

Incorporation d'actinides tétravalents au sein de céramiques de structure monazitique : synthèse, frittage et comportement à long-terme

En raison de nombreuses propriétés d'intérêt, plusieurs matériaux céramiques à base d'ions phosphate ont été envisagés en tant que matrices potentielles de conditionnement spécifique à long-terme de certaines familles de radionucléides dont les éléments actinides, en vue de leur stockage en formation géologique profonde. Parmi ces matériaux, les phases dérivées de la monazite $(\text{Ln}, \text{An})\text{PO}_4$, ont été particulièrement étudiées en raison de leur grande flexibilité structurale et leur durabilité chimique [1-3]. Toutefois, alors que l'incorporation directe des actinides trivalents a déjà été reportée en employant des méthodes de synthèse par voies humide ou sèche, celle des actinides tétravalents se sont limitées à quelques études réalisées par voie sèche, en raison de problèmes persistant dans les étapes de précipitation des précurseurs initiaux [4-5].

Toutefois, les méthodes de synthèse par voie humide peuvent conduire à des améliorations importantes en terme d'homogénéité chimique et d'aptitude au frittage, ce qui est de nature à renforcer la durabilité chimique des matériaux au cours des tests de lixiviation. Ce projet de thèse s'inscrit donc dans l'élaboration et l'étude des propriétés de plusieurs familles de matrices cristallisant avec la structure monazitique, dont :

- les solutions solides monazite/cheralite $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)$ ($\text{An} = \text{U}$, $\text{M}^{\text{II}} = \text{Ca, Sr, Ba}$) préparées par substitution couplée $2 \text{Ln}^{\text{III}} \Leftrightarrow \text{An}^{\text{IV}} + \text{M}^{\text{II}}$ suite à la calcination de précurseurs $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)$, $0,667 \text{ H}_2\text{O}$ eux-mêmes obtenus par précipitation en conditions hydrothermales (récemment optimisées par D. Qin pour le thorium [6]);
- les solutions solides monazite/huttonite $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x$ ($\text{An} = \text{Th, U}$) préparées par substitution mixte couplée $\text{Ln}^{\text{III}} + \text{PO}_4 \Leftrightarrow \text{An}^{\text{IV}} + \text{SiO}_4$ suite à la calcination de précurseurs $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x$, $n \text{ H}_2\text{O}$ dont la préparation s'inspire de celle optimisée pour la coiffinité USiO_4 , ainsi que pour les solutions solides d'uranothorite $\text{Th}_{1-x}\text{U}_x(\text{SiO}_4)$ [7] et de xenotime-thorite $\text{Th}_{1-x}\text{Er}_x(\text{SiO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{PO}_4)_x$ [8].

Pour les deux systèmes, la préparation puis la caractérisation des précurseurs constituera un aspect important du travail. La structure des composés originaux sera affinée et le domaine d'existence des différentes solutions solides sera précisé. La conversion thermique conduisant du précurseur à la céramique finale sera suivie par DRX, Raman, ATG-ATD,... L'optimisation des conditions de synthèse conduira à l'amélioration de l'homogénéité cationique des poudres, laquelle devrait modifier favorablement l'aptitude au frittage (diminution de la température de frittage) ainsi que la durabilité chimique (meilleure résistance à l'altération).

