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Americium and trivalent Lanthanides incorporation in high-level waste glass-ceramics

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Abstract

The incorporation and partitioning of americium and trivalent lanthanides were investigated in aluminoborosilicate glass-ceramics with apatite-like silicate crystals of general formula $Ca_2(Ln,Am)_8(SiO_4)_6O_2$.

A microstructural and structural study of two glass-ceramics containing Am_2O_3 - La_2O_3 or Nd_2O_3 - La_2O_3, respectively, was carried out by XRD, SEM/EDS and EMPA so as to assess a comparison of Lanthanides and Actinides partitioning into apatite crystals and residual glass. Moreover, Raman analyses of residual glasses were performed to compare the role of Am and Nd on the glassy structure.

Results put forward that shape, composition, Ln/Am stoichiometry and cell parameters of apatite crystals of both (Am-La) and (Nd-La) glass-ceramics are very close. This paper thus shows similar results for (Am-La) and (Nd-La) glass-ceramics in terms of apatite / glass

partitioning and in terms of structural role on glassy structure. It can be therefore put forward that Nd^{3+} and Am^{3+} behaviors are close, either in the glass or in the crystalline structure.

I. Introduction

The conditioning of high level wastes coming from spent nuclear fuel reprocessing aims at stabilizing the radionuclides for geological time scale in bulk matrices. The compositions of these matrices must ensure good chemical durability and thermal and radiation stability in geological repositories. Current and past investigations have mainly considered amorphous and crystalline materials for the immobilization of specific wastes type or composition. [1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8] The industrial immobilization of radioactive wastes is in operation in several countries, each relying on specific technological solutions. This is the case for the French R7/T7 borosilicate glass which incorporates up to18.5 wt.% of high level wastes coming from reprocessed spent nuclear fuel.[9]

Glass-ceramic matrices could be an alternative way to confine high level rates of waste and could offer flexibility in the management of flows to be vitrified. Their design and development need to evaluate the partitioning of radionuclides into glassy and crystalline phases and also to master the crystallization phenomena.

Furthermore, the aspects of minor-actinides and lanthanides incorporation in glass and glass-ceramic matrices are of utmost interest, not only for the design of high level waste matrices but also for further understanding of the chemistry of minor-actinide elements. In a previous study, we have thoroughly investigated Lanthanides (Nd^{3+}, La^{3+}) incorporation and local environment in an aluminoborosilicate glassy system (SiO_2 – B_2O_3 – Na_2O – Al_2O_3 – CaO – Nd_2O_3 – La_2O_3).[10] The changes in glass composition affect their local environment and their

impact on the crystallization mechanisms.[10,11,12] Beyond the solubility limit, lanthanides elements are reported to form apatite phases with the general formula $Ca_2Ln_8(SiO_4)_6O_2$. It appeared that Ln_2O_3 solubility is higher for La-rich formulations than for Nd-rich ones and that an increase in the RE oxide content reduces the connectivity of the network building units through formation of non-bridging oxygens at the expense of the oxygen bridges. This depolymerization of the glass network did not affect neodymium environment which always consisted in silicate tetrahedra. The composition of the apatite crystals was found to be affected by the La and Nd contents of the parent glass and deviation from the ideal composition ($Ca_2Ln_8(SiO_4)_6O_2$) occurred in the neodymium end of the system (La/(La + Nd) ratio approaching zero). It thus appears that both Ln_2O_3 solubility and crystal composition are strongly dependent on the type and crystal chemistry of the Ln elements.

However, similar studies conducted with transuranic elements at concentrations exceeding their solubility or with glass-ceramic materials are limited. In glasses, even if introduced as Am^{4+} in AmO_2, americium stabilizes as Am^{3+} in borosilicate and aluminoborosilicate glasses.[13,14] Under this oxidation state (+III), Am^{3+} has a ionic radius of 0.097 nm and 0.108 nm when coordinated to 6 (CN6) and 8 (CN8) oxygen atoms, respectively.[15] These values are comparable to that of Nd^{3+}: 0.098 nm (CN6) and 0.111 nm (CN8).[16] Moreover in crystalline structures, both elements are accommodated in their +III oxidation state: neodymium in apatite structures for example,[17] and americium in $AmNbTiO_6$ [17] and $AmPO_4$.[2,18]

