

# SYNTHESIS AND PROPERTIES OF INORGANIC COMPOUNDS

## Low-temperature synthesis and luminescent properties of lanthanum

### metaphosphate $\text{LaP}_3\text{O}_9$ : Tb

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Promising for inorganic luminophores, terbium-doped lanthanum metaphosphates  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  ( $x = 0.05, 0.1, 0.2, 0.3, 0.4$ ) were synthesised by extraction-pyrolytic method at low temperature in comparison with known methods. The crystal structure and optical properties of the obtained samples were characterised by X-ray phase analysis, IR and luminescence spectroscopy, and the unit cell parameters were calculated. Compounds having rhombic structure, pr. gr.  $C 222_1$ , were obtained in the temperature range of 500-900°C. All parameters of the unit cell decrease linearly with the introduction of terbium into lanthanum metaphosphate.  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  compounds show intense luminescence in the region of 450 - 650 nm. The  $\text{La}_{0.8}\text{Tb}_{0.2}\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  sample obtained in one hour annealing at pyrolysis temperature of 900°C shows maximum luminescence intensity.

**Keywords:** lanthanum metaphosphates, terbium, doping, luminescence

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of methods for the synthesis of new chemically, thermally and mechanically stable materials with optical properties is a pressing task. High heat resistance, as well as chemical and radiation resistance of materials based on rare earth element phosphates (**REE**) determine the prospects of their use as matrices for phosphors [1–6].

Based on luminescent materials containing REE ions, plasma panels, light-emitting diodes, fluorescent lamps, liquid crystal displays, and temperature sensors have been created [7 – 10]. In recent years, phosphate luminophore materials have

attracted great attention due to the relative simplicity of synthesis, high stability and low toxicity [11]. Thus, interest in further study of phosphates is due to their unique properties and wide range of applications.

The most commonly used methods for synthesizing REE metaphosphates are the solid-phase method [12–16], precipitation from solutions [7, 17–19] and the sol-gel method [16, 20].

Traditional high-temperature solid-phase synthesis is most frequently used [12–16]. When using this method, REE oxides are thoroughly ground, mixed with a phosphorus-containing reagent, and fired several times at different temperatures, with the final firing temperature reaching 800 – 1200°C, each stage of the process taking from several hours to days. Phosphorus(V) oxide, ammonium or alkali metal dihydrogen phosphates or hydrogen phosphates are used as sources of phosphate ions. Depending on the reaction temperature, phosphorus-containing reagents sometimes should be taken in excess to compensate for losses caused by sublimation. The solid-phase method has several disadvantages: multiple stages, long duration, and high synthesis temperature.

The production of REE phosphates, including doped ones, is very often carried out from aqueous solutions containing ammonium phosphates or phosphoric acid, with phosphates of various compositions being synthesized depending on the temperature and reaction conditions [17]. In studies [7, 18, 19] REE metaphosphates were successfully obtained by precipitation from solutions. At the same time, dehydration of the obtained precursors was carried out at a temperature of 100 – 110 °C for 10 – 12 hours, and firing at a temperature of 900 – 1000°C was required to obtain the final metaphosphate.

When using the sol-gel method for the synthesis of rare earth metaphosphates [16, 20], the transparent sol formed at low temperature was heated at a higher temperature, converting it into a viscous gel from which the final product is formed at the optimal temperature.

However, compared to precipitation and solid-state reactions, this method is used less frequently due to the lengthy and complex process. For example, in work [16], yttrium metaphosphate was obtained from anhydrous phosphorus oxide  $P_2O_5$  in a mixture with yttrium and europium chlorides in isopropanol. In the first stage, yttrium and europium alkoxides were synthesized, after which anhydrous phosphorus oxide  $P_2O_5$  powder was added to them with intensive stirring for ~6 h to obtain a transparent solution of heterometallic alkoxides. After that, the sol was hydrolyzed by adding excess water, resulting in the formation of a transparent gel, which was dried at 80°C to obtain a white xerogel. The latter was calcined at temperatures from 80 to 1200°C for 5 h. Since the synthesized yttrium and europium alkoxides actively react with water vapor contained in the air, all experiments were carried out in a dry argon atmosphere at all stages of the process.

Since the preparation method determines the morphology, particle size, composition, and luminescent properties of materials, the search for new methods for the synthesis of phosphate phosphors remains a relevant topic of scientific research [20, 21].

This paper presents the results of studying the synthesis conditions and luminescent properties of terbium-doped lanthanum metaphosphates using the extraction-pyrolytic method, which has not been previously used for this purpose.

