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Characterization of smectite and illite by FTIR spectroscopy of interlayer NH_4^+ cations

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ABSTRACT: FTIR spectroscopy has been applied to NH_4^+ -exchanged dioctahedral clay minerals to determine the molecular environment of NH_4^+ and to quantify N concentration. FTIR under vapour-pressure control, coupled with heating and freezing treatments has shown that NH_4^+ ion symmetry varies with the nature of clay minerals. NH_4^+ has a perfect tetrahedral symmetry in hydrated or dehydrated smectites and belongs to the T_d symmetry group. The NH_4^+ -bending vibration is centred at 1450 and 1425 cm^{-1} .

The Si^{4+} - Al^{3+} substitution in dioctahedral clay minerals induces the loss of symmetry elements of the NH_4^+ tetrahedron which acquires a C_{2v} symmetry. As a consequence, the T_d - C_{2v} transition can be used to characterize the smectite–illite transition. Quantification of NH_4^+ content per half unit cell is provided by $n_{\text{NH}_4} = k[\text{NH}_4]/[\text{OH}]$ where $[\text{NH}_4]/[\text{OH}]$ is the band area ratio of the NH_4^+ -bending vibration to the OH-stretching vibration. $k = 1.1$ for hydrated smectite, 0.9 for dehydrated smectite and 0.8 for illite or tobelite. The bending vibration of NH_4^+ is chosen for the calculation because it is not affected by superimposed contributions.

KEYWORDS: ammonium, smectite, illite, tobelite, IR spectroscopy, hydration.

In subsurface geological environments, the presence of NH_4^+ ions is generally explained as resulting from deamination of organic matter (Hunt, 1979; Tissot & Welte, 1984; Williams & Ferrell, 1991). However, the NH_4^+ ion is also detected in metamorphic, igneous and volcanic systems. In view of its stability field, the NH_4^+ ion can be used as a pH-Eh marker: it is stable at low pH and Eh and therefore is commonly encountered in sedimentary basins. Due to both its organic origin (Boudou *et al.*, 1984; Williams *et al.*, 1989; Williams & Ferrell, 1991; Barth *et al.*, 1996) and pH-Eh stability field (Grishina *et al.*, 1998) analyses of NH_4^+ ions play an important role in reconstructing the sedimentary, diagenetic and metamorphic evolution of rocks.

NH_4^+ has an ionic radius of 1.43 Å. As this value is close to the ionic radius of K^+ (1.33 Å) (Lindgreen, 1994), NH_4^+ often substitutes for K in minerals (Bos *et al.*, 1988; Bastoul *et al.*, 1993). Salts (sylvite, carnallite) and silicates (feldspar, mica, clay minerals) are the most common NH_4^+ -bearing minerals, often found in evaporitic and clastic systems sometimes affected by metamorphism (Williams *et al.*, 1989; Pironon *et al.*, 1995a,b).

In layered minerals, NH_4^+ ions are usually located in the interlayer space as charge-compensating cations. Such a situation is encountered in nature for micas (biotite, muscovite) (Vedder, 1965; Bos *et al.*, 1988; Bastoul *et al.*, 1993; Higashi, 2000) and swelling clay minerals (vermiculite, smectite) (Mortland *et al.*, 1963; Šuchá *et al.*, 1994; Lindgreen, 1994; Schroeder and Ingall, 1994; Schroeder & McLain, 1998). Ammonium ions have

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a tetrahedral symmetry with a central N atom surrounded by four H atoms. For constant N–H bond length and H–N–H angle, ammonium belongs to the T_d symmetry group. Due to this T_d symmetry, the mid-infrared (IR) spectrum exhibits two main absorption bands: a triply degenerate bending-vibration band located between 1400 and 1500 cm^{-1} and a triply degenerate stretching vibration located at $\sim 3300 \text{ cm}^{-1}$.

According to Chourabi & Fripiat (1981), the IR spectra of NH_4^+ -smectite is affected by increasing Al for Si substitution in the tetrahedral sheet. Indeed, for increasing Si^{4+} - Al^{3+} substitution, the NH_4^+ ion is increasingly distorted, which should result in a change from the T_d symmetry to the C_{3v} symmetry. Such lowering of T_d symmetry was described by Casal *et al.* (1984) in the case of NH_4^+ -exchanged montmorillonite (Table 1). This symmetry change results in the loss of three C_3 , C_2 and S_4 axes and three planes of symmetry (Herzberg, 1947). This work aims to demonstrate that, on the basis of these symmetry changes, IR spectroscopy can be used to characterize the smectite–illite transition and it complements X-ray diffraction (XRD) studies. More precisely, the main objectives of this work are (1) to characterize the symmetry and molecular environment of NH_4^+ ions using IR spectroscopy, and (2) to propose a quantification procedure for N analysis of layered minerals. To achieve the first objective, we characterized in detail the effect of interlayer spacing and water adsorption on the FTIR spectrum of NH_4^+ -exchanged clays. The second objective was the development of the feasibility study by Shigorova (1982) who was the first to show that IR spectroscopy can provide a quantification of the NH_4 content of micas.

ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

Two different analytical procedures were applied to characterize smectite, illite and tobelite using FTIR spectroscopy.

The Fourier transform spectrometer used is a Bruker IFS 55 coupled with two different sampling devices: (1) A Bruker microscope which collects the IR beam with cassegrain objectives. Analysis of clay films deposited on a CaF_2 disk was carried out by transmission, using a circular diaphragm with a 60 μm diameter aperture in the image plane and a MCT detector. Spectra of atmospheric CO_2 and H_2O were recorded independently for subtraction purposes. Optical microscopy allows visual control of the purity of the area studied (i.e. the absence of mineral or organic contamination). A Linkam FT-IR 600 microthermometric stage was also adapted to the Bruker microscope to record IR spectra at various temperatures. Such a set-up allows us to record IR spectra from -196°C (liquid nitrogen temperature) to $+600^\circ\text{C}$. To record transmission IR microspectroscopy spectra at various temperatures, some specific adaptations are required: IR transparent windows (CaF_2 or BaF_2) are used to replace all glass slides. In the case of clay minerals, the use of FTIR microspectrometry at various temperatures has several advantages. Indeed, at very low temperatures the IR absorption bands narrow, which facilitates band assignment and decomposition procedures. Variable-temperature studies also provide some insight into the various populations of water molecules, more or less firmly adsorbed on the clay surfaces, whereas the use of high temperatures permit study of water release and the associated structural changes. (2) In order to study

TABLE 1. Wavenumbers of normal modes of vibration of NH_4^+ with T_d or C_{3v} symmetry.

Symmetry IR vibration	T_d wavenumber (cm^{-1})	C_{3v} wavenumber (cm^{-1})
ν_1	3040 ¹	ν_1 3030 ³ –3070 ⁴
$\nu_2 + \nu_4$	3053 ²	
ν_2	1680 ¹ –1649 ²	Not observed
ν_3	3145 ^{1,2}	$\nu_{3a}-\nu_{3bc}$ 3195 ⁴ –3250 ³
ν_4	1400 ¹ –1404 ²	$\nu_{4a}-\nu_{4bc}$ 1430 ^{3,4}

(1) from Nakamoto (1963); (2) for NH_4Cl at 22°C from Morgan *et al.* (1957);

(3) for smectites from Chourabi & Fripiat (1981); (4) for montmorillonites from Casal *et al.* (1984).

TABLE 2. Structural formulae of layered minerals (average of 10 analyses). Half-unit-cell formulae were calculated from electron microprobe analysis, considering all Fe to be Fe³⁺, and from FTIR analysis for NH₄.

	Si ^{IV}	Al ^{IV}	Al ^{VI}	Fe ^{VI}	Mg ^{VI}	O	OH	K	Ca	Na	NH ₄
SmW	3.91	0.09	1.53	0.20	0.29	10	2	0.01	0.08	0.13	0.00
NH ₄ -SmW	3.87	0.13	1.57	0.19	0.26	10	2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.31
Illite Netherlands	3.36	0.64	1.65	0.11	0.24	10	2	0.45	0.01	0.06	0.33
Tobelite	3.17	0.83	1.97	0.03	0.05	10	2	0.19	0.00	0.00	0.53

SmW: initial smectite from Wyoming, NH₄-SmW: smectite from Wyoming exchanged with NH₄. Tobelite formula is from Higashi (1982).

SAMPLES

possible changes in the IR vibrations of NH₄⁺ ions and hydration water molecules, IR spectra were obtained with a special lab-built IR cell with controlled water pressure (Pelletier *et al.*, 1999). When combined with water adsorption measurement and XRD studies under controlled water pressure, the use of such a set-up allows us to obtain very valuable information on the status of water in layered materials (Pelletier *et al.*, 1999; Eypert-Blaison *et al.*, 2001). The sample is a clay film, deposited on a gold grid, and placed on the IR beam before a DTGS detector. Two CaF₂ windows close the cell. The sample is maintained under vacuum at 10⁻⁶ Torr for 10 days in order to acquire a good reference spectrum ($P/P_0 = 0$). The film is kept at 30°C±0.1°C and the control of the relative water vapour pressure in the cell (P/P_0), is obtained by setting the temperature of a water liquid source connected to the cell. By controlling its temperature between -20 and +27.9°C (±0.1°C), a P/P_0 range from 0.024 to 0.85 can be investigated. The equilibrium time for each water vapour relative pressure (P/P_0) varies between 24 and 96 h.

The spectral resolution is 4 cm⁻¹ and the recording time is 1 min. Spectra are presented in absorbance units between 4000 and 1200 cm⁻¹. Bands located below 1200 cm⁻¹ are not taken into account because of detector saturation in the region of Si-O stretching and absorption of CaF₂ windows below 800 cm⁻¹. Each spectrum was processed using the OPUS program (© Bruker). The integrated intensities of OH-stretching bands and H₂O- and NH₄-bending bands were calculated. Peak areas were calculated using various baseline corrections (linear or polynomial) and a standard deviation of 3% was thus determined. NH₄-bending bands were decomposed after baseline correction using the Levenberg-Marquard algorithm and mixed Lorentzian-Gaussian curves.

