

High Resolution Electron Microscopy and X-Ray Powder Diffraction Studies of $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$

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A new reduced strontium niobate, $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$, has been found. The space group is $P4/mmm$ and its unit cell parameters are $a = 4.1405(2)$ and $c = 12.040(2)$ Å. It is isostructural with $\text{Ba}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$, having alternating slabs of SrNbO_3 (perovskite) and NbO . In the NbO layer Nb_6 octahedra are vertex-linked in two dimensions, having Nb-Nb bonds. The structure has been confirmed by comparing observed and calculated X-ray powder diffraction patterns. HREM studies have shown the presence of defects, where the layers have broken up to form a disordered intergrowth between NbO and SrNbO_3 blocks.

In the reduced part of the Sr-Nb-O system, the following phases have been known for some time, namely Sr_xNbO_3 ,¹ $\text{Sr}_5\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_{16}$,² and $\text{Sr}_7\text{Nb}_6\text{O}_{21}$.³ Recently $\text{SrNb}_8\text{O}_{14}$ ⁴ was found, together with two new reduced phases in the Ba-Nb-O system, $\text{Ba}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ ⁵ and $\text{BaNb}_8\text{O}_{14}$.⁶ The structure of $\text{Ba}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ was found to be an ordered intergrowth of alternating layers of the perovskite type (BaNbO_3)⁷ and an ordered deficient NaCl -type structure (NbO).⁸ The NbO layer consists of Nb_6 octahedra sharing corners in two dimensions, with metal-metal bonds between the Nb atoms. It can also be described as comprising condensed Nb_6O_{12}

clusters.⁹ The Nb_6 octahedra in such a cluster can be coordinated by oxygen atoms according to the scheme $\text{Nb}_6\text{O}_{12}^i\text{O}_6^a$ (Fig. 1a). There are 12 oxygen atoms outside the edges (O^i) and 6 located outside the apices (O^a) of the Nb_6 octahedra. This notation can also be used to describe the connection pattern between octahedral clusters, see e.g. Ref. 10. Some examples of linkage are shown in Fig. 1b.

When the compositions are moved towards the $\text{NbO-Nb}_2\text{O}_5$ binary line of the phase diagram, the NbO layers in $\text{Ba}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ break up. Instead, blocks of corner-sharing Nb_6 octahedra in a perovskite (BaNbO_3) matrix form.

Since a perovskite-type phase corresponding to BaNbO_3 also exists in the Sr-Nb-O system, it was natural to investigate if an $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ phase, isostructural with $\text{Ba}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$, could be prepared. It was also interesting to see if block structures similar to those found in the Ba-Nb-O system could be prepared. This paper will discuss the stoichiometric $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ phase and also briefly the defects found in it.

Experimental

The starting materials used for the preparation were Nb_2O_5 (puriss, 99.9%, Roth Co.; purified of oxide-fluorides by heating in air at 1100°C), Nb (400 mesh), and $\text{Sr}_5\text{Nb}_4\text{O}_{15}$.^{11–13} This latter phase was obtained by heating appropriate amounts SrCO_3 (Baker's analysed) at 1000°C for 24 h, then regrinding and heating again at 1100°C for a further 18 h. The phase composition of the product was checked by means of X-ray powder diffraction patterns. Appropriate amounts of $\text{Sr}_5\text{Nb}_4\text{O}_{15}$, Nb and Nb_2O_5 were ground and pelleted in order to minimise the reaction with the walls of the silica tube. These tubes were evacuated and sealed. Temperatures from 1100 to 1250°C for 1–2 days were normally used, but longer periods were also tested. The tubes were air-quenched. The surfaces of the tablets