## EXPERIMENTAL PART

For the synthesis of lanthanum metaphosphates  $LaP_3O_9$ : Tb, saturated extracts of lanthanum and terbium were used. To obtain the extracts, nitrate solutions containing 0.012 mol/L of lanthanum and  $6.6 \times 10^{-3}$  mol/L of terbium were used as the aqueous phase; the pH value of the aqueous phase at 7.0-7.5 was created by adding an aqueous solution of ammonia. The pH value of the aqueous phase was controlled using a pH-meter/millivoltmeter Mark-901. REE extraction was carried out with mixed solutions of 1.95 mol/L acetylacetone and 0.0167 mol/L 1,10-phenanthroline in benzene. The

organic and aqueous phases in a ratio of 1:1 were intensively mixed at room temperature for 30 minutes on a mechanical shaker SK-30 (Korea). The composition of the REE aqueous phases was controlled before and after extraction using a Shimadzu AA 7000 atomic absorption spectrophotometer. The concentration of La and Tb in organic extracts was determined by the L-lines of the characteristic spectrum using energy-dispersive X-ray fluorescence analysis on a Shimadzu EDX-800HS instrument. The excitation source was an X-ray tube with a Rh-anode, the measurement time was 100 s. The calculation of element concentrations was carried out using a calibration graph with the instrument software. For the synthesis of  $\text{LaP}_3\text{O}_9$ : Tb, tributyl phosphate was added to the saturated extracts in a molar ratio of  $\text{Ln} : \text{P} = 1 : 4$ , terbium was introduced into the lanthanum extract in various ratios. Homogeneous saturated extracts were evaporated at 60-80°C until paste formation and subjected to pyrolysis at various temperatures in a muffle furnace for 1-2 hours.

X-ray analysis of the samples was carried out on a D8 Advance BrukerAXS diffractometer (Germany) in  $\text{Cu } K_{\alpha}$ -radiation using the EVA search program with the PDF-2 powder data bank. Luminescence excitation and luminescence spectra of the phosphors were recorded at 300 K on a Shimadzu RF-5301 PC spectrofluorimeter. IR spectra of the samples were recorded at room temperature on a Vertex 70 instrument in the range of 4000-400  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ .

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Various phosphors based on ortho- and metaborates, oxysulfides, polyphosphates, polyniobates, and polytantalates of REE have previously been successfully synthesized by the extraction-pyrolytic method [21-23].

REE metaphosphates crystallize in two structural types. For elements of the La–Eu series, the orthorhombic crystal system is characteristic, while lanthanides with a small ionic radius ( $\text{Ln} = \text{Gd–Lu, Y}$ ) have monoclinic symmetry [11, 12]. The first reflections corresponding to the orthorhombic phase of lanthanum metaphosphate

appear already at a pyrolysis temperature of 400°C (Fig. 1, curve 1). At a temperature of 500°C, a phase of crystalline lanthanum metaphosphate  $\text{LaP}_3\text{O}_9$  of orthorhombic modification (space group  $C222_1$  (20),  $a = 11.303$ ,  $b = 8.648$ ,  $c = 7.397$  Å,  $\alpha = 90^\circ$ ,  $\beta = 90^\circ$ ,  $\gamma = 90^\circ$ ,  $Z = 4$ ,  $V_{\text{unit cell}} = 723.044$  Å<sup>3</sup>) [6, 24] is formed (Fig. 1, curve 2). In the temperature range of 500–900°C, the crystallinity of the samples increases while the composition remains unchanged. With an increase in temperature to 1000°C and above, the metaphosphate begins to decompose, and an additional phase of lanthanum orthophosphate  $\text{LaPO}_4$  of monoclinic modification appears.

According to [1], all oxygen atoms in the  $\text{LaP}_3\text{O}_9$  matrix are tetrahedrally bonded to phosphorus atoms. Phosphorus ions occupy two different crystallographic positions and form two types of  $\text{PO}_4$  tetrahedra. One tetrahedron has good symmetry, while the other is asymmetric. The  $\text{PO}_4$  tetrahedra share corners, forming one-dimensional spiral chains along the  $c$  axis, connected to each other by Ln–O bonds. The La atom is coordinated by eight oxygen atoms, forming a slightly distorted dodecahedron [17, 19], resulting in La–O bond lengths ranging from 2.415 to 2.749 Å, with the nearest La–La distance being 4.315 Å, and the distance between chains is approximately 7 Å [24].

