Jahn-Teller distortion around Fe$^{4+}$ in Sr(Fe$_x$Ti$_{1-x}$)O$_{3-\delta}$ from x-ray absorption spectroscopy, x-ray diffraction, and vibrational spectroscopy


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(Received 12 December 2006; revised manuscript received 3 September 2007; published 12 November 2007)

Sr(Fe$_x$Ti$_{1-x}$)O$_{3-\delta}$ perovskites (strontium titanate ferrite solid solution) with well-defined oxygen stoichiometry have been studied as a function of iron concentration by x-ray diffraction, Fe and Ti K-edge x-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS), and vibrational (Raman and infrared) spectroscopy. In reduced Sr(Fe$_x$Ti$_{1-x}$)O$_{3-\delta}$ samples, the analysis of the Fe K-edge extended x-ray absorption fine structure indicates the expected presence of oxygen vacancies $V_O$ in the first coordination shell of Fe$^{3+}$ ions. In oxidized Sr(Fe$_x$Ti$_{1-x}$)O$_3$ samples, the combination of XAS and vibrational spectroscopy results yields strong indications for the presence of a Jahn-Teller distortion around Fe$^{4+}$ ions, which is most pronounced for $x=0.03$ and decreases for higher iron concentrations.

DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevB.76.174107 PACS number(s): 61.10.Ht, 78.70.Dm, 61.10.Nz, 78.30.–j

I. INTRODUCTION

The perovskite solid solution series Sr(Fe$_x$Ti$_{1-x}$)O$_{3-\delta}$, $0 \leq x \leq 1$, is an interesting system spanning the range from slightly iron-doped SrTiO$_3$, a model representative of acceptor-doped large band gap electroceramics to iron-rich SrFe$_x$Ti$_{1-x}$O$_{3-\delta}$ materials which are good electronic and ionic conductors. Such mixed conductors can serve as key functional materials in fuel cells, electrochemical sensors, ionic conductors. Such mixed conductors can serve as key functional materials in fuel cells, electrochemical sensors, permeation membranes, and catalysts. In Sr(Fe$_x$Ti$_{1-x}$)O$_{3-\delta}$, the iron substitutes for Ti$^{4+}$ partly in the oxidation state of Fe$^{3+}$ and partly as Fe$^{4+}$, the actual Fe$^{3+}$/Fe$^{4+}$ fraction depending on total iron concentration, oxygen partial pressure $p(O_2)$, and temperature. The charge compensation for Fe$^{3+}$ occurs predominantly by the formation of mobile oxygen vacancies $V_O$ (Kröger-Vink notation$^1$). For low iron contents, the defect concentrations can be calculated from a defect model expressed in terms of ideal mass action laws.$^2$ Already for iron concentrations in the percent range, interaction of the charged defects leads to strong deviations from the dilute defect model. The formation of an iron impurity band occurs for iron concentrations of 3%-10% and represents a drastic change of the electronic structure.$^{3,4}$ Magnetism$^5$ as well as related transport properties of these materials, has been the subject of intensive investigation.$^6,7$ For $x \approx 0.3$, the electrical resistance shows negligible temperature dependence in the $p(O_2)$ range of 10$^{-4}$–1 bar, which is interesting for resistive oxygen sensor applications.$^8$

In this work, we present the dependence of the electronic and atomic structures of Sr(Fe$_x$Ti$_{1-x}$)O$_{3-\delta}$ perovskites on the composition, probed by x-ray diffraction (XRD), x-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS), and vibrational (Raman and infrared) spectroscopy. The advance of XAS experimental techniques provides a chance to access the local environment around Fe centers throughout the whole Sr(Fe$_x$Ti$_{1-x}$)O$_{3-\delta}$ series. In this series, the electronic properties change drastically from isolated iron impurities hosted in a large band gap semiconductor to the metallic but strongly correlated SrFeO$_3$.$^9$ For dilute Fe$^{4+}$ centers, a Jahn-Teller (JT) distortion is predicted by quantum chemical calculations,$^3$ while the iron in SrFeO$_3$ is known to have an undistorted octahedral coordination.$^9$ The transition between these limiting cases is addressed in this study.

II. EXPERIMENT

Sr(Fe$_x$Ti$_{1-x}$)O$_{3-\delta}$ powder samples were prepared from SrCO$_3$, TiO$_2$, and Fe$_2$O$_3$ powders by heating first to 1200 °C and then three times to 1300 °C in air with intermitting grinding in a zirconia ball mill. Fully reduced samples ($\delta=x/2$) were prepared by heating for 2 h with 8% H$_2$ in N$_2$ at 700 °C followed by rapid quenching. Thermogravimetry (TG) showed that these conditions are sufficient to reduce all Fe ions to Fe$^{3+}$. Fully oxidized samples, i.e., stoichiometric samples with $\delta=0$, were prepared by a high oxygen pressure treatment at 600 bars and temperature decrease from 550 to 180 °C with the cooling rate decreasing from 40 to 1 K/h. The oxygen stoichiometry of the oxidized Sr(Fe$_x$Ti$_{1-x}$)O$_3$ samples with $x \approx 0.03$ was checked by TG: heating in 8% H$_2$/N$_2$ to 700 °C leads to complete reduction of all iron to Fe$^{3+}$ (for buoyancy corrections, the empty sample holder was measured under the same conditions). All samples were found to be more than 95% oxidized; only $x=0.5$ exhibits a slightly lower value of 93%. For samples with $x \approx 0.3$, iodometric titrations yielded degrees of oxidation $\approx 95\%$. The results are summarized in Table I.