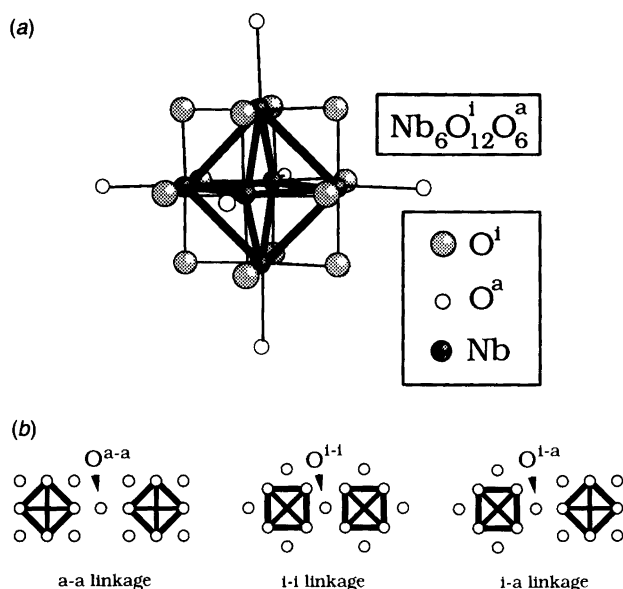


Fig. 1. (a) A $\text{Nb}_6\text{O}_{12}^i\text{O}_6^a$ cluster showing the O^i and O^a atoms. The former are located outside the edges, bonded to two Nb atoms in the same cluster, the latter outside the apices, bonded only to one Nb in the cluster. (b) Examples of inter-cluster connection, O^i , O^a and O^i - O^a linkage.

were always coated by a silicon-containing product which was removed mechanically. X-Ray powder diffraction patterns were taken in a focusing camera of the Guinier-Hägg type, using Cu K α_1 radiation. Silicon [$a = 5.430880(35)$ Å]¹⁴ was added as internal standard. The films were analysed with a film scanner system.¹⁵ The unit cell parameters of Sr₂Nb₅O₉ were refined with the program PIRUM.¹⁶

Electron microscopy studies were made at 200 kV in a Jeol 200CX instrument. The structure model of Sr₂Nb₅O₉ was tested by image calculation according to the multislice method using a local version of the program suite SHRLI¹⁷ and by comparing observed and calculated X-ray powder diffraction patterns.

Results

In the reduced part of the SrO-NbO-Nb₂O₅ system preparations corresponding to Sr_xNbO₃, Sr₂Nb₅O₉, SrNb₈O₁₄ and some intermediate compositions were made.

Sr_xNbO₃ was reported by Ridgley and Ward¹ to have a perovskite type structure. They found that the Sr content x varied from 0.7 to 0.95 and that the unit cell dimension obeyed Vegard's law. Sr_{0.7}NbO₃ had $a = 3.981$ Å, while SrNbO₃ had $a = 4.020$ Å. We also observed varying cell dimensions. A sample with the nominal composition Sr_{1.1}NbO₃ (I) (synthesised at 1100 °C) had $a = 4.0216(2)$ Å, while in a polyphasic sample with the gross composition Sr₂Nb_{5.1}O_{8.8} (II) (synthesised at 1200 °C) the lattice parameter was $a = 3.9951(1)$ Å. In the X-ray powder pattern of sample (I) there were some unidentified lines besides those from SrNbO₃, and in (II) lines from NbO and Sr₂Nb₅O₉ were also seen.

Sr₂Nb₅O₉ formed only at temperatures at or above 1200 °C. Below this temperature only lines corresponding to Sr_xNbO₃ and NbO were found in the powder patterns. At these high temperatures and prevailing reducing conditions the SiO vapour pressure in the silica tubes is high, and silicon-containing products form on the surface of the pellets upon prolonged heating. This decreases the amount of Sr available for the formation of strontium niobates. In the X-ray pattern of a sample with the nominal composition Sr₂Nb_{5.1}O_{8.8} heated at 1250 °C for 3 weeks, only Sr-poor phases such as SrNb₈O₁₄, NbO and α (see below) were observed. Monophasic samples of Sr₂Nb₅O₉ were never obtained. There were always strong lines from both Sr_xNbO₃ present. In most cases Sr₂Nb₅O₉ was the minor phase. Regrinding and reannealing did not increase the amount of Sr₂Nb₅O₉. Once the reflections corresponding to SrNbO₃ and NbO in the diffraction pattern had been removed, all the remaining lines were found to correspond to Sr₂Nb₅O₉, and a least-squares refinement yielded the unit cell parameters $a = 4.1405(4)$ and $c = 12.040(2)$ Å. The observed and calculated d -values are given in Table 1.