X-ray diffraction patterns of terbium-doped lanthanum metaphosphates  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  ( $x = 0.05; 0.10; 0.20; 0.30; 0.40$ ) are presented in Fig. 2. With the addition of terbium in amounts up to 20 mol. %, no impurity peaks appear on the diffraction pattern of the orthorhombic modification of  $\text{LaP}_3\text{O}_9$  (Fig. 2, curves 1, 2). As can be seen from Table 1, which presents the unit cell parameters for  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$ , with an increase in  $\text{Tb}^{3+}$  concentration up to 20 mol. %, all unit cell parameters tend to decrease linearly with increasing dopant concentration.

As previously noted,  $\text{La}^{3+}$  ions in  $\text{LaP}_3\text{O}_9$  occupy only one crystallographic position, forming  $\text{LaO}_8$  dodecahedra, and since the ionic radius of  $\text{Tb}^{3+}$  is smaller than that of  $\text{La}^{3+}$  [12, 25], the unit cell parameters will decrease, indicating the substitution of  $\text{La}^{3+}$  ions by  $\text{Tb}^{3+}$  ions.

In compounds  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  ( $x = 0.30, 0.40$ ), a second phase of terbium metaphosphate  $\text{TbP}_3\text{O}_9$  of monoclinic modification appears (space group  $P2_1/c$  (14),  $a = 11.258$ ,  $b = 20.220$ ,  $c = 10.138$  Å,  $\alpha = 90^\circ$ ,  $\beta = 97.150^\circ$ ,  $\gamma = 90^\circ$ ,  $Z = 12$ ,  $V_{\text{unit cell}} = 2289.835$  Å<sup>3</sup>) (Fig. 2, curves 3, 4). In the structure of  $\text{TbP}_3\text{O}_9$ , rare-earth ions are located inside slightly distorted  $\text{TbO}_6$  octahedra, isolated from each other by  $\text{PO}_4$  tetrahedra [11, 16].

Table 2 presents the IR spectral data of lanthanum metaphosphates. When  $\text{LaP}_3\text{O}_9$  is doped with  $\text{Tb}^{3+}$  ions, no changes in the IR spectra of the compounds are observed.

In the IR spectra, absorption bands at 1271 and 1153  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  are attributed to symmetric stretching vibrations  $\nu_s(\text{O-P-O})$  and asymmetric vibrations  $\nu_{as}(\text{O-P-O})$ , respectively. The absorption band at 1120  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  can be assigned to asymmetric stretching vibrations  $\nu_{as}(\text{O-P-O})$ . Additionally, the spectrum shows absorption bands at 567 and 532  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  related to bending vibrations  $\delta(\text{O-P-O})$ . Absorption bands at 499, 474 and 457  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  can be attributed to bending vibrations characteristic of (P-O-P) groups [20, 26]. Absorption bands at 682 and 771  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  correspond to symmetric stretching vibrations, while bands at 950, 1006 and 1053  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  to asymmetric vibrations of (P-O-P) groups. The observed bands are consistent with a structure consisting of an infinite chain of tetrahedral P-O bonds.

The luminescent characteristics of the obtained  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  metaphosphate samples were evaluated based on luminescence excitation and emission spectra at 300 K, which were recorded under identical conditions.

Figure 3 shows the luminescence excitation spectra of  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  metaphosphates with different  $\text{Tb}^{3+}$  content, including those obtained at different temperatures. As seen in Fig. 3, the position of bands in the luminescence excitation spectra, recorded at the wavelength of maximum luminescence of the  $\text{Tb}^{3+}$  ion  $\lambda_{\text{em}} = 545$  nm, does not change for  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  metaphosphates.

In the wavelength range of 220-270 nm, a broad intense band with a maximum at ~241 nm is recorded, which can be attributed to the transition  $4f^8 \rightarrow 4f^7 5d^1$  in the Tb

$^{3+}$  ion [7, 12, 21, 27]. As the concentration of terbium ions increases up to 20 mol. %, the intensity of this band increases (Fig. 3a, curves 1, 2). With further increase in the concentration of terbium ions, the intensity of the  $4f^8 \rightarrow 4f^7 5d^1$  transition band decreases (Fig. 3a, curves 3, 4).

In the region 300-390 nm at  $\lambda_{em} = 545$  nm, low-intensity bands are observed, corresponding to transitions from the ground level of the  $Tb^{3+} 7F_6$  ion to the excited levels  $^5D_0$ ,  $^5D_4$ ,  $^5L_7$ ,  $^5L_9$ ,  $^5G_5$ ,  $^5G_6$  [7, 15, 25].

Fig. 3b shows the luminescence excitation spectrum of the  $La_{0.8} Tb_{0.2} P_3 O_9$  compound synthesized at different pyrolysis temperatures. With increasing pyrolysis temperature of organic precursors (Fig. 3b), the intensity of the  $f-d$  transition band of the  $Tb^{3+}$  ion increases, reaching a maximum at an annealing temperature of 900°C, which can be explained by the increase in crystallinity of the samples.

