

# WIDTH IR LUMINESCENCE OF PRIME CENTER OF TWO-VALENT MEDIUM IN PEROVSKIT $\text{LaAlO}_3$

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Received September 04, 2024

Revised December 24, 2024

Accepted December 24, 2024

**Abstract.** In samples of  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  perovskites doped with copper, broadband photoluminescence in the near infrared range was detected. Its source, apparently, is an optically active center formed at heterovalent substitution of  $\text{Al}^{3+}$  cation for  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$ . Additional introduction of tetravalent cations  $\text{Sn}^{4+}$ ,  $\text{Zr}^{4+}$  and  $\text{Hf}^{4+}$  provides charge compensation of heterovalent substitution, which leads to an increase in the photoluminescence intensity of the corresponding doped materials.

**Keywords:** *photoluminescence, perovskite,  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ , divalent copper, impurity center*

**DOI:** 10.31857/S0002337X250303e4

## INTRODUCTION

Optically active centers based on impurity  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  ions can become the basis of promising materials for quantum electronics and photonics, but the photoluminescence (PL) of the divalent copper cation  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  is currently insufficiently

studied. The electronic configuration of this ion ( $d^9$ ) is the "hole equivalent" of the simplest configuration involving a  $d$  electron:  $d^1$ . But while the FL for  $d^1$ -cations ( $\text{Ti}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{V}^{4+}$ ) is well known [1], there are few reports of FL observed for optically active  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  centers. Near-infrared (NIR) FL has been observed previously on impurity  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  center in copper-doped crystalline phases of ZnS, CdS and ZnO [2-5] ( $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  in tetrahedral coordination), in Egyptian Blue pigment and similar phases [6-8] ( $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  in plano-square coordination), as well as in copper-doped phases  $\text{YGaO}_3$ ,  $\text{YInO}_3$ ,  $\text{GdInO}_3$  [9] ( $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  in trigonal-bipyramidal coordination). FL of octahedrally coordinated  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  was observed for perovskite  $\text{KZnF}_3$  and  $\text{K}_2$  phase of  $\text{ZnF}_4$  at cryogenic temperatures ( $<20\text{K}$ ) [10-12]. Rather unexpectedly, NIR-FL of  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  impurity centers was recently detected at room temperature in the corundum lattice ( $\alpha\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ) [13, 14]. This fact is of considerable interest, since it was previously thought that the FL of  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  cation in octahedral coordination is hardly possible (especially at  $T \sim 300\text{ K}$ ), since the presence of the Jahn-Teller effect in the ground electronic state  ${}^{(2)}E_g$  of  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  ion leads to a significant distortion of the initial geometry of the impurity center and strong electron-phonon coupling at the optical transition  ${}^{(2)}T_{(2)(g)} \rightarrow {}^{(2)}E_{(g)}$ . This, in turn, determines a high probability of radiation-free relaxation of the excited state  ${}^{(2)}T_{(2)(g)}$ . Nevertheless, the existence of intense NIR-FL in copper-doped corundum proves that, even in spite of the existence of strong electron-phonon coupling leading to a significant broadening of the FL spectrum, the radiation-free decay channel of the excited state cannot completely extinguish the FL. Apparently, the decrease in the rate of  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  radiation-free

relaxation in corundum is due to a number of factors, one of which is the large value of the crystal field in the cationic positions of  $\alpha\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ , which leads to an increase in the energy of the excited state  ${}^{(2)}\text{T}_1$  relative to the ground state  ${}^2\text{E}$  and an increase in the potential barrier of the excited state deactivation process.

The large width of the NIR-FL spectrum of impurity  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  centers in corundum may be of practical interest, since such materials are in demand as the active medium of broadband optical amplifiers and oscillators. Therefore, it is reasonable to search for other crystalline phases in which the  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  ion also demonstrates broadband FL. It is obvious that the most promising matrices will be those in which the  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  ion is located under strong crystal field conditions. The perovskite  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  satisfies this condition, since it was shown earlier by comparing the spectral characteristics of the  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ion that the crystalline field in this oxide is even slightly stronger than in  $\alpha\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$  [15]. The significant magnitude of the crystal field in the aluminum cationic position of the  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  lattice is also indicated by a recent study of the luminescence of impurity  $\text{Ni}^{2+}$  ions in this crystal [16].  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  is a well-studied technological material, which is available in the form of large-sized single crystals, it is widely used as a substrate for the preparation of thin films of various functional materials [17, 18].