XRD patterns were measured at room temperature using the Cu $K\alpha$ radiation in Bragg-Brentano geometry with internal Si standard in the range $2\theta=10^{\circ}$–120$^{\circ}$ (Fig. 1). All oxidized samples and the reduced samples with $x<0.9$ were found to be single phase cubic ABO$_3$ perovskites (space group $Pm\overline{3}m$), while the reduced ones with $x=0.9$ and $x=1$ were predominantly or purely of brownmillerite structure$^{10}$ (space group $Ibm2$). Lattice parameters were refined by least squares minimization using the program LCLSQu$^{11}$ after indexing with the program DICVOL91.$^{12}$

Fe and Ti K-edge XAS spectra were measured at the ESRF synchrotron (Grenoble, France) at the BM29 beam...
TABLE I. Degree of oxidation of oxidized Sr(Fe\textsubscript{x}Ti\textsubscript{1-x})O\textsubscript{3} samples determined by TG and iodometric titration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fe content (x)</th>
<th>Thermogravimetry (%)</th>
<th>Titration (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>100±10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>100±5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>96±5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>95±2</td>
<td>95±3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>93±2</td>
<td>96±3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>98±2</td>
<td>102±3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>96±2</td>
<td>102±3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>98±2</td>
<td>101±3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

recorded on slightly compacted powder samples with a Dilor-XY triple monochromator spectrometer using a CCD camera in backscattering geometry at an excitation wavelength of 514.5 nm and a power of 10 mW. Infrared spectra (IR) were measured at room temperature in diffuse reflection mode on KBr diluted powder samples (3 mg in 400 mg KBr) with a Bruker IFS 66 spectrometer. The measured reflectivity \(R\) was transformed into the Kubelka-Munk function \(KM = (1-R^2)/(2R)\) which is proportional to the absorption coefficient.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

X-ray absorption spectra at the Fe and Ti \(K\) edges were analyzed using the EDA software package.\textsuperscript{14}

The x-ray absorption near edge structure (XANES) region at the Fe(Ti) \(K\) edge was separated from the total x-ray absorption coefficient by subtracting the preedge background and normalizing the absorption coefficient around 100 eV above the edge (Figs. 2 and 3). The XANES signals at both edges consist of the well visible preedge peak(s), the main absorption edge, and the fine structure above it.

The Fe(Ti) \(K\)-edge extended x-ray absorption fine structure (EXAFS) signals \(\chi(k)\) were extracted according to conventional definition as

\[
\chi(k) = \left[ \mu_\text{exp}(E) - \mu_0(E) - \mu_\text{b}(E) \right] / \mu_0(E),
\]

where \(\mu_\text{exp}(E)\) is the experimental absorption coefficient, \(\mu_\text{b}(E)\) is the preedge background extrapolated beyond the absorption edge, \(\mu_0(E)\) is the atomiclike contribution, and \(k = [(2m_e/e)^2(E-E_0)]^{1/2}\) is the wave vector, with \(E_0\) being the photoelectron energy origin.

The choice of correct \(E_0\) value is important, since it affects the amplitude and the phase of the EXAFS signal, especially at low \(k\) values, and therefore restricts the accuracy of interatomic distance determination. The best results were achieved when the \(E_0\) position in the experimental signal under study was set in the same way as for the reference signal, which can be either another experimental signal, measured for the reference compound with known crystallographic structure, or a theoretically calculated signal by one of the available \textit{ab initio} codes.\textsuperscript{15–17} In this work, the FEFF8 code\textsuperscript{15} was used for generating the reference signal, and the

FIG. 1. (Color online) (a) Room temperature x-ray powder diffraction patterns for Sr(Fe\textsubscript{x}Ti\textsubscript{1-x})O\textsubscript{3-\(y\)} samples. Stars denote the reflection from the internal Si standard; the peak splitting at high angles is due to Cu \(K\alpha_1,K\alpha_2\). (b) Lattice constants obtained by XRD. Lines are drawn as a guide for the eye; the symbol size represents the error bar.
JAHN-TELLER DISTORTION AROUND Fe$^{4+}$ IN SrFe...  

FIG. 2. (Color online) Upper panel: Ti K-edge XANES signals in oxidized Sr(Fe$_{x}$Ti$_{1-x}$)$_{3}$O$_{3}$ samples at room temperature. Only a few spectra are shown and are vertically shifted for clarity. Lower panel: enlarged preedge Ti K-edge XANES region.

$E_0$ position was set at 7117.0 eV for Fe$^{4+}$, 7116.5 eV for Fe$^{3+}$, and 4971.0 eV for Ti$^{4+}$ (Fig. 4). The FEFF8 code was also used for the interpretation of peak origin in Fourier transforms similar to our previous works.$^{18,19}$

FIG. 3. (Color online) Upper panel: Fe K-edge XANES signals in oxidized (dashed curves) and reduced (solid curves) Sr(Fe$_{x}$Ti$_{1-x}$)$_{3}$O$_{3-x/2}$ samples at room temperature. Only a few spectra are shown and are vertically shifted for clarity. Lower panel: enlarged preedge Fe K-edge XANES region. The curve for $\alpha$-Fe$_{3}$O$_{3}$ is shifted downward by $-0.02$ for clarity.

FIG. 4. (Color online) Comparison of the Ti and Fe K-edge XANES signals of oxidized Sr(Fe$_{x}$Ti$_{1-x}$)$_{3}$O$_{3}$ ($x=0.75$) sample. The energy scale of the two spectra was aligned relative to the absorption threshold.

The experimental Fe(Ti) K-edge EXAFS signals $\chi(k)k^2$ and their Fourier transforms (FTs) for fully oxidized and reduced Sr(Fe$_{x}$Ti$_{1-x}$)$_{3}$O$_{3-x/2}$ samples are shown in Figs. 5–7. The FTs were calculated in the $k$-space range from 0.5 to 15 Å$^{-1}$ (or less when limited by the signal quality) using the Kaiser-Bessel window function with parameter $A=2$ as implemented in Ref. 14. Note that due to the presence of the scattering phase shifts, the positions of peaks in FTs generally differ from the true values. The first coordination shell around iron and titanium atoms was isolated by back-Fourier transformation (typically in the range from 0.8 to 2.1 Å) and analyzed by a best-fit procedure using the model described below. The fit procedure was done in $k$ space using typically the range from 2 to 12 Å$^{-1}$; however, for a few reduced samples, the range was shortened to $k$=2$-8$ Å$^{-1}$ due to poor signal quality at high $k$ values.

