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Crystal Field Levels and Magnetic Anisotropy in the Kagome Compounds
Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$, Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Zn$_2$O$_{14}$, and Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$

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We report the crystal field levels of several newly-discovered rare-earth kagome compounds: Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$, Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Zn$_2$O$_{14}$, and Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$. We determine the CEF Hamiltonian by fitting to neutron scattering data using a point-charge Hamiltonian as an intermediate fitting step. The fitted Hamiltonians accurately reproduce bulk susceptibility measurements, and the results indicate easy-axis ground state doublets for Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$ and Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Zn$_2$O$_{14}$, and a singlet ground state for Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$. These results provide the groundwork for future investigations of these compounds and a template for CEF analysis of other low-symmetry materials.

I. INTRODUCTION

The kagome lattice of corner-sharing triangles is the basis for multiple distinct forms of frustrated magnetism with unique physical properties. Magnetic kagome lattices are believed to host spin-liquid phases$^{1-4}$, non-trivial transport properties$^5$, and topologically protected phases$^6$. Experimental realizations of these models present important opportunities to explore new states of matter.

Recently, a new family of kagome compounds with magnetic rare earth ions RE$_3$Sb$_3$A$_2$O$_{14}$ (RE = rare earth, A = Mg, Zn) was discovered$^{7-9}$. Basic materials characterization has been carried out on the entire family$^{7-10}$, and neutron diffraction has revealed the low temperature magnetic structure of Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$$^{11}$ and Dy$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$$^{12}$. µSR data for Tb$_3$Sb$_3$Zn$_2$O$_{14}$ were interpreted as indicative of a spin-liquid ground state$^{13}$.

The rare earth ions in these materials are strongly influenced by the electrostatic environment they occupy. It determines to what extent and how the $2J + 1$ fold spin-orbital degeneracy of the rare earth ion is lifted$^{14}$. Clearly this has major impacts on the nature of the potentially frustrated magnetism. Fortunately the crystal electric field (CEF) level scheme can be accurately determined using inelastic neutron scattering and it is to this task that we have devoted ourselves in this paper. Specifically, we report the crystal field Hamiltonians of the insulating compounds Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$, Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Zn$_2$O$_{14}$, and Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$ deduced from crystal field excitations observed with neutron scattering. The complexity of the CEF Hamiltonian is determined by the point group symmetry of the ion: high symmetry means few CEF parameters, low symmetry means many CEF parameters. The ligand environment for RE$_3$Sb$_3$A$_2$O$_{14}$ (RE = rare earth, A = Mg, Zn) has a very low symmetry environment of $2/m$ symmetry (see Fig. 1), leading to 15 allowed CEF parameters in the Hamiltonian. Such a model is very difficult to uniquely establish, but—by using a point-charge approximation to obtain a first approximation—reliable fits to neutron scattering data are possible. The techniques outlined here provide a template for analyzing the rest of this family of Kagome compounds and indeed they should be useful for analyzing the crystal field level scheme when as here the symmetries involved are low.

II. EXPERIMENTAL METHODS

We performed neutron scattering experiments on 5g of Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$, 5g Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Zn$_2$O$_{14}$, and 5g Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$ (all loose powders) on the ARCS spectrometer at the SNS at ORNL. For every compound, we collected data at incident energies $E_i = 150$ meV, $E_i = 80$ meV, and $E_i = 40$ meV; at temperatures $T = 6$K, $T = 100$ K, and $T = 200$ K for every $E_i$ (a total of...
nine data sets), measuring for two hours at each setting. We also acquired data for a 5g nonmagnetic analogue \( \text{La}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) to serve as a background. This allows us to subtract the phonon contribution from the data for the magnetic compounds (see supplemental materials\textsuperscript{26} for details about the background subtraction).

