

Article

Photoluminescence Properties of X-Ray Generated Divalent Sm in Mechanochemically Prepared Nanocrystalline CaF₂:Sm³⁺

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Abstract: In this study, the mechanochemical preparation of nanocrystalline CaF₂:Sm³⁺ by ball milling calcium acetate hydrate, samarium (III) acetate hydrate, and ammonium fluoride is reported. The photoluminescence of the as-prepared CaF₂:Sm³⁺ shows predominantly Sm³⁺ ⁴G_{5/2} → ⁶H_J (*J* = 5/2, 7/2, 9/2, and 11/2) f-f luminescence, but intense electric dipole allowed 4f⁵5d (T_{1u}) → 4f⁶7F₁ (T_{1g}) luminescence by Sm²⁺ was generated upon X-irradiation. In comparison with the co-precipitated CaF₂:Sm³⁺, the conversion of Sm³⁺ → Sm²⁺ in the ball-milled sample upon X-irradiation is significantly lower. Importantly, the present results indicate that the crystallite size and X-ray storage phosphor properties of the lanthanide-doped nanocrystalline CaF₂ can be modified by adjusting the ball milling time, dopant concentration and post-annealing treatment, yielding crystallite sizes as low as 6 nm under specific experimental conditions.

Keywords: ball milling; dopant concentration; post-annealing treatment; calcium fluoride; samarium



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1. Introduction

CaF₂ belongs to the alkaline earth metal fluoride (MF₂) compounds which crystallize in the cubic structure with the *Fm* $\bar{3}$ *m* space group [1,2]. The Ca²⁺ ions lie at the nodes in the face-centred lattice, while F⁻ lies at the centre of the octants [3,4]. There has been growing interest in studying the optical properties of lanthanide (Ln)-doped CaF₂ due to its high transmittance properties from the far-UV to the mid-IR range, and the high chemical resistance and low refractive index of this host [5].

Nanocrystalline CaF₂:Ln has been prepared by a wide variety of methods, such as co-precipitation [6–8], the sol–gel process [9], hydrothermal synthesis [10,11], and thermal decomposition of precursors [12]. In recent years, high-energy ball milling has increasingly been applied to synthesize stoichiometric and non-stoichiometric solid solutions with minimal or solvent free routes [13–16]. In this process, the mechanical energy caused by the high speed collision of balls in the ball milling jar forces the reagents to react and turn into fine powders that can be on the nanoscale [17]. This method has advantages of increasing the material reactivity, and uniformity of the spatial distribution of elements, and in reducing the possibility of multi-phase formation [18,19]. Heise et al. successfully synthesized Eu³⁺-doped MF₂ (M = Ca, Sr, and Ba) powders by ball milling M(OAc)₂, Eu(OAc)₃ and NH₄F, and crystallite sizes in the range of 12 to 18 nm were obtained [20]. Molaiyan and Witter also reported the preparation of the CaF₂:Sm³⁺ electrolyte by ball milling anhydrous CaF₂ and SmF₃ in stoichiometric compositions of Sm_{1–y}Ca_yF_{3–y} (0 ≤ *y* ≤ 0.15), using a Tanchen planetary ball mill [15]. Although ball milling is a facile method for preparing nanocrystalline powders, this method has still not been widely applied for the preparation of MF₂:Ln materials for optical applications.

We have previously reported that nanocrystalline $\text{CaF}_2:\text{Sm}^{3+}$ prepared by a co-precipitation method can serve as a relatively efficient photoluminescent X-ray storage phosphor, with the storage mechanism based on the reduction of Sm^{3+} to Sm^{2+} upon exposure to X-irradiation [21]. It is worth noting that in this case about 65% of trivalent Sm was successfully converted to divalent Sm upon 850 Gy X-irradiation. Samarium-doped systems can be highly sensitive to X-rays, and there is continued interest in identifying potential candidates that display the fast X-ray conversion of Sm^{3+} to Sm^{2+} for applications in dosimetry and computed radiography. In the present study, we report the mechanochemical synthesis of nanocrystalline $\text{CaF}_2:\text{Sm}^{3+}$ by ball milling $\text{Ca}(\text{OAc})_2$, $\text{Sm}(\text{OAc})_3$, and NH_4F at room temperature. The synthesized powders were characterized by XRD, electron microscopy, and luminescence spectroscopy. The effects of the ball milling time, Sm concentration, and post-annealing on the generation of Sm^{2+} by X-ray were investigated in detail using photoluminescence measurements.

