LOW DIMENSIONAL CORRELATED SYSTEMS: CuGeO$_3$ AND NaV$_2$O$_5$

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Some of the properties of the low-dimensional electronically correlated materials CuGeO$_3$ and NaV$_2$O$_5$ are discussed. The emphasis lies on recent results obtained using Raman scattering and optical absorption spectroscopy as a function of temperature, magnetic field and hydrostatic pressure.

Keywords Correlated systems; Low-dimensional; Phase diagrams; Spin-Peierls; Charge-ordering; Optical spectroscopy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Low-dimensional correlated systems show a wide variety of physically interesting and unusual properties. Well known in this field are the copper oxides showing high temperature superconductivity, and the low-dimensional spin systems such as the spin-Peierls compound CuGeO$_3$, the Sr-Cu-O ladder compound Sr$_{14}$-$a$Ca$_{24}$Cu$_{24}$O$_{61}$, the superconducting chain/ladder compound Sr$_{14}$-$a$Ca$_{2}$Cu$_{24}$O$_{61}$, and the recently discovered charge-ordered compound NaV$_2$O$_5$. One of the interesting aspects of one-dimensional spin-chains with isotropic interactions is that the presence of a continuous symmetry prevents spontaneous ordering. In these systems ordering may occur only through coupling to other degrees of freedom, such as lattice or charge excitations. The transition to a singlet ground state in CuGeO$_3$ is, for instance, a direct result of the spin-phonon coupling in this system.

In this contribution, a few of the fascinating properties of low-dimensional correlated systems – in particular of CuGeO$_3$ and NaV$_2$O$_5$ – are briefly discussed. Section II introduces the compounds CuGeO$_3$ and NaV$_2$O$_5$. Section III discusses the nature of spin-excitation and the occurrence of bound states in low-dimensional spin systems. Section IV addresses the $(H - T)$ phase diagram of, in particular, CuGeO$_3$. Finally, section V discusses charge-ordering in NaV$_2$O$_5$, and presents some ideas on low-energy charge excitations in this compound.

II. CuGeO$_3$ AND NaV$_2$O$_5$

A. The spin-Peierls compound CuGeO$_3$

CuGeO$_3$ is the first example of an inorganic compound showing a spin-Peierls transition. Characteristic fingerprints of a spin-Peierls transition are the formation of a singlet ground state, evidenced by a vanishing magnetic susceptibility; the formation of a superstructure, as evidenced by the appearance of superlattice reflections in diffraction experiments; and the opening of a spin gap in the magnetic excitation spectrum, as evidenced in, for instance, inelastic neutron scattering experiments.

The spin-chains in CuGeO$_3$ are formed by unpaired $d$-electrons on Cu$^{2+}$ ions which are magnetically linked into chains along the orthorhombic $c$-direction by an almost $90^\circ$ Cu-O-Cu super-exchange path. The chains are separated from each other by GeO$_2$ units. The existence of weak inter-chain couplings makes this compound quasi-one-dimensional ($J_c \approx 120$ K, $J_b \approx 16$ K, $J_a \approx 2$ K).

In addition, there is a substantial next-nearest-neighbor interaction ($J_{nn} \approx 160$ K, $J_{nnn} \approx 40$ K). The transition temperature in CuGeO$_3$ is $T_c \approx 14$ K, and the gap in the magnetic excitation spectrum is found to be $2.1$ meV.

B. The charge-ordered compound NaV$_2$O$_5$

Initially, NaV$_2$O$_5$ was thought to be a spin-Peierls compound with $T_c \approx 34$ K. Also in this case, an exponentially vanishing susceptibility was observed, as well as the formation of a superstructure and the opening of
a spin-gap ($\Delta \approx 10\text{ meV}$). Moreover, the temperature-dependent susceptibility in the high temperature phase exhibits the typical Bonner-Fisher behaviour expected for an antiferromagnetic $S = 1/2$ spin-chain. Recent experimental findings suggest, however, that this compound is not a spin-Peierls compound but rather a charge-ordered compound [18-22].