In the present work, we present for the first time the observation and study of broadband NIR-FL of an octahedrally coordinated impurity ion  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  in the crystalline matrix  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ .

## EXPERIMENTAL PART

Samples of perovskite  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ , doped with  $\text{Cu}^{(2+)}$  and co-doped with four-charged ions  $\text{M}^{(4+)}$  ( $\text{M} = \text{Ti, Ge, Zr, Hf, Sn}$ ), were prepared by coprecipitation of hydroxides of Al, La, and Cu. The coprecipitation was carried out by adding excess aqueous ammonia to a solution containing lanthanum, aluminum and copper nitrates in appropriate amounts. The resulting suspension of coprecipitated hydroxides without filtration was gently heated in a wide glass-carbon crucible until evaporation of the solution and decomposition of ammonium nitrate formed during coprecipitation ( $\sim 400^\circ\text{C}$ ). The solid residue was then heated in a porcelain crucible to  $900^\circ\text{C}$ , extracted from the furnace, grinded in a mortar with a calculated amount of the coalescing element oxide ( $\text{TiO}_2, \text{GeO}_2, \text{ZrO}_2, \text{HfO}_2, \text{SnO}_2$ ), and subjected to final heat treatment at  $1500^\circ\text{C}$  for 2 h. The amount of copper and the coalescing element ( $\text{TiO}_2, \text{GeO}_2, \text{ZrO}_2, \text{HfO}_2, \text{SnO}_2$ ) was determined. The amount of Cu and the salt-enhancing element in the initial charge corresponded to the atomic ratios  $\text{Cu}^{2+}/\text{Al}^{(3+)} = 0.005$  and  $\text{M}^{4+}/\text{Al}^{(3+)} = 0.01$ .

The phase composition and lattice parameters of the obtained samples were determined by powder diffractometry using Rigaku Smartlab SE ( $\text{CuK}_\alpha$ -radiation,  $\lambda = 1.54056 \text{ \AA}$ ).

FL spectra in the NIR range were recorded using an SDH-IV spectrometer (Solar LS) equipped with a linear InGaAs sensor G9212-512 (Hamamatsu). A semiconductor laser module with an emission wavelength of 820 nm was used for FL excitation. The obtained spectra were corrected taking into account the spectral sensitivity curves of the photodetector.

The FL excitation spectra were recorded using a setup consisting of an HLX 64640 Xenophot 150W halogen lamp, an IR cutoff water filter, a LOMO MDR-206 monochromator, an SR530 optical interrupter (Stanford Instruments), a focusing system, and an InGaAs photodetector (produced by Polyus). The signal from the photodetector was fed to an SR830 synchronous amplifier phased with the SR530 interrupter. The output from the amplifier through ADC was registered on the PC. The necessary FL registration bandwidth was provided by a set of light filters (IKS-7, interference light filters Thorlabs, Edmund Optics).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Figure 1** shows overview diffractograms of  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  samples doped with  $\text{Cu}^{(2+)}$  ions and co-doped with various tetravalent cations.

The main phase in all samples (except for the solvated Cu and Ti) is the pseudo-cubic (rhombohedral) phase  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ , which can be removed from the cubic lattice of perovskite by imposing a small rhombohedral distortion with symmetry reduction [19]. This distortion leads only to a slight splitting of the reflexes (not noticeable in the overview diffractograms, Fig. 1) characteristic of cubic perovskite. When Cu and Ti are solvated, no splitting of the reflexes occurs, indicating that the cubic perovskite lattice is stabilized in this sample (**Fig. 2**). Comparatively wide reflections indicate a small area of coherent X-ray scattering. This is apparently due to the strong defectivity of the crystal lattice of this perovskite.

Broadband IR-FL was observed in all the samples studied (**Fig. 3**).

The NIR-FL spectra are almost identical, from which it can be concluded that there is a single type of photoluminescent center present in all samples. In Fig. 4 also shows the combined FL and FL excitation spectra for one of the obtained samples ( $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Zr}^{4+}$  co-doped  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ )

These spectra are generally similar to those previously obtained for copper-doped corundum [13], although slightly shifted to the shorter wavelength region, apparently due to the stronger crystal field in  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ .

