
263 consistently suggested that hydrohematite precipitates from ferrihydrite slightly sooner
264 than goethite.

265 The refined weight fractions and normalized scale factors as a function of time for
266 90 °C and pH 11 are plotted in Figure 3. Scale factors directly reflect the mass of each
267 phase as detected by the X-ray beam within the sampling window. In order to compare
268 the behaviors of hematite and goethite, the scale factors were normalized to their final
269 refined values for each phase at the end of the experiment. As seen in Figure 3A, both
270 hydrohematite and goethite continuously increased in mass abundance until attaining a
271 plateau when ferrihydrite was depleted (~3,500 s in Fig. 3A). Despite the first
272 appearance by hematite, the weight fraction (Fig. 3B) of goethite dominated in the
273 earliest stages of each run but was overtaken by hematite. At 90 °C and pH 11, the
274 experimental systems achieved a steady state with ~75 wt% hematite and ~25 wt%

275 goethite. As seen in Figure 3B, this hematite-to-goethite ratio was maintained despite
276 continued co-precipitation of goethite and hematite, as reflected in the refined scale
277 factors beyond 1000 s in Figures. 3A and 3B. We attribute the constancy of these phase
278 proportions to a uniformity in the kinetics of precipitation, which depend strongly on pH
279 and temperature (Chen, 2021a). In agreement with Das et al. (2011), goethite growth was
280 more favorable at low temperatures (Table 1).

281

282 **Fe occupancy in hydrohematite**

283 As shown in Figure 3, when ferrihydrite at pH 11 was heated to 90 °C, the Fe
284 occupancy initially refined to 0.68(2) at 17 min and increased to 0.84(1) at 30 min. For
285 the next 60 min, Fe_{occ} stabilized at 0.84. Although peak-to-background was low and
286 errors were accordingly high for structure refinements of the first-formed crystals, our
287 analyses revealed that Fe occupancies of incipient nuclei ranged between 0.60(2) and
288 0.75(2) – below that of Hm-FeOOH. Estimated standard deviations (ESDs) for refined
289 occupancies as calculated during Rietveld refinements typically are underestimated (Post
290 and Bish 1989). Experiments at other temperatures, however, exhibited similar behaviors
291 (Fig. S3), such that hydrohematite started with iron occupancies below 0.75(2), and then
292 evolved to a metastable hydrohematite composition by Fe infilling during crystal growth.

293 The refined Fe occupancies for the final metastable hydrohematite structures
294 ranged from 0.80-0.90 in our experiments (Table 2, Fig. 1). Though we were time-
295 limited during our synchrotron runs, our experiments demonstrated that highly Fe-
296 deficient hydrohematite remained unchanged for more than 4 hours when temperatures
297 were lower than 150 °C. Prior researchers have observed Fe-deficient hematite-like

298 phases as unstable, intermediate precursors during stoichiometric hematite formation
299 (Gualtieri and Venturelli 1999; Peterson et al. 2018). For the first time, we have shown
300 that at pH 10 and 11, ferrihydrite gels will generate hydrohematite with Fe occupancies
301 ranging from 0.80-0.90 as a steady-state product (Figs. 3, 4, and S3).

302 In Figure 4, we have plotted the Fe occupancy of hematite as a function of
303 reaction time and temperature for all runs at pH 10 from 80-170 °C. This plot shows the
304 Fe concentration of hydrohematite at different time stamps at various temperatures. A
305 2D projection of Figure 4 is shown in the Supplementary Information (Fig. S4). At pH
306 10, higher temperatures favor hydrohematite with fewer Fe vacancies, suggesting that
307 highly Fe-deficient hematite, with $Fe_{occ} = 0.8-0.9$, is evidence of precipitation at
308 temperatures less than 200 °C. In a separate study, we showed that stoichiometric
309 hematite forms in acidic solutions ($pH \leq 5$) at high temperatures ($T \geq 180$ °C) (Chen et
310 al., 2022).

311

312 **Changes in unit-cell parameters and crystal size during hydrohematite growth**

313 We monitored structural changes during the transformation from ferrihydrite to
314 hydrohematite by combining synchrotron TRXRD and Rietveld analysis. The growth of
315 hydrohematite nanoparticles was accompanied by an initially rapid expansion of the unit
316 cell, followed by a decrease in the magnitudes of a and c , and therefore, of unit-cell
317 volume (Fig. 5). The initial unit-cell expansion strongly correlated with an increase in Fe
318 occupancy. We hypothesize that with higher occupancies of Fe, the Fe-Fe repulsion
319 between adjacent face-sharing octahedra increased, resulting in the observed unit-cell
320 expansion. The c -axis, which is normal to the plane of closest packed oxygen atoms,

321 exhibited a more dramatic extension than did the *a*-axis. For example, at 90 °C and pH
322 11, as the Fe occupancy increased from 0.68(2) to 0.84(1) in the first 25 min, the *c*-axis
323 expanded 0.050% while the *a*-axis expanded 0.023%, and unit-cell volume increased
324 0.083%. As described in more detail below, the greater expansion along *c* relative to *a*
325 was associated with a larger change in the Fe-O-Fe angle of face-sharing octahedra along
326 the *c*-axis than in the edge-sharing octahedra perpendicular to *c*. This unit-cell expansion
327 continued until the crystallite sizes attained ~36 nm, as ascertained by Scherrer analysis.

328 Once the Fe occupancy achieved a steady state of ~0.85, mean crystallite sizes
329 continued to increase, and the unit-cell volume contracted. During this second stage, the
330 *a*-axis contracted relatively more than the *c*-axis. Specifically, when hydrohematite
331 nanoparticles grew from ~37 to ~50 nm at 90 °C and pH 11, the Fe occupancy remained
332 at 0.84(1), the *a*-axis contracted 0.065% but the *c*-axis contracted only 0.025%. The
333 decrease in lattice parameters during hydrohematite nanocrystal growth is consistent with
334 the crystallization behavior of many other ionic nanoparticles (Perebeinos et al. 2002;
335 Fischer et al. 2008; Diehm et al. 2012), although the cause of this inverse relationship
336 remains controversial (Heaney et al. 2020).

337 Unit-cell volume, crystallite size, and scale factors plateaued at the same time in
338 our experimental runs (~3300 s in Figs. 3 and 5), indicating that depletion of ferrihydrite
339 induced a cessation in crystal growth. The attainment of a steady-state value for Fe
340 occupancy occurred much earlier than the termination of crystal growth. This result
341 suggests that the generation of Fe-deficient hydrohematite was favored relative to
342 stoichiometric hematite in our experiments. Chen et al. (2021b) reported a crystal
343 structure for natural hydrohematite from Salisbury, CT. The final structure refined for

344 synthetic hydrohematite at pH 11, 90 °C (Table 2) was nearly identical to that of the
345 natural material, which exhibited a refined Fe occupancy of 0.83(2), *a*-axis of 5.040(1) Å,
346 and *c*-axis of 13.797(1) Å.

347

348 **Geometrical evolution of octahedral sites**

349 For the end-product hydrohematite synthesized at pH 11 and 90 °C, the three
350 longer Fe-O bonds refined as 2.164(4) Å, and the three shorter Fe-O bonds refined as
351 1.916(3) Å (Fig. 6). Blake et al. (1966), however, report that in stoichiometric hematite,
352 the three longer Fe-O bonds are 2.119(2) Å and the three shorter Fe-O bonds are 1.941(2)
353 Å. The duality of Fe-O bond lengths in the FeO₆ octahedra of hematite is attributed to
354 Fe-Fe repulsion in face-sharing octahedra. In Fe-poor hydrohematite, the distortion
355 associated with Fe-Fe repulsion therefore is diminished, but the octahedral site
356 geometries also are influenced by OH⁻ groups. The long Fe-O bond lengths that we
357 refined for hydrohematite reflect a 15% contribution of octahedral vacancy sites as well
358 as a reduced effective charge for O in OH⁻. The average Fe-O bond lengths refined here
359 for hydrohematite (2.040(2) Å) are not significantly different from the stoichiometric
360 hematite (2.030(2) Å) (Blake et al. 1966). We provide a full cif file of our representative
361 synthetic hydrohematite structure at pH 11 and 90 °C in the Supplementary Materials, but
362 we acknowledge that our neutron diffraction refinements in a separate study will present
363 the magnetic structure and hydrogen positions of natural hydrohematite (Chen, 2021a).

364 Figure 7 offers some insight into the evolution of Fe-O octahedra during
365 hydrohematite crystal growth. As Fe occupancy increased from 0.68(2) to 0.84(1), the
366 Fe-O-Fe angle of the face-sharing octahedra increased 16.6% (from 71.4(5) to 83.25(24));

367 the Fe-O-Fe angle of edge-sharing octahedra increased 5.4% (from 88.4(3) to 93.13(7));
368 and the Fe-O-Fe angle for corner-sharing octahedra decreased 14.7% (from 142.0(9) to
369 123.75(32)). These trends of Fe-O-Fe angles versus Fe occupancies are consistent with
370 those described in Gualtieri and Venturelli (1999) for the transition of hydrohematite to
371 stoichiometric hematite during the dry heating of goethite powders.

