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Insight into the dehydration behaviour of scandium-substituted barium titanate perovskites via simultaneous in situ neutron powder diffractionmetry and thermogravimetric analysis

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A B S T R A C T

Hydration-dehydration cycles are critical to the mechanical performance of ceramic proton conductors. The development of in situ methods is desirable in order to study their structural response under conditions that mimic the operating ones. Neutron powder diffraction studies combined with simultaneous thermogravimetric analysis were performed on the hydrated forms of two members of the oxygen deficient perovskite \(\text{BaTi}_{1-x}\text{Sc}_{x}\text{O}_{3-δ}\) series, with \(x = 0.5\) and \(x = 0.7\). Rietveld analyses agreed with in situ gravimetric data, allowing correlation of occupancy factors of the oxygen site to hydration levels and other structural data. Dehydration is an activated process that impacts on structural parameters and the level of Sc substitution was found to control the structural response during in situ dehydration, with higher Sc content leading to significantly greater volume contraction. This was rationalised by the chemical expansion due to hydration of oxygen vacancies within the \(x = 0.5\) sample being anomalously small. Furthermore, the behaviour of the \(x = 0.5\) system revealed an unexpected cell expansion during the early stages of dehydration, suggesting the hydration level may influence the thermal expansion coefficient (TEC).

1. Introduction

The success of proton conducting-solid oxide fuel cells (PC-SOFC, or PCFC) technology relies on understanding the transport properties and probing the stability of the materials utilised to fabricate the cell. To this end, the toolkit available to the materials scientist is ever increasing, with a number of characterisation methods contributing to elucidating structure-property relationships [1]. Often, independent or ex situ studies fail to comprehensively explain processes, due to difficulties in exactly reproducing conditions. Hence, the development of in situ, in operando and combined method approaches is very desirable [2], and demonstrated, for example, by studies on hydrogen storage materials [3], Li-ion batteries [4], oxide systems for carbon sequestration [5], catalytic systems [6], and protonic conductors [7, 8].

High temperature proton conducting electrolytes are the benchmark among acceptor doped perovskite-type materials, with the BaCeO\(_3\) and BaZrO\(_3\) related phases considered as the most promising [1]; among those, Y-doped BaZrO\(_3\) [9] proton conductors display the highest bulk proton conductivity [10, 11]. Commercialisation of this class of ceramic materials remains an ongoing endeavour, mainly because of the high grain boundary resistance due to a bimodal size distribution of grains [12, 13] that affects their sinterability and stability under operating conditions. Optimisation of the parameters governing densification and stability of such phases is being addressed by novel fabrication methods [14–16] and grain surface processing prior to utilisation [17].

In order to conduct protons, these oxides undergo a hydration step, illustrated in the Kröger-Vink notation by the equilibrium:

\[
\text{H}_2\text{O}(g) + \nu \gamma^\ast + \nu \delta^\ast \rightleftharpoons 2 \text{OH}^\ast
\]  

(1)

where water from the gas phase is incorporated into the vacancies generated by acceptor doping the host phase, i.e. the original mixed oxide itself, thus creating protonic defects within the lattice in the form of hydroxyl anions at an oxygen lattice site. Hydration is usually associated with an expansion of the crystal lattice [18, 19], a phenomenon that is critical to the mechanical stability and, therefore, to the lifetime of any device, potentially leading to micro-fissures in the...
electrolyte and/or delamination at the electrolyte/electrode interface. Further, filling the vacancies in systems with high levels of oxygen vacancies can produce structural phase transitions, as in the case of the orthorhombic to tetragonal transition that accompanies the transformation of the brownmillerite phase Ba5In2O8 to Ba5In2O8(H2O) [20]. Likewise, in Y-doped BaCe0.8Y0.2O3−δ, a more relevant system for PCFC applications, neutron diffraction experiments performed on the x = 0.20 solid solution show transitions at 773 K (orthorhombic, Imma), 873 K (rhombohedral, R3c), and 1073 K (cubic, Pm3m) [21] and the stability of the phases can be correlated with the degree of hydration. Phase transitions are suppressed by the presence of oxygen vacancies and the protonic defects increase the tendency for octahedral tilting, as shown by Andersson et al. [8]. This shifts the stability of lower symmetry phases to higher temperatures and promotes a monoclinic I2/m structure at temperature below 673 K. These examples show that the hydration-dehydration behaviour in proton conductors can be complex. Development of methods to investigate systems under conditions that mimic those found in a device is necessary and may also shorten the development cycle of new materials.

