

SunStone  
29-4-2025



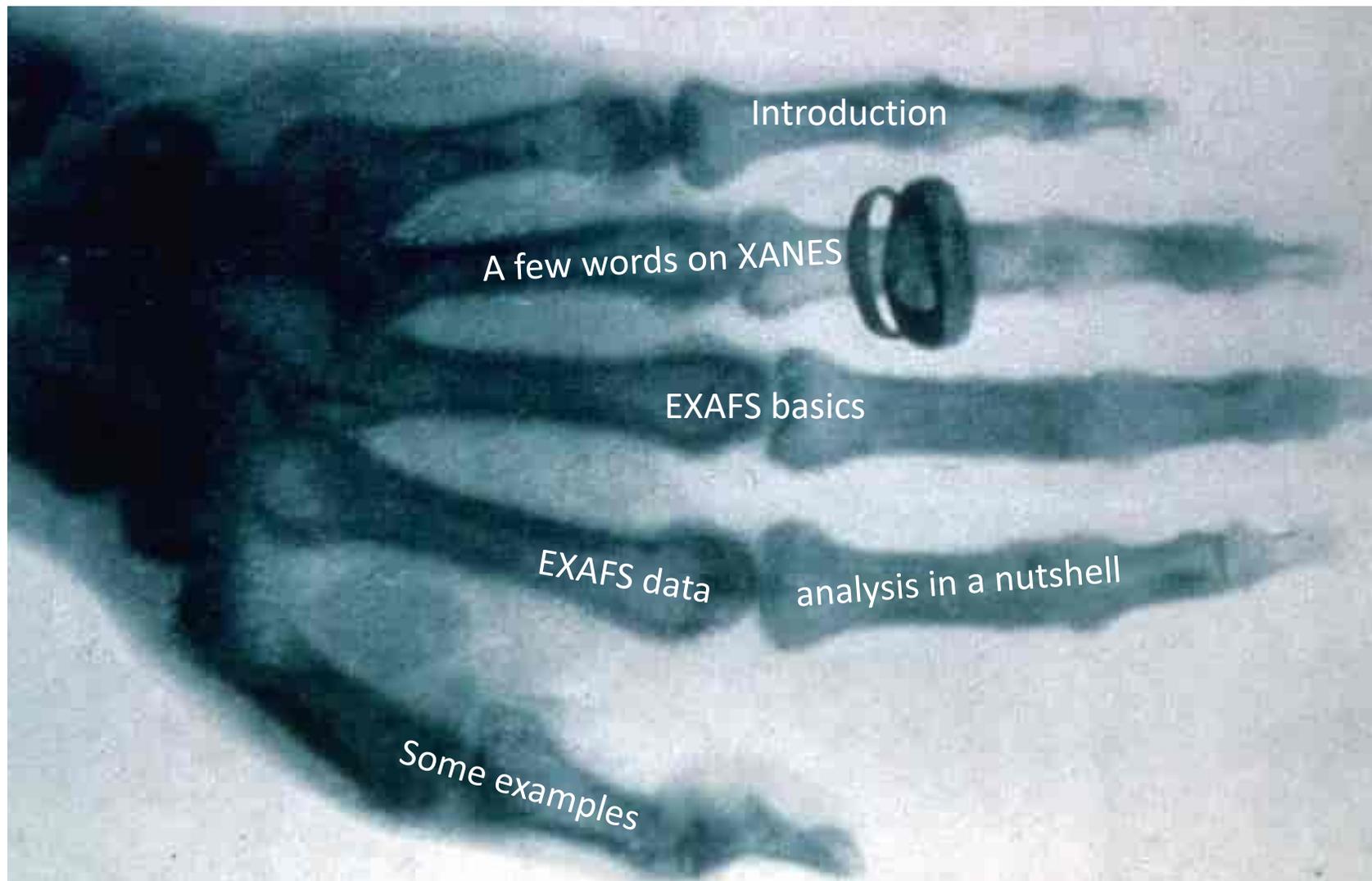
# Investigating structures at the local scale via X-ray Absorption Spectroscopy

E. Fonda

Synchrotron SOLEIL



What are we talking about today?



Introduction

A few words on XANES

EXAFS basics

EXAFS data

analysis in a nutshell

Some examples

# X-rays absorption



$$K_{\max} = h(\nu - \nu_0).$$

A. Einstein "On a [Heuristic](#) Viewpoint Concerning the Production and Transformation of [Light](#)"  
*Annalen der Physik* (1905)

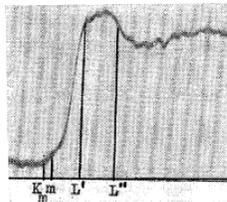


Fig. 6.  
Titanium.

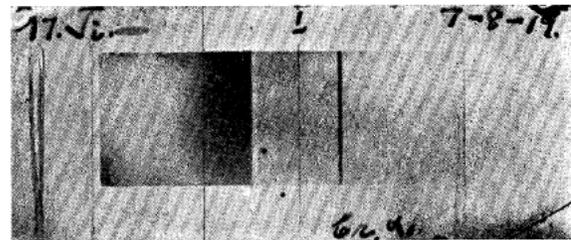


Fig. 10.  
Titanium.

HUGO FRICKE

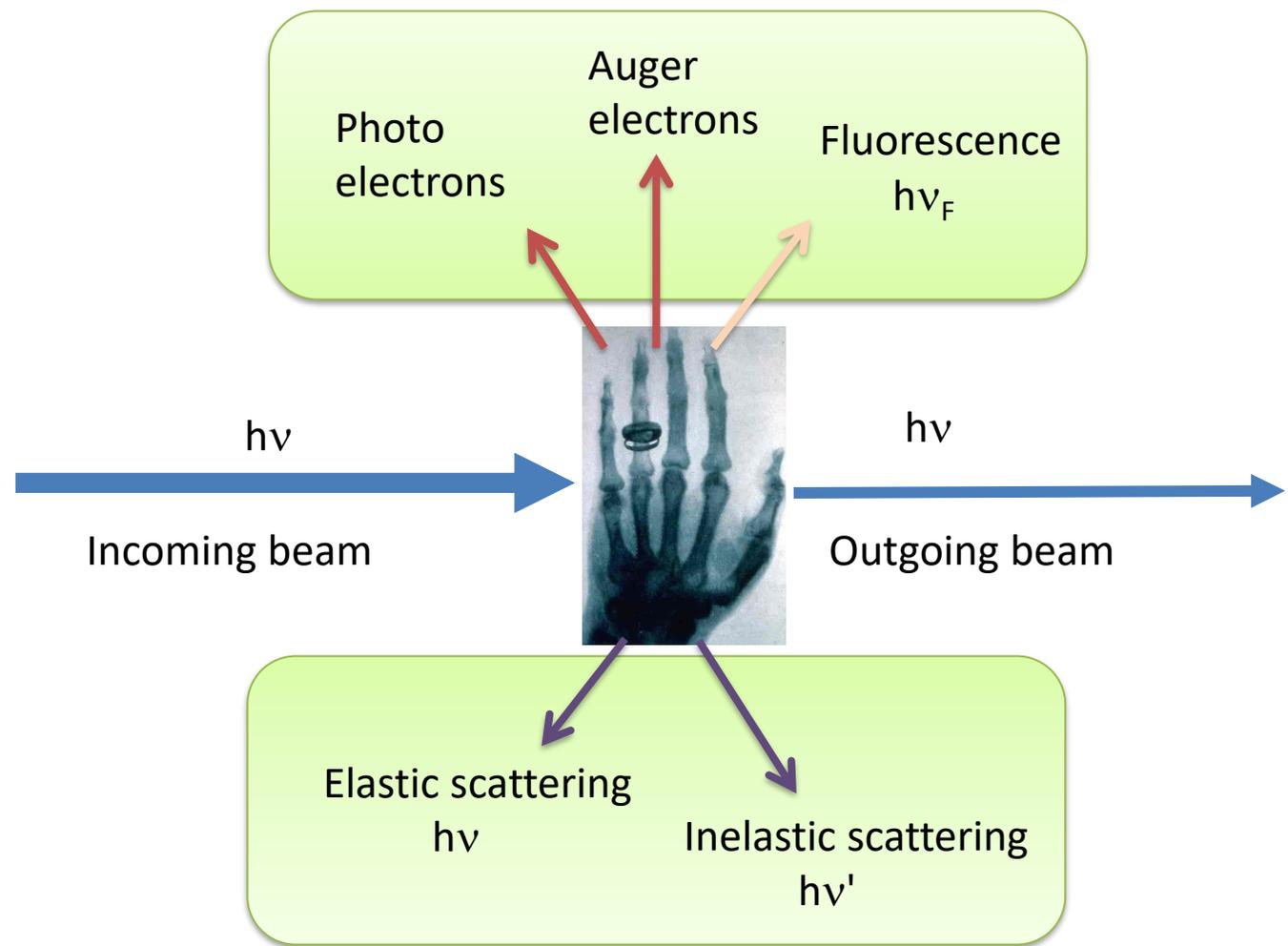
PHYSICAL REVIEW, VOL. XVI., SECOND SERIES.  
September, 1920.

## My EXAFS Family Tree.

Röntgen (1895)	Discovered X-rays
Maurice de Broglie (1913)	Measured first absorption edge
World War I (1914–1918)	
Fricke (1920)	Observed first fine structure
Kossel (1920)	First theory of XANES
Hanawalt (1931)	EXAFS in gases, temperature effect
Kronig (1931)	First theory of EXAFS
Cauchois (1932)	Curved crystal transmission spectrograph
Hayasi (1936, 1949)	Theory of EXAFS
World War II (1941–1945)	
Sawada (1955)	Amorphous/crystalline polymorphs
Shiraiwa (1958)	Improved theory
Kostarev (1939, 1946)	Theory and measured EXAFS in single crystals
Kozlenkov (1960)	Improved theory
Van Nordstrand (1960)	Instrumentation, fingerprint ID, used XAS to characterize catalysts
Lytle (14 July 1960)	Starts work at Boeing (BSRL)
Krogstad (1960)	Personal communication
Lytle (1962)	Particle-in-a-box model
Prins (1964)	Helped name EXAFS
Parratt (1965)	Personal communication; <i>Rev. Mod. Phys.</i> (1959). <b>31</b> , 616
Sayers, Stern, Lytle (1968–1971)	Modern theory, Fourier transform of EXAFS
Sayers, Stern, Lytle (1974)	First trip to synchrotron (SSRL)

Lytle, F. (1999). *Journal of Synchrotron Radiation* **6**(3): 123-134.

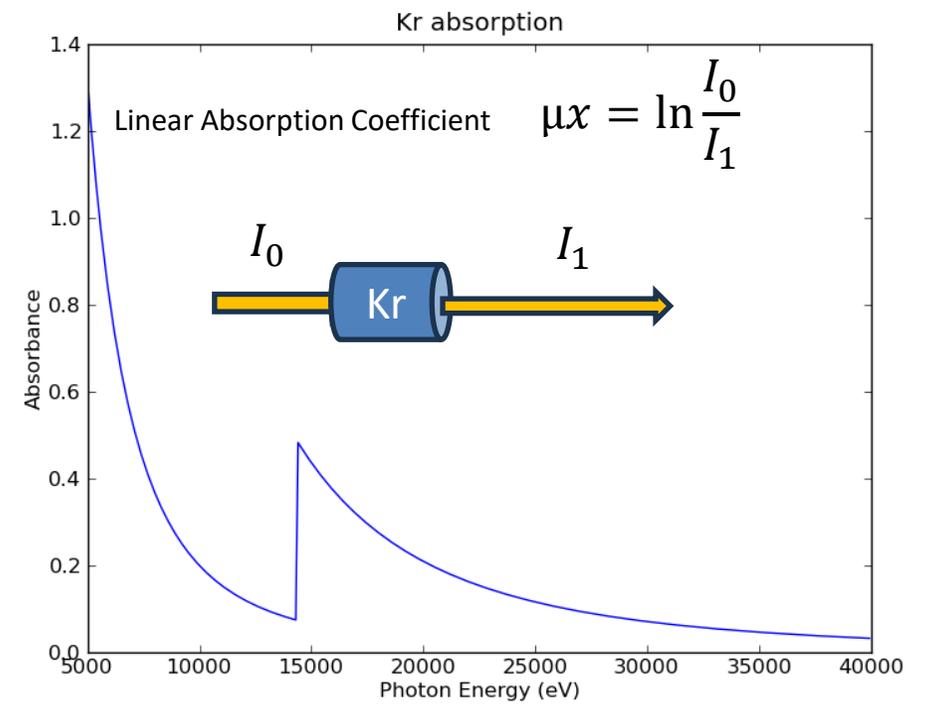
# X-rays absorption spectroscopy



Lambert-Beer :

$$\frac{dI}{I} = -\mu dx$$

$$I = I_0 \exp(-\mu x)$$



$$\mu \approx \frac{\rho Z^4}{AE^3}$$

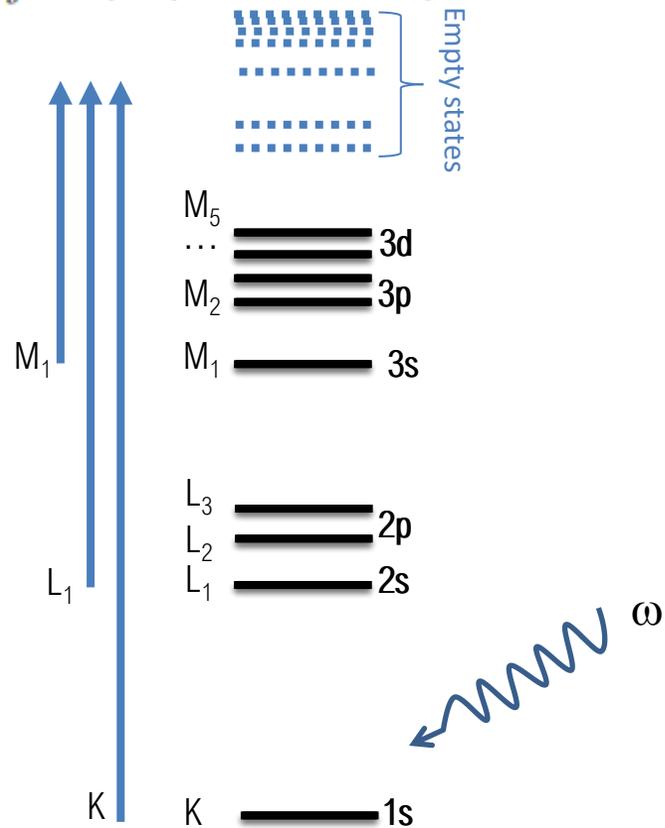
A = atomic mass  
 Z = atomic number  
 E = Energy  
 $\rho$  = mass density

# Hard X-rays energies are in the range of core electrons excitations

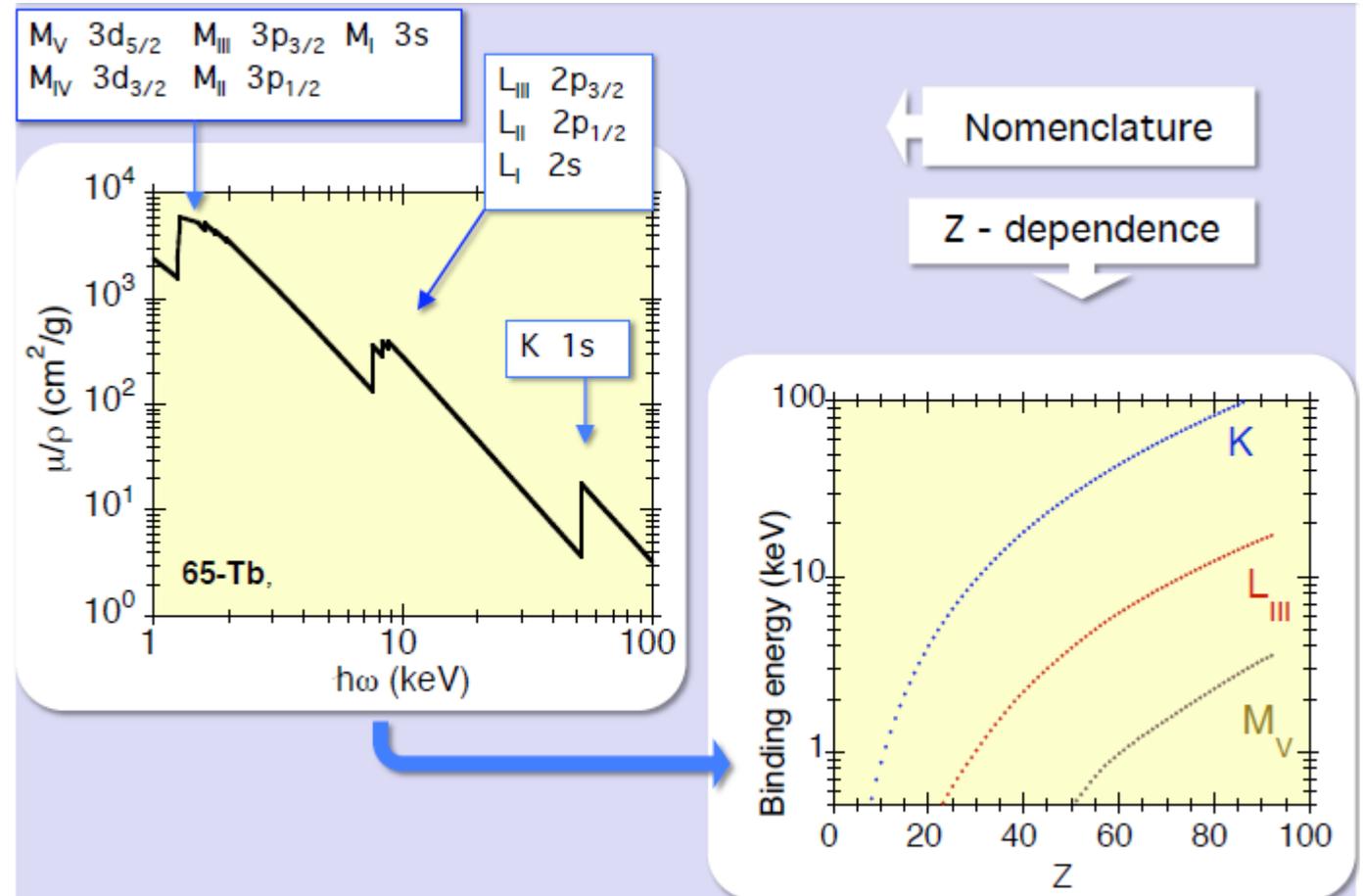
Electric dipole approximation  
Selection rules

$$\Delta\ell = \pm 1 \quad \Delta s = 0$$

$$\Delta j = 0, \pm 1, \quad \Delta m = 0, \pm 1$$



Each « edge » is identified by n,l,j (e.g. n=2 l=1 j=1-1/2 gives 2p<sub>1/2</sub> or L<sub>2</sub>)



In hard X-ray region edges of one element and of different elements are far apart, i.e. much more than 100eV  
→ strong chemical selectivity

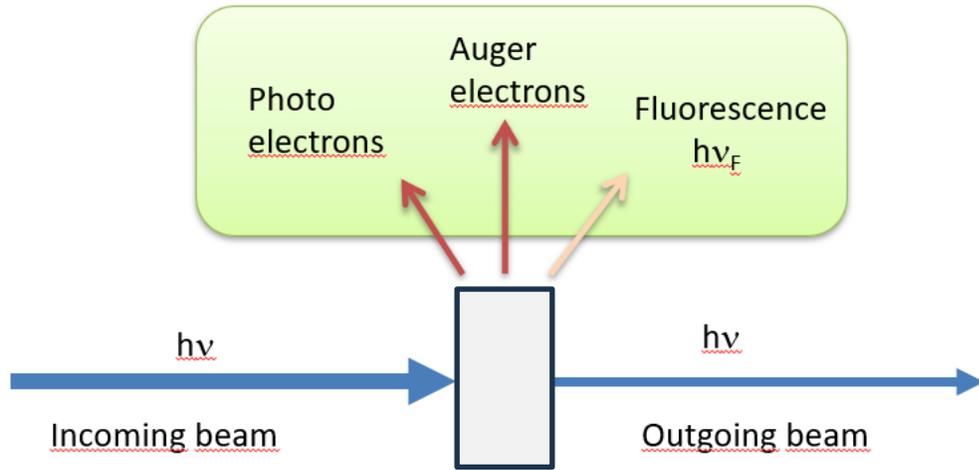
$$\mu(\omega) = \frac{Ne^2\omega\pi}{\hbar c\epsilon_0} \sum_f \left| \langle f | \vec{\epsilon} \cdot \vec{r} | i \rangle \right|^2 \delta(\omega - \omega_0)$$

How to practically measure absorption ?

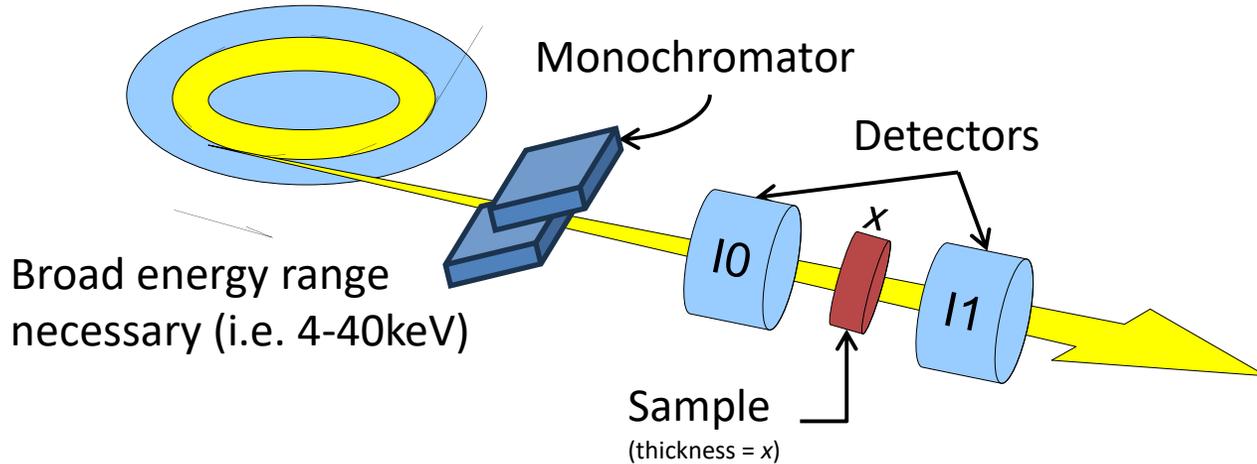
Lambert-Beer :

$$\frac{dI}{I} = -\mu dx \quad \mu x = \ln\left(\frac{I_0}{I_1}\right)$$

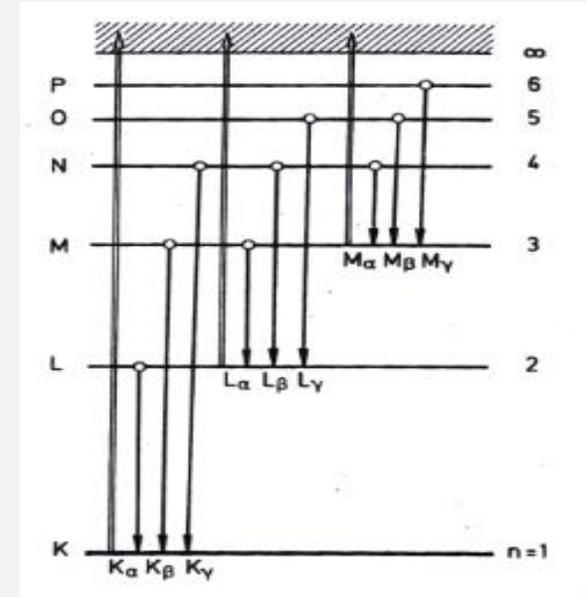
$$I = I_0 \exp(-\mu x)$$



Polychromatic X-ray source



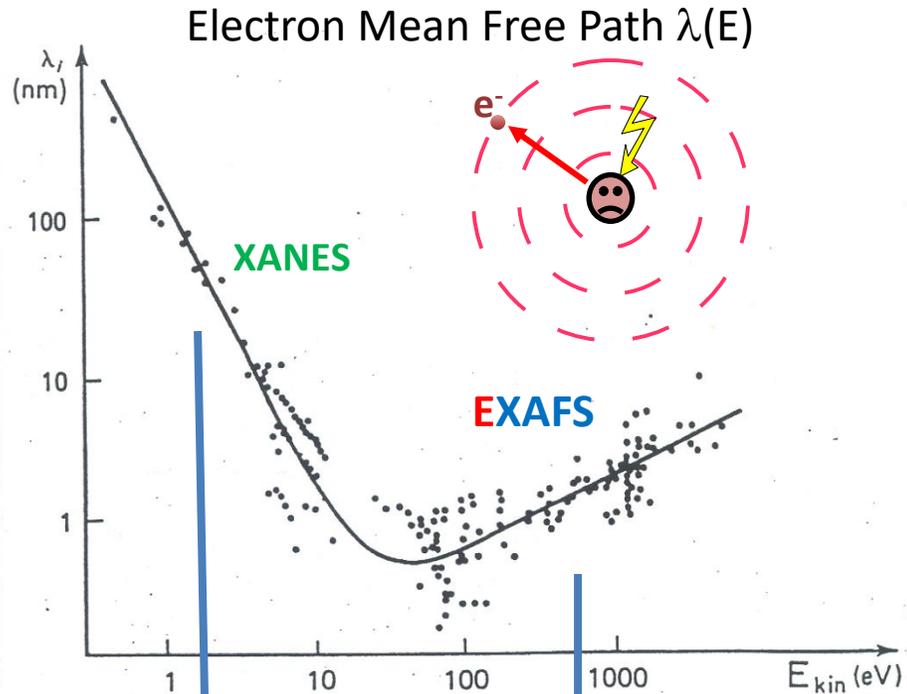
**Characteristic X-ray emission:**  
De-excitation processes



Sample emits fluorescence or electrons proportionally to absorption  
 → indirect measurement of  $\mu$  is possible.