The first coordination shell EXAFS $\chi(k)$ signal can be accurately described in the single-scattering curved-wave cumulant approximation as$^{20}$

$$\chi(k) = \sum_i S_i^2 \frac{N_i}{kR_i^2} F_i(k,R_i) \exp \left[ -2\sigma_i^2 k^2 + \frac{2}{3} C_{4i} k^4 - \frac{4}{45} C_{6i} k^6 \right] \times \sin \left[ 2kR_i - \frac{4}{15} C_{3i} k^3 + \frac{4}{15} C_{5i} k^5 + \Phi_i(k,R_i) \right],$$

where $i$ denotes the group of atoms inside the shell, $N_i$ the coordination number, $R_i$ the average distance, the mean square relative displacement (MSRD), corresponding to the thermal Debye-Waller factor in the absence of static distortions, and $C_{3i}, C_{4i}, C_{5i}, C_{6i}$ the higher order cumulants of the distance distribution. In this work, we used two single-component models: (1) Gaussian approximation with only three ($N, R, \sigma^2$) fitting parameters and (2) cumulant approximation with four ($N, R, \sigma^2, C_{3i}$) fitting parameters which improves the fit in some cases without affecting significantly the results and conclusions. The amplitude $F_i(k,R_i)$ and phase shift $\Phi_i(k,R_i)$ functions for the Fe-O and Ti-O atom pairs were calculated with the FEFF8 code$^{15,21}$ using the complex exchange-correlation Hedin-Lundqvist potential. The calculations were performed for a cluster with radius of 8 Å having the structure of cubic SrFeO$_3$(SrTiO$_3$) and centered at the Fe(Ti) atom, respectively. Calculations of the cluster po-
tentials were done in the muffin-tin (MT) self-consistent-field approximation using default values of MT radii as provided within the FEFF8 code.15

The value of the amplitude reduction factor \( S_0^2 \) due to many-body effects was estimated to be 0.67 for both Fe and Ti \( K \) edges based on known coordination numbers of end members SrTiO\(_3\) and SrFeO\(_3\). Note that this value of \( S_0^2 \) is close to the one (0.69) found for SrFe\(_{x}\)Sn\(_{1-x}\)O\(_3\) in Ref. 22. The distances determined in the fitting procedure, Fig. 9, were brought in accord with the distances known from XRD data for SrTiO\(_3\) and SrFeO\(_3\) (Ti and Fe \( K \) edges, respectively) by a constant shift of 0.02 Å.

The error bars were estimated based on the largest data scatter appearing in due course of analysis.

IV. RESULTS

A. X-ray absorption near edge structure

The XANES signals at the Fe and Ti \( K \) edges in Sr(Fe\(_x\)Ti\(_{1-x}\))O\(_3\) samples reveal qualitative similarity but differ in details although iron and titanium occupy the same crystallographic site and have scattering amplitudes close enough. A group of four preedge peaks is observed at the Ti \( K \) edge (Fig. 2), whereas a single broad peak is visible at the Fe \( K \) edge (Fig. 3; the edge region of Fe\(_2\)O\(_3\) is shown for comparison). Two effects can be emphasized: (i) The intensity of the preedge peaks varies with composition, see Sec. V. (ii) For the Fe \( K \) edge, the preedge peak intensity is slightly higher in reduced samples for the same composition, and there is an energy difference of about 0.5 eV between the edges of the first preedge peaks in oxidized and reduced samples. The reason for this small shift is the large covalency of the Fe\(^{4+}\)-O\(^{2−}\) bonds (corresponding to a heavy admixture of the \( d^7L \) states; \( L \) means a hole in oxygen 2\( p \) orbitals)\(^{23,24}\) which reduces the charge on Fe\(^{4+}\). Note also that the edge energy position (7113 eV) of the first preedge peak for reduced samples is in good agreement with that for Fe\(_2\)O\(_3\), having all iron ions in 3+ valence state.

FIG. 5. (Color) Iron concentration dependence of experimental Fe \( K \)-edge EXAFS signals \( \chi(k)k^2 \) and their Fourier transforms in fully oxidized Sr(Fe\(_x\)Ti\(_{1-x}\))O\(_3\) samples at room temperature. Only a few spectra are shown for clarity.

FIG. 6. (Color) Concentration dependence of experimental Fe \( K \)-edge EXAFS signals \( \chi(k)k^2 \) and their Fourier transforms in fully reduced Sr(Fe\(_x\)Ti\(_{1-x}\))O\(_3\) samples at room temperature. Only a few spectra are shown for clarity. Note that the sample with \( x=1 \) has brownmillerite structure.

FIG. 7. (Color) Concentration dependence of experimental Ti \( K \)-edge EXAFS signals \( \chi(k)k^2 \) and their Fourier transforms in fully oxidized Sr(Fe\(_x\)Ti\(_{1-x}\))O\(_3\) samples at room temperature. Only a few spectra are shown for clarity.
The XANES signal is due to transitions (allowed by selection rules) to unoccupied electronic states, which are relaxed in the presence of the core hole. In the case of the Fe and Ti K edges, the main x-ray absorption occurs due to the dipole-allowed excitation of the 1s electron to states with p character. The preedge transitions, which probe the unoccupied states in the conduction band region, are more difficult to explain. Different authors attribute these peaks to transitions of different characters: a pure dipole-allowed 1s→np model was suggested in Refs. 26 and 28, a pure quadrupole origin was accepted in Ref. 22, whereas a mixed dipole-quadrupole origin was favored in Refs. 25, 27, and 29–31. Note that the value of the transition matrix elements being mainly due to 1s→np model of the preedge transition is only about 1% of that for the dipole transition, however, this difference can be compensated by the larger number of available 3d states. The situation is even more complicated because the dipole character of the preedge peaks has also been proposed to be of different origin. To conclude, there are several interpretations based on different theoretical approaches and approximations, which makes the unique explanation of the preedge peaks rather complicated.

The Ti K-edge XANES in pure SrTiO3 has been studied in Refs. 25–27. While all groups were able to interpret experimental data reasonably well, they provide different explanations of the preedge peak origin. Further, we will follow the interpretation provided in Refs. 30 and 31 for the Ti K edge in TiO2, which exhibits a preedge peak structure very similar to Sr(Fe,Ti)x−1O2−x−y due to octahedral coordination of titanium atoms in both compounds. The first preedge peak P1 in Fig. 2 was assigned to pure quadrupole origin due to 1s(Fe)→3d(t2g)(Ti) transition, in agreement also with Refs. 25 and 27. The second peak P2 is dipolar in nature, being mainly due to 1s(Fe)→4p(Ti) transition but includes some degree of 1s(Fe)→3d(e_g)(Ti) quadrupole contribution. Both quadrupole contributions predicted in Ref. 30 have been experimentally confirmed. It was suggested that the intensity of the Ti K-edge peak P2 is proportional to a displacement of Ti atoms from the center of the TiO6 octahedra but inversely related to the Ti-O bond length. Finally, the next two preedge peaks P3 and P4 are due to pure 1s(Ti)→4p(Ti) dipole transitions.