To investigate a possible disordered intergrowth between blocks of NbO and perovskite-type blocks, similar to that found in the Ba system,¹⁸ a synthesis with the composition

Table 1. Observed and calculated d -values and X-ray powder intensities for Sr₂Nb₅O₉.

hkl	$d_{\text{obs}}/\text{Å}$	I_{rel}	$d_{\text{calc}}/\text{Å}$	I_{calc}
001	12.11	9	12.04	16
002	6.02	3	6.02	7
100	4.141	9	4.141	13
003			4.013	<1
101	3.921	1	3.916	8
102	3.411	2	3.412	2
004	3.011	3	3.011	3
110	2.927	13	2.928	15
103	2.882	100	2.882	100
111	2.843	55	2.845	57
112	2.632	34	2.633	39
104			2.435	2
005	2.407	1	2.408	1
113	2.365	13	2.365	12
114	2.099	19	2.099	16
105			2.082	4
200	2.070	82	2.070	75
201	2.040	2	2.040	1
006	2.005	42	2.007	34
202	1.958	3	1.958	1
115	1.860	17	1.860	16
210	1.852	4	1.852	3
203			1.840	<1
211			1.830	2
106	1.806	3	1.806	3
212	1.771	2	1.770	1
007			1.720	<1
204	1.706	2	1.706	3
213	1.681	65	1.681	47
116	1.655	7	1.655	7
107			1.584	<1
214			1.577	1
205	1.570	3	1.570	1
008			1.505	<1
117	1.483	7	1.483	10
215			1.468	3
220	1.464	36	1.464	27
221			1.453	<1
206	1.441	69	1.441	52
222	1.422	2	1.422	1
108			1.414	<1
300			1.380	1
223			1.375	<1
301			1.371	1
216	1.361	3	1.361	2
302			1.345	<1
118	1.339	6	1.339	8
009			1.338	<1
207			1.323	<1
224			1.316	1
310	1.309	5	1.309	4
303	1.305	18	1.305	13

SrNb₆O₈ at 1200 °C was made. This composition is on the two-phase line between Sr₂Nb₅O₉ and NbO. In the corresponding X-ray powder diffraction pattern we found lines from NbO (strong),⁸ SrNb₈O₁₄ (weak),⁴ Sr_xNbO₃ (weak)¹ and the $hk0$ reflections from Sr₂Nb₅O₉ (strong). The position of these last lines were slightly shifted compared to Sr₂Nb₅O₉. There were also some new reflections. In the Ba

system¹⁸ a sample with a similar composition gave an X-ray pattern having lines from NbO and the $hk0$ reflections from $\text{Ba}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$, together with some new ones. The more intense of these new reflections and those at positions corresponding to the $hk0$ lines of $\text{Ba}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ could be indexed on the basis of a tetragonal lattice, having the unit cell axes $a = 4.164(1)$ and $c = 4.151(1)$ Å.^{18,19} This "phase" was called A_{def} , but here it will be called α . Such a cell was also found here, having the axes $a = 4.120(1)$ and $c = 4.141(1)$ Å. After the lines corresponding to this cell had been indexed only two weak reflections remained unidentified in the powder pattern. The α "phase" in the barium system corresponds to a two- (three-) dimensional intergrowth of NbO in BaNbO_3 .^{18,19} This is briefly discussed below.

Structure. The similarity in unit cell dimensions and composition between $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ and $\text{Ba}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ ⁵ made it reasonable to assume that they were isostructural. The atomic coordinates for $\text{Ba}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ (slightly shifted) and space group $P4/mmm$, together with the unit cell obtained for $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$, were used to calculate an X-ray powder diffraction pattern for $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$. In this model the following assumptions were made; (1) the Nb_6 octahedra are given cubic symmetry, with their size determined by the length of the a -axis, and (2) the Sr positions are fully occupied. The atomic coordinates used for the calculated X-ray powder diffraction pattern and the simulated lattice images are given in Table 2. As seen in Table 1, only minor differences exist between the observed and calculated intensities. The observed X-ray pattern corresponds to a sample with the nominal composition $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_{5.1}\text{O}_{8.8}$. The intensities in Table 1 were used to calculate $R_I = \sum |I_{\text{obs}} - I_{\text{cal}}| / I_{\text{obs}} = 18\%$. The model was not refined, since there were relatively strong reflections from both SrNbO_3 and NbO present in the diffraction patterns which affect the line profiles.