Three different samples were used for this study. They cover the dioctahedral range of layer charge from smectite to muscovite, and are composed of particles <2 µm in size.

Ammonium-smectite was prepared from a natural Ca-Na-smectite from Wyoming. The initial structural formula was determined by electron microprobe and ICP-MS analysis (Table 2). 10 g of smectite were placed in 100 ml of 1 M NH₄Cl aqueous solution at room temperature and stirred for 2 h. After solid-liquid separation the solution was renewed, and that procedure was repeated three times. Electron microprobe and ICP-MS analyses showed that octahedral sites are not strongly affected by such exchange treatment and that K, Ca and Na are completely released from the interlayer space of smectite. The NH₄ content was deduced from FTIR analysis, as explained later. X-ray diffraction studies revealed that the sample preparation did not cause any crystallographic modifications.

The illite sample used comes from a shale of the Namurian-Dinantian boundary, located at the

TABLE 3. Assignments of mid-IR vibration bands of NH₄-clays (Van der Marel & Beutelspacher, 1976; Chourabi & Fripiat, 1981).

Wavenumber (cm ⁻¹)	Assignment
3630	OH from octahedral sites (stretching)
3425–2830	H ₂ O and NH ₄ (stretching)
1846	SiO (combination)
1633	H ₂ O (bending)
1450–1427	NH ₄ (bending)
1167–1027	SiO (stretching)
919–798	OH from octahedral sites (bending)

marine-lacustrine transition in the Netherlands. It was sampled from a well in the Geverik area at a depth of 963 m. This series, 400 m thick, is marked by a zonation of marine black shales and limestones. Illite is associated with chlorite, organic matter, detrital micas, framboidal pyrite, calcite and dolomite. X-ray diffraction patterns of the clay fraction reveal an illitic composition mixed with 5% of chlorite. The widths at half maximum of the (001) diffraction peak for illite are 1.2 and 0.8 Å, for the normal and glycolated diffractograms, respectively. These differences can be explained by the presence of either poorly crystalline illite or interstratified minerals, or by the occurrence of NH_4^+/K in illite. The presence of NH_4 was confirmed by FTIR analysis (Table 2). The sample

contains >5% carbon and the reflectance of vitrinite is near 3.7%.

Tobelite is an NH_4 muscovite, from the Tobe area (Japan) described and provided by Dr S. Higashi. Ammonium-bearing dioctahedral micas are associated with quartz and graphite in a hydrothermally altered biotite andesite dyke of Miocene age (Higashi, 1982). Tobelite is finely crystallized (<2 μm). It was suspended in pure water in order to cover the CaF_2 slide.

For FTIR analysis, clay and tobelite films were prepared by evaporation. Films of pure materials have been used rather than KBr mixtures to avoid KBr-matrix interactions, water contamination and replacement of the NH_4 of the clay by K from the matrix (Petit *et al.*, 1999).

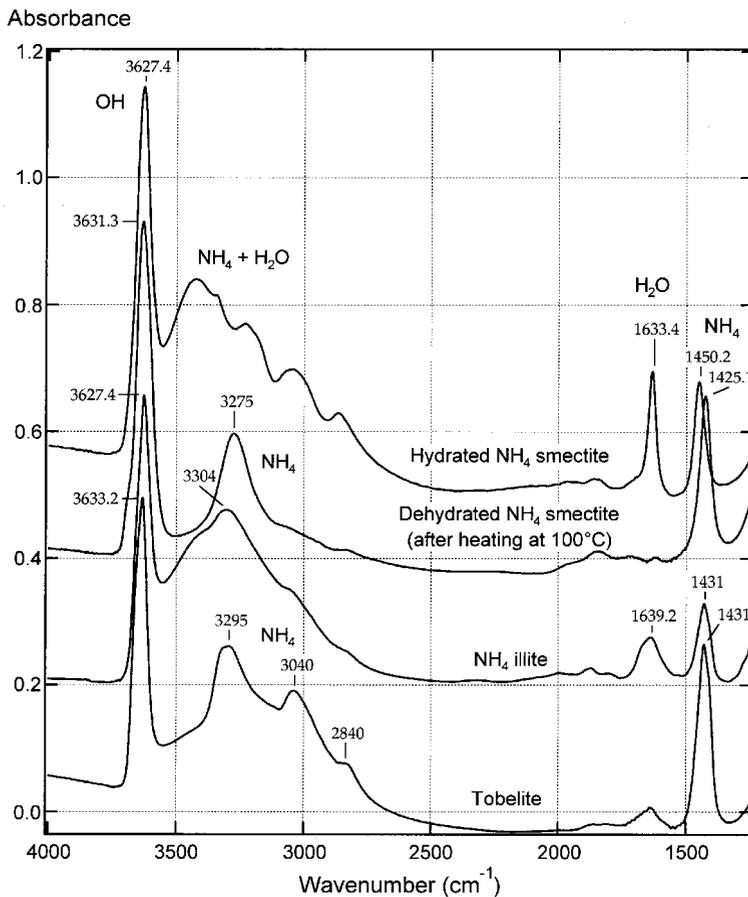


FIG. 1. FTIR spectra of hydrated NH_4 smectite (equivalent to $P/P_0 = 1$), dehydrated NH_4^+ smectite (equivalent to $P/P_0 = 0$), NH_4 -illite from The Netherlands, and tobelite, recorded at room temperature (except for the spectrum of dehydrated smectite acquired at 100°C) with the IR microscope.