Relatively few studies have focussed on the proton conductivity of BaTiO3-based solid solutions, and most concern pristine or 5–10% doped materials [11, 22–26]. The main investigations on heavily doped titanate phases are ionic conduction studies of doped brownmillerite Ba5In2O8 [27, 28]. Here, progressively replacing Ti for In induces disordering of the vacancy array, stabilising cubic perovskite structures at room temperature for substitutions larger than 15%. BaTi0.8In0.2O3−δ displays the highest proton conductivity (1.1 × 10−3 S cm−1, under wet N2 at 723 K), but also a phase transition from cubic Pm3m to tetragonal P4/mmm upon hydration [29]. Higher doping levels (≥50%) fully stabilise cubic structures, but show poorer protonic conduction [30]. This may be linked to the irregular oxygen sublattice built up by a combination of regular InO4 and distorted TiO6 octahedra [31]. A more regular framework for proton mobility is obtained by replacing In3+ with the smaller Sc3+ (0.80 Å vs. 0.74 Å, respectively, when 6-coordinated) that has a strong preference for octahedral environments. The 50% Sc-substituted BaTiO3 [32] is a better proton conductor than its In-doped counterpart [30], under similar conditions. Its proton transference number, tH+, is close to unitary, below 773 K in a wet inert atmosphere. The 70% Sc-substituted material is able to maintain the same tH+ at higher temperatures [33]. Interestingly, in the Ba1−xScxTiO3−δ system, the Sc doping is structure directing. X-ray diffraction data [32] revealed a phase transition from a 6H hexagonal perovskite structure for compositions 0.1 ≤ x ≤ 0.2, to a cubic perovskite for 0.5 ≤ x ≤ 0.8, with an intermediate multiphasic region when 0.3 ≤ x ≤ 0.5. In the same study, impedance spectroscopy analyses show how the structural transition impacts on proton mobility, with the highest proton conductivity measured for the cubic x = 0.7 (ca. 2 × 10−3 S cm−1), whereas in the hexagonal x = 0.2 sample performance is reduced by two orders of magnitude, under the same conditions [33]. The behaviour was investigated [34] by means of neutron powder diffraction (NPD) and thermogravimetric analysis (TG), coupled with predictions based on first principle calculations. Ordering of metal dopant, oxygen vacancies and protonic defects was found in the hexagonal x = 0.2 type, where protons diffuse via higher energy positions. On the contrary, the cubic x = 0.7 type is characterised by disorder.

It is clear that Sc levels have a profound effect on the physical properties of these titanate phases and that the cubic members are more interesting from the point of view of the technical applications. Further, a striking point about the 50% Sc-substituted material is that it displays very little chemical expansion of its lattice with the filling of vacancies [32], as per hydration reaction (1). Given the large amount of vacancies that the material can host and that can be filled with protonic defects, this reveals a property that can be crucial for its application as a proton conducting membrane in commercial devices. This work, hence, explores hydration levels and structural response with a simultaneous thermogravimetric (TG) and in situ neutron powder diffraction (NPD) study on two cubic members of the BaTi1−xScxO3−δ series, with x = 0.5 and x = 0.7 (BTS50 and BTS70, respectively). With neutrons, crystallographic sites bearing lighter atoms, such as oxygen, can be investigated even in the presence of heavier elements. Therefore, following the evolution of the oxygen site occupancy during dehydration becomes possible, in order to directly link structural parameters and hydration levels to observed mass losses. The structural evolution due to dehydration is discussed in terms of the combination of thermal and chemical expansion in the two systems, and the relative size of vacancies and protonic defects. The aspect of method development is equally important as we hope that demonstrating the feasibility of the experiment will allow further studies on proton conductors and other related materials.