Analogous to $\text{Ba}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$, the structure is built up from alternating layers of SrNbO_3 (perovskite) and NbO (ordered deficient NaCl), Fig. 2. The perovskite layers are two unit cells, and the NbO layers one unit cell thick, having boundary atoms in common. The bond lengths are reasonable and similar to those found in $\text{Ba}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$. The Nb_6O_{12}

Table 2. Atomic coordinates for $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ used for calculated X-ray powder diffraction pattern and lattice image simulations.^a

Atom	x	y	z
Sr	0.0	0.0	0.1694
Nb(1)	0.0	0.5	0.5
Nb(2)	0.5	0.5	0.3280
Nb(3)	0.5	0.5	0.0
O(1)	0.5	0.0	0.0
O(2)	0.5	0.5	0.165
O(3)	0.5	0.0	0.329
O(4)	0.0	0.0	0.5

^aSpace group $P4/mmm$; $a = 4.1405(4)$, $c = 12.040(2)$ Å; $V = 206.41$ Å³.

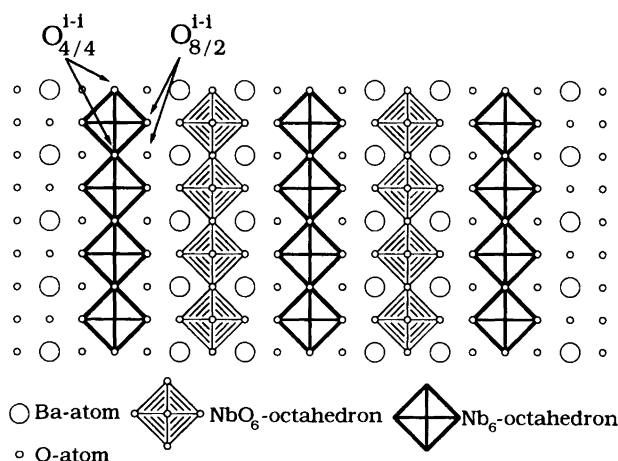


Fig. 2. An idealized structure model of $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$, viewed along the a -axis. The Nb-Nb bonds in the Nb_6 octahedra in the single NbO layer are heavily outlined. Note that there are $-\text{Nb}-\text{O}-\text{Nb}-\text{O}$ chains projecting below all outer corners of the Nb_6 octahedra; only the oxygen atoms are shown. The double perovskite layer consists of one whole and two half Nb_6 octahedra and shares half of its niobium atoms with the NbO layer. In the model only the complete Nb_6 octahedra are outlined. The connection pattern of the O atoms in the clusters is marked.

clusters in the NbO layer have Nb-Nb bond lengths of 2.928 Å. This is slightly shorter than the value of 2.948 Å in $\text{Ba}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$. A more thorough description of that structure has been given in Ref. 5.

High-resolution electron microscopy. A lattice image of a $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ crystal taken along $\langle 100 \rangle$ is shown in Fig. 3. The image can be described as a square net of dark spots 2.9 Å apart. Diagonally to this net, dark rows are seen separated by ca. 12 Å. The square net corresponds to Sr and the Nb

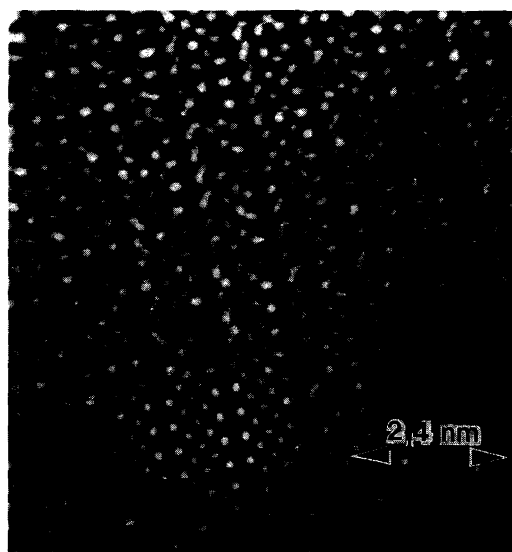


Fig. 3. HREM image of $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ viewed along the a -axis. In the image a calculated image has been inserted (defocus -600 Å, objective aperture size 0.41 Å⁻¹, thickness 21 Å).