372 The greater expansion in the Fe-O-Fe angle oriented along c for face-sharing
373 octahedra relative to the Fe-O-Fe angle between edge-sharing octahedra would be
374 expected as Fe infills sites and Fe-Fe repulsion increases. Consequently, expansion along
375 the c -axis is more significant relative to a , as described above. An animation of the
376 structural changes observed during the evolution of hydrohematite at 90 °C and pH 11 is
377 accessible in the Supplementary Materials. This movie reveals that as the Fe occupancy
378 for hydrohematite increases from ~0.68 to ~0.84, the FeO₆ octahedra develop from
379 distorted to highly symmetrical coordination polyhedra when viewed along c .

380

381 **Thermal stability of hydrohematite**

382 We have reported natural occurrences of hydrohematite that likely persisted at
383 low temperatures for hundreds of millions of years (Chen et al. 2021b). Can
384 hydrohematite diagenetically transform to stoichiometric hematite? To test the stability
385 of hydrohematite, we dry-heated some hydrohematite samples from room temperature to
386 1000 °C using TRXRD (Figs. 8, 9). Because our synthetic hydrohematite contained low
387 concentrations of goethite, we employed phase pure natural hydrohematite from
388 Salisbury, CT (Penn State University, Genth Collection #255.3). A complete structural
389 refinement of Salisbury hydrohematite has been reported in Chen et al (2021b).

390 Rietveld refinement allowed us to explore the changes in structure and Fe
391 occupancy with elevated temperatures. The refined Fe occupancy of Salisbury (CT)
392 hydrohematite before heating was 0.81(1) (Fig. 9), within error of the value reported in
393 Chen et al. (2021b) of 0.83(2). The Fe occupancy increased very slightly from room
394 temperature to ~150 °C, beyond which the rate of Fe infilling was notably more rapid
395 (Fig. 10). Above 200 °C, the refined Fe occupancy increased linearly with temperature
396 until Fe_{occ} achieved unity at 700 °C (Fig. 10G). Magnetite appeared at 400 °C due to the
397 reduction of Fe³⁺ to Fe²⁺, but only in small quantities, representing less than 2 wt% of the
398 mixture at 700 °C.

399 The transformation from hydrohematite to stoichiometric hematite was
400 accompanied by measurable structural changes. Consistent with our synthetic
401 hydrohematite, within each FeO₆ octahedron in Salisbury hydrohematite, two types of
402 Fe-O bonds exist, with refined distances of 2.154(2) Å and 1.923(2) Å at room
403 temperature. Between room temperature and 150 °C, the overall thermal expansion
404 induced a stretching of all Fe-O bond lengths and an increase in unit-cell volume with
405 scarcely any change in Fe occupancy (Fig. 10). When the temperature exceeded 150 °C,
406 however, hydrohematite started to lose hydroxyls with a concomitant increase in Fe
407 occupancy. At the onset of this dehydration, we observed a decrease in refined crystallite
408 size and a rapid increase in the Fe-Fe bond length. Despite the overall thermal expansion
409 that accompanied heating, the long Fe-O bond contracted in response to deprotonation.
410 From 150 °C to 400 °C, the dehydration process dominated the thermal expansion such
411 that the unit-cell expansion slowed and, even more dramatically, *c* contracted between
412 230 °C and 330 °C (Fig. 11). These crystallographic changes between 150 and 400 °C

413 are consistent with a significant water loss, as further supported by thermogravimetric
414 analysis-mass spectroscopy (TGA-MS) analysis (Chen et al. 2021b). Moreover, crystal
415 annealing was revealed by the sustained increase in crystallite size from 300 to 700 °C.

416 From 400-600 °C, the refined Fe occupancy increased from ~0.91 to ~0.96, and
417 all lattice parameters continued to expand. The long Fe-O bond length was constant
418 within error, but the short Fe-O bond increased due to thermal expansion. The most
419 tightly bonded hydroxyls escaped at ~600 °C and were completely depleted at 700 °C,
420 again consistent with TGA-MS data (Chen et al. 2021b). The long Fe-O bond length
421 again decreased between 600 and 700 °C, whereas Fe-Fe distances hardly changed. The
422 final decrease in the long Fe-O bond length (Fig. 10) may be related to the loss of
423 magnetic coupling around the Néel temperature (T_N) at ~690 °C (Lu and Meng 2010).

424 The overall increase in Fe occupancies during the transformation from
425 hydrohematite to stoichiometric hematite suggests that some hydrohematite steadily
426 disintegrated and supplied the residual crystalline material with Fe. The breakdown of
427 some hydrohematite into an amorphous phase was evidenced by a continual decrease in
428 scale factor during the heating experiment (Fig. 10A). Moreover, we observed a slight
429 increase in background between 2θ of 8.3° and 13.8° (d-spacings of 5.7 to 3.4 Å) (Fig. 9).
430

431 f

432

DISCUSSION

433 **Conditions for hydrohematite formation**

434 Past researchers have reported hydrohematite as an unstable intermediate phase in
435 the transformation of Fe-deficient to stoichiometric hematite (Wolska 1981; Wolska and
436 Schwertmann 1989; Kustova et al. 1992; Gualtieri and Venturelli 1999; Liu et al. 2013;
437 Peterson et al. 2015, 2016, 2018). It was not clear whether, under certain conditions,
438 hydrohematite could be generated as a steady-state metastable product in preference to
439 stoichiometric hematite. In the present work, we have successfully synthesized
440 metastable hydrohematite from ferrihydrite at pH 10 and 11 as an end-stage material.
441 Peterson et al. (2018) also described an increase in refined Fe occupancies from 0.6 to 1.0
442 during the synthesis of hematite (Fig. 12). However, that study employed a different
443 reactant (akageneite) at very low starting pH (~1.0). We used fresh two-line ferrihydrite
444 as the starting material because ferrihydrite is the most common precursor to hematite
445 and goethite in soils (Fischer and Schwertmann 1975; Schwertmann and Murad 1983;
446 Paterson 1999; Waychunas et al. 2005; Colombo et al. 2014; Lagroix et al. 2016). We
447 argue that high pH may be necessary to crystallize Fe-deficient hydrohematite as a
448 steady-state product, at least when temperatures are above 25 °C. High OH⁻
449 concentrations in alkaline solutions may stabilize hydrous hydrohematite relative to
450 anhydrous hematite. Thus, our results suggest hydrohematite preferentially precipitates
451 in moderately alkaline, low-temperature fluids.

452

453 **Structural mechanism of metastable hydrohematite crystallization**

454 Classical crystal growth theories assume atom-by-atom or molecule-by-molecule
455 attachment to the surface of a crystal growing in solution (Karthika et al. 2016).
456 Schwertmann and Murad (1983) first proposed a departure from this simple mechanism
457 by asserting that hematite forms through ferrihydrite aggregation and “internal structural
458 re-arrangement”. However, the nature of this structural change was not explained. We
459 propose that the initially Fe-deficient structure of hydrohematite is inherited from
460 precursor ferrihydrite through a rapid aggregation of ferrihydrite nanoparticles, consistent
461 with the models of Soltis and Penn (2016) and Soltis et al. (2016). These authors report
462 that trace amounts of defect-rich hematite nanoparticles already were detectable using
463 low-temperature SQUID magnetometry in as-prepared two-line ferrihydrite, even though
464 hematite peaks were not visible by synchrotron XRD. Hematite growth occurred by “a
465 particle-mediated growth mechanism”, possibly involving oriented aggregation of
466 hematite nanoparticles.

467 As these nanocrystals grow, we infer that Fe from dissolving or transforming two-
468 line ferrihydrite infills the defective hematite nanocrystals by vacancy diffusion, leading
469 to an increase in Fe occupancy in the hematite. Since X-rays average over domains that
470 are roughly 10 times the lattice repeat, it is useful to note that the low Fe occupancies that
471 we observed represent at least nanoscale-sized domains; aggregates of defect-free
472 nanocrystals separated by Fe-deficient grain boundaries produced during oriented
473 aggregation would not have yielded the XRD patterns that we observed. As more Fe
474 infills the vacancies, stronger Fe-Fe repulsion leads to an increase in the Fe-Fe distances
475 of face-sharing and edge-sharing octahedra, and therefore an expansion in the lattice
476 parameters. As the Fe occupancy reaches steady-state equilibrium ($Fe_{occ} \sim 0.85$), the Fe

477 occupancy ceases to change but the crystals can continue to grow. Thus, we suggest that
478 hydrohematite forms through a non-classical process in which nanocrystal-mediated
479 growth is accompanied by the infilling of vacancies with Fe.

480

481 **Hydrogen Positions**

482 Due to the low X-ray scattering factor for H⁺, the locations of the hydroxyl groups
483 cannot be directly detected by XRD. However, our present study may offer some
484 constraints with respect to the H positions in the hydrohematite structure: 1) the H atoms
485 likely are bonded to the three longer Fe-O bonds; 2) the continuous loss of H on heating
486 to 700 °C suggests that hydrohematite contains a variety of hydroxyl bonding
487 environments; and 3) a high activation energy is required to completely deprotonate the
488 structure. Indeed, prior studies have reported that temperatures >1000 °C were required
489 to remove all hydroxyls from synthetic hydrohematite (Wolska 1981; Wolska and
490 Schwertmann 1989).