2. Results and Discussion

The XRD patterns of nanocrystalline $\text{CaF}_2:0.1\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$, which were prepared by ball milling for periods of 1, 3, 5 and 8 h, are shown in Figure 1a. In Figure 1b, the XRD patterns of $\text{CaF}_2:y\text{Sm}^{3+}$ ball milled for 8 h with different concentrations of Sm^{3+} ($0 \leq y \leq 5\%$) are illustrated. Finally, in Figure 1c, the XRD patterns of $\text{CaF}_2:0.1\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$ (8 h ball milling period) annealed at temperatures of 200, 300, and 400 °C are shown. The patterns were compared with the standard CaF_2 data (PDF-1000043) taken from the Crystallography Open Database [22]. Results from Rietveld refinements obtained by the MAUD 2.93 [23] software package are summarized in Table 1. The goodness of fit $G = R_{wp}/R_{exp}$ is <1.5 for all refinements, i.e., implying good fits [24]. As follows from the figures, all the prominent peaks could be indexed to the cubic CaF_2 structure with the $Fm\bar{3}m$ space group [1,2].

As observed in Figure 1a, impurity peaks are still visible after 1 h of milling. A more complete phase formation of nanocrystalline CaF_2 can be observed after 3 h. Importantly, prolonged ball milling broadened the diffractions peaks, and this was caused by the decrease of the average crystallite size of $\text{CaF}_2:0.1\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$ from 12 ± 1 to 8 ± 1 nm for ball milling times of 1 to 8 h (Table 1a). A 0.14% expansion of the lattice parameter was also observed with this decrease in the crystallite size. It is noted here that the use of hydrated salts in ball milling may accelerate the formation of $\text{CaF}_2:y\text{Sm}^{3+}$ due to the higher mobility of ions and this was also previously observed in the preparation of nanocrystalline BaFCl [25].

Interestingly, a reduction of the average crystallite size of $\text{CaF}_2:y\text{Sm}^{3+}$ from 12 ± 1 to 6 ± 1 nm (Table 1b) was observed when the Sm^{3+} concentration was increased from 0 to 5%. The lattice parameter also increased by 0.17% in this case. The latter is most likely caused by the mechanism of charge compensation as Sm^{3+} substitutes Ca^{2+} . The excess positive charge must be compensated by defects such as O^{2-} impurity ions, substituting F^- in the lattice, and/or interstitial F^- . Also, the electronic repulsion of the ions may increase the lattice parameter [26,27]. Importantly, Sm^{3+} can easily substitute Ca^{2+} in the O_h symmetry with eightfold (bcc) coordination, due to their similar ionic radii ($\text{Sm}^{3+} = 1.08 \text{ \AA}$, compared to $\text{Ca}^{2+} = 1.12 \text{ \AA}$) [28] and, importantly, phase purity is retained for Sm^{3+} concentrations up to 5%.

As follows from Figure 1c, the annealing of $\text{CaF}_2:0.1\% \text{Sm}^{3+}$ at 200, 300, and 400 °C significantly narrowed the diffraction peaks. From the Rietveld refinements, average crystallite sizes of 12, 22, and 46 ± 1 nm were obtained, respectively, for these annealing temperatures (Table 1c). The crystallite size appeared to grow by $\sim T^{3.4}$ upon annealing up to 400 °C. Notably, at the higher annealing temperature of 1100 °C, the crystallographic phase purity of $\text{CaF}_2:0.1\% \text{Sm}^{3+}$ is lost, and multiple additional phases are observed in the XRD pattern.