At high temperatures, NaV$_2$O$_5$ may be considered as a quarter-filled ladder system $^2$. The rungs ($||$ a) of the ladders ($|| b$) are formed by two Vanadium ions (VO$_5$ pyramids) with intermediate valence 4.5+. The V ions are connected through 180° V-O-V bonds. The a – b ladder layers are separated in the c-direction, by Na ions. At high temperatures spin-chains are formed by the rungs, each containing one unpaired electron. At low temperature a charge-ordering occurs, where the two V ions on a single rung become inequivalent, i.e. they now have different $(4.5 \pm \delta)$ valence states. The ordering occurs most likely in a zig-zag pattern along the ladders.

III. SPIN EXCITATIONS AND BOUND STATES

Spin excitations in antiferromagnetic compounds are classically described by spin-wave theory. In quantum spin systems, however, this simple theory is no longer sufficient. Instead of having a dispersion branch describing well-defined spin waves, one now has spinons as elementary excitations. These $S = 1/2$ spinons do not occur as single particles, but rather form a two-particle triplet excitation continuum. In addition to that, the interaction between these triplets may lead to the formation of bound states and additional continua which may be of singlet, triplet or even quintet nature. Such bound states have indeed been observed. In CuGeO$_3$ it reveals itself as a well-defined mode at 30 cm$^{-1}$ (see figure a)). Its singlet nature is evidenced by the lack of field dependence in the dimerized phase ($H < 12.5$ T). In the high field phase ($H > 12.5$ T), the bound state mode either moves to lower energy or disappears altogether.

In NaV$_2$O$_5$, the situation is a bit more complex. Also here, one finds newly activated modes in the low-temperature phase (see figure b)). In this case, however, several modes are observed – at 66, 106, and 132 cm$^{-1}$ – that have been interpreted as singlet bound states, as low-lying Vanadium d-level excitations, or as folded phonon excitations with a renormalized energy and intensity due to spin-phonon interactions. Presently, the exact origin of these low-energy modes is still under intense debate. The availability of inelastic neutron scattering data, as well as an improved understanding of, in particular, the low energy dynamics in NaV$_2$O$_5$ appear to be a prerequisite for a full understanding of these low-energy modes.

IV. THE ($H$ – $T$) PHASE DIAGRAM

One of the characteristic properties of a spin-Peierls compound is its ($H$ – $T$) phase diagram (see figure a)) consisting of a uniform phase ($T > T_c$), a dimerized phase ($T < T_c; H < H_c$), and a modulated phase for high fields ($T < T_c; H > H_c$). For CuGeO$_3$, this general structure is experimentally well supported (see for instance b)). The full phase diagram of NaV$_2$O$_5$ has not yet been determined. It has been shown, however, that the phase transition is rather insensitive to applied fields, strongly supporting the idea that this is not a spin-Peierls, but rather a charge-ordered compound.

Standard theory predicts the phase diagram of a spin-Peierls compound to scale as $H/T_c$ and $T/T_c$. Optical absorption experiments on CuGeO$_3$, in which $T_c$ was varied by applying hydrostatic pressure, have shown that this compound does not follow this scaling (figure b)). Instead a $H/\Delta, T/T_c$ type of scaling has been found (figure b)), where $\Delta$ is the spin-gap (about 2.1 meV in CuGeO$_3$) at zero magnetic field. This observed $H/\Delta$ scaling may not be so surprising: the gap state has a triplet character, and therefore shows a linear splitting in a magnetic field. A phase transition is expected when the lowest energy triplet state energetically crosses the ground state. The surprising observation is, however, that the first-order phase transition into the incommensurate phase occurs already when the gap from the ground state to the lowest triplet state is still about $\Delta/4$, i.e. at much lower magnetic fields than intuitively expected. These observations call for a theory going beyond the standard Cross-Fisher theory. They also call for a reexamination of the organic spin-Peierls compounds, where, in particular, an accurate determination of the spin-gap value is of interest. An initial test for $H/\Delta$ scaling, based on spin-gaps determined from susceptibility.
is observed in (aa)-polarization only (i.e. polarizations along the rungs).