Fig. 4 shows the luminescence spectra of the synthesized lanthanum metaphosphates. The luminescence spectra of  $\lambda_{ex} = 241$  nm consist of a series of bands in the region of 450-650 nm, corresponding to transitions between the multiplets  $_{1-x} Tb_x P_3 O_9$  recorded at an excitation wavelength  $\lambda_{ex} = 241$  nm, the position of the transition bands  $^5D_4 \rightarrow ^7F_{6,5,4,3}$ , characteristic for the  $Tb^{3+}$  ion [7, 12, 21, 27]. At  $\lambda_{ex} = 241$  nm, the position of the transition bands  $^5D_4 \rightarrow ^7F_{6,5,4,3}$ , as well as the intensity distribution across the bands in doped lanthanum metaphosphates  $La_{1-x} Tb_x P_3 O_9$  remain unchanged with varying concentrations of the doping  $Tb^{3+}$  ions. As shown in Fig. 4a, the band at ~547 nm, corresponding to the  $^5D_4 \rightarrow ^7F_5$  transition characteristic of the  $Tb^{3+}$  ion, has a maximum intensity.

The highest luminescence intensity, determined by integrating the area under the transition bands  $^5D_4 \rightarrow ^7F_{6,5,4,3}$  in the spectra of  $La_{1-x} Tb_x P_3 O_9$  samples, is shown by lanthanum metaphosphates containing 20 mol. %  $Tb^{3+}$  (Fig. 4b, curve 1). Increasing the  $Tb^{3+}$  ion concentration to 30-40 mol. % leads to a decrease in luminescence intensity, which can be explained by concentration quenching [7, 20, 27]. Additionally, as shown earlier (Fig. 1), in compounds  $La_{1-x} Tb_x P_3 O_9$  ( $x = 0.30, 0.40$ ), besides the  $La_{1-x} Tb_x P_3 O_9$  phase, a monoclinic terbium metaphosphate phase  $TbP_3 O_9$  appears. Considering

that the luminescence intensity of  $\text{TbP}_3\text{O}_9$  is significantly lower than that of terbium-doped lanthanum metaphosphate [12, 21], the appearance of an additional  $\text{TbP}_3\text{O}_9$  phase in the compound leads to a decrease in the luminescence intensity of  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  at dopant concentrations  $>30$  mol. %.

Increasing the synthesis temperature of  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  metaphosphates to  $900^\circ\text{C}$  leads to a sequential increase in the integral luminescence intensity (Fig. 4b, curve 1), which may be associated with increased crystallinity of the compounds [20, 21]. As shown above, at temperatures  $>1000^\circ\text{C}$ , lanthanum metaphosphate begins to partially decompose, and a phase of lanthanum orthophosphate appears in the sample composition (Fig. 1, curve 4). Apparently, the decrease in luminescence intensity with further temperature increase can be explained by the presence of an additional phase of lanthanum orthophosphate, which has lower luminescence intensity [20, 21].

## CONCLUSION

The conditions for obtaining orthorhombic lanthanum metaphosphates (space group  $C222_1$ ) were studied using extraction-pyrolytic and low-temperature methods. The influence of pyrolysis temperature on the composition of the obtained metaphosphates was investigated. It was shown that the formation of metaphosphates begins already at  $400^\circ\text{C}$ ; in the range of  $500$ - $900^\circ\text{C}$ , there is an increase in the crystallinity of the samples, and with further temperature increase, the metaphosphates partially decompose to form  $\text{LaPO}_4$  orthophosphate. Terbium-doped compounds  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  ( $x = 0.05; 0.10; 0.20; 0.30; 0.40$ ) were synthesized.

The IR spectra of the compounds contain absorption bands characteristic of stretching ( $457, 474, 499\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) and bending ( $682$  and  $771\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) vibrations of the P-O-P bond.

$\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  metaphosphates exhibit luminescence in the  $450$ - $50\text{ nm}$  range, with the emission maximum at  $\sim 545\text{ nm}$  associated with the  $^5\text{D}_4 - ^7\text{F}_5$  transition in the  $\text{Tb}^{3+}$  ion. The nature of the spectra does not change with varying terbium concentration. In



the synthesized  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  polyphosphate, the maximum luminescence intensity is observed at a terbium concentration of 20 mol. %.

Thus, the extraction-pyrolytic method is promising for obtaining REE-doped metaphosphates.