2. Experimental

BTS50 and BTS70 were prepared by solid-state reaction, using carbonate and oxides: BaCO3 (Alfa Aesar, 99.8%), TiO2 (Sigma-Aldrich, 99.8%), Sc2O3 (Alfa Aesar, 99.9%). TiO2 and Sc2O3 were annealed at 1273 K overnight, then stored in a drying oven at 423 K, along with BaCO3 prior to mixing. Stoichiometric mixtures were prepared by manually grinding the reactants in an agate mortar, with ethanol as suspending agent to enhance homogenisation. The finely mixed powders were fired at 1273 K in α-alumina crucibles, then intensively ground and pelleted. The same operations were repeated for every following heating step until phase purity was satisfactory. BTS50 was annealed up to 1773 K, and BTS70 up to 1798 K, with intermediate grinding and pelleting. During the synthesis, sacrificial loose powder was used to cover the faces of the pellets in order to limit volatilisation of BaO, and Ti ions diffusion into the alumina crucible. The samples, placed into α-Al2O3 boats, then underwent a hydration step, carried out in a tube furnace through which nitrogen (Air Liquide Alphagaz 1, containing 6 ppm of H2O) was passed, after bubbling through a round bottom flask filled with distilled water maintained at a constant temperature of 333 K, providing a p(H2O) of ca. 0.2 atm. The samples were exposed to a stepwise temperature programme, from 1073 K to 423 K using the method described in a previous study [34].

Laboratory X-ray powder diffraction data were collected using a Bruker AXS D8 Advance diffractometer equipped with a copper target, a Ge (111) primary monochromator (providing Cu Kα radiation with λ = 1.54056 Å), and a solid state LynxEye detector. Data were analysed by means of the Rietveld method [35], using the academic version of the software TOPAS v5 [36] (Bruker AXS). The background was modelled with a Chebyshev polynomial function and peak shapes by a convolution of two back-to-back exponentials with a pseudo-Voigt function. For the RT datasets, structural parameters, occupancy factors for the Sc/Ti site, and isotropic displacement parameters were refined. Sequential refinements were performed on cubic lattice parameters, all atomic displacement parameters (ADPs), oxygen site occupancy factors (SOFs), with constrains on Sc/Ti SOFs.

Ex situ thermogravimetric analyses (TGA) were performed on the hydrated samples, in order to determine the degree of saturation of the oxygen vacancies, according to (1). Measurements were carried out on samples of about 60 mg loaded in small α-alumina pans (6 mm diameter), using a Netzsch STA 409 PC Luxx. Temperature programmes were set from room temperature up to 1073 K, at heating rate of 15 K/ min, under a flow of 20 ml/min of nitrogen (Air Liquide Alphagaz 1, containing 6 ppm of H2O).

In situ high-resolution diffraction data were collected on the time-of-flight instrument Polaris at the ISIS neutron and muon source. The samples were loaded into open, cylindrical 8 mm external diameter vanadium cans, then hooked by a fine tungsten wire to the balance of the IGA” (Intelligent Gravimetric Analysers for neutron experiments, Hiden Isochema) and enclosed in a quartz tube sealed by a Cu gasket. The sample environment was heated up to 573 K by two resistive coils,
one above and one below the sample container, and temperature was monitored by a thermocouple; a similar setup is shown in Wood et al. [6]. The experiments were carried out under vacuum, while pressure was controlled by an inlet and outlet valve through which the system was outgassed at 100 mbar/min. Experiments were started when pressure measured ca. 2 mbar, with heating rates set to 0.6 K/min for BTS50 and to 0.5 K/min for BTS70. The choice concerning final temperature and heating rates was determined by the need to accommodate ca. 20 h long experiments to the available beam-time. Diffraction data were collected continuously in 10 min blocks, yielding temperature resolution ranging from 6 K at the beginning of the experiments to 2 K towards the end. Rietveld analysis was performed on the data collected on the backscattering bank (0.2–2.65 Å), and 90° bank (up to 4.1 Å).