To understand the Fe K preedge, we first compare the Fe and Ti K-edge XANES signals (Fig. 4) in oxidized Sr(Fe0.75Ti0.25)O3. After aligning both XANES spectra relative to the absorption threshold, we note a good correspondence between the main absorption maxima located at 18 eV. The main features at higher energies, determined by the frequency of the EXAFS oscillations, are in close correspondence, indicating the expected similarity of the local structure around Ti and Fe. However, in contrast to the Ti K edge, the preedge structures at the Fe K edge are less resolved. Taking into account the similarity of two XANES signals, one can suppose a similar origin of the preedge peaks. We attribute the peak at 7115 eV in Fig. 3 (peak P1 in Fig. 4) to 1s(Fe)→3d(Fe) quadrupole transition and the shoulder at 7122 eV (P4 in Fig. 4) to pure 1s(Fe)→4d(Fe) dipole transition. The intermediate features at about 7116–7120 eV can be correlated with transitions having both 1s(Fe)→3d(Fe) quadrupole and 1s(Fe)→4d(Fe) dipole character. On the basis of these assignments, a correlation between the variations of the prepeaks and the local environment around Fe/Ti ions will be discussed in Sec. V.

B. Extended x-ray absorption fine structure and x-ray diffraction

Experimental Fe and Ti K-edge EXAFS signals χ(k)k^2 and their FTs of oxidized and reduced Sr(Fe,Ti)x−1O3−δ samples are shown in Figs. 5–7. Note that all obtained EXAFS χ(k)k^2 signals have a very good signal to noise ratio up to 12 Å⁻¹. The FTs of the EXAFS signals are typical for the perovskite-type structure and exhibit a number of well-resolved peaks up to 8 Å. In this work, we concentrate mainly on the analysis of the first peak at about 1.5 Å, which is isolated well and corresponds to the first coordination shell of Fe(Ti) atoms. In “stoichiometric,” i.e., fully oxidized Sr(Fe4+Ti3−x)xO3, the first shell is composed of six oxygen atoms, whereas some decrease of the coordination number can be expected in reduced samples due to the presence of oxygen vacancies.

The analysis of peaks beyond the first shell is a more demanding task due to the overlap of contributions from outer coordination shells and additional complications caused by strong multiple-scattering effects, mainly in linear atomic chains such as B−O−B and O−B−O (B=Fe or Ti). However, qualitative comparison of FTs allows us to draw some conclusions. In cubic perovskite-type compounds, the amplitude of the peak corresponding to the second coordination shell (the peak at 3.5 Å in Figs. 5 and 7) depends strongly on the bond angle B−O−B between two BO6 octahedra. In oxidized cubic Sr(Fe4+Ti3−x)xO3, this peak is strong at both Fe and Ti K edges, being comparable in amplitude with the first shell peak at 1.5 Å and varies slightly with composition due to the lattice parameter variation. At the same time, the peak at 3.5 Å in reduced Sr(Fe4+Ti3−x)xO3−δ/2 has a nearly two times larger amplitude than the first shell (Fig. 6) for low iron content; moreover, it becomes even smaller for χ=1.0 when Sr(Fe4+Ti3−x)xO3−δ/2 transforms to the brownmillerite phase. Such a behavior usually indicates a deviation of the B−O−B angles from linear configuration due to rototations of BO6 octahedra or off-center displacement of metal ions. Similar effects have been observed in many perovskite-type compounds, e.g., in tungsten oxides upon a change of stoichiometry or in ReO3 (Ref. 37) upon pressure variation. Another possible explanation can be a strong increase of the static or thermal disorder, and as has been observed in ReO3 (Ref. 19) upon heating. Note that the peaks due to outer shells in reduced Sr(Fe4+Ti3−x)xO3−δ/2, located at distances above 4 Å in Fig. 6, have also much smaller amplitudes than analogous peaks in oxidized Sr(Fe4+Ti3−x)xO3 (Figs. 5 and 7). This suggests the presence of long nonlinear B−O−B−O−B chains in reduced samples, and thus a possible deviation of their local structure from cubic symmetry due to the presence of oxygen vacancies.

The results of the fitting of the first B−O coordination shell are shown in Figs. 8–10. In the stoichiometric perov-
FIG. 8. (Color online) Concentration dependence of the coordination numbers around Fe\textsuperscript{4+} and Ti\textsuperscript{4+} in Sr(Fe\textsuperscript{3+}Ti\textsubscript{1−x}O\textsubscript{3} oxidized samples, and Fe\textsuperscript{3+} in Sr(Fe\textsuperscript{3+}Ti\textsubscript{1−x}O\textsubscript{3−x/2} reduced samples in the first coordination shell, all at room temperature. Dashed lines correspond to the octahedral coordination of the Fe\textsuperscript{4+} (Ti\textsuperscript{4+}) ions in the stoichiometric perovskite. Solid line indicates the expected coordination for Fe\textsuperscript{3+} ions in the presence of oxygen vacancies.

FIG. 9. (Color online) Concentration dependence of the Fe\textsuperscript{4+}−O\textsuperscript{2−} and Ti\textsuperscript{4+}−O\textsuperscript{2−} (oxidized samples) and Fe\textsuperscript{3+}−O\textsuperscript{2−} (reduced samples) distances in the first coordination shell, all at room temperature. The half-values of the lattice constants obtained by XRD are shown for comparison: dashed curve for oxidized and solid curve for reduced samples.

FIG. 10. (Color online) Concentration dependence of the MSRD for Fe\textsuperscript{4+}−O\textsuperscript{2−} and Ti\textsuperscript{4+}−O\textsuperscript{2−} (oxidized samples) and Fe\textsuperscript{3+}−O\textsuperscript{2−} bonds (reduced samples) in the first coordination shell, all at room temperature. Dotted lines are guides for the eye.
creasing $x$. This deviation from Vegard’s law can be rationalized as follows: The Ti$^{4+}$ in SrTiO$_3$ is slightly too small for its octahedral site (the Goldschmidt tolerance factor $t=(r_A+r_B)/[\sqrt{2}(r_A+r_B)]=1.002$ is larger than unity; the facile displacement of Ti$^{4+}$ inside the O$_6$ octahedron gives rise to the high relative dielectric constant $\varepsilon_r=300$ at room temperature). Therefore, the lattice parameter is determined essentially by close packing of the Sr$^{2+}$ and O$^{2−}$ ions. Substituting Ti$^{4+}$ by the smaller Fe$^{4+}$ can decrease the lattice parameter only indirectly, i.e., by withdrawing electron density from the O$^{2−}$ which reduces their size. Obviously, this occurs only for $x \approx 0.15$.