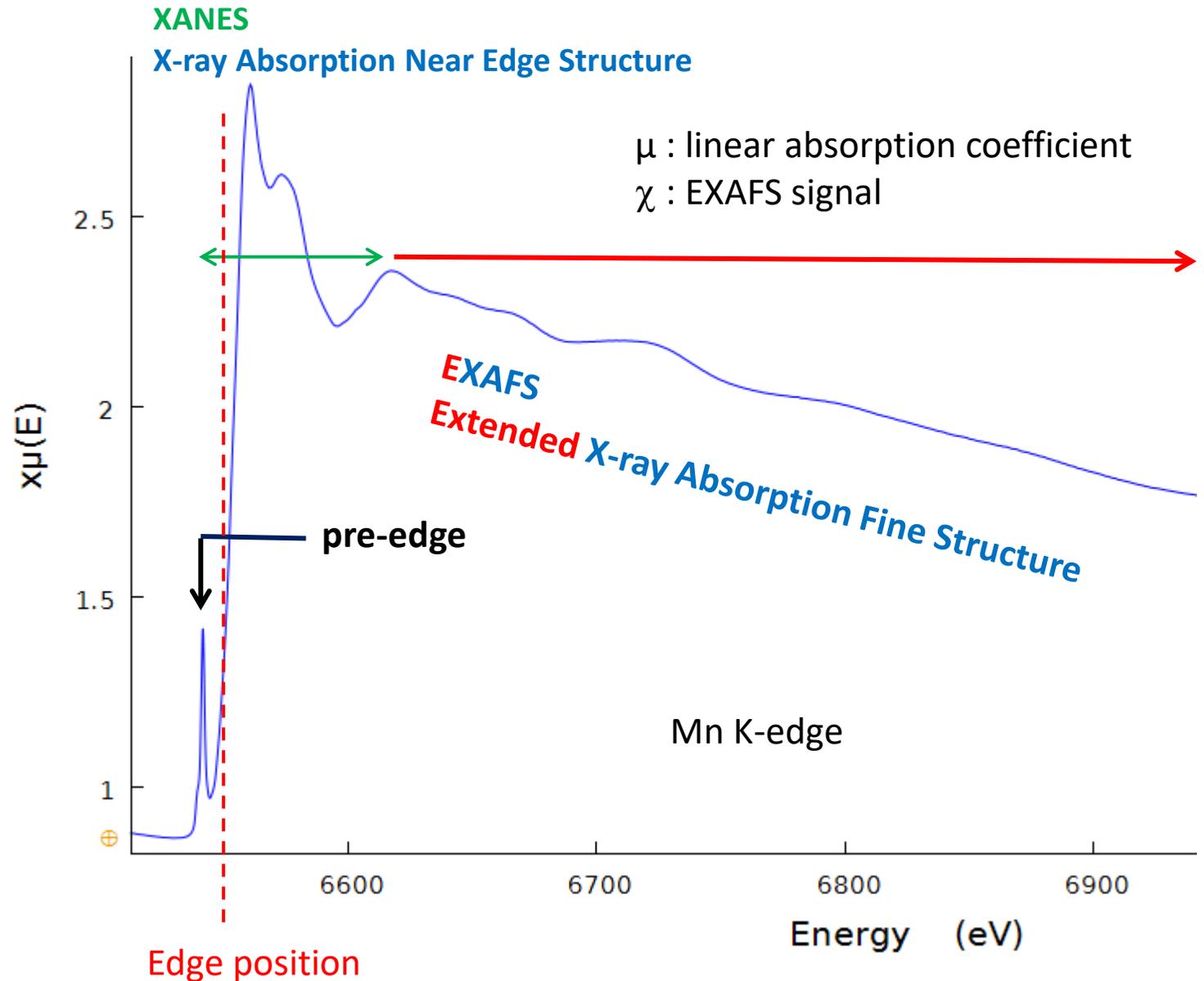
# XAFS: X-ray Absorption Fine Structure

We create a photoelectron:  $E_p = h\nu - E_0$



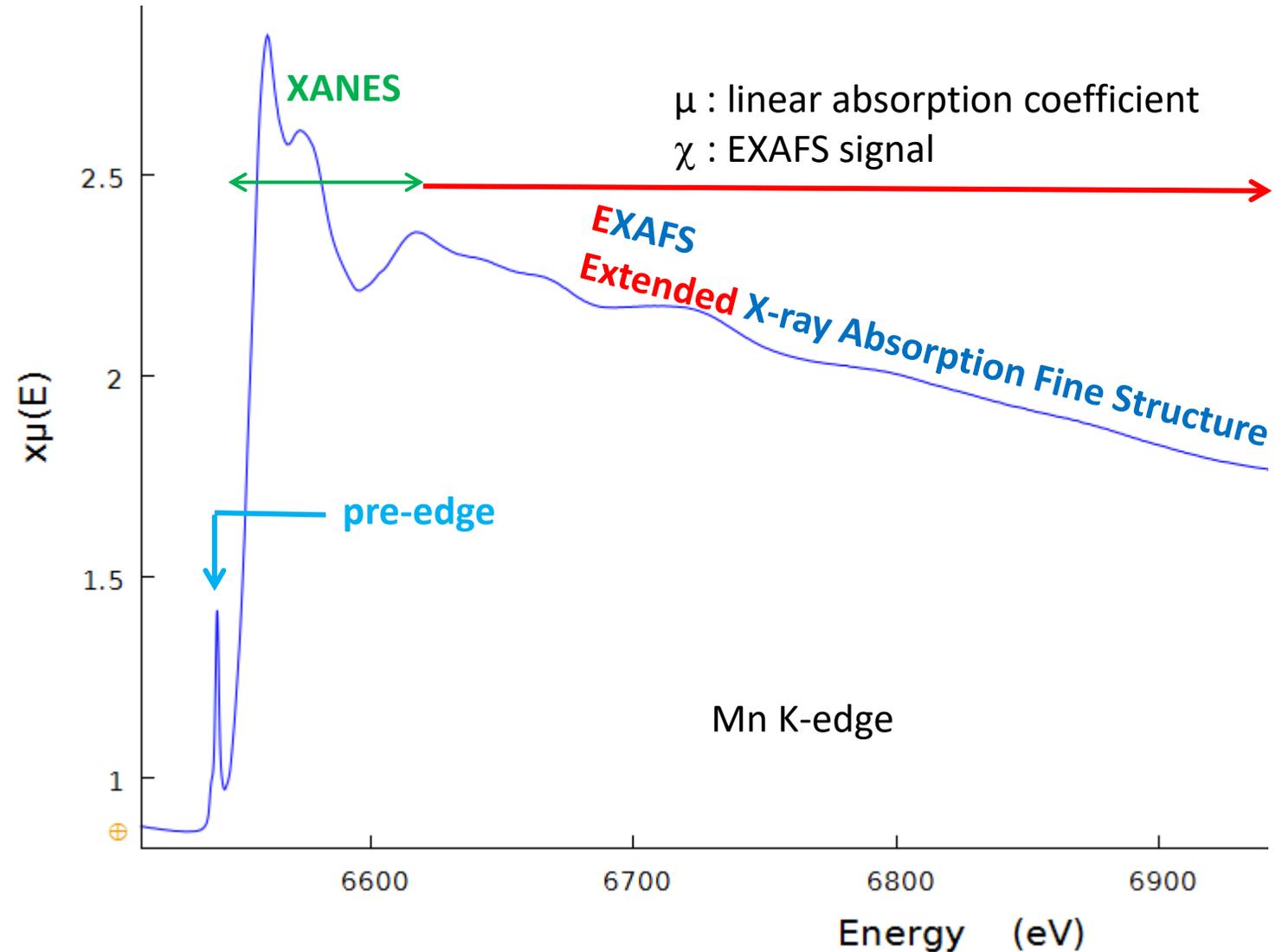
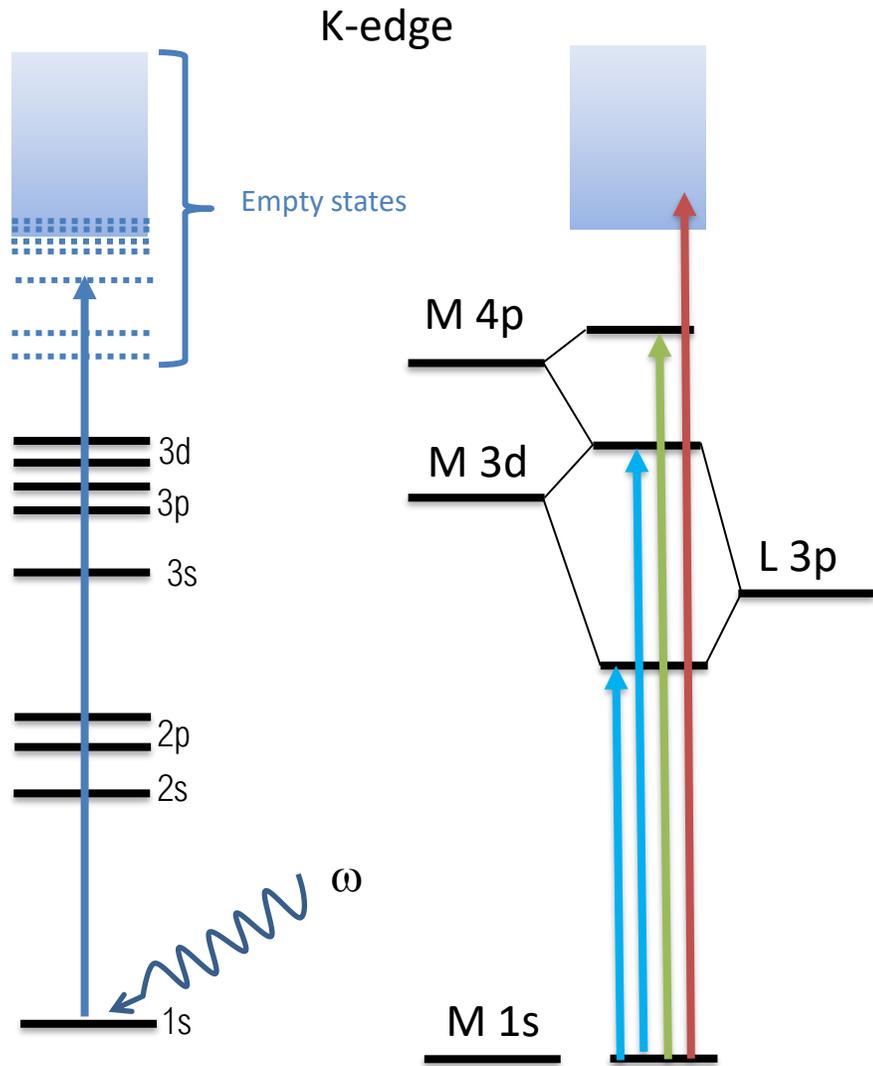
No analytical formula  
Direct and complex  
calculations

Series expansion  
analytical formulation



# XAFS: X-ray Absorption Fine Structure

## X-ray Absorption Near Edge Structure

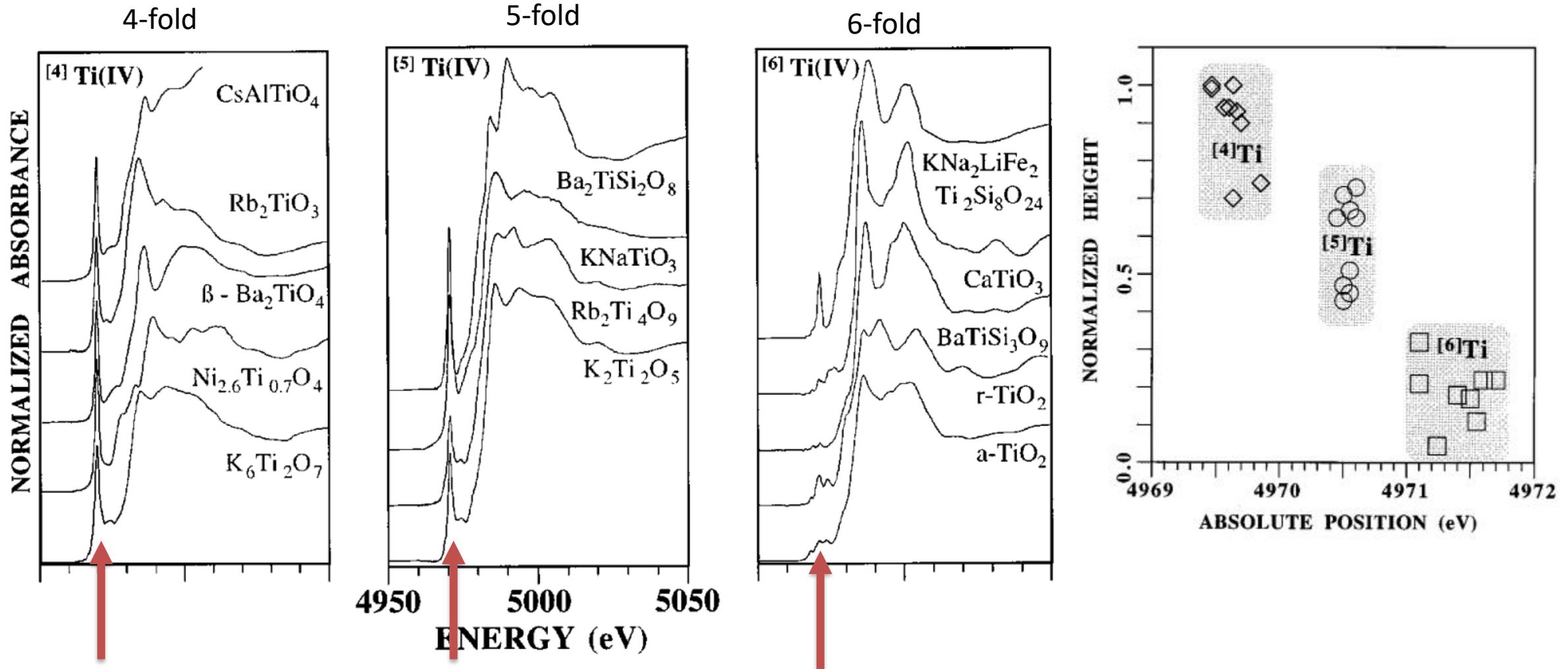


Transitions in pre edge have several origins. Dipole allowed ( $a_1$ ) are stronger.

The pd ligand/absorber hybridization modulates the character of final states => geometry impacts intensity

# XANES pre edge and coordination geometry

Ti K edge: only coordination changes  $1s \rightarrow 4p + 3pd$  hybridization, d are more localized  $\rightarrow$  sharp pre edge  
Geometrical information can be obtained via p/d mixing



# XANES pre edge: Fe K coordination AND valence

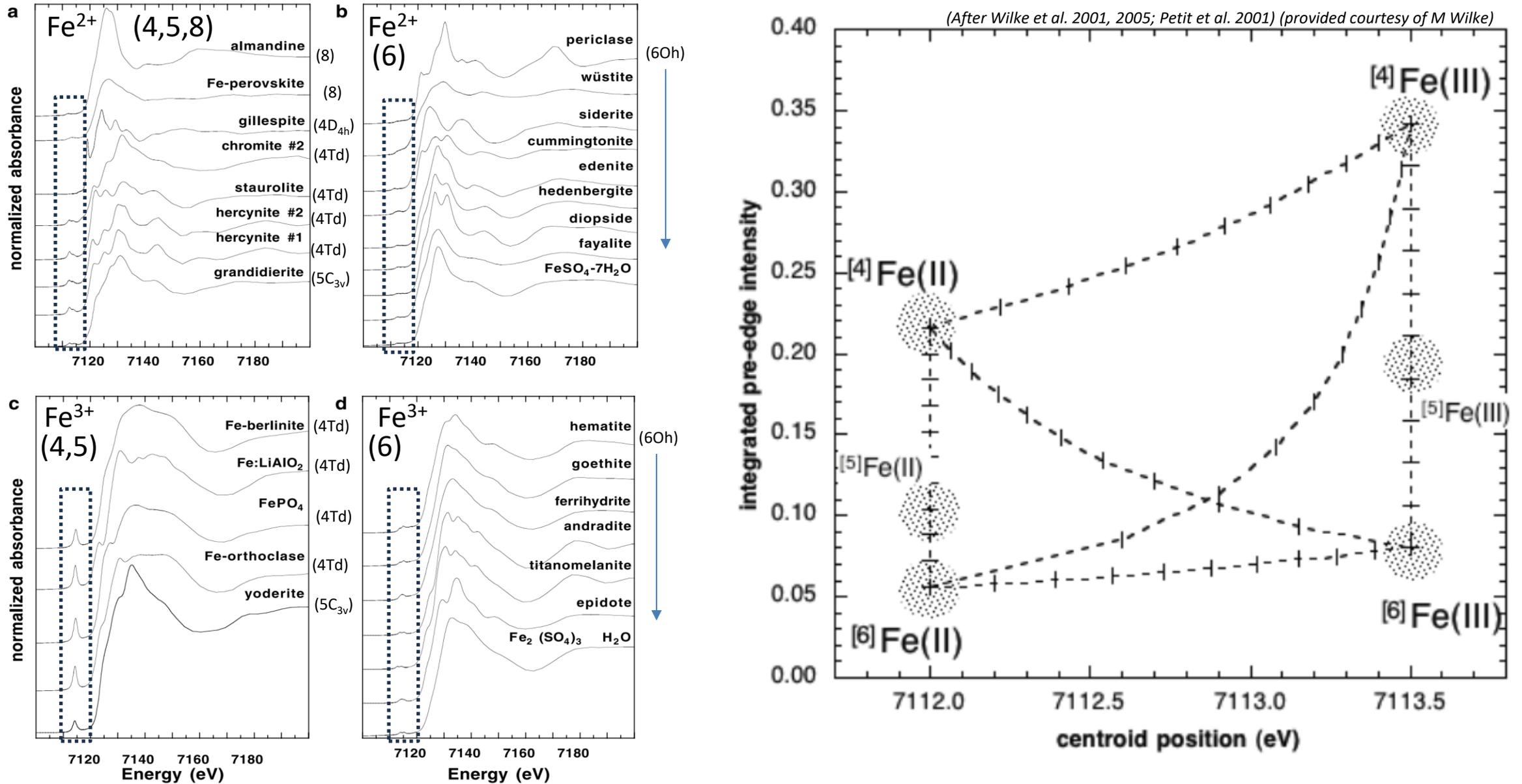
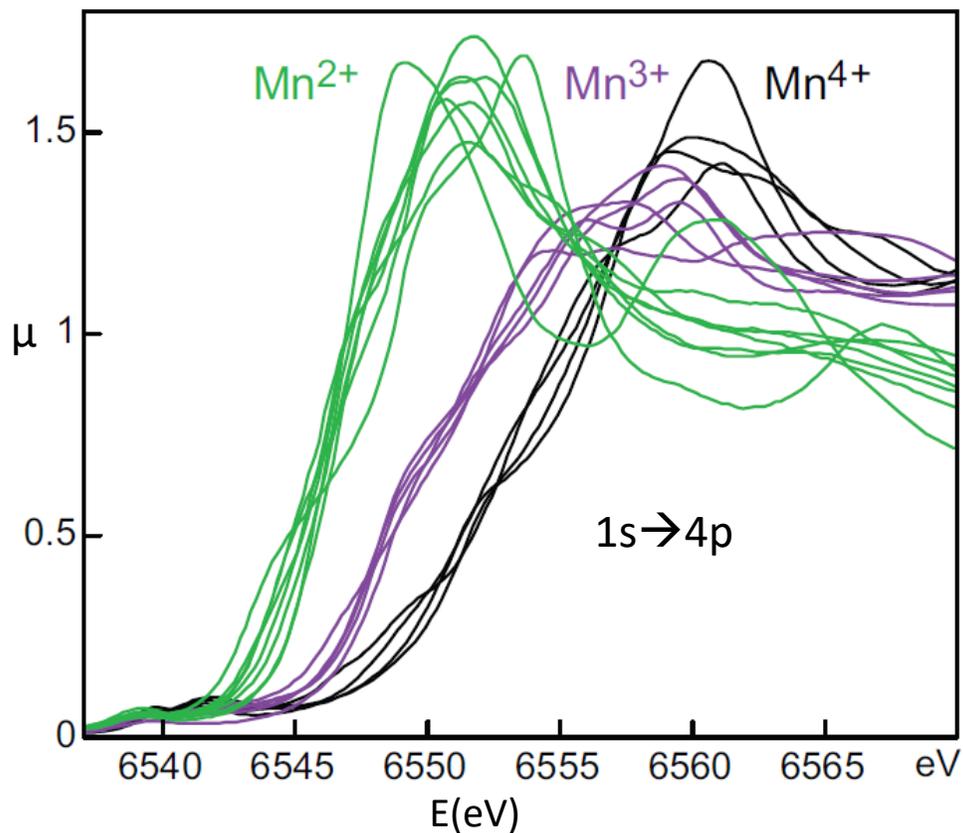


Figure 2 and 6 from Wilke, M., F. Farges, P.-E. Petit, G. E. Brown and F. Martin (2001). *American Mineralogist* **86**(5-6): 714-730

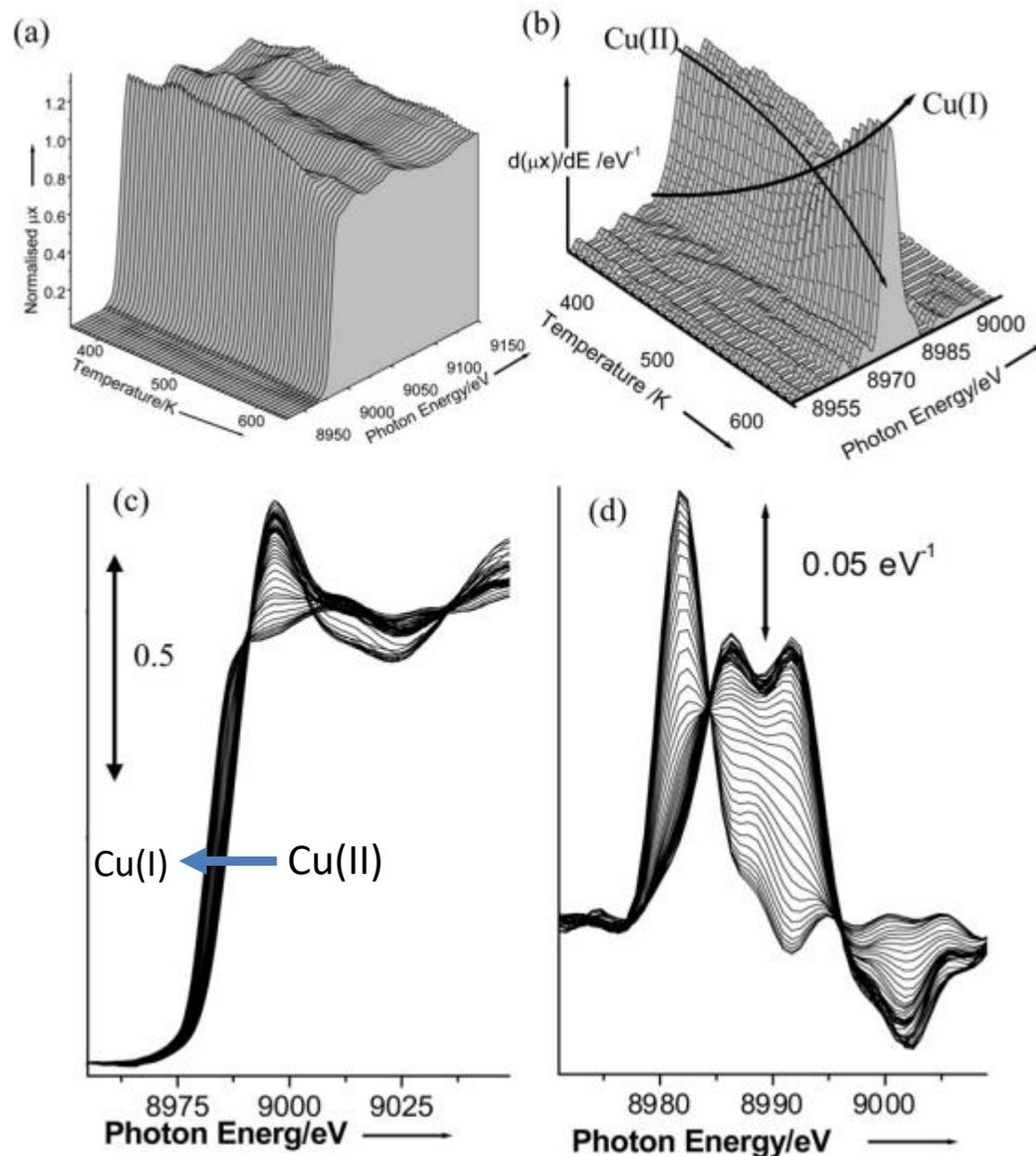
# XANES and oxidation state

K edge:  $1s \rightarrow n p$



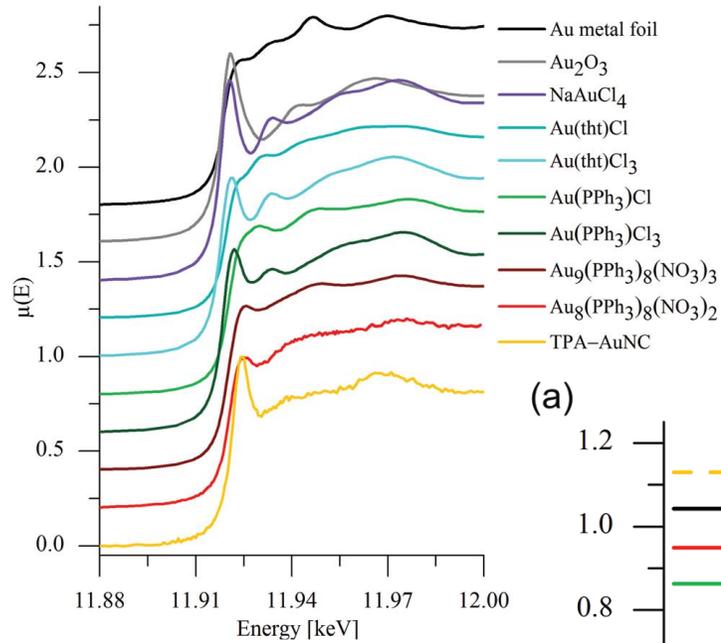
Edge position sensitive to oxidation state

Manceau, A., M. A. Marcus and S. Grangeon (2012) *Am. Mineralogist* 97



Lamberti, C., S. Bordiga, F. Bonino, C. Prestipino, G. Berlier, L. Capello, F. D'Acapito, F. X. Llabrés i Xamena and A. Zecchina (2003) *Phys. Chem. Chem. Phys.* **5**(20): 4502-4509.

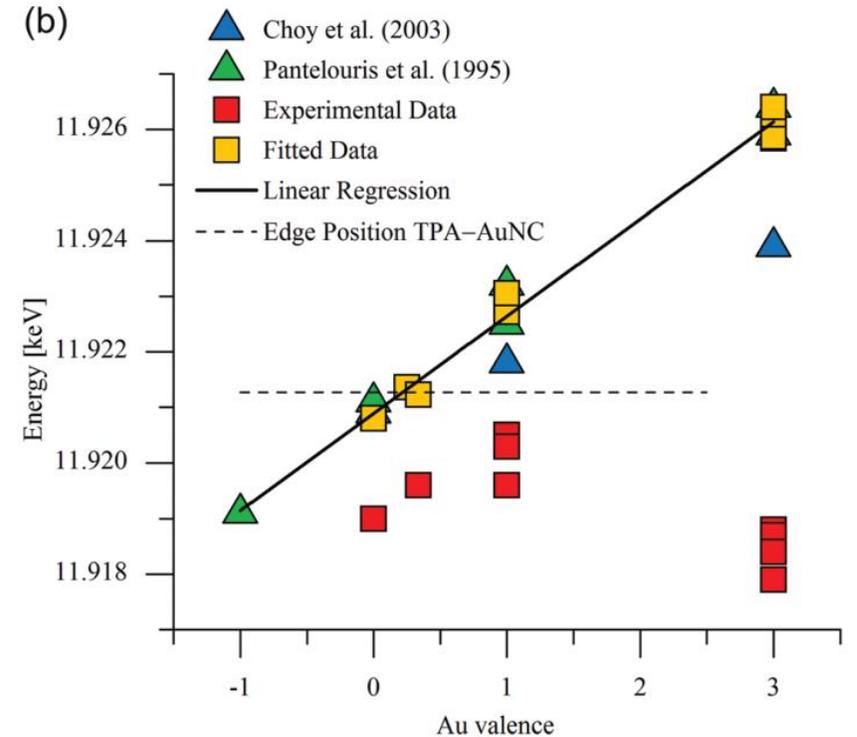
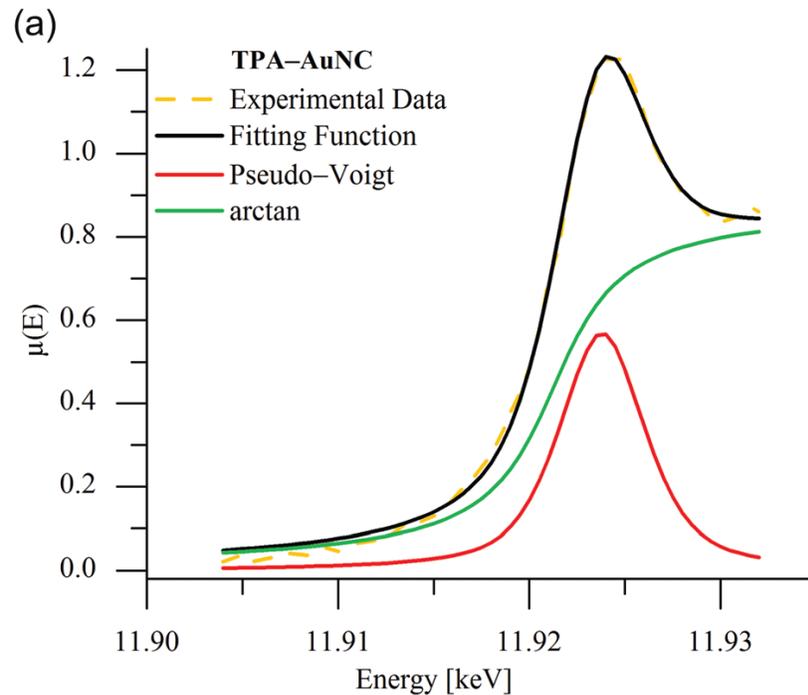
# XANES and oxidation state: life is not always that easy



L<sub>3</sub> edge: p→d. Bound and continuum transitions overlap.