491 Figure 13 shows the relationship between Fe-O bond length and Fe occupancy
492 when our hydrothermal and dry heating data sets are combined. Although mixing of
493 these datasets does not account for the different thermal regimes of the wet and dry
494 heating experiments, the results do suggest that decreasing Fe occupancies -- and greater
495 hydroxyl contents -- lead to longer “long Fe-O bonds” and shorter “short Fe-O bonds”
496 (Fig. 13). Thus, our heating data are consistent with trends described in Gualtieri and
497 Venturelli (1999). As we ponder the peculiar metastability of hydrohematite when Fe_{occ}
498 = 0.85, it is interesting to note the near constancy in the long Fe-O distance as Fe_{occ}
499 increases from 0.85 to 1.00.

500 XRD patterns of the hydrohematite produced from ferrihydrite in this study did
501 not exhibit extra reflections or split peaks. Indeed, despite the proposed existence of
502 monoclinic “clinohematite” when akageneite transforms at low pH (Peterson et al. 2015),
503 none of the synthetic hematite in the current study supported a departure from $R\bar{3}c$
504 symmetry. Thus, the incorporation of considerable concentrations of H in the hematite
505 structure does not require a violation of the $R\bar{3}c$ symmetry. One may interpret the
506 absence of superstructures as evidence that the vacancies, and also the H positions, lack
507 long-range order. On the other hand, neutron scattering analyses do offer evidence for
508 partial positional ordering of H, with approximately half of the H ordered and half
509 disordered (Chen, 2021a). TGA-MS analyses of hydrohematite, as described in Chen et
510 al. (2021b), reveal a thermally continuous depletion of H as seen with TRXRD of heated
511 samples and consistent with locally ordered OH groups with different bonding
512 environments.

513

514

IMPLICATIONS

515 Our crystallographic analysis alters the conventional view of the crystallization
516 mechanism for hematite, and perhaps other metal hydroxides. Our XRD results reflect
517 changes in the state of the bulk structure as hematite nanoparticles nucleated and grew.
518 Importantly, the TRXRD data were insensitive to surface structures. Consequently, the
519 observation of non-unitary occupancy factors for Fe reflects deficiencies within the inner
520 volumes of the nanoparticles. Thus, these experiments demonstrate that the hydrothermal
521 transformation of ferrihydrite first generates hematite nanoparticles that are a
522 crystallographic “Swiss cheese”. The overall space group symmetry and atomic structure

523 conform to those of hematite, but the vacancy concentrations of the first nanocrystals
524 were so high that the compositions fell between Hm-Fe(OH)₃ and Hm-FeOOH (Fig. 1).
525 The evolution of these highly Fe-deficient phases towards Fe₂O₃ must involve rapid
526 diffusion of Fe into interior sites. This study demonstrates the reach of in situ
527 synchrotron X-ray diffraction coupled with Rietveld analysis to unravel transformation
528 mechanisms of minerals in hydrothermal systems.

529 Chen et al. (2021b) report the widespread occurrence of natural hydrohematite
530 with Fe occupancies near 0.85. Here, we provide a recipe to synthesize Fe-deficient
531 hematite as a metastable product. Combining the natural discoveries of hydrohematite
532 (Chen et al. 2021b) and our laboratory synthesis of hydrohematite, we interpret our
533 results to indicate that hydrohematite may form in alkaline and low-temperature solutions
534 in sedimentary and hydrothermal deposits. Moreover, the Fe occupancy in
535 hydrohematite and the hematite-to-goethite ratio are sensitive to pH and temperature, thus
536 serving as a possible indicator of paleoclimatic conditions. Since the concentration of Fe
537 vacancies in hematite can significantly modify its physical and chemical properties, such
538 as color, magnetic properties, reactivity, and electrochemistry (Paterson 1999; Walter
539 2006; Lu et al. 2014; McBriarty et al. 2018; Guo et al. 2020), this study provides
540 direction for the synthesis of hydrohematite with tailored characteristics. By extension,
541 these results offer technological as well as natural implications, as they suggest that
542 hydrohematite rather than hematite can form through water-saturated corrosion reactions
543 at moderately alkaline pH, such as in the passivation layers on steel reinforcement in
544 concrete (Leek 1991; Angst et al. 2017).

545

546

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Tables

Table 1. The weight fraction of hydrohematite (Hyhm) and goethite (Gt) and Rietveld fitting parameters at pH 10 from 80-170 °C, pH 11 and 90 °C.

Temp (°C)	pH	Heating time (min)	Wt, Fraction ¹		Goodness of Fit (GOF)		
			Hyhm	Gt	χ^2	wRp	RF^2
80	10	50	0.67(1)	0.33(1)	0.6486	0.0070	0.1336
90	10	18	0.78(1)	0.22(1)	0.7221	0.0072	0.0928
110	10	44	0.88(1)	0.12(1)	0.3500	0.0055	0.0423
130	10	30	0.79(1)	0.21(1)	0.6502	0.0060	0.0709
150	10	7	0.84(1)	0.16(1)	0.6680	0.0060	0.0711
170	10	7	0.90(1)	0.10(1)	0.2138	0.0046	0.0523
90	11	90	0.71(1)	0.29(1)	0.9786	0.0079	0.2185

739 ¹Weight fractions were constrained to sum to 1.0.

740
741

742
743 Table 2. Rietveld refinement lattice parameters of metastable hydrohematite and goethite synthesized at pH 10, 11 in the present
744 study.
745

Temp (°C)	pH	Heating time (min)	Hydrohematite				Goethite			
			<i>a</i> (Å)	<i>c</i> (Å)	Vol (Å ³)	Fe _{occ}	<i>a</i> (Å)	<i>b</i> (Å)	<i>c</i> (Å)	Vol (Å ³)
80	10	50	5.032(1)	13.748(1)	301.51(3)	0.82(1)	9.946(2)	3.019(1)	4.603(1)	138.22(4)
90	10	18	5.031(1)	13.747(1)	301.35(3)	0.84(1)	9.950(2)	3.021(1)	4.602(1)	138.34(4)
110	10	44	5.034(1)	13.757(1)	301.96(3)	0.89(1)	9.964(2)	3.024(1)	4.600(1)	138.58(4)
130	10	30	5.044(1)	13.780(1)	303.60(3)	0.89(1)	9.976(1)	3.037(1)	4.610(1)	139.69(4)
150	10	7	5.039(1)	13.766(1)	302.72(3)	0.87(1)	9.945(1)	3.026(1)	4.607(1)	138.66(4)
170	10	7	5.038(1)	13.763(1)	302.57(3)	0.89(1)	9.972(1)	3.023(1)	4.608(1)	138.90(4)
90	11	90	5.041(1)	13.777(1)	303.23(3)	0.84(1)	9.965(1)	3.025(1)	4.612(1)	139.04(4)

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Figure Captions

753 **Figure 1** The compositional relationships among ferrihydrite, hydrohematite, and
754 stoichiometric hematite. Synthetic hydrohematite products in this study
755 exhibited refined Fe occupancies in the range of 0.80 to 0.90.

756

757 **Figure 2** Stacked TRXRD patterns showing the crystallization of hydrohematite
758 (Hyhm, red peaks) and goethite (Gt, yellow peaks) from 2-line ferrihydrite (Fh)
759 at 90 °C pH 11. Zoom-in plot showed that the ratio of starred peaks at $(12\bar{4})$
760 (left) and (030) (right) in hydrohematite is sensitive to time and Fe occupancies.

761

762 **Figure 3.** (A) A representative refinement at 90 °C and pH 11 showed that
763 hydrohematite (Hyhm, black dots) and goethite (Gt, blue squares) precipitated
764 from ferrihydrite with time. (B) Normalized scale factors and (C) crystallite
765 sizes achieved a plateau at ~3300 s, indicating that ferrihydrite had depleted and
766 crystal growth ceased. (D) Refined Fe occupancy in hematite (Chen et al.,
767 2021b) increased from 0.68(2) to 0.84(1) after 1550 s, and then stabilized at
768 0.84(1), suggesting metastable hydrohematite formed. Rietveld refined standard
769 deviations were smaller than symbols.

770

771 **Figure 4** The dependence of Fe occupancy on transformation time and temperature
772 (80-170 °C) as revealed by a best fit surface to our refined TRXRD data at pH
773 10. Our refined Fe occupancy data are indicated by black dots. Initial
774 structures for hydrohematite were always highly Fe-deficient and then stabilized

775 at a refined Fe occupancy of 0.8-0.9. Higher temperatures produced metastable
776 hydrohematite with fewer Fe vacancies.

777

778 **Figure 5** Evolution of unit-cell parameters a (A), c (B), and volume (C) during
779 hydrohematite growth at 90 °C pH 11. Changes in Fe occupancy are included
780 (D, Chen et al., 2021b) for comparison. Refinement errors, as reported by
781 GSAS, are smaller than symbols.