To our knowledge, there are no previous reports of americium behavior in crystalline structures similar to those of the present study, the closest cases being that of $Ca_2Nd_8(SiO_4)_6O_2$ apatites containing ^{244}Cm formed in supercalcine ceramics[19] and that of $Ca_3Gd_7(SiO_4)_5(PO_4)O_2$ apatites like crystals containing ^{244}Cm formed in partially devitrified PNL 77-260 waste glass[20]. Nevertheless, none of these studies adressed the specific role and partitionning of Am in the glass-ceramic systems. In this paper, Lanthanides (Nd^{3+}, La^{3+}) and

Actinides (Am^{3+}) incorporation and local environment were investigated in glass-ceramics of the $SiO_2 – B_2O_3 – Na_2O – Al_2O_3 – CaO – Ln_2O_3/Am_2O_3$ system (with Ln = Nd, La) for which the cumulative Ln_2O_3 - Am_2O_3 solubility limit was voluntary exceeded, leading to the formation of apatite-like silicate crystals of general formula $Ca_2(Ln,Am)_8(SiO_4)_6O_2$. A comparison of Lanthanides and Am (particularly Nd and Am) partitioning into apatite crystals and residual glass was performed, focusing on the stoichiometry and cell parameters of Ln-apatite and Am-apatite crystals. Neodymium is generally considered as a good minor-actinide surrogate since both elements have similar ionic radii and identical oxidation states in the glass network and crystalline structures. However this was never experimentally confirmed. Therefore to this aim, two glass-ceramics (Am-La) and (Nd-La), respectively containing Am_2O_3 - La_2O_3 and Nd_2O_3 - La_2O_3, for which americium was fully substituted by neodymium on a molar basis, were elaborated and characterized. Structural and microstructural aspects were assessed by means of chemical analyses, spectroscopic and X-ray diffraction techniques. The relevant differences in the structure and composition of the amorphous and crystalline phases are reported, while the overall effects of replacing Am by Nd are discussed in light of the trivalent cations partitioning in the crystals and in the amorphous glassy matrix. These results provide valuable information on the partitioning of Am/Nd in the residual glass and on the Am-apatite chemistry above the $Ln_2O_3 – Am_2O_3$ solubility limit.

II. Materials and methods

(1) Material fabrication

Two glass-ceramics (GC) called (Am-La) GC and (Nd-La) GC, respectively containing Am_2O_3 - La_2O_3 and Nd_2O_3 - La_2O_3, with a R ratio of 0.5 (R = La/(La+Am) or La/(La+Nd)[10]), were prepared in the $SiO_2 – B_2O_3 – Na_2O – Al_2O_3 – CaO – Ln_2O_3/Ac_2O_3$ system. Moreover a

base glass SiO_2-B_2O_3-Na_2O-Al_2O_3-CaO was prepared as a structural reference without Nd and Am for comparing both role and Nd and Am by Raman spectroscopy analyses (Table I).

Reagent grade SiO_2 (Millisil), H_3BO_3, Al_2O_3, Na_2CO_3, La_2O_3, Nd_2O_3 (Prolabo) and CaO (Alfa Aesar) were used along with americium oxide powder (AmO_2, Camix 85% ±1 Am per g) with an isotopic composition of 99.99% ±0.02 ^{241}Am.

Preparation and characterization operations of (Am-La) GC were conducted in dedicated hot cells of DHA laboratory located within ATALANTE facility. Under these conditions, it is possible to proceed with remote preparation and analysis of glasses with significant fractions of radionuclides. Prior to synthesis, the homogeneity of compositions with increasing lanthanides content (Nd_2O_3+La_2O_3 = 2.08, 2.66, 3.26, 3.90, 4.56 mol.% at La/(La+Nd) = 0.5) was assessed in a non-radioactive laboratory using an exact replica of the hot cell process. The solubility limit of Ln^{3+} elements (which corresponds to the last content before the appearance of apatite-like crystals $Ca_2Nd_xLa_{8-x}(SiO_4)_6O_2$ as seen in the previous study[10]) was established to be located between 2.66 and 3.26 mol.%. According to these results, the radioactive sample was batched with a La_2O_3+Am_2O_3 content of 3.90 mol.% with a ratio of La/(La+Am) = 0.5 so as to yield to a heterogeneous material (i) with sufficient crystallinity for convenient structural analyses and (ii) using realistic quantities of ^{241}Am (Table 1).