RESULTS

Spectra of tobelite, illite and smectite were acquired at different temperatures to follow the effect of temperature on water bound directly to the NH_4^+ cation and on IR band shapes. Absorption bands between 4000 and 600 cm^{-1} are assigned in Table 3. This study focuses preferentially on the NH_4^+ -bending vibration located between 1400 and 1500 cm^{-1} because in contrast with the stretching vibrations it is affected only a little by overlaps due to hydration water.

FTIR spectra at room conditions

Figure 1 shows IR spectra recorded at room conditions without any baseline correction. The only spectral treatment is the subtraction of atmospheric CO_2 and H_2O . The spectrum corresponding to tobelite is characterized by a strong NH_4^+ -bending vibration centred at 1431 cm^{-1} . This band displays some asymmetry towards low wavenumbers. A weak water-bending contribution is observed at 1630 cm^{-1} . An OH-stretching contribution from octahedral sheets is located at 3633 cm^{-1} . Three main NH_4^+ -stretching bands are

observed at 3295 , 3040 and 2840 cm^{-1} . These bands are superimposed on the O-H-stretching vibrations of water (broad signals at 3620 and 3350 cm^{-1} in hydrated micas (Bishop *et al.*, 1994)).

The illite spectrum is similar, with weaker NH_4 bands and stronger water bands. A bending H_2O band at 1639 cm^{-1} displays a marked asymmetry towards high wavenumbers, suggesting the presence of different types of adsorbed water.

The spectrum of hydrated NH_4 -smectite, recorded on a clay film just after water evaporation is characterized by water and NH_4^+ -bending vibrations of similar intensities and shapes. These two bands are sharp and symmetric. In the range corresponding to stretching NH_4 and water vibrations, the shape of the spectrum is complex with numerous contributions.

FTIR spectra at variable temperature

Figure 2 shows the FTIR spectra of an NH_4 -smectite at 150 , 23 and -180°C in the range corresponding to bending vibrations. At 150°C , the bending band of water disappears and the NH_4^+ -bending band is shifted towards low wavenumbers with a maximum at 1425 cm^{-1} and a width at half

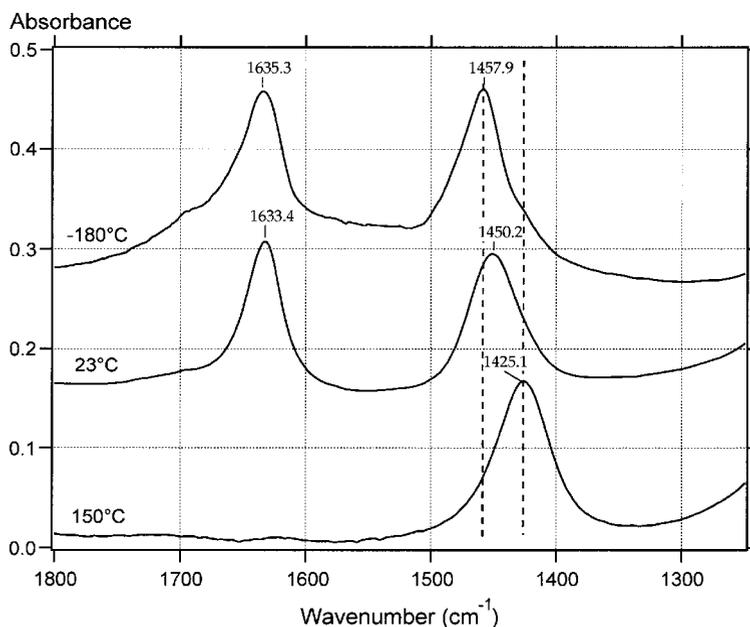


FIG. 2. FTIR spectra of the H_2O - and NH_4^+ -bending vibrations of NH_4 smectite recorded with the IR microscope at different temperatures.

maximum (WHM) of 50 cm^{-1} . The band seems perfectly symmetrical and can be fitted with a Lorentzian (30%) + Gaussian (70%) symmetric curve with a weak residual error. Smectite dehydration can also be observed in the valence region (Fig. 1) as the number of vibration bands in the $3600\text{--}3000\text{ cm}^{-1}$ range decreases (Fig. 1). One strong band is observed at 3275 cm^{-1} . The OH stretching band is located at 3631 cm^{-1} with a shoulder at 3685 cm^{-1} . At liquid nitrogen temperature, the NH_4 -bending band is narrowed (WHM = 40 cm^{-1}) and centred at 1458 cm^{-1} . A shoulder appears at 1430 cm^{-1} . The water-bending vibration becomes non-symmetrical, but its maximum is only shifted by 2 cm^{-1} .