782

783 **Figure 6** The crystal structure of hydrohematite synthesized at pH 11 and heated at
784 90 °C for 1.5 hr, with a refined Fe occupancy of 0.84(1). The hydrohematite
785 structure exhibits sheets of oxygen (O) anions that are hexagonal closest
786 packed, and iron (Fe) resides within octahedral sites. Two types of Fe-O bonds
787 refined as 2.164(4) and 1.916(3) Å. The Fe-O-Fe angles of face-sharing, edge-
788 sharing, and corner-sharing octahedra are 83.25°(24), 93.13°(7), and
789 123.75°(32) respectively.

790

791 **Figure 7** Changes in refined bond angles during hydrohematite growth at 90 °C pH
792 11. (A) The Fe-O-Fe angle reflects octahedra that are adjacent along the c -axis.
793 These face-sharing octahedra exhibited the greatest expansion (16.65%) of all
794 Fe-O-Fe and O-Fe-O angles. (B) The Fe-O-Fe angle represent adjacent
795 octahedra within the (001) plane. These edge-sharing octahedra exhibited a
796 smaller expansion of 5.34%. (C) The Fe-O-Fe angle of corner-sharing

797 octahedra contracted 14.77%. Standard deviations of refined values are smaller
798 than symbols.

799

800 **Figure 8** Stacked TRXRD patterns showing the transformation of hydrohematite to
801 hematite when dry heated from room temperature to 700 °C.

802

803 **Figure 9** XRD patterns with varied Fe occupancies during the transformation of
804 hydrohematite to hematite. The ratio of starred peaks at $(12\bar{4})$ and (030) is
805 sensitive to Fe occupancies.

806

807 **Figure 10** Crystallographic evolution in the transformation of hydrohematite to
808 hematite with increased temperatures. Standard deviations of refined values are
809 smaller than symbols.

810

811 **Figure 11** Refined lattice parameters in the dehydration of hydrohematite to hematite
812 with increased temperatures.

813

814 **Figure 12** A comparison of the formation of hydrohematite from ferrihydrite in our
815 study (Chen et al., 2021b) and hematite formation from akageneite in Peterson
816 et al. (2018). The variation in Fe occupancy in hematite is shown as a function
817 of final phase abundance (as represented by final refined scale factors).
818 Akageneite powders in solution were heated to 175 °C at pH 1.4 (red squares),
819 whereas the ferrihydrite gels were heated in this study to 90 °C at pH 11.

820

821 **Figure 13** Fe-O bond length dependence on Fe occupancy, combining the data from
822 the transformation of ferrihydrite to hydrohematite at 90 °C and pH11,
823 hydrohematite to hematite from room temperature to 700 °C, and goethite to
824 hematite from 200 to 800 °C (Gualtieri and Venturelli, 1999). With an
825 increased Fe occupancy, the three longer Fe-O bonds shorten, and the three
826 shorter Fe-O bonds lengthen.