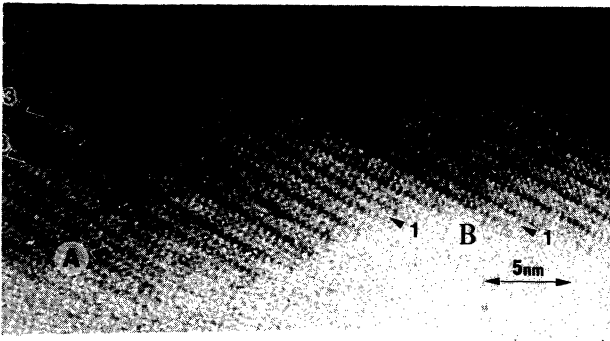


Fig. 4. HREM image of a crystal found in a sample with the nominal composition $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_{8.8}$. The main part of the crystal is stoichiometric $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$, but in the region shown there are some defects. There are perovskite slabs having an extra layer of octahedra (arrows marked 3) and those with one layer missing (arrows marked 1). In connection with the wider perovskite slabs an area (A) with more complicated defects is seen. The structure is shifted along the c -axis twice. In connection with this a 2×2 block of dark contrast is found, corresponding to 2×2 corner-sharing Nb_6 octahedra. In one of the dark rows one dark spot is missing which should correspond to a missing projected column of Nb_6 octahedra. Tentative models of the areas marked A and B are shown in Figs. 5a and 5b.

atoms in the perovskite layer, and the dark rows to the Nb atoms in NbO layers in $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$. Note that at this degree of defocusing there is no significant difference in contrast between the Sr and Nb atoms in the perovskite layer. A simulated image of $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ has been inserted into the image. The agreement between observed and simulated images is reasonable.

In the same sample, the crystal shown in Fig. 4 was found. The main part of this crystal consists of stoichiometric $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$, but in the region shown defects are present. Perovskite-type slabs of smaller as well as larger spacing compared to $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ are seen, indicated by the arrows marked 1 and 3, respectively. In one part of the defect, the dark rows corresponding to NbO layers are shifted by $c/2$, and are shifted back after ca. 16 \AA . In connection with these shifts, a more disordered region is present, marked A.

Tentative models of the defects marked A and B in the lattice image are shown in Figs. 5a and 5b, respectively. In the region interpreted, it is assumed that the structural elements extend through the whole thickness of the crystal. The bonding distances in the models are all in the same range as found in $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$. The defects with thinner (denoted 1) and wider (denoted 3) perovskite-type slabs represent homologues with a missing and an extra SrNbO_3 octahedral layer, respectively. The thin slabs consist of only a single perovskite unit. In the image shown, there are two such thin layers separated by two "normal" $\text{Sr}_2\text{Nb}_5\text{O}_9$ layers. These thin slabs share all their niobium atoms with the adjacent NbO layers (Fig. 5b). Alternatively they can be described as single SrO layers between NbO layers. The similarity in scattering power of Sr and Nb makes it hard to say if the dark spots in the perovskite slabs correspond to Sr

or Nb atoms. A simple charge balance calculation gives no definite answer. However, since no Nb–O binary phase containing both Nb_6O_{12} clusters and NbO_6 octahedra is known, it seems more reasonable to assume that the layers consist of SrO. As stated above, there is a more disordered region A in connection with the defects with wider perovskite slabs (arrowed 3 in Fig. 4). There are also other types of defects found. Parts of this area are hard to interpret unequivocally, but a tentative model is shown in Fig. 5a.

In the same crystal, areas where the alternating slabs of NbO and perovskite types have locally broken up were also found. Then there are isolated NbO blocks of corner-sharing Nb_6 octahedra. These blocks are of the same type as reported for the barium system in Refs. 18 and 19. An example is shown in Fig. 6, together with a tentative model of the image. In this model the perovskite parts between the NbO blocks have been arranged so as to maximize the number of Sr atoms.