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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**Table 1.** Unit cell parameters of doped lanthanum metaphosphates

Sample	$a$ , Å	$b$ , Å	$c$ , Å <sup>3</sup>	$wRp$ , %	$V$ , Å <sup>3</sup>
$\text{La}_{0.95}\text{Tb}_{0.05}\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$	11.286(2)	8.632(2)	7.377(1)	4.12	714.776
$\text{La}_{0.9}\text{Tb}_{0.1}\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$	11.247(2)	8.600(2)	7.347(1)	5.71	710.633
$\text{La}_{0.8}\text{Tb}_{0.2}\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$	11.206(3)	8.574(2)	7.313(3)	6.84	702.635

**Table 2.** Band assignments in IR spectra of doped lanthanum metaphosphates

$\text{LaP}_3\text{O}_9$ $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$	Assignment
457 474	$\delta(\text{POP})$
499 532 567	$\delta(\text{OPO})$
682 771	$\nu_s(\text{POP})$
950 1006 1053	$\nu_{as}(\text{POP})$
1271 1153 1120	$\nu_s(\text{OPO})$ $\nu_{as}(\text{OPO})$

## FIGURE CAPTIONS

**Fig. 1.** X-ray diffraction patterns of  $\text{LaP}_3\text{O}_9$ , obtained at 400 ( 1 ), 500 ( 2 ), 900 ( 3 ) and 1100°C ( 4 ).

**Fig. 2.** X-ray diffraction patterns of samples with composition  $\text{La}_{0.9}\text{Tb}_{0.1}\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  ( 1 ),  $\text{La}_{0.8}\text{Tb}_{0.2}\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  ( 2 ),  $\text{La}_{0.7}\text{Tb}_{0.3}\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  ( 3 ),  $\text{La}_{0.6}\text{Tb}_{0.4}\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  ( 4 ).

**Fig. 3.** Luminescence excitation spectra of  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  samples at  $x = 0.05$  ( 1 ), 0.1 ( 2 ), 0.2 ( 3 ), 0.3 ( 4 ), 0.4 ( 5 ), obtained at 900°C (a), and  $\text{La}_{0.8}\text{Tb}_{0.2}\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  sample obtained at 700 ( 1 ), 800 ( 2 ) and 900°C ( 3 );  $\lambda_{\text{em}} = 545$  nm, 300 K (b).

**Fig. 4.** Luminescence spectra of  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Tb}_x\text{P}_3\text{O}_9$  at  $x = 0.05$  ( 1 ), 0.1 ( 2 ), 0.2 ( 3 ), 0.3 ( 4 ), 0.4 ( 5 ), obtained at 900°C (a); dependence of compounds luminescence intensity on precursor annealing temperature ( 1 ) and  $\text{Tb}^{3+}$  ion concentration ( 2 );  $\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 241$  nm, 300 K (b).