The full background-subtracted data set for \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) is shown in Fig. 2. The crystal field excitations are clearly visible because the corresponding intensity decreases with \( Q \) as a result of the electronic form factor. As \( \text{Nd}^{3+} \) is a \( J = 9/2 \) Kramers ion, we expect to see 10/2 = 5 CEF levels, and thus four CEF transition energies from the ground state. This is indeed what we observe in the neutron data: in the 6 K data, four transitions are visible at 23 meV, 36 meV, 43 meV, and 111 meV. At higher temperatures, the existing peaks broaden in \( \Delta E \) due to shorter excited-state lifetimes, and additional weak peaks appear corresponding to transitions between thermally populated excited levels.

An abbreviated (6 K only) data set for \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Zn}_2\text{O}_{14} \) is shown in Fig. 3. These data are nearly identical to the \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) data in Fig. 2, with four transitions from a \( J = 9/2 \) Kramers ion, but with transition energies at 18 meV, 32 meV, 40 meV, and 109 meV. Such differences indicate slight modifications in the ligand environment experienced by the rare earth ion.

An abbreviated (6 K only) data set for \( \text{Pr}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) is shown in Fig. 4. \( \text{Pr}^{3+} \) is a non-Kramers ion with \( J = 4 \), which means that singlet states are possible when the point group symmetry is sufficiently low so the number of transitions observed is greater. Five transitions are clearly distinguishable at 6 K, with more being too weak to distinguish in the figure.

### III. COMPUTATIONAL METHODS

Using the inelastic neutron scattering data, we were able to infer a crystal field model for each of the compounds that can account for their anisotropic magnetic properties for temperatures above the inter-site interaction scale (1 K). The fits were carried out using the PyCrystalField software package\textsuperscript{15}. The analysis is based on the following CEF Hamiltonian

\[
\mathcal{H}_{CEF} = \sum_{n,m} B_n^m O_n^m. \tag{1}
\]

Here \( O_n^m \) are the Stevens Operators\textsuperscript{16,17} and \( B_n^m \) are multiplicative factors called CEF parameters that parametrize the effects of the ligand environment on the rare earth ion. This formalism is convenient when the ligand environment has high symmetry, leaving only a handful of CEF parameters to be fit\textsuperscript{17}. Unfortunately, a direct fit to the data for \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) is not feasible: fitting 15 parameters to eight observables (four transition energies and four neutron intensities). To get around this, we begin with a constrained fit based on an electrostatic point-charge model of the ligand environment. Specifically, the point charge \( \mathcal{H}_{CEF} \) is based on a Taylor expansion of the electrostatic field at the rare earth site generated by the coordinating atoms treated as point charges\textsuperscript{17,18}. This approximation is valid for insulating compounds, which \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14}, \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Zn}_2\text{O}_{14}, \) and \( \text{Pr}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) are.

As is shown in Fig. 1, we chose our axes such that the two-fold rotation symmetry about the \( y \) axis, which leads to 15 allowed CEF parameters in the Hamiltonian. The placement of the rotation axis in the \( xy \) plane ensures that all imaginary CEF terms are zero\textsuperscript{19}.

Following the method outlined by Hutchings\textsuperscript{17}, the CEF parameters \( B_n^m \) are given by

\[
B_n^m = -\gamma_{nm} q C_{nm} \langle r^n \rangle \theta_n. \tag{2}
\]

Here \( \gamma_{nm} \) is a term calculated from the ligand environment expressed in terms of tesseral harmonics, \( q \) is the charge of the central ion (in units of \( |e| \)), \( C_{nm} \) are normalization factors of the tesseral harmonics\textsuperscript{17}, \( \langle r^n \rangle \) is the expectation value of the radial wavefunction for the rare earth ion\textsuperscript{20}, and \( \theta_n \) are multiplicative factors from expressing the electrostatic potential in terms of Stevens Operators in the \( J \) basis\textsuperscript{16}.