Même si le frittage des monazites LnPO_4 a été reporté depuis de nombreuses années [9,10], plusieurs auteurs ont mentionné l'existence de problèmes liés à la décomposition à haute température des phosphates, nuisant à la qualité des céramiques obtenues à l'issue de la calcination à haute température (i.e. vers 1350°C). Ainsi, une étude complète de la densification des phases préparées sera développée dans la seconde partie de ce travail. La première étape sera dédiée à l'optimisation des conditions de frittage, à travers une étude multiparamétrique, pour les deux types de solutions solides : monazite-cheralite and monazite-huttonite. L'impact des propriétés des poudres initiales, de la température, de la durée du traitement thermique et de l'atmosphère de frittage sera analysé de manière indépendante. Ce dernier point sera capital dans le cas de l'uranium(IV), actinide pour lequel des phénomènes d'oxydo-réduction peuvent intervenir lors du traitement thermique à haute température. Une fois les pastilles préparées, une caractérisation microstructurale multiéchelle sera menée. Parallèlement, des études dilatométriques seront développées (telle que la méthode de Dorn) afin de préciser les mécanismes de densification. La microstructure obtenue à l'issue de l'étape de densification gouverne plusieurs propriétés d'usage dont le comportement à long terme (résistance à la lixiviation et à l'irradiation). Afin d'atteindre la microstructure « idéale », des cartes de frittage (variation de la taille de grains en fonction du taux de densification) seront construites en couplant des études dilatométriques et l'utilisation de MEBE-HT [11]. Il en découlera la détermination des conditions optimales de préparation et de frittage pour atteindre une telle microstructure.

La dernière partie du travail sera consacrée à deux propriétés importantes requises dans le cadre de l’immobilisation de radionucléides, à savoir la résistance à l’irradiation et à l’altération en conditions représentatives d’un stockage à long terme. L’étude de la durabilité chimique concertera en premier lieu un volet cinétique. Pour cela, une étude multiparamétrique permettra de discriminer les effets des différents paramètres (température, pH, complexation, effets rédox, microstructure et homogénéité des céramiques) influençant la vitesse de dissolution. La durabilité sera examinée à travers les vitesses de relâchement des différents radionucléides en solution mais également à travers les potentielles modifications microstructurales en cours de dissolution/lixiviation. Cette étude cinétique sera suivie d’un volet thermodynamique visant à étudier les phases potentielles précipitées à la surface des solides dont la formation peut agir rétroactivement sur les relâchements élémentaires par passivation de l’interface. Les propriétés thermodynamiques associées à ces phases (produit de solubilité et fonctions thermodynamiques associées), dont peu d’entre elles ont été caractérisées de manière poussée [12], seront évaluées. Ainsi, l’étude de la durabilité chimique des céramiques, sera basée sur un approche duale micro-/macroscopique incluant de nombreuses techniques de caractérisation complémentaires dont des observations par Microscopie Electronique à Balayage en mode Environnemental (MEBE) et par Microscopie à Force Atomique (AFM). Ce travail s’achèvera par l’analyse des conséquences de l’irradiation sur les propriétés relevées dans l’optique de l’optimisation des propriétés des matrices de confinement mises au point.

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Incorporation of tetravalent actinides in monazite-type ceramics: synthesis, sintering and long-term behavior

Due to various properties of interest, several phosphate-based ceramics were envisaged as potential matrices for specific conditioning of radionuclides from a long time. Among them, monazite-derived materials, $(\text{Ln}, \text{An})\text{PO}_4$, have been extensively studied due to the high chemical flexibility and durability of the monazite structure [1-3]. While the incorporation of trivalent actinides was reported either using wet or dry chemical methods, that of tetravalent actinides was only limited to few dry chemistry routes due some persistent difficulties occurring during precipitation processes [4-5].

However, wet chemistry methods are expected to bring some strong improvements in the field of the chemical homogeneity or sintering capability that could strengthen the long term behavior of the materials during leaching tests. For this reason and considering the chemical substitutions occurring in natural monazite samples, we propose to perform the incorporation of tetravalent elements through precipitation processes taking into account two main processes :