The lattice constants for Sr(Fe$_{Ti_{1-x}}$)$_{o}$O$_{3-x}$ samples reported in Ref. 6 seem to be questionable since for $x \rightarrow 0$, they do not approach the SrTiO$_3$ value of 3.905 Å but rather 3.915 Å. The Sr(Fe$_{Ti_{1-x}}$)$_{o}$O$_{3-x}$ samples studied in Ref. 5 were prepared by a different $p(O_2)$-temperature scheme than the samples in this work, and thus cannot be compared directly. The lattice parameters in Ref. 5 also show deviations from Vegard’s law which could be, at least partly, due to incomplete oxidation (the Mössbauer spectra indicate oxygen deficiency for samples with intermediate $x$), but nevertheless exhibit the correct values for $x \rightarrow 0$ and $x \rightarrow 1$.

The local distances determined by EXAFS analysis exhibit a more detailed picture with different Ti-O and Fe-O distances for the same sample. For the oxidized samples, the Ti-O distance remains essentially constant, at about 1.95 Å (the same as in SrTiO$_3$), while the Fe-O distances stay close to that in SrFeO$_3$ (1.92 Å) for large $x$ and increase only for $x \approx 0.3$. The composition variation of the Fe(Ti)-O distances, determined by EXAFS, deviates from the half-values of the lattice constants obtained by XRD (Fig. 9). Although the “fully oxidized” samples still contain a minor oxygen deficiency (see Table I), the small fraction of Fe$^{4+}$ is not sufficient to explain the increasing Fe-O distances just by averaging constant contributions from Fe$^{3+}$-O and Fe$^{3+}$-O (e.g., for $x=0.1$, about half of the Fe would have to be Fe$^{3+}$ to yield the observed Fe-O distance). For the reduced samples, we found nearly constant Fe-O distances of about 1.95 Å, which is slightly shorter at high iron content than the half-values of the lattice constants obtained by XRD (Fig. 9) (no Ti EXAFS data are available for these samples). Individual local EXAFS distances different from the averaged XRD value were also observed in other solid solution series, e.g., in Ca(Zr$_{Ti_{1-x}}$)$_{o}$O$_3$ (0 $\leq x \leq 1$, samples calcined at 1200 °C) or (Fe$_{Mn_{1-x}}$)$_{o}$Nb$_2$O$_6$ (0 $\leq x \leq 1$).

Figure 10 shows the MSRDs at room temperatures for Fe$^{3+}$-O$^{2−}$, Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2−}$, and Ti$^{4+}$-O$^{2−}$ bonds (note that the EXAFS MSRD models the disorder in the B−O bond length, while the Debye-Waller factor used in XRD describes the disorder of an atom around its equilibrium lattice position). The MSRD of Fe$^{3+}$-O$^{2−}$ (reduced samples) is to a good approximation independent of the iron concentration. The same behavior is observed for the MSRD of Ti$^{4+}$-O$^{2−}$ (oxidized samples). Most interestingly, the MSRD of Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2−}$ exhibits a strong decrease with an increase of iron concentration, such that it is larger than the Fe$^{3+}$-O$^{2−}$ MSRD for small $x$, lower than that for large $x$, and finally, in SrFeO$_3$, achieving about the same value as the Ti$^{4+}$-O$^{2−}$ MSRD in all samples. An

![Color online] FIG. 11. (Color online) Temperature dependence of the MSRD for Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2−}$ bonds (oxidized samples, solid symbols) and Fe$^{3+}$-O$^{2−}$ bonds (reduced samples, open symbols) in the first coordination shell. Lines are guides for the eye.

$x=0.75$ sample prepared with deliberately incomplete oxidation (SrFe$_{0.75}$Ti$_{0.25}$O$_{2.906}$ instead of SrFe$_{0.75}$Ti$_{0.25}$O$_3$) has a MSRD slightly below that of the reduced sample. This demonstrates that the mixed valence of the Fe does not increase the Fe-O MSRD above the value of the reduced samples. In the above mentioned EXAFS studies of Ca(Zr$_{Ti_{1-x}}$)$_{o}$O$_3$ (Ref. 42) and (Fe$_{Mn_{1-x}}$)$_{o}$Nb$_2$O$_6$, the Ti-O and Zr-O MSRDs (Ref. 42) and the Fe-O and Mn-O MSRDs (Ref. 43) remain essentially constant throughout the whole solid solution series.

The temperature dependence of the Fe-O MSRD of some samples is shown in Fig. 11. As expected, the MSRD decreases as the temperature decreases and remains approximately constant below 100 K. Even for SrFeO$_3$ where no disorder due to Fe/Ti substitution, JT distortion, and oxygen vacancies are expected, the temperature dependence cannot be quantitatively described by correlated Einstein or or correlated Debye models. Failure of these simple models is not surprising since lattice dynamics calculations for SrTiO$_3$ (Ref. 46) yield phonon spectra that can be described neither by a single frequency nor by a Debye-type frequency distribution. The slope of the Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2−}$-MSRD versus temperature observed for SrFeO$_3$ (1.33 $\times 10^{-5}$ Å$^2$/K in the range of 200−350 K) is comparable to the Ti$^{4+}$-O$^{2−}$ MSRD value determined for SrTiO$_3$ in the high temperature region (1.2 $\times 10^{-5}$ Å$^2$/K in the range of 200−1000 K). Although a quantitative model for the temperature dependence of MSRD is not available yet, Fig. 11 shows that there is a strong static disorder contribution, increasing with decreasing iron content. The temperature-dependent vibrational contribution is of comparable magnitude for different compositions, being only slightly higher for SrFeO$_3$.

C. Vibrational spectroscopy

The peak positions in the IR spectra of the oxidized Sr(Fe$_{Ti_{1-x}}$)$_{o}$O$_3$ samples (Fig. 12) hardly change with increasing iron concentration. This finding is not unexpected since substitution of Fe$^{4+}$ for Ti$^{4+}$ should not drastically alter the force constant and the reduced mass (the observed peaks involve mainly B−O motions with the reduced mass being close to that of oxygen). However, for the reduced Sr(Fe$_{Ti_{1-x}}$)$_{o}$O$_{3-x/2}$ samples, a splitting of the peak centered at

174107-7
VRAČAR et al.