The neutron cross section for a single CEF transition in a powder sample is

\[
\frac{d^2\sigma}{d\Omega d\omega} = N(\gamma r_0^2)^2 \frac{k'}{k} f^2(Q) e^{-2W(Q)} p_n |\langle \Gamma_m | \hat{J}_\perp | \Gamma_n \rangle|^2 \delta(h\omega + E_n - E_m) \tag{3}
\]

where \( N \) is the number of ions, \( \gamma = 1.832 \times 10^8 \) \( \text{s}^{-1} \) is the gyromagnetic ratio of the neutron, \( r_0 = 2.818 \times 10^{-15} \) m is the classical electron radius, \( k \) and \( k' \) are the incoming and outgoing neutron wavevectors, \( f(Q) \) is the form factor, \( e^{-2W(Q)} \) is the Debye Waller factor, \( p_n = e^{-\beta E_n} / \sum_i e^{-\beta E_i} \) is the Boltzmann weight, and \( |\langle \Gamma_m | \hat{J}_\perp | \Gamma_n \rangle|^2 = \frac{4}{3} \sum_{n,m} |\langle \Gamma_m | \hat{J}_n | \Gamma_n \rangle|^2 \) is computed from the inner product of total angular momentum \( J_n \) with the CEF eigenstates \( |\Gamma_n \rangle \). Using this equation, one can calculate the neutron spectrum of a given CEF Hamiltonian at a given temperature. In reality, the delta function \( \delta(h\omega + E_n - E_m) \) is replaced with a finite width peak due to the limited energy resolution of the instrument, dispersion, and/or the finite lifetime of the excitation. The resolution was approximated with a Gaussian profile, while finite lifetimes give Lorentzian profiles. We approximated the convolution of these with a Voigt profile for computational efficiency. The energy transfer dependent resolution width was calculated as described in ref.\textsuperscript{22} with sample width \( dL \) defined so the calculated Full Width at Half Maximum (FWHM) of the elastic line matched the measured FWHM. The finite lifetime Lorentzian width was a single temperature dependent fitting parameter shared by all transitions.

Multiple constant-\( Q \) spectra were fitted simultaneously computing the \( Q \)-dependent scattering using the calcu-
Figure 2. Inelastic neutron scattering from \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \), taken at \( E_i = 150 \text{ meV}, 80 \text{ meV}, \) and \( 40 \text{ meV} \) and \( T = 6 \text{ K}, 100 \text{ K}, \) and \( 200 \text{ K} \). Scattering from nonmagnetic \( \text{La}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) was scaled and subtracted to eliminate phonon scattering. The CEF excitations are clearly visible and become broadened as temperature increases.

Figure 3. Inelastic neutron scattering from \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Zn}_2\text{O}_{14} \), taken at \( E_i = 150 \text{ meV}, 80 \text{ meV}, \) and \( 40 \text{ meV} \) and \( T = 6 \text{ K} \) (100 K and 200 K data are not shown). Scaled \( \text{La}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) scattering was subtracted. Note the similarity of the patterns to Fig. 2.

lated form factor and a temperature dependent Debye-Waller factor approximated with an overall thermal parameter \( u \)\(^23\) (see supplemental materials\(^26\) for details). We also fit simultaneously to data at all energy transfers and temperatures, for a total of nine \( Q \) and \( \Delta E \) dependent data sets being fit simultaneously for each compound. For \( E_i = 150 \text{ meV} \) and \( E_i = 80 \text{ meV} \), we fit data up to \( 8 \text{ Å}^{-1} \), and for \( E_i = 40 \text{ meV} \) we fit up to \( 7 \text{ Å}^{-1} \) (at which point the magnetic intensity was indistinguishable from background noise).

Using the point charge formalism described above, we fit the CEF Hamiltonians in three steps. The first step was calculating the CEF parameters for each compound using the ligand positions refined in refs.\(^8,9,11\). (We refer to this as the "Calculated PC" model.) As a second step, we refined the effective charges of the symmetry-
Figure 4. Inelastic neutron scattering from Pr₃Sb₃Mg₂O₁₄, taken at Eᵢ =150 meV, 80 meV, and 40 meV and T =6 K (100 K and 200 K data are not shown). Scaled La₃Sb₃Mg₂O₁₄ scattering was subtracted. There is a very strong transition at 7.5 meV, and much weaker transitions at higher energies.