The absolute intensities of both the stretching-OH band and NH_4 -bending band were measured for NH_4 -smectite from ambient to 400°C (Fig. 3). The integrated intensity of the OH band decreases sharply between 25 and 75°C , remains stable up to 200°C and decreases slightly at higher temperatures. The integrated intensity of the NH_4 band remains constant up to 200°C and then decreases with increasing temperature. Such evolutions are clearly observed by looking at the evolution of the band area ratio (NH_4/OH) (Fig. 3).

The spectrum of tobelite was recorded at room temperature, 400°C and -180°C (Fig. 4). At 400°C the NH_4 -bending vibration becomes symmetrical and shifts to 1419 cm^{-1} . In the same way, the stretching band located at 3295 cm^{-1} shifts to 3280 cm^{-1} and the intensities of the stretching bands at 3040 and 2840 cm^{-1} decrease. At -180°C , the NH_4 bending band contains three contributions at 1460 , 1433 and 1408 cm^{-1} . Temperature lowering induces a narrowing of the absorption bands, which reveals these three contributions. However at such low temperature, ice crystals form on the preparation and their IR absorption bands partially mask the NH_4^+ -stretching area. The presence of ice also explains the weak band detected at 1650 cm^{-1} (Herzberg, 1947).

FTIR spectra under controlled relative water pressure (P/P_0)

The FTIR spectra of NH_4 -smectite under controlled temperature and water vapour relative pressures are presented in Fig. 5. The increase in P/P_0 is marked by the growth of the H_2O -bending vibration. The wavenumber of this band is shifted towards lower values at low P/P_0 (0.2) but remains

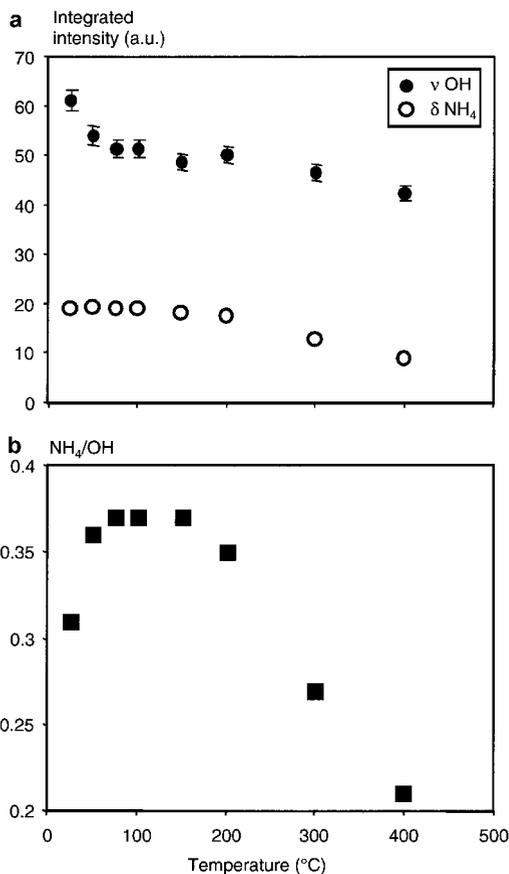


Fig. 3. (a) Evolution of the integrated intensities of the OH-stretching band and the NH_4 -bending band of NH_4 smectite with temperature. The error bars for the NH_4 band integration are equivalent to the point size. (b) Evolution of the (NH_4/OH) band area ratio with temperature.

constant at higher water pressure. The NH_4^+ -bending vibration is centred at 1425 cm^{-1} at $P/P_0 = 0$. It becomes asymmetrical with increasing water pressure with a shift of its position towards 1450 cm^{-1} . The increase of background with increasing P/P_0 can be explained by the imperfect subtraction of the signal due to water vapour. These results can be combined with data derived from water adsorption gravimetry and XRD measurements under controlled water pressure (Fig. 6). When plotted as a function of the number of water molecules per interlayer cation the water adsorption and desorption isotherm exhibits three main domains $P/P_0 \leq 0.25$, $0.25 < P/P_0 < 0.6$ and $P/P_0 > 0.6$ (Fig. 6a). Such evolution is similar to

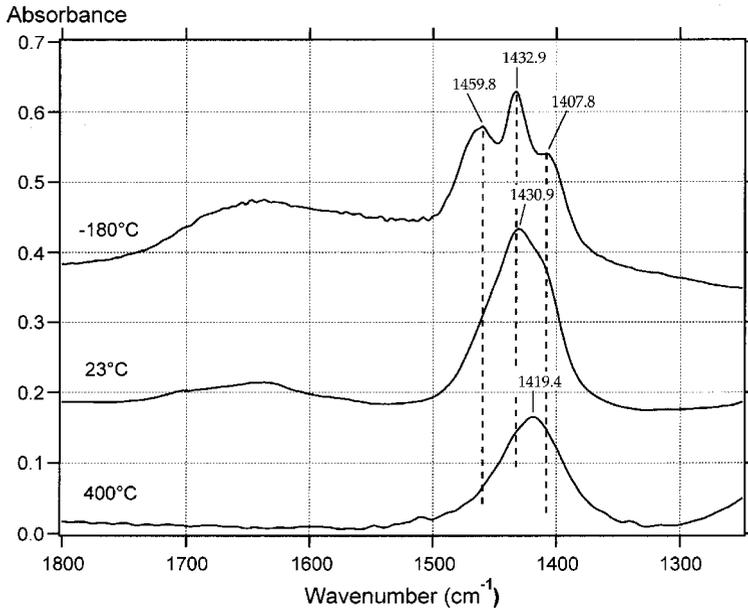


FIG. 4. FTIR spectra of the NH_4^+ -bending vibrations of tobelite recorded with the IR microscope at different temperatures.