FIG. 12. Diffuse reflection infrared spectra for fully oxidized (top panel) and fully reduced (lower panel) Sr(Fe,Ti$_{1-x}$)$_2$O$_{3-\delta}$ samples (for $x=0$ the spectra of oxidized and reduced samples are identical). The spectra are scaled to comparable intensity at 645 cm$^{-1}$ and shifted upward for clarity. For oxidized samples with $x>0.5$, the high electronic conductivity of the samples impeded spectra acquisition.

645 cm$^{-1}$ into three components is found. The relative contribution of the 645 cm$^{-1}$ peak (Ti$^{4+}$-$\text{O}^2-$ vibration) decreases with increasing iron concentration, while the component at 590 cm$^{-1}$ and the weaker shoulder at 710 cm$^{-1}$ gain weight (Fe$^{3+}$-$\text{O}^2-$ vibrations).

In cubic perovskites, all first-order Raman lines are symmetry forbidden. Raman spectra for the oxidized and reduced samples are shown in Fig. 13. The broad structures at 250–400 and at 600–800 cm$^{-1}$ in pure SrTiO$_3$ ($x=0$) are due to second-order Raman scattering. The SrTiO$_3$ phonon modes, determined, e.g., from hyper-Raman measurements, are indicated by vertical lines (LO4 and TO4 correspond to $\overline{B_1}$-$\text{O}$ stretching, and LO3 and TO3 to $\overline{O}$-$\overline{B}$-$\overline{O}$ bending modes). For the reduced Sr(Fe,Ti$_{1-x}$)$_2$O$_{3-\delta}$ samples, the spectra become less structured with increasing iron concentration. The substitution of Fe$^{3+}$ for Ti$^{4+}$ (which leads also to the appearance of oxygen vacancies located more or less close to the Fe$^{3+}$ centers) represents a local symmetry lowering and could in principle lead to the appearance of Raman lines. For SrTiO$_3$, it is known that symmetry breaking by an applied electrical field or the preparation of thin films leads to the observation of first-order Raman peaks. The effect of $B$-site cation substitution was studied, e.g., for cubic Sr(Mg$_{0.05}$Ti$_{0.95}$)$_2$O$_{3-\delta}$ where a weak new peak at 762 cm$^{-1}$ was observed and for orthorhombic Ca(Zr,Ti$_{1-x}$)$_2$O$_3$ where a strong additional peak in the range of 750–800 cm$^{-1}$ was found for 0.25$\leq x\leq$0.75. In the spectra of the reduced Sr(Fe$_{x}$Ti$_{1-x}$)$_2$O$_{3-\delta}$, even for large $x$, the presence of Fe$^{3+}$ and oxygen vacancies obviously does not create a sufficient symmetry distortion for inducing pronounced Raman peaks. Spectra measured on oxygen vacancy containing Sr(SC$_{0.03}$Ti$_{0.97}$)O$_2$ also do not show first-order Raman peaks.

For the oxidized Sr(Fe$_{x}$Ti$_{1-x}$)$_2$O$_3$ samples, a pronounced line at 690 cm$^{-1}$ appears at an iron concentration as low as $x=0.003$. Its intensity increases up to $x=0.03$ and then decreases (Fig. 14). The full width at half maximum (FWHM) of the peak increases almost linearly from 30 cm$^{-1}$ ($x=0.003$) to 70 cm$^{-1}$ ($x=0.3$), while the peak position shifts only slightly to 695 cm$^{-1}$ for large $x$. For $x=0.03$, a systematic decrease of the 690 cm$^{-1}$ peak was observed for samples with a smaller degree of oxidation (prepared by heating to 500 °C in air or 700 °C in N$_2$; spectra not shown). Since all these peaks are observed with the same frequencies and intensities for all applied excitation wavelengths (784.7, 632.8, and 514.5 nm), luminescence effects are not the origin of these lines. The fact that the frequency of 690 cm$^{-1}$ does not split into TO and LO modes and does not correspond to any of the SrTiO$_3$ first-order phonons can be seen as an indication that this peak is caused by a vibration with local character. For such a local vibration, also modes with inversion symmetry at the Fe$^{4+}$ center would become Raman active. On the other hand, the symmetry reduction at the Fe$^{4+}$ also makes the LO3, TO4, and LO4 modes weakly allowed. The intensity at the 475 cm$^{-1}$ SrTiO$_3$ phonon frequency (and also of the shoulder at 795 cm$^{-1}$ which is difficult to quantify) increases in parallel to the 690 cm$^{-1}$ peak, while the intensity at 545 cm$^{-1}$ exhibits a broad maximum centered around $x=0.2$.

Low temperature measurements have been done for the oxidized Sr(Fe$_{0.01}$Ti$_{0.99}$)O$_3$ sample from room temperature...
down to 120 K in steps of 20 K and an additional spectrum at 80 K bearing in mind the phase transition of SrTiO$_3$ into the tetragonal phase at 105 K (in first approximation, this does not change the character of the spectrum). The amplitude of the most pronounced peak at 690 cm$^{-1}$ increased by about 120% upon cooling, whereas the FWHM decreased by about 50% resulting in an overall peak intensity increase by about 20%.

V. DISCUSSION

In this section, our experimental findings are discussed synoptically emphasizing the question of a JT distortion around Fe$^{4+}$ proposed in a recent theoretical study.$^3$ In the case of Fe$^{3+}$ ions, the high-spin ground state $d^5(t_{2g}^3e_g^2)$ configuration$^{35}$ does not suppose any local structural distortion. Pure SrFeO$_3$ has Fe$^{4+}$ ($d^4$) ions in high-spin configuration but has no JT distortion and exhibits metallic conductivity. These facts are explained by strong mixing of $d^1(t_{2g}^1e_g^1)$ and $d^4L(t_{2g}^3e_g^1)$ configurations in the ground state that stabilize the undistorted cubic perovskite structure and indicates a strong degree of covalency in the Fe-O bonds.$^{33,34}$ A local JT distortion can therefore be expected only for low iron concentrations where delocalization of the iron $d$ electrons is not yet of influence. In this context, it is worth mentioning that $x \approx 0.03$ marks the border between the low concentration regime with essentially independent Fe centers and the higher concentration regime where the formation of an iron impurity band begins$^3$ and the electronic conductivity significantly increases (together with the decrease in the activation energy for conductivity).$^4$