No evident correlation of position and oxidation state → ■

Fit to disentangle 2p→5d and 2p→continuum → ■



# XANES take away messages

## Information provided by XANES and advantages

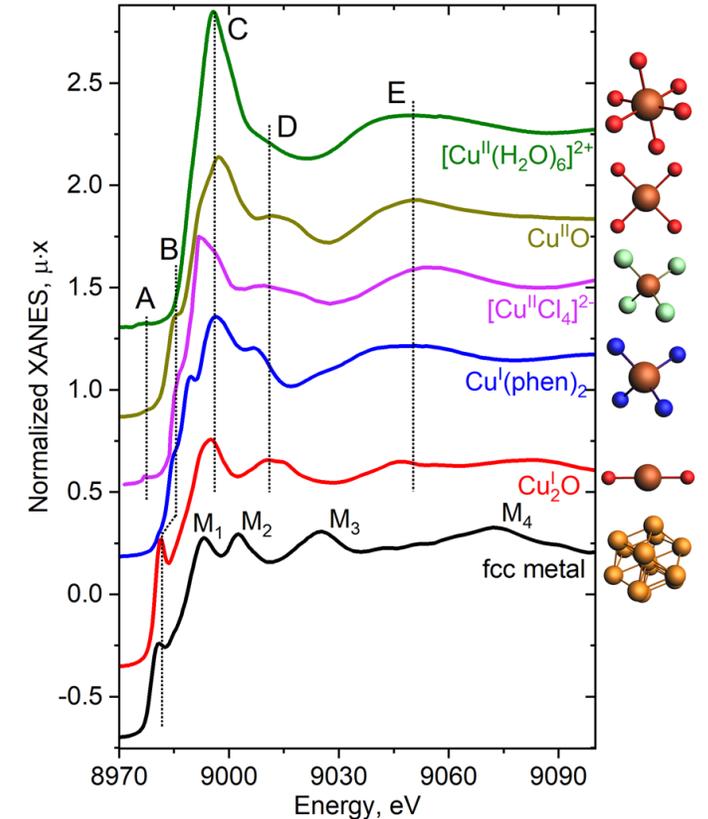
- Strong signal = easy to measure
- Information available (minimum):
  - Geometry
  - Oxidation state

## Disadvantages

- Geometry AND oxidation state information are often entangled
- There is not a universal method to obtain the information
- Theory is complex and different approaches tackle different problems

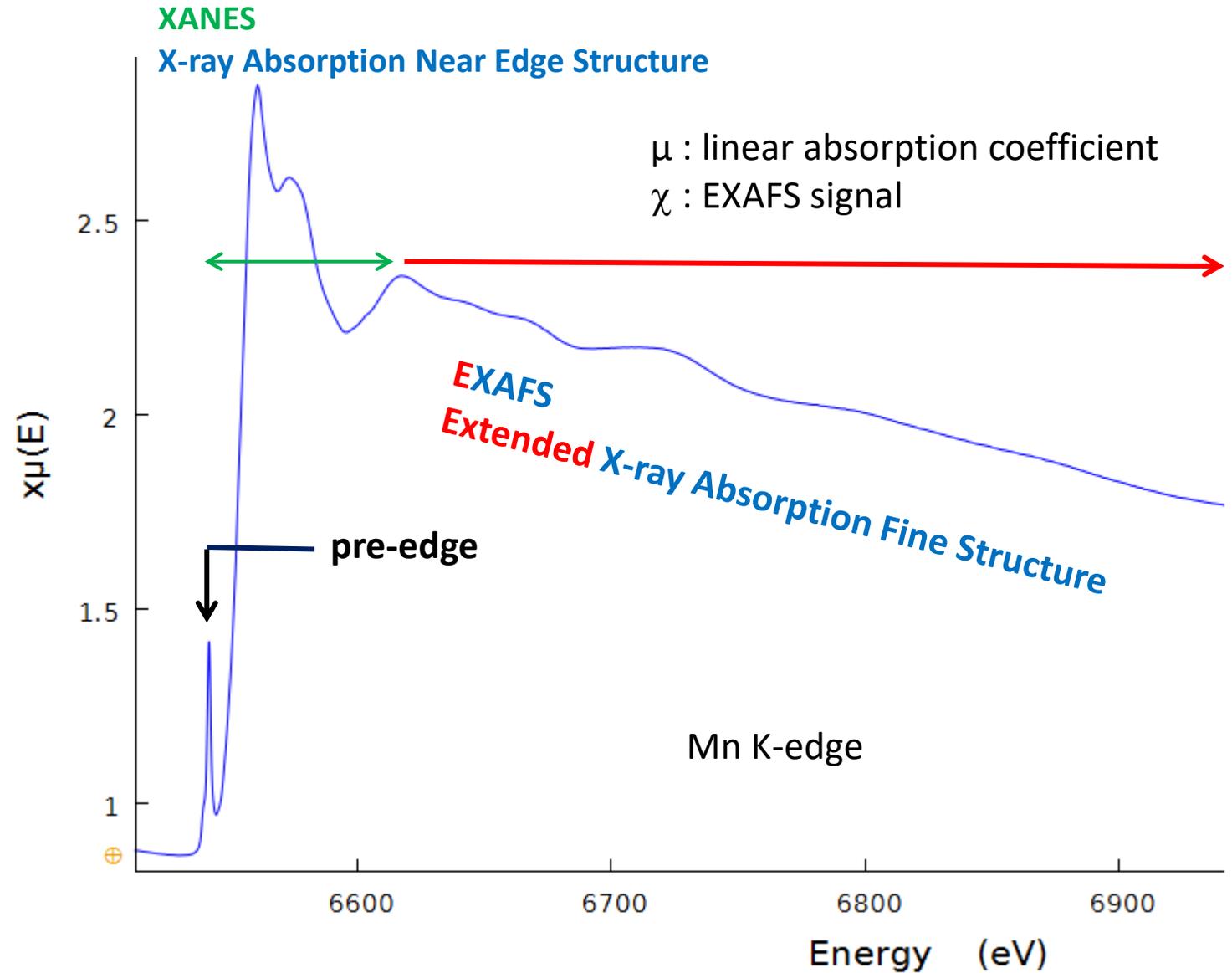
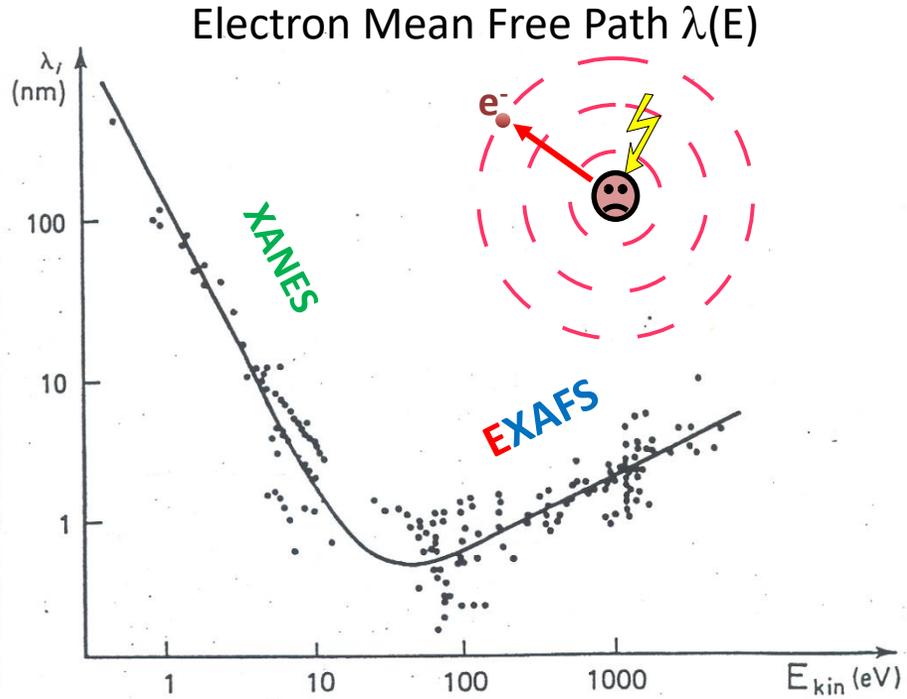
## Perspectives

- A good playground for machine learning?

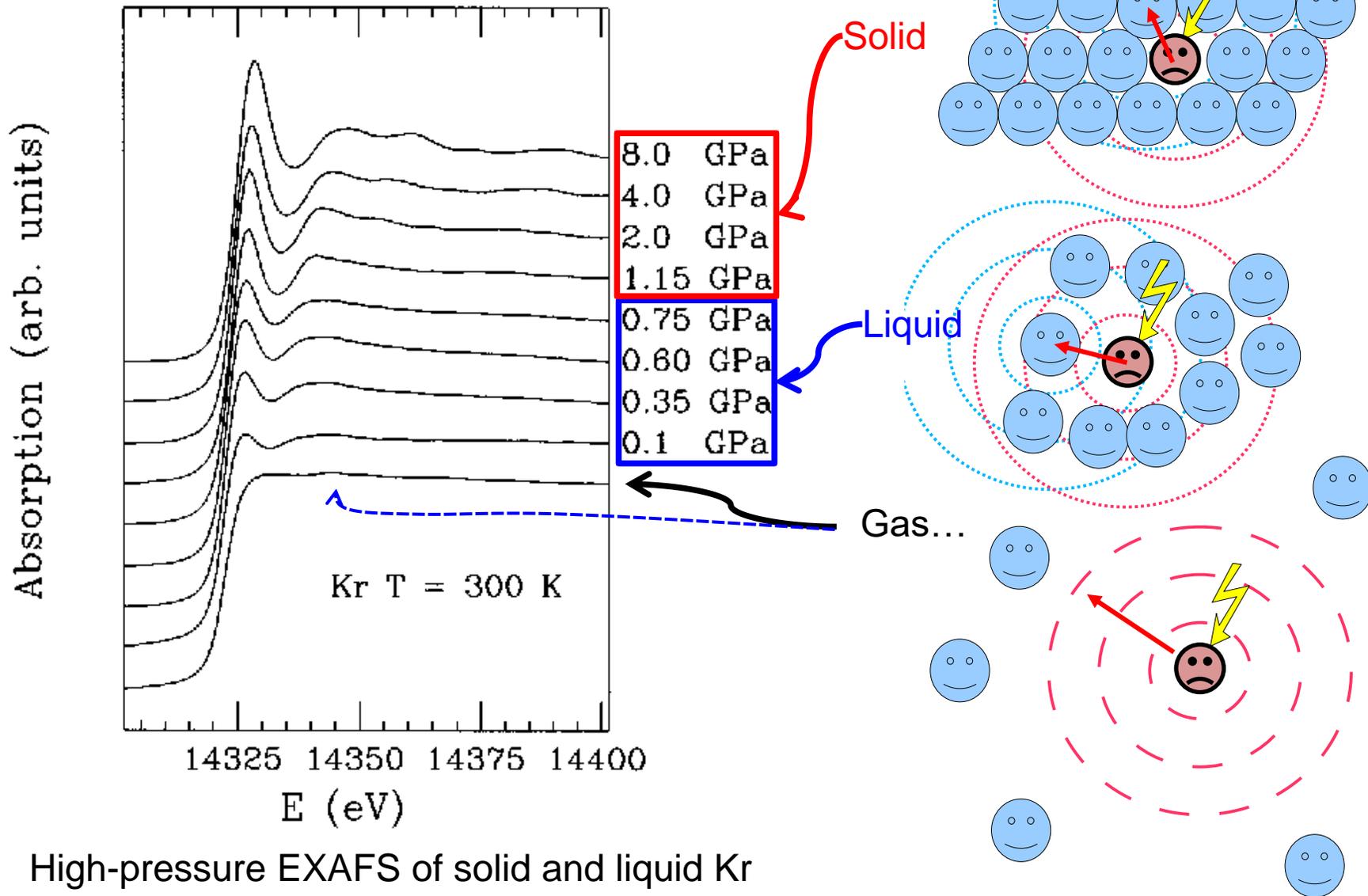


Guda et al. (2021). "Understanding X-ray absorption spectra by means of descriptors and machine learning algorithms." *npj Computational Materials* **7**(1).

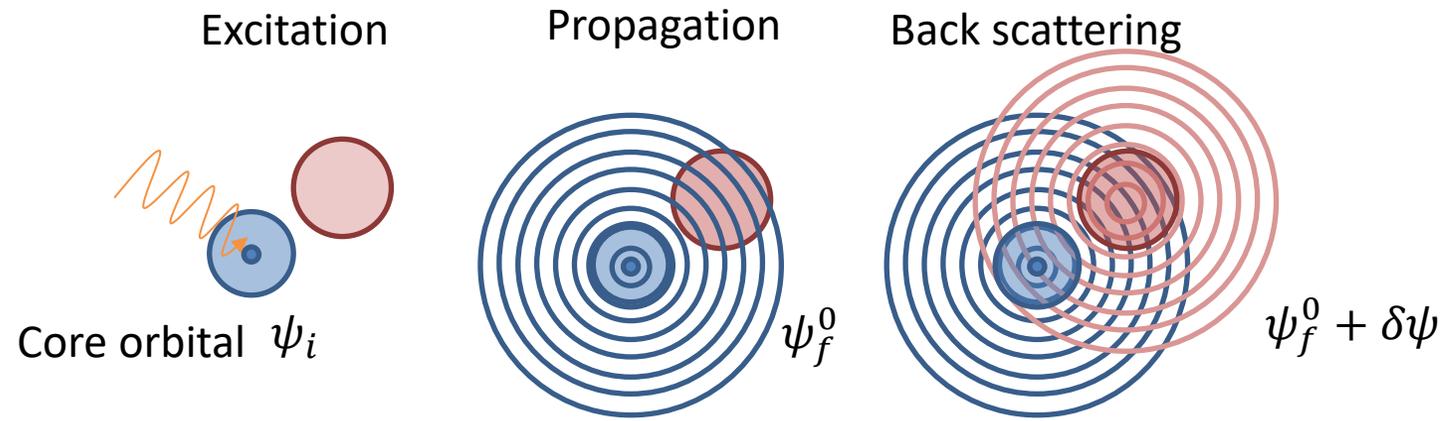
# EXAFS: Extended X-ray Absorption Fine Structure



# EXAFS explained in a single figure



High-pressure EXAFS of solid and liquid Kr



Photoelectron wavenumber:

$$|\vec{k}| = \frac{2\pi}{\lambda} = \sqrt{\frac{m}{\hbar^2} (E - E_0)}$$

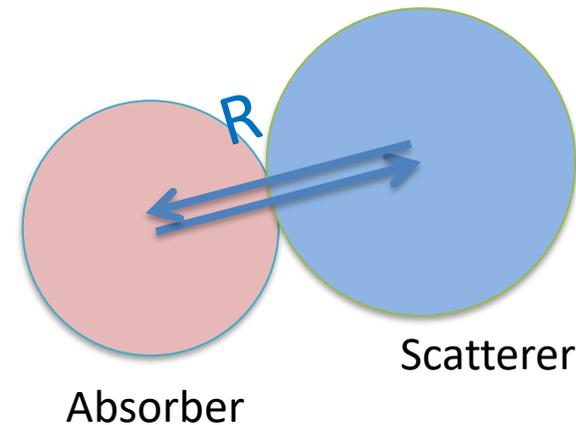
$$\mu(\omega) \propto \left| \langle \psi_f^0 + \delta\psi | \hat{n} \cdot \vec{r} | \psi_i \rangle \right|^2$$

Projection over core orbital

As the wave travels, it's shifted by absorber, scatterer and again absorber potentials.

It's backscattered (angle =  $\pi$ ) with effective amplitude  $f$

$$\delta\psi_f \propto \psi_f^0 i \frac{1}{2k} e^{i\delta} \frac{e^{ikR}}{R} f(k, \pi) \frac{e^{ikR}}{R} e^{i\delta}$$



# EXAFS equation

$$\chi(k) = 3 \underbrace{|\hat{\eta} \cdot \hat{R}|^2}_{\text{Polarization}} \underbrace{\frac{1}{kR^2}}_{\text{Spherical wave}} \sin(\underbrace{2Rk + \Phi(k)}_{\chi(k) \text{ oscillates with Frequency} = 2R})$$

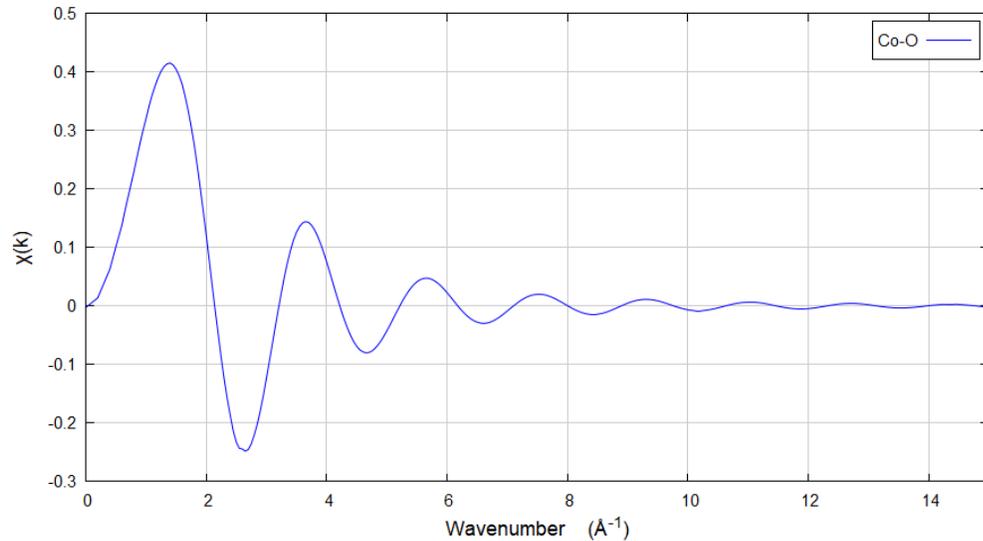
Simplifies to 1 in the following if anisotropy can be neglected

Polarization

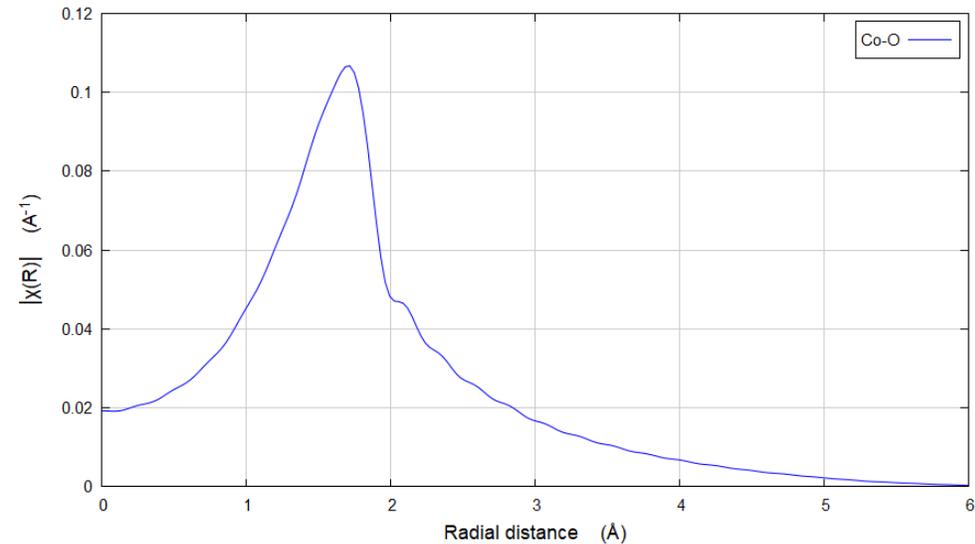
Spherical wave

$\chi(k)$  oscillates with Frequency = 2 R

CoO in k space



CoO in R space



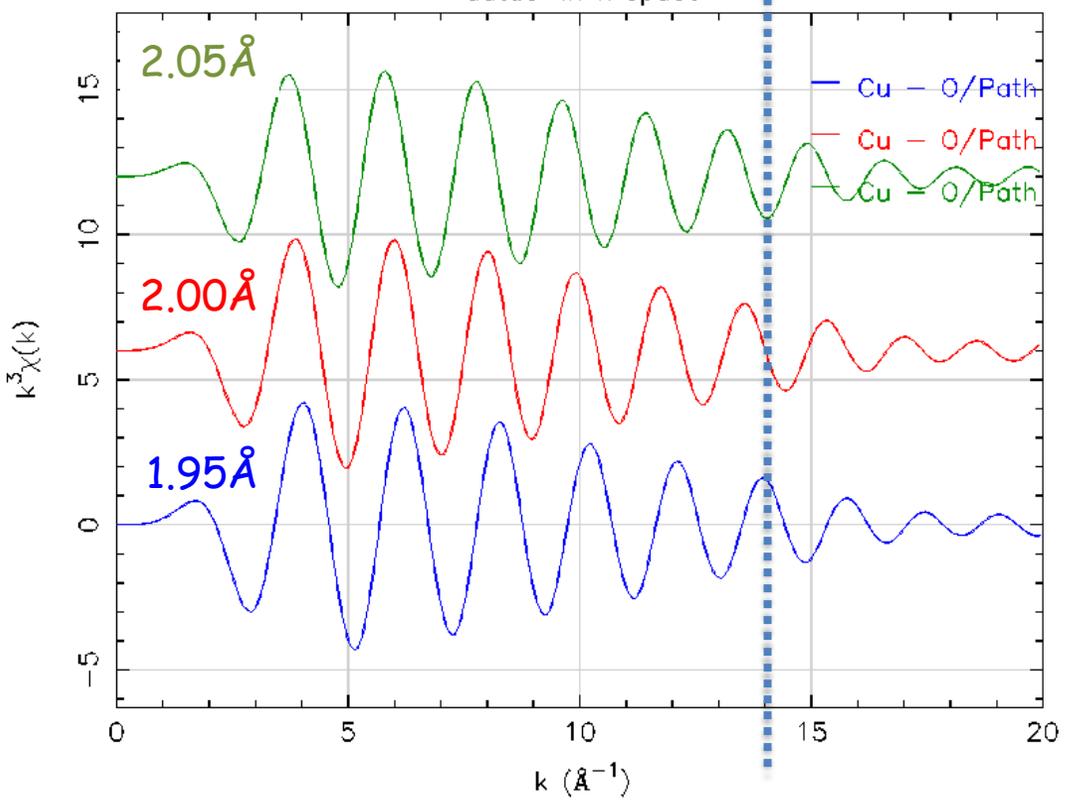
$$k\chi(k) = \frac{1}{R^2} |f(k, \pi)| \sin(2Rk + \Phi(k))$$

$R^2$   
Spherical wave

$\chi(k)$  oscillates with  
Frequency = 2 R

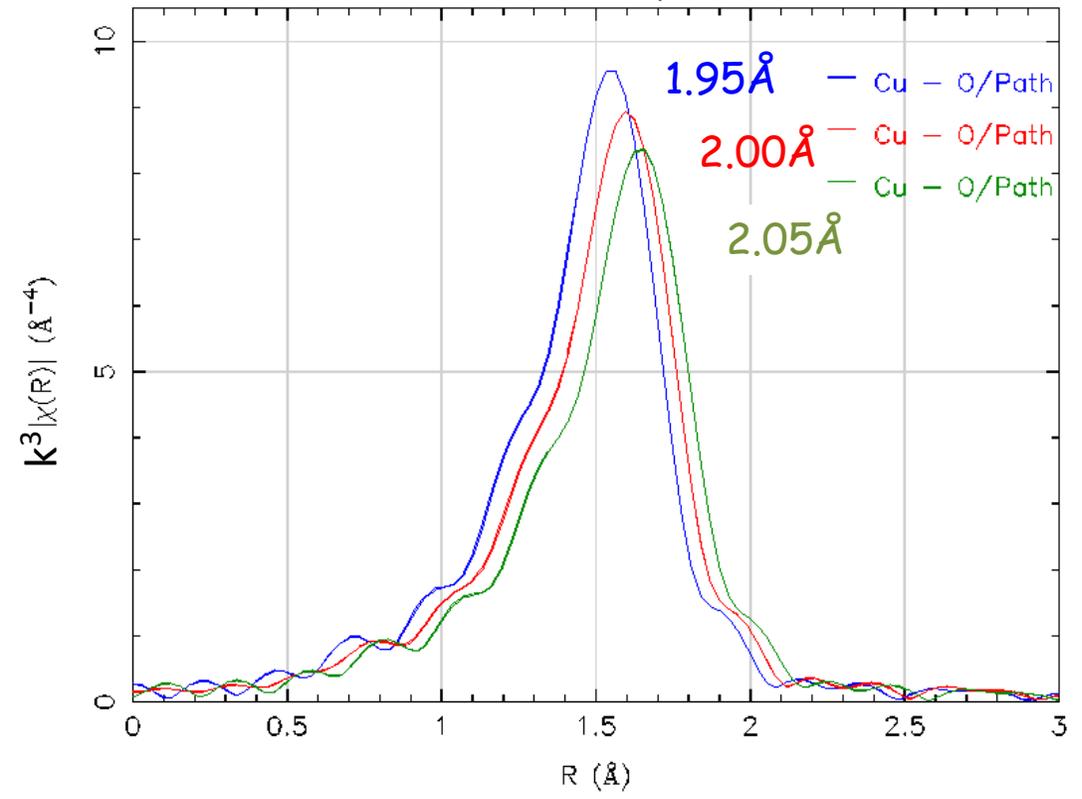
Cu-O

'data0' in k space

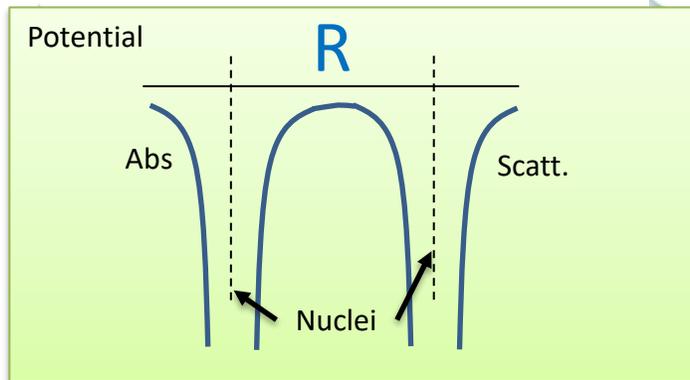
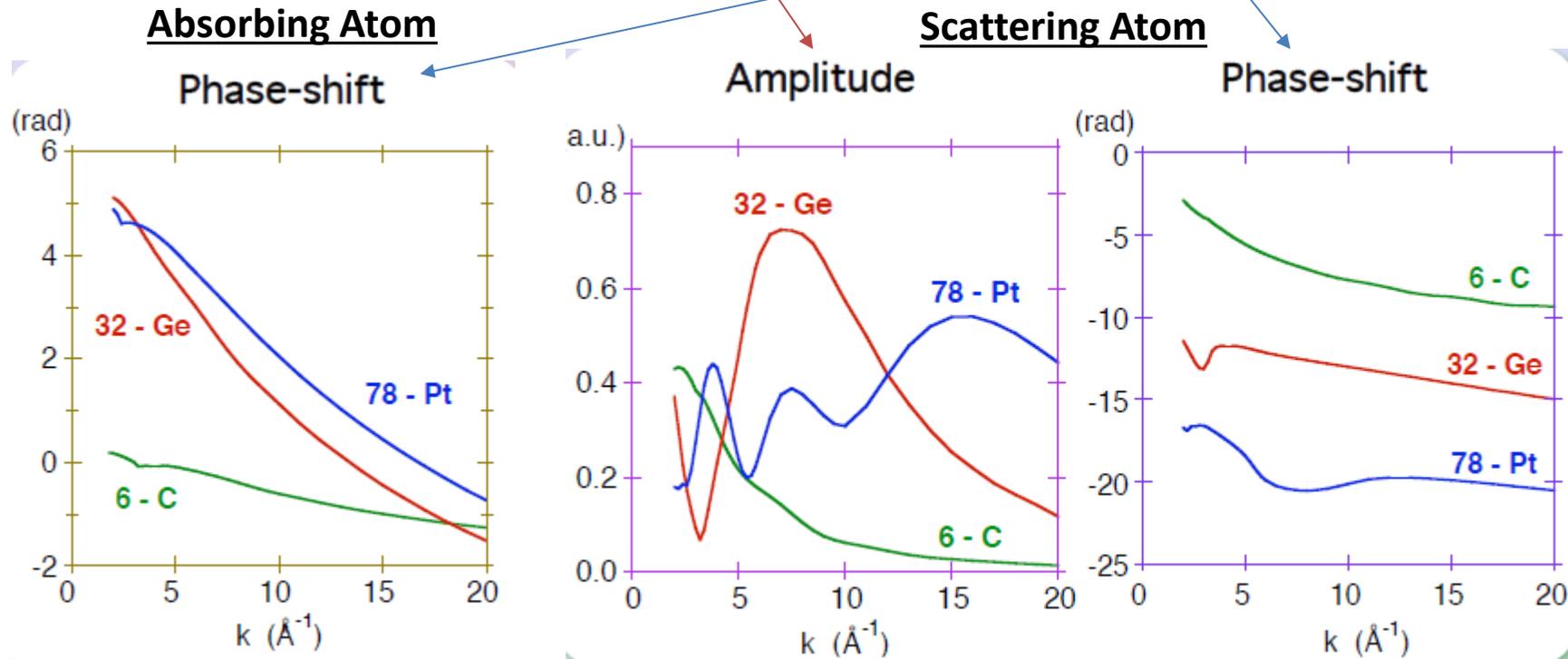


Fourier Transform →

'data0' in R space



$$k\chi(k) = \frac{1}{R^2} |f(k, \pi)| \sin(2Rk + \Phi(k))$$



**Different neighbors have different phases and scattering amplitudes.**  
**Higher Z higher |f| at higher |k| values**

Pair distance distribution :

- Picture of thermal motion, EXAFS depends on T



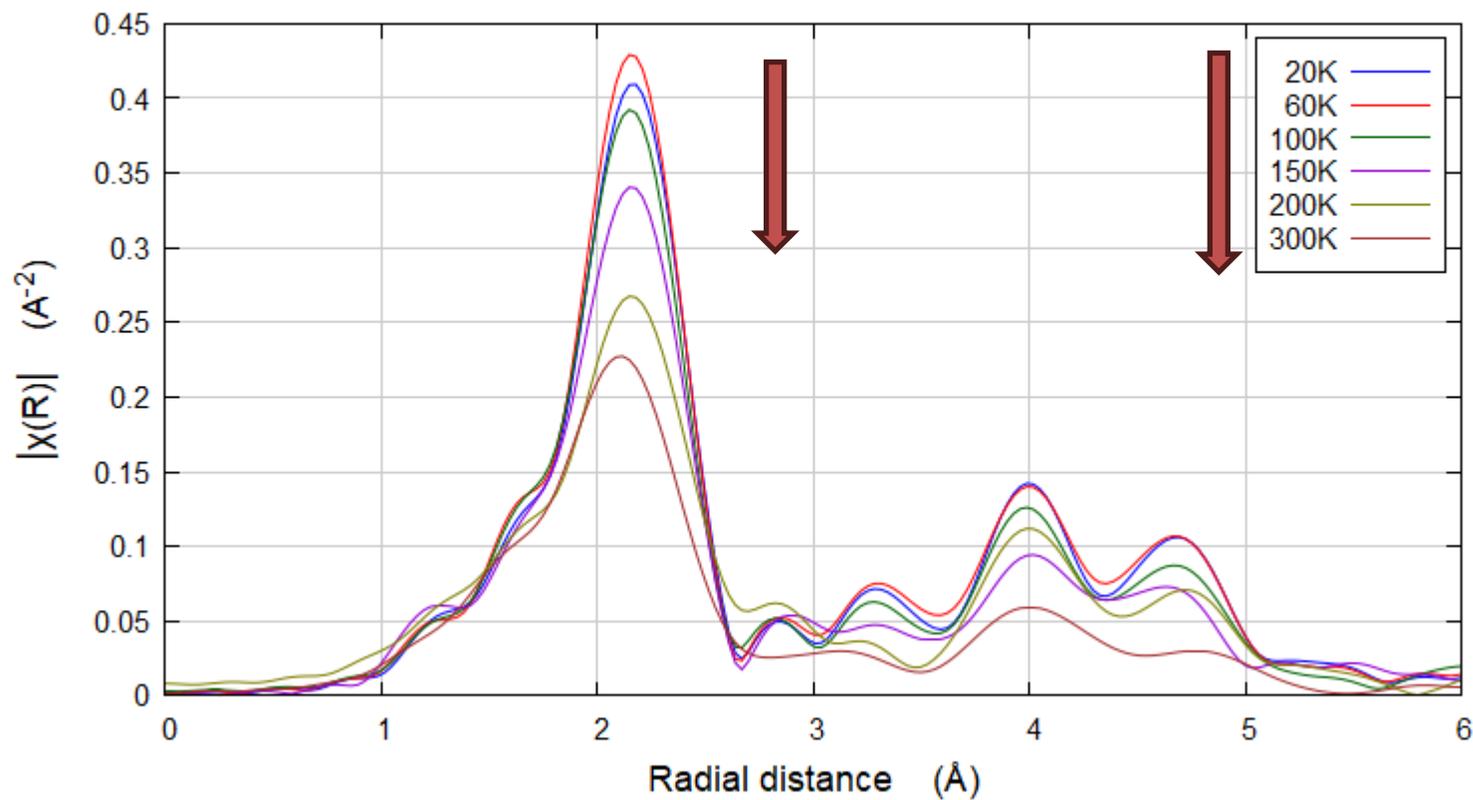
Damping term: « Debye Waller factor like »



$$k\chi(k) = \frac{1}{R^2} |f(k, \pi)| e^{-2\sigma^2 k^2} \sin(2Rk + \Phi(k))$$

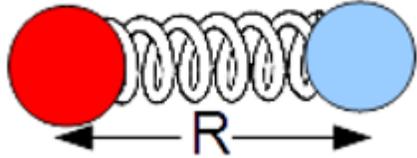
Temperature effect

Copper clusters



## Pair distance distribution :

- Picture of thermal motion, EXAFS depends on T

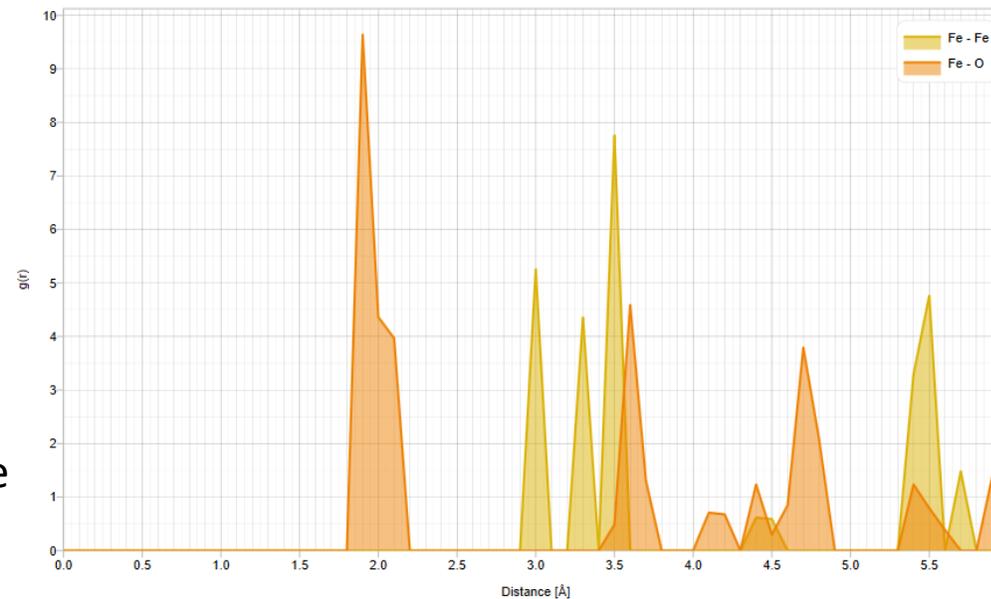
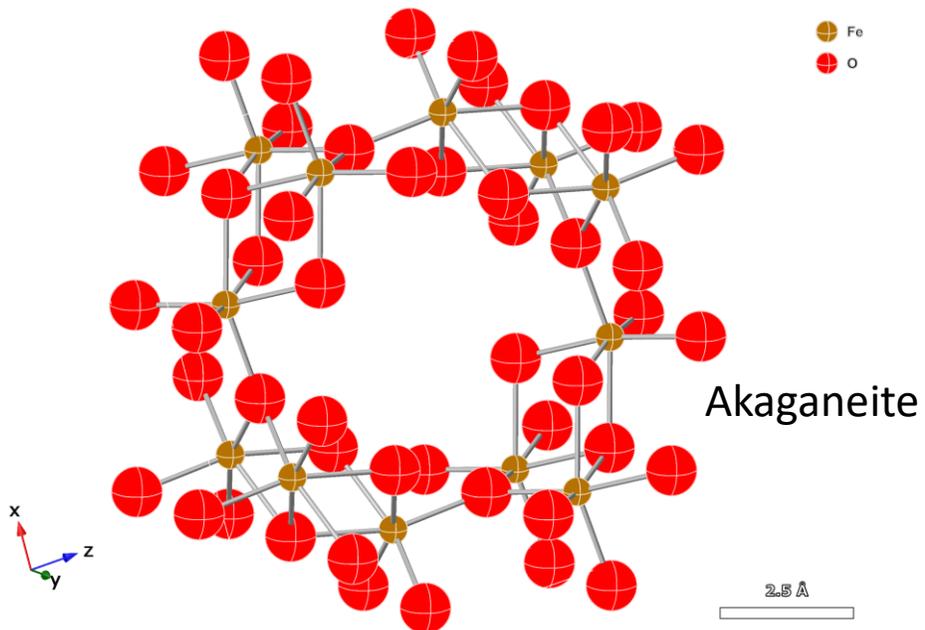