The hot cell sample preparation procedure used 5 g batch of glass-ceramic. Powders were first introduced in cylindrical Pt crucible (Ø 14.8 mm x100 mm) in which 4 ml of deionized H_2O were added, followed by AmO_2 powder. The slurry was homogenized by means of an ultrasonic probe for several minutes. After homogenization, the Pt-crucible was placed in an alumina container, loaded in a graphite resistor furnace. The furnace atmosphere was then flushed with argon for 4 hours. Melting took place at 1200ºC for 5.5 hours (heating rate of

around 50ºC.h^{-1} from room temperature to 800°C then 100ºC.h^{-1} from 800°C to 1200°C). The melt was then cooled down to room temperature at 350ºC.h^{-1}.

To assess a pertinent comparison of Am and Nd behavior, preparation of (Nd-La) GC was performed under identical experimental conditions (reactant mixing and thermal treatments).

Furthermore, the fabrication of the base glass was done according a fabrication process described elsewhere. [10]

(2) Characterization

The ^{241}Am content of the (Am-La) sample was determined from the thermal output of the sample measured in a SETARAM C80D calorimeter (SETARAM, France) with a resolution of 1.2 x 10^{-7} W and a detection limit of 2 x 10^{-6} W. The average of three measurements was converted into Am_2O_3 considering a decay heat of 0.11 W/g of ^{241}Am.

Following analysis of the americium content, the initial cylindrical (Am-La) sample was cut in two parts and both samples were embedded in a Wood's alloy or epoxy resin and furthermore polished for subsequent structural and microstructural investigations.

X-ray diffraction patterns were recorded using a Seifert 3000 diffractometer (GE Sensing, France) equipped with a Mo source (λ=0.07093 nm) (40 kV, 30 mA) and on a Phillips X'pert PRO instrument (PANalytical, Netherlands) operated with a Cu source (λ=0.15406 nm) (40 kV, 40 mA) for the active (Am-La) and non-active (Nd-La) samples, respectively. After extraction of the space groups, the profiles were fitted by the Le Bail method using the FULLPROF program.[21]

Scanning electron micrographs were collected on carbon-coated samples with a JEOL 6300 (JEOL, Japan) scanning electron microscopes (SEM, 15kV) and a Philips XL30 (Philips, Netherlands) for (Am-La) and (Nd-La) samples, respectively.

The chemical composition of the (Am-La) sample was determined by means of a CAMECA SX 50 electron probe micro analyzer (EMPA, Cameca, France) equipped with four X-ray spectrometers and TAP/PET crystals and operated under an acceleration voltage of 20 kV and 20 nA stabilized beam. The chemical composition of the (Nd-La) sample was determined by means of a CAMECA SX 100 electron probe micro analyzer (EMPA, Cameca, France) equipped with four X-ray spectrometers (LPC3, LTAP, LPET and PET crystals) and an acceleration voltage of 12 kV and 10 nA stabilized beam.

For (Am-La) glass-ceramic, Raman spectra were collected with a Horiba HR-800micro-spectrometer (Horiba, UK) using a 532 nm green laser source located outside the hot cell and coupled to an optical microscope with x1.25 to x100 objectives (Optic Peter, France) located within the hot cell. A grating of 1800 mm^{-1} and a slit size of 125 µm were used. . For (Nd-La) sample, Raman spectra were also collected with a Horiba HR-800micro-spectrometer with a green laser at 532 nm. The beam was focused on the sample with x50 and x100 objectives (Olympus BX41) and the spectra collected between 200 and 1600 cm^{-1} (1800 mm^{-1} grating, 100 µm slit and 200 µm confocal hole). All the spectra were corrected for temperature and frequency dependent scattering intensity[22] and the baseline subtracted.

III. Results

(1) Am content

After removal of the platinum crucible (Fig. 1-(a)), calorimetric analyses indicated an average thermal power output that corresponds to ~1.65 mol.% Am_2O_3 instead of the 1.95 mol.% theoretical value. Therefore the (Am-La) GC composition was recalculated, noted "(Am-La) GC corrected" in Table 1.

Then, the crude sample has been embedded and polished (Fig. 1-(b)) for optical and electronic microscopic observations.

(2) Microstructure

Optical microscopy images of the (Am-La) GC confirmed its glass-ceramic character under polarized light, with a homogeneous dispersion of the crystals within the sample (Fig. 1-(c-e)). The (Nd-La) GC synthesized under identical conditions showed similar features (Fig. 2-(a-b)).

Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) revealed hexagonal shaped crystals (white phase on the SEM micrographs) of varying sizes and orientations in both radioactive (Fig. 3(a-c)) and non-radioactive samples (Fig. 3(d-f)). In addition, back scattered electron imaging reveal a similar contrast between the amorphous and crystalline regions of the (Am-La) and (Nd-La) GCs, that could state for close compositions of the (Am-La) and (Nd-La) residual glassy phase on the one hand and (Am-La) and (Nd-La) crystalline ones on the other hand.

(2) Structure and composition of crystalline and glassy phases

X-ray diffraction measurement of the (Am-La) GC (Fig. 4-(a)) showed reflections unequivocally corresponding to that of hexagonal apatite-like silicate structure ($P6_3/m$ space

group) with the general formula $Ca_2RE_8(SiO_4)_6O_2$, where RE is a trivalent cation. The same crystalline structure was identified in the (Nd-La) GC (Fig. 4-(b)). The refinement of the lattice parameters indicates that cell parameters of crystal phases formed in (Am-La) and (Nd-La) GCs are very close ($a_{Am\text{-}La}$= 0.960 nm and $c_{Am\text{-}La}$= 0.707 nm; $a_{Nd\text{-}La}$= 0.961 nm and $c_{Nd\text{-}La}$= 0.707 nm) and nearly similar to those of the $Ca_2La_4Nd_4(SiO_4)_6O_2$ ceramic reference (a_{ceram}= 0.959 nm and c_{ceram}= 0.708 nm) (Table II).

Table III summarizes the residual glass chemical composition of both (Am-La) and (Nd-La) GCs as measured by EPMA. For (Am-La) GC, although close to that of the theoretical "corrected" GC (Table I), residual glass composition indicates a depletion of Am_2O_3 (1.07 mol. % in comparison to ~1.65 mol.%), La_2O_3 (1.61 mol. % instead of 1.95 mol. %) and CaO (7.30 mol. % in comparison to 8.23 mol. %). The R ratio (R = La/(La + Am)) in the glassy phase is also slightly modified ($R_{residual\ matrix}$ = 0.60 instead of R theoretical value of 0.5). For (Nd-La) GC, such phenomena are a bit less marked: the residual glass matrix composition is closer to that of the theoretical (Nd-La) composition in terms of rare earth amounts (Nd_2O_3, La_2O_3), it can only be noticed a lower CaO content (7.62 mol. % instead of 8.20 mol. %) (Table III).

Apatite phase chemical composition of both (Am-La) and (Nd-La) samples determined by EPMA are reported in Table IV. These results indicate a stoichiometry in lanthanum, neodymium or americium close to that of the theoretical $Ca_2La_4Nd_4(SiO_4)_6O_2$ ceramic phase with a $R_{crystal}$ ratio of 0.5.

Fig. 5-(a) compares Raman spectra of (Am-La) and (Nd-La) residual glass with those of the base glass used as a free-lanthanide-actinide reference (Table I) and Table V indicates fitted areas of 850 - 1250 cm^{-1} ranges. This region is attributed to the stretching motion of silicon oxygen bonds in SiO_4 units with Q^n connectivity (where n is the number of bridging oxygen

atoms per tetrahedron). This band has been decomposed into several components, using the second derivative of the signal and data from the literature as shown in Table V.[23,24,25]

In the base glass, spectrum decomposition yields three components at 970, 1070 and 1145 cm^{-1} that could be assigned to Q^2 / Q^4(2Al) / Q^4(2B), Q^3(Na+Ca) and Q^4(Al) / Q^4(B) silicate tetrahedra, respectively.[23-25,26,27,28] At lower frequencies two main bands are detected at 505 and 630 cm^{-1} assigned to mixed Si-O-Si bending and rocking mode and to the breathing mode of danburite rings (four members ring containing two silica and two boron tetrahedra), respectively.[27,29] Raman bands between 630 and 800 cm^{-1} are also observed whose origin arise mainly to borate units and to O-Si-O bonds and will not be discussed here, because of overlapping and of a lack of discernable features.[10,30,31]