Presently, the low energy scale is still an open question. There is a simple single ladder model which gives some first insight into this problem. In this model, the only parameters are the Coulomb interaction, $V$, between vanadium ions on different rungs along the ladder, and the hopping, $t$, between ions on a single rung. The Hamiltonian for this system is given by

$$H = t \sum_{i} (c_{i,r}^{+}c_{i,r} + c_{i,l}^{+}c_{i,l}) + V \sum_{i,s,l,r} \rho_{i,s} \rho_{i+1,s}, \quad (1)$$

where $c_{i,s}$ ($c_{i,s}^{+}$) are electron annihilation (creation) operators for site $s$ on the $i$th rung, and $\rho_{i,s}$ are the charge densities on these sites. As long as $|V| < t$, this Hamiltonian leads to a homogeneous charge distribution on the rungs, i.e. the average position of the electron on the rung is at the center. Starting from this equilibrium state, it is clear that the classical elementary excitations in such a system are charge waves involving small displacements of the average electron position. The dispersion of these excitations is easily derived from eq. (1) to give $E_{k} = 2t \sqrt{1 + (V/t) \cos(k \cdot x)}$, where $k$ is the momentum along the ladder, and $x$ is in the ladder direction. At $k = 0$ these are relatively high energy excitations with uniform charge displacements along the rungs (possibly observable in a polarized infrared spectra). The excitations at $k = \pi/a$ have an alternating charge displacement, and have a low energy provided that $V \sim t$. These may indeed be Raman active, in a (aa)-configuration through a two-particle process involving states with momentum $\pm k$.

For $V > t$, the Hamiltonian eq. (1) leads to a zig-zag charge-ordered phase with a charge disproporionately $\delta = \sqrt{1 - (t/V)^2}$. The typical low-energy excitations
would then be charge solitons – which can be envisioned as kinks in the zig-zag pattern – with typical energy \((V - t)^{3/2}\). Provided that \(V\) is of the order of \(t\), this indeed gives again a low-energy scale.

The fact that NaV\(_2\)O\(_5\) charge-orders, implies that \(V \sim t\) for the present simple model eq. (1). So, within the above model one can easily understand the occurrence of low-energy charge waves and charge solitons. The question is, however, how the charge order is stabilized. Any small variation of either \(V\) or \(t\) would directly lead to drastic changes in the charge dynamics, as well as to the phase transition itself. Another problem is that eq. (1) considers a single chain only. This approach is not ideal of course. The presence of long-range Coulomb interactions and inter-ladder hopping terms requires inclusion of neighboring ladders too [18-22] Hopefully more elaborate models can resolve these problems, and give a full understanding of the charge-ordering and the low-energy charge dynamics in NaV\(_2\)O\(_5\).

VI. CONCLUSION

Low-dimensional, correlated spin and charge systems show a wide variety of intriguing physical phenomena. Many of these phenomena may be understood using one-dimensional models, which theory can handle quite well. Many of the interesting phenomena arise due to the interactions between the various degrees of freedom such as the spin-Peierls transition in CuGeO\(_3\), and the charge-order transition and formation of a singlet ground state in NaV\(_2\)O\(_5\).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The GHMFL is “Laboratoire conventionné à l’UJF et l’INPG de Grenoble”. The Laboratoire de Physico-Chimie des Solides is a “Unité mixte de Recherche n° 8648”. J. Z. acknowledges partial support from the EC through grant ERBCHGECT 930034. M.K. thanks the Roman Herzog-AvH foundation for support. This work is partially supported by the DFG through SFB341.

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