Damping term: « Debye Waller factor like »



$$k\chi(k) = \frac{1}{R^2} |f(k, \pi)| e^{-2\sigma^2 k^2} \sin(2Rk + \Phi(k))$$

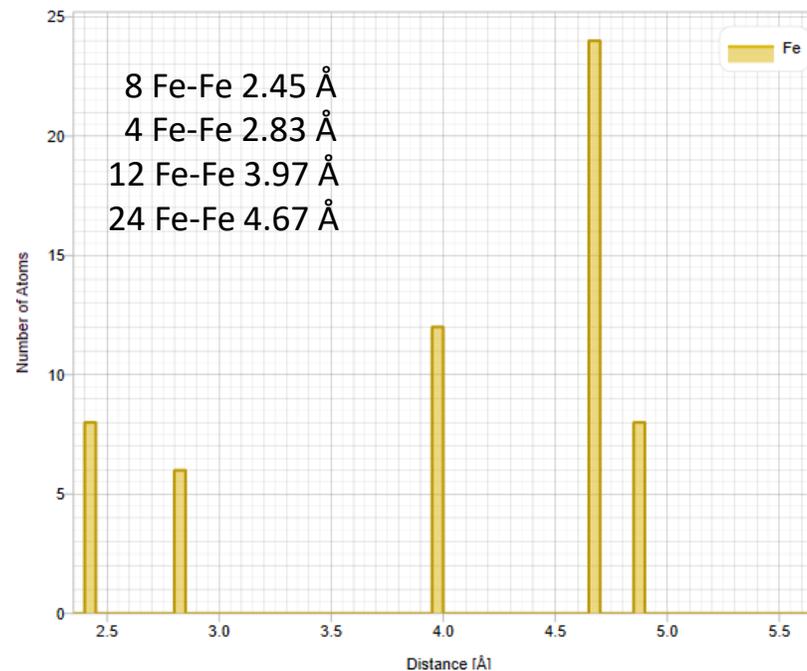
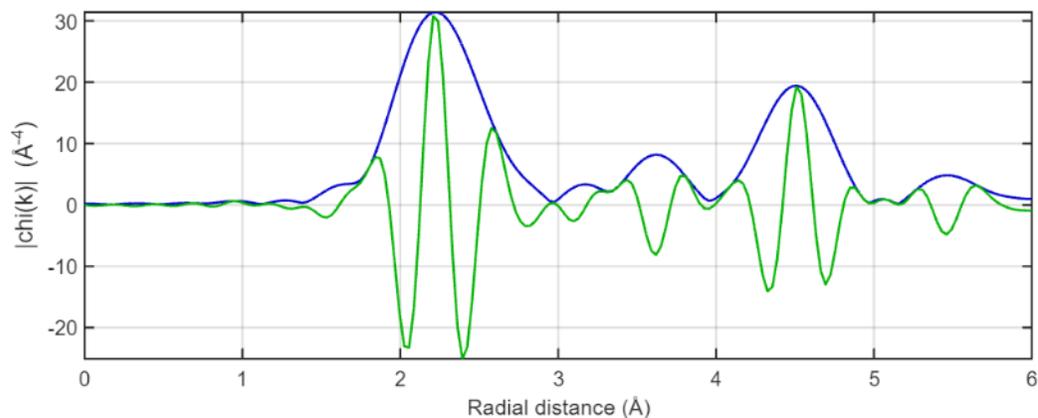
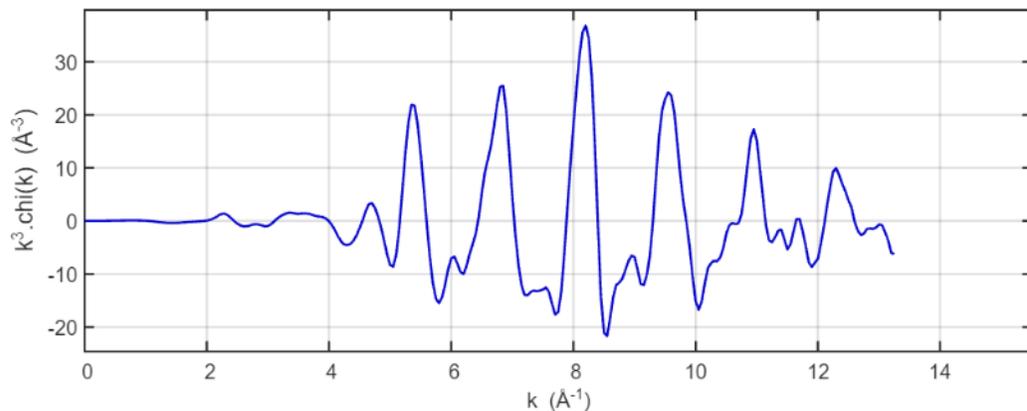
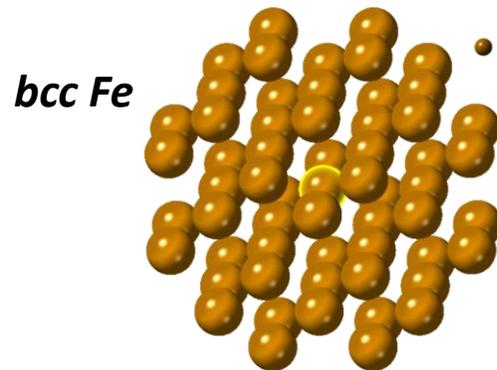
- Structural average + structural disorder



# Adding up more atoms

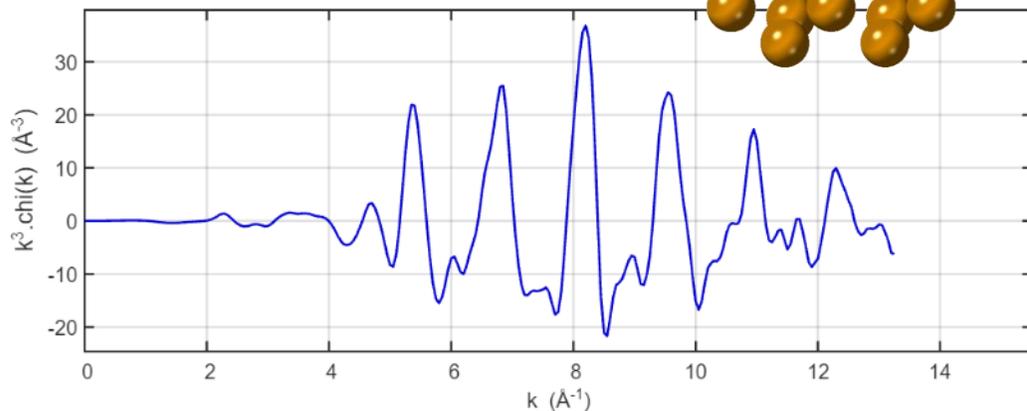
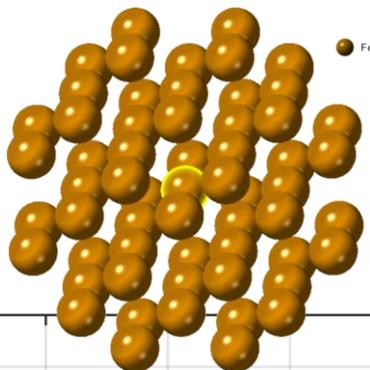
$$k\chi(k) = \sum_i 3 \cos^2(\theta_i) N_i \frac{1}{R_i^2} |f_i(k, \pi)| e^{-2\sigma_i^2 k^2} \sin(2R_i k + \Phi_i(k))$$

↑

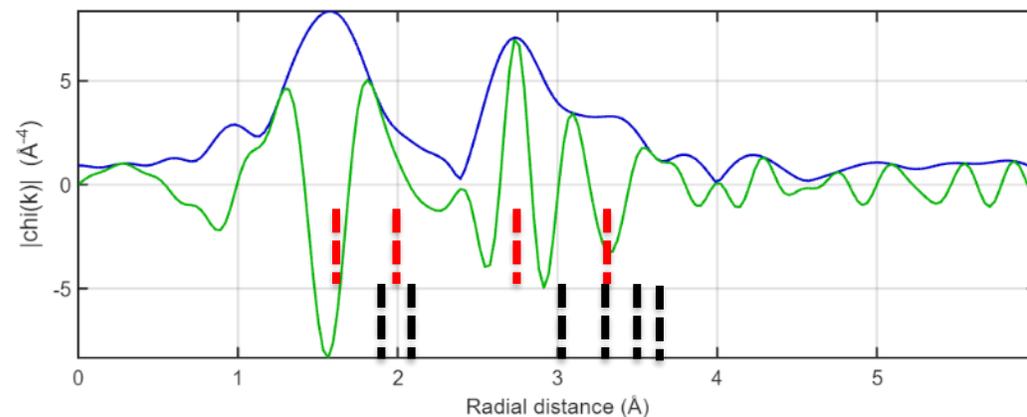
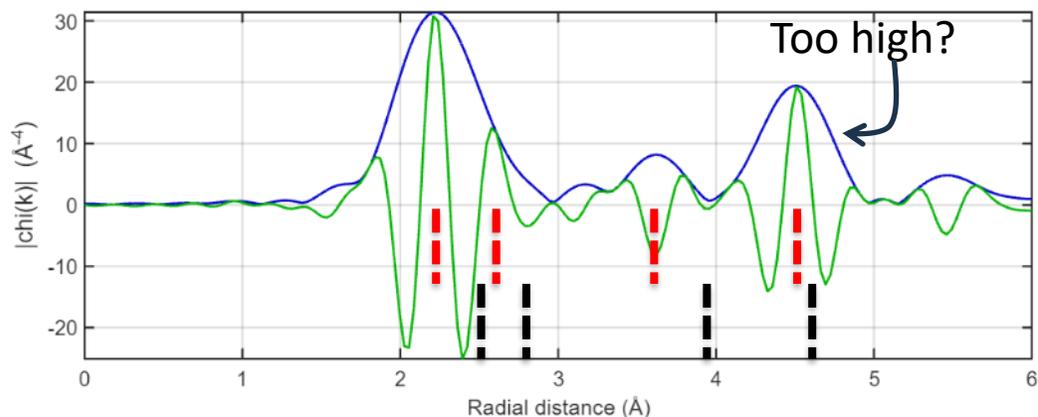
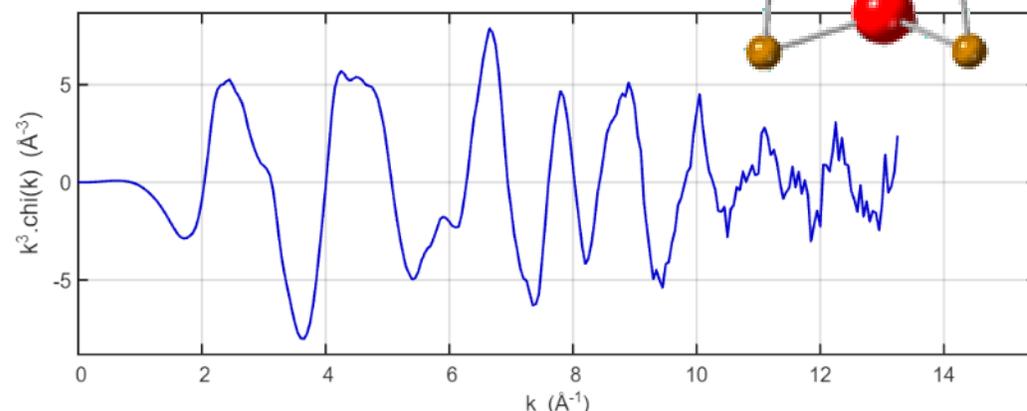
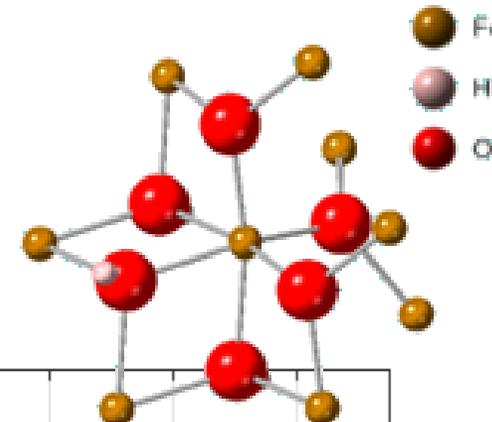


# EXAFS examples: Fe bcc vs Fe in Goethite

- 8 Fe-Fe 2.45 Å
- 4 Fe-Fe 2.83 Å
- 12 Fe-Fe 3.97 Å
- 24 Fe-Fe 4.67 Å



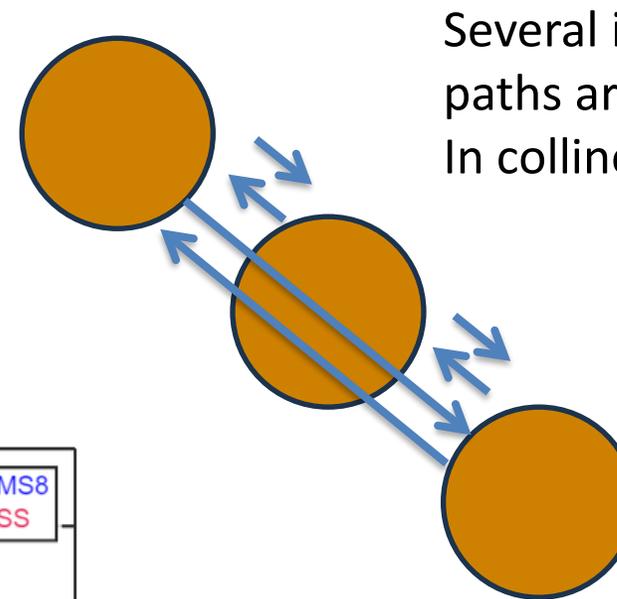
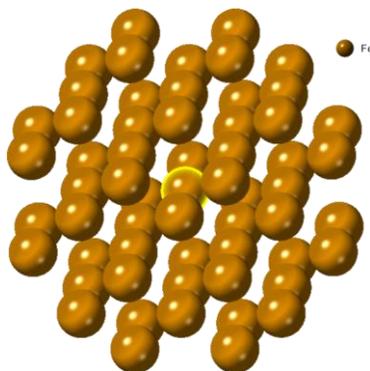
- 3 Fe-O 1.96 Å
- 3 Fe-O 2.11 Å
- 2 Fe-Fe 3.02 Å
- 1 Fe-O 3.21 Å
- 2 Fe-Fe 3.31 Å
- 4 Fe-Fe 3.44 Å



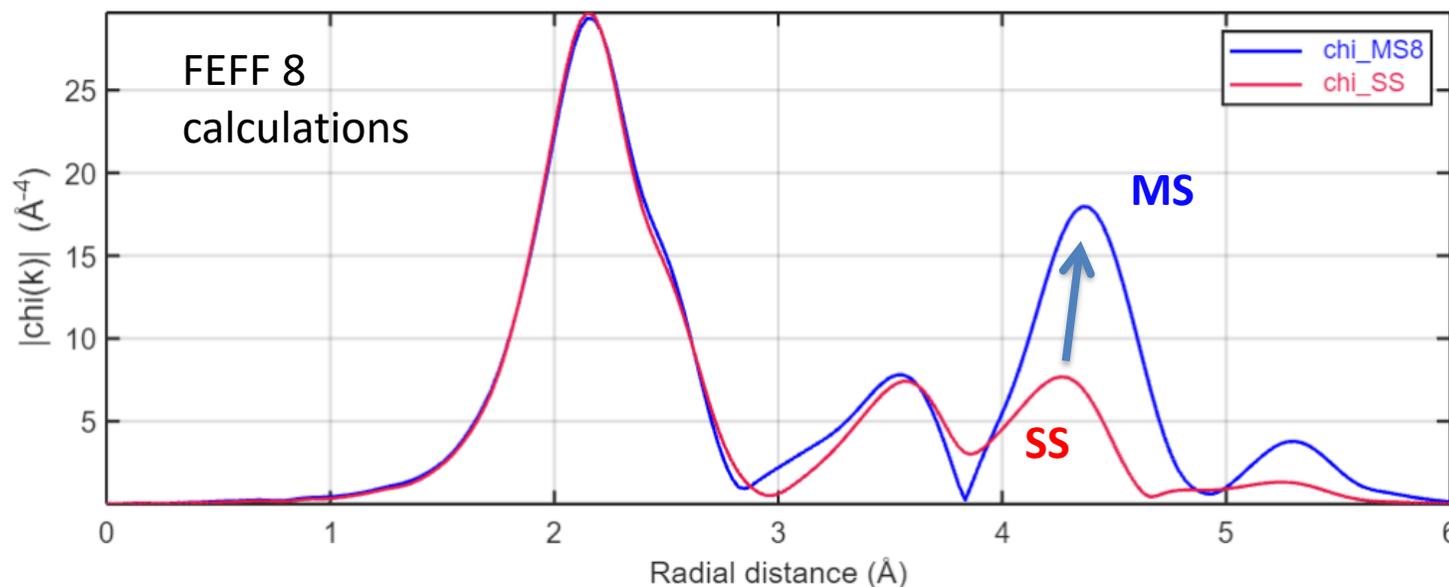
FT: a pseudo radial distribution representation

# Multiple scattering the bcc-Fe case

8 Fe-Fe 2.45 Å  
 4 Fe-Fe 2.83 Å  
 12 Fe-Fe 3.97 Å  
 24 Fe-Fe 4.67 Å



Several intense MS paths are possible  
 In collinear geometry



MS requires and provides  
 Geometrical information

# EXAFS take away messages

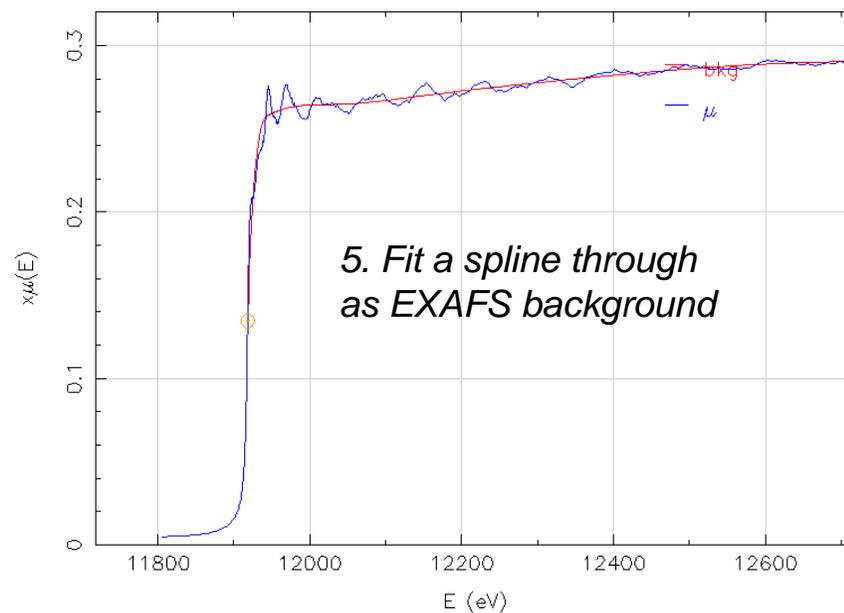
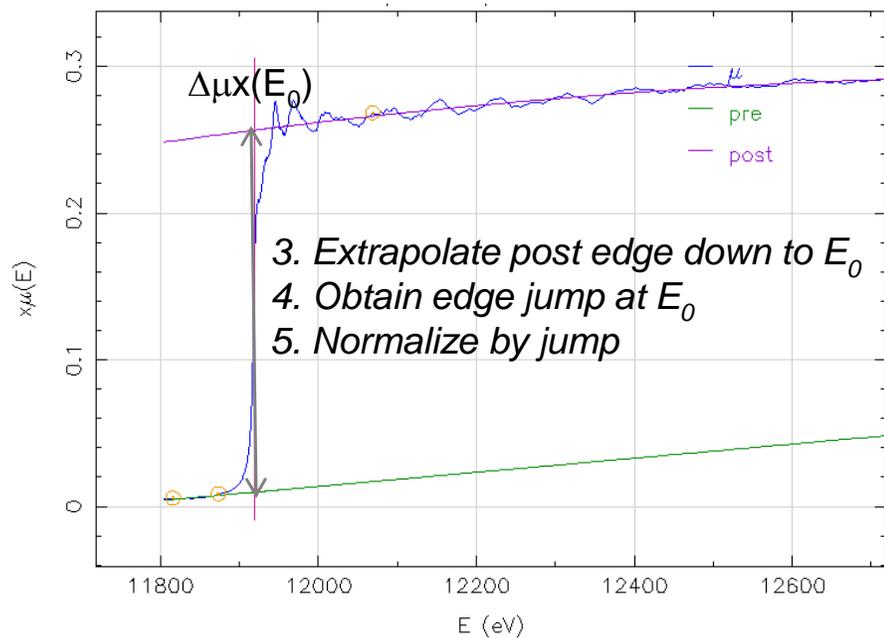
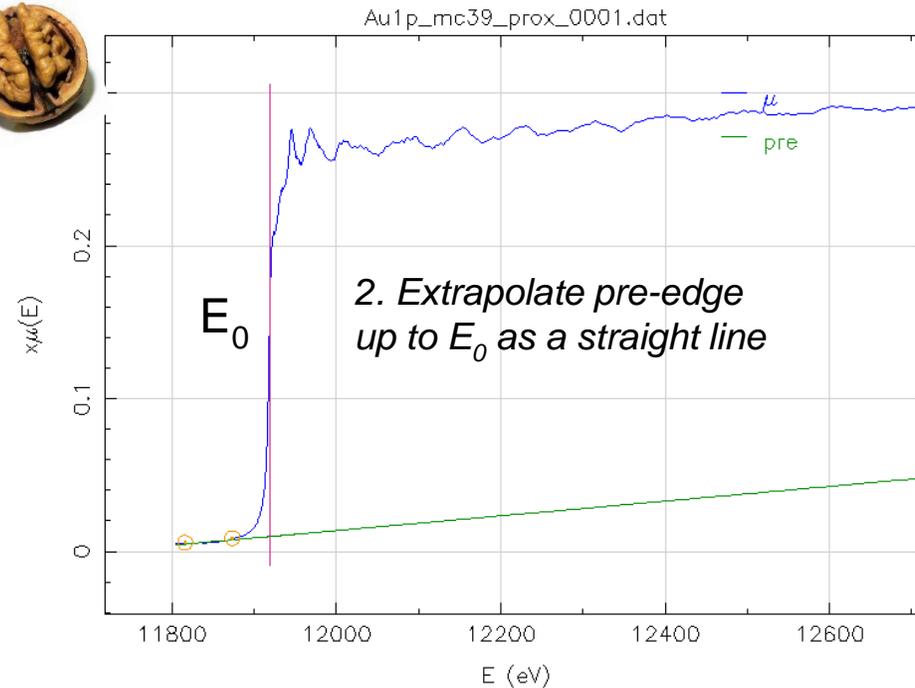
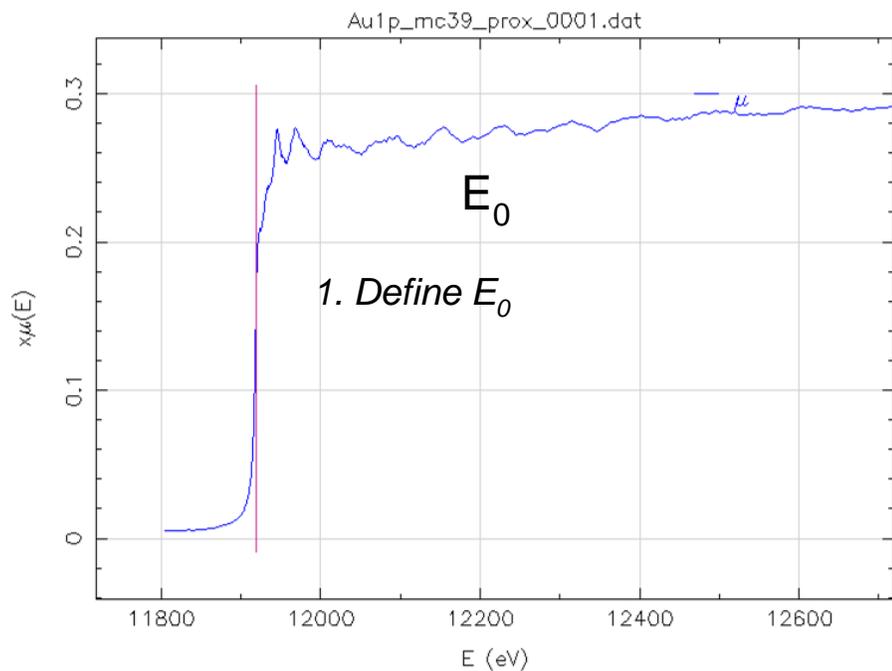
## Information provided by EXAFS and advantages

- Interatomic distances
- Coordination numbers
- Nature of atomic neighbors (for quite different Z)
- Disorder/thermal effects via Debye Waller
  
- It can be simulated via direct analytical methods
- We can stop simulations to first coordination shell
  
- Beamlines are getting better and better to provide high S/N
- Many good simulation codes are freely available