- Preparation of monazite/cheralite solid solutions $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)$ ($\text{An} = \text{U}, \dots, \text{M}^{\text{II}} = \text{Ca}, \text{Sr}, \text{Ba}$) through the coupled substitution $2 \text{Ln}^{\text{III}} \Leftrightarrow \text{An}^{\text{IV}} + \text{M}^{\text{II}}$ and by heat treatment of $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4) \cdot 0.667 \text{H}_2\text{O}$ rhabdophane prepared by direct precipitation under hydrothermal conditions (that have been recently optimized for thorium D. Qin [6]);
- Preparation of monazite/huttonite solid solutions $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x$ ($\text{An} = \text{Th}, \text{U}$) through the coupled mixed substitution $\text{Ln}^{\text{III}} + \text{PO}_4 \Leftrightarrow \text{An}^{\text{IV}} + \text{SiO}_4$ using a precipitation method of $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x \cdot n \text{H}_2\text{O}$ derived from that recently developed with success for coffinite, uranothorite solid solutions [7] and xenotime-thorite $\text{Th}_{1-x}\text{Er}_x(\text{SiO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{PO}_4)_x$ solid solutions [8].

For both systems, the preparation by precipitation then characterization of new kinds of precursors will be performed. The structure of all these original compounds will be refined and the field of existence of potential solid solutions derived from cationic/cationic or cationic/anionic substitutions will be examined then correlated to the obtained crystal structures. The thermal conversion leading from the precursor to the final ceramic will be followed by coupling various complementary techniques such as XRD, Raman, TGA-DTA, ... Then, the optimal conditions to prepare sintered samples will be fixed. One can expect the improvement of the chemical homogeneity (cation distribution within the solid) of the powders prepared by such wet chemistry routes that could affect significantly and positively several properties of interest such as sintering capability (decrease of the sintering temperature) and final chemical durability.

The sintering of LnPO_4 monazites was also widely investigated in the past leading to densification temperatures ranging from 1350 to 1500°C [9, 10]. Nevertheless, this process frequently appeared to be limited by the phosphate decomposition, which can start at as soon as 1300°C and led to a significant degradation of the surface properties (formation of cracks and pores, decrease of the grain size, ...). It is then obvious that the monazite sintering is still an open field for investigation, especially when dealing with actinides-based samples, with the aim to provide dense and defect-free ceramics. With this goal, a complete study of the densification step will be developed. The first step will focus on the optimization of the sintering parameters for the two types of solid solutions studied, *i.e.* monazite-cheralite and monazite-huttonite. First, the impact of the starting powder on the sintering will be evaluated in order to precise the heat treatment to be applied to the precursor before densification. Then the operating conditions required to achieve a complete densification will be determined in terms of temperature, heating time and atmosphere. This latter point will be particularly important when dealing with uranium(IV) based samples, in order to ensure the tetravalent oxidation state of uranium in the final solids. Once the sintered pellets prepared, a complete microstructural characterization will be conducted by the means of XRD, SEM and EDS analyses while dilatometric methods (such as Dorn's) will be employed to precise the mechanisms of diffusion involved in the densification process.

In a second step, it will be also necessary to monitor the final microstructure of the ceramics, as it is expected to drive several properties of the wasteform, including its long-term behavior (resistance of the ceramics to alteration and radiation damages). With this aim, sintering maps (*i.e.* variation of the average

grain size versus the relative density of the solid) will be elaborated for the different solid solutions studied by combining dilatometric measurements and *in situ* HT-ESEM observations [11].

The optimization of ceramics properties dedicated to the specific immobilization of radionuclides includes a better knowledge of its chemical durability during leaching tests. It includes not only the study of the dissolution kinetics of the prepared ceramics but also the precipitation of low-soluble neoformed phases that could induce the sequestration of radionuclides. Moreover, one point of significant interest is to underline how synthesis and sintering processes can affect the chemical durability of the ceramics. The chemical durability will be examined through the elementary releases in the solution as well as the monitoring of evolving solid/liquid interface.

For all the prepared ceramics, the kinetics of dissolution will be studied by determining the multiparametric expression of the normalized dissolution rates as a function of temperature, acidity, complexing and/or redox reagents, microstructure and chemical homogeneity of the interface. At this stage, the chemical durability of the materials will be also examined in the light of structural modifications as well as potential microstructural modifications (densification rate, grain size or density of grain boundaries, ...) during dissolution and/or leaching. In order to get a better understanding of the description of the dissolution mechanism, microstructural modifications occurring at the solid/solution interface will be followed combining Environmental Scanning Electron Microscopy (ESEM) and Atomic Force Microscopy (AFM).