the adsorption/desorption isotherm described for K smectite (Bérend *et al.*, 1995). In the case of K montmorillonite, it was shown to correspond to one single type of site for H_2O adsorption. The evolution of the (001) spacings with water pressure is presented in the middle part of Fig. 6. The evolution can be decomposed in three domains: for $P/P_0 \leq 0.05$ the d spacing does not change with water content; for $0.05 < P/P_0 \leq 0.3$, the d spacing increases sharply to reach a value of 11.6 Å; and for $P/P_0 > 0.3$, the interlayer spacing increases slightly to reach a final value of 12.2 Å at $P/P_0 = 0.80$. The IR band area ratio [1450/(1450+1425)]

(Fig. 6c) was calculated after decomposition of the NH_4 -bending vibrations in two main components. Water adsorption is marked by no change until a P/P_0 value of 0.07, a strong increase of the [1450/(1450+1425)] IR band area ratio between 0.07 and 0.15, a slight increase between 0.15 and 0.75 and then a strong increase up to 0.85.

DISCUSSION

The FTIR analysis of NH_4 -smectites, illite and muscovite at variable temperature reveals clear differences in the profiles of the NH_4 -bending

TABLE 4. Symmetry group description for NH_4 tetrahedra in layered minerals, described by analogy to CH_4 - CH_3D - CH_2D_2 molecules (Herzberg, 1947).

NH_4 species	T_d Wavenumber (cm^{-1})	C_{3v} Wavenumber (cm^{-1})	C_{2v} Wavenumber (cm^{-1})
ν_1	– (R)	ν_1 (I,R)	ν_1 (R)
ν_2	– (I,R)	ν_2 (I,R)	$\nu_{2a}-\nu_{2b}$ (R;R)
ν_3	3275 (I,R)	$\nu_{3a}-\nu_{3bc}$ (I;I)	$\nu_{3a}-\nu_{3b}-\nu_{3c}$ (R;I;I) 2840–3040–3295
ν_4	1400 (I)	$\nu_{4a}-\nu_{4bc}$ (I,R;I,R)	$\nu_{4a}-\nu_{4b}-\nu_{4c}$ (I,R;I;I,R) 1408–1433–1460

I: IR active mode, R: Raman active mode

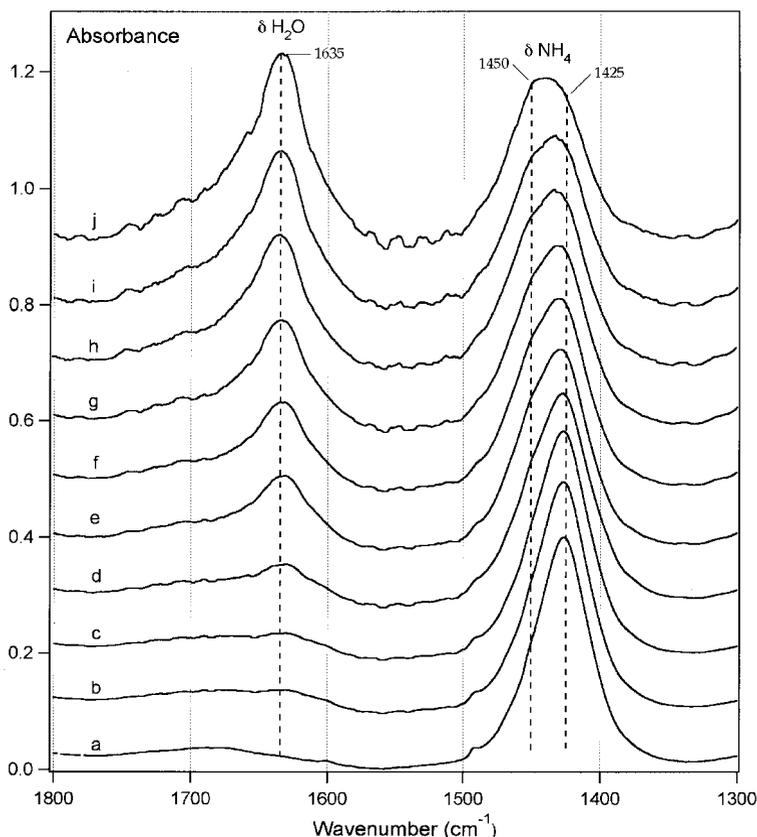


FIG. 5. FTIR spectra of the H₂O- and NH₄⁺-bending vibrations of NH₄ smectite acquired under water pressure control during the adsorption isotherm. $P/P_0 = 0$ (a), 0.024 (b), 0.039 (c), 0.099 (d), 0.174 (e), 0.249 (f), 0.402 (g), 0.601 (h), 0.746 (i) and 0.85 (j).