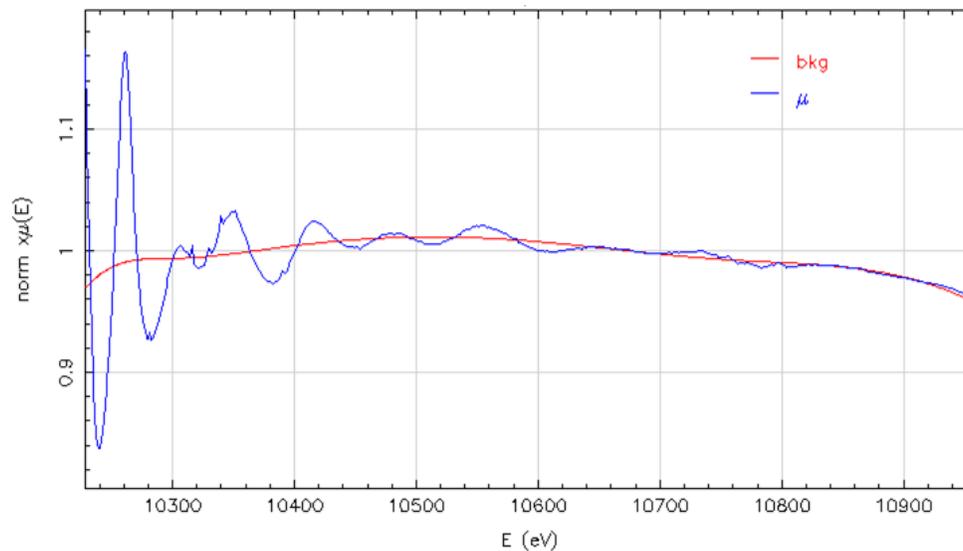
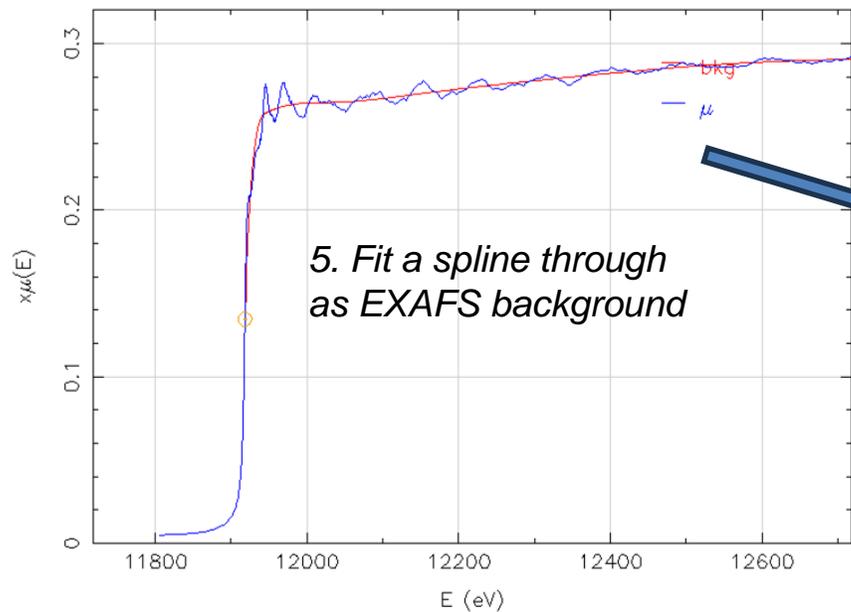
## Disadvantages

- Signal is weak and thermal/structural disorders reduce it even more
- Resolution depends on k space = length of EXAFS
- Limited information versus complex structures in many cases

# EXAFS data analysis in a nutshell

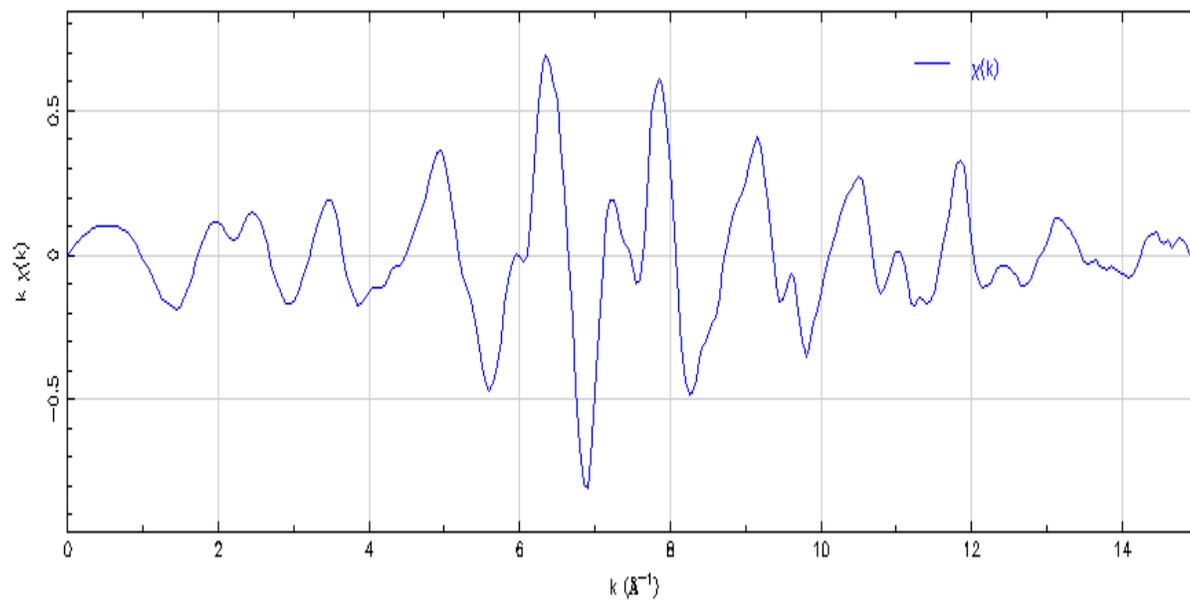
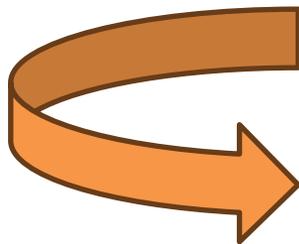


# EXAFS data analysis in a nutshell

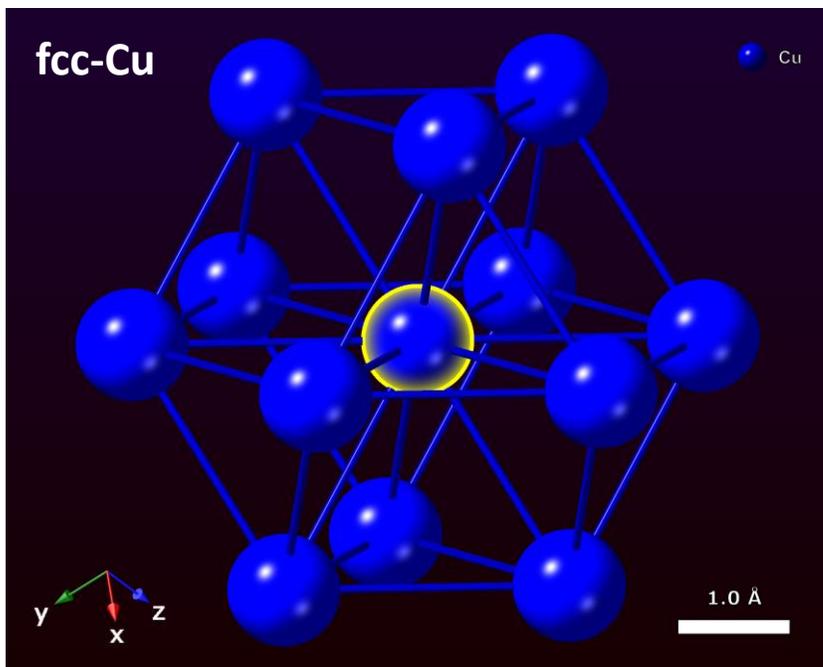


## EXAFS $\chi(k)$

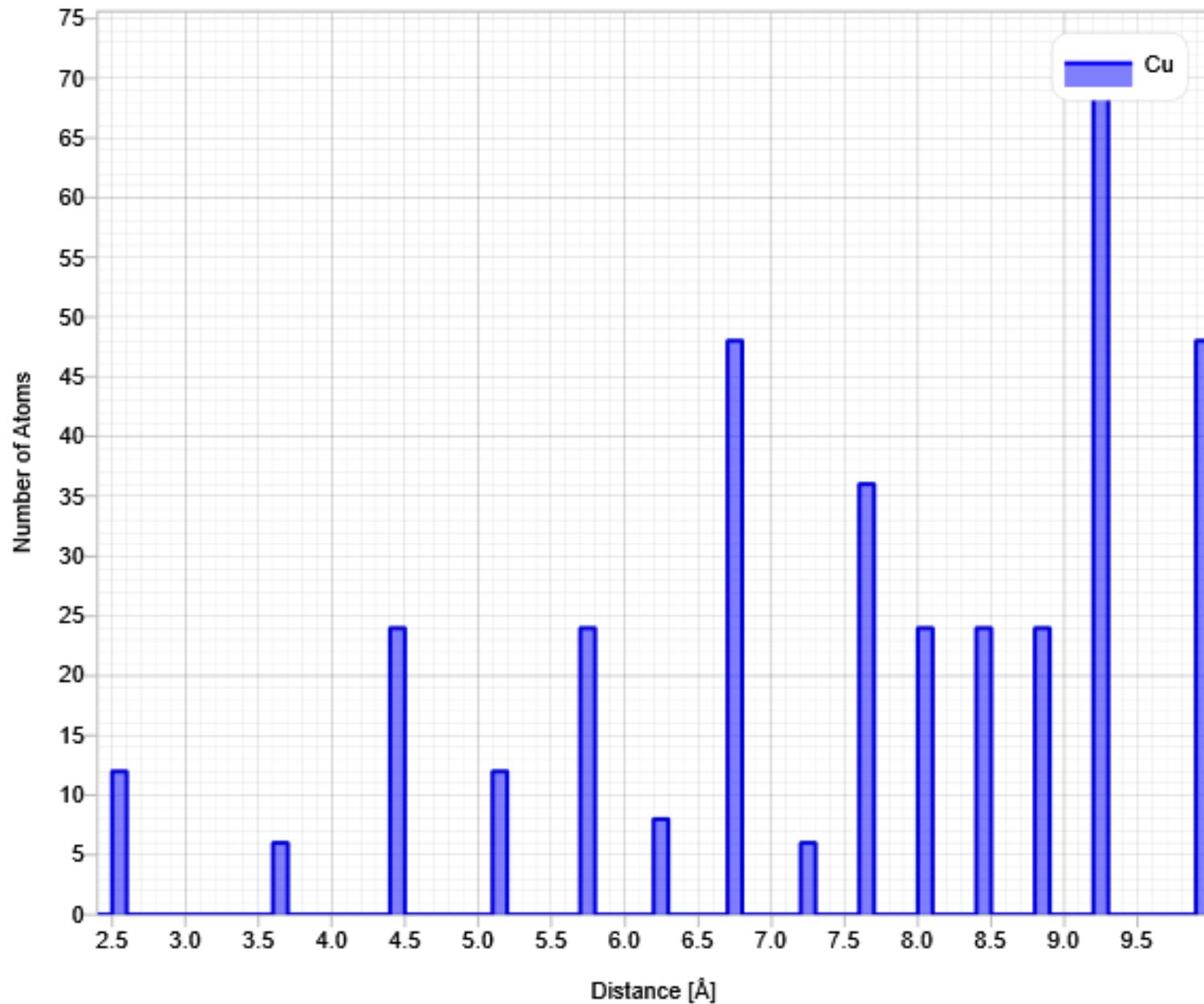
$$k \approx \sqrt{0.2625(E - E_0)}$$



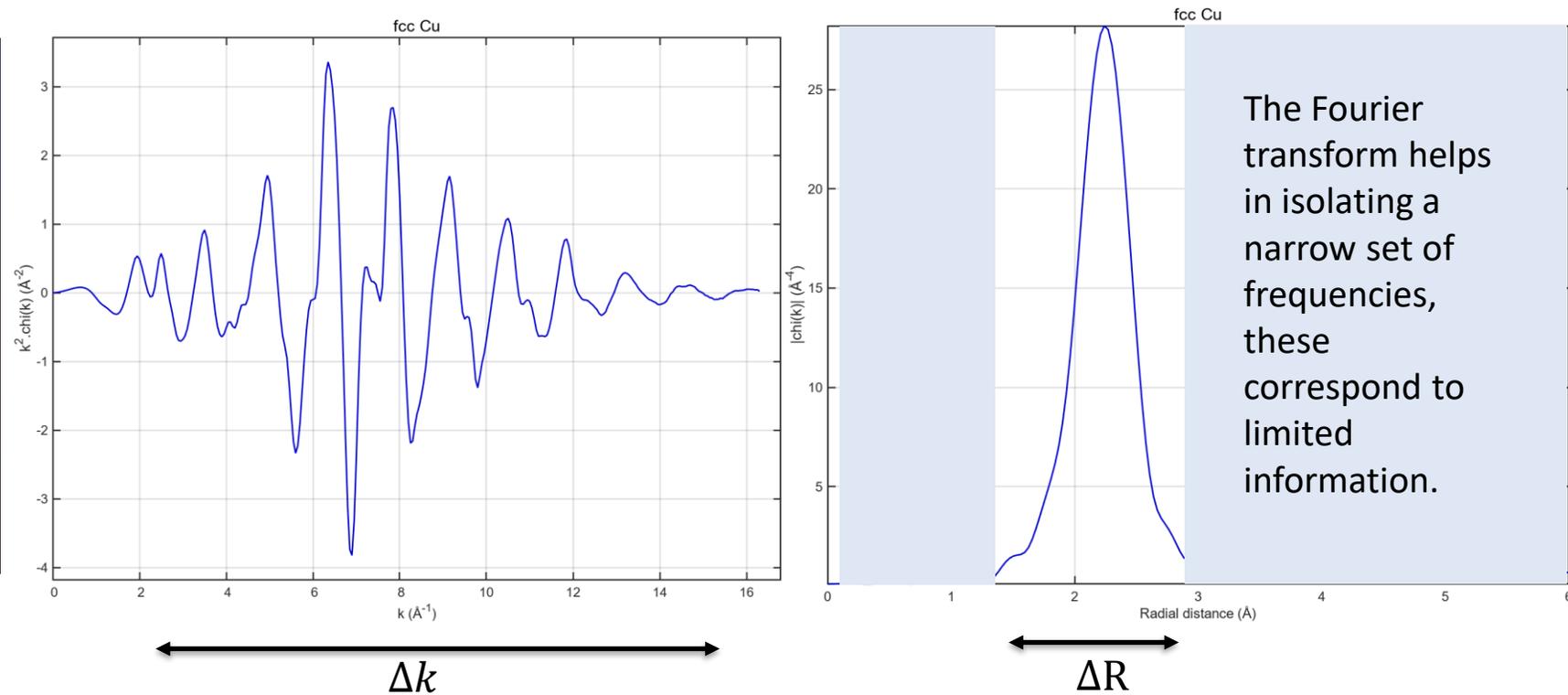
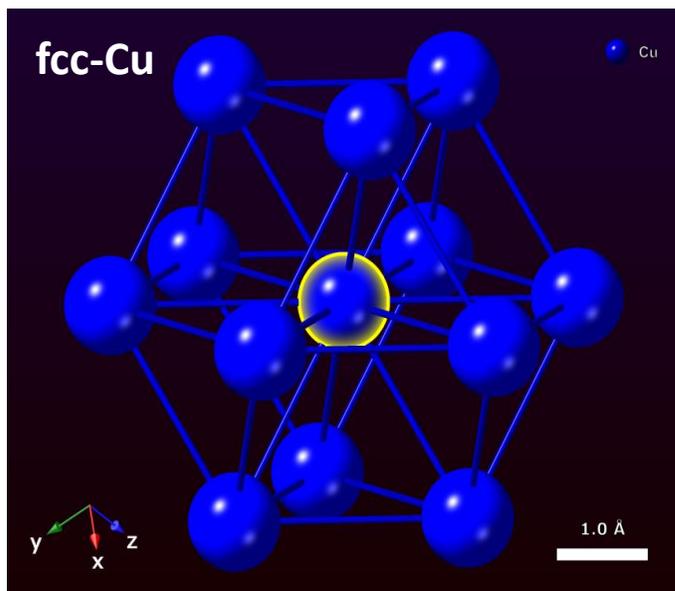
# EXAFS data analysis in a nutshell



Radial distribution function contains too much information versus EXAFS.



# EXAFS data analysis in a nutshell

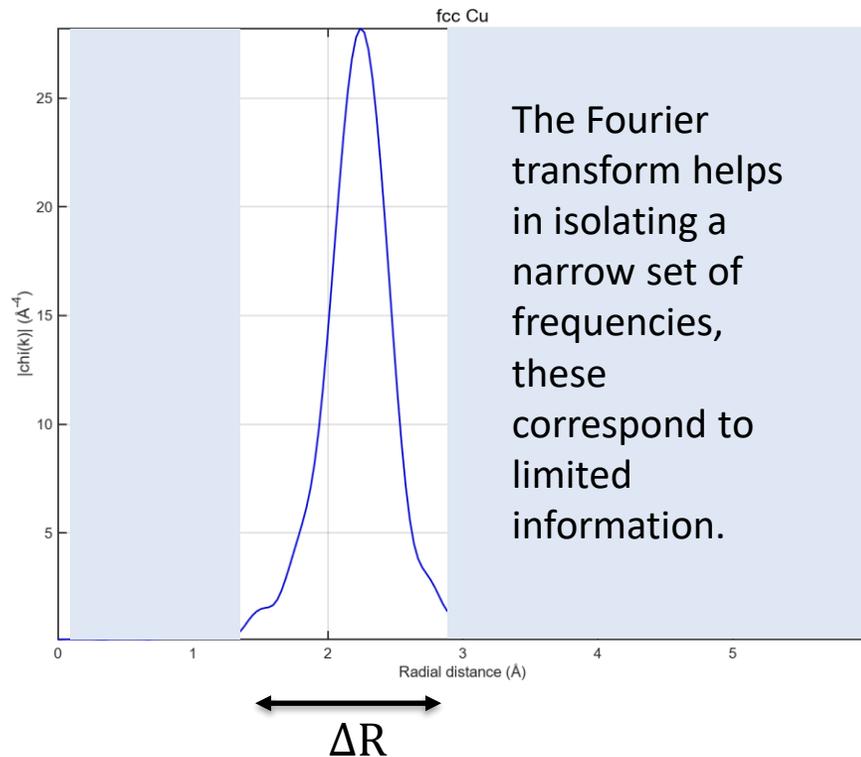
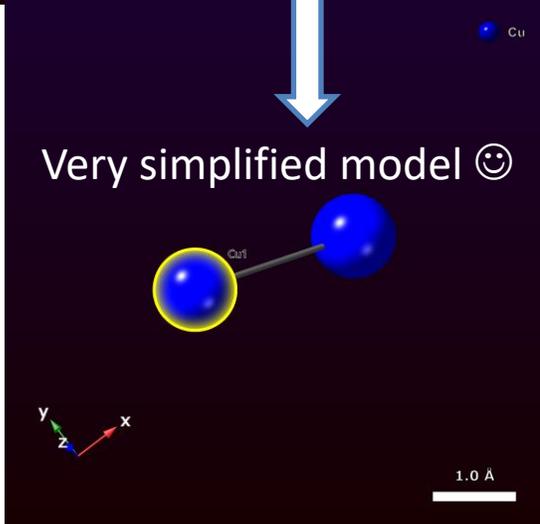
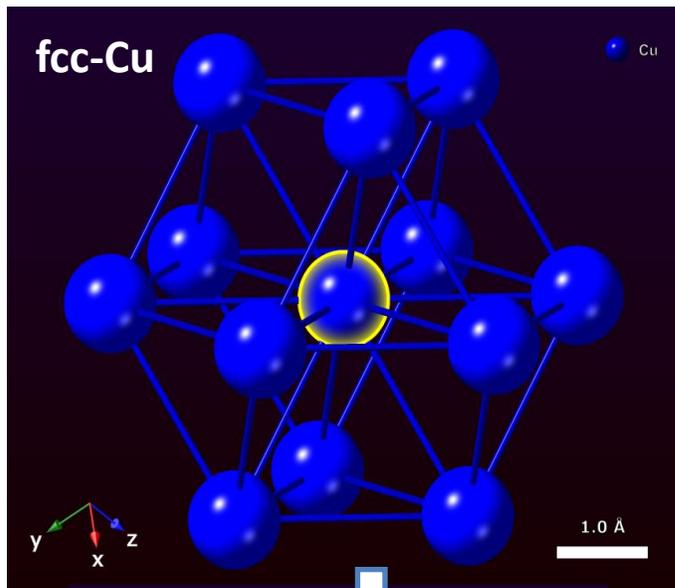


$$N_{idp} = \frac{2\Delta k \Delta R}{\pi} + (2)$$

*Nyquist Shannon Theorem applied to EXAFS*

- Simulating the EXAFS signal implies:
- Making a structural hypothesis
  - Fit a number of parameters  $N_{par} < N_{idp}$

# EXAFS data analysis in a nutshell



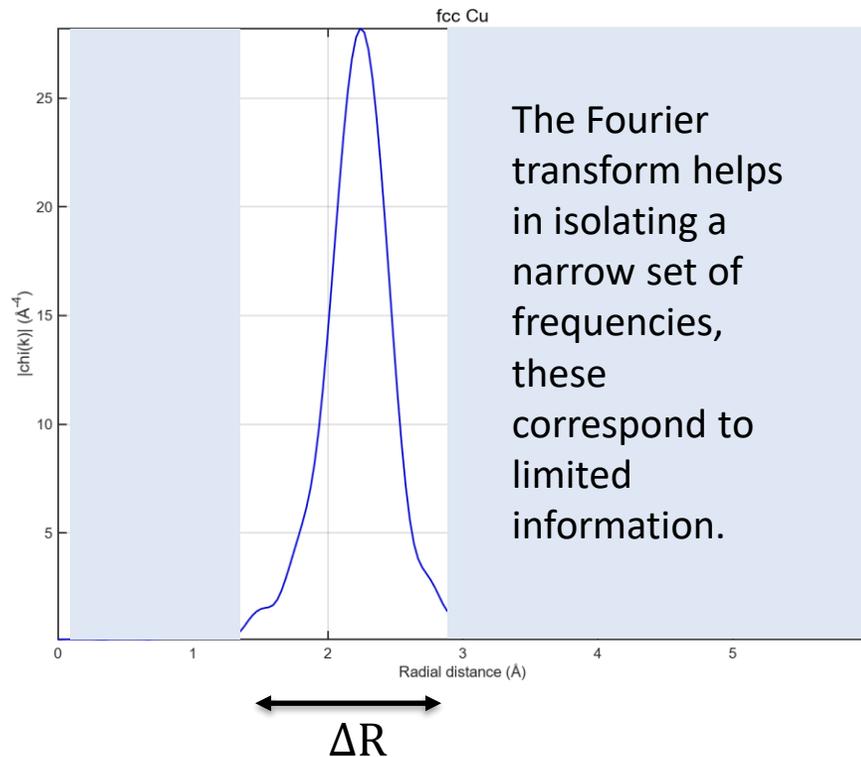
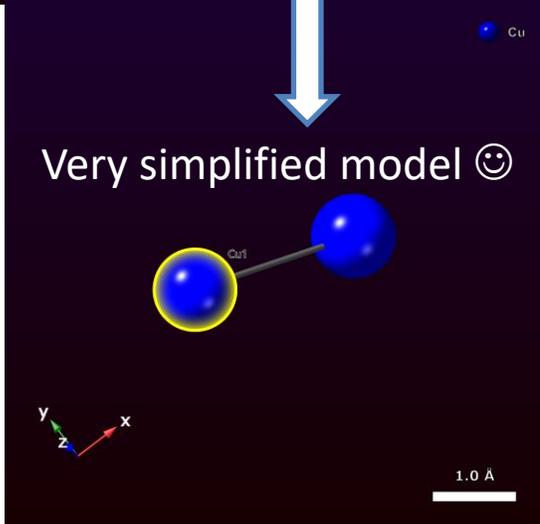
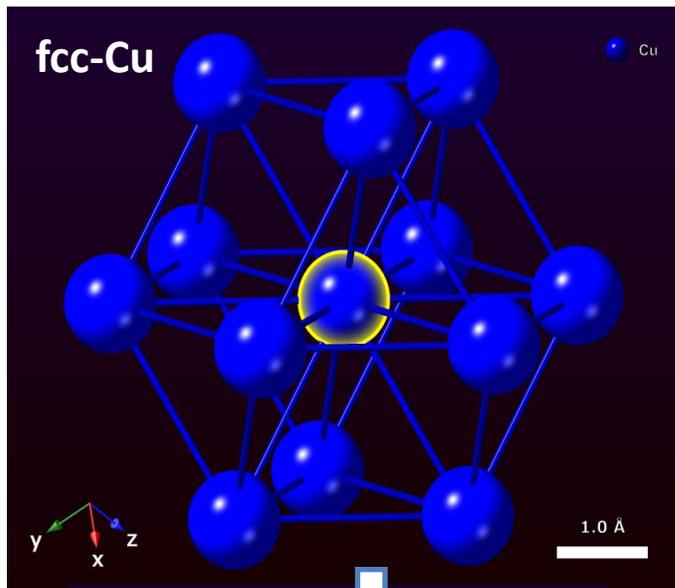
$$N_{idp} = \frac{2\Delta k \Delta R}{\pi} + (2)$$

## Simplified Theoretical Calculation

$$k\chi(k) = N \frac{|f(k, \pi)|}{R^2} e^{-2\sigma^2 k^2} \sin(2Rk + \Phi(k))$$

Fitting parameters

# EXAFS data analysis in a nutshell



$$N_{idp} = \frac{2\Delta k \Delta R}{\pi} + (2)$$

## Simplified Theoretical Calculation

$$k\chi(k) = N \frac{|f(k, \pi)|}{R^2} e^{-2\sigma^2 k^2} \sin(2Rk + \Phi(k))$$

Fitting parameters

# EXAFS data analysis in a nutshell

A two step procedure to model signal:

- Create model

$$k\chi(k) = N \frac{|f(k, \pi)|}{R^2} e^{-2\sigma^2 k^2} \sin(2Rk + \Phi(k))$$

Fastosh - Quick EXAFS Modelling & Fitting

Options **Model creation**

**New shell modelled by FEFF:**

Atom type of absorber  \*rec

Atom type of scatterer

Absorber-scatterer distance  Å

Edge

$\sigma^2$

N (SO2 fixed at 0.8)

$\Delta E_0$

- Variate parameters to fit experiment

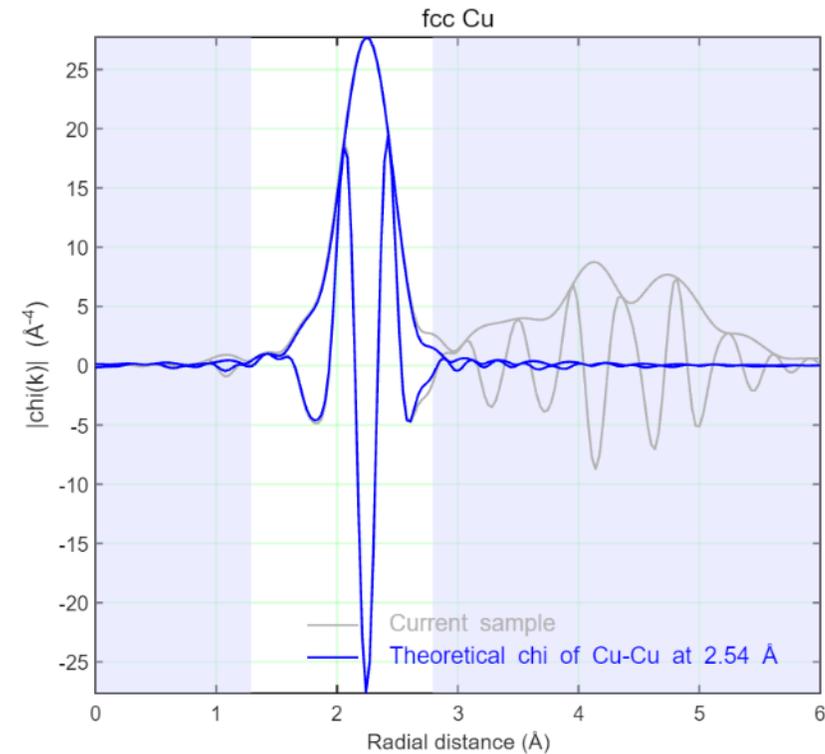
Fit parameters

Fit results

Hamilton Test

	Abs.	Scat.	Edge	R theo	R + $\Delta R$	$\sigma^2$	$\Delta e_0$	N
					Float	Float	Float	Float
Float	Cu	Cu	K	2.50	2.54	0.0082	3.43	12.00

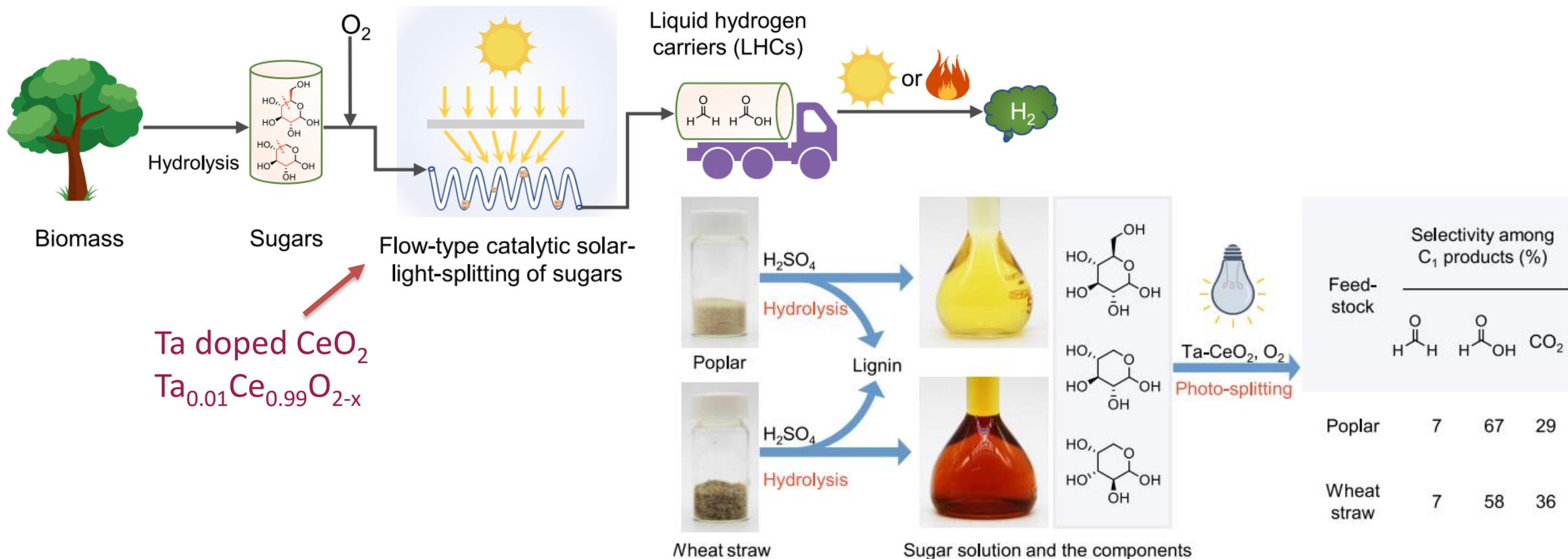
Get your simulation over the first shell range

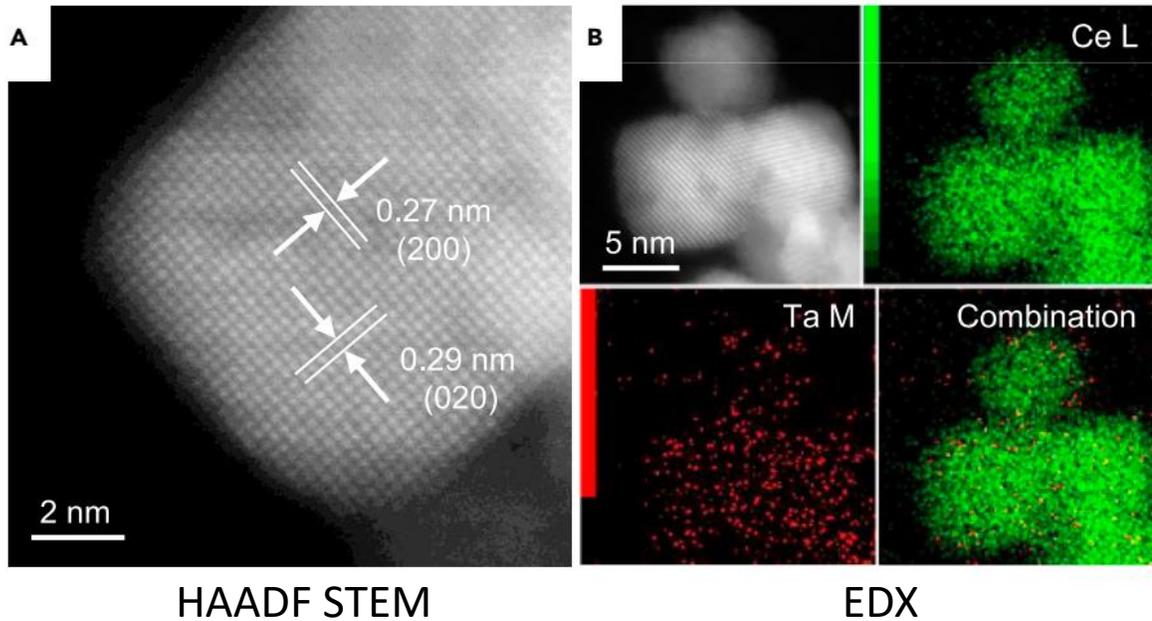


# XAFS for studying the local structure of doping elements

Stepwise photoassisted decomposition of carbohydrates to H<sub>2</sub>.