827

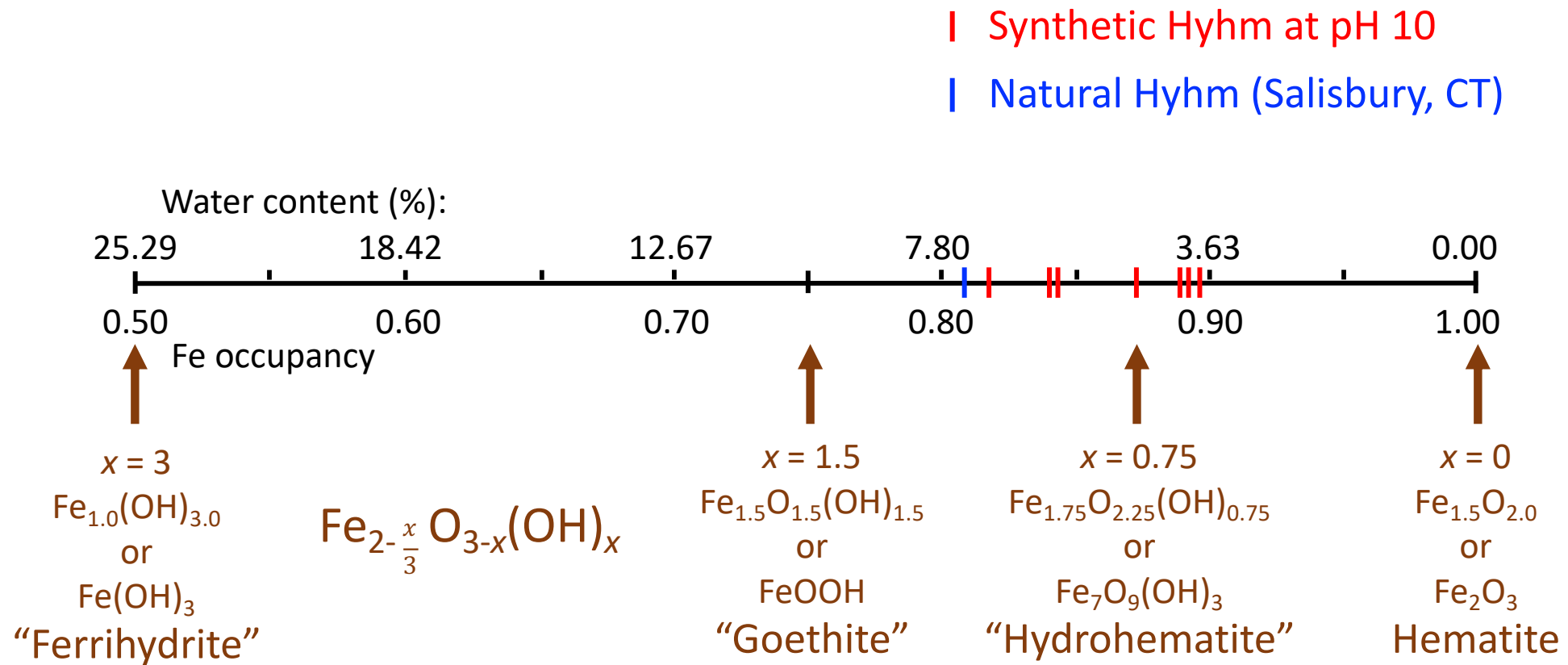


Figure 1

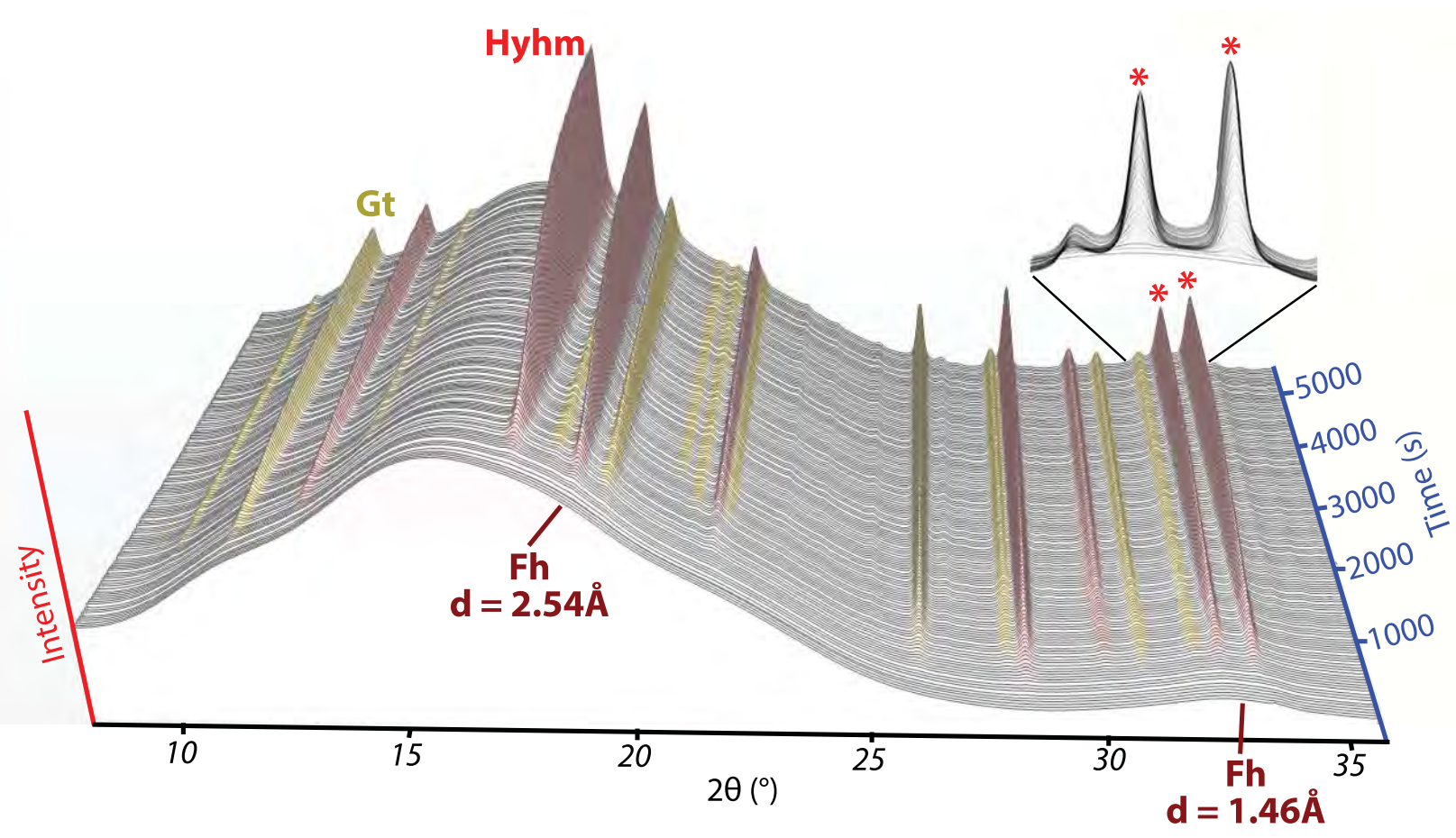


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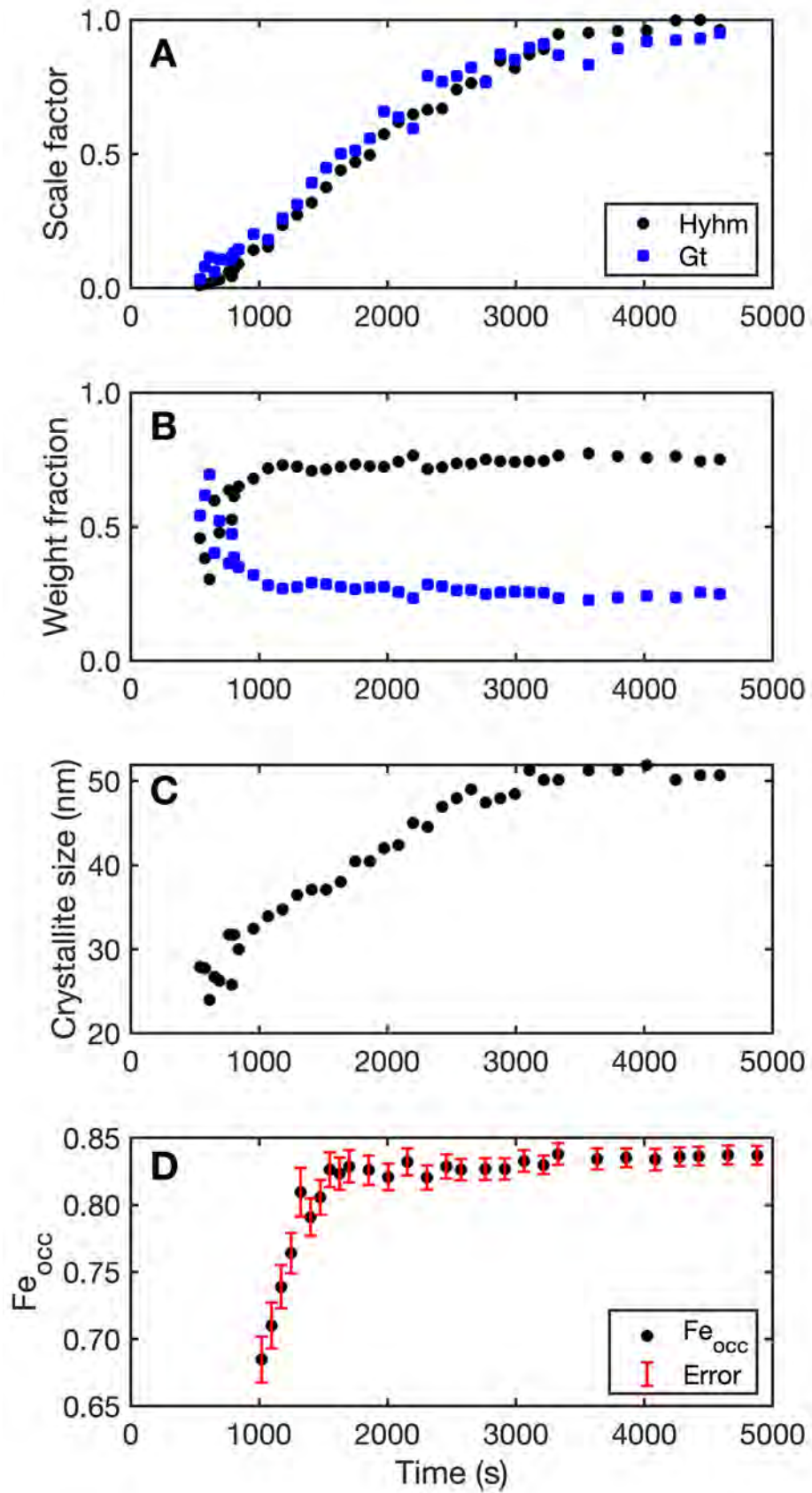


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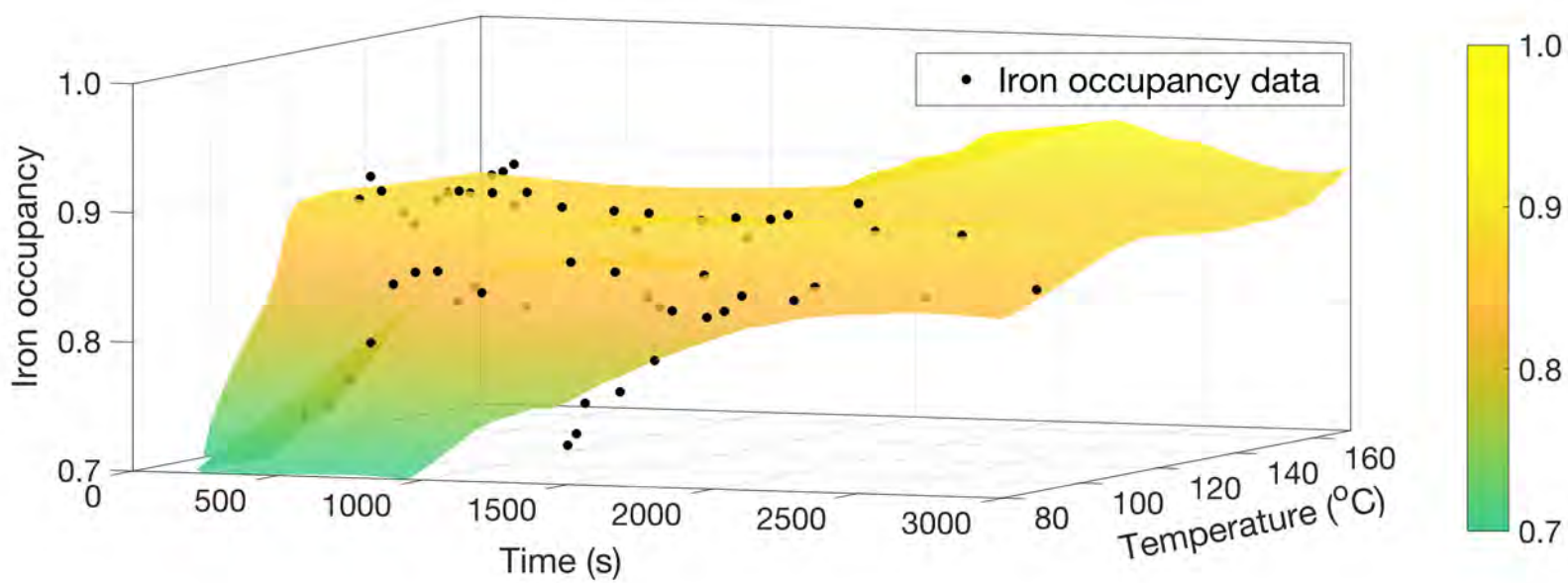