While the origin of the XANES preedge peaks has been given above, we discuss here their composition dependence and their relationship with the EXAFS findings. The Ti-O MSRD (Fig. 10) and bond length (Fig. 9) are almost constant for all $x$ in oxidized Sr(Fe,Ti$_{1-x}$)O$_3$, indicating similar degree of distortion around Ti$^{4+}$ ions. Therefore, one could expect$^{25}$ that the intensity of the peak P2 in Fig. 2 should not change with composition and its variation to be mostly connected with a variation of the background contribution from the neighboring peak P1. The P1 peak (quadrupole transition to 3$d$ states) decreases for lower iron content, and its intensity variation is larger at the Ti K edge (Fig. 2) than at the Fe K edge (Fig. 3). The change of the P1 intensity is determined by a variation of the squared transition matrix element and of the occupation number of 3$d$ metal states. Since the Ti environment does not change significantly, we do not expect the overlap integral to change. On the other hand, for large $x$, the stronger electron withdrawal from O$^{2-}$ to Fe$^{4+}$ can result in a decreased Ti 3$d$ occupation number. Note that the quadrupole transition at the Ti K edge is extremely sensitive to the occupation number.$^{30}$

In the case of the P1 peak for Fe$^{4+}$, the decrease of the Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ distances with increasing $x$ might be viewed as an indication for "more compact" 3$d$ orbitals which leads to an increase of the overlap integrals, and thus to the P1 peak intensity increase with increasing $x$. However, in the case of Fe$^{3+}$ ions, the Fe$^{3+}$-O$^{2-}$ distance hardly varies with composition. Taking into account the difference between peaks at 3.5 Å in the FTs (Figs. 5 and 6, as discussed above in Sec. IV B), one can correlate the change in the Fe$^{3+}$ 3$d$ states with the variation of B–O–B bond angles and the presence of oxygen vacancies. Both effects are expected to result in 3$d$ band narrowing, and thus in more localized 3$d$ wave functions, increasing the preedge intensity for high Fe$^{3+}$ content (Fig. 3).

One should also note that the preedge peak intensity at the Fe K edge (Fig. 3) is slightly higher in reduced samples than in oxidized ones for the same composition. This difference can be partially attributed to a decrease of the Fe$^{3+}$ coordination number found in EXAFS analysis [Fig. 8 (upper panel)]. Such a phenomenon has been previously discussed for ferric complexes$^{29}$ and iron coordination in silicate glasses.$^{56}$

The independence of the Ti$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ MSRD (oxidized samples) from the iron concentration (Fig. 10) is consistent with the fact that these samples exhibit no $x$-dependent disorder due to oxygen vacancies and also with the observation of almost $x$-independent IR frequencies (Fig. 12). The finding of an almost constant Fe$^{3+}$-O$^{2-}$ MSRD (reduced samples) over an extended concentration range from $x \approx 0$ up to $x = 0.75$ is not self-evident, since the concentration of oxygen vacancies which potentially induce disorder increases linearly with $x$. On the other hand, the Fe$^{3+}$-O$^{2-}$ vibration frequencies observed in the IR spectra are found to be $x$ independent. Moreover, an oxygen vacancy next to a $B$ cation tends to displace the cation closer to the remaining oxide ions (the attractive force of the missing O$^{2-}$ is absent). Since Fe$^{3+}$ is larger than Ti$^{4+}$, it is difficult for the Fe$^{3+}$ to approach closer to the remaining O$^{2-}$ anions. A tendency for the $B$ cations to shift away from the V$^O$ was confirmed, e.g., for Fe$^{2+}$-V$^O$ in PbTiO$_3$ by density functional theory (DFT) calculations but the displacement is significantly more pronounced for the smaller Ti$^{4+}$ than for the Fe$^{3+}$ ion.$^{57}$

The variation of the Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ MSRD (oxidized samples) with iron concentration is nontrivial. For $x$ close to 1, its value approaches that of the Ti$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ MSRD, which seems to be reasonable since the vibrational characteristics of Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ and Ti$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ are similar. The increase of the Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ MSRD with decreasing $x$ is more astonishing. For $x \rightarrow 0$, it increases by a factor of about 3 and is significantly larger than the Fe$^{3+}$-O$^{2-}$ MSRD. If one takes the MSRD of SrFeO$_3$ as a reference point for the vibrational disorder, the excess contribution is 0.006 Å$^2$ for $x=0$. Since the vibrational characteristics can be assumed to be similar for all Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ bonds in the oxidized samples and the remaining minor oxygen vacancy concentration was shown to not increase the MSRD, this excess Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ MSRD contribution strongly implies a bond length distribution. In first-order approximation, the MSRD is the sum of a static and a vibrational disorder component,$^{20}$

$$\text{MSRD} = \text{MSRD}_{\text{stat}} + \text{MSRD}_{\text{vib}},$$

and from $\text{MSRD}_{\text{stat}} = 0.006$ Å$^2$ ($x=0$), the bond length distribution is calculated from$^{20}$

$$\Delta r = \frac{m+n}{\sqrt{mn}} \text{MSRD}_{\text{stat}},$$
resulting in $\Delta r = 0.16 \text{ Å}$ (here, we inserted $m=4$ and $n=2$ corresponding to a JT distortion, but setting $m=n$ hardly changes the numerical result). A plausible explanation for such a distribution occurring only for Fe$^{4+}$ and not for Ti$^{4+}$ or Fe$^{3+}$ could be a JT distortion. This broadening of the bond length distribution is significantly larger than the Fe-O distance increase of 0.03 Å between $x=1$ and $x=0$. The magnitude of the total distortion of 0.16 Å is larger than the sum of the contraction of 0.028 Å along the $x,y$ axes and the elongation of 0.052 Å along the $z$ direction found in quantum chemical calculations of an isolated Fe$^{4+}$ in SrTiO$_3$.

Since the respective transitions are allowed in cubic perovskites, the IR peaks observed in Fig. 12 represent an average over the contributions from Ti-O and Fe-O bond vibrations. For the oxidized samples, the IR frequencies are almost independent of the iron concentration $x$, therefore, we expect that (independent of the exact model) the vibrational contribution to the MSRD of Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ is also independent of $x$. A splitting of IR peaks due to a JT distortion around Fe$^{4+}$ would not show up in the IR spectra because for small $x \approx 0.03$ (where the strongest JT effect is expected), their statistical weight is too small, while for large $x$, the JT distortion is expected to vanish.