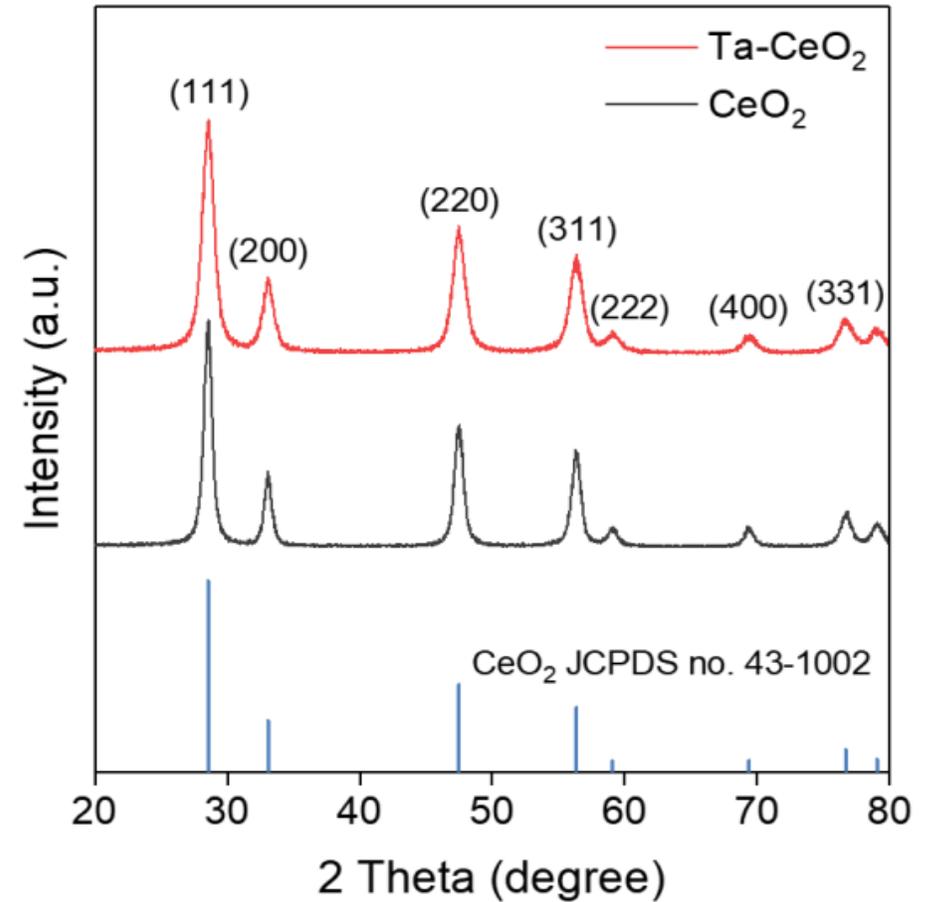
**“C–C bond first”** strategy of photoassisted splitting of biomass carbons into C<sub>1</sub> liquid hydrogen carriers



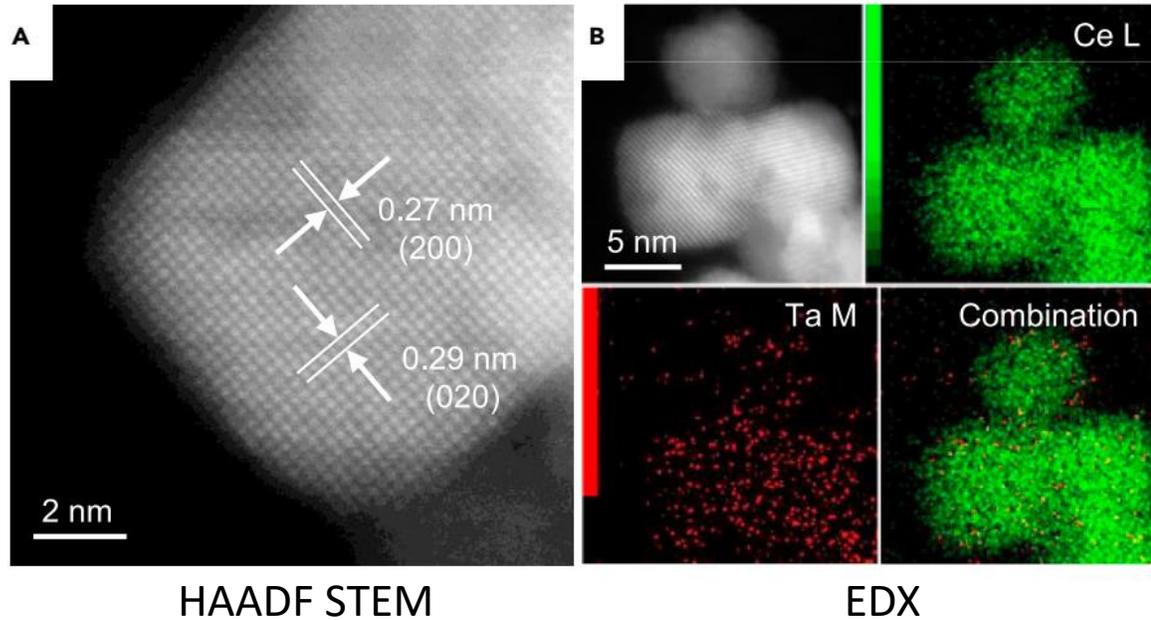


- Dispersion of Ta in/over  $\text{CeO}_2$  (*hydrothermal synthesis*)
- XRD/HAADF: unchanged lattice / increased disorder
- *Band gap is reduced from 2.6eV to 2.37eV by Ta doping*
- *Ce<sup>3+</sup> detected by Raman*

➔ Ta oxidation state / localisation ?

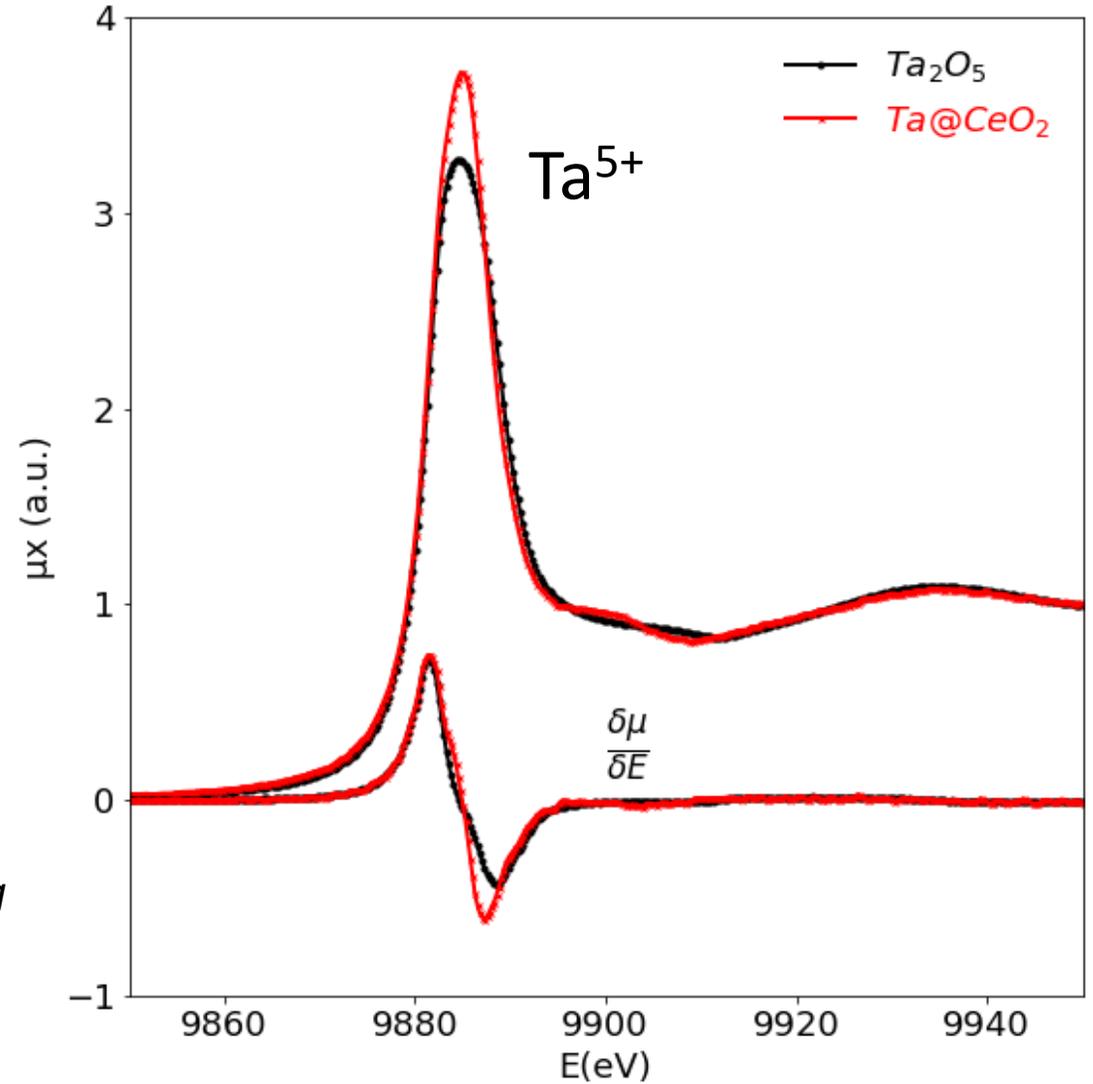


# XANES: oxidation state



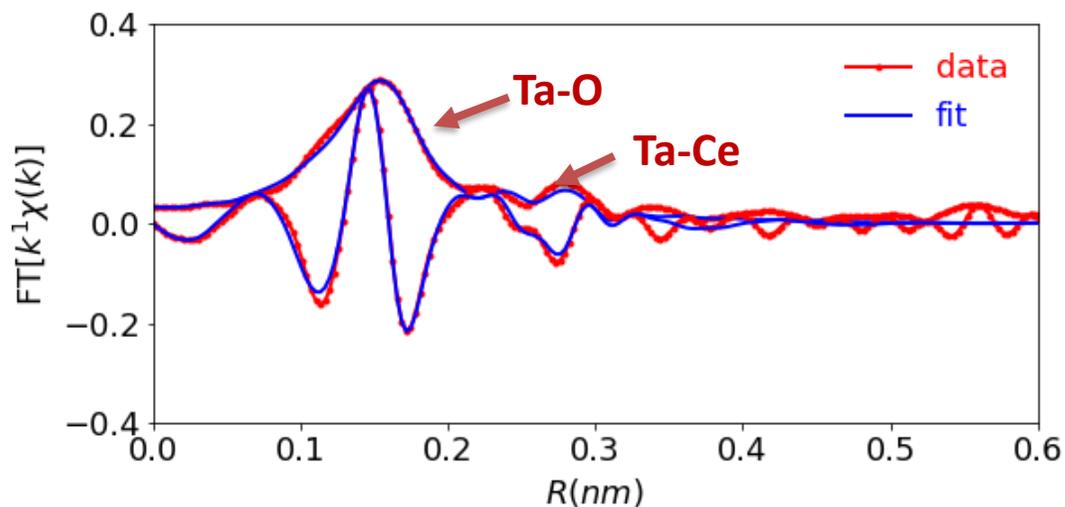
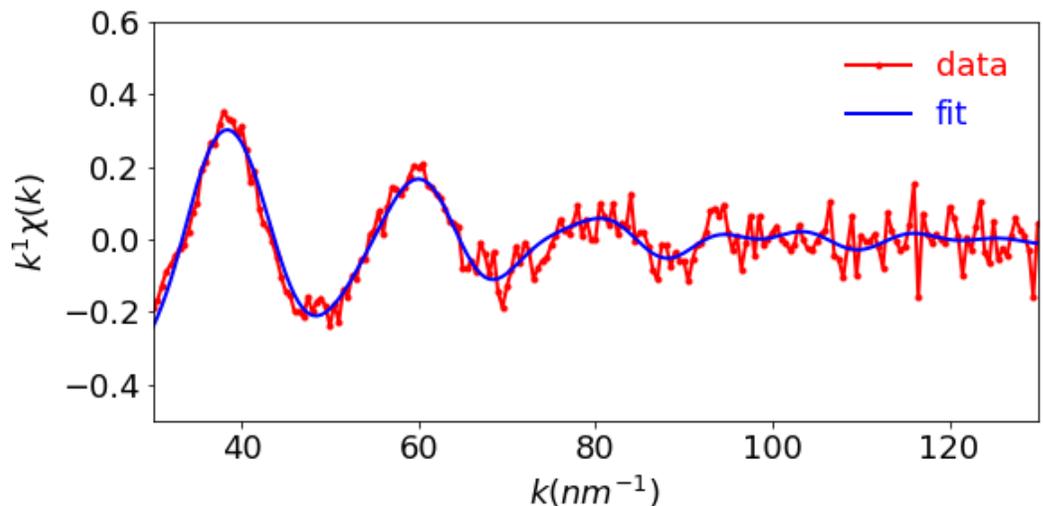
- Dispersion of Ta in/over  $\text{CeO}_2$  (hydrothermal synthesis)
- XRD/HAADF: unchanged lattice / increased disorder
- Band gap is reduced from 2.6eV to 2.37eV by Ta doping
- $\text{Ce}^{3+}$  detected by Raman

➔ Ta oxidation state / localisation ?

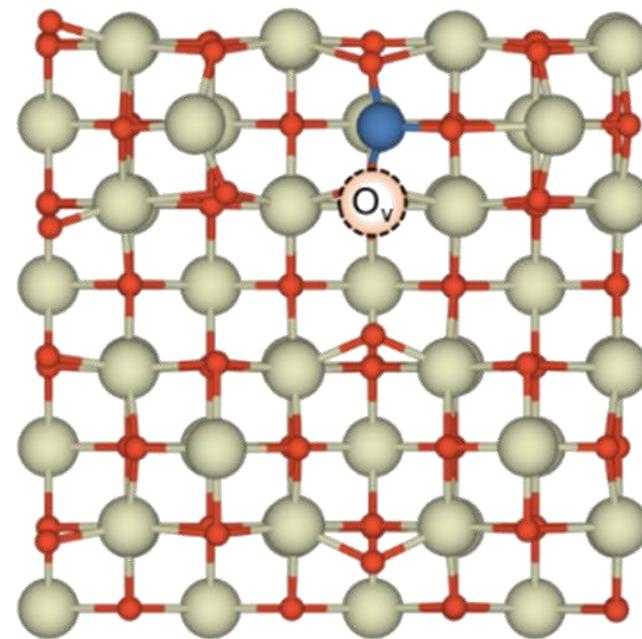


Ta very close to 5+ state

# EXAFS: local structure



Ta – O shell highly deformed  
 Ta – Ce shorter and only 2 detected  
 Ta is in the Ce<sup>4+</sup> site



DFT model

$$r(\text{Ta}^{5+}) = 0.97 \text{ \AA} \ll r(\text{Ce}^{4+}) = 1.14 \text{ \AA}$$

Distance	N	R (nm)	S <sup>2</sup> (10 <sup>-5</sup> nm <sup>2</sup> )
Ta-O	5.6 ± 0.9	0.194 ± 0.002	5 ± 2
Ta-O	1.4 ± 0.8	0.242 ± 0.003	
Ta-Ce	2.1 ± 0.7	0.312 ± 0.003	

Ce<sup>3+</sup> and O<sub>v</sub> must compensate Ta<sup>5+</sup>  
 Ce<sup>3+</sup> lowers the band gap of CeO<sub>2</sub>

# Conclusions

## XANES

Ta oxidation state is close to 5+

→ Charge compensation is necessary:  $\text{Ce}^{3+}$

## EXAFS

Ta – O : 7 oxygens (instead of 8 over a cube in  $\text{CeO}_2$ )

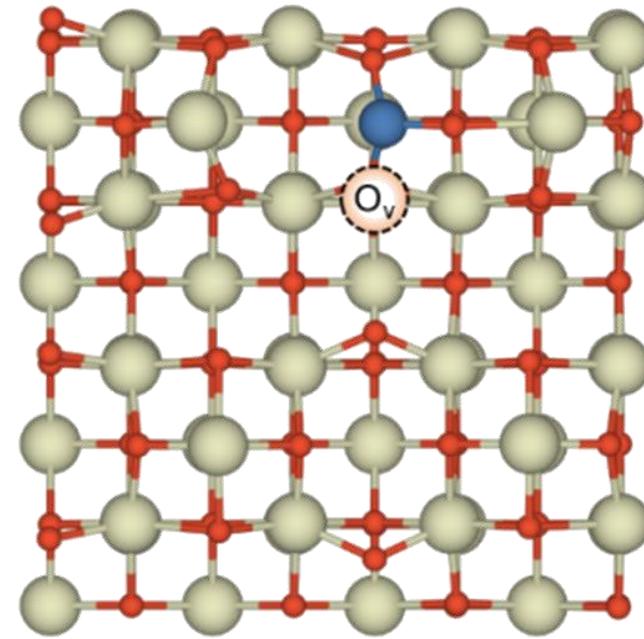
Ta – Ce : 2 detected at a much shorter distance than Ce-Ce (0.379 nm)

→ distorted geometry into  $\text{CeO}_2$

## Suggests

→ proximal oxygen vacancy

→  $\text{Ce}^{3+}$  localised nearby

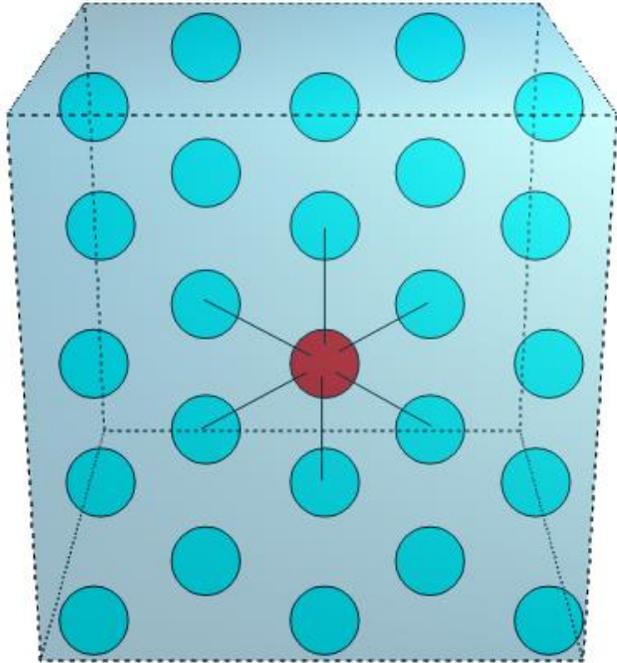


*DFT  
model*

Distance	N	R (nm)	S <sup>2</sup> (10 <sup>-5</sup> nm <sup>2</sup> )
Ta-O	5.6 ± 0.9	0.194 ± 0.002	
Ta-O	1.4 ± 0.8	0.242 ± 0.003	5 ± 2
Ta-Ce	2.1 ± 0.7	0.312 ± 0.003	

# Applications to nano objects: finite size effect on CN

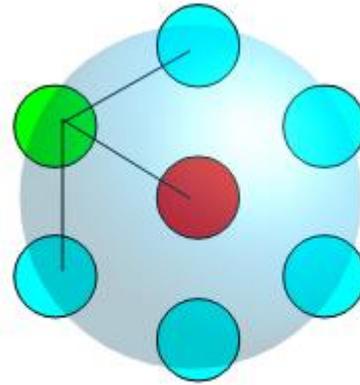
Surface atoms have a diminished coordination number.



Diminishing size  
 $N^*$  diminishes



$N_{\text{surface}}/N_{\text{bulk}}$  increases

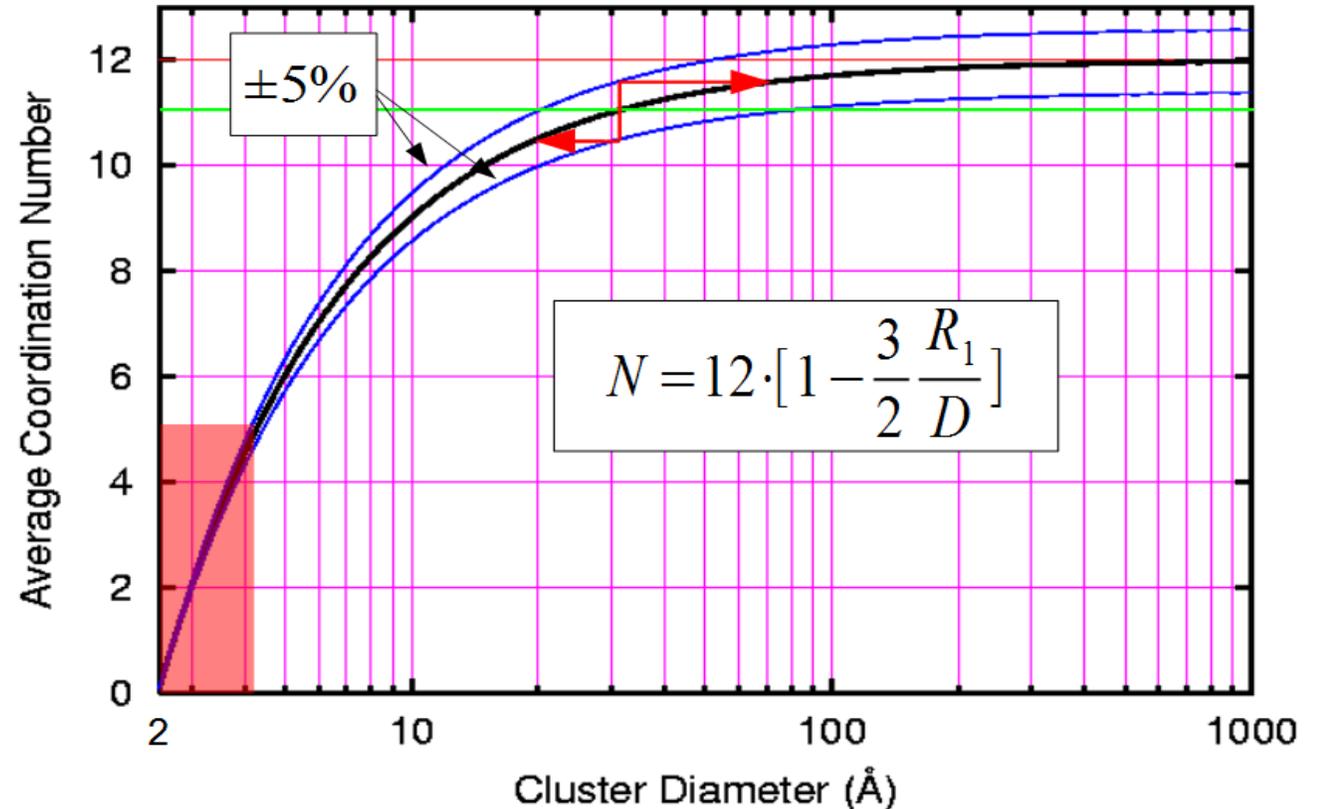


An average particle size may be deduced from  $N$ .  
 (Size is weighted by size dispersion).

EXAFS coordination number is the weighted average of the coordination numbers of all absorbers.