The long-term behavior assessment of the materials (and the retention properties of the materials) requires the determination of solubility constants associated to the potential neoformed phases in the back end of the initial dissolution of the materials. Although these phases are very important in the global inventory of the released elements, the solubility constants related to the major part of actinide phosphates based phases are often unknown or have been inaccurately determined (only few of them have been recently evaluated [12]). Thus, the neoformed phases will be first identified. Then, standard solubility constants as well as associated thermodynamic data will be evaluated at various temperatures. combining under-saturation (dissolution) and super-saturation (precipitation) experiments and taking into account the speciation of the elements in solution.

This work will end with the study of the consequences of radiation damages on the long-term behavior of the ceramics in the field of their use as specific conditioning matrices for an underground long-term repository.

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ROADMAP OF THE PhD WORK

1ST YEAR	SEMESTER 1	SEMESTER 2
SYNTHESIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation and characterization of the $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_x \cdot 0.667 \text{H}_2\text{O}$ precursors Determination of the stability domain of the rhabdophane-type solid solution Thermal conversion to the final monazite/cheralite solid solutions $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_x$ (MCSS) 	
SINTERING		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sintering of $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_x$: optimization of the sintering conditions of MCSS
DISSOLUTION		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissolution kinetics: first insight of the multiparametric law for $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{Th}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_x$
REDACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 papers on synthesis & structure and on thermal conversion for MCSS 	
2ND YEAR	SEMESTER 3	SEMESTER 4
SYNTHESIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation and characterization of $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x \cdot n \text{H}_2\text{O}$ precursors and determination of the stability domain Refinement of the crystal structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thermal conversion to the final monazite/huttonite solid solutions $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{An}^{\text{IV}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x$ (MHSS)
SINTERING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building of the sintering map of $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{Th}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_x$ solid solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building of the sintering map of $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{U}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_x$ solid solutions
DISSOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissolution kinetics: multiparametric law for $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{Th}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_x$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissolution kinetics: multiparametric law for $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{U}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_x$ Saturation processes: thermodynamic data associated to neoformed phases associated to the $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{Th}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_x$ dissolution
REDACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 papers on synthesis, structure and on thermal conversion for MHSS 1 paper on sintering of MCSS-Th 	
3RD YEAR	SEMESTER 5	SEMESTER 6
SYNTHESIS		
SINTERING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sintering of $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x$: optimization of the sintering conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building of the sintering map of $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x$ solid solutions Sintering of $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{U}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x$: optimization of the sintering conditions
DISSOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissolution kinetics: multiparametric law for $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x$ Saturation processes: thermodynamic data associated to neoformed phases associated to $\text{Ln}_{1-2x}\text{U}_x\text{M}^{\text{II}}_x(\text{PO}_4)_x$ dissolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissolution kinetics: multiparametric law for $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{U}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x$ Saturation processes: thermodynamic data associated to neoformed phases associated to $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x$ dissolution
REDACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 paper on sintering of MCSS-U 2 papers on dissolution of MCSS (-Th & -U) 	

4RD YEAR	SEMESTER 7	SEMESTER 8
SYNTHESIS		
SINTERING	• Building of the sintering map of $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{U}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x$ solid solutions	
DISSOLUTION	• Saturation processes: thermodynamic data associated to neoformed phases associated to $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{U}_x(\text{PO}_4)_{1-x}(\text{SiO}_4)_x$ dissolution	
REDACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redaction of the PhD manuscript / Defense of the PhD work • 1 paper on sintering of MHSS (-Th & -U) • 2 papers on dissolution of MHSS (-Th & -U) 	