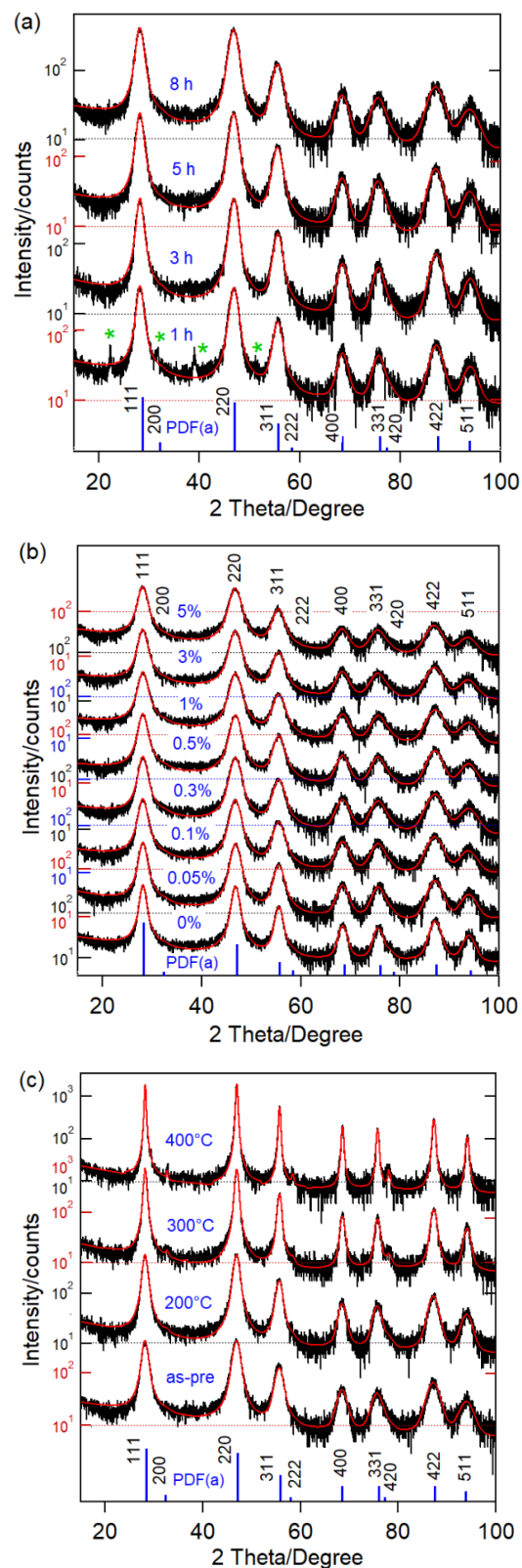


Figure 1. XRD patterns (semi-logarithmic plot) of (a) nanocrystalline CaF₂:0.1% Sm³⁺ prepared by ball milling for 1, 3, 5 and 8 h, (b) nanocrystalline CaF₂:ySm³⁺ with different concentrations of Sm³⁺ ($0 \leq y \leq 5\%$) ball milled for 8 h, and (c) nanocrystalline CaF₂:0.1%Sm³⁺ as prepared by ball milling for 8 h and subsequently annealed at 200, 300, and 400 °C. Experimental data and Rietveld refinements are shown as black and red lines, respectively. The standard data of cubic CaF₂ (PDF-1000043) is shown in blue. The green asterisks indicate impurity phases.

Table 1. Summary of XRD results obtained from Rietveld refinements. R_{wp} and R_{exp} are the weighted-profile R -factor and expected R -factor. G is the goodness of fit (R_{wp}/R_{exp}).

| (a) Ball milling time CaF ₂ : 0.1% Sm ³⁺ | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|----------------|------|
| Time (h) | Average crystallite size ± 1 (nm) | Lattice parameter, a (Å) | Rietveld refinement | | |
| | | | R_{wp} % | R_{exp} % | G |
| 1 | 12 | 5.4754 ± 0.0012 | 18.9 | 14.5 | 1.30 |
| 3 | 11 | 5.4763 ± 0.0010 | 19.0 | 15.1 | 1.26 |
| 5 | 9 | 5.4823 ± 0.0012 | 19.4 | 14.9 | 1.30 |
| 8 | 8 | 5.4832 ± 0.0013 | 18.5 | 14.9 | 1.24 |
| (b) Concentration of Sm ³⁺ CaF ₂ : y Sm ³⁺ , 8 h ball milling time | | | | | |
| y % | Average crystallite size ± 1 (nm) | Lattice parameter, a (Å) | Rietveld refinement | | |
| | | | R_{wp} % | R_{exp} % | G |
| 0 | 12 | 5.4824 ± 0.0011 | 15.9 | 13.9 | 1.14 |
| 0.05 | 11 | 5.4826 ± 0.0012 | 16.8 | 13.8 | 1.22 |
| 0.1 | 9 | 5.4832 ± 0.0013 | 18.5 | 14.9 | 1.24 |
| 0.3 | 9 | 5.4838 ± 0.0012 | 17.4 | 14.4 | 1.21 |
| 0.5 | 8 | 5.4844 ± 0.0011 | 17.8 | 15.2 | 1.17 |
| 1 | 8 | 5.4864 ± 0.0010 | 17.3 | 14.6 | 1.18 |
| 3 | 7 | 5.4880 ± 0.0014 | 17.1 | 14.5 | 1.18 |
| 5 | 6 | 5.4915 ± 0.0017 | 17.2 | 14.6 | 1.18 |
| (c) Annealing temperature CaF ₂ : 0.1% Sm ³⁺ , 8 h ball milling time | | | | | |
| Temp. (°C) | Average crystallite size ± 1 (nm) | Lattice parameter, a (Å) | Rietveld refinement | | |
| | | | R_{wp} % | R_{exp} % | G |
| as-pre | 9 | 5.4774 ± 0.0011 | 20.9 | 15.0 | 1.39 |
| 200 | 12 | 5.4753 ± 0.0007 | 19.3 | 15.4 | 1.25 |
| 300 | 22 | 5.4701 ± 0.0004 | 18.7 | 15.3 | 1.22 |
| 400 | 45 | 5.4687 ± 0.0002 | 18.7 | 15.2 | 1.23 |

Typical TEM micrographs of CaF₂:0.1%Sm³⁺ prepared by ball milling are displayed in Figure 2. The observed particle size distribution was in qualitative agreement with the average crystallite sizes obtained from the Rietveld refinements. In particular, annealing the sample to 400 °C significantly increased the particle size. A micrograph of CaF₂:0.5%Sm³⁺ prepared by co-precipitation [21] with an average crystallite size of 46 ± 1 nm is shown in Figure 2e for comparison.