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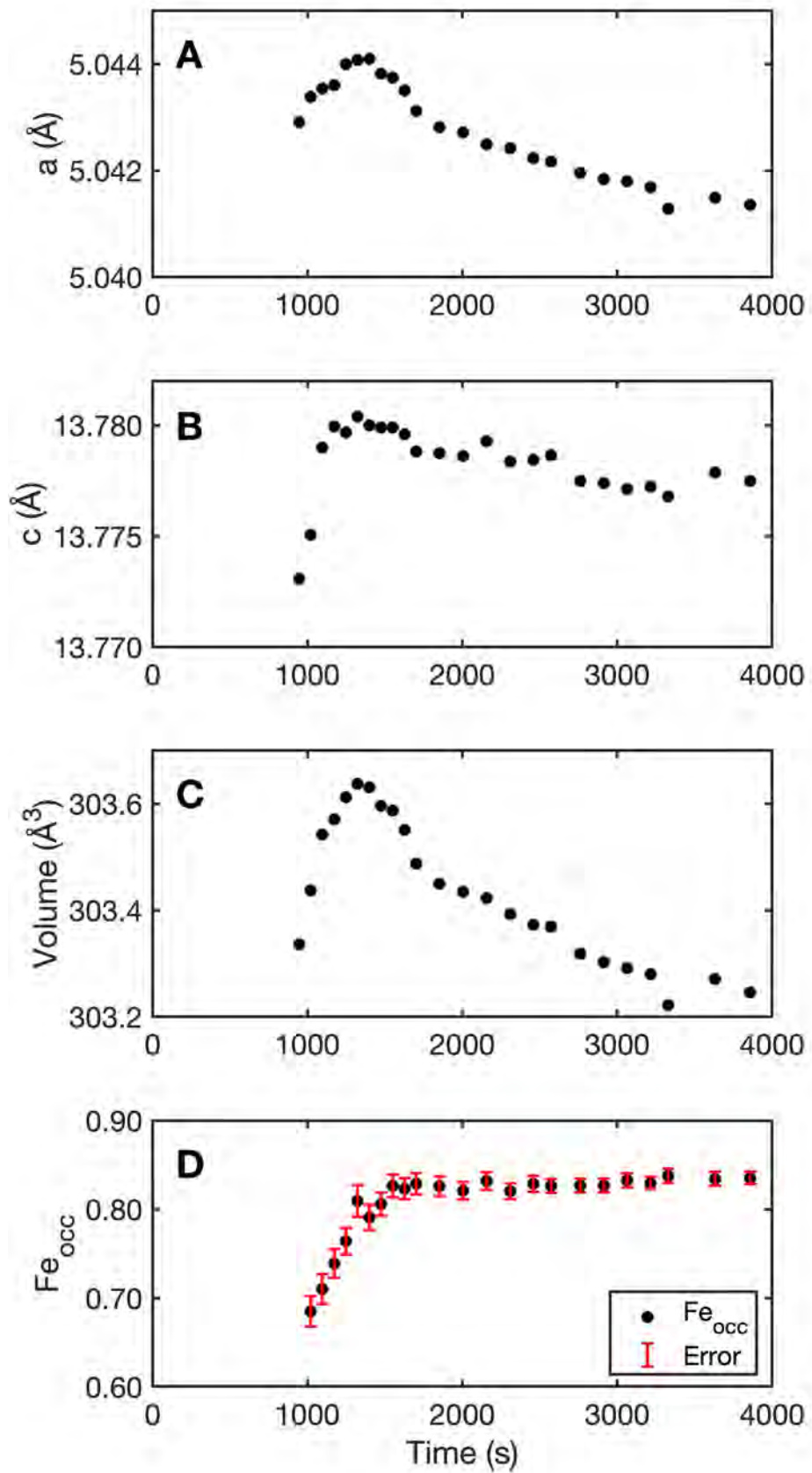


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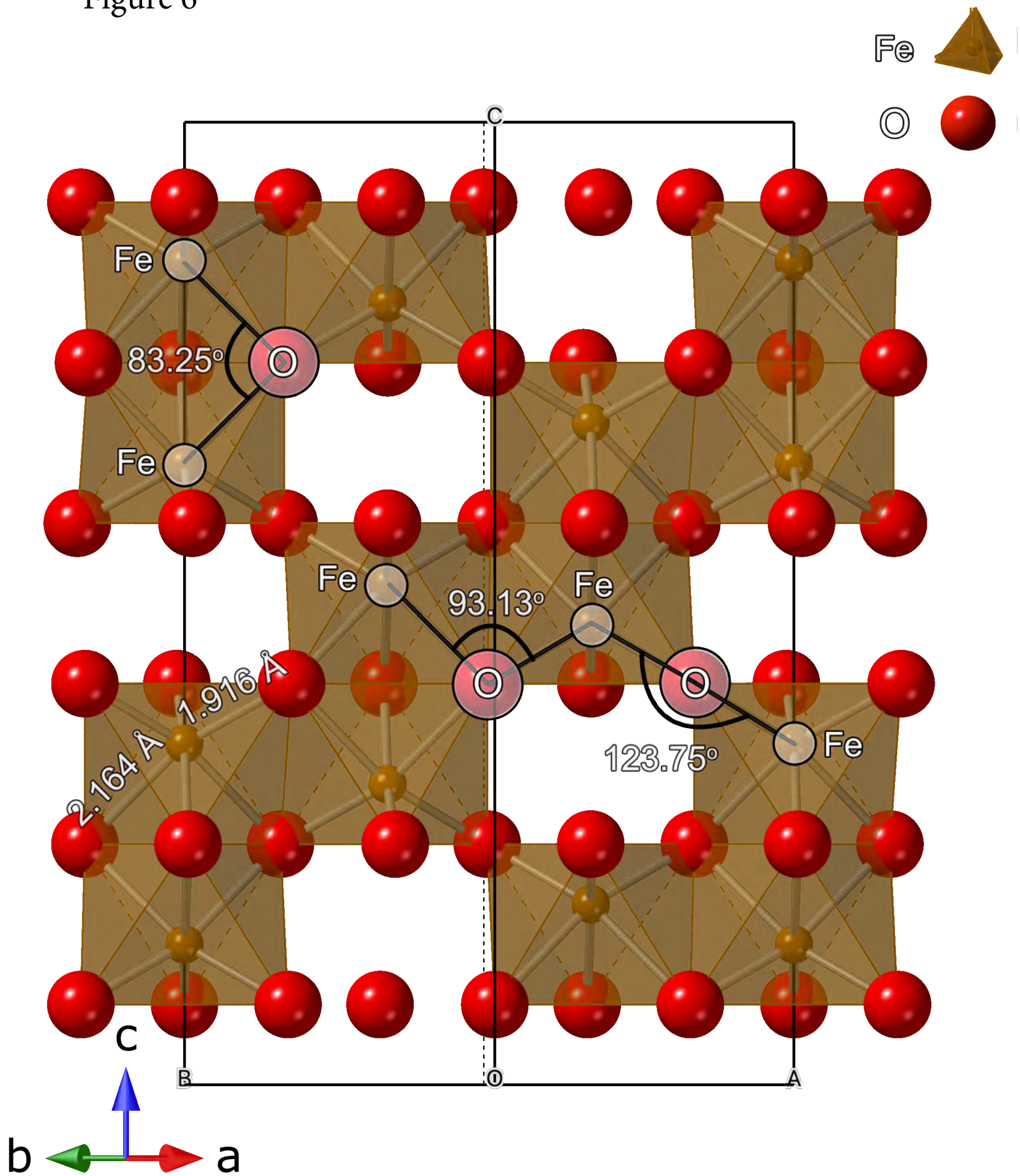


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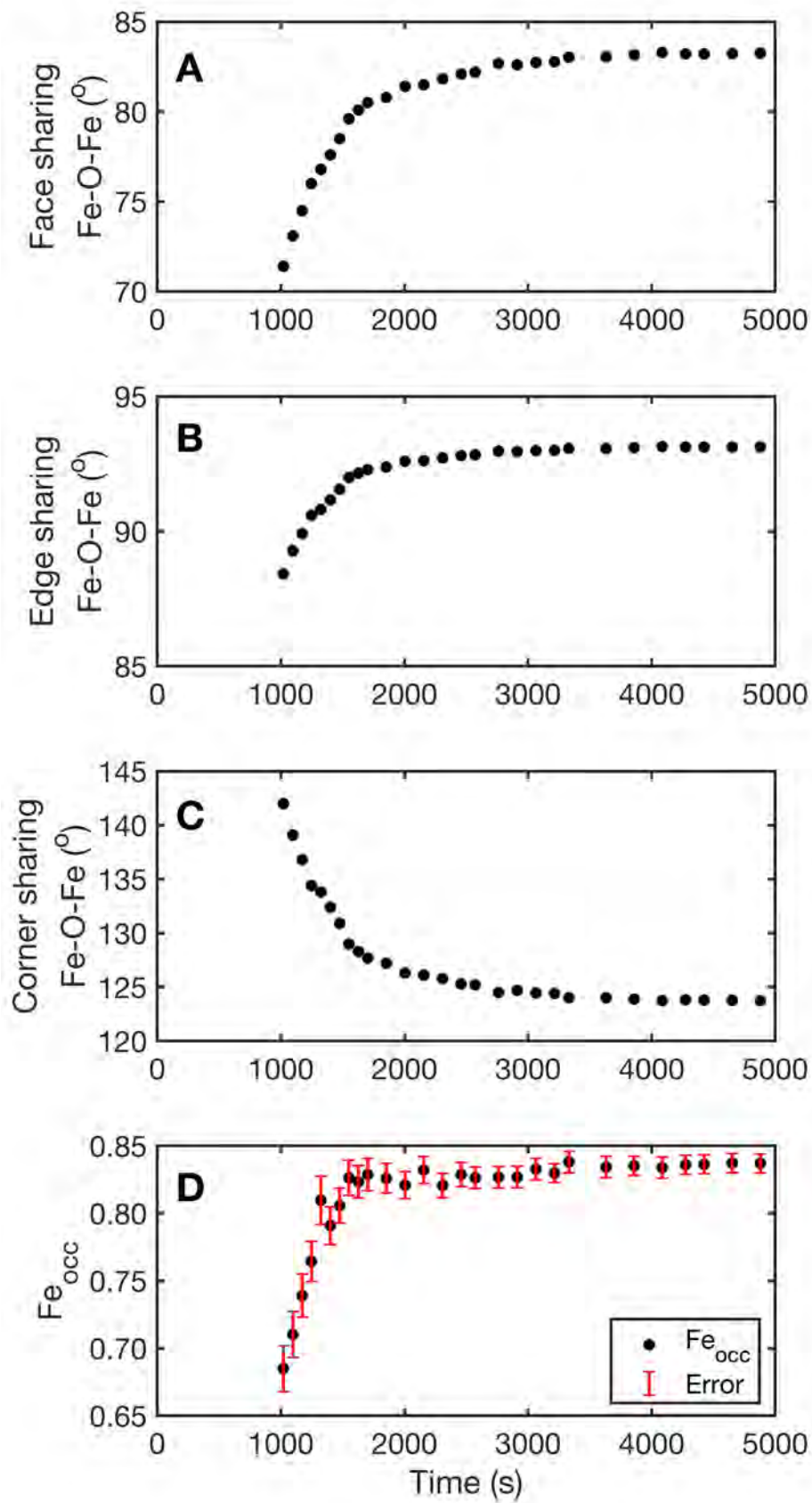


