

SPINELS RENAISSANCE: THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF THOSE UBIQUITOUS MINERALS AND MATERIALS

An X-ray magnetic circular dichroism (XMCD) study of Fe ordering in a synthetic MgAl₂O₄-Fe₃O₄ (spinel-magnetite) solid-solution series: Implications for magnetic properties and cation site ordering

**C. MICHAEL B. HENDERSON^{1,2,*}, CAROLYN I. PEARCE^{1,3,5}, JOHN M. CHARNOCK¹,
RICHARD J. HARRISON⁴, AND KEVIN M. ROSSO^{1,5}**

¹Williamson Research Centre, School of Earth, Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL, U.K.

²Astec, Daresbury Laboratory, STFC, Warrington WA4 4AD, U.K.

³School of Chemistry and Dalton Nuclear Institute, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL, U.K.

⁴Department of Earth Sciences, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 3EQ, U.K.

⁵Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, Richland, Washington 99352, U.S.A.

ABSTRACT

Fe $L_{2,3}$ -edge XAS and XMCD studies have been used to unravel structural trends in the MgAl₂O₄-Fe₃O₄ solid solution where thermodynamic modeling has presented a challenge due to the complex ordering arrangements of the end-members. Partitioning of Fe³⁺ and Fe²⁺ between tetrahedral (Td) and octahedral (Oh) sites has been established. In the most Fe-rich samples, despite rapid quenching from a disordered state, Fe_{Td}²⁺ is not present, which matches the ordered, inverse spinel nature of end-member magnetite (Mgt) at room temperature. However, in intermediate compositions Al and Mg substantially replace Fe and small amounts of Fe_{Td}²⁺ are found, stabilized, or trapped by decreasing occurrence of the continuous nearest neighbor Fe-Fe interactions that facilitate charge redistribution by electron transfer. Furthermore, in the composition range ~Mgt_{0.4-0.9}, XAS and XMCD bonding and site occupancy data suggest that nanoscale, magnetite-like Fe clusters are present. By contrast, at the spinel-rich end of the series, Mgt_{0.17} and Mgt_{0.23} have a homogeneous long-range distribution of Fe, Mg, and Al. These relationships are consistent with the intermediate and Fe-rich samples falling within a wide solvus in this system such that the Fe-clusters occur as proto-nuclei for phases that would exsolve following development of long-range crystalline order during slow cooling.

Unit-cell edges calculated from the spectroscopy-derived site occupancies show excellent agreement with those measured by X-ray powder diffraction on the bulk samples. Calculated saturation magnetic moments (M_s) for the Fe-rich samples also show excellent agreement with measured values but for the most Mg-rich samples are displaced to slightly higher values; this displacement is due to the presence of abundant Mg and Al disrupting the anti-parallel alignment of electron spins for Fe atoms.

Keywords: MgAl₂O₄-Fe₃O₄ spinel solid solutions, Fe $L_{2,3}$ X-ray absorption spectroscopy, Fe $L_{2,3}$ X-ray magnetic circular dichroism, Mg and Fe K -edge extended X-ray absorption fine structure spectroscopy, octahedral and tetrahedral site occupancies, calculated unit-cell parameters, calculated magnetic moments, spinel-magnetite solvus, hypothetical high-temperature ordering model