Photoluminescence spectra of nanocrystalline CaF₂:0.1%Sm³⁺ prepared by ball milling for 8 h before and after 360 Gy X-irradiation (Cu-K α) are shown in Figure 3. Sm³⁺ emission lines centred at 566, 604, 645 and 704 nm (Figure 3a) correspond to ⁴G_{5/2} → ⁶H_{*J*} (*J* = 5/2, 7/2, 9/2, and 11/2) f-f transitions, respectively [29–31]. Sm³⁺ ⁴G_{5/2} → ⁶H_{5/2} and ⁶H_{7/2} transitions contain magnetic and electric dipole contributions that obey the selection rules $\Delta J = 0, \pm 1$, while the other two transitions ⁴G_{5/2} → ⁶H_{9/2} and ⁶H_{11/2} are purely electric dipole transitions ($\Delta J \leq 6$) [32]. The symmetry of the local environment of the trivalent 4f ions can be identified by the relative intensity ratio of electric dipole to magnetic dipole transitions ($I_R = {}^4G_{5/2} \rightarrow {}^6H_{9/2} / {}^4G_{5/2} \rightarrow {}^6H_{5/2}$) [33]. The present work indicates that most of the Sm³⁺ ions occupied the inversion symmetry sites of the CaF₂ host lattice, since the

IR is <1 [33–35]. Note however that charge compensation will in principle lower the site symmetry.

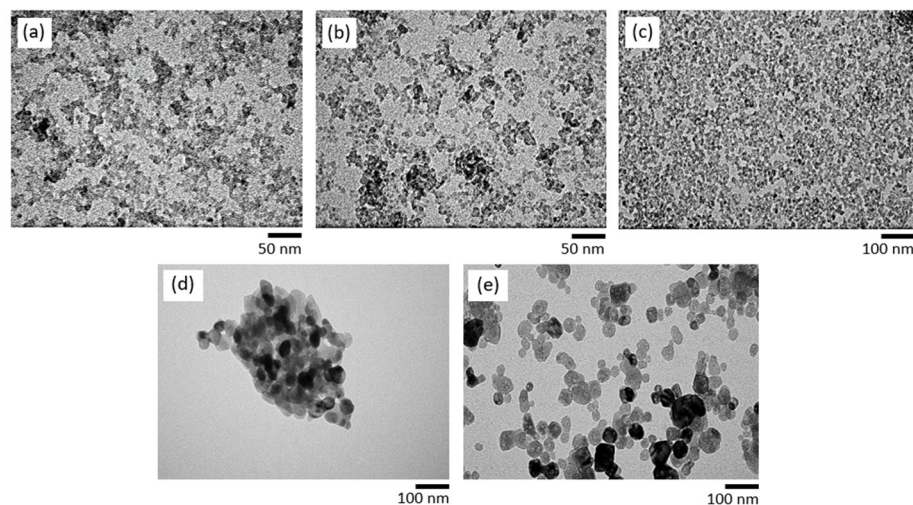


Figure 2. TEM micrographs of nanocrystalline CaF₂:0.1%Sm³⁺, ball milled for (a) 3 h and (b) 8 h, annealed at (c) 200 °C, (d) 400 °C, and (e) nanocrystalline CaF₂:0.5%Sm³⁺ prepared by co-precipitation.

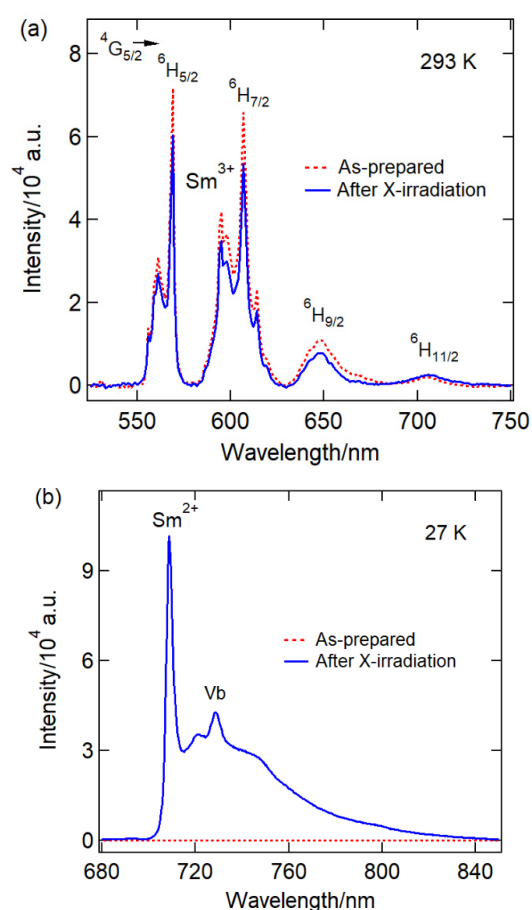


Figure 3. Photoluminescence spectra of nanocrystalline CaF₂:0.1% Sm³⁺ prepared by ball milling for 8 h, before and after 360 Gy X-irradiation. (a) Region of Sm³⁺ luminescence at 293 K and (b) region of the Sm²⁺ 4f⁵5d (T_{1u}) → 4f⁶7F₁ (T_{1g}) emission at 27 K.