From Fig. 3 shows that the NIR-FL intensity varies greatly depending on the presence and nature of the co-doping four-charged cation. At the same time, the greatest enhancement of the FL intensity compared to the sample doped only with  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  is observed when co-doped with relatively large cations:  $\text{Sn}^{(4+)}$  (ionic radius for  $\text{EC} = 6$   $R = 0.69 \text{ \AA}$ ),  $\text{Zr}^{(4+)}$  ( $R = 0.72 \text{ \AA}$ ),  $\text{Hf}^{(4+)}$  ( $R = 0.71 \text{ \AA}$ ). In contrast, co-doping with a small  $\text{Ge}^{4+}$  cation ( $R = 0.53 \text{ \AA}$ ) leads to a decrease in the FL intensity compared to the sample doped with  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  alone. The sample co-doped with  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  and a medium-sized  $\text{Ti}^{(4+)}$  ion ( $R = 0.605 \text{ \AA}$ ), also shows very weak FL, but this seems to be a consequence of the strong lattice defectivity of this sample and the difference of its lattice type from all other samples.

The revealed pattern of  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  FL enhancement in  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  upon co-doping with different four-charged cations differs from that obtained earlier for  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$ -doped corundum ( $\alpha\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ) [13]. In this case, samples co-doped with  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$  and  $\text{Ge}^{4+}$ , exhibited more intense FL than those containing  $\text{Zr}^{(4+)}$  and  $\text{Hf}^{4+}$ . It also differs from the sequence (in order of increasing FL intensity) of the solvating cations obtained

in a recent study of the FL of impurity  $\text{Ni}^{(2+)}$  ion in  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  [16]:  $\text{Sn}^{4+} > \text{Hf}^{(4+)} = \text{Ti}^{4+} > \text{Zr}^{(4+)} >$  without solvation.

Let us try to understand the reason for the different influence of the solvating cations in our case. Four-charged cations  $\text{M}^{4+}$  are introduced into the crystal lattice of the matrix to provide charge compensation for heterovalent substitution of  $\text{Al}^{3+} \rightarrow \text{Cu}^{2+}$ . Without  $\text{M}^{(4+)}$  doping, a significant fraction of Cu enters the lattice as  $\text{Cu}^{3+}$ . This was shown in the case of copper-doped corundum [13] and seems to be true also for perovskite  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ . The presence of  $\text{Cu}^{3+}$  in copper-containing  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  perovskites is evidenced, in particular, by their reddish-purple coloration, characteristic of  $\text{Cu}^{(3+)}$  ions. This coloration is noticeably weaker in sol-doped samples, since, with the possibility of charge compensation, copper enters the lattice predominantly in the form of  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  cations rather than  $\text{Cu}^{(3+)}$ .

In the corundum matrix, the most intense FL was observed in samples coalloied with relatively small cations,  $\text{Ge}^{4+}$  and  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$ , because they more easily substitute  $\text{Al}^{3+}$  ions. In  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ , in contrast, the FL is more intense in samples coalloied only with large cations  $\text{Hf}^{(4+)}$ ,  $\text{Zr}^{(4+)}$ ,  $\text{Sn}^{(4+)}$ . This suggests that for the formation of the luminescent impurity center  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  in  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ , charge compensation must occur by substitution of the large cation  $\text{La}^{(3+)}$  rather than the small  $\text{Al}^{3+}$  by the coalloying ion  $\text{M}^{(4+)}$ . In this connection, it is interesting to note that it has recently been demonstrated how similar solvation of  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  by thorium dioxide with substitution of  $\text{La}^{(3+)} \xrightarrow{\text{with}} \text{Th}^{(4+)}$  (due to the large ionic radius of  $\text{Th}^{(4+)}$ ) only such substitution is possible in perovskite  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  ) significantly improves the FL

parameters of  $\text{Nd}^{3+}$  by reducing the number of defect centers in the form of cation vacancies [20, 21]. This mechanism of PL intensity enhancement is also possible in our samples.

Additional information on the formation of  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  impurity centers in the  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  matrix is provided by the data obtained from X-ray diffractograms (Fig. 5) on the change in unit cell size during copper doping and co-doping with various  $\text{M}^{4+}$  cations.