In the (Am-La) and (Nd-La) GCs the main 850 - 1250 cm^{-1} band shifts towards lower wavenumbers compared to the one of the base glass. Decomposition of the Q^n band needs the introduction of four components instead of three, with the replacement of the band at 970 cm^{-1} by two bands at 933 and 998 cm^{-1}. It is known that the position of a specific band associated to a Qn unit is strongly dependent of the valence state of the neighboring cations. Q^3 band were observed at 1100 cm^{-1} for $Q^3(Na^+)$, [32] at 1060-1080 cm^{-1} for $Q^3(Ca^{2+}, Sr^{2+})$, [28,33,34] at 1010-1040 cm^{-1} for $Q^3(Y^{3+}, La^{3+}, Zr^{4+})$. [34,35] Therefore, the band at 998 cm^{-1} could be assigned to Q^3 units surrounded by Ln^{3+}/Ac^{3+}, with also a possible contribution from Q^2 tetrahedra [35] exclusively surrounded by Ca^{2+}/Na^+ that is observed at around 950-970cm^{-1} (Table V). [33] Subsequently, the new band at 933 cm^{-1} could be assigned to Q^2 silicate units connected to several lanthanides (Ln^{3+}: La^{3+}, Nd^{3+}) and/or actinide (Ac^{3+}: Am^{3+}) cations.

Raman spectra of crystals formed in (Am-La) and (Nd-La) GCs are very similar (Fig. 5-(b)). In both (Am-La) and (Nd-La) crystals, the symmetric stretching mode of SiO_4 (ν_1) appears around 852-854 cm^{-1} and the associated asymmetric stretching motion (ν_3 ~ 920 cm^{-1}) is

hidden by contributions from the residual glass matrix. Both symmetric (ν_2) and asymmetric (ν_4) bending modes are found at 394 and 527 cm^{-1}, respectively.[31,35] A slight difference lies in the fact that ν_1 Full Width at Half Maximum (FWHM) value was found to be higher in the (Am- La) crystals than in the (Nd-La) and in the $Ca_2La_4Nd_4(SiO_4)_6O_2$ ceramic (Table VI). This origin could be related to the radiation damage generated by Am alpha decays, even if the characterization were performed rapidly after the elaboration process to minimize this effect.

IV. Discussion

Thanks to prior investigations on the solubility limit of Nd_2O_3 and La_2O_3 in the SiO_2 – B_2O_3 – Al_2O_3 – Na_2O – CaO – La_2O_3 - Nd_2O_3 system ((Nd-La) system),[10] a composition of a glass-ceramic in the SiO_2 – B_2O_3 – Al_2O_3 – Na_2O – CaO – La_2O_3 - Am_2O_3 system ((Am-La) system) has been determined and tested, relying on a presumed assumption of a Nd and Am close crystal chemistry.

The first notable statement is that the (Am-La) GC contains a homogeneous dispersion of crystals, as theoretically wanted, with an Am_2O_3 content close to the target value.

Comparing (Am-La) GC with its counterpart (Nd-La) - elaborated with the same process – XRD, SEM/EDS, EMPA and Raman characterizations have clearly shown that Am and Nd have similar behavior in both glass-ceramic materials. Indeed, both (Am-La) and (Nd-La) GCs present a similar microstructure and identical crystals morphology, with a dispersion of hexagonal shaped crystals of varying sizes and orientations. In both glass-ceramics, crystals formed in the same apatite-like structure ($P6_3/m$ space group), of general formula $Ca_2La_xAm_{8-x}(SiO_4)_6O_2$ and $Ca_2La_xNd_{8-x}(SiO_4)_6O_2$, respectively. Furthermore, cell parameters of (Am-La) and (Nd-La)-apatite crystals are almost identical and also close to that of the $Ca_2La_4Nd_4(SiO_4)_6O_2$ ceramic reference. Raman data on crystals formed in both (Am-La) and (Nd-La) glass-ceramic materials are also very close. These results are confirmed by EPMA, leading to the determination of very close apatite compositions: $Ca_{2.02}La_{3.96}Am_{4.07}(SiO_4)_6O_{1.99}$ and $Ca_{2.81}La_{3.62}Nd_{3.57}(SiO_4)_6O_{1.59}$, respectively. The values of the R ratios, close to 0.5 in both (Am-La) and (Nd-La) apatite crystals (R = La/(La+Am) or La/(La+Nd)), put forward the fact that the two Nd^{3+} and Am^{3+} behave in a similar manner, i.e. both cations are congruently incorporated in the crystalline phase during the crystallization process.