As a third and final step, we used the crystal field parameters Bᵢⁿ obtained from the best effective charge fit as starting parameters for a fit to neutron data varying all Bᵢⁿ. (We refer to this as the "PC Fit" model.) We included a weakly weighted χ₂ term in the final fit to keep the fit from wandering astray. In doing so, we assume that the point charge fit approaches the global minimum in χ² and that the final fit is merely an adjustment to the best-fit point charge model.

To cross-check our results, we computed the magnetic susceptibility from $\mathcal{H}_{CEF}$ numerically. Susceptibility is defined as $\chi_{\alpha,\beta} = \frac{\partial M_{\alpha}}{\partial H_{\beta}}$, and $M_{\alpha} = \langle J_{\alpha} \rangle$, where $\langle J_{\alpha} \rangle = \sum e^{-\beta J_{\alpha}} \langle \alpha | J_{\alpha} | \alpha \rangle / Z$ and $| \alpha \rangle$ are the eigenstates of the effective Hamiltonian $\mathcal{H} = \mathcal{H}_{CEF} + \mu_B g_{\alpha} \mu_0 H \cdot J$, where $\mu_0 H$ is magnetic field. Computing $M_{\alpha}$ at various fields and taking a numerical derivative with respect to field yields the magnetic susceptibility. Figure 9 provides a comparison of the calculated powder-average susceptibility compared with experimental data. The calculated anistropic low-temperature magnetization is in Fig. 10.

### IV. RESULTS

#### A. Nd₃Sb₃Mg₂O₁₄

The best fit CEF parameters for Nd₃Sb₃Mg₂O₁₄ are listed in Table I, along with the CEF parameters from the initial Calculated PC and the PC Fit models. Constant Q cuts of the fits to neutron data are shown in Fig. 6, with the final fit plotted in black and the PC fit plotted in a grey dashed line.

Starting with effective charges of (−2e, −2e, −2e), the PC fitted charges for Nd₃Sb₃Mg₂O₁₄ are (−0.999e, −0.931e, −0.910e). The Powell method of minimization yields this result for any value of initial charges from −0.6e to −2e. Although these values are about 50% less than −2e, they are reasonable because the electrostatic repulsion is actually from electron orbitals and not point charges; so the effective charge can differ significantly from the net charge. As Fig. 6 shows, the effective charge fit resembles the data but does not reproduce the precise energies and intensities of the tran-
Table I. Calculated and fitted CEF parameters for \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \). The first column (Calculated PC) is the CEF parameters from a point-charge model where all effective charges are \( 2e \). The second column (PC Fit) gives the result of the effective charge fit. The final column (Final Fit) is the result of fitting the CEF parameters to the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( B_{20}^0 ) (meV)</th>
<th>Calculated PC</th>
<th>PC Fit</th>
<th>Final Fit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( B_2^0 )</td>
<td>0.08051</td>
<td>-0.1851</td>
<td>0.0121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( B_2^1 )</td>
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<td>-0.80854</td>
<td>-0.25649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( B_2^2 )</td>
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<td>-0.00787</td>
<td>-0.02649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( B_4^0 )</td>
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<td>-0.01914</td>
<td>-0.01861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( B_4^1 )</td>
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<td>0.00297</td>
<td>0.00844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( B_4^2 )</td>
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<td>-0.00441</td>
<td>0.00763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( B_4^3 )</td>
<td>-0.11134</td>
<td>-0.15368</td>
<td>-0.04106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( B_4^4 )</td>
<td>0.00772</td>
<td>0.00994</td>
<td>0.0198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( B_6^0 )</td>
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<td>-0.00027</td>
<td>-0.00056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( B_6^1 )</td>
<td>( 3 \times 10^{-5} )</td>
<td>( 3 \times 10^{-5} )</td>
<td>0.00011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( B_6^2 )</td>
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<td>( B_6^5 )</td>
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<td>-0.00081</td>
<td>-0.00073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( B_6^6 )</td>
<td>-0.00224</td>
<td>-0.00309</td>
<td>-0.00218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the fits to \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Zn}_2\text{O}_{14} \) data are similar to \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \). Constant Q cuts of the Final Fit to \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Zn}_2\text{O}_{14} \) CEF neutron data are shown in Fig. 7. The effective charge fit (PC Fit) yielded \((-1.01e, -0.968e, -0.915e)\). The PC Fit resembles the data, but the final fit matches the data much better and provides a faithful reproduction of all large peaks.