3. Results

3.1. Pre-characterisation of samples

The X-ray powder diffraction (XPD) data of the hydrated BTS50 and BTS70 were refined according to a cubic perovskite model using space group no. 221, Pnma, with structural parameters in agreement with those previously reported by Rahman et al. [32, 33] and Torino et al. [34]. BTS50 was found to be phase pure, while, in BTS70, a low-level parasitic phase, BaSc2O6, coexisted. This additional phase was refined on the basis of the model proposed by Agafonov et al. [37], giving a refined weight fraction of 3.07(3)%: this was taken into account for all following calculations involving mass changes and stoichiometry. During the syntheses, covering the pellets with sacrificial loose powder proved to be an effective way for preventing Ba and Ti loss, as the diffraction patterns of the loose powders were consistently different from the as-prepared phases.

Sc3+ replaces Ti4+, acting as an acceptor dopant, creating oxygen vacancies in order to maintain charge balance within the material (in the Kröger-Vink notation):

\[
\text{BaO} + (1-x)\text{TiO}_2 + \frac{x}{2} \text{Sc}_2 \text{O}_3 \rightleftharpoons \text{Ba}_x \text{Sc}_{1-x/2} \text{Ti}_{x/2} \text{O}_{3-x/2} + \left(3-x \right)\text{O}_2^\cdot
\]

(2)

According to (2), and assuming that all scandium is present as Sc3+ and titanium as Ti4+, the ideal hydrated compositions, for BTS50 and BTS70 respectively, are BaSc0.5Ti0.5O2.75(H2O)0.25 and BaSc0.7Ti0.3O2.65(H2O)0.35, leading to theoretical mass losses of 1.94% and 2.72%, when all oxygen vacancies are filled with water. The 

3.2. Simultaneous in situ NPD and TGA

The data collected during the in situ thermodiffracto-gravimetric experiment, show a lower dehydration onset temperature for BTS50 (Fig. 2). The derivative of the mass change with respect to temperature was calculated from the raw TG data, and smoothed by averaging the datapoints to obtain resolutions ranging from 10 K around RT, to 2 K around 573 K. Extracted dehydration rates (DR) and cell parameters from refined NPD data reveal peculiarities that are characteristic of the respective Sc-doping level (Fig. 3, a and b). For BTS50, the thermal evolution of the lattice parameter can be divided into four regions. In the first region, from RT to 413 K, the lattice parameter increases linearly with temperature and a thermal expansion coefficient (TEC) of 4.3 × 10^{-5} K^{-1} is calculated. At 413 K, the 0.05% of the initial mass is lost and the temperature onset of dehydration is evident, at a DR of 0.05(1) mg/K, or 2.77(1) × 10^{-5} molH2O/K. Until 493 K, the evolution of the lattice parameter diverges from the previous trend and a region with a steeper slope is observed, with a TEC of 5.9 × 10^{-5} K^{-1}. Between 493 and 533 K a plateau is observed, where the TEC shifts from 0.03% to 0.05%, and a DR of 0.05(1) mg/K (2.87(1) × 10^{-5} molH2O/K). Below this limit the initial mass is lost and the lattice parameter measures 4.1339(4) Å, with a dehydration rate of 0.05(1) mg/K.

The thermal evolution of BTS70’s lattice parameter can also be divided into four regions. The expansion of the unit cell between RT and 493 K is linear, with a TEC of 4.5 × 10^{-5} K^{-1}. Between 493 and 513 K the expansion drastically decelerates under the effect of the increase in DR from 0.53(1) mg/K (2.94(1) × 10^{-5} molH2O/K) up to 0.78(1) mg/K (4.33(1) × 10^{-5} molH2O/K). This plateau-like region extends from 99.49% to 99.18% of the initial mass. At 573 K the sample is 94.4% dehydrated, 1.57% of the initial mass is lost and the lattice parameter measures 4.1339(4) Å, with a dehydration rate of 0.05(1) mg/K.