Upon 360 Gy X-irradiation, the luminescence of Sm³⁺ decreased, as is seen in Figure 3a, accompanied by the rise in the electric dipole allowed Sm²⁺ 4f⁵5d (T_{1u}) → 4f⁶7F₁ (T_{1g})

transition at 708.2 nm with vibronic side bands (transverse optical phonon mode of CaF₂ due to the O_h⁵ group symmetry) (Figure 3b) [36–38]. Note that the Sm²⁺ emission is temperature-dependent and very broad at room temperature [39–41]. We stress here that no Sm²⁺ luminescence was observed before X-irradiation, indicating that the Sm ions entered the CaF₂ host lattice in their +3 oxidation state. In contrast, Liu et al. reported the presence of Sm²⁺ emission lines in the absence of X-irradiation in nanocrystalline BaFCl:Sm³⁺ prepared by ball milling [25].

In Figure 4, the photoluminescence spectra of nanocrystalline CaF₂:0.1%Sm³⁺ are depicted as a function of ball milling time. As follows from Figure 4a, the luminescence of Sm³⁺ increased with a longer milling time. In contrast, the generation of Sm²⁺ upon X-irradiation gradually decreased with increasing ball milling time (Figure 4b). This may be due to better embedding and charge compensation for longer ball milling times, e.g., the closer proximity of the charge compensators to the Sm³⁺ ions. It is also possible that with longer ball milling times, more defects are generated, facilitating efficient non-radiative deactivation paths for the Sm²⁺.

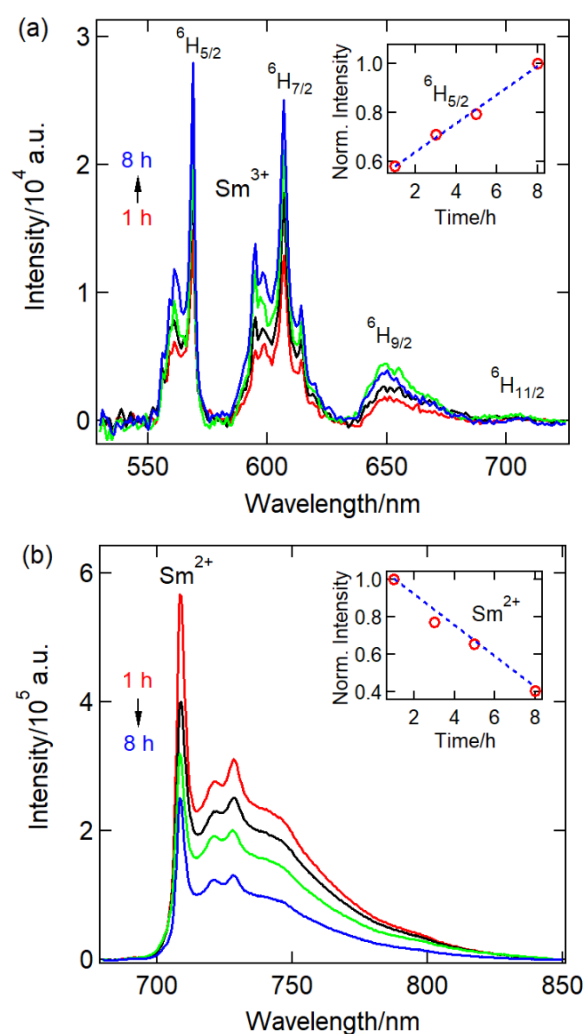


Figure 4. Photoluminescence spectra of nanocrystalline CaF₂:0.1% Sm³⁺ prepared by ball milling for 1, 3, 5, and 8 h (red, black, green and blue traces, respectively). (a) Sm³⁺ region at 293 K of the as-prepared sample and (b) Sm²⁺ 4f⁵5d (T_{1u}) → 4f⁶7F₁ (T_{1g}) region at 27 K after 135 Gy X-irradiation. The insets show corresponding integrated intensities (red circles are data points; the blue dotted line is a guide to the eye) as a function of ball milling time.