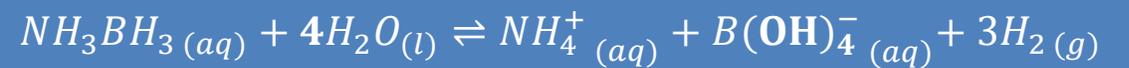
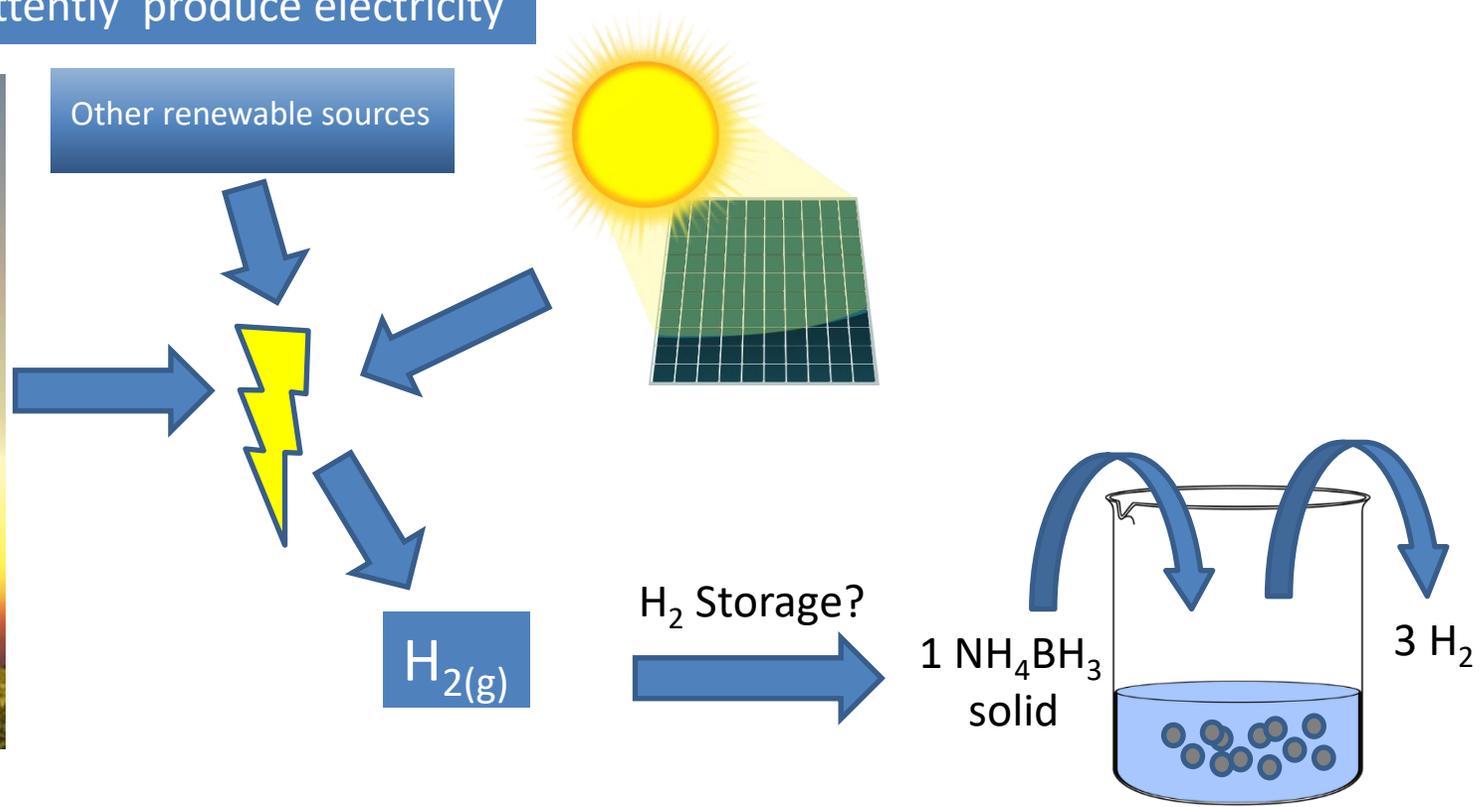
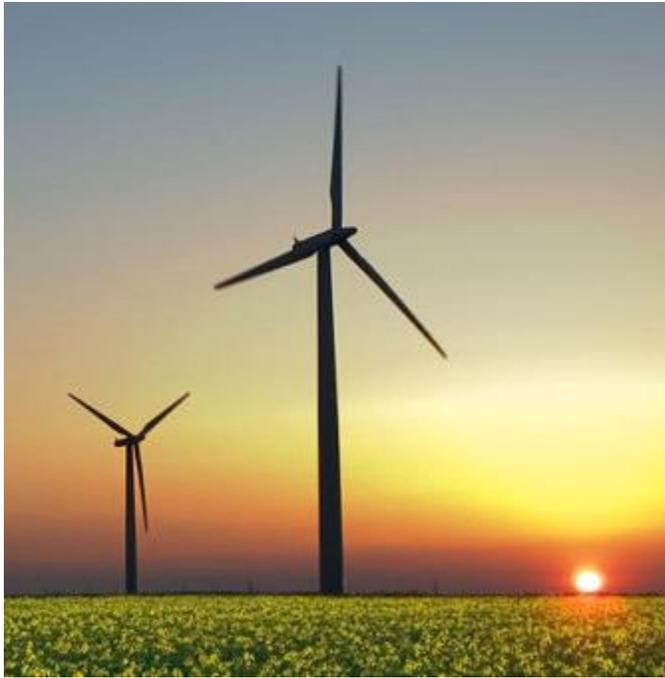
$$N^* = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n_{tot}} N_i}{n_{tot}}$$

E.g. Ni (fcc)  $N$  vs  $D$  (Å)



# Pt-Pd Bimetallic nanoparticles for $\text{NH}_4\text{BH}_3$ hydrolysis

Renewable energy sources intermittently produce electricity



# Pt-Pd Bimetallic nanoparticles

*PreRed nanoparticles*

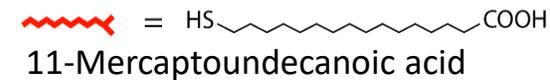
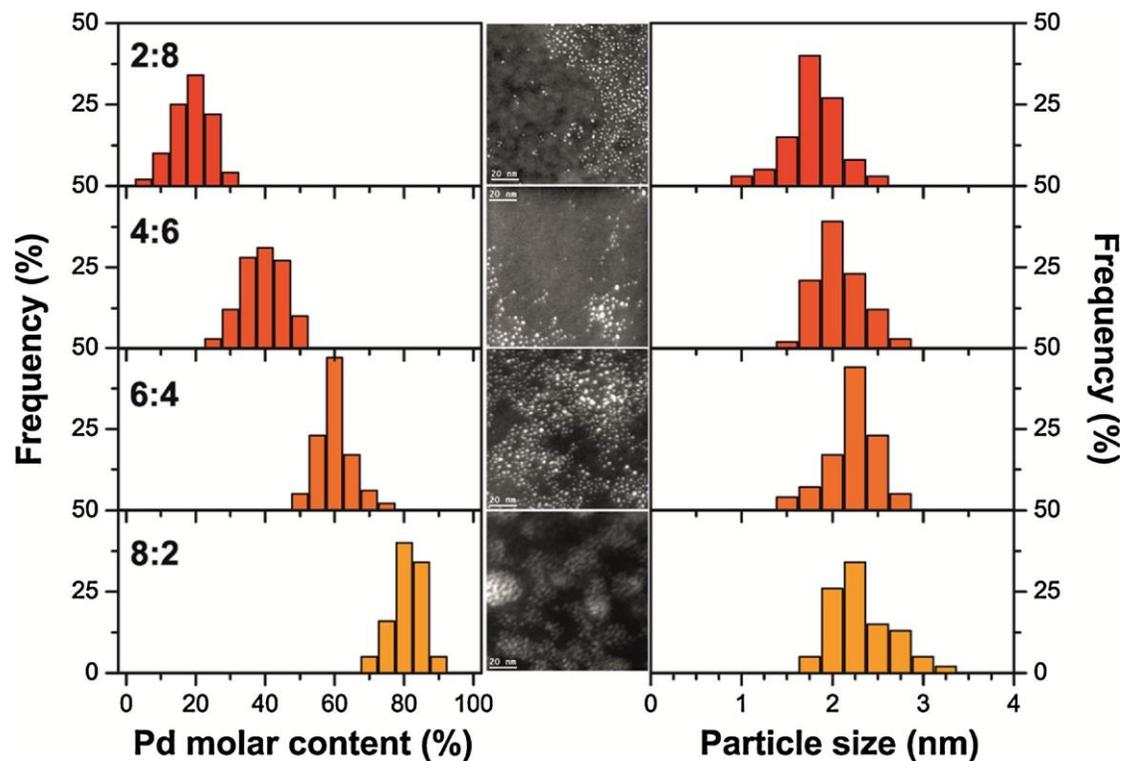
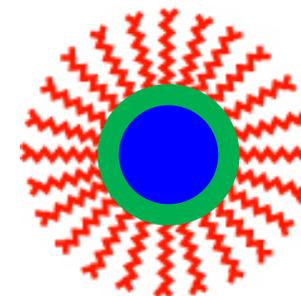


+

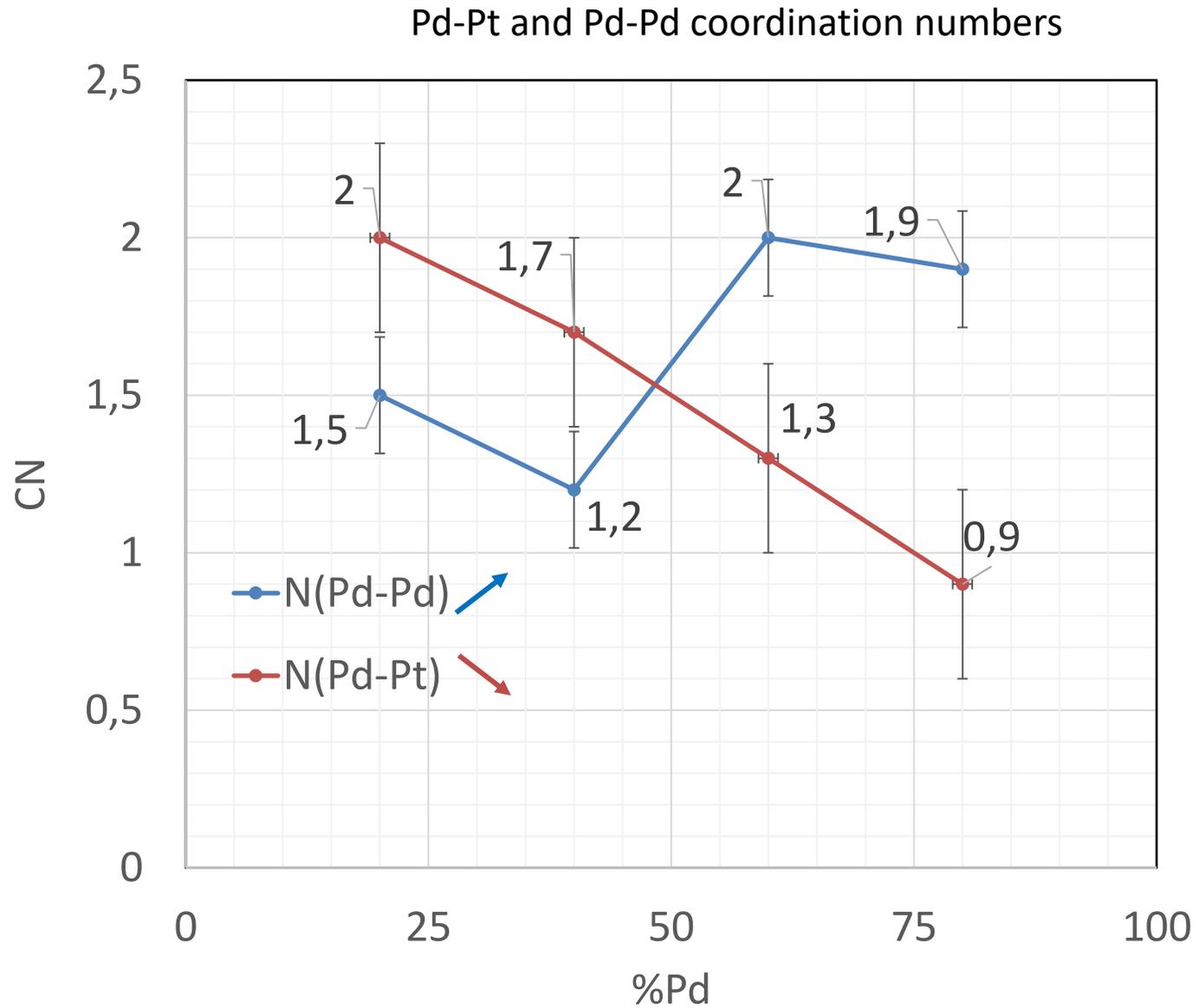
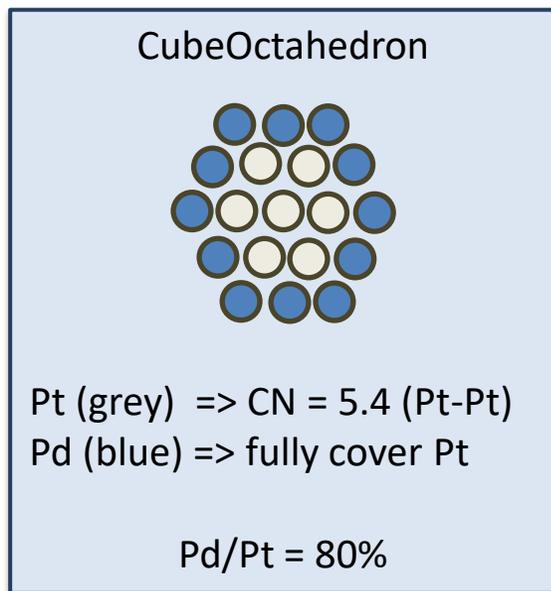
+ MUA +  $NaBH_4$

Pt NPs

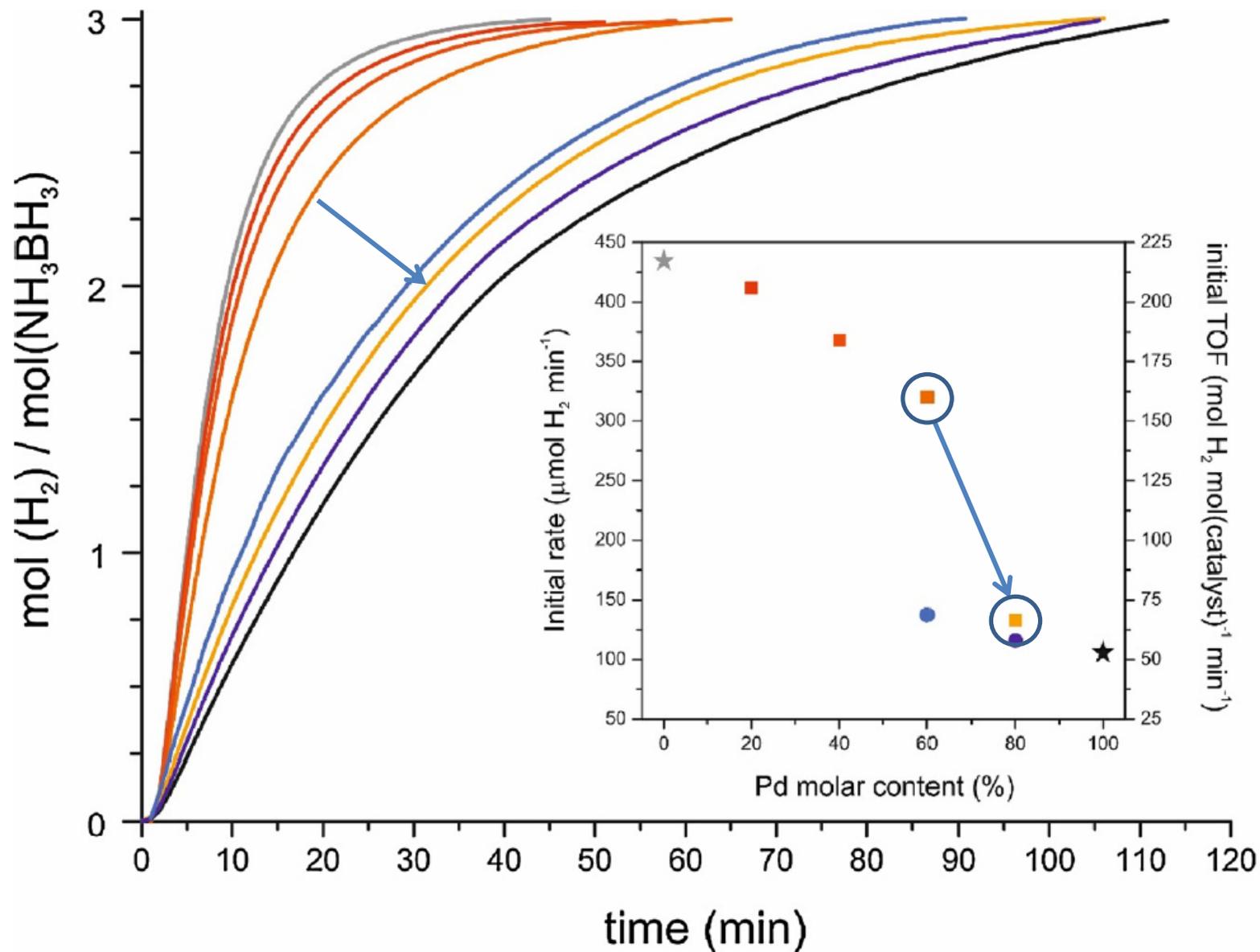
$H_2O/Acetone$



PreRed	
%Pd	N(Pt-Pt)
20	5.1(4)
40	6.1(9)
60	4.2(4)
80	5.6(5)
Average	5.3

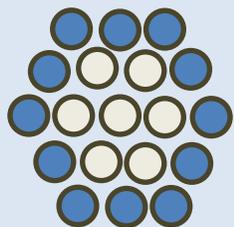


# Activity structure relationship



H<sub>2</sub> evolution at 20°C in NaOH 100mM Catalyst/AB=0.001

CubeOctahedron



Pt (grey) => CN = 5.4 (Pt-Pt)

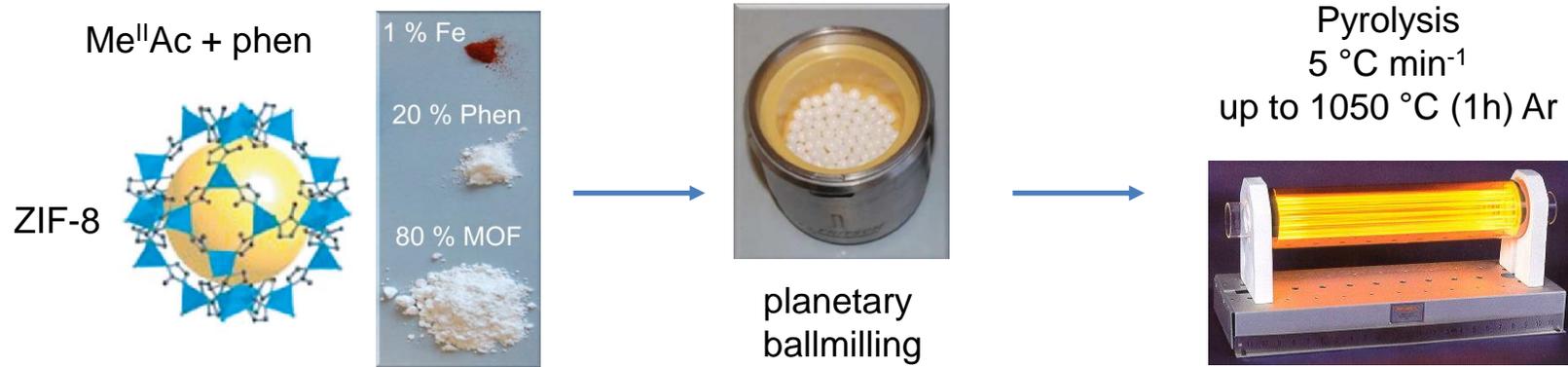
Pd (blue) => fully cover Pt

Pd/Pt = 80%

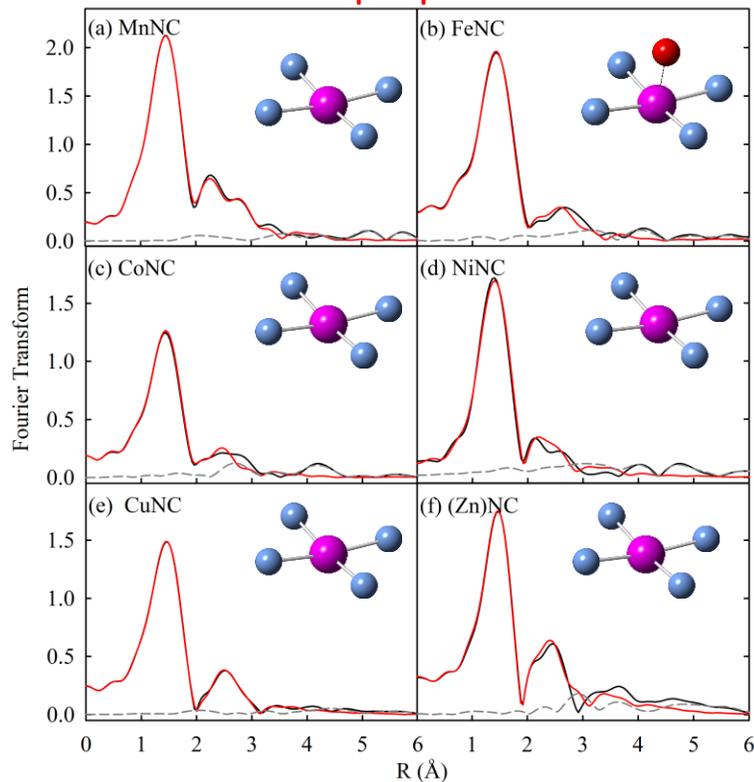
To be SAC or  
not to be ?



# CO<sub>2</sub> reduction over atomically dispersed Me-N-C



As prepared

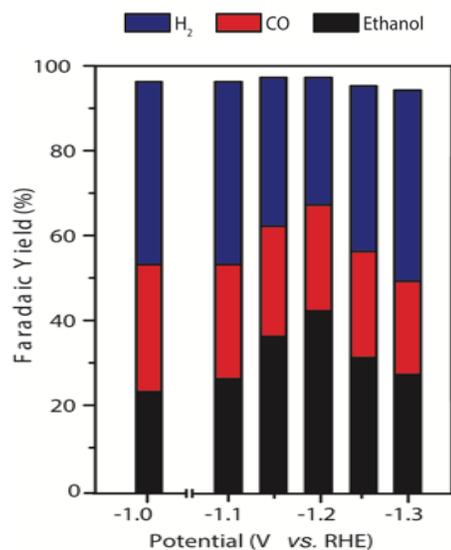


Synthesis may be more generalized

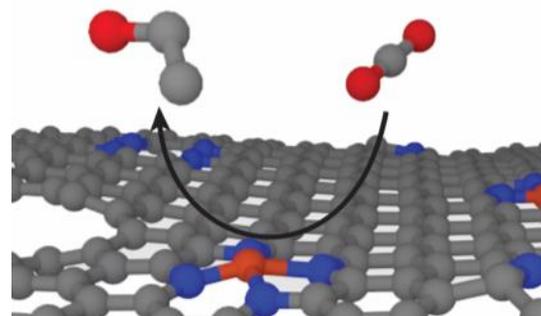
EXAFS analysis confirms the atomically-dispersed nature of Me-N-C :

- First shell peak at ~ 1.5 Å assigned to Me-N(C,O)
- Second shell peaks at 2-3 Å assigned to Me-C(N,O)
- Absence of metal signal due to metal clusters

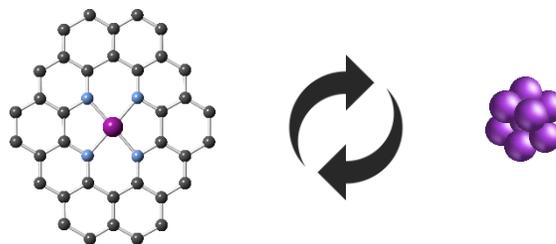
# CO<sub>2</sub> reduction over atomically dispersed Cu-N-C



Faradaic yields in 0.1 M CsHCO<sub>3</sub>

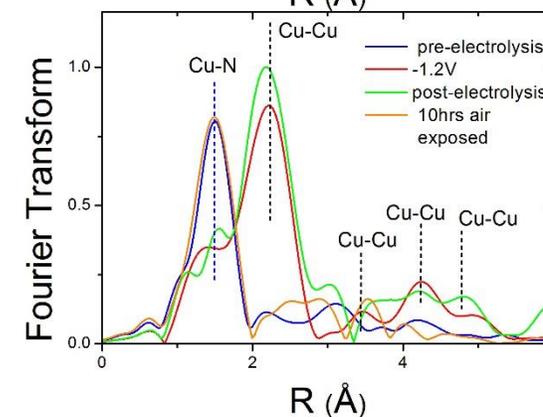
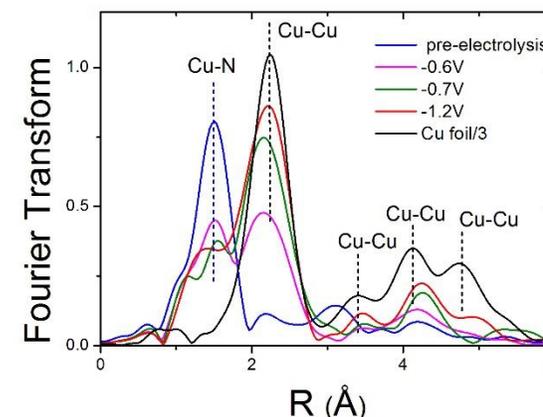


CO<sub>2</sub> electroreduction to ethanol



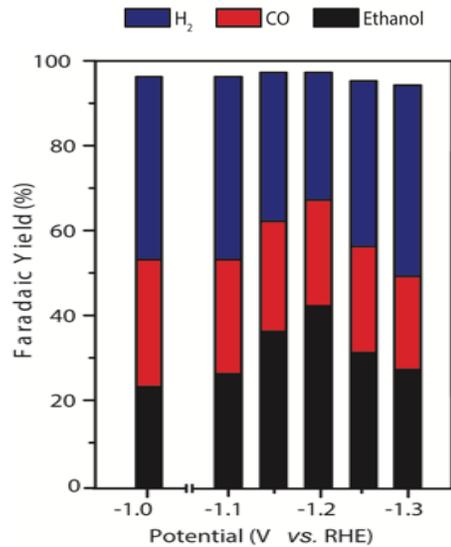
Pre-electrolysis

-1.2V

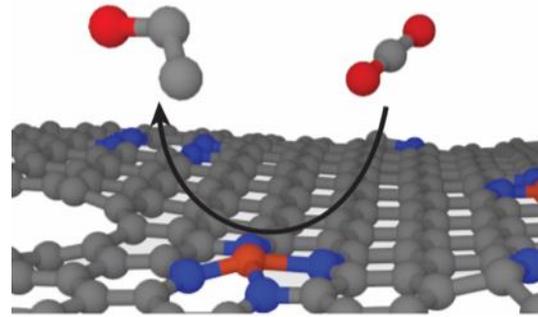


Reversible switching between CuN<sub>4</sub> sites and Cu nanoparticles, that are likely to be the catalytically active species at low potential

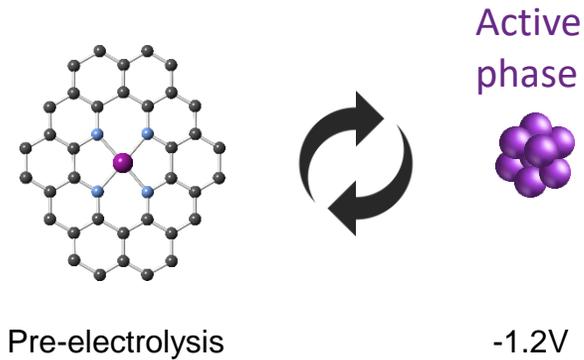
# CO<sub>2</sub> reduction over atomically dispersed Cu-N-C



Faradaic yields in 0.1 M CsHCO<sub>3</sub>

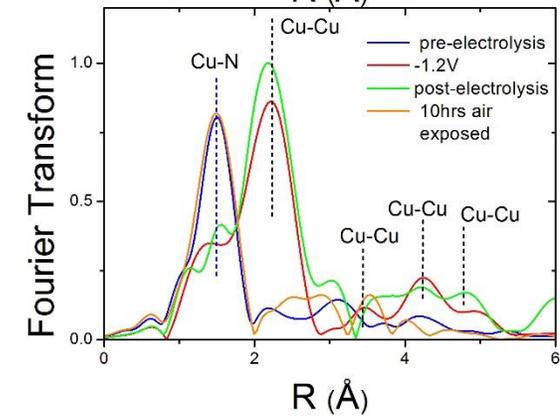
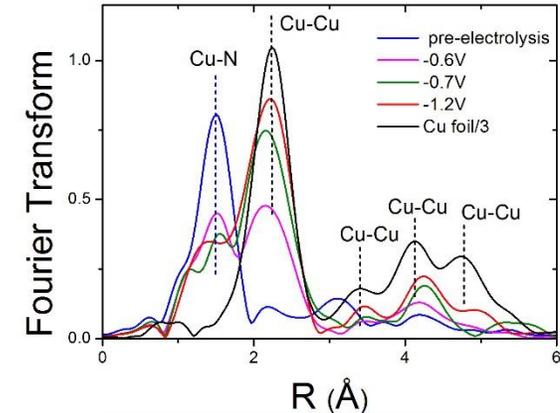


CO<sub>2</sub> electroreduction to ethanol

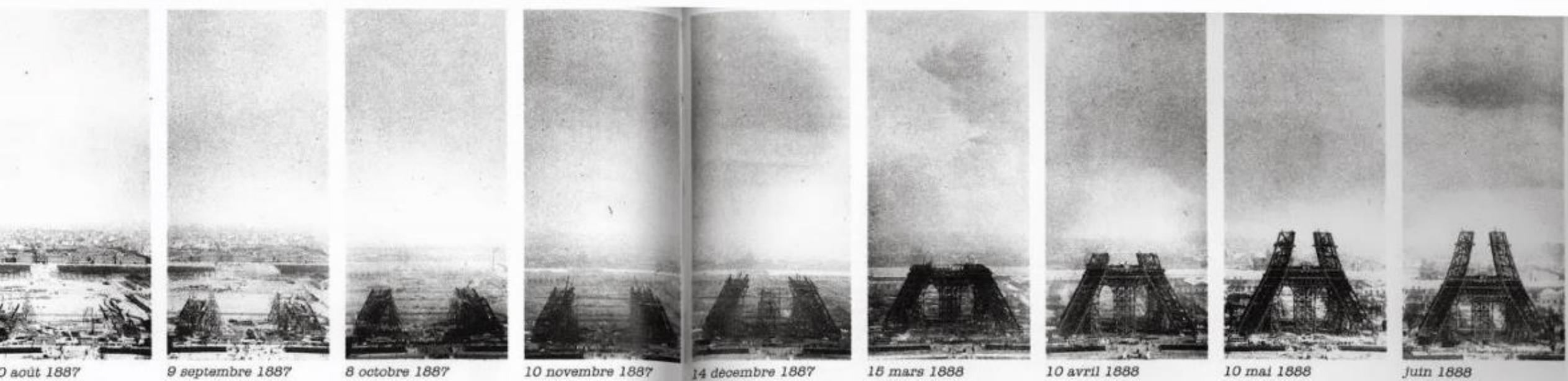


Estimated\* NPs size: 0.47±0.04 nm

\*Borowski equation (*J. Phys. IV France*. 1997, 7, C2-259--C252-260)

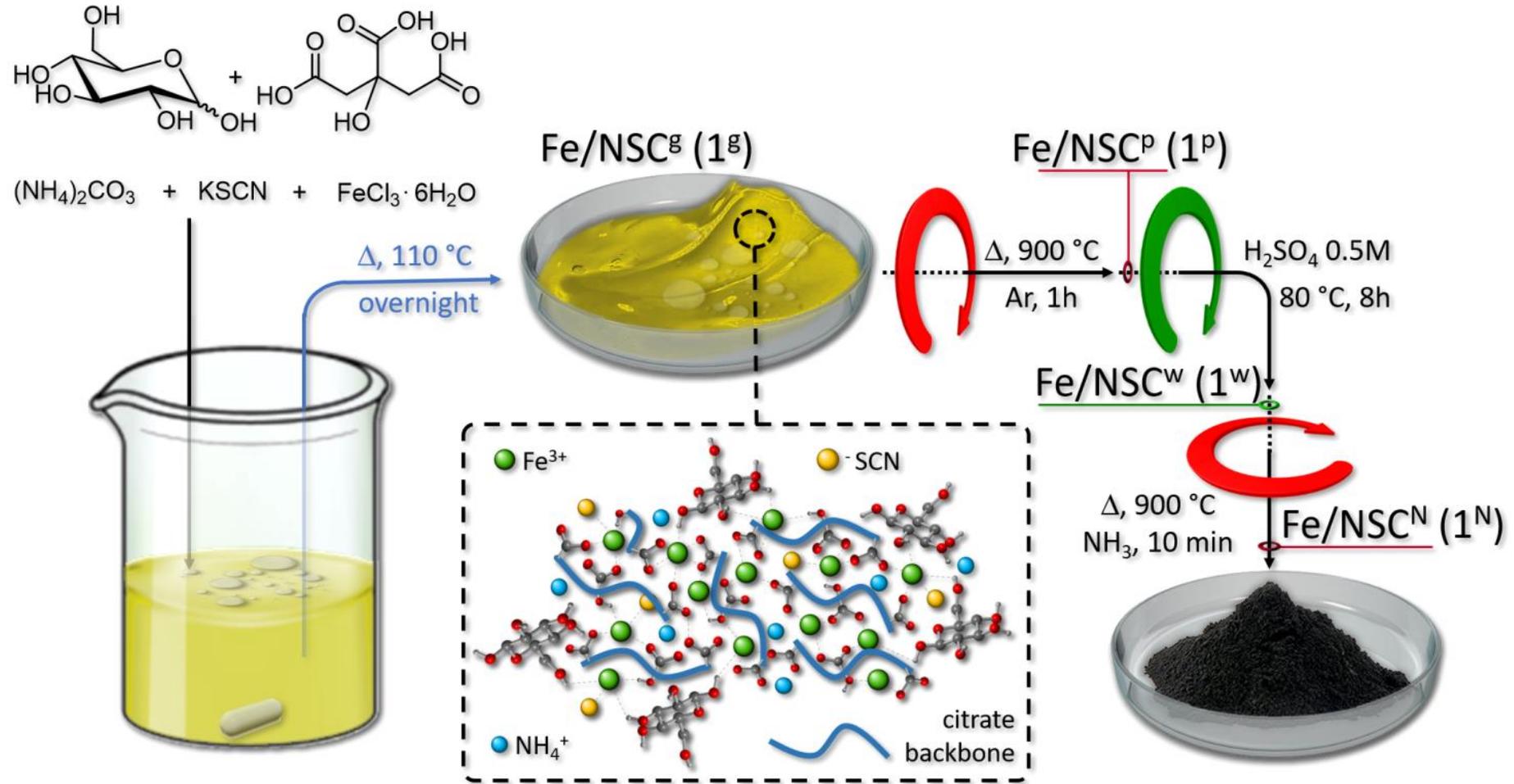


Conclusion: Only in situ measurements may provide an answer.