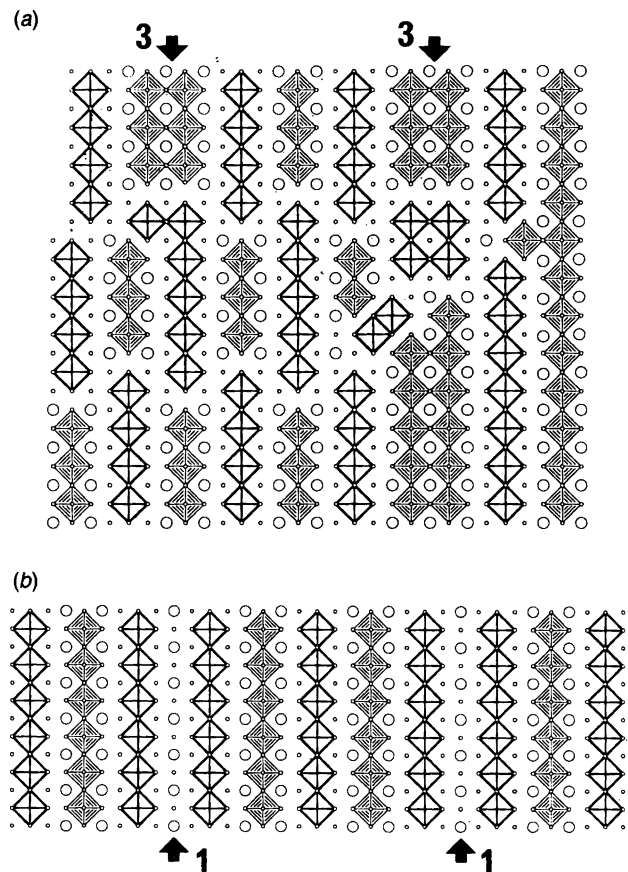


Fig. 5. Tentative models of the regions marked A and B in the HREM image shown in Fig. 4. The Nb_6 octahedra in the Nb_6O_{12} cluster are heavily outlined. (a) This model shows a region (A) with more complicated defects. The extra wide perovskite layers (arrows marked 3) are unequivocally interpreted, but the other defect models are more tentative, since it is impossible to distinguish between Sr and Nb at this defocus. (b) The defect (B) with a single perovskite layer (arrows marked 1 in Fig. 4). In the perovskite layer all remaining Nb atoms are shared with the NbO layer. This single layer can also be described as an SrO layer inserted between layers of condensed Nb_6O_{12} clusters.

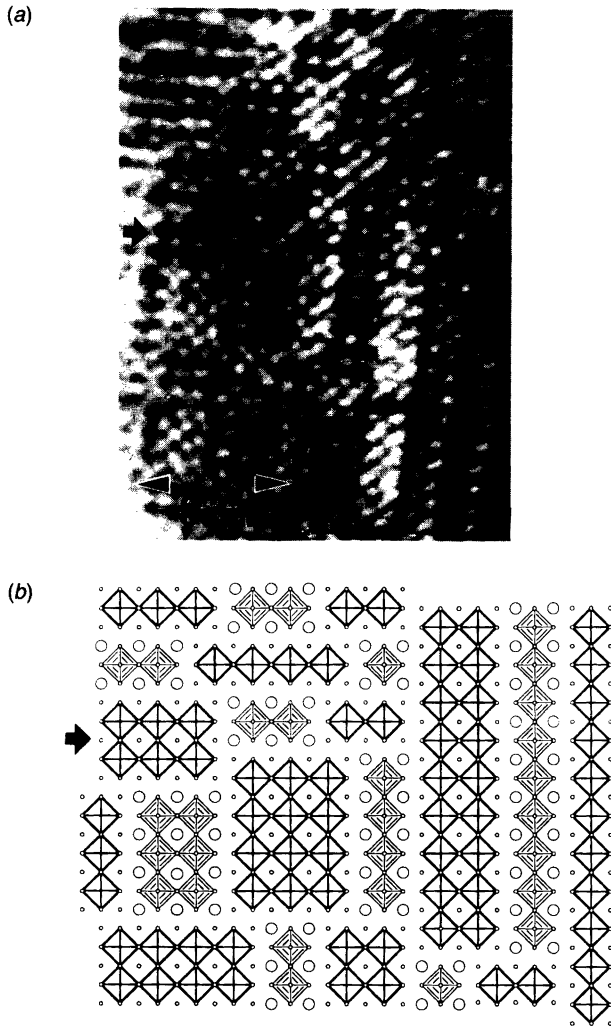


Fig. 6. (a) A lattice image of an area found in the same crystal as shown in Fig. 4. It can be described as blocks of dark spots separated by 4 Å. Between these blocks are areas with lighter contrast separated by 2.9 Å. The blocks can be interpreted as consisting of corner-sharing Nb₆ octahedra (or NbO–Nb₆O₁₂ clusters), inserted in a perovskite lattice, (SrNbO₃). (b) A tentative model of a part of the image. The perovskite blocks between the NbO blocks are independently oriented so as to maximize the amount of Sr. The arrows highlight the same NbO block in the image and in the model.