B. \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Zn}_2\text{O}_{14} \)

The ground state eigenkets from the final fit are listed in Table III. Like \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \), the ground state doublet is mostly composed of \(| \pm \frac{9}{2} \rangle \), with some \(| \pm \frac{3}{2} \rangle \) also present. The initial point-charge calculation (Calculated PC) predicted significant weight on \(| \pm \frac{1}{2} \rangle \) which is not present in the final fit. This indicates that the
Table II. Ground state eigenvectors and eigenvalues for Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$. The top two lines give the results of the Calculated PC model, and the last two lines give the results of the Final Fit. In both cases the ground state kets are primarily |± 9/2⟩.

| Model     | E (meV) | | −9/2 | | −7/2 | | −5/2 | | −3/2 | | −1/2 | | +1/2 | | +3/2 | | +5/2 | | +9/2 |
|-----------|---------|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| PC calc.  | 0.000   | 0.8181 | -0.0632 | -0.0772 | -0.1835 | 0.1644 | 0.1965 | 0.4597 | 0.0936 | 0.036 | -0.0664 |
| Final Fit | 0.000   | 0.8346 | 0.0211 | -0.0939 | -0.291 | 0.0711 | -0.0357 | 0.4097 | 0.0782 | -0.0248 | 0.1693 | 0.0211 | -0.0939 | -0.291 | 0.0711 | -0.0357 | 0.4097 | 0.0782 | -0.0248 | 0.1693 |

Figure 7. Constant Q cuts showing the results of the CEF fit to Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Zn$_2$O$_{14}$ neutron scattering data. Only T = 6 K data is shown; 100 K and 200 data are shown in the Supplemental Materials.

The ground state eigenvectors, computed from <j|j> = ±0.23 μB, <j> = 0 μB, <j_z> = ±2.40 μB. The total ordered moment of <j> = 2.41 μB is slightly less than for Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$.

C. Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$

Constant Q cuts of the final fit to Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$ CEF neutron data are shown in Fig. 8. Because Pr$^{3+}$ is a non-Kramers ion, non-magnetic singlets are possible and there are many more energy levels and transitions. An unfortunate consequence of this is that many of the transitions are too faint to distinguish, and the neutron spectrum fit is mostly based on the low energy transitions, and the possible presence of orphan spins within the lattice (see below).

An alternative to directly fitting a CEF model is rescaling the CEF parameters from a compound with a similar ligand environment. Although it is theoretically questionable for going from a Kramers ion (Nd) to a non-Kramers ion (Pr), rescaling CEF parameters has been shown to work sometimes for neighbors on the periodic table. We carried out such a calculation for Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$ by re-scaling the CEF parameters from the final fit $B_n^m$ from Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$ using the equation

$$B_n^m \text{Pr} = \left(\frac{B_n^m \text{Nd}}{\langle r^n \rangle \text{Pr}}\right) \left(\langle r^n \rangle \text{Nd} \right) \theta_n \theta_m,$$

which is derived from Eq. 2 for two different ions with the same ligand environment. While the ligand environments are not identical, this re-scaling sometimes works for two rare earth ions with similar electron counts. The results are plotted in Fig. 8. Unfortunately, the re-scaled CEF parameters do not come close to predicting the energy or intensity of the transitions in the neutron spectrum. Therefore, we conclude that it is not possible to re-scale the CEF parameters to accurately predict the CEF Hamiltonians of RE$_3$Sb$_3$A$_2$O$_{14}$. 
Table III. Ground state wavefunctions for Nd₃Sb₃Zn₂O₁₄. The top two lines give the results from the Calculated PC model, and the last two lines give the results of the final fit. In this case, the point-charge model involves \(| \pm 1/2 \rangle \) while the final fit shifts most of the weight to \(| \pm 9/2 \rangle \).