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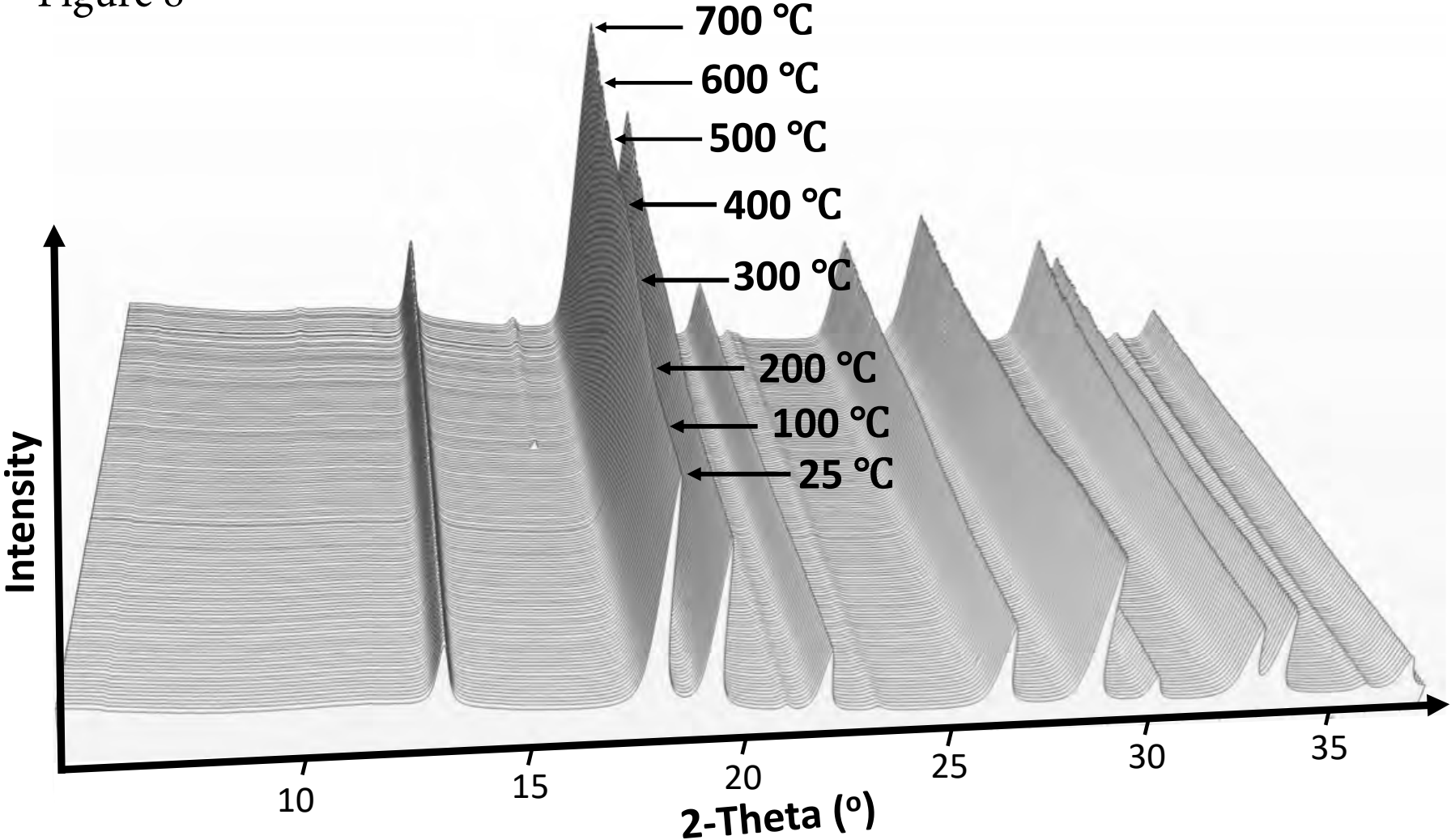


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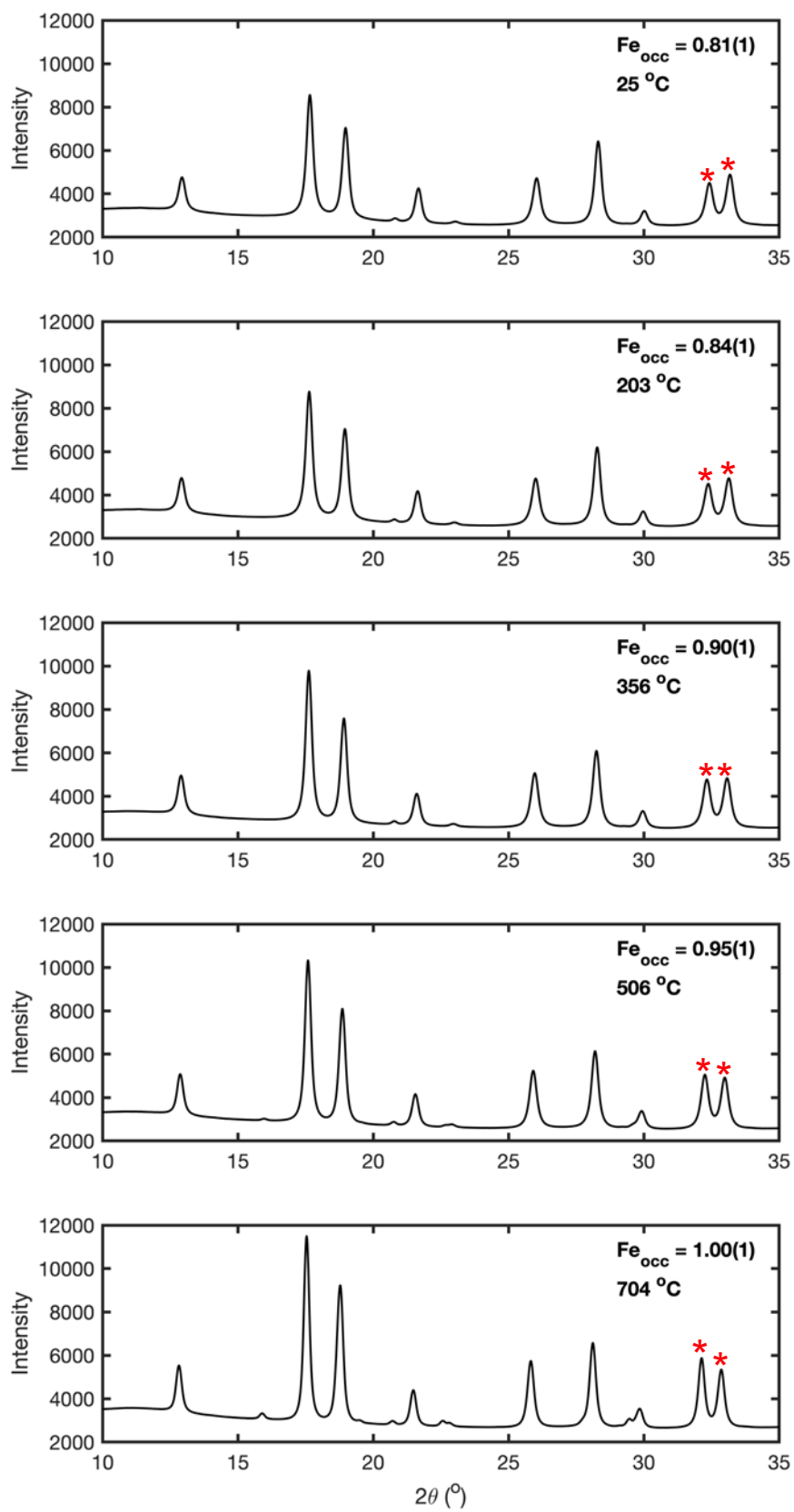