Fig. 1. Refined RT NPD data for hydrated BTS70. The plot shows data collected on the backscattering bank as red dots, the fitted profile as the black solid line, the difference between observed and calculated pattern in blue. Diffraction peaks due to the sample environment are denoted as crosses (+, IGA© encasement) and asterisks (*, Vanadium can). (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

The water contents extracted from TGA data were used to adjust and constrain O and H occupancies in the following restraints that were modelled according to a cubic perovskite model using space group no. 221, Pnma, with structural parameters in agreement with those previously reported by Rahman et al. [32, 33] and Torino et al. [34]. BTS50 was found to be phase pure, while, in BTS70, a low-level parasitic phase, BaSc2O6, coexisted. This additional phase was refined on the basis of the model proposed by Agafonov et al. [37], giving a refined weight fraction of 3.07(3)%: this was taken into account for all following calculations involving mass changes and stoichiometry. During the syntheses, covering the pellets with sacrificial loose powder proved to be an effective way for preventing Ba and Ti loss, as the diffraction patterns of the loose powders were consistently different from the as-prepared phases.

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\]

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At 553 K, corresponding to 98.40% of the initial mass, the DR is 0.53(1) mg/K and the lattice parameter 4.1648(4) Å. Beyond 553 K the lattice parameter curve starts flattening and the unit cell starts stabilising again, with a lattice constant of 4.1644(4) Å at 573 K. Here, the sample lost 1.8% of its initial mass and it is still about 25% hydrated.

Fig. 4a and b, show the evolution of the oxygen site occupancies with respect to temperature. For both systems, refined oxygen SOFs curves show trends superimposable to TG signals. This allowed us to correlate the dehydration processes to the respective structural responses of BTS50 and BTS70.

4. Discussion

From inspection of the diffractograms, the simple cubic perovskite structural model is retained for both BTS50 and BTS70, at room temperature and above. Constrained refinements of NPD RT data confirmed the hydration level for BTS50 (86.6%), and demonstrated that BTS70 was close to its saturation limit, being 95.2% hydrated. Assuming Sc to be trivalent and Ti as tetravalent, NPD data indicate, in fact, a composition for BTS50, BaSc$_{0.494(4)}$Ti$_{0.506(4)}$O$_{2.753(5)}$(H$_2$O)$_{0.214}$, that agrees with the expected stoichiometry.

The refined composition for BTS70, BaSc$_{0.663(5)}$Ti$_{0.337(5)}$O$_{2.669}$, is below the intended stoichiometry of BaSc$_{0.7}$Ti$_{0.3}$O$_{2.65}$ (H$_2$O)$_{0.35}$, but is consistent with the presence of the secondary phase BaSc$_2$O$_4$. The different degree of success of the hydration reaction (1) can be explained by the compositional dependence of the hydration thermodynamics for the two systems. For Sc-doped BaTiO$_3$ systems, $\Delta_{\text{hydr}}$H$^\circ$ becomes less negative with smaller dopant content ($\sim$ 83(2) kJ/mol for BTS70 vs. $\sim$ 57(2) kJ/mol for BTS50) [38], decreasing both temperature onset of hydration and temperature of saturation. For BTS50, hence, a longer time is required to reach equilibrium (1) since lower temperatures slow the diffusion of protonic defects.

The data extracted from the IGA$^a$ demonstrate the conclusions Bjørheim et al. [38] drawn from the thermodynamics study of the Sc-
doped BaTiO$_3$ systems: the enthalpy of proton mobility, $\Delta H_{m,H^+}$, increases with the dopant concentration, 40(5) kJ/mol for BTS50 and 60(5) kJ/mol for BTS70. This indicates that higher temperatures are required for BTS70 to mobilise protons, which is reflected by its higher temperature onset of dehydration, measured at around 423 K (see Fig. 2). Heating rates have an impact on onset temperatures of dehydration, with faster rates shifting the onset towards higher temperatures. Despite the slightly faster heating rate set for BTS50, the expected behaviour was observed on the IGAn, and confirmed by ex situ TG data, where conditions were the same.