| Model               | \( E \) (meV) | \( | \pm \frac{3}{2} \rangle \) | \( | \pm \frac{7}{2} \rangle \) | \( | \pm \frac{5}{2} \rangle \) | \( | \pm \frac{3}{2} \rangle \) | \( | \pm \frac{1}{2} \rangle \) | \( | \frac{3}{2} \rangle \) | \( | \frac{5}{2} \rangle \) | \( | \frac{7}{2} \rangle \) |
|---------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| PC calc.            | 0.000         | 0.4198                           | -0.0573                          | -0.2189                          | 0.1273                           | -0.4703                          | -0.5831                          | 0.4703                           | 0.1273                           |
| Final Fit           | 0.000         | 0.2368                           | 0.0265                           | 0.0455                           | 0.4932                           | -0.0389                          | 0.0939                           | -0.0389                          | 0.0939                           |

Figure 8. Constant Q cuts showing the results of the final fit to Pr₃Sb₃Mg₂O₁₄ neutron scattering data, along with the results of rescaling the CEF parameters from Nd₃Sb₃Mg₂O₁₄. Only \( T = 6 \) K data are shown; 100 K and 200 data are shown in the Supplemental Materials. Clearly, the rescaled CEF parameters are unreliable. The black fit line is not as good as for the Nd compounds, especially for the higher energy transitions in panel (c).

D. Susceptibility

The calculated magnetic susceptibilities for all three compounds based on the final fit CEF Hamiltonians are plotted in Fig. 9, along with experimental data from refs. In every case, the \( \chi_{CEF} \) calculation (plotted with a gray dashed line) overestimates the measured susceptibility by about 10% (the predicted inverse susceptibility curve lies below the data). The reason for this discrepancy appears to be impurities or site-mixing in the compounds, mainly evidenced by the low-temperature Pr₃Sb₃Mg₂O₁₄ data.

In the Pr₃Sb₃Mg₂O₁₄ experimental susceptibility plotted in Fig. 9(c), \( \chi^{-1} \rightarrow 0 \) as \( T \rightarrow 0 \). This should not happen for a singlet ground state (non-Kramers ion in a low-symmetry ligand field), where \( \chi \) should saturate at a finite value. The deviation to zero indicates Kramers ions in the sample. To estimate the relative contribution, we fit the Pr₃Sb₃Mg₂O₁₄ susceptibility to a simple model:

\[
\chi = (1-x) \chi_{CEF} + x \chi_{CW},
\]

where \( 0 < x < 1 \) and \( \chi_{CW} \) is represented by a Curie-Weiss law: \( \frac{C}{T+\theta_{CW}} \). The fit works surprisingly well, and indicates a 13% orphan spin contribution with an effective moment of \( 1.8 \mu_B \) (see Supplemental Materials for more details). Such a contribution could arise from site mixing between Pr and Mg, like the \( \sim 10\% \) Dy/Mg site mixing observed in Dy₃Sb₃Mg₂O₁₄. This would decouple some of the spins from the kagome planes, and put them in completely different ligand environments. However, we were unable to identify any site...
Table IV. Eigenvectors and eigenvalues for the ground state and first excited crystal field state of Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$. The top two lines give the results of the calculated PC model, and the last two lines give the results of the final fit. As a non-Kramers ion, the ground state is not constrained to be a doublet. As required for singlets, $\langle j_z \rangle = \langle j_y \rangle = \langle j_x \rangle = 0$ for all states.