Photoluminescence spectra of nanocrystalline CaF₂:ySm³⁺ doped with different concentrations of Sm³⁺ (0.05% ≤ y ≤ 5%), and ball milled for 8 h are shown in Figure 5. As is

seen in Figure 5a, the intensity of the Sm^{3+} luminescence lines of the as-prepared sample increased with the Sm^{3+} concentration for up to 1%, and then decreased with higher concentrations. Interestingly, the same trend was observed for the Sm^{2+} luminescence (upon 135 Gy X-irradiation) (Figure 5b). This concentration dependence is most likely due to quenching for concentrations higher than 1%, induced by rapid excitation energy transfer between the Sm ions that leads to non-radiative deactivation at trap sites [42].

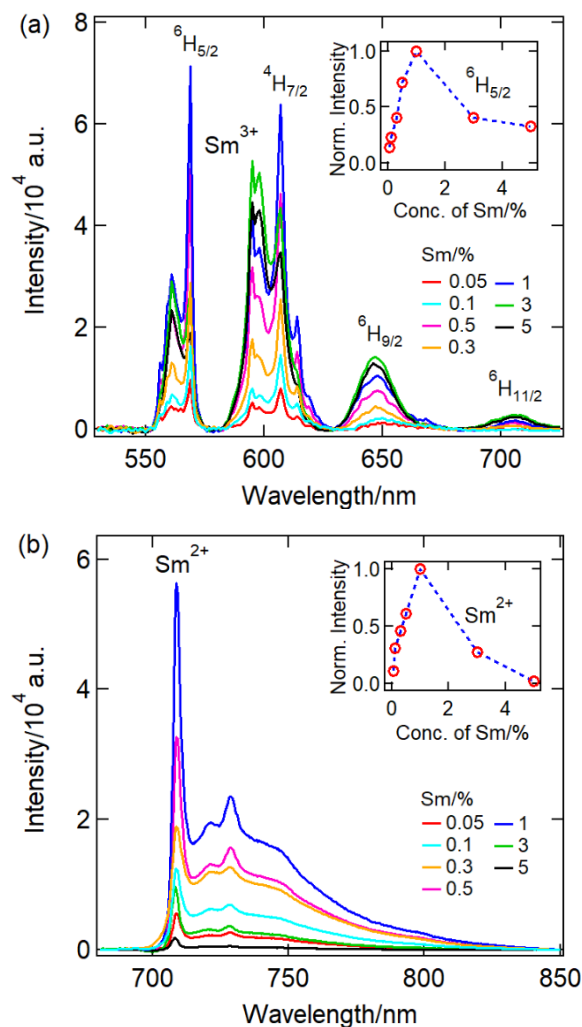


Figure 5. Photoluminescence spectra of $\text{CaF}_2:y\text{Sm}^{3+}$ with $0.05\% \leq y \leq 5\%$ in the region of (a) Sm^{3+} at 293 K of the as-prepared sample and (b) $\text{Sm}^{2+} 4f^55d (T_{1u}) \rightarrow 4f^67F_1 (T_{1g})$ at 27 K upon 135 Gy X-irradiation. Integrated intensities of (a) $\text{Sm}^{3+} 4G_{5/2} \rightarrow 6H_{5/2}$ and (b) the Sm^{2+} emission band as a function of Sm concentration are shown in the insets.

In Figure 6, the effect of post-annealing for 1 h at 200, 300, and 400 °C on the luminescence of nanocrystalline $\text{CaF}_2:0.1\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$ (ball milled for 8 h) is summarized. The figure shows that both the Sm^{3+} luminescence of the as-prepared sample (Figure 6a) and the Sm^{2+} luminescence of the X-irradiated samples (Figure 6b) became significantly stronger with increasing annealing temperature. The normalized photoluminescence intensity of the Sm^{3+} and Sm^{2+} emissions followed a $T^{2.4}$ and $T^{2.6}$ power law, respectively. An increase in the photoluminescence intensity of the $\text{Sm}^{3+/2+}$ with increased temperature was previously observed by Liu et al. for $\text{BaFCl}:\text{Sm}^{3+}$ [43].