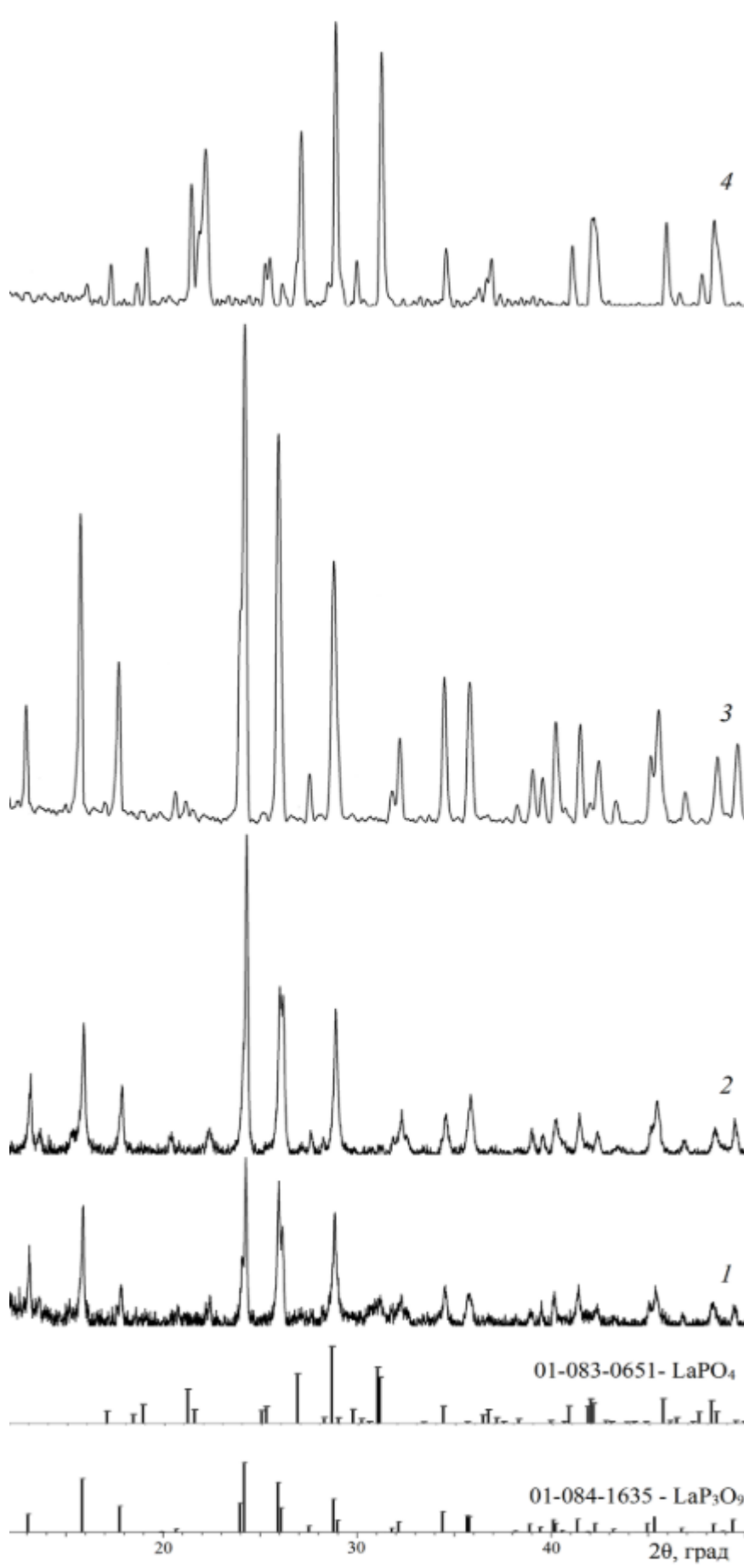


Fig. 1

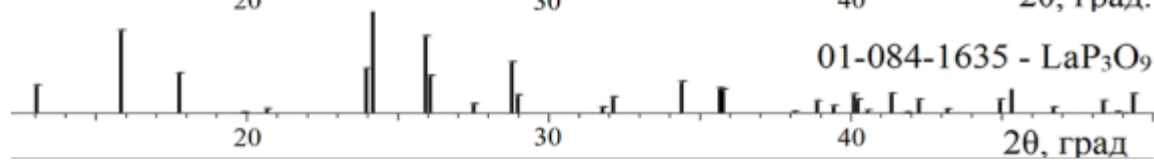
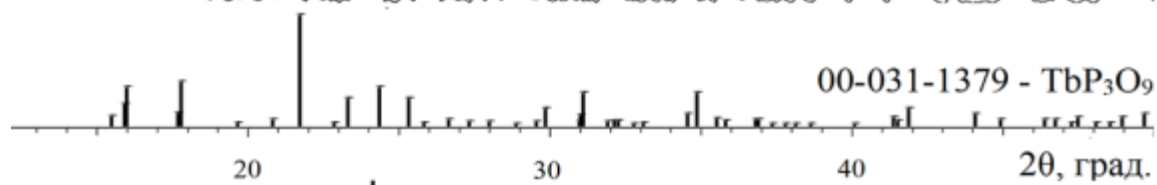
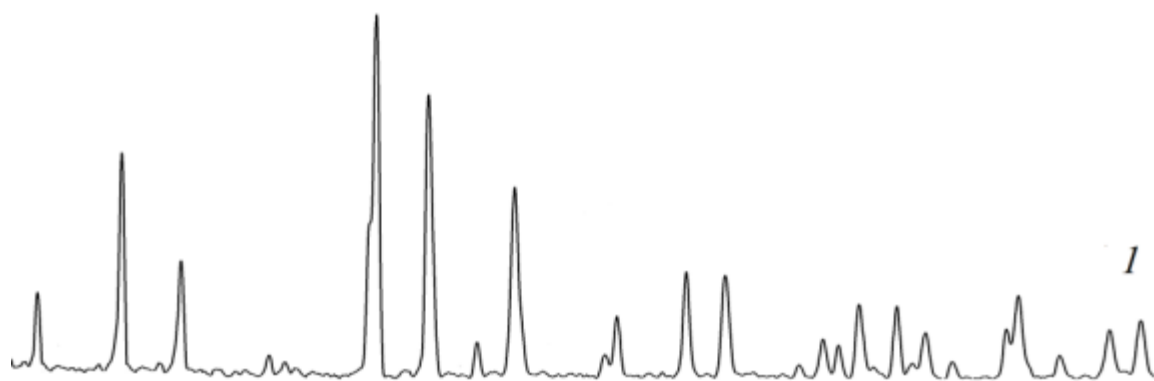