vibrations. This band is symmetrical for smectite with a maximum located at 1450 cm^{-1} in hydrated conditions and at 1425 cm^{-1} for the dehydrated sample. Such a shift towards higher wavenumbers upon hydration is probably due to hydrogen bonding occurring between NH₄⁺ ions and H₂O molecules (Chourabi & Fripiat, 1981). Hydrogen bonding could also explain the numerous bands observed in the O-H- and N-H-stretching region of hydrated smectite. In the case of illite and tobelite, the NH₄-bending vibration is composed of three bands centred at 1460 , 1433 and 1408 cm^{-1} . The difference observed between smectite, illite and tobelite can be assigned to changes in the symmetry of the NH₄ tetrahedron. In the interlayer space of smectite, NH₄ interacts slightly with the tetrahedral sheet and has a T_d symmetry. Water adsorption around NH₄⁺ cations does not induce any symmetry change but only a shift towards high wavenumbers.

For illite or tobelite, the NH₄ tetrahedron is submitted to a different crystal field. The high negative charge defect in the tetrahedral sheet (mainly due to Al-for-Si substitution) involves a stronger attraction between TOT sheets and interlayer cations. The NH₄ tetrahedron then loses its T_d symmetry, which is resolved into C_{2v} symmetry as revealed by the presence of three ν_3 and ν_4 bands. This symmetry change is summarized in Table 4 where assignments are made by analogy with the CH₄ molecule (Herzberg, 1947). The T_d - C_{2v} change thus appears as a good indicator for the smectite-illite transition.

Experiments with varying water pressures (P/P_0) simulate the hydration phenomenon below the water saturation point. Water-saturated smectites are analysed at room conditions during heating experiments which correspond to natural smectites in geological stability conditions. Increasing P/P_0

induces a shift towards high wavenumbers of the bending vibration, but no change in the NH_4 symmetry. At $P/P_0 = 0$, dehydration is not complete as the $[1450/(1450+1425)]$ IR ratio is near 0.1 (Fig. 6), corresponding to a percentage of irreducible water of 10%. Between $P/P_0 = 0$ and $P/P_0 = 0.07$, both the IR ratio and the (001) spacing remain constant whereas the amount of adsorbed water increases. Such behaviour is related to the hydration of the external surfaces of clay particles. Between $P/P_0 = 0.07$ and $P/P_0 = 0.3$, both the (001) spacing and IR ratio increase, which corresponds to the

opening of the sheets by hydration of some cations. As only two bands were detected by IR spectroscopy, this could indicate that hydration occurs cation by cation. No partial hydration of a cation is observed. Therefore, hydration of some interlayer spaces is enough to increase d spacing. For P/P_0 between 0.3 and 0.75, hydration regularly increases and opening of new interlayer spaces is rare as is shown by the slight increase in the d spacing. For $P/P_0 > 0.75$, hydration drastically increases up to water saturation of the interlayer space and further to the destruction of clay particles.

The FTIR analysis of films of pure fine particles seems to be well adapted for N quantification inside NH_4 -bearing layered minerals. However, for a proper quantification, the NH_4 environment must be taken into account, and therefore, hydration rate and/or charge balance have to be considered. The IR quantification procedure is based on a measurement of the ratio of the NH_4^- and OH-band areas that is correlated to the NH_4 content. In that case, OH represents octahedral hydroxyls (two hydroxyls per half unit cell), and is thus proportional to the number of TOT sheets. Therefore, the NH_4 content of minerals (n_{NH_4}) is proportional to the area ratio:

$$n_{NH_4} = k[NH_4]/[OH] \quad (1)$$

Using calibrated reference samples, the value of k has been determined at 0.8 for illite-muscovite and 1.1 for hydrated smectite.

Figure 3 reveals that for hydrated smectites, $[NH_4]/[OH]$ is less than for non-hydrated samples. This variation is due to the increase of the OH-band intensity with hydration. Such an increase is probably due to the presence of an absorption band assigned to free-water which superimposes on the absorption band of octahedral hydroxyls. Therefore, N quantification inside swelling minerals must take into account the hydration rate of NH_4 cations and equation (1) becomes:

$$n_{NH_4} = (1.1[NH_{4(1450)}] + 0.9[NH_{4(1425)}])/[OH] \quad (2)$$

where $[NH_{4(1450)}]$ and $[NH_{4(1425)}]$ are the integrated intensities of the NH_4 -bending vibration centred at 1450 cm^{-1} and 1425 cm^{-1} after decomposition, and $[OH]$ is the integrated intensity of the stretching vibration of hydroxyls. A k value of 0.9 was determined for dehydrated smectite and is close to the value obtained for tobelite (0.8). The difference between the two coefficients could be assigned to residual amounts of molecular water in the 'dehydrated' swelling clay.