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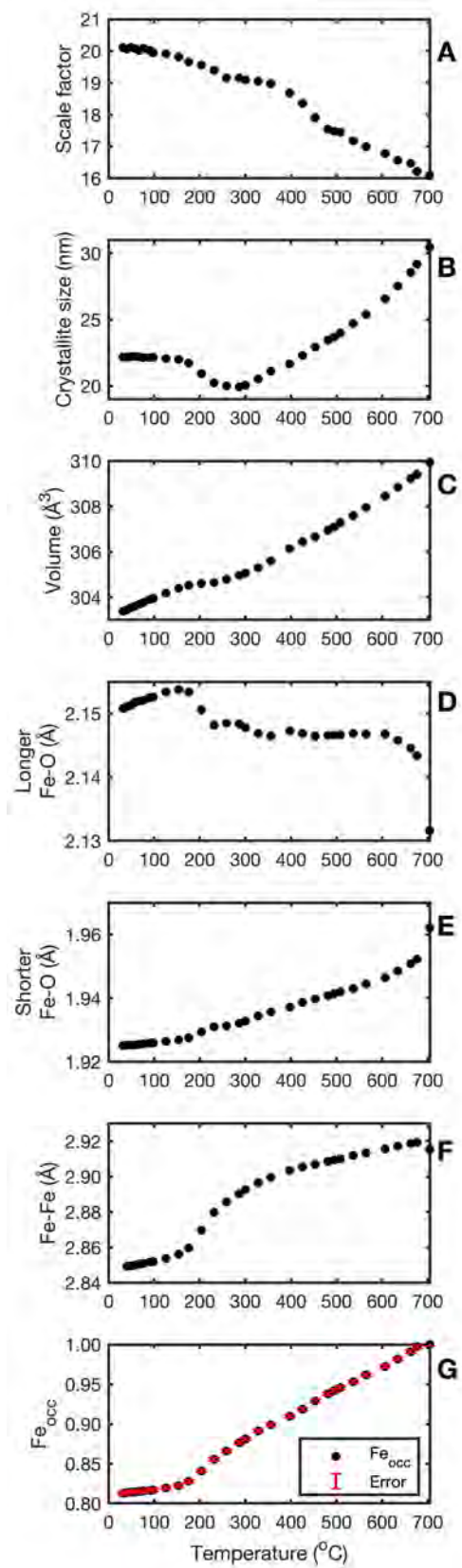


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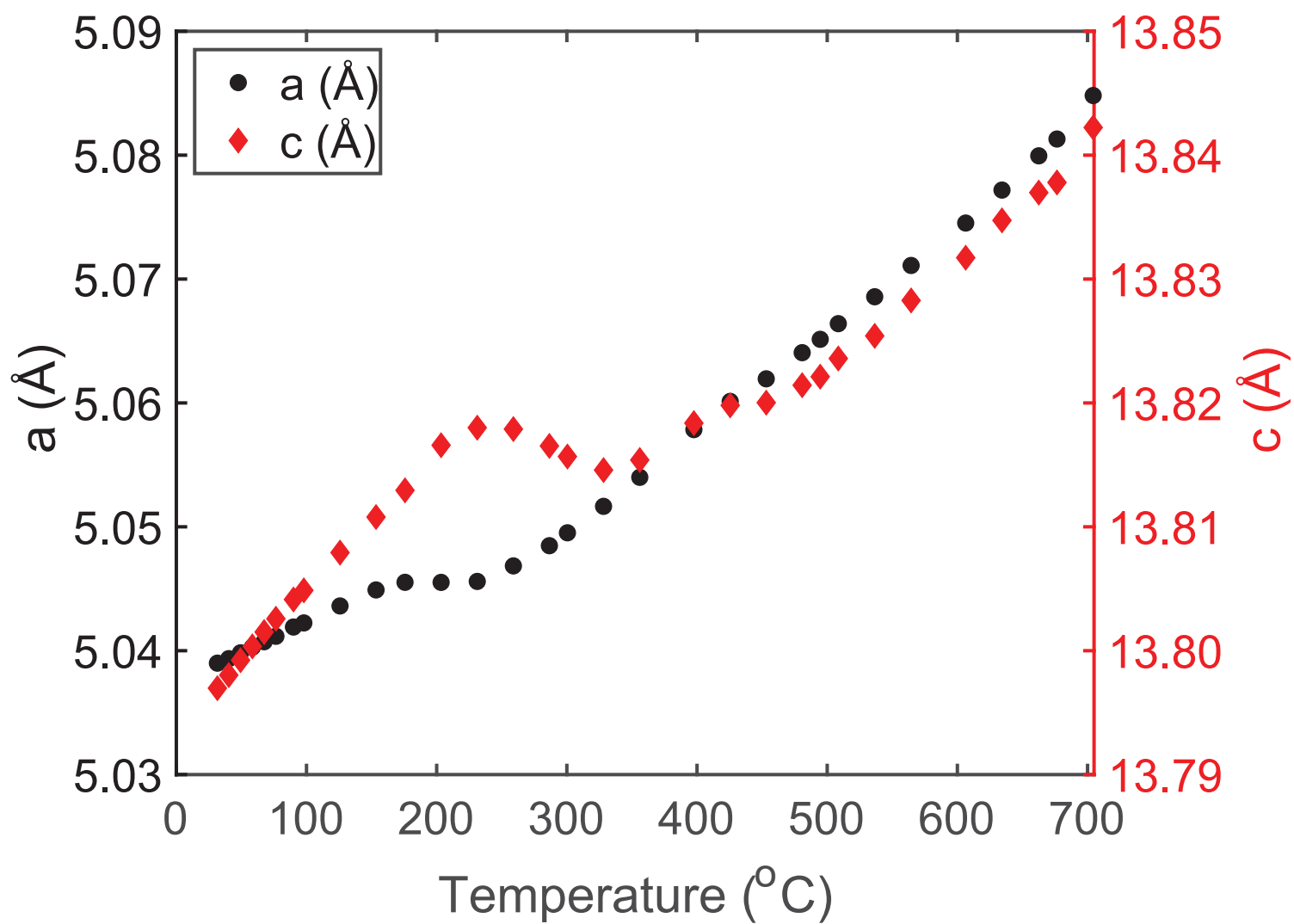


Figure 12

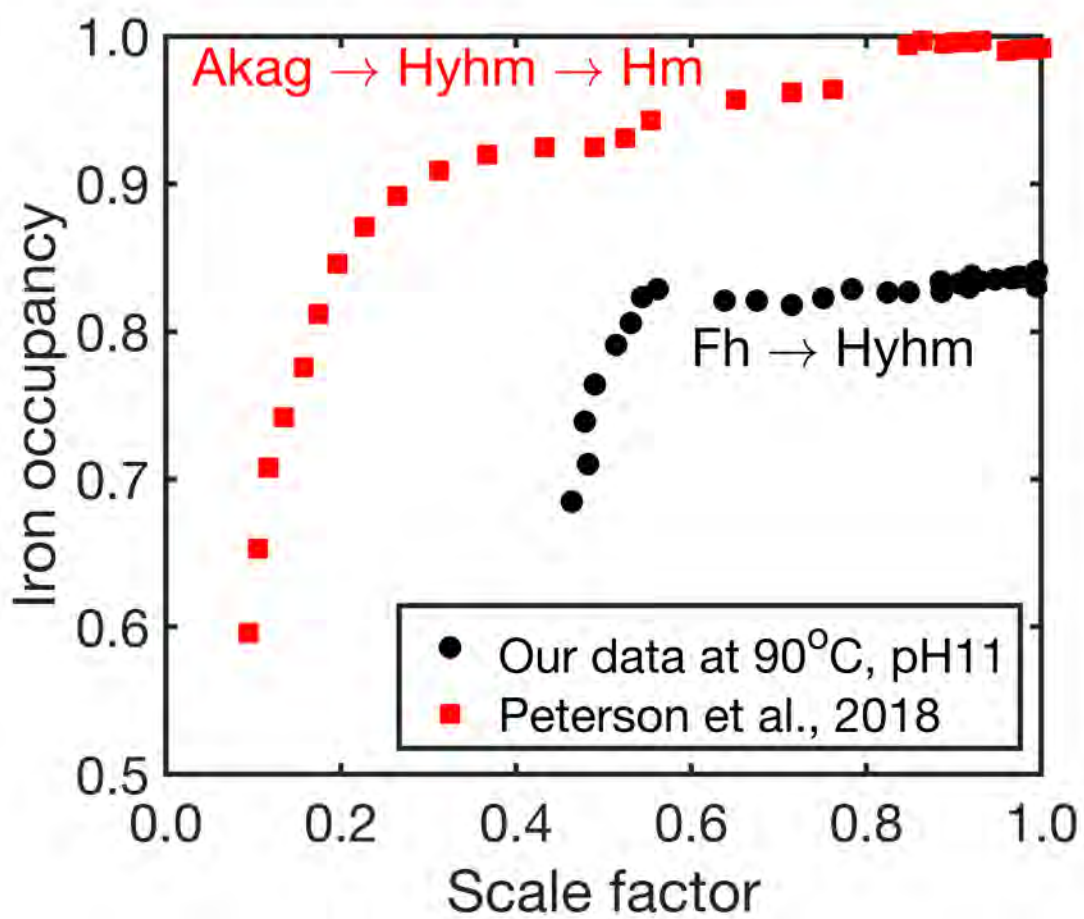


Figure 13