In an attempt to gain further insights into the balance between chemical and thermal expansion effects in the two systems, the model reported in Andersson et al. [19] was used to simulate the cell parameter dependence. The results are shown in Fig. 5. The model uses established thermodynamics formalisms to predict the equilibrium concentration of protonic defects and applies this to calculate the perovskite cell parameter based on the summation of the average cation (Ti and Sc) and anion sites ($\times$OO$^\cdot$, O$^\cdot$H$^\cdot$ and vO$^\cdot$•) [18]. The ionic radii of Ti$^{4+}$ and Sc$^{3+}$ with 6-fold coordination were used [39], and following Andersson et al. [19], the size of oxygen ion and –OH group were taken as 1.38 Å and 1.35 Å respectively. The “effective” size of the vO$^\cdot$ is not known and different values were used in the simulations, including 1.18 Å that was used in the original work [19]. The size and shape of the oxygen vacancy has, in fact, been a topic of several studies. Focussing on perovskite-structured oxides, Jedvik et al. [40], employing density functional theory (DFT) calculations on acceptor-doped BaZrO$_3$, proposed an ellipsoidal shape for the oxygen vacancy, with semi-principal axes measuring $r_{vac,x} = 1.18$ Å, and $r_{vac,y} = r_{vac,z} = 0.58$ Å. Marrocchelli et al. [41], using both DFT calculations and molecular dynamics simulations, found that $r_{vac}$ ranges from 1.24 Å to 1.57 Å. Noticeably the lattice contracts when an oxygen vacancy is created therefore it is reasonable to imagine a vacancy smaller than an oxide ion. The size of a vacancy seems also to be sensitive to the kind of dopant and its concentration though a clear trend is yet to be found. New experimental data on perovskite systems will eventually help rationalising our current understanding, with the present approach proving to be useful in gathering new information.

The enthalpies of hydration and entropy for these two systems were taken from the values reported in Bjørheim et al. [38] based on DSC measurements, and the partial pressure was adjusted in order to reflect the dehydration temperature displayed by the samples. The simulated cell parameter was then obtained by using the initial TEC and the additional contributions from the chemical expansion. In the model, this component reflects the greater average size of the O$^\cdot$H$^\cdot$ defects in comparison to the vO$^\cdot$ that overrides the expected decrease resulting from conversion of a lattice oxygen to an O$^\cdot$H$^\cdot$ defect. As dehydration occurs at the temperature predicted based on the thermodynamics properties this contribution decreases gradually to zero.

The figure underlines that the chemical expansion (in this case
chemical contraction due to dehydration) of BTS50 is both quite remarkable in nature and very small in magnitude. In particular, the increased rate of cell expansion in the T region 450 to 500 K is clear despite the mass loss shown in the simultaneous IGAn data indicating significant dehydration. This leads to the large divergence between the experimental data and the simulated trend lines that follow the mass loss data more closely. In contrast, for BTS70 the behaviour is more conventional. The overall magnitude of unit cell contraction is simulated with a reasonable accuracy using for the hydrated material and a lack of experimental data to higher temperatures results in a limitation in the comparison with the simulated trend.

The overall magnitude of chemical expansion in BTS50 is very small, as judged based on a comparison of the normalised chemical strain determined by comparing cell parameters at RT presented in Table 2.

The chemical strain, \( \varepsilon_c = (a - a_0)/a_0 \), where \( a \) represents the lattice parameter of the hydrated material, and \( a_0 \) its lattice parameter at a reference chemical composition (in this case when the material is dried), is employed as a measure of the effect of the chemical expansion, a concept introduced and formalised by Adler [42] as a new property of electrochemical ceramics. Used as a means to better understanding the relationship between local electronic and defect structure in perovskite-like cobaltite phases as electrode materials for SOFCs [43,44], the relationship between local electronic and defect structure in perovskite-like cobaltite phases as electrode materials for SOFCs [43,44], the interaction between vacancies could make it necessary to supply more energy to mobilise a vacancy due to clustering, implying a stabilisation of oxygen vacancies at higher temperatures for the lower substitution levels in comparison to the higher substitution levels. The interaction between vacancies could make it necessary to supply more energy to mobilise a vacancy due to clustering, implying a stabilisation of oxygen vacancies at higher temperatures.

Regard is. Regardless of the exact mechanism at play it is clear that the applicability of the simple point defect model used to simulate the cell parameter is more questionable for these heavily substituted samples in comparison to the lower substitution levels of BaSc1-x/2Ta2/3O3−x/2 (0.05 ≤ x ≤ 0.20) and BaSc0.6Ba0.4O2.9 perovskites it was first applied to [19].