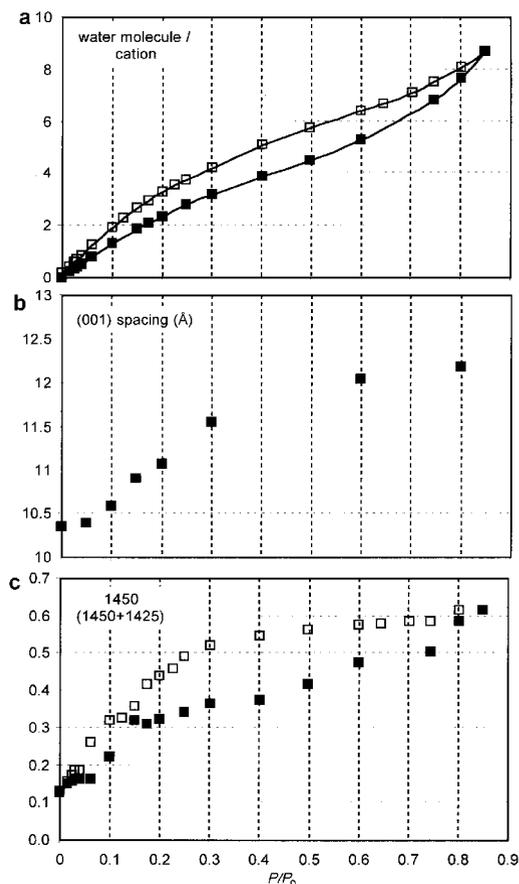


FIG. 6. (a) Water adsorption (filled squares) and desorption (open squares) isotherms expressed as the number of water molecules per NH_4^+ cation for the NH_4 smectite. (b) Evolution of the (001) spacing for the NH_4 smectite measured by XRD under controlled water pressure (adsorption branch). (c) Evolution with water relative pressure of the IR band area ratio $(1450/(1450+1425))$ calculated after decomposition of the NH_4 -bending vibrations.

In the case of a good signal/background ratio, a detection limit of ~300 ppm of N can be expected. This detection limit is of the same order of magnitude as the detection limit of 100 ppm provided by Schroeder and Ingall (1994). The N wt.% in the reference NH₄-smectite is 1.5.

CONCLUSIONS

Interlayer NH₄⁺ cations can be used to characterize smectite and illite by FTIR spectroscopy. Our study shows that Si⁴⁺-Al³⁺ substitution induces a deformation of the NH₄ tetrahedron marked by a symmetry change. T_d symmetry, with only one symmetric NH₄-bending vibration, is lowered to C_{2v} symmetry with a bending vibration consisting of three overlapping bands. No C_{3v} symmetry has been detected in the studied dioctahedral minerals, contrary to what was suggested in previous works (Chourabi & Fripiat, 1981; Casal *et al.*, 1984). Using these results, a procedure for quantifying swelling (*s*), and non-swelling (*ns*) NH₄-clays in mixtures (i.e. interstratified minerals) can be proposed: (1) water saturation of a clay deposit on a CaF₂ slide; (2) IR measurement (spectrum A) and calculation of the [NH₄]/[OH] band area ratio; (3) spectrum subtraction of a reference spectrum for tobelite (T) (i.e. A-T); (4) area measurements of NH₄-bending and OH-stretching vibrations, calculation of the [NH₄]_s/[OH]_s band area ratio; (5) calculation of the [NH₄]_{ns}/[OH]_{ns} band area ratio by [NH₄]/[OH]-[NH₄]_s/[OH]_s subtraction; (6) estimation of the relative proportions of swelling and non-swelling NH₄-minerals using the following calculations:

$$\%s = \frac{1.1[\text{NH}_4]_s/[\text{OH}]_s \cdot 100}{1.1[\text{NH}_4]_s/[\text{OH}]_s + 0.8[\text{NH}_4]_{ns}/[\text{OH}]_{ns}}$$

$$\%ns = \frac{0.8[\text{NH}_4]_{ns}/[\text{OH}]_{ns} \cdot 100}{1.1[\text{NH}_4]_s/[\text{OH}]_s + 0.8[\text{NH}_4]_{ns}/[\text{OH}]_{ns}}$$

In addition, using such an analytical approach, dehydrated smectite can be distinguished from illite in the non-swelling clay minerals group.

Experiments with variable P/P₀ reveal that (1) hydration occurs cation by cation with no change of NH₄ tetrahedron symmetry; (2) 10% of NH₄ cations in smectite are surrounded by irreducible water; (3) good agreement is observed between FTIR and XRD measurements under varying water pressure.

Nitrogen quantification by FTIR does not require any complex sample preparation and so is well suited to routine analysis. However, in some cases, advanced sample and/or spectral treatments may be needed. Samples must be free of carbonate phases because of the overlapping between carbonate-stretching and NH₄-bending vibrations. The presence of other clay species besides smectite or illite must be considered and the influence of these additional species on the spectra must be suppressed by subtraction of their independently recorded spectra. Hydroxyl contribution from kaolinite or chlorite can be superimposed on hydroxyl bands from smectite-illite assemblages.

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