| Model   | E (meV) | |−4| |−3| |−2| |−1| |0 | |1 | |2 | |3 | |4 |
|---------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| PC calc.| 0.000   | 0.021           | 0.135           | 0.014           | 0.067           | -0.976          | -0.067          | 0.014           | -0.135          | 0.021           | 0.000           | 0.481           | -0.051          | -0.006          | -0.513          | -0.064          | 0.513           | -0.006          | 0.0515          | 0.481           |
| Final Fit | 0.000   | 0.285           | -0.100          | 0.233           | 0.386           | -0.639          | -0.386          | 0.233           | 0.100           | 0.285           | 0.000           | 7.963           | -0.168          | -0.065          | 0.090            | -0.492          | -0.658          | 0.492           | 0.0903          | 0.0653          | -0.1683         |

mixing in structural refinements, so we cannot positively identify site-mixing as the cause. Alternatively, these orphan ions may be from second phases or other RE ions mixed in with Pr. The experiments in this study are not sufficient to determine the orphan spins’ origin.

We also attempted to account for the susceptibility discrepancy using an interaction model $\chi = \frac{\lambda_{CEF}^2}{1-\lambda_{CEF}^2}$ where $\lambda$ is the magnetic interaction between ions. No matter what $\lambda$ is chosen, model fails to account for the low temperature divergence, and it fails to correct the slope of high temperature susceptibility. Thus, the observed effects indicate an additional Curie-Weiss contribution to the susceptibility and not merely interactions.

Incorporating this Curie-Weiss contribution model makes the calculations match the low-temperature Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$ susceptibility data well, and happens to resolve the high-temperature discrepancy between theory and experiment. Assuming that the Nd$^{3+}$ compounds have the same $\chi_{CW}$, we also get good agreement between theory and experiment for Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$ and Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Zn$_2$O$_{14}$ (Fig. 9).

We tested and ultimately rejected three alternative explanations for the high-temperature discrepancy between calculated and measured susceptibility: (i) an incorrect CEF Hamiltonian, (ii) sample diamagnetism and (iii) higher multiplet mixing. We tested (i) by attempting to re-fit the CEF Hamiltonian to the neutron data including a $\chi^2$ term from calculated susceptibility (without $\chi_{CW}$). This attempt failed. No matter what starting parameters are chosen (and the relative $\chi^2$ weight given to susceptibility versus neutron spectrum), we were unable to fit them simultaneously. We tested (ii) by measuring the susceptibility of the non-magnetic analogue La$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$, which comes out to $-10^{-4}$ ($\mu_B$/T/ion)—an order of magnitude too small. We tested (iii) by calculating susceptibility using the intermediate-coupling scheme and found that the result is nearly identical to the fits based on the Hund’s rule spin-orbital ground state. (Details behind (ii) and (iii) are given in the Supplemental Materials, which includes Ref.28,29.) Therefore, we are confident that the discrepancy between calculated and measured susceptibility in Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$ is due to orphan Kramers ions in the sample.

The presence of orphan spins may explain some of the slight discrepancies in the neutron spectrum. However, 10% population of orphan spins is too little to significantly affect the CEF excitation spectrum, and the statistics in the high-energy Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$ are simply too low to identify and fit peaks of an impurity signal. Nevertheless, the presence of such spins may be enough to have effects on some forms of collective phenomena in these frustrated magnets.

V. DISCUSSION

The point-charge fit followed by the final CEF parameter fit seems to have worked as a method to determine the crystal field level scheme in the low point group symmetry RE$_3$Sb$_3$A$_2$O$_{14}$ compounds. The final fit matches the data well, and along the way the fitted effective charges are within an electron charge from the formal ligand charge. Furthermore, the calculated temperature dependent susceptibility reproduces measurements well after accounting for orphan spins at the <10% level. We are confident that we have identified the single-ion CEF Hamiltonians for Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$, Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Zn$_2$O$_{14}$, and Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$ and determined the associated crystal field eigenvalues and eigenstates.

