

3.4. Domain structures

BY V. JANOVEC AND J. PŘÍVRATSKÁ

3.4.1. Introduction

3.4.1.1. Basic concepts

It was demonstrated in Section 3.1.2 that a characteristic feature of structural phase transitions connected with a lowering of crystal symmetry is an anomalous behaviour near the transition, namely unusually large values of certain physical properties that vary strongly with temperature. In this chapter, we shall deal with another fundamental feature of structural phase transitions associated with symmetry lowering: the formation of a non-homogeneous, textured low-symmetry phase called a *domain structure*.

When a crystal homogeneous in the *parent* (prototypic, high-symmetry) phase undergoes a phase transition into a *ferroic* low-symmetry phase with lower point-group symmetry, then this ferroic phase is almost always formed as a non-homogeneous structure consisting of homogeneous regions called *domains* and contact regions between domains called *domain walls*. All domains have the same or the enantiomorphous crystal structure of the ferroic phase, but this structure has in different domains a different orientation, and sometimes also a different position in space. When a domain structure is observed by a measuring instrument, different domains can exhibit different tensor properties, different diffraction patterns and can differ in other physical properties. The domain structure can be visualized optically (see Fig. 3.4.1.1) or by other experimental techniques. Powerful high-resolution electron microscopy (HREM) techniques have made it possible to visualize atomic arrangements in domain structures (see Fig. 3.4.1.2). The appearance of a domain structure, detected by any reliable technique, provides the simplest unambiguous experimental proof of a structural phase transition.

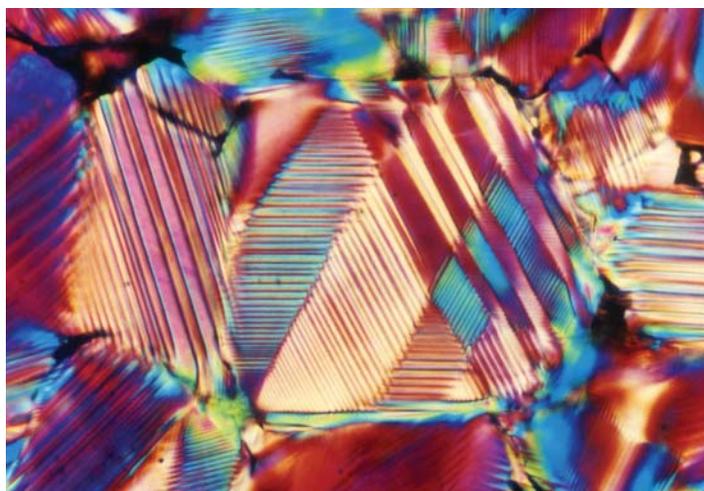


Fig. 3.4.1.1. Domain structure of tetragonal barium titanate (BaTiO_3). A thin section of barium titanate ceramic observed at room temperature in a polarized-light microscope (transmitted light, crossed polarizers). Courtesy of U. Täffner, Max-Planck-Institut für Metallforschung, Stuttgart. Different colours correspond to different ferroelastic domain states, connected areas of the same colour are ferroelastic domains and sharp boundaries between these areas are domain walls. Areas of continuously changing colour correspond to gradually changing thickness of wedge-shaped domains. An average distance between parallel ferroelastic domain walls is of the order of 1–10 μm .

Under the influence of external fields (mechanical stress, electric or magnetic fields, or combinations thereof), the domain structure can change; usually some domains grow while others decrease in size or eventually vanish. This process is called *domain switching*. After removing or decreasing the field a domain structure might not change considerably, *i.e.* the form of a domain pattern depends upon the field history: the domain structure exhibits *hysteresis* (see Fig. 3.4.1.3). In large enough fields, switching results in a reduction of the number of domains. Such a procedure is called *detwinning*. In rare cases, the crystal may consist of one domain only. Then we speak of a *single-domain crystal*.

There are two basic types of domain structures:

(i) Domain structures with one or several systems of parallel plane domain walls that can be observed in an optical or electron microscope. Two systems of perpendicular domain walls are often visible (see Fig. 3.4.1.4). In polarized light, domains exhibit different colours (see Fig. 3.4.1.1) and in diffraction experiments splitting of reflections can be observed (see Fig. 3.4.3.9). Domains can be switched by external mechanical stress. These features are typical for a *ferroelastic domain structure* in which neighbouring domains differ in mechanical strain (deformation). Ferroelastic domain structures can appear only in ferroelastic phases, *i.e.* as a result of a phase transition characterized by a decrease in the number of independent strain components (see Table 3.4.2.2).

(ii) Domain structures that are not visible using a polarized-light microscope and in whose diffraction patterns no splitting of reflections is observed. Special methods [*e.g.* etching, deposition of liquid crystals (see Fig. 3.4.1.5), electron or atomic force microscopy, or higher-rank optical effects (see Fig. 3.4.3.3)] are needed to visualize domains. Domains have the same strain and cannot usually be switched by an external mechanical stress. Such domain structures are called *non-ferroelastic domain structures*. They appear in all non-ferroelastic phases resulting from symmetry lowering that preserves the number of independent strain components (see Table 3.4.2.2).

Another important kind of domain structure is a *ferroelectric domain structure*, in which domains differ in the direction of the

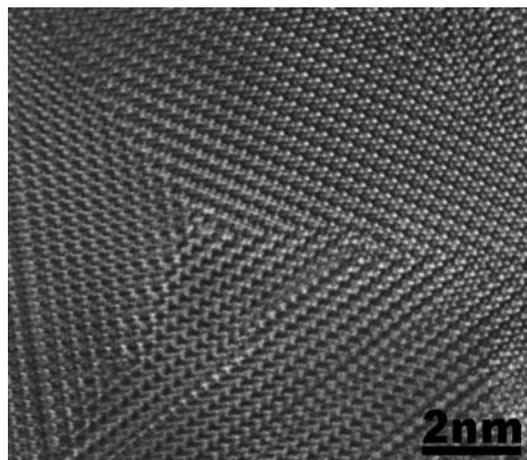


Fig. 3.4.1.2. Domain structure of a BaGa_2O_4 crystal seen by high-resolution transmission electron microscopy. Parallel rows are atomic layers. Different directions correspond to different ferroelastic domain states of domains, connected areas with parallel layers are different ferroelastic domains and boundaries between these areas are ferroelastic domain walls. Courtesy of H. Lemmens, EMAT, University of Antwerp.