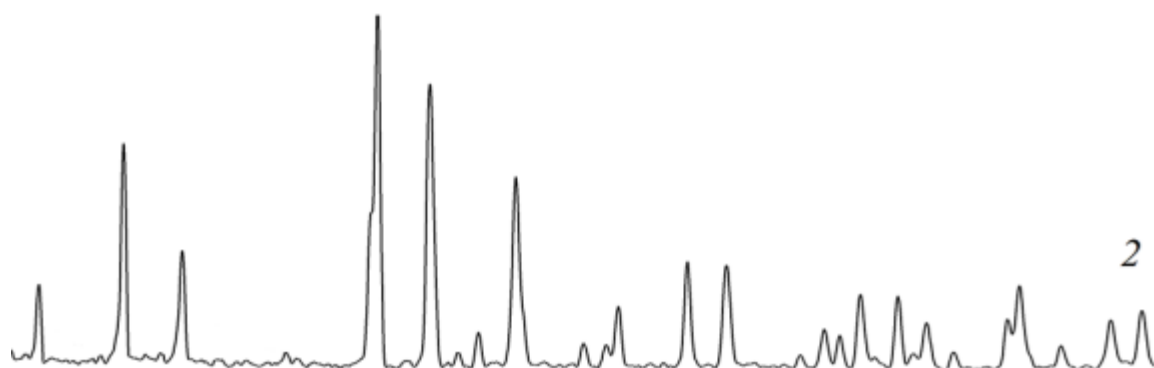
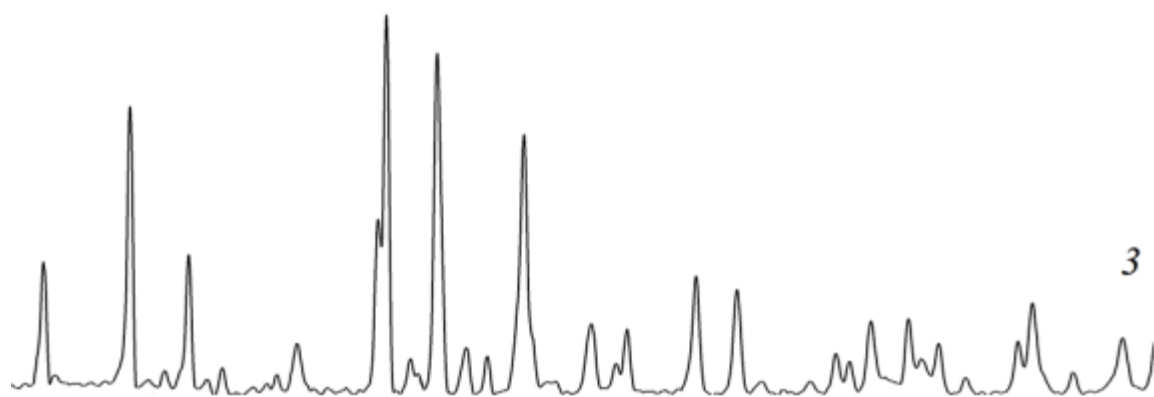
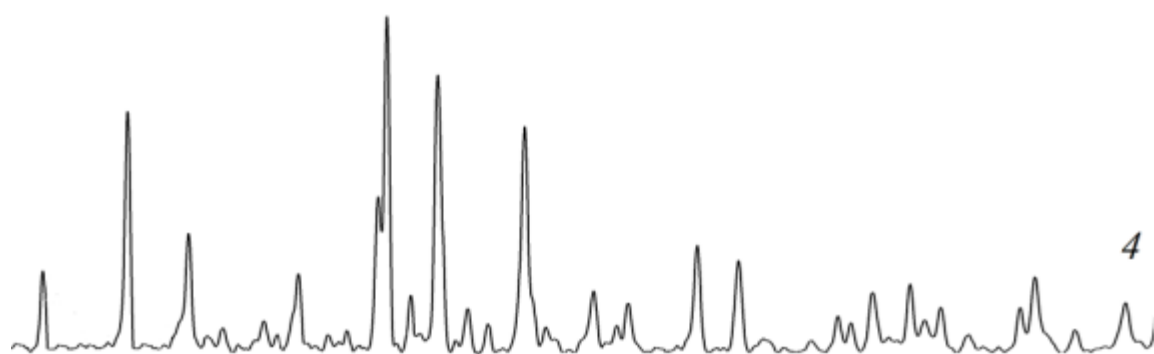




Fig. 2.