In contrast to the IR measurements, the Raman spectra are sensitive to local symmetry reduction since the undistorted cubic perovskites exhibit no allowed first-order peaks at all. The pronounced new peak at 690 cm$^{-1}$ appears for the oxidized samples with low to moderate iron content, while the spectra of the reduced samples remain essentially unchanged although at a first glance, the incorporation of Fe$^{4+}$ and oxygen vacancies should induce an even stronger symmetry reduction. This could be interpreted as an indication for the local symmetry reduction being inseparably related to the 4+ oxidation state of iron. While such a local symmetry breaking could be caused by an anisotropic JT-type distortion or alternatively by an isotropic bond length change around Fe$^{4+}$, the observed broadening of the Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ distance distribution at only slightly increasing bond length (see discussion above) and the concentration dependence of this Raman line (see below) clearly favor the first interpretation. The absence of an intensity decrease (and even a peak intensity increase observed) upon cooling shows that the peak does not arise from anharmonicity effects.

For the lowest iron concentrations $x < 0.03$, the 690 cm$^{-1}$ Raman peak area is approximately proportional to the Fe concentration, already for $x \approx 0.03$, the peak area decreases with the increase in $x$. Obviously a continuous decrease of the JT distortion with increasing iron concentration occurs which shows up in the decreasing excess contribution to the Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ MSRD as well as in the decreasing Raman peak area (note that these two quantities are not necessarily proportional). The decrease of the line intensity already at $x > 0.03$ is difficult to rationalize for the symmetry breaking caused by an isotropic local bond length change. On the other hand, the fact that in this Fe concentration range also the electronic conductivity changes drastically$^4$ points toward the importance of the electronic structure. That supports that the Raman line is related to the presence of a JT distortion. In parallel to the decrease in Raman peak area, the FWHM of the 690 cm$^{-1}$ peak increases. A similar behavior was observed for rhombohedral La$_{0.85}$Mn$_{0.15}$O$_3$, where a temperature decrease leads to a transition into a ferromagnetic phase with decreased deformation in the MnO$_6$ octahedra. The intensity of the Raman peaks at 499 and 517 cm$^{-1}$ assigned to local JT distortions decreases with decreasing temperature and the FWHM increases, which was interpreted by a reduced phonon lifetime related to the decreasing local distortions.

In principle, an off-center position of the Fe$^{4+}$, e.g., along the $z$ axis, cannot be ruled out. Such a displacement would also remove the degeneracy of the singly occupied $e_g$ orbitals. For Ni$^+$ and Cu$^{2+}$ in SrO, such a combined distortion ("pseudo-JT effect") was observed.$^{59,60}$ Nevertheless, it has to be emphasized that there, the substituting cation is about 0.2 Å smaller than the Sr$^{2+}$ ion,$^{60}$ while the size difference between Fe$^{4+}$ and Ti$^{4+}$ amounts to only 0.02 Å.

The fact that we do not observe a splitting of the first shell due to the JT effect around Fe$^{4+}$ ions at low concentrations directly in EXAFS spectra or in their FTs can be attributed to the type of local distortion, resulting in several groups of strongly overlapping Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ distances. As a result, the existing JT distortion expresses itself in large increase of the first shell MSRD (Fig. 11). Such an effect was observed previously in LaMnO$_3$ (Mn, high spin $d^4$, coherent JT effect, monoclinic unit cell),$^{61}$ where the distribution of Mn-O bond lengths ranging from 1.91 to 1.97 to 2.15 Å was also not resolved into individual peaks (although spectra were measured to high $k$ values of 15 Å$^{-1}$), but large MSRD values were found (0.0095 Å$^2$ at 300 K, being comparable to our oxidized samples with $x \approx 0.1$). Also, only an anomalous MSRD increase with temperature was observed for (Sr$_{1-x}$La$_{x}$)MnO$_3$ samples in the temperature range where the transition from the ferromagnetic phase (no JT effect) to the paramagnetic state (JT distortion for Mn$^{4+}$) occurs.$^{62}$ This seems to be a comparable case to our findings. For Sr$_5$Ti$_{1-x}$La$_x$O$_3$, which crystallizes in the K$_2$NiF$_4$ structure with Fe$^{4+}$ in a tetragonally distorted octahedron, a splitting of the Fe-K absorption edge by $\approx 3$ eV was observed.$^{63,64}$ The absence of such a splitting in our case can be understood from the fact that the difference in Fe-O distances is only 0.16 Å compared to 0.5 Å reported for Sr$_5$Ti$_{1-x}$La$_x$O$_3$ in Refs. 63 and 64.

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Structural studies of Sr(Fe$_{x}$Ti$_{1-x}$)O$_{3-\delta}$ perovskites as a function of composition and iron oxidation state have been performed by means of XRD, Fe and Ti K-edge XAS, and vibrational (Raman and infrared) spectroscopy with the emphasis on the possible Jahn-Teller distortion around Fe$^{4+}$ ions. The local electronic structure probed by XANES, as well as the long range order probed by XRD and the short range order reflected in EXAFS, showed a dependence on composition as well as on iron oxidation state. The variation of the preedge peak intensity in the XANES signals is attributed to the modification of the Fe(Ti)-O bond lengths and $B-O-B$ bonding angles, resulting in a change of localization of 3d-metal states and their occupation numbers $n_d$. 

174107-10
Although none of the individual observations alone gives a final proof of a JT distortion around Fe$^{4+}$ ions, the combination of results obtained by XAS (especially the iron concentration dependence of the Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ MSRD) and vibrational spectroscopies strongly supports its presence, most pronounced for $x \approx 0.03$ and decreasing for higher iron concentrations. The decrease of the JT effect with increasing $x$ can be understood qualitatively by the change in the electronic structure of the materials from insulator to metal. A quantitative modeling of the variation of the Fe$^{4+}$-O$^{2-}$ MSRD and the intensities of the Raman lines remains a challenging theoretical problem. More detailed DFT calculations will be reported in a forthcoming paper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF) for the beam time allocation and support during these experiments. The XAS measurements were performed at the ESRF under Project No. CH-1812. We thank G. Götz for recording the diffractograms, W. Dietrich for assistance with the high oxygen pressure treatment, A. Schulz for the Raman measurements, W. König (IR spectroscopy), C. Ulrich and M. Bakr (temperature-dependent Raman measurements), and P. Adler for valuable discussions, all from MPI Stuttgart.