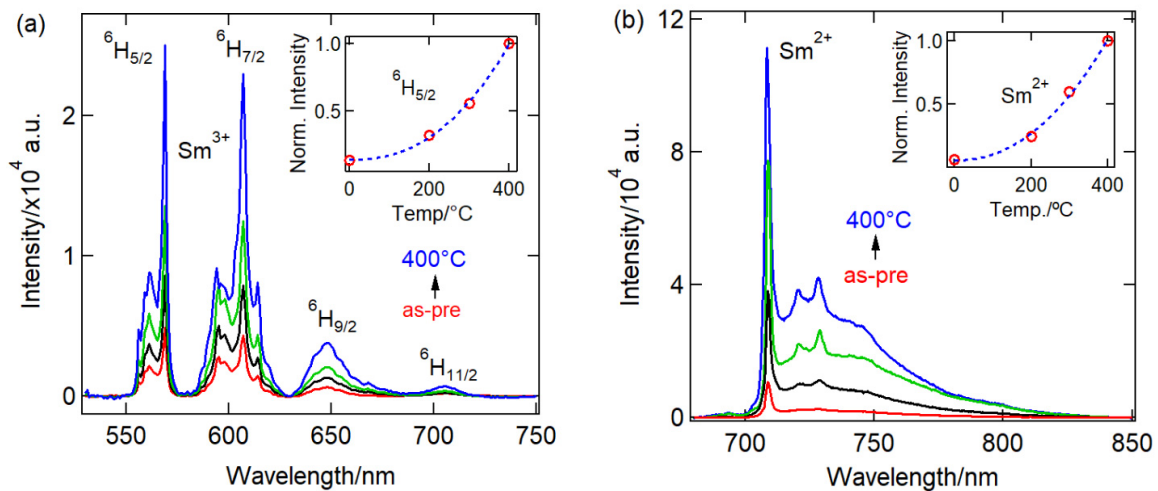


Figure 6. Photoluminescence spectra of $\text{CaF}_2:0.1\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$ annealed at 200, 300, and 400 °C for 1 h in air. (a) Sm^{3+} region of the as-prepared sample at 293 K, (b) Sm^{2+} region of the 135 Gy X-irradiated sample at 27 K. The insets of (a,b) show normalized intensities of Sm^{3+} and Sm^{2+} luminescence, respectively (red circles are data points; the blue dotted lines are exponential fits).

In Figure 7 a comparison is shown between the Sm^{2+} luminescence of X-irradiated (100 Gy) nanocrystalline $\text{CaF}_2:0.5\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$ prepared by co-precipitation (CPT), and as-prepared (as well as annealed at 400 °C) $\text{CaF}_2:0.5\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$ prepared by 8 h of ball milling (BM). As seen from the inset of this figure, the Sm^{2+} generation of BM $\text{CaF}_2:0.5\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$ significantly increased by a factor of 23 after annealing at 400 °C, with crystallite size increasing from 8 nm to 44 nm. In addition, both CPT $\text{CaF}_2:0.5\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$ and annealed BM $\text{CaF}_2:0.5\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$ had similar average crystallite sizes of 46 nm and 44 nm, respectively. However, in comparison with the CPT sample, the Sm^{2+} luminescence intensity of the annealed BM sample was lowered by a factor of 3 after 100 Gy X-irradiation. This indicated a faster $\text{Sm}^{3+} \rightarrow \text{Sm}^{2+}$ conversion upon X-irradiation in the CPT sample when compared to the BM samples. In the BM sample the trivalent Sm^{3+} may be more stabilized by a charge compensator due to the prolonged milling and annealing time, enabling ionic rearrangements of the lattice [44]. However, multiple extra peaks in the Sm^{3+} luminescence were noted in BM $\text{CaF}_2:0.5\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$ upon annealing at the higher temperature of 1100 °C. This may be related to the extra phases observed in the XRD pattern, which are possibly due to the generation of some oxyfluoride phases.

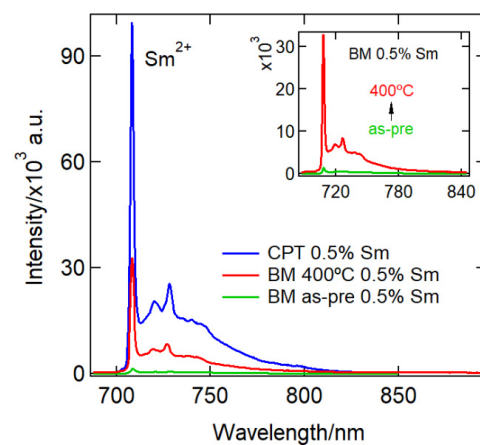
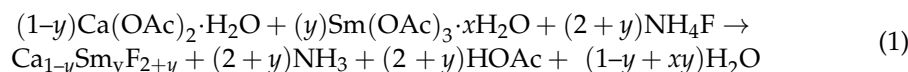


Figure 7. Comparison of photoluminescence spectra of nanocrystalline $\text{CaF}_2:0.5\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$ prepared by co-precipitation (CPT) and as-prepared (as well as annealed at 400 °C) $\text{CaF}_2:0.5\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$ prepared by 8 h of ball milling (BM). The inset shows a 3x magnification of BM $\text{CaF}_2:0.5\%\text{Sm}^{3+}$.