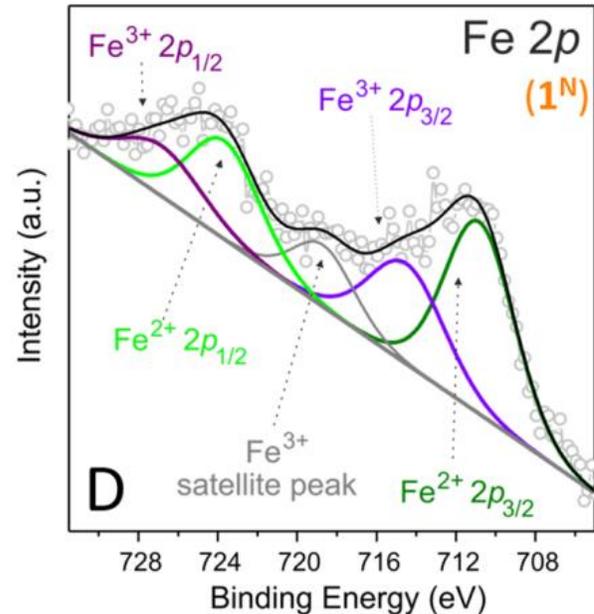
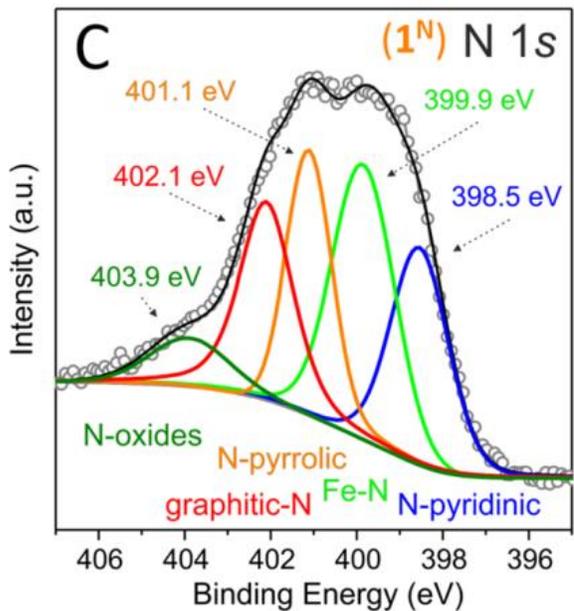
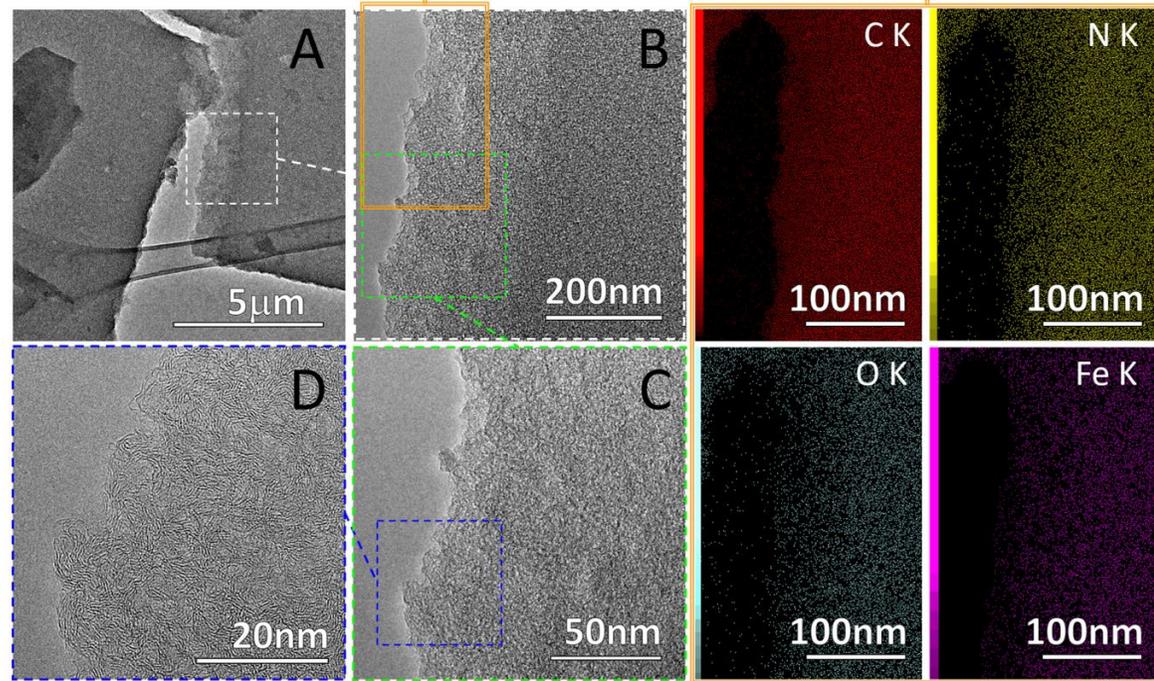
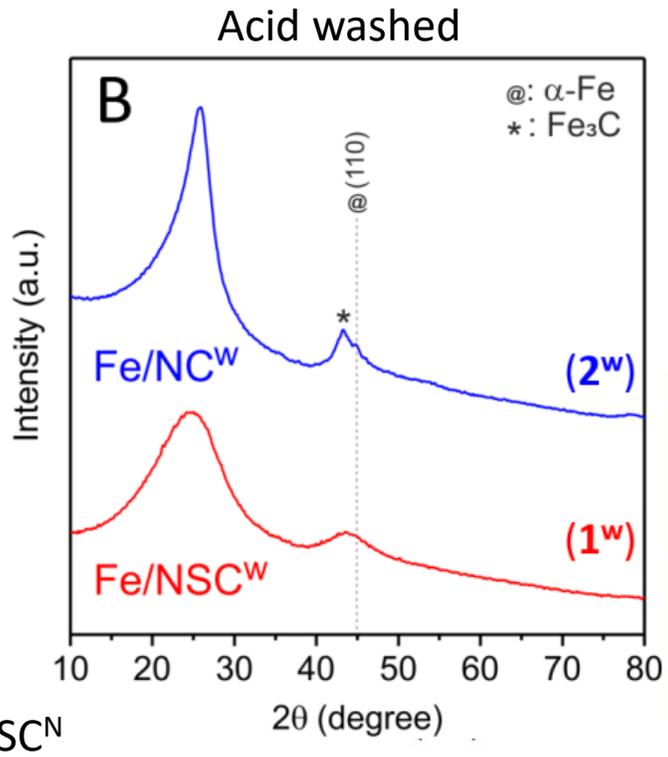
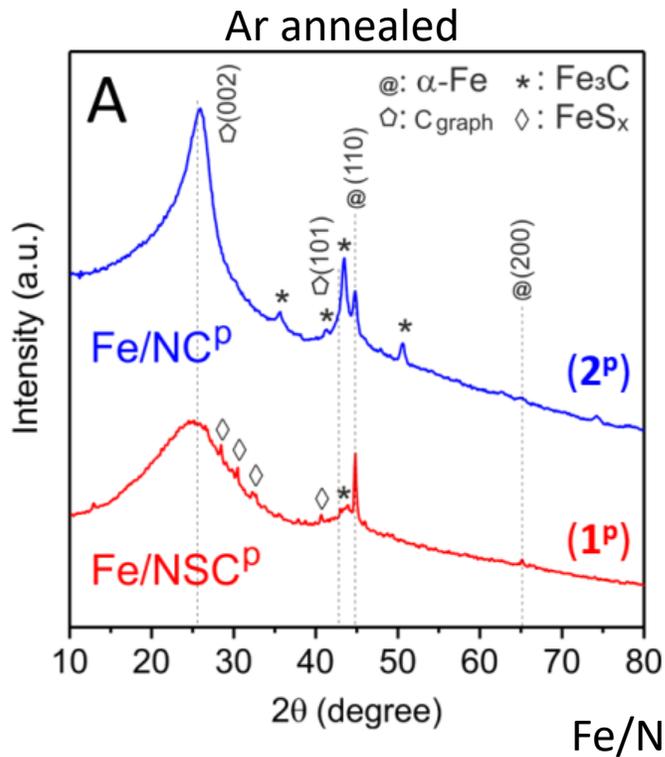


The charm of rust

# High-Density Metal Ions in N-Doped Carbon Networks: Powering Fe–N–C Catalyst Efficiency in the Oxygen Reduction Reaction.



Zhang, X., L. Truong-Phuoc, X. Liao, G. Tuci, E. Fonda, V. Papaefthymiou, S. Zafeiratos, G. Giambastiani, S. Pronkin and C. Pham-Huu (2021). *ACS Catalysis* **11**(14): 8915-8928.



XRD: adding KSCN less particles are formed  
remaining are all washed out.

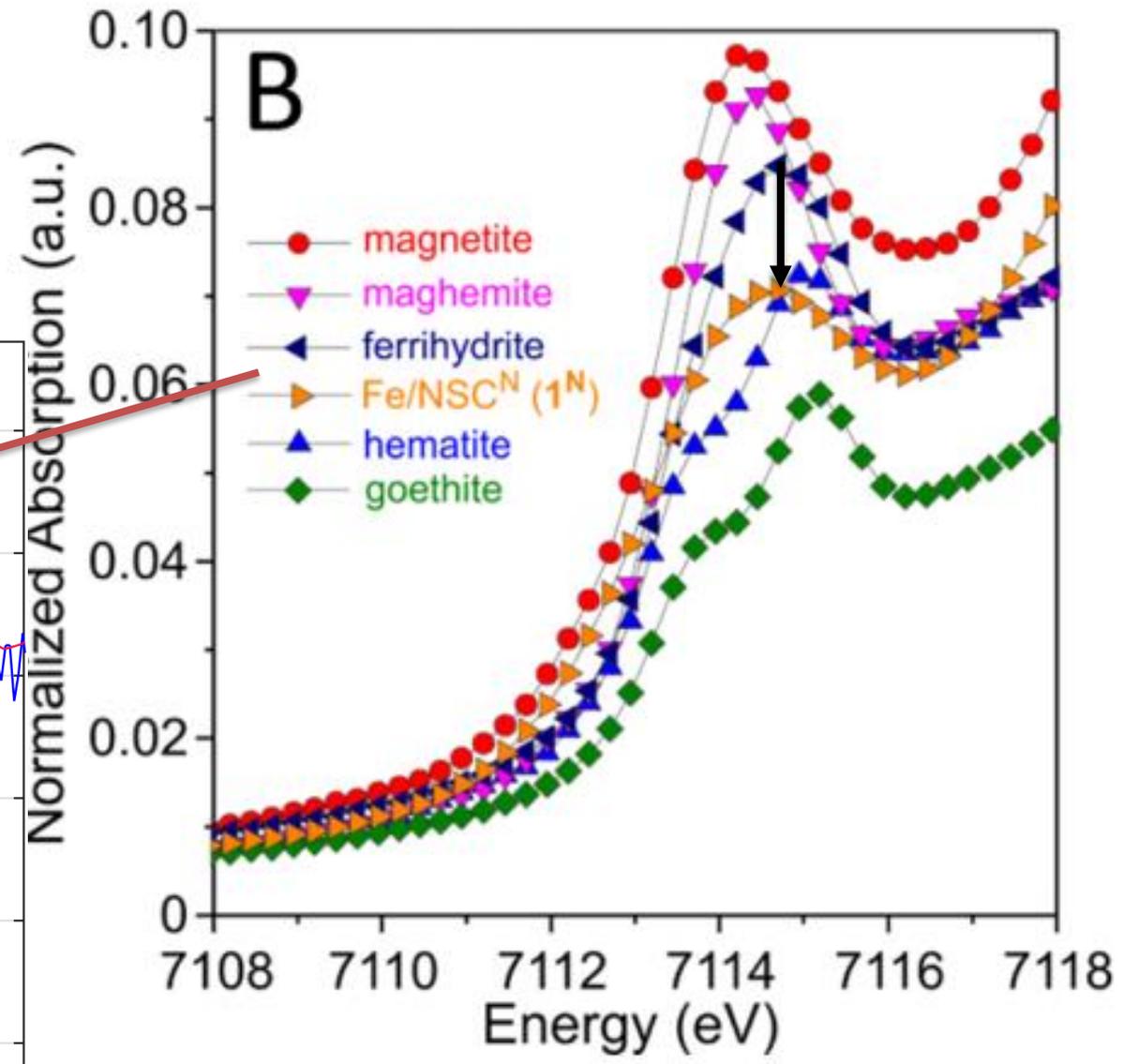
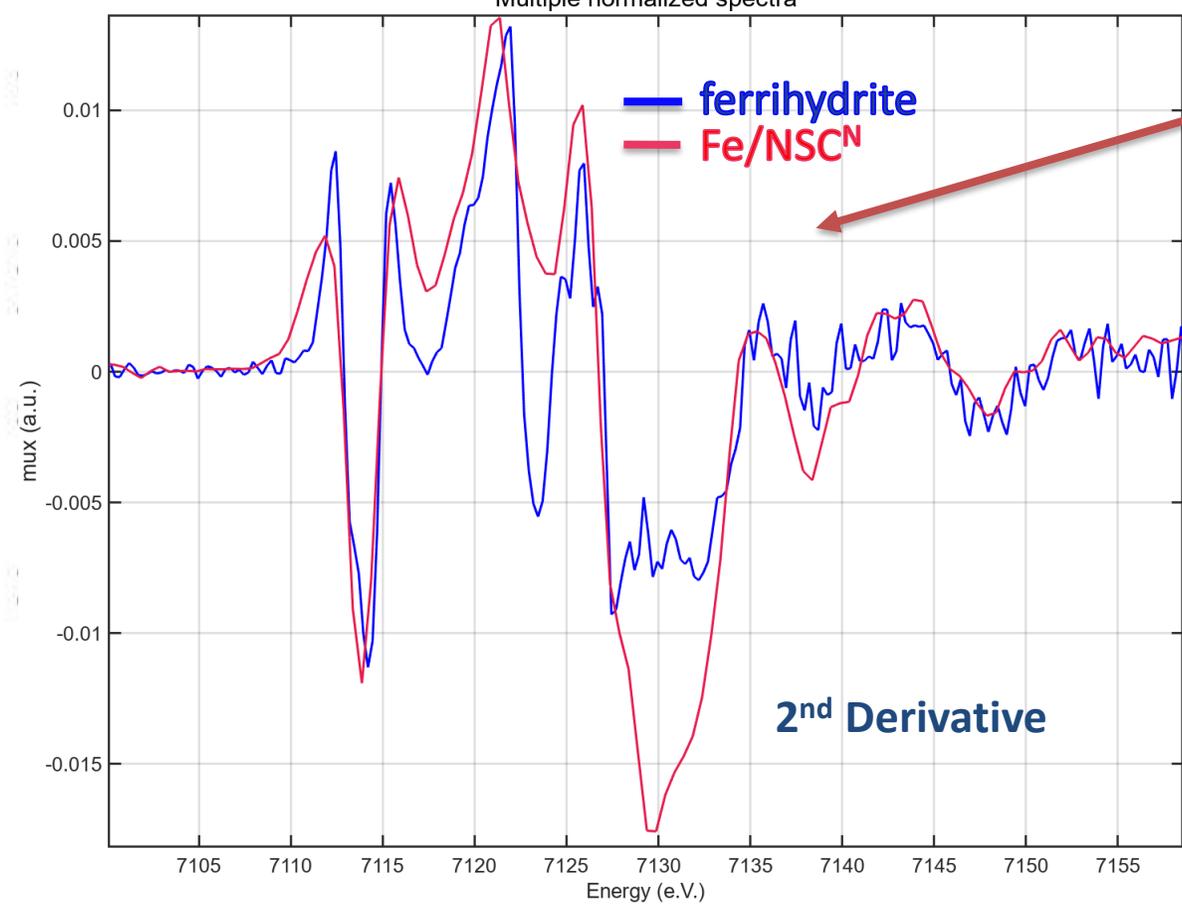
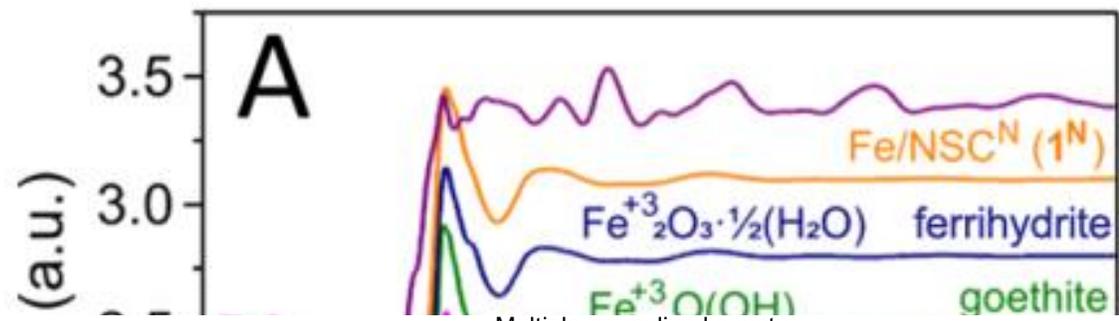
HR-TEM : no particles detected in Fe/NSC<sup>Washed</sup>

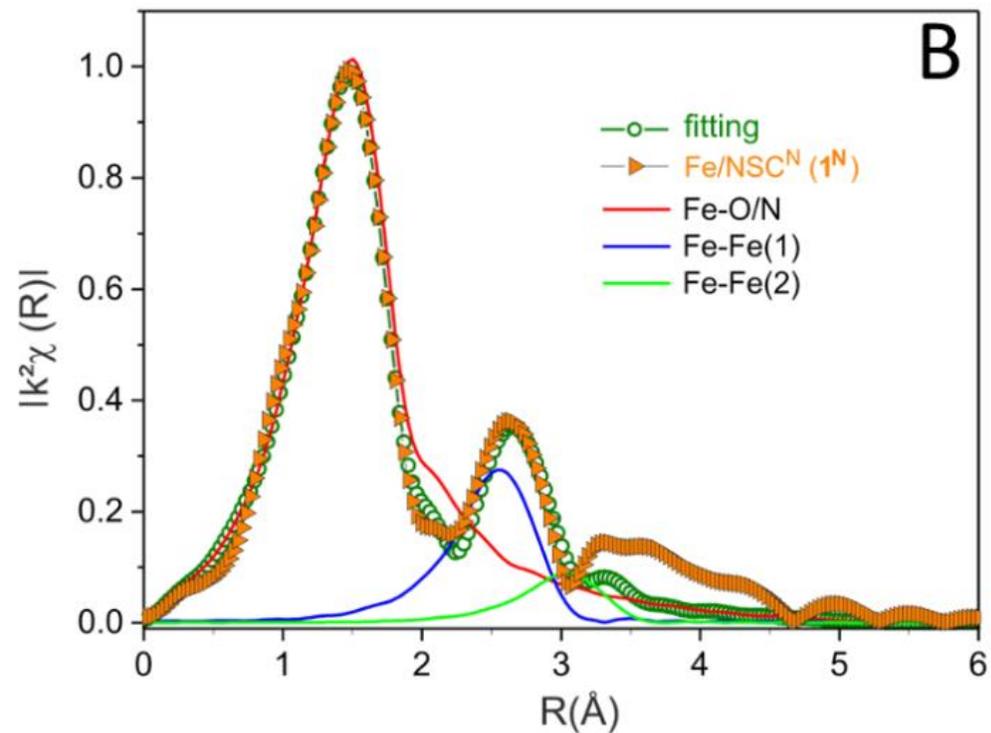
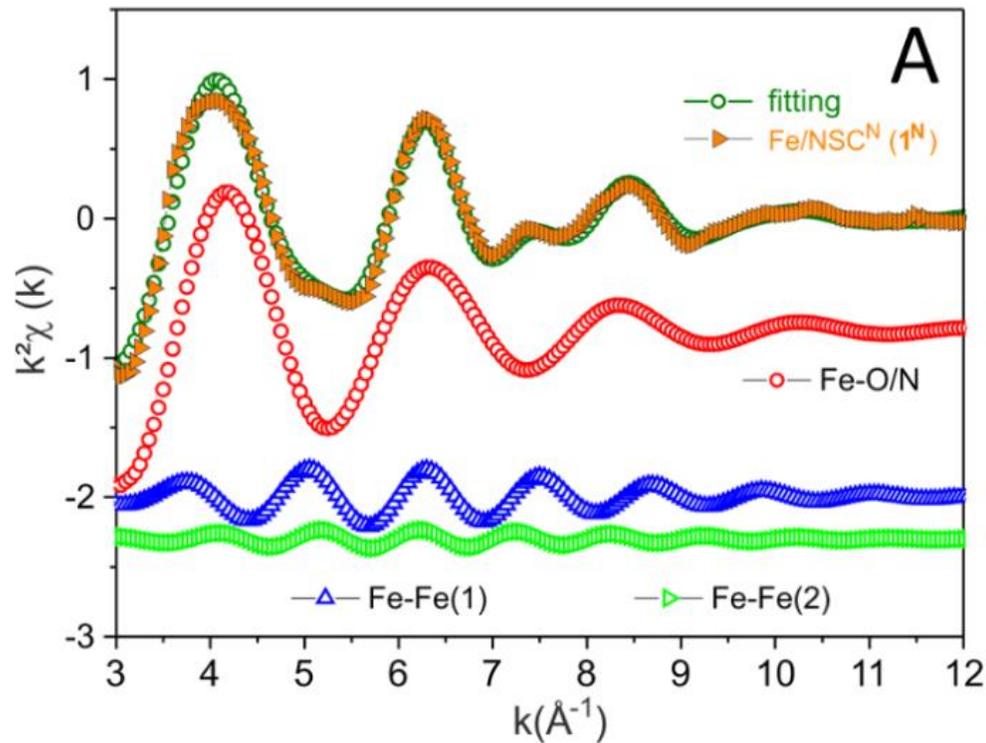
XPS:

→ Fe<sup>2+</sup> and Fe<sup>3+</sup> detected

→ Fe-N detected

So far so good... but is it a SAC ?



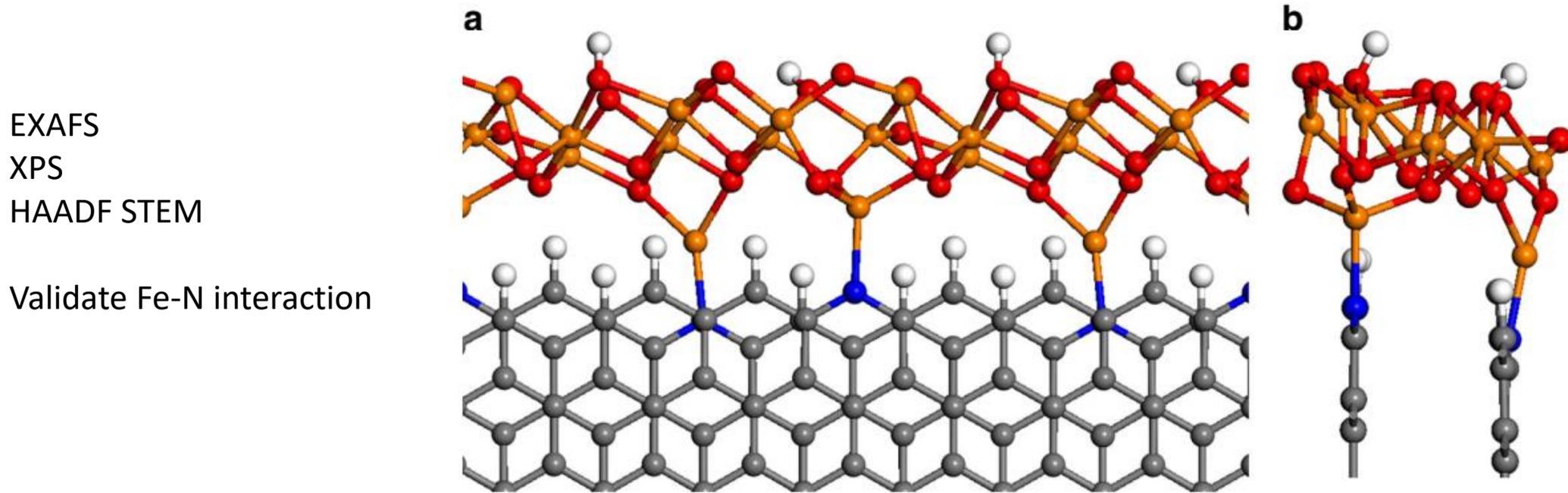


path	coord. numb.	$R$ (Å) <sup>a</sup>	$\sigma^2$ ( $10^{-2}$ Å <sup>2</sup> ) <sup>b</sup>	$\Delta E_0$ (eV) <sup>c</sup>	$R$ -factor <sup>d</sup>
Fe-O(N)	6.2 (6)	1.957 (7)	1.2 (1)	-5 (1)	0.007
Fe-Fe (1)	1.3 (3)	3.00 (1)			
Fe-Fe (2)	1.6 (4)	3.45 (2)			

→ **SAC anymore ?**

*An inspiring comparison:*

Operando spectroscopy study of the carbon dioxide electro-reduction by iron species on nitrogen-doped carbon.



**Fig. 5** Model of the *Fh*-FeOOH/N-C interface. **a** Top and **b** lateral views of the DFT + U-relaxed geometry of ferrihydrite nanostructures decorating the N-doped graphitic zigzag edges. Color code: C = gray, H = white, N = blue, Fe = orange, O = red

# Summary

XAS → Fe in Fh FeOOH

XPS → Fe-N

TEM → undetected Fh flakes

XRD/XPS → KSCN inhibits FexC growth

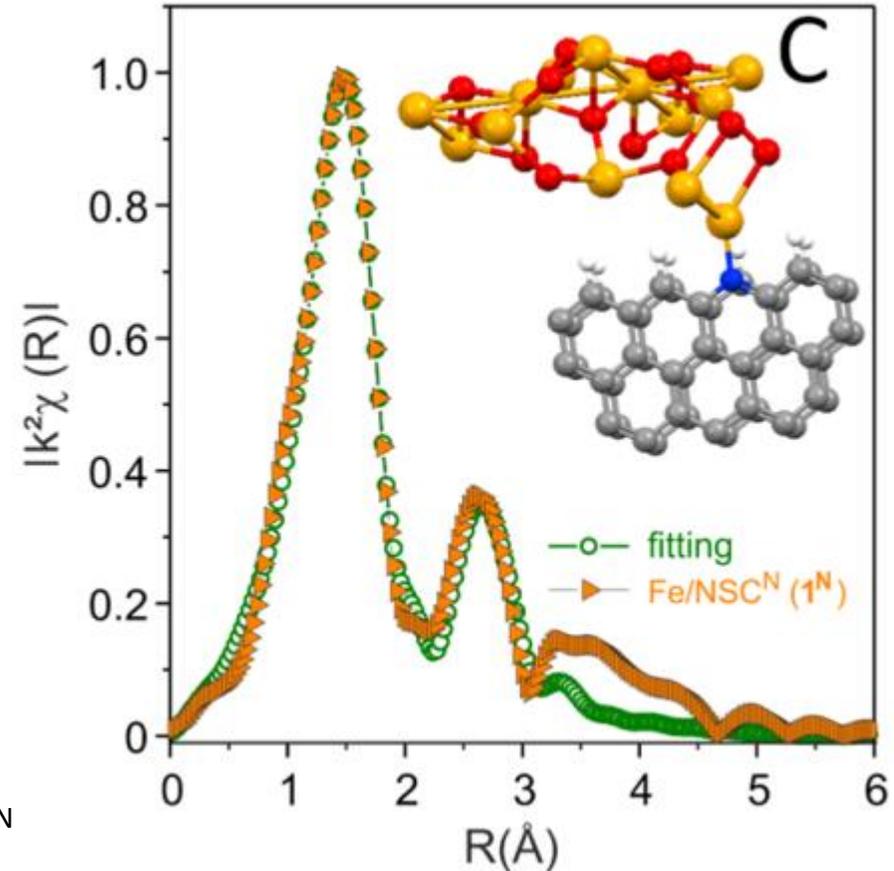
Fh FeOOH are highly stable (cycles)

# Conclusions

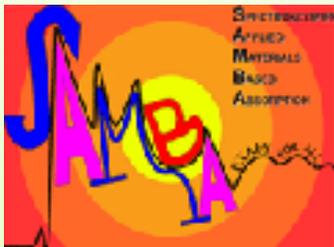
Most abundant Fe(III) species dominates XAFS signal

Anchoring and activities may be related to Fe-N in Fe/NSC<sup>N</sup> only by a plethora of techniques and indirect evidences.

Without XAFS Fh FeOOH could pass undetected



# Acknowledgments



Andrea Zitolo  
Guillaume Alizon  
Anastassiya Khan  
Gautier Landrot

Stephanie Blanchandin  
Karine Chaouchi



Prof. Paolo Fornasiero  
Prof. Tiziano Montini



Frédéric Jaouen  
Tzonka Mineva  
Lorenzo Stievano  
Moulay-Thar Sougrati



Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche  
Dr. Giuliano Giambastiani