It can be seen that the unit cell size of  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  increases slightly when doped only with copper, apparently due to the substitution of  $\text{Al}^{3+}$  by larger cations  $\text{Cu}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$ . The cell size also increases when  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  is doped with Zr, Sn, and Ge oxides. Simultaneous doping of  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  with copper and zirconium, as well as with copper and tin leads to a strong increase in the size of the crystal lattice, so that the size increment turns out to be larger than could be expected from the sum of the increments due to doping with copper or a co-doping element only. In this case, the excess increment appears to be due to the preferential substitution of  $\text{Al}^{3+}$  for the bulk  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  cation (rather than the relatively small  $\text{Cu}^{3+}$ ), since the introduction of  $\text{Sn}^{4+}$  and  $\text{Zr}^{4+}$  ions into the crystal lattice can provide charge compensation for such substitution. The increase in the amount of impurity  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  ions leads to the enhanced PL of the corresponding sol-doped samples compared to  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  doped only with copper.

In contrast, the crystal cell size is slightly reduced upon co-doping with germanium and copper compared to doping with germanium alone, indicating that



the additional introduction of  $\text{Ge}^{4+}$  does not promote the formation of  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  impurity centers in  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ . In agreement with this finding, a decrease in the PL intensity of the sample co-doped with Ge and Cu compared to the sample doped with copper alone is observed.

## CONCLUSION

Impurity  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  ions in the  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  perovskite lattice exhibit broadband NIR-FL. The appearance of this FL is promoted by the large value of the crystal field on the impurity ion in the  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  matrix, demonstrated earlier for impurity cations  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Ni}^{2+}$ . The intensity of the  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  FL increases with the additional introduction into the  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  lattice of some four-charged cations that act as charge compensators. The greatest PL enhancement was observed upon introduction of relatively bulk cations  $\text{Sn}^{4+}$ ,  $\text{Zr}^{4+}$ ,  $\text{Hf}^{4+}$ , rather than compact  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$  and  $\text{Ge}^{4+}$ . This seems to indicate that the charge compensator must replace the  $\text{La}^{3+}$  cation to form the FL center.

It is also noted that the introduction of  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$  cation as a charge compensator in  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  leads to the stabilization at room temperature of the high-temperature cubic modification  $Pm\bar{3}m$  instead of the usual low-temperature trigonal one  $R\bar{3}c$ . The presence of broadband PL in  $\text{Cu}^{2+}:\text{LaAlO}_3$  along with the previously studied PL of  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  in  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  testifies to the correctness of our chosen approach to search for matrices for PL of octahedrally-coordinated impurity  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  among crystals providing the strongest possible crystal field on the impurity ions.

## FUNDING

This work was supported by the Russian Science Foundation (grant No. 23-23-00160).

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

## FIGURE CAPTIONS

**Fig. 1.** Overview diffractograms of different  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  samples: unalloyed, copper-doped, and also coalloyed with copper and different elements (indication of the reflections is given in hexagonal system; due to close proximity many reflections are not visually resolved).

**Fig. 2.** Details of diffractograms of different  $\text{LaAlO}_3$  samples: unalloyed, Cu-doped, and also coalloyed with Cu and different elements in the region  $41.2^\circ$  (for all samples, except for Cu, Ti co-doped, we can see a complex structure formed by the convolution of two peaks from adjacent reflexes (202, 006) with a hardware profile formed by superposition of two reflexes -  $K_{(\alpha)}(1)$  and  $K_{(\alpha)}(2)$ ; in the Cu, Ti co-doped sample there is only one split cubic perovskite reflex).

**Fig. 3.** PL spectra of  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ , doped with  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  and co-doped with different tetravalent ions (the height of the spectrum corresponds to the relative PL intensity of each sample; excitation wavelength  $\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 820 \text{ nm}$ ).

**Fig. 4.** PL and FL excitation spectra of perovskite  $\text{LaAlO}_3$ , co-doped with  $\text{Cu}^{(2+)}$  and  $\text{Zr}^{4+}$ .

**Fig. 5.** Variation of crystal lattice parameters of perovskite  $\text{LaAlO}_{(3)}$  (hexagonal system) when it is doped with copper, four-charged ions  $\text{M}^{(4+)}$  ( $\text{M} = \text{Zr}, \text{Sn}, \text{Ge}$ ), and also when it is co-doped with copper and these elements.