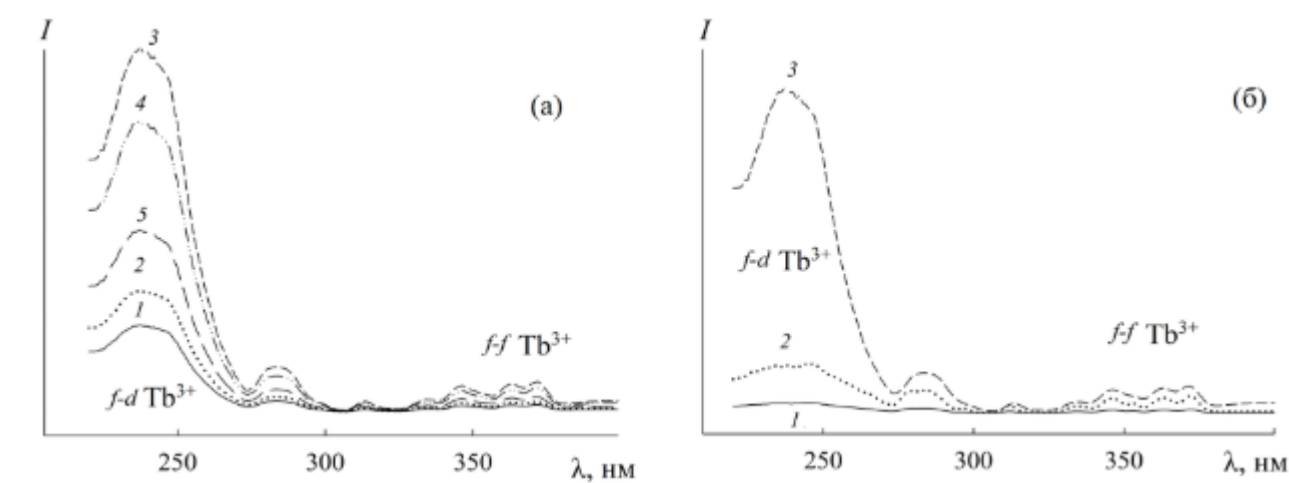


Fig. 3. I,

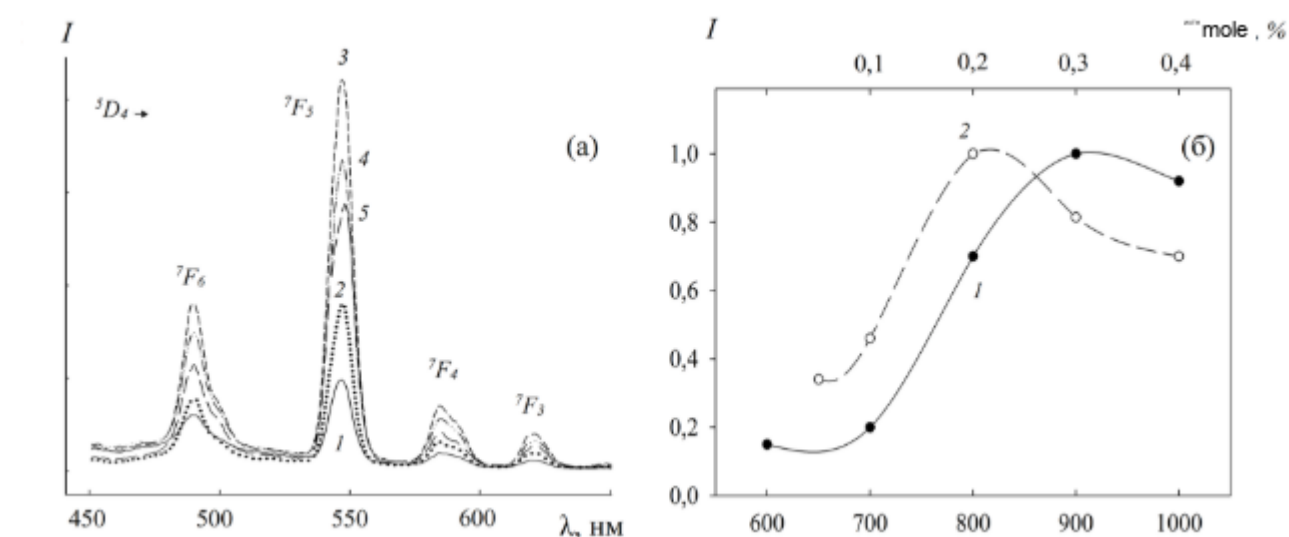


Fig. 4.