Within the amorphous glass matrix, Nd^{3+}, La^{3+} and Am^{3+} also behave in a similar manner; the incorporation of both elements to the base glass induces a global shift of the Q^n unit vibration bands toward lower wavenumbers due to the connectivity of both Ln^{3+} and Am^{3+} to the silicon units. This global shift is an indication of a modifier role of both Ln and Am in the glassy network as already demonstrated for Ln [36] with specific ^{17}O NMR experiments and for Am with EXAFS studies showing a similar field strength of around $0.5A^{-2}$ for Ln^{3+} and Ac^{3+}. [6]

In the base glass, used as a non-disrupted network reference, most of the sodium atoms are used as charge compensators for alumina and boron tetrahedra. Because NMR analysis of this glass revealed around 75% of boron atoms in fourfold coordination, and because AlO_4 tetrahedra are preferentially compensated by Na atoms, only around 3.5 mol. % of Na_2O are still available for creating NBO atoms. Consequently, NBOs are created mainly by Ca atoms (8.5 mol. % of CaO compared to 3.5 mol. % of Na_2O in a modifier role). It is known that the Si-O stretching vibrations of Q^3(Na) and Q^3(Ca) are located at around 1100 and 1060-1080 cm^{-1}, respectively. Therefore, the broad band at 1070 cm^{-1} comes certainly from a mixture of these two contributions. The weaker band observed at 1145 cm^{-1} could be attributed to Q^4(Al) and Q^4(B) as generally assigned in aluminosilicate and borosilicate systems.[29-31] The band at 970 cm^{-1} can be assigned to a mixture of Q^2 units and of Q^4(2Al) or Q^4(2B) as discussed in several articles on aluminosilicate and borosilicate glasses [29-31].

As introducing lanthanides and/or actinides in this system, news bands appear in the silicon tetrahedral region, attributed to Q^2 and Q^3 silicate units connected to one or several lanthanide (Ln^{3+} : La^{3+}, Nd^{3+}) and/or actinide (Ac^{3+} : Am^{3+}) cations. It means that a part of Q^2 and Q^3 units of the base glass are shifted to lower frequency due to the vicinity of an Ln^{3+}/Ac^{3+} in the silica tetrahedra due to the higher field strength. The introduction of either Am or Nd exactly induces the same effect on the Q^n region of the glassy phases of the (Am-La) and (Nd-La)

GCs which indicates a similar role of both Am or Nd in the glassy network, and confirming their modifying role. Therefore Nd can be considered as a good surrogate of Am in the glassy network of silicate glasses.

This study by comparing the incorporation and partitioning of Am and Ln in the two phases of an aluminoborosilicate GC, apatite crystals and glassy phase, have demonstrated a similar behavior of Am^{3+} and Nd^{3+} in both phases and that Nd^{3+} can be used as a good surrogate as Am^{3+} in the two phases and in the GC system.

V. Conclusion

This paper aimed to assess a comparison of Actinides (Am) and Lanthanides (Nd) incorporation in High-Level Waste glass-ceramics in terms of Ln^{3+}/Am^{3+} partitioning into crystals and residual glass, stoichiometry and cell parameters of Ln/Am-crystals and influence of Ln/Am nature on the glassy structure.

As reminded here before, neodymium is usually taken as minor-actinide surrogate in glasses, thanks to their common oxidation state (+III) and ionic radius (0.097 nm and 0.108 nm for Am^{3+} when coordinated to 6 (CN6) and 8 (CN8) oxygen atoms respectively and 0.098 nm (CN6) and 0.111 nm (CN8) for Nd^{3+}).[15,16] In crystalline structures also, both elements are accommodated in their +III oxidation state.[2,17,18]

In the present glass-ceramics prepared in the SiO_2 – B_2O_3 – Al_2O_3 – Na_2O – CaO – Ln_2O_3/Am_2O_3 system (with Ln = Nd, La) above the Am_2O_3/Ln_2O_3 solubility limit, Am^{3+} and Nd^{3+} behave in a similar manner. In both (Am-La) and (Nd-La) systems apatite silicate crystals were formed of composition $Ca_2La_xNd_{8-x}(SiO_4)_6O_2$ and $Ca_2La_xAm_{8-x}(SiO_4)_6O_2$,

respectively. Shape, composition, Ln/Am stoichiometry and cell parameters of apatite crystals of both (Am-La) and (Nd-La) glass-ceramics are very close. Moreover, both Nd^{3+} and Am^{3+} cations are congruently incorporated in the crystalline phase compared to the glass. In the glassy phase the role of both Am^{3+} and Nd^{3+} are similar with a modifier behavior.

This paper thus shows that Nd^{3+} and Am^{3+} behaviors are very close, either in the glass or in the crystalline structure and demonstrated from a structural basis that Nd can be used as a good surrogate of Am in such aluminoborosilicate GC systems.

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