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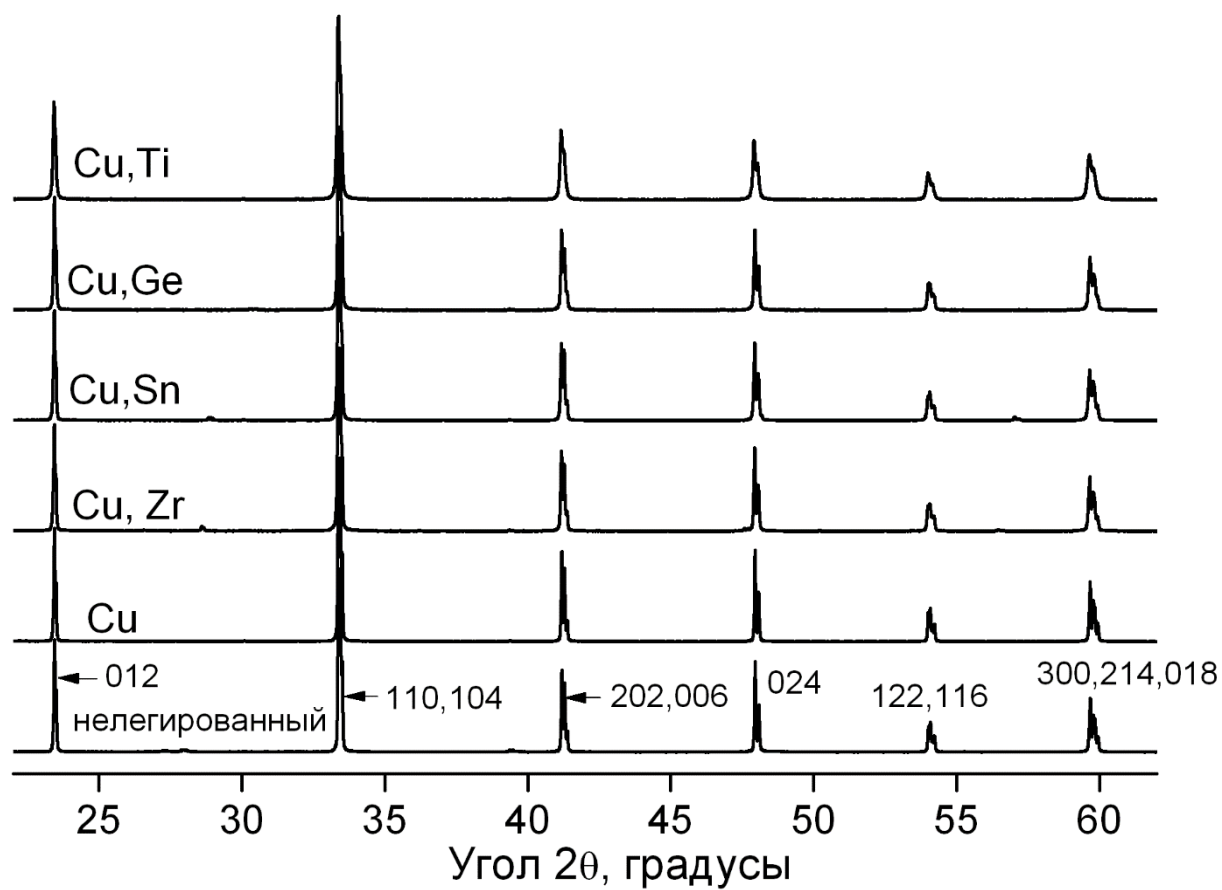


Fig. 1

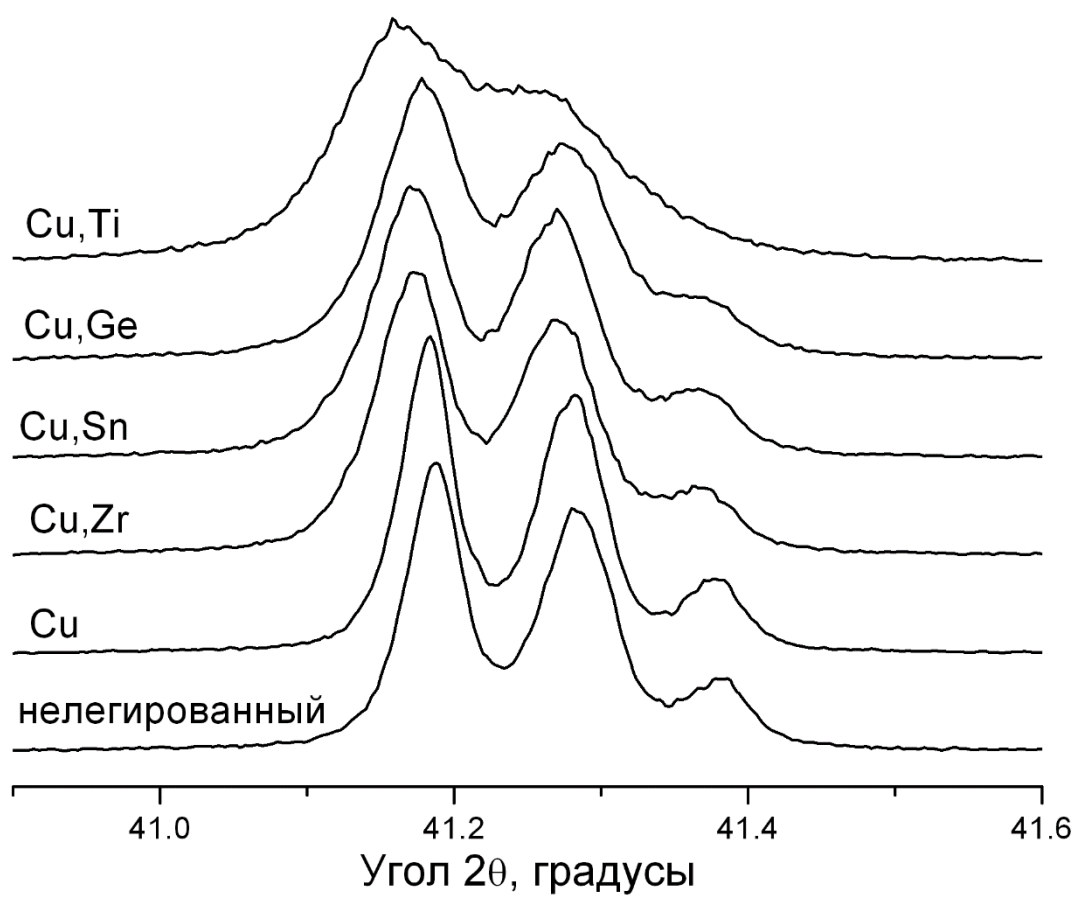


Fig. 2



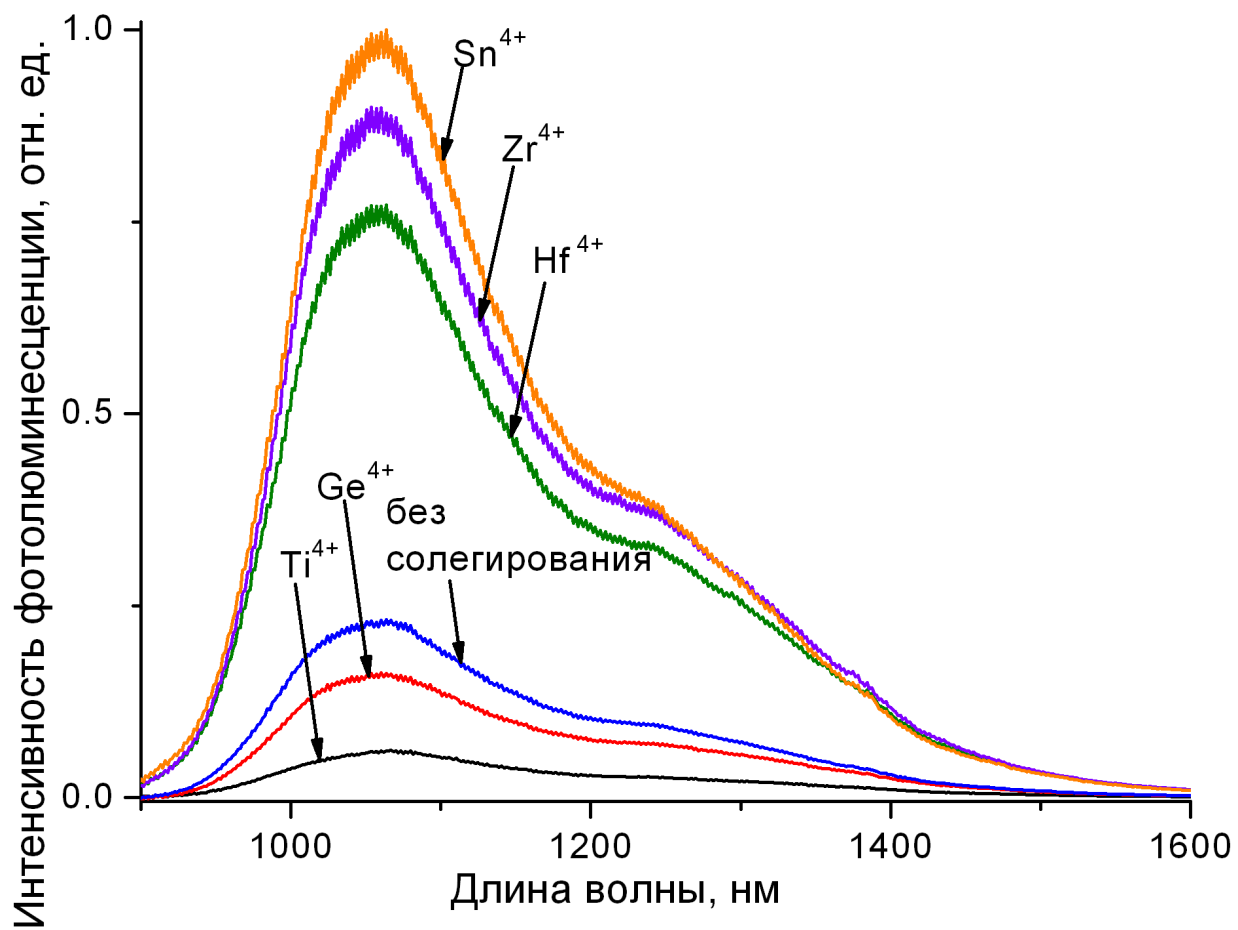


Fig. 3

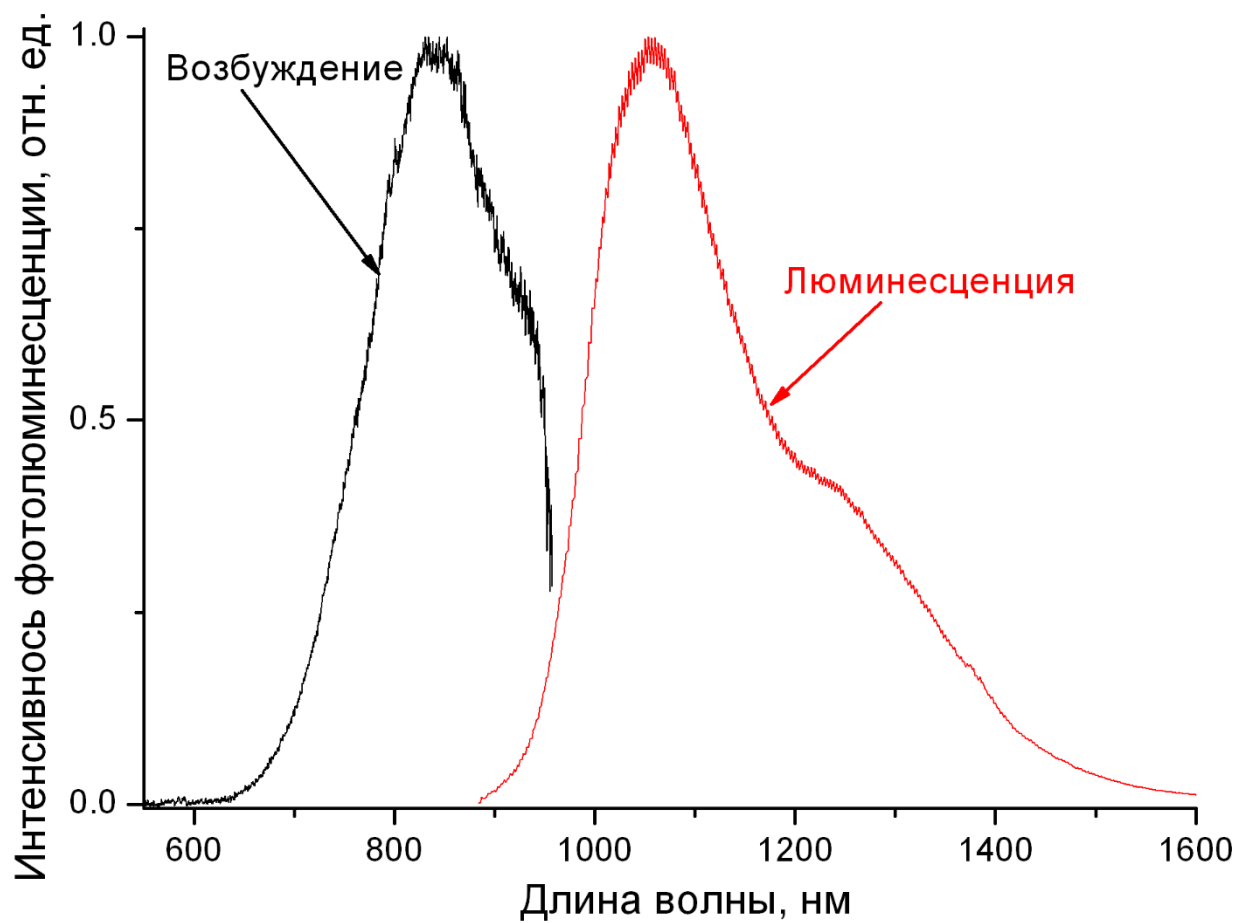


Fig. 4

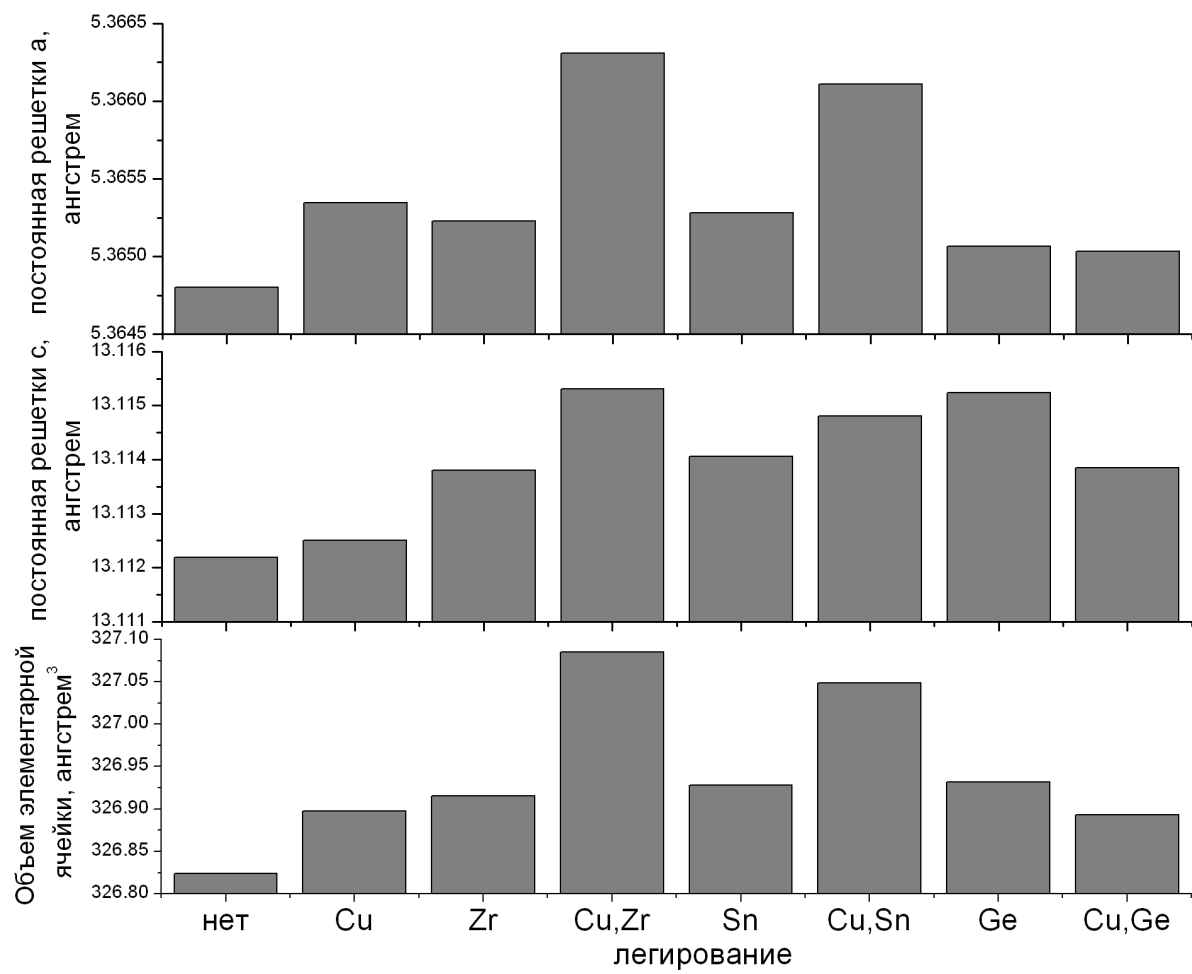


Fig. 5