As described in Ref. 18, a shift of the composition of the samples towards the NbO–Nb₂O₅ binary line in the phase diagram of the BaO–NbO–Nb₂O₅ system increases the number of block structure crystals. In the sample of composition SrNb₆O₈ discussed above, several such crystals were found. This type of intergrowth will be discussed in some detail elsewhere.¹⁹

Discussion

The unit cell of Sr₂Nb₅O₉ is slightly smaller than that of Ba₂Nb₅O₉. This difference reflects the smaller size of the unit cell of SrNbO₃ compared to BaNbO₃. The size difference between BaNbO₃ and NbO is quite small. When forming Ba₂Nb₅O₉, an intergrowth of these structures, the BaNbO₃ parts have expanded by 1.02% and NbO has decreased by 0.97%. SrNbO₃ is smaller than BaNbO₃, and consequently the size difference between SrNbO₃ and NbO is larger, 4.5%. It is mainly the *c*-axis in Sr₂Nb₅O₉ that has shrunk in comparison with that in Ba₂Nb₅O₉. The shortening along the *a*-axis in Sr₂Nb₅O₉ is limited by the size of the Nb₆ octahedra, which may act as a framework, obstructing a full decrease in length. The *c*-axis is not affected by this constraint, and can therefore shrink freely.

The frequency of defects in “stoichiometric” Sr₂Nb₅O₉ crystals was higher than in Ba₂Nb₅O₉, as found in HREM studies.

The two defect types, with thinner and wider perovskite layers between the NbO slabs, can be considered as being members with *n* = 1 and 3, respectively, of a homologous series Sr_{*n*}Nb_{3+*n*}O_{3+*n*}. Defects representing the same members, as well as some with higher *n*-values, have been observed in the Ba system. No ordered homologues have been found, however.

It is interesting to compare this structure with the one obtained for SrNb₈O₁₄ by Köhler *et al.*⁴ That structure also contains NbO₆ octahedra and Nb₆O₁₂ clusters. In contrast to Sr₂Nb₅O₉, it has discrete metal clusters, which are connected via oxygen atoms, forming chains. The connection pattern is [Nb₆O_{2/2}ⁱ⁻ⁱO₈O₂^{i-a}]₂O₂^{a-a}O_{4/2}^{a-a}, while in Sr₂Nb₅O₉ it is Sr₂Nb₅O₉ = “Sr₂NbO₂·Nb₄O₇” = “Sr₂NbO₂·Nb₂Nb_{4/2}O_{4/2}ⁱ⁻ⁱO_{8/2}O₂^{a-a}”. The O_{4/4}ⁱ⁻ⁱ and O_{8/2}ⁱ⁻ⁱ atoms are marked in Fig. 2.

A simple charge-balance calculation gives the oxidation number +4 for Nb(3) in the Sr₂Nb₅O₉ perovskite layer. Then the number of electrons involved in metal–metal bonding in the cluster is 10 per unit cell, which is close to the 9 per unit cell found in NbO. This is also reflected in the similarity of the Nb–Nb bond lengths, 2.93 Å in Sr₂Nb₅O₉ and 2.97 Å in NbO. This number of electrons should be compared with the value of 14–16 found in structures having discrete clusters, e.g. SrNb₈O₁₄,⁴ Mg₃Nb₆O₁₁,^{20,21} Mn₃Nb₆O₁₁,²¹ NaNb₁₀O₁₈,²² and BaNb₈O₁₄.⁶ Na(Si,Nb)Nb₁₀O₁₉²³ has 14.33, Na₃Al₂Nb₃₄O₆₄²³ has 15 and Na(V_{3-x}Nb_x)Nb₆O₁₂²⁴ has 16.

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