3. Experimental Methods

Nanocrystalline $\text{CaF}_2:y\text{Sm}^{3+}$ ($y = \text{mol}\%$) was prepared by ball milling $\text{Ca}(\text{OAc})_2 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$ (May & Baker Ltd., Essex, England), $\text{Sm}(\text{OAc})_3 \cdot x\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (Sigma Aldrich, Australia), and NH_4F (Sigma Aldrich) according to the following solid-state reaction:



Reagents (with $y = 0.1\%$) were premixed and ground using a mortar and pestle before being transferred into a 12 mL zirconia ball mill jar with six 5 mm diameter zirconia balls. The mixtures were then ball milled for 1, 3, 5 or 8 h to investigate the dependence of physical properties on ball milling time. The ball milling was performed using a Planetary Mill (Pulverisette 7 from Fritsch, Germany) at 10 Hz. The mixture obtained was dried overnight in an oven (Labec, Model H323, Marrickville, Australia) at 60 °C. The final product was then ground using a mortar and pestle to yield a homogenous nanocrystalline powder. Nanocrystalline $\text{CaF}_2:y\text{Sm}^{3+}$ powders with different Sm concentrations ($y = 0, 0.05, 0.1, 0.3, 0.5, 1, 3,$ and 5%) were also prepared with a ball milling time of 8 h. Post-annealing by using a muffle furnace (Labec, CEMLS-SD) was undertaken at temperatures of 200, 300, and 400 °C in air.

The phase purity of samples was characterized by powder X-ray diffraction (XRD) on a Rigaku MiniFlex-600 benchtop diffractometer with $\text{Cu-K}\alpha$ radiation ($\lambda = 0.154 \text{ nm}$, 40 kV and 15 mA) with a scanning step and speed of 0.01° and $0.5^\circ/\text{min}$, respectively. Data was collected in the 2θ range of 10° to 100° . TEM imaging was undertaken by a Tecnai G2 Spirit transmission electron microscope (FEI, Oregon, USA).

Photoluminescence (PL) spectra of Sm^{3+} were measured by using a Horiba Jobin-Yvon Spex FluoroMax-3 fluorometer (controlled by the FluorEssence software) at room temperature with 405 nm excitation. Sm^{2+} luminescence spectra were recorded on a Spex 500 M monochromator (150 grooves/mm grating), equipped with an Andor iDus camera (DV401A-BV Si CCD). A closed-cycle cryostat (CTI-Cryogenics Cryodyne model 22) was used to cool the sample to 27 K. In this case, the samples were excited by a focused 635 nm laser diode. The powders were manually pressed into a counterbore of 5 mm diameter and 0.5 mm depth on an aluminium holder.

The X-ray based reduction of Sm^{3+} to Sm^{2+} was undertaken on the Rigaku Miniflex-600 benchtop powder XRD diffractometer at a 2θ angle of 30° (dose rate $\sim 15 \text{ mGy s}^{-1}$). The X-ray dose was cross-calibrated against a Sirona (Erlangen, Germany) HELIODENT Plus dental X-ray source.

4. Conclusions

We have reported a direct and facile mechanochemical preparation route for nanocrystalline $\text{CaF}_2:\text{Sm}^{3+}$ by ball milling $\text{Ca}(\text{OAc})$, $\text{Sm}(\text{OAc})_2$, and NH_4F at room temperature. The photoluminescence spectra of the as-prepared samples display the $\text{Sm}^{3+} {}^4\text{G}_j \rightarrow {}^6\text{H}_j$ luminescence lines, whereas X-irradiation generates Sm^{2+} with its characteristic luminescence around 708 nm at low temperatures. A ball milling period of 3 to 4 h was found to result in the best single phase, whereas shorter or longer ball milling times resulted in some impurity phases. A longer ball milling period such as 8 h reduced the efficacy of Sm^{2+} generation by X-irradiation. This is likely due to the stabilization of the trivalent state by embedding the charge compensator in the vicinity of the Sm ion, as well as more effective non-radiative deactivation by the introduction of more defects. Maximum luminescence was observed for the sample with a 1 mol% Sm^{3+} concentration, and at a higher concentration quenching was observed. Interestingly, post-annealing substantially increases the X-ray induced Sm^{3+} to Sm^{2+} conversion. It is noted here that attempts to anneal at higher temperatures such as 1100 °C (in air) generated extra phases in the XRD pattern with an associated change in the Sm^{3+} luminescence spectrum. In comparison with the co-precipitation (CPT)-sample, the Sm^{3+} ion in the ball milling sample (BM) is much more stable. The present results

demonstrated that the X-ray storage efficiency of nanocrystalline CaF_2 can be controlled in the preparation process by varying parameters such as ball milling time, annealing temperature and rare earth ion concentration. This study offers valuable insights into the X-ray storage properties of ball-milled $\text{CaF}_2:\text{Sm}^{3+}$, particularly the accelerated reduction of Sm ions, with potential applications in areas such as dosimetry and computed radiography.

Author Contributions: Z.S.R.: Sample preparation, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, writing—original draft. N.R.: TEM analysis, writing—review and editing. H.R.: supervision, conceptualization, methodology, writing—review and editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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