The analysis of Nd$_3$Sb$_3$Zn$_2$O$_{14}$ shows that the point-charge model by itself does not reliably predict the ground state eigenkets of RE$_3$Sb$_3$A$_2$O$_{14}$ compounds. Here we note that we are basing the models on a high T x-ray structural refinement. Low T neutron diffraction measurements would provide more accurate ligand positions, which could improve the point charge fitting. We find that scaling Nd$^{3+}$ results to Pr$^{3+}$ does not reproduce the observed spectrum in Pr$_3$Sb$_3$Mg$_2$O$_{14}$. Therefore, it is unfortunately not possible to accurately predict the CEF ground states of other RE$_3$Sb$_3$A$_2$O$_{14}$ compounds from these results.

For Pr$^{3+}$ the lowest level states of the single-ion non-Kramers states are singlets. This is true for the naive calculated PC Hamiltonian, the PC fit Hamiltonian, and the final fit Hamiltonian. The gap between the lowest and first excited state exceeds the exchange energy scale so that we expect this system to be a singlet ground state system with no phase transitions.

One of the key features of interest for these compounds is the magnetic anisotropy. One can gain a rough understanding of the single ion anisotropy by examining
the ground state wave function. The final fit results for \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) and \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Zn}_2\text{O}_{14} \) have mostly an effective \( J = |± \frac{3}{2} \rangle \) ground state doublet, which can be interpreted as easy-axis moments. The substitution of Zn for Mg does not have a dramatic effect on the ground state, at least for the \( \text{Nd}^{3+} \) ion. For a clearer picture of the anisotropy, the computed single-ion directional magnetization at 2 K is shown in Fig. 10. For \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) and \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Zn}_2\text{O}_{14} \), the saturation magnetic field is around 5 T, with the largest magnetization for \( B \parallel z \), indicating an easy-axis. In both compounds, negligibly small off-diagonal \( xz \) and \( xz \) elements are present. For \( \text{Pr}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \), the predicted saturation magnetic field is around 80 T with the easiest axis in the \( y \) direction.

These results show that the authors’ previously hypothesized effective \( J = |± \frac{3}{2} \rangle \) \( \text{Nd}^{3+} \) ground state for \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) is incorrect, and Dun et. al.’s suggestion of an easy axis\(^\text{10}\) is closer to the true ground state. Ref.\(^\text{11}\) failed to account for impurities in magnetization, which led to the inference of an incorrect model. The ordered moment in \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) determined from neutron scattering is \( 1.79(5) \mu_B \).

Assuming a 13% site-mixing, this is only 71% of the theoretically predicted moment of \( (0.87 \times 2.89 \mu_B) = 2.51 \mu_B \). This reduction in moment, in conjunction with the magnetic entropy not reaching \( R \ln(2) \)\(^\text{11}\), suggests that the magnetism in \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) remains dynamic to the lowest temperatures. This suggests a closer examination of the collective properties of this material in a high quality single crystal sample would be interesting.

**VI. CONCLUSION**

We have outlined a method whereby complex inelastic neutron scattering spectra for crystal field excitations of rare earth ions can be fitted using a point-charge model with effective ligand charges as an intermediate step. We applied this method to \( \text{Nd}^{3+} \) in \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \) and \( \text{Nd}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Zn}_2\text{O}_{14} \), showing that the single-ion anisotropy is easy-axis. We also applied the method to \( \text{Pr}^{3+} \), showing that the ground state is a singlet with an energy gap of 8.0 meV.

This information is an essential component towards understanding the low-temperature magnetism of this new family of frustrated magnets, and will guide further investigations of their collective properties.

*Note:* While this manuscript was in the final stages of preparation, there appeared Ref.\(^\text{30}\) which independently implemented an effective point charge fit to the CEF Hamiltonian of \( \text{Ho}_3\text{Sb}_3\text{Mg}_2\text{O}_{14} \).

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10