A stronger vacancy-vacancy interaction might also explain why the enthalpy of vacancy mobility, \( \Delta H_{m,v} \), diminishes at higher Sc concentrations (95(5) kJ/mol for BTS50 and 66(5) kJ/mol for BTS70) [38]. The interaction between vacancies could make it necessary to supply more energy to mobilise a vacancy due to clustering, implying a stabilisation of oxygen vacancies at higher temperatures for the lower substitution levels. The other hand, the relative stability of vacancies and protonic defects may vary with the hydration level. For instance, the chemical expansion of BaScO2.9 increases during dehydration is that the thermal expansion coefficient, \( \alpha \), diminishes at higher Sc concentrations (95(5) kJ/mol for BTS50 and 66(5) kJ/mol for BTS70) [38]. The interaction between vacancies could make it necessary to supply more energy to mobilise a vacancy due to clustering, implying a stabilisation of oxygen vacancies at higher temperatures.

Table 2 shows that titanate systems display a smaller expansion on hydration, with respect to the well-known cerate and zirconate systems, with BTS50 displaying the smallest expansion. This indicates that the size difference between the \( \nu_0^+ \) and the protonic defects is small for this system, and certainly smaller than that for the BTS70 sample. Both systems are very heavily substituted, and support a high level of oxygen deficiency when dry within the framework of a highly disordered perovskite structure. It is therefore reasonable to suspect that short range oxygen vacancy to vacancy correlations exist and this leads to some extent of vacancy clustering, possibly also associated with localised B-site ordering. This, in turn, will influence the cell parameter in the dry state, and consequently also impact the magnitude of the chemical expansion linked to hydration of the vacancies.

A working hypothesis is then that vacancy-vacancy interactions are important in these systems, and that for BTS50 this results in an “average” oxygen vacancy size that is smaller than the size of protonic defects in BTS70. Bearing in mind that hydration both replaces a vacancy with a protonic defect, and converts an oxide ion to a smaller –OH group, the net chemical expansion will consequently be much smaller in BTS50. Further studies are required to investigate the degree of short range correlations within these systems in both dry and hydrated forms. The use of neutron diffraction data and the total scattering approach, as applied recently to ordering effects in fluorites/pyrochlores [45,46] is planned in the near future and may provide further information regarding the chemical strain effects. Regardless of the exact mechanism at play it is clear that the applicability of the simple point defect model used to simulate the cell parameter is more questionable for these heavily substituted samples in comparison to the lower substitution levels of BaSc1-x/2Ta2/3O3−x/2 (0.05 ≤ x ≤ 0.20) and BaSc0.6Ba0.4O2.9 perovskites it was first applied to [19].

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5. Conclusion

Hydration-dehydration cycles are critical to proton conductors and neutrons are ideal to probe oxygen sites in the presence of heavier elements. The simultaneous in situ NPD and TG analysis of our systems
allowed us to correlate dehydration properties to structural responses, in a way ex situ and independent studies cannot. It is, in fact, often difficult to connect ex situ data from different techniques with great confidence since conditions experienced by the samples are usually not exactly the same. This study was successful in directly linking oxygen occupancy, and therefore water content, to gravimetric data. This link was instrumental in correlating lattice changes to dehydration rates, occupancy, and therefore water content, to gravimetric data. This link was instrumental in correlating lattice changes to dehydration rates, occupancy, and therefore water content, to gravimetric data.

In BTS70, the size difference between the protonic defects and the oxygen vacancy is suggested to be anomalously small and the rate of expansion strain effect on evolving systems during the thermally induced dehydration.

Two effects mean that thermal expansion compensates the contraction caused by dehydration and associated vacancy formation, ultimately leading to a plateau region for the unit cell parameter. In BTS70, the observed cell dependence is more conventional in nature, with the cell contraction observed during de-hydration indicating the chemical expansion contribution is larger for the more heavily scanner barium zirconate films grown by pulsed laser deposition, Nat. Mater. 9 (2010) 846–852, https://doi.org